



DECONFINING Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa

Teodora Grigaitė

Deconfinement



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These fiction texts from the Lithuanian language to the English language were translated by Olga Prisekina–Olrachs and Ieva Vaičiulienė, UAB “Bella Verba” translators and edited by Ana Kirijeva and Olga Prisekina–Olrachs, UAB “Bella Verba” translators and English language editors.

Deconfinement Presentation of the Idea

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This DECONFINEMENT Project is part one of four and consists of two stories. The conceptual axis of the first story is the mystical experience and *Gelassenheit* (releasement, detachment, stoic repose), the second one is the Sartrean¹ concept of “bad faith”, indicating how a person behaves under the influence of bad motives (the adjective “bad” in this case does not refer to a certain moral judgement, but to existential and ontological inauthenticity. Bad faith is when a person acts guided by principles that have nothing to do with his/her dispositions and wishes, but rather according to the expectations of others (individuals, society, religious and cultural tropes). Both concepts are considered in connection with different spaces and the phenomenon of boredom. The first and second parts operate on the principle of contrast (both in terms of space and contemplated concepts).

The first story, which depicts a mystical experience and *Gelassenheit*, interlaces these concepts into a narrative where the main character is an abandoned flat in the Kaunas district filled with Soviet-era buildings. The story unfolds the amplitude of an individual’s relationship with space and depicts how interpersonal, interobjective communication depends on changing states of consciousness. The idea of painting the environment as the protagonist of the story comes from Aldous Huxley’s essay *The Doors of Perception. Heaven and Hell*² that explores modes of penetration into space. The protagonist of the Huxley’s essay becomes a guinea pig and, for the sake of creativity, ingests a large amount of psychedelic drugs. This action resulted in the story of the entire essay, which is nothing more than a description of the environment surrounding the lyrical self.

In both parts, a lot of attention will be paid to the environment and space, however, the motivation for the (consciousness) change in this case will not be psychotropic substances, but the previously unexperienced feeling (emptying of consciousness) caused by the mandatory quarantine

instructions. Therefore, the first part considers the following questions: What is our relationship with space?; Can dedication to space influence the perceived releasement?; Why is spatial liberation usually perceived quantitatively, and not qualitatively (i.e. why is the view that freedom means travelling to other lands, experiencing other cultures, and not a changing state of consciousness so rooted in popular culture and in the new age spirituality tradition?). The first part is divided into three components: (i) consideration of the mystical experience as such; (ii) a brief introduction to the concept of *Gelassenheit*; (iii) a story in which the mystical experience and *Gelassenheit* appear in different guises.

The second part, with bad faith experience at its centre, talks about the 21st century’s common image, illustrating how a person associates freedom with a certain exotic space, which, by the principle of connotations, embodies various practices of the new age spiritual life. The protagonists, engaged in digital nomadism³, spent their quarantine on one of the most picturesque islands in the world. There, after securing financial well-being, they spent several months on the island and practised all possible manifestations of the new age (Western) spiritual life. The story asks: Why is this specific example a good illustration of bad faith? Why does nature or culture, which are valued by everyone, worn out by aesthetic look, ultimately no longer connotes anything and does not existentially fill the chest?

Both parts are intended to critically contemplate on what we consider liberation from the consequences of the pandemic that has been shaking the world for several years and to rhetorically ask why the basic impulses to escape from the usual space do not meet expectations and disappoint the individual existentially, psychologically, and ontologically even more.

1 The existentialist, phenomenological system of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.

2 Huxley, Aldous. *The Doors of Perception. Heaven and Hell*. Vilnius: Kitos Knygos. 2019. ISBN 9786094273667

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_nomad





PART ONE

Mystical experience (concept consideration)

In the history of philosophical thought, it has been stated for a very long time that one will not understand the world by reason and rationality alone. Some go even further and postulate that such movements as the emergence of modern philosophy or the much-glorified Age of Enlightenment have told us nothing about the world and experience of living. Well, unless the world can be measured, and it is a totality of transformations and events measured according to certain laws, theories, and equations. Rationality will save the world, rationality will solve individual and collective human problems. Logically understood reality, based on various natural or exact sciences, can tell exactly why we cry, why we experience ecstasy, why we gather in communities, and why we help the Other.

However, in addition to measurability and calculability, small experiences, which are quite difficult to penetrate, squeeze themselves in as well. And it seems that something is still missing, that the heart is aching from the fact that the answer to everything that seems magical and inexplicable is “it’s just your brain chemistry”, “it’s because the ozone layer combines with potassium oxide and nitrogen dust”; “because you drank too much poppy seed milk” ...

In this *clear* world, it is not clear what the voice of mysticism and mystical experience is. First of all, what is mysticism? What do we associate this term with? Are mysticism and mystical experience attributed only to the area of religion or spiritual matters? It seems that only Mary Magdalene, Meister Eckhart, some individual living on the Bouvet Island, or a shaman can tell us something about exceptional sensations. It seems that the mystical feeling is associated with experiences that are incomprehensible to the Western mind, which are usually associated with people who we orientalise and wrap up in various myths, and see not as the same people as us, but as those

capable of experiencing, well, something more interesting.

According to the sources, mysticism is defined as a discipline or a worldview, which is based on unexplained phenomena, emotions, and intuition, however, it seems that today this experience is equated with new age spiritual practices, usually adapted for enrichment and a specific class of people. An ordinary person does not seem to have the right conditions for it. The conditions that are usually related to the inner state, because after everything is explained, after examining not only the structure of the rocks, but also the state of the soul, and the affect, mysticism does not fit into the smoothness of the thought of the 21st century. However, perhaps the collectively felt “normality” as an emotion, or rather a cognitive/spiritual disposition, is actually just a response to a reality that seeks to negate otherness, something more magical than the reality of work-food-obligations-one week a year trip to Tenerife-new iPhone.

Oh, let us get back to normal sooner!

Probably both heard and acted-upon phrase.

After the pandemic passed, normalcy receded. The notion that the world will stop if we do not get up five days out of seven to sell electric motors or to file accounting reports has receded. The obligation or, rather, the inevitability of filling the consciousness with all possible content – work, studies, relationships, finances, career – abandoned us as well. Time seemed to have stopped. Not for everyone, of course. For those who risk their lives, time passes by too fast and too chaotically.

As for the rest, for those who collectively confined themselves, everything became *postponed*. The thoughts too have been postponed. Consciousness became blank. After all, what are we if for the most part not those obligations or small, fleeting pleasures? Some of us more, some less. Therefore, emptying the consciousness made more room for other experiences.





Gelassenheit

(concept consideration)

What should we do with this empty feeling? Of course, the first reaction is boredom and apathy. It seems that if we do not have obligations or do not artificially create new ones, the absence of rustle and noise becomes perplexing. We got used to having a dozen websites operating in our consciousness, and now, once x has been pressed on the entire browser, the ringing of silence is deafening. There is no doubt that experiencing silence is a privilege. This means that basic needs – sleep, food, and shelter – are ensured. Dealing with existential matters, no matter how much stress it causes to the subject, does not equate with not knowing whether you will be able to pay the rent next month. This dead time, according to the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, is also presented in the form of the concept of *Gelassenheit*:

Dead time – moments of withdrawal, of what old mystics called *Gelassenheit*, releasement – are crucial for the revitalisation of our life experience. And, perhaps, one can hope that one of the unintended consequences of the coronavirus quarantines in Chinese cities will be that some people at least will use their dead time to be released from hectic activity and think about the (non)sense of their predicament.⁴

Gelassenheit, releasement, has several meanings. First of all, some have a rather rudimentary understanding of the concept, (i) *Gelassenheit* is relaxation. It is a situational event, which, however, can quickly change into a radically different state, such as anxiety, fear, alertness...; (ii) *Gelassenheit* is a calm state of consciousness. We are simply calm, content, while strong emotions do not disturb the psyche; (iii) *Gelassenheit* – a stoic repose; (iv) *Gelassenheit* – the state of mind

when separation and release are achieved, in other words – *unio mystica*.

Contemplating about the latter concept and its unfolding in isolation and specific space, we define almost all the meanings represented by the same word. It can be a religious experience, a moment of intentionality experienced for a long time, a different relationship with space, a state of peace (releasement), or moving away from the circumstances of life. Living in a de facto secular environment, we first look at a mystical, but religion-independent state-event-affect.

This releasement comes primarily from a certain discomfort. Looking at the 21st century socio-health crisis that took place in the early 2020s and affected the whole world, looking at the conditions humanity had to endure, we see that this releasement is a by-product of suffering. Releasement can follow the reconciliation of be-reavement, financial deprivation, existential crisis, a strange sense of time, and, finally, boredom leading to the thinning of consciousness. The story aims to reveal releasement as a (unexpected) side-effect of quarantine.

4 Slavoj Žižek. My Dream of Wuhan. 2020. <https://literaturairmenas.lt/publicistika/slavoj-zizek-mano-uhano-svajones>





I and my Khrushchevka (story)

Together, we recovered from the shock of confinement. Together, we fenced ourselves off behind the window, hiding from the virus particles – practically visible to the naked eye in our paranoia. Together, we forgot the toil of essential workers and, as the clock struck seven in the evening, we stopped clapping to those working their fingers to the bone in the medical field. Together, we no longer give a caring smile to delivery men taking their leave, but, on the contrary, we scrupulously inspect our soup for spillage, salad for scattering, and whether our Chicken Kiev has not gotten too cold. Together, we forgot the general agreement to allow *only* the elderly to shop during certain hours in the morning to protect them from the virus.

Together, we gained, for an indefinite period, a new and rather obnoxious friend – Boredom – characterised by an insecure ambivalent attachment style. It, clinging to us, seeking validation that it is wanted and loved, insecure, began pulling the wool over our eyes:

“Silence is not interesting!”

“A longer than two-minute video will not tell you anything worth hearing!”

“Learn French! No, learn Mandarin!”

“Knit a sweater for your cat ... Although don't bother, she will squirm out of this rag anyway!”

“Work out, work out, work out – endorphins, beautiful body. Everyone works out... except you.”

“Practice Transcendental Meditation! Did you see that your friend is in Bali? She posts live videos of herself doing yoga on the side of the ocean and repeating the mantra created for her “max-re-lax, max-re-lax”. Where is your *re-lax*? Why aren't you thinking about Enlightenment, not even with one little neuron of your brain?”

This is how we – together – have finally become the space we *consume*. And it is especially difficult when your own space is the thing you despise.

And what is there to love about it? Despite the fact that I'm forced to stare at a few repeating components, these components are as ugly as they get. My space, that is my flat, where I endure these historical events, has a long history, but the longer I stay there, the uglier it gets.

I became my own space precisely at the coordinate xxx yyy zzz, in Kaunas, in a crowded neighbourhood of Eastern Europe. My space didn't bode well, and I had no idea where else could I seek refuge. I exchanged a sterile Ikea-furnished home without a single stain for peace. The peace to experience this time without worrying that I will transmit the virus to others, that I will be bothered when I am running out of time to wrap up my final thesis for the university degree, that I will be seen, evaluated, commented on when I experience new sensations and react to devastating global events. But it doesn't matter. I don't care about it that much.

I must focus on my work and try to ignore Lombardy, Wuhan, and Barcelona. And I am not thinking about my ageing parents living in another city. I am not thinking about how thin dad looks when I see him during our video chat. I am not thinking about how my mother contracted tuberculosis from her grandfather when she was two years old and spent several years in a sanatorium in Suvalkija⁵. She recovered, but sometimes still unloads her memories, like a daytime nightmare, on the family members:

“In my second year at the sanatorium, we sometimes were allowed to go for a weekend with the caretakers to a lake, where we could swim and have fun. I was really looking forward to those trips. One evening, before the next day's big voyage, we all were having dinner. At the end of the dinner, all the children in the sanatorium were given hot cocoa drink with milk. Did you know that when hot milk sits for a while it forms a thick skin⁶ that can make you gag when swallowed? I was a very dutiful girl, but I could not force myself to drink that skin. They tried to force me, motivating (threatening) me with not letting me go to the lake the next day. I spent Saturday all alone in the sanatorium.”

Or

“My friends from the sanatorium and I used to tell each other scary stories⁷. One night I got up wanting to go to the toilet. The toilet was at the end

5 Lithuanian ethnographic region on the left bank of Nemunas (the country's largest river).

6 Skin – a layer formed on hot milk or soup.

7 <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/siurpe/>





of the hall. It was dark around. Maybe I did see a witch fly by, I don't know, something really flash before my eyes. Well, I could not hold it any more. I crept down the corridor, opened the door, and lo and behold, sitting there on the night pot and staring right at me was a bear. I ran back to my bed and don't remember what happened afterwards. I just know that I never went to the toilet at night again."

There were many more memories of a similar gist, which would be labelled as trauma by today's Gen Z generation.

Well, I don't really care about my parents' childhood sufferings and current troubles. I care about finishing my studies. And about leaving here to continue the next level of education at a foreign university. Experience the world. See what an exchange of universal ideas looks like. Abandon these Khrushchevka⁸ slums. My homeland does not correlate with my spirit.

How did I end up stuck in this ugly slum as the quarantine continues? Why isn't it at least some place where the walls are thick and you can't hear the yelling of hangover neighbours, where the moss isn't threatening to take over the floor, and where the furniture is a tiny bit more modern?

While here... A flat built in the 1970s. Khrushchevkas here stretch for kilometres. Everywhere you go, all you see is Khrushchevkas. At least if you don't see the miserable outside view, you can imagine that it's only the interior of your flat that is ugly, while others live in George Clooney's villa on the Lake Como in Italy. I keep the rubbish on the balcony as I don't want to go outside and touch the handles. What if there are virus particles that will crawl in through my pores while I sleep? I will get infected and sick. Oh no, I am not bothered by hypochondriacal thoughts at all. I am healthy, my body is healthy, and those young people (my age or even younger) who died from the virus are only an exception, only an exception. Anyways, I don't really care.

I care that my carpets are dusty and half a century old. Who knows how many tiny dust mites live there? I am disgusted by their colours: faded yellow, faded red, and brown. Just looking at that

ragged material makes my stomach turn, I don't want to walk over it barefoot.

I care that I have a ton of those brown leather edition books in my (worn out) bookcase. I would like to have an aesthetic Penguin collection books with a comfortable font print, and I would like the books not to smell of old. I can't read either Cervantes, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, or Rabelais. No one would eat the candy if it was wrapped in toilet paper.

I'm also baffled by the five empty rooms. There is plenty of room, but the emptiness reminds me of the people who used to live in that space, may they rest in peace – my grandmother, grandfather, and uncle. Emptiness does not give you peace, it only fills your head with more thoughts that irritate you, and it takes a lot of effort to stuff them into the box of denial and oblivion.

One of the five rooms is the living room. I used to stay there when I was little and came to visit my grandparents for entire weeks in the summer, spending the nights reading *Harry Potter*. In all seven books, you can still find traces of what I ate while reading, which is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* Chapter 3 dyed tomato red. The remains of Miglè chocolate candy in *the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Sitting there in the living room is a table, two pompous chairs that look like overfed comrade dictators. Difficult to move, bloated, ugly, in unnatural colour.

The second room – where my grandfather spent his last days – is where I hardly ever go. Maybe it's superstitions or fear of the image of death, maybe it's the interior that has remained almost unchanged, maybe it's the wardrobe full of moths, maybe it's the monochromatic photos of three or four generations of relatives that perplex me so much.

The third room used to be my uncle's. He suffered from renal failure and was bedridden for the last twenty years of his life because his pelvic bones had decayed and he was unable to walk. He used to have dialysis twice a day. While in bed, he would read Russian opposition texts, watch TV, and call me by his invented nickname to come and play with Barbies, if I wanted to. In this bed, ten years after my uncle's death, is where I sleep now, as it has a great Dormeo mattress. However, I wouldn't say that I feel comfortable sleeping there. Not because of the structure of the mattress, but because of its experience and other people it used to have on top.

⁸ Khruschiovka (Russian: хрущёвка) is a derisive term that was used (and sometimes is still used) to describe block and brick three- to five-story houses built en masse during Nikita Khrushchev's reign, designed by Vitaly Lagutenko.





Next to the bed there is a brown varnished wooden cabinet used to store various means for relieving the frustrations of my uncle's body, which up until now none of the living could bring themselves to throw away. There is a cigarette holder in the cabinet. Its cover has an image of the American Wild West – a desert and a cowboy leaning against a wooden fence. My uncle, getting into his wheelchair, would lock himself up in the toilet for a smoke a couple of dozen times a day. Next to my uncle's room there is the smallest room in the flat, which belonged to my grandmother. It used to be the cosiest place to stay. Now the most neglected one: walls gnawed by the merciless teeth of a rabbit and ten-year-old willow branches are not a definition of cosiness. A melancholic feeling is also brought about by the pile of books read by the grandmother in the years before her death.

The kitchen was the cosiest spot – at least you can catch some daylight there. Other rooms face the trees, which have long overgrown the level of third-floor windows, blocking the sun, as rare as it already is. The kitchen is a place where I make chickpea stew, it is a place where I join a virtual bar with my friends. However, it is also a place where I get disgusted by the gas stove and old sticky dishes (*mea maxima culpa*, I don't even know how to wash them properly due to my lack of interest in maintaining tidiness). If my space is me, then I am cluttered, abandoned, and unloved. A stranger. One to run from. But it doesn't matter. I don't even care.



20 April. A little over a month since the start of the collective confinement. I woke up screaming last night. I was screeching involuntarily for the first time. It's a peculiar feeling, it seemed that something foreign or an alien has taken over my body and is making this sound by forcing open my mouth.

I have had trouble sleeping since the start of the crisis that hit us all. At first it became very difficult for me to fall asleep at night. And now, I sleep like a Schrödinger's cat. Being half in each state is unpleasant, as is listening to two people talking at the same time. You are neither here nor there, but a little bit everywhere.

The abnormality of sleep epitomised itself during the alien possession, and something about that

Munch scream haunts me long after I've sobered up from that sensation. The affect is still there.

I think my psyche was trying to tell me something: "My sweet girl, you *mi-issed it*" – Now I'm starting to think, is it a mistake to venture into those dark dungeons? Because I don't even care. I'm calm. The environment and being stuck is just annoying.

After all the screaming, I was lying in bed looking at the light in the hallway because I'm afraid to sleep in complete darkness, and I think I heard some noises. The non-anonymity of this flat's experience began to symbolically create various scenarios. Uncle is rolling his wheelchair to the toilet to have a smoke? Grandma screams as she dreams of tortures in Gulag⁹? Grandpa wandering around the house, having forgotten where he is? Perhaps living with the fact of death is tiring. Is there a relationship with the flat, while calmly accepting the fact of the death of the people who existed in it? I believe that I have not completely transcended the superstitious astrological and spiritual realm of perception of the world. I'd rather be in a sterile flat with one piece of furniture.

I felt that I was about to bellow like a hyena, but I couldn't, I was still in a goddamn state of half-sleeping. I thought that there was someone in my home, I thought that it was a stranger, and at the same time I felt very clearly that where I was lying now, is where many years ago my uncle used to lay. That mystical continuity is very awkward. I remember the terror that came over me, and I wouldn't say that waking up and realising it was just a dream helped me calm down.

Since the night screaming, I began to lose confidence in my opinion, state, and decisions. I began to believe little by little that my annoyance with the ugly environment, the desire for sterility, the desire to be anywhere but here are only elementary things that are accidental rather than key components that caused the screaming. Does a person scream for no reason? Probably not. Doesn't a person who wakes up in the middle of the night and feels an indescribable horror until turning over and falling asleep again, suppresses something inside? Can disgust and displeasure really be the reasons for screaming? I understand my

9 Gulag – a network of forced labour camps in the Soviet Union, where prisoners who disobeyed the system were kept.





grandmother's reminiscences. I understand that some experiences will live on in the body until we stop breathing. But what is wrong with me, why am I destroying my vocal cords for nothing?

However, everyone is a hostage to this situation and in one way or another everyone collectively seeks to escape the unknown, death, and sounds of ambulances.

Consciousness, be quiet, be quiet, be quiet. Yoga is better. Transcendental Meditation. Dreams of a post-pandemic world. Where should I travel to? Some place where the ocean roars, elephants stomp around, and papayas grow? Or maybe I'll sail through the Drake Passage hoping to get the Drake Lake rather than the Drake Shake¹⁰ conditions... Or maybe I'll buy a cottage and a vineyard in Provence or Burgundy in France. I will tread the grapes barefoot, and barefoot I will sip those *processed* grapes on my veranda. I will learn French and discuss Marcel Proust with the locals when invited to a dinner party. I might even learn how to properly gut a frog's leg and serve it in red wine and anchovy sauce; hopefully a local woman living there will teach me.

That is what my dreams are. It should be possible! Why not? The main thing is to get out of here. What can the present and my region offer me? Cepelinai (Lithuanian potato dumplings) and sutartinės (Lithuanian multipart songs)? Maironis and Vincas Mykolaitis Putinas? Nine months long winters? Mass emigration and slow extinction of villages? Chauvinist politics and prejudice? Well, I firmly believed that, and being in a semi-reality, semi-dream world – aside from writing my academic paper – was the main activity of my collective confinement. What else is there to think about? I used to think about work, relationships, how to travel somewhere, how to get somewhere else on time, how to find time to relax, how to fulfil obligations more efficiently...



After being confined in this space, the latter daily sorrows disappeared; they were replaced by the

superficial glimpses of dreams and some strange heartache and pressure in my chest. Could it be lack of magnesium? Maybe I don't work out enough? Maybe my thoughts are not positive enough? How come? I've been sending good vibes to the world! I even made an appointment with a transcendental meditation practitioner to get my mantra. Mine and no one else's. It's just a pity that I can't tidy up even two square meters and turn them into a sterile, adequate place, well, at least a suitable one for a social space. Everyone will think I'm stuck in a slum. I am forced to lie that my camera is broken.

"Then how are you talking to me on a video call? You can take a video on your phone, you know so much about meditation and yoga," asks my friend. She doesn't even know that I've been toiling and moiling until I was able to find at least one presentable corner that would deceive her eye into thinking that this place is beautiful and neat.

"Well, you know, oh look, a bird!" I shout.

A bit of time is bought, and her attention is shifted to look for a bird. In the meantime, I will come up with a better excuse.

My flat is not modern. No room for soul liberation. Furthermore, neither my oatmeal with aesthetically presented pieces of fresh fruit and chia seeds, nor green tea look beautiful, no matter where. Now others will forget that I am the one who says not to give up, eat healthy, work out, and think positively during difficult moments. My ugly environment drained me of my very *essence* and for that I will never forgive it. Some people are just unlucky. And that failure is digging deeper into the soul.

My friend L managed to leave Lithuania before the borders closed, and where do you think she is stuck now? Well, on the island of Bali. Why, God, why this torture, why me? She called the other day, couldn't stop talking, one experience better than another. She was calling while sitting on a tanning bed. I could barely hear her voice over the sound of the ocean. But that didn't stop her from her loquacious narration. She rented a house by the ocean for pennies. She gets up at the crack of dawn, grabs her yoga and walks – a few meters – to the water. After that, she jogs along the shore. Then takes a clean shower and makes exactly the same oatmeal. But is that porridge the same porridge if consumed in different conditions? Does the yoga mat maintain its validity, or can this practice

¹⁰ The Drake Passage is characterised by unpredictable conditions. Given that the currents of three oceans meet in this passage, it is one of the most dangerous tourist destinations, but the only way to get to Antarctica.





purify the soul and body if you lie down on a floor made of God knows what? One place is ugly, obsolete, and growing moss, the other is sterile and new. It seems that if I don't have the whole package, there's no point in carrying on with anything. I was stripped of the opportunity to be the queen of 21st century aesthetics and spiritual affairs, well, what's the difference. Almost the entire conversation was in a podcast format (I am in the role of a listener). When asked what I've been up to, I used the bird tactics again. It worked.

These interactions that force me to face my qualitative and quantitative deficiency, do affect me greatly. Am I really this jealous? I am de facto happy for the happiness of others. But I am saddened by sparseness and rarefaction of my own happiness. I am saddened by being confined to the environment surrounding me. I am saddened by not knowing who I am and what I am doing. If my space is mercilessly stripping me of my attributes and the entirety of me, what can I do? It seems that a great personal and existential void has opened up.

Maybe I need to go back to my routine, think about my studies. Maybe what I am is my routine and what I write on a virtual scrap of paper. I will do without documenting my healthy buckwheat routine, my workouts, my positive thoughts, because I don't really have any anyway. I read and write until late at night. And after that I twiddle my thumbs. I try not to think about my life. I watch the shows and laugh at people on the screen who entertain me. But I get tired of them too in a few hours, and the entire evening is left unoccupied. This is the time of day when I feel most perplexed. And the hardest one to withstand the unwanted thoughts.



One of such evenings, around nine o'clock, a few days after my strange dream and the screaming, I went into the kitchen, made some hemp and lemon balm tea, and turned off the lights. I put a stool (Lith.: *Taburete*¹¹) by the window and made myself comfortable, hoping to find some peace and quiet.

At first I was watching my neighbours. It is middle-aged people with their families or retirees who

usually live in Khrushchevkas. There are hardly any young people. Even the nearby *IKI* store (still called by its former name – *Topolis*) is usually full of people who are already into the second half of their lives. These people still cook warm, somewhat complex dishes, while those few poor youngsters usually give in and indulge in exotic food delivered by couriers on a daily basis – sushi, ramen, and pizza.

People who cook spend a lot of time in the kitchen. Watching them is calming. From the outside, the existence of others seems to be idyllic, a carefree smooth ride through life. Maybe someone watching me cook the only dish I know how thinks the same way? I doubt it. It is a universally known truth that young people are drowning in existential anxiety.

I also watch people watching TV. When we see our loved ones glued to the screen, we feel differently. You want to shake them to break up that dead, glassy gaze that doesn't even register the images on the screen. Sound provides comfort, but it seems to be the only entertainment a person can find. We want good for that person, we want him/her to live a more meaningful life.

However, these anonymous people, seem to be floating in some fog of peace. Having eaten, worked, and quarantined, they meditate on the couch. From time to time, they talk to one another. But everything is coated with soft melancholy. My eyes fall on an old man, probably in his eighties or nineties, reading a book. He seems quite intelligent and sensitive. In another block of flats, a woman is petting a tabby cat perched on the windowsill. In this moment, for both of them it is sufficient to be pet and be petting. Everyone's actions are assured, calm, and real. I even subordinate other senses, which, just like sight, are able to create various images, with reality polished off. My neighbours, for example, are listening to the radio. I too used to listen to the radio, in this very kitchen, when my grandmother was making me hot sandwiches with adjika sauce, cheese, and Bologna sausage. Most likely, these radio listeners also feel like little children and do not have a single worry in their heads. It is easy to idealise the environment and objects without letting them speak for themselves.

Finally, my eyes turned away from the human players and began to stare at the stars. They are especially bright tonight. Is it really true that after

11 A backless chair. Barbarism from the Russian language.





people stay at home for a few months, the pollution decreases, the smog clears up a bit, and dolphins swim in the Venice's canals? The stars are extremely bright. I see the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper.

And finally, I heard something unexpected. At first I didn't even understand what I was hearing. Isn't it the sound of silence? Does silence have sounds? It sounded like a ringing, buzzing, white noise¹². I wonder how I lived my life without hearing silence. Maybe it is just the whooshing sound of my blood rushing. The same as the sound of the ocean that we don't actually hear in a shell.

Peculiar, but whether it is the sound of my body or silence, it sent me spinning into thoughts, or rather images, running at a speed of five hundred kilometres per second, which, on one hand, feels foreign, on the other hand, are my life experiences: like when I was a child, in elementary school, playing dodgeball¹³, I made a fool of myself in front of all my classmates while trying to avoid being hit by the ball. How my mother cried when her father, suffering from Alzheimer's, ran away from home, and no one could find him for several days, until someone in another town, ten kilometres from home, finally recognised him and brought him back. This time, memories seem to matter. What is this feeling in my chest? How does it feel to care?

Sometimes I become one with my stool. The body no longer feels corporeal, like a static substance. I have had attacks of hypochondria since I was eleven years old. I have also picked out my favourite incurable diseases that I suffer from cyclically. Therefore, I am used to scanning my body. Sometimes it even seems that my consciousness is like a probe passing through the chest, brain, liver, blood, bones, kidneys, skin... and keeps getting stuck in some place, saying:

"Problem, problem... but it's too late. Go to a hospice if you can stay there for at least one day before dying."

Because of this, I experience an unknown sensation. It seems that the body, as a separate object that belongs to me, has spilled out and splashed over everything around. It sounds like the last scene of Monty Python's 'The Meaning of Life', depicting an obese man literally explode after yet another excessive meal, splattering his insides all over people dining at the restaurant. Maybe not so grotesquely, but I also splattered all over my surroundings.

My awareness of myself as a subject seems to have disappeared. Obviously, I think through the 'I' prism: my thoughts, my experiences, my environment, which I share with others. You can't deny that no matter how much you practice Zen Buddhism. But I seem to have reached something that neither yoga, nor transcendental meditation, nor mindfulness¹⁴ has helped me to achieve. I deliquessed in my kitchen. I wonder if I'm deliquessed in other rooms too?

In the beginning, I said with dissatisfaction that I had become my own space. The one that imprisoned me, restricted me, prevented me from as much as virtual participation in society. Why does this deliquescence feel different?

First of all, I seem to be letting go of various details that I have considered to be me. As I sit and look at seniors reading, cats being pet, nimble people busy in the kitchen, I see that the links with regional images are strong and metaphysical. Practices that my space forbade me to document nicely or perform altogether because of the perceived sterility were illuminated in a completely different light in a few moments of releasement. Time stood still and I stood with it.

After a few moments I realised that my buttocks were getting numb from all the sitting. Soviet stools are definitely not the most comfortable invention. This bodily sensation passed through my body like an electric current and prompted me to walk around the flat. Walking around the flat – that sounds strange. Well, after all, at one time, four people in four rooms used to live here. There is enough space to walk around.

12 A noise reminiscent of the sound heard inside an airplane, intended for many to calm down. Especially popular among people with autism spectrum disorder. This sound is similar to humming, but because of its repetitive frequency, it often helps to focus or calm down.
https://lt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltasis_triuk%C5%A1mas.

13 Dodgeball is a team sport in which players on two teams try to throw balls and hit opponents while avoiding being hit themselves.

14 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness>





I walk over that same carpet that disgusted me so much. Its diverse woven ornaments somewhat resemble DNA cells. I follow each cell junction with my eyes. It seems that I am inside a cell or mitochondrion magnified a million times. I touch the surface of the carpet. It's rough. The carpet is very old and worn out, but its material reminded me of the time when I would drop down on the carpet in a childish fit, when my grandmother or parents would not allow me to do something or scold me for something. However, these moments do not cause any negative emotions, but only cheer me up, because I have a feeling that I am remembering this detail about myself for the first time.

I walk slowly past the bookcase – section – where books with brown imitation leather covers are rotting. I'm flipping through them. I discover that in some places my grandfather underlined different sentences that seemed important to him. In some places along the edge of the page, he even scribbled down, rather illegibly, his thoughts. From the intensity of the notes on the edges, I noticed that the *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* part of 'The Three Metamorphoses' produced the largest heap of emotions in him. I also notice that the handwriting reminds me a bit of that of my dad's. Flipping through the pages, I sit down on a chair resembling a dictator's belly. I haven't notice how I lost myself in it. It is so big and stalwart that I can even tuck my legs under and cover myself with a grey wool blanket. The kitchen is a little too far though; if I had some caraway tea in my hand, I could sit here into midnight. I fell in and distilled myself in this brown material.

However, after a while I get up. I slowly go to the room that used to be my grandfather's. There are several portraits hanging in the room. My aunt. My grandmother. My grandmother's family. Grandfather. I look at their features. I can see who I inherited my long nose from. Who gave me that particular shape of the eyes. For a moment, even my dad's smile flashed on my great grandmother's face. In the same room where a couple of moths fly around, I put on my grandmother's fur hat and fur coat. I giggle at the thought of how this outfit would provoke an outburst of anger in activists. They might have even douse me with red paint, yelling: "Murderer, murderer!"

Times are changing. For better and for worse. In this case, for better. Having put on my fancy hat, I go to my bedroom, which used to be my uncle's room. I read his letters. I notice that we read (used to read) the same Russian opposition books. Looking back, I remember his sense of humour and how much I used to laugh at various little things he would come up with when he was tired of lying in bed. Finally, I step into the smallest room with gnaw marks on the walls. I hover there for half an hour to the rhythm of the ticking clock, thinking about how my grandmother used to listen to Mary's radio on this very corner of the sofa and pray for everyone who just happened to be on her mind.

After this voyage, which lasted for who knows how many hours, I decide to make potato pancakes. There was a sound of releasement in the air.





PART TWO

Hell is other people **(from the play *No Exit*)**

This is what Jean-Paul Sartre, a famous 20th century existentialist and phenomenologist once said. What does this age-old sententia mean? How does this sententia unfold in the living empirical world? How do we feel this hell in the 21st century and how do we escape from it?

In both the virtual and physical worlds, we as a human species seem to seek shelter to shield ourselves from the gaze of the Other. Why do we hide our habits that we consider shameful? Why do we speak one way in a certain group of people and another in a different group? Why is school one of the biggest challenges for our sociability? It often seems that if we had to repeat this experience again – spending most of our time for a period of twelve years among age-mates in the post-Soviet period, i.e., when bullying is a very common phenomenon – we would rather decline. From these and even earlier institutions, we learn to mediate with our emotions, actions, and to crack the code in order to know how to avoid being bullied.

We learn to show society the side of ourselves which we can share until the authentic elements no longer exist. The story of ‘Reflection in Bali’ is a depiction of how individuals can align their essence with popular practices and popular market demands until the outside gaze strips away all selfhood.

Reflection in Bali **(story)**

Lithuania. The grim winter period. The holiday season is over, the presents have been unwrapped, the fireworks have all been set off, and the sparkling wine bottles have been emptied. It’s been three weeks since the New Year, people are beginning to gradually abandon their New Year’s resolutions and no longer stick to their goals. Wellness gurus L and V, drunk on red wine and pigged out on cheese and olives, are talking about their failing online business, a website where they post holistic mind and body training practices:

“Be that as it may, but Lithuanians really don’t know how to enjoy life. It’s only the third week, and everyone has dropped their New Year’s resolutions, criticises others, and is generally physically and spiritually stagnant,” – snorted L.

“Yes, yes, you know, this is the collective trauma talking. The Soviets really did a number on us, leaving us resigned, indignant, still looking at the grass on the other side”, – described her social community in a knowledgeable tone V.

“What a bad luck for us to be born and having to create our business in such an environment. If we were in the West, where people are normal, able to relax and enjoy life, we would have made it a long time ago. Now it’s like offering a stalk of celery to a lion... I don’t know what to do,” L sighed sorrowfully, “Who wouldn’t like self-help courses, weekly blog on the best books and podcasts, your masterful yoga and meditation classes? Why are we such a dense and uneducated society...”

“You can’t get pigs interested in diamonds, honey.”

“Maybe this is the answer, my handsome V? Maybe they are not our audience? Imagine if we teach only those who are really interested in living a quality life? Should we be expanding to foreign markets?”

“What do you mean?”

“Come on, think about it. Eastern Europe is now the “it” region for the West. At least that’s





what TikTok says. Everyone is interested in our fierceness, Slavic behaviour. It doesn't matter that we're not even Slavs, those Westerners can't tell the difference. A self-help podcast hosted by two gurus of ambiguous identity. Neither Europeans, nor Asians, some anonymous people. Let's monetise this advantage of ours?"

"An advantage? Whaaat? And most importantly how? I think you've had too much wine, L."

"Or maybe it's a stroke of genius? How many years have we been slaving away trying to educate the Lithuanian society, to teach it healthy ways and balanced life? Hopeless. Everything is. Let's look for a new consumer. Of course, the basis of our website would remain the same – promotion of Eastern culture for self-help purposes, but we can also toss in some Lithuanian, Baltic¹⁵, or, as I already mentioned, Slavic elements... And maybe Lithuanian emigrants will become interested. They have already assimilated into their Belgians, Germans, and Americans, but maybe it will spark up some nostalgia?"

"So, we are changing the audience and making a mixture of cultures for the purposes of self-education?"

L pondered on this question for a few minutes, fiddling with her yet another glass of wine, until, finally, her eyes lit up:

"We're moving to Bali," said L confidently.

"Or maybe, we're moving to a psych ward? What does Bali have to do with anything?" – V asked confused, unable to keep up with L's brainstorm.

"Have you heard about digital nomads?"

"Those who travel while working remotely? And document their polished aesthetic journey on Instagram?"

"Yes, exactly. We can become like that as well."



February 2020. L and V, having forgotten their conversation, continue their monotonous translation and legal work, trying from time to time to revive the self-help website for the Lithuanian

public. Everything seems to run its course, the days are pretty much the same.

However, in the middle of February, news spread about the threat of a strange virus that came from Asia. The world didn't care about the force of nature tearing China apart, but as cases popped up in Europe and took hold in Italy, people began to whisper. Whispers were barely audible while Lithuania proudly counted zero cases on coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html¹⁶.

28 February has dawned. Nothing special, nothing outstanding was to be expected. However, this day was important to show this region that Lithuania, otherwise known as God's ear¹⁷, is not protected from the threat that has befallen humanity. We were, are and will be connected. Air droplets don't see country borders, they don't see Schengen, they don't see strange limits that only human intelligence can come up with. This was proven by the first case of the virus reported in Lithuania.

The spectrum of reactions, rising by several points in two weeks, ranged from alpha to omega. Denial, panic, blame, drastic measures (unprecedented purchase of toilet paper, various models of haute-couture medical masks, games "who didn't wash their hands for long enough?" and the like).

Disarray reached L and V. The universal upheaval acted like the ripples of an ocean, stirring up everyone wantoning in it.

L, having agreed to meet up with V to discuss matters, sits in a café waiting. Tapping her foot, she is looking around, frowning at a slight coughing of others. Finally, when she sees V approach, she straightens up, as if ready for a serious attack.

"Hi, I'm sorry for being late, but the traffic is terrible, seems like everyone is rushing to Lidl to buy all the canned food or toilet paper..." V blurted out running in, with his jacket still on.

"Oh, ok, all right, no problem, listen. Remember when we talked about how cool it would be to move to another country and stream our content from there?"

"You did. But yes, I remember. What about it?"

"Let's go. To Bali. We will create our own website, teach people how to live proper and healthy

15 Balts are an Eastern European tribe whose language was formed from the Indo-European tradition. The roots of the Baltic tribe go back to 3000 BC. More about this in Edmund Bunkše and Wolf Tietze, 'Baltic peoples, Baltic culture, and Europe: Introduction'. *GeoJournal* (1994): 5–8.

16 The most popular website for COVID-19 tracking.

17 "God's ear" is a metaphor for a place of safety.





life. I've arranged digital nomad passports for us. There are many different nuances, but, the good news is that we meet the requirements! Let's finally invest ourselves in it. Wasn't that our dream? Imagine – we are sitting by the ocean... wait a second, is that the ocean or the sea there? Oh well, who cares. The important thing is that it looks beautiful and is immediately associated with Oriental wisdom. Who would want to learn these truths when they see a guru stuck in some ugly Khrushchevka? Trashy. So, get this, we sit on the beach, create content, work out, I bet you yourself will come back enlightened like Buddha and then we could-..."

V interrupts L's feverish ranting:

"Fine."

"Fine? That's it?"

"Yes. Let's hurry while we can. We can escape from the global panic about this tiny virus. We will be able to teach the world in isolation. My favourite method. No need to communicate. Just show. And they learn. Obediently, like children."

"I did not expect it would be so easy to talk you into it."

"Me neither. We finally need to do something."



Scene at the airport. It only took L and V a few days to plan the trip and book a flat with a pool and bamboo walls in Negara¹⁸, Bali. The place was located a few dozen meters from the water, which turned out to be the Indian Ocean.

Flight from Vilnius Airport to Denpasar¹⁹, Bali. V and L couldn't wait to leave their constantly disappointing homeland. Even the masked individuals cannot take away their joy and enthusiasm. The excitement of travel, which marks the beginning of a new life, affects the friends differently: Without saying a word, V lets the dreams ripple through his mind, staring at the Duty Free shop but not actually seeing it. V's great concentration stirs up L, who, on the contrary, keeps on babbling, occasionally taking a sip of *Evian* water for her dry mouth: "Pure Swiss water for a pure experience," she thought, investing three euros in a half-litre

bottle, voicing her train of thought to an inattentive audience:

"You know how many new asanas²⁰ I've discovered while packing? I can already see which ones will be perfect on the beach, and which ones by the pool, but I can't decide on bhujangasana²¹, do you think its vibe is better suitable for a green environment or water? Or maybe actually at home? I've seen on various channels that placing the animal in front of the window can get more views. Where will we get an animal? Maybe a Komodo dragon will show up, *ha ha ha*, well then I would definitely stand out from all the yogis in the world. Actually, who knows, maybe you can rent a puppy in Bali? Do you think it will make everything look nicer? Although, on the other hand, maybe the dogs in the yoga videos are old news? What if the animal I rent will be poorly trained, it will only ruin the whole atmosphere for me, well, I don't know, I don't know..."

"They're boarding," – said V shaking off his dreams.



L and V have been living in Negara for two weeks now. Digital nomadism is based on the principle that workers must change their place of residence every few months and, in the literal sense of the word, wander around without having a permanent place to live. However, who knows how the quarantine measures will affect the principles of these people and the work itself. There is no need to think about it for now.

A full two-week quarantine has just been announced in Lithuania. For travellers L and V, everything seems to be running like clockwork. Both feel an emotion that they try to run away from, because it is not in the least consistent with their doctrine of gratitude and kindness to others. This emotion is affect – a kind of malevolence, satisfaction with one's own experience, compared to the people left in their homeland, who are struggling with the greyness and desolation, resenting each other, the cloudy sky and endless winter, and

18 A city in Indonesia.

19 The capital of Bali.

20 Yoga poses.

21 In other words, the cobra pose. Modern yoga exercise.





mistrust those in power²². Meanwhile, these two are combating the growing number of followers, good weather, and fruits of indescribable freshness. It seems that the virus doesn't exist either – when you don't speak Indonesian and don't know the locals, neither number of cases, nor quickly occupied and quickly disappearing places in the hospitals are of no concern, it doesn't scare you and doesn't appear in your dreams in the form of nightmares either. They also rarely call their family in Lithuania, because “all they do is complain”.

After settling down, starting to conduct remote meditation and yoga classes, actively filling the content of the page with various articles about conscious mindfulness, monism and energy, the routine has taken shape. Just as corporate employees go to work to warm their chairs from eight to five, L and V, like soldiers, cooked up content and educated the public, which welcomed this knowledge with open arms in these troubled times. It was not even necessary to check the statistics – as long as coins fall into the virtual pocket, your face, your birthplace, gender, habits or age are of no interest. And papayas remain delicious and fresh.

Yes, work can sometimes become a set of repetitive actions that create a robotic feeling. But who can get tired of the practices that purify the soul? And, of course, fills the wallet..

**20 MARCH.***SARVANGASANA.**MATSYASANA.**PASCHIMOTHANASANA.*

L:

“It's a strange day, I didn't feel anything today. Maybe I didn't match the asanas well? Do you think the pressure is low?”

V:

“Oh, that's interesting. I feel out of steam today too. Well, there are different kind of days. How many people joined the live stream?”

“Five hundred.”

“Same here. So, it's all good. It means we are doing everything right.”

23 MARCH.*HALASANA.**BHUJANGASANA.**SALABHASANA.*

On this day, L was talking to her friend from Lithuania. Since L has abandoned nearly all contact with her friends, she cherished this short conversation, told all about her impressions from Bali, how meaningful her life is, how she feels close to enlightenment, and how the crashing of the waves soothes her. The friend was very quiet and muttered something strange about a bird flying by.

25 MARCH.*DHANURASANA.**SIRSASANA.**SARVANGASANA.*

V:

“L, does it ever happen to you that you can't feel the asanas? Yesterday I saw a local working out here, he seemed to have his chakras fully open, but me... I don't know, don't you sometimes feel like you're faking it?”

“These practices are not specific to the region they originated from. They are a gift to all mankind. Why are you so pessimistic?” – replied L with irritation, keeping to herself that for as much as a week she's been feeling constant existential emptiness, while yoga and meditation felt like an obligation, not a source of peace or a path to completeness.

“You are right. I'm probably not trying hard enough. I catch myself thinking a lot about my relatives and friends back in Lithuania. Perhaps my focus is not on the here and now. In Lithuania, people isolate themselves physically, but it seems that social solidarity prevails. And we isolated ourselves both ways. How long can a person survive alone with his most precious asanas and mantras assigned by the world's most famous gurus, when all support is tens of thousands of kilometres away? How many namastes and asanas can a person from the Baltic country take on?”

“Maybe you just didn't sleep well last night?”

“Maybe I didn't. But you know what I dreamt about? That I was eating lard with tomato and bread. Lard with tomato and bread!!! In Lithuania,

²² In Lithuania, as in many other countries, there were (and still are) corona-sceptic individuals who refused to obey the quarantine orders, avoided wearing masks, did not trust the orders of the government in general, believing that the virus is a way to enrich the elite and control the masses.





no one could ever force me to eat that – carbohydrates and fat, is my subconscious laughing at me...”

26 MARCH.

HALASANA.

MATSYASANA.

PASCHIMOTHANASANA.

L's mother caught coronavirus. She had to go to the hospital to be put on a ventilator because she couldn't breathe. L secretly wiped away exactly three tears while doing one of her live training sessions. She spent the rest of the day in bed checking her phone, jumping at each message.

“When my mother recovers, I will return to practice full of motivation and gratitude to the universe. For now, I just want to rest a bit. I hope, V, that you won't be angry with me if we don't have dinner together today. I don't have the energy. I'll have a McDonald's combo meal delivered.”

“Can you order McFlurry and fries for me? Thank you.”

30 MARCH.

BHUJANGASANA.

SALABHASANA.

DHANURASANA.

L's mother recovered and was discharged from the hospital yesterday.

L did not regain her motivation for spiritual practice.

All last week, V had dreams of the streaming Merkys River, his mother's smiling face and Lithuanian potato dumplings.

1 APRIL.

HALASANA.

SIRSASANA.

MATSYASANA.





DECONFINING Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa

DECONFINING is a large-scale collaborative project that aims to create improved and fairer cultural ties between Europe and Africa by developing a sustainable reference model of cooperation.

Building on the close collaboration between the two continents and the integration of their Capitals of Culture programmes, this project brings together cultural practitioners, policymakers, performing, media/visual artists, in-field universities, and audiences from both continents to explore and demonstrate new ways of intercontinental artistic and cultural (policy) cooperation, and to contribute to a better understanding of confinement patterns from different points of view from an intercontinental perspective.



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