



OLGA's Notes

This Whole New World

by MARWA ARSANIOS

When I start writing the script, I have to face the blank page, I have to face the limits of my courage. To doubt, to scribble, to hesitate, to close the computer, to open it again, to take a piece of paper, to draw. The breaks of not writing the script, the resistances not to write the script will follow me until I finish the script. I have it in my hands, the same hand with which I typed it in, erased, edited, selected. The hand that consists of five fingers, each consisting of three phalanges that make typing possible and that make those thoughts buried in my head confront the blankness of the page. The desire to write often triggered by an accumulation of reading and driven by a projected image into a room full of people sitting and listening, hopefully most of the time. This very projection drives the text to be written as if told, as if talking. The silences in the writing process are often cut out. Sometimes you sit for hours and your head is in a complete silence, you cannot write. You cannot do the typing, although your fingers are moving, or can potentially move. Those blank, silent moments are often edited out of the final script.

“The page is surveilled by government, family, society.”

In this library there are books that were said to be important for the learning process of the reader. These were all recommended books in the Al Hilal magazine from 1950–60. What should we read? What were they reading? What should be read? This is only a sample of what they were advised to read. I only found 30 related books from a list of 220 or more.

I went through the collection and drafted a list. A list of books, a list of words, a list of authors, etc. . . . “List” is the librarian’s favorite word. “List,” or “listo,” means “ready” in . . . I don’t remember which language (Spanish). Ready to learn, ready to serve, ready to follow, ready to leave, ready to enroll, ready to . . . “List” and “ready” have military undertones. Lists come with numbers 1 2 3 4. . . Counting and accountability. When you have gone through all the books on the list, that means that you will be ready. You will be counted as an educated subject who can talk about his knowledge with other educated subjects who were also following the advice of the magazine. “The educated bourgeoisie.” Ready to read. Readiness is a state of the body. In the army you should always be ready, ready to bow.

If we think that publishing was nationalized under Nasser, then we could also think of the promotion of certain books as the state propaganda of knowledge. But it is never a one-way promotion. At least we can often question the supremacy of state control over publishing and propaganda, the diffusion of a certain knowledge over another.

In his book Why Are the Arabs Not Free? The Politics of Writing, Moustapha Safouan talks about the nationalization of publishing as the moment that turned writers and translators into lifelong state employees, bored with their jobs, but controlling the content of all publications. The writers that were against the regime were fired.

So perhaps in this library there is a consent or complicity with a literature promoted by the state-controlled publishing houses. But not only . . . I hope. If hope is a quality, then I could still cling to hope. When I am flying, I always cling to hope to arrive at my destination. I never say I will arrive but I always hope to arrive, to land. In hope there is always a sense of precaution. There is also superstition, and superstition comes out very strongly when I am about to fly. There is still this incongruous feeling in flying. In fact, most of the passengers are in a state of hope; even if you are used to flying very often, there is still a tense existential nervousness in the machine that is countered by a feeling of hope, or that feeds a feeling of hope, fear and hope in flying. When the rocket was about to take off, Olga was the only confident one. She was shouting from joy. The liberation from this prison called earth is about to come. The liberation from her own body that is lost under all the clothes she had to put on, the salvation, in a very Christian way, of forgetting her own body. Faith and science become one and the same in the conquest of flying, getting closer to god and defying him at the same time.



The dancer will imitate the astronauts by doing the slow moon dance. She will not fly but rather imitate a certain slowness and gravity-less walk, gravitating between walking, flying, and dancing on a borderless stage. In imitating everyday mundane bodies walking on the streets, the dancer's body transforms everyday gestures into motion and form. Imitation is the main key for collecting gestures and movements. Imitation and dance, or imitating dance, or imitating the dancer herself, or the dancer imitating the other dancer, imitating the other one. And so on. Silences in dance are cut by the dancer's body-sounds. Silences in writing are erased.

We played a video of Yvonne Rainer's Trio A, as Sandra said this would be a good exercise; she had learned it at dance school. It was one of the first dances they learned. Yvonne Rainer herself had relinquished her authorship of Trio A by announcing that anyone who had performed it could teach it to anyone else. We followed Yvonne Rainer. It was hard to follow her intentional hesitation. Right left. We thought she was going right, when she turns and goes in the opposite direction, then unexpectedly turns back again and goes right. It was a game of switching directions. She stumbles as if she will fall, but she doesn't; but she will. She stumbles, holds herself and doesn't fall; but suddenly she does. We see her on the floor. In this twist, we followed her back and forth, back and forth, until we learned the move. We repeated it so many times, we learned it well and always got stuck on the stumbling. The fall needs a lot of muscles. To let oneself powerfully fall one needs lots of muscle and strength. Without hesitation we followed Yvonne. We stumbled, but were not powerful enough to fall. We skipped the fall.

I hope that publishing was not only about state policy. It is often simplistic to look at publishing from the 1950s and 60s as censored. Censored to us today? The word censorship becomes anachronistic in this case. Censored for a subject of the 21st century. It wasn't censored for her. Writers were fired. Hope was the only way out of this state control. The astronaut was liberated from this prison called earth. Capital was to conquer space.

*The process of learning to become a modern nation-state.
The beautiful magazines are on display in the museum.*

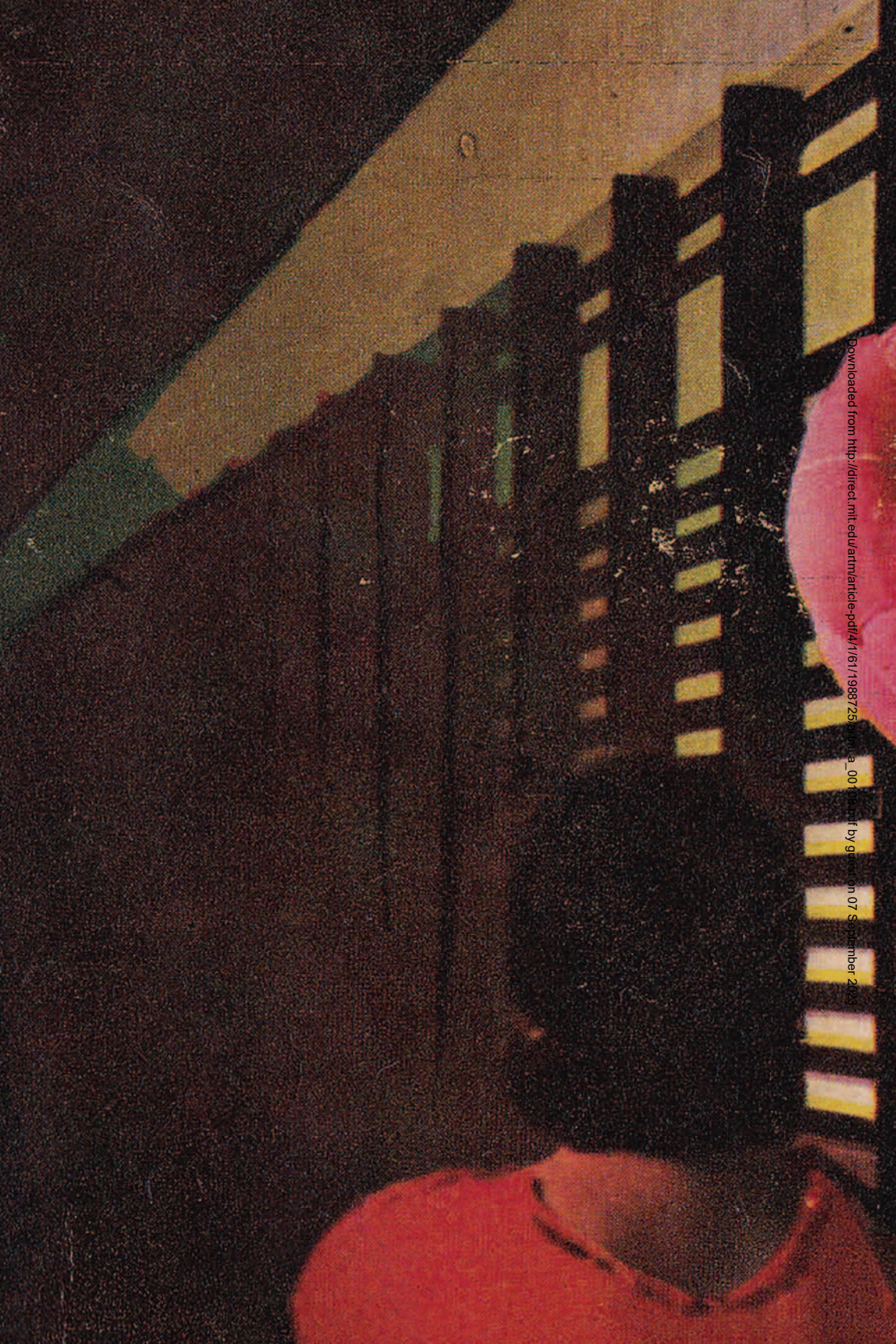
Learning to dance

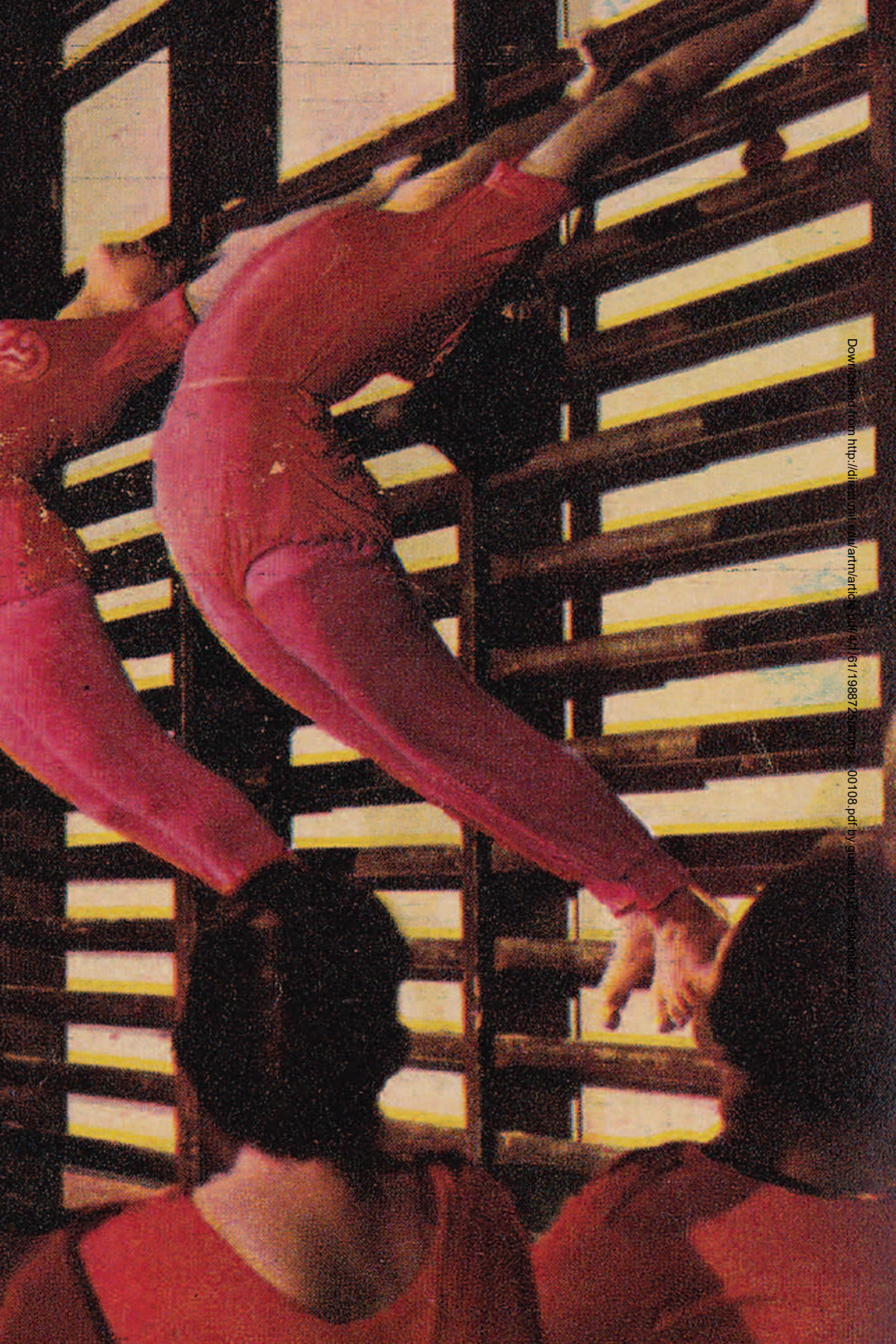
Learning to write

Learning to work

Learning to fly







“The Most Beautiful Industry in Our Country” is the title of an article that talks about a dance school.

“If you pass next to an industrial building, don’t think this is a new metal or car factory! No! It is a big hangar but nothing of what you expect. It is a place where bodies get trained to dance in a certain manner and join the national troupe.”

Learning in a factory is a mass learning and producing a mass that has learned. Bodies in masses that have learned to dance ballet to become, or not become, ballerinas. The article describes the newly built ballet school as “the biggest industry that has been built in the country,” and continues, “This is not a steel industry, this is a place that will surprise you. It is an industry of the body, it is a ballet school.” It promotes the school and the activities happening inside it in the way it would promote a building development project. Building bodies that could dance in a certain manner. The opera house and the ballet school become part of the modernization process of the nation. But why ballet? Ballet as a tradition coming from industrialized countries. But also ballet as a tradition that would disrupt the local folkloric and traditional dances. But why ballet? Ballet as a colonizer, ballet as a decolonizer from traditional dance.

The national dance school aimed at producing national dancers that would enter the national troupe and dance on official occasions. These bodies of dancers would become representatives of the country with its specific borders. Beyond borders, traveling to give spectacles and performances, the dancers’ bodies freshly coming out of national industry will have to dance the dance that represents their country and their people. A specific gesture or a dance movement can be representative of a country and the people living within specific borders mapped by human hands and fingers—colonial hands. What do colonial hands look like?

In the same way, the spectators start identifying with the dance group who they think best represents their country. The ballet school was implemented in 1958 with the help of experts from the Bolshoi Ballet. In 1966, Lavrosky flew to Cairo to stage *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, the first big production. Nasser attended the opening on December 3, 1966, and awarded Orders of Merit to the lead dancers. One year later, Lavrosky died. A year after that, the Six Day War was fought. The bodies had to learn and adapt to this dance. The industrial body had to learn ballet. The body of the ballerina can fly. It learned to fly. After certain conditioning, it can do the jump-in-the-air-and-fly.



If the modern project has given birth to democracy and totalitarianism at the same time, then perhaps the dancer's body was trapped in between those two projects. But don't worry, we are not here to save it. Perhaps the dancer will decide to break away when she rebels against the choreographer. But in any case we are not here to save her.



Carita and Natasha were my neighbors. Older than me, they were trained as ballerinas but joined the national folkloric dance troupe in the 1980s. The twins. They were known as the twins. Born to Greek parents, they moved to Beirut with their mother after she remarried. Their stepfather owned the building where I lived as a child. This is what Carita writes next to a photo she posts on Facebook:

“La guerre battait son plein et le temps d’une acalmie nous prenions la pause sur le balcon de ma chambre, vue par la photographe Houda”

“The war was in full swing but for the time of a lull we would take a break on the balcony of my room, seen by the photographer Houda”

The pose of the ballerina on her balcony when the fighting paused.

The ballerina with her pointe in a funny fashion comes out and poses. She doesn't dance, she poses. She poses the moment the fighting stops. She simulates the act of being a dancer for a moment on the balcony. She seduces. She is a dancer even if she is not dancing for the moment, or she had to stop dancing for a while. As soon as the fighting stops she steps out on her balcony and becomes a dancer again. The body of the dancer on the balcony means that the fighting has stopped. At least for a while. The time to take a picture. Twenty years later she can write the comment and post it on Facebook.

“That moment 20 years ago the fighting stopped for a bit and I went out on my balcony and posed.”

Seduction

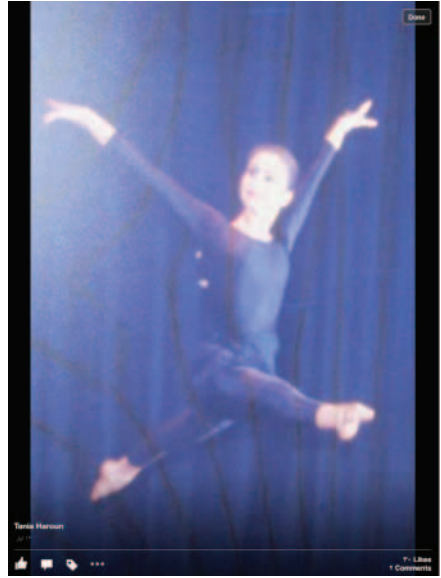
In this same moment I would go down to her apartment and try on her dancing clothes and accessories. I would transform into a dancer, by wearing the mask for a moment, without having to go to the dance school. I would act as if I was a dancer for a moment, for the moment of the picture.

The body being trained like steel, shaped and formatted to dance in a certain manner. What writes the dancer's body coming out of the industry?

Dance / as if flying

The ballerina is flying, her body flies over for a second, she thinks she will stay up in the air, but she has to land again quickly. The ballerina will defy gravity. She is the center of the modernist project in the way she defies the very idea of center and gravity. She is getting ready for the harim dance. A neo-Orientalist tableau with ballerinas and a total fantasy of the choreographer and watchers. The harim dance, where we see Natasha (one of the twins) dancing, defies the modernist project that was proposed in the magazine, the project of women's liberation and participation in the public sphere. The harim dance is what the dancer dreamt of doing most. "It was the most challenging tableau," she says. Look at the costumes. She will defy any project just to do the harim dance.

They say you talk about dance when you want to talk about your own body. When you feel your body is changing or when you just feel like being naked in front of people and dancing. In front of an audience perhaps. Or take on the street naked. But this is so 1960s, forget about it. Nakedness is not the solution. Naked bodies running in the fields are not the solution for liberation. Neither is the neo-Orientalist tableau. And don't worry, we are not here to free the dancer from the choreographer or the choreographer from god. Neither are we freeing the naked body from its own nakedness. What do you mean by this phrase? I mean the nakedness of the body will never be saved. We will always be shy from our nakedness, we will always blush if someone sees us naked, unless we are in a nudist camp. After a while, when we were sitting in the public bath, we started feeling comfortable with our nakedness; our bodies were totally comfortable and we started chatting normally until someone told us to lower our voices. The bodies sitting together in that bath neither were shy nor sought proximity. They were just bodies next to each other.



*The naked bodies were found floating on the shore.
The boat had sunk around midnight and the blue
bodies were found in the morning.*

His body had burnt, they recognized him from his head—it was the only part of his body that did not blow up. It hung out of the car window. He blew himself up around midnight.





“I remember a story about an industrialist in the 19th century . . . he owned a factory in the North of England and instructed his team of managers that it would be beneficial to teach the workers he employed to read, but he strictly forbade that they should learn to write.”

Writing was not a necessary task, but when she left the village to come and work in an industrial zone in the northern suburbs of the capital, she decided to learn how to write by herself at home. She started learning by copying the books she was reading and slowly formed a group of people who would meet every other day in the evening at her place to teach each other, read for each other, and learn how to write. Her house became like a schooling place where many of her colleagues gathered to learn. Learning to write was often associated with the task of writing history and controlling historical narratives. A task controlled by a certain class.

“The educated bourgeoisie,” she thought.

The class that controls the educational system.

The same class that controls publishing.

The same class that promoted ballet.

The state supporting class.

On the cover of the magazine, the educated middle class simulates the act of reading and the act of writing for the photo. As if reading, as if writing. As if history.

When she took the book, he told her to hold it closer to her face as if really looking, as if really interested; she moved it closer and posed for the picture. Simulating reading, simulating curiosity for knowledge, simulating knowledge consumption. The middle class simulates, for the moment of the photo.

“Revolution itself, that modern idea, represents the scriptural project at the level of an entire society seeking to constitute itself as a blank page with respect to the past, to write itself by itself, refaire l’histoire.”

As if writing, as if revolution.

The capitalist and conquering task of writing was inaugurated by the decision to write her diary.

Learning to work

When a certain position molds your body—whether sitting in a library reading a document or working in a factory operating a machine—when you figure you have to sleep as if you are sitting, or you have to stand up as if you are sleeping, this means your body has been molded to the position of labor. This productive force is nothing but the molding of your own body that hurts now.

You can see the violence of a project on the body of the people taking part in the project.

The nightmare of the project can be seen in the building, or in how the building has become. You see it in the paper, how yellow it is. You see it in the words that are like ruins. The nightmare of the project is that it has a specific time. And with its violence, it imposes this time. It imposes its own time. The progress of the project is its very violence. Or the violence of progress. Of labor of reading of writing. In every act, the violence comes out imposing the time of the project. The violence of adapting your body to the seat of the library.

The body being trained like steel, shaped and formatted to dance in a certain manner.

*The workers are locked inside / factory burnt /
gates are locked.*



