

• 11 MAY 1905

edge of town. When waves of water splash against the shore, the shore rebuilds itself. When leaves fall from the trees, the leaves line up like birds in V-formation. When clouds form faces, the faces stay. When a pipe lets smoke into a room, the soot drifts toward a corner of the room, leaving clear air. Painted balconies exposed to wind and rain become brighter in time. The sound of thunder makes a broken vase reform itself, makes the fractured shards leap up to the precise positions where they fit and bind. The fragrant odor of a passing cinnamon cart intensifies, not dissipates, with time.

Do these happenings seem strange?

In this world, the passage of time brings increasing order. Order is the law of nature, the universal trend, the cosmic direction. If time is an arrow, that arrow points toward order. The future is pattern, organization, union, intensification; the past, randomness, confusion, disintegration, dissipation.

Philosophers have argued that without a trend toward order, time would lack meaning. The future would be indistinguishable from the past. Sequences of events would be just so many random scenes from a thousand novels. History would be indistinct, like the mist slowly gathered by treetops in evening.

In such a world, people with untidy houses lie in their beds

Walking on the Marktgasse, one sees a wondrous sight. The cherries in the fruit stalls sit aligned in rows, the hats in the millinery shop are neatly stacked, the flowers on the balconies are arranged in perfect symmetries, no crumbs lie on the bakery floor, no milk is spilled on the cobblestones of the buttery. No thing is out of place.

When a gay party leaves a restaurant, the tables are more tidy than before. When a wind blows gently through the street, the street is swept clean, the dirt and dust transported to the

and wait for the forces of nature to jostle the dust from their windowsills and straighten the shoes in their closets. People with untidy affairs may picnic while their calendars become organized, their appointments arranged, their accounts balanced. Lipsticks and brushes and letters may be tossed into purses with the satisfaction that they will sort themselves out automatically. Gardens need never be pruned, weeds never uprooted. Desks become neat by the end of the day. Clothes on the floor in the evening lie on chairs in the morning. Missing socks reappear.

If one visits a city in spring, one sees another wondrous sight. For in springtime the populace become sick of the order in their lives. In spring, people furiously lay waste to their houses. They sweep in dirt, smash chairs, break windows. On Aarbergasse, or any residential avenue in spring, one hears the sounds of broken glass, shouting, howling, laughter. In spring, people meet at unarranged times, burn their appointment books, throw away their watches, drink through the night. This hysterical abandon continues until summer, when people regain their senses and return to order.

• 14 MAY 1905

There is a place where time stands still. Raindrops hang motionless in air. Pendulums of clocks float mid-swing. Dogs raise their muzzles in silent howls. Pedestrians are frozen on the dusty streets, their legs cocked as if held by strings. The aromas of dates, mangoes, coriander, cumin are suspended in space.

As a traveler approaches this place from any direction, he moves more and more slowly. His heartbeats grow farther apart, his breathing slackens, his temperature drops, his

thoughts diminish, until he reaches dead center and stops. For this is the center of time. From this place, time travels outward in concentric circles—at rest at the center, slowly picking up speed at greater diameters.

Who would make pilgrimage to the center of time? Parents with children, and lovers.

And so, at the place where time stands still, one sees parents clutching their children, in a frozen embrace that will never let go. The beautiful young daughter with blue eyes and blond hair will never stop smiling the smile she smiles now, will never lose this soft pink glow on her cheeks, will never grow wrinkled or tired, will never get injured, will never unlearn what her parents have taught her, will never think thoughts that her parents don't know, will never know evil, will never tell her parents that she does not love them, will never leave her room with the view of the ocean, will never stop touching her parents as she does now.

And at the place where time stands still, one sees lovers kissing in the shadows of buildings, in a frozen embrace that will never let go. The loved one will never take his arms from where they are now, will never give back the bracelet of memories, will never journey far from his lover, will never place him-

self in danger in self-sacrifice, will never fail to show his love, will never become jealous, will never fall in love with someone else, will never lose the passion of this instant in time.

One must consider that these statues are illuminated by only the most feeble red light, for light is diminished almost to nothing at the center of time, its vibrations slowed to echoes in vast canyons, its intensity reduced to the faint glow of fireflies.

Those not quite at dead center do indeed move, but at the pace of glaciers. A brush of the hair might take a year; a kiss might take a thousand. While a smile is returned, seasons pass in the outer world. While a child is hugged, bridges rise. While a goodbye is said, cities crumble and are forgotten.

And those who return to the outer world . . . Children grow rapidly, forget the centuries-long embrace from their parents, which to them lasted but seconds. Children become adults, live far from their parents, live in their own houses, learn ways of their own, suffer pain, grow old. Children curse their parents for trying to hold them forever, curse time for their own wrinkled skin and hoarse voices. These now old children also want to stop time, but at another time. They want to freeze their own children at the center of time.

Lovers who return find their friends are long gone. After all,

lifetimes have passed. They move in a world they do not recognize. Lovers who return still embrace in the shadows of buildings, but now their embraces seem empty and alone. Soon they forget the centuries-long promises, which to them lasted only seconds. They become jealous even among strangers, say hateful things to each other, lose passion, drift apart, grow old and alone in a world they do not know.

Some say it is best not to go near the center of time. Life is a vessel of sadness, but it is noble to live life, and without time there is no life. Others disagree. They would rather have an eternity of contentment, even if that eternity were fixed and frozen, like a butterfly mounted in a case.

• 15 MAY 1905

Imagine a world in which there is no time. Only images.

A child at the seashore, spellbound by her first glimpse of the ocean. A woman standing on a balcony at dawn, her hair down, her loose sleeping silks, her bare feet, her lips. The curved arch of the arcade near the Zähringer Fountain on Kramgasse, sandstone and iron. A man sitting in the quiet of his study, holding the photograph of a woman, a pained look on his face. An osprey framed in the sky, its wings outstretched, the sun rays piercing between feathers. A young boy sitting in