

Thoughts for Lucy: a foreword to "Lament in Three Parts"

It made me think of μοιρολόγια / moirologia, the Greek folk laments, with ancient origins... partly because of the title, but also because of the sounds themselves, the patience and solemnity of them, and because of how I can hear your body sitting and breathing, and going over and over this matter, speaking the same thing in different ways, trying now this way, now that... and because of what you said about making out of what feels necessary right now. The idea that there is just too much to process at this moment - there is always too much to process of course, but normally we live at a comfortable distance from those realities. Now we don't have the distraction of our comfortably busy lives and suddenly we cannot *not* see the depth of the mess we're in. But we need space for this realisation to settle - we need to not have the option of blocking it out with the noise of our lives. And paradoxically, we are gaining that space (such a luxury!) by virtue of the same microorganism that is killing hundreds of thousands of people, and making life even more unbearable than it usually is for countless others. This destruction - because it is not wreaked by humans, but by another autonomous, living organism - is hitting us all, but in such profoundly unequal ways. And suddenly we can see that it doesn't matter if it's a virus or capital or race or the patriarchy or CO₂ emissions or borders or property ownership - whatever it is, it is going to impact us all unequally and disproportionately. We have built a world that has disparity sewn inextricably into its fabric.

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The word mirolai comes from the ancient Greek μοῖρα + λέγω. Μοῖρα means many things - part or portion, that which is right, or in the right order, lot, destiny, or one's portion in life. I wonder if there's a similar nexus of meaning in English. I recall, for example, the Sacred Harp hymn:

*Soon as from earth I go
what will become of me?
Eternal happiness or woe
must then my portion be.*

Then there are the Moirai, or the Fates, the mythological goddesses of destiny who determine the span of mortal life. The concepts 'fate' and 'portion' are bound up in the word moira, a word reflecting the classical worldview that humans are allotted portions of time - as well as portions of misery and suffering - on this earth.

Λέγω means to say, to speak, to tell. So to perform a moiroloi is to tell one's fate, or the fate of another. And in the telling, to grieve.

What is it about the telling that provides comfort or consolation? Perhaps it's partly in the curative power of naming, an act that can bring our experience into relief and ward off the depressive forces of nothingness, formlessness, and monstrous plasticity. There are also other forms of telling that are not lexical, and our too-easy separation of sound and speech, music and words, belies the existence of something deeply healing and transformational that grounds and unifies them both.

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The concept of fate or allotted fortunes might seem remote or romantic, but actually it is alive and well. I think of Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, and the notion that capitalism so successfully sedates our capacity for imagining other possibilities that we may as well call it 'fate' or 'allotted fortune'. It is a realism "analogous to the deflationary perspective of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion". I can't help but recall Michael Ende's fable *The Neverending Story*, and the procession of grotesque dancers willfully throwing themselves into 'The Nothing' because they had "given up hope". This lack of hope, of imagination, is our version of destiny. It is a short-sightedness so powerful that it whittles down the possibilities of who we can become - individually and collectively - to a handful of fateful options.

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When I listen to your two bodies together, acting on one another, I enter, *in medias res*, a conversation that has been going on for many, many years. I experience the richly stratified and sedimented technique that structures the relationship between your bodies, a technique so intimate that it has become a form of self-knowledge.

But I am not a spectator. I am an activator, and a witness. I was one of the imagined bodies seated in front of you, around you, when the plasma of this moment you are living was assembled into a form. When you sat down with your closest friend and confidant, to speak some of the grief you are feeling. To tell the conflicted fate of this moment that affords time and mental freedom to the privileged few, while others are encaged, endangered, traumatised, buried. To sit with the uncomfortable knowledge that this moment is exposing, the knowledge that we are inserted, in Fisher's words, "at the level of desire" into the "remorseless meat-grinder of Capital", and

that maybe the voicing of other desires - autonomous, but connected desires - can also be what keeps us from flinging ourselves into the Nothing.

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Mirologia are semi-improvised, or, wrought in the moment using forms, words and ornaments that are embodied and inherited. They can be vocal or instrumental, can be performed alone or in a group. Moirologia, and laments in general, are a sort of quintessential form when it comes to the practice of making from, out of, in response to, the needs of the moment. There is grief, and it needs to be sung. Nobody asks why, nobody says "what will that accomplish", it is simply self-evident that this mode of human response is necessary. That there is grief, and it must be sung, just as love and birth and ecstasy must be sung.

I like to think of the moirologia as acts of resistance against fate. Acts of situating ourselves in our specific embodied techniques, our intimate self-knowledges, and, from that standpoint, voicing our desire for the impossible, or the seemingly impossible. To speak against realism, and in doing so to invoke realities to which we have become blind. I think of 'Margiola', the famous Epirote miroloi:

*Σήκω, Μαργιόλα από τη γη
κι από το μαύρο χώμα.
Κάνε τα νύχια σου τσαπιά,
τις απαλάμες φ'κυάρι, Μαργιό.*

*Rise, Margiola, from the earth
and from the black soil.
Make your nails into harrows,
your palms into spades, Margio.*

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The old separation of form and content, of the political and the aesthetic, might mislead us into thinking that these forms merely 'represent events' or 'express emotions'. But I would defend any art form against accusations of inefficacy, indulgence or "mere" representationalism. When we use our bodies to fashion a new form, we enter into a process of discovering something that doesn't exist yet. We root ourselves in our body's potentialities, and out of these potentialities, form something that is nothing more or less than a momentary flowering of life-long processes of becoming. In forms of lament in particular, we make space for what would otherwise be covered over, repressed, transformed into pathologies of avoidance, or

simply ignored completely. To make a lament, to play a lament, to participate as activator and witness in the performance of a lament, is to open up a space of duration in which you sit with the complexity of the moment, with its profound contradictions, even, yes, with feelings of guilt and fear, and *live* those feelings. To not only contemplate them - although that is also happening - but to inscribe them in the body's physical, technical capacity for movement and for change. Making *situated* art - out of the needs of the moment, with whatever means and tools we have at our disposal - is a way to resist the kinds of alienated activities that otherwise so widely characterise our lives; a way to open a space for imagining new forms of living as well as new forms of art-making.

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Rise, Margiola, from the earth and from the black soil. Make your nails into harrows, your palms into spades, Margio.

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