

186 A = SaD

Thomas Feuerstein:

l anu

l nds

d-t

26 April 1986

187

It is Saturday morning. At the Mohamed V airport the Hercules C-130 is waiting for clearance for takeoff. The air shimmers over the runway blackened by skid marks, and fine sand dust filters the blue portions of the sunlight. Deep rumbling commingles with the whirring of the T56 turbines, and fifty tons start moving. At airports there are two kinds of sculptures, the asphalt of the runways and the engines of the airplanes. The former stick to the ground like poured carpets, the latter modulate gas into ephemeral forms, Robert Smithson and Robert Barry. A last look at the beach of Ain Diab and the Atlantic seeps into the sand. — The vibrations of the motors rock you into a dim sleep and liquefy your thoughts. The shadows of halfah grass, juniper and boulders inscribe a cryptic code into the overexposed desert landscape, until a monochrome expanse of sand erases the traces of memory. Those who say fiction brings us closer to reality have understood art. Desert is the entropy of stone, boulders ground into sand, having tiredly lost their form. Antiform instead of

form, material of chaos, plaything of demons, the perfect host for artistparasites. Desert is another word for sculpture, a macroscopic allegory of the molecular. Particles condense trickling and grinding on the ground, expand in space into clouds and ribbons. They form polymer hordes and are the fluid gas of contingency. The desert is the sculptor's possibility form. — All sand and dust. The pockmarked phosphate mines come into view above Meskala. Behind them the ridges of the High Atlas creep to the coast. Descent begins, and with the sun at its zenith the machine dips into the smog of Agadir. A Peugeot P4 is waiting at the airport in front of the Royal Pavilion. No mint tea, no dates, only thick dust that turns into a dark tunnel behind the car, devouring the landscape like a sarcophagus. After about twelve miles we head from Biougra along the R105 south to Tafraoute and further into the rectum of the Anti-Atlas. Five hours later, a vegetationless field of course rubble opens up with pink granite cliffs rising up to the sky like phalluses. The car stops in front of a fifteen-meter-high

erratic boulder, hollowed out by the Chleuh Berbers. Geometric patterns in white, blue and green fill the embrasures of the apertures to keep out the jinn, especially the powerful Afarit, whose name is derived from the Arabic word *'afar* for dust. Sand and dust is the avatar, the medium of incarnation for the Afarit, who blow through our bodies and arouse our fears. They penetrate into all the cracks and gaps, enter into our blood through the bronchia and lungs, absorb moisture into sticky mush, grow in the flesh and fulfill the prophesy that from dust everything will return to dust. Everything the jinn of the desert winds touch dries out, is ground up and disintegrates. The desert is epidemic and its dust infectious.

— The sun retreats behind the monoliths and the heat radiates up then only from below. A sickly sweet smell of vomited rotten eggs streams out of the stone house, and crystalline crusts cover the walls inside, shimmering in the last of the light. The air sparkles, pleasantly tempered and moist. Life on the surface is familiar to us. It is based on the light of the sun. Descending into the

underworld, though, you become hopelessly lost in the labyrinth of the hollow spaces. In the depths of the stone, a negative sculpture proliferates in the form of caves and passageways, shafts and chambers. Sculptural spaces are larger inside than outside. If you enter them, they fold and bend, distorting perception. Everything becomes perforated and porous. A tunnel leads steeply down into the dark matter, and the temperature rises with every step. Acetic acid and methane mix with the smell of sulfur. The intestine of the granite is a deep, hot biosphere populated by archaea and bacteria that feed on sulphuric and manganic compounds; even arsenic and uranium are on their menu.

They breathe iron instead of air, digest metal sulfides and excrete sulphuric acid. The sour sweat of chemolithotrophic microbes drips from the ceiling and walls, and a metallic blue glittering sauce of magnetite and greigite blubbers lethargically on the floor. The rancid heat becomes unbearable and threatens to melt the proteins.

— Life did not originate in paradise, it comes from hell. In the stone there is no sun and no

weather, no daytime or time of year, no dry seasons or rainy seasons. Hell is dependable. How comforting it was to believe in the singular emergence of life. But life did not emerge at some random time. Life emerges perpetually in the stone matrix and is on its way to us. The stone is a magmatic machine, incessantly combining molecules and generating new beings. A chemical store and processor of life. Aliens are not found in the cold of outer space, they have inhabited the hot depths as stonemasons and sculptors for billions of years. Michelangelo sensed that the sculpture is trapped in the stone and only has to be liberated. The art of the endoliths represents nothing and signifies nothing, is not intended to be an object for viewing, but seeks only to be a real object. No light of insight penetrates into the inferno of matter, no expression of desire germinates there. The stone is a dark ontology that allows us to shudderingly see a different world.

— Nothing waits at the end of the chasm. Hollow tentacles drill through the space in all directions, peristaltically retching up black

acids. This place is sacred to the Berbers. According to popular belief, Aisha Qandisha inhabits it. Lalla, as the demon is called, is moist and bloody, fertile and greedy. She devours men and makes women irresistible. At night she creeps out of her hiding place and likes to cavort in slaughterhouses to form lumpy baby sculptures out of sand moist with blood. For orthodox Muslims she is a pagan temple prostitute, for the Sufis a healer. She cures alcoholics through possession, so that instead of fig schnapps they drink the blood of infidels. Her world is that of inversion, the reversal of all values, the contortion of inside and outside. Lalla disintegrates the oppositions between order and entropy, pure and mixed states. Her breath swallows the dry wind demons and soaks the dust into a substrate of alien life. Lalla floods the world and animates the bodies. She reveals the collection of molecules that is a human being as an amalgamation of matter and spirit. Sand and dust become flesh and blood, cement and asphalt, body and house. She is the sculptress

performing life. Anthropocentrism dissolves in Lalla's acids and becomes the nourishing medium of a new culture.

— Back to the surface, a dark haze spreads its tent over the desert. Moistened with dew, the dust lies like a slippery sheet over the landscape erased by the murky black. How easy it is for painters to introduce themselves to nothingness and load it onto their square. Sculptors remain alone. Thick drops roll off the rusty P4 and perforate the sand. The glow plug signal light flashes on the dashboard next to the steering wheel and the diesel starts up. All of this is familiar, but the more we know about things, the stranger and more demonic they become. Slowly we head back across the slippery desert excrement of the slope. One mosaic stone for the intercontinental sculpture has been found. For provisions we have the alkaloids of the hermal seeds and the fragrance of prickly juniper.

— All sand and dust. It is Sunday noon. The Hercules C-130 heaves its massive rump across the runway and rises lurching like an albatross into the hazy air of

the Atlantic. Between the cliffs of Gibraltar and the Jebel Musa we head through the Pillars of Hercules across the Mediterranean to Europe. We have overcome the non-plus-ultra. Sculpture no longer stands statically in space, but space bubbles and brews in it.

— A film of sulphuric acid condenses in the cockpit and the hold. Called vitriolium by the alchemists, it contains as the essence of stone and the interior of the earth the acronym of the motto of the secret guild: *Visita interiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultum lapidem, veram medicinam* (Visit the interior of the earth, and by rectifying you will find the hidden stone, which is the true medicine). Like the searing shirt of Nessus that ate through the genitals of Hercules in antiquity, the acid attacks the side of the plane, the cables and the instruments. Still 100 km to our destination. The Moroccan pilots cry, Lalla is on board! And Lalla sings with the voice of Elvis: *Feelin' fast vibrations and I just can't take it. Living from day to day, chasing the dream. I'm, I'm leavin'. Lalla la la la la la la la la la la.*

— Aviationists know that

headwind means upswing, and you can only crash well from a great height. The crash requires energy for deformation. Not scratches, but folds and liquification perform work on the form. The secret of entropy is found in the creation of new information: in mathematics minus and minus always yield plus, in life sometimes. A new object emerges from the effects of hidden processes, which hit us abruptly and abysmally. In the middle of the brain, right through the flesh. Appearance is past, essence is future. Instead of an aesthetics of the surface, a poetics of the abyss is needed. Aesthetics was a historical exercise, poetics realizes the sculpture of the future. On the crust of the earth sculpture is a terrarium that we move around watching in space. The sculpture of the depths, on the other hand, is a realium, in which we exist and from which there is no escape. It is not content with blocks from the quarry, but encompasses the entire planet, forming the foundation of all cultures as an intercontinental sculpture.

— The energy is used up, the

air current halts. The airplane plunges like a stone from the clouds and crashes through Andrea Pozzo's ceiling painting. The apotheosis no longer glorifies, but instead bores and corrodes its way into the inside of things. The Hercules Hall in Palais Liechtenstein has found its purpose. Hell has landed in heaven.

←

"All sand and dust" pays homage to Gottfried Bechtold's concept of sculpture, especially to his term "underground sculpture". Matter, information and energy form an abysmal alliance, deeper than any "delightful horror" can show. Before posthumanism, speculative realism and new materialism, Bechtold created objects that alienate us through a poetics of processes in a fascinating way.

The Titans Atlas and Prometheus are brothers who limit in the personification with the Atlas Mountains and the merger with the Caucasus, the western and the eastern end of the ancient world. The two short stories Everything "Sand and Dust" and "The Prometheus Protocols" are literary speculations between science fiction and horror about a changed concept of sculpture.