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**FRAGMENTS OF MOURNING. ABOUT THE LOSS OF A MOTHER  
FROM AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**existential exploration of first-hand experience  
loss of a mother  
mourning**

**Summary**

The death of a mother (as an event of the order of the outside world) is at the forefront of these considerations. As guides we take those who after their loss left the traces in the form of a journal, poems, or texts. The loss they suffered was demanding an action – recognized by us as a process of grievance. Starting from the Freudian definition of mourning, we are guided somehow outside of it. We are wondering what we are writing when we use the word mourning and if it is our right to define its traits? The complaint itself (as a response to the experienced lack) is written in four acts: her silence (the mourner is alone and in vain to listen to the beloved voice), speaking without her (pointing to the silence of the orphaned, recognized by us as: uttering the lack, complaint, union with these who no longer exists, or no desire to speak); talking to oneself (recognising by the writer his or her own emotional states and processes, knowing what is going on, which as such becomes a painful lesson, a source of intimate but not wanted knowledge). The last is an attempt to answer why writing experience has become important. The field of our reflections is what is unique (eine Ausnahme). Their method – exploration of the existence (existentielle Aufklärung), that we are.

of the things of this world only mother's eyes shall remain  
eyes of the mother with whom  
everything begins  
even death

[1, p. 429]

### 1. Ways of reconnaissance, or upon the method

Truth is infinitely more than scientific correctness  
[2, p. 67]

Let us begin with some remarks to clarify the words of the title. „Fragments” forecasts a form that, according to Friedrich Schlegel, never reaches finiteness [3]<sup>1</sup>; it is incomplete, imperfect, so to say, and as such it demands completion. The word „mourning” indicates at least two worlds; one: the world of the process of regretting, complaining, lamenting [5, p. 601], the other: Barthes’ (although not only) journal, written after his mother’s death (we will also refer to the Gliwice diary, written by Tadeusz Różewicz during his mother’s dying, death and after her death, as well as to the “book on the mother” – “history of things and also of chattering”, written by Marcin Wicha after her death). „Loss of a Mother” commemorates the one who passes away and the one who complains about her passing. „Perspective” is just looking at something through something else (fac. *per-spicere*, or piercing something with sight); in this case – when it comes to the existential perspective – it is looking at an existence through another existence, passing in time, from which fragments remain.

The method of our research is existential exploration [2]. By applying it, we follow the tracks set by Karl Jaspers, who demands, also from clinicians and therapists, reflection on the exception that we are [6]. „To be an exception” – he wrote, is to break ranks of all kinds of prevalence” [2, p. 113]; not in the sense that they do not concern (nor touch upon) us, but in the sense that comparing to them, it becomes possible to realize that it is impossible to translate individual existence onto language stating what is common. The exceptionality of our existences slips science, which is only „empirical statement of facts and finding principles ruling the processes” [2, p. 48]. Not being able to become its subject (Gr. *problema*), it can – as a thing to think of (Gr. *pragma*; Lat. *res*) – become the source of reflection on “the soul’s possibilities”. „Existential exploration”, according to Jaspers’ expression, is a „project of the soul’s possibilities, showing the person as in a mirror who can he be, what he can achieve and where he can get” [2, p. 48]. Its result is not explaining the reality being the source of the view (Ger. *die Er-klärung*), but putting light on it with the perspective of the one who reflects upon it (Ger. *die Aufklärung*). That is why the result of the reflection is inevitably partial: the research of what is exceptional becomes the way (Gr. *methodos*) of self-reflection; this existential communication, of which Jaspers wrote that it is „clarifying in mutuality, that in its core remains historic [and] it does not consist in applying general knowledge to some exceptional case” [2, p. 401].

The intention of our writing is existential communication. Its stake is the truth of existence that cannot be reduced to scientific correctness. As possible, it becomes an obligation without which all interpersonal relations, including the ones set up during the course of psychotherapy, are endangered with nihilism or irresponsible dreaminess [2, p. 386]. „Reflecting despite” the truth of existence, „external” and „non-imaginary”, just schematic [6, p. 9] „vulgarizes” and „levels the soul” [2, p. 420]. The alternative is co-reflection – here, following Jaspers, called the existential communication. Let us therefore „the facts have an effect upon us to the degree to which we can see them” [6, p. 9].

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<sup>1</sup> Compare with Dorota Plucińska article on fragment as a literary form. [4].

## 2. Mourning – taken as a word or taken for word

December 7th, 1977

(Simple) words of Death: - „It is impossible!”

- „Why, why?”

- „Forever”

etc.

[7, p. 91]

The mother of Roland Barthes dies on October 25th, 1977. The next morning her son depicts a few words: „The first wedding night. But the first mourning night?” (October 26th, 1977) [7, p. 15]. Other notes will follow: written on separate pieces of paper, divided into four, with his hand, pen, pencil, whatever. In this one moment, death ceases to be „*borrowed* knowledge (fake, coming from others, from philosophy etc.)” (May 1st, 1978) [7, p. 132]; it becomes someone’s: her, his, mine. The suddenly stopped life, speaks with silence in another life. The silence demonstrates the loss. To bear it, the one who has lost begins to complain. The grief is an echo of the loss and as such it does not fit the traces it leaves behind; it spreads beyond them (Barthes shall write that the mourning is “multiple – like the sclerosis” (November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 40], even if the traces are telling, black on white, like the ones left by the son of another mother: „Mother died at 10.20 in the morning. *Carcinoma ventriculi* (...). The funeral’s tomorrow (...). Yesterday at four we buried the mother. Yesterday the people, who attended the funeral, left. (...). I shall stay alone. I have given my darling to the soil. My good suffering child – my soul” [8, p. 106]. – the orphaned regardless of the age, sex and the cause, begin to mourn the mother „with whom everything begins, even death”.

I remember – it was  
october and the sun was shining

one day before, at night  
my mother died

I saw the sun and the sky  
it was not hazy

[1, p. 264].

The Barthesian jeremiad is marked out by the silence (hers), speaking (without her) and speaking (to oneself), as well as writing (why). Listening to its irregular rhythm, chaotic, as he

himself will notice, we will try to hear the reality that is hiding away from us; the mute reality of the death of the mother that is coming<sup>2</sup>.

Our intention, although realized by the written word, reaches beyond it. What is expressed here is but a trace of what there also is, but soundless. The death of the mother, as everything that is unspoken of, is easily gossiped about. The mourning of her, not treated with the seriousness to which the mortals are entitled, is taken into a word, that vulgarizes it, putting it into stiff frames of the so called norm and pathology. „Irritation. No, mourning (depression) is something totally different from sickness. What would I cure myself of? To move on to what state, what life? If there is any work to do here, then I suppose only such that the one who is reviving is not an *average*, but *moral* being, a subject of *value*, not of integration” (October 27th, 1977) [7, p. 20]. The vulgarization that comes into effect (also) because of the language („The measure of mourning (Larousse, Memento): eighteen months for the mourning of father or mother” (October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 31]), takes away life from any life and death from any death<sup>3</sup>.

Let us try to take the mourning for its word, keeping in mind that it is beyond any trace that it leaves. Let us state in the beginning what is unquestioned: there is a reality of the one lamenting the mother’s passing away. The „there is”, as we know from the existential philosophy lesson by Martin Heidegger, is not reduced to the simple statement that something is (Ger.: *es ist*), which is expressed by the memorable: *Aujourd’hui, maman est morte*<sup>4</sup>. Read as „this what gives” (Ger.: *es gibt*) it opens up to us as giving something<sup>5</sup>. The mourning, if it is, gives. What does it give? To whom? And if it gives its word, like Roland Barthes’ mourning expressing itself in his journal, does it promise, that it will not leave one until the time comes?

### 3. Death is. What does it mean?

July 18th, 1978

To everyone his own rhythm of grief

[7, p. 176]

From the reading of „Mourning and Melancholia” by Sigmund Freud we know that mourning is a given person’s attitude towards the loss of a beloved object and although the sources of difficulty in getting over this loss are neither clear nor sure, an analyst will say that time is needed to complete this process of grief. [12, p. 147-149]. Is that, however, not just an illusion that sometimes lets a person live? Does mourning not come back in waves, caring nothing for our desire to abolish it? Is it reasonable to speak of mourning that has not been gone through and what would that mean? Or of mourning that extends in time? Is there an out of place mourning and could there be an out of time one? Too long or too short? Deep or shallow; superficial, although intensive? „Everybody judges – I can feel that – the level of the

<sup>2</sup> Let us add that death as a fact is a word from the visible order, the loss, on the other hand, is the name of the invisible order, meaning no one can tell what and how.

<sup>3</sup> Compare a fragment of „Ferdynand” by Witold Gombrowicz, regarding the vulgarizing mentality [9, p. 10].

<sup>4</sup> Compare Camus, *L’Étranger* [10, p. 9].

<sup>5</sup> Compare Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* [11, p. 9].

mourning's intensity. It cannot be measured though (deceptive, conflicting symptoms), how it is reached" (October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 22]. So – let us repeat the question which seems to be key – can mourning be completed or incomplete, as we happen to say when we try to express somebody else's experience? Does it proceed in time that can be divided into phases, until it finally disappears (meaning where?)?

The death of the mother makes its presence felt in the empty place that had been occupied by her. Looking at it from the subject's side, who, noticing the lack of her, complains, one might ask what does he do towards that void, impossible to fill with the world that is gone with her: if he keeps silent, then about what?; if he speaks, what about? If he writes, how and what and what for? Looking at the empty space from the side of the absent one, it could be asked: what does the absence give? Because if it is (*es ist*), then it must also give (*es gibt*). The fragments below will be an effort to look both ways. In the starting point of our writing we acknowledged the lack: *Aujourd'hui, maman est morte*. The way of the writing will be filled with traces of the mother, who is (*es gibt*) in the space where she is absent.

#### 4. The silence of hers

October 29th, 1977

It is strange, her voice, that I used to know so well, her voice,  
Of which they say it is a seed of memory  
("dear intonation..."), I can hear no more. Like local deafness...  
[7, p. 26]

The silence cast after the mother's death is absolute. It is in vain that one tries to hear her voice, only a few (always too few) photographs remain, which commemorate the past. The silence of the mother is related to the loss that (contradicting itself?) is looking for ways of expression. Speaking the language of psychoanalysis, it could be said that the subject experiencing the loss, the subject of frustration and hurt, can „make use of reflection (if he or she can) – which is a form of experiential action – to work out the absence and to cope with it in this way<sup>6</sup>. Let us listen: „I am sitting in the room, alone" – wrote Różewicz one day after his mother's funeral. „it is quiet. I am talking and I will always be talking to you, Mom. I will be talking to you as if you were by my side" [8, p. 106]. The absence, because of the one who lives it out (is it only his cause?) becomes "the presence of the absent one" (November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 81]. Someone with whom he is talking as if she were by his side. Someone to whom he gives his word that he will be always talking to her. Whom he asks for more time: „I know that I should get down to work, that time flies. It is running. But one more moment. I will talk to you some more" [8, p. 108]. It was 1957, when the son asked his mother for time. Forty two years later he was still talking to the one, "whose eyes rested upon him". – „Those eyes, attentive and tender, ask in silence «what is bothering you, my little son...?» I answer with a smile «nothing... everything is all right, really, Mom», «oh, tell me – says Mother – what is worrying you?» I turn my head, I look through the window..." [8, p. 7]. Finite and infinite in one moment?

<sup>6</sup> Compare with the publication of Marta Szpak – Development of symbolisation. Chosen psychoanalytical perspectives [13, p. 22-23]

## 5. Speaking without her

As I begin to speak, I express the general,  
and when I keep silent, no one can comprehend me

[14, p. 63]

The day after his mother's death – let us repeat once again - Roland Barthes begins to draw up short notes. During the first few months he writes down several slips of paper a day. The notes concern mostly himself. There is not much on the mother, close to nothing – one could think. However, read many years later (in the meantime the one who had written them, died) we notice at least two silences inseparable from each other: the abovementioned silence of the mother, and the silence of the son, the silence of the son upon the mother, interrupted every now and then by memories, initiated by the external world. „At the confectioner (a trifle), I am buying an almond cookie. Serving the client, the small waitress says *Voilà*. I used this word when bringing something to mom when I was taking care of her. One time, near the end, semiconscious, she repeated the *Voilà* just like echo (*je suis là*), the word we used all our lives). This word, voiced by the waitress, makes my eyes water. I cry a long time (having returned to the empty apartment)” (November 5th, 1977) [7, p. 49]. – The silence of the son after his mother's death is meaningful, it demands looking into, listening to, noticing. As meaningful, it is the *meaning* of the lack – lack of the mother's voice. But is it only?

The silence of the orphaned one could be a complaint directed forwards, into the darkness, blindly; „because when the mother turns her eyes away from her child, the child begins to wander and gets lost in the world, lacking love and warmth” [8, p. 7]. – „Today – on my birthday – I am sick and I cannot – I do not have the chance to tell her that” (November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 58]. Less and less to say, „if not about this (but I cannot tell this to anyone)” (November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 52]. The silence will express the absent one, also this time. And if it expresses *her*, will *she* speak? Would it be, the silence of the child after its mother's death, dictated with the hope of returning to the time that flowed with her voice? Intentional, what does not mean conscious, searching for “lost time”, that had not known the division between „there was” and „there will be”, between her and its time, between you and not-me, me therefore not you? Does the orphaned one keep silent, because he desires the voice that will fill him up, like then? And when it does not arrive, he reacts like before „with some kind of digestive oversensitivity”: – „as if I was hit in the spot that she had cared for the most: meals (even though she had not been preparing them for me for many months) (November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1977) [7, s. 73]. With the burden of the loss, the tongue „gets stuck in the throat” and sets the body in motion; the body is fidgeting “neither here nor there”<sup>7</sup>, not knowing where to and what. If ever?

Or, does the child after mother's death keep silent because she keeps silent too and in this silence they are united again? By keeping silent, he speaks her? – „The first Sunday without the Mother. I was trying to do something. But I cannot. It is raining. It is before noon, dark, empty. My industrial town. I can go to the railway station to see the timetable, I can walk past the „delicatessen”, past three, four churches, I can look at drunks and motorcyclists, at...” [8, p. 107].

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<sup>7</sup> Compare: Kronhold, Long jump [15, p. 18].

Or it keeps silent because it does not desire to speak? „The desires I had before she died (during her sickness) cannot be fulfilled anymore, because it would mean that her death allows for their fulfillment – that her death could be, in a sense, liberating for my desires. But her death hurt me, I do not desire anymore what I had desired. I have to wait – let us suppose it will happen – for a new desire, a post-mortem desire, to take form” (October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 30]. „Suppose” – let us notice the word where possibility (impossibility?) of post-mortem desire speaks out – so, let us suppose there will be time (I have to wait) for a post-mortem word to be born from her silence and from speaking without her. Post-mortem word? Such to whom death is spared, whom the death will spare? So also such to which death will give its word, even if it is bitter, like the ones copied here not without hesitation:

as you are leaving  
you are staying forever  
not lived through  
to the end  
all  
mine

[1, p. 396].

„Around 18: the apartment is warm, nice, bright, clean. I make it such, energetically, with devotion (I relish this with *bitterness*): since now and forever I am my own mother to myself” (November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 48].

## 6. Speaking to oneself

August 1st, 1978  
My grief is *inexpressible*,  
although *voicable*.

[7, p. 189]

*Inexpressible* and although utter – possible to be voiced. But to whom to direct the lament, if there is no more mother, and the presence of others becomes unbearable? – On October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1977 Barthes notes: „Everybody judges – I can feel that – the level of the mourning’s intensity. It cannot be measured though (deceptive, conflicting symptoms), how it is reached” [7, p. 22]. A few days later, the same, in a different way: „People believe that I suffer less than they could suppose”, and then the mourning, his own, is not directly present neither in the loneliness nor in the empirical world (...). The mourning is there, where there is a rip in a loving relationship, in the «we loved each other». The most burning point in the most abstract point” (November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 49]. – Is it possible to believe in what does not exist in the empirical world, if one has not died, living? – „They wish me «courage»” –he will note on November the 10<sup>th</sup> 1977 „But the time for courage was when she was sick, when I was taking care of her, seeing her suffering, her sadness, when I had to hide my tears. In every moment I had to take a decision, and that’s what courage is. – Now *courage* would mean *the will to live* and there is more than enough of that” [7, p. 53]. – He speaks to himself because the other will not hear who is speaking and what anyway? Because they will not understand that for the mourning the will to live is a sickness? Not despair, but will of life, of which there is “more

than enough”? „Some part of me remains alert in despair, and at the same time some other part is dealing with tidying my most trifle cases. I experience this as sickness” (October 31st, 1977) [7, p. 37]. He speaks to himself, because the other will not understand that the mourning, the real one, not the borrowed one, is not something „to move on from”, leaving it behind; it is not something that will „ripen (does it mean that time will cause the mourning to fall like fruit or crack like an ulcer”) (June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1978) [7, p. 162]?; that it is not something that “gives in to wear”, nor to use, abuse, manipulation, persuasion etc.?

What has died does not pass. „*The moments* (of worry / love of one’s life) as fresh today as during the first day” (November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 84]. To say of someone that they have not completed their mourning, or – what is even more audacious – that they do not want to complete it, because they are terrified by the possibility of the day, when „the memory of words that she used to say to me will trigger tears no more ...” (November 19<sup>th</sup> 1977) [7, p. 69] – so to think that, ever more to say, is it to close the mouth of the one who is still speaking? – „Mom” – after twenty years they are still talking to each other – „Mom do you recognize me... the smile on the small time-worn face transparent skin grey hair on the head – yes my little it is / it is me Mom please eat the borsch maybe you will swallow some more spoonfuls – /the mouth is closed and the nutritious borsch leaks on the side it stains the chin I wipe the face/ the small face with a tissue and again I lift the spoon to her closed mouth Mom sits on the bed the back supported by cushions... woodbine can be seen through the window light transparent through the leaves Mom wants to look through the window behind it red walls of the army’s bakery warehouse” [8, p. 110].

So, „do not say *Mourning (Deuil)*. This is too psychoanalytical. I am not *mourning*. I have a worry (*J’ai du chagrin*)” (November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 85]. The worry – Barthes will write elsewhere – „is based on the generally accepted idea – also psychoanalytical one – that mourning depends on time, gets dialected, time-worn, «brought under control». The worry does not deprive suddenly of anything – but it also does not wear out” (November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 83]. It is also not something that could be defined by reference to a set of phenomena, taking place always, or usually, as statistical computations would show. „Aren’t you satisfied with your life? But no, everything is all right with my life, I do not feel any lack at the phenomenal level; but with a lack of disturbances from outside, «incidents», there is absolute lack: to be exact, is it not mourning, but pure *grief (le chagrin pur)* – without substitutes, beyond symbolization” (June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978) [7, p. 158]. Grief, worry, reduced to a sequence of phenomena, described as the mourning process, of which the non-worried (yet?) dare to think that they know “what it is about”, deepens the unwillingness to speak, the impossibility to talk that is close to death. „I cannot bear having them *reduced* – having them generalized (...): because it is as if they were stolen from me” (29<sup>th</sup> November, 1977) [7, p. 83]. „It makes me suffer” [7, p. 83].

The death of the mother is a specific lesson of darkness. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1977, Barthes writes: „There is time when death is an *event*, an adventure, and that is why it motivates, interests, attracts, activates, numbs. And then later, one day, it ceases to be an event, it is being in some other way, denser, deprived of meaning, indescribable, gloomy, with no way out: the real mourning, not to be negotiated with any narrative dialectics” (November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 62]. Her death (or death of anyone with whom our life was shared?) can be experienced as herald of our own death; something unthinkable until now becomes thinkable, and not only thinkable, if beyond what there will be, it already is. „My mind wakes up from a ponderous

dream it is raining on us on the surface on the earth smell of forest of life / and how about at your place underground? You go deeper / here on the ground I am listening to music and my brain through my eyes and hands passes the form of my thought to the letters/ since the morning I have been tossed around / I hurl on the surface like a straw / give me the grace of inner concentration and let me see. Years have passed You hold me by my arms by my legs you pull me underground I repudiate you the rooster crows when I wake up” [8, p. 111]. – „The truth of mourning is very simple” –Barthes writes on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1978 – „Now, that mom is dead, I am driven up the death (I am not separated from it by anything but time” [7, p. 143].

That life resists death („You hold me by my arms by my legs you pull me underground I repudiate you”) – cannot be known by those who derive knowledge of both at second hand. In this sense it is intimate knowledge, reached only by death. Can one be surprised by the person who turns away from it as long as it is possible? Or by the fact that when it already comes, the one who experiences it turns away from those who still do not know anything? „Now everywhere, on the street, in a cafe, inevitably I see people in a *premortals* state, or in an exact sense – *mortals*. And with no lesser certainty I can see them as ones *unaware of it*” (November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 64]. Let us dare to ask: which of them are more full of life? Is it those who, living through own death tell themselves that death is and gives („I am driven up the death”, give me the grace of inner concentration and let me see”), or those who still do not know anything about it, thinking that if it is, there is nothing?

## 7. Writing. Why?

December 22nd, 1977

*Indescribability* of my mourning comes from what I do not get hysterical about; a constant indisposition, very particular

[7, p. 96]

In one of his texts he singles out the losses that the speech sustains with writing – one of them is the disappearance of the phatic function, manifested by the lack of such expressions as „isn't it?” [16, p. 41]<sup>8</sup>. Among the „benefits” of writing – that introduce some order – one can enumerate: brackets (that enable the observation of the thought's course) and punctuation (dividing the sense) [comp. with 16, p. 42]. One can imagine that writing puts in order those experiences, whose chaotic course is otherwise difficult to bear. What is painful is the source moment of the writing, as it can be seen in the effort to tame in rotation chaos or void, that are experienced as a lack of meaning – “lack of meaning is the place of real meaning. One can never forget that” [16, p. 14]. The writing has in itself something of a photo commemorating something already gone, documenting the course of thought. In the face of mother's death, the written word is a confirmation and commemoration of the loss. It is at the same time its forgetting, because when words were missing – he did not write or he wrote less and less – his grief “reached the rank of eternity” (December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1978) [7, p. 228]. Paradoxically, the lack of

<sup>8</sup> About those fragments like „isn't it?” Roland Barthes writes that they are like trill „through which one body is looking for another one. And this trill – clumsy, flat, funny when written – wanes in the writing” [16, p. 41].

words to fill the loss commemorates the one who speaks no more; for the eternal grief, opposing the sickness of life, as if it did not exist.

However, he did write from time to time. In spite of the fear of reducing the experience to the object of knowledge and the other one that he reckoned with, the fear of “practicing literature” in face of which he could have felt helpless, because if not he himself, then somebody else will make from what is alive, because it has died, literature. Why did he write, if he knew that the silence would be fuller than the word at commemorating the presence of the absent one? For the sake of memory? Yet he could not forget, particularly when he was not writing. „To write – not to remember by *oneself*, but to fight with the rip of oblivion, *announcing itself as final*. With the – soon - «lack of trace», nowhere in no one” (around April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1978) [7, p. 127]. Writing as beckoning what is passing away. Leaving traces that, like castles built on quicksand, disappear before light turns out. Writing for time, for forgetting what apart from that is eternal? And at the same time lonely, impossible to fraternize with what passes; what will welcome with *Voilà*, and farewell with “you are sitting the wrong way” (November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1977) [7, p. 78].

And maybe writing after the mother’s death is not about a gesture beckoning the future, that will bring it down by substituting. Maybe the writing is creating (illusionary, but still) a space that by saying: „*Voilà*”, „you are sitting the wrong way”, „put something colorful on” will be there always?

## 8. Given?

July 20th, 1978

Mourning

Impossible – unworthy – to entrust a narcotic – with the excuse of depression – the grief, as if it was some kind of sickness, «spookiness» - alienation (something that makes you an alien) – whereas in fact it is a basic, intimate good...

[7, p. 177]

Being attentive towards the reality, also the one that reveals itself to us with the moment the mother dies, prevents one from hasty dictation of its „unchecked demonstrations”, such as those: completed mourning, uncompleted, finalized prematurely, not lived through. Because what do they say? That there is time for mourning, like for everything, that the time which comes is on time or not on time, premature (will it always be too early or too late, that it is too long or too short. Because what do they do and what for? They reduce the mourning to a phenomenon, taking it in for words that allegedly comprehend it: describe it, foresee it and bring it down. Looking at the mourning from the perspective of deceptive opinions (borrowed, as Barthes wrote of them, and fake) we turn our attention to what is visible in the reality (*es ist*) and, therefore, measurable: longer or shorter, intensive or not. Death, however, and the person experiencing it, cannot be reduced to what there is and what everybody sees qualities of. What is visible remains but a trace of what is invisible, although it also is, because it gives this, or that, depends to whom, where and when (*es gibt*). So for the question: what does it give (*was gibt es?*) you cannot answer in another way but by experiencing it by yourself. To see in the death, also the death of one’s mother, a possibility of a gift, is to speak up against what is

measurable and visible, and what at the same time „announces itself as final”; knowing not only what there is and what like, but also, what it should be like, because if it is different, then it is sick, disordered, requiring therapy.

To ask about the death of the mother from the side of the person who experiences it is to turn to the side, from which nothing is seen nor heard, but there is something there, if it gives, the word gives, promises that it shall not leave, that it will be there, always, even though it has died. The invisible giving, where one can live, what can live in the one who takes death for its word, knowing that it shall not leave him until the time comes. Looking only from this side, is it possible to understand those, who „live in their grief” (31<sup>st</sup> of July, 1978) [7, p. 188], having life as a symptom of sickness, as if it was not there? Who do not cease to talk to the absent present one, trying to “continue the daily life according to her values”, as Barthes did, of which he has left testimony by writing: „Bumping into some kind of food that she would prepare, I prepare it myself, I keep her house order, this fulfillment of ethics and esthetics that was her way of life, creating the everyday life, not comparable to anything. This «peculiarity» of practical thriftiness is not possible in travel – it is only possible at home. To travel is to separate myself from her – now even more because she is not there anymore – that it is just the most intimate part of everyday life” (August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1978) [7, p. 205]. So, only by looking from the side of, so to say, darkness, it is possible to understand those who are unable to throw away her books, even if they turn out to be the record of our reading failures” – that they have turned out to be? – „And now I am not alive. I am sitting in her apartment. Everything has disappeared. Only the books are left” [17, p. 20]. To understand those who cannot say anything about her, cannot describe her and instead of her, tell us about the things they have not thrown away? – „I used to think” – says one of them – „that we remember people until we are able to describe them. Now I think it is the other way around: they are with us until we are not able to do that. It is only the dead people that we have for our own, reduced to some picture or a few sentences. Figures in the background. Now we know – they were such or such. Now we can recapitulate all this struggle. Untangle the inconsequences. Spell it out. Write down the result. But I do not remember everything yet. As long as I cannot describe them, they are still a little bit alive” [17, p. 5]. Only looking from the darkness’ side shall we understand the one, who many years after her death tells us (although they could tell it to themselves)):

me, a house for the dead  
they have found here their  
last refuge  
(...)  
i got opened  
and they have inhabited  
the cold  
empty  
dark

this is  
their  
light eternal

such forgiveness of sins  
resurrection of the body

such life everlasting  
[8, p. 56]

„Hit by the incomprehensible nature of the absence” – would Barthes write, adding after a semicolon: „yet it burns and tears”. Is it only in this way, being hit by the incomprehensible nature of the absence of life in death and of death in life can one better understand the abstract? „[It] is absence and pain, the pain of absence – so, love, maybe?” (November 10th, 1977) [7, p. 54].

P.S.

the eyes of my mother were blue  
I have remembered the eyes and the milk

the eyes tasted of tears and  
the milk was of color blue

my dresses did not reflect blue in  
my mother’s eyes

wrinkled they did not shed  
a single drop of milk

[1, p. 10]

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