

In the Course of Time, Andrew Renton, 1996

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(SOMEWHERE ON THE ROAD BETWEEN JERUSALEM TO TEL AVIV)

I tried to send you something before you went, but I could not get through. I wanted to warn you, to direct you, but it would appear, in the end, that you needed little or nothing from the likes of me.

But I will piece together some scraps, just for the sake of it. Or because I know that you now know how it does not unveil itself willingly. And because you know how much I have wanted you to see what you saw, and for how long.

There isn't a single way through it. The signs are always shifting, quickly but imperceptibly. Perhaps one way through it would be to root out first thoughts and set them constantly against one's changing perspective. Because when one looks at an object, however apparently stable it might appear, circumstances are always shifting around it. Or because some things do not catch the attention until later.

(...)

(Your journey is already marked by a thread or trail left behind from some time before that you might retrace your steps should you ever be obliged in yourself to return again.)

In gathering and furling the thread or trail you left that last time, you pass from one place to another by circuitous routes. You begin to remember the stages of your return despite the contrary motion.

The sun begins to rise at last over the basin laden with mist. You follow it from hill to hill, eastwards of necessity. And from time to time, somewhat southwards. Of necessity. South-eastwards, from time to time, before resuming true course.

(...)

I wanted to send you to places.

(...)

She takes your right hand and ties a red thread around your wrist, blessing you, the son of your mother.

One day it will fall from you, having done it's work.

(...)

I wanted to send you places, but realize now that they must be fallen upon by accident.

(...)

You come across an object which obstructs your path. It is not something which has drawn you toward it or around it. You cannot be sure if it was left by you or with you in mind, or whether it is something abandoned.

(...)

And the crossroads in Jerusalem, where the Jaffa Road meets King George. A complexity out of a desire to have things work one stage at a time. The traffic lights let cars pass west to east and east to west, then north to south and south to north, in succession. As far as I understand it (and it is, incidentally, replicated further up King George at Mea Shearim), the pedestrians cross not in alternation with the two planes of traffic, but all at once in all directions. They bide their time, then cross. Twelve directions together.

The point of all this is the crucial meeting point or evasion point at the no-place, at the centre of the square. Because it is nowhere as such, but a moment to avoid, and in so doing, avoid others. This, then, is the centre of absolutely everything.

(...)

You have not really looked at the garden before. The last time was somewhat later in the season or the next, and the orange tree was bearing its fruit, now still green.

But other colours, like berries staining the ground with excessive yield. The moist surplus is extravagant in this dry heat.

The walls of the garden. The feeling which unsettles you most here is the proximity of the sounds which break not so much the silence but nature taking its course. The walls offer a seclusion against all but the most inventive of intruders. And here more than ever, you feel that the intruders are aware of you.

You cannot decide whether they notice you in the steet, or whether you leave no impression at all. The latter, in all probability, but the sense of how you appear, how you cover yourself, from whose hand you can receive directly, all such suggest that you should modify your deportment according to the vernacular.

In the last hours of the week, you sit at the top of the house, this time not facing the valley to the west, but southwards towards David's Tomb and the Zion Gate. Below, the odd soul burdened with preserves and condiments, making a purposeful way up or down the hill.

(...)

I wanted to tell you to watch your step and watch how others watch yours.

And when one travels even from one side of the city to another. It is not so much a question of disguising oneself, but of not announcing oneself. The codes are complex. There are nuances to what to wear, how to carry yourself, how to pass through the street. With hardly a glance, they will look at you and either recognize you as one of their own or as one not of their own. Or as another still, somehow out of the frame or focus.

(...)

Somewhere on the road from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. A few miles from an established point of arrival, in the distance, set back from the road, and in turn set back from a cluster of white houses, a red brick house, standing higher than the others, quite out of place in terms of style. The house is an exact replica of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's headquarters in Brooklyn. It was passionately believed by the Rebbe's followers in his later years that he might declare himself as the Messiah and 'return' triumphant. Thus, the likeness was constructed to make him feel at home.

Whose home? Where?

(...)

Because this place was to be all about home. But there are claims in all directions. It is not simply territorial according to the lines of demarcation disputed endlessly. It is about applying marks to a never neutral landscape, to suggest home. As if home was always elsewhere.

And this landscape is worked to look like its own paradigm, whilst possibly never having looked this way before. The landscape is posited as history, your history, a universal history, but one's eyes need to grow accustomed to all that information. There are layers to what one sees. Or rather, to what one does not.

There are images, where the makers saw without seeing. It took time to unsee what had got in the way of what was already there. The eye must exclude what was superimposed to reveal what was already excluded.

Whose home?

(...)

I wanted to talk to you about names. Naming things. Everything is named in the name of someone else, someone elsewhere. But what is being memorialized? The place not yet relinquished and an idea becoming home.

Places speaking in the name of one elsewhere.

Because a name is earned and carried forward. You come to inhabit your name.

(...)

The Rabbis could hardly speak except in the name of another.

Andrew Renton

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