

STILLP • INT
A MAGAZINE IN THE EYE OF THE STORM**EXILE****SOKOL FERIZI**

*Dear friends of many possibilities I miss
you right now last night in my dream
more savage than in reality
less possible than deep
yellow linings of silent promises
omnipresent like an intricate bridge
both connecting and dividing your smile
grew out of my disturbed memory
whetting a few meanings soon
to be lost and dissipate
in the western frontiers.*

Havok returned home with the feeling everything was in order. He turned on the lights, first in the corridor, then storming into the living room, he groped for the switch, and turned on the light there as well. Everything seemed to give him a simpering look: the books on the table, the furniture sparsely strewn around, and a framed image of the godly Apollo, his sculpted, see-through eyes squarely facing a drawing on the opposite wall of a space capsule bearing his name. Havok felt a bit stiffened by the attention he felt he was getting from soulless things.

As if wanting to establish contact with a world other than what now seemed to be languidly and only his, a world of freedom barred by distance or, as if to want to steal from another world's racketing sounds and ways, and thus reaffirm a certain link with a place he felt he had forever lost, he turned on the radio, and quickly stripped naked. The clothes he wished he had, a pair of tight but comfortable jeans, a bunch of sweaters best worn in-between seasons, and the collection of coats and jackets that would ultimately keep a modicum of personality for him, were all scattered around, as if he'd tried all of them before he left home, but none had made him feel worthy enough to justify his leaving.

Now it was already after midnight. Images and faces from an amalgamated city he no longer recognized paraded in his mind, each pressing for attention, giving rise to a restlessness that further disaffected him. But Havok was not that kind of man who would brood for long,

especially not over something that was pressing, though perhaps just a passing scene, or thought. He would rather act upon it rushedly. His mind would normally attach itself to something that was not visible, something he felt, or saw, but when pursued, left no trace, or at most a gap. How else would he explain to himself, for instance, dashing out past midnight for a ride to the *Prater*, a deserted luna park a dozen stations away, just to embark on a stroll as erratic and aimless as it was dogged and purposeful, as if on the lookout for *impulse* itself. It gripped him, the idea that he could carry his being into a part of a city without the faintest idea of what he was after.



Kostërrc (CH), 2011 ~ Petrit Hailaj

Havok was a man of exposure. He sought nothing except to bring himself to the tipping point of a given day. He arranged his impulses. He knew when they would overwhelm him. So, he arranged his impulses, yet Havok was not a man of order. That is, he would not get satisfaction when things ran according to a coherent scheme. He actually feared the emergence of such a pattern in his life, and since he was an animal of the sharpest sense of anticipation, he often managed to derail a smooth cascading of events.

Havok had a penchant for laying things bare, as if to excavate from the field of vision the underlying structure of it all. Apollo kept looking at him with a gaze both ancient and alien.

Havok recognized himself in this gaze, initially feeling a kind of unease, as if exposed to a gaping infinity, that turned his body stiff until, yawning, he realised nobody was in the house, or at home.

When Havok turned twenty-five, nobody believed him. People would insist that he looked much older, more mature. They would all give him at least twenty-six! Because Havok was a sensitive man, he suffered greatly seeing how people went to great lengths to assert their trivial observations. This suffering is what, in the end, perhaps, made Havok look both older and more mature! The truth was that his life was a long musical note rendered mute.

He usually felt as if he was walking in space, detached from that thing that seemed to hold everything together. This was that kind of feeling that becomes physical, giving extra weight to one's body, like an imperfection that defines one's appearance. His father didn't know about this feeling of his when he told him, "*my son, if you would one day bring your feet to the ground, I'm sure you'd surpass me.*"

But Havok . . . how could one possibly put it . . . he was after something else. He was after those moments when time goes on vacation. One could say he convinced time to take leave! It never occurred to him to bring anything to fruition. That's why whenever he heard someone say "*do this*" or "*do that*," he wondered what they meant, or as he was himself often told "*you must do something*," he would mutter, "*but it's done!*"

Needless to say, Havok was the embodiment of action. But nobody could see that, because he was a collector of invisible things, an architect of ruins.

'I kiss your strength in the head.'

With this line Havok wanted to conclude the email he sent to his friend Ekselsior. But seeing that it could be misunderstood—as so many other such heartfelt, abrupt poeticizations had so often been taken as erotic advances by his friends—he decided to change it to "*I salute your strength!*"

This self-censorship, that had by now become a certain poetic automatism, weighed heavily on Havok's already-downtrodden spirit. He couldn't understand why he should mind these potential misunderstandings. '*Wouldn't life be a mistake without misunderstandings?*' he thought, with a rapid succession of images of Friedrich Nietzsche lying on his deathbed setting the scene in his mind. Music, after all, is nothing if not the very expression of a long series of human misunderstandings rendered mute, pleasant, breathtaking. Even otherworldly.

Havok felt that what he wanted to think was different from the thought that actually took shape in his mind. This unnerved him, and for an instant he blamed the German music playing on the radio for this mental lapse.

'What I think is not what I want to think,' he thought he thought. In less than a second he grabbed the radio and hit it against the table, causing batteries to fall out . . .

He lifted his eyes, looked towards the end of the table, and saw that the view had enhanced. In addition to Apollo hanging on the wall—with his unseeing eyes, yet piercing look—on the right hand, out of a magazine, two statuesque bodies coated in gold and clasped together with some affection had been staring at Havok out of their Venetian masks with the same simpering look as everything else in what he now felt to be home itself. He shook his head as if something there had to be shed, and rolled a Golden Virginia cigarette out of the package that carried an inscription “*Fumer tue,*” which he thought in French meant “*You are dead.*”

Ekselsior was a man awaiting the death of his father. He had abandoned his wild life to go back home and witness this unique event. Havok heard about his best friend’s misfortune shortly after he arrived in Vienna to see his mother and was, together with her, awaiting his own father to join them for an early spring reunion. This in itself was also a unique event, for it was the first reunion in twenty-five years! Before clicking send on the letter to his friend, Havok read it again to make sure that the word *father* didn’t occur in too positive a light. After all, the time they spent in Berlin’s decadent wilderness would have meant little if they hadn’t reminded each other every now and then how satisfying and relieving, even meaningful, it would be were they never to become fathers themselves.

But looking at the letter he had just written, and awakening to the occasion for which he was now writing to Ekselsior, Havok realized that things had changed. And quickly at that!

So when he first wrote “*I kiss your strength in the head,*” unlike his initial fears of an erotic misunderstanding, what he now felt he meant was ‘*stay strong,*’ yet his actual impulse was to somehow reach into his friend, dive into his own words as physically as possible and embrace him, or see him and make sure he wasn’t shaken. Havok could only hope that the subtle promises—even if only made in their minds—as well as the implicit truths that had emerged within their friendship and sustained it until last winter, had not been as shaken now in the wake of the present circumstances . . .

There was no doubt that these were times of dying fathers. In a sense, Havok already took his own father to be dead, despite his imminent visit, and Ekselsior also, when he wrote Havok to explain to him the new circumstances (that chemotherapy was not working, etc.) wrote with a heightened spirit. Sad, of course, but with a language that bespoke newfound freshness.

He wrote about his days that were now full of tasks, that he was running up and down Valencia taking care of things, that he never thought he had so much energy, that he didn’t want to go back to live in Berlin to sprawl his being across an infinite string of sofas, etc., etc. He promised to come to Paris for a visit, and to see Havok (who himself had been lying there in an infinite string of sofas, before all this reunion business) as soon as he made some money. Ekselsior was getting high on these funereal times, perhaps that’s why he signed the letter simply, *LOVE*.

Havok knew what he was after but preferred not to tell himself. He would rather let life tell him.

Perhaps this has something to do with that strange kind of respect that binds people together, even if only at an unconscious level, a specific respect he held for his father, for instance, who always told him “*my son, life will teach you,*” that most unspecific bit of wisdom that there is! Still, Havok knew he had to subvert some of that wisdom, some of that respect, some of that unconscious bind even, and venture out into a state of exposure. Into self-exile.

One of his childhood habits was to stare at the sun until it turned red. Though the last time he did that he was not a child. One could therefore say that Havok was also a man of saturation. He often felt awash with life, which didn't necessarily have to do with being alive and its trappings, and which left him exhausted. In fact, that's what he answered to his mother when she asked him how was he coping in this unbridled exile: that the mere word *life*, more than any other activity, exhausted him. Something of this exhaustion is what he had also picked from the works of many exiled modernist writers. For instance, the way he felt the word *life* occurred in the work of Thomas Mann; it debilitated him.

Havok liked to speculate to himself that Mann's son Klaus had died, alongside other causes, because of the controlled way his Apollonian father had employed the word *life* throughout his work. Because he had never truly integrated the realizations that came out in some of his *works*, into his *own life*, he had acted transgenerationally, and left that task to his son.

Havok's own father was a teacher for more than thirty years. It often seemed to him as if the only way for him to have peaceful encounters with his own destiny, unadulterated by fatherly-teacherly pudding, was to resort to a position that was steeped in anticipatory reflection. That is, to see what was coming his way, but do nothing towards it. First. Let it come, pass through, transform, if it may. So when people kept telling him “*Havok, do something!*” he said, “*but it is done.*”

This answer obviously devastated both him and his surroundings, yet Havok blossomed from within at every turn away from both Apollo's ancient gaze, and his alien one. *Philosophy is homesickness.*

Like most of his contemporaries, Havok was a man of letters. Though he spent most of his life doing nothing, because everything was already done, one would only need to click print and the emails he had sent for more than a decade would reveal an astounding body of work. One could argue about the quality of the work, but that it was a body, fully-fledged, with its own inner logic, no one could question. Up until his twenty-fifth birthday Havok knew for certain: most people were one click away from some kind of genius, or ruin. Or from myriad other fates, depending on the degree to which actual, lived experience had survived, unscathed from the virtuality of it all.

These were times of dying fathers, but also rampant dropping dead, disappearance, and continual waking up, only to reappear, ghosted, in the same place. A movement similar to that small tripping in the street and falling on one's own Achilles' heel, that moment of somewhat surprising, but possibly also intentional, loss of one's awareness. For there was something thoroughly intentional in the order of things, thought Havok, again losing himself in the fiber of his exhaustion.

Thus one would choose to faint, rather than just faint. In the first instance, thus went the logic of Havok, when one chooses to faint, one seeks to make sure there's no coming back to any known place, let alone to any known state of awareness! Unlike just fainting, which, even when one recovers from it, one doesn't remember, and thus one remains.

If Friedrich Nietzsche had written his philosophy in the form of emails to his friends, perhaps he wouldn't have gone mad. The logic being that, the further one keeps one's thoughts from contact with everyday objects (a radio, a person, a whip) the safer one is from the horrible possibility of these things morphing into moving things with mouths that speak.

Today, because the Internet *rains insight* on everybody, we don't go classically mad. Rather, we go algorithmically mad: since we're all just one click away from both sky and soul, we implode silently. This wasn't the case for Nietzsche, alas, who lost his father at age five, mourning him to the point of vicariously becoming . . . him/self. "*What was silent in the father speaks in the son; and often I found the son the unveiled secret of the father.*"

A university professor of twenty-four, his academic career—and health— began to come to ruins a few years later, for having created out of the ancient Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus two principles of understanding life and art, which he embodied to the marrow. He was never really at ease with the Apollonian principle, feverishly wandering Europe seeking the Dionysian, a father only to the tragedy he gave birth to.

Havok thought: '*Nietzsche's mind caught fire! Consigned to a fatherless state so intense, his soul became wildly, and sparkingly, effeminate. As if his moist soul turned dry, his moustache veiled a secret, and Nietzsche went . . . off-line.*'

"*Who am I and who's talking?*" muttered Havok, and with a fit of rage that left all molecules in the air intact, he decided to take a shower. Soon after this resolve, it felt to him like he'd violently turned the day on its side, when his mother called him to go out for lunch, and suddenly, "it was done," nothing was in his hands anymore.

Havok had an ambiguous relationship with his mother tongue. Perhaps this was nothing new in the order of things, but since Havok was not a man of order, nor was he after new things, this relationship was certainly and only that: ambiguous. For instance, how could one explain that a few days after Havok decided to cut his hair, he also decided to pay tribute to Gregor Samsa by visiting his absent grave in *Kafkastraße*?

The result of his haircut was bizarre, because he'd never had his skull as fully exposed as he did then. It made him look both a most energetic punk refusenik and a debilitated prisoner, a walking holocaust. The word in his mother language for *skull* is *kafka*.

How far could he go stretching this linguistic twist? He didn't have an answer—nor did he make this question in the first place, probably relishing the twist instead—but he was convinced that his relationship with his mother was also ambiguous, and that one of the reasons was language.

It was easier for him to slip into a life, as if into a coat, than to truly inhabit one. That's why he stood faithful to those things that few people dared, or could afford: to distance, to solitude, and, being as he ever was in-between, to anything in the shape of a wedge.

Not that he was sure what these things meant, nor that he necessarily called them names, say *attitudes* or *states*—Havok was not someone who called himself something—but he nevertheless felt as though he was a wedge, the embodiment, the shape of in-between. He hung like a bat in broad daylight on the heaviest connotations of the heart. *Longing* being the lightest of them.

He knew that to slip into or *construct* a new life is to lose friends; it is *to tinker with the incurable*. Havok didn't want to lose Ekselsior, for example, and lunge into a pursuit of success, always an insatiable state of being, of forever inaugurating one's Self. He preferred friendship, as a way of buffering this pursuit indefinitely.

That day when he decided to embark on a visit to Gregor Samsa's grave, Havok surfaced from the underground on *Austellungsstraße*, and started walking with extreme composure, slowly looking around, as if to catch a glimpse of everything at once, just like one does walking around in an exhibition. He knew why he was there, but he did not allow himself ease in knowing. On his right side, the first thing he saw was a structure in the shape of a spire that grew out of a heavy-built glass platform culminating with a spike that seemed fiercely in touch with the sky. He crossed to the other side of the street, as usual not on the watchout for cars, and upon the first turn of the head to the left, he found himself facing a massive scaffolding and *Kafkastraße*.

It was a strange street. From where Havok was standing he could see the end of it. The buildings flanking the street were either ghostly, prison-like, few-stories high, or larger monochromatic and otherwise empty-looking apartment blocks.

The massive scaffolding wrapping the first building made Havok think it was erected to pump it up with soul from all sides, instead of renovation. A few moments after venturing further into the street, Havok was already at the end of it.

One thing, however, seemed to stand there as a faint suggestion as to why this street bore this name, and looked so beleaguered. The last block on the left end had a shiny plaque on

its entrance wall: “*Dieses Haus wird tag und nacht überwacht!*” That this austere warning (otherwise normal in these times of dying fathers) should be punctuated with an exclamation mark was a surprising nicety, a sort of literary connection established between its message, “*this house is day and night under surveillance,*” and the word under the street name on the signpost few meters behind: “*schriftsteller.*”

Walking a few steps further, Havok found himself on a small bridge, which made him panic. On the first attempt to get out, he turned around and lo, the view had been enhanced. The spire with a sharp spike was by now prominent, and sat at a crossroads between *Ausstellungsstraße* and *Kafkastraße*, pretty much defining the latter. Havok gave a simpering look at this modern sculpture, and a feeling of sadness pierced deeply into his heart. Seeing how the spire aimed high towards the sky, he thought about, and thoroughly missed, his friend Ekselsior.

The grave of Gregor Samsa was nowhere to be seen, but Havok knew that if it wasn't here, it was nowhere. Elusively intent on the purpose of his pilgrimage, he stepped out of the bridge, and found himself on the shore of the Danube, a few swans and geese and blackbirds swarming in and out of the river, humming and dipping their heads into the water, and into themselves . . .

Eerie silence in *Kafkastraße* . . . nothing and no one paying attention to anything or anyone; a scaffolding there, a bridge here . . . nothing to renovate, nothing to connect. There must be a grave somewhere near! Havok was about to walk away when a swan's attention, and then his, was taken by a moving thing right there, on the shore. He was keen to see what it was, and a rat emerged from a hole, leapt in his direction, sniffed and zig-zagged, successfully escaping the swan's mauling attempt. For less than a second he gave Havok a simpering look, a kind of welcome, only to disappear into another, bigger hole in the ground, half-sunk in water, half bone-dry.

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