



EXIT STRATEGY

ANNE MARIE SPIDAHL

We've set ourselves quite a task at Stillpoint Magazine. In each issue, we peer into the future to determine a word that will evoke the global zeitgeist three or six months hence. Our recent selections have been eerily prescient: Issue 004: APOCALYPSE, for example, launched just as lockdown began and global society was altered, perhaps forever. And now, Issue 005: DAZE. How are you feeling these days? A bit confused? Overwhelmed? Disoriented? Unsure of how—or on what basis—to orient, decide, or act?

Us too. So, we've brought together a taste of the storm we're all in:

Riot and protest, orgasm and repression, liberation praxis, the sublime urgency—and sometimes misuse & distortion—of a Black-led uprising, attempts at subtle totalitarian coups (especially as seen in Poland and the United States), LGBTQIA liberation and backlash to it. Defiance to white supremacy, fashion and attire as sculptural self-expression, toilet paper hoarding, hair and hair, lockdown days and daze, COVID death, television, screens, masked taxi rides the world over, computer-generated romance, solace in virtual forests, unknown landscapes of mystical and futurist lands, longing, isolation, grief, poverty, desperation, tear gas, propaganda, repetition, visions.

Daze indeed.

Meditating on all that the DAZE issue contains this evening, I thought I knew what I would tell you: I was walking the rail line behind my place, watching the trains in the dusk. I changed my course when the Minneapolis-St. Paul police passed, so they wouldn't catch me trespassing. I caught the driver's eye: cops. But all the while, I was thinking I'd tell you: "some kinda love," like the Velvet Underground say. Walking, I was trying to conjure a love-based exit strategy from this daze to offer like a life raft, if you needed one.

But then, my evening unfolded into yet another microcosm of 2020: passion and turmoil, fear of death, more shocking news reports and difficult conversations, debate and disagreement, tenuous reconciliation, and of course, decisions—so many decisions—large and small, each with a rippling set of consequences. So I found myself dazed again, not thinking "love" at all, but instead trying to balance this exponentially exploding number of factors—geopolitical and domestic, personal and political—all mutated, tainted (or sometimes, enabled and empowered) through the digital.

Sound familiar?

When I first began this editorial statement (at four in the morning, one unexceptional morning) I had planned to talk about reason and rationality. I was going to argue that, in a time like this—a time of dismantling and reimagining, but also of distortion, deception, and violence—the rigidified systems of perception and interpretation stemming from the European Enlightenment have, by 2020, completely run their course. I planned to suggest that, rather than interpretation and decision-making based on Enlightenment-style rationality, it's time for the gloriously nonrational to step forward: the fantastic, the impossible, the erotic, the sublime, the transcendent, the unknowable, the indescribable.

But in the weeks that followed, I was provided with what seemed to be irrefutable evidence that, indeed, my idealism in attempting to live out my belief in the nonrational was wrong. That my delusions had been placed on mirages, and have, at last, fully shimmered out of reach. Rationality, rather than appearing unsuitable to my situation, had been the approach by which I finally understood my own fallibility, weakness, and foolishness. I had evidence, clear arguments, and the all-but indisputable conclusions that resulted: many of my beliefs, premises, desires, hopes, fears, were wrong. In many instances, the nonrational had turned out to be not an exit from this mess, but an expression and extension of it.

Daze indeed.

The indescribability of this experience we're calling "2020" has been for me—as is has been for so many of you reading this—a riotous deluge that has swelled and swarmed into every part of my being and life, surrounding me in varying degrees of militarization, protest, infection, isolation, overstimulation, and boredom. A roiling mass of emotion and idea, of commitments and attempts—an uprising of all things, one that has even swept away the bracing by which I thought I had been holding steady, for so long. I mention this because it's part of the task we've set ourselves at Stillpoint Magazine: to knit together the broadly social or cultural with internal and personal. In DAZE, and in everything we do, we work across the experiential and the theoretical, across the creative and the deeply lived and material. We work, too, across genres and media—across what, in a bygone era, might have been termed high and low culture. It's part of why I love what we do, even at a time like this.

At this point in the editorial statement, I had hoped to offer you that life raft from the most intimate and expansive parts of myself—be that life raft "love," or something else. I'd hoped to offer you some suggestion of an exit strategy, some hope for what's possible and what's ahead. And I do find I'm drawn to have faith in the glimmers of good that the writers and artists gathered here have offered: solace in small things, peace in rest, a soul's knowledge, the possibilities held in the "circular and expansive," and more. But for now—as my children interrupt me once again, asking to be fed, seen, touched, loved—I am forced to end with a humble admission:

What to do from the storm of the daze? I simply don't know.

Anne Marie Spidahl is Editor-in-Chief of *Stillpoint Magazine*, and Creative Director of the PrairieCare Institute's Center for Applied Psychoanalysis, the mother of two, a PhD candidate in English and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota, and the author of the novel *Nothing*.