



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

By Alexander and Nicole Gratovsky

A LONG TIME BEFORE NOW

We have an unpredictable schedule.

Sometimes we work at home, sometimes we leave for a short while, sometimes we return long after midnight.

Our relatives always open the door a minute before our arrival and our mystical dogs always meet us at the gate.

We ask how this happens. How do they know that we are coming?

When we make the last turn towards the house, driving off the highway a couple of kilometres and minutes before it, the dogs approach the front door and give a short “Woof,” asking for it to be opened.

“Coincidences” — every day. They are always waiting for us and feel when we are near.

TEN YEARS BEFORE NOW

Our first encounters with dolphins in the sea. We do not know how to swim like we swim with them. Coming (being admitted) close to them, we dive for several hours without a break, swim with our breath held, emerge with them, take one breath and dive again. We are infinitely far from sport in general and from freediving in particular. We should be laid out flat after these experiments, but we return to dry land full of strength and life, as if charged with energy in every cell of the body. Fluid dynamics and laminar flow are unable to explain anything. The surrounding space is a source of energy, if you know how to communicate

with it like they can.

THE SAME TIME

A storm prevents us from going out to sea.

The border of Egypt and Sudan, a tiny diving camp, hundreds of kilometres of desert all around.

We look at the waves and chat. We are not planning to do anything. Then, “suddenly,” we open the computer and start writing a text. One continues the phrases of the other, we simply write without any reflection or discussion as fast as we can type. For around forty minutes. Then we reread. To edit and supplement would be pointless. We have nothing to add, nothing to remove — we do not feel authorship. We do not write like that, we do not think like that, we do not build phrases like that, we do not grasp all of the meanings here. It is not our text — it was dictated to us. It roams the Internet under different pseudonyms, under the guise of an ancient manuscript, translations from a lost language, performances are based on it, a community has been created, there are even a couple of cafes named with its words...

It would be good to know what it has to do with us...

FIVE YEARS BEFORE NOW

Whales and dolphins see sound.

Unlike us, the areas of their brain responsible for the perception of auditory and visual signals are not separate.

At our request, a group of programmers creates software capable of visualising their voices and songs, providing the opportunity to at least approximately see their language as they do.

We want to find at least some correspondences of their world to ours, “points of contact,” and analyse thousands of different sound patterns, from scientific lectures to frogs croaking.

The results are strange. There is no music for them in our “entertaining” music — it is noise. There is no information for them in our news bulletins — it is noise. In a poem naively read by a child, there is the voice of one dolphin speaking to another. The “phrase” of the pilot whale is very similar to the melody of the Armenian duduk. The songs of humpback whales scarcely differ from monastic singing.

THREE YEARS BEFORE NOW

We are on a round-the-world journey.

In Los Angeles, Amit Goswami tells us about an experiment that we immediately decide to replicate.

We head in different directions to two screened rooms on different sides of a large city, the clocks in both of which are synchronised.

We think about each other — just mentally picturing each other.

An encephalograph is put on the head of one of us and different stimuli are spontaneously presented to the other at varying intervals.

Audio (a sudden loud sound), visual (a flash), tactile (a firm push).

Without a delay, the encephalograph registers the reaction of different areas of the brain responsible for hearing, vision, kinaesthetics.

Eight out of ten times. We are connected non-locally — beyond time and space.

THE SAME YEAR

India, “palm leaf readers.” A small mansion. We introduce ourselves and wait a while. We need to feel the importance of the moment; they need to find “our leaves.” They are brought out and read. We hear such details of our biography, about which no one but us can know, that we ourselves have almost forgotten. Where is the memory of what we experience stored? How is it done? There cannot be seven billion “personal files” on palm leaves. “Of course not,” they explain to us, almost seriously. “Seven billion will not come

here. Here there are only the books of those who will come.” These dark-skinned people with smiling attentive eyes can be very focused.

AGAIN THE SAME YEAR

A storm in the ocean, rolling waves, a piece of heavy equipment falls on the leg of one of us. The leg is crushed under it resulting in multiple fractures.

The French doctors in the nearest port do X-rays, put on a plaster cast and describe the cost of the upcoming, almost year-long treatment, and warn that there is likely to be a slight limp. And for sure — from now on you will have to forget about Argentine tango and swimming in flippers.

The first month after things only get worse.

Friends give us the address of a specialist, warning that you need to bring shoes with you, in order not to leave barefoot in late autumn.

The doctor is grey-haired and tired, diplomas and a licence hang on the walls, everything is legal and there is a queue in the corridor.

He refuses to look at the X-ray, removes the cast, strokes the leg, and then begins to put it back together with quick precise movements, like a Rubik's Cube is solved.

The pain is sharp, but instantaneous, and immediately passes. Five minutes, twenty dollars.

He warns that there will be discomfort for about a month—the ligaments are injured.

In two weeks we dance, in a month we head to the sea. When we return, we ask this doctor:

“Tell us, does medicine not know how a human is arranged?”

“Doctors are taught on those who are no longer alive. About them medicine knows everything. Living people are arranged differently.”

A living person is arranged differently.

ONE YEAR BEFORE NOW

We are on an expedition with sperm whales. The year before, we removed a fishing hook from the gum of a young whale. This year, he recognises us and now each time we meet he takes us for a ride on his back. And he introduces us to his family. From now on, we are allowed to be inside. Every day they hang motionless in a vertical position — sometimes for an hour. Scientists say that they are sleeping, but this is not true—not just because they never sleep completely, risking, like us, to drown, but simply because it is always more difficult to maintain a vertical position in these underwater currents than a horizontal one.

What are they doing? We are now allowed to be with them at this time. We return to the boat, having lost all words on the way due to their inadequacy. We all KNOW that it was beyond words. We take sheets of paper and write down what we “heard.” Then we compare what we wrote. It is as if we are retelling the same short poem. We hear the contents of their prayers.

SIX MONTHS BEFORE NOW

We meet with our friend and teacher, a famous scientist, to invite him to attend the Assembly.

We are extremely polite — we know that almost ten years ago he received a serious diagnosis and was given three months to put his affairs in order.

He told them then that what he intended to do would take much longer.

Since then, he has not missed any of his lectures, has published several brilliant monographs and created unique interdisciplinary projects.

We tell him about the subject of the Assembly and ask what he thinks of wonders.

He laughs, so that the answer does not sound pretentious: “A wonder is in front of you. Yesterday a consultation took place. The doctors conferred for a long time and when they returned, they informed me that medicine has no explanations for the fact that I am moving and talking.”

There is no explanation for the wonder of man in the rational sphere.

THREE MONTHS BEFORE NOW

Chartres, the most famous labyrinth. Model of the path of life. After the cathedral has closed, abbot Fr. Emmanuel Blondeau helps us to remove

a thousand chairs in order to uncover the labyrinth laid out on the floor. It is a cold spring. We walk barefoot on the icy stone slabs of the labyrinth, take

the first steps and each of us (there were five) is immersed back into childhood. Memories are not like this—here, two metres away, the curtains flutter on the nursery window, reflections of the headlights of passing cars play on the ceiling of a room that has long since ceased to exist, the scent of lilacs drifts in from the street, and behind the wall the deafening whispers of your young mother and father are heard. You can't take the next step until you live this one. Almost an hour and a half to the centre of the labyrinth, which is six metres away in a straight line. Not in a trance; we maintain full contact with reality, feeling every detail, hearing every sound in the huge echoing space. Inside a stove flares up, heat blazes from the palms, it is seven degrees

in the cathedral, yet we take off our jackets and sweaters, remaining in t-shirts soaked through with sweat.

This is a space with different metrics, psychology, physics.

It is now impossible to convince us that the world is arranged in the way we were told at school and then university.

It was not invented by lawyers and is not managed by accountants. With all due respect to their heavy work.