

Anagnorisis
or
the need for a problem when in search of a solution

Gintarė Maciulskytė

Listaháskóli Íslands
Myndlistardeild

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or
the need for a problem when in search of a solution

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Formáli

Hinir vingjarnlegu Íslendingar hafa tekið vel á móti útlendingum í gegnum árin. En þegar að það kemur að samfélagslegum vandamálum, þá kemur útlenska fólknið upp.

Innflytjendur eru þeir sem komu með glæpi til landsins, en hvað um íslenska útflytjendur (einhverja hluta vegna er ekkert orð til yfir enska orðið *emigrant* í íslensku) sem lenda í ýmsum vandamálum, en eru samt ekki á forsiðum íslenskra dagblaða.

Svo er annað, einfaldara vandamál – tungumálið.

Íslendingar vilja gjarnan kenna innflytjendum tungumálið sitt (sem stundum koma hingað sérstaklega út af því), en strax og maður segir eitthvað vitlaust, þá skipta Íslendingarnir yfir á ensku eins og ekkert væri. Þetta gerir samskiptin auðveldari, en hvers vegna er t.d. íslenskumælandi fólk sett skrefi ofar á atvinnumarkaðnum, þegar að samfélagið gefur útlendingum ekki fleiri tækifæri til þess að læra málið?

Meira að segja í formála er mál og sem betur fer, þá er (tungu)málið sem þetta er skrifað á, mál sem að flestir á þessu landi ættu að skilja.

Þú ert einn af þeim.

Annars myndirðu ekki lesa þetta.

Þeir sem skilja þetta ekki, þurfa ekki formála hvort eð er. Fyrir þeim ætti þetta að vera skírt, því að þeir hafa lent í sömu vandamálum.

Stundum er besta leiðin til að vinna úr vanda-málum lífsins – að flýja frá tungu-málum.

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**The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner;
he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong;
but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land.**

-Hugh of St. Victor in
"Didascalicon"(p.101)

The Case of the Return

I,
I am an immigrant, a forced immigrant. Therefore, I will give you what you expect from me – a text written in English.

After a wait of a month or so, I finally received the answer I feared telling my family about. I let them read and understand it as they felt it was appropriate, since they had no idea about me planning to go back. I, like my grandparents from my father's side, was forced to emigrate. Not because my country was in danger or because the regime ruling the country thought that I was some sort of criminal. I was simply a child and my father found it terribly hard to live away from my mother and she found it difficult to be without me and my brother, so after his year long stay in Iceland, he decided to bring us there as well.

The accused: Maciulskytė, Gintarė
Social Security Number: 260290-3049
Date of Birth: 26/02/90
Jurisdiction / Location: Reykjavík, Iceland
Case: Emigrant going back home.

On arrival to Vilnius, in the afternoon of 4th of February, 2011 she still moderately allowed herself to speak Lithuanian. She got a room in the Academy's student dorm.. She was supposed to share a balcony with another exchange student, but she refused. Her demand was for another room - this time a single. She wanted to be alone.

At the Academy, she was offered to study with masters students in the textile dept., but she exhibited disrespect once more and started studying with 1st -3rd year students, whom she later hurt with her unreasonable procedure. She even asked for a whole room for her “magic show”, while others were showing their standard textile works in groups. With this, she was trying to make a fool out of everyone.

She had the linguistic ability, but did not use it. The fellow students were shocked by such behavior and showed her what she deserved in return, by ignoring her.

The Fasting Off/On the Mother Tongue (2011)

Once again you were accusing me!

No, it wasn't so easy to get the room. The endlessly frowning manager took his first glance at my uncle and me and not for a moment believed that I was not Lithuanian and didn't want to offer me a place to stay. I peeked inside the room and found a dozen beer bottles and cigarette stubs on my neighbor's side of the balcony. I took the chance of changing rooms while it was still possible.

I went to the academy on Monday and they hardly showed me around. It was cold in there. The international coordinator tried forcing me to speak the language he felt comfortable speaking in, but it did not work. He also tried putting me in the master students' group, without even asking me if I'd taken any courses in textile before (wasn't he supposed to know it all?).

The students were busy with their projects from the first day on and hardly had time for anything else. I got ill from their cold responses, both physically and mentally for some time and had to rethink my reasons for doing all of this.

After slightly more than a ten years stay in Iceland, I had started my longest journey back to the rainy land of Lithuania. It was only for six months, but time felt multiplied by four. Why four? Maybe because four is the number of the months I tried so ardently to be the true foreigner, even there.

Sure, I found some friends there, very good ones in fact, but before the truth

came out, they were using every possible way to make me move my tongue as they moved theirs.

True, it ended up quite chaotically. Some people left and stopped speaking to me. Some haven't spoken to me since. With others, I was able to introduce myself anew. That is when the big brick wall was broken.

I need a foundation to accept or deny.

For the sake of understanding myself, I will turn into a book of three chapters.

The Bonds and the Layers

These next chapters are only three layers of many more existent ones. I haven't counted them all yet. To get to the layer of the mother-tongue, I had to go through so many layers, that it made me somewhat lost.

While I was still in the chilly space of the crime scene (the act of displacing the native tongue), I could feel the wind slightly shifting through the open layers. When I finally stepped inside a warmer space, the layers started melting and distorting, not only that but they were becoming one, submerged under the weighty mass of the revitalizing mother-tongue that was brought to life just so it could be suppressed by my need to put my former-natives into the situation I've been in for many years. No, not only that. What made me do this was partly the fear of doing things in a wrong way and the best example here would be the speaking in a vaguely grammatically wrong Lithuanian language, and, not to mention, with an accent. As a foreigner, I didn't have to fear it.

If it was the main thing I feared, then why did I decide to go there in the first place? It was the right time.

Was I then forcing myself?

Not sure.

I felt like I had to go back then, because going later would make me into a *real foreigner*.

So, did I fear losing my last connections? Did I want to strengthen the bonds between me and my homeland? I wanted to tie the bonds, make them visible. People living there saw and felt them, while I could only feel the outline of them.

Is it maybe the same problem as with the layers? The older bonds get lost behind the new bonds and might as well become threadbare if they are not taken care of as they should be. One's bonds with a country might as well be chains (no worries, I don't think that I suffer from that), but they could also be very delicate.

Still, the problem is that the way of taking care of them might be very tricky, for the humidity and the temperature touching the bond must be identical (depends on how far you are from that place), or at least similar to the ones typical in the country one has the bonds with.

It is just like an artwork. If the masterpiece is not placed in the right conditions, it starts getting distorted (however, the time it takes depends on the material it is made of). The heavy chains might pull you down to the horrid depths of the past, which one has no joy of remembering without any

safekeeping. Once more, I must remind you, it is certainly not my problem.

THE FOREIGNER

Some people fight for the possibility to be visible (popular) by being different from others. Others try to be like the popular people amongst them. My family moved from one place to another many times, well, not so many, but not only a few times either. Once we even had to flee.

Therefore, to try to be like others wasn't even an option. It was hardly possible, since I have already changed schools eight times and lived in seven different houses.

The texts I write, the letters, words, sentences, stories, they all get written in different languages. I don't mind it, but *you* do. You fear that you might get tricked, misled, deceived, swindled. I guess I like that. Once written, the sentence atop starts vanishing from my head, just so that the moral side of me would not have to fight back the relatively troubled side of me. The side that let's itself talk, act and decide without my permission simply has no mercy. Letting your identity split may be the result of a crisis, but crisis of what is too hard to understand at the moment.

Does Face = Identity?

Can your ID shows your identity? People look at your face and they know (one must really have lived in a small country, such as Iceland to understand) it all. They know that you're "that kind of person".

It's often easier to just let others think that you are what they see, what your appearance tells them, but it may also hurt your feelings, and it *will* hurt the feelings of others when your innocent lies will come into the light.

Like Fernando Pessoa¹, I have often stated that I, in a sense, enjoy suffering, but once there are no more people who'd offer me the pain, I guess I do prefer the other choice, the so-called "something else."²

The Foreigner Speaks

"I never wanted to be understood by other people. To be understood is akin to prostituting oneself. I prefer to be taken seriously as what I am not and to be, with decency and naturalness ignored as a person."³

-Why don't you speak Lithuanian?

1 Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) – a renowned Portuguese poet, writer and critic. He wrote both using many heteronyms (secret identities) as well as his real name. His most famous heteronym is Bernardo Soares from *The Book of Disquiet* (a book in a form of a diary, that was put together from his notes after his death), who's thinking is much alike to Pessoa's. (Pessoa, F., Zenith, R., 2002, p.13-23)

2 Pessoa, Fernando, 1991, p.155

3 Ibid, p.135

-Why is your name Lithuanian? They asked as they tried to show their witty minds, but failed as I didn't move an inch of hair.

Speaking in Standard Lithuanian is like turning into an actor whether you want to or not. My native tongue is Western-Lithuanian, also called Samogitian, which, with my eleven-year-long stay in Iceland, developed into “Gintarian”, a mix of Samogitian and Standard Lithuanian, strongly spiced up with Icelandic and English, which is best heard when speaking with “Icelandic” friends of Lithuanian descent. Due to that, I did not feel comfortable speaking the 'real' Lithuanian, especially with all these people I had never met before. The exchange program was a kick back into my mother's womb. I went there as a real foreigner, with an Icelandic passport, took Lithuanian language courses for beginners and realized that forgetting one's mother tongue is in fact possible. When trying to understand (yet keeping a poker face) what people around me were saying, I would often just hear a mishmash of sounds and would have to ask friends to translate or switch to English.

Respectful Foreignness

It would be selfish of me to say, that I was the only one feeling hurt. It was hard for others as well.

The exchange program ended with a performance *Untitled (Migrant) (2011)*, where I started off by slowly explaining how things looked from my point of view by playing a recording of my grandmother's story about her comeback from the ten year long exile in Siberia. Then asking the irritating question I've been asked for years -Do you feel more Icelandic or Lithuanian?- and then the same question in reverse.

This performance was also a baptizing ceremony where I poured water over my head and baptized myself as a “migrant” and then finally said my first Lithuanian words that made the audience believe that I do know Lithuanian. To conclude, I, with my back turned to the audience, asked the head of the textile department to read from my grandmother's book, which I had placed behind me. By going to Lithuania as an immigrant and not an emigrant (with an Icelandic passport), I filled all four check-mark boxes of my foreign identities – an immigrant and an emigrant both in Lithuania and Iceland.

To emphasize the fact that it was a difficult experience for many of the people whom I met there, whether they attended the performance or not, a few of those who attended left without saying a word and/or participating in my handshaking and re-introduction of myself in Lithuanian. Their feelings and thoughts are well explained in the black video of the subtitled interviews made soon after the comeback home.

Allowing Oneself to be Foreign

The Iranian artist, Shirin Neshat explained my, and many other artists' feelings

concerning migration:

Globalization of the world and the subsequent rapid migration has uprooted many of us, sometimes by choice, and other times due to economic factors. Whatever the reason, however, those of us living in the state of 'in-between' have certain advantages and disadvantages: the advantage of being exposed to a new culture and (...) the disadvantages, of course, being that you will never experience again being in a 'center' or quite at 'home' anywhere.⁴

As time passes, I start running away from the languages I know, towards languages I still have to learn. For how long must one flee to comprehend that he's running in circles? You might see some path, but with time it makes you get lost anyway and just how much sillier does it get when you also realize that you're running away from nothing more than your own self-portrait?

It's hard to understand what decisions to make, if one does not take into consideration that one might have some kind of personality disorder or the indescribable 'lost identity'.

The Name and the Gender

I got a name that I'm proud of, due to its meaning. It's not too difficult to pronounce. Unfortunately, when you're a foreigner, you're *supposed* to have a difficult name. It is that that led me to have so many nicknames throughout the years.

On the other hand, what if your name also tells you what you should do with your life

Gin-tare:
gin- (ginti) + tar- (tarti)
to defend + voice⁵

Lithuania is not among the European countries, where most of the people speak, or at least understand, English due to big tourist groups arriving each summer. But expecting them to speak English, when introducing myself with a Lithuanian name (I did pronounce it the Icelandic way – [gin-d-are] instead of [gint-A:re]), was an uncanny thing to expect. Many lies could have developed throughout this stay, but luckily this didn't happen. I managed to get away from the unwanted questions by looking blankly at people or asking, Sorry?, which made most people smile stressfully and walk away.

Being a woman and a foreigner at once is even harder, or some may say so.

“I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for 'talking back'

4 Weintraub, Linda, 2003, p.219-220

5 No author, *Gintare*, accessed on 2nd of Dec., 2011

to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. “If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong”, shared Gloria Anzaldúa, a chicana, Mexican-Texas writer.”⁶

I, like chicanos, speak *patois*, a forked tongue.⁷ I can pronounce my name, but never in the same way when talking to other people. Even when writing down many different notes at once, they hardly get put down in the same place or in the same notebook. This desire to find different notebooks for unrelated ideas makes them get lost or simply wander around in the “outer space”, just like migrants, until they find their way back home.

In early 2009, I got an Icelandic passport, but before receiving it, I was asked if I wouldn't like to change my name.
-Change my name? To what? *Gindare*?⁸, I asked the other self. She sighed (once again I was wasting my time considering both choices as equally good choices) and left it completely up to me, although I already knew the answer, which made me keep on following the road of otherness and despite the fact that the “what if?” question rarely appears in my dictionary, it did appear in a sculpture from 2010, *Gintarè fær íslenskan ríkisborgararétt* (*Gintarè gets an Icelandic citizenship*) (figure 7).

The Long Research of The Long Hair

-Gintare, be kind to us, don't ever cut your hair!
I was startled by their slave-like way of pleading, but also pleased.
Soon I realized:
It was as if I could control their lives by this simple act and was sure I would never hurt them in such a humble way.

Having long hair is seen by many Lithuanians as a sign of being a true Lithuanian woman. Sure, these days it is not as strong of a symbol as it was, but what else can it mean when my mother's friends phoned her to express their compassion once they found out that I had cut my hair short, if not a fear of changing the Lithuanian rituals?
Then again, this way of thinking battles against the fact that they did not like the headscarves I wore for two months, which could be seen just as Lithuanian as the hair-length. Maybe it's because I'm still young and after the end of the Soviet regime, headscarves of that kind are only popular among ladies advanced in years, especially those living in the countryside.

Mona Hatoum's, the Beirut-born Palestinian, *Keffieh* (figure 9) is a male scarf made using the artist's back hair. Hatoum feminized the *Keffieh*, which

6 Ferguson, Russell, 1990, p.203

7 Ibid, p.204

8 When typing my name, I rarely ever have the *é* at the end of it, since my real name ends with an e with a simple dot on top of it and is pronounced differently from the Icelandic *é*.

stands for the resistant Arab masculinity by leaving the unnecessarily long locks of hair randomly spread in curves at the edges, which also disrupts the structured design of the cloth. In this work she makes the male's head touch with the, usually hidden, female hair,⁹ just like in my untitled sculpture from early 2010 (*figure 6*), where my hair, which was ritualistically cut by my friends sitting around me (on the eve of my birthday in a gallery space), was glued by me inside the holes of a brick, which made the solid brick lose its masculinity. However, this is not the only example of the loss of gender.

In the ritualistic performance of *Past Future (2009)* (*figure 5*), I showed my hair just so I could cut it (the end of the first part of the *Muslim Chronicles*). Not only in Muslim countries do women hide their hair, but all over the world, including Lithuania. Only in Lithuania the girls' hair is cut on their wedding day and as the bride sheds tears for her passed youth as a headdress is put over her head.¹⁰ Married women used to wear scarves all day long and whether it covered all of her hair, or if a hair lock could be seen peeking out from behind the scarf, depended on the region they lived in.

In Vilnius I also only took off my turban in public for the first time in four months when my mother-tongue-fast ended. However, Lithuanians didn't look at it as a religious sign, while Icelanders acted in a completely opposite way.

Becoming the Leftovers

“For the average man, to feel is to live, and to think is to know that one lives. For me, to think is to live, and to feel just provides food for my thought.”¹¹

During the years of 2007-2009, countless evenings of mine were spent making handmade postcards using old materials, which were waiting to be thrown away. It was a way of expressing myself, which led me to connect my remarkable obsession with languages, religions and later on, the wanting to understand the term - migration.

The making of the postcards became a very important ritual in my everyday life, where I could let the receiver choose what kind of persona to turn me into, somewhat like the artist Mary Beth Edelson, who invited friends to suggest what she should make and that way “fuse creative energies”.¹² The receiver expected a lot from me, since, for many of them, Iceland was their dream country.

The postcards may have not been the most important and the main things I was making during those years, but they were a big part of bringing forth this certain need for making others misunderstand me even more than they used to and these short performances developed into investigative performances of noting down how people look at certain ways of dressing and acting. It also took me one step further into the world of migration difficulties. The first

9 Armstrong, Carol, 2006, p.256-7

10 Wedding lament - is a ritual and does not, as many think, mean that the girl is forced to marry, although weddings in Lithuania used to be arranged by matchmakers. (Zickiene, Ausra, 14th of December, 2004)

11 Pessoa, Fernando, 1991, p.149

12 Edelson, Mary Beth, 1980, p.11-13

conscious, yet intuitively *forced*, performance of that kind was “*The Muslim chronicles I*” (2009-2010).

Wearing a hijab everywhere I went and trying to follow the European Muslim way of living, as well as researching their history, both here in Iceland and abroad, didn't bring me any closer to the Muslim communities. But it showed me even better how much Islamophobia America seems to have brought to Iceland.

“*Man farsi harf mizanam*” (*I speak Persian*) (2010) was a repeated pronunciation of Persian words and sentences in the downtown of Reykjavík and, half a year later, in Vilnius, where I followed my unconscious need to go back to my unrevealed homeland – Iran.

A mere passerby could say that we, the “home-less”, can choose any place we want, but often the places choose us, just like Iran chose me through its language and its *holy* pomegranate. Sitting on the sidewalks of the main street, where people were able to attack you if they felt like it, vulnerability was at its highest with the eyes blindfolded. Yet, the people surrounding me showed that they were still kind humans.

In the summery Vilnius, people just passed by, and once when I walked away an old lady started yelling at me: *Boze moi, boze moi...* (my God, my God, how could you do this?). In the wintery Reykjavík, a few people took photos of me, others hurried home and then finally, after a ten minute meditative trip home, four young ladies stopped and started asking me if something was wrong and after half a dozen of tries, they gave up by saying: *Æj, hún er örugglega bara útlendingur* (Ah, she's probably just a foreigner).

The most recent one and still in progress is “*The Jewish chronicles.*” Just like the performances mentioned above, it started off without any planning. The circumstances lead me towards the unknown path I must cross next.

What exactly are my works about then? The one we all know the best (or so we think!): Me.

One thing that was first too hard to run away from was being a foreigner, which I am, both here and everywhere else. I also try out of other foreigners' masks, both of those around me and the ones whom I scarcely see. When the overanalyzing takes over, it's of course time for meditation to deal with it (*figures 1 and 3*).

The art related to migration has been developing a great deal over past decades and a few of important groundbreakers of this road in different fields are Ana Mendieta, Shirin Neshat and Mona Hatoum.

During her short career, the Cuban-born Ana Mendieta let her art embody the identity conflicts which are frequently suffered by people who migrate.¹³ For three days I transformed into *Kasis* (lith. *Kazys*) (2011) (*figure 2*), the poker-faced man with a glued-on mustache made of fake-fur, in hopes of being able to detach myself from surrounding influences and explore the identity through the change of facial appearance. My artworks usually come

13 Viso, Olga M., 2004, p.21

forth from my need to run away or heal myself from both tiny and big problems, which I prefer not to talk about with other people, before the work is finished. Those works are not always well composed, since most of them are quite spontaneous, but still an important part of the artistic life-exploring path.

Mendieta, in her *Untitled 35mm color slide (1972) (figure 10)* did a similar thing to *Kasís*. In the photo she shows herself with facial and hair transformations and later that year, submitted it as a self-portrait when applying for MA studies.¹⁴ For a migrant it's all about memories and nostalgia, no? You hear one thing and you remember a dozen of others! I remembered, that I did a similar thing, where I went to the school photo-shoot with a scarf over my head on the school opening day, when the photo was being taken, the scarf slipped and got me frightened that people would see my hair, but the photo somehow disappeared before anyone could see it. Silly me, no one had interest in it to begin with.

Becoming Visible

-Where are you originally from?

“Origin – to rise, *become visible*, appear.”¹⁵

Enter silently through the back door and pretend you really have existed there all this time (one has to be just like the other existing creatures there to fit in, right? I don't remember if I was). For you, it's a way of expressing yourself.

I really did try it. It wasn't planned and it was supposed to be put in the far end of the “Things that didn't happen” drawer, but once in a while, one must make space for the new memories too, since it was my life. My life in Iceland, a day of fleeing.

The dreadful day came when the senior students at my college were going to baptize us, the *newbies*. It's an old ritual and I do like rituals. My own rituals. I said – No.

I said no in my head to the discriminating forces and walked past them on my second week of studying in general study program¹⁶ in a college in Garðabær. Just because I didn't pass the mathematics exam (which was later proven to be because of Dyscalculia) was why I was put there, among the students who didn't know what they were doing in their lives. I knew it so well, so well, that today, only five and a half years later, I simply forgot. Did they really think they would get another chance to victimize me?

I walked past them as they tried to stop me and I attacked with my simple mildly aggressive words in Lithuanian without any eye contact or facial expression.

I was visible, but I also, once more, disappeared from the group.

14 Viso, Olga M., 2004, p.40

15 Harper, Douglas, accessed on 10th of December, 2011

16 Known as “Almenn braut” in Iceland.

THE DAUGHTER

Forceful Migration – Parents to Blame?

“Though I walked amongst them as a stranger, no one noticed. I lived amongst them as a spy and no one, not even I suspected. Everyone took me for a relative, no one knew that I had been switched at birth.”¹⁷

There were two parents. There are two of them.
One is here, one is away.

- When did you move here?
- You were so young when you moved here, how is that possible?
- Your parents brought you here?

I. The Daughter of the Fatherland

They –
My dad's grandparents, their children, including my father's mother, Zose and her husband, Zenonas, were guiltlessly exiled to Siberia, just after their wedlock, for ten years. Their daughter was born there and it was only when she turned five that they were allowed to go back home to Lithuania. My father was born in his fatherland, but only a few years passed and Zenonas, his father, passed away from lung cancer and my grandmother was left alone with her two children, Zina and my father.
His fatherland became his motherland. Therefore, he unconsciously started looking for a better place, the place he found in 1999 was Iceland.

Hello my dear father,

Where are you?
One day you're in Chicago, then somewhere in Florida, then...
You haven't really been a part of my life since the start of 2006, since I turned sixteen.
Even on that day you were absent!
Always looking for a better job offer, just so you wouldn't have to work.
What good did it bring? It made you get so innocently involved in that silly business.
First, you were sent out for ten years from my current homeland and now you cannot leave *your* current home, just because you want to have the opportunity to stay there longer than the law allows.
Excuses.
Excuses.
Excuses.

17 Pessoa, Fernando, 199, p.131

It's all I hear. It's not only my own head that stands up for you, you do that too, because you say that it hurts you. It hurts me too, but do you care?

You asked me if I missed you. I said, I didn't know and it surprised you. "How can a daughter not miss her father?"

For you,

There is always someone else to blame.

Yes, dear father, you blame others, but what about you? Are you never the one to blame? I never blamed you, but because of not doing so, I went to see a psychological healer, a students' council, a homeopath, an Ayurvedic practitioner and last, but not least, a psychoanalyst. I told him about you, and he looked at me in wonder and asked: "Where's the anger? You talked about the incident as if it never was a problem."

Six years have passed since the first incident, and only now it has become clear to me, that if I feel the need to be angry, I should be, but all I am able to do so far is smile. I tried explaining this to you. It hardly did any good.

-Stefa (mother's mom), wasn't exiled, right?, I asked my two and a half years older brother after having listened to the secret recording I made of Zose talking about Siberia in early 2011. He didn't even turn his eyes away from the computer screen and said: Of course not. Haven't you noticed how she, Zose, doesn't communicate as well as people around her? She is still a victim. She's also a true lady and she knew how to complain. Zose was a confectioner and while working she seemed to replace the sad thoughts of the past and all possible diseases she might be having with her sweet and tender buns and pastries. That period passed just as I went away and each holiday, from then on, would be a great tale of diseases.

(re)Member? (2011) (figure 8) - An installation story of the forgotten family and the past that the family is trying to forget. On one side of the installation are the newspaper articles that show how the media showed the story, while on the other side is the ironic presentation of how it ended up looking like once the family became a part of it.

My dad is a mama's boy. He still stands up for her and is always the one who gets hurt, whether he hurts other people's feelings or not, but now Zose is not among us anymore. These sentences were being written as she lay in her deathbed and since we were all away anyway, she passed away.

II. The Daughter of the Motherland

Hello dear mdm. Daiva,

These past few years, your name has been more sacred than your working title - "the mother of two children and a divorced wife, due to husband's misfortunes", or the more common one - "mom."

To know a language is to be able to pass through the labyrinth of words. It is a tool that helps you express yourself.

-Mdm. Daiva, I didn't get the chance to learn my native tongue perfectly. Why?

Mom: Now you blame *me* for taking you away?"

-No...

Mom: You're Lithuanian. Your Lithuanian language knowledge is okay. Why do you worry?

Yes, she's right. Why do I worry?

I go back to the so-called mother/fatherland and am partly laughed at.

I talk to the close natives in Iceland and they worry I might forget it.

I talk to other natives in Iceland and once again feel laughed at for not knowing things I never even had a chance to learn.

I might as well keep on dreaming...

While researching studies on psycho-analysis in late November, I noticed that Freud talked about dreams and, although I had not remembered dreams for a while, one night I dreamt of finding the box under my bed full of plush-monkeys.

I immediately connected it with you, dear Daiva. You had told me many times how much you wanted to have a real monkey as a pet when you were a young girl.

The dream seemed like some kind of detective, which made me look up the word 'monkey' in the dream dictionary. "Deceit, insight, intuition." The psychological meaning of it was, on the other hand, that it shows your own, the dreamer's, playful and mischievous side and that one should stop taking life so seriously.¹⁸

Were you taking life as seriously as I am? Were you longing for a monkey so much that you turned into one yourself?

Oh, don't start calling me rude, don't you remember that your father used to call you that, but not meaning any harm, I would guess.

Mdm. Daiva, you complain that I never paint your portrait. Still, the house is full of them. It may not be me who painted them, but why is it so important to see my ability in completing this task?

Are you still afraid of having the face of an ape? Were you ever afraid of that? Is this a task for me to prove to you, that you never were one?

You complain that I blame you, but did I ever have a reason to?

Family Motto: *Blame the Shame*

"Our parents rejected who we were before we could talk, so the pain of the

¹⁸ No author, accessed on 18th of Dec., 2011

rejection is probably stored in some pre-verbal space.”¹⁹

The parent's main problem seems to be – the blaming.
One blames others and the others get blamed.

Did I tell you...?

Did I tell you, that in Vilnius I was supposed to make a big sketch, which would someday be turned into a big applique work? No, not a family portrait. It was a much more complicated assignment than that.

The teacher²⁰ wanted us to show it in a partly abstract way – though colors and forms (and it was a task I couldn't start on for three weeks). I presented it through letters, numbers and missing photographs.

Šeima – Family.

The students were using the word so often that I didn't fear to be *accused* of understanding Lithuanian. I, as a foreigner, heard the Lithuanian words differently; therefore, the word “šeima” (shei-ma), sounded like “shame-a”, which leads me to question whether I really connected these two words together.

I was in denial for some time, but finally the trust in my hearing-intuition broke the barriers and after doing some counting I put together a development map showing how the family word transformed into the most shameful one. Shame (80%) + A (20%). The shameful family, whether you admit it or not.

Daughter vs. Son

“Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the part of us our parents don't like, we, to keep our parents' love, put in the bag. By the time we go to school our bag is quite large.”²¹

And then I was born.

Accidentally.

The doctors called me a “special child”, for I was able to fight through a protection field of 99 percent. I appeared in their life too soon. My mother was sewing clothes and father was driving around Russia.

At least my older bother was around and he sure knew how to show his affection – by biting my hands till they started bleeding.

I suffer from the second-child syndrome?

19 Bly, Robert, 1988, p.24

20 She became strongly frustrated after the performance, but later assured me that I had true Samogitian (Western Lithuanian) blood – the one of the brave ones.

21 Bly, Robert, 1988, p.17

THE ARTIST

“Knowing clearly that who we are has nothing to do with us, that what we think or feel is always in translation, that perhaps what we want we never wanted - to know this every moment, to feel all this in every feeling, is not this what it means to be a stranger in one own's soul, an exile of one's own feelings?”²²

It is only now, once I've explained it all, that you feel like you might understand, or even like my art. Why is that?
Because the way it looks does not interest you as much as the story of it?
Yes, I know. You always prefer something else, in other words, the part I tend not to show or don't consider to be as important. Why is that?
My works are about the real life and exactly through the real life it starts interesting others.

A long research of one or a few words, terms, things or cultures starts with it stalking me. After researching it long enough, it starts making the artwork by itself and then finally some hidden genie makes my heart skip a beat and I realize that the work is finished.

An/The Artist is Born

"Everything about me is fading away. My whole life, my memories, my imagination and its contents, my personality, it's all fading away. I continually feel that I was someone else, that I felt and thought as another. I am present at play with different scenery and the drama I watch is me."²³

I try to figure out why I'm an artist and I fail.
Can an artwork know what it is? Don't we all see ourselves from a different perspective? From a perspective that is not the same as the one others see us from?

Twisted by the fate? One could look at it from an astrological point of view. I, as horoscopic sign of Pisces shouldn't be surprised. Pisces are two fish facing different directions.

Not knowing yourself may lead to gazing into an abyss (*figure 1*), while Jung stated that when we repress the shadow well enough, one finds it difficult to

22 Pessoa, Fernando, 1991, p.132

23 Ibid, p.229

express his or her feelings.²⁴

The light at the end of the tunnel appears only when the text starts lighting the fire (since paper is made of wood, one could imagine every word being a new matchstick, each time showing a different side if the tunnel).

-Yes! Wow! Now, that's what I understand! But you should try to explain it in 1-3 minutes. Your artwork should explain everything by itself. There are definitely many things I *should* do according to you.

Don't you understand: that I prefer library books to those newly published, second-hand clothes to new ones, I prefer using found objects, rather than buying them; dull paper to acid-bleached, white one? I also prefer making the works completely by myself rather than with a help of a person or a tool (such as the widely used A3 photo-printing machine).

When I showed my artworks made in a complete hurry - *(re)Member?* (2011), the professors and classmates acted as if they didn't understand what I was trying to tell them. I, once again was the person who is too difficult to understand.

"If you've been like that, you'll stay like that," I heard this sentence in my head without anyone saying a word. I've been looking for an alter-ego, trying to step into other people's shoes, but still, always keeping mine in sight. Once I started leaving them out of sight, I realized that the situation didn't change much, my shoes were worn out and didn't interest anyone. Both I, and others, had a hard time believing that the past I was presenting *is* the truth. So, I fought for it, with my back turned towards them, I explained, and yet no one listened. I thought I was showing something wrong, but this time it was clear, I simply had to wait for them to get used to the idea.

Most of us have heard the story of a shepherd trying to get away from work by calling townwards: "Wolf, wolf!" when there was no wolf getting closer to the sheep. When the wolf finally came, the sheep got killed, because the townsmen didn't believe his cries for help anymore.

I seem to be in a similar situation here.

I give people mingled plots of stories, that my surroundings make, just because I feel it's right. When finally a true life-experience in every visible detail appears before people, titled as an artwork, but not wearing the fancy dress of Art, they can only take it as another set-up of connections, rather than a true story.

Suddenly, I say: I feel like I have no right to be an artist, but what comments do I get? -Then you shouldn't be.

What happened to the world of compliments and motivation?

I fear of not knowing enough. So, I read, watch, absorb everyone's good and bad feelings and thoughts. Unfortunately, by doing so, I lack time to write down my own thoughts and express them in a way that could be called art.

I try not to cross paths with other migrants from my homeland. They make me feel uneasy. I used to not talk much. I had a lot to say, but my voice wasn't sharp

24 Bly, Robert, 1988, p.50

enough. Often these days I feel like I've lost the ability to understand what I say or think, unless I know that the people with whom I'll interact will not ignore me, and in case of an argument I'll be able to fight back. What do I fear then?

How a Pierced Heart Ended Up Piercing a Nostril

“I'm always astonished whenever I finish anything. Astonished and depressed. My desire for perfection should prevent me from ever finishing anything, it should prevent me even from starting. But I forget that and I do begin.”²⁵

I wrote down many stories, didn't I?

I could keep on rambling endlessly, but I must ask: Did my works show these stories to people throughout the years? (I slightly fear hearing a negative answer, but must surely expect it.)

My artworks are so strongly connected to my everyday life, both my past and my present life, that it gets problematic to distance myself from them.

Ignoring my artwork equals to ignoring me.

With many of the works I've been trying to ignore myself.

They came to life with me trying to be someone else, someone who knows who one is, using the term “research” as a certain excuse, if one looks at it from a certain point of view.

Some works can only be known of from the rumors or by me simply telling others about it as an interesting incident that happened some time ago. It sounds simple, but only because I explain it that way. Inside of me, somewhere deep inside, it's like an epiphany, in which I fear to believe in until I see signs of it in the most random places. One good and most recent example is nose-piercing.

During my last month in Vilnius, I was making jokes about how I finally felt like I could live there, but to be able to do so, I would have to get more piercings, due to its popularity there.

I was so sure that it would never happen, since I never understood the reason behind such things and, unlike most girls I knew, I only got my ears pierced when I was twelve-years-old.

I came back home, and I missed Vilnius.

The idea of piercing didn't seem to be anyhow connected to Lithuania at first, since none of the books, nor the websites connected with nostril piercing had any links to European society. It was all about Asian and North-African countries and their wedding ceremonies and even the Ayurvedic beliefs didn't make sense to me at that time. Why should I get my nose-pierced if I am not planning to get married nor have babies, even though when piercing the acupuncture point on the left side of my nose would help with childbirth.²⁶ Not only was I disappointed, it made my blood run cold. Have I really reached the point in my life when I should have babies?

25 Pessoa, Fernando, 1991, p.126

26 Iyengar, TRS, accessed on 12th of Oct, 2011

A month passed and I went off to a workshop in Naples where I met a Portuguese girl with a nose-piercing and, as absurd as it sounds, at exactly the first sight of it I understood that I have no right to fight my fate anymore. Once I did what my heart was telling me to do and stopped trying to understand the meaning of it, the explanation came forward from the most unexpected place – my notebook for the bachelor thesis writing class! Some time ago the professor had said that the thesis is like our baby and we will always be fond of it. While, just a few weeks before finishing it, a writer who had read this thesis stated, that this will be an artwork of mine as well (and I immensely agree with her, for I would not spend so many hours writing something, just so I could graduate) and to go back to the event/performance of piercing my left nostril, I could say, that I got used to it very fast, but it took me some time to remember the jokes I made about the piercings in Vilnius, that was the actual start of this whole problematic, yet educational process.

Once again, one tiny incident in my life connected the three main identities I have.

In fact, they were never split into these three (or more) groups. It's just you who wanted to understand it better, that made me do so.

CONCLUSION

(The End of the Illusion)

Dear Accuser(s),

I am willing to be accused. I know, that it is then, when you'll lose your tenaciousness to force yourself onto my human rights with your accusations.

If you meet me, you probably won't notice my short hair (which might be long by then) nor the piercing. It's not very striking. Just like me in general (most of the time).

I came into this life without any hopes or plans, yet all of these ideas started appearing in my head everyday like an invisible force telling me that this or that should be done and to top that, people start bringing their ideas as well.

It is great to share and I'm always willing to, but time has shown that these forces will pull me apart if I won't find a way out. I wouldn't mind, if that's my fate, but you would.

How can you know what might happen to you, when your identity is lost or when and how you'll regain it? One must have a camera, a dictaphone or at least a sketchbook and a pen ready in case of finding a new identity, which might lead your desperate search to an end. In the meantime, one must remind oneself (or me, myself) of this simple rule:

Art = Meditation, if it's not, you're doing something wrong, so make it that way!

I, the forced migrant, the *holy* combination of an immigrant and emigrant and am ready to explore the world through these eyes, whether I will make anything right (from your perspective) or not.

Gintarė Maciulskytė

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Image resources

1. *(figure 1)*

“If you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you”
10min. Performance, at the Living Art Museum, Reykjavik, 2010

2. *(figure 2)*

“Kasis and the garlic incident”
57sec. Performance in Vilnius, Lithuania, 2011

3. *(figure 3)*

“Ritual of regaining memories”
15min. Performance documentation, 2011

4. *(figure 4)*

“The Jewish Chronicles”
Performance, 2011

5. *(figure 5)*

“Past Future”
4.40min. Ritualistic haircutting performance in Kaffistofa, students' gallery,
2009

6. *(figure 6)*

“Untitled (Plyta)”
29x11x29cm,
Brick, glue, artist's hair, 2010

7. *(figure 7)*

“Gintarè fær íslenskan ríkisborgararétt” (Gintarè gets an Icelandic citizenship)
42x25,5x12cm,
Wool from Eastern Iceland, artist's hair, glass, marker, plastic box, 2010

8. *(figure 8)*

“(re)Member?”
Installation
Paper, thread, old newspaper articles, photos from the family album, 2011

9. *(figure 9)*

Mona Hatoum - “Keffieh”

120 x 120 cm
Human hair, cotton fabric, 1993-99
collection of Peter Norton, Santa Monica

10. (*figure 10*)
Ana Mendieta - "Untitled 35mm color slide"
32,5 x 49 cm
color photograph, 1972

Images

1.



2.



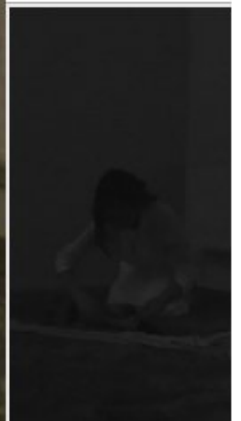
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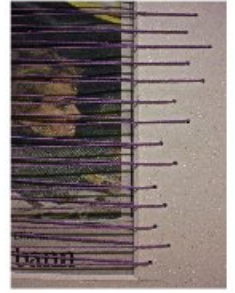
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