

As we proceed, the wind outside shifts.

Clouds are approaching. I watch them roll over the roof and realize I forgot my torch in the car. We don't talk too much. You place the precious paper carefully, as instructed, on the glass-plate. I push "2" and see the number appear on the display. The artificial humming sound of the machine and its discrete chemical odour fills the room. Claustrofobic. The display says "warming up". A thin line of sharp blue light travels over the sheet; a blinded, oblong planet in its own isolated orbit. I keep the lid open. I like to watch the stroke work its way over the fine, thin paper. The light cannot see; it cannot react to the information it so meticulous travels through. It only scans to produce copies. To multiply a smudged, over-contrasted image of whatever surface touches the glass. It often enlarges mistakes; the little dots between the lines and the stains in the corners. It only knows the difference between black and white, dark and bright, nothing else. Everything it detects is information, regardless. I notice how the light shines through, the paper appears semi-transparent for a moment. The numbers and diagrams can be seen from behind, mirrored. You take the copy from the tray and glance at it, trying to determine whether it'll do. The machine sighs and repeats its movements. The light sweeps back, illuminating the sheet once again. For a moment, there, the white rectangle is fully lit. It resembles a movie-screen from behind. I wonder what film it would be. \*1

\*1) A detective-story

As he enters it, the room is scanned by his penetrating gaze. Nothing escapes the detective's attention. The dirty socks under the bed, the careless newspaper on the chair, the dirty dishes and the toothbrush which is still wet. All those seemingly irrelevant reminiscences of everyday-habits, the careless little leftovers from life become traces, writing. A story can be distilled from it. Under the gaze of the detective, the otherwise innocent and unimportant mess becomes a mystery. What happened in this space? Why? Who wants to know? Somebody wants to know. Somebody has an interest. Somebody hired a detective. A private eye with a particular interest. An eye that can read the space; specify it through a certain method and knowledge. The interior is scanned, line by line, sentence by sentence, letter by letter, as though it were a piece of writing that could be deciphered. He processes every detail, as if a crime had happened here, and the reading — the right reading — of the overcrowded interior could render the mystery solved. What motive? What alibi? What intention? What revealing mistakes?\*2

Mistakes. I look around, on guard, like I'm supposed to. I concentrate, try not to let my thoughts wander. I study the details of the door, estimating the distance between the walls. No matter how well I prepare, how diligent I study the plans and imagine the spaces we are about to enter, I am always puzzled by their materiality when we arrive. I compare what I had imagined before with what I see now, but the memory of my conception is already pushed aside. I quickly check that the alarms are where we had anticipated them. I follow their cables, discretely running along the ceiling. I examine the walls minutely. No surprises. I notice a book on a table. It is heavy. I'm not supposed to touch anything, but this won't matter too much, I think to myself. No mistakes

To scan: to examine minutely, scrutinize carefully. To glance at or read carefully. To traverse a surface with a beam of light or electrons in order to reproduce or transmit a picture. Study, investigate, inspect, search, skim...

\*1) No. It would be about Superman, of course

Superman has light coming out of his eyes. It is sharp as a razor and strong as lightning. He just has to look; to take aim, and he hits his target. Exactness, accuracy. He is a modern man. His eyes are inhabited by the determined spirit of modernity, the hopes of enlightenment, and the

precision of science\*3. He not only looks at the world to understand it, he looks to change it. His gaze is active, it hits, melts, cuts, hurts. His eyeballs are inverted, turned inside-out: they do not register light by letting it pass through their moist membranes, they produce it themselves, the bright shining flashes, not only to shed light onto dark corners and hidden intentions, but to combat them: eyes as weapons. To see is to fight. A war. Against darkness. Violently. Superman is not looking to see; to learn. He already knows what is necessary; what is good and what is evil. He is looking to master and control.

\*3) precise: being exactly that and no more, no less. Being just that and no other.  
Precise: separating or distinguishing (a person or a thing) from another or others.

We proceed carefully. We are thieves. Desinfected. The small red and green lamps on the equipment are glowing silently in the dark. A few computers are on, processing endless amounts of data, turning the many measurements, deflections and numbers into colored graphs and illustrative curves. Their silent humming is accompanied by rhythmic, discrete beeps from the alarm system. One beep for every room, twice every minute. We know it well; we read the maps and the diagrams and the timetables. We have memorized it all. With this knowledge, we can move in the space without it detecting us. Intruders. There are those like you and me, spying for preciously obtained knowledge. And there is the dirt, the filth, the small stains of dust that would render the information useless; make the microscopes dysfunctional, disturb the accuracy of the counting, falsify the conclusions. There is even the unordered piling of the paper that would confuse the information collected. The small traces of chaos along the walls of this space, built to house eyes and machines that detect and reveal more than facts: To protect the purity and truth of those facts — they also look for infections, the viruses and bacteria that would multiply and mutate and render the objects of research and the conclusions reached, worthless. The walls are a shining blank, white, even in the evacuated aisles where "exit" signs and letters spelling "do not enter" hover, red and glowing, over the doors. We wear white masks, gloves and overalls to protect the fragile environment which would so easily be marked by our presence. — And to protect ourselves, of course, from being noticed. All this we know. All this could be true.

\*2)

Mystery: anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown. Any truth unknowable except by divine revelation. Any rites or secrets known only to those initiated.

There are spaces built like this, Superman would love them. I often think of him on nights like this, when we are waiting. The buildings propose an appropriation of his gaze. Scientists, researchers and their students, their computers, their calculations, notes and speculations. They watch to learn, to know. Also to change. The spaces are constructed to contain and arrange the revelation they strive for, yet also — at the same time — to keep their discoveries secret. They are valuable. This is why we are here. Uninvited. I think of laboratories, and of Superman and of the detective; the private eye. And of myself, a disinfected thief. I know you prefer that I concentrate and don't let my thoughts wander when we work. But I can't help it. These white walls, built to reveal everything around them, yet they seem to reveal nothing but themselves\*4. Their hygienic neutrality designed to make everything else stand out, become obvious and attract attention. Both the valuable detections and the unwanted spots. The space itself, its architecture and logic of organization, is a machine constructed to perform neutrality, to contrast everything with its light of objectivity. I watch the bulbs in the ceiling\*4. Truth and knowledge. A screen, as seen from behind. I wonder, again. What story? Who's eyes?

\*5)

It was once explained to me that hospitals began this habit of whitewashing their walls in the 16th (or was it the 17th?) century, because the lime seemed to prevent the infections from spreading. Back then they didn't really know why, it just worked. Soon the very color of white was in itself understood as disinfectious. It could have been any other color, but since lime is white, white persisted. We've stuck with it ever since; the notion of white as transparent and neutral and clean. Even though we know, rationally, by now, that it has nothing to do with the colour. I guess "to know", "rationally", is insufficient, after all: There is also the understanding of the knowledge; it takes the habit, the history and the myth of "the facts" — that which seems to be known — to enter it. \*6

I think of the scientist and of Superman; of rationality and the mythology behind the construction of it. Supporting, producing. I think of the space I'm in. The laboratory, and it's mythification. I think of the museum, the artspace. So much like the laboratory with its clean walls, straight angles and enormous surfaces, just waiting to be covered. With knowledge. The space, concealed from the world in order to tell us about it \*7. We stare at objects, walk around them, trace their origin, scan their surfaces, cut them open to ponder upon their contents, level the microscope at them or our critical, knowing eyes. We isolate, in big white rooms like this, to make the closer examination possible, it seems. Focus. Not at the room, but at everything in it. Don't look at it all at the same time, but arrange time along a line, and information accordingly. Let the gaze travel along this line. Slowly. Concentrate. Apart. Detached. One fragment at a time, piece by piece. To draw conclusions, imagine an understanding, fantasise about knowledge. In this room, that is. — Not about it.

\*6) ... by "connaissance" I mean the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it. "Savoir" refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to connaissance and for this or that object to be formulated...

(Michel Foucault, from *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Introduction. Pantheon Books, N.Y. 1972.)

You point towards the next door. I nod. We cannot speak here, we have to be silent. I open it, we enter. You immediately begin working at the microscope, with swift, experienced movements. You turn towards the wall.\*7 I watch you focus with one hand while taking notes with the other. Once in a while you stop to compare your notes with those of the copy. After a while I continue leafing through, randomly, page after page.

\*4)

Does science not metaphorically structure the practice of inhabiting the room while simultaneously structuring its production and maintenance? Does the scientific language with which the space was imagined and communicated and the scientific gaze with which it is understood not influence the modes of using the space, moving and behaving, looking for and finding? \*8

\*8)

Isolate: to detach or place apart; detach or separate so as to be alone. To keep an infected person from contact with noninfected ones; quarantine. To obtain (a substance or microorganism) in an uncombined or pure state.

Isolated: separated from other persons or things.

Isolation: (Psychoanal.) A process whereby an idea or memory is deprived of its emotional component.

\*7)

to detect a spy

detect: to find out the true character or activity

detection: discovery as of error or crime

detective: one whose function it is to obtain information and evidence

detectaphone: device for overhearing telephone conversations secretly

detector: one who or that which detects

\*9)

Something is uncanny — that is how it begins. But at the same time one must search for that remoter "something", which is already close at hand.

(Ernst Bloch, "A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel" — brought to my attention by Anthony Vidler in "The Architectural Uncanny — Essays in the Modern Unhomely", MIT press, 1992.)

Who wants to know?\*10 Who is behind the devices, receiving their information in an other room, or waiting anxiously to empty the black box and decipher its content? Is it the scientist? Is it us, thieves in building that does not belong to us, but in which we are born and mapped out, strangers in languages we speak perfectly but do not feel at home in? Why do we want to know, to enter again, this time not from the main entrance, but from side doors, through chambers and atticks, almost forgotten, through leftovers and throw-aways, rests and fragments. I wonder about this. The motives for our movements in the dark, our interests and intentions. I also wonder what mind constructed these walls and these machines, which separates one from the other?

\*10)

Paranoia. Paranoia and knowledge. Paranoia and science. The fear for the unknown, the unmapped, the other. The desire to win it over, to know about it. The fear of losing that which seems won. The battlefield we sneak into at night, as intruders.\*11

You clean up the glasses and collect your notes. You signal to me to put down the book, leave it where I found it, and take over from here. I hesitate. I like dictionaries. But of course, we are professionals, you and I. I put it back and bring you out of the room, safely. Only one more door ahead, and we're done. I concentrate, I am calm.

\*11)

At daytime? — I don't know. Is us who watch them search, I think. Watch them inhabit the spaces and speak the language they built of... Or is it us they examine? Will it be known that we were here? Who are we at daytime, you ask — again — since we know these spaces so well, use them so routinely. I do not answer.

I coax the small tool in the lock. Gentle, with my fingertips. This is what I do, this is why I came along. I'm good at it. The door opens with an almost imperceptible "click". I am relieved and smile to myself, then we hurry out, leaving no traces behind.\*12

\*12 We weren't seen, I think.