

The Gerund Mountain and the Stamped Paper Cave

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Two children bump into my legs, I look down and see they're holding plastic guns, they point at each other and simulate they are shooting. Clicking their tongues against their teeth, they make "bang bang" and machine guns noises. The adult accompanying them smiles at me and says *ai, quin parell de bandolers!*¹¹ with a tenderness that sheds light to illuminate my face.

The sun beams hit effusively the screen of the mini-laptop that I brought with me to the mountain. I close the laptop to look for another place where there is neither reflections nor language. I like onomatopoeias because they are less equivocal. At each step I take I repeat "bandolers" separating steps by syllables. I don't see any luminosity in this word that carries strong bonds among individuals and with the leader. The children run away, they point their guns at whomever comes across their way. The adult that looks after them tightens their pace behind them, her arms and legs full of backpacks and small-size jackets. I lose sight of them and enter a mix of tourists and pensioners wandering around and taking pictures of themselves and the green and

marine background around us. I repeat once more the last word they said to me, making it roll in my head, as I walk further into the pathways. *Ban-*, one step, *-do-*, two steps, *-lers*, three steps. The bandits were nobles who had fallen into disgrace, among the remains, the debris, the ruins of feudalism; they were reactionaries from the old regime who kept hidden a mass of army-felons inside their castles, and they get them out to wage family wars. The bandits owned castles, they lent them to each other, and with others they waged surname wars. The bonds between them and those who joined their clans were due to survival and vassalage. Perhaps they were due to debt accumulated during the old regime, or the comfort of belonging to a group, to drink, to struggle, brotherhood, castles, horses and a hatred of everything that was modern; a hatred that in solitude can be dissolved but the hunger is stronger. A banditry due to *connitio*, due to the survival instinct. The familiarity in this, is also identifiable by a common opposite. When I go outside, to the bar, for a walk, to dinners, I look around in case I see any bandits, because I know they are not just four unlucky wretches who want to steal from me the few coins I have left in my pockets, but characters who play as to create family battles in which I can find myself trapped. The forest is empty, because they are no longer in the forests, the places that are crowded now are those that are more and more private. I want the kids with the guns to go away, don't these kids watch tv?

I have put a full stop to the interrupted text. The laptop is on standby, it is in my bag, with that full stop that is not final; I needed to walk so to make some distance with the preceding actions. Just the way I walk looking for shade, I walk through the paragraphs.

A few years ago I tried to write a text with literary intention: to utilize the third person describing actions using gerunds. I sent the text to a friend who printed it out and invited me for dinner. In front of me he crossed out one by one

every single verb in gerund, and said to me, never use gerunds, it kills actions, it sounds literary but it is not, it makes the text slow. In the beginning was the verb, and the verb should not trap you. There is a maintenance of news where the beginning of verbs is announced, but there is almost never news of when they end. This is what gerunds do, this is what I don't want in my texts, or in my small actions, the small verbs. The children are far away now, a tourist takes a *selfie*, another drops her mobile, I have already moved on. The sounds coming from the port can be heard up here in Montjuïc, the cranes move the containers and the metal they are made of is loud enough to climb up the mountain and resonate through the trees.^[2] The colored containers are lifted up by the cranes, they are moved around and they wait. The iron, the size, the fact that they are so stacked, suggest months of stillness and goods that need no oxygen. They are the big boxes of the circulating immobility. The cruise ships leave their engines running while all cars, vans and passengers come out of their insides, end then, with their engines still running, they get filled up again and redo the same journey. The port fences block the way, which can only be seen from a distance, like a carpet for the little ones to play on, with drawings of roads, traffic lights, roundabouts, childish representations of purely *manmade* places. The port is further down and around it is the World Trade Center, the Correos, the Agencia Tributaria and customs; all places that write using gerunds, and if you get access to them, you are left in the gerund-like style of *requesting, sending, receiving and investigating*.^[3] I have managed to get into every building except from the port, for its center remains fenced off and it is the institutions around the ones that sustain it in the language they create. From the top of the mountain, it is easy for me to see all those places that make up an imaginary of power. Down there: the institutions that surround the port, and up there:

the castle, the botanical garden, the cemetery and the common grave. Each of these places enters the imaginary to build an infinite chain. The administration can be the tax office, customs, the port. Circulation: customs, the port. The desire: the goods, the port, the hotel, the cruise ship. The other outside: the port, the bushes, the botanical garden. The limits can be those of the castle, those of its wall, the fence of the port, the garden or the road; its breakage at night, the cruising. The stagnant fluid: the night walks, the sex between the bushes. Death administered: the niches, the vertical tombs, the fenced cemetery. Death in a hole is the common grave. The same happens to me with plants: palm trees are imports of death; the pine trees overlooking the port while I pee; the bougainvillea that resembles a summer house but has no smell; the giant reeds are invasive and they pollinate the soil underneath and close off fluids and rivers; the cypress can only be a vertical mountain of niches and death. The game is fun, it is to observe what it is seen, all those palpable and visible things, and to add all things that exist only in language—or maybe somewhere else I have long stopped hearing the children using onomatopoeia to animate their toys. The castle wall seems endless, and I walk around it very close to the stone. The small guns, the castle, the cemetery, they all are fairy-tale architectures. The castle with its great wall, the palm trees in colonial gardens, the big customs building within the tax office and next to it, in an identical building for the post office. That roundabouts are getting bigger and bigger, the cemeteries are full of coats of arms, of visible things; the children could make them out and identify which onomatopoeia they should apply to each of them. I still play the game of repeating the word *bandolers* in my head and separate syllables by steps. Over the years I have achieved the ability to separate the syllables of names and at the same time think of other things, as though I were able to compartmentalize in two the silent language of thought. It is at the *ban-*, and the

-do- that the syllables stop and I see inclusive flags flying over the castle wall. The castle wall that used to announce the barrier, the limit that engulfed with executions everyone who was against the regime, against the dictatorship; now it rises inclusive. There is a tendency to wanting to re-signify imaginaries, to adding discourses to these spaces full of violence. The Barcelona police force has also a gay Instagram, for gay policemen. The gay policemen come out with the flags and there are people who are going very fast and have already applauded them, and others who have stood with their palms on the verge of clapping, wondering whether to wave them or not, and what this refusal means. I turn my face away from them, I keep them invisible because what they show me visible is only a resignification, an alteration of the imaginary. What remains the same is the space of power they occupy in the invisible structure. Let no one make me believe that my denial is violent, the policeman is still the same substance but now it takes on another form of expression. In making this move, the place they occupy remains untouchable as well as our encounters with it. For the castle to remain a castle, and the police to remain the police, it is not to keep violence immovable. Fairy tales serve to recognize the gaps, and it is the gaps that need a *virage* to have better encounters. Better encounters in these small moments when the thing moves. The flags on the castle wall do not make my experience in this walk any better, they only create hope and whoever creates hope, creates fear. Every inclusion leaves someone outside, the word needs the outside to exist. The long wall full of stones is sad. There is the sadness of the brown, the sadness of the beige, of the grey, and of the timeless place to which it can send me, the waiting place of the *requesting*. I know that before the places of sadness I must not be afraid, but it always appears together with the verb tenses in which it threatens me, with a constant *threatening*. This is the fear that gerunds gives me. Waiting in company can be

good, but individualized waiting can be a great process of isolation. Cruise ships are always on the move because in a way they are always moored, they lack escape. In gerunds there exists the language that has no space between what it wants to say and what it says. The colonists were well aware of the power of the letter and quickly invented judicial processes where the sentenced “illiterate” of the imposed language would sign with a simple X. In these texts there are no spaces to dilate, they try to keep signified and signifiers very close together.

Why write at home when you can write wherever you'd like? That's the fun of writing. I have a very small laptop that almost fits in my pocket and which gives very little light so that they can't see my face at dusk or dawn. The lights of the port come on and the blues of the sea and the sky merge into the same tone. Over the mountain the contemporary *libertés* of male cruising come out, at night they appear and at dawn they leave. There is one who follows me, stops two metres away and smiles at me. I think this happens because I have short hair, but I immediately regret having summoned this small difference. When the light from the streetlamp reflects the light from the screen into my eyes, I get into the car and drive off.

The engine, or rather the wheels, drive me towards the A2.^[4] When I enter, it's like entering a bank, a tunnel, a sliding stream. I have to get rid of so many scenographies full of cypress trees, palm trees, bougainvilleas, castle, niches, port. I have asphalt and I have petrol stations and other cars sliding beside me. I have the Mediterranean landscape that makes me calm because its green becomes a magnet for me, and its power composes me. All these places that are so full of imaginary architecture, that carry such and such a structure in their guts, bother me. I want to escape, I want a few hours to slip away. There is always a small margin to not let yourself be trapped, to listen to your body and make a point of fugue. Lawyers have

specialized translators because they want the words to be precise with no other ways of being interpreted. I want to get out of the world of signs, even when I'm in the car and the little computer is transcribing the words as the kilometres go by.

The pines in the harbour were planted individually and the whole tree was visible: the trunk and the crown. At the side of the road, a mass of pines accumulates in which only the tops can be seen, without the trunks: a large green stain. The descent gets steeper, the roundabout makes me turn towards the turnoff and I see the first houses overlooking the ravine. Below the houses, below the ravine, are the caves and the paper mills. Below all this, I pass by in the car on the road. The port is far away, but in front of me the old roads that linked the village with the harbour begin. The roads that were filled with wagons with goods from both sides. From the port came the rags, the products; from the village the stamped papers were sent; the papers that were used for taxes and that every legal document had to be inscribed and written on. You will only find paper mills where there is plenty of water, where there are rivers, aquifers, irrigation ditches, canalised water. Some of the mill owners also owned harbours, making an invisible line between one and the other, between canalised water and harbour water, with the paper filling the line. The wheel turns and I make the path that a rag would take to be shredded and turned into paper, I go to the paper mill.

The paper archive is the only renovated space in the mill and it separates me from the visitors who come in multitudes, in schools, institutes, families, groups. Inside boxes and between files they keep the stamped papers and I run my eyes over them, I lift them up and see the watermarks. Against the light from the window through the paper, animals, fruit and hands, shields and eagles appear. Almost invisible marks to specify their provenance, almost invisible marks to determine value. One of the

stamped papers has letters written on it, I locate the gerunds, the Xs. I look at the other papers, some are empty of content, others have two lines, a few words, unfinished texts, gerunds. The content doesn't seem to matter. The mill archive classifies them by the type of paper, by the years, by the stamp and by the watermarks. I look at the watermarks, those almost invisible signs that never quite make sense or have meaning and are only visible against the light. I find a coat of arms that I understand refers to the manufacturer, but the rest escapes to me. A bunch of grapes, a little dog, a griffin, hammers, hands, a group of people, like bandits.

The door to the archive is transparent and I see a group of boys pass through. The lady in the archive turns to look for a box containing more watermarked papers. As she turns her back to the glass door, a boy opens it, reaches out, grabs the paper I was looking at with the bandit watermark and disappears into the group. The lady from the archive turns around again and brings me more papers, she hasn't seen anything. I calm down so that she doesn't see me fidgeting, I've seen that she hasn't seen anything and the blame can fall on me. The boy has seen that I have seen him and he has left so calmly. My sudden calm makes it impossible to report the robbery that has just occurred. I start to sort all the papers, place an unmarked one inside the envelope where the one with the bandits' watermark was and leave with my hands clearly empty, my pockets clearly empty. I leave looking like I have nothing. I have to find the boy. I come from the mountain of the gerund, from the maintenance of the port, from a closed circulation. The theft has accelerated my verbs. The computer in my bag consumes the battery faster with so many verbs in the present tense.

I hear the group of boys shouting and climbing up to the lookout point of the mill, where the papers were dried. There are ropes running from side to side from which some papers like the ones I've been playing in the archive hang.

Papers like white, earthy, small, theatre curtains hung by wooden clamps. Little windows let the wind in and make them move slightly. The group with the theft boy is in the center of the room, learning how to hang the folds. I am thirsty for water and thirsty to get the paper back. The boy sees me and blends into the group, carrying the signifier I want in my pocket. The whole group is like a simile, a repetition of each other, of an age that dilates between that thing of a person from the old regime who has left that transit and has entered a future one, and who doesn't want to, who has nostalgia and problems. They are like bandits, who group together and have been expelled from an impasse of time. Afterwards, some of them decide that they have grown up and are disposed to a state of linear time. Others lengthen their demands or get caught up in gerunds.

I catch one that comes off the clamps and rises up in the air. The little windows are made of wood and the papers come from the rags as I come from the port. The group of bandit boys leave the mill and I follow them. I'm not on the mountain of the gerund, on the mountain of the symbolic, I'm above a ravine where a robbery has taken place, and I follow them. I follow the group and I follow the paper with the watermark. The boys move in a group, colliding with each other without dispersing, like blocks. My footsteps follow them next to a ditch that runs down with transparent water, you know it's cold as soon as you see it. Maybe there is also cold water that is translucent, but I think that the brightness and transparency have a temperature. The papers circulate from hand to hand, they never stop moving, it is their contents that contain the gerunds that capture the people who want to use them. But paper only moves, it is not itself the gerund. The water of the irrigation ditch that passes by my side also circulates endlessly, and they try to capture it by inscribing on paper the laws of the irrigators, the wars of peasants and industrialists who get together to have water

within reach. It is another gerund of water. The oldest courts always have to do with water, the ports, the irrigators, the paper, water is always necessary.

The group of boys reaches the ravine and one by one they jump over a fence. The boy with the paper falls and hurts his knee. I can't help but laugh because there's something childish about skinned knees, because it's peeled like when they used to put tights on me, and the knickers stayed in place, but the tights came down and bagged up to my knees, preventing me from walking. To stop them from being put on, I would drop to the floor on my knees and peel them off so that the fabric would tear. With the hole in the tights I wondered where the fabric that was gone went, because I didn't see a tear, a cut, I saw a hole, and the hole means that something has been emptied, and when something is emptied, it is displaced. I didn't see any cloth on my knee, but a thin darker layer, blood waiting on the epidermis. A stain without oozing, a shadow that would crust over, no trace of the fabric of the pierced tights. The paper boy has skinned his knees when jumping over the fence, and now the rest of the rowdy ones are helping each other by slyly doing the ladder or holding hands so that their knees don't have to bend so much and need less of an angle. When they have all jumped over, I wait and jump the fence. I'll bring my knee up to my ears if I have to. Going up is all legs and weight, coming down is ankles and weight. In the whole time no one has passed by and now that I'm just jumping, the police, the neighbours, the pensioners are walking by. I think of the children with the plastic guns pointing at me over the port, I look away from those who look at me like that.

There is a footbridge that goes from one side of the ravine to the other and connects the caves. It was built years ago and has never been opened to the public because it is full of rocks that have fallen in. Pieces of the ravine that fall little by little and instead of crashing down next

to the road, they explode against the footbridge. There are also snails that are white and empty inside, their inhabitants dead or having moved away. Everything looks pretty much dead except for the traces of things that have been alive like snails and goat poo which are scattered like black olives all over the ground. The group of boys have entered one of the caves and are fighting, pushing and shoving each other and touching their genitals over their clothes. If water appears in the port and on paper, here it is water that has formed the cave over years of sediment, of calcium carbonate deposits now turned to travertine stone. Ancient waterfalls that are now perfect hiding places. The bandits are inside, sheltering from the splash. The paper with the watermark is on top of a stone, next to the footbridge, in four steps I reach it without stepping on snails or goat shit, and I take it. I change it for the one that has no watermark and was hanging in the mill.

The watermark of the group of bandits can be seen through the light that hits hard against the rock and warms it, and I quickly take refuge in another cave. I sit down to watch the road to the port, where the trucks and vans pass. The sounds of the road rise and amplify in the cave, and I no longer hear the sounds of the village or the group of boys. There are marks in the cave that are not water marks, they are made by scratching, scrubbing with knives, nails, bones, shells or sticks. There is a Lea & David which is a mark of love. There are some names with dates from 1920 that are archival marks, marks of ownership of discovery. There are marks that say they are Iberian, and they are the funniest because they don't seem to mean anything, they are two human figures drawn on sticks. There is also text, a very long text that although it is in our alphabet and with capital letters, I can't manage to make up a word. The letters and the Iberian marks don't want to say anything and that's why people create so many narratives around them, the others want to be remembered.

I don't quite know where to put my butt so as

not to be on any marks, I don't want to wear out the effort that someone has put into nailing things down to get material out and etch the rock. My bum also removes material by rubbing against the rock. A river runs under the gully. Beside the road, two lines: one of asphalt and one of water. On the asphalt people and things go back and forth, the water just moves. The water is mute, the river has little flow. From the asphalt comes an electric noise that means it has high-pitched parts, and then there is the low noise of the car engines and all the noises that are transported in the ravine and go up to the cave. Inside there is a buzzing sound with very high notes and a very low base. The paper remains on the rock and the rays that hit it leave the watermark inscribed on it, I go over it with my finger.

Watermarks appear in the process, when the paper is formed. In a vat there is paper pulp and water. On a form, which is a frame with a sieve through which the water is strained, is sewn the watermark, which is a drawing made with copper wire. When the form enters the vat, the paper pulp is deposited on the form, and where the watermark is, the amount of pulp is less. This is why the most translucent part of the paper is where the watermark is, and this appears against the light. But it is not called a light mark, it is the watermark. Like a small traumatism that appears in the formation of the paper, and that will bring a drawing, a signifier in which it will be in relation. There is no architecture, no big buildings, no plants, no castle walls rising up. There is no language, no written letter, no verb that catches you. Just a drawing, a sign, like in the cave. It is impossible for me to do the exercise of re-signifying this drawing where bandits appear. I simply leave it as a mark, I leave it as the signifier that has followed me from one water to another. I take out the laptop that has accompanied me from the mountain, from the port, and which is about to run out of battery. The only thing left for me to do is to write down in detail the drawing on the paper and why the

hell it has had this effect on me.

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[1]

Oh, what a pair of bandits!

[2]

Montjuic is Mountain in Barcelona that looks both at the harbour and the city.

[3]

Post Office, Spanish Tax Office

[4]

A road