

Pola Oloixarac

Extract from the novel *The wild theories*.

Chapter 5

5

It is the custom among the Papuan Gahuka-Gana and Gurumbumba tribes for a group of chanting and howling warriors to bring children previously disguised as tigers to the edge of the river; there, a group of men stand in the water, masturbate, and introduce sharp leaf slivers into their nasal cavities, making them bleed profusely. The children imitate these gestures, also self-inducing nasal hemorrhages; afterwards they are herded into the depths of the forest, where they live in the warriors' huts for a year. During this period they have scarce contact with women; they practice giving themselves nosebleeds, vomiting and playing the flute.

Augusto García Roxler's first steps in human society were likewise singularly obscure and systematic. Certain university legends (pejorative rumors, which did not survive the department's transfer to its current domain on Puan Street) would have him caressing his pudenda during written exams. Not exactly the equestrian effigy of a hero of Argentine letters. I was able to discover (as a result of secret operations, which I won't expound on here) that his contacts with the fair sex were restricted to a minimum.

On the other hand his retiring, vulnerable aspect gained him the trust of an assortment of graceless female students, who agreed to collaborate in his experiments. Emilia Sosa, aka "The Pig" Sosa, was the first to complete his strange questionnaires, and to stoically bear the horror which the Theory, in its original and mysterious aspects, was wont to induce. Apparently his defective nakedness facilitated this endeavor; and although he was not the only one, he was endowed with the necessary strength for them to *voluntarily, instinctively* recognize him as their predator. He also measured their craniums; at the time that I entered university, García Roxler had lost his way and abandoned these practices.

At first I looked down on his theories. I would evince a half smile upon reading or hearing his name mentioned: and if, delving in the used section, I came across one of his books, I would shunt it aside without a second thought, as children with stunted ambitions or defective writing abilities are shunted. I close my eyes and see him advancing down the the department's main hall, serious, absent-minded, in a gray overcoat, books and papers spilling from his pockets; I see myself

languidly chewing gum or raising a disparaging eyebrow, or both; for the savage era of Augustus's theories was history, albeit not of the historic kind that generates prefaces, fear, disciples; having him among us was less an honor than evidence of a senile ecosystem, which allowed the senile academic to continue feeling at home with institutional decay much as he had done throughout his life; nothing more was expected of him than the *possibility* of a (senile) presence, a sort of working retirement; thanks to such individuals the university displayed its collection of Dorian Grays, robotic portraits of an atrophied atheneum that could never quite muster a feeling of pride in itself. Augustus's intellectual life was over before I enrolled. The weakening of his superior functions made him an object of pity, but books? Alone among my classmates, due to my omnivorous nature and my devotion to the task of knowledge-gathering, I condescended to weed through these spurious bibliographies.

It is notoriously difficult to dissociate sense from sensibilities in a contemporary, even more so when the contemporary in question appears to resemble nothing so much as the long-lost cousin of some *Tyrannosaurus Rex* subspecies; I can only state that, when the time came, his voice as it presented itself to me bore the cadence of absolute facts. The impossible occurred: the young promise, the rampant tigress of the lecture halls (*moi*) took an interest in the gnarled beast, the relegated Professor Augustus. And now, *ensuite*, everything changed. My inverted romance with García Roxler took a decisive turn; with my youthful energy and that knack for springing into action, which can only be acquired in humanities departments, I threw myself into investigating the possibilities of his theory. García Roxler himself agreed to send me a copy of a seminal article published in the *Continental Philosophy Review*, which I later returned along with an succinct commendation and a prolonged annex of notes. I got busy immediately, postponing investigations that were probably more urgent. I wrote in small, seraphic handwriting, on pieces of paper I dragged with me everywhere; afterwards I translated my outbursts into far more legible and docile electronic calligraphy. I soon adhered to that illustrious theory of Time, which scorns lineal representation and subsumes all time, past and future, into the task of writing. I obtained unobtainable articles published in New Haven, Río Cuarto, Aix-en-Provence and Leipzig, as well as a transcription of "Do Cave Paintings Dream of Syntactical Structures?"; since eventually I would need company, I also acquired a fish (Yorick, a red *Betta splendens*); I couldn't stop.

The peaks of intensity - those moments in which my intuitions manifested in ways that were more or less discernible to the human eye - took place after dinner, and also early in the morning; it was only between the pink and the violet hours (4-7pm) that my mind rested. Outside these intervals my nails stopped growing, eroded by constant keyboard tapping. I used wrist bandages to avoid carpal tunnel syndrome. I read, debated out loud, reworked premises, undid conclusions; I read Augustus's texts, Augustus's lectures, returned to my notes, crossed them out, corrected errors in the margins, went back to writing. Augustus had taken the first step in a tactically forbidden direction: his approximation to

Van Vliet's Theory of Selfic Transmissions combined metaphysical intuitions, deep anthropology, the potentialities of political philosophy and a language that was attractive, risk-taking and rationalist. I believe I haven't met with a comparable swarm of theoretical activity since my tumultuous affair with Clausewitz's theory of warfare and the *Maanloos Geschriften* (Moonless Writings) of Van Vliet himself. I couldn't stop.

5.1

Anyone reading these pages¹ before we've been personally introduced should try to visualize a young woman in her twenties; a jet-black mane; a beige raincoat. Her cheeks are pink with excitement. She pushes a mesh of hair off her face, tiptoes through a crystal doorway. It leads into a red-carpeted marble hall; much like a Russian Empire debutante, the young woman faces the mob that composes the world, blinking delicately; her tiny pale green feet don't dare descend into it. There is another door, at which people crowd to get in: impelled by moderately brutal elbowings, the young woman, thrown off balance, penetrates the hall.

It is a reception in a Latin American embassy in honor of a visiting Yucatanian man of letters; the promise of free drinks in a climate of decorum has attracted the cream of the local intelligentsia. Mariachis provide the sound track; knots of gentlemen and ladies converse animatedly around various lamps; there are bohemian or philobohemian elements, some academics, a few canine frowns, a collection of bald heads. A sober army of waiters passes out the spumante; the atmosphere is relaxed, the mariachis and their vests can count on the public's sympathy. The bolero "Sabor a mí" begins to play.

Our young debutante slips in furtively, wades by the windows' *art nouveau* undulations, glances discreetly in all directions. She stops for a while, thinking of nothing in particular; when the trio of mariachis reaches the verses *I don't expect to own you/I am nothing, I have no vanity*, she recovers her craneal-motor functions. Augustus is nowhere to be seen.

She swallows the champagne she is offered, throttles a bacon canapé between trembling lips. Surreptitiously, the song changes to "Piel Canela" (also known as "Me importas tú"). One of Augustus's departmental assistants – a stableboy from his nepotist duchy – crosses the salon, rebounding off the guests. It's the chubby E. G., and he's heading in her direction. Horrified, the young woman hastily mingles in an attempt at avoidance. Having battered him, the human wave should dash him against the window, so she circumnavigates the breaker stealthily, sliding in the general direction of the bathrooms.

¹ Not so Augustus, who knows perfectly who I am.

Unable to duck out of her influx, men look at her, talk to her, try to detain her. But she cannot afford to be distracted by random chit chat with elements alien to the plan. She therefore adopts a strategic position, out of range of the jackals. Unfortunately it's not long before a waiter squats courteously to inquire what she's doing under the table, and whether she's feeling all right. Although dozens of meters and people separate them she can smell her prey, no matter how it may try to hide. She accepts the champagne she is offered; her acid lips glimmer.

And suddenly the noun García Roxler is made flesh and is present, blue raincoat, gray pants, I can see him. Lofty, magnetic, white-haired, he smiles blankly, with perhaps a shade of contempt for the *quidam* who faces him, a former city culture secretary. Oh, I certainly wasn't planning to suddenly appear before the former city official and his incredible captive audience, stalling like some mermaid-shaped prow! Right away, my hand extended itself exquisitely towards them:

–Dr. García Roxler. Good evening. I'd like to propose an impossible project to you. People often find the force of my directness perplexing. Augustus's first reaction was to back away slightly, like some chaste *avis* exhibiting (*Majestates Domine!*) that slightly bewildered, obscurely romantic composure as it distances itself – the reticent, seductive aura of the innate South American academic. The former culture secretary inclines his bald head towards me, affecting an air of Parisian refinement: out of pure voracity, I hide my lip beneath my teeth.

Habitually spare in his expressions, Augustus thought it sufficient to reply:

AUGUSTUS: Trust your intuitions. Do not make me the offer, and I shall not accept it.

ME: That would be a mistake on your part. However, the conditions are such that you may consider yourself obliged to reject it. I am referring to conditions that are not entirely objective, of course.

AUGUSTUS (*somewhat impatiently*): What do you mean?

I hastened to explain that certain of his writings suffered from a series of errors, *I'd say pretty serious ones*, the contaminating nature of which mangled whatever points of view still had a decent chance of preserving a modicum of substance or, at the very least, interest. I, however, could correct them; and I preferred to let him know this way, rather than publicly demolishing him at some congress. The former culture secretary appeared to be highly amused and wanted to know my name. Augustus detained him with a (perhaps jealous) gesture and, prey to an unspeakable certainty or natural grudge, bent towards me with precise, parsimonious slowness: “Young lady, I doubt that the vigor of your adjectives on the subject of my work could be of any interest to me.”

The interval thickened, becoming open and furtive at the same time. Often, in his lectures, I felt myself to be under his robust surveillance. I was surprised by the fixity of the pact of submission he maintained with a certain sector of my anatomy. He simply wouldn't back down. I would half-close my eyes with extreme reverence, aware that such shady exercises must be carried under cover of silence. A prodigious yearning would rise from my knees, grazing my amatory

triangle. I can see it, I can see it all: Augustus rising to write something on the blackboard, Augustus suddenly detained (struck by the lightning of some fabulous, impious idea) with the eraser in his hand. Augustus tolerating interruptions – slowly closing his fist in fury. Augustus interlocked in a brisk circumlocution, to which no one listens; going from side to side, then standing, skeptical, before the ceiling. I see him changing his opinion (choosing the correct bifurcation between worlds), then carefully breaking a piece of chalk. His face alternating between the empty blackboard and the empty faces of the students in the first rows, until Augustus sinks into the chair, palms some yellow candies from his inside jacket pocket and continues his lecture as though he were by himself and we, mere participants in the strange, repeated privilege of the lofty García Roxler letting himself be seen. Standing in the middle of the classroom, dedicating somber endecasyllables to me – sublime messages, which I alone could decipher.

I answered slowly, as though approaching a little forest animal, letting my words fall like candy among little forest animals. He didn't say anything; trusting in his facial rhetoric, Augustus did without linguistic skills. (Actually he did say some things but, *noblesse oblige*, I'd rather gloss over that foul eruption of saliva and poststructuralism with an equally curt silence). I remained unscathed, my empty glass trembling in my hand. Ideas belong to a fortress of syntactical thicknesses, and only a deliberately precise execution forcing them through the gauntlet of events allows them to transmit their purity. I could read the reverse of his plot. I might have told him what I knew, have come away with the hygienic consciousness of one who, just before imparting the death blow, explains to the fallen enemy that fire will follow upon the blade, then siege, then a martial concealment of the pyres. Could he see, with those atrophied optic nerves, how the terrible shadow of this young Athena, *si sage si combative*, lengthened over the ancient stars? I dared to insist upon my corrections of the Theory of Selfic Transmissions – and decreased the velocity – *in that dawning of the theory's radicalization*. The echoes of my decisive coda were still fading, folding subtly among the leafy layers of silence, when the left corner of Augustus's mouth began to twitch; here the chubby E. G. materialized next to his lord and sustained his glass, enveloping me in a jealous gaze.

My sensible readers will point out that this was my cue to disappear, ever so lightly humming *so long, farewell*. And while I was able to discern this signal within the weave of fabric, stale air, disconnected phrases and sweat, which they call the world, I did not budge. No sirree. On the contrary: I felt as though that fatal trio of men had just cracked the code of a rebellious army within me. In the throes of a voluptuous attack, I was invaded by an insane desire to recite verses in the manner of Von Clausewitz:

*But the annihilation of the other (the adversary)
cannot be reduced to a simple logical negation;
on the contrary,*

*it is a dialectical negation engendered by the conflict
itself.*

*Insofar as the conflict develops, that is,
insofar as it develops its potentiality,
it manifests not as a force per se,
but rather as the product
of a reality created
by antagonists
who are also
real.*

But I remained silent, quashed my desires. Cats making hairballs advance and retreat through the laryngeal complex may perhaps feel something similar (“Is it I who am playing with the Hairball? Or is the Hairball playing with Me?” Montaigne the cat may ask herself. More later on my fish, Yorick.) This is the silent dilemma of Space and Time teetering on the edge of existence; my private Senesthetic-Fundantital-Senesthetic dictionary, a pure, breathless, pressurized slide through the depths and curvatures of my lines. It is like a diminishing surface, becoming more vague and porous, much as the now receding trio of men gradually darkened as it entered further pools of meaning, rounded other, more distant peninsulas.

I know he turned slightly, making sure no one saw him, in a personal version of “see you later.” But I wouldn’t want to get ahead of myself, to “push the envelope” as the North Americans would say, in the analysis of an intuition, a cold explosion of controlled empathy, the seriousness of its rictus and the distant, collegiate gleam of austere souls upon recognizing an equal. I am not blinded by the excuses of your pride.

I want you to see, Augustus, to notice the crystalline mercy with which I shall have to operate from now on. I know that bugging the key to your theory is a task which, in principle, you might believe pertains *solely* to you. While I address you informally now, I shall cease to do so immediately, moved by cadences more or less pertaining to the River Plate – plane-river, sober, somber and neutral. I understand it may be difficult to translate the power of an apparently autonomous decision into the seductive (and, possibly, horrific) realm in which, hunted down and bleeding, it can be observed to dangle between a fanged superimposition of voices, as I will demonstrate to you in my advance upon your brothers in arms, your selves that are almost you, these yous that are almost myself, chosen by the self within you.

For your theory is incomplete without me.