

TOWARDS A VISION OF DIGNIFIED SURVIVAL ON EARTH

EM DIREÇÃO A UMA VISÃO DE SOBREVIVÊNCIA DIGNA NA TERRA

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When I was about five, I had a little grey cat, named Popeye. I have no idea why. I have some pictures with him, sunbathing in the backyard. I don't exactly know why I never forgot him. Maybe because of the pictures. As it happens with the pictures of my great grandmother. I don't really remember my great grandmother, the one speaking Polish, Portuguese, German, Italian (is this craving for languages her inheritance?), this old immigrant woman living in the midst of the crop fields built over Brazilian indigenous bodies. But I do never forget her either and I do still miss her terribly. Even if I was about three when she passed away. It seems she was fond of cats, stories and headscarves. Then later on there was this yellow cat named The Cat, this poor guy, poisoned, and left alone and to die by the hand, and I mean literally, of a man I profoundly disliked, and maybe, now I think of it, because he was capable of doing it. To put him out of his misery. How could that be of any consolation at all? The Cat brought the need for cats. Then there was Cathy, and she was a brave, violent, loyal companion, whom I saw, for the first time in my own life, as a living creature full of being, to breathe her long last breath into giving her soul away — or back to the universe, who knows. And then again, there was Aninha, whom I myself had to bring to breathe no more, watching her to give herself to my own hands, trustingly. I betrayed her. My own chance of putting someone out of her misery. She was fourteen years old. But how could that be of any consolation at all? Six months later, I felt betrayed myself by my grandmother, my mother's mother, who could not wait for me and my brother to arrive to say goodbye. We were caught by death halfway.

You see, I am a vegan for something like fifteen years now, and my grandmother, this peasant woman, turned one because there was no other path to go for the, although once urban and learned, now married and migrant woman she was, my grandmother, was one of the most important people in my life. I had seen her with the chicken to die, the piglets to die, the cow to milk, the horrifying hunting stories of her husband and of her father-in-law, the one who lost a leg in a hunting shooting.

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And yet, how could I turn my face to this affectionate evening popcorn she had made for us, popped with lard, when I came to say farewell before my long-distance departure? I was not even sure I would ever be able to see her again.

I do miss her terribly. And although I was deeply hurt by her silencing about the indigenous inhabitants in the very land of my birth, of whom I'm still so profoundly ignorant, I am still accomplishing things and coping with my own life in a desperate attempt to do justice to her, and to my mother, both of whom would make the best of feminist vegetarian fighters, the best of feminist listeners.

Had they ever had the chance of surmounting survival, agricultural capitalist oppression, greenish monoculturalism, male and patriarchal dominance, low education, structural, unplanned destiny.

Understanding reality, hearing the non-human animal voices. Hearing animal women's voices.

How can that be of any consolation at all?

This all hurts as much as it does. And it has nothing to do with my dead cats to have been sentient beings, even if their sufferings and well-being meant a lot to me while they were there, nor with my grandmother to have been a rational, intelligent and a being with interests of her own — even if the injustices she had to deal with along the whole of her life injured the heart of her soul.

But it has to do with souls. Their unique, irreplaceable souls, and the meanings their souls offered for life to have a meaning, and the meanings their souls offered to the lives of all the beings surrounding them while they were there, and after they parted — because we remember them even if we don't.

It has to do with the life we build in connection — human and non-human animals, human and bodies, full of being bodies. We could as well be talking about butterflies, couldn't we?

Now my godfather is dying. He had a full life of love — and misery. He lost his right fingers while working himself up to a shoe factory. A capitalist, monopolist, shoe factory. He then retired and found some comfort in the love of his grandchildren. But he is now vulnerably sick. I look to his dried up face, his skinny legs, and his never repaired hand, and I cannot blame him for having been greedy about alcohol, and meat. Can I?

He and my father used to do the whole of the housework my grandmother would not do while working in the fields. So, they were both autonomous boys, grown up to be autonomous men.

They are both facing age now, and pandemic loneliness and distance. But what the hell does that have to do with animals in any sense?

Vulnerability, I guess, might be a possible answer. And care. And being kind to living creatures.

It has to do with souls. Their unique, irreplaceable souls, and the meanings their souls offer for life to have a meaning, and the meanings their souls offer to the lives of all the beings surrounding them while they are here.

It has to do with the life we build in connection — human and non-human animals, human and bodies, full of being bodies. Men and women, and no gender beings. And no social hierarchical normativity. We could be talking about birds and reptiles, and babies, couldn't we?

And it has also to do with a non-negotiable need for a world which is safe for workers not to wear their lives for the money they never make enough for themselves; safe for women to choose their paths out of their human hearts; safe for cats to be loved and to be remembered, not as pets, but as unique, irreplaceable souls. As souls, full of being.

I know.

How do I even dare to narrate cats, and grandmothers, and godfathers in the same piece of feelings? And cats, and pigs, cows, butterflies, birds, reptiles and babies? How do I even dare?

Well, you see, it has all to do with the life of meaning we build in connection — or, as vulnerability makes it clear, on every occasion, it has to do with our failings to offer justice. But justice as love and as embodied generosity, not as law, or norm, or judgement. Our failings to respond to them as sharing inhabitants of the world we live in. Justice as a possibility of seeing “the other” in its fullest, deepest, reality. Justice as an attitude towards a soul.

So, there is no question here other than this one: are we able to do it?

To save ourselves and human value and non-human value in view of a dignified survival on Earth? Can we save ourselves in the face of our actions of violence and injustice?