

Title: The Little Things
Author(s): Ozayr Saloojee
Source: *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, vol. III, no. II
(Spring 2024), pp. 78-80
Published by: *Memorial University of Newfoundland*



Disclaimer

The views, opinions, conclusions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this publication are strictly those of the respective author(s) and are not necessarily the views of *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, its editors, its editorial team, and Memorial University of Newfoundland (collectively, the “Publishers”). Authors are responsible for all content of their article(s) including accuracy of facts, statements, citations, and so on. The University gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility or liability for the accuracy or completeness of any information or materials contained herein. Under no circumstances will the Publishers, including Memorial University of Newfoundland, be held responsible or liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, costs, or liabilities whatsoever resulting or arising directly or indirectly from any use of or inability to use the contents of this publication or from any reliance on any information or material contained herein.

Message from the Editors

The editors welcome letters on all subjects, especially if they discuss or comment on the works published in *Janus Unbound*. Please read our Guidelines for Authors prior to submitting your manuscript.



Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies is published by Memorial University of Newfoundland

Ozayr Saloojee

The Little Things

Zurich is cold in January. The raclette and coffee at the airport were expensive, but the city was pretty, an obsidian lake and a broken sapphire sky; a sun with no warmth but lots of light. Our Airbnb host met us exactly on time, coming out of the apartment to let us in the gate, ignoring our earlier door knocks. We were on the way to Rome, via Milan, Tirano and the Bernina Express across the Alps, then to Istanbul, for a term of teaching abroad. We wandered the cobblestone city for a while. We bought chocolates and little Swiss Army knives - one for each of the four of us. The girls have them to this day. Mine was confiscated - it was part of my key ring - at a security check for a hockey game years later. The blade was little and dull, about an inch long, hardly sharp enough to prick a finger, let alone make a meaningful, or purposeful cut.

The apartment was strange and sweet and small. A ground floor - I think? - on a quiet street, not far from the lake. A short walk to the train station. Two rooms, low ceilings. Cat-print cushions. Old Hollywood posters; the poetics of bricolage. Straight in, a bathroom to the right, immediately off the little lobby, with an old chair and tiny artefacts on old desks, magnets on the fridge, frames on the wall. Audrey Hepburn + Cat, embroidered in bold colours on a pillow. Two bedrooms, pinwheeling off a main room - a combination of kitchen, living room and dining room. Everything just curated enough to be a modest ad in a local city magazine. In the dining room - in the very middle of everything - a table.

The girls - little, tired, but with new energy to take this new thing and place in - scattered. Backpacks dropped, shoes off, jackets and mitts and hats on the floor. A new, little soundtrack from all corners of the apartment now: “ewwww,” “so cute” “Is that a butterfly collection?” “It smells funny” “I want that bed.” “Can I put my lego there?” And so on. وهكذا، وهكذا. The table in the middle of the room was artfully piled with little things. Kitchen things, eating things. Dried flowers. Some books. Art. Travel. Zurich. Switzerland things. It had a metal top, sloped from each side to a drain near the bottom. A small, narrow channel, all around. A solid base. A Medical examiner’s table, an autopsy table, a coroner’s table. I stared. Jen stared.

We didn’t tell the girls of course. One would have been immensely and immediately fascinated at the macabre nature of this thing in the middle of our room, and that we were now eating our cereal at. The other would have paled, declared immediately that we (A), leave; (B), remove the table from any possible



*Janus Unbound: Journal
of Critical Studies*
E-ISSN: 2564-2154
3(2) 78-80
© Ozayr Saloojee,
2024

perspective where she might see it, or (C), cover it with a large enough blanket (impossible - it was huge), where she would give it side-eye and walk around the edges of the room not looking at it for three days. It stayed, and so did we, doing little things in little Zurich, waiting for our train to Chur, and then across the mountains. We stayed, eating meals out of our little coroner's table.

Today, maybe? I don't know anymore. In Gaza, Dr. Hani Bseiso, at a kitchen table, in a room with little things, in a house with cushions and curtains, and an armchair, and cold bright light streaming in from windows, and surrounded by tanks and Israeli soldiers, amputated the leg of his 16-year-old niece, Ahed. He used a saw, and a needle and thread.

I downloaded a video of this scene - after the amputation, because it felt important to have, to watch. In it, a young girl lies on a table, she blinks and turns to the camera. A hand reaches down to brush her cheek. A tear, maybe? Her right leg bandaged by the knee. Six men - I think? - attend to her. The camera pans left. A bottle on the table, a blue bag. A young man with an Adidas hoodie brushes her face, looks down and smiles at her.

This was the first thing I saw today in the social media litany. Wake up. Stay in bed. Check the feed. Sit up. Check the feed. Make some coffee. Check the Feed. Check. Check. Check. Like. Like. Share. Share. Like. Break apart.

It's the little things now, today, then, tomorrow, that I cannot look at anymore. I look at the kitchen table I built, that we had dinner at. That the cat jumps on. Piled with books, a few letters. A bank statement. A bottle of vitamins. A rock my nephew painted with "I Love you" on it. My little daughter, a year older than Ahed, sits at it, in a black BTS hoodie, eating a cupcake. It's cold outside, in Ottawa, in January.

I look at the little cardboard box on it, full of my not-so-little daughter's crochet supplies. A kufi she was hoping to make for her uncle (it's too small); spools of yarn from her Grandmother's secret stash. Needles. Thread. A sharp pair of scissors.

I condemn chocolates and Swiss Army knives. I condemn raclette and expensive coffee. I condemn key-rings and cat cushions, and desks, and Audrey Hepburn. I condemn butterflies, and butterfly collections. And I condemn pillows and dried flowers. Trains, too. I condemn cobblestone streets. I condemn blunt saws and sharp scalpels, and purposeful cuts. I condemn houses, and rooms, and cameras, and bags, and bottles and hoodies. I condemn yarn and needles, and rocks that say I love you. I condemn language. All those little things.

Biography

Ozayr Saloojee (b. Johannesburg, South Africa) teaches architecture at Carleton University in Ottawa. His research and creative practice is pre-occupied with the search for architecture enacted *otherwise*, where design is a process of tender epistemic repair and dreaming.