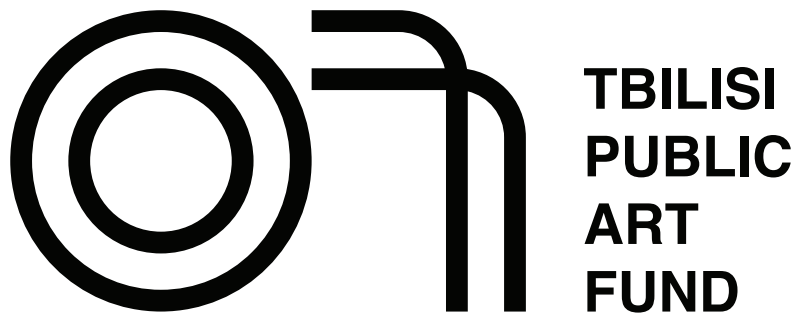




Hafez's Rose in Proudhon's Vase: The Booklet of Lotsman

Zura Jishkariani

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Dedication

(In his 1621 work "The Anatomy of Melancholy", Robert Burton mentions strange fires: "That appear above ships and which the ancients called Castor and Polydeuces." Castor and Polydeuces are known as the Dioscuri brothers, in whose honor the city of Dioscurias, now modern-day Sokhumi, was founded. This dedication is addressed to the gods and the Muse.)

"Saviors among the gods, precious gift of the dead; to you I once told what I had seen before, and now, through my song, you will also learn what I once concealed. For it is said: That those yet to come may also know.

01. Introduction: "In navigiorum summitatibus visuntur"

I have the feeling that ever since childhood I have been scattering, have been scattered, have been scattering myself—atoms, thoughts, warmth—and wherever I have passed through, whether it was the field of a kindergarten settled by forcibly displaced people, which was full of chemical substances spilled when men were carrying transformers away to hand them in as scrap, or the night, with small puddles full of rainwater in the broken asphalt, or whether I have passed along a rooftop, some rooftop, any rooftop, or set foot in yet another foreign, rented apartment—as if everywhere a particle of me has been spilled.

Like blood on snow.

When you are trying to make yourself whole, in every phase you bring exactly that phase to completion and do not mix them—you do not laugh in the time of mourning, and you do not mourn in the time of laughter; in the time of peace you do not wage war, and in the time of love you do not hate. It happens for you like the alternation of the seasons, the cycle of day and night, and the many other "distant nuances" to which our biographies submit.

For this gathering, scattering is again necessary—this time conscious—because everything I have to collect is scattered across different cities and apartments; some of it is left in other people's lives, some of it has gone with the dead. For the past year one motif keeps appearing in my dreams: my personal things and some hundreds of rare books and editions, which in the dream belong to me, are scattered all over the city. I walk and try to gather them, but there are too many and they are scattered in too many places, and it is hard for me to gather them. Throughout the dreams I think of methods, of how I might gather all these scattered things, clothes and books.

The experience of displacement brings with it a certain kind of nomadism that opens doors into invisible worlds.

As if these involuntary or voluntary movements, "like wandering the sea, like the turning of fate, with swift rumble and roar", this life in fragments in different districts—were sewing, weaving them together for me like needle and thread; and these districts, which seem as if they are just about to come loose from the city and begin aimless drifting in unconscious landscapes, and crossing from one end of Tbilisi to the other begins to resemble the impossibility of crossing an ocean between continents, because the only thing that still binds us into one city is no longer shared experience, but mutually contradictory scraps of television reports, delivered to us with such yellow zeal, as if everything that happens here touches all of us in the same way. It touches us.

But differently, and not all of us.

Wandering gathers scattered frames. Wandering shows you another city within the city. Many people in Tbilisi do not know how

endless travel from era to era, from aesthetic to aesthetic, is possible using only the inner districts of Tbilisi. The apartment-rental sites are a world unto themselves—their owners, brokers, the aesthetics and the angle of vision in the apartment photos that you look through on the site. Many do not know how to use the “apartments by the day” system, which has apartments by the day in every district and is a network of cheap nights—a portal. Many have not understood that lordship and serfdom here have never really “fallen”; only their appearance has changed, and the real lords are few, the serfs—the rest. Many do not know how many blessers, fortune-tellers and black magi live in the territories between the suburb’s cold blocks and the “apartments by the day”. With such endless wandering you also open city quests, such as, for example, “divination by the turning on and off of lights in the building’s windows”. Or how you find yourself in urban magic, if you walk in the direction of the location laid down by the ‘foot’ (*Georgian criminal slang for the runner who plants the stash*), but take one detour and find yourself at a pink window in the depths of Tbilisi’s African Khrushchevkas, and in the trails left by planes flying over Tbilisi you read New Year’s melancholy

So my gathering is, first of all, the recollection of wandering, because moving frames ensure in me autobiographical continuity in time. In a word, they ensure that you do not forget your side of history. I need the stubborn weaving of my own story out of any material I meet along the way—otherwise, from the very first memory on, I feel I will be lost. I will be confused. And I will scatter.

This wandering demands full openness, full vulnerability. During this wandering you might be killed, the hammer hidden in your bag will not save you, but you do not get killed, because no one around you—neither the buildings nor the stars—can imagine that someone might come out into the open like this. This is your freedom.

After twentythree years of wandering through almost every district of Tbilisi, now I am trying to gather together the events, “movements and exaltations”, exhibitions, memories, failures, revelations, those who left the city and those who left life—I am trying to bring together everything that accompanied one of the most secret, sacred projects of my life: to draw out the sea into Tbilisi from ancient Colchis, from the Abkhazian subtropics, and to open an office in any business district—

the Tbilisi branch of the port of Dioscurias:

as the experience learned from the Dioscurians of how alignment on a single virtual port takes place—from the side of refugees scattered across the world.

Or simply,

the port of Tbilisi:

for those who, like us, feel themselves at once a part of the city and at the same time feel themselves an unforgivable mistake in the city,

for all who flower only in the nonexistent landscapes of existing cities,

and for those who are at sea.

Here I was, having begun to write, and suddenly I caught myself at the fact that I was explaining something, that I was looking for a logical or ideological justification for something; I caught myself because I know where this desire to explain comes from.

The historical-cultural genetics of our society have arranged themselves in such a way that we are constantly in an alternation of existential catastrophes and existential celebrations.

And in parallel with these catastrophes, society and everyday life have constantly been, and still are, putting this question to the artist, the poet and the dreamer:

- Is this really the time for that?

A culture operating in catastrophe mode cannot admit the “luxury” of non-utilitarian, “non-productive”, non-collective activity, and poets and artists are always forced to justify their “impractical” “ravings”, always forced to explain that which sometimes—cannot be explained. How are you supposed to fit eternity seen through the crack of noon, or the inner darkness whose “source lies somewhere in the underworld, where the gates of night open”, into an Excel spreadsheet?

No one says: “I came because of that pain, because the story I heard about you made me feel it,” everyone says: “What will your sad songs do for the image of my business?”

“I want your eyes to be like cherubim, and not asleep,” said the Athonite monk. If art does not win in our country—no one will win. “Plus-minus, mc^2 , F, square root ($\sqrt{}$) toward the infinity of passion and of recognized necessity! Go, Ertaoz!”

02. The Port of Poti

“23. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;

24. These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.”
– Psalm 107 (106)

“L’être voué à l’eau est un être en vertige. Il meurt à chaque minute, sans cesse quelque chose de sa substance s’écoule. La mort quotidienne n’est pas la mort exubérante du feu qui perce le ciel de ses flèches; la mort quotidienne est la mort de l’eau. L’eau coule toujours, l’eau tombe toujours, elle finit toujours en sa mort horizontale. [...] La peine de l’eau est infinie.”
Gaston Bachelard

It is the postwar period. In the mornings we go down to the sea to gather the dry branches and twigs the water has thrown up—for the stove. It is one of those outings. When you gather the twigs, you look down—you see the sand, your feet in the sand, the twigs and your own hands. Sometimes the edge of a wave comes into the frame of your seeing and then goes out again. Back then, something like a shoreline still existed in Poti. Later, the sea swallowed it.

And so, with my gaze turned downward, I came up against something. A dolphin had been cast ashore by the sea, dead. Unnaturally swollen and distorted, but a dolphin. I was so frightened I froze on the spot; it looked like some monster from a dream. But slowly the fear went back and gave its place to sorrow, because this fabulous creature I was looking at suddenly appeared to me as nothing. Emptiness. Meaningless emptiness. Organic tissue that means nothing, gives you nothing, but takes everything.

- Come on, I'll introduce you to the captain, he's my friend.

My father is leading me toward the port. It is freezing. Somewhere the cry of a gull is heard, like the cackle of an evil old woman from an unknown fairy tale. We pass the black soils where my father and the neighbor men, for some reason in the pre-sunrise hours, go and dig into the black earth, and dig, and from there they bring up black coal. They themselves become blackened all over. Some of it they sell, with some of it we light fires at home. Then we pass by the small ships at the port entrance, with titles like “Captain Bukia”, “Dawn”, and so on. These Dawns and Bukias, when they come back from sailing, bring a lot of fish—mostly anchovy, what they call “khamsa”—and they hand it out to us for free, to us and to the locals. You just have to get to the port when the ship returns, stand in line and have in your hands the bag which these sailors, these fishermen, these ones called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, this James son of Zebedee and his brother John, these captains of the little ships, fill with fish.

We go deeper into the port's territory and come up close to the ship. The ship is large, tied with thick ropes to small, fat posts.

We climb onto the ship. A man meets us. The captain. My father's friend. He invites us into a long compartment like a train carriage; there are many places to sit. He boils coffee. He gives me chocolate. For a long time he tells us what he intends and what he cannot intend for the ship. “It needs repairs,” he says. “I have to take her out soon,” he says. “I have problems with the port,” he says. “Here I sleep,” he says, and shows us the captain's room—with a mattress, pillows, and a faded poster on the wall of some blonde woman (Madonna?). The room is saturated with cigarette smoke.

A floating house, forced to cling to a foreign harbor.

“I was watching the trails of airplanes on the sky-monitor, following the white streaks with my finger until they disappeared,

and I was divining in those traces as my mother's friends used to divine in coffee grounds, with mystical faces, in a small provincial town,

where even the tiniest cloud floods everything with rain and it is better to have a boat than a car.

A motorboat is better still.

From ownerless graves, coffins stick out their corners like ships sunk in sand—wave your hand to them as a greeting.

*Cows graze in the yards of the school and the town hall—
call out ‘moo’, laugh, study the foundations of anarchism.*

*Girls read Russian fashion magazines,
and their future fiancés smoke local marijuana in the phantom ruins of industrialization,*

*where the sky looked like an empty blue theatre, waiting for Star Wars—
throughout my whole childhood.”*

In Samegrelo, by the sea, it rains a lot—it rains for days, sometimes it lasts more than a week. It rains and rains. As if a radio were hissing in the sky, and against that interference what is heard is yours: words, silence, dreams, a corpse. Sometimes it rains so hard that the water comes into the entranceway, the first floor is covered with water. Neighbours cross over to each other in small boats—for coffee and to watch a TV series. Everything is wet, everything is forgotten. Any moment now the sea itself will come over the shores and dolphins will swim into our Khrushchevkas.

“The fish have come.

Additional measures are needed so that researchers can begin work on the medical non-creation of the waves, otherwise the water will cast ashore even huge ships between our blocks of flats and the anchors of those ships will be reflected in our hearts.” – this is how wetness entered the TANAPHA, when I had no other words for the reader I was looking for from the place where I was writing this:

the Tetríkhevi Hydroelectric Plant settlement, Tbilisi.

At that time, the small town had already formed its own answer to the “Tbilisi pressure”. Because the products that had arrived were first officially sent on to Tbilisi, then sorted for the whole country, and only then returned to the town that had received those products, a hard movement was recorded in response:

A ship arrived loaded with humanitarian aid, and in addition: containers full of drinks, food, clothes... A brigade of boys comes up to the port with a pistol; they “ask” that one of the containers be opened. It does not take much asking, this is part of the spectacle. The brigadiers take away the best things, whatever they can fit to carry. Then, according to the scheme: a messenger is sent into the town, and at 2 a.m. the messenger tells the displaced people that an open container has been sighted at the port, and that the container is probably filled with warm clothes for children and with vodka for getting through a winter without electricity. Then the displaced people living near the port send their own messengers to the displaced people living far from the port. In the meantime, the locals also hear of it. Within an hour of the container being broken open, by 3 a.m., hungry and exhausted people are upon the port.

When Tbilisi calls to find out who is guilty, everything is pinned on the displaced people: they came at night—vandals, they broke open the container and took everything, my dear Tbilisi.

Tbilisi shuts its eyes; what is it to say to the displaced? The displaced themselves, for their part, do half-heartedly try to find out who broke open the container, but that is not the point at all; the point is that warm tops exist. The locals are satisfied too. Everyone is satisfied, because it has frozen, which means it will snow, and if you have ever paid attention, when it’s really coming down, thinking is difficult.

“If only I survive the winter somehow!
If only the wind would somehow abandon me!” – G. Tabidze

Here we have to bring in fragments from a poem by Karlo Kacharava. Karlo too was born and grew up in Western Georgia; in his texts you cannot avoid that rain, that melancholy, and that helplessness in front of the world in which we too grew up.

“You were born by the elevator in Poti, in Niko Nikoladze’s town.
In the next room hung Akaki Tsereteli’s smile on a bad reproduction.
Your portion, those who came after them, your immortal grandfathers, ate.

....
Because even among the forebears there are immortal ones and dead ones.
Apparently you understood that Egnate Ninoshvili,
Giorgi Kuchishvili, Kote Kapaneli, Valerian Gaprindashvili,
Shalva Karmeli and Titsian
are not supposed to be your ancestors.
To die of hunger is shameful in the land of the Mother of God.

....
You were born by the elevator in Poti.
You were born by the sea.
You were born by Paliastomi, beside the corpse of a poor doctor,
beside a romantic prostitute,
beside the boulevard photographer, in a cheap canteen that today appears as paradise,
which today really is a lullaby for the wandering bands of the half-starved.
In dreams you have seen Tolstoy, Schwarzenegger, Bioli, and a bit of García
Lorca too.
There where they are not shooting, your homeland is no longer.
“Father, Father, give me a little money and the capacity for wandering,
and do not forget the rainy cemeteries of western Georgia,
my sky, which all my life my own have been taking from me.”
You did not say this.
You do not sleep.
You are waiting with a rifle.
You are a customs officer.”
1993.

03. The Port of Kutaisi

*“I was returning towards my homeland on the ship Dalandi
and waking by the moon laid sorrow on my heart,
but I could no longer find my homeland by its old roads,
and I could not remember: did I still have it, or had I merely thought it up?”*

Galaktion Tabidze – “The Ship Dalandi”, 1918

Everything, like everything, began much earlier than the moment we came up to it, but this particular story I only heard in the early 2010s, when a friend sent me a “news” item in which a man unknown to me was demanding that Kutaisi be turned into a port city.

On Wikipedia it says of Omar Nishnianidze: “Georgian official, politician, historian”; from more recent news I learned that he is a professor at Akaki Tsereteli University in Kutaisi. But for me Mr Omar is, first of all, a poet and an ontological anarchist. Only someone with a poet’s mental structure can, with such conviction and with readiness for accounting-level proof, demand the return of mythos and kairos into everyday life. This can also be read as a revolt against vulgar time. Only in such a zen-koan does it become possible to catch sight of freedom, which “is a shadow-like chance”, a one-tailed second that you must seize.

For it is said: “Before us and after us there will be no other gods”, and behind these words there seems to echo the heresies of Gnostic sects, the carnival music from the pirate captain Mission’s “Libertaria”, and the psalms of the Situationists about turning everyday life upside down.

While I was searching for the sea between the apartment blocks of Tbilisi, in Kutaisi a politician and professor was announcing the bringing in of ships from the Rioni into Aya. I remember feeling a kind of spiritual kinship with this man, as if we both were afflicted by the same sickness: we were tired of the land, of the desert, and of the narrow, capitalist, individual existence; tired of materialism, and instead of the scheming culture built on the values of fraudulent call centres, we thirsted for the sirens of ships and the endless horizon.

Pirates recognize one another from a distance.

Then I urgently convened a general assembly. In all, perhaps six people.

The methodology was as follows:

we had to determine where the future port of Kutaisi would appear, and we had to squat the place.

We had to find a map of Batumi from the Porto Franco times, and a contemporary map of Kutaisi. Batumi’s map had to be laid over the map of Kutaisi, and we had to mark the spot where the port indicated on the Porto Franco map would come to rest on the territory of Kutaisi’s map.

I looked for maps, but the Georgian internet of that time was poorer than the starless Georgian pop stage. All summer I was gathering people. I wrote to and phoned just about everyone. When I think back now, half my life has been spent on such activities: the struggle for survival has always taken place against, and out of, the search for some kind of miracle. I did not want any other kind of survival, and I still don’t.

The trail of our intermittent research eventually led us to the grounds of the Kutaisi Parliament.

*“What is a ship, if not a prison?”
Robert Burton – The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621)*

In the end, years later, the ephemeral harbor found me by itself. It came like a ship and like an apparition. In this form:

Over thirty years had passed since the war in Abkhazia, and the state distributed apartments to displaced people who had been left without homes, but did so with no consideration whatsoever for their context; it gave them flats in the cities where it gave them, often in a different city from the one where they had managed to put down a foot, and now they again had to move somewhere else – you were given an apartment, the rest was up to you, how you would re-arrange yourself.

This “handing over of apartments” happened in Kutaisi, if I am not mistaken, in the hall of Akaki Tsereteli University. Or in a theatre? (I wonder whether Mr Omar was not secretly present at the assembly; where would you find better Argonauts than among the displaced?) In any case, we displaced people from different cities and different districts of Kutaisi were gathered from such-and-such places at such-and-such time (at ten o’clock in the morning!) and led into a hall where there was a theatrical stage.

We were brought into the hall by the shouting of surnames outside. No one had thought to bring a microphone and speakers, or even a megaphone. A man stood by the hall doors, shouting the surnames at the top of his lungs; other men, already displaced themselves, were taking up these surnames and passing them on by shouting and calling, and so the names reached the back of the queue. That is how we went in.

The displaced who entered the hall seated themselves on the empty chairs, as spectators. (Where else were we supposed to go?)

On the stage we were met by living scenery – women with documents sat at shiny tables at the back of the stage; at the very front stood the lottery drum, and attached to it stood its man, the turner. A boy from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, quite out of key with the rest, was cutting diagonals across the stage in suspicious silence, but businesslike. When he saw that I was filming, he started filming me too. I smiled – he smiled back. Suddenly, from nowhere, a man in glasses whirled in like a storm, an-

nounced into the microphone that he was the minister, and quickly recited the script of the spectacle, which sounded more like an instruction:

- We will announce surnames. Those surnames will come to these stairs at the side of the stage. From there you will be sent to the lottery. In this box the apartments are placed; in each envelope it is written – building, entrance, floor, apartment number – so that everything will be done transparently, you yourselves will take your apartment number from the transparent lottery machine, in front of everyone’s eyes.

The apartment randomiser began, and we displaced people began walking on the stage as our surnames were announced. My surname was announced two hours in – the wheel of fortune had been turning that long already, and there were still many people after me.

Your surname is cried out for the whole hall to hear; the minister calls it into the microphone. You appear by the side stairs of the stage, and then, when the security gives permission, you go up onto the stage together with the other surnames that have been called. There too there is a little queue and a crush, and while you are on the stage, the rest of the displaced are watching from the hall and waiting for their turn.

The minister calls you, you come closer. The man-who-turns spins the wheel of fate and opens the narrow window. He puts your hand inside; an envelope comes out; in the envelope is your future permanent address, printed on a small slip of paper. You then hand this slip to the already sweating, exhausted minister, who reads your address into the microphone. Here and there you hear the voice of an old woman, congratulating you on your home. In the hall people of all ages are mixed together, children are milling and dizzy from the stuffiness. Then the minister points you towards the back of the stage – to the women at the tables. You go, hand over the slip, hand over your passport, hand over your displaced-person certificate, call God as witness. It is also mandatory that you have with you your parent who has turned almost eighty; otherwise they will not yet give you the key to the apartment.

In the hall there was no water, no other minimal, existential comfort. To drink water the displaced would go to the building’s toilet, asking those who stayed behind that if their surname was called they would shout for them urgently: we have such trauma that we are sure we will lose the home that is due to us if we are not right there, under the minister’s theatrical call. Perhaps it is really like this in the energetic-vibrational field of our unfinished feudal system. Up there, above our heads, like opera ghosts, circled state structures, wars of days gone by, and not-intentional but systematised mutual oppression already passing over into national identity.

Such was that day in Akaki Tsereteli University in Kutaisi.

News from 2013 reported:

“Kutaisi may soon become the only city in the world to have the status of a port city without a sea. For now this is only an idea, but the author’s second initiative will be carried out very soon.”

Elsewhere we read:

“Does this belong to the sphere of dreams and fantasies, or what is going on? How can it be a port city, will cargo come from Poti to Kutaisi, or will it be a branch of the Black Sea?” – asked Gia Tevdoradze.

Mr Omar gave this criticism a serious answer and unexpectedly closed a millennia-long circle between the coming of the Argonauts and present-day Kutaisi. Television at the time announced:

“depute Omar Nishnianidze is erecting ‘Aeetes’ at the entrance to Kutaisi. The monument to the ‘fierce’ son of Helios and Perseis, the mythical king of ancient Colchis, will presumably be set up in Nikea.”

The second annihilating blow from Mr Omar was his calling upon Niko Nikoladze. It turned out that similar ideas already existed at the beginning of the previous century, and this is well recounted in Lia Bibilishvili’s essay “Niko Nikoladze on Navigation on the Rioni”.

A few years after these events, in 2019, Mr Omar delivered yet another blow to the fragile fabric of our quasi-reality:

I copy the note from the website of 1tv.ge:

“The ship Argo, built by Akaki Tsereteli State University professor and former MP Omar Nishnianidze, sailed to the village of Chkvishi, to the Galaktion Tabidze House-Museum, for the feast of Vanoba.

Within the performance, the Argonauts are on the ship, led by the goddess Hera. In Vani, Aeetes and Medea meet them. As the author of the performance’s idea states, he brought centuries of history to life and went through that route. According to Omar Nishnianidze, the uncleared river created problems for them along the way, but they still managed to arrive at their destination.”

After some time had passed since the assigning of the apartment in Kutaisi, I went down to see where I was living and what had to be done. I did not know where this street and this block were—this address that had come up in the lottery, that the exhausted minister had announced in front of the face of God—and when I found these blocks, I realised that the ship was sailing on

the right course: the block stands in front of the abandoned Parliament, where cows graze in the mode of eternity, grazing grass under this sun, and where, decades earlier, a few little psychogeographers had imagined the future port of Kutaisi.

04. The Port of Tbilisi

*“Have you heard a ship’s siren in a city where there is no sea?”
inscription on a building roof, Varketili, 3rd micro-district, 18*

*“The doctor prescribed me
only tea and kissel.
For the kissel went
Olia Darbaiseli.
I sit and wait for this kissel –
but what are you expecting, whom do you expect?
Who cares about kissel; what is not to be seen
is a woman firm and sober.
Only you come, Olia,
let the kissel break its neck.
I am writing this poem, Galaktion,
a Tbilisian-Kutaisian.”*

Galaktion Tabidze, 1925

I don’t remember who wrote it, because the one who wrote it has died:

“and life was easy in that doomed stellar desert, surrounded by alluring abysses, cars and comrades.”

Those few days in the summer of 2017 resembled mythic time. The days did not fall in the direction of the clock by the domino principle, but went into themselves, into depth, and it was as if there were only this one day, “and the day was longer than this passing world”. As if it was the first day of the planet in the city – its noon resting on the pavilion on Tsereteli, the exhibition space – while arched, the eternal realm-of-dusk enclosed all the other districts within itself.

First, I saw the ship in the sky. That captain had two small ships standing in the yard of his house – Aurora and this one, which we later turned into the Dilla. No one had seen the ships beyond the yard until then, and when the special truck lifted the several-ton ship into the air to lay it on its back, the ship caught on the power cables. Two more seconds and the lights on Lotkini would have gone out, as so often happened in our towns in the longed-for 90s. In those longed-for 90s, Lotkini was a famous place for getting drugs; this district had never yet seen an addict who had come here to get hold of a ship.

While the transport crew were working out how to get the lower part of the ship clear of the power cables, the ship hung in the air. How long? I don’t remember. By then Chronos was no longer working; the sky was full of kairos, the ship was hanging in the sky, and below, children from countless districts, and their parents and grandmothers, had gathered and were watching the ship above Lotkini.

“Mum, look, a ship!” – a child points out; I would have said the same, if my mother had been somewhere nearby.

In this frame an unbelievable moment unites us all – what we were witness to. Benjamin’s Jetztzeit. Six years later that ship swims in the text of *TANAPHA* as well: “My last heart is a project that screams like ships’ sirens in the loneliness of the city.”

In front of the ship that is hanging down from the pavilion ceiling stands a small old man with white hair and speaks, and most of his words none of us understands. Here and there the words “sea”, “myth”, “Georgian” flash out. He has already been asked so many times to say his words “into the microphone” that everyone is embarrassed to remind him once more. And he still forgets the microphone, and we, sitting on the four-to-six rows of chairs laid out in front of the ship, try to string together, logically, the words we manage to catch.

And yet, what need is there. Is it not clear anyway what is happening? Officially, according to the schedule, this is Zurab Knadze’s lecture “Sea and Land in Georgian Myth”, which he is giving standing in front of my ship.

Zurab talks and talks, perhaps everything he knows, perhaps also what he does not know; perhaps he is entrusting us with the secret of the Black Sea that he has solved; but ninety percent of his words do not get into the microphone, people sit in awkward silence, and the lecture does not end, it goes on and on, “for exactly as long as a spring day lasts.”

Almost no photos or video documentation of these events has somehow remained – neither of the ship in Lotkini’s sky, nor of the ship cutting through the streets, nor of the old man standing in front of the ship like Homer. Only a few eyewitnesses remember, each in a different way, and we do not know how deeply our individual memories will carry Tbilisi’s ship into the city’s memory, because our memories are measured by the earth’s circles around the sun, while the city’s time-memory is measured by aeons. But they say there are stories “that have the endurance of myths”.

At last the ship was set onto the back of the special truck. For some reason I cannot remember whether I sat in the ship itself or in the second vehicle that followed the ship. In my memory both frames are there, both look real.

In such special-transport cases, it turns out you have to agree in advance with the Interior Ministry and the police structures. They prepared in advance the route for moving the ship, and handed it to the driver – it was not allowed to deviate from this route.

A police car follows us as well, like a bewildered cortege of this silent, visible miracle: a ship is cutting through the streets of a city without a sea. And what is all this for? For what purpose is it happening?

The answer is always unsatisfactory, like art – for everyone and for no one, for everything and for nothing.

(And perhaps the police understand all too well, but cannot prove that at that moment in the artist's heart there is only childlike delight, brought on by wild, childish play-fantasies that are not driven towards any defined goal or outcome, apart from delight in the play itself, by which it becomes possible to test the boundaries of the impossible.)

“Every movement of yours, every quickened heartbeat in this strange bed calls forth the suspicious displacements of unknown machines in dark alleys, sudden unpleasant telephone calls into sleeping blocks of flats, automatic updates in foreign social networks, the activation of a thousand kinds of dreams and pleasures, the cheap resellers of used devices and of the bodies of neighbours, across the superficially filled-in territories of the city map.”

– Text of Somehow Sleep, 2010

- Now do you hear, Zura? - Irakli's voice is heard, and the sound of sea-waves.
-“Yes, yes, what's happening on your side, is it going well?
Man, we've found a pole here, but it's on the territory of this bungalow or café, and do you know anyone here, so that they'll let us in and give us permission to use their Wi-Fi as well?”
-“What bungalow, what's it called?”

We are checking whether we know anyone who knows the owner of the bungalow. In the meantime Irakli and his boys are trying to explain to the staff that they need uninterrupted access to “that pole” where they will fix micro-devices that are at once receivers and transmitters. As a signal these micro-transmitters have to take in the rhythm of the movement of the seaside waves and measure the strength of the waves' impact, and then, using the bungalow's Wi-Fi, they will send this signal to the tenth pavilion of the exhibition space on Tsereteli Street in Tbilisi, where a real ship is hanging in the air; inside the ship a special receiving program is installed, the program will receive this signal and, according to the signal, will release this or that sound, this sound will then be sent to a speaker which also lies in the heart of the ship, in the captain's cabin, and the speaker will emit this sound at full volume for those gathered in the exhibition space; and for those standing in complete darkness it will appear as if these sounds are being released by the ship itself – a ship without a sea, and a sea without a ship – this will be the momentum of this communication, the boys explain now to the bungalow boss, because the staff, baffled by this delirium, had already brought out the boss.

After a little while a photo comes to me from the Black Sea coast – the developer boys are standing in water up to their waists and wrapping a big pole with transmitters. The Wi-Fi is sorted too. This operation is taking place at one and the same time in several cities and realities: Batumi, the Wi-Fi of an unknown café, the exhibition space, and the imagination of the viewers.

The ship, stunned by its strange history, hangs – once a favourite, then at some time sunk and brought up from the bottom, then lying for years in the captain's yard, and now, in the exhibition space, it takes on itself the signals of wave-impacts from the sea. Somewhere at this time people who have fled war are making for European shores in similar small ships, and the great majority of them are sinking. Somewhere at this time, in ancient Egypt, the sun is ferrying such a small ship across the waters of the afterlife and back. This shamelessly displayed ship in a city without a sea is, at the same time, the architecture of my soul at that time – that is how I always felt myself.

But it is neither a monument to the past nor a promise of the future; it is a present which, by all the rules, ought not to exist. Nor is it the swing of lawlessness; more likely, it is a special rule, a marginal note upon the laws of physics.

Like the individual, unsanctioned marginal notes of unknown copyists on the edges of Holy Writ. Nothing individual that does not believe in something greater than itself survives here.

On Lotkini, in searching for the captain's house, I came across this aged, stained dwelling which any displaced person would recognise from a kilometre away – that their subtropical blood and flesh live there. On the wall, in large letters, it says: “the sea-people”.

I, as a “declassé type, sediment of the proletariat”, am a representative of two groups of people who are marginalised, but whom you meet in every sphere of life and of society, you see us everywhere – displaced people and addicts (sometimes both in one) – up above, down below, on the bottom, and among the stars of society. We are everywhere – from Tbilisi's “Africa” settlement

to Batumi's "Swamp" and Poti's "Ostrovi" – and this is how we soothe ourselves:

*"27. But God chose the foolish things of this world,
28. and God chose the lowly and the despised, and those that are not, to annul those that are."
– First Epistle to the Corinthians*

From an old diary:

"Samael,
fortress of my fragile standing in the storm –
please, remind me of my Self that I once acquired and soon scattered –
into pointless relationships, sleepless dawns, psychotropic pharmacies, drug dens, cafés and bars, tagged photos, the thunderous applause of audiences, social networks, parties and bubbles, kisses on lips, the night streets near 'Tbilisi Central', night's nightmares, morning's deliriums, supermarket chains, dances for angels who were not angels at all, the registering and not-registering of civic stances, the desire to be liked in someone else's eyes, the cold of foreign apartments, brutal openness towards the world, boring brunches with paunchy millionaires, unanswered missed calls, and so on, and so on.

But give back to me my own self, and the joy of reproducing eternal spring once more.
Amen."

"He sees multi-storey houses and church domes raised high, and it seems to him as if huge ships were standing at anchor in an ocean. Mist is lying over the city – and in the streams of electricity heaving under the poles it really does resemble an ocean lit up (or a Leviathan awakened?)" – writes Grigol Robakidze in the unfinished novel *PALESTRA*. And there, when he describes the Tbilisi of a century ago as a city of poetic revolution and tells how Paolo fell upon Tbilisi as Arthur Rimbaud fell upon Paris, he says of himself: "At that time only two things tormented Grigol Robakidze: the Apocalypse and Dionysus."

– Grigol Robakidze, *PALESTRA* (unfinished novel)

A new version of inner emigration. In the end it is not only the city that acts upon our psyche and on the limits of our movements, but every city is also an expression of our inner intensity. When, in inner emigration, you rebuild the map of the city, that map must necessarily mark every temporary autonomous and safe harbor that has arisen since countless people took their course back, inward, into their apartments – as silent protest, as refusal of the spectacle. I know these flats – outwardly kilometres separate them, inwardly, they all connect to everyone, like islands.

In 1936 Boris Pasternak gave such advice to his beloved friend, "the poetic mayor of Tbilisi", Titsian Tabidze, one year before the latter was killed:

"Go deeper with the boring-tool of earth, without fear and without mercy, but into yourself, inside. And if you do not find there the people, the earth and the sky, do not continue the search; then there is nowhere left to seek."

Yet the main difference between inner displacement and the building of virtual ports is this: the emigrant carries within the best version of the city, to preserve it; we, on the other hand, go inside in order to bring outwards all the cities that have remained there and been lost – a city "nonexistent, in order that it may annul the existent".

The wandering of exile is endless. The sea is endless. Somewhere, out there, there are ports for those who will never come.

"пишу я с моря. С моря. Корабли
сюда стремятся после непогоды,
чтоб подтвердить, что это край земли.
И в трюмах их не отыскать свободы."

Бродский, Ex Ponto