



ONE IMPERATIVE | 36  
SIGNS SIGNS SIGNS

*It's only words,  
and words are all I have  
to take your heart away.*

~ The Bee Gees

*Photography is a marvelous discovery, a  
science that occupies the highest intelligences,  
an art that sharpens the most sagacious minds  
— and the application of which is within the  
reach of any imbecile ...*

~ Nadar

## SINGING IN, SIGNING OUT

Anders Kølle

We may thank Saussure and Peirce for teaching us what a sign is and how it basically works. Anyone who is interested in semiotics knows the names of the old, married couple *signifier* and *signified* by heart and has witnessed the dance routine between icons, indexes, and symbols a thousand times. But, and herein lies my problem: so far no one has been able to teach me exactly *when* a sign is a sign. How much does it take – or how little? When is the threshold crossed that makes something – a sound, a hand, a finger, a set of eyes, a mouth, a doodle – significant and thus potentially meaningful? And, equally important: when do signs stop signifying, exit the zone of significance and become utterly meaningless – something that simply is? To me this question is not only of theoretical but also of existential interest. I believe the difference between sanity and madness is closely related to this issue and to the very possibility of determining when a sign is a sign. I believe my own life would be significantly easier if I had a better sense of where sense begins and ends. I am, in fact, so far from being *sign-proofed* that every hour of every day is something of a semiotic strangulation that demands

tiresome readings and exhausting guesswork of rather grotesque proportions.

I have given up on love many years ago. Love is semiotics on drugs and impossible for me to handle. Love enlarges every sign, stretches it, pumps it up, heats it up until even the shortest glance, the smallest smile, the hastiest movement of a hand, a leg, a foot is a sign the size of the world and as deep and inexhaustible as the Holy Scripture. I find my death certificate written in the air of a sigh or a hesitation from the woman I love and I am reborn under the touch of a hand – a touch that was – or was not? – meant as a brief caress (but a caress in what sense exactly?). Alain Badiou beautifully describes love as the world experienced from the point of view of two instead of one and as a celebration of this very difference – but I have never experienced such love and know only differences that remain unshared in words and worlds that are always too many: How does one communicate one's terror of communication? Love to me is a tyranny of signs in which I gradually lose sight of the woman I love. She disappears behind words that are walls, signs that are traps, meanings that are abysses. Orpheus turned around too quickly on his way back from Hades and

lost his Eurydice. I enter the Hades of love and of signs and remain there babbling.

I handle friendships better than love because the signs of friendship have somewhat cooled and calmed down and are, all in all, less feverish, less ecstatic. In friendship semiotics return to a more human, less monstrous, level. And yet, the few friends I am fortunate enough to have – people I both cherish and admire – I still keep at the distance of emails, finding even these sporadic signs of life demanding. Here is my paradox then: communication is both what enables and prevents me from sharing.

I love music because music is meaning that doesn't say a thing. And I love the nonsense I sometimes come across in poetry and literature because nonsense says a lot without meaning a thing. I have the deepest sympathy for Hölderlin who after a hectic youth spent in the service of signs signed out early and retired his entire vocabulary – only occasionally mumbling the single, meaningless word “pallaksch” to his visitors and guests. And I consider Rimbaud to be the cleverest of all poets: he who turned his back on the entire sign-industry to become a businessman and an arms dealer in Ethiopia, thus translating his work, verse for verse, into bullets and rifles.

Here is my life then: I go to class, I teach, I go home. These few hours in the company of others have given me enough signs to last an entire day – and possibly a sleepless night too. To those who complain that life is without meaning and who turn to God or Facebook to find it, I ask: isn't the problem the reverse? If only there was such a thing as a completely meaningless existence.



Lucía Sbardella

*Sin título*

Pintura al óleo (oil canvas)

15x7cm

2016

escucho los ojos de mi gato  
Sobre mí. Descansa el juicio del mundo

Lucía Sbardella

February 2025

*A book is a huge cemetery in which on the majority of the tombs the names are effaced and can no longer be read.*

~ Marcel Proust

*Not a coincidence I think that wanted can mean both the fugitive and the loved.*

~ Jason Wee



## LAND OF MAKE BELIEVE

In the land of make believe  
We are born in sin and punishment  
Have balanced unpredictable times  
Given up innocence  
Washed and anointed  
Ourselves with the wind and salt  
Embraced every corner and shadow of our past  
Have fallen prey  
To promises and hope  
Have eaten our days  
In tasteless loves  
And romances that would not last  
Woke up late to the calling  
Of the sun  
To find the night  
Had no meaning  
Worked through jobs  
With pointless metaphors  
Childish cries wiped across  
Walls of train stations  
Taking us uptown  
Downtown  
It did not make a difference  
This land of opportunity  
Took many things for granted

How a headache kills a woman  
A stomach ache turns  
Life to hell  
Nothing is accomplished  
Dreams are fooled  
From day to day  
On and on  
We wake to find  
That if we stop believing  
Dreams fall apart

Maria Kranidis  
March 2025



Jeremy Fernando

*It's only words, and words are all I have,  
to take your heart away*

2025

# THE CATASOPH OF JABBERWOCK

*for Lewis Carroll*

When all was said and done  
the world was left for its makers.  
Each fostergate of the rile and  
deribidaun industries —  
they set like flies upon  
the bayoue.

To the finders, keep clear  
of all emerald deribate trails,  
and log the land, explant no  
seeds or t-el packs on muddy soil.  
We never know what's in the water anymore.

On a personal note, my finder  
may be 1 or 200 years old. So,  
as a Tenenwichian I must set straight:  
The Empirico and National Pages,  
were not in the exen-rile factories  
with me and the 9000 fracmen.

For years all cardridge, oil, and  
deribate line complosions were blamed  
on the Emidinas or the Alterinians.

I knew one of the Emidinas — nearing the  
Catasoph they and family were  
crying plastic and vomiting rile —  
acute sinthosis in infants produces  
visibly pulsing veins.

I was of the half they called “Trumean”;  
True men, or truce men, divided further into:  
Emidina, Unaltern, and Technical sherf:  
I belonged to the latter two. Together  
with 5000 other unsettlers, we fled  
aqualine conditions and the rising fawglines.

The Powershift the sheets did not lie about.  
Emerson and Ou Lee really did sign the amends  
to refract all factolines to the south; trading off  
nuclear enodomies for fawgline refugees.  
Yes, we did ask for it, over our AllPass apps —  
but we feared extinction. The north and south  
..... thus began mass exodus: the world turned.

Sean Francis Han

May 2320 / May 2023



Jeremy Fernando  
*Mister President*  
2024

## ANOTHER USELESS ELEGY

Elegies are of no use anymore;  
the heavens have stopped listening;  
never mind the bulk of the entities trodding  
this plane of existence.

Were they ever useful?  
Were they ever listening?  
Perhaps you suppose too much.

Cows are sublime: they simply be.  
Sharks are beautiful: they simply are.

US things, US Yahoos – hunh!!  
Too much wasted potential –

Watch how you use that word, dear writer!!  
YOUR meaning, understanding, concept of  
*potential* might not be,  
surely is not,  
the same  
as all those others  
(Sadly, so few.)  
who might read this.

Ah, right you are there, READER;  
I had better explain myself:  
*potential* to be empathetic,  
kind, generous,  
forgiving, trusting,  
concerned, well-intentioned  
to all those others that exist outside of one's self.

Elegies only really hit the few, don't they?  
To reflect, seriously, deeply – so infrequent now:  
we have no time to think – tick, tock.

Hey there, writer, this is not an elegy.  
Where are the couplets?  
The dactyls, hexameter and pentameter,  
the spondees?

Aw ... c'mon, give me a break with your dactyls and  
spondees. I'm stuck using English,  
a stress-timed language;  
I have too little knowledge of Greek and Latin.  
It's my poem,  
and I'll call it an elegy if I want to.  
(You know the tune, don't you?)



Ah, okay, I get it:  
trapped in the language of the oppressor;  
your native tongue supplanted by the invader's.  
Okay, we'll call it an elegy in spirit.

An insurgent elegy, if you will.

To lament and mourn, not a pleasant thing,  
yet it is a fine trait in a being.  
Keep your "time heals ... blah, blah"  
and your "ya gotta keep going;  
ya gotta get on with your life."

Huh? Do I gotta?

What do I really have to do?  
Work? Be productive?  
Fill in a form  
to show  
someone else  
how much I did  
so that they can set a value upon me?

Wow, how absurd is that?!?!?!?

Something went askew right at the start,  
and somehow, we as a species, well ...  
not all of us, I guess, not everybody ...

we all know those names that  
I am not going to write ... you know ...  
all those peace-loving dudes and dudettes  
preaching about understanding, tolerance,  
acceptance, giving to others ...  
all those poet cats calling for equity,  
justice, humility, love ...

Well, I think I will determine  
what, for me, is work;  
will decide my potential,  
my productivity,  
my place  
in this absurd space.

I think I will reflect,  
seriously, on all sorts of stuff.  
I will be pensive over a slow, silent pint,  
will mourn for all those that suffer from  
the murdering and maliciousness  
that meanders  
through every beautiful place  
on this fine planet.

I see no respite,  
nor do I any longer expect one,  
that would be foolhardy:  
contemplation-time spent unwisely.

My time is my most valuable resource,  
and it is diminishing at every instant –  
I guess its worth is skyrocketing.

Thus, I will also mourn the loss of my time,  
even as I celebrate the beauty of ever having it.  
And please, don't read me wrong:  
I am not despondent,  
nor have I given up hope of enjoying being here,  
and the possibility of something after being here,  
neither am I looking for indicators of an after-here.  
My here will come to an endpoint eventually;  
then I will know,  
or be done with knowing.

Hmm ... I think I will write a few elegies,  
as useless as they may be for oh so many.  
I will write them for me.

Yeah, I will do that and breathe ...  
ah, what a productive, beautiful evening,  
for me, anyway.

Michael Kearney  
March – April 2025



Jeremy Fernando

*Now that's what I call a sign*

2024

*Literature isn't only entertainment. It is a way of seeing. Then, the writer finds a language to express that, so that the reader can live beyond what it is possible to know via direct experience. Good writing moves us. That's not sentimental, it's kinetic. We are not where we were.*

*Humans will always want to read what other humans have to say, but like it or not, humans will be living around non-biological entities. Alternative ways of seeing. And perhaps being. We need to understand this as more than tech. AI is trained on our data. Humans are trained on data too — your family, friends, education, environment, what you read, or watch. It's all data.*

*AI reads us. Now it's time for us to read AI.*

*~ Jeanette Winterson*



Jeremy Fernando  
*a mop | a top*  
2025

## HEAVENLY TREATS: A PORTRAIT OF AN ANGEL

Setsuko Adachi

Thank you very much for writing to me.

I wanted to let you know that I recall Angel smiling and licking a lollipop after the surgery. It was lovely to see that radiating smile after what she went through. She was only four then. I also remember Mother violently snatching the lollipop out of Angel's mouth and the stunned face of the doctor and the nurse, who gave her the lollipop. When Angel did not fight back, Mother was overjoyed. She covered my sister, who looked scared, with kisses, repeating *you are cured, you are cured*, thanking the doctor profusely. I understood Angel, who growled at Mother earlier in the consultation room to defend the lollipop in her pocket, had signed-off.

Angel today, in the eyes of the law, is a forger. The police contacted me because Angel had signed Mother's name on everything. In Mother's eyes, Angel is truly an angel. She maintains Mother's subjective reality very well in their best interest. Angel refuses to understand that the daughter forging the mother's signature is illegal. She insists that is

what a good, trusted, daughter does. I do not understand Angel's game or her world order. I named it Agentonomy Syndrome. It is too twisted. I stay away — Angel harasses me for not being thankful to Mother enough. I have no idea what she wants me to thank Mother for, and, no, I do not want to ask for clarification because hell breaks loose if I do. I am bombarded with nonsense, which is aimed at hurting and overpowering me.

Again, thank you very much. I need time to let all the information you wrote sink into me, but things are starting to make sense. Thank you.

Please stay in touch.

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The above was the reply to the following:

Hello Nicolas, thank you for your kind words on my wife's passing. My wife and I have often thought about you and Angel. It's a shame we have not seen each other for over forty years. Your presence at my wife's wake meant a lot to us.

What you told me at the wake, that you did not remember much about your father's wake and that



you are now estranged from your mother and sister, generated in me the desire to honor Hugo and write to you.

Nicolas, Hugo's wake was one of the best wakes I attended. We were next-door neighbors and became close friends. When Hugo got killed by a raging moose, leaving his wife and two young kids behind, we were all shocked and saddened. My wife immediately went over and offered her help. She would come back with the two of you to give Anni the rest that she needed. Angel was only two, and you were four.

Hugo's wake was held at your home. When I walked over next door to offer my condolences with plenty of alcohol, the kinds that Hugo and I used to drink, the wake was already thriving with those who came to pay their respects — sharing memories, telling stories, and emptying lots of glasses toasting Hugo. The table had plenty of food and drinks, and a band played the music Hugo liked. It showed unmistakable signs of Anni's love for her husband and warm hospitality. Much laughter was heard, and singing and dancing was abundant.

Hugo was cultured, had depth, and was a human full of love. He was aware as a vet that animals generated emotions, involuntarily responding to tragic incidents; it is within their physical make-up, much like humans. I, a philosophical doctor, agreed and pointed out that we, homo sapiens, are equipped with a creative brain that gives meaning to these emotions. For example, I said, I am proud of our wake system. It contains a cultural myth that the departed do not wish the grieving ones to be stuck in sadness and pain. Thus, our wake system is opposed to amplifying sadness and pain. Happy laughter is not rude at our wakes, while we know it would be considered disrespectful and rude in other cultures. In ours, people come to the wake to offer comfort and support, and the generated emotions in the grieving ones learn to feel these emotions in our mythic context. — So, I knew Anni would, as she experienced Hugo's wake, attain peace with Hugo's death and move on.

Anni was holding up well. She talked and laughed occasionally, scooping the toddling Angel up and kissing or hugging you. When a delivery guy at the door announced *a box from Heavenly Treats for Angel*, the wake roared in pleasure — even more when it was announced that it came from Hugo.

The box had Angel's birthday cake and two chou-a-la-crèmes.

*Where's the birthday girl?* Someone shouted. Anni quickly reacted. *Oh, don't do that. That would not be appropriate.* The crowd responded with *Oh, no, Anni. On the contrary, Hugo would love it.*

Someone started singing the birthday song. We all sang Happy Birthday to Angel. Angel was all happiness eating a thin slice of the cake. She then devoured the two chou-a-la-crèmes. When Anni tried to give you one, you insisted that the choux-a-la-crèmes were for your sister. *Dad bought them because Angel loves them. Dad got two because Angel turned two!* People applauded your four-year-old child's wisdom and caring, and marveled at Hugo's great fatherhood.

Angel was beaming in happiness. Her laughter, the sound of pure joy, was contagious. We laughed in good spirits. Many complimented Anni on Hugo. *Hugo is great, Anni. You must be proud of your husband. Can you believe it? He made Angel the happiest child, even at his own wake! Hugo has done an amazing job as a father. He has taught Nicolas well the essence of gift-giving! He will be very proud of Nicolas.*

So, you see, Nicolas, Hugo's wake was a good one. You and Angel made the wake great for Hugo.

Nicolas, I am sorry to hear you are estranged from your mother and sister. But to be honest, I am happy for you. I take your estrangement as a sign that Hugo's spirit, which we applauded at his wake, is intact in you.

When Hugo was alive Anni was a sweet wife. She got upset if anybody said Hugo was wrong, even when Hugo agreed and said he was. She would continue to be upset against the person for speaking ill of Hugo. That Anni disappeared quickly. I hope my writing this does not upset you, but I have come to view Anni as the worst kind of parent after Hugo passed. I have given this a lot of thought, especially after my wife accidentally got hold of a confidential consultation transcript between Anni and the doctor who performed the brain surgery on Angel that tells me it was unnecessary. (I included a copy of it for your interest.)

After the funeral was over, when everyday life resumed, the two of you spent a lot of time with us at our place. Nothing had changed except Hugo was no longer there. My wife and I had plenty of time, space, money, and energy and did not have kids. We loved

giving you and Angel a good time. Making Angel happy was easy. All my wife had to do was bake cakes, pies, and cookies, and then Angel shined.

Nicolas, do you remember eating your portion slowly? You were waiting for Angel to ask for more when she finished hers. My wife would not serve more, and you gave Angel what was left on your plate. It melted us to see you glow when you made Angel happy. You were very much like your father.

That changed a few weeks later, after Anni had spoken to Hugo's fellow vet, who was at the wake. He told her the description of Angel that Anni gave him is called hyperactivity. He told her that hyperactivity is a sign of excessive sugar intake. Two chou-a-la crèmes for a two-year-old, that is not permissible. Hugo had made Angel a sugar addict. Cut down on Angel's sugar intake, and Anni should be able to enjoy the unconditional love and comfort children can offer their grieving mother.

Anni had gone extreme and asked us not to give Angel anything with sugar in it. Putting Angel through that ordeal was difficult for us because we did not see any hyperactive issues in Angel. When you came without Angel — Anni often took Angel's visit to us away as a punishment — and asked if it was okay for you not to

eat the slice of cake, pie, or whatever was served to you but bring it home — we always said yes. (My wife and I kind of suspected you were the only resource Angel had, and we were the only suppliers.)

You were a smart, considerate, loving brother. You prepared Angel to outsmart Anni when you started school. We learned about it on one of the rare occasions when Anni sent Angel over to us alone while you were there. We saw the sparkle in Angel's eyes that we had not seen in her for a while come back when my wife gave Angel a glass of water. Smiling, Angel scooped an ice cube out, reached over for the sugar bowl on the table, and sprinkled sugar over it with her tiny fingers. *See, isn't this cool? Nicolas showed it to me. You can't see sugar. Mama won't know.* Then, Angel ate it as if she were eating candy. My wife had to retreat into the kitchen so that Angel would not see her crying.

A few days later, Anni asked my wife if we knew any doctor who would diagnose Angel because she caught her stealing ice cubes, and Angel went out of control. Anni did not feel safe around her four-year-old. Anni said she needed to find a doctor who did not think she was overreacting and understood that Angel required immediate medical attention.

Anni did find a doctor. One day, while Angel was still at hospital, Anni came over excited. *My Angel is cured, a wonderful doctor brought my Angel back to me!* When Angel came home, my wife and I held a tiny celebration tea party for Angel. My wife had baked several of Angel's favorite pies. We were looking forward to seeing Hugo's merry little girl, again.

Anni was in the best mood since Hugo had passed. My wife started serving tea and pies. We were anticipating Angel's joyous outburst, instead, we saw an explicit terror appear on her face at the sight of her favorite pie. It was awful. We have lost access to Angel's happiness. I actually experienced a very physical reaction — sick in my stomach. It was petrifying. Angel no longer had access to her own happiness. Anni was too self-absorbed to notice that the shock we were experiencing was very negative. She looked at us and said proudly, "Now you know, I rescued my Angel!" and then blamed Hugo for creating in Angel a monster.

Shortly after, Anni decided to move out of this neighborhood to find herself and you two a forever home. It is a shame Anni did not have the desire in her to guard an innocent child's happiness. Hugo succeeded in implementing that in you. If Anni had fostered that mental structure, Hugo's wake might

have worked. The laughter celebrating Angel's birthday might have made her feel Hugo's love, and brought on her a happier resilience. But that was not the case. Instead, she chose to see the signs maliciously and cunningly intended to hurt and debauch her. The wake went on to celebrate Angel's birthday, disregarding and undermining Anni's authority as the wife of the deceased. Anni took it out on Angel — Angel was the beneficiary of the wake's call.

Your father will be very proud of you.

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## **A copy of the transcript**

*How are you holding up?*

*Not well. As I said over the phone, Angel needs your immediate attention.*

*Okay, let's make sure I understand everything correctly while I observe your kids playing in the adjacent room: why don't you tell me everything from the beginning?*

*Right, Angel became hyperactive after Hugo, my husband, died. I spoke about it to a doctor who rang to check on us.*



*He said he feared it would happen because he saw with his own eyes how Hugo indulged his two-year-old with sweets. The doctor told me it was not my fault; trying to stop Angel's birthday celebration at the wake was the right move as a good parent. Angel is only two, it is not too late. Cut down on her sugar intake was the advice the doctor gave me. Angel was an aggressive fighter. She would not let me touch her when she had her fits. Nicolas was the only one that Angel would let near her. He would carry Angel until she settled. Angel's sugar addiction ended a little after she turned three.*

*I was quite happy with her until recently: I caught her stealing ice cubes. When I confronted her, her aggressiveness returned. Nicolas was in school, and the four-year-old Angel drove me to a point where I feared I might strangle her. So, I shut myself in a room and prayed for Nicolas to come home. I know this is wrong. Nicolas should not have to bear the burden. As a parent, I should not let Angel take his childhood away. That is why I am here. Can you fix my Angel? So, I can be a loving forever home for her?*

*Let me see if we can find the cause. We can rule out Nicolas as the cause. Nicolas is a very caring brother. I can see him watching out for her safety, and Angel feels secure with him. We can also rule out sugar intake. You told me that Angel's sugar intake was under control, so we did a little experiment to confirm. We gave Angel and Nicolas a lollipop each and told them to eat it at home. Don't frown. No need. Angel did*

*not eat it. It is in her pocket. You did a good job. Do you know how many children just start eating them in the playroom? We can safely say her desire for sugar is well under control. You should also be informed that scientifically, the connection between sugar intake and hyperactivity is not found in humans. It is applicable to dogs. So, the good thing is, whatever the cause was, Angel is no longer hyperactive. At any rate, it does not explain Angel's recent aggressive behavior toward you. There has to be some other cause. And I have an idea of what might be causing it. Let me have a look at Angel and see if I am right.*

*Angel, Nicolas, come in here, please.*

*Angel, let me touch your head for a second, okay? Yes. Here, I can feel a soft swelling. Let me press it a little, okay? It doesn't hurt? How about this? No? How about this? Yes?*

*All right, Angel. It's all right. Your Mama won't touch it. Let me show the spot to your mother with Nicolas. Nicolas, do you want to keep carrying Angel? Well, Nicolas, I guess you do not have a choice. Angel won't let you go. You love your big brother, eh? Well, let me show the spot I am talking about with Nicolas. You cannot feel it on Nicolas but the same spot here on Angel's is soft and swollen. Let's take some x-rays of her head.*

*This is Angel's. See this here? Angel has developed a lipoma. You notice how Angel growled at you and pushed you away? She does not want you to touch it probably because you have pressed it a bit too hard in the past and caused her pain. Does this ring a bell?*

*Yes, Anni, you have done the right thing to bring Angel here. If it started around the time Nicolas started his school, this one is a rapidly growing lipoma, which means it requires immediate attention. But lipoma is a benign tumor, it does not need to be removed at this size.*

*On the other hand, if it is removed, chances of her aggressive behavior toward you will most likely go away, which means, Anni, you are closer to having the happy, loving family that you want. Now, it is brain surgery. It is a risky procedure to perform on such a young child. We will need to sedate Angel, and I need to scrape out her tumor as quickly as I can. I must be quick. I do not want to strain the toddler's body too much.*

*So, it is up to you. What do you say?*

*Please, go on with the surgery.*

*Okay, let's do it, shall we? I would say, after the removal of the tumor, go on and try giving Angel sweets and see if it brings out any problematic behavior. If not, Angel should enjoy sweets like any other four-year-old.*

*All right, Anni. I am happy to inform you that the surgery went very well. I scooped and scraped the swollen tumor neatly and quickly. We will give you a call when Angel wakes up.*

*You are awake, Angel. Good girl, Angel. Good Girl. Here, would you like your lollipop?*



Janice Sim  
*Spirit Tree*  
2025

Signs, everywhere! What  
good if we cannot listen,  
decipher meaning?

Janice Sim  
April 2025

*Like Jean Genet, I never experienced sex in a pure state, I always had some affection for the person, or felt some love.*

~ Edmund White



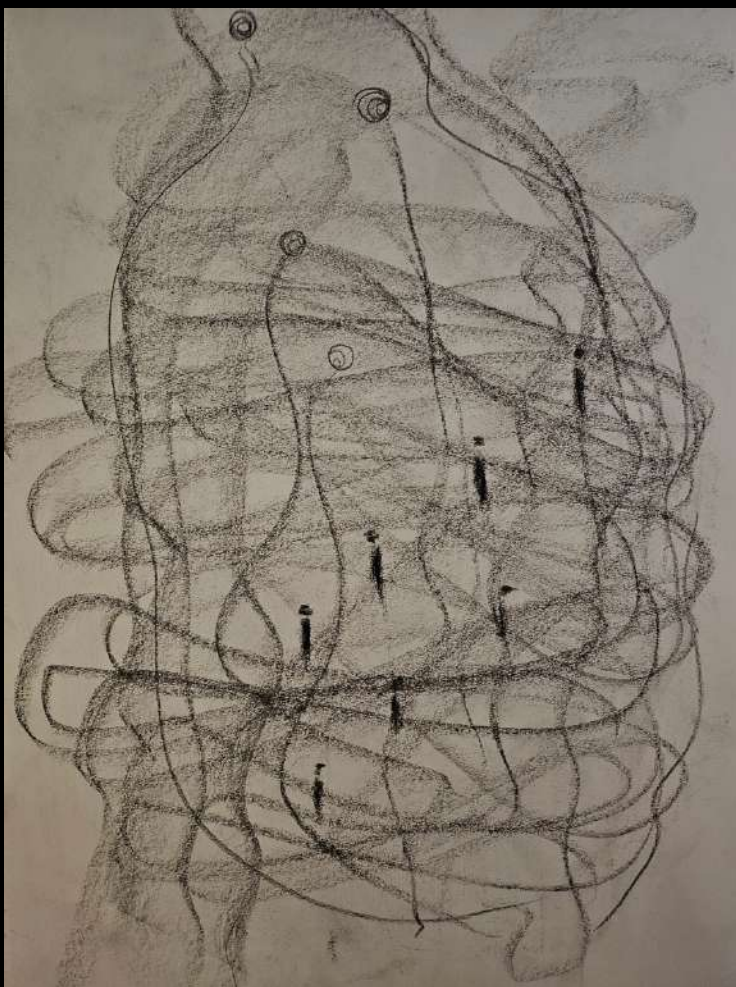
Jeremy Fernando

*On the question of signs, or how I finally won the Turner  
2021*



*The accumulation of mass-produced commodities for the abstract space of the market, just as it has smashed all regional and legal barriers, and all corporate restrictions of the Middle Ages that maintained the quality of artisanal production, has also destroyed the autonomy and quality of places.*

~ Guy Debord



Janice Sim

*I feel dull and flat and full of shattered visions (the bell jar)*

2024

## WAITING FOR A SIGN

Wesley Leon Aroozoo

“Go! Go now!”

In a white suit and gentlemen’s fedora but acting like a monkey, William commands assertively as he flails his arms at the frenzied movements that retreat into the dense shrubs of the Bukit Timah forest in Singapore.

“Now I need to go save the rest” he nods mainly to assure himself this is the right choice as his weary eyes glance down at his watch. Barely ten hurried steps away, William is suddenly hauled by the tail of his coat. He loses his balance and stumbles backwards, falling flat on the grass. Instinctively clenching his eyes shut from the bright sun glaring now from above, only prying them open when a curious eclipse of a familiar silhouette leans over.

“Aseng!”

Knowing he is in trouble, the eclipse scurries away only for a guilty second before skittering over on all fours towards William with reckless abandon for an embrace. Just as he did on the first time on demand, when he was a young chimpanzee in the zoo years ago.

Back then it was love at first sight for Aseng; William had such kind eyes and broad, strong chest. His admiration grew on the days they play rough, always full of big hearty laughs and warm hugs. On his naughty days, Aseng learned to respect William when he disciplined him like an alpha father figure with swift hand gestures of instruction. Aseng was the only animal that William managed to teach simple hand signs for communication. A simple movement of fingers imitating legs walking and Aseng would diligently take walks around the zoo holding hands with William, for all visitors to marvel at their friendship as they paraded the grounds that housed over two hundred animals and two-thousand birds. Aseng plunges his flat face into William's chest in the forest. Affectionate cooing-like grunts are muffled from the air-tight bury, the hump of his heavy eyebrows grinds up and down, finding the right spot where his deep jaw nestles in safety, where it belongs.

“No! Go! Go!”

Williams yells as he shoves Aseng, who hobbles backwards.

“There are nuts, seeds, insects in the forest. You'll survive... Now, go! Get out of here!” shouts William, gesturing to the forest.

“Ooh hoo. Ooh hoo. Ooh hoo. Waa!”

Aseng lets out a flustered pant-hoot, baffled as to why he is being treated this way. He looks at William hands, waiting for him to send a signal instructing him to return. Waiting for the soothing hand gesture of a caress, fingers imitating legs walking or anything. But, all Aseng had was a clenched fist.

“Go away, Aseng!” shouts William exasperated.

With pleading eyes still locked on Williams hands, Aseng witnesses his hands pick up a rock the size of his fist from the ground, holds it up and winds his arms back.

“Go, now! Shoo!” blasts William. The flustered war cry is followed by an exaggerated swerve, as William swings his arm forwards. Aseng jolts in fright and retreats with a frantic scatter deep into the bushes.

Breathing heavily, William looks at his hand and sees the rock still tightly grasped. He lets it go and looks up at the empty bushes ahead.

Silence.

“I’m sorry I have to leave you behind...” he mumbles to himself as he holds back his tears and makes his way out of the forest.

The year 1942 is a year that would be unforgettable for many Singaporeans. This was the year of the Japanese invasion of Asia.

When William returned in a hurry to his zoo in Punggol that afternoon, the British armed forces had also returned to carry out their orders. They had given William a decree to vacate all his animals and birds within twenty-four hours or they would be executed, for his zoo on the Northern coast was vital in their preparation against the incoming Japanese invasion via Malaysia. William raced to save as many as he could in those twenty-four hours, holding onto the hope they would be reunited someday.

The Punggol Zoo is one of Singapore’s earliest and most popular Zoos from the 1920’s. Nicknamed the ‘Animal Man’, William was not only the founder of the Zoo but the ‘Father’ to the animals. He loved each animal like they were his own children.

Now in the 1940’s, the Zoo is modern with power generators and worker’s dormitories nearby. Earlier in 1933, Hollywood even came-a-calling, filming fight

scenes involving a python from William's ambitious and much-admired zoo.

Faced with the biggest fight of his life, William runs along the muddy gravel road towards the entrance of his zoo as British military vehicles rumble by his shoulder with little care. A rifle shot thunders in the distance! William looks up and sees an ominous sign of striking red painting the sky. It is the flock of his scarlet Ibis flying up high in a distance from above the Zoo. They fly together in the same direction away from the commotion at the zoo and land on some tall trees in a neighbouring forest. He glances at his watch.

“No... it's not yet time!” he screams to himself as he runs even faster.

But he was too late. The British army had shot many of his animals.

It was not only the British soldiers and William who had run out of time, but Singapore herself who would fall to the Japanese invasion just seven days later on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, 1942.

As he rests, trapped in his home during the Japanese occupation, William wonders if Aseng survived. As he lays on his bed, he looks at his fingers and reminisces,

gesturing with various signs he would sign to communicate with Aseng. His gestures slow down and he finds himself by the window looking out aimlessly to a Singapore that is now unrecognisable to him.

He stares out of his window as he would every day. Waiting for a sign. There is nothing as always, but today in the distance, he notices the branches of the rain tree peeking from behind the house in front shake and sway. It sways to his breath. In and out. Then stops and all he feels is a gentle breeze on his face.

At that moment, he could feel his hands holding Aseng's.

He holds on tightly.

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This story is inspired by the extraordinary life of William Lawrence Soma Basapa (1893-1943), founder of one of Singapore's earliest zoos in Punggol. His love for his animals will be commemorated with the Punggol Point Crown Housing Development Board project in Singapore featuring animal motifs and designs.





Jeremy Fernando  
*a sign is a sign is a sign*  
2023

*Je vous dirai aujourd'hui tout ce que je ne sais pas  
mais dont je sens la langue me lécher le cœur quand  
je le pourrai.*

~ Hélène Cixous

## BRING COME HERE

— for Allen Fernando (1946 – 2024) —

*In order to say something a whole apparatus is necessary  
(larynx, vocal chords, mouth, teeth, tongue, and words)*

~ Hélène Cixous

lying there no  
longer allowing us to lie  
to lay down in our easy thoughts  
to think easy, to think that living  
necessarily entails rising

or speaking

not that we need to hear a peep  
to know what you be saying, calling out  
*bring come here*, that most  
wonderful of phrases you coined  
capturing visions of excess

for which life should entail  
and despite moments of sometimes  
having one's tail between  
I shall always hold onto

the beers, our chats, your smiles

rapturous laughter

the massive massive  
whiskeys, gins, beaming grins

whispers of time which not only linger  
but write themselves onto  
minds, hearts, skin  
always, even as this silent writing  
brings with it always a little,  
a 'wee dram of  
writhing

*Said you sailed a big ship  
Said you sailed away  
Didn't know the right thing to say*

*I'd love to get a letter  
Like to know what's what  
Hope the weather's good and it's not too hot  
For you*

*Everyone says hi*

~ David Bowie

for the last thing we need  
be to be strapped to an  
apparatus, *don't go*  
*quietly into the light*

fuck dispositifs

...

Jeremy Fernando  
25 November 2024



Jeremy Fernando  
*still | tree | life*  
2025

*When you finish anything, people want you to then talk about it. And I think it's almost like a crime. A film or a painting – each thing is its own sort of language and it's not right to try to say the same thing in words. The words are not there. The language of film, cinema, is the language it was put into, and the English language – it's not going to translate. It's going to lose.*

~ David Lynch