

Imaginary Islands

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Envision fully a
single feature
of utopia.

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Brooklyn Artists Gym

video by Sunita Prasad

performance by Laryssa Husiak & Sunita Prasad

text by Lindsay Caplan

On the shores

I wonder what it means to dream anymore. Does it come from being steeped in what we know, what we have experienced? If so, then what would it mean to hope for something—where does that come from?

For years I thought I didn't dream. This really terrified me. It threatened what I thought I knew about myself. Can you be a creative, critical, whole person and only live a fully awake, aware, conscientious life? It punctured the image of who and what I thought I was. My adult mirror stage arrested, its constant restaging rendered still. And I was left one-dimensional, unreflective.

Just recently, I began dreaming again. Night after night, the dreams ask me questions. One time, a man looks up at me, his head laid on my lap as I stroke his hair (we are at the bank of a river, the shores of a stream): how many of us do you have? He asks. I answer: Five. I say this with more certainty than ever. I don't even know what he was talking about. At least, the me that watched the dream had no idea.

Without dreams, the rest began to reek of hesitation. No, it is more than that. Indeterminacy is more than a fashion, it is more than a waking state above with the rest below. It has become the choice position, a philosophy, a political stance, a place to safely wait and watch and work. Say anything, but try not to say so much that you're not paying homage to complexity. Think dialectically. Agree with ambiguity, agree with at least part of what is vague (and there can be so many parts). Agree that to be in(de)finite is better than to be finite (and small), agree to the open-endedness of it all. It's a delicacy, if not delectable, to relish in and within this state of uncertainty. It is part of the landscape, a physical state. Concepts become things, things so encompassing that all we are left to do is nod and say, nod, or eventually say:

Tell me what you want. Exactly. But that's not what this experiment is supposed to be about. It is about opening up possibilities, not closing them down with a fork in the road. A clear vision is always anything but. You know how those have gone in the past. Don't go there. Just stand here. Look, feel, revel in the pure potential of the present. *Purity? Present? That's pure tautology, isn't it? No, I want you to tell me, be specific.* Point to something, please. Point. But that is the point. Pointing is what you want, not me.

There is something to all this circling. To say something is always to open something (open it up to debate, I wonder?) Not always, it seems. The determinate, absolute, definitiveness of an argument has gotten an intense beating over the last, long century. We seek solace in the not-yet. It's a better place to be, this not-place. But it leaves us nothing to stand on. Say something definitive, and you have to defend it. It is a gift, this openness. A place to play. Not a place to plan. Just look at history and see how plans can easily lead to catastrophe, by missing the mark or, in other times, nailing it precisely. I could not stand to be a part of that, to look back and know I stood for, stood firmly on, something that later I will regret. Steer clear—so clear, steer off the map.

The time and space of dreams are different. When I write, I use gridded paper. I love those kinds of notebooks. But my dream notebook has no lines. The dreams provide their own. I pencil them in, draw diagrams: from this to that to there. I remember reading somewhere that dreams were cinematic. Now that I'm dreaming I see how this works, precisely. Dreams are cinematic in that I am outside, even above, them. There are structured this way: cinematic in that watching is the way I participate. Watching and being are happening in the same body, they become the same thing. I no longer have anxiety about this position, no need to philosophize and make it ok.

The dreams are a montage of still, flat pictures. That is just what they are; not a metaphor of flatness, not a symbol of spectatorship. They float by me in one dimension, invoking two but not yet the fullness of five (a handful). It is their promise and their problem that dreams are something to sink into. See, I embody the act of seeing these pictures. That's what is so marvelous about dreaming. The screen wraps around my consciousness and I spin my head to watch them pass. It is as if it is one of those films that is so good that I wish I made it. I want to hold it close and make it mine. I wake up and quickly shut my eyes to catch it. And I do, now more than ever. It is true, then, that you always dream, but some forget. Forgotten dreams haunt me like memories become hazy, an empty box of something I lost, a broken shell with pieces missing. Dreams I remember surprise me. They inspire me like history. Now, and finally again.

