

HER PRACTICE IS A ROPE THAT TIES HER FANTASIES TO THE REALM OF OTHERS

Rakel Stammer

I am torn, undone by suffering. Ruptured and injured. Smeared all over the sidewalk. A disjointed mess.

Sitting in my studio on one of the hottest days recorded in history, I imagined injury as a creative force. That injury shapes our landscapes, interior and exterior. Molding the tectonic plates of our minds and bodies. Mountain ranges as scars cutting across the horizon. That in injury we are claimed by the world.

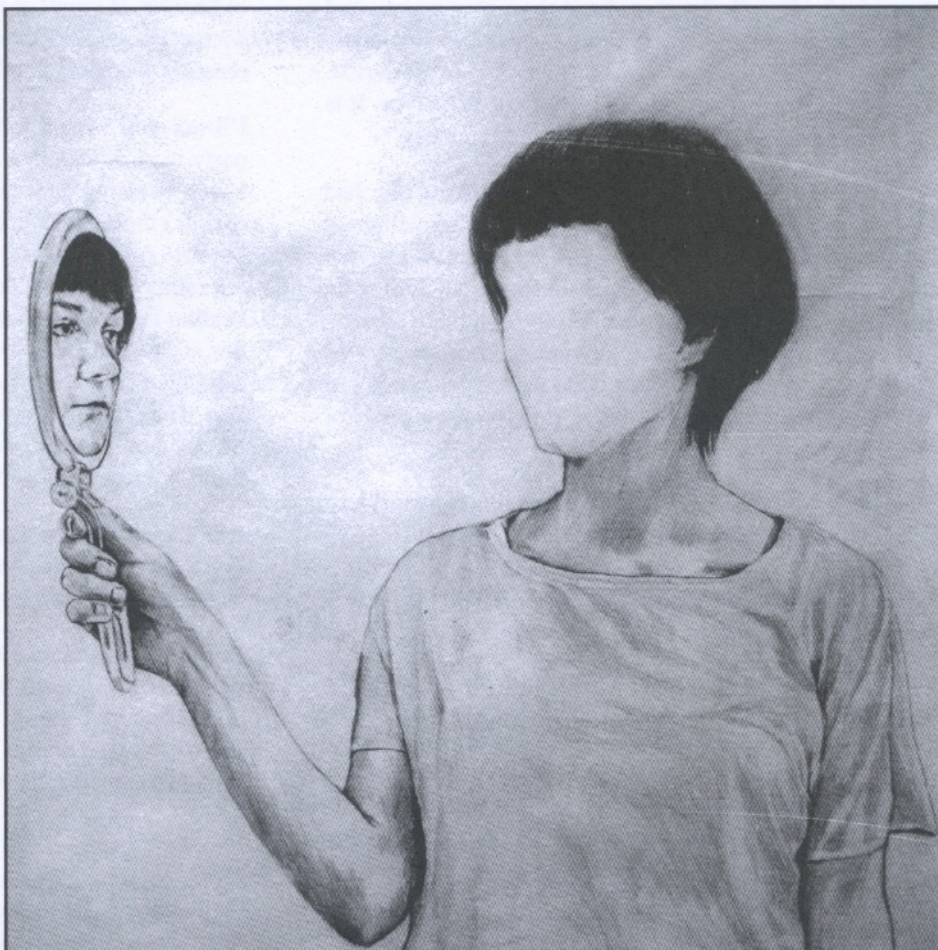
The last time I went home to Sweden, I sat on Bekim's living room floor, hungover and strung out, and proclaimed that I only have trust for those who have undergone an ideological rupture. That I only trust those who have had to betray something precious to them. The ones who have come apart like tomatoes rotting on the vine and live with the injury of their own betrayal.

There is a reason for my obsession with the trickster and it is rooted in my rupture. Of all the figures to align myself with, the trickster is the one to cling to when faith has been lost. When you've become suspicious of "faith" itself. They are the alien insider who struggles in the ambiguous hollows between individualism and conformity. They are wounded, disabled, irrational and their injury tears through the world and casts it into the abyss.

The artist is a trickster. Being stupid, or brave, enough to open a portal, allowing otherworldly things to transgress into the world and cause disruption. She stands with the same posture as a dark magician, or an innocent child at the threshold of an idea and holds the door open, not knowing who she serves. Her practice is a rope that ties her fantasies to the realm of others. When opening to a place of true potential, who's to say what will come through? She puts her hand through the mirror and pulls, willing something to cross over, not for its goodness, but instead to satisfy her insatiable hunger.

In the desolate imagination of America, art is burdened by the belief that it is forever *good*. Here, we have built an altar to the individual, and hence individual expression has become a glorious and precious commodity.

I have grown suspicious of the true intention of *good*, I know of its bloody past; as I am suspicious of art, the last shelter for my faith.



Even if there may be such a thing as *good* or virtuous art, it doesn't mean that art, or art making, is by default either. I do not believe that art houses a mystical value that sets it apart from other more mundane commodities. A value derived from divinity and transcendence, and the good of having been made in a perceived innocence of mind. The moment an artwork is executed with supreme skill we must elevate it beyond our own depravity in order to uphold worlds of duality. And while we are at it, let's glorify the artist too! Whatever is named "art" transgresses into the realm of God; hence it must be perceived as virtuous, falling into the stark contrast of good & evil. This dichotomy in turn means two things 1) art can be used as a shield to hide behind when committing atrocious acts and 2) whatever is deemed too horrendous, is stripped of its title as art, and instead viewed as perversion or depravity (God cannot be a pervert!). Perhaps one should be suspicious of virtue? Invoke Judas and do a little kissing?

As Lars von Trier argues in *The House That Jack Built* (2018), so much breathtaking art has been made in the service of violence and bigotry. So much murderous art has acted as the midwives of annihilation and destruction.

Not long ago, I told someone that I hated them more than I ever thought possible. That I was like Judas exploding in a field out of spite, spilling my guts in blinding rage. I told her that art is not automatically virtuous. That art is not absolved from its violence, even if its intention carries no trace of harm.

On a cracked sidewalk, I put my hand through a mirror, and told her that art is both the unlimited potential (transcendence) and the deprived limitation (facticity) of the artist. Creating art is not a way to make a GOD of ourselves. It is not an escape hatch from our own envy and pettiness.

This person had come to apologize for something she had done years ago. Ways she had fractured me and delighted in it. Stomping down the street, I snarled and told her that violence and transgression is a freedom we are all born with, and enlisting her art in that project was too, but that violence, even the kind that crosses from the threshold of art into the lives of others, stays. No one can undo its consequences just because the work was realized under the virtuous auspice of well-intended *art*.

I desperately want to escape her, but injury is a mark inflicted by others, it molds us in their image.

"You will have to bear the burden of having committed this violence alone".

Trickster mythology is about ingenuity in the face of the creative process, not going alongside it but mirroring what is behind it. It traces a mythology around transgression and liminality. It is when the imagination tries to cross into the world, that things get muddled, and art that has this aim, to realize the threat it is making, is still art, but equally violence.

The insistence on one's own virtue and the evilness of the other is a specific trait all ideological art has in common. Being a pessimist, I suspect our insistence on goodness is merely so that the opposite can be uttered as well; for us to identify as good, we must first find someone or something to portray as evil.

I feel torn because I so desperately desire to live in a universe that is ordered and operates from a sense of justice, however unfathomable that may be, but what I believe is that there is no logic, only violence. That there is no reason or coherency, and there never will be. That we are cursed to look for narrative meaning in a disjointed world, and like the knowledge of our own death, it is inescapable, the centerpiece in our crown of thorns.

I recently read, *Judas: A Biography*, by Susan Gubar (2009) it traces the development of the figure of Judas throughout history. I wonder if what Judas really confronts is the idea Jesus put forth: *that we can remain innocent, and in our innocence live forever*. Perhaps Judas exists in confrontation to the myth that we can escape injury.

This is what I hold onto. The driftwood I am on in a sea of anxiety. That injury is what shapes us all. Meaning, there is no hope of undoing or avoiding anything.

My words are a bitter ritual for those of us afflicted with disillusionment. Like sitting at the bottom of a well, only to crawl up and spout my malice onto those who put their faith in the gospel of healing. (I vomit at the sound of that word!). The insistence that we can correct any wrong and rise again, better and more efficient: creating art that is good-natured and beautiful, a heal-all!

I'll tell you what I realized about healing while at a roller skate party in an abandoned Dollar General in New Orleans. It was hot, I was sweating and on Adderall,--drinking and going round-and-round. I thought about how we go on in spite of injury, and perhaps because of it, in some ways, we heal, not so that we may escape, but rather so we may continue. It seems to me that the "crusade" of healing is in fact an attempt to distort the permanency of violence. For if we can heal, and thereby undo the ways we are forcibly estranged from our former self-image, violence becomes reversible. The myth of miraculous healing relieves us from the brutality of our own actions and the difficulty of carrying on not only for those injured, but also for those inflicting injury.

It is a false hope. A banner under which much cruelty is enacted. It is the excuse we need to enact our cruelty onto others, and it blinds us to the sorrow we have birthed with our violence.

In this I understand Judas, as well as, the trickster, the only ones never to be redeemed and instead remain to remind us of the permanency of injury. Let me be the blade that shreds any hero's journey to leap across its path. The hand that holds open the door, plummeting with the sword through the mirror.

☞ *Rakel Stammer is a printer, painter, puppeteer & materialist, she operates Obsessed Press in Kingston, NY*

Drawing by Bekim Gaši

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Thank you everyone who came out to the press on August 19th to hear: Stacy Szymaszek, Alexis Almeida, Joey Yearous-Algozin, and Kimberly Alidio read. What a magical night!