
RED HOOK JOURNAL

Dear Curator

Natascha Sadr Haghighian

Dear Curator,

I've been meaning to write to you, but it's only now, since your invitation, that I've made the time to respond. That's actually funny, since I've long been trying to somehow break this pattern in our relationship.

How've you been? Did you recover from this tour de force? omg, it was painful seeing you in that situation, so fragile, so vulnerable, and so, so doubtful. You were in no state to represent. No wonder you dumped on everyone who dared ask a question. I felt sorry for you, then again I thought, well, it comes with the job, right? I certainly wouldn't wanna do it myself.

It's been a little confusing for me since we became friends. I started seeing you as a person. Well, that sounds silly, of course I knew you were a person, from the start—but I didn't allow that to enter into our relationship. When I found myself meeting you in my favorite neighborhood cafes, or even inviting you for dinner, I noticed something was different. I actually started seeing you, even liking you. Not for your job, no, but as a person. I wanted to know how the crisis in your relationship was going, where you were moving to, and how you were doing, just in general.

Why had I tried to avoid that before? Well, because I did not want to mingle in that way, and randomly expose things that I like, or that matter to me, to the gaze of someone whose job it is to constantly rate, pick, choose, make lists and redistribute. I still won't make those lists you asked for—lists of people I think you should meet —but honestly, I don't know what to protect from your gaze any longer. I can't re-create this feeling any more, of something precious, unpolluted, and pure that needs to be sheltered. Things that matter seem to evade utilization anyhow, and as for the ones that don't, well, to hell with them. Maybe it's ever since art started to inhabit every tiny segment of everything that things started to neutralize each other. It really is pointless to try and maintain borders that, at the end of the day, still have art on both sides. What's to be protected from what? What's to be saved?

And to begin with, the border made no sense, as it reaffirmed the very definitions and divisions I found pointless in the first place—curator, artist, writer, blah blah. So I was actually shooting myself in the foot with this checkpoint mentality.

Well, now we're buddies. I even stayed at your apartment for a week just recently, and in fact this was unrelated to any project. I actually loved your place.

Speaking of projects: I wanted to suggest something to you. It's not a project, really, but something to do. I think it suits our new nonprofessional relationship.[1]

*suspension of the holy law of contrast:
Being here below and being beyond, may both claim you*

Strangely, without distinction.

The good thing is, we can do it at once and on the spot, together, and we don't even need to Skype. There's no specific settings or requirements to it, you can do it anywhere, even while in a meeting or a conference. But I would really love to do this with you, because then we'd actually share something. Maybe it could offer an occasion for exchanging thoughts next time we meet.

So, whenever you're ready:

Focus on one specific point. It can be any point, but it needs to be specific, such as a dot on the screen of your Smartphone, or a grain of dust on your shoe. Once you're focused on this point, slowly zoom out a tiny bit, but without adjusting the focal distance. The point should become a bit blurry but still remain perceptible. That's when you want to stop zooming, and maintain that exact gaze. Now try and concentrate on the space around the point, still without focalizing. Your (slightly blurry) focus is now on what is called the blur circle, or the circle of confusion.

Try to stay there for some time, until your eyes stop struggling, and let go of the impulse to go back to the point, or select a new one. Instead, with your mind's eye, start to envision all other points within and—as the next step—beyond the circle of confusion, points close by and farther away, visible and invisible. Do this in a concentrated and yet disinterested way. None of these points are important to you, but you associate with all of them. You should feel close to them, to all of them, very close, actually, but you don't make preferences or choices. Your attention is equally distributed, and your concentration is embodied by this very precise nonintentional gaze.

Stay in this precise state for as long as you can. When you start to lose concentration, slowly close your eyes and relax the focus. Keep your eyes closed until any after-image has faded. Then breathe in while opening your eyes.

Lately I've been reencountering Rilke via Blanchot, and if I understand correctly, Rilke is very passionate about engaging with things. But instead of looking at a particular object, he prefers to regard all things without distinction—with a disinterested gaze, as if looking at them over his shoulder. So instead of looking forward, toward things, and projecting them into the future, he proposes a gaze that has no future stakes. This gaze creates a distance that allows for coming closer, allows for the seeing of things in their being beyond utility. If seeing is ultimately seeing-as, in the intentional state, this gaze is precisely suspending the *seeing-as* function, and is dedicated to encounter.

Well, let me know how it goes. Oh, and can you please send me the recipe for the Asian bean dish you made the other night.

Warmly,
Natascha

Natascha Sadr Haghigian (born Natasha Taylor; March 23, 1971) is currently based in Santa Monica, CA.

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1. What follows is an amalgam of Rainer Maria Rilke, my own phrasings, and an excerpt from Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 150. [return to text](#)

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