

This is a piece of fiction based on true circumstances.

May 28, Saturday

Heute war ein Tag... actually, seeing that I will go to NY soon I should write my journal entries in English: Today was a day. Didn't really want to meet anyone and didn't really meet anyone. I visited a friend of mine. Other people were there. We had some small talk. That was it. In a small talk when it comes to telling insignificant things about myself I can't quite think of anything. I wanted to tell them the important things about me - the things that matter. But then it would have gotten weird. So I kept to myself, kept to myself that I have this huge feeling of displacement influencing me. As an Italian, born and raised in Germany and living in Switzerland – I've got migration written all over me. Not belonging to a category is a problem here. Even worse than belonging to a category Swiss have prejudices against. I am neither friend nor foe. So for them I am nothing. Nothing to consider. Why do I have to be like that?

I was so tired today. I could hardly stand up to finish the pieces that I am going to perform in NY. Will that ever happen? I am pessimistic again. Hi, dad! I felt like weighing a thousand kilos.

May 31, Tuesday

After arriving at JFK and going through the customs I took my bag from the baggage claim. My bag seemed heavier. Did they put something in? Or had I just gotten lighter?

I took the train to Manhattan through Brooklyn. After 1h I arrived: Grand Street Station. I got out there. The station was pretty derelict. Dirty. I looked for the exit. A long flight of stairs and then slowly I reached the surface. The last steps. The handrail. The banister at the top. Behind that: New York. And I am in it. Everything was busy. I felt good. Everything was new. I smiled.... I went ahead and stood at a pedestrian crosswalk to cross the street. While waiting there next to other people – some of them appeared to be NYers, some tourists - I noticed that there were trash cans at every corner of the intersection. None the less there was trash on the sidewalk and in the gutter. Disgusting. Ugly. One could not identify what the substance was that had accumulated. But one thing I was able to identify: There was a flower growing from that dry mud. Are you kidding me? A flower growing in the gutter and it actually survived long enough to blossom? I don't know flowers so I don't know it's species but it looked beautiful - partly because it grew there. You don't see stuff like that in Zurich. Like the people the street cleaners are very thorough. Sterile streets. Nothing out of the ordinary is supposed to survive. The street light turned to "go". The people started moving across the street. I put down my bag, bent down and touched the flower. No one noticed. No bitterness, no compulsion. Just dirt and beauty. I didn't pluck the flower and went on.

Eventually I reached the room I am staying in. It is nice. I left my stuff there and went out. I felt antsy. Should I describe the atmosphere of the city as it was while it was getting dark? Should I tell about the people roaming the streets after dark? I saw all that but actually remembered only one thing: No one of them seemed self-conscious. Everyone had her or his own business. How can that be? I thought when walking through a city you have to assess the other people and judge them a little... oh, no wait... that is Zurich. On the streets of NY frequently no one cares about you. If you want something you need to make the others care. Earn their attention. I stopped on the sidewalk. People walked by. No snide comments because I suddenly stopped. No demeaning glances. No assessment of my appearance. I

looked around. A weight was lifted from me. I can finally behave as I like. Like a weirdo. I smiled and happily went back to my room to sleep.

Dream of the night of May 31

I'm a little boy. I go out on a walk with my parents. It is a lovely day. We take the path we used to walk when we took walks in Germany. I'm never walking really close to my parents. I run ahead enjoying the nature along the path. I go farther and farther away from my parents. At some point they call me back. I turn back to them. They seem really far away. Suddenly I see a bird's nest in a bush along the path. I am very curious. The little birdies have feathers already and are about to leave the nest. One of them is sitting on the edge of the nest and chirps. It leaps and flies away. I follow it in the direction it flies. I wake up.

June 2, Thursday

I woke up at about 7am. I felt very hungry. I took a shower and went outside. Going down Grand Street I came by a diner – Landmark diner. Delicious pancakes After I had eaten and paid I went on. I needed to get to SoHo to the Apple Store to look for open mics today. It turned out there were two noteworthy ones: One at 1+1 Bar and one at Lucky Jack's both on the Lower East Side. Both started at 7. I decided to go to 1+1 Bar. I had to kill some time until then so I looked for a 24 hour diner. I wanted to sit in there and write. Just like in the movies. Well, the movies I watch. I walked north on Broadway and indeed found a 24 hour diner near Astor Place – Cozy Diner. I went in and yes, this seemed like a place I would enjoy writing. It is hard to convey what made me feel good there. Maybe it was just the fact that this place never closes. Very much like the city that never sleeps. I opened up my books on the table, ordered the mandatory coffee and put my thoughts on paper. Hours passed and the owner actually got curious. He asked me what I do. Picking up on the fact that I am a writer he told me to be cautious not to tell my ideas to just anyone. They might steal them. He told me so because he once designed a car part and his design got stolen by a car company he was under contract with. So that's when he decided to establish his own design studio. "If you can't beat them, fuck them!" he said, and then he made a suggestive movement with his arm. His name was John. He has this design company and the diner. He must be doing well. I like his openness. At the wall above the counter there were pictures and signatures of famous people who apparently had been to the diner - Jackie Chan and other celebrities. While we talked about what I do and that I am trying to be an established writer John pointed to the picture frames with the celebrities and said: "I wanna see your picture up there one day." I was flattered and awed. 2 days in NY and I already got more encouragement than 8 years in Switzerland.

One and One Bar on 1st street had quite a spacious room downstairs with a stage set up. I talked to the girl who sold the tickets and it was \$10 that night. I paid. I thought that's what open mics were like. You pay for other people to listen to you. The owner of the bar – Marvin - came and was very friendly to everyone. He said hello to me and asked me just general stuff. Where I was from, what I was doing here in NY. I told him that I was here to appear on open mics and this here is my first one. Marvin got a puzzled look on his face.

"There is no open mic today"

"No open mic?"

"No, tonight it's Squinchy's Poppycock"

"Squinchy's Poppycock?!"

“Yeah, it’s an awesome show. There is this guy...”

Marvin started telling me about the show I just had bought a ticket to without knowing. He went on and on about how hilarious this guy is and I just looked at the clock on the wall. Could I still make it to Lucky Jack’s, that other joint? At some point I had to interrupt Marvin.

“Listen, I wanted to go to an open mic. I think I’ll go somewhere else.”

“Oh, ok, buddy. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, so... could I get the \$10 back?!”

“Well... why don’t you wanna stay? This is a great show.”

“Yeah, I’m sure, sorry. I really wanted to go to an open mic and appear on stage tonight.”

“Ah, we have an open mic on Tuesdays.”

“Oh, nice. Well, then I’ll definitely come on Tuesday. But for today I think I need my money back.”

“Well, ok...”

I left the ticket and Marvin reluctantly handed me the \$10. Before he let go of the bills he said:

“So, see you on Tuesday, paly.”

“Yeah, thanks, bye!”

I saw to it that I got out of there as quick as possible and went on my way to Lucky Jack’s. It was really close. 129 Orchard Street. I arrived there and they, too had a room downstairs where they set up a stage - a really cozy atmosphere. I asked some guy how the whole thing worked and he just told me to wait and see. It was going to start soon. There were a lot of people there. I was starting to get nervous. But they seemed very friendly. The host introduced himself and explained the rules. No admission fee. Lots with the names of the people wishing to appear were being thrown in a bucket and then drawn. That determined the order of appearance. Each artist got 5 minutes. They started pulling the lots. I went to place 17. That gave me some time to see the others and get familiar with the joint before I appear. There were a lot people there who wanted to share their talent. People just like you and me who felt the need to perform. I was moved and wanted to listen to the performances. There were comedians, musicians, other poets and singers. I felt very much amongst my peers. No bad blood. No envy or competition. Just a joyful gathering aimed at basking in the pleasure created by performances from average people with hopes, dreams, strengths and weaknesses. It all felt so very real. Before it was my turn I went to the restroom to calm down and get rid of the stage fright. A little of it remained. I got on stage. My heart was beating. The host introduced me. He gave me the mic. I announced that I was going to perform two pieces: A poem and a monologue. I took a breath for my poem:

[Exhaustion]

[Guilty Conscience]

I spoke the last words. There was a silence for a fraction of a second. The audience realized I was done. The applause raised. It felt nice. Well, they are generous, I thought. I thanked the audience and packed up my sheets. Suddenly the host stood up and gave me his hand. “Nice job” He took the mic and started to say how good that had been and how he admired my courage for saying the poems in front of so many people... and by heart. I was kind of flattered and thanked him, too. I sat down and the woman next to me congratulated me to my pieces. I couldn’t quite tell why so many people congratulate me. But I felt flattered. Something remarkable must have come out of my poems although I didn’t entirely understand what. The open mic went on. I felt relaxed and could really listen to the other performers. After the open mic was over we all said good bye to each other and went home. I was on my way to Grand Street. A feeling of lightness took me. Or maybe it was something more than

light. I felt happy. I felt kind of high. This not because it *went soooo well* . No. The thing that really satisfied me was that I followed this calling that I felt within me beginning of the year: To plan a trip to NY and perform at open mics. It had all come together. It was real. Suddenly the city didn't seem so dirty anymore. It just seemed NY.

Dream of the night of June 2

I walk through the city of NY. I am going through the LES towards Tribeca. There is burning stuff lying around. Papers, furniture, objects, trash. I make my way through it. I try to avoid the flames so that my nice clothes don't get burnt. People come walking from Tribeca into my direction. Some I don't know. Some are the people I met at the open mic at Lucky Jack's. They burn but they are calm. They see me and smile at me. I ask them what is going on and they tell me that the Statue of Liberty is walking through the city setting fire to things with her torch. I go ahead. But now I am scared that I will encounter the Statue and she will ignite me. I try to take hidden streets. But by doing that I come too close to burning debris and my clothes catch fire. The fire doesn't hurt. I wake up.

June 14, Tuesday

I woke up late today. Went to get lunch right away. I came by this place that gives you your food in little plastic trays if you take it to go. I did so and walked around with two trays in my arms. One I kept in my left hand the other on top of it and eating from it. My journal was under my left arm. It was just some hamburger meat with lettuce and tomatoes. I walked north out of the LES on Bowery. I passed by quite a lot of homeless people. I tried to ignore them. I went ahead and after a while I saw another of them lying in the entrance to some old building sleeping on the doorstep. I stopped. I felt pretty full. I approached the sleeping homeless guy. No one of the passers-by took notice. Nobody cared. As I was really close to him I looked at his face. Tanned and marked by his time on the street. The expressions of sorrow had engraved their traits in his face. How long had he been living like this? Years and years of unresolved conflicts. Could I ever end up like this? I reached out with my hand and came very close to him but actually never touched him. Partly because I didn't want to wake him, partly because he seemed so dirty. Quietly I took the food-tray I hadn't yet opened and placed it next to his head so that he would find it when he woke up. I left him like this. I would have loved to watch him from across the street to see how he reacts when he wakes up. But then I decided not to. As much as this sight compelled me to stay, it also made me want to leave. What is it with me in NY? Why is it different here? Well, for the first time in my life I feel that my not belonging to any category my not really belonging to a specific cultural background is not a flaw. It isn't something that guarantees that I will be accepted and live well here but at least it is not seen as a flaw. A lot of people who live here don't belong here. They create their story, their belonging here through hard work and the pursuit of an ideal. I decided to go into SoHo. Very strange people walking on the street there. I believe they are called hipsters. They dress carefully careless. And when you see them on the streets you can tell that they are self-conscious. I wanted to tell them: "Hey, we are in NY. Just be as you like. Don't care what the others think." But it seemed like they do want to care about what others think. When they walk it seems like they are looking at themselves from across the street. They are their own toy which they dress up in eccentric outfits and attitudes. I also have the feeling that if I would ask one of them "Hey are you a hipster?" He would answer: "I'm not a hipster, ignoramus!" The toy cannot talk about itself. The human playing the hipster game is too caught up to make a statement.

After a few hours of watching this peculiar phenomenon and other stuff it got 7pm. Time for another open mic on Saint Marks Place. Penny's Open Mic. After Lucky Jack's I wonder how that will be.

I reached Under Saint Marks Theater and there were already a bunch of people waiting outside to be let in. I felt talkative and started to engage people in conversations - just small talk. I felt confident and eager to do another open mic. Suddenly a guy on a bike came by and started distributing flyers he printed himself. He was going on about Penny – the girl who was hosting the open mic – and what a bad person she is. I read the flyer and it seemed like a very hurt person had written it.

“Penny is the most anti-art jerk I've ever seen in the arts “community”. And she's so fake she'd make Los Angeles blush!”

There was a lot more written on the flyer but mostly I remember how I felt that somebody acting in this way MUST be wrong. However I had too little information and now I was scared of Penny. The door was being opened and I expected this eccentric diva. But Penny was actually a really sweet girl. She was talking to everyone and welcoming everyone. No one had to feel left out. I was puzzled by why this guy outside was trying to bash her. The open mic started. I was on place 25. It got very late before I could appear on stage. There was a really nice and supporting atmosphere. I got on stage and performed two monologues:

[Solace]

[Cannibal]

The funniest thing happened while I was performing my texts. Originally I had written them in a very serious tone. They were exploratory pieces. As I performed them people began to laugh. Not just chuckling. People were laughing loudly while I read “Solace”. I was confused but could hide that feeling behind my performance. When doing “Cannibal” people laughed as well. Penny even asked me astonished where those monologues were from. Well, I wrote them myself! After I was done I had to make sense of this. Why did people laugh as I performed my so seriously laid out texts? Did I perform them wrongly? Not earnest enough? Or was it so dark and scary that people could cope with this only by laughing about it? I don't understand.

Anyways, at least no booing. So this evening was a success in my book. Penny's open mic ended pretty late. At 2am. Fulfilled I went home. The dreams already beginning to float in my mind. Soon I'd sleep.

Dream of the night of June 14

I'm in a standing subway train. I want to smile at everyone and engage everyone. I feel very extroverted. Nobody cares. Suddenly through the window outside on the tracks I see a guy standing and smiling at me. I get scared, stand up and yell: “Hey there is a guy standing on the tracks! Help him, he's gonna die!” One older man turns to me calmly and says: “Nah, he's living.” The train is close to departure. The older man tells me to stop looking at myself and go out. I wake up

June 27, Monday

Woke up, took a shower and went to Landmark diner. It has become my favorite place to have breakfast. As usual I had pancakes. I felt happy until I watched out the window. I couldn't take my eyes off the business going on at a construction site across the street. Suddenly I lost my appetite. I don't know why but I stood up to go over there. I went out of the diner and the waitress called me back to pay the bill. I was kind of embarrassed and paid. Then I went out again. I went over and started talking to the workers at the construction site. What were they building? They asked me why I would want to know. No reason. They said that condos were being built. After some talking I walked back into the diner. I sat down again. The waitress set the table for me again and I asked her if it was ok if I just sat there. She told me it was ok. I was afraid she was mad. I looked at the construction site for some time. Then I felt it: I have to stay here. I have never wanted something so strongly as a goal for my life. Suddenly I feel tense, tight. I want to stay here. Why? The reasons for my wanting haven't manifested yet. The wanting is there first. This is the place to be, partly because for the first time in my life by not belonging... I belong.

It got 10 pm and I went to the open mic at Bowery Poetry Club. As I walk in there and sit down and watch the people coming I start getting it: Each open mic has it's posse. Mostly people gathering around the hosts. Always the same people. Slowly becoming friends. Then there are the open mic nomads. People like me that you see at various open mics. Quiet, trying to interact with the other open micers, just moving around wanting to express their art. As usual I get a very late spot. I have to wait for long to get on but eventually my time comes and I perform 2 monologues and a poem:

[Family Feast]

[Lawsuit]

[The Voice]

This performance went well. Not extraordinary, but well. Something really moving happened afterwards. A musician also appearing at the open mic before me liked my works. He asked me to send him the poems via email so he can put them in his text book and read them for inspiration. I was really flattered. After having a little small talk with him, I leave the Bowery Poetry Club and just enjoy the night. In front of the club there is a sycamore tree growing. I stand in front of it and watch it. After a while I noticed that in between the roots there is a flower growing and blossoming. What?! Another flower growing here on the street?! And blossoming after midnight!?! Just like the flower I saw in the gutter on my first day. Right then and there I got on my knees. The people standing in front of the club around me didn't care. I touched the flower and smelt it. It smelled delicious.

Dream of the night of June 27

I am walking through the city of NY. People on the street start climbing on fences. They start dancing on them. After a while they call me and tell me to join them. I want to join and ask them where there are ladders so I can get up. They respond that I have to climb up myself or it is no fun. I wake up.

June 28, Tuesday

I went to an event organized by the NYWC. It's called the Write-A-Thon. A charitable event where you donate \$150 and you can spend a day there doing workshops and writing. I wanted to get to know some fellow writers from NY, so I took part. The people there were really nice. I took part in a workshop. It was a class with like 12 people and we got little tasks to write about. During that class I noticed a bird outside the window on the windowsill. It didn't seem shy at all and I believe it was a robin. It just behaved remarkably playful. Anyways, all in all the workshop was about making us feel comfortable to write. We were asked to write down a question on a piece of paper and then exchanged those questions and wrote an answer. The question I had to write an answer to was. Does anything ever truly end? My answer was the following poem:

[Does Anything Ever Truly End?]

To my surprise the people were impressed by my poem. I was asked to read it again and they enjoyed it. It pleases me that I was able to write something that seemed to touch people in a way. My mood really lifted. The workshop ended and shortly after that the Write-A-Thon. After the event I stepped on the streets and suddenly it felt like the city had just noise. No clear voices or sounds of people. Just ambiance sounds. So soothing. I started walking and just enjoyed that high I was on. Suddenly the weather changed from rainy to sunny and really warm I kept on walking and after a while I reached Union Square Park. I stopped there. As I looked around me I noticed a bird again. It was a robin. Was it that robin from outside the window when I was in the writing workshop? Has it followed me all the time? Union Square Park was beautiful. There was lots of people, somebody played music. I decided to lie down on the grass. After a while to my astonishment I noticed the bird next to me on the grass. I never saw something like that. It wasn't shy at all and jumped around me lively. I just watched it. It was really feisty. At some point it started pecking my arm. I asked it: Who are you? With the bird in my view I closed my eyes. The sun made it seem like my eyelids were on fire. I enjoyed the glow and slowly drifted into sleep. I had never felt so light before. Suddenly I feel a thud. I erect myself in terror. I am in Zürich on my crappy bed in my crappy room, I am wet of sweat. It is 3pm. I can still feel the jet lag. My limbs are heavy – a thousand pounds. I stand up and try to go about my day like I used to do in NY. I don't even feel the want to go somewhere - just collapse into my bed again. Going to a café would be nice, like in NY, to watch people, to think and to write. There are a lot of cafes in Zürich, too. I go to one... only to realize that there is nothing happening on the streets. Grey people in a grey city. The streets are not a place here. They are just transit.

Dream of the night of July 3rd

I approach a garden. It has beautiful fruits. I cannot enter. The garden is surrounded by a thick and high hedge. Funnily the hedge carries berries that are little heads of people. I walk along the hedge to find a way in. Suddenly I encounter an old woman who tells me that there is a way through the hedge. I look for it. I wake up.