



Alp d'Huez from *à disparaître*, 2013, by Daniel Andersson.

and when one is running, all objects appear blurry.

–“We Have No Instincts, Only Legs to Run On,”
Hannah Gamble

Was it Martin Amis or Will Self who wrote something along the lines: *sex, money and sports are the only reasons to live?* I dare replace the word “money” with “art” and insert the word “endurance” before sports, then this quote makes sense. On the evening of January 3, 2013, I was feeling trapped and anxious in my apartment during a cold, dark winter in Stockholm. As a general observation, I have too much energy. When I do not use this excess energy at the end of any day, it becomes my enemy – eats at my sanity, prevents peaceful sleep, inhibits productive work. The hour was approaching 10pm. When the world closes in and invisible rats begin to nibble: I run. For as long and hard as I can. When I’m finished, I am new and occasionally convince myself that I am invincible.

There is nothing more satisfying than running. I have been formally trained to run – with high school and college cross country coaches instructing me how to maximize my stride, pay attention to my gait, position my arms so as to not expend additional energy haphazardly swaying limbs, slide my feet barely above ground preventing unnecessary impact. I am not tall, but my center of gravity is positioned to my benefit – like a boxer’s physique but with a talent for sliding stealthily between particles of air. My earliest memories are of running towards those I love or away from those I despise. In short, running along with two other sports (cycling and swimming) are an inherent part of my identity. Many do not know this about me – my dependence on this triumvirate. Over the course of my life, these activities served as healthy substitute for more harmful pursuits, situations or mutually shared realities: lethargy, apathy, anxiety, nymphomania, substance abuse, depression, complacency, resignation, ad nauseam. Instead of destroying myself with these extra molecules that I am blessed and cursed to have, I redirect them – expunge them towards the universe. But much like a boomerang or the ethic of reciprocity, this energy returns to me. I am in continual motion, destined to terminally combat this charge.

Running is a solitary sport. The pleasure derived from it is understood by other runners, but none of us know what another runner feels. I have had moments where I have experi-

enced what many refer to as the “runner’s high.” Once one experiences this euphoria, they are more inclined to take the sport seriously – to the next level. After one is alone on a path and this wave of bliss envelops, the runner is hooked. I became obsessed with running in my teens, and it kept me on the “straight and narrow” when friends and acquaintances were dangerously swaying left and right – fighting not so gallantly their own foes. Just as quickly as one falls in love with their beloved, one falls in love with running. Just as quickly as one falls out of love, one’s ability to run can be taken from them.

I orchestrate my runs in a number of ways: by duration, speed, distance, intervals or pleasure. The run which took place on January 3 was organized with duration and pleasure in mind. My default run is both on pavement and on a designated trail in the forest near Nacka, and usually, all goes well. But this time, I encountered a patch of ruthless, black ice which prevented me from making my way home. Like most traumas which happen to people all over the world *all of the time*, each gruesome experience is singular in design. No one knows what another person’s trauma is like – no matter how much one explains or expresses it, some veiled *idea* of trauma is all that is shared. Mine began with hearing my fibia snap then watching my body collapse to the ground in shock. No one was around when I fell. No one heard my scream. No one saw me attempt to stand then writhe in pain. No one saw me shiver intensely as my body temperature dropped in sub – zero conditions. No one saw me cry as I thought that I would die before someone found me. No one saw me crawl like a wounded animal towards light for help. No one saw me finally use my mobile phone to dial 112 – the American equivalent: 911.

Then I’m whisked away to the ER, the hour approaching midnight, my ankle swollen to the size of a baby elephant’s. After waiting for an ocean of faces to determine whether or not I had indeed broken bones, they pushed my gurney into a sterile room where doctors and nurses gathered around my body – as if I was already dead. Then one warns: “I’m not going to tell you that this isn’t going to hurt.” They gave me an additional dose of morphine intravenously and proceeded, in layman’s terms, with the act of shoving my foot which was almost ripped off its hinge back into place. This is a step to determine if they need to perform surgery (or not) and to fit the foot and leg into a splint or cast. I have never experienced such pain be-

fore – never of this magnitude. It is the kind of pain which causes one to screech, then laugh psychotically from relief after the doctor finishes the act – akin to the shrill cackle of a Joker who made it through the 6th layer of Hell.

The surgery which followed the next morning – only 6 hours later to my surprise – was cake compared to that which had occurred the previous night. They paralyzed me from the waste down and placed a titanium plate and screws into both my tibia and fibia to ensure bones would heal properly. I was informed that my bones would not heal normally (a.k.a. nonunion) without this freakish reinforcement. I desperately tried to negotiate with Swedish health care professionals in my drug – induced haze; they wouldn't listen. I am now forced to carry this new hardware in my body for at least one year – possibly longer. Every doctor tells me something different than the one before. I have been told I can realistically run again in six months, four months and three months post – op. I now have two physical therapists: one in Stockholm and a virtual one in Boulder. I have read close to everything available on my injury – every horror and success story, how – to page and forum geared towards athletes and octogenarians alike.

I am now at three months post – op, and I'm able to shuffle – run on the treadmill – pathetic and painful. I'm not yet ready to run outside. I now fear the pavement and possibility of black ice reappearing, even though it is now spring. Because of this delay in being able to run at 100%, I cycle. My body responds beautifully; vigorous, aggressive spinning pumps blood throughout my body and accelerates healing. I do not know when I will run again on the level that I was before, and I'm not confident that I will be able to participate in impact sports in the same way. It is this space where I now find myself – in between – which makes my state volatile and crucial. I wait and observe.

Since the Aspectivity course investigates ways of seeing – according to the syllabus, “our desires, ideals and lifestyles are created from visual images” – I share the inscape of a runner who has been denied her primary pleasure, of someone who was confined for six weeks to a cast and instructed not to walk *at all* for two months but who now walks, who will be stronger and more agile than she was before, who writes with a perspective she never invited but now accepts. We devise and create castles, constructions of power and competency; these stately images and sublime memories of victory are linked to how we interact

with the world and others today. When any given architecture crumbles and links weaken, the test is how to recycle the remainder.

I have known real pain, even though I do not recall it like one remembers a birthday party or perfect day at the park, and I cannot explain it well to others. Clarity often comes with being denied that which one desires most. I harbor a pristine image of me running full force – no pain, surviving, winning. I hope to remind you that most, if not all, concerns are relative; one's position in life changes as quickly as a bone snaps on a winter's night. Frankly, most people do not care about your tragedy until they have experienced their own of equal or greater value. And just when I was struggling to find an analogy for our delicate relationship (reader / writer) – that you cannot feel my pain and I cannot feel yours, that we only imagine or express the plight of the Other – America gave me one. She's dependable like that.

April 15, 2013. I'm on the metro moving between two familiar points; I scan my phone screen to read the news. It's more acceptable in Stockholm to pay attention to my mobile device rather than engage in conversation with the stone – faced man in front view. I read: someone has bombed Boston Marathon runners on their day of supposed victory. Schrapnel flies into anonymous flesh, runners' legs are strategically destroyed – for some, even amputated – tourniquets are constructed. I know that I shouldn't feel so much about this particular news piece because I read stories like this every day. Most, if not all, of these tragedies affect me on a purely objective, analytical, archival level – rarely on an emotional one. My inability to feel emotions regarding each article I read is not enough evidence to support that I'm an insensitive jerk, but more so: I'm a product of a *phenomenon* related to the fact that individuals of our era are flooded with too much information, too many traumas and heartbreaks, too many unfair, unforeseen, unpredictable moments which do not lead to sound conclusions or justice. We live in a fog of text – image dichotomies which hope to corner our attention; we respond with self – preservation of the senses.

And then I'm crying again, but this time on public transit surrounded by others who, most likely, aren't used to seeing someone express raw emotion. And maybe these are selfish tears felt only because I still feel the pain of my injury with each step and am reminded of my own suffering by what I have read, or maybe I understand what it feels like to have the pleas-

ure of running and possible victories brutally rejected – like war, suffering is nonsensical, illogical, constant. But until opening *The New York Times* and then reading articles from competing media sources on this same event, I may have forgotten what it feels like to be affected emotionally by current events at all. I give an example of what it takes for most of us to *really* feel – and see. Am I trying to tell you something? Yes. I am.

This text is devoid of academic quotes and art historical references. Using these devices would not make my position and experience more credible; you would not gain access to my trauma or anyone else's by tricking yourself into seeing connections which may or may not exist outside of yourself. Yet, if I have to choose one work which helps me define my position, let it be Daniel Andersson's *à disparaître* (2013). The Swedish artist expresses his passion for road cycling with a series of aerial graphite drawings illustrating *Le Tour de France* cycling route in stages. Because I wait to run, I redirect my energies to road cycling. Slopes, twists, turns and inclines are what make life worth living – one is able to disappear, to get lost with such graceful sports. Instead: only your glory can be seen.

As with most courses which are site – specific and socio – political in nature, I can absorb course material, attend lectures, watch films, go on field trips, but I will never know what it is like to live another person's life in another country with a different language and set of circumstances, alternative narratives, structures for reasoning and spirituality. I could have made an artwork closely linked to the Middle East, but I instead chose to introduce the question of how anyone anywhere can ever truly access a person's trauma or perspective. *What is to be done?* I responded by creating a work in which everyone exists in the same labyrinth together – far from accurate but worthy of investigation.

I'm sorry if my text does not fit. My personal archive of images, memories and representations of running and endurance sports are no priority. My desire for personal freedom is not as important as war x, conflict y or resolution z, but x, y and z were fueled by selfish motives as well (yet often masked as collective issues) – much like how my anticipated physical liberation is now fueled by the denial of such. I share with you my drive to not be a prisoner in my own body, and I now empathize with those who are confined in any way. Questions remain. Who or what is to blame for our relations

with one another? Where does one person's suffering begin and another person's empathy end? Are we responsible for how we respond to stimuli? Is it possible to change without experiencing trauma and shock?

We are not given the same maze to make our way through. My map will not work for you. Yet, do not be afraid to enter the construct. Some dead ends only require that you turn around and go another direction. Let us escape the labyrinth when it is filled only with convoluted tricks and traps – instead of playful, creative alternatives. Getting lost isn't the end of the world. When you meet the beast, the creature may not even look you in the eye. When in doubt, follow the thread. Sometimes, there is no obvious exit.