

JOY

JOHN BARBOUR

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One

A small package arrives through the post. I'd been here about three months. I was looking for mail from home daily. Looking for contact, for messages, for love. Anything that acknowledged I had left, that I was no longer there.

The package, a padded post-bag contained a handmade cardboard box. Not small, not big: 13x23.5x2.2cms... inside it a small picture that has a hinge on the back, so it can stand up, on a desk, like a photograph. This picture is also cardboard, covered in white gauze, and 'embroidered' with a few pieces of cotton. It is titled 'Joy'.
...

Something posted arrives, and has travelled from one hemisphere to the other, from one world to another.

Two

...Joy is then (a) work. (A) Work chosen. Work, which might give joy, in the working itself, in the making. The 'joy' therefore is not meant for me, it is the name of the labour – and, receiving the 'fruits' of labour, is another thing altogether. I have been laboured for; or, at the end of the labour I was thought. This is, or takes on, a moment of wonder, as it is memory at work, or remembrance. I can think: I am remembered. Someone even knows where I am, where I can be reached. Where something made – with joy – can find itself. Joy is a sober work. And its sobriety, its strange calm presence, is an endless working, an infinite calamity, a struggle for goodness (rather than calmness), even an austerity (an austerity already fractured, blown apart; all desires for perfection end in tears), which, in terms of 'beauty' is terrible, is refined to hell (where no 'need' is needed)...

Three

...

Four

The time of arrival, the receiving of something, the meeting of someone, ends. Writing 'it' is no consolation. Writing it is further lament; writing is lamenting too much, even. To dwell too intimately on the pleasure of whatever arrives; to be unable to take the arrival in one's stride, to just accept it as a 'matter of course'; that's the trouble, that's what awaits the gift – this inability to take without question, curiosity, suspicion, and [as] personal, the arrival of 'something'.

Five

It is safe to say: Spring has arrived. The month of March, the first week over, but the weather... it is perfect, the sky is blue, the air is still and warm. It is joy to walk. Finally I wear sandals again. Now, mid-evening, the glass door slightly open, the sound of passing traffic, dogs barking, voices upstairs; it is like a dream, pleasant but restrained. The work 'Joy' is on my table, shifted by Elif, who comes to clean the apartment, but not shifted enough to cause grief.

Six

If I can say so (just words, just a matter of writing), if you will allow me (ditto, but a real question too), if my own heart does not fail: 'Joy' is a prayer. I have only now noticed that *your* work is a work of 'telling' and 'asking'. You tell, to ask. You compose prayers. This is not religious, but it is godfull. And perhaps it should be bypassed, forgotten. No (talking to myself), this poor-ness, this fallen-ness, has to do with 'hope'. Out of the corner of my eye 'Joy' sits. She is a tiny display. And 'she' is complete. There is not one more mark needed, or wished for. And, one must never ask more of an artwork (it is as it is). It is always finished...

Seven

I go away, to another place, not far, but away from 'Joy'. And I come back, open my door, and there it is, as it was. Yet, not so, also. As having been...it is late. The work remains, stays, is (almost) stable – waits. This patient, dark, mute sense of the work is easily avoided; it is simple not to look, pay attention, acknowledge presence. It fades into the background, not literally, but within the scheme of things. It takes its place among all

other things, real things and imagined things. It is exactly as it was when it arrived; it is exactly as it is now, and as it will be in a moment, and tomorrow. What is doubtless about 'Joy,' when it finally comes into focus (once more), is the labour (handling) of it, the time spent, the cutting, gluing, sewing, the actual material poetic, the event of its poetic; that while it was being made there was quietness, and in that quietness there was thought, and within thought dreams, and despairs, and cares, and regrets. All past passing, all future coming, and all now making. If someone walked into this room now would they see Joy.

The very point of Joy is its lack of 'distance'. It is a personal (too obvious to say really) work. It is a 'relational' work, it aspires to no 'look' except its own, it is a 'stranger' to art. And in being a stranger, in being the form of stranger, it is at the mercy 'of kindness', of a particular attention or touch. (And it is at the mercy 'of unkindness', of a particular dismissive talk or rough handling). It has offered its poorness, and there is nothing to be done. It exists. It is in the world, affecting the world (and potentially affected by the world, if the world (as 'you' walk through the door, enter the space) 'sees'): "Affectability constitutes the pre-sense of sensible presence, not as a pure virtuality, but as a being-in-itself-always-already-touched, touched by the possibility of being touched."¹

Eight

Such a small work, a few scraps of banal material; a small work of making, of writing. Joy has been stitched into the ordinary. Joy in the everyday, in the great expanse (desert) of everyday. The banal has become excessively imbued – not to romanticise it, or evoke its numb efficacy, but to say that amidst our floundering, and our precise timing,

there are materials and matters (of the heart, of the bones, and joints, of the mind), there thoughts, possibilities, which can be gathered into song, poem, thing; to say that our world-work could be just this: the making, or the composing of the pragmatic (or, even: the ugly, the necessary, the broken, the redundant) into the poetic, into the useless. Into the work of art which cannot be a weapon, or be targeted – except as or by further thought. And what of beauty; is Joy beautiful. Is it smooth and shiny. Does it give instant relief. No. no: there can be no definitive no, 'no' is a flash of hopelessness, of unhappiness, of sleeplessness; 'no' is (only) a reply. It is always only a way of coming to 'yes'. Joy can be ignored, as it does not dominate – I mean, it leaves one's breath intact, fluid, shallow, light, and at the same time one remembers breathing, one can feel breathing, it emerges from the everyday, that 'work' that is too much, too replete, because relentless and inescapable, and also achieved (time passes, we move on, though, into) amongst the tiniest fleeting images, the visibility of the 'leaving' - a sparkling particle of dust, a vivid yellow daisy, the scent of freesias on the air, the dive of a swallow, a frail red thread quivering on the breeze, the blink of a cat – for, the appearance of the world goes and goes, as if it constantly drains away, and yet it is endless, pouring in like a waterfall, a rushing wide icy river, coming and coming, the world; joy is a like a tiny 'thing', alive, not alive, big as a fingernail fluttering across the eyes, listening – not even a table, it commands no care; it looks like a refugee, an object dressed awkwardly to meet the officials; it won't be good enough, because the officials 'know' how to dress. Real people don't look like this, these people/things look tired, bewildered, confused. Wandering is lonely work; home is an exacting science.

Nine

Joy is brief. This is its joy. It comes to be, instantly, it fills the body with magic (the small nervous stinging stuttering aliveness (butterflies in the stomach)); one is loved, loving, at peace. And forever more one must know that, joy, which may never visit again. It is the one, him, her, it, they – stranger – who appears out of the blue. The beautiful face one glimpses behind one, at the café. Who smiles; looks directly at you and smiles. It is a type of geometry. And so, the arrival of the box containing 'joy' (a box containing an idea) - a geometry of planes composed to make a vessel, an architecture in fact (a pale brown rectangular box – exactly like the museum (a pale brown museum)) – a box within which one expects to find 'something', 'art'; like architecture, one expects the interior to reveal treasure, a lovely floor, a window onto the sea, a pale pink door, etc, one is 'in love' with arrangements of a certain kind, with the 'beautiful', with the sudden surprise of 'there, isn't that amazing'; and it continues, this longing (this habit of beauty), pervades, haunts, traces. And one leans towards it, as toward a flame (like Duchamp in his studio watching the bicycle wheel turn), wanting the warmth, the shape, the movement, the energy. The beautiful is nowhere and everywhere. It has no borders, no place of its own, it is rain on the road, the cat sleeping by the heater, a single note in a song, a gesture (a raised hand of welcome), and a gift in the post. The beauty of arrival, a beauty that dissolves into joy, memory.

Linda Marie Walker
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¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*. Trans. Jeffrey S. Librett. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis & London, 1997. p128.