

what ignites, what burns

By Magdalena Schrefel

Translated from German by Caroline Lee-Jeong

With

MIAMI

DINA

ACHILLE

And the INTERNET, where countless new windows keep opening up full of [images] and [videos] and [sounds] and [links], and full of questions and people, some real, some made up – there are plastic dinosaurs and an obscure inventor, for example, as well as many, many others – and each one leaves their trace and adds onto the pile. As many already know, data is the new oil.

Indented text represents traces of the action left on the INTERNET.

Once open, the windows stay open. They keep going, or loop back to the beginning. The internet never stays still.

[As many already know, that is also part of the problem.]

The windows themselves are projected onto oil slicks on stage.

This night, these lights

DINA
Here?

MIAMI
Yeah.
Here.
Here is good.

ACHILLE

They come out of a side street. It's a quiet area, just houses. They have backpacks on their backs. They check to see if there's anyone following them and then they immediately check again. Just in case. But there's no one. Nothing. The streets are empty. So they walk on down the road. Bushes, trees, bushes, no road markings. They're quiet. They don't speak. The streetlamps bathe everything in a yellow light, and they move from one beam of light to the next to the next to the-- Between the light beams, there's darkness. Above it all, the smog. Only the very brightest stars are visible. Venus, for example Over there. Then, as they walk around the corner, this gleaming white light starts to appear, this incredible, unbelievable, supernatural white light. And this light starts to shine brighter and brighter, until it --

MIAMI
Here.

DINA
Here?

MIAMI
Yes, here.

ACHILLE

-- Until it overcolors everything, or overshadows it. No, that's not right, I don't know how to put it. Wait, I've got it: until the gleaming white light turns the night here into day.

MIAMI
You go first.

DINA
Okay.

MIAMI
Here.
Vaseline.

DINA
Thanks.

MIAMI
Can you get through?

DINA
Give me your backpack.

MIAMI
You got it?

DINA
Your turn.

MIAMI
Okay.
Here I go.

ACHILLE

The two women climb through the metal fence. It's easy - easier than you think, especially if you've got some Vaseline on you. You rub it onto the metal posts and then you just glide through. OK, maybe there's a bit of effort involved, but it works. It has to. So now they're standing in front of the towers, these huge silver beasts, they're monstrous. It's like a spaceship landed here, that's the only way to describe it. It's like there's a filter on everything - the lights, the haze, the whole site. The darkness of the night has completely vanished and the lights flash as though they were sending messages in Morse code up into space.

DINA
Now what?

MIAMI
Good question.

DINA
This way?

MIAMI

How do you know that?

DINA

I don't know, I don't have the foggiest.

But we have to go *somewhere*.

ACHILLE

So they start running, hidden under the protection of the huge bulging towers that barely cast any shadow in this shining, bright night. They run through this artificial day, and this feeling rises up in them that they've done it? Done it? Done it! Done it!!! What do you call that feeling... euphoria, joy, pure joy, oh joyous joy, yes, that's-

ACHILLE

Stop!

ACHILLE

—someone suddenly calls from behind them. My voice rings out:

ACHILLE

Stop, stand still!

Stand still, I said!

Stop right now.

MIAMI

I run away, I run a few steps, until I stumble – over my own feet, which suddenly aren't holding me up anymore. My feet are suddenly against me, my feet are refusing to walk – and I fall down, and I see Dina turning round, I see Dina hesitating, I see Dina, wondering for a split second if she should keep running. I want to say to her, “run, one's better than no-one, go on!” but she's already stopped. “Go on, run!” I yell, even though it's already too late.

MIAMI

Run!

DINA

My body freezes. If I were an image online, I'd be a mess of pixels. That's how abruptly I move into stillness. Then I take a step towards Miami, another and another and another, over to Miami, who's standing up, and the uniform, which is wheezing and coming over to us.

ACHILLE

I've got you!

DINA

A beam of light falls on me. Which is completely unnecessary. An extra beam which is barely visible because it's already so bright. What's the point in that?

DINA

I can't see!

MIAMI

The light shines right onto our faces. It moves from mine to yours. I trace the light away from our bodies up into a flashlight, and the flashlight is being held by a man in uniform, the same man who pushes us across the compound and opens a door with his card and makes us climb some stairs and turn left -

ACHILLE

I said left!

MIAMI

-and then makes us walk up more stairs, and then turn left again -

ACHILLE

Turn left again.

MIAMI

-and then unlocks another door with a key. The same man who's sitting opposite us now, in this office, with a desk between us, the way you see in the movies.

DINA

Just like that.

Us, now, here

DINA

There's a desk and behind the desk is a tower of computer monitors, and then another tower and another and another. And they all show the towers outside, and you can see the vapor and the haze that surrounds them, and there are thousands of tiny lights on the towers and they're all flashing, and there are thousands of pipes leading from one tower to the next and they shine. They shine so brightly. You can see the whole world in these images on these screens in this tiny little room.

MIAMI

Not the entire world. Just the refinery, which keeps it going.

ACHILLE

Sorry?

MIAMI and DINA

—.

ACHILLE

You said something.

MIAMI and DINA

—.

ACHILLE

Name?

MIAMI and DINA

—.

ACHILLE

You must have names?

MIAMI and DINA

—!

ACHILLE

No name?

MIAMI and DINA

—!!

ACHILLE

I still have to report it.

Regardless of whether you talk to me or not.

If you tell me your names now, it'll just save the paperwork later.

What were you trying to do?

Take a picture?

Huh?

Is that it?

For Instagram?

Or TikTok?

Something like that?

You wouldn't be the first. Or the only ones.

But no one's ever actually managed to do it.

It would make a great shot, this stuff.

It's quite a sight. Can't deny it.

But I'm always here to stop them.

DINA

So now what?

ACHILLE

I really don't know what you wanted to do here. Maybe it wasn't just about a picture. It's not my job to find that out, but from where I'm standing I'd say we're looking at trespassing at the very least. Trespassing in a key industry. Maybe espionage? Or sabotage? I really don't know what you were planning to do, but there's only one way to get out of here and that's in a police car. If we were somewhere else, what you've done here would be a capital offence. You had tools in your backpacks - bolt cutters, crowbars, screwdrivers, the works. That's enough evidence in itself. Plus you entered the site without permission. But even here we know how they deal with the likes of you: when the police come, they'll be polite enough as long as I'm around. I'm a witness after all. But as soon as they take you away, they'll accidentally trip you up, unintentionally dislocate your arm. Then you'll sit at the police station with your dislocated shoulder and your broken leg. For an hour. Then two. Then three. Then four. You'll wait. You'll be in pain. You'll be thirsty, you might even ask for some water, but you won't get anything to drink. And you won't be the first people they've arrested tonight, so you'll be sharing your cell with the kinds of people you'd usually give a couple of coins to on the street. These people will stink. They'll be in withdrawal. These people will scream all night long and you won't get a wink of sleep. You won't get bail because you're too risky, so you'll have to stay in custody. For months. Until the trial starts. And even if you get out on bail, you'll have to bear the legal costs. Which you will for the rest of your life. So much for the killer resume.

DINA

I have a suggestion.

ACHILLE

A suggestion?

DINA

I - I mean we, we'll tell you what brought us here—

MIAMI

Sparing no details?

DINA

—Yes, and if you haven't changed your mind after we've told you everything, then you hand us over to the police.

ACHILLE

And what do you want me to convince me of?

MIAMI

That depends on you.

ACHILLE

You've got ten minutes.

Interlude

The Origins of It All or: Existential Crisis of a Plastic Dinosaur

DINO

OK, now it's me, I'm right here, may I please, excuse me, I just have to - I'm sorry, so sorry, excuse me, excuse me, excuse me, I just have to, that is, I just need to squeeze past, do you mind? Thank you, thank you very much, thank you, thanks a lot, I just have to get up on stage for a moment, this is my scene: So. As you all can see, I'm a plastic dinosaur. To be precise, I am a Brachiosaurus toy for ages four and up. I cost €15.49. I was bought online but I'm but also available in retail stores. In stores you can usually find me on a shelf, for example on the top left shelf, with my brother and sister dinosaurs, whom I also want to speak for here today, because there is a question which we urgently want to answer. The matter is as follows: Am I fundamentally me, and am I my own beginning? I was once me. I stomped through this world as a Brachiosaurus 150 million years ago, give or take a few years, my long neck holding my head up high, you could say I always had my "head in the clouds." But the long neck was my downfall, well the downfall of the Brachiosaurus I mean, because he fell down a hole, a pretty big hole, and then he couldn't get out because there was a swamp at the bottom and the Brachiosaurus sank into the swamp, until he was completely submerged, and then rocks fell on top of him, and pushed him deeper into the swamp, deeper and deeper and deeper and squashed him with this other organic matter, I don't want to call it waste, because it was a primordial plankton soup, to be precise, and then at some point, I can't explain all that clearly how it happened, because I'm just a dinosaur (or I was?), but somehow this compressed mass of organic matter became a viscous mass and this viscous mass became a dark mass and this dark mass was discovered and after it was discovered, it was pumped back up to the surface where it was pumped into barrels and loaded onto ships and shoved through pipelines and brought to a refinery where it was separated and distilled and reformed and refined, which really just means that it was heated up and broken down into individual components, and some of these components became plastic granules, and these plastic granules were colored, melted and poured into molds – and that brings me to the heart of the matter.. Am I me – because there once was a Brachiosaurus that fell down a hole and into a swamp etc, – or aren't I? You could say that the dinosaur that I was has been so completely transformed by this process, that we plastic dinosaurs are really only synthetic forms of that original dinosaur. Then are we a part of him in any meaningful way or are we just a derivative? I've been asking myself this for a long time now and I honestly don't know what the answer is. I just don't know.

The Troubled Times

DINA

There are questions that you ask yourself all your life—who am I, where do I come from, things like that—and still don't find any answers to. Then there are questions that appear out of the blue and the answers are actually very simple and clear—and despite this, you prefer to keep mulling over the question than tell yourself the answer, right? What I'm trying to say is: if I had to say how it began, then I'd say it started with this feeling of heaviness that covered me like a blanket during the hard days, weeks, months, and years. It came back to me every day, even though I was reading the newspaper, listening to the radio, clicking on new windows with the Evening Show playing on another window in the background, looking at things like: The best balcony plants for heatwaves / Weathered Rocks May Absorb CO², / The Climate Crisis, Colonial Roots and Continuities / Lady Gaga Turns 35! / Your Daily Horoscope for Sunday the 6th / etc etc. Then at night, when I couldn't fall asleep, I watched videos, and time and time again I ended up heading for the same video: There's a man, and the man is building a cabin, so he's cutting down trees, one after another, with an ax, he strikes the trunk with his ax, until at some point the trunk topples over and the tree lies down as if it's tired. And the man saws the trunk into parts, and the parts into beams, and the beams into boards, and then he screws and hammers and nails them together. He builds a cabin. He doesn't talk, he works silently in his own world for hours. My head is on the pillow, my eyes are following him. The only time he speaks is when he manages to do something particularly well. Sometimes he makes this noise when two pieces finally fit together. He breathes out loud. Otherwise you can only hear the rustle of the wind in the trees, every once in a while a bird, for example like this: —, or this: —, or this: —, the crackle of the leaves and some other noises that I can't identify, and as I feel my eyelids growing heavier, as I think that now sleep is finally overcoming me, just then the man begins to screw solar panels onto the roof of the cabin and he says, more to himself than to us: *"the heat is undoubtedly coming, but we'll be prepared, won't we?"*

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[Will we?]

[Are we already prepared?]

[And what does prepared mean in this context?]

//

DINA

I wake up in the middle of the night, the browser window is still open on my phone, and there's this woman speaking, she's an older woman and her hair is curled, and she says:

MÁRIA TELKES

When I was a child, maybe four or five years old, we stood in a field on a hill not far from our home in Hungary. We were squinting up at the sun. It was bright, brighter than bright, it was white, although of course light doesn't itself have any color. We held filter paper in front of our eyes while we stared at the sky, and slowly, very slowly, I was able to see something making its way in front of the sun. 'What is that,' I asked, and my father said: 'That is a solar eclipse.' 'Will it be dark forever from now on?' 'No,' my father said. 'What you're seeing here is a miracle.' And he went on: 'In outer space it's completely dark, darker than the deepest night in the coldest winter. But in our solar system, there's the sun, the sun,' and with that he pushed my brother a little to the side, 'the sun,' he said and pointed at my brother to designate him as the sun, 'the sun continuously shines.' 'And the Earth circles the sun, the ball that we live on,' he said and pointed at me to make me circle around my brother, like in ring-a-ring-a-roses, 'and then there's the moon, the moon rotates around the Earth,' and now he himself began to spin around me and around my brother with me. 'And sometimes, very seldom, it happens that the sun, the moon, and the Earth line up at the exact same height. Can you guess what happens then?' I looked at him questioningly. 'Can you still see your brother?' And because I couldn't see him behind my father, I shook my head. 'In this very moment it becomes so cold and quiet on Earth, that the birds think that it's night, the rabbits and the foxes and the wild animals all think that life has suddenly disappeared. Until,' and here he made one step to the side, 'until things start moving again.' I saw my brother again and I said: 'Until light starts shining onto Earth again!' 'That's right.'

DINA

The woman pauses as though she were recalling the moment, then she looks at the camera and says:

MÁRIA TELKES

The very same evening I made a solemn vow, as solemn as only a child can, that I would make sure that this light never faded, that the warmth of the sun would never be lost. Later I attended lectures in physics at the university in Budapest and a professor said: 'This oil that everyone is now so eagerly searching for is nothing other than

sunlight from a very long time ago which has been stored underground.’ Then – how should I put it – a light dawned on me: We needed to build a mechanism that would allow us to store the light, the thermal energy of the sun, in the ground for when we needed it. And I have done nothing other than this, I have invented this exact thing: the solar house.

DINA

‘And when was this?’ a voice asks from off screen.

MÁRIA TELKES

‘In the 40s.’

DINA

‘And then?’

MÁRIA TELKES

‘Then they extracted more oil.’

//

[We see men, a lot of men, topless men, men laying pipes into the ground.]

[We see men, a lot of men, men in suits, with ties and bowties, with white shirts; whether the suits are blue or not, we can’t say, because the photographs we see are black and white.]

[We see men standing in front of a technical facility, a lot of men, men turning a valve, men who’ve just turned it, we see a thick, dark-colored liquid spurting out into the landscape.]

[We see puddles of oil, dark puddles of oil against the landscape, puddles of oil with dark viscous surfaces.]

[We hesitate: aren’t our screens also just dark surfaces?]

[And are the pictures on the screens the same pictures as the ones reflected in the puddles of oil?]

[How many pixels does it take to create the illusion of a surface?]

[Or: how many drops of oil produce a beginning?]

GAMER

Right, so, you see these oil rigs against the blue sky, lots of them, like seven or eight, soaring way up into the sky, and in front of them there are these two buildings, with windows and chimneys, I guess they're administrative buildings, it is a company after all, and in front of them is a brick wall, it's tall and white and there's no way anyone could get over it, and you then have to decide: do you buy local or imported oil? Most of the time the local oil is cheaper, isn't it, so first you go for that, but then the quality changes, so you also end up buying some imported stuff from Iraq or Afghanistan or Kuwait or somewhere, I can't exactly, I can't really tell those flags apart, but you know where imported oil comes from, right, and then you also have to think about the environmental protection. So you gotta make sure that your facility is keeping the environmental stuff in check, the damage, the pollution. And you do that by investing in R&D, that means research and development, you should spend at least 2% on that, and most of the time that's enough, and you also have to keep investing in other things, I mean in refining and the stock market and so on. Right, so then you also have to keep building new gas stations in order to get rid of the oil that you either imported or bought and make some money, so you build gas stations, right, and sometimes you also have to also meet with the lobbyists in the moonlight in front of the Capitol Building, you know, these are men in suits, two of them, to be exact, two men, I mean, and they're wearing funny ties, I mean with funny patterns, but then you have to meet with other lobbyists too, and they're wearing shades and have mustaches, I'm serious, they really do look like that, and up have to meet them in moonlight too, although it could be sunlight, it's kind of hard to tell. But at any rate there's this yellow disc in the sky but I'm getting off track. Whatever, the point is: you also have to let your money work for itself, that's actually the goal of this game, and whilst you're off doing that at the stock market, someone else might get some bad news, like: there's no oil where they've been drilling, nothing, nada, zilch. That's an occupational hazard! But they've already spent so much money doing all this drilling that has just led to dry soil that there's a financial crisis so your company, or the company you've been playing, gets liquidated. And then yeah, then you have to start from scratch again.

//

[When they discovered oil in the Middle East, England and the U.S. tried to divide the oil reserves between themselves. Roosevelt himself was supposed to have said: "Persian oil... is yours. We share the oil of Iraq and Kuwait. As for Saudi Arabian oil, it's ours."]

[As if the whole world were just a board game.]

[They build golf courses in the middle of the desert for the managers of the British and American oil companies. They regularly soak the sand of the golf course in oil to make it firmer.]

[Coincidentally, oil decreases our dependence on coal, which helps to weaken the miners' unions.]

[Others put it this way: oil is an instrument of internationalization.]

[And still others put it this way: it greases the wheels of international understanding.]

[However you put it, the idea that this buried treasure can be used for literally anything begins to spread like wildfire.]

[But if you burn it, carbon escapes into the air and binds itself to oxygen: C O two.]

[And that's the beginning of an unfortunate equation for the future.]

[As everyone commit themselves to the new energy supply, a young man on Martinique builds a rocket, which is fueled by poetry.]

[Around the same time, Edward Lorenz discovers that one single tiny mistake on the fourth decimal place in his data leads to incredibly large fluctuations in his climate models.]

[The conclusion he comes to? Nothing is as stable as we've thought.]

//

JAMES HANSEN

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to present the results of my research. My name is James Hansen and I work for NASA in an area that I would like to call climate research. Our studies are preliminary, but I would like to draw three main conclusions. Number one, this year, 1988, this summer, in which I stand before you here today, the earth is warmer than at any time in the history of instrumental measurements. Number two, global warming is now large enough that we can ascribe with a high degree of confidence a cause-and-effect relationship to the greenhouse effect. And number

three, our computer climate simulations indicate that the greenhouse effect is already large enough to begin to affect the probability—and therefore genuine possibility—of extreme weather conditions.

MIAMI

“And what do you conclude?” asks a committee member. Sweat gathers on her forehead. James Hansen has prepared a handout about his findings, with graphs and statistics and recommendations. The committee member takes the handout, doesn’t give it a glance and uses it to fan herself, but it doesn’t help. Wet patches are starting to appear under her arms on her white synthetic blouse, it’s immensely embarrassing for the committee member, but there’s no concealing it, because it is hot in this June in 1988, hotter than she has ever known. So: “What do you conclude?”

JAMES HANSEN

If we continue like this, the temperature will keep rising and the earth will grow warmer.

MIAMI

“Are you certain?”

JAMES HANSEN

Our figures show that with probability of around 99%.

MIAMI

“And what can we do?”

JAMES HANSEN

It’s very simple. We leave fossil fuel under the earth, no more extracting, and no more burning.

//

[And then?]

[In June 1988, I’m three years old.]

[My favorite toy is a plastic dinosaur, which I play with in the bathtub in winter. In summer I take it on a trip to the inflatable pool in my garden.]

[That was almost thirty-four years ago.]

[Nothing stays the way you assumed it would.]

[And nothing happens the way you think it will.]

[Fifteen years after Hansen, a climate researcher says that “Our climate has proven to be an angry beast.”]

[What does that mean?]

[If we poke it, it will squirm and bite back.]

[As sinking revenues from oil futures abruptly blast the global petroleum trade in April of 2020, more container ships suddenly get chartered.]

[On these ships, petroleum is stored for an indeterminate amount of time at sea.]

[These ships are powered by fuel oil, a leftover material from the production of gasoline and diesel.]

[Nothing goes to waste.]

[Tiny droplets from each load escape into the sea.]

[On the surface, they gather and turn into green trails.]

[They wash up on the coast as small clumps of tar.]

[At some point, prices rise again.]

[And then the oil arrives.]

[Is there a set day in the week, or is oil flexible?]

[And how flexible are we?]

[When all that no longer exists, what would happen to all these things here?]

[What would happen to those 2733 gas stations?]

[And what would happen to you?]

//

ILKA M.

My name is Ilka M., and I run this gas station here. I've been here for a long time and I can only say that it'll turn out badly if we don't do something soon.

MIAMI and DINA

The camera sways over the old gas station, the building is run down. Does it say Esso? Or Shell? Or Gazprom? There's a poster on one pillar: "Radio Energy, your shot of energy in the morning!" The camera focuses on it, and then crosses back to Ilka M.

ILKA M.

When I was a child, right, there was nothing more promising for me than the smell of gas stations, it's a cliché, sure, I know, but did you ever notice that the smell of gasoline in your nose can open up the whole world in front of you? What I mean by that is: the whole world is in this stuff, and it always has been, in diesel, light diesel, gasoline and premium gasoline, because it all comes from real far away, from the whole wide world, and then it flows into these tanks here, and then it lets you go where you want to go, into the vastness in front of you, ready to be conquered. But to get back to your question, unfortunately the place doesn't run like a well-oiled machine these days, and all the chocolate bars and sandwiches and friendly chats in the world won't change that. The place just doesn't run the way it used to. Back in the day, this place would be full of cars at lunchtime, diesels and gasoline engines, and the drivers would come in, on their own, with their families, and they'd get themselves something to eat. We had frankfurters, bockwurst, debreceners, cheese krainers, and hotdogs for the kids. And they took their food back out with them to the parking lot. A car like that was your home, a place for rest and reflection, a small piece of home on wheels. Three years ago I had to let go of an employee, then another one, and now I'm alone here. I open up in the morning and close down at night, in between I do everything that four people used to do around here.

MIAMI and DINA

And then you had an idea, right?

ILKA M.

Then I had an idea, right, one day I thought, I've got to think this through, move with the times, you know? I figure that what I'm going to do is fill those underground tanks up, but not with diesel or gasoline or even premium gasoline. No, I'm going to fill them with data! I'll

get a server in here, get myself internet right here in the middle of the countryside, so I'll still connected to the rest of the world just like I was before, but in a different way, you know? The important thing is not to march on one spot, you've got to keep moving. The last thing I do is sell a guy a canister of gasoline. He's in his mid-fifties with a red, 20L canister. "Out of gas?" I ask. "Time for a change," he says. "OK," I say. "Time for a new direction, you know?" "That'll be €29.80," I say. "Do you want something to drink with that?" "No, thank you." "Rewards program?" He shakes his head. "Membership points?" He doesn't react anymore, pays in cash without speaking to me, and then he shuffles out and doesn't look back, the door opens, the door closes. And then I turn the lights off.

//

[Is that really the solution?]

[Should we store the world as an image?

[And hang it in a museum?]

[Is that a Caspar David Friedrich?]

[Or a William Turner?]

[And what's that?]

[What?]

[There, on the horizon.]

//

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//

[Crack.]

[Black screen.]

[Was that it?]

//

ACHILLE

What's going on now?

DINA

Battery's dead.

MIAMI

Shit.

ACHILLE

Now what?

MIAMI

There's only one more story that we can tell. Our own.

//

DINA

What would you be called?

MIAMI

In our story?

DINA

In this story that you want to tell about us.

MIAMI

Miami.

DINA

Miami?

MIAMI

Why not? At least the name gets to survive. And you?

DINA

I want to stay me.

MIAMI

That works.

DINA

And what happens next, Miami?

MIAMI

The story would be about a journey, a journey in which it's not the hero but rather the events themselves that emerge changed at the end. It would be a story in which pieces are placed next to each other. Things don't follow one another logically, there isn't a causal relationship. The story would function more like a kaleidoscope. Things would appear differently depending on which way you turned it. But it would always remain clear that there are many parts that together make up a whole.

DINA

What do you mean?

MIAMI

We're so trapped by this idea that we can't do anything, that we have to do more research, to the point we've become completely incapable of taking action. So the first thing we're going to do is throw all our images out the window so we can learn to see again!

DINA

And the doubt?

MIAMI

The doubt can only ever be about whether we can really do it. But it can't be about whether we should even do anything.

DINA

We have to learn to think that we can do something!

MIAMI

Exactly!

DINA

But how?

MIAMI

We will have to document our search, and then we will put those images into the world like a kind of story in which there's finally more than one type of hero. It'll be a story about searching and collecting and gathering. We'll produce new images that encourage people.

//

DINA

And then we looked at each other, and then I said: "Then we have to do something really big." And Miami said:

MIAMI

Yes.

DINA

YES!

MIAMI

YEES!!

DINA
But what?!

MIAMI
Stop the oil!?

DINA
Stop the oil!
Of course!

MIAMI
Just like that!

DINA
Just like that, yes!

MIAMI
And when?

DINA
We've already started! So let's go!

Interlude:
Energy Consumption Record
(Notes from January 7th)

At night I lie in bed and can't sleep. The pipes are clunking and gurgling but the heating's not on, is it? I listen to the gurgling and wonder how much energy this play has actually used up. I get up, go to the living room, check the thermostat, but the heating's off. I go into the kitchen, but the heater there is also quiet. I drink a glass of water. So what's making the gurgling noise? Back in bed I turn the light on and type into my phone: Energy Consumption Record (Note from January 7th). So if I count up all the times I charge my laptop, and if I charge it twice a day, that makes two or three hundred charges – and how much energy does it take to charge a laptop once? I ask Google but I don't understand the answer and then I start asking myself if online searches also count towards my energy consumption? So I google how much energy a Google search takes, and Google says that a Google search uses 0.003kWh, which is equal to 0.2 grams of CO² emission. Is that a lot? I google some more and then I realize that all this googling is probably the root of the actual problem. I mean, how many times have I asked Google something as I wrote this play?! I reckon it's at least 178,000 times, so I start going through my notes and realize that I've downloaded a massive number of PDFs and newspaper articles, and then there's all the Wikipedia searches and the YouTube videos and Spotify running in the background and the emails and all the Zooms and Skypes with the director and the theater, and then just aimless searches, online surfing and hanging out... That adds up to an unimaginable number of hours online! And of course I always had the light on, just like I do now. And what about printing?! According to yet another Google search, it takes about 200 ml of water, two grams of wood and two grams of CO² to print a page of paper. So how much does that make in total? I can't do the math in my head, but if I use my app, does that also count toward my total energy consumption? And should I include the heating, because it's winter and cold when I'm sitting at my desk? And how about my fridge, which is old and second-hand, and what matters more, energy efficiency labels or length of use? How do you google that? Then I remember someone who told me that when he can't solve a problem in his script, he always takes a shower. He can take up to five showers a day. The only way he can get past a writer's block is to get under running water. Does that mean I should include every shower I take? Then I remember that when this guy told me about the showers, I told him that if I've got writer's block, I get in my car and just drive, ideally on the highway at 130 km/h, with the countryside whizzing past, that's what sets my thoughts in motion, and then I remember: my contact lenses! I couldn't even see the countryside without my contact lenses, everything would just be a big swamp, one giant soupy world. Even my contact lenses are a product made from petroleum, aren't they? The heating pipes are still gurgling and I have no idea why. I go into my contacts, start a new email with the subject line <Energy consumption!!!> and copy and paste the note I've just written and then I read through it again, I read everything, the entire text, and a few minutes later a reply pops up: "you have to come to terms with the fact that your play

can't save the world." So I reply: "You mean I can't make the right kind of theater in the wrong kind of world?" The answer: "A production like this is just another refining process!" and two seconds later: "But remember – any kind of action is better than no action!" So I sit down at my desk and write:

What ignites, what burns

MIAMI

Here.

Hold on a minute.

DINA

What are you doing?

MIAMI

I'm letting air out of the tires.

DINA

Just like that?

MIAMI

Just like that, yeah.

DINA

Isn't that dangerous?

MIAMI

Put that here under the windshield wiper, but make sure that no one can see it.

DINA

"The rising fraction" – who's that?

MIAMI

That's us! I gave us the name. And now: keep walking. Keep going, as if nothing has happened.

MIAMI

In order to put an end to these troubled times, we start meeting up towards the end of fall to go for a walk. That's all we can do. We go for walks in the parts of the city which have particularly high numbers of SUVs. We have copies of this flier we've made that say something like: "we've let the air out of your tires before the air disappears from us. Please just take the tram once in a while." Then there's a map of the public transport system with the nearest stops marked in pen.

DINA

How do you do it?

MIAMI

Open the valve, put a small mung bean on top, then screw the cap back on.

DINA

And then?

MIAMI

Then the air comes out.

Here, try it.

//

DINA

Hey. Imagine you could actually do it.

MIAMI

Turn off the oil flow?

DINA

Yeah.

MIAMI

You mean literally?

DINA

Literally. For good.

MIAMI

Would you do it?

DINA

I think so, yeah.

MIAMI

And then?

DINA

I have no idea, you can't plan everything. But just because you can't plan it doesn't mean you shouldn't try it.

MAIMAI

So let's look for it.

DINA
The oil?

MIAMI
We can't run around letting air out of tires forever. Let's look for the pipeline,
let's look for the pipe that brings the oil all the way here.

//

DINA
Where did you get that?

MIAMI
Borrowed it from the hardware store.

DINA
Just like that?

MIAMI
"What do you want that for," the lady asked me, and I said, "My U lock. The
key's broken. Only thing for it is the bolt cutter."

DINA
So now what happens?

MIAMI
I want to get in there!

DINA
Into the oil depot?

MIAMI
Are you scared?

DINA
No, why.

MIAMI
Just curious.

DINA
And if someone comes?

MIAMI

Then we run away.

DINA

So Miami takes the bolt cutter in her hands and she cuts a hole in the wire netting.

MIAMI

It's super simple!

DINA

Then she puts on some gloves and bends the wire netting back, it's not a huge hole, you really have to squeeze your way through. Then it's my turn and I get stuck because of my jacket. I tug at the left sleeve, and just as I make it through, there's this loud noise.

MIAMI

What was that?

DINA

Just my jacket sleeve.

DINA

And we look around, but there's no one there, not a single person to be seen, adrenaline is pumping through my veins, which is just another form of energy going round a circuit—

DINA

OK, so where's this pipeline?

MIAMI

It must be somewhere around here.

DINA

Do you see that bare patch of ground over there?

MIAMI

Yes, yes, that must be the answer!

DINA

The answer?

MIAMI

I read somewhere that the heat from the pipeline melts the snow in winter. So now just happens to be the best time of the year.

DINA

And we're lucky to have snow.

MIAMI

So now what happens?

DINA

Do you feel that?

MIAMI

Rain?

DINA

Exactly.

MIAMI

Oh, come on! Shit.

DINA

Come on, we're going to get drenched, I'm cold, I'm freezing and shivering already, almost jittering in fact. Let's go back to the car!

MIAMI

I read somewhere that oil moves at about the same pace as a human, and that it pumps through here at about five or six kilometers per hour. So if we keep going at this pace, it'll take us a couple of years to map out the whole pipeline.

//

DINA

There's just one problem.

MIAMI

What?

DINA

The car won't start anymore. I mean, the engine won't.

MIAMI
Let me try.

DINA
And?

MIAMI
It's not working.

DINA
I said so.

MIAMI
And now what?

DINA
Keep going on foot?

MIAMI
To the next gas station?

DINA
We can make it.

//

MIAMI
Since when are gas stations closed at night?

DINA
All the better.

MIAMI
All the better?

DINA
Do you remember what I told you?

MIAMI
Right now?

DINA
Seeing as we're already here.

MIAMI
What about the cameras?

DINA
It'll take five minutes, seven max. We'll wear our masks and hoodies.
What can go wrong?

MIAMI
Alright!

DINA
Ready?

MIAMI
Ready!

DINA
Here.

MIAMI
Do you think that's enough?

DINA
Sure, it's superglue.

//

[At one of those motorway rest areas.]

[The sun comes up.]

[In the background: forest, fields, and wind turbines.]

[It takes you a while to notice but: the trees are bare.]

[You can't see the tree for the lack of leaves?]

[Hmmm.]

[OK, let's just stand here for a bit.]

[Which means we're looking at: the porta potties, the gas pumps, a huge parking lot.]

[Cars that have parked up and still have their engines running.]

[Someone places his hotdog on the hood of a car.]

["Enjoy."]

["Thank you."]

["Nothing better than a sausage for breakfast, am I right?"]

["Will it be a long drive?"]

[In the radio the announcer is saying: "and now the news. Incidents have been reported at several gas stations. Unknown persons glued over the locks of the gas station so that they could not be opened in the morning."]

//

MIAMI

Are they talking about us?

DINA

We only stopped at one station.

MIAMI

So who are they talking about?

DINA

No idea, but now we have to keep going.

//

["It is not known whether these three incidents are connected and were carried out by the same person or group. And now the weather: snowfall is expected overnight, with temperatures falling to -5. A more cheerful day with sunshine will follow."]

[And then here's the jingle: "Radio Energy, let us warm you up."]

//

MIAMI

The first thing I see in the parking lot is a snowman, but it's not made of snow, it's made of tires painted white, with four different sized tires and a

smaller tire balanced on top for the head. Someone's put a piece of wood in the smaller tire and painted on a smiling mouth and two big eyes.

DINA

Next to us a truck stops. A man gets out of the driver's seat. He's wearing slippers. He goes into the store. And while he's away, the truck driver leaves his engine running:

DINA (ad-libbing)

The engine is running.

The engine is running.

The engine is running.

...

MIAMI

I go into the gas station store as well, past the chips and the beverages, and I see a big freezer in the corner. As I open it, I see the last remains of summer inside, a single Magnum surrounded by an ice landscape of frozen crystals. "Do you guys still have Twinnies?" I shout. No response from the cashier. So I go over to the counter where you can order coffee and sandwiches, and just as I get in line behind him, I hear the man from the truck say:

TRUCK DRIVER

Eggs and garden, please.

MIAMI

His index finger is pointing at two egg sandwiches, which have curly-leaf parsley on them. He calls the parsley 'garden' and I have to laugh out loud, it seems so absurd to me, and as the man turns around, I'm still laughing.

TRUCK DRIVER

Something wrong?

MIAMI

You called the parsley 'garden.'

TRUCK DRIVER

That's what we call it where I'm from.

MIAMI

And where is that?

TRUCK DRIVER

Kapfenberg.

MIAMI

And where are you heading today?

TRUCK DRIVER

Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Sofia.

MIAMI

Could we hitch a ride to Vienna?

TRUCK DRIVER

Which exit? Wiener Neudorf, Mödling, Vösendorf, South Inzersdorf or North Inzersdorf?

MIAMI

South Inzersdorf sounds perfect!

MIAMI

The driver and I leave the gas station store and walk across the parking lot, I wave at Dina—

MIAMI

Come on, we've got a ride!

DINA (still continuing)

The engine is running.

The engine is running.

The engine is running.

Your engine's running, dude!

TRUCK DRIVER

I just went in there for some snacks.

MIAMI

As we drive on, a car transporter passes us with one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, with a load of SUVs on it, fresh out of the factory, still wrapped in plastic coverings.

DINA

"Unbelievable," I say.

TRUCK DRIVER

What?

DINA

It's kind of unbelievable that they're still making more cars. You'd think that by 2022 everyone would have a car, wouldn't you?

TRUCK DRIVER

It's just wear and tear.

DINA

What?

TRUCK DRIVER

Cars don't disappear, they just get passed on.

DINA

I don't get it.

TRUCK DRIVER

When I hit 250,000 kilometers this thing here is going to get sold, it'll go to Poland or Russia, and when they don't want it anymore, it'll end up in Africa.

MIAMI

Have you been doing this long?

TRUCK DRIVER

What?

MIAMI

Driving trucks.

TRUCK DRIVER

I just count the kilometers, the exits, and the borders that I leave behind me. Most people check the clock at work. I'm check geography.

MIAMI

So what are you transporting here?

TRUCK DRIVER

Car parts.

MIAMI

Car parts?

Seriously?

DINA

Take a look!

MIAMI

What is it?

TRUCK DRIVER

Sucker rods.

MIAMI

Sucker rods?

TRUCK DRIVER

For pumpjacks.

DINA

Pumpjacks?

TRUCK DRIVER

For the local oil wells.

MIAMI

Around here?

TRUCK DRIVER

We have oil here. Didn't you know?

DINA

I didn't. Did you?

MIAMI

First time I'm hearing about it.

TRUCK DRIVER

They refined it in Floridsdorf and the light gasoline was sold as a cleaning product: "Floridsdorf stain remover." My grandmother swore by it.

MIAMI

Here in Austria?

DINA

Do you mind if I record this?

TRUCK DRIVER

Sure. Anyway, that was another reason Austria was so important to the Nazis: they needed oil badly, and we had direct access. After 1945 they used that same oil to pay for the reparations. It all went to the Soviet Union. Back in those days it was worth a fortune but these days it's a fraction of what we actually use. Still, the myth lives on: we've got oil! And that's why we need pumpjacks.

MIAMI

I've never heard any of this before.

TRUCK DRIVER

After 1955 Austria was a neutral country stuck between the eastern and western blocks. We had to be careful that we didn't get crushed. So Kreisky himself got OPEC to Vienna, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. "Oil's our gateway to the world," that's what people said back then. Oil was going to bring us all together.

DINA

And how do you know all this?

TRUCK DRIVER

I've got a lot of time to listen to the radio when I'm driving.

//

DINA

This way?

MIAMI

Yeah, this way. Just follow the stream.

DINA

We walk past an OMV gas station.

MIAMI

Past a Muslim cemetery.

DINA

Past a junkyard.

MIAMI

Past the village inn and a pirate themed playground.

DINA

Past the Fox.

MIAMI

The Fox?!

DINA

It says there, a car repair shop.

MIAMI

Past the Johanneskirche.

DINA

Past Schmied's car recycling lot.

MIAMI

And past Javornik's car repair shop.

DINA

And then the river bends, it's just a stream really, and it bends slightly to the left, and then we're almost there.

MIAMI

Through the Rathauspark. Then we fall silent.

DINA

In front of Eurospar we pull our masks over our heads.

MIAMI

Eisteich Street?

DINA

Yeah, that way.

MIAMI

And then we're standing by the fence.

DINA

Here?

MIAMI
Yeah, here.
You go first.

DINA
Okay.

MIAMI
Here. The Vaseline.

DINA
Thanks.

MIAMI
Can you get through?

DINA
Have to.
Pass me the backpack?

MIAMI
You got it?

DINA
Your turn.

//

MIAMI
And you know the rest.

ACHILLE
I do, yes.

DINA
So?

ACHILLE
Can I ask you something?

MIAMI
Sure.

ACHILLE

Do you really believe in change?

MIAMI

It's the only thing left to believe in.

ACHILLE

But that's never going to be enough!

DINA

Someone once said that hope is the strongest fuel we have. Hope isn't a door that just opens up because you're waiting for it. It's an ax that you have to use in emergencies to tear walls down, or at least knock holes into them.

MIAMI

We need to start panicking. As if we're on a train that's getting faster and faster. We need to hit the emergency brake, we need to break the glass, if we want to get out of it alive.

ACHILLE

But there's nowhere to escape to. There's nothing more out there, there is no beyond.

DINA

Yes there is. If we pick up our axes now, we can at least hope that we'll find something else out there.

ACHILLE

What makes you two so sure?

MIAMI

Because we know: if we don't take matters into our own hands now, this whole place is going to go up in flames!

//

JOURNALIST

It's morning, early morning, a morning like any other morning. A man wakes up, turns on the radio, "This is Radio Energy, your energy shot with the sunrise. The weather might be cloudy right now but we're here to –," He clears away his breakfast, does the dishes, then he puts on his shoes, fetches a bike and a red canister from his garage, then he straps the canister to the rack on the back and makes his way to the OPEC headquarters where Ministers of Energy from petroleum-

producing countries are holding a meeting. There's a press conference at noon for a group photo. He knows this because he knows someone who knows someone who works there. He leans his bike against a drainpipe and doesn't lock it up. It's 11:52. He takes the red canister and then he disappears behind a row of houses. The streets are narrow here. A few minutes later he comes back. There are barriers up but hardly anyone's there, a few photographers are waiting, and he joins them. Maybe he also has a camera? Now the door's opening and all the energy ministers are coming out to stand in front of the building. There are ministers from Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, from Algeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Libya, Nigeria, and the Republic of Congo, and from Venezuela. All the ministers are wearing dark blue suits and white shirts, it's drizzling slightly but no-one's wearing a jacket. They're not going to let the unpredictable weather spoil their appearance. The photographers pull out their cameras. Everyone's concentrating on their pictures and no one notices the man squeezing through the barriers. He takes something out of his pocket. A security man notices him and starts to walk towards him. The guard puts his hand on his gun and opens his mouth but before he can say anything there's a click and suddenly the man is on fire. The newspapers will call it the first case of self-immolation connected to climate change.

DINA

But we'll know that's not true.

MIAMI

We'll know that in India more than 140,000 farmers took their lives from 2006 to 2016 because their fields weren't suitable for crops anymore, because they couldn't feed their families or even themselves.

JOURNALIST

"It remains unclear how this case is to be interpreted. It is 2023, and we can only hope that similar incidents will not follow."

MIAMI

The message is clear: we have to direct the violence somewhere else before it turns against life itself.

DINA

The question is no longer when we should escalate. It's how.

//

[On the radio someone is singing: “you say no future, in just two years we will all crumble.”]

[And someone else yells into the microphone: “I burn myself, I am the fuel.”]

[Then the news.]

[The WHO estimates that from 2030 to 2050, at least 250,000 people will die each year because of climate change.]

[38,000 will die of heat-related illness (especially the elderly).]

[48,000 will die of water-borne diseases.]

[60,000 will die of malaria.]

[And 95,000 children will die of malnourishment.]

[These are additional deaths.]

[Every year.]

[So the question is: when do we escalate?]

[And how?]

[Other people say that in May 2021, CO² levels reached their highest ever concentration.]

[The last time CO² levels were so high, say the researchers, was more than four million years ago. Back then the sea level was 23.5 meters higher than it is today, the average temperature was around 4°C higher than in preindustrial times, and today’s Arctic tundra was covered in forests.]

[What does that mean?]

[It’s been burning for a long time.]

[“We’re burning,” says a twenty-six-year-old female student in Basra to a journalist. What does that mean, he asks, and the young woman answers that when she leaves her house, it’s like “walking into a fire.”]

[In 2020, climate change replaced military conflict as the single biggest cause of forced migration.]

[Will these people let their homes be taken away from them?]

[Just like that?]

[Will they just take it?]

[Who's not going to take it?]

[And what does that mean for us?]

Us, here, now

ACHILLE

I want to state what has happened for the record. After both women told me their story, their stories, I looked at them for a long time, and then I said: “come with me, I want to show you something.”

ACHILLE

I want to show you something, you have to see this.

ACHILLE

We left the guard room—

ACHILLE

Now down the stairs on the right!

ACHILLE

—down the stairs, through a long hallway, down more stairs—

ACHILLE

It’s over there!

The very first door.

ACHILLE

—then out through the door, out onto the compound. You could see in the sky that the sun was about to come up, there are these hints of pink that begin to emerge. The sky’s turning from black to blue. There’s a hint that something else might be about to happen.

ACHILLE

Here.

DINA

Here?

ACHILLE

Yes, here.

MIAMI

What is that?

ACHILLE

On the refinery compound there are beehives. You haven't heard anything yet because the bees are waiting for dawn to come before they swarm out and start collecting nectar.

ACHILLE

Bees. Aristotle describes them as a higher life form because they have a structure. A beehive can easily accommodate 50,000 bees. That's a nation. And each bee has a role which is based on a series of complex processes. Each bee knows what it has to do and when. Each bee relies on another bee. It's like an interlocking bit of machinery, but this one is all natural. The only thing we can say with certainty about it is that if we take its honey away today, the bees will make more tomorrow.

DINA

What's that supposed to mean?

ACHILLE

It's the same with oil. No-one wants to be the first to stop if all the others are still using it. It is the old alchemist's dream come true – this is the substance from which everything else can be made. Road tar, kerosene, diesel, heating oil, nylon stockings and pantyhose and bitumen and gear oil, painkillers, body wash, mascara and body lotion, shampoo and laundry detergent, condoms and lubricant, chewing gum, spacers for your teeth, toothpaste, PVC flooring, steel beams, credit cards and mattresses, PC cases and cell phone displays, lipsticks, fleece jumpers, outdoor jackets and plastic slippers, plastic bins and plastic everything, the pill, car seats and Vaseline–

MIAMI

But what's the fuel?

ACHILLE

One of them interrupted me.

ACHILLE

I'm sorry?

DINA

A machine has the power to conceal its inner workings, to define itself through its output and its performance.

ACHILLE

The other one said, and:

DINA

But every machine actually needs fuel, so: what do these machines here run on?

ACHILLE

Electricity, what else?

MIAMI

That's it.

ACHILLE

What?

MIAMI

The power plant!

DINA

And where is it?

ACHILLE

What?

DINA

The power plant!

ACHILLE

Right here!

MIAMI

Here?

ACHILLE

Yes, here, right over there.

MIAMI

OK. Now it's your turn.

ACHILLE

Me?

DINA

Now is the moment when you have it in your power.

MIAMI

When we have it in our power.

DINA

Being brave can also just mean doing what you can with your back against the wall.

Our night, our lights

ACHILLE

The sun slowly rose behind the towers. Now there were two colors competing in the sky. “Will you tell us your name?” one of the two women said.

DINA

What’s your name?

ACHILLE

So I said:

ACHILLE

Achille, my name is Achille.

ACHILLE

My gaze slid over the silver city of silver pipes– this enormous factory compound made of cylinders, which stand alone or in pairs, the spheres resting on top of pillars, which are regenerators, crackers, condensers or fraction towers, the tube furnaces and storage tanks full of Arabian Heavy, Arabian Medium, Arabian Light, Arabian Extra Light and Arabian Super Light, the pumps in all sizes and strengths, the footbridges and stairs which allow you to move over the compound, and also the chimneys and the pipes.

MIAMI

Here?

DINA

Yeah.

Here.

Here is good.

ACHILLE

I turned around one more time and saw the two from a distance, but even if I had been closer I wouldn’t have been able to hear a single word. They had broken open the door with a crowbar – there was no noise apart from a small clicking noise, no bird flit up, no rabbit hopped across the compound. Smog enveloped the whole place. And the light - this gleaming white light, this truly incredible, supernatural light, this gleaming light which -

MIAMI

Here.

DINA

Here?

MIAMI

Yeah, here.

ACHILLE

– Then the gleaming white light suddenly went out. But it didn't get dark. The sun was already up. And then the alarm, ringing out into the silence. I stood there and looked out at the city, and I thought: the only reason everything runs so smoothly here is because we all work together. There comes a moment where you realize that you already have everything you need – right here, right now – and all you have to do is get started. That's the moment when resistance becomes possible. Resistance grows like the highways did back in the day - not suddenly at once, but piece by piece, one new section of road at a time. Resistance has to be practiced, until at some point new relations emerge in front of our eyes and new connections open up. It's the art of being taken by surprise. There were reports in the news and on social media tonight that every single car in Malmö, Göteborg and Stockholm had its tires deflated. In Cairo, people went to the airport and instead of checking in and jetting off on vacation, they blockaded it. All three runways. In Michigan and Beijing, people rolled banners down the sides of the tallest high risers that said "We're here! Another world is here to stay!" for the whole city to see. There were reports of hackers actually attacking and shutting off their pipelines in Rumaila and Kirkut and Lagos for days. We saw pictures from St. Petersburg and Caracas and Berlin and Madrid of people forming human chains and blocking off the highways so no one could get through! There was even a report from Schwechat district in Vienna: "We know which levers we have to pull. And we're not afraid to use it."

DINA

Here?

MIAMI

Right here.

ACHILLE

And just like that the negotiations shifted. Things that had seemed unrealistic or unfeasible yesterday suddenly seemed possible. Some

people even started talking about ‘necessity.’ Ministers held conferences, because they saw that the streets were full of determination. Now I know that resistance is like Lego or building blocks: you put one down, then another one, then another one, and another, until you have a solid foundation. Resistance has to be kept quiet. Things have to appear unconnected. It’s like the bees: their individual dances seem erratic, but together they have an astonishing power. Because in the end it was never about single-handedly turning individual valves off or forcing every drilling operation to stop. It was about being able to form opinions and stories about this topic so that people in power would feel compelled to act. We wanted to force them into a corner. So now they were standing there, and it had suddenly all become clear: what we thought of as modernity was just one possibility among many. What we realized on that cold winter’s night was that this modernity had run its course. No-one had ever really thought about the consequences or the costs or what would happen if we kept using up the finite natural resources. We threw ourselves at that oil as though the only moment that existed in human history was right here, right now, this one, single moment. In the history of this planet, they say that we humans come into existence a fraction of a second before midnight. But that places humanity– us, here, now – at the end of the timeline ,as though there were no future. But what’s going to happen at midnight? Won’t a new day start? In total darkness, illuminated by the smallest light – but there will be a new day. What we needed to do was to realize that the moment is now. We are the moment. We are the moment when this can all change. You want to know what finally convinced me? Which image finally did it for me? I have to throw that question right back at you. If you already know all of this, why haven’t you done anything?

The End of History

[We see the pictures again.]

[We zoom in real close.]

[With our measuring tools we can analyse the dust particles from oil paintings whose composition has changed over the centuries.]

[Every old master is proof of climate change.]

[Could we have foreseen it?]

[In the pictures?]

[In all the pictures that we've seen so far?]

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CLEANING CREW

We'll learn about all this stuff in the news after we wake up in the morning, put on our overalls and go to work like we do every morning. They told us that in China there are people who pollinate flowers by hand because there aren't enough bees anymore. We read about it in the papers and had to laugh while we took a break, while we ate a snack bar or drank some water. Then we'll have gone out and done our jobs. We'll use nets, gigantic, finely woven glass wool netting to fish the exhaust gases from the past worlds out of the air. We'll pass the air through a series of filters, and nuggets of carbon dioxide from past incinerations will fall to the ground like tiny stones. We'll work in neat rows. If someone misses something, someone else will catch it. It's quiet work. Teamwork. They will have told us that for every kilogram of petroleum that was burned by an engine, 2.3 kilograms of carbon dioxide were released into the air. "How can that be?" we will have asked, and we'll have wondered why the people hadn't thought about it beforehand. "The pact with fire," they will have told us, "was simply very powerful." "But...but..." we'll have replied. "Couldn't people count in those days?" But we ourselves won't know what to say to that. The pieces of carbon that we fish out of the air are collected by brigades. They walk behind us in protective suits. They carry machines which suck up all the carbon pieces. At the end of their shifts, when their vacuum bags are heavy, they go and empty them at a central collection point. It's an old refinery. The little pieces of carbon are dissolved in water and then pumped down deep into the earth using

the pipes that used to bring oil up. Now the water is pumped down into the ground, into the basalt, where the solution reacts and turn into calcium. In two years, it will have formed solid rock. We are turning Earth back into stone. We're making it heavier and heavier. At night we sometimes dream that the Earth has started to drift off course, that something's gone wrong, that nothing's changing. But in the morning we'll tell ourselves that our nets are like sails. We'll tell ourselves to unfurl our sails. We'll tell ourselves that our sails will keep the Earth on track, as long as we keep doing our jobs.

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[Some people say that we don't need fewer particles, we need more.]

[Think: solar radiation management.]

[Our atmosphere would then be full of that stuff.]

[Light would fracture differently.]

[Earth would get colder again.]

[Then what would happen to the koalas?]

[And the cherry blossom?]

[Where will these things called glaciers grow that we've only read about in books?]

[Will everything become flat, flatter, flat, black, glittering surfaces?]

[Someone sings: apocalypse or revolution...]

[In 2021 the oil and gas enterprise Shell received a ruling from a Dutch court requiring it to lower its carbon dioxide emissions.]

["By 2030, the company is required to reduce its CO₂ emission to 45% of its net emissions in 2019."]

[On a wall of a house someone has scrawled: "The revolution says: I was, I am, I will be."]

[“For the first time in history a company has been legally required to consider its contribution to the climate crisis and to radically reduce its emissions. The fossil fuel era is coming to an end.”]

[In the same year, the German Federal Supreme Court ruled that the burden of counteracting the consequences of CO² emissions may not be postponed in the belief that future generations will have more money and better technologies available to them.]

[So what does that mean?]

[It means that we cannot legally make any more withdrawals from the finite resources we have.]

[Is something beginning to happen here?]

[Slowly, but surely?]

[Is this image in any way accurate?]

[Talking of images!]

[We see a cemetery for rental bikes.]

[One for planes.]

[And one for cruise ships.]

[And what else?]

[We see a closed down gas station. In front of it there’s a child holding a man’s hand. The child is perhaps four or five years old, we can’t tell exactly. We see the child and the child asks: “What is that? What is that, Daddy?” Then we see a father who answers, “It’s the remnants of a future that we left behind us.” “Oh, OK,” the child says, and then they leave.]

[From far away we hear a voice that says that each future has an old heart.]

[“Really?”]

[“Yes.”]

[“Is this search here over?”]

[“Yes, but we will come back.”]

[Because we’re going to write the last chapter together.]

[All of us together.]

[On the roof of the gas station wild wheat has started growing, or is that oats dancing in the wind?]

[“Do you hear the roar of the polar bears and the reindeers in the gas pipelines?”]

[“Do you hear that? How it rumbles and thunders, how it groans and purrs!”]

[This movement has many voices.]

[“The future,” they yell, “demands a presence in the here and now.”]

[Nothing more, nothing less.]

[“And now?”]

[Now it begins to snow.]

[Thick flakes fall from the sky.]

[The sky here is just part of the set.]

[And stage snow is usually made of plastic.]

[But snow is really the best time of the year to find pipelines.]

[So what are you waiting for? Let’s go!]

[Close all these windows down?]

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