

I CAN ONLY LOVE, AND NOTHING ELSE ...

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By **Dirk C. Fleck**.

The first snow. The city lies stunned under the white sheet. Hamburg dreams itself under a deep blue sky to new innocence. Even the cars have to respect this, they ghost around on their toes, so to speak. The barking of a dog sounds as if it were getting lost in a wide valley. I stand on the balcony and breathe - breathe deeply and regularly. The winter wind settles on my face as if to protect me from the cold. After a while I grab my coat, hurry down the stairs and join the numerous walkers who, despite the harsh Corona measures, miss nothing. The sound of our footsteps in the harsh snow seems to magically connect us.

I drift all the way to the Innocentiapark and stand in the sun. Children packed in padded nylon suits tumble down from an icy hill like gummy bears. The mothers stand next to them and observe which of the little ones probably gets my special attention. I can't decide, there is no one...

As I stand there, wrapped in the happy shrieking of the children, I have the unmistakable feeling that I am only temporarily present in this body. I feel the shell aging, getting ready to release me again. Feels good, especially since, thanks to this gift of a winter day, I am finally back in tune with my fellow human beings. They haven't changed fundamentally, but I'm close to them again, I'm not distancing myself. At the edge of the park, an old woman is bending over a freshly poured concrete wall, looking into its pores. She suffers back pain, keeps holding her back. A concrete wall! Why doesn't she look at the bush that this wall is stepping on and whose screams can't be ignored? It does not matter, I like her in her twisted contemplation.

On the way to the Alster I meet a woman whose upright walk impresses me. She is beautiful. She meets the desirous looks of men with the thought: "I give life, but not for you, nor for you, nor for you." No one steps too close to her. I have to smile as we pass each other, she smiles back barely noticeable. I remember a book by Botho Strauß that I used to leaf through frequently, "Couples, Passersby."

Short concise observations in passing, in a café, in a theater. I don't need to read any more in the book, because I have now "worked through" most of the passages it contains myself. But there is one sentence

that I often recall: "Absolute leisure, free time, begins only when the waiting has completely disappeared."

A small man with hollow cheeks, tired eyes and a cold cigar in his mouth hangs on the arm of a stocky, fleshy woman. In passing, I hear her say imploringly, "Put yourself in my place...!" Why does that touch me? Or the one-eyed boy. Where the other eye should sit, smooth skin stretches as if it had never grown. Why doesn't he wear an eye patch? His mother averts the eyes of the oncoming people, turns them around, gratefully registers my equanimity. I sit down on a bench by the water and watch the ducks in the reeds. Here I find myself in the forecourt of silence. There an instance rules, which stifles every arising thought, before I am pulled on any side wars. This instance needs a bright day like this, only then it unfolds its full authority. I trust it. Thus I remain without desire and without any idea of myself. It is the idea of myself which permanently distorts my perception of the world.

Occasionally I look at the stream of people passing by. I like the group of female punks. Chewing gum, the girls display a certain attitude of defiance towards the well-behaved Hanseatic citizens between whom they have stumbled on this bright Sunday. On the way back to my apartment, I pass an Art Nouveau villa that I loved very much. Now it has had to surrender to a real estate shark, its facade already smashed. Other houses on the street also show their wounded teeth: apartments hanging in the air with dirty sinks and white stains on the wall where pictures once hung. Ripped-out wiring and tattered lampshades. That someone forgets the birdcage happens rather rarely. That a dusty canary jumps frantically back and forth in it, almost never.

A group of young people is approaching me. Five boys and two girls. They march towards me as a bawling, hysterically laughing front, swaying heavily in their hips. I dive through without bumping into them. Being young, folks, is certainly not a merit; you can't help it. Youth, on the other hand, is a quality. If you have it, you don't lose it. Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, said that. I made a mental note of that.

I turn back to them, just as I occasionally turn back to history. From the very beginning, people, animals and plants died away like whitecaps on the sea. Most of the persons to whom we can refer are dead. We live

from the estate of the deceased and experience ourselves in the midst of those who have died. So what are we fussing about? Home again. Evening has come. In the house across the street, someone extinguishes the candle on the piano and turns on the television. A child is running around the table. Why do I suddenly feel the need to protect people? And against whom? In view of the fact that we can be swept off this planet together at any second, the enemy images cancel themselves out, we are all dust before the wind. Collective death, the end for all, for victims AND tormentors, for the just AND the unjust, for the rich AND the poor - that is the orgasm to which history is heading.

Why do I suddenly make myself the advocate of banality, of stupidity, of the useless pastime, of the small everyday life? Quite simply: because the sun has gilded and sealed it today in an inimitable way. And because it still exists, the small everyday life. It is my home, my life. The fuse has already been lit and nothing of it will remain, but it still breathes. All misunderstandings are still hidden in it, people still lie and cheat, hate and sometimes even love. On days like these, that is enough to make peace with him. To cool the wounds I have contracted in my dealings with him so far. On days like these, I love the horror of all of us in my little street, where every evening at the time of the day's news, the reflection from the television sets breaks in the branches of the sick chestnuts. On a day like this, I can only love, and nothing else ...

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