couriers

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As time became yours and mine the power of management began to wane. It was not that the governing processes lacked variety - it was that hierarchies lost their power to persuade everyone to shrink into roles and live to rules instead of being themselves. This happened first in the persons of two women, Hana and Alfa. They were sisters.

When the story was composed Hana and Alfa were travelling across Australia re-naming everything they saw. I'm doing my best to translate this out of their language into words and events we might have recognised, back at the conference. The two women were not only illiterate, they'd never learnt to speak any words but their own. They made sounds together, like lovers. "Oooo Oooo", "Ch-Ch-Ch", each knowing what the other meant. They were closer than we are. Able to understand apparent nonsense.

Hana had a child with her and Alfa was pregnant. Usually they were awake at night and slept by day, taking new lovers at every full moon and keeping them only until their periods came. If they did. This was long after Cartesian thinking had been assigned permanantly to AI and everyone stopped worrying about should. Hana's father was also the father of her child and Alfa had slept with her brother when she became pregnant. When they made love they

smiled continuously having quelled any obligation to give themselves to men. It was pure enjoyment. They moved across the desert in cars without wheels, propelled by magnetic fields. They could almost hear the silence. They prophesied that everything they named would soon be perceived as sacred, as it had been before.

At last, having travelled through many countries and urban regions, they came to Los Angeles which they recognised as the nearest thing to home and decided to stay the night. Unbeknown to them there was a snake living there who was one of their kinspersons. Nobody knew if the snake was male or female. It came from below Hollywood and was coloured like a rainbow. Some said it had once been a queen, or a president. Perhaps it was all of these, the names and phenomena were becoming less distinct. The snake was their ally but did not know it. It was called Jojo, or some such. As Alfa felt she was about to give birth Hana took her to a motel. She found a power point by the fountain and began to cook some of the food they'd found and re-named on their travels. In fulfillment of their prophesy the food had become too sacred to be eaten and jumped out of the cooker into the water. This began to trouble and excite the snake who was undergoing a meta-crisis.

As Alfa, helped by Hana, began to give birth her waters flowed into the fountain, arousing Jojo still more. The smog cleared quite suddenly and a rain cloud, lightning flashes, and a rainbow appeared in the sky: Jojo was emerging from a previous life and unleashing weather which had not been seen in Los Angeles since before the time of the wheel, or the car. It was as if the watergates had opened. Rockets flew out in all directions, never to return. The boys whistled.

At this point the story began to falter and records were consulted. The knight shook his head. Karl Marx looked surprised. Who was going to wash the dishes?

Hana remembered what she had to say about labour, work and action, thinking that, to the contemplatives at least, it might be news. She was remembering ancient Greece, soon after men had destroyed the original freedoms and and invented new ones, exclusive to some of themselves, having first put everyone else into slavery or into domestic life. The thinkers had been trying to justify this state of affairs ever since. Some of them called it dualism, or the mind-body split, while to everyone else it became simply the problem of keeping up.

It was then that the men made the famous distinctions. Labour was seen as the process of nature, continued by slaves and women, the never-ending task of providing for bodily existence. Work was seen as the making by hand of excellent things which would endure and would provide stability and protection against natural change (and the unpredictibility of females). And action, the only residue of freedom, was limited to those men who were peers, or

heads of households, and was seen as political action between equals. Action excluded work, and labour, and consisted only of speaking or fighting in public. It was unpredictable in its effects and became the content of history, revealing the actor as an authentic person, seeking fame and immortality. Literature began as myths declined. Hmm.

The sequel was that, with the turning of time into continuous growth, nature became a machine and labour replaced work, transforming all of life into an anonymous and alienating extension of the tyrranical household. The elimination of mind and the homogenization of things. Then politics, the last fragment of freedom, got lost in the marketplace and in the universal excuse: "I only work here". Even the rulers said it at times. "We should not just blame the system, it was ourselves who let it happen" the sisters concluded as they threw away the book. It was as if everyone had got stuck in a lift. Only the unions said no. But not to this.

The sisters became excited when they saw that the snake had begun to fill the sky and they could see that their moment had come. So they began to sing their most sacred song "Menstrual Blood" and to dance to make the snake continue. The dancing brought on Hana's period, which also ran into the fountain, arousing Jojo still more. The calendar was ignored and the sisters kept smiling. Protestants closed their eyes and even catholics began to worry. Everyone could see that it was a

time of change, not of regularity. The storyteller began to laugh, remembering what he had run away from. "What's happened to humanism?" he thought "and what's happened to truth?" He couldn't forget his beginnings, on the narrow path and in the solitary bathroom. But the young ones began to applaud. Had somebody found a way to shake the system, or was it something more constructive? Or even conservative. No need to pretend.

There could of course be other versions. Some might see it as a first attempt and wonder why they did it. And what will the freedom fighters think, not to mention the guardians of safety? The old foxes may be wagging their heads, or perhaps their tails. "It's hard to know where to step, or to stop" they said "This could be the exhaustion of the masculine." Confusion prevailed but a new order stood preformed within. There's not much continuity as yet. It used to be a girl but now it's part of the fabric. In what they call the artificial church.

Not having read any of this, but filled with a sense of theatre without audience, the sisters returned to their motel room. Hana to continue giving birth and Alfa to continue her period. They were not representing anyone else or following a pattern. Realism was over and so was apparent democracy.

At this point, as they were both shedding blood and becoming a little ecstatic, Jojo came into the room and swallowed them and

their children alive. Inside his or her body they were carried up into the sky. Eros was jealous but Psyche just nodded. Descartes was astounded. The computers continued undisturbed and production didn't falter. Nothing could upset the system now that automation and homeostasis had finally been realised. The peace of the world cannot extend beyond that. Meaning, and decision-making had come to a stop. Synchrony was about to be established and chance processes were becoming a thing of the past. There were loud noises in the street for the fighting hadn't stopped, perhaps it never would. The committee system would never be the same again, or even exist. No more work. Thinkers turned to better things. The grey tables became colourful.

"What is the point of all this?" the old gentleman asked. It started in the attempt to reverse a reversal. The reversal of westernism. The primacy of reason. The displacement of imagination. But these words came from the old language. William Blake knew that and was obliged to invent. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. The genders became confused. Hana and Alfa were inside the snake just as the snake was inside the two of them. It became erect like a tree, its head stretching high into the clouds. Inside it the sisters were still active, continuing to to re-name everything that could be seen below them and speaking sacred words in the voice of the snake and of thunder and through the sattellites. Everyone could join in this new conversation which inaugurated the

solidarity of persons in all nations despite linguistic differences. And real ones. It was like life in a living book. Or writing of writing.

The sisters and their children now began an alternating movement between life and death, or between idea and reality, as they said in academia. The snake crashed down to the earth when it had to admit to the old ones the crime of having eaten its own kin. Form became content. Reality was disturbed by this fall creating spaces for new cultures and rituals. The sisters and children were apparently killed, their bones being smashed inside the serpent's body. But Jojo then regurgitated them inside the domain of reason where the irritation would soon revive them. Then they were swallowed again and finally spewed out as seeds of time. You will find their presence in every thought and every action.

There's nothing new in this. I learnt much of it from Chris Knight in his version of the story of the Wawilak sisters in "Lévi-Strauss and the Dragon: Mythologiques Reconsidered in the Light of an Australian Aboriginal Myth", Man, number 18, 21-50, 1983. The remarks about labour, work and action are adapted from from Hannah Arendt's book "The Human Condition", University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1958, still in print, and to me the best book to be found on the nature of both action and modern life. There's more to them than this, it's just a pretext. The sisters danced in turns. The snake,

smelling blood, came forward without hesitation. The clocks went back to nature. And the Man? "It's the changes that interest me" he said "and the continuities. There's no harm in re-telling old stories. They'll surely change in the process. Everything will." His eyes still twinkled but had he understood? His position was ambiguous.

I haven't had a chance to thank the people whose story this was or to ask the sisters. But, as an old Aboriginal woman told the anthroplogist, the snake woman emerged from under the ground and "made our feet, cut fingers for us, made our eyes for seeing with, made our heads, made anger and peace for us, made our belly/intestines, gave us energy to move about - made us people". Men and women. There's more to come. I hope they'll forgive.

My thanks to Annetta Pedretti for many of the thoughts and for encouraging me to attempt a story.

("Radio Plays", the paper presented at the conference, was a sampling of radio broadcasts from several channels, plus words and sounds from Hannah Arendt and others. I could not see how to turn it into a written paper. Hence this.)

→ conference-book:
discussion "Radio Plays" p. 121-142
participation p. 16, 39, 96-102, 183