

Dear I and A,

I have been meaning to write to you both for a while, but mundane reasons have kept me from doing so. Not until the moment I shifted my location east did it become impossible to postpone this matter further. I believe you have never met, though you are both crossing paths perhaps on a weekly basis.

The area of Esposizione Universale di Roma was intended as a showcase during the World Expo in 1942, but the war changed both the attention of the fascist system and the grandiose plans to show the world that the future was filled with straight lines and efficiency. Today the area carries the name EUR, and as an integrated part of Rome it still functions as a perfect backdrop for different realities. I am still struggling with the pronunciation of EUR: it seems to be a rolling sound stuck in my throat.

For different reasons, you both have strong connections to this historical place, which was conceived to be a site without history by architects commissioned by Mussolini. Here the streets are grids and the white shades of rationalist architecture create sharp corners when the sun strikes the right angle. On Sundays there is hardly a person or car in sight when wandering the empty streets. Except at the famous Caffé Palombini, where you, A, are to be found, or the miniature version of Saint Peter's Basilica located on top of a hill in EUR—where you, I, are to be found together with the large Filipino community.

I am writing to you from Warsaw, and being in a post-totalitarian state of mind, in a city built rapidly on ruins after a damaging war, it all came back with urgency. At dusk, whilst wandering the streets of the reconstructed old city of Warsaw—I don't know if you have been there, but it is right at the edge of where the Warsaw Ghetto

was located in 1940–43—the sound of some of your words came back to me:
shadows, community, periphery, totality.

The past acts as a wall, which prevents the present from entering the life's time; or, if it filters in, it is transformed immediately into terms of the past. Everything she sees reminds her of what she can no longer see; and what she is reminded of becomes the essential experience, not what she sees.

A: You told me that you don't believe in the democratic system while we were walking around in the area of Esposizione Universale di Roma. You casually mentioned things were more straightforward in the times of a dictator, and that you appreciated efficiency. You looked content when you walked around the area where you were born.

I: You mentioned how for twenty-five years, since the time you migrated to Italy, you have spent every day working in EUR. You described how you arrived as a tourist in Italy and never left.

It was about the same time that the community began to hold ceremonies in the park near the lake without permission, and only much later that the church agreed to host your ceremonies.

Somehow both your Sunday activities make me think of the paths we create for ourselves and make me wonder if you would ever consider looking for each other in the different locations? Would it make sense at all? Being here in Warsaw somehow urges me to question the notions of past, present, and future tense, particularly in relation to my own perception.

The layering of history I am walking upon in the streets of the rise and fall of a totalitarian ideology.

How people insisted on having the cultural palace—a symbol of starvation and Stalinism—brought down after the fall of communism, to demolish the violence of its hated symbolic value, and how it still stands whilst hundreds of thousands are migrating from Poland in order to pursue another sort of independence, although many end up being stuck. The flow and ebb of people creating new paths for themselves while the outlines of the frontiers are being drawn harder and harder in order to prevent the appearance of these new paths. The first- and second-class compartments enforced in trains, etc., remind us of a difference—the one that is produced when you legitimately enter either of those compartments. There were no compartments when leaving the Warsaw Ghetto at the time when the World Expo of 1942 was intended to open and when dictators were in charge. So it made me wonder what you, A, meant when you said that you like the idea of a one-party system. Couldn't it be too efficient?

I: You said that Italian employees like the Filipinos better, since they are hardworking and honest, and you didn't mind going along with that perception. You simply want to be treated well—so your future could be secured. You reluctantly mentioned the future, which somehow had become the present and the past, while you were working away, and you had almost forgotten that you wanted to return to your origin.

This brought me to think of something, A, casually mentioned during our walk. That EUR in many ways represents a past stuck in a past; every attempt to change its architecture or its path fails. The place without history somehow has become the

site of a contested fascist history—till this day very present as an ideology that seeps through Europe as a revival of something that should have been abandoned, but not forgotten. Instead, it was right there in front of us: a group of young neo-fascists right next to the statue of Mussolini that has been kept since the time of the utopian vision.

It may sound strange to bring up these issues, and it is hard to put into writing why I want the two of you to cross paths—at least through this letter.

Kind regards,

M