

LITERATURA LITERATURE

SOMEWHERE

by Paloma Vidal

Translated from the Portuguese

by Jordan B. Jones¹

Se llega a un lugar sin haber partido de otro, sin llegar.

[You get to a place without having left another, without arriving.]

Silvina Ocampo

LOS ANGELES

I

Autumn was beginning to show its colors in the northern hemisphere when my flight landed in the city, at 10:05. I passed through immigration without any problems, showing my student visa, and rescued my luggage from one of the dozens of carousels at arrivals. All I had left to do was look for a place to sit through the four hours that remained before M's arrival.

Pushing the cart with my giant blue bag, I move toward an attendant outside the concourse: I'm waiting for someone who arrives on American Airlines flight 3455. Where could I find a café? There's nothing around here, the man responds, smiling.

¹ Translator's Note: Although the vast majority of this book's original text is in Portuguese, the author periodically includes English and Spanish phrases in her prose. Text that is in English in the original is included here, *italicized and in this sans serif font (Arial)*, so as to distinguish my translation from Vidal's English prose. Text that is in Spanish in the original appears in italics.

What about chairs? Also nothing. You could use one of those benches for the handicapped, he suggests, but you'll have to get up if someone asks you to. *That's the deal?* I plow forward with my cart on the outside of the concourse, narrowly avoiding other recently-arrived passengers, and I finally find some chairs in the next terminal over, where I lie down and observe my neighbors until I fall asleep: two Asian girls talking excitedly in their language, a guy, lying down like me, glued to his bag, two tall black men, standing up, with their legs spread wide, holding signs with the names of passengers. I can't understand the voice coming from the loud speaker. Is it English?

When I wake up, M's plane has already emptied. I look for him in vain. The concourses are packed. People come and go, bumping into each other, trying to find their carousel so they can get their things and—as quickly as possible—leave the airport that makes a point of pushing them out. Outside, the taxi and van lines are long. I don't see him in any of them. I think, none of this would be happening if we had traveled on the same flight, and I anticipate the mutual blame: from him, because I got ahead of myself and bought a ticket before we even knew we were going; from me, because he didn't get his until the last minute. I come back with my cart to my terminal, hoping that M will have gone to meet me there, guided by the number that I scribbled on a piece of paper before departing. I come across the attendant from earlier, who looks at me but doesn't recognize me. I can't believe that we're already lost before we've even left the airport. I don't want to believe it: if I get carried away, by looking back I'll see the connection between the many signs that were invisible before and that indicated what only now, alone in the city, I'm able to comprehend. The decision to come on separate flights will seem to me like the first misstep. What's worse, the fact that there weren't two seats on the same flight will seem like an omen that I wasn't able to identify but that called into question the whole point of the journey. The shock of that sudden recollection paralyzes my thinking: we had planned to meet at the car rental place. When I arrive, he's there, drinking coffee and reading the *Los Angeles Times*.

When he hears my voice, M lowers the paper and smiles. Then he sets it on the ground, gets up, comes toward me and hugs me, as if he had anticipated the mix-up, which I don't mention so I don't lose the chance of having a fresh start. We're here. It worked. Soon, we'll be crossing the city. What we'll see will be much like a

scene where the boundaries between reality and fiction melt away. My imagination won't have been the only one at work here, which is where the feeling comes that I've already seen everything in another place, far away from here. Slowly driving the white car we rented, which is huge despite being the cheapest one, he too seems like he's fresh out of a movie, with the smile of someone who's thinking the unthinkable. A smile that will distance him from me and will make me open the window and open myself up to the transparent scenery of the city, seducing me with a false familiarity of low homes and palm trees, familiar stores and brands, long avenues under a perfectly blue sky. I'll let it seduce me with its movielike geometry, abandoning the troubling impression of the airport in favor of a sense of recognition that will comfort me in the moment.

Do you really want to be here?

On the TV in the room we rented in the middle of the city, dozens of sales channels offer useless products. Dozens of news channels, all talking about the same thing in the same way: the war in Iraq, our casualties in Iraq, how to get out of Iraq. The approach seems unreal. *Iraq War* blinks on the screen like the title of a new film. What follows is a type of trailer, the same on every channel, with the same images and the same captions. When I turn off the TV, I'm exhausted, but I can't close my eyes.

Every day during the first week, we go up and down Wilshire Boulevard, which goes from downtown to the ocean, right by Westwood, where the university is. Kilometers along an avenue that, especially on the way back, seems to have no end. We spend the entire day in a nomadic state, from the university to some apartment advertised on the internet, then to a bar, back to the university, then to the bank, to try to open an account, another apartment, but nothing livable for the price we're able to pay.

An old man greets us at the gate of a three-story building that looks like a house, with a little garden in the entry that, although neglected, promises an inviting interior. We follow the man to a door at the end of a hallway, which opens to reveal a dark square, with a high window on the right-hand wall; on the left side, a door to the bathroom; at the back, a counter with a sink and a portable, two-burner stove. The contrast with the bright exterior makes the environment even more gloomy. We thank the old man and leave with our heads down.

We speak little, but we're united in our search and in our determination to not give in to discouragement. M says things like, "that's how it goes." Other times, I'm the one who makes the encouraging comment that gives us the extra energy to keep looking, climbing and descending the campus stairs, still disoriented, without knowing if the sequence of our errands will result in any apparent success today. We go back to our room exhausted, after spending more than an hour on the avenue that

cuts through the city. It's only months later, while riding in a car with a friend, that we'll begin to understand that in Los Angeles the avenues aren't really thoroughfares; to get around, you use the *freeways*, which form a map overlaid on the city, a map of their own, with its entrances and exits that have a merely tangential relationship with the grid plan, the remnants of a city in which sidewalks still made some sense.

Downtown?, an acquaintance from Brazil asks when we talk over the phone, I'll be right there to pick you up. The rescue team never arrives.

During our first sightseeing tour, through the busy streets of Santa Monica, very close to the beach, we entered a bookstore on 2nd Street, a welcoming place, curiously protected from the hubbub about it, as if it had been there much earlier, in a time in which there weren't so many stores, so many pedestrians, so much traffic, and this antiquity allowed it to stay separate; to maintain, for example, its proportions, much smaller than those of the big chain bookstores, with only one floor and few sections. It was in the *Critical theory* section that I found a *paperback* edition of *One-Way Street*, a book with a light green cover, with a twenty-page introduction by Susan Sontag, which I carried around indecisively from one section to another for the half hour that we spent in the store until I convinced myself that I actually wanted it. I left with a small Wallace Stevens collection.

When I got to my room, I put the book on the bed, but I didn't open it that night, thinking it wasn't exactly what I should read in that moment. Instead, I should go to the library and methodically start my research, an idea which filled me with an enveloping anxiety connected to other projects that had never been finished. But Benjamin's book, its shape, its composition, with innumerable subtitles followed by small one- or two-page sections, comforted me with the possibility of other methods.

If it's up to Los Angeles, our English will eternally stay as it is: a basic, Latinized, transitory language.

I realize that I don't have my own space on the outside, my thoughts don't belong to me. Only, another weekend has come and gone and we still don't have the prospect of

finding an apartment in the next few days, so my mind will continue to float around in its own confusion, unable to concentrate on any of the readings I present to it after a first trip to the library. We have already exhausted the list of ads with discouraging phone calls and useless visits. The long trips to and from the university have become a silent torture. Each day we are massacred by the city, which makes us pay for our ignorance with a slow and grinding journey. My only contact with it is through the car window, a small, private, moving screen. I watch a long sequence in which the city shows its apparent monotony—a single street, from one end to the other. Supposedly, anyone could walk around anywhere, but no: there are the Wilshire and Beverly Drive pedestrians, the Wilshire and Fairfax pedestrians, the Wilshire and La Brea ones, and the Wilshire and Western ones. As we come closer to downtown, everything gets less homogenous: blacks, Asians, Arabs, the new buildings and the old dilapidated ones, the department stores and the museum, empty lots, bicycles and cars. From one end of the boulevard to the other, the differences are apparent, but everything passes by seamlessly, as if one thing led naturally to the other.

Each time they get to their room she thinks about how it would be impossible to do this without him. How could she face the claustrophobic room, with its old floral curtains and a double bed in the center of the carpeted rectangle? Before 9:00 p.m. they are both squeezed into it. She remembers when she was a girl and would sometimes go all afternoon without getting up, shut away from the world in a space that was only hers, able to metamorphose infinitely. She asks herself if she has lost the ability to bear isolation, but she admits that even back then she could only bear it because in the distance she could hear the noise of the dishes from the kitchen or because a shadow under the door betrayed someone in the hall.

Sometimes he stays awake until late. She doesn't know how he spends his time, but nothing comforts her more than to think that his gaze sometimes rests on her while she's sleeping. To what degree this feeling is reciprocated is a question: how much does he also need her? Would he be able to do this alone? She doesn't ask. She obeys him when he asks her to undress, while he does the same. Under the covers

they are two naked bodies and the world becomes infinitesimal. After the sex, he embraces her with his whole body, as if he wanted to hold her within himself. And suddenly he gets up with a mumbled excuse, shattering the scene with a forced detachment.

Is our journey yet another version of the American dream?

The detachment is overwhelming. I write emails to friends describing events, but everything sounds fake. Behind each phrase there is a question that I am unable to answer. A question mark at the end of every sentence would be more appropriate; or an abstract sketch: a straight line that at some point transforms into a spiral until it forms the shape of two upside-down letters.

You dream that you just arrived in Los Angeles. It's midday and you walk through the streets around the hotel, close to what they call the *Financial District*. Without realizing it, you have crossed several blocks and are now between the skyscrapers in the financial district. Even though it's lunchtime, the streets are practically deserted. You feel like you're in some futuristic scene. At any moment, a flying car might appear between the buildings. Exactly, a flying car, a metallic blue car, the size of a Beetle and also rounded, like the one that is flying over your head. You aren't scared, but you think it's incredible that it hasn't run into any of the buildings. As soon as you think this, you see a huge tower of black smoke ahead, probably caused by the impact of the vehicle. Surprisingly, the building that was hit does not fall, it just leans a little to the left, allowing you to see another part of the city behind it, a part you didn't know existed, with signs in some Asian language.

"Here's the deal: Los Angeles is not an easy place to grasp. It doesn't feel like any city you've ever known. It's vast and amorphous, with no clearly defined center. But the key to understanding—and appreciating—the place is to throw out the notion that it's a city at all." It was on the first page of the guidebook. How did I not see it?

I started reading *One-Way Street* without skipping Susan Sontag's introduction. After a few paragraphs that describe pictures of Benjamin from the end of the 20s to the end of the 30s, she states: "*He was what the French called un triste.*" I'm hooked. The short phrase, the two languages, the promise of a text that is more subjective than critical, or better, a text in which subjectivity and criticism are the same because it's understood that life and work are the same. She talks about this later, when describing Benjamin's obsession with working nonstop, totally immersed in what he does. She mentions countless notebooks, letters, journals. Everything becomes writing, even dreams—writing capable of synthesizing experience.

Exactly two weeks after our arrival, we finally get an apartment with the help of a Colombian classmate who tells us about an opening in her building, two blocks from the bus stop that will take us to Wilshire and Westwood, where we can catch a shuttle across campus. Perfect, I tell her when she shows me the spot on the map.

We reverse the route, guided by her, until we come to a deserted street with houses and low buildings, all more or less neglected, with peeling paint and garbage bags in the doorway. We walk to a four-story building with green balconies, imitating a colonial style that, together with the other, more solemn buildings on the block, creates a heterogeneity unique to the city. As we pass through the glass door leading to the street, we're surprised with an inner courtyard, with several apartments looking

out on it. But not our apartment which, luckily, is on the outside and has a view of the street.

It's a studio, well-lit despite the small rectangular windows near the roof, with beige carpet that's reasonably clean, and recently painted. There's no furniture, except what's in the kitchen, separated from everything else by a counter. We buy a bed and a desk from a student who is returning home. Over the weekend, we go to Target, taking advantage of our last days with the rental car. I put a pot, a frying pan, four plates, four cups, some silverware and a few other basic kitchen utensils in the cart. I also get a set of striped placemats. M goes to explore the rest of the store, while I wander from aisle to aisle, waiting for a revelation, but everything I see seems useless and I end up going to the register without getting anything else. M arrives a few minutes later, smiling and carrying a beach chair.

I never shared my mother's desire to visit new places. Why travel? Where my mother saw a challenge, for me there was only retreat; people I'd never meet, languages I didn't understand, hazy landscapes. I asked M and he responded, soberly: we're not traveling, we're moving.

You dream about your brother. You're in a city that is not Rio. Nor is it Los Angeles. You walk down the street, talking about one of his projects, that's never defined. You decide to enter a store. It's a bookstore, with shelves up to the ceiling and ladders that move along rails, allowing access to the books on the highest shelves. Your brother approaches a clerk. You can't hear the conversation between the two. You come closer, but the words continue to be inaudible. The clerk disappears. He returns with a book, which he gives to your brother, who hides it, saying you won't understand. You insist. First you're joking, then you're serious. You try to take the book from him. You start to shout. You're on the brink of tears. At this point, you know it will be

impossible to find out what it's about because you're already between sleep and wakefulness. The dream breaks off and you wake with a start.

When he found me frozen at the bus stop that will take me to the university, the doorman was taken aback: what are you doing there? The answer was so obvious that he didn't even give me time to say it, amending his question with the admission that he had never ridden on a bus in Los Angeles. He is from Tennessee and brought his car. He lived in it for three weeks before finding this job at the apartment complex. That is surprising, I say. He came to Los Angeles to be an actor and made it into a few commercials, but he started seeing an Ecuadorian who took his head out of the clouds. He laughs with his perfectly white smile. I remember that when she recommended the apartment to me one of the first pros my Colombian classmate mentioned was that the doorman looks like a Hollywood actor. I don't mention this to the doorman, who keeps talking about how practical his Ecuadorian girlfriend is and how she did away with his dreams of stardom. The conversation is interrupted with the arrival of the bus. I get on it and he smiles at me through the window, waving as if he were saying goodbye to someone who's going to cross the ocean.

There are few people on the bus, *as usual*. A group of teenagers talks and laughs. Words in Spanish break the rhythm of the phrases, producing a studied dissonance. More than a conversation, it's a duel. Two girls and two boys, sitting side by side, provoke each other and have fun. The occasional interference of the other language is part of the allurements. One of the boys says "*te fuiste, te fuiste*" and the girls laugh, responding raucously in English.

On the last row, a beggar woman dressed in various layers of clothing carries a pile of objects, cloths, and provisions in a folding shopping cart. There are various *homeless* people like her in the areas around our apartment. Our Colombian neighbor told us that they're war veterans, people who couldn't fit in again when they returned; they couldn't find a job or weren't taken in by their families or maybe decided to distance themselves from a world in which they no longer belong. Some talk to themselves, like this lady, who alternates with high and low-pitched words

about the price of fares. The majority are black and speak an English full of slang that I don't understand well.

Seated a few rows ahead of the woman, I listen carefully to her monologue, but I'm able to pick up little. She keeps talking about the price of fares; repeats several times "*five dollars*" with resentment, and then says "*I'm an old woman.*" She punctuates her phrases by banging on the glass with her fist. Each time she does, the driver complains, saying "*that's enough.*" She isn't fazed. She doesn't hear, or pretends she doesn't hear. The situation never becomes tense. There seems to be an agreement: she won't hit very hard, and he won't yell. The other passengers don't interfere. The teenagers continue talking and in a few moments their voices drown out the woman's.

Through the reflection in the window, I can watch her without being seen. She's a thin woman whose age is unclear, maybe 50, 60, 65. Even in her voice it's difficult to determine her age. The impression is of several people in one, many women in one body, of differing ages, just as the clothes she uses probably are, from different places. It's the first time I see her on this route. I take this bus every morning to go to the university and I come back in the afternoon. As the cityscape (which I'm learning to recognize) passes by my window, I take part in this temporary microcosm like a living statue.

Rio is a shadow that I sometimes see pass by, like a ship flying over the city. The points of comparison are few, just the beach actually, which is still very different, but I feel tempted to impose one geography on the other as if to measure the degree of my displacement or to force myself to a needed adaptation. I'm here because I want to be, I repeat.

To follow the news, there was a whole new language to be learned: *cluster munition, duds, decapitation attack, collateral damage, civilian casualties*. A report by the Human Rights Watch on the internet explains that the term “*casualty*” refers to both the dead and the injured; they are the fatalities, but also any victim. It also clarifies that a bomb can break into thousands of mini-bombs that explode, devastating everything around them, or burrow into the soil, ready to explode later. The report talks about the laws of war that are often disregarded: people are used as human shields; electric company buildings are devastated by cluster bombs. There’s a reading of maps, graphics, and aerial photos to be done. A whole territory marked by deadly signs to be perceived. The valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates are combat areas on which triangles, circles with a dot in the middle, and little crosses are drawn, to indicate aerial attacks, the location of artillery, and affected areas. There are no pictures.

On the day of her departure, she woke up much earlier than was necessary, with nausea that started during her sleep, as if provoked by a dream that she was unable to recall later. Well before the taxi’s arrival she had everything ready, with the obsession that takes control of her in these moments in which a much-anticipated date comes closer. She had tried to take advantage of the trip to put her life in order, so she had spent the whole week arranging papers, pictures, books, and clothes in labeled boxes that she then took to her parents’ house. The precise order of things momentarily left her in a state of extreme automatism, in which her thoughts were consumed by lists. Everything seemed to be ready well in advance, but she still gnawed on the corners of her fingers, seated in the room waiting for the time to pass, with the feeling that she had left something undone. She could have gone to the phone and called her parents and brother. She could have said the words they desperately hoped for in that moment, but no: she deliberately refused to carry out the ritual. With her bags packed, she wished she could close her eyes and disappear.

You dream you're in Rio. You're walking down a familiar street at night. You recognize your building, even though it looks nothing like the real one. The rest is totally strange, but you're not worried—on the contrary. You feel that, despite having never seen these buildings before, they are part of a familiar scene for you, perhaps from some other city, some other street that you walked along one day. You say this to M, who walks by your side: I know this place, but I don't know where from.

I realize that I'm trying to create a domestic circuit for myself in the city, contradicting the evidence that my neighborhood isn't a neighborhood. I celebrate each new discovery as a small victory over the sprawl of the city. I already know where to find a dry cleaner, a mechanic, a jeweler; four blocks from the house, a stationery store; on a street behind the grocery store, a glass shop; going down the big avenue to the left, a costume store. A costume store? What do you want a costume store for? M asks. It doesn't matter. What matters is the discovery, as if the promise of a fulfilled need could briefly rescue me from my state of isolation. If I need it, I already know where it is. It's a path drawn between two points that previously had no connection at all.

You think we'll manage to stay?

This time objectivity won the match. I knew enough to pack what was absolutely necessary and distribute the rest among my friends: my bed in the Flamengo neighborhood, a dresser in Humaitá, my table and chairs in Méier. My house, spread across the city, doesn't belong to me anymore.

You dream about your brother again. Is it him? Yes, it's him. Very small, newly born, in a blue stroller that looks more like a tub. You rock the stroller back and forth down a dimly-lit hallway. You sing a lullaby that in the dream seems so clear, so obvious, but that even with all the concentration in the world you can't recall upon waking. It will have disappeared into some nook of your memory, if it ever existed at all. It will leave only a silent image of the baby being rocked to sleep.

During one of my first trips to the university, I was approached by an Asian girl who smiled as if she knew me. I was embarrassed when she told me we had already met. I could have confused her with any of the many other Asians walking around campus. She didn't seem to mind my confusion and kept talking, identifying herself with a smile, *soy coreana*, in Spanish that was correct and at the same time confusing. Although she pronounced the words perfectly, there was something in the structure of her phrases that made comprehension difficult, something odd that at the time reminded me of electronic translation programs.

Estudiamos lo mismo, she stated, and began to explain what her dissertation was about. She went off about the fragmented postmodern subject and the confined spaces of postmodernity; about the end of utopia, about Baudrillard, Lyotard and several other authors, some of which I'd never heard of; then she transitioned to a Chilean author, Eltit, and then she talked about her latest book, how she had liked it, or not liked it, I didn't quite understand, and then she went on about the earlier book and another one, from even earlier. It was a calm discourse, even halting—or, better, a discourse with gaps that she filled with a gentle smile before returning to her explanation, although not necessarily from where she had left off.

As she spoke, I tried to identify what it was that kept me from understanding her phrases completely. Carried away by this perplexity, I was lost when she suddenly stopped speaking, still smiling and looking into my eyes, not sure if she awaited some comment about what she had just said. I think I said it sounded interesting, trying to be nice to one of the first people who had decided to make contact with me that went beyond perfunctory greetings, and trying to disguise the difficulty of continuing the conversation from the point where she had left it. I would have liked to ask where she came from, how she wound up at this university, where she learned Spanish, but I ended up just asking her name. The girl pronounced three incomprehensible syllables and then we were both silent. To my relief, after a few seconds, she added: *me puedes llamar Luci*.

What did you expect?

A month and a half after our first visit to the bookstore on 2nd Street, we returned there, to find the door locked with a large padlock and the store completely empty. I don't know precisely how many minutes we stood there, without saying a word, in front of the big sign: *for rent*.

In the dream, Los Angeles is deserted. It takes a while for you to realize that what you see is not the habitual empty streets, but ruins. You recognize the boulevard you're walking along: it's Wilshire. There isn't a single car. No pedestrians. As you round a corner, you're on your street. Your building is there, but the door is locked and you don't have the key. You walk around back and find your window on the back side of the building. It's open. With some effort, you manage to climb the wall and enter. Everything is in its place, but there's no one in the bed. Where did M go at this hour? Then you realize what's happening: you're dead. It's a flash, but the thought is enough to plunge you into a terrible state. You wake up. Sitting on the edge of the bed, you can't separate yourself from the feeling of unreality: Los Angeles had transformed into a ghost city.

Our Colombian neighbor bought a cat, despite the rule against having pets in the building.

When I answered the phone, I realized that, beginning a long time ago, my mom's voice didn't sound very happy. She told me that she had been researching the city on the internet and had discovered a museum, on the top of a hill, unmistakable. It's an important collection. *¿Cómo puede ser que no hayan ido?* They've told me about it, Mom, but without a car it's tricky. *¿No viven cerca de la universidad?* We do live close, relatively. I try to explain that Los Angeles isn't like that, that references are different—close, far, what does that mean when distances aren't measured in blocks but in miles? The deserted streets intimidate, as if by walking down them we were doing something forbidden. Distances seem greater than they are. I tell her that soon after we moved to the apartment I wanted to buy a lamp and I was sure I had seen a store on an avenue close by. I decided to walk there, but on my way there I began to think I had made a mistake, that it wasn't actually that close, and I asked a girl who was walking her dog whether the avenue was really in that direction. You're going to walk? It was only three blocks away, but the girl only knew enough to say it was *further down*, get it?

My mom insists: she repeats the details of what she read, how it's one-of-a-kind, an important collection, an architectural landmark. There are film screenings, exhibits, workshops. There's even a library and a reading room. *¿Qué hacen los fines de semana?* The question lingers in the silence and after a few minutes I tell her I'll go, I'll go, yes, don't worry. As I hang up, I look around and the apartment seems like a cell. In just two months, we're situated, doing well, with everything we need. Beyond what we bought at Target, we've acquired little: the lamp, bought in a store that actually did exist; a coffee machine, that reigns alone on the kitchen counter; a poster of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which M found in a store close to the university. We go from home to the library, from the library back home. The city has quickly turned into a backdrop. It's as if it didn't exist and its erasure sustains us in the task we came to complete.

I verify this with the laziness that permeates our Sundays. M is reading a book, seated in the beach chair. I stand in one corner of the room, fixed, waiting for him to raise his head to rouse me from inertia. He finally looks at me and asks what we're having for lunch. I don't respond and he asks again. I say I don't know and he goes back to his book. I remain standing, now without waiting for anything, letting inertia do its work of emptying. I let my mind become totally blank, fixed on some point in space. From this void, I manage to muster the will to go to the desk and get my guidebook to double check what my mom said about the museum. Theoretically, if it were another city, I could walk there. I see on the map that it's a straight line, but in this city what does a straight line between one point and another mean? There's no telling how many overpasses, avenues that are impossible to cross, and streets with no sidewalk there are between my apartment and the museum's entrance.

With my back to M, I announce that I'm going to the Getty Center. Where? he asks in disbelief. It's a straight shot to the Getty Center, I say, knowing that it's an imaginary line that I'll have to forge. After announcing my decision, I feel more ready to face it. It's 10a.m. I'll get there in time for lunch. M declines my invitation, and I prefer not to waste my energy (which could prove at any time to be less powerful than I thought) trying to convince him. I leave a few minutes later wearing a backpack, and I buy a bottle of water at the Subway nearby. Americans always carry water with them, as if they were ready to cross the desert. Suddenly, I'm infected with the excitement of

these people that love tennis shoes and shorts, an explorer *look* that represents a spiritual state between curiosity and ignorance, boldness and naivete.

I go up Sepulveda Boulevard, headed north. It's totally empty, except for the cars, which are fancier in this part of town, close to Brentwood and Bel Air. The sun heats up a lot, despite the time of year. I'm wearing a thick jacket and pants, which makes me sweat, but I'll be cold if I'm just in my T-shirt. My socks are also too thick, which bothers me. I regret having gone out dressed like this. I think that it was a form of self-boycotting, which I need to overcome now without getting discouraged. I can't waste energy berating myself. I need that energy to walk along the 405, with no shade, no sidewalk, and cars passing by alarmingly close. I step firmly on the ground and quicken my march, as if obeying some external order.

A few dozen meters later, I'm convinced that I'm undertaking a futile quest, personifying the city, transforming it into a being that I need to conquer, linking it to the image of a lifestyle that I should fight against, despite admitting that I am fully capable of adapting to it. It's probably for this reason, understanding that in the end it's very easy to belong, using a regimented routine, that I suddenly feel the need to fight myself through this bodily struggle that is the walk to the Getty Center; a struggle that I will lose, with my excitement ebbing and my energy waning. With each step I become more discouraged, not so much because of the path I've followed but because I feel that everything around me is hostile. I shouldn't be there. I continue for a few more meters, until I reach an intersection, and I sit on the curb.

Surrounded by the sound of car engines, I give in to my insignificance and to the fatigue I anticipate as I retrace my steps, with no energy, not having seen the museum recommended by my mom, not having eaten lunch, and not having any water in my little bottle, which ran out sooner than expected. My body hurts. I'm exhausted. I feel like a fool. I want to stay there, waiting for somebody to rescue me. But who? Who will see me from their speeding car? M is far away, shut up in the apartment. If he knew the state I was in he would certainly come save me, with an ironic smile stamped on his face. Maybe he'd find me unconscious at the deserted intersection. Dead, even. I imagine myself dying stupidly in this city. Suddenly I don't understand why I didn't stay with him on this Sunday that promised to be so relaxing—another Sunday, we could make pasta, watch a DVD on the computer.

I remember my mother and calm down; I realize that I needed to make some sense of that interest, of the distance that separates us—to find a path in the city that corresponds to that voice. I also realize that I have failed. I'm paralyzed in the middle of the path and now I'll have to take that path back. As I think about the route I just took for nothing, I want to cry. A bus passes, headed in the direction of where the museum should be. A bus that's almost empty, as always. I might be able to take that bus. It's possible that there's a bus stop and that it's not too far away. Maybe another three hundred meters. With a final effort, I could walk there and wait for the bus. It's also possible that it might take me to the museum's front door, on Getty Center Drive, so that from there I could take the little clear electric train up to the top of the hill in Brentwood, feeling like a conqueror whose reward is the brilliant view of an infinite city.

Fonte: Paloma Vidal. *Algum lugar*. Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2009.