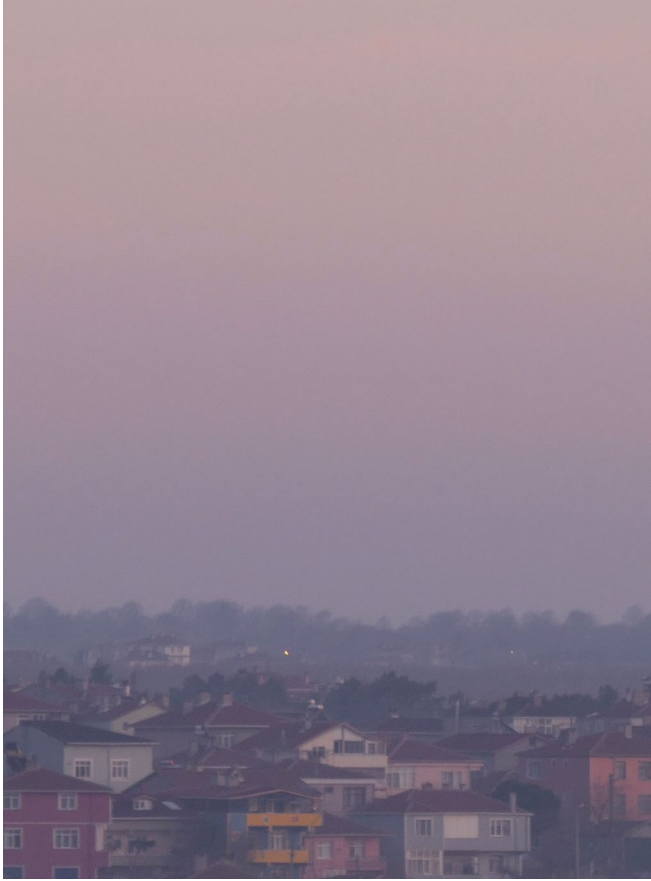




*Weqtê weku
cûne ser malê*

Ibrahim Kurt



Wegtê weku cûne ser malê
When they went home

Ibrahim Kurt

Weqtê weku cûne ser malê

*“Goya ku di feslê nûbibarî
Her yek bi meqameki dîkalîn”*



Onlar eve gittikleri zaman,

*“Sanki ilkbahar mevsiminde,
her biri bir makamda sızlıyordu.”*

(Xanî, 1695/2010, p.185)

When they went home,

“As if in the spring time,
Each of them were sobbing in a certain tune.”

When they went home; sleepwalking from Ağrı to Ankara

In some circles, sleepwalking is referred to as ‘a type of sleep disorder’.

Some mornings, when I was young, my family would tell me that I had been sleepwalking — wandering around the house, pacing from one side of the living room to the other without getting tired or bored — and that sometimes I would go into the kitchen and move the plates and pans while asleep. These moments would strike me as funny, or I would smile because they were told in a light manner. The structure of these recollections may have different details in my mind, just like the way I sleepwalk through the kitchen and move things around, the structure of these moments I return to are designed differently each time I remember them. Maybe I design those moments differently in time within each return.

“So why do people remember things? Is it to get at the truth? For the sake of justice? To let go and forget? Because they realize they were part of some monumental event? Or are they taking

refuge in the past? And then there’s the fact that memory is fragile, fleeting, it isn’t precise facts, it’s your conjecture about your own self. It’s just emotions, not proper knowledge.” (Alexievich, 1997/2016, p35)

The origin of these sleepwalk–states of mine is the city of Ağrı where I was born and grew up until my teenage years. My father was working as a guest worker in the Netherlands in those years. He got his permanent residence permit, the opportunity to take his family with him, in early 2001. And then he took us with him. Of course this journey was a turning point for me. We first set off from the east to the west of Turkey; you had to go to the west of the country before you could go to the ‘west’. It was during this journey, that I sleepwalked.

The ride from Ağrı to Ankara, is about a day’s bus ride, and, at night, while asleep, my fragile, fifteen-year-old body walked from one side to the other in the narrow corridor of the bus. Relentlessly, without getting tired, my mother would say to me later, and a restlessness overtook the people who could not sleep. When I woke up and they told me about it, I didn’t smile like I used to; this memory is embroidered on my mind as a heavy, unsettling event. I had started practicing our journey west years before this bus ride; from time to time, while everyone else was asleep, while I was asleep, I would stand up and start walking.

When I look back now, to that day on that bus, I think that I was still not ready for Europe, for the west. My uneasiness was due to the fact that I was not ready. I think that an easterner never can be ready for the west, always in a state of not being complete, and that the best preparation we can do is



to walk, as my fragile body unknowingly prepared itself for, even in sleep. That we need a body that can mobilize itself to far away places, to beyond, always beyond, even in sleep, as if it is about to set off at any moment. Because migration is an endless movement; it is a necessity to be able to walk without stopping in order to be prepared for the day 'when'.

Six months after we moved to the Netherlands, the attack on the twin towers occurred in the United States. And I, with my family, watched George Bush's infamous speech, "you are either with us, or against us," through the window of our TV, in our small living room, like watching any soap opera. He was addressing the muslim communities living in the west. I remember my mother sitting with her prayer beads, her back facing the

television screen (maybe I am making her sit like that while revisiting this memory); this image I have in my head makes me think of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* now. The first sentence of the novel. "Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." (Tolstoy, 1875–1877/2001, p1) I imagine many families like ours gathered in the living room of their homes; I want to sob and lament for them.

My last sleep-walks lasted about a year; in a year, at the age of sixteen, Europe synchronized me; my body and my consciousness. In all those years, since my childhood, I can say that I reached myself by walking in my sleep.



On the sentiment in the act of building¹

A house!

I told her the house we are building was for me just this repetition of going there, working on the same wall endlessly. It was poetic for me. The migratory, diasporic struggles are in it, in the centre of it to be honest. I don't want to point towards them, mention it too often. So I kept close to the shared things with her, and close to my own memories, and family histories, how they shape and reshape some paths I am following.

I can understand that it is sort of about migration, but it is not about 'migration'.

Like in the video, the text she wrote is also quite intimate; you can read it as a

love letter.

The video really felt for me like building a home with her. Kind of that whole process, which is its own. It can involve migration.

How picking up the stones I would find insects or other things that are using them as a home. I was wondering, alluding to the fact that this sort of changes my sense of the materials that we find in our habitual built environment, like living in a city. What is my feeling now when I am looking at the buildings around here as opposed to the wall I am building?

The way I think about this project. When you build something like a house, you are then responsible to it. You have taken these materials from somewhere and you are constructing a thing that didn't exist before, and then there may be a moment it doesn't work anymore and you want to move on to somewhere else; what is my obligation? How do I take care of it? With my installation project, I feel as my obligation to take care of it by building and reconstructing it over and over again.

For me, when I enter the building, I know that down there I had my stones, that I built a part of a house there. I feel this attachment. There is some kind of longing. We were talking about traces earlier. This is not just a house we left behind, and longing to go back to. The house I am building in parts is also something I want to share. Already decided I want to set in motion this repetitional movement. Over and over again, from place to place. This nomadic movement, is a decided movement. It is not forced migration, but it will trigger some to think alongside that discourse too. It is not unforced migration, but it also is. It carries all of it in itself actually.

I build, and leave it, and the wall, a house that emerges from it starts interacting with others, as an extension of me. Like I am an extension of it. Like the Kurdish diaspora being part of me, I became part of the house I am building. Some things I make visible, because I want to share them. You see me, an eastern person, building a wall with stones and dirt in the west inside a building. This has to mean something. It invites for some conversations. And I consciously decide to do that. I am not building a house, go live in it, and after some time break it down, and that is it. No, it is a house appearing and disappearing, without ever being a whole house. I intend to do this, share it, so people also can reflect on it.

Het is niet zozeer de zelfacceptatie van je anders zijn, wetende dat je als 'de andere' benaderd wordt, maar het voelen van de nabijheid van de anderen die zich ook onaf voelen, die ook als onaf benaderd worden. Accepteren dat je een been, en dan nog een been hebt; een arm, en dan nog een arm bezit. Naast je tong, dat je ook meerdere oren, meerdere ogen hebt.

Dat je niet alleen maar inziet dat je als minder, als onaf gezien wordt, maar dat je dan ook de rol die je toebedeeld wordt ontleedt en aandachtig bestudeert, en probeert te begrijpen waarom de ogen die je bekijken en als ander bestempelen als de 'normale' ogen gelden.



at the process of building homes, I try to get glimpses of the ways in which migration and movement can form experiences, and spaces of belonging.

A nahif intention to intervene in the social and the political fabric



Imagine a house; a house that is not yet built; a house of which we are building its walls. With earth, with stones. After a short time, grass starts to grow on it, as if our wall wants to live; like us. Or in Jennifer S. Cheng's words: "take the world's materials and make for / ourselves a space in which to keep a / weather eye. / think of say, the frames of the windows / or the ritual of blinds and curtains. / a house from which we learn to / recognize atmospheric patterns." (Cheng, 2016, p.67)

In my longterm project *Our house is only half finished*, I built a house for myself. In parts. Each part is somewhere else. Scattered, like my own body and mind, I build, break and rebuild a house. With just enough soil, sand, stones and water to build only a small part, each time I lay the stones for the next room, the next wall, I have to tear down what was already there. A continuous crumbling and disappearing, remaining unfinished, yet opening space for other homes to be built. By looking closely

Through this I invite conversation on diasporic and migratory struggles that come with finding oneself a home. "If we imagine that architecture always fails in their attempt to finish things, you can at least say that they and their projects are alive." (Upmeyer, 2022, p.6) This undefined, unfinished phase, although *nahif* (tiny, brittle, weak), carries in its body a guidance for the future. "Because [for something] to be unfinished, you have to have a sense of what it could have been if it was finished" (Upmeyer, p.5), leaving space for speculation, for the unknown—an unpredictable future. It automatically refers to completeness. But when can we speak of completeness? Is anything ever complete? And if it is, what comes after completeness? This research mainly explores the notion of unfinishedness, studied within a context of bodies in the midst of global hierarchies of power. As I am currently situated in a western environment, my own memories and position are somehow reinstated.

I remember the houses in the east of Turkey, the neighborhood houses of my childhood. Our neighbors would build a floor, move in, and the houses they lived in would stay unfinished. Concrete, bricks, and sometimes electricity cables or, even water pipes remained visible. Unpainted; incomplete. As children, we felt the coldness of the concrete when we put our arms and foreheads against it. We were unaware that we were tasting this unfinishedness. Sometimes on top of a floor was the skeleton of a second floor; rusted reinforcing bars hammered into the concrete looking at the sky, accompanying the antennae. Those irons, warmed by the sun every day, carried the dreams and desires of our neighbors. The city I grew up in was full of these unfinished houses. “To be finished is to be dead” (Upmeyer, p.6.)

In the early 2000s, my brother, following in my father’s footsteps, started working in construction as an *ijzervlechter* (steelworker). As a part of and in contrast to *our house is only half finished*, while continuing to build different parts of the house, I am researching Kurdish migrants in The Hague working in construction as steelworkers. How they repeatedly do the same work, the steel parts, and move on to the next building. I am especially in close collaboration with my brother; He films himself while at work. These video diaries are parallel to how I document myself while building parts of the house at different sites. Besides the videos, he also shares leftover materials from a day of work. The idea is to include them in my artistic practice, to realize a material- and image-based conversation (that goes way back to our shared memories). At this point in my research I am speaking with people who came to the Netherlands as guest workers starting in the seventies, including my father (second generation), his uncle (first generation), and my brother (third generation). I roughly follow a line of three/four generations of Kurdish migrants.



In *The Migrant's Time* Ranajit Guha writes the following: "Our first migrant is...in a temporal dilemma. He must win recognition from his fellows in the host community by participating in the now of their everyday life. But such participation is made difficult by the fact that whatever is anticipatory and future about it is liable to make him appear as an alien, and whatever is past will perhaps be mistaken for nostalgia." (Guha, 2011, p.9) The migrant has to learn to live with the said quandary until the next generation arrives. The next generation being a continuation of their unfinished remnants, simultaneously carries within them a new series of conflicts and entanglements.

Here I highlight the side of unfinishedness that's due to systematic dehumanization (neglect, poverty, war, etc.), [in which] the reason objects are unfinished is because a large part of our planet is ill-treated. Migrants from these places of the world are part of that unfinishedness, moved to different wests due to poverty and war. If we closely look at the Kurdish part of Turkey (the East), this poverty, neglect, and the endless aggression, crimes against the Kurdish population is a product of the republic of Turkey's oppressive socio-economic policy. For example, in the East the government is assimilating the population at an early age, by forbidding them to speak their mother tongue at schools. Also by not including any Kurdish related history, literature in school's teaching contents. They grow up speaking the Turkish language way better than their own, and this absence of language alone causes an 'absence' of home, land.

This sets them to another rhythm in their bodies, in their mind, leaving them in a state of uncertainty and unfinishedness.

In his single-channel video *A Hope and Peace to End All Hope and Peace* we see the Kurdish artist Rushdi Anwar writing the words *hope* and *peace* with a calligraphy brush on a white paper. He repeats the same until there is no white left of the paper, until the words hope and peace turn into a black screen through countless repetition. They lose their value, and are burdened with a critical sense of cynicism. (Duong, 2024)

Anwar's video work can be read as a touching, wretched manifesto, carrying the desire for a creative response in its heart, the longing to respond, an attempt to rethink the human, to rethink his existence in exile in the West, the reasons that caused his exile. In her movie *Reassemblage*, filmed in Senegal, we hear Trinh T. Minh-ha's voice at the beginning; "I do not intend to speak about/just speak nearby". (Minh-ha, 1982) We see, hear, feel Anwar speaking nearby.

In *elsewhere, within here*, Minh-ha says the following: "Questions arising on the move, at the borders, in the encounter with the other, and when stranger meets stranger, all tend to intensify around the problem the *other* foreigner—someone doubly strange, who doesn't *speak* or look like the rest of us, being paradoxically at once exotic guest and abhorred enemy." (Minh-ha, 2011, p.1) It is not so much the self-acceptance of being different, knowing that you are approached as *the other*, but feeling the closeness of others who also feel unfinished, who are also approached as unfinished. Accepting that you have a leg, and then another leg; that you possess an arm, and then another arm. Besides your tongue, that you also have multiple ears, multiple eyes; that you are composed of different elements, so to speak.

That you not only recognize that you are seen as lesser, as unfinished, but that you then dissect and study attentively the role assigned to you, and try to understand why the eyes that view you and label you as the other apply as the *normal* eye.

Minh-ha continues: "Those targeted or 'randomly selected' for security checks are not only those whose political background poses a threat to the ruling authorities, but most often those in possession of a 'Muslim name,' and those who simply 'look' other, queer, or shady to the 'normal' eye." (Minh-ha, 2011, p.5)

What exactly is happening when I build a house in parts, when the steelworker walks from one construction area to another? What does this circulation mean? In present-time, anxiety and fear can be a daily reality for the other,

the migrant. Both works, *Our house is only half finished* and *Ijzervlechter*, focusing on the space of belonging, carry the memories, the entanglements of the migratory movement, land, bodies, and sleeping—walking—building that are familiar to me, in their utmost friability. They are extensions of home transcending the chronological time. The house itself isn't automatically home; it's the aura that surrounds us, the landscape that we carry with us, within us, that gives it its meaning. The place where we can gather ourselves, then, can be anywhere.

"One's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist." (hooks, 1990, P. 42) Returning to one's homeplace and walking away from home can mean the same if we find the right *tone, texture*.

How to present these relations? In Cheng's words: "instead of a house: the noise of a tunnel: / or, vice versa. / an act of translation: building a / house/structure to represent the / tone/texture. / an immigrant is like this: *cirrus, circular, circulate*." (Cheng, 2016, p.69)



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On unfinished houses²

I think that the concept of unfinished houses is very interesting. When you go to many countries there are a lot of unfinished houses, even in Ghana, that people are living in. And sometimes I am like; Is this house livable? But then you go there and you see that people are living in the house, and it's incomplete. What I really like about your research is the fact that, I mean you are trying to make an argument about how houses are part of the humans. And it's also very similar to my own research, because I am also trying to, in a way yours is more practical and mine is a bit more theoretical, but I am also trying to make the argument that humans and houses, they are one. In a way the houses influence the humans to do certain things; and the humans also influence the houses. It's like a one on one relationship where you can't really separate them. The houses also force us to think about so many things; how we build them; how we use them; how we care for them; how we manage them.

Yours is the more practical, when we think about a house. The human being's connection to a house. Also the fact that you even can move along with your house; that's something very interesting; I would say that's another level, because a year ago I also started building my house in Ghana. I go there; I see it; I have contact as I work on it. It is not finished, and I am like, 'when it's finished, I move here.' When I am in Netherlands I have the feeling, well this is still my house, I am paying for it. And I am always asking for pictures and videos.

In a way I can say that automatically the house is part of me. In many ways.

But what your research makes me think about my own house is the fact that you can carry your house along.

I have been living in the Netherlands for nearly twenty years, and I inhabited during these years roughly between fifteen and twenty rooms, studios. I can't at this moment point towards one and say this is the one.

What about the house back in Portugal? Why did you choose the old way? Why didn't you go for a more modernized way of building a house?

The place is in a protected area, in the middle of nowhere. There is just one family living there. They own some of the ruins there, and not the land. You are not allowed to build modern houses in this area, but only restore the ruins to their original state. If there is a mill in the house, you also have to restore the mill. You can't change the mill-room into something else, but you can also just leave it as a ruin. They are stone houses; so you have to use the stones and the dirt from the area to restore them. So you can't mix, let's say, cement into the building. In a way it forces you to move towards a certain path. And I believe it puts you in the right direction somehow.

So that's where the whole research came from?

For the last two three years we have been working on the same wall, but then different layers each time. I started thinking of these parts of the house I was working on each time. It felt like a repetition, an endless repetition. I felt the connection with all the houses I inhabited, in the Netherlands, and the one back in the east of Turkey. Because of its repetitional character, it also feels like a return, but then not to the country of origin. What does that say?

The owner knows a lot about stone buildings. So I am listening and watching attentively. He is most of the time on the wall and I am looking for the right stones. And doing the earth mix. I pass it to him, and he places the stones with the dirt mix onto the wall. And then he shows me the next part that he needs. And I start looking for the next stone.

If I compare your approach, your house to mine, it's completely different.

The owners of the houses are living abroad. And they have people living in, taking care of their houses. Most of the people living in their houses, they don't have money to rent their own house. Its a win-win situation for both sides. But it's also a vulnerable situation, because the owner of the house can ask them to leave at any time. So maybe when the house within years is almost done, the owner can suddenly say; 'okee, caretaker! I need you out, because I'm almost done.' And from the caretaker's perspective, sometimes they feel like 'I have done so much to get this house from a state of nothing to this, and now it's time I have to leave.' It comes with a lot of vulnerability, and troubles. In general that is also what I want to say; that care, the concept of care can be very troubling, because there is a lot of misunderstandings, confusions. There are times when people don't want to move out, and it becomes a court case.

You also built an attachment to the house.

Some people, they move into the house with no windows, and they use their own money to fix it.

Especially when you have kids, you know! They grow up there; they know the place, and as a child you think that the place is your dad's. The concept of ownership is alien to them.

When I am in the Netherlands, I have a caretaker living in the house back home.

When I speak to them, the caretakers, some of them say that it's their home because they take care of it and all that, but at the same time when I was there, my caretaker had been at my house for eight months, almost a year, and she hadn't bought anything. It was exactly as I left it. There was only just a small bowl. I know from myself that if you own a house you want to buy stuff, replace things. But I see that everything is exactly the same as I left it. They live with the consciousness of 'it's not mine'. I always say, mentally, it is a very vulnerable situation. You feel like you're at home but at the same time you're not at home. You feel like you're living in a place where you are making memories, but you cannot say, 'this is my house.'







Sleeping houses³

They are sleeping!

Each house here is separated from other houses by five, six hundred meters. It was not a village, but it was not that isolated. You always had a neighbor nearby. You knew it; you could feel their presence. But now it's completely isolated. There are not many people wanting to live like this. For sure there is, but most of the society has demands, rather characteristic, for their houses.

It was around 1971, 1972 that the last people permanently left. Some people kept the olive trees, keeping a little connection, but they were not sleeping in the place. So they would come from time to time to do some maintenance. But eventually these people got older and older. They stopped coming.

If you don't use the trails they get full of bushes. Then it's harder to get to the house. So everything gets worse. And the roofs of these houses are always the bigger problem. If the wall is well made it can last many decades abandoned, but the roofs, if you have a tiny leak, there is water entering the wood, it will rot. Like in five, six, ten years top it's on the ground. And if people still inhabited them, they would immediately fix it.

It is not very easy to find books that describe exactly how it was build. But sometimes you can tell by differences that exist from region to region. And also very important is looking at the walls that fell down. With these walls you can learn a lot. Especially if you saw, not the exact moment it fell down, but if you see from year to year what has happened. Then you can observe the 'fail' that caused the wall to collapse. Like in the last house, one of the walls was still there. I completely remember. It had a beam, the one inside the wall. When the beam started rotting, like a liver, the whole wall collapsed inside the house.



An open end; or masking it for infinite reasons

Garip bir çocuktum.

Yatağımda oturmuş, bir şeyleri bekler gibi kocaman tahta kapılara, pencerelelere bakıyorum, kocaman gözlerimle. Beş–altı yaşlarındayım. Gün ağarmamış henüz. Kapkaranlık oda da ne eşyaları renkleri seçebiliyorum, ne de camların ötesinde herhangi bir şeyi. Romanlarda bahsedilen zifiri karanlık o küçük yaşta gözlerimin dibine kadar gelip oturmuş.

Birdenbire bir aydınlık dokunuyor odaya, eşyalara, bana. Camlardan, kapı aralığından, süzülüyor, adeta en şiddetli şelalelerde suyun suya değdiği anı taklit eder gibi, göz bebeklerimle temas ediyor bu ışık silsilesi. Sanki kapı eşiğine kadar gelip sokulmuş güneş. Kırılgan, mutlu bir hisle, hayatta olduğumun farkına belki de o gün, o yatakta varıyorum.

O günden itibaren, çoğu sabahın alacakaranlığında yatağımda oturup, içimi harekete geçiren o harika anı tekrar yaşamayı denedim. Belki de beni

uyurgezerliğe iten bu alacakaranlıkta uyanmaya çalışıp, o ışık deryasını tekrar görebilme arzusuymdu. Çocukluğumda, yaşamamın ne denli güzel olduğunu tekrardan anımsamak için bir anı kovaladım durdum diyebilirim. Halende öyleyim (parçalar halinde inşa ettiğim evde bunları hissediyorum).

Çoğu kez de güneşten önce uyanmayı başaramadım. Vücudum da o kadar istiyordu ki uyanmayı gün doğumundan önce, bu arzularımın bir nevi uyurgezerliğimi tetiklediğine inanmak istiyordum. Belki de ben uykumdayken kalkıp yürüdüğüm zamanlar, o harika gün doğumu da çoğu kez tekrardan beni bulmuştur. Buna da inanmak istiyordum.





Our house is only half finished⁴

What binds us together is a landscape.

As I am standing near the edge of the river, I am surrounded by ferns and tall sedge. I watch the sheep chewing their cud, eight of them, each wearing a different bell. The sheep here, they are large. The high mountains, their grey rock. There is the sandy road — you arrive via the sandy road; and we both know that, when the river runs dry, winter will be long.

In front of me there is a man looking for shadow. I sit at the edge of the river with my back leaning against the rock as I watch him lay the second layer of the wall. My feet in the dry river bedding. The man moves his body slowly as he gently picks up one of the stones in front of him. He measures the stone with a sharp eye before he decides it is not the right fit and moves on to the next one.

He picks it up, weighs, measures, and calmly places the stone upon the layer of earth he prepared.

The man is building shadow. He tells me he is not used to the heat. “I prefer the snow,” he says. His childhood landscape was shaped by houses unfinished. Heavy icicles hung from their window sills. At night he would dream of how to finish them, which rooms he would add, what structures he would use. So many houses that have been built, rebuilt. So many that have been abandoned.

I sit there for a while and listen to him speak. I watch him place stone after stone. Lay dirt on top of dirt.



“Şurada merdiven vardı, Osman! Çatıya çıkardık. Çatının içine girerdik şu delikten. Saman doluydu. İçine dağ meyveleri koyardık yumuşasın diye. Cihanlar getirirdi.”

(There was a ladder, Osman! We used to go up to the roof. We used to go onto the roof, right through that hole; the hole was filled with straw. We used to put mountain fruits inside, to soften them. It was Cihan who would bring us the fruits.)

The objects inside the house are organized in such a way that the light falls precisely on their edges. Early afternoon their colors reflect on the walls; orange earth, a blue stone.

We are laying on the bed looking at the colors. It is the beginning of winter and outside the plants have hardened. With my hand I brush by yours. It is quiet and warm inside. I get up from our bed as I hear the sheep nearing the house. When I open the door they stop in their movement and briefly stare at me, attentively. The sky is wet. A minute passes and then they go back to grazing, walking.

It is this landscape that has brought us together. Its wet rock.

I get back inside, hang my coat over the chair and get water boiling, you are sitting up now in the corner, took a book from the night stand, you read.

“It has turned into ruins.”



“How it was like this: the layout of the room: the air between us: evaporations and condensations of their morning rhythms spinning the room in which we slowed.”

(Cheng, 2016, p40)

Notes

1. Conversation with Lauren Wagner, Amsterdam, October 2023
2. Conversation with Joma Edward Ronden, 's-Hertogenbosch, April 2024
3. Conversation with Fernando, Serra de Malcata, Portugal, August 2023
4. Excerpts of Lucie Fortuin's text for our video work 'Our house is only half finished', 2024

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