

THE YEAR

FIGHT THE PIRATES

52 weeks

345 days

2 countries

300 000 pirates

96 injections

1581 pills

THE FULL STORY

1 hanging

299990 casualties

20 knitted scarves

89 knitted hats

much cooking

2 crushes

no crashes

THE MOTHERS OF ALL BATTLE

AND ITS AFTERMATH

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THE MOTHERS OF ALL YEAR TOO

Trying out THE YEAR for the very first time. Anticipation, expectation, confusion, excitement, promises to keep it simple yet already seeking concept, structure, brilliance...

THE CLOCK IS TICKING

—15 days before Benny and I drive off to France with my little Peugeot 205 loaded with all I need to keep me occupied for one long year in Auvergne. 365 whole days before I can return.

Aug 29, 07:23 PM

FINAL COUNTDOWN

—I have reached the bottom of my list with one day to go.
—Cleared my studio and gave the keys to Benny.
—Cleared my flat ready for Christian and Philippe to move in, packed all I need, clothes, music, books, hard drives, laptop, cameras, amps.
—It is amazing to see how little one needs, reassuring and puzzling too. Why do we surround ourselves with so much stuff ?

Posted Sep 9, 09:08 PM

I AM THERE... I AM HERE

—We made it ! leaving London at 7.30 am, car full, blue sky, the taste of her barbecued mushrooms is still lingering in my mouth.

—Great boat trip, hot and windy. FIGHT THE PIRATES was written in big and bold just above the entrance. I now have a name for my enemies.

—Then a long long journey down on a very very hot day: 11pm it was when we reached St. Yrieix la Perche, 2 zombies dazed and very confused. I was now right in between the end of something familiar and the beginning of a strange adventure.

Posted Sep 14, 06:00 PM





A U T U M N

one week in...

—It has finally sunk in and it is too late to turn back, a good thing considering my car is still packed, I go to Paris instead.

—There I came across the work of Nicolas Bouvier,; his most famous book is "L usage de la vie".

one of his motto is the body is the mirror of the world.

A simple phrase which I am trying to make sense of in my present in between or in between present. Not much luck so far, first dead end in my no mans land.

Posted Sep 18, 05:33 PM

2 weeks in ADRENALINE

—The battle has begun. Fight the pirates. I am a true chemical plant, the mind is trying to let go, the body, in a real state of shock, is responding with wave after wave of adrenaline that the mind has difficulty absorbing.

—The hunting season has also begun. Early on Sunday pheasants were let out, about 2 hours before local hunters and their dogs were let loose. Gunshots in the rain.

—Maybe my body and the world are starting resembling each other: organized battleground, mindless aggression, all for a good cause. Getting rid of the uncontrollable other.

—The mushroom season is about to start, a bit more rain and the frenzy will begin: ceps, girolles. Forgotten instincts are quickly awoken,

Posted Sep 25, 04:48 PM

3 weeks in HUNTING

— Never has time passed so slowly in Limbo land. My body is learning to accommodate the constant chemical aggression it is subjected to while my mind is slowly understanding the changing patterns of the side effects. Life as it was is fading away while I observe more or less calmly the widening gap between who I was and who I am becoming. The image of a free fall into a bottomless well is coming to mind with the pain of all that bumping and scraping at the walls in my useless attempt to resist.

—This week I have been the silent witness of family rituals I am now part of: each ritual is perfectly choreographed and has been for years. Everybody has a role to play and having been away for so long I can only be tolerated as a passive guest, to make sure I do not disturb the fragile balance of it all.....

—The whole week-end was punctuated by sounds of hunting dogs barking and howling, deers screaming in agony when caught by dogs or shot badly by hunters. Some used the occasion to relate their own hunting adventures. Probably told and heard a 1000 times already.

Posted Oct 2, 06:27 PM



4 weeks in MUSHROOM MANIA

—Autumn here is mushroom mania. It is also a very good year for ceps (porcinis in Italian). As soon as the sun is shining everybody drives to their secret grounds; by 2pm there is usually nothing left or only the most rotten and slug ridden. In local newspapers there are reports of punctured tires, broken windscreens and fights between desperate mushroom pickers or with angry farmers. Despite their passion for mushrooms, very few do respect their surroundings, there is litter, broken fences and damaged wood undergrowth and ferns. What wouldn't you do to be able to bring proudly home kilos of the best specimen,

—I am happily engrossed in Proust 'A la recherche du temps perdu', having all the time in the world and absolutely no physical energy or will to move: a perfect state of being for this particular reading.

—Sometimes I find the pace (of the writing and the life so precisely described) a bit too fast for me... A sign that I have finally become in tune with my current condition, mind and body having stopped resisting each other and the constant chemical aggression and related side effects, getting used to it all. Of course with the help of 1 or 2 new pacifying molecules...

Posted Oct 10, 02:34 PM



5 weeks in ...ROUTINE

—The novelty of it all is wearing off and I am settling into some kinds of routine following the rhythm of my swinging moods and energy levels.

—1/ I have had my first 'doping' injection' to boost my production of red cells which had become very low. I understand more why so many athletes do succumb to the temptation.

—2/ I have eaten some trompettes de la mort (death trumpets) It feels strange to eat something so dark and I can't think of many other dark/black food... Italian black pastas..... black pudding..... squids cooked in their own ink.....

—3/ I have had a ride in a 15 years old Porsche carrera 4 and reached a speed of 190 kms/hour on a small country road. I can see the attraction one may have for such power, elegance and craftsmanship. Strangely enough I never thought I would have to share my lodging with the same porsche which is now permanently parked next to my table and computer in the spacious room I use as a studio next to my bedroom. I am slowly getting used to the strange optical illusion that this juxtaposition creates. It is hard to decide which is out of place or which looks out of scale: the life size toy or me in my work space.

—Today is my parents 50th wedding anniversary... Half a century together, quite amazing.

Posted Oct 17, 11:34 AM



6 weeks in NO HEADING

—It is about time I change my heading but nothing comes to mind apart from apples and nuts.

—The mushroom season is coming to a close, announced by the beautiful amanites tue-mouches (fly killer) which are popping out everywhere in small clusters of bright red with white dots perfect tops. It is now time to collect and store apples chestnuts and walnuts. Usually the task of women and children. Apples are stored in open boxes in the darkest corner of the basement to finish ripening, they can last all winter. Chestnuts are boiled or roasted, a wholesome seasonal dish. The more efficient housewives will peel and freeze some for later use or preserve them in alcohol. Walnuts are left to dry and ripen on trays in the autumn sun, it takes about a month.

—Autumn is the most beautiful season in this region of mostly woodland. Every day the various shades of green gently mutate into all kinds of red yellow orange and brown, reminding me of a slow real time digital color manipulation.

—For the first time I am feeling slightly angry and frustrated by my environment. The zombie in me is receding which is a great! But it makes it harder sometimes to put up with small talk, spoiled children and moaning in-laws and I do remain mainly silent. The novelty of family rituals is wearing off I am left starving for something more, which so far I can only find in myself and my own company, daydreaming, reading, writing or walking. I am consuming so many ideas memories and words yet speaking or sharing so few. I can't make up my mind if it is a good thing or a waste.

Posted Oct 24, 02:22 PM



7 weeks in TOTAL OVERDOSE

—The most difficult week so far. An overwhelming sense of total overdose of the caring family environment slowly cracking at the seems, letting loose all kind of profound differences – opinion, way of life, understanding . I do feel trapped and slightly ashamed too, finding it difficult to bite the hands that care so well for me. Everybody else seems so adept at ignoring what sends me into hours of brooding and internal turmoil. The silent mode I have adopted up to now can only result in a storm later on if I don't find some form of non confrontational release.....

—Enjoying the unseasonal sunshine has helped, a glorious 25 degrees Celsius for the past week. Mushrooms are popping out again everywhere and the birds can hardly believe it, behaving as if it was spring. Two lizards, living in a small gap near my bay window, are lazing in the sun all day, sometimes venturing inside to check what I am up to in front of my laptop. Yet signs of the coming winter are everywhere: electric saws frantically cutting the last wood to be stored, tractors turning the fields into gracious lines of shiny red earth, birds lining up on telephone lines preparing for migration... Two radically different weather prognostics are fuelling conversations. Some say that last time there was such a good year for mushrooms was 1986 and that year winter was one of the worst, temperatures often reaching minus 20. Others maintain that the winter will be mild with a lot of snow judging by how thin the skin of onions is at the moment, it never fails. I had never heard of the onion oracle but I like the idea.

—I found a connection between my reading Proust and my brother in law (the owner of the Porsche I am cohabiting with). Yesterday he took me to visit his family business – a cake and biscuit factory specializing in madeleines. I have been enjoying them for years, check them out online “madeleines bijou”. I was able to pick them off the production line, still hot and dripping with chocolate. It was great to observe various imposing pieces of machinery being able to replicate at great speed, amazing precision and grace all kinds of human gestures. It reminded me of Charlie Chaplin's film Modern times. I really enjoyed watching the occasional mechanical failings, breaking the perfect rhythm of it all, one machine squirting chocolate instead of coating the bottom of the madeleines, the other creating big blobs of dough in between the well oiled mechanism, instead of delicately turned puff pastry tubes. I found it quite reassuring. I did feel for the people working there though., imagining having to put up with the constant noise of the engines and being tied to the never ending rhythm of the production line, day after day after day.

Posted Oct 31, 04:13 PM



8 weeks in ADIEU SADDAM

—A definite shift in atmosphere, the same every year around this time of all saints day/Halloween/day of dead. I am not sure which came first, the celebration of death or the timely feeling. In one day the temperature has dropped by 17 degrees bringing frost every morning. Last Saturday there was this freaky blackout for 10 millions Europeans, my sisters and my parents house were effected but not mine. Saddam Hussein has been condemned to death: quite absurd in the light of the number of daily innocent deaths the bringing down of a dictator has provoked. In my entourage two people have also died this week, an 86 year old man with of a weak heart and a 33 year old trumpet teacher, of glandular cancer.

—St. Yrieix la perche is in shock: a quiet small town of 7000 inhabitants, affluent, where not much happens. Yesterday at 2.30pm in the lycée Darney (the high school attended by my niece and nephews) during a Spanish lesson a 16 years old boy got up suddenly and knifed 3 times in the arm and the stomach a 15 year old, then run out of the classroom and threw himself off the 3rd floor staircase. They are both in hospital with severe wounds. Everyone is talking about it, some concerned for the safety of their own kids, others empathizing with both families. People here are not used to have this kind of incidents happening on their door steps. It is OK to read about teenage riots and burnt buses in the suburbs of Paris and Marseille, plenty to say , to judge and condemn; government, lazyness of youth, Arabs, Immigration laws. It is much harder to judge their own community.



—Yesterday I saw a flight of cranes crossing the sky going south. A loose line of more than a hundred guided by an inverted V shaped formation of about 20. Their quacking was hideous , not suited to the grace of their travelling. You could hear them about five minutes before they appeared in the sky. On Sunday I saved 2 pheasants from the guns of two hunters and their dogs. I was walking on a country lane when I saw them on the road in front of me, oblivious of the hunters a hundred yard away. I innocently continued walking, placing myself in between birds and men and tapped my feet on the ground as if cold, creating enough noise to frighten the birds into flying away, then continued walking as if nothing had happened. I could see the hunters in the corner of my eye staring at me, stunned. What a hero...

—I haven't yet spoken about my growing fascination for the local cows, the Limousine, famous for its tender meat. I am surrounded by them and I have had plenty of time to observe and admire them. They do seem to be as fascinated by me. I am completely amazed by their gaze: staring you straight in the eyes, no blinking, no wavering with such purpose and calm intensity, with a hint of surprise, almost giving them an air of wisdom. I haven't managed to stare one down yet unless I cheat and scare them. Their hide is the most glorious ginger/red /brown color, amid the rich green of the surrounding grass in summer. Right now they blend in perfectly with the autumnal shades of the surrounding woods. I think it is the perfect mix of the tamed and the untamed in them that fascinates me, and also how much they love posing for the camera.

—I wanted to talk about my other growing fascination , Proust. This week in the 3rd volume "Du cote des Guermantes" his talent for putting into words so precisely the smallest sensation or feeling has given me a lot of pleasure, re-reading endlessly certain paragraphs, my favorite one being the description of a first kiss to Albertine.

Posted Nov 7, 06:25 PM



9 weeks in CRUDE REMINDER

—Writing as narration of one's reality as it happens, navigating between awareness, self consciousness and random impulses. A way of tracking some of it. A way of finding one's way back if need be.

—To my surprise this week I managed to stare down a Limousine cow, then another, then another.... Then I understood why: until now I was alien to their environment and as such became an object of curiosity and good entertainment, hence their interest and welcoming attitude. Now I barely get a glance, saying 'ahh it is you again...', before going back to grazing, which creates a very interesting melody of layered crunchy sounds that I must record one day. I have to find all kinds of ways to attract their attention – singing, clapping, talking, laughing – so that I may capture more of that fascinating gaze.

—Then when you think it is finally going smoothly and you are feeling confident, at the end of your 2nd month of chemical processing: EPO doping to maintain red cell count, growth factor doping to maintain white cell count (grown on Chinese hamsters' ovaries...), Miraculous mood pacifying molecules, all t to help body and mind fight the real battle. A letter arrives saying that despite the destruction of 96% of the pirates in the first month, it may not be good enough, 99% was expected of me. A crude reminder that it is not just about surviving it all more or less gracefully but about winning it.

—Then there is Proust and the first kiss to Albertine, which he was building up to for the whole volume 2. I have now started volume 4, Sodom and Gomorrah, where right from the start the narrator relates in great details his naive discovery and latent interest for what he calls inversion (homosexuality). It is retrospectively bringing some light on his frustration with his first kiss in the middle of volume 3. In the short distance between his lips and her cheek a whole world of sensation vanished due to, according to him, the inadequacy of the mouth as a kissing tool. Here is a poor translation of mine “ Lips, ideal for bringing to the palate the flavours they desire, have to content with remaining on the surface, without understanding why, and to put up with the closure of the cheek, impenetrable yet desired. The neck now seen from so close reveals a coarse grain to the skin and unexpected toughness..... Helas, as for a kiss our nostrils and our eyes are as badly located as our lips are badly made..... As long as I hadn't touched her, I still could see her face and a slight perfume was reaching me. Suddenly my eyes ceased to see, in turn my nose, crushed against the cheek couldn't smell anything, these were the signs that told me I was kissing Albertine. “ I find the two or three pages trying to describe that instant absolutely wonderful. And inspiring. And kissing will never be the same again.

— It reminds me of the embarrassment of my first kisses at thirteen on a school trip to the seaside. The event itself not as memorable as its consequences, marking the first time I felt betrayed. I returned home elated and enlightened, very happy with this first experience, a success despite my lack of practice. I was ready for my first romance and foolishly proud to have been unexpectedly chosen by the heartthrob of the class. These feelings were short lived. The next morning, back at school, everybody was pointing at me laughing, even kids I didn't know. My charming prince had turned overnight into an ugly toad, spreading rumors that I didn't know how to kiss, shame shame shame. I was in shock, mortified and hurt and never dared asking anybody what I was doing wrong. I spent the next two years watching closely in films and on television, trying to solve the mystery of french kissing. But in those days clues were rare and often confusing and not that different from my own innocent approach.

Posted Nov 14, 06:10 PM

10 weeks in MME LA PRESIDENTE ROYAL

—I am spending a week at my other sister's in the Dordogne, even more beautiful and remote than my home with the Porsche and there is broadband and a fire place, enjoying the first days of real winter, cold, very foggy and windy, unbearable in the city but here it makes for dreamlike landscapes and nothing beats looking at it through the window, snuggled up by a fire, writing these words.

—The fight goes on. The verdict was confirmed. It is good results but possibly not good enough. I have one month to persuade the pirates to let go of me: the next count has to be negative if I want good chances to win this battle at all. For once all my voices are working together on this: conscious and subconscious, reason, moral, super ego and divine voice (the crucial one I feel but not the loudest at the moment which worries me a bit) are all in agreement: a rare thing in itself.

—It is an important week in the French political calendar. Segolene Royal has been chosen as the socialist candidate for the presidential elections next May – a beautiful young looking woman (classic French bourgeois style) who has no issues with using her femininity and is a perfect mother and devoted wife, allegedly. Both supporters and detractors find it unnerving. It is the first time in French history that a woman has a chance to become president: quite an achievement for a Latin country. What is fascinating is that she has managed to lose the support of many women who do find her annoying and hypocritical, denying, through their irrational resentment and mistrust of her using her feminine way, their own womanhood. I am enjoying the turmoil and the controversy: debates in the media but also in everyday life are heated and argumentative in pure French style.. Chirac will probably give her his support to make sure Nicolas Sarkozy (the head of the conservative party UMP, Jacques Chirac's party and his current Minister of the Interior) doesn't win.... The political intrigues are crazy, a gripping strategical game is openly taking place. The Blair Brown contest seems a bit tame in comparison. Her title would be Madame la Presidente Royal.... France could then be mistaken for a socialist monarchy.... A country which has lost many heads abolishing it two centuries ago.

Posted Nov 21, 02:24 PM



11 weeks in 21 GRAMS AND 79

—Time travels in strange ways. I have shut down completely from the world, body and mind, finding it hard to recall on the fingers of one hand what I have achieved during my week in the Dordogne.

1/ took a few foggy pictures in the (big) back yard

2/ spent a lot of time by the fire that I was lighting daily first thing when I got up

3/ watched the movie 21 grams on cable TV, early one morning after breakfast, chemical intake and fire duties in that order. I found it absolutely gripping, a superb piece of cinema. I spent two days completely immersed in its world of inter connections, then became really aware of the web of (non) exchanges between us all . How many people or events does one effect, in a good or bad way, consciously or not. How far does one's responsibility go? How many do bare grudges against me ? How can one individual decide to bring a whole nation to war against another? How can they bear the consequences and the guilt?

4/ made a chocolate cake with whipped cream for my father's 79th birthday on Sunday. My present was a 1 to 1 beginners course in word processing, emailing and web surfing. He was thrilled. It is hard to remember that some have still never had access to what most of us find hard to live without. He is starting in January.

5/ I started to read Mircea Eliade Shamanism, Archaic techniques of ecstasy. In Central Asian cultures, surviving severe physical or mental illness was a prerequisite and a rite of passage to become a shamanic practitioner, as well as having a natural ability to faint and have epileptic fit – what we consider in western society to be signs of disabilities and deficiencies. The keepers of tradition and oral history, the protectors of morality and good against evil have to visit death quite closely as well as survive the experience, before being trusted with the community's welfare. In other words people in power have to be put to the test and survive their own medicine before being allowed to subject others to it. How sophisticated, and we call them primitive cultures.

—Even here in the middle of nowhere, the Christmas machine has been switched on, children prepare their (long and expensive) lists, which are typed and indexed, then printed out or emailed to parents who will dispatch the suggestions to all family members, accordingly. Shopping afternoon are allocated and planned carefully in advance. I have introduced my sister to the joys of internet shopping, she is a convert. I am ashamed. Alliances are made to share cost of certain gifts... Christmas menus are discussed and planned, the tasks of buying and cooking divided more or less fairly, according to means and abilities and (lack of) enthusiasm, also taking into account previous years involvement.

Posted Nov 27, 02:54 PM



12 weeks in OTHER BEGINNINGS

—Three months since the beginning of this strange adventure. Many earlier dates would have done equally but one has to start somewhere in order to hopefully finish somewhere else or chose other beginnings if needed.

—There are a more MOIblog images in Flickr. Unfortunately not of the wonderful dishes I cooked for our Sunday lunch at my sister's in the Dordogne, in the excitement of the moment I completely forgot to document; Babaganush (Turkish aubergine caviar), Rabbit in mustard sauce with mushrooms and polenta, Apple cake with creme au caramel.

—Internal negotiation with the pirates has intensified as the day of the crucial test is approaching fast, another 9 days of intense yet peaceful battle of will. I have chosen a firm but gentle approach avoiding any dramatic moves, and it seems to pay off as my body feels less at war and divine voice has become much louder recently. Time will tell.

—I am now attending a writing workshop every Tuesday for the next 3 months. It is a project organized by Fabregues, a family printing firm and the town's biggest employer with around 400 staff, taking place at the town's library. The idea behind the project is interesting if not flawed. Fabregues wants to record 'workers memories', to document and preserve a declining profession. They assumed that their workers and others would find the idea irresistible, the workshop being there to help them. It is led by Michel C Thomas, an elegant and soft spoken white haired, small diamond earring male writer, fan of Aragon and Blaise Pascal, who has published a couple of books of short novels and run a workshop in a prison last year, the outcome of which (the stories the prisoners wrote) is currently being published . In his own words, he writes in order to forget. There were seven of us at the first session, an interesting bunch but far from the worker's model expected. A divorced social worker who always dreamt of sharing her singular vision of the world by publishing books. An ex school teacher who had to give up after a stroke and loves writing biographies and poetry and wants to know how to get published.

A retired city woman reconverted to farming, but not a farmer, just an animal lover with a few goats, sheep, pigs, ducks, rabbits and chickens, who loves talking to her four legged friends and writing about them. Her parents did survive concentration camps in Germany and she wants to write about their experience. Fabregues' director of human resources who is a keen photographer and local radio Dj in his spare time. Both my parents, who at nearly 80 want to write their exciting life story for their grand children – no irony in the use of exciting as they have had quite an eventful life. My father was sent to the Russian front at 16 by the Germans, deserted and walked wounded for 8 days looking for American troops who made him prisoner, thinking him a German spy. They met in Morocco in the 50's in colonial times, her an Arab teacher, him a young farm manager for rich aristocratic French colons and an agricultural adviser to the king. And myself on my refurbishment year out, needing to fill time usefully and wanting to reconnect with French language that I have neglected for more than 20 years.

—I am wondering if, through this activity, I can attempt to bridge the gap between what I call my two lives: the one in which I lived spoke and thought French, representing all my childhood up to my early twenties, and the one in which I speak think and write in English, most of my adult life. At this moment in time I am doing both, living and speaking in French but only being able to write about it in English as most of my thinking is still in English.

Posted Dec 5, 06:16 PM



Week 13 SUSPENSE IS RIFE

—It sounds like the title of a spy or cold war movie whose press release would read like: ” a gripping story about the end of a struggle, internal negotiations have ended peacefully just in time for the final summit. Signs are confusing, nobody knows the outcome. The hero feels at peace for the first time since the beginning but why? Has the body won the battle and the pirates left the ship? Has it accepted the toxic invasion and got used to it? Is it too tired to protest anymore? Are the pirates back with their habits, having found the antidote to my chemical weapon. Suspense is rife. Time will tell and I am enjoying the truce, well aware that it might not last.

—I found the last fly lying dead next to the Porsche yesterday, winter is truly here. More cows and trees in fog and misty mornings. I am really getting into cooking mode, a sign that I am definitely better, rediscovering traditional French cooking with great pleasure and appetite. Both my sisters have great big family kitchen. This week it was white and black pudding with cooked apples and mashed potatoes, chocolate fondant for desert.

—I have exhausted most of my brain power for the week, yesterday, writing in French for the first time in years, doing my homework for the writing workshop. I was asked to expand on “If I did write I would write. Quite uninspired at first, it soon became a beginning full of surprises and let downs too. I found playing with French very exciting, the words feeling so fresh and full of promises, reacting very differently than their English equivalent. My lack of practice (probably) lending them a certain dignity and weight (almost pomposity) that I rarely encountered in English, giving a grand (almost pretentious) style to my modest attempt, which I find hilarious and annoying at the same time. I realised that in French or English, my methodology is the same and relies heavily on process and structure, what I call the rational emotional approach or the analytico-instinctive one. I was subconsciously hoping to escape myself in French. The other night the fact that I was dreaming in English woke me up suddenly. First time it happens (being woken up, I have been dreaming in English for years), a sign that French contamination is progressing well.

Posted Dec 12, 06:43 PM

Week 14... REMOTE LIVING

—By this time next week, Christmas will be over. I do not feel the usual frenzy; advertising madness from Halloween onwards, endless Christmas parties, work related stress, trying to tie loose ends before the year is over, clever Christmas shopping, dreading as much as looking forward to family reunion and the usual frictions (being full of good will vanishing in smoke as soon as you get there, as I succumb to the divide between my two lives, a sort of jet lag, needing a few days to adjust each way), choosing what to do for New Year, where to be, who with, while managing to please oneself without annoying others, usually left to the last minute as I hate planning ahead.

—Being so remote from urban living and working life I have escaped most of it and I am enjoying the luxury. I have had three months to adapt to family ways and bridge the gap between my two self, I have no choice but to stay here, done all my shopping online and some presents handmade. My only stress has been planning Christmas eve menu and divide the chores between all according to skill budget and willingness. All the family get together for the only time of the year, 18 altogether, parents, 3 brothers and sisters with respective partners and kids. For once I have been given a role, I am unwillingly getting active family membership and have to live up to the challenge. It is no easy task I assure you, managing to please so many individuals with as many tastes and strong opinions; from traditional to refine and elitist (only the best of the rarest) via original and eclectic (myself) and the not caring (who always see any effort as a waste of energy, time, money...).

—I have chosen for aperitif; champagne WITH 4 or 5 Spanish tapas, made by myself. Much calories are needed as it can take up to two hours for everybody to open their presents, one by one for the enjoyment and the hos and has of all, starting by the youngest..... yes it is excessive, a nightmare of consumerism and I usually end up trying to guess the cost of it all and comparing it to my average annual income. We usually end up sitting down for diner around 11pm , exhausted, tipsy with champagne, with no appetite left.



So for starters smoked salmon terrine (one of my sisters specialties) and foie gras terrine with armagnac (traditionally made by my mother), as a main scallops in saffron sauce with rice (made by my other sister) then the traditional Christmas log (my brother's responsibility to order from the best patisserie of the area). Well I am quite happy with it. Lets hope it all goes according to plan.

—My other stress has been to finish in time the two lovely scarves I have started to knit as Christmas presents for friends. Yes I am knitting and loving it. It must be an age thing as I remember my mother teaching me in my teens but not getting the point. I knit listening to music or lost in my thoughts or planning in my head my next bit of French or English writing. Unfortunately I am not good enough to knit and read at the same time. I look so content doing it that my 8 years old nephew Louis (the son of the Porsche owner) has asked me to teach him. I never thought that such a hyper active kid would get into it so completely.

He is hooked, from the moment he wakes up to last thing at night he knits, even leaving his kit in his mothers car to pick it up when he finishes school. Whatever you ask him to do, he answers, “yes when I finish my row”. I am completely amazed.

—It is Christmas time whatever that means. and I hope folovely surprises in my stocking, having forgotten to write my wish list.

Posted Dec 19, 06:54 PM



W I N T E R

Week 15

PASSING JUDGEMENT

—The coldest and whitest Christmas since 1962 according to the news. Three days at minus 6 degrees Celsius with fog and everything frosted over so completely that it looked like snow. Absolutely unreal landscape making me feel like an extra on the film set of the wizard of Oz or an elf on a 1950's seasonal postcard. Too bad most of my time was spent inside, busy with preparation, consumption and recuperation; wrapping presents, cooking tapas and other treats, decorating the house and setting the scene for a perfect and gentle family reunion (presents, drinks and food), eating it all while sipping champagne and unwrapping presents, occasionally taking pictures (all on moiblog images) then Christmas diner, and Christmas lunch the next day, then digesting and discussing it all before the whole family disintegrates once more until the next occasion.

By the time it was all over and everything cleared up, finishing with a big fire at the bottom of the garden, burning all the wrapping and packaging, the temperature was back to normal and the landscape reverted to its usual wintery grey brown, looking grimmer than usual, missing the luminosity of all that whiteness.

—Everything went smoothly and every one was on their best behavior; no clashes, very little tension in the usual places, a culinary success, no complaints or criticism. It was even enjoyable at times, no doubt the champagne and Pauliac 1982, an amazingly tasty white wine with a nutty taste helped; I decided to give up my forced ascetic diet for the occasion. I was reasonably spoiled, a funky little dress, a pair of leather gloves, a cooking book, perfume, bird feed, funky socks, a set of ten solid aluminium pegs, a CD, a seated ticket for a

Michel Polnareff gig in March. I am a real fan and let's hope I will have enough energy. A pair of earrings, a 2007 Scottish calendar with amazing images of highland cows, my pictures of the limousine cows look quite boring now.

—No comparison with the absurd orgy of presents some of them give each other, and on three occasions in 24 hours; once with all of us on Christmas eve, once more on Christmas day in the morning within the privacy of their own sub family (usually the most extravagant one), then finally at Christmas lunch with the in laws. Each year is a bit more excessive. I try not to listen to the proud enumerations, finding it hard not to pass judgement. Luckily most of them have gone back to their own lives now, others leaving tomorrow to spend New Year in Venice.

—The weekly EPO doping is not as effective anymore, my red cell count is going down steadily making me very tired and breathless, but less panicky than first time around, my body being more used to it by now. Hopefully next week the dose will be increased..... Next year actually.

—Knitting is perfect for me right now, keeping hands and mind busy with minimum energy loss. This week I am going back to french writing, seeing where it takes me. I am on my fifth knitted scarf and I have 4 more to go. The enjoyment hasn't decreased, I am trying to find ways of not looking too middle aged while doing it. I might get into knitting hats next if I manage to decipher the instructions in the knitting magazine I couldn't help buying... I never thought it could be so complicated, such an obscure language of abbreviations. Probably a way of keeping the knitting circle a bit more exclusive.

Posted Dec 27, 08:08 PM



Week 16 EPIPHANIES

—The end of another round of celebrating, eating and drinking champagne. Starting the year sitting by the fire on a sofa next to my mother, at two in the morning with a cup of verbena in front of us, trying to entangle a severely messed up ball of silver thread I use in my knitting (I am on my 7th scarf), she begging me to let her do it, I am amused by the corny metaphor, letting my mind revisit past new year celebrations. Both of us waiting for our epiphany...

—Epiphany falls on the 6th January and is also known as three kings day, remembering the coming of the wise men bringing gifts to newly born Jesus. In France it is celebrated by a cake “Galette des Rois ” containing “la feve” a bean dropped into the batter before it’s baked. The finder of the fève is crowned king or queen for the day and has good luck for the year and has to buy the next bottle of champagne or the next galette des rois. For about 3 weeks, almost everyday galettes are eaten, offered, shared and kings and queens chosen and the wise men happily forgotten. We are only the 2nd and I am on my 4th one.

—I am wondering what Epiphany Saddam had in the chaotic last minutes of his life, his death is not solving a thing. I find absolutely chilling the mobile phone footage on Youtube: “The hanging of Saddam Hussein – directors cut” – “UNEDITED SADDAM HANGING VIDEO” – “Saddam Execution Video (full including the drop)”. Such a barbaric end broadcasted in the latest fashion.

—My epiphany didn’t happen and my hopes of freedom are slightly deflated. It looks like the pirates are reluctant to let go completely. It is not great news, they are still here. It is not terrible news as they have gone down in numbers by 95 % again which means they are still reacting to the attack. I will find out next week the real implications of this news. Decisions will have to be made. At this stage the choice between a longer battle or giving up is a difficult one. I am feeling slightly numb and fatalistic. Should I stay or should I go now? If I go there will be trouble.... An if I stay it will be double ...

Posted Jan 2, 05:37 PM



Week 17 NOT A QUEEN

—There was no change of rhythm over the Christmas break, I find it hard to start the year, to get the ball rolling however slowly. The constant rain is not helping and the Porsche has gone, living a big void in my life / living space. She went elsewhere when my first visitors arrived just before the new year; Philippe and Eric on their way to Morocco. They were disappointed not to meet her, having heard so much about our cohabitation. I am hesitating to fill in the gap, deciding to give her two weeks before I do. By then my next visitor will be here, Joachim, she might take offence and leave once more. I have instead added an old mirror in my bedroom and attached to it the vevitian mask my sister brought me back.

—What I like about this time of the year is exchanging wishes with all those I have not seen or been in touch with for a long time which usually triggers an exchange of news and promises to meet up this year (not always kept but both sides know that the intention is there). Or you realize you have lost contact completely and you have the choice to let it go or to frantically try to reconnect, not ready to let this one go. Or you hesitate wondering if the other side is not glad to be rid of you.

—I am on my ninth scarf (one more and I stop I promise, I love thinking of the ones kept warm and cosy with a piece of me in Paris, London, Bordeaux, silly I know) and my sixth galette des rois but not once did I break my teeth on the feve (the bean) not worthy of becoming a queen....

—I am having a break from Proust, finding it hard to finish the 4th volume, getting a bit bored with the narrator’s moods and paranoiac manipulation of his lover Albertine. I do not understand her docility and compliance. I have just finished Jules Verne’s Around the world in eighty days, a real treat read. I love to see how little the world has changed since it was written but how much easier it is to cross it. Imagine doing the same journey today, travelling by plane going eastward against the clock, you could arrive a day before you actually left. But it would probably take you eighty days to sort out all travel documents, queuing for visas.... and the person you save in India or Pakistan, brought back, fell in love with and married will be considered an illegal immigrant and have to fight for his/her right as a refugee.

—My experiments in French writing are still surprising me, what comes out in these strange words I haven’t used for so long, the bursts of madness crossing my mind before coming alive on paper, bringing up the strangest configurations, the quirkiest fictions that at times feel truer than reality itself.

Posted Jan 9, 06:42 PM



Week 18 WHAT A DAY

—Finally a queen for one brief mouthful on my tenth galette des rois. Things are looking up I can feel it all too literally. The drugs (not sure which one) are having reverse side effects, making me feel really wired as if on fifty espressos a day. I would need to run a daily marathon to work out my surplus of adrenaline and nervous energy yet my body can just about cope with a mile. Everybody around me is relieved and find my change of state hilarious after all these months of lethargy. I feel quite the opposite, finding it unbearable. I am having night walks in country lanes around my home in pitch darkness (on cloudy or moonless nights). I hadn't experienced unpolluted nights for a long time; no street, car or house lights and nature's silence broken occasionally by small cracks and animal noises; strangely peaceful and sometimes scary.

—The results of first round negotiation with the pirates is quite positive. No overwhelming victory unfortunately as they are slow to leave the ship but they are leaving steadily. The final ultimatum is for March but I am confident this time, my voices too.

—Last Thursday was beginning of the winter Sales in France and my first shopping in 4 months, a memorable experience in many ways. My sister (wife of the Madeleines manufacturer and Porsche owner) took me to Limoges and became my personal stylist. She sat me down in my own dressing room at the back of the French equivalent of Zara or H&M, the music and bargain frenzy inside the shop a bit too much too soon for me. She brought to me all kind of wonderful garments with the eye and speed of the true shopper and fashion expert she is: great if not expensive tastes, years of personal experience and the purse to sustain it. We left 45 minutes later, I was exhausted and over excited with a big carrier bag full. I didn't care I didn't count, I needed true retail therapy. I then found myself sitting at her hairdressers, sandwich in hand, pointing at a funky razor edge haircut Louise Brooks style with a hint of Blade Runner. I closed my eyes feeling wonderful imagining my new look. When I came round I saw in the mirror a true Limoges bourgeois lady with a classic shoulder length bob. I couldn't help laughing while feeling like the victim of a strange conspiracy on French contamination, I looked nothing like the image in the magazine still spread on my knees but like a brunette version of my sister.

Both of us amused yet unsettled by the uncanny resemblance, her swearing to change haircut and hairdresser next week. That is when we bumped into Yves Gay my physics teacher and much respected theatre workshop leader when I was 16. I hadn't seen him or thought of him for more than 25 years. Bumping into him like that suddenly reminded me how important he had been in opening up the gate of my creative juices and his belief in and support of me at a time when my family was completely against my choice of a creative career. Well I did get there in the end but meeting him on my first day out in the world so to speak was a symbolic moment, like a circle closing down and a sudden affirmation or reminder of what or who I am. The shock was as big for him. He remembered me clearly, said he often wondered what happened to me, hoping that I hadn't wasted my talent. He wasn't a teacher any more but a full time theatre director/actor with his own little company, preparing a play for next month. We exchanged numbers. He phoned the same evening saying how excited he had been about our encounter. I am not sure what epiphany it brought him but I can't wait to find out.

— Back reading Proust, 5th volume la prisonniere, also back Deleuze and Guattari after many years, looking at VINST in relation to their Bwo concept the body without organ. Timing is right I am loving it, wishing I had made the connection earlier. I am ordering a thousand plateaux in French and inspired by watching Charlie Chaplin Limelight, it still makes me cry.

Posted Jan 16, 06:42 PM



Week 19 DELAYED BY SNOW

—If only my decontamination program was going as well as my French contamination. I am liking the region more and more. Nature still amazes me. I am surrounded by sparrows, bluetits, magpies, buzzards, herons, crows and jays and lots more I cannot give names to. I am quite able to recognise each one by its habits and personal marks; the fat sparrow, the limping one, the couple of jays courting every morning on the telephone cable, the bluetit feeding on the grease ball I hang from the apple tree visible from my bedroom window, the one looking for crumbs on the front terrasse, the gang of aggressive crows and their leader looking for a fight every other day.... I cannot identify their call, don't really want to, but I love listening to the various rhythms and textures, I try imitation, with no great success but it is early days...

—Talking about making noises Raoul Hausmann, one of the pillar of Dada Berlin, spent the last twenty years of his life in Limoges, 20 miles away. A permanent archive/collection of his work is now held in the castle of Rochechouart not far. I am hoping to see it in the spring. I found out this week that Deleuze also lived and died around here in St. Leonard de Noblat, thirty miles away. What fertile ground I am treading. These connections makes me look at the place quite differently and I am starting to see what could have been the attraction for them, unless like me it was by necessity rather than choice.

—To get rid of my excess adrenaline, still driving me and others quite mad, I have started to rack all the leaves and dead wood from the garden (more of a park really), then burning it all proudly when the sun goes down, sometimes joined by my nephews and they play fire games, writing in the night with burning sticks, jumping over. An hour of it leaves my body absolutely exhausted but almost still and relaxed until the next day.

—I have been stopped in my tracks by the first snow since I am here, we have had plenty of heavy frost and more fog in four months then I have seen in 20 years in London. No one here believes me but it is true. The French still think that London is blinded with fog for most of the winter or even the year. No point in trying to convince them otherwise, I tried. Same thing about food.

I am still trying to find someone here (who hasn't been to visit me) who could be persuaded that you can eat very well if you want to in London. Well snow is here, blizzards of it, more than 50 cms in 2 hours, as unusually icy and windy as it was warm a week ago, quite rare to see so much of it in the area. All roads blocked, schools and colleges closed, trains and planes stopped, no phone line, a few power cuts, one which almost burnt my laptop on which I was writing these words and other ones, it all went down with a crack and left me in the cold and dark until morning. I am stuck here until it improves, writing workshop cancelled, car unusable. But I love it and I have the time and the adrenaline to do so. I spent an hour last night running around with my camera, flashing snow flakes, white trees, bushes, invisible roads, then back inside with frozen fingers tows hair, I flashed the snowy views from each window, standing on the frames to get a better view point. I feel sorry for the birds, panicking around unprepared, having to look for refuge from the heavy winds.

—Family tea/champagne party for Louis the knitter 9th birthday with crème brûlée coconut cake and apple pie (all home made of course). My Dordogne sister's Sunday lunch a success again: little parcels of stuffed cabbage. Patrick Lecomte new film Mon meilleur ami, very touching and well acted, waiting for Deleuze in French delayed by the snow, waiting also for Joachim on Saturday, if planes are allowed to land again in Limoges.

Posted Jan 24, 02:42 PM



Week 20...

BLEAKNESS AND BEAUTY

—I am able now to look further than the next day or two and daring to look back at the past 4 months with awe but also pride and amazement: I am stuck at home by snow and poor roads for the last 3 days. I am on my 60th injection, 160th pill and 23rd checkup, not ready to count how many I have left. I don't know how much longer I will have to be a chemical plant. The boundaries of my territory have expanded quite dramatically half by sheer will power, half by necessity; I had to drive to the airport to collect Joachim. What an expedition, I am so proud to have made it, I also went inside a small supermarket for the first time in 4 months, broke 3 light bulbs I was carrying, looked for body lotion in the shampoos and couldn't recognise my sisters car on the way out but it felt great and I made everybody laugh. I went to the theatre and was taken out to a great restaurant. I had my first pseudo work meeting with the director of Centre des Livres d' Artistes. A wonderful places with a great collection, a bookshop and research centre housed in a beautiful listed building, I can see myself spending many days there and there are possibilities of projects on the horizon.

—I am feeling like a new born discovering the world, everything looks tastes feels wonderful. It is all a bit overwhelming and with the adrenaline still pumping strong I don't get much sleep at night.

—The remedy to boredom and depression is quite obvious, retreat from the world for a while, a long while, and when you dive back in it will feel absolutely great. Some around me don't really understand and blame the drugs.

—It is wonderful to have Joachim here, I am discovering a bit more of the area with him and he is seduced by it all as much as I am. I do hate winters in London but here the bleakness is wild and beautiful. We are invited around constantly by parents, sisters.... and each family is outdoing the other with great lunch diners and delicious treat. I am very touched by their warmth and generosity. Joachim brought me a small flying cow. You hang it from the ceiling and it flies in circles, magical and really funny.

—Two Deleuze books in French are waiting on my bedside table, had a few picks already. I decided to make a little book of all the family recipes I am enjoying and documenting, this week a mouth watering cassoulet and magret de canard with fennel and lemon and coriander sauce... I went to Pompadour to see the castle the horses and the race course, I saw and touched a 5 year old pure blood Arab horse named 'no more doping'. I am finished with scarves but I am now on my third knitted hat, the first one strippy green and mustard looking a bit like a head condom I have been told.

Posted Jan 30, 06:45 PM



Week 21...

THE PRICE OF EXPANSION

—Expanding one's boundaries comes with a price, it is payback time for all the excesses of last week. Adrenaline is still running high but I feel quite deflated. I have the mother of all bruises on my left buttock caused by a spectacular yet gracious fall in highly polished oak stairs. I am not too sure how it happened. My mind is fully awake now, I find it hard to keep up with so much energy: a lot of ideas and connections and lists made, a lot of thinking and writing in my head, most of it at night when I can't sleep. I do miss the slow mind of the past few months, I had got used to the luxury of only having room for one or two things in there.

—Now I have found my place within the family circle (not always comfortable), it is time for me to do the same within the community, before rumors and false information about me run too high. I have only become aware of my peculiar situation here and the curiosity it is creating in town in the past two weeks, since my re-entry in the world. Everybody 'knows' me but I know nobody. They know that I come from London and that I am my father's or mother's daughter or sister's (sometimes twin) sister, or brother in law's sister in law, all of them well known and established in the community due to their various involvement. I used to visit twice a year for a few days and now that I am here for longer the rumors are going strong. Why I am still here and to what is it exactly that I do. Some shopkeepers do not hesitate to ask me straight : why are you still here ? is it a permanent move ? The librarians that I have never met tell people I have an art gallery in London, others know that I teach and ask me in which English school I was teaching French, others being told that I am an artist ask to see my paintings, others ask me if I would know how to re-upholster their sofa, or would I teach English to their son, daughter, grandchild.... I find it all highly amusing but quite puzzling. I am tempting to play with it a bit but my family is a bit weary of what I might do.

—I am interested in finding ways to communicate what is it that I do exactly and to share (rather than show) some of it with the community. It is the first time I have the opportunity to actually 'work' some of my concepts against a real environment, as opposed to a specialist, art related or academic context. I am realizing that it is what I have been trying to do all along (quite unsuccessfully perhaps): it is the first time I have the possibility to be part of a traditional community (for a while). I find my current situation highly inspiring and it makes me look at my practice with new eyes. I am starting to connect with and looking at ways to develop projects with some of the local structures, cultural and social ones: music school for kids and adults, local choirs, various family planning groups, local cultural centre, centre of artist books. Lets see what happens, I find it all very challenging, feeling that there is great potential and a definite sense of expectation from the community, but I find myself on completely new grounds and feel a bit uncertain of how to proceed.

—I am on my sixth knitted hat, only two are wearable, others look like mops or conquers top.... A timid attempt at reading thousand plateaux, every 3 or 4 lines I am getting lost in thoughts triggered by a particular idea, or the words used or the structure of the thinking. I have only reached page 20 in a week. But my sketchbook is full.

Posted Feb 6, 06:39 PM



Week 22... SHE IS BACK

—I could smell hot rubber and leather before I could see her. I was at my Dordogne sister for the weekend and on my return the Porsche was parked there as if she had never left, the flying cow now hovering above her bonnet. I am noticing that I am no longer the zombie I was when she left and that she is no longer crowding my world now that I am spreading my wings in all directions.

—I am approaching the half way mark (hopefully) of my refurbishment program and I have mixed feelings. It is going incredibly slowly in terms of what my body is going through and it is going way too fast when I consider what I am experiencing on all other levels, I feel I need time to stand still a bit longer in order to let it all in, process it and let it find its place in my life and in my work. I do feel worried that I am not making the most of this strange adventure, that I am not living up to expectations, mine and others. It is difficult to explain to others that I might look/act normal but that every single move is the result of a great effort, my energy level is that of an 80 years old with a weak heart. Close ones are used to it by now but others are puzzled and don't really understand my sometimes peculiar behavior. When I do try to explain it is always taken the wrong way, dramatically awkwardly patronizingly worryingly, And when I make jokes, most are horrified or shocked. So I avoid saying anything at all but it makes it more stressing, having to pretend I am coping when I do feel at my most fragile and vulnerable.

—I do miss the luminous whiteness of the past weeks, high wind and rain showers are not my thing, birds are in hiding. In the fields the first lambs are shivering and I saw in a restaurant a stuffed limousine cow head with a ring in its nose, its glass eyes staring me down, entrecote was on the menu but luckily not on my plate. The sales are finally over, everybody bragging about their bargains yes I did succumb to a few myself, the spring and summer collection is now out, it is time to get your summer swimwear as all the best will be gone by June..... I am both amazed and appalled by it all.

—I had to introduce a bit of English etiquette in my family for the sake of everybody's sanity: one shouldn't talk about Politics or Religion at the diner table. Someone replied, but what else then ? What about sex and food I replied. The presidential elections are getting closer, arguments and debates are going strong, unfortunately very little I do agree with and most are repeating whatever they read or hear in the media without much alteration of words or meaning. I was finding it increasingly hard to keep my mouth shut and when I did open it I was finding it hard to shut it again. Not that there are many interesting or challenging ideas been thrown around by candidates of all sides, they all say the same things, in the same way while contradicting or attacking each other. Never have words sounded more hollow or remote from the hard reality of most French people. Even the art of rhetoric so much part of the tradition is absent. I am worried

Posted Feb 13, 06:49 PM



Week 23... ODD

—Shift in pace shift in space shift in mood, in weather, in normality in adrenaline. One week to go before the sixth month ultimatum to the pirates expires. I am not stressed or anxious despite what is at stake (stopping everything it is not working vs. continuing it might work) yet everything feels quite different, as if I am starting to look at things from the inside rather than the outside as until now. I am no longer a passive and curious observer but an active participant instead, a crucial shift in my decontamination/contamination process. I am slowly blending in the environment. It is leaving me feeling quite uneasy I am so used to the privileged position of the outsider always having one foot in while keeping one foot out. I am not sure I do want to be part of it all but I am not sure I can avoid it here.

—Perhaps the sudden drop in adrenaline levels in the past week is explaining this shift. I am back to a very very very calm state of mind/body and low energy levels feeling like I am carrying the world and the universe on my head. I can finally sleep a bit but my mind is lacking/missing the extra energy to nurture the few seeds I have planted here.

—I have met Yves the physics/theatre teacher of my youth so instrumental in my choice of life. A great reunion full of mutual expectations and curiosity. He looks exactly the same with a few more wrinkles and few less hair and observed that I hadn't changed much just a bit fatter now. Twenty years have past with its load of experience and adventures and it felt good to see that both had remained true to their earlier aspirations. We have evolved in parallel, working on similar ideas with similar concerns but in a different language (French English) medium (theatre visual arts) and context (small town big town). I kept on wondering what would have happened if I had been able to follow his advice at the time (I was 18) and go to drama school in Strasbourg instead of running away to London, would have I been much different now, do all paths truly lead to Rome? I felt mixed feelings on his part; very happy to have found each other again and full of pride and amazement but I could sense a certain disappointment and slight sadness perhaps. I am not too sure why but I find it amusing to think of possible reasons. Anyhow we are meeting again

—My third wave of visitors have just left, Katy and her two teenage sons from Paris, Nico and Roman who are as lovely and charming as they can be a pain, moody, unruly, demanding... I know them both since birth; I am the godmother of the elder and of the other on his request. My family has offered the usual hospitality and generosity, very touching. I do find the two of them incredibly difficult and have problems with sustaining the required levels of patience. I have unwillingly and reluctantly been put in the role of the figure of authority they need and almost demand of me, to contest it better of course, authority that an absent father and overwhelmed mother cannot provide. Not a role I am enjoying or have chosen but one I cannot refuse.

—I haven't got much further with 1000 plateaux but I am still as inspired, I am moving along steadily through Proust's la prisonniere, which is quoted often in Deleuze. My knitting is proving popular, I am receiving a few requests of scarves and hat (I am on my 12th now and I have finally perfected the pattern, quite amazed by the result. But I have restricted myself to only weekend knitting, still enough to produce 3 or 4 hats.

Posted Feb 21, 01:47 PM





B_{de}M

70%wool 30%adrenaline
100% original

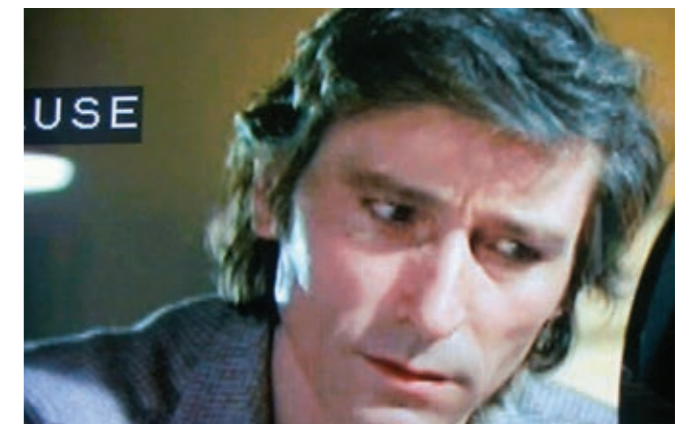
Week 24 THEY ARE BACK

—Sign of time passing while I, the Porsche and the flying cow are sitting still, the cranes are coming back, crossing my sky from left to right, coming from Africa where they spent the winter and on their way to Northern Europe for the summer: hundred of them in formations (not unlike Nike symbols in the air) as gracious and cacophonous as when they left a few months ago. First sign that spring will be here soon. They are followed by a number of other beginnings – buds lambs and calves – and piles of dung in every field – cow and horse dung used as natural fertiliser to grow the grass the cows will feed on and shit out, while they produce more milk and meat that we will feed on and shit out too, the cycle is complete. The air is saturated with this glorious and pungent smell when the wind is right in between the April showers which are called giboulées de Mars here – March storms.

—Sign of time passing I remember feeling slightly ashamed in my teens when being in public in the company of an aunt of mine. She had very little thin hair and always wore a wig, and still does, to hide it all. She wore it almost like a hat sometimes over her ears, often sliding on one side or the other with her own sparse and sad looking hair showing through, not a pretty sight: this week my 11 years old nephew (the brother of the knitting expert) clearly expressed his shame when I drove him to school one afternoon. First he bent down to hide, as if to tie his laces, when we drove past some friends of his in my old English Peugeot 205. It made me smile until a while later he demanded that I took my hat off (a lovely hand knitted green and blue strippy hat I had made the previous day) before we got near the school, plainly telling me he was ashamed of being seen with me wearing it. I couldn't believe my ears and had to comply. Then he made me stop 150 yards before the gate, got out without a look a goodbye or a thank-you and walked off. I was shocked and assured him and his mother that evening that next time he would have to walk. It reminded me of my aunt and my feelings then. I would have never dared asking her to straighten her wig or wear a hat. Anyway had I done so I would have been slapped right back. I now find myself on her side of the fence.

—Another quirky and farfetched link between myself my presence here and my London life past. A French remake of Lady Chatterley's lover has just won the French Cesar award for best film (equivalent to the Oscar here). It was shot on location around the corner from where I am staying. The connection might seem obscure but it is there in more ways than one. I am no Lady and haven't found, yet, a suitable sexy gardener/farmer/neighbor. More like mutual attraction and interest between myself and the community here, due perhaps to novelty and difference. It is not that sexy or sensuous, unfortunately, but exciting and inspiring still, let's hope it lasts longer than passion.

Posted Feb 28, 05:12 PM





THE BEAUTY OF FAILURE

Week 25 THE DICE ARE CAST

—Spring is definitely here with all its changing moods: hot and sunny one day, constant rain for the next three followed by cold blizzard. People and animals are excited and unnerved by it all. Birds are courting and fighting, mothers stressing over their new born lambs calves and piglets. Buds are exploding everywhere, cold viruses also, there are a lot of depressed and weary faces around, myself excepted, probably immunized by all my drugs .

—It is school holiday time and skiing season for those who can afford it. So I am finding myself here in my little bubble – with the Porsche and the flying cow – alone for ten days in the middle of nowhere for the first time since I arrived. I find it liberating and stressing at the same time. I didn't realize how amazingly protective and supportive the family web around me had been. I had forgotten how weak and vulnerable I actually am now that I have to take care of myself and all the daily chores: cooking, shopping, driving, cleaning, planning. On the other hand I am managing it all with a smile and no panics which was unthinkable a month ago. I can also spend hours undisturbed writing reading dreaming thinking sleeping and that is priceless.

—Tomorrow is a big day, the ultimatum to the pirates is expiring, the dice are cast, two weeks before I get the verdict. I am neither stressed or worried about it, no point, not much more I can do and I feel that regardless of the outcome I have passed (with high marks) the survival test.

—The writing workshop, which started in November, ended this week with a big friendly meal cooked by one of the participant. We all felt it had been a great adventure. Never would I have thought that I could reconnect so entirely with French, it has definitely opened new horizons and my old demons haven't yet caught up with me. A selection of the texts produced are going to be published and I have unwillingly been chosen as one of the three editors. A task I am looking forward to, I welcome the experience, but I am not sure how I will cope with having to refuse some of the submissions. In such small community it is difficult not to hurt feelings and one or two of the participants definitely have unjustified ambitions.

There is a public reading organized for the launch of the publication at the beginning of June. On the 17th of March it is national poetry day in France, not sure there is such a thing in England. This year the theme is Love, I have been asked to read something of mine. If I do I will also read an extract from Proust, his first kiss to Albertine, and the inadequacy of the mouth for such a task.

—A great culinary feast this week, rabbit in tomato sauce, stuffed geese neck, cooked apples with crème caramel, cabbage and morteaux sausages, pear cake..... Coincidentally but not surprisingly I have started reading the complete works of Rabelais, researching one of the project I am developing here where I am associating cooking and writing, eating and speaking, digesting and listening, all fascinating activities essential to French living but rarely challenged or provoked the way Rabelais did for example. I have just finished my 18th knitted hat, the pattern evolving as I go along. I watched one of my favorite film of the 80's , Carmen by Carlos Saura with the fantasy hero of my twenty's Antonio Gades. Such a flashback in time but even better than I remembered. I watched it with my 18 years old niece Amandine, it is one of her favorite film also, the legacy lives on.

Posted Mar 7, 02:58 PM

Week 26 DO FLIES HIBERNATE?

—While typing some French words I recognized a familiar buzz approaching the warmth of my laptop; the flies are back, I am not sure what they did or where they went for winter, I don't imagine they can fly to the warmth like the cranes, with such small wings. I thought they just died in Autumn, then how do they come back to life ? I must find out. Anyway my abode is getting crowded with the Porsche the flying cow and three flies on orbit above it all. A gentle warning of what is to come, the endless war against thousands of flies in the summer months, one of the rare draw back of being in the countryside. Who knows whether I will or will not be here to suffer it. The bees are also back, bingeing on the first pollen of the prunus trees, first to come into flowers, about a month too early this year

—I have a week or so of suspense, trying to wonder what will be the prognostic of my internal war, am I winning the battle? Am I persuading the pirates to go else where ? I feel strangely detached, so much depends on it yet it is outside of my control. I have the same feeling as on previous ultimatum, I feel very positive but my instinct, rarely in the wrong, tells me that the results will not be that good. How I would love to be wrong this time. Up to now the results haven't bee the best possible but they have remained positive if not borderline, this time it has swung one way or the other....

—The skiing season is over, along my first home alone break, which I have handled beautifully. There are a lot of smiling sun kissed faces around, a few, like my chemist, have big goggle marks around their eyes, making them look like flies. I find it highly amusing and difficult not to make silly jokes.

—Healthy or not it feels like revival time, spring is definitely here, the warm air is punctuated by the cries of despair of lambs separated from their mother, the cows are back in the field enjoying the fresh grass after long months of confinement on a hay diet and giving birth. Two new projects I am developing here for next year are becoming concrete. I cannot believe how easily everything is falling into place. One is the development of a new performance work for the theatre, a sonic and visual journey in and out language with two characters, inspired by the myth of Echo and Narcissus.

The second is a collaboration between myself, the centre of Artists books and the cultural centre to host an event around alternative ways of performing text (reading and speaking) for the national literary day here “ Lire en fête “, not sure there is such a thing in England; in “ Jeu de bouche “ (mouth games) I am bringing together in various ways two major mouth activities – eating (bringing in) and vocalizing (bringing out) – of course it will involve a lot of cooking

Posted Mar 14, 02:48 PM



WEEK 27

BORROWED TIMES

—Any minute any day now the phone will ring with that special news. Time is almost standing still yet a lot is happening in my toxic bubble. I am busy preparing my mother’s eightieth birthday on Friday, a surprise celebration bringing together her friends around some of her eclectic and quirky tastes, compiling a list of eighty words about her with contribution from all the family.

—I have had more entertainment in two days than I have had in six months here. On Friday I did my first public reading for National Poetry day on the theme of Love. So I read Proust description of the frustrated first kiss to Albertine in front of a packed audience in a setting resembling a church mass. It went down very well, despite the contrast with what else was read, it left me absolutely breathless, quite a task to negotiate the right coma to breath at. Then I read one of my own, a small text celebrating the pleasure of the senses where I confess my passion for the smell of horse dung. I am not sure it went down that well considering the hesitant clapping.

—Then on Saturday, after a long day of mental and physical preparation, along with 6000 others, I went to see Michel Polnareff live on stage in Limoges. I was a real fan of his in my twenties. He went to America in the seventies ruined and broken hearted yet at the top of his fame, running away from tax problems, the hassle and slander of the media who didn’t understand his taste for public streaking (fashionable in England and the States but the puritans French didn’t get it and accused him of exhibitionism and all kind of sexual perversions) This was his glorious come back after 34 years and the first gig of his tour after his overwhelming success in Paris, last week. What an experience, what a show, what a triumphant come back. Visually and musically brilliant, his voice as beautiful now as ever, from a distance and with the same famous glasses and blond Afro hairdo he also looked the same; a real consecration of his talent, not a pretentious and nostalgic come back. Quite an intimate experience despite the crowd, his emotion and pleasure to be here was obvious. I was dreading such a big event, the crowd the noise. In normal time I avoid big gatherings being quite claustrophobic. But it was a christmas present and an occasion I couldn’t pass, I was also fortunate to be in the company of two doctors, a nurse and an anesthetist, just in case. Crowd control was very good and being part of it all was surprisingly enjoyable, one indivisible mass swaying in unison,

—It took me three days to recover, I am back on my baby schedule of the beginning, a long siesta morning and afternoon. It is snowing outside, a succession of snow showers bringing us back to winter mood. I don’t mind, watching it all from the warmth of my strange paradise. I am often forgetting that I am on borrowed time here, in this heavenly place so suited to my current physical and mental state, and so conducive to good living and good work. I haven’t been that inspired and productive for a long time. Yet I am forgetting that I cannot afford to live this way, as much as I would like too, soon I will be back to the mad rat race. I must find a way to preserve some of it somehow, get my own base here perhaps, nothing as fancy as what I have now. Let’s put my mind to it. I have now finished my 24th knitted hat and decided to stop at 30. Well maybe.

Posted Mar 20, 05:45 PM



a l'écoute . accueillante . bavarde . barbu . familles rurales . bikarni . bistroquet . bonne cuisinière . bonne mémoire . bonne vivante . bouquets de fleurs . bourse aux vêtements . brushing . campagnarde . cascadeuse . chèvre . grands colliers . choriste assidue . siffleuse . compréhensive . conteuse . courageuse . couturière . crème caramel . cultivée . curieuse . dumas . écoute . espiegle . exigeante . femme d'intérieur . fissa . généreuse . gourmande . gros tétons . herui . hachis parmentier . hibou . homeoplasmine . joueuse . joyeuse . juste une goutte . la meilleure . la redoute . maman . mamie kefta . mamie yoga . m'enfin . maminette . mamoelle . maroc . memorable . mère bique . merle . fan du bon Dieu . mon arbre . pas gaga . patiente . peau douce . petits petons . polyglote . poulet aux amandes . présidente . soeur fidèle . réaliste . reine du fromage . rien que la moitié . ronfleuse . sage . scrabbleuse . siffleuse . souriante . sieste . tata popo . tétu . thé citron . 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80 words in alphabetical order to describe one’s mother on her 80th birthday

WEEK 28 THE WAIT IS OVER

—On Spring day the wait was over. On one hand my instinct was right and I am pleased. On the other I would have preferred to be wrong and facing an overwhelming victory or defeat. It is neither I am afraid. The pirates are still on board 6 months on, very few of them it is true, but enough to jeopardise everything: I have reached 76 units/ml when I needed less than 10 to be a winner, I started with 300 000, went down to 20 000 after a months, 900 after three and 76 after six. I was expected to reach 10 after 3 months for 50% chances of success after a full year of the fiercest chemical war. Now my chances are less than 10% for an 18 months battle (an extra 6 months). I never realized how logical and mathematical it all was. I also have to take into account the long term effect of it all on my body. I have until mid April to decide whether it is worth the risk/chance or not. My instinct says it is time to admit defeat but let see what the experts have to say. F***** pirates! Anyway the war is not over, if I decide to stop now, I am sure I can control the bastards until new weapons are on the markets in 4/5 years time....

—Death is not at bay but I encountered it twice this week, a still born calf carried away on a tractor and a baby bird fallen from his nest that my nephew rescued and tried to help fly off, not realizing it was too young to do so. It crashed down and died. He buried it under a pine tree in a bed of old chestnuts. It was painful for him to acknowledge his fatal mistake.



—My mothers surprise 80th birthday party was a total success. The look of shock and childlike joy on her face was a real treat. I read aloud her 80 words in alphabetical order, everybody interrupted to contribute more, an equally poetic and farcical moment. I have now about a hundred and have to update the image and text card I read from, everybody wants a copy of it. Everyone praised the two beautiful loving and caring daughters who orchestrated such a celebration. The beauty of illusion.

— The only thing not working out on this trip is the one thing that brought me here in the first place. Everything else happening, neither planned or expected, is going very smoothly as if it was meant to; French contamination, connections, projects, possibility to get a place here. I would never have taken that big dip without the pirates. It is almost like what made me run away in my teens - confusion, family struggle and expectations in relation to my own aspirations - had to bring me back twenty five years later, so that the cycle may complete itself. I would have thought that with their mission accomplished the bastards would simply go away. I can't help feeling that there must be a missing link still, staring me in the face and the day I will find it I will be free. I have that strong sensation that perhaps deep down I am not ready to yet , hence not winning this battle. It infuriates and frustrates me, I do so want my health back, and it is so silly an argument, a strange version of god's will . I have this need, we all have, for rational explanation. What is the purpose of this new failure ?

Posted Mar 27, 04:48 PM



Week 29 INDIVISIBLE BLAME

—Easter is near. Is resurrection the same as renaissance I wonder? I am waiting for both with a feeling of déjà vu, of many déjà vus if that is possible. My bubble is bursting; I am watching last week news slowly sinking in as if I wasn't really concerned. Out of the confusion and the disappointment the right decision is appearing more and more clearly as if I wasn't involved, yet I do not dare saying it aloud. As if there was still hope that the experts in white will convince me otherwise in two days time. As if there was still hope that I will find that missing link, that I will resolve the last riddle like Hercules in front of the sphinx. I am feeling deflated and defeated. I am a terribly bad loser, but whom can I blame. I've tried the birds, the flies, the flying cow, the Porsche, spring, looming elections, the weather, the Americans, my past, Jesus, saddam hussein, the pope ...

Posted Apr 3, 04:53 PM

Week 30

DRIP DRIP ALL THE WAY DOWN

—Never has time or consciousness appeared more oily or gone so slowly: I am observing each drop sliding along my conquered body before sinking through to my brain. I am not very good at bouncing, I usually let myself go all the way before I can look up again and slowly dig my way back up. Wounded warrior, I have shut off to the world completely, licking my wounds, lost inside in endless monologues, hands and eyes locked on the knitting needles giving me cramps in my fingers, mind racing to readjust my horizon, each move a painful reminder that I have failed. I am surrounded by the family in its entirety, busy celebrating Easter with endless feasts, games and chocolate bells, chicks, eggs and rabbits. The presidential elections are looming, spirits are high and political arguments fly easily across the table. I can clearly say that I am outnumbered in more ways than one, but I do not have the energy or the voice to stand my ground on any fronts.

—I have stopped all drugs, not that I feel the difference yet, not that I am sure I did the right thing, not that anybody else has the answer either. The women in white said that I was ‘ambiguous’ and ‘unique’ in my response to the chemio, falling outside any statistics, a puzzling case as far as they knew, I could go on but my chances were very slight and unknown as the pirates were responding in peculiar ways and way too slowly, I would need to continue at least twenty four months before being able to find out anything for sure. Considering the possible long term side effects of some of the drugs (some still unknown) I understood that by then I might have a brand new liver and no more pirates in my blood but not much else. They were willing to have a go considering my efforts so far and how much I had invested (body and mind) in this adventure, but left the decision to me, as did everybody else around me, some not knowing what to say or how to say it, others not daring to influence me one way or the other. Very few times have I felt more aware of what a singular journey life is, however loved and surrounded one is. A very sobering reminder. Anyway I have decided to stop the war, I don’t know if it out of wisdom or lack of belief and I’ll never know. It is too late to change my mind so be it.

— I am trying to keep up appearances and follow the flow of my French contamination, amused by the irony of some of the projects I am working on, their festive and hedonistic mood so removed from what is going on inside me. My knitted hats are proving very popular, I have only ten left out of thirty six, and a few requests. I decided to name them “ les bonnets de Marneix”, B de M. Lambs are jumping around, young birds risking their lives flying across roads recklessly, the ones surviving the experienced learn fast, first slight sunburn yesterday, a sweet voice from the past has got in touch out of the blue after 27 years, not long after my father handed me remains of our correspondence he found in the attic, uncanny, fascinating, sweet, heart warming and life affirming all at once.

Posted Apr 10, 05:05 PM



Week 31

GREEN EXPLOSION

— Green is exploding everywhere at an incredible pace, changing the landscape day by day, new grass you would happily roll yourself in among the cows and their dungs, trees unfolding their new foliage.... More suicidal birds are crossing roads or throwing themselves onto bay windows and car windscreens, invisible to them, with the most incredible bang. I have never seen or heard anything like it.

— By Sunday, the first round of presidential election will be over, the suspense is high as to who will be in the second round, a lot of indecision around more than ever before allegedly. I have been fascinated by the poster campaign, which is in a way more democratic than in England, but much less eye catching, no big advertising campaign with clever twists. Each candidate (12 of them in the first round this time) has one poster, all the same size, all displaying their portrait and their slogan in one form or another, all displayed in a row, in every town and village centre. Lined up like this it is easier to compare and appreciate each more or less subtle choice of symbolic color, slogan, smile, gaze. Barbara kruger overt influence in Segolene royal choice of design, grainy black and white and bold letter on red, earthy warm rural feel of Jose Bove with emphasis on his worker’s hand, various shades and strength of blue for the competing nuances of the conservatives, with a slight Magritte influence for Sarkozy –blue sky with cloud and outline of a naïve landscape in the background). I don’t quite get the Colgate smile and acid green (almost uranium like) color of the green candidate (ecological)... A mistake I hope. And finally the very minimal symbolism, in a simplistic reductive way, of Le Pen, big bold white letter on dark blurred background of faces. Each poster more telling and revealing than all the verbal diarrhea uttered by each in the past few months, for who has an interest in semiotics.

—I feel I have regained some kind of composure, quietly settling down at the bottom of my mind in order to regain strength and prepare my ascent. Never before have I had mixed feelings or hesitated in writing this blog, like in the past two weeks, when everything got a bit too close to the bone. While it still helped in putting into words and communicating to others what I am going through, without having to do it face to face and have to deal with their and my reactions, which is in fact the primary purpose of the whole thing, it has started to feel slightly exhibitionist lately. But to remain true to the idea I forced myself to continue, a sudden break could have felt more dramatic. I am also weary of being labelled and forever put aside into the sick side lane, with a polite and condescending mix of admiration, generous concern and pity. Nothing wrong with that but my pride won’t have it.

—I had a sweet day out with my mother and 2 sisters in Limoges, her 80th birthday present from us, it hadn’t happened since our teens. We also took her shopping for a ‘relooking’ treat, well the two others did, while I waited in the car too tired. The funny thing is that they came back with two very different kind of outfits, completely incompatible, each reflecting their own taste and style.

Posted Apr 17, 05:29 PM



Week 32 NO VOTE

—Spring is already over and summer in full swing, nothing to do with global warming of course, a very nice feeling but a change way too sudden for body and mind. I am proudly shown oversized leeks, eggs, flowers, all certified non GM produced of course. I have seen the other night big suicidal beetles throwing themselves on our bay windows over our heads attracted by light behind ,while we were having diner outside, then falling down on their back, legs wiggling in the air until they died chocking or of exhaustion (in about 10 mins), incapable of getting back straight. A strange feeling that the world is blind and deaf to Nature's speak. No wonder that none of the various green conscious parties scored more than 1.5% this Sunday, the first round of the elections, their worst results ever, despite a record level of participation, more than 85 . The main contenders not feeling that concerned with ecological matters. The French are scared, not of the same things and not often for the right reasons, some of losing their wealth and privileges, others their jobs, the less fortunate are asking for better shelter, jobs and security, but everyone is concerned with immigration issues (on both side of the argument, unfortunately with a growing trend on protectionism) and consumer power.

—So we are left with a good old fashioned social versus productivity duel, left-wing versus right wing challenge with a gender angle, balanced by a strong middle ground waiting to be bought. The two contenders, the clumsy gazelle and the frustrated vertically challenged puppy, have two weeks to seduce the electorate without losing their supporters, in order to win the battle. Such a comical farce. I went as far as queuing and putting my choice in the envelope, before being told with many apologies for having sent me a voting card by mistake, that I couldn't vote here as I was registered to do so in London. I kept the envelope, all the bulletins and the photos I took in the booth and worked through my frustration by making a great little book of subverted slogans and fragments of the poster campaign, playing with what remains unsaid behind smiles and slogans.

—My in between time is coming to an end, wounds are healing, strength and sanity are slowly re-emerging. I am trying to remember the way to the edge that I haven't finished exploring. The pirates are still on board but new beginnings are looming. It is time to count the dead and move on with the survivors, making sure not to fall safely back into the previous mould but to adapt to a shifting new horizon. After seven months, 215 days exactly of toxic war, 1581 pills (without counting hundred of homeopathic ones), 78 injections, 32 blood tests, 300 000 pirates became 32. My vessels are not as crowded or contaminated as before but soon they might start breeding again fast if I don't show them who is the boss and keep them under control. After all we are each others prisoners but I am in charge of what goes in or out: I will give them everything they hate; careful diet, limited alcohol, healthy living, minimum stress, exercise and yoga until I am ready for another open battle in a few years time.

—I give myself until June to secure a place here, the local council seems happy to help me in the light of the various projects I am developing. I can hardly believe it might actually all happen, amazed at how easily it is all falling into place. Well nothing is definite yet, only promises, and in election times, plenty of them are thrown around.

Posted Apr 24, 05:30 PM



Week 33 ALL THE THREES

—Thomas birthday today on May day, happy birthday my dear, and the last few days of a silly and scary political campaign, whose outcome on Sunday I am dreading. I have been shuddering at so many comments heard or read recently, people putting all their trust and belief on someone based on their strength guts and balls to do what need to be done". Without of course ever expanding on what needs to be done, as there is no doubt on the question – i.e. to protect them, their balls wealth and power from people without. What is even more worrying is that the only ones who had a bit of common sense and talked about issues others than protecting consumer power and economic growth, are the small candidates on the first round, none scored more than 2 %, their worst score ever.

—It was such a big thing organizing and starting this “in between” time in France that I never even thought about the way back, until now: I left in September, as if attached to a rubber band, stretching it all the way here, expecting that when I did let it go, it would automatically snap me back. The thread is still there, slightly twisted and over stretched, its pulling power greatly reduced, making returning not that straightforward. I am for ever grateful for these past few months experiences and opportunities it generated, following the flow with excitement and wonder, despite all the ups and downs and the unfortunate outcome. I am simply feeling overwhelmed by all the changes and part of me wants to retreat to the more familiar grounds of before, not feeling strong enough yet for the challenge. I have started a program of detox, exercise, yoga, walking, gently regaining control over my body, slowly expanding my boundaries, mentally finding my way back to London and clearing space there for what I have started here. It feels wonderful to stretch reconquer and polish every inch of my tired body.

—A gentle awakening compared to the current waking of nature which feels much more brutal than I ever had a chance to experience. I am almost missing the bare and quiet stillness of winter months, frightened by the sudden orgiastic decadence of so much green, grass, leaves, flowers, insects, birds, lizards, toads and frogs on heat crocking away all night and numerous thundery storms. Twice this week birds (a sparrow and a bluetit) came flying inside my room, had a few flaps around then casually flew out. The lizards living by my door and window have multiplied and are no longer scared or shy of me, as when I first arrived. They barely moe when I walk in or out, staring away at me sideways when I crouch down for a little chat. I will be able to touch them soon.

Posted May 1, 04:41 PM



Week 34 LATE AND ON ALL FOUR

—The righteous gnome turned magnanimous in its victory has beaten the clumsy gazelle. I am in silent mourning, not able to share the happy relief of most of my family, feeling slightly unnerved by their political views and narrow vision of the world. How could we be from the same mould yet so different. Winter is temporarily back, as predicted by the locals in the know. This time of the year around the ginger moon (lune rousse) is called the ice saints (les saints de glace) because it always bring cold weather, snow sometimes and the last frost of the year. It never fails.

—My engine is still coughing and puffing, leaving me feeling fragmented, frazzled, unable to concentrate and finding it hard to keep up with it all, almost wishing for a little shot of EPO. I have managed to secure a lovely studio in a disused porcelain factory (subsidized by the local council) but no accommodation yet, that I can afford until I rearrange my London set up. There must be a way.

—I attended a weekend workshop on writing for the theatre in Brive, run by two directors, one the former teacher of my youth Yves Gay, and Filip Forgeau a director/writer with a wonderful visual imagination. Starting from writing one's own text, developing it, creating one's own interpretation on stage, then being directed by each in turn through their radically different interpretations. I started with a short monologue of a snail and its glistening trace who crashes its shell against a rock and the reaction of the rock after the crash. I ended up on all fours suggestively mopping the contour of a man's body lying on the floor (dead or asleep I am not sure) and offering him my monologue; a very effective performance apparently, far from my original idea but it was interesting to allow myself and my text to be stretched this way. I also have a better idea now of how to possibly start developing the echo and narcissus linguistic road movie for the stage. Another great culinary week, with asparagus, iles flottantes and paella for my niece eleventh birthday.

Posted May 10, 04:23 PM



Week 35 REALITY CHURCH

—The ice saints are still creating havoc with hale, thunderstorms, and cold winds, not managing to delay nature's overwhelming green takeover. This week a dear friend from far away confessed to no longer reading these words, finding it heart wrenching for being overtly vulnerable yet confident at the same time. While appreciating this as a compliment, I think, it brings me back once more to question my initial motives for starting this blog and the exhibitionistic tendencies of the medium. Initially I wanted to keep a log of my strange adventure, a sort of static travel diary, but also to keep friends and close ones informed of my progress without them having to ask or me not being able to express it or having to repeat myself endlessly. I think it fulfilled this double purpose beautifully but I soon realized that it also allowed me to keep a certain distance with what was happening, by having to put it into words and on paper so to speak as it was happening. It became more personal and revealing than I wished, especially in critical times, but giving it up temporarily would have been confusing, difficult and not true to the task somehow.

—France is brought to a standstill in May, there is a midweek bank holiday every week, and most people, businesses, schools and public offices turn them into long weekends. It is impossible to get anything done or to arrange any meetings. No wonder the country is in such a state, economically and socially. Most complain about it but none would give up the extra time off. May is also the season of endless country fairs of all kind ; fun fairs, horse and cow fairs and races, craft fairs, antique fairs, book fairs, chestnut fairs, flower shows.... All advertised by cheap brightly colored posters pasted up on every possible surface, often mingling with the remains of the election campaign.

—I went to a strange flower show in a small village in the Dordogne, organized for the past 14 years by the locals and the neighboring rehabilitation and training centre, Claire Vivre. There are all kinds of stalls, flowers, food, home made wines and liqueurs, crafts, woodwork, birds, a small farm animals circus – a sort of reality country farm show. The highlight of the week-end takes place in a beautiful restored 15th century church. A group of “clients” (mostly schizophrenics) studying horticulture at the centre work in pairs for 8 months, spending four of them on site living with the locals, researching, designing and producing a series of life size flower arrangement tableaux on the theme of fairy tales this year. After queuing for a while among the naive sketches and collages of their work in progress, you enter a church crammed from ceiling to floor with flower sculptures, strange contraptions, and mannequins, sleeping beauties, red riding hood, blue beard, Venus, Eve, they are all there as frozen as their abode....You have to follow a very narrow path taking you around the different tableaux. The result is quite surreal, very elaborate but clumsy and naïve as if done by children with quite a dark mind for some, with sometimes beautiful unintended touches: Jesus smiling with open arms is in the middle of Blue beard chamber surrounded by upside down hanging black and red gladiolas. Mary in her shrine is half hiding behind a hanging metal structure lined with pages of local newspapers picked with various brightly colored flower heads... Farms are turning into reality shows and living museum, and churches into Freudian theatres open to all kinds of Gestalt therapy.

Posted May 15, 04:37 PM



WEEK 36 LATE AGAIN BUT WHOLE

—Benny is here Benny was here; she brought me here in September, zoomed up to Ireland to complete her Herculean job, 16000 square meters of scenic painting for the Millennium (now renamed O²) Dome in London. Last week out of the blue she announced her visit and arrived just on time for my first day of work at the centre of artists books. Trust her to always be here when it matters, this time to witness my unexpected turn of life, to approve and applaud it and as well as to ease my remaining doubts. A very pleasurable, stress free day of work, French style with long lunch coffee and tea breaks in a beautiful space full of great works, with a small friendly team, Didier, Monique, Jean Marc and Laurent on temporary work placement. A real treat. I went to sleep that night exhausted with a big smile on my face, making sums in my head to figure out how to get my own place here.

—A very surreal few days followed, working and tired but finally feeling myself and at home in a place that up to now I felt completely disconnected from, always having to leave behind my everyday life in another language, not my mother tongue but the one I speak, think, swear, dream, love, hate and cry in. Always being stretched in between two separate worlds, for twenty-three years never being able to reconcile them. This week for the first time since leaving morocco behind in my teens do I feel whole again, and able to reconcile past and present, family and personal life, English and French and all I am about. I came to have my body decontaminated and instead I have defragmented my mind. I am enjoying the wonderful novelty of it all, dreading when bad habits will start catching up with me.

—Just before Benny arrived I made a trip back in time to the place my family came to when we left Morocco, a farm 80 kms west of here, near Bourganeuf in Creuse. I hadn't been for seventeen years, what a shock, I can count on the fingers of one hand the changes. The same holes on the road, the same houses and farms, the same shops in town, almost the same people but older or younger but looking like their elder. Only Nature had evolved, bare fields of newly planted trees turned into big forests, while many other forests were destroyed by the giant storms of December 1999, I remember it well I was in the area, some have been cleared but the majority are still waiting their turn eight years later. It rained all day, exactly the weather I have always associated with the place, as miserable as my memories of my time there. A strange day, quite painful to start with, as we drove around to revisit and reminice past moments and places, I started to feel as if I never left. Not an ounce of nostalgia.

Since last September It looks like I am slowly walking back in time and retracing my steps, it means my next trip has to be Morocco... finally.

Posted May 25, 10:48 AM



WEEK 37 CRACKING AT THE SEAMS

—It is raining like hell, I am paddling around in mud, quite literally as time is cracking at the seams. In less than a month I will be back in London, I haven't yet got the keys of my studio or found anywhere to live here, apart from a lovely 60's cottage with cherry trees in the garden quite cheap at 50 000 pounds and an old school to renovate for 40 000. I don't have the readies yet anyway, and the second, despite being a sort of old time dream space, feels like too big a venture for now.

—My first week work at the centre des livres d'artistes has been equally exciting and exhausting. My ideas and what I propose to bring to the place seems to be welcomed, yet I already find it difficult to shake off the well rooted mistrust and indifference of the town in relation to the centre itself, its local role and relevance, but also in relation to what is Culture and/or (contemporary) Art and its place in today's society. These are not new issues but it is the first time I have a chance to confront my ideas on the subject. I have a big task ahead.

—Doubts are creeping up again, multiplied by the mixed feelings expressed quite clearly and strongly by a few around me, who find it difficult to accept or adjust to the new turns of my life, making my little renaissance rather difficult and painful and my joy impossible to share.

—Benny has gone, quickly replaced by Claire Frank and their three children, the last one Hugo a gorgeous 5 months old baby. Once he fell asleep in my arms as I was chatting with his mother. I had forgotten what a wonderful feeling that was, soaking in his warmth, his unconditional love and trust. Claire told me that at night when he sleeps in their bed, against her body, she sometimes feels like a vampire as she can't help craving and stealing (her own words) that energy I was trying to describe.

—I am discovering the prose of Blaise Cendrars, captivated by it in fact. And wondering what makes him and Nicolas Bouvier quite similar in essence, if not in style and time. They were both Swiss. Could that be part of it ?

Posted May 30, 02:40 PM



WEEK 38 WELL COOKED

—Three weeks before I fly back to London. I am making endless lists, things to do, things to remember, people to call, emails to send, my mind is getting dizzy with it all. I am almost missing the one thought a day zombie state of last autumn. The remote and ascetic (drug enhanced) life suits me fine.

—Mother's day, yet another occasion to eat drink and spend money. The French economy is based on the multitude of events to celebrate every year. This time my sister in the Dordogne had visitors from west coast America, friends of her husband mad about French cooking. A big garden party was organized in their honour, a mechoui: a whole roast lamb cooked on an open fire for seven hours, Moroccan style. Imagine their reaction to this rather primitive yet delicious ritual, they couldn't believe their eyes or their taste buds: as impressive were the rowdy drunken songs and jokes of my brother in law and his friends. Listening to their English translation of the rude lyrics was a real treat. I was surprised to see they could speak English fairly well, proving wrong the reputation French have abroad.



—I was given the role of photographer to document the whole event. It is always hard to get any recognition or interest for what I do, generally considered as obscure superfluous and useless, but when a photographer is needed, all is forgotten and I am the only one who has any doubts about my skills for the job.

—No home still but I have just got a phone call that the keys of my new studio are awaiting me. My enthusiasm is tempered by the consideration of all I need to do to make it work: tables, shelves, paint, bringing things from London. I am lacking arms and energy. Still enjoying Blaise Cendrars. Still rubbing the wrong way some around me. Still shaking the dust in my new job, hoping some of it won't fall back down, trying to find a balance between my pace and their much slower one.

Posted Jun 5, 03:38 PM

WEEK 39 IN MY PRIME

—10 days to take off among the rolling of daily thunder and the pungent smell of chestnut trees flowers; I have never smelt anything like it, resembling the musty rot of silage sprinkled with chloride, it is coming from a nearby field of around 80 trees, beautiful to look at the sort of furry yellow coating on the green leaves but the heady smell which lasts a week or two is sometimes hard to stand. In ten days I will finally be out of my luxurious bubble of paradise in which I am now feeling like a lingering stain on the landscape. Not a nice feeling but an understandable one perhaps considering how long I have been here, compassion only stretches so far. I am trying not to take it too personally and concentrate on the weeks ahead. On the 23rd I go to London then from then on the 29th I fly off to Zaragoza for a week where I am showing VINST there for their first biennial (yes one more), then back to London until the end of July, time too reconnect with things and make room for what I have started here and see what it looks and feels like from there, then back here until September to shake more dust and set up my studio. It is the first time in 10 months that I am looking more than a week ahead and will leave my 60 kms wide territory, which surprisingly has never felt too small.

—I gave my second public reading part of the closing event of the writing workshop I did this winter. Writing and reading in French still feels so much like operating in a foreign language that it helped me to overcome my usual reluctance in relation to my own words. I seem to have done a good job considering comments on content and delivery. It was a great feeling to read with my father in the audience and alongside my eighty years old mother who stood proudly to read with her storyteller's voice a short text called 'A man I will never forget', this man is not my father of course and it is very difficult to tell if she chose that title innocently or not, she says she did. I finally manage to write an artist statement in French that manages to articulate this new turn with a French twist, in life and career; this rejoining of past and future into a present with two lanes. I had my first dip in the swimming pool in front of my bedroom window, at sunset after a long day of meetings and running around ... What a wonderful feeling. Unfortunately not one I can afford for much longer. It all feels like a perfect end to an average French movie.

Posted 102 days ago



A U T H E N T I C a n d E C S T A T I C



T R A D I T I O N A L R E C I P E S F O R T R A D I T I O N A L M E A L S

WEEK 40
BIKINIS FOR ALL

—I am writing these words, the last ones from here next week it will be from London, sitting by the pool in between two thunderstorms and work calls about tomorrow schedule of meetings. What a life, I am not bragging but sighing, trying to make the most of it before it all ends on Saturday. The atmosphere is more relaxed now that boxes are appearing, assuring some that I am leaving and that my departure is looming, I think I won't be missed by all, at least not for a long while.

—This morning I took my parents to the local train station, with luggage and passport, off for two weeks to Zarzis in Tunisia, their 50th wedding anniversary present from us their kids, and the first time they go abroad and to North Africa for 15 years, possibly the last time too, in some ways their last honeymoon. It was a touching moment to see them leave, all excited and a bit overwhelmed: they are consumed travellers but their bodies are not respnding as well as they were used to, a difficult fact to accept. For once it was them leaving and me waving goodbye from the platform, a truly meaningful moment for the three of us. It was always me going back to London with relief and sadness after a few awkward days where words or feelings rarely crossed our mouths, and all hoped that next time perhaps, in six months things will be different. This time it was a joyous occasion with laughter surprise and relief in our eyes when we silently acknowledged this shift, realizing that we had perhaps, over these months, managed to bridge the silence. I also felt a bit of what they must have gone through each time, the pang of being left behind.

—Another family occasion to eat and be merry for my niece Chloe first communion. An occasion for me to go to church and check my opinions. I am more candid than before but reassuringly as distant. My sister in law noticed that I was the only one taking pictures of walls, sand baskets and spider webs. Chloe's reward for entering the Christian community was a gigantic trampoline, the only reason she chose to endure three years of catechism, on the advice of her elder brothers and sister; most kids have no intention of ever going to church again but they know that the presents are worth it.

Posted 97 days ago





S U M M E R

Week 41 STRANGE DREAMS

—As Spring becomes Summer and Tony Blair is finally stepping down (entirely coincidental timing), the rubber band effect has worked a treat and snapped me right back to where I nailed it last autumn, it just needed a bit of warming up, largely provided by tying up loose ends before I left France.

I am now breathing and writing again in the same language. It feels as if I have never left. The Porsche, the cows, the French, the family, the drugs, the birds, my luxury bubble, it all feels like a strange dream, a great one actually despite the circumstances and the outcome. Yet I am getting French emails requesting answers, invoices, confirmations, statements, quotes, reminding me it did all happen

—It is great to see London with fresh eyes, in all its eccentric magic and hidden beauty, compared to where I have been these last ten months. I am reluctant to fall back into the fast lane though, my body is struggling slightly, and my mind racing through all the possible ways of adapting my living arrangement: selling (or not) the flat, moving (or not) to Farnham and keeping a room or my studio in London, I change my mind ten times a day. Never have I been so uprooted and indecisive, I have always dreaded uncertainty, I am staying in the little spare room of my flat now occupied by Christian since I left. We both play with this peculiar shift of circumstances, I am trying not to impose my ways, while sneaking a bit of cleaning dusting and female touch to what has become a bit of a masculine den, a nice den though.

—I am slowly reconnecting with everybody, being bombarded with great news, not one sad note yet: love stories, travels, babies on the way, new jobs and ventures, sophie's new magazine Okido, a wedding. Tomorrow is my first day back at work at UCCA, planning next year, accommodating my timetable to my plans and proposing links with my projects there.

—The only struggle so far, apart from my tired and moody liver trying to recover from toxic war, is getting used to noisy neighbors and crowded buses. I miss my car left behind and the pungent smell of chestnut tree flowers. But it feels good to know that it is all waiting for me there. My return is premature but the cycle doesn't feel complete yet.

Posted 90 days ago



Week 42...

—Just when I start feeling home again and settling back into forgotten rituals; Bonnington square summer fest, hugging long seen friends in between raindrops and hale storms, (I have just seen what looks like snow covering the pavements of Brixton), English breakfast/lunch/brunch before throwing myself into whatever I want or have to do, journeys to Farnham, hunting in charity shops, the wonderful Turkish deli shop around the corner, London skyline from my window, twenty four hours wireless access, Brixton crazy fashion sense, the ritzy cinema a go go, slowly catching up with everybody.

—Just when I feel that I have never left and that I do love it here, the tide catches up with me and takes me further once more, the storm is not over. Today I have been offered a 0.5 post in Farnham (upgrade from my 0.2 with overtime hours), it has been in the air for a few years but I truly didn't believe it would happen and was almost glad considering how things have changed lately. It is hard to refuse, I am also able to group my days so that I will be able to do four weeks here, three weeks in France. My flat has been estimated at 210 000 pounds!! I can rent it through an agency for 1100 pounds a month! absolutely ridiculous no way I can do that, it would feel wrong. So I am deciding to move to Farnham and rent here to Christian and another person at reasonable cost for one year. I can come to London for friendly visits and culture fixes whenever I want. If I like this new arrangement I will sell the flat, buy one in Farnham and get a place in France too. Absolutely unreal, I am excited about all these possibilities but I do feel like running away or getting my old life back.



Week 43 UNEXPECTED

—Constant floods of rain, my back is hurting, Christian is virtually flying in his room, I think we are both getting used to cohabitation, I am more civilised than Philippe and he is more talkative than the Porsche, maybe not as house trained though but I am slowly regaining control of the place, cleaning it inch by inch, a bit every day. I am off to Linz tomorrow, visiting Joachim in time for his annual big project in the Lagerhaus, It feels wonderful to recover freedom of movement after so long but back pain is worrying me, hoping my kidneys haven't been damaged by the war on pirates.

Posted 83 days ago



—The show in Zaragoza has been postponed so I decided to go to Neufelden to see Joachim in time for his Heimart summer project; an annual collaboration with Linz theatre, this year called Land in sight: Alle im selbem boot – an outdoor multicultural / musical / singing / acting / dancing / running extravaganza about immigration and asylum seekers, with a roast pig feast at the end. The highlight for me was a video shot illegally on a boat overpacked and piled up with sick and tired African immigrants, risking their life to reach Spain being beaten up and manhandled by their boat keepers: an in your face visualization of what we read in the paper everyday, so effective in revealing the horror and desperation behind what has become for us little more than a matter of political opinion an issue used to win a few electoral voices. What was more shocking is to realize that this footage could equally represent a shipment of slaves in colonial times, being brutalized and exploited by their keens, only this time they are not slaves but willing and paying victims escaping an even harsher reality. No words can describe what I felt, I remained speechless for a long time.

—Almost speechless, as I ended up being part of the show, performing/improvising, with an Afro wig under the name of German Angst, with Marcus Kaiser a wonderful artist and cello player from Dusseldorf – I requested the wig to match his incredible head of hair – the last minute replacement of a violin and a flute player, his two partners in angst. I was initially puzzled by the invitation, not sure I would feel up to the task so soon in my recovery, not having used my voice this way for almost a year. But how could I resist the opportunity to improvise with one of my favorite instrument and to get back into it all faster than anticipated. What a wonderful experience that was, and very cleansing too, I truly felt sometimes that I was vocally clearing my body of its toxic overload. I am not sure of the outcome or whether I lived up to Marcus (pretty high) standards or expectation. The cello and the clarinet have always been the two instruments I most enjoy and relate to, being able to hear/feel their voices with my whole body. I have had for a while the fantasy of doing my version of Nam June Paik cello piece with charlotte moorman. Well I never got that far this week, but that was close enough for now and probably more fulfilling and entirely unexpected.



—Then everybody left and I spent the most beautiful day and a half entirely by myself, drawing in the open air with burnt straw ashes as pigment. One of these rare special moments when time stands still and you feel in tune with it all; I felt alive and well, finally. Back in London after these special few days was a bit of a come down, my life being what it is right now, scattered and fragmented, so many loose ends, projects, changes, decision taken to put into practice, in between times full of potential and surprises, before I finally root myself again.

I am surprised at how much this fluidity has suited me and done me good. More images of my bohemian adventure and the roasted pig and the karma car on flickr in the moiblogsummer and the bohemian memories sets . Check the BdeM hat collection too.

Posted 76 days ago

Week 44 ALL THE FOURS AND FIVE SOON

—During a short walk on the river bank between Waterloo bridge and Tate modern last Friday evening, rushing against the tide of strollers to meet Rikka for the Dali and film exhibition, I saw a giant flag with Bruce Willis face crossing the sky following an helicopter under the gaze of Gormley's human silhouettes standing on the edge of surrounding rooftops, below by the water a well build half naked Scot in tartan skirt was making life size sand sculptures of sofa, table and chairs, a bit further a woman was offering parrot horoscope to confused lager lads, with what looked like budgies: London and its eccentric Victorian magic bursting out in between thundery showers.

—My eyes and mind were full of the wonderful ritual I observed from my bedroom window as I was getting ready. Scruffy polish builders, unaware of my presence, stripping off and metamorphosing into gorgeous metro sexual (diesel and Calvin Klein) hunks, ready for a night out chasing girls. To feel part of it all feels almost as surreal as revisiting Dali's L'age d'or and Un chien andalou and indulging in my favorite London skyline, the condensed view of St. Paul's and the City from the top floor of the Tate modern at night. It matches my second favorite, Manhattan skyline, when sitting by the water on Green Point old docks in Brooklyn. I have mentally visited these two places often from the depth of my bed in deep France. It is wonderful to be here again, throwing myself into cheap and nasty but so stylish Brixton fashion from the aptly named RISKY shop; how could I resist this off the shoulder asymmetrical 60's short dress, the slick black jersey Marilyn's dress with a twist, the bright green and pink watermelon pattern folded skirt. After 10 months stuck in conventional sophisticated classic French fashion, the norm there, it is hard to resist.

—London magnetic pull is relentless, I am happily succumbing, yet there is no going back. Yesterday I signed the contract for a small maisonette in Farnham, moving in on the 22nd of August, and I received a phone call from St. Yrieix to tell me that I have a council flat as of the first of August, completely unexpected, and lovely Karen offered a room in London whenever I feel like. It is all falling in place. Time to pack.

Posted 68 days ago

WEEK 45 LATE FLAT OUT AND SPIRALLING

—I sadly missed the 5pm polish builder's ritual of last Friday. I was too engrossed in unearthing twenty years of work stored at the back of my studio, some I hadn't looked at since I moved in there 13 years ago. Some has been destroyed by the foxes squatting there for a whole winter 3/4 years ago. What a humbling and rewarding experience, cruel at time yet there is really little I felt truly ashamed of. Most of it has acquired a new momentum, seen in relation to what followed, being part of a continuum, a succession of projects and ideas and experiments which lead me to where and who I am today, which in turn lead me to having to unearth it all this week.

—I can represent it best as a slowly evolving upward spiralling movement, circling around this hard to define continuous core, exploring it at every rotation from a different angle or perspective, sometimes close to it, sometimes not, with a few unrelated splashes of digression, transgression or momentary relief. I just wished I had more time to indulge in the moment. Everything has to be sorted labelled boxed and/or discarded, ready to be loaded on Friday and driven down to my new workspace in France on Saturday. I will have a chance to look at it all again when unpacking it next month. I have hired a van, Pedro and I are driving down to France on Saturday, Christian is joining us on Sunday and both are driving back on Tuesday, living me behind to organise home and studio there.



—This personal mini retrospective coincided with Hazel's long awaited visit from New Zealand, on her way to the arctic circle where she is joining a small cruise ship as a chef, sailing all the way down to Antarctica, via Greenland and Panama Detroit for the next few months. Being the closest of friends in London in the early eighties we hadn't seen each other for 18 years and amazingly as I was leaving the studio to pick her up at Heathrow, I came across a pile of photos and contacts sheets of two studio sessions I did with her pregnant and later on with her three months old baby just before she left. Jessie her daughter is now a beautiful and sexy 18 year old Dita van Teese look alike young woman. A few wrinkles and fat patches apart, we noticed, politely perhaps, very little differences in each others, it does feel as if we have never been apart, naturally falling back where we left off all that time ago, in between sharing a few stories of the long absence and reminiscence of our youth.

—I love July here, always the time when long gone Londoners have to turn up from around the world, on their way to somewhere else, to catch up and fill up on the London buzz. Huma is here from Pakistan, her visits are more regular every three years or so, this time she is here with David on her honeymoon, I have slight difficulties in adjusting to her new status, seeing her as two rather than one, with time I am sure. Anup is also visiting from Kerala. Endless diner, breakfast and lunch dates. As a way of fitting it all in and still catching up with a few more dear friends I still haven't seen, Jochen, Rhett and Jer, Debby, Carole, Sue....., I have organized a picnic in Brockwell Park during the famous Lambeth country show, a strange event mixing, rap and reggae gig, animal displays, horse and bike races, market stalls of all kinds, medieval horse riding parade.... And a whole lot more, in my eyes one of the few remaining true brixtonian cultural experience

—An incredible cold is leaving me flat out and struggling floods on a huge scale are paralyzing England, the worst ever apparently and there are no signs of any improvement on the contrary.

Posted 60 days ago

WEEK 46 45 IN 48 (HOURS)

—Hazel has left for the Arctic circle she is probably half way to Greenland by now, I have given her Bruce Chatwin's In Patagonia to read when she gets there. She has bought herself a Lumix camera and I have registered her on Flickr so that we can all share her amazing boat trip from one pole to the other. It was so hard to part; I was so glad I had much to finish off, packing and sorting things (at home and in the studio) before leaving early the next day with a full van. Pedro was amazing, what felt like a huge mountain to climb (loading, clearing and driving half way down to France) became a short stroll with a lovely boat ride, well at least for me....

—I am now by myself in deep France, writing these words sitting by a pool next to a big empty house feeling like a cuckoo in someone else's nest. I have seven sets of keys in my bag, three homes of my own but none ready to move in before September, places to stay and invitations are plenty but I am longing for my own bed (that I haven't slept in for almost a year now) and a bit of quiet solitude. Pedro and Christian have now returned to England with the van and a few goodies, foie gras, madeleines, wine and cheese, after a short but packed first visit here, between the Centre of artists books, eating local specialties, swimming, trampoline and endless table tennis challenges, Pedro the uncontested winner, myself not far behind and Christian catching up fast, all courtesy of my Dordogne sister and her family currently on holiday.





—My brand new studio is full of boxes waiting to be unpacked and sorted. I am still planning how to best use the space and archive all the old work I have brought here, a very special moment when old and new come together, being careful and precious with the first steps and marks I make, making sure to start on the right foot. Now I am back here and not for health reason anymore, I have to break old habits and switch the way my mind operate. This was the place I dropped in for a week; two or three time a year, for family occasions and/or a quick load of fresh air. I was very tempted to jump in the van when it went back to London, feeling slightly confused and, not quite ready to stay behind, missing already keen spirits and friends.

I guess I will feel this way for a while each time I go back and forth between the two. What is amusing is that everybody is asking me if I had a great holiday this past month in England despite the floods, not realizing what a roller coaster it has been, and in England everybody is envying my new laid back life here. In a few months I have gone from being considered a workaholic to a sicko to a full time tourist and/or glamorous jet-setter. How misleading appearances are.

Posted 54 days ago

WEEK 47 AND 45

—Visiting week is over, the guests are now gone, my sister and her family back from their Mediterranean cruise and I am settling into a program of gentle cuckoo fitness every morning, trying to regain some kind of natural energy: I have come up with a multi purpose trampoline session which includes stretching, walking and running in circle and of course bouncing, all this courtesy of my Dordogne sister and her family with whom I am staying until I get my own place on the 1st of September with no trampoline or swimming pool or wide and wild open space or fireplace, but my own place. I went to visit it yesterday as the previous tenants were clearing it out. It is actually lovely and spacious for a one bedroom flat with a big kitchen, bay windows in each room and plenty of cupboards, a lot of works though to get it ready, it hasn't been decorated for 13 years, wall paper needs to come off and the bathroom is a mess. It is located on the ground floor of a 2 floor high small concrete building built in the 70's on the edge of town, in the middle of a big piece of green with a pond, the windows facing the green, the best possible location and very quiet too.

—Meanwhile the town has had its annual vide grenier (attic clearing/flea market) on and around the main square, the occasion for families to get rid of their surplus of consumerism, furniture, books, toys, household items, clothes, and sometimes also the house content of dead relative's or what is left once antique dealers have made their choice. There are also a few antiques stalls and lots of old books too. It is always on the first week end of August, I haven't missed one since it all started around 10 years ago ,I make it coincide with my summer visit and birthday celebration. For the first time I could freely indulge, not worrying about how to take it all back to London, and having the perfect excuse of a new home and studio to furnish, I went on a small binge running out of time and money and energy, it was such a hot day; lamps (20's, 50's and 70's style, a 50's wooden table, an old green classroom blackboard that also turn into a table, a 30's wooden newspaper rack, various lamp shades, including 3 shiny mirror sphere ones from the 70's, a small carpet, a proper set of old fashioned pans, a beautiful ball shaped 30's Italian coffee maker, a 70's aluminium chain necklace...

The next day I was spoiled with more useful and beautiful household gift for my birthday with of course delicious home made dishes served with great wine and champagne. It seems like my wish for minimal Zen living will remain a fantasy once again.

—I have somehow officially regained the accent I have left behind and completely forgotten when I came to England, the accent on the last letter of my surname that is. Emmanuelle Waeckerlé is printed on the contract I have to sign for my flat but also on the publicity for an exhibition I am having here in June 2008. What a strange sight, slightly puzzling too and predictably symbolic. Waeckerlé, it feels right, I am wondering how could I have erased it so completely for so long, I am keeping it for good.

Posted 47 days ago

WEEK 48 IN THE SKY

—Hot air balloons, shooting stars and farmyard theatre were in this week. Every afternoon and right up to sunset the sky over my studio filled up with a multitude of colored blobs, around sixty hot air balloons competing for a European title, quite a majestic and unreal sight difficult to capture in a photograph. Then for the past four nights, clear sky permitting, my niece and I lied down on the trampoline under a cosy blanket to admire and count the multitude of shooting stars crossing the milky way; every year around this time the earth crosses the pass of a trail of dust and small rocks coming from the Swift Tuttle comet, which consume themselves into shooting stars when they enter the atmosphere. Star lovers all around Europe get their big lenses out but I prefer lying down in wonder under the gigantic night sky, almost 180 degrees of it, trying to spot where the next falling star will manifest itself, letting my eyes follow its trail sometimes holding my breath. Even my niece who is a real chatterbox managed to remain speechless for two or three minutes at a time. It is over now.

—In a nearby apple farm, the owners host and organise with the local population an annual grand scale open-air theatre /play/peplum in a field with a small lake. This year the subject was the ongoing struggle of the peasants in the region starting in prehistorical time (this is the region of the Lascaux grottoes and Padirac where the first prehistorical paintings and tools were found but also the area of the “croquants” the first farmers strikers in the 18th century), through the revolution right up to today’s global farming and GM issues; a two hours extravaganza with fireworks, more than 200 actors and extras, cows, pigs, horses, goats, antic tractors and steam engines in perfect working order, and still a few shooting stars, the show followed by a great diner of local specialties for 800 punters. It was absolutely amazing, No West End musical, as professional, but more effective and enjoyable, not so much because of the quality of the show or the setting or the food but knowing that the whole project is put together by a bunch of local farmers in their spare time in order to share and preserve their dying trade, with great initiative, modesty and humour. Seeing them dancing and getting drunk in their primitive Cro-Magnon costume or medieval clogs and rags with big bellies popping out, after the show, was a real treat. They would not stick out in a La Pocha Nostra performance at the Tate.

—I am finally ready to unpack boxes in my studio, giving me a small sense of feeling rooted; shelves and table tops are in place thanks to the help of my nephew Mathieu. I am managing to leave my lingering doubts queuing at the door; the isolation, the energy and the money needed to make it all work, the lack of local kindred spirits, feeling unsettled about so much changes, having to set up two new homes soon, the hand that cared so well for me this winter still withdrawn broody and scornful at my lingering presence here, not being very good at dealing with it, torn between sadness, anger and feelings of rejection while missing previous understanding.

Posted 40 days ago



WEEK 49 NO VALID EXCUSES

—The mood is low and loaded, as is the sky above my head. I have absolutely no valid excuses apart from endless waiting in almost constant rain, for French bureaucracy more pleasant than the English one but ten times more laid back, for the keys to my home, for the end of August during which all France shuts down and nothing gets done – I should have done the same and gone to Paris or the mountains for a while, I have way too much time on my hands and mind. The tide has finally slowed down and I am already nostalgic of the excitement of the past few months, envious of Hazel on her arctic cruise ship, missing London, doubting my sanity, my recent choices, feeling a bit sorry for myself and hating myself for it.

—On the other hand I have had all the time to invest my new studio, unpack and organise almost all I brought with me, and I have thrown myself into work with total relief. As soon as I step in, everything is forgotten and it all falls into place; it feels like sleeping in a bed with clean sheets every day; old habits are there but the air is fresher and the smell different, my mind is clear and uncluttered, nothing or no one to disturb or interrupt me. It makes such a difference from London, a real pleasure. Then again I would be happy sometimes to get some of that buzz at the end of the day when I leave. Two sets of cards, makeyourown (hole story) and IDEAL HO E, are ready to go to the printer, the planning of Jeux de bouche project is ready for the meeting with all participants next Tuesday, the concept for the workshops also and I even managed to make a quick and cheap mouth prototype too.

—Still doubts are lingering at the door, I am concerned with how provincial and cautious it can be here, habits and boundaries seems hard to shift and I find it frustrating. I have met up and improvised with La lulette agile (the handy uvula), a local bunch of young artists and musicians from Limoges doing vocal improvisations and interventions. They will take part in Jeux de bouche, It felt good to get the old voice going again, (I am surprised how little it has lost during that year of inactivity). And it also gave me the idea to run a regular workshop for students and staff in Farnham this year.

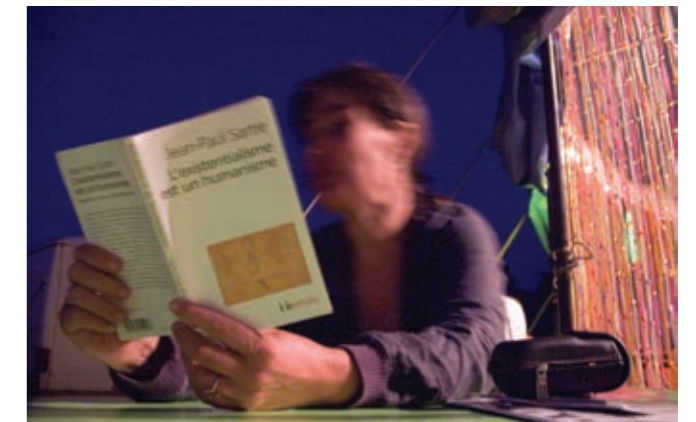
—A deer crossed the road right in front of my car today. This time next week I will be in London,

Posted 33 days ago

Week 50 CLUTTER IN AN EMPTY SHELL

—Writing these words four days late, staring at a London skyline from the height of my guest bed in Karen’s beautiful house, the bed I can come too when I need my London fix, once based in Farnham, my new home there is full of boxes waiting to be unpacked; I have yet to get bed, bookshelves, sofa. The clutter in this empty shell add to the unfamiliarity, it looks so corporate and new and clean and impersonal and carpeted throughout and magnolia walls and suburban and twee and and and, as if I had mistakenly stepped into someone else’s shoes.

—On the other end I like the old-fashioned and picture perfect country feel to Farnham. Yesterday I got lost on my way to Argos and suddenly found myself in a small country lane surrounded by horses. I am living in the country side fifty minutes from London, I might need to copy it a 1000 times before I come to term with it. I didn’t have the guts to cut all links with Dumbarton court, I feel nostalgic already, even before deciding to seel it nex year. Just before leaving France on Tuesday I signed the contract for my home there. The good news is that the local council has decided to renovate it all, saving me the expense and the effort, the bad news is it will not be ready before October at the earliest and my choice of colors for walls (compulsory wallpaper) and floors is quite limited, I might end up with magnolia again.....



Week 51 plus ending ON A DOUBLE YELLOW LINE

—The morning I left I had the first meeting with all partners taking part in the Jeux de bouches project in February, and what an unexpected epic that was, the project has truly started and fulfils its title of mouth games in more ways than one. I had forgotten how stropy and argumentative the French could be. Though everybody is eager, enthusiastic and generous with their time and energy, it has to come with a certain amount of moaning; about the collaborative nature of it all where each is invited to contribute freely to the idea, some request more directive but then rebel against it, some prefer to criticise other's initiative to mask a lack of their own, old grievances are brought back and thrown on the table and I am expected to referee and orchestrate it all. I had to be very diplomatic, trying to avoid taking anybody's side or any of the comments personally, while keeping a clear vision of the idea as a whole as it evolves and comes to life, according to suggestions as well as objections and practical limitations; one thing is sure it has reached a scale and an intensity which is challenging the city's structures and mechanics. I hope to record and transcribe future meetings, as they feel so much part of the work itself.

—My refurbishment year out is coming to an end next week and I will close this folder (week 1 to week 51) to start a new one. Refurbishment it has been in more ways than initially predicted; body of course but also mind and life cobwebs. I don't think I will have many such chapters in my life, the best and the worse in equal proportion, the worse came first, bringing the best with itself, it sounds cliché but it is true.

Five years since the pirates invasion turned my life upside down. This year during the decisive battle I los, I have befriended the bastards. I have regained control over my body, my lust for life, an accent on my surname, my French heritage, and a little piece of paradise among limousine cows.

I have never read back any of my weekly reports until now
Posted 24 days ago

—If one counts the statutory four weeks holiday everyone gets in France, I have reached the end, of the predicted and unpredictable refurbishment year I subjected myself too, the cycle is complete. The rubber band I was securely fastened too (in order not to get lost) has snapped me back somewhere slightly out of target, Farnham upon St. yrieix la Perche. I feel as stretched and stunned – but livelier and luckier – than the dead squirrel I saw in Brixton, lying next to double yellow lines, the two tone pattern of his fur (light underneath and darker on top) uncannily flush with the inside curve of the pavement, after being knocked down by a speeding car.

—I am writing the final words of this chapter of my life, sitting comfortably at the bar of my American bar kitchen in Farnham, listening to Andreas Schol singing Vivaldi's Stabat Mater, sometimes accompanied by a thumping bass line of passing cargo trains, reminding me that when I arrived on Sunday, the local brass band was there to welcome me on a nearby green. London suddenly feels very far and tomorrow even further as I will be breathing French air.....

Posted 19 days ago

—I do love beginning, they are much easier to do well then endings. The hunting season started the day I arrived in Limousin to launch into battle with the pirates, I remember the wounded deer howling all day when I began writng these words.



IF YOU

Reality narrated as it happened

CAN'T

stories of sheer survival

KILL THEM

read all about it



ADOPT

THEM