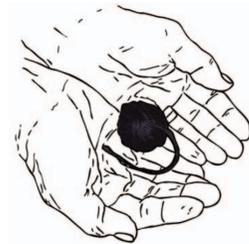


Paris, 8 December 2002

I bought two small skeins of midnight blue tapestry wool in a warehouse at the Porte de Clignancourt market.

A haberdashery or junk shop. In some places a strong odour of dampness and urine. The wool was kept, among a mountain of stuff, in a small, light-coloured wooden chest of drawers from the DMC. In the drawers were mostly wooden spools for sewing cotton and old 'wilted' cloth flowers.

I wound up the wool in an apartment on rue Simonet, one rainy Monday morning.



I. You asked to travel: the soft wood chips in the grass, the keel ploughs the slope – such a black furrow – the prow breaks the skin of the water. You asked me to travel: on two fingers you wound up my words, and then word upon word, a whole planet, blue, for no weaving. Let's leave: the islands, the little one wrought from fire, fjords, pumice, basalt. The big one covered by the frost that eats its edges, the tongues slide into the sea. The panicle of cliffs, seeds to float on the ocean. And what else? Flat lands, woods, intact plants of wine. Let's sail: there is a good wind this evening, so moveable the air, bread, salted fish, the word-box between the chilled skin and the wool.

Avignon, January 2003

Bologna, 2 January 2003

In a store in town, under an arcade from the 50s, are shelves and piles of skeins and large distaffs of wool. I went there often, over the last few years. I buy a skein of green and blue wool, of irregular thickness (thin, thick, thin, thick).

Bologna in the fog and a strong scent from the hedge of fragrant wintersweets that I pass by. I would rather not have smelled it. Casa Carducci: I set down the knot of wool (it has a complex and inviting shape) on the desk in Carducci's study. Just for an instant, so that the guide does not notice.



II. You asked to travel. Wind up this green, this blue: fields soaked with moss, the rivers buried in the grass – folded – water and swamp plant, plants and bog pools, the lakes' pupils, the kelp in the stone cup dug out by wordless winters, the currents. Wind them up. There is still green, there is their blue: peninsulas rolled in the bays, gulfs pierced by promontories, land-tide, moving ocean ground, currents. And then only currents. And the kelp muscles that unravel, their calm dissolution, the open sea at last, the currents.

Avignon, January 2003

Piacenza, 4 January 2003

I wind the blue-green wool up onto the blue sphere. In my studio, while I listen to someone talking about soundscapes on the radio. About soundwalks. Recording of the 'old sheep' and of the 'new sheep': manual shearing, while the shepherd hums and you hear the sounds of the surrounding area, which you imagine to be vast, while you follow the bleats and the barking of the sheep dog. Mechanical shearing: an annoying buzz, that drowns out everything, draws near, crushes; the bleat that sinks, from moment to moment, between the open paths of the razor in the hedges of wool. And then I discover that these recordings of ambient sounds were done in the Outer Hebrides. A coincidence? Like the fragrant wintersweets?



III. There is someone who tells: "Green-Land. Oars hammering the sea. Even the sail snaps. White of the glaciers, wind it around the promontories. And you see? Can you count them? One, two, three, four, five—the sixth is the Middle-Glacier. The first time that I saw it, it was white. We went back many times: Winter – butter in the mist. Spring – hardened alumen. Summer – blinding gypsum. Autumn – grey bone, corroded. But today it is broken. Its marrow is blue. Blue-Cloak, the white of the snow on top, like the present on memories. We went back many times. To build farms. To hunt."

Avignon, April 2003

Piacenza, January 2003

Music From the Western Isles: I listen to this recording while the yarn is winding up. The rhythm of the wrist follows the melody. There are excerpts sung by a few women, seated at a table, while they 'beat' pieces of tweed, in order to soften them. The lyrics speak of adieus and new loves. Or maybe of nothing, only the imitation of sea sounds, of birds, of faraway voices. They are 'waulking songs'.

The yarn comes from a bag that spent several winters in the corner of the green trunk. The skein, which seems like spun alpine butter, I bought in 1999 in Kirkwall, in the Orkney Islands. The wool, the store owner told me, came from the sheep of North Ronaldsay (or Rinansay). When I saw the real ones in the pastures, I mistook them for goats. These long-haired goat-sheep, a mix of black, white, tawny and brown. They feed on kelp and live on a strip of a few yards of rock between the sea and the fields, separated from the rich, green grass by stone walls as tall as a man. The wool still smells strong and domestic.

Rinansay: where I threw a pebble in the sea, on which I wrote, in ink, words that were not mine.



IV. There is someone who recalls: "We took the first ones from the skulls that we came across in the sand. The bay was full of them, but after two ship passages they were gone. Knife handles and chess pieces. It was the landowners' fancy. The ivory of the elephants of the pack-ice, fashioned during the ocean crossings: at each landing we rid ourselves of them like someone cleansing himself of blood. Up there, the first few times, they were barely frightened, a wave of fat that quivered on the shore, and us with the axes, there in the middle of them, bearded foxes among oversized geese. We began to hammer on their fresh skulls, and they did not understand, they stared mooring like calves whose mothers have just been taken. We bit into their flesh with axes and swords, we made a pile of the heads close to the water, the bodies were everywhere, like sacs emptying blood among the pebbles, so much of this blood that ten feet of the sea and ten thousand feet of the shore rusted until the morning wind – red to wind up bays. And all night little fish came to drink at the shore, the earth-wind slipping down from the glaciers dispersed them at dawn. The blood too was gone, the sacs of meat were empty and the pebbles blackened with mosquitoes became white with the arrival of the birds. They feasted on the cadavers, flapping their wings like tablecloths, and nearby we tore the teeth from their sockets, and at precisely that point they were pink, like private parts. The heads, however, finished in the cauldron of the bay, and the fish came back, roiling like hot springs. We washed the teeth of the last tissue with sea water and sand, we let them sit, as if in mourning, then we attempted to transform them into objects. The blade disguised their origin. The filth of death was made elegant, a coarse elegance for calloused hands, to make a move distilled in far away lands – in India, in Arabia – to make geometric moves holding between peasants' fingers the remainder of lives distilled in the ice of a land that was not green. Epochs of lives repeated over and over, combats, mating, maternity, and a few centuries of bishops, queens, pawns, perhaps in the light of a lamp that floated in whale blubber. And the whales...what a tale!"

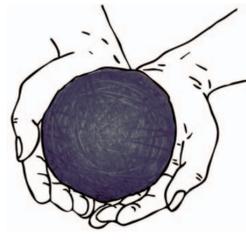
Avignon, June 2003

Piacenza, end of January 2003

The wool is red, double-yarned. It is one of the skeins bought in Cruja, Albania in 1999. The animal odour is not as strong as when I got it: it smells more like lavender essence. I got it from a weaver whom I asked where I could find wool: he opened a curtain and a mountain of distaffs and skeins tumbled out. They are rejects but I pay for them anyway. I smiled when, once outside, I saw him rub his hands together.

I wound up the yarn in the house where I grew up, sitting on the floor, with the cat, Hoy, in front of me. Every now and again he stopped the yarn from rolling with his paw, without using his claws.

Both of us squatting on the warm 'river' that passes under certain tiles. The heating pipes discovered as a child. That tawny striped cat rediscovered them. Bridges of heat to follow and fall asleep on.



V. We continued to miss the strait. We went back up there with the melting of the pack ice. We followed paths in the ice – geometric blue like the sky in pieces. On the floating clouds a mother-bear, jumping, frightened. We tried to harpoon her, but she sunk like a stone and disappeared. We continued to miss like drunken salmon. We looked north, when the heart was west. So we turned west, and the blue turned clear, we found a coast. We entered the boat into a turquoise delta.

Avignon, June 2003

Genoa, 5 February 2003

I find myself on the staircase of the side entrance of San Siro, not far from Via del Campo. Just next to the pedestrian zone.

A sky blue skein bought in Vico Stella io Rosso. A very bright blue, like the irregular geometry of the sky overhead. Solid blue marrow between my hands.

I sat down and hid the skeins between my legs: the one that was being undone winding up the one that I was holding, from right to left. The passers-by, very, very silent... except a child who asked his grandmother what colour that yarn was. Blue?

I board the train with a little more weight on my back and a few less thoughts.

I notice the strings of a mop used for cleaning the aisles of the cars entangled in some overhanging vines. Like kelp, they had followed the current... the water had completely dried and the travellers' shoes could leave new dusty footprints.

Will we be able to go back up there? Without continuing to miss the strait...



VI. Again you ask to tell. And you tie up onto the skein of memories straws of empty islands, cat hair, hops, snail trails, pepper, raven bones. And you ask me to tell, again, beyond the old farm's fences. Red once my beard, even that left you memories, hairs in your skein. Now it is the colour of sand, faded by the sea autumns. On my side, leaning on my forearms, I speak to you of the years of journeying, when unknown islands followed known islands, and they were the colour of rope from the immense current-tormented sands. The ship crosses their lifeless bodies, risking running aground, sandy whirlpools in the water turn the sea grey. The Old Age Strait slows the arms on the oars, like empty stomachs the sails. The blue entrails glimmer on the inland sands: anguish-slow rivers, a century wide, born of a monster, buried under ages of mist. Herds of hirsute quadrupeds tighten into a circle against wolf attacks, bones flash at dawn, and we glide away, unscathed, with a memory knotted in our throat. And, like blood from a body, the red of my beard flowed out of youth, on my chin remains this rope-end, frayed, like an unsteady landing. Beyond the fence you continue to wind the yarn, and again this old man's beard leaves you its pawn, grey as the islands I saw, one last time.

Avignon, June 2003



VII. But do not believe in memory. Someone is watching with you. You wind up night on the skein of time. No flock of wool, no fragment, no star to break your blue. Like softened black, but even deeper, even stiller, no star to break your blue. Old women in the kitchen who are telling stories. They do not tell of the dark constellations, the bloody hunts. They talk fabrics where hard becomes soft, where blood becomes yarn, where coal-black becomes night, where night becomes unbroken blue. No, do not believe in memory. Someone is watching the courses of yarn with you.

Avignon, October 2003

Venice, May 2003

More blue wool. An enormous, heavy distaff. Lucia gave it to me, in Venice: in the same bag two other distaffs, one of green wool, the other cream. She kept them in the attic, with her collection of Chinese plaster pencil sharpeners, waiting for the 'right time'. Up there was also an embroidery done by an old man, a sailor. She bought it in St. Ives, in Cornwall, at a second-hand market. A big cruise ship...

"It has beautiful colours". "Do you really like it?"

She gave it to me in a campiello of the Strada Nuova area, while a strong, cool wind blew and the light was silver-grey. I wound up the skein in my studio, while I talked to Daniela about what I was going to do the next day, about what it would have been like to embroider with six friends from different countries in a garden in full bloom, talking and telling stories.

Who is looking with me?



VIII. And again. You ask to tell colours. So here, for you, are the last mustard-yellow woods, birches, when we landed, at the end of a voyage. The peaks on the background were white, foam on the beer-woods. A constant wind froze our faces, but the mixed leaves inebriated us. We drank those woods like a reward, and only a liar named that land because of the grape, the grape that grew indeed, rare, useless, like a twig for a ship. He was the same one that lied, calling a place Green-Land, green like a field of wheat. That lied calling a glacier Blue-Cloak, blue like a bruise. And they who went there felt the bitterness of the ice. None returned, though, to Wine-Land, frightened by the lie. That liar was me, sailor's honour, and yet that green was as green as wheat: moss, and moss-continent adrift, on granite shells. And there were really grapes up there, but not for colouring memory. Wine comes to us from France, so the proverb says, the old road is faster, surer. But my skull was inhabited by islands, a coastline jewel box.

Avignon, October 2003

Castell'Arquato, August 2003

Fine cotton yarn the colour of Alpine butter. I cotoni di malusa, bought in a haberdashery shop in the centre of Catania where they sell 'buttons-stockings-yarns-costume jewellery-linings-carnival items'.

On the volcano, on the summit of the central crater and bordering on the new, enormous craters, I walk and at times I sink. I pull my foot out of the powder, puffs of carbon dioxide rush out.

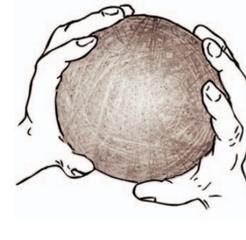
"Is this the South-Eastern crater?" The blinding yellow sulphur under short fingernails.

"Put this handkerchief on your mouth and breathe slowly."

"I have coarse, black sand behind my ears".

"You'll be finding it for a few days, even in your hair... dust of pulverised glass.

And the fine cotton yarn now is the colour of the inside of an almond, when you break it between your teeth or you drink it, like milk. Or maybe it was that whitish colour of sand transformed by heat that spiralled upward from the sea to the fire, to creep like a vein into the porous, black rock.



IX. Which yarn still? What are you still asking me? With the coarse cotton you wove a shroud. So braid the colours of the journey at my last bedside: overseas blue, green with ocean blue, farm butter yellow, blood red, sky blue, raw wool white, midnight blue, mustard yellow. Or let them go, rather, so that non-colour takes non-life. I still hear your words while the earth covers me: "Now the cat finds a little energy to stop the yarn with its sweaty paw, while the skein rolls away, colliding with ants, azure pine needles and fallen lavender flowers."

Avignon, June 2004

