

What is laughter to a smoke signal?

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accompanying text to the exhibition by Paz Sher: *Justice [laughter] Justice*

Tunnel videos in optic canals:

It's uncomfortable to see those headless feet. I think I know them. The tunnel edge cuts their silhouettes off around the knees. No horizon line, snow tipping forward, I'm looking down with them at the birch stump smoke bombs.

Don't do it. Don't just watch them smoke.

I'm angry that they burned, and that we see them, and that no one is moving. Aren't we responsible for what we do not do? I'd rather be called superstitious. To quench them from bleeding out and believe it matters to keep one more cough out of the air, from choking out a stranger's voice.

I used to think stopping those coughs meant slowing down. If we could reconsider, if we could catch our breath (cry at birth and learn quickly the source of any smoke), that would be something. A discernment. A choice. Or, a freedom to connect more readily, to move expansively, democratically. More humbly.

Slow smoke shows something else. The repercussions of holding still when the wind doesn't follow directions. I either have to watch, too casually completing the circle of feet, or find myself lost outside of them. In one: I flock. Conceivably to be rescued. In the other: I scatter. Lost and supposedly worthy of derision. *[Birch-stump-smoke-bombs didn't signal as expected.*

Where did the brigade go?]

Justice [laughter] Justice

is more honest than safe. I've been spinning for a North Star. For any track headed somewhere on purpose. Past sincere attempts, waving hands, still there is something laughing at me from around every next corner, outside the mind of this room. In video channels, a bat strike to the back of the head poses as acidic humor, or prepares me for supplication. The work is laughing at me. It's suspended remotely, entering here as tunnel-mouths withholding a reply. As cast rubber skins with lives underneath.

I'm disoriented, wanting to see through smog and skins for a sign. Just cling to the glimpse of a red flare or reflected blue at the very edge of that cloud. Say or see too much and risk punishment. Speak, and once laughter rescrambles an encrypted message, the only sound that reaches someone is babble. A muffled language of parts, each truncated as a result of my throat's own ineptitude.

There could be direction in koans, in absurdity, or in Deconstruction. These coagulate as a strategy: decentralization. We could all move together, the feet and the smoke bomb stumps too, among and through each other, morphing into a low cloud veil to conceal every person from threat. If I could stay in the nuance, if I could slow down enough to pay attention to every perspective in a room, then no one would be able to tie us down. Our minds would practice being nimble, unflinching. Up to now relationships, all imperfect, were praxis. Curiosity meant agency. I could accept many personal indignities, and imagine needing to stomach many more, if I could retain my own integrity, my inner world till the end. So tell me which way to move, to dance for the sickos. To collapse and fight and sacrifice. For a while, we would find a way to navigate in the gold hallways and trashed courts. As strangers we would adopt a honeybee dance, masking it as nonsense [*wiggling map directions*], for just long enough to remind each other of love. This is how I could imagine keeping on.

But then, the sickos do have a sense of humor, too. All of them caricatures of stiffs coming before them. Their cardboard humanity gives them immunity. Nothing but smoke, nothing to challenge with words. A bully's laughter doesn't need to be convincing. It expands out of conceit. What it sounded like yesterday was only for yesterday, predictably unrecognizable from any day before. Dry cough to spit to whisper. The bully, and its laughter, wins as long as each day's new impersonation laughs again. Its laughter sounds like a threat, invitation, plea, and lie, all at once.

Will anyone connect the aftermath sealed within *Justice [laughter] Justice* to more than one singular event? This is the challenge of a work which shares everything it witnessed, each cut hair and gut temperature-checked, but never the form of what's next. What laughs? Imagine a response, and another will blow that away. Speak, or swallow. See any humor for its horror, justice not real, devastated by impasse, able to dance and to fight, your own laughter as justice, and refusing the indignity of insufficient breath, go quiet.

Our next step, somewhere in front of us, babbling: ha. ha ha ha.

Appeals for rescue, or, appeals for sight: ma! ma!

Curiosity: (texture)

Paradox: (bike chains)