



OBJECTS OF ORDER

from the *Interior Exterior* series
by Francis B. Meier

Certain scenes and observations in this text
are based on real places and events,
while others have been altered, condensed, or fictionalized.

A pigeon wanders through the underpass, its fluttering restless, almost desperate. There is something excessive in the frantic beating of its wings, something nearly ecstatic. Only upon closer inspection does one notice the injured wing that no longer fulfils its task. Again and again it gathers its strength, lifts itself up, trying to contradict itself, to outwit the body once more through sheer will alone. While most passersby move past it indifferently, a few stop hesitantly, without intervening — puzzled, irritated. As though caught in a disturbing frequency, it keeps striking the ground again and again — a hard, recurring sound.

Only an announcement pulls me back out of this hypnotic state. Suddenly I remember my actual destination: the National Museum, the Carl Jung exhibition. One hour remains before the museum closes. I leave the station via a new escalator and am lifted upward into a seemingly utopian cityscape still unfamiliar to me. Enormous, block-like building complexes suddenly define a place once marked by old railway tracks and depressions in the ground. These flawlessly maintained surfaces, stripped of every trace of patina, rise upward, uncanny in their coldness, thoughtless constellations without depth, without inner movement.

The relentless polishing leaves one uneasy. It feels as though something essential has been lost in the process. At that moment a homeless man calls out: “Soon we’ll all burn. I’m telling you — the whole place is burning.”

He stands there as though this place had never intended to include him — a disruption within the ordered structure. His words barely separate themselves from the noise of the street, and yet they land like something foreign, like the warning of a madman standing at the edge, announcing catastrophe.

They detach themselves from him and return again, quieter now, but persistent.

“Soon we’ll all burn. I’m telling you — the whole place is burning.”

I stop for a moment. Something feels estranged. Something was different. The people seem duller to me than usual. That reservedness, that manner of conduct so characteristic and self-evident here, suddenly appears grotesquely intensified; they seem caught in a passive current from which they can no longer escape. Even as the thought begins to form, the shrill screech of a tram cuts through the scene. The doors open, and I step inside.

A few stops later, the monument to Alfred Escher appears through the clear windows. I get off at the next station.

The impression continues: the same flags in the same places, the frivolous fountains still splashing where they have stood since the turn of the century.

I walk toward the small traffic island on which Escher stands. For the first time it occurs to me to look more closely at the undeniably imposing sculpture. At the base, where the gaze of passersby ra-

rely lingers, another image presses itself forward beneath the upright and controlled figure above. Faces, animals, beasts emerge from the bronze, intertwined, tense, filled with a hellish unrest. They are tamed creatures, symbols of those raw forces of nature that were meant to be subdued and controlled, just as the Gotthard massif itself was penetrated in the name of progress. A tension resides within them — the restless remains unconquered, unresolved, merely suppressed, waiting to return at a later hour. For a moment I pause, with the almost childish expectation that one of these forms might free itself and shake off its rigidity. Nothing moves. My gaze lingers on them a moment longer. Traffic flows past me in steady streams, cars pressing tightly against one another, no one stopping, nothing falling out of rhythm. As I approach the museum, the scenery changes almost imperceptibly. The sounds become muted, the movements slower. The historicist façade of the museum, with its towers and battlements, conveys the impression that history itself has already been arranged into a collective narrative here. Crossing the square, I step through the heavy portal. For a brief moment I remain standing in the entrance hall. It smells of stone, wood, something preserved. Behind the counter sits an attendant, motionless, almost part of the scenery itself. Her gaze lifts briefly and rests on me for a moment. A short sequence of routine questions, then she hands me the ticket. As I walk away, I hear her already repeating the same sentence to the two women now standing before the counter.

Moving further inside, the space does not simply open up — it unfolds in layers, drawing one deeper beneath the surface of things. Just as tunnels were once driven through the Alpine massif with patience, technique, and unwavering determination, people later began digging into the human psyche in much the same way, seeking to organise and discipline it. It was a practice carried less by genuine insight than by a presumed form of knowledge: people were restrained, shocked, confined: the goal was to drive the deviant out of them, to extract the restless and resistant from within through force and return it to order. One doctor of the time formulated this logic openly: “The madman must not only be tamed but compelled toward self-control; only within this environment of coercion does he rediscover the discipline of his thinking mind again.”

Behind glass, carefully illuminated, lie the instruments of that order:

Restraint strap
Electrode
Insulating glove
Shock apparatus
Sedation syringe
Straitjacket

Further on, in a narrow display case, a discharge certificate:
“It became known that he behaved idly, expressed inappropriate thoughts, and no longer wished to comply with the instructions of his employer.”

Beneath it, from another dossier:
“After several months of treatment, the patient no longer displays sudden excitability but behaves calmly and submissively.”

The sentences lie there in clean typography, and within their factual tone a form of preserved violence continues to resonate. No outcry, no doubt, no visible trace of whatever must have preceded them. Everything has been cleaned, contained, archived. What is perhaps most unsettling lies precisely in this absence: the patient herself has disappeared, leaving behind only a filtered remainder of her being, reduced to a few appeasing lines.

Very quickly the exhibition distances itself from these archaic instruments of discipline. The heavy apparatuses recede; straps, masks, and electroshock devices disappear from view. They appear like relics of a past epoch whose darkness one hopes to have left behind. The exhibition transforms into something less resembling a laboratory than a peculiar cathedral of interiority. On the walls hang the colourful geometric mandalas of Emma Kunz. Beside them, the drawings of Jung’s patients – intertwined lines, spirals, radiant fields, images speaking of a mind attempting to understand itself, calling out for authenticity and perhaps already laying the foundation for a new style that would soon become imitated in turn.

And yet the rusted restraints and straitjackets remain present somewhere in the background. There is a peculiar truth in the brutality of these practices. In their rawness they perhaps reveal more about human states than all the later attempts to redeem the inner self through colours and symbols. Straps, restraints, straitjackets show the human being in a form that is difficult to endure. In their awkward brutality they seem, perhaps, more honest than the naked bodies that later sought liberation on the hills of Monte Verità – and perhaps it is precisely within these crude devices that something becomes visible which has long since disappeared again beneath all the later symbols and colours.

They are relics from a time when pain still assumed a visible form. What raged within the human being – madness, despair, frenzy – was bound into iron and fabric. The invisible takes on a material form within them. They are therefore more than mere tools. In their blunt materiality they reveal a power capable of transforming inner suffering into something visible and manageable – into an object silently testifying to an unspeakable condition.

In one of the vitrines stand the physiognomic facial models of the Scottish psychiatrist Sir Alexander Morison, who believed madness could be read in the architecture of the face. Forehead, jaw, eye socket — every form was meant to serve as a clue, every asymmetry a symptom. It was an attempt to render the inner life legible upon the surface; the body itself already carried its deviation openly on display. One sees tense jaws, rigidly opened eyes, clenched mouths, mask-like faces suspended somewhere between melancholy, mania, and neglect. In some, pain appears frozen within the features themselves.

I move through the remainder of the exhibition with diminishing attention until I finally enter a room recalling Freud's practice, with Persian carpets and cushions upon whose patterns, it seems, generations of thoughts must once have rested. I sit down for a moment. Amid these patterns, cushions, and this museum-like intimacy, the question imposes itself: to which disciplining and controlling objects had one oneself been subjected, which things had shaped and tuned us, soothed us, demanded concentration and gradually produced particular forms of posture that inscribed themselves imperceptibly into the body over time. I begin imagining them within a white, almost sterile room, carefully separated from one another, extracted from memory itself. Objects displayed like products one might observe, perhaps even purchase.

A desk
A school bench
A wardrobe
A comb

It becomes apparent that each of these forms carries within it a subtle impulse, a small order of behaviour that has inscribed itself into the body over years, barely noticeable and yet persistent.

My face appears different when I look at myself in the restroom mirror. I study it longer than usual. Could there be something written there that had escaped me until now? The accompanying text beside Morison's faces returns to mind:

"The forehead reveals the disposition of the mind."

"In the gaze one sees the order or disorder of the inner self."

"The mouth reveals instinct, restraint, and moral discipline."

"Every asymmetry carries the indication of a hidden condition."

"The face is not a mask, but a protocol."

My own expression begins to feel unfamiliar. My face, too, bears the traces of those expressions it had to learn over the years. When I leave the museum, the square outside has filled with people. The sun hangs low. People sit on the steps eating ice cream, laughing. On one woman's face, a smile remains for a moment too long before fading

again. Two men listen to one another with small, almost synchronous movements, their expressions attentive without ever truly changing. Someone pulls their lips slightly back and nods repeatedly, as though agreement itself had to become visible. Another holds a glass before his mouth, staring into empty space while the conversation continues around him. Everything appears light, almost carefree.

Practiced surfaces, shaped through repetition, posture, and adaptation.