“High above the clouds lies the centre of our poetic mysteries: the irresistible desire to travel.”

Dear Sir/Madam:

you will find here the account of a series of journeys which I began in August 2010. You will also find in the text and drawings of Right After the Comma(1) other earlier and later journeys which are not restricted by it and which will orbit and “de-temporalise” its central course.

(1) of the reason for the choice of the title. René Daumal’s Mount Analogue: A Tail of Non-Euclidean and Symbolically Authentic Mountaineering Adventures, is my starting point. This journey “[...] exists entirely as though it did not exist’ and whose existence is proved by the ‘necessity’ that it exist” has occupied a special place in my personal mythology and work in recent years. I remember the exact day I first discovered the book. It was a sunny spring day, like one of those when you open the windows for the first time after a long and weary winter. A fresh breeze with a scent of rebirth ruffled the curtains. A studious silence hung over the house, and I was held fast in the clasp of what at the time was a genuine tedium.

I had no idea what to do with the tumult of desires that assailed me. I was sixteen or seventeen. I was in my mother’s study, anxiously perusing the overflowing bookshelves while she read. Repeated daily, this search had turned, little by little, into an obsessive ritual. The bookshelves were like the bark of a tree and their spines skin cells. They formed a tight and homogeneous whole in which each of the parts conveyed its contents to the others through the contact of their covers and by an internal process, invisible to the naked eye, like the liquids in adjacent jugs. To read them, I had to momentarily stop the internal flow of significant exchanges — like performing a surgical operation — and pluck a book from the whole. I always chose the same ones, the thickest ones, as if the fact they had lots of pages could save me finally from my enveloping tedium. I browsed the two or three first pages and returned the volume to its respective place. The boredom was such — and with it the lack of meaning, the insight that there was no logic in any of this — that none of the sensations which one usually feels in the first few pages could wrench this boredom from me. Irritability can be sensed, and even with all the care in the world not to make any noise, my restlessness attracted my mother’s attention. With her usual patience, she asked me what I wanted, to which I replied “a good book to escape into”. After a slight hesitation, and a scan of the shelves, she removed a thin book with a yellowish cover on which was written in red letters at the top — René Daumal; in green, in the middle – Le Mont Analogue; and at the bottom, separated by a horizontal magenta bar – L’imaginaire, Gallimard. I sat in the armchair and began to read:

“Everything I am about to tell began with a scrap of unfamiliar handwriting on an envelope. On it was written my name and the address of the Revue des Fossiles, to which I had contributed and through which the letter had tracked me down, yet those penned lines conveyed a shifting mix of violence and sweetness. Behind the questions I was forming in my mind about the sender and the possible contents of the message, a vague but powerful presentiment evoked in me an image of a ‘pebble in the millpond’. And from deep inside me the confession rose like a bubble that my life had become all too stagnant of late. When I opened the letter, I could not have told you whether it had the effect of a revitalising breath of fresh air or a disagreeable miasma.”

I read the whole book without putting it down and what happened when I reached the end was truly magical. The fact that both the ascent of the mountain (the journey) and the book ended unexpectedly with the words “in stabilising the shifting earth,” left me in suspense. Right after a comma there was silence and the mystery of a journey to come. Before the comma, there was something strange about the second to last word, “shifting”. What had come through the open window on that spring afternoon was “a revitalising breath of fresh air” from a faraway and unknown place, never to leave again. The suspense has remained till this day and since then the book has followed me, or, to be more exact, I have followed the book wherever I go. To its ‘unfinishedness’ I have added other analogue ‘unfinishednesses’. 

“It is said that tedium is a disease of the idle, or that it attacks only those who have nothing to do. But this ailment of the soul is in fact more subtle: it attacks people who are predisposed to it, and those who work or who pretend they work (which in this case come down to the same thing) are less apt to be spared than the truly idle. “Nothing is worse than the contrast between the natural splendour of the inner life, with its natural Indies and its exotic countries, and the squalor (even when it’s not really squalid) of life’s daily routine. And tedium is more oppressive when there’s not the excuse of idleness. The tedium of those who strive hard is worst of all.”

But before we begin, I would like to clarify one or two things:
- Rather than write a descriptive account, I opted for a kind of sketch which was gradually constructed little by little (2). A “perpetual sketch”;
When mountain climbers prepare their expeditions to a summit, they usually leave a trail of “encampments” along the way to store the equipment and food which is too heavy or unnecessary for the next stages. It is these stores that allow them to reach the summit. Mountain climbers rest at these encampments for several days, like sailors in the decompression chambers of submarines, to acclimatise to the altitude and to ensure they do not suffer from "acute mountain sickness". And after they have reached their goal, it is to these refuges that they return. Those who do return. And then there are the **porté disparu** too.

The journeys **I commit** are nothing more than just bits of The Journey. Right from the start, I wander nomadically between more or less impermanent "encampments". I reach the summit and then descend again. I replenish myself and climb again. It matters little whether the summit is different or even which one it is; it is always ‘IT’. Perhaps I climb merely to enjoy a better view, for a few
moments, from a unique viewpoint. In general, when I reach the top, the overcast sky prevents me from seeing beyond my silhouette projected onto the surface of the clouds. If I believed in what I saw, I would not continue to want to see beyond what I can see and I would give up moving. But a strange, probably internal(3) phenomenon means that I never wholly believe in what I see. The nature of things hides behind the nature of things, and so on infinitely. I dream of a true materialism: pure tautology.

(3) I call it “ipseioïd”, a combination of the idea of ipseity (selfhood; individual identity) and helioïd (the movement of rotating paddles that allows them to move forwards and backwards). A kind of inner vortex which makes us search inside and out simultaneously. I developed a theory about this which, in a work called “ipso-facto hard substance, largely, soft substance”, attained the summit.

- Nine months before I was born, my father released a few solitary spermatozoa – in actual fact rather a lot – of which one – it could have been any other – landed on planet mother. That was my pre-journey. Life, with a bit of luck, begins with a synchronised orgasm. It is our Big Bang;

- I am not an intransigent fan of the truth: I frequent it and relate to it like anybody else. In order to survive, it is better to swing between it and its opposite. I don’t seek it out, but sometimes I trip over it. It has the morphology of a root, sticking out of the ground, on which my feet catch; of a stone, on which I support myself confidently, that appears stable and which suddenly trembles; of a mirage that attracts us in the desert. Truth does not need to be sought out. It is There, ever present and in its most aesthetic aspect: the absurd, which, on the surface of things, is its message. High above the clouds lies the centre of our poetic mysteries etc.

Here ends the sermon.

The journey begins.
Démembrement et ruine
TENSION
“At last the day came! I proudly carried with me in a cage a fat rock rat whom I’d easily captured and would free as I passed the place where I had killed the other one – since I had to ‘repair the damage’. Alas, the extent of the damage was only about to be revealed… I was forbidden to leave until a commission of guides had determined the causes of the catastrophe. At the end of a week, I was called before this commission, which declared that I was responsible for the disaster, and that by virtue of the first judgment I would have to repair the damage.

“I was flabbergasted. But they explained to me how things had transpired, according to the commission’s findings. Here is what they explained to me – impartially, objectively, and today I would even say kindly, but in a categorical fashion. The old rat I had killed fed chiefly on a species of wasp found abundantly in this place. But, especially at his age, a rock rat is not agile enough to catch wasps in flight; so he usually ate only the sick and the weak who dragged themselves on the ground and could barely fly. In this way he destroyed the wasps that carried defects or germs that, through heredity or contagion, would have spread dangerous illnesses in the colonies of these insects without his unconscious intervention. Once the rat was dead, these illnesses spread quickly, and by the following spring there were hardly any wasps left in the region. These wasps, gathering nectar from the flowers, ensured their pollination. Without them, a great many plants that played an important role in stabilising the shifting earth.”
I have always liked epigraphs. Well chosen, they are like a key (4). So far, the best I have found is in Les Amours Jaunes by Tristan Corbières, an accursed 19th-century French poet. The first poem, written in a police station on 20 May 1873, is at the same time a preface and an ironic and acerbic self-portrait. It is called “ÇA?” The epigraph is as follows:

“What?...

Shakespeare”

(4) Lots of people lose keys, that is, lots of keys get lost. For many years, I kept a pile of keys that I found in the street. I kept them because I could still feel their intrinsic opening power, added to the mystery of the place to which they were intrinsically linked: a door, a safe, drawers that may not exist anymore. I carried in my hands the possibility of uncovering many secrets, of discovering hidden, inaccessible, abandoned and forgotten places, perhaps even treasure and, who knows, the corresponding map, semi-digested and illegible, on which a quickly scribbled ‘X’ marked its hiding place. Promises of journeys, of dépaysement ↗

↗ on “in-coincidence”.

I had always fantasised about drawing or painting in the open air like the Impressionists. I remember as a child spending whole afternoons in front of my house painting landscapes of foreign mountains that slid towards a cobalt blue sea with patches of emerald green in which deep red blotches of an orange sunset were reflected. I should point out that in the scenery before me, which I looked at insistently — in imitation of the caricatured gestures of the painter who stands back and alternates, eyes half closed, between looking at his painting and observing his subject — not a single mountain, nor sea or sunset, could be seen. It was a perfectly flat field, consisting solely of horizontal layers, free of perspective, and grassy ochres and brown soil. In the background, beyond, was the edge of a forest, the green of which had turned black from the total lack of light; and a metallic grey sky, sad and low, covered it all. This mismatch between the landscape and what I depicted, this “in-coincidence”, came certainly from an early urge to travel or escape, from a tremendous need for dépaysement. This desire to imitate the open-air painters was probably inherited from my grandfather, a late Impressionist painter who, in my fertile childish mind, I could imagine strolling through nature with his magnificent beard, easel and canvases on his back; or under an oak tree painting the arid landscapes of Provence. I never met him, he died right after the Second World War, but we lived surrounded by his paintings: landscapes, two or three portraits, a few nudes and still-lifes. Paintings which looked neglected, an appearance exacerbated by the dust which had accumulated on them in this house in the country, where we co-habitate with chickens, ducks, geese, magpies, sheep and goats in a scene of Eden-like promiscuity. This practice of painting outdoors coincided with my deambulatory and peripatetic (yet solitary) habit of walking, which I exercised daily when returning
from school on foot. The sound of my inner conversation with the objects around me – trees, pond, quagmire, turf, puddle, plants, birds and cows – coalesced with the rhythm of my steps and thoughts. Without realising the distance I had walked, I would find myself at home as if by magic, as if I had flown there. To me, “think” and “fly” are analogous. So when I think sitting down, it is as if the very essence of my body has been affected by the fervour, by a sudden commotion, a biological tumult that forces it to move, get up and walk as if disoriented in chaotic and hallucinating wanderings in the place where I happen to be. This separate and disconnected energy, suddenly released like an accursed element, is for the most part wasted and sacrificed to this unconnected movement which leaves me insufficient time, and insufficiently lucid, to concentrate my thoughts or even remember them. I would have to funnel this excess energy onto the blankness of a page, but, very often due to the physical inability of writing whilst walking at the desired pace, I would make mere brief notes of this deep meditations.
Logbook of the L'Évadeur
There is not a single inch of this planet where man has not set foot and he is proud of that. But the world has shrunk like a magic skin (5). An American walked on the moon, said something that immediately became famous and, probably, left his rubbish behind. And there have been other, differently travelled, journeys: Bernardo Soares took a journey while sat at his desk; H. G. Wells and the time traveller explored a future; Alfred Jarry and Dr. Faustroll (6) invented the pataphysical journey and wandered through the meandering labyrinth of a cabbage leaf; and Prof. Sogol and his team sailed and discovered the way to Mount Analogue.

"If I had the world in my hand, I’m quite sure I’d trade it for a ticket to Douradores Street."

(5) An expression meaning that something is gradually shrinking. In Balzac’s novel The Magic Skin, a talismanic shagreen takes control of the hero’s fate. The shagreen grants him his every wish, but in so doing shrinks, until, after his final wish, they both disappear.

(6) In the famous Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, pataphysician, the main character begins his journey to escape the government’s inspectors, turning his bed into a boat and sailing on the River Seine. Mount Analogue also begins with sailing. I always thought the phrase “to sail is necessary; to live is not necessary” mysterious and fascinating. The first time I heard it was in the song Os Argonautas by Caetano Veloso:
“Oh boat, my heart can take no more
So much torment, joy
My heart is not content
The day, the watershed, my heart, the harbour, no
To sail is necessary, to live is not necessary [...]”

At the time, I had not come across Fernando Pessoa’s phrase and its parallel with creation – “to live is not necessary; what is necessary is to create” – nor the phrase uttered by the Roman emperor that spawned all of this poetry – Navigare necesse, vivere non est necesse. According to Plutarch,

“When he was about to set sail, there was a violent wind on the sea, and the masters of the ships were unwilling to put out, but Pompeius embarking first, and bidding them raise the anchor, cried, ‘It is necessary to sail; there is no necessity to live’.”


Is THAT the unfinished chronicle of a journey located between two contradictory propositions? Between a present place, which has an end in itself, and another, disconnected from time and space, so unique that it only reveals itself in one’s imagination? THAT is a philosophical, pataphysical, physical and metaphysical journey. If, as Paul Valery suggests, nothing is deeper than skin, will THAT be turned into a sub-aquatic journey? Is THAT a mere epidermic reflection?

THAT is a visagem.

Before recounting this first journey in the forest and along the banks of the River Paraná do Mamori, I shall begin with an initiation journey.

Parked on the land in front of my house was an inhabitable van which, by force of imagination, I turned into a sailing boat in which I decided to cross the Atlantic alone. I baptised the boat Évadeur and this Journey represented my first serious, but very discreet, attempt to abandon reality, to add time to time and space to space. This primordial Journey (this Journey before the journeys) is the most genuine, truest or, if nothing else, least foolish starting point.

Valery, Paul. L’idée fixe (1932).

visagem – Braz. Supernatural apparition; ghost.
Extract from the *Logbook of Évadeur*, written in 1979 in a 1978 diary:

**Tuesday 24 January**

*St. Francis de Sales 24-341 crescent moon.*

*Mattia Denisse*

*solo crossing of the Atlantic*

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**Aboard the évadeur**

**Wednesday 25 January**

*Conversion of St. Paul 25- 340*

8.10

45° north of the Canaries. Bad. Wether. (∞) Headwind

The natives greeted us with loads of food. We ate well. After dinner we went ashore to fetch supplies, buy souveniers and ask the natives if we could sleep there until tomorrow.

We stay on land to pick up provisions

Wether forecast rough to very rough seas
T.N.: the logbook is littered with spelling mistakes which in places reflect a child’s grasp of the language, in others a certain distraction, and in others the haste with which it was written. The errors which appear in the English translation do not necessarily correspond to those in the Portuguese text due to obvious differences between the languages. The spirit, however, has been respected as far as possible.
45° north of the Canary Islands: rough to very rough seas.
In the afternoon the storm dies down and at night blows up again.
We stay onshore. Another boat left to make the crossing.
It was small, but it might have got its coordinates wrong as it headed into the dangerous currents.
The night went well. I tuned on the heater. Nothing to write. For now we will stay here until tomorrow. We're going to the other side of the island to get supplies.
Tomorrow rough seas in the morning. Slight swell in the afternoon and night.
Accident: on my way to the harbour on the other side of the island I hit another boat.
None of the crew was hurt but there was lots of damage. 3500 francs x 350 in damage to pay.
i'm going to the harbour authority to talk to the commissioner who won't believe me despite being French. I'm gonna explain that I'm in trouble cos I'm taking part in a transatlantic race and one of the boats has already left. "I won't mention that it went the wrong way and so it won't win because he'll say 'don't worry you can go when the boats arrive. But I think the French commission on the Canary Islands must be landlubbers. "They don't understand anything" I bet they really are landlubbers cos a native told me that he must be nuts cos he built a bath tank right by the sea and that he already had a pool". I think the natives are a bit shocked about that. But its true that the French commissioners are mad. AND TO TOP IT OFF they don't understand anything that annoys me and the natives too. Who must be really upset is the robber, either that or he's already on the other side of the island or he's eaten by the natives who are a bit weird specially the French commissioners who have a pool right next to the sea I don't get that I'm not even bothered about it, if you really want to know Not even in school. I'm not losing time with this commissioner who has a pool by the sea - bye.

For today 27 January 1978 enough PSs. Still

PS on top of it all I don't know what this means. **No more PS**. No more PS of PSs. all of these PSs together is weird. oh, I forgot to say that I know what PS means it means I've just finished writing another one.

END
Mattia aboard the évadeur

Friday 27 January
St. Angela Merici 27-338

45° north of the canaries: rough seas in the morning 10 11 slight swell at night and in the afternoon. 5 6 the boat is fine. The cooks gone. She left me a note. The note began like this: “My lovely captain”. I tidied everything because she left with her things. The harbour is closed they won’t let us leave. “what a mess!”
They give me back the 360 francs because it wasn’t my fault. The commissioner didn’t believe me despite being french / I’m going to ask for permission to leave because I’m in the transatlantic race I’m going to rejoin the race if everyone agrees. If not, I’m out of here
Tomorow little wind all day
PS waiting to get outta of here
another big pees PS on the exta page

Mattia aboard the évadeur

Saturday 28 January
St. Thomas Aquinas 28-337

left the islands without asking the commissioner. set off must have been 12.30pm. The storm split the jibb and broke the mizen mast. arplanes watched me all day. I ate it when planes fly over. the storm died down in the afternoon. rigged the spinnaker for the first time bad to change it a few minutes later. I got really scared for a while cos I saw a plane in flames coming towards me. but I wasn’t sure if it was a plane or a fireball. It’s pretty scary when your alone and you see a kind of UFO fly over you. and after there were no other planes around. Then I saw my spinaker flying in the wind. I went to change it and saw it up. I had to put up the mizzen mast. it was difficult but I managed. I checked all of the sails [spi and main sale – destroyed].

fixed the sales. the planes came back. they film me and take photograpgs. they are also frensh arplanes. I’m sailing at about 5 or 8 nots. that’s 1m x5= 1.850x 5 nots which is 9.250 kmh. I plotted my coarse on the charts. Im worried abot the wind from Brazil. what if i get there at the wrong time? I have no idea when the wind will start blowing. I can’t think about it. I have to think that this is the first time I am tring to sail across the atlatic and that if I make it even if I don’t win it’s pretty good. I think I’m a good sailor and I can I’m able to do this by myself
Force 8 to nine wind. The wind got calmer in the afternoon. The boat’s still fine and I’ve had no problems. The helicopter should have come this morning but didn’t turn up, but a passing trawler gave me supplies. I tied the boat to the trawler and went to eat something onboard. “lucky break!”. At two, I returned to the “évadeur”. I ate so much I couldn’t move. I’d forgotten to say that before eating on the trawler, I found two hidden oranges, 4 walnuts and a bit of ancient cheese and some very hard sausage. I keep seeing airplanes flying around me and flying as if spying on me. Until four, there were no problems. Not a riped sail or anything. It was only at 4 that the spire tore. Right at tea time. After mending the spinaker, I heard a scream from the water. I saw a massive animal jumping. That monster was just what I wanted to see. It was a killer whale. When it screamed like that it made me want to cry but I soon got over it. The helicopter appeared right after that. It left me the supplies and flew of. I think Jean is sick of his airplanes. I swear at em and I think it makes em laff. I heard the shipping news and it said I was first and everything was fine after that.
vent de force 8 à noces. Le temps se cabra dans l'après-midi : le bateau va bien, tout est bien installé. L'épicerie qui devrait venir ce matin n'est pas venue. Il ne s'est pas mon bateau. J'ai été au restaurant, le coucou de Pot, vers l'heure que je me trouvais plus. J'aurais été bien manger de me restaurer dans le château, mais je n'ai pas la chance de manger de l'agneau, mais deux oranges à moitié. Un tout de fraîcheur maîtrise et je suis bien surpris que je n'ai pas de problème, pas une seule de ces choses. C'est à quatre heures juste que mon étape casse. Je n'ai toujours deux minutes servir mais surveillez comme des fous, jusqu'à quelques heures. Je remettrais mon maître problème, j'aurais été un crêpe, et je suis bien réveillé. Il est merveilleux, l'eau est bien au frais, et le soleil est tout de brouillé. Il n'y a pas de problème, et il est très bon de se gouter. Il a mis le parc de sauvages, je suis très content, il a mis le parc de sauvages. Il est tard du temps, et il est un peu amusé. Première place, tout le reste du temps est bien passé.
Mattia aboard the évadeur  
**Monday 30 January**  
*St. Martina of Rome 30-335*  
20° south of the Canary Islands

nothing to write about. not hot or cold. the wind blue in the afternoon. in the morning and afternoon the sails hold. It’s half past five. No problems rounding the Cape. 8 nautical miles in the afternoon and in morning. I am sure now I’ll succeed. It’s nearly a week since I left. on the news it said I was neck and neck with Tabarly. everything was fine till 6 o’clock, but at 6:14 I ripped a sail. it was the spi. I had to change everything but now it’s fine. I still haven’t checked where I am on the chart.

Mattia aboard the évadeur  
**Tuesday 31 January**  
*St. Marcella 31-334*

where I am: 22° south of the Canary Islands north of the northern emisphere  
Nothing to write about. Not much wind during the day. But it rained and it’s cold. Two spis come loose and one got ripped. I cooked some food. I had a good meal. There’s no light up front. I can’t see anything from the cockpit. I still have to sew a bit of the spi. The radio is working good. The planes keep circling above me. I’m in first. I think Tabarly got stuck in the currents off the coast. Cos he was miles ahead of me. He was already in Cape Verde but the currents sunk him. so his boat is theirs and Tabarly too but he’s at death’s door: it’s sad but that’s the way it goes. I mean, he managed to jump in the life-raft, but he could have drowned. But he’s on shore.

Mattia aboard the évadeur  
**Friday 3 February**  
*St. Blaise 34-331*

Today was really hard. I got really cold. There was a lot of wind. I decided to do some trapezing and fell in the water. But I managed to grab hold. The boat didn’t get damaged much. Only the sails keep coming loose. They must think it’s funny, or something. It’s still cold. I turned the heater on but it doesn’t do much. Cape Verde is still far away. Not as far as last week, but far nonetheless. If I don’t win, it’ll be hard. F.uchester’s boat, the Gipsy Motha, sank. He was right behind me. That is, in second place. 

Far away
Sunday 26 February
St. Nestor 57-308

The gentle wind from yesterday is now very strong

Monday 27 February
St. Gabriel Francis of Our Lady of Sorrows 58-307

It's gonna get dangerous tomorrow but that's alright

Tuesday 28 February
St. Raymond 59-306

I'm happy cos the storm didn't happen

Notes
Gale force warning off the coast of Portugal
Wind not strong not gentel today. beaufort 5. waves further apart lots of fomy waves 17 to 21m 29 to 38km/h. made good progress. set genoa no. 1 big sail - main sail ripped. boat speed 10 nots. all well onboard. made a great cake. I fixed the sails cos the spi had ripped. I had to climb the mast to fetch one of its corners. I feel ded alone. so I don’t think about it I sing an old sea sailor's song. I think I’ve changed since leaving. I don’t think it’s anything really. I forgot! I ate my cake.

Mattia

week 5

Thursday 9 March
St. Francis of Rome 68-297 new moon

Today’s reaaly sad day the wind has gone on strike

Sunday 12 March
St. Justina 71-294

everything OK but windy and rainy

Monday 13 March
St. Rodrick 72-293

everything OK but windy and rainy
I was the first to arrive I mean 2nd sorry! I feel like having a drink and then returning to France. I’ll get the boat towed back and then I’m gonna buy another one with just a single mast. I’ve got enough money. I’m going fishing in the Atlantic. Right, I’m off for a drink. Bye

monday 13 June
1978
second place in the transatlantic race. ahead of his companion buterflálde following behind

1st Tabarly

Mattia
Je suis arrivé au premier feu de mer. J'ai envie d'aller boire quelque chose et de repartir en France. Il y a des remorques qui vont me y emmener le bateau et je vais en acheter un autre un qui a un seul maïs. J'ai assez d'argent je pourrais en Atlantique bon je vais être mon coup. Salut

Lundi 13 juin 1978
Arrivé 2ème de la course transat avant sont compagnons buterfleil que le sucre de taballa.