

*Hovering Over "Send"*

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On the steps of New York Public Library, people take photographs of each other, smiling. The people who are in this town, and who visit it, come from all over the world. A lot of them find themselves standing in front of this building, and under the portico, there's no real need for anyone to "paint 'Library' on the library".<sup>1</sup>

Onto the house of words used is added the inscription of the image of the person. A photo in front of the library, part of recognition of humans by humans of its voluntary great work of accessible story and communication. Here is a monument, adherence, proximity (easily understood, the basis of souvenir image), my nearness to this trove of names that could be *any names at all*! And here is the wordless name of me, inherited body, the new cave of my ancestors, inherited face, inhering and cohering with the fame of the name but the fame of the name that could be any name that comes from all "we" and for us all and by us all. There was an ancient famous library at Alexandria in Egypt, destroyed nearly two thousand years ago. International scholars came from far and wide to study there. The reason we know of it is the physical words that escaped in time; some of those words say that library had an inscription on the wall. "The place of the cure of the soul."

Given how much hectoring capital's intrusive message is window-licking most adjacent space, the New York Library stands out. It gets respect without demand, as an active cultural centre, where new things are being made and discovered in the midst of things that were made and discovered, and a lot of the time, with their direct help. I find it a genuinely direct and strange thing that is happening here, outside and in.

On a stairwell inside the building, a quote from the writer Toni Morrison is cut into soft marble from Vermont. "Access to knowledge is the superb, the supreme act of truly great civilisations. The New York Public Library is, in this regard, both symbol and act of what the best civilisation has to offer." She warns against the paranoia of any exclusive civilisation that would not be truly great, and the quote is set as a measurable standard. The craft of her admonition is to avoid nationalising civilisation.

That famous library rule, silence, as much as possible. Vocal silence. It's easy to tune out the sounds of chair scrape, sigh, pen-clicking, keyboard tapping, stair climbing, book-cracking, throat-clearing. Subvocalisations murmur in the leaves of books and in the throats of visitors. There is a feel of voices. Easy community, unspoken. Going for break leave your notebooks on the desk. Wide open. It's nothing yet, that scribble in there, "all those gyres and cubes and midnight things".<sup>2</sup>

Sneezes in the library get the traditional blessing though. Everybody knows you can't help it. The sneeze sticks out too as something between speech and a sound

– it's been taken as an appeal, but it's involuntary. The people doing work in the great reading rooms, and the visitors, keep their other exclamations inwards. Eureka! That's already in a book, eureka of pulling sources together. The info was there, just put myself to seeing it. I've got in the bath before, but today something clicked. Spoken words do ring out though, and take a certain longer path to fall into their messages. Being long inside oneself in this world of printed words, to hear them as originally invented is shocking. The sound of words has to be translated, as if heard for the first time... "The library will begin closing in fifteen minutes". The study room walls are twelve shelves high, on two levels. Regular lines of tucked-in books, white designation labels on the bottom of every spine, yellow ones (CR) for catalogues raisonnés. The labels bubble along the shelves like foam pushed up the beach from windblown serried waves.

You can do a library visit via its catalogue or by grabby wandering – there's license in the very availability. Recuperation is in the movement of a hand, the taking down from a shelf. Inversion is the path that takes the discarded back to use. The stuff is on the shelf though – the library books are there and ready. That is all they have to be. At some point they might be taken down, handled, opened, they might meet urgent voluntary efforts: the leaping light for your delight discovers... that most of the work done in here is voluntary... and is liable to head in whatever direction it feels, and guide itself through. Allowing time, research runs its course eventually. And it builds an inspirational atmosphere of purpose. Here is what some humans have done, now with guardianship and labelling. Another group comes in to look around, eyecatch the incarcerated. You could be here doing this. Play your cards right. The visitors enjoy the being silent. A holiday within a holiday.

Still outside, people move up the steps constantly, closer to the portico, even when the main doors are closed; sit on the steps, the rocks under its name, like a tour group at a coast. Is there not some part of all the named rocky coastlines, the Giant's Causeway, for example, called "the Library"? There must be one somewhere. Words for place. Need them to get there. Nomenclatterature. There and here, and this and that; Montauk Point, Eddystone, Fraggie Rock, St. John's Point, Alexandria and Clonmacnoise. Wait, at Alexandria there was a library and a lighthouse? Hold on... Yes. One of the Seven Wonders Of The Ancient World, the great lighthouse of Alexandria was built on an island off the Nile delta called Pharos. The lighthouse on Pharos lent its name to Greek, Persian and the Romance languages, *pharos*, *fanus*, *faro*.

Seen easily, even from shoals of Brooklyn, rhythmic camera flashes from the Empire State building's viewing platform. More visitors on the Sky Tour. Heavenly lightning. Making images from the non-location. Sending photons in the hope they come back. Eventually bounced flash. Such distance, such instance.

It takes a parabolic reflector to push new photons out in a beam. A slit in a rotating



cowl also makes a messaging lamp. Regularity of pulse, or a shepherded beam, is intention. Rotation sends to surroundings. Different to a mute raging unrefuelled burn, that could be house, ship, meteor, planet, a life, all or one afire in the night. Giulia Piscitelli lays out a project for the introduction of a lighthouse/faro into the courtyard of the Madre museum. The attraction of this proposal, apart from its conceptual coherence encountering genuine magical contradictions in systems of display, is that it can do this while being imaginary, as yet an artist's impression. The model for a beacon like this, although non-central to most everyday experience, exists due to necessity, a real assessment of danger, steps taken to reduce potential harm. Its placement is generous, the cura of a "state", maybe, or at least some more local adult concurrence, to warn about the territory it knows. In a cruder sense, it's not exactly *laissez-faire*. The lighthouse is out there doing work for people, that's all it needs to be. Giulia's Madre faro speaks of itself as a speaker of elsewhere, a literally truncated indication of a location and a distance, a placement, centrality to radial awareness and it's an invitation to stay away from the light. The faro, made new from plans, is an efficiency that implodes the museum by not beaconing its own position- rocks, avoid. It's too late now. Here's where I am in relation to warning, to what I know a signal means. It becomes a twisted lamp now, cyclically illuminating a surface, no longer just an indication of a source; so close now it sets off all sorts of excitements and alarms. The translation of an indicating source, the clearest possible information, into something that is not to be looked at, is to be looked at, is not to be looked at, a medium recycled into an object that minute by minute tries to refind its distance. A lighthouse beam in here is a scan by a prison searchlight. The exercise yard.

In the act of illuminating the physical frame, the repurposed building, the eye's retina sees itself thrown up as courtyard walls. Can reading that make the museum a brain, an eye, or both? The museum's precinct prevents 'proper' reach of the light, and exposes the idea of that propriety. The revelation of the precinct as itself containing an internally problematic space is a forceful moment. The courtyard retreat, being inside and outside at once, fundamentally affects the usual function of the object, and not solely in "an operation of meaning". It is asked by the museum, and by the faro, where is the limit of approach to object. And it is also asked how did it get in here in the first place? A slight panic ripples through the museum and out into the street...

Some things look good in your house or your phone memory and are sufficient, but are not museum quality. This is. The faro is out there if needed, the books are in the library if needed. The library is a place to study, and the lighthouse is a keeper.

<sup>1</sup> Van Morrison, *For Mr. Thomas*, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid*, 1928.