See

you

soon

By Aleksander Johan Andreassen
I will not abandon you.
I will honor my own boundaries and yours
to the best of my ability.
I will share my value system and beliefs with you so that you
know why I am saying and
doing what I say and do.
I am open to learning from you at all times.
I make mistakes, do things I’m not pleased with, and I am
misguided at times. In such instances, I will say so.
I am able to say, “I’m sorry.”
You were outside your publisher’s office when we bumped into each other. You seemed distant. We talked about nothing. Just the usual grunts. Ten days later you were dead. By your own hand. You had been contemplating suicide for years.

I am standing on the sidewalk talking to you. I am smiling, nodding my head and engaging in what you are saying. There is a wall between us, and it is built out of air. I try to understand the words coming out of you. Your body and gestures are sometimes underlining what you say, other times hinting of something else. What something else? I do not know what my body is doing. I do not have a mirror, and even if I had one it would not help. I was probably on my way somewhere, to do something. I was thinking of something, I can not remember. I am present but also not, there is a lot to keep track of. Words are spoken, but they do not seem relevant.

You had just handed in the manuscript. Your novel with the fitting title: *Suicide*. It must have amused you. The irony of it. At least somewhat in all your misery.

No hugging.
No kissing.
No thinking.
No feeling.

You chose to erase the world; you exempt us in doing so. What you miss, we see. Can our pains become pleasures when we think you are nothing at all?

You could have chosen differently, but so can we all. No body is right. No body is wrong. You had made up your mind, once again. What made you cling, all the times you failed? Maybe you just had to finish *Suicide*.

You told me once that you felt out of touch with your body, like your mind was one place and your body another. There was such distance there, and you felt it strongly because you remembered that it had not been like that all the time.

I am talking to myself, inside myself, saying words and sentences, at times even singing them. They can be meaningless, coming from somewhere I do not know. Other times I am reasoning without words. There is meaning there, even conclusions, but there is no language.

I will not regret our conversation. You had already left. You had decided. We will never fully understand what you had to do. What you had to think. We are not angry with you. Your mother is happier. You are better off now, she says. She is better of now. Her time is not filled with worry. She is finally living.
You had come to terms with death. It was no cry for help. We must acknowledge this. But we cannot accept your choice. It stirs us. Stirs our living bodies. Stirs our thinking minds. It is wrong!

You said you were sick. Being suicidal was a sickness. It should be treated as such. You wrote several books about it. You told us you couldn’t be trusted, not without medication anyway. Off of them, the distinction between day and night was lost; you would work for hours and days without sleeping or eating. You forgot to take care of yourself. You lost control and needed help. You said you were touched with fire. You had tried to kill yourself twice. You were ill, and so was anyone else attempting suicide. You said that we need to take it seriously: “This is an illness killing tens of thousands of people every year.”

You’re frightened, and you’re frightening, and you’re not at all like yourself but will be soon, but you know you won’t.

I remember our first conversation, it was on the telephone. You were renting out a room. I needed a place to live. I called you up and expressed my interest. I asked questions and got answers; you did the same. I thought it went pretty well. I thought I was awake, that I was aware of what and how I said things, that I answered your questions politely but also with some probity, that I asked the right questions, the ones that make sense, in a correct manner.

You sent me a text message telling me you were sorry, but you had found someone else. It was tough competition, you could assure me. You wished me the best of luck with finding somewhere else to live. I did not care, days had passed, and I had already found a place. I did not know you then; you were a stranger to me.

When we finally got to know each other, you brought it up. You remembered it very well. You had to laugh when you told the story. It was funny now that you had gotten to know me. “Did I remember the time when I called for the room?” No, well it was a strange conversation, you told me. I must have been stressed or something since I was often interrupting, and asking lots of weird questions. You thought I might be some kind of neurotic hypochondriac, clearly impossible to live with. No point of even trying. It would fail miserably. I was not even under consideration. Quite frankly I wouldn’t have gotten the room if I was the only one showing interest, you said.

Now that you knew me, you were amused by this. That the impression you got then could differ so much from what you now knew. I was not what you have thought me to be, not at all, quite to the contrary, it was funny, you thought. I was not amused; I was afraid. I did not say anything but I became scared, of you, but most of all of me. How could this be? Our experiences did not concord, how come? Why didn’t you imply anything then? Was I at times out of control, without being aware of it? Nobody else had said this to me. Maybe your memory couldn’t be trusted? But you could assure me: It was me.
When I see myself, I only see the image that I have created of myself. This image does not represent what you see me as. The mind and the body is collaborating in an imperfect way to maintain order within me. One might call it a conspiracy. That they are conspiring behind my back. Keeping trouble at arms length and maintaining my safety. Protecting me from the overwhelming danger of drowning in myself or others without me being aware of it. I am preoccupying myself with chores and work. But no work or preoccupation is sufficient for the mind. Someone told me that most of the time we think of our own desires, fantasies and made-up fictions, that we basically tell ourselves stories most of the time we are alive. We don’t care if they are lies, or even morally wrong. It doesn’t really matter, since no one else hears them. Maybe it’s out of boredom, maybe its out of necessity, maybe it’s both.

In public, your quiet way of observing others made them uncomfortable, as if you were a breathing statue, indifferent to all the frivolous movement that the stillness of a statue so underlines.

When I heard the news of your death I could not stop thinking of it. I found a photograph I had taken of you, a 35 mm negative. It was summer, the sun was low, clear blue skies. We were a group sitting round a campfire, you had a beer in your right hand, resting your elbow on your knee. You were laughing out loud. Your smile covered your face. You didn’t look in the camera, but I knew you were posing. You were pretending not to. It was cute. You were pretty, confident. Sunshine hitting the back of your hair. Orange light from the sun and the campfire illuminating your body, a clear blue sky as the backdrop.

I had to make a paper copy of it and send it to your mother. I would put everything else on hold. I would do it in the darkroom. The slow way. It was the only thing that made sense to me. To make the perfect print. Maybe searching for answers in repetition, maybe looking for the comforting logic of the apparatus. I do not know. After a week of countless unworthy paper prints, I finally made it. A week with just one picture, one moment. The perfect blue in the skies. Just the right amount of red in the skin. It wasn’t easy with the only source of light coming from a low sun and a campfire. But this was perfect. I had to crop away some shoes. I zoomed closer to your face for a better composition. I made two versions, one landscape cropped and another portrait cropped. I sent it to your mother accompanied by a short letter. She wrote me back an even shorter one thanking me. We never met after this.

Your mother ended the letter: See you soon.

I never got to know how you did it. We are not supposed to talk about it, to turn it into a spectacle. It is hard not to wonder. I guess probably by hanging or an overdose of pills. I don’t know why I wonder. Maybe I am just trying to make the pieces fit the puzzle. Looking for the missing pieces, but I will never find them. Even if I knew, your method of choice could not tell me much more than I already know. It is unexplainable. I will never know why. You left no letter, but it is hard not to read your book as one.

0 kids.
2 parents.
As my thoughts turn to you again, I do not suffer. I do not miss you. You are more present in my memory then you were in the life we shared. If you were still alive, you would perhaps have become a stranger to me. Dead, you are as alive as you are vivid.
I am aware that going on one’s inner journey can be a frightening, exhilarating, exhausting adventure.
    I will be present for you but not intrusive.
I have faith that you know how to take care of yourself.
I won’t be responsible for you or take away your power.
    I will respect you and your decisions for yourself.
    I have faith in your ability.
I will support you and encourage you on your inner journey.
I may challenge you and your belief system, at times,
    but I will always respect you and your truth.
    I will encourage you to try new things,
    to take risks into the unknown of your inner world,
    but I will never push you.
At times I will give you my opinions and feedback,
but I will always check it out to see if it is meaningful to you.
I have sometimes thought that everything I know is stored in my brain, so I think intensely about this flimsy piece of flesh, but I feel a void, the organ evokes nothing in me: I am unable to think about the organ of my thinking.

I saw your film again the other day. The one where you film your brother, where you try, out of all your might, to show us what it means to see the world through his eyes, where you succeed in showing us that his world makes sense, this world that we know does not make sense. He tells us about how nature touches him, how the ocean frees him, about the talk of the woods and the mumbling of the sea. It is not our tongue, we fail even to imagine.

“It’s not healthy, to go too far in imagining, but I wish I could go further than I do now. I wish I could talk with the owl. Howl back at it in the same way it does, get loads of answers. That was fun. But I can’t do that anymore.”

“We will fall short, and so will our words. There is no logic there, just sense. If you try to talk about it, it vanishes, becomes banal, incomprehensible, looses its magic. It will be ridiculed, laughed at around lunch tables, scornfully constructed into jokes with a punchline. It will not be transferred in any proper way from where it is. Words can not bare it; they can try, but they are bound to fail. Words will be put in rational linguistic systems. From there they will be put in subdivisions, made to define, define what can be written about, talked about. Define what you are, so we can understand, without even bothering to try and see, to try and feel your perception.

“I wonder where the dreams go that I don’t remember.”
You said in a moment of clarity: There is no difference between documentary and fiction. A film with Marilyn Monroe will 20 years later be a documentary on Marilyn Monroe, it will be a document of an era. The same goes for the material in which the film was made.

I meet you again and again. Sometimes in real life but mostly in the editing room, where you live behind the screen, repeating yourself in eternity. With you I am searching for something, something that does not yet exist, something that is made up of bits and pieces, truths and lies. These fragments will be glued together and form a structure, a story, a piece of time repeating itself. What can we agree upon? What am I looking for? What will I find? I do not know, but it makes sense to me somehow. When I come into the editing room I see you, day after day, again and again. When I leave I say: See you soon!
I will never define you.
I will try to see it from your perspective.
I know we are much more than just one identity.
I will trust you because I know you trust me.
I know that you at times will say things that can be misinterpreted, sometimes even things that you don’t mean.
I had already known you for some years when I asked you if I could make a film about you. You were flattered but also skeptical. I knew you had a certain outlook that was intriguing. I did not know how to do it. You were very shy. I would interview you for hours. You liked that. You would talk about whatever was running through your mind. Bursts mixed with anger and laughs, in between cigarettes and wine. You were often acting, playing someone for the camera. So was I. I started it. It was half-joke, half-serious. When you talked about your drawings you became very engaged. I somehow understood that the film would be about this. Your drawings are important. You had a conflicted relationship with the mental healthcare system. I had to cut out most of your rants about them. I liked editing your voice. It has an titillating consistency. Somehow monotone, but also varied. Your drawings are very expressive. They are searching, they are faces, they are looking back at me. I wasn't sure what to think of the film after I finished it. Closeness, then distance, and as time passes my opinion becomes clearer. I learnt to like it more and more. Like a jacket that has been given to me. In the beginning I just wear it because I have to, but as time goes, I start to like it more and more.

During the week you sometimes thought it was Sunday.
There you are, sitting in your chair, looking at the TV. Looking at the emptiness, searching for the horizon. It flickers so fast it is almost impossible find it, but if you focus hard you can see it. You have to look through the images. The horizon lies behind them, still and quiet, calm and soothing. If you turn of the sound, it becomes easier. Then you can hear the wind. There you sit, forever sitting, in between small breaks of lying down to rest.

You don’t want to change this. It does not matter what I say, it is impossible, you really don’t want to. You don’t need to, you have made up your mind. This is were you will sit for as long as you are alive. It is safest that way, and it is not so bad. You have what you need, and sometimes the horizon is really nice. How long will you sit there looking at it?

It is too hard for me to come to terms with. It breaks my heart, but I have to try and come to terms with this. Even though I think I can, I think I have, I still have not. I am sad, I am crying. I can not make a change for you. I cannot decide over your life. I can barely decide over my own life. I know you are better off doing something, anything, but you do not want to. I can not force you, but sometimes I wish something would happen that would shake you out of your chair. Could a small disaster be it? Maybe a snowstorm or an earthquake would do it? I know you could be so much more because you have been. You never used to sit.

You used to tick the wrong boxes on administrative forms to fabricate a new identity for yourself under your own name. Sometimes you would tick “Yes” for “I am on maternity leave”, write “3” for number of children, and write “Australian” for “Nationality.”
It was a very special place. You had been talking about it for ages. You had to take me there, but we would have to wait for the snow to thaw. It was still snow in the mountains. It was late May, so it would thaw any day now. Finally it did. We were very excited. Would we find it? You had made a map for us, but the mountain was so large and the map so small. We drove as far as we could and began the hike. We hiked up a path for three to four hours, then you said that we were close. It was off any path and the terrain looked all the same. The map couldn’t help anymore, so we would have to search for it. You said it was best if I did it alone. It would let me find it if it wanted to. It was most respectful. You would come after, if you could see that I had found it. I thought it would be impossible. It could be anywhere. It was just a rock. There were rocks everywhere. The sun had finally come out, and it felt like a sign. I was too close for giving up. I just needed a stroke of luck. I was persistent. I searched for around half an hour, and then I found it. It was lurking behind a group of skinny birch trees. I immediately saw it was a special place. The rock was larger than I thought it would be. It was meticulously placed on four small rocks acting almost like the legs of a chair. It was a weird place. Nothing could explain why the rock was placed just there. On a hillside, almost on top of a mountain but not quite. How could it be man-made? It was several tons. Why would it be placed there? It didn’t look like any trap of any kind I had ever seen. Could it have occurred naturally? So many questions, but none of them mattered to you. This was a sacred place. It had to be treated with respect. It did not matter what or who had made it.

You loved to talk about this place. It really excited you. I had to make a film of it. It was so nice. Just lovely.

It can not be explained, and that is just it, you said. It is for you to wrap your imagination around. Explanations will always be static, boring, divulging.
“I’ve been troubled by evil spirits for quite some time now. It’s been going on for about one and a half years now. It’s been intense the last two months.”

You talked all the time, but many times it was hard to talk with you. At times, it was as if words had broken down. All that was left was something in between. The words that were spoken were searching for something. I just had to listen most of the time. I had to try to understand why you were at odds with the rest of us. Why you were always fighting against misinterpretation. Most of the time it was futile. You had lost before you opened your mouth, and that was always the first thing you did upon meeting someone. But you wouldn’t give up.

“There are many reasons as to why the spirits are here: I’m very open, I want to do good in our society. They don’t want people to be like me. But they are not going to make it.”

There must be someone who can understand, who can help, maybe a shaman, or a healer, or even an astrologer. Your demons are strong. They will try to destroy everything if they can. You have a constant fight going on inside. They are so strong that if they wanted to, they could make your life a complete misery. But you will not allow them, you will fight. They are torturing you, saying the most terrible things, talking about murder and rape, trying to break you, making life at times intolerable, constantly feeding you with negativity. You know it is them because they say you when they talk to you. But sometimes it is hard to know if it is really you or them who is talking. Everything becomes a blur sometimes. It is them. They are playing.

“The spirits are laughing at me for the moment. They tell me that all that I think is bullshit. But it’s not. It comes straight from the heart.”

It gives you so much much anxiety. You have to talk about it. Maybe someone can help. And talking helps a bit. Putting words in your mouth can tame them. It is harder for them to maintain a strong attack while a constant stream of words is under construction.

It is inexpressible, this feeling, but like all words are kin so must all thoughts be. All thoughts must be kin.

“It was something about the emotions, have you thought about how emotions work? For instance: When you feel something, you experience it, and it lasts. But it only lasts for some time. Where does it go? Get it? There has to be a system for it, there’s a system for everything.”

Then, what has happened so many times before happens once more: We are worried that something might happen to you. That you will not be able to control yourself. That your thoughts will run loose, that your mind will get an infectious idea. Your demons tell you the worst kinds of things, talking about murder, suicide, rape. How can we be sure you won’t act out on them? People have found you threatening. You sometimes have a temper, you seem to not be able to control yourself. How can we be sure you will not endanger yourself or others? You say you won’t, but how can we trust you? People are worried. Something might happen that will make you lose control. We must prevent this.
We can not accept this threat. Isn’t it best you got some rest? We know you say and do things you don’t mean. Something could happen, someone could get hurt. Listen to us, let us talk? Wouldn’t it be better to get some rest? There is so much confusion here, things might calm down once you get some rest. When did you last get your shot of medicine? Are you cutting down on your medicine? Do you think that’s a good idea? Come on, don’t get upset, lets just talk? Please calm down. We must cuff you if you are not calm. Do you understand? Let us talk, come with us! Voluntarily, or else we will have to cuff you!

“It’s serious stuff, hearing voices. I could suddenly kill someone.”
I am never going to do anything to disrespect who you are.
I am at my weakest with you, but you believe in me.
You are the only ones who can make me feel anything less than who I am.
You made me believe it could be, even when I didn’t believe it could be.
Your believing in me will help me become what I can be.
I had put you in a vacuum, an empty space without walls or borders, undefined by its lack of surroundings. You were only abstract shapes. The only thing describing you as humans were your voices, clear and convincing. You were telling stories from your lives. It was serious stuff, it had not been easy, you could tell:

“I actually don’t have that many memories from childhood. The few I have are hard to separate from dreams or stories I have been told. My dad wasn’t there much, he was caught up in his own. He travelled for business. He was kind of self-absorbed. I sometimes feel that I am that too, I am afraid of becoming too self-absorbed, like he was. That I could stop caring about my closest ones, that I could have gotten it from him.”

When I first met you, you were recordings in a database, put there for learning purposes. I wanted to take you out of your natural context, to see what meaning you could create away from where you had started out. The environment I chose was far from your home. It consisted of projected shapes floating, intermixing with a physical triangular shape. The floating shapes are not depictions of anything clear, but rather abstracted, mesmerizing, moving masses. Easy to get sucked into. Like an ocean, moving but at the same time still, without any direction, without any size.

I made the soundscape to emphasize the place I had put you. Or maybe it was the sound that truly defined this place? It had an emptiness, but in its depths there were other voices as well. They could barely be heard in the form of a hum, or a chant. It was three of you talking. Not to each other, but to someone. To a listener, to us who listen.

“I believe in you. I take you seriously.

“The best memories I have of my mother are from right before she died. She came over to my house a lot and... it was like I... I was taking care of her. I liked taking care of her. I would help her do her bills, do her groceries and... She had cancer, and she stayed with me, and I took care of her doing all that. Whenever she needed anything, it was me she called. You know, if she came over on Sundays I’d make a big breakfast, and you know, with the kids during the weekdays she’d come over for dinner. When she died I... I think it was the worst for me.”
A dictionary resembles the world more than a novel does, because the world is not a coherent sequence of actions, but a constellation of things perceived.
I remember the first time we met. I had seen you several times before, but we had never been properly introduced. We had mutual friends, but our time to greet still hadn’t come. It was a party, or a little get-together amongst colleagues and acquaintances. I did not know that you would come, and if I had known I probably would not have cared much. I sat in a living room couch looking at people conversing. The door slammed and before I knew it, you where there. You had someone accompanying you. You were this kind of person that when in the company of a group, your presence could be felt. Everyone knew when you where in the room. You were greeted by many, and to my surprise you greeted not only them, but also me, whom you had never officially met before. It was clear to see that you were happier than most of us, smiling from ear to ear. Your company was happy to, but you were glowing. I was even more surprised when I saw the two of you coming in my direction, with you looking straight into my eyes to signal that it was me, the loner in the couch, you had planned to chat with. Instead of introducing yourself, it was as if you mistook me for someone you already knew. I played along and introduced myself to your company, which you briskly pointed out was your sibling. I felt I had all rights to doubt this since there was absolutely no resemblance between you. I did little to hide my doubt concerning this, which in turn made you laugh wildly. You could assure me, you were siblings. I threw my doubt aside and played along, but somehow whatever you said after this lacked credibility.

It was as if you knew this and thought it was such a funny game that you could not steer clear of it. Our whole conversation became a game filled with stories that were given not to be taken too seriously, but rather as a vague strategy to see where our conversation would go from there. The question of what was true or false was irrelevant and the doubt of it made it even funnier. We talked for hours, and I have absolutely no recollection of the specifics other than that we had a lot of fun. When we were about to leave each to our own, I said with confidence: “See you soon!” Three weeks later you took your own life.
We will develop together.
What we think is wrong today might be right tomorrow.
We will learn together. Search for what is right.

We must accept that some things will just be.
They are neither right nor wrong.
They are just here.
Some of these things words can not touch.
We only catch short glimpses of them.
In between thoughts, in the unspoken.

These things will contain little or no meaning when pronounced.
They will turn into nonsense, truisms or plain banalities.
I sometimes wonder whether what I do is art or art therapy. When I was about fifteen I bought two volumes of the “Que sais-je?” series, one on art, the other on madness, these are still the subjects that trouble me the most. I wrote this text as an effort to find a language to my own developing art practice. It is an attempt to give a personal voice to some of the aspects and themes that occupy my practice; the form it has taken reflects this. In addition to literal quotes from people included in my own work, this text contains pieces of text that is either borrowed or completely rewritten from the following people:

Chantal Akerman
Kay Redfield Jamison
Edouard Levé
Judith Aron Rubin
Ellen Harriet Ugelstad

All images presented are from my own artistic production and are in the following order of appearance:

Page 03. Video still from *Alle tankers slekt / All thoughts are kin.*
HD video. 2015. 24 minutes.
Page 08. Video still from *Generating Fortitude.*
Video installation with sound. 2014. 22 minutes.
Page 13. Video still from *Roy.*
HD video. 2014. 10 minutes.
Page 15. Video still from *stille dag / silent day.*
HD video. 2012. 08 minutes.
Page 17. Video still from *En stein / A rock.*
HD video. 2013. 03 minutes.
Page 19. Video still from *Alle tankers slekt / All thoughts are kin.*
HD video. 2015. 24 minutes.
Page 23. Installation view of *Generating Fortitude* in Galleri Konstfack.
Video installation with sound. 2014. 22 minutes.
Page 27. Video screenshot from *Generating Fortitude.*
Video installation with sound. 2014. 22 minutes.
I want this epitaph engraved on my tombstone:
“See you soon”