

# HOST ME AND I COOK FOR YOU

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The first moment, the very first instant when cook and host meet. I ring the bell and we both know that we don't know who will be on the other side. That first border... which opening the door allows us to see. The first impression takes place and with it the acknowledgement of locking the other in the frame of mere projection. What I see is my expectation and not the other. Soon we delude each other's first face. Not because projections disappear, they probably don't, but they are interrupted.... sometimes they stay, or overlap with the appearance of a new face, sometimes the other becomes yet another as soon as I do too.... relating becomes a complex thing.

You are alone. Alone in the house first bought with your now ex-wife. She left and you decided to stay and to pay the debt. It could be a narrative of a rather older man, but no, you are not even 30. You could have decided to leave, to start somewhere else, a new place, a new life, a new bed. You stay. After 10 years of life together, you prefer to deal with the memory embedded on the walls instead of turning the page and writing life on new territories. Brave, I would say, but perhaps not moving out from all the past resonating in that domestic space could have been a passive decision. But what could be braver than staying in the house that reminds you of a separation? Still a question.

You want to help me cook. I say no. You say: "it feels awkward to have you here cooking and to be somewhere else in the house". I know, embrace the awkwardness.... find something to do that you wouldn't be doing if I weren't here. You go read in the garden.

Pets and owners always channel each other. Missy; a cat oscillating between shyness and the desire for contact. And we seat, eat, talk, smoke... You tell me about your life and however very often practical in dealing with struggles you always consider an unknown gaze towards them.... the struggles. You are not a man of statements or very fixed positions.... some solid narratives about yourself, as yes... we all have... but spontaneous enough to be surprised with a different you not known yet.

You ask me to tell you how I see you. You ask me how is this you from my point of view, from the perspective of someone who sees you with neutral eyes. How neutral can I be even if not knowing you? As if just seeing you for one evening allows me to allow you to be you. You don't know how I look at you but you desperately want to know what kind of person you are when I see you. You have forgotten the kind of person you can be when I look at you without knowing you. This you being looked by someone that doesn't know you is the you, you feel so excited to be.

You never studied art and don't dare to consider yourself as a photographer. "PHOTOGRAPHER is too big a word". You witness the image of others while working in the darkroom of a photo printer shop. You are the one who prints the life of others. A job full of ethical protocols. You are in love with the intimacy of those you print everyday. The same

love for the intimacy of others is the one who locks you from creating an image of your own. Your own image. Overwhelmed by very dense relationships you create scenarios to capture the voids of intimacy you never fully understand. Tired of male narratives, you prefer to hang out with women and invest in different qualities of relationship instead of the sexual-haunting one. Convinced that the male gaze is far too long exhausted, and yet kept as what obfuscates difference between genders (or what creates them), you direct attention to the artwork by women hoping for the intimacy of their imagery. You dream about having a family even though you already know you will never have one.

You close your two hands as if drawing a territory and say "I want a family of my own, which is mine". You refuse the woman who censures your other relationships, you deny yourself as a property of your partner but keep projecting your life on the ideal of mommy-daddy-me. You can have sex with most women but can never kiss their mouth. When a woman grabs your head you know she loves you, so you run away. I invite you to do the experiment. You accept but have a hard time choosing the objects I will soon reposition next to you. After all you are the only one who reacts intensely to the noise of the photo camera and say, "I am scared of my own sound".

I think I am lost but I am just around the corner of your house. Something in the neighbourhood weakens my sense of direction. I walk in circles without finding the right street. Your apartment is in the street floor and the window of the kitchen is a vitrine to the passers-by. I find the place. You are sitting behind the table, drinking a beer and reading the newspaper. I stop on the other side of the street and watch you for few minutes. You check the clock, pour some more beer in the half full glass, turn some pages and move your hair from side to side. I cross the street. The entrance door is open and from that corner I see you; behind the table, drinking, reading, waiting. So I call your name. You come and welcome me inside. We are inside, together. You directly show me your house and we go up and down the stairs. There are toys everywhere and drawings from a kid. Your daughter. She is not there tonight but I can feel her presence everywhere. I will later sleep in her room with the bed inherited from the great-grand-mother. We go back to the kitchen and you bring some wine bottles stored by your parents in the basement.

Your parents were both born deaf so their parents adopted you when you were born. You were never completely away from your mother and father but the familial quotidian was not experienced with them. You never had the need to learn the language of signs and still don't. In one way or another you always communicated with your parents without knowing their language neither them yours. No language of signs, no language of words. Silence seems to be the language for togetherness. Your mother reads lips perfectly, so when you talk she looks at you in the mouth instead of in the eye. She reads in silence the muted movement of your words. You pronounce with unusual precision to be read instead of heard. Your father doesn't read lips. With him is a different language. Gestures, distances and proximities. You communicate by positioning your bodies in the space. You are very close, frontally facing each other, very far away, diagonally very close again, looking at the same horizon with different views about it, your arms touch each other's back when you hug.

You just stopped smoking but allow me to smoke inside. My presence makes you want to

smoke. But you don't. You say "Stopping to smoke is the only thing I've managed to accomplish so far". You work with tourism but hate the idea of going to an exotic country. You hate Spanish people because they make too much noise when they gather. *Algo con la pronunciación de la lengua molesta tu oídos*. You can't understand when tourists want to see something unusual than the cliché touristic attractions. Tourism is about watching clichés anyway so they must accept their intent and the cliché landscapes of their journey. You don't like Latin girls, especially when they dance in the streets. You will never have a girlfriend who dances in the streets. You don't want to be a stranger to anyone rather than to those close to you. You like people that do weird things, like your friend that just bought a ridiculously big Cadillac. You are single now but have two lovers. They don't like each other. One thinks the other is a slut but she is just the sexy one. The other thinks the one is superficial but she is just the common one.

Your house has a name. Jesus and Maria. From the street view there is a gate, an old one. Like those in medieval times. I cross the gate, the air is silent. I doubt about where I should head. Searching for you I walk through a street with biblical names in houses. Nobody is on the street. Nobody at the windows. The church is closed and the football field is empty. It feels I am in a gap of space and time and no guess about who is going to host me. You open the door and welcome me in. The church bells ring and we laugh between the theatricality and holiness of the moment. You tell me we are in one of the houses of a Beguinage used by Beguines between the 12th and 13th century. Beguines? They could be considered as the first Feminists of all times. They were not nuns but very religious women, they did not take vows, they could return to the world, wed if they chose, did not renounce their property, they use to paint and write and would sign as men since women couldn't be authors, they would produce and harvest their own food, they had a community functioning in its own. Accused of spreading heresy and mysticism the Beguinages were shut down and some Beguines burned .

We are in the garden facing the wall, which was the border of the medieval city. You are not nostalgic about it but we both agree about the bold presence of past in matter. You live in a monument and work as an archivist of cultural documents. You are frustrated with the bureaucratic level of archiving based on the regularity of information and flirts with organizing the past as if actualized in the present.

Your daughters are away and their mother lives somewhere else. The older one comes and goes. The youngest arrives late but eats. It feels awkward when they are here. As if the presence of another woman in their space disturbs the relation they have with you. And it does. I am not their friend neither yours. I am not their mother neither your new girlfriend. I am in between their age and yours. They never saw me. They know nothing about me and suddenly I am cooking in their house. I would embrace the strangeness of the meeting but they don't. We are looser when they are not here. As soon as they enter the kitchen it seems that relating becomes a script. The script of family roles.

And how invisible this script can be? It is what the regularity among family roles can do. It becomes so normative and extremely visible that the constraints of repetition turn to be invisible for those who are in it. Your daughter knows how to behave in the way to keep you

behaving in the way she needs you behaving to keep her behaving in the way she can behave with you.

You are young and every night you cook and serve dinner for your parents and sisters. You are not the oldest but the middle one. Every night you go upstairs without eating with them. Every night they don't ask you why. Every night you leave the house for few hours and go to a pub around the corner. Every night they don't notice you are gone since they are having the dinner prepared by you. Every night you have a drink alone. Every night you become invisible. Every night invisibility is your desire. This choreography becomes so regular that no reaction can break the numbness of the familial relationship. Your parents leave the house. You are fifteen and they go to work abroad for 10 years. You are finally alone in charge of the domestic space. You are not used to having somebody cook for you since you always cooked for everybody in the house. Surprisingly you let me enter your kitchen and do the work.

You come down to open the door. A Polish man, with naked chest, drinking a beer and with working pants. You look at me, I call your name but it's not you. So, YOU really come to open the door. A student, with naked chest, no beer and a blanket around you as if wearing a long skirt. You leave in a 10 square meters room. The computer table ends where the bed starts, the bed ends where the kitchen starts, the kitchen ends where the door opens. You study global ethics and urge for the consistency between discourse and practice. Your life is the material for testing your beliefs. Every gesture is the very tool to verify how your discourse can be experienced. You are consistent and radical. Everything I do you don't. You never took a plain and never will. No alcohol, no meat, you are vegan anyway, no cigarettes and pot only for medical purposes. You avoid fulfilling desires with the consuming void.

You leave in pretty basic conditions and agree that sophistication has nothing to do with luxury. You don't want to have children since the world is already too full. You would take care with much love of your godson if his mother dies. But you don't want to be a biological father, you don't want to reproduce. You probably lost your girlfriend because of the clash between your ideology and hers. And love "is a dirty trick placed on us by nature in order to propagate our species". You are a loving person. You like to disagree and is sick of postmodern philosophers. They don't make a point but only surf into the uncompromising relativism. You identify with Functionalism and the idea that mental states (beliefs, desires, being in pain, etc.) are constituted solely by their functional role.

Now it's the moment to sleep. We place the mattress stored behind the closet in the space between the kitchen and your bed. We brush our teeth together and I consciously prolong the time of brushing mine to avoid the embarrassment of spitting the foam at the same time in the sink. You lay down in your bed and I am on the mattress next to you. We look at each other and say good night. The light is off. And as it happens in every house, that's the moment I experience the space. That's the moment of a paradox. Although your houses and the places I sleep are very different, the moment I quiet myself just before sleeping is the same. Although the feeling of each space is a different one, I am again the same one in silence listening to your spaces. As if I were doing the same thing and the space were

changing around me and not me crossing different spaces. That's the moment the house screams its presence and I am finally quiet to listen in the dark and to witness in silence.

I arrive at your place. The living room is neat. There are some bowls on the center table with untouched chips, peanuts and other little snacks I cannot really name. They look as if they were from long time ago. They don't really look like food but more like souvenirs. You bring me to the kitchen. There is nothing in the fridge but only a microwave lasagna that you would be probably eating if I weren't here. I search for basics; olive oil and salt but there is nothing. You never cook because you always eat alone. "Do you want me to help you?" No, thanks. Just keep doing what you were doing. You leave to the computer room. I am alone in the empty, spotless, silent kitchen. As if in the opening of a show, I am the first one to cook here. We seat outside. You don't ask me anything. Nothing at all. We eat and the sound is all about cutlery touching the food and plates, mouths chewing, throats swallowing. I observe you eating the food I cooked for you. I wonder what you are really eating right now. What part of me you swallow after every bite? Still mute we seem to swallow the meeting. Still mute we seem to prepare for digesting the kind of relation we are in. I try to hold on to that silence and resist the amenities of a dialogue. So we keep silent. You look at me. I look at you. We give a shy, awkward, undigested smile between strangers..... We are done. The food is gone down to the stomach. I wonder if you will want to go on with the meeting.

Touch, trust and silence. That's the invitation after dinner. I invite you to a sensorial adventure. I promise I am not going to molest you. It will be all about a sensorial experiment between you and your own objects. You say yes. I ask you to choose objects from the domestic space to be used in the adventure. You walk in the house searching for them. I suggest the sensoriality of the object as the parameter for choosing. I witness you looking at the space and objects without knowing what they are. You don't really know what to chose because you never really looked at your house from this perspective. The sensorial. Your house never looked at you either. Or if it did you never realized. You and your house searching for each other. You, the furniture, the oven, the tools, everything in here can be an object to be touched and experienced. You and the space you believe to have intimacy with. The house you mirror and that mirrors you. You ask yourself how you relate with everything occupying a space in your space. You become an alien at your own house and forget that things are there because you put them there in that particular way you believe to be the way you are and that others recognize you to be. You lay down on top of the provisory bed we arranged in the living room. The space moves and the tidiness is disturbed. The bowls with the unknown snacks are still there. Untouched. I ask you to close your eyes and to be there. It's not about relaxing; it's about being there. Relaxing is not enough to be present. I remove one sock very slowly. Slow enough. as if I were removing a membrane of your body. I fan the foot to oxygenate the skin and cover it with a soft blanket. With the palm of my hands I start delineating the contour of your body. I stop at the left hand. I put a stone inside the removed sock and place it on your palm.

I continue delineating your body and aware of the space between my hand and your skin. Aware of the limit between my body and your self. A limit that establishes a contact. A contact between temperatures, texture, pulse... I stop at your left ear. I cover the ear with my concave hand and replace my hand for a shell. I continue delineating you as if giving the

territoriality of the body. And the shell in the right ear, the stone inside your right palm, I am at the end of your body removing the socks of your right foot. I leave you and observe the space that the body occupies in another space. I wonder if you can perceive that. I start placing the objects from the domestic space around, on, under and in between your body parts. I leave you again to perceive the space of your objects in the space of your body in the space of your house. I give you time for the weight of each space to weigh. I remove them. Each object is detached from your body. One-at-a-time. The stones are the last ones. Wind blows over you as if removing everything that has settled once. I place your hands on top of your eyes. You can open your eyes slowly and with your hands adjust the amount of light you want back. If want light to be back at all. You don't wait, you don't make a transition, or you do make a transition but not the expected one. You fast do three movements as if at once, you open your eyes, wear your glasses, seat, look at me and ask, "Is it done? What is next?" We decide to watch tv together. The snacks are still there. You don't say anything about them. You don't offer them to me. You don't introduce me to them. They seem to be watching tv with us. There, static and in silence in the living room already back to the intimacy of its neatness.

You feel constrained by the objects next to you, near you; on top you, under you, inside you. You feel the weight of their material, especially that one I lay on your left arm. It is a record about the pain of a man living his woman behind. You carry that pain somehow since the record moves with you from house to house. You few loaded. Loaded by the psychological weight of the objects you carry. Before you felt free, you were open. Now it's a different freedom, not so light... a strange freedom. You feel like screaming, undressing, running around, throwing all that stuff against the wall, and screaming again, and running, and naked again. But you don't do it. You don't do it because of me. You don't know me. Not enough to embody that strange freedom. Or perhaps that strange freedom is the one always being imagined but never embodied. Or perhaps imagining freedom is already the embodiment of it. You are not sure. Neither do I. While sleeping you can't stand anything touching you. When she hugs you for too long you feel that same constraint, as if she were those objects next you, on top of you, under you, inside you. You ask her to move to the other side of the bed. She does. You sleep.

You open the door again. We meet again. I enter your house again. I enter in the domesticity of your space. I enter in the physical space of the house and in the subjective space of a home. I witness together with you the discontinuity of the space and time of relating to others. What can hospitality do when intimacy is not yet known? Do we need to talk? What is that sequence of questions again? Those we already know will come, as we already know how to answer them. You once asked me if I weren't tired of answering the same questions. I lied and said no because I always answer them differently. But in fact, to answer them differently every time is a demanding re-writing of one's narrative. And although I try; to narrate myself present enough so you can cut the crap and invent your self again.... I constantly fail... we constantly fail... because there is something about intimacy that is misunderstood in order to numb the risks of relating to each other. In other words; numbness seems to be our way of avoiding the risk of relating to one another.

Every - time you open the door I focus on emptying myself for you. And so we meet again.

And we talk and we are in silence. In this silence there is something. The awkwardness of not knowing each other and having dinner in the dining room of your house. As if the stranger, myself or yourself, and the domesticity of the domestic space are in clash. In this moment, which we usually cannot hold for too long, something real seems to happen. As if the reality of a meeting, as the clumsiness of not knowing how to relate yet, takes place.