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# Pigeons

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# Pigeons

## **Abstract**

I guess it was a couple of instants after knowing that an airliner crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center, the North Tower, right after having received a phone call from a colleague based in Boston, area code 617. He had been awake for two hours already. He had thanked Caroline, hung up the phone, turned the radio on and he had started to get changed – thinking that it was absurd to envy those who were sitting on the boat and were passing in front of the Irish Hunger Memorial for 36 Dollars. It had been one of them: one of those had called Caroline to tell her what was going on. He said so: his name was Colin something. But how on earth could he have told her that he was excited about what was going on? After the phone call with Caroline Bloom, Michael Taro Yamasaky had received other calls, even Matthew O'Brian had called, a prison warden at Jackson State Prison, one with the balls, they would say, one who was not afraid to fill in surveillance reports in prison cells, alone, just with paper and pen.

# Pigeons

**Tiziano Toracca**  
**Translation by Angela Condello**

## I

I guess it was a couple of instants after knowing that an airliner crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center, the North Tower, right after having received a phone call from a colleague based in Boston, area code 617. He had been awake for two hours already. He had thanked Caroline, hung up the phone, turned the radio on and he had started to get changed – thinking that it was absurd to envy those who were sitting on the boat and were passing in front of the Irish Hunger Memorial for 36 Dollars. It had been one of them: one of those had called Caroline to tell her what was going on. He said so: his name was Colin something. But how on earth could he have told her that he was excited about what was going on? After the phone call with Caroline Bloom, Michael Taro Yamasaky had received other calls, even Matthew O'Brian had called, a prison warden at Jackson State Prison, one with the balls, they would say, one who was not afraid to fill in surveillance reports in prison cells, alone, just with paper and pen.

The television had already started talking about it. The flight was American Airlines II. They would broadcast the images of an airport with deserted runways, the top of the grass moved by the wind, the air all around thickened by the combustion of the diesel, a man in the distance with a red hat moving a little flag, some policemen with

woulfhounds curled up on the floor. He had gone back, to the living room, in the hallway, he had to avoid panic but Susan's voice sounded desperate, she would repeat the same things over and over again, she was crying. Their sons were alright. Also his daughter. Everybody was doing fine. There were many people on the street, all brought together in little groups, the traffic was blocked, an electrical appliance store was closing. The truth was that grey and black stripes of smoke climbing up the limpid and light blue sky for hundreds of meters, all compact and dense, was coming from the Twin Towers. They had called Susan from the college to tell her to keep the children home. In the meantime, she had called her mother. She was ok. Everybody was alright. Little by little he was calming down. Susan – Taro told her – try to calm down. It was a couple of minutes after nine. Another airplane had crashed on the second tower, the South Tower, that now was burning like the other one. The smoke kept growing and spreading with a supernatural annihilating force.

— It's Jacob. Have you seen what is going on?

— I heard about it a second ago but I did not understand. Caroline Bloom called me. I am here. The radio, the television, everyone talks about it. Two airplanes have crashed on the Twin Towers. The cloud is frightful, it's a disaster.

— Is Susan with you?

— Yes, she's fine, we are all fine.

There was a pause.

— Where are you?

— I'm in my office. But we're going to send everyone back home. Nobody can tell what's going on. We cannot breathe.

— I am going to go out. I want to see.

— I am not sure that is a good idea. Anyway, call me if you need something. Call me anytime, I'm here.

— Alright, thank you Jacob. Say hi to Christine.

After Jacob's phone call, Taro felt better; for a couple of moments he remained still and silent in front of the built-in-closet where he would usually leave his scarves and his coat when getting back home. He thought of Jacob, of Susan, of Christine, he thought of his daughter and in front of the pearl-grey closet doors he thought that, when unreasonable things happen, people try their best to say what they think. And for this reason, we feel closer to them, because they are scared. We are all scared. He looked out of the window, towards the river, and he understood that the compulsory re-emerging of the past must be an intrinsic element of every mourning, as well as the painful perception of some background noises, a barking dog, and other things like a light breeze, someone downstairs that was closing the door, the siren of an ambulance moving away. He wanted to go out. His Siemens A36 was still in his hand, while the news on tv announced an imminent special edition with live images from the Presbyterian, from Lenox Hill, from the Eisembach, from the New Gouverneur. At the White House they were about to read a press release. Many people had already been hospitalized for toxic inhalations. The smoke was everywhere: it would block exits from buildings, it was so stationary that it was as if it had roots. At the bottom of the tv screen some news was still standing out: the risk of diffusion of half liter packaging, sold in some supermarkets in Maryland, or the cost maintenance of the canals in the New York Harbour.

In the doorway of Dr. Michael Taro Yamasaky's apartment, one can see a depiction of minuscule Nishigoï carps swimming in a little lake. Forty years have passed since their first trip from China to Tokyo, since the amazement of the workers that dropped the nets on the tanks while the fountain started to spray soft water on the pottery, the foam of the hydrogen peroxide, the breath on the glass doors at Juillard School, in winter, with his mum. There is an invincible sweetness in the life of one who looks at life from a fixed point, it is like observing the circles that originate when a leaf dies and falls in a lake, one circle after the other in a perfect balance, all enchanted around the vital push

caused by the dead leaf.

The telephone rang again. Doing something was necessary, but definitely not calling, definitely not trying to call to ask the same background questions, greetings and regards. Everybody was alright and he was fine too. He was there by accident, he could go out to see what was happening. He would just call Susan and then go. Done. Take the camera, the films, the tripod. Done. Bring the video camera and the spare batteries. Bring a bottle of water, a change of clothes, a mask, all that one needs when there is an emergency. Done. All this logical and consequential behaviour just to calm down that growing feeling of impotence. It was a form of brutality suppressed by some irregular breaths, like the order when there can be no order. It is hard to know what a man is thinking when he is rushing everyone around his own apartment, before going out without knowing where to go. Cellphone, documents. Finally Taro closes the door, he is out, it's nice outside, there's a bit of sunshine and a breath of wind. The taxi was there already, the engine running and the trunk open. Only later on, on the radio, a femal emotional - broken - voice, with Irish accent, would have communicated that a third airplane had crashed on the Pentagon and a fourth one had crashed towards the southern suburbs in Pittsburgh some minutes after ten.

II

Michael Taro Yamasaki is almost sixty-six years old. He is in his studio, at home, comfortably sitting on a couch. It is six p.m. He is just back from China – Shangai, Nantong, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Nanjing. He shot a reportage for the Chinese government of Wen Jiabao. His photographs depict more or less always the same scene: about fifty Chinese tourists, men and women dressed in Western-style, with short sleeves, stripes, straw hats, sunglasses, little coloured umbrellas to protect from sunlight, white sneakers. The guide holds little light-blue flags in his hands and observes his clients eating at the foot of an off-white and reddish wall, sitting in the shadow, wasted, silent. The shots are coloured and primary colors dominate. These are shots

that have been commissioned to Taro to celebrate the opening of China to the Western markets, the business of the new millennium – Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt – and for this reason the photographs are warm, the background is on sale, as is the light of the landscape, the lowcost existence of the organized trips that aim at promoting brands, signs, trades. The tourists are movie-extras. They have accepted to be filmed for one dollar per hour because three percent of them might win a trip to Morocco. There will be a selection during the evening buffet. It was not possible to find so many Western tourists willing to sweat into acrylic for one dollar per hour. In one shot you can see the sixteenth floor of a shopping mall in Nanjing. They sell middle-eastern objects, mostly clothes, carpets and souvenirs. Nobody looks in the camera lenses. The movie-extras must pretend to be walking, there's hundreds of stable napes marching in the same direction. Up high, some screens project their image dozens of times. It looks like the parade of an infantry division of the army. They have their coloured t-shirts instead of the coat of arms; bags, hats, and suitcases instead of the uniforms, plates, and helmets. Yet all proceed, motionless, with that pitiful and cold certainty of one who has given up his or her expression because he or she had to adhere to a certain principle. They sleepwalk. Only some objects on the shelves of the supermarket seem to have followed the objective of Michael Taro and they respond with an erotic fixity. They are the commodities that will be sold abroad, together with the image of the feminine torn apart: red nails, naked feet hanging, legs apart all covered with oil, backs bent, with tatoos, in series like their mouths, their hands, their teets that breath from the portholes of some cardboard boat. By looking at the picture of the sixteenth floor of the supermarket in Nanjing and by trying to intensify the close-ups, Taro thinks of the ants that put out feelers every time they cross each other at the corners of the walls and then they leave again, obliged by instinct to cross each other to communicate, always with the same strategy, to accumulate every missed crumb, every abandoned membrane, the seeds, the rests. The ants dream to craft precious things with the fragments of useless things.

Dr. Yamasaky lifts the screen of his new MacBook Pro 2011 and

watches again the videos of the fall. It's been almost ten years. He has watched them other times and he has saved at least thirty of them but today is a particular day. In about an hour he will meet on Skype for Business a collaborator of Steve Chen, one of the principal founders of Youtube, a young boy that made his way thanks to informatic technology and e-commerce. Impossible, unimaginable things: the future is the perception to have lost the capacity to make decisions, to have the will to be someone, to judge. It was the perception of the existence of something that before had not existed. But it is difficult to say what Michael Taro thinks one hour before a meeting over Skype for Business with the commercial office of YouTube ten years after the fall of the Twin Towers, after having returned back home from a trip to China. Online there are more videos, still unreleased, that last longer. In some weeks there will be the celebrations and this year is a special year because of the inauguration of the Memorial. They predict to have millions of visitors from all over the world. Some retailers have been authorized to sell tags, fragments, miniatures. Sixty seconds of global silence, and the sale of some gifts for the rooms in the museums, which are ready. For months now, the *New York Times* has dedicated one entire page to the progress of works for the Memorial, to the water which sits there, ready (it has been months now) to fall through space to be collected afterwards by the repetition of the sound, so that the pounding endures and multiplies, the trees around in the same order and measure as in an English paddock, the names engraved in the stone to resist, the infinitesimal duration of the drops that do not evaporate. Remembering the past seems to be a natural thing, but it is not. On the contrary, it is very unnatural. Forgetting is the gasoline of time, the arrow that fires and separates the space of *before* from the space of *after*, the ignorance that feeds our desires and puts us to bed every night. In life, one must travel light. One must be able to accelerate, to steer, to establish a trajectory, to connect the dots, to be able to say "after this, that" to make quick progresses, to make up after a defeat. One must have time to grieve to then go back to the swimming pool on a Sunday, in March, and to swim for two or three hours with the head under the water, to then feel tired. The secret of every experience



is to forget the link with its general dimension, with morality, with ownership, with memories. Taro is sitting on the couch in his study and he is scrolling the videos of the fall. In each page, dozen of videos appear. Each of them has a title, a brief description, the name of the person who uploaded it, usually names that mix different letters of the alphabet, numbers and special characters with words such as Reality, Truth, Collapse, Life, Conspiracy, Suffering. The dates of their upload are often visible. Some videos have been visualised more than 15 million times. One has 20 million visualisations. All it takes is scrolling down, to perceive the law of quantum physics, the particles shining a moment before colliding, the truth that lies at the bottom, all it takes is doing all this – in order to see the man that falls into a yellow circle that traps him and follows him from a monitor, the third and the fourth airplane 600 miles away, the true sound of September 11th like a sacred inscription decoded in summer 2005. Otherwise the faces, the scars on the chin of an Argentinian girl named Julia, some interviews made with a man that stutters, those people standing down there with a white t-shirt selling brochures because they want to demonstrate how things have gone (really), the ministers of the temple, the third building collapsing like a Lego, without a scratch, and then a video made to a helicopter, the tu-tu-tu-tu-tu of the propellers when children see their white contrails and imitate their sound, the European televisions, the word ‘twins’ that bounces in French, in German, on the CNN, in Lisbon, who knows if that Colin guy has made a video of the Hudson – because he was excited to witness an explosion in Manhattan, excited by the fire turning orange, by the grey and black smoke going up in the sky after the fusion of glass and steel. Who knows if he threw his watch in the river, because he was too excited. Who knows if the mobile phone with which he called Caroline had a built-in video camera. Ten years ago, mobile phones with video cameras were rare, very expensive, too bulky for a boat ride of a couple of hours, at sunrise, for \$36. Ten years ago, it was hard to make a video with a mobile phone. Zooming was hard, as well as setting the camera on “automatic” mode in order not to burn the lights, the exposure time, or opening the diaphragm. It was hard to upload it online. It took

time. A certain power was necessary, some extra gigs, and a certain experience. YouTube did not exist, and Steve Chen was still working in the financial sector. Facebook was created the year before, in 2004, but had not been launched before the two Towers fell. Watches, on the contrary, were still quite cheap. And they were also fashionable since the new Millennium had just promoted them to something vintage, with the tic-toc sound of a XIX century museum, the elegant Sunday afternoons at the park, and the 30-minute naps in the waiting rooms of a day-hospital. Outside, there is a warm wind. Some young boys are playing basketball. From the window of Mr. Yamasaky's, one can see a little piece of the East River, a basketball court in acrylic resin and a training track for purebred dogs, greyhounds, a track in red-clay which looks half abandoned because the grass is grown, yellow in tufts. On the street, the usual people are buying something, or going to work by bike, or working, or going back home, or just woken up to walk the dog. Taro runs the video that films New York from the river, from the top down, and then bottom to top, it lasts almost six minutes. The Towers look immediately like a gigantic smokestack and in the background one can see that it was a beautiful early-autumn day because the rays of the sun make the shore and the clouds shine. The video gives the impression that from the river one could perceive the black shadows of the airplanes, the fact that they were approaching like a tempest. It continues on this line: one sees the smoke climbing up from the two Towers, slightly reclined towards East because of the wind, the lighting of the combustions, on the background of the blue sky, and a ghostly silence. Taro starts running the other videos but only to read some comments under the images. He browses them quickly. He turns off the screen. The comments are violent, of a terroristic superficiality, a spiral difficult to be deciphered, and not to be hated or despised.

### III

Michael Taro Yamasaky is a professional photographer. In New York he knows many people, particularly in the studios, in Brooklyn, in Chelsea, in Norwood. He has been living there for thirty years. But

he is renowned also abroad, in China, in Japan, in Europe, particularly in Northern Europe. Ever since he received the Pulitzer he has been traveling a lot. More than six hundred exhibitions only in the United States. Usually, when he is home he goes out early in the morning, sometimes he is not there for months because he works a lot abroad, or he returns late, by taxi, with a suitcase. Other times he goes running with a waterproof jacket, once they went to pick him up with a white truck that looked like an armoured vehicle, sometimes he goes back home with a group of people talking out loud, people that laugh, smoke and drink, people who are drunk, sometimes he stands on his balcony to watch his piece of East River with lens protruding the wrought-iron bars of the terrace. A couple of days ago they called from YouTube, the commercial office, directed by Chen. They got his number by the press office. They called and right after they sent him an official email because they know he is the son of Minoru Yamasaky, the architect who in 1971 designed the Twin Towers. They know he is a good and famous photographer, and they knew that on September 11th he was in New York, in his apartment between 84th and 85th, that he went down on the street with a tripod and a bag, and that he started working. Maybe this is the reason why they want to meet him. Yes, it must be for all this. It is weird to think of what others might know about us. It is like trying to reorganize a place in an episode of the past in which we misbehaved. It is ridiculous. It is a measure of the emptiness generated by our guilt. But it is a weird effect, indeed, that one cannot grasp, especially since one considers that we all know only what we want to know and that - beyond forty - we keep saying the few things we have learned and we make prejudices out of them. Getting old is one of the easiest ways of becoming mean.

The meeting via Skype for Business is scheduled for 7pm. In California at that time it is 4pm. Probably it is the last meeting before the commercial offices shut down. Chen's collaborator is called Andy Rowell, he signed with this name in the email and he said that was his name during the brief phone conversation with Taro. The Wikipedia page portays him in profile, with a black and red plaid shirt, short hair, a pair of round steel glasses from which one can see his light-blue eyes.

He is forty, married to a yoga teacher. They live in Los Angeles. This is the only accessible data and details, for free, that Taro read while sitting in Frankfurt airport 30 days before, waiting for the plane to go back to New York. The stopover, the wait, the glass windows through which the profiles of the travellers become silhouettes. They did not say much on the phone. Taro accepted right away, also because Rowell did not say much. He spoke about a commercial offer, all to be decided during the Skype conversation and then maybe during a real meeting. He said exactly like this – ‘then maybe’ – and then he got off the phone, saying ‘ciao’. They must have imagined that Taro was one of the first ones to know about the fall of the Towers, to go out in the street, to film it, to watch it, to distinguish the photograms like familiar objects destroyed by the sky, minutes and minutes of unimaginable reality that then made almost three thousand victims. They must have heard something of his private life, something beyond his work, and they must be interested for this reason, in view of the celebrations of September 11th 2011, in less than three months. The noise of the ball on the basketball playground is precisely the same as ten years before, it is one of those images that go immediately out to sea because they are repeated automatically with an hypnotic rhythm, like when it starts raining and Taro stands bewitched in front of the window glass. But then everyone started to get connected. To re-tie their lives to the moment of the impact of the airplanes on the Towers. Billions of individual lives have started to flood, to leave their trace on the web, to upload videos, to superimpose their numbers, a video after the other – the cruelty, the violence of the details when the entire picture is chaotic and gets lost – everyone started looking for a potential harmony between their lives and the greatest fracture of contemporary history.

Where was I. With whom. Sometimes people write what they thought. I was there. I was in Durham, North Carolina, with Helen, my sister. I was in Durham, in the car with my sister Helen, and I thought it was a joke, I laughed. It was then, more or less, when he heard the sound of the basket call in the background, that Michael Taro perceived the drift of memory, the vacuum-sealed recollections that we do not own because they have been crumbled in the web recording,

by the substance they became when they changed into instants related to other instants, instants drugged by the presence of the others, by the testimony that others recall of themselves, of the “being there” that is pronounced in the distance. And right in that moment, in the commercial office of YouTube, in California, sitting on a swivel chair, Andy Rowell was thinking about what he could say to Michael Taro Yamasaky to convince him to offer his shootings, and how this would have been useful for the platform for which he worked, twelve-thousand dollars a month, and how Yamasaky would react to the fact that working with images was both his job and Rowell’s job. It is 7pm. Taro appears slightly overweight but still in good shape, like a boxer at rest. Barefoot, he wears cotton trousers and a light colour t-shirt – a watering can watering a little rose printed on it. Skype was ringing.

#### **IV**

The first image of Rowell is clear. He is very different from the image that appears on his Wikipedia profile. He looks older, and more sad. He wears a short-sleeved shirt, not well ironed. Taro thinks that Rowell is having a similar feeling, looking at him as when one looks a person that he cannot recognize because he is not as he should be, the haircut, the posture, the voice. It’s Wednesday and Taro Yamasaky and Mr. Rowell are two among the 663 million users registered on Skype. After a couple of sentences, Andy Rowell feels it is the moment to get to the point. It was already 7.15pm.

- Listen. We got in contact with you because we know what you do and we would like to know if you are willing to collaborate with us in view of the celebrations for 9/11.
- I thought so.
- We would like to launch on our channel a series of videos of the Towers. To guarantee a better quality of the images. You know (he added after having uttered ‘quality’) we are taking a risk which is currently in the public eye. (He paused).
- What?

- The risk of addiction.

Taro didn't have the time to talk because Rowell added immediately:

- the risk of all the web is addiction. You know, the democracy of the web is absolute. Everyone can participate. The can upload images related to whatever event. Everyone can make an appearance. This increases the number of people involved. It recognizes their right to be part of the world, it gives them the power to be protagonists, but, believe me, this indiscriminate extension is like an anesthetic. Addiction is the biggest ghost of the web, of its unlimited extension, of its memory. Addiction (concluded Rowell) is the triumph of total recording, without limits. Too much life, Mr. Yamasaky, annihilates.
- Everyone might have his own opinion, but I believe anesthesia, the real boredom provoked by the enormous amount of images recorded on the web might be related to an ancient feeling, if you want also a very banal feeling: the fear to die.
- The addiction, the habituation to the images published on the web is the “boomerang” effect of the virtual world, of the terror generated by the tear in reality provoked by that world. It is the result of the need that everyone has to leave traces of themselves. Have you ever participated in a meeting in which everyone says what he thinks based on what he thinks without listening to the others? (Taro nodded).
- You see, the web has taught us to be alone in front of death like no other technique had ever done: it took us into the deep end. The terror not to be there made us more lonely. The web has been the first systematic attempt to win against death. An attempt which evidently failed that has produced, as a result, a general habituation. The amazement of the idiots. We are no longer able to listen because we live in the panic of never having existed at all. The stage is full, the audience is deserted. This is the addiction in which we are sinking.

Rowell made a pause and touched his glasses. Then he started again:

- One of the last videos on the Towers that was uploaded a couple

of days ago has been divided into episodes. A man and a woman have filmed what they have done every year, every September 11th, to commemorate the fall. The editing consists of eleven videos. Strolls, days of work like many others, a hiking in the mountains, and so on. During one of these episodes they invited friends for dinner and they uploaded a video in which the images of the dinner are mixed with the images of the fall. I don't want to talk at length, but uploading images of this kind provokes addiction and habituation. You know why?

- I wouldn't know. Tell me (said Taro).
- Because it does not give a fuck about the audience. It is made only to exist, to remain there. It proves that that man and that woman exist, or existed, and that they were there while the Towers were falling and then in the years later. They grabbed on to history like two vultures, poor them. But it is only the umpteenth trace that refers only to itself, a fragment of the nothing, a footprint a few steps from the ocean. You know what habituation means? It means that every day about two hundred videos are uploaded and that the percentage of videos watched at the end of the day is around 3%; it means that the most visualized videos are pornographic: in that case, each one is alone with their ghosts, walled up, happy because he is alone and alone because he is unhappy. It is incredible how people are so afraid not to exist: but it is even more impressive to see the amount of traces that they produce to leave proof of their existence.

Taro had realized that while he was fixed, silent, focused on what Rowell was saying, Rowell was doing other things while speaking. Sometimes he would crouch down as if he was trying to catch something on the floor, sometimes he would stand up and disappear from the screen; and he drank continuously. He had a steel canteen from which he sipped continuously by lifting his elbow. In the office from which Rowell was calling, on the background, Taro could see a reproduction of a Chagall, a mix between a horse and a bull holding an umbrella with his paw. The tail of the horse-bull at a certain point would generate a couple of human figures, and then it would identify

a rooster, another animal perhaps a sheep opening the mouth, a little desperate, some houses at the bottom, and a red sun with yellow fluorescences around. Rowell drank a sip from his steel canteen and continued - People lie. They say they have uploaded interesting images but the truth is they uploaded something useful to keep them alive.

- I see (said Taro).
- Do not misunderstand. We want to fight this tendency. This is why we looked for you. We do not want to reduce ourselves to a company who releases only porn videos. We want to create a real audience and not androids enchanted by the rythm of nice butt cheeks. Most of the videos about the fall of the Towers do not make an exception: they are porn videos. We need a stragegy, quality images, it is not easy to say how to subvert this tendency, how to prevent the habituation in which we are immersed. Generations will have to pass.
- Are you trying to say that you are looking for a strategy to have different users from those you usually have? And how would I be part of such a strategy?
- We are trying to reverse course, otherwise this tendency will not take us far. And it is not a form of idealism. It is a commercial strategy. What we do requires a certain commitment by the users. We believe that in the long run this habituation will foster new platforms. Shortly, if we don't reverse course, we will disappear.
- And what strategy would you have in mind, if I may ask?
- None, actually. One of the rules of the web is: never force the hand. Your case is interesting for us. We want facts.

There was a pause.

- The fall of the Twin Towers is a perfect metaphor of what I am about to tell you. In the exact moment of its shaping, in the instant in which we recognize it as such, every fact leaves behind a series of minor events that its emergence makes difficult to decipher. Make, make, make, make and then eventually comes "the fact",



what is made. And all that happened before goes to oblivion. But when a trauma occurs, that series of minor events that had contributed to create a fact, become important again. History gets stuck. Possible worlds re-emerge. Aren't these things, *the traces*? Not only the signs of what existed but also the scars of what could have been. The imperceptible noise of the possible worlds that harbor underneath reality, the magma ready to emerge. We don't have a genuine strategy but your case is particularly interesting because we believe that you have the capacity to make the past times re-emerge. You are a case, so to say, a complex case.

- I see (Taro repeated, surprised to see a complete stranger talking to him as if they had known each other for ages, as if they had already been down there, at Mylenis, to drink a beer and watch the sunset).
- Sure, sometimes people upload excellent images without even realizing. You might have seen those incredible amateur videos. It happens, but it's becoming more and more rare. The unlimited possibility has become the very limit of possibility. Low intensity, dispersion. A colleague of mine calls it "inflation of porn-pixels".
- So you think that my images or my videos are special and you would like to buy them?
- Not exactly. We do not buy. We only sell. We sell a product that appears on its own, that circulates autonomously, like an unmarried machine. The profit, your profit, comes afterwards.
- Afterwards?
- Depending on the number of visualisations. We propose to upload your videos and images. We advertise them, we add links, we "drug" them. We make them circulate and shine. We decide together what to cut, if we want to add a soundtrack, if editing is required. And then we launch them. You see, visualisations are crucial. It just works. It's like money. It's based on the idea that things do not have value in themselves, but they can have, or better: they can have different values. It is based on suspension, on projection, on the will of power that each individual harbors

in himself like a larva. Don't believe that it is banal: those that demonstrate more willpower are the best, the smart ones, those that have studied and teach at Harvard. They are the best users: those that watch the video until the end, that share it, that use it for a presentation by copying the content for their slides. Once the mechanism starts, the visualisations never stop. It's like throwing a stone in space. Here begins accumulation. What is needed is an original shove that starts the process. On YouTube, like in all the web, what counts is to propagate. You start earning after the first step: ten thousand visualisations. You earn about five thousand dollars. And then you keep earning in relation to the next steps, with a higher percentage. There are other details, to tell the truth, there is the rollout, the commercial uses outside the platform, the percentages generated by the geography of the visualisations, etc. But you don't have to worry about this, we will explain this better and in more detail over time.

- It won't take long (added Rowell after a pause) two or three days. Consider that our offer happens in the right moment, when everyone will be willing to remember the fall of the Towers not only for curiosity, but to celebrate and remember what happened. They will have to visualize and share. Isn't a civilization based on shared duties?
- I am sorry (said Taro abruptly, with a smile that he himself would not have been able to decipher). You are wrong. You are wrong because when I heard about the fall, that morning, I was home (this is true) and I went down and I recorded many things, it is true he repeated, but there were police barricades at every corner. There was the army. Vans. Barriers. There were crowds, broken-down cars, sirens. New York was paralyzed. I couldn't even walk for half a mile. The taxi left me early on, and on foot I got to see what everyone saw. Still enough to panic, today, when I see the stairs to get on a plane, or in a crowded duty free shop, but not enough to offer you a video of the fall, of the cloud. I don't even have a close-up of a rescue. I could not get close to the World Trade Center. I am sorry. It is the truth. I think I don't have much to upload on YouTube. I took many pictures but those are

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pictures of what I could see, mainly portraits of common people standing there, tears in their eyes, wearing slippers, holding their children's hands. Faces.

- (Taro made a pause trying to think of those photos. He added:) I filmed mainly the faces of the people, the contractions of the faces, there the emotions of human beings are condensed.

Rowell seemed to be a little disappointed. He was, disappointed. He breathed through the nose lifting his eyebrows. Drank from the canteen. He squeezed his nostrils with his thumb and pointer. He stood up and so Taro could see better, for a couple of seconds, Chagall's painting. He realized that on the back of the animal there was a hand pointing upwards, red like the sun that was above it, and that in that hand there was a bunch of flowers with violet tips or maybe it was only grass. The goat, below, was not bleating: it was putting its mouth near the nipples of the horse-bull. It was very clear.

Rowell reappeared and sat down again. He joined his hands and seemed to be thinking more intensely than before, then he asked:

- Do you think your images are not special? I mean the images with the faces?

And he added right away:

- I must confess one thing you are probably already aware of, but that you are not considering at the moment. Your video, whatever it is and whatever object and person you filmed, would not only be a video uploaded by an ordinary person that on that day was there and that went down on the street willing to film what was going on; it would even be the video of a famous photographer, which you are, and which would guarantee for the quality of your work. No. It would be something exceptional: the video filmed by the son of Minoru Yamasaky, of the architect that designed the Twin Towers. Here, after having marked with a rhythm the last ten words, Rowell stopped like one of those good players that know they have struck a decisive blow and they enjoy the scene from above, from their still silence. He did not drink. He did not move. He was there, unperturbed, like Chagall's horse-bull

behind his shoulders.

It is hard to say what Michael Taro Yamasaky thought in that precise moment, after those words, and particularly in front of the sudden remembrance of his past reconstructed from that commercial office in California, on Skype, just for the purpose of concluding a deal whose reason was still unclear to him. His father had moved to New York in 1930, and he had immediately started collaborating on the design of the Empire State Building. Thanks to this prestigious collaboration he had avoided jail at the end of World War II. After all, his grandparents were Japanese. Looking at his stable hands on the computer keyboard, Taro remembered when on an early morning, he was still a young boy, he woke up, got up and went out in the garden; he saw his father feeding pigeons with bread crumbs, alone, in his pajamas, whistling a theme song that he used to sing while he was absent-minded. In his memory, that was the moment when he understood that his father would finally die, like everyone else, one day or another, despite his drawings, his models and his trips abroad, despite everything. He would then be caught by a stomach cancer just like he had caught him, in the back, at first light on an ordinary day, while he was cheerfully feeding pigeons with bread crumbs. Taro looked at the screen towards which he was speaking, in which Rowell was perched.

- Can I make a suggestion? (he said).
- You want to make a suggestion? (counter-asked Rowell).
- Yes.
- Sure. Tell me. Don't you agree?
- As I told you, the videos I made on September 11th 2001 and the pictures I took on that morning are nothing special at all.
- Mmh.
- But I do have a video that might be interesting for you.
- Ah...

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- I want to be frank (said Taro rising his fingers and taking his interlocutor by surprise. It was 7.40PM. Half an hour had passed).
- Until now I listened to you with great interest but I have not thought for a second that I could accept your offer.
- Why not? (asked Rowell, as if he had been trained to ask people the reason of their choices with an attitude mixed with candor and seriousness).
- In recent years I saw dozens of videos on the fall of the Towers and when you talk about addiction or habituation you should have been more specific. You ended up removing the tragic by making it spectacular. The habituation of those that you call 'users' is the result of a psychical suppression. When I work, you know, tragic is the only thing I am interested in and the video I saw have nothing tragic at all. They are impressive for this very reason: because they represent a tragedy as if it was a show. I saw people laugh, enjoy, suffer.
- Anyways (he said). Listen to me. I thought I could accept your offer only if I could upload on YouTube this video and not the images of September 11th 2001.
- Tell me what you have in mind.
- In 1972 I filmed my father and his colleagues while they were celebrating the official inauguration of the World Trade Center. I filmed him together with the engineers and the architects, the workers, the entrepreneurs, the managers of the companies that were about to occupy the offices in the Towers, applauding under the stage. There were the institutions, the authorities. There were politicians and foreign journalists. The ribbon they cut was as long as the Towers were tall. All the participants held the ribbon in their hands and they invited two twin girls to keep the extremes of the piece of ribbon that then my father cut. It took him some minutes, he had to get off the stage, though he did not like celebrations. People were excited. I still have with me, at home, a little piece of that orange ribbon.

- A video on the day of the inauguration of the Towers (wondered Rowell) I must think about it. I must talk to Mr. Chen, and with other people. I do not deny that I find it an extraordinary idea. How long is the video?
- Eleven minutes, colour. I filmed the Towers for long, bottom up, and also inside. They allowed me to film some images of the inauguration from a floor of the North Tower. I don't remember which floor exactly. My father also gave a short speech before cutting the ribbon. The last one after other speeches. It's in the video. I filmed it, but I can't recall what he says precisely...

Taro stopped for a second to catch his breath. He was a little thrilled. Maybe it had been a mistake to accept that odd offer; he should have interrupted the call, he should have called Jacob, go for a beer as they had planned. He had no memories about his father's speech right before the inauguration of the Towers but the fact that those words had had the task to condense the happiness and enthusiasm of so many people had moved him. He wanted to continue. Then he would have gone out with Jacob to tell him everything, to ask him advice.

Rowell had listened to him carefully. He was excited by the idea that the deal with Taro, apparently a failure, might work out well. A video on the inauguration. Not on the fall. A video of almost thirty years before the fall. He coughed. He propped his steel glasses and sipped again a little water.

- I think it's a great idea (he said and replied). Excellent.

It could have been the noise of the ball on the basketball playground outside Taro's flat, or the noise of a key ring taken from the desk close to Rowell by a colleague that was leaving the office, anyways some kind of noise filled in that empty silence in which Taro Yamasaky felt a little moved and in which Andy Rowell had said "excellent" twice.

## V

Forty-eight hours had passed after the meeting with Rowell. Taro had gone out with Jacob, he had spoken with him about his Skype

conversation, Jacob thought the idea was smart, original. Representing the fall of the Towers ten year later, when they would have inaugurated the Memorial, by sharing online images of the inauguration of the Towers. Jacob told him it was the best way to remember the tragedy seriously by avoiding spectacularization. Indifference, anesthesia were not relevant. What was really important was leaving a trace, an image of the fall in that short circuit between full and empty, in that attraction of opposite poles that reminded of an exploded galaxy, showing the glares of the clouds on the glasses, an orange ribbon being cut, the forearm of a worker lifting the bookrest on which his father would have placed the papers with his speech.

Forty-eight hours had passed. Rowell and Chen had seen the video, they had approved it and they had written an email in which they accepted Taro's proposition. They said they were happy. The operation could either work or not, but it certainly was a great idea. They added a couple of lines on the value of the facts recorded in the video. They had invited Taro for another meeting over Skype for Business with Rowell. Taro had accepted.

- Mr. Yamasaky, it's a pleasure to see you again (he started, from his office).
- Mr. Rowell repeated mechanically the content of his last email and said he was ready to schedule a real appointment, in person, with Taro. This is the last time, (thought Taro), I see Chagall's horse-bull giving the nipples to a sheep while looking at the sunset and holding an umbrella with his paw.
- This is not everything (Taro said as soon as there was a pause) this is not everything (and he closed his mouth). The video of the inauguration of the Towers is ready, you saw it. I don't think you will need to cut much of it. Also my father's speech is quite short.
- Eleven minutes Mr. Yamasaky. Precisely what we need. We won't cut anything. Your father's speech is just perfect.
- Yet, I would like to add something.

- Wow, (Rowell said, uncertain between being happy or feeling the urge to start over again). You have similar videos? In that case, I would certainly have to see them first to understand, but we could then decide if and how to upload them, we could organize them into a mini-series, we could relate them to similar videos, I am not sure if there are any, but we can talk about this once we meet. Sorry I got lost. Tell me. What is this about?
- You know that my father designed the World Trade Center and now you have also seen the video of the inauguration but maybe there is one thing you don't know.
- Something I don't know, (repeated Rowell mechanically). Probably. What is it about?
- It is not a secret.
- If this is the case, I am all ears.

It was instead, somehow, a secret and in that bunch of seconds before, while speaking with Rowell, Taro had thought of St. Louis, of the day in which they had started demolishing the 33 building of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, hosting 1400 American and 1400 African American families. He had tried to remember the truncated sound of the denotation, of the implosion of concrete on the windows, the hinges, on the windowsills from which nobody had looked from the windows for months. He was 27 years old circa, and his father – to explain what was about to happen – had called them into his office, unusually, on a Sunday in spring, in Denver, where at that time he was living with Ann. He said it was a good idea to demolish the buildings because it was all a mess in that neighborhood of miserables in disgrace, where day after day the faces got dispersed among the mountains of mattresses and the daily traffick of amphetamines and acids. They were completing the *World Trade Center* at that time, his father was happy and his career in the studios was improving, he had various ongoing projects, they were both happy.

- I still have the pictures of the fall (said Taro). Many of them are stock photos by now but they are extraordinary.



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- What are you talking about, sorry? (Rowell interrupted him) Maybe you said something I could not hear.
- I am talking about Pruitt-Igoe, of Wendell Pruitt Homes and William Igoe Apartments, known together as Pruitt-Igoe. Surrounded by Cass Avenue on the north, North Jefferson Avenue on the west, Carr Street on the south, and North 20th Street on the East. I am talking about the 33 buildings organized on 57 acres that were demolished less than twenty years later than their construction because they were inadequate and because of the profound disrepair that they provoked. A shame. You should read *Behind Ghetto Walls* by Lee Rainwater. Many things, unfortunately, are true.

Taro had gone with his father every day on the construction site, for the demolition. He had shown him the projects for the construction, what had never been completed, the playgrounds for the kids, the parking lots, the green areas. It was immense and desolate: all things had lost their aura. Sixteen buildings had remained empty for years, closed behind the rotten wooden boards, with the window shutters dangling from the highest floors. The whole area smelled rotten in St. Louis. People used to say it was omelette gone bad. Taro had taken pictures of the people working there, of the men wearing black tracksuits that had to decide where to put the explosive, of the engineers discussing (who looked like they were fighting). Because he was the son of Minoru he could join the special meeting organized in a container where it was very hot. Usually his father was silent. It was a Federal construction site, an extraordinary public tender; instead designing or constructing a building they had to demolish a series of other buildings. They had to clean, to erase the neighborhood with the highest density of thieves, killers and prostitutes in Missouri.

It was March 16th 1972. The second building would have been demolished in April. Right before demolition, a white sheet had been raised in the sky, a little child's bedsheet, small, white and clean; it must have been in one of the flats – someone probably had forgotten it on the floor during the relocation started in 1968.

Everyone started to stare at that white dot rising up, stretching and twirling in the sky while with another signal, right after it, a prolonged sound of siren, the building had started falling. It fell immediately like there was no longer earth underneath, kicking up the dust, a grey indistinct dust for hundreds of meters above the debris accumulated. The archive of St. Louis still preserves three images (in series) of that demolition. The only noise that was distinguished among that uproar was the creaking noise of the glasses. Everyone wore a mask and glasses, everyone was far enough not to see the little white spot that was now flying and that had become invisible. The boy's bedsheet was absorbed by the strength of that fall, but the will to destroy the first of 33 buildings that his father had designed in the mid-Fifties. The bedsheet had disappeared and beyond the pictures in the archive of Pruitt-Igoe remained the faces of the people that Taro had photographed a couple of instants before demolition, while everyone was staring astonished and dazed at that little piece of cloth raising without waiting for the sound of the siren, without authorization. The pictures are black and white. The newspapers, the day after, wrote that the Pruitt-Igoe – before it died forever – had raised a white flag.