

Jean Robert, A Key to Interpretation

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For Sylvia Marcos

In 2007, on the occasion of Jean Robert's 70th birthday, I wrote an essay titled "Thinking With One's Feet."¹ Now with Jean gone, I'm still thinking about the same matter: Jean Robert—the walker, the renouncer and fierce critic of automobiles and motorized transport—was a man whose thought was rooted in the grounds he wandered, and for that reason, it's impossible to classify him. A thinker whose thoughts were as complex as the footpaths and meanders that he roamed over the course of his life, at times with his teacher and friend Ivan Illich and at other times with other friends and colleagues he met along the way (a very long list). There was always a relationship, an intimate correspondence, between his thinking and his wandering, between the rhythm of his physical and intellectual steps, the places he explored literally and theoretically. In this sense, we can't separate Jean Robert into discrete categorizations: an urbanist, environmentalist, and architect, a politician, philosopher, musicologist, historian, critic of the economy and of technology, and so on. Similarly, we can't say that there was a Swiss Jean Robert (where he was born), another Dutch one (where he was initiated), a Mexican one (where he opted to make his home), nor one from Tlahuica (where he later lived and died). Nor can we say there were discrete versions of Jean Robert the Zapatista, the professor, and the activist. All of these categories and paths appear in his work; the essays published here are only a small

¹¹ The essay is adapted from one found in an author's edition, produced by Sylvia Marcos, of *La mirada invertida [The Inverted Gaze]*, which is a compilation of several essays of Jean Robert's friends and fellow travelers.

sample of it. The paths of his work meandered and crisscrossed like the many roads leading to Rome.

As such, I can't synthesize Jean's thought. When one thinks you have grasped it, something you didn't expect, a ford or bridge that you have not seen connects you to all the points until you have an illuminating clarity full of common sense, but impossible to define. My relationship to Jean Robert's thought is like Augustine of Hippo's relationship to time: "If no one asks me, I know; if they ask me, I know not." Gustavo Esteva himself, Jean's friend and contemporary along the many paths they both walked, remarks with amazement in his text in this *Journal*, "[...] there's always several openings towards many different directions alongside the main theme [Jean] addresses in each piece of work."

But even if it is not possible to define Jean Robert's thought—at least not for me—I can nonetheless attempt to discover the hub that turns the wheels of the innumerable paths his thoughts and feet explored, and his writing exposed. Even if I can't define Jean Robert's thought, I'm sure he would approve of the bicycle analogy. The paths of his feet and thoughts are themes that I addressed to some extent in "Thinking With One's Feet."

If one verse could synthesize the thoughts and life of Jean, I would choose one from "Psalm IV" by Francisco de Quevedo: "The world has bewitched me." But the spell cast on Jean shouldn't be understood—as Quevedo and the majority of us seem to understand it—as a matter of artifice, nor as something that is unnatural. We shouldn't understand this bewitchment as a devious imitation of senses and reality meant to entrap us in its clutches—in much the same way we are bewitched by market-fabricated objects or by the empty gaze of cybernetic screens and their interfaces, both of which Jean astutely critiqued—but rather in the most literal sense of the Latin word from which "enchantment" comes. That is, to be made to appear like something else, from the Latin word *facticius* (from *facere* = "to make/do" and *-ici* = "likeness"). In this sense, for Jean the world—the world of vernacular cultures and subsistence economies, of tools, of

friendship, and of proportions and limits, the world that was destroyed by industrialism, the chrematistics of the modern economy, the logic of power, of development, and by all that which near the end of his life Jean, in keeping with Illich's thinking, called the system—has its corresponding equivalent in the great beyond. In other words, the here and now of the world is analogous to the great beyond, it's made proportionally in the likeness of the hereafter (*el más allá*). But what is the hereafter?

As I attempt to answer this question, I feel like I'm committing a terrible indiscretion, to the point that I can hear Jean in my head, with his French-accented "r" that he called his bridle, "Javierr, don't say it!". So, before I answer this question, I must address Jean's reticence.

Like all humans born in the West, Jean's thought is nestled between its two foundations: the Judeo-Christian realm and the Greek realm. Moreover, within this cultural framework Jean was a man of profound and uncommon faith, a faith analogous to mysticism, if we understand this word in reference to its Greek root *myein* ("to shut/close"): referring to an interior experience, an alcove where there are no words and about which, as Wittgenstein said, it's better not to talk. For these reasons, Jean refused to talk about these issues in theological or "cataphatic" terms, which is to say positive explanatory terms. Jean coincided with the apophatic, or negative, tradition of mysticism, which holds there can be no affirmative or rational descriptions or explanations of the Divine—to the point where he would get upset when I tried to frame some of his ideas in affirmative descriptive language. What bothered him, beyond the fact that language of that nature misrepresents the ineffability of the Divine, is that by framing it in these categories its complexity is reduced to a particular language and perception. And this particular enunciation displaces its essential nature, full of common sense and of truths "as old as the hills," a Gandhi quote Jean liked to use to refer to the topics his writing addressed and illuminated.

I remember when I, alongside Valentina Borremans, edited two tomes of texts by Ivan Illich published in Spanish by the *Fondo de Cultura Económica*.² I sent Jean the prologue that I had written for the second tome. The prologue to the first tome had been written by him and Valentina. In mine, I tried to explain Illich's thoughts starting with his theological intuition about the mystery of the Incarnation. This intuition—mystical revelation perhaps?—is, in my opinion, the basis of his writing. Illich speaks explicitly about this intuition in his long interviews with David Cayley, published upon the death of Illich, under the title of a Paul Celan verse, *The Rivers North of the Future*³. After reading it, Jean replied with a long critique of the above arguments. We exchanged letters. In the end, our debate, in which we were both right, settled more or less on the following conclusion: “You're right, Jean, and your perspective suits a philosopher, but not a poet.”

Like with Illich in *The Rivers North of the Future*, Jean hints in some of his writing at that which I consider the crux, the apophatic nucleus of his thought. Bearing in mind the conclusion of the aforementioned debate, I will, with my apologies to Jean, commit the indiscretion of trying to describe the core of his thought. I think—again with apologies to Jean—that this is my way to try to holistically look at and understand the complexity of the many distinct paths that Jean, the walker, traveled.

There is a fundamental concept within the cultural matrix of Jean Robert's thoughts and faith, that of incarnation. He was able to examine this concept more deeply thanks to Ivan Illich's thinking, as well as conversations between the two of them. This concept is expressed very clearly in two essays that don't appear in this *Journal*: “Betrayal of the Great Tradition:

² Iván Illich, *Obras reunidas [Compiled Texts]* I and II, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, t. I, first edition, 2006; t. II, first edition, 2008.

³ *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich*, House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2005. The Spanish translation is: David Cayley, *Últimas conversaciones con Iván Illich. Un camino de amistad*, El Pez Volador, España, 2019.

Corruption of Christianity” and “Proportionality, Friendship and Presence.”⁴ The latter was published under the pseudonym Émile Zapotek.

In Jean Robert’s faith—a faith which his radical apophatic stance prevented him from talking about—the *Logos* of the Gospel of John refers not only to word, but also to relation, proportion, and analogy. The *Logos*, with which according to Saint John, God created the world and incarnated himself to inhabit the world, led Jean to understand two things. Firstly, that the elements of the hereafter that are visible to us are only visible due to the relationships between *Logos* and *Sarx* (the “flesh”⁵ that isn’t body, but rather the experience of sensation). In this sense, in Jean’s faith, our flesh and our word are analogous, possessing a proportional relationship between the ineffability of God, the hereafter and the incarnation of *Logos* in Jesus. Secondly, that the flesh and *logos* within us is as diverse as the many languages and cultures that have existed.

Drawing from the phenomenological discourse of Michel Henri⁶, Jean stated that the flesh is what defines living beings. It is what distinguishes all pure bodies, such as rocks or a glass, from living bodies. It is also what distinguishes living beings from the tiny particles that make up organic and inorganic matter. According to Jean, these particles “aren’t bodies, because they don’t have sensory experiences.” Instead, they are “a-phenomenal, a-somatic, alienated from everything that’s manifest in a *soma*.” A cup, for example, will never feel my touch no matter how close it is to my hand. “It is a body—writes Jean—but it can’t perceive other bodies. Inert objects are incapable of touching, feeling, seeing, hearing, breathing, and experiencing

⁴ Both are published in the following magazine: *Ixtus. Espiritu y Cultura, Y el Verbo se hizo carne*, núm. 55, Cuernavaca, 2006.

⁵ In the original Spanish version of the text, this footnote explains that in Spanish there is only one word “carne,” that simultaneously means *flesh* and *meat*. In both French and English, there are two words to distinguish between meat meant for consumption, *viande* in French, and the flesh of the living, *chair* in French. Jean’s use of the word “carne” in his Spanish writing referred to *flesh* or *chair*.

⁶ *La Encarnación. Una filosofía dela carne* [Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh]. Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca, 2001.

oneself [...] They are just bodies.” Only fleshly beings are capable of feeling. The human being, endowed with language and *logos*, has the capacity to perceive the relationships between its flesh and other objects in the world. Moreover, the human being can perceive and manifest the relationship between here and the hereafter. Nonetheless, this capacity to feel, name, and relate with here and there, and with the hereafter differs across cultures, languages, and places.

The problem, according to Jean, is that the Christian tradition broke away from the proportion revealed by the Gospel and began to understand god and the hereafter as a power. It also began to understand God and the hereafter as something that falls outside of our carnal relationships with the world and with the languages that describe our experience in it. Illich called this the corruption of the Gospel, which he synthesized in the words of Saint Jerome: “The corruption of the best is the worst.” Throughout his work Jean remarks that the modern world is but the consequence of pretending to know and possess that which is not revealed to us by flesh or *logos*: the rupture of proportion, the excess that wishes to access the domain of the ineffable. I could argue that Jean’s faith managed to grasp and delve into a contemporary take on an age-old problem. The Greeks—masters of moderation—saw *hubris* as the origin of tragedy. This is clearly expressed in the myths of Prometheus, Sisyphus, and Icharus, and summarized in Heraclitus’ aphorism: “The sun will not go beyond its proper boundaries: if not, the Spinners, servants of Justice, will find him out.” Furthermore, he managed to recover the profound meaning of a word so oft-used in the Judeo-Christian world that it has been emptied of meaning. “Sin,” a word whose original meaning is “fall,” “collide,” “to lose balance,” corresponds to the Judeo-Christian way of understanding *hubris*.

In the same way that Prometheus, Sisyphus, Icharus, Adam, and Eve sought to possess something that didn’t belong to them, Jean argues that modern science at times tried to discover, possess, and dominate facets of the hereafter. For example, the eleven dimensions of physics, molecules, electrons, quarks, “each with its inevitable energy” or with their “out of place

concreteness.” Their expression is so abstract that we can’t perceive them with our flesh, just like we can’t perceive information, population, communication, and sexual energy. Jean also tells us, like the poetic stories of the bible and of the Greeks, that these scientific entities don’t belong to the proportions of our flesh and its *logos*. After all, these are phantasmagoric presences that we can’t touch and can only see—if it can even be called seeing—through complex apparatuses such as a “non-optical electron-based or a scanning ‘tunneling’ microscope,” or through graphs, curves, and diagrams.

Like the vengeance of the Furies or the “fall” of Adam and Eve, which launched them into the utilitarian multiplicity of the world, “the sciencifying culture of modernity has globalized a perceptual anesthesia [a bewitchment in the sense of artifice not analogy] that masquerades as Reason. In praising matters of physics, we have devalued the sensation of [the flesh]. The illusion of the ‘thing-in-itself’—which Kant called the unknowable *neumenon* to distinguish it from the concrete *phenomenon*—furnishes the contemporary mind with unquestionable certainty about various invisible omnipresent matters, while relegating the remaining fleshly sensations to academic scrutiny. In the clay [...], which was in other times known as *Scientia*, there is no flesh, only bodies and corpuscles that are endlessly divisible.”

The flesh, on the other hand, is “... indivisible. It is not composed of particles or atoms, but rather of pleasure and suffering, of hunger and thirst, of desire and fatigue, of strength and delight, of vivid impressions, all of which draw their substance from the verb and are constituted in it.” It is an experience that is expressed not only in the flesh of each person, but also in the *logos* and the culture that that flesh belongs to and lives, flourishes, and dies within.

In this sense, for Jean, everything from the hereafter that corresponds to us, has a legible analogue in the fleshly world due to the relationship between flesh and *Logos*. Vice versa, everything here—in its legible and proportional form—has an illegible and ineffable analogue in the hereafter. To summarize the preceding sentences, I could say that for Jean there was no need

to look to the hereafter to find the meaning of life. In fact, looking there not only takes us out of proportion and prompts us to stumble, it also hampers the world that our flesh inhabits and takes it out of proportion. In doing so, it generates violence and ailments that were previously unknown, and destroys our liberty. I can imagine Jean referring to two quotes. Albert Camus' proclamation, "I know something worse than hate—abstract love" and another one from Staretz Zósima (a spiritual guide in the Russian Orthodox tradition), from *The Brothers Karamazov*—"We don't understand that life is a paradise [at present], for we have only to wish to understand this and it will immediately appear before us in all its beauty." Jean was one of the few people who analyzed the consequences of love for the abstract, and he was also one of the few people who unveiled the paradise that abstractions endeavor to erase.

This revelation of his faith, which can be found in a few articles I addressed in "Thinking With One's Feet,"⁷ illuminates—an apophatic light, like the light in the absence of a presence or shadow—the origin of the common sense underlying his arguments.⁸ It seems that this revelation, like an Ariadne's thread, allows one to cover and connect the diverse meanders and paths that Jean roamed with his feet and with his mind.

Jean didn't speak of that apophatic light, except in a few essays, and even then, only in his capacity as a historian or philosopher. Seen in that light, one can understand not only his critique of modern civilization, which, in its disproportion, destroyed the proportional order between the flesh, the *logos*, the world, and the innumerable manifestations and perceptions in it.

⁷ "De aquí, del allá, de un *poodle* y del sentido de la proporción en arquitectura" [From here, from there, from a *poodle* and from the sense of proportion in architecture]. Revista *Ixtus. Espiritu y Cultura, La mística o el deseo de Dios*, núm. 34, 2002, and "Nuevas preguntas sobre arte y arquitectura" [New questions about art and architecture], revista *Ixtus*, núm. 37, 2003. Two articles about proportion, which Jean illustrates with his analysis of the Saint-Denis cathedral.

⁸ A clear example of the apophatism that Jean defended is the poetry of Saint John of the Cross. Jean refused to provide positive theological explanations because he felt it impoverished meaning and gave things a unidirectional slant. In Saint John of the Cross' poetry, eroticism and the night become the light of an absent presence. In doing so, rather than reducing the experience of the hereafter to a body of doctrine or a privileged language, he makes it resonate in a manner analogous to the most radical fleshly experience, that of being in love. God, says Saint John of the Cross without invoking his name, is an experience that is proportionally the same to the experience of erotic love that is a part of our incarnated reality.

One can also understand his analysis of the modern economy, which by placing its pillars on the allocation of scarce resources, rather than on care for the home—the original meaning of economy—destroys diverse forms of self-subsistence across culture. Moreover, he claimed it uproots us from the commons and launches us into misery and dependence on “counterproductive” jobs that transform liberty and dignity into poverty and dependence on the market. In this sense, Jean often referred to “the increasing difficulty of subsisting outside of the market as a poor person.”

In that apophatic light, one can also understand his devastating critique of the automobile, whose wheels are more harmful than the latex of a condom because they dispossess us of our natural and autonomous movements, make us dependent on a rubber prosthetic and on a greater dose of energy, they steal time, and produce contamination that precipitates climate change. Moreover, the roads they require to circulate destroy peasant populations and agricultural soils.

One can understand his analysis of public housing and self-service shops, which impose administrative control and paralyze creative autonomies by eroding mutual-support networks born of fleshly relations and common proportions. One can also understand his critique of systems, which numb us to fleshly perceptions, uprooting us from the ground that is here, there, and in the great beyond, manifest in proportional relationships. He critiqued the system for inhibiting our senses and generating within us an addictive dependency on the consumption of immaterial realities, alienated from our human proportions.

One can understand his critique of a world that has passed certain thresholds and is now more destructive of culture and freedom than the production of material goods is destructive to nature. One can discern the relationship between one matter and the other through the thought and the wanderings of Jean Robert. One can even understand his struggle to defend cultural patrimonies, including his fight in the name of the Front for the Defense of Casino de la Selva, aimed at saving the original urban layout of Cuernavaca, the economic life of its populace, and

its cultural memory. Finally, one can understand his friendship with the Zapatistas (about which he left several illuminating essays); his solidarity with peasants defending their territories in Atenco; his exercise in self-building and hundreds of other undertakings he embarked on as he was wandering along many paths. In these paths, he saw a resonance of flesh and proportions through which a particular *común* expressed itself.

Perhaps this reflection from Hugo of St. Víctor, a contemporary of abbot Suger can summarize this apophatic light by which Jean roamed the world. I have taken this reflection from Ivan Illich's *In the Vineyard of the Text*, and I cited it in the conclusion of my essay, "Thinking With One's feet." According to Suger, "If one does not know God's wisdom corporally at first [Jean would say in the flesh] one can't be illuminated by his spiritual contemplation. For this reason, one should never scorn the humble ways through which God's word reaches us. It is precisely this humility that illuminates us." Jean would add that it also illuminates those who don't belong to the Western tradition, or those who have lost their roots.

Near the end of his life, Jean and I would have breakfast once a week at La Alondra café, right in front of the Cuernavaca cathedral. The café was located in an old building, nicknamed a Casona [the big house], whose origins date back to the XVI century. Painter and sculptor John Spencer, bought the Casona at the end of his life and converted it into a cultural center.

Jean had been struggling with a cancer for some time. He endeavored not to talk about the cancer or the treatment he was undergoing to control it. Nonetheless its ravages were reflected in his face and in his gait. Already thin by nature, the illness left him gaunt and exhausted. Formerly a tireless walker and expert swimmer, his movements became clumsy and laborious. Despite this, he refused to talk about it and much less to give up. True to the experience of his flesh, he took his sickness as a part of life, rather than as a terminal illness. He refused, thus, to live under the shadow of the future and chose to devote himself to the present. After replying laconically to my questions about his health, our conversations turned towards his

book on Ivan Illich, the last book he would write. He had written in French, his native tongue, but it would be published in Italian, and Jean was supervising the translation: *L'età dei sistemi nel pensiero dell'ultimo Illich*⁹ (*The Era of Systems in the Late Thought of Illich*).

The book reached magnificent levels of depth and prose while exploring new avenues of thought in seven questions related to carnal relationships, proportion, and the excesses of the modern world that drove us to a profound crisis of civilization. His fourth essay addressed the beginning of an era driven by the “scientifying culture of modernity,” which both he and Ivan Illich ceaselessly denounced. From my perspective, and in keeping with the theological basis of Illich’s thought, I compared this era with an apocalypse. Not in the sense of “the end of time,” which we know nothing about, but rather a “time for the end.” If it is not the end of time, it is at least the ending of an era which was born with the Gospel and the notion of Incarnation. With the end of one era comes the beginning of another one that I would call “the post-flesh era.” Jean, in his radical apophaticism, rejected this language. He preferred to refer to this crisis from a historical perspective, just like Illich did, and called it the “era of systems.” That was the origin of his aforementioned book and of the chapter that we would frequently discuss at La Alondra: “Sistemi... nella testa delle persone” (“Systems... in people’s heads”). Nonetheless, we did agree that the system and the time for the end referred to a world without flesh and that it was lacking in exits. “The system,” he would say—often invoking a computer as a metaphor—“is a closed house, without windows, doors, horizons, or flesh.” He would also say that it was necessary to resist within what was left of the proportional world, through friendship and the preservation of small spaces of fraternity, such as the one we shared every week in La Alondra café.

⁹ Hermatena, Italia, 2019.

Before the end of 2019, the Italian edition of his book saw the light of day and Jean gifted it to me for Christmas.

At the start of 2020, like the resurgence of the System, the announcement of the pandemic, stole away that corner of resistance, and forced us to confine ourselves, and to forego our carnal, physical, face-to-face relationships. In effect to deprive us of our common atmosphere. Confined, like me, to his house, his pen and to his computer, which he used exclusively as a tool (not only was his laptop as old as his *Word*, he essentially used it as a typewriter and as a means to check his email), his illness worsened.

In a final act of resistance within friendship, and as a means of supporting him through his illness, I suggested that we translate his entire book to Spanish via *mail*. He got excited. Sitting in a bed which Sylvia Marcos, his companion, improvised for him in the living room since he was no longer capable of going up to his studio-bedroom, he would use the Italian version, which he considered superior to the French, and translated his book chapter by chapter. Then he would send chapters to me and I would use the digital version of the French book, which he had shared with me during our conversations at La Alondra, and the Italian version to make corrections and send them back to him. The chapters came and went; as did the comments, clarifications, and explanations. When we finished, Jean suggested we continue our little acts of resistance by translating a book by Ivan Illich, which at the time only existed in German. The book consisted of Illich's conference presentations in the 1980s on the occasion of the inauguration of the National Museum of the School, an offshoot of Bremen's *Schulmuseum*. Ivan's book, *The School at the Museum. Fedro and the Consequences*, is a magnificent book about the oral tradition, the birth of writing, and the consequences of the first act of disincarnation of the word. It is related to the emergence of the tool, which, like the book, was born in the XII century. A large part of Jean's essay on the system was dedicated to the emergence of tools. Both books, Jean's and Illich's, were his final acts of resistance against his

illness and against the system that, exacerbated by the pandemic, deprived us of the world and of the flesh.

Because I can neither read nor speak German, we used a different method for this translation. Jean would produce an almost literal translation of Illich's German and I would convert it into Spanish syntax, and after some back and forth, we would find a translation that was true to the German version.

In August of 2020, after I sent the last version, he called to tell me, with his French-accented "r"—or bridle according to him —: "We arre finished, Javierr." He didn't take up the pen or write again. Like the spiritual man that he was, he dedicated himself to seeking closure with his life in the world.

Despite his terminal cancer, Jean, who had learned the art of suffering and dying through his spirituality, never appeared to suffer from the unbearable pain that typically accompanies that illness. If he was in pain—he never complained—he bore it with admirable patience. Twice, with our face masks secured, my wife Isolda and I went to visit him. Lying in bed, surrounded by books, and with Sylvia attending to him, his body was diminishing. He could barely get up and when he did it was, laboriously leaning on his cane, in order to make his way to the bathroom. But his mind was sharp and his humor intact. He lived an exemplary life and he served as an example even in illness and death.

On the night of September 30th, Sylvia called me. "Jean has asked me to read him poetry. He was softly reciting Paul Celan's 'Death Fugue' this afternoon. Send me some poets. I'll send you a taxi to bring them to me."

Why was he reciting this poem, the only one where a poet dared to poeticize the impossible: the crematoriums of Auschwitz in Nazi Germany? Why this devastating and terribly beautiful poem that describes a brutal form of disincarnation?

In a birthday card, dated November 19, 1992, to his friend Helmut Becker, director of the Max-Planck Institute in Berlin,¹⁰ Iván Illich talks about the disappearance of the flesh and the world in the wake of the disincarnation brought about by what Jean would call “the system.” In this context, Illich understood “Death Fugue” as a metaphor for the epoch that has sprung from the regimes of Hitler, Roosevelt, and Stalin. He described what would befall us in the age of “the system”: “Paul Celan understood that nothing but smoke remained of the world we knew. But he had to wait until the advent of my computer’s hard drive to locate the emblem of an irrevocable disappearance that could be understood as the dying out of the world and of flesh. Fleshly materiality doesn’t disappear like a dead man abandoned behind enemy lines, nor like ruins that slowly sink into the ground. No! It disappears like a phrase that’s erased by holding a finger down on the “Delete” key on a computer keyboard.”

I think Jean was thinking of this letter and that by reciting Celan’s poem, he was simultaneously evoking the disincarnation of the fleshly world—a phenomenon he had always denounced—and indicating that he would not disappear in the manner in which Celan describes. His body would be buried in the ground he had inhabited, in the pantheon of Chamilpa. He wouldn’t vanish into smoke in the ovens of a crematorium. Nor would he become a sub-system in a hospital bed, connected to a screen that, like the “delete” key on a computer, would announce his death with a line of light and loud beep. Instead, by dying in bed, next to his wife, in the house he built with his hands, he was dying like a person who inhabited and continued to inhabit the world with his flesh, like a walker who—akin to the pilgrims of earlier times—was prepared to give everything up with absolute faith in his resurrection.

To Jean and Sylvia I sent the complete works of Konstantino Kavafis, translated by Cayetano Cantú. Jean loved him. He knew many of his poems in the original Greek by heart.

¹⁰ The letter, translated from German by Jean Robert and Valentina Borremans, is published at the end of *la perte des sens* under the title “La perte du monde et de la chair,” Fayard, Paris, 2004.

Sometimes, before diving into a conversation, I would ask him to recite them. I also sent Juan de la Cruz's poetry. Listening to Sylvia recite those poems, he passed on with them on the morning of October 1st. He passed to a place like the one he had freely inhabited in life while resisting against the hardships of the system. For Jean, this place was an analogue to world in the presence of Incarnation and of *Logos*. On Sylvia's lips, he left me a precious message that speaks of his love for the world, for friendship, for face-to-face encounters and for their proportions. The words of this last message are profoundly reciprocated: "Tell Javier that I love him very much."

Barranca de Acapantzingo, April 2021.