



CLEANING

WRITING

SOLID ARGUMENTS

SISYPHOS

BROOM

DEAR FRIEND,

I know there's much to catch up on, but I really want to talk to you about cleaning. In a funny way, I have been obsessed with it lately. I haven't actually been cleaning much, but I have been thinking about it a lot while doing some other things. Usually we tend to procrastinate by cleaning, but for me fantasizing about it is quite enough.

I thought about it a lot while writing this letter. I was constantly lost in thought, constructing sentences in my mind, while staring around with a blank gaze. My room is a bit of a mess, so I guess it's no surprise that the allusion of cleaning was constantly popping up. Soon enough this mess started to provide me with several metaphors and storylines to hang on to until I reached a conclusion that writing and cleaning are essentially the same.

Here are my arguments for it:

1. BOTH ARE OFTEN DONE WITH A CERTAIN AUDIENCE IN MIND

I always clean the best when someone is coming over and the same goes in writing—it's always easier when you have a certain audience in mind. Even if the audience is very private—perhaps a personal diary meant for my eyes only—it is still written as if it was meant for someone else. I guess it relies on the fact that we are alien to ourselves, as well. I am sure this is the reason why we are always surprised about the stuff that we write and often feel detached from the writing when it's done. It is as if the text belongs to someone else. But in reality I don't think the texts belong to anyone. They are their own subjects. The moment a text is published it enters the public sphere, meaning it belongs to everyone engaging with it, not someone in particular.

If we compare this to cleaning, then it becomes apparent that a reader of a text is nothing but a guest in our head. When they come over, the least we can do is make up our mind, change the sheets like a white page, and show some hospitality by constructing a temporary order in thought.

Cleaning also has that element of surprise that makes writing so rewarding. I often find the strangest things under the sofa or behind the bookshelf. I once found an old pencil, a green one, hidden behind a desk. I think I remember buying it when I was 18. It still works, and every time I use it for writing or drawing it fills me with vague memories of adolescence.

2. CLEANING IS ALWAYS TEMPORARY AND SO IS WRITING

I really think that if Sisyphus had been given a broom to sweep the hills instead of pushing a boulder over them, he would have learned the same lesson. It would have been even better if the gods had given him a pen and a paper and cursed him to write every day. In that case I would really see Sisyphus as a writer like Thomas Bernhard¹—who seems to be writing the same novel over and over again.

For him, writing is clearly a boulder to be pushed from book to book. In that sense it almost

does not matter what he writes about. In *Concrete* we are not interested in his obsessive loathing of his "fictional" sister, or in *The Loser* the constant repetition of the genius of Glenn Gould and the crushing smallness of other characters. In his novels we are not looking for a resolution to the events happening. Instead, what fascinates us is the sisyphian struggle that Bernhard faces while writing. A struggle that is present from sentence to sentence, chapter to chapter, and book to book. It is the same struggle that Camus calls the absurdity of life in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* and which manifests itself in writing through the fact that we are constantly trying to communicate but language only meets us halfway.

The same rule applies to cleaning. No matter how thorough and precise you are, you still have to pick up the broom again sooner or later. In that sense, a clean room is very similar to a well-phrased sentence. When everything is in its "right" place, either in a text or in a living room; it always becomes a peculiar *mise en scene*, an extremely slow piece of art, that pats us on our back and tells us to try again.

To come back to Camus, I really agree with him that the never ending task of Sisyphus makes him happy. One can see the limitations of our language as a burden. But for me it takes the pressure off from writing, because there is always a second chance, always enough language to push around like a boulder.

3. A THIRD ARGUMENT!

For the sake of good structure and good taste a third argument for writing and cleaning should be presented here in an elegant fashion. Written with great passion and admirable rigour. If I remember correctly, this advice was given in 1637 by Rene Descartes in his *Discourse on Method*. He was certain that a good essay presents three ideas and never more, because the reader is incapable of digesting more information at once.

I am not really a student of Descartes, but somehow for this particular letter having a third "argument" kind of makes sense. Even though it is just a formal one, it makes this text feel complete. Makes it sound as if we would be playing a harmonic chord. It looks trustworthy from afar and while reading it has a logical ending. So without further adieu, I sincerely thank you for reading and hope to hear from you soon!



1. Thomas Bernhard (1931–1989) was an Austrian writer, and I would really recommend his books to you if you are not already into them. In the context of letter writing, I would like to point out that his novels are basically extremely long letters consisting of obsessive inner monologues. I know I know, such are the worst letters to receive, but surprisingly they make a great novel!