

Etel Adnan

A FUNERAL MARCH FOR THE FIRST COSMONAUT

In 11 Chapters

A radio-poem by Etel Adnan and Ulrike Haage

Direction and composition: Ulrike Haage

With: Etel Adnan (English voice), Judith Engel (German voice),
Zainab Alsawah (Arabic/English voice), Eduard Wassmann (Russian voice)

Soloists: Christina Andersson (Soprano),
Claudio Puntin (Clarinet), Ulrike Haage (Grand Piano, Organ, Celesta)

German Translation: Klaudia Ruschkowski

Sound: Thomas Monnerjahn

Production: Deutschlandfunk Kultur 2019, 49'37 min.

1.

You were searching through the hands of the monkey tree
that pipeline to the sky
an incoherent light-wave was moving
behind the clouds
and you went swimming into that distant
pool you went to be suspended there
cool as the western side of palm leaves
under the break of noon

there are potholes in the skies
familiar to the Sierra's wanderers
moving icebergs which taste like
anti-matter when physics go wild

Gagarin Scott Gherman Titov McDivitt
Komarov the new hierarchy of archangels
bringing messages from outer space
decoding the protons and moving under
a shower of travelling electrons

seven sunsets for a single evening
and the uninterrupted moon
growing into their eyes with the look
of mothers looking back on us from the other
side of our death

seven sunrises for a cosmonaut!

2.

2.

I was in Carthage and the american
satellite was orbiting over St.
Augustin's land. I told him: African,
today you would have not drowned yourself
in the seas of the Roman Empire
but go into that fifth ocean when the sun sets
as it rises so that it is always night
and always day and the stars we are launching
be the antennas of that beeping
pulsing thinking atom
of human life.

Seventeen sunrises in one day.

3.

In the beginning was the sufi in orbit

In the beginning was the white page

In the beginning was the sword

In the beginning was the rocket

In the beginning was the dancer

In the beginning was color

In the beginning was music

Gagarin's death... it is again Icarus remember Dedalus
remember Gagarin remember the archangel remember the
white rose Roses blanches tombez! remember Icarus remember
Dedalus remember Gagarin

Remember Komarov Vladimir Vladimir Vladimir Komarov
Komarov Komarov remember Carpenter remember McDivitt
Remember Glenn Glenn Glenn Glenn Komarov Glenn Gagarin
Vladimir Glenn Vladimir Glenn

Remember in the beginning was space in the beginning
was time and space-time and time-space and sleep ...
and music.

4.

I see the tarot of Japan in these subdued images
a procession of samourais bending their swords
carrying a processional for op art
on the white silks of their ghosts.

This is Japan drowned and resurrected
resurrected but still dying
drinking water and emerging
swimming from underwater and drowning in a
transistorized version of Hiroshima
tears dripping from Mt Fuji and an earthquake
reconciled at the open wound of
Kamakura

Long elliptical trajectories are making a bruise
on the sky
and we are the introverts of the space age
scratching clouds with closed fists
burying eyes in the leather of trees
eating and remaining hungry
kissing and remaining lonely
speaking and remaining doomed

breaking wells in the direction of death
and forgetting the sun the black halo of the
japanese flag
and the toy which moves in the Pacific
at the feet of the city of Osaka
that moving sun which moves like a fish under the waves
far out side Tokyo.

5.

We threw into outer space
a whole maze of Indian tribes
with nuclear garbage
as unwanted satellites

The Omaha Indian sings:
Arise, sun, moon, stars, all of you
who move in the heavens
I pray you, hear me: in your midst
a new life has come.

His song is
drilling holes in our ears
hammering its way into the Mountain Speech of Memphis
our Revelation

The Black prophet
ascended twice:
to meet the sun
and to meet his death

- remember the kites falling when we were children,
they always looked like dying birds-

In the dark rooms of the
movie houses the films of prophecy
contaminate the audiences. Batman
Gagarin Superman Martin Luther King
this is the Battle of Angels.

6.

We drank from the camel's mouth a liquid
which was bitter
we heard laughters

There is a system in the universe
unforgiving solar-centered in which
no obscure paradise can last

there is an animal inflated moving on a thousand feet
we live in its belly
we breathe its gases
we look with its eyes
we curse its liver

then we send a cosmonaut to the other planets
to sing a resurrection!

7.

In the beginning was San Quentin
I saw it at twilight a gigantic casino
a Frank Lloyd Wright building a
floating dream but
it was rejecting light
like a mirror
its sadness all written in the refusal
light was not going through
it was being arrested in all its glory
the prison transfigured, only for
those outside
 the inmates remaining in the dark

and these images are imprisoned on
 paper

I see them struggle toward freedom,
 toward meaning

and they fall like Gagarin today
fell:

he was a frog descending
he was a cross shooting towards earth
he was a boat moved by its genes
 when all the information went insane
 in each one of his cells

and he flew both arms and both legs opened
 like a compass
 like a bird hit by lightning
 like the bats that Leonardo used to draw
 bats whose wings were also blinded.

8.

And he saw
from where not even the onethirteenth diameter of
the earth was visible
he saw – like banks of dead fish
 in tropical water –
a silent line of dead
cosmonauts moving through
the pureness of space

And he fell
back to the black shrubs
of earth in an instant fire
which was his eulogy
(the journey came to an end
another journey had just
dawned)

Explosions of light
bulbs exploding
cracking
the whole human race
bombarded by so many
news, images, the voltage
of intercourse,
and a requiem for the sound barrier!

9.

Flying in the center of a furious blaze
like a song
he came down at cosmic speeds
missing mother earth
and returning to her a
dead hero from battle,
while the sun wept.

there are only red flowers on our land
flowers and no stems
stems and no flowers

fife gongs drums beats strings
drums and more drums and people's
feet as many more drums
asian drums african drums arabian drums
american drums russian drums
a drum

While the sun wept
the dead hero came back from battle
to his mother whom he missed
at cosmic speeds
like a song
flying in the center of a furious blaze.

10.

Body of space swelling as woman after death

body of space beaten opened up in tracks in wounds

dripping with clouds

moaning its agony

body of space enlarging under pressure

from ancestors

fire trucks nails armored tanks

columns of soldier-angels and retreating Algerians

the whole wretched battalion climbing up the

invisible stairways of space

body of space white as early morning

do not be afraid...

11.

Astronauts also are mortal

Gagarin first man in space but also the thirteenth

the sun god Ra and murderous Isis

Elijah and Jesus and you

Mohammad hovering above Jerusalem

refusing to enter Paradise but unclothed

and reduced to a heap of ashes

you prophet Elijah carried by your horses

burning close to the sun

all of you cosmonauts carried by our dreams

floating above sleep

all of you pioneers of that space

which lingers between atom and dream

we heard the tremendous minute of silence

you all stood when Gagarin came to you

the great child in the great machine.

Etel Adnan, 1968