

Mariusz Maślanka  
*Days Wide Open*

“Yet her poetry from beginning to end is concerned with prisons,  
vaults, cages, bars, curbs, bits, bolts, fetters,  
locked windows, narrow frames, aching walls.”<sup>1</sup>

Lately, I’ve been vigilant of drapery. Merriam Webster defines drapery as either “hangings of heavy fabric for use as a curtain”, or “a decorative piece of material usually hung in loose folds and arranged in a graceful design”.<sup>2</sup> The curtains I’ve come across of recent haven’t been particularly graceful. Hanging there, in strangers’ windows, they’re rather unfashionable – even dowdy.

I’m writing from a hotel apartment somewhere in Southeast Europe. The tall windows in my room are also adorned with drapery, in the form of thick, Rococo-patterned, silvery curtains. They look synthetic. It is approaching sunset, and the sky outside is blue. When I wake up in the morning, the curtains have turned gold.

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In bedrooms, private homes, and therapists’ offices, curtains bear witness to the utmost intimate. A synonym to the word *intimate* is *bosom*, which in the form of an adjective means *close*. Bosom is commonly used as a noun, defining either a woman’s breasts or more broadly a human chest – from which the definition as something held close is derived.

In 1929, Sigmund Freud wrote about the “oceanic feeling”, which his friend and author Romain Rolland had coined. According to Rolland, it was a feeling of eternity connected to religious energy. Freud, on the other hand, meant that an “oceanic feeling” was only remnants of a primitive ego-feeling that humans experience as infants, up until the mother ceases breastfeeding.<sup>3</sup> During this time, the infant has no concept of self: It isn’t separated from the mother’s bosom.

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At a recent dinner, a friend showed me a picture he had taken of the dark red velvet curtains hanging in the staircase window of the Casa Poporului – The People’s House – in Bucharest. The curtains are sixteen meters high and weigh more than 250 kilos each, comprising part of what is, astonishingly, the heaviest building in the world. The palace was built under Romania’s last communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, and contains a dizzying amount of crystal chandeliers, marble, and woven woollen carpets. I wonder if these curtains have ever been opened.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Carson, *The Glass Essay*, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> “Drapery”, Merriam Webster Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930.

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In shutting the world out, or oneself in, curtains are helpful. Blackout curtains even more, as they disperse any daylight that might slither through the textiles. Producing fiction and displacement – out of time out of space. You're always either inside or outside, yet peeking through could be an emancipatory action.

The displacement is perhaps of an anxiety of the outside which is all-too wide open. Curtains becomes the liminal space which captures the excessively wild world.

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Jacques Lacan wrote on the imaginary veil, or curtain, which is between ourselves and that which we love: "the curtain takes on its value, its very being and its consistency, by being precisely that on which absence is projected and imagined. The curtain is, as it were, the idol of absence [...]"<sup>4</sup>

The idol of absence.

In *The Glass Essay*, Anne Carson writes about her curtainless mornings. They're crisp and blue, in contrast to her mothers', who "always closes her bedroom drapes tight before going to bed". In Carson's text, the sun is pale blue, and blue appears as both hot and cold. The curtain or drapery becomes as if a cage – that which imprisons.

In Latifa Echakhch's *La dépossession* (2014), the blue, the veil and the sky appear. The work consists of a large theatre canvas painted with a blue sky and clouds, half lying on the floor, on the brink of collapsing. Illusions are broken, and there is nothing behind. Ceal Floyer's *Double Act* (2006) also alludes to the theatrical, consisting of only a spotlight projecting a red stage curtain onto a blank wall: another deceiving image.

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Mariusz Maślanka's new *Shadows* series (2025) is barely theatrical. In a poetic turn, it alludes to the domestic sphere, the less-than-spectacular, the at times uncannily familiar. But also here, the curtains reveal nothing but themselves. They've become almost anthropomorphized sculptures, mounted onto the wall – hung as if a bit too low, in order to highlight the melodramatic drapery formed on the ground by the excessive fabric.

Displaced into the gallery space, the curtain and accompanying, shortened rail go, in the Heideggerian sense from object to *thing* – no longer connected to the windows for which they were produced. Through this estranged move, they appear simultaneously melancholic, claustrophobic and alluringly vulnerable.

-Live Drønen

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Lacan, Seminar IV, 1956-57.