FRIEDENSNOTE NR. 47

The Human in the Mirror

In his song „Man in the Mirror“, Michael Jackson answers the question of where the transformation of society begins.

Since 1987, Michael Jackson has been holding up a mirror to the many people all over the world who listen to his music, through his emotional ballad „Man in the Mirror“. The official video for the song shows scenes of violence, poverty and hunger, edited together from more than 200 hours of footage.

The lyrics call on everyone to make the world a better place and to begin with themselves. Fittingly, the proceeds from „Man in the Mirror“ were donated.

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AUTHOR	Elisa Gratias
SONG	Man in the Mirror
PERFORMER	Michael Jackson
ALBUM	Bad, 1987

We find ourselves in the 16th century. It is spring. Anne is not even twenty years old and sees the world through different eyes than the people around her. She defies social conventions, speaks her mind, and is sentenced to death by burning at the stake.

When Anne steps out of the stinking prison on the day of her execution, she breathes the fresh air deeply and delights in the cheerful chirping of the birds.

> *It calmed Anne to see how indifferent the elements were to her fate. The course of the world was not confined to her or her story; there was a mighty, majestic force that pressed on without pause. Amid this abundance she was no more than a flower crushed beneath the hoof of a cow; if she were destroyed, another Anne would take her place; she counted firmly on the lavish riches of the earth.*

Anne is a fictional character from the book Die Frau im Spiegel by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

Many people demonize us as a species, because „we“ cause so much harm in the world: wars, environmental destruction, the exploitation of other people and of animals … Even more, „we“ demonize „the others“: the elites, industry, the media, the activists, the meat-eaters, the do-gooders …

In the end, all this resentment does not change much about our own behavior, let alone that of others. We carry on just as before, only now with a guilty conscience. Meanwhile, life showers us with gifts every day. Anne recognized this despite her dramatic situation.

Our organs function without our ever appreciating it. We only notice them once they stop doing their job. We treat ourselves like machines, stuff ourselves full of toxins, subject ourselves to every kind of stress, and yet our lungs give us fresh oxygen, our gut digests, our kidneys detoxify us – in every second of our lives.

Nature too, where it still exists, showers us with its lavish abundance. The lemon tree in the garden „produces“ so many fruits that my housemates and I could never eat them all. Most fall to the ground and return to the cycle of eternal passing and becoming. All too often we tear edible wild plants out of the soil as weeds, simply because we were never taught otherwise. Life-giving rain cannot reach the plants because the soils are sealed over with concrete, or the soils have been leached out by industrial agriculture and can no longer supply the plants with nutrients.

Most people in the wealthy countries perceive abundance above all in the form of information, often as horror headlines. But what do we inform ourselves for? Are we willing to take in new information that does not merely confirm our existing worldview? At what point do we begin to change course?

To be a witness to how a man-made yet overpowering system – large corporations and governments – destroys entire cycles of nature for all living beings leaves behind a feeling of powerlessness and resentment. The question of how the destruction wrought by the megamachine can be stopped drives some people to search for solutions, while others fend off those very solutions – perhaps out of an unconscious fear of having to change their own habits or admit their own share of responsibility.

Logic says that changes to the greater whole only happen when the individual parts behave differently. And yet most people underestimate this very logic, overlook it, or refuse to accept it as true.

Michael Jackson expressed this simple message powerfully in his song „Man in the mirror“. The images in the official video – starving children, armed soldiers, bombs and homeless people – combined with the lyrics touch me and motivate me again and again to contribute my small part to a more humane society in harmony with our nature – within and without. Above all by continually learning, by looking – at the suffering *and* at the beauty – and by expanding my worldview again and again.

ORIGINAL

„Ich werde etwas ändern,

wenigstens dieses eine Mal in meinem Leben.

Es wird sich richtig gut anfühlen.

Ich werde etwas verändern.

Ich werde es richtig machen …

Als ich den Kragen meines Wintermantels hochschlug,

blies der Wind auf einmal meine Gedanken frei.

Ich sah die Straßenkinder,

die nicht genug zu essen haben.

Wer bin ich eigentlich, dass ich davor die Augen verschließe?

So tue, als ob ich ihre Not nicht bemerke?

Die Vernachlässigung eines Sommers,

ein abgebrochener Flaschenhals,

eine einsame Seele.

Sie alle folgen einander dorthin, wo der Wind sie hinträgt,

weil sie keinen Ort haben, wo sie hingehen können.

Und deshalb möchte ich, dass ihr wisst:

Ich werde mit dem Mann im Spiegel beginnen,

ihn darum bitten seine Ansichten zu ändern.

Und keine Botschaft könnte klarer sein.

Wenn du die Welt zu einem besseren Ort machen willst,

betrachte dich selbst und ändere etwas.

Ich war das Opfer einer selbstsüchtigen Liebe.

Es wird höchste Zeit zu erkennen,

dass da einige sind, die weder ein Zuhause,

noch einen Cent in der Tasche haben.

Kann das wirklich ich sein, der sich hier einredet, diese Menschen wären nicht einsam?

Eine Weide mit tiefen Narben,

ein gebrochenes Herz,

und ein verblasster Traum,

sie alle folgen dem Wind, weil sie keinen Ort haben, an dem sie bleiben können.

Deswegen fange ich jetzt bei mir an:

Ich werde mit dem Mann im Spiegel beginnen,

ihn darum bitten seine Ansichten zu ändern.

Und keine Botschaft könnte klarer sein.

Wenn du die Welt zu einem besseren Ort machen willst,

betrachte dich selbst und ändere etwas.

Du musst es richtig machen, solange du die Zeit dazu hast

Denn wenn du dein Herz verschließt

Dann verschließt du deinen Verstand.“

ÜBERSETZUNG

„I’m going to make a change,

for once in my life.

It’s going to feel really good.

I’m going to make a difference.

I’m going to make it right …

As I turned up the collar of my winter coat,

the wind suddenly blew my thoughts free.

I saw the children of the streets,

who don’t have enough to eat.

Who am I, really, to close my eyes to it?

To pretend I don’t notice their need?

The neglect of a summer,

a broken bottleneck,

a lonely soul.

They all follow one another wherever the wind carries them,

because they have no place to go.

And that is why I want you to know:

> *I'm going to begin with the man in the mirror,*
>
> *and ask him to change his ways.*
>
> *And no message could be any clearer.*
>
> *If you want to make the world a better place,*
>
> *take a look at yourself and make a change.*
>
> *I was the victim of a selfish kind of love.*
>
> *It is high time to realize*
>
> *that there are some who have neither a home,*
>
> *nor a penny in their pocket.*
>
> *Can that really be me, telling myself these people aren't lonely?*
>
> *A willow deeply scarred,*
>
> *a broken heart,*
>
> *and a washed-out dream,*
>
> *they all follow the wind, because they have no place to stay.*
>
> *That is why I now begin with myself:*
>
> *I'm going to begin with the man in the mirror,*
>
> *and ask him to change his ways.*
>
> *And no message could be any clearer.*
>
> *If you want to make the world a better place,*
>
> *take a look at yourself and make a change.*
>
> *You have to make it right while you still have the time.*
>
> *For if you close your heart,*
>
> *then you close your mind.*"

The woman in the mirror and the man in the mirror. Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt and Michael Jackson remind us that we ourselves help steer the megamachine – in one direction or the other.

> *The system is driven by the great decisions of a few on the world stage – and just as much by all the small decisions of every person in their everyday life.*

We can debate forever about what good it does, on top of raising awareness of the wrongs, to question and change our own behavior … or we can simply do it: perceive homeless people as human beings with whom we share the same streets, donate to soup kitchens, keep lonely people company, reduce our own consumption, boycott mega-corporations, truly listen to one another and learn to understand each other, plant trees, grow our own fruit and vegetables, build water-retention landscapes …

> ORIGINAL
>
> *„Die eine bricht zusammen vor der Fülle dieser Aufgabe; die andere beginnt zu jubilieren ob der Fülle dieser Möglichkeiten“*
>
> ÜBERSETZUNG
>
> *„The one breaks down before the abundance of this task; the other begins to rejoice at the abundance of these possibilities“*
>
> Sabine Lichtenfels from „Quellen der Liebe und des Friedens“

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FIRST PUBLISHED ON MANOVA

www.manova.news/artikel/der-mensch-im-spiegel

AUDIO VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE · RADIO MÜNCHEN

radiomuenchen.net/de/podcast-archiv/sendeformate/friedensnoten/2265-friedensnoten-46-man-in-the-mirror-von-michael-jackson.html

THE SONG IN ITS ORIGINAL · YOUTUBE

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PivWY9wn5ps

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Elisa Gratias, Jahrgang 1983, ist Redakteurin bei Manova. Sie studierte Übersetzen und Journalismus. 2005 wanderte sie nach Frankreich aus. 2014 zog sie nach Mallorca und arbeitet dort seitdem als freiberufliche Autorin, Übersetzerin und Künstlerin. Von 2018 bis 2023 leitete sie als freie Mitarbeiterin die Mutmach-Redaktion.

Zu den Themen Glück, Erfüllung und Gesellschaft schreibt sie auf ihrem Blog flohbair.com. Ihre Kunst zeigt sie auf elisagratias.com.

Website: elisagratias.com

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