TO THE LAST LAYER
IN THE HIMALAYAN WILDERNESS
In 1982 unfortunate events befell a group of mountaineers from Croatia in the icy wilderness of the Himalayas. Those who were a part of this, in the beginning pleasureably-imagined, trip to Nepal, suddenly experienced the never-anticipated maelstrom of existence and extinction. The deepest layers of living beings, deeply hidden, unknown responses of the body and spirit emerged as responses to the extremely harsh challenges of the high mountains.

...concerning what need not be verified...

written for Veljko Šušak
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Besides the beauty of the mountainous landscape, its clean high-altitude air, the sudden encounters with the unknown and the relaxed companionship with people we know, some human beings, certainly not everybody, are affected by other, powerful impulses to head for the mountains and to surmount the challenge of their heights. The enormous difficulties and, to many people, unimaginable efforts—frequently marveled at by their fellow men and seemingly without any real, visible or immediate necessity, generally without any practical benefits—that mountaineers choose to make provokes in many people sincere admiration but doubts as well concerning the purpose of such undertakings.

In an overpopulated world of enormous cities, mysterious, distant mountain heights offer, although perhaps for a short period of time and only seemingly, a feeling of free movement and of conquering spaces that thwart access. Mountain-climbing gives the impression of one discovering something new in nature, although in most instances nothing of distinction is discovered, to people in whom the need to constantly be in motion is deeply rooted and abiding at least during a certain period of life. The same cannot be experienced at work nor can it be realized in the framework of the circumstances in which they live. On the heights, where the sky seems to be at the tip of one’s fingers, where our lungs seek air, where the heart trembles in our chests and icy winds mercilessly tear asunder the snow-filled clouds, individuals who are attracted to this can in full force experience the operations of natural elements and powers, for which nature had created them and which they can no longer encounter. For some people the measure of standing up to natural afflictions is the proof of the power of existence, of the will to live and the guarantee of being. Climbing is a manifestation of the joy of the body and of the spirit because of the ability to overcome difficulties and to move without hindrance through unsettled wildness, an occasion to confirm that each individual is an inseparable part of nature. In the tribulations of climbing high mountains and in overcoming human frailty some inquisitive persons seek answers about themselves, about their virtues and shortcomings, about relations with other people, about their role in nature and about their position within the flux of time. Some travelers seek in the mountains and sometimes find a remedy for the difficulties of everyday life. It is not possible, nor is it necessary to come to know and understand all the individual impulses why numerous people walk mountain paths and demanding mountaineering routes because nobody will reveal their reasons, keeping to themselves the pleasure or the bitterness of their secret. The inquisitive person expecting a solution to the riddle of climbing by reading travel books or listening to the accounts of those who have been to the top will be left bereft of the knowledge that can be gained only through experience. Views from the heights produce in the travelers a longing to know nature and people, the long-ago time from which one has arrived and the far-away places towards which one is headed. The more one goes into the mountains, the stronger the body and spirit become but curiosity also is heightened. Departures become longer, the climbing heights greater, returns more difficult and the need to be in the mountains keeps growing until finally someone comes to desire to remain forever amongst mountain nymphs and fairies.

I, a child of the endless plains without a hill on them, found myself on mountain heights, compelled there by an impulse that I could neither understand nor resist. The contrast between my flat and tame place of birth and the ruggedly furrowed mountains is insufficient to explain how I found myself caught in the trap of desire and curiosity. I wanted to feel how is it to sleep on rocks and in the snow, I wanted to experience desert winds and snow blizzards, hunger and thirst, I wanted to feel how my lungs hanker for oxygen and how my heart flutters in its effort to satisfy the body, I wanted to get to know people who wanted to cope with these things and fathom their and my own endurance. Answers to questions about who and what we are, answers that cannot be expressed in words, ambiguously addressed to oneself and with restraint or not at all to others, can suddenly come to us. Solutions to submerged doubts can appear suddenly, like mountain storms and accidents that devotees of mountain heights are exposed to. One moment suffices for the lives of individuals as well as of many other people enmeshed in the whirl of events to suddenly take an entirely different, unimaginable turn.
1. Death Of A Himalayan Tiger

Many people engaged in mountaineering have suffered harm in different circumstances. Every such case in its own way causes sadness but some accidents, because of the circumstances in which they occurred and because of their consequences, open up many more questions and doubts than others. In 1980, the Himalayan tiger Ang Phu was killed during one of the great and successful ventures to climb Mount Everest. Members of the Himalayan people Sherpa, who as guides and assistants on these ventures have climbed the highest summits, some a number of times, are called tigers. While descending from the highest summit on earth which he had climbed the second time, the then already famous and esteemed sirdar Ang Phu slipped and fell 2000 meters down a deep steep slope. The fall occurred at the moment when he reached out for a cup of refreshing drink offered by a climber who had come from a high camp to give aid to the exhausted conquerors of the summit. Later the participants of the expedition recalled how they had watched shocked how he did not make any move aimed to stop the fall. Such behavior in a man of enormous strength, endurance, experience and will to live was unexpected and seemingly unexplainable. Initially an attempt was made to ascribe this behavior to him self-surrendering to fate and to the distinct spirit and the religion of the people of the heights. The Sherpa people think that they ought not to disturb the gods who dwell on the undisturbed mountain heights. They view casualties and falls undergone by those climbing the holy Himalayan heights as punishment meted out to those impertinent enough to trespass the Holy heights. The Sherpa do not sympathize with climbers who experience mishaps but neither do they express joy, at least not openly, when affliction strikes. To those who witnessed the accident, Ang Phu's behavior during the fall was mysterious. Participants and afterwards those who attentively listened to their stories, I myself included, thought about what took place in the mind of the falling Himalayan tiger. Questions multiplied from such as whether he was afraid or was he suffering to the more sensitive ones such as whether he had surrendered himself to his fate. Did he feel pain, did he think about his loved ones or did his whole life pass in front of his eyes? There was no way to know. We could only guess, horrified by what befell him. Never did one of those remained behind, however much he tried and desired to do so, have the opportunity to share such an experience with those who were departing. The mystery of the last moment, which has to remain so. Forever.
2. Preparations For The Journey

For years a small group of travelers in Zagreb had prepared to take a trip to Nepal. Collecting data about the chosen destination of the journey, conversing with mountain climbers who had already been there, attending lectures and watching pictures and slides as well as selecting routes on geographical maps was interesting even if ultimately the journey failed to materialize. The planning of needed food-stuffs and equipment and the search for the most favorable means of transportation were additional interesting activities in their own right. Furthermore one had to physically prepare oneself and train in the mountains in summer and winter conditions. The primary destination for this group was the highly-celebrated, beautiful trekking-tour around the peak Annapurna, always a challenge to mountaineers. Trekking is a demanding form of mountain-climbing which is mostly practiced in the Himalayas. It is a combination of strenuous mountain climbing, Alpinism and sometimes mountain expeditions. According to plan, the journey led through the irresistibly attractive valley of the Kali Gandaki and Marsyangdi river. Some members of the group, touched by a greater desire to climb, hoped for a possible ascent to the trekking-summit Pisang Peak which stands in the immediate vicinity of and somewhat midway between Annapurna and Kang Guru peaks. This would depend on the amount of time at our disposal and on weather conditions.

The journey was planned together with friends from the Croatian ski expedition on Kang Guru, a summit visible from nearby Pisang Peak. They planned their approach from the opposite direction. They intended to set out through the valley of Marsyangdi river and to return through the valley of the river Kali Gandaki. At the same time the Croatian Himalayan expedition was preparing for a far more demanding climb to legendary Annapurna, the first eight thousand meter mountain to be climbed in history. They were scheduled to depart a bit earlier. The three groups of mountaineers could meet somewhere near the village Mananga in Mustang province, in a circle that could be encompassed by a few hours of walking.

Ultimately the trekking-group was composed of 17 people from a number of cities and mountaineering associations: Goran Rubić, the organizer of the journey, Krešimir Sintić, Vělimír Sušak and his wife Sonja, Lota Arh, Branislav Ćelap, Albina Baruškin, Mladen Ćimin, Slobodan Habulinec, Boris Koštek, Zdenko Kristian, Marina Lukić, Jadranka Mesarčić, Bogumil Obelić, Mia Poje, Nenad Rijavec ... and myself, Kalman Žiha. Most of the people were acquaintances but some only by sight. The varied interests and impulses of the travelers to go on such a long journey made the trip more interesting but a high level of patience concerning their various wishes and individual capabilities was expected of the members of the group.
3. In Other Parts Of The World

At the same time in distant parts of the world other people dreamt and thought about the same farway Himalayan regions. Without knowing of each other, they planned their journeys into the same parts of Nepal as our group did. They pored over the same geographical maps, they read the same travel books and gazed at the same designated paths and peaks. Theoretically, it would be possible to observe their journey from its inception, comparing it with our own. It would be possible to see what points on their journey they reached at certain times starting as they did from other departure points. But this would not be that important until the moment or the place when our paths crisscrossed. If the paths had not crossed the travelers in all probability would never have known of one another. Some devotees of past, present and future journeys like to know how far back one has to reconstruct the seemingly random assembling of people on their journeys. Perhaps it is in some far distant past that one can discern the beginning of their destined coming together and the inevitability of the earlier chartered convergence of paths. Some people travel believing that they are a part of a great common journey with all other travelers. For them individual pathways might seem insignificant detours. To others it appears that each person travels his own unique, lonely, independent path which only accidentally connects with the path of others. Although many people have taken numerous journeys and have had numerous meetings, as of now only various hints about connections between individual destinies have multiplied, without giving us satisfactory final answers.

4. Departure

The trekking-group finally flew from Zagreb to Amsterdam. They flew in the same plane with friends from the Croatian ski expedition. The atmosphere was full of emphatic enthusiasm which stifle the feelings of anxiety before a trip which is not without its dangers. From the Amsterdam airport Schiphol the plane departed for New Delhi. After a short stop in India, the itinerary led to Nepal.

The two groups from Zagreb flew into Kathmandu airport on September 19th, 1982 at noon. Low, dark but vivacious clouds dominated the landscape. Exotic sites, strange inhabitants and the unfamiliar speech of the passers-by put the travelers in a cheerful mood, despite the onerous bureaucratic procedures attending entrance into Nepal. The entire next day passed in sightseeing the city and solving administrative work before the journey. It was necessary to get permits for trekking from the Nepal Ministry of Tourism. After this the ski expedition heading for Kang Guru went their own way. The trekking-group hired two members of the Sherpa people to serve as sirdars. Sirdars have a somewhat higher role than that of guides. They take upon themselves the larger part of the organization of the journey and do all the work in the relations with local authorities and the populace. Details of the ensuing journey that are arranged with them. One was called Kani, the other Nima. They were young, enterprising men, of reliable appearance and well educated. Kani was the real leader while Nima assisted him. In addition, Kani fluently spoke English. Regarding their approach to the trip, one cannot discern curiosity or the sporting spirit. For them it’s just work. Taking into considerations conditions in Nepal, their labor is very well paid.

The next day, a bus, which transported animals in addition to people, if only on its roof, cheerfully made its way through picturesque Nepalese villages to the last larger settlement on the journey route, Pokhari. In Pokhari the sirdars sought bearers for the continuation of the journey through the mountainous wilderness where, excepting the mountain footpaths, there are no other passageways. The negotiations took place on the local football field. Many locals were interested in the job. The sirdars took stock of the person’s general appearance and his physical strength. They checked the muscles of the applicants, sometimes by actually touching them. They mercilessly rejected the weaker. It was disagreeable to watch the rejected ones who with a last hope turned their pleading eyes towards us.

Baskets that are strapped onto the human back in the form of a sepet and around five meters of rope had to be purchased for each chosen bearer. All of this, in addition to the customary wage, is given to them as a reward at the end of the journey. I sought to catch the eyes of the Nepalese folk hoping that I could penetrate into their spiritual world. Their eyes are not expressionless but their dark sheen, which seemed
to have absorbed the cold Himalayan nights, did not reveal anything that we would have liked to know concerning our fellow travelers. Cordial but not intimate relations were established. It would have pleased me that we were making a good impression but they showed no signs that we interested them more than any other travelers. In the open spaces, happy and comely children were flying kites with long tails on the monotonous, pleasant wind. Kites here do not fly high like back home but they are brightly decorated. It took the bearers hours to weight the load so as to equally partition it between themselves. After prolonged preparations the motley column of mountaineers and bearers finally set forth towards its destination, located some ten day’s walking distance across mountainous heights. Although we would have liked to move faster, the bearers had a precisely determined daily route. They reluctantly deviate from traditional relations even for a many times higher wage.

5. Journey Across Nepal – Notes From A Diary

For readers who are interested in these faraway places what follows is a succinct description of the journey across the trekking-route around Annapurna. The more important events and the geographical names are given according to my own diary records.

We began the journey on the well-known mountain tour around Annapurna on September 21, 1982 at 3 o’clock PM. After one hour of walking we arrived at a Tibetian refugee camp. The Tibetians settled here when China took over control of Tibet. On the route there are many inns on the ground floor of residential houses where they usually serve homecooked food and tea with yak milk. This is a tasteful and, by all evidence, nutritious drink. News about the arrival of a new group of travelers spread before us faster than we walked. Numerous inns were immediately set up which eventuated in new, higher prices for foreigners. In a mysterious way, at-hand souvenir shops sprung up whenever we made our arrival. What was generally on sale were Nepalese “kukri”knives and various prayer paraphernalia. Proud owners of rare transistor radios gladly displayed their property. On all sides there is a lot of running water, with numerous waterfalls. Some streams are deep so that one has to take off one’s shoes in order to wade through. At the very beginning we passed the comely and well-developed villages of Naudanda, Khare, Chandrakot and arrived in Biretnanti. Below us flows the silver thread of the Madi Khola river which conjoins with the same thread of its sister river Bhurungdi Khola. After a steep ascent we entered the settlement Ulleri, standing at the height of 2097 meters. Afterwards, a part of the steep, polished stone path led through areas of moist and dark jungle. Enormous vegetation grew all around. In the silence of the jungle, together with the Sherpas, we watched white monkeys playing high in the tree branches. However, at the same time we were being attacked by leeches, known in the local dialect as „dzuga”. They are thin as the common thread and with ease pass through the material of our clothing and penetrate beneath the skin. They are removed with salt or are burned with the flame of a match. After the half-dark of the jungle, foggy vistas open up in the distance. High cultivated plateaus with green young rice stretch to the clouds. Wherever in the villages there is some flat surface, football or basketball is played. Cattle drench themselves in water puddles. On the evidence of what we see, the Nepalese people are happy and joyful. After a short stay in Nayapani, we found a comfortable inn in the neighboring settlement Ghorepani. We warmed ourselves in the house around a large open fire. We resumed walking across the stilemenent Sikha from where the path steeply falls to the place where the river Ghar Khola flows into the river Kali Gandaki. At the mouth of the two rivers, high amongst the clouds, there are two hanging bridges. The steel rope is firm but the planks across which people walk are set far apart and they do not give the impression of being trustworthy. Beneath our feet are abysses of hundreds of meters. The wild rivers at the bottom of the cliffs are neither quiet nor submissive as it seems to us but rather they are so far beneath us that their roar does not reach the person
on the bridge. Soon we arrived at the settlement Tatopani which in Nepalese signifies thermal springs, baths with warm water. We slept at a family-owned inn. It was clean and tidy. There is no glass on windows but wooden slats. In general there is little wood in Nepal but it is used a lot. We bathed in the nearby spring whose waters are caught in a hollowed round log. Our journey took us onwards through the deep valley of the river Kali Gandaki. Dark clouds around us were not low but rather we were high up in their midst. Fortunately, the clouds soon dispersed, pushing one another as though they were cramped amongst the mountain heights. They opened to us, us travelers-passers-by, unrestricted and undisturbed vistas. It seemed that merciless, heavy, dark clouds were chasing out the gentle and much swifter downywhite clouds, all of them finally disappearing in the whirling winds. We passed through Kapchepani where countless small and large waterfalls rushed into the valley. We bathed in one of these waterfalls under a strong jet of freely-falling icy water. At the height of above 4000 meters the waters are believed to be clean and fit for drinking without parasites dangerous to white people. After passing through the settlement Ghansa and after a short easy walk, we arrived at the, so far, largest hanging bridge, spanning a nameless river. The walk across the bridge takes one directly to Lete, a place full of moisture and unpleasant to be in.

For the first time on our journey Annapurna showed its southwestern side. One first sees its southern peak which is called Ganesh, 5041 meters high, and a little later its western peak Nilgiri, standing at the height of 6940 meters. The Tilicho glacier with a glacier lake bearing the same name stretches beyond Nilgiri. Before us, towards the north, stands Tukuche Peak with its 6820 meters. Beyond it is an area bearing the mysterious name Rikha Samba – Hidden Valley. We’ve entered the region of the highest and most beautiful peaks on earth. Of and on we catch sight of many legendary Mimalayan summits. They displace one another from view competing with their size and beauty. For a minute we catch sight of probably the most beautiful view on our journey. The frightening and compressed amongst the mountain heights. They opened to us, us travelers-passers-by, unrestricted and undisturbed vistas. It seemed that merciless, heavy, dark clouds were chasing out the gentle and much swifter downywhite clouds, all of them finally disappearing in the whirling winds. We passed through Kapchepani where countless small and large waterfalls rushed into the valley. We bathed in one of these waterfalls under a strong jet of freely-falling icy water. At the height of above 4000 meters the waters are believed to be clean and fit for drinking without parasites dangerous to white people. After passing through the settlement Ghansa and after a short easy walk, we arrived at the, so far, largest hanging bridge, spanning a nameless river. The walk across the bridge takes one directly to Lete, a place full of moisture and unpleasant to be in.

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While we rested in the square, local folks approached us and asked whether they could touch our chest-hair. They are curious about hairy chests because theirs are without hair. Shortly afterwards in Marphi, the white pearl of the Himalayas, we come upon a plantation of apples. We bought some. Our bearers are very happy that we offered some to them because to them apples are a sign of great luxury.

On the way we met many travelers on the mountain paths. Local folk transport commodities and other articles for their needs. Many visitors, attracted by the irresistible magic of new experience and in search for not yet experienced beauties, walk the mountain paths. We entered Jomson, the largest settlement on our journey, on September 27, 1982. The settlement has an airport, banks, numerous hotels and inns. Despite its vivacity, the settlement is not distinguished by beauty. A part of our group stayed in Jomson waiting for the plane for Kathmandu. The others continued the journey towards the high Himalayan passes which lead to areas that had quite recently been designated off-limits. Through Mustang district, for a long period of time wholly prohibited to foreigners, across the holy place of Muktinath we climbed towards the highest passes on our journey. In the holy place itself there are numerous prayer stones and prayer cylinders, water-mills and wind-mills. On them are inscribed the prayers which reach the gods for whom they are intended, mediated by the motion produced by passers-by, by running water or by winds.

We spent the night in an isolated house beneath the mountain pass itself. It is not easy for the locals to survive in such circumstances. There was not enough room for all of us in the house so that some had to sleep in tents. Snow fell in the night. Long-haired yaks strolled around the place. These are high-altitude cattle that sleep out in the open, very resistant to cold and the thin air. They are of great use to the inhabitants of the Himalayas. As soon as the morning chill abated a little we started for the mountain-ridge. We passed through Thorong La ridge standing at 5416 meters height. We shook from the cold and the thin air. We put on whatever clothes we had to keep warm. We gave some clothing to the bearers who would have otherwise been ill-dressed and barefoot. For many in the group this was the highest they had ever climbed. We swiftly descended to the other side of the ridge across enormous creep formations composed of tiny or something larger rocks. The easier part of the journey, through the valley of the river Jhargeng Khol, a tributary of the river Marsyangdi, lay in front of us. The path goes through comely, cultivated fields. Wheat, corn, potatoes and the beautiful, tiny, purple mairhuana flowers grow alongside the road. Deep gorges tore the earth beneath us while in the distance, in the direction of Mananga, strange geological formations were visible. To the north the vista is obstructed by Roc Noir and the “Glacier Dome” 7485 and 7193 meters high, and a bit further by Gangapurne 7455 meters and Annapurna II 7585 in elevation. We finally arrived into the fine-looking place Manang where people live in solid wood houses with terraces turned towards the interior court-yards. We found a place to stay in one such house. On the terrace the landlord painstakingly tanned a yak hide constantly folding it across his shoulders. We had potatoes for supper ....

Those are the last recorded words and the end of the diary. The date of the last note is September 29, 1982.
6. AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN, THE CALL OF HEIGHTS

In Manang our group visited the international school for mountain guides. The school stands on our route and is an edifice made of firm material. It trains members of the Sherpa people for participation in international expeditions which in these regions are a significant source of income. It was founded by our neighbors the Slovenes within the framework of international aid for the development of mountain tourism in Nepal. Everywhere we find traces of their recent stay here. Amongst other things a bit of European food and Slovenian cheese. We ate the food initially with wonder and then with joy.

We found out that our friends from the advance party of the Croatian expedition to Annapurna had recently passed through on their way to their base camp. There was no news about the ski expedition to Kang Guru which was advancing from another direction. Not far from the school stands the village Pisang above which rises the beckoning summit of Pisang Peak about which we dreamt and heard stories in Kranj from one of the greatest Slovenian Alpinists, the late Nejac Zaplotnik. It is six thousand meters high, to be more precise, 6093 meters. Our eyes involuntarily rise to the summit with its snowwhite cap. We compare it to known pictures, descriptions and to our own imaginings. On the road from Mananga to Pisang we met an American physician and mountaineer who a few days earlier had been on Pisang Peak. He said that up there, near the very summit, there was unpleasant ice and that it was not without danger but we did not heed his warning. As he revealed to us, he was engaged in examining the behavior of the human organism on great heights. He offered to share with us his findings on altitude sickness at some future time.

Pisang Peak is not a part of some great mountain chain. With its sharp peak it stands alone and tears open the sky. Lovers of heights from our group measure it with curiosity and desire. In the vicinity of a beckoning summit mountaineers are more silent than otherwise. Each one, in his or her own way, tosses in the mind the decision whether to ascend to the top or to desist. The climber’s thoughts about the irresistible call of the heights are personal questions concerning which one usually does not talk openly and aloud. Even when great intimacy is achieved amongst climbers, during long cold nights in mountain bivouacs when the last parcel of food or drink is shared, individual impulses and reasons for climbing remain unshareable secrets. Talk about climbing experiences, about routes that have been excessively accessed, about the beauty and challenges of mountain peaks, displace, in a polite manner, interest from individual impulses that cannot be communicated in a simple manner.
7. LAST PREPARATIONS

Five from the group who were well-trained and who above all else wanted to climb decided to start off for Pisang Peak. Just enough time remained to go up and descend but all had to be done quickly without any delay. There was no possibility of giving it another try in the case of failure. It would have been a great shame after such a long journey not to attempt what had been dreamt of for such a long period of time. The weather conditions were not ideal, indeed, at this time of year it was not advisable to climb. In the high mountains good weather is always of short duration, more an exception than a rule and it can be waited for only by those whose time and resources are not limited. Those who are careful give up while those in whom the call of the wild overcomes caution nevertheless give it a try without heeding possible consequences. Those interested in the climb estimated that with heightened caution they will be able to surmount the ice crust underneath the summit that the American had warned about. In addition, they had earlier arranged with their comrades from the ski expedition that, if conditions permitted, they will photo the target of their desires, the peak Kang Guru. The same arrangement had been reached with the other friendly expedition that was climbing neighboring Annapurna. From Pisang Peak both of these summits were visible as if in the palms of one's hand. Of course, the arrangement about taking photos wasn't binding but it was an additional impetus, almost an excuse for the climb. At this time both Croatian expeditions should have been in the vicinity of the climbing area. The resolute five, together with a number of Sherpa bearers, quickly climbed up to 5000 meters. Base camp was set up there. As usual, because of the height it was difficult to sleep, if reclining in a small tent in a strong wind and a sharp cold, with a headache and nausea caused by thin air, can be called sleep at all. In a half-delirium we talked about how if we were already here, so near to realizing our desire, it would be a shame not to at least make an attempt, because most of us will not get the chance to come back.

Around midnight, in a luxuriant silver light shed by a three-fourth or an almost full moon, the small group started towards the summit. At dawn, the slopes overgrown with short and yellowish grass turned into the last dry, rocky part. The sirdars Kani and Nima, who had joined the climbers, returned to camp because they were not equipped to climb at these heights. They evinced no desire for the ascent, giving the impression that they were happy heading back towards the camp. The terrain we climbed was covered with large and thin plates of shivering rock.

On this terrain, it is necessary to softly and quickly step onto the surface and change one's step before the plates underneath start slipping down the enormous slope like tiles from a roof. When the rhythm of easy steps, barely touching the surface, is lost one must in the shortest possible time revert to moving on all fours. It gave great satisfaction to be caught up in the rhythm of climbing the slippery rock because it resembled floating through time and space. Further up this unusual surface, we came to the boundary of snow and ice so that we had to buckle climbing irons with crampons onto our mountain shoes for the remaining ascent. Shortly, because of altitude sickness, two climbers from the group gave up the climb. The third climber gave up before the final ascent underneath the very summit because he had problems with fastening his climbing irons. Day came imperceptibly, hiding behind tufts of fog. Visibility increased although the sun was not yet to be seen while the summit seemed so delusively near that it appeared that only a small additional effort had to be made in order to reach it. Only Veljko Šušak and myself remained as partners for the ascent to the summit itself.
8. The Ascent

The resolve to continue and an absolute faith in success without fearing any kind of mishap were felt in our bearing and behavior. Admittedly, because of the thin air we avoided conversation in order to save our breadth. At such heights ideas to converse about are not all that brilliant. Having lived in different cities we did not know each other well. On this journey we had kept company. We had the opportunity to talk about our favorite climbs. Veljko was especially partial to high equator peaks. He had climbed a lot in snow, he was in excellent physical shape and well acclimatized to heights such as these and his measured resolve contributed to the confidence one felt in his vicinity.

The illusionary proximity of the peak gave us hope in a quick and simple ascent. It seemed that the peak was in the palm of one’s hand. Although the last lap seemed short and simple we would have to invest a lot more effort, more and more as the air thinned out, before the final ascent to the summit itself. Veljko and I secured ourselves by Alpine ropes and using ice axes started for the summit, alternating between climbing and securing ourselves as is customary on such snow-ice slopes. In the thin, variedly scattered snow underneath the summit we saw traces of previous climbers. There was little air, we breathed with difficulty but from earlier experiences we knew that we could cope with this. I stopped feeling a headache and nausea but I still felt the fluttering of my heart’s muscles in my temples. I liked this, it seemed that I was more alive than usual. There arises the great desire to bring to an end such inhuman effort as soon as possible but there is the even greater desire to reach the goal of the ascent. Sometimes even a brief thought about something else, about something pleasant and beautiful, about one’s family, work, about a pastry shop and a coffee, about the descent, about something accessible and wanted, suffices to undermine the frail structure of desire and willpower, defusing the powerful wish to ascend at all costs and transforming resolve into faint-heartedness. This was not happening to us. We knew what had to be done and talk demands an enormous effort which in the present circumstances we could not afford. I am grateful that my partner does not start a conversation because I think that I would not be able to utter one word. After ten hours of climbing from the last camp I and Veljko reach the summit. As frequently happens clouds enshroud the summit and an untransparent fog is covering Pisang peak. Little was to be seen of the celebrated Himalayan summits. Rarely do mountaineers receive awards in the form of beautiful landscapes, proportionate to the invested efforts. One has to climb a great deal but only sometimes does one glimpse the desired, unforgettable sights. It is even more difficult to capture them on photos. We had known that earlier because both of us had been on many mountains in various circumstances, frequently not being able to see anything of mountain beauty so that we were not particularly disappointed. We congratulated each other by softly grasping our cold gloved hands because this also demanded an effort. We performed the habitual mountaineering rituals. Usually these are photo sessions with flags in outstretched arms with the possible forced smile which cannot even be seen because of caps, shawl, glacier sunglasses and sun-repellent skin cream. Accompanied perhaps by an occasional and sparing utterance of mutual support without the expected enthusiasm since enthusiasm itself demands air. In accord with the earlier made arrangements we attempted to photograph Kang Guru and Annapurna but without investing much hope in success due to bad visibility. Exhaustion and fatigue were already perceptible in our slow and heavy bodily movements.

We headed back towards the last camp. Thinking about the descent alleviated, at least it seemed, the altitude sickness and created the false impression that the descent to the base camp would be simple. Flocks of fog and low clouds played their illusionary games around us, transforming our sense of space. The murky, opaque weather resembled dusk more than afternoon. It was probably about 3 o’clock PM. We had not thought of consulting our watches. On those heights it is difficult to remember anything. Even the simplest brain processes are very much hampered. Calculations of distance and of the dangers attending the descent are highly unreliable. It is even difficult to count one’s own steps. All mathematical operations above three become a difficult-to-solve complex arithmetic.

We wanted to make a short pause a little distance beneath the summit on a steep slope where a dry rock, wiped clean by the high winds, jutted out from the frozen snow drifts. And then, we had not even come to a stop, the snow and ice beneath our feet began to move. There was no time to consider what was happening. Fatigued bodies, weakened by altitude sickness, reacted in slow motion. There was too little time for an appropriate course of action in the case of deadly danger. We lost the support under our feet and fell into the depth.
9. **The Fall**

I threw myself onto the snow and and press the tip of my ice ax with all of my strength into the snow. I trust in the success of this, countless times practiced and implemented, method of bringing myself to a halt in the snow. Without fear I expect to soon stop the fall. However, I did not stop the fall after the first attempt. The tip of the ice ax hits the rock under the thin snow crust. The snow cover is too thin for the tip of the ice ax to catch onto the surface. This is not snow which naturally fell onto the rock but rather was piled up there by high winds. It is freely attached to the earth. I still hope to bring myself to a halt. The serrated tip of the ice ax resounds with metal sounds against rock. Then the threatening scraping and grating of metal and rock. One more time and then another. At the end, after probably the fifth or the sixth attempt, the ice ax flies from my hand due to the power of the blow. Even the security rope on my wrist could not hold it. The serious fall continued and I could not do anything to stop it. There was nothing I could do. Neither my willpower nor my strength had any influence on the course of things, although one could not have been conscious of this, indeed, one must not have been. Despite the constantly accelerating speed I see what is happening around me. On its independent loop, the ice ax falls nearby. It bounces off various rocky and icy obstacles and quickly disappears from view. For one moment I saw Veljko trying to stop his fall with his ice ax. I cannot keep my attention on him because things unfold too quickly. I am in free fall down the steep slope. It seems easy and simple. I hardly feel my own weight. Other operating forces are not observable. I do not feel the blows of the surface. Not one muscle is tense; they are relaxed, wholly accommodating themselves to the obstacles beneath, without feeling, without cramps or resistance. I am not uncomfortable. Neither am I comfortable. Space no longer represents a system of coordinates. It is of no significance what is left, right, above or below. The only things that are important are the disturbances and the obstacles on the path of the fall. I no longer see my partner. My thoughts do not go back to him. I do not feel afraid. In reality I feel nothing. Suddenly the altitude sickness, lack of breath, headaches and nausea have disappeared. There is no time for any doubts or feelings to develop. Consciousness is emptied of all by-products which would not be of significance to this moment. Changes of movement have to be followed with all the senses. The speed of the fall is already quite high. One must not make sudden movements. Even a small snag of the climbing irons against the ice can bring about an uncontrollable overturning. I am entirely still and doubled up in the fetal position. I am falling straight forward. I do not try to stop the fall in any way. Sudden movements would be dangerous and entirely useless. Perceptions and echoes are strongly accelerated. I perceive only the essential details around me. Better to say in front of me because my angle of vision is very narrow but sharp. My gaze is directed only at the direction of movement. Only a restricted number of objects and phenomena can be registered at this speed of falling. Only the details in the immediate vicinity and of significance to the current moment. I do not think a lot. Better to say, I do not think, in the ordinary sense of the word. I react quickly. No thoughts about my past or future life disturb perception. No memories pass through my mind. Only the clear and sharp images of immediate reality. I am wholly focused only on the immediate surroundings accessible to the senses. I have no idea how long I have been falling. Duration has no significance. However, I note various obstacles in front of me. Larger rocks, stones, hollows and fractures. As soon as an obstacle passes me by I forget it. There is no past in the instant. New phenomena come at too much speed and instantaneously cover over previous images. Very small, spontaneous movements of the body, only gentle tilting and bending on one or the other side control the direction of the fall. As if on child’s sleds or on skis. Error is excluded, it simply must not happen, it would be the last error in my life. Even the smallest movement would mean the end. I do not think of anything or of anybody, including myself and my partner. The thought of a disastrous outcome does not come to mind. I do not think of any outcome. In a conscious and level-headed condition when there is plenty of time, prediction and forethought are possible and necessary. One tries to foresee the next moment as the outcome of the preceding moment but also of all observable moments which we think about in our minds. Within the enormous speed of the fall it becomes clear that each next moment might be the last. One has no influence on the moment that has passed. Once it has passed and life continues the previous moment no longer has any significance. New dangers appear at such a speed and frequency that thoughts about the future cannot even be thought, not alone brought to fruition. Very fast a dark, threatening rock is entering my field of vision. It looks like an enormous rocky wall which protrudes from the crystal shining snow. I know that I have to evade it but I cannot and do not know how to achieve this with only my willpower and actions. In reality there is nothing that I can purposefully accomplish. I expect to come to a stop every moment in a fortunate or less fortunate manner. However, this wished-for cessation of the fall fails to materialize. On the contrary, the acceleration continues. I undertake no visible movements. It seems that I am doing nothing. From a distance it might be concluded that I am surrendering myself to fate. Whereas in fact feverish brain and bottled-up bodily activities are taking place. Whatever one undertakes now can cause more harm than good. Only some kind of fortuitous circumstance can change the course of events. No physical effort or skillful manoeuvre can be of any help. Activities of the mind are simple but very precise. They are focused only on registering
immediate reality. There is no time for complex thoughts. Questions of life and death are not on the agenda. All of the activities of the human organism are wholly reasonable and suitable to the conditions. There are no panic reactions. There is no fear. There is too little time and the danger is too great to allow the development of fear that would be detrimental to other purposeful bodily and spiritual activities. The incoming black rock swamps my entire sight. It is approaching at the speed of a jet plane. It threatens to break me into smithereens the next moment. To destroy me. I do not manage to be frightened at the possible end of life. Nevertheless something within and around me is changing. In the lower parts of my body, in distant nerves' ends I feel that a change is intruding into the motion. Initially these are only announcements of some possibly scattered inertial forces in the process of coming into being. After some time, indeterminate but probably very short, some forces outside of my power of action are bending me and changing the course of the fall. I feel as if I was on a twisted child's toboggan. I had felt no concentrated blow nor pressure from any kind of obstacle. The groove through which I had been falling, because of the natural shape of the terrain fronting the rock itself, had of itself turned from the rock towards the valley. Long ago before me, countless avalanches had fallen through this groove and melted snows had flown in this, the only possible, direction. I had temporarily evaded immediate danger. I continued falling almost perpendicularly in the direction I had been moving up to then. This time my fall continues parallel to the recently threatening rock. The clouds on the summit are high above me. Flocks of fog were gradually disappearing and visibility was growing better. Instead of the black rocky wall, my eyes gazed on a valley, falling some thousands of meters. Continuing to fall faster and faster I soon saw in the incalculable distance a deep rocky cleft. A dark chasm. It appeared more dangerous than the black rocky wall I had just left behind. In each moment it is necessary to take stock of all the changed circumstances. In accordance with these quick, instinctual calculations one has to proceed to act or restrain oneself. There is no time to make reasonable decisions. To say nothing of the fact that there is no time nor possibility to implement these decisions into action.

10. Coming To A Stop

Signs that something is changing in the dynamics of motion are again reaching me from the depths of the lower parts of the body. Small, but significant, barely noticeable, flutterings of my nerves' ends. The speed began to decrease. The snow's thickness is changing. It is heavier and wetter than it was underneath the summit itself. Probably it has been falling for some time. Now it is possible to clearly make out rocks, fractures and the really small changes in the relief. A chasm is almost at my arm's length.

The fall is slower and although the last moment is approaching I cannot stop it. But there is no possibility of postponement. I have to stop now, I have to stop at whatever cost, I have to …..

I turn as far as I can on my side and throw myself on the last large stone I see before me. Instantaneously I come to a stop. In front of me, only a few meters from where I had come to a stop, is a dangerous chasm. Deep, dark, absorbing. But now I am in an entirely different position. I am motionless, reclining, no longer falling. I could not joy at this new state of things. I could only confirm the newly-established state of things.

The absolute focusing on the self is disturbed by a strange noise near my ear. Like the hissing of a snake. I quickly turn my head towards the source of the sound and catch a glimpse of a winding, red-blue, mottled mountaineering rope passing within reaching distance. My partner Veljko is falling at great speed tied to the other end of the rope. He does not undertake anything in order to stop. I am confused. I am no longer alone, I can no longer be preoccupied with only myself. It is difficult for me to accept the appearance of a new challenge. One has to either do something or stay clear of everything. Doubts are fateful. I am in doubt. I am afraid to grasp the rope because the weight of my partner's body mass could pull me with it into the chasm. The thought of the possible resumption of the fall with a pending drop into the chasm lasts only a short while. The next impulse, impulse not thought because there is no time to think, is that I must, unconditionally and without delay, grasp the rope. Now, only this time, only here and nowhere and never again is there a chance that the fall can be stopped. Already by the next moment it will be impossible to do anything. Unforgivably and inadmissibly late. This chance would never be repeated. I must not let the rope slip by. I turn to my side, I stretch out as far as I can towards the noise and towards the mottled, red-blue snake. I feel the rope in my bare hands. It is soft and bendable. I have a firm hold on it. As firmly as I can. I immediately feel warmth from the abrasion of the rope on my palms. The slipping rope burns my palms and
In his unconscious state he is constantly slipping downward. I try to hold him so try to make out some sign, message in the movement of his body, head and hands. We do not succeed in communicating with one another. As though we will be saved. Due to my injury I will not be able to get up. I see that Veljko is in vain. I am sure that he must soon regain consciousness. That is our only hope that see that he breathing easier. However, my comrade is still unconscious. I call to him towards his windpipe. I crawl towards him and with my arms I try to turn him on head. I notice that he is breathing with difficulty. His tongue is an obstacle. It falls towards his feet. I see my right leg. It seems to be fine. But my left foot is in a strange position. It stands vertically next to my lower leg. It appears that my foot is broken at the ankle. I do not feel the pain that usually accompanies a broken ankle. Neither do other parts of the body hurt. The position of my left foot is weird. I cannot stand on my foot. Neither can I move from the place where I am. I thought of taking off my climbing boots to see what happened to my foot. At that moment I do not have the strength to do this. I am surprised that the fall stopped just like that, seemingly in a simple fashion, without me suffering graver injuries. I do not take the injury seriously. It seems insignificant considering the circumstances.

I do not know how the injury occurred. I do not recall any blow or any special hurt. Moreover, there were countless blows. And what do I care how it occurred! It happened and what now? Things seem simple. A small fall, true somewhat more seri-

ous than what we trained for in the Alpinist school. Small injuries, by all accounts happened and what now? Things seem simple. A small fall, true somewhat more serious than what we trained for in the Alpinist school. Small injuries, by all accounts nothing serious when there is no blood or perceptible pain. Soon help will arrive and everything will be fine.

Next to me I hear Veljko breathing with difficulty. I look at him. I see him not far from me lying on his back. I first look at his feet. Confidence in being saved quickly grows when I see that his legs are whole. I thought that everything else can be taken care of if only one of us had legs that were not injured. I raise my eyes towards his head. I notice that he is breathing with difficulty. His tongue is an obstacle. It falls towards his windpipe. I crawl towards him and with my arms I try to turn him on his side. It is difficult to do this while lying down. Finally this turning succeeded. I see that he breathing easier. However, my comrade is still unconscious. I call to him in vain. I am sure that he must soon regain consciousness. That is our only hope that we will be saved. Due to my injury I will not be able to get up. I see that Veljko is trying to move. We do not succeed in communicating with one another. As though he neither sees nor hears. The impossibility of conversation fills me with unease. I try to make out some sign, message in the movement of his body, head and hands. In his unconscious state he is constantly slipping downward. I try to hold him so that he does not slip into the chasm. The chasm in front of us is a constant threat. Our situation is made even more difficult by the fact that the steep slope on which we lie consists of naked, sharp rocks of various sizes. In reality this is creep which incessantly is sliding towards the abyss. Fortunately, the mountaineering rope lies next to us. I try to tie myself with the rope to anything within reach. Everything I touch is unstable. There is no firm support in the vicinity. Only above us is there a larger mushroom-shaped rock. I stretched out, maybe even moved a bit and threw the loop around the rock. I did not succeed. The loop slipped from the smooth rock. I had to move myself a bit upwards. Finally, after a number of attempts, I managed to scatter the smaller stones around the neck of the rock and throw the loop which caught on the bottom of the mushroom-like rock. I made a hole in the terrain with my healthy foot and put my whole weight against it. It seemed sufficient insurance for a period of time.

I look around and search for any piece of equipment. I would very much like to locate my ice-ax. I think that I could make a prosthesis for my leg from it. A wooden leg like the one pirates had. I would attach the ice-ax handle to my lower leg and would support myself on its iron ending. Thusly the foot would be freed of weight. A number of times I thought that I saw the ice-ax. Due probably to the play of shad-

ows in the foggy dusk. Giving up on the ice-ax I thought that I ought to find a firm branch or a piece of wood. I search the vicinity but without results. At these heights there is nothing resembling a piece of wood or a branch. However, if I found two narrow and sufficiently long stones I would be able to immobilize my leg. I would have to push them from the side into my shoe and fasten them with something. Maybe I would then be able to stand up, maybe even walk. Nothing similar is at hand. Moreover, amongst the available objects, these being mostly stones, no enlong-

gated shapes are to be found. Everything is short and broad, even the large visible rocks that protrude from the snow and the ice. As if all shapes seek to gain length by way of breadth. To become one in all directions. No effort of mine enables me to ensure my foot. I check my gear. Nothing of it has remained. My backpack has been torn apart and scattered. My pockets have been emptied. Everything that I had taken with me on the climb, chocolate, raisins, nuts, a small knife, everything dispersed from my pockets. The Weston and my pants are in shatters. My cap and protective glasses have flown off my head. Especially discomforting is the fact that there is no trace of my gloves. I see that from the tears in the Weston white duck-feathers are flying. Only a feather or two are of a darker color. The filling of the Weston was not really first-class.

My partner’s backpack was still on his back. It was torn and shapeless. There was nothing in it. His clothing is in good shape. During the great acceleration, inertial forces have managed to empty out everything we took with us in our backpacks, in
our pockets. Like the most skillful pickpockets. The circumstances are not favorable for reasonable thinking. Reason would probably bring about a state of despair. My watch was still on my wrist. It shows the time of the accident with its bare hands because the see-through covering has cracked. I do not recall the last time registered by the watch. The fact that the watch did not work did not bother me. I cannot recall what happened to the climbing irons. When I had stopped falling, they were no longer on the boots. I cannot understand how they fell off despite the strong attaching tapes. I saw the camera next to my feet. The fall had opened its closed box. The band for carrying the camera entangled itself with my shoes. I thought that all the photos on the film might have been exposed to light. I quickly closed the case and put the camera into the only whole pocket on the Weston.

My comrade does not regain consciousness. I do not worry too much about this. Sooner or later he has to regain consciousness. Besides, I am wholly certain that help will come during the day. I calculated how long it will take help to reach us from the last camp. I thought about who from our group would be the fastest in reaching us. I screamed as loudly as I was able, thinking that rescuers were somewhere nearby. My voice gave out on me from the effort. Such screaming without a reason made no sense. When yelling will really be needed, I will no longer have a voice. I fell silent. I looked around eager for the rescuers. At that instance I thought it would be useful to move so as to meet head on the rescuers whom I was expecting from the direction of the rock standing above the place where the two of us were lying. I leant with my hands somewhat above the place where I was lying and pulled my body upwards. I repeated this a number of times. Every time I tied to raise myself I slipped backwards. This slipping was accompanied by an ugly dangling of the injured foot and blows against the rocky terrain. The blows against the foot brought discomfort but not pain. After a number of failures I desisted from crawling the slope upwards.

Our position seemed a bad dream. I constantly look around in the hope that evidence will appear showing that all of this is not true. The landscape with us within it looks unreal. Around us colors almost do not exist. Not counting our clothes, everything else is white (snow and ice), gray (rocks) and transparently blue (sky). The silence is absolute. There are no signs of life. No motion or sound. Absolute loneliness.

11. First Night

The sun sinks too early behind the towering peaks. Stars begin to flare up according to the intensity of their brightness across the sky. Dusk brings on anxiety. What remains of the few colors is only the darker grey nuances. The temperature plummeted. Darkness irresistible spreads through the mountain like a black fog. Blackness finally engulfed the mountains and devoured everything except the sky. The reign of cold set in. It is definitely winter. I knew this but I did not feel the low temperature. I approached my partner hoping that we could warm each other. I lay on my back. Every time I opened my eyes I saw above me the icy brightness of large and small stars in the expanse of cosmic coldness. As though I was floating in icy water containing numberless bubbles. There were more stars than I had ever seen. They icily fluttered on the dark, deep sky. I paid no heed to the constellations. I was not interested in the parts of the world. As never before, I was an unconscious, but full-blown part of my environment. Nothing disturbed my identification with the environment. Neither thought nor memories. I was without feelings and without needs. Like the nature around me. My surroundings were neither friendly nor inimical. They neither brought me fear nor extinguished my hope. I was not an intruder but neither was I welcomed. I had equal chances of surviving or perishing. To perish amidst these surroundings would be natural and painless. Without suffering or self-pity. On equal terms, I partook in existence with everything alive or dead in what surrounded me. I exist because I am here and because I want to exist. Existence is a self-standing meaning and not a desire. Existence is necessity lacking sensible reason. It is necessary and sufficient onto itself, independent of anybody or anything. Including myself.

At a certain point, high above me, at the place where the rock cut into the starry sky, a small flurrying light appeared. Different than the brightness of the stars. It could have been the light of a battery lamp. It moved slowly across the ridge of the rock. The light aroused in me a febrile excitement. I have to yell as loud as I can. I called out enthusiastically. Happy and full of hope. I deeply believed that my troubles were coming to an end. The light on the ridge seemed to have stopped and then continued which additionally gave me hope that those were rescuers who are resting and looking at the area beneath them. However, nobody answered my calls. The light moved unwaveringly in a straight line. Rescuers could not move in such a fashion. I looked away and then looked back again at the dotted source of light. The shining trace was farther and farther from the ridge of the rock. It was disappearing more and more towards the sky. Ultimately it became obvious that it was a star. A cheating star.

After an indeterminate period of time a strong, diffused light appeared in the
distance. Not a number of individual lights such as would be carried by rescuers in the darkness, but a shining cupola belonging to a powerful source of light in the night, that one sees approaching it from afar. But distance was now approaching me, immobilized. The center of all dimensions. All imaginable spatial rays pass through me. I am the source and the end of space. Spaces are enclosed in the knowledge of their inaccessibility and in the restricted motion of the injured being.

One did not need to wait for a long time for the source of the light to appear on the horizon. First a small part, then a larger one and finally the whole, almost full moon in its luxuriant brightness. Darkness retreated but day did not arrive. The game of elongated moon shadows began. Even the small summits looked like giants while insignificant hollows appeared to be abysses. Snow and ice were transformed into silver-coated moon jewelry. The deceptive brightness of the moon did not bring the necessary warmth. I watched it with astonishment but deeply disappointed. Beauty without fervency. Fervency without warmth. Stars that came into the vicinity of the moon shyly extinguished their brightness. They drowned their light into the superior source of brightness.

I get no sleep. Neither do I feel a need to sleep. At least sleep as it is usually conceived. At times I fall into a state of numbness. Those are periods of time about which I have no memory. They resemble unconsciousness more than sleep. This is brought about only by a obfuscation of consciousness. Without previous preparations, I extinguish myself. One cannot determine the duration of these shotdowns. Absolute ruptures with the surroundings. The end of being. Frozen existence. However, as soon as I open my eyes, I continue to act on the heels of the last memorized image. As though the stoppage did not occur. I watch and listen to my partner who is still breathing with difficulty. I am fidgety and perplexed because I cannot and I do not know how to help him. In the unearthly landscape, illuminated by an almost full moon, the two of us look pale and unreal. As though we were not of this world. I take a more pleasant position. I check the security ropes. I am probably again falling into numbness. And thusly probably till morning.

12. First Morning

As though a day of full light immediately set in, the morning had skipped sunrise. The sky is almost wholly clear. Only a few speedy, feathery clouds scuttle by. Whirling winds quickly devour the clouds. It seems that the sun is somewhere behind me. Its enormous brilliance bothers me. I am comforted when it is covered by a cloud. There is no joy in the coming of the day. However, the first Himalaya night has passed. No anticipations of happiness or sadness can be recognized. Ordinary moods are not being developed. The need to act grows with the coming of the day. Whatever action since there is no plan or idea about what should be done. I carefully look over the surroundings hoping to catch sight of the ice-ax, a branch or a suitable stone. I listen for sounds. Nothing is to be heard. Loneliness does not bring on anxiety. I am indifferent if I should be the only person on earth. I can survive absolutely alone. Independence is the result of the absence of desire and needs. It is not desire that keeps us alive. Needs do not demand satisfaction.

I look at and touch my injured foot. I do not know what has happened to my ankle. There are no traces of blood. I am certain that if I could stabilize my ankle I would be able to walk. With my foot dangling as it is I cannot attempt anything at all. I dare not take off my shoes. I probably would not be able to put them back on. I cannot urinate. Sitting in the snow I try to take off my three pairs of trousers. I do not succeed. I feel how my warm fluid flows over, enducing a kind of pleasure. I would like to photograph the scene stretching out beneath me. I think it would be interesting to show the photo of the place where the accident occurred after we are rescued. I fail in my attempt to take photos.

Help fails to materialize. My comrade is still unconscious. I expect him to wake up. How can he be unconscious so long? It appears that his legs have not suffered injury and that he is the one who should stand up and go seeking help. I think about the next night. I doubt that one can survive another night in these circumstances. The thought of the next night compels me to try to do something. True to say, I still have no ideas what ought to be done. I look around for signs of rescuers or at least for a possible path of descent. I cannot go forward because of the deep chasm. On one side is an enormous, steep rock. A chasm yawns on the other side also but it is not without borders. I see that that edge of the chasm ends on a distant rock which from my position seems inaccessible. The blinding sun is already high over my head. High altitude sunrays imperceptibly burn the exposed parts of my skin. The burns are deep but I do not feel them. I watch the scene in front of me. Deep down below lies a green valley. Down there it is quiet and safe. I would like to get there. Or at least yell so that my voice is heard down below. For a long time I observe the lifeless scenes
in front of me. I feverishly hope something indeterminate will happen. Suddenly something appeared on the rock that was neither snow nor rock. By all accounts it is a scrappy house as these are built in Nepal. The site of the building is unusual. It stands on the rock without a path leading up to it. People are distributed around it but not far from the house. Only a few steps away. Exhilarated and full of hope I yell as loud as I can. People in front of the house are stubbornly motionless. They do not respond to my yelling. They do not talk amongst themselves. Everyone is stuck in a position of daily routine. They lack the slightest of movements. I think the Nepalese are a weird people if they can stand still for such a long time. Regardless of everything they are now the only hope for salvation. If they will not come to me I must go to them. I would not seek anything special from them. I would only ask them to take a message to base camp. If they would refuse this let them at least lend me a horse so that I can go myself. I cannot walk but I could sit on a horse. I would give them the last rupee I had in my possession.

13. Departure

There are no rescuers. The Nepalese and their house on the rock are still in place. Now is the chance. I will have to do something, move somehow. A lot of time passes in indecisiveness. Speedy rescue and salvation seem not to be in store. Prolonged exposure to bad conditions heightens danger. Cold and hunger without respite and unredeemably exhaust my strength. I do not know how to help my comrade who is unconscious. I cannot move him or raise him. How can I leave him in such a state and move somewhere else? I am very anxious about the forthcoming icy night. The only way of transforming this hopelessness is in removing from the place of the accident. If I do not find a way to move from this place and find help there is no hope for my partner or for myself. I convince myself that departure will benefit both of us. Or maybe it is better to remain with my partner and await help? If rescuers do come it would be easier for them to notice us two than either of us separately if we split up. Unrest and discomfort. As a start to making my decision I check my partner’s fastened ropes. The rope need not be too tight around his chest but it has to be sufficiently firm so that the body cannot slip through the loop. Now it is quite clear that I will move from the place. I attempt to fasten the rope to something as best as I can. The only thing on hand is the weird mushroom-like rock.

Preparations for departure take a long time. My decision is not firm. The decision does not ensue in a sudden, resolute movement into the unknown. There is only the imperceptible impulse to move from the place. There is no relief which ought to have arisen after long uncertainty. Neither is there a firm resolve to see through the decision. Suddenly I moved in the only possible direction and in the only possible manner. I leaned on my arms and moved parallel to the cahsm. In order to depart I had to climb up a bit. I crawled on my back upward towards the summit. I leaned with my hands behind me and pulled my body and feet. On the second stroke I would lean on my healthy right leg which I would first bend towards myself as much as it was possible. The hardest part was pulling the injured leg. My foot helplessly dangled and hit against rocks and the ice. Where it was possible, usually on smoother and less steep places, with one hand, sometimes with both, I would hold and pull close the injured leg. On the steep places I had to hold with both hands firmly to the earth and drag the injured leg with the strength of my upper leg. When I came to the ice I had to first make holes in it with my fingers onto which I grabbed with my hands. The holes had to be big enough so as to allow me to place at least four fingers. Then I would have to make holes with the heel of my healthy leg in which I would then find support for my healthy leg. There was no need to make holes for my injured leg. It was useless. I could still move in such a manner. True very slowly but still move I did.
Speed as a concept of covering a certain distance in time was irrelevant. Time did not exist, and the length of the journey was not known. It was important to reach those people some distance below the rock. They will take care of me. I turn and look back. Veljko is in the same reclining position as when I made my departure, in the place where the accident occurred. He had not moved. I stopped. I would return. However, I hesitantly continue forward. This is the last thing I remember about my unfortunate comrade. The accident and my partner did not enter my consciousness again during my ordeal on the mountain. I was totally focused on myself. In my vicinity I observed black, emphatically ugly birds, resembling jackdaws. There were not many. Two, three, five at most. Without moving they stand in the snow and watch the surroundings without a sound. I tried to throw a rock. From my sitting position the throw was not very successful. But the birds did jump to the side. Therefore, they were not hallucinations. The first and only signs of life on those heights. A form of life that does not bring exaltation. An ugly scene. Bringing on unease. Excepting the birds, the surroundings are just inanimate life. In addition it is icy. There is no sound. Everything takes place in deaf silence. In different circumstances one could say that this is a rugged but in its wild manner a beautiful region. For those who are injured the only thing of importance is whether one can survive or not in such surroundings.

After an indeterminate span of time I crawled across the sharp edge of the rock at the rim of the chasm. A cliff, seemingly beautiful and one that could be walked through, dropped from there towards the valley. It seemed that the tortuous crawling was a wholly adequate manner of movement in the given conditions and my state of being. The view down the cliff is surprising. Except stone and ice there was nothing else. The house is nowhere to be seen nor the people who had compelled me to depart. I glanced over the surroundings in vain. There was no sign of the presence of humans. I focused my attention and glanced all around for a long time. Finally I saw what I needed at that moment. On a small snowy terrace, not far beneath me, I saw humans who were leisurely resting. So relaxed that I felt envy. It was a strange scene in the given circumstances. On reclining chairs made of aluminum pipes two men, naked to the waist, were sunbathing in shorts. They had hiking boots and thick socks on their legs. They were very pale-fleshed and freckled, with light, red hair. I thought how these strange people were able to get anywhere, even into this ice wilderness. Whatever kind of men they might be, they were the only living creatures who gave me hope. They were totally motionless and without a voice. Motionless like the Nepalese who stood in front of their house. Full of hope I headed towards them. However, I had to discover a way of crawling downhill. I had to turn in such a manner that my face was turned toward the valley. On the icy slopes I would dig supports with my fingers for my hands in front of me. After clenching firmly, I would slowly stretch out my healthy foot and with my heel dig a support for my foot as further down as possible. Then I would free my hands from the preceding support and try to dig new supports a bit lower down, resting while doing so only on my healthy leg. The critical part of this procedure occurred when hands abandoned the supports and sought new ones. The support for the healthy leg frequently gave away and I would slip downward. Sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on the terrain. The injured foot uncomfortably hit against obstacles. Frequently the only way to stop was a blow to the leg from a rock or the spasmodic scratching with hands and feet on the ice and on the rocks. If I did not stop, I would have slipped deep and far, incurring new injuries. Usually during such long slides one loses consciousness. But the route traversed is significant. Soon all three pairs of my trousers were torn on the sharp rocks. I continued to stubbornly crawl, using already automatized movements, on my exposed, naked and peeled off skin.

When I wanted to warm my hands for the first time I witnessed a horrible scene. My hands were a shapeless mass of unrecognizable tissue. My nails were blue, my fingers terribly swollen with countless flowering blisters and deep cuts. Some injuries were bleeding while others were black with the coagulated blood. The color of my palms was white with blue-green toppings. Because of the swellings I could not join my fingers together. They looked like cracked cooked frankfurters. Pieces of peeled off skin hung out. The image of my own hands was horrific. I looked at them one more time and blew onto them in order to warm hem. I realized they were tough and still useful for climbing. After that, during the entire ordeal in the mountain, I did not intentionally look at them.


14. Timelessness

Somehow from that instant I was no longer able to orientate myself in time. It was impossible to connect the flow of time with events taking place around me. Without a watch I could calculate elapsed time only by attentively following the sequence of events. I remembered the first day, the first night and the morning of decision-making before departure. All of the other events after this were timeless. I did not know how much time had elapsed after the accident. The times elapsed between individual events were unknown and not essential. I knew that days and nights had changed a number of times but I did not know how many. The order of events and hallucinations could not be established. Time without significance could be eternity or only an instant. There was no beginning or end. Only the present instant, without memory or plans. Space and time cannot be experienced without events. The occurrence of events without the significance of order produces the impression of infinity and immortality. I was not in a hurry. To hurry one has to know the destination and the available time. I did not know this. There was no determinate goal. It was not important how many hours nor how many days had passed. For some events it was impossible to know whether they really happened or were they hallucinations. Many hallucinatory images are so clear that they are more convincing than any reality that I have ever experienced. In hallucinations I related to my surroundings. However, it was not clear whether the words were uttered or whether they were not spoken aloud, a constituent part of hallucinations. Reality and hallucinations supplemented each other and rotated so that never one or the other dominated. The experience of reality was precise when this was necessary. Hallucinations hid reality without a critical verification when the position was hopeless or when some interior or exterior obstacle had to be surmounted.

I stubbornly descended the cliff. In one place the cliff was broken by a large and deep step. I clutched the rim of the rock and dropped my healthy leg. I succeeded in finding support for my healthy leg. I was firmly positioned on three points. Then I had to lower my injured foot. This I also succeeded to do. However, I could not put pressure on it so that I remained for a number of minutes hanging by my hands. Then I fell down. I felt relief during this free fall. The hands no longer had to carry the weight of my body. After this, everything darkened and disappeared. I did not experience the end of the fall in a conscious state. I do not even know whether I fell. I especially do not know how I fell, for how long I fell and how long I lay at the bottom of the cahsm. When I opened my eyes, my hands immediately continued searching for the next support. I immediately recommenced crawling downwards. The terrain became more simple and the crawling easier than before. I did not turn back I do not know what the breach looked like. I do not remember the depth of the breach, neither the blow nor the pain.

15. Strength

Yearningly glanced towards the valley searching for signs of human presence. Any kind of presence. I could not count on rescuers who would come seeking for me, who would take care of me and return me to my previous life. I strove with my whole being to descend to the valley on my own strength. My helpers became imaginary. They would appear temporarily and suddenly but not undesired. Usually as unmoving figures, projections of rescuers from my head onto the broad, wild spaces around me. All the projections were composed of familiar images from the past. Nothing new appeared. The complex scenes were composed of real, experienced, alreadyseen images and of images that at times were purely imagined. These were reflections of my earlier life, of stories heard, of books read or of films seen. These were not phantasies, these were not unimaginable scenes that had not been experienced. One had to watch for a long time the inaccessible mountain landscapes until one’s eyes discovered the appropriate place in the wilderness. In the meantime swarms of images formed in the mind. The compositions were projected onto an existing space in a chosen, appropriate place. The scenes were sufficiently convincing that they left no doubt about their plausibility. They would remain for a period of time unchanged on the horizon. For a sufficiently long period of time so that the exhausted body moved from its position or surmounted an obstacle. The image would fade suddenly and without complaint but also without memory. They were stored in memory on an equal footing with other images of real events.

When I next looked down the slope there was nothing. Signposts had disappeared. The direction of the descent was indeterminate. There was nothing encouraging on the horizon. But I had no choice. I could only descend the cliff. In doing so I had to evade the largest difficulties and obstacles. If a hole appeared in the ice I would enter it. I would roll up and try to shelter myself from the cold and the wind. Belief in the happy conclusion of an attempt was not necessary. All outcomes were equal. Neither happy nor unhappy ones. Actions were not permeated with hopes nor with thought expectations. No known, conscious propelling force or directed wish was needed for my movement. No plan of action was possible. A plan necessitates the anticipation of the order of events in time. Nothing could be foreseen beforehand. My movement unfolded from one obstacle to the next. In the direction of the hallucination if such existed or in a fortuituous but possible direction if there was no signpost. Most frequently the direction of movement corresponded to the direction of least obstacles. Usually downward. Some of the large obstacles could be surmounted only by crawling upward. Hallucinations appeared always after long observations and pointed to the easiest direction of movement. The need to act existed for itself.
Fatigue was never a factor. There was no need to rest. If I stopped, the cause was not a feeling of fatigue. Physical obstacles or numbness were the cause. Pain in the muscles as the result of their strenuous labor never appeared. Lack of oxygen in the lungs or the quickening of heartbeats did not occur. The body imperceptibly and wholly became exhausted without fatigue taking over. I did not eat anything. Neither did I think of food. From time to time I bit snow and licked ice. I would simply take a piece of snow or ice and suck on it. After a number of tries the taste of snow and ice became bad. As if metallic balls slid down my throat. I reluctantly picked up snow and ice. A cold metallic tastelessness. I did not notice that my body was withering away. In no way did I pay attention to my body. I could have done without it. Interior reserves had been spent without agony. Without restrictions, tissues were being transformed into a propelling force.

16. ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE SKY

The massif Annapurna dominates the field of vision without a competitor. Every time I open my eyes, during daytime or at night, I see its crystal peak tearing the sky. It has no wings. It consisted only of an elongated, spindle-shaped trunk. Maybe it was carrying somebody in its enormous interior. I could not move. I watch enchanted. I felt special, singular. Maybe I will witness someone or something being loaded or unloaded. I imagined that I had been chosen, the one and only human being to observe the unthinkable and the unprecedented. The flying was approaching Annapurna. I was afraid to lose sight of it. In waves of exaltation I was overtaken by sublime, deepest feelings of happiness and exultation. I was wholly relaxed and collected. The flying object touched the contours of the mountain massif. It did not collide but flew onwards towards the most massive part of the mountain. Annapurna opens up. Rocks slide apart. Huge masses in motion. Solemn, Slowly, without hurry, with dignity. One can see its fiery entrails. Unthinkable beauty. Beneficial warmth irradiates from the opening. I feel it on my body like medicine. Most beautiful and most wished-for warmth. The opening is larger and larger. The warmth overtaking me is more and more pleasant. I have never felt such delight. A large part of Annapurna is a fiery mass. The most beautiful and most pleasant scene I have ever seen. I could not imagine such a thing. The flying object continues to approach the opening. It disappears in the fiery whirlwind. The opening closes slowly after it. Only a small fissure remains behind which one can see the fiery interior. Finally this also disappears. Even after the closing of the mountain I feel pleasant and warm. I feel a great confidence in myself. I blessedly give myself over to numbness.
17. Blue Monk

The darkness devours the valleys in front of me. Only the surrounding sloped above me are colored in the red and yellow nuances of the setting sun. Huge chunks of rough and sharp rock are dispersed all around me. I seek passageways between rocks, resting on their smoothest parts. Shrill blows of rolling stones rear apart the silence of the early evening. These are the only sounds noticeable in the dead silence. Stones of different size are falling all around. Some of them very near to me. I would not say that they are hallucinations. In alarm I observe the surroundings. High above me, at the place where at a great height ice disconnects from snow, something is becoming blue. I suspiciously glance in the direction from where rocky projectiles are coming and make out a stiff, motionless figure. It is dressed in a bright, light, blue tunic with a parasol in its hands. On its head it has a blue hat with embroidered black decorations on its rim. Its thin black mustaches are turned upwards. Its eyes are narrow, dark, expressionless. An interlaced pigtail protrudes from beneath the hat. In its Eastern manner it is elegant. Maybe even too much for this place. Since there is no sun, the parasol is obviously a sign of the importance of the person. I suppose this is a priest. Probably the monastery he inhabits is somewhere nearby. The figure is distant, on an inaccessible rock. Nevertheless, I recognize disinterestedness not only on his face but in his entire demeanor. There is no sign of partiality or a desire for giving help. As though I was being told that there is nothing I ought to seek in this area. That this is not a place for me. I am uncomfortable in being here. How am I to explain that I am here by pure accident, against my will and that I harbor no ill intentions. In reality, my main wish is to move from here as soon as possible. I am totally uninterested in the Blue One, indeed I would like to forget him as soon as possible if I could get myself safely from this place. I do not see how he manages to send the rocks my way. The rocks are genuine, hard, sharp. This is no hallucination. I see tiny, ricocheted pieces of stone after each collision. I beckon to him to stop throwing and pushing rocks because they endanger me. In addition, what he is doing is senseless. I yell as loud as I can. It would be appropriate that he approach me. I would not say that they are hallucinations. In alarm I observe the surroundings. When I lower my glance again, I see the newspaper besides my feet but not the person. I cannot make out what is written in them. I only decipher the letters but not the content. My greatest joy is that despite the nasty Blue One I will use the newspapers by lying on them. I delight in the thought that I will have old newspapers beneath my body. They will protect me from the cold on the rough ground. I forget the Blue One. I cannot locate the newspapers. I sprightly crawl from the area of falling stones looking for a safer place to rest before the oncoming night.

I looked at the fields stretching out in the valley. They seemed immeasurable in the tuned-down evening brightness. A herd of horses browsed in the distance. They were small and brown. With black napes and lavish tails. Their legs were thin, their stomachs large. Real mountain horses that surely knew the ways of the wilderness. Although I had never rode a horse, my head was brimming with thoughts full of hope how I will get me a horse. If I could only climb onto one and descend with it into the valley! Surely each of these horses know the way down. I would not have to worry about descending. I calmed down and cunningly waited for one of the horses to come near me. I saw them in a column passing the cliff and disappear on the other side of the mountain. Fortunately there were other herds. Some were very close to me. I realized that they will not come to me but that I had to go to them. When this thought came to me, I moved downward but the horses became less and less present and after a short period of time they disappeared. Although I strained my eyes I could no longer see the horses. But, instead of horses I saw tiny red points deep down. I thought came to me, I moved downward but the horses became less and less present and after a short period of time they disappeared. Although I strained my eyes I could no longer see the horses. But, instead of horses I saw tiny red points deep down. They were small and brown. With black napes and lavish tails. Their legs were thin, their stomachs large. Real mountain horses that surely knew the ways of the wilderness.

The night that then fell was very bright. The full moon aroused in me a primordial unrest which spread through all my bodily cells. This is an impulse which does not allow rest. It forces one to move. I stumbled through the night in which the moon illuminated the mountains as though it was a reflector.
18. Downy People

Floors of white fog writhe all around. They quickly spill over the cliff. As one after another mass of cloud spills over onto the other side disappearing from sight, new immeasurable quantities of whiteness fill in the emptied, disturbed space. It is impossible to reckon the time of day. The cold is enormous. A whole downy village undulates before my eyes. Everything within it, including buildings and people, seems to be made of blocked and thickened fog. People are dressed in white tunics. They have white hair and beards. They seem light as though made of cotton, they probably do not touch the ground when walking. Their cottages are downy like them. The walls and roofs are white as though made out of sugar foam. The place looks like a small bazaar. Counters stand between cottages offering wares. Something white and light like cotton, down or wool. It could be sugar foam. Houses do not rest on firm ground. They float in the same rhythm like the floating fog. They are ordered in groups that form short streets and small squares. Nothing in this scene can be sized up. Maybe here we have pigmy dimensions. Nor can the possibility that gigantic dimensions are in question be excluded. The whole scene appears as though none of its elements has weight. All the downy figures are motionless. They seem good-hearted, disinterested also. I cannot understand the expressions on their faces. All have the same appearance of self-confident coldness. They are neither repulsive nor attractive. They give the impression of great wisdom. They are peaceful in an Eastern manner. If I were not injured I would delight in the scene. I would definitely take photos. I would surely start up a conversation. It seems that all involved in this play are men. I wanted to come nearer to them. But we are separated by a steep icy slope along which I cannot move. On a number of occasions two men approached me. They were wholly ordinary, ordinary people from the road. They were dressed like civilians. They did not wear mountaineering gear. What did they seek? They introduced themselves and promised easy and speedy help. I trusted in their promises. When the final rescue ought to have taken place they were no longer there. Unfilled promises exasperated me. If they were to return I would vent on them all my contempt for those who do not fulfill promises. I continued descending distressed by their lack of care. I slipped a few meters until I managed with my healthy foot to push against a protruding rock which by pure accident appeared on my path. I bruised my hands and helplessly watched the injured foot as it flew in all directions. My next glance against a protruding rock which by pure accident appeared on my path. I bruised my touch. I still look at the snowy valley in order to see the attractive scene of the small mountain village. There is no village, there are no people but another difficult obstacle has been left behind.

19. Rejected Hospitality

At dusk I would have liked to have come to any kind of shelter. Even if only a temporary one. I imagined that in the vicinity there was some kind of a settlement. I continued crawling until I came to the edge of a small Nepalese village. I thought with relief that at least this night I would find good and safe lodgings. The settlement consisted of only a few thickly grouped wooden cottages. It stood on a steep slope, on the boundary of the ice layer and the stunted yellow grass. All the houses are without glass windows as were all the houses I had seen so far on my journey. There are only grown-up men. I do not know whether there are women and children. All the persons in this scene are entirely rigid engaged in their village chores. Nevertheless, the scene is full of living reality. The motionless inhabitants do not surprise me because the other people whom I have met recently were the same. The village stands above me. It will take a great deal of effort to climb up. First I politely ask the nearest inhabitants whether I can spend the night in their village. Wholly unexpected and in my opinion unjustifiably my request is rejected. They did not answer me aloud but this was obvious from their cold reactions. I seek an explanation but they give me no reply. Excepting their clear, although unuttered rejection no other communication is possible. However, I conclude that they have nothing against me spending the night nearby the village. It seems that they are flaggergasted by strangers. It seems obvious that I am in a pitiful state and that I need help. They ought to see this themselves. I argue my case but they are steadfast in their invioalability. I am deeply disappointed and I try to convey this with reproving looks and vociferous protests. Finally, I cannot do anything but try to find a comfortable place to rest at the edge of the village. This is difficult because everything around me is steep and uneven. I unwillingly cringe in a hole of snow and rock with only a few turfs of short yellow grass. From time to time I throw envious and angry looks towards the unpolite people.

An unusually dark night fell. Soon I could not see anything. The dark devoured the village and its inhabitants. The moon failed to appear. At some deaf time of the night something moved in the silence. There is no sound, no movement. Crazy games, whose nature I could not fathom, took place at the edge of the village. At times, that something resembled material phenomena, as though the enormous, branching trees moved from their place and the insane wind tossed the huge branches and leaves. Other times it seemed that cobweb shadows separated from their bearers and insanely flew around. Sometime foggy whirlwinds joined the game. Perhaps this was an inanimate phenomenon but one could not be ceratin. Images came very near to me but nothing material touched me. The small village encompassed the whirlpool of insane motion. I was afraid that it would not be able to resist the power of the event. Sometimes enormous shadows towered over me. An enormous energy was evident.
in all the surrounding motions. The virulence of the movement of the enormous
masses was astonishing. It was impossible to figure out whether the power derived
from the loosened up mass or whether the motion was propelled by an outside force.
I motionlessly watched what was occurring around me. There was something familiar
in all of this. Like the hallucinations I had when as a child I was administered nar-
cosis by chloroform before an operation. The phenomenon of the animated images
did not make me afraid. I thought that no human being had before witnessed such
scenes. I delighted in the uniqueness of my experience. I wanted to photograph the
whole thing or at least to draw it. I would draw it because I was afraid I would not be
able to describe it. Without pictures nobody will believe what I had seen.

20. French Hotel

Blood freezes in the veins. The night is unbelievably cold. I do not know what
night it is in the row. Visibility is bad. Untransparent thick fog around me. No
stars and no moon. Holes of ice, snow and rock are the only shelter. Suddenly, a ple-
asant smiling person moved in the dark. At a distance, through the fog, I recognize
a colleague from the expedition. He approaches but not too near. He does not touch
me. His reserve is not in harmony with the friendly expression on his face. I would
like him to approach and touch me. He should pick me up and help me walk. He
talks to me with the voice of a self-confident man. He literally says: “My friend,
there, not far distant is a great French hotel. The food is excellent. And the hot wa-
ter! There is as much of it as you want”. I say nothing, only listen and delight in the
words. Images of a white, discreetly illuminated, spacious and steamed up bathroom
arise before my eyes. Flowing hot water steaming in an old-fashioned bath made of
cast iron with supports shaped like lion’s paws. With white, fluttering bathing foam.
Trellises made of light wood for walking are on the floor. I see thick, white Turkish
toweling. They have probably been heated-up. These are familiar images from the
Turkish bath which I went to with my parents. Waves of warmth and desire stream
through my body at the thought that I could soon find myself in warm, fragrant
water. It would probably give off the fragrance of pines. Satisfaction is so near, at
the tip of my fingers. With a smile on my deformed face I thankfully watch my collea-
gue who confidently continues saying: “Here, I will go to get another person so that
we can transport you to a hotel”. He departs into the night. I watch his swaying
silhouette as he leaves through the thick flocks of the fog. Darkness devours him. I
wait long and patiently. I am certain that persistence will pay off. After some time I
am nevertheless overtaken by anxiety. Even fury. How is it that noone has appeared in
such a long time? The hotel is nearby! Time passes and noone appears. The cruel and
relentless cold pushes aside the beautiful imaginings about the warm French bath.
The eternal desire for warmth remains. Another morning is coming. Other things
preoccupy me.
21. Life Before The Fall

When falling I did not forget who I was. But one did not have to think about one's own individuality. It was not necessary to recall one's name, the place and date of birth nor the other details from one's past. Gender was an indeterminate and insignificant characteristic. The past did not disappear. It was only displaced by the present. It was not essential in comparison with reality. The past could be ignored. Life before the fall did not have a great deal of significance in the circumstances I now found myself in. Memories did not arouse feelings. Only very rarely did premonitions of memories about incompleted tasks and enterprises appear. And only as reminders about what had to be done after I was rescued. Rarely did recognizable figures or events from earlier life appear. These were ordinary, static images. Like photographs. Some distant, familiar sites or persons I was close to. My, at that time six years old daughter would swayingly intertwine in the unreal flocks of fog and silently watch me. As though she were calling me to join her. Intermittent and rare hallucinations from past life reminded me that I had not ended up here from nowhere and that I had to depart for somewhere.

I felt no responsibility towards any person or thing. Not even towards myself. Survival did not impose itself as a duty. I did not have to survive. Nobody and nothing demanded this of me. There was no obligation or duty in this act. Nevertheless, without special feelings or thoughts, the entire action of the singular person was very responsible and extremely to the purpose. The organism, being and not the personality are responsible to unfolding life. Neither to parents, family nor to society but to the principle of existence. Whatever is once created necessarily resists extinction.

22. Path Of Rescue

The sun takes a long time to peer behind the enormous summits. Then it is already high in the sky and in full brilliance and fervor. Invisible rays of the hidden part of the sun’s light mercilessly burn away at the exposed parts of my skin. The sun is such a superior phenomenon that it makes no sense to think about its activity. There is nowhere to hide from it. There is no protection from its radiation. However, I am not the only one affected by the sun. Surprised and with curiosity I watch a small ice stalagmite whose top is turning into water. Drops fall slowly like forced tears. The drops as such do not arouse my curiosity but a desire to drink them. The small indent in the rock collected the melted drops like a lachrymatory. Their path after they have spilled over the edge of the indent is uncertain. Persistently dropping in the same place, joining with other droplets from other sources, for who knows how long, they are making a channel for their flow into the valley on the rough stony terrain. Unlike the knife-sharp rock covered with snow and ice, the imperceptible smoothness of the channel leads me somewhere as though it were a signpost. The inevitable right of way of the drops seeks out a path into the valley. My injured body, like the liquid, unmistakably chooses the easiest path.

During all this time a group of mountaineers from Japan is approaching through the river valleys and high ridges. We looked at the same maps, we measured the same summits. They have excellent equipment for the high mountains. With ease they climb up to 4500 meters and put up a base camp. They are making preparations to ascend Pisang Peak. Rumors of the accident have reached down the mountain. All the mountaineers are on high alert to track and offer aid. Nobody really knows what has happened. The two of us are thought to be lost. The Japanese put up camp and begin preparing food. They send a woman mountaineer to seek water. They want to cook something and quench their thirst. Flowing and drinkable water was to be found only in one place. In the channel of the lovely stream, already safe and undisturbed on its way to the valley not more than a half hour from the base camp.
23. END OF MY STRENGTH

I fall prey to total weakness. Weakness is not a feeling of exhaustion or pain. Exhaustion manifests itself in the lack of definitiveness and the slowness of motion. For each following attempt to move more time is needed. I lie motionless more and more. It takes me a long time to collect my strength. A tiny, almost imperceptible movement follows and then rest again. Even hallucinations are rarer. Total lightness of being has set in. Without any effort. It seems that one does not possess one’s own weight. A feeling of bliss dissipates in all the cells of the body. The ruggedness of the rocky ground or the bitter cold are no longer felt. Instead of images of reality, a foggy whiteness predominates. I do not sleep but neither do I watch. My glances are not directed at the surroundings. Reality is no longer an object of interest. Everything that can or that one desires to see is already inbuilt into my interior fields of vision. The whole world, the past and the present, are summarized through one’s own experience. Anything outside what has been experienced no longer exists. Even if the eyes open one can barely make out existing things in the vicinity. When the eyes close, endless, transparent, foggy spaces of the inner world make their appearance. After this one anticipates promising light, warmth and peace. The final, undistrubed, inevitable and desired quietude. Thoughts of a possible peace extinguish impulses to keep on moving. There is no more purpose to suffer by moving across sharp rock, in the unbearable cold and skin-burning sun. A solution is at hand. It can implemented immediately. It is sufficient to firmly close one’s eye and fall asleep. Rest is the only possible and desired state. It is impossible to imagine anything more beautiful than to surrender oneself to weightless swaying on the waves of the becalmed soul. In each instant being is whole. With all the necessary bodily and spiritual capabilities. The spirit is not a distant observer of bodily extinction. The body is not an insignificant and unimportant loser who in the battle for survival has lost his strength. Spirit is body, the body is spirit. The spirit remains with the body as an ally and support as long as life flickers within it. Like a captain who remains alone and lost on a sinking ship. What happens afterwards is not to be known.

The sun’s light is unpleasant. For most of the time the eyes are closed. They open only when they have to. I have not moved from this place for some time. It seems that I am no longer able to do so. My bodily strength is at its end. My organism has spent all of its reserves. Nothing of the bodily material has been spared. Of visible tissue only bone and skin remain. My senses are numb. Images, hallucinations and thoughts are disconnected. Actions are no longer directed at some goal. Bodily and spiritual functions are reduced to the lowest possible level. And all of this just to prolong life as much as possible. Nature gently accepts the weakened body in its blissful embrace. It frees man of the feeling of weight and pain. Hallucinations do not appear. Memories fade. There are no images, landscapes or persons. There is no past, present or future. Time is standing still. Events have stopped. Only gentleness, quietude and peace remain. Preparation for death.

24. RESCUE

Suddenly something really quivered. A disturbance occurred in motionless nature. Initially it was impossible to account for it. Only small, hardly perceptible changes. Maybe in the streaming of air. Or some new, unusual sounds. In any case, something was happening in the vicinity. Maybe some living being is irradiating its presence. Curiosity is aroused. Eyes open by themselves. The gaze is murky. It is difficult to discern even the nearby objects. Distance cannot be measured. A tiny human figure was approaching in silence. Fearfully. Maybe only astonished. Or perplexed. It is clear that the approaching figure is not a hallucination. It does not come too close. At least not within arm’s reach. It does not reach out its hands, nor does it touch. It speaks. I cannot make out the words. Only a chirping voice. It is a woman. Maybe I said something about the accident. I did not fully understand what the figure was saying to me. Suddenly it quickly departed. I remained motionless lying in the snow. It is a great assurance that rescue is possible. I sunk into numbness.

The girl is part of the Japanese expedition. She has left her home city a long time ago. She sought water for herself and her friends in the base camp on Pisang Peak. She found that water, those same drops that had led me to the valley. Now she was quickly descending to the camp to get help. Again stronger movements are felt in the surrounding area. My eyes opened again. I gazed upon a cluster of people. They quickly prepared Alpinist equipment for the rescue. They put me in a warm sleeping bag. They additionally folded me into a protective folio to prevent the loss of warmth. They show immeasurable care. They move me slowly and gently. But to me even the smallest movement is annoying. I have retained only a few bits of memory about the first moments of the rescue. The flickering astro-folio and the immersion into the sleeping bag.

Our paths finally conjoined. For me at the last moment. Maybe we had traveled our whole previous lives because of this meeting not having any inkling of each other. The fully-believed knowledge that what was happening was not a hallucination but reality brought about relaxation and the extinction of all defensive systems. I fell into deep unconsciousness. Never before had unconsciousness been so deep. After the coming of the rescuers, unconsciousness was a blissful means for relaxation and the preservation of the last remaining forces. I was convinced that the danger of dying had passed. My organism had done everything, literally everything to save itself. All that a human being was capable of. To the ultimate boundaries of human capability. Unconsciousness was a sign of surrendering one’s life into another’s hands with full confidence. If the rescuers had not arrived when they did I would not have been in a condition to do anything more for myself. I would not have been able to move from the place I was in. The body had exhausted all its strength. To the last atom. The latent condition of the body at rest is the best way of extending life without the necessary expenditure of life’s forces. The thought of dying had never appeared. Even when my whole body had wholly malfunctioned. Survival is not a battle against the frightening, to man incomprehensible phenomenon of death but the natural resistance to the ending of life. The path to ultimate rescue was long. Many more people had to invest their extreme efforts to deliver me from the icy embrace of the high mountains.
25. Descent Into The Valley

I felt commotion around me. They were putting me into a basket. I am totally helpless. They lowered me into the basket while it was still on the ground. It was very uncomfortable. One bearer raised me to his back and started descending the steep slope. I saw the bearer's muscular calves as they powerfully strained. Bare, almost black feet shakily resisted the sharp rocks. The terrain is dappled with white traces of snow and ice. In certain places there are footprints. Like most bearers who traverse most of the path barefooted, he had broad feet while his big toes stood out from his other toes. I saw a number of worried and harried familiar faces from our group. At the start the bearer shook from the effort beneath me. The basket swung on his back. We almost stumbled. Then the bearer caught his balance and a walking rhythm. The first steps are unsure. I am afraid that we will fall. I feel a discomfort that the man is making such an effort only for me. The fact that my weight is slight is a mitigating circumstance. Only bone and skin remain of my body. Every step caused me great pain. The scraping of the fractured bones was hardly bearable. After a few steps I lose consciousness of events around me. I do not know how the descent proceeded from then on. Nor when I arrived into the valley.

A group of mountaineers set out from Germany a little after our departure from Zagreb. They arrived in Nepal at approximately the same time as we did. Their advance group was already in the region of Pisang. They carried a lot of equipment. A physician was in their group. He was a great lover of mountains. Among the enormous quantity of various equipment there was a large trunk of medicine accessories. They had carried with them almost everything that they might need in cases of smaller or larger mishaps on the journey. Fortunately, up to that point they had not yet opened it.

As soon as I regained consciousness I tried to describe the unfortunate accident and the place where it had occurred. Despite the confused images and the indecipherable mixture of reality and hallucinations, I thought that I could reconstruct the place of the accident and the direction of the descent. The image of my partner lying on his back was the most deeply inscribed image in my mind. My last turning around, my memory prior to departing into the inevitable uncertainty. All around was the stone, icy wilderness. I leave out the black birds from my story.

Relying on my description of the place of the accident, my partners from the expedition immediately unselfishly started in search of missing Veljko. In addition, they sent a messenger with a written note for help to the base camp of our colleagues on Annapurna. In this wilderness there was no way excepting messengers to exchange messages. They duly paid him in advance, a sum larger than is customary because of the urgency of the message, which is not advisable in these regions. The messenger immediately hurried off. He walked quickly while visible on the horizon. All the way to the first tavern. At first he drank only a sip of alcoholic beverage. Only to give a bit of nourishment to himself. Then a bit more and so on. Until he was totally drunk. He slept on a table in the tavern which did not overly surprise any of the other guests.

The neatly folded message lay on the table. Nobody gave it any heed. The messenger was in such a state that he would not be able to resume the journey in days. The fate of the message and both Veljko's and mine hung on a thin thread.

When I again opened my eyes I saw that I was in some kind of a cottage. It seemed to be round with a wooden column in the middle. I lay on the wooden floor and looked at the ceiling, sometimes at a part of the walls. I could not eat myself but was fed by others. I remember the orange marmalade. I liked it while the rest of the food I did not enjoy. To say the truth I do not know whether there was other food. I used a small spoon and it was difficult. The effort to swallow was strenuous. I had no wishes regarding food. I ate what I was given. I did not remember any special tastes nor did I have any desires. I ate but did not enjoy the food. I was without consciousness between meals.

Some men examined me. I thought they were physicians. First there was a German physician whom I had not seen earlier, than an American one, whom I had previously met in the village but it might have been the other way around. They had beards and looked very worried. The German physician was in the company of mountaineers who on their second trip had come to the tavern to take a short rest. Drink tea and eat something. The drunk messanger lay across a table. The neatly folded piece of white paper lay in front of him. Luckily the physician noted the message. I immediately realized what had happened. He sent the message through a second messenger to the base camp at the foothill of Annapurna. He himself, after a quick and resolute walk, shortly appeared in the village Pisang. He brought with him a large trunk of medical equipment. The American physician lived in the village Pisang. We had seen him earlier. I surrendered myself to them with all confidence. Some men examined me. I thought they were physicians. First there was a German physician whom I had not seen earlier, than an American one, whom I had previously met in the village but it might have been the other way around. They had beards and looked very worried. The German physician was in the company of mountaineers who on their second trip had come to the tavern to take a short rest. Drink tea and eat something. The drunk messenger lay across a table. The neatly folded piece of white paper lay in front of him. Luckily the physician noted the message. I immediately realized what had happened. He sent the message through a second messenger to the base camp at the foothill of Annapurna. He himself, after a quick and resolute walk, shortly appeared in the village Pisang. He brought with him a large trunk of medical equipment. The American physician lived in the village Pisang. We had seen him earlier. I surrendered myself to them with all confidence. There was no other choice. I saw various medical items, bandages, needles, scissors but I did not know what they had done to me.

Our friends from Annapurna arrived with great haste. Shortly the returnees from Kang Guru also made their appearance. New rescue teams immediately went on a rescue mission for Veljko. All of them were very experienced Alpinists. Some of them were self-sacrificing mountain rescuers who had on countless occasions shown their mettle in difficult rescue missions in the most difficult of circumstances. If anything was to be done in this wilderness they were the ones who could do it. The terrain was
very difficult. The weather conditions had worsened. The place of the accident could not be determined because of heavy snowfall. Even a small amount of snow suffices to cover up traces of the accident. With enormous efforts rescuers combed the terrain. Without success. Illusory hope was displaced by deep despair.

At times I thought I saw Nepalese people, probably the hosts, entering and exiting the premises. I heard my friends discussing the situation but was unable to follow the train of thoughts. I spent a number of days in the cottage but I do not know how many. At one point I saw a horrifying scene. A group of Spanish conquistadors, untidy and dangerously looking, were descending the slope. They had metal armors fastened by thick hide ropes across their chests and helmets with bent ends on their heads. All of their accouterments were old and rusted. Worn out from overuse. Their faces were covered with sharp mustaches and beards. Some carried swords, others spears. Some of them towed small ponies. I knew their intentions were bad, dangerous. I wanted to explain with all of my strength to anybody entering the room that they were in great danger. They had to move as quickly as possible because these cruel soldiers will attack them. The expressions on their faces were soldierly, threatening and uninterested in human suffering. Real murderers. I became greatly agitated when my colleagues good-heartedly smiled, persuading me that every-thing will be all right. How can they be so cold-blooded when the pestilence had almost greataly agitated when my colleagues good-heartedly smiled, persuading me that every-thing will be all right. How can they be so cold-blooded when the pestilence had almost
dissipated in instantaneous forgetfulness. It was obvious that the condition of my health was deteriorating. I could not survive for long without medical treatment. On the other hand, the rescue mission cannot easily acquiesce to the cessation of the mission for the missing mountaineer.

26. DEPARTURE FROM THE HIMALAYAS

The trip to Kathmandu with bearers who would carry me on their backs or in a litter would take too long. I would not survive the journey. Communication with the capital city from this distance is very bad. The only wireless connection with Kathmandu could be established only from a distant station of the Nepalese army. A few friends from the expedition hurried to the army base. Through a radio-station they asked for a helicopter. In order for the helicopter to take off advance payment had to be made. A special additional sum, not at all small, is charged for a flight above 4000 meters where helicopters encounter difficulties because of thin air. If the flight does not succeed because of weather conditions the advance has to be paid again. The necessary money could not be collected even by all the members of the expedition combined. The situation was saved by the members of the expedition who had earlier decided to shorten their journey and were already on their way back to Kathmandu. One of their credit cards (American Express Card) enabled us to pay the advance. The helicopter took off.

I see the olive-green chopper, its relaxed, tired wings on the small, uneven, grassy plateau in front of the cottage. The pilots have army ensigns on their uniforms. They have a neat and fresh appearance. Especially compared to the inhabitants of the village Pisang. They look excellent even if compared to the exhausted and, because of the accident that befell their colleagues, worried participants of the expedition. Their tanned, manly faces, freshly shaven, with sharp, level, black mustaches reveal tension. As though they doubt whether they will be able to take off. Their too-worried expressions give the impression of unsecurity. They do not look at me. They talk with expedition colleagues. I cannot hear the content of their conversa-
tion. Neither am I curious. I hope to leave soon.

They finally transport me into the chopper. Every movement, especially sudden ones, annoys me and I have to control myself not to cry out. I do not want to cry out because I think that I have caused my colleagues trouble enough as it is. I feel awkward because a nicely planned excursion into the mountains for pleasure has been transformed into a nightmare for all involved. Exhausted and worried faces are all around. These are familiar faces of friends who were on the expedition to Kang Guru and Annapurna. Their presence gives me confidence. These are experienced men who have gone through a lot in the mountains and probably in life in general. They journeyed a long way from their camps. I register their presence for a short while. I know I am in safe hands. They carry the stretchers into the helicopter. They place them under the seat of the helicopter towards its tail. I would have liked to be where I can look through the window. I feel disappointment that I will be flying between the highest peaks on earth and not be able to see anything. I try to protest but nobody notices. I hear the noise of the powerful motors when taking off. The helicopter slowly rises. The taking off seems unwilling but this is because of the thin air at these heights. We are leaving the ridges of Pisang. Then everything fades from memory. Landscapes, objects and people. Images, noises, thoughts and wishes disappear. Probably I have again fallen unconscious. Blissful numbness.
27. Shanta Bhawan Hospital In Kathmandu

For a short span of time I feel the rhythmic blows accompanying the motion of the wheeled stretcher and the smallest uneven bumps of the airport runway they are taking me over. Then again unconsciousness. My eyes open only under the intense light of a reflector. Finally in a hospital. My confidence grows. I hope that I will be able to walk with crutches immediately after being treated in the hospital. I would not want to be the cause of changing the journey plans. We still have to visit Bangkok. With crutches, maybe using taxis or rickshaws I think I could see the sights of the city. To say the truth, I would rather go home. I had seen crutches somewhere on the streets of Kathmandu. On one of the numerous markets but I could not recall which. Ther is a lot of commotion in the hospital. Despite the rush I think that examinations are being performed too slowly. My stretcher is pushed everywhere. They take a sample of my blood, take X-rays in different positions. It is very unpleasant. It is difficult to be transported from stretcher to table and vise versa. Every time after I am moved, it takes me a long time to calm down and become accustomed to the new position. Finally a male nurse, with X-rays stacked on his chest, pushes my stretcher through long hallways and between many people. He leaves me in an operating room. In the middle of a room panelled with ceramic plates stands an ordinary iron table with a ripped green plastic coverlet. I take all my clothes off. I am cold. For a time I was alone in the room. I already began to look apprehensively around. Finally two physicians enter. They exchange remarks. They put me on all fours in the kneeling position. They converse shortly between themselves. They mention spinal anresthesia. Then I feel a tiny injection at the bottom of my back. After this I no longer have a sense of the lower extremities of my body. Suddenly I felt eased and almost cheerily conversed with the physicians. I had the need to draw attention to myself by talking. In addition, hearing my own voice increased my confidence. The more I talked the more I felt alive.

Nothing came of my thoughts of a speedy recovery. After the operating table they took me to a private care unit in the vicinity of the hospital. Someone was always on watch next to me. All the nursing staff were Nepalese. They walked without making a sound, with tiny steps, on tiptoe. They brought and took away food. Physicians came if needed. Sometimes I would open my eyes and see them attentively cleaning the injury on my ankle. The question was frequently asked then and later on was: “Do you want a painkiller?” I would usually curtly respond “yes” or I would just affirmatively nod my head. I do not know what they administered but after the injection I was for a long time without pain but also without consciousness. I liked visits but only short ones. I could not endure long conversations. I made efforts to show good will but I did not have the strength. I experienced the greatest agitation when Sonja, Veljko’s wife, paid me a visit. I knew that she would come but I could not imagine the meeting. When she entered the hospital room I saw already at the door her worried face and eyes full of hope. I told her everything I knew about what took place on the mountain. The only thing I left out were the black birds. I did not like to think about them. I believed that my comrade was alive the last time I looked back. I was not ready to confront the idea of a deadly outcome. Neither did the visitors mention the possibility of tragedy. We did not talk about this. At least not in front of me.

Hospital days passed monotonously. A further stay in the care unit made no sense. Postponement weakens the injured and exhausted organism. The injuries were such that Nepal did not have the wherewithal to heal them. If I had to go somewhere, the best thing would be to return to Zagreb. The physicians are preparing me for departure. They are putting on a plaster cast on the shin which is not that terrible but the drilling of an opening on the casing where I suffered the injury is. A physician took an ordinary electric drill for wood and a number of time drilled the plaster cast. I was afraid that the plaster cast under the pressure of the heavy drill will cave in and that the bone will ram into the leg. Finally the hole for bandaging and nursing the wound was made. But during this whole time I was breaking out in sweat. I received a discharge letter. It was folded and packed into an envelope. This is the discharge letter as given to me.

SHANTA BHAWAN HOSPITAL

Telephone: 21553
G.P.O. Box No. 252
Ziha Kalman 9.10.82.
Kathmandu, Nepal

To whom it may concern,

This man was admitted to the Shanta Bhawan Hospital 8 days after a fall in which he sustained a compound # of the L ankle with both medial malleolus + lat. malleolus separated. He also had multiple abrasions due to second fall in his attempt to crawl to safety. These were his only problems in admission.

On view of his desire to have definitive treatment of his injuries in Zagreb, the wound on the ankle, on the lateral aspect was debided, approximate reduction detained of the leg enclosed in plaster of paris.

A firm day escher above the ankle wound overlying the calf was left on rack for the journey. He has been commenced on Chloramphenicol 500 mg. We enclosed his Xrays with him.

Yours faithfully
A. T. Young F.R.C.S(E).
28. DEPARTURE FROM NEPAL

Many hopes for getting well are connected to my departure from Nepal. I lie motionless on stretchers on the runway. Awaiting boarding of passengers. In the clear heights torn clouds scuttle to all sides. They remind me of the day when we, full of willpower, landed in Nepal. I feel a fresh breeze on my face and in my hair. I deeply inhale the pure air as an anticipation of getting well. For some time I am alone alongside the plane. I can barely move. My hands and head can make tiny movements. I look around. I see two handsome men in the vicinity. They are strong and hairy with long hair and beards. They give the impression of immense strength and endurance. I recognize them as famous Alpinists. They are briskly discussing something. I watch them from my position trying to fathom what they are talking about. I hope they will address me. I would like to tell them what happened. I wish they approached me. I would like them to listen to what I have to say. I would like to hear their understanding and their support. I look again in their direction but they have disappeared. Why have they gone not even glancing at me. Is this hallucination or reality?

My self-sacrificing companions from the trekking-group do not leave me alone for one moment. This is not easy for them. They have to raise me, move me and push the stretcher many times. I do like being moved. When I become accustomed to one position, every movement causes me discomfort and a long period of recuperation. In the plane I occupy three places across in the middle of the corridor. Stretchers are placed over the seats. My legs stretch out onto the passage for the passengers. It is narrow and uncomfortable. I take a “painkiller” and lose consciousness. I regain partial consciousness in Bangkok. Some passengers in passing look at me with curiosity, some scowl. The wound has begun to emit a smell. Gangrenous changes have set in. I see a grey head and a familiar face. I do not really know who he is. But he resembles someone very much. The gentleman addresses me. It is soon revealed that he is the father of a colleague of mine from work. Physician by profession. He is returning with his wife from the Philippines. They boarded the plane in Bangkok. Conscious of the difficulty in which he met me, he gives me medicine from his pharmacy at hand. The pill is enormous, I can barely swallow it. I agonize in panic. Just a little bit more, a draught in my dry throat and it slips down.

Schiphol is the first European airport we put down in. Shining and brilliant. Countless passengers seemingly disconnectedly rush on all sides. Here we transfer to the plane for Zagreb. My companions push my stretcher towards the ambulance at the airport. For a moment, in passing, I saw my reflection in the glass of some store. An unrecognizable, horrifying figure. A worn-out, emaciated, black face with red blotches. A red disinfecting liquid spread over black burns, scabs and scars. My hair and beard is plastered with blood. Hurrying travellers throw me compassionate looks. My bandages are changed in the airport ambulance. They paste sanitary bands with the calming fragrance of eucalyptus over my open wounds. Like balm they cool my wounds. For a short time I even feel fine. At the end I get another pain-killing injection and I lose my memory. I again regain consciousness in the plane before landing into Zagreb. I make out that the airplane crew by radio-waves was arranging the coming of an ambulance van to Zagreb airport. We finally land. When we touch the runway and suddenly stop I feel pain. I am again removed to another stretcher which I do not bear easily. The ambulance van shakes while it drives across the illuminated highway. Something is still being arranged in front of the administration building. I am impatient. From an angle, at a distance, I catch sight of the night outlines of Zagreb mountains. Nobody in Zagreb knows about the accident on Pisang Peak. The first aid crew is in counsel. I hear the decision: “He will be taken to Accident Hospital”.
29. The Accident Hospital in Zagreb

The stretcher wends a long time through escalators and hallways. Compassionate remarks by passers-by reach me in the hubbub of human voices in the illuminated hallways. The hospital is packed. A bed cannot be vacated for the late newly-arrived patients. I spent the night on an auxiliary bed in a hallways. The third ward. Early next morning I got a cup, misted with warmth, containing soup made of meat and noodles. A fluttering desire overtook me for warm food. I ate the soup with restraint, hungrily and with appetite. In the whiteness of the hospital bed, now much more comfortably set up, I again felt satisfaction because of the availability of food. Warmth streamed through me while they fed me the nourishing liquid. My hands were black, rough and motionless. As though made out of bakelite. Someone nearby says that I will have no movements in my fists. I am not overly impressed by the remark. There are greater problems than fists.

I do not like my state of total powerlessness but I can bear it. I am almost totally incapacitated. I cannot undertake the simplest, otherwise daily, actions without the help of others. I cannot hold a spoon, turn in the bed to attend to basic needs without someone's help. I repress the anxiety and the discomfort I feel because of my immobility. In the depths of the powerless being is the fear that he might be abandoned by the community. I would like to be as small a burden as possible. I am adjusting to total dependence on others. One can accept without reservation unconditional help probably only from one's parents. To the one who is immobilized the whole world contracts to the small space of a hospital room. Only a few persons are offering me their services. Seemingly insignificant details from the immediate surroundings assume enormous importance. One seeks hidden meanings in the movement of bodies or in the reflections of an eye. Sympathy or antipathy. Attraction or repulsion. The fear of being abandoned or neglected.

I desired the speedy resolution of uncertainty by undergoing an operation. Even if this meant amputating the injured leg. The waiting was harder and harder to bear. Many visits by and consultations amongst physicians unfolded. I listened to them with excitement until I heard a voice which stood apart in the group of physicians: “Good, than I will take him”. Finally, after long preparations, they take me on a stretcher to the operating room. The operating table is old, made of iron, with tattered coating. They place me on it and tie me with thick, leather bindings. The iron beneath pinches me and I do not know how to find a good position. Fortunately, I quickly receive an injection in my forearm and they place a needle in a vein for infusions and transfusions. When I again opened my eyes, a serious man with beard and glasses stood above me: “You will have to be very patient, we left the leg but the healing process will be very long!” Why is he speaking Hungarian? Where am I? His use of my Hungarian mother tongue makes me feel safe. I feel provided for and protected. I note this worldly phenomenon. Water oozes down my face, I feel the pressure of the bed therefore I am still in this world. The physician leaves. I remain alone in the room.

30. Return To Life

I cannot breathe. My throat is full of secretions. I am choking. I cannot call anybody. I have no voice. I try to spit. I am terribly distressed because I do not know where to spit. It is so indecent. I think I am going to die. I feel as though I have to spit out death that is choking me. I turn my head as far as I can and spit on the wall. The wall is panelled with green ceramic plates. I spat horribly. What will the cleaning woman say when she washes the premises? I hope noone has seen me. To live by spitting! Now I know, I am certain, that I will live.

For a few days after entering the hospital I felt pressure in my chest. I lacked breadth. My heart pounded like crazy. It seemed that I was going choke or that my heart will stop beating. I became frightened. I returned to the arduous world of fright and pain. Life with feelings and memories. Fear of pain unsurprisingly grew because of the unknown boundaries of suffering. The enormity of suffering could not be known without previous experience. There is a time and a bodily position when pain decreases. There is a threshold that one does not trespass. When once you experience the whole scale of pain, from its beginnings to the highest stage, fear decreases although not pain itself. Time will again govern the sequence of events. The space whose center I was will again disperse into infinity.

Immobility was an additional but also a permanent cause of suffering. I lay motionless on my back during the whole period. Initially I was unable to move without help. Sometimes the pain was almost unbearable. By directing my thoughts to other things I could put up with the pain a bit longer. The body still retained its muscular firmness resisting the one and only position I was in. As my organism weakened because of the lack of movement, my muscles became slack and withered while the body accommodated itself to new conditions. After some time the body no longer put up any resistance. It shapelessly took on the form of the bed so that the ensuing immobility was easier to bear. What followed were numerous visits by physicians, consultations, tests, transplantations of the skin, additional operations, student novices practicing in the hospital, curious newspaper people and visits by family and acquaintances. Numerous patients passed through the room. By pure coincidence, my room physician, doctor Komanov, who had operated me, was from the same region as I hailed from. This explained him speaking Hungarian after the operation. The return to life was accompanied by everyday fears. I earnestly wanted to get well. In the beginning my desires related to the decrease of pain and a quick recovery. It began with the wish to find a warm room and a warm bed. When this came to pass, I wished that the pain in the lower parts of my body, which were very much flayed when I fell and later when I was crawling, disappear. I only wanted to turn around for a short time in my bed. I waited for this for four months. I surreptitiously hoped that in such a manner, if in no other, this will wondrously give me back the use of my legs. The enormity of suffering could not be known without previous experience. There is a time and a bodily position when pain decreases. There is a threshold that one does not trespass. When once you experience the whole scale of pain, from its beginnings to the highest stage, fear decreases although not pain itself. Time will again govern the sequence of events. The space whose center I was will again disperse into infinity.
31. Upright Again

The unfettered power and energy of survival freed themselves without my having desire, emotions or thought but only when this was inevitably necessary. When the perfect machine for survival in me ceased to function, many everyday human difficulties, that up to then had been kept at bay, again came to life. I had to think and make decisions on my own. I began reading newspapers and books. I exercised my fists, hands and stomach muscles as much as I could in my hospital bed. I tried to stretch out my uninjured leg which had, because of my immobility, wholly stiffened in the knee.

I must not get up quickly, although I desire this so much. In the beginning I can only sit a bit on the edge of the bed. Only for a few seconds. I immediately become dizzy. The injured leg momentarily swells up and becomes blue. I received new steel crutches. In my thoughts I exercise walking with crutches. I am afraid. How can one stand on two points? How does one climb steps? If I had only, before the accident, been able to move about a bit. How can one stretch out my uninjured leg which had, because of my immobility, wholly stiffened in the knee.

When I entered the hospital it was winter. Through the window, above my head I could see a bit of sky. I guessed the time of day, the weather conditions and the change of seasons by the clouds and the color of the sky. Sometimes a bird, sometimes a plane flew by. There is a school near the hospital. Children's voices were the sign of the unbrokenness of life, exuberant life. During the long stay in the hospital I developed great confidence and a deep connection with the staff that was taking care of me. I wanted to leave the hospital but without parting. But the end of my stay in the hospital was approaching. One fine spring day they told me to prepare myself because a van from the spa was coming for me. I received a discharge letter with the hospital was approaching. One fine spring day they told me to prepare myself because a van from the spa was coming for me. I received a discharge letter with the.

The patient was admitted to the hospital on October 11, 1982 because of injuries on his left leg, burns on his face and fists, as well as frostbites of both his feet. He suffered these injuries on September 1, 1982 while climbing the Himalayas (6.000 meters altitude) when he fell on ice and slid about 400 meters, suffering an open concave fracture of the distal third of the left lower leg and luxation of the ankle. Since he was missing for a long time both of his feet suffered frostbites while his face and both hands suffered IIInd and IIId degree burns.

After transportation, medical treatment commenced in Katmandu where attempts were made to reposition the fracture and luxation. He was immobilized in a upper leg cast with an opening. He was transported by plane and admitted to our hospital.

Upon admission his left leg was immobilized with a upper leg cast with the opening on the outer side in the lower third of his lower leg and ankle where a great defect of the skin is visible with peeled off fragments of bones and cartilage with abundant necrosis of the rim of the bones and skin and an intensive acidulous fetor. Burns covered with scabs on his forehead, nose, face and chin as well as on the dorsum of the fist, toes on both of his feet greatly swollen, liquid. Arterial circulation preserved. On the left lower leg a few areas of peeled off skin covered with scabs, the entire outer side of the left gluteus and and upper leg peeled off with a lot of secretion and infection.

X-ray pictures through the cast upon admission show a concave luxatious fracture of the distal part of the lower leg with totally deranged connection in the joint body.

Upon arrival the infection was treated by rebandaging, with Boric acid and antibiotics applied to the antibiogram. After secretion ceased and the infection removed and after negative tests for piocceousness, the patient was operated upon in the skin of extirpating the necrotic bone fragment, repositioning and the reconstructing the ankle alongside fixation by three Kirschner wires and auxiliary extension.

Immovilized by an upper leg longeter.

After prognosed regular rebandaging and regular controls of the antibiogram the infection subsided, so that after preparing the granulation base Thiersch's skin graft was applied to the left upper leg, to the lower leg and to both knees. The donor region was the right lower leg.

Plastic transplant repeated a number of times because of smaller remaining defects. Regular X-rays monitor the positioning of the fragments. After 4 months Kirschner's wires and Steinman nail were removed. All the defects healed so that the patient began walking with the help of crutches initially without placing any weight and later by putting weight. Functional findings show the atrophy of upper and lower leg muscles, regular movements in hip and knees, while the dorsal flexion in the ankle is almost zero while the plantar one can be executed at 20 degrees. Extension in the mtz. joint 40, flexion 15. The ankle is swollen, without pain.

On April 8, 1983 it was agreed that the patient be moved to the rehabilitation Center in Krapinske Toplice.

Patient is asked to come with a referral-slip to this hospital for controls.

ROOM PHYSICIAN
Dr. I. Komanov

DEPARTMENT HEAD
V. Ribić
32. Life Afterwards

It was not only my life that wandered off in other, unexpected directions. The life’s trajectories of other participants in the Nepal events also changed. For some the expected sequence of events had apparently and temporarily but suddenly changed. For some the immediate consequences of the accident were unspeakably difficult. Our comrade Veljko’s thread of life was broken. His family suffered an irretrievably painful loss with hard to imagine consequences.

Changes in my family, exposed to enormous challenges and difficulties because of the consequences of the accident, took a nonrecurring course. The time and efforts invested in my rescue, survival and recovery exhausted the strength and the patience of other people close to me. The fall separated my life into two almost independent parts. Events before the fall now fade into the fog of forgetfulness as though I was not the person involved, as though everything had happened to someone else. So many things had changed in those short yet tumultuous events, including the person who I was, that it is hardly possible to speak about a singular life and about me as a single person. The change brought about by the accident in the Himalays was so foundational that the rest of life seems like a new life. Numerous scars I carry from the blows, burns, frostbites, operations and additional transplantations are reminders of the accident. My left leg is shorter, while my ankle joint is wholly stiff. The rehabilitation, including the strengthening of my organism and learning to walk, lasted for years. Less obvious are the changes regarding my ideas about the world, my feelings and way of thinking but these were not less consequential for my new life. In the place of my birth, in my parents’ home, I healed my scars like a wounded animal and filled my soul with a new belief in life. I gradually accustomed myself to the world and again joyed in life in all of its manifested forms. After a short time I resumed my job.

Intoxication by the experience of survival, the delusional feeling of superiority over human frailty and over the inbred fear of injuring oneself, over pain and death, soon began to fade away. Even today I am greatly affected by the consequences of the accident. Certain images, real and hallucinatory, if we can distinguish between them, are apt to make a sudden appearance in my mind. The experience of survival, although I had not consciously sought it, has become a precious, dominating part of the totality of my life’s experience. The Nepal accident has not only changed my life, it has also changed me. Irretrievably, survival in a short time spends an enormous store of life’s energy. The boundless and uncontrolled power that frees itself during situations of danger spends quickly, for a specific purpose and without restrictions the sum store of energy and will for life. Losses of bodily and spiritual power is the price one pays for life itself. Part of the loss is irretrievable and irreparable.

Searching for the secrets of life, propelled by curiosity which I could not curtail, I touched the secrets which I had no need of: the secrets of death. I was very close but it was not fated that I know the very end. As is true for all those who are alive. One must not, nor is it possible, to read the end of the story of life before the fated time. There is only one, always fatal way to discover the unutterable secret of the end of life. At certain moments it seemed that I was so weightless, eternal and without feeling, as though I no longer belonged to the terrestrial world of the lack of freedom of the body and soul. As though for a short time I ceased being a part of the world of human suffering and difficulties which is ruled over by irresistible natural and spiritual forces, in which space is extended on coordinates, and time unstopably flows not heeding those who stop along the road. As though I was touched by the angel of death, taking me gently, smoothly and peacefully into his lap, hinting that there is no sense nor need to ultimately resist.

I thought that I could put up with not only the idea of death but death itself. I feared the sinful and exciting loss of fear in the face of death. I almost came to answering the question whether the last breadth of life is relief and not pain. The explanation of the secret was postponed at the last moment. Maybe that is the last question for which answer we hanker, for whose explanation we live, from which we flee and to which we constantly return. The question which nobody can confirm for us nor that we ourselves have the chance to plausibly formulate. Curiosity of all curiosities. Joy above all joy. And sorrow above all sorrow.
The rescue of my partner in the Himalays did not succeed. The terrain was forbidding. The weather on the mountain after the accident took a turn for the worse. On September 19, 1982 four experienced and strong mountain rescuers from the expedition to Kang Guru, after extreme efforts, did not succeed in reaching our unfortunate comrade. Another search mission was prepared from October 23 to November 1, 1982 in Kathmandu to find the missing mountaineer at all costs. Two mountaineers from the Kang Guru expedition flew by helicopter from Kathmandu to Pisang Peak. It was only on November 3, 1982 that Velimir Šušak’s body was found and buried. Because of inaccessible terrain to descend into the valley was impossible. Veljko Šušak, lover of mountains, who has climbed all the equatorial peaks that he loved and about which he wanted to write a book that will never materialize, was to remain forever on the summits to which he aspired.

Mechanisms of survival affected me without my knowledge or willpower. The beginning is somewhere in the indeterminate, but probably short time, at the very beginning of the accident. Already during the short but accelerated fall, when every movement would have been life-endangering, infallible reactions came to the fore. Owing to the fact that I had not been killed when the fall began, the abilities to survive could manifest themselves in all of their effectiveness even in the brutal conditions of the high mountain.

After the accident it was no longer possible to speak of me as a singular individual, a being with a name, gender and origin. That being was in me trying to survive. The primordial capacity to survive of a living being exposed to danger was set in motion. The absence of fear was not bravery, the absence of exhaustion was not strength, the absence of hunger and thirst was not perseverance. All the activities of the whole of being were effectively directed into the basic aim to survive. The whole organism, with all of its reserves and capabilities served the needs of the machine for survival in the wounded being. The invariant of living beings, the primordial capacity to survive, emerged from beneath the layers of acquired and learned behavior, beneath everything that we would like to know about ourselves, beneath the wished-for characteristics that we constantly ask whether we possess them and in what measure. Perfect mechanisms are built into and preserved in the hidden recesses of the organism. The complex mechanisms of survival move only in extraordinary circumstances. Something turns on and something turns off some switch in the human organism without our willpower. These control elements are inaccessible to conscious beings. The threshold of triggering off the mechanism cannot be anticipated in advance. When the machine starts up, the mechanism is perfect in its functioning, incomparable in its efficiency and unstoppable in its activity. As though at the bottom of human nature there is an inerasable, ultimate layer where there are no desires, thoughts or feelings. In that ultimate layer are collected all the powerful capabilities of the machine for survival, reasonable of themselves and reliable to the end.

When all the sources of survival are spent, one only has a hint of the existence of total tranquility, of a tempting and liberating pre-death feeling, a state without pain and spiritual suffering. What remains is only the consciousness of a unique and unrepeatable being who is more subject to natural laws and who no longer avails himself of bodily strength because he no longer needs it.

But not even the most efficacious mechanism of survival would have been sufficient without the great and selfless help of numerous participants in the rescue mission. Some of them were constantly involved in the rescue mission while others found themselves in the places where events occurred.

Besides my own efforts to survive, mountaineering solidarity gave the essential support for the rescue mission. For the first meeting and for being found I can be thankful to the woman mountaineer from the Japanese expedition, while for for the essential aid I received I am grateful to the other members of the Japanese expedition. I owe my first medical aid to the physicians from the German and the American expedition. The whole rescue was organized and successfully managed by friends from the trekking-group. Great camaraderie was shown by the members of the Croatian expedition to Annapurna and Kang Guru who as soon as humanly possible came from their camps to the place of the accident. Fortunately, amongst them there were experienced rescuers who knew what to do at every moment. The rescue mission was a very complex operation which included many people and teams, starting with the medical crew in Kathmandu hospital, transporters, the airplane crew, airport services and ambulances, all the way to the Accident Hospital in Zagreb where I was given the professional and humane care of the physicians and nurses up to my final recovery.

Finally, I am conscious that I would not have survived regardless all the efforts made by me and the actors in the rescue mission if I did not have a lot of luck and if an unusual set of circumstances had not obtained.
I n searching for the meaning of happiness and suffering, of life and death, the
greatest mistake I made was in seeking an explanation by applying well-established
attitudes, especially for each of these categories separately. Freed of the feeling of the
pride of youth and the triumph of the survivor I anticipate, without giving proof or
imposing upon others, that the meaning of the wholeness of life for the individual, if
it exists, is not in happiness, nor is it in sadness, nor is it in a particular moment but
rather in the continuous experiencing of the uncertain experience of humanity, again
and again, from day to day, sometimes new, sometimes repeated, sometimes exciting,
sometimes boring, frequently terrifying, rarely encouraging but always variable and
unexpected.

The imperfection of our mind, the uncertainty of our feelings, the inability to mas-
ter powers so as to make happy ourselves and others, points to the fact that one’s
experience of the world is not in happiness nor in sadness, that it is not in security
or insecurity, but in that, frequently despised, everyday life, neither beautiful nor ugly
or both beautiful and ugly depending on our, from moment to moment, changing
disposition.

The meaningfulness of the urge to climb high mountains, similar to the urge to un-
dertake other challenging enterprises, if it does not have to do with planned explora-
tions or specific aims such as gaining wealth and/or fame, ought not to be sought
in the rational domain of human behavior but in the deeps of our inherited emo-
tionality. Individuals hanker after excitement and fears when they believe that no
real danger threatens them, when they feel that they are exempt from danger, when
they fool themselves into believing in their invincibility. All of this is highly needed,
invariably thus and not otherwise, for certain persons to be moved to discover the
new and transcend the old whereas for others to persist in maintaining the existing
at all costs. In which process all outcomes are possible.

Observed though the eyes of those who are daily preoccupied by their survival as, for
example, are the Nepalese whom we met on our journey through the valleys of the
rivers Kali Gandaki and Marsyandi, climbing high mountains demands too much
energy and impermissibly great resources, exposes those engaged in the enterprise
to unnecessary dangers which cannot be accounted for by basic human needs. One
could sooner say that the impulse of individuals to undertake extraordinary enter-
prises is founded on the long-ago formed human exploratory nature appropriate for
other circumstances and other natural conditions - a nature that has become discrep-
ant with the possibilities and the benefits created by the abundance of the modern
developed world - or on the insufficiency of natural experiences which today’s man
can avail himself of in daily life.

I was unable to fixate my existence, the existence that I so eagerly wanted to test on
my own skin by way of challenges and a search for unlived experience, through the
description of all the happenings neither in relation to myself, nor in respect to the
community from which I derive. Neither did I do it in relation to the time and space
which I had at my disposal nor, worse, in relation to imaginary eternity or unproven
ideals. I did it only transgenerationally more as a consoling than an explanatory, at
least up to now continuous, but I anticipate unbreakable, series of transfers of expe-
rience amongst persons of similar natures and views which, amongst other things,
include knowledge, spirituality and feeling.

I remember with discomfort that before the events in Nepal, in spite of numerous at-
tempts and great, constant exertion and my search for an answer, I was unable to es-
tablish the complete and permanent unity of body and spirit which as two separate
entities constantly fought for the domination of my individuality. I have an inkling
that the reasons for such a state of disruption lie in the dark prejudices which I was
unable to resist at the time of coming to consciousness about myself as a singular be-
ing. This process took place under the influence of mighty social structures and pow-
ers over a subservient and weak infant being, perhaps with good intentions to facil-
itate life and the inclusion into society with the purpose of creating an accomodating,
unproblematic social being according to the measuring rods embraced by society.

I suppose that I succumbed to delusions not exclusively because of any fault of mine
or because of my frailty, implanted in me through schooling, upbringing and culture.
I later became aware that they facilitate one’s incorporation into society and simplify
survival but that they do not explain reality nor do they provide answers to questions
some people ask but, on the contrary, lead us to desist from essential questions in the
name of a promised but never insured security. I am even more astounded by the
insight about the ease of succumbing to self-delusions as an unavoidable means of
survival in the unequal conflict between our desires and capabilities and the natural
and social reality that surrounds us.

Only genuine bodily pain and the challenges of the spirit, more during the period of
rehabilitation than at the time of the accident itself, made me feel singular but not
proud, at peace with my human incompleteness, bodily frailty and spiritual uncer-
tainty. The accident itself and the prolonged healing did not decrease nor did they
increase my being although they inevitably transformed it. They did this through
enforced self-observation, through a heightened attentiveness to my surround-
ings bestowing new distinctions of particularity. Healing testifies to the capacity to
accomodate oneself, to the enrooted will for life and is a joint act of both physician and patient but also of the broader community including family and friends.

I wholeheartedly tried to convince myself about the importance of the imposed thesis concerning the formative importance of acquiring life experience through different challenges, including pain and suffering, as something that one has to go through alongside learning and reading in order to obtain something that is vaguely defined as maturity and more vaguely as the deeper understanding of something indeterminate. However, all that has been recorded in these notes fortified my belief that I was an inseparable part of animate and inanimate nature, something that I had always felt as an unbreakable connection and that filled me with faith and love for the world around me, reminding me of the childish joy I felt when I, picking an apple from a tree, thought that I and the apple are one and the same thing.

It would not be proper to suppress a bitter, uncomely, fallacious and foremost of all irrational feeling of satisfaction in the victim which, seemingly through affliction and suffering, redeems the sin of his unconfirmed fulness of humanity. The outer manifestation of this kind of feeling evinces itself in constant attempts to bring to notice bodily injuries and accompanying sufferings as evident differences between victims and others, conditionally speaking, those who are not victims. Connected to this is a new kind of curiosity, a curiosity that it is nasty to speak of, which is produced by doubts about how much pain and suffering the human being can bear? Unwillingly but, nevertheless, I do mention that at times I thought that what we have here is something that some define as masochism which is reflected in the not wholly conscious search for the the temptations of the body and soul through pain and suffering.

Thinking about suffering prior to a serious experience of pain simply calls forth horror, necessary and requisite for foreseeing and avoiding circumstances that can be the source of pain. However, the sufferer in pain and suffering confronts the unknown of how to withstand them especially if we are dealing with pains which endure or return or repeat themselves. My experience testifies that the horror ensuing from the onset of pain derives from not knowing its possible intensity but that every kind of pain has its own kind of surplus value which one can withstand or “switches” go off that disconnect consciousness. Pain and suffering, when they cannot be avoided, can be an important experience that changes our ideas about the world and the human being himself but more as a consoling prize than the goal one must aim at.

On the other hand, wholly rationally and based on experience, an impulse arises in the sufferer to lessen the consequences of his injury, ultimately to understate his reduced capability, all in the hope that society will not revalorize his work capability and assign him a reduced role in society. And not only this but during the time I was under treatment I wanted at any price to obtain from expressing pain. Like a little child that is taught how men do not show their feelings, I wanted to suppress my physical pain and prove, not so much to myself as to the imaginary authorities from childhood, that I can put up with pain without yells or tears.

Through the period of convalescence I felt a fear deep inside me, a fear familiar from early childhood and a fear that after the described events I will never forget, that as wounded and incapacitated as I was my community will justly, for the purpose of the survival of the remaining majority, leave me by the roadway because I alone cannot go on. I am now ready to believe that the fear of being abandoned by society because of the incapacity to continue an independent life is stronger than the fear of death or is at least equal to it. For that matter, in most cases the outcome is the same.

At the same time suspicion grew concerning my own actions as an imitation of life as it was presented to me through my upbringing and schooling, through art and a superficial religiosity, through a tradition handed down from one generation to the next. Because, looking backwards, these actions were not aimed at discovering something objectively new nor at conquering space, gaining knowledge of new truths. They followed imposed patterns through social expectations and they were used only to satisfy an unclear yearning to be different than what you were, special, observable and, even worse, to be different from the others which was the greatest delusion that does not fill me with pride but rather with a strange discomfort.

An inappropriate desire to be perfect emerged in the immense desire to experience one’s own capabilities because of both interior impulses and imposed social expectations. Unfortunately, the measures of perfection were not known to me in absolute coordinates but always relatively in relation to some models. I am filled with unease remembering my impulses to be better, stronger and more successful than my fellow men with a deep apology that then I did not know better. Connected to this was the unfounded belief that life’s energy is continuously and completely renewed. Truth to say, a great deal is renewed but a part is irrevocably lost which ultimately is not a bad thing because this gradually decreases the will for new tasks and imperceptibly leads the individual into a life of peace and tranquility. In connection to this I have to say that I frequently remember Veljko and although I know it makes no sense I imagine that the fall never happened and that we continued our lives there where we broke it up by going to Nepal.

From time to time, usually in moments of faint-heratedness and a bad mood, sinful thoughts emerge about how it was easy and simple there high on the ice and snow of Pisang Peak to fall asleep forever. Remembering the state of bliss immediately before I was found, the pleasant floating in the fog without the effort of desire, I sometimes wretchedly thought that it was an unique opportunity to have departed not being
conscious of it nor knowing what had happened to me. Yet when I now look back on these thoughts I would say that these are not primary desires but a quite morbid feeling of self-pity and affectation.

After 20 years I can no longer, even with the greatest effort of willpower, remember and restore the reasons why I was ready and willing to pay the price of great effort and suffering, even the price of my life, in order to go to places that can be reached only with difficulty. If this is something that is usually called maturity, if this is coming to terms with one’s own restrictive capabilities then the acceptance of peace and quiet is an accompanying and beneficial consequence. However, this acceptance does not fill man with complete satisfaction nor is it desirable as a permanent state of the spirit and body but it seems that the calming of the body and spirit is relentless, something that we rather call life’s experience than getting old which in reality it is.

Sad to say, after the accident nobody looked at me or saw me as other than a victim. This has remained my basic social identification which I sometime put up with in an easier or harder manner but which, because of the self-evidence, I cannot contradict except with a forced smile and jokes about my own position. In the meantime I have more and more frequent dreams in which I, again young and healthy, wander the mountains and freely, without effort run barefoot across the immeasurable flatland of my home place, between wheat and corn fields, sucking in the lucid morning air with full lungs easily and smilingly, on indefatigable healthy legs while around me fly swallows and skylarks and high in the sky hawks are seeking out their victims.
Owing to the unbelievable development of technology it is possible on a satellite photo of Pisang Peak with its surroundings to partially reconstruct the path of the fall to the place where rescue was possible.

Trekking Permit of the Nepalese Ministry of Tourism

The group in front of the embassy in New Delhi before departure for Nepal
Children

Last consultations – the worried sirdar Kani

Kathmandu

Marpha

Last swim on the journey
The valley of the river Kali Gandaki
View from the roof of the climbing school in Mananga on Pisang Peak before the decision to make the climb
Last photograph from the summit of Pisang taken by the hand of Veljko Šušak a few minutes before the fall; in the background one can make out Kang Guru where our friends from the ski expedition are.
I was born. I attended school with interest and grew up in inspiring surroundings. The work that befell me in life I did with joy and delight. That was happiness. I married and have children. That too was happiness. Curiosity, to want to know and to know how to want gave directions to my life more than anything else. I sought ways to humanization through variegated experiences through which the human being can pass. Mountains, both small and large, and that unknown lurking on the other side brought me rapture, unrest, an impulse that I could not resist. Initially I started out alone, then with friends, then with a mountaineering company, with an Alpinist school, then alone again, then farther and farther, higher and higher. I passed through many magnificent places but I was unable, did not know how, to stop, until I was stopped. Now I know that all of experience is inaccessible to the person desirous of experience. Each person has to come to terms with the experience that is given him or bitterly grieve for what has not been experienced. After the accident on Pisang Peak about which I write in these notes, I stopped for a short time and then continued onward but in a different manner without bitterness or complaint for the past. I recorded the experiences of a deeply rooted impulse for survival before they fade from memory or, even worse, before they, illusory, might be deemed an exaggeration.

Born 1948 in Somobor, at the bottom of the one-time Panonian sea. Completed a course of study of naval architecture at the University of Zagreb. Worked as a young engineer at the shipbuilding yard in Split, as an informatician in the University Computer Center and as a professor at the Faculty of Engineering and Naval Architecture in Zagreb where I work today.

Kalman Žiha
“I am in free fall down the steep slope. It seems easy and simple. I hardly feel my own weight. Other operating forces are not observable. I do not feel the blows of the surface. Not one muscle is tense, they are relaxed, wholly accommodating themselves to the obstacles beneath, without feeling, without cramps or resistance. I am not uncomfortable. Neither am I comfortable. Space no longer represents a system of coordinates. It is of no significance what is left, right, above or below. The only things that are important are the disturbances and the obstacles on the path of the fall. I no longer see my partner. My thoughts do not go back to him. I do not feel afraid. In reality I feel nothing.”

*The story was created at the time when I realized that the memories of the event that changed my life plans, and the plans of others, were fading. It is authentic to that extent in which an individual can subjectively retell the reality in accordance with his modest writing experience. I wanted to communicate the feeling of the will to survive as a reminder of our legacy in the fight for survival.*

*Kalman Žiha*

This story is amazing: no matter how many times I read it, I always breathlessly fall through the layers of my own thoughts, feelings, fears… as if the irreplaceable life force of which he is speaking is running out of me. As if the rule that states that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger isn't applicable anymore. Man is not a machine. No matter how much Kalman really is an engineer. I'm cold. It hurts. And nevertheless, fascinated by the hallucinations that are reproduced in his mind during the fever, I even laugh for a moment. And I cry every time when his hand suddenly grabs the rope that comes by his ear hissing like a snake.

*Sonja Bennet*