

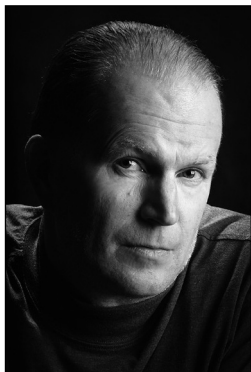
RAX RINNEKANGAS



LEON TROTSKY'S STOPWATCH

LURRA Editions

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Rax Rinnekangas is an author and film director. His most recent works include *Mestarin viimeinen toivomus* (Master's last wish, 2019), an essay of reading three times *The Brothers Karamazov* of Dostoevsky in a monastery, and *Nocturama: Sebaldia lukiessa* (Nocturama: Reading Sebald, 2013), an account of experiencing the literature of W.G. Sebald and the works of Peter Handke, Thomas Bernhard, and Imre Kertész, authors of the same spiritual circle. In his art films, Rinnekangas has examined architecture, visual art, and social themes. *Two North(s) & a little part of anywhere*, a collection of his six feature films with the music scores by Pascal Gaigne, a French-Spanish composer, was published in 2018 and is distributed by Quartet Records (Spain), one of the world's leading publishers of the cinema music. American streaming service Kanopy distributes his architecture films. He has published photographic works on subjects such as Europeanism and the Holocaust and had 60 private exhibitions in various countries (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, 2003, Centro de la Imagen in Mexico City, 2007). His literary works have been published in France, Germany, and Spain: *La lune s'enfuit*, Editions Phébus, France, 2011; *Le juif égaré*, Editions Phébus, France, 2013; *Der Mond flieht*, Graf Verlag, Germany, 2014; *La Partida*, El Desvelo Ediciones, Spain, 2010; *La Luna se escapa*, El Aleph Editores, 2012; *Adana*, El Desvelo Ediciones, Spain, 2019. His works have received numerous awards, including the Finnish State Prize for Literature, the Finnish State Prize for Photographic Art, the Honoured Jury Prize of the International Festival of Films on Art (FIFA), Montreal, the Alex North Prize, Spain. *Leon Trotsky's Stopwatch* describes the evolution of the most misunderstood great figure of the early 20th century and portrays the Jewish politician, philosopher, and advocate for world-wide equality who was assassinated in Mexico in 1940 with a different aura than the one the early Stalinist world wanted to give him. It's also a different love story at a time when the concept of time has lost its original meaning.

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STOPWATCH

TRANSLATED BY

Lola Rogers

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Quotes from W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* are translated by Anthea Bell, W.G. Sebald: *Austerlitz* (Random House, 2001).

Quotes from Leon Trotsky's *Testament* are translated by Elena Zarudnaya, *Trotsky's Diary in Exile, 1935*, Faber and Faber, 1958

Quotes from Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet* are translated by Lola Rogers from Sanna Pernu's Finnish translation *Viisas elämä*, 2016.

Quotes from Imre Kertész's *Galley Diary* are translated by by Lola Rogers from Outi Hassi's Finnish translation *Kaleeripäiväkirja*, Otava, 2008.

Quotes from Kahlil Gibran's "On Children" are from his 1923 collection *The Prophet*.

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”Nothing in his life became him
like the leaving it.”

William Shakespeare

THE CODE

1.

That autumn, at the beginning of humanity's final century, when humankind was at long last finding the courage to acknowledge the dramatic change that had occurred in the planet's climate and I had travelled to Mexico to shoot the last film of my documentary series, I had as yet no idea of the extent to which humankind's conception of its entire history was based on the same sort of cowardice. Hand in hand, with eyes closed, we were living a collective lie buttressed by our need to see our history, its central figures and the factors that influenced their fates in a concrete light, to the exclusion of their more equivocal psychological intricacies. I was also unable to conceive of the idea that almost as soon as I had arrived in Mexico City I would encounter real lions. Up to that point I had thought, like many people, that

almost all of the lions left on the planet were living in captivity in the numerous zoos of the Western world, and that any remaining wild lions were wandering somewhere on the African savannah, where very rich people went to secretly hunt them so they could mount their heads on the walls of their mansions. I'd seen, of course, the documentary about the shameful treatment of perhaps the proudest creatures in all creation. In certain African countries there were centers run by parasitic humans, black and white, where clones were made from lions abducted from the wild, and anyone with an interest in violence and animal torture could go there to kill them, for a large fee. But the idea of absolutely real, living lions in the garden of a middle-sized, two-story, Spanish-style hotel in the Tacubaya neighborhood of Mexico City had never entered my mind.

The hotel was a hacienda-style compound and I was staying for three weeks in a room in one of its annexes. My window opened directly onto a lush garden covered in foliage and intersected by a little gurgling brook with the hotel restaurant on the other side, and between the

brook and the restaurant's outdoor tables were the lions, living in two connected steel cages. There were two lions—an elderly female and a young male. Golden brown, quite muscular under the circumstances, thoroughly noble and unconcerned in spite of their living conditions, they lay behind their bars as if in some twice-removed reality, or walked unhurriedly from one cage to the other casting indifferent glances at the hotel guests, who sat about ten meters away at their breakfast tables marveling at the presence of these animals, until they grew accustomed to them and became absorbed in their meals. In the darkest hours of night I heard strangled-sounding roars that made it seem as if I were sleeping at the edge of a jungle in some small African nation.

I didn't really wonder much at the arrangement – I was in Mexico now, after all. With each meal I watched these enigmatic animals, whose invisible mental state and visible physical state impressed me above all in a moral and emotional sense because, for one thing, in any other country keeping lions in a cage in a hotel garden would almost certainly be prohibited. But

not in Mexico. It was a country where ancient and indivisible self-interest and the individual right to enjoyment still reigned and legislative oversight by the corrupt government was a mere formality. The ones with actual rights were the aristocratic upper classes, and on another, more dire level el cartel de la droga, whose members divided the large country into their own personal dominions beginning at the southern border of the United States, slaughtering each other pitilessly and in the process murdering innocent bystanders with increasing frenzy and, by these openly genocidal acts of public terrorism which reached across both Americas, achieved an annual economic output greater than that of the entire country of Mexico. The right of the family who owned the hotel to have openly kept, for some unknown reason, ten or more African lions, one after another, in their idyllic hotel garden, is an example of how far an individual's idea of his rights could be taken in that country.

I spent all my early mornings and many of my evenings near the lions as I ate my meals in the garden, which made me even more sensi-

tive than usual to the progression of thoughts I found myself in. I watched the animals' proud and self-assured figures in the steel cage prison that made it impossible for them to turn around more than twice in its ten square meters, let alone exercise all their natural need to run free and hunt, which must have caused them horrible suffering, and in those hours of deep anguish I imagined them in their true home on the African savannah with its grasses and trees, from whence they had been taken by some dark route of civilization to this prison, a fact they outwardly seemed to accept, but which they couldn't for one second forget in this occult ritual where they performed the part of unending dignity for the audience of hotel guests, a role they had mastered as Homer's Odysseus had when trapped in the cave at the hands of the cyclops Polyphemus. I saw the lions as thinking, creative individuals, and as I observed the demeanor of these creatures imprisoned in their cages I pondered all of humanity on our planet and all their wrongheaded ideas, the creative individual's state of simultaneous imprisonment and liberty under those circumstances, the fact that even if our political reality represses spiri-

tuality, consciously and unconsciously ignoring the significance of the creative individual in the development of society, both creativity and its suppression have nevertheless always been essential to the birth of local identities, including Mexico's, through a litany of names spanning the cruel and bloody history of the formation of the country: Porfilio Díaz, Émiliano Zapata, Lázaro Cárdenas, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, Fernando Leal, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera... It was through the joined, bloody hands of the soldiers and politicians and artists who made revolutions that the Mexican people's concept of its identity was born, its national imagery, its citizens' sense of home. The latter, in a broader sense, was part of the reason I had begun my documentary project.

With the help of an architect friend I had chosen five private homes in different countries and on different continents that represented the architectural peak of 20th century modernism. Through the physical and psychological substance of the houses and their designers' signatures I would, in the resulting documentary series, give a complete picture of the approach

to architectural language and the concept of home in different cultures and language areas. The chosen houses were in central Moscow in Russia; outside the city of Ashiya in Japan; on a steep, narrow spit of land in the bay at Monaco; in my home country of Finland; and in Mexico. After a phase of preparation that lasted a year, I had obtained permission to film in all the houses, and funding from various sources around the world, and I had completed shooting in all of the destinations except Mexico City, where the project had now led me for the second time.

Before I began filming the final installment in the series, whose subject was located near my hotel in the Tacubaya neighborhood, I held a week-long workshop at a private film school in the southern part of the central city. There were about sixty students in the course, widely ranging in age and nationality. For five days I lectured on the film language represented in my work and my conviction that a film image of even one minute's duration, whether fictional or documentary, is something completely different from the mere pictorial surface that

strikes the eye. An image is not just an image but also a multi-layered code system that must be deciphered and understood in the same way that we decipher, interpret, and understand multi-layered literature, and I showed the class various shots from my films as examples and had heated discussions with the class about my vision. It was all the usual ego-stroking and helpful interaction with my students to which I'd grown accustomed in various workshops in various countries over the years. But then, at the end of the last day of the course, the whole meaning of the class, as well as the whole direction of my life, changed quite unexpectedly when a woman of about forty, black-haired, tall and erect, stepped forward from the back of the lecture room and asked if she could show me her photographs.

That evening after the final film showing we met in the school's cafeteria and she—Veronica Díaz, originally from Spain, a woman shot through with suppressed sorrow, as I sensed from the first moment I saw her, and confirmed later—opened up a leather portfolio she'd brought and laid before me a series of

Mexico City – Autumn 2004.

A Nordic filmmaker arrives in the city to make a documentary about a major architectural landmark – Luis Barragán's Casa Estudio house.

He meets a Mexican woman who opens a totally new door into the world of the Russian Jewish ex-communist leader Leon Trotsky, who was murdered in Mexico in August 1940.

The encounter sends the filmmaker on an extraordinary journey into an entirely new aspect of the most mistreated political figure of the 20th century and his philosophy.

The novel is also an exceptional love story set in an era when the concept of time has lost its original meaning and climate change is just an unpleasant possibility.

