



Flight patterns

Susan Jahoda

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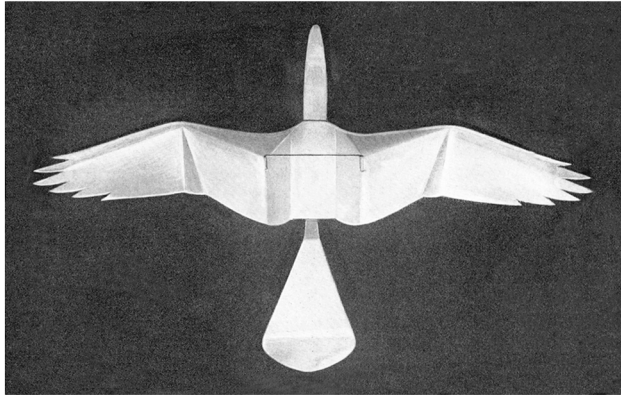
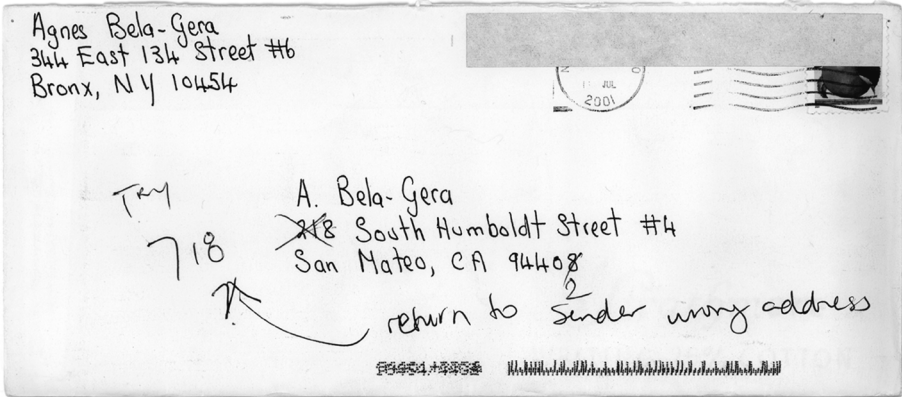
Flight Patterns

Susan Jahoda

Flight Patterns concerns a person writing and sending letters to herself at addresses in ten cities across the United States. Her return address and the letters' destinations are vacant lots where residential buildings no longer exist. These letters are found to be undeliverable by the post office, and are returned to the sender, who is also unable to be found.

Contained within each envelope is a segment of a narrative, and in most cases, a photograph. The narrative develops over the duration of the mailings. It activates a conception of time and borderless space, open to occupation by displaced persons seeking escape from the fixed identities of a post-colonial discourse.

I wish to thank Tia Phillips, Warren Heckstall, manager of the Mott-Haven Post Office, and Lydia Vega, the mail carrier for Route #1. Without their collaboration this project would not have been possible.



Esu-Elegbara, the trickster figure, appears in West Africa and the African Diaspora as a messenger, linguist, metaphysician, and interpreter who presides over the crossroads. A divine mediator of information and communication, he subverts the codes and dynamics he simultaneously reinforces.

344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N. Y. 10454

July 13, 2001

Dear A,

I am at a juncture, an intersection. It's a curious location. Perhaps I'll move to another city.

On my way to a job interview, yesterday I saw Esu-Elegbara, trickster of the crossroads, stepping out of the offices of GEO Information and Mapping. As I passed in front of him he seemed to recognize the book I was carrying. As naturally as smiling, he turned to follow me.

A gust of wind unexpectedly stole the book from my grip, and blew its pages into a stream of passing traffic. Somebody shouted, "Don't move!" When I turned I saw a man in a wheelchair peeling two of the detached sheets off his jacket. He handed them to me and I thanked him. Then a bus pulled up beside us, and the man stood up, adeptly collapsed the chair, and disappeared inside. I watched the vehicle break into a line of cars, then walked toward something fluttering on the pavement.

A swan rose from the waters off a lake. Its neck, the trickster noticed, was pink as the single magnolia blossom on a nearby tree. Esu-Elegbara entered the mind of the flying bird and saw a map of a city spread below.

Clouds obscured the sun as I gathered the last pages from the street and put them, randomly, within their covers. The book sank to the bottom of my shoulder bag when I boarded the cross-town bus at East 79th Street. And in the green, between one side of town and the other, the clouds thinned to slivers.

Agnes

344 East 134th St. #6
Bronx, N.Y. 10454

July 16, 2001

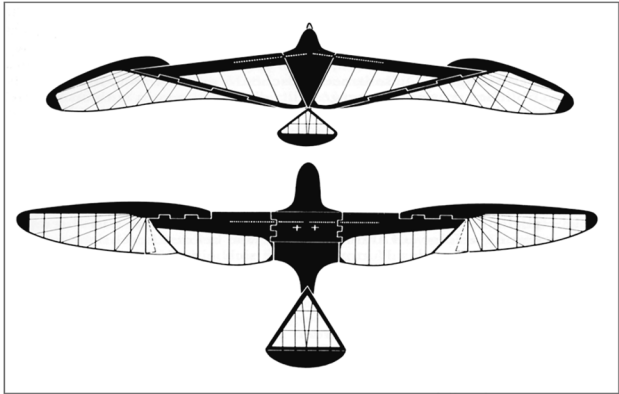
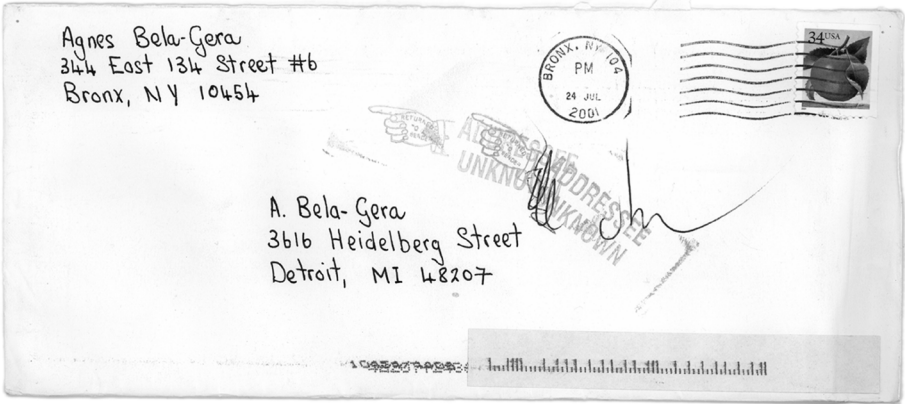
Dear A,

I recently met somebody who reminded me of you. He was pacing the lobby of the building where I was going for a job interview. When I mentioned to him the name of the man I was looking for, he smiled and followed me into the elevator. We stopped on the fifth floor and he opened the gate. There was nobody there. He said we should wait for a minute or two, and then sat down on a stool, tapping his heel against a metal bar. He seemed to be studying the shape of my head, indirectly, through the mirror on the rear wall of the elevator. I cleared my throat and looked at my watch, hoping that the sound would draw his attention away from the mirror. He asked if I was in a hurry. I said I was.

Reaching down through his unbuttoned shirt collar, the man pulled out a medallion, almost two inches in diameter. He moved it back and forth on a knotted chain and then let it hang freely. Not wanting to stare, I turned toward the mirror to see it more clearly. It showed the trickster of the crossroads, engraved with two mouths. He was riding on the back of a bird in flight. The man got up from his seat, stepped outside, and seemed to disappear.

Esu-Elegbara entered the elevator. A bell rang and the second floor light turned red. Esu ignored the call and transported me to the top of the building. "I know you," he said as he aligned the lift bed with the ninth floor. I asked him if he was the neighbor who took in my grandmother when the property was sold. The trickster replied, "I know him, but I am not he." The air filled with the smell of eucalyptus. Esu felt the sea breeze on the shores of Senegal. He was a cedar-wood boat cutting through the blue waters in moonlight. The trees were still, like flamingos in the dark.

Agnes



344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N. Y. 10454

July 21, 2001

A,

Have you ever been inside one of those elegant apartment buildings on the Upper West Side of Manhattan?

Last Monday I interviewed for a job as a free-lance editor. When I got to the client's door there was no bell, so I knocked. There was no answer. He might have been watching me through the peephole. I heard the sound of a deadbolt snapping back into its mechanism, and then the door opened. The man appeared with a grayness, like a prisoner in need of a change of air. He suggested I follow him down the hall into his office. When offered a chair, I said I would rather stand. I asked him if he wrote for a living. "Sometimes," he answered, and then lit a cigarette.

I stepped backwards onto a pile of crumpled papers, my shoe leaving an imprint across a number of sheets. The man turned his head, exhaled, and then flicked some ash into a saucer. I bent down, intending to straighten the papers but, instead, picked up a sheet, and read in a whisper.

"I took the bird by its neck and squeezed hard. Its breath came in short bursts. A heat from its swelling breast warmed my palm. Its death was repulsive."

The man smiled and said that he had an interest in ornithology, that he wrote about flight strategies in his free time. "Actually," he continued, "I'm an engineer, specializing in invisible fencing for border territories."

This is a city where crossroads lead to dead ends. This is a city of electronic signals that causes birds in flight to lose direction.

Agnes

Agnes Bela-Gera
344 East 134 Street #6
Bronx, NY 10454

ATTEMPTED - NOT KNOWN
JUL 21 2001
600840

BRONX, NY 104
PM
21 JUL
2001



A. Bela-Gera
1968 West Foster #60
Chicago IL 60625

60625/156



344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N.Y. 10454

July 24, 2001

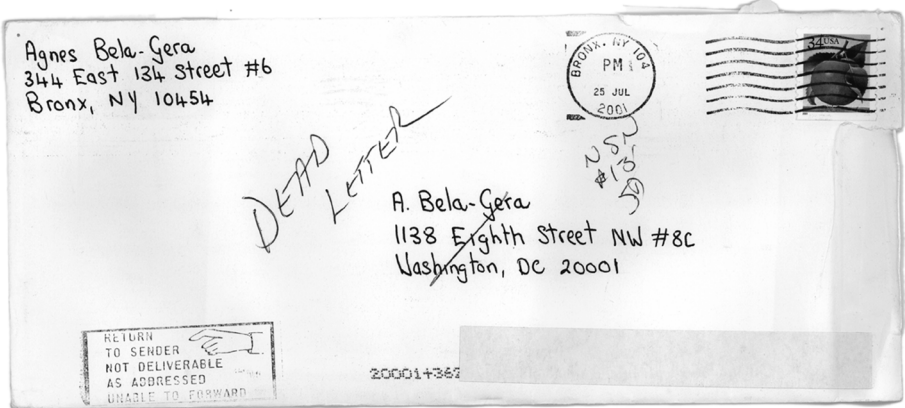
Dear A,

Anger is a formless, disembodied mass that seeks residence in unsuspecting sites.

Anger is airless.

Anger tortures its hosts.

Agnes



344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N.Y. 10454

July 25, 2001

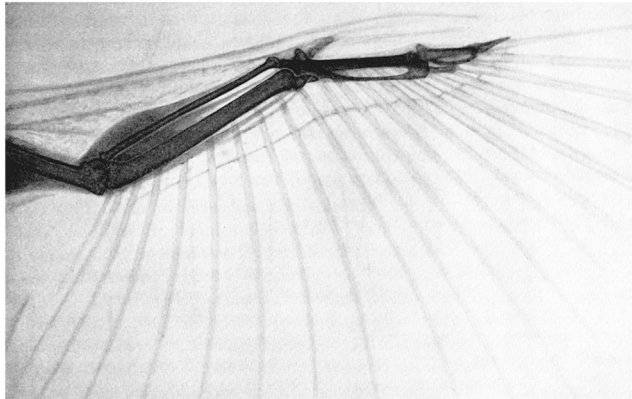
A,

I am at a juncture, an intersection. It's a curious location. Perhaps I'll move to another city.

Earlier today I walked into a café on Broadway and ordered a sandwich. A child at the next table demanded in a loud voice "I want a yellow ice-cream."
"It doesn't come in yellow. Would you like banana?" his mother inquired.
"No, I want yellow," insisted the child, tipping the sugar over onto its side.
"Calm down," the child's father said, righting the sugar.
"Daddy, I want yellow."
"It doesn't come in yellow."
"I want Andrews then," he said

Without hesitation the child lurched forward and snatched his friend's cone. Stunned by the unexpected theft, the boy began to cry. Coolly, the father licked his index finger and gathered up spilled chocolate particles that lay scattered on the tabletop. They clung to his skin, as if to a magnet. Then he put the finger close to his son's face and asked him if he knew what happened to people that took things from others. The child replied that he didn't know. "They lose all sense of direction, and walk in circles until they die from exhaustion."

Agnes



344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N. Y. 10454

July 26, 2001

Dear A,

I know very little about the flight strategies of birds. For example, how do birds decide whether to ignore topographic features or follow them?

I was sitting in the reference room of the Public library when I felt a hand on my shoulder. "Sorry I'm late," the trickster of the crossroads said. "There was a fire in the subway and I couldn't find a taxi." He took a handkerchief from his trouser pocket and, pointing to a dust mark on the front of my blouse, wiped away the imprint left by the books that I had carried from the shelf to the table.

"hate for what?" I asked.

"Confirming the reasons for turning down the engineer," he said, and smiled.

I asked him if he was the man who gave my family money when my father was arrested.

"I know him, but I am not he," the trickster replied. The air filled with the smell of eucalyptus. Esu-Flegbara felt the sea breeze on the shores of Senegal. A door opened in the dark. Time lay across the floor like shadows of a prison's bars.

Esu-Flegbara said that he needed to return to the conference on Information and Mapping, where a meeting on more effective border patrolling was underway. As he moved toward the door I noticed that one of his legs was slightly shorter than the other, causing him to walk with a limp.

Agnes

Agnes Bela-Gera
344 East 134 Street #6
Bronx, NY 10454



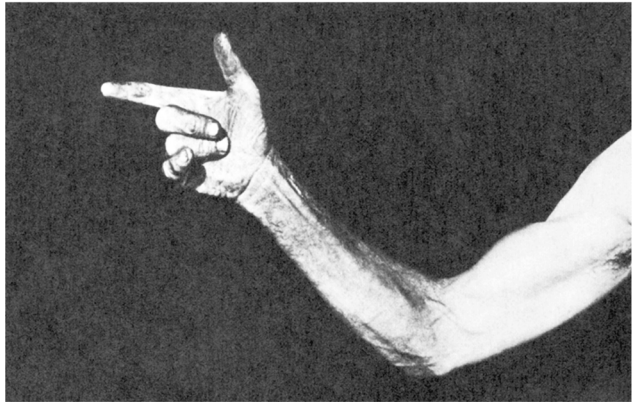
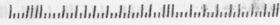
A. Bela-Gera
17 North Michigan Ave
Atlantic City, NJ

RTS
RETURN TO SENDER

- INSUFFICIENT ADDRESS
- ATTEMPTED NOT KNOWN
- NO SUCH NUMBER/STREET
- NOT DELIVERABLE AS ADDRESSED
- UNABLE TO FORWARD

OTHER A
C
S

10454/4408



344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N.Y. 10454

July 30, 2001

Dear A,

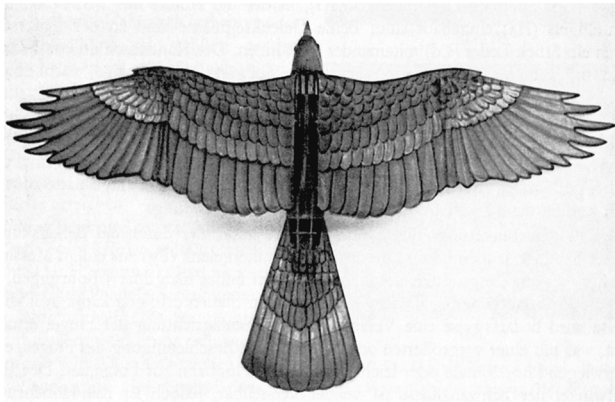
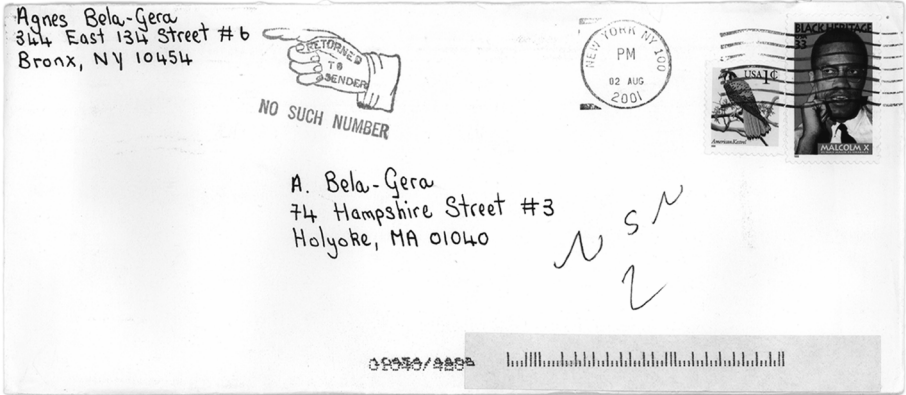
A woman in dark glasses and a burnt-orange coat got onto the train at Prospect Street and sat down next to me. When the train was underway, she got up and moved next to a man fingering a large bunch of keys. He glanced at her, and then spread his legs wide so that his knee touched her thigh. She didn't move. He ground his heels into the floor. When the train stopped a number of people got off, leaving the three of us alone in the car. The woman began to speak.

"People all over the world are in captivity, in ecstasy and pain. Departing from and arriving in places for reasons that are not their own. Why has no one searched for the shape of the world in my belly, felt the beat of its heart with their fingers?"

She repeated these words several times until I knew them well enough to follow along. Then, abruptly, she stopped, peered at her watch, and declared that it was eleven sixteen. The man lifted a plastic bag that had been leaning against his side and let it hang between his legs. After a minute he turned toward her, made eye contact, and offered her the bunch of keys. The woman said, "Thank you for your contribution."

He got off at the next stop, and she and I got off at the Bronx Zoo

Agnes



344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N.Y. 10454

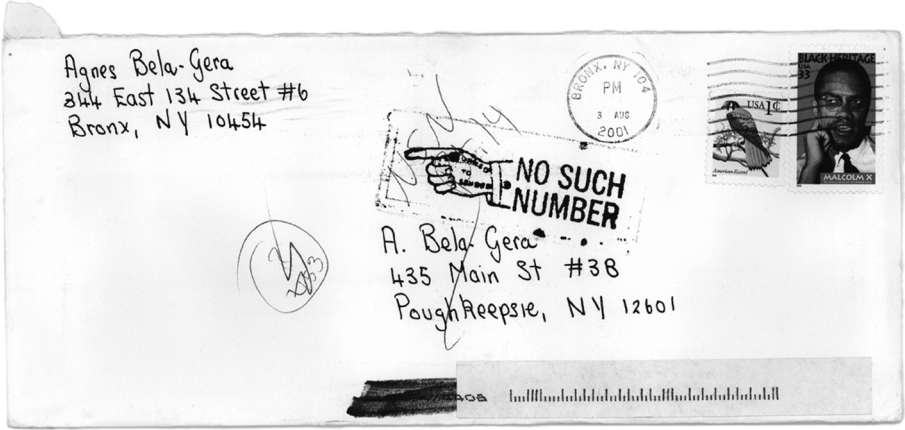
August 2, 2001

A,

The bird and reptile house at the Bronx Zoo has a variety of chameleons. Today, after careful watching, I spotted a three-horned male. Its eyes rotated independently as its skin changed color from head to tail. When an employee sprinkled insects into its ersatz home, the lizard disappeared into available foliage. I stood looking for at least ten minutes but I couldn't detect any movement.

Fsu-Elegbara put his hand on my shoulder and said, "We met in Birmingham, Alabama. You were a journalist, bitten by dogs, and I was a musician who used my instrument to strike a National Guardsman." I took a step forward and embraced him. Fsu searched in his mind for the name of the scent which lingered on his leathery skin.

Agnes



344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N. Y. 10454

August 3, 2001

Dear A.

I am at a juncture, an intersection. It's a curious location. Perhaps I'll move to another city.

Today, a woman in a yellow skirt sat down at my table at The Internet Café, and began to engage me in conversation. Something about her was vaguely familiar. I mentioned that I had been working for an international employee placement bureau, as a profile analyst. She asked me what a profile analyst does. I told her that we provide job seekers with questionnaires appropriate to the positions they are seeking, and then, after analyzing the data, make suggestions to job counselors about who should apply for particular listings. I told her that I had recently resigned, in anticipation of being fired. Someone would eventually have discovered that I was reconfiguring questionnaires to produce atypical responses.

"Did you witness any unusual hirings as a result of your interventions," she asked? I said that it was impossible to tell. Catching my eye, the woman asked what I was staring at. I told her I couldn't decipher the two black shapes on the opposite facade. "Are they crows or diamond shaped windows?"

At the next table, Esu-Flegbara was exploring Internet sites, looking for material for a story he was writing about African Kingdoms and the civil rights movement. He looked over and greeted us, his eyes shining as he watched the woman finish her drink.

Agnes

Agnes Bela-Gera
344 East 134 Street #6
Bronx, NY 10454



A. Bela-Gera
344 East 134 Street #6
Bronx, NY 10454

10454+4406 

344 East 134th St #6
Bronx, N.Y. 10454

August 4, 2001

Dear A,

At sunset today I went to collect some remaining paperwork from the cubicle that was my office. It's situated in one of those cement and glass buildings with windows that can't be opened. Twenty-four hours a day, the building's systems drone and knock. The place seemed breathless, underground.

Last night Esv-Flegbara came to me as a birdman, carrying a book of empty pages. Placing the book in my hands, he told me to collect all my memories, envision them as unidentifiable landscapes, and walk without origin or destination.

Then he said, "When you have finished your journey, return the book to me."

Agnes