

If the swallows fly low, they indicate rain

Patrick Böttner

Oh, it's a mystery to me. How something of the past becomes the motor of the present, a messiah of a future. What I am talking about is the moped Simson KR51 which is more commonly known as "Schwalbe" - the German word for the passerine songbird swallow. The older the model, the better. If you can get your hands on such a scooter produced and licensed before February 28, 1992, you can ride legally at a pace of sixty kilometers an hour. Twice as fast as the first driving license could get you at the age of fifteen - a fortune having to do with old East German registration rules, that no one really understood. It was in its function not merely a moped but a sacred time machine, a way of delivering oneself at high velocity out of the present into a future. Escaping what was left of time. Although if one were to close his eyes and try to envision such a machine, he wouldn't necessarily think of two tires on a blue steel frame looking like the East German socialist

copy of an Italian Vespa, a symbol for a united German *dolce vita*.

Yet they were hotly sought after and easily found in the villages, as our fathers held them at our age as well - the longing to flee, not a play programmed into teenage brains, but a duty inherent to a bounded life. Trying to break out before the invention of Google Maps, most of them got lost, ran out of fuel, or crashed like my father. He still has a mark sitting on his right shoulder - the devil, in the size of his old man hand. Holding back and reminding him of his rainy tragedy.

No one ever got as far as I did.

I decide to head back in time. The ancestral Time Machine between my legs and the sixty kilometers unfolding before my eyes.

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Altogether it is quite the remarkable bird.

It can only launch itself into flight by
diving off of something high, staying
airborne for 10 months of the year, feeding
and sleeping on the wing.

Diving down the road I know, I launch
myself into the past. Traversing into
adulthood, I have spent more than three
years fluttering. Flying so low that there
is nothing ahead of me but storm. Amidst
storm and wind there is a glimpse of
homeness ahead - already shivering, I
accelerate. I accelerate until the engine
roars. I accelerate until there is nothing
left to shiver.

And I seem to wander endlessly between the
trees that frame the federal highway and
the trees that frame this lifelong tragedy.

The rain awakens me. Caught by the trees
and thrown back at a guarded, frightened
face. My guard is the glass. The glass of
the window, the glass resting on my nose.

How am I to find a home with something
blocking my sight?

Even sixty kilometers per hour won't take
me off the ground.