AN ODE TO RESEARCH/ERS

I picture Lara Croft meets Abu Nasr al-Farabi,
meets Indiana Jones meets Chandra Talpade Mohanty,
meets Captain Nemo meets Patricia Hill Collins,
meets you and you and you and you.

What do you want to be?
we were asked
when we were younger.
Back then our hunger for a better future had us
answer vet, fire brigade, astronaut, dog trainer,
doctors without borders,
Our dreams had us say actor, dancer, pop star,
artist, superhero, world explorer
Nothing seemed impossible!

Our minds not yet fully corrupted by capitalism;
no one said billionaire.
We didn't care for all the riches in the world,
we just wanted to play and be happy.

Which is to say
our empathy wasn't yet depleted;
no one said fascist, misogynist,
coloniser, homophobe, transphobe, Nazi.
But here we are today, gathered in a country that
supports a genocide, has cut funding for
education and the arts, and stopped all international
humanitarian financial aid to gender related projects.

I wonder what was the day we
lost our sense of wonder?

Our imagination amputated,
strangled by algorithms,
suffocated by clickbait headlines.
We are cuckolded by corporate elites who
fuck with our lives, while we are witnessing
the most unsatisfying ending.
There is no pretending, we live in an age
where fiction has become fact, where
politicians act to advance their own agendas.

We've grown numb, dumbed down by
oversimplified one-sided propaganda.

We rewrite histories into science fiction,
and turn the present into horror stories.
Her stories become his stories.
White lies become truth.
We place our hope in youth, but
naivety can easily be exploited.
Fear and anger are powerful engines
perpetually feeding addiction and hate.

With scientists setting the doomsday clock
89 seconds to midnight, are we perhaps too late?
What fate are we bestowed?
Who are the modern day heroes who will save us?
Surely not corporate CEOs, politicians, or billionaires.

So who,
if not researchers; the modern day anti-heroes.

You see, we all love Black Panther,
Wakanda forever!
But scores of people relate to Killmonger more,
because the world needs rebels who speak truth to power.
Who in the darkest hour still have a voice that echoes.
Location, located, locked in,
Leiden, Pieterskerk.
Researchers and scientists,
assemble!

It's comforting to know there are people like you
who continue being hopeful.
Who turn hope into conviction.
Armed with only predictions, assumptions, and hypothesis,
go out in the field to procure the stories otherwise forgotten.
Who don't yield to the allure of big money and greed.
Who bleed statistics until the data runs out,
but do it all over again and repeat when
new discoveries lead to new insights.

I understand this may put a lot of pressure on you,
but research really needs a resurgence.

We have to resurrect the status of scientists.
Make Tesla Nikola again!
We need facts to persevere
We need to stay clear from despair turning into apathy.
If there was ever a time when research was more necessary
it is now!
We live in an age of extinction,
but instead of turning to science for solutions,
we are silencing the scientists and focus on
false prophets prophesying blame.
A game, those of you present here today, who study history,
have seen repeated over and over again.

We can't let them put fiction up in a museum of despair.
We have to daringly display defiance instead,
because we have to accomplish centuries in just decades.
No time to wait for a better political climate.
Change is inevitable.
Question is: will we promote progression or regression?
The rise of fascism suppressing progressive voices,
we can't let lost in translation translate to escalating transgressions.
Lessons learned from the past need to fuel progress of humankind.
And what better weapon to fight against repression than
the bright minds who right wrongs,
no concessions!

The world needs research, the world needs facts,
the world needs hope, the world needs to act.
So let's factor in the human factor.
We have to mobilize.
Rise to the occasion.
Turn facts into feelings.
Give the people something to believe in.

Faith can't put a dent into facts, but
the fact is faith can move people.
Like the guy on the Dutch dating show Cheers to Love
who, in order to impress his date, ran and jumped
from the roof, and consequently broke his leg and
the internet, giving new meaning to “falling in love."
And I wonder if he second-guessed his decision
right before gravity became a painful fact.
But sometimes you just gotta jump and pray for the best.

We might be walking a tightrope, but
if you simply look close enough, you can see
that science is just an anagram of hope.

Hope for a better future.

So go ahead.
Let research guide you.
Observe, analyse the data,
and write your conclusions.
Publish your dissertations.
There are names to be celebrated,
histories to be remembered,
mysteries to be understood,
so many discoveries still to be discovered,
and lessons to be taught.

Too many people are starving from ignorance,
so give them food for thought.
As if you are all curators
able to provide society with answers to
questions they don't know how ask.

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