

The Erosion of my Mind

Knots and Loose Ends in Abundance

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## Abstract

On the pages below you may find a tear, a dark hole, a colour never seen before and conversations with a shadow. The fragmentary writing, moving between the lines of rhizomes and aphorisms, allows for a non-linear reading which weaves together multiple themes, perspectives, narratives and timelines. What started as a way to cope with episodes of depression and anxiety, eventually, evolved into an opportunity for self-reflection. Sections alternate between the avoidance and acceptance of uncertainty and fall into an examination of memory, time and existence. Layered between fictional and non-fictional elements you may find my attempts of coming to terms with my own fractured sense of home and belonging.

## Key words

time | existence | impermanence | memory | home

# Acknowledgements

For Baby, who continues to live on in the specks of colour all around.

&

Thank you sister for helping me throughout my writing and beyond.

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## Preface

The process of writing this work began at a difficult time for me - personally and psychologically. Feeling overwhelmed by thoughts of depression and anxiety, I was additionally faced with the task of writing this dissertation. Unable to fight my obsessive thoughts, I decided to grant them authority instead and approach a self-reflective text. Parts of it were written within those self-deprecating moments, others reflect on my efforts of coming to terms with them. Instinctually, I started to explore questions of memory, existence and time; emptiness and nothingness, permanence and impermanence. As I began writing, my words were intuitively falling into fragmented paragraphs and upon my research into possible writing styles I decided to embrace this natural inclination. Each snippet of text was becoming a separate entity with its own sense of agency. I began collecting fractions of contrasting impulses; not yet knowing how they would come together as a whole - if at all. Fearful of and yet exhilarated by the uncertainty of the process, I ventured into exploring the potentiality of writing outside of rules and conventions I had previously followed.

Fragmentary writing<sup>1</sup> is most commonly traced back to Jena Romanticism, an early phase of German Romanticism literature, at the end of the 18th century, and the writings of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis in *Athenaeum*, a literary magazine published by the movement. In an attempt to break through the constraints of established philosophical and poetical thinking, the group worked towards new methods of writing. The aphorism was introduced, a short philosophical statement, which is seen to be complete in itself.<sup>2</sup> For Schlegel the fragment's form is intentionally incomplete. It strives to be multi-faceted, unresolved and therefore rejects singularity and structure. It is infinitely progressive. Rupture and discontinuity are central to fragmentary writing.<sup>3</sup>

The rhizome, on the other hand, which finds its origin in *A Thousand Plateaux* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, strives to achieve a network of fragmented yet interlinked thoughts which sprout into various different directions, similar to plant roots. It rejects a linear reading and instead suggests multiple entry points without a beginning or an end. It picks up old strands of thought, jumps ahead to new ones, then transforms and expands.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the rhizome, as varied as it seems in its out-branching paragraphs, is a concept of connection between the similar as well as the strange.<sup>5</sup> My writing seemingly moves towards the aphorism as each fragment aspires to be self-contained, claiming authority to stand alone. And yet, it simultaneously finds ground within the rhizome and its notion of off-shooting thoughts and the refusal to a sequential reading. Multiplicity of narratives, narrations, perspectives and timelines weave into a net of layers, flowing in circles, to dead ends and back again. Leaning towards the fragmentary writing by Maurice Blanchot, I aspired to combine fictional and non-fictional elements. Moving from commentary to reflection, the text continuously ruptures itself.<sup>6</sup> Words flow from one place to another, at times apparently seamless, then juxtaposed - drifting between two contrasts like the tidal flow of the sea. Questions of absence and nothingness sit with notions of memory and the mundane - sometimes comfortably, every now and again, with hostility. For me, this seems to hold the potential of echoing the way life presents itself as a constant stream of moments which becomes punctured by loss, heartbreak, trauma or euphoria. But then again, time passes and these piercing instances start to lose their saturation. They dilute and blend in with everyday life. Once in a while, faded memories arise to the fore of the conscious mind before disappearing into the unconscious again. Similarly, feelings of anxiety and depression may be experienced as non-linear, as well.

The philosophical writings by Deleuze, Heidegger, Hegel, Novalis and Sartre have been influential in my considerations of time and existence, of being and non-being and all in-between. I was equally informed by



contemporary thinkers and their works. Gay Watson's writing in, *A Philosophy of Emptiness*, offered insights into various historical but also contemporary philosophical concepts of Emptiness. It was especially illuminating in regard to Eastern treatments of emptiness. In contrast to Western culture, Eastern theories emphasise the acknowledgement of uncertainty which, in turn, opens up a realm for potential rather than fixating on a lack of something or avoiding emptiness. Furthermore, the book was a source of numerous examples of historical and contemporary art works which tackle these opposing ideas. Building on this material I then delved into related theories on boredom in Lars Svendsen's *A Philosophy of Boredom* which helped me contemplate the conscious act of paying attention as an alternative to our tendencies of having to fill every empty space. Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* and Clarice Lispector's *Agua Viva* were both pivotal guidance in my consideration of the fragmented writing style. Diving into Nelson's beautiful obsession with the colour blue and Lispector's affiliation for the instant, I found myself striving to explore my own fixations. In his collection of poetries, *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, Ocean Vuong creates a tangled web of themes by using his lyrical approach and distilled wording to wander off for a while, only to bring one back again and again. It is a book I kept returning to for its unique language, tapping into different corners of my own distorted views of home with each reading. Additionally, it was Barbara Cassin's book *Nostalgia: When are We Ever at Home?*, which had a strong affect on my exploration of my sense of belonging. Between Vuong's and Cassin's treatment of nostalgia, uprootedness, the exile and the elsewhere, I was prompted to retrace my lack of recollections and research genetic memory.

The integrated illustrations consist of test strips of photographic prints and scans of empty 35mm negatives. Test strips are used to determine the exposure and colour filters before printing a whole sheet of paper in the darkroom and are commonly tossed away. On a whim, I decided to use expired paper which had been handed down to me. Because of its old

condition the paper did not reproduce the correct colours but, instead, bathed the entire print in a magical hue of pink. It was not a print I had anticipated nor strived to achieve. Even so, I was unexpectedly fascinated by this chance appearance. What had happened was that the paper had started to break down and therefore had lost its pristine condition. But more interestingly, within this destruction a new quality had been introduced: the unexpected, an uncertainty, a free fall. A test strip may be seen as part of a whole but, moreover, it may take on an autonomous form, precisely defined by its fractured outline. This led me to revisit scans of an old film roll. I cannot remember where the film had come from and whether or how I had used it. The negatives appear to be empty. The only information the scanner had picked up on were numerous scratches and coloured marks. It was solely because I had begun the process of writing this piece that I was able to view the images from a new perspective. The patterns I was looking at were starting to resemble traces of informations lost. The empty frame did no longer seem so empty.

Writing was informing my practical and visual methods and vice versa. Revealing my techniques and making process seems to be an intricate part of my practice. Following this approach, I became intrigued by the idea of haptic writing and what such writing might be. This concept allowed me to reflect on sound in particular. Silence, especially, seemed non-existent during times of inner struggle as in depressive periods it seems impossible to tune out the noises and voices of self-doubt and fear. Over time, parts of this work have evolved into a love letter to the silence I had lost and was so desperately aching for.

'Men have talked about the world without paying attention to the world or to their own minds, as if they were asleep or absent minded.'<sup>7</sup>

Heraclitus

The drift of time, with the pulsing of seconds that runs through me, became infested by the seemingly endless pain of losing myself.<sup>8</sup> Vibrating to the heartbeat of the instant, the continuous flow of being, now falls in folds like a blood-stained bedsheet which, scrubbed obsessively, still resists its own whiteness. Rhythm has cracked open and salt is pouring out. A stream of crushed rock falls through my grip and strokes the insides of my palms.<sup>9</sup> My silhouette is smudged; and there I remain, a blurry fog within a razor-sharp vision. Everything that constitutes this moment vanishes the next and I keep losing myself within the flood, one flake of hope at a time.

I wish I knew more and then I wish I knew nothing at all. Vast emptiness is a frightening place to be, and yet the beginning is where we aspire to go back to. The moment arrives when we fear what is still to come and long for the days of not knowing.<sup>10</sup>

Between the middles and the ends, stranded in despair: the beginning.

A tree stands strong within a field; both feet rooted in the soil. Branches reaching further; stretching out and finding light. A fracture rips deeper into skin and wood cracks under weight: I split. Detached, the limb falls to the ground.<sup>11</sup> At once a log, a twig, a tree? Came apart and now adrift. Am I the one who looks at me or the one who has been seen?<sup>12/13</sup>

I find an undisturbed plane of matter; fall down backwards with my arms outstretched. Far and wide, noise all over - while I make snow angles in opaque silence.<sup>14</sup>

Deep orange found her lover in the night. A heartache had robbed her of her sleep, so she was pacing down the street when a crescent moon set the scene for them to meet. One look at deep orange and teal blue was smitten. True love could not describe their bond. Endless bubblebaths and breakfasts in bed - the sun just never seemed to set. The two lived happily ever after, till the day he met mermaidian pink.

Translucent time remains unspecified and ambiguous, for it has no register. It withstands all attempts of definition; mere numbers would not do it justice. At once, it remains the instant of five hours and the eternity of a second; it solely unfolds inside the judgement of the mind.<sup>15</sup>

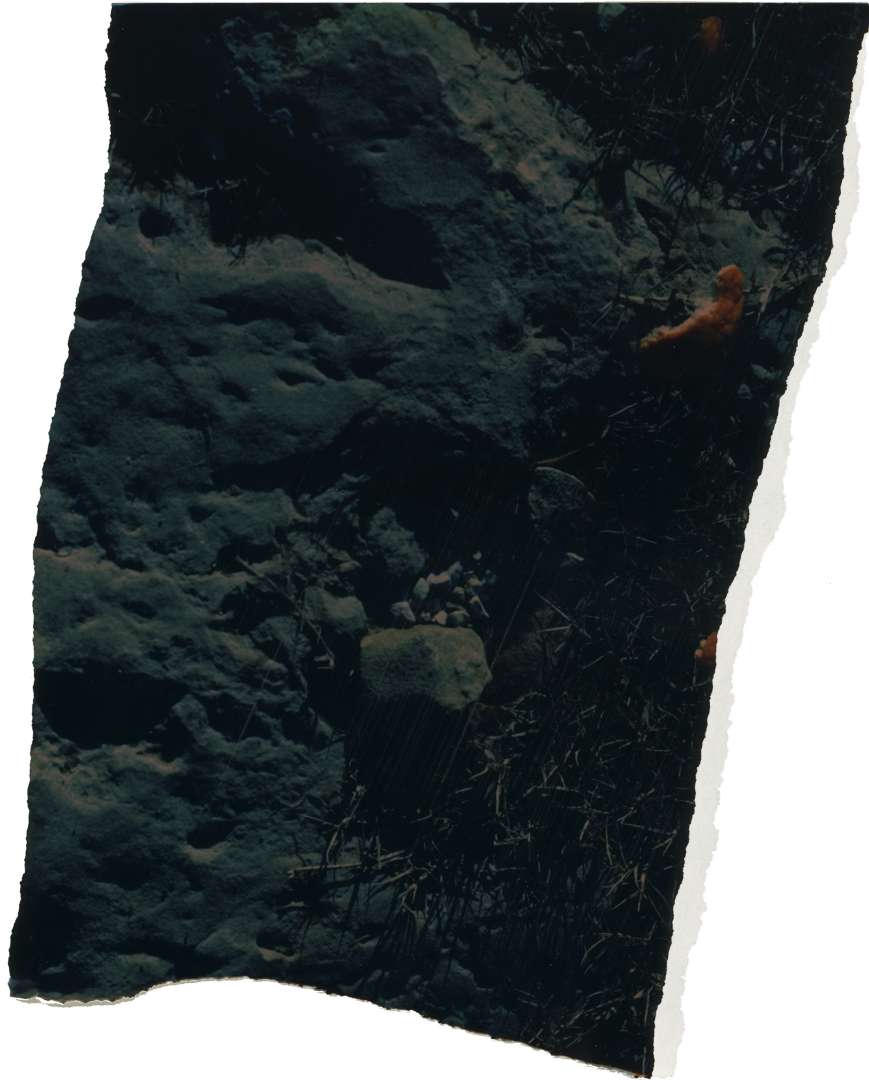


Fig.1

The one I came from, but have never met; an abstract thought I will never know nor understand. My touch goes through what it is I am. I will live a lifetime knowing of it, just not comprehend. And I will spend my every day not knowing what it means until the day I become what it is to be - on the day on which I will not know at all.<sup>16/17</sup>

On a bright summer day, after a long, long way, the bird finds home; its feathers brightened from excursions towards the sun. For days it flew above the empty, open vast; flapping wings in pride. So many things there are to see; a little bird can only fly so free. *I admire its ways, for I keep getting lost on even my most grounded days. Is it possible to ask a bird for directions?*

To know means to be in control, a highly valued commodity among people. We love to direct what is to transpire. We cut and tie, we bend and force, we prevail until we defeat; a victory in shaping the world to our vision. But to know means to confine the unexpected. It means to hold magic captive. For have you ever tried to listen to the beauty of not knowing? To put down your forces and just bear witness to the happening, to feed off the anticipation of bursting potentiality and the gratifying feeling of watching chance in motion.<sup>18</sup> The everyday holds all the colours of the world.

When the wind praises a shadow<sup>19</sup> and a smudge serenades a leaf, salt prickles on the skin, rain resides a poem and dust draws memories in.

I glance at the edge of my wardrobe and stare into his eyes, looking back at me, all the while I keep looking into empty space.

Sadness is a taste: dry and sharp.

Earlier today, I noticed the kitchen cupboard being precariously empty, which is why I am on my way to the shop. As I walk along my road, I pass by rows and rows of houses; all more or less identical boxes with different coloured doors - *mine is pastel blue*. In fact, it took my cat, Pierre, six months to learn which of these boxes hides his home. One looks seemingly more mundane than the other as I try to catch the difference between them. Then, one of the many doors opens and somewhere behind me a mother's voice calls out: 'Sarah look! This sand has come all the way from the Sahara! Isn't that impressive?'. I must be too far ahead by now, as I cannot make out Sarah's reply. Or maybe she does not answer at all. Maybe Sarah is still too young to know what the Saharan desert is and why there should be anything special about the reddish flecks of mud in front of her. But for what it is worth, I am glad that I passed by Sarah's house at the right moment to hear her mum explain. All morning, I have been wondering why my bins were suddenly covered in dirt.

Now, my eyes wide open I can see it everywhere: the waves it has painted along the road, the shimmering specks on the doorsteps, the remaining stains on the garden table and the dried up drops on my windows. The tender veil of warm Saharan dust has settled over us. Now, everything shines in the colour of rust. My finger touches the burning dunes of desert sand. As I look down on traces of African Earth on my skin I feel humbled by its resistance to gravity. At the same time, I am reminded of the constraints of my own bodily form. First, I feel heavy; then insignificant. How to comprehend reality? I can only ever be a minuscule fragment; a fleeting presence within existence. I find myself standing at the threshold of human time looking into an abyss; the vastness of cosmos itself.<sup>20</sup>





Fig.2

Through a mist of foginess I can see the beach we used to go to; salt water in the air. A wave is swelling up in front of me. I hold my breath as it rises higher. I feel somewhat scared, but try not to show. Then, the wave hits against concrete. It bursts and pours out a forceful roar, before falling right down again. She is standing to my left and we are dressed in matching purple jackets. I do not remember this, but I have seen photographs of it. On one of them I look happy, smiling back at the camera; behind me a mounting ocean. After the shutter clicked, it probably disappeared, once more.<sup>21</sup>

I have shaped my own path; my force has carved it in the land. I hold all the rocks and pebbles, all the sand and soil within me. You may have moved my ways but I continue to be free. At times nostalgia pulls me in the directions of my past. You may say I *flood*; I say I remember.<sup>22</sup>

Distance makes the line a dot; in the realm of blue.

Leaves bow brave before the sun, a small opening becomes an aperture. Children's laughter and women's chatter; but no one thought to see - the photograph before their feet. As rays fall through the crown, the sun casts her image on the ground and prides herself on hiding her portrait from us - in plain sight.<sup>23</sup>

Have you ever watched the world bend in front of you; twist and turn like an unshielded foetus in a beam of light? Like a nerve exposed, then touched; contorted and deformed. I know this spectacle happens solely in my head; still the outline is hard to grasp. Time is falling down the stairs; set in motion by an instant unknown. It stumbles, hits the step and cracks; frantic seconds pouring out the rift. I hide in fear of what could be if this was not. Nothing fits: the circle has become a square. I know what is true and my mind is not; it is however, out of my control, derailed and now, free in fall. My pulse slows down, but the world is spinning. The clocks have been replaced while no one was watching. Inside madness I recall sanity - *how did it slip my grip?* Then, finally my release: the turmoil starts to ebb. I can feel the seconds stretching out; time is slowly falling into place. As the episode subsides, I am left behind: curled up and confused, wishing for the inside of my mother's womb.<sup>24/25</sup>

Consider this, it takes a piece of paper merely 42 foldings to reach the moon.<sup>26</sup> Now, if I could physically unfold my mind like a piece of paper, maybe I could make sense of this.

*[Listen well, these are lines of wisdom seeping through the mud.]*

Reminiscing about the past like two old friends, the bird speaks to me about the elsewhere; the place where a rock strives to be a mountain and the lion learns to love the sea.

I think of him. Now, nothing more than dust himself, I like to think he remains as free as the Saharan desert.

Did you know that silence can unfold? Just draw its outline in and watch its edges crumble. Take a crease between your index finger and your thumb; slowly peel it open and observe the layers falling off. Now, skin silence bare! Then expose the thing I know is there. Naked in the fold; a colour not yet known: flamboyant and brave, and never seen before. *I wonder where it will in the sequence of the rainbow?*

My mother as a child. The time that was before is present in the now. Discoloured and the surface marked with stains; her face still bears the happiness of a distant day. Could I have been there by her side, before she brought me into life? Whose memory is this if not mine? I look again and there I am; standing still and smiling strong, all the while to my mother's right - on our first day of school.<sup>27/28</sup>

An instinct led him here. No thought in mind, no place to be, he keeps on waiting; for waiting is the entirety of possibilities.

How blissful stillness can be; pure and raw like a germinating seed about to sprout up high, wanting to reveal the potential it holds quietly inside. To stumble across the quiet moment; bearing the exhilarating expectation of what is yet to come. I used to dream within those mountains of silence, walking barefoot along its foothills and feeding off its sunny rocks of warmth.

But it aches me to stay still these days and here is why: I have been invaded by fear. I cannot say when it happened, but my thoughts are suddenly not mine anymore. I'm not who I was, not who I thought I was, anyway. I live with fear now and I have gotten to know her quite well; she is resilient and outgoing and her favourite colour is deep mulberry. Some nights we stay up late, talking to one another about it all: the paths we've lost and buried, the suns we've touched and the burns we've suffered. Fear listens well, just like a sister would. And she does not need my words to understand the secrets I deny; the things I cannot bear to say out loud but which corrode my body from the inside out.<sup>29</sup> And yet, thoughts do not stop at night when fear speaks her mind. I give in and surrender under her weight. Her words piercing through the night; a constant surge of pain. As the two of us lay in the dark, holding each other close, the creeping arms of sleep start to pull us in. Submerged within a haze of dancing pearls, we slowly drift off - into another sphere.

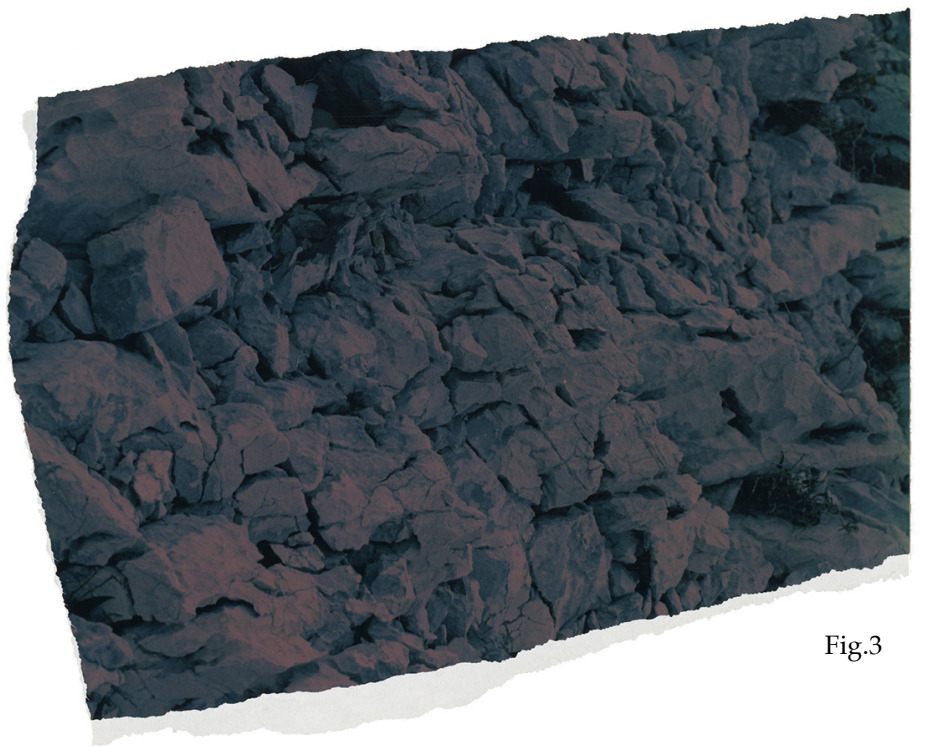


Fig.3

The day starts with a fall. When a painter trips and a pot spills, the world suddenly turns blue. Every last corner of the room is left soaking wet with glossy paint; melted pigment running down the walls. The carpet drenched and the plant dripping, no one remembers any longer what has been before. Colour has died. Only one hue remains: *infinite blue*. It seems as if truth has been unravelled and we are left in knots while life shimmers in the thousand colours of the sea.

Carve *my* bed inside a tree and I will know which way is home.<sup>30</sup>

In the midst of cosmic blueness<sup>31</sup>, a girl is found within. The place, where seagulls sing against the wind and dance for her in secret, where life extends beyond a cliff and mermaids can be real. A landscape and an isolated figure. She looks into the distance, the familiar glow along the horizon; an otherworldly threshold where sky and sea kiss longingly in the dimness of infinity. Waves calling out her name - *to touch their tender lips and immerse herself in soft embrace*. Her breath cuts through the salty sparkling mist; a plea. Down below, sharp and shimmery rocks. Death never looked this beautiful<sup>32/33</sup> and the day ends with a fall.<sup>34</sup>

In the rift between two words, common places and known faces feel at odds; an interrogating brain and a housefly on vacation. Then the deranged resurgence of a pocket full of truths. When I try to touch the shadow of my mind, the queen demands: '*Off with the head!*'<sup>35</sup>

I am wounded all around, no sign of blood, just floods of pain; counting scars  
in darkness.

The past has made me cry, the future probably will too; but so has, and will, an onion.



It is a warm summer day and we are sitting on my grandmother's terrace.<sup>36</sup> I am still too young to have a refined sense of metric time, therefore it cannot be a matter of looking at the clock - the moment can only be established by intuition. As the burning heat of the afternoon is gradually ebbing off and I feel a cold breeze stroking against my skin - I know the hour has come. I turn my head towards her, try to get her attention by tipping annoyingly on her hand. My sister turns and looks at me; a bulging stare signals her the urgency of the matter - *it is time*. Eager for the spectacle to start, we carry our chairs over to the concrete path that leads up to the house. However, if in fact my intuition failed and the sun is still resting high up in the sky, we might have to wait for quite some time. But plants cannot be rushed by human desire, thus we cannot be impatient. And yet, I am sliding restlessly up and down my chair trying to endure the boredom of the moment.<sup>37</sup> Minutes pass and nothing happens; moments linger. Then, the sun slowly starts to set. There! I detect the first movement in the corner of my eye; I squeeze my sister's arm and point towards my finding. The yellow, rolled-in petals slowly start to move, almost unnoticeably at first. Then, with one push they start to unfurl. Impulse by impulse, they unravel and lay their insides bare. The first one here, not yet fully open, when another one starts to turn; until flowers are popping open all around us. There we sit, side by side, armrest touching armrest, watching the little path of flowers<sup>38</sup> blossoming at dusk.<sup>39</sup>

And then I look around; rays piercing through the veil. It seems my mind has played a game. *Why was I so sad, before?*

Looking into blue; translucent yet opaque. Lines rising before falling, making curves; disappearing and emerging. The ocean holds the pattern of the waves. Looking into white with specks of grey; marbled with veins; cracks and creases trickling through, spreading out and turning back. The mountain holds the pattern of the rock. *Now, look at it some more and you might just find, the pattern that is time.*<sup>40</sup>



Fig.4



Fig.5

In complete darkness a tear is torn. Ripping through the paper; marks left by my hand. The surface cracked and substance ruptured. A fractured self; expanding and unveiling, the outcome pending. I grant you authority to be your own, to push away the edges that contained you. Find your form and draw your outline in. Then reveal to me what you have made.<sup>41</sup> I shall look and smile: you made a perfect lie.<sup>42</sup>

When time is added up, it starts to erode, fall apart and dissolve. <sup>43</sup> For in the multiplicity of time lays the inability to calculate; an equation of mathematical impossibility.

A golden frame hung askew against a white wall, containing nothing but its own shadow.<sup>44</sup> Staring at the paint, I solely see the one that's missing; present in its absence is the void. <sup>45 / 46</sup>

Emptiness frees it all; the grip loosens when there is nothing left to hold.

The boy liked to argue with his shadow, telling him to be more like the trees he saw: *'If you are the shape of a tree, maybe I can be!'* But the shadow never listened, so the boy was forced to remain as he was: a boy.

I doubt myself, I disappoint myself. Unease and apprehension occupy my thinking.<sup>47</sup> Surges of pain flood over me and force my sanity on its knees. *Who will be the last one standing?* I try to run, I try to hide; to find a rock to conceal, a cave to keep out of the light, what I do not want to know. But there is no hiding from the mind; so I sit and wait. Wait for time to pass and the moment to prevail. I wait and hope. Hope for pain to end and unveil something else. The seconds run, yet I try to hold them close. And then, without warning it appears: my beloved calmness - where everything falls into place. *I wish you would never leave me.* How do I hold on to something; the one I have never found, but has come to me willingly? As I take an unobstructed breath, I feel its brightness washing out my lungs; love streaming through my veins. The knot has been untied and now rests bare before my feet. A longing echo, soft and mellow, travels within space. Then, suddenly it slips and drips back into the deep dark waters of my mind.

A place I know too well, where words are mumbled and not said.

I am expanding and contorting; my cells are bursting and erupting. I move towards and then fall back. Shattered glass and broken skin; inside the collapse I encounter failure. Now, the fraction speaks: *'Hold your breath! Within the ruins of the old lays the substance of new ventures.'*

Not even a frame this time; merely blank walls connecting blank floor to blank ceiling. *[five]* Light floods through the room. A sea of warmth running down the walls before fading into the grey of concrete ground. Count again. *[five]* Shadow spreads all over; the empty room emptied itself. *[five]* Light; orange shimmer and reflections of a lightbulb. *[five]* Dark; in dim light much can be seen<sup>48</sup>, if you decide to look. *[five]*<sup>49</sup>

All colours are muted. Soft hues of pink and peach hold the sky captive, while glowing coral circles around the descending sun, before collapsing into the infinite mountains of pale blue waters. Blue as far as I can see. I find myself in a world of pastels. *Could this be a dream?* In this moment sadness feels inexplicable to me. I should take ferries more often.

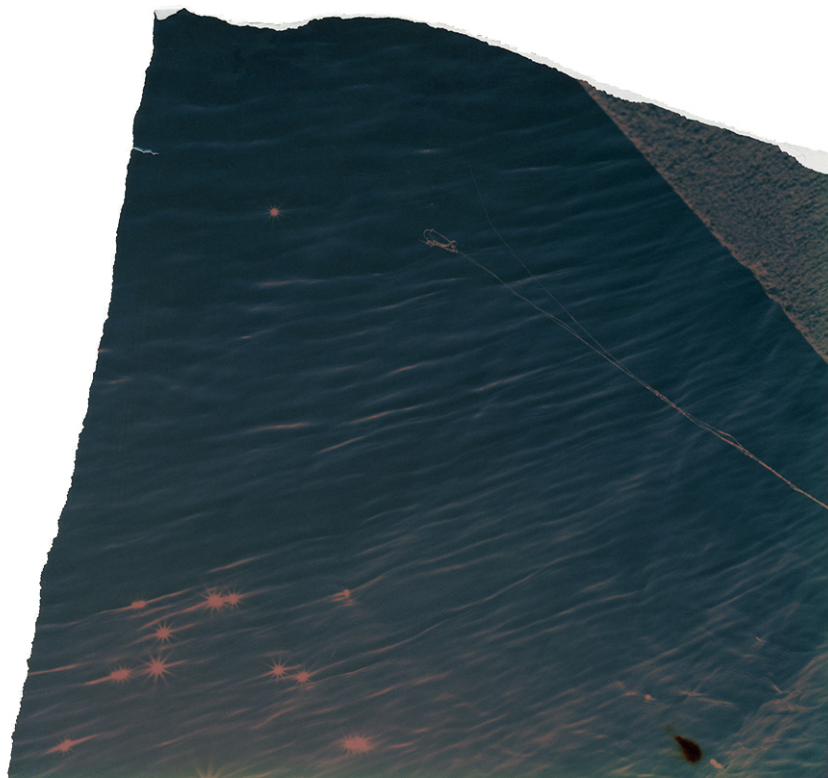


Fig.6

*Maybe all that is, is not actually me. Maybe all that is, is only currently flowing through me.*



It feels like somewhat of a home; still, parts do not quite fit. The same way my primary school teacher wore two black, almost identical, but nevertheless miss-matched shoes, one day. Seemingly complete - just not quite right. Maybe, it is in fact an inherited memory, passed down from my mother through the umbilical cord to me. Could it be of truth? A sensation, felt throughout but never named, finds its roots in someone else's time.<sup>50/51</sup> I burry the seed of home deep inside my flesh; mine, forever mine - *no one needs to know of the stolen goods.*<sup>52</sup>

Land with borders, defined precisely by the dashing sea: an island.<sup>53</sup>

I will make your memory mine and live in it.<sup>54</sup>

When the void decides to accept its own emptiness, it can start to live in acknowledgment of itself; the *lack of* becomes the *potential for.*<sup>55</sup>

Red fabric draped around her head; a scarlet scarf, florals down the side. A curl comes loose and falls in mid her brows; brown strands of hair between green eyes. I touch my little crown - *I can almost feel the blue.* The heart aches for memories.<sup>56/57</sup>

Time is tangled up - folded 42 times; knots and loose ends in abundance.<sup>58</sup>

The rock has crumbled and the ceiling has become my ground. I might just be, a person absorbed in dense layers of delirium. The pulse sits in my ear and keeps on throbbing through the night.<sup>59</sup>

What is noise if not the absence of silence? Quiet moments which have fled the mind and blues that have been coloured red; *rupture*. Let me rephrase: Noise is the missile piercing through the skin of silence.

Humans always swift around, while I sit steady in the ground. *Do not tell me it feels static!* What good could all your places be, when I keep dreaming of my lea? Where my roots dig deeper into soil; like veins reaching through the night. No one guides me where to grow - *I know*. I learn and strive; then, remember and decide. It is hard for you to understand when all you ever try to find are answers of your own. I do not bend before your rules and do not speak your peculiar sounds. I would rather listen to the symphony that is vibration - the soft pulsation in the air, the *touching* of the tone. For I share my language with the whale. [In the mind of a dandelion]<sup>60</sup>

Hues of pink, you are warmly invited to enter space and flood the screen. This is a request for unapologetic disruption. Let us undo reality and forget the truth; matter will dissolve in the process, but essence might remain. Then, everyone works tirelessly throughout the day and by the evening time the cosmos looks immaculate; like sheer fabric dipped in dye, spread out and left to dry.

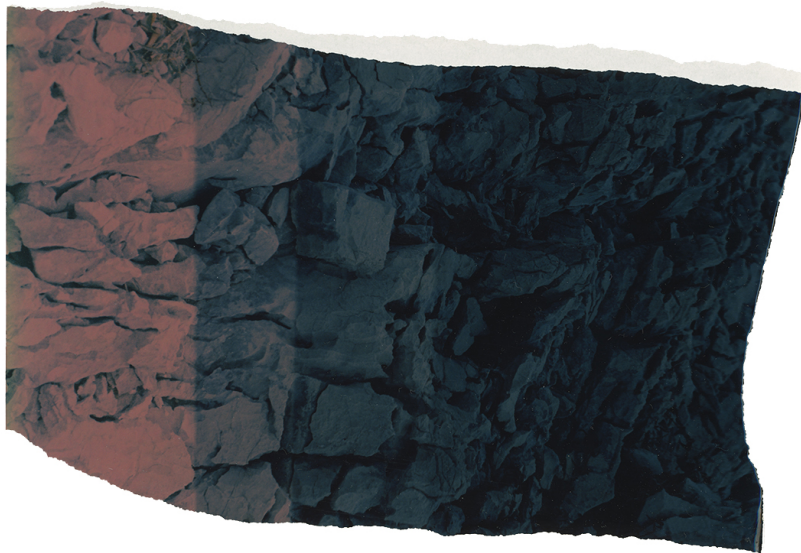


Fig.7

When a painter listens to the music of chance<sup>61</sup>, he decides to let painting go; instead he settles for scraping and erasing. The result: thick layers of paint, irregular; various colours and shades; details everywhere, and yet nothing all-around.<sup>62</sup>

*'You jump from watering the garden to writing within a second - quite a skill you have there.'*

Dust is falling, shimmering against the sun and performing pirouettes mid-air. Weightless, floating downwards, touching ground, settling in and covering up. Gradually its opacity thickens. Like rings inside a tree,<sup>63</sup> it speaks of moments passed and seconds lived; leaving traces on every side of touch.<sup>64</sup>

I wipe the bookshelf clean; time itself flows down the drain.

Stone pine, in the distance glows her silhouette. With firm roots she guards her land, all the while staring into the open sea; strong and perfectly poised, she bows before the wind. I feel, she has been seen; a glimpse through someone else's eyes and a landmark of my mind.<sup>65</sup>

After moments' time, the air feels lighter; the fall slows down. Today, the seconds shimmer in soft shades of pink, like the inside of a fig. During my conversations with the sea, we watch fear rushing up against the rock; bulging up, then washing out. My bewildered thoughts; now, nothing more than a distant echo running through the light.

Dry salt on skin, a memory.

The midnight sun had cast a spell on me; and life went through a maze. At once, silence felt to be the most distant friend to me; one that had moved away and never responded to my letters. I could not understand, the thing which I thought missing was in fact forever all around. I had merely lost the paper holding the directions. And after months of running, I reconsidered. Maybe the way to find the quiet would be to walk inside the noise. On the other side: all the sounds that make up silence.<sup>66</sup>

One stroke; a gesture of the hand. The ink sits down and flexes on the ground. If you want to see what it means, the word *perfection*, follow the line that takes a spin. Gently curved and not quite finished; in an uneven streak.<sup>67/68</sup> Then again, a fish would dance it in the sand.<sup>69</sup>

I personally feel one. But it has been said: *One* is open for debate.<sup>70</sup>

On the verge of nothingness, decay roars loudly. I found translucent time in a tapestry of instants, glassy patches stitched together. And woven in-between: the debris of my mind. It might just all end in dust.<sup>71</sup>

He knew of himself because of his knowing of the other not being him. If the other had blue eyes would that make his green?

Listen carefully, press your ear against the dripping shell and plunge into the sorrows of my heartbeat. Meet me in the space between, where the circle finds its roundness and the line becomes a curve; where rhythm stops and nothingness collapses. Follow me to the other side of glowing death; there, in the meadow of my pulse, we shall dance madly to the chords of unspoken truths. Our souls possessed, we will twist and twirl in circles; fast and faster we will run deeper into the nine arms of raging lunacy. Everything reeks of tragic death in the forecast of another breath.<sup>72/73</sup>

Nothing is, all the while everything becomes.<sup>74/75</sup>

[A tedious scene, where nothing happens] The home looks pale; every object plain. The chair sits stiff in a corner and the plant hangs droopy to the side. Not a thing has substance and even air tastes flat. Eyes start to roam around, frantically looking for relieve and a speck of vibrance to grip onto, yet the only thing to see - yawning fields of grey. Time is warped when boredom fills the room.<sup>76/77</sup>

It follows a story as rare as a rainbow on a winter night.

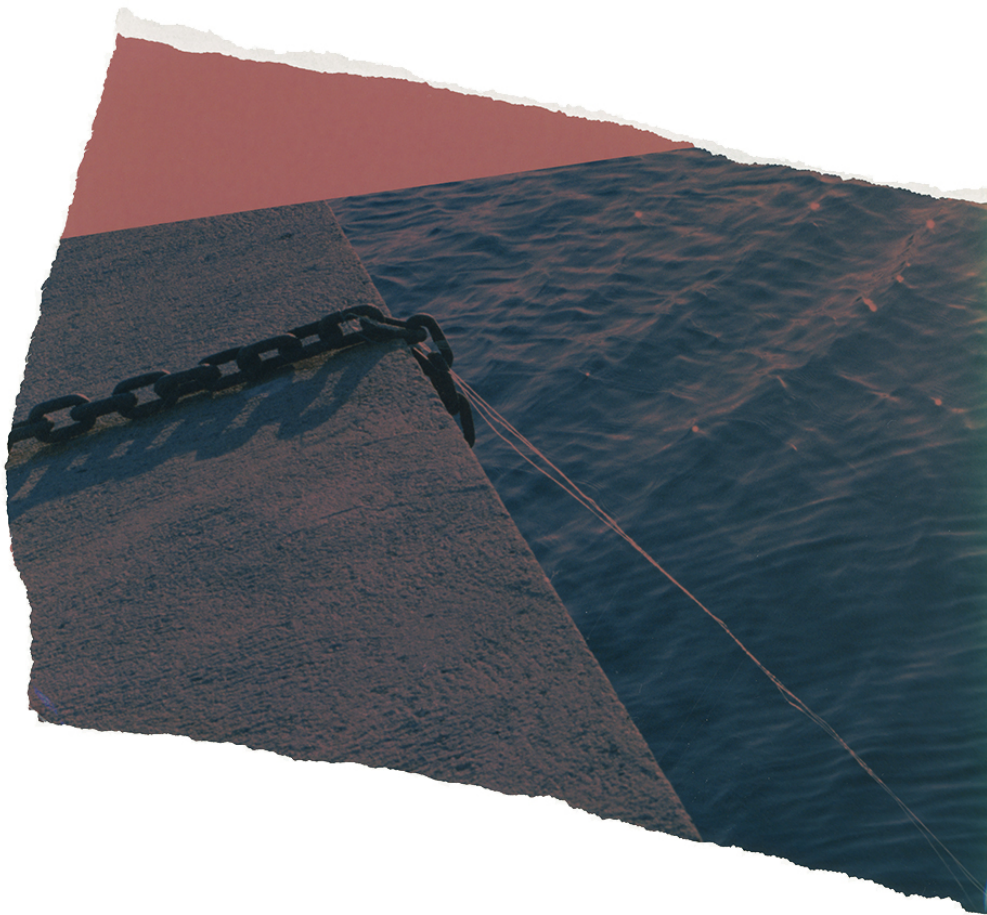


Fig.8



As I was walking over the landing stage, something jumped through the planks and into air, right in front of me. Instinctively, I stretched out my hands and caught the thing mid-fall. Then, I stood there, mesmerised. Inside my palm laid a tiny, shiny, silver fish; on its side a thin black line. The following second, it took another leap and dropped into the water, back home. By the time my dad turned around, the fish was gone. Yes, indeed, you do hear right. I do not have any witnesses for this significant encounter and you certainly do not have to believe the accuracy of my account. But this one I actually *do* remember.

This is not my home. Even so, it is the place most constant in my life. Is this what they call uprootedness?<sup>78</sup>

I started without sense - then lost clarity along the way. Felt my way through tiny holes in rocks, trying to navigate through touch. Submerged in murky, deep black waters, I tried to sense which way is up. I put these words onto paper and invited you to read; not knowing I would allow you to witness the erosion of my mind. But then again, as I collapse and shatter, unravel the folds, dissect and dismember, all pieces come loose. Now, floating adrift they suddenly make sense to me.<sup>79</sup>

Wind whispers within; a tale is spun. Goodbyes are said at sea and new worlds are found beyond. She spoke of all her dreams, pleading him to see: what she could be if this was real, the one she was but will not be, more than she could say, the gaps between and life that had begun. All the while, he could not understand. The words she said out loud, for him just silent sounds.<sup>80</sup> Her toenails sparkled in the turquoise of a mermaid's tail.

A place, one cannot return to - just the same, never leave.<sup>81</sup>

Words afloat; matter sinking.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hill, L. 2012, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing: A Change of Epoch*, Continuum, London. p.2

There have been numerous returns and ventures into the fragmentary by writers such as Höderlin, Büchner, Nietzsche, Kafka, Proust, Beckett and more.

<sup>2</sup> Schlegel F. quoted in Lacoue-Labarthe, P. & Nancy, J. 1998, *The literary absolute: the theory of literature in German romanticism*, State University of New York Press, New York. p.43

“A fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog.”

<sup>3</sup> Allen W. 2007, *Ellipsis - Of Poetry and the Experience of Language after Heidegger, Holderlin, and Blanchot*, State University of New York, New York. Press. p.197

“The fragmentary does not refer beyond itself to a hidden unity of which it is exposed part, but rather exists as an incompleteness that is bound to its own rupturing as that which it endlessly pursues. The fragmentary possess a constitutive rather than an accidental incompleteness: its interruption is what brings it about, not what ruins it.”

<sup>4</sup> Then & Now, 2018, *The Rhizome - A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari*. [video] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQ2rJWwXilw>> [Accessed 07.06.2022].

<sup>5</sup> Miles J. 2022, *Writing*, Tutorial Handouts

<sup>6</sup> Allen W. 2007, *Ellipsis - Of Poetry and the Experience of Language after Heidegger, Holderlin, and Blanchot*, State University of New York Press, p.193

“Writing at the limits of poeticizing and thinking entailed a writing that persistently interrupted itself, giving itself to its own fragmentation and thereby writing.” Allen comments on the fragmentary writing by Maurice Blanchot.

<sup>7</sup> Heraclitus quoted in Watson, G. 2014, *A Philosophy of Emptiness*, 1st edn, Reaktion Books, London. p.19

<sup>8</sup> Kosoi, N. 2005, 'Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings', *Art journal* (New York. 1960), vol. 64, no. 2, pp. 21–31.

"In rare moments during our existence, however, anxiety floats to the surface and reveals to us what we in our everyday life are trying to repress, namely, that it is **nothingness** that constitutes our being." In an article about Mark Rothko's paintings, Natalie Kosoi introduces Martin Heidegger's thoughts on 'nothingness'.

<sup>9</sup> Lispector, C. 2014, *Agua Viva*, Penguin Books, London. p.3

"Every instant has an instant in which it is. I want to grab hold of the is of the thing. These instants passing through the air I breathe: in fireworks they explode silently in space. I want to possess the atoms of time."

<sup>10</sup> Watson, G. 2014, *A Philosophy of Emptiness*, 1st edn, Reaktion Books, London. p.13

"Man is the only creature that is conscious of its inevitable death; that, aware of its finitude, is future-oriented and seeks meaning outside itself. Our inevitable physical death remains the most unspoken topic of our daily lives, yet is unavoidable and cast its shadow."

<sup>11</sup> Serpentine Podcast. 2019, *General Ecology: In Our Body* (4.45min - 5.32min)

In this episode of the Serpentine Podcast, the moderator Victoria Sin introduces research showing that humans are outnumbered in their own bodies 1-9 by non-human, bacterial cells, and talks to academics and scholars about the question of identity as an individual vs. a multitude.

Victoria Sin: "Do (...) you perceive yourself as more of an individual or more as a multitude?"

Lucia Pietroiusti: "I perceived myself as an individual until I got pregnant. And then I realised that there were two brains thinking in the same body and that made me think: If we are the same body now, then technically we have always been the same body, like the starter of yeast. In Italian, the starter of yeast is actually called 'madre' - mother; it separates from, but it has always been the same *yeast*. So multitude since then."

<sup>12</sup> Evans, D. 1996, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London. p.72

After Sartre, it is through the act of seeing and being-seen that the subject understands its own subjectivity through identifying the Other as another subject looking back. In Sartre's theory the gaze is set equal with the "act of looking", the seeing through the eye. Lacan moves on from Sartre's position and redefines the gaze as "(...) the object of the act of looking, or, to be more precise, the object of the scopic drive. The gaze is therefore, in Lacan's account, no longer on the side of the subject; it is the gaze of the Other."(Evans, D. 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Sartre, J. 2003, *Being and Nothingness: an Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Routledge, London. p.222

"By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgement on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other."

<sup>14</sup> Hillyard, D. in Serpentine Podcast. 2019, *General Ecology: Complex Everything:*.

The auditory sense of sound perception can include a conscious tuning in and out, meaning we, as humans, have the ability to select which sounds we listen to and which we try to blend out - although background noise is always there, we can shift our awareness towards *and* away from it.

<sup>15</sup> Miles J. 2022, *Glossary*, Tutorial Handouts

The ancient Greeks differentiated between two times. The first, *Chronos*, is the time of the clock, a quantitative time, which has been widely adopted by modern day society. Secondly, *Chairos*, the time of the moment, which is thought to be perceived and defined through the subject's mind, it cannot be measured; also psychological time.

<sup>16</sup> Kosoi, N. 2005, '*Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings*', *Art journal* (New York. 1960), vol.64, no.2, p.21

"Heidegger, however, assumes the existence of nothingness from the outset, arguing that although we cannot grasp or know nothingness, we nonetheless, when anxious, have an experience of it. He argues that because any being is finite, nothingness forms beings and as such is a prerequisite of everything that is."

- <sup>17</sup> *In Praise of Nothing* 2017, Directed by Boris Mitić. [online] Trailer Available at: <https://mubi.com/films/in-praise-of-nothing/trailer> [Accessed: 03.07.2022]  
 “They say I can only be hinted at and never shown unlike any other thing currently unknown. But I am actually there in every shot. If you bother to find me.”  
*In Praise of Nothing* is a film directed by Boris Mitić. It was shot by 62 cinematographers in 70 countries, who responded to the director’s prompt to film ‘nothing’. Having gathered an enormous archive of snippets, references and images over years, Mitić unified his fragmented findings in the personification of *Nothing*, narrated by Iggy Pop. As *Nothing* runs away from home, it reminisces about existence, love and politics. A contemplative and poetic body of work in which nothingness, a non-being, has been given agency and “addresses humanity for the first time” (Mubi, 2019).
- <sup>18</sup> Vuong, O. 2017, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, Jonathan Cape, London. p.45  
 “It’s not about the light - but how dark it makes you depending on where you stand.”
- <sup>19</sup> Play on the book title ‘In Praise of Shadows’ by Junichiro Tanizaki, 2001.
- <sup>20</sup> Miles J. 2021, *Lecture 4: Temporalities* [Lecture] Critical Historical Studies, Royal College of Art. [online] Available at: <https://moodle.rca.ac.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=17789&chapterid=4679> [Accessed: 12.11.2021]  
 “The mountain rock face signifies geological time outside human time, its extent being vast. The act of passing through is merely a brief interval of time when measured against cosmic process opened by the loop of water and rock in play.”  
 Jonathan Miles contemplating ‘*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*’ by Fan Kuan (early 11th Century) and the discrepancy between human perception of time and geological time.
- <sup>21</sup> Marquez, G. 2003, *Living To Tell The Tale*, Jonathan Cape, London.  
 “Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it.”
- <sup>22</sup> Morrison T. 1995, ‘The Site of Memory’ in Zinsser, W. (ed.), *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, Antioch Review, Inc. pp.83-102  
 “All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.”  
 Toni Morrison speaking of the memory of a river which has been reshaped by humans but occasionally floods into its original paths.

<sup>23</sup> Nail T. 2022, *RCA Lecture 13* [Lecture], MA Photography, Royal College of Art, [16.05.2022]

When sunshine falls through the branches of a tree it creates what we commonly refer to as a 'dappled light effect', the sunlight seemingly creates scattered shadows on the ground. But if one looks closer, it can be observed that the light patches are actually circular. As the leaves overlap, they create minuscule openings which function as 'pinholes', ultimately creating the effect of a camera obscura. The circular shapes are in fact images of the sun, projected through the pinholes of the leaves. This effect can be witnessed most significantly during a solar eclipse, when the projected images are crescent shapes.

<sup>24</sup> As a child I experienced frequent episodes of 'fast-time', during which time itself seemed to pass at high speed (like I had pressed the fast-forward button on a VCR). I never realised this was something abnormal until just a couple of years back, in my mid-twenties, when I excused myself from a conversation and my friend was seemingly baffled by my reasoning of needing to wait for *time to slow down again*.

<sup>25</sup> Psychology Today. 2022. *Tachysensia*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/tachysensia>> [Accessed 30.03.2022]. Tachysensia, a neurological condition causing episodes of time distortion ('fast-feeling').

<sup>26</sup> If you were to fold a piece of paper 42 times, it would reach the moon. Facts can be found here: Scienceblogs.com. 2022. *Paper Folding to the Moon* | *ScienceBlogs*. [online] Available at: <<https://scienceblogs.com/startswithabang/2009/08/31/paper-folding-to-the-moon>> [Accessed 30.03.2022].

<sup>27</sup> When I found a photograph of my mother's first day at school, it instantly reminded me of the ones of myself on my special day some 28 years later. What would it feel like to share this memory of hers, the same way I had felt her presence during mine? After joining the images digitally, and tinting my little self in sepia tones, it almost looked like I fit; that possibly I had been a proud first grader in the 70s. Although, the print was only intended as a simple exercise, my mum displayed the photograph proudly in her living room. I think, she liked the memory of me sharing this day with her.

<sup>28</sup> Bernstein D., Boyd L., Connolly D, & Giroux M. 2018, 'Reconstructing the Past' in Tortell, P., Turin, M., & Young, M. (ed.), *Memory*, Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, Vancouver, BC p.152

"Individuals can also develop entirely false memories of putative autobiographical events. One can have a "memory" that is coherent, rich in detail, infused with emotion, and held with confidence, even when the event remembered never happened."

<sup>29</sup> Walsh, S. 2018, 'In Defence of Forgetting', in Tortell, P., Turin, M., & Young, M. (ed.), *Memory*, Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, Vancouver, BC. p.174

"Avoidance is an elemental way to cope with something painful; the mind suspends normal operation in order to survive."

<sup>30</sup> Cassin, B. 2016, *Nostalgia*, Fordham University Press, New York. pp.ix -29

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus begins his seemingly never ending quest for his homeland Ithaka. In the epic poem Odysseus has carved his own bed inside an olive tree, ensuring it would remain "rooted and unmovable". But after ten years of wandering, when he finally arrives to Ithaka, he is "again driven away by his very incapacity to inhabit a home." (Cassin B. 2016) The epic speaks of the phenomenon of uprootedness, in which one experiences a nostalgia for a place which one can never reach and a homeland which in fact does not exist.

<sup>31</sup> Maggie Nelson quoting Goethe in Nelson, M. 2009, *Bluets*, Wave Books, Seattle. p.14

"Goethe describes blue as a lively color, but one devoid of gladness. 'It may be said to disturb rather than enliven'."

<sup>32</sup> Thorpe, L. 2014. *The Kant Dictionary*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. p.193

According to Kant, the sublime is the experience of perceiving an object of immense magnitude during which our imagination cannot fully grasp the object in its totality. Instead it perceives it through the object's infinitude, which subsequently leads to a pleasurable feeling. Kant argues further, that in the recognition of the limitations of our own imagination a feeling of realisation "that there is more than the world of sense" is released, which "transport us, at least in terms of feeling, into the intelligible realm." (Thorpe, L. 2014).



<sup>33</sup> Watson, G. 2014, *A Philosophy of Emptiness*, 1st edn, Reaktion Books, London. p.124  
“The Sublime contains an excessive factor beyond the beautiful that brings terror as well as delight as it assails the safety of the self.”

<sup>34</sup> Shakespeare, W. 1998. *Hamlet*. Edited by Kevin Bryant. London: Penguin.  
“To be, or not to be: that is the question:”

<sup>35</sup> Walt Disney Productions, Samuel Armstrong, and Lewis Carroll. 1951. *Walt Disney's Alice in Wonderland*. Racine, Wis: Whitman.

<sup>36</sup> Parr, A. 2005, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. p.160  
“The perceptions of actual existence are duplicated in a virtual existence as images with the potential for becoming conscious, actual ones. Thus every lived moment is both actual and virtual, with perception on one side and memory on the other; an ever growing mass of recollections.”

<sup>37</sup> Svendsen, L. 2005, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, Reaktion Books, London. p.118  
“In boredom, time is slow, and because of the slowness we notice that we are not in charge of time, that we are subject to time.”

<sup>38</sup> *Oenothera biennis*, or common evening primrose: a flower which blossoms in the evening time during summer and autumn

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger M. quoted in Riera, G. (ed.) 2006, *Intrigues: From Being to the Other*, Fordham University Press, US. p.16  
“To see the Moment (Augenblick) means to stand in it.”

<sup>40</sup> Miles J. 2022 *Glossary*, Tutorial Handouts

In the context of Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographic series of seascapes, Jonathan Miles observes how one, in moments of looking into the everlasting patterns of an ocean, gains insight into cosmic time and human's limitations within it. “An ocean is both a substance but it is also a pattern, and in looking at an ocean the sense of a constant pattern of re-occurrence gives rise to the feeling of its own self-sufficiency and its sense of being there. This sense of eternal re-occurrence gives rise to the sensation of being dwarfed by it and overwhelmed by its temporal everlasting presence. As a spectacle, its gaze traps us within our own fragile relationship to time.”

<sup>41</sup> Miles J. 2022 *Glossary*, Tutorial Handouts

After Martin Heidegger, poiesis is a bringing-forth, a coming into presence and out of concealment. It can be found in the arts and in nature.

<sup>42</sup> Nassar, D. 2013, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. pp.131-132

“This is to say, the modern fragment aims to remain open, consciously resist closure. (...) Thus, the fragment, unlike a moment within a completed system, retains a degree of independence from the whole and resists the systematic goal of arriving at one, final and unchangeable meaning.”

<sup>43</sup> Miles J. 2022 *Glossary*, Tutorial Handouts

In Hiroshi Sugimoto’s photographic series *Theaters*, the artist photographed the entire length of film projections inside cinemas. The result of these multi-hour long exposures are seemingly empty movie theatres. In the middle of each photograph sits a white, brightly illuminated rectangle - the projection screen - which simultaneously holds no physical information of the film shown while containing the entirety of the screening, resulting in a puzzling paradox of layered time, revealed through the erasure of all evidence of its progression.

<sup>44</sup> Lispector, C. 2014, *Agua Viva*, Penguin Books, London. p.19

“(…) - but what is a window if not the air framed by right angles?”

<sup>45</sup> In 1953, at the Künstlerhaus Klagenfurt the artist Arnulf Rainer exhibited an empty picture frame as his presentation of the void. In order to present an experience of non-existence, the artist framed it. The art work builds on our perception of nothingness being formed in relation to an expectation for presence.

<sup>46</sup> Kosoi, N. 2005, ‘*Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko’s Paintings*’, *Art journal* (New York. 1960), vol. 64, no. 2, pp. 21–31.

Sartre argues that, “nothingness is a non-being” and therefore “depends on being, an entity, in order to negate it.”

<sup>47</sup> Feldborg, M., Lee, N.A., Hung, K., Peng, K. & Sui, J. 2021, 'Perceiving the Self and Emotions with an Anxious Mind: Evidence from an Implicit Perceptual Task', *International journal of environmental research and public health*, vol. 18, no. 22 (online) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182212096> [Accessed: 05.07.2022]

"Anxiety is also characterised by an altered self-view, which often takes the form of enhanced negative self-focus. Anxious individuals ruminate on their past and future experiences. Since this rumination is dysfunctional and focusses excessively on negative experiences, anxious people often have distorted evaluations of themselves (...)."

<sup>48</sup> Tanizaki, J. 2001, *In Praise of Shadows*, Vintage, London. p.46

"A phosphorescent jewel gives off its glow on colour in the dark and loses its beauty in the light. Were it not for shadows, there would be no beauty."

<sup>49</sup> The Museum of Modern Art. 2022. *Martin Creed. Work No. 227, The Lights Going On And Off. 2000* | MoMA. [online] Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/101549> [Accessed 31.05.2022].

*Work No. 227, The Lights Going On And Off* from 2000 is an installation piece by artist Martin Creed, the sole content of the work is an empty room, inside which a lightbulb turns on and off in intervals of five seconds. Through a continuous loop of repetition, a play of light on the verge of nothing, we enter into a sphere of circular time. Building on John Cage's soundpiece 4'33" from 1952, Creed's humorous iteration disrupts the viewing experience and shifts our attention towards the walls, the infrastructure of the gallery room - the background noise.

<sup>50</sup> Schulte, P. & Hall, J. 2018, 'Echoes Across Generations', in Tortell, P., Turin, M., & Young, M. (ed.), *Memory*, Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, Vancouver, BC. p.57- 61

In recent years, scientific findings have suggested that in addition to our DNA, there is another contributing factor which influences our biological memory "(...)that acts through so-called epigenetic mechanisms (...) that control(s) gene expression in a specific way. (...) Some forms of biological memory may be carried by specific cells or cell types. During pregnancy, cells are exchanged between the mother and the developing fetus. (...) There can even be transfer of cells from older siblings to the mother and then on to younger siblings, or from grandmother to mother and then to the mother's children. Families are thus tied together by a complex web of shared cells across generations."

<sup>51</sup>Schulte, P. & Hall, J. 2018, 'Echoes Across Generations', in Tortell, P., Turin, M., & Young, M. (ed.), *Memory*, Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, Vancouver, BC. p.60

"This biological memory is a record of past experiences and, potentially, those of our parents and grandparents. It affects the physiology and growth of our cells, potentially pre-programming offspring to deal with the conditions experienced by their parents."

<sup>52</sup> Cassin, B. 2016, *Nostalgia*, Fordham University Press, New York. p.3

"Just like language, a homeland 'is not something that belongs'"

<sup>53</sup> Cassin, B. 2016, *Nostalgia*, Fordham University Press, New York. p.4

"An island is an entity par excellence, an identity, something with a contour, an *eidōs*; it emerges like an idea."

<sup>54</sup> Parr, A. 2005, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. p.161

"Thus conceived, memory is a creative power for producing the new rather than a mechanism for reproducing the same."

<sup>55</sup> Watson, G. 2014, *A Philosophy of Emptiness*, 1st edn, Reaktion Books, London. pp.10-16

"Emptiness may be experienced as empty of absolutes, empty of permanence and empty of independence, yet *not* empty of existence and meaning. Emptiness as insubstantiality may provide an alternative to our philosophies of substance; the middle way between *is* and *is not*, and the stark choice between existence and nothingness. Empty space may be space for possibility and contemplation, just as silence may hold an opening for quiet and the potential for sound." - This is Gay Watson considering Eastern philosophy of emptiness, particularly the philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism, in which nothingness is perceived as "ultimate". In accordance, emptiness surpasses any duality between emptiness and fullness and in doing so opens up a way of living in acceptance of chance and uncertainty; rather than in "defence against chance".

<sup>56</sup> I wish I could remember the gift my father gave me on our only trip together. As my sister is describing the scarfs he bought for us, I start to envision what could be my recollection. I can see my former self, draping the scarf around my head just like my sister is telling in her story. Somehow, it feels real. Maybe the image in my mind and hearing that the blue scarf belonged to me is already enough of a memory to hold onto; even though it's fabricated.

<sup>57</sup> Popova, M. 2017, 'A Pioneering Scientist On Memory', *The Marginalian*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.themarginalian.org/2017/07/18/erwin-chargaff-heraclitean-fire-memory/>> [Accessed 29.05.2022].

"Memory, then, is not the pencil with which the outline of life is drawn but the eraser - (...)."

<sup>58</sup> Shakespeare quoted by Jacques Derrida, extract found in Alfano, C. (ed.) 2012, 'Porpentine.' *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp.109-22.

"'The time is out of joint' time is *disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down(...), *deranged*, both out of order, and mad."

<sup>59</sup> Parr, A. 2005, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. p.123  
"For Deleuze and Guattari, hysteria describes - in general philosophical sense - the attempt to escape from one's own body which is experienced as a trap."

<sup>60</sup> Serpentine Podcast. 2019. *General Ecology: In Our Body*

This episode of the Serpentine Podcast, *General Ecology: In Our Body* provides research and commentary on the areas of memory, decision making and communication within the plant world. It introduces radical ideas of forms of intelligence beyond the human scope.

<sup>61</sup> Cage, J. quoted in Watson, G. (ed. ) 2014, *A Philosophy of Emptiness*, 1st edn, Reaktion Books, London. pp.17-18

“wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.”

In 1952 John Cage presented his sound piece *4'33"*, during which a pianist performed 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence on stage with the sole exception of opening and closing the piano lid. Cage continuous, “I have felt and hoped to have led other people to feel that the sound of their environment constitute a music which is more interesting than the music which day would hear if they went into a concert hall.”

<sup>62</sup> Obrist, H. 2022, *Gerhard Richter | Interview*, Gagosian Quarterly. [online] Available at: <<https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2021/02/22/interview-gerhard-richter/>> [Accessed 07.06.2022].

In 2007, the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed the artist Gerhard Richter at his studio in Cologne. After the interview, Richter shared his most recent body of work with Obrist, a series of large-scale canvases covered in uneven, thick layers of paint which Richter had applied, only to use a large squeegee to scrape them off again. Richter had not titled the work yet and when Obrist asked him about the music he was listening to when working on it he replied ‘Cage’, referring to the music by John Cage, who similarly to Richter “often applied chance procedures in composing”. In his article from 2021 Obrist remembers his first encounter with the *Cage* paintings “As Richter says, painting happens. He seizes on these moments revealed by chance in a tension between composition and accident—a controlled chance, so to speak, like that found in Cage’s work. (...) To me these demand an infinite process of looking, since one can always discover new and different elements in them on each viewing. This process has a certain sense of slowness.”

<sup>63</sup> In his short film *Dad's Stick* John Smith reveals peculiarities he remembers about his father through objects that 'incapsulate' them. What we see, initially, are abstract lines of colours. As Smith tells us about his father's painting, he then goes on to reminisce about the colour palettes he would have used throughout the years. What is revealed, eventually, is that his father would always use the same stick to stir paint when painting a room in their family home. What we have been looking at is this particular stick which has been cut through to reveal all the colours and layers, representing passages in their family's life and the continuous task his father had performed before passing away. What the film conveys is a visualisation of memory and a chronology which we may attribute significance to through nostalgia or emotional attachment. Excerpt of the film can be viewed here: John Smith 2012, *Dad's Stick* [Short Film], commissioned by the Frieze Foundation for Frieze Art Fair, available at: <http://johnsmithfilms.com/selected-works/dads-stick/> [Accessed: 07.06.2022]

<sup>64</sup> Campany, D. 2005, in Darsie A., Batchen G., and Howarth S.(ed.), *Singular Images*, Tate Publishing, London.

In 1920 New York, Man Ray photographed the dust that his good friend Marcel Duchamp had been cultivating in his studio for one of his works. *Dust Breeding* shows a thick layer and bundles of dust upon a sheet of glass. In 2005, the curator David Campany commented on the photograph: "Dust is a trace – a trace of mortality. A photograph is a trace of what was before the camera. So a photograph of dust is a trace of a trace."

<sup>65</sup> I feel a deep sense of belonging to the place my mother was born in, although I have never lived there. The stone pine which overlooks my grandparents land has inscribed itself into my memory.

<sup>66</sup> Blanchot, M. 1993, *The Infinite Conversation*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis; London. p.121

"Attention is the emptiness of thought orientated by a gentle force and maintained in accord with the empty intimacy of time... Attention is the reception of what escapes attention, an opening upon the unexpected, a waiting that is unawaited of all waiting."

<sup>67</sup> Miles J. 2022, *Emptiness - Flecks of the Marvellous (Figuring Aesthetics)* [Lecture], Critical Contextual Studies, Royal College of Art, [17.02.2022]

In Japanese painting, the 'Enso' is a hand drawn circle, painted in a single gesture. It embodies the notion of perfect imperfection and references the traditional Chinese believe that everything comes from and goes back into emptiness; a play of coming in and out of presence.

<sup>68</sup> Watson, G. 2014, *A Philosophy of Emptiness*, 1st edn, Reaktion Books, London. p.15  
"In a contemporary commentary to one of the key texts of Mahayana Buddhism, the Heart Sutra, Mu Soeng points out that in Sanskrit language, *sunya*, empty, was also the word chosen for zero, (...). Zero, he says, is a round circle with nothing inside, denoting the 'essential consciousness of the phenomena. In other words, manifestation without essence' [(M. Soeng, 2010)]."

<sup>69</sup> Serpentine Galleries. 2019. *The Shape of a Circle in the Mind of a Fish* [online]  
Available at: <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/shape-circle-mind-fish/> [Accessed 04.072022].

*The Shape of a Circle in the Mind of a Fish* is a multiyear-long research and festival project by the Serpentine Gallery in London, and part of their over-arching General Ecology series. The project examines forms of intelligence beyond the human mind across species, plants, organisms as well as technology. The starting point for the research was a small puffer fish who draws circles in the sand through a sort of dance, presumably to attract potential mates. Questions arose on how the shape of this circle is perceived in the fish's mind and how humans can "reconsider language, communication and imagination in an interspecies landscape (...)" (Serpentine Gallery, 2019).



<sup>70</sup> Serpentine Podcast. 2019. *General Ecology: In Our Body* (5.30min - 6.05min & 14.30min - 15.05min)

In this episode of the Serpentine podcast, anthropologist Anna Tsing considers the symbiotic interconnections between different species. She suggests that, many organisms are depended on other species in their own development, the same way that different bacteria play a crucial role in the human digestive system. In the light of this discussion biologist Phoebe Tickell goes on to say, that the human cognitive processes are influenced and 'conditioned' by a multitude of entities (bacteria & microorganisms) with a multitude of agencies and thus proposes a redefinition of the conscious self as a "cluster of lives and of life-forms." (Tickell P., 2019)

<sup>71</sup> Peppiatt, M. 2021, *Francis Bacon: Man and Beast*, Royal Academy of Arts, London. p. 37

"After all, what is more eternal than dust?" - In his later works, Francis Bacon started to include dust collected from his studio in his paintings. In '*Study of a Bull*' 1991, the bull is seemingly appearing and disappearing at once, moving from a dark, black rectangular into the light. The use of dust, which Bacon refers to as being "eternal" as well as the ambiguity of the figure, and the coming in and out of presence of the bull, carry the notion of life and death through. '*Study of a Bull*' was Bacon's last painting, he died shortly after.

<sup>72</sup> Lispector, C. 2014, *Água Viva*, Penguin Books, London. p.7

"I pin down sudden instants that carry within them their own death and others are born (...)"

<sup>73</sup> Riera, G. 2006, *Intrigues: From Being to the Other*, Fordham University Press, US. p.20

"In *Being and Time* Heidegger conceives "the eternity" of the eternal return as the moment ( *der Augenblick* ) of decision and insight *proper* to a *Dasein* who temporalizes time by a resolute anticipation of its possibilities. These possibilities are set forth in horizon of death; by anticipating death *Dasein* projects itself in advance into the possibility that *Dasein* is itself."

<sup>74</sup> Lispector, C. 2014, *Água Viva*, Penguin Books, London. p.3

"I'm trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant-now so fleeting that it's already gone because it's already become a new instant-now that's also already gone. (...) the present slips away and the instant too, I am this very second forever in the now."

<sup>75</sup> Riera, G. 2006, *Intrigues: From Being to the Other*, Fordham University Press, US. p.19  
“(…), Heidegger injects being into becoming, transforming the latter into a consistent impermanence.”

<sup>76</sup> Pascal B. quoted in Svendsen, L. 2005, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, Reaktion Books, London. p.53

“Man finds nothing so intolerable as to be in a state of complete rest, without passions, without occupation, without diversion, without effort. Then he feels his nullity, loneliness, inadequacy, dependence, helplessness, emptiness. And at once there wells up from the depths of his soul boredom, gloom, depression, chagrin, resentment, despair.”

<sup>77</sup> Svendsen, L. 2005, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, Reaktion Books, London. pp.122-123  
Heidegger distinguishes between three cases of boredom; the third one being ‘profound boredom’. “In the superficial form of boredom, one is left empty by the objects around one, but in profound boredom, one is left empty by everything - even by oneself.(…) Everything becomes both indifferent and bothersome in its lack of meaning. This indifference also characterizes me. I become an ‘empty’ nobody who can be experienced in my emptiness. (Svendsen, L. 2005)”

<sup>78</sup> Cassin, B. 2016, *Nostalgia*, Fordham University Press, New York. p.2

“I am at home “as though”, or insofar as, I am not at home. It is because I have no roots there that the uprooted one that I am, (...) finds herself “as though” at home.”

<sup>79</sup> Heidegger M. quoted in Riera, G. 2006, *Intrigues: From Being to the Other*, Fordham University Press, US. p.38

“Thinking is itself the proper acting insofar as to act means to comply with the essential unfolding of being.”

<sup>80</sup> Vuong, O. 2019, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Jonathan Cape, London. p.1  
As a child of second generation immigrants, and now an immigrant myself, I am acutely aware of the barriers even nuances in languages can create. The struggle to communicate and express myself, precisely, is something I have observed and felt throughout my life. In his novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* Ocean Vuong's protagonist writes letters to his illiterate mother creating an ever-growing distance between the two. While his preferred way of communication, writing, is intended to create intimacy and draw them closer together, he is writing knowing very well that she may never be able to fully experience what he is expressing. - "Dear Ma, I am writing to reach you - even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are."(Vuong O. 2019)

<sup>81</sup> Vuong, O. 2017, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, Jonathan Cape, London. p.5  
"Yes, you have a country. Someday, they will find it while searching for lost ships..."  
Vuong explores themes of memory, connection and exile in his collection of poems *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, referencing his family's experience as Vietnamese refugees in the US. In this particular poem (*To my Father / To my Future Son*) he alludes to a multitude of timelines, addressing not only the past but also the future. Although his words speak directly to his understanding of exile, they also echo a broader sense of time and heritage. This idea of the forgotten, but rediscovered, ties in with the phenomenon of uprootedness or the elsewhere. Similarly, this awareness he describes may be applied to areas of the mind which one may want to return to but can only look back on or tell anecdotes about. You can be both, trapped in the elsewhere, yet feel as though you cannot reach it.

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