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Prologue

The following thesis paper accompanies the body of artwork[†] that I have been creating throughout the past two years of the Master of Visual Studies program. To a large extent, the form and content of this paper are derived directly from the ideas and processes of my artistic work. For this reason, this thesis is written in an aphoristic format that consists of various textual meditations that can be read **in any order**, with each fragment touching upon key recurring themes of my artwork and working process. The goal of this thesis paper is to propose terrains of thought, reflections and questions that are meant to be considered in dialogue with the exhibited work.

The exhibited body of artwork, appearing in a variety of mediums, is comprised of several overlapping narratives that unfold as a series of artistic revelations in dialogue with a fragmented, poetic manuscript of my late grandfather. Since he passed away when I was nearly fourteen years old, I have been left with a strong sense of loss. His manuscript and diverse artistic work, although insignificant to me at that time, has become increasingly important to me. By telling a story and reimagining its narratives, I interpret in and through this personal archive. The current body of artwork tries to recreate the possibility of a shared biography through artistic dialogue.

[†] Appendix, images 1-4.

Gentle Steps

I recall a polaroid photograph of my grandfather and me standing in the backyard of the house I grew up in. We are photographed sitting on the ground, looking at the camera; in fact, I am sitting, facing the camera directly, while my grandfather leans toward me, his left knee touching the ground and his right leg forcibly forming a strange shape, almost touching my body. His right arm reaches toward my opposite shoulder as if making sure I will not escape the scene at the last moment.

A three-hour bus ride brought him that afternoon to Jerusalem to spend the weekend with me while my parents had gone out of town. Minutes before they left, I had what seemed to be a terrible fight with them, a moment of elementary rebellion against parental authority that only an eight-year old can have, one that apparently shakes up his world profoundly. They rushed out angrily. My anger accumulated, eventually bursting out in the form of uncontrolled weeping that was prolonged mainly because it could not be thrown back at whomever, so to speak, deserved it.

My grandfather followed me outside, persuading me to let go, not by any particular logical argument, but by his serene, consolable presence. His voice gently stroked my eardrums and relieved their vibrations. Every once in a while, he wanted us to be photographed, which seemed like a reasonable request as time went by. In the end, much more than my unnatural smile, his compassion and supposedly one-sided love is what radiate from that photograph; these are emotions that remain vivid despite qualitative degradation in both memory and polaroid's chemicals.

This photograph, a well-preserved letter of some kind, always reminds me a poem by Hart Crane called "My Grandmother's Love Letters." It reads:

There are no stars tonight
But those of memory.
Yet how much room for memory there is
In the loose girdle of soft rain.

There is even room enough
For the letters of my mother's mother,
Elizabeth,
That have been pressed so long
Into a corner of the roof
That they are brown and soft,
And liable to melt as snow.

Over the greatness of such space
Steps must be gentle.
It is all hung by an invisible white hair.
It trembles as birch limbs webbing the air.

And I ask myself:

Are your fingers long enough to play
Old keys that are but echoes:
Is the silence strong enough
To carry back the music to its source

And back to you again
As though to her?

Yet I would lead my grandmother by the hand
Through much of what she would not understand;
And so I stumble. And the rain continues on the roof
With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.[‡]

‡ Crane, *Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, 6.

Our Unravelling Nightgown

In 1969, Maurice Blanchot published *The Infinite Conversation*, containing a beautiful opening passage titled "Thought and the Exigency of Discontinuity." Blanchot writes there about another book published exactly three hundred years earlier (1669, however posthumously), the *Pensées*, by French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal. Although originally written as a unified lecture, the *Pensées*, claims Blanchot, turned out to be somewhat of a deviation from the accepted course of writing and theorization at that time. Working independently from any educational institution and thus free from obeying formal and informal academic rules, Pascal conducted his research according to his own needs. It eventually became a divided and fragmented lecture that for the first time presented the idea of the fragment as a unity.

It was only afterwards, with the appearance of Hegel's dialectics, that the idea of continuousness that gives rise to itself and that proceeds from the centre to the perimeter, from the abstract to the concrete, will not be merely a synchronous whole, but will also add to itself the "scale" of duration and history. This idea will construct itself as a totality in motion, and eventually we will recognize that the form of the research and the research itself are congruent. The dialectical act doesn't eliminate but rather tries to include the moment of discontinuity by proceeding from one concept to its opposite. What exists between these two oppositions? The nothingness, the limbo's vacuum that deepens continuously, the nothingness as creation and motion.

Writing, says Blanchot, is always at risk of being satisfied with a pseudo continuity that supposedly make things easier for its reader. But this continuous motion cannot pretend to be in terms of true continuity. In modern literature (Proust, the surrealists, Joyce), attempts at a profound continuity hindered the reader's permanent habituated ways of understanding texts. André Breton, for example, with his preaching for "absolute continuity," with his call that is aimed for the writer to count only on the "rustle's inexhaustible character," disrupted our reading habits, since our spirit, with its systematic and moderate progression, could not cope with the indirect intrusion of reality in its entirety. Thus, only our consciousness's modality, our senses' structures and forms of language, force us to tear apart this unified and beautiful nightgown.[◊]

Should we understand this discontinuity as a sign of the misery of consciousness, a defect in human structure, a sign for our finiteness? Or rather, Blanchot asks, assuming this discontinuity is intrinsic to human nature and constitutes its creation, will we discover that the "essence of everything" is connected to the need for discontinuity as much as it is connected to the need for unity? When we speak of the human being as non-unified, we invoke a completely different relation, one that questions the idea of existence as continuity or discontinuity—In other words, a relation that extracts itself from the problematics of existence and raises a question which isn't the question of being. Thus, according to Blanchot, when we ask ourselves about it, we may end up escaping from dialectics but also from ontology.

◊ Appendix, image 6. In this work, a speech-made, sonic nightgown is constantly being unravelled by various speech acts that testify to the once unified object. Those speech acts, which do not cease, prevent a change in the world and yet the rustle's inexhaustible character (as Blanchot via Breton refers to it) submerses the process. These sonic utterances of language fluctuate on the margin, between sense and non-sense. There is a sense of craving for balance, but at the same time an attempt to present a work that dwells on the very moment of destabilization, the moment before disintegration or resolve in favor of a certain narrative.

Baltic Inclusions

Inclusions[¥] trapped in amber are often found in the Baltic Sea region of Northern Europe. Fossilized from tree resin and formed through a long period of petrification, these inclusions don't easily share their mysteries. Early amber hunters of the region used to measure the amber's value according to the inclusions found within it. Their assessment was based not only on the object caught within the resin, but also on the narrative they could generate from the particular inclusion. Vernacular Baltic legends about how a certain insect or plant ended up trapped within this once viscous material highly affected their overall evaluation. By contrast, an inclusion found and presented as an orphan fragment caused great confusion. Mysteries entangled and exchange rates followed promptly.

Extensive landscape descriptions, maps, and drawings were made by the hunters for future reference. Their outlines had to be reliable; however, if mistakes occurred, one could always revisit the landscape to decipher the problem. Can we apply this methodology to a textual landscape? Can we follow the same path, back and forth, between a text (as a system of representation or as an abstract map) and the world supposedly outside the text? Can we revisit the world in order to decipher an error or a problem in comprehension that occurs within a textual landscape? Will it still be the same world?[€]

My grandfather once told me about a story he was planning to write. It was about a journey he had taken from his hometown of Vilnius to the Curonian Spit, which separates the Curonian lagoon from the Baltic Sea's southeastern coast. He departed on that journey, as a somewhat modern Baltic hunter, in search for the earliest catechism written in Old Prussian, around AD 1400, and said to be buried within the dunes of the spit. The catechism also included, so he was told, a mysterious "footnote" written in Hebrew and serving as an important key to the text, without which the text could not be fully deciphered. Being fluent in both languages, he was hired by a local archbishop eager to find the original text and its footnote (though he already held a printed copy in his hands from the 16th century). He equipped my grandfather with a crumpled map that indicated the catechism's exact location. Because it seemed completely hopeless, my grandfather was astounded to find the catechism, including its footnote, in the exact place indicated by the map. But he could not immediately recognize nor read the footnote, because it was written densely, by an encumbered hand. Back in Vilnius, feeding the archbishop's discontent, all he managed to ascertain was that its subject matter was maybe one of the earliest references to what later came to be known as the "Hermeneutic Circle."

Originally derived from Greek philosophy, the idea of "The Hermeneutic Circle" describes an interpretive process of a text that aims at its accurate comprehension. According to this idea, the act of comprehending and understanding a text as a whole, as an inclusion, depends on comprehending and understanding its parts. The one conditions the other(s), and a reciprocal movement between the text as a whole and its parts is needed in order to ignite the process from the outset. Supposedly, what does not lend itself to immediate understanding can be interpreted by means of philological work. However, this interplay between the whole and its parts results in a vicious circle, since a focus on one side presupposes the existence of the other. Thus, we should ask, how does comprehension occur? The Hermeneutic Circle's theoretical purpose, roughly speaking, is to emphasize the idea that the text's meaning has to be found outside the text itself, in its broader cultural, historical, and lingual contexts, rather than in the text itself. Could this idea be of any use for the Baltic hunters when they drew their maps and representational abstractions?

¥ In mineralogy or gemology, inclusion is any fragment (once animated or not) internally encapsulated within a mineral that functions as its "host."

€ Appendix, images 13–15. In the course of a text's life, continuous terrains, dimensions, relationships, readings, interpretations, and emotions constitute the text's topography. Its "thousand plateaux" is one metaphor (out of many) for the stratification of language and for its ability to transform, solidify, and fracture. The use of damar resin in this work, for once, preserves relative clarifications that extend our understanding of it. Resin, in this instance, is used as one of the tree's internal organic materials. The tree uses it, primarily, as a substance-based defense mechanism.

Song of the Sea²

I often think about those moments when we fall behind the trace of our words until eventually we lose sight of them and have nothing to say. As we follow that trace it twists and turns in many directions. It sometimes curves in a self-destructive manner, threatens to collapse into itself like a black hole or a whirlpool. I was once caught up in such a whirlpool, which took me by surprise. The situation escalated so dramatically that there was no time to think or react. Miraculously, it ended the same way. But until I was drawn to safety, the only thing I could clearly notice was that losing of trace and the profound sound of the whirlpool—a roaring silence, a terrifying lullaby.

“Song of the Sea” appears in the Hebrew Bible as one of only three poems throughout the holy scripture, appearing in close proximity to certain miracles that took place. The “Song of the Sea,” as sung by the Hebrews immediately after they crossed the sea of reeds in safety, praises the lord for the miracle that was brought upon them the moment the sea was torn in half. Yet apart from its obvious religious purpose of glorification, the poem can also be analyzed and understood from a perspective of aesthetic discourse.

The perplexing and incomprehensible nature of the encounter with a miracle is inherently part of the miracle. In its absurdity, we learn that the world, as we apprehend it, is incomplete. What is the nature of this experience? How can we understand or sense it? What does it mean for us? This endless chain of questions demonstrates a need for a different set of conceptual tools—poetic ones—in order to approach the miraculous encounter. As an extraordinary event, the miracle is a fracture in reality's crust. This unique moment is when a poet “realizes” that the event will summon him to write a poem. While caught in the whirlpool, I didn't have such a realization. Instead, it was like being a poem. Slow progression and yet an emphasis on every movement; intervals and deferments; a too-large space to breath that nullifies breathing itself, and consequently, our ability to speak. Poetry is a non-literal moment torn and unfolded from within reality. However, it is bound by a certain necessary limiting condition that keeps it somewhat intact, specifically to sense and meaning. This condition is poetry's prevalent use of repetitive forms. Like the circular and repetitive movement of the whirlpool, a poem traces repetitions or else will be drawn to dissipation, unable to speak about the miracle in a unified manner. The poem attempts to contain the horrifying disintegration of reality that is also the possible moment of witnessing the miraculous.

² Exodus 15:1-18.

The Autobiographical Dimension of Thought

The annual cult of personality culminated somewhat as usual. We all gathered at the familiar southwestern corner of our ocean of gravestones and waited for the first one to open up. I can't recall exactly who it was but the poem he or she read was extremely poetic, beautiful and stunning. Relatively short and direct, yet a poem that nonetheless contains and delivers perpetual and numinous meanings. Each year, when clouds began to pile up in the sky, a single poem was taken out of the poetic cache that had been pressed into a corner of the roof. As if only temporarily resurrected, that certain poem spoke to us, frantically, before it was put away again into damp darkness. As years went by, this continuous, cyclic turnover of imaginary, paper-made narrators eventually turned into a chaotic and untidy manuscript. Although it was not done deliberately, this was something my grandfather would certainly not have approved of. Moreover, the manuscript had never been adequately archived or preserved. It seemed as if nobody wanted to exclusively grant it the patronage such a mythical object deserves.

By the time my grandfather passed away, typewriters and even computerized word processors were relatively in use. Yet he insisted on writing poetry by hand, an aesthetics he derived from his conception of the artistic object. I was never able to discuss this with him, but I can feel it by looking at the way he placed the words on the papers, by the way the shape of each letter conquers what had become by now fragmented sheets. In that sense, his manuscript, as a physical entity, demanded special treatment and eventually yielded a unique understanding regarding a physical object's potential to constitute abstract meanings. In other words, the physical manuscript my grandfather created was an attempt to think, through material, how the particular, fragmentary, or biographical can be conceived as the general or philosophical.

My continuing dialogue with him restarted when I decided to remove the entire manuscript from the attic. Since it didn't present any linear arrangement or other logical structure, I initially divided the extensive manuscript into various different piles that form a reasonable point of departure and which, at the same time, did not cause it to be reduced or deprived of its rich potentiality. I tried to understand the connection between the different piles, to arrive at a (unified) conception of what the manuscript ultimately is, what it "means." I attempted to read autobiography as philosophy. This is a contradictory task, since philosophy asks for generality and timelessness while biography aims for the opposite.[‡]

Among the numerous books in the attic I found a copy of *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, the autobiographical memoir by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, originally published in 1782, four years after Rousseau's death. One of the ten chapters of the memoir exhibits Rousseau's intensive involvement with botany and his wish to construct an anthology of plants. The chapter results in a special form of wholeness that can be attributed to both the anthology itself and to human nature as a metaphor for it. Rousseau conveys a sense of the soul's expansion as felt by scattering himself across the surface, of his memories looking for the particular that represents convergence, focus, and reduction as it connects to the ground, unrelates to imagination and becomes concrete. Through that movement, the anthology embodies an additive logic rather than a systematic one; the additive logic propels towards the exposure of unique connections between the various particulars of the collection by offering a bird's-eye view over the entire collection. The collection, thus, is fully present for us when out of context; only then can we rediscover a new meaning in it by summoning and presenting the various particulars in it side by side.

‡ Appendix, image 1. In regard to the manuscript, a great challenge in this current body of artwork was to profoundly change my sustainable conception of the manuscript—from so far working solely with its content, to working with it in terms of being a physical entity. Consequently, this meant replacing my focus of a mainly time-based perspective with a three-dimensional one.

The Experienced / The Storyteller

My grandfather was a witty storyteller who always took me by a devious route to the heart of a story until all categories of the real and the imaginary blurred together, losing their aesthetic meaning and destination. That was the exact moment when he leaned back and recessed the story on a false pretext of some sort, albeit with a “to be continued” promise. And the next night (and the following one) it always did continue until it became a giant, multi-structured story whose point of departure I had already forgotten and whose end I could not anticipate. Everything was told by heart and yet felt scripted; stories related to other stories to form a successive structure, not only due to what seemed to be a perfect transformation of oral tradition into a written format that could be collected and easily retold, but also due to something internal to the logic of storytelling.[‡]

One of his favorite books was *One Thousand and One Nights*, which was also cherished, apparently, by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin refers to the model of *One Thousand and One Nights*[◊] where Scheherazade tells a series of successive stories that causes the king to keep her alive in order to hear the conclusion, only to be again held in suspense by another beginning of a tale the next night. This model, says Benjamin, is the polar opposite to the mental relaxation and boredom necessary for the absorption of stories. Storytelling thus is the occasion for the dialectical overcoming of boredom associated with the habitual. The succession of stories becomes the model for presence of mind, an urgency manifest in finding ways to postpone.

What does an entire life articulated through stories, through the anecdotal, look like? In order to understand that, we need to go back to Benjamin's distinction between the form of the novel and the form of the story, both traceable to the original unity of the epos. Benjamin contrasts the perpetual remembrance of the novelist and the short-lived reminiscence of the storyteller: "The first is dedicated to one hero, one odyssey, or one battle, the second to many diffuse occurrences."[§] A character in a novel is best described by saying that the “meaning” of his or her life is revealed only in death. The reader of a novel is a witness to what can never be experienced in their own life—that is, a view of life from the outside, the ability to return and reflect on life, tighten it into a meaningful totality, to see that even death becomes part of its necessary unity. The novel is the experience of life seen as a limited whole. The solipsistic fantasy (to view life from the outside) is fulfilled by reading of the completeness of meaning of another's life. This sense of life as a meaningful totality, as a limited whole, is what the reader seeks.

In contrast, the constitution of the meaning of life as a plurality of stories provides a way to conceive of experience so that essential limits disappear. In stories, because we're speaking in terms of remembrance, there is no necessity to understand things in an already determined way, according to an unavoidable progression. There's no unique odyssey, and the experience can be seen as significant without the need to become an ultimate conflict. The succession of stories can become a model for a mode of experience in which the sense of limit is transformed. Memory can become the medium in which any sense of a necessary progression of things is dissolved. In contrast to the solitude of the hero and the reader of the novel, the voice of the storyteller draws its strength from turning a life-determining necessity into a specific difficulty to be avoided. The multiplicity of stories related to the entirety of life by the potential to open the field of life to further direction.

‡ Appendix, images 2–5. The manuscript is divided into five different piles, which I refer to as the creation of different narratives. This was the only physical act of arrangement I applied to the original manuscript, which was a chaotic object when I found it. What happens when a single narrative becomes dominant? On the one hand, it contributes to a process of solidification, identity, and understanding of a subject matter (as an act of decision and stabilization); on the other hand, it cancels all other potential narratives in terms of future possibilities.

◊ Benjamin, *Selected Writings*.

§ Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, III, 154.

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Pristine crust. Hypothetically, the earth's oldest tectonic plates were once an assembled and unified supercontinent dating back about three-hundred-million years. The southern hemisphere's Archean cratons of Kaapvall and Pilbara⁸ are the only sizable areas where granite-greenstone terrains were preserved in a relatively ancient state to be examined. The word “relatively” entails the above mentioned hypothesis, perhaps even a belief or wishful thinking, since the earth's crust as part of its geological life is continuously evolving, changing, forming, and deforming. The scope of our gaze is necessarily limited, not due to our human potential for reasoning, but due to the elusive character of our gaze, which constitutes an infinite dialogue with, supposedly, an exterior world.

An alternative interpretation might suggest that global processes synchronized the same geological sequence in different areas of the earth, and hence a single supercontinent never existed. If we will follow this interpretation, we should also inquire about a hypothetical “master clock” that is the source for such synchronization, and then again, we aim for a possible unity. A master clock measures time—an idea that in fact we know relatively little about it. However, a master clock measures the basic familiar unit of a second which is 9,192,631,770 periods of oscillations of an undisturbed cesium atom. Time is a coordinate that lets us most simply understand the evolution of the universe... but that is a circular definition. The computation of time as done by a master clock synchronizes all human digital-dependent activities on planet earth these days, and its accuracy is almost inconceivable. Computing frequency to about sixteen decimal points, this master clock will not lose or gain one second in a period of three hundred million years, which makes it the most accurate measuring device operationally ever created by humankind to measure anything. Time, as produced by the single master clock, is being distributed globally. This distribution means coordinating (almost) all everyday human actions on various levels. Why do we need such a precise time all the time? A simple example: If one GPS satellite is off by one billionth of a second, one nanosecond, then the GPS receiver will mistakenly think that it is about three feet closer or further away from that satellite; how, then, we will be able to find the entrance for our driveway? Driveways, streets, highways, transportation veins, movement on the ground and in space. The absence of the master clock means the absence of coordination and synchronization in different parts on earth. But do we actually need a master clock in a single supercontinent?

Even a master clock is liable to catastrophic failure as no clock runs perfectly. The radicalization of time and the attempts to control its accuracy can become a double-edged sword. If we hit the level of a hundred times more accurate clocks, that is an accuracy of eighteen decimal points, many problems arise involving Einstein's theory of relativity, which says that time runs slower at two different levels of a gravitational field. A three-foot-tall clock, for example, will run slightly faster at the top than at its bottom. In a futuristic scenario like this, a master clock no longer means harmony for mankind.

✘ Appendix, images 11–12. The work, so it seems, tends to speak about what cannot be said or expressed rather than the opposite, or about that which conceals itself from us and becomes inaccessible rather than presents a certain affirmative meaning. Acute examination is therefore required. In this sense, the crucial feasibility of the contingent nature of this work depends, maybe even more than the work itself, on a viewer/listener and their active engagement with the work. The work depends on the “presence” of the viewer/listener for its experience. It presents questions for the viewer/listener rather than offers direct or implied answers; it highlights the need to frame an open question in which the artistic work, as well as the viewer/listener, will function as the vehicle for finding out an answer rather than illustrating a predetermined one.

Deep Listening

Last summer I departed on a journey to Canada's west and arrived at Vancouver Island on a partly clouded morning. The Pacific Ocean, stretching out and reaching the horizon, glittered in silence. Similarly, the coast breathed slowly and peacefully, attuned itself to the water. On the shoreline, I initially heard nothing but faint sounds of propagated waves, which did not differ much in volume, density, timbre, or related moments of silence. But in a deeper listening¹ various nuances unfolded and revealed continuous mini-dramas that occurred when different states of matter collided into one another.

Later I thought about the prolonged mutual history those different materials share on the coastline and about the charged dialogue they develop throughout constant cycles of tide. The longer I sat there to listen, although an insignificant time in geological terms, the better I realized my part in this dialogue and more clearly became the complex relationship I have with sound. A constant dialogue is being created between our perception of sounds and sounds themselves. The various characteristics of sounds change as a result of our mutual dialogue and the degree of control we impose on them. Sound's tendency to disappear is challenged by our attention to it. At some point, however, a certain attempt to control the sonic realm becomes irrelevant since, acoustically, sounds fade away and we can do nothing about it but retain them in memory for future purposes. Sometimes we're impatient for attentive listening and thus feel attacked by sounds. We instinctively try to "fight back," as if we are engaged in a certain negative, unproductive dialogue with sound. In moments when my mind drifted away during the deep-listening session on the coast, I thought about the manner in which I try to control a sound scene. I then realized that sounds occur when an expectation emerged and resistance follows. When I expect something to happen, I can be prepared to act and to apply force or resistance and thus to create a sound, a change. When I resist, the situation is unstable, it rumbles. Calmness arrives through voluntary non-resistance, which ideally results in silence.

I recalled the following passage by Hannah Arendt, which nicely ties together the different ends of the idea of silence, the political sphere human beings occupy, and her notion of history: "What is difficult for us to realize is that the great deeds and works of which mortals are capable, and which become the topic of historical narrative, are not seen as parts of either an encompassing whole or a process; on the contrary, the stress is always on single instances and single gestures. These single instances, deeds or events, interrupt the circular movement of daily life in the same sense that the rectilinear *βίος* of the mortals interrupts the circular movement of biological life itself. The subject matter of history is these interruptions—the extraordinary, in other words."²

In regard to "Deep Listening," later insights slowly emerged days after I left Vancouver Island. Here are

¹ In the practice of "Deep Listening," as developed by artist and composer Pauline Oliveros, we listen with the understanding that physical hearing also requires active attention. Thus, listening takes place voluntarily. The ear transmits auditory information, but our attention to it can be tuned out. To hear is the physical means that enables perception, while to listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically. Our auditory perception is comprised of the various combinations of both physical and psychological properties—pressure patterns assist hearing but cultural history and experience influence listening.

Thus, sometimes we can identify a situation that a sound, after being first experienced, is discarded unnoticed without conscious interpretation. In order to avoid that, the aim of "Deep Listening" is to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound (with all its complexities). The focus on a certain sound can fully reveal its details, but such focus should always return to, or be within, the whole of the space/time continuum. "Deep Listening" practice intends to expand consciousness to the whole space/time continuum of sounds/silence.

"Deep Listening" is a form of meditation. Just as meditation is used to calm the mind and to promote receptivity or concentration, through attention engaged in particular ways, and through the emptying, expansion and contraction of the mind where there is relaxation or "letting go" and focus, "Deep Listening" is used in the same way and thus makes a form of meditation. Attention is directed to the interplay of sounds and silences; the relationship of all perceptible sounds is important. Inner listening is an altered state of consciousness full of inner sounds. Sonic meditations, in this sense, are based on patterns of attention; they are ways of listening and responding and form the basis for "Deep Listening" as a practice.

² ≈ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42–43.

a few of them:

1. The Geography of Sound

Sounds tend to be arranged in layers, bottom to top, left to right. Each sound occupies its own altitude and vector in this array and so our hearing/listening is, in fact, three dimensional. Apparently, when we try to divide stereo sounds arriving to the right ear from the ones that arriving at the left ear (which is possible), we realize that listening in stereo makes, almost, no sense at all.

Another interesting characteristic to sounds' geography involves its connection to time. Sound has the tendency to be arranged in "scenes" according to a certain time signature (one after the other, one mixed into another) yet with the ability to be differentiated, to a certain extent, into the different scenes. We thus can decide where one scene starts and the other ends. We experience sound as a time/space continuum.

2. Imaginary Sounds

The phenomenon of imaginary sound is a function of self-attention and tuning as well as wishful thinking. These sounds don't grow out of the void, out of nothing, but are connected, both physically and psychologically, to existing sounds or to what happens in the world in a certain moment. In this regard, we can contribute or create other sounds which will become part of sonic reality. These "other sounds" have the same phenomenological significance.

3. Tuning

Tuning one's perception, simultaneously both internally and externally, is a difficult but possible task. I've noticed that while focusing on my breathing, I lose attention to sound and to the process of listening. It seems as if the focus needs to shift back and forth between two realms. Later on, they can coexist with one's losing full attention. Furthermore, attention to a certain sound affects the perception of other sounds, in the sense of perceived volume. The process of tuning unites us with an "external" world of sounds.

4. The Symbolic Function of Sound

It is very hard to listen to sounds without a labeling impulse since most of our surrounding sounds are very functional sounds. But furthermore, the sounds of spoken language seem to grasp meaning tightly, making it difficult to listen to them "in-themselves" (supposedly with absolutely no context).

5. Writing About Sound

When I try to conceptualize, articulate, and write about sounds, I immediately lose the direct connection with them and drift away in personal associations. I believe we need to develop a better vocabulary of sound. Consider this following example, which might be of help: the description of a phone call. It can be divided into three parts and can be of use according to the one that's more suitable in a certain situation: first, "puru puru"—the sound itself (onomatopoeia); second, "telephone"—sound situation (source); and third, "annoying"—sound impression (adjective).

Aphorisms

“The aphoristic form, which doesn't seek evidence nor enable it, allows you to deceive to your heart's desire. You will find within it the freedom to say nothing but the truth, that is: to present unprovable certainties without causing them to be adorn in reason and method.”^B

Aphorisms, Martin Buber tells us, indicate a three-dimensional devotion. The first devotion is the word's devotion to the idea. To “deceive,” in the context of the above quote, does not mean to “lie.” We interpret “lie,” in essence, as if saying something we do not believe in. To “deceive,” then, is to say something we do not think about. The liar deceptively presents a factual situation whereas the one who deceives deceptively presents a process of thought. Whoever is devoted in this area is self-imposed by the authority of his or her own idea; we merely express our ideas. We do not sharpen our ideas nor add “proofs,” interpretations, or ornaments to them. At the same time, however, we say nothing less than our ideas.

The second, higher devotion is the idea's devotion to the soul. We are not troubled by a true idea unlike over a true word. The idea emerges from within the soul and exposes itself. It is not part of the moment that it appears within. In the case of aphorisms, the idea is not part of that which needs to be expropriated from its context for its later constitution as an “expression.” Rather, it is a self-contained unity that wishes to sustain itself as such. The soul's various happenings and darings laid the foundation, thus it bursts and now blossoms. Responsibility, here, is not needed; this idea guarantees itself by its existence.

The third devotion, the highest one, is the soul's devotion to its creator who determined the devotion's true-existence in order for the devotion to aspire towards itself throughout its becoming. Its devotion is confirmed through its whirlpool of inventions; it is allowed to open up and absorb the seed of inspiration. The “unprovable certainties” it obtains, not in the spheres of idea or word, are adornments. Everything in here is absolute truth. Thus, a book of expressions is gradually created in the course of a human life.

^B Strauss, *Gedichte, Auswahl aus "Wintersaat"*.

A (Perpetual) Modernist Crawling Creature

My grandfather's manuscript is scattered all over my studio. Nothing makes sense anymore. Not even a single page or merely a title to hang on to its meaning, and I recall poor Baudelaire and the crises of experience he had gone through in trying to construct a reasonable duration of experience. The evident lack of continuum was hopeless and devastating for Baudelaire, as it would be for anyone facing this incomprehensible pile of texts that threatens to draw you inwards until, completely perplexed, you fall out of time. "A swarm of seconds," writes Benjamin,⁸ describing the sporadic consciousness of time Baudelaire faced. But how did he arrive at such a horrifying, perforated condition?

Based on Sigmund Freud's diagnosis of the relation between memory and consciousness, Benjamin looked at human consciousness as a form of defense mechanism that aims to shield us from conscious burdens that are too radical to handle. When consciousness operates "well enough" as a defense mechanism, it causes an undesirable series of discrete conscious impressions that results in a sporadic and meaningless experience of reality—a profound characteristic element of modernity, says Benjamin. The structure of experience is very sensitive to current times, and when a culture is facing a significant interruptive pulse of energy, traditional structures of experience, which at one time enabled meaning to form, are no longer operative. Thus, in modern times characterized by continuous self-defense and a lack of meaningful structures of experience, how can we retain a certain degree of openness and attentiveness to reality? In other words, how can I cohesively experience the texts in front of me?

Benjamin offers us his idea of "affinity." Affinity, for Benjamin, constructs connections and semblances that exist and operate within a work's authentic space of meaning. These are affinities, which are not empirical nor circumstantial, but form a deeper meaning in which a more profound unity is being expressed. To demonstrate this, Benjamin ties affinity to his conception of memory. In memory, various affinities consolidate together through the multi-directional process of influence; thus, memory is an associative space that constantly enables the formation of different and new affinities. Strong memory means the formation of rich affinities. Thus, an authentic experience happens in a rich environment of affinities in the memory, which means this specific memory is not a reconstructive one, but a creative one. Memory's work has a surplus value and can't be conceived as an archive.

It helped only slightly. Running away from the thought that I'm a victim of modernity, which still had never passed away, I left the studio. Before falling asleep, I read Sebald's *Austerlitz* and consequently thought about my grandfather's actual language as manifested in the manuscript; I thought maybe I should start there... until I reached that point where Austerlitz describes his own lingual-based existential crises:

"If language may be regarded as an old city full of streets and squares, nooks and crannies, with some quarters dating from far back in time while other have been torn down, cleaned up, and rebuilt, and with suburbs reaching further and further into the surrounding country, then I was like a man who has been abroad a long time and cannot find his way through this urban sprawl anymore, no longer knows what a bus stop is for, or what a back yard is, or a street junction, an avenue or a bridge. The entire structure of language, the symmetrical arrangement of parts of speech, punctuation, conjunctions, and finally even the nouns denoting ordinary objects were all enveloped in impenetrable fog. I could not even understand what I myself had written in the past—perhaps I could understand that least of all. All I could think was that such a sentence only appears to mean something, but in truth is at best a makeshift expedient, a kind of unhealthy growth issuing from our ignorance, something which we use, in the same way as many sea plants and animals use their tentacles, to grope blindly through the darkness enveloping us. The very thing which may usually convey a sense of purposeful intelligence—the exposition of an idea by means of a certain stylistic facility—now seemed to me

8 Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, 155–200.

nothing but an entirely arbitrary or deluded enterprise. I could see no connections anymore, the sentences resolved themselves into a series of separate words, the words into random sets of letters, the letters into disjointed signs, and those signs into a blue-gray trail gleaming silver here and there, excreted and left behind it by some crawling creature, and the sight of it increasingly filled me with feelings of horror and shame.”^{1/2}

And so, I returned to the studio the next morning to find a greater mess. I thought that the meaning of the concept of language had also changed over the course of modernity; from being a multiple whole or unified concept that could encompass a vast amount of knowledge, it became a fragmented concept that can't be grasped at once anymore. What then can we consider nowadays as the fulcrum of language? In the presence of an excess of undecipherable fragments, an actual definition for this excess needs to arise in terms of constituting a new “whole.” And so on and so forth...[☒]

^{1/2} Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 123–24.

☒ Appendix, images 7–10. At some point during the working process on this piece, I faced the need to stabilize the object irreversibly or to allow it to decay. In fact, perhaps unconsciously, the seeds were planted there already in advance, in order to allow the work to head toward, potentially, a catastrophe. After a thorough research in different materials, I have decided to use a mixture of “beeswax” and “damar resin” as the basis of a lining adhesive I was interested in applying to the piece's cloths, mainly due to intuitive connection with those materials, which were natural components of a large pine forest that grew in proximity to where I spent endless hours wandering around in. A well-balanced mixture of “beeswax” and “damar resin” adhesive causes no shrinkage and is not vulnerable to changes in humidity; thus, it can be integrated into the piece's formal structure in such a way that will sustain the structure far beyond artificial adhesives, which will result in a structure that decays much slower though at the same time is not being preserved until it practically dies, lack any organic process of life. This special material-based landscape that was created has another function; in relation to the transmitted sound, it functions as a membrane which filters sound to a various degree throughout the landscape. The sound therefore is also a continuous flux that, in relation to the material, changes acoustically rather than semantically. In terms of integration, the challenge was how to create a supposedly natural integration between technology (i.e., sound speakers and audio wires) and material that would not seem artificial, on the one hand, or fetishistic on the other hand; in other words, to be able to integrate them as if they were a unity.

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