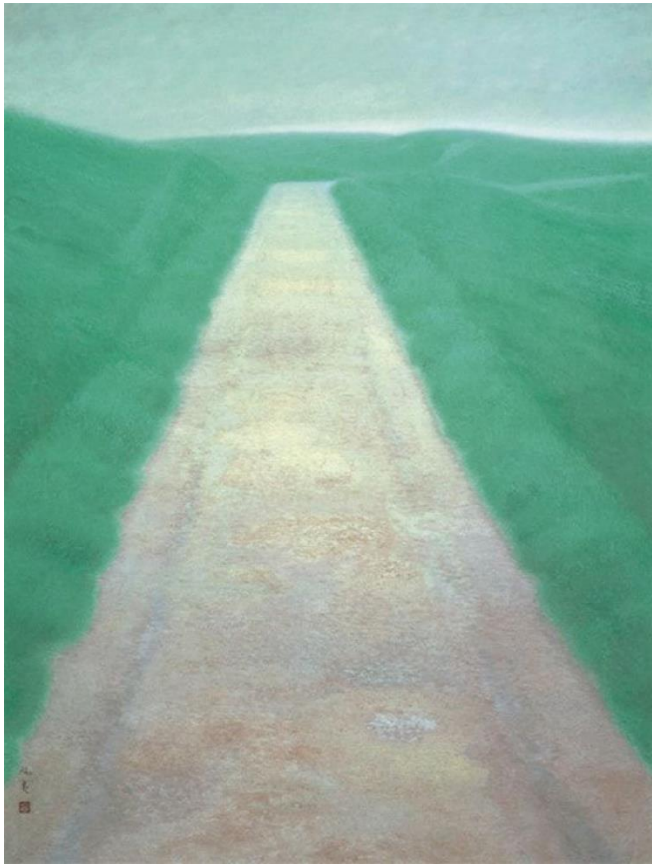


no place, only now



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contents

Prologue

I THE WINDOW OF TIME

II REFLECTION IN A PUDDLE

III ENCOUNTERING THE ECHO

IV TWILIGHT IN BOSTON

Epilogue

*When we let go of our battles and open our heart to things as they are, then we come to rest in the present moment. This is the beginning and the end of spiritual practice. Only in this moment can we discover that which is timeless. Only here can we find the love that we seek. Love in the past is simply memory, and love in the future is fantasy. Only in the reality of the present can we love, can we awaken, can we find peace and understanding and connection with ourselves and the world<sup>1</sup>*

I awoke one morning amid my waking slumber. I was greeted with the scent of salt and fresh cut grass blades that tickled the back of my throat. The lush green hills were impartial to the scenery, they linked and linked again continuously, atop the long, dusted road, cracked and dry from the humidity. I watched as a veil of mist cloaked the horizon. The dampness of the atmosphere pricked my cheeks with a cool breath. I had been walking for years I felt, my whole life perhaps. The path unfolded like a string I did not want to follow. I followed it because I had to.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Kornfield

I

THE WINDOW OF TIME

*Sunlight pierces through,*

*I am alone in this room*

*A leaf has fallen*

In my studio there is a window.

Every day I am granted the view of a beautiful tree and the cobblestone patterns of the courtyard that surrounds it. As I work, my thoughts are accompanied by the sound of quiet conversation through the open glass.

Today there are two men standing underneath the tree, they are collecting its fallen leaves,

“There are three different colours in one tree, isn’t that so beautiful?” I hear one observe to the other.

I watch as both men proceed to take a moment to admire its natural details. I admire it with them. The leaves are painted with burnt tones of yellow, orange, and green and begin to blend beautifully, the more your eyes focus on the branches. When the wind blows, its breath makes them dance and the body that was once so still, now looks so very alive. For a moment, we exist in this period together, present with the world and in tune with its harmony. The wind brushes through the leaves, a quiet rustling attends my thought. I think of the two men and then I watch them walk away, the moment has

passed and in that fleetingness is a sadness that settles within me, *a sickening of the heart*<sup>2</sup>.

I turn to the next page in my sketchbook and a woman soon replaces them, she perches on the stone bench beneath the tree. She is speaking to her mother on the phone. Their conversation replaces my own thoughts for as long as she sits there. Half-invested in the compounds of her quiet consultation, it stirs within me that the moment will end soon and then it does.

Shortly afterwards, a couple approached the empty bench where she was sitting. The woman rests her head upon his shoulder and takes his hand in her palm, they do not speak. They sit there for about half an hour – just as the sky begins to darken at quarter to four.

From this window I bear witness<sup>3</sup> to the inextricable movement and passage of time. Like a riverbed it flows, the turnover is quick – like the next scene of an act. I have no knowledge of these people, apart from the occasional friend or familiar face who will pass. Where they have come from and where they will go is disclosed information that holds no meaning to the now. These experiences grant me a quiet invitation to be present with a stranger, to briefly perch inside the impermanence of every passing moment, like a silent spectator, an invisible observer.

The subtle sorrow that sweeps me afterwards reminds me of the moments I would experience as a teenager when I would be sitting on the tube in a carriage full of strangers, on my way to college. I lived far, so the journey was long – over an hour

between the central and the northern line. The journey allowed me to spend a lot of time in my head, to ruminate on anything my mind could think of. In this liminal

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<sup>2</sup> quote directly from 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839) written by Edgar Allen Poe, a story about a man who succumbs to a self-fulfilling prophecy in a decrepit mansion that is haunted by both its past and present.

space, I would look at the faces of the commuters who sat across from me, some would leave early on, but some would stay for as long as I would, causing a strange sense of familiarity to be built by the seventh or eighth stop – as though it became clear to me that I was sitting in the present moment with others in a room shaped by the impermanence of time. Everyone is briefly stuck in this chamber of waiting, life is paused, but as we wait, we flow in this rhythm that is suddenly poetic because it will inevitably end.

There was a pinch, when they would leave - because then came the awareness of the truth that we would never cross paths again – a reality of the circuit board that is the city. This sense of mourning, grief even, exists in all corners of our lived experience – I think we as humans grieve more than we think we do. Grief and nostalgia hold hands, to reminisce is to mourn the loss of the present.

When I look out of the window in my studio, and I watch the way the orange-turned leaves gently fall from the tree, I am struck with the deepest sense of sorrow and tearfulness – like all the grief inside of me has risen to my throat – it's this bittersweet entanglement of both mourning and overcoming, for I know this period is momentary, and that the leaves will grow again when the sun returns.

<sup>3</sup> to 'bear witness' is what Buddhism and other Eastern Philosophy teach. It is a form of meditation wherein you stand apart dispassionately and bear witness to whatever is happening inside and outside of you.

When I was younger, I would describe these feelings to my Japanese mother, and she'd coin what I was experiencing as '*mono-no-aware*'.

*MONO-NO-AWARE (物の哀れ)*<sup>4</sup>

Between Eros (the life force) and Thanatos, (the ending of things) lies the middle ground that could be described as 'mono no aware', the appreciation of life and beauty and the liminality of the space between life and death. 'Mono no aware' is a typical Japanese expression in aesthetics, culturally expressed in literature, film and art. There is no direct translation or equivalent in the English Language, but it can be best described as '*The appreciation of the fleeting nature of beauty, a bittersweet awareness that everything in existence is temporary*' like the shadows cast by the light and the leaves, or the bloom and fall of a cherry blossom tree.

One of my favourite poems is a haiku<sup>5</sup> written by the Japanese poet, Kobayashi Issa<sup>6</sup>. I remember my mother showing it to me and loving it for the same reason I do - the stillness that he can convey with such few words. It's a silent mantra, you can hear a pin drop, a meditation of thought.

It made me think about Haiku as a medium, and how it's a way of writing that could be comparable to that of an artist painting an image with a limited palette. Its poetic minimalism creates an inherent sense of stillness and presence for it depicts a moment in time through a singular essence.

*"A man, just one -*

*A fly, just one*

*In the large guest room."*

- Issa, 1762-1826

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<sup>4</sup> Japanese expression in aesthetics meaning the 'the pathos of things'

<sup>5</sup> A traditional Japanese poem that is made up of three lines and seventeen syllables, typically following the rhythm of 5-7-5

<sup>6</sup> Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828) was a Japanese poet and lay Buddhist priest, he was known for his haiku poems

Issa's three short lines reflect the brevity of a passing moment. It invites the reader to pause, breathe, and experience time as it is, offering a snapshot of the *now* that stretches beyond the poems form and into something timeless.

In a way, *Mono-no-aware* connects to time by recognising the inevitability of change, transience<sup>7</sup> and the emotional resonance that comes from understanding that all moments – whether tinged with joy or sorrow – are temporary. When we acknowledge this phenomenon, we birth a heightened sense of appreciation for the present, as it becomes ever more precious in its transient nature.

I've found that when I am fully present and aligned within, I become open to the universe's whispers. Unseen truths and synchronicities slip into my subconscious<sup>8</sup>, revealing themselves in coincidences – a person, a thought, a song, an experience. To be in tune with the moment is to be in harmony with all that unfolds, both within and around you. We must acknowledge this awareness with complete and whole acceptance, embracing it fully *...if your mind is not clouded by unnecessary things, then this season is the best of your life.*<sup>9</sup>

Carl Jung<sup>10</sup> explored the human experience of transience, particularly through his theories involving the unconscious and archetypes<sup>11</sup>. He believed confronting and integrating the impermanence of things such as how we as humans relate to our own mortality; was a crucial item in achieving psychological wholeness. In his process of individuation<sup>12</sup> (the journey toward becoming one's true self) Jung introduced two different concepts that he believed, influenced the psyche<sup>13</sup>, *Kronos* and *Kairos*. They reflected two distinct ways we experience and relate to time.

*Kronos*, which derives from the Ancient Greek word 'kraínō' / 'chronōs' (*chronology*) is our external perception of time, it is the linear and the chronological time that we naturally live by. It represents the rational, conscious aspects of life: the structured, predictable, and measurable events and routines we navigate throughout our daily lives. *Kronos* is about order, discipline, and practicality. Jung believed that *Kronos* is tied to ego consciousness and one's external existence which is shaped by societal expectations and our inherent need to adapt to life's practicalities.

If *Kronos* is the quantitative, linear and mechanical structure of time, then *Kairos*, (which is translated as 'the right or critical moment') is the qualitative, unmeasurable, and emotional significance of time. It is our internal perception, the awareness of alignment, of significance and opportune moment. *Kairos* does not follow the same structure of rational as *Kronos*, for it relies solely on emotion or heart and can manifest as a moment of insight, revelation, or any overlap between one's psychological journey and what the external world has to offer, such as an opportunity for growth, healing, and transformation. These moments can be marked with an unexplainable sense of *rightness* – a rich internal feeling that *now* is the right moment to act, to fulfill a particular quality within our internal journey.

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<sup>7</sup> A state or quality of being temporary and short-lived

<sup>8</sup> The part of the mind that operates below the level of conscious awareness

<sup>9</sup> Deleu-zine pp. 65

<sup>10</sup> Carl Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology in the West, he was known for his ideas about the unconscious mind, archetypes, and the process of individuation

<sup>11</sup> A universal symbol, pattern or character type found across cultures, stories and mythology

<sup>12</sup> The lifelong journey of personal development where a person integrates all aspects of their conscious and unconscious selves to become their true, whole self

<sup>13</sup> The totality of the mind

Blending these concepts from both the West and the East, my understanding relies in the personal belief that *Kronos* gives us context, *Kairos* provides the moment of significance, and *Mono-no-aware* brings the emotional depth of appreciating the fleeting nature of that moment. They do not exist separately, but between us; all three work together to shape a deeper understanding of time and our lived experience.

I believe the most universal moments wherein we experience time on the clock of *Kairos* is when we experience love. Love is not written under the passage of *logic*, nor can it be measured within a linear framework. It exists in its own realm, detached, and when true, is encouraged by no other reasoning other than the sweeping sensation of complete and utter *rightness*. If one begins to over-think, it or attempts to understand it through a veil of logic, it only weakens it to the core. Love transcends the chronology of *Kronos*, it dances to a different rhythm, one that blends our perception of time until it bundles with the softness of a duvet. It is not solely personal, nor emotional, but a spiritual<sup>14</sup>, unconscious drive towards wholeness. Synchronicity and the transformative power of love are deeply intertwined, the idea that it is built on our unconscious alignment as well as its external randomness allows us to breathe the concept of *fate* and divine timing.

When I encounter a new romantic interest, it's as though the presence of that individual is an echo of both the past and the future. Even when it is long over, when my feelings for them have subsided, a chasm of a memory, an image or a song can escort me back into the same sensuality that was felt when I was with them. Time folds in on itself and suddenly it's as though everything I have experienced is just a static screen that I simply glide over, *back and forth back and forth*. But my love for them only truly existed in the present moment and the *now* only exists as an afterthought. Perhaps this is why we yearn, perhaps this is why we hold space for feelings like desire. *Pain runs through families until someone is willing to feel it* and

desire too. Sometimes I feel like the past, the present and the future's events are all just as equally real, and that time does not ebb and flow, but rather, exist all at once – eternally and unchangingly. Like the stream of a riverbed, it does not stop or start, it simply flows and continuously washes over itself until it meets the source of the sea.

As I look out of the window in my studio and watch the way the orange-turned leaves gently fall from the tree, I am struck with the deepest sense of sorrow and tearfulness, because I succumb to the appreciation of it all. The privilege to witness nature's harmony in real-time and to momentarily remove myself from the mental space that burdens me. The courtyard is empty and silent, the yellow lights behind the windows slowly switch off. The wind brushes the leaves of the tree, and I watch as they fall into a pool of moments before.

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<sup>14</sup> Refers to anything related to the inner aspects of a person, often connected to a sense of meaning beyond the material world



*Un focus your eyes*

*Reflection in a puddle*

*Turning a corner*

About a month ago, I experienced something that danced under the breath of bizarre and welded itself within the heart of the peculiar.

## II

### REFLECTION IN A PUDDLE



*To my sleeplessness*<sup>15</sup>, in a dream as clear as night: I was walking down Camberwell Church Street, the stretch where cafés and restaurants begin to gather. I noticed the light was a yellowing blue, the liquid light from the sun seeped through the clouds, the type of light that strikes the sky in the early Winter, when darkness cloaks noon. I gathered it was around 4pm, I *touched the red sun and the rain* and watched as pools of water formed on the pavement slabs, reflections of traffic lights shaping into glassy puddles that I stepped into.

*In all the dust and glass*, it was like looking through an opal, the blurriness of it all – the light sharpened around the edges of everything. People walked along the street; I wondered who they were where they were going. I heard somewhere that the brain is unable to imagine a new face from scratch, that the people who appear in your dreams, the seemingly unrecognisable strangers, are all people you have crossed paths with, in your waking life. Two individuals I specifically remember was a man with a red motorcycle helmet and a woman carrying a considerable number of shopping bags. There were children running across the street, they had just finished school, they glided with glee. There was a beauty to the atmosphere, an inherent optimism.

I soon passed the cafe I frequent often and as I peered inside the dimly lit window; I saw the barista who routinely makes my coffee - an individual who I have noticed I regularly cross paths with, in my waking life, *my silent friend*. Something in his actions tells me that the cafe is closing and as I passed, we acknowledged each other.

As I continued walking, I was accompanied by the sound of the song *Reflections After Jane* by *The Clientele*. *I can starve my life into a deeper sleep. Remembering*. And when I awoke from my slumber, like the echo of a ghost whispering in my ear, I heard it ringing.

*I can starve my life into a deeper sleep. Remembering. Reflections after Jane.*

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<sup>15</sup> lyrics from *Reflections After Jane* by *The Clientele*

I awoke to the blankness of a white ceiling glaring back at me. Bright light seeped behind the drawn curtain of my bedroom window. I turned to my sleeping friend and whispered in a heavy-eyed state,

“I just had the most visceral dream.”

*I delight in synchronicities and what others might perceive as weird coincidence have become landmarks in my experience of time. Having enough time right now to study the Cosmos and view it as an enchanted vision on which our own experiences are drawn*<sup>16</sup>. As the day naturally unfolded, as did the dream.

Like water draining from a bathtub, its fluidity left my consciousness and eased into what I can only imagine as the subconscious realm. It did not come back to me until that evening, when I found myself walking along Camberwell Church Street, that passage where the cafes and the restaurants begin to gather. I was walking to Peckham Rye station and by chance found myself along that same stretch – a pinch of familiarity settled within my chest, I could not quite place it - like a word that relaxes on the tip of your tongue.

As I walked further, this feeling grew increasingly. The sky was a golden blue, yellow streams of light shadowed behind the clouds, cutting its edges with an ephemeral glow. I checked the time, it was 3:40pm, it was December, and the sun was beginning to set, causing a blooming deep orange to tinge the horizon. Today was the first day of Storm Darragh, you could taste in the calmness of the atmosphere, that the environment was preparing for an inexplicable change – that the stillness staged, was fleeting, and was ready to turn soon. Puddles of the brief rainfall marked the pavements. Like the illusion created when you unfocus your eyes, everything blurred, the haziness of the traffic, the gleaming lights behind the windows, the cars, the water – they all merged into a thick silkiness through which I was gliding. I

<sup>16</sup> Deleu-zine pp.64

*touched the red sun and the rain.* School children ran across the roads, it was rush-hour, but the atmosphere lacked the pressure cooker anxiety that comes with such a time of day. *In all the dust and glass,* I passed commuters, per usual. *The workers pass in threes and fours and fives,* and then two individuals strike an almost painful familiarity: a man with a red motorcycle helmet and not long after, an older woman carrying a numerous amount of shopping bags.

It is here I began to feel slightly sick, like I was walking into something I was not meant to, the uncanniness of it all – like exiting the stage and walking into a back room, bearing witness to something that breaks the illusion of it all. I was deeply present with everything happening inside and outside of me and yet the feeling that buried itself within, to this day – I struggle to define. It's as though the curtains had opened, like I was not looking *through* the window, nor behind it. I was looking *inside* of the glass pane, inside of the structure itself. *Once the familiar turns strange, it's never quite the same again. Self-knowledge is like lost innocence, however unsettling you find it, it can never be unthought or unknown.* <sup>17</sup>

Precognitive experience<sup>18</sup> blurs the line between the past, the present and the future and challenges our understanding of time. When we experience déjà vu<sup>19</sup>, the eeriness that is evoked, displays a sense that time isn't as linear or fixed as we had initially thought. The fabric of reality begins to tear and the thought that something else, something other and something unexplainable might be orchestrating our experience.

When I experience déjà vu, I feel as though my mind has had access to a strange, fractured imitation of a memory, it implies a temporal fluidity where it almost feels as though the future is

accessible. I am anchored in the present and the present reveals gaps and repetitions and disturbances in my perception of time.

Gripping the Deja-vu and swallowing the creeping eeriness that was developing within my skull. I passed the cafe that I frequent, a part of me was hesitant to look inside and a wave of vulnerability entered my system. As I glanced inside the dimly lit opening, I saw the barista who routinely makes my coffee, a man who I find myself regularly crossing paths with under strangely random circumstances. He is sweeping the floors by the window; the cafe is closing. We acknowledge each other from the other side of the glass. And before I can process anything, the lullaby chimes of a quiet guitar begin to play through my headphones. *Reflections After Jane.* The words passed through me with a humming, were *The Clientele* aware of what they had stirred into the world when they had written those three chords?

*The Clientele* are a project that I have come to deeply appreciate – their music glares a fleeting dissonance, a mourning of the past, through the imagery of the present. Autumnal disclosure and isolation, watching a train pass outside of your bedroom window in the darkness of the early morning. Walking around your neighborhood aimlessly, attempting to escape through the pathways of nostalgia. You turn a corner, and you suddenly find yourself in a picture of a childhood memory. *Reflections After Jane* is a love song for the nights, we search for ourselves in our loneliness, and those ambivalent thoughts that attend us. It is written in the *aftermath*. Jane is never described to us; we can only understand her through the singers' contemplations and his relation to time now that she has gone. He experiences the world as a mere reflection of her absence.

I paused, took a deep breath, and tried to shake off the feeling of deep eeriness that consumed my experience. However, the more I tried to resist such feeling, the more

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Sandel

<sup>18</sup> When one becomes aware of future events before they happen, i.e. Dreams

<sup>19</sup> The feeling you have experienced something before

unsettled I became. It was the most beautiful evening and yet the feeling of dread began to paint all of it. At this point, I had remembered my dream and as I recollected its imagery and pieced together the vivid familiarity of the sequence of events, something turned within, and my vision was blurred by a dissociative<sup>20</sup> stagnancy. A part of me feared I was on the cusp of experiencing some sort of stroke<sup>21</sup> or psychosis<sup>22</sup> - that this pre-cognition was the result of a health issue.

In his book, *The Weird and the Eerie*, Mark Fisher writes about the experience of time folding in on itself. *The eerie is what happens when time folds in on itself*. He captures the sensation of the past and the future collapsing into the present, where the boundary between them becomes blurred or imperceptible. In his exploration of the eerie, Fisher often discusses how time, memory and perception can overlap in unsettling ways, creating a sense of disorientation or a feeling that time is not linear but rather cyclical and recursive. The eerie is about that sense of temporal dislocation<sup>23</sup>, where things seem out of joint with the normal passage of time.

I cannot measure how long I was standing on the street. It was not until a violent gust of wind, followed by a showering rainfall, did I finally come back into myself. The sky was darker, a lot darker. The street was still glaring a glassiness, but the storm clouds penetrated *the red sun, and the rain* was hard and darkened my hair. Vulnerability still consumed me; all my senses were heightened by a sharpness. Natural sounds of the atmosphere were overwhelming, and the blurriness of the traffic made me spin with a dizzying disorientation.

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<sup>20</sup> A psychological experience where a person feels disconnected from their own thoughts, feelings, memories, and sense of identity

<sup>21</sup> Experiencing déjà vu before a stroke is rare, but can occur in certain cases, particularly if the stroke is affecting areas of the brain involved in memory and perception. Déjà vu is thought to involve the temporal lobes, which play a role in processing memories and sensory

I was stood on the cornerstone of St. Giles Church and noticed the warm light that was gleaming behind its windows. Despite having no religious affiliation, when I am faced with doubt and the desire to rejuvenate my faith settles inside of me; a church is what I become most drawn to. I entered the building and exited the storm that took shape outside. Upon entry, I could feel myself immediately ease into a more grounded state.

To my surprise, the space was overflowed with market stalls and Christmas shoppers. Decorated with tinsel and candlelight, the scent of mulled wine spices and the sounds of traditional hymns through a quiet radio. The contrast between the isolation experienced moments before, to *now* was effervescent. I was standing in the window of something else, something beautiful and pure. The blanket was back, the curtains were drawn again. I walked amongst the market stalls, smiled at the artists selling their work and began a brief conversation with a lovely woman who was selling her handmade soaps. I desired to experience something so normal, so accustomed to the ordinary. Our conversation did not dance under the guise of anything extraordinary and yet there was an essence that was so exceptionally comforting inside of it.

As I moved through another array of stalls, I turned a corner and by chance, found myself in direct eyeline with the barista whom I saw moments ago, *my silent friend*. This confused my perception of time; I was not entirely sure how he had been able to go from one place to another so quickly and it made me realise more time had passed outside than I had initially thought. We mutually paused and acknowledged each other once again, but it was the gaze held between us that caused me to sink back into a state of dissociation.

experiences. If a stroke happens in/near the region, it could cause abnormal electrical activity in the brain, leading to the feeling of familiarity or pre-cognitive experience.

<sup>22</sup> A mental health condition, wherein one loses touch with reality

<sup>23</sup> Feeling disconnected from the normal flow of time

I remembered *the outside*. The past and what had happened *out there* began to consume the purity of this present moment. I dropped my gaze to the side, any thoughts that had formed started to unravel like a string that I did not want to follow. I left the church, walked outside, and re-entered the storm, the window had smashed, the curtain had lifted once more. The veil was burnt. *There is no inside, except as a folding of the outside; the mirror cracks, I am another, and I always was.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Fisher pp. 10



### III

## ENCOUNTERING THE ECHO

*Searching for something,*

*In the stillness of water*

*Reflection, it shows*

MÅNGATA (Swedish) The road-like reflection of the moon on the water.

A few weeks ago, I was cycling through Hyde Park, it was around half past four and the mist of the cool December climate imbued with the illumination of the lights from the *Winter Wonderland* caused the sky to take shape of the most beautiful pale pink, washed and light – like the way turpentine washes over oil and creates that faded glow of colour. I stopped cycling and looked up at the sky, there is always an open sky in Hyde Park, but this evening it felt particularly embracing. I realised I was in no rush to be anywhere at all and as I turned to the right, the Round Pond with the swans that centered the park – a place I had always defined with a certain apathy – looked especially beautiful in a way that could only be conceived from the hand of Monet's brush. In that moment I understood that there was nowhere for me to go but forward, towards the pond where an empty bench was perched. I sat down, my bike to my side as if it were a person and I watched the water and the swans and the family who were feeding them.

I watched the blended landscape of leafless trees and high-rise buildings; I thought about the people behind the yellow gleam of windows and what they were doing, I

looked at the few people who were around me and I thought about who they were and where they were going. The water was still and illuminated by shards of silky pink light from the sky, it began to rain, but the rain was soft and caused no excuse for me to leave. There was hardly anyone by the pond, making it feel as though it was a lot

later than it was. It is in times like these where I feel fully present with the world, where I do not let time simply slip through my fingers but instead allow myself to experience the flow of its movement.

It is here, I tend to lose myself in thought, but instead of thought existing as a burden of rumination and scrutinization - it is liberating, as though memories or questions or answers float in like flashes of dust particles, they sit and then they dissolve. It is here wherein my grief exists in its solitude and makes sense of itself in ambiguous ways – I look at the swans gliding in the pond and I think of a childhood friend that I miss, I watch the way the sky reflects against the shape of the water and see my mother in a memory, when the moon begins to appear faintly behind the window of mist I think of a boy and when I look at the trees and watch as their leafless branches move ever – so gently I am suddenly struck with the most overwhelming sensation of both peace and sorrow.

Even at the time I felt the weight of how special the moment truly was, and I knew that a part of the reason was because I was never going to be able to experience it again. *The end is built into the beginning*<sup>25</sup>, the fleetingness of the moment is what made it so beautiful. My soul will search and experience instances like it, but the essence of that evening is buried in the mist of memory where photos can do no justice. All I have is my remembrance. It is in my mind's eye, can I see a pink sky

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<sup>25</sup> Quote from the film *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) written and directed by Charlie Kaufman, the film is a psychological drama about a man who attempts to direct an ambitious

play on his own life within the set of a re-constructed New York City. The film is notable for its themes on the existentially absurd, surrealism, and the human experience

reflected in the water below my feet, a sheet of mist veiling the horizon and above it all the glare of a silent moon.

I often feel like my mind is battling between two tensions of both mourning and anticipating the future. Where mono-no-aware embraces the fleeting, *Eternalism*<sup>26</sup> views all moments as existing outside of change. The relationship between these two concepts is like contrasting colours. Mono-no-aware is rooted in the awareness of the impermanence of time, embracing the notion that time is ever-changing, fleeting and that this transience is what gives life its poignancy. Eternalism, by contrast, posits that time is a fixed dimension where all moment-past, present, and future, are all equally real. Eternalism essentially rejects the existence of mono-no-aware, by suggesting that all events in time are eternal, which implies a static view of existence and removes the urgency of times passing.

However, I do believe that these two concepts can co-exist, in fact, I think that *Mono-no-aware* breathes underneath the blanket of the eternal whole. That within a static world, we can still slip into states of melancholia at the seemingly temporary, without diminishing or undervaluing the sentimentality of the fleeting.

To illustrate, when I read my old diary entries, pages heavy and filled with the collage of fleeting moments, that at the time carried the weight of everything I was aware and ignorant of. There was an understanding within me that these moments would pass and often writing was an outlet to release such a burden, an attempt at immortalizing

time, the present. It is a gift to be able to read what once was, in a way, it follows the same vein as speaking to a ghost. To write is *remembering what never existed*. So how can I know what has never existed? Like this: as if I were remembering. By an effort of memory, as if I had never been born. I was never born. I have never lived. But I remember, and remembering is like an open wound<sup>27</sup>.

When I am offered the opportunity to finally read a completed diary, I realise that every entry was an ephemeral moment that made up an eternal whole, it is fixed and unmoving. When I start a new journal, fresh paper unscathed by the bluntness of my pencil – I am faced with an absence that represents both the potential for the future and the immediate presence of the now. I think about how the past has been written and how the future will sink into these pages, so seamlessly that I will not even realise it has happened until I acknowledge it as something following behind me. The passage of time feels imperceptible until it is observed in hindsight. As I begin to write, the act itself distills moments into words, while the fluidity of the experience masks how time is slipping away.

This sense of seamless transition between the future and the past is rooted in the *continuum of time*<sup>28</sup> - it feels like a constant unfolding until, later, you recognise it as something that has already passed. Like a form of *temporal dissonance* - where the awareness of times passage does not fully register until some external trigger, like reflection, brings it into focus. For me, the act of journaling becomes a subtle way of marking time, liberated from the pressure of 'watching' it. I write about the present, and as I blink it accumulates as past moments as though they were always meant to be recorded in the pages that were once blank.

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<sup>26</sup> The philosophical view that all points in time are fixed and unchanging

<sup>27</sup> Clarice Lispector

<sup>28</sup> Refers to the idea that time is a continuous, unbroken flow from the past, through the present, and into the future, with no clear divisions or interruptions

Last May, I received an email from FutureMe, a site where you can write a letter to your future self. I'd forgotten that my best friend and I had written letters to each other, back in 2019, until the moment I opened it on my phone.

The waves crashed, the tide began to overlap, two timelines collapsed into each other.

I could almost smell the sterile school library and see the harsh white lights that surveilled us. We were 15, bored, and thought it would be a fun thing to do. Writing to her future self – I vividly remember that the idea of being 20 felt so distant, almost mythical, five years felt like forever. The letter held hands with the purity of youth, an innocence protected by naivety and cheekiness. But there was also a deep blue irony and inevitable bittersweetness due to the reality in which we do not speak anymore and the truth that our friendship did not end on peaceful terms.

The letter unfolded like a timeworn relic, a true time capsule. The past was condensed and immortalized. As I read her fragile words, a 15-year-old girl addressing me now, time itself seemed to pause. Like two ghosts lost in translation, I glided through the walls of chronology, where the past and present blurred and the moment, *then* and *now*, folded into one another.

## A letter from May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2019

Dear future Nikko

wow you must be twenty, you better not forget me! I told you so, you did not fail your GCSE's! You're sitting next to me in the school library. We met in year 8 when you joined the school. At first when Anna introduced us i thought that you were quite shy, you didn't speak much but wow when you get to know someone you realise a lot. We went to Japan together in 2018 (doubt you'd forget that) . I have a feeling that if we are still friends we still talk about how special it was. right now its

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> of may 2019! and we're in year 10, I hope that we will keep in touch and if not you better text me right now! My email will still be the same so there's no reason not to.

Right now i picture the 20 yr old nikko to have short hair and a fringe because you keep cutting it secretly in the bathroom. You'll wear brown, earthy colour clothes and maybe a turtle neck? sorta like the striped one you wear now. Your house will have art supplies and paint on the table and you will have lots of coffee and tea in the cupboards. I hope you're still doing art because its something that you love.

Year 10 is not fun and I bet being an adult is better right? Please tell me it does! I don't want to think that my whole life led up to me being without a job still living with my mum. Are you still living in London? Japan or America? Whats your job? Your favourite colour? How did Brexit turn out? Id like to think that you still remember school, our weird vegetarian, philosophical school. it kind of feels like im dead or about to die writing a letter so you wont forget me. i hope we haven't

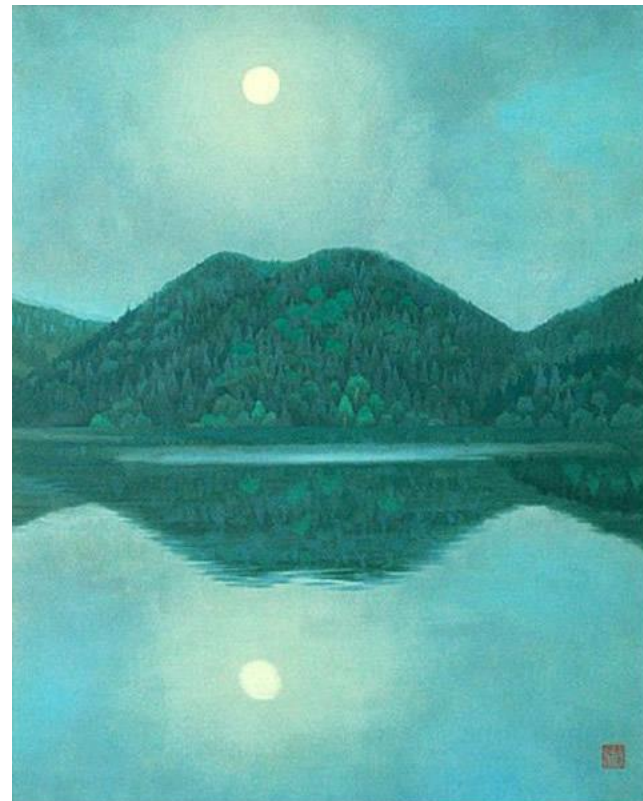
had a big argument like in those tv dramas that spoil our friendship. I hope that youre still reading. thank you for being there for the 13 yr odl me to whatever age I am! Thank you so much for making school bright. You were someone I could talk to and trust. I hope you live a happy, long and healthy life.

Goodbye nikko of the future i hope to see you soon! (wow now it really sounds like im dead.) are you crying?i bet I will when I get your eamil!

We do not speak anymore, I have thought about getting in touch, but even if I so desired, I bear no access to her contact. What I wrote to her that day will remain an



eternal mystery, but what I know for certain is that on May 2<sup>nd</sup> of last year, she received a letter from a 15-year-old girl who addressed her as she sat in the library with her best friend beside her.



## IV

### TWILIGHT IN BOSTON

*Decorated with,  
The scent of summer evenings.  
I could still see you*

A couple of years ago I had met a man in the smoking area of a well-known bar in Camden Town. I was eighteen, it was the last summer of sixth form, the air was humid and decorated with that dirty heat of a late-August evening in London. It was a strange time for me. Liminal. A space between two spaces, two momentous events. It was a time painted in the crack between my farewell to a certain innocence that came with being a teenager and the mystery that embodied the future of university.

I was sitting outside the front, buzzed on vodka shots and nicotine, surrounded by friends who I have since lost contact with. He was tall, absurdly tall - around 6ft7. I had spotted him inside the nightclub of the bar, the dark room at the back lit with purple and red lights and couples dancing to 50's rockabilly classics. I had spotted him, because it was impossible not to, I remember seeing him from the side, he wore a linen blazer and corduroy trousers, dressed smartly, but still balanced with the artistic edge of a poet. He looked like a character. I remember my curiosity as I briefly swept my eyes across the room, *who are you?* I thought he was alone; he was dancing alone in a room full of people.

Later, when I went outside for a smoke, things unraveled quickly, and I found myself sitting next to him on a bench outside. In some strangely natural manner, we began a conversation about Dante's Inferno, I had brought it up because I had started reading it at the time and he had asked me a question that struck my curiosity because of its peculiarity.

"Do you think you have met your *Virgil*<sup>29</sup> yet?" he asked.

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<sup>29</sup> Virgil is a character from Dante's Inferno who guides Dante through the nine circles of hell. The Virgil archetype is that of a wise, rational guide or mentor who helps the protagonist navigate challenges, especially in journeys that involve moral or spiritual growth

I thought about his question; I made sure to really think about it before pushing with an answer. I suppose, I had not, I had come across figures in my life, strangers who had felt significant, like they had held a type of lesson. But to label them under the archetype of a *Virgil* seemed extreme.

“No, *I can’t say I have*” I replied. He looked at me,

“You will, everyone does, it’s just about being aware that you have.”

He then proceeded to tell a story about how his *Virgil* came to him in the body of an old man with a large black hat.

“I kept seeing him everywhere, but exclusively when I was present with the world detached from my mind. You would be surprised by how many of life’s synchronicities we miss, by being too stuck in our heads. I realised he was trying to tell me something and then when I finally pursued a conversation with him, my life was changed”

Even now I still reflect on this conversation and his words. I’ve thought about the people who I’ve crossed paths with, the interesting, beautiful and intriguing individuals who have marked my experience of time. *We wonder through each other’s lives, like the rivers constant flow*<sup>30</sup>. Whomever my ‘*Virgil*’ is does not exist in one body, but a thousand faces.

*Love has never been a popular movement. And no one’s ever wanted, really, to be free. The world is held together, really it is held together, by the love and the passion of a very few people. Otherwise, of course, you can despair. Walk down the street of any city, any afternoon, and look around you. What you’ve got to remember is what you’re looking at is also you. Everyone you’re looking at is also you. You could be that person. You could be that cop. And you have to decide, in yourself, not to be.*<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lyrics from the song Zone 1 to 6000 by Nabihah Iqbal

*Little Venice*, sunset melted the blue. Me and *him* were sat by the water, it was warm, but the peak of Summer had preceded. We sat on a bench, close and knit, fingers laced between the cups of our palms. The sky was a pale orange, the atmosphere humid, Summer was leaving us. We were sat on the bench, and we did not speak - I made sure to take it all in, the colour of the sky, the shape of the water, the soundscape, his presence and the way his chest lifted as I rested my head against him. I made sure to take it all in because I knew that I would never be sat here, that *we* would never be sat here like this again.

We shared a pair of earphones, the music intertwined between the both of us – he asked if he could play me a song, *Twilight in Boston* by Jonathan Richman. It was a piece of him, for Boston was his home, sharing it with me, he said, was like allowing me to peak into the window of his musings.

“I’d spend hours walking around my city, listening to it in the hours of the earliest mornings, when I knew I was one of the few who were still awake.”

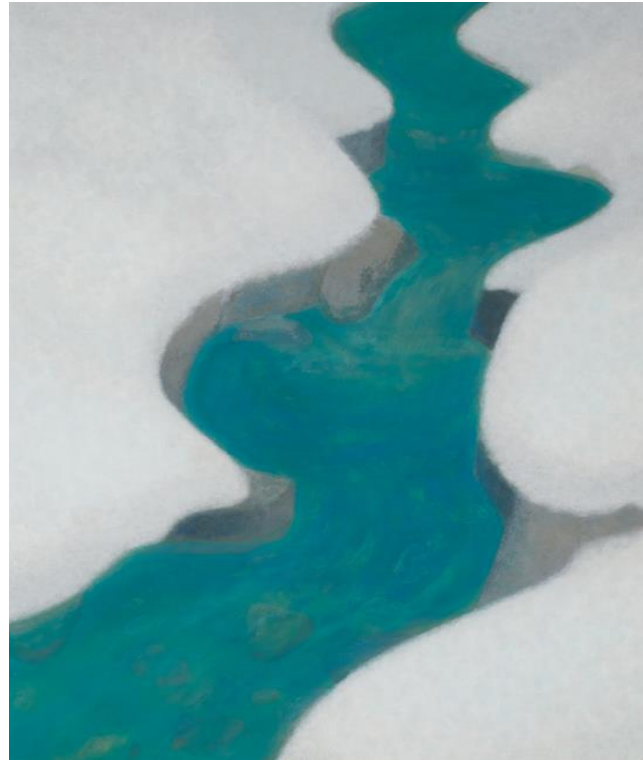
As we listened to Richman narrate, what was essentially a love song to his City, I sank into his lyricism and experienced London transform into Boston. Suddenly, I was experiencing the present through the perspective of Richman’s affections. The slowness of the song and the softness of the guitar perfectly accompanied the end of season haze, all dusted with stillness, curiosity and reflection.

The future to come introduced hang ups and a reality that would be faced with a certain ugliness and conflict that highlighted our incompatibility. It is all a ghost story, really. To reminisce is to mourn the present. Life comes with the taste of a bittersweetness, that burns the tongue because then we were naïve to the knowledge that in few months, we would become strangers again.

But for now, we sit together – eloped in a tangled embrace, lips on skin, dusted with the strokes of an almost “I love you”. People pass, they are our witnesses, and we are

<sup>31</sup> James Baldwin

theirs. You are watching the world watch you, the sunset smiles a song from centuries ago, the trees see us and in ourselves they see a million poems painted before.



*Mind is like the sun journeying through the sky and emitting glorious light  
uncontaminated by the finest particle of dust.*<sup>32</sup>

*... in this final assignment, the anachronism has led to stasis:  
time has stopped. The service station is in 'a pocket, a  
vacuum'. There is 'still traffic, but it's not going anywhere': the  
sound of cars is locked into a looped drone. Silver says, there  
is no time here, not anymore*<sup>33</sup>

I awoke one morning amid my waking slumber. I was greeted with the sight of a long, dusted road. The scent of salt and fresh cut grass blades tickles the back my throat. The lush green hills are impartial to the scenery, they link and link again continuously and I watch as a veil of mist cloaks the horizon. The dampness of the atmosphere pricks my cheeks with a cool breath. I have been walking for years I feel, my whole life perhaps. The path unfolds like a string I do not want to follow. I follow it because I have to. Questions as to where it is that I am going— have never been able to be answered. Where I have come from and where it is I will go is disclosed, null information that holds no meaning to the now. I do not know, and I don't think I ever will. A part of me, feels as though I should question it further, this experience and the absurdity of it all. But another part of me succumbs to the present, to the now and to the appreciation of it all – it's all I really have – what good is it to speculate. I look at my footprints and watch as they become buried by the engulfing mist that follows behind me. I have no real memory of the past, or I have a memory, but I have no evidence of it, the footprints have vanished, the mist has swallowed them. I have no evidence of the future either, for it doesn't exist. I only really have the now, the grass, the muddied path, the moistness of the climate and the sky that is my blanket. I am gliding through a collage of moments, and it is these moments that define it all.

The horizon links, the path unfolds-

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<sup>32</sup> Huangbo pp. 9

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