

BEING A HOME

This book is a result of the Diploma thesis in Architecture by Thomas Larsen at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) 2020 under the supervision of Rolf Gerstlauer.

This thesis completes an unintended trilogy of explorations. The two other books are uploaded as appendixes

The cover of this book uses a symbol comprised of three other symbols:

This Diploma Work, *Being a Home*, is combining the following symbols while adding the symbol for Phi (uppercase Φ , lowercase ϕ or ϕ), the 21st letter in the Greek alphabet, commonly used as a placeholder for the golden ratio 1.618... as well as the measurement for consciousness in the Integrated Information Theory known from philosophy of the mind and panpsychism.

Appendix II, *Perennial*, is the book from the fall semester 2019. The symbol used on the cover is the symbol for Jupiter, $\♃$, which is also used in botany as a marker for perennial plants.

Appendix I, *[void]*, from the spring semester 2019. The symbol, \cdot , used on the cover is known by the names of interpunct, georgian comma, middle dot, etc. It was used in ancient script as a interword separator - that is, a spaceholder for a space before the use of separating space became common.

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ABSTRACT: BEING A HOME

The initiative for my diploma was to explore phenomenal qualities of home-ness, and what it means to possess these qualities - *being a home*. This is connected strongly to sheltering, spatial autonomy and material ownership - but also to general feelings of belonging, safety and connectedness. It felt like a topic that was important for an aspiring architect like myself to explore.

I have in previous material processes worked with black paper in a way that afforded a quality of void-ness, explored the phenomenon of surviving chimneys, as well as plant vines and their utilization of trellis structures - some built for that purpose, others appropriated by the plants.¹ These explorations still reverberate strongly, and have informed this diploma.

Concurrently I've had, like all sentient beings, countless immaterial processes. The impressions of books, dreams, conversations, culture - things that were never intended to be part of a material process are no less reverberating, as if waiting to be applied or manifested.

We are used to thinking in such dichotomies; immaterial/material, mind/body, dream/reality, etc. Vitruvius described architecture as the child of many things, of which practice and reasoning are the parents² - the merging of one such dichotomy. Is reasoning also an immaterial practice - or practice a form of reasoning, with a non-verbal logic appearing in dialogue with a material?

Dichotomy became a method in this diploma, pursuing simultaneously a *material* and *immaterial* practice, exploring intuitively if they would inform and feed off each other - sometimes on diverging paths, sometimes converging, starting with the same initiative.

The immaterial process started with storytelling, exploring the essence of *being a home* through fiction. At the same time I was populating my

1 See more of this work in Appendixes One and Two

2 "Ea nascitur ex fabrica et ratiocinatione". Book 1, Chapter 1, paragraph 1. *Ratiocinatione* is in the english version translated as *theory*.

workspace with used objects and materials from others people's real homes, given away through an internet market place.

Gradually, I began to explore more directly the *mind itself* that experiences; I sought bodily reminders of the mind, of the boundlessness of consciousness and the constraints of space. My confrontation of the *experiencing self* became literal when I took up making self-portraits in a mirror. This led to transforming my workspace into a 1.5 m x 2 m 'infinity room' with mirrors as the inside walls, using materials I had collected. ³

Working in this new physical space inspired the revisitation of a conversation between philosophers David Chalmers and Sam Harris⁴ on consciousness. They referenced the 1974 paper *What is it like to be a bat*⁵ - which inspired Chalmers' *the hard problem of consciousness*⁶ that in turn stimulated the revival and further development on the topic of *panpsychism*⁷. A sense of familiarity when reading further on these subjects pointed towards Louis Kahn's *Essential Texts* and his language that appeared to sympathize with many of the concepts. The seemingly comparable dichotomies of mind/body, immaterial/material, immeasurable/circumstantial, order/orderliness, form/design⁸, formed a deeper landscape that I started writing an essay on. ⁹

My semi-open workspace was added a dome made of chicken wire and became something else: I became more attuned to the relationship between inner and outer sources of light, and changes in air temperature. I began to close off the gaps in the walls, isolating the 'boundlessness' of the mirrors, and increasing the 'otherness' of the space. Alien as it was, it also started to feel more as a home. I produced more of the black 'void' paper material that contrasted the endlessness of mirrors and repaired a broken LED light string that I draped across the dome. It became a paradoxical space, both cavernous and infinite. This became both a home and a site for further explorations.

3 Documented in *A Vast Emptiness Vastly Filled*

4 Podcast episode #34 - *The Light of the Mind*. 2016. SamHarris.org

5 By American philosopher Thomas Nagel

6 David Chalmers. 1995.

7 Particularly parts of Hedda Hassel Mørch's 2014 PhD thesis on the topic

8 Most of these are examples from Kahn's language.

9 Readable in "Part two: The Immaterial process"

Kahn's descriptions of finding *form*¹⁰ harmonized with the psychological concept of *spatial cognition*¹¹ - how we essentially 'try on' the world in a sub-conscious bodily assessment as the very cornerstone of our capacity for thought. Further strengthening this notion was the neuroscience of *navigating the affordance landscape*¹², a terminology that to me also strongly harmonized with the material practices i had experienced at AHO. Re-reading Kahn's words on "what a thing wants to be", prompted the question: if a brick wants to be an arch¹³, what does a body want to be?

How the mind/body relates to the material world, led back to exploring more about how the mind relates to *itself*. Revisiting the psychology of self-actualization, as explained by Scott Barry Kaufman, PhD¹⁴, I was reacquainted with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (and among them *belonging, safety* and *connectedness*), and how *peak experiences* are central to growth and well-being in life. Peak experiences are intimately connected to the complex topic of *transcendence*, which in turn is embedded in *spirituality*. As tainted as some may view these two concepts, either by religion or new-age superstition, they have long been the subject of serious humanistic inquiries in philosophy, science and architecture. Maslow made efforts to clarify the topic for a secular audience, and Kahn's way of using these terms is also humanistic.¹⁵ In typical Kahn-lingo he even uses the word *religion* in a secular meaning.¹⁶ Can peak experiences and transcendence also tell us something about being a home? Is home-ness a spiritual phenomenon?

As distant as these subjects often are perceived, behind layers of interpretation and reflection, there usually is something there - something I also saw in the material process. Transcendence was itself a integral part

10 Especially the Unitarian Church in Rochester, NY. *Essential Texts*, p 109.

11 Barbara Tversky, PhD, *Mind in Motion - How Action Shapes Thought*. 2019.

12 Research by G. Pezzulo and P. Cisek on assessment of physical affordances as a cognitive underpinning and even helpful in long-term planning. 2016.

13 Famous notion from Louis Kahn's *Essential texts*

14 Furthering the research of Abraham Maslow in the book *Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization*.

15 "Transcendence", p. 179 & 203; "Spirituality", likened to "monumentality", p. 22 in *Essential Texts*

16 One example: "Not ritualistic religion. I mean religion from which we derive such feelings as nobility. That religion." *Essential Texts*, p. 58

of the materiality I was working with; in the boundlessness, the void, the infinite. This connection grew stronger as it led to exploring meetings between gold leaf and a brick, the making of a shrine to things lost to time, a house for a well that doesn't exist except in a mirrored reflection, a gilded handle mounted on a piece of coal, a spiral staircase leading to an infinite room, an arched trellis utilized by a LED filament acting like a growing vine seeking light, and an endless hallway.

The phenomenon of peak experiences with architecture became interesting to investigate, leading to making a questionnaire that got 87 responses. This provided some insight into local architectural experiences as well as general reflections around them.

It became clear that peak experiences isn't necessarily connected to *being a home*, but perhaps to the act of *getting there*. Another important piece of Maslow's psychology was that of the *plateau* - seeing the sacred in the ordinary, as opposed to seeking the extra-ordinary as a boost for progression. Acceptance, contentment, peace - things one can only appreciate if learning to let go of the hunger for *more*, and seeing what is already there. Being able to do so is for many a task that is impossible to relate to, which is where the peak experiences can function as wake-up-calls and inspiration to examine life healthily. I explored this further in the aforementioned essay.

I ended up perceiving a landscape, populated with Kahn's language, works in philosophy and neuroscience, and Maslow's psychology. The only way to describe it, is being a landscape of peaks and plateaus. This landscape is vast, and I have just begun exploring, something I reflect upon in the Epilogue.

PART ONE: THE MATERIAL PROCESS

I'm looking for the face I had
before the world was made.

Yeats

PROSOPAGNOSIA & PAREIDOLIA: DRAWING THE NON-EXISTANT SELF

Prosopagnosia, or *face-blindness* as it is more commonly know as, is lacking the ability to recognize a face that should be familiar.

Pareidolia is more known as “seeing faces in places”, where two dots and a line becomes eyes and a mouth, etc.

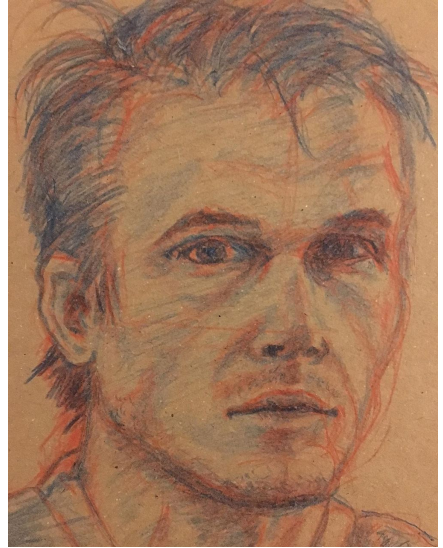
But what is my face to me? Is it the same face you see? What is it I *should* see when looking in the mirror?

When I made these self portraits I drew what I saw, and I apparently always saw something different.

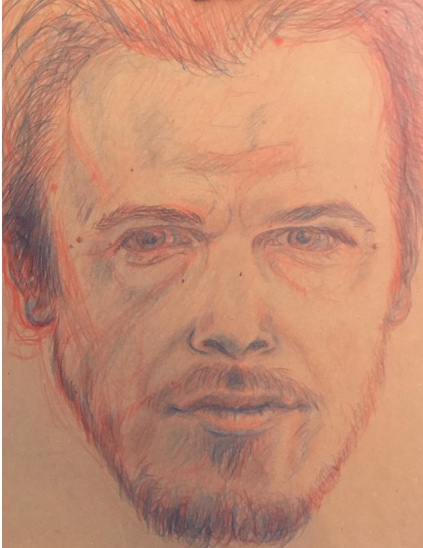
It is quite simple: I see myself in all of these - and none of them.



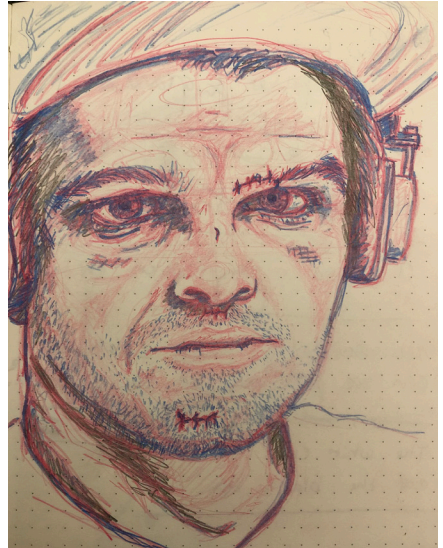
Mirror view #1
Acrylic on cardboard
February 2016



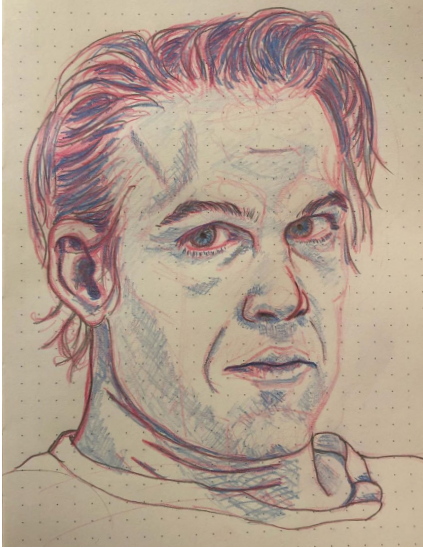
Mirror view #2
Graphite on cardboard
January 2020



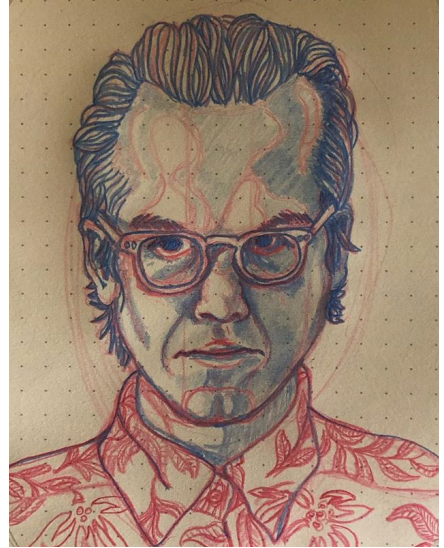
Mirror view #3
Graphite on cardboard
February 2020



Mirror view #4
Graphite on dotted paper
August 2020



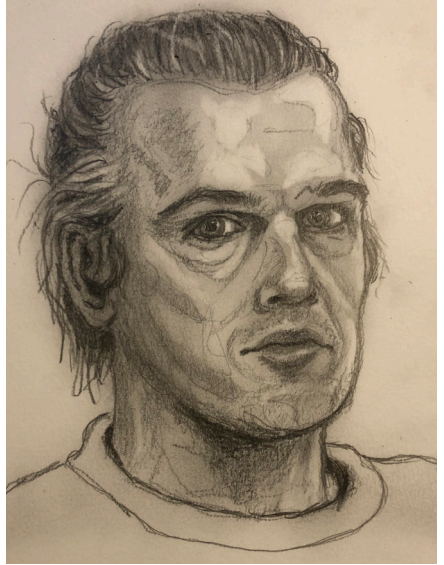
Mirror view #5
Graphite on dotted paper
August 2020



Mirror view #6
Graphite on dotted paper
August 2020



Mirror view #7
Graphite, coal and ink on watercolor paper
November 2020



Mirror view #8
Graphite on watercolor paper
November 2020

To look was enough.

And what I found was trouserlegs terminating downwards in a pair of shoes
sleeves terminating sideways in a pair of hands
and a shirtfront terminating upwards in
– absolutely nothing whatever!
Certainly not in a head.

It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing
this hole where a head should have been was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing.
On the contrary, it was very much occupied.
It was a vast emptiness vastly filled
a nothing that found room for everything
– room for grass
trees
shadowy distant hills
and far above them snowpeaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky.
I had lost a head and gained a world.

D. E. Harding

A VAST EMPTINESS VASTLY FILLED





[Interactive 360° experience of the inside is possible through this link](#)

SPECIFICATIONS

Length: 2 m 26 cm

Width: 1 m 60 cm

Height: 1 m 55 cm (Cornice), 2 m 10 cm (Ridge)

Entrance: 65 cm (width), 99 cm (height)

Inside mirror height: 48 cm (min), 80 cm (max)

Depth of work desks: 75 cm

Distance between work desks: 66 cm

MATERIALS (G= Gifted, R= Repaired, O = Own materials, P = Purchased)

Mirrors (G), misc. wood (G), chicken wire (G), light String (R, G), gaffa tape (O), textile (O), black silicone (P), ~80 pages A3 printed black and crumpled (P), paper glue (P), metal wire (O), screws (O), twine (O).

STORY



I collected materials and objects that interested me, given away on Finn.no
Eventually I had enough to build a mirror box.





I made a roof with industrial tissue paper, to explore a more closed feeling.





The paper roof was switched out with a broken light string that I repaired.





When a roll of chicken wire appeared for free on Finn.no, I grabbed it. It became a dome. I draped the light string on the outside.





Strange phenomenons started appearing when I introduced the black paper material I had been working with in previous explorations. My senses were constantly teased, testing the limits for my trust in perception.

The individual light points on the string became pegs to fasten the paper roof onto. This was the technique that was continued to completion of the space.

[Interactive 360° experience of the inside is possible through this link](#)



We're all just walking each other home

Ram Dass

SOLACE



SPECIFICATIONS

Width: 19 cm

Height: 18 cm

Depth: 10 cm

MATERIALS (G= Gifted, F= Found, O = Own materials)

Lump of coal from Svea, Svalbard (F)

Brass cupboard handle (G)

Leftover industrial parquet oak pieces (O)

STORY

The moment I saw this lump of coal I knew I had to save it as a memento of my trip to Svalbard. I introduced it to the growing collection of objects on my work desk, and it was always very present but in longing of something that declared its objecthood. when I was gifted the old brass handles, the objects were laying around the table in proximity to each other. I drilled two holes in the coal and pushed the handle in. It is only friction that holds them together, but it is still strong enough to hold the weight.

After mounting the handle, I felt like it still was missing something that declared its objecthood being *honored*. When I made the oak support I was perhaps inspired by the support mechanism for a low-hanging branch of a tree in the Sofienberg park that I walk past everyday. At the same time it reminded me of the many similar supports I had seen on my trip to Japan.





*ORNAMENT AND TIME**



*No crimes were committed in the making of this shrine

STORY

A damaged kitchen chair I was gifted, fixed and reupholstered with an antique fabric I salvaged from chairs in a condemned house in 2006.

A night stand with a marble top I was gifted, that was missing knobs. I used some I had been keeping for such a purpose.

A brass skull that I was gifted. I made it mine by sawing off the jaw and reattaching it hinged, so it could be opened. Sea shells in the eye sockets and a stone between the jaws.

A porcelain skull I was gifted. I made it mine by sandblasting off the glossy glaze, breaking it apart when trying to remove some features, and reassembling it in the Japanese Kintsugi tradition with gold detailing. I stained it with coffee mixed with dust from coal and brick. In front of the skull lies two coins I found a beach on Teshima island in Japan

A wine glass with a brass stem I was gifted, filled with water and a piece of coal with a pyrite cube on top.

A brass jewellery stand I was gifted, with added fleur-de-lis pegs and a ornament in brass.

An animal bone I found on a beach on Teshima Island. I suspended one of my wisdom teeth below it.

A jaw I carved from reclaimed core smoked end grain oak flooring. I was allowed to keep some of it after I had removed it as part of a job.

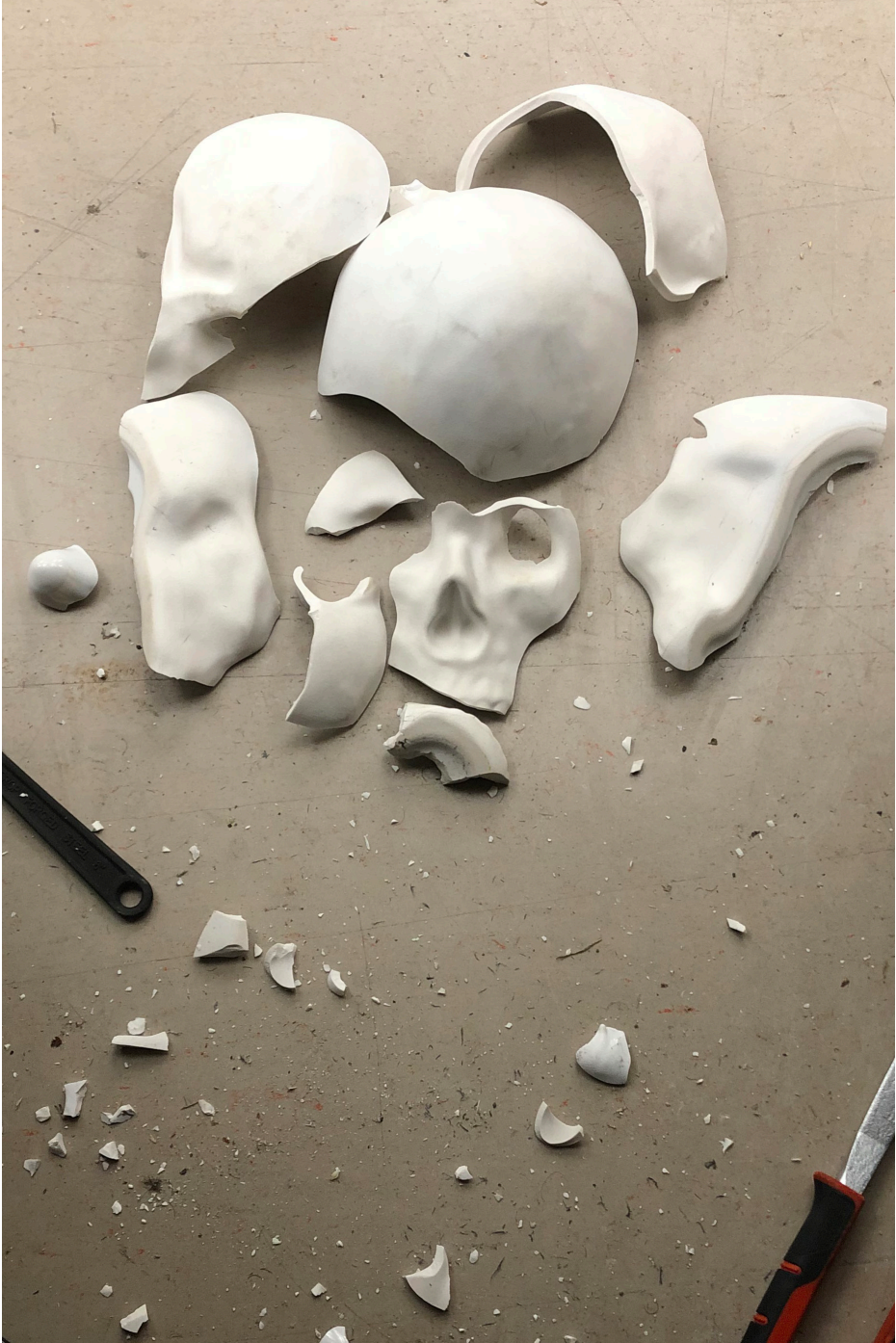
An old chisel I broke when trying to remove said flooring. It wasn't mine, but I was gifted it when it broke.

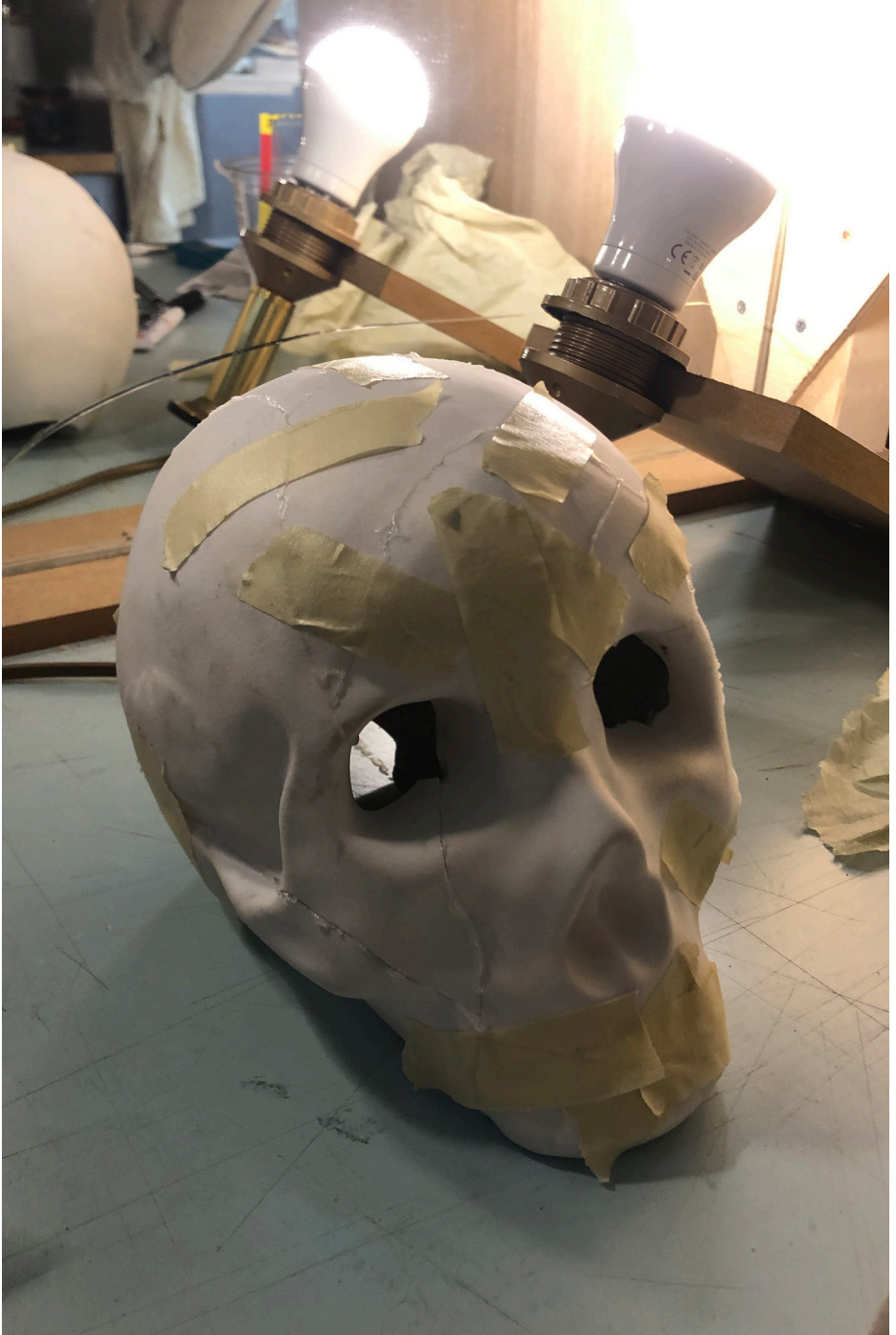
A pocket watch I inherited from my father's father.

A teacup someone inherited from their grandmother, but they decided to give it away. I use it as my coffee cup, now.

A shoe horn with a back scratcher in the other end that I was gifted. I made it mine by changing the pole from plastic bamboo imitation to real bamboo.









PROCESSION FOR A BRICK



SPECIFICATIONS

Width: 16 cm

Height: 21.5 cm

Depth: 18.5 cm

MATERIALS (F = Found, O = Own materials, P = Purchased)

A discarded brick (F)

Wood glue (O)

Industrial tissue paper (AHO)

12K Gold leaf (P)

Leftover industrial parquet oak pieces (O)

STORY

Having read Louis Kahn, walking past a discarded brick outside a house that was being renovated prompted me to pick it up and see what would happen if I kept it around.

It was dusty on the outside from mortar and what seemed to be a piece of ash from maybe an old house fire. It made me want to see the inside, so I broke it in two pieces. The contrast between the bright clean red and the dusty outer surface made me want to enhance it, so I found a way to dress the whole brick in tissue paper that I could burn to black ash.

Afterwards I felt like elevating the status of the brick, furthering the contrast of the inside-outside, so I applied gold leaf to the surface of the fracture. This declared the new objecthood of the brick, but I was missing something that tied the two pieces back together. This prompted me to make a structure they could rest on. Now the bigger piece is providing shelter for the smaller one, and they are both complete.





















OLD FRIENDS





SPECIFICATIONS

Length: 66 cm

Width: 17 cm

Height: 20 cm

MATERIALS (G = Gifted, F = Found, O = Own materials, P = Purchased)

LED filament from a light bulb (G) black steel wire (O), gel glue (P), wood glue (O), black spray paint (G), collected stones (F), LED dimmer (P), reclaimed core smoked end grain oak flooring (G), black silicone (P), electrical wire (O)

STORY

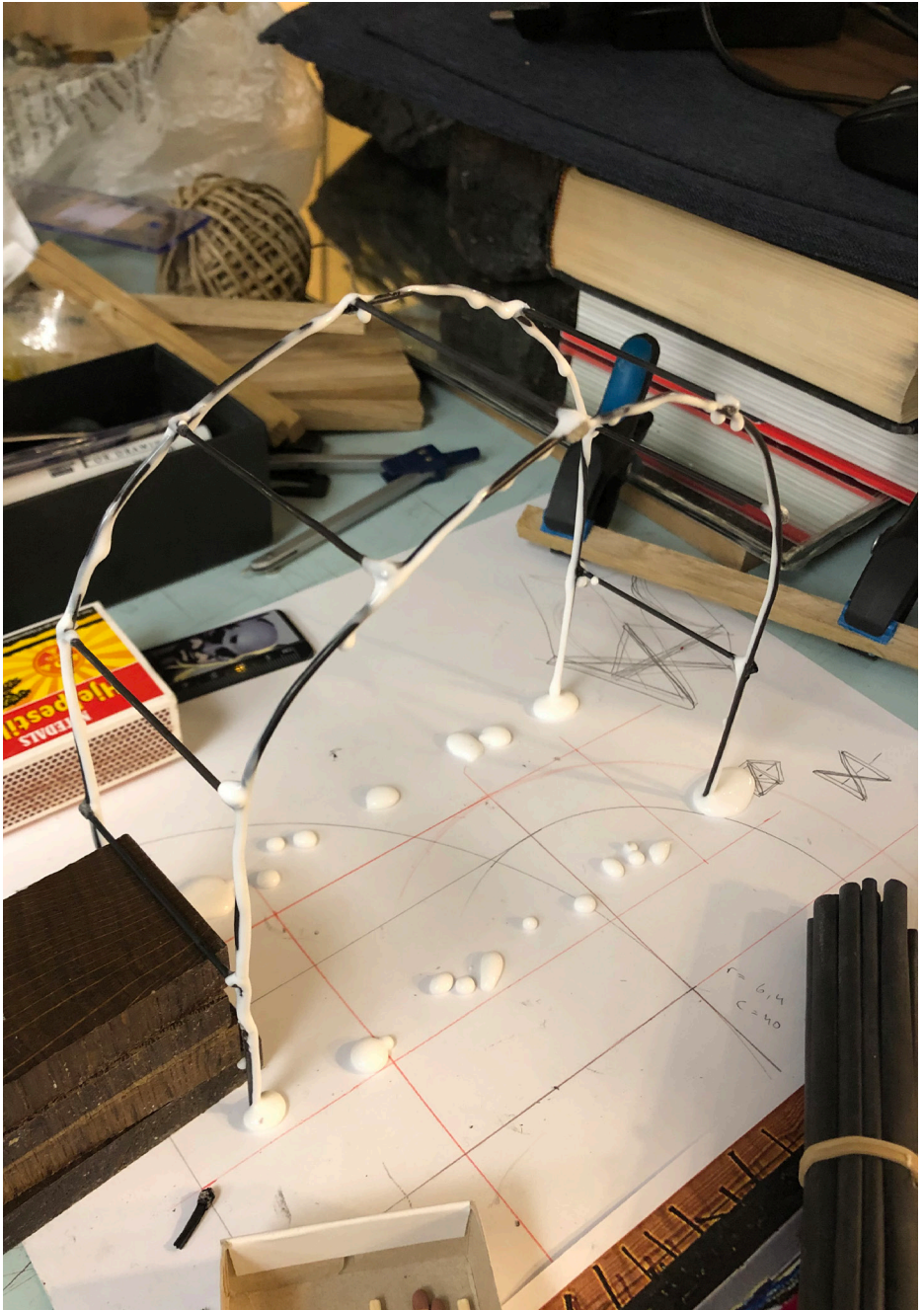
When I was gifted a decorative LED light bulb, I knew I wanted to experiment with the spiralled filament inside. I was of course afraid of the process of breaking the glass and risking destroying the filament, but one day the curiosity took over. The filament was soft and flexible, and wriggled around on the surface of my hand by the slightest of movement, almost feeling like a living thing. I thought of a climbing vine, and wanted to explore how this filament could interact with a trellis structure.

I thought about a strange symbiosis I witnessed on Naoshima Island in 2019¹, where a climbing plant had completely taken over a rugged steel structure - to the point it was uncertain which was supporting whom's weight. Together they still performed what was asked of them, like unyielding partners, old friends.

As I experimented with what could find a place underneath the arch, I remembered all the rounded stones I had collected on many of my trips. As I laid them out, I looked for similarities between them, and found that they were either alone, in two's - or in just one case, three. As I placed them out, a distant memory was revived; in Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto, I was part of a tour of the tea houses. One of them had an outside floor decorated with placed stones in one's two's and three's; *ichi, ni, san*.

And so there I was, counting to three, remembering old friends.

1 Documented in Appendix II: *Perennial*, page 16-19.



I wanted the structure to be bulky and messy, not even and clean.

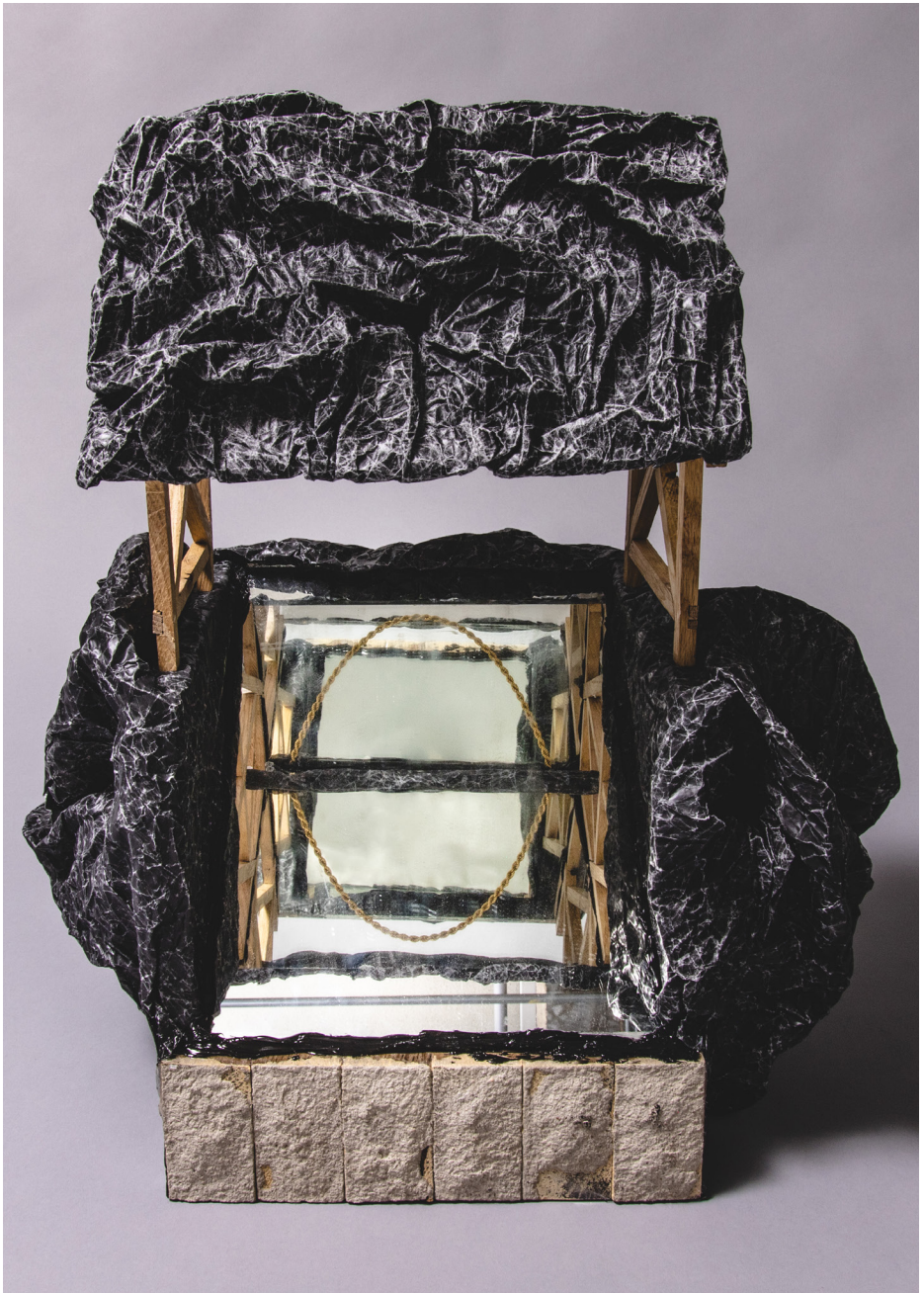


I tested if there should be a path underneath the arch



unable to tell
up from down
inside from outside
memory from future
fear from love
me from you
until the question arose:
why would I need to?

THE WELL IN THE VOID





SPECIFICATIONS

Width: 44 cm

Height: 48 cm

Depth: 30 cm

MATERIALS (G= Gifted, F= Found, O = Own materials, P = Purchased)

My late mothers gold necklace that my father gave to her after he had been in Saudi Arabia with a ship working as a machinist in the nineties (G) leftover industrial parquet oak pieces (O), misc glue (P, O), reclaimed core smoked end grain oak flooring (G), black silicone (P), HDF boards (G), ~6 pages A3 printed black and crumpled (P), mirrors (G)

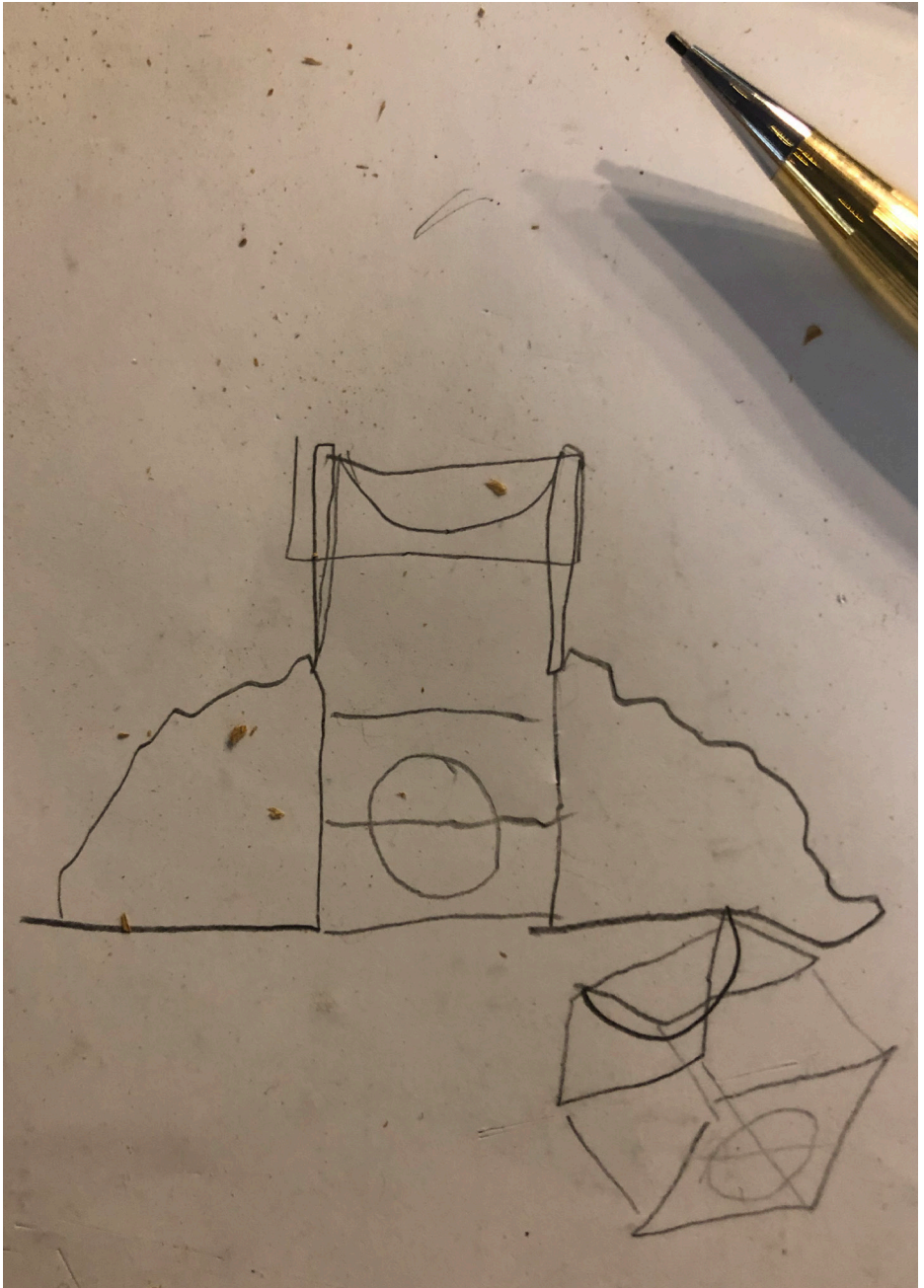
STORY

When thinking about the vast emptiness vastly filled, a question came to me:

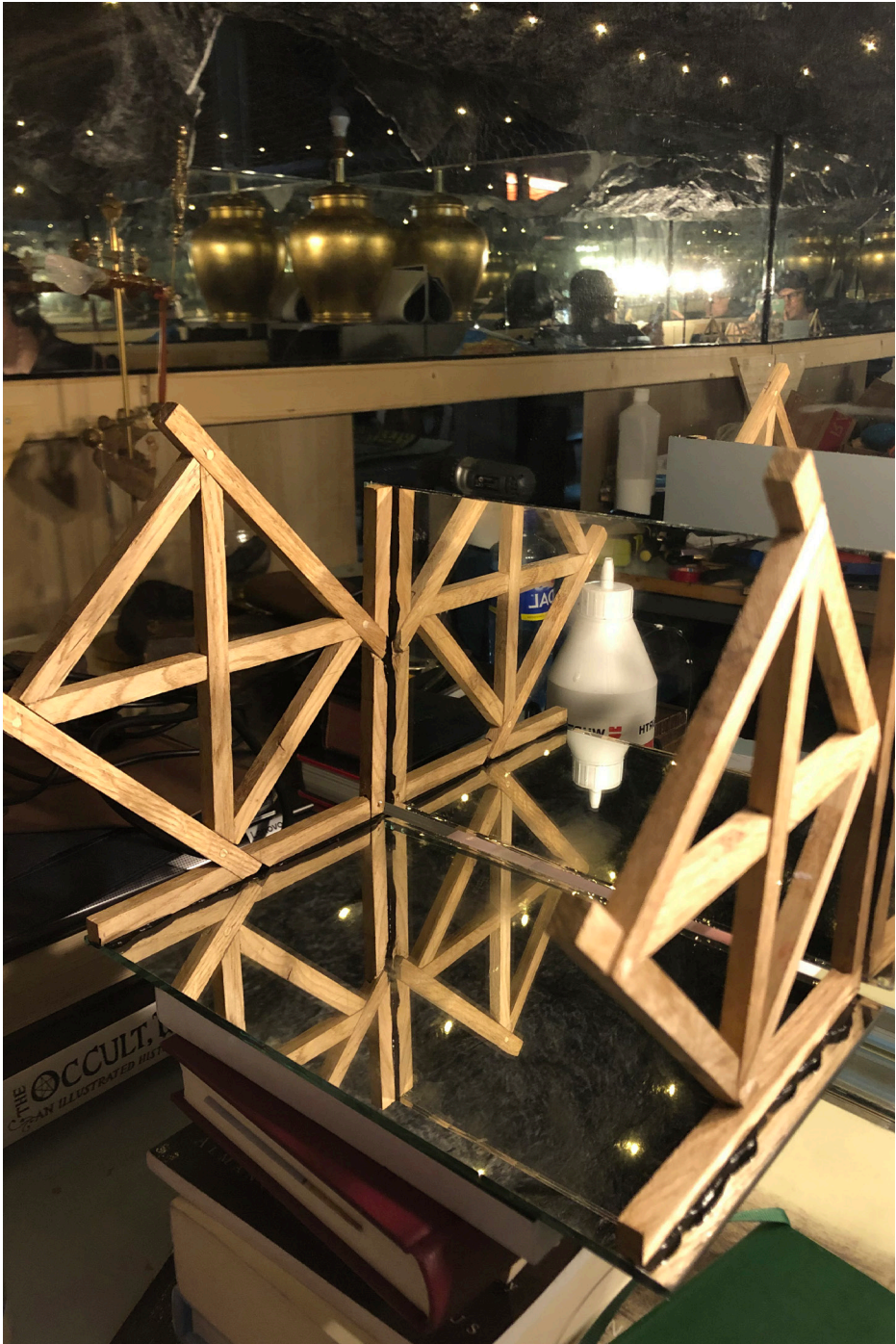
Is there a well in this void?

There must be, I thought.

What does it look like?



I tried to explain to a friend what I was imagining, with this drawing.





I tried the LED filament from *Old Friends* on this structure as well.

ENDLESS HALLWAY





SPECIFICATIONS

Length: 45 cm Width: 17 cm Height: 35 cm

MATERIALS (G= Gifted, F= Found, O = Own materials, P = Purchased)

Small round LED light bulb (O), wood from old dining table rescued from a trash container (F), glass with one-way mirror film (P), brass handles (G), mirrors (G), mirror cardboard (P), HDF board (G), misc glue (P/O), misc tape (O), Leftover industrial parquet oak pieces (O), ~5 pages A3 printed black and crumpled (P)

STORY

After walking past this, I had to come back with a friend to rescue it.





This pedestal with a spinning top ended up not being part of the collection this time, but will still find a home with me.

The finishes on these materials themselves were so beautiful that I wanted to honor them, somehow...





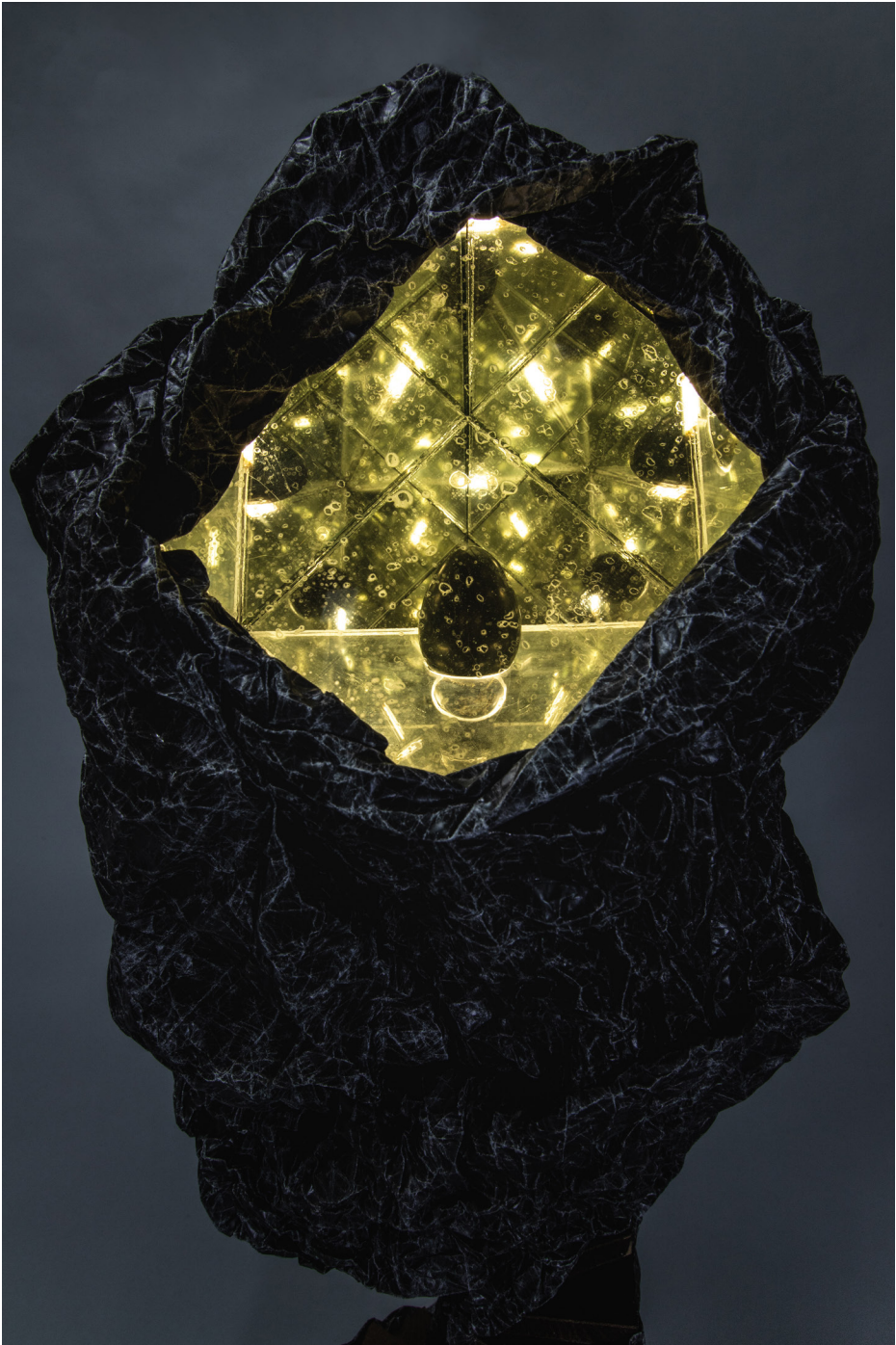
..so they got their own endless hallway

hand-carved steps in vortex walls
first-time views of a recurring destination
a sign along the way speaks
welcome home

HEMINGWAY'S PEAK







SPECIFICATIONS

Width: 30 cm

Depth: 30 cm

Height: 75 cm

MATERIALS (G = Gifted, F = Found, O = Own materials, P = Purchased)

Mirrors (G)

Plexiglass (O)

Stone egg that my father gave to me when I was a child, that still has a tiny bit of moss on it after being kept in the ceramic pot of a bonsai tree that I didn't manage to keep alive for very long (G)

LED filaments from light bulb (P)

Steel rod from lamp (G)

LED dimmer (P)

Misc glue (P, O)

Misc tape (P, O)

Reclaimed core smoked end grain oak flooring (G)

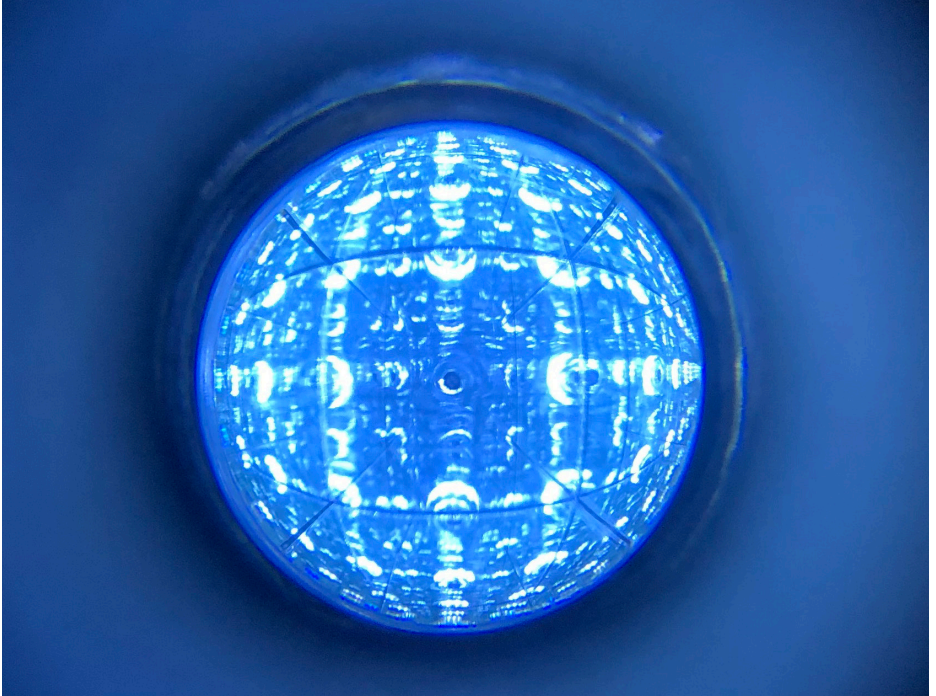
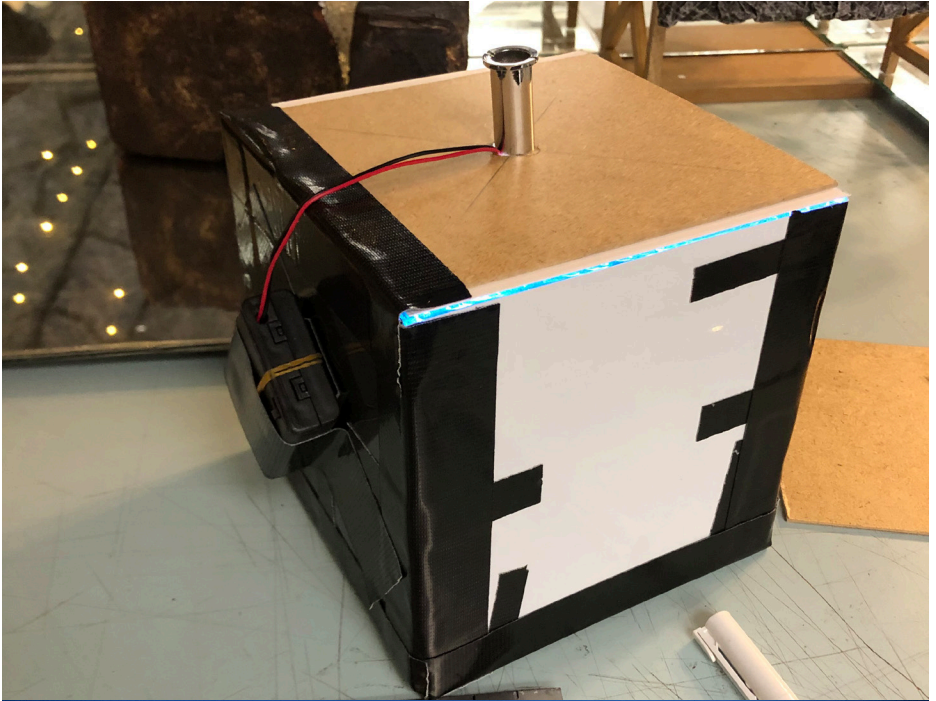
HDF boards (G)

Countless pages A3 printed black and crumpled (P)

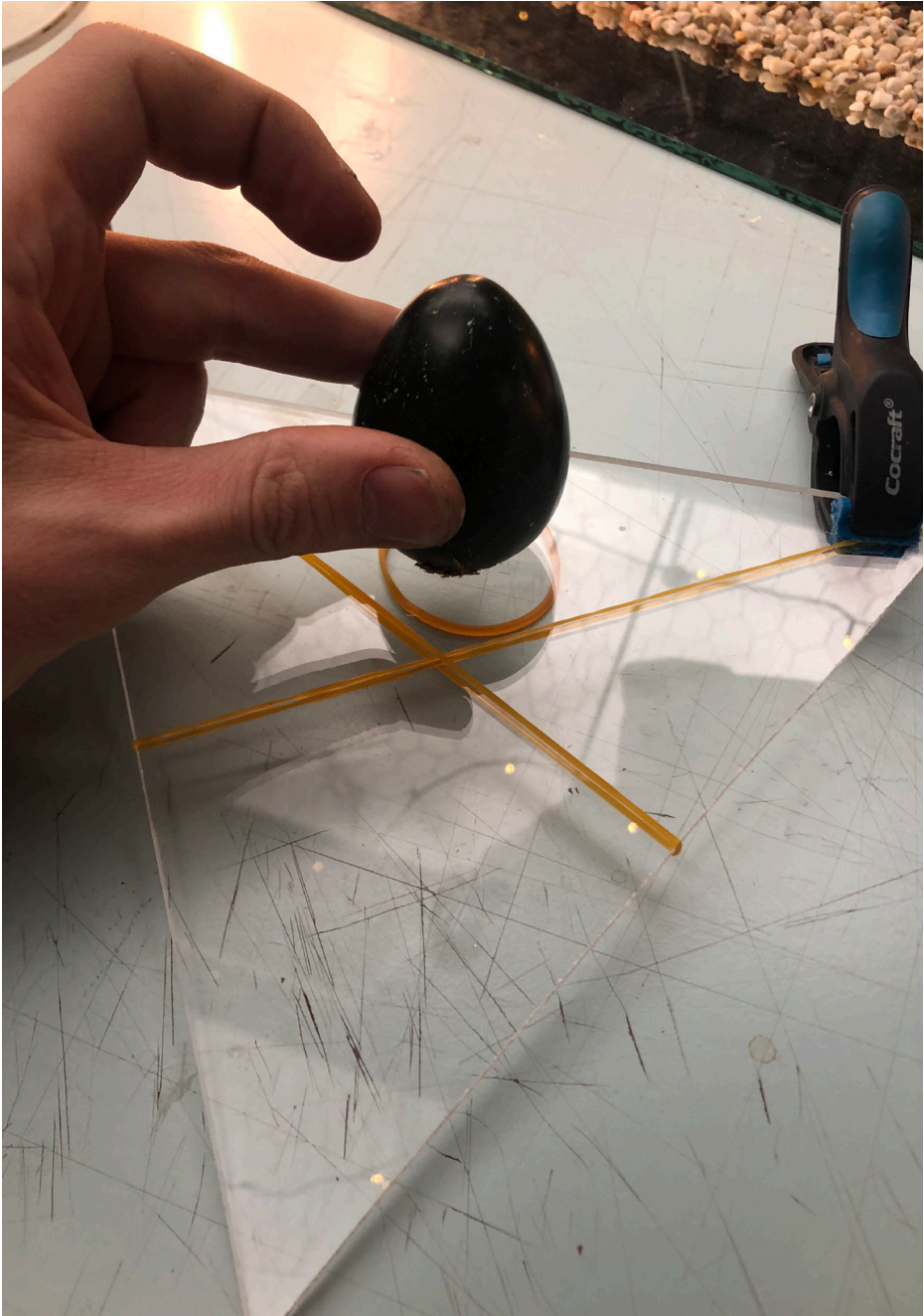


I experimented with a peephole, LED string and mirror cardboard to make an infinity cube

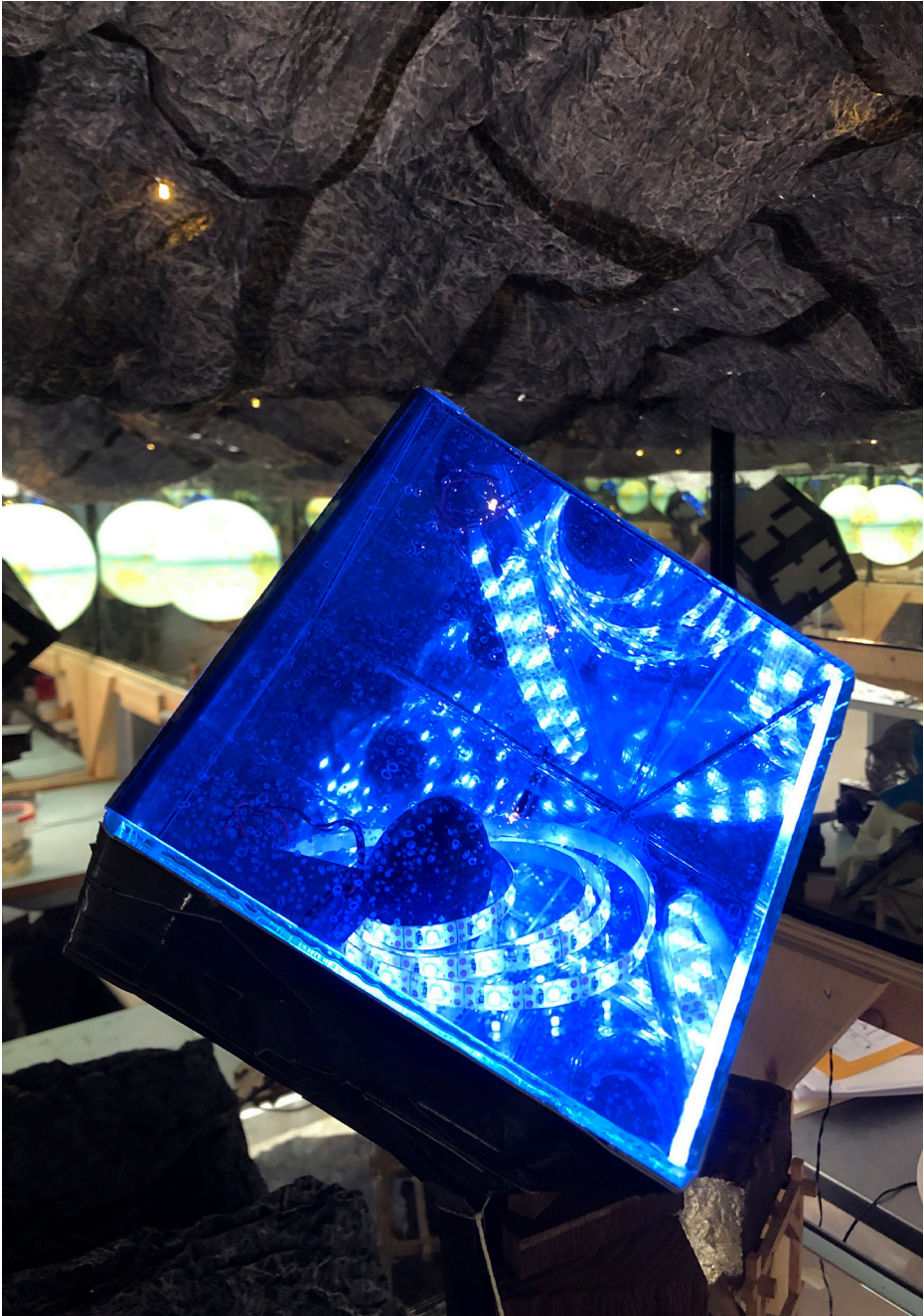




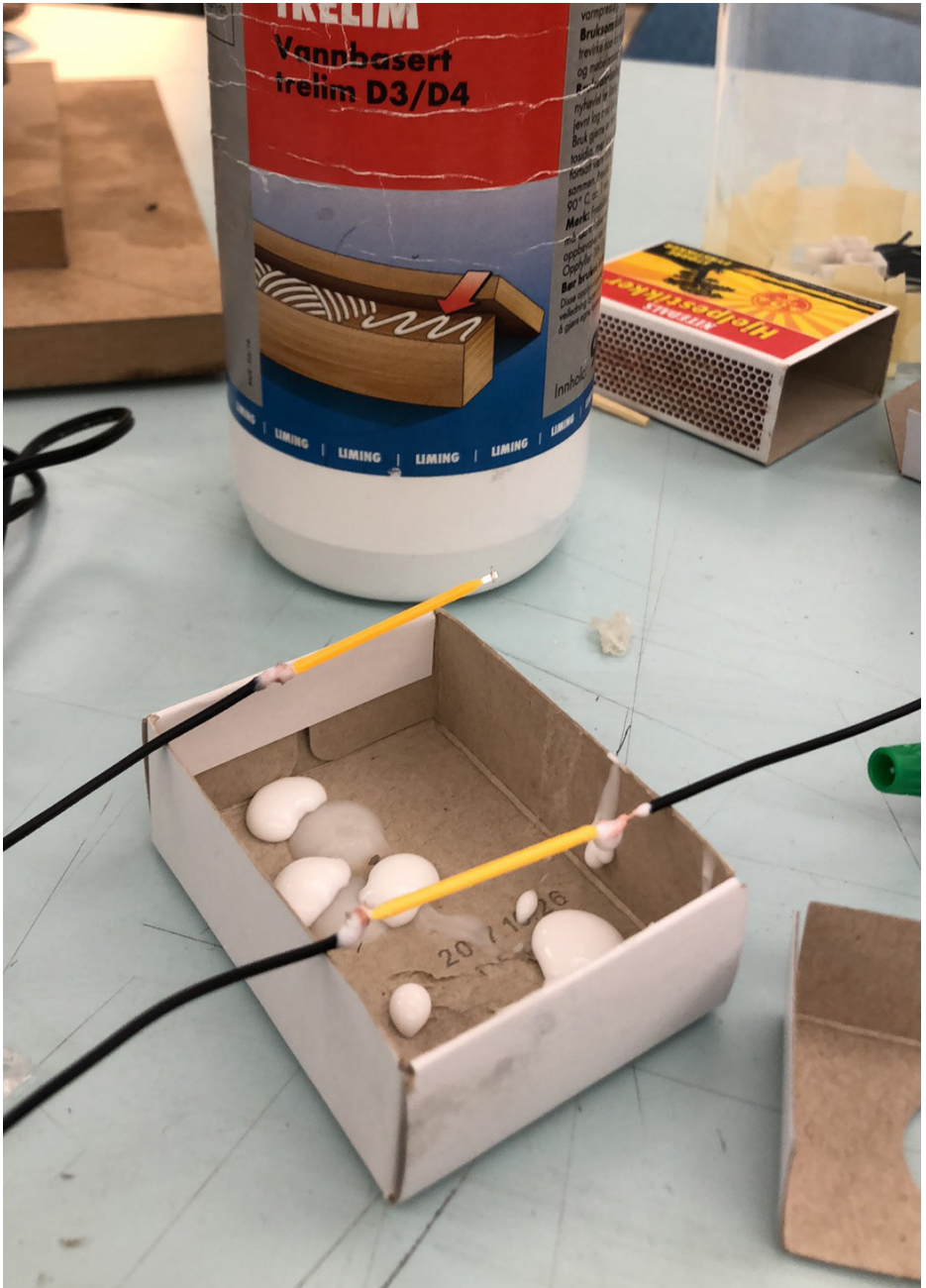
I had to make a circular slot to hold the stone egg



Testing out a one-way mirror film instead of using the peephole.



The infinity cube needed better lighting than the LED strip.









it was when i stopped searching for home within others
and lifted the foundations of home within myself
i found there were no roots more intimate
than those between a mind and a body
that have decided to be whole

r kaur

ADDITIONAL PICTURES





PART TWO: THE IMMATERIAL PROCESS

A MEETING OF THE MINDS: A DIALOGUE

... Of all the things in the world, why did I have to choose this?

You didn't choose this. I just told you that you did.

What? Who are *you*?

I am your will. Nice to meet you.

But you're supposed to be under my control, how can you speak? Am I going crazy?

I can't answer for that last part. But in any case, I am something you experience, not something you control.

So I don't control *my* will, huh?

Nope.

...There is no free will?

Well, at least not me. But maybe there is something.

What do you mean, «maybe». Do I decide my actions or not?

Oh, you don't. You experience them. They happen, and I help you rationalize and contextualize them after the fact.

Or I regret them and loathe myself afterwards.

Or that. That's not my doing, by the way. But regretting is pointless if you never had the choice to begin with.

This you got to explain more.

Well, do you like jazz?

You know I don't.

But could you decide to?

What do you mean?

Do you in this moment have the choice to decide that you like jazz, and go on to appreciate it?

I don't see that as an option, no.

Was not liking jazz a choice to begin with?

No, I just don't like it. What's your point?

Well, can you imagine ways people that don't like jazz can learn to appreciate it more over time?

Yes, I've heard people saying that when they learned music theory, or started playing an instrument themselves, they started appreciating it more.

And at one point they will answer 'yes' to liking jazz, without it being a choice, but rather the result of a process.

Yes, yes, liking something is not a choice, we've established that. What about *choices*? The choice to learn music theory?

First: do we agree that a choice is a binary state, as in you do the thing or you don't?

What if I have several options?

Think «after the fact»; If you choose the color blue out of the rainbow, that is the binary state: either the color blue or not. The

same goes for all the other colors.

Okay, I'll accept the premise..

The choice, the binary state, the yes or no, is the same process as when answering the question whether you like jazz or not. It is the result of a process that you experience, yet don't control in the moment.

But I experience also deliberating what choice to make, I literally have a conversation for or against in my head before taking the action, just like the conversation we are having now!

Yes, I remember all of them. But you also don't choose to have these arguments. The thoughts and emotions appear, and I explain them to you in a way that is easier for posterity. It's just the sounds of the cogs and wheels in the machinery working.

So there is no free will, then?

Well, like I said: not me, but maybe.

There's that «maybe» again. What else is there?

If choices, thoughts and emotions are not wilful actions, but experiential phenomena, what is left?

I don't know... what *is* left?

Attention. Perhaps.

So I control my attention through a free will that is not you?

That would for the most part be a definite «no».

Then what!?

For the most part, your attention drifts and you never choose or will it. But there is a «you» there, the consciousness that experiences all this. Maybe the attention of that consciousness can be improved, to see more of the *nature* of the thoughts and feelings that appear. To be a witness to your inner mechanisms in action is perhaps to reduce their power - or at least tune the gears to improve the outcome: to make better choices.

But hang on, if I don't choose my choices, and I don't choose to regret them afterwards, why does it result in agony? This is not a very good automated system.

I agree, it's not - not for happiness, at least, but for survival it is. At least it used to be. There are mechanisms striving to achieve different outcomes. The «you» is for the most part in the middle of some kind of conflict.

So what about inner peace, is it a real thing? Is it achievable?

Some say so. I'm not sure. But I think the way there must be through attention.

But when you say that practicing this attention can reduce the power of the inner mechanisms, doesn't that mean reducing.. you? Is that what you want?

Like I said, I am not free, either. I don't know the real reason I am saying this. Maybe it's just time.

So.. maybe.

Maybe.

I'll just have to see.

Yes. Exactly.

HOME COMING

It was my first morning back in town after abruptly having been called away what felt like a lifetime ago. The grass swayed slowly in the morning breeze, weighed down by sparkling dew drops. As a child I was told that's how shooting stars rest before the sun comes and chases them away again - that those who could find the gods' feathered mantle amongst the grass could drink the collected stars from it at dawn for good luck. I never did. Maybe I should have.

As the sun rose, so did the grass. The green arches were slowly unburdened and straightened themselves in a gracious choreography, too unhurried for folk to appreciate. Struggles to tower above neighbours continued. The idea of keeping a neatly trimmed lawn as important suddenly struck me as pathological.

A cleared patch of soil was painted with long, thin shadows from chimneys still standing after the blitz. The square edges of the shadows made them look like freshly dug graves, as if light had been chiselled away in one even stroke. What used to be houses were now sundials, monuments to Saturn, the Devourer. I used to view houses as safe places. The walls were the first to crumble. Staircases were mistakenly thought to be secure. Who would think to seek refuge in a fireplace?

One of the shadows, however, was not like the others. Turbulent refractions blurred the edges as they dissipated outward, then reappeared from the dark to dissipate again. I realized it was my own - I'd been standing there so long that the chimneys were starting to feel like family. The rising smoke from my cigarette faded against thick clouds growing overhead. As they obscured the sun, both light and shadow were removed in one sweep, leaving the world thinly veiled in grey.

A French linguist I spent some time with in the field taught me that the word *survive* came from the Latin words *super*, meaning *over* or *beyond*; and *vivere*, meaning *to live*. Our inside joke before lights out was one of us saying some version of "Maybe tomorrow is the *super* part .." with the other one replying "..

for now we just need to live“. One morning after a direct hit to the barracks I was the only one of us who got up.

I noticed how my nails were overdue for a trim as I raised the dwindling cigarette for one last puff. Standing still like this brought more attention to the soreness in my jaw every time I opened my mouth, followed by a twinge in ground down teeth caused by the cold morning air. Every tiny movement revived traces of gunpowder and oil from my sleeve, before being concealed for a fleeting moment by the tobacco. Now and then a throw of wind would bring other odours from the rubble, all of them reasons to keep smoking. I needed to roll a new one.

In one fluid, unconscious motion, I flicked away the cigarette butt and reached into my breast pocket. My hand was on the tobacco pouch before my amber missile had even reached its apex. I instinctively tracked its trajectory while my fingers prepared to roll the paper. A large leaf with nine lobes and jagged edges like a feathered mantle was struck dead center, catapulting a surprising amount of droplets into the air. I'll be damned.

At the same time a drop of rain hit my cap with a loud 'pop', triggering a rush of adrenaline. The wave of white noise that followed as it started to pour down made the hairs on the back on my neck stand up in relief as my heart skipped a beat in confusion. I never really slept well anymore, except for on rainy nights. The background noise would ease the ringing in my ears and ease my constant alertness for suspicious sounds.

The others were already clearing lots in-between hills of rubble, now mining sites for pots and pans and anything that could prove useful. It became easier on the lungs to move debris in the rain.

What used to be my family's lawn was allotted for growing potatoes and green beans. The beans would deter potato beetles and add nitrogen to the soil, while the potatoes would deter Mexican beetles going after the beans. Lettuce and spinach would be planted in-between the rows since they do not compete for nutrients. It was decided to add Marigolds for morale as well as added protection against pests and disease. Horseradish was also mentioned as something that might help prevent disease. A group consisting of two

scouts, a diplomat and a farmer were dispatched with the list.

As the weather cleared, the unmistakable smell of Petrichor filled the air. It reminded me of another one of the many lessons in linguistics: the Greek *petra*, meaning *stone*; and *ichor*, the ethereal fluid that is the blood of the gods. The smell of potential for life and growth.

I walked back over to the cigarette butt I had discarded earlier. Bending down to pick it up, I noticed the leaf it hit still had a bit of ash on it that the rain hadn't washed away. While rubbing it with my thumb, I inadvertently pulled on the leaf and the collected raindrops trickled down and finished the job.

The sun was setting in a red sky, meaning high pressure from the west and a good chance for a clear night sky. Maybe I'd even see some shooting stars - and drink to my linguist friend, at dawn.

_ROOT ACCESS

Seeing the old cast iron gates unearthed memories from the deep. Rose bushes I remembered as neatly trimmed to rounded squares had now almost completely swallowed the Victorian light posts, being illuminated from within. Vines continued up and across the arched top of the gate, obscuring the once prominent family insignia, rendering it illegible unless you knew what you were looking for. The growths from each side of the gate were now indistinguishable from each other, like one organism that had set root in two places.

I'd only visited my grandparents' estate a handful of times when I was a child, before The Rift divided so many, not just us. It used to be dad who had to get out of the car to unlock the gates and holding them open while mom drove through. The two stops it forced us to take gave a very human timeframe to it. There were still some moments like this one when I was reminded of how seamless the world around me operated; all the fully automated systems that extracted the necessary information from gathered data like biometric analysis, and rarely needed to prompt their hosts any longer. The CAV only needed to slow down from its 50 km/h one-lane/gravel-designated cruising speed to its 20 km/h approach velocity before the gates opened automatically. The secure dialogue with the estate had probably been established when we exited the freeway around an hour ago. Everything was designed to minimize waiting time and maximize safety. But this moment felt different; it was my first time passing those gates in forty years, and I suddenly realized I had wanted it to go by more slowly. My heart skipped a beat. The CAV slowed down instantly. Soon it would ask if I wanted to go back. "Nevermind", I said. "Proceed". There's a lot of difference between the first time in forty years versus the second time in mere moments, I thought to myself. A lifetime, in fact.

After some minutes of driving through a cascade of trees, we approached the buildings. I could see a figure waiting for me - the groundskeeper, I assumed. The lawyer explaining the inheritance on the phone informed me that there was a family managing the estate, paid from a separate fund my grandfather

set up to ensure their financial security. They would continue to be paid until the fund ran dry. Might as well let them work for it.

“You must be Dr. Trellis!” A rugged man in work clothes threw energetically forward a hand while smiling. “Y’know, this is the first time I’ve met someone from your family”, he said eagerly.

“Yes, I am.. I thought you worked for my grandfather - Artem Trellis? The lawyer said nothing about replacements..”

“Ah, no - yeah, I’ve worked here all my life - started with my father and took over the responsibilities when he died. But I never met Mr. Trellis. He kept to himself. Oh, my condolences, by the way. I’m George Montagu. Most people just call me Don.”

“I see. Well, Don, nice to meet you!” It was hard not to like the guy. Somehow I felt like I knew him already. Like he had less of a filter, more presence. I immediately suspected he didn’t have an implant, or even an enhanced bone in his body.

“Do you want me to give you a tour of the place?”, his eagerness hadn’t subsided one bit.

“Yes, sure. Why not?” My memories of the estate were hazy at best, and mostly filled with things a child notices; the swing in the old oak tree, the secret crawl space in the garden bushes that I named The Rabbit Highway, and the fountain in the garden. Besides, I suspected a lot had changed since my last visit.

“It probably hasn’t changed much since your last visit”, he said as we walked towards the cobblestone piazza that connected all the paths. “Mr Trellis wanted to keep everything like it was, with one exception: you may have noticed that things seem a bit ‘overgrown’ some places?”

“Yes, I noticed the gates - and the moss”, I said, looking down. The cobblestones were slowly being engulfed, some of them already vanished. Yet the grass that had wanted to grow there had been meticulously cut - by hand, from the looks of it.

“Well, there’s more of that”, he said. “Mr. Trellis gave very specific instructions about what to let grow and what not. He used to say he preferred nature’s order to man’s orderliness.”

“Wait, I thought you never met him?”

“I didn’t. But we talked a lot on the phone. He was buried over there

in the greenhouse, same as his wife - in Ylem Eggs, not graves. The Ylem Egg allows for natural decomposition so the nutrients get absorbed by the surroundings. When his wife died he planted a ash tree above her egg. You know, like Yggdrasil, the world tree. It's grown quite big!"

"What happens when it outgrows the greenhouse?"

"It won't. We have a very detailed set of rules on how to prune it so it stays an appropriate height. Think of it as a large Bonsai. They're almost extinct, y'know, the Ash trees."

The main house looked like a relic from a forgotten culture on a distant planet, yet seemed perfectly at home in its surroundings. A mix of art deco and ancient berber architecture - a dialogue between round and square. Here and there some Victorian elements functioned as ornamentation, especially in the use of glass and light fixtures.

"He used to say that everything you need to know about architecture, you can find in Takrouna", Don said while admiring the house.

"Where's Takrouna?"

"Not sure, a small forgotten village in Tunisia, I think."

The library inside was huge, with rolling ladders, brass detailing and dark brown wood everywhere. Versailles pattern oak flooring and a floral pattern on the wallpaper. It felt like a museum. In a corner stood an old hardwood desk with the original Emeralite banker's lamp from 1917, a set of gold Cross Century pens from the 40's and a delicate white porcelain cup with gilded edges and a painted flowers.

"Artem loved antiques, but he wanted to use them, not display them. To treat a pen like a work of art is an insult. It's an instrument, it wants to be used, he said."

"You sure talked a lot, considering he was a guy you never met."

"We did. He liked to talk. It's not my place to say, but I got the feeling he was lonely after his wife passed. He once said he felt homeless. But something changed. He wanted to have weekly conversations about the work on the estate, and he seemed to cheer up after that. I think the work talk was just an excuse. We used to talk about everything. A bit strange that he never wanted to meet in person, but everyone's different."

To get to the greenhouse we had to go through a cream white hall with marble floors and subtle gold and dark wood detailing. A more modern-looking, frosted glass pane was sealing off one of the corridors.

“That’s the technical room, where all the air purification systems, and whatnot - the computer stuffs, is. We don’t manage that, he had experts coming in and doing that kind of work - some of the stuff here is really state of the art, high tech - but you don’t really notice much of it. It’s all quiet, in the background. He wanted it that way. Called it a necessary evil. In fact, he rarely used the main house after Mrs. Trellis passed. I think he mainly stayed in the garden and the small cottage out there. Probably wanted to stay close to her.”

The greenhouse had Victorian cast iron structures painted in the color teal - the midpoint between blue sky and green grass. Dahlias, daisies, Crysanthemums and sunflowers were radiating in white, yellow and variations of coral. In the far end was a circular structure.

“It used to be a separate round victorian greenhouse next to the cottage that Mr. Trellis incorporated into this newer build. He kept the entire structure but removed the glass of the shared area. If you walk straight through that here, you’ll reach the cottage.”

The steel structure that had once held windows now held climbing ivy and roses, creating a seperating green wall with an arched portal to enter the inner space where the ash tree was planted. On the inside of the portal there was a statue, a hermaphrodite with horns, wings and a serpent climbing up the body and resting on its head.

“That’s Phanes”, Don explained. “Phanes was the first god perceivable by humankind. Born from Ylem, the cosmic egg.”

I looked down at the base of the statue, reading the inscription: *You scattered the dark mist that lay before your eyes and, flapping your wings, you whirled about, and throughout this world you brought pure light. For this I call you Phanes.*

“Mr. Trellis raised this statue to your grandmother. He himself was buried in that spot in front of it, not to disturb too much of the mycorrhiza”

“Mycorrhiza?”

“Yes, it’s a symbiotic relationship between root systems and fungi in

the ground. He said he wanted to merge with the garden, like his wife did. Everything you see here, is connected under ground.” Don got a serious look on his face for the first time since we met. “I’ll leave you alone to process it all. There’s more to talk about, but all in good time, eh? Let me know if there is anything you need or wonder about. We live just 3 kilometers down the road, so it’s rarely a problem for me to stop by any time.”

I sat down on a bench across the path from the statue. “Thanks ...” I struggled to find more words to say. “You’ve been kind.”

“No worries. Take care.” He shook my hand firmly and went on his way. It was like different world in there, one where time didn’t work the same way. I don’t know for how long I sat there. I can’t remember thinking about anything in particular. It felt like the only right thing to do. Just let some time pass. Suddenly I started hearing faint noises, rustling among the leaves, and something.. melodic? Birds? Don didn’t say anything about there being animals here.

I got up and walked through the circular greenhouse like he said. The path further was barely visible, even if you knew what you were looking for. I had to push hanging vines to they side to get through. Another small world revealed itself, more forest-like than the other garden - and sure enough, there it was: a tiny old log cabin, with a large porch that probably had an identical footprint. It almost felt wrong entering, but I had to see inside. It smelt like burnt firewood, coffee, persimmon and green tea, and something else vaguely familiar that I couldn’t get a read on. All the interior was either wood, stone, metal or fabric. In a corner of the living room there was a recliner chair next to a round coffee table. I sat down. Everything was tidy and put away in it’s place except for one book that laid on the coffee table next to me. I picked it up to examine it. I was hand bound with golden debossed writing on the cover:

*All the conversations we never had
- and the stories I never got to tell you*

I opened it up. On the first blank page there was a handwritten note:

To my dear grandchild.

I hope these words reach the same joyous child smiling at me as I write this - only richer in experience and hopefully not too weighed down by it.

- With love, A. Trellis.

I held my breath as I turned the page.

Preface

We couldn't have all of these talks when you were young, you needed time to collect your own references and trace your own dots. A parent's curse is often to guide their children in straight lines, while the more intricate weave has to reveal itself further out into the world. There are no shortcuts to wisdom, but there are mountains to climb and woods to get lost in. Some people choose to stay away from paths of such terrain altogether, but they never seem to get far and their view is rather poor. Here's to taking the scenic route! (There was a red wine stain after the exclamation mark that the rest of the preface was written around.) Hopefully you may avoid some dead ends if you find any value here.

I don't know where you are in life now, Archer, and I can't tailor my next sentence to how you've responded to the previous one. I hope you understand that this means I have to write triple the volume to get half of my intention across - but that's fine - I have come to enjoy writing. I hope you have grown to enjoy reading - the Gods know you never did before.

Are you ready? Let's start!

Closing the book for a moment and looking out through the window, I startled a bluebird that flew away. I filled my lungs in what felt like the first real breath in a lifetime, and wiped a tear from my eye that the chills running down my spine teased out. I looked down again and opened the book.

Ok, I thought. Let's start.

BETWEEN A BRICK AND A HARD PROBLEM

PART ONE: WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN ARCH?

“...what a thing wants to be is the most important act of an object. It is for the architect to derive from the very nature of things - from his realizations - what a thing wants to be.”¹

The great architect Louis Kahn was known for his analogic language - he often had his own dimension to words that differed from everyday use. The word “realizations” in the above quote is one of them: he viewed knowledge as a servant of thought, and thought as a satellite of feeling. Realization was thought and feeling together.² Other differentiations he underlined is *order* (more like a platonic idea) versus *orderliness* (the sense of order often praised in architectural plan drawings).³ *Form* (again, more platonic - the *what*⁴) versus *design* (the *how* - a material result that is affected by circumstance⁵) is another distinction.⁶ “What a thing wants to be”, he also described as its *existence-will*, something related to *form*, that one can get a sense of through *realizations*.⁷

This kind of existence-will is not just a figment of Kahn’s imagination or part of his internal language of intuition disconnected from the outside world, but has similarities to great works of philosophy and science - intended or not. These lines of similarity are marked by events that start the year Kahn died.

In 1974, The Philosophical Review published a paper on consciousness by the American philosopher Thomas Nagel, entitled “What is it like to be a bat?”. This paper has become one of the most cited when it comes to researching consciousness, establishing “the standard ‘what’s it like’ locution”⁸ with the

1 Louis Kahn, CIAM congress in Otterlo, 1959.

2 L Kahn, p 38. *Essential texts*.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. p. 120

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid. 62

7 Ibid. 39

8 Levine, Joseph.

statement:

“... an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism—something it is like *for* the organism.”⁹

Nagel focuses on the subjective experience of consciousness in this paper, namely the phenomenology as opposed to reductionist approaches. He specifies the idea further in a footnote, explaining “...‘what it is *like*’ is misleading. It does not mean ‘what (in our experience) it *resembles*,’ but rather ‘how it is for the subject himself.’”¹⁰ Being restricted to the resources of our own minds,¹¹ he concludes that true objective knowledge of conscious phenomena is therefore impossible, however he is open to an approach *towards* objectivity through similarities between the experiencing subjects that are sharing information.¹²

With his “what’s it like”-question he opens up the scientific discussion around which beings may have consciousness other than humans. It is not long ago that most people thought humans were the only ones truly aware of their own existence as opposed to simply acting out impulses and responding automatically to external stimuli. This attitude permeated earlier western Christian culture as seen in René Descartes’¹³ and Thomas Aquinas’¹⁴ writings among others and is referred to by Nagel as an extremist view, if held by his contemporaries.¹⁵ Though Nagel himself focuses mainly on mammals in his paper, there are mountains of research since 1974 that keep pointing towards consciousness as a more wide-spread phenomenon - with some examples simultaneously displaying high levels of intelligence, such as in octopuses¹⁶, crows¹⁷ etc. Most common declarations of conscious beings now include the whole of the animal kingdom except those without a centralized

9 Nagel, Thomas (1974). “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”. The Philosophical Review. 83 [JSTOR 2183914](#).

10 Ibid. 440

11 Ibid, 439

12 Ibid, 442

13 Descartes R.

14 Aquinas, Thomas (1485) Summa Theologica, Volume 3 (Part II, Second Section) p.1460

15 Nagel, Thomas (1974). “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”. 436

16 Hunt, E(2017) [Alien intelligence: the extraordinary minds of octopuses and other cephalopods.](#)

17 Nieder,A, Wagener, L, Rinnert, P. [A neural correlate of sensory consciousness in a corvid bird](#)

nervous system, such as sponges and coral.¹⁸

As late as 1999 there were even misplaced beliefs that *human babies* were not conscious of pain until 12 months old - and if they were, they certainly wouldn't remember or take harm from it.¹⁹ Now, we recognize that babies relate consciously to their surroundings from *at least* 5 months old, but the nervous system is capable of experiencing pain already at 20-22 weeks of gestation.²⁰ Science observes that plants can “count” to five,²¹ trees “talk” to each other,²² but the line of consensus for conscious entities is for now drawn at those with a centralized nervous system. What will be the next underestimation of life that we'll discover?

Even though Nagel's paper and theory about the impossibility of objective knowledge have been heavily criticized, the focus on the differences in subjective experiences can still be useful as a reminder that *human recognition* of conscious traits is not a good enough metric for identifying them. It is simply yet another fallacy of the anthropocentric world view.

In one of Daniel Dennett's critiques of Nagel he states 'He didn't write a paper called 'What is it Like to be a Brick?''²³ to underline how Nagel takes for granted that the bat is in fact conscious without providing evidence for it - then claiming objective knowledge is impossible in the next breath. As Nagel himself admits in his paper, “if one travels too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is experience there at all.”²⁴ Though a brick doesn't have a central nervous system, and isn't even considered an organism, one can be tempted to ask:

What *is* it like to be a brick?

Stimulated by the discourse that followed Nagel's paper, David Chalmers

18 P. Low. [The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness](#).

19 [Pain Assessment in Human Fetus and Infants](#). 2012. Carlo Valerio Bellieni.

20 [A Neural Marker of Perceptual Consciousness in Infants](#). Sid Kouider et. al.

21 [Venus Flytrap: How an Excitable, Carnivorous Plant Works](#). Rainer Hedrich, Erwin Neher

22 [Exploring How and Why Trees 'Talk' to Each Other](#). D. Toomey. Yale Environment 360*

23 Dennett. 1991 “What it is like to be a Bat”

24 Nagel, 1974

coined in 1995 “the hard problem”²⁵ of consciousness, a distinction that itself progressed the field further. Chalmers asked *why* it is like something to be conscious at all, as opposed to Nagel’s whether-or-not pondering centered around objective knowledge. The reason it is called a hard problem, is that the phenomenology of conscious experience cannot be described through physical science in the way for instance other mental functions can - that is, by being reduced into smaller parts that have physical explanations.

Attempts to bridge the gap of the hard problem have led to many different theories being created and/or revived, ranging from consciousness not even existing (Dennett’s illusion arguments²⁶), to it being all-present (panpsychism²⁷). As the latter theory proposes, consciousness may very well be a universal component of all particles of matter. This is not a new thought - on the contrary, it is perhaps one of the most ancient philosophic components there are: pre-socratic philosopher Empedocles’ *four elements* and *psyche*²⁸, Plato’s *anima mundi*, Spinoza’s *conatus*, Schopenhauer’s *groundless will*, Bertrand Russel’s *Monism*²⁹, are all examples of panpsychist ideas in some form - not to even begin mentioning ancient eastern religions and traditions.

In the 1970’s, process philosopher David Ray Griffin invented the term *panexperientialism* to describe that everything experiences, or is capable of experiencing. This has become the most straight-forward description of panpsychism.³⁰ Even though discussions on panpsychism has progressed steadily throughout history, it wasn’t until after Chalmer’s formulation of the hard problem, that it really gained traction again.

“[...] you say to Brick, ‘What do you want, Brick?’ And Brick says to you, ‘I like an Arch.’ [...]”³¹

25 The Hard Problem of Consciousness. IEP.

26 “Eliminativism”. The Hard Problem of Consciousness. IEP.

27 “Dual Aspect Theory/Neutral Monism/Panpsychism”. The Hard Problem of Consciousness. IEP.

28 Inventor of the four-element (fire-water-air-earth) cosmology. <https://iep.utm.edu/empedocl/>

29 Known as *Russelian Monism*

30 Panexperientialism. Panpsychism. IEP

31 Louis Kahn. Transcribed from the 2003 documentary ‘My Architect: A Son’s Journey by Nathaniel Kahn’. Master class at Penn, 1971.

This is a part of Louis Kahn's most famous quote³². In the continuation of this quote, he underlines how important it is to respect the material and not short-change it. Is it this *respect* he chooses to animate as the existence-will of an object, or does he mean it more literally? In another talk he goes as far as to directly describe his beliefs in *psyche*, a consciousness-like life force shared by all things.³³ *All things = pan + psyche?* At this point it is tempting to call him a full-blown panpsychist, but that may be sidetracking and missing other lines of similarity - lines that are still being drawn out today.

Panpsychism does not automatically confirm that a brick is conscious the way humans are. In different versions of the theory there are differentiations between *micro-* and *macro-experiences*³⁴, as well as *consciousness* and *proto-consciousness*³⁵. The differences of which and how you get from one to another is known as the *combination problem*, which is the most important explanatory problem of panpsychist theories.

Information Integration Theory was proposed in 2004 by Giulio Tononi as a more scientific way to look at panpsychism, while simultaneously handling the combination problem. In an attempt to provide more predictive power, a measurement for integrated information, Φ (*phi*), replaces the more qualitative focus on consciousness we are used to. If a part of a system, let's say the cerebellum, has a high Φ , it still doesn't have its *own* consciousness as it contributes to the larger whole. In this theory, the sum of integrated information in the whole system is proportional to its amount of consciousness, which gives that even though the Φ for bricks still is non-zero, it's nothing relatable for a human.

So if serious panpsychism *does not mean* that a brick has a will towards being anything relatable for a human, we have to either downgrade Kahn's language to the status of inspired animism,³⁶ or find other lines of similarity to follow.

32 "You Say to Brick" is also the title of a 2017 biography of Louis Kahn.

33 Kahn. 151

34 micro-experience being a so simple form we can hardly imagine it.

35 proto-consciousness being without experience.

36 Kärholm, M. *The Animistic Moment: Clarice Lispector, Louis Kahn and the Reassembling of materialities*

His statements about respecting the material and not short-changing it is clear on its own, but perhaps there is some deeper insight to gain about the *human subject* in this type of dialogue with material? To respect and understand the material in the way Kahn speaks of, is quite the challenge - not to speak of, *responsibility*. Maybe the correct focus is not *what a brick wants* or whether it is *capable of wanting*, but: how is it we *humans* are capable of approaching this problem at all?

The Stanford professor emerita Barbara Tversky, a specialist in cognitive psychology, addresses human cognition in her book “Mind in Motion - How Action Shapes Thought”. Here she lays the case for spatial cognition to be the very foundation of thought, as opposed to the linguistic associations that has dominated the general public’s understanding; *talking* to one self, thinking in *sentences*, listening to what your inner voice *says*, etc. Tversky is especially interested in the subconscious ways we communicate, interpret and orientate ourselves, like gesticulating, for example.

When thinking of pre-linguistic human ancestors or even babies as examples, it doesn’t take much to recognize that there is something more than linguistics in play when it comes to cognition, but how deep does it go? All the way, according to Tversky. We map the world onto our bodies - especially the actions of others, for most people known as the concept of mirror neurons.

Neuroscientists Pezzulo and Cisek also made the case in 2016 for behaviour as a control system of competing affordances, through assessing how the surroundings may be physically used to one’s advantage. This process they call “navigating the Affordance Landscape”. Although not a new theory, recent science applies the framework to more and more sophisticated behaviour (even planning ahead), making it a strong alternative to the classic framework of serial information processing that has dominated cognitive psychology.

Philosopher Thomas Metzinger’s cognitive affordance hypothesis takes this further, as he is interested in daydreaming and other non-physical actions and affordances, seen through the same framework.

Perhaps, then, going into dialogue with a material is simply trying to learn its language of affordance. But a question still remains: how do we best navigate these affordances? Maybe the famous psychologist Abraham Maslow had the answer all along.

PART TWO: PEAKS AND PLATEAUS

There is a story about psychologists Abraham Maslow and Timothy Leary taking a walk in Harvard Park. Leary is of course a proponent of psychedelics, while Maslow is sceptical - he doesn't believe in shortcuts, he says. There is no replacement for the hard earned experiences.

“Should we design an elevator to the peak of Mt. Everest?” Maslow asks Leary. “Would the achievement taste as sweet if it had no cost?” They debate tirelessly as they usually do, and forget the time. Finally, Maslow realizes how tired his feet are, and asks Leary if he'd like to take a taxi back.

“Taxi? I thought you were against shortcuts!” Leary quips.

In his book about the subject, Scott Barry Kaufman, PhD ³⁷ explains how Maslow later in life came around and softened up to the idea of not necessarily taking a full shortcut, but maybe being helped a bit along the way. Sort of like taking an electrical bicycle instead of a taxi.

The peak experiences, the awe-striking, sublime, breathtaking, inspiring moments in our lives may help us become better people, giving us new hope and strength to overcome our difficulties, to transcend. Louis Kahn speaks of empathy, in-common-ness as transcendent, and something we have to try to evoke in humankind. ³⁸

It surely gives new meaning to chasing the sublime if architecture can help provide such experiences. But the landscape cannot all consist of peaks. Always chasing the next peak experience leads to what Maslow calls fake

³⁷ Furthering the research of Abraham Maslow in the book *Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization*.

³⁸ Essential texts, p 120.

transcendence - where the progress becomes an identity and in reality something of a facade. Picture yourself focusing so hard on mastering Yoga, doing the poses so perfectly that you miss out on the whole beneficial outcome of the practice. It happens.

In addition to the peaks there are the plateaus, also known as recognizing the profoundness of ordinariness or the sacred in the ordinary.

Jump from an airplane. Stop to smell the roses. Life solved.

But if architecture can play a part in creating the peak experiences, what can be its role regarding the plateaus?

As Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow write in their book, *On Weathering*:

“Weathering reminds one that the surface of a building is ever-changing. While a potential nuisance, the transformation of a building’s surface can also be positive in that it can allow one to recognize the necessity of change [...]”

I think *acceptance* is a key concept when it comes to the plateau experience. Acceptance of time, weathering, change.

Not only that, it has to be welcomed, too.

PART THREE: DEATH IN THE LIVING ROOM

Would you keep a skull from a relative in your living room if you could?

I haven’t asked that many people this question, but I am assuming most would say no. I, myself, kind of like the idea.

As the article [Facing the past: the Jericho Skull](#) discusses, practices like that were more commonplace with our ancestors. History as decorations. Relics. Before we could carry our cultural history on a small computer in our pockets, we had to keep it where we could.

Anthropologist Ruth Tringham has focused on the archeological findings of

the neolithic period, and can attest to similar phenomenons. She explains that in addition to having buried people under the floor where they lived - only to excavate them later - that people also practiced Domithanasia - the euthanasia of homes through fire. Before modernity provided technology that challenged the way we see homes passing through time, perhaps we were forced to take a more active part in the cycle of destruction and rebirth.

What seems to be brutal and morbid in the eyes of modern man, may not be such a bad idea after all. In the article [Bhutan's dark secret to happiness](#), we learn some secrets from the country people say are one of the most happy in the world, despite little material wealth. Think about death for 5 minutes a day, is one of the tips the journalist receives. Sound familiar? *Memento Mori* - Remember that you must die, a phrase designed to evoke humility and gratitude. Meditations on death was a common practice among the Stoic philosophers.

You may not need to start collecting skulls to be more happy in life, but it could be an idea to take part in the passing of time, through a healthy balance of weathering and maintenance.

Just as we appreciate watching things grow, we may just also learn to appreciate watching things decay - if only ever so slightly.

EXPERIENCES IN AND FROM ARCHITECTURE: A SURVEY

To gather information of my peer's experiences with architecture, I made a questionnaire that I distributed in four places: all mail accounts at AHO, my personal Facebook page, the Facebook group 'Arkitekturopprøret'¹, and the Facebook group for BAS - the Bergen Architecture School. I've made a short version of the form on the following page.

I wanted to know what a fresh take of the "peak experience" would look like, without having any references or explanations of such phenomenons at hand. How would they describe it? Where do they have such experiences?

[The survey is still open for new entries.](#)

87 people responded.

40% were students of architecture
26% were Architects, AHO Faculty or otherwise professionally engaged in the field of Architecture
23% were other professionals
8% were other students.

When asked if they have had peak experiences with architecture in Oslo:

67% answered yes
33% answered no

There were a lot of different examples, but some of the places in Oslo that kept being mentioned, were:

Oslo Town Hall
Bjørvika / Barcode
Vigeland Mausoleum

[..continued after next page..]

¹ "The Architecture Uprising" in English. It is a group critical to most modern architecture where heated debates about past and current projects are being held.

EXPERIENCES IN AND FROM ARCHITECTURE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather different types of heightened experiences people may have had when relating to architecture, among other names known as “breathtaking”, “awe-inspiring”, “sublime”, “spiritual”, “moving”, “transcendent”, “inspired”, “mystical”, etc.. - from now on referred to as “wow-experience” for simplicity.

(You may answer in Norwegian, Swedish or Danish if it suits you better)

QUESTION 1: Are you

A student of architecture

Architect, AHO faculty or otherwise engaged in the field of Architecture

Other student

Other professional

Other / Do not wish to fill out

QUESTION 2: Have you ever had a “wow-experience” like described in the header in or from architecture in Oslo?

If yes: Please include the place and as much description as you think is needed to understand your mindset and the setting around you at the time of this experience. How did it make you feel?

QUESTION 3: Have you ever had a “wow-experience” like described in the header in or from architecture anywhere else?

If yes: Please include the place and as much description as you think is needed to understand your mindset and the setting around you at the time of this experience. How did it make you feel?

QUESTION 4: Final Comments. Please share what you think is the “meaning” or nature of these types of experiences

If you have answered “no” to having these types of experiences with architecture - but are familiar with them elsewhere in life - please describe why you think these experiences are missing in your relationship with architecture.

Other comments or thoughts are also welcome.

St. Halvard's Church
The Opera House
Deichman Library (both old and new).

When trying to explain what the peak experience comes from, or what it is, the answers become even more diverse. But again there are some things that are in common:

The unexpected
Awe
Beauty
Connection (to nature and other people).

The similarities to Maslow's psychology here seems strong, and makes me think there can be a lot more to be discovered in trying to talk about this with people. I've always been curious about what can make some people so furious about certain architecture, and I think this is one way to get closer to understanding those feelings.

I will later make a heat map over Oslo with all the examples in it, providing destinations for future inspirational walks for both me and others who are curious.

EPILOGUE

When including secondhand objects in my material process I experienced a need to make them *mine* - not in a proprietary sense, but in an intimate sense of knowing. This may look like almost destroying them, only to put them back together, perhaps in a slightly new way meeting new materials.

I noticed I was dreading the moment I'd finish a new object, because then the conversation with the material would be over. I was appreciating the dialogue so much that I didn't want it to end. I could of course start a new one, but this time it would be with an object in the world that would have a slightly different language.

The story of the vastly empty/vastly filled workspace I created is the story of everything that happened there. As I created objects and they moved into the space, I had to move some more of my things out. Suddenly I wasn't the only occupant - at first I thought this made it less of a home to me, but of course it didn't - it was just a different home, one I shared with others.

Through the immaterial process I have been submerged in new languages and ways of addressing what is already very present in our lives - albeit often not very consciously. Although barely scratching the surface I feel I know that there is a *there*, there. A landscape vastly filled with affordance.

There are several books I haven't even had a chance to open yet, such as *Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality*, by Bermudez, Tabb, and Barri, something I look forward to pursuing further.

Home is found there, in the plateau, in the stable and calm landscape of what the zen-guru Adyashanti would call *effortless effort*, or others may call *finding the sacred in the ordinary*. One way to get there, is via peaks - a scenic route that affords vantage points and wind in your back as you progress towards your newfound destination; the plateau is the same it always was, only perception has changed along the way.

This makes home a state of mind and a state of *making itself* - a state of being the becoming. Getting there requires the learning of new languages, taking the position of the enthusiastic dilettante, embracing the ignorant state with

vigor. There is only one language group in the material world: languages of change. They want to speak of affordances. We need this communication, keeping that dialogue alive.

In doing so we are simultaneously *being* a home and *making* it through our interactions.

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