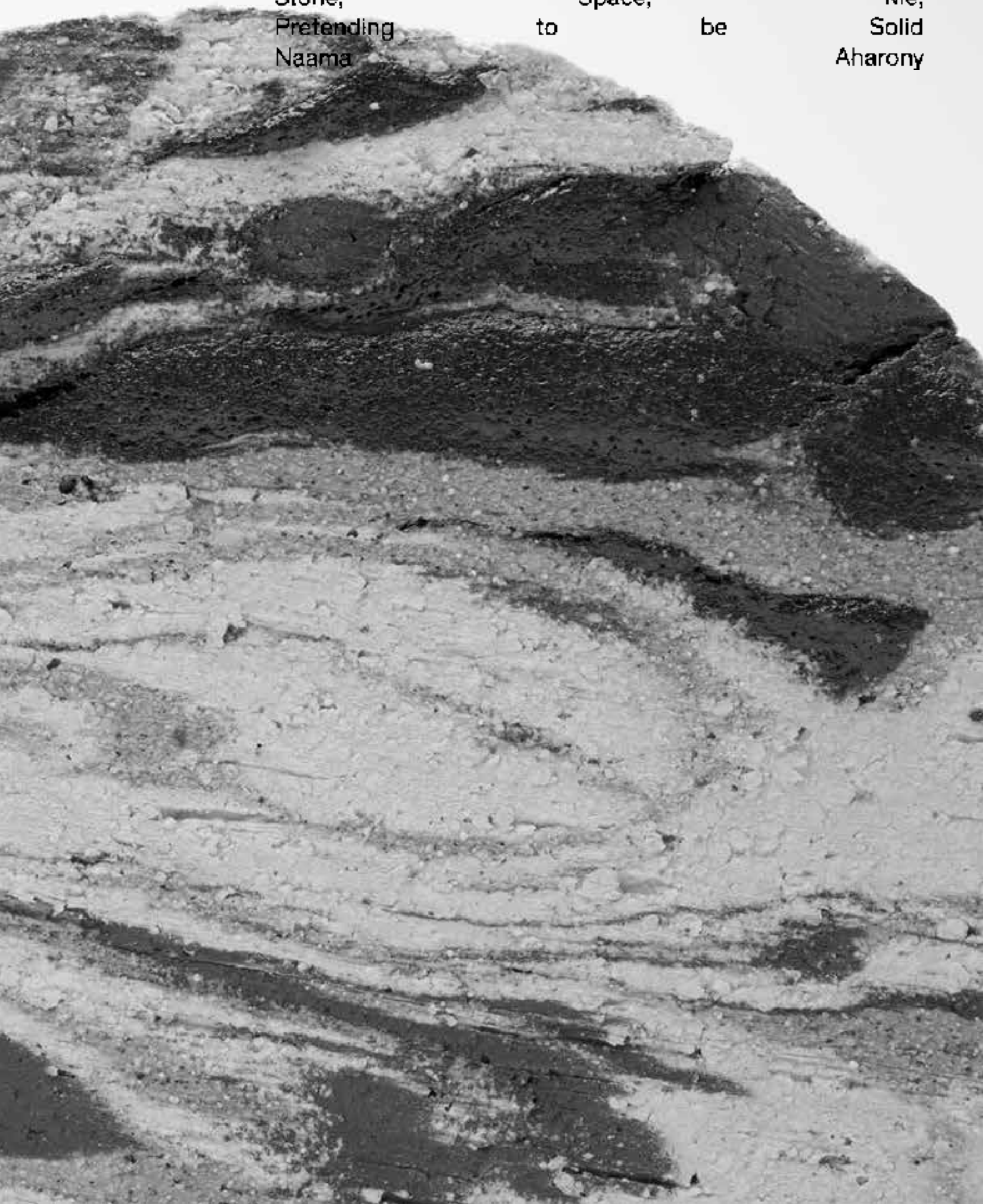


Stone,
Pretending
Naama

to Space,

be

Me;
Solid
Aharony



Stone,

Space, Me;

Prologue

On my table there's a collection of stones I gathered for a few years now. Most of them from the desert.

At first sight they seem rough and pointy but their texture is actually smooth. Their colors drift from bright yellow, brown to rouge red. They smell like dry land.

What I find most fascinating is that no matter what the temperature of the room is, these stones remain fresh and cold.



Stones and spaces

Man is a perceiving creature. We are constantly seizing data from our surroundings, we recognize patterns and shapes in the spaces we encounter, we translate them through our body to our mind, create our so-called reality. In other words, one creates one's reality through one's own spatial memories and experiences. Our mind becomes a giant library of places and spaces: cliffy mountains, wide riverbanks, dark rooms with slippery floors and moist walls, or bright, minimalist, white domes with spiral staircases going up and down... Thanks to our sensual abilities: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, just a glimpse in an image of a place can transport one into the memory and experience one had. I will name this place the mental space.

We relate to those mental spaces differently, simply because our mind is split into two: the rational mind and the fanciful mind. The rational mind will look for a definition by finding names and categories that are part of a known reality in the image: a dark room implies the sensation of fear, a door implies the existence of another room and so on... The fanciful mind has more freedom in the sense that while looking at one image it can drift from one space to another: an image of a white cube can become a house, a chair, a mountain or many other things. Although the differences in reading visual information, both the rational and fanciful minds are dependent on memory and imagination in order to travel through mental spaces.

We learn by now that man, through his memory and his imagination, is able to mentally dwell in spaces. But where does the stone come in?

Stones come from earth, they travel with the forces of earth, creating the landscapes and environment we live in.¹ [The very first habitat of man were stone caves, and perhaps that's where the concept of man inhabiting places actually started, but this will not be a prehistoric study of Stone-man.] When we encounter a stone we meet both the physical and the metaphysical landscape it offers, the stone becomes an object that stands somewhere in between its physical and its mental space.

This text is divided into two parts that follow two aspects of the human mind: memory and imagination. Focusing on those I will create a link between the interior of stones and the human capacity to dwell and take part in the creation. It will not necessarily talk about actual or potential caves, walls, floors or corridors that might exist in the interior of stones, but will be researching the metaphysical content of the stone, the meaning and narratives this stone might bring.

Along with personal notes and thoughts about dwelling the stone, I will map various cultural narratives, traditions and legends contemplating the meaning found in stones. I will use philosophical inputs that deal with the interior of stones, with *The Writing of Stones* by Roger Caillois, and *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard.

This writing can be seen as a collection of short texts where the shared ground is memory, imagination and the stone, and although while reading you might drift away from time to time, you will always go back to the ground, and the stone.



Conversation with a stone
By Wislawa Szymborska

I knock at the stone's front door.
"It's only me, let me come in.
I want to enter your insides,
breathe my fill of you."

"Go away", says the stone.
"I'm shut tight.
Even if you break me to pieces,
we'll all still be closed.
You can grind us to sand,
we still won't let you in."

I knock on the stone's front door.
"It's only me, let me come in.
I've come out of pure curiosity.
Only life can quench it.
I mean to stroll through your palace,
then go calling on a leaf, a drop of water.
I don't have much time.
My mortality should touch you."

"I'm made of stone," says the stone,
"and must therefore keep a straight face.
Go away.
I don't have the muscles to laugh."

I knock on the stone's front door.
"It's only me, let me come in.
I hear you have great empty halls inside you,
unseen, their beauty in vain,
soundless, not echoing anyone's steps.
Admit you don't know them well yourself."

"Great and empty, true enough," says the stone,
"but there isn't any room.
Beautiful, perhaps, but not to the taste
of your poor senses.
You may get to know me,
but you'll never know me through.
My whole surface is turned toward you,
all my inside turned away."

I knock on the stone's front door.
"It's only me, let me come in.
I don't seek refuge for eternity.
I'm not un-happy,
I'm not homeless.
My world is worth returning to.
I'll enter and exit empty handed.

And my proof I was there
will be only words,
which no one will believe."

"You shall not enter," says the stone.
"You lack the sense of taking part.
No other sense can make up for your missing
sense of taking part.
Even sight heightened to become all seeing will
do you no good without the sense of taking part.
You shall not enter, you have only a sense
of what that sense should be,
only its seed, imagination."

I knock on the stone's front door.
"It's only me, let me come in.
I haven't got two thousands centuries,
so let me come under your roof."
"If you don't believe me," says the stone,
"just ask the leaf, it will tell you the same.
Ask a drop of water, it will say what the leaf said.
And, finally, ask a hair from your own head.
I am bursting with laughter,
yes, laughter, vast laughter,
although I don't know how to laugh."

I knock on the stone's front door.
"It's only me, let me come in.

"I don't have a door," says the stone.

Wisława Szymborska
'Conversation with a Stone' in
View with a Grain of Sand
p. 30–32, 1995.



About

Imagination

Cavity

I like to think and imagine what I could find inside of a stone I hold. If I would cut it into two parts what will I find in the middle? Will it have empty caves? Will I find some hidden crystals? Or perhaps traces of very small animals?

Geological studies show that the cavity in a stone's interior implies the knowledge of that stone. It is thanks to cracks on the surface of that stone which allow space for minerals and acids to penetrate inside, and by very high temperatures and pressures of earth, processes of crystallization and oxidation take place.² Those coincidental activities and processes, which occurred millions of years ago, will affect the formation of a stone. Colors, textures, crystals and new layers appear, creating spontaneous patterns and shapes.

Cavity in a stone creates space for its physical formation, but also space for the human mind to take part. This emptiness allows me to linger on my imagination of how my body might relate to that place. Which shapes will I see? Which textures will I touch? Would it be cold? What if I would make a loud sound, would it echo or disappear?

If I need to draw with a pencil
how the inside of a stone
would be like, I would give away
my secrets.
While I keep it in
my mind,
through my imagination,
I own it. Once I draw it,
I release it,
it's not mine anymore.



Dwelling the stone

To dwell means to inhabit. To inhabit means to take space.

As small animals dwell in small nests and shells, men are able to dwell in small found objects using their imagination. Let's take the Hermit crab as an example. The Hermit crab carries its physical home, the shell, on its back. Thanks to its ability to adapt into the shell, the two will become one, until the Hermit crab feels the need to grow and move into another shell, it will then look for a new potential habitat. Slowly it withdraws itself into the new shape, and shortly he will again become one with the shell. If we look at the Hermit crab's behavior as a metaphor to how we, mankind, can use our imaginative mind to change the spaces and environments we see, a beautiful concept is born! For if one has a fanciful mind, or still has the wondrous inner-world of a child, then one can sense endless possibilities and change one's environment as one wishes!

Here I introduce *The Poetics of Space* and Bachelard ideas about inhabiting the shell. Bachelard gives a lot of attention to the shape of the shell which creates a tension of scale, as he draws images of big creatures that come out of a shell. But my interest lies in the state of mind such a spiral space may offer its inhabitants. *A creature that hides and 'withdraws into its shell,' is preparing a 'way out.'* *This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from the resurrection of a man in his grave, to the sudden outburst of one who has long been silent. If we remain at the heart of the image under consideration, we have the impression that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being(...)³ To inhabit a shell we must be alone(...)* *It expresses the isolation of the human being withdrawn into himself...⁴*

Bachelard speaks of the shell as a metaphor of a state of mind, the state of being in one's own solitude. Dwelling in solitude in a shell or in a house of a snail seems a bit easier in my mind than dwelling a stone because of its shape. The shell has a continuous spiral shape that might feel as though it carries on to infinity, while the stone feels solid, what you see is what you get. The shell also has an entrance, where the snail or small creature goes in, that entrance allows one to see the possibility to go inside, or more reasonably to go outside. Perceiving an empty black hole in a wall or floor implies there is an entrance to some mysterious space, where one might decide to inhabit that empty space by setting a nice living room, with a low rounded wooden table and a soft red couch. Entering a stone is different because it has no entrance, it has an inside and an outside.

In a different chapter Bachelard talks about the dialectics of outside and inside, what is hidden and what is manifested.⁵ He drifts away from the simple division of looking at them as oppositions (same as black/white, yes/no, positive/negative) and stresses questions that might arise around this dialectics, how the concept of inside/outside creates problematics in human existence. For what is being if not being there? The tension in this idea lies in the question of how can one both be and be there? Does the main stress exist in being or in there? *When we experience this passage, we absorb a mixture of being and nothingness. The center of 'being-there' wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility...*⁶

This brings me back to the stone, where the multiple possibilities to enter the surface of this sealed object, having



no doors, becomes even more unreachable, unanswered. To know what really lies within the stone one needs to break it. But then, where to break it? Exactly in the middle? more to the side? From a specific point in the stone? Or just to take a hammer and hit it wherever? And even after it is broken it can still be broken into more parts, until it is grinded completely and transformed into sand. And even then, no answer. Perhaps then the stone just has too many doors, too many holes, too many entries. This makes me look at the space in the stone as an endless potential for sceneries and back to Bachelard's ideas of the tension, the ability or possibility of one to withdraw or remain in one's own spiral being, one's own mind and imagination.⁷ Then, what of a state of solitude it might be to inhabit a stone! The stone has no holes or cracks to open. No door to knock, nor a hole to peek through... If one wants to inhabit in solitary, what a paradise he has found!

*Phenomenology of the imagination must assume the task of seizing this ephemeral being.*⁸ —Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

A walk through a stone.
White. Bright.
The color of an eggshell.

I touch the surface, it's rubbery, the kind of rubber you can stretch to infinity.

I make a sound, the acoustics is dry, no echo to be heard, it's a good space for a concert I believe, or to record some important interview.

As I wander through, foot, step, walking in jelly. (It reminds me now a walk I once had in the wild jungles of Bolivia, next to the Tuichi River, tall trees above and tangled big roots on the path; looking up, looking down, looking left, looking right, getting lost in endless patterns).

My feet don't reach a floor as I know it, there is no solidness, but some sort of a liquid trampoline. It feels safe, it actually feels as if I am walking on the most embracing floor I have ever walked on.

As I continue walking, I look back to find no traces to my last footsteps, they withdraw in the thick, bright, white jelly floor..

It's quite of a weird sensation not to have any traces; how will anyone know I was just there?

*The vision the eye records is always impoverished and uncertain. Imagination fills it out with the treasures of memory and knowledge, with all that is put at its disposal by experience, culture, and history, not to mention what the imagination itself may necessary invent or dream. So the imagination is never at loss when it comes to making something rich and compelling out of a subject that might almost seem an absence of all life and significance.*⁹ — Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*

I often box things

We search to understand the things and objects we encounter by naming and categorizing them. Giving meaning to things through symbols becomes our common cultural and visual language. That way we can relate, discuss and make an opinion or argument: this flower is pretty, that house is big... In fact, the objects around us provide ourselves the ability to take part in our cultural society, perhaps even these objects make us relate to our surrounding and the spaces we encounter.

Objects found in nature (we shall name them natural artifacts) will always remain a sort of mystery, a hazard, as we cannot fully understand how this miraculous object has formed and how the process of becoming produced such a spontaneous beauty. The formation of stones is for sure one of the riddles of the universe. It involves immense time scale, unpredictable changes of temperatures and pressures, and so there can hardly ever be found an ultimate answer to how a particular shape and image was created in each stone. There can be only an assumption that it appeared between these years (millions of years) and by this and that minerals and temperatures...¹⁰

In *The Writing of Stones* Roger Caillois uses some basic geological knowledge contemplating the stones he mentions. In my mind he manages to create a very interesting linkage between the physical characteristics to the imaginary interpretation in each of the cut open stones. It is important for him to exhibit the unpredictable processes which form the stones in order to reflect on the way we, mankind, read those coincidental images drawn by the forces of nature.¹¹ Such wondrous description found in Caillois writing's on Agates *Such resemblances emerge from their long concealment when certain stones are split open and published, presenting the willing mind with immortal small scale models of living beings and inanimate things(...) the observer is always finding fresh details to round out the supposed analogy. Such images miniaturize, for this benefit alone, every object in the world, providing him with stable duplicates which he may hold in the palm of his hand, carry about from place to place, or put in a glass case... moreover, such a duplicate is not a copy; it is not born of an artist's talent. It has been there always; we only had to find our way into its presence.*¹²

Throughout the text Caillois cuts open stones to find visual resemblances, architectural sceneries of medieval castles, landscapes of mountains and streams, to an image of a mocking bird sitting on a branch of a lemon tree in a hot summer day. [Here it is hard not to follow Caillois' ideas of memory in the cut-open stones here, I will mention these in the next chapter.] The fact that a stone, which is a natural object, can carry an image of a natural landscape empowers the imaginative connotation. Nature creates the image of nature within itself, an attempt painters have been busy with ever since the first drawings of man. *What used to make them attractive was not their intrinsic aesthetic qualities but*

*their resemblance to certain aspects of the external world, the closeness of this likeness or their apparent representation of some model.*¹³

Earlier we talked about the human need to box the images perceived in our natural environment and then to copy-paste them into a defined cultural symbol (it's a hat, it's a chair, it's a cat and so on...). This means that the mind is so powerful that it can actually define the existing object. This makes me wonder: can the mind also change the same object into something completely else? Let us try something out here, a small exercise. Look at any object in your present surrounding, look at it long enough so you learn all its features. What is the shape? The materiality? Where do the lines go? Is it round, smooth or rough? Is it heavy? What is the color? After doing so, close your eyes and imagine how this object would look like in a completely different environment, in a different space. Did the object change? What does this exercise have to do with our stone? If we are able to change the scenery of an object with our mind, why then can't we change the image we see in that object?

This makes me think about the clouds above us, clouds move constantly, the shapes and forms created change in the same rhythm. What used to be a sheep transforms into a castle, into a hippopotamus into a giant hand... the temporality and movement of the cloud allows one to imagine different shapes as the time passes by. If we take this observation together with the exercise we just performed, then we reach my wondering about how we are looking in the cut-open stones.

I believe that due to the stones characteristics, being a solid natural object, it tends to be perceived as a solid truth, with no movement. And so, when one looks at the cut-open stone and he sees an image, it will be very hard for

him to see other potentialities. The risk is where a stone gets a meaning, a clear image or a story, it becomes a symbol and then the space to linger and dwell on the imagination is fixed to eternity.

Until now I mentioned stones that carry recognizable qualities, here I introduce another fascinating phenomena Caillois mentions: the Septaria stone. The Septaria are quite varied stones because they are not part of a specific group in the family of mineral stones (like the Geodes), but they share the same structure, or way of formation. They are siliceous nodules that have crisscrossed cracks that are filled with calcite. *They form patterns which explode; showers of many-sided cells; sprays of dodecahedral all one plane; irregular veins branching out in all directions then suddenly tapering away; steelyards weighing a large object which is yet so light that the arm to the balance is unmoved; cobwebs spun in the void; attached to no point and containing no lurking spider; cross sections of murexes, with the helix in the middle and the spines on the outside; the waving tentacles of sea anemones; the filaments of jellyfish, ending in a whip-lash.*¹⁴ What is special about the Septaria is that it will never exhibit the same pattern twice, even within itself.¹⁵ The lines and patterns that move within have no order, they might be tangled or crisscrossed, and the colors may diverse from white to pale pink. The way the stone has been cut will determine a completely different image, as it changes immensely by the different cuts, thanks to the lines and colors which moves so instinctively within. And so, one can never really get a fixated image in the cut open Septaria, not by cutting it in into exact two equal parts, or in any other way. I believe this awareness somehow constraints and at the same time liberates the mind, which will constantly try to relate and box the cut stone.



If contemporary art would choose a stone, it would probably be the Septaria, simply because this stone creates abstraction. *The patterns in Septaria consist of strictly plastic equipoises in which nothing is regular, and each of which is as unique and, in a manner of speaking, as personal as a deliberately executed work of art. While in the days of figurative painting connoisseurs used to frame landscapes and ruin marbles as parallel to real pictures, nowadays they should certainly choose Septaria from among all the other natural forms to compare with many features of contemporary art.*¹⁶

Those septarian characteristics we have looked upon, create an abstraction that might give the imagination space to rest and perhaps give more space for the memory,¹⁷ as there is no clear image but just a sense of composition which can touch subjectively personal interpretations. They share no common ground but a drifting one. Perhaps it is similar to the idea of looking for shapes in the clouds, where one, by the ability to daydream freely, can be in constant movement, and therefore in constant interpretation. In my mind, these are the really precious moments, to allow myself to change my mind upon things I see, to allow myself to change with my surrounding.



The stone the stone the stone

Me me me

The world the world the world

Me me me

I move a stone, I move a landscape

Stones don't change

I do.



About

Memory

It starts with me, collecting, and returns to my roots, placing

Growing up, my parents would take me on walks in the nature. I remember I would walk with my face down, looking at the ground, my eyes would search for things to pick up, usually it would be stones lying in the path we walked. The size of the stones chosen would fit the size of my hand, so I could hold them and they kept me company while walking. Each stone became magical for the time being until the next one came along... This fascination of picking up stones I find stayed with me until nowadays, as I move around in my travels I take these natural souvenirs with me.

The decision of the stone chosen is coincidental. I don't plan where I will find a stone, I don't go on walks in order to find a stone, they appear on the way. Trying to find a structure in my action I notice I don't even have a list of criteria which directs my choice, I don't pick up only white stones, smooth round stones, stones that are smaller than five centimeters. It is the moment that I pick it up which directs my choice. This coincidental moment requires three elements in order for it to exist: stone, space, me.

By collecting these stones on the way, I remove something from its natural place, something that clearly doesn't belong to me, that actually doesn't belong to anyone besides its own self. When I move a stone, I move the landscape. But what if through my action I create a new place for the stone chosen? A new landscape?

These actions can perhaps be looked upon as a physical intervention, involving and changing the visual appearance of the landscape, but I would like to focus on the internal meaning of it, as some traditions use stone piling as a gesture of memory and heritage.

In Jewish culture, when someone passes away it is the tradition to pick a stone and place it on the gravestone. Unlike the custom of burying the dead with flowers, there are stones, piled without any pattern on the grave, as though a community were being haphazardly built. Why then to leave stones rather than flowers? I think that for most of us, stones conjure a harsh image, it does not seem the appropriate memorial for one who has died. But stones have a special character in Judaism; in the Bible, an altar is no more than a pile of stones, but it is on an altar that one offers to God.¹⁸ (It starts in the story of Abraham taking his son Isaac to be sacrificed and placing him on a stone. This stone is called Even haShetiya, which means the foundation stone of the world.) The superstitious idea behind placing stones on graves is that they keep the soul down, there is a belief that souls continue to dwell for a while in the graves in which they are placed. The grave, called Beit olam (a permanent home) was thought to retain some aspects of the departed soul. Stones then become much more than a marker of one's visit in the world, they are the means by which the living help the dead to stay put. All these explanations have one thing in common: the sense of solidity that stones gives. Flowers are a good metaphor for life, it fades like a flower. For that reason, flowers are a symbol of passing, but the memory is supposed to be lasting. Stones seem better suited to the permanence of memory. Stones do not die.

When I collect a stone I create a landscape for myself, a footprint, I take it with me to make sure I don't forget where I was, how I was, with whom and so on... The stone becomes like a GPS mark, a representation of the landscape it was found in but mostly it symbolizes the specific moment and experience I had while collecting them. When I place

the stone on my table it becomes a new landscape of my passage in the world, it is a an exaggeration of the gestures of the stone grave visitors. This realization makes me wonder if we, mankind, put the meaning and memory in the stone? Or is it also possible that the stone puts meaning and memory in us?

'Stones possess a kind of gravitas, something ultimate and unchanging, something that will never perish or else has already done so. They attract through an intrinsic, infallible, immediate beauty, answerable to no one, necessarily perfect yet excluding the idea of perfection in order to exclude approximation, error, and excess. This spontaneous beauty thus precedes and goes beyond the actual notion of beauty, of which it is at once the promise and the foundation'

Roger Caillois

The Writing of Stones

p. 1, 1985.



Eshet Lot

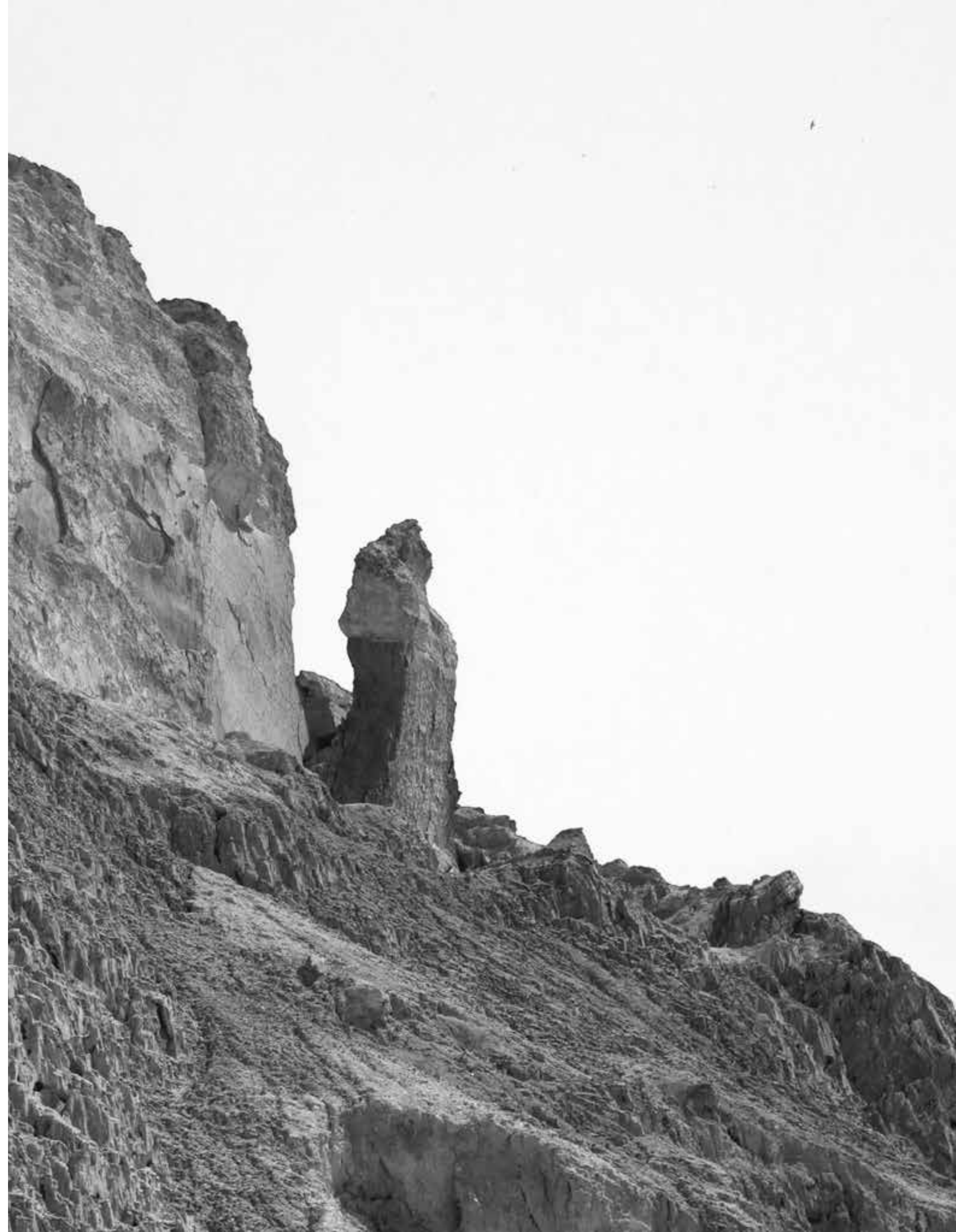
I drive on the long and winding road of the Judean desert on my way to the south of Israel. It has been two hours now of driving in this landscape, endless piles of sand and rocks. The driving become slower as does the movement of my thoughts, I call it 'desert mode'. I arrive at the Dead Sea, the road follows the shape and lines of the landscape, on my left the flat shiny crystal water, on my right big limestone and calcite rocks that look like some wondrous force has curved them in precise movements, as two genius hands were sculpting in wet clay. [As I wonder the beauty of this landscape, I remember vaguely my Geography teacher in high school telling the class about the formation of the rocks in the Judean desert, where millions of years ago movements of the African and Arabian tectonic plates created a huge crack in the crust of the earth, creating this spectacular eroded landscape.]¹⁹

It has been now an hour of driving near the Dead Sea as I recall suddenly my grandfather and a story he liked to tell us, the family, about a very special calcite rock that I will see in a little while on my right hand side. This rock is called Eshet Lot (Lot's Wife). I don't remember the rock's exact location but I know I will notice it as I pass by, not only because it is marked with a clear touristic sign: 'Lot's Wife' but also the shape of this rock is so particular that it stands out clearly in the otherwise coherent desert landscape. In the blink of the eye it looks like a pillar, standing separate from the row of the other calcite rocks, as if the same hands that shaped the rocks around decided to put one pillar aside. But if you will stop on the side of the road to look for a few moments, you will probably see a woman frozen in movement. Her posture appears as if she just twisted her upper

part of the body left in order to look back... [I imagine one would look like that when one turns just for a short moment, to call a name, say hello or perhaps goodbye, and in that particular moment, not a second before or a second after, time will freeze.]

Eshet Lot is a figure from the Bible. She comes from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (in the book of Genesis 19).²⁰ The narrative of Lot's Wife begins after two angels arrived in Sodom, and were invited to spend the night at Lot's home. As dawn was breaking, the angels urged Lot to get his family and flee Sodom, to avoid being caught in the disaster for the sins of people of Sodom. The angels took Lot, Lot's Wife and their two daughters outside of the city. The command that was given was: 'Flee for your life, don't look behind you nor stop anywhere or you will be swept away!' Lot's Wife disobeyed the command and looked back for a short moment. Because of it she was changed into a pillar of Calcite.

The Kabbalah (which literally means 'receiving God'), is a study of thought that is originated in Judaism. The Kabbalah seeks to define the nature and purpose of the universe and the human existence, by presenting methods and stories to help understanding of the concepts and thereby attain spiritual realization. By the Kabbalah, what lies behind this pillar of Calcite, is a story which represents one of the primal steps in the development of man's spirituality, the lesson of letting go of external bonds, literally of stuff and property: the land, the house, the furniture, cloths and so on... in order to find and re-connect with one's internal home: the soul, the heart and above all the faith. These foundation actions (called Yesod) of drifting away from the importance of property and one's home are one of the most fundamental steps in becoming connected with the supernal crown, above conscious, attached to God.²¹



If we go back to Lot's Wife, she couldn't obey the command and striven for another short moment to say goodbye. Therefore she was transformed into part of the land. If I go back to the actual rock of Eshet Lot, I see it becomes a reminder of that story, a symbolic landmark. For some perhaps it represents God and religion, what is right and what is wrong, but for me it represents a spiritual journey and a reminder of what is important. And so, when I drive and pass by near Lot's pillar I am reminded of my grandfather, then my culture, then back to my own self and to what I find important and valuable in life.

True story
Two stones in my pockets.
One on the left, the other on the right.
One is black,
the other is white.
One has sharp angles,
the other is smooth and round.
I hold them in my hands,
no one around me knows I have them,
it is between me and the stone.
In my mind,
they balance me.

For centuries man has used stones as a form of storytelling, they move through the world. Encountering stories and contemplating stones in different mythologies, I notice a lot of them share a similar ground; some God or hero is to be trapped in the stone, bound to the stone, or turned into stone. I can't ignore the feeling that the stone emphasizes mainly a narrative of solidness.

Stone is movement

Stories and allegories are part of human culture and heritage, in fact by telling these stories one makes culture. It is a movement of generation to generation, and as the evolution of mankind goes naturally, so does the cultural stories within it. I am an evolution of my grandfather, and so the way I translate the stories is different to how my grandfather relates to it, the story follows my progress and I will carry it with me to the next generation. I will create the movement in the story and the symbols it carries; therefore I create the movement in the stone.

Let's take the story of king Sisyphus as an example. This story comes from ancient Greek mythology where Sisyphus, the king of Ephyrae, was punished for his arrogant craftiness and deceitfulness by being forced to roll an immense stone up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, repeating this action for eternity. There are many different ways to interpret this story, as this allegorical act may be applied for many social contexts, both psychologists and philosophers found different ideas about the story. For example, Soren Kierkegaard, a philosopher, saw this myth as referring to anything a person loves too much, the story represents the irony in human behavior towards stuff around them.²² I myself was taught that a sisyphus job means working too hard

for no outcome, or a never ending work that can't be completed. A similar story may be found in a completely different place in the world, in India. Naranath Branthan is a character in Malayalam folklore. He was considered to be a divine person, his chief activity consisted of rolling a big stone up a hill and then letting it fall back down. Unlike Sisyphus, he acted out of free will rather than under a curse.²³ One can see the difference between the stories in the way carrying the stone up and down is looked upon, endless work or an endless process, a burden or an act of free will. In both stories the human subject (Sisyphus/Naranath Branthan) are bound physically to a stone. The objectiveness of the stone is clear: it's heavy, un-changing, solid and immortal. The two together, subject (character) and object (stone), along with the action performed (pushing up and rolling down) implies endless movement in the story, it becomes infinity.

Although I believe these stories represent beautiful concepts, looking at life as a process rather than outcome, endless cycles and movements... still I can't avoid a tone of a punishment. For who wouldn't be feeling slightly scared to be bound to a stone? Or to become stone? Solid, still, frozen. This makes me wonder if it is because the nature of man, ever since discovering the ability to fear the unknown future [and this begins when man discovered how to grow wheat for the future to come]. If so, then what safety the stone can offer! If it is, as it has been always perceived, solid and therefore unchanging, then isn't it a place of safety? Of confidence? Of knowing?

Up until now we have talked about the story we put in the stone through cultural narratives, but what about the storytelling the stone puts in us?



Roger Caillois devotes part of his writings to architectural images found in the cut marbles in Florence. He divides them into two main categories: ruin marbles and landscape marbles. *For scholars these marbles proved that nature, which through mere creative fantasy could depict ruined cities or pleasant valleys dotted with smiling groves, was even more capable of spontaneously producing images of fishes, mollusks, or ferns (...) this clearly meant they were whims of nature, just like the tiny ruined cities in the Tuscan marbles and the little rows of trees in those from England.*²⁴ The images in the ruin marbles create such similarity to ruins of cities, cities that were perhaps demolished in some war, lost or forgotten.

The images found are perhaps fictional but feel very relevant to our cultural society, as our history is quite rich in battle stories. They bring a sense of an artificial memory, and through the symbols of the ruins they become a collective memory. An architectural representation of an endless state of destruction and construction. *These represent ruined cities, towers and pyramids, crumbling walls and houses (...) the ruins are brown, shaded darker brown in places. Between the ruins and especially near their base are little dendrites, as if the ruins were covered with moss...*²⁵ The Landscape marbles described manage to create a detailed picture of a terrain, through the use of natural symbols: a tree, a mountain, a river, they produce an atmosphere, perhaps of a misty forest, an entrance of a cave or a field of tall daisies. I can imagine that looking at the landscape marbles can feel quite tactile, so when I look at the image in the stone I recreate a memory of a similar landscape I have once visited.

In both marbles representation plays an important role, as the images we perceive stimulate our own memories

and experiences. This is connected to both our cultural background (history, religion, heritage) and our natural background (the landscape we grew up in or traveled). Here I can mention again history and past but in a different aspect, as these terms are relevant also to the physical formation of stone, which is a natural phenomena of movements and traces of earth, air, water and oxides. The time scale of these processes is much longer than my existence (and the history I can follow) and will also stay much longer after me.

This geological input makes me understand even more why the stone is relevant as a symbol in storytelling, relating to memory and the history, but what can these stones tell me about the present? What will be a modern interest in the story of a stone? perhaps the illusion of reproducing constantly the manner of understanding what you see? If I use Caillois' ideas of the found landscapes and ruins in the marbles of Florence, I think abstraction is the answer. *A modern connoisseur, however, is more likely to be attracted by ruin or landscape stones in which the alleged resemblance is imperfect or rudimentary.*²⁶ The modern man perhaps is busy looking at an imperfect, coincidental image, allowing the images found in those marbles to create narratives which become constantly. He is filling the abstract space with stories that perhaps never existed, of a landscape no-one ever visited, or of one's lost city where he was never born. *Such objects may resemble a mountain, a chasm, a cave. They reduce space, they condense time. They are the object of prolonged reverie, meditation, and self-hypnosis, a path to ecstasy and a means of communication with the Real-world. The sage contemplates them, ventures into them, and is lost. Legends has it that he never returns to the world of mankind: he has entered the realm of the Immortals, and become an Immortal himself.*²⁷

Once upon a time there was
a tiny little stone.
(She is called the tiny little stone.)
And in that tiny little stone there was another
stone that was moving around constantly inside.
(She is called the moving stone.)

They would have long talks about
important issues of life, discussing the weather
and if it is a good time now to move to another land.

One morning, some neighbor stone told them
she heard that some other stone disappeared,
rumors said
one man passing by took that stone
and put it in his house, on his shelf.
Why would that man do such a weird thing?
they wondered... "Some say that the man thought
that the stone looked like the moon," said the
neighbor stone "the moon means a lot to him,
it reminded him of his childhood when he
thought he would become an
astronaut. He must have wanted to recreate that
memory by putting the moon stone on his shelf..."

Both the tiny little stone and the moving stone within
thought people behave so weirdly when they try to
dress them up with all these kind of narratives...

And ever since when they saw a man approach they
did their best to look like a very very normal stone.
Blended in their other stone sisters and brothers,
pretending to
be solid.



Epilogue

I sit near my table to write the final lines of my text. In front of me a stone, and still it's silent, fresh and cold; no door has opened, no crack to peek.

Collecting images, stories, meanings and imaginary fragments I found myself dwelling the stone. Somewhere between memory and imagination my mind became the traveler; moving through environments, places and spaces the stone I hold offers. Those spaces are coincidental, undefined, circumstantial, wandering, changing.

In the end we are a collection of everything we have been exposed to, and like a sponge we collect what flows on our way, searching to relate and find meaning to our passage in the world...

How to approach

a stone?

Knock gently stroke

whisper your name

take a step back

sit with your legs crossed

and wait.



Notes

- 1 From a conversation held between Jehuda Diner, a geologist, and myself. July 15, 2015. Israel.
- 2 Ibidem.
- 3 Gaston Bachelard. Shells, in *The Poetics of Space*, p.111.
- 4 Ibidem, p.123-124.
- 5 Gaston Bachelard. The dialectics of outside and inside, in *The Poetics of Space*, p.213.
- 6 Ibidem, p.218.
- 7 Gaston Bachelard. Shells, in *The Poetics of Space*, p.123.
- 8 Gaston Bachelard. The dialectics of outside and inside, in *The Poetics of Space*, p.218-219.
- 9 Roger Caillois. Jaspers and Agates, in *The Writing of Stones*, p.78.
- 10 From a conversation held between Jehuda Diner, a geologist, and myself. July 15, 2015. Israel.
- 11 Roger Caillois. The image in the Stone, in *The Writing of Stones*, p.4.
- 12 Ibidem, p.6.
- 13 Roger Caillois. 'Pierres-aux-masures,' or ruin and landscape marbles, in *The Writing of Stones*, p.34.
- 14 Roger Caillois. Septaria, in *The Writing of Stones*, p.49.
- 15 Ibidem, p.48.
- 16 Ibidem, p.58.
- 17 Ibidem, p.56.
- 18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation_Stone
- 19 From a conversation held between Jehuda Diner, a geologist, and myself. July 15, 2015. Israel.
- 20 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lot%27s_wife
- 21 From a conversation held between Ben Landau, Kabbalah student, and myself. October 15, 2015. Tel-Aviv-Amsterdam.
- 22 <http://www.mythweb.com/encyc/entries/sisyphus.html>
- 23 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naranath_Bhranthan
- 24 Roger Caillois. 'Pierres-aux-masures,' or ruin and landscape marbles, in *The Writing of Stones*, p.16.
- 25 Ibidem, p.18.
- 26 Ibidem, p.36.
- 27 Roger Caillois. The image in the Stone, in *The Writing of Stones*, p.12.

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All photographs of sculptures by Naama Aharony, 2015-2016.
To the exception the photograph of Eshet Lot, page 14 and 39, taken in the Judean desert, Israel, by Naama Aharony.

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Stone, Space, Me; Pretending to be Solid
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Pretending

to be Solid

