



MU & THE POROUS SELVES

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Preface

I wonder, why is it so important for me to create? If my work does not bring me recognition, if it doesn't bring me peace and if I cannot sustain myself through it, if it doesn't have any specific purpose or use, why do I keep on going? Even while being aware of all of these things, I cannot find anything else I'd want to do more. Sometimes I lose hope and I fail to see the point of it all and I hear the voice of the ones trying to reason through my choices. They might be afraid of the way the future will play out for me. While I perceive their disapproval I, all the while, remain stubborn even if I fail to explain to myself the point of it all. Like everyone else, I seem to be walking with my eyes wide open in the dark.

The process and the experiences I go through while working never stop fascinating me. My work, through reflection, helps me get a grasp on different aspects of reality, while opening a wider perspective onto my own life. It gives me more depth in thought and at each step of the way, more choices. It gives me the freedom to shape myself in the way I consider best. For the last four years I pursued my development in the context of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. This is where I am writing this essay today, in order to conclude those years and continue in another unknown context. Each of those years I had been confronted with a different problematic. And each problematic lead to the next, all of them closely intertwined with my everyday life.

At first, I thought that maybe those themes had nothing to do with one another. Each of them seemed way too broad on its own to be treated in combination with the others. No matter, I felt the need to keep them together as if they were indivisible. I felt discouraged in front of the task that these themes traced for me. The subject I was dealing with was unclear, my notes contradicting themselves in the most chaotic way. Throughout the years I gathered thoughts which were highly confusing and unstructured. I was failing to see the point, the core of it all. This was until I read Pirandello's 1925 classic novel "Uno, Nessuno e Centomila" ("One, No One and One Hundred Thousand") that recounts the tragedy of a man who struggles to reclaim a coherent identity for himself in the face of an inherently multi-faceted world. The fictional protagonist, Moscarda, embarks on different social experiments that make him break his perception of who he believes to be.

I understood then that all those themes and all the works they were embodied in had the same aim. I was all along trying to find explanations and a core for my own existence, my own identity, craving to understand this "I" that I was encumbered with. My experiments, the different research I embarked on and the projects I completed were attempts to peel off the constructed, projected and invented, which gravitated this supposed core. It hit me, while reading the book, how close the method of deconstruction of Pirandello was to my own. Like Moscarda, I use myself as an object of study, of curiosity, being both the guinea pig and the scientist trying to see and understand this strange "I".

In order to trace the steps of my process now, instead of using a fictive figure, I will write about a selection of my own crafted experiments reflecting directly onto my artistic development. But to also touch upon the text of Pirandello, and offer a broader understanding of where our paths meet, I will introduce you to his three experiments and three stages of research⁹ from “Uno, Nessuno e Centomila”. In reflection to this novel, my text shows four different experiments on which my investigation is based.

The first experiment described in the book is the “mirror experiment”, where Moscarda performs in order to explore the public perception of his own persona and identity. The second experiment is a conversation between Moscarda, Dida (his wife) and Quantorzo, through which he comes to realize that he inhabits countless identities. There is: “1. Dida, as she was for herself; 2. Dida, as she was for me; 3. Dida, as she was for Quantorzo; 4. Quantorzo, as he was for himself; 5. Quantorzo, as he was for Dida; 6. Quantorzo, as he was for me; 7. Dida’s dear Gengè; (surname she gave to Moscarda) 8. Quantorzo’s dear Vi-tangelo.” . Following these experiments, in the last chapter, the deconstruction of the mosaic of personas that lived within Moscarda leaves him with a void: “But what other did I have inside me, except this torment that revealed me as no one and one hundred thousand?” (p. 120). He then chooses to entirely extricate himself from his social fabric and to live contentedly by himself in a house for the destitute. Moscarda does not find his true self and abandons any attempt to do so.

In reflection to the novel by Pirandello the following text shows different experiments which I pursued and which contain similarities in approach:

Ana & Malco

This performance took place in 2012. For a week I convinced myself that I was Malco, a boy, and later on Ana. I explored the performative self and how the roles we play and the masks we wear can become the “real Self”.

Silent dialogues

An exploration of the relation between the maker and her chosen material, based on a work from 2013 where I investigated the dialogue between clay and myself. This led to a research on languages and non-languages in which realities are formed. The research was started by a performance from 2014, during which I stopped talking for a week.

Memory mechanics

A research on how my surroundings bear the stamp of my existence, making me the “one hundred thousand”, in reference to Luigi Pirandello’s “Uno, Nessuno e Centomila” (“One, No One and One Hundred Thousand”). It derives from my investigation started in 2014, on the influence of spaces which are perceived as a second body and continued in 2015, on the topic of the relation we have with the objects we surround ourselves with.

Dream horses

Is a research on the touching point between my imagination and my real life and it plays with their boundaries. This research is based on a series of paintings started in 2013 and still in process.

Introduction

“Identity” - this notion keeps on ringing in my ears and I cannot find a proper sense to it. Is it my body, genetic code, name, the face I show to the world, my possessions or a solid, permanent and fundamental core making me unique? I wonder, when did man start perceiving himself to be human, separated and different from others?

It seems to me that identity has become something fundamental in our society, selling models of special, unique, exceptional individuals that are worth remembering. The perfidious element opposing this quest is the expansion of technologies of communication which show us 7 billion individuals we are competing with. What is there to learn from this for me as one of these individuals? Should I be special, different, in order to exist and in order to be remembered? What is this ‘I’ we are encumbered with?

First of all, I find it important to define the terms “Identity” and “Self” since these are the keys of my research. We sometimes use the notion of “a Self” when speaking about a human person, where our ancestors might have used the word “soul”. This shift reflects a change in our understanding of what is essential. The “Self” is the subject of reflectivity over action - I examine my own experience, or scrutinize my own thinking, through my own subjective experience. “Identity” is linked to “who” we are. I answer the question “who” by telling my function (I am a student, I am French, I am a girl). To have an identity is to know “where you are coming from” when it comes to questions of value or issues of importance. Your identity defines the background against which you know where you stand on such matters. Identity in a way is based on the past selves, past interactions.

The notions of identity and of “self have become increasingly important, starting with the Western modern society. The globalization of information and the increasing movement of population made possible by ever more accessible transport and technologies of communication have challenged the fundament of our identity. We are slowly becoming multicultural selves. The different pillars and roots on which identity was once built upon have evolved. The familial aspect is challenged since we can grow up in a country with a specific culture and be raised in another one. Furthermore the professional pillar is shaken by the possibility of changing one’s job and function and by the potential of embodying different ones simultaneously.

The cultural space in turns is challenged with the access to different cultural perspectives and the amassed points of view which are made available via internet and social networks. The social space is transforming as well, with the possibility to work and study abroad, the flexibility when traveling rapidly from one country to another. The language barrier is slowly fading away with the globalized use of English. These processes, running in parallel, have slowly changed the fundament of how we perceive ourselves, and our relations with others. The notion of acculturation is spreading. Instead of being one: as a culture, a society, a family, we tend to perceive ourselves as one within the frontier of our bodies. Confronted by the times, we need to redefine ourselves based on a plural and flexible identity, that isn't fixed anymore within a specific background.

I'd like to touch on this idea and, in order to do so, I will investigate it through the practice of art. This practice has been considered as the reflection of one's self, or, in the past, the reflection of a soul. The difference between the two is that, in the case of the "self", immortality is achieved through the immortality of ideas and objects: the artist lives through what he or she creates. In contrast, the soul is considered as immortal in itself and detachable from the body, with creation being only a mirror capable of proving its existence. We can say that art has, in a way, replaced the institution of the Church, becoming the place where the notion of the self is researched, debated, and believed to be accessible. My attempt will be at sharing my own process. This process is not in itself an answer, but a reflection on a fragment of reality in which I happened to evolve.



*I present myself to you in a form suitable to the
relationship I wish to achieve with you.*

Luigi Pirandello¹

Performing bodies

Thoughts on the way the body looks have become omnipresent, pre-occupying the minds of our generation. We're not speaking of just any type of body, but the one that we want the others to see us in, body which coincides with our ideas, our cultural background and belief systems. Every means are employed in order to get as close as possible to what we believe to be perfection. From surgery to make up, the way we look becomes a reflection of who we are. The body, flesh and bones, the structure of a fragile animal, remains silently hidden under the layers of clothes and ornaments revealing the glorified reason of its wearer. Be they matters of identity, culture, background, ideology, work field and aspirations, these take over the bestiality of our bodies, which was rejected since time immemorial.

We have a body as support for ornament, or adored object of care, as rejected entity. This body, our current body, gives out the impression that it is enough to change the way it looks in order to change our very core, the "Self".

My body, stranger

“It is so. When YOU think so”
Luigi Pirandello ²

For thousands of years, even before the ancient Greeks, the body was perceived as the beast that needs to be educated, controlled and surveyed. The way we manage to control our bestiality is what we end up calling culture. According to Descartes, we must subordinate our passions to reason; decision which gave birth to the disciplinary society. From the corset, aimed at helping women to stand straight, to the Chinese shoes, which prevent the feet from taking the natural path of growing, societies have always tried to transform and be in control of the body. This tendency most likely reflects our desire to control the very “Self”, our thoughts and actions. Nowadays, there seems to have been a certain mastery achieved in controlling the body, as this task is more effective and fine-tuned than ever, with each individual being surveilled, controlled, registered, repaired and modified from day one. The relationship we end up having with our bodies is, as a result, often distant, as if it was separated from the “I”. Over centuries the body has become a stranger, an entity that needs to be re-appropriated, adopted and understood anew. It’s no wonder then, given the coordinates of how we now look at the body that once we have it hidden or exhibited, it continues to draw a reaction. It might be a reaction of disgust, of fear or excitement, of shyness or interest, but no matter the color of this reaction, one thing can be said about it and that is the fact that it’s an immediate reaction.

My body is there, right in front of the one looking. I can see it, I can feel it. I look at pictures and I see how it has been transforming, recording slow changes from year to year. My inner feelings ripple the surface of my skin, even if I sometimes would prefer them not to show up. My face, flexible, expresses my reactions to things in a controlled or uncontrolled manner. My gestures work while connected with my thought, they are inseparable. My body gives out the impression that I could control it. At times it's as if my body was just a material, a façade within which the "I" is residing. We all, and I as well, tend to believe in this entity, in the solid "I" hidden under layers of constructed identity, or perhaps under clothes and beneath a body. An "I" residing somewhere under or in, like a ghost in the machine, crystallized there, solid and intangible, something we may access. When touching upon this, Gaston Bachelard describes it as "the myth of the inside".

Present-day society structures itself on the surface, describing, categorizing people on the basis of their appearances, background and roles. Based on this I want to pose a question: What if this core we are so eager to discover isn't hiding deep inside, but on the surface of things?

Zimbardo's experiment shows how one can become the role that is attributed to him. In 1971, in the Stanford prison study, 24 clinically sane individuals were randomly assigned to be "prisoners" or "guards" in a mock dungeon. On arrival, the "prisoners" were stripped, searched, shaved and deloused, which caused a great deal of humiliation. They were then issued uniforms, ID numbers and escorted to their cells by the volunteer prison guards. The guards were dressed in identical uniforms, wore a whistle around their necks and carried a night stick. The students quickly began acting out their roles, with "guards" becoming sadistic and "prisoners" showing extreme passivity and depression. By the end of the experiment, there was no tangible relation among the prisoners or guards. The guards had won complete control over all of their prisoners and were using their authority to its greatest extent. One prisoner had even gone as far as to begin a hunger strike. When he refused to eat, the guards put him into solitary confinement for three hours. Instead of the other prisoners looking at this inmate as a hero and following along in his strike, they chanted together that he was a bad prisoner and a troublemaker.

Without knowing about it, on the footsteps of this study, three years back I initiated an experiment of my own. At the time I didn't know what triggered it. It all started with curiosity. I was wondering: can I be someone else? Can I control who I am?

18-24 April 2012
Malco

Nobody sees me. nobody knows me. No one looks at me. I feel comfortable and free. It is as if eyes passe on me without seeing. Of course they see that someone is there, a presence, but nothing more.



The first day, I found myself seated around a table in a quit small room with 12 people I knew from far. Nobody recognized me. Some people looked at me wondering “who is this guy”. But it stops there .

I was in France for my first try-out. My sister refused to speak to me or to look at me for the 2 hours I spent home. My stepfather was totally fascinated and my mother laughed a lot when she saw the reactions of the others.

I don't feel like I have to prove anything to anyone, I don't smile nor speak, it does not feel necessary anymore.

On my second day, my period began. But my body decided differently. Instead of 4 days, it lasted only 3 hours and stopped.

Some people don't see me. They see Maya. Or, maybe, they see both at the same time. I frighten and disturb.

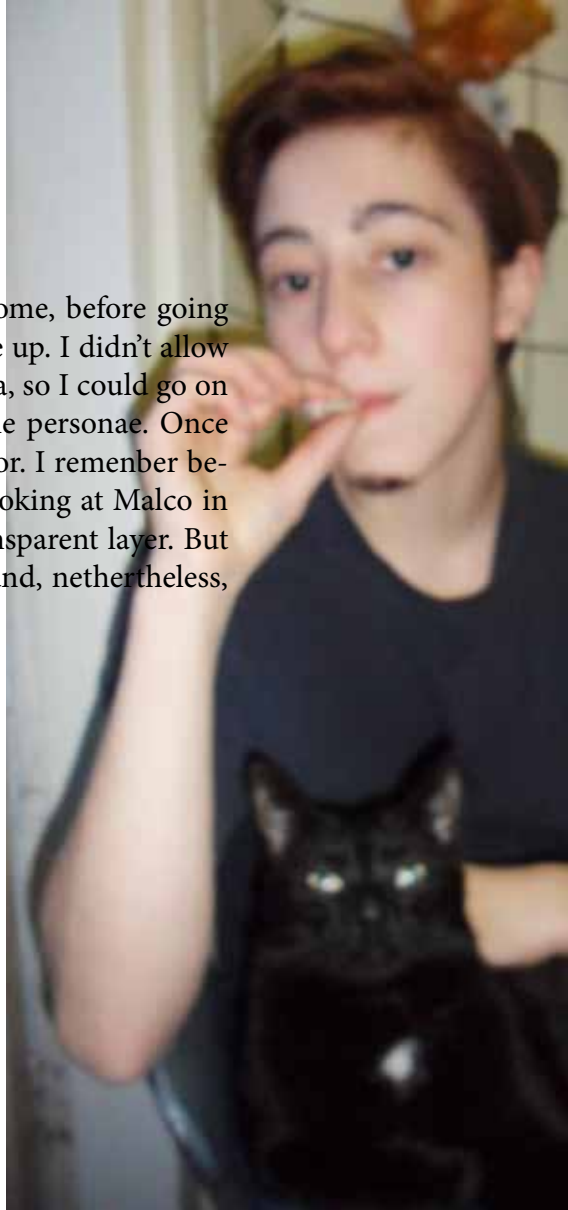


On the third day, I woke up extremely tired. Living with a mask tire's me as if I was sharing my energy with two people. Maya, that I still have to nourish, and Malco, as greedy as a leaving soul. I am not anymore in the game. I am becomming the mask.

Malco didn't worked much for school, he mainly wrote. About everything. Even some poems. He walked around amsterdam silently. Observing the world, observing himself in this world. He took some pictures also, randomly.



Everyday when I was coming back home, before going to sleep, I removed my lents and make up. I didn't allow to look at myself in the mirror as Maya, so I could go on focusing on Malco, never breaking the personae. Once by accident, my eyes crossed the mirror. I remember being very confused. Each time I was looking at Malco in the mirror, I could see Maya, as a transparent layer. But this time, I had Maya in front of me and, nethertheless, I saw Malco.



25-30 April 2012
Ana

I notice quickly how many effort I need to keep girly. This morning for example I had to try thousand clothes before I was satisfied. Then the make-up, then the hairs; hairs are definitely the worse, they are everywhere. I have trouble to focus on the outside because I always have to focus on myself; there is so many details to take care of! Some girls want to dress me up. Like if I was a doll or something.



Everybody have something to say about how I should be, dress or behave. My voice, my attitude, my shoes! As if there were rules in how to be a girl! I look at myself and I judge myself. I see myself. Actually I don't see much more anymore.

I am touched by other people's opinion. I move a lot, I am always using my hands and occupying my mind with something. Maya fight quit a lot with me. She is not happy to let me out because I break those opinions that she built with precaution. This wall to protect her from injustice, pressure and suffering... From life! She would like to look strong and unbreakable. She don't like the women 'woman' but what she don't understand is that, being able to be a woman physically and stayed strong mentally is even more difficult then trying not being a woman. There is no shame in the desire of being a woman. And it is no weakness. I enjoy being what I am and feeling this way.



I notice that my behavior is very influenced according on how people behave towards me. I feel sometimes very comfortable or awfully uncomfortable. For example, my teachers really try to make me feel comfortable in class. In those moments I can really be myself more easily. The students often expect something from me, at those moment ,I become less and less secure. I have to admit, everybody seems to appreciate me. And even though I have some trouble with all sort of remarks, I know they are not meant to be mean .Some people that doesn't like Maya seems to appreciate me. I connect with some girls, they speak to me , make jokes and even propose me to go out . I feel accepted and sociable.



Ana accept her sexuality. She is not so afraid of it and likes also the game that goes with it. I have been blamed to be false, to act, but Ana really exist and it is terrifying. She represent all that I have fought against for the last years of my life. It is a real challenge to let this personnage take control. And nethertheless as for Malco, after three days, she started to grow stronger. She smokes a lot, drinks a lot, and don't care about what she thinks or says. She perceive herself at the center of the world and don't like restrictions nor moralistics behaviors.



Ana didn't write much but she made collages and drawings. She exposed her past without any complex or pudicity.

If the personage of Malco was a discovery, the personage of Ana was a blast, forcing me to redefine myself and to accept the fact that I was refuting many aspect of myself, considering them as unworthy, bad and incompatible with who I beleived to be.









The danger of this experiment is to eventually believe in the mask I wear and to lose my own identity. But at the end, what is an identity? Is it necessary to have one? Does it even exist?

By observing people's reactions and making myself believe in being other people I started being able to see myself with an exterritorial look. I opened my comprehension of the world and of myself into breaking the prerequisite and narrow ideas that I possessed. Masks helped me cure my mind and open the closed doors in my consciousness. By doing/making, I broke the correct/incorrect categories, I tasted subtleties and nuances.

Theseus's paradox is a thought experiment which raises the question of whether an object which has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object. The paradox is most notably recorded by Plutarch in the "Life of Theseus", created in the late first century. Plutarch then asked whether a ship which was restored by replacing each and every one of its wooden parts remained the same ship. In the movie of Anand Gandhi "Ship of Theseus"³, produced in 2012, a blind photographer by the name of Aaliya undergoes surgery and has her eyes replaced during an organ transplant. The result of the surgery is that she can see again. Prior to the surgery, she was taking pictures following sounds, smells and with the help of devices which informed her of the color of her compositions. Once she regains sight her pictures change radically revealing her as having a different "Self". The result is also that instead of making her a better photographer, gaining sight overwhelms her and she becomes unable to focus on a subject. The fundamentals of her identity based on the ways she knew how to interact with the world get challenged. While lacking sight, Aaliya had a system in order to take pictures, certain habits and gestures she built in time, to shape a specific interaction with the external world around her. But the method she was used to perform could not work anymore with the new attributes of her body. While she does have the option of going blind or blocking her sight in order to return to her former "Self", she doesn't choose this path and instead tries to adapt to her new condition by performing new gestures and building new habits in order to find a new "Self".

In my own experience, while being confronted with an experiment in changing of roles, which I called the “Ana & Malco” performance, based on the names I have chosen for the two different gendered characters that I inhabited each for the duration of a week, I was to see and accept the fact that my social masks were deeply affecting my inner “Self”. Through the interactions that were triggered I had in the end to realize that I didn’t in fact possess what I could call an inner “Self”, but as many cores as masks I could imagine, create, choose for or get forced into. This experiment as a result completely changed my perspective on the notion of “Self”. From ineluctable it became fluid. The Maya I believed in wasn’t there. I felt like a stranger to my own image, unable to distinguish the “real” from the role. I didn’t know anymore who “I” was and if “I” was. My torments started when, while leaving aside a mask I realized that I was still inhabiting the same body, I was still wearing clothes and without a doubt had an image in front of me in the mirror.

Gestural realities

The notion of the “Self” would depend then on the way one interacts with their environment, the habits and gestures performed introducing the notion of “Self”. The question is then: How do you perform with your given attribute, and how does it reveal you?

In 1943, Jean-Paul Sartre speculated that a French café waiter is “playing a waiter”, not merely “being a waiter”⁴: “But what is he playing? He is playing at being a waiter in a café.” We are born facing pre-existing societal constellations. We are confronted and outfitted with ready-made scripts and roles, which we can choose to adopt, perform and even, improvise on. J. L. Austin (1962) refers to these pre-scripted identities as “performatives”. When does the play become real? One doesn’t adopt one ready-made role; often an individual adopts different aspects of the different roles he or she is confronted to during his/her life. The existentialists believed that one is creating himself with the choices he makes but most of the time, the decisions taken are reactions to external elements which one does not have any control over. Yes, there is the possibility of having a choice to react to situations one finds themselves in, choosing to identify oneself in a specific way with them or to reject them but there is no control over the variety of situations one can be confronted with.

A French proverb says: “it isn’t the clothing that makes a monk”, but here I would like to introduce the element of doubt. In order to perform, one first imitates a role. As an actor, one must observe and repeat the actions in order to be able to convince society that he is what he knows he is not. Once society is convinced, the gestures he applied make him become what he was imitating at first. For example: I look like a boy named Malco, so people take me for Malco. With this I become Malco through using my body, actions, and thoughts.

Yoshi Oida tells the example of a Nô actor who played an old woman and ended up confusing the murderer of his son. Walking slowly, she came from the backstage and crossed the bridge leading to the scene where the assassin was waiting for her. Seeing the walk, you could feel all the grief, anger, despair and determination of the old woman. When Yoshi Oida went to ask the actor how he had given life to such a complex character and what he felt before going on stage, the actor replied:

“It’s an old woman, so when I walk I must make a little step, smaller than usual. And I have to stop at the first tree.” This Nô actor was not striving to create an inner life, yet the old woman seemed completely credible. Although he was certainly experiencing the feelings the scene evoked, he had not tried to make his interpretation personal and he started from the body language of his character.⁵

“We can try to direct ourselves to be happy or sad, but I generally the self, do not listen. But if we change what the body do, it begins to affect our emotions and it became easier to carry a credible plays.”

Yoshi Oida, actor. ⁵

When specific gestures are applied, the mind naturally follows. Those gestures can connect one to a specific reality. We can find different applications for this phenomenon. In a church, people describe themselves feeling strongly connected to one another when singing the same songs together and performing the same gestures. They don't need to think for themselves, nor make choices. Rituals allow them to access each other's reality and for a moment they lose the burden of their own individuality and end up sharing one. They briefly escape the “I”. When we hear the same sound, taste the same food, share the same space, share experiences, speak the same language we access one another's reality. See for example what happens when two lovers spend all their time with one another. First, they begin to reflect onto one another, they mimic each other, starting to move in the same way, to look the same, to sound the same, and slowly, they start perceiving each other as one and not as two different entities.

My body, an organic composition, is a platform where I can transform and shape different roles that will lead me to different selves, because they lead to different types of interactions. The way I present myself, the way I look and the gestures I perform, are like a language that situate and identify me for the people around me. They also help me to have a grasp of myself in order to “know” who I am or at least believe in it. By the means of gestures based on imitation, we can communicate different identities and, with conviction and through appropriation, we can change ourselves. I create myself based upon my surrounding through the way I perceive them, imitate them and interact with them.

But if my gestures and disguises act like a language that, when performed, can lead me to a specific reality, are there then other languages that in the same way can be found enabling the discovery of different aspects of my identity?



« Dialogue is only possible if we accept we don't know the outcome of our conversation and provided we are willing to examine our assumptions. We easily slip into discussions or monologues due to a fixation on a particular outcome or because we are unaware of our assumptions. Dialogue and creativity have a lot in common. »

David Bohm ⁶

Corporeal dialogue

If I can shape my body and discover different selves through this practice, then I can also shape my surroundings. I can cut, glue, assemble, paint, and capture instants, model landscapes and the objects I am surrounded with. When I do so, the result acts like an external mirror and unveils what lies beyond my visible surface, showing to the world crudely what I fail to see of myself. The result “speaks” in an ungraspable manner, with no defined alphabet, meaning, reason nor logic and still, I can understand it. I find this undefined silent language most of the time more pertinent and close to the real state of things than the structured languages of reason. In the same way, a poem can be more relevant than a consistent and logical text treating the same notion, and a gesture can have more depth than a logical sentence.

A craftman dialogue

When I was a little girl, my stepmother told me that our bodies had memories and that each part of them was smart. I immediately took this story and made it mine. I got convinced that my feet were very smart. I went around saying proudly to everyone that my brain was in fact in my feet. My friends mocked me for a while. This story marked me and it took time before I could understand why. I remember the frustration of not being able to explain then, in a reasonable way, why I was sure to be right. Of course I had no brain in my feet. But I understand now why I believed my feet to be intelligent. Like any other part of the body they have memory and a language of their own.

Through the practice of ceramics, I got enlightened on the matter. I didn't learn ceramics through my logical understanding of it, but through its practice. I didn't need someone to offer me an explanation in order to make; what I needed was to touch the material in order to understand it, and my hand to know what to do, how to touch, when to apply pressure and on which part in order not to break the piece. This sensitivity got integrated through the years in the memory bank of my hands. During the process of making, a dialogue occurs with the chosen material using a language that doesn't have an alphabet, nor words. A language where things are shown the way they are; based on actions and reactions, projections and absorptions.

François Delsarte (1811-1871) tells us that the gesture captures all the inner light, *“which is the weakness of articulate language, language of philosophy is successive. We must articulate sentence by sentences (...) how much to write in order to express a feeling? You will not succeed with a volume when a single gesture says it all. There are things in a gesture that would require a volume to be translated. This volume would not say what could be said in one movement. Because this simple movement known my whole being. That’s all the man’s gesture. That is why it is persuasive. It is the direct agent of the soul and that says it all. “*

In order to understand this relation between the maker and the material, I made an experiment while learning to throw clay. I started to work with ceramics when I was seven years old. I had been modeling, carving, coiling, casting it, but never had the chance to explore the technique of the throwing wheel



I had to learn this new language happening on the surface of interaction, separating me from my material. The fact that I was learning the techniques helped my research. I didn't know how to listen to the material through my hands and, because I didn't know the technique well, my own emotions got projected into the clay, taking over the material. I was in fact in myself and not in the clay.

Allow me to explain: when a potter throws clay, he does not project his self on the pot he is making, but the shape he wants to achieve. He works with specific techniques that his sensitive body learned through repetition in aim for a production of quality in respect to the material he uses. He knows the language of his material so well that he can access its reality. He becomes so receptive to his material that it can mark him/her, shaping his hands, the position of his body, his way of thinking, moving and apprehending the world. The dialogue is balanced, material and maker shaping one another.

“I work as a potter from a clay base to create a vase. My clay base, it's my pelvis. I then give form to energy that emerges. From there, I look for contradictions. I make movements, slow, fast, up, down. I create breaks for a change of rhythm. All the movements are like words in a language that I master perfectly and I assembled them indifferently as could a poet. I am tirelessly seeking new combinations. This is free work, a silent choreography.” Pepe Robledo

Before each throwing session, I wrote my current state of mind on paper. Each pot was marked with a number associated to the written text. At the end, I joined the words with the associated pot. Together, they showed me clearly the influence of my emotions onto the material, and the capacity of the material to integrate me in its own body. My gestures, carried out by my thoughts, became visible, printed and absorbed by the material.





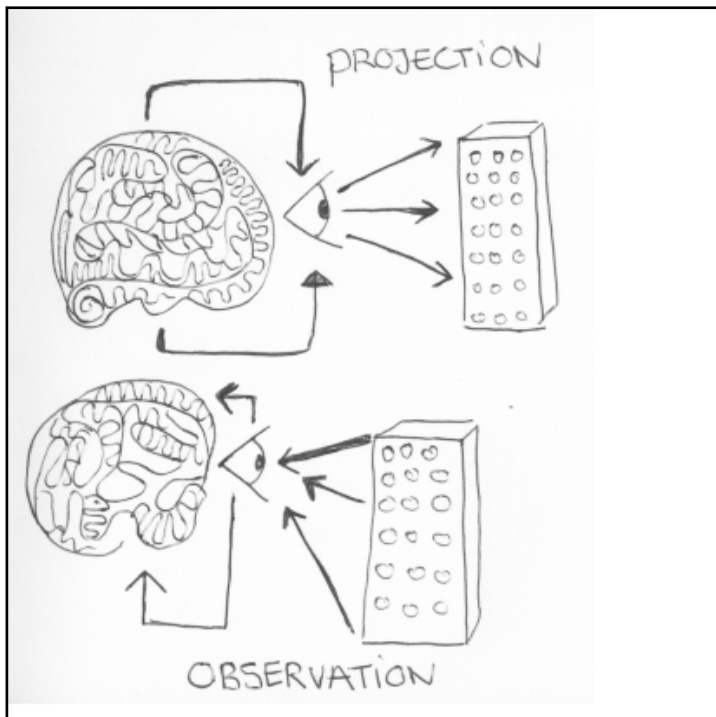
Working directly with a material is my way of freeing myself from my own corporeality. My concentration focuses on my sensitivity and through it I access the present, and I can enter another body, sharing for an instant its reality. I need to be connected with my senses, therefore with my body, in order to be also outside of it. The burden of my spirit fades away. My ideas and thoughts disappear, absorbed and transformed into a new language that doesn't use words, but movements. Through my hands, I understand the world around me in another way than when trying to make sense of it through reason. I get closer to the now.

Problems, ideas, opinions, fears and words get peeled away. I am focused on the material and everything else disappears. I have always tried to find a way of running away from my thoughts, from this thin separation between myself and the rest of the world. With time, working with my hands became a means to do so.

I believe that the art of calligraphy is very close in this extent to the practice of ceramics, the notion of receptivity being essential in both. In calligraphy, the breath is essential, a perfect metaphor of the practice itself: repetition, exchange, bearing the stamp of life, the infinite movement of energy flowing from the inner self to the outer self and from the outer self to the inner self again. The notion of “being” is very important in this exchange.

In the “Propos sur la peinture du moine Citrouille Amère”⁶ (“Reflection on the painting of the monk Bitter Pumpkin”), written by Pierre Rickman in 1984 the Shitao philosophy is revealed through the exploration of the calligraphies of the Monk Bitter Pumpkin, recognized as a Master of this ancient technique:

“Receptiveness comes first, followed by knowledge. It is therefore important to expand and develop them before one can grasp the extent of the single brush stroke. For the single brush stroke embrace the universality of things, painting is the result of receiving the ink, the ink receiving the brush, the brush receiving the hand, the hand receiving the mind” “For it is I who express itself by the mean of ink, not ink that expresses itself; it is I who trace with the brush, not the brush that traces of itself. I give birth to my creation, it is not it that could give birth to itself. From one, the innumerable splits. From the innumerable, the One is conquered.”



Bidirectional Sensitivity

By the time I arrived at the Rietveld Academie, I had been studying art for 4 years in Paris during my high-school. In those times it had never occurred to me to actually watch the results of my work without seeing what I wanted to see in the first place. Like a child, I would make a painting of an elephant, and I would see an elephant even if everyone else would see a grey storm with giant eyes. I could not see, nor perceive what I had made. For me there was only what I wanted to make, what I projected onto the paper, images and ideas I had in mind while making. I was stuck with my own projections and it was very difficult to see beyond what I thought I knew. After being asked a hundred times: “What do you SEE?”, I finally started seeing. My eyes needed and still need to be educated in this process. Strange thing really, when you think about it. Even now it takes me a great deal of effort in order to be able to stop my own projection and to open myself to what stands in front of me. I felt the need to explain and to find words in order to understand this mechanism. I then realized an experiment in the hope of making this situation clearer for myself. I stopped talking for a week in the school environment, shutting down one of my tools of projection, my voice.

DAY 1

The first mute day is complicated. Not because I want to say something, but because my head is full of words. I easily forget that I should not talk. It is not natural yet. Three times a word popped-out of my mouth.

Because my voice doesn't come out, I can hear it very clearly in my head. I need to make an effort not to speak. How weird it is, words are like an addiction. I tried not only to be mute, but also to erase all "languages". No writing, no mimes. I started to disappear. To cut communication, disconnecting myself in a social context, it felt like becoming a ghost wondering through people.

After this day I decided to start communicating by the means of writing and mimicry. Only voice couldn't be used. I made this decision because isolation is not what I was searching for: I wanted to understand exchange and communication through a new perspective. So, I started to explore what the voice is, what it does, how people relate to it, how do I relate to it. For that I needed to be confronted with the absence of my voice.

DAY 2

Because I didn't communicate at all yesterday, I had terrible nightmares, as if everything that didn't come out through my voice yesterday came as a compact and violent hit during the night. Murder - incapacity of running - incapacity of moving - paralysis. Stop interaction and communication is a little death - what are we without the "other"?

Despite the fact that I am now writing, my inner voice is going weaker. I still have voices in my head, but not as often. They come when asked. The muteness doesn't bring silence. Silence is within.



DAY 3

My voice starts to appear on my body. What was inside, starts go outside. I have now many words written on my arms; along with this my body language is accentuated. I smile more.

Silence, my inner voice appears now only when I write and during a silent conversation. The rest of the time, listening is filling silence. I start to think without words. I am closer now to my emotions and I don't feel the need to explain them to myself through words.

When words come into my head in a moment of loneliness, I repress them. I need to escape this silence sometimes by watching movies or listening to music or reading books. Every reason is good enough to escape the desert, even for a short while.

Because I am silent, people approach me and start speaking about silence. Everybody is bringing me a new point a view, different ideas, without knowing they are teaching me. I like how this experiment goes both ways; people are adapting to this new situation, they also experiment with silence. With the writing part, for example, people become more patient, more curious about what I have to say. I write, they wait until I am finished, they read, they respond.

DAY 4

The voice of the other becomes mine. I noticed that I am now waiting so that people can say themselves what I would have had said myself. I think I miss my identity. How come identities and voice/language can be related to such a broad extent?

It's funny, some people during a conversation with me will stop talking also and start writing back to me. This mimetic reaction is fascinating. The experience put me in front of a very new type of loneliness. I am normally with myself even when I am alone. Now I feel like I am not with "myself" anymore.

I listen more easily. Not only because I am not talking but also because I have a hunger for words.

I start noticing how many times in the day I end up repeating the same things, great amounts of banality. My arms are covered with words, and at some point I don't need to write anymore, instead I only need to point out an already written sentence.

DAY 5

I had an interesting “conversation” with a girl I’d tried to talk to before, but always without success. Today thought, we had a 20-minute silent conversation. With some people, I have less difficulty to communicate in silence.

Some people hardly notice my silence. Someone today spoke with me for 10 minutes without noticing that I stood silent the whole time.

I had a long “conversation” around a table. I was writing and the girl I was “talking to” was using her voice. After 30 minutes of discussion, another girl came round the table. She took all the papers, read them and immediately integrated herself into the conversation as if she had been with us the whole time.

People in the supermarket, people I don’t know, think I am mute. Some of them start to speak louder, some act as if I was cute, some articulate more and use signs, as if not only I was mute, but also stupid.

DAY 6

DAY 7

Days after experiment

The first time I used my voice again, I was not sure if what I was hearing was really the right tone. Was it my voice precisely? My voice came back pretty easily. I am now trying to find a balance for silence. Sometimes, it is necessary to speak out. Sometimes, silence is a better response. I am learning now how to use silence in language.

When I stopped projecting my voice, I became able to listen. Because I stopped projecting myself into a situation, I became able to perceive others and their projections. After this experience, I became obsessed by the process of projection and appropriation. I understood that I was most of the time blind to others, not picking half of what I was hearing, not seeing half of what was standing right in front of me, not being receptive in reality to what was around me, for me to take and integrate into myself. I was seeing only what I wanted to see, meaning only what I was receptive to. I needed to name those things that existed for me to perceive them. This fact had a fundamental effect of personal transformation since I could make them mine.

I started thinking: maybe that is why I do not open up fully to everything: I would lose control of who I am, getting dissolved into my surroundings. Maybe the fact that I can open up to some information and keep closed to other is where my “Self” stands. Opening up and forcing my receptiveness in the silent performance made me feel like I was disappearing in the way that I was becoming part of others. To only give, on the contrary, was making me blind, unable to perceive any other.

At first, I used the notion of “gift” in order to define what is exchanged during an interaction and, having this power of transforming the participants by means of receptiveness and appropriation.

The notion of gift implicitly brings the notion of return, not per se, in the same way or shape as what is given at first. Charity, meant to be a “free” gift, voluntarily given, not required, has as I perceive it, also a form of return. As an example: I give money to an association, I feel better about myself, and this feeling is the returned price of this charitable action. Marcel Mauss⁷, a French anthropologist, has explored this issue in his book “The gift” written in 1950. He sheds light on the matter by explaining that there are no free gifts. In one way or another, gifts are always “repaid”; may it be by the return of friendship or good feelings. This is a cycle of commitment that articulates social interactions. Mauss’s early book with Henri Hubert (1889) on “Sacrifice” took for its central theme a Vedic principle that sacrifice is a gift that compels the deity to make a return: “Do ut des”; I give so that you may give.

The gift is an object or action that is given from an entity to another. As such it implies a direction and a valuation since it carries a notion of return. The notion of gift in our current language also implies the idea of appreciation, and that is where it starts to show its limits: how can I exclude the notion of appreciation, implying a separation between good and bad? For example in my perspective an insult would be a “gift” in the way that something is given.

The other problem I am confronted with is that “gift” implies animate actors or imaginary animate actors (for example: in the case of sacrifices to gods). If I interact with a table, could I perceive the fact of its only existence as a gift in itself?

I needed to find another word in order to clarify my thoughts. I had no choice but to go to Latin, on which my language and therefore my way of thinking is partly based. I started researching “transformation”, “exchange”, “giving”, “gift”, “change”. The so-called Gaffiot, a French-Latin dictionary⁸ showed me a series of words that together were depicting a correct shape of my thought. (See following pages). Some of them, aside from “gift”, share the same linguistic root: Mut (Latin radical), pronounced mu, the “t” being silent. Moving from the object “gift”, my focus shifted onto the shapeless process of its effect.

1 *mūto*, *āvī*, *ātum*, *āre*, tr. et int.

I tr., ¶ 1 déplacer: *neque se luna quoquam mutat* PL. Amp. 274, et la lune ne se déplace nulle part; *civitate mutari* CIC. Balb. 30, être changé de cité [devenir citoyen d'une autre patrie], cf. CIC. R. Post. 25; Phil. 1, 17 ¶ 2 changer, modifier: *sententiam* CIC. Mur. 61; *consilium* CIC. Fam. 4, 4, 4; *consuetudinem dicendi* CIC. Br. 314, changer son opinion, sa résolution, ses habitudes de parler [comme orateur]; *mentem alicujus* CIC. Prov. 25, modifier les idées de qq; *simulacrum locum tantum hominesque mutarat* CIC. Verr. 4, 72, la statue avait changé d'emplacement seulement et d'adorateurs; ¶ *facies locorum cum ventis simul mutatur* SALL. J. 78, 3, l'aspect des lieux change en même temps que les vents; *cum fortuna animum mutare* VELL. 2, 82, 2, changer de disposition d'esprit avec la fortune; *mutare ad...* QUINT. 10, 7, 3, changer selon...

14, échanger une chose contre une autre; *victoriae possessionem incerta pace* LIV. 9, 12, 2, changer une victoire assurée contre une paix incertaine, cf. LIV. 5, 30, 3 ¶ prendre en échange: *uvam furtiva strigili* HOR. S. 2, 7, 110, prendre une grappe de raisin en échange d'un racloir volé, cf. HOR. O. 1, 16, 26; J. 29, 15 ¶ échange des marchandises [trafic, commerce]: VIRG. B. 4, 38; HOR. S. 1, 4, 29; *mutandi copia* SALL. J. 18, 5, faculté de faire des échanges, cf. SALL. J. 44, 6 ¶ 4 changer, abandonner (v. NON p. 351, 1); *principem* TAC. H. 3, 44; changer de prince, lui donner un successeur.

II int., ¶ 1 se changer, changer: *mores mutaverunt* LIV. 39, 51, 10, les mœurs ont changé, cf. LIV. 9,

= adapter à [pass.]: *mutari in pejus* QUINT. 1, 1, 6, se modifier dans un sens plus mauvais; *ea feminis mutari in mares* PLIN. 7, 36, de femmes se changer en hommes; *mutatis animis ad misericordiam* LIV. 24, 26, 14, les cœurs s'étant tournés à la pitié par un revirement; *quantum mutatus al illo* HECTORE VIRG. En. 2, 274, combien différent de cet autre Hector; *silvae foliis mutantur* HOR. P. 60, les bois changent de feuilles; *vinum mutatum* HOR. S. 2, 2, 58, vin tourné; *mutata verba* CIC. Or. 92, métonymie; *oratio mutata* CIC. Part. 23, style varié, cf. CIC. Part. 16 ¶ 3 changer, échanger, remplacer par échange: *calceos et vestimenta* CIC. Mil. 28, changer de chaussures et de vêtements; *mutatis ad celeritatem iumentis* CES. C. 3, 11, 1, ayant changé de chevaux pour aller plus vite ¶ *vestem mutare* CIC. Quir. 8, prendre des habits de deuil, cf. CIC. Sest. 26; LIV. 2, 61, 5; 8, 37, 9; *solum* CIC. Par. 31, aller en exil ¶ *rem cum aliqua re* CIC. Verr. 3, 19, changer qqch contre qqch; *rem cum aliqua* TER. Eun. 572, échanger qqch avec qq; *rem pro aliqua re* SALL. J. 83, 1; LIV. 27, 35,

mūtūtātio, *ōnis*, f. (*mutito*), invitation réciproque: INSCR. Or. 2 p. 388.

mūtūtio (*mutti-*), f., action de murmurer: PL. Amp. 519.

mūtūto, *āre*, int. (fréq. de *muto*), se traiter tour à tour, se régaler réciproquement: GELL. 2, 24, 8; 18, 2, 11.

mūtūtatio, *ōnis*, f. (*mutuor*), emprunt [d'argent]: CIC. Tusc. 1, 100 ¶ emprunt [d'une expression]: CIC. de Or. 3, 156.

mūtūtātus, a, um, part. de *mutuor*.

mūtūō, c. *mutuo* 1: CIC. Fam. 5, 2, 4; 5, 7, 2; CHAR. 205, 16.

mūtūtians, *tis* (*mutuor*), qui cherche à emprunter: PL. Merc. 52.

mūtūtiter, c. *mutuo* 1: VARR. d. NON. 513, 16.

1 *mūtūlus*, i, m., [t. d'archit.] corbeau: VARR. R. 3, 5, 13 ¶ modillon, mutule: VITR. 4, 1, 2; 4, 2, 7.

2 *mūtūlus*, i, m., v. *mitulus*: CAT. Agr. 153.

Mūtūnus, v. *Mutinus*.

1 *mūtūō* (*mutuus*), mutuellement, réciproquement: PLANC. Fam. 10, 15, 4; LEPID. Fam. 10, 34, 3.

2 *mūtūō*, *āvī*, *ātum*, *āre* (*mutuum*), tr., emprunter de l'argent: CAECIL. d. NON. 474, 4 [en

2 *mūtūlus*, a, um (*μυτολος* et *μυτολος*), mutilé, dont on a coupé ou retranché qqch: COD. TH. 7, 13, 10; *alces mutilus sunt cornibus* CES. G. 6, 27, 1, les alces ont les cornes tronquées [mais *bos mutilus* VARR. L. 9, 33, bœuf écorné, cf. HOR. S. 1, 5, 60]; [fig.] *mutila sentire* CIC. Or. 178, sentir que des phrases sont mutilées; *mutila loqui* CIC. Or. 32, faire des phrases incomplètes, tronquées.

Mūtina, ae, f., ville de la Gaule Transpadane,auj. Modène: CIC. Phil. 5, 24; LIV. 21, 25, 3 ¶ -ensis, e, de Modène: CIC. Fam. 10, 14, 1.

Mūtīnus ou *Mūtūnus*, i, m. (*mutō* 2), le même que Priape: LACT. 1, 20, 36 ¶ = *penis* PRIAP. 72, 2.

mūtīo (-tīō), ire, int., produire le son mu, grommeler, mar-

mōvĕo, mōvi, mōtum, ĕre, tr.

I pr., ¶ 1 mouvoir, remuer, agir : *quæ moventur* Cic. *Tusc.* 1, 53, les choses qui se meuvent ; *vis movendi* Cic. *Ac.* 1, 26, force motrice ¶ *membra movere* Tib. 1, 7, 38 ou *moveri* seul HOR. *P.* 232, se remuer, danser ; *moveri Cyclopa* HOR. *Ep.* 2, 2, 125, danser la danse du Cyclope ¶ *citharam, fila sonantia movere* Ov. *M.* 5, 112 ; 10, 89, jouer de la cithare, faire vibrer les cordes résonnantes de la lyre ¶ *signum loco* Cic. *Div.* 1, 77, arracher de terre l'étendard ; *loco motus est* Cic. *Cat.* 2, 1, il a été délogé de sa position ; *moveri sedibus* Cic. *Phil.* 13, 49, se déplacer de son lieu de séjour ; *se ex loco movere* Liv. 34, 20, 5, se déplacer ¶ *movere castra*, décamper, ex loco, d'un endroit : *CÆS. G.* 1, 15, 1 ; 7, 8, 5 ; Cic. *Fam.* 15, 2, 8 ; [ou *movere* seul] *Camusio moverat* Cic. *Att.* 9, 1, 3, il était parti avec ses troupes de Camusium, cf. Liv. 37, 23, 4 ¶ 2 éloigner, écarter : *aliquem possessione* Cic. *Verr.* 1, 116, évincer qqn d'une possession ; *heredes* Cic. *Off.* 3, 76, évincer des héritiers ; *aliquem tribu, de senatu* Cic. *de Or.* 2, 272 ; *Clu.* 122, exclure qqn de la tribu, du sénat ; *ex agro* Cic. *Fam.* 13, 5, 2, chasser d'une terre ; *litteram* Cic. *Fin.* 3, 74, déplacer une lettre ¶ 3 pousser, produire [en parl. des plantes] : *gemmæ se movent* Col. 11, 2, 26, les bourgeons poussent, cf. Ov. *Tr.* 3, 12, 13 ¶ 4 int. [rare] : *terra movit* Liv. 35, 40, 7, la terre remua, il y eut un tremblement de terre, cf. Liv. 40, 59, 7

II [fig.] ¶ 1 mettre en mouvement, pousser, déterminer : *aliquem, ut* Cic. *Mur.* 3 ; *Leg.* 1, 41, *Fam.* 1, 7, 9, pousser qqn à faire qqch ; *quæ me causæ moverint* Cic. *Att.* 11, 5, 1 [je ne puis te dire] les raisons qui m'ont poussé, cf. Cic. *Fam.* 1, 9, 22 ; *aliquem*

mōtiō, ōnis, f. (*moveo*), action de mouvoir, mouvement, impulsion : Cic. *Fat.* 43 ; *Tim.* 30 ; *Nat.* 2, 146 ¶ [philos.] = ἐνδελέχεια Cic. *Tusc.* 1, 22 ¶ [médec.] mouvement de fièvre, frisson : *CELS.* 3, 5, 28. mōtĭto, āre, frĕq. de moto : GELL. 9, 6, 3.

mōtiuncŭla, æ, f. (*motio*), léger accès de fièvre : *SEN. Ep.* 53, 6 ; *SUET. Vesp.* 24.

mōtĭvus, a, um (*moveo*), relatif au mouvement, mobile : *CHALCID. Tim.* 57.

2 mōtĭs, ūs, m., ¶ 1 [en gén.] mouvement : *sphæræ genus, in quo solis et lunæ motus inessent* Cic. *Rep.* 1, 22, un genre de sphère, où se trouvaient représentés les mouvements du soleil et de la lune ; *terræ motus* Cic. *Div.* 1, 35, tremblement de terre ¶ *corporis* Cic. *Arch.* 17, mouvement du corps [de l'acteur] ; *motus dare* Liv. 7, 2, 4, exécuter des mouvements, cf. *VIRG. G.* 1, 350 ; *flexi fractique motus* Cic. *Fin.* 5, 35, démarches nonchalantes et affectées ¶ geste, action oratoire : Cic. *Br.* 116 ; 250 ¶ mouvements de la vigne, d'une plante ; degrés d'accroissement : *CELS.* 4, 28, 2 ¶ 2 [fig.] a) mouvement de l'âme : *animi* Cic. *Br.* 93, mouvement, agitation de l'âme ; *qui motus cogitationis celeriter agitatur per se ipse delectat* Cic. *Or.* 134, et ce mouvement de la pensée provoqué promptement est agréable par lui-même ; [en part.] *motus animi = perturbaciones* Cic. *Off.* 1, 136, émotions, passions ; b) mouvement de foule : *servorum* Cic. *Verr.* 5, 9, des mouvements d'esclaves ;

Seeing those pages, I felt relieved, finding finally a way to make some sense out of my thoughts. Mutation, transformation, voice, exchange, community, movement, all sharing the same root: mut.

Discussing this idea with the ones which surround me, I was lead towards another spot of investigation.

In Japanese mu: 無

In Korean mu: 무

and Chinese wú: 无

The terms were keywords in Buddhism, in the Chan and Zen traditions, and could be translated as “has not”, “is without”, “without”, “lack of”, “absence”, “nothing”, “emptiness”, “vacuum”, or “void”. I could not decide if those concepts are related or relatable, but I saw a connection between them answering the need I felt for the word “mut”, which was before missing from my dictionary, with it’s power to give a body to my thoughts. Please allow me now to give you my own definition of it:

Mu Process of potential transformation and movement residing in the in-between of any interaction. *Mu* does not have specific results of transformation, except the ones given by the entities in play, these being dependent on their sensibilities and perceptions of the situation. *Mu* is the point where two elements, having different selves, meet, potentially transforming either one another, or one or the other, depending on their own receptivity.

Mu is in a way not so different from the Japanese mu since it is a nothingness residing in between entities that will become something through interaction. It is also deeply connected with its Latin radical *mut* since it contains the act of transformation, mutation or movement of the *participant in play*.

Let me give you an imaginary example:

Mr. A is walking in the direction of his office. While walking he sees a bird in the sky. The bird doesn't see him. The bird goes South, the man goes South also. Mr. A thinks "If I could fly, I would be there faster". He starts walking at a slightly speedier pace since he would like to be soon at work, drinking a coffee with his colleagues, before starting the day. The mu here was triggered by the interaction that Mr. A had with the bird. This interaction had the effect Mr. A gave it: acceleration and thirst. The bird on the other hand doesn't see Mr. A. Its focus is instead on the roof of a building nearby, where it is planning to land. Its sensitivity and openness is towards another element, different than Mr. A's. The bird could not possibly know that because it was flying above that piece of land, at this precise instant, Mr. A would walk slightly faster. The mu created here is a passive reaction because the gestural reaction "walking faster" of Mr. A was his choice, based on the kind of sensitivity to the situation at that particular moment. If, instead of a bird, an airplane passed by, flying close to the ground, Mr. A would have been carried away by the wind created by the airplane and would have been forced to walk faster.

In such a case, the interaction would not have let Mr. A with much choice to react, the energy of the airplane being stronger than his. The transformation provoked by an interaction depends also in the power released by the actors and their receptivity to this power. Sometimes the mu opens up different possibilities of interpretation and reaction, and sometimes it doesn't, creating an immediate transformation on the other. But it depends again on the sensitivity and characteristics of the actors at play: the same airplane flying close to a mountain would not have carried it away.

We are not always aware that we are interacting and therefore not always aware of mu in the same way. Therefore we cannot always control the provoked effect onto one another even when trying our best. For example: if the bird, instead of seeing the tree, would have noticed the sandwich in the pocket of Mr. A, it would have perhaps come flying in and singing around the man, trying to get at the sandwich. The intention of the bird would then have been to get the bread. In such a case the man could have understood the intention of the bird. All that he would have needed would be a way of being open to it and of avoiding the act of projecting his own meaning into it, thinking for example that the bird is attacking him. In such a situation the notions of projection and reception become fundamental. In the same situation, based on whether the actors are receptive or projecting, the effect of mu would be totally different. Most of the time, we interact with many different elements simultaneously through our various senses. Mu then affects us as much due to the inter-actor's actions, as it does due to our own actions: the result being a combination of the two.

While studying art I came to see mu as relevant, because it deals with the intentions and energies I am creating during both the process of making and the display stage. I cannot control what the mu of the pieces created and the interaction of them with the audience will lead to. I transform actively the material(s) I choose to work with, and the material(s) transform me as well. Once finished, my work slips out from my hands and the audience takes over, having an interaction with the piece itself. The mu created between the piece and the audience isn't the one I experienced myself and isn't directly accessible to me. I cannot entirely control what will be given nor received and how it will transform the actors during their play. As a maker, in the end I merely open up a new platform that people can interact with, using their own sensitivity, inward or outward of the object they are confronted to during their mu. Often, the makers project themselves actively onto the material they work with and at the end, a part of them resides in the result of this interaction. This result being a combination of the material and the maker. When the maker works, his actions and energy the properties get partly printed on the material, because of its receptivity. The piece does not carry the evolving self of the maker, but his self during the time of the making. In the same way, when a man and a woman interact sexually and form a baby, the baby will carry part of his parents within himself, but he will become himself an object of interaction. The audience has the ability to interact through the piece to the past self of his or their maker(s).

Also as a maker, I often hope that some of my audience will be in resonance with my work, capable to receive what was put into the material. Language is as well present within mu: when I interact with a text in English, I am more receptive to it than a text in Chinese, because I trained this receptivity. I am therefore able to access its reality. Mu can be developed in order for it to become a more fruitful exchange leading to a stronger transformation of one's being. If I read a text in Chinese it will have an effect on me, but I won't be as strongly touched as in the case when I would understand its meaning.

The interactions that occur during the making process shape both the maker and the material through their mu. These interactions make it possible to penetrate one another's reality. Through interaction with an animate or inanimate object, I have to adapt my gestures and sensitivity. This allows me the gateway to entering another reality. In some cases, the result of this interaction has a physical body (for example: a drawing) like a dialogue frozen in time. It makes it possible for people external to the creation process to participate and interact with it as long as it exists, offering a platform of dialogue where a new mu can occur. The audience interacts with the piece using their own subjectivity, allowing their projection and the possible perception of the material and the maker. This relation, which one can have with an object of art, exists in many other forms. And we can take as additional examples: the way we interact with objects in our daily life, or with animate beings, spaces and architecture, also shapes, all having the capacity of revealing the self.



Embodied objects

My body is the 1st layer of “I”, it’s a tool giving me the ability to perceive the world and to interact with it. The way I perform with it is the 2nd layer of “I”, which opens up different perceptions and realities. The space where I evolve, and the objects (animate or inanimate) I am confronted with, would be the 3rd layer, offering me different types of interactions where mu happens and the “Self” is shaped and revealed. This 3d layer is a space composed of variable entities that form a landscape together. Each of them offers different ways for the body to move and evolve. My next quest is understanding in which way we mu, confronted with inanimate objects and their relations with us.

Extended bodies

The space we evolve into and the objects we interact with participate in the shaping of our identity and “Self”, offering specific experiences as a platform. As human beings, we are most receptive to objects and we build, use and collect them with intensity. We define ourselves as “Homo Faber” and we shape our surroundings. We use objects in order to extend our physical capacity, to reflect on ourselves, to carry real or imaginary projections and to travel through time, making objects carry memories. When interacting with ancient objects bearing mu of lost times, we can try to grasp the lost reality that comes with them. We can use objects in order to access one another, no matter is we are separated by time or space. And, because of our specific receptivity toward inanimate objects, our existence is not limited within the frontier of our own skin. We fluidly travel despite our body’s limitation in time and space. The walls that surround our habitat can be straight, organized, logical, practical and stable, reflecting our way of thinking. These walls contain mu and they shape us. In the same way, clothes contain and shape the body, hiding it, protecting it, communicating our given or self-given position towards others.

Our objects of daily use act like extended bodies that communicate, protect, separate, shape and give us new characteristics. In the case of the objects we make, our existence is strongly intertwined with them. We build object attributing them specific roles related to our methods of use: a painting is made to be looked at, a fork has a handle to be held in a specific manner, and chairs shapes our body by the way we sit on them - back straight, legs bending, feet touching the floor parallel to one another, the list can go on. Most of the objects in our environment are built taking into consideration the way they will be used. Those objects make us perform certain gestures that shape our realities and lead our thoughts and emotions in specific directions. No matter, we tend to forget about the influence of objects and our way of being. We perceive

ourselves within the boundaries of a body, being attentive to its smallest details, when in fact the flexible body we should take care of is wider than ever. There are many different ways to relate with an object. In my research I would like to explore the object as carrier of memories, given that memories are an important part on the concept of identity (what one remembers of their past selves).

Selected memories

“Ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.”

Walter Benjamin

What I remember of my previous selves supports who I believe to be today. I obviously don't carry all my memories in crystal clear form floating around in my head, but they are there, lurking. Those memories don't reside only within the frontiers of my physical body, but also outside of it. The long forgotten box, left in the garage of my parents and found after many years, brought memories to life. Their perfume, colors, textures, brought ghosts of my past selves back in the present, unleashing a flood of emotions. The gap between my experiences and what I remember today is wide; but having objects that existed in my past makes it easier to reconnect with my long forgotten memories and selves. My memories transform from year to year and even tend to disappear as if they never existed. They are always being re-shaped and the images I have in mind are not what they were at the beginning of the process of memorizing. Like a child that lies, I become unable to distinguish what is real from what isn't. I can have very strong memories of something that never happened and they will also become part of my identity construction.

In the same way, when one never speaks about an element of his past or never traps it into images, symbols nor objects, it can disappear, erased from the memory bank. Physical objects, texts, drawings, pictures, or even mental images make it possible for me to get a grasp of specific moments and give me the possibility to connect with them again and again; even if those memories are constructed and never really happened in the way I remember them. Invented or transformed, I don't seem to be able to distinguish my "real" memories from the "fake" ones. The memories on which I base my identity aren't stable, fixed or linear. Malleable and evaluative, they reflect my incoherent selves.

"Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories."

Walter Benjamin ¹⁰

Objects possess me, my body remembers our interaction and how we shaped one another, in mu. Some objects trigger memories of my past. In the novel "La Nausée", Sartre points out that inanimate objects show themselves to be resistant to whatever significance human consciousness might perceive in them. Maybe out of the frustration, due to the persistency of the objects to resist what I can project of myself in them when we interact, I sometimes feel the need to leave a mark on them and through this mark to reveal my projections, making sure I exist.

I sometime feel the need to leave a mark onto it, to reveal my projections, making sure that what I perceive in it will become visible, as a way to say, I exist.

“The maker leaves a personal mark of his or her presence on the object, in the history of craftsmanship, these maker’s marks have carried no political messages, as graffiti scrawled on a wall can, merely the statement anonymous laborers have imposed on inert material, fecit: “I have made this” “I am here in this work” which is to say “I exist”. The philosopher Anne Phillips would not scorn such a declaration as part of what she calls “the politics of presence” nor have historians of labors and maker’s marks of American slaves. Ancient bricks stamps also bore this primal message” Craftsman, Richard Sennett ¹¹

Everywhere I look, I find objects imbued with meanings, which remind me of my own existence and sometimes I feel the need to possess them in order perhaps to extend my body and capacity of remembrance. This tendency for appropriation reveals that my consideration of identity goes beyond my body. In order to feel in control over what lays outside of it, I project myself onto it. From strangers, external objects become “I”. Everywhere I look, I never entirely see, blinded by my own image and existence. In the same way we project onto inanimate objects, we project onto other human beings. They also carry past self memories and “I” exist within them. If you’re my friend, my relative, “my” something. I possess you, and you possess me because we shaped each other and we carry in our flesh the memories of our mu.

If you're my friend, my relative, "my" something. I possess you, and you possess me because we shaped each other, and, we carry in our flesh the memories of our *mu*.

The action of collecting is a way to give a body to your own selected and treasured memories: records of the past, dreams in the form of collected objects. The objects of memories as "lieux de mémoire" (or memorial sites), as Pierre Nora would have them described, have the power to bring the past into the present, making lost moments visible once again. In the Kaufman and Gondry movie "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"¹², in an effort to eradicate all traces of his girlfriend Clementine from his memory, Joel Barish undergoes a medical procedure. Joel is given explicit instructions. He is told to return home and gather every object which he possesses and that had something to do with Clementine. "Anything. Photos. Clothing. Gifts. Journal entries. Perfume. Books she bought for you. CDs you bought together. We want to empty your home... your life of Clementine." What becomes evident throughout the film is the crucial role that objects imbued as "lieux de mémoire" (place of memories) play in the transmission of the past in the present. That is, by examining the function of Joel's collection with regard to his procedure we can see how these artifacts are imbued as agents of memory and as markers of identity.



Objects & Memories



Collection

Bone It has the most perfect shape, perfect weight and size. The top part looked shape by hand. This is how our body is structured; build around a secret architecture, never to be revealed, until the end. The bones I am made of are my sanctuary.

Stone I speak to bird, talk to tree. I am out of our reality. I found the way out of the realm of reason. The stone speaks. It knows everything: The beginning and the end.

Spear I escaped my country, I was looking for freedom. With me I had bags full of ground from my town, the one I come from. In my bags I have my identity. Because I carry my identity in a bag, I am afraid to lose it.

Box

In this box, I locked up forever my past. In this box, I putted everything I wanted to forget, Everything I wanted to remember.

Mirror The first time I saw my face, it was in the tiniest mirror. The mirror told me: 'see? Now, you exist' The mirror got broken, but my face never left me. Stuck there forever.

Empty bottles I buy empty bottles that I never fill in. Just for the sake of possessing the object. The bottle used to pop-up in my apartment, Appearing almost from nowhere. Almost. The emptiness of the bottles first filled up an unthirsty throat to crave dry fillings. I swore not to fill myself this way. I collect empty bottles, and I pay attention, never to fill me.

African mask I leave, once per year in a far away country, I bring nothing with me on the way there, but always, I bring back object and memories. Like if I could share something of where I comes from.I try to speak but the words describes. Always I was alone in my experiences.

Fish and horse Sometimes, dreams imprint my reality. They are part of my life. I like to listen to them. I sometimes paint or write them.I see a part of truth true dreams. They hide nothing. They never lie. Reality makes the dreams, dreams makes reality.

Pendant I collected jewels during my travels.When does the travel start? Does it ever end? Would I ever be tired to run from place to place? I spoke three languages, Italian, Spanish and French. At the end, none are mines, or maybe all of them.My family is split up, around the world. This is how it goes now. I don't have to stay anymore where I was born.

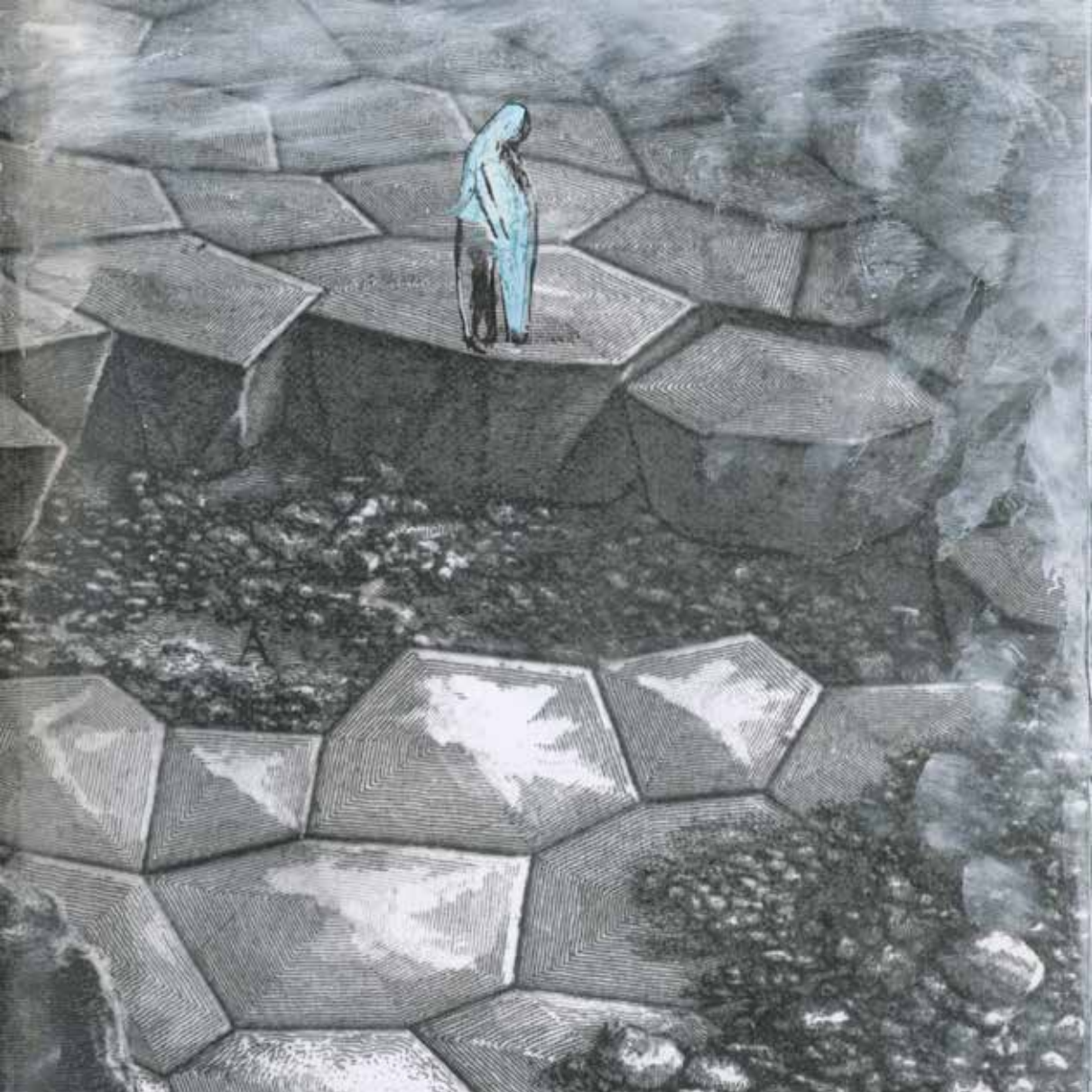
Bracelet

I am afraid to loose the present, to forget, Everything I possess, I can loose. The only thing I am certain of is that I cannot loose my body. I tattooed on my feat the drawing that is on that bracelet. Yes, the bracelet one day will belong to somebody else. But my feet are mine forever.

Flower box One smell attracts all my senses.I want to grab it, to control it, to make it mine.I hum and hum the ground, the air, the plants, and the people. Nothing. I took everything, and put it in a little box.I got it. It is now in my hand, it belongs to me.



The action of collecting is a way to give a body to our past selves: records of the past in the form of collected objects. What if I wanted to forget about my past, about my selves attached to those objects? Would it be enough to abandon them in order to create a new me? Coming to Amsterdam from Paris, I had the opportunity to reinvent myself by reinventing my ways of living, rituals of everyday life leading to different me. Today, four years later, I changed my ways of living, my relationship with people, my perception and point of view on the world, but am I really a different person? Yes and no. My mother still recognizes me, my friends still recognize me. Even if many things have changed, some fundamental things that I fail to point out stay. Maybe because we are simultaneously like Pirandello describes it “one, hundred-thousand, no one” in the same way that we are simultaneously in the present (one), in the past (hundred thousand) and in the future (no one).

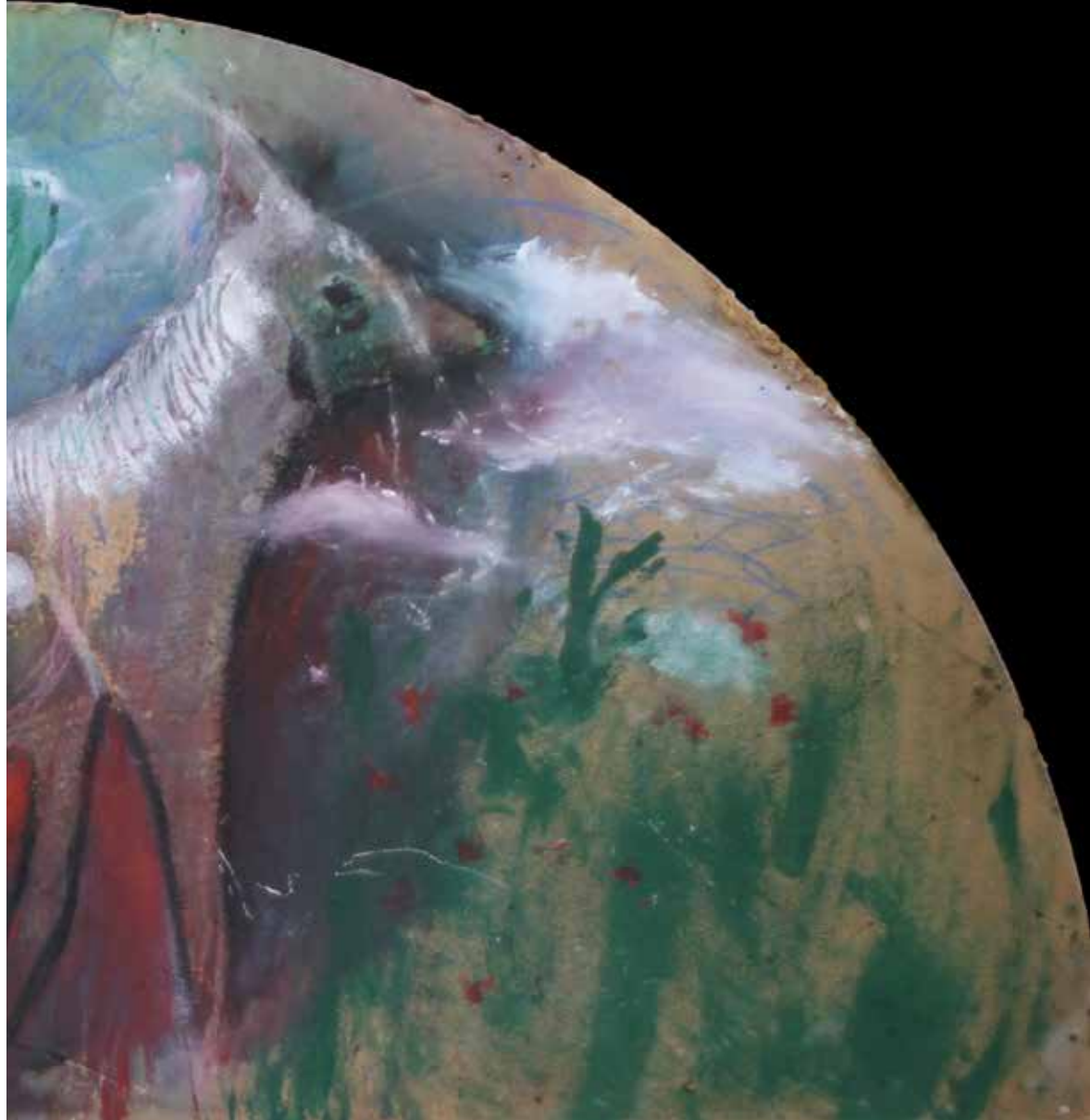


Fictional self

Because I am busy everyday with making, my everyday life and the objects I make become intertwined, responding to one another. What I make influences my everyday life, my everyday life influences what I make. I cannot distinguish anymore what is imagination and what is real since my imagination becomes object, how can I then deny its existence? Dreams, imagination, reality, I take all into consideration. The more or less distant wars seem as surreal as my dreams and the past floats, is dissolved and slowly disappears in the fog of my thoughts. Sometimes I find pictures, objects or old letters awakening images of this past (is it my past or someone else's past? probably a bit of both). Often forgotten, I reinvent it, making it vivid for an instant. The dates get mixed up, the past remade with each step.

In 2013, I started to paint. At that time I was in the Fine Art department and I was probably influenced by the painters around me. I painted a horse that lead me to the strangest dream and then guided me back to another horse painting. In this work, the limit between the real and the imaginary blended the two until I couldn't distinguish their frontier anymore. To paint made my interior's emptiness real, it made it swell and turned it palpable until the dream started to stain my days.









uzo

What is the real, since everything we believe in can become, if we exteriorize it? After all, churches were raised to the sky, made of stones that no single man can lift, prompted to rest hundreds of feet overhead, all because of belief. They are created while feeding on imagination, through means of constructing and offering it a body to reside into.

The notion of autofiction, or the designing of one's "Self", is maybe the right term to describe this point where the real gets mixed up with the imaginary and they end up living side by side and shaping one another. The term autofiction appeared in 1977, when Serge Doubrovsky invented the word to qualify his own literary practice. It is described as a lively game between the imagination and how the exteriorization of it can work the real which escape us. The artist or writer invents himself in the movement of his own practice. Thus autofiction becomes a way to translate the inner chaos from the outside.

"Writing is a way out of me." Serge Doubrovsky. ¹⁴

The porosity of the border between art and artifice is where the notion of intimacy stands, defined not only as a staging of the self, but as true "invention of the Self". Intimate writing, for example, would not be the expression of "me", instead, by a strange reversal, the place where "me" gets shaped. In this dialogue, mu doesn't only stand in between different entities but in between different perspectives towards one entity: dreams, imagination, actual experiences, memories of those experiences; the whole, released, reinvented and made "real" through the making.

Attempt to conclude

Our collective Western past, the one that separates each body from the other with the notion of authorship, individual recognition, and individual faults is preventing us from accepting the fact that we aren't only within our skin, but within our interactions and more specifically in mu. We tend to separate different entities and to distinguish one for the other. We quantify, count, weigh, measure, judge, test, prioritize in an attempt to get a grasp of them, and to get in the end the feeling of being in control. We've left apart what resides in between those points (or entities), that which we have been giving so much attention to. The place where things connect is where I believe the "Self" to be shaped, where it resides: within mu. If my "Self" is within mu, standing in between everything, the notion of authorship is therefore obsolete. Because I refused to separate my different subjects at the beginning of my writing process, I was able to find points of connection, and in-between those subject I can see the "Self" being drawn. Each project, each step in life, giving it clarity. The notion of "I" is what is within the frontier we collectively drew in time. In this text, I attempt to extend this frontier. My own "Self" resides in the objects I build as well as in the people I have met and had the chance to mu with. My "Self" is a story I tell and invent step by step, building it, side by side with my interactions.

“Heavy clouds were putting out the stars”¹⁵ (Antoine de St-Exuperie). In the dark, I imagine them. I walk on a non-existing path that I project before me. I don’t see, but I invent instead, linking points of light to one another and giving meaning to the images that they create. If I sometimes believe that I see more clearly, I have to remind myself that I am still walking blind. My explanations and attempts at rationalizing those images is what makes me go on. Even so, I know deep down that it is the rationalization itself that prevents me from seeing. Those tireless attempts to make sense out of nothingness is where the “I” stands. I invent my days, one after the other, from one mu to the other.

Knowing all this, I can then look at things differently. I can will myself into playfully building my way and open up to unexpected interactions, trying at each step to reinvent my “Self”. In this new way of seeing, every mask will be like a reinvention, each objects more than a companion, another “Self”. If the chance is that there is only emptiness, I’d rather be dancing in it instead of walking my way through it being fearful. And in this movement, my lies will no longer embarrass me, nor will my dreams. My actions will not be doubted, nor repressed. Along with my memories, revisited or forgotten, I’m ready to move forward without fearing nothingness.

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A RESEARCH ON THE *SELF* THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF ART