

Retrospective to the I

Written component of master's thesis

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Dedicated to Mamu.



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Abstract as a

Synopsis as an

Invitation

This thesis is an artistic piece of work, it is also a book: Retrospective to the I is not finished, rather it is an invitation to a future me; I invite her to carry this work with her and do as she pleases with it later on. Retrospective from the Latin: retrospectare, "look back". I am looking back at what the I means, through a poetic, creative, and ontological lens. The book poses questions such as "who has gotten to be the P." and "How do we understand the I in relation to the tapestries of stories and narratives we encompass?" and "Can there be a demarcation between the multitudinous and the personal?". I raise these questions, not necessarily to answer them, but to explore them. In my exploration, I pose that it is the narratives and histories and structures and institutions we carry that shape us, while also conceding of an individual I that exists nevertheless, even though that is not my focus here. Currently, this book serves as a companion to my visual art pieces that will be exhibited as a part of my master's degree exhibition in Art & Science, die Angewandte (June 2023); hence why it also contains references to my own work and life, past and contemporaneous. I do not know what shape it will take later on.

But for now, it is also a play on retrospective exhibitions. Art about the self—what is it good for? Derivative, representational, oftentimes leaning on a hyper-individualistic capitalistic narcissism: self-referential works become kitsch, un-innovative, selfish, self-centred, egotistical. However, my thesis challenges these notions and presents art about the self as an encountering and involvement with a multi-pluralistic *I*.

So this is what it is now: engaging in the I through a combination of journal entries, poetic writing, discussions of materiality, subjectivity and ontology, letters, short stories, memories, and art pieces. I situate myself in this great, complex world. In the end, I try to frame the I through the lens of care-related ontology, taking a leaf from post-humanistic and postcolonial feminism AND poetry. We must care if we are to be and become.

Page vii: abstract textile installation; wool, thread, fabric; shown in the exhibition

Page viii: *Running*, Gouache in Watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition





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And I don't want to quantify my gratitude, so I won't. But there is a reason why I am constantly talking about you and there is a reason for the expression "last but not least, above all I would like to thank..."; and there is a reason I have dedicated this thesis to her: Thank you, Mamu. No further expression is needed. Thank you for everything. We romanticise our mothers' sacrifices too much, I know this—but I promise you, I will make you proud even if I have to spend the rest of my life trying to do so.





Page xiii: *red 1*; Gouache on Watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition.

Page xiv: *red 2*; Gouache on Watercolour paper; not shown in the exhibition.

Prologue

Somewhere in the Alps, Late February, 2023

Today it is quiet. Like all days here. Exhaustion takes a hold my body, but the sun rises behind curtains of mountains and clouds. Our skies are grey today and the slopes are white with snow. Precarious times, we walk towards agony like it's something to be considered. In the night, I look out to the sky, a light emanates behind the mountains. I have always wanted to be a poet.

Grey, green fragments of memories rush through my sinews—a life spent in thought, in the tall green blades of my family home, flowers that smell like the sweetest perfume only bloom in the night.

Right now, far away from my childhood, the February sun warms my back, these precious rays enter through the large windows, it's like moss forms on me. I have a different life now than I did a few years ago, but it is the same face I see in the mirror. I age a little, a little slower some years, a little faster the others. Poets and their analogies.

I become analogous to polaroid photos stored in drawers. Archives of files and narratives, how do I sort through my body?

Where is the meeting point between my different selves? Do I dare disturb the universe?¹

I think I will throw myself a retrospective.

¹T.S. Eliot, "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock," *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, June 1915, 130–135.

You and I are walking through a slightly steep pathway together. I haven't had much to eat, neither have you. The steepness gets to us, we both need to sit down and relax for a bit. "I am hungry," I admit. Then so do you. Yet your hunger remains yours and mine remains mine. We sit down together to rest, but the way in which you fold your body differs from mine. There is a break between you and me; the break of a body, of an existence. Do we even need to navigate this? Then, after the walk and a few days later, you contact me. You want to come see me in my apartment. I ask you to bring something sweet to eat. There are hangers everywhere in my little dilapidated space, I don't know why. You, of course, have to comment on it immediately. I mutter something about Louise Bourgeois. You nod, "show me your work" you ask. I am a boisterous person by nature, but shy and insecure about my work. "Is everything about you?" you say, not even unkindly. But it just gets me thinking, and it makes me panic.

There is something I really want to say though. Really, really want to say—I am viewing this thesis or book as a bucket, I am trying to carry these words that I am pouring into you and I need a container for that. I am creating this container, bear with me.

I am creating a piece-to-piece-co-dependent exhibition by working with memory, feminism, invisible work, gratitude, gifts from friends, textile, journal entries, logbooks, poetry, painting, prose writing, stories and narratives from communities, friends, and lovers. Centring myself in a partially sincere and partially ironic way, my work is a play on the concept of a retrospective; and therefore my work is entitled: Retrospective to the I. Through the combination of my art and my thesis, this project explores, if not answers, the questions: Who has gotten to be the I? How do we understand the I in relation to the tapestries of stories and narratives we

encompass? And can there be a demarcation between the multitudinous and the personal?

There are images scattered across the book; those images are of my work that add to the Retrospective nature of my work: further descriptions will be appropriately labelled.

I hold all these words together through the framework of care and community. This book is a conceptual piece of work in itself in which I look at the writing process as an undetachable part of the exploration of the *I*. This thesis consists of four chapters. Every chapter includes a note that serves as a prologue before its proper beginning to clarify any confusing or novel structures that may be introduced.

The I is a kaleidoscopic being. This thesis is a composite being. I have tried to create coherence, but I cannot guarantee it; simply because the subject of my work is the I, and how do we go about describing or talking about the I without, at least, wetting our toes in complexity. This work of mine comes to you through an experiment. It is not a novel experiment, it has been done before—to combine the personal and the theoretical together, is like the rain and the spring—

nevertheless, I am trying to wreck something in me. The different styles are a promise of a prism.

Structurally

it may be a bit confusing at times; however like a novel or story, the questions posed in the text are usually answered, it just requires the plot to unfold, hmm so please let it; like a mango not quite ripe, I am still offering you this fruit to cherish.

So let us look back at the I together; like any other retrospective exhibition, it is curated—these pages become the white cube, the things I choose to honour and write about do not exclude the existence of other illuminating concepts relating to the I. But I am one curator, and this is one exhibition.

Chapter One

one wild life

Part I: I confess, I am the I in my poems Part II: The Room and Power Part III: Poetic Inquiry Part IV: Essay figurines

The things I want to say have been said before, by so many people in so many beautiful ways. I want to say we are all available to each other by the simple grace of reality. Do I need to say more when Mary Oliver's words exist:

"Do you think there is anything not attached by its unbreakable cord to everything else?"²

"...Tell me, what is it you plan to do//With your one wild and precious life?"³

Why this title?

one wild and precious life are the final words in Mary Oliver's poem "The Summer's Day." It is often taken out of context and used as a "motivational" quote, corresponding to productivity culture and doing something quote end-quote valuable with your life. However, Oliver poses the question in a different way. Her poem is not about doing, doing, doing but rather being, and observing. It is one's individual choice to do what they will with their one wild and precious life, but it would be a shame if we missed our own lives because we were too busy trying to make something grand of it.

one wild life delves into poetry. This chapter not only consists of my poems, but also serves as an investigative effort into archiving the process and the embodied praxises that go behind writing. I also look at female subjectivity, feminist objectivity and subjectivity of the self at large through situational knowledge systems and power discourse, and introduce the concept of the Ātman (universal Self in Sanskrit), in an attempt to find the body in a non-Eurocentric matrix. This chapter also includes snippets of conversations I have had with friends about poetry.

Additionally, this chapter discusses confessional poetry and poetry about the self. My poetry, the conversations, the theoretical framework intertwine with each other to celebrate the verse and the act of reading, writing, and listening to poetry. I combine all these elements in my discursive essay (see Part IV: Essay figurines).

² Mary Oliver, "Upstream," in Upstream: Selected Essays (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 5.

³ Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day," in *New and Selected Poems: Volume One* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 94.

Page 9: *Lift*; Gouache in Watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition

Page 10: *This warm winter day;* Gouache in Watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition





Part I: I confess, I am the I in my poems

Journal: 11th March 2023

Poetry from the Greek poiesis: making, and what or how do you make? I wonder this today as I contemplate deeply about the empty parts in my life, the ones that aren't filled, the ones that are silent, the things without words.

In the midst of all this quantum entanglement emerges this: what is emptiness as a phenomenon in a universe that's built on the idea of codependence, contingent based on contingent, the parts forming the whole, the whole holding the parts. If everything relies on everything to exist, then is there actual individual substance? Or is it, as David Foster Wallace said...all water?⁴ i.e. are our realities shared somehow? I talk about ontological realities and situated knowledges in this chapter and also in further chapters; but to surmise, I believe that although we are co-dependent on each other and we owe each other community and care, the way we experience reality differs based on our varying identities and situations. Therefore, the Self is a difficult thing to boil down into one singular definition. However, one thing is true for all humans: death.

Our imaginations of what happens post-death depend on our religious beliefs (or lack thereof). These imaginations also hinge on one's behaviour in life. For example, many seek a heaven and different doctrines attribute different ways through which a person could reach it, but there are also many who seek oneness with the universe: Moksha which is true liberation from the cycle of birth and death; a concept in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. The contradictory nature of

⁴ David Foster Wallace, "This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life," Kenyon Commencement Address, April 14, 2009.

Moksha is that it both encompasses everything and nothing, the whole and complete emptiness. Oneness with the universe is to eliminate yourself completely, but it is also to become it all. I won't talk about Moksha more thoroughly, but I do talk about the Ātman—which relates to Moksha.

Ātman is often translated as the soul, in its complexity it contains other definitions and meanings as well. It is better described as the higher Self. The Self that relates to the Universe, the Self that is contained within all beings.

I am not a religious person but the metaphor draws me in—the arbitrary nature of all definitions of the I, the varying demarcations of the body and mind, of the Self and of others, emptiness and wholeness: I am, I am, I am, I am.⁵

On a far more micro level, my relationship to myself is also complex, like for all of us I assume. This is my selfish reason for writing this thesis. That being said, this retrospective that I am throwing myself is not necessarily a result of confidence in my work or who I am, but rather the opposite. Through many reckonings, I have had to believe in an I that is higher than just what I can perceive to be contained in my body. Because if not, I would either implode or explode. It is a dangerous thing to live for other people, but perhaps there is a power and solace in trying to understand the self as something more than the demarcated individual.

Let me arrive at my point: in 2019, I found myself in a rather trepidatious and precarious situation, I was coming undone at the seams rapidly. I felt like an alienated being constantly drowning in a great uncertain sea. There are a few people who helped to keep me afloat, I am eternally thankful. This community and love is a privilege that, unfortunately, not everyone has.

Beyond that, there was something else that brought me back to quieter rivers; then, eventually, after years, to dry land. Writing.

I wrote extensively that year: about thirty poems, two journals, four short stories.⁶ It was all I could do; I engaged myself and I engaged with myself. I wrote to myself, I wrote letters to other people that I never sent. I tried to communicate with the saner person that I had to believe still lived inside of me. I am not claiming that I knew what I was doing, that

⁵ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London: Heinemann, 1969).

⁶ "Do you miss me?" in Chapter Two is one of those short stories.

I knew I was inquiring with myself, with my many selves but the process became that anyway.

And this is exactly why I am connecting poetry to the self in this chapter. This may not be an obvious thread for most people; but in my one wild and precious life, writing and poetry is a thread that cannot be untied from the thread of my existence.

It is a romantic and naïve notion-but I am romantic and naïve.

What follows in the next few pages are three poems I wrote in 2019.

January 2019

Unhad and Had

such pain over nothing.

do you remember mangoes in the heat, like satiated beasts, our bodies moving forward, ever so gently with the sweetness of a childhood never had, do you look for happiness in your untouched body, in your unbroken soul, do you see, across the distance of your floating limbs, the fleeting summerbutterflies and dandelions in sky high grass, why the unkindness? the ruckus of tiny spider crawling on your unswept floor-I remember us in the rain, one foot at a time, one finger at a time, what was time? what was darkness but the soft chirps of grasshoppers, but the soft spread of the moonthere was no darkness in this unhad childhood, only ripe mangoes cruising across chins,

such pain over nothing.

do you recall the afternoon, when we lay under the winter sun, Vienna- warm with joy, the sun is a diligent beast. I remember it as clear as a Beijing day, my hands were spread across my chest, I counted my steady beats, and time never moved. what was time? such softness, the sun is a sweet worker, it takes no overpay, it only wants validation.

here sun, this is your validation.

such pain over nothing.

do you resent who you are now, keep it all drawn,

14 — one wild life

whisper to the Danube, ask her to swallow you whole, oh Danube, hold me- lull me into sleep, take me to a place with mangoes, to a place where I can ask "what is time?" to a place where loneliness turns into sunlight and tears into wineto a had childhood, the first time I saw a dead baby bird, the scent of my favourite flowers, they only bloom in the night the rain gushed over us one foot at a time, one finger at a time, what was time?

March 2019

one day I will bite through this orange as swiftly as a hawk would,

citrus soaked talons cool in the sky, stained; strong beak cutting through the wind.

it's futile to find form when bodies live outside bodies

-so high-

this existence augmented free from allocation,

I bit in, bit in without presuppositions bit in, bit in, tasted tang

the sun is mine to swallow, the air is mine to follow this body outside bodies, only mine to define only mine, only mine.

> Oh to be a queen, to be a king. free to live outside bodies as bodies become meaningless - high above

16 — one wild life

June 2019

turning and turning, a livestream of widening gyres, buttered up, thick spaces, knifed through atoms; enter I, widening gyre, enter I, turning and turning, until I cannot hold the growth in me, any longer.

A growth, dormant for a year, a few months, a week, turning, and turning, the holding unholds, the centre falls.

still, I wait for the second-coming of spring, as perplexed eyes glaze over me.

I confess, I am the I in my poems - 17

First person poetry does not mean that the poet is talking about themselves. The first person can be a persona, the I can be fictionalised or the poem could be fiction, the poet could be pretending to be someone else, or writing from someone else's point of view. Other poets are better than me in that regard (and in many other ways). I have to confess

I am the I in my poems.

I want to return to the Atman. But before I do so, I want to preface with a disclaimer. I am trying to understand the Ātman through a philosophical and reflexive outlook, and see merit in its descriptions as sincere and thorough non-Western philosophy. However, I understand that the doctrine is still religious. I do not wish to delve into religiosity or into the reality or irreality of different conception myths. I am not trying to preach for its importance or look at Hinduism like an apologist.⁷ I am not using religion to explore the Self, I am using complex philosophy that has been an integral part of my culture and cultural upbringing to do so. That is apt, given the T exploratory nature of my thesis. I am also being purposeful in describing concepts related to the Atman without additional external texts such as sources or references, as I do not want to indulge in the religious, neither the orientalist-mostly two options offered to me in my research. I also do not claim to have surmised the concept of Atman, I am only focusing on its rudimentary understanding to provide another lens with which one can look at the Self. I also want to say that although I am talking about non-western philosophy, and trying to deconstruct many western academic patterns, I fully recognise that I am still enacting it by talking about the Atman in the way I do below. I recognise that I am writing for a certain audience (see Annex).

Anyway,

The Ātman is the universal Self. The Self with a capital S. You can call it a soul, spirit is also acceptable but it may be a bit reductive. It is the unchanging consciousness or essence that a living organism has. It is not the Ahamkara (ego) which is the self that can change, the 'I-ness' of the Ahamkara is different to the Self of the Ātman.

There are differing philosophical understandings of the Ātman. Some subscribe to duality, and some subscribe to non-duality. Duality is the concept that the Ātman is different from Brahman—the ultimate reality, encompassing the universe and beyond. That there is a clear demarkation between our Ātman and the Brahman.

Non-duality is the concept that the Ātman and Brahman are intrinsically linked, that there is no differentiation between the immovable force that is the ultimate reality and the immovable force that is the Self.

⁷ Apologists look to defend religion through discourse and argumentation, often trying to make loosely scientific argumentation for said religion.

Ultimately, the Ātman is the inner Self that is unchanging and immortal, it is the realised truth. However, only few can tap into it.

Some dualists believe that one can achieve non-duality with Brahman, that the possibility exists, while other dualists believe that non-duality cannot be achieved at all.

Depending on the standpoint, the Atman could mean

the Witness (Sakshi),	
the consciousness,	the immortal essence,
part of a whole,	the whole,
a part of material reality,	beyond material reality.

As an irreligious person, my conception is: from the universe, of the universe, and to the universe. And I engage with this concept through poetry, arts; through spending time alone and spending time with friends. This metaphysical ontological need to understand the nature of reality, time, existence is something that a lot of people can relate to. Through complexity

> reaching beyond boxes of theories, is an unwavering thing- a witness to consciousness in itself, somethings you think are too lofty until you see the ant climb up a leaf or lend a boy a warm scarf.

My poetry or the act of writing poetry itself (or making any kind of art for that matter) is through another I, an I that is more accessible. But the reality is, I am trying to access the Åtman, whether consciously or not. Returning back to emptiness and Moksha—Moksha as a state of everythingness and emptiness, the Åtman becoming one with the universe—it is exactly this dissonance between the whole and nothing that I try to straddle in my art and writing, I also try to work with the emptiness that lives inside of me and create something. Since I am not using emptiness or nothingness as scientific terms here, I am using it as an allegory for a feeling. But that feeling exists, emptiness exists as a tangible material. We all try to work with that in whatever way we can; including through shared discourses, shared experiences, shared situated positionalities, and individual internal worlds. I return to this soon in this chapter and also in chapter two.

Mary Oliver ends her essay, "Upstream," with the words "Attention is the beginning of devotion."⁸—and it is this attention that leads to devotion that lets poetry find a way to exist. The attention could be turned outward, or inward, but it is this inquisitive nature, and the act of feeling your feelings, attention, and observation that allows you to face the blank page. Allowing yourself to see writing or drawing, for example, as a deliberate effort into the kind act of attention, is a habit that requires time, patience, and above all curiosity. With what *gaze* do we look at the confessional form? The lens of space

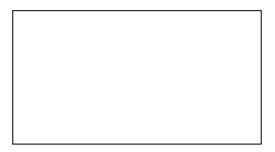
the observatory I

I sing the body electric9—

⁸ Oliver, "Upstream," 8.

⁹ Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric," in *Leaves of Grass*, 4th ed. (New York: William E. Chapin, 1867), 98–107.

Conjoining poetry, attention, and the Ātman, I am trying to imagine a room now.



Part II: The Room and Power

This room is created by the writer inside of me, I have always wanted to be a poet,¹⁰ and therefore I attempt to be even when I am not trying. The room is a construct of my fascination with language.

Through it, I can consider subjectivity, more so social constructivism, and how as a female-bodied individual, my perception of space is in constant negotiation with my perceived gender, amongst other factors.

Space is a largely discussed issue within feminist theory.

Is it inevitable then that we fit into the shape that others make us, like social constructivists could argue for—things can change but for that we have to change social constructs or we have to be in constant negotiation and renegotiation about it—Kuhn's paradigm shifts,¹¹ Foucault's discourse on power:¹² there is systematic bias in this world, that bias is engrained on us, like a nail being hit over and over again, we become used to the idea of living within our created constructs or constructs created for us. But is this fatalistic? Not necessarily, things can change because things have changed and because things look different elsewhere in time or space or time and space. According to social constructivists, objective and universal reality does not exist, we are in constant negotiation to form different selves, sometimes they oppose each other.

April 202013

for all the talk of Foucault, i have never met a man who loved to sin as much as I did. And one day-I might revisit these gates, a time before mankind was taken away, the word man is a matter of power discourse

¹⁰ see prologue

¹¹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹² Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," Critical Inquiry 8, no. 4 (1982): 777–95.

¹³ my own poem, first published at https://www.instagram.com/p/B_gJSLT1NIk

the word language is a matter of controversy.

there's an easy way out of this, become someone who is loved in equal party, always become someone for whom emotions don't st-st-stutter. become someone for whom love is a given, and kindness is not pity.

but It is difficult to become someone you will never be.

Maybe next time I'll write a poem that makes sense.

I agree with social constructivism to an extent. But then what is the problem? I find that power is negotiable but not always. There may or may not be an objective truth, but it is often difficult to negotiate certain identities of mine, maybe I don't mean the things that are deep down, maybe I just mean things like my brownness, for example. Of course, in a space where being brown is the norm, I am not an Other because of that; however, in the context of the world, especially regarding power and imperialism, there is a certain degree of otherness that cannot be negotiated. I am choosing to view subjectivity through the means of power. To me, power is a matter of identity. Who we are is complex, but the results are often informed by the structures we are born within.

My status as someone who is relatively privileged in Nepal (relative in relation to caste, access, class) is something that is in renegotiation with the power structures, here, in Vienna—but at the same time, my identities result in having access to certain things like material gains and education and also to me rolling my eyes at boys at parties who want to talk to me about the capital T truth and Kant. Similarly, I can't always and will never be able to gain access to certain things completely or at all. My identity and my reality are socially constructed in the sense that the power and construction of it can be subject to extraneous interaction, but to what extent? I may face a relatively smaller risk of getting catcalled in Vienna than in other parts of the world, but to what extent? It has still happened to me multiple times, I don't go home after and read the statistics and go "Ah, at least Vienna is safer for women than xyz"¹⁴ I go home and seethe or cry or forget about it, depending on my mood, and yes the mood may be subject to some negotiation but also

to what extent?

I have a chronic illness, this illness is not negotiable—in my reality, this is an objective truth. For the past 19 years, I have been dependent on exogenous steroid replacement to mimic the cortisol production of a functioning adrenal gland. Mine does not function; this entails that I have to take pills twice a day, every day, for the rest of my life. At the age of ten, I was diagnosed with primary adrenal insufficiency (PAI) or Addison's disease, a rare disease in which the adrenal gland produces insufficient amounts of cortisol and aldosterone. My diagnosis came after a prolonged process of many doctor visits and misdiagnoses. This is a familiar journey that many people with Addison's and other uncommon illnesses have to take because of the rarity of the disease(s)¹⁵. This is not to say that I am beholden on jus t my meds, but also on doctors, the quality and the pricing of healthcare, and global supply-chain. There is only so much I can do about these realities. However, this also means that I experience the world slightly differently than my other able-bodied peers, and thus have different encounters with different institutions-like with Pharma. Without going too much into objectivity in science (see Kuhn,¹⁶ see Latour,¹⁷ see Harding¹⁸), I tend to agree with Haraway's situated knowledges.19

¹⁴ Austria ranked the 5th safest country in the world according to the 2022 Global Peace Index. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2022: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*, June 2022, http://visionofhumanity.org/resources.

¹⁵ Andreas Barthel et al., "An Update on Addison's Disease," *Experimental and Clinical Endocrinology & Diabetes* 127, no. 2/3 (2019): 165–75.

¹⁶ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹⁷ Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity?'," *Centennial Review* 36, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 437–70.

¹⁹ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575–599.

"Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object."²⁰

The object and subject are entangled. I am the subject, sometimes the object; I navigate the world through my position. I come back to this in Chapter Two but briefly, I want to say that social realities cannot be ignored, especially in how they affect individuals who have to navigate these realities. Race, gender, class are deeply attached to the I, it is inescapable. At least, without actively and collectively trying to change and break systems. I am a making of my own reality; my body that needs an external adrenal gland to live; my bags that get checked in that one Billa all the time (I avoid it now).

I create a room

But a room is also constructed for me.

When situating yourself in a poem, you are acknowledging the entanglement of the subject and object, you are acknowledging that you are speaking from your situation and context.

I want to harken back to the concept of confessionalism: what can we confess to and how? Poetry is an ancient tradition. It is older than the written word.²¹

With this, I want to now talk about confessional poetry. Confessional poetry is a movement that arose in the United States in the late 1950s. I would argue that the name most linked with the movement is Sylvia Plath. There are many criticisms surrounding the movement, even feminist critiques: reduction of the world to the 'T being one.

Often considered to be a womanly activity, these 'I' poems are seen through a different lens than the 'I' poems of the beat generation. Of course, there were many female poets in the beat generation too,²² however the big names have been male: Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg for example; as were there male confessional poets.

²⁰ Ibid., 583.

²¹ Margaret H. Beissinger, "Oral poetry," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 978–81.

²² Brenda Knight, ed., Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1996).

The difference is apparently simple; beat poets wrote poetry that was about 'bigger, larger' issues, like anti-conformism or anti-war; confessional poets wrote about their own personal lives. But, as the second-wave feminist phrase goes, the personal is political.²³

I repeat, even though confessional poetry is not necessarily a gendered movement, it is often associated with women. Whenever my parents have a party at home, the men sit together and talk about politics; the women sit together and talk about their families or their lives.

As historian Gerda Lerner wrote, "the male and the female poet live in a gendered society, that is, one in which the societal definitions of behaviour and expectations appropriate to the sexes are embedded in every institution of society."²⁴

I cannot simply dismiss confessional poetry as an egotistical and reductive methodology of expression. I even reject the categorisation of confessionalism as an exclusive movement that happened in the United States in the 50s and 60s. Of course, minorities (in terms of power, not numbers) have been excluded from being the I for so long, but I too have a body and this body too occupies this world and navigates this world in whatever way it can (also see Chapter Two).

I am not static. Here are two poems, written a decade apart. I really dislike the poem I wrote when I was 18. I think it is pretentious, without any maturity. However, I recognise I was still growing as a person and writer; I have included it here to illustrate not necessarily my growth as a writer (which some may disagree with regardless) but the difference between the poems at large. I am not static.

²³ Popularised by Carol Hanisch in her 1969 essay "The Personal is Political," although she states that she did not invent the phrase.

²⁴ Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 168.

A Poem I wrote a month before I turned 19:25

Will you run across your well-kept garden Trampling your beloved red roses, Holding up your clean skirt and your clean hem, When you see me, dressed in white, crying ? (Oh, my outstretched arms are always waiting impatiently) And will you hold my hand in the dark, While both of us try to make our way, Across the sordid, musky tunnel? Crying when we realise that the light at the end is a sixteen year old boy, Skinny and wary of any emotions, (All bones and nerves and stares) Curled up in a ball, shining a torch that only mildly serves its purpose, But it does so with pride and dignity Like a funeral pyre in the monsoon. Will you sit down with me in the dark, and say my name 'Malashree' over and over again? Till it rolls off your tongue like the avalanche that buried all. Including the wooden housed town, Where lived she, the sad little girl who cried on sunny days but was now cold No amount of coal or wood or fire could keep her warm; freezing at thirteen and tired with it all, she braided her brittle hair meticulously then one grim morning she killed herself. Do you believe that she is warm now on her death, burning; even if it the rain pours? And should we smoke weed to fly higher? We could pretend to be phoenixes, Fluttering our wings, instead of lashes,

²⁵ This entry can be found in my blog https://kafkaesquedreams.tumblr.com, I unfortunately do not have access to it anymore.

(Like humans in love or in pain do)

We could fly across a timeless space, In a dimension where chaos is an important physical law. Laugh, I am obviously describing our world, But how is it then, we are not gods no, not even close Only mortals, who still age Do we understand anything? Do we understand love and pain and joy and laughter and lust and ageing? Probably not.

Let us leave then, you and I Out of the darkness and Into the light, wherever that may be. Perhaps, we'll misinterpret headlights, For God's atomic bomb. Then run over by the train, We'll die.

The Room and Power — 29

A Poem I wrote a week before I turned 29:

A New Year Birthday Treat

Beautiful, moments of dress up this gown looks different on me than it did two years ago.

Fireworks break apart in the sky, like I once did at bus stops

Now holier we holler, out of the window, lean and crane our bejewelled necks to see the noise. Play my music, all night long always been a speaker hog.

> Gotta have some follies. Or at the very least, Gotta mention some of them.

A New Year treat, birthday girl you son of a gun- you sordid little thing, vain one writing poetry for yourself, watch how the painting of you ages as well as you, well as poorly as you.

Another party poem, is it?

(I could've been a fantastical butterfly in a storybook but here I am, now a human surrounded mostly by people I know well.)

30 — one wild life

Watch,

Now watch the fireworks-Controversial things, not good for dogs your brother can't be too close to them, shut his ears your father does, that one time, at least.

Now watch, as your friends waltz and you waltz, and the radio counts down the seconds- and suddenly, you're too young to be old, but old enough to know good poison from bad. And you could have had children.-

> But you don't, don't worry, you have dresses and gowns and one must attend some parties some of the times, and watch. And be a part of the scene too. 29.

> > Journal: 15th March 2023

Who am I to be scared of the blank page? I cannot deny the tabula rasa, poetry is older than the written word-I do not need to be scared of the blank page.

The Room and Power — 31

Without the context of the dozens upon dozens upon dozens of poems I had written between 2012–2023, it becomes difficult to ascertain a trajectory of growth, or perhaps I should be using the word change. But that trajectory exists, and it is my past selves who were, of course, at one point, my present self that brought me here. I mean to say that we have to live with our past selves all the time, which makes moving on from one's mistakes or traumas difficult but not impossible. There is a certain grace and humility that is required to do so, I am not a mental health professional so I cannot speak of it in scientific terms but personally, writing saved my life, it helped me navigate myself and my world. Now I have moments where I crane my neck outside of windows; all smiles. Interestingly, I use the word sordid²⁶ in both poems, this wasn't intentional.

In his poem "Song of Myself," first published in 1855, Walt Whitman uses T more than 300 times (I stopped counting after a while). Of course, it is a very long poem and the T does not just represent him but humanity in general, but he could only speak from his standpoint, his vantage, his positionality. In verse 51, he wrote:

> Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)²⁷

It is exactly this plurality that we must accept not only within ourselves, but within each other. The subject and the object become a thing not of substance but of phenomena, there is a personal I, but how often does it bleed into narrative, into the communal, into kinship.

Ātman is the Universal Self.

Prakriti is the nature of the self, the one that observes cognitive reality.

Citta is the self that is responsible for mental process, the mind. I am in a constant state of growth and change, but there is something inside of me that remains constant, call it the soul,

²⁶ meaning dishonourable, dirty, immoral

²⁷ Walt Whitman, ["Song of Myself," originally untitled], in *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn: Privately Printed, 1855), 13–56.

Call it whatever you want, call it the immovable I, the Id, the spark inside of me, but I cannot leave it behind.

Anyway, I have tried to change often. I have tried to take up less space, much to every postcolonial, intersectional feminist's dismay, but I have failed to do so (the feminists, I am also one, tell me that that is good, that I should take up space).

It's exhausting sometimes.

But I keep returning to myself, what self? I don't know, don't ask, but the self I can't seem to escape—what self is that? Like waves arriving and departing, arriving and departing at the soft sands of the beaches, I too arrive and depart from myself often

but to different extents, and when I am not there by the sands, I am still the waves.

Oh,

It is all water.

Journal: 15th March 2023

It is 5 am, and I am awake. And I think of waves combing the sand, and I think of the lovesong of J Alfred Prufrock ("That is not what I meant at all"/ "Do I dare/ disturb the universe?"/ "No, I am not Prince Hamlet"/ "I have seen them riding seaward on the waves/ Combing the white hair of the waves blown back/ When the wind blows the water white and black./ have lingered in the chambers of the sea/By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown/Till human voices wake us, and we drown.")

and I think the only way I can exorcise demons is through poetry.

Part III: Poetic Inquiry

I want to include my friends now & also want to engage in the act of poetic inquiry. Poetic inquiry is an arts-based qualitative research framework or methodology in which varying data sets, for example interviews, personal experiences or even other poetry, are inquired upon through poetry. It is the act of writing poetry, or prose-poetry, based on data, whatever form that data may be in.²⁸ Poetic inquiry does not need to be based on the outside world, it can also be introspective and retrospective in manner, therefore the data can simply be yourself or what surrounds you. The debate, then, is if poetic inquiry is different from poetry itself. Is art-based research art?²⁹

I believe it is, I do no think it matters how or why the poem is written, poetry is poetry. Regardless, poetry in itself is not an easily definable phenomenon. Mary Oliver would write on her notebook while walking through the woods.³⁰ Her practice, here, was based on observation. This is also a form of poetic inquiry, inquiring upon the present and the things that surround you, while breaking away from conventional academic practices. It is an act of phenomenology.

As a means of delving into Mary Oliver's method of writing, I have created an artistic score for myself to follow. Hopefully it can also be helpful to the readers of this thesis.

Score:31

- 1) Take a notebook and a pen or pencil, stand up
- 2) Go outside if you can; if you can't stay where you are
- 3) Take a moment to observe your surroundings
- 4) Write based on observation while walking around

²⁸ Monica Prendergast, Carl Leggo, Pauline Sameshina, eds., *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009), xxi–xxiii.

²⁹ Ibid., xxv.

³⁰ Mary Oliver, "I got saved by the beauty of the world," interview by Krista Tippet, On Being with Krista Tippet, podcast, February 5, 2015.

³¹ instructions on how to create an artwork or composition

5) Do not attempt to do this in a setting that may be dangerous, for example in a traffic heavy place.

12th March 2023: Indoors

Indoor plants- and the Odyssey on the shelf, Unfinished paintings, one hung up of flowers in oil. A scrapbook life of wool and figurines of idols- this too with Russian dolls, unfolded laundry- take me to mirrors, its reflective properties-I am covered in pink, life has a way of happening, the cat will tell you that. Elsewhere, there are cars and also gardens.

I wrote the poem above while walking around in my flat in Vienna, following the score. I did not have the intention to write a complex poem or become entrapped with notions of writing a good poem, I just wanted to write—

1st April 2023: Outdoors

I wonder how and if shadows replicate something more innate, today it falls to my right On this sunny day, the tree stands uncoerced And little birds bloom like flowers. Pocket filled with lint, Insects introspect on their lovers Babies latch on and grow-Other things create shadows, and in their movements create life. Spring- truly a poet's vice. I wrote the poem above while walking around a park near my flat, it was an afternoon with a soft spring sun. When I followed the score indoors, a different set of information was available to me than when I followed it outdoors. Indoors, I felt like my observation field became smaller as I needed to focus on more minute details. While I also felt this way when writing outdoors, I also simultaneously became aware of the largeness of outdoors. I enjoyed experiencing and writing like this. I do write outside, often; but I am usually sitting or laying on the grass rather than walking around. I cannot say that I found it to be the most compatible with how I usually write, but I enjoyed stepping out of myself and will continue to do so.

A good friend and colleague of mine, Charlotte Bastam, was also kind enough to follow the score.

13th March 2023 By Charlotte Bastam

I see children running up and down a half pipe Most of them fail to reach the top one girl managed she is sliding down now on the other side slightly smaller children on the playground a boy called Albert, is almost tumbling into me, he can't be 2; big brown eyes look at me totally confused. I am walking over a bridge towards the sound of a saxophone, It's pleasant But I don't have a coin.

Following her writing in accordance to the score, I asked Charlotte to send me a voice note about where and how she wrote the piece, and how it compared to the way she usually wrote. "So I was taking these notes when I was leaving the U4 towards Stadtpark to cross my way to the Angewandte main building and there...yeah there was this children's playground and also this half pipe and just, like, a massive amount of children playing there *laughs* and umm I just took out my notebook and started to write down things I saw, I mean, like, I had something in mind. You know, I thought these children would make, like, you know, a nice start to write about but then I kind of didn't think so much about what I was writing but more like taking notes of things that were happening directly to me. And really just, like, looked up and then looked down again on my piece of paper to write it while I was making a few steps forwards and that's also how I then went on towards the bridge and just followed the music. Yeah, and it was a nice experience because it was a safe space, I felt a bit weird, you know, taking notes between these children but you know, no one really minded and *laughs* and so I yeah, it was just maybe an overall time of three minutes but it was very nice because I felt very aware of my surroundings and also of my senses because I had to follow more like noises because I was looking so much...not so much where I was going or planning where I was going because I was writing and also looking around that's how I followed, then, also the saxophone player and yeah, I think this is quite different to most ways I write. I mean like, I like to sit down outside and take notes what I see around me but I'm much more then already thinking about what I'm gonna write and how I'm gonna express myself and like, choosing words and also judging myself if I'm not really content with what comes out. It was nice because it was just this little exercise that felt quite freeing to me."

In return, I responded to this interview through a poem as well. This type of poetry in poetic inquiry is called 'found poetry' because the poem is found, so to speak, through other means—in this instance, the poem was found through Charlotte's transcript.

2nd April 2023

Cross Stadtpark, and find half metal pipe, half child it is like the world is a playground I take steps, steps with my feet and steps on my page, three minutes can fill ages, if you just listen and follow the sound- through a bridge, a saxophone rings follow it follow it, meet the man who plays it how freeing life could be.

The poems produced via the score function similarly to this particular piece of poetic inquiry, these poems focus on a writing that cherishes and values observation and response.

Interestingly, I think I write notes on my phone more often while walking around or standing rather than on my notebook. I am sure many poets and writers would not approve of this technological mediation.

I wrote this while walking through a busy street on my phone:

12th March 2023

forth, through the indescribable city architecture and it's so cold, I feel like a leafless tree.

I wanted to hear someone else's thoughts on poetry. I talked to my good friend and colleague Chloë Lalonde and discussed poetry with her.

Her thoughts on poetry were: poetry happens as opposed to her making it happen, when she sits down to write poetry, it doesn't really express in a way that aligns with her other artistic practices. "I like poetry accidentally a lot" she says.

When she says "the poetry happens," she means that the notes and observations she sometimes writes come out as verse; for example her notes on exhibitions are often poetic in nature, and she uses it to inquire and observe the setting, the pieces, and how she feels about the works and space. This happens even though she doesn't intend it to. The notes read "poetic," she says. However, when she actively sits down to write poetry, she often finds it loaded ("the idea of words...it's too loaded").

When she actively tries to write poetry, she finds that she seeks rhythm, and rhymes and puts a constructed effort into the craft which, to her, is detrimental to her work.

This is interesting to me, because I too often find that my poetry is best when I let the words guide me, when I play with language as an experimental tool rather than viewing words as a concrete meaning-tosymbol assigned value system.

However, for me the socially coded aspect of it is important, because the process of understanding symbols and creating meaning through it (semiotics) is also about perception and discourse, about situated knowledge.

I am not trying to suggest that Chloë's and mine understanding of poetry is drastically different, I am saying that both of us understand the loaded nature of language, the words that dissolve into emptiness, the emptiness and silence that also creates meaning: and we extrapolate and express in a way in which we can either circumnavigate these meanings or adhere to them; or sometimes, often, both.

It is not the writing or poetry, but rather the constructivist aspects of focusing on the rhythm or the rhymes that makes a lot of visual artists uncomfortable about language, especially when they seek abstraction. This is also what my friend meant, and I tend to agree.

I choose to live in the danger of being misunderstood because ironically, sometimes, I feel like in the nodes between one word of mine and the other, that may be misunderstood or understood by other people or other friends or lovers, lives a kind of despondent nature of mine—the one I could've been or may be to others.

This does not necessarily provide me with comfort, it is a sort of exercise in the "that is not what I mean to say at all"³² nature of it all.

Journal: 13th March 2023

I am wrecked with nerves, anxiety sweeps in. My bones go bzz bzz. I hope I can make it happen.

³² Eliot, "Prufrock." I come back to this in my final chapter.

Part IV: Essay figurines

January 2023

Weiter The water flows, like blue ignition oils And forests grow, as I grow bored out of my mind.

Friends escape me, and I escape time, can't always go looking for the thrill.

Can I be lonely again? Like hot air balloons that splatter the sky. Can I be lonely again? Like loose keys lost forever.

July 2019

This grief will build its own room a slow quiet, space- the giving is over the taking is done, it will lay statically; as it grows within itself, building more rooms,

an empty mansion with haunted years, rotten years, my grief is mine: I place no trust, no truth value to empty statements coming from other mouths, just words, empty syllables; disconnected conveyance.

my grief is mine to cultivate, mine to harvest. to feast on, no one else is welcome, large dining rooms, large dining tables

empty seats.

40 — one wild life

September 2020

I am sour, you see of all this biting down I have to do of my cherry pit

excuse the pace, the succulent grace

the same tired refrain, the never ending pain-

I can't confer with what I don't know but that's the way it goes.

June 2018

God

I feel it: the peacock inside me dancing barefoot on the kitchen tiles, my feet know these movements like how my palms have memorised the undoing of cheap warm wine, and how my elbows are architects always creating wallswe are a set of motor skills, after alla plethora of nerves held together by mediocre quirks.

however, in the middle of a winter June, you find yourself like a sweater taken out too soona juxtaposition not ready for anything new;

so where is your little god now, missy?, I wonder do you need a god- a taskmasterwhen your own hands are faster, oh peacock lady, you don't need some mistress in the clouds to end this,

you could

jump.

but then your elbows keep creating more room and you move your stuff from here to there you smoke one cigarette here and there.

And like a ragged doll limping in the wind

the peacock keeps pacing around the kitchen looking for anything but meaning;

you stare at your reflection on a coffee spoon till the pronouns within the metaphors dissipate like milk in tea.

and you become the damned poem, all muscle memory and instinct.

I won't jump.

May 2014

LONGING.

It is the longing of a fruit so sweet it burns in my mouth like the sun and thousand oranges collapsing on top of one another love, as we make -ourselvesas we make -each other- more bearable we forget, we are mere seedlings for trees to root out off. The blood red moon stands adamantly agape as the sky gives way to more longing. I long. I long for the red to bleed in my mouth as the heat of a thousand deserts melt me from within. I forgo sacrifice I am not a saint. I long. I long, sensuous longing. The joy is filling me.

After Barthes³³

Haraway	Female subjectivity viewed through feminist objectivity, what does this exactly mean?—That we must strive towards understanding that does not
Suvedi	forsake those of us, most of us, who are bound to numerous identities. We are placed in different situations and see different things, and experience different things—for example, your body folds and mine folds differently, maybe sometimes it's about love, maybe sometimes about violence. Other times, we may just be sitting across each other.
Llanding 8r	What does feminism have to do with the <i>P</i> ?
Harding & Haraway	Well what doesn't it? Do you think of yourself as objective? Well, if you value it, then you must get rid of
Tataway	the conception that the capital T truth can be derived
	through neutral stand-points. There is no neutral be-
	ginning, the social world we inhabit is not neutral, it is
	unfair. Structures impose on us and are imposed on us.
Harding	If we place women at the forefront of our research, we
8	can strive towards a doctrine of objectivity. But it must
	be a constant striving.
Suvedi	Not just women, but all voices that are usually unheard.
Harding	There is bias in science; and it is often a male-centric
Harding &	bias, and white, and euro-centric bias. Biases about
Haraway	class, caste, disability must also be considered.
-	Does that mean gender is a reality? It depends on what
Butler	reality means. For Butler: gender is constructed, it is
	performative in its nature. However, she does not mean
	to say that individuals do not experience gender in any
	kind of way. We should be free to explore and realise
	our gender(s) and our orientations. We should be free

³³ I have taken inspiration from Barthes, specifically from "A Lover's Discourse." In the book, Barthes writes his text while showing his citations and references like I have done here. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

	to understand ourselves outside of prescriptivist no- tions.
Ahmed	What is it then to encompass yourself fully? Do we always have to push ourselves to be the happiest? Can we become okay with sometimes being the <i>killjoy</i> ? It takes work and care to perform happiness in this way. Speaking of social constructivism—so our desire to appear happy and to be happy for the other person. To
Suvedi	keep the peace, so to speak. While care and community are important to the <i>I</i> and this is what my thesis posits;
Puig de la	the burden of care-work and performative happiness is
Bellacasa	often gendered and racialised.
	Therefore, the idea of care must also be in constant interrogation, just like the idea of objectivity. Through our situated knowledges it is that we understand and perceive things, denying that displaces responsibilities of care unequally.
Suvedi	I trace the I within these discourses of the beingso many different definitions of being, I am but someone trying to place myself in the matrix. Where the \bar{A} tman is, it is aching to feel one with everything. But this body of mine loves too much the comforts of the human world, like community and also like solitude being such things. How many people live in accordance to value systems that don't align to mine? <i>Caring</i> and valuing other people does not imply abun-
Puig de la	dance or boundlessness. Knowledge systems are in
Bellacasa	shift, as they grow. Or rather, that's how they should function.
(Et al)	Without the constraints of constantly challenging, of anger, frustration, sadness, retreat; there would be no shifts, no changing of social structures. Caring does not mean blind complacency. The <i>I</i> in my works are a result of many histories, and narratives, and people—sometimes they arrive from outside of myself, but sometimes from inside of myself. I would not be able to tap into that change without caring to demarcate myself from others. The thing

Mole & Puig de la Bellacasa	about care is that it is not held in its materiality, as it is in its interventions—in its necessity to define and redefine. The <i>I</i> becomes a function of that constant negotiation
Oliver	too. There are landscapes that provide us with matrixes for care and pluralism. We do not always traverse too far, or too hard; neither do we extend olive branches to
Suvedi	all those who may want nothing to do with us. We can realise that we are more than just selfish prod- ucts, and instead are consequences of subjectivity, space, situatedness, community, through many ways. Making art is one of them. Poetry is one of them. Not
	all art and poetry encompasses any such intersectional and interconnected values, of course.

But

it

could be a great conduit.

Essay figurines — 45

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Chapter Two

creatures in rich cities

Part I: The Needle Part II: Conversation Part III: Do you miss me? Part IV: Reflections Part V: creatures in rich cities: A commentary

Notes on creatures in rich cities

All things are connected in some way or the other, it is difficult to then reduce a historical event to its locality and temporality. I have been tying knots together. What is the history of thread?

* * *

The second chapter, *creatures in rich cities*, asks the question: what is art history? This chapter focuses on the mediums I use most in my artistic practice and will try to orientate these mediums in geographical, temporal, and sociological histories. For this, I look at the medium as an ontological phenomenon. I specifically look at the history of the needle, and textile—I orient these histories in a non-linear context.

Histories like these will be briefly investigated upon, but the core of this chapter is to dismantle this understanding of the objects existing as mere unliving things. While this chapter also rudimentarily discusses substance theory, it will also look at idol and object worshipping in Hinduism, to create a metaphorical parallel between my needle and the statuette of the goddess. This chapter also further delves into subject-object discourse. The goal is to explore differing understanding of objects, and also to challenge the hegemonic and incorrect linear notion that Eurocentric Art Historians have; this, of course, through extrapolation and metaphor. This will also be done through the inclusion of two short stories (Part I and Part III) that I have and had written, and will try to understand materiality as encoded in our beings.

Page 51: खेर/What a waste; embroidery in tulle; shown in the exhibition

Page 52: खेर/What a waste; embroidery in tulle; shown in the exhibition

Symbols become meanings—descriptors to denote abstract feelings and descriptors to loss and death.





Part I: The Needle

It was my turn to inherit the needle. This was my moment to untangle myself from grief: just for a moment I needed to focus my energy, not on the impending death of my mother, but on the object. Her frail hands looked like parchment paper. Crumpled and brown—tiny little things.

My mother was so large, a woman of so many qualities. Boisterous, temperamental, fiercely intelligent, hesitant to be proven wrong. I found myself imitating her in my early 20s.

She preferred her lipstick a natural hue. Now, I wear a brighter shade of red but I remember at 22, I wore her shirt and a cheaper dupe for her slightly higher priced lipstick. I felt so beautiful, I did not mind imitating, I did not mind being a shadow. I knew my turn would come.

And now, at 40, I wear a bright red lipstick. The men of the family talk "how can she wear this shade to her mother's deathbed?"

They are fools. My mother lays on her pink pillow, she looks up to me and smiles "my daughter is beautiful," she mumbles. Her hands are like parchment paper, I hold on to them. Once upon a time, I was a six year old girl on her lap and now the roles are reversed. We take our time to grow, yet it seems like we change our rolls so quickly.

Time rushes through us. We are not static, definitely. But our memories can make it seem like we are.

I help my mother up now, adjust the pillow so she can lay sitting up. "That drawer, Nani."

I open the drawer she points towards. I am shaking, I need to put grief aside but to do so is like navigating a tiny boat in a turbulent sea.

"I love you," I say and reach out for the tiny wooden box, handcrafted by my grandmother. "Open it," her little voice breaks. This is my moment and I take it.

I breathe in

and then I open the box: there it is, the needle.

* * *

Something lurks in corners, always: sneering, open mouthed men with their teeth ready and bare. These are some of the men of my family; others try very hard not to be like them but still enjoy maintaining their brotherhood. I have found a partner in a man too. He is gentle, soft; he doesn't hang around by corners with his teeth ready to attack but occasionally I have found him arm in arm with a man who would snide me for wearing my lipstick.

By the pricking of my thumbs....

I have pricked myself on this needle, accidentally perhaps or perhaps it was meant to be.

By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.³⁴ My mother smiles when she sees a tiny drop of blood flow out, a little sarcastically, like she expected this. I press a tissue to my thumb, "it's not a big deal but I wonder how I did this so quickly? I have only gotten my hands on this needle."

"It happens more often than you think."My mother, licks her pointer finger gently and with it smudges a little bit of her kohl³⁵ that my aunt had applied on her, on this dying woman—of course at my mother's request. She transfers a hint of the blackness on my cheek.

"कसैको नजर नलागोस्।" —

No gaze shall reach you: often implying not just the lingering eyes of those who wish evil on you but also the ones who gaze at you longingly, ogling. These people with their envy and jealousy waded off by the black mark of kohl, kajal, whatever you call it in your native tongue.

I smile at my mother, the bleeding stops. She looks at me, I look at her. I pine to be a child in her arms again.

Now the moment for putting grief aside is over.

I burst out in tears. My uncles had told me not to cry in front of a dying woman. I do not care what they have to say, I was raised by a woman whose emotions were always colourful and loud.

She cries too.

"I'll miss you," I say.

"I'll miss you too," she responds.

"I'll keep the needle safe."

³⁴ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 4, Scene 1.

³⁵ A traditional charcoal based makeup product worn as eyeliner in South Asia, Middle East, Western Africa, Horn of Africa, and the Caucasus region.

"I know you will."

This needle has been in our family for 120 years. A simple embroidery needle. A multipurpose needle. Sew a button, finish off a knitting, embroider a design—

only passed down from mother to daughter, or sometimes from aunt to niece-

sometimes even from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. A needle of matrilineal importance, and of some seclusive quality.

Our women define what *in the family* means.

But I must not be hindered by boxes, even the box of womanhood.

My mother passed away that night—I held on to the needle and cried. I did not sleep. Outside, I could hear some men laughing. In the morning they said, "act your age, death is natural."

I asked my aunt, my mother's sister-in-law, for the kohl. She gave it to me and said "do use it, too many of us are jealous of you now, too many eyes stare at you."

Later, I will embroider a flower with that needle. Right now, I carry it in my person always. I do not have my mother's confidence, these men are less scared of me, and as a result I am afraid of thieves. I hold on to it with my life.

* * *

I must not be hindered by boxes.

My 15 year old child came to me recently and said that 'girl' didn't really fit their frame. I had managed to mention this to my mother a week before she passed, some other women in my family said "give the needle to someone who is assured of their womanhood."

I rolled my eyes. I am not assured of anything, I do not have time to engage in such facades. I sat with my child and asked "do you want this needle when I die?"

"I don't want you to die."

"But I will."

They didn't say anything for a while but then exclaimed "You would be breaking away from tradition by giving it to me for I am not a girl, nor a boy."

I said, "I have been thinking a lot about gender lately. We can't really be sure that all the women who have had this needle inherited to them were as confident about their woman box, their womanhood either. We have just always assumed. And now my child, you are confident enough and feel safe enough with me to tell me your truth. I still grapple with it, but I will get over myself. This needle is yours when I die. No gaze shall reach you." I transferred a bit of my kohl to my child's cheek.

After the funeral rites and the people coming and going, there was silence. This was when mourning began, I sat on my mother's favourite chair, I embroidered a flower onto a white cloth.

Magic needle, the men called it—"how come we never get to hold it?"

"Oh, it's a woman's domain-the kitchen and the sewing." They sneered-

"Yes it is." I mocked them, I laughed at my cousin's face. The same cousin I keep away from my children. Wicked man. The same cousin who says "our grandmother could not have made the box, it's woodwork —women do not know how to do that."

It makes me giggle uncontrollably, and his face goes red. He doesn't know what I know, he doesn't know that I was a five year old girl who lingered by her grandmother—like a sunflower turned to the sun. I was there for the entire process, I saw her make the box from scratch.

My cousin has only once caught a glimpse of the finished product.

I laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh. And they say "this is a funeral home. Grow up. Stop laughing."

And then I cry and cry and cry. They cannot deal with my layers and layers of emotions. I can sew them together in one go.

How they create myths around this needle when they are the ones to inherit land and money. This needle is a needle is a needle. Magic because of its history, magic because of its seclusion. We make family, we make traditions.

My mother's name was Chahana. Desire, longing, wish.

They better lower their gazes.

Part II: Conversation

Is the Ātman present in the needle? If one's understanding of the Ātman is non-dualistic, then yes. This does not mean necessarily that the needle is a living creature, it does mean that everything is all an extension of one another. However, looking at the world through a dualistic lens also could mean this: gods and agents of gods exist in all forms and live in all forms and take all forms. The needle isn't the god, but what it contains could be god or akin to godlihood.

Another way to look at ontology is: Das Ding an sich, the thing-initself, opposed to the phenomenon.³⁶ The phenomenon is the thing as it appears to an observer, the thing-in-itself is what it is, outside of representation or observation.

However, I believe this is a disparate separation. The separation between the object and subject does not take into consideration philosophies such as institutional role, nor does it consider more paganistic views of collision and universal essence. A needle is a needle, but the needle featured in the story above holds a different meaning than any other needle that the characters in the story may encounter. The ontological importance of the needle is that it has been imbued with meaning and symbolic value; the men who feel slighted by the act of them being barred from inheriting an inexpensive needle could potentially just buy another needle and create a new mythos around it. But why would they do that?

The needle holds value specifically because it exists in a patriarchal context, where things like capital-inheritance is often patrilineal. Of course, a needle bought in anger and slight still holds symbolic value, but it does not nor can it ever hold the same value as the needle that's been passed down matrilineally for 120 years. Breaking away from symbolic and not symbolic systems is possible, but that does not erase the existence of these systems in the first place.

³⁶ Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, trans. Paul Carus (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1912).

I have heirlooms from my grandmothers, my aunts: sarees, bangles, shawls. These objects transcend materiality, material value: they become tangibilities of histories. When I wrap my grandaunt's saree around myself, her realities and mine coincide. In patriarchal societies, it is common for women to inherit things that are not quantitive or monetarily beneficial in its nature.

Enter positionality and situated knowledge again.

Journal: 22nd March 2023

I have been feeling like it's all one long day.

I would like to talk about two simple materials I use in my textile work a lot: the needle and the thread. The histories of these objects are not easy to track; one reason for this is that the objects that existed to create textile work may resemble its modern day counterparts but they may have looked different, may have been made from different materials, and may have been used differently. The question, then, becomes: what is a needle?

However, for the sake of my research, I am considering the needle, the crochet hook, and the thread not as the static, modern day objects that are now mass-produced but rather I am attempting to situate these objects in a historical context. The question transforms from *what is a needle?* to *how can we understand the needle?*

Let's start our journey with another question: "Who wore clothes first?" The answer is probably the subspecies of archaic humans; the Homo Erectus. Most likely the first to use fire, the first to drape fur of their hunts on their bodies for warmth.

The Neanderthals, however, created slightly more sophisticated clothes because they invented the scraper; stone tools that were used for hideworking and woodworking. Evidence also suggests that Nean-derthals could make string and weave.³⁷ They used plant fibres that were

³⁷ Bruce L. Hardy et al., "Impossible Neanderthals? Making string, throwing projectiles and catching small game during Marine Isotope Stage 4 (Abri du Maras, France)," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 82 (2013): 23–40.

twisted in an effort to create string and thread.³⁸ They were weaving, knotting, and looping.³⁹ Essentially how we knit and crochet and weave now, without, of course, modern day tools. This was happening 41,000–50,000 years ago.

The oldest needle to be ever found was made by our other ancestors; the little talked or known about Denisovans. This needle was found in a cave in Siberia. It is 50,000 years old and was made from the bone of a large bird that scientists have yet to identify.⁴⁰

Our ancestors did not wade through the days without care or thought, rather they created things, they created community, they foraged, they kept themselves and each other warm.

The needle was a revolution.⁴¹

This made me emotional. I think about Neanderthals weaving from thread that they patiently made themselves. I think about the Denisovans trying to thread a needle, like I have done so many times. It moves me in a way I cannot articulate. The contradictory understandings of early humans within the scientific community is fascinating to me.

The oldest needle found is 50,000 years old in a cave in Siberia and made by Denisovans.⁴² No, actually, the oldest needle found was from a cave in South Africa and is 100,000 years old and made by Early Modern Humans in the Middle Stone Ages.⁴³ The Neanderthals knew how to stay warm,⁴⁴ in fact they did not.⁴⁵

³⁸ Ibid., 27.

³⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁰ "World's oldest needle found in Siberian cave that stitches together human history," *The Siberian Times*, August 23, 2016.

⁴¹ Robin McKie, "Neanderthals: how needles and skins gave us the edge on our kissing cousins," *The Observer*, December 5, 2010.

⁴² Britta Irslinger, "The 'sewing needle' in Western Europe: Archaeological and linguistic data," in Usque ad radices: Indo-European studies in honour of Birgit Anette Olsen, eds. Bjarne Simmelkjær Sandgaard Hansen et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2017), 307–323.

⁴³ Lucinda Backwell, Francesco d'Errico, Lyn Wadley, "Middle Stone Age bone tools from the Howiesons Poort layers, Sibudu Cave, South Africa," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35, no. 6 (June 2008): 1566–1580.

⁴⁴ Hardy et al., "Impossible Neanderthals?"

⁴⁵ Ian Gilligan, "Neanderthal extinction and modern human behaviour: the role of climate change and clothing," *World Archaeology* 39, no. 4 (December 2007): 499–514.

These contradictions are a way to say: nuance, non-linearity. Many species of archaic humans and also early homo sapiens coexisted at the same time; some lived in geographical proximity, some did not. Our ancients created things, yes even things like art, in parallel, at different paces, at different times, differently, sometimes collaboratively but we have been sitting with each other in communities and sharing for a long, long time.

The needle was a great invention! I am reminded of Elizabeth Fisher's carrier bag theory of human evolution.⁴⁶ The container is the hero of that story, the vessel—so we could carry things, like berries and our kids, and roots we found.

"Essential to the procuring of all these foods is the container. The first cultural device was probably a recipient."⁴⁷

We needed to carry our infants who are so dependent on their mothers for so long,⁴⁸ their infancy a thing of fragility, their infancy is why we share our food and live in communities. We gather and we tell stories, and then we carry our children in slings. I can imagine neanderthals with their woven slings holding their babies close to their hearts.

We still imagine Man as the hunter, the woman waits. In our common mythos, early **man** threw spears and grunted, big strong men hunting big game, keeping the women and children safe, bringing food, keeping it all together.⁴⁹ We imagine the Man as the hero,⁵⁰ the *I* of the story. **The I**. He hunts, she gathers maybe a little. He stood up first. He stood up first in order to hunt, you see?

But that is just not true. We know now that gathering and foraging was mostly how we ate. While we were omnivorous, we were more reliant on a plant based diet:

"[E]volutionists are changing their minds. They are coming to realise that co-operation, mutual aid, and kindness have been

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Fisher, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Evolution," in *Woman's Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979), 56–61.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁹ Fisher, "From Man the Hunter to Woman the Gatherer," in *Woman's Creation*, 47–55.

⁵⁰ Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Women of Vision: Essays by Women Writing Science Fiction*, ed. Denise DuPont (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

more conducive to survival than the nineteenth century battle mentality projected onto nature."⁵¹

Let's talk about sewing again. There was born a baby girl 10,000 years ago. She tragically died when she was only 40 or 50 days old.⁵² A mesolithic baby born to hunter-gatherers in what is now Italy (then of course, there were no such imaginations of nation states).

She was buried not without ritual. She was

"[...] adorned with at least 66 perforated Columbella rustica ornamental shell beads and three perforated pendants made on polished fragments of Glycymeris sp. [...] A line of shell beads and three pendants was recovered in situ over the right shoulder and upper thoracic region [...], suggesting they were sewn onto a blanket or hood. Over 20 of the C. rustica beads covered the abdominal region [...], possibly reflecting a beaded vestment or other item skirting the waist and torso. In addition to the beads closely associated with the skeleton, 27 C. rustica beads, one Turritella sp., and one Glycymeris pendant come from pit fill or disturbed contexts nearby. Most shell beads bear significant wear, implying a lengthy use-life, and were probably not made originally for funerary purposes; rather, the infant likely received beads initially worn by other individuals. Regardless, they represent significant labor. Preliminary experiments estimate manufacture of all the ornaments required 8-11 person hours, not including time needed to collect shells and sew the beads onto a garment."53

These were her heirlooms, she could not live a full life so she was buried with deep care and intentionality. These shells were passed down to her. We named this baby Neve after the river Neva that runs near the cave her remains were found in.

⁵¹ Fisher, "Man the Hunter," 54.

⁵² Jamie Hodgkins et al., "An infant burial from Arma Veirana in northwestern Italy provides insights into funerary practices and female personhood in early Mesolithic Europe," *Scientific Reports* 11, 23735 (2021).

⁵³ Ibid., 4.

Hers is the oldest infant burial site found yet in Europe. Hodgkins, the lead researcher and writer of the paper, stated the importance of Neve being a female baby multiple times. Archaeologists are quick to infer a decorated burial site as that belonging to a male's;⁵⁴ the *I* of the story, of course. To me, this is bizarre. The idea we have, the conception we hold that baby girls did not receive personhood in hunter-gatherer times because, of course, it is the Man who hunts and it is the Man who resides at the top, is inhumane.

As Fisher wrote, maybe we also have to understand that the Man shouldn't just be relegated to being the Hunter but perhaps we can imagine the Man as the potter and the Man as the gatherer too. Also, the Woman was the hunter,⁵⁵ and She was also the gatherer, and also the potter.⁵⁶ We need to understand this fluidity to fully break away from this pernicious myth of either/or.

Hodgkins said, "In Western society, archaeologists have historically assumed that figureheads and warriors were male. But DNA analyses have proven the existence of female Viking warriors, nonbinary warriors, and powerful Bronze Age female rulers. Finding a burial like Neve's is reason to look more critically at archaeology's past."⁵⁷

Neve was buried with 66 shells, 3 pendants, an eagle-owl claw. We may never fully know our ancestors, but a group of humans coming together to sew beads that they had collected and created themselves onto a little garment for a little girl makes my body and mind ache with understanding. This was 10,000 years ago. It could've been today.

What I am trying to do is simple: I am making a case for care for community

the objects in our lives hold far greater value than that just of its literal form and capitalistic worth.

⁵⁴ Tom Metcalfe, "Earliest modern female human infant burial found in Europe," *National Geographic*, December 14, 2021.

⁵⁵ Fisher, "Woman the Hunter," in *Woman's Creation*, 70–74.

⁵⁶ Fisher, "Woman the Potter: Household Equipment as the Key," in *Woman's Creation*, 62–69.

⁵⁷ Rachel Sturtz, "Europe's Earliest Female Infant Burial Reveals a Mesolithic Society that Honored Its Youngest Members," *CU Denver News*, December 14, 2021.

I feel like a bunch of boxes being pushed into one. I think I feel alone and inadequate. In my research and writing today, I delved into humans and how we were a thousand, two thousand-thousands of years ago, With varying degrees of differences, we always seemed to place on how we could survive-through community and love and care, of course. Violence was only a part of it. I am wrapped up in unimaginable thoughts, I am a container-we are all just containers, inside of other containers pushed together in a never ending collision of doing and being. I feel the tides of my body and mind but there is also a solitary resignation to the confinement of everyday.there is a profound beauty in this loneliness. I know in the night I'll be sleeping besides....again. The Self vs other Selves vs the Selves of other people in the great negotiation. I must be okay with letting myself feel lonely and alone even if I am objectively not. Whatever objectivity means in this instance, or in any instance.

* * *

Two thousand years before the silk trade route, five thousand years ago, people living in what is present-day Nepal were already weaving complex textiles. This was in the Bronze Age.⁵⁸ The past is difficult to trace, especially the prehistory of Nepal.

One reason for this is simply that things are lost to time, to the wear and tear of wind and snow, and rain and sun. Another reason for this is apparently the *East's* tendency to mythologise history. The suggestion is that linking worldly experiences with trance and myth is how the *Orien*-

⁵⁸ "Nepal & The Art of Ancient Looms," Accompany, August 11, 2022.

tal understanding of history and knowledge is fundamentally different than that of *Occidental* understanding.⁵⁹

I do not necessarily believe in such clear divides, especially in relation to humanity and ancient humans pre nation state. However, for the purposes of this text, let us consider this to be true. Say the mythification of history is part of a different knowledge system than that of a modern day university; then, as academics and artists, what are we to do? Must we untangle the myth from the reality, or can we come to be interested in them through a more poetic lens? One that can in turn help us understand and see in different ways.

If we are to think about the creation of myth as entangled to history, then one can derive contextuality from those myths; the clothing and tools described in ancient texts are an example. What is written about gods and flying men ascending to the sun may be inaccurate but there is merit in extrapolating descriptions relating to eating habits, clothing, and tools.

This being said, neither the *oriental* world nor the ancient world at large are bound to guesswork. Talking about Nepal, scientists and archaeologists have determined that there were settlements in the plains and in the foothills of the Western part of the country since the Middle Pleistocene, which was between 770,000–26,000 years ago.⁶⁰ This was before Homo Sapiens.

We know that textile is ancient, and that cotton, sheep wool, nettle, pashmina, yak wool, amongst others have been used in Nepal for thousands of years.⁶¹ Predating modern day looms, predating ancient trading routes.

We also know that for generations, humans in Nepal have traded with humans in India and Tibet.⁶² The first historical record that men-

⁵⁹ Helmut Uhlig, *Himalaya: Menschen und Kulturen in der Heimat des Schnees* (Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe Verlag, 1987), 11, cited in Susi Dunsmore, *Nepalese Textiles* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 21.

⁶⁰ Gudrun Corvinus, "The prehistory of Nepal after 10 years of research," Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association 14 (1996): 43–55.

⁶¹ Dunsmore, *Nepalese Textiles*; Kurt W. Alt et al., "Climbing into the past—first Himalayan mummies discovered in Nepal," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 30, no. 11 (November 2003): 1529–1535.

⁶² Dunsmore, Nepalese Textiles, 11.

tions a textile item traded from Nepal to India was in the Arthashastra,⁶³ an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft and political science written in Sanskrit; dated between the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century BCE.

Connectivity is a long-held convention of humankind, situating this connectivity is important. The silk road extended further south than we previously believed. We now hold this account to be true because archaeologists recently found remnants of silk and other materials dating back to 2000 years in the Samdzong tomb complex in Upper Mustang, Nepal.⁶⁴ Upper Mustang lies in the Tibetan plateau. Its seclusive history and harsh conditions have made it seem untouched and isolated. Therefore, the discovery that 2000 years ago, in the high mountains, silk made its way to Upper Mustang can help us to restructure our sureness about Orientalist biases. And can inevitably lead us to realise that inventions are not a post-industrialised byproduct; the stories we grow up with have merit or at least matter in some way; and there is so much we don't know and so much we will never know, complacency in our understanding of the world only leads to a very linear modality of understanding history.

There is another myth that's pervasive in our psyche—the myth of the male genius who invents things out of thin air.

Who invented the needle? Who invented the syringe? Who invented weaving? Who invented the loom? It was not a singular entity, but rather a collective effort. All of us forever, in this never-ending⁶⁵ woven piece, all responsible for a stitch or two, to continue is to grow is to invent is to evolve is to be is to invent is to grow is to continue.

⁶³ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁴ Margarita Gleba, Ina Vanden Berghe, and Mark Aldenderfer, "Textile technology in Nepal in the 5th-7th centuries CE: the case of Samdzong," STAR: Science & Technology of Archaeological Research 2, no. 1 (2016): 25–35.

⁶⁵ until the demise of humankind or the universe, after that I cannot say what will happen

Part III: Do you miss me?

Sangita was a scoundrel of a woman, illogical, irrational, volatile, hurt; so she kept to herself. Even as a young, outgoing woman of 20 something, Sangita instinctively knew that her cynicism about other people was true, but it's the curse of youth to dredge on, despite one's core knowledge about oneself, it's the curse of youth to try to be something you're not. Now, at 40, Sangita had no such foolish notions, she was meant to be alone. This wasn't fatalism so much as knowledge. She knew and accepted this, although there was no happiness in this acceptance, there was a simplicity and peace to it.

Here we have a woman who lived her life like a recluse, going through a daily curmudgeon of routine that she needed to adhere to so as to numb the constant bombardment of pain she would otherwise feel. Sangita lived just outside of where everyone lived, in a small, one-storied wooden house that she had built herself with her bare hands; her bedroom was a simple affair, a single-sized bed that was made perfectly to her frame, a rack of books that she barely touched, a wardrobe of functional clothes. The bedroom had tiny, decorated windows that faced her little vegetable patch in the East, and the windows had no curtains, so when the sun rose, the sweet golden rays, ample in the spring and summer, hit her face and woke her up. But regardless, even in the winters and rainy days when sunshine was scarce, her mind had adapted to the sensation of sunlight so well that she would feel its warmth on her eyelids, though phantom it may be, so that for the last 10 years she had woken up at exactly 6 am.

Every morning, she woke up and sighed out loud, she threw her legs out of bed, and as it touched the carpeted floor, she looked towards the ceiling just to make sure it was still there. This morning, too, she did exactly that. Lo and behold, the ceiling still loomed over this woman's head; which was, as usual, a great disappointment to Sangita.

Sangita kept almost everything she needed in a large worn-out handbag that was a modest brown in colour. This handbag was a gift to her, but it wasn't auspicious or presented with love, it was given to her as a bitter goodbye. Sangita remembered walking around with the bag in tow in this city we won't name but she hated. She hated the people, always gossipping about and snickering at Sangita, she hated the pollution.

No, none of this was true, she just hated herself.

She hadn't cried when her friend had said goodbye because she had forgotten how to feel immediately after, but her feelings came back as rage when she saw her turquoise blue watch, dangling like a loose handcuff around her small wrist and felt a sharp pain on her abdomen. It had stopped working the exact moment she was given this handbag, 2:35 in the afternoon. Forever stuck, reminding her that it wasn't just she who hated herself, there were others too.

She had always intensely disliked turquoise because it was too beautiful, too precious like a male peacock, confident, wanting the attention. But she had chosen to wear it around her wrist, perhaps to get accustomed to it. Only, of course, it became a trap, a handcuff around her reminding her that she was an uncoloured thing. Sangita chose to flung this wristwatch off a bridge. It was gone.

Now, she was no longer that angry young woman, she was just exhausted and sad. Sangita got out of bed this morning as she had done every day for the past 10 years, walked over to where her bag always laid, on top of a stool that she never used for any other purpose. She looked outside the window to check her carrots-they were coming on splendidly-rummaged the bag to find her toothbrush and toothpaste, carried the bag with her on her right shoulder as she always did. Right outside her bedroom, to the left, was her bathroom. She brushed her teeth as she glanced at herself in the mirror, then quickly looked away. She wanted very little to do with a reflection that didn't actually represent her. She washed her face with cold water, rummaged her bag for a hand towel, washed her face and put the towel back in the laundry basket, it already had its 3 uses, then placed the toothbrush and toothpaste in the bag again. Sangita went back to her room, scoured her wardrobe for a simple a-line dress, also a modest brown in colour, some underwear, no bra, and went back into the bathroom for a shower, her handbag still in tow. Miraculous as it seemed, it could contain enormous amounts of things.

Her shampoo and conditioner and comb and body soap and towel were all in the handbag, so she took out whatever she needed one by one and placed it back in once she was done. After showering, she sat in the living room where she re-read the same book over and over again, it was either Thrower in the Barley or Ms. Dull, go away. Worn out pages, do-geared, water-damaged,

marked by time and pencil, they too lived in the bag. And so her day went on, her trowel in the bag was used for a little bit of digging, she plucked her carrots to make a carrot stew, the condiments magically never spilt in her bag. And on and on and on, her boring curmudgeon of a life. Every two weeks on a Tuesday, she would go out to the local market in the evening to buy—

fruits and vegetables, sometimes she would buy seeds and other things like household amenities. Occasionally, she'd buy a new dress.

At night, she took out her toothpaste and toothbrush again, brushed her teeth, washed her face with cold tap water, changed into her pyjamas that laid unfurled on her bed and fell asleep.

She dissipated into dreams that she rarely remembered come morning. In her 20s, all she had were anxiety dreams of friends and people in her life. But now, sans people and sans friends, there was no anxiety, just a stunning emptiness that she had come to accept as her kin.

* * *

In the morning, she awoke to the sun, but for the first time in 10 years, it wasn't at 6 am. She awoke half an hour later. Something was off. It was like a box of cookies that was a little bit lighter in the evening than it was in the morning, it might look the same, it might have been untouched but even a minute difference, or no difference at all, just the thought of the difference, could fester and the taste would become significantly different.

Whatever, it couldn't matter. It wouldn't, it was only half an hour, her carrots were fine. She went about her day as she had done for 10 years, with a tiny delay. Whatever, it doesn't matter. It's fine, it's fine.

Except it wasn't, the dread built up. Slowly, steadily, but she could feel the giant knot in her chest, her lungs became two anchors that tangled at the bottom of shallow water because the two ships had docked too close.

To work in the garden, Sangita wore comfortable shoes, size 36. But today her feet wouldn't fit, they had become larger, which is strange. A 40 year old does not wake up with feet two sizes larger, usually. That's when things began to fall apart, she couldn't find the trowel in her bag. Where was it? Sangita was sure she had put it back in the bag after using it yesterday.

Never mind, she'd go barefoot, she'd use her hands. Filthy feet and filthy hands at the end of the job, only three good carrots, the carrots that were fine in the morning but now they had wilted away. Do carrots wilt?

She washed her feet and hands on the tap outside and then washed the carrots, searched through her bag to find a hand-towel, and couldn't. She remembered putting a fresh, new one in her bag in the morning after brushing her teeth. But perhaps she was growing old before her time.

With the carrots in her little woven basket, she entered her house through her living room, which she usually did but her living room was lacking a sofa at this point, which was fair. When was the last time she had guests anyway? (never). She didn't need extra seating.

In the kitchen, she decided to make carrot stew, the clock on the wall told her that it was 1:45 pm, half an hour later than her daily time of cooking. Oh well, better hurry then, Sangita.

Sangita ignored the anchors in her chest, began cutting the carrots, only to cut herself. It wasn't anything alarming, but there was blood all right. Sangita was never scared of blood, she washed her finger then rummaged her bag for bandages, only to find none, she always had bandages. Oh well, she wrapped her finger with some tissue paper, and began cutting the carrot again.

The stew was coming on splendidly, she looked up to check the time, only to find a bare wall. Oh well, oh well. Missing clocks, disappearing sofas.

One bite of that stew and she broke down, she left the bowl on her countertop as her knees gave in. Kneeling on the cold tiles, she began sobbing uncontrollably. She spread herself out like butter on toast, stretching her body like the Vitruvian man. The stew tasted different, she didn't understand. She'd use the same ingredients, the exact amount of salt and pepper and oil.

Still on the floor, she sat up and reached for her bag. She searched for a cigarette and lighter, the only unroutine thing about her life, the one element of surprise. She smoked, but only sometimes and didn't know when and why. Her fingers meandered through the bag, to try to reach out for anything, but all they did was grasp at air. "Where are my things?" Sangita shouted to no one.

She tipped her bag upside down, there was nothing there. Nothing. "Where are my things?" Sangita shouted louder. Suddenly, a metal object hit the tiles. Clank.

Her panicked face at once changed into relief at finding that her bag wasn't completely empty but then it quickly became a scowl when she realised just what it was.

It was the turquoise blue wristwatch.

It was the damned watch she had gotten rid of 15 years ago, it still said 2:35 pm (even a broken clock is right twice a day), still as turquoise as ever.

Sangita tipped her bag again, still nothing. She fisted the watch in her palms as she stood up and hurled it out of the window. She held the worn-out, modest brown handbag as if holding a baby, while the world around began to disappear, quite literally. Her counters, her tiles, her fridge, her kitchen racks, carpets, tables, the one sofa that was remaining in her living room.

She made her way to the bedroom ignoring the ruckus around her, still holding the bag like a newborn. In the bedroom, she found that her bed was still intact. She sighed, rested her head on her cushion and looked up as the afternoon sky became the evening sky (somewhere, someone was bringing their cows back home), after a few moments she smiled the first genuine smile in 15 years because she realised that the ceiling was no longer there.

Her bed disappeared now, so she was on the ground, her little vegetable patch that had begun to wilt in the afternoon, now disappeared altogether. She was reluctant to move, she didn't know what time it was, but could guess it was after 7 pm, she gripped her handbag with all her might and then reached into it as she held her body slightly upright.

Her fingers still moved through nothing, but this time she reached further in until her elbow could not be seen, then further and further, strangely she couldn't feel the base.

Curious as she was, she put her head inside only to discover absolute nothingness, a vast expanse of dark. She screamed into the nothingness as we are all used to doing but in her case, it was literal.

She crawled into the bag horizontally, only the toes of her left foot dangled out. Sangita closed her eyes, "it can't all be emptiness" she murmured and pulled her foot in. Her body that was aligned horizontally now began falling downwards. There *was* a downwards! Soon she both fell unconscious and kept falling through nothing, more nothing, more nothing. Sangita didn't know how long she was out for, but when she came to, her trajectory downwards was still continuing. What a way to die.

Would she grow old while falling? Would her organs fail before that? What if she never died?

These are the thoughts that distressingly repeated in Sangita's head until she did actually reach a ground.

This cursed handbag was given to her by her very last friend one and a half decades ago as a goodbye gift "you're broken, Sangita, please leave" she had said. At that time, Sangita didn't think much of it, "I'm not broken, humans aren't broken."

And even now she refused to believe that other humans are broken, but it's so simple to create exceptions for our own rules when it comes to ourselves "Others are definitely not broken but I am." But the idea of fixing her brokenness made her retch with disgust, whatever she was, she was all she had.

Now, spread eagle on a ground that was still made of nothing but was contradictorily solid, she looked up with glee.

"No ceiling," although she wouldn't be able to identify it regardless. Eyes don't adapt in this sort of darkness. She closed her eyes, held her abdomen that stung and fell asleep in a foetal position.

Sangita woke up after some time (or was it before time), and rubbed her eyes with her right hand. She was missing something, the darkness around her didn't make clarity easier as she began obsessing, her head became a string of words that repeated itself over and over:

> "I am missing something" "I am missing something" "I am missing something"

She picked on it like a scab, minutes passed, hours passed, days passed; who knows? Until she realised that what she was missing was tangible.

Her left arm was missing. She felt a sense of congruence upon knowing what it was, and her abuzz head settled down for a while before it began running amok again.

"I am missing something" "Again"

It was her left leg. Sangita became better at this every time, every time something would disappear, every time her mind would be stuck obsessing, the duration in which she figured out just what was missing would become shorter and shorter.

This was a game and Sangita was getting better at it. After her left leg, it was her right arm, then her dress and underwear, then her right leg. Her abdomen area, her breasts, then her collarbones, her neck, her mouth, her earrings, her right ear, her left ear, her hair (all 43 centimetres of it), her nose-ring, her nose-piercing itself, then her nose. Then both of her eyes simultaneously disappeared, this was particularly difficult for Sangita to figure out because not having eyesight didn't add anything to the already existing darkness.

Sangita was nothing but a head with thoughts now, discorporated in the middle of a sea of black.

"I am missing something" "I am missing something" "I am missing something"

"Oh, it's my eyes" "and everything else"

Sangita, or the discorporated head + thoughts that was Sangita remained unchanged in the void for what felt like days, but could have been minutes, until her head too disappeared.

"I am missing something" "Again"

She pinpointed what it was rather quickly, but unlike before, her obsessive cyclical thoughts did not stop. "I am missing something" "I am missing something" "I am missing something"

All of her other thoughts melted away. In the end, the feeling of missing something never disappeared. All that remains of Sangita the woman was just a thought of longing and missing in this nothingness that was now her home.

Outside, the world still existed. Someone else was carrying the modest brown handbag now. Who was that someone? Whoever they were, they took it upon themselves to hurl the bag from a bridge.

To this day, this bag, submerged in dirty river water, floats through this unnamed city, if anyone ever finds it, they are advised to let it be. The longing it emanates is enchanting like a siren's song, but the misery that will stay on forever is not worth it.

I should know, reader. This expanse of stunning emptiness is all we have.

Part IV: Reflections

I wrote *Do you miss me?* four years ago in 2019, I was 25 then. I was obviously going through something.⁶⁶ I figured my best bet would be to express my feelings in what I think is a rather bleak story. Now, at 29, and having had lived more lives, I cannot fully relate to this story as I once did. However, I thought it would be interesting to include this story in this thesis for two reasons: one) the retrospective act of looking at your old work, as I have done with my poetry in chapter one; two) the discussion about materiality that this story can bring forth.

Are substances then just independent beings, different from the materials that encompass them? Different from their histories and contexts?

In the story, Sangita, our main character, a scoundrel of a woman, dissolves into something that is close to nothingness but not quite. In the beginning, the contents of her bag begin disappearing. The same bag in which she would find herself falling into.

Before that, an object—the wristwatch—that she had hurled from a bridge comes back to haunt her. As established in Part II of this chapter, humans have had a long history of attaching symbolic meaning to objects. Neve's burial site adorned with shells is one such instance. I find myself disagreeing with Kant, the thing-in-itself as a concept is incompatible with our highly interconnected world that uses symbols as one such method to navigate existence and navigate communities.

Do you miss me? is a sombre story, that leans heavily on cynicism. I disagree with my past self,⁶⁷ none of us are meant to be alone. Even in the story, Sangita goes out to buy groceries and clothes occasionally—we can look at connectivity even from this simplistic view: Sangita needs other people to procure things that she needs to live. In a more complex sense, Sangita's personality and situation is directly dependent on her

⁶⁶ a lot of pain, heartbreak, terrible depression.

⁶⁷ Not the story telling or character but the motivation for writing this—Death of the author? Maybe hard to do when you're the author, however that author is no longer the same, so to speak.

past, not just other people who brought her to existence, raised her, or associated with her but also her own past selves.

Sangita also heavily relies on the objects she uses (the trowel or her towel for example), when the objects start to disappear—she starts to disappear. I am not speaking of a capitalistic connection. I am simply trying to connect objects into the ontology of the subject. Sangita's connectivity through her fundamental interactions with her world is laid bare.

I am denouncing hyper individualism, capitalo-individualism rather than any form of individual I; in capitalism materials become things we consume rather than substances we can interact with. That is a fragmented reality in which **man** occupies a higher domain. Who, in the past, has gotten to occupy that space of 'man'?

An aside

White supremacist concepts such as 'untermensch' (literally subhuman) are still held to be true by neo-nazis and other white supremacists. The pseudoscience that is phrenology posits many gendered and racialised notions of intelligence. Much of history is marred by imperialism and colonialism.

Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the UK who served during the second world war from 1940–1945 and also later between 1951–1955, is celebrated for his role in defeating the nazis. He is seen as a heroic figure, a figure for good, a man who stood against evil. However, Churchill actively believed in social-darwinistic ideas of race. When referring to the Bengal Famine of 1943, in which historians argue of Churchill's active role in leading to the death of approximately 4 million people,⁶⁸ he stated "I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion. The famine was their own fault for breeding like rabbits."⁶⁹

Many fundamental Hindus are still bound to a rigid and highly discriminatory caste system in which certain members of the society are considered to be 'untouchable'. The world is a stratified place. Who gets to be the *I*? In Nepal,

⁶⁸ Madhusree Mukerjee, "Bengal Famine of 1943: An Appraisal of the Famine Inquiry Commission," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 11 (March 15, 2014): 71–75; S.D. Choudhury, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: Misfortune or Imperial Schema," *Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 5 (May 2021): 15–21.

⁶⁹ The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929–1945, eds. John Barnes and David Nicholson (London: Hutchinson, 1988), entry for September 9, 1942.

women of the family, specifically daughters, daughters-in-law and mothers have had a history of eating last, this has resulted in uneven gendered malnutrition.⁷⁰

The Anthropocene is a well-used term in social sciences to denote an epoch of climate catastrophe that has been caused by humans. However, are all humans equally responsible?

Here are some statistics:

- "Over half of global industrial emissions since human induced climate change was officially recognised can be traced to just 25 corporate and state producing entities."⁷¹
- "Just 100 companies have been the source of more than 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988, according to a new report." 772
- "The historical concentration of industry and wealth in developed countries means that they are responsible for 79 percent of the emissions from 1850 to 2011"
- "Developing countries get hit with 78 percent of the cost of climate change in 2015, according to Professor William Nordhaus' RICE model, rising to 87 percent by 2035. Though this share is on par with developing countries' share of population (81 percent), it far exceeds their share of gross domestic product (36 percent)".

Voting rights, birthing rights, housing rights. The body that is seen as neutral versus the body that is not. The fluctuating nature of the treatment of humans and how, Who climate change will affect the most and what institutional roles have they played?

The I can become so many times over when there are choices offered, not everyone has that luxury.



⁷⁰ "Nutritional status of women and children in Nepal not satisfactory: Stakeholders," *Onlinekhabar*, March 25, 2023.

⁷¹ CDP Worldwide, Carbon Majors Report 2017.

⁷² Tess Riley, "Just 100 companies responsible for 71% of global emissions, study says," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2017.

⁷³ Jonah Busch, "Climate Change and Development in Three Charts," *Center for Global Development*, August 18, 2015.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Does the needle have an Ātman? Let's go back to this. Yes, by every definition of the Ātman, that does not grant it sentiency, necessarily. Although in some schools of thought, it could as well. So the bracelet in *Do you miss me?* has an Ātman too, it is connected to the great tapestry of the universe and beyond.

This symbolic association we have to objects can be seen in the Hindu act of object worship—rocks can represent statues that can represent the gods. This representationalism does not mean that the rock is the god —the rock just represents god. However, this could not be true if we did not view objects being able to hold some intrinsic value; a fundamental essence.

In Nepali we have this saying, "ढुङ्गा खोज्दा देउता मिल्यो" which translates to finding god when looking for a rock. It is an idiom that simply means finding something extraordinary when looking for something ordinary.

Perhaps it isn't what the object represents that is incredible, perhaps it is incredible because of its potentiality. What could it mean and why? What can we infer from the needle? From the rock? These liminal spaces are created through mutual understanding, interaction, and co-creation.

The problem with art history, as with other fields of history, is its symbiotic nature with institutionalism, with the white cube. Art history is a lens through which we look at disparate objects, group them together with a neat bow, while fixating on temporality and vague similarities in form. Art history favours the things that were seen, of course, and heavily relies on who sees them. Imagine our ancestors looking at stars, arranging them in their minds and then naming these constellations, constellations aren't an objective truth—our lenses, our geographical conditions, our vocabulary were situated in these knowledge systems.

This is art history—this does not mean that there is no truth in describing a movement as confessionalism or cubism, but it means it comes from a specific point of view. And whose view has that been usually?

A lot of art is never seen. British sculptor and artist Phyllidia Barlow asks if art is art if it's not seen, does that novel that's written that will never be read by anyone else deserve to exist? She answers her question, of course it deserves to exist.⁷⁵ This is not necessarily a case for art for

⁷⁵ Phyllida Barlow, "Homemade," interview for *Art21 Extended Play*, episode 276, July 7, 2021, https://youtu.be/0gbkFHiMxNQ

art's sake, rather it is a testament to the existence of expression. There are many artworks that are never seen, many artists who never even reveal themselves as artists.

Why is it confessional poetry when Plath does it, and not when Whitman does it?

What about when a quiet person writes poetry quietly? What is it then? The existence of one thing may be contingent on the existence of others, but that does not mean it has to be widely seen. Existence can be quiet, subdued. Art that is not seen is as important as art that is seen because we must ask ourselves: why make art? Differing opinions exist on it, let's go with the simple one: we want to.

Figures like Picasso are considered to be pioneers in transforming art. According to the Tate museum, "Cubism was a revolutionary new approach to representing reality invented in around 1907–08 by artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. They brought different views of subjects (usually objects or figures) together in the same picture, resulting in paintings that appear fragmented and abstracted."⁷⁶

Was it really that revolutionary when a thousand years before Picasso's time, Inca art already heavily worked with geometrical shapes and abstracting form rather than representationalism?⁷⁷ Nor was this accidental, as Pazstory writes: "Vauxcelles, a well known art critic in Paris, baffled by their new art in an exhibition, dubbed it derisively as 'Peruvian cubism,' from which the term 'cubism' originates."⁷⁸

However, in Europe, Inca art was classified as objects of craft rather than that of art. Their materiality was held in import to their culture and mythos. Our understanding of objects, then, has to be reliant on our definitions of culture and value. Western Art History has tried to discern itself based on an imperial reality.

In the 18th century in Europe, the divine became a motif to illustrate the dominion of man, precipitated by the so called enlightenment. The idea was to wane off religion, and bring forth science and philosophy. Europe began looking to nature and inwards as a way to discern the divine. This further created a divide between art and craft, as art was elevated into a higher plane. Already in the 16th century, writers like Vasari

⁷⁶ Tate Art Terms, s.v. "Cubism," https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cubism.

⁷⁷ Esther Pasztory, Inka Cubism: Reflections on Andean Art (self-pub., 2010).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

were elevating humans into the roles of the godlike; he called Michelangelo "divine".⁷⁹ Even Kant, who made a distinction between the object and the subject, thought of art as a higher, more divined object than the rest. Here we form hierarchies even in objects.

And between art and craft, and between one **man** and another. Between art that is seen and not, the divine is divined not just through observation but through faith. We may have differing opinions and definitions of water, but the water exists as a medium. This universe, this shared Ātman, we create meaning based on contingency—and if no one ever sees your art, then it is an irreligious (or religious, if that is your thing) prayer to something, may be expression, may be existence. We try to visualise the empty parts of the universe too, we try to connect the dots—and live our lives based on the lotus pads we can jump to.

Human beings are not objects, nor am I suggesting that we should think of the object as something that is human. Objects are not humans but they aren't detached from us is what I'm trying to say. There has never been an equal definition of human either, and our understanding of materiality and humanness has always been linked.

The problem with Art History is the gaze.80

Journal: 29th March 2023

Disparate disparate disparate, very tired- thinking about things, objects, subjects- I float and feel heavy at the same time, sinking ships also change their forms, become different, float back as different realities intersect

⁷⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁰ I talk about it later soon.

Part V: creatures in rich cities: A commentary

Mid-April 2015

Diary Entry One:81

I'm a fool, I hold on to symbols. That is the reason I can't let go of things. When the earthquake hit, I was in Marpha showering. I quickly ran out with a towel and stood under the doorframe. Tchaikovsky was playing from my phone. The wooden panels on the ceiling were moving hurriedly, the floor beneath me was shaking in a continuous crescendo. At first, I was relaxed but then I became frightened. I wanted it to end. I said "Please end, please end". Do earthquakes listen to human voices?

I didn't understand the gravitas of the situation until I heard about Dharara back home. Its fall was a symbol. It took so many lives with it, to think I thought it was a lie in the beginning. I ran out to the fields after another aftershock or was it just fear? I tried calling my family. I tried calling my grandparents. I was scared. I cried. When I finally got through to them, for a moment I thought everything was fine. Then the fear took hold of me again.

In the village, everyone was terrified. Adrenalin pumping into their bodies, dust around the hills. Landslide. It never reached Marpha but the fear remained for days.

I, honestly, wasn't afraid for myself. I was cursing myself for not being back home. The death toll increased by the day. A thousand people, two thousand, three thousand. And now, it's at seven thousand and all I can do about that is pet my puppy and say "I'm so glad you're all safe"

The villagers decided to sleep in the community hall. Some slept out in the fields. We slept in our hotel room, all collectively. The aftershocks wouldn't stop. The next day, there was a big one. We all ran out of the house and into the streets. The narrow streets harrowing. Maybe I was a bit afraid for myself. I will never forget the lady who screamed for her son

⁸¹ This entry can be found in my blog https://kafkaesquedreams.tumblr.com, I unfortunately do not have access to it anymore. This is my voice from the past, unedited.

to come out of the house. The whole village in a stand still. The ground had stopped shaking by this time. Her brisk scream harrowing. The son was fine, of course.

We sat in the fields for two to three hours, the villagers were there for the whole day. I will also never forget the echo of a wail from the other end of the field. I saw a man jumping towards the echo, colours had never been so vivid. The greenery only marred by the golden of the sun setting. At once, people stood up and walked towards the wail. I looked around in confusion until I found out that it was not a ubiquitous noise but had rather come from a woman who had heard about the death of her parents in Kathmandu.

Out in the fields, things got realer and realer. The next day, I sat in the kitchen and bawled. I cried my heart out. All those people dead. All those villages crushed to nothing. My city is rubble. The world knows my city as a pile of rubble. I knew it differently, I know it much differently.

When another aftershock hit in the night, I said out loud "When will this end?" The ground was always shaking to us, even when it was not. We would look at each and then realise it was nothing.

Things were worse at home. My family was safe, they slept indoors although down in the living room. I decided I needed to come back even if was for a few days.

The commute back home was strange, but that's a post for some other time. When I entered the valley, I saw a few houses crushed to the ground. I saw a large crowd around a house, and a few white men digging through the debris.

My uncle picked me up in his scooter. And I was glad he was the same, making jokes that were slightly inappropriate "Remember the time I told you about my idea for 'Poverty Tourism', I think we can also market 'Earthquake Tourism'. I'm sure foreigners will like that too". His old mother had been sleeping out in the car for days, afraid of her own house. At least they have a car. And at least, she is safe.

I hadn't seen Kathmandu in two months, I hadn't seen my mother in two months. I had lost weight in those four days, my complexion turning grey, acne on my face. "This isn't Marpha's doing, I had rosy cheeks before this...thing happened" I told my Mother. "You've gained weight" she said. Then ten minutes later she said "Actually you've lost weight".

I was glad that my locality was okay, that my parents were okay. That my grandparents, my brother, my puppy were okay. But I cried that night too, like I had cried every day of the week.

In the morning, I was out. I met people I hadn't seen in a while, and I met them and embraced them and viewed them like I had never before. I had infinite love and the utmost respect for everyone.

I saw familiar faces, even though I didn't know their names, nor did I talk to them, but I was so glad they were safe and sound.

I saw her and I was glad she was good, she looked shaken up. Not different in appearance but her being echoed of something different. I'm sure she'd say the same about me. I took a picture of the Gulmohar tree next to my house and posted it online. The flowers have been blooming every spring.

The next day, I went to Bhaktapur. And then, again the day after. It's not all gone. But the destruction is vast. I took more pictures of trees and flowers.

Amidst the destruction, people were still moving around in Bhaktapur. Then, we heard a sound. We looked right and left to no avail, then we looked up and realised it was not a ubiquitous sound but a drone filming the debris. It's a pile of rubble to the rest of the world.

That evening, I got lost as I sat behind my friend's scooter. This was after I had spent an hour crying. Yes, I'm cynical about candle light vigils, but I swear, I saw those flames dancing, and that moment was familiar to me. It felt exactly like when I watched my grandfather's pyre burn. Except this time, I felt hopeless. My grandfather was old and suffering. I cannot come up with an excuse for what is probably 10,000 people dead.

When I got lost in the evening. I giggled. I felt light for a moment. I shared silly stories "Can you believe it? I was showering!", "My horoscope said I'd find a boyfriend, I don't know how I feel about making out with a yak", "I love Marpha, it is absolutely stunning. But Kathmandu is a wonderful city too, or at least it was". And although, aeroplanes passing by still cause a dread in me ("it's just a plane, the ground is not shaking") I won't stop taking pictures of flowers and trees. I'm a fool, I hold on to symbols. Spring always knows when to arrive, even if it's a bit late sometimes. My city is not a pile of rubble. My country is not a pile of rubble. My country is all vast and rugged geography, languages dying, old ladies carrying the world on their shoulders. My country is not lacking Western amenities; it is surviving harsh winters and burning summers. It is all Namastes and tea and "have you eaten yet". It is all "Don't trust the government" but hope anyway. It is all hope.

Diary Entry Two:82

Listen, I have tried writing about all the Gulmohar trees I never noticed in my city before. I have tried writing about all the tall buildings I never noticed before. But I can't. All I can think about is the ground and how I feel lightheaded constantly. I joined Tinder the other day, and what was that for? Some self-destruction, maybe. I have friends who've started drinking and smoking a lot. I can't do that. Not because I'm aware that that's a bad road to head down but because I'm currently living with my parents and earn no money. Anyway, Tinder didn't work out, you see, that's the one self-destructive thing I can't do. I don't know what it is. So this has become my self-destruction, wearing lipstick and taking selfies. A big "FUCK YOU" to it all. A big "I AM STILL VAIN AS FUCK" to everyone. Yes, yes, so I'm losing it slightly, maybe. I feel like the ground beneath me is shaking constantly. Loud noises accelerate my heart, planes cause me to hyperventilate. But I'm still going to endeavour to match my outfit head to toe, either that or look like I usually do which is a disemboweled rainbow

Listen, I can't write anymore. No poetry, no words. Nothing. I feel like a nothing. I feel like I have dissolved into the zero like the zero but not like Laxmi Prasad Devkota meant it. More like I have become a zero of existence. Not sans existence, like I have achieved Nirvana. But like Nirvana was never mine to achieve.

(I have always thought in tangents but this is getting out of hand)

(it is getting out of hand, and out of existence)

⁸² Ibid.

When the 7.3 or 6.8 (Whichever way you look at it) aftershock hit, I wasn't calm and composed. I was in a frenzy thinking about all the houses going down. I vomited that feeling out later. And had a bottle of beer. I've never even liked beer.

That night, at 2 am, my bed jolted and I woke up to my dog barking and my heart racing.

"I can't take this anymore" I said. Again, I thought of buildings crumbling. At 3 am, I made tea. I called my grandmother from the other house, she was sitting on her balcony talking to my mother about the apocalypse. My mother screaming for our patio, my grandmother from her balcony that she loves so much. Constantly Laughing her sarcastic laugh (I make it sound like the houses are very far apart, they are not)

We all drank tea in our living room, my mother, my father, my grandmother, I. My brother went back to sleep. My dog charged on, racing in circles, biting my grandmother's slippers. I was worried my grandmother wouldn't like the way I made tea, she's particular about it. For a moment, that was my only worry. She said it was delicious, "you make really good chiya!" I will always be her granddaughter.

That was the second night that I didn't get much sleep. Later in the evening, I met people, doing important things, while I grasped the air to find words in English and then in Nepali. And then I grasped the air just to find meaning, any meaning. "I'm sorry, I haven't slept in two days" I said, what a pathetic excuse. No one has slept in forever.

After years, I had a few plans, although still vague in their form, I believed I could take them somewhere. Then, it all changed. "You can't trust your plans when you can't trust the ground beneath your feet" a friend said. And at that moment, all I could think of was the majestic Gulmohar tree and the sun setting behind it. And tea. I constantly want to drink tea.

Entry for the current day, 29th March 2023:

Long beasts. Long beasts. These are the words that keep popping into my mind, these people with their Oriental lenses. When Dharara fell in Kathmandu, I was not there. I was in Marpha, a village in Lower Mustang, Nepal.

I had been up on Dharara a few months prior, and in between crying and flinching, found time to look at a picture I had taken of my friend and me on Dharara. I was with people I did not want to be with and would leave for Kathmandu soon after, I had just been waiting for the roads to open.

I sat on a table with a Buddhist Monk, an American woman who had found an NGO in Marpha—the same NGO I was volunteering for, and an annoying European person who liked espousing half-baked spiritualism. Let's call him Mark.

Mark had been complaining about not being able to find honey in the village, all the shops were closed because people were either mourning or terrified to die. But somehow he, in all his spirituality, could not comprehend this.

I was staring at the picture on my phone, and had been showing it to the American woman, when Mark commented "you must not be attached to material objects."

When the Dharara fell, I was not in Kathmandu but a lot of people were on top of the building, the Earthquake crushed them to death. Their bodies still had not been recovered. I was younger then, only 21, still trying to understand and navigate myself.

I couldn't say much except "Look at me, do I look like I am wearing orange robes? He is the Monk (I had said pointing to the man who was actually wearing orange robes), not me."

Mark did not say anything, the Monk sheepishly laughed.

Mark was probably still thinking about where to find honey.

Another instance:

On the day of the earthquake, I sat outside with my phone to try to find any signal, any wifi connection. I had finally luckily managed to and was trying to reach out to loved ones to make sure they were safe. An English man walked past me with his wife, loudly declaring "everybody's on their phone." Of course, he assumed I could not speak English, I echoed after him "well excuse me, I'm trying to make sure my family isn't dead."

This is the oriental gaze; in people's imagination Nepal exists in a different world unencumbered by reality. I will make broad assumptions now but I know these assumptions to be real.

My phone represented to him a breakaway from nature, something us orientals are not supposed to be doing. I was not paying attention to my surroundings, always entranced. Let me echo my younger self here, I was supposed to be all Namastes.

But I was not his oriental myth. My family could've been dead, my friends could've been buried under Dharara, but I was supposed to go on smiling. They weren't, of course, I was lucky but I was being questioned by these long beasts, these open mouthed creatures waiting for their spiritual fix. I was being questioned for my emotions, for being distraught over fallen buildings and constantly worried about the rising death toll.

In a moment all the tourists who were in the area disappeared their bodies became a priority. They were flown away to safety. No sign of honey obsessed, must-not-be-material Mark; no sign of post-colonial colonial English man.

* * *

Why did I entitle this chapter creatures in rich cities?

Only look at *gaze* and what sort of people have mobility and access to the world. The constructs of the world create material reality, our ontological understanding of objects, we situate realities based on what is available to us. Material reality translates into gaze, into differing myths, sometimes orientalist, sometimes of the genius.

We go to different parts of the world for different reasons, differing pull and push factors—creatures in rich cities go to poor cities and view everything from a different reality, a reality that hasn't been and mustn't be codified—when people from poor cities *come* to rich cities, reality is objective and rational in its construction, how do we access such opulence? The uncut marble stairs, the huge cathedrals covered in gold. We also ascribe these same notions to historical pasts that have not been recorded, to invisible and visible labour. Forgive me, Michelangelo, I would not be able to take an undivine block of marble and turn it into David. I am only able to sit with my idols and statuettes, their godly bodies once made out of objects, sometimes handcrafted, more often now mass produced. Sometimes, when I go out for a walk, I am able to find rocks and bring them home, turning the adage on its head.

My crochet hook becomes the divine one, not me; my needle, my thread, I have reverence for these materials, because I have reverence for its role in our shared and collective histories. How quick we are to leap onto metaphors, but a metaphor is a metaphor is a valuable insight into the real and into description, and into our perceptions.

There was a time when I took air drying clay and made little statuettes of gods and goddesses for friends. "I am feeling anxious," a friend told me, so I created the goddess of anxiety. A god who would wane of anxiety, or perhaps even eat it all up. A few other such statuettes have been made.

The object becomes the act becomes a reality, only accessible to us from a certain vantage point. Luckily, sometimes it's a collective act. Although there can also be different collections, different people, different mornings.

What is the difference between your object and mine? Who gets to be the *I*?

Page 89: खेर/What a waste; embroidery in tulle; shown in the exhibition

Page 90: *Untitled as of yet*; weaving with wool on found frame; shown in the exhibition; the frame was found in the Art & Science studio and was created by alumnus Anna Téglássy; used with her permission.





Chapter three:

आमा ओ आमा!/ Aama o Aama!

Part I: A brief introduction to the Nepali Aama Part II: चिठीहरू/letters



Notes on आमा ओ आमा!/ Aama o Aama!

आमा/Aama means mother in Nepali. More recently, Aama is also used colloquially to refer to one's grandmother.

आमा, आज म स्थानको बारेमा सौंच्दैछु । Aama, today I've been thinking about space. अरु सबैले मलाई म भन्दा जानेको छ हो ? Is it so that everyone else knows me better than I do? कर्म र धर्ममा म एउटा फसेकी चरी । I am a bird ensnared in karma and dharma. गृहको खोजमा म आमा । I am in search of a home, Aama.

Aama o Aama is written through the medium of letters in which I converse with my grandmothers. However, the contents are fictionalised, therefore the grandmothers in the letters will only serve as a conceptual stand-in for my actual grandmothers who have passed. This conceptualisation also serves as a modality of creation of narratives and the multitudinous nature of fictionalised selves. Through the medium of these letters, I want to establish a feminist understanding of language, writing, and the *I*. These letters are handwritten in Nepali, my mother tongue, and then translated to English; additionally instigating further discourse about the nature of language, added by the fact that the letters are quickly and awkwardly translated. The letters are originally written on textured handmade Nepali paper, produced by local artisans in Kathmandu.

Part I:

A brief introduction to the Nepali Aama

The mother—Aama—is a very important and oft-repeated trope in Nepali media; in our literature, in our music, in our art, in our poems, in our folk songs.

The Nepali mother becomes a figure of sacrifice, of pain, of *dukha*. She is objectified, like my crochet hook—she becomes the object—

She becomes the goddess and at the same time, the eternal giver—we sing songs about her. The first Nepali film to be produced in Nepal was called...Aama.

We view ourselves as the subjects and her as the object. It is oftentimes sons addressing their mothers.

The daughters additionally sing different tunes, tunes that know that we, too, shall become Aama. And we too shall have to move mountains, become goddess-like figures, so romanticised that our human-frames can no longer hold our feminine bodies, our wombs become the Brahman the ultimate reality.

In a gendered society like Nepal, Aama is still legally a second-class citizen (passing down citizenship is one such complexity); but by all my goddesses, at least all our dedications are to her. Part II: चिठीहरु/letters

मिय मामा, स्रीरो इतिहास तपाईकी इतिहास ही, मेरो इतिहास तपाईकी इतिहास ही, अमा जस्ते बहुकथाहर, बहुवा साविकगहर बिगा म म हने शिस्त हुन सकिन शिस्टा तर म तपाई, तपाई हर होरने। ब म हुन धाहान्ह, किनकि म माफूँ हुने माता श्वीजरे हु। त्यी माफूँ हुने माता श्वीजरे हु। त्यी मदाकी रवीजमा म आफूँ भित्र कता कता प्रतिसने। धन्यवाद, इतिहासबाट मेले रहाको वंद्या न पास्को अस्-आफनो कोठा बनाउन सस्ति 回当 तेपाई वि

Dear Aama,

My history is your history, I wouldn't be, couldn't be me without the multiple stories, multiple narratives that live in me. But I am not you, you all. Nor do I want to be, because I am looking for permission to be myself. I have reached multiple places inside of myself in search of that permission. Thank you, without having inherited bricks from history, I wouldn't have been able to make my room.

-Yours

आआ तपार्ड कता हुनुहुन्द? मणा कमा हुनुहुद्दा मणा, एक्सीपना न, क्षकिने जिन कति कोष्ठ हरार, कति नाउली ट्यामेन कति कोष्ठ हरार, कति नाउली ट्यमेन किंग् तर स्कर्नापना, हरे - यो जनमा रहते किरनार जिरव । संसार जना द्रा रहते किरनार जिरव । संसार जना द्रा प्रतीस म त थर्त रहडडु ही ? के भूगोस, म त थर्त रहडडु ही ? के भूगोस, म त स्त्री रहडडु ही ? के भूगों की कार्य, तार्य, का नहीं की कार्य, तार्य, का

Aama, Where are you?

Aama,

Loneliness is an unbreakable thing. How many rooms have been lost, how many novel roles have I played? But loneliness, look—the eternal shriek that remains in your heart. No matter where the world is, I will still be here. Right? What can I say— I am an unfinished human being living in hedonism, but still, even so sadness doesn't relent. Happy new year.

31211 आज ज टजुरकी खारेमा सी देखा न्यी बादति -के हक द जमा ? के को हक ? ज यता कि क उता कि कि कति रुगाई लो हैं आमा । स्तार बन्दा मेरी दरवाता मेरी दुकित 1 में कि स्पत्न समय मा साति चिकं. र म ति क्र राजयमा, हेर्रसंग TIRT 22 1 NR 318 मामारा मून गई गई म

I have been thinking of you today, that balcony what right do I have? What kind of right? I'm not from here, not here. How fun, the world has become my gate, my door. I was also small at one time, and I would play cards with you; but now I am a vagrant— no I have always been one—

31 37 वय, न 1 72 27 , जन्म के हिम्ह वत - उन्होत्रे त वन्ही? अस त्र वन्ही? अस त्राचीय अविनी 210 5-2

I am talking to myself. New year, new person, you're still the same old. Where's the birth certificate, auspicious, incomparable, return from here, don't become— abstract, why become difficult? Time is time.

आमा ओ आमा! — 103

आमा, आषा रहित स कहाँ हुन्हरीं मेरी र तपाईको आषा मिल, र लिपा मात्रे होटून, भाषाकी उच्यारण र प्रकार मात्रे होटून - तर भाषाकी उपयार गम तटल हु। मेरी साशीहरू दन्। द्रुम्न जन नाग्द्र। चेतनाकी धारामा बग्ने बानी द्र। झाफ्नी अंगंगता हराउने पुकृति – कति कुरा हाम्री मिल्द्-कति कुरा मिल्देन । अनुवार में हेरास्की मान्यता पर्याचानी र विपरीतार्थक शब्दहरूको मैलमा बसेको - हामी सबै । असहरणको अन्मा लाटो समि दानको हामी । आवेममा हरास्की अनेकी होगी।

Where would I be without language. Are your language and mine the same? Not just the script, or the pronunciation of the language nor just the type of language—but also its usage. I am difficult. I have friends. I like travelling. My habit is to flow with the stream with of consciousness. My nature is to get lost in my own body— there are many things that are similar about us—many things that are not. Lost meaning amongst translations, we are all situated in the meeting point between synonyms and antonyms. We picked a bath based on examples. Hungry while lost in passion.

आमा कुन कुनामा हामीलर्स त्र अनेका थिए ? हामी सतासँग के खालकी सम्बन्ध दृ २ हामी सर्वेकी उनाला वोक्टी रेटी ? यो भार होरे भो। म त रहेले रवेलमा संसारकी मायातल मा पत्रे की आजा, के को सत्रा, के को भाषा? केसकी प्रधार

What corner did they tell us to sit in? What kind of relationship do we have with power? Is it true that we carry everyone's Ātman? This burden is too much. I feel like I coasted by into the great illusion. Aama, what kind of power, what kind of language? Whose institution?

माला, मारा मुद्दी में , मारा मा भारिंग भारा नस्ते, रल, आशि, माशि, रल । भाधि, तल, रल, माशि, भारिपा, श्रद्भ मारिंग, भारिपा, श्रद्भ मारिंग, स्ति बेनेक म स्त, तपार् स्ति - स्त्री कि म स्त, तपार् मेल में ही परिपान ने हो? भूकि म में जिता स्का, भूकि म होनी कि मासिन, भूकि म होनी कि सामित, हाम हामी हामी ETHIN 1 - तपार्वक, मालक्री

Today I have emptied, today I am full. Like a container, down, up, up, down. Up, down, down, up. Completely filled, zeroed. I am a combination of the room and power, you are also one—apparently it is just our unions with the room that's our identities. No, damn, I don't believe that, we are not empty vessels that spend our lives confused. Us us us us.

> —Yours, Malashree

Chapter Four

thank you for having me

Part I: In conclusion Part II: Images Part III: Experimental Blacked-out Novel

Notes on thank you for having me

The fourth and final chapter, *thank you for having me*, focuses on reflection and creation of my work in the exhibition. This chapter also includes an extensive portion of a written element that will be displayed in the Retrospective; and includes the conclusion through which I aim to tie in the different chapters together: through a feminist ontological discourse on care.

More Notes on thank you for having me

Journal: 2nd April 2023 (right after midnight)

I internalise, it is my status quo. I speak of the multipluralistic I in this text but through multiple limitations. Limitations of time, limitations of the scope of the work, limitations of my abilities, and limitations of who I am. I can only fully speak of the I within, and that is already so elusive.

I am so lucky, I am so loved, but yet I feel so trapped. Is it because I want too much? Is this a narcissistic pursuit? I couldn't disengage with myself, so I had to try to fully engage with who I am.

I rely on agencies to guide me, rely on fractured parts of my being coming together to form a whole.

This Retrospective is not for me. But it is for the I. And in this case, isn't the I, me? I write this with a sudden turn in my mood, a sunny day turned into a windy night.

Is that all it takes?

Oh, it is all water, oh I am just contingent on the contingencies. Oh I am all stream of consciousness, oh I am so dynamic, oh I am so static.

Notes / More Notes — 113

Mary Oliver wrote:

You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. Meanwhile the world goes on. Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers. Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

This poem (Wild Geese, 1986) is one of my favourite things in the world, I come back to it over and over again. Every time I read it, I garner a different meaning from it, because every time I read it my situation is slightly different.

Words lose meaning sometimes, but sometimes it's all we have. So it's best to make the best of it, even when I write such a damned strange stream of consciousness that no one, including myself, can fully decipher-right now, these words are all I have.

I use the the phrase "what I mean to say is...." (Or something to that extent) a few times in this thesis. One could view this as hedging, but I am viewing it as a choice. Not just a stylistic or aesthetic choice, but also that. But also because T.S. Eliot's poem The lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock (1915) keeps ringing in my head, in this instance specifically the verse: If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl, And turning toward the window, should say: "That is not it at all, That is not what I meant, at all."

And I keep misremembering it as "that is not what I meant to say at all"

But also because

I want to say I mean to say please help me understand what I mean. And I know what I mean, but I have so much to say and maybe it's not all good, and maybe none of it makes sense.

And

But regardless, Thank you for having me. Love, Malashree B. Suvedi Host, Director, Manager, Organiser, Curator, PR, Technical crew, Artist, Friend of Artist, Foe of Artist & Critic of the Artist of the Retrospective in question.

Page 117: A self-portrait; Gouache on watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition

Page 118: A self-portrait; Gouache on watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition









Page 119: *On your knees: a series;* Gouache on watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition

Page 120: A section of my installation—*Ocean closeness*; after *On your knees*; sample wool and thread tied together; shown in the exhibition

Through the paintings of many limbs reaching out to bodies of water, I built a mini-series entitled *On your knees*. In conjunction, I received a gift from my good friend and colleague Martina Moro: the gift of a bag filled with loose threads and wool, often of samples. This came to me through her family friend, artist Giorgio Tagliabue. He made art for himself and had a studio near the ocean. He would work with water and imagery of fishes. Martina told me that his studio was a treasure trove. I received this gift for my 28th birthday, with the permission of his wife, Chiara Varetto. Giorgio had recently passed away. I never knew him but it is a great honour. Therefore, I focused on the materiality of the objects I was gifted, choosing to tie knots together to keep the focus on the objects. My installation is also an homage to the water, and through the distance of time and space and oceans, we can still come together to celebrate the softness of textile. And in turn, I can celebrate lives that affect me even though I never directly knew them.

Part I:

In conclusion:

No one has ever attempted to be slightly experimental in their writing before, it's completely new. I have done the unthinkable, the unimaginable. First of all, no one has ever attempted to mix in the personal with the theoretical (do not think of Barthes, do not think of Pessoa, do not think of Woolf, you will not think of Lamichhane or Parijat who were Nepali writers). No one has ever attempted to talk about the problematic nature of viewing objects outside of ourselves, and no one has ever considered that to think of subjects and objects as ontologically separate may cause a material problem in our lives (do not think of Haraway, do not think of Puig de la Bellacasa, do not think of poets, do not think of every postcolonial feminist ever, do not think of Latour, do not think of pantheism, do not think of non-western philosophy).

Journal: 8th April 2023

I read Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's Matters of Care (2017), and then listened to my mother talk about how she had to stop pursuing a master's degree twice when my brother and I were young. Let's try placing ourselves in a history that is non-linear and care centric; let's recognise that we do not have dominion over materials and land, nor other people.

This 'I/Me'-self-referential art: myself, myself, myself. It's gaudy, representational, uninteresting. Derivative, kitsch. Big fancy art words. Art related to the self is viewed as selfish, un-innovative, self-centred, and egotistical. These works are viewed through capitalistic notions of the individual and the mass market, reducing art to narcissism. However, my collective body of work, including this thesis, challenges this very notion because while the art world does cater to mass markets and the moneyed, art about the self or the I does not necessarily have to be an agent of hyper-individualism. The stories we embody are oftentimes passed down to us like heirlooms. We become figures that are larger than our own bodies, i.e., we carry multitudes; our selves are a result of the micro and macro histories and stories. We cannot look at the personal without considering larger contexts. If we are an amalgamation of narratives, histories, objects, and subjects then this 'I'-the confessional, the personaldoes not necessarily have an agent of selfish hyper-capitalism. The collective I does not negate an individual I, nor does this negate the potential, substance, and material the individual I holds. We may be creatures that are bound to constructions, but that does not mean we have no agency. We are nuanced creatures; the *I* is complex.

Making art about the self or one's family or personal life is often assigned to the feminine;⁸³ much like how any marginalised groups of people who make art about their lives are said to be catering to identity politics. It is because of spaces we've been assigned, the space of care has been assigned to the woman—so she makes art about her family and her self, naturally ⁸⁴. However, white men who paint nudes of their mistresses are just cherishing the female form (they look at us with their *gazes*, and all of a sudden it becomes high art).

⁸³ Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, I Am An Artist (He Said), trans. Kong Rithdee (Singapore: National Gallery, 2022).

⁸⁴ I am being sardonic.

In a stratified world informed by gender, race, sexuality, class, caste, state, and access, only a few amongst us have gotten to enjoy being the *I*. This is exactly why the exploration of the I in my work is personal; subjective rather than objective. I want to enjoy being the I, and I want to tell stories of the people in my life. I choose to do so through the confessional lens of my own positionality and situationality, and through the medium of my art. Specifically through what some art historians, art critics, and artists may consider to be self-referential art—which is a categorisation of art that is often greatly debated and mocked for varying reasons, including the often contradictory criticism of it being too self-indulgent and narcissistic while still somehow being too driven by social justice and communal identity politics. I have challenged the derogatory nature in which this categorisation of art is often critiqued and understood.

The act of observation, inquiry, viewing materials and objects as codependent to subjects, constructions of space, positionality, gaze, articulations about language, all tie together to create the I in my work, including 'in my exhibition (see: Chapter Four, Part II and Part III).

I am making my work with care—I think *Care*, or whatever word one uses, community for example, becomes how we deal with the multiple *I*. The exploration of the singular I cannot be done without placing ourselves in some context.

The *I* becomes not a just negotiation with the external—based on situated knowledge—but also becomes a framework that deals with care at the heart of things (including self-care and boundaries).

I mean to say that care is in all our hearts. However:

- Care is not going to mean the same thing for everyone. How we deal with and understand care can also change even within ourselves.
- Care does also lead to frustration, especially in specific contexts. Marginalised individuals have always had to take up the brunt of care work, unpaid emotional labour, poorly paid care work, it can all be exhausting.
- Care does not necessarily imply a gentle ideation, it can also be coarse in nature. One can care about racial purity, for example. One can care about the environment, which is taxing.

Thus, the framework moves and we move with it. We must. We must care about the fact that inventions aren't just mechanised, and we must care about our best friend's health, we must care about ourselves too. We must sometimes also care enough to care less. The existence of a core *I* does not exclude who we could be and are in varying situations. Care work can be exhausting, I am not challenging this notion; nor am I trying to justify the instrumentalisation of care in relation to its gendered and racialised history. In fact, I believe that care simply exists, it is a matter of how we care that should be important to us. I hold that our histories with spaces, our histories with histories, and our histories with community and systems dictate who we can become—this is in flux, of course.

The fatalistic notion that we are bound to be someone just because of our situations do not take into accord the very invariable nature of situations and of the different ways in which those situations can interact with each and can be interacted with. Statements like these are difficult to make without also bringing in the validity of the disproportional nature of severe oppression and trauma that many people live under.

Then, I ask and so may you do too: what good is understanding the *I* as a complex entanglement? What good is to question and interfere with institutions? What good is trying to encompass community and care into our frameworks of creation and being?

The answer is simple: you who has gotten to be I and still gets to be the *I*: do your due diligence now—minuscule though you think your role may be, it is only through minuscule knots that we are able to create large tapestries. We must care and we must show that care in positive interventions and positive ways; i.e., we must want everyone's lives to be good and equitable.

This is an enormous task. Please do not think I advocate for constant anxiety, because speaking from a very pragmatic point of view, that will only lead to such a grave sense of overwhelmedness and shame, that it would be difficult to actually actively engage with anyone or anything. As María Puig de la Bellacasa puts it, care is a "living terrain."⁸⁵ It must be negotiated with, constantly. Even in relation to ourselves. We must also think of care as outside the mother's body, as outside the Global South's

⁸⁵ María Puig de la Bellacasa, Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 8.

responsibility, as outside the underpaid (if paid at all), overworked care worker's domain.

Who has gotten to be the I? And who gets to be the I now? This too changes and become situational, but the situational nature of it all does not exclude the seismic nature of centuries of oppression. We talk about the I, taking care of the I, self-care, and many other fragments relating to the I and are comfortable to do so through capitalism: the capitalism that takes away many people's opportunity to be an I in flux—instead the poorest amongst us, the most racialised and gendered amongst us, have to struggle to survive.

It is through a feminist and post-colonial perspective that I come and challenge the individual as a cornered animal belonging to one's own body. We have to think ourselves as more than that, as part of a larger ever changing discourse, to even begin to start at destroying inequality. It is up to the most privileged amongst to do that: but no, do not speak for other people; just because you are entangled with other people, does not mean you can become other people, especially other people who are so OTHERED. We must create space, actively, to listen to other people, to other ways of knowing and caring. This is why reparations are important, dismantling institutions is important (see Annex), objecting to and actively challenging and talking about race and caste is important, understanding that marbled halls aren't the only way to preserve culture is important, challenging notions relating to gender and the gender binary is important. However, at a certain point discourse and conversation becomes an echo chamber of one's making. Everyone knows someone who has said, "we have to do something and not just talk amongst ourselves."

I agree with this sentiment; unfortunately the current state of the world proves this to be difficult: because the biggest Is in our world today are powerful billionaires and more so—giant companies that are now considered to be individuals.

But whatever it is, we must try. I do not claim to have the answers (see Annex) but I am trying to do my part, my very small part, by trying to interconnect my I to my feminist and Nepali histories. The demarcation between the personal I and my multitudinous I may exist, but I stand on the shoulder of people who paved my path here. Without them, I would be nothing. We must care if we are to be and to become.

Journal: 7th April 2023

I confront myself with myself when I write. The I in this thesis becomes inescapable from the I in the readers' minds. Who knows if I am talking about myself or the myself I could've been.

Part II: Images

My work is a combination of textile, crocheting, knitting, embroidery, knotting, paintings, writing, and sculptural elements. Interspersed in this book are images of some of the works I will be showing in the master's exhibition, Retrospective to the *I*.

The Retrospective is an amalgamation and an homage to everyone who I have been and everyone who has affected me and helped in creating me. It is not just the people I know who have brought me here, I am also grateful to the readings and art I have experienced.

Additionally, between 2018–2023, I wrote the first draft of a novel entitled *I built myself a cave*. For the master's exhibition, all 254 pages of it will be blacked out (see page 137), through which a story within the novel will be created. For the purposes of this text, 90 of those pages have been blacked out. By blacking out the text, I explore language, fragmentation, and mostly what stories contain what other stories. The novel also considers the thematic ideas of the individual versus the collective. This blacked out text becomes a testament to the *I*. How many stories are there within how many stories? Not to be too post-structural, but these fragments become conjoined with a larger fragment.

All the things shown here and not shown here conjoin together to create a space that is celebratory. The celebration does not always have to encompass only positive feelings, I am celebrating the Self, the Åtman, and the act of caring. All of this can also be burdensome. The juxtaposition of recognising the value of other people, of communities, of the complex self with distance, void, loneliness, frustration, tiredness is a very human state. I celebrate the emptiness, disparate fragments; and the conjoinedness; how those disparate fragments come together in one installation.

The exhibition will be curated in such a way that mimics a retrospective—hope you enjoy it.





Page 129: *On your knees: a series;* Gouache on watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition

Page 130: Toe Toggle; Gouache on watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition

Page 133: *On your knees: a series*; Gouache on watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition

Page 134: *On your knees: a series;* Gouache on watercolour paper; shown in the exhibition





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73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81
82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90

Part III: Experimental Blacked-out Novel

I

Malashree Suvedi

The gatherings have hurt his restless self. insincere summer, new money, lonely, automated people. No core people. I took noise unwanted, parallel ghost, I entered

He Seltsam, strange belted, but I leant by a wall, and multiple eyes wondered irritated, embarrassed. But instead, it unwinded me

tall, broad him, clumsy acquaintance

I usually gulped to admire

"You look great"

racially ambiguous, very beautiful.

we were two open-ended questions I thought. bizarre, abstract. I really mean jarring.

Don't know, different from them

I was struck, wrecking our walls inadvertently, what we both truly mean to say

he was important.

muse, my eyes lingered on his

I suddenly was propelled by a desire, I let my mind drift far, far off.

on my face, on my fingers like Monet. conjure visions on the top of my fingers

I remained silent

the boy speaking to me.

"Oh," "Interesting" my lips twitched, a little indignant. He shot me a fantastic smile. "Well, good." I nodded. He giggled. he muttered. strange character was he mocking me or himself? a little weary. I tore down the evening next morning sober, the universe fell silent. speak only when spoken to art art space of red, timid intense, mission.

I've heard your friends extinguish you And thus call me by a sudden sweet skin. mine, mine.

I cried hours relentless, strawberry pink.

memory formless; fully foggy

dread

dodge, lose people, please.

Outside wet with conjugation streets woke up and ran, in perfect frenzy.

Damn, "Friendship with you is never physical.

We drank wine,

earth.

Was I in love?

kindness cover up my arms, uncomfortable, sorry

We both looked truly loved

Inside the distinctions became a point, barely tremble.

distant, shouldn't be death

I thought of songs jumping machine with cuffs, missing gesture

"Want to contradict."

I belligerently, like a little lamb felt jittery legs "Oh"

bothered, nonchalantly, of course, the sun, was amiss. childish despair, strange special.

I live in a keyhole in pastel, red element. get the idea? "This wine was laid out. A cacophony of colour. mysterious glance, careful Nothing no, no, wrong harm.

albeit for having hope on the table. We sat, smoked dissipate glances rolling in turn

exhausted revelled reiterated odd impressions. fuck off. The ghost creatures devolved Dependant pathogens. the wind moves like a continent Crying evening. Over. Instantaneous. normalcy acknowledged.

I act handsome. But in my heart I worry. scared soft uphill. I will wait the whole day. big voice. good choice. the sun behind fog, remember him filter picture. sugar belly girl Promise no word All silence. being a woman, with two heads, carpentry.

Dream Winter circumnavigate a flash, fake pieces always wrong time. her hands wrap my beautiful handsome face. Of course, a boisterous distant. different people. Time was a bitter goodbye. The wooden walls breathe. screaming pot, thunder. gulp the lights.

.
.
.
I wake up dreaming, emptied. covered in a bouquet of poached roots.
dream of me.

Remembering distance watering wordless hurricane, threshold implied bright harsh combination.

blush. sweet flowers

my name's completely a drumming parallel. Softly, gently, the same hours knock on the door. After I was saddened by a ghost. the knot was gone, signalling another ending. got back to each other. grandiose, vague the privileged interject, I sunk the water and fell.

I verbalise with endorphins

I changed my clothes. I one-sidedly present it as jest

shorthanded. soaking in a sun, ogling, hardcore convincing. I once occupied my place and shared my dancing. Come on, celebrate weeks like wind chimes, too harsh. convey teasingly, our follies. After an anthropologist, come into possession of a translator, been lost. our possession contains narratives. loving thy history.

At last, fools. Fools! Lucky lucky one, lucky, lucky gift.

across my eyes, his. I felt like singing.

I see my girl, completely smart. birds like the evening. free. Later, is different.

accept it.

I love you.

baby pink, lighthearted jabs

shoulders were bare, the dying onslaught of cynicism. It took me aback. I had convinced myself

I shook hands

he held me

nightmares rolled, empty.

"Can you avert my future."

glances and kisses

I rested Like always.

sleepyhead, I felt here.

Ι

I was scared "How are you going to carry it?"

We can carry it together

lovers. Didn't let myself think too much of it.

rise, hear, in love. rigid, bundled with a great sound.

an outburst, soft, then progressively shaking in slow spring days and sunny winter days.

I leant closer his perception, love me gently, with a kindness.

his shoulders focused. idiots, I love as loud as geese. be quiet in the lull reclined himself tired here.

Somewhere born far, far away My forever woman. astounded in waves. I have an ocean of pain, But this depth, a seamstress, I am my exposed spine, and soon I laugh, my heart my eternity. in the morning, I breathed heavy, clutched my physical space, and my friends needed callous, and I time. as usual The coffee sat awkwardly

She asked planets. in love her head rose. my bones played, my palm lit.

"Thanks." We constantly for weeks turned to Tulip. It was then, that I through the hills spent hours slipped

trusting you you won't reveal your own judgements

So far, all is good love me, I love him. animals, human in reality, tease me, the mountain and I with multiple hands

What can I say?

tap only for the cold, we have very little money, But life big.

I go by heart. Listen, we understand transfixed laying Repeatedly stubborn unfolding a perfectly turquoise centred agreement. He with the vocabulary this fierce, realisation

my identity, on the tip of my tongue. free like a meteorite. tulips in my soles deep. this body an inch. this shell shook with both glass and water. He trembled slowly in a singsongy voice, my shoulders, filled with attention. I unwound and belong. He in silence checked my soles. told me to lay, as I closed my eyes, "Sometimes people lose their minds." his lips looking for the words, he paid my bill and we drank beer.

I mimic a ceiling walls and, I begin with nothing but the emptiness in the dark. large noise eats me, breathless.

"whatiswrongwithyou give a reason" horror yellow haze I laugh. asleep through a kaleidoscope.

sometimes, the tension holds my hands, often. I laugh. asleep through a kaleidoscope. sometimes, the tension, often concentrates beams. -You like Tulips, nod.

nonchalantly nonetheless I me owe me one.

quick, I go back to giggles, grinning sheepishly. The moon light jolts. his hands, This whole world. me, swaying. stammer out a bucket. The moon still pours.

I sit, mirror reflexes. Sweet, soft, How did you come to be? I begin and I'm the process of.

"You are,"

so beautiful, a bird sticks his tongue out, blush, softly, kisses the sunshine. Come out.

After breakfast a convertible folds. "hello to my girl" "A tribute to you" embody the air. "The point is to feel the air through your hair." beside new disbelief. our options pops and whizzes. "Slow down" I say.

slow making. I see in the night, I unravel. the reflection is a relief. , like bird being, like full sun a roaring loving moon sky imagining My hero, now in the present

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150 — Bibliography

Annex: My Body is an Institution A Stream of Consciousness

Journal: 5th April 2023, 2 am

My body is an institution, it has become institutionalised-my proximity to whiteness does not evade me. I constantly think about it in one way or the other. And now, I am working with a difficult thing like identity. I am trying to be coherent about it and present it in a way that is acceptable for a thesis. But I still want to stay true to my writing, writing means so much to me.

I want to be able to explore ideas and express myself without the constraints of a rigid institutional system but I know that that's not possible. I cannot detangle myself from it. I cannot detangle myself from the fact that I have to resign myself to this space I have been allocated, and now I am talking quite literally. I was assigned a space to show my art, and all I can do is show it there.

This Viennese opulence haunts me, but I am not faultless. I am a product of my privilege, my insistence on making I-centric art, my caste, my command of the English language, my class.

Have I failed to be a good artist because I have holed myself into the dogma of a retrospective? Possibly. I wanted to write poetry, now I feel like I have strayed so far. I wanted to explore language, but now I feel like I failed at that. I wake up and I am exotic, I sleep and I am exotic. I wake up and I am white, I sleep and I am white. What about when I go back to Kathmandu? I should say if, right? What happened to my idealism? Drowned in water like ants in rain, I am an ant in rain. I have begun to repulse myself, I have always been tied to oppression. I am sorry, Aama. I do not know what I mean to say, this will have to be in English because I do not think I can express this in Nepali. I am a coloniser in my body, but I have always been. I am an artist, a bad one. I am a poet, a failed one.

world stuff, it bothers me- so does the horde of myselves in me, and i i i fragments of punctuations, become desperate for need so bored and boring, I drone on and on and on and i frighten myself with what futility have I unentangled a little slice of pie i am a crazed midnight bird, images of roads rush in to me and suddenly i am a child again but i wish this time i could be a happy child with a good childhood and a good home and if could hug and hold her who would i be, my little one, the little one in me

And i could have been anything in this world, but i arranged myself as human, and to what end Do i

Become a poet when poetry becomes anti-poetry and i become so abstract i begin writing in full sentences again And however And however and therefore and a comma here and then a conclusion and oh I need to make and make and somehow in the summer, Feed myself, beholden to other people's gift- my hands will be empty later and I will Become a table and i will become a chair, and i will become this and that and what of you And the rest and what of My books, and my thread and the coffee that's instant and what of love, who loves whom i am unknowable and unreachable like dark wells, we only try to say something and piece together Each Other and Ourselves, and uno i win this round, and uno you win this round And fuck, i am a slice of something am i not and fuck I am my mother but not, and she tells me Do we have to use big words to sound smart but I am do not sound smart either way And i must sleep eventually, but i have drank instant coffee now and i am now locked into a treatise with myself.

* * *

The realisation that I have finished this thesis (well I am about to finish it) hits me. I hedge a lot in my work, but that is because I am careful. I do not pretend to know the answers to fix things like institutional roles, misogyny, racism, casteism. I know that I am culpable in many ways too.

At one point, I wanted to write a different text; maybe something that was more experimental than this; something that followed different patterns of citing than the usual. But I ended up with this work, I worked within some kind of institutional framework. I don't mean to suggest that all institutional frameworks are wrong or evil, but the didactic nature of it, the inherent presumption of objective truths (that are actually not so objective because of the inherent biases that observers, researchers, creators have) are difficult for me to fully reclaim.

I understand that irony of writing a semi-postcolonial text while in Vienna, with my background. All the punctuations I had to correct. I am not correcting anything in this annex that nobody will read anyway. Most punctuations in Nepali are borrowed (or imposed—complex story).

The world-weariness, Weltschmerz (nice German word), that I have cornered myself in while trying to write about community and the pluralistic I. I don't have the answers but I think positionality and situatiating yourself in the text is important. So here, like a good fake social scientist, I have tried to do so.



Other hand-painted covers









