

## Seasons of Time

Understanding of time through bodily experience

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**Before you start reading, I would like to acknowledge:**

1. I like to listen and equally to that, I like to tell stories
2. I learn through experiencing things; I have hard time to gain knowledge while sitting
3. To keep people mentioned in texts anonymous, only first letter of their name is written
4. This thesis is written with the intention to share stories and experiences in relation to the subject of time as the value of lived and collected knowledges of the body, which is different than intellectual knowledge

## INTRODUCTION

Keywords: time, death, ephemeral, stories, memory, temporality, mourning, grief, dance, theatre

Some time ago, probably a couple of years, my dear friend M. were having conversation where we shared thoughts and experiences regarding death. Both of us had a strong bond with our deceased grandmothers and those two figures often appeared in our conversations. Once, he shared a story of how his grandmother A. told him about two letter M's on our hands, two M's that God imprinted on the palms of each human being, two M's to remember death - *memento mori*. A video work, I made during the first lockdown, *Memento mori* (2020), refers to this narrative. This was my first attempt to work with my body, to perform in a safe space in front of a camera, from home due to global the global pandemic, where the physical presence of an audience is lacking. Those circumstances allowed me to be focused and intimate, to sit with my own grief, to sit and experience the presence of life by actively remembering death.

Less than half a year later, I started to doing research on vegetal ontology. I came across the film *Minute Bodies: The Intimate world of F. Percy Smith*, a pioneer of microfilm and naturalist from Britain. Observing the whole process of how plants grow from a seed visually reminded me of the growth of a human being, from the moment when two cells become one. Finding this parallel between plants and humans, I started to look for more similarities between the two. The one that stuck with me the most was the parallel between nerves in the human body and the roots of plants, their similarity in being a fragile web, heavily relying upon an additional, external structure to hold them, yet carrying vital information to the rest of its body.

The first impulse for understanding relations, trying to imitate and recognize for human beings is drawing. A Child first learns to recognize through visuals and colours the world around, before it can speak or write.

After drawing roots and nerves, I started making roots in clay. These experiences of working with a natural material allowed me to understand its own processes, my struggles with them and ability to relate differently. Further, it raised certain questions about how to present a piece itself in space and how to keep a clay being in its unfired, fragile stage, without it completely falling apart. I started to support the clay with jute, wrapping the roots in it. This way, I could observe how the clay dries, breaks, yet remains together. In writings from November, the new relation I found enclosed the cycle of understanding: '...I've made this root from clay and jute which reminds me of a baby. It looks like an entity itself.' (21/11/20) This experience brought to my memory my father, and how he always talks about him holding me as a baby.

I travelled back to my home country and after getting a recommendation to look up the work of an artist whose name I don't remember, I decided to make a video work in the forest where we used to go for walks when I was a child. In that video, I am holding a root and talking about the first memory I have with my deceased grandmother T., and rituals I keep doing to this day, due to un - mourned /unprocessed grief, as I was prohibited to attend her funeral - she died when I was two years old.

I have started to notice a pattern in my practice: repetition dealing with a struggle – the struggle of time. Whether taking the form of how materials I use in my creation engage together, or performing in a specific time and place, or even site- specific installations. Now,

my aim is not to define what time is, nor understand time and come to a clear answer, but rather to share and speak about a cyclical process I have been observing and actively trying to define, taking place in four stages - how we as human beings experience time through emotional or abstract understandings of events in space (momentum), how each moment is a memory of the future (memento), how time shapes the quality of presence and (in)ability to relate to it (mourning) and finally - how acts of creations are memorials of, and for, the past.

## I. Momentum

Understanding: quantity of motion of the body in time and space

Season: summer

Feeling: waves, rotation of the body

### Shifting attention in the body

My first encounter with the word *momentum* was when I started to take movement classes in the Korzo theatre. On Monday's classes were more theoretical, with different choreographers, and focused on understanding how the body functions: how you can shift attention towards different movements in your body or combine them, how you can listen to different rhythms in music and move accordingly. Probably one of the most remarkable things I understood about movement was when we were laying on our bellies on the floor and we were asked to remember how babies move. Imitating the first movement a baby does, moving across the space. The choreographer said: 'coordination is more important than force'. He explained there is always a counter movement to coordination - one part of the body that contracts and the other one that stretches, and this is how babies move, by coordination - which is so natural and instinctive for the body.

When we stood up and started to move through space, shifting attention in our bodies, contracting muscles, and letting go of tension, the choreographer started talking about how to create a momentum. It is the body that determines momentum – an acceleration created by movement. We divided body in three parts – head (1), torso (2) and legs (3), and explored how each part of the body can determine the movement and its direction in space. He was standing in the middle of the room, surrounded by us, giving us directions, and telling us when and which area of our body to shift our attention to as we moved. Those parts of the body lead it and the *linear* momentum happens in those in- between those moments: when you are shifting attention from one part of the body to the other, together with gravity. While linear momentum is in relation to space and time, *angular* momentums are happening by shifting the attention to different segments of the body – shoulders, elbows, hands, chest, hips, knees, feet.

### Dance and theatre

I was four when my mother took me to a play - *Romeo and Juliet On Ice*. It was a theatre play, performed on ice skates. Happening in a stadium, the space was very cold and dark – I can still recall 'the smell' of coldness and ice. I don't remember much, only abstract feelings the theatre play left in me, a few visuals of skaters and the sound of skates on ice. From then on, my love and joy for theatre and dance kept growing throughout the years.

In Pina Bausch's work *Rite of Spring*, inspired by composer Igor Stravinsky, momentums seems to appear constantly as she uses both angular and linear momentum equally. The Changes of tempo and intensity of movements - moments where bodies move slowly or stands still - are interrupted with sudden bursts of dynamic bodily expression. The colours and atmosphere were what first struck me when I saw a video recording of the dance theatre play. A Woman, laying on the floor covered in soil, her head resting on a red dress. As the performance continues, more women come out on stage and slowly gather, welcoming spring

in gentle gestures intermittent with expressive repetitive movements, interacting with each other. At one point, men come on stage, sometimes gathering in bands with women to engage in rituals of celebration of spring - something that looks like a competition, expressions of tenderness and love, lust, conflict, frustration, fear – all a way to choose a young woman as a sacrificial victim who must dance herself to death. the women then form a group - one of them holding the red dress and slowly walking towards the man who decides which one is going to be sacrificed. the Women start passing each other the dress and going up to the man, until one of them gets chosen by him. Other dancers start madly dancing, running around while the man is taking the white dress off of the chosen one, and clothing her in the red one. In the last act, *Sacrificial dance*, a young woman is wearing the red dress and dancing while all the other dancers are statically observing her, until the moment she falls on the ground and her body remains without movement.

### **The idea of present**

'There is only a memory of momentums and a representation of them that remains, but never a repetition of it in the same form it is experienced. Moments are grasped through emotional understanding of an unrepeatable present moment - understanding of one's own experience of presence in time and relation to space traps momentum in a forever lasting memory of it, unable to be freed from its past. Its representation is nothing but an attempt to reproduce and free the memory of its time.'

(Writing from 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2022)

Maurice Merleau Ponty, a French phenomenology philosopher and colleague of Jean Paul Sartre, in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* wrote:

'I may have mistaken the idea about the present which I now experience' (M.Merleau Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, p. 80)

I am wondering what exactly Ponty meant by this. My first understanding would be that the idea of the present which one is experiencing is changing from one individual to the other, depending on their perception - the way now is perceived by an individual being. However, it can also be understood as there is an idea of present - the concept of now, an invention, to be able to relate to our surroundings, which is an abstract understanding of being in space and time.

In October 2021, I left the Netherlands for short trip to Belgium, listening to my urge to disappear from my then current space. I remember being scared, anxious, panicking as I was not understanding myself, and reasoning behind my escape was unknown to me.

I woke up in the morning, finding myself in Belgium, not wanting to leave the house, not knowing where to go, how to go about the day, what to do, ... but my mind was a stronger force and so, I took a metro to the city centre. Passing by a shop with art supplies, I bought a sketchbook and a pencil. I started to map my walking and my surrounding in the form of drawing actual maps and writing, keeping receipts from cafes, keeping thoughts about space and perception of time; as when you are in an unknown environment - when you are an unknown element in an environment. On the third day - on the day I had to leave, I'd made a conclusion.

Being in an unknown environment, having a foreign setting, no familiarity of surrounding, not knowing how to grasp nor experience time, I felt more present because of the lack of

safety which brought me to my experience of being more aware. I still have vivid images of people's faces in the metro: a young boy falling asleep so peacefully, his chin falling towards chest, or this man in a yellow coat who was taking metro every day from the same neighbourhood as I did, or this little blonde girl being held by her father on the metal bar, or this homeless man who sat in front of me with huge baguette in his hands; or Liza, a homeless girl from Poland with whom I spoke for over an hour.

Using my memory of my trip to Belgium as an example, I would explain momentums as the action of noticing and shifting one's attention to the environment around oneself - presence of *the other* in space when they are 'not with themselves' but busy with action or simply wondering. It is almost as if you're making your own film, where the blink of an eye is the cut to another scene. A part of one's skin between two pieces of fabric, a first raindrop falling to the ground before it starts pouring - it is happening before you are awake, but not yet asleep - when you are almost asleep, but still awake.



## II. MEMENTO

Understanding: collecting momentums

Season: autumn

Feeling: letting go, falling, linear movement combined with rotation

### Unpredictable paths of remembering

Virginia Woolf in her *Moments of being*, shares her struggle with writing, how every attempt to depict memory (and feeling bonded with it) through writing is a failure, and she herself is not an exception of failure. She states that many writers write what happened to a character, but barely write to whom it happened, who was the person, how they were; and according to Woolf, it is due to the impossibility of fully describing a human being. Here, I wonder as I am writing, what sharing my memories, thoughts, experiences mean, without a description of who I am, to a reader. What is the importance of me remembering as I write and you, reading my memories, becoming a part of your memory of reading this text. This is rather a side thought which may find its importance later.

Woolf speaks about the importance of her first memory, where she describes herself sitting in her mother's lap, her mother's flower-printed dress, and even how close she could see those flowers, where they were heading and what the time of the day it was. However, she also faces the uncertainty of fogging and confusion of memory in regard to passing time. wrote she thought they were going to St. Ives but regarding the light settling down, it is much more probable they were going back to London. Woolf looks at this confusion analytically, where she tries to understand why this confusion in her memory happened

*'But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we were going to St. Ives, for that will lead to my other memory, which also seems to be my first memory, and in fact it is the most important of all my memories'* (*Moments of being*, Woolf, p.64)

She tries to understand why she remembers they were going to St. Ives instead of going to London, and her reasoning is that it is more convenient for the brain to create a net out of memories that follow other memories, which then might be from a completely different time in the past, to create a narrative that makes sense and carries the importance of one's own being in the world.

### Nostalgia and memory

*Nostalgia* by Andrej Tarkovskij, a Russian filmmaker, was filmed in 1983. It follows the journey of a Russian writer coming to Italy with the purpose of researching the life of a composer who committed suicide after he returned back to his homeland - Russia. Tarkovskij explains in his book *Sculpting in Time*, how he wanted to create a film about a *particular state of mind which assails Russians who are far from their native land*, the film about *Russian nostalgia*. He explains how he found also himself going through something very

similar when he was away from home for a long time, an alienation coming from an attachment to the ‘newness’ of another culture. Tarkovskij himself stated that he couldn’t imagine that somehow, he would bear this painful malady himself and that the film about Russian nostalgia would somehow become his own journey of longing for the past. I have often been told I am too young to have experienced nostalgia (to which I partially agree), however, the seed of nostalgia has been planted in me ever since I left my home country. Recalling first moments of reflection on my own culture, cultural weight, moments of trying to deny and separate myself from it and at the same time, the unbearable frustration of finding familiar traits in nature or buildings, to *grasp what is boundless, or unite what cannot be joined*. I find myself doing things the same way as my mum does or even memories, long forgotten, come back to me again, more intensively, more vividly than ever before. Finding myself often in a liminal space between being *here* and *there* at the same time, standing in the threshold of doors, my feet can’t ever fully decide where to be - wherever I am, I always want to be *there*. What binds me to my country is language, memories, and the romanticizing of what is long gone in time, impossible to bring back.

### Memory and intentional forgetting

My dear friend M., whom I mentioned in introduction, once said a sentence that can be taken as a question but also a statement by itself:

'What if we experienced everything during our childhood and after, everything is a repetition of what has happened.'

I remember being struck by this sentence as I tried to recall my first memories, from very simple ones, such as learning how to ride a bike, to more complex ones, dealing with grief. I remember a period where I was very scared of forgetting. Around 2008, I started to write my diaries as I promised myself, I would never forget and if I would, I could still recall thanks to my writings. But my writings between years 2008 - 2018 don't exist anymore in the form they used to - I burnt them, with the intention to create an artwork: *Frozen ashes* (2022) exhibited in Billytown. I questioned the importance and truthfulness of written word as well as a form that has been given to memories. I viewed the action of burning diaries more as preservation of memories rather than destruction of them, however, the decision of burning only the diaries I wrote when I lived in Slovakia came from a recognition of generational and cultural trauma.

As I have mentioned before, my aim was not to destroy the memories, nor forget them, as they still vividly appear in my mind. Cathy Carruth defines trauma as '*an overwhelming experience of sudden catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena*' where Patrick Dugan, in his book *Feeling Performance, Remembering Trauma* highlights the fact that '*..while the return of the event is an imagined re-living (or remembering) it is nonetheless a powerfully visceral experience that the life survivor embodies, it seems to be happening again, so to speak.*' (Dugan, p.45).

Our bodies are carriers of events and experiences. Why do our minds throw us back all over again to experiences where our understanding of an event is lacking, as if the understanding of life is divided between the *before* and *after* of painful events. How many times can life be divided between a *before* and *after*, how can one find wholeness in their body, again? A wholeness of a child – a reminder of what *we* have lost.

Guy Cools writes about the different stages of mourning and pathological repetition of the events that appear in uncontrolled way. Maybe, he comes to the conclusion that re-living and rationalizing events gives space to transformation.

### III. MOURNING

Understanding: sorrows of memento

Season: winter

Feeling: stiff, cold, grey, linear movement - almost static

#### Unprocessed death

Guy Cools in *Performing Mourning: Laments in Contemporary art* starts his book by writing about his early experience with death. He speaks about the death of his father, who died in a car accident when the author was six years old. Despite his grief, his family didn't allow him to attend the funeral since it was deemed unhealthy for a child to attend such an event, and so, he got stuck in his own grief. His story resonated with me and resembled my own uncried grief. Similarly, I was told by my family that it is unhealthy for a child to attend a funeral.

In Slovak, we say *'You shouldn't grieve more than the family of the deceased one.'* However, my absence in funerals made me an observer of the ones that kept mourning after the death of their beloved ones. It made me an observer of my own grief, and I often mourned with them, as their mourning triggered my own memories of loss, to which I was not able to *'Bid Adieu'*. It allowed me to experience mourning with them, as listening to them, their story, their feelings of pain, were something I could relate to. I became part of their mourning process. Cools speaks about the mythology and importance of storytelling and listening in relation to *moirólóghia* (funeral laments during death rituals) where he refers to a dissertation work of Christos Varvantakis, *Emotion, Performance and Death Ritual In Inner Mani* (2013), who focuses on a region in Inner Maniat in Greece, where the tradition of *moirólóghia* is still present.

*'The important thing is the need to tell the stories, to share them with others, and by doing so to make the underlying grief communal.'*

(Cools, p.31)

I was two years old when my father's mother died - I was four years old when my mother's father died - I was eight years old when my father's father died - I was seventeen years old when my brother's best friend (and my mother's best friend's son) died - I was seventeen years old when my brother's wife died - I was seventeen years old when my friend's mother died - I was twenty-one years old when my friend's father died - I was twenty-two years old when my father's aunt died.

#### Sharing grief

Grandmother T.

She died of skin cancer. She was a chemistry teacher with a passion for reading detective novels and dreams to become a medic when she was younger. Since I was very little, I don't

remember her much, even the things I do remember might be thanks to video tapes we have, stories my parents told me or photographs, but for some reason, I was very attached to her. It is something I can't explain, only my body feels, remembers, and recognizes the connection. I cried so much after she died, sitting on the balcony, and looking for the brightest star to give myself comfort; she is here.

I was five when I first wrote her letter. It became a reoccurring habit, a form of ritual. During summer, we used to sail a lot, mostly in Croatia and Greece, and since half of her ashes are in the sea and half are in a grave with my grandfather, I kept writing her letters that I folded in the shape of an origami boat and sent to sail. We haven't been sailing for eight years and my form of talking to her became just a simple gesture without words - folding a boat out of any piece of paper I find.

#### Grandfather M.

I don't remember what my grandfather died of, but I remember taking care of him when I was little together with my grandmother and my mother. He was a tailor and every time I go through old photo albums, my grandmother mentions that most of the clothes my mother and her sister were wearing were made by him.

He never called me by my name, but only the name of my mother, Katka (Kate). I always protested that it is not my name, but his response was - you will always be Katka for me. Later, I found out from my father that my grandfather was not treating my mother and her sister well and perhaps, this was his way to forgive himself so he could rest.

#### Grandfather K.

Grandfather K. was a basketball player and later coach, who raised and trained one of the best teams in the history of Czechoslovakian basketball.

On 19th of March 2008, at 4 in the afternoon, I found my father crying on the couch in my room. He was holding his head, covering face. I asked what happened and he said grandpa died. I walked to my father and hugged him. I recall pushing my tears away, prohibiting myself to cry, because I must be strong for my father whose arms were wrapped around me, his head on my tiny chest, sobbing.

#### Friend of M.

J. was the son of my mother's best friend from childhood. My mother and her friend gave birth to their sons around the same time and so, my brother M. and J. grew up together since they were little babies. I didn't know J. very well but I knew his mother A., who was always an idol for me. I admired her for her lightness of being, her laughter, I loved her as my second mother. My brother talked about him and their adventures often. I have one memory with him from my brother's wedding when I was 12, he was easy going and outspoken, the type of person that loves to make people laugh. I slept on 4 chairs, covered with my father's jacket, when he woke me up at 4 in the morning to tell me about how life is when you are an adult. I was in high school when my mother found out I am not attending some classes and gave berated me about how irresponsible I am, but I saw there was something else. I had to ask multiple times to the point she got upset for her to tell me what happened. My eyes were flooded with tears. My school attendance was not important anymore, not for me, nor for my mother.

#### Sister-in-law E.

She was Bulgarian and died of brain cancer after fighting with it for more than a year. I remember seeing her for the first time, I was probably around seven years old, impatiently waiting on the balcony for my brother and his girlfriend to arrive. I saw his car – an Opel

Tiger, parking in front of our house. She stepped out. She had dark long hair falling to below her waist, she was wearing a black skirt and a leather jacket. When they came upstairs, she gave me a feeling of calmness, her smile was even more gentle and subtle than her voice. I always admired her for the way she was, so calm and elegant even during fights with my brother. They called each other by a word I assume they made up together - babushka - which can be translated as baby.

Once, I came home and I could hear my mother quietly speaking on phone with my brother. I went to my room and sat on my bed with prayers in my hands. My father came to my room with tears in his eyes, washing smile away, to tell me E. died.

Mother of R.

R. lived further away from the city, together with her mother who was ceramist. Their whole house was filled with her ceramics, glazed with pale dreamy colours - colours of sadness. Most of them depicted flowers and trees, some of them were not yet fired and some were broken, decorating shelves with lots of books. I remember their kitchen tiles, the wooden table, very old bed of R. - above hanging clothes and feather duvets and pillows. Her mother was a very warm and loving person who wished for one more daughter, like me - that is what she always said when I came for a visit. One day, R. was on her way back from the mountains and messaged me that something had happened, but nobody wanted to tell her.

A Few days past and I received a message. Her mother died.

Father of M.

M. is my dear friend and artist whose passion for creation is something I have always admired and to this day, it is not otherwise. I knew his family well, as well as his father who always sat in their small kitchen, with the loud clocks ticking, behind a tiny table, watching tv. Sometimes, in the morning when I would come over, I sat with him and he was telling me stories from his youth, when he was hiking, encouraging me to take M. To mountains. I remember his direct eye-contact that used to make me uneasy, as if he was looking through me and even deeper.

One autumn day, I woke up around 5 in the morning, not knowing why, and I saw a message from M., sent half an hour earlier. His father had died. At That time M. was in New York so he couldn't attend the funeral, but he. had the honour to write a letter for the priest to read out loud at the funeral.

Aunt of R.

Auntie A., we used to call her. She was my grandfather's sister. Every time we went to the mountains we visited her, as a part of my family lives in the middle of Slovakia, in city called Zvolen which is surrounded by mountains. It was a rare occasion, but I felt very close to auntie A. She was a tiny woman with incredibly strong attitude and energy to share. I admired her for her chipperly spirit despite her age. She had a party for her 90th birthday which my parents attend. I couldn't be there, so we video called for me to wish her a happy birthday.

A Few months later, I asked my parents about auntie A. s, how she is doing, and they told me that she had died. they didn't want to tell me, to spare me from grieving.

### **Allowing to mourn**

Some time ago, my friend M. once mentioned to me an artist, who built a boat and tried to cross the Atlantic Ocean on it and disappeared. I haven't yet remembered his name, but every now and then his work crossed my mind. Later, I got a recommendation from one of my

teachers to look up an artist called Bas Jan Ader. It was in relation to one of my works, *Disappearance of matter* (2022), where I made a casket out of unfired clay, filled with frozen water from the sea, as part of my research on burials at sea. This work was also accompanied by my text '*Disappearance of Matter*' where I am writing about matter which has a form and therefore, it has potential to change.

*'By disappearance, referring to death of physical matter and by physical matter, I mean everything that has the ability to change its form – to be active in time. In this case, frozen sea water melts due to temperature differences and clay can still break since it hasn't gone through the process of firing. However, clay is dependent on the reaction of melting in order to dissolve and return to its original substance as ice is dependent on temperature in order to melt. Therefore, I preferer to call this moment as moment of disappearance, because materials don't experience death of their matter, but rather return to their original state.'*

I saw a documentary on Ader, *Here Is Always Somewhere Else* (2007), directed and written by Rene Daalder. One of the people who had been invited to participate in the documentary was also an artist and friend of Ader's, Ger Van Elk. He was commenting on Ader's work, *I am Too Sad To Tell You* (1971), and he was remembering one of their conversations about that particular work.

'- I am too sad to tell you means I cannot tell you and that is making me very sad.  
- And what is it that you cannot tell me?  
- Well... Everything.'

Susan Sontag in her short story *Project for a trip to China* depicts the atmosphere of the country in a very vivid yet dreamy way. Triggering memories by poetic approach, the purpose of her trip is slowly unfolding throughout the story. She visited China to reclaim her father's death, who died of tuberculosis when she was less than 6 years old. When is the last time you said goodbye, or are you saying the last goodbye repeatedly?

In the beginning of this year, I had a talk with one of my dear teachers. We were talking about death and mourning.

'What are you mourning for?'

I remained silent for a second as the question touched something in me that I had to reach out for.

'In The book I am reading, Cools speaks about clear distinction between mourning and grief where mourning is public, and grief is private. I think I grieve for all the times I couldn't mourn.'

## IV. MEMORIAL

Understanding: reminder of events, creations as memorials

Season: spring

Feeling: blossoming, awakening, opening, first sun

### Acts of creation

There is something gentle, fragile, and silent about making art. Whether it refers to a horrific event, criticises, comments, denies, argues or studies, research, involves, depicts, reproduces, showcases – the process of making remains as a silent act of being closest with yourself and the world outside you, inside you, simultaneously. Indeed, a uniqueness of creative process belongs to each human being, but I find there is something fundamental within acts of creation. I'd like to believe it's a non-verbal *language* we use to translate our thoughts and perceptions, an attempt to communicate, to share, to speak together – to speak to each other. Sometimes, it feels like a gathering, a dinner without eating food but rather a mutual feeding, an act of care. I perceive acts of creation as memorials, consequences of responding to the world without an order of time.

### March, farewell to an old man

In my second semester of my second year, in March, we visited a place where one of my dear classmates' mothers had a studio. We called it Studio in the woods, it was an antikraak, ready to be torn down. We walked around, as there was a lot of nature and interesting places to see. We came across a former graveyard, as my dear friend E. said, where I did one of my site-specific works: *'My mum used to tell me to not to step on graves'* (2021). I highlighted the perimeter of the graveyard with salt, as it is associated with purity and the act of preserving and protecting but also, it has a relation to death. Although the bodies were no longer there, I couldn't step on the soil because it carries the knowledge of bodies that once were buried there. It reminded me of how my mum used to tell me, when we were visiting cemeteries, to not step on graves. I did research about this place, officially called Beresteyn, whose history goes back to the year 1833. Unfortunately, I couldn't find any details regarding the graveyard, but E. told me that priests were buried there, as Beresteyn has been over the years mostly a religious institution for boys.

In Slovakia, we have a proverb:

*'Marec, marec  
poberaj sa starec.'*

The Literal translation is *'March, march, farewell to an old man'*. This proverb refers to saying goodbye to long dark days, full of coldness – winter, and welcoming spring - birth, scent of newness and everlasting sun, warmth.

When I was a child, I asked my parents about what a farewell to an old man has to do with a month in a year. They explained that it is a metaphor for winter. My father additionally mentioned an interesting rumour, which a lot of people believe, that a lot of old people die in

March, after winter, as if they would have to give a space to life. This was a few years before my grandfather passed away in March.

### **Sculpting space for dying**

*'A cemetery made of oak trees, considered as an environment with a unique ecosystem, I am walking through this uniqueness without a sense of guilt. Perhaps, finding beauty in dead trees justifies my presence here – as anyone else's presence... it does give the same feeling as walking in a cemetery. As a matter of fact, I do understand – acknowledge – have knowledge – all those oak trees are dead but, in my eyes, they are still dying, as if those 300 or 400 years of being here are equate to the time it would take them to die.*

*Some of them are open – a surgery performed by a lightning storm– some already fell on the ground – some have a fortress made out of small branches coming out of the ground – children maybe – and some of them stand in the cold – too naked, covered in moss. In Each of these processes – processing death, life feeds on them.'*

(Text from 8th of January, '23, Gravúrky, Slovakia)

Rereading the text I wrote back home, reflecting, I was thinking whether cemeteries/graves are an actual memorial or if they are only a space where memorial is held. Maybe the first question to ask is what is a memorial? Definitions such as serving to preserve remembrance or something that keeps remembrance alive usually give us a hint of reference to a monument, statue, etc. Cools writes that *'There is a distrust and fear that it might fossilize the lived experiences and turn mourning into memorial ... in order for our mourning to liquify, we have to perform it.'* (Cools, p.32)

Despite the dead trees and their bodies standing as what has been left, I couldn't see them as memorials nor as statues or monuments, but rather as an actual environment to mourn in. As I wrote, life was feeding on them, it surrounded them. Where and how can one mourn if there is no passing of time?



## CONCLUSION

I have never been good with conclusions, as the mind of human being works in mysterious ways. In fact, often, I fear them since I do like to wonder, I do like not knowing. *‘Not knowing is part of the art practice because when you know what you are doing or what is going to happen, you are at the end’* as one of my dear teachers said. Maybe temporary conclusion is the way to go, I will try.

Perceiving time by acknowledging it as a philosophical concept, as numbers on clocks, as days in a calendar, as seasons in a year, as decades, as centuries, as periods, ... for being able to orientate yourself throughout the day, to grasp ungraspable amounts of time, to comprehend in our minds, to mark our progress as a society.

I remember seeing a film called *Mr. Nobody* (2009) by Jaco Van Dormael, some time ago. Three parallel stories involving the main character named Nemo were representing parallel universes where he existed, but his life was completely different in each of them. Those differences depended on choices he made, however, whichever choice he made, the one he didn't make continued to exist and had an impact on his life in another universe. I was deeply touched by this film, and I vividly recall one of the scenes, filmed from first person perspective. The main character was still a child and he said *‘I see you, but I don't see myself. Does that mean I don't exist?’*. I started to ask myself the question of when do I *feel* my body – its borders, how I *recognize* myself in the moment of presence and am I aware of it? A reflection in glass or a mirror - confirmation of existence by an eye contact, making a sound - voicing thoughts, listening, touching the other, myself, smell – experiencing the world through senses, the world experiencing you. A form of witnessing, the importance of it, equal to listening, - a momentum, *the in-between* cracks on walls, I often get lost in there and what is left - memories of any form, abstract or physical, spatial or flat, sound or silence, we carry and mourn and keep returning as a remembrance. I posed a question regarding farewells/goodbyes in chapter of Mourning. Isn't any form of past appearing in the present indicating nostalgia, remembering, reliving a constant action of saying goodbye - constant mourning for saying goodbye for the last time? Have you ever held an object in your hands, smelled the scent of a season, a small gesture with your hands, an expression of a feeling, familiarity of strangers poses, ways of walking, a smile, a spark in the eyes, reminding you of a moment in the past? Isn't that another form of farewell you have to say to momentum, to the memory, to mourn again and again. In the context of actual *dying*, I speak of mourning as if death doesn't concern me, neither you, I speak as if we are the ones that survived death – the ones that stayed, the ones that keep meeting *her*, the ones that *she* is still waiting for. Acknowledging dying as a loss of *presence* – *the ability to speak to* – *the ability to touch* – *the ability to hear the other*, we also become *the other*, one's body is never the same. The body must *readjust, learn, to find* a way to keep existing in the world without the *body of the other*, who passed – who left, how to keep existing in your *new body*. I believe we mourn and grieve regardless of death, also in everyday life, whether it is for yesterday's moments of happiness or tomorrow's moments of relief - a constant moments of *metamorphosis*.



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## **Glossary**

### **Day**

- a period in time consisting from 24 hours, enclosing the 1<sup>st</sup> circle of being in time and space

### **Death**

- permanent end of the matter existing in time and space, enclosing the 4<sup>th</sup> circle of being in time and space

### **Ephemeral**

- momentary brevity of duration or life

### **Grave**

- resting place for remains of matter

### **Grief**

- internal and private response to loss

### **Hour**

- a period in a day consisting from 60 minutes

### **Life**

- a period of time in being and experiencing time and space

### **Moment**

- a particular point in time

### **Memory**

- information transformed into remembrance

### **Minute**

- a period in an hour consisting from 60 seconds

### **Month**

- a period in a year consisting from 30 and 31 days or 28 and 29, enclosing the 2<sup>nd</sup> circle of being in time and space

### **Mourning**

- external and shared response to loss

### **Nostalgia**

- yearning for a period in time

### **Second**

- a period in a minute consisting from 10 deciseconds

### **Time**

- all periods together (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years), enclosing the 5<sup>th</sup> circle of being in space

### **Year**

- a period in time consisting from 12 months, enclosing the 3<sup>rd</sup> circle of being in time and space

## **A letter of gratitude**

Dear to whom it may concern,

I would like to close off my writing with a word of gratitude to:

- our teachers for enormous support, presence, guidance, and understanding
- my dear classmates for vulnerability, care, love, and support
- my dearest friends for being my home
- my family for being my land

I would like to close off my list of gratitude with a word - thank you.

With forever love,  
Romana Klementisová.