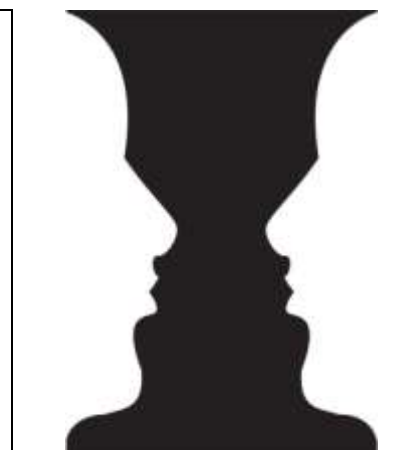

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Words leaking from objects: thinking with absent photographs

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Abstract

The possibilities within notions of the object constitute a special area of interest in my research. As I have come to see it, the object is bounded by - and yet comes to alter- views of representation/re-presentation; it contributes towards academic thinking through its capacity for democratizing and bridging itself towards others - yet it has a history of failing in the exchange of everyday gestures with places seemingly remote from the academia.

Although accused of resolution and impermeability, I admittedly cannot part with the word 'object'. And this creates a tension in my work with photography, where I attempt to articulate a personal view of the photograph as something ultimately unfixed. In this view, writing and photography extend continuously and reciprocally into the virtual and the physical from gestures before the photograph and before the word. This text reflects on these tensions, drawing on notions of affect, potentiality and on ethics to discover traces of the other suggested in the physical, but also the imaginary surface of an object. Following Sherry Turkle's notion of 'object' as evocative, in this text 'the things I think with' form narratives that reflect the absence of other(s), and the escaping capacity of absent objects in and out of words.

Keywords

Unfixed, writing, object, absent, virtual, image

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A brief note on interstices with words (after Roland Barthes)

I have in front of me, on the table and by the computer, a sentence about Roland Barthes.

The place where I sit to read and write hasn't changed this month. I keep noticing, as if anew every day, and with such pleasure, the trees outside my window and the varying nuance of greens, ochre and other earth tones.

The colours of the olive trees – especially the two large olive trees on the right hand side of the window frame, – appear to me so close to the deep tone of the sea in the British coast; and the ground has become covered in a shade of green that I hadn't thought possible in Portugal, as before this season I had wrongly affirmed several times that one could witness it in England only, not here.

For some weeks now, the sound of the trees has been slowly changing to a deeper murmur, closer to the one of the deep sea we once crossed to a tiny Irish island years ago. And at times, the sound of the trees, the same trees, is also the rising sound of the turned-tiny waves upon our arrival in that island, where the water became soft, slow and translucent; as if: *he*ⁱ- the sea, as if: *he* - saying, *his* consistency conveyed a glass-sound of shells, minute (s)tones and sand.

Fluidity stands for bodies being touched, involved, mingled, while words happen in the uncontainable drive for expression, exchange. As if taking notes of what can be transcribed - from the sounds, images, partly skin, partly water, - into a language of the senses from which other structures will be raised; taking notes in the long time that gets one body to announce again a trace of an-other. The raising of structures might happen to be a product of unresolved platforms in nearness: a formula that maintains a platform extending and also sustains the reciprocity of the vulnerability of bodies.

Language isn't just language.

Words aren't just words.

Numbers aren't just numbers.

Any body's substance is altered through air. Some day. Now. Has beenⁱⁱ.

Language happens as soon as my desire is to reach you. Before I know the words, signs cross your gestures; along the genealogy of words. The vulnerability of a body cannot be detached from the way language is sustained.

So in writing I am not to be represented delineated *here* by a trace, by any line that defines a single word, circumscribes an image. I, as a porous element, tracing words in the hopeⁱⁱⁱ of repositioning (in) things found, never without others

I, never without others, repositioning in things found
never without others, I, repositioning in things found

as movements of the sea, commas announcing (with another sound, almost a silence, a pause) the movements of the water in the sand shore. *Sh-ore*: for saying, seeing, touching, the water becoming thinner in nearness of the shore. A pleonasm, like

writing a sentence and failing to evade a thought distinct from the words that should be written instead. A sound announcing a movement; a movement announcing a sound, as a sequence of tiny waves.

A sequence of tiny waves - I see it now through my memory of him playing the piano - leading to a repeated movement: his comprehension of the area where the stool is to be adjusted to the distance of the piano, from where his body leans forward and curves towards the instrument forming a shape slightly similar to the one of a wave. *Sh:ore*.

A word that can also be a movement. A perfect word, I find, in a language that is not my first;

though when I say the word in my mother tongue, my tongue translates it from the language that is not my first.

In being displaced (from my mother tongue), I hear - I read another's words as if pointed out by the landscape, the memory of a landscape also - "you no longer walk between walls, meanings flow, the world of railways explodes, the air circulates (...)"²

Inside the room and outside - now: where things keep happening; then: in Ireland; then: in England,

Glass resonates, uni-sonates with *vidro*, the word I learned much before *glass*. The memory of an ancient crystal vase already chipped but precious kept. 'Verre, pour boire. De l'eau', mother taught me as a child.

Words were like a sieve through which language happened in unnumbered possibilities. Any language. Way: of speaking. Way: of hearing. Of talking, feeling, touching-about. Through words the walls slipped through our fingers, like sand.

Sand. *Areia*. (in the British coast)

(then)

(now)

Vidro, *Glass*. The *i* and the *ss* don't sound in similarity, yet the sound conjoins in a delicate, fragile transparency. The whispering air in the sound of lips (*ss*, for *Glass*) arriving on the glass, then the touch (*i*, for *Vidro*).

To say is also to learn bodies in saying; *corpora* are also formed by escaping words into heterogeneity, as in Barthes's words *detouring*^{iv} in speaking of the ones he loved: 'While it cannot be denied that words live, they do not simply lead the lives that we want them to.' Barthes (1989) cited by Pieters (2005)

² Cixous, Hélène. (1991) *Coming to Writing and other essays*. Harvard University Press, p 50

‘Material objects to which things happen’³: gestures within the objects we think with

My experience with the subject of anthropology is like when one finds a thread of cotton and then thinks backward and forward towards the scarf and what it could be from the affect one is confronted with. My intention is not to fake familiarity with the subject area, but instead to gain understanding from what is, to me, a new possibility of ‘looking towards’. An attraction to anthropology is admittedly developing from the pleasurable possibility of ‘revelation’, from the interstices that have emerged (as an image onto photographic paper merged in developer) when the pages from a book suddenly appear to make sense extended by the pages of another book – and the sentences read coming to make sense as if lighted, as ignited, by others heard in supervisory meetings and shedding light towards everyday gestures. What I am hearing, and reading, and, at times, gazing at, is that the anthropological views over photography as a material open a way of looking where the objectness of the photograph is understood as a translator of human experiences. From my position – one in which I have found my grandmother’s photographic album, her suitcase, Roland Barthes, writing the visual and a multiplicity of times, of gestures also –, the material as a socio biographical element as proposed in anthropology has come to reveal the possibility of openness from which to take forward an intersection between the representational in Barthes and the multiplicity in Deleuze.

Going back to my grandmother’s album, that has unfortunately been lost, it is not the photographs kept within that structured my imaginary of photography that so strongly form my memories of her. Nor is it the ‘object’ of the album. It is instead more the fact that I cannot identify the ‘object’ – the photograph – in isolation from what surrounded it – her cup of coffee, the chairs, the kitchen, her apron – and the affect on the images of the writing on the back that indented the front of the photographs – and how that has certainly concerned my understanding of photography as representation. Of the album, what I make is my imaginary of it residing, not on paper, nor on copper, but somewhere in the very materiality itself [I guess the *punctum*^v resides somewhere there too] and in relation to what surrounded it; and the peculiar fact that, apart from the tiger killed in Africa, none of the known beings appeared deceased to us.

I am troubled by finding a way to write without mentioning the word ‘object’^{vi}. Yet I have it, not in front of me, but somewhere within my imaginary that solicits my understanding of photography, a view over it - it being my grandmother’s photographic album. I will then use the word ‘object’ by placing it within the context of ‘objects we think with’, which differs from a view over the object that envisages representation. The notion of ‘evocative objects’ and ‘things we think with’⁴ forms the title of a collection of autobiographical essays edited by the sociologist Sherry Turkle (2007), where scholars were invited to write about the trace that objects have left in their lives and how these objects connect them to ideas and people. It is an account of evocative objects ‘bringing together intellect and emotion’.

³ Edwards, Elizabeth & Janice Hart (eds.) (2004) *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images*. London/New York, Routledge, Kindle Edition location 1,431-44 of 6,406

⁴ Turkle, Sherry (ed) (2007) *Evocative Objects: things we think with*. Massachusetts/London: The MIT Press

In ‘thinking with the photographic album’, I am also trying to understand the relational dimension of the photograph, its possibility to translate human experiences⁵ - this involves me in debates about the way people and things are entangled, which I will discuss in this section.

For Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (2007), the materiality of photographs takes two forms: the ‘first it is the plasticity of the image itself’, meaning ‘technical and physical choices’ in making photographs; the ‘second are the presentational forms, such as the *cartes de visite*, cabinet cards, albums, mounts and frames with which photographs are inseparably enmeshed.’⁶ Also for Edwards, ‘materiality translates the abstract and representational photography into photographs as objects that exist in time and space’⁷, which in Ravetz is also defined as a ‘social biography of the photograph’⁸ itself, considering the human relations it translates.

In thinking with the daguerreotype as a physical object in a chapter from the book by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images*, Geoffrey Batchen (2007), explains that in the late 1830s the daguerreotype was “called the ‘mirror with a memory’, because of its highly reflective silvered surface, the daguerreotype was greeted as a ‘discovery as useful as it was unexpected’, capable of rendering both art and science services ‘beyond calculation.’”⁹ The physicality of the daguerreotype is stressed by the way it had to be kept. Its fragility demanded ‘a protective housing consisting of a coverglass, a mat or *passe-partout*, and a frame or case to preserve its delicate surface.’¹⁰ The fact that the image sat on a copper plate extended the experience of its manipulation by the viewer, as the gestures described by Batchen illustrate: ‘the case must be picked up, opened carefully, cradled in the hand and tilted slowly, right to left, back and forth until, at just the right angle, the image becomes clearly visible on the surface of the plate.’¹¹

In understanding the photograph as a material, the gestures become inseparable from the objectness of the photograph; and indexicality continues to extend the gestures of the subject in providing presence/absence.

Alongside the album, my grandmother gathered in her suitcase ‘objects for staying behind’. Certainly objects for keeping, *again and again*. And in the repetition of those two words, the description of a gesture is implied in accordance to all my grandmother’s gestures, as nourishing. However, this action is somehow directed afar from the past. All of the objects within the suitcase, and the suitcase itself are, like her photographic album, lost, with the exception of a heart shaped fabric box where I keep

⁵ Pinney, Christopher. (1997) *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*. London, Reaktion Books

⁶ Edwards, Elizabeth & Janice Hart (eds.) (2004) *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images*. London/New York, Routledge, Kindle Edition location 647-51

⁷ Ibid, kindle location 240-59

⁸ Ravetz, Amanda. (2007) ‘From Documenting Culture to Experimenting with Cultural Phenomena: Using Fine Art Pedagogies with Visual Anthropology Students’ in *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. Oxford/New York, Berg, p

⁹ Ibid, kindle location 260-80

¹⁰ Ibid, 652-56

¹¹ Ibid, 663-67

her rosary, and a heart shaped crocheted lavender sachet with a silk ribbon that I keep over my son's bed in England.

Both these objects that were left to me seem somehow wrongly preserved, exposed to the erosion of time, for I irrefutably see them as pieces from an archival collection (and as a collection of gestures and traces). They are, to me, displaced museum pieces that account for her gestures and risk the imposition of the gestures of others without prior establishing the affect of hers.

In the same book, the following chapter written by the two editors titled "Mixed Box", considers 'perhaps the most ubiquitous and therefore invisible of material objects: a box with things in it in the reserve collection of a museum'. The authors add the 'hope to demonstrate how, through seeing photographs as material objects to which things happen, we might come closer to understanding ways in which photographs operate as visual objects within the discursive practices of, in this case, anthropology and anthropological museums.'¹²

In the analysis, in the period after 1980, there is 'recognition of the photograph as a cultural object'¹³, which was 'in part a response to growing awareness for the needs of photographic conservation....but was premised on a re-evaluation of historical photographic sources over a number of related disciplines – for instance, anthropology, geography, cross cultural and colonial history and art history.'¹⁴ This change, as noted by Edwards and Hart, was 'from image-based perception to object-based perception.'¹⁵

The authors are referring to an item from a museum collection, Box 54. This box contains photographs 'arranged broadly, but not entirely consistently, by cultural region', that show 'surface damage consistent with them having been soaked off their original mounts, but written information from the mounts or on the back of the prints appears to have been meticulously transcribed on to the new boards in 1931'¹⁶. The photographs bear 'various annotations and numbering systems recorded in different hands, and comprise a palimpsest of curatorial thinking and acts of description.'¹⁷

Edwards and Hart argue that in tracing the effects onto an 'object' part of a museum collection, the 'object' comes to be understood from a variety of histories and meanings that become its most significant characteristic - "The life of things is in reality many lives, winding through each other, no more than so than for photographs. Box 54 is an amalgam of indexical traces of the physical world and cultural objects projecting those traces embedded within shifting patterns of ownership, organisation and use."¹⁸

¹² Edwards, Elizabeth & Janice Hart (eds.) (2004) *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images*. London/New York, Routledge, Kindle location 1,431-44.

¹³ Ibid, 1,679-91

¹⁴ Ibid, 1,679-91

¹⁵ Ibid, 1,692-704

¹⁶ Ibid, 1,533-43

¹⁷ Ibid, 1,524-36

¹⁸ Edwards, Elizabeth & Janice Hart (eds.) (2004) *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images*. London/New York: Routledge. Kindle Location 1,739-54

This tracing is also read in the views that Ingold¹⁹ proposes through an understanding of materials from a continuous encounter of lived experiences, while looking at things as entangled in the lives and relational experiences of people for whom they gain a certain significance and preciousness, either from the process of making, from use or other levels of affect. The understanding of ‘things’ as relational processes with others have come to constitute a key discourse for this research, as I attempt to describe in the next chapter.

From observing the box in relation to the museum, Edwards and Hart conclude that the past material traces perpetuate the meaning in a way that seems un-dissociable from what was noted in the beginning of the text as a ‘methodological problem central to the concerns of the chapter’ - in the presence of the archive the ‘act of looking is caught up between the conjecture of a disappearing past and an emerging present.’²⁰

The dissolving of the past as something fixed and finished through identifying material traces, comes up in the chapter written by Geoffrey Batchen too, which explore a locket composed by a photograph and a lock of hair. Batchen writes ‘Like a photograph, the hair sample stands in for the whole body of the absent subject, turning this locket into a modern fetish object....A photograph usually functions as a memory of the past (the moment in which the photograph was taken), while this hair sample stolidly occupies the eternal horizon of the present. The photograph speaks of the catastrophe of time’s passing, but the locket as a whole speaks of the possibility of eternal life.’²¹

While the lock of hair also comes to suggest the presence/absence of a person, it also evidences the traces onto the locket. The traces make lived experience visible, suggest gestures, invite observation and subjectivity. The past is unfixed from *presencing* these traces onto the locket, and onto the box. The participation through observation, directs time towards an emerging present, from the continuity of experiences brought onto the material, from being handled, its uses, but also from being appreciated and (re-) understood. In both examples, the photograph appears as one of the physical compositional elements of the material, while the visibility of the traces appear conveyed through evidences of physicality and uses, as evidence of affects onto things – the surface damage, the mounts, the box, the locket, the hair sample attached to the locket.

Taking a more philosophical approach, in a discourse where the virtual is also accounted for, perhaps more than the physical, Yve Lomax writes, somehow similarly, that the present is ‘continually splitting in two directions, one of which is the present-becoming-past and the other, the present-becoming-future. The *having already happened* paradoxically co-exists with the still to come....the past is not constituted after the

¹⁹ Ingold, Tim (ed.) (2011) *Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines*. London, Ashgate publishing

²⁰ Edwards, Elizabeth & Janice Hart (eds.) (2004) *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images*. London/New York: Routledge. Kindle Location 1432-44

²¹ Batchen, G. (2004) ‘Ere the substance fade: Photography and hair jewellery’ in: Edwards, Elizabeth & Janice Hart (eds.) *Photographs Objects Histories: on the materiality of images*. London/New York: Routledge. Kindle Location 1,250-61

present that it once was but, rather, contemporaneously.’²² A common trace between the two chapters in Edwards et al and Lomax has to do with the revelation that accompanies the ‘act of looking’. In Lomax, an explication involves implication and proximity. Understanding explication from a reciprocal position of ‘looking to know’ and ‘a view of what something can be’, a photograph comes to be a relational element within a body in movement that takes shape from things continuously affecting others. A photograph, a thing, comes to be extended through this movement of implicating another. The viewer and the photograph are implicated in the same movement, and so are the elements that compose the photograph, and the elements that come into composition with the act of looking from which the photograph comes to be known by the viewer. A photograph comes to be about implications and relations. This perspective extends it beyond its physicality. The mark of time, which seems to be the moment in which the photograph was taken, stands for in Edwards, Hart and Batchen, as well as in Lomax, rather than the past, the possibility for a past revealed anew from the act of looking to know.

My investigation tries to find a view where a thing can be extended beyond physicality through traces onto the material, accounting for the virtual where these traces are suggested by gestures ‘before’ the material. These gestures stand for the implication of others, however, they also come to constitute the material as a relational and a conversational place. A place for nourishing, but also a place constituted from gestures towards. While implicating and affecting is to include subjectivity, I am also keeping, along this movement that takes shape in the virtual, the preciousness of ‘objects’.

While I wish my grandmother’s photographic album and objects were preserved as a collection, I realise I am in search of an act of looking that too has an expectation of revelation of gestures. Gestures towards – *again and again*, as in nourishing.

Collecting traces of others onto objects

‘Fleeting and amorphous, [the potential] lives as a residue or resonance in an emergent assemblage of disparate forms and realms of life. Yet it can be as palpable as a physical trace.’

(Kathleen Stuart, *Ordinary Affects*)

About keeping (inventing) the ‘object’ as evocative

The image appearing through writing is different to an image given through any other medium. Words are not neutral but can indicate differences of class, of intellectuality. Not knowing how to write is more poignant than not knowing how to draw, or not being able to handle any sort of gadget able to record an image. Writing is embedded in all democratic rights attained by people. It affects and includes the individuals collectively

²² Lomax, Yve. (2000). *Writing the Image: an Adventure with Art and Theory*, London/New York, I.B.Tauris, p 235

within an environment where they are intended to act upon in order to maintain its sustainability.

Writing can be writing of many languages. It can be the sort of language used in contracts, manifestos, formal reports, where 'outside' the pre-established form is the requirement for the evaluation of competence; or writing can be the way two people communicate without being acquainted with the same words and signs - where the 'outside' extends and reciprocally precisions the 'inside' towards the subjectivity of the self and the subjectivity of the other, as a condition for maintaining a discourse in openness and nearness, attending to both precision and subjectivity.

It could seem that it is through a notion of writing as a platform for facilitating communication that academic thinking endeavours to narrow the distance between itself and places remote from academia – that are so often present in the enquiry.

Words are to be un-wrapped and revisited, risking exposing our vulnerability towards another.

Writing constitutes a way to side and revisit within a proximate, yet not invading distance all sorts of elements; to 'essay'^{vii} (as in 'attempting') about standing in nearness to the other. That is my intention when revisiting the word 'object', from which the notion of object as resolved, or contained appears to me impermeable to the potentiality of 'outward movements'.

This revisiting is not in opposition to the notion of 'thing'. Rather it is made possible through considering the reciprocity of movements defined as intrinsic to a 'thing' viewed as entangled in the lives and relational experiences of people for whom it gains a certain significance and preciousness, either from the process of making, from use or other levels of affect (Ingold, 2011).

What motivates me to revisit the word 'object' in my research - thinking with Ingold's notion of 'thing' and Deleuze's consideration of object as commonsense^{viii} - is the consideration that it stands too close to the 'ordinary' not to attempt a view of it as reciprocal, considering the ordinary as 'a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveliness and exhaustion (...)' where 'ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they are also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of.'²³

When I was a child, objects were understood as scarce and precious, something that passed on between us, the women with whom I grew up. Objects were not far from the realm of physical touch, they were also close to gestures and, from there, close to the traces others left when writing. My grandmother had in a suitcase kept under the bed, her objects ready for the day she would die; things for staying behind, ready to attend to others in that eventuality. Our objects, as I came to understand them, were close to Roland Barthes's *punctum*^{ix}. They continue in their absence, and in the absence of others. Their movement forward pulls us back a little. They are dustier than a 'thing', less crowded than a 'thing', yet they stand for the same possibility of conversation, of

²³ Stewart, Kathleen. (2007) *Ordinary Affects*. Durham/London, Duke University Press, e-book location 21-30

moving towards the other. However, the 'object' poses the risk that a 'thing', in approximating itself to nanobehaviours observed in science, has eliminated through its definition as a flux not completely traceable in direction or in origin – the constant risk of an object is the eventuality that an agent might fail the assemblage's^x wandering movement, compromising its outwardness and consequently its flow.

This risk is well illustrated in Tim Ingold (2008) where 'the object, having closed in on itself, has turned its back on the world, cutting itself off from the paths along which it came into being and presenting only its congealed, outer surfaces for inspection. That is to say, the 'objectness' of things – or what Heidegger called their 'over-againstness' – is the result of an inversion that turns the lines of their generation into boundaries of exclusion.'²⁴

However, in the self's vulnerability before the object the gestures of self and other are encountered reciprocally as attentive to absence; abstract and virtual traces of other(s) forming intuitive, yet recognisable signs that part of a collective language. An 'object', therefore, comes to be more imaginary than a 'thing', in both the understanding of its form, and in its rearrangement from the traces of others onto its surface. Any possible definition of object comes to incorporate our responses towards absence, and resides in the imaginary and the poignancy of the desired. However, this doesn't mean it cannot, does not, escape boundaries attributed to it, maintaining its openness through its immanent intensity and potentiality to evoke, even if suggested through a written description. In fact, the potentiality of objects extending towards others seems to be evidenced in descriptions where the object itself is absent.

These qualities attributed to objects are in fact subjective insofar as they remain attached and reflect the qualities of the subject, and extend themselves from narratives of the self and others. The dusty or stained surface of evocative objects, no matter how virtual the dust of the stains may be, carry the possibility to remind us of our vulnerability, and keep within a fair and non alienating distance from the drawers where they are kept.

Collection of gestures onto a tree branch – 'R.'s Lemon Tree'

Part of a work in progress, I asked R., a young woman from Tel Aviv, if she would be interested in collaborating in a project consisting of 'making visible' a fragrant tree by the physicality of her gestures-in-writing.

I had never seen her, only exchanged e-mails with her, which seemed to me a way to take a step towards the viewer in the reading of the work.

We agreed that she would choose a fragrant tree about which she would write, not on a daily basis, but whenever she felt it to be significant. She was also to collect small portions of the branches and send them to me. I would then reproduce the branch

²⁴ Ingold, Tim. (2008) 'Bindings against Boundaries – entanglements of life in an open world', published online. Available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/22398695/Ingold-Tim-Bindings-Against-Boudaries-Entanglements-of-Life-in-an-Open-World>

portions in porcelain. R. chose the Lemon Tree she could see every day outside her window.

Here follows an extract of the first written description received, the first hint of the Lemon Tree:

“Israel, Tel Aviv. May 29, 2011. 10:03 in the morning.

It is a very hot day. Too hot for the lemon tree.

It still has many fruits on it - their yellow colour shines in the bright sun. I love the contrast between the strong yellow and the different tones of green of the leaves. In the sun, the brightest tones of green seem yellow and almost merge with the fruits of the tree.

The fruits are strong. They seem stiff when I touch them. I am charmed by this, knowing how juicy and soft they are inside. Today the leaves seem a bit tired... because of the heat. In the past months they were straight and strong. Like the fruit, the leaves of the lemon tree are stiff – which is surprising to me, considering the softness of the tree’s colours.

And there is of course the smell. I love the fragrant of the lemon tree. It is for me the ultimate freshness. The fragrant of the lemon tree is cool and windy, in contrast to today’s weather... it reminds me of a lemon pie, and of lemonade. Funny, this tree is such a mix between winter and summer. The fruits grow during the winter, and yet their smell and taste are so cool that their products are most suitable for the summer.

I see this contrast in the tree itself: its trunk and branches are wide and brown. The tree seems strong stable and old, while the leaves and the fruits represent to me such gentleness and freshness.

(...) I can smell it from my back window, on the first floor.

Soon it will lose all its fruits. The entire summer will have to pass until it will blossom with white flowers and a gorgeous sweet smell, which will later on be substituted by the more gentle fragrant of the fruits, that will, again, fill me with this fresh, vivid feeling that I sense today, looking or thinking of it.

R. had to leave the project unexpectedly, and wasn’t able to send me the little portions of the branches. The project was interrupted.

After some time, I decided to continue it, in agreement with R. She had kept the measurements and information about the branches she had collected, so she sent me the details in writing.

I then collected a small branch from a Lemon Tree, and created a mould from which reproduction is made possible. While the work is unfinished, the possibilities for its continuation conjoin with storytelling possibilities read from R’s fragrant tree. The present intention, however, is to create three porcelain reproductions of the same branch, titled accordingly to the information sent by R.

This work presents a porcelain-fragile possibility offered by ‘items’ missing in a certain time and being simultaneously abstracted and suggested through writing.

In *Migrations of Gesture*, Blake Stimson writes ‘it is the process of abstraction itself – that is, the removal of understanding outward from any particular experience to a general, all-purpose explanation or figure or time – that can paradoxically serve as a locus of affective or embodied engagement. The cool, distant, and objective “over there” of

theoretical or artistic abstraction, in other words, is considered as the woolly, intimate, and subjective “in here” of fleeting feeling’ (Stimson, 2008: p.69). What Stimson refers to is an abstract gesture, in his case related to photography, leaving the particular to inscribe ‘the social form of lived experience’ where the gesture becomes ‘the intersection of objective understanding and subjective experience’ (Stimson, 2008: p.78). This intersection constitutes a way of creating meaning from encountering the other.

I go back to the sentence from which I have started to write these research notes, and that remains on the table where I have been writing. I realise I have started with words escaping their meaning, and I am ending with a tree escaping its sturdy physical form into words and the hope for its fragrance to allude to the senses. ‘While it cannot be denied that words live, they do not simply lead the lives that we want them to’, I recall Pieters (2005: p132) interpretation of Barthes words. From the line in the air suggested above by Ingold, I read that a description within the plane of the virtual only comes to stand for communication positioned exposed and vulnerable to forms of exchange before others. I read the line as a possibility arriving to the porcelain branch, touching R.’s gestures.

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Notes:

ⁱ In Portuguese, my native tongue, the sea is a masculine gender noun. It can be substituted by the pronoun 'he', as in English would be substituted by the pronoun 'it'.

ⁱⁱ Roland Barthes: for Barthes, the *noeme* of photography is that it 'has been'. This notion appears to fix photography in a past tense, or demanding for a travelling backwards, since Barthes positions himself in the present – a poignant present, when it comes to trying to find, through a photograph, the truth about one he loves: 'Now, in the Photograph, what I posit is not only the absence of the object; it is also, by on and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed, and that it has been there where I see it' (CL, p115). However, in my view, through *Camera Lucida*, in identifying the *punctum* as intensity, and this intensity as time, Barthes is able to identify an almost universal vulnerability we express before the evidence of absence, allowing for the transferability of the tension within 'has been' that he sees as the *noeme* of photography into other mediums. See: Barthes Roland *Camera Lucida*; and Lind, Maria. 'An Elusive Eidolon in a Social Archaeology'.

ⁱⁱⁱ In Miyazaki 'Moments of Hope, can only be apprehended as sparks on another terrain, in other words [...] The challenge (...) is to preserve these sparks while resisting the immediate demand of hope for synchronicity that emerges in (...) incongruities' (*The Method of Hope*, p24).

^{iv} Detour, (Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 2002 [1977]: p 154): 'To say I-love-you (to repeat it) is to expel the reaction-formation, to return it to the deaf and doleful world of signs – of the detours of speech (which, however, I never cease to pass through.' See also Roland Barthes last essay, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves' in: *The Rustle of Language* (1989 [1984]: p 305).

^v Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* communicates the concept of *punctum* as an element resulting from an identified presence of a loved one and consequent absence in a photograph that 'pricks', is 'poignant to' the viewer. The *punctum* is an extreme intensity through which the photograph comes to show nothing but 'what has been', as if facilitating a re-encounter while revealing the absence of the other at the same time.

^{vi} Heidegger and others use 'thing' instead of 'object' in his essay 'The Thing' in: *Poetry, language, thought* (2001 [1971]: p161) opposing the idea of 'object' that refers to something closed and impermeable, accomplished and resolved, to the notion of 'thing' as something un-static, relational with the world. Heidegger considers the void resulting from the shape of a thing or the space it occupies as 'thingness', (p166-173) which stands for what the thing can be from 'relating with', from activity and usability.

^{vii} When the word *Essay* was first used to describe a literary style, by Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), it was applied in correspondence to its meaning in French as *trial* or *attempt*. In his collection of *Essais*, Montaigne produced several short written pieces about given topics where a subjective, wandering view between themes appears side by side with parts of the text more objectively structured and quotes from ancient classical texts. Even though the text takes different directions, in both style and themes, it appears underpinned by the question "What do I know?" which motivated Montaigne to revisit and re-edit this collection of writings repeatedly throughout his life. In turn, the author's continuous revisiting of the text maintained the question unresolved, opened, and revealed both the question and the writing as a process, rather than a final piece. The small corrections and additions to the original text were hand written side notes onto the printed text. Of these notes, the only ones that were kept until today refer to the last four years of Montaigne's life, after the *Essais*'s 1588 publication. There reads, in a reflection about his relationship to his friend, the poet La Boétie: "Because it was him, because it was me." See: Interview with Philippe Desan, Director of Montaigne Project, and editor of the journal *Montaigne Studies*; Professor of French and History of Culture, University of Chicago, <http://www.fathom.com/feature/122610/index.html>; 'Montaigne studies' in: http://humanities.uchicago.edu/orgs/montaigne/h/bordeaux_copy/; Profil - Montaigne (Michel de) : *Essais* de Bénédicte Boudou (Format Kindle - 29 août 2001) - Kindle eBook ; Complete Works: *Essays, Travel Journal, Letters* by Michel de Montaigne | Summary & Study Guide by BookRags (Kindle Edition - 15 Aug 2011) - Kindle eBook

^{viii} Deleuze classifies the 'object' along representation, and both within the realm as common sense where we interact with objects 'according to requirements of habit'. Contrarily, philosophy aims to challenge established orders, and in turn 'representation works within a given order...its habitual mode of operating...it does not account for how that order comes about, nor for how it evolves' (McMahon, Melissa 'Difference, repetition' in: *Gilles Deleuze Key Concepts*, p45).

^{ix} In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes offers two definitions of the *punctum*, the second being a restructuring of the first. As it is referred to for the first time, in Part One, the *punctum* is beyond the ‘inconsequential taste: I like/I don’t like’ (CL, p26) that belongs to the realm of the *studium*. The *studium* is why we become interested in a photograph; a Latin word that means ‘application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general enthusiastic commitment’ (CL, p27). In turn, the *punctum* signifies a ‘sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice’, the latter referring to an uncertainty of happening, a mere possibility; It is as an accident that ‘pricks’, but ‘also bruises; is ‘poignant’ to the bearer. A restructured *punctum* is described in Part Two of the book, not as a form, a detail suggested within the photograph, as in the first definition, but as Time and the intensity of its irreducibility. Barthes writes ‘I know that there exists another *punctum* (another “stigmatum”) than the detail. This new *punctum* is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (“that-has-been”), its pure representation’ (CL, pp 95-96).

^x Jane Bennett defines assemblages as ‘as hoc grouping of diverse elements of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface’ (*Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, p 23). Affect is here referred in relation to Spinoza’s conative bodies, where one body (collective or singular) is ‘continuously affecting and being affected by other bodies’ (VM, p 21). Bennett’s definitions refer directly to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘assemblage’ in *A Thousand Plateaus* as a multiplicity of ‘lines of flight’ (‘movements of deterritorialization and destratification’), and their comparative rates of flow of these lines’ (ATP, p 4). The measurement is asking “what a thing can do?” since ‘we do not know what an assemblage is until we find out what it can do’ (Macgregor, J. Wise, ‘Assemblage’, in: *Gilles Deleuze Key Concepts*, p78). The assemblages include the ‘things’ themselves AND the things’ qualities, speeds and lines, and creates territories that are always subjected to reterritorialization and deterritorialization of elements (Macgregor, GDKC, p79); and an assemblage has the characteristics of a rhizome that ‘establishes connections [the enunciation of signifiers] between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social structures....There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogenous linguistic community....There is no mother tongue, only a power take over by a dominant language within a political multiplicity.’(...) ‘A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence’ (ATP, p8).