The Invisible Shadow

Individual’s Sense of Mortality and its Manifestations in Western Culture

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- Prologue -
This thesis, ‘Invisible Shadow’ consists of three parts; my monograph *At The Heart of It All* published by Hatje Cantz Verlag, exhibition at Valokuvakeskus Peri and this written part.

All in all the realisation of the series *At The Heart of It All* took a decade, from the first drawings and paintings to the point where all the realised images were between the covers of the book and hanging on the walls in a gallery. Initially ideas took the form of sketches; small aquarelle and oil paintings, and monochromatic ink drawings. Realised directly from the subconscious, these unfiltered images depicted un-places and views of the impossible. The pieces failed to become finished works on their own, instead ending up acting as half finished sketches, waiting to be realised at some point in the future. In my previous projects I had found out relatively quickly how to image and represent certain ideas; be it utilising photogrammetry, LiDAR or other novel methods to capture and map the surroundings when a mere photograph is not enough to capture the space involved. Or when a traditional two-dimensional image was not the optimal vessel for the information at hand, using projections or laser engravings for the representation. Ideas found their ‘right’ medium, however unconventional that might be.
With *At The Heart of it All*, things were slightly different. While the basic *nature* of the images was there from the beginning, monochromatic images of spaces with only a hint of light revealing objects, symbols and ideas, there were also open questions; what were they about, how would I realise them and what would their final form be? Even at the beginning of the photographing process of the series in 2014, they were vague shadows of ideas, flickering apparitions, bile of subconscious. In my previous projects, whether in the field of reportage for magazines or realising my own personal projects, I had always been aware what the images were about, the topic at hand being clear and coherent. But here I was oblivious to why I did them and what they represented.

After a year of shooting I felt that I had reached a point where I could start to break down the imagery, dissect and analyse the elements. There was some inherent fragility built in to the topic at hand that I was reluctant to analyse and confront too early, feeling that the ideas and images had to mature and strengthen so they could carry their weight and stand on their own. When confronted with my images I was faced with a hesitant question: What are these all *about*? Were they images of bereavement and sorrow for the ones I have lost or will lose? Were they *vis a vis* realisations of my internal emotional mind scape; of melancholy, detachment and alienation? Or were they just manifestations of my nascent realisation that *I have not been, I am, I will not be*?

Having been a relative introvert with an active inner imaginary life, a trait that could perhaps be seen as caused by constant moving in my youth, a dozen times in two decades, and being displaced in different cultures frequently. That position of a perpetual outsider could easily be imagined as being the reason behind the urge to create and construct worlds of my own: to suppress the murmur of everyday and create places that I solely inhabit, possess and
control, be those worlds internal mindscapes or external realisations like paintings, miniatures or dioramas. This tension and urge fell dormant, but later in life when faced with my father’s slow withering by a hereditary heart condition, it all resurfaced. The process of coming to terms with his deteriorating condition, getting caught up by this inheritance of ours that had passed through generations, and slowly coming to terms with my own mortality, a cognition that I had actively suppressed.

What happened was that I regressed back to my youth, that time of perpetual displacement and resorted to the same tools of coping; manifesting my internal worlds by recreating and making them real. Places where time is in stasis, in that space between the tick and tock. This awakening brought me face to face with my existence, the same thought that humankind has had as a companion since the dawn of cognition. An emotion that has been explained, contained and controlled by various social structures, be it by laws, social constructs, traditions, myths or religions. In our consciousness death is the ultimate mystery and source of anxiety and that invariably manifests itself in our behaviour and thus in our society. It is this invisible shadow that I am mapping out with these threads that bind us to our losses, creating the very fabric of reality we are surrounded by.

There were extremely interesting and equally valid approaches that I could have taken and used in this thesis; Terror Management Theory, Theory of the Spectacle or Marx’s Alienation to name a few. In the end the trinity, or more aptly the particular prism which I ended up looking through was existence, mortality and eschatology. Here the main reference points ended up being Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus and Martin Heidegger in the field of philosophy and Frank Kermode and Philippe Ariès regarding mortality and eschatology. Each concept being so vast on its own, one understands
that it is borderline foolish to try to incorporate these ideas into a single thesis, but there is a reason for this approach; each element is integral in my works and each concept is by its nature fundamentally linked to each other, incapable of existing on its own.

The first and second parts of this thesis will introduce and link together the themes of death, eschatology and existentialism through the aforementioned thinkers. In the third part I will open up how my contemplations and artistic practice link to the previously discussed topics and the fourth part consists of my observations of the process and practicalities.
Part I

- The History of this World and the Other -
1.1 The Tame Death

When reading French historian Philippe Ariès (1914 - 1984) texts about the attitudes of ancient man towards death, there is a certain kind of lack built into the sentences, a gap exists between that man of the past and us in the present. Looking back from our modern society, we can easily forget that the approach towards death has varied from era to era, sometimes so radically that we might have difficulties comprehending the profound difference between the mindsets of then and now.

As Ariès states in *The Hour of Our Death* (2004/1981) it is not that ancient man never feared death or dying, *per se*, but the individuals of that time had a very different concept and perspective of time *after* death from that of contemporary man. Regardless of the different perceptions between Greek cyclisism or Christian rectilinearity of time, existence was perceived as a continuum, one did not cease to exist after death. This attitude tells us a lot about the familiarity with death and how this mindset resisted the evolution for two millennia, a relationship that went on relatively unaltered until the late 18th century. This death is what Ariès calls “the tame death”, the oldest death there is, domesticated and tamed, close and familiar yet present and in view.(1)

One of the main characteristics of the tame death was its communal aspect. In premodern societies without the amenities of our contemporary society, the circle of life was on display in everyday life. In society there was no escape from the cycle of life
as everything happened in plain view, under the same roof, from birth to death. There were very few institutions to take care of the individual entering and exiting the world, let alone anything similar to our culture where birth, illness and especially death have been institutionalised and removed from sight. As death held that integral position, society was dealing with it by necessary traditions or rituals of bereavement. Death was not shunned nor hidden, mankind and it just co-habited as one could not exist without the other.

Ariès concludes that in our contemporary society where we consider mourning as a malady, this evacuation of death is even more prominent. Death has been institutionalised and medicalised, removed from view and moved behind closed doors. With this discrepancy between our monotonous everyday reality and death, the distance between the concepts has grown too vast and we are left with nothing else but repression and denial. (2) Indeed, what is echoed here are the thoughts of Sigmund Freud in his essay *Timely Reflections on War and Death* (1915), that in our current state of estrangement from our world, we have managed to “push death aside, to eliminate if from life. [...] Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and however often we try to imagine it, we realise that we are actually still present as onlookers. [...] fundamentally no one believes in his own death, [...] in the unconscious each of us is convinced of his immortality.” (3)
1.2 ‘I’ as a Witness

During millennia the perception of death slowly changed, mainly because of the growth of the Christian faith and its growing influence in western society. As Ariès put forth in *The Hour of Our Death* (2004), the eschatological undertones, the ´images´ of end times, were embedded in Christian iconography after the inclusion of the Last Judgement after the 12th century. The roots for the biblical visions concerning the end were not that different from contemporary fantasies; caused by disappointment and longing, triggered because the present does not meet the expectations of the past and the promises of better futures failed.(4)

The longing was not for the end of everything, but rather for a new beginning. In this regard this old-testament way of thinking, which saw the ´other side´ as an extension to this earthly living, just without suffering and hardship, differs from the contemporary apocalyptic visions in the sense that the end is not about destruction, but rather a renewal.

As the eschatology of the Last Judgement slowly lost it popularity and became detached from the cosmic drama, the focus turned to the destiny of the individual, to the idea where the ‘I’ exists as a witness, one taking the journey from this time to the next and continuing existence. This slow change and replacement of death by the idea of mortality in general, put forth the idea of not solely preparing the individual for their inevitable death, but rather teaching them to meditate on death while living. During this period,
art rose to an integral position in society to express and convey the end times, the whole panoply of ideas put forth by sculptors, painters, poets and preachers alike. Art itself took particular and specific forms like *missa solemnis*, *memento mori*, *artes moriendi* or *macabre*, styles that were utilised to convey particular messages and ideas. The Catholic Church in particular actively used different media to promote its agendas. Accordingly to Ariès, this notion where existence is simultaneously felt as a presence in the temporal yet on the other hand as a ceaseless struggle against oblivion, studying the ideas that are regarded as eternal and unchanged might give one solace: a small hope that *maybe* there is something immortal in man and his actions.(6)

This slow change, the first stirrings of the secularisation that characterises the modern era, had already begun at the end of the middle ages when death ceased to be just a crossing or a transition, but an end in itself. What also happened during this period was the temporalization of history; the distance between the present and the past connected and the concept of *History* as we know it was born. What this allowed was seeing the past not just as a continuum of eschatological signs, but each past event was seen as something unique, no event repeated as such. This made it possible to view time as a continuity that brings continuously new and unique events. As Kari Saastamoinen explains in *Eskatologia, edistys ja historia* (1999) (7) from antiquity until the 17th century the word history described ´*what had happened in the past*´ not the ´*past itself*´. This brought forth a totally new approach towards the present; because the future will be different from the present, the present and past have to have qualitative differences as well. This change caused history to become a subject, suddenly possessing power over humans and performing its own more or less mysterious plan. History also became an entity for which humans could feel responsible, or even act in its name.
1.3 Repositioning of Myth

Some existentialists have perceived mythologies as a certain kind of a ground zero, as the starting point of mankind’s journey towards personal and collective identity and as such, eschatological myths also have a certain existential interest. John MacQuarrie writes in his book *Existentialism* (1972):

> Death-awareness is seen by modern anthropology as a fundamental constituent of man’s being, and as one of the traits that mark him off from the animal. To be aware of death is to be aware of living in the face of the end. Eschatological myths are not primarily speculations about the end of the world but rather attempts to find some framework of meaning within which to set the transience and mortality of human existence. (8)

After the eighteenth century, different processes of disarming myths started to emerge; by negating their fanciful elements and trying to redact and analyse the reasons that gave birth to them in the first place, study them from the perspective that the myths are mere allegories and some kind of vessels, or as MacQuarrie states they are bearers “of metaphysical truth for which no precise literal language would be adequate.” (9)

For Max Weber the end result of this demystification was that the world was deprived of mystery and richness. It became predictable, disenchanted and rationalised. In that sense, the disenchantment of the world is the alienating and undesirable side-effect of scientific progress, even if disenchantment as a concept is neutral in nature. (10) Dealing with this contingency has been the main concern for many existentialists, and human beings in general, yet the struggle
with stripping the reality from the protection of myth remains. Coming to terms with the finitude, reclaiming the world, the process of sense-making and linking the beginning to the end is of great complexity. When the individual is faced with mortality and the brevity of existence, tools are needed to handle that cognition. If the old ones are not at hand or have ceased to exist, new ones will be created to fill that void. It is in this state of compromise where we still are, unable to keep death at a distance, unable to accept it, unable to imagine oneself not existing anymore and in Freud’s words, coming up “...with the ideas of metempsychosis and reincarnation, all with the intention of robbing death of its significance as the abolition of life.”(11)

When faced with this new world, a new approach is needed. For artists the starting position can be their own internal, private world. This does not necessarily mean recreating some phantasmic visions, but merely breaking down the routine of the everyday world and showing us the nature and worldhood of the world. Likewise, artists can choose to apply the registers of emotions, not merely expressing emotion for emotion’s sake, but using the emotion as one of the Elements to reveal the hidden. Steering away in one’s own expression from a certain kind of form does not necessarily mean ´abandonment of all form´, quite to the opposite. Stripping apart and re-arranging the conventional elements, like myths and things, can provide a possibility for the world to re-appear in shapes and configurations never seen before.

Or as Frank Kermode suggested in The Sense of an Ending (2000/1967), the individual can take the position of an active participant, allowing us to see “- past the End, so as to see the structure as whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle”(12). Here one can assume the position of an archeologist, dig deep into the sediments and rediscover the foundations of the perceived world, these excavations acting as the venues and the findings themselves as works.
Part II

- The Sense of an Ending -

_Truly, though our element is time,
We are not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant of our lives.
They link us to our losses. ..._

_Phillip Larkin - Reference Back_
2.1 The Sense of an Ending

While literary critic Frank Kermode’s (1919-2010) approach to the topic at hand in *The Sense of an Ending* was originally built around the concept of language and written text, his writings nevertheless manage to act as an intermediary between the different concepts. His ideas are open and malleable enough for me to use within the concept of *Art* in this case, be it poetry or photography. As Kermode quotes Alcmaeon, the Greek philosopher (500bc) : “men die because they cannot join the beginning and the end. What they, the dying men, can do is to imagine a significance for themselves in these unremembered but imaginable events. One of the ways [...] is to make an object in which everything is that exists in concord with everything else, and nothing else is”.(13) *The Sense of an Ending* (2000)

Personally, this idea is more than apt. By making these little moments of existence into objects, and the object here being not an object per se, but an idea that is distilled and made into an autonomous and self-sufficient container, a vessel, be it a composition, a poem or a painting. And it is not that artists should try to make sense of our lives but they are bound to attempt the “[...] feat of making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives.” (14) as Kermode states, to think and speak out of life’s importance in relation to it, to try to link our beginnings to the ends. It is peculiar yet beautiful, our inability to relate to the infinite and our craving for intelligible Ends; how we construct different methods to see past the end and try to see the structure as whole. We have difficulties to
comprehend our existences and map them out from our position in the middle. As Kermode describes, the fictions and interpretations change and have to change with time, and we have to learn to distinguish the structural differences between myths and fictions as they are different by nature, that the “Myths are agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. [...] Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time, *illud tempus* [...] fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now”.(15)

Kermode also talks about us humans as a certain kind of linkage points, not only regarding direct relations between each other or past and future, but also as the creators and spectators of the apocalypse. It is these observations of the present, memories of the past and expectations of the future that we blend to recreate the vistas and structures we have abolished. Mutability being the core element, the basic nature of all things, we take these old ingredients, remix them and adapt the visions to our new world, making all the past Ends into new images.(16)

This leads to one particular element of interest, the relationship between temporality and transition. Kermode also speaks frequently about the transition as a crucial element in the apocalyptic tradition, acting out as a point of co-existence where past and future link. The thought that each and every point of time, that each and every present is a transition between major periods, can turn into a belief that we “are left with eternal transition, perpetual crisis.”(17) This leaves us in the present with a feeling that our times are nothing but a continuum of crises, extension of the negative, with no relatable link to the past nor future. It is hard to see that this kind of discontinuity would not shape and alter the personal or cultural psyche.
2.2 Writing with an Eraser

What I have contemplated numerous times is to what extent my works in *At The Heart of it All* are merely direct subjective internal re-enactments or manifestations of a collective contemporary eschatological and apocalyptical culture. The visualised End Times in different genres in popular culture: fantasy, horror and science fiction, are littered with the same elements that have been around in the eschatological imagery for centuries. Ruination, decay, entrophy. It seems this is a basic human trait of having the urge to experience the “future in the instant, to be transported beyond the ignorant present.”(18) *The Sense of an Ending* (2000)

It is not that there haven not been powerful eschatological thoughts in the past, our time is not unique in that sense, but never have there been better means to experience it to the fullest, even *consume* it. We have the option to choose a particular apocalypse and end of our liking: a climate catastrophe, meteorite strike, nuclear war or a zombie outbreak. We can consume the end in literature, lyrics, comics, movies or photographs. Each and every option gives us the position of a spectator of the aftermath, voyeur of utter destruction that was previously reserved for God alone. And it is by this particular imagery of our times and ages that this particular character of apocalypse must be known, because it is *our* apocalypse. There are certain elements of this perpetual anxiety that extend beyond times and ages. And as Kermode writes, this
particular recurrence is a manifestation of our cultural (or even psychological) tradition by which each age brings its particularities and peculiarities into expression. Every culture and period have their main medium of articulation, it is these elements that are harnessed to serve it, be it television, art or some collective ritualistic behaviour.

Consequently, it is an inescapable fact that At The Heart of it All has been built upon not only the aesthetic culture of the present, but the roots of that past culture as well, the history of apocalyptic art. The framework within which the images are built is as much the art of Gustave Doré and Albrecht Dürer, as it relies on the works of Louise Bourgeois, Anselm Kiefer or H.R. Giger. No matter how much I claim that these images are from within, and by such definition solely my visions, they are not. Images are an amalgam, a coagulation of sorts, where I have been the alchemist and the raw material excavated from the society around me, from the sediments made up of layers and layers of history. Solve et coagula, separate and join together, as the ancient alchemists stated.

Looking back it seems that I have been searching for a way to create a certain kind of ́slow´ images that I could not only contemplate upon while figuring them out and creating them, but even when revisiting them after they have been finalised. Personally I have found certain difficulties in finding a venue for my contemplation in this modern and secularised world. Of course one can find solitude in chapels and churches, or in nature, but all those spaces possess a peculiar kind of lack. The search for a venue where one can see the world unconcealed, ask the raw and primitive existential questions and try to comprehend the totality of Being, was to a great extent realised during this project. But instead of finding a venue, the world turned out to be the venue.
2.3 Enter the Existent

As the *idea* and forces behind the images started to come into focus, articulation was needed to arrange the words into ontological questions: not only to ask what does it mean to exist or what does it mean to be a human being, but what it is like to be a thing at all? To take a look not only at the world, but at the lens itself that the world is seen through. This existentialist thought seemed to be the instigator for the images and the sketches before them, albeit in the beginning the questions did not have name nor shape, they merely existed as a vague feeling, emotion and symptom.

These questions were asked as a conscious agent, one having the urge to study the subject/object relationships, space and time, cause and effect, looking at the world with the methods at hand, shaped by our culture and society and engaging in the attempt to bring truth(s) into being, not unlike philosophers throughout the history. One could easily ask why bother to write about and contemplate the topic, when realistically one is hardly equipped well enough to advance the field of study let alone break new ground? The reason is simple, as the questions the existent asks: ´where do I come from? where do I go? what is the meaning of all this?´ is arguably the most universal ever asked. Personally I consider it as not only a necessity, but an obligation for me to ask the same questions. To come up with my own answers, loaded with the particularities of my time and age, distilled by the culture I live in.
It is through this loosely phenomenological method that I try to understand the underlying structures of human thought, to observe different phenomena and how they relate to each other, striving to comprehend how we human beings come to understand those basic structures in the first place, to take a look at the lens itself that we see the world through. To quote Martin Heidegger in *Letter on Humanism*:

> If man is once again to come into the vicinity of Being, he must first learn to exist in namelessness. He must recognise equally the seduction of the public and the powerlessness of the private. Before he speaks, he must allow himself again to be spoken to by Being and risk the danger that in being spoken to he will have little or rarely have something to say. (20)

The Written existential thought, in one form or another, has existed since what Karl Jaspers refers to as the ´axial age`, a period of a few centuries around 500BC. Hebrew prophets (Hosea, Isaiah etc) and Greek philosophers (Heraclitus, Socrates and Plato etc) commented on society and its laws and contemplated human destiny. (21)

The themes varied, dealing with issues from freedom, decision or responsibility to finitude, alienation, and death. In *Existentialism* (1972) John MacQuarrie opens up this basic premise by stating that “man is never a part of the cosmos but always stands to it in a relationship of tension[...].”(22)

As it is not in my capacity to make any comprehensive introduction to existentialism, I have brought a few guides with me to act as prisms while studying the questions at hand, companions with whom I have had silent discussions, their words acting as lenses and apparatuses that I watch the world through, reinterpreting it. During the research I was introduced to many eminent thinkers that for one reason or another failed to become integral in the process. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) or the proto-existentialist Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), both had interesting ideas but one way or another they were lacking.
In the end Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Albert Camus (1913-1960) possessed the greatest gravitas, not solely because of the content of their writing, nor how it resonated or aligned with the questions I had at hand but because of how they wrote about the topics at hand. Each has their distinct voice and impetus in how they interrogated the world. Nietzsche with his gusto, fervour and fracturing mind, Heidegger with his slow and meticulous disintegration of words and meanings, and Camus with his fervent humanism. I can not, and will not, act as an expert on the aforementioned individuals’ writings or personal history, as that is not the point. The reason why I refer to these writers is because the invisible strings within their writing and thinking started to link up with my own nascent thoughts. Their ideas and thoughts came to preoccupy me, words seeping into the worlds I was building, affecting and altering them. It was this totality that followed me into my catabasis, to map out the terrain vague, trying to find this interconnectedness of things, that coalition of forms lying latent within structures and to study us beings-in-the-world. We are fundamentally united with it and not some vessels traveling in a disinterested universe, detached, strings cut. And this leads one to consider that this meaning of life is not solely something to be discovered, but rather something to be created. We must give our lives meaning, exert our Will to Power.
Part III

- Spaces within Spaces -
3.1 Ill at Ease With Reality

The series *At The Heart of it All* holds a certain tension within it, a potential for *un-folding, in-folding* and collapse. Initially the images might look staged and set up, even constructed, yet by most standards and conventions they are documentary; straightforward representations of reality. Nothing has been constructed nor removed, space and the place have neither been altered nor intervened in, images have not been recomposed or manipulated. It could almost be said that only *nothing* has been added. By negating the space outside the sphere of light, it is as the *thing* that has been revealed in its simplest and purest form, revealing its *thingness* to the full. Contamination and obscurism that the environment brings into play have merely been silenced and veiled, moved to the background and shown their due place in the distance. One can contemplate whether the images are merely allegorised and miniaturised distillations of reality, reconstructed and scaled down to fit in the field of view, turned into simulations of sorts.

The images in the series certainly do not directly fit into the category of faithful reproduction as the authenticity of pure documentarism has been removed by the intervention of light, artificiality and especially as *intention* has been brought into the image. Distortion has been applied but has not corrected the perspective for the viewer. It has not put things *right*, instead it has shifted the images further toward the strange, into the Uncanny. The ambiguity between the recorded and constructed, how things are depicted, opens up more questions. Or does it actually even matter if these simulations are perceived as negative or positive,
as we approach the liminality? Language breaks down and only indirectly can anything be said about reality, “The self becomes aware of its finitude and nothingness through the ontological experience of anxiety in the face of death” (23) *Existentialism* (1972)

And by language here I do not mean just written language but any language we use to express ourselves, be it painting, photography or poetry. The danger in this reflection created is that it can be affected by feeling and mood, and then ceases to be an objective approach and instead one regresses into myths and mysticism. The transcendence is interrupted and the individual starts to act in bad faith as the “existent cannot be abstracted from his environment, so that to raise the question of man is also to raise the questions of world, of time, of history and man’s relation to these” (24)

And herein lies the challenge, how to articulate these thoughts and visions that have been bothering me for the last two decades, into images. With what toolset could I approach the topics that are elusive to begin with: mortality, the persistence of loss, or the recurring ruinous behaviour of a fellow man? That same behaviour that so easily transforms and mutates from singular to plural; from random individual acts of violence into sociopolitical constructs of oppression.

The other question that got frequently asked was what position does control have in the series? Constantly positing oneself as a godlike entity, controlling all aspects of the image, re-enacting the genesis so to speak. Why? There is this ‘Ship In a Bottle’ dilemma at the very core of the images, the ships one can build into a bottle and imagine all the voyages one could take while building them, from the safety of home. All the while the ship is in safety, encased in glass and out of harm. Yet the ships never sailed the seas, experienced the winds and waves, their existence jeopardised and facing the totality of being, simply by the fact that they are not real, just simulations.
During the realisation of the images of *At The Heart of it All* very little room has been given to chance and random occurrence, all was dictated beforehand by different methods. Ideas, composition, topic, protocols had been created, the formula of inclusion vs. exclusion has been constantly applied. Partly it was due to the technical constraints, but also because a certain kind of dogma developed during the process. The images *should* look a certain way, hold certain parameters and hold a direct relation to each other, have a strong kinship, both visually and in content. What became the relevant question here was not the authenticity of the worlds created but the motives of the creator, where did this aversion towards the reality we exist in come from? Does the world leave something lacking, create too much unease or is it too complex to face directly so one has to build miniatures, small dioramas where one can like an omniscient being, see everything visible at once?

One could hypothesize whether the roots of this urge could arise from childhood and constant relocation from place to place, from country to country. Having these own private worlds, constructed with wood, plastic and glue, gave the chance to withdraw from the constantly changing, unstable world. Having the possibility to see the multitude of worlds created at a glance, re-arrange and de-construct them at will and pack them in a crate to be moved to the next city/country, certainly gave continuity to one’s existence. Or do my actions hold within some more universal atavistic urge to find and construct order, build a totem and regress back to animism just ‘to hold that terrible silence at bay’, as Samuel Beckett would say.

*St.Peters Dream, 2018*
3.2 Spaces Within Spaces

The art of French artist Gustave Doré (1832-1883) holds within it a great example of the concept ´Spaces within Spaces´. In his series of engravings for *Le Sainte Bible* (1866) and Dante Alighieri`s *Divine Comedy* (1861-68), vast cavernous spaces were lit by light from above, like God’s mercy falling on the sinners. These dark vistas resisted disclosing whether they were subterranean worlds or not, re-charting and re-defining the topography of the subterranean. The sphere of light revealed scenes where wretched beings struggled for an eternity, or desolate landscapes where humanity was present solely in the shape of ruins and derelicts. In the far distance, in the almost pitch black darkness one could still see some hints, details that mapped and marked the outlines of the space, creating a sense that the place depicted was in a space instead of floating in a void. In that sense Doré managed to resist Martin Heidegger´s statement in *Being and Time* (1990/1962) that it is “impossible for us to make nothing into an object”(25) but by circumvention, by making a container, Doré made it visible by indirect means.

There is more to Doré in his handling of light and darkness than just form, it is how he sheds light on the human condition as well. The *Divine Comedy* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* might at first glance seem purely illustrations but Doré picked up Alighieri’s and Coleridge’s existential undercurrents, how souls must find meaning for their existence even if they are in Purgatory or heading there. An individual called Sisyphus comes to mind but more of him later...

Gustave Doré, *Dante addressing Bocca degli Abati*, 1861. (Detail)
If Doré shaped the space in his works with his handling of light, other personally influential artists, especially Anselm Kiefer, Louise Bourgeois and Michael Heizer, have had different approaches to space and spatiality. In addition, they all possess in their works a certain constant state of becoming; instead of something ever finally being resolved, their works are continuously relating to some particular point in time. Something that was previously buried comes crashing into the light. And it is not only the vocabulary that counts, but the syntax as well; associations, points of view and modifications of reality all contribute towards a vision.

In a sense, all the aforementioned artists could be labeled as surrealists, as in Andre Breton’s words, surrealism was to follow the “dictate of the mind without any control exercised by the reason” and “will thus refer to a purely interior model or it will not exist”. Beyond The Time and Place (1978) And indeed, surrealism offers a tool for exploring ontological questions, like the meaning of time and space, history, existence, landscape and psyche. But, I will not go so far as to label the artists surrealists (nor non-realists), I rather suggest that the artists mentioned carry forth a certain legacy of the surrealists; a rejection of tangible reality while conjuring up a reality where sleep itself is broken down.

When German painter Anselm Kiefer (1944-) wrote, ´History is my material´ he stated that for the artist history is not static, but an impermanent and subjective state where there is a necessity to remember, redact and rearrange the links between the past and present. He excavates (sometimes literally) the connections buried underneath the soils of time to come to terms not only with the past of our society but with our personal pasts as well: realising that the past has not only passed, it is perpetually in the making as well. While Kiefer was initially renowned more as a painter, his installations have almost taken the forefront since the 1990s.
In his works he uses installations and vitrines full of found and constructed objects; whether submarines, palm leaves or aeroplanes and then creates self-contained worlds with their own particular history. On a grander scale, for example at his old Barjac studio in Southern France, he constructed massive ruins made of concrete and subterranean spaces littered with installations that thrust through the surface and reach for the leaden skies, literally creating *works-within-works-within-works*, like Russian matryoshka dolls. His movement from latent two-dimensional painting to more three-dimensional, layered and structured paintings has found its logical continuum in his installations and land-art, creating these new entities that from their births are already soiled, aged and ruined.

While Kiefer is dealing with Vergangenheitsbewältigung (´coming to terms with the past´) with Germany’s post WWII history and external societal mechanisms, some would assert that Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) is more internal and subjective. By re-constructing and re-arranging the liberated particles from her imagination into the external physical reality, she is creating spaces and figures that do suggest the ´elsewhere´. “A feeling of unreality is produced by familiar things being given a new meaning as well as by unexpected suggestions being put forward ...” (27) as Philippe Roberts-Jones states in *Beyond Time and Place* (1978). Even in her drawings and aquarelles this spatiality is tangible; images of rooms filled with beds and spiders, reflections of her complex childhood. While these images projected from the psyche may have no direct correlation to their apparent counterparts in the world outside us, they certainly are mapping the terrain around the black hole. In Bourgeois’s installations (which Anselm Kiefers’ installations greatly resemble) her handling of internal places have been further translated into external spaces, it is here that the concept of *Spaces Within Spaces* unfolds. In this act, it is not just about furnishing the void, filling it, but rather creating a container to reveal it. Giving
shape to the subjective interior, she reconstructs that space so that
the spectator ends up feeling the same lack. By creating this vessel,
a carrier of emptiness, she makes emptiness itself a substance, a
matter.

The elements, lack and absence, particularly stand out in her Cell
series, room sized installations where she creates an architecture of
her own to furnish her fears and pains. Here one of the ideas is to
modify the size of some particular feature simply by taking an object
out of its natural context, be it spiders, scissors or looking glasses.
Here she studies the relationship between her body and the space,
infusing the forms with her memory. Yet, how can these overtly
personal memories be read anymore as they have gone through
the metamorphosis from internal idea to external entity? It is by
maintaining a triad: a light and an object create a shadow and even
if one were not able to see that particular shadow created directly,
one can feel and experience the shadow indirectly due to its lack and
absence. It is these very same shadows that allow us to link with of
our fellow individuals.

If Bourgeois’ art can be considered autobiographic and occasionally
very intimate, the same can not be said about the land artist
Michael Heizer. Originally a sculptor and one of the members of
the groundbreaking Earthworks exhibition (1968) along with Robert
Smithson and Walter DeMaria, he has (literally) cemented his
position as one of the eminent land artists. The voids and negative
spaces created in his land art go a step further than Kiefer in scale
and take almost cosmological proportions. Even his interior works
like North, East, South, West (2003) found at Dia:Beacon are of grand
proportions of volume and absence, but they are dwarfed by his
seminal piece Double Negative (1969) or City (1972-) which is still under
construction after 35 years and at present covers over two square
kilometres. Here the artist is putting the subject, the spectator,
Unknown - Flammarion engraving, 1888
on a scale where the opposite end is the cosmos itself, dwarfing and basically crushing the existent with the perspectives laid out. One’s position regarding everything is shown, making it clear that every individual and civilisation is finite and inherently linked with decay. It is here where we face the incapability of language to describe It, the great unknown that control us with it currents. It is fascinating to wonder how consciously Heizer (or Kiefer) have tried to construct these what one could call transcendental and sacrosanct spaces. These created physical environments and consecrated places for our secular era, come across as burial places where instead of individuals, civilisations are buried.

What links these artists and their works is a certain kind of Heideggerian disclosedness(28), a certain primordial truth they seem to hold within. A mystery, question and answer, all wrapped into one container as if they were inseparable. It is this paradox that unites the contradictories that create this captivating tension, this in-folding on itself: how phantasma turns out to be the tool to decipher and re-represent the reality, turn it into a hyperreality of sorts. How it enables us to map the terrain around the black hole, the magnum silentium, allowing detachment and secession from facing the ‘infra ordinary’, the murmur of everyday. It is these encounters with the sublime, the ones that most of us are either actively searching for or unconsciously hoping to stumble upon, that made me reconsider the objects not as empty receptacles but as containers for that elusive and invisible abundance that surrounds us, the potential. And like Bourgeois with her theoretical objects that somehow manage to contain in themselves an idea and a narrative, the question became how to create the entanglement between the idea and the final piece of work?
3.3 Nothing as Nothing, not as nothing

The necessity for this ambivalent approach towards space became evident several times during the realisation period of *At The Heart of it All*. Some of the images benefitted from the exclusion of space, the notion that no apparent world exists beyond the sphere of light or the surface of the images. This ‘closing’ prevented the seeping through, the wandering eye and kept the gaze coming back to the half-way point, to the object, thus closing the loop. However, it does not mean that there is *nothing* in the background, the nothing *itself* is an entity, an object, an apparition. Nothing is there as Nothing, not as *nothing*. As Heidegger deconstructs Nothing in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

Does there ever occur in human existence a mood [...], through which we are brought face to face with Nothing itself? This may and actually does occur, albeit rather seldom and for moments only, in the key-mood of dread. In dread, as we say, “one feels something uncanny”, [...] not in the sense that everything simply disappears; rather, in the very act of drawing away from us everything turns towards us. [...] There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhels us whilst what-is slips away, is this “nothing”. Dread reveals Nothing. (...) Nothing is neither an object nor anything that “is” (at all). Nothing occurs neither by itself nor “apart from” what-is, as for of adjunct. [...] Instead of giving way to such precipitate and empty ingenuity and abandoning Nothing in all its mysterious multiplicity of meanings, we should rather equip ourselves and make ready for one thing only: To experience in Nothing the vastness of that which gives every being the warrant to be. That is Being itself. (29)
While some of the images benefited from the limited dimensionality of the space, others did not. Many of the images asphyxiated, succumbed as they could not bear the utter void beyond them. Images like Sense of Foreboding (30), Gardenia (31) and A Borrowed State of Being (32) needed the depth and space, the possibility for the spectator to excavate information from the distance. To link the place not only to the space it occupies inside the image but to the same space, the world, that the spectator occupies. Not to solely be the object-in-space-before-the-subject but the idea-habiting-the-same-world-as-the-subject. Instead of the images being in some detached world from our own, the hints in the background show that they exist in a space that is our own world, linking them to the present. It could then be asked ´what is needed´ from the distance, what does the spectator require? In this case it could be stated that the spectator could benefit from having coordinates to orientate himself, to take bearings. It is not about forcing the spectator to a certain point of view, but rather transferring the ciphers to the subject so it can be decrypted on its own using the algorithms given; the symbols, the allegories, the cultural artefacts.

Yet what are these ciphers? Karl Jaspers, a German-Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher, contemplated the limits of thought and language and described ´ciphers´ as “ideas by which we try to represent to ourselves realities that cannot be grasped by thought” (33). Jaspers studied this relation of language to being and recognises three levels of thought and language:

Appearance is described and thought in concepts. Signs convey what I am and can be as myself. Transcendent reality, to be experienced by existence (Existent) alone, is manifested in ciphers. A cipher is the language of a reality that can be heard and addressed only thus and in no other way. (34)

Some would argue that Jaspers uses ´ciphers´ and ´transcendence´ in a more theological context, while I merely use them as gestures,
as a language of transcendence while trying to reveal something from the physiognomy of the human world itself. As this question of Being is rather onerous, if not next to impossible to address directly, the oblique path might allow one to move forward, approach that elusive liminal space that is in between.
3.4 The Oblique Path

Contemplating whether a space, the space, can hold within it a particular index that no other space can, can lead us to think that the space cannot be occupied simultaneously by two different systems either. The premise of Wolfgang Pauli’s Exclusion Principle that an X,Y,Z position can hold only a singular entity within it luckily applies only to matter. And as Ideas can relatively certainly be considered to have neither mass nor spatial parameters, one can explore the topic in more detail. Certain spaces within the At The Heart of it All do act as repositories of memories and history; acts and actions that have happened in a certain place and space hold a unique quality to it, but they are never unique in the sense that similar things have not happened before, in different places. This non-locality differs from, say, universality, as non-locality can happen in some places, not in every place as universality would suggest.

This thought of non-locality became important as the concept of location surfaced; must certain contexts and ideas be realised in a certain place, say, where a certain historical act or deed took place? Or can the idea be transferred to a different venue, or even an object, without the original idea falling apart or mutating beyond recognition. The Ship Called Night (35) for example can be read solely as an image of a beached ship, a document of a certain kind, but it is relatively improbable that it will be read solely as that. It could be read as homage to the romantic era and Caspar David Friedrich’s painting The Sea of Ice (1824) or as a critique against capitalistic discardment. One could also use the title of the work to link it to
Marguerite Duras’ novel *Le Navire Night* (1978), a story where two lovers recurrently pass each other in the night, never to meet. As all aforementioned ideas are equally valid and hold the same space, that same place, overlapping at will, it can be thought that the object, the ship, is of no critical concern either. It could be replaced by any other derelict ship, anywhere in the world and the connotations would remain. The ship could even be replaced with any discarded man-made object and most of the emblems would still attach to it. Only if one told about that particular ship would it, that object, have a particular meaning in it.

And if we move away from objects to venues, this leads us to the next consideration; not all spaces and places are equal, some are much more problematic, hold more gravitas within them and require more contemplation. *Routine of a Broken Machine* (36) could be read solely as an anonymous guard tower, a symbol of authority and control. But the watchtower in Auschwitz Birkenau holds within it a much larger amount of connotations, history and links. The first question that arises is if it is even tenable to use that space as a venue, to appropriate the pain of others that one does not have direct links to? Yet again, some could claim that one not only can but must remember, to use it as a starting point, to un-conceal it and put it in the open again.

What has happened, will happen again; “there are cinders there,” “cinders there are” [il y al là cendre] as French philosopher Jaques Derrida (1930-2004) put it, contemplating on “how can this fatally silent call that speaks before its own voice be made audible?”.(37) In *Cinders* (2014/1987) Derrida explicitly deals with not only the necessity of remembering (the holocaust), but also with the struggle to be able to give a voice to the totality of it and the limits of language to express that totality. It is as if the language withdraws from itself, falls apart in front of it, words and sentences are reduced
to staccatos, punctuated by silences. “But the urn of language is so fragile. It crumbles and immediately you blow into the dust of words that are the cinder itself”. (38) Seeing that the mechanisms for that same totality are still among us, remembering and retelling becomes not a mere necessity but an obligation. It is as long as we existents have anxieties and aversions towards our own end, we are susceptible to falling for it, again.

The fire: what one cannot extinguish in this trace among other that is a cinder. Memory or oblivion, as you wish, but of the fire, trait that still relates to the burning. No doubt the fire has withdrawn, the conflagration has been subdued, but if cinder there is, it is because the fire remains in retreat. By its retreat it still feigns having abandoned the terrain. It still camouflages, it disguises itself, beneath the multiplicity, the dust, the makeup powder, the insistent pharmakon of a plural body that no longer belongs to itself — not to remain nearby itself, not to belong to itself; there is the essence of the cinder, its cinder itself. (39)

Jaques Derrida, Cinders
Sense of Foreboding, 2014
3.5 Terrain Vague

The idea of the locality of an object/place, that a particular object *has a particular space assigned to it*, opens up an opportunity to contemplate what kind of differences exist between an object that already exists in-situ (and represents something particular in a certain time and space), and an object that has been created by the author just to realise a certain idea and transfer that idea into an image. For example, one can clearly see that a difference exists between some particular pyre in Klooga, Estonia that existed in September 1944, the reconstruction of a pyre in the same location, let alone a re-representation as a monument in a different place, country or in a gallery. This representation / re-representation involves the same problematics as the removal of the human form, but to a much greater extent. As the human figure holds some kind of relatable universals within it, be it within certain symbols and affects, an object by its nature risks lacking it. Or it could be said that certain kinds of *localities* and *particularities* resist displacement and repositioning.

*Sense of Foreboding* (40) represents the more flexible kind of space; an anonymous chasm, a pit, that can perhaps be seen as a grave. It does not hold large amounts of *particular* in it, but it contains a lot of *universality*; it could be reproduced to a certain extent basically anywhere in the world, given that place would have a pit and the possibility for snowfall.
On the other hand, *Abandonment of Being* (41) holds much more *locality* and *particularities* within it. That certain space is the end result in a particular chain of events. Energy politics of Mussolini’s fascistic government and the actions of local catholic governance of Curon Venosta led to the creating of an artificial lake and displacement of several villages in the valley. Ironically, the only thing that was left visible after the deluge was the bell tower in the middle of the lake, as a reminder of the betrayal of the local population that took place. In this case the place and the image holds much more of *locality* and *particularity* within it, but the narrative that has been created has gained a lot of *universal* as well. The events and actions are universal and relatable; they have happened before and will happen again, in similar forms, all over the world. So again a certain kind of un-folding occurs as that *particular* $\Rightarrow$ *individual* holds a certain kind of *universal* within its structure and by opening up it doubles, transforms and achieves the third state, the 300%.

The aim of all this was to see if in the images one could achieve what the German writer Gotthold Ephraim-Lessing described it as ‘a pregnant moment’ (42). To hold within one image a variety of situations and events seemingly happening at the same time, that moment where we ask what has happened, what is about to occur, and where we are in this sequence of a narrative. This is a constant process of becoming, one trying to capture a world caught on the threshold between formation and disintegration, and contain that into a single interpretation.

As most of the images are situated in an open space, the topic of landscape as a backdrop became relevant. Either the settings depicted in the images contain elements or hints of civilisation, or nature has been subjected to *pareidolia* (43) blurring the line and distinction between natural and artificial. This *terrain vague* then
acts as a venue where matter can be reconfigured, feeding our fascination with entropy and giving a glimpse of the infinite. As Marcel Brion stated: “This world and the next exchange properties and appearances”. It is this ´next world´ that has bothered and troubled me, one that I have failed to understand and comprehend. A world that ceaselessly un-folds and in-folds, a world that I try to imagine and image.

Abandonment of Being, 2016
3.6 Objects as Containers

Then, what is supposed to be achieved via this acting out by proxy, using the locations and objects as agents? The basic premise and/or question is if objects and places represented can act as containers of a sort, as vessels of information just as the images themselves are containers on their own as well. The slight difference here being that the objects in my works simultaneously act as substitutes for human figures. But instead of being separate entities they are intertwined, folded over each other. The objects represent a human and an idea, and as well a human with an idea. This exclusion of the human figure, facilitates the folding over of the idea with the spectator.

One could easily read for example the work *House of Lilith* (45) solely as ruins, an abandoned house. But the title (first container) links the ruins to biblical fables (second) where the context is the individual’s rebellion against authority (third) and its repercussions (fourth), together these elements create a palimpsest, a container of history that in its unity represents an idea; an individual in search of autonomy and meaning as an existent, and the ramifications when acting against the norms of society. To a certain extent this is the same as Roland Barthes talked about that “a denotation is ‘what we see’, what can be described as simply ´there´ in the picture. Connotation is the immediate cultural meanings derived from what is seen, but it is not actually in the picture.” (46) The challenge in this acting out via a proxy, substitution, is that a particular link is
jeopardised. With a human figure one could imagine that a certain amount of information would be transposed, be it in documentary or staged photography; sex, cultural position, relations to the surroundings or emotions displayed. The validity and veracity of the information might vary depending into which genre the image would fall to, but one could posit oneself to a certain extent based on the information received. Now replacing the human figure with an object risks a false sense of attainment; the author might unduly think that all the relevant ideas, emotions and registers are successfully transferred into the image, available to the spectator to read and understand as the artist has originally intended. Although even relatively complex ideas can be represented through substitutions, this way of operating poses an inherent risk that too much of the original intent and idea will get lost in the translation and the spectator is left with very little information to reflect upon, or worse, might arrive at a conclusion totally opposite to what the artist originally intended to represent. As the individual, the spectator, has an inherent right to come to any conclusion, the author must come to terms with and accept the profound risks involved in the choice of this substitution.

This risk was realised in At The Heart of it All, the imagery being documentary and not journalistic by nature, images being ´neutral´ photographs that merely show the state of something in its present condition. And what I mean by ´documentary photography´ is what “...hovers between art and journalism, between a creative treatment and actuality”(47). This staged reality is where I have taken and organised the materials (places, spaces, objects) and re-organised them into photographic codes, created a reality effect. Apart from two particular images Dialogues With Infinity #1-2 (48), nothing were altered when the images have been shot and post-production has been limited to basic luminance and tonal corrections. The reality has been left on its own and merely reframed with artificial lighting
and context, images have been turned into interpretations and not objective and absolute truths. I have chosen to intervene and re-contextualise objects, spaces and places to tie them down to my narrative of choice, taken the different parts of the whole, created my own point of view of reality where “...every object is presented against a background which is not an object, the present lying between two horizons of absence, past and future. (49)” as Maurice Merleau-Ponty states in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1978/1962). These acts of staging reality are still far from interventions, actions where I would have intervened in a space; altered the reality by constructing objects, re-arranging nature as in land art or bringing in performative human bodies.

This *modus operandi* had several reasons, some ideological and some merely pragmatic. Having a background as a photojournalist there was this subconscious urge to keep things as unaltered as possible: to maintain some kind veracity, a link between the world of the images and the world that we inhabit, to prevent the spectator being thrown in and out of the narrative. This approach was also to prevent the created worlds from slipping into pure fantasy or science fiction, into some juvenile and escapists dreams, as the images are all about the world we inhabit.

The second reason for excluding interventions is because it was not yet time for that. The documentary approach allowed me to study a great variety of different kinds of topics, to see how they all reacted to the interrogation differently, some topics opening up and unfolding while others resisted it and clammed up. And it is these particular refusals and withholdings *At The Heart of it All* that produced the need for closer inspection and restudy, to open up their nature and character and then construct them into images.
3.7 The Clearing

One could think that the perceived absence of human beings in the series *At The Heart of it All* would have some direct reason behind it, stemming either from lack of resources, ideological reasons or just general aversion toward one’s fellow man. All these claims hold some truth in them, perhaps. A partial reason for the absence of man could stem from certain events coinciding with the beginning of the series in 2014. At that time period, a certain chapter was closing in my personal life regarding working with people, for people, in the realm of image making. Two decades of working in the field of photojournalism and advertisement had taken its toll, disillusion had taken hold. Distance and solitude were much needed, yet the basic craving for *Being-with-others* and *Being-in-the-world* was still there.

The solution arrived in the form of withdrawal and repositioning oneself in the aphelion, acquiring distance from the issues and topics at hand, both literally and figuratively. There was the realisation of perceived changes in the surrounding society, cognition that certain kind of forces within our individual and societal behaviour are still not only present, but seem to be gaining in strength. Further studies of the topic required certain kind of detachment from the physical shape and form of being, so removing the subject from the picture, erasing the man, became a necessity in order to study the condition of man. As Nietzsche writes in *The Use and Abuse of History* “man must have the strength to break
up the past [...] He must bring the past to the bar of judgement, interrogate it remorselessly and finally condemn it.” (50)

Nietzsche’s idea behind these repetitional forces, the key to understanding history, is to tear down all the comforting illusions and to come to terms with ‘what has been, will be again and that what will be has already been’. And when we start to discuss the past, we speak about it as history rather than temporality, a human occurrence into which we are all tied as a collective, acknowledging the reciprocity between the past and present. The notion is that existence is in Heidegger’s terms Being-with-others and Being-in-the-world, where the world acts as a stage on which our existence is unfolded, where we externalise ourselves in action and take part in re-(de)constructing the world. And as the Dasein cannot be removed from its environment, study of the individual is also at the same time a study of “the questions of the world, of time, of history, and of man’s relation to these”. (51)

In Being and Time Heidegger reveals that not only does Dasein contain the lumen naturale within, it also brings the clearing (Lichtung) with it as well. Dasein is the light that lights the very clearing it brings with it, it is surrounded by it, it is its nature. This is the doubling down, or more aptly in-folding that is so captivating. “In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting... Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are.” (52) This metaphorical forest glade provides clear boundaries to our fields of action and perception. These enable us to imagine not only what is inside the clearing but also what is outside it, the visible creating boundaries for the invisible.

Even if the images of At The Heart of it All are about us humans and humanity, the necessity for the direct inclusion of a figure is not
there. A mere shadow will suffice, even an invisible one. The work and the spectator are already present, the presence of that third entity is embodied by lack and exclusion, shaped into allegories and symbols. Not only would the incorporation of a human figure be blatant and obvious, vulgar almost, but it would bring in a false kind of concreteness. It would crowd the stage with unnecessary actors as man is already present on the stage (in the images), manifesting itself in the shape of places, deeds, consequences and as history itself. The inclusion of human form would also risk depriving the spectator of a chance to start a private dialogue with the work, to have the space to reflect upon things that are for one only. To incorporate that corporal human in the image would require a different kind of narrative, a ‘who? why? when?’ It would also necessitate a very particular story to be told, in a particular manner, with a particular motivation. And it would not only posit the author as an authority, it would also risk depriving the spectator of autonomy, options and interpretations.

In my works exclusion of the human figure allowed the creation of an intimate space where the spectator “experiences the terror of the world, and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void, he strives for liberation and redemption.”(53) as Karl Jaspers contemplates in The Origin and Goal of History (2010/1953). There he talks about the individual who is no longer protected by the divine powers but instead faces the void alone. The inclusion of a human figure in to the images would also require a certain kind of mimetic approach; feeling through another being, living through that particular ‘individual’ and externalising personal emotions. There are times this approach of connecting to the world through the fellow human justifies itself, but it can easily become a crutch or even an obstacle to confronting ourselves. What I aimed for in my works was that the lack of human shape within the images would require one to project oneself into the frame, reposition Dasein so
that one can mirror and observe self from a distance, allowing the individual to retain autonomy and subjectivity through dissociation. But this intimacy is not an invitation to escapism, a call for some simpler mode of life or a return to the ‘cult of the primitive,’ but rather offers a venue where one can study different kinds of manifestations of our existence. That space in front of the image is there to retain the intersubjective and intimate relation between the work and spectator. For the artist, the making of the image has been about the search for an authentic existence, and one can wonder how the spectator would differ from that. Both might have attained what Mary Warnock describes in *Existentialism* (1970) the “realization of one’s position in the world, one’s isolation, and one’s inevitable orientation towards one’s own death. Before this realization can be complete, one has to experience oneself as something suspended over a void.”(54)
Dealing with the perceived cyclicity of certain events and human behaviour calls for dealing with time as well, with the ´Tick´ and the ´Tock´ and what is left in between. The necessity of dealing with the continuity and successiveness of time is the only thing stopping us regressing “towards myth, out of this time into that time” as Kermode expresses it.(55)

In the images of At The Heart of it All, time has been made visible, concrete, in a multitude of forms. Not only do the images reach back in time by having certain painterly aspects in them, in the terms of composition, framing or stating capriccio (56), they also reach forward in time, bridging the past, present and future. Picturing the apocalypse and laying out the eschatological fantasies that most of us in western society either consciously or subconsciously revel in. The popular culture of our times uses it constantly. Escapist ideas of immortality are portrayed by magical thinking where greater powers hold and control fate (not unlike the myths of ancient times); or vampiric or zombistic phantasms where eternal existence is attained by exchange of saliva or immortality is secured via complex digital constructs, dissolving the consciousness of the individual into the eternal digital realm.

All these manifestations are valid, in a perverted kind of way. They all are symptoms of our time and age. Yet they all deal with the
same basic premise, the impossibility of facing the void and our finitude as conscious human beings. We are stuck in the present with no escape, history is of no consolation and the future holds no salvation. Our time is tainted by the abolition of the interim, we resist the existence here and now.

It is this very resistance that Albert Camus is resisting with his notion of the Absurd Man. Instead of realising and coming to terms with our existence and position in the universe, we are by all means possible yielding and shying away from authenticity. Instead of positing ourselves and taking our place in time, we merely recoil. As Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2005/1955)

> A step lower and strangeness creeps in: [...] sensing to what degree a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, with what intensity nature or a landscape can negate us. At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the on-line of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, [...] The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across the millennia. [...] that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd. (57)

This limited and finite character of existence that we must face, create the very notion of the Absurd. We realise that the world we inhabit, and our own existence, has no meaning in itself and when one is confronted with this realisation one is faced with the option of suicide or continuing existence. If one chooses to continue, the familiar world is suddenly stripped of lights and illusions, and in exile one is turned into a stranger to himself. It is in this setting where the feeling of absurdity properly sets in. The chair ceases to be just a chair or a tree just a tree as Sartre describes in *Nausea* (Le Nausée, 1938), instead the world is shown as it is. The main protagonist Roquentin, estranged from the world, is faced with the *self-made-man*, who almost desperately clings to his humanism, both acting in bad faith. And it is here, through living and personal
revolt, where one must create meaning for oneself, shying away from that literal suicide as well as from philosophical suicide, to steer away from intellectual pitfalls or resorting to external belief systems that promise us salvation or false hope, be it in politics, belief systems, morality or ideology. (58)

One could ask then where could we find Ariadne’s thread in this labyrinthine world, how to face the unreasonable silence of the void? Camus gives in neither to bitterness nor nostalgia, instead he allies himself with time and goes on stating that for “the absurd man it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but experiencing and describing.” (59) Here it could be easily read that Camus suggests that art itself could act as a remedy for the Absurd, but instead he goes on to state that art itself is merely a monotonous and passionate repetition arranged by the world, offering no escape for the intellectual ailment but rather being one. Yet he does not condemn it, quite the opposite in fact:

To work and create ‘for nothing’, to sculpt in clay, to know that one’s creation has no future, to see one’s work destroyed in a day while being aware that, fundamentally, this has no more importance than building for centuries — this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions. Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on the one hand and magnifying on the other, is the way open to the absurd creator. He must give the void its colours. (60)

And it is this Sisyphean act one can choose to undertake, to create art under the notion that some day the works made will bear witness.
Todtnauberg

Arnica, eyebright, the
draft from the well with the
star-die on top,
in the
Hütte,

written in the book
—whose name did it record
before mine?—,
in this book
the line about
a hope, today,
for a thinker’s
word
to come,
in the heart,

forest sward, unleveled,
orchis and orchis, singly,

raw exchanges, later, while driving,
clearly,

he who drives us, the mensch,
he also hears it,

the half-
trod log-
trails on the highmoor,

humidity,
much.

Paul Celan, 1968
Translation Pierre Joris, 2014
Part IV

- The View of the Impossible -
4.1 Mapping out Apeiron

The birth of the images in *At The Heart of it All* has been a relatively long and slow process, a distillation of sorts. Like *Prima materia* in alchemy, the basis for images existed for two decades before taking their final shape. Personal fascination with artists like Francisco Goya, Gustave Doré, Anselm Kiefer, Michael Heizer and Louise Bourgeois certainly has affected the visual register, how the images look, how the space within them is handled and that certain *tone* or *register* that is in the final images. Yet this visual side is only a small fragment behind the real reason why I ended up building these small worlds.

When looking back and mapping the origins of the images, the first problem was to define what the images were *about*, what they represented, what the idea behind the series was (as a series they were) as the images have kinship with each other. While most of the original paintings & drawings were results of direct and undistilled subconscious regurgitation, the photographs demanded a more analytical and grounded approach. The places and spaces had to *matter*, they had to have a meaning and history of their own and not just merely fulfil some spatiovisual purpose. Slowly a certain kind of pattern evolved, what places were suitable and why. Links and threads started to emerge between the images, connections and closures started to take place, slowly forming an intricate web. Some of original images, paintings and drawings found their siblings, or shall I say doppelgängers, in the real world with relative ease. Research and previous travels in Europe had built a certain kind of
Gardenia, 2015.
topography, a sense of relations that allowed me to place ideas in the world due to some specifics, be it geological topography, biosphere or sites of historical significance. *Gardenia* (61), originally a drawing inspired by Max Ernst’s painting *Solitary and Conjugal Trees* (62), found its location in Provence, in a place where cultures have appeared and disappeared centuries before the Roman arrival. The place had the necessary objects of substitutions to act as witnesses in space and time, observe the ceaseless unfolding of events. If most of the images were pre-planned and locations chosen in advance, some places revealed themselves by coincidence. When settling for a night of sleep at the desolate beaches in Camargue, the elements that had hidden in plain sight during the day suddenly emerged from the darkness. Rocks and sand drift fences took totally new shapes and meanings in the twilight, forming ruins of vanished cities and monuments of past civilisations. Images *Apeiron I-III* (63) were born on the following nights, old drawings finding their analogues by chance.

The second, more mundane challenge was how to actually realise the images into photographs. Creating the worlds is of no difficulty when you are painting, one acts as a God there, acting at will and imposing one’s own laws when necessary. But creating dark spaces and landscapes in photography, with strict and controlled lighting from above, would have been next to impossible even a few years ago unless one had a movie sized team. Utilising complicated light riggings, gun based flares or helicopters, tempting as the ideas were, was fiscally unrealistic. The solution arrived with the advent of drones. Normally used for direct imaging with cameras, I instantly realised their potential and re-utilised and rigged them with light fixtures. Suddenly I had at hand a brush of light with which I could paint the spaces, picking out details at will or leaving them in the shadows. The gift of the painters, the control of light and ability to create worlds at will, was suddenly at my disposal. This allowed me
to choose freely the best vantage points for the camera and removed the worry about light fixtures showing up in wider images like *House of Lilith* (64). The use of drones was not totally without challenges though. While realising *A Borrowed State of Being* (65) in the remote parts of Alpes Maritimes, a French military low level helicopter training put an abrupt end to the shooting on the first two nights. Another matter was no-fly zones and bureaucracy; securing permission to photograph at Auschwitz-Birkenau took days due to the obvious sensitivities one had to take into account regarding the history of the place. In the end the series *At The Heart of it All* was realised in nine different countries in Europe during eight separate trips, over a four year period. In total, about seventy different locations were photographed and from the resulting couple of hundred potential images, approximately 75 where finalised for consideration for the book and exhibitions.
A Borrowed State of Being. 2015.
4.2 The Weight of the Shape

If the process of making the images was an act of distillation, a clash between exclusion and inclusion, so was the process of deciding the final shape of the images, be it in the form of a singular work or a self-contained package like a book. From early on the material imaged held a certain kind of resistance within it, it did not feel malleable, it refused to yield and to be set into certain kinds of representations. For example, overtly digital and/or polished representations brought a certain kind of ‘wrong’ artificiality into the images. The content would start to look like a 3D model, thoroughly digital, unreliable and lacking any kind of link to the world we inhabit. Glossy Diasec prints or digital projections also brought a falseness in, threw away the veracity and stripped away the real that was of utmost importance. After all, the series is not solely about creating fictional non-existing places but representing and documenting the real as well, to bringing forth its true form.

The images of At The Heart of it All have their main register in the dark end of tonal range. Information does not solely exist in the high key areas but is complemented and supported by the darker register that hold at least as much detail and importance. This characteristic, a feature of a sort, posed a problem. Generally, as darker areas in dark images are extremely prone to ‘contamination’ (with this I mean contaminated by reflections from the surroundings and lights), the materialness of the image took an essence of its own. Glossy or even semi-glossy printing papers reflect the lights to such an extent that looking at the images becomes a physical act. One has
to move and weave to look behind the reflections, to try to read the
details in the darker register. This spastic jitter alone is enough to
break the contact with the content, to subject the Subject to totally
unnecessary challenges and obstacles. One of the main ideas behind
the images was to set up a certain kind of a stage, a silent venue
where the individual can contemplate upon existence and mortality
without undue detractions.

After a certain period of testing the solution to the challenges
manifested itself in the form of super matte papers and museum
glass. The matte paper could provide the necessary calm and
reflection-free canvas for the image, showing the necessary details
and providing a slight softness to the harshness of the black. But the
material is extremely susceptible to dust and mechanical damage
like smears and scratches, so the final pieces had to be protected
and encased in frames. That brought the problem of reflections
back as normal glass used in frames is very reflective, to a such an
extent that the spectator can see themselves reflected clearly while
standing in the front of a dark image. And while in many ways the
idea of a ´spectator seeing them self in the image´ is apt, it was not
to be taken that literally.

The inadvertent causality from the framing solution was a certain
kind of rigidness and absoluteness, that crept in to the works and
their representation in the exhibition context. Due to the fragility
of the matte material, this particular kind of framed presentation
became a de-facto approach, making it much more difficult to
represent the images in a way that would not be a non-single use
format. While making unique and unframed prints and using them
in an exhibition situation is certainly possible, they are hard to
justify. It is not fiscally or ecologically feasible as the fragility of the
medium makes them expendable and they would barely last through
an exhibition let alone be reusable. Yet there is some hidden
potential in the concept itself; how to find ways of representation that would entail the very same decay that the images depict? This perceived rigidity of expression has lately become a great concern, as most images hold within them a multitude, not only with interpretations, but also possibilities of representation. Monolithic black rectangles on the wall of an exhibition certainly hold some validity, it is not wrong per-se, but it also it begs a question; what else is there, what are the other possibilities of representation? Exactly these same questions had to be asked while dealing with the process of the book, *At The Heart of it All.*
4.3 Book as a Vessel

The process of realising the series as a book was made concrete in November 2016, in Paris Photo when the decision to publish with Hatje Cantz Verlag was made. The book was printed and released in October 2017, eleven months later. From the onset, challenges with the material choices for the book became evident, some of them very similar to the ones that had been dealt with in the framed works. In addition, the extremely fast paced schedule posed issues of their own.

The shape, materials and the form of the book were relatively straightforward. The issue with the reflections in dark images had been sorted out to a great extent earlier when dealing with the printing of the works. This choice of matte paper as the best medium was verified again when going through in excess of 400 photographic publications while deciding certain parameters for the book. Images containing a lot of black were proven to be challenging to look at when printed on semi-glossy or glossy paper. The benefit of preserving minute details when printing on glossier papers, was not by any standards worth destroying the intimate experience that matte paper provides. But what turned out to be even worse than the reflections, was the haptic and tactile feedback the glossy papers caused; that plastic, dead, artificiality was something that could not even be considered. The No was absolute. The choice of matte paper brought up another challenging issue to deal with, the printing itself. Dark images are by default extremely
difficult to print; contamination of tones happens when the black mixes with colours, porous matte paper requires large amounts of black to look black and not grey and that excessive black can transfer to opposite pages smudging the pages and images. Initially the publisher Hatje Cantz was hesitant to even print on the selected paper due the technical challenges it posed, but three rounds of test printings with various methods and exceptional work by their print master Jan Scheffler made the unorthodox presentation possible.

When the issue regarding the choice of what type of matte paper and the printing challenges were dealt with, the focus turned to a more complex issue; the shape and form of the book and the question about narrative. As the underlying theme in the series At The Heart of it All is existentialistic, the individual coming to terms with mortality, the urgency of maintaining a certain kind of intimacy of space within the book became crucial. This particular space was not so dissimilar to the sphere of light itself realised in the images, a certain kind of bubble where one cohabits with the ideas in the same space and all the rest, the unnecessary, is removed beyond the horizon. To create this kind of space for introspection, one had to consider the elements that make that possible. As only four images from the series of 35 are vertical, and quite often the main punctum is in the relative middle of the image, a horizontal book made the most sense. The most important aspect that shaped the layout ended up being the images themselves and that certain kind of narrative that they created. Whilst there is no obvious narrative or some particular continuum in the series, there is a certain kind of a labyrinthine thread in it. This proposition by pre-socratic philosopher Anaximander that there is ´No Beginning or End in Apeiron´ created a certain kind accelerating entropy in the series; the series starts in a certain kind of midpoint when everything is still recognisable and manageable but slowly spirals down to a point where one begins to lose one’s bearings, materia
fractures and loses cohesion and words turns staccato in face of the totality.

Whilst most of the images are singular, independent works, there are a few diptych-like pairs such as *Void Above, Another Below* (66) and *The Passage (Terror) & (Erebus)* (67) that break down the hegemony of singular images, and act as interdependent pairs, bridging the gaps, so to speak. While arranging the sequence of the images it was fascinating to see how adding or removing even one image could put a whole segment of the book into a turmoil. In this phase of the project the eyes of an outsider, which in this case belonged to Jyrki Parantainen, proved to be of great importance, as even the last phase of editing still involved dealing with over 100 images. In the end one, could contemplate whether the far too tight schedule and fiscal constraints were detrimental to the project. One has to entertain the thought of ‘what if’ for a minute. Again the question arises about the problem of representation; what other ways of representation and layout would have been more apt? What would have been alternative ways of representing the images, ones that would not become gimmicky yet retain the images to live up to their full potential? With the works and pieces that option is still open, every exhibition and realisation giving an opportunity to extend their shape but with the book, all is closed, done.
All in all, the project brought several revelations, and the individual who returned from the metaphorical mountain wasn’t the same as the one who ascended it. On a personal level, any illusions of contentment and certainty were stripped away early on, only to be replaced by doubt, questions and insecurities. But those new elements turned out to be accelerators as well. Realising one’s own finitude and lack of knowledge was profoundly challenging my artistic approach. Previous ways of working that had served me well, proved to be inadequate when dealing with more complex ideas.

The approach that ended up being the modus operandi with *At The Heart of it All*, this non-interventionist approach, created the necessary distance at the time and it allowed me to be an enabler of sorts. I could take part in the process, express myself (with limitations), map and study the world and make representations of it through particularities of my vision, all from a distance. One could think this detachment might be a symptom of irresponsibility and avoidance; avoiding writing myself into the images or shying away from genuine self expression. In hindsight, I realise that it was the optimal solution by creating the necessary distance, to enable me to work in the first place. But because of its basic nature of exclusion and avoidance, I find it hard or next to impossible, to continue to work with that approach anymore.
This approach of avoidance and perceived documentarism left me longing, leaving behind a peculiar sense of un-achievement. The lack of intervention and manipulation of the pre-existing condition of the universe, the absence of re-arrangement and re-assembly left behind a sterility instead of some vital contamination. The sterility manifested itself in a silence, not too dissimilar to when a question is answered but the answer is not understood. Obviously, only a fool would wish for a clear and cohesive answer to the questions asked by humanity for millennia. But the point has never been to answer them properly, to provide a definite answer. Instead, the wish here is to seed and contaminate as reality is constantly reborn and ‘Being’ is an evolutionary process, to create a fertile ground where new strains can emerge and evolve. Interrogate the topic at hand from the perspective and position of our time, with the tools at our disposal and maybe, perhaps, create new questions along the way. Questions forgotten or never asked before, take part in this chain of inquiries, further and extend it, link together the past and future in new ways.

This intervention and shaping the world has its potentia, both in micro and macro structures. The macro structures would hold within the intervention with the visible world on a larger scale; creating structures in places/spaces, excavating and revealing the subterranean and altering and rearranging the pre-existing shape of the current. As interesting as it is, this approach also holds several challenges. Not only is it labour intensive and fiscally restrictive but can easily be invasive and environmentally destructive.

Also, this interventionist approach alters the previously utilised documentarism and subjects the intentions and motivations of the artist to a wholly different degree of questioning; one must have at least some answers to the ‘what’s’ and ‘why’s’ that will be asked. Recreating the space/place from scratch, re-representing
and altering the venue require a different kind of approach and connection to the history of the spaces involved.

But this is a peril one must accept as there is an inherent risk in remembering and *re-membering*. As in the myth of Lemminkäinen or ancient Egyptian mythology where the goddess Isis is sews together the dismembered body of her husband Osiris after he had been mutilated, cut to pieces and cast into different corners of Egypt, the body’s members are sewn back together and brought alive; but not everything is restored, something is always missing and lacking. And herein lies the beauty, in this futile Sispyhean struggle; by this act of re-membering *something* is restored and resurrected and *something* inevitably will be born out of this act.
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5.0 Quotes

1.1
(2) : Ibid. 576-580.

1.2
(6) : Ibid. 126-127.

1.3
(9) : Ibid. 33.
(12) : Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 8

2.1
(14) : Ibid. 3.
(15) : Ibid. 39.
(16) : Ibid. 39-75.
(17) : Ibid. 101.

2.2
(18) : Ibid. 89.
(19) : Ibid. 84-99.

2.3
(22) : Ibid. 17.
3.1

(23) : Ibid. 247-248.
(24) : Ibid. 241.

3.2

(27) : Ibid. 78.
(28) : Dasein exhibits a radical openness - it is disclosive. Indeed, *Dasein is the place of Disclosedness (Erschlossenheit).* This is what is meant by the *lumen naturale.* The lumination by which Dasein has access to itself and other beings is a natural human ‘illumination.’ Dasein is the place of disclosedness in the sense of a lighted clearing. - Robert Cavalier

3.3

(31) : Ibid. 33.
(32) : Ibid. 37.
(33) : MacQuarrie, *Existentialism*, 141-142.

3.4

(36) : Ibid. 53.
(38) : Ibid. 35.
(39) : Ibid. 43.

3.5

(40) : Petri Juntunen, “Sense of Foreboding” - *At The Heart of it All*, 19.
(41) : Ibid. 49.
(43) : Pareidolia is a psychological phenomenon in which the mind responds to a stimulus, usually an image or a sound, by perceiving a familiar pattern where none exists. Common examples are perceived images of animals, faces, or objects in cloud formations. Pareidolia can cause people to interpret random images, or patterns of light and shadow, as faces. Wikipedia.
3.6

(46) : David Bate, *Photography*, 17.
(47) : Ibid. 56.
(48) : Petri Juntunen, “Dialogues With Infinity I & II” - *At The Heart of it All*, 74-75.
(49) : Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 22.

3.7


3.8

(56) : Capriccio : In painting *capriccio* means an architectural fantasy, placing together buildings, archaeological ruins and other architectural elements in fictional and often fantastical combinations.
(60) : Ibid. 110.

4.1

(61) : Petri Juntunen, “Gardenia” - *At The Heart of it All*, 33.
(62) : Max Ernst, *Solitary and Conjugal Trees, 1940* : Ernst, Max
(64) : Ibid. 31.
(65) : Ibid. 37.

4.3

(66) : Ibid. 46-47
(67) : Ibid. 20-21.
6.0 Literature

A


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