

The line between memory and history is as unreliable as one might expect. Whether in the confines of our mind, or within the bias of consensus, there is always more eclipsed than exposed. The past is what we recall, but history is what we agree has happened.

My eyes scan Anna's cyanotypes and there is a vast richness of familiarity. It's the fact that the blue envelops you before your eyes can penetrate it, reminding me of the sea of my childhood, although I know little about the photographic technique, despite her explaining it to me in person one evening in Helsinki. It's somewhat the reverse of Anna's own story in which she first saw sand dunes during a family trip off Denmark's western coast. Her father explained to Anna how they were formed. Anna does not remember the words, but each time she sees the sand formations, she is deeply convinced that she understands the phenomenon behind what she is looking at.

I cannot locate my earliest childhood memory as a singular contained entity, but rather as slivers of moments that surface like a light that waxes and wanes, together skimming upon an early nascent period, impressionistic, banal. One was an encounter with the thorn of a rose—I watched my finger turn from flesh to crimson red, unaware of the pain, instead enthralled by the pooling of blood after its prick, confounding a logical consequence with alchemy. Another was late at night: unable to sleep, I sat up in my bed and envisioned animated shapes with my eyes tightly closed and found upon opening them that the shapes were still there, falling upon the sheets like a hallucinatory snow. I thought to wake someone else to tell them of my discovery, but there's a gentle pleasure in knowing something others fail to see, the same secretive, perhaps selfish, tendency I still have to not always point out a flock of birds in formation or a cloud breaking into streams of sunlight and shadow, in hopes that to keep what I have witnessed inside somehow means the memory or observation is something I can own. In retrospect, I'm sure the phenomenon I experienced wasn't a gift, but a form of phosphene, when you see light without light entering the eyes—which often happens after intensely rubbing them.

Within the fields of philosophy and psychology, the idea of "mental time travel" or "MTT", states that episodic memory, or the capacity we have to relive or relocate ourselves within an experience, is the closest thing we have to a time machine. I heard a more recent argument that what distinguishes "the conscious experience of episodic memory" from semantic memory (knowledge accumulated over time) is the fact that "episodic memory is transparent... {it} memory makes us directly aware of past events as events in the world, as opposed to events represented in our minds." <sup>1</sup>

I think of the transparency of Josefine's sugar-glass castings of toy-like shapes—somewhat see-through, fragile and brittle, yet supple with care, evoking Shamanistic rituals or superstitious objects. It strikes me how ritual itself is inherently tied to memory—repetition and routine save us from having to reflect or anticipate, a rare opportunity to rest cradled by the current moment. The micro-greens surrounding these small objects, emerging gently, but persistently, appear as a practice of maintenance, moving onward, forward, as the sculptures strewn within them ask not to be forgotten in their stasis.

In contrast to episodic or semantic memory, cultural memory often serves as a gesture of erasure, as much as it is a means to establish a collective sense of self. What warrants our reconsideration remains perched on a wavering threshold. Ida's work confronts this paradox. Are apologies rendered useless once their intended recipients are no longer present? Are these past atrocities static, excised from history once absolved, like scissors cutting shapes from paper? Read aloud by children's voices, the Danish government's apologies ring fraught with darkly absurd humor: a performative, restorative gesture, which attempts to cleanse destructive legacies by severing their ties to the present. Remorse is wielded like a form of terminal punctuation. Such apologies fail to acknowledge that memory exists beyond the realm of the past, present even when repressed. Memory is itself a consequence, like the phenomenon of phosphene, sometimes you see light without it directly entering the eyes. And sometimes it still bleeds without the perceived sensation of pain.

And then, there is the natural world—a concept we strangely view as all around and outside ourselves and manmade creations—which possesses its own memory and conscious recollection. Trees have webs of complex communication, mycorrhizal networks. The formation of sand, like that which comprises the dunes in Rubjerg Knude and the shores of Rømø, is a testament that even the most solid of substances, rocks, eventually erode. And there is the Sort Sol—when starlings, on their return to the south in the autumn, fill the skies at sunset in southern Jutland, a black illumination, swallowing the sun. As Cecilie's footage of this phenomenon plays, the passage of Ecclesiastes rolls like a parallel tide: *Meaningless! Meaningless!* says the Teacher. *Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.*

To remember is to seek sense and purpose in what unfolds and unravels before and after us. It renders us small, but renders us here. I think of a truth from the poet Henrik Nordbrandt: *Når jeg vender tilbage til havet / bliver den uden mig. When I turn my back to the sea / it goes on without me.* <sup>2</sup>

—Sabrina Tamar

<sup>1</sup> André Sant'Anna, "Mental time travel, transparency, and the distinctiveness of episodic memory", *Generative Episodic Memory 2021*, Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Nordbrandt, Henrik (trans. Phillips, Patrick). "Huskessedel {Note To Self}." *When We Leave Each Other: Selected Poems*, Open Letter at the University of Rochester, 2013, p.155-156.



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FABRIKKEN  
FOR KUNST OG DESIGN

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Nothing New  
Under the Sun

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*Josefine Boel Johannessen* (b. 1990) graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam in 2017. Her practice centers on sculpture and installation. Based in Copenhagen, she also works as an art teacher and organizes artist workshops for children. This year she will continue her studies in the Funen Academy of Fine Arts in Odense, Denmark. [www.josefineboel.com](http://www.josefineboel.com)

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