

figleaf

vol 2

"FLINTSTONES TELEVISION"

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The seeds of knowledge are within us like fire in flint; philosophers educe them by reason, but the poets strike them forth by imagination, and they shine the more clearly. (Descartes qtd. in Killeen, 2023)

I treasure vague impressions.

It's not exactly an explanation I'm seeking, or even an understanding—

I'm content not under-standing, in fact I insist on not understanding—

[...]

It's something more like a communion I'm after. Of flesh, not spirit—or spirit, if by spirit you also mean flesh.

(Skoblow, 2014, 38-41)

A single leaf

About ten years ago in my undergraduate English course, I read a book where a man wrote about a single leaf pushing through concrete. He was fixated on the leaf, and dedicated pages and pages to its description and thoughts about it. For years and years, I couldn't remember the name of the book, author, or even which class I had taken. Sporadically throughout the decade I would google things like "leaf pushing through the concrete book" and similar iterations. But I could never find the book. I thought maybe I had dreamed it or confused it with something else. But something amazing happened recently – in the back of another book I was reading was a list of recommended books by the publisher. There I saw the name "Gerald Murnane." How I knew it was the author I had been searching for I don't know. But I found the book and it seems like a magical experience.

It turns out the leaf pushing through the concrete was a fern frond pushing through a wall. But he had indeed spent pages and pages thinking about this image. I've found him, and it seems at the right time as well. I believe in the magic of those kinds of experiences. It's like I had to wait until I was ready for the answer to my question.

His book "Barley Patch" is a remembrance of mind-images. I think continually how he leaves an image without explanation. I think he does not explain it because he cannot, not because he will not. His works are like paintings. They exist as they are, and they are allowed to exist as unknown and unknowable landscapes.

Violin

Every late afternoon my neighbour plays the violin for an hour or two. I have never met this person, nor even caught sight of them, but I am as devoted to their daily concerts as I am loyal to any of my close friends.

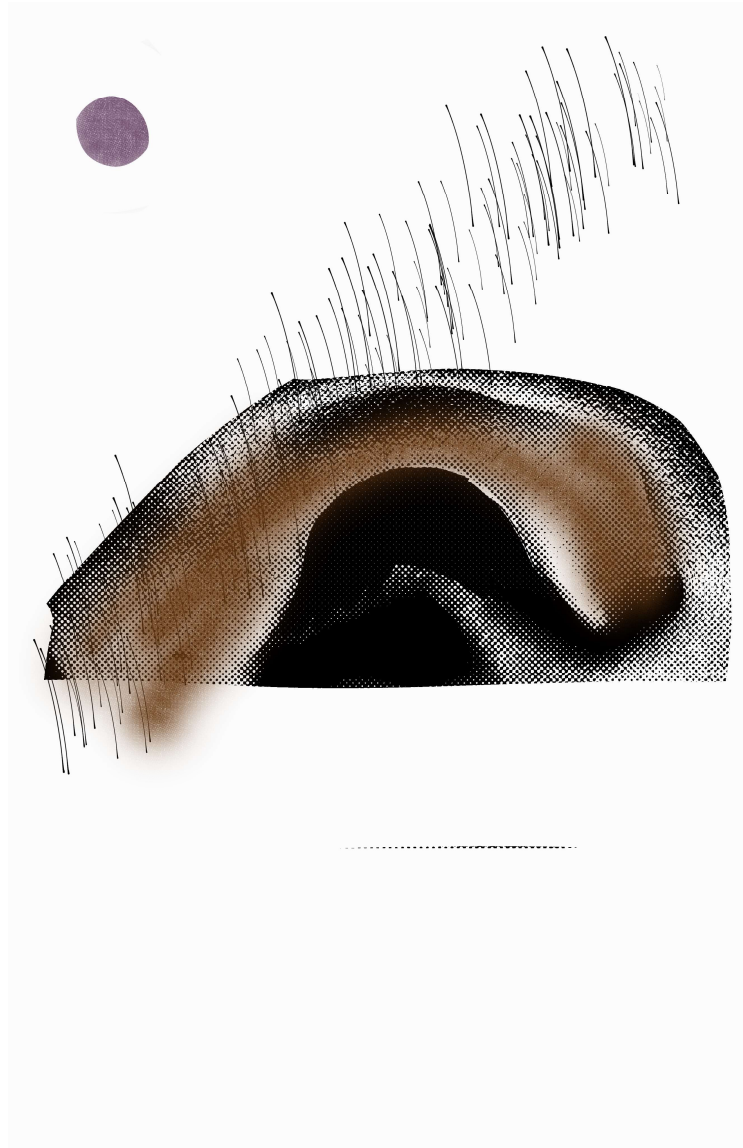
Yesterday I poked my head over the fence hoping for a glimpse of the person. Next door is a series of single level flats, five houses on one plot of land. I was close enough to the sound to realise that the person probably lived in the last flat at the back of the plot. Their window was open. I was almost about to say "Hey, that sounds really good", but I stopped. Maybe it's better that I don't know what they look like. Maybe it's better left a mystery, a sound coming through a wire screen in the late afternoon.

*

I'm contemplating the divine.

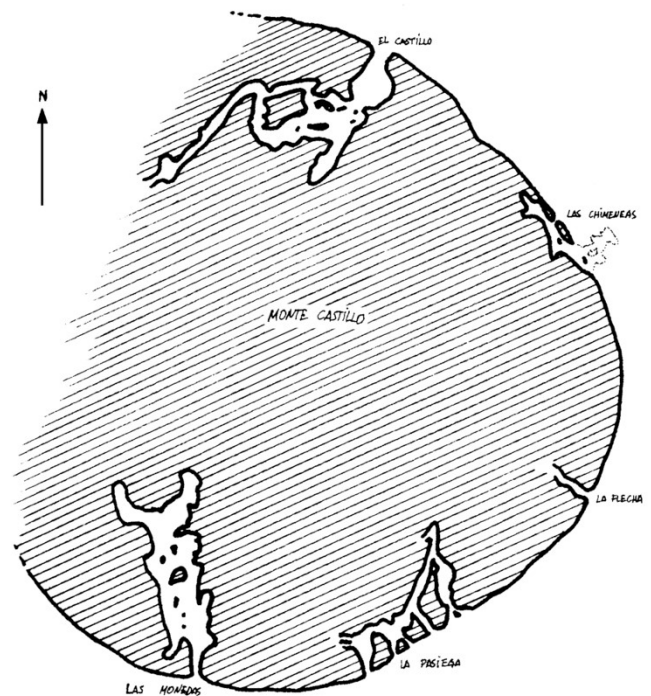
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This is all at once a travel account, an essay, a treatise, an enquiry, and the written component to a body of unfinished art works. Maybe you're in the future seeing them right now.



I'm travelling from Madrid into Northern Spain to see the cave paintings that lay on the Cantabrian coast, and then taking a bus (divine carriage) across the border into Southern France. My feet are sunburnt with sandal patterns. I walk up roads that lead to mountains that dissolve into dirt tracks, I'm dripping sweat, hot head bursting with passion.

We wait outside the mouth of each cave for our guide to lead us into the opening in the side of the mountain.



Las Monedas, El Castillo, El Pendo, Altamira, Puente Viesego, Lascaux, Font de Gaume, Les Eyzies, Castel Merle, Laugerie Basse, Grand Roc – these are caves and sites that I went to, but the words and the descriptions aren't enough to represent the feeling that I had when I was there.

I don't know if it's a valuable thing to tell you which caves I visited, at what time, or in what order. People politely ask how your holiday was but it's like describing a dream: it doesn't affect them, does it? The conversation is one sided, which gives me reason to think why the dream-person wouldn't just keep it to themselves. Those experiences are inside my head, and it bears no importance to tell you that on Monday I went here, and

on Tuesday I went there. It's not interesting for you, and of course, this zine is for both of us.

The point of this writing is to explore what I saw, and how I know and understand what happened to me. It's an exploration of KNOWING what these experiences meant, which hopefully can elucidate some greater understanding of what it means to see ANYTHING in the world. I want to express what it means to see, and the limitations of human understanding. At what point are we in the dark, beyond our limits, into the ineffable, and what do we do about it?

So where were we? Back in the cave mouth, ready to pass through its mouth and into the beyond.

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To enter a cave as a city-dweller is bizarre. I thought the air would be moist and mossy, but it smells crisp and clear like ice. The guide shines a light on paintings up to 30,000 years old, and you have less than a minute to take it in. Passages light up and then go back to shadowy darkness. Sometimes you are not allowed to go further, and you wonder. You think of fire and torches, and the artists hard at work.

There are many instances of dots leading to these forbidden places. We were not allowed to follow the dots, which led deep into the mountain.



The dots of El Castillo, Spain are approximately 42,000 years old.

The whole experience is simply staggering. I can tell you what I saw, but it isn't the truth of it. Skoblow says, "What either horse or bison mean is entirely a blank. (A hole.)" Killeen (2023) calls this kind of experience 'at times as a puckish game, at times [...] a terrible hole.' A red dot, signifying something, yet utterly elusive – Hiekkilla (2021) refers to the utter 'silence' of art. (p.51) It simply is.

Or isn't.

A hole in the mountain, a hole in the brain.

"The history of painting could have possibly sprung from a simple red dot in Spain." (Vartanian, 2012)

*

The most intuitive, instinctive desire with any artwork is to touch, as if touching brings you closer to the truth.

In Font de Gaume, our guide shined light perpendicular to the cave walls, to illuminate how the artist had scraped into the soft outer material. It was difficult to see an image of two deer, close to each other. If you were to look close enough, you could see that one was licking the nose of the other. It is most memorable to me from Font de Gaume because it was so touching: the connection between two living creatures.



This image above is a contemporary artist's interpretation of the image: for clarity, they have filled in the scraped lines to indicate how the rock gives the impression of depth. They have also removed the texture of the rock face surrounding it. However, it is the rendering which

cuts through the plain fact of the matter: the artwork doesn't look like this in Font de Gaume, and the scratched element is entirely missing. It is the engraved aspect which calls out to be touched, to trace the lines of the artist's hand.

'no tocar, the guide warned us before we went in. No touching. No matter how tempting the impulse to reach across thirty thousand years and make contact with someone who lived in an entirely different world and yet had the same heart' (Frawley, 2023)

Frawley assumes that to touch is to know. I don't agree with him. To touch is to make an attempt at contact. The attempt is almost always lacking and is 'always in some sense about longing, as much as it is about knowledge.' (Killeen, 2023)





Now Thomas one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

With 'stark aggressiveness' (Spolsky, 1994 p.3) St. Thomas sticks his whole finger into the earthly body of Jesus and rummaging around, hopes to know divinity.

Touch is not always an avenue to know; touch can still leave the toucher heunsatisfied in accessing the essence of a thing. It is not always true that ‘better instruments, sounder logic, or a more refined paradigm’ will get us any closer to the truth of the matter. (Killeen, 2023)
Although the cave exists as a physical phenomenon, it contains divinity. It is encased in a physical dimension, but it's true essence exceeds what is present to us in

experience' (Heikkila, 2021, p.66) 'Reality throbs in its fullness below the threshold of the visible, and what we get to see of the world, of temporal nature, is at best partial.' (Killeen, 2023, p.64)

The unknown, the unknowable.

I need something to hold onto. This intellectual endeavour is thrilling, baffling, overwhelming. These spaces and paintings teeter on the edge of 'extreme abstraction' (Smith, 2021, p.17) They:

[o]ffer no clear message. We are invited to contemplate what the space may mean, to what use it may be put [...] and who its inhabitants may be. And yet we are not provided enough information to answer those questions (Smith, 2021, p.22)

The spectre of time looms over me. I feel puny and idiotic.

And yet I pass through the proscenium to look around at an empty stage and try to fill up the hole with words. A pilgrimage, a 'journey to the other side of what is conceivable by reason.' (Doronina & Tsereteli, 2022)

*

Not--

The apophatic is a term used by early modern philosophers to describe something in negative terms. For example, a person may be understood as not an animal, not a tree, not a stone. Although these spaces are located within and can be accessed in our own time, they are

somehow also not-of-time. I don't know if that means that they exist only in their own time, or whether they exist outside of time. They are not part of our world.

These artworks lie beyond anything we would conceptualise as painting. The logic of modern painting is a delineated space, cut off at the edges. But cave paintings have no border, no edge. The entire cave might be thought of as the surface where the painting exists.

(Or perhaps you could say the painting is the surface by which the cave exists.)

“What we call a “work of art” or, for example, a “painting,” always lacks something in relation to its concept, being either too much or too little in comparison to it.” (Heikkila, 2021, p.67)

A cave is porous with sculptural shape: cool, rough, sensual. These paintings cannot be transferred except in reproduction. The cave and the paintings are inseparable parts of the whole. A cave is an 'image-site, [...] set into a specific architectural location from which it derives its meaning [and contains] encompassing volume in which the beholder is immersed'.(Loos, 2018)

So what you have is an ecological entity: a space where images exist, where people came and went, and where nature did not end at the doorstep, because the doorstep was also nature.

What else?

I come to number, 4: not-empty. A rock is witness. ‘The water-sculpted rocks of Monte Castillo still remember a

world without life of any kind, when limestone dropped cold tears into echoing pools for nothing to hear.'

(Frawley, 2023) A rock has seen everything and remains silent – it is 'willfully obscure' (Killeen, 2023, n.p). It is willful in the way that any local would be to a tourist who doesn't speak their language.

So where are we now:

1. Not-of-time
2. Not-paintings
3. Not-singular
4. Not-empty

How can we then explore these four concepts that we are left with, that describe my experience: beyond time, beyond art, multiple, ecological, filled to the brim with absent presence (what kinds of presence?)

Sideways

"In all my adult life, I had merely glanced or look sideways at such things, partly from my belief [...] that a glance or a sideways look often reveals more than a direct gaze.' (Murnane, 2017, p.117)

I am dancing around the edge of something, trying not to make eye contact. Not because it is monstrous, but because it is shy. What substance it is I'm not sure, but a direct gaze would see it disappear in a puff of smoke. I'm following the process of thought, an Auto-unravelling, putting fragments next to each other to see what happens to odd bedfellows.

Killeen (2023) says that the the apophatic is always about longing for something that can never be known, only glimpsed, which ‘tantalizes and disappears [...] akin to the fleeting nature of how one might encounter God.’

*

I had a realisation last night, and I leaped out of bed to write it down.

We have transferred the divinity of the creation onto the divinity of the creators. The people who made those paintings are out of reach, forever, never to be accessed, never, never, never. Without a doubt lost irrevocably. We transfer the longing to know the art onto the people, divine in their absence. The art in itself is not divine, it is the touch of the now absent hand which makes it so. It is a centralising of the human, transformed into divine through the passage of unfathomable time.

The cave is a theatre, the actors have left. Now the stage is empty, but everything else remains. It is the people that I long for, but they have long since gone home for the night. The presence lies in expectation 'inherent in spaces one would expect to be occupied by people, [...] instead absent of human figures.' (Smith, 2021 p.18) Skoblow call this an ‘experience of ‘pure presence’ [...] The thing in itself, the as yet unknown.’ (146-47)

*

I remember in Spain my guide asked whether there was anything else I would like to know.

And I said, no, it's enough just to be here.

What “enough” means is what Kant would call the ‘noumenon’, a certain category of truth beyond the senses, a consideration that ‘another kind of intuition is possible’ even if it cannot be defined. (Kant, 1998, A253) Yet this is a problem for him, where ‘the category is a mere function of thinking, through which no object is given to me.’ (Kant, 1998, A254) The process of thought yields no answer, it remains a process rather a result. I remain in the dark.

I am searching for ‘that which goes beyond and is more significant than meaning.’ (Bois & Krauss, 1997, p.21)



Above: Painter Edward Hopper presents actors about to take their final bow, 'before turning to walk into the unknown.' (Klein, 2018) 'We will be left only with the void. (Smith, 2021)

These prehistoric artists walk back into Time, and I cannot follow them.

I long for the unknown and I fill it up with myself.

The Day I Ventured Beyond The Proscenium

Being an audience member and passing beyond the proscenium is an unforgivable act. The proscenium arch orders space by indicating a point beyond which the audience cannot breach. Harries (2021) calls the place of action beyond the proscenium, 'not inside the theatre but strictly another location.' (p.89) Benjamin (1998) calls this the 'abyss whose silence heightens the sublime in drama, [which] bears the traces of its sacral origins.' Thus, passing through the cave mouth is venturing into a space that you are not welcome, interrupting a world that you are not part of. It is a betrayal of the 'agreement to treat the framed but immaterial divide [...] as solid and impermeable. (Harries, p.90) Yet that is what I have done, entered a world beyond my world, and expected to be welcomed.

Grabau (1963) attests that 'Being may be had directly in a leap of faith (which is a leap out of the world) (779). The very act of entering a cave is only an attempt, a failed attempt at that, to leap out of one's own world and into another's. For of course, it is not a leap of faith, it is ringing the doorbell.

Them

These absent artists are all at once human, at all once divine. Yet to intuit divinity says also something about contemporary positionality, always 'inscribed with the structures that produce [cultural] meaning.' (Heikkila,

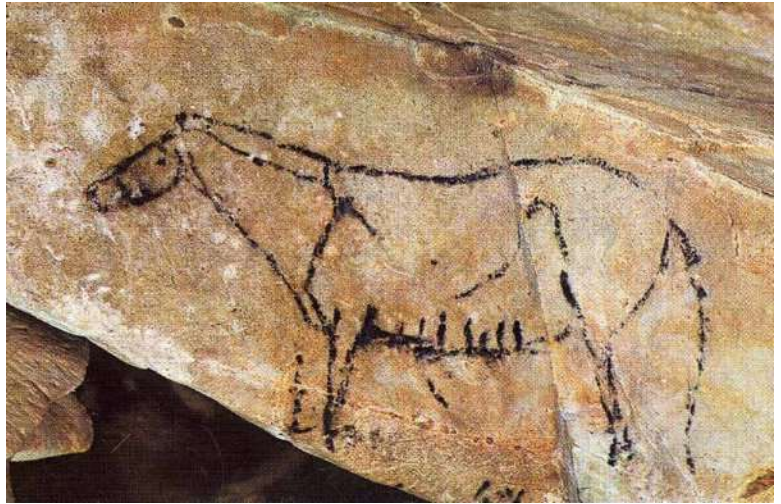
2021 p.66) In contrast to our perception of a sombre and holy spatiality, Freeman (2009) suggests that these cultural artefacts represent an everyday expression of living, simply the production of 'culturally organised space' which is more 'playful' than serious. (p.317)

So here is the question: are conceptions of the everyday so incompatible with conceptions of the divine, and why is that? Does divine form have to be otherworldly?

Let me indicate why this is relevant with an anecdote. On my travels through France, I met a kind bus driver called Jules who drove the route between the town and cave of Lascaux, and to other towns in the area. I used the bus route almost every day and we got to talking. He told me that his girlfriend's horse had died and that he was going to give her a drawing of it, which he showed me, a beautiful sketch in scratchy ballpoint pen, on normal A4 paper.

A horse is a horse, of course.

As I was in the shower just now, the significance has only just occurred to me. These caves, too, are filled with images of horses. 'The infusion of the eternal in the mundane, and the return of the mundane to the eternal is the fundamental gesture.' (Killeen, 2021, p.73)



Horse-image from La Monedas Cave, Cantabria, Spain.

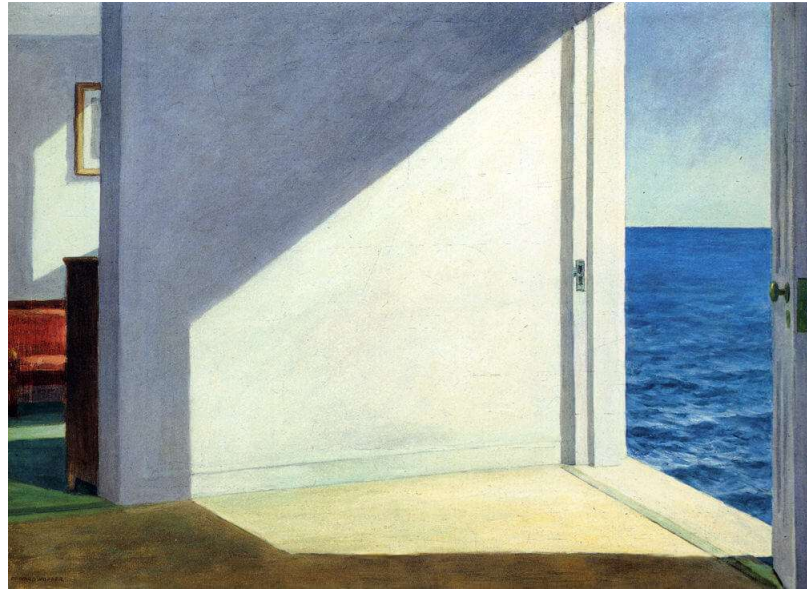
The first cave I ever visited.

Did Jules think he had produced a ballpoint masterpiece?
No, it was a present, a token of remembrance. The action of drawing denotes the subject that it was worthy of representation, important enough to be transformed into symbol.

To contemplate anything is to direct consciousness into a frame, 'the decisive structure of what is at stake'.

(Derrida, 1987) The mouth, the proscenium, the frame, not only encircles but signifies, by 'revealing, concealing and focusing'. (Grimes, 2006, p.90) Things are divine by focusing, by centralising them, by recording them.

Mundane in its form and divine in its mysticism, which is not a contradiction.



Spider, spit and laughter: a conclusion, continually deferred,,,,,,,,?

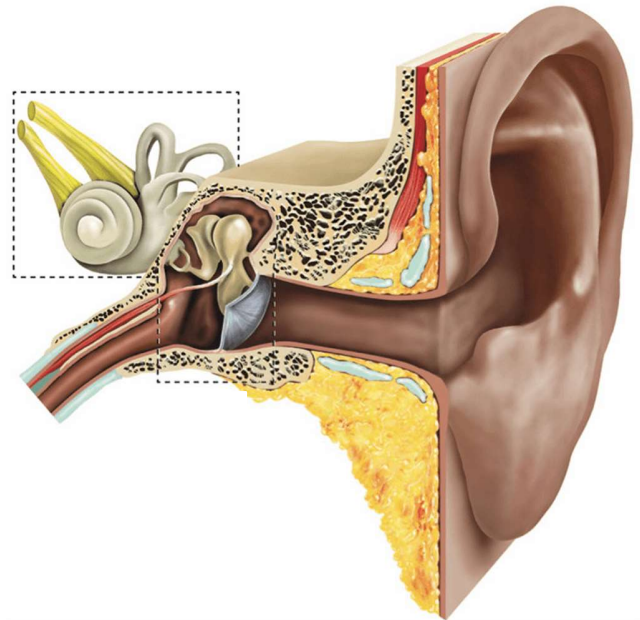
What if the artwork was base, normal, everyday – would that make it, by admission, non-divine? Can everyday be also divine, simultaneously? To draw or paint is to give form to formlessness, to direct an idea into a gate and to lock it in.

Divine and regular, all at the same time:

'Bodiless Being begins to thicken into the external world, ejected, “cast out,” of angelic disembodiment, with its purer essence, into the opacity of “earth and stones,” and quotidian, visible reality. These “worlds” exist at close quarters and at the same time are wholly alien to each other.' (Killeen, 2021, p.74)

Bataille considers that formlessness is the original precedent before the differentiations between matter and

form (Heikkilla, 2021, p.59) A spider is no less holy than a wad of spit or a burst of laughter.



The essence of things exists but is inaccessible, like trying to perform a living autopsy starting from the cave of our ear.

I need to finish this zine because it must be printed before Saturday morning, and bound with a needle, and taken to a place, and given to people. But I don't know if it's possible for me to finish this.

It's ten o'clock at night, and still thirty-three degrees Celsius. I just went outside to hang out my washing. It's very dark, very still, very hot, very quiet. I feel the coolness of just washed clothes on my skin as I hang them up. The wind blows slightly, making the trees in our backyard sway slightly. And I realise that things are infinitely more mysterious than we'll ever know.

It's not that the divine is every day, or that the everyday is divine. Those two ideas, if they can even be called "two" are moving in between states all the time.

I just know that I'll never know. It's like trying to see how your body works on the inside. You're alive because of these gizzards, but you will never witness them with your own eyes. Just how you will never see your own skull. You know it's there because it's holding up your universe. You can say skulls exist, because you've seen others. But as for your own, you'll just have to have faith.

And to every paradox I am confronted with I say

exactly.

PART 2

“FLINTSTONES TELEVISION”



Regular as television,

Bedrock, transfixed -

Divine images

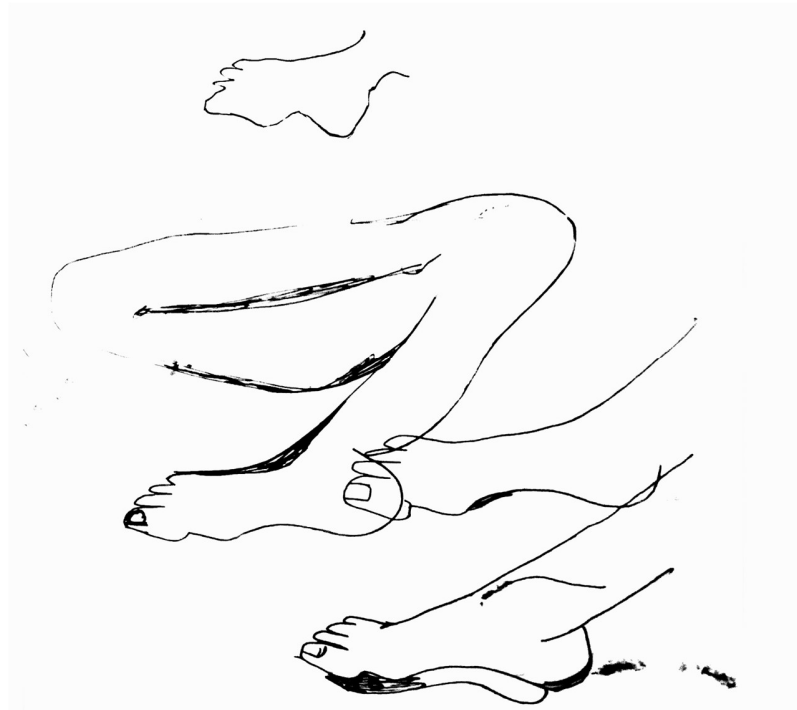
Move without electricity

Lovely, curved stone

Alcove, corner, nook, cubbyhole, niche, cubicle, cranny,
indentation, indenture, hole, cavity, dent, pit, concavity,
hollow, depression, furrow, indentation, trench,
ditch, cave, groove, dint, valley, cavern,
basin, excavation, bowl, burrow, trough,
socket, opening, impression, gutter, pocket,
nook, crater, cleft, dimple, vacuum, notch, abyss, imprint,
void, well, niche, pothole, chasm, gouge “Theopoetics, as
a modern anti-hermeneutics, a way of thinking about God
that accepts its ruses will never dent the armor of divine
incomprehensibility, reacts by asserting wild poetic logic,
which belies reason.” (Killeen, 2023)

The alcove in my shower is a resting place for the soap
when it's not at work. It lives and shelters in its ceramic
home. Its home has three walls. The cliff face opens onto
the air. The fourth wall is broken by my huge hand
reaching into its universe.

T.B has covid. I pass a cup of tea through the open
window.



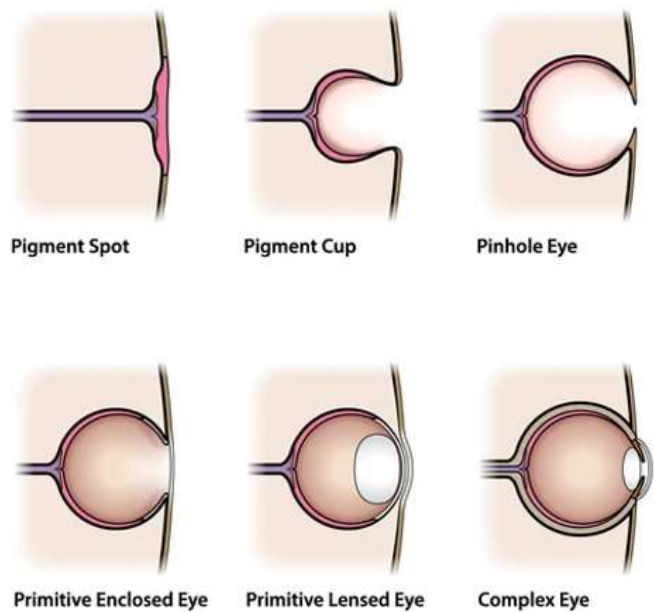
EL CAMINO + NINO ROTA = 'MINOROTA

Pilgrim's process
the clanging sounds
of time outside of time,
A burst of laughter

Cheeri-o

The weekend is too short. The working week looms, with only a window of time in the evenings to write. Then you get on a roll, and everything is magic.

I try to catch glimpses of my secret world but when I'm busy it stays stubbornly in the corner of my eye.



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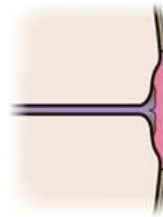
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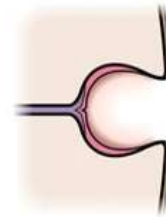
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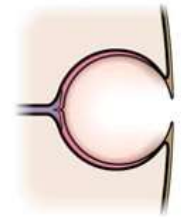
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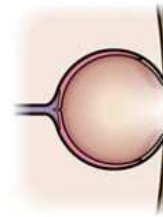
Pigment Spot



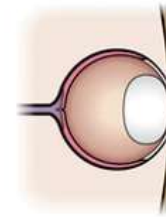
Pigment Cup



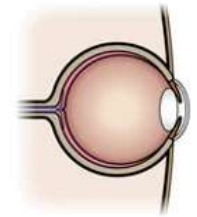
Pinhole Eye



Primitive Enclosed Eye



Primitive Lensed Eye



Complex Eye

