TIME IS A BROKEN UMBRELLA

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EVENT HORIZON

The first time you realised other people had lives you knew nothing about was a shock. You were seven or eight years old and sitting in the back of a car when you noticed people having a conversation in the car next to you. Their mouths were moving but you couldn't hear and probably would never find out what they were saying to each other.

You've been quite selective in asking people whether they remember the first time they realised they didn't have universal access – that they weren't at the centre of things. You haven't always worded it that way when you've asked. You've never known how best to word it, but you've read that seven or eight is the age that most people begin to appraise themselves in relation to other people.

Do you remember when you first realised that other people were their own individual people?
Do you remember the time before this, when you thought that everyone was an extension of you?

You've heard about how, for the first few months of life, babies aren't able to separate their conception of themselves from the people around them. This feels a bit abstract to you. How do they know what babies do or don't know? In the year of your birth a series of films with Kirstie Alley and John Travolta speculated on the subject. *LOOK WHO'S TALKING* (1989) was quickly followed by *LOOK WHO'S TALKING TOO* (1990) and *LOOK WHO'S TALKING NOW* (1993). You haven't watched the third one but the poster suggests that the inner monologues of animals are introduced, along with those of babies. Outside of giving voice to babies and animals, you don't remember it being a particularly representative story.

Perhaps you would understand better if you had your own baby. The neighbour drilling into the floors and ceilings is sorry and knows exactly how you feel. She asks you to imagine how it was for them when their neighbours renovated and Ernest was only three months old.

Do you remember the exact moment when you realised you were your own person? What were you before that?

You've been quite selective about who you've asked in case it signals narcissism, or a kind of opposite of that, a void where your 'self' should be.

Versions of you

When your cousin was born, they said she was your great-grandmother coming back, Ray. Ray (short for Rachel) is also your middle name.

To those who come before

You modelled yourself on your sister for most of your childhood. Your identity was pinned to her shirt. Later, she made choices (cargo pants, ankle bracelets) and you split off.

Later, you went to live in a city where you didn't know anyone and you realised four contradictory things: that you could reinvent yourself and no-one would know; that who you are is mediated by the people around you, in any context; that who you are is multiple people at different points in time and space; that who other people are is multiple people at different points in time and space.

The river, though measured, zoned, charted, managed, forsaken and owned, was irreducible to its parts.

You've read about reading as an engagement with multiplicity, a void where you loosen ties to your 'self' and submit to the text. The text is multiple texts at different points in time and space. You don't like the word 'text', which has a coldness to it that doesn't correlate with the warmth of words whose meaning is charged and reconfigured with each use.

The woman at the fabric shop tells you about the internationally recognised Martindale rub test. A label on the swatch details how many times you can rub the fabric before it wears out. A 100 000 rub count doesn't mean that the fabric is better quality than the fabric with the 30 000 rub count. It just means you can rub it more times before it wears out. The rub count is measured using a Martindale machine, which rubs the fabric thousands of times, sometimes hundreds of thousands of times. She says it's not supposed to sound suggestive. It sounds a little bit suggestive to you and it also makes you think of words and how they're rubbed, hundreds of thousands of times. It's not exactly the same, but it's similar. Because words look the same but change when they are used. Words rely on a commonality of meaning, and what you have in common shifts across time and space. Each time you use them, you cause a kind of friction between your use of the word and all the other times it's been used before.

The world is not a collection of things; it is a collection of events.

Now here you want to write about rubbing. You want to write about the number of wishes you get for a hundred thousand rubs.

…biscuits, three for five rand
three for five rand, biscuits

What is a commonality of meaning?
The rubbing of perceptions.
What are its parameters?
Empathy.
The opposite of empathy.
At what point does it break down?
Somewhere in the middle of the mountain.

You wonder if collaboration is conditional upon a commonality of meaning. You've never been very good at collaboration. You struggle to reconcile your own perceptions with other people's perceptions in a balanced way.

…the act of saying I, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying listen to me, see it my way, change your mind.[1]

It occurs to you that collaboration might be the opposite of a creative act. It requires that you surrender, compromise, submit.

Your curiosity struck me as vast and you seemed to know, mostly, you were being misinterpreted and that was that. But that was not you.[2]

To feel 'met' is to feel seen by another person or to feel matched by them in some way. To yield is to give way but also to produce and provide. The yield is the product itself.

…a space in which mutual acknowledgement is a structuring ethics.

Is it possible to ever really free yourself from a personalised story of reality? [3]

…always asking essentially the same question. *How do I recognize that other people are real, as I am?* and the strange, quasi-mystical answer was always the same, too. *You may have to give up on your attachment to the 'self'*.[4]

How do you know for certain that knowledge is not just an extension of your own beliefs and desires?

Brenda told you that your vertebrae were out of line because you overthink things. You use too much of your rational brain and too little of your emotional brain so the bones in your neck have started to migrate to the right. This strikes a chord because you've recently been accused of using enlightenment-era rationality to reason an argument. In spite of all that education in the creative arts, you've managed to become a representative of the patriarchy.

The feeling of being at sea

You wonder if the artist knows about The Story of 'O', the erotic novel written by Pauline Réage, a pen name for Dominique Aury, who later revealed that her real name was Anne Desclos. The book is about dominance and submission. 'O' is the name of the main character and also a stand in for bodily orifices. You never finished reading it because you couldn't decide whether it was about literature and reading (as one, admittedly obscure, source described it), the objectification of women, or a study in female sexuality. You worried that if you didn't disown it, there might not be room for you to change your mind.

A story of assumptions

You change your mind all the time, especially about people. You're quick to judge but also very amenable to apologising once you've changed your mind. You've also been on the receiving end of this. You forgave those people for thinking you were uptight. You are a bit uptight.

The video is subtitled with a dialogue between two characters, '0' and '????' You remember the collective of artists who let you fill in their press releases: "The collective is a '……' and '…….' that '……'"

I have been trying to sniff around and find a distinctive smell to guide me.[5]

The conversation between '0' and '????' is set onto moving images that slide into one another. Glimmering transparent bodies dance, with some difficulty, or not very well. With some difficulty, or not very well, you follow their conversation.

Were you a different person?

You look up 'event horizon'. It's the boundary marking the limits of a black hole, used metaphorically to describe a point of no return

Somehow it feels like having just climbed down from a vehicle that has been rocking violently for countless miles.[6]

1. Joan Didion, 1976, Why I Write, Published in The New York Times, 5 December 1976.

2. Sarah Tripp, 2020. Guitar! London: BookWorks, pp. 136.

3. Rachel Cusk, 2019, paraphrased from Conversation with Stephen Winn City Arts & Lectures. London. Transcript. Online.

4. Zadie Smith writing about David Foster Wallace, 2009, Changing My Mind, London: Penguin Books, pp. 291

5. Es'kia Mphahlele, 1967. *In Corner B*. East African Publishing House. Courtesy of Nyakallo Maleke

6. Ibid.