

RHYTHM: DANCING WITHOUT MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

RHYTHM: DANCING WITHOUT MUSIC

“Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm.”¹

Henri Lefebvre

What can be done with a rhythm?

This thesis explores rhythmicity through a fictionalized narrative, treating rhythm as something that permeates and structures our experiences and environments.

When is it too much? Why am I restless? What does too much repetition do, and how about too little? Should I stay or should I go? Can a rhythm capture and hold you, and can it push you away? Why does trends come and go? Why do you come and go?

Drawing further inspiration from Henri Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life* (2004) and the *Of the Refrain* chapter in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *a Thousand Plateaus*.(1994).

Focusing on their concepts of flow, territorialisation, and de-territorialisation, refrain, and subjectivity.

The text is rhythmically structured in three acts. Going from the “Natural” to the “Mechanical” to the Virtual”, using “Something”, “Nothing”, “Repetition” and “Break” as recurring themes throughout the text.

My reason to approach artistic research through fiction comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is philosophy?* They write that science dives into chaos and brings back data, philosophy brings back concepts, while art brings back sensations and that we use this to understand our selves in the world.²

For me, this opened up for more playful, intuitive, and creative ways to communicate my research, trying to communicate with feelings rather than conclusions.

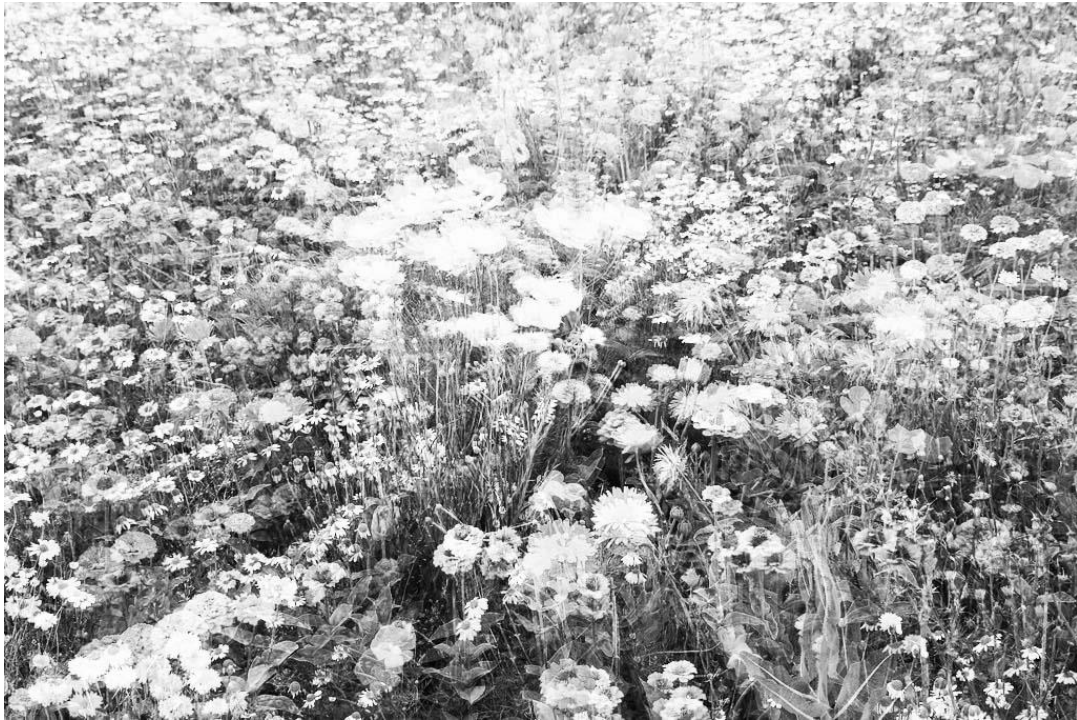
The physical work will correspond to the three-act structure while featuring elements from the text, making them interconnected.

¹ Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*. Editions Syllepse.

² Deleuze, G & Guattari, F. (1994) *What is philosophy?* Verso

RHYTHM: DANCING WITHOUT MUSIC

FIRST ACT: NATURAL



1 2 3 4

SOMETHING

...we're just about to start. We can go anywhere from here.

For whatever reason, we are here and there is all kinds of things here with us too.

There is a shining circle in the sky, and wherever it shines, all kinds different of shapes and forms appear. I see combinations of shapes making up new ones. They all have an outline, marked by their own end. Some have colours that make them stand out, some make them blend in. It seems like everything, big and small, have something to express.

There is movement all around me, big movements, tiny movements. Slow and fast ones.

It's like I'm right in the middle of something, I also want to move around so I start exploring. I see things that look like each other, some that are different. As I am moving forward, the scenery seems to be flowing towards me, growing, and growing in size before disappearing behind me.

I get fixated on the walking itself. Every step a small event, together they form a pattern, and the pattern is influenced from the direction I walk in. The steps that are behind me are not here anymore, but they still got me to where I am now. I walk faster and faster and notice my heart beats faster too.

A particular spot caught my attention. I sit down and listen; my heartbeat slows down again; my breathing slows down with it. I realize I still feel like I am in the middle, the centre, even though I've moved.

Various noises are coming from various places. Some long, some short. They also seem to have an outline marked by a starting and an ending. Together they make up a patterns and harmonies. I feel hypnotized just sitting here listening. I close my eyes and imagine what all the different sounds would look like if I could see them.³

To get here, I had to move through the terrain, and the walking formed a sort of line through it. But what are the noises making a line through?

1 2 3 4

NOTHING (MORE OR LESS)

It's a strange feeling, to be the only person here.

I pick something up and stare as hard at it as I can. I zoom in and see lots of tiny building blocks.

Together they make up the object in my hand, but the building blocks aren't touching, there is a little bit of space between them, creating new outlines. I wonder what's going on there, in that in-between space. I bet there are all kinds of potentials with those spaces.

I notice it is gradually getting darker. That bright circle is moving towards the horizon, in the process, the sky has changed colour. What's going on?

Now it's completely dark.

All the things I could see have disappeared. But it's not nothing either. It's almost silent, but a silence full of tension. I hear things moving around. Every time there's a noise, it startles me. I notice my heart beating faster. Whatever this place is, it feels different now, colder.

³ Stellander Larsen F. (2021). *Choreography for Cooking*. [Sound, animation]

I don't know what will happen next. I feel I should be on guard, but I am overpowered by a need to rest.⁴ I use my hands to feel around in the dark, it's all definitely still there.

I find a place that feels dry and warm and curl into a ball, fiddling around in the darkness until I find something to use as cover.

I close my eyes and lie there thinking about the outlines of things I saw during the day, how everything I saw had an ending. I make up little stories in my head until I eventually fall asleep.

I dream I'm running down a corridor. It has endless doors with endless rooms with more doors leading to more rooms.

What is this place? I slip through one of the doors and find myself by a waterfall. The noise is overpowering, it's so intense it somehow feels like nothing.

I'm still sleeping, so I'm not aware but everywhere things are starting to wake up, while others are going to sleep.

Somewhere, something gets knocked over. It makes a sudden noise, like it came out of nowhere.

1 2 **3** 4

REPETITION

It wakes me up, I'm confused at first, but start to remember. A strange feeling comes over me of having returned but also gone forward.

Like it gradually got darker, it's getting brighter. I see familiar things; it looks and sounds the same as before, it makes me feel safe. The eerie feeling and tension the dark brought with it is gone, but I still wonder if it will come back.

I have many questions, I should go looking for answers, but feel connected to this place, I decide to leave behind traces in the landscape to find my way back.

I noticed a bird flying back and forth collecting twigs and grass, constructing a place for itself. I feel inspired to do the same.

Following the traces back worked. I start collecting branches and constructing a nest for myself. I decorated it with flowers, leaves, and twigs. I use stones to create a pattern around it with a path through it.

⁴ circadian rhythm. Oxford Reference. Retrieved 1 Apr. 2024, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095613599>.

The darkness came back, a hundred times. Over and over. I don't mind anymore, by night I am tired anyway and appreciate a break and I feel safe inside my nest.

I wake up. I wake up like I have done a hundred times before.

I remembered the outlines from before, marking beginnings and ends, but now those felt blurrier. Maybe it's all just one big "thing" and everything within it is intensities, pulses, tempos, and movements?

Everything just parts of a whole?

Where I often walk, the ground has flattened, forming lines in the landscape. It's easy to end up always walking down the same paths, but if something, somehow catches my attention, I go explore.

I look at ants building an anthill. How complex it is, and so much work! I zoom in and see that it goes deep underground with tunnels connecting to new tunnels and chambers with millions of ants working and living there. How did they do all this?⁵

I have stayed in the same area since I arrived here. It's familiar, predictable. I know when trouble is coming. Easy to move around, even when its dark. Daily tasks have over time become efficient and streamlined.

But something has moved in, I can't see it.

I've been feeling distant and restless. Something must have changed without me noticing, but I don't know what.

I knew I had to move.

From higher grounds I've seen other places far away in all directions. New plots of land. Landscapes different than this one. I could go in any direction, but I simply let what attracts guide me.

The days pass, I continue moving forward. I walk during the day; at night I make a simple camp. I do this for a long time.

Every day, I'm somewhere I've never been before, but it still feels familiar. Most of the time I can predict how things will unfold.

As I have been traveling, I have left behind markings. Not to find my way back, I don't want to go back, but as signs that I had been there, it became a ritual.

⁵ Stigmergy. Oxford Reference. Retrieved 1 Apr. 2024, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100532972>.

A river: I stop for a moment and observe the water flowing past.

I follow the river downstream and notice how it's flow changes in intensity following the landscape . Sometimes the river is wide, sometimes narrow.

Some places the water runs slow and calm, other places fast and aggressive. I see how small rivers connect and make up bigger ones. I see from a distance how the river pools up into lakes, with new rivers flowing from it.

I eventually leave the river and continue moving forward.

One night I got caught in a storm. It was already getting dark, I tried to find shelter by a large rock-wall.

Walking towards it, I am sure I saw you standing on top of its edge. I got distracted, and when I turned back around you were gone.

I could hardly get any sleep that night, but the storm eventually stopped, and it was morning again.

I woke up with a strange feeling of having returned instead of going forward. In the daylight I can see there was a camp here long ago, broken down and overgrown now. Under the grass I see silhouettes of stones laid out on the ground.

I did this.

I have been walking in a circle, I'm back to the place I was moving away from.⁶

I'm tired, I've been traveling for too long. A nostalgic feeling comes over me, a new kind of familiar feeling. Coming back after so long, I'm seeing this place differently, and I am sure it actually is.

I think I will stay for now.

On accident, I discovered a part of a stone-wall that appeared different. When I hit it with a rock it made a hollow sound. Is there something behind it?

I can't control my curiosity; I start hitting the wall using the stone. It took a long time, but eventually I broke through, creating a hole big enough for me to fit. With a torch in hand, I duck through, careful not to hit my head.

Now I'm standing inside a huge cave. The walls, covered in images and symbols. What is this place? I've never seen anything like it! A number of tunnels seem to be extending deeper underground in many directions, also covered in images.

⁶ Reuters. (2009, 20 August). *Lost people really do walk in circles: study*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE57J416/>

As I'm moving closer, the flickering from the light makes the images appear to move.⁷

They tell stories and every tunnel has its own story to follow.

Completely hypnotized I follow these stories deeper and deeper into the underground tunnels. I have so many questions, can I find some answers? I travel deeper and deeper, not paying attention to where I'm going.

With a sudden jolt, I wake up, but I wasn't sleeping.

The torch is about to burn out, and I have no way to find my way back! Going into the tunnels, I should have left a long thread behind me.

The light dies, complete darkness.

Panic. All I can hear is my heart pounding. I try to breathe slowly; my heart rate eventually slows down.

Another sound catches my attention, is it water dripping? It's hard to tell with the echo, but it's a short, sharp sound coming at steady, pulse. It sounds out of place, too perfect.

I don't know why, but I carefully follow the noise, holding one hand on the wall at all times.

I don't think it's water, it sounds more like two stones being repeatedly hit together, but different. Over and over and over and over.

What is making this sound all the way down here?

⁷ Herzog W. (Director). (2010). *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. [Documentary]. IFC Films.



RHYTHM: DANCING WITHOUT MUSIC

SECOND ACT: LIKE A MACHINE

1 2 3 4

SOMETHING

It's still dark outside when the alarm clock rings.

I turn on the light and look around, I see familiar things. A room, it has four walls, two windows, one door, one floor, one ceiling, All straight lines. Just like a million other rooms.

It's filled with the steady, mechanical ticking of the clock. I have decorated the room to make it feel more personal, and I have made little displays of objects and photos I care about.

This room is connected to another room via a door, that room connect to other rooms with more doors connecting to new rooms and new hallways eventually leading outside. An outside connected to more insides.

I notice a spider web in the corner.

I get out of bed and decide to make breakfast. As the coffee is brewing, I go look out the window.⁸ The first thing I see is more windows, maybe forty. Some have the light on, some don't.

Even though it's early, I see people, cars and bikes flowing in long streams along the straight grids of the streets. A light turns red and the traffic stops, then green, and traffic starts again.

Along the pavements trees are methodically planted with an equal amount of space between them, the green creating a contrast to the otherwise grey environment. I close my eyes and listen to all the noise, engines, talking, shouting, horns honking and dogs barking.

After I have finished my breakfast, I get dressed and go out into the streets. Tonight at 21.30 is the premier of a new and exciting TV-series, the very first episode, so I need to be back by then.

But for now, I have nowhere to be, so I walk in whichever direction feels right. I don't worry about getting lost, I have my address and can always get a taxi back.

As I am walking through the city, the landscape doesn't really change much, different but similar. Buildings look alike, cars look like each other and people mostly dress the same.

I walk past a shop, and a little bit later I walk past one that looks exactly the same.

If I didn't know better, I would have thought I had walked in a circle, but I have been following the same straight street since before walking past that other shop.

I hear a song I've heard too many times already. On the radio, from cars, windows, shops, and bars. There is something disturbing about it.

I walk through an entrance. There are stairs leading underground connecting to tunnels that lead to a bigger network of tunnels, spreading all around and out from the city. I get on the first train that comes. It interrupts itself by stopping at every stop. People get off and people get on, then it starts again.

Back in the room, I turn on the television. The clock turns 21.30, and the show starts, at 22.00 it ends.

Within an half hour we get to know the characters and the world they inhabit, then tension and drama is introduced.

The police have discovered a body without organs, the tight-knitted community is in shock.

Part of the mystery is resolved before the show ends, but not without leaving us with a new unresolved mystery.

I'm not really left satisfied, there's a feeling that I have to see the next episode too to get the full picture, if not this was a waste of time.

⁸ Camus A. *Myth of Sisyphus*.

1 2 3 4

NOTHING (MORE OR LESS)

I stop and look at a billboard that caught my attention with its spotlights and bright colours. It's a commercial informing me about an offer on trips to sun-filled holiday destinations. All-inclusive packages, everything is taken care of. Sunbed with your name on it. Slow, breezy days of happiness and palms. One to two weeks of the year where nothing needs to be done.

Next to the billboard, an old building has been torn down, leaving an empty space. The emptiness feels strange. I look at the buildings surrounding the empty space. Is this place now, is it just there creating an outline for the other buildings? A negative, useless space.⁹

The streetlights turn on, I realize it's getting late. The mood around me has changed, different than a few hours ago. Less people, less traffic. Different people, different traffic.

It feels like something is brewing. It's a certain type with a certain style that are heading out into the darkness on a Sunday evening, I wonder what people get up to. Don't they have work in the morning? I have work in the morning.

I had strange dream, I was blinded and we were playing a game of hide and seek.

I had to use my hands to feel look through the room, I could not find you and I started to panic. I pulled off my blindfold. I was in the middle of a forest. I see a procession of animals coming towards me. As they come closer, I see they are carrying a box!¹⁰

1 2 3 4

REPETITION / REPETITION

I wake up and go to work like I've done a thousand times before.

Work. I work at a factory that mass produce machine-parts, the parts are then shipped to another factory for the next step of the process, and so on. We never see the parts we produce, they come out of the machine already in boxes. I am more interested in the machines anyway.

⁹ Eastgate, T. (2018, 12 December). *Useful emptiness: conceptualisation of space in Japanese art*. <https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2018/12/14/useful-emptiness-space-japanese-art/>

¹⁰ Honarvar, A. (2016) *Die Guten Freunde 7*. [12 handmade collages, paper, braille in adhesive pearls]. <https://www.behance.net/gallery/42179751/Die-guten-freunde-7>

I remember when I first started the job, I was so clumsy. The controls and the machines seemed alien to me. Loud and noisy, everything moving too fast.

Day by day I became comfortable operating the machines, I even studied instruction manuals at home. It amazes me how these components work together. We're speaking the same language; I hear if a part need changing.

I enjoy my job and the life it affords me. Life can feel chaotic and unpredictable. Work is a stabilizing factor.

A chain of events at work changed this.

A urinal had been installed upside down in the employee restroom, slowing down the bathroom rotation. This disruption of the schedule caused me to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, almost getting run over by a forklift carrying stacks of boxes.¹¹

The driver swerved at the last moment but hit a metal beam, boxes were spread all over, I tried to help pick up the boxes. They were all empty.

Some of them had ripped open and I could see there were nothing inside. Next thing I know I am politely escorted back to my station while the rest is quickly cleared away.

At home I could not stop thinking about the empty boxes. What does it mean? I close my eyes and see empty boxes. When I fell asleep, empty boxes.

Work was different the next day. I felt suspicious, was all my work completely meaningless? Is this some sick game?¹²

I can't shake the empty boxes, and like the boxes, everything else becomes empty.

I go through every day on autopilot, barely present. Everything feels like empty routines and habits. What is the point? I just stay in my room, day in and day out. Eventually the days just became a blur.¹³

The only box that does not feel empty is listening to the sound of your voice coming through the telephone.

I look out the window, I hear someone shouting the same thing over and over and over again. I can't even understand the words anymore, they're meaningless, like a strange melody or foreign language.¹⁴

The fridge is also becoming an empty box. I go to the supermarket; I know the exact location of every item on my list. I know which route to take through the supermarket, the shopping list is even written in order of where the items are placed.

¹¹ Duchamp, M (1917). *Fountain*. [Readymade urinal, signature].

¹² Teshigahara, H. (Director). (1964). *Woman in the Dunes*. [Movie]. Toho.

¹³ Lucier, A. (1969). *I am Sitting in a Room*. [Sound Art].

¹⁴ Nordquist, Richard. (2021, February 16). *Semantic Satiation*. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/semantic-satiation-1691937>

I arrive, shopping list in hand, to find they have rearranged the entire store. Nothing is where it should be. And they're playing that song, again.

This is too much, I start running.

Next thing I know, I'm in the passenger seat of your car. I don't know what time it is, but it's almost dark. Trunk and the backseats are stacked with boxes filled with our most important belongings, everything else we left behind.

We're still driving through the city. We both sit in silence, and I am just sitting there thinking and looking at the streets, buildings, people, and cars floating past us.

I turn on the radio, it's the song again, I turn off the radio. It feels like it's building and building towards a climax, but it never actually gets there and it's driving me crazy, an un-scratchable itch.

How can it be so popular?

At first, we had a destination, but none of us were able to read the map properly, we ended up going in circles before just heading in straight line in a random direction. I don't think any of us cared, as long as it was somewhere else. The landscape changes, different buildings, the mood changes. I can tell we are leaving the city limits.

Now the city far behind us, except the headlights of the car and the streetlights, it's completely dark. I'm staring at the white lines on the road disappearing behind us. You start driving faster and faster, and the lines start disappearing faster and faster.

I look at the long, dotted row of streetlights stretching through the landscape like a river. Every time we pass underneath a streetlight, the light shines through the front window, all the shadow shifting as we pass.

Together with the steady stream of lines coming towards us I become completely hypnotized, childhood memories of car rides, I feel safe.

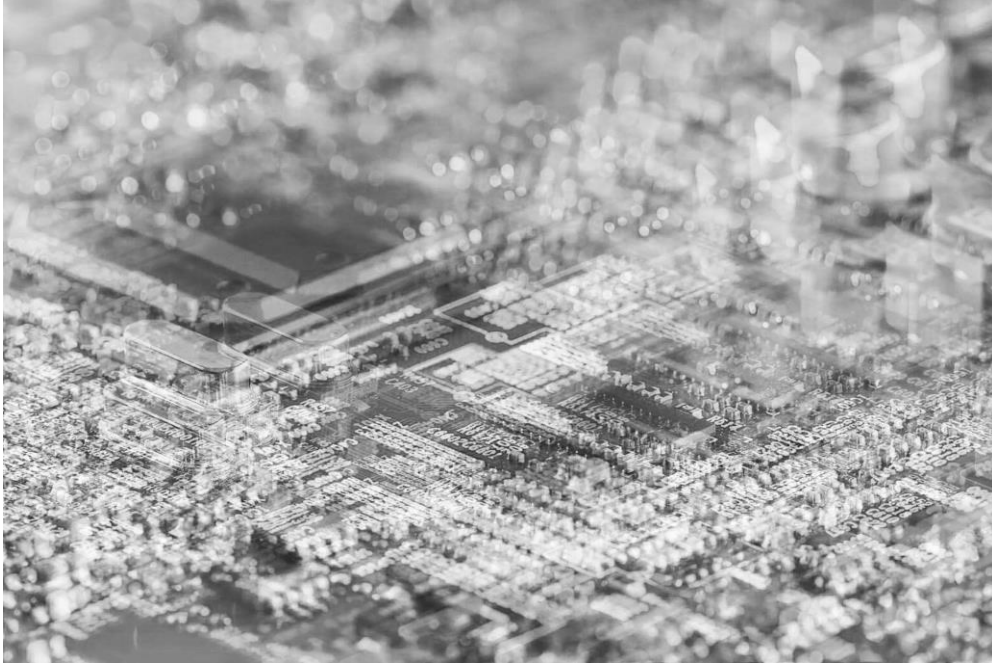
For some reason I start remembering something I saw on a documentary. Large numbers of ants can start following each other's pheromone trails in a spiral, they continue in this spiral until they die, or something breaks it up.¹⁵

I close my eyes and picture a death spiral growing and growing until it covers the entire planet.

¹⁵ Delsuc F. (2003). *Army ants trapped by their evolutionary history*. PLoS biology, 1(2), E37. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.0000037>

RHYTHM: DANCING WITHOUT MUSIC

THIRD ACT: CHAOTIC



1 2 3 4

SOMETHING

Ding!

I wake up.

My dream was so chaotic I can't remember or understand what it was about, quickly cutting and cutting between stressful, intense, and confusing scenarios. There were people in them wanting something from me, it was never clear what.

My dreams are often like this.

Like, subscribe and follow, there's a bright square in my hand. I zoom in as far as I can.

Wires, control boards, screen, cameras, sensors, more wires, battery. Little electrical charges shooting around inside a network of wires and boards. Everything happening super-fast!

I get lost in walking around, so many distractions! What did I want, again? This? Or that? It's a place with endless doors.

I walk up to a river; it's made of an endless stream of images. Or images of images?

Ding! It grabs my attention; I wander towards it. But before I reach it there is another ding coming from a different direction, and another one, and another one.

I don't know for how long I was wandering around chasing these dings. As I'm walking around, I find many rivers! A river of arguments, a river of news, a river of recipes. I even saw my boss floating past as well. Ding!

Cat, crisis, argument.

I see a curtain and peak behind it. A white background with endless rows of ones and zeros, in all kinds of configurations. Is that what everything in here is made of?¹⁶

"One" in binary programming represents the presence of an electrical signal. I am so glad you are still here.

1 2 3 4

NOTHING (MORE OR LESS)

"Zero" represents the absence of an electrical signal. I almost lost you forever.

I press my face up to the screen and try my best to try and reach you. I hear your voice through the phone's speaker. That is real, isn't it? I immediately hear that something is wrong. Your voice, flatlined, no longer a wave. I wish that it wasn't so.¹⁷

Still lost, still distracted, wandering around inside this thing. Am I actually just hiding? It rings, I quickly answer. The call hit me like a ton of bricks and everything broke. All of it.¹⁸

Ding! Crisis, bad news, tragedy.

I don't know how, but you're not gone after all! But why hasn't everything automatically gotten easy?

I've been a cartoon character that ran off a cliff, running in thin air until eventually looking down.

¹⁶ Science and Industry Museum. (2019, 25 June). *Programming Patterns: The Story of the Jacquard Loom*. <https://www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/jacquard-loom>

¹⁷ Yan J. (2012, 19 October). *Listen Closely to Patient's Voice—You May Hear Depression Signals*. https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/pn.47.20.psychnews_47_20_17-a

¹⁸ Ader B.A. (1975). *In Search of the Miraculous*.

Broken pieces everywhere, all over the floor, in all the cupboards, in pockets and in hearts. Chaos, broken dreams, and confusion. Do we stay in this landscape? Maybe it's time to leave?

The hallway is filling up with unopened boxes I can't remember ordering, I have to squeeze past them. I look down at my shoes, they are completely worn out, how did I not notice?¹⁹

No need leaving a trail of clues in behind us, there's no going back. Was it just someone else's dream this whole time, anyway? What is it that was lost, exactly?

I don't know where we are, and I don't know where we are going, but let's go. Only bring the things that matter, the rest we leave behind.

1 2 **3** 4

REPETITION

I can't keep doing what I'm doing. This endless cycle of chasing a promise of something, ending up disappointed when I get there.

I think I expect an end-station to things, a place where I can settle down for good, but that never comes. Doesn't anything ever stand still?

No, no, I don't have to go back to work. I left a decoy version of myself in the office and boarded the door shut from the inside, just to be sure.²⁰

It's all automatic now, they'll never notice.

Let's take these broken pieces with us, mix them up, turn them inside out and put them together in new ways! Accept the imperfections, mix the glue with gold!²¹

Let's draw new maps with our eyes closed, feel our way to new landscapes, crawling on all fours.

1 2 3 **4**

BREAK

¹⁹ Basinski, W. (2002-2003). *The Disintegration Loops*. [Album series].

²⁰ Ervik, A. (2021). *Office Nostalgia. Back 2 Work*. [Installation. Office, door boarded up with planks, clothing filled with plant, mushrooms]. UiO.

²¹ Koren, L. (1994). *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*. Imperfect Publishing.

Come with me, I know a way, duck through these bushes. Wait, let me clear away the spiderwebs first.

There's a place, it's not far. Watch your head. Okey, here we are!

Listen how quiet it is. Let's enjoy this moment for a while. Nothing but stillness. It's almost overwhelming how quiet it is.

This place is actually an in-between space. Right now, nothing is happening, but something has happened, and something will happen, this is where they meet.

Action, time, and place.

Can you feel how the air is almost vibrating with tension? It's actually not very quiet at all, it's full of potential! It can feel chaotic and scary, but it doesn't have to.

We're just about to start, we can go anywhere from here.

The sun is shining in the sky, and wherever it shines, we can see that the forest has burnt down, but new life has also begun to grow.

See those flowers? Look how beautiful they are growing out of the scorched ground.

The fire has happened a thousand times before and will happen a thousand times more. But it's hard not to feel bad for what was lost.²²

The seeds have been patiently waiting for the fire to clear the undergrowth away. Now is their moment.

One thing led to another, and this fire started, and the forest is gone, but one thing will be leading to another a million times more and in every direction.

And in time, this place will be full of life again.

²² Goudal, N. (2021) *Below the Deep South*. [Video]