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Anat Tzur Mahalel

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GEORGES PEREC'S *ZEIT-RAUM*: CREATING A SPACE OF REMEMBRANCE

Georges Perec's memoir of his analysis, "The Scene of a Stratagem" (1977), is part of a literary oeuvre characterized by innovative forms addressing the paradoxical task of telling a story that cannot be told. His life history was constructed from memory traces, veiled behind the untimely death of his parents in World War II. The memoir tells the story of his analysis in adulthood with Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, at a time when Perec was struggling with depression and writer's block. Beneath doubts and the tedious analytic routine, Perec presents analysis as a space in which memory traces can be given new life. The historical past takes place in a space Walter Benjamin calls time-space (*Zeit-raum*), or time-dream (*Zeit-traum*). This space is created in a flash of *co-incidence* between dreaming and waking. History, then, is created in a space where archived memory traces are transformed into present experience. Perec creates a kind of Benjaminian dream-space of the past to deal with the fragmentation of memory that follows traumatic loss. The significance of this distinct space is discussed in relation to the challenge of representing traumatic experiences while remaining faithful to the dreamlike and fragmented nature of the space.

Keywords: Georges Perec, Walter Benjamin, dreams, Freudian theory, memory, philosophy, transitional space, trauma, unconscious

I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin: My birthplace, the cradle of my family, the house where I may have been born, the tree I may

Research Fellow, Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society, University of Haifa; Israel Psychoanalytic Society.

Submitted for publication November 12, 2020; revised April 27, 2021; accepted July 24, 2021.

DOI: 10.1177/00030651221123605

> *have seen grow (that my father may have planted the day I was born), the attic of my childhood filled with intact memories. . . . Such places don't exist, and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question.*
>
> —Georges Perec (1974, p. 91)

In these strange days of plague, we find ourselves, as psychoanalysts, struggling to redefine the analytic setting. The dimension most affected by these radical changes, I suggest, is space. The familiar spaces within which we meet and exist, most prominently the consulting room as a space to conduct and teach psychoanalysis, have suddenly become a threat. We now find ourselves meeting mostly in virtual spaces, struggling with complex questions of space, its absence, and the conditions for creating a space for dreaming and waking, remembrance, and transformation. These questions have led me to the thoughts of Freud and Walter Benjamin on the creation of a transformational space and to Georges Perec's singular memoir of his analysis.

Perec (1936–1982) writes, in the epigraph above, of historical places that we are strongly attached to as centers of our wishes and dreams. He suggests, though, that these yearned-for places do not exist in the external world, and perhaps never did. Childhood reminiscences express an intriguing mixture of real events, inner fantasies, and a reconstruction in *Nachträglichkeit*. A reason for the distinctive character of childhood memories is that fantasies are stimulated and present in the child's mind. Freud discusses the unique nature of childhood memories in his early paper "On Screen Memories":

> It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge;* they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves [1899, p. 322].

The house in which Perec may have been born, and the tree that he may have seen grow and that may have been planted by his father the day he was born, embody his deepest wishes and their elusiveness. These crucial and formative events in the child's early development may or may not have actually occurred in the past. A quest for meaning has, I submit, a

concomitant model of time and space. Regarding time, we can speak of a dialectical relation between historical time and transcendental time or timelessness: the historic path stems from the assumption that the past holds the roots of our present and future development, whereas transcendental time touches the distinct moment in time that remains timeless and eternal in the experiential-subjective level (Tzur Mahalel 2021).

Similarly, the essence of space is linked to the search for a place that captures time, where memory traces and residues of the past can be reconstructed, at least partly. In his late essay "Constructions in Analysis," Freud (1937) discusses the challenging task of analytic construction or reconstruction of the archived past. He compares psychoanalysis to the site of an ancient, buried archaeological object, such as Pompeii or the tomb of Tutankhamun:

> All of the essentials are preserved; even things that seem completely forgotten are present somehow and somewhere, and have merely been buried and made inaccessible to the subject. Indeed, it may, as we know, be doubted whether any psychical structure can really be the victim of total destruction. It depends only upon analytic technique whether we shall succeed in bringing what is concealed completely to light. There are only two other facts that weigh against the extraordinary advantage which is thus enjoyed by the work of analysis: namely, that psychical objects are incomparably more complicated than the excavator's material ones and that we have insufficient knowledge of what we may expect to find, since their finer structure contains so much that is still mysterious [p. 260].

The idea of the mystery of the psyche is woven throughout Freud's writing and is usually presented in the context of the attempt to decipher and reveal repressed experiences that are archived in the unconscious. In this late essay, intriguingly, the mysterious nature of the psyche is "still" presented as a fact, something more to be reconciled with than struggled against.

Freud introduces the image of archaeology to describe the continuous construction involved in analytic work. Truth is thus presented as an historical construction of something ruined and buried by the process of repression, the task of analysis being to rescue crucial residues of the past and give them meaning relevant to the analysand's present. A somewhat similar image is presented by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), in the context of translation and what he calls the task of the translator. In a classic paper, Benjamin (1923) offers the image of a fragmented vessel that the

translator continuously strives to glue together in his challenging movement between languages. For Benjamin, the broken vessel is "the pure language" that initially connected all mankind. After Babel, translation became the task of finding bridges between languages and thereby connecting to the pure language implicitly present in them in various fragmented forms. The relation between translation and the original should represent this historical complexity. Translation, "instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel" (p. 260).

Freud's image of the archaeological site and Benjamin's image of the broken vessel stand in intriguing contrast to characteristics of modernity: the haste, mass reproduction, and duplication in which meaning can dissolve and collapse. This contrast is expressed, for example, in Freud's image of free association as resembling the position of "a traveller sitting next to the window of a railway carriage" (1913, p. 135) and Benjamin's pivotal thoughts on the work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility (1939). The romantic assumption behind these ideas and images is that truth, on both the personal and the cultural level, lies in the archaic. Both the philosopher and the analyst carry out the challenging tasks of the archaeologist and the archivist: they search for buried residues of lost times, fragments and memory traces. In taking on these demanding tasks, which they can succeed at only partially, they strive to protect reminiscences from ruin and allow their continued existence. Thus, both Freud and Benjamin are intrigued by the metaphor of the archaic and its modern vicissitudes or, in other words, the challenge modernism poses to the archaic in terms of history and memory. Freud and Benjamin differ in their quest for hidden truth mainly in that Freud believed in truth as an ontological entity located, in spite of its tangled paths, in our inner world. In Benjamin's framework, we have a deep longing for truth and an inner conviction of its importance, but its existence is for him an ongoing and unresolved riddle. Pure language exists only as an horizon, a wish, an ideal, and in spite of the impossibility of grasping it, striving toward it creates manifold enriching potentials. The spoken languages of present and future are inevitably destined for a mere fragmentary existence. In the face of the forthcoming atrocities of World War II, fragmentary and elusive possibilities were the only kinds of truth one could aim at grasping.

And although the quest for truth was not annihilated by the war, it underwent massive transformations. Meaning was supplemented by fragmentation, and a dialectical movement was created between hope and despair, meaning and meaninglessness. In this context, Benjamin's notion of *Zeit-raum* presents a space in which momentary and fragmentary meanings can be captured.

ZEIT-RAUM / ZEIT-TRAUM: DREAM SPACE

The challenge of creating a dialectical space of archived memory traces and live experiences of the past requires the work of mourning what will forever remain obscure and hidden. To provide a better understanding of this fragmentary, provisional, and mysterious path, I want to suggest some of Benjamin's thoughts on the challenge of communication. Benjamin presents this challenge as melancholic, for it is inevitably interwoven with mourning: "In all mourning there is the deepest inclination to speechlessness, which is infinitely more than the inability or disinclination to communicate" (1916, p. 73). The struggle to communicate is challenged by a striving for noncommunication; the motivation to create speech is constantly challenged by speechlessness. As Benjamin writes, "For language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable" (p. 74).

Benjamin, a German Jewish philosopher, fled the Nazi regime as it closed in, wandering the streets of Paris trying to grasp insights in a dreadfully changing world. His uncompleted *Arcades Project* (published in 1982, four decades after his untimely death) is retrospectively read as a fascinating and intriguing quest for meaning, a sanctuary in times of danger and uncertainty. In what turned out to be the last decade of his short life, Benjamin visited the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris daily, determinedly searching for historical fragments of the abandoned Parisian arcades: philosophical and poetic texts, alongside pictures, journalistic clippings, and random advertisements. This patient and demanding research, in which Benjamin was completely absorbed, expresses a deep wish to glue together the fragments of a broken vessel (1923, p. 260), a melancholy task that embodied the hope of collecting and constructing allusions of home and homeland. As Buck-Morss (1990) writes, historical urban objects were for Benjamin living relics of the previous century, dream images, hieroglyphic clues to a forgotten past. Benjamin was

concerned with how public space had entered his unconscious and held sway over his imagination. Writing his childhood recollections of the public sphere and the living relics of the city of Berlin was an explicit attempt to treat his homesickness. The covered shopping arcades of the nineteenth century were Benjamin's central image, a precise material replica of the unconscious of the dreaming collective (Buck-Morss 1990, pp. 38–39).

In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin develops some innovative thoughts connecting history and memory. Modernism, he states, calls for a new understanding of history, as something more than the reconstructing of the past in an archive of past events, statically categorized along a chronological timeline. History and memory find new paths through the mental states that he suggests are the distinct space of dreams and awakening (*das Erwachen*): "The Copernican revolution in historical perception is as follows. Formerly it was thought that a fixed point had been found in 'what has been,' and one saw the present engaged in tentatively concentrating the forces of knowledge on this ground. Now this relation is to be overturned, and what has been is to become the dialectical reversal—the flash of awakened consciousness" (1982, p. 388). Benjamin thus suggests that the moment of awakening from a dream is equivalent to the moment of remembering, "the flash of awakened consciousness," rescuing oneself from the dusk of forgetting: "Awakening is a gradual process that goes on in the life of the individual as in the life of generations. Sleep its initial stage" (p. 388).

Like Freud, who followed the archaeologist of Pompeii or the tomb of Tutankhamun, Benjamin dives into the history of the Parisian arcades. Yet, unlike Freud, Benjamin searches for the history of the arcades as an image of the lost past, rather than as an actual residue. The aim of this quest is to transform historical archived evidence into a present experience/event (*Erlebnis*):

> The new, dialectical method of doing history presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as waking world, a world to which that dream we name the past refers in truth. To pass through and carry out *what has been* in remembering the dream!—therefore: remembering and awaking are most intimately related. Awakening is namely the dialectical, Copernican turn of remembrance [p. 389].

Benjamin is intrigued by the moment of awaking, where the past becomes a present in a dreamlike state of mind. The moment is for him a dialectical

element whose spatial and temporal coordinates are intertwined. The temporal dimension of history, which is always, as Benjamin suggests, a spatial dimension, becomes decipherable as a legible moment in the flash of knowledge that produces and marks itself in an image that demands to be read. The historian's task is therefore to be an alert reader of residual images of historical time in which the past registers its knowledge of the present while a certain knowledge of the present allows the past to emerge.

> The nineteenth century a spacetime <Zeitraum> (a dreamtime <Zeit-traum>) in which the individual consciousness more and more secures itself in reflecting, while the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep. But just as the sleeper—in this respect like the madman—sets out on the macrocosmic journey through his own body, and the noises and feelings of his insides, such as blood pressure, intestinal churn, heartbeat, and muscle sensation (which for the waking and salubrious individual converge in a steady surge of health) generate, in the extravagantly heightened inner awareness of the sleeper, illusion or dream imagery which translates and accounts for them, so likewise for the dreaming collective, which, through the arcades, communes with its own insides. We must follow in its wake so as to expound the nineteenth century—in fashion and advertising, in buildings and politic—as the outcome of its dream visions [p. 389].

Awakening, remembrance, and actualization of the historical past will take place in a flash of *co-incidence*. Benjamin suggests the intertwining of *Zeit-raum* (time-space), the coordinates of the social-historical, with the playful metonymy *Zeit-traum* (time-dream), the dimension within which history exists in order to be retrieved and actualized. The task of the historian is to trace the dialectical moment between dreaming and awakening, where dream images are blurred with sensual data embodied in awakening. As Gourgouris (2006) writes, "dream-time is refashioned in an archaic sense as the time (and space) of awakening to one's internal, submerged dimensions of actual experience—in the most precise sense: the historical trace, the psychic landscape formed by *what has been.* . . . For Benjamin, the truth of history does not involve the representation of an 'eternal past' but rather the production . . . of an image" (p. 210).

In a world of speculation, the dream images are no less important than actual experience in the construction of meaning. Images "find their expression in the dream and their interpretation in the awakening" (Benjamin 1982, p. 392). Children naturally experience the world in this distinct space that Benjamin calls *Zeit-raum,* and this opportunity gradually decreases as the process of adapting to reality advances. Adult

experience, therefore, in comparison to the experience of the child, involves an absence: "we seek a teleological moment in the context of dreams. Which is the moment of waiting. The dream waits secretly for the awakening; the sleeper surrenders to death only provisionally, waits for the second when he will cunningly wrest himself from its clutches" (p. 390). The child faces the demand to enter "the symbolic space" and, during this complex formational process (*Bildung*), is challenged not to forget "the dream space" of archaic images and sensual experience. "Task of childhood: to bring the new world into symbolic space. The child, in fact, can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: recognize the new once again" (p. 390).

These relatively elusive ideas find more lucid expression, I suggest, in a dream that Benjamin presents in *The Arcades Project*. The dream appears as an expression of "the dread of doors that won't close" or, stated more precisely, "doors that appear closed without being so," a dread that allegedly "everyone knows from dreams"—the archaic dread of perhaps losing the boundaries between spaces, alluding to a potential enmeshment between the realm of fantasy and imagination and that of actual experience. Benjamin writes, "It was with heightened senses that I was in the company of a friend, a ghost appeared to me in the window of the ground floor of a house to our right. And as we walked on, the ghost accompanied us from inside all the houses. It passed through all the walls and always remained at the same height with us. I saw this, though I was blind" (p. 409). Benjamin's historical quest through the abandoned arcades archived in the National Library was, like the dream, "fundamentally just such a ghost walk, on which doors give way and walls yield" (p. 409).

Space (*Raum*), within which time and dreams can be momentarily captured, is pivotally accompanied by a ghost, perhaps resembling Freud's "spirit from the underworld" (1915, p. 164). These ghosts from mysterious transcendental realms can be noticed and seen not through ordinary perception, but through blindness and turning one's attention inward. The *Zeit-raum* carries within it a dialectic between borders and the infinite, definition and imagination. A white sheet of paper, as Perec (1974) shows us in "Species of Spaces," represents an infinite space for creation within the limits of the page's dimensions and also within the limits of the writer's creativity and of linguistic and poetic expression (pp. 9–15). The white ceiling, as will be shown from Perec's analytic memoir, can represent to the analysand, lying on the couch, an infinite

space in which to explore his or her sense of self and voice within the freedom and security of analysis, and at the same time a structured space within the walls of the consulting room, the borders of the hour, and the limitations of the encounter with the analyst as other.

GEORGES PEREC'S ANALYTIC MEMOIR

Georges Perec's memoir of his analysis, "The Scene of a Stratagem" (1977), was first published in the journal *Cause Commune.* His unique oeuvre was already widely known and read, an oeuvre rooted in his personal history as a Jewish child refugee of World War II who had lost his parents during the war. His literary voice expresses his efforts to grasp and construct a personal history, a childhood story, after his parents' untimely death. Perec was born in Paris in 1936 to Polish Jews who had moved to France in the 1920s. His father enlisted in the French army and was killed in the last days of French military resistance to the German advance, in June 1940. His mother, intending to join her son in the safe sanctuary of Villard-de-Lans, was instead arrested and interned in Drancy and then deported to Auschwitz in 1943. She did not survive, and the cause and date of her death have never been determined.

Perec describes his separation from his mother at the Gare de Lyon three times in his autobiography, *W, or the Memory of Childhood* (1975, pp. 26, 32, 54–55), and many more times in his notes and drafts for the book. He confesses that this was his "only surviving memory" of her (p. 26). Here is what he remembered of the scene: After his mother bought him a *Charlie* magazine at the station, Perec was hastily separated from her to board the train he had been assigned to by the Red Cross. The plan was for him to meet relatives in Villard-de-Lans, where his mother intended to join them few days later. She probably spoke words of farewell, reminded him of what was ahead, and promised she would see him very soon. In any case, little Georges Perec surely could not have imagined then that this would be the last time he would see her. Perec's biographer presents this scene of separation as formative in his subject's psychological development:

> We can only guess what the five-year-old boy's true feelings were, but whatever they were, they must have been inappropriate to the real meaning of his departure, which he would begin to understand only years later. It was *the wrong*

> *farewell*. He must have come to feel that it was he who had abandoned his mother, that he should have looked after her better, brought her along, stayed behind, or done something. No wonder he could not really remember his departure from the Gare de Lyon [Bellos 1993, p. 58].

I find myself continuously troubled by this "wrong farewell" that young Perec possibly experienced and the unbearable challenge he would have faced to gradually acknowledge and work through the traumatic loss. In an effort to digest his new orphanhood, part of him likely strove anxiously to capture every trace of memory of the departure, while on the other hand the intensity of the deprived present would have led him to construct strong defenses against unbearable pain. The sudden and inexplicable loss of his mother, following his father's death and acknowledged only in retrospect, most probably mobilized the defense mechanism of keeping the door locked on his past, de-animating and fragmenting it. In *après-coup,* Perec's effort to reconstruct his past, most distinctly embodied in *W, or the Memory of Childhood* (1975), was his fragmented way of sustaining the essential entities of home and family. In "Species of Spaces," Perec writes, "Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it. My spaces are fragile: time is going to wear them away to destroy them. Nothing will any longer resemble what was, my memories will betray me, oblivion will infiltrate my memory" (1974, p. 91).

Perec's writing draws attention to the fragmentation and absence of his history, rather than its interpretation and analysis. This focus on fragmentation is perhaps the most pivotal expression of his mother's disappearance and the distinct way in which the Holocaust was presented in his childhood and throughout his life. Michael Sheringham (1993) relates to Perec's composition of his childhood memories, intertwined with the childhood fantasy-story of the island W that he wrote as a teen, as embodied in his autobiography, as a distinct expression of the elusive way the traumatic losses he experienced had found a way to his inner representations: "what is at stake here—the mark of the Holocaust in Perec's past—is all the more indelible for being impossible to localize. As a child, the source of anxiety was the uncertainty surrounding his parents' absence: it is the trace of this absence—and particularly the subterfuges by which it is covered up—that Perec comes to identify in his memories" (p. 324).

Perec's writing is widely known as the expression of a distinctive work of mourning, revolving around the complex task of reconstructing a story that cannot be told. He is thus totally absorbed, as an author, in what can be understood as impossible mourning: "Perec seeks an active engagement with his grief, recognizing that, if left unattended and undirected, it would threaten to cripple him" (Motte 2004, p. 58). From an early age, Perec had dreamed of being an author. Early in his writing career, he became a member of the Oulipo literary group, *Ou(vroir) de li(ttérature) po(tentielle),* or "Workshop for Potential Literature." Accordingly, his work introduces innovative forms of writing that adhere to new sets of rules and use language playfully and distinctively. In Perec's case, these techniques were used to express the dialectics of a story that no one was left to tell and yet had to be told. His writing continually questions the ability of language to penetrate defenses and reach an untold history only vaguely remembered through screen memories and arbitrary pictures. Language naturally implies communication, yet, as Perec stresses in manifold ways, it also embodies traps, mischief, and stratagems.

Perec worked as an archivist in the Parisian *Laboratoire de neurophysiologie médicale* for most of his short adulthood, from 1961 to 1978. His work, which others might think of as routine and tedious, fascinated him in terms of collecting and organizing knowledge. He developed a variety of creative methods to efficiently collect, categorize, restore, and retrieve archived information, initiating and developing various information storage and retrieval systems and adding thousands of items to the lab's catalogue every year (Bellos 1993, pp. 250–258). Perec's passion for the archive intriguingly echoes Benjamin's similar passion. Both Perec and Benjamin express this passion in their life choices and in their writing. Perhaps the archive serves them as a representation of the dialectics between meaning and meaninglessness, a quest for lost history through the fragmented and minor residues it offers. For Benjamin and Perec, unlike for Freud, the historical quest is essentially woven from the thread of fragmentation and absence, accompanied by the ghosts of catastrophe, of a world in ruin.

Perec was in analysis from May 1971 to June 1975. His memoir starts with this time framework, stating the beginning and end. The analyst's identity is not explicitly mentioned in the memoir, but it is widely known that Perec's analyst was Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (1924–2013). Perec

declares up front that the desire to write about his experience as an analysand gnawed at him throughout the analysis, and that this text was written fifteen months after it terminated. Perec wonders about the source of this desire to write about his analytic experience, for he does not even know how to articulate what the essence of the analytic experience was for him. In any case, he states at the outset that the essence of analysis, like the essence of writing, is not to decipher hidden truth. Truth from his point of view remains forever hidden, and the desire to reveal it is a part of the stratagem of writing and the stratagem of psychoanalysis:

> The stratagem is something that circumvents, but how to circumvent the stratagem? The question is a trap, a pre-text, preceding the text, in order each time to defer the ineluctable moment of writing. Each word I put down was not a marker but a detour, something to set me daydreaming. During those fifteen months, I daydreamed over these verbal meanderings just as, for four years, on the couch, I had daydreamed as I gazed at the mouldings and the cracks in the ceiling (Perec 1977, p. 166).

Perec's analytic story starts with questions, the riddle of psychoanalysis and of the unconscious, the enigmatic past and elusive memory. He turned to analysis in a depressed state, after the breakdown of his marriage and a couple of suicide attempts. At the same time, he also found himself in an ongoing struggle with writing his autobiography and constructing the fragmented narrative of his childhood. As the lonely storyteller that he was, the only survivor of his immediate family, he is given the task of remembering, reconstructing, and restoring his early history. A writing block is usually accompanied by great anguish. As this crucial inner fountain of creativity dries up, the author finds himself alienated from the source of his liveliness.[1]

One thing that makes Perec's writing so intriguing is the paradox of truth, for in spite of his clear acknowledgment that there is no absolute truth, and that the search for it is an illusion, he nevertheless finds himself compulsively seeking to solve this endless enigma: "For a long time you believe that talking will mean finding, discovering, understanding, finally

[1]This was also the case for the poet Hilda Doolittle, known by the *nom de plume* H. D. (1886–1961), who sought analysis with Freud to overcome a writing block. Returning to writing became the goal of the analysis, and thus writing a memoir about the experience became a tribute to the process that restored her creativity, as seen in her posthumously published *Tribute to Freud* (1974; see Tzur Mahalel 2020, pp. 137–172).

understanding, being illuminated by the truth. But no: when that happens, you know only that it's happening; it's there, you're talking, you're writing. Talking is talking only, merely talking, writing is only writing, tracing characters on a blank sheet of paper" (p. 166). Perec insists on the absence of catharsis during the process of analytic talking and literary writing. These are activities that are actualized as a matter of fact; they do not involve epiphany or alteration.

Surprisingly, Perec begins his analytic reminiscences not with what psychoanalysis was for him, but with what it was not. He strips psychoanalysis of all romantic illusions and exposes it to the penetrating light of a strict, stable, daily, even petty routine, "repetitive and exhausting gymnastics" (p. 172). In a way characteristic of early traumatic experiences, Perec experiences his past as an ungraspable inner mystery, containing a tortuous dialectics of nonpresentable presence, noncommunicable communication, nonrepresented representation.

In this clogged obscurity on the one hand and determination to avoid the trap of knowledge on the other, Perec addresses two dimensions pivotal to him: time and space. Only through this dual dimension can meaning perhaps be captured. Addressing the subject of time in analysis, Perec insists on a cautious investigation, in accordance with his stance toward both analysis and literature:

> Psychoanalysis isn't really like those advertisements for hair restorers: there wasn't any "before" or "after." There was the present of the analysis, a "here and now," that began, lasted and ended. I could just as well write "which took four years to start" or "which ended during four years." There was no beginning or end. The analysis had already begun long before the first session, if only in the slow making-up of my mind to undergo one and in the choice of the analyst. The analysis continues, long after the final session, if only in the solitary duplication of it, which mimics both its obstinacy and its failures to move forward. In an analysis you are either stuck fast in time or else time is inflated. For four years, the analysis had its everyday, its ordinary side: small marks in diaries, the work spaced out through the successive sessions, the regularity with which they came round, their rhythm [p. 167].

Time in analysis for Perec holds the dialectics of expectation and disappointment in the deepest sense. Time means waiting for something new to happen, and, as he emphasizes, this expectation is almost never fulfilled. Time in analysis is described somewhat as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* as a process of constantly waiting for something that never comes: "There

was something abstract about this arbitrary time, something at once both reassuring and frightening, an immutable, intemporal time, an immobile time in an improbable space" (p. 167).

From the ungraspable notion of time, Perec continues to address the question of space. Time and space construct the physical dimensions of the analytic setting, they build the container for as-yet-uncontained thoughts and experiences. Of the crossroads of time and space, Perec writes, "The analysis was first of all this: a certain dividing-up of the days—into days with and days without—and on days with something resembling a fold, a pleat, a pocket: in the stratification of the hours a moment that was suspended, was other; a sort of halt or interval in the continuity of the day" (p. 167). This pleat was structured from banal repetitive details and ritual etiquette, a rigid protocol of arrival, entrance, situating of analysand and analyst in the space of the consulting room, spending stringently constant episodes of time together, sometimes in silence, sometimes with the analysand engaged in hectic compulsive talk in response to the analyst's silence. Then the session is over, and the repetitive ceremony of separation takes place until the next pleat in time: "the ritual protocol of the sessions extruded space and time from these landmarks. . . . the same identical movements, the same gestures, were repeated exactly" (pp. 167–168).

Omitting illusions and stratagems, Perec is left with core experiences of boredom and disappointment, a continuous awaiting with a dim somewhat forgotten hope, an obscure Beckettian *Godot* that holds an enigmatic promise that no one remembers or knows apart from its mere yet vague name. Even on the rare occasions when Perec succeeds in capturing a certain content in his diary, or a presumed meaning that remained in his memory from the analytic sessions, in retrospect it does not amount to anything he can truly hold on to; perhaps it even emphasizes the absence.

Perec describes himself as hunting for deviations from the strict and repetitive constancy, such as times when the analyst's secretary was absent and the analyst answered the phone, or when he as the analysand took the initiative and opened the door of the consulting room himself. He records these rare occasions, wondering what meaning they carried: "it meant something, even if I don't know what. . . . either way they all indicated the function that these rites had for me: the temporal and spatial framework of the unending discourse which, session by session, month by month, year by year, I was going to try and make my own, going to attempt to assume

responsibility for, in which I was going to seek to recognize myself and to give myself a name" (p. 168). Cautiously and reticently, Perec draws closer to his deepest wish as an analysand, a wish that is articulated as "to recognize myself and to give myself a name." Recognition, as a psychic function, develops and is acquired through being looked at by the intimate other and having one's subjectivity recognized by that other. A name is given in the intimacy of the relationship between parents and child after birth. The name also touches on the theological meaning of language as itself a creating force. The psychical and linguistic building blocks of identity are thus intertwined in Perec's wish:

> The regularity of these rites of entry and departure thus constituted for me a first rule (I'm not talking about psychoanalysis in general, but of the one experience of it I have been affected by and the memories of it that remain to me). Their quiet repetition, their conventional immutability, indicated, with a serene courtesy, the limits of that enclosed space in which, far from the din of the town, outside of time, outside of the world, something was going to be said that perhaps would come from me, would be mine, would be for me [p. 169].

The something that was going to be said is imagined to be deeply connected with his inner being, an inner truth that would fill the void. This something is connected to his lost history: "for four years I sank deeply into that history-less time, into that non-existent place that was to become the place of my history, of my as yet absent words" (p. 169). Words, for Perec, served as a partial and fragmented substitute for a home, an essential holding where all holding structures had gradually disappeared.

While Perec cannot find the absent words to tell his story, the analyst, at least in Perec's experience, remains stubbornly silent:

> Behind me, the other said nothing. At each session I waited for him to speak. I was convinced he was hiding something from me, that he knew much more than he was willing to say, that he was thinking it none the less, that he had his own idea there in the back of his brain. A little as if the words that were passing through my head were going to lodge in the back of his head, to bury themselves there forever, giving rise, as the sessions came and went, to a ball of silence that was as heavy as my words were hollow, as full as my words were empty [p. 170].

Perec experiences his analyst's continuing silence as a dreadful void, an absence that pushes him to retraumatization: "I was shut in with this other person in this other space. The other person was sitting in an armchair,

behind me, he could see me, he could speak or not speak, and chose generally not to speak; I was stretched out on the couch, in front of him, I couldn't see him, I had to speak, my words had to fill that empty space" (pp. 169–170).[2]

In response to his analyst's silence, Perec experienced himself as being coerced into speech: "Speaking wasn't hard in any case," he writes. Perec is a man of words and could easily fill the void with "a whole arsenal of stories, problems, questions, associations, phantasms, plays on words, memories, hypotheses, explanations, theories, points of reference (*repères*), hiding-places (*repaires*)" (p. 170). Analysis has thus become "the scene of a stratagem," a stratagem of redundant speech, of words hectically scattered for the sole purpose of defending Perec from the dreaded silence. He understands in retrospect that his speech had at that stage in analysis lost its communicative value: "I travelled cheerfully down the too clearly marked-out paths of my labyrinths. Everything meant something, everything was linked together, everything was clear, everything allowed itself to be dissected at leisure, a great waltz of signifiers unrolling their pleasing anxieties" (p. 170). Pontalis, in his analytic vignettes, which are commonly understood to be describing Perec's analysis, expresses awareness of his analysand's inner void, due to the inability to mourn, and discusses the countertransference that he developed toward him: "countertransference seems to me to be nourished by the following imaginary aim: to bring the survivor to life, to have come to life, for good, for himself" (Pontalis 1974, p. 163; for discussion see Schwartz 2016).

Perec's dread of retraumatization, intensified by his analyst's silence, gradually created for him the experience of an overwhelmingly present void, of a complete ignorance and inauthenticity in relation to himself:

> Beneath the ephemeral glitter of these verbal collisions, the measured titillations of this little illustrated Oedipus, my voice met only its own emptiness: neither the feeble echo of my life-story, nor the uncertain tumult of the enemies I should

[2]This experience resonates with André Green's critical stance toward what he calls the silence of the analyst, "the well-known attitude of silence which can be taken so far that it is reminiscent of the tomb"; he continues, "the qustion is . . . if such a silence is not responsible for a deleterious analytic atmosphere, letting the analysand fall back into his original *Hilflosigkeit,* withering away, session after session, on the couch" (Green 2005, p. 230). "Excessive silence abandons the patient to dereliction," he adds, and emphasizes the importance of a flexible analytic setting, how crucial it is to be able to make changes and modifications in the setting for analysands who present difficulty, including giving emphasis to the analyst's subjective presence (p. 85).

> be facing up to, but the threadbare Daddy/Mummy, prick/pussy routine; not my emotion, nor my fear, nor my desire, nor my body, but responses that were ready-made, an anonymous ironmongery, and all the exaltation of a ride on a scenic railway [p. 170].

Specifically in such moments, split seconds of waiting after hectic speech that had led to a complete loss of his path, the analyst's silence was experienced as harsh: "The verbal intoxication of these brief moments of pansemic delirium was not long in fading, it took only a few seconds, a few seconds of silence during which I was watching for an acknowledgement from the analyst which never came, and I would then go back to feeling bitter and morose, further off than ever from my own words, my own voice" (p. 170).

FACING THE STRATAGEM

Given the silence of the analyst and the hollow quality of his own words, Perec's inner world was eventually filled with desolation and emptiness. The analytic setting brought back raw memories of absence; he describes it as "a dead, a tranquil place" (p. 169). Tranquility felt traumatically excessive, like an encounter with death.

During analysis, Perec faced the danger of identifying with the dead object, becoming dead inside and finding himself bereft of his memory. As a spontaneous response, he then found himself becoming a living archive of his life activities and presence. Freud's image of the analyst as an archaeologist patiently reconstructing buried sites is replaced, by Perec, with an image of the analysand as an archivist hectically preserving evidence of himself as a living object: "I began to be afraid of forgetting, as if, unless I noted everything down, I wasn't going to be able to retain anything of the life that was escaping from me" (p. 171). The fear of retraumatization by approaching too close to the dead object pushed him to turn his life into a work of recollection. He was building an archive of his present life, as if he had to prove that he was indeed alive. Yet the anxiety did not allow an organized recollection of data. Instead, his archive is presented mainly as scattered and condensed, characterized by redundancy of the need to remember and controlled by a compulsive urge to avoid forgetfulness. Remembrance is experienced as being equivalent to life, while forgetfulness for him meant death. Perec at this point, so it seems, is striving

to protect himself from death through his compulsion to remember, yet this compulsion denies him the opportunity to approach life. Perec's remembrance is not a part of what Benjamin calls awakening: it is not remembering that welcomes and provokes life. Perec's awakening is embodied instead, as he would gradually acknowledge, in the inherent fragmentation that marks his history and memory formation.

Because of his dread of forgetting, Perec began to scrupulously keep a daily journal.

> It was the exact opposite of a *journal intime:* all I put into it were the "objective" things that had happened to me: the time I woke up, how I spent the day, my movements, what I had bought, the progress—measured in lines or pages—of my work, the people I had met or simply caught sight of, the details of the meal I had in the evening in one or other restaurant, my reading, the records I had listened to, the films I had seen, etc. [p. 171].

This rigorous archive of daily activities also incorporated actual evidence, such as letters, cinema tickets, bills, and receipts, of the activities: "With this panic about losing track of myself there went a fury for preserving and for classifying. I kept everything" (p. 171).

The mystery of his past leads Perec to a very careful and cautious investigation of his experience. If he is able to record his experience in and out of analysis, he may find an answer to his fragmented story. He is determined to avoid traps and stratagems and write only experiences that are convincingly lacking any threat of illusion and inaccuracy. His analytic diary strictly honors these boundaries:

> Made cautious perhaps by my oneiric stratagems, I transcribed nothing, or almost nothing, of the analysis itself. A symbol in my diary—the analyst's initial—marked the day and time of the session. In my journal, I wrote simply "session" sometimes followed by a—generally pessimistic—adjective: "sad," "drab," "long-winded," "not much fun," "a pain in the arse," "crap," "pretty dim," "pretty shitty," "depressing," "laughable," "anodyne," "nostalgisome," "feeble and forgettable," etc. [p. 172].

Perec's compulsive documentation of his daily routine was especially developed in reference to his dreams. He had started documenting his dreams even before he became an analysand:

> Well before the start of my analysis, I'd begun waking up during the night in order to note them down in black exercise-books that never left me. I'd very soon become so practiced at it that my dreams came to me already written out, their titles included. Whatever liking I may still feel today for these terse, secret forms of words, in which the reflections of my life-story seem to reach me through innumerable prisms, I have finally come to admit that these dreams weren't lived in order to be dreamt, but dreamt in order to become texts, that they weren't the royal road I thought they would be, but tortuous paths that led me ever further away from self-recognition [pp. 171–172].[3]

These impressions correlate with his analyst's impression of his patient's dreams. Pontalis wrote about the dreams of an anonymous patient, understood today to be Perec:

> I realized after a while that I wasn't "buying" the dreams he offered. Obviously, I had good reasons for my doubts: if I wasn't buying them, it was because the dreams lacked body, found an evident place in a superficial kind of language, were unpunctuated by silences and were lacking in the expression of affects, as if anguish dissolved itself in the saying . . . like texts to be deciphered, like a letter certainly written in a foreign tongue but not posted in a far-off place, and bearing no specific address [Pontalis, quoted in Bellos 1993, p. 476].

The dynamics of Perec's dreaming present some of the implications of early trauma for the natural flow of the psyche. Although Perec treats these experiences in a playful and somewhat humoristic manner, the reading experience feels deeply sad, as if the implicit and minor tones of the text are in fact tragic. Freud, in "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva,*" writes, "For the dream, when the laborious work of translating it had been accomplished, revealed itself to him as a wish of the dreamer's represented as fulfilled; and who could deny that wishes are predominantly turned towards the future?" (1907, p. 7). The analysand's wish toward the future is projected onto the analyst, yet the analyst will to a certain extent forever remain a foreigner to the patient's history. This question presents itself even more saliently in the case of early loss. The transference holds the analysand's future, yet it also serves as a painful reminder of the analysand's loneliness. Although the analyst offers his presence, the analysand to a certain extent remains lonely in the storytelling task, the sole survivor of his history, the only witness.

[3]Perec published a book constructed of the dream journal he kept from 1968 to 1972, offering recollections of 124 dreams (Perec 1973).

Analysis is faced with the challenge of following residues of memory, finding and creating paths to memory traces that hide behind the patient's dreams, screen memories, and neurotic symptoms. But where are these hidden paths, and how can one experience these memory traces as live experiences rather than just archived items? Freud (1907) writes,

> Now we do not know in general whether the forgetting of an impression is linked with the dissolution of its memory-trace in the mind; but we can assert quite definitely of "repression" that it does not coincide with the dissolution or extinction of the memory. What is repressed cannot, it is true, as a rule make its way into memory without more ado; but it retains a capacity for effective action, and, under the influence of some external event, it may one day bring about psychical consequences which can be regarded as products of a modification of the forgotten memory and as derivatives of it and which remain unintelligible unless we take this view of them [p. 34].

Thus, repressed memories are stored in the mysterious psychical archive, where their information storage and retrieval systems remain mostly unknown and the path to them as live experiences is also challenged.

During most of his analysis, Perec describes himself as being left too much alone in the face of his inner dread and inhibitions: "From then on, everything became mistrust, my words and his silence alike, a tedious game with mirrors in which the Möbius strips of images reflected one another endlessly, dreams too beautiful to be dreams. Where was the true, where the false?" (pp. 170–171). Through the cracks of this patient waiting, innovative movement mysteriously emerged: "Of the actual movement that enabled me to emerge from these repetitive and exhausting gymnastics, and gave me access to my own story and my voice, I shall only say that it was infinitely slow: it was the movement of the analysis itself, but I only found that out later on" (p. 172).

This inner movement that emerged in Perec's analysis gave him access to lost paths of his story and his literary voice. He is grateful for this movement yet does not say much about it. He only reveals that its essence was found in the noncommunicable: "First, the carapace of writing behind which I had concealed my desire to write had to crumble, the great wall of ready-made memories to erode, the rationalizations I had taken refuge in to fall into dust. I had to retrace my steps, to remake the journey I had already made all of whose threads I had broken" (p. 171). Ready-made memories and rationalizations made up Perec's archive,

which he felt coerced to maintain. In a somewhat mysterious fashion, analysis enabled him to create a space in which to innovatively experience himself and his story: "Of this subterranean place I have nothing to say. I know that it happened and that, from that time on, its trace was inscribed in me and in the texts that I write. It lasted for the time it took for my story to come together" (p. 171). The truth of the noncommunicable cannot be articulated as such; it forever remains, as articulated by Benjamin (1925), a dialectics of the veil and the veiled. The dialectics of the archive and an innovative historic movement released Perec from the abyss of meaninglessness and glued together the broken fragments of his history.

This innovative movement was given to Perec, "one day, violently, to [his] surprise and amazement." He primarily connected the revelation with the notion of space. It was given to him "like a memory restored to its space, like a gesture, like a warmth I had rediscovered" (pp. 171–172). An archived memory trace was transformed into a live, sensual experience of intimacy, relatedness, and warmth. Until that moment there had been only representations of frustrated anticipation and a tedious routine. But that boredom, which tends to be understood as peripheral to the true essence of things, is presented by Perec as the actual center of the analytic process and writing. In *après-coup,* the reading of his daily impressions of the analytic sessions from his diary brings Perec to these concluding words:

> Very occasionally, I characterized it by something the analyst had said to me that day, by an image, or a sensation ("cramp" for example), but most of these notations, whether positive or negative, are today devoid of meaning, and all the sessions—bar the few exceptions when the words that were to make the analysis a success came to the surface—have merged for me with the memory of that ceilinged-in expectancy, of my troubled gaze as I searched unremittingly among the mouldings for the outline of an animal, or a man's head: for signs [p. 172].

Words that were spoken during the sessions by the analyst and by himself appear in retrospect "devoid of meaning." Although Perec is a man of words and used them excessively in analysis, in retrospect he acknowledges them as having been redundant. The analytic experiences that left a transformative mark on him were his own "ceilinged-in expectancy" and "troubled gaze." He remembers searching "unremittingly" for signs of life, a head, perhaps eyes, that would look back at him, recognizing his

desolation. As he lay daily on the couch, gazing at the white ceiling, he imagined it as a white sheet of paper waiting for him to start writing: "I posit as self-evident from the start this equivalence between speaking and writing, just as I assimilate the blank sheet of paper to that other scene of hesitations, illusions and erasures that was the ceiling of the analyst's consulting-room. That doesn't automatically follow, I know, but it will do for me from now on" (p. 166). This is quite a radical conclusion: that the verbal aspect of analysis had almost no significance for his inner transformation.

The distinct experience of lying on the couch, gazing at the ceiling, remains engraved in his memory perhaps because it resonates with his desperate waiting as a child for his mother to come and fulfill the promise she had made to him, to join him in Villard-de-Lans. Following this line of interpretation, analysis created a time-space that drew Perec closer to his unbearable loss and enabled him to feel less lost and lonely there. The search for a sign of the other (for a head, for eyes) was partly fulfilled in the presence of the other. His troubled and searching gaze hoped to find, and perhaps did indeed find, a space that captured time both as archived memory traces and as a live experience.

HISTORY AS DREAM AND AWAKENING

On completing analysis, Perec was finally able to complete his autobiography, titled *W, or the Memory of Childhood* (1975). There he constructs vague memory traces from his childhood and interweaves them with a fictional story of the island W, which he had initially developed as a child. By way of this apparently fragmented and elusive autobiography, he gives a unique and incredibly moving expression to the paradox of his existence, for who will bear the story of his birth, his infancy, his childhood, after the life bearers are gone? He faces his own tragic incompetence at bearing his story, because his conscious memories cannot be sustained from these early times, and yet a story has to be told in order for him to become a subject:

> I don't know where the break is in the threads that tie me to my childhood. Like everyone else, or almost everyone, I had a father and a mother, a potty, a cot, a rattle, and, later on, a bicycle which apparently I never mounted without screaming with terror at the mere thought that someone might try to raise or even

> remove the two small side-wheels which kept me stable. Like everyone else, I have forgotten everything about the earliest years of my existence [1975, p. 12].

Reading Perec's literary oeuvre, especially the post-analysis works and most prominently *W, or the Memory of Childhood,* one gets the impression that analysis gave him insight into the endless paradox of telling a story that cannot be told, of constructing a history that can never be truly constructed but can be partly experienced. Perec brings up vague reminiscences of injuries he may have suffered to his arms in Villard-de-Lans and on the way there. On one occasion, he writes, "the right sleeve of my jacket flaps emptily as if I really had lost an arm" (p. 79). Trying to grasp these traces of fragmented memory and possibly bind them together into a sensible story, he interprets them in retrospect: "I can see perfectly well what it was that these mendable fractures . . . were meant to stand in for, although today it seems to me that the metaphor will not serve as a way of describing what had been broken—and what it was surely pointless hoping to contain within the guise of an imaginary limb. In simpler terms, these fantasy treatments, more like supports than like straitjackets, these *marks of suspension* indicated pains that could be named" (p. 80). These marks of suspension allow him to reexperience the pain and limitation in movement that he felt as a child: as a substitute for the unbearable psychic pain that filled his inner world, the fragmentation of memory was followed by the fracture of limbs.

History was thus innovatively opened to him, not just as an archive of memory traces that he was bound to collect and restore but as an inner movement that he could call his own. His innovative *Zeit-raum* enabled him to dream (*träumen*) himself in a new way and to transform himself from compulsive archivist into creative archaeologist or historian. In his well-known 1978 novel *Life: A User's Manual,* the protagonist, Bartlebooth, dedicates his life to creating watercolor paintings of landscapes from around the world, having them cut up into jigsaw puzzles, solving the puzzles, and then immediately destroying the reassembled paintings. This incredible life mission, over the course of which Bartlebooth gradually loses his eyesight, is a beautiful image for Perec's insight into his own life mission as the sole survivor of his family, who did not leave any offspring of his own. Residues of the past cannot be experienced only as archived memory traces, for in this form they remain foreign and alienated from the experiencing self. They need to find their

path to be experienced in Benjamin's *Zeit-raum,* the space of dreaming and awakening. Perec destined his writing to be the living continuation of his genealogy, his eternal mark. His work presents the transition of his experience, from recollected archived data to the living impression of the fragmented remains of his ruined archaeological site. His post-analysis writing shows that the challenging task of representation he faced was made possible only after he had implicitly acknowledged the inherent fragmentation of those remains.

Perec's autobiography opens with this inherent fragmentation and the distinct dialectics of presence and absence:

> I have no childhood memories. Up to my twelfth year or thereabouts, my story comes to barely a couple of lines: I lost my father at four, my mother at six; I spent the war in various boarding houses at Villard-de-Lans. In 1945, my father's sister and her husband adopted me.
>
> For years, I took comfort in such an absence of history: its objective crispness, its apparent obviousness, its innocence protected me; but what did they protect me from, if not precisely from my history, the story of my living, my real story, my own story, which presumably was neither crisp nor objective, nor apparently obvious, nor obviously innocent? [1975, p. 6].

The search for lost history as a living experience weaves a thread between Freud, Benjamin, and Perec, three great Jewish writers who lived and worked in a Europe torn by two world wars. The task they charged themselves with was to rescue meaning from annihilation, reconstruct archaeological residues from buried tombs, grasp and glue together fragments of a broken vessel, and find their lost story. History evolves through collecting, restoring, and redefining past evidence and establishing an archive of memory traces. Yet the past can be only partially grasped and re-created within the craft of archiving. The archive is a space that is created with the aim of capturing time, in terms of history and remembrance, of saving reminiscences from the claws of forgetfulness. The movement of life is created within the ability to free these archived memory traces, allow them to move in the inner *Zeit-raum,* and capture momentary experiences that take place in a flash of *co-incidence* between dreaming and waking. This movement gives life to the recollected data that lie statically in the archive. The historical texture is thus woven into the dialectics of the archive and its ruin, the veil and the veiled, dream and awakening.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Freud suggested that the archaeological site is where historical truth exists, buried. Approximately three decades later, faced with the atrocities of war, Benjamin created a *Zeit-raum* for the abandoned Parisian arcades through fragmented and minor residues of an historical culture. In the traumatic aftermath of the Holocaust, Perec reconstructs the childhood memoir of a forgotten childhood, struggling to present his absent story, avoid obsessive and repetitive recollection, and represent the continuous fragmentation that traumatic experiences leave on memory and on the very ability to tell a story. In retrospect, we can acknowledge the historical context of writing for each of these three as being the time-space or dream-space of three distinct epochs. As Benjamin writes, "Every epoch has such a side turned toward dreams, the child's side" (1982, p. 388).

Perec arrives at his awakening through both the holding environment provided by the routine of his analysis and his acknowledgment of the fragmentation of memory. Benjamin's *Zeit-raum,* the space of dreaming and awakening, is first freed up for Perec by his acknowledging fragmentation, which allows him, post-analysis, to reconstruct his memories creatively in his writing. Only after gaining access to this distinct space can his story be re-created, and his voice be found:

> I am not writing in order to say that I shall say nothing. I am not writing to say that I have nothing to say. I write: I write because we lived together, because I was one amongst them, a shadow amongst their shadows, a body close to their bodies. I write because they left in me their indelible mark, whose trace is writing. Their memory is dead in writing; writing is the memory of their death and the assertion of my life [Perec 1975, p. 42].

Perec overcomes the witnessless state of his past, caused by his early loss, and leaves his eternal mark. His "Species of Spaces" concludes with these words:

> Space melts like sand running through one's fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds:
>
> To write: to try meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive; to wrest a few precise scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs [1974, pp. 91–92].

ORCID iD

Anat Tzur Mahalel https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2690-9146

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Bucerius Institute
University of Haifa Faculty of Education
9 Haviva Reich Street
Haifa 3220705
ISRAEL
Email: anatmahalel@gmail.com