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Deciphering the Silence: A Literary Journey to Alice E. Kober

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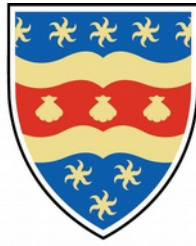
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UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

**DECIPHERING THE SILENCE:
A LITERARY JOURNEY TO ALICE E. KOBER**

by
REGINA DÜRIG

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Art, Design and Architecture

January 2021

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

The following external institutions were visited for consultation purposes:

- Ventris Papers at the Institute of Classical Studies at the School of Advanced Study University of London (16-17 July 2019)
- Classical Studies Room at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (3-4 July 2019)
- Alice Kober Papers at PASP (Program for Aegean Scripts and Prehistory) at the University of Texas, Austin (2-30 October 2017)

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'Schreiben als Werkzeug der Zerrüttung – Überlegungen zum literarischen Schreiben als Erkenntnisprozess.' *Journal für Psychologie*, 1/2020
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'Writing ghosts: How to enter the room inside' Proceedings of Taboo–Transgression–Transcendence, *Interdisciplinary Conference*, Ionian University, Department of Audio and Visual Arts, ISBN: 978-960-7260-60-4, 2017

'The bird in brackets: Arguments for artistic research from a writer's perspective.', *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, Volume 15, Issue 3, 2017
https://doi.org/10.1386/tear.15.3.311_1

'Dust–Image–Fragments–Ghosts.' *Ubiquity: The Journal of Pervasive Media*, Volume 5, 2016
https://doi.org/10.1386/ubiq.5.1.139_1

'The Onion Pie as Souvenir–The in Between of Writing as a Space of Meeting the Other.' *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, Volume 13, Issue 3, 2015

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'Literal transitions From ORGANIC to DIGITAL in a Constrained Writing Piece.' *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, Volume 12, Issue 2 & 3, 2014

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Pieces/performances:

55 minute audio drama 'Das Schweigen entziffern' about Alice Kober and my journey to her (realised together with Christian Müller as Butterland), commissioned by Swiss national radio SRF, forthcoming, summer 2020

'Journey to Alice' approx. 40 minute live piece with Christian Müller as Butterland, performed in five iterations so far:

- 12 September 2019: Serdce, St. Petersburg, Russia
- 28 July 2019: Open Studio Show, Landis & Gyr Residency, London, UK
- 7 December 2018: Literaturcafé, Biel, Switzerland
- 26 October 2018: Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany
- 20 October 2018: zoom in Festival, Bern, Switzerland

Presentations at conferences:

27 May 2017, Writing Ghosts: How to enter the room inside, Taboo–Transgression–Transcendence, Ionian University, Department of Audio & Visual Arts, Corfu, Greece

27 November 2016, The bird in brackets: Arguments for artistic research from a writer's perspective, Consciousness Reframed Conference, Shanghai, China

23 July 2016, Die Mitte der Zwei – Erzählen zwischen literarischem Text und autoethnografischer Methodik, poster presented at Berliner Methodentreffen Qualitative Forschung, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

3 July 2016, Dust–Image–Fragments–Ghosts, Transimage Conference, Plymouth University, UK

6 May 2016, Blanks – Connecting the In-Between, Cairotronica, Cairo International Electronic and New Media Arts Symposium, American University Cairo, Egypt

22 November 2015, How to Write the Immaterial, Consciousness Reframed Conference, DeTao Shanghai Centre at SIVA, Institute of Visual Arts, Shanghai, China

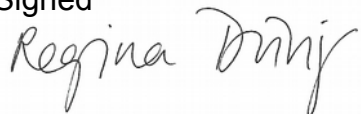
16 July 2015, The Onion Pie as Souvenir. The in Between of Writing as a Space of Meeting the Other, Undivided Mind Conference, Plymouth University, UK

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Word count of main body of thesis:
theory part: 47'578, practice part: 40'750 (of which 6'954 are quotations from the archive material)

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Regina Dinić', written in a cursive style.

Date: January 19, 2020

Abstract

Deciphering the Silence: A Literary Journey to Alice E. Kober

by Regina Dürig

On Thursday, 28 September 2017, I embarked upon my Journey to Alice Kober: 48 hours in trains taking me from New York City, where she had lived all her life, to Austin, Texas, where everything that she left behind is stored today. 48 hours of shades of green and mustardy yellow, 48 hours of train whistles, drip coffee and blunt panic attacks from being tucked away under the plastic roof of the compartment at night. 48 hours of hope and expectations regarding the archive material, of finding what has been lost. My journey to Alice Kober's archive, to her still-existing traces, to her home, but also to her as a character, as an obsession, as an idea which is the setting and material for this project, which circles around the in-between, the absent present, and explores writing in the conditions of silence.

My research is a literary exploration of American classicist Alice Kober's archive. Literary in the sense of embracing fabulatory strategies, of working within language rather than using language as an instrument (cf. Barthes: *From Literature to Science*). I propose silence and the space to disappear as method-metaphors of writing, thinking and teaching writing *within* language, based on Foucault's concept of Heterotopia and the Oulipian conception of constrained writing.

I am a writer with an extensive artistic practice and I think and write, including when doing research, with my writer's body. This is to say, I follow my hand to examine Barthes' juxtaposition of the bodies of literature and science, which are, roughly, represented by Alice Kober and myself. I will, in writing, inhabit her ever-so-distant body to experience what cannot be known. Revisiting the available documents with artistic means is, given the limitations in source material, a consequential approach to deepening our knowledge about Alice Kober.

To substantiate the importance of not-knowing and partial, local narratives, I draw on poststructuralist and feminist theories which also feed into my poetics of absence. I discuss the idea of writing *within* language from different perspectives, including writing projects I have realised during the research process. By exploring Alice Kober's life in a collection of prose fragments featuring unpublished excerpts from her correspondence, I strive to foster creative writing as a method in artistic research, celebrating Luce Irigaray's idea of silence as the first word that we speak to each other.

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“She wasn’t there, so I had to invent her.”

Anne Carson

You were there, and yet I strived to invent you. I was there and yet I had to invent me, word by word. The work on this thesis has been a journey more than anything. Quite literally, as I went to New York (USA), to Austin (USA), to Stuttgart (Germany), and to London (UK) to do my research and write. But also metaphorically, very much so, as the original idea of writing you back into the world soon slivered in my hands, into my thoughts and took me to projects I would have never imagined. All of them have circled around different consistencies of silence, of finding a language of some sort. A language that can tell what can’t be told.

Opening—I, the Camel

Your fear, Alice, was being led in circles by invalid assumptions without knowing it. Your unease with all sorts of latency or voids. I know it, too: if I have to climb a flight of open stairs. My certainty as a child (and still, today, my suspicion): that I will blunder into the gaping stair boards with one wrong step, and from there fall all the way down right into the idle stacks of boxes or home accessories. I take your hand, Alice, and we jump off, and while we fall, we have time to take a good look at everything. I see nothing. I read every single letter, every paper, every notebook in your archive, and there are many in those cramped three rooms in the basement of the classics building. I know everything about you as a scholar, but still so very little about you as a daughter, a friend, a woman. I know you were very close to being appointed professor at Penn. I know you brailled the exam papers for the blind students at Brooklyn College, where you worked. I know you sent coffee, sweets and oranges to Johannes Sundwall in Sweden in the years after the war. I know you strived to create a research centre for Minoan languages to facilitate access to the little Linear B script material that existed, and to foster exchange among the researchers. I get the sense of a kind, generous and spirited woman, but only between the lines, the type.

You let go of my hand for a moment and our fingers intertwine. It was of no value, you say. My fingertips on the back of your hand. I knew that I'd have to invent things in order to write you back into the world. But I didn't anticipate that I would feel childish compared to your determination and your unquestionably brilliant mind. You: meticulous lines with the finest pen, I: a set of crayons. Our fall velocity decreases.

Over a whole month of intense reading, opening archival boxes, talking to the experts I didn't find a single comment or thought that wasn't meant to be there: no glimpse, no glitch. No accidents, no re-used paper with unintentional words on the reverse side, no slippage. But on my last day in the archive, in the last drawer I pulled it out: a little ring binder.

In it was Hittite homework, probably from 1941. On one of the last pages, you wrote in German and in pencil: “When grass has grown over all the good things, for sure some camel comes along to eat it all away.” It is a slightly skewed version of a line attributed to the 19th century author Wilhelm Busch—in which in the original grass has grown over “a bad thing” not “all good things”, as you put it.

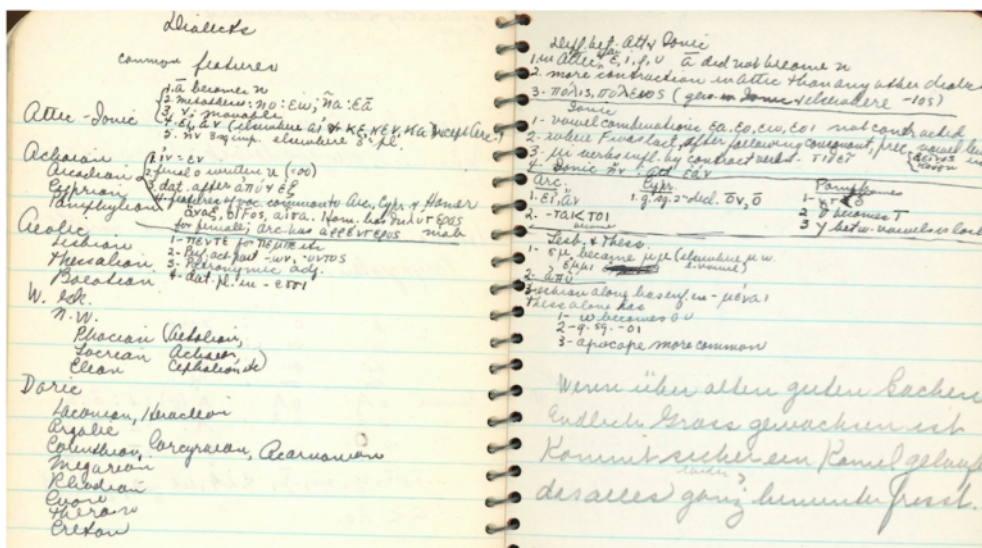


Image 1: Alice Kober’s ring binder with the camel quote in pencil on the right page. PASP, uncategorised. Reproduction: Christian Müller.

I don’t know what Wilhelm Busch meant to you, if the line was a saying you knew from your parents who (as immigrants from Austria-Hungary) surely knew of him, or if you knew his illustrated stories. For me, they are quite significant: The Collected Stories of Wilhelm Busch was the only book (a big, red volume) my dad would read to us on the rare occasions that he was at home in the evening and took the time to be with us (I think the rather harsh sense of humour in Busch’s stories was how he himself made sense of the world, the bitter taste of consequences’ cavalcades was what he wanted us to understand), my brother was always the one allowed to stick his little index finger randomly between two of the many pages to choose

our bedtime story: the raven and the wine, the bed full of May beetles, the twin rascals processed into flour.

“Let grass grow over something” is a German saying equivalent to “time heals all wounds”, so the Busch quote is all about some troublemaker stirring up what should have been left in peace. The camel, enchanté, that’s me.

I looked around in the dim archive room: yes, I looked up, not to but beyond the ceiling panels. Heaven and afterlife in a symmetric pattern of pale fibre squares, gravely convinced that you were addressing me, that you had found a way to disclose your disapproval of me standing there, having touched many of your residues for the very first time, as it seemed, because most of them are still not catalogued or digitised, sit in their dressers, drawers and boxes, just the way your mother gave them to the museum in Pennsylvania (see letter from Katharina Kober to JS, 23 August 1950, PASP, Box 58). I was probably the first person to read your letters in German, sharing the same mother tongue. “But I am on your side”, I wanted to say, “I am not going to nibble away what was good. On the contrary, I want to keep it, make it grow.” For a long time, this find was unsettling for me. The friction that it provoked provided the energy for this work. A project in which silence became writing. In this proposition I am as determined as you were. This is why I’d like to think that you would, after all, understand my work, or maybe even approve.

Or was it not all about you discrediting me, but trying to shoo me away? You died young, at 43, in the middle of your deciphering work. Literally, in the middle of it: I found an index card you had cut from a letter you had received, written on 8 May 1950. You died a mere eight days later, after having suffered for nearly two years, after a self-imposed diet, after surgery. It is said it was a gastric carcinoma, despite being weak and in pain you kept working on the problem of Linear B until there was no energy left. You went, and Michael Ventris, who solved the riddle in 1952, died four years

later in a car crash aged 34. Franklin Daniel died at 38 in a car in Turkey, looking for a new excavation site.

I looked up beyond the ceiling panels, but up there was only one of these bland fluorescent tubes, suspended, without the slightest glint. No warning. No curse. The drawer's metallic sigh when I closed it, as high-pitched as unforgiving. I was convinced—a part of me still is—that what your sentence commented on was my methods more than the imminent end of my life, because, in fact, it was you who found me, it was you who stirred me up.

I can't remember in which book I came across the footnote that mentioned the Linear B script. All I know is that it was in the first year of my research, and I think it must have been either in a commentary on Wittgenstein—the link between Linear B and his thoughts is rather adventurous, though—or in a book about Eros. Back then, my research topic was *Love & Ghosts—A Literary Exploration of the Space in Between as a Place of Meeting the Other*, and despite my honest efforts to narrow down what I was interested in (language, writing, the ghostly, the absent present) I was overwhelmed by all sorts of ideas, feedback and references. The book about Eros demonstrated how he had not been one of the original Olympian Gods but a late addendum, a sequel to human longing, pain and misery. Amidst all that, possibly, was the footnote about Linear B. I wondered how a script called Linear B might look like. I imagined stave or cursive, many little lines, neatly stacked in any case. I Googled it and found, after following some links, your story. What struck me the most was your dedication and obsession for your work, for the decipherment. But also, I found language and scripts. Daughterhood, womanhood in a male world. Lacking. Insisting. Traveling. Losing against time.

By the way, you are perfectly right, I am a camel. I am interested in the decipherment as a backdrop or reality for your story, but I cannot read Lin-

ear B, I can only follow the basic lines of the intellectual efforts which eventually led to the realisation that it was ancient Greek, which was written in a mostly syllabic script. I am a camel that doesn't know any Greek: just, vaguely, Latin. I do not want to expose, though, what should be kept covered, overgrown, hidden. I feel a very strong responsibility towards you, your achievements and your life. I had never worked on a project like this one: a writing project based on an authentic story which I want to honour in my text. As intriguing as it was to imagine the text, what it might look like in the end, it was also incredibly hard to write, to get started with writing. The reason for this restraint is exactly what I am interested in: the absent present. You are not all that absent: after all, you sit there, across from me, carefully stirring half a teaspoon of sugar in your black tea. Now that you have died, you don't suffer from pain anymore, you don't have to diet, your strength has returned.

You aren't comfortable on my faux-leather easy chair, because the seat is too low and too wide. Your thighs point up slightly and your woollen skirt feels like it is sliding down. You wish you'd worn flat shoes, and, who would have thought, trousers. You think that I am wasting your time, but you are too polite to say so out loud. But your eyes do, the softness of the skin beneath them does.

You have to know: I am quite good at observing, noticing, seeing through surfaces. Maybe this is my only ability, or at least the only one I have mastered. In my writing, I am very much aware of the world and its inhabitants: to me, writing is all about the creation of spaces. Let me assure you that this text will explain and argue for its form and tone and right and relevance. As a camel, I am aware that this is a balancing act, especially for an even-toed ungulate, but as a writer I have to take the risk. Trust me.

You don't know where to direct your gaze. You break the butter cookie in two halves by lifting one side from the plate and pushing down your thumb. You put the piece in your mouth, drink a sip of tea, use the moisture to let pastry melt on your tongue, and you swallow silently.

Introduction—Journey to Alice

On Thursday, 28 September 2017, I embarked upon my Journey to Alice Kober: 48 hours in trains taking me from New York City, where she had lived all her life, to Austin, Texas, where everything that she left behind is stored today. 48 hours of shades of green and mustardy yellow, 48 hours of train whistles, drip coffee and blunt panic attacks from being tucked away under the plastic roof of the compartment at night. 48 hours of hope and expectations regarding the archive material, of finding what has been lost. Lost (like my suitcase on the train) or never having existed.

Alice, as the object of my investigation is situated in a poetic space shaped by the ineffable (Eisner 1981: 8), the allusion (Lyotard 1984: 81) and silence (Irigaray 2011: 113). To meet her I have to enter that space, too, and I can do so in writing.

My journey to Alice (1906-1950)—to her archive, to her still-existing traces, to her home, but also to her as a character, as an obsession, as an idea—is the setting and material for this text, which circles around the in-between, the absent present and the concept of Heterotopia. In creative writing, I explore events or incidents that were hinted at in the archive material, but cannot be grasped or substantiated otherwise, as no other accounts or sources are available to us, seventy years after Alice Kober's death. My work proposes alternative narratives to the existing ones and alternative ways of immersing oneself in Kober's life. It is a heterotopian practice insofar as I use my imagination to transform her letters into experiences, sometimes adventurous, sometimes mundane, like kids turning their parents' bed into a ship, as Foucault describes the locally constructed utopias in the imaginary realm (see p. 158).

The driving force behind this project is first and foremost an artistic one, I am researching as a writer: my instruments are literary, my convictions poetic. As such, I embrace the formal frame of this project, that is, it being a thesis and not a novel. It creates a unique opportunity to use my own writing as a thinking machine (echoing Georges Perec's "machine à raconter",

which he constructed by composing the constraints for *La vie, mode d'emploi*, see Perec 1993: 7), to write while revealing and reflecting the process and its implications.

Researching and writing were closely intertwined in this process and led me on new paths in my artistic practice, some pieces were more than others theoretically informed and reflective than others. *Deciphering the Silence* is, as it were, a consecution and continuation of these projects, and also a whole cosmos of its own. It is not only about telling Alice E. Kober's story or stories inspired by her life and her scholarly achievements towards the decipherment of Linear B, but also about reflecting on writing as an inquiring gesture. This reflection incorporates debates about the knowledge of the arts (Borgdorff 2012), and writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson /St.Pierre 2008). I will establish a voice that comments, connects and creates the space for me to disappear as a writer (Foucault 1984 [1969]). The image of a room which exists in the writer and reader is interpreted through the concept of Heterotopia as the site of the imaginary, and has a poetic guiding function for this research:

Everyone carries a room inside him. This fact can even be proved by means of the sense of hearing. If someone walks fast and one pricks up one's ears and listens, say in the night, when everything around is quiet, one hears, for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall. (Kafka 1991 [1953]: 1)

It is into this room which I rewrite Alice, a place of language, imagination, and the here and not here. It is a place that can be witnessed but not proven. The fast walker seems alone in their room, surrounded by silence, pacing around. The listener has no place, no presence in this room (no chair, no shoes, no breath). They could be listening from next door or behind the wall, but then they'd most certainly hear the steps of the walker and not the rattling of the mirror. The listener is me and you, us, with our ears and head bent over a piece of paper containing these lines. The listener is Kafka himself, listening inside himself, bent over his blue octavo notebook, writing.

This spatial congruence of the character, the writer and the reader, as they are all inside this floating room, contains the possibility of an encounter in language.

Language and writing is the object and aim of this research on many levels. The most solid layer is Linear B itself, the Aegean script excavated in Crete in the summer of 1900 by Sir Arthur Evans, which showed that the cultural technique of script existed in the Aegean in the Bronze Age, almost 1000 years earlier than assumed—and, in fact, didn't originate on the Greek mainland. This sensation for classicists and archaeologists drove scholars throughout the world to solve the riddle—against all odds (more details are to come in the following chapters). Alice Kober was one of them, soon becoming the most important one because of her highly systematic approach. For her, the deciphering work was merely about the signs and their relations. She despised wild guesses and those who tried to find meaning before understanding the mechanics of the logical system.

“It is one thing to start by considering all the known facts, and to come to a conclusion. It is quite another to start with a perceived idea, and try to prove it. A scholar's worst enemy is his own mind” (AK, untitled manuscript, PASP, Box 54.9).

The next layer—more paper, less clay—is Alice Kober's writing, most of all her letters, but also her notes, lectures and articles, through which I met her. An encounter in her words and mine, an encounter that, like any other, is brought into existence by language.

Irigaray proposes that a place of proximity (see Irigaray 2011: 112-3) can be created in inventing a new language: one that embraces silence, different voices, and the momentary to avoid always directing words into the past by referring to what already exists. To me, this project is about creating a place or room of proximity *within* language, creating a language while walking through an inner room, while hearing the mirror rattle.

Research Question

What brought this project about and kept me pursuing it was in essence a curiosity which, at times, felt like a little blanket made from carbonic acid wrapped around me: the excitement, the echoes, the discoveries. Just like Alice, who became one of the few experts on Linear B worldwide, I became one of the few Alice Kober experts worldwide. Probably the first German speaker to read her German letters. Probably the first one to read her correspondence and pay attention to the tiniest of details. Probably the first one without an established image of her in mind which her writings were to substantiate (see chapter 3). Nevertheless, I repeatedly experienced frustration: with the limitation of the archive material, with voids, with accepting to *not* know—even though my aim from the beginning was to write Alice Kober back into the world, which included a fabulatory approach (see p. 35), I was eager to drag up new details that others had overlooked, I was secretly longing for unambiguousness. This tension soon turned into the research question which I needed to find shards of answers for in the following stages of my research, first in dialogue with theory and, eventually, through my practice itself:

How can ambiguous, missing and non-existent material in a personal, archival context like Alice Kober's case be challenged, sustained and sincerely replenished with literary means?

First, I followed what is framed in the question above with “sincerely”—ways of writing which are conscious of the responsibilities tied to a research project and to working artistically, a reflection of methods that employ writing as a method of enquiry, and a reflection of the body of

my artistic work with regards to set approaches and methodologies (chapter 2), also including teaching writing.

In this reflection of language and writing in the context of a social reality, naturally, the poststructuralist positions of Barthes and Foucault were of great importance. I read them as a writer and wrote about them as a writer. This is to say, I purposely balanced theory and practice in a slightly unbalanced way—with more focus on practice. I've tried throughout to explain or describe, as tangibly as possible the framework of my literary work: what telling feels like, what using language feels like, what being silent feels like, what being forced to remain silent feels like. *Feels like* as a naïve formula for all that can be known and said about these actions or states explicitly. My aim was to create a comprehensive account of working *within language*: another concept by Barthes at the centre of my methodology which was confirmed and restated by Luce Irigaray. My unbalanced balancing of theory and artistic practice was and is supported by her demands for a new, sensitive and open use of language:

[...] without reducing this gesture [of communicating with another subject] to passing on some information, we must change our way of talking, our use of words—we must be attentive to use words that in themselves conserve life and pass it on instead of passing on only information. We must use a language that remains breathful, alive, sensible. (Irigaray 2002: 87)

I am, in this research, passing on information and I am doing so by using words (whenever it is possible for me) which “conserve life”: beneath the question of where to position myself in or towards the Kober archive material, there are many methodical questions. Some of these are: what does a literary exploration look like? When is writing aware of the language's potential for “disturbance of the essential concepts of our culture” (Barthes 1967: 5)? How can a researcher/writer enter “the complete space of language, with its logical subversions, the mixing of its codes, with its slippages, its dialogues, its parodies” (Barthes 1967: 9)?

There are (many) aspects of these questions that cannot be answered in theory, only in or with the making. This is another aim, hidden in the word *evoked* from above: making the making reveal itself, talk about itself. The other aspects (for instance the *ambiguity*, the material which is *missing*) I addressed through closely examining the notion of silence (chapter 4), of the absent present, departing from Foucault's concept of Heterotopia, in different realms: in the author's practice and position in general (chapter 6), in being (or becoming) a female writer (chapter 4), in writing fragments (chapter 7). What made the absent present so important for my work was that it *paved the way* for establishing space as an image to think about writing, which led me to incorporate ideas of the Oulipo writers, with whose methods I have been working for years. Also, it bears in itself a certain blurriness which may contribute to a breathful body of theory that, hopefully, has the power to inspire writing and creative writing research projects other than mine. Writing that has the power to "expose the question the answer hides" (Baldwin 1962: 19).

Methodology

In the first phase of the research, before I had chosen the Kober project, I created a fairly large body of creative work informed by readings about writing, narrative and Heterotopia. It was a phase of a broad search in many directions which led, eventually, to the Kober project and a focus on creative writing as a method in the context of artistic research.

This decision was propelled by the fact that I was awarded a six month artist residency in New York by the Canton of Berne (August 2017-January 2018). My stay in the US allowed me to be a visiting scholar at the University of Texas at Austin during October 2017, where I had round-the-clock access to the Kober material at PASP (Program for Aegean Scripts and Prehistory), and was kindly welcomed and accompanied by Prof. Tom Palaima and his team. In those four weeks, I went through all of Alice Kober's letters, notes and notebooks multiple times, extracting passages that were relevant in terms of her work and everyday life.

To continue my work on the Kober project, I was invited to be a fellow of Akademie Schloss Solitude, Germany, from June to October 2018, and to be artist in residence in London, UK, from February to August 2019 by the Swiss culture foundation Landis & Gyr.

During my residency in London I visited the Classical Studies Room at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (July 3-4) where, thanks to Dr. Andrew Shapland, I had access to the Kober-Myres correspondence originals and Linear B tablets. I was also granted access to the Ventris Papers at the Institute of Classical Studies (IoCS) at the School of Advanced Study University of London (July 16-17) by Dr. Olga Krzyszkowska.

In the Kober archive my first step was to review the material, with a focus on the letters and talks/papers Alice had given in conferences and as a

speaker for different societies and institutions. I did this firstly, because they have not been published, and secondly because they are the most personal of her writings that exist.

I read the documents several times, paying attention to all the details, especially those which allude to otherwise unmentioned events, relations, feelings. What I was trying to do was find hints that would allow me to better understand Alice as a human being, and ultimately, to be able to write her as a character. To understand a character, means finding the little edge of vulnerability and of oddness that everyone has, understanding their desires and weaknesses which cause the friction vital to actually telling a story.

I took notes while going through Alice's correspondence, re-typed large portions of the Kober-Daniel and Kober-Sundwall correspondences, and compiled the paragraphs in her letters in which she talks about family, friends, the illness, the war, and her journeys. In addition to this categorisation, I registered major events during the years while she was working on the decipherment in a timeline.

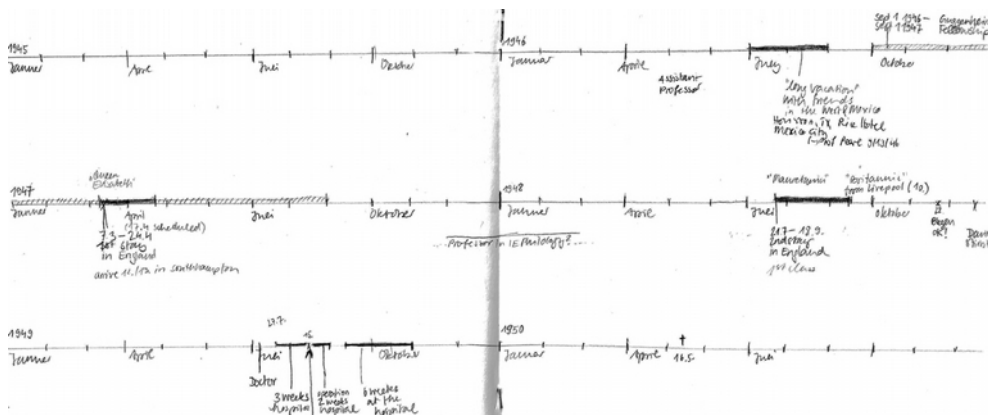


Image 2: Timeline of major events in Alice Kober's life 1945-1950, scan from my notebook

Originally, I had planned to start writing just after my stay in Texas (or even while still there), but I was very much overwhelmed by Alice's presence—at times it felt like she was in the room with me, looking over my shoulders. I grappled with her belief in objectivity or empiricism in general

(see chapter 1) and needed to legitimise the project for myself, to find my own way of dealing with the responsibility that comes with writing about a historical person. What followed was a period of silence, of suffering from Alice's presence (in my thoughts) and absence (in my writing), in which I reviewed research methods with proximity to creative writing (see chapter 2), to ultimately envision an approach for my own project which balances the doubts and possibilities encompassed in creative writing with the responsibility and demands of a research context in a comprehensive and productive way.

Constraints and Guidelines for the Practice Part

The literary exploration of Alice Kober's archive is a collection of prose fragments (for a discussion of fragments as a literary form, see chapter 7) that either:

- a) respond to certain aspects of Alice's letters;
- b) reflect on certain aspects of Alice's letters;
- c) fictionalise certain events that must have, one way or other, taken place, based on the information given in Alice's letters;
- d) present and discuss new material on Alice's life that I found by following hints in her letters/documents;
- e) are a combination of the above-mentioned possibilities.

In the cases in which I have fictionalised, I put the text into context by referencing significant passages from Alice's correspondence that I had in mind when writing. To clearly mark the fictionalised parts, they are presented in a different font and always start with three asterisks. To further highlight their status as alternative possibilities, I give, whenever possible, more than one fictional version of a certain event. Sometimes they contradict each other, sometimes they have different areas of focus. To be

able to do this, I've tried to write intuitively, to immerse myself in the given scene without thinking it through in minute detail. The rule was to leave the first draft (smaller changes during the editing were allowed) and to write a new first draft, if I felt something had to be done differently.

The fragments are nestled into Alice's own voice in her correspondence, which is, from time to time, halted by longer cohorts of fragments, mostly regarding my findings and their implications. While the literary exploration is conscious of its narrativity and is aware and excited to be the first in-depth discussion of Alice Kober's correspondence, it is, in the form at hand, not a manuscript for a book yet, for three reasons:

It does not repeat basic information about Alice Kober or Linear B or the decipherment given in the theory part of the thesis.

It keeps track of the sources/references to make my writing traceable for other scholars interested in Kober.

It is structured and constructed in a way that implies a writer's perspective more than a reader's perspective.

The process of telling Alice's story for a wider audience will occur after this research is finished, based on the material found, insights gathered and writing done during this research.

It will be the first fiction (well, half-fiction) book entirely dedicated to Alice E. Kober. To my knowledge there is only one other literary text in which she appears, *The Element -inth in Greek* by Scottish author Alison Fell (2012) (see chapter 3), who helped, with her research for the book, to build up the information on Alice Kober's family story which is accessible in PASP. Her text is about Ingrid Laurie's, the main character's, research on Alice Kober's life—factual paragraphs are scattered throughout the detective and romance novel in italics, visibly separating the fiction from fact.

My project is entirely different, in the sense that it uses literary strategies to explore hints and motifs I found in Alice's letters. It is less about repeating the facts from the archive, than departing from them, interrogating or interpreting them in the creative realm. In this process, I chose those particular moments in which insights are revealed that are not mentioned or followed up by the two nonfiction books which cover Alice Kober (Fox: *The Riddle of the Labyrinth*, 2013, Robinson: *The Man who Deciphered Linear B*, 2002). With this process, I put forward the idea of poetic knowledge that opens up new spaces for thinking about the unknowable.

It is noticeable in more than one case that Fox and Fell rely heavily on the same sources—namely the Kober Papers at PASP. While Fell conveys more of the facts regarding the family background and Fox is more concerned with the methodological background of the decipherment, both authors repeat (for example) Kober's chain smoking on the basis of the cigarette boxes as ersatz filing cabinets and draw a comparison to Rosalind Franklin in discussing the fate of being deprived of scientific merit due to an untimely death. This is not to say that any of this information is incorrect. It is more that the limitation of the available material seen from a biographical perspective becomes apparent in factually-oriented writing. This is why a fabulatory approach (see p. 35) is needed, which embraces intuition, imagination and voids, ultimately, a reconciliation of the two bodies of literature and science (see p. 31).

The Notion of the Anarchive

In his 2015 article *AnArcheology for AnArchives: Why Do We Need—Especially for the Arts—A Complementary Concept to the Archive?* Siegfried Zielinski unfolds his concept of the “anarchive”, a term he has coined to describe artists' archives—stacks of works, references and material organised in a way that follows personal principles, work-process-logic or available space, rather than externally accessible systems.

They [anarchives] do not, however, lay claim to leadership. Nor do they claim to truthfully know where things come from and where they may be headed to. The origin is and remains a trap. Anarchives do not follow any external purpose; they indulge in waste and offer presents. Basically, they are indebted to a single economy, that of friendship. And friendship, as Georges Bataille would have it (1971), is characterized by an acute feeling of strangeness in the world, which we occasionally share with others. (Zielinski 2015: 122)

While the Kober papers at PASP are fully organised and even partly digitised, the concept of the anarchivite resonates with this research insofar that I was the prefix of anarchy in the archive: I used it for my own logic's sake, I restructured the items in my memory and in notes to serve my process and purpose. I, as an artist, became an anarchivist amidst the neatly labelled boxes. I, too, am indebted to the economy of friendship, whose currency is my "own strangeness in the world". My mindset, with which I immersed myself in the Kober archive, was from the beginning gentle and attentive, but not uncritical, not uncritical of myself, too, of my own position. What drew me to Alice was her strangeness in the world in which I saw my own strangeness, although mine takes a different shape.

The idea of the anarchivite recognises the value of alternative propositions, of simultaneity, and the absence of power. I, as an anarchivist, did so in my own work too. I followed my own thoughts and the inspirations I got from the material. I allowed myself to get lost, to lose or deliberately misplace ideas and preconceptions. In the archive itself, as goes without saying, I was anxious not to disorganise the papers, to leave the order in order, so to speak.

Knowledge Community and New Knowledge

The literary exploration of Alice Kober's archive, as it is presented in this thesis, is a contribution to the field of classics, in which I am a dilettante. It offers alternative views of long-standing representations of Alice Kober. In one case, I was able to show that conclusions drawn in earlier

publications and biographies simply couldn't have been true. This concerns the alleged meeting between Kober and Ventris in 1948 in Oxford: While this incident is usually interpreted against Alice Kober and used as evidence for her cold and somewhat self-opinionated behaviour, I was able to show that this meeting, in all likelihood, never happened. Apart from an archive find what guided me was my writer's instinct or sensorium for the situation and social constellation Alice Kober was in. It is downright impossible to write such a meeting with such a bad outcome that would, henceforth, never be referenced by any of the involved (for an in depth exploration see pp. 331).

The literary exploration of Alice Kober's archive is also a contribution to the field of creative writing in the context of artistic research. The *fabulatory approach* (see p. 35) is a method that I developed during this project and that I propose for exploring archives and other historical documents. It is a research method informed by an artistic writing practice, which can provide insights, questions and doubts regarding existing master narratives. It is playful and imaginative but also sensitive and serious in its immersion into the historic context and its particularities. This balance allows for creating knowledge and for understanding what cannot be known.

Aim: Creating a Space of Writing *Within*

Barthes stated in his 1967 article *From Literature to Science*, which was published in *The Times Literature Supplement*, that science (he was addressing the debate of what was being taught at universities and what wasn't) and literature are, while sharing certain methods and aims, fundamentally different in their way of approaching language: "science speaks itself; literature writes itself; science is led by the voice, literature follows the hand; it is not the same body, and hence the same desire, which is behind the one and the other" (Barthes 1967: 5).

While science needs and depends on language, it does not take place in language itself; science uses language to communicate the ideas or facts found with other instruments. It doesn't question language. This means that literature "is alone today in bearing the entire responsibility for language; for though science needs language, it is not, like literature, *within* language" (Barthes 1967: 5). I read this thought as a logical utopia, which does not mean all research must be writing, but writing must, if one follows the simplest means of science, namely logic, be or become part of the discourse in the sciences.¹

What Barthes demands of language is self-confidence and subversiveness, right up to the disintegration of the essential concepts of our culture:

Language is the *being* of literature, its very world: all literature is contained in the act of writing [...]. Ethically, it is solely by its passage through language that literature pursues the disturbance of the essential concepts of our culture, 'reality' chief among them. Politically, it is by professing (and illustrating) that no language is innocent, it is by employing what might be called an 'integral language' that literature is revolutionary. (Barthes 1967: 5-6)

As a trained and published writer, I *follow the hand* when I write, and also in doing research I have a writer's body. This is to say, my aim is to establish an in-between-space which encourages thinking and working *within* the language, balancing or expanding the writing into a dialogue with texts falling in Barthes' category of *science*.

Obviously, time has passed since Barthes' statement of the separation between science and literature, and today we see many approaches which strive to bring them closer together (see chapter 1), but keeping the separation proved productive as a starting point, especially since the image of two bodies resonates for me, with the two bodies of Alice Kober and myself.

¹ Cixous demands the the feminine writing (her way of phrasing the writing *within* language) to be "an inscribing of some sort; it will be [...] not as much a mastered writing, that is, a writing that is aware of writing and observes itself while writing, but an alive writing, ungraspable, in the realm of the subconscious, the phantasms" (Cixous 1980 [1977], 23, my translation), or, in a more poetic framing: "We [women] don't manufacture word-objects, no cans, no jewel boxes, no 'book'. We create paths, in movements" (Cixous 1980 [1977]: 20, my translation).

How can I make them meet without destroying the world “which is proper to each one” (Irigaray 2011: 112)?

Method-metaphors

To guide my research on Alice Kober *within* language, I have established two images that, for me, contain and create Barthes’ idea of a language that is not a tool, but an apparatus itself: silence and absence. I call them method-metaphors, to emphasise the fact that they are not methods in a science-driven understanding: they are not instructive, they are not definite, as this would automatically encourage the use of language as a tool. They are images, encouraging an unfolding in language, personal and poetic. I will carry out my personal unfolding of those two method-metaphors in chapters 5 (silence) and 6 and 7 (absence), interweaving reflective and creative practice to create a poetic thick description of my approach.

The image of *silence* is strongly based on Luce Irigaray’s writings, in particular her text *How Can We Meet the Other?* (2011). With a different argumentation and aim than Barthes, she, too, contrasts language that speaks *of* things (which equals the use of language to communicate) with the desired language that speaks *with* the other (language that is not a tool, but an action, an instance of welcoming openness):

Silence is the word, or the speaking, of the threshold—a space of possible meeting, of possible hospitality to one another. If silence does not exist in our discourse, this one loses its most important function: communicating with the other and not just transmitting information. Speaking *with* has to find its role again without being subjected to speaking *of*. (Irigaray 2011: 114)

The image of *absence* is also connected to the concept of *working within*, via the artist’s responsibility in relation to the society following writer and activist James Baldwin. In his 1962 essay *The Creative Process*, he as-

signs a secluded position to artists (who, in his view, are researchers, but not scientists): a deep loneliness determines their existence, a fundamental separation from all other agents. The artists have to challenge the majorities' narratives by embracing the certainty that they cannot contain the complexities of our lives and worlds. What enables them to do so is precisely the fact that they think inside but are, themselves, outside common social structures (I will elaborate on the motif of Heterotopia and writing as opening a space to disappear in chapter 6):

The artist is distinguished from all other responsible actors in society—the politicians, legislators, educators, and scientists—by the fact that he is his own test tube, his own laboratory, working according to very rigorous rules, however unstated these may be, and cannot allow any consideration to supersede his responsibility to reveal all that he can possibly discover concerning the mystery of the human being. Society must accept some things as real; but he must always know that visible reality hides a deeper one, and that all our action and achievement rest on things unseen. A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven. One cannot possibly build a school, teach a child, or drive a car without taking some things for granted. The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides. (Baldwin 1962: 19)

The image of artists who are their own test tubes, their own laboratories, (this is to say that they share the scientists' desire to understand the relations of the world, but as they are not implied in existing discourses, they can be more radical and profound in their scrutiny) can be seen as a variation of Barthes' statement that writing as a total code contains the scientific code and thus is the only way to introduce poetic, pluralistic and peripheral knowledge:

[...] writing seeks to be a total code, including its own forces of destruction. It follows that only writing can break the theological image imposed by science, can reject the paternal terror spread by the abusive 'truth' of contents and reasonings [...]. (Barthes 1967: 9)

What follows on from these considerations is the basic layout of this research as deeply rooted in language and the belief that language is not innocent, cannot be used in a neutral mode. The two method-metaphors *silence* and *absence* are interior imprints which, upon being unfolded in detail in between theory positions and literary texts, trickled through my writing about Alice. They informed my vigilant and compassionate immersion in the archive material and my writing *within* it.

The Fabulatory Approach

I found the word *fabulatory*, or it found me, while I attended an artists' talk and film presentation by Silvia Maglioni and Graeme Thomson at the Whitechapel Gallery (*Border Struggles (of the Common Birds)*, 16 May 2019) in London. The word is not on the handout which compiled important texts for the pair, all of them from Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. I don't remember who said the word or whether the voice was soft or coarse, or if it came from afar.

While the adjective is a neologism, the verb 'fabulate' is found in the dictionary, and means either 'to create fables' or to 'relate an event as fable'. 'Fabulieren' in German means the same, telling stories in an imaginative way or embellishing stories in a detailed way. There is a slight oscillation between reality and fiction contained in the word, as a fable has, in some cases, a connection to our actions and being in the world, which it tries to explain morally or guide by a narrative, usually acted out by animals; the fox, the donkey, the stork...and the camel? I, in my animal capacity in this research project, found that there are in fact two qualities of fictionalising. There is fictionalising which imagines what could have been (see the chapter *Body* in the practice part, page 256)—I wrote scenes based on information from the correspondence, I imagined how Alice would have behaved in a certain situation into which I placed her, so to speak. But there is also fictionalising which points out what could not have been. This approach

was not planned, but became apparent while I was writing the chapter *Oxford and Ventris* (see page 331).

While researching the alleged meeting between Alice Kober and Michael Ventris in Oxford in August 1948, about which I've always had strange feelings (the way it is presented in the literature always seemed *wrong* to me, or at least *not quite right*), I could show *within* writing, by trying to write it as a fictional scene, that it must have happened differently. It is this process, this particular piece of writing, which demonstrates the idea of creative writing as a method in (artistic) research most comprehensibly. Doing what a writer does (creating coherent characters that have goals and motivations, and also things to lose or risk through their actions) allowed me to reveal the instances of doubt, of unrealistic behaviour that was (up until then) believed to be true. The new knowledge this research proposes is based in the very gesture of the writing hand, in my writer's body, and is twofold: the alternative perspectives on Alice Kober's life, and the fabulatory approach as a method which brought these alternative narratives about.

The fabulatory approach as a method of inquiry requires an artistic practice: experience with writing narrative, character-driven prose, as well as compassion and the ability to engage with the given material thoroughly and openly. Without the intuition for a character and their possible courses of action, it cannot be applied. It also cannot be used to generate definitive propositions, it is a means of questioning rather than knowing, a means of comfortable doubt. In this respect, the fabulatory approach is interlinked with the notion of the anarchic (see page 29), as it can be used as a method to challenge assumed historical certainties, archives and their "consciousness fundamentally tied to power" (Zielinski 2015: 116).

A precondition to using the fabulatory approach as a means of exploring archives or other historic materials is to bear in mind the thread (of wool, of fur, of feathers) that connects the narrative with some sort of experienced or historical reality. Just as the fable is told in a way that allows for a recourse to the world the reader lives in, the fabulatory approach, as a research meth-

od, has to respectfully embrace the reality of its object of investigation and the reality of the researcher to be meaningful.

This distinction is, I am aware, quite subtle. I think I can show what I mean by “embracing reality” when I contrast the fabulatory approach with another artistic project I am working on. Since summer 2019, I have been collaborating with Berlin based artist Patrizia Bach on a dialogue between drawing and writing, in which we react to images from her extensive amateur photography collection. I write a text based on a photograph in five minutes, and she creates a drawing for another one. Later, after shuffling the drawings and texts, I write (again in five minutes) a text based on each of her drawings and she makes a drawing for each of the texts. This procedure results in two texts and two drawings per original photograph from the archive: one set of drawing and text as a direct reaction, and one set as a second order reaction.

This project is an example of an approach which I wouldn't call fabulatory, even though it is embedded in an archive and composes alternative narratives, as I do not explore the photographs in writing: I let them guide or inspire my writing. Although there is obviously a thread connecting the writings (and drawings) with some sort of reality, which had been photographed by someone at some point of time, I am not fabulating, as I don't have any background-knowledge of the circumstances of the photograph or the photographer. I am not fabulating, I am inventing: The texts I write show what I see or find peculiar in an image, what it reminds me of. The texts are more about me as a writer today than they are about the genuine moment in the past in which the photographs were taken. It is a purely artistic project, not a research project.

The fabulatory approach on the other hand can provide insights, questions and doubts regarding existing master narratives, because it is aware of the contexts and immersed in the material it investigates. Following the fabulatory approach means to know as much as possible, to subsequently allow for a sympathetic unknowing and re-imagining.

Literature Review

The literature review encompassed in this research is focused on four main topics:

- 1) Writing about Alice Kober and the decipherment of Linear B,
- 2) Alice Kober's writing (most notably her articles about the Minoan languages and Linear B),
- 3) literary references,
- 4) theoretical texts about Heterotopia, writing and artistic research.

The literature review will be presented over more than one chapter in order to allow the theoretical texts to resonate: The method of *writing within* necessitated a constant movement between philosophical concepts or ideas and my own writing. What was thus established is some sort of an echo space, in which theory and prose became interrelated. I will discuss the relevant references where they are most important, but some of them accompanied my thinking so steadily over the past four years that their influence unfolded in many ideas and pieces, in some cases probably unbeknownst to me.

Background

When I write on my typewriter, which I do regularly for first drafts, spontaneous ideas or writing exercises, for making writing more physical than it actually is—I make sure that nobody is around. Not out of consideration, but vanity. When I use the typewriter, it becomes audible how slowly I think. I am questioning instead of claiming: this is my way of seeing the world. I see incertitude and instability, and I tiptoe towards them because I don't want to frighten them away.

In hindsight, it doesn't surprise me that this research endeavour took every possible detour, as if following the cracks on a frozen lake and, through that, permanently causing new cracks. A situation in which “the only salvation is speed” (Bauman quoting Emerson, 2003: xii), Zygmunt Bauman would have shouted to me benevolently from the bank, maybe even waving an arm. But instead of speeding up I stayed right where I was, examining crack after crack.

From Code to Love

In the first preliminary sketch of my research, which was initially rooted in my Master's thesis but soon took on a different direction (in my thesis I came, by reading literary texts against sociological texts and analysing the condition of love in our age, to the conclusion that the code of inaccessible love had emerged), I formulated a main question of whether writing is or can be understood, to a certain extent, as loving. I was interested in the beauty of the abstract, the quality of not being graspable, whereas in my previous work, with which I graduated from the only non-artistic study course at the Berlin University of the Arts, I was fascinated by the sociologists' rigour in coming up with criteria for love, of describing such an ungraspable

concept in seven or thirteen points. Back then I was a copywriter, trained to break every idea down to its very essence, because if it doesn't fit on a napkin, it actually is not an idea (or so were we told). When I started to map out my PhD-research I had finished my creative writing studies, had published my first YA novel and several texts in literature magazines.

From Love to Ghosts

By the time of the RDC2, I had decided to shift to a practice-based thesis and put an even stronger emphasis on all which eludes. Love can be understood as uncertain encounter, language as its primary medium encloses vagueness and contingency. All thinking about love takes place in language, often drawing from literature as data or echo space. In my research, I wanted to approach the field from the opposite direction and explore the theoretical positions and their implications in a poetic investigation. I wanted to establish my own poetic methodology in order to answer the question: “(how) can the ghostly, the ephemeral qualities of love be penetrated in (poetic) language?”

There were three assumptions at the basis of the designated project: If reality is constructed and knowledge is performative, an (artistic) exploration has to embrace narrative.

As it is not possible to lodge love in writing, an exploration of love in the realm of language has to be poetic.

As love, from a poststructuralist/postmodern view, is ghostly, it can be framed by the concept of Heterotopia.

From Ghosts to Alice

I am still intrigued by the ghostly qualities of love and, one day, will reflect on them in writing, but in a literary context rather than a scholarly one, to escape requirements and prerequisites. The two years in which my thoughts (and my creative work, which I will delineate in chapter 2) circled

around the ghostly and the absent present were enriching and inspiring, and provided the foundation for my *Journey to Alice*. The decision to reposition and concretise the research came unexpectedly, but seemed natural, as it relied heavily on my artistic practice and intuition.

A method is a word that means nothing to me. I would not follow one, as my work is analogous to a relationship of love. The text I write is an object of desire to me. Between it and me, there is an exchange that occurs day and night. It does not matter if this happens on paper or not. In some ways, I live with it constantly. All that would happen within me—continuously fermenting emotions, desires, anxiety—I never cease to recapture and rework in order to return it to this other body in the process of maturing next to me. At root, it is precisely as if I made more than another body with my own body. (Cixous 2008 [1978]: 51)

1
Foundation—Knowing and not

Your idea about excavating Sardis sounds wonderful—if it can be done. I don't know of any better site. As a matter of fact, I don't really know much about sites—from the practicing archaeologists' point of view. But imagine how wonderful it would be if a few bilinguals of assorted varieties turned up. I hope, though, that they aren't Semitic. Semitic and Egyptian are a nuisance, because they lack vowel signs, and leave too much to the imagination.

AK to FD, 8 September 1947 (PASP, Box 57)—————

I cringed when I read this letter for the first time. Cringed and looked at my hands, which did not do much other than typing up imagination. I went for a pecan coffee, passing the seating (designed by algorithms and cockiness) in the foyer of the computer science building, settling on a bench outside. I looked at the squirrels, at their self-absorbed operations in the shadows, as the brightness of the October sky folded over my inadequacy: a fever blanket, a heavyweight writing pad, a pane of disillusion. I felt the gradual cooling of the paper cup's content and couldn't drink it, couldn't pour it out, couldn't bring myself to go back to the archive where you would clearly frown upon me, or worse, push your glasses back with your index finger, silently, with a letter of considerable importance in your hand, and say in a conciliatory fashion:

Although I try very hard, I can't quite reach Newton's ideal 'Ne facias hypotheses'. The closest I can get to it is to realize when I'm building on a hypothesis and when I'm building on facts. I'm doing my best to work only inductively, building hypotheses only when facts warrant, and trying not to distort facts to fit a hypothesis.

AK to SJM, 29 May 1947 (Ashmolean)—————

Your deliberateness is inscribed in your face as a small, straight line right above your nose, less a wrinkle than a scar, a mark that doubt and determinedness have left in equal shares. I nod. I don't think that you have a reason to be worried about not building your argumentation on facts: your papers and manuscripts are so carefully written, almost a little grave. And I know that in the end a hypothesis led to the decipherment, a more-or-less wild guess. I'm relieved you didn't have to witness this guess. Probably, if you hadn't have died, it would have been you who would have solved it, following your strict methodology, based on nothing but facts. I decide against telling you that in the sign table you kept in one of your notebooks, where you secretly assigned values (you never showed this table to anyone, let alone published it)—all of them were correct. What fuelled your work was the positivist certainty that an objective reality existed, whose truths could only be understood through measuring facts.

In your unease with hypotheses we can meet: you, because you were afraid they would cloud your judgement, me, because artistic work for me never starts with an assumption, always with a question. Or, to be more precise, with curiosity, sometimes even rage. I wouldn't call it crisis, as some do. I imagine it simply to be a more dramatic way of expressing the fundamental need for "uncertainty and mystery rather than reliability and predictability" (McNiff 1998: 43), the need to make my own sense, to explore.

There is a definition of scholarship which states that a scholar is a person who learns more and more about less and less until finally he knows everything about nothing. It is supposed to be funny, but as a matter of fact, it comes very close to stating a deep philosophical truth. The more one knows, the more one becomes aware of how much more there is to learn. Only the ignorant know everything about anything, or, to put it more accurately, they think they know.

AK, The Fore-Runners of the Greeks, Earle Lecture at Hunter College, 9 April 1948 (PASP, Box 55.2)—————

The definition of scholarship, the definition of research and the definition of reality are fundamental in any discussion of the research's scope. Acknowledging the underlying paradigms and thus fundamental ontological differences (which is, at least in the German-speaking world, still the main problem in the debate about artistic research) sheds light on what we can know of *everything* or *nothing* or the *truth*. Therefore, it is relevant to delineate the arguments which substantiate artistic, practice-based approaches in my understanding of research, with their focus on language and narrative. I will do this by revisiting positions which resonated most with my own work and which proved helpful in my discussions with students in the process of drafting their theoretical master theses and encouraging them to question their preconceptions of research.

Let me recapitulate: There is a world.

If you don't mind, I'd very much like to say this in italics:

Look, a world.

In this world, I can make connections or think of a colour or wear shoes.

I can draw boundaries, but I don't believe in them.

And I am terrible at drawing.

Look, says the world, an I.

Expressing Experience—The Narrative Turn

Knowledge, no matter how it be defined, is in the heads of persons, and [...] the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. What we make of experience constitutes the only world we consciously live in. (von Glasersfeld 1995: 1)

Resonating with postmodernist thought in the 1980s, the fundamental critique of the conventional conception of research provoked a crisis of confidence (see Ellis et al. 2011) and representation (Adams et al. 2015: 9), especially in the social sciences, resulting in a flight of questions: roughly, in my understanding, the following: how is research done? (Methods focused on facts/truths or experience?) From which perspective? (Inside or outside?) For whom? (Those who are observed, or a scientific community?) The question of perspective is crucial for the development of new methods and alternative ways of describing the process and results. As researchers became *persons* in whom the scholarly work was no longer conceived as separate from life, private trauma, experiences and personal stories, they could do other types of research—research focused on experience rather than observable behaviour, research acknowledging different world views and perspectives.

The narrative turn moves away from a singular, monolithic conception of social science toward a pluralism that promotes multiple forms of representation and research; away from facts and toward meanings; away from master narratives and toward local stories. (Bochner 2001: 134)

The narrative turn is intertwined with the development of autoethnography, an “approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis et al. 2011: 273), which resonated with the

desire to “question from within” (Hutcheon 2004 [1988]: xiii), and which has inspired a multitude of narratives over the last two decades. Increasingly, these are artistic—poetic, dramatic, visual—which was surely sparked by Carolyn Ellis, who, from her first autoethnographic book *Final Negotiations* in 1995, established a novel-like style for her writing, with characters, direct speech and detailed, often sensory descriptions. It is no surprise that students, asked in which genre Ellis’ piece *Maternal Connections* (1996) belongs, are unanimously certain (the impatient ones rolling their eyes at me for asking the question) it is an excerpt from a novel. The founders of autoethnography place themselves close to literature. In fact, they advocate a style of writing which is both literary and autoethnographic, to be evocative and engage with the reader, which is one of the key criteria for autoethnographic texts. To achieve this, the author has to “embrace the *vulnerability* of asking and answering questions about experience [...]. Autoethnographers embrace vulnerability with a *purpose* [...] as Ruth Behar writes: ‘The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to’” (Adams et al. 2015: 39-40). This demand is of great significance for legitimising autoethnographic work—it is bound to provide unique insights which would be difficult or impossible to gather with other methods, especially observation from an external perspective. The presentation of these narratives departs “radically from the conventions of rational/analytic social science reporting” (Bochner 2012: 157), as the researchers are viewed as storytellers.

While in autoethnography narrative is used as a broad category of all sorts of texts or art forms, Hayden White limits (in quoting Roland Barthes) narrative to a manner of speaking of events which is not discourse, not lyrical or poetic. Nevertheless, he points out the great importance of narrative, with special focus on historical representations:

Narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing

into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture specific. [...] This suggests that far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted. (White 1980: 5-6)

From a writer's perspective these thoughts seem quite natural, and it is astonishing to follow the intellectual efforts which had to come together for establishing narrative as an accepted manner of reporting research and also as a method of research. To me, the ability to make a claim is what characterises writing. Claiming a literary tone, a character, a place. Claiming the relevance to write in the first place. And the other way round: every writing is a claim, be it scientific or artistic.

Of Words and Games—Expressing the Ineffable

A piece of theory that is very dear to me is Wittgenstein's elaboration on inner feelings. I read about it when I still was interested in love as a meeting of the Other in language and often, reluctantly, had to explain why I wasn't interested in neuroscientific or other physical approaches.

Wittgenstein talks about how we cannot communicate our inner feelings to each other. As we don't ever have a way to compare and understand what we are told about somebody else's inner experiences and feelings, we have to accept being seen, read and heard indirectly. Wittgenstein asks and answers:

But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences—his feelings, moods, and the rest—for his private use?—Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language?—But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language. (Wittgenstein 1986 [1953]: 88)

Schroeder explains this non-understanding further, taking pain as an example: “When other people complain about pain, we cannot know whether any private experiences they might have are ever of the same kind as our experiences. [...] Still, the word ‘pain’ has a common use” (Schroeder 2006: 208). It has a common usage, but only insofar as it refers to our individual experiences: “Whatever you find painful *is* painful to you. That is what we mean by ‘painful’” (Schroeder 2006: 214).

I'll explain the relevance of this idea right after two short scenes that illustrate this impossibility on different layers. I like to think that both happened in the year I first read *Philosophical Investigations*, but that might not be absolutely true.

I

For two weeks C. and I were artists in residence in Kadiköy, Istanbul. Two weeks of quickly-established work routines and living patterns: breakfast at the cedar-tattooed chef's place, tea in the little stool place on the sidewalk or by the sea, dinner at the kebab grill close to our house. With every kebab we drank ayran in a foil-lidded plastic cup, the blue-green brand. One night we left home so late that only a strange little restaurant across the street (where we hadn't yet eaten, despite recommendations) was open. We ordered tomato and bean stew and two ayrans. The ayran was served in foil-lidded plastic-cups, too, but it was the yellow-orange brand. It tasted horrible. I asked C. what he thought of this brand's taste, and he said he quite liked it. So I tried again, and unintentionally made a face. C. told me to pull myself together. Composure, particularly in public, is crucial for him, being Swiss. He removed the lid from his cup and drank in big sips—partly because he could live on yoghurt, partly to point out my fussiness. I ate the bland stew, and when I was done I put the straw as far as possible to the back of my mouth so that I could drink the ayran without tasting it. Pragmatism and frugality is vital for me, being German. But even with this technique I couldn't finish it, because it was absolutely revolting. C. said he didn't know why I was making a fuss, grabbed my ayran and before even putting the straw in his mouth he said: That one has gone off. He put it back on the table and we decided not to complain, and never came back. I had plenty of time to think about this real-life metaphor for the inability to communicate what is hidden inside, because my stomach became so sick that I couldn't leave the house for nearly a week.

II

I was taken into this world by cesarean, and afterwards confined to an incubator a couple of blocks away from my mother, the children's and adults' hospital being two different institutions. My mother tried to pump the milk which my dad delivered between buildings, but it didn't work that well, probably because the doctors had shown me to her for just a couple of minutes before taking me away, or because she was in so much pain after the surgery. When we finally met two weeks after my birth, we had drifted apart. But we support each other nevertheless, and so I was with her when she had to have intestinal surgery, her first invasion for 35 years, after having given birth to me. What scared her most was the prospect of being in as much pain as in that cherry summer of 1982, when the midwife forced her to get up and walk with embers in her belly. I sat next to her during the appointment with the anaesthesiologist, who told her point-blank that the surgery she was awaiting was way more serious than a cesarean, and wouldn't let her finish her sentences. When she couldn't ignore my mother's rising panic anymore, she told her that post surgery pain will be ok, level 3 on a scale of 10. I felt inclined to bring up my strong suspicion that *pain level 3* had no meaning whatsoever. But as I just wanted us to get out of the consultation room, I bit my tongue. Guessing by the increasing temperature in my mother's hand that I was holding, it actually did calm her down. Level 3 (I understood later) was solacing, precisely because it was, in fact, meaningless, but the best way to communicate that the pain medication usually works alright. "Tolerable", for example, would have immediately raised doubt: can I tolerate what others endure? I couldn't deal with the cesarean back then, even though everybody said it wasn't that bad, so how can I do this now? Level 3 said: way less painful than the most painful experience you can imagine, without saying anything at all. I didn't ask my mother if she'd agree in retrospect that it was a level 3 pain, but given the fact that only two days after the operation she was sneaking out on the balcony to

secretly enjoy a cigarette in a strict non-smoking hospital, that's what it seemed like.

Accepting the ineffable as a steady dimension of our day-to-day communication is, to me, a manoeuvre of beauty. It invites the necessity for poetic expression—if nobody else can understand, compare or grasp what is inside us, what we want to whisper, to mutter, to scream, we might as well cease trying with precision and instead embrace a language which is open to interpretations, which opens up spaces for sharing and empathising. Especially if the aim of research is to make experiences accessible, the need for a language that is aware of the inherent boundaries and able to create ever-new ways around silence is apparent.

That this vote for incertitude shouldn't be at all unsettling, as the absence of defined boundaries is a basic characteristic of the language, is discussed by Wittgenstein in his concept of "family similarities". As he shows with the concept of games, there are family similarities, but no common overall criteria (see Wittgenstein 1986 [1953]: 32). It is impossible to draft a definition that comprises all the senses in which the word "game" can be used in German. He asks and answers, charmingly: "Can you give the boundary? No. You can draw one; for none has so far been drawn. (But that never troubled you before when you used the word.)" (Wittgenstein 1986 [1953]: 33).

(I especially adore this parenthetical assertion that, intuitively, we don't rely on boundaries or banisters. It reminds me of when a child can first take a couple of steps on their own, and the only reason they stumble is the sudden realisation that nobody is holding their hand. We are not troubled, we deal with blurred boundaries all the time, even without noticing: we walk on our own.)

Pushing the Boundaries—Artistic Research

In Germany and Switzerland, the rise of the buzzword Artistic Research is often, mostly by the critics, put in the context of the Bologna Process, over the course of which art schools became applied universities and applied universities had to establish or strengthen their research departments (see Borgdorff 2006), and were thus denied intrinsic motivation or relevance. That, in fact, the first theorisations of artistic research occurred in the 1980s, in the United States, resonating with poststructuralist, postmodernist and constructivist theory, is rarely mentioned.

To understand the potential and qualities of artistic research (also in comparison to more conventional ways of creating and reporting new knowledge), I find Eisner's seminal article *On the Differences Between Scientific and Artistic Approaches to Qualitative Research* from 1981 extremely helpful (for a more recent overview see Borgdorff 2012). Eisner, from a background in education, carefully lays out the differences in assumptions, approaches and aims. Artistically oriented research, he states, focuses "on the experience the individuals are having and the meaning their actions have for others" (Eisner 1981: 6). An artistic approach to research, "instead of presenting a facade of objectivity, exploits the potential of selectivity and emphasis to say what needs saying as the investigator sees it" (Eisner 1981: 8). The investigator is "the major instrument of the research" (ibid.). The aim of their work cannot be to predict but to explore, to create meaning where it couldn't otherwise be created: "What it yields at its best are ineffable forms of understanding that can only be conveyed through the figurative or nondiscursive character of the artistic image" (ibid.).

If only those squirrels under the bench and the tree with the funny red nuts in front of the classics building, where the pecan coffee had cooled down to air temperature, had said something. If they had said: *You are the major instrument of your research, dear.*

Then I could have gone back inside and faced you and told you: You might consider it dilettantish, but I am a writer and that is my power and I have to use it, and I will. Therefore my research is “initiated by an artistic hunch [or] intuition” (Rubidge 2004: 6), which will be followed by using genuine artistic strategies or methods. This research “may not be linked initially to any formally articulated question, hypothesis or theoretical concern, although it may lead to them [...] may be generated later by the researcher’s practice as their creative investigation into the artistic intuition or concern progresses” (Rubidge 2004: 6). What distinguishes me from more conventionally oriented researchers might be a higher “tolerance for complexity and confusion” (Webb & Brien 2008: 3) and a profound willingness “to drift for a while, making work, feeling [...] my] way into a question or an idea that may lead to an original contribution to knowledge” (Webb & Brien 2012: 193).

But, before you go back to your letter, let me ask you: Isn’t the intuition worth considering? Without it, I would have never found you, would never have been in your archive. Would never have read every single letter that is left. And because I read differently than the others (the few who have dedicated their work to you) different things seem important to me. I don’t believe you were a chain smoker, for example. This doubt came to me one night when reading your letters to Johannes Sundwall. He thanks you for sending him sweets as the only treat he, as a former smoker, is entitled to. Sweets that were rationed, for kids only, in postwar Finland. You were so deliberate in your instructions for what you sent and how you tried to protect it for the journey and how it should be used after its arrival, that I can’t

imagine you wouldn't have commented on being a heavy smoker yourself, especially since it had meant a distant connection, a shared guilty pleasure. Then your handwriting and the typing. I know that you were quite a multi-tasker—reading detective novels while knitting, your way of taking a little break—but I can hardly imagine you interrupting the writing over and over again just to knock some ash off, or to light or stub out a cigarette. It turned out that the image of you as a heavy smoker was inspired by the cigarette packs you used as filing boxes for your little slips of paper. Maybe your brother smoked or your neighbours: I'm sure they would have collected their boxes for you. But, definitely, it didn't *have* to be you. I am not saying this is a great revelation, but it is a new perspective. What has been written about you so far is mostly collecting and comprehending rather than empathising and exploring. What I have in mind is offering “new ways of seeing and, in doing so, contribute some interesting and perhaps provocative facts to the knowledge community” (Webb & Brien 2012: 195).

Von Glasersfeld shows how important language and writing is from the radical constructivist point of view, when he states that “fictions are enormously useful in the organization of our experiences” (1997: 324, my translation), they can even “provide instruction for experiences one has not had yet” (1995: 137). These statements are illustrated with the example that somebody reads about Paris in a novel and thus learns certain facts (geography, streets, sights, culture etc.) about this city that can be applied in reality, when the former reader ends up as a visitor in Paris. The usefulness of the fiction about Paris for a real life experience depends strongly on how veridically the city was described. (When I first arrived in the East Village, I was pleasantly surprised at how ordinarily people were dressed—just like in Berlin, Bern or any other city I know, and unlike what Sex and the City had me believe.)

Von Glasersfeld also gives a less fact-centred explanation of fiction, by contrasting fiction and hypothesis: a “hypothesis is something you are ex-

pecting to, earlier or later, find evidence in experience for, a fiction is something from which you know from the beginning that you'll never be able to say in experience: it is like that or not like that" (1997: 324, my translation).

In summer 2016, I attended the *Berliner Methodentreffen*, a two day conference which provides an overview of different qualitative research methods. It was so hot that weekend that the glue on the tape which held the multiple sheets of paper from which I had DIYed my poster together, titled *Die Mitte der zwei—Erzählen zwischen literarischem Text und autoethnografischer Methodik* (The Middle of the Two—Narratives Between Literary Text and Autoethnographic Methodology), simply volatilised, so it looked very frazzled and confusing—*artistic*, as the other presenters with social science backgrounds put it. The so-called lunch keynote, which habitually addresses new methods, presented *Mixed Methods, Emergent Methods and Arts-Based Research*². For the latter part, the speaker chose examples like poetic transcription and ethno-theatre, quite frankly admitting that most of her knowledge relied on a literature review, not on actively working with those methods. I very quickly realised that I was the only (or one of very few) artist(s) in around two hundred social science researchers and graduate students. Some laughed, some snorted, many shook their heads. In the Q&A part after the lecture, all the predictable objections were voiced, until somebody (a man in his late fifties, with long, scanty hair and most probably open shoes) shouted: "Well, these are just more or less the same arguments we heard against qualitative research back then, in the 80s, aren't they?"

² http://www.berliner-methodentreffen.de/archiv/video/mittagsvorlesung_2016/index.html (accessed 15 December 2019).

2
Writing as Method—On Resilient Planks

On resilient planks
I carry the bags of cement
into myself
like one who believes that piling up alone
can make a shelter
I pour a foundation
stack bricks
hang the plumb
plumb line or hand lead
I cover the thread
in chalk dust
and wait
until the centric movement is gone
I lower
the plumb
and discover
that no line emerges
no angle at all
no hideouts
most of all no zenith
as much as I cling
to the plumb
there is no
order
no innocence
no law³

³ This poem is taken from my performance texts for the piece *Im Zwischen*.

How can we think in, through and with art, if art is creative writing?

Tess Brady suggests that the writer's method resembles the bowerbird technique:

Unlike my colleagues in other more traditional disciplines I needed to acquire a working rather than specialist knowledge, not in one area but in a range of areas and disciplines. I needed to function a little like a bowerbird that picks out the blue things and leaves all the other colours. To work with this metaphor, I needed to pick out the dark blue pieces of ecclesiastical history, the azure lines of cartography, the sapphire decorations of medieval manuscripts and the Nile blue theories of archaeology. (Brady 2000, online)

I think everybody who writes (or at least has to produce texts occasionally) knows the technique Brady is talking about. Indeed, collecting the bits and pieces of information that are needed in the text or in a text's sediment means looking into a broad range of topics, from the raven's breeding behaviour to different cosmogonies. (It also means getting lost in the internet, and hours upon hours of brilliant excuses for procrastination.)

Over the course of my PhD studies I wrote many literary texts, some of them exploring the concept of Heterotopia, some experimenting with different settings or strategies for writing. Others aren't motivated or driven by this thesis' content, they are just on their own. To enter the discussion of writing as a methodology, I present some of the texts from the second type—pieces in which the method is constitutive for the final result. Of course, not all the processes of my writing are visible to myself, and every text draws from more than its approach and more than I can trace. In the following examples, I deliberately discuss only discrete aspects, movements that I am aware of and that make sense to highlight in hindsight, with the aim of creating an overview for myself and being able to discuss potential methods against the background of concrete projects. All of the texts were originally published in German: I translated them into English to appear here or in papers/articles.

Interview-based I—Childhood Stories

Childhood Stories is an audio drama series which composes narratives of childhood in order to create an authentic image of the social environments in which people grew up. For the first edition in China (2012) I asked about 35 people 12 very simple questions about their childhood (in written form, in Chinese). Later the answers were anonymised, translated into English and used as literary material, condensed and cut up, arranged in a dialogue. The voices were embedded in a composition from field recordings (music: Christian Müller). For the second edition (2015-2018), I asked the same questions in Istanbul, Turkey. This time, I decided to compose the 28 sets of answers (also in English) in a choir-like text for four female voices, to echo Istanbul's very lively and sometimes overwhelming sound texture.

- A* *Once my mom fell into the pond and got a terrible cold.*
- B* *How can a woman*
- C* *a grown up woman*
- B* *fall into a pond?*
- C* *That sounds bizarre*
- B* *don't you think?*
- D* *Every story is bizarre. Otherwise we wouldn't bother to tell*
it.
- A* *Maybe she stumbled or slipped or it was in the middle of the*
night or whatever.
- B* *Slipped?*
- A* *In the rain*
- C* *or it was*
- D* *in the middle of the night.*
- A* *I was scared at night.*

- C* *Of the darkness.*
- D* *Of insomnia.*
- A* *Of the shadows.*
- B* *Of the monsters.*
- D* *Of a giant grabbing me and taking me with him.*
- A* *Of my grandma not waking up again.*
- B* *I used to get up, just to check if she was still breathing.*

The data gathering followed a classical questionnaire scheme, the choice of participants was not lead by defined criteria, but by whoever wanted to participate. While I didn't invent anything, I altered the material during the collaging process through repetitions, contrasts, intensification; according to dramaturgic and aesthetic reasons. These emphases reflect my personal way of making sense of the material and also, to some extent, my experiences in Turkey. While I wouldn't claim that this *is* a piece of research, I think it is legitimate to say that it uses basic methods borrowed from qualitative research.

Interview-based II—Transform

In early 2016, I was part of the 5th annual *Transform Festival* in Berne, a monthlong transdisciplinary festival which invites different groups of artists to stay in a quarter in Berne (Loryplatz/Europaplatz) for one week and realise a piece of work which is either site specific or developed in exchange with local people and businesses.

For the week in which I participated, I was based in an instrument shop specialised in reeds, and besides just watching what happened and occasionally using the typewriter, I talked to the staff about their job—what they liked about it, why they had chosen it, which tools and materials were their favourites. From the notes I made from these conversations, I finally selected words and sentences which I asked the local engraving shop to write on badges. (It was the order of the year, judging by the friendly way in which the owner treated me.) After they had been made, I scattered them in the quarter by mounting them on lamp posts, benches and structures: as ephemeral as graffiti. At the showing at the end of the week, which took the form of a guided walk through the quarter, I introduced my project but didn't point out any of the piece's locations (which lay along the route of the walking tour), inviting the participants to see their own neighbourhood with a new focus—on all that is overlooked.



Image 3: Text installation for the Transform Festival Berne. The badge reads “bearbeitbar”—“workable”



Image 4: Text installation for the Transform Festival Berne. The badge reads “eher weich”—“rather soft”.

Interview-based III—Unstable Dictionary

As a literary documentarist I was invited to the electronic music festival *Instabile Systeme*, which took place in Biel from 26 to 29 June 2018. After contemplating what a literary documentation could or should be, I decided to ask the musicians what their strongest association with instability (the festival's theme) was. They gave me a word and in a short open interview they told me why they had chosen it, and what it meant for them and their work. Then I wrote a short poem or prose fragment which contained the atmosphere or texture of what resonated most with me from our exchange. It quickly became a game: audience and musicians trying to trace which word came from whom, adding words to see them transformed on the typewriter in new texts.

Warmth

expands the material
from inside out
increases distances
returns the sound

Noise

under the microscope
snow is cursing
in all its whiteness
in Arab, crackling

Poetic Field Notes

In spring 2018 I was commissioned by the *Transhelvetica Magazin* to visit a construction site close to Solothurn, Switzerland, and to literarily observe what was happening there. The method I used to write this text can be summed up as Poetic Field Notes—incorporating associations and memories into a protocol of events. Unlike a researcher who studies a field, I had no prior knowledge about the processes, machines or routines. I came as a blank page, so to speak. My text became an inventory of outward and inward impressions. There were not many changes made between the first and the final version (which is rare in my work), so that the text still reflects the fleetingness of the writing situation, the wandering of my senses.

A man walks in my direction, without a helmet, without orange, but with a phone and gloves in his hand. Now he sits on a wicker chair, takes his t-shirt off, the cigarette still in his mouth, pulls a laptop out of a black sleeve, same brand as mine, the screen seems to be as dirty as mine. He wipes it with his shirt, pollen or construction dust or maybe both are one and the same: microscopically small friction loss between status quo and scheduled progress.

[...]

For the first time, the excavator's shovel comes to the fore, emptying itself out unmistakably and turned to the side, already three shovels, now the fourth, I'm writing more slowly than an excavator excavates. I would have thought my head was less inert, the fifth, was at an advantage, because of being made of, the sixth, cellular material instead of metal, but apparently the slowness of, the seventh, metal is a misapprehension on my side, which is hereby proven wrong.

Writing as an Echo Space—Residencies

Over the last couple of years, being abroad for longer periods of time became an important strategy for writing. In every year of my PhD studies, apart from attending composite sessions in spectacular cities, I had the opportunity to visit places I had never been to before as artist in residence (for full list see Appendix, p. 441), which was a great privilege and tremendously inspiring for my work. Being in a different cultural environment requires more permeability of skin and more porousness of thoughts. I can be a child, constantly amazed, I can be a guest, humbly human. I am mostly silent: I absorb the place's peculiarities and while they are going through me, stories which represent them form. Sometimes immediately, sometimes later, sometimes they are based on things I see, sometimes it's more a place's mood that stays with me and subsequently becomes inhabited by completely fictional characters, animals and humans.

Cheshire Cat

Tok is sitting up so high that most people aren't aware that he's there when they come in. They go straight to the fridges, which take up the whole length of the store. They choose a beer, maybe they ask someone waiting outside: "They also have the dark one, would you prefer one of those?" Or: "Do you think she'll drink two big ones?" Afterwards they come to the till and only now, when I hand them their change or fumble with the plastic bag, do they become aware of Tok's leg, which—from their point of view—dangles directly from the ceiling. At this moment, they might not think of a cat as I do, because they have never seen how Tok jumps up and grabs hold of the ceiling's rim with his fingertips to pull himself up the two meters in one breath of air. It is a child's leg, even though Tok has not been a child for a long time now. So smooth and thin. A woman who was about to pay for a

lighter knocked the chewing gum display over in shock. Tok can be sitting there for hours without talking. He knows that I'm looking at his legs. And I know that I like them. This is the certainty we have been living on since we've met.

Prehistoric

In the garden I've found a small, prehistoric animal. Its name is Adda, just like my daughter's. I had to take care of a couple of things outside, for example I've finally fixed the loose step by the front door. Jòn lent me his power drill. After I tightened the screws, I swept the stairs and I emptied the dustpan out under the juniper. It was there I found the animal. It looked right at me and made a tiny sound, as if trying to scream backwards. I showed it the dustpan and it climbed on it, its hooves clacked on the plastic. I mean, I don't know if it really has hooves, but in any case it has keratin down there. It's about the size of a redshank, but with four legs. Its eyes are very much awake. I wanted to set it down again, but it kind of clenched its teeth into the plastic. Then I brought it to Adda's room. Since she has started university, she only comes by every three or four months or so. The animal is sitting in the bedding box right now, and I'm trying to find out what it likes to eat. The oldest food I have found is some potatoes from last winter and canned mustard pickles from the winter before. If it doesn't like any of that, I will go and get a fern plant, I guess.

Tok is based on that exact visual described in the text: a young man's leg in the roof of a liquor shop in the liberal quarter of Kadiköy, in Istanbul. Adda is from the Icelandic collection of texts, and its origin was a sentence that was somehow inserted into my head (I think I even heard it in an inner voice) during a poorly-equipped night walk through way-too-high and quiet snow: I've found a prehistoric animal. To me, these stories are amalgamated with their places of origin, they transport how I felt there. I know that I

couldn't have written any of these texts without being in these different contexts, because they struck tones in the language I didn't even know existed.

Words and Voice—Performances

For almost ten years, I have been closely collaborating with the improvising and experimental musician (and my partner) Christian Müller in our stories & sounds duo, *Butterland*. We have realised audio dramas, live performances and created culinary, immersive environments for the audience in which we presented our work (for a full list, see Appendix, p. 443). What we do is neither a reading with musical backing nor a concert incorporating words. It is something in between: a space in which texts that are musical and music that is narrative can meet. Space is, again, my metaphor for describing how the texts I write for the stage—texts to be heard—differ from texts I write to be read: it is about inviting the audience into a room that is created in the moment, always from scratch as Christian improvises and, even though we know each other very well, I (and even he) cannot predict how his part will turn out, if there is a flow, if it works, or if it does not. When it does work, the room gets its volume from the music, and its structures from the images the texts evoke. I have a stack of fragments for each performance and the duration of the set is usually roughly fixed. Apart from that, there are no cues, no agreements, no rules. When I first began working with Christian I was so afraid of missing the end, which is a common phrase for dressing down musicians in the improvised scene (*this guy just missed three endings, right?*), that I stopped reading as soon as I heard the faintest possibility of the piece being over. Today, I have a better feeling and more confidence, but it still is (and will be) an entirely different way of being (that is, thinking with the ears and knowing intuitively what to do) which performing like this requires, as opposed to just reading a text which is linear and only dependent on itself. Performing on stage with music, as a musical voice, is probably the most obvious way of disappearing. Not while

writing, but while reading: there is nothing to see, I am not performing in a physical way, but sitting or standing still. I have to fully focus on the music, so I cannot be in contact with the audience most of the time. I am in the room as a voice, and as that voice I am in the audience's imagination.

This voice, though, is a different one to that which Barthes had in mind when he contrasted the two bodies of science and literature ("science speaks itself; literature writes itself; science is led by the voice, literature follows the hand; it is not the same body, and hence the same desire, which is behind the one and the other", Barthes 1967: 5). My voice follows the hand as it is not sharing facts, but communicating: it allows the audience to resonate with the words in their own, individual ways. The voice also embraces the hand by being silent. When to start reading again? When to stop? These are decisions that cannot be made analytically (while Christian is an instant composer and builds his pieces in the moment he plays, I, as a dilettante, don't have the musical knowledge to *know* what he is doing, I can only *listen* to what the music tells me), they can only be developed from what happens around them. The words write themselves as a voice.

As an example for my performance work, however, I chose to present a different piece: *Im Zwischen*, a piece by the singer Hannah E. Hänni for voice, cello soundtrack (by Martin Birnstiel) and text (by me), which premiered in June 2017 in Biel. My texts circle around Kafka's image of the *room inside*, and were created in the way I have just outlined, but were, in the end, fixed: I developed a score with a precise timeline because the cello soundtrack was also static, and during the rehearsal process I could work out the best way to put the texts into dialogue with the music. As a whole, it is less improvised than the way I work with Christian, and it includes a visual layer which the Butterland pieces don't have, but the texts are rooted in this research as they explore the spatial notion of writing and performing from different angles.



Image 5: Performance Im Zwischen, still from the video documentation

The Bowerbird Technique—Castor & Pollux

Of course, I use the Bowerbird Technique a lot, especially for commissions with thematic demands. For example for the performance of *ephemer* in Berne, during the *Musikfestival* 2017, a piece for four voices, four reeds players and a bridge. The festival's theme was 'will-o'-the-wisp' and for my text, which was the overture to the performance, I interwove old texts about sightings and scientific explanations of the phenomenon with literary texts about Castor and Pollux (as this is the name of two will-o'-the-wisps on the open sea), loosely incorporating the mythological story.

In the open street shot by a truck Castor dies, one pointless sacrifice among many. Unfortunately Castor was the mortal of the twins, alas, Zeus can fidget with lightning for as long as he wants. For Pollux though nothing is left but a brother's sorrow, he doesn't think of segregated areas, wire-pullers, progressions of events. Castor's face everywhere, multiplied in elliptic incremental points, and yet he doesn't cease to exist in Pollux's lazy eye, those narrow brows and the beard reminiscent of feathers. Pollux, embodying the brother, his appetite, his sarcasm, who refuses to be a memorial on the mountain of gods. Pollux, who begs his father to dismiss him from immortality, to let him go down to his brother, to the flesh.

I might not be a real bowerbird, because I don't care for the colour of my finds—at times it is more about finding anything at all, an angle to start the project. In general this activity is what I'd call in German *recherchieren*. *Recherchieren* is one word for 'research', another is *forschen*. *Forschen*, which is used for researching in an academic or scientific context, requires a stronger focus on the generation of some sort of knowledge and is closely tied to natural sciences. *Recherchieren* is following the need to substantiate

a narrative one way or another, adding detail or background knowledge, finding answers to whatever questions arise on the route to realising a project.

Thinking in, Through and With Art

The question of how creative writing fits into the scope of academic research, and which gaps in the existing knowledge can be addressed through writing, is debated for example in *TEXT Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, extensively in the special issue *The ERA era: creative writing as research* (Brien et al. 2010)⁴. This issue compiles a selection of peer-reviewed creative works which are situated in the context of research. At the end of every text, there's an author's statement about the research background, contribution and significance. Among the contributions are, for example, the exploration of a first person narrator in a documentary text or an insight into parents' grief after the death of a young adult child from cancer.

Trying to explicate my own methods and compiling the excerpts from the different texts was an insightful process. Before I began to work on this chapter, I had a sentence in the opening section stating that during my PhD, I did a lot of unrelated creative work. I later wanted to make this sentence sound a bit more confident and purposeful, more a strength and less like an excuse. Only when I thought about how I could turn this around, what parallels could be found in these very diverse texts, did I see how inscribed methodological approaches are in my work—they were so deeply incorporated into my process that I wasn't even aware of them.

In the last two years I have often relied on techniques to gather different kinds of data, which then served as starting points for my literary writing. The decisions came naturally, as my main interest in writing is seeing the world, relations, and absences, therefore I need to meet them. To me, the question or dialogue at the centre of emergence is crucial for texts like *Childhood Stories* or the *Transform* piece, and I do, whenever I speak about the creative processes, mention their context. For *Childhood Stories*, it is es-

⁴ <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue7/content.htm> (accessed 15 December 2019).

pecially relevant to give this information, as it changes the perception: it is more documentary than fiction, it enables a poetic understanding—through making experiences accessible—of a certain part of a society at a certain time.

The faith in process, in not putting a research question in the beginning necessarily but an intuition is in my conception a crucial feature of artistic or practice-based research, it emphasises that it is not formal knowledge that is the subject matter of artistic research, but thinking in, through and with art. (Borgdorff 2012a: 44)

When and how is creative writing research? Following Borgdorff, it requires thinking *in*, *through* and *with* creative writing. In my interpretation, thinking *in* writing means that the creative text is the result, *through* writing that the creative text is only a partial result, which needs some sort of supplement to communicate the intended result, and *with* writing might not even involve the act of writing, as it uses texts as examples or data which is then analysed. Given these categories, *Childhood Stories* could be research *through* writing: the answers from the questionnaires are made accessible and engaging *through* writing strategies as character speech, montage, rhythm. Even though the other pieces use research methods, I don't regard them as examples of artistic research because they are not written with the intention of being an answer to or asking a specific question—to return to Borgdorff's terms: it was just writing, not *thinking* in writing. A creative writing project is thinking *in* writing, as soon it departs from a non-self referential question or is deliberately anchored in discourses or theories and contains its answers in an appropriate form.

Writing as a Method of Discovery

Writing as the construction of an inner space for the readers. Sometimes turmoil, seldom escape. Writing as my way to veritably exist in the world, to have a voice that can speak silence. Writing as a “method of discovery” (Richardson 2001: 35). I can write in order “to learn something that [...] I didn’t know before [...] I wrote it” (ibid.), as the postmodernist position “does allow us to know ‘something’ without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, and historical knowledge is still knowing” (Richardson/St.Pierre 2008: 961). There is a more artistic interpretation of the desire to write as an inquiry in Carolyn Ellis’ statement about what drives her auto-ethnographical work: “I tend to write about experiences that [...] challenge the construction of meaning I have put together for myself. [...] I write when my world falls apart or the meaning I have constructed for myself is in danger of doing so” (Ellis 2004: 33). It is an epiphany or a minuscule moment of being startled that makes me question myself or the world as I see it. What I do if I write about it is to “invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented” (Lyotard, 1984 [1979]: 81).

On my journey to Alice, I use writing as a method of inquiry, as Laurel Richardson describes it: gaining understanding through the very process of (literary) writing. Thus I am not following the design of *fiction as research practice*, coined by scholar and writer Patricia Leavy (2013), who considers fiction a “highly effective pedagogical tool” (Leavy 2013: 10) to disseminate research findings, but the findings are gathered through conventional qualitative research methods like interviews. I don’t use the literary text to write findings about Alice Kober and her life, but to construct a literary space which she inhabits as the Other that I can meet.

Autoethnography is a method that is very close to creative writing, and encourages artistic approaches and forms. Commenting on the intersection of literary and autoethnographic writing, Ellis states: “If you viewed your project as closer to art than science, then your goal would not be so much to portray *facts* of what happened [...] but instead to convey the *meanings* you attached to the experience. You’d want to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of” (Ellis 2004: 116). As autoethnography puts the I, that writes and tells, that experiences and shares, in the beginning of all writing, it becomes a “way of life. It is a way of life that acknowledges contingency, finitude, embeddedness in storied being, encounters with Otherness [...]” (Jones et al. 2013: 53). Life is the source of experiences, experiences the source of writing. The undertaking only makes sense if it is seen as a whole: everything, every aspect of life can become a theme for writing, can shape the writing into what it needs to be. Eisner stresses that in “artistic approaches to research, standardization of form is counterproductive. What artistic approaches seek is to exploit the form to inform. What those engaged in artistic work take as given is the belief that form and content interact; some would say that form is content” (Eisner 1981: 7).

Bochner and Riggs highlight the great importance of the connection between researcher, research, and life: “The researcher is part of the research data [...], writing and/or performing research is part of the inquiry, research involves the emotionality and subjectivity of both researchers and participants, [...] research should be about what could be (not just about what has been)” (Bochner/Riggs 2014: 201). This last parenthesis is especially important for this research, as it legitimates projection and the fictional extension of the material found in the archive. Another strong congruency between creative writing and autoethnography is the involvement of the reader, they “should be conceived as co-participant, not as a spectator, and should be given opportunities to think with (no just about) the research

story” (ibid.). This mirrors the poststructuralist idea of texts materialising in the reader, individually, and not in or through the author (see chapter 6).

But there are also criteria which aren’t or are not necessarily met by creative writing, namely the vulnerability of the author and the focus on cultural understanding. The exposure of the writing subject through autoethnography can take on quite radical forms: “giving public insight into long hidden secrets like suffering from bulimia or being a night club dancer. You have to have a strong ego to write autoethnography—to make yourself vulnerable to criticism about your most personal stories” (Davis/Ellis 2008: 284). In the genre of memoir and elsewhere, creative writers expose themselves in such a radical way, too. It is not a condition to write however, and, most importantly, the writers can protect themselves from being unwillingly exposed by inventing or fictionalising certain aspects or finding metaphors or alternative structures to write about very personal experiences without declaring it.

I started my career as a writer, like many writers do, with a very personal book: *Katertag* (Dürig 2011, see Appendix for full list of publications, p. 441). It was about growing up in a dysfunctional family, due to the parents’ alcohol abuse. Even though it was and is highly personal, it is not about me or my family, as I invented a whole new family and background story: the narrator is a boy—one of the many distancing strategies which, in the end, enabled the writing in the first place.

Earlier, during my final year of studying creative writing, I had a project which was rooted in my family. I wrote portraits. Portraits of my parents, of their parents and their parents’ parents. I wrote about people I had heard about only a couple of times in my life. That might seem strange—at least it does to me—but my mother’s family came from north-eastern Germany, a region which is Poland today, and there you don’t talk much. You work, you live. They had to leave everything behind during WWII, and when they finally found a place to stay in southern Germany, their accent was alien and

they were even quieter than at home. On my father's side, too, there was war and eviction. I assume that on both sides there was guilt.

They couldn't forget, but they could cease remembering. This is why even about my grandparents, who I knew in person, I hardly know more than their dates of birth and education. I grew up in silence. This silence or void was what I tried to recapture with my literary project. My parents and my grandparents became characters in my texts. For the first time in my life, I understood why they were so constricted. Of course, it was my version of them which I understood, but it was at least some sort of understanding. I never finished that text after my graduation, I never published it. It helped me to find my tone, my style. It helped me to find the room inside from which I can tell stories. My stories, other stories.

When I wrote *Katertag*, I didn't fill in gaps. I had everything in my experience, but I had to make it accessible. How can I tell what is ineffable? How can I allow others to enter the sites of silence? These questions led my writing, in which I did not want to go through my personal story again, because it was a story of weakness.

The weakness of a child who knows that everything is wrong but can't fix any of it. I wanted sovereignty, I wanted a strong voice. I had to write about what had not happened to convey what happened. This tension between what is there and not at the same time is enclosed in the first sentence of the book, the first sentence in which the main character, a young teenager, writes to his dad: "I need you to know what I have to forget" (Dürig 2011: 7, my translation).

In *Katertag*, my voice, though not exposing me, is at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking, writing and describing. I "locate the general in the particular [... and] attempt to shed light on what is unique in time and space while at the same time conveying insights that exceed the limits of the situation in which they emerge" (Eisner 1981: 7). As Eisner shows, pieces of literature are not limited to the particular story they tell, but always reflect a larger social reality or a critique of it. The personal is what

leads to the cultural. The cultural, the “ethno” as motivation for the writing, is what distinguishes autoethnography from memoir/autobiography: it is crucial that the accounts aim to reveal insights that can be meaningful for other members of the same cultural environment. The individual narrative is one case of a collective or more global narrative, the particular has to point to the general. The awareness of how a narrative is embedded in a larger context is, even if it is not mentioned explicitly, what characterises autoethnography:

Autoethnographers *intentionally* use personal experience to create *nuanced, complex, and comprehensive* accounts of cultural norms, experiences and practices. Autoethnographers offer these accounts [...] to facilitate an understanding, and often a *critique*, of cultural life by encouraging readers to think about [...] experiences, and practices in new, unique, complicated, and challenging ways. (Adams et al. 2015: 32-3)

3
The Careful Alien—Literature Review

Alice Kober and Michael Ventris

During the last few weeks, I've suddenly come to the conclusion that the Knossos and Pylos tablets must, after all, be written in Greek—an difficult and archaic Greek, seeing that it's a 500 years older than Homer and written in a rather abbreviated form, but Greek nevertheless. [...] As we expected, they [the inscriptions] seem to contain nothing of any literary value, but merely record the prosaic and often trivial details of the palace administration. (Ventris 1952: 8)

This is how the British architect Michael Ventris, then 29 years old, announced his groundbreaking achievement on 1 July 1952 in a transmission on *BBC's Third Programme*, after having summarised where Linear B was found and what difficulties the decipherers were presented with:

It's often alleged to be quite impossible to decipher a set of inscriptions where both the writing and the language are unknown quantities, and where there's no bilingual to help us. But provided there's enough material to work on, the situation is not hopeless at all. It simply means that, instead of a mechanical piece of decoding, a rather subtle process of deduction has to be undertaken. It's rather like doing a crossword puzzle on which the positions of the black squares haven't been printed for you. (Ventris 1952: 5)

In presenting the milestones that, eventually, led to the decipherment, he mentioned in the following order Champillon (who deciphered the Egyptian Hieroglyphs with the help of the trilingual Rosetta Stone), Schliemann (as the one who discovered Mycenae), Sir Arthur Evans (who, looking for script from that same period, went to Crete and discovered Knossos, Palace of the legendary King Minos, with its Linear A and B tablets), Sir John Myres (whom Evans had entrusted with the task of publishing the Linear B material) and Emmett Bennet (who worked on and published Blegen's Linear B inscriptions from Pylos). Ventris did not mention Alice Kober, even though he pointed out that a “great help in finding out which signs belong together

is the fact of inflection” (Ventris 1952: 7). A great helpful fact that was discovered by Alice and published in her 1946 paper “Inflection in Linear Class B: 1-Declension”, a paper Michael Ventris had read and which had “slightly disappointed” him, “because the ‘terminations’ don’t really seem to carry us beyond Evans’ note [...]” (MV to JSM 28 January 1948, Ashmolean Museum).

The time at hand was scarce, one might think, between 7.25 and 7.45 p.m. on this 1st of July. Why would Ventris, who would decades later be celebrated as *A Very English Genius* (the title of a *BBC* documentary about him, televised in 2002), sacrifice twenty precious seconds of his and the grand men’s fame to bring up a scholar that wasn’t even alive any more, female or not? (He also failed to mention Johannes Sundwall, who was still alive then, or his correspondents whose ideas about Linear B he compiled in his *Mid Century Report*⁵.)

In the first paper discussing his theory, *Evidence for Greek Dialect in the Mycenaean Archives* (1953), written together with John Chadwick, who provided Ventris with linguist knowledge and was the first scholar to embrace Ventris’ theory, Alice Kober is mentioned six times, namely her ideas of inflection and the sign for “total” in female and male.

In his 1954 paper *The Decipherment of the Mycenaean Script* given at the *Second International Congress of Classical Studies* (the proceedings were published in 1958), Ventris credits Kober to have undertaken “the first and systematic programme on analysis and research of the Linear B documents” (Ventris 1958: 72), also her suggestion of inflection and the sign for “total” are mentioned. In the Ventris/Chadwick book *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, published in 1956, the same year Michael Ventris died in a car acci-

⁵ “After the war, when he [Michael Ventris] had completed his training as an architect, he returned to it [Linear B] with renewed vigour. At the beginning of 1950 he took the unusual step of circulating a questionnaire to a group of dozen scholars of international reputation, whom he knew to be actively working on the Minoan scripts. [...] The ten scholars who sent answers were Bennett (U.S.A.), Bossert and Grumach (Germany), Schachermeyr (Austria), Pugliese Carratelli and Peruzzi (Italy), Georgiev (Bulgaria), Ktistopolus (Greece), Sundwall (Finland), and Myres (Great Britain)” (Chadwick 1967: 47).

dent in the north of London, the presentation of Alice's scholarly achievements towards the decipherment are presented as follows:

'In attempting to decipher documents written in an unknown language with an unknown script, the first step is to establish the facts that are obvious from an inspection of the available documents. The second step in the decipherment is to find, by careful analysis and logical deduction, what conclusions can be drawn from these fundamental facts.' This prim but necessary programme, purposely stopping short of the third and crucial step (the attempt to substitute actual sounds and words), was undertaken by Alice Kober of Brooklyn in a series of fundamental articles on Linear B published between 1943 and her premature death in 1950. (Ventris/Chadwick 1973 [1956]: 15)

Even though omitting the source of the quotation and abridging the original text without indication (the first sentence is the opening sentence of Kober's 1945 article *Evidence of Inflection in the 'Chariot' Tablets from Knossos*, the second sentence opens the third paragraph of the same article), Kober's work is acknowledged as "fundamental" but not crucial: as Margalit Fox (in the first comprehensive book about Evans, Myres, Kober, Ventris and Linear B, *The Riddle of the Labyrinth*) portrays the process of decipherment, it was Alice Kober's study of the inflection that unlocked, ultimately, the path towards the decipherment:

Now that he'd [Ventris] been through the Pylos data, he realized something vital: While it contained many 'triplets' of the kind Kober had identified, the specific triplets she had isolated were found only in Knossos. [...] Perhaps, Ventris conjured in early 1952, the words found exclusively there [at Knossos] were the name of Cretan towns. With that in mind, he tried the following experiment: Ventris homed in on the simplest forms in Kober's paradigm [...]. By making 'only a little adjustment' to his grid, as he told Myres, he was able to plug in reasonable guesses for the values of [the signs. ...] What Ventris wound up with looked an awful lot like the Greek names, spelled syllabically, for the three major towns of Cretan antiquity: Amnisos, Tulissos, and Knossos. (Fox 2013: 231)

The Feminist Angle

It does not come as a surprise that Fox tells about this process from a perspective that is extremely sympathetic to Alice Kober: her book portrays all three key figures in the Linear B decipherment. Sir Arthur Evans (dubbed “the digger”), Dr. Alice Kober (“the detective”, alluding to her favourite way to spend free time: reading detective novels), and Michael Ventris (“the architect”). The chapters dedicated to Alice Kober (4-9) are the first ever biography about the American scholar and Fox, who was the first journalist to research in the archive at PASP, had set out to bring Alice Kober and her work back to the attention of classicists and the broader public. “I RESCUE lost souls” is how she opens her article in the *New York Times* about “The Riddle of the Labyrinth”, connecting her work as an obituary writer in that very newspaper with Alice Kober, whose obituary at the time didn’t account for her extraordinary scholarly work and who was subsequently, according to Fox, “lost to history”:

Little did I realize six years ago, when I began work on a new book about the decipherment of an ancient script, that I would encounter the greatest backstage player I have ever written about: a woman who helped illuminate a world that flourished 3,000 years ago. [...] In the mid-20th century, though hardly anyone knew it, Dr. Kober, working quietly and methodically at her dining table in Flatbush, helped solve one of the most tantalizing mysteries of the modern age. [...] Like so many canonical narratives of achievement, this story has a quiet backstage figure behind the towering public one. And here, too, as in other such stories [...], that figure is a woman. [...] To] correct a gaping omission in the story of one of the world’s great intellectual puzzles and to narrate a vital piece of American women’s history, I have chosen to reconstitute this singular unsung heroine at length, at last. (Fox 2013a)

The unsung heroine who helped decode Linear B: the BBC News Magazine echoed Fox’s stance in the title of an article about Alice Kober’s

role in the decipherment, published on the occasion of Fox’s book release in June 2013:

When a British architect finally cracked it in the 1950s, he was hailed as a genius—but he may never have succeeded had it not been for a woman on the other side of the Atlantic. [...] Alice Kober was on the verge of deciphering Linear B. But before she could, she fell ill, suddenly, and died soon after. [...] Still, she left behind, in her academic publications, a sturdy bridge for others to cross. And in 1952, Michael Ventris did. In a lecture after he had cracked Linear B, and before his death, Ventris did however give substantial credit to Kober for her contribution—but this acknowledgement went largely unnoticed. (Gallafent 2013)

As I have shown above, Ventris and Chadwick gave her credit in their first publication on Linear B, and Chadwick also mentions Alice Kober in his monograph about the decipherment which he first published in 1958. He begins the paragraph about her findings in a praising voice—as far as I can see after having gone through all the accounts of the decipherment in which she appears, this is the only time “Miss Kober” is properly addressed as “Dr. Alice E. Kober”:

The most valuable contribution came a little later (1943-50), from the American Dr. Alice E. Kober. She died at the early age of forty-three in 1950, just too soon to witness and take part in the decipherment for which she had done so much to prepare the way. She was the first to set out methodically to discover the nature of the language through the barrier of the script. (Chadwick 1967: 35)

Later in the same paragraph he comments on the term “Kober triplets”, which was coined by Michael Ventris in a rather blunt (Robinson calls it “slightly teasing” (2002: 69)) manner: the childless *Miss* discovers different sets of three inscriptions, a discovery that was destined to outlive her. Alas, these must be the children she didn’t have in her life: by stating that they are “now commonly, and irreverently” known as such, Chadwick is expressing a certain regret for this unfortunate fact. Maybe he himself could have prevented this from happening, this is what comes to my mind, the mind of a later-born, by editing the passage in *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, where

the term triplets is used without quotation marks or comment (Ventris/Chadwick 1956: 16), giving it an established character. Apart from the casual use of the term triplets, Kober is mentioned (maybe not at length, but still with respect and recognition for her work, or so it seems to me) in both key publications on Linear B. In Chadwick's 1987 introductory book for the British Museum *Linear B and related scripts*, he reinforces Kober's influence by stating:

The most important step, seen with hindsight, was the discovery by the American scholar Alice Kober of a number of sign-groups at Knossos which occurred in three different forms, which she thought must represent some sort of inflexional endings. (Chadwick 1989 [1987]: 17)

In the Ventris Papers at the *Institute of Classical Studies* (IoCS), there is a 1955 typescript for a BBC radio documentary under the title *Tongue of the Heroes* (IoCS, MV 054.1-37, first draft, and -50, second draft) which was broadcast after Ventris' death in 1958 under the title *Language of the Heroes* (see correspondence between *BBC* and Lois Ventris in the Ventris Papers, IoCS, MV 083.1-3). In this script, Ventris dedicated a section to Kober's achievements. Originally he proposed including quotations from her articles, but these passages were erased—either by Ventris himself or the *BBC* editor. What was left is the following:

We began to realize we'd been working in a hopelessly unmethodical way. New discipline came from lead given by Dr. Alice Kober (worked 1944 to death 1950). Her three important contributions: (1) Drawing up a list of signs [...] (2) recognizing inflections [...] (3) Evidence from inflection enables you to construct the 'grid'. (IoCS MV 054.1-37)

He also takes the time to mention the other scholars who were working on the problem of the decipherment. So perhaps, in the first transmission of *The Cretan Tablets* from 1952, time had indeed been scarce. Ventris and Chadwick both were aware of Kober's achievements, and praised them publicly.

That is to say, Alice Kober is not an unsung heroine, after all, but I guess the singing about her is pretty soft. So the task would be to turn up the volume? Or did I overlook any major publications in which Dr. Alice Kober wasn't mentioned, mistakenly?

I think Myres, old and tired as he must have been when the manuscript was finally with the printer, didn't mention her in *Scripta Minoa II*, the long-anticipated publication of the Knossos tablets, that Arthur Evans had passed down to him, for which Alice Kober did so much, unpaid and despite her worsening health. But when I open the heavy volume—right there, in between the narrow library shelves, to convict Myres in the very act, I read:

Thanks [...] to Dr. Alice Kober, of Brooklyn College, New York, who came twice to Oxford to study unpublished texts, revised the Vocabulary, contributed the Inventory of tablets according to their contents, read the proofs, and contributed many valuable suggestions. She was ready to go also to Crete, if the Candia Museum had been restored as to make the original tablets accessible. After the lamented death of Dr. Kober on 16 May 1950, Dr. Emmett Bennett, Jr., of Yale University most kindly visited the reopened museum, checked the numeration of the tablets, and rejoined some unregistered fragments. (Evans 1952: vi)

Encyclopaedias and Anthologies

To be fair, how important is it to be acknowledged in somebody else's book? One has to be written about on one's own behalf. So I keep checking: Alice Kober is mentioned in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, though in the entry on Arthur Evans, not in the one about Ventris (but neither John Chadwick, John Myres or Emmett Bennett have their own entry, or are mentioned in others) and maybe it was a late addendum, sparked by Fox's book:

(Ventris—with the aid of Cambridge linguist John Chadwick [1920–98] and building on the painstaking work of Brooklyn College Classics professor Alice E. Kober [1906–50]—later presented evidence that Linear B was a form of Greek, and his proposal was widely accepted.)⁶

There is no entry for Kober in the *Encyclopedia Americana*. In the German *Brockhaus Lexikon* there are two Kobers: Leopold, an Austrian geologist, who did research on continental crust and *Zwischengebirge* (in between mountains), and Theodor, an aviation engineer, the first employee of Graf Zeppelin, it seems. Nevertheless, Alice wasn't lost in the mountains in between time: since February 2006⁷ she has had an entry on *Wikipedia*, stating that she was “best known for extensive investigations that eventually led to the decipherment of Linear B”. Given that the Palaima/Trombley newspaper article *Archives Revive Interest in Forgotten Life* (2003) is listed as the only source, it might have sparked the creation of the entry, which was substantially improved in 2013, after *The Riddle of the Labyrinth* was published.

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-Evans> (accessed 15 December 2019).

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alice_Kober&dir=prev&action=history (accessed 12 May 2019).

Alice Kober is not included in the book *Breaking Ground. Pioneering Women Archaeologists* (Joukowsky/Getzel 2004), but in the online collection that was conceptualised as the publication's sequel: *Breaking Ground: Women in Old World Archaeology*⁸. The three page biography gives a solid overview of Kober's life, although not all the facts are correctly portrayed: Kober never "studied first hand, the inscriptions at Knossos" (p. 3), and she wasn't "research assistant at the Minoan Research Center for the University Library at the University of Pennsylvania" (p. 4)—this was the centre she and Franklin Daniel wanted to create, inspired by Johannes Sundwall, to collect all the Linear B material and keep it in a safe space (Sundwall was, given the Iron Curtain, constantly worried of another war. See quotation from the Mid-Century Report below). After Franklin's death, Alice Kober pursued the installation of the Minoan Research Center (in which she would have worked, unpaid, at the weekends), but because of her illness it never operated.

Alice Kober is, however, included in *Notable American Women 1607-1950* (James et al. 1971: 344). In a text written by Emmett Bennett, she is presented as a "classical scholar and linguist, important in the decipherment of the Minoan script 'Linear B'" as her findings lead "directly to Michael Ventris' successful decipherment". The same biography is reprinted in the *Lexicon Grammaticorum: Who's Who in the History of World Linguistics* (Stammerjohann 1996).

⁸ www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/ (accessed 12 May 2019).

On the Decipherment and Linear B

In *Archaeological Decipherment. A Handbook* by Jane Barber (1974), which focuses on methodologies in the process of deciphering different ancient languages, Alice Kober is mentioned a few times and praised in two footnotes for her logical deduction work: “Her logic was excellent in terms of semantics” (p. 165) and “to see how far one can deduce useful evidence from such classified alternations alone, see Alice Kober, *AJA*, 49 (1954) 143-51. Note particularly her excellent methodological guidelines” (p. 174).

Chapter Nine of Maurice Pope’s book *The Story of Decipherment. From Egyptian hieroglyphs to Maya script* (1975) is called *Kober, Ventris, and Linear B*, and opens with the following lines (after a cautious warning that the decipherment is “not yet absolutely certain”):

The credit for its accomplishment belongs to Michael Ventris [...]. But the first and most difficult steps along that path were taken by an American, Alice Kober. It was one thing to suggest that the writing on the Linear B tablets might conceal an inflected language. It was quite another to establish definite patterns of inflection. This is what Miss Kober did. Her work on the script is contained in a series of firm and penetrating articles which appeared from 1943 to 1950. (Pope 1975: 159)

In his chapter *The Decipherment of Linear B* contributed to *A Companion to Linear B* (Duhoux/Davies 2008), Pope alludes to three of Kober’s articles: two about the inflection (1945 and 1946) and the one from 1949 in which she showed that the form of “total” can differ according to gender. But the way he introduces Alice Kober is rather sober, not explicitly stating her role for the decipherment: “Its potential [Evans’ ideas about inflection] was recognised by an American scholar, Alice Kober” (Pope 2008: 3).

The exhibition *Codebreakers and Groundbreakers* at *The Fitzwilliam Museum* in Cambridge, 2017/18 brought together two positions of cracking code: “those involved in breaking the Second World War codes and those who deciphered the ancient script of Linear B”.⁹ These two positions are not entirely separate narratives, given that Emmett Bennett worked as a cryptographer for the U.S. Army in WWII. In the publication accompanying the exhibition (Galanakis et al. 2017), Alice Kober’s work is briefly introduced in the chapter *The Decipherment: People, Process, Challenges* by Anna P. Judson, who furthermore highlighted Alice Kober’s scholarly significance in a blog post addressed to non-specialists on her personal blog *It’s All Greek to Me*: “As today is International Women’s Day, I want to celebrate the woman without whose work it’s not an exaggeration to say my field of research might well not even exist today: Alice E. Kober.”¹⁰ Judson revisits the comparison of Alice Kober to Rosalind Franklin, and comes to the same conclusion I reached: “I don’t think this is entirely fair: her contributions have always been made clear in works written about the decipherment by specialists. [...] However, it is certainly true that Kober is not well-known outside of specialist circles, and that she deserves to be better known.”

⁹ <https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/calendar/whatson/codebreakers-and-groundbreakers> (accessed 12 May 2019).

¹⁰ <https://itsallgreektoanna.wordpress.com/2018/03/08/international-womens-day-celebrating-alice-kober/> (accessed 12 May 2019).

Changing the Tune

Given that almost all the relevant publications on Linear B and its decipherment mention Alice Kober, I wondered for a long time where the unsung heroine impression came from. It couldn't simply be prompted by the fact that she isn't known to a broader audience today. After all, she was not the one who managed to crack the script, how *could* she be known better? I still can't tell for sure how this notion came into being, but I suppose it has—or could have—something to do with the press articles breaking news of the decipherment. Going through the newspaper clipping folders in the Michael Ventris Papers (IoCS, MV 075.1-52), my spirits dampened: not in one of the 52 articles from all over Europe and the US was Alice Kober's contribution mentioned. The image of Michael Ventris as the brilliant mastermind who has, in a triumphant act of volition, solved one of mankind's great mysteries is the story reported by journalists. A story in which Ventris becomes a WWII cryptographer, because it suits the narrative. A story in which Ventris suddenly understood that Linear B was a syllabic script, Ventris who did the sign-frequency analysis, Ventris who discovered the inflection, like in the *Time Magazine* article *Tale of Two Palaces* from 19 April 1954 (p. 72):

At first Ventris also favored the idea that the tablets were Minoan. That being the case, he had few hints as to their meaning, except for the tiny pictures (e.g. a horse's head, a chariot, a cup) that accompanied some of the text. Otherwise, the writing seemed to consist of about 88 'signs', each one apparently denoting a syllable. With the help of Cambridge Philologist John Chadwick, Ventris began experimenting. He counted the frequencies of various signs, tried to determine how often they might appear at the beginning, the middle, or the end of words. Then he began to investigate the various changes in word endings, and found that they seemed to follow certain rules of grammar much like those of Greek.

While it is true that John Chadwick supported him, the timeline is wrong: Chadwick didn't work with Ventris until he had first put out his hypothesis that Linear B was used to write Ancient Greek. And, clearly, the endings were discovered by Alice Kober.

As a copywriter, a part of me understands why Alice Kober's achievements were omitted in the articles: in order to keep the story straight and focused, easy to follow for a non-specialist audience. But the amount of misinformation and attributions found in the articles about the decipherment can't be explained with the simplification of a story. It seems to be an almost violently disrespectful rewriting of the narrative in order to place Ventris at the centre of the achievement, ignoring all the other scholars who worked on the problem (apart from Chadwick, as mentioned, and Blegen) for decades. What was a story of many, and could have been presented as a joint effort across continents, overcoming the discontinuation of intellectual exchange caused by the war, is instead reduced to that of one man, one mind. Like the summit of Mount Everest, which was accomplished in 1953, when Ventris published the results of the decipherment. In *The Times* of 25 June 1953, both achievements are even placed on the same page: three men alone, against the known world and its order.

Regarding the newspaper articles, the assessment of Alice as an unsung heroine is absolutely right. She had, at the time of the decipherment, never been shown to the public. In the context of the books and articles about Linear B, it might be more a matter of turning up the volume, or better yet, of changing the tune. When going through all the passages in which Alice Kober is mentioned, the sentences praising her "excellent logic" are in many cases (all written by male authors) ironed out by words like "prim", "arid", "cold", "ponderous". Even the word "frigid" came up. The fiercest judgement of Alice Kober is to be found in *The Man Who Deciphered Linear B*. Take, for example, in the following passage, which Fox must have had in

mind when she wrote her version of the correlations of the decipherment, almost rectifying Alice Kober's reputation:

In mid-June 1951, on this topic [inflection] he [Ventris] wrote: 'It is possible to disagree here and there on whether a particular pair of sign groups really are inflected forms of the same word; but the basic existence of inflection, hinted at by Evans and confirmed with rather ponderous logic by Kober, is now beyond doubt. I must admit though, that at the time of Kober's articles on the subject I was inclined to follow Myres in dismissing most of her evidence for inflection as being merely alternative name endings' [...]. By late August, he [Ventris] was willing to be more definite still: 'the large and very interesting body of evidence which can be extracted from them [the Pylos sign groups] makes the presence of inflection, first demonstrated by Kober, a certainty.' In due course, Ventris would be prepared to give the late American scholar further credit for her work in inflection, but he would never be warm in his praise. And given the consistent cold shoulder he had received from her throughout, even before her illness, one does not feel inclined to criticise him. (Robinson 2002: 90)

One does not? Well, in fact I do, and I also am inclined to criticise the author's commenting voice. Allegedly, Kober and Ventris met in Oxford in 1948, as Myres had asked them both to help him with the publication of *Scripta Minoa*, Ventris was supposed to make the drawings of the tablets, but Ventris left abruptly and bailed out of the project. He apologised to Myres in a quite tumultuous letter, stating he was a swine for letting Myres down, but having come to the conclusion he should stick to his last. Even though it is unknown what really happened that night, it tends to be interpreted against Kober, as Ventris later told his wife he "had a terrible row" (Robinson 2002: 61). I'll explore this incident in depth in chapter 9.

More weight in judging Alice Kober's personality has her reply to Ventris' so called *Mid-Century Report*, probably because it is still visible, typewriter on paper. At the end of 1949 Michael Ventris distributed a set of 21 questions to twelve scholars who were working on the decipherment. Their scope ranged from general to specific, and the aim was to bring to-

gether all the knowledge and theories about Linear B at the time. After having received the answers, Ventris translated where necessary, then compiled and copied the answers and distributed them to the participants (for a facsimile of the whole report see Ventris 1988). Against her usual policy of corresponding even with annoying people¹¹, Alice Kober replied on 20 February 1950 that she thought this questionnaire was a waste of time and a step in the wrong direction. This is presented in the literature, for example like, this:

Alice Kober herself refused to reply, saying it was a waste of time and (rather oddly) a step in the wrong direction. She can hardly have meant by this that collaboration was in itself undesirable. Perhaps she felt that many of Ventris' questions would only encourage *a priori* speculations as to what the answers would be. (Pope 1975: 8)

Or like this: “She [Miss Kober] replied briefly that she thought the questionnaire was a waste of time; but this rebuff did not prevent Ventris from establishing friendly relations with her” (Chadwick 1976: 48). The Chadwick account, which has surely been the basis for all following renderings of the relationship between Ventris and Kober is, strangely enough, misleading: How could Ventris establish friendly relations with a person who would die four months later and, due to her health, couldn't write letters anymore?

Chadwick, in twisting the order of events, laid the ground for the perception of Ventris as the dedicated, warm person, while Kober is the icy one. In going back to the actual report, we can see that Ventris added, under Alice's reply, a reference to her seminal paper about the Minoan scripts: “(For a recent assessment of the present state of research, see Miss Kober's ‘The Minoan Scripts: fact and theory’ (AJA 52 1948 p 82 ff).” We can also see that while some scholars indeed wrote lengthy replies (Pugliese Carratelli peaks with 13.5 pages), Alice Kober wasn't the only one who kept it

¹¹ “I consider myself an expert on crack-pots. Everytime I've published anything, I got two or three letters from people who explained how simple the problem was. Then would ensue an active correspondence for a month or so, with my correspondent getting more and more annoyed with my ‘stolid classicism’ or my ‘unscientific conservatism’ until I stopped answering.” (AK to FD, 4 September 1946, PASP, Box 57).

short: Emmett Bennet a little over 1 page, Myres 1.5 pages and Sundwall 2 pages. In fact, reading Sundwall's 28 January 1950 answer to the last question of the set "Q21, WORK FOR THE FUTURE—What (apart from full publication of the records) do you consider the most important work to be undertaken in the future?" is as telling as it is touching:

The most important task for the present seems to me to be that of using Miss Kober's classification list to draw up surveys of the Knossos inventory records of their contents. [...] I do not know how far Myres has got with the printing. I have unfortunately not heard from Miss Kober for some time. She wrote last autumn that she was to undergo an operation: I am afraid she is not better yet. She is really the pole around which the whole of Myres's work of editing has revolved. One has come to place reliance on her painstaking work with the texts, and she is perhaps more than anyone else familiar with them and with the formulae peculiar to the lists. [...] With best wishes for a successful 1950, and in the hope that we shall not be prevented, by the critical state of the world and by the threat of atomic, hydrogen and other bombs, from being able to continue to work together on the problems which science has set us. (Sundwall quoted in Ventris 1988: 86)

The reason for Kober's silence is already given in the report then: just none of the writers turning it against her had bothered to follow the lead. Or is it, in terms of contrasts in the story, convenient to have an antagonist who puts pressure on the protagonist and makes him shine even more brilliantly?

Although he [Ventris] undoubtedly learned from her [Alice Kober's] work and would later praise some aspects, he never went back on his basic view that she was too negative about the prospects of a decipherment. Surely, she did go too far in her article [Kober 1948]. No science, and certainly no archaeological decipherment, proceeds on such arid, all-or-nothing basis. [...] Alice Kober was probably too restrained a scholar to have 'cracked' Liner B. In the published words of Ventris written after the decipherment, her approach was 'prim but necessary' (privately, he told another American woman scholar that Kober's logic was 'a shade too frigid and destructive for my taste!'). To go further would require a mind like his, that combined her perseverance, logic and method with a willingness to take intellectual risks. (Robinson 2002: 72)

Instead of protesting this representation myself, I would like to re-quote Prof. Palaima, who has studied and worked with Emmett Bennett and is besides being a Linear B expert an enthusiastic Alice Kober supporter:

‘Kober has tended to be presented as a harsh, suffer-no-fools, kind of character,’ says Prof Thomas Palaima, head of the Program in Aegean Scripts and Prehistory at the University of Texas at Austin, which holds Kober’s archives. ‘But this reputation is unfair,’ he says. ‘Her papers show her to be a thoughtful, kind and dedicated person, who, for example, converted test papers for a student who was blind into Braille (which she mastered). She has a fine sense of humour,’ says Palaima. ‘There’s an amazing amount of whimsical stuff in there.’ (Gallafent 2013)

I couldn’t agree more with him, even in the published articles, to me, there is whimsical stuff. For example, Kober built her 1944 article *The Scripts of Pre-Hellenic Greece* on the ancient Greek saying “All Cretans are liars”. While its origin is unknown, Kober says that in classical times the Greeks used to comment on the Cretans’ claims that “Crete had once ruled the Aegean, when every Greek knew it was an island of little political or commercial importance, and quite outside the current of Greek civilization; finally, to cap the climax, the Cretans asserted that they had invented writing, when every school child knew that Cadmus had brought writing to Greece, and that Cadmus was a Phoenician!” (Kober 1944: 72). After giving an overview of the Minoan Scripts and the basic problems of the decipherment, she concludes: “We can say only one thing with certainty: the ancient Greeks did the Cretans an injustice. All Cretans were not liars” (Kober 1944: 74). Opening up an alternative narrative to Greek prehistory by rehabilitating the Cretan’s reputation shows a thinker far from cold or rigid—it is a funny, thorough and gentle way of thinking about the past and what of it is knowable to us. And Kober is, even in this light-footed frame for her article, cautious. She doesn’t reach her point by stating “Cretans weren’t liars”, but “All Cretans were not liars. They sometimes told the truth”—a proposition that is unquestionably true, given her previous elaborations. Given her language’s accuracy and strict refusal of conjecture, it seems doubly unfair that

she herself is subject to speculation and looseness, that many of the texts about her are biased and thus the sources aren't read *carefully*: care not only as a concern or worry, but also diligence and welfare.

In her first article about inflection (1945) she underlines how jumping to conclusions easily can cause misunderstandings:

It is obvious that, in any language written in an alphabet or syllabary, a certain number of words can be found that have many signs in common and still are not related—e.g. in English, the pairs 'heavy' and 'heaven'; 'berry' and 'merry' each have four signs in common. Yet they are not related, although a careless alien might conclude that they showed suffixal and prefixal inflection respectively. (Kober 1945: 144)

I cannot know if she meant alien in the sense of “a foreign person” or of “an extraterrestrial being”, but every time I read these lines, I see a greenish jelly-creature from outer space putting on a row of 13 reading glasses (its eyes are dry from the long journey and also a bit tired) with an almost inaudible pebbly exhale, bending over a hard drive or newspaper scrap, determined to find out what this vanished civilisation was once communicating. Because where careless aliens exist, there also must be careful ones, right? But, more importantly, how does the careful alien examine and write about what is only to be found between the lines?

Turning to Fiction

There is, to my knowledge, only one work of fiction in which Alice Kober is featured: Alison Fell's novel *The Element -inth in Greek* (2012). The title is taken from a Kober manuscript (PASP, Boxes 52, 53). She published an excerpt of her findings in the 1942 article *The Gender of Nouns Ending in -inthos*. Franklin Daniel wanted to publish the whole study in 1947 as a book (FD to AK 11 September 1947, PASP, Box 57), but it never materialised. The blurb of Fell's book opens:

In a small holiday village on the coast of Crete, Ingrid Laurie researches a biography of the neglected linguist Alice Kober, who laid the basis for the decipherment of the ancient Cretan script Linear B, but died too young to reap the rewards of her work. While Ingrid struggles to decipher the life of the enigmatic scholar, on the outskirts of the village local policeman Yannis Stephanoudakis discovers a bizarre, naked corpse covered in honey and dead bees.

It is a kind of detective novel in which the fictional biographer, Ingrid Laurie, is 43 years old, just as Alice Kober was when she died. Laurie is divorced and only entertained by books or when talking to others about her research. She falls for the policeman (and helps him with the case by going through a manuscript of the deceased young man), but doesn't want to allow him any space in her life. In the end, she has to return home from Crete early to take care of her frail mother (another distant Kober parallel) and eventually commits to Yannis' courting from a distance.

Loosely scattered into the murder case narrative are passages about Alice Kober's life, which are the results of Ingrid's research stays in Texas, New York and Greece: Alice Kober's education and decision to decipher linear B (p. 2-4), that her birth certificate listed Alice as Adele (p. 42), the dif-

ferent places of residence of the Kober family over time and the unknown cause of death (p. 47-51), the Kober archive and especially the contents of the Brann memoir (p. 90-7), the unpublished monograph about the element -inthos and Franklin Daniel (p. 103-5), Linear A (p. 120-1), Alice's first journey to England and Sundwall's idea for a Minoan research institute (p. 146-150), Kober's candidacy for the Indo-European Linguistics post at the University of Pennsylvania and her malaise at the Christmas Convention of the American Philological Association, the Archaeological Institute and the Linguistic Society of America in 1947 (p. 170-5), her correspondence with Johannes Sundwall (p. 188-191), Kober's second trip to England, the alleged encounter with Ventris in Oxford and establishing an exchange with Bennett (p. 292-5), work on *Scripta Minoa II* and Franklin Daniel's sudden death (p. 322-6), and Kober's illness, exhaustion and death (p. 393-8).

Essentially, the information given in these passages is the same as Margalit Fox uses in the chapters on Kober, as both rely heavily on the Kober correspondences at PASP, notably the Brann memoir, a 1948 student of Kober's who was invited by Prof. Palaima to write down her memories of Kober, in which she gives the only existing physical description of her (Brann Memoir, PASP, Box 58.1). Even though Fell's text is clearly a piece of fiction, the passages about Kober are, following the main character's task of writing a biography, as non-fictional as possible. Only in very select situations does the main character allow herself an imaginative tone to think about Alice, and then only to immediately censor herself. One example is the image of Alice Kober at the '47 Christmas Convention—Franklin Daniel had told her to make an impression on certain post-bearers from Penn, because he knew they needed a little persuasion to make Kober a candidate for the professorship. Apparently, Alice didn't have the chance to talk to them or Franklin Daniel as he always was in conversation with others, when she saw him, as she mentions in a letter to him on 15 February 1948. Kober's tone in the letter is not reproachful, it seems to me to be more like an apo-

logy or explanation to Daniel as to why she didn't talk to him (despite all the communication that had gone back and forth between them in the months prior, due to Daniel's plan to get her appointed). Ingrid Laurie imagines the situation quite differently, pitying Alice Kober for being passive, overlooked and somewhat powerless:

[...] it's the thought of Alice the wallflower that makes her shiver. Ingrid imagines her in something mauve, her hands clasped before her waist, a clunky handbag like the Queen's dangling from her wrist. Her hair bobbed and permed, perhaps, for the big occasion, it's enough to make you weep. Invisible Alice, waiting and watching, and never being seen. No one likes to go unnoticed, and sallow, stocky Alice didn't have glamour on her side. Impossible not to empathise with her as she hangs about, excluded, and finally, gathering the rags of her pride, flees from the convention. Did Alice actually feel any of the emotions she imputes to her? She'll never know, of course, and empathy or no empathy, she has no right to fill in the gaps. It's supposed to be a biography, not a fairy tale [...]. (Fell 2012: 176)

The lack of insight into Alice Kober's life is also of importance in the passage where Ingrid Laurie contemplates if the cancer type Alice Kober died of (even though the cause of death is not recorded in the death certificate, it is quite certain that Alice Kober died of cancer; see Adelaide Hahn's obituary, PASP, Box 56.23) was of a gynaecological origin, as Kober had to suppress her feminine side:

The speculation will have to go, of course. The trouble is that bare statistics don't make a life, and in the absence of proof—she would have killed for a fragment of diary, a single personal letter—her mind piles supposition on conjecture, racing around like a rat in the trap. (Fell 2012: 51)

I do not know what the original intention of Alison Fell's book was: writing a detective story or writing a Kober biography (at the same time that Margalit Fox wrote hers, which is an odd coincidence) or interlacing both, but for the result this doesn't matter. Even though Alice Kober appears in a book of fiction, the means of fiction have not been used to explore Alice

Kober's correspondence. As (almost) no material other than what is already in the archive exists, re-visiting the available documents with a different methodology is the only approach that is left to *make a life*. Well, maybe not making, as that sounds like an imposition from the beginning, but *retrieving* a life, versions and possibilities of a life that had once been lived.

Before elaborating on the difficulties this endeavour brought about, I must comment on the difficulty I had with *The Element -inth in Greek*, simply because it cannot remain unsaid: in several passages there were more or less unconcealed ethnic discriminations to be found. In many cases against Germans, which is manifested in the use of Nazi vocabulary by Yannis (the worst is when Yannis thinks of a German character with an artificial leg as “steel-rimmed Gauleiter” (Fell 2012: 330)) and even German characters, but also against people of colour. Ingrid Laurie wanted to visit Kober's house in Flatbush and, while standing in front of it and seeing a black man walking out the door, she wonders why they hadn't answered her letter in which she had explained her request: “Most likely the current owners had seen her letter as some kind of scam—a philologist (a whaaaat?) who deciphered ancient scripts (are you kidding me?)” (Fell 2012: 216). While I do understand that for Greeks there are historical reasons for despising Germans (even though this opinion doesn't seem to suit the police officer's backstory, who is quite cosmopolitan, as he was married to an Australian and had lived many years abroad), I do not understand why Ingrid, Laurie who is Scottish, also has to be racist and anti-German. As there doesn't seem to be a necessity for them in the text, these comments remain irritating and misplaced.

4
Deciphering the Silence—*Losing Skin*

From the beginning on, the project about Alice was called *Deciphering the Silence*. This title came to me as unquestionably as the whole material. It just was there: the silence. The silences: a strangely tuned silence in the publications about the scholar Alice Kober, and the silence as a starting point for my planned artistic work—what can be found if little or nothing is left? I assumed from the beginning that I would need to “decipher” the remains—try to understand an inherent inner logic without implying my own logic, cautiously filling in the blanks. Little did I know how powerful the silence I encountered would turn out to be: productive and unsettling, painful and liberating. Alice’s silence made my own silence audible, like wearing noise-cancelling headphones—suddenly the own heart’s cawing drowns out turbine drumming, the universe’s judder, and all the sounds of outer friction.

This is one of my earliest memories: I am about three years old, standing in our little town's stationary shop, in the evening, winter. Maybe there's a Christmas market outside, the store is a bit crowded. The lady at the cashier gives me a candy, *Nimm2*. Despite the name meaning *take two* I have to choose between yellow (lemon) and orange (orange). Both flavours are filled with the same syrup. I pick yellow. Some bite right away through to the filling, but I hate that splintering sound. I would wait until the hard part dissolved. Enjoying the gentle clicking sound of the hard candy against my teeth.

"When we are home, can I get a glass of water?" I ask my Mum.

"Are you thirsty?"

"The candy got stuck." I can hardly breathe. The cheerful yellow candy turned into a villain, raging in the inside of my throat. And yet I do not dare to ask for a glass of water, right now in the store, because I have already been given a candy. I am three years old, about to suffocate, and what I care about is not being excessive. I am three years old and I know how long the walk back to our house is. In fact, I know every feeder pillar, all the cross-roads, I know where the pistachio green house is and the sign with the school kids on it, I could draw the different types of paving: cobble stone, tar, concrete blocks. I am three years old and I have no voice for myself, for my needs.

Becoming a Female Writer

Being on my journey to Alice's archive, I thought I'd start writing about her, writing her back into the world right there in Austin, sitting at my desk in the cramped archive. I still thought that over my first days there. But I was busy with carefully opening the moon-coloured archival boxes and folders, taking out the thin postwar paper, which made it hard (especially the type from Finland that Johannes Sundwall used) to see which letters were written on which side—front and back inked together in immediacy. I was busy holding my breath. Then, after I had seen, had read everything, I sat there, eventually enveloped in the same delicate layer of dust that covered Alice's former belongings. I couldn't move to write. To invent. To imagine. To play. As it is not uncommon for me not to write even though I want to, I wasn't alarmed. But inevitably, the pressure built up. After all, I had only a couple of weeks in Austin and I couldn't spend them all motionlessly. So I started to type up all the parts that I felt I'd need from Alice's correspondence with Franklin Daniel and Johannes Sundwall. Alice's voice went through my fingers, her rhythm of language structured my thoughts. Her way of expressing herself in English and German. The German which was almost perfect, but slipped from time to time. I chose these two correspondences because they seem to have meant the most to Alice: the collection of letters exchanged with Franklin Daniel is by far the most extensive, even with the four year long silence while he was in the Army. They are letters of friendship, of professional inspiration, of advice, of attraction even. They are the most personal. In the letters with Sundwall Alice is a different writer (in the German as well as in the English ones). She admires him, caring for him, his advice and health, across continents.

I decided to re-type—and not photograph, as I did with other letters—for practical reasons: to get a better overview, to being able to look for specific words and terms afterwards, but also to get closer to them. To enter them. To see what I am missing. “To write is to want to rewrite”, says Barthes (2011 [2003]: 132).

The dance of readerly excitement: the smack of an open hand on the desk, abrupt shifts in position, breath quickening or slowing down. In these scenes of extraordinary encounter I realize what Barthes describes as a lack. I am up out of my chair, or I’m not: I’m still seated, I’m folding down the corner of the page, underlining, typing the passage out, capturing it on my phone because even in its plenitude, even as it is right now filling me up, there is, I feel, something missing. (Briggs 2017: 116)

Rewriting as not not writing: I was filling myself with Alice’s words. And slowly, ever so gently, she arrived inside me or I arrived inside her. And all the anger I had felt when she hadn’t gotten appointed as a professor in Philadelphia, when Sir John Myres made her work for him and kept her from her own work and she was too polite to refuse, when she talked about how she served cocoa for her students’ classical club meeting—all that jolted my ribcage from the inside, from where the void is halted by bone, by flesh.

Suddenly I realised that I, up to this point, had been a writer. Not female, not male. Just a writer without a body, and I had considered it a strength. If you have no body, you cannot be hurt, can you? You cannot suffer. You cannot bleed. “Writing is easy”, as Hemingway allegedly said, “all you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.”

Writing is easy, all you do is sit down and choke on a piece of hard candy.

Speaking Silences

I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. (Lorde 2017 [1984]: 1)

From the beginning, this project had a certain feminine energy to it (“Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing. [...] When I say ‘woman,’ I’m speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history.” Cixous 1976 [1975]: 875-6), but I didn’t call myself a feminist writer or think of myself as a feminist. One reason is that feminism has a different notion in Germany, probably in all German-speaking countries. For a long time feminists were deemed old, stubborn man-haters, and prominent activists like Alice Schwarzer inevitably substantiated this prejudice, simply because she was an activist and opposed common opinions about pornography, for example. For my whole school career, feminism was not mentioned once. No one introduced us to the terminology, gave us the words to think about and share our everyday life experiences.

When I was in New York, I went to readings of Laurie Penny, Roxane Gay, Naomi Klein and Siri Hustved. There it belonged together: being a female writer and being a feminist. I think one of them even said it: *I write and I am a woman, how could I not be a feminist?* In the German-speaking literature world, it is still an exception and not a matter of course to be a feminist. Not in a single introduction or Q&A section of a reading I have attended in the last ten years in Switzerland and Germany did the word femin-

ist come up. It seems highly unlikely now that I write it, but I have a fairly good memory and I don't see why it would fail me on this question, of all things.

In 1999 the term *Fräuleinwunder*, which originally was coined to describe the success of the German beauty queen Susanne Erichsen in the 1950s (see *Life Magazine*, 7 April 1952, p.77), was attributed by literature critic Volker Hage (1999) to young female authors who had just published their debuts: “Das literarische Fräuleinwunder ist jedenfalls augenfällig”. (“The literary Fräulein wonder is obvious, however.”) He goes on to call Judith Hermann's (one of the most accomplished writers of short stories) writing “ganz hinreißend” (truly adorable), an almost violently patronising choice of words for a book review in one of Germany's most important print media.

Almost ten years later, in 2008, Charlotte Roche's book *Feuchtgebiete* took up a stance on how women see themselves, their bodies, and their desires. This huge success was partly due to the fact that Charlotte Roche was, back then, thirty years old, which undermined the image of the “old” (I cannot help the quotation marks—that capitalist logic at work: what is old has to be replaced, recycled, up-cycled at best, but cannot, under any circumstances, be good) feminist who, out of their own bitterness condemned men. The book provided an unspoken view on the female body (with an emphasis on secretions) and female pleasure. Soon after it was published it was declared “the new feminism”, and this claim was in turn widely debated¹². Charlotte Roche declared herself to be a feminist (see the interview with Nina Power in *Power* 2011 [2008]) and strived to inspire discussions, but through the exaggerations in the play, with disgust and taboos, no general discussion about the female body, sexuality, and needs unfolded, as the extreme couldn't refer in a meaningful way to the ordinary.

¹² See for example the article “Da kommt Mutter Natur” by Hubert Spiegel in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 April 2008, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/erfolgsgeschichte-eines-buches-da-kommt-mutter-natur-1539783.html> (accessed 16 December 2019).

A more recent example of feminism in German-speaking literature is the Austrian author Stefanie Sargnagel, who puts forth the idea of matriarchy as a writer of status updates on Facebook, which have been published as books too. Sargnagel is a founding member of *Hysteria*, a female fraternity which is a satirical project, but leaves a quite serious impression: I saw their appearance in the audience during a reading by Stefanie Sargnagel at *Volksbühne Berlin*. They were in full uniform in the audience, saluting, and somehow prepared. For taking over? For finally getting it right? In this performance, as well as in Stefanie Sargnagel's attitude as a writer (in her texts, she cultivates the outsider attitude of an alcoholic, an art student and a call centre agent, and maybe her brilliance lies in making all three of them work together perfectly), there is that of boredom (see her reading at the prestigious literary award *Bachmann Preis*¹³) and decline towards the world. Recently, her twitter account was shut down because she tweeted (in a heavy Austrian accent) after a band she was not supportive of was selected to represent Austria in the 2019 *Eurovision Song Contest*: "Austria, you stupid child of a bitch, I'm going to kill you". It is a late (and probably deliberate) echo of the image of militant feminists who are driven by hatred.

In the realm of German-speaking mainstream culture there are only in the last couple of years voices like Roxane Gay's to be found who advocate a differentiated and positive feminism which does not rely on confrontation, but implicitness and companionship, which is much harder to dismiss (Caroline Emcke and Magarete Stokowski are two of them I enjoy reading a lot).

On the contrary, there are female writers who decline feminism and are applauded by critics and readers alike. The most recent cases that come to my mind are Ronja von Rönne and Svenja Flaßpöhler. The latter has written an essay (published in a pink jacket) called *Die potente Frau* (the potent woman) (2018) as a response to the #metoo debate, arguing that saying "no" leaves women in the position of the weak, the victim. In making women responsible for what does or does not happen to them and considering this a

¹³ <https://bachmannpreis.orf.at/stories/2773162/> (accessed 16 December 2019).

precious position of power, the terms of “the new femininity” are just the same as the ones before. It is not the climate that has to change but the women’s attitude towards it: embracing it instead of demanding changes.

The blogger and journalist Ronja von Rönne, born in 1992, wrote a 2015 article for the German newspaper *Die Welt* entitled *Warum mich der Feminismus anekelt* (Why feminism disgusts me), stating, among other things, that she, living in a country whose most powerful person has a vagina, has never experienced being a woman as a disadvantage. That for her, it is fine if companies use naked women in ads for their products, because there seems to be a market for it. In the last decades, Rönne writes, feminism has become a charity mission for underprivileged women, only a symptom in a culture of outrage that clutches more tightly to the idea of equality than any communist regime. She knows many successful women, says Rönne, none of whom is a feminist because they’ve never seen themselves as victims.

I have to stop the quoting here. Rönne herself would probably agree with my objection: she rejected a major journalist price for this piece (the silver *Axel Springer Preis*, please allow me to translate just one more bit, from the statutes: awarded to “journalistically outstanding work” in order to “support prospective journalists and encourage excellency”)¹⁴ and said she never wanted to be an antifeminist in the first place, and that some sentences are unclear. Did she anticipate the instant popularity that would follow her article? Today, four years later, she hosts a TV show on Arte. She is a successful woman, too.

I have to be honest: ten years ago, I was ignorant. I was aware of inequalities, I would join in my friend Kitty’s anger when she didn’t get a Postdoc position on grounds of being in her late twenties, that is: of potentially getting pregnant and thus going on maternity leave (of course, that wasn’t said explicitly, but wasn’t hard to guess either). I vehemently tried to talk my sister out of getting into a relationship with her maths teacher who

¹⁴ <https://www.axel-springer-preis.de/satzung/> (accessed 2 March 2019).

was 15 years her senior—the only time ever she hung up on me (in the end, the fact that he still lived with his mother did the job). But with regards to what had happened to myself, it was different. I didn't protest. I wasn't even angry. The logic's blade was forged like this: if it doesn't hurt me, I am not a victim. If I am not a victim, I have power. If I have power, I cannot be hurt. Ultimately: If I have overcome _____, _____ can't have happened. I guess I wasn't and am not the only woman with this view of my life and my experiences. It made sense: girls were not encouraged to be vulnerable. I, for one, was brought up to be neat, polite and—under the surface—persistent. My parents have told the story from the stationary store over and over again as an example how cute I was as a child. They haven't told it as a story about how they had failed teaching their daughter the words to verbalise her most basic needs. They have not told it as a story of silence. Nor any other. For which language is there to tell stories of silence? Can language protect the silence that is a shelter?

While living in New York, I read a passage in Bell Hooks' *The Will to Change* about why feminists are considered bad or hateful, while it isn't usually women who create an atmosphere of violence, pornography and abuse ("Even though not all men are misogynists, feminist thinkers were accurate when we stated that patriarchy in its most basic, unmediated form promotes fear and hatred of females" Hooks 2004: 108). In this single instant of reading, a multiplicity of situations in which I had found myself, situations including different degrees of violence, forced into action against my will, lay spread out in front of me, neatly aligned. Moments that I had long forgotten or belittled for years. Their very number was shocking—the memories kept and kept on pouring out, just weeks before the #metoo debate started. I was outraged: how could so many things have happened to me and why didn't I ever report anything? Why, most of all, had I never felt that my integrity had been violated, that very wrong things had happened to me? I had to write to understand what I had experienced, I wanted to write

in order to keep the conversation going. It's not only in Hollywood or with actresses: it is in our very homes, in the cities and the countrysides, in Southern Germany, and Berlin and everywhere else. I felt and feel a responsibility or obligation to tell my own story (before re-telling Alice's), with the faint hope that eventually the atmosphere of assault and power abuse can be transformed into a more humane, respectful and secure one. The manuscript I worked on between summer 2017 and 2018 is a collection of prose fragments which reach from childhood to my early thirties, revolving around the telling of stories of silence. On the following pages, I present an excerpt of *Losing Skin*, translated to English. The book will be published in 2021 by a publishing house specialised in experimental prose.

Losing Skin—Excerpt

Games

*You are four
and enjoy playing most
if you're on your own
this concerns your parents
because kids
normally do
like to be
with other kids
they say
and invite
Torsten over
your mother
lends him an old
pair of her slippers
which looks silly
but you don't say that
out loud
you go to the bathroom
and put toothpaste
on the brush
you let water run
over it
and then there is
the pink taste*

*in your mouth
until the foam
finally fades
and eventually
all the foam
is gone
and yet a bit later
all of the taste
and Torsten
goes to find your mother
and asks if he's
allowed to go
home now and she
wants to know
aren't you having
fun playing
together
and the front door
is opened and shut
and you put the
brush back into
its plastic mug
you are four and
you won out*

Magic Flute

*You are five and made
to attend a pantomime
class to make you come
out of your shell at last*

*a scenario just
in case you wished
to stay inside wasn't
mentioned so you
find yourself amidst
a bunch of excited kids
who fight over animal
faces in the form of
rubber masks
all of them want to be
the lion the giraffe
the horse to circle
the guitar teacher's
beautiful son as
prince Tamino
four little animals
clockwise and two
others the other way round
a foolproof
choreography thought
the teacher
and how could she
have known that
on the day of the show
one of the animals
would be sick
which just leaves you
to fulfil the glorious duty
of trotting around
kneeling Tamino
counterclockwise*

*unflinching and proud
you little introvert
child under a layer
of rubber in the
face of a camel*

Thuja

*You're hiding
your mother's
keychain a white
leather case with
of a set of golden
hooks inside at the
beginning you only
rediscovered it after she
had mislaid it
forgotten
in all the fuss
about your baby
brother the gratitude
in her eyes the case
in her hand
was for you only thereupon
you tipped the odds in
your favour from time to
time and now you're fishing
the key case out of the
neighbours' hedge
and your mother
knows with*

*absolute certainty
that she can't have left
it there in the dangling branches
maternal amnesia yes but
insanity no you
are pointing at
your brother because
you also realise
this time you've gone
too far embarrassed
your mother
picks up your brother
her hand with the case
supports the
small of his back
and leaves*

Fabric

*While
your brother grows
and becomes more and more
awake and laughs you see in
your parents eyes
how a child should be
impetuous unafraid
not stuffed with questions
would everyone be better
off without you
for example*

*to find that out
you pack your sleeping
bag your pillow a drink packet
and half a chocolate
bunny you
go through
the patio door
very quietly as
always you sneak
around the
house past the kitchen
window you walk
to the
crossroads there
you wait for a long time
although the light is
green is you feel
free red free
green free red then
you realise
that you are
a child that this plan
won't work out
you get sad and relieved
at once green you turn
around to find
your way
back home
across the patio
to your room
you poke*

*the straw into the
the metal foil dot you
drink and think about
the clip which is shown
before Sesame Street
comes on it points out
that you can
can suffocate in
a plastic bag and
without air you are
really quiet you know
you don't have a bag
so you take the tie
out of your dressing up
box it's smooth with blue
checks you put it
around your neck
holding with each hand
one of the ends
you pull as much
as you can
but there's something
inside of you that
suddenly gets loud
and
rages
a need
that's not made by
the head
the head does nothing
but feeling heavy*

*pressing against the
eyes the power of
the rage is greater than
the power in your
arms
you
let go
and you know
from now on that
the silence is only
attached to you on
the outside
that inside something
can rage loudly
and clearly and strongly*

Overland

*You're nine and ringing the bell
of every front door
in the quarter on the
Dahlienweg
at news time
'Tagesschau'
good evening
in your fingers
shards of cold
I just wanted to ask if
my little brother's
kite has by any*

*chance landed at
your place in the
back yard maybe
which he had received
for his birthday
you say it was the
day before yesterday
white backdrop with
Mickey Mouse on it
Mickey in checkered
pants purple and
black
he did let you
hold the plastic handle
and rotation by
rotation
unwind the nylon thread
Mickey clattering along
high up in the wind your brother
laughed and said higher
you gave it more string
even higher
and held the handle
firmly you gave it more
string until the string
ran out it was
not fastened on the
handle the clattering fell silent
the end of the thread staggering
over your heads good evening
I have to find the kite again*

*I mustn't
show up at home
without it
my parents said
it was their
birthday present
it wasn't on
purpose good evening
you say it was
my fault
mine
good evening*

Universe
*You're eleven
and art
is the only class
where you don't sit
alone because the tables
are arranged in a
rectangular shape
you are busy with
silhouette scissors
in midair
sun and dust
while you're cutting out people
under an expansive
deciduous tree
lime tree maybe*

*Alexandra slips
you a note
repeatedly
it doesn't say anything
because you're supposed to
sign the paper
why she doesn't want
to tell you
you don't want to either and
return the empty note
again and
snip on
hundreds of tiny
paper scraps collected
on the tabletop
as black-white
starry sky and
when Alexandra bugs
you for the fifth time with
the note she says you
can trust her
what could happen
with your name on paper
what could in general happen
on such a beautiful afternoon
almost summer
and finally you sign
and then whispering and then
hoots of laughter because somebody
has added I love Sebi
and then slipped Sebi the note*

*and Sebi flashes you a glance
and you're staring into the
universe on your table
and the universe stares
silently
back*

Sunset

*You are twelve and the
one who evens out
Roland Pflug
he attends athletics
training six days
a week and when in PE
dodge ball teams have to
be chosen the first one
to pick of course
says Roland and the second
Toby and then the
first one chooses Ron and the
second Chris
and when the boys
are all distributed the
girls are picked just until
only you are remaining
on the bench and Kessy
but she's got her period so
the one who has picked
Roland looks at you*

*saying no way that's
simply not fair and then
the one who picked
Toby says but you guys
have Roland right so it's
totally balanced and only
moments later you're
hit by the ball in your belly
and you know the skin will
be red well into the evening
red and round and warm*

Perspective

*You're thirteen
and wearing a dress
of your mother's
batik dyed cotton
in black and white
from the collar dangling
small tassels silently
tapping your ribcage
to the rhythm of your
steps the meadows buzz
from heat otherwise
nothing but carports
and chain swings
you upright
and somehow beautiful
from the inside the whole*

*way to the summer party
extends itself in
unknown confidence
you reach the gate
where you smell stick bread
scent and another
step and you've passed
the gate under
garlands another
step another
then Mo who's standing
there with a cigarette and
his cobalt eyes asks
is that seriously Snoopy
on your underpants
and with every word
a little tail of
smoke rises from
his mouth
while the heat
hisses in your neck
you say
yes triple pack
at H&M and you know
this is going to be a
long evening lifelong
in fact*

Writing *Losing Skin* was a journey into my own life, into the far corners of my memory. This project is closely connected to this research, as I, before reading about autoethnography, always refused to write directly about

myself. I don't think that it was a lack of rigour, which kept me from doing so, but the feeling that it wouldn't be legitimate or of interest to share my personal stories. Why would others care? Reading autoethnographies and exploring how they transformed me made me experience the power of real life stories. What is told is of interest precisely because it has happened to a human being and it is being told. Even though I am very visible in these texts, at least two literary strategies helped me to be contained in them instead of being exposed: firstly, there's the you-perspective, which during the writing process was my own inner voice recalling the events, but now is directed at the reader. Secondly, there is shock and insecurity embedded in the language, indirectly expressing my feelings—numerous line breaks which at times (at least in the German originals) destabilise the syntax. When looking back on the writing process, it feels as though it was expressly the tone of a lyrical stumble that enabled me to continue with the project, balancing between restraint and constraint. It inscribed the decades of speechlessness into the text, and took the pressure from me to find adequate words to communicate my memories and feelings which cannot possibly exist. The hardship of witnessing and writing about assaults was made bearable by a language which incorporated and externalised the distress—a literary language.

“Who knows not how to hide, knows not how to love.”¹⁵

Who knows not how to write, knows not how to love.

Who knows not how to hide, knows not how to choke.

The playful absence of a ghostly subject as a precondition for nearness and the quiet self-protection of a narrating subject as a precondition for accessibility. Achieving an ultimate opening towards the other through a deliberate confining of the self. Or at least through the knowledge of how the self could disappear if necessary. In my own perceptions of my text and other autoethnographies I have read, the impression that the author could, if they

¹⁵ Epigraph to Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (1993).

wanted to, hide—meaning, they control their narrative, they shaped it through active choices, not the other way round—is crucial for an effective and not just affected reading experience. The absent present and its role in the creation of a room for the reader and writer will be dealt with in the chapter *How to Disappear*. For now, it is important to trace the two contrary movements of showing and hiding, which are substantial for writing with a focus on the I. Hiding is something I don't understand as a gesture of subduction in this context, not as holding back or depriving, but as hinting or glancing, both for the reader and the writer. For example, in this fragment of *Losing Skin*, everything is said but the paint stains are, quite literally, hiding the more painful stains:

Housewarming

*You are nineteen
and wave to your
parents in their pumpkin seed green
five seater
the trunk filled
with farewell
toolboxes
cleaning devices and
on the tapas bar's patio
is the real estate guy
who is always there
Primke or something
like that who
also waves at
your parents and says
well kid now
they're off
it was a lot of*

*work wasn't it and
orders Crema catalana
for you and gets you
a chair and wants
to know all about the
renovation process
professional interest
you assume
and after having spooned
the set milk
you say sure I can show
you the apartment quickly
it's just upstairs after
all and unlock for the
first time your
own apartment
point at bathroom and kitchen
living room there
and there
he's already on
your bed and
pulls you down
so close you
can smell the
restaurant's
oil in his hair
and kneels on top
of you that Primke
guy you can't believe
what is happening here
that above you*

*Primke who had
drank red wine
evening after evening
with your parents
is kneeling and fumbling
his belt open and
his pants and heavily
breathing so heavy
that before he
can tamper with you
he comes on you
on your jumper
right next to the
dried paint
100% covering
interior paint
silky shine
brilliant white
on the walls
of whole generations
was what the label
had claimed this is
what you think
while that Primke guy
wraps up and sallies
forth not because of
comprehension compassion
lucidity contrition
but just
because of
failed manliness*

and consequentially

childish

shame

There had been no paint on my jumper, not on that day at least, because we must have painted the apartment way before. But the paint saved me in telling this story—even the bucket and what it said. This is not a memory, but it might as well be, and it represents feelings which I remember very well after nearly twenty years, in the most honest way I can imagine. The paint saved me from having to write about disgust, about embarrassment, about weakness, which is hard to do and even harder to read. It also saved me from explicitly describing my body in the situation: it is hidden in the jumper. The paint is the literary hideout in this text, a literally and metaphorically untouched space.

Losing Skin is thinking in writing insofar as the writing process fostered more memories and gave them a form which is open for interrogation—from myself and also from others. It is one possible basis to discuss the deeply-rooted power inequalities in our society and thus complies with the criteria for autoethnographies, that through written narratives of individuals, light is shed on cultural phenomena. The writing has calmed and outraged me at the same time—I am calmer in the sense of having accepted moments in my life that before have been thoroughly unsettling. Why didn't I say something? Why didn't I do something? I remembered, in the writing process, the incredibly strong disbelief that such things could happen—in general and, certainly, in those particular moments, to me. Me, a careful person who never, not even as a child, forfeited skin or bone or flesh, because I know my physical boundaries quite well and do not feel any desire to go beyond them. Was it my genuine curiosity or naiveté then, that led me into these situations? During the writing, in accumulating memories, I suddenly felt, not only knew, that it was not my fault. That I hadn't asked for any of

this in any way, and that I could not be blamed. This feeling was the energy for keeping on writing.

My very earliest memory, by the way, is me sitting on the edge of my parents' bed. Afternoon light. My Mum is kneeling in front of me, asking which nostril it is in. I have just shoved one of those tiny white mother-of-pearl buttons that she was about to sew on my Dad's shirt's cuff up my nose. I have not learned how to talk yet, so I point. Sometimes, silence is all you need to survive.

5

Silence as a Space to Share—*Nebensächlich, Nomade*

Schnee

Drinnen schneit's

sanfte Flocken aus Kälte

bedecken Organ um Organ

Schnee aus Schwarz

Snow

It's snowing inside

soft flakes made from cold

cover organ by organ

snow that black

It's snowing inside, soft flakes in all their irretrievability on the rattling mirror's wooden frame. On the floor, of course it is snowing on the floor, except for the rectangular lacks of white caused by the table, the chair, the bed. The soft border between snow and what used to be floorboards and is now emptiness, windblown (thoughtblown, doubtblown) dispersals in the room inside. Writing, to me, is a matter of embracing gaps and voids. Blanks as a memorial of what cannot be told, of silence: blanks as the space for the reader to enter a text. Blanks also as a figure of reliability, of strength: the snow's unflinching white encasing the words on a page.

After I had decided that my thesis had to be practice-based, that it wasn't only *in* writing, but *about* writing as a method, I started to reflect on the gesture, the nature, the correlations of writing itself. This process, which was mostly inspired by Foucault, Barthes, and Irigaray, sparked ideas for writing projects which would circle around the absent present. This chapter focuses on the project *Nebensächlich, Nomade* (which consists of Savyon's poems in Hebrew and my *transferences* into German, published in spring 2020 by Edition Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany) and shows the German versions of the poems next to translations into English, to make them accessible in the context of the thesis.

Imagine that for you, too, there must be a sentence. A paragraph. Or a longer part of somebody else's work that you feel you know well. You like it. You love it, even. Or perhaps you don't. Perhaps it hurts you. But you are, nevertheless, for a complex of reasons, attached to it. Let's say that it acts upon you. [...] It addresses you. Or is it that you have made it address you? (Briggs 2017: 129)

Yes, for me, too, there is a sentence I feel I know well, that I love, even. A sentence which acts upon me, which has inspired this whole project, which is not one, but many. It is from the French philosopher Luce Irigaray:

The matter is no longer to simply show things to each other as we have been taught in our culture. What we have to tell each other is not yet determined by a discourse existing outside of us. Therefore, the first word we have to speak to each other is our capacity or acceptance of being silent. (Irigaray 2011: 113)

The way I read it and work with it is highly selective—I leave aside the debate of a masculinist economy/phallogocentrism (see Butler 1990) and its connection to language. I focus on the newer texts which are more about rapprochement between the male and female or the one and the other in general (see Irigaray 2008 and Irigaray 2017). I do, with Irigaray, understand language as a means of power, as well as the only means of overcoming it. Yes, for me, this is a sentence I feel I have known well, that I must have loved from the moment of grasping language as a concept. The absence of words as a starting point for speaking to each other invites what I would call a poetic state of being into our cultural concept of communication—embracing blanks and blurs as the possibility of meeting the other on equal grounds, rather than insisting on the existence of unambiguousness:

The capacity of acquiring or constructing the totality of knowledge, the totality of discourse, is often considered an accomplishment in our culture, and even the accomplishment of our culture itself. To succeed in constructing a culture of two subjects, we must instead acquire the capacity to remain silent in order to listen to the other as other, and to his or her truth which will always remain strange for us, unknowable by us. Our culture lacks a cultivation of silence as it lacks an education of relationship with the other as other. (Irigaray 2002: 85)

It's a positive and productive silence, a silence in order to speak, not to choke. A silence that awaits, that opens up a space to share.

In the beginning all pages were blank.

When I first met Israeli poet Savyon in the communal lunch room at Akademie Schloss Solitude in July 2018, she told me that she uses her own texts in her pieces. Since I'm interested in how one's own texts can be performed on stage, I asked her about her strategies and if her poems are translated into English, as I don't speak a word of Hebrew. Savyon replied that her texts are untranslatable, as a friend of hers told her, who had studied Comparative Literature at Harvard and whom she had asked to try. She even offered him money, she added, so it couldn't have been a lack of motivation that kept her friend from finding the right words. They just didn't exist.

Imagine for you, too, there must be a sentence, or at least a curiosity. I heard Alice's verdict of semitic languages being a nuisance ("Semitic and Egyptian are a nuisance, because they lack vowel signs, and leave too much to the imagination", AK to FD, 8 September 1947, PASP, Box 57) jolting around in my thoughts. Was she right? How much is, in fact, left to the imagination in Hebrew? More than in other languages? More than in my own? More than is bearable? I've never been to the Middle East and have virtually no knowledge of Hebrew or Arabic. In experimenting with bringing Savyon's poems into German, I saw a chance for learning about the omitted vowels, of getting to know Hebrew from an almost intimate position: being inside the language, surrounded by it, marvelling at it with my own inner words. I also heard Luce Irigaray saying nothing. Just smiling and pointing at the opportunity to put her idea of listening, of keeping the other's truth, ultimately unknowable, into action. Working with Savyon was the chance to make a profound, honest and kind silence truly the beginning of a conversation, of an encounter between two subjects, between two writers encountering the world.

"I'm afraid my poems are untranslatable," said Savyon, emphasising every syllable in overcome exasperation.

“Let me try to translate them,” I heard myself saying, “I don’t yet know how, but I absolutely want to try.”

“Like a bird who understands nothing of what we hear, who hears what we do not understand” (Barthes 1975 [1973]: 25).

The longer I write, the more I long to become the bird Barthes writes about—tilted head, paper-light bones—hearing what they don’t understand. Gliding past meaning, past the idea of borders in language, in my thoughts. Leaving behind definitions to reach immediacy. Obviously, in using language to communicate, there must be sense, structure, shared agreements. I am well aware of this. But as a bird I am interested in the porosity of the in-between-spaces. (Like the resting swallow fledglings in the arches below Schloss Solitude—you can see their nests huddled against the white corners, you can see the three of them sitting in there, but you cannot see how this tiny structure can actually contain them.)

The ineffable inside us, this December white sky, produces the possibility of poetry—as there are no ways to be precise about what is inside, we have to be poetic and imaginative; we have to create our own room of meaning, a room which is different for every Other who enters it. This is the room in which I lingered when I worked on Savyon’s poems. We met and she read her texts to me—that unbelievably lenient and perpetual sound of pebbles in a creek—and then explained every word to me in English: what it means, why she chose it, what its roots are, what it sounds like, what she associates with it. What was apparent, even to a bird’s ear (which is usually to be found right beneath the eye) is how Savyon’s poems are built on rhythm and sound. I tried to find equivalent echoes in German, which in many cases led to shifts in meaning. I, in return, read my versions to Savyon, who doesn’t speak German, and on her turn heard what hadn’t been said. I explained the meaning of new words I had chosen because of their sound, and thus added new layers, new nests.

In German, I do not use the word *Übersetzung* (translation) to talk about the project with Savyon. I prefer *ungewisse Übertragungen* (uncertain transferences), a term I coined to relate to the audience's expectation of how a "real" translation is done.

Imagine, for you, too, there must be a presupposition, a plumed delusion. While we worked on the transferences we still did not know what we were actually saying—we heard the languages meet and resonate. The silence in which we met was voice without meaning. I learned about the relation between German and Hebrew on a level of sound. I learned about the Niqqud, the little dots that are, when writing poetry, added to the Hebrew signs to indicate the vowels—to ensure that it's not the vowels which are left to the reader's imagination, but the world. I learned about roots.

*Unversehens eine Welt
unversehens fallen die Seelen
und ich fang sie auf
ich rette sie und flute die Ufer
bei Bedarf*

*Suddenly a world
suddenly falling: the souls
and I catch them
I save them and flood the banks
as needed*

Imagine for you, too, there must be a sentence, a journey. Going from pure sound through an English intermediate state to my mother tongue, going from the somehow earthly, sedimentary Hebrew with eons inscribed through quotidian, pragmatic English to my way of using German: lean, airy, homely. How can an I which is female (something like I-she) be repro-

duced in German? How can a human-she be conveyed? Through my vision (how to get rid of the eyes and bring in the ears) of what the poems in Hebrew meant, I started to hear my own language, its possibilities and restrictions, differently. Going back and forth between the languages became primarily a potentiality, a task not of finding the right word but the right consistency: “We must use a language that remains breathful, alive, sensible. Thus we must attend to the quality of the words we choose, of the tone of voice” (Irigaray 2002: 87).

It was a very gentle way of writing, balancing one sky in between two worlds. When I write in English I am aware of my limitations, I know that I do not have the same sensitivity at my command as in German. I can express my thoughts, but there’s always a certain amount of doubt, of unpleasant reduction. My language feels sifted: only the coarse and clumsy (klutzy, says the dictionary and couldn’t be more right) bits make it to the page, stacking up like Tetris blocks. Almost never does the long four brick bar arrive in time. But I am the same person in English as I am in German (unlike in French, in which I am a five year old, more pointing and grimacing than verbally expressing myself), it’s just the minutiae that get lost.

Translating my own texts into English means rewriting them with the language switched in my head. Writing in English means writing with lesser supplies. When I write in German, I feel like knowing (owning?) (owing?) all the words, which lets me get every nuance right. On rare occasions, I feel almost all-powerful. And there it is: the power. The power of belonging. A belonging in which language can become a barbarous blade. Imagine for you, too, there is a sentence, an ancestry. This is not the place to discuss fascism (the old, the new) in Germany, the way it was never addressed in my family and all the families of my friends, the shivers of speechlessness running through three generations. This is just to say that the idea of encountering the Other with true openness had for me, in this context, an existential quality—allowing for the words, the sounds to meet in the here and now,

between me and Savyon, between one writer/subject/culture and another, nestled in the hollows.

*In eine Landkarte, weiß
mit einem kleinen Fleckchen Lehm
ist mein Herz geschlagen
und es gibt kein Gehen und kein Kommen
Belagerung aller Schöpfung*

*In a street map, white
with a little stain of clay
my heart is wrapped
and there is no leaving and no arriving
besieging of all being*

We didn't know where our project would lead us when we started to work on it. It could have been a lost way or lost time. But once we sat down and I started to listen, a quality of proximity unfolded that I had never experienced before. It wasn't about us, it wasn't about the words. It was about the worlds. After I had translated the first batch of poems, we started to read them simultaneously (at least the short ones), again sitting in the communal dining area, our voices bouncing off tables, walls and the red-dot-embossed PVC floor. Whoever was walking by to get a coffee or juice stopped. Listened. Smiled. Most of those passersby knew neither Hebrew nor German. For them, it was even more sound, even less meaning. One night in August, after having met four or five times, we invited all the fellows to an informal reading in Schloss Solitude's Guibal Saal: in pyjamas, on mats and pillows. A warm and soft silence was what filled the room after we had finished. A., who also didn't speak German, said: "That was touching."

"Touching means to touch on something evanescent which—like a ghost—eludes the touch" (Steinweg 2010: 30, my translation).

In *Nebensächlich, Nomade*, language became the place of presence and absence at the same time, through listening more than saying. The tangency cannot be located at an exact, predicted, predetermined point somewhere *here*, but in infinity, far beyond our reach or comprehension. In our project, bringing poems from one language to another, translation “is an asymptote: no matter how close we try to get, there’s always a space between the two bodies and that is the space where we live” (Antena 2014: 1).

Today, I arrived late to the library. All the window seats (facing the Mason’s Yard, where John Lennon first met Yoko Ono in 1966) were taken, which is why I’m sitting at a desk right next to the rare books glass cabinets. On the shelf below *Images of Bath* there are two unequally proportioned volumes in a slipcase: *Ovid’s Metamorph. English’d by Caxton 1480*. English’d! To ‘English’ a Latin text, to ‘German’ Hebrew poems: using language as a transitive verb to escape the *translation* as an unflinching removal of a word from one place, carrying it over to another place where it had never been before and maybe never wanted to go. Using language as a transitive verb to keep the word in its vested place (where it is used to the weather, the consistency of bread, the greeting conventions) and think of it while being somewhere else—in a house of broken dishes on the sea, in a house of paper among high mountains, in a house of dust on open ground.¹⁶

When I wrote this bit, I must have blocked out the obvious reference—Barthes’ elaboration on writing as *an intransitive verb*. Today I was reminded of it, reading in *The Rustle of Language* in the German edition: *Das Rauschen der Sprache* (Barthes 2006 [1984]). Already slipping between languages, let me leave the transitivity aside and turn to the verbs: *Rauschen* is what strong, green leaves do in the wind. It is not what small animals (a mouse, a hedgehog, a blackbird) do while making their way through a pile of dry autumn leaves. In German, unlike in French and English, for the

¹⁶ see Alison Knowles’ 1967 computer poem “House of Dust”, reimplemented by Nick Montfort, https://nickm.com/memslam/a_house_of_dust.html (accessed 13 May 2019).

sound of bestirred dead leaves and loose leaves or paper in general, there is another term: *rascheln*. Both words are onomatopoeic and I see why translator Dieter Horning chose to make *le bruissement* into *Rauschen*—a word like a grandiose boulevard in early summer—the sound of superiority and baffled audiences (*rauschender Applaus* as enthusiastic response), to which Barthes is undoubtedly entitled. But wouldn't he, being the cautious thinker he was, have liked even more to be a fur-skinned, fast-heart-rate creature, rustling ceaselessly through the pages of world's literature and our conceptions of it? I, for one, would like him to have liked that earthy smell, the porous light, the confident decay.

Savyon and I did another reading from our project during the *Soft Power Palace Festival* in Stuttgart (30 October 2018), and still nobody who could speak both German and Hebrew had read the texts. A part of me wishes that it could have stayed that way, but when Akademie Schloss Solitude's publishing house Edition Solitude offered us a book deal for the manuscript, we felt that we needed to make sure there were no strange glitches. And there were some, though not many—Savyon meant “hores”, where I had understood “horrors”, for example. Sometimes I think of the Hebrew-German proofreading as weakness, as caving in, as a tribute to a more conventional approach to language, where there is no space between the soft, bird-like bodies of the words, where there are equations and two outcomes of a result: equal or not equal¹⁷. Sometimes I am quite proud that, apart from two or three mundane misunderstandings that I corrected, all the poems stayed the way I wrote them at first. They are made from silence, from words and images, that were there and not there at the same time.

“Nothing is lost in translation. Everything was always already lost, long before we arrived“ (Antena 2014: 1).

¹⁷ See for example the debate about untranslatability, e. g. Large/Akashi/Józwikowska/Rose (2018)

*In einer parallelen Welt
gibt es kein Gewissen
gibt es keine Gravitation
ist alles ohne Gewicht*

*In a parallel world
no conscience exists
no gravity exists
everything is without heft*

Rotationsfläche

*Ich schüttle die Babies aus
schüttle und schüttle
bis ich einschlafe
ein Anwesen
abwesend
aus Glas
zwischen Wolken
zwischen Menschen Galaxien
Monde—was verstecken sie?*

Surface of Revolution

*I'm shaking the babies out
I'm shaking and shaking
before falling asleep
a mansion
absent
from glass
between clouds
between humans galaxies
moons—what are they hiding?*

Mammutmut

*In der großen Schwärze
kommen die Mammuts zurück
kehren die Herden heim
und ich lege all meine Angst in die Tiere
weil sie sind groß genug dafür
lasst uns alles gelb anmalen
damit es warm wird und freundlich
und kindlich
was kümmert's mich
und die Herde holt mich ein
halt mich an ihren Hörnern fest
und wir reiten zusammen
hoppe, hoppe*

Mammothers

*In the full blackness
the mammoths are coming back
are the herds returning home
and I put all my fear in the beasts
because they sure are big enough
let's paint everything yellow
to make it warm and friendly
and childlike
what do I care
and the herd's closing in on me
I hold on to their horns
and we ride together
far, far away*

*Früher war ich eine Menschin
und hatte Gedanken wie eine Menschin
und Gewohnheiten wie eine Menschin
und Gliedmaße wie eine Menschin
jetzt bin ich eine kleine Erdjungfrau
und es ist schwer zu sagen, worauf
klein sich bezieht, den Kontinent
oder mich*

*Früher war ich eine Menschin
jetzt bin ich eine gebrochene offene Linie
die zerfällt ins Vermissen
dessen, das nicht geschehen ist
oder passiert ist und verblasst und keinen Reim ergab
oder verrostet und verrottet und zusammengesetzt
vor Ihm
als alte Dichtung*

*I used to be a humaness
and had thoughts like a humaness
and habits like a humaness
and extremities like a humaness
now I am a little earthmaid
and it's hard to tell what
little refers to, the continent
or me*

*I used to be a humaness
now I am a broken open line
which diverges into longing
for what hasn't happened
or has happened and faded and didn't make a rhyme
or corroded and decomposed and was assembled
in front of Him
as old poetry*

*Ein endloser Tag heute
mit keinem Anfang, außerdem
ein endloser Tag, heute*

*An endless day today
with no beginning besides
an endless day, today*

6

The Space in Between—Heterotopia and Writing

In fact, proximity to the other and closeness between us can be reached when engendering a common world together, a world that will not destroy the world which is proper to each one. Here nihilism finds a positive fulfilment. Calling into question one's own world, so as to preserve the existence and the access to the world of the other, allows and needs to bring about a nothing which will permit the articulation between two worlds. (Irigaray 2011: 112)

I used to be a humanness, to say words like a humanness, to grab hold like a humanness. Now I am a little interval and it's hard to tell what little refers to: the absence of colour or the span of my arms.

I like to think of the space between two bodies or worlds, between the writer and the reader, between the one and the other as a metaphorical instance of space that is there and at the same time is not, a concept which was described by Michel Foucault in a talk about other spaces for architects:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites [...]. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 24)

Foucault himself only gave a very open description of the concept of heterotopia, his “outlines of heterotopia attempt to explain principles and features of a range of cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow ‘different’: disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory and transforming” (Johnson 2013: 790). The widely-known examples he gave of heterotopias are zoos, hospitals, cemeteries and other places that are outside regular environments or society. But Foucault also said that in the play of children, heterotopia plays a major role, as a locally constructed utopia:

These counter-spaces are well recognised by children. Certainly, it's the bottom of the garden; or even more, it's the Indian tent erected in the middle of the attic; or still, it's Thursday afternoons on their parents' bed. It is on that bed where they discover the ocean, as

they can swim between the covers, and the bed is also the sky, or they can bounce on the springs; it's the forest as they can hide there; or still, it's night as they can become ghosts between the sheets. (Foucault as quoted in Johnson 2013: 798)

In these examples, the heterotopias are created in the imaginary, the starting point is the same definite space—the parents' bed—but the other, the imagined space, is always different, is inhabited and brought to life by play. The fact that the parents are not present when the bed is transformed into the ocean, the sky or the forest might be of importance; the imagination has to be shared and to be undoubtedly real in this moment for making the other space come to life. The other space, shared but separate, intimate but indirect.

The dichotomy of intimacy without fusion is formulated referring to language in Heidegger's remarks on the related but separated relationship between things and the world:

For world and things do not subsist alongside one another. They penetrate each other. Thus the two traverse a middle. In it, they are at one. Thus at one they are intimate. The middle of the two is intimacy. The intimacy of the world and thing is not a fusion. Intimacy obtains only where the intimate—world and thing—divides itself cleanly and remains separated. (Heidegger 1971 [1959]: 199)

That intimacy in the middle of the two is essential to me, and, in fact, the German original sounds different: "Die Mitte der Zwei ist die Innigkeit" (2003 [1959]: 24). *Innigkeit* has no physical connotation like intimacy, quite the contrary. The adjective *innig* is usually used to describe a type of love: *jemanden innig lieben/to love someone dearly*, it is almost a childlike love. *Innigkeit* is not holding back; it is a complete openness without expectations. The middle of the two is where they are and remain separated, "the ever open place, the unwaning light in which that one being, that thing, remains forever exposed and sealed off" (Agamben 1995 [1985]: 61).

Sometimes, what unfolds in the distance is the space in which the author can create (themselves). Canetti, commenting on Kafka's love letters to Felice Bauer, suggests that the relationship did have a major impact on his artistic productivity because it was "security somewhere far off, a source of strength sufficiently distant to leave his sensitivity lucid, not perturbed by too close a contact" (Canetti 1974 [1969]: 14). "The important thing about Felice was that she did exist, that she was not invented, and that, the way she was, she could not have been invented by Kafka" (Canetti 1974 [1969]: 33). Again, distance and proximity are floating to create a counter-space, in this particular case a space of proliferating narratives.

Felice, as Canetti points out, couldn't have been invented. She had to be there, existing with a body and a life, where Kafka could desire her in narrative, imagining an intimacy with her based on the information he made her give him: "He asks her to tell him when she arrives at her office, what she has had for breakfast, what sort of view she has from her office window, what sort of work she is doing" (Canetti 1974 [1969]: 12). He could leave her sealed off in reality, but be one with her in writing:

Across the distance between Prague and Berlin he wishes to hold fast to her robustness. The weak words that he is permitted to address to her come back from her ten times stronger. [...] The struggle to obtain this strength which her regular letters bring him does have a meaning. It is no empty exchange of letters, no end in itself, no mere self-gratification: it helps his *writing*. (Canetti 1974 [1969]: 13)

It serves his writing insofar as his thoughts, his words are now directed to and answered by an Other. An Other who, sitting at a desk, lying on a bed from a safe distance, imagines with him the ocean, the forest, the sky, the ghosts. An Other who invites him to carve out his own territory, to "establish [...] himself] as particular, outdo [...] himself] in a sublime Other—metaphor or metonymy of the sovereign *Good*" (Kristeva 1987 [1983]: 7).

How to Disappear—Foucault and Oulipo

But where am I as a writer if writing is a practice of here and not here? How is it possible to touch and at the same time elude touch? There's one image in Foucault's famous 1969 essay *What is an Author?* which makes my skin tingle, because it's a piece of legerdemain. With the quickest of hands Foucault turns the writer into a ghost—"here and at the same time elsewhere, fleeting yet present" (Steinweg 2010: 30, my translation)—or even more than that: flatly makes her disappear. Evidently, not in a deep burgundy sequin dress, but in some sort of clean, potentially matte grey hollow:

Writing unfolds like a game (jeu) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears. (Foucault 1984 [1969]: 102)

Disappearing from the surface of what is surrounding me. Disappearing and disintegrating at the same time. Where does it start? In the space between the fingertips and the keys? And when? Even a continuous development needs to begin at some point, doesn't it? Was my disappearance initiated when I decided to be a writer? How was the disappearance able to tell that I took this lingering decision? Let me think of Foucault's original from here, where I sit—in a house made of books under an unabridged sky:

L'écriture se déploie comme un jeu qui va infailliblement au-delà de ses règles, et passe ainsi au-dehors. Dans l'écriture, il n'y va pas de la manifestation ou de l'exaltation du geste d'écrire; il ne s'agit pas de l'épinglage d'un sujet dans un langage; il est question de l'ouverture d'un espace où le sujet écrivain ne cesse de disparaître. (Foucault 1969, online)

In the original, the room is not created, it's *opened*. A set of keys fumbled for, a heavy door is moved, a triangle of light is poured out onto the floor. Or a motion detector is waved at, to convince it of the subject's substance, to make sheets of glass slide away, soundless. But the room itself is already always there, defined, stable. Of what is this room constructed? Stacked reverse sides of printed manuscript drafts? Neatly composed rubbers? Is it a cave, a gap, a crack?

“What pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss” (Barthes 1975 [1973]: 7).

Dissolving or disintegrating in the *midst of bliss*, that is, between one word and the other. Maybe the room has been there for a very long time, maybe it was only recently built: brackish stone, powdery carpet, dazzling white. A room waiting to be entered to subsequently alter the writer's containedness: from there to not there. This is the room's power or purpose, no matter whether someone is in it or not, no matter whether the door is opened, ajar or closed. But more important than the room, “un espace”, marked as indefinite, seems “l'ouverture”, definite action and definite article. The movement of writing leads to moving the door, which leads to vanishing. It is a consequential course of events, advanced by the use of written words. Let me rephrase Foucault: writing is about getting access to the state in which the text exceeds the writing subject, to avoid that, ultimately, the writing subject beleaguers their own text and keeps it from transforming to be the reader's text, the reader's imagination. Especially when writing about one's own experiences, the ability to unlock the door is crucial. Getting out of the text to leave what it tells (to a certain extent) behind, getting closure through the act of writing. But also getting out in order to make room for the reader. When I work with students on their writing projects, this is the hard-

est bit to learn: anticipating the reader in the text, meeting their needs or not, but in any case being aware of them.

I imagine the moment of opening the space's door, quite dry and two dimensional. Like in this dream I've been having for years now: I am in my apartment (which looks completely different from every apartment I have ever lived in) and casually (that is, not by accident and not intentionally) I'm opening a door (*the* door, the thus-far unnoticed door even though it *must* have been there all the time, like all the other doors) which leads to a room or a series of rooms (four adjacent neo-baroque style bathrooms, in the latest iteration). My dream apartment is usually very small and lacks basic features like walls or windows. Bats fly in and furniture flows out. The rooms revealed by the door are a long-needed shelter, they provide some sort of soft peace. My whole life and its circumstances make sense now (even the bathrooms), I am finally ok. The whisper of uncertainty falls silent. And I fall asleep (in the bathtub-turned-bed) and I wake up in a brittle sadness, because the room I have only just inspirited is gone already.

Is the room gone or am I gone? Or are we both nestled into one another? Lydia Davis writes about the oscillation between dream state and dreamlike experiences in everyday life in her prose miniature piece *Swimming in Egypt: Dreams While Awake and Asleep*:

Part of my interest in not identifying which were actual dreams was to allow the pieces to remain in the same dreamlike territory, that zone in which our life experiences are sometimes stranger than our sleeping experiences—though of course one striking aspect of our role as protagonist in our dreams is, it seems to me, that we are not surprised by the surprising things that occur, even though, usually, we believe what we are experiencing is real. (Davis 2007: 38)

Past the kitchen is a large bathroom with a trapezoidal bathtub. Then a hallway and, at the very end, a somewhat worm-eaten door. This is how I discover, for the first time in my life, that my apartment has two doors; I vaguely suspected as much, but I (finally?) have tangible proof. I open the door. Immediately the three cats who

live in the apartment run out. There is one white cat and two grey cats, one of which is certainly my cat. (Perec 2012 [1973]: 23)

Georges Perec, who shortly after having decided to record his dreams realised that he was “having dreams only in order to write them” (Perec 2012 [1973]: 1), won’t get his dreamed cats back, they’ve freed themselves. Do we have to expect something running from Foucault’s room? It is very much still in there, the only movement seems to be caused by the writing subject. A draft. A sound maybe? For me, Foucault’s room revealed through writing, in all its nightliness, in its abruptness, coincides with the one Kafka describes in each and every one of us (see Kafka 1991 [1953]: 1). The room which is given away by the mirror’s clanking:

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia in the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 24)

Let me go back again to Foucault’s words: a room in which the writing subject never ceases to disappear. Right? It’s not the room that is reason to disappear, it’s the room extending the already-established disappearance into a far future.

Was there ever a moment of just being?

Why is never ceasing to disappear another asymptotic figure?

Does opening the door amount to immortality?

In the beginning there were clouds, there were bones, there were cliffs. Maybe even the sky was white. Maybe even at night. In the beginning, there was no need for underlining, for correcting, for crossing anything out.

Wherever it is located, this room unfolding between the writer's body and the emptiness, between author and reader, between language and silence, whatever it is made from, it represents the transitional process of ideas from the writer to the reader, the steady flow of images, the uncertainty of where the words end up, how they are taken or understood.

The room in which or from which one writes as a contained absence: Maggie Nelson, in *The Argonauts*, quotes Carson's advice to always write in a manner which leaves the space in the middle empty for god. Text like potted bonsai trees—planted right off the centre to make room for the divine (cf. Nelson 2015: 49). In thinking about writing, I prefer to substitute god with the power of creation. And the power of creation with the reader of a text. Writing in order to leave a little space: to articulate the ineffable, the unspeakable, the speechlessness.

Monsieur Foucault, assuming that I could address you somehow, would you allow me to ask you this question: do you have days when you feel more translucent than others? Do you also fear, when the sliding doors between train cars refuse to move despite the fact that you are clearly standing in front of them, that it has happened at last, that you have become invisible? Does this realisation reassure you? Monsieur Foucault, assuming that disappearing is a desirable quality, does everybody have a share in it, or is it a privilege of writers? Of whoever creates something that exists outside him or herself, possibly also outside his or her time? Monsieur Foucault, assuming that you don't already know, I need to tell you that I have deliberately stashed away the lines right above the paragraph with the room. The ones in which you say:

First of all, we can say that today's writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression. Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority. This means that it is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than accord-

ing to the very nature of the signifier. Writing unfolds like a game (jeu) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. (Foucault 1984 [1969]: 102)

Monsieur Foucault, assuming that you were microscopically aware of your time's literature, I am quite sure that in the image of writing "that has freed itself from the dimension of expression" you are alluding to the Oulipian authors, first and foremost Georges Perec, who just had published or was just about to publish his lipogrammatic novel *La Disparition*. But also his comrade-in-arms (in hands), Raymond Queneau, who had founded Oulipo 1960 together with François Le Lionnais. Monsieur Foucault, assuming that you'd like to know what the Oulipiens are up to nowadays, I picked the *constraint* "à supposer", a rather simple one saying that every sentence has to start with "assuming that", to write these paragraphs. It's from Jaques Jouet from 1993, to be found on the archive of *constraints* on Oulipo's website.¹⁸

To escape the arbitrariness of writing as, essentially, anything can be written (in writing there usually is no limitation of the outcome due to any kind of availability of resources), Oulipo relied on rules, sometimes very simple ones (like the one I used) sometimes tremendously complicated sets of rules. Like the *Cahier de charge* (1993), which took Perec more than two years to create and compile, that determined quotes, places and characters that had to appear in each chapter of *Life: A user's manual* (2009) [1987].

I work quite often with constraints—using very simple ones—and I know both mechanisms well: the bewilderment after the constraint is established (for example, re-narrate Goethe's *Sorrows of the Young Werther* using only the vowel e, in the 2014 *Butterland* project *Werthers versehrtes Herz*), the absolute certainty that it is never going to work. But, of course, it is and after a while I become a service provider for my text rather than its author. My only task is to find words without any other vowel than e, apart from

¹⁸ <https://www.ouliipo.net/fr/contraintes/a-supposer> (accessed 1 December 2019).

this assistance, the text itself decides its direction and progress. I start to fade.

When the Oulipian authors call themselves “rats who must build the labyrinth from which they propose to escape” (Motte 1986: 22), Foucault’s image of the disappearance room coincides with constrained writing techniques: they contribute to constructing the space which opens itself up to dissolution. This is especially true for the works of writers at the beginning of their careers: constraints provide helpful guidance and insights. They drastically reduce the amount of decisions that have to be taken, they help in creating distance and take away the pressure from the writing subject: for the time being not the individual experience or way to see and think about the world is important, but only the language itself. Constraints inevitably create a complicity between the writer and the reader. As if the readers are the co-players of a text through interpreting and appropriating it, the writers are also co-players of the text through following its rules (or breaking them).

Digression: The Heterotopian Writing Workshop

Over the last couple of years spent teaching the basic level prose module at the Swiss Literature Institute, the beginner's writing workshop for the art students at Berne University of the Arts, and a continuous creative writing workshop at the Adult Education Centre in Biel, I compiled, invented and tested many writing impulses, partly based on the Oulipo methods. I use the word impulse deliberately, because exercise (as much as I love it as a literary form) implies conforming as opposed to creating. To open, even for beginners and non-professional writers, the space to disappear, I found impulses helpful that work, on some level, with absence. I've developed a (naturally) loose teaching approach that I'd like to think of as *The Heterotopian Writing Workshop*. It is, on the one hand, a way of thinking about teaching writing and, on the other hand, a collection of references and impulses that can be adapted for each group or context. In the following, I will present a selection of impulses (those which work best and are the most fun) which can be used in the given order or independently of each other.

Hiding Words

My signature writing workshop impulse, which I usually propose right at the beginning, is called *Hiding Words* and I developed it to help the participants to learn to write with the reader in mind. Everybody draws a word (nouns, I usually take them from a text that I will discuss later on in the workshop) and has five minutes to write a short text in which the word appears, but in a way that the others, when listening to the text, won't notice which word it was. It is not permitted to use it in a compound or alter it in any other way. After the writing period, the participants read their texts one by one. After each text is read, those who listened get to say, in a quick

round, what they suspect to be the hidden word. Everybody who guessed right gets one point. If nobody guessed right, the author gets two points. Usually, the price for the winner is coffee, but it is not really about winning or losing. It is about guiding the readers, while the intention is to mislead them. It's a game of inversion, a game of there and not there, a game as a key to perform the opening of the room inside.

Un-understanding

This group of impulses might have anticipated the uncertain transfer-ences from Hebrew to German: in fact, I started using it after I had translated a horoscope from an Icelandic supermarket magazine into German (it goes without saying, without knowing Icelandic). *Un-understanding* is a set of three translation experiments that starts with a poem by Magnus William-Olsson in Swedish. I ask the participants to bring it into German (in the rare case that someone does actually speak Swedish, I have a spare Polish poem). This impulse is based on the book *Homullus absconditus [Hypno-Homullus]* by German poet Monika Rinck (2016), who has “translated” the whole book under the same conditions. The reading of the resulting poems or texts (which usually work with sound similarities to go from one language into another) is highly liberating as it takes away the layers of sense and nonsense and leaves just language itself. The follow-up task is to identify one line or image that the author likes a lot and use it as a starting point for a whole new text.

The second experiment takes the attention away from the sound, and directs it at the visual appearance of a script. I distribute copies of asemic writings (e.g. Dermisache 2018), that is, drawings that look like text but do not have any specific semantic content (cf. Fenstermaker 2018). I again ask the participants to “translate” these drawings into German. It is rare that somebody just writes their own text (independently of the drawing) and then declares it a “translation”, usually the participants work with graphic resemblances: the length and the number of words and lines are kept, the style of

the drawing implies the tone of the text (thick lines are translated into an angry voice, for example), signs which look like punctuation marks (e.g. fraction bars) are used in the respective logic. The strength of this impulse is that can be used as a very strict set of constraints, but it can also be seen as an inspiration or pretext to write whatever the participants want to write. The follow up task is to produce an asemic writing piece and exchange it with someone else as an optional writing impulse for at home.

The third experiment is much more serious (basically, after those first two experiments, whatever is proposed in the course of the workshop seems quite feasible and easy, so even insecure participants will feel confident to share their work). It is based on the book *Deutsch-deutsche Übersetzerwerkstatt* (Allemann/Engeler 2010) in which sets of two poets have exchanged a series of poems and “translated” those they’ve received into their own style. I distribute examples of these translations without any contextual information, and ask the participants to figure out what is going on in the texts. It is fascinating to see how complicated their explanations can be, once they are really aware of the poems’ details. After having revealed the procedure, the participants are invited to pick a poem and “translate” it into their own style.

When I teach writing for non-writers, I often work with absent context information to allow for a different kind of approach to text—attentive, alert. I also let them read some twenty pages of Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style* (1958) with the titles removed, or discuss only the first page of a short story in depth before reading it as a whole.

Invisible Beginnings

Another strategy is to use titles or first sentences as impulses. There are quite a lot that work very well, but two have proven to be especially productive:

Things That Disappear—the title of a book by the German author Jenny Erpenbeck (*Dinge, die verschwinden*, Erpenbeck 2009)¹⁹, which contains short stories about places, objects or people who disappear: the Palace of the Republic, bulky waste, socks, cheese and so on.

This is the story I wouldn't tell you when I was your girlfriend—the first sentence of Miranda July's brilliant short story *The Swim Team* (July 2007: 13).

Die Bibliothek der ungeschriebenen Bücher – a book by Annette Pehnt (2014) that compiles ideas for books by contemporary German authors which were never realised. I distribute the fictive covers (which were made especially for the compilation) of these non-existent books copied on cards, all featuring the author's name and their title for the project.

I don't give much time to react to those impulses, only 5 to 8 minutes. The tight time frame helps to avoid self-censorship and unproductive doubts. After this, the authors read their pieces. I moderate the feedback discussions to focus on how or where the text could go on, so that what was written becomes the seed for a new text. Usually, the given sentence or title can be left out in the end, as it was just a vehicle to reach the actual story that wanted to be told.

It's the quality of dematerialisation, of time passing, of parallelity that make these impulses very easy to react to: all kinds of presence (in a physical and temporal sense) are implied and ready to be substantiated in the realm of writing.

Not Knowing

A constraint that is very productive during editing texts is “I don't know...”, which I was introduced to in Madelyn Kent's workshop *Sense Writing*²⁰ in December 2017 in Brooklyn, NY. Her concept interweaves writ-

¹⁹ in excerpts translated by Susan Bernofsky on <http://intranslation.brooklynrail.org/german/from-things-that-disappear> (accessed 25 April 2019).

²⁰ <http://www.sensewriting.org/> (accessed 1 May 2019).

ing and the Feldenkrais method (which works with constrained micro-movements), but I've used the constraint in my workshops without the movement aspect and it works just fine. I ask the participants to identify a passage in their text which feels flat, that lacks something, but it is not clear to them what is missing. The first task is to really immerse themselves in the scene. Then they have 10 minutes to write about it, but every sentence has to start with "I don't know...". It is possible to add another 10 minutes of free writing and also to talk about the difference between writing with the constraint and without it—I usually ask everybody to choose the text that was easier to write and read one sentence aloud from it. Two or three participants have found the free writing easier than the constrained. The rest are usually quite happy with what appears through the not-knowing technique—they end up with ten or fifteen topics that they can address in new texts. It is astonishing how even writers who have never developed a character before come up with just the right questions using this constraint. It makes the writing subject disappear, in the sense that it emphasises intuition rather than constructions or concepts, it automatically turns the "desire-to-write" (Barthes 2011 [2003]: 128) into writing. Obviously, what has been found with the constraint's help has to be developed further in writing, it is only the first step to unflattening a passage. But apart from the actual result, the inversion is significant: by addressing the lack, embracing what is not there, the gaps start to be filled.

Here

The idea of the other space, of a space which becomes an other through attribution or imagination, is at the very core of the concept of Heterotopia. To incorporate this idea in a comprehensive, intuitive way into my writing workshops, I work with different methods and tools.

One is based on Richard McGuire's graphic novel *Here* (2014), in which he tells the story of one specific place from 500,957,406,073 BCE to the year 2033 CE. In the given time, it turns from lava into woods into a clear-

ing, where a shack is built, and later turned into a house and into an apartment. Every double page shows the exact same view, what changes (in the years of the apartment) are the inhabitants and the minutiae of their lives. Using a photocopy of one moment in the apartment as a starting point, the task is to imagine different moments in time (a week after or before, a month after or before, a year after or before) in the same apartment. A follow-up task is to write about the life in one's own apartment before one lived there.

Another space-based impulse needs visual representations of different kinds of rooms (I use, for example, Polly Shindler's illustrations of living rooms and kitchens²¹) which don't feature any people or animals. The first task is to write freely about the room. The second task is to imagine two characters who are talking to each other through the room—if there's a living room shown, the characters can be imagined in adjacent rooms like the kitchen or bathroom. The third task is to pick one of the characters and write about a small monstrosity in their everyday life that had occurred a couple of days earlier and wasn't noticed by anyone else other than the character. Building up the tasks in this way, instead of just demanding the last one, leads to an automatic grounding in the character's development, the character that was created by their room, so to speak.

A very different approach to using space as a means to inspire writing is very Oulipian—I ask the participants to roll two 10-sided dice (with the numerals 0-9) and note the result as a two-digit number (higher numeral first). This is the exact amount of words their text has to have. I usually take Lydia Davis' *Odd Behaviour* (2009: 182) as a title for the text, so it is not the space itself that is the starting point for the text, but what shapes the text significantly. The constraint usually inspires quite pointed texts, as the ending becomes an essential part of the beginning. The parents' bed turns into a ship, into a mountain, into a colony of bats as the writers go back and forth

²¹ <https://pollyshindlerpainting.com/painting-2017/> (accessed 17 December 2019).

between where their text is right now and where they want it to end, echoing their stories in the territory of potential.

Alternatively, and less mathematically, this embrace of the ending can be achieved by working with last sentences (which have to come last in the newly written texts, too) instead of titles or first sentences as writing impulses. My favourite last sentences are from Daniil Kharmis, who is a master in going back from the ending to the beginning, where he, mischievously, makes the story disappear altogether (all from Kharmis 2007):

“After that, everyone went home” (p. 48).

“And that’s it, more or less” (p. 56).

“This is how a fine summer’s day began” (p. 84).

There was a redheaded man who had no eyes or ears. He didn’t have hair either, so he was called a redhead arbitrarily. He couldn’t talk because he had no mouth. He didn’t have a nose either. He didn’t even have arms or legs. He had no stomach, he had no back, no spine, and he didn’t have any insides at all. There was nothing! So, we don’t even know who we’re talking about. We’d better not talk about him any more. (p. 45)

Now that Kharms is gone, and the students, and their desire to write, and probably also the bats, I am the only one left to write this chapter to its ending. There is not much to add, apart from some words about what I meant by stating that the *Heterotopian Writing Workshop* is also a way of thinking about teaching writing. More precisely, it is a way of thinking of my own position or presence, this is to say: it is the desire to be there (to support) and not there (as a necessity in the texts)—to find impulses that open the participants' own rooms, which are and have to remain unknowable to me. To make this point very clear, I keep two baseball caps in my classroom, props I borrowed from John Zorn: when conducting his madcap (!) ensemble Cobra, each musician has a white terry-cloth headband dangling from their music stand. Whenever they feel they know where the piece should go better than John Zorn, they put it on (great hair results) and Zorn has to take off the cap he's wearing. This is how they become the conductor (as long as they want to or John Zorn lets them—when he puts his hat back on, the headband authority comes to its end. Sometimes, he also calls on someone to put on their headband so that he can just listen). As I don't wear a cap, I modified this detail of the rule: if a student puts on one of the caps, I have to put on the other, and they conduct the writing room while I, as a teacher, am spirited away.

7

The Everything and the Sky—On Writing Fragments

Walk past a mirror and remind yourself of an old friend.

I cannot remember when I began to write in fragments. Or if I've ever been writing without the *bliss* of cuts, of the white space encasing the words on their page. A soft and kindhearted place made of an embrace, of membranes, of lime stone.

Typically fragments are less works than gestures, arrows pointing in the direction a person might research, meditate on or develop. Unlike paragraphs or sentences, they do not flow directly from and into their bordering text. Instead they are independent, defined by their singularity, by the white space that encases them on a page—even when they are cobbled together and marshalled into service as the contents of a book. (Segal 2011: 158)

Pointing in a direction rather than actually going there is what makes fragments so exciting and precious for me as a reader and a writer. The white space is encasing—holding, carrying, substantiating—because it is not an absence, but a presence. Let's inverse the contemporary logic of writing as a technique of addition and employ, just to the end of this paragraph, a clay tablet logic: the white space around a fragment contains—like white light containing all the other wavelengths in the electromagnetic spectrum—everything that was, is and could be told. Writing a fragment means carefully removing layer after layer of the everything until there is only the something left in these particular spots—so delicate and thin that what creates the contrast on the page is the universe's ceaselessness shining through.

“Each something is the celebration of the nothing that supports it”
(Cage 1973: 139).

Imagine a thread tying you to all the people you love dearly. Think of the thread's colour as often as you can.

Writing fragments is a heterotopic practice, since what is left out becomes as (or even more) important as what materialises on the page. A great example of these kinds of texts are Yoko Ono's pieces, published in *Grapefruit* (1970) and *Acorn* (2013). They are less encased by the page's white and the totality of written words than they are by the world itself and the totality of its spaces, its encounters, its wondrousness. Only a few weeks after I had found and bought *Acorns* by chance (it was the white silkscreen print of an acorn on the sky blue cover that caught my attention—the attention of a wintered squirrel rustling through a Boston book store shelf) I started to write *exercises* in different collections: *Übungen auf einem Schiff* (Exercises on a boat, January 2018, as part of the participative writing performance *Little Literary Studio* in the *Red House Gallery*, East Village, NYC), *Exercises for an Urban Cowboy* (March 2018, artist's book exhibited at the off space gallery *Lokal.Int* in Biel, Switzerland), *Übungen am Spielfeldrand* (Exercises on the Edge of a Field, December 2018, live performance with Christian Müller, commissioned by *PAKT* Bern) and *Solitude Exercises* (March 2019).

For the latter collection, I invited other ex-fellows of Akademie Schloss Solitude to contribute. The exercises scattered through this chapter (on the page tops in italics) are a selection of the exercises I wrote for the Solitude project, examining the notion of absence and presence as prerequisite of artistic production. "Solitude Exercise" was published on Akademie Schloss Solitude's blog *Schlosspost*²² in February 2019 and in spring 2019 as an artist's book.

²² <https://schloss-post.com/solitude-exercises/>

Let a stranger write a word they haven't used in a long time on the back of your hand. See if it bleeds through.

Words that definitely bled through my hands came from Maggie Nelson—most of all *Bluets* (2009), her book in fragments, and *Jane* (2005), which I will discuss in the next chapter, but also *The Argonauts* (2015), which unfolds its blasting strength through insisting and repeating.

It goes without saying that Wittgenstein is an important reference concerning fragmented, almost mathematical ways of composing a whole from smaller pieces (Nelson confirms this, adding, of course, Roland Barthes' practice of writing in fragments, cf. Segal 2011), which Katherine Angel adapted in a literary text—in *Unmastered* (2012), she works extensively with the white space and numbers structuring the sentences of her novel. But the book that motivated me most to not only write *about* Heterotopia in this thesis, but to write in a heterotopic, that is, fragmented way, was *This Little Art* by Kate Briggs (2017). Talking about the conditions and possibilities of translation, the text embodies different voices and uses the ever-new gesture of commencing writing to underline the brittle practice of bringing text from one language's context to another:

Translation as the chance—a translation project as a means of giving oneself the chance—of being taught by the other's writing, where answers to questions of *how* to be responsible for this writing, and *whether or not you or I will be capable* of taking responsibility for this writing are, again, in no way given in advance. (Briggs 2017: 207)

Synchronise your breath with the free-line telephone signal. Hang up before someone picks up the phone. Keep the rhythm as long as you can.

Not knowing whose voice I am going to read next, in fact, not knowing where I am going to end up at all captures the *bliss* of turning the page of a picture book as a child, all on edge to see what would happen next (even with those books we knew by heart—would Goldilocks get out of the family bear’s house this time, too?). As the paradigm of consequence is rippled, the world is suddenly multiplied. Yes, there needs to be some sort of coherence to be leaping as a reader and not falling, but it’s a subtle structure, not necessarily known to the reader (Maggie Nelson established seven themed categories for the fragments’ composition in *Bluets*, but the text itself doesn’t reveal this blueprint, it’s only function was to help the author decide which fragments had to be included in the book and which hadn’t (cf. Segal 2011)).

Consider that you are a being living in outer space as often as you can.

Has it never happened, as you were reading a book, that you kept stopping as you read, not because you weren't interested, but because you were: because of a flow of ideas, stimuli associations? In a word, haven't you ever happened to read while looking up from your book? (Barthes 1989 [1984]: 29)

Right now, the universe is the colour of recycled paper in the 90s, at least when seen through the library's not-very-recently-cleaned skylights. If I look up from the screen and down from the sky, the two shades of white become one: the page as an imprint of the afternoon clouds, always already carrying the words away into the vastness. Yes, I do look up often: from books, from this manuscript, from conversations. To be honest, I think I look up more than I look down (a hazardous habit especially in public transportation; going up the East Side in the 15 bus, I was once almost attacked by a middle aged woman wearing a crop top which exposed a massive scar running across her belly, a sentence coloured mountain range and I simply couldn't bring myself to looking down again, not before she started to shout at me) this is "how I have my best ideas, how I best invent what is necessary to my work" confesses Barthes (1976 [1973]: 24) and I nod: this is my basic methodology for the text at hand, too. The *indirectness* is essential—letting the texts and positions pass through my *hand*, through my *body*, through my *desire* (cf. Barthes 1967: 5) and allow for a resonance in my own language, in my own voice.

If the text "produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else" (Barthes 1975 [1973]: 24), then working with fragments is an invitation to the reader to scatter their thoughts, to listen to something or someone else, to themselves, to the season. The author's primacy is softened (now there's more blue in the sky, several bruise-shaped shards).

Imagine your body has leaves. Whisper all the colours you want them to turn into, to an old love falling asleep.

As much as the incomplete is a matter of warmth and love, it is a matter of fragility and inadequacy. “To be with the one I love and to think of something else: this is how I have my best ideas”, this is how Barthes introduces the idea of looking up from the page to complete the reading and the writing (Barthes 1975 [1973]: 24). To be with the one I love and silently returning to my own world, to my own entanglements with the world, to my pleasantly illuminated studio inside. Or: to be with the one I love to allow myself to enter the tingling inbetween space, that room that just wouldn’t exist without this other presence, those additional hands helping to balance one sky in between our two worlds, the sky which is my paper.

Mine. Not theirs.

Note down some evidence of why you are not somebody else's imagination. Note down some suggestions for improvement just in case you are somebody else's imagination after all.

Who is this one I love who isn't offended since 1973, when I left off in the middle of a conversation over breakfast (pain au chocolat, orange juice, a window in the apartment downstairs being repeatedly slammed shut by the wind) to have my very best ideas? Where does all this generosity, sympathy and support for my "anxious desire" (Barthes 2011 [2003]: 140) come from? Maybe the one I love is, like Felice Bauer, an other in some distance that I can address my writing to, ever so yearning? Then I wouldn't be the one who abandons or turns away internally, I'd just be absent minded from thinking of the other. But the one I love is *being with me (Etre avec)*, *being* the capitalised first word in the sentence, and thus the one I love is imperatively tied to me in spacial immediacy. The one I love has to be sitting there, in these dark blue faux silk pyjamas we found at a thrift store when we weren't looking for anything to buy. Sitting there, eating, crumbling, swallowing and breathing in order for my thoughts to leave. What unfolds between me and the one I love is the distance that bridges the sea miles between the parents' bed and the ship which I am inventing to carry us away, us or me or even you. It is the distance which is at the core of all that is told & written; narrative, after all, is "a structure of desire, a structure that both invents and distances its object and thereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified" (Stewart 1984: ix).

Hide in a place that holds you comfortably (in the closet, under the desk). Stay there, motionless, until your absence finds you.

What are the ideas the one I love cannot have because I am there but not there? Or does it work both ways: the two of us are in the same room and both following our thoughts at the same time? Is the sentence *To be with the one I love ...* also a meaningful proposition for the one I love? Contemporaneously? Or are we taking turns? Maybe the one I love doesn't feel played on, after all. Maybe the one I love is prepared for this game of inventing and distancing—at least if Lyotard is right: the one I love knows how to love and thus knows how to hide. How, otherwise, could there be love, could there be language given all the distance, the lesions, the sea.

My mom always said 'don't cut if you're afraid of scars' says the one I love, and we laugh, because isn't the one I love simply hilarious, so patient and unreasonably simple, and we choke a little on our pains au chocolat and when we can finally breathe again, I have an excellent idea.

Collect all the materials in your apartment that would make a great cocoon. Rearrange them regularly.

Fragments lay open the longing which is immanent to all writing by acknowledging and inscribing this distance, the silence and gaps. The white space enclosing them is a place for what is lost, for what wasn't said, what can't be said, what never will be said. The white space belongs to those who read. It is a room to embrace difference, a room that reminds us of all the stories of all the people and all their dreams.

Choose the native animal you like the most. Provide a thoughtful house for it in the room you spend the least time in. Leave a window ajar in twilight.

Voids are all around us. In a world that seeks to fill everything in at all times, where everything must be busy and complete and overflowing, we should instead defend the integrity of the void. Some voids are indeed bigger than others, but every little void is a reminder that the universe is incomplete and that this strange fact is, from all angles a joyful thing. [...] By suspending ourselves over the void without falling in we come to understand that far from being something to fear, we should recognise and welcome the comfort that absence sometimes affords. (Power 2019: 18)

With a soft permanent marker circle a close friend's bruises and scars, the tiny ones too. When the ink is washed away, circle the same spots on your own body. Document the fading for your friend.

The white space as the sky, a bandage, a void—the fragment as a literary form encompasses the disparate dimensions of writing the way I see it. It embraces a world full of *incompleteness and over-flowing*, but also of silence and being silenced. Writing fragments is taking a political stance insofar as it further dismantles the idea of master narratives by deliberately stumbling and stuttering through cutting and pausing, the form prevents me as the writing subject from being drawn into a flow of words that would make me forget the uncertainty, injustice and inequality around me. In short, the world. The encasing space is, whether it is conceptualised as a presence of potential or an absence of power, “a Suspension, a final Suspense—I myself don’t know how it is going to turn out” (Barthes 2011 [2003]: 128).

Close the blinds and draw the curtains. Imagine the light twelve hours and twelve days from now, in all the places you were exceptionally happy in.

The fragment is not only a way to write, an aesthetic or political choice, but an essential condition for this project. It is fragmented knowledge that can guide me on my journey to Alice. Many of her letters weren't donated to the archive by her mother and brother, or Alice herself didn't keep them in the first place. Alice's resolutely determined quest was also dependent on fragments, on a heterotopian coincidence even: the only reason for the clay tablets, on which Linear B was found, outlasting the culture in which they were written, is the final destruction of this very culture. The fire, which broke out or was set in the Palace of Knossos on Crete, burnt it down and burnt the clay slips with the palace's inventory. Habitually, the clay had been reused each year and therefore was left raw, the collapse and the fire is what allowed them to endure in the soil.

It cannot be known if all the Linear B writing was some sort of accounting and thus referred to the present, or if writing was also used to document the past, to pass on narration even. Alice argues that the long, narrow tablets were shaped after palm tree leaves—either to cover stacks of this ephemeral organic material or to resemble them. It is likely that the Cretans used palm tree leaves or other perishable material for the bulk of their records, maybe even for poetry or writing other than lists (cf. Kober 1948: 92). This writing, if it once existed, is lost forever. The clay tablets are the only and final records of an obliterated civilisation. While the social structures that brought them into existence disappeared, they lay safely in their wooden and lead storage boxes in the ruins, like a caught breath in persistent decay.

Think of countless ways to share a secret with a person on another continent. Don't let likelihood dishearten you.

The second grave moment of here-and-not-here in the process of the decipherment of Linear B was the accessibility of the inscriptions. After their discovery, Sir Arthur Evans only published around 200 of the 2,500 inscriptions (cf. Kober 1944: 73). The rest he kept for himself. Officially to prepare the publication, in truth, probably, to decipher Linear B himself. While he cracked the system of numbers, he wasn't successful with the other signs. After his death, John Myres inherited the publication project from him and tried to find a classification system, but was quite lost: "The truth is that he can't read the Minoan scripts. May be it's because he can't see that well anymore and doesn't want to admit it" (AK to JS, 3 October 1948, PASP, Box 58).

In addition to his struggles with the material, the publisher had to postpone the printing and thus publishing several times due to the shortages of the Second World War. *Scripta Minoa II*, the volume that Sir Arthur Evans started to compile around 1910, was finally completed in 1952. The whole decipherment had to be done with only one ninth of the existing inscriptions at hand.

“Sometimes, we catch glimpses of one another through the jungle of ignorance. Occasionally our paths cross, and we can stop and exchange notes” (AK, *The Fore-Runners of the Greek*, Earle Lecture at Hunter College, 9 April 1948, PASP, Box 55.2).

There were moments in my archival work when the distance between Alice Kober’s and my own life collapsed into an unlikely proximity and eventually produced a sound of mutuality. The first of these moments was when I understood that Alice Kober’s mother tongue was German. Even though her parent’s immigration papers state “Hungary” as their previous country of residence, it referred to Austria-Hungary at that time.

The second moment was when I read in Alice’s birth certificate that her mother’s maiden name was Gruber—my grandmother’s sister married into a Gruber family, but they were from Silesia. It was seconds spent in a something like electric shock, the forehead prickling in anticipation. What if it wasn’t for a long string of chance that I became interested in Alice Kober? What if her life was inscribed in my own from the beginning, against all odds?

Every morning for 50 days, draw a portrait of yourself as a cloud.

8
Wandering—Literary Field

We [women] don't manufacture word-objects, no cans, no jewel boxes, no 'book'. We create paths, in movements" (Cixous 1980 [1977]: 20, my translation).

The practice part of this research is about writing which is intended as a journey rather than a book (being linear, being consistent, being whole). It is about meandering between the inner and outer worlds, between what can be addressed with words and what can't. It is writing between bodies and languages.

I had to translate the Cixous quote above, which so lightly and whimsically sums up my aims and methods for this research, from German to English, because hours and hours of internet and library catalogue queries didn't amount to anything—I simply cannot find the English translation of the 1979 Cixous article *Poétique e(s)t le politique* which appeared, allegedly, as *Poetry Is/and (the) Political* in a journal called *Bread and Roses* in 1980. I have given up on it, hungry and empty-handed.

The German version of the second sentence is highly ambiguous: we create paths, we create in movements. Or: we create paths by moving through the landscape (of our thoughts). Or: we, as part of our work as organised, connected and compassionate subjects make way for the moving of the world in a direction we are appreciative of. Or: our making is at the root of itself. Because as we are wandering, we are creating paths. The paths are neither an aim nor a prerequisite of our moving in the world, maybe not even a consequence, but a legacy.

For the writing of the practice part, the notion of being on my way while at the same time creating this way was formative. Not having to think of *the book* yet, not creating useful or precious objects (sentences, images), just committing myself to writing where the writing hand would lead me.

The literary positions I see as related to this endeavour (I am talking about books in which the wandering process of their creation is somehow

inscribed), embrace the notion of a journey, immerse themselves in the qualities of the absent present and stress the need for openness and plurality of voices in writing. In the following, I will briefly talk about three books whose authors seem to have used similar strategies to mine. They are incredibly powerful and poetic narratives which allow the reader to wander off to places that could not be reached otherwise, to create their own path in the landscape of silence.

“When I tell my grandfather
I am writing about Jane, he says,

*What will it be, a figment
of your imagination?*

We are eating awful little pizzas
and my mother is into

the boxed wine. I don’t know
what to say. I wish

I could show him: between
figling (a little fig)

and *figure* lies
figment, from *ingere*, meaning

to form.”

(Nelson 2005: 23)

Forming meaning by forming figures from what they left behind. No gloomy sweet juice of certainty dripping from the hand that writes. Forming meaning where there are only fractions left: In *Jane. A Murder* Maggie Nelson retraces the murder of her mother's sister Jane, who was killed in 1969, aged 23. Even though she is thought to be the victim in a series of seven rape-murders, she was not raped. She was shot twice in her head, once from the front and once from the back (see Nelson 2005: 17, 129).

Nelson interweaves poems like the one quoted above about details of her search, of the case, of conversations with family members and Phil, Jane's boyfriend at the time, with excerpts from Jane's diaries and other material like newspaper articles, letters to the editor and dictionary snippets. As she states in her preamble to the book, she navigates between what has happened according to witnesses and her family and how she tells it: "Also, although this is a 'true story', I make no claim for the factual accuracy of its representations of events or individuals" (Nelson 2005).

When I began reading *Jane. A Murder* in New York in 2017—more or less by accident (while I had read and infinitely enjoyed *The Argonauts* and *Bluets*, *Jane* was not a deliberate continuation of reading Nelson, but a chance find in the Strand bookstore), I knew I had found the book which was closest to what I wanted to do in my text about Alice Kober. The similitude is the approach of layering different voices and sources to examine a "real" incident, to follow a person that had really lived. The major difference is that Nelson is, even though she had never met her aunt, being born four years after her death, related to her subject's story—her grandfather accidentally calling her "Jane" occasionally (Nelson 2005: 37), entangled through the family's way of dealing with or refusing to deal with the traumatic situation of their daughter's/sister's murder. Maggie Nelson writes from the inside, also piecing together her own story.

Even though Alice Kober's story is not my own story, the process of being in her archive and writing about her is. This is how, for me, the project is

different from the multitude of biographies or biographically-inspired novels that exist and that interlocutors keep recommending I read: I am not making claims about accuracy, strictly speaking, I am making claims about inaccuracy. The certainty of not being able to know is what underpins my writing. In this aspect I am going further than Maggie Nelson, as I'm consciously incorporating alternative versions of events, of attributions. I am not producing a linear narrative about Alice Kober. I am writing a narrative about my search for her, which creates a space in which the findings from the archive and other documents can resonate with my own experience as a woman, as a reader, as a writer.

The notion of creating a texture rather than a text that represents a life and all the struggles which come with living it can be found, for example, in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's book *Dictée*, in which she tells her own story alongside her mother's story, the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon and the Greek Muses. She incorporates historic documents, handwriting and photographs into her own prose texts and poems, between English and French. As a reader who is unfamiliar with Korean history, I continue to be surprised and, at times, irritated. I am listening to a story full of religious and historical references, I have to reread passages multiple times, I can't summarise the book any better than stating that it is a journey to the author's own roots in culture, in belief, but also in a history of exile and oppression, of deprived language, of having to deny one's identity. The debarment experience translates and repeats itself gently when I come across the pages featuring calligraphy, with no note to say what the signs mean. The power of the text is that it recreates, inside me, the feeling of being on my own, of navigating a realm unknown to me, following rules without understanding them.

“Tell me the story
Of all these things.
Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us.”
(Cha 2001: 11)

The third book I consider to be an important artistic reference for my project is *13 Presidents* by Marisa J. Futernick (2016), which does not work with different sorts of (found) texts like Maggie Nelson or even different media like Cha, but brings together text and photography. The author is a multimedia artist who went on a journey to the birthplaces, houses and grave sites of 13 US presidents. She documented this journey in photographs, which complement the short stories that she wrote, one about each president. They are fictional stories featuring the presidents, their colleagues, their wives and children, but as the setting is authentic, and known facts about the presidents are touched on, and the stories even incorporate, in italic, passages which could be taken from diaries, letters or the like (there is no reference list), the line between fiction and *reality* is constantly blurred. As Futernick can rely on the fact that her readers know the presidents (even though in her preamble she claims that “any similarities between these stories and the reality of any person living or dead are unintended”) she has many ways to be playful about the subjects of her story and how they are seen from today’s perspective. The playfulness and the echoing or altering how a person is perceived is an aspect that writing about Alice Kober does not provide. Her story and the decipherment’s story aren’t known to many readers. The task is to make it accessible in the first place, not to deform it.

What reading Futernick’s text has showed me is the lightness and dauntlessness with which she invents or re-invents her characters and their relationships. She doesn’t explain or legitimate her fictional work. The figments of her imagination are grounded through her photographs, which show how

the places that were important in the real presidents' lives look today. The space in which the question of fiction's matter is discussed lies in between the text and the pictures. The book is, like my undertaking, a narrative of a journey, but Futernick examines in hers the roots of a nation's identity and dreams, the patterns of duty and power, the images of blistering success against the backdrop of stale rurality.

What all the three books have in common is that they offer multi-voiced accounts of historical events, challenging the existing narratives through a personal perspective. They are all written by women which is, by no means, coincidental; on the contrary, I am seeing this way of writing, which is more than anything based on always already knowing that language and the structures it represents are not innocent, a writing which thus doubts the all-too-well-defined, the all-too-facile at the core of the feminist (or "féminine", following Cixous' term) way of artistically encountering the world. One way among many others to celebrate plurality, to include voices otherwise unheard.

9

**Practice Part—Literary Exploration of Alice Kober’s
Archive**

“The basic distinction between fact and theory is clear enough: a fact is a reality, an actuality, something that exists; a theory states that something might be, or could be, or should be. Like most simple statements, the foregoing has implications that are far from simple. In dealing with the past we are concerned, not with something that exists, but with something that has existed. Our facts are limited to those things from the past which still exist; everything else is theory, which may range all the way from practical certainty to utter impossibility, depending on its relationship to known facts.”

—Alice Kober, *The Minoan Scripts: Fact and Theory*, 1948

You weren't there, Alice, so all I was concerned with was how I might, could, or should be able to find you.

“Writing is an ambivalent movement. Writing separates, isolates, retreats. There is the danger of an ivory tower. But there also is the necessity to inscribe, to offer resistance to death, erasure and silence. Writing is a practice of life. [...] It is about showing oblivion its limits. We mustn't write in order to forget but to remind ourselves to remember. Don't forget yourself, don't forget the Other(s)” (Cixous 1980 [1977]: 13, my translation).

The journey to you, Alice, is a train ride, is an observation car, is hinterland, is crumbly sleep and folding bed skirmish. The journey to you, Alice, is in essence a question: What can be found if all is lost? Are traces left of you as a woman, as a daughter, as a lover? Possibly, on the back or in the margins, sentences which have gone astray, secretly preserved in the moment of oblivion?

It took 48 hours from New York City to Austin, Texas. The train was, as expected, the means of transport for melancholiacs: one spins round in the panorama car seat, one stares at a cocktail glass, one enjoys the advantages of gravity in general. One is a veteran, a policewoman, a pensioner, a bird-watcher or a volunteer storyteller. One has slept or has not, one had some warm water left while taking a shower or had not, one had been served the right food or had not. What united us all was the cracking of the vertebrae when we greeted each other.

Grand Central Station in New York is a building of such size that from time to time, smaller celestial bodies patter from the ceiling onto the polished marble tiles. The station in Austin is a combined waiting and counter room next to the tracks: plywood, plaster boards, cicadas. The officer at the counter takes note of the fact that my luggage is missing. “Tomorrow evening,” he says, “the next train is arriving tomorrow evening and I bet they’ll have it on board”. My need for greater commitment makes him pick up the phone after a while: he dials, it rings, he breathes, “believe me, Miss,” he repeats and hangs up, “same time tomorrow”.

Right after my arrival on campus, I am handed the key for the archive rooms in the basement of the Department of Ancient Philology. I learn how to activate the alarm when I leave the archive last, which will be the case almost every night. I am the ghost who knows the code: hashtag, 1, 9, 3, 9. I would have preferred the end of the war.

We meet each other, Alice, me and you, and our bodies are covered in dust. Like the subtle film on the moon-coloured archival boxes, acid-free and neatly stacked.

*When Two People Independently Wonder About the Same
Thing: Franklin Daniel I*

15 November 1941 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Dear Dr. Daniel:

The following pages contain the various points that occurred to me when I read your article through again to-day, and considered what you said there together with what I remembered you saying a year ago at the AJA meeting and yesterday. I decided that while I was doing it, I might as well do it thoroughly, and the result was so bulky I had to write on manifold paper.

[First draft:]

Dear Dr. Daniel:

Before I start with my threatened list of queries on your article, I want to make it clear that I do not do it in a spirit of criticism, but because I feel that you, like me, want to make some headway with a problem which is fascinating because it is practically insoluble, and any slightest error when one is dealing with unknowns may throw one off the right track.

18 November 1941 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

Dear Miss Kober,

First of all I want to thank you for writing me so fully about your evidence for Linear B and related problems. I sent a number of reprints to various people (and am now sending one to you) in the hope of getting some constructive criticism on some of the many aspects of this work on which I do not pretend to have more than a minimum of knowledge. You are the first person who has done anything other than say that it looks wonderful, which of course means that it doesn't interest them. The remark that I made facetiously at the start of my lecture is perfectly true: if I am expressing myself on this subject, it is only because of the accident of having excavated new material, and because in preparing this material for publication I realized that little as I knew, I could nevertheless correct some misapprehensions in previous work.

In conclusion let me say that I am very much impressed by your command of your material, and look forward to hearing you at the Christmas meetings.

21 November 1941 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Dear Mr. Daniel:

I am chagrined, humiliated and absolutely disgusted with myself because, in writing to you, I did exactly what I have so often bitterly criticized others for doing, namely, I made statements without checking all the available evidence. You are entirely right when you say in several places in your letter, that what guided you in making a certain suggestion was the use of a sign, rather than its superficial resemblance to another. In dealing with any sort of hand-writing, use is the only safe criterion. In all the scripts I know, the difference between two letters which represent entirely different sounds, is often so minor that it might escape any but the most critical eye when the would-be reader does not know the language involved. On the other hand, it is also true that great variations exist, even in a single line written by one hand. I myself have two variations of r and e and I seem to use them indiscriminately, even in the same word.

In the beginning, I too couldn't tell which were variants of the same letters; in the beginning, your hand looked like the sea to me. I followed the tide, I read like a child, letter by letter, sometimes quietly mad, like someone who has misplaced their reading glasses. But then, after having been a little boat for a while, floating on the surface, I got into your habit of misplacing the slashes, for example. I realised that while your logic was extremely sharp, your hand was gentler, more erratic. Your hand, traced by this incredibly fine blue ink waves, washing up on the off-white of the paper.

21 November 1941 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

I agree with you that much more progress can be made when those of us working in the different fields get together. I'd like nothing better than to take part in a symposium such as you suggest. This interchange of ideas with you has already given me several new clues. What is only a vague hypothesis when one person thinks of it, becomes an idea worth pursuing to its end when it turns out that someone else got the same idea from different material.

Getting an idea from a hypothesis, getting an idea from someone else's voice or thoughts, getting an idea from a magpie outside the window. Getting an idea from the neighbour's footprints in the snow. Getting an idea from the pattern that coffee leaves behind in the cup, getting an idea from the slice of sky that is visible through the bedroom window, getting an idea from the way your mother always walks a bit unevenly.

You see, it was you too, who wanted exchange, who wanted collaboration. I don't know why it's presented how it was Ventris' invention¹. It doesn't take fancy new ideas, just one person and another. When they talk, something inside the body is aligned, something that had never existed before.

25 November 1941 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

I look forward to seeing what progress you make with the ideograms. I am also very anxious to see your paper on the suffixes. We must try to get Blegen and his co-workers into a discussion at Hartford, and see what common ground we can find. Blegen himself, as you probably know, is very reticent, and hates to suggest anything until he is absolutely certain of it. A young man, however, whose name I can't recall, who is working with Blegen on the tablets, is much more prone to the discussion of half-formulated ideas; we may be able to get something from him.

Thank you again for writing, and do it whenever you have any questions or anything you wish to pass on. It is very welcome.

In Flatbush, Brooklyn, I had visited your house, if you can really say that: I stood in front of it and didn't dare ring the bell. How could I summarise, in a few words, why I wanted to be admitted? There is no plaque, no sign, no reference to you. Only a handful of people know: Alice Kober, American classical philologist and leading international researcher in the deciphering of Linear B, lived here. Then, if I managed to do it and I was invited in, what would I find after 70 years of your absence? After multiple changes of ownership, of generations, of interior styles? I tore a page out of my notebook and wrote:

Hi. I am Regina, a writer based in Switzerland and I'm researching Alice Kober, who lived in this house with her mother, Katharina Kober, in the 1930s and 40s. I'd very much like to see the inside of the house. Please give me a call if you could imagine letting me peek around your home. Of course, I'd gladly tell you more about Alice Kober.

Quietly, I climbed the two steps of the veranda and realised that there was no letter box on the front door, nor in the wall next to it, and no free-standing mailbox on the curb. I liked the fact that house number 1050 in East 43rd Street seemed to survive without mail, but it was also slightly mysterious—bills, contracts, books. I stuck the note between the door leaf and the frame, where it was bent by the wind. "You wish," the wind whispered, "there's no way that's going to last."

Good afternoon. If I were standing in your living room, I would remove the wallpaper in my imagination while answering your question about why I am interested in Alice Kober. After all I am neither a classical philologist nor an archaeologist. I don't even know Ancient Greek. It was like this: I came across Alice because I followed a footnote. A footnote in which Linear B was mentioned. In what kind of book this reference might have been necessary I can't say, not by any stretch of the imagination. All I remember was that I was curious about what a font called Linear B might look like.

A bit like the capital letters of our own writing. There is a sign like a mirrored S, and an L with a circle, where the lines form a corner. Another one looks like an elephant with its trunk thrown back. There are also signs that stand for a whole word: man, woman, horse, pig, clothes, cart, fabric. The man is a long triangle, on top a horizontal line for the arms, on top of the arms a small line for the head. The woman is a long triangle, on top a horizontal line for the arms, below two dots as breasts, above a semicircle for a head.

Good afternoon. Actually, it's so unlikely that I came across Alice that I secretly assume that she was the one who found me. Why me of all people? Because I too am a woman: line, dot, dot. Because we resemble each other in our stubbornness. Because she knew that if she just made me curious enough, I would follow her traces. I would travel to the US, first to New York and from there, as a visiting scholar, to the University of Texas at Austin, where her archive landed through a certain set of coincidences. She knew that I would be willing to read every single letter there, every document, every article, every sheet. Line by line, dot by dot. She knew that I would want to write about her, that this writing about would very soon become a form of writing towards each other.

Good afternoon. If I was sure the wind would blow my note away, I'd write this: was it on a Saturday that you dismantled the mailbox and removed its traces? Did you have slippers on and a taste of bread in your mouth? Do you know more since it is quiet? Or different?

Maybe you're right, maybe silence is a good start. The best beginning, for everything.

30 January 1942 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

Dear Alice

I have been meaning for some time to write to tell you how impressed I was by your article on words in -inthos. It really is monumental.

I haven't heard a word from or about Bennett. I gathered at Hartford that he did plan to publish fairly soon, but I may be wrong about that. When you do get the vowels in order, do give me at least an inkling of your results. I think that is a crucial point in the history of writing in Greece.

Sometimes it's disappointing to look up new words in order to get a language right. It's in these moments that I'd like to command the words to extend the promise they make to me—the susurrus just between myself and the letters, their order, their silhouette—to densely written dictionary pages. Under these circumstances the word “inkling” does derive from the noun “ink”, and means “a tiny bit of writing that sums up great efforts of thought”, or “some wavy lines thrown on manifold paper like a stone in the almost motionless Ionian Sea on any weekday afternoon.”

12 May 1942 —————PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

Dear Alice,

I must apologize for not having written sooner: for once in my brief career I have been swamped with curatorial duties. I don't even try to write letters at home: spring on a farm is a very busy season.

I need hardly tell you how delighted I was to hear you say that [two signs] may be vowel signs after all.

No, I'm not in the army, thanks to a dependent wife. I have been trying to find some part-time use for my knowledge of Greece and Modern Greek, but so far to no avail.

I assume that you heard Blegen's NY lecture. I wish that I might have. I saw him at the A.P.A. meetings long enough to learn that the Pylos inscriptions are in Minoan, which must have been the literary language, while the spoken language at Pylos was Greek. It sounds reasonable.

A very reasonable idea, indeed. You were so close, in this sentence, to the final solution, both of you: one writing, one following the words with their eyes—inklingreen, inklingblack. There it was: Greek and Minoan so closely linked, but neither of you raised the easier solution which doesn't require two languages—one spoken, one written—but just one. I must apologise for the impatience, but: Did either of you consider Greek to be the answer at some point?

15 May 1942 —————PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Dear Franklin,

When I didn't hear from you I decided that you were in the army and it was with pleasure that I noted that your letter came from the museum. Tell your wife I am grateful to her for keeping you where I can write you about my findings once in a while.

Tell your wife I am grateful that her hands are too small or just not numerous enough to tame nature's constitution, that her muscles get sore way too fast, that her body is mainly made of connective tissue. Maybe she coughs a lot, maybe she is always cold. Maybe she drinks tea she brews from herbs that she collected herself in the underwood. Maybe she has bad dreams every other night, maybe she is awake all the time, cradling a child or her fears or her pride at having hair the colour of marsh marigolds, maybe she tosses and turns in her sleep until she is wet with sweat, buried under snow. Maybe, secretly, she sometimes cannot get up from the kitchen chair for fear of touching stone, touching wood, touching metal in the wrong order. Maybe sometimes she cannot drag herself out of bed because her whole life seems folded into the bedside lamp, every little action, even the smallest task is suddenly sitting there, beside her and mocking her. Would you tell her, please, that I am grateful for that.

Sometimes confidence and uselessness aren't two sides of the same entity (plate, paper, pebble), but the very same thing.

The only difference is their distance to the sun.

15 May 1942 —————PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Yes, I certainly heard Blegen, and, what's more, he showed slides of at least three inscriptions I had never seen before, so I considered it a perfect evening.

Why does the knowledge always fall into their laps, those territories of leeriness and pride. Showing their slides like magicians at a fair, but still with hands that can snatch you blatantly. Knowing, just knowing, that they are doing this out of generosity, sharing what has fallen to their ground, their pockets, their pipes. Not even raising their voice, not even clearing their throats. Still they make a tiny pause, just enough to give the audience time to hold their breath, to feel their lungs start to prickle. Then, they point with the stick onto the wall where the slide is projected, the sticks, the men, the verticals. Helena had rewarded Blegen with the palace and the inscriptions in Pylos because he had decided not to cut down the century-old olive trees and dig somewhere other than planned. This is the story², and he couldn't help telling it again, but it remained unclear if he was showing respect or he knew that he could dig wherever the hell he wanted to and something eternal would surface, cocksure.

22 May 1942 —————PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Dear Franklin:

One of these days I'm coming to Philadelphia and do away with you, because you are a dangerous character. As I work away I get "brainstorms" which I store away in my mind for future reference, and sooner or later, you write to me and wonder whether so and so couldn't perhaps be the case. Seriously, I am delighted, of course, because when two people independently wonder about the same thing, there is so much more probability that there is something in it.

I find some very interesting things. Certain signs are often prefixed, or suffixed, to roots. Some are often intrusive. I have some roots. Pretty soon I'll be able to conjugate or decline them, but I still can't read them.

Whenever you write and tell me that you just haven't the time to spend on Cypro-Minoan, I feel sad, and then brighten up at the reflection that you probably can't really tear yourself away entirely. I can't. I've tried several times, but it's a no go. I've resigned myself; if I want peace I must first finish the job, or work till someone else finishes it.

I envy you. Your work is related to your field of interest. I have to teach beginners Latin, or read papers in which I am told that the inner frieze of the Parthenon portrays the Panatheistic Procession. 'Tain't funny! Not when I spent a period describing and discussing the darn thing!

I'm looking forward to hearing you again. I'll sit in the front row (I mean the second—the front row is reserved for the big shots) and make faces.

The first letter you exchanged with Franklin was six months ago. Six months of thorough scrutiny of theories, six months of getting used to this other mind that can be addressed, this other being on University stationary. Only one week after he mentions his wife, you seem on your way to him. She's dependent, you are not. When you write this letter, bubbly and cheerful, you cannot know that it will remain unanswered for a long time—almost four years. You cannot know that you will feel embarrassed for months on end, you wish you had kept a carbon copy to check your words again, if they were indeed as pathetic as their echoes in your head. You imagine him chuckling at your lines or digging trenches in Normandy, and then you stop the thinking about him altogether—whenever he comes up in your mind, you push him through a barn door (a red one, like that from the children's book) and then you lock it shut. The key is warm in your hand, warm and balanced and rugged.

1 See for example Robinson's account of the *Mid-Century Report* (2002: 75): "The 'venture'—which Ventris also called an 'interesting experiment in international cooperation' and which soon became known as the *Mid-Century Report*—was wholly typical of him. No professional classicist would have conceived it, and if one had, he or she would almost certainly have lacked the linguistic skills to translate the replies, which came from all over Europe and the United States. It was 'group working' applied to a completely different field, the decipherment of the Minoan scripts, in a disinterested effort to break the scholarly impasse."

2 "As the story went, Blegen arrived in Pylos in April 1939 and looked around for a place to dig. He chose a nearby hill and asked its owner if he could excavate there. Permission was granted on one condition: that Blegen's workmen not disturb the ancient olive trees growing on the hillside. Blegen agreed to dig a meandering trench that would spare the trees. As a result, he liked to say afterward, Pallas Athene, the Greek goddess of wisdom, who had given man the olive tree, rewarded him. Early the next morning, Blegen's greek workmen began digging the crooked trench. Almost at once, one of the men approached him, holding up an object he had lifted from the earth. '*Grammata*,' he said, extending his hand to Blegen. In the man's hand was a clay tablet, much like those from Knossos, inscribed with similar symbols." (Fox 2013: 146-7).

*A Fragile Sequence:
Caesura*

I think it was a Monday night. The library was open till late, and I needed a break from writing, so I checked something online. I then checked something else, and eventually I happened to read this sentence about Luce Irigaray on Encyclopaedia Britannica online: “Irigaray was circumspect about revealing details of her personal life or upbringing; she believed that interpreters and critics within the male-dominated academic establishment typically use such information to distort or dismiss the work of challenging women thinkers.”

I heard her (even though I didn't know her voice back then) joining you in calling me a camel, gently, laughingly. For such a long time, her idea of meeting in silence had been the guiding star for this research, and now she was circumspect. How could I convince her and myself to continue? Obviously, the male-dominated academic establishment couldn't and wouldn't use whatever I was writing against you, for they had moved on long ago. But still, I am attributing, making decisions, exemplifying, simplifying, amplifying. I am replacing the silence with matter: particles, particularities.

Words.

I have been carrying your letters and writings inside me for well over a year, and sometimes I feel like I can't run or move quickly, as that would swirl them up, displace the words I know so well, disturb the natural order they have taken, a fragile sequence which would collapse when being spoken of.

I don't know what they've been doing inside, your words, all these months. There was no whispering, no rattling, neither day nor night time. My guess is they were silently pointing to the poles, quietly re-arranging themselves like rough-edged ghosts, according to the movements of my hands.

All I can do is write to leave your words inside. I write reverberations,
wordily echo soundings. I write into the dark of my body and into the dark
of your body, too.

*I shall Never, While I'm Alive, Desist:
Voice*

I'm sitting at my desk in the archive with my usual late-night snack: a protein shake from the gym bar as none of the coffee places are open this late. The cold cup plucks water from the air like mediocre ideas and they gather on the transparent cell wall. Of course I shouldn't be endangering the documents, the thin carbon paper on which the violet is already blurring. I throw away the cup with the ice cubes and read on in the folder that contains, among other things, your application for the Guggenheim Fellowship (PASP, Box 56.6). In the section "In Connection with Other College Organizations", I read:

Talk on Roman Drama on radio (1936) as preface to Dr. Arnold Moss' presentation of The Menaechmi

And all the others had left for the day quite a while ago, and so I can't tell anyone that there is a possible trace here, the opportunity of proximity. Your voice, with which I share my mother tongue, German, the language of a minority in Prague. That you spoke it to your parents is a secure state of knowledge: your pronunciation of English had a strong German accent, someone would write much later.¹ Your voice. A voice that can be a place, a promise, a world.

I can adore a voice: I am a woman: the love of the voice: nothing is more powerful than the intimate touch of a veiled voice, profound but reserved coming to awaken my blood; the first ray of a voice that comes to meet the newly-born heart. My heart is in the belongingness with a voice fashioned out of shining darkness, a nearness infinitely tender and reserved. (Cixous 2003 [1979]: 84)

The hope of being able to call over to another world—me to you, or you to me. The exuberance of having tracked down a so-far undiscovered document, an overlooked testimony. The thought of hearing you speak over a good eighty years wraps itself around me like a small blanket of carbon dioxide.

Archive Request ——
New York Public Radio

I'm looking for the episode *The Menaechmi* from the show *Theater Parade*, a radio program prepared and directed by the student body and faculty of Brooklyn College, which was broadcast on Friday, February 21, 1936, probably at 4.30 pm. I'm especially interested in the featured speaker, Dr. Alice Kober.

Dear Ms. Duerig,

I'm sorry to report this is not a recording we have in our collection and this predates the station's 1937 WPA make-over when they acquired disc cutting/recording machines. So, I have my doubts about it being recorded at all.

Sincerely yours,

Andy Lanset, Director of Archives
New York Public Radio

Dear Mr. Lanset

Thank you very much for your quick reply! It's a pity that the recording doesn't exist. I was so excited... I might ask the Brooklyn College just to be sure, but if the technical equipment wasn't at disposal, as you point out, the chances are very slim.

One final attempt to clutch at a straw: if the old recordings are somehow tagged & it wouldn't take you too long, could I ask you to check if Alice Kober was on air (and recorded) for another show? (She died in May 1950, so it would have been between 1937 and 1950.) I don't think she was, but there's so little information about her that it could be possible.

Dear Ms. Dürig,

I've checked our catalog as well as the NYC Municipal Archives WNYC collection—which contains the bulk of our older shows—neither is showing anything for “Kober”. Sorry.

There's always a chance she had asked/paid for a commercial recording service at the time to record her appearance off the air. Those types of discs typically turn up in institutional/university collections of the individual's donated personal papers. So, if her papers were donated somewhere, it might be worth checking that out.

Dear Mr. Lanset

Unfortunately, or fortunately, I'm sitting amidst her papers, so to speak. I've spent the last four weeks going through all that there is, but have only found a tiny hint at the show in a CV, no disc at all...

“DOKTÈRKOBÈR, WOULD YOU allow me the pleasure of having dinner with you later? I could imagine that you like French food as much as I myself.” Moss threw this smile at her that she had seen him sending out to almost all female teachers, it had nearly always been reciprocated, shy yet beaming. He couldn’t even pronounce her name correctly, but at least, in her case, he was close.

“Where are we supposed to be standing?” asked a student with a ponytail, excited by the idea that her voice, trained by crumbly singing teachers and overambitious actors without real engagement all these hours after school, was soon to be heard in thousands of homes in New York City. Her hip tilted impatiently, “Over here?”

Moss started to turn towards her, sending his stretched arm out first so that his eyes could still rest on Alice, his eyebrows almost a caricature of a question mark, horizontal dashes of expectation.

“Please, Doktèrkobèr, I have never had the chance to hear the opinion of a Roman expert on the play.”

Was he bowing to her? Alice sounded in his mouth like a dubious pill. But the word expert made her move her head sideways and down, even though she was neither an expert on Rome nor on plays, but maybe she could shift the conversation to Horace², Roman poetry she knew, a nod so slow that it could have been no, seen with eyes other than Moss’s.

“Impeccable,” he said, sending out his voice to the far corner of the known universe, now fully positioned towards the student, “I would be delighted.”

Alice's torso flashed with inward heat, a red of reluctance, when she caught the student's look—the same that Alice used to forbear when women gave in to all too obvious advances. For a second she hoped the student had also heard the word expert, but it might have been exactly this word that gave Moss away. Then Alice saw how the student was tilting her hip in the other direction, her eyes determined like a double flamed fen fire, Castor and Pollux would have been proud of her. It had not been contempt, it had been a warning, Alice thought, and started to breathe again, deep and soft. Being a bitter pill of intelligence, who wouldn't agree to that?

THE MICROPHONE LOOKED like a tea strainer that had decided to become a cargo ship, but had abandoned its transformation halfway. It was shiny. Alice ran her fingers over the meshed metal.

“Don’t,” harrumphed the technician, “talk with the mouth.” His neck was badly shaved and a sweaty dew covered his nose and forehead.

“Yes, sir,” Alice repeated softly, “I will talk with my mouth.” She felt her heart echo in her throat. Usually, his nonsensical proposal would have reassured her, nothing so warm and enveloping as a mind focused on the certainties of the world, as if walking on a layer of solid glass above all the others, the junctions, the assumptions, the sea. The technician put his headphones on and snapped his fingers in front of the microphone, checking the amplitude described by the little needles in their half-moon cases.

“You haven’t done this before, Miss?” Without turning away from the bulky black box and its control knobs, he provided all the oracle-like advice he thought Alice worthy of: “Take your voice from your stomach. Don’t turn your head away under any circumstance. The less you think about it, the better you will sound, Miss.”

“Sure. I will try my best.” Alice’s heartbeat amplified itself into her arms, into the sheet of paper. In the early morning hours, she had typed them up for the very last time, incorporating all her corrections dangling on long lines from the words they referred to. She read her introduction to herself in front of the bathroom mirror after her mother had gone to bed. At first, the movements of her duplicated herself irrit-

ated her. Then, the words started to materialise in between the two Alices, as if choosing from which mouth to emerge. Alice had looked herself in the eye reciting what had to be said about this quaint play. She watched her thin lips, the lines between the nostrils and the corners of the mouth changing their angle ever so slightly. Words dangling again, this time from her face. She couldn't help but laugh at herself, the gurgling dryness of her voice aseptically reflected back on the yellowish bathroom tiles. One cannot look with one's mouth.

We distinguish between two types of Roman comedies—those based on Greek plays, and those written for Roman circumstances. “The Twins” by Plautus is a *fabula palliata*, based on Greek themes. The whole play takes place on the street in front of a house, as is typical of ancient comedies. A place of arrival and departure, of presence and absence. A place of encounter.

There are plenty of encounters in this piece. It tells the story of a pair of twins, the Menaechmi, who look very similar to each other. As children they were separated from each other. When they had grown up, the righteous one of the two set forth to look for the other. Stubbornly, the righteous one did not want to realise that his venture was unsuccessful, that he had to go back home with the last of his money, and this is exactly where he gets caught up in the life of his not evil but indecent twin brother. The righteous Menaechmus meets his brother’s wife and mistress, who confront him. The indecent one encounters the servant of the righteous brother and releases him to his freedom. Only at the end of the play do the brothers finally meet and all their confusion dissolves upon their reunion.

IT WAS THE whole acting class that Moss took to a French restaurant, girls and boys like grapes around him. Led by some movement she couldn't reconstruct Alice ended up sitting next to Moss, his left arm resting on the back of her chair. Precisely because he was opening his body in her direction, she was shut off. Sitting next to him but not looking at him, leaning forward to not touch his arm, like a doll on the day its owner finally realised she was too old to play with it but couldn't yet let go of the habit of taking the little stuffed body everywhere she went. Alice couldn't even move her chair an inch, so crowded was the table, the whole restaurant in fact. Even though she must have walked past it many times, she had never seen it. *La Semaine Passée*, what a pretentious name. The students' voices were shrill with excitement, congratulating each other on their performances, pointing out which lines had been delivered better than ever before and which mistakes went unnoticed by everybody else.

"Some say live broadcasting is like drinking champagne," said Moss, "but I believe that only drinking champagne is like drinking champagne." Everybody laughed. This was a play, too, thought Alice, just poorly written and presented in an uncomfortable theatre. She could have been home by now, she could be reading. Moss removed his arm to receive a bottle of champagne brought to him by the waiter, making a great fuss about the little wire cage around the cork and talking about how champagne, following French etymology, had to be opened with a sabre. Playing a French nobleman with his arm as a blade, Moss knocked

over the glasses the waiter had just put on the table. The students were screaming at the feather-edged disorder and Moss cut his finger while picking up the glass remains. Then, the cork shot out of the bottle of its own accord, hitting the ceiling and finally landing in a bread basket. After a second of silence everybody broke out in frenetic applause, and Moss got up and took a round of bows. Alice, too, got up from the table, her purse clutched in her hands. Nobody will ever notice that I am gone, she thought. In fact, I should never have been here in the first place.

“Are you feeling unwell?” asked Moss, his index finger in his mouth to stop the bleeding.

“I’m not much of a bubbly woman,” said Alice in a jejune voice, feeling her limbs turn to wool.

“Do you think I need a Band-Aid?” asked Moss, holding his finger in front of Alice’s face. She saw how a dot of blood became a red pearl, then a line.

“I’m not an expert on that,” Alice said, “but I’m sure you will be fine. Thanks for the invitation to this peculiar place.”

The students were pouring the champagne.

“Please stay, Doktèrkobèr,” Moss said in another voice, deeper and breathless, “you played an important role this afternoon, too, you cannot refuse to be celebrated!”

He turned around to grab a glass, but was immediately caught in a conversation. Alice moved herself through the tables and chairs, her woollen belly and legs bumping clumsily into wood, into people. On the street she turned into a human again. A human with a blood stain on her blouse sleeve, a blood stain in the shape of a continent.

IT WAS A blouse she actually liked, with little ribbons for cuffs. Alice stood outside the idiotic restaurant, still hearing the voices somersault. She was empty, but not hungry. Or hungry but not for food. She thought of her mother, sitting in front of the radio. She insisted on wearing her glasses to listen to the radio for a reason unbeknownst to Alice. Sometimes she'd make a little joke about it, but mostly she'd just observe the body that was so much like her own lean in overly intense concentration. As if the eyes could catch what escapes the ears. How is blood removed? Salt? Soap? Lye? Her mother will know. When did he even touch her? And why did he bring her here, just to add another odd figure to his quaint circus of followers? Alice pictured herself lurching on a unicycle, throwing cheerfully coloured juggling balls at the ignorant student and her ponytail. She chuckled. She should have known better.

HUÎTRES, MOULES, BOUILLABAISSE.

“It’s the old question, if ‘I see what I eat’ is the same thing as ‘I eat what I see’,” said Alice into the silence hovering over the white table cloth. Even though she had spoken more to herself than addressed her words to Moss, the candle in between them on the table broke into a disproportional flare, like little fiery somersaults.

“Do you like what you see?” answered Moss and the flame solidified. Cheeky traitor, thought Alice.

“I am more of a dessert eater myself,” said Alice, “and not too fond of sea dwellers. You know, I am a firm believer in the earth and all the good that comes from it.” Why was he even bothering to go out with her? He, the actor, he, the voice. He, who everybody else holds their breath for when he walks by. This hair, these eyes, this voice. All that whispering. Alice wondered if he knew how often the female colleagues talked about or thought of him. Dreaming. Fantasising.

“I’ve heard much about your passion, *Doktèrkobèr*. I’m afraid everything here is rather freshly prepared and not many thousand years old. But let’s order dessert, if that’s what you like. What would you recommend?” His voice and posture changed, as if a little door had been opened in his chest. A door like that on those portable altars from the middle ages. He was now soft or mild. He put the menu down and spread his arms out on the table, an open embrace.

“I, well... It sure is impolite not to order a proper meal, *n’est-ce pas?*”

“That would be the advantage of moderate fame. People tend to refrain from letting you know what they think. But don’t worry, please. I come here so often it is basically my home.”

Suddenly, a lot of matter was hurrying around in Alice’s head. The letters on the menu went out of focus, then reappeared. She was falling down the rabbit hole. How do other women do it? Why do they enjoy this kind of interaction, where everything constantly shifts? Where you never know where you are or where you’re headed? He seemed considerate and generous. Wasn’t that a good thing?

“I like Tarte Tartin,” Alice said finally, “it’s one of my favourites.”

“Very well then.” Moss ordered two Tarte Tartins, a cheese board and a bottle of red wine in fairly fluent French and looked pleased with himself when the waiter made sure there hadn’t been a misunderstanding. “So tell me, *Doktèrkobèr*, what is it that drives you to unravel the past?”

“Understanding where we come from.” Usually people ask why questions, a whole series of them: Why do you do that, why is it important, why had nobody done it before, why do you think you can. Why aren’t you married, why aren’t you concerned. “There’s clear evidence whenever the past is concerned. We might not be able to say what it means, but it is distinct and manageable. The past is contained. The present is, quite often, not.”

Moss nodded. “But you can never be sure, with the past, that it really was the way you imagine it, right? It’s you, it’s the archaeologists who make the past. You are, so to speak, God, *Doktèrkobèr*. You create a world.”

“It’s the evidence, not the archaeologists. I’ve never thought of myself as some sort of divine authority, especially not in matters concerning the progression of the planet.”

“But wouldn’t you make a great goddess? Look at you! Wouldn’t it be something if you excavated the remains of the Kobercult? Little figures with curly hair and pencils and statues and temples!”

“Then I’d need more training as an archaeologist, they don’t let diletantes lead digs, I’m afraid.”

“Who ever heard of a goddess needing training? You would have all the power, the power of knowledge. With eyes so much more blue than Helena’s. Homer would sing your praise, and later there would be plays about you. Plays that I could perform with the students!”

“If I ever find evidence for my cult, you will be the first one to know, I promise.”

“The mortals would worship you, I am convinced. Let’s see. Chouchou! If this mademoiselle was a goddess, wouldn’t you gladly worship her?” The waiter tried to keep himself occupied with the bottle of wine and the glasses, but he smiled and said “oui”, exchanging a conspiratorial look with Alice, “bien sûr”.

Alice smiled back at him, grateful for his presence.

“THERE’S CARAMEL SAUCE on your blouse,” Moss said and was right. It was, in fact, Alice’s favourite blouse, comfortable and remotely elegant at the same time.

“Let me,” he said, dabbing his finger on her arm, licking it clean thoughtlessly. “It’s an island,” he said, the finger out of his mouth by now, “maybe a prophecy. This is the island you will be living happily on.”

Alice couldn’t stop looking at her forearm, at the little brown territory that Moss had conquered. She drew her arm back. She didn’t want to be someone else’s land. She didn’t want to be living happily. First and foremost, not in the sense that was implied here—a useless woman on a beach, porch or her side of the bed. A happy wife.

“Have you been to Greece?”

“I don’t want to—”

“Don’t want to go to Greece? You must be joking!”

“No. Yes. I mean, yes, I want to go to Greece. Athens. Europe.³”

Enough headwords to spark Moss’s enthusiasm for Europe, for traveling. Alice couldn’t follow his meandering comments about things he had read about places he wanted to visit. Alice could feel the little island turning slowly into fire, into ice, into stone. Droughts and floods. Years of poor harvest and years of abundance. Isolation and fugacity. Alice could feel it all amounting to the only obvious circumstance: another civilisation’s downfall⁴.

“If you had been searching for a needle, I do believe you would, long ere this, have found the needle, if it were visible.”⁵

...the servant says to the righteous Menaechmus, the one who strives to find his brother. And it is 1936, and it is not possible for you to know that your search will continue for years to come, your search for meaning and syllables and silver linings. You heard this sentence in the piece, you heard the sentence, you heard the silicifying crunch in the spine of those who shake their heads, who say those kinds of sentences, sentences that are meant to make you abandon stubbornness and rigidity, to silence voices for the common good, you heard: role model women and love of order. No I, no U.

“I shall never, while I’m alive, desist.”⁶

...replies the good Menaechmus to his servant, and is right, even though he does not know that the solution is only seconds away, the solution that does not want to cross his mind. While you listen to the student say this sentence with an empty face, you do not know how long you will live. You hear this sentence in the piece, and inside it underlines you. It marks everything in which you are ready to believe, because it is everything you know.

Among the hundreds of thousands of cards cut out by hand that I have seen in the archive, I found one that you have cut to size from a letter. The date on which the letter was written is 8 May, it is clearly marked on the back, 8 May 1950, the year in which you died. It was probably posted that same day or maybe one day later, perhaps it arrived at your home on May 10 or 11. You have read it and, who knows, maybe answered it. Maybe it was recovery wishes that you skimmed with scissors in your hand. You made a card and noted a word on it. On 16 May, only five days later, you were no longer alive.

At the time of Plautus, the stages were made of wood and so small that the audience stood directly in front of the actors. The experience was immediate, every word intelligible, every emotion and gesture to see.

Did you like theatre, Alice? The exaggerated speaking, the emotional states thrown through the room?

I hate all kinds of inventions.

I flinched every time I read about this dislike in your letters.

What do you know about my letters?

I was in the archives and I read them, and everything else I could understand. The details of the notebooks, the word lists, the frequency counts were only roughly accessible to me.

Is there an archive?

In Texas. It's like the Center for Minoan Studies you should have run at the University of Pennsylvania. Anyway, all the material from that time ended up in Texas.

Why?

Because your mother, after your—

Why did you read my letters?

Because I wanted to find what the early historians and other scientists and biographers who wrote about you overlooked.

What would that be?

Something human. Not because I think that women should or must be portrayed with some sort of softness, but because you are portrayed as a kind of deciphering machine. Meticulous is the word that is used the most, which makes me think of Mephisto somehow. In any case: Disembodied.

Without the body, I could have made it. Without its weakness, its tiredness.

1 Emmett Bennett had sent Adelaide Hahn a letter on 22 June 1961 to inquire about details of Alice Kober's life for his entry about her in *Notable American Women 1607-1950*. She annotated his information by hand. To his sentence "It seems to me that Mrs. Kober spoke German" she added "Yes. She had a strong accent in English"(Bennett Correspondence, PASP).

2 Horace was her favourite poet (see unsigned letter—probably from Joseph Pearl—to Katharina Kober after Alice's death, 31 May 1950, Brooklyn College File: "Fate has dealt both you and us a most cruel blow. But as Alice's favorite poet Horace says, 'There must be a limit to grief for one so dear.' Patience only will lighten what may not be cured.").

3 As Alice Kober's CV in her Guggenheim application shows, she spent the summer of 1939 in Europe: "1939 (summer) examination of archaeological exhibits in European museums, in France, Germany, Austria, Greece and Italy; examination of important sites in Greece and Italy: tour of Greece (under American School of Classical Studies in Athens) and study of newest work of the American, British, French and German schools." In the work plan, also part of the application, she refers to the journey like this: "Survey of archaeological sites; hasty examination of Minoan inscriptions found at Thebes and Pylos. Further plans interrupted by the war." (PASP, Boxes 56.6 and 56.7).

4 "I am a pessimist, as you have probably guessed. I prepare for the worst. Usually I am pleasantly surprised" (AK to SJM, 26 June 1947, Ashmolean Museum).

"Nasty character, that's me" (AK to SJM, 26 June 1947, Ashmolean Museum).

5 From Plautus: *Menaechmi*, or *The Twin Brothers*. Act 2, Scene 1
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=pl.+men.+1> (accessed 1 April 2020).

6 From Plautus: *Menaechmi*, or *The Twin Brothers*. Act 2, Scene 1
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=pl.+men.+1> (accessed 1 April 2020).

***It is a Matter of Resoluteness:
Body***

In my body there is space for yours. You don't seem tall on the picture I will be finding, and sure I am not tall. Your brilliance, no doubt, exceeds mine by far. I don't have your rigour. I don't have your persistence. I am not bound to solve one of mankind's great mysteries. I am, today, almost fully occupied with sitting up straight. I am not being coquettish, just longing for a shell. I wouldn't care to be the one who has to do the moving.

I think of you and wonder if you were missing a shell too, from time to time. It's hard to imagine, reading your articles and considering your workload. Isn't discipline wooden planks suspended over nothingness? How did you do it? I mean, how did you not stumble and fall? Is this why you held on to the facts, to what can be checked and double checked, what is undoubtedly true? To keep you on track? Today, I am off track. I'm dying to dangle my feet, but they, inconsolably, touch the library's carpet firmly.

ALICE WAS THAT kind of girl that would play hours and hours on her own. The only thing that made her come to me was being hungry or just wanting to eat something. She liked apples cut into pieces. But she hated cut apples when the apple had been peeled. She had this phase, that must have been before school, when she was played at being a cat. But because it was Alice, she was not playing at being a cat, she was a cat. She wouldn't use any words, she answered in purrs. Ferrie wasn't too fond of childishness of that kind. After a while he ignored her. She could rub up against his leg for as long as she wanted, but he didn't pet her, didn't pick her up, even though Alice was his princess. He'd buy her dresses, so beautiful that I didn't want her to wear them. So expensive, so delicate. But he insisted. I don't really know where he got the money from or what he did to get them. Sometimes I thought, well, I don't grow out of things, I could do with something nice too. But that just didn't interest him. She was his little doll. I started to worry that Alice would think her father didn't like her anymore. So I begged her to stop being a cat, to stand up straight, to talk, to smile for Ferrie's sake. But she looked at me with this cat gaze. You know the way cats look: with their little triangular heads tilted, the way in which you have no idea whether they understand what you are saying and just don't care, or if they really have no idea what you want from them. When Ferrie went off to work, I put a little bowl of cream on the kitchen floor. I couldn't let the child starve, could I? She did it for so long, it must have been several days in a row, not answering, not blinking, that I began to think she had suffered a

concussion or something or had gone deaf. Things happen faster than one might think inside those little heads, and I took her to our neighbour who had been a doctor back home. Alice would climb up to the fourth floor on all fours. She would lick the backs of her hands while neatly sitting on the doormat. Mr. Cramer examined her, but she wouldn't answer him with words either. He said that Alice was fine, but that she was a cat now and the only advice he could give me was to adjust her diet. At least once a week she needed to eat a mouse or bird or a rat. He asked me if I had traps in the house and I said yes. He said: "Try to catch them alive, cats like to play with their prey before they eat them." This was too much for my poor little Alice. She stood up with an awfully grim look on her face and said: "You can't be a doctor if you can't tell the difference between a girl and a cat."

Then she walked home with me and has remained my little girl ever since.

“WHAT IS IT like,” asked Alice, interrupting a cicada solo.

“Trying to remember every single dream you have ever had while ironing shirt after shirt?”

“Not that. That,” Alice raised her eyebrows and nodded slightly.

“What, I thought you weren’t interested in doing any of that clinging nonsense? Or what was it that you called it...”

“I’m not interested in doing it. I just wondered what it feels like. It seems so far-fetched and altogether degrading.”

“I’ll tell you if you kiss me.”

“Well, don’t tell me then. You are such a silly creature, Laurie.”

“No, seriously. I want to kiss you. And even more so, I want you to be kissed. Have another one or two of these and you won’t find the idea childish anymore.” Laurie poured two glasses of whiskey.

“I shouldn’t have asked,” said Alice, lighting a cigarette. “Tell me more about ironing. That’s also a subject matter I have virtually no knowledge of. How does it feel?”

“Maybe all of us should live with our mothers. She even does your clothes? That is just not fair.”

“I guess she likes doing it. Or at least she is so used to doing it that she doesn’t mind. The truth is, she can’t stand watching me doing anything in the house. I never paid attention to all the things she taught me. In her world, she failed me.”

“It leaves an emptiness behind which cannot be filled.”

“Well, I’m not forcing her, you know.”

“Not your mother. That. First you tilt into one another, like sheets of light in a cardboard box. You dissolve, but keep your outline, the edges.”

Alice emptied her glass tumbler, the sound of her evenly paced swallowing echoing back from the house wall.

“I don’t see how light can keep its edges while fading. And would that be a good thing?” she asks.

“Yes,” Laurie said with a warmth in her voice that Alice had never noticed before. “Yes, that is a good thing. But afterwards you are left with all your emptiness, so endlessly hollow. And there’s nothing you can do to fill yourself again, at least if you are lucky and they didn’t leave their future inside.”

“That sounds terrible,” Alice said softly.

“It’s not terrible, it’s just that you know for a couple of days that you consist of a lack at the core. I will never get used to that feeling. Once I almost tried to stuff a towel inside me. But then I saw for the first time that the little embroidered violets on the bordure have those tiny squinted faces, and that stopped me. I mean, you don’t shove little faces in there if you are lucky enough to not to have one growing there already. Right?”

Alice had no idea what to say. Didn’t Laurie want to feel something growing inside her? Wasn’t that what women wanted? At least women who go for the whole domestic thing, or are made to go for it. The image of Ruby flashed through Alice’s head, the pregnant girl at the dance marathon in McCoy’s crime novel everybody had liked so much.¹ How Alice had all the time feared the scene in which she would fall onto her stomach during one of the derbies and a lot of blood would be on her underside and all sorts of flesh that had been alive just minutes before. And how even though that scene never came, thanks to the women of the Moral League, who had Ruby removed from the marathon and tried to shut down the sad circus of lost souls altogether, how even though Mc-

Coy resected Ruby from the text from one page to the next, how despite all that, Ruby will always have buried her child with the weight of her own body in Alice's mind. As if Alice's copy of the book had actually contained this horror that everyone else's hadn't. Ruby had been lying on that ragged parquet floor, Alice had seen it in her own mind.

"Right?"

"No, I guess you wouldn't," said Alice, returning from that seedy racetrack on a Hollywood pier where the Pacific pounded underneath to her balcony chair with the Pacific crashing into the coast, several states away, a distant and dark heart.

"I like my hollow," said Alice, "but I am aware of it in a strictly theoretical way. I have never actually felt it, which is what makes all the difference, doesn't it?"

"It does," agreed Laurie, arranging her hair in a ponytail as neat and tidy as the one before.

"Sometimes, when I try to learn something, like vocabulary, and just can't keep it in my head, I console myself over my already overflowing brain with the idea that I could store some of the information in this unused space. Like a warm cellar or something."

"You are also a silly creature, Alice Kober, let me tell you that. But I guess it's a good idea, just imagine how those thoughts would grow! I'd like to be with you when they make you push them out and clean them and wrap them in one of those blankets."

There is a moment of silence, then a stifling giggle, and then a fit of suppressed laughter which couldn't be calmed down. Every word of reason came out as a laugh.

I think of your body like my Grandma's body, the way I remember it. Of course, I remember her when she was in her mid seventies, and you were in your early forties. Your skin was smoother, your kidneys weren't surrendering. You had another war, another loss inscribed in your bones, your flesh. My grandmother's body was slow and certain. It didn't want to be attractive, not in an aggressive gesture, but finite. It was a body in the wrong place, knowing that its original place had ceased to exist. My grandmother's body was a site of abandonment which was never spoken of. Maybe it's the curls and the glasses and the grain of contempt in the eyes which makes me think of her. Contempt for all that is wasted in life, one way or another.

ALICE WAS THE kind of child that never liked going to bed, apart from at family parties. When we had my sister over with her children and everything was loud and a mess, Alice would, after eating as much cake or marillenknödel as we could give her, silently disappear. You'd never see her leave; at some point you'd just notice that you hadn't seen her in a while. Her cousins were making jokes about Alice, but she didn't mind. She would put on her nightgown, brush her teeth, comb her hair and curl up in bed, no matter what the time of day. I couldn't get her out, not for anything in the world. And a part of me didn't want to get her out: a part of me enjoyed that, for once, it was effortless to get her into bed. From her youth, she just wasn't tired. Not like other kids who want to stay up to play or be with the adults but, in fact, are so exhausted that they finally fall asleep sitting at the table or tying their shoelaces. No. Alice was wide awake. Later on, as a school girl, she would lie down without making a fuss. When she was younger, bedtime was the only thing that made her cry. She didn't cry when she fell, she didn't cry when Willie hurt her in his clumsiness or rage, she didn't cry when she didn't get what she wanted. When I went to bed, she was almost always still awake. I'd ask her what she was doing and she said she was sleeping. This was said completely truthfully. She thought that lying in bed and being bored was actually what sleeping was. I don't know what thoughts went through her little head for all those hours. I don't know how much she slept, because I myself am a good sleeper. Ferrie was too. I don't know where she got it from. When she was six or seven and her teeth

started to fall out, she'd spend the nights wiggling them. She did it even with teeth that weren't quite loose, she'd just decide on which one was next. She seemed to like the pain that came with it. Alice was the kind of child you never really worried about, but you wondered a lot. Where did all those ideas and habits come from? I still have no idea. Not from us, most certainly, and not from other kids, because she didn't like to be with them. The only one she liked was a boy from the neighbourhood who was a bit slow. She was very gentle with him and talked to him a lot. When I asked her what they were talking about, she of course refused to tell me.

IT WAS A perfect spot: slightly cooler air, and some shrubs smelling of a tangy shade of green and a rock smoothly washed out by the millenia into the shape of a recliner. Alice went up there every night while the others had their after-dinner drinks, smelling of fire inside and out. She took a book with her, but never opened it. It was more a prop for the others to not question her, let alone follow. Her muscles were so sore from kneeling, bending and digging that her body felt like one of these collapsing donkey toys, held together with hot wire instead of numb elastic. There were so many stars up there, it looked almost like a mistake. Alice enjoyed drifting away a little, the wind still dry from the heat covering her like a blanket. From time to time laughter from the camp or shrieking voices, someone answering a coyote in the distance. It took a while until the steps she heard really reached her, became a part of reality. Unstable steps, sliding, little rocks leaping off.

“I’m fine,” Alice said into the darkness. The steps stopped.

“Good, good,” said an exceptionally deep voice, giving away who was climbing up the slope. “We were wondering if we could bring you to join us? At least for the last evening?”

“Thanks, but I’m fine, really.” Alice didn’t get up, but placed the book in her lap in a way that suggested she had just put it down. “I’ll be down there in a minute.” Now Marcello stood in front of her, the legs of his trousers covered in red dust.

“The moon is bright, but not that bright,” he said, pointing at her book. “Why are you avoiding us?”

“I just don’t like groups, that’s all. Nothing personal. Besides, it’s so calm up here, back in Brooklyn it will seem like a dream. I’m just taking it in, storing it.” Marcello made a sound that could have meant anything. Most probably he was mocking her, but Alice didn’t care. That chunky ex-frat boy who was so used to being the centre of the world, he would mock gravity if he could.

“What is it that you pretend to be reading?” he asked, kneeling down next to Alice’s millennia old resort, balancing on the balls of his feet.

“The woman that wants to be left alone,” said Alice, turning the book so that he couldn’t see the cover anymore.

“Chandler,” said Marcello. “Good, good.” He kept balancing, looking over the canyon. With another inconclusive sound he sat down in the dust, hugging his shins. “I hear you are a curious woman,” he said, glancing at Alice from the side. Her recliner momentarily turned into stone and started to hurt her back. She wanted to get up, but she needed space to manoeuvre herself out of her cavity.

“Curious and tired.”

“Come on, you can’t be that detached. Help this oafish mind out and tell me about your work. You might be surprised to find that other people care.”

“Really, this is neither the place nor the time for me telling you about deciphering an ancient script. Plus, you probably know almost everything already, as you are an archaeologist and I am not.”

“But I don’t know you,” Marcello said, “you odd pot. You kept hiding from me the whole time. Deep in the ground.”

The thing with a really comfortable seating is that you are either helped up by a friendly hand or roll yourself onto the side, gracelessly breaking the spell of weight.

“Stay,” said Marcello, “please.” He moved his body in front of Alice’s and brushed her hair out of her face with the back of his hands. Alice

was not so much in shock at him as she was at herself. Her skin welcomed him, her muscles betrayed her.

“Kiss me,” he said and moved away, making room for the canyon and all the stars looking down on Alice. He stretched out his hand to help Alice up. Her bones betrayed her, moving her hand towards his.

“No,” she said, now standing in front of him. “I don’t...” His fingertips softly on her collar bones and the back of her neck, not pushing her, not pulling her. Marcello stood perfectly silent, his eyes on Alice. At this moment and many years later too, when Alice revisited this scene in her mind, she couldn’t find an explanation for why she did what she had done: She had put her forehead on his sternum, bringing space between the length of her body and his. And when he put his hands on her waist, not pulling her, but ever so warm, she moved against him and she did what he had asked. A part of herself, from afar, wanted to recoil from him when his tongue touched hers, but the majority of Alice’s body stayed right where it was, feeling what it felt. Just before Marcello tried to unbutton her blouse she pushed him away, and produced a “No” that sounded like one.

“Good, good,” Marcello said, “a respectable woman in the wilderness.” Alice started to run downhill, time and time again sliding. Little rocks leaping away into their coverings. When she saw the campfire she stopped to check her clothes. She wanted to close that one tell-tale button, but her hands were shaking so much that she couldn’t even feel the hole. Alice sat down and waited in the dark until everybody had gone to sleep, sneaking into the women’s tent enveloped in darkness. Now her skin was sore too.

I haven't seen my grandmother die. I haven't seen you die. I've been sitting up straight.

It doesn't make any difference, but I wonder if you really never knew that you were terminally ill. That they didn't even tell you the diagnosis. That they opened your body and then saw that they were far too late. That they closed your body and drew a line and let you believe you could return to your work eventually, if you just balanced things well enough. It didn't seem impossible: Why worry the woman? Let her go in peace. Would you have wanted to know? Would you have written more letters, last letters, instructions, provisions? Probably.

ALICE WAS THE kind of a young woman that was not particularly interested in household matters. “You aren’t teaching it to Willie so don’t teach it to me, Muttchen.” She was so aware of how different her life was going to be from mine. Sometimes she even said so: “You didn’t come to the new world to make it like the old one, did you?”

“What do you know about the old world?” I would answer.

“Everything you’ve told me about it,” she would say, “remember?” Even cooking didn’t pique her interest, no matter how much she liked eating. She would fry herself a slice of bread or serve potatoes with white cheese and flaxseed oil. But whatever took time to prepare frustrated her. Dicing. Peeling. She’d eat the potatoes unpeeled; said she didn’t mind. Ferrie wasn’t all that worried, I think he liked the idea of not having her married to someone. Some man that could never be good enough anyway. The only thing that she made me teach her was knitting. She was a furious knitter, I remember once she made a whole sweater in just one night. We all wore her sweaters. When we had worn them for a while she’d unravel them and make something else for someone else from the yarn. She wasn’t attached to the garments that echoed through our family. She just wanted to knit. Often she even read while doing it². Like that, her hands and head were occupied. Willie was quite the opposite. He loved spending the days somewhere outside, minding his own boyish business. He knew all the kids that lived in our street, he’d swap his treasures with them. He would just wander off. Once, he hid in the store around the corner long enough to be locked in

when Mr. & Mrs. Mitts left for the day. He ate eleven bars of chocolate before we found him. Alice didn't talk to him for a couple of days. We weren't sure if it was because she thought we didn't punish him in the way he had deserved it, or if she was jealous of him eating the chocolate without her. The two of them were so different that I had to remind myself from time to time that they had come from the same place. But the curls were the same, as were the green eyes and the shape of their fingers and the little stomachs they had, even as kids.

“WHY DON’T YOU take a dip, too?” asked her mother, lying on her belly. “Just to refresh,” she added, which seemed quite odd to Alice, given that her mother had never in her life swum in the sea or even considered doing so.

The sea³, an incalculable multiple of the Danube, about which her mother had been warned through her whole childhood. In a constant hunger, the river must have swallowed girls and women, from time to time a careless bachelor, a barge, a cow.

Alice knew these stories, like all stories from Prague back then, as the supply was limited. Alice reached the end of her chapter, closed her book and got up. She walked into the water without the slightest pause or hesitation so that the weighty cold could tear the breath out of her lungs.

When I write your name, I mistype it often.

The other day, when I was looking online for the one photograph of you as an adult⁴, the one that was taken for the article about the Guggenheim fellowships in 1946, I must have typed *Korber* instead of Kober. I found an entry for a picture of *Alice Korber* in the *Chaco Canyon Old Timers Reunion Oral History Project Photograph Collection*⁵, an archive that has never come up in my search before and wasn't referenced in the Kober Papers. I contacted them and only a couple of hours later they mailed me back. It seems that only when my search is flawed do I actually end up finding something.

000-579-0003

Chaco Canyon 1935 Field Session -
Outside our "Circus tent!"
Helen Hewitt (now Servis), Delphine
Mc Cready (now deceased), Pauline
Vannoy (now Eck), Virginia Hunter
(her pictures), Alice Kober (deceased)

Image 6: "Outside our circus tent"—Virginia Hunter's incorrectly dated shot from the Chaco Canyon field session in 1936. Courtesy of: Chaco Canyon Old Timers Reunion Oral History Project Photograph Collection 1935, 7 photographic prints (8.5 x 12.25 cm.), PICT 000-579-0003back, Special Collections and Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico Libraries.



Image 7: From left to right: Helen Hewitt, Delphine McCready, Pauline Vonnegut, Virginia Hunter, Alice Kober. Courtesy of: Chaco Canyon Old Timers Reunion Oral History Project Photograph Collection 1935, 7 photographic prints (8.5 x 12.25 cm.), PICT 000-579-0003, Special Collections and Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico Libraries.

And there, without any warning, you are looking at me.

Even though all five of you are standing next to each other, you are clearly in front.

I wonder if the photographer had planned to arrange all five of you in between the ropes, but you came late and didn't fill the gap that was left for you between Delphine and Pauline, you just stood where you stopped walking. In your right hand a cigarette, in your left hand a little pouch—maybe the cigarettes, maybe something else. I try to zoom into the picture, but the closer I look the blurrier it gets. Do you also hold your folded glasses in the hand with the pouch? And if you have taken your glasses off, was it vanity? Habit? Obligation?

Or did you want to refuse to be in the picture because you knew that you wouldn't like how the metallic silver would catch your body, your face from the light and keep hold of it? And then the others wouldn't stop asking you to join them, either for emotional reasons or for the sake of documentary completeness? Or was it to get it over with quickly, to avoid any further attention, and so you caved?

For a very long time I had doubts about the assumption that you were a smoker, because I just couldn't picture you writing or cutting or noting, so concentrated and neat, while having to take care of fire, of ashes, of need. When I learned that the idea of you as a chain smoker was based on the sheer existence of the cigarette box filing system, I was sure that you had gotten them from William or a neighbour or a colleague. Also, your former student Eva Brann doesn't remember you smoking in school⁶. But then you stood there, under the desert sun, ready for the next drag. (Later, when I re-read the correspondence from the Brooklyn College file, I had even more proof: you wrote to Professor Pearl that you brought your own cigarette supplies with you to England.⁷)

You are 29 years old, and your lips are tightly closed. You are 29 years old, and your arms don't drag your shoulders, your upper body into obedience's collapse like Helen's, Delphine's and Virginia's. You are 29 years old, and your hands are full.

The shadow's length indicates a lunch break: either you are eager to eat or eager to get back to work. I can't stop looking at Pauline looking at you. I know, from a letter from Pauline that I read in the archive, that you were friends⁸. I suppose you met there, at the summer excavations at Chaco Canyon⁹, and most probably you were already friends when this picture was taken. Her arms are soft, but she stands up straight like a letter press type. If I see this look of hers in the eyes of long-time lovers I get envious: knowing each other, without illusions, and still being full of admiration for the other, treating them with casual gratefulness like a basket of perfectly ripe peaches, it's too much for me to take. In your case, I am pleased that you were looked at with such tenderness by the most graceful woman around. Looking down but looking up. Ready to follow you in the shadow to light a new cigarette with the one burning, hands fleetingly touching.

You are filled with the type of strength that usually can be seen in bus drivers, night nurses, butchers' wives on market day.

I admire your solidity, as if your body weren't covered by those ridiculous trousers. Probably you weren't vain, or at least you weren't when, back home in New York, you bought or borrowed the outfit you were advised to pack. It seemed the right choice at the time. The shop in a basement, I imagine, was tiny even though they sold uniforms of all sorts. The owner—you couldn't quite decide if it was a man (following his features) or a woman (according to her voice)—managed to find the right pair and the right size without getting up from the chair. He or she held the trousers in the air for you, and you had to walk up to him so you could see if they'd fit.

“Can do anything in them,” she said, “itchy but sturdy” and handed you a sheet of paper to wrap them in. Even though you had never been treated like this in a shop in your life, you weren't outraged or uncomfortable, but as warm as a fledgling in the hollow of two hands.

It is a matter of resoluteness, this slide of matter to your edge of the picture, even the tent giving willingly in.



Image 8: Photography of Alice Kober in 1946, original print with retouching dye behind Alice's head. PASP. Reproduction: Christian Müller

ALICE IS SITTING on a cross between an easy chair and a chair: a clumsy incommodiousness without any trace of cushioning. Alice is turned to the side, her gaze the beginning of a sentence. The photographer kneels down, his joints crack, he positions his upper body in a diagonal. He doesn't say anything.

He feels embarrassed for telling Alice to hold a book in her lap, open, and a pen in her hand. He's embarrassed because he knows that they'll crop the image for the newspaper. Only her head will be in the article listing the 1946 Guggenheim fellows.

He's embarrassed because the hand which holds the pen is clearly the most authentic part of the image. Authentic and truthful. The fingers rest on the page, absolutely consistent with gravity and other laws of nature. They touch the paper casually and naturally as if they belonged to another person, in another life, in another time. The diaphragm opens and closes with a dry rigour for which the photographer also would like to apologize, if only he knew how.

Sir Arthur Evans who found the inscribed clay tablets in his excavations of the Knossos ruins.

Well Equipped for Task

But it's doubtful that she will be permitted to see them, since according to an unwritten law, no scholar may work on the discovery of another until his findings have been published. Most of his work has yet to be reported.

That leaves about 250 inscriptions which Evans had published before his death, some castes made by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and squeezes, paper impressions of the clay tablets—and a lot of plain, hard thinking and comparing with other languages.

Dr. Kober is equipped for her task, for which she will take a year's leave from teaching, with a sound knowledge of German, French and the Germanic languages, and a reading comprehension "with dictionary and grammar" of Spanish and Italian, besides the classics.

She learned Braille when she saw the difficulty blind students at the college have in taking their exams with pupils who have the advantage of written questions. Although it takes as long as 15 hours to translate an exam into Braille, Dr. Kober has become the expert



Dr. Alice E. Kober

Image 9: Clipping from "The Brooklyn Daily Eagle", 28 April 1946. Distortion of Alice's face tel quel in the original. Source: newspapers.com

When I write your name, I mistype it often.
My fingers, full of haste, write *Alive*.

1 Alice Kober liked reading detective novels, as the following passages from her letters show, but she never mentioned which ones she read. I researched those which were the most popular detective novels of her time (the 30s and 40s) and read some of them, hoping that she might have read them as well. The book quoted in the text is “They Shoot Horses, Don’t They” by Horace McCoy (first published in 1935).

“As usual on a sea-trip, I caught up on detective stories, and saw a movie every day” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 17 March 1947, Brooklyn College File).

“I’ve just spent a couple of hours reading a detective story. I was so tired after finishing the article, I couldn’t think straight” (AK to FD, 18 October 1947, PASP, Box 57).

“I don’t like the idea of getting paid. If I wanted to make money writing, I’d write detective stories” (AK to FD, 18 February 1948, PASP, Box 57).

2 “I can’t say back to my knitting—because I only knit when I read detective stories, and therefore that’s in the field of entertainment” (AK to FD, 6 December 1947, PASP, Box 57).

3 “Otherwise no news. Some friends took me to the beach last week, both Mother and I got terrific sunburns. We weren’t very careful, because neither of us usually gets an effect from the sun; we hardly ever tan. This time, however, the sun seems to have had more than the usual amount of actinic rays, or whatever it is that causes sunburns.” (AK to SJM, 29 July 1947, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

4 “Ich möchte Ihnen gerne ein Bild von mir schicken, habe aber keins. Sobald ich eins bekomme, werde ich es in einem Brief schicken. Das letzte war die Passport Photographie und die passt mir gar nicht” (AK to JS, 1 January 1948, PASP, Box 58).
 (“I’d like to send you a picture of myself, but I don’t have one. As soon as I’ll have one made, I’ll post it to you. The last one was the passport photography and I don’t like it at all.”).

“Hier ist beiliegend ein Bild von ihr [Alice]. Wir mussten es von einer Gruppe machen lassen, da wir in letzter Zeit kein Bild von ihr hatten” (Katharina Kober to JS, 19 October 1950, PASP, Box 58).
 (“Please find enclosed a photography of her [Alice]. We had to have it reproduced from a group [shot?], as we didn’t have a newer picture of her.”).

5 <https://rmoa.unm.edu/docviewer.php?docId=nmupict000-579.xml>

Chaco Canyon Old Timers Reunion Oral History Project Photograph Collection 1935, 7 photographic prints (8.5 x 12.25 cm.), PICT 000-579, Special Collections and Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico Libraries.

6 “She was a chain-smoker (not in class, to my recollection, though I don’t think there was a ban on indoor smoking)”, Eva Brann “In Memoriam Alice E. Kober”, PASP, Box 58.1.

7 “Conditions in England remind me of our war years. Signs on store windows ‘Sorry no cigarettes’ (I brought my own, and helped pay part of Britain’s debt with the duty), no electricity in the streets (it looks like Brooklyn at night, only damper), everything is rationed.” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 17 March 1947, Brooklyn College File).

8 There’s one letter from Pauline Vonnegut in Box 58, folder “assorted received 1941-1950” at PASP: “Dear Alice. The mad rush of finishing the old semester and beginning a new one is over. I’m still alive and kicking. To you perhaps who are waiting for information, I have probably gone down the drain. The point is I have not located answers for each of your questions. The reference books in the libraries to not have much to say about pants around the seashore.” (Letter from Pauline Vonnegut to Alice Kober, 23 February 1941, PASP, Box 58).

9 The photograph is incorrectly dated, as Alice Kober’s CV, submitted to the Guggenheim Foundation (PASP, Box 56.6), shows: “work in archaeology. 1936 (summer) field work, excavating at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico (under the University of New Mexico)”.

A critical history of the field work in New Mexico offered to female archaeology students can be found in Browman, D. (2013). *Cultural Negotiations: The Role of Women in the Founding of Americanist Archaeology*. Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press.

*The Question of Getting you Here:
Franklin Daniel II*

IT SAT RIGHT there, in the cheap straw purse she had bought from that woman in front of the diner. Her eyes so cloudy, she must have been almost blind.

“Usually my niece decorates them with sea shells,” she had said with tender anger, addressing the sky turning into marzipan yellow more than Alice, “but with summer this high, she’s off all over the village with those friends of hers. God bless her, my rueful gull, may he bless you too and all his lavender fields.” Alice nodded.

“It’s also beautiful when it is plain,” she said, the words feeling almost like an insult. It sat right there, in the bast purse on the mahogany painted counter.

“What can I get you, ma’am?” asked the bartender who must have only recently been expelled from the moon: he looked somewhat dusty, his white hair and his body strangely compressed. Alice slid the little purse towards her and put both her hands on it, a position that made her think a little of church. She had no idea what she could possibly want, as if she had never been to a bar before. Do people order coffee in bars? Didn’t the man on the moon have some sort of mythical function, like turning it on at night and off in the morning? How could the moon stay up without its man? Will the Moon Man miss the craters he left behind? Or had he been dying to go back to earth after all those years of duty, pulling the earth, the seas, the days towards him as far as he could with silvery strings?

“Did you find something?” The Moon Man was gesturing towards the menu that he must have placed next to the purse.

“Do you serve coffee?” asked Alice.

“Unfortunately, we don’t,” reported the Moon Man, turning around to the bottles and mirrors as if to check if a coffee maker had suddenly appeared there without his knowledge. “You can get one in the lobby, I’m sure.”

“I’ll meet my friends here.”

“I could go and order coffee for you?”

“To be honest, I don’t really want coffee. I just want to be alone for a moment.”

The Moon Man nodded, his face turning a shade lighter. He dried his already dry and slightly blotchy hands on the white tea towel which dangled from the chain he wore around his hips. The letter was right there, Alice saw the envelope’s edge. Then she rested her forehead on the back of her hands, now spread out on the bar. Franklin was alive. It was his handwriting, no doubt. Franklin was home. Franklin was safe. Suddenly, it felt silly that Alice never had dared to ask any of his colleagues that she had met at the Christmas Meetings where he was, how he was. It was a thing a man could do without even so much as thinking about it: “How’s Daniel holdin’ up over there? Lots of red wine, I suppose? Those lucky bastards in Greece, while the rest of the boys are fighting for their lives in the French trenches. Listen to that: French trench. Sounds like living hell to me.”

It just wasn’t a thing a woman could do. Another thing that wasn’t a thing a woman could do was write to Mrs. Daniel to ask about her husband’s whereabouts and health. What if he had died? What if he hadn’t? A woman scholar could, at best, find the reprint of an article on her desk after the summer holidays and inquire, after two years of silence, as to where she could send it. But if there’s no answer to that, all that a wo-

man could do was to wait, eventually open this letter and receive the news. A woman could only use whatever hollow was in herself as a letter box, happily pulling up the little assiduous flag. Maybe this was why they sent the men overseas—not because of their physical strength, but of the women’s. Women didn’t have to be trained, they were already experts in the matter of lacking. And longing. Dealing with shortages, doing without. Alice felt her breath speeding, creeping up her throat. It was at that mediocre hotel bar in Boulder, Colorado that Alice realised that all her hollows had been filled up with incertitude, hope and composure over the last few years. The tears her body produced were tears of anger. It was like walking with a heavy bag for a mile or two, finally putting it down and remembering how light your own body used to feel, so light that it almost hurts.

When the Moon Man put a glass of water in front of her and then circled around his bar to come and stand on her side, a little less compressed, Alice wasn’t able to bring the words in her head into any order. She didn’t know if she was empty or full. She didn’t want to know. Wasn’t this something a woman could do? Not want to know? The Moon Man shrugged gently, probably a woman could not want to know, there was nothing about it that seemed wrong or indecent to him. But he was a man whose expertise was filling glasses with colourful liquids, what did he know about women and men?

“Witnessing their conversations and lonelineses doesn’t mean understanding anything,” he said, shaking a cigarette out of a pack. Alice remembered that she had walked on greasy grey tiles, smelling the acrid warmth of excessive dishwashing. She was leaning next to the back door, holding a cigarette in her right hand and the Moon Man’s white tea towel in her left.

“You will be fine,” said the Moon Man while Alice sobbed, “or you won’t, what do I know? I don’t know you, but I know. I mean in general. I

can tell who is lost. Shut up, Trevor,” the Moon Man said to himself, “just let the lady get some air.”

“I never cried during the war. Not once. Maybe I should have. But I didn’t need to. Isn’t that peculiar?”

“It isn’t a good place for bad news,” the Moon Man said and pointed off into the sky, “being away from home.”

“That’s not it at all. In fact, this is the best news I’ve had in a very, very long time.”

“Then I want my smoke back,” said Trevor, opening the pack in front of Alice. “I thought someone had died. Can’t give out perks to the privileged happy.” For a second Alice considered obeying his gesture, then she realised he was joking.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I made a scene. That’s not very much like me.”

“We don’t always have to be ourselves,” Trevor said, “that’s what I have learned standing behind the bar all these years. In fact, I think we rarely are.”

“You are always the bartender.”

“I could also be a ballet dancer.” He pirouetted slowly and terribly lopsidedly. It was impossible to tell if he really was a ballet dancer—or, for that matter, had been one when he was younger, or if he was making a joke. “See?” He took her hand, asking her for a dance.

“I seem to have a hard time knowing myself. Maybe a gin & tonic would help?”

“With pleasure,” said Trevor and put his cigarette out. He held the door for Alice: this time she saw the tiny kitchen and the two very old women standing in a corner, drying glasses with gestures so assertive that the hollow-ware seemed like a camouflage for their actual duty, which was nothing less than spinning the world.

ALICE WAS RESTING on a bed in Boulder, Colorado. Albany Hotel: 100 rooms, 90 with bath. The plaid was made from peach-coloured fabric squares which were colder than expected. Alice looked at the letter which had been waiting for her in the little box with her room number on it, 79. As she didn't have her letter opener with her, she had opened it with her nail file.

She tapped her ballpoint pen on the note pad she found in the drawer, right under the Bible. There were steps in the adjacent room, then words. Laurie and Helen discussing the next leg of the journey: Santa Fe or Salt Lake City?¹ Alice was happy to leave decisions like this—not making a real difference to the course of things—to others.

Alice breathed in. Then she pushed the sore parts of her toes against the fabric. The lack of skin turned into embers. Alice breathed out.

“Tell your wife I am grateful to her for keeping you where I can write you about my findings once in a while.” This is what she had written him four years ago. Then, silence.

Another dependency, another absence, another nature of nature.

Alice wanted to get up to comb her hair, but she forced herself to keep resting, on her back and look at the poorly-painted ceiling, winter-blue.

“How that must feel, to come home after four years?” asked Alice Laurie, who was standing in the door between the rooms.

“How it must feel to be deprived of a home for four years,” said Laurie. And: “Mexico?”

“Why not?” said Alice and put the pen into the little gap between the mattress and the wall. What on earth can one write if everything has to be said?

7 July 1946 —————PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

Dear Alice,

Your letter of Sept. 25, 1944, asking for my whereabouts was waiting for me when I returned from my then whereabouts a few days ago. The purpose of the query, in case you have forgotten, was to learn whether it was safe to send me an offprint. It is safe now, and one would be welcome if there are any left.

I have had quite a time of it, four years in the army, 40 months overseas, entirely in Greece and the Middle East, and no leave at all. Now I am reaping my reward in the form of the maximum permissible terminal leave, carrying me into October. While I still feel more or less on vacation, I am going in to my office at the museum a couple of times a week, and am in the process of taking over the AJA.

Part of the "backlog" which I found waiting for me in the AJA is your "Inflection in Linear Class B: 1-Declension". It has already been edited by Miss Swindler (no changes that I can spot) and is ready for press. All that we need now is a press. Literally, the "June" number of the Journal was waiting for me ready, once we can find a press to print it, so that I won't be able to put your article into it. I will, however, put it in just as soon as possible afterwards, and hope to have it in circulation late this year.

One of my reasons for behaving so well and trying to rush your article in to print (another reason is that I like it) is that I want to gain your confidence so that you will continue to give us your articles. I really consider them very valuable, and will be glad to publish anything of the type that you have to give us.

“GIVE ME THAT pen, you should go to sleep.”

“I’ll just finish this line.”

“That’s what you said half an hour ago.”

“It’s a long letter.”

“He doesn’t deserve so much of your time.”

“That would be my decision.”

“But I remember how heartbroken you were when he didn’t write back.”

“He was in the army. And I wasn’t heartbroken.”

Helen scoffed and got out of bed. She put on her dressing gown and sat down in the leather chair right next to Alice.

“You should use your energy on the living. The living attentive ones.”

“Franklin is alive. And stop talking up that bartender, he was friendly for professional reasons.”

Helen lit a cigarette and followed the smoke with her eyes.

“He could have written you, you know, even in Greece they have mail, as far as I’ve heard. I think they installed it shortly after they invented how to write. He could have let you know that he is alright.”

Alice shrugged. She didn’t want to admit that Helen was right, because she knew where that would lead to—admitting that she was always right, with everything. Helen believed in the existence of an easy solution for any situation. She didn’t acknowledge complexities in her life and indeed it seemed free of them, which made it impossible to make her

understand that other people's lives followed different rules, other levels of uncertainty. She wouldn't believe that malaises weren't created by a wandering mind. Sometimes, Alice thought Helen could have, in a prior life, been that Austrian princess or queen who exclaimed, after having been told that their people were so poor that they didn't have enough bread to eat: *But why don't they eat cake then?* But, on the other hand, it was highly unlikely that an actual person would have been shallow-minded enough to have thought like that and probably it was just a legend to vilify that queen or princess, a woman, in any case. Some problems just don't have easy solutions which precisely is what makes them intriguing. And some problems aren't even problems. They are just life. Maybe he hadn't known for how long he would be gone for. Maybe he wasn't allowed to write to anyone other than his close family. Maybe he couldn't find the right words, away from his university desk and official stationary.

"You don't need the pen to stare at the paper," said Helen, and attempted to snatch it. In an unexpectedly expansive reflex movement, Alice took her hand away and almost hit Helen, knocking the cigarette out of her hand. It circled itself in an ember aureola and ever so slowly danced to the floor, where the yellow red seeped into the carpet, revealing a resting heart. It was an instant of awkward yet absolute beauty. Alice jumped to her feet.

"Jesus," snapped Helen and picked up the cigarette, stepping on the carpet with her slippers. When she took her foot away, there was a little black hole.

"We can move the chair over here and nobody will see," was Helen's suggestion.

"I'm quite sure that, at some point, they'll move the chair to clean the room."

"They won't be able to prove that it was us."

“It’s such a shame you didn’t study law. But then the whole thing wouldn’t have happened in the first place, because then you knew that stealing is an offence.”

“The end justifies the means.” Helen smiled and one moment later she had Alice’s pen in her hand. “Go to sleep now, tomorrow you’ll get it back.”

20 July 1946 —————PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Dear Franklin

Your letter reached me here to-day. My family sent it on because of the Lt-Colonel, I think. My brother is running a laboratory for the Signal Corps, and I gather he respects your title.

I'm taking a long vacation with some friends—we're driving west and then to Mexico.

When I go back, I'll really tackle Minoan. Thanks to the Guggenheim Foundation, I'll have a whole year to work. Just now I'm analyzing Carian, I brought the material along, and work on it at odd intervals.

This letter is running on at great length. I'm so delighted that you are about to enter civilian life again, that I hate to stop.

WHEN THE CONCIERGE handed Alice a folded paper after the check-out was settled, she felt like a school girl caught cheating or having not done the homework, both of which had never happened to her in reality but many times in her dreams. Why did she go along with Helen's cover-up? Just because it seemed like a very expensive thing to replace a hotel room's carpet? To prove that the easy solution is always going to be blown? With unease and satisfaction, Alice unfolded what she expected to be a bill or some sort of accusation. It was a white sheet of paper which loosely enclosed a newspaper clipping of very poor quality: Two ballet dancers on stage. She looked at the concierge to get some sort of explanation, but he was busy with filing papers. The print was done with too much contrast, the black faded over time, approximating the paper's sandy colour. The paper was thin and smooth, not like any newspaper Alice knew. She turned the cutout around—cyrillic letters. Laurie called her, they were waiting in the car outside. Alice waved to the concierge, who in turn took a subtle bow. It took her almost twenty miles sitting on the backseat and feeling the warm wind dishevelling her hair to connect the dots: It must be a message from the bartender. A message without words, without a message in fact. One of the taut apparitions could be him in his younger years, but it could also be pretty much anybody else. But why would he keep an old newspaper clipping of somebody other than him? And if it was him, why would he give this memento of an early life of precision and fame away? Why to her? She checked the paper several times for hints, for something illuminating added by his hand. It felt

like the opening to a novel. It took Alice another ten miles to decide that none of this was her business. The bartender had been right and maybe was making this point again: We don't have to be ourselves all the time. If he could be a dancer, what could Alice be? She could be jaunty, like Laurie and Helen and so many others wanted her to be. She could, indeed, not finish the second letter to Franklin she had already begun to write in her head. She could be a vacation person and at night she could study Carian as she had planned to. She could be invincible, she could be a ghost in any newspaper in the world. Alice folded the cryptic relic three times and slid it into her pocket. She would use it as a reminder to be herself by not being herself, and then leave it in the last hotel room of the summer—in the back of the desk's drawer, behind her bed's headboard, inside an abundant lamp shade. Maybe the next person to come across it would be curious enough to find out if it really was Trevor, if Trevor was his name, if he had been famous, if a horrible accident during rehearsals had brought his career to an untimely end, if he was ever to see the moon again in his life.

31 August 1946 ————PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

After all, I didn't get a chance to write sooner. We got back home yesterday, and this is to inform you I'm back and ready for work. The off-prints are on their way by mail.

8 September 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Your idea about excavating Sardis sounds wonderful—if it can be done. I don't know of any better site. As a matter of fact, I don't really know much about sites—from the practicing archaeologists' point of view. But imagine how wonderful it would be if a few bilinguals of assorted varieties turned up. I hope, though, that they aren't Semitic. Semitic and Egyptian are a nuisance, because they lack vowel signs, and leave too much to the imagination. I doubt that I'll ever learn to read vowelless Semitic—and so anything later than Akkadian (Assyrian) drives me to drink.

I meant to end the letter here. But I just remembered something. Sundwall in his last letter to me asked if something could be done about establishing a sort of "Minoan Institute" here in the U.S., where the literature, reproductions, etc. could be collected. He thinks Europe isn't safe.

11 September 1947 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

Sundwall's idea about a "Minoan Institute" is provocative. Do you think he refers simply to epigraphical and linguistic material, or to all archaeological material in general? In either case it would be a fairly big order and I wonder whether Myres, the Italians, and the Greeks would cooperate to the extent of supplying us with casts or their inscriptions. I didn't mention Blegen in the above list because I am very much afraid that he intends to sit on his material for a good many years and give no one else a chance to get at it.

I would certainly strongly support such a project. The chief trouble, to that, of course, is that you are the person in this country who is working most actively in the material and it should really be in a place which is easily accessible to you.

18 September 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

I'll write to Sundwall that his idea about a "Minoan Institute" sounds interesting, and that I've mentioned it to you.

I do want to have a hand in its establishment—if it can be arranged. In many ways Philadelphia is an ideal place. It is close enough to New York, yet far enough away in case we ever are bombed (which I doubt for the present, but may happen). An "Institute" is really a combination of Museum and University.

Since the beginnings would be small, I should be "available" for assistance, at any rate week-ends and summers, if personal presence is necessary. You don't mean full time, do you? I have a job which, while far from ideal in many ways (for instance, when I need to go to Greece) does pay well. I don't intend to keep it all my life, but at present the kind of work I'd really like is open only to men. If you were thinking of somebody who would devote full time to it (always with all the ifs) how about Sundwall himself? He wrote me in his first letter that he is retiring (he'll be seventy this fall). He seems to be hale and hearty.

But count on me for everything that I can do, in the way of letters, influence, personal assistance, etc. etc. I think the Europeans would co-operate, once it has been started; they probably all feel as Sundwall does, that there should be a place in America where the things will be safer. Besides, it's about time Europeans were coming to America to study, as we go to Europe. Maybe even Blegen will cooperate, once the "Institute" is a fait accompli.

I do hate to think of its going to Cincinnati though.

Can't think of anything I'd like better than being in charge of it myself, with you as boss. You're one of the few people I know who's willing to try something that sounds like a good idea, without insisting on a list of precedents first.

Well, there are still a lot of ifs in the situation.

19 September 1947 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

I have just had a few words with our Director, who is in favor of the Minoan Institute idea. My understanding is that at first at least our effort would be directed toward getting plaster impressions.

The second question, that of getting you here, is more complicated and I am not sure that I see the solution though I have an idea. The idea is simply that Roland Kent has retired as Professor of Indo-European Philology and his chair has not been filled. I don't know whether they intend to fill it or not, but I will try to find out about it. It might be that I could start a minor boom with hopes of success in having the position made available to you. In case it were, I would like to urge that the appointment be partly in the University and partly in the Museum, specifically for the Minoan business. I gather that the major emphasis in such a combination would have to be on the University. Kent's heaviest teaching load was in Greek and Latin linguistics, particularly the latter. I have no doubt that you can handle this with the greatest of ease. As you understand, I'm thinking out loud; my thoughts are iffy and my putting them down on paper is nothing short of rash. I am putting this out simply as a feeler so as to know your reaction to the whole thing. Obviously I would not want to push the matter without feeling reasonable sure that you would be interested if it succeeded. Don't count on it too much because I am still pretty young in university politics and it may well be that my word will carry even less weight than I timidly think. Furthermore I am afraid that there is something of a prejudice against giving faculty appointments to women. How strong it is I don't know, but will soon find out.

22 September 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Dangling Professor Kent's shoes and the Institute in front of my nose like that, when all I'm teaching this term is Greek and Roman literature in Translation, and high-school level Vergil, is almost more than I can bear. I daren't say no, and I daren't say yes. I'm getting a big salary for a woman teacher, I don't know exactly what it is right now, what with cost of living bonusses and a revision in increments because of a law-suit with which I had nothing to do, but which benefits me. I know it's over 6,000, but can't say how much more, and if I get a promotion (which is overdue) mandatory annual increments will bring it up to \$7,000 or thereabouts eventually. Then there's tenure, and a pension that depends on staying in the city system. I know enough about academic salaries for women to realize that financially I can't do better, at least for another ten years.

24 October 1947 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

There should be no difficulty about setting up the Minoan collection as such, though, of course, it would be rather lost without someone like you to look after it and use it. If you were to come here, you would have to teach general Indo-European linguistics (ancient) as well as some work in Latin philology and probably Greek dialects. I assume that none of this would hold any terrors for you. Have you published anything in the general Indo-European field to which I could refer people here? It might help. I have had some success in softening up the classicist and orientalist on the matter and am about ready to make a frontal attack on the Dean. I certainly hope that this works out. It would give us a wonderful nucleus here for Aegean and Near East studies generally and would tie in admirably with our plans for Sardis.

27 October 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

I haven't said anything about your project to lure the University authorities into luring me from Brooklyn, because I thought I would let the gods decide the matter. When I say it's the kind of thing I hoped to get when I was around sixty, you can see why I say nothing and lay low.

I haven't published anything on general IE because I didn't have anything worthwhile to say, and publishing an article a year on Minoan has kept me busy. I have a fairly sound general background, which includes about four years of Sanskrit with Edgerton in Yale, some Tocharian with Lane of North Carolina, Old Irish with Dillon of Chicago, Old Persian (a smattering—I was too busy learning six other languages at the same time) with Kent, Hittite with Sturtevant and Goetze, and assorted non-Indo-European languages ranging from Sumerian to Basque & Chinese. I have enough self-confidence to feel I can teach anything classical. I think I'm a good teacher; at least my students come to class with a smile, laugh at my jokes, learn what I want them to, and I enjoy it tremendously.

7 November 1947 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

My nefarious schemes re you and the University are coming along slowly, but not unsatisfactorily. I would say that you are definitely considered a possibility for the job; the next step is to make you seem the only possibility. I certainly think that it would be wonderful, for us at least, if this thing could be pulled off. It is just what we need to make this into a first class center for the study of the Bronze Age in Greece and the Near East.

4 December 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Is Hönigswald the other person you mentioned? He's a good man, and deserves a break. I was glad to find that out, because it gives me an idea of the sort of person being considered. I think I'm as well prepared as he in linguistics, though it might be hard to prove without a direct trial, because he has been teaching all kinds of things in various places, while I've been plugging along at my own uninspiring job.

The trouble is, I never expected to take another job, and have made absolutely no effort to learn or publish things that might impress anyone. People don't ordinarily leave the city college once they are set, because the salaries are good, and there is the question of pension. As things are now, I can retire at 55, and have every intention of doing so, and perhaps taking some more congenial teaching work then.

There are other factors involved: the question of more congenial teaching, working with the Minoan material, and working with you. I figure they might be worth the sacrifice—but I wouldn't be heart-broken in either case. And I can still help with the Minoan Research Library in any event.

I am quite neutral about the whole thing. I won't refuse the job if it is offered, but I don't want it so badly that it's worth too much effort.

6 December 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Everybody tells me this job, if it materializes, would be a wonderful opportunity. I know that too. It's too good to be true.

All the same, I've been figuring out what I would do if the job actually materializes. I think I would work it this way: I'd take it, and try to get a year's leave without pay from Brooklyn College. In that way, I can find out how it really works out, and if I'm not as good as I think I am, can retire gracefully at the end of the year, to everybody's relief, and come back here. If it works out, I can resign here.

I own a house here in Flatbush, and think I'll hold on to it, coming home week-ends, so that Mother won't be completely alone, at least for the first year. I presume the housing situation is as bad in Philadelphia as in New York.

I've never told you I'm grateful for all you're doing. I am. It's been fun, too.

6 December 1947 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

Just a word to tell you the latest since the meeting of the Classics department yesterday. First and most important, I left it feeling most encouraged. The two chief candidates are you and a man (not Hönigswald, at least not at the moment) whom no one here knows personally, but who has written one or two things that Crosby does not understand but finds impressive.

What I may not have made clear before is that the committee on the IE appointment was very strongly impressed by the Minoan research library project. Everybody made it very clear that they would be delighted to have this established here. One person went so far to say that although he was not convinced by the information presented that you were the proper person for the IE post, he would still look with great favor in your appointment here in some other capacity. If we can convince him that you are qualified to teach IE (and I think we can), then I feel that your chances are excellent; I might almost go so far as to say that it would be in the bag.

8 December 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Your latest letter has me sitting here with my tongue hanging out, and that's bad. I'm trying to preserve my equilibrium, so that I'll be happy no matter how things turn out. You're heartless.

I've resolutely refused to think how wonderful it would be to have people like Speiser and Kramer right there in case Minoan starts swiveling toward Semitic, Hurrian, Sumerian, etc., and an Egyptologist on tap so I can finally get to read it.

Now you add a course in Minoan scripts!!! I've been looking at the list of course, and feel much encouraged. I could begin teaching most of them to-morrow, and plan the entire course in a week or two.

If you can do half as well in selling me to Pennsylvania as you have done in selling Pennsylvania to me—it's in the bag.

21 December 1947 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

One trouble is, we don't know who the other candidates are. For instance, I can't compete with a man like Sturtevant, but I couldn't figure out what younger person could be superior.

Don't you think a lot of the opposition is really based on the fact that I'm a woman? Even if it isn't openly mentioned.

24 December 1947 ———PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

The fact that you are a woman has absolutely nothing to do with the case. Williams went so far as to say it was a point in your favor, since it was time for us to rectify our male exclusiveness of the past.

15 February 1948 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

I've been meaning to write you ever since New Year's, but didn't get to it, first because of the end-of-the-semester rush, then papers, and then I got myself involved in a statistical study that may give immediate results, and tore myself away from it only with the greatest difficulty.

I did try to see you the last morning of the meeting, and saw you at least five times, but each time you were in deep conversation, and didn't see me. I didn't want to interrupt. The last time you were just saying to someone "Let's go upstairs where we can talk without interference." I saw you go up, and decided I'd go home, because I still wasn't feeling right. Something I ate, no doubt.

Whenever I read this letter, it makes me shiver. Before christmas, Franklin was exchanging letters with you at a dizzying pace to get you to Penn, but when you two have the chance to talk to each other because you are in the same conference room, listening to people present their papers, he doesn't even turn to you. He doesn't pick up on your gaze which usually happens if one looks at people with some sort of expectation. So when he doesn't (or doesn't want to) talk to you, you don't know if it's because of the job or for some other reason, I just wonder how he could be so close in his letters and so cold in person. I can't help but think that he was trying to get you to Penn not for your sake, but for his—getting the nation's best researcher in one of the more exciting problems of archaeology. Is that it? He wants you to solve it as a member of staff of his museum, to unlock new funds, to drizzle prestige?

Or was he suffering from the confusion that occurs when a person that is for weeks or months merely a voice or typed message suddenly materialises and takes up too much space, almost all the space available outside one's own head? The stale disappointment caused by the very fact that this person really exists and has a way of walking—touching a handrail in a funny way, not really holding, but also not not holding—, a way of clearing her throat—as if preparing to say something but remaining silent every single time—, or the habit of carrying a bag loaded with books around, not putting it somewhere off to the side, but always in the middle where people have to step over it, risking spilling their coffee.

Or couldn't he make out who he was, having turned from the interspace between ink ribbon and paper into spine and hair and suit? Did the words fray in his mouth, words he'd used so often in writing to you that he had forgotten their taste?

ALICE STABILISED HERSELF by pressing her hands against the padded tablecloth.

“Let me have a look for you, ma’am,” said the girl tending to the refreshments, a young girl with frighteningly old eyes.

“Thanks,” said Alice in the almost snowy voice one has when speaking while sucking in air. The cups were stacked quite elaborately, all equipped with sugar and spoon and biscuit. Alice tried to focus on the china’s pattern, to keep her mind from the unforgiving sensation that someone was tying hot knots around her stomach. Alice was unable to straighten her back. She heard the girl’s voice somewhere in the kitchen, inquiring about the varieties of tea. Maybe she would look for it for the rest of the afternoon and nobody would mind that Alice stood there, at a strange angle.

“I found peppermint,” reported the girl, “but I’m afraid it’s pretty old.”

“I don’t mind,” Alice tried to look at the girl, but she couldn’t lift her gaze further than the apron’s tie.

“Maybe you’d be better off with this?” The girl put a small metal cup in between Alice’s hands, pouring an autumn brown liquid from an unlabelled bottle. “It helps me when I have seizures,” she said, timidly. “It’s pretty strong.”

Alice looked at her again, this time reaching all the way up to her eyes, focusing on her face while carefully trying to pick up one hand from the table. The pain thundered until Alice had rearranged the re-

maintaining hand, almost touching the glass. Then Alice held her breath, picked it up and swallowed the contents at once. Now there was also a fire in her mouth, her throat. The warmth almost instantly melted the knots.

“You can keep the bottle, if you want.”

“I think it was that spinach soup,” said Alice short of breath from relief, “it had the most unusual taste to it.”

“My aunt brings one every time she visits. She’d be happy to know it helped you, too.”

Alice took the bottle from the girl and the peppermint tea bag.

“You saved my life,” she said, and reached for her purse. The young girl shook her head.

“It’s fine,” she said, “on the house. What a place!” They looked at each other like two people who had been neighbours for many years, but never talked to each other before. Then Alice prepared herself to turn back to the crowd.

“OF COURSE I haven’t cracked it, but having access to all the tablets in England was important. It’s a shame I can’t publish anything based on the unpublished material.” Alice wasn’t sure if this was the sixth or seventh time she had heard herself saying that exact same sentence today. She wondered if she should try to bring more variance to the narrative. She wondered if the fact that men’s glasses were so much greasier than women’s correlated somehow with the loss of hair. She wondered what it was about the Guggenheim that people felt obliged to have a little chat with her. People who had never talked to her before suddenly made conversation as if there had been the sanguine sound of wine glasses chinking years back, as if knowing that a person exists means supporting them in every possible way and thus being part of their success. Alice nodded to the cavalcade of words her interlocutor was turning loose. It was about England, of course, Mr. Wunschle’s England. Everybody had their own British Empire, Alice had learned. Even though she had been there herself, had seen the colleges, the river, the punting, the beer, the weather, the tea, she couldn’t possibly have seen the colleges, rivers, water sports, cold beverages, meteorological conditions, hot beverages that Mr. Wunschle had seen there before the war (which one remained unsaid and even it had been WWI it wouldn’t have retarded Mr. Wunschle’s fervour of sharing his knowledge of the world), so he had to tell her.

It must be an American thing, Alice thought, telling people where they have been, what they have experienced. Probably it would be too pleonastic to bring news to the New World. She sucked cheek flesh

between her left rows of teeth and started to chew. With the other half of her face Alice smiled, alert. She missed the quiet coruscation of well-assorted politeness of St. Hugh's². Where for the first time it had not only been effortless but joyous to talk to strangers.

"I think it's the different quality of having a past altogether, don't you think?" Alice was surprised by the actual pause that followed and was left for her to deposit her opinion.

"I think it's exactly like Carr wrote: England, for some reason too remote to grasp, is older than its oldest tales."

"Who wrote that?"

"Carr. Hag's Nook? It's quite good."

"Never heard of him."

"A detective novel set in England," Alice said, "it's brilliant." She expected him to end the conversation with some sort of mumbling shoulder patting manoeuvre — another thing only men could do and some indeed with perfection—, which would give her the opportunity to finally talk to Franklin. He was standing there in his slightly too-tight suit jacket and with his head, that Alice always felt she had never seen before, square and acutely round at the same time. Franklin was lighting a cigarette.

"I know it sounds crazy, but in this stone cottage, in the middle of a thunderstorm, I read *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to my wife and I swear we were so scared that I had to continue reading to distract us from the fact that we were literally in the middle of nowhere, and that we could hear all kinds of sounds that didn't seem to be normal at all."

"If you like Doyle, you will love Carr." Alice tried to outmanoeuvre him by insisting on her topic, but quickly saw that there must be a reason why the word manoeuvre began with 'man' and not with 'woman': He was opening his briefcase to find his notebook to jot down the author's

name, but it took forever to find. So why wouldn't he start to question her, to make the interruption worth his while?

"Did you get a lot of reading done on the trip?"

Now, Alice missed the old lizard days. Sucked to the wall, being indistinguishable from the stone, the wallpaper, the water-repellent paint. Reluctantly but appreciatively heating up her poiklothermic body with whatever achievement or hypothesis heat the front row crowd was emitting. She just wanted to talk to Franklin, to thank him for all the cable pulling. Maybe also thank him for having stirred her up a little bit, for making her realise the idleness which had crept into her life and plans. Why hadn't she ever thought of getting another job? The house, mother, the salary: all of it felt a bit of a constraint now where before it had been reassuring.

Mr. Wunschle clicked with his pen a couple of times to get Alice's attention.

"Carr?" he asked.

"Precisely," she answered. "Hag's Nook, it's the first of the Dr. Fell series. He wrote it when he just had moved over there and the American perspective on England is incorporated rather nicely, I think. No hounds though, I'm afraid. But an intriguing case of cryptography."

For a split second both of them had a melting in their eyes, caused by respective memories, too fleeting to be recorded.

"Thank you, Miss Kober," Wunschle said, clapping his notebook shut, "I will let you know next year how we liked it. Keep up the good work!"

"You're welcome," Alice said, but he was already arriving at the next conversation, saying "Believe it or not, I also had a pair of those garters once!"

4 May 1948 —————PASP
Franklin Daniel to Alice Kober

I have bad news. I have been told quite unofficially that we have offered the job in Indo-European to Hoenigswald. The committee has never met again, so the decision was made by the Deans, and the committee was not even informed. I heard of it from Speiser, who heard it from Dean Williams, so I am afraid that it is authentic enough.

I am terribly disappointed about it, perhaps more so than you will be. I was dreaming wonderful dreams of the terrific set-up we would have here with you and the Minoan collection. Rodney Young is coming in as my associate curator, you know. The three of us really could have gone places. Hoenigswald is a good man, but it won't be quite the same.

It may give you some satisfaction to know that you were very close to getting it; if one person had swung from opposition to all known candidates to support, I think that we could have swung it. But that is spilled milk.

It seems to me that under the present conditions we should give up the plan for the "Minoan Institute" in your favor. It is obvious that I will have neither the time to run the thing properly, nor the knowledge to make adequate use of it. It certainly should be where you can watch its growth and use the material.

I will be gone by the time you get back; in fact I sail for Greece on the same day that you sail from England on your way home.

ALICE SAT IN front of her typewriter, but the fingers weren't following her thoughts. "It may give you some satisfaction to know that you were very close to getting it; if one person had swung from opposition to all known candidates to support, I think that we could have swung it." Alice felt a may-green tingling inside her head. It was not very painful, but she was unable to ignore it.

Alice wasn't sure whom she needed to cheer up: herself or him. He who had put in so much effort to support her. He. Expectation. Ambition. Results. Trust.

Alice imagined that she'd have a cat and that precisely this cat would jump into her lap right now, because apparently those beings can sense even the smallest question in the human soul and rub all the troubles away with their fur, just until the sparks spray through darkness.

Alice watched how the light withdrew from the room, backwards and consequential.

6 May 1948 —————PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Well, it was fun while it lasted. I can't say your news was unexpected, because I am a pessimist from way back, and always expect the worst—hoping to be pleasantly surprised.

I'm much more bothered about the "Minoan Institute". I do not like the idea of starting it at Brooklyn. First, I doubt that it could be done, and second, if it could, it would be all tied up in red tape, college, city and state. In addition, it would be rather hard for me to walk out on it, and one result of your getting me to consider leaving, is that I really considered it, and came to the conclusion that it would be necessary, sooner or later.

I don't think there would be much to do about it at first. If you could keep it at Pennsylvania, I'd gladly come down to get it into order, and, every so often, to look after it. That's what I thought of doing in the first place, when I suggested it. I don't see how it could possibly require more than one Saturday a month, or something like that. When you consider that I'm jogging off to England for something similar, and in some ways perhaps hardly as important, you can see that I really mean it. After all, Philadelphia is right next door. But of course, that is up to you and the museum.

24 August 1948 ————PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Be sure to get Athene on your side in Greece. She sounds like a useful goddess for an archaeologist.

Be sure.

Be safe.

Be rock.

Maybe Athene was tired of all those people coming to her country, opening up the soil with foreign words and metal blades of some sort to dig up things that didn't belong to them, no matter how highly they valued their importance. Maybe she was done with the past and wanted answers for a contemporary world: post-war, post-peace. Maybe she couldn't get her head around the fact that they would continue to painstakingly produce remnants of civilisations gone for millennia, despite humankind's recent ruins staring back at them. What could they possibly learn? That everything will be covered up eventually, as a silent layer of stagnation and stone, slowly jerking down towards the only ultimate truth: the liquid fire. Athene stubbed out her cigarette in the palm of her hand. What had they learned over the past decades that was of any use for the future? Sometimes, she thought, it's not that bad to have a body sculpted from marble. If only she could replace the sempiternal tunic with present-day clothing, that is, a tailored, fate blue suit. But Athene didn't want to be slowed down by wardrobe issues. She was what her therapist calls indignant (in order to avoid the horrible word hysterical), and she would have loved to see some olive trees burn. You know, it's really hard to light matches with marble hands, almost impossible. All that slow motion bending, mobilised by wasted volition. Athene in no way felt a wish to be memorable today, a day too bright to think. And what was the point in delaying death when everything ultimately had to go on the journey into the soil, sediment by sediment? Athene couldn't even be bothered to follow the course of events: was it really an intractable heart stumbling over a rock on the plains of Turkey, or was it a poisoned heart³, soundlessly squashed in its almost black covert? She just looked up—a beam of light, bouncing off the window of a car door being opened hurriedly, slid as an ellipse over her half-exposed chest—and it had already happened.

19 March 1949 —————PASP
Alice Kober to Johannes Sundwall

I did not write more about Daniel because I myself had no information. He died in Turkey, while he was exploring for a site to excavate for the University Museum. He was with Rodney Young, who is now his successor at the Museum. Young came back for a few weeks in January, and told me all I know. Daniel seems to have died from a heart-attack—although I suspect the doctors did not examine him too carefully. They had just finished inspecting a site, and were in an automobile, going to another place, when Daniel, who had apparently been in the best of health, complained of feeling ill. In half an hour, he was unconscious, and in two or three hours more, was dead. He was taken to Cyprus, and buried at Episcope. That's all I know. It is very sad. I still can't believe it.

I am afraid our civilization is doomed. Whatever happens, the freedom of the individual will be lost, and for generations we will live in war or under the threat of war. The dreams of the 18th and 19th century are gone. The prospect is too gloomy to think of.

1 “I stayed at Houston, Texas, overnight, at the Rice Hotel, and I thought of you and wondered whether you were there then. Some friends and I went on a two months auto trip, taking in the Middle West and South, and Mexico City.” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 19 September 1946, Brooklyn College File).

2 “To-night, for the first time in my life, I ate dinner at the high table with the don (note my British English!), after we all marched in very formally, while the students stood at their places respectfully. Quite different from our cafeteria!” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 17 March 1947, Brooklyn College File).

3 It is possible that Franklin Daniel, as a former American soldier, didn’t die of a mysterious heart attack, but was, in fact, poisoned in Turkey. See for example: Allen, S. H. (2011). *Classical spies: American archaeologists with the OSS in World War II Greece*. University of Michigan Press.

*Acting on Irrational and Irresistible Impulses:
Oxford and Ventris*

ALICE SAW THE bronze firefly of someone else's cigarette too late, her steps already adding their frequency to the other material's vibration. The door falling shut with its sharp thump like someone gasping from a shock of considerable but expected pain. She stopped right there, next to the door, leaning against the welding studs, feeling the wall's warmth despite the wind. Alice closed her eyes for a moment, trying to get rid of the impression of her respiratory passages being overgrown with moss. How did her mother endure the passage in a cabin full of other people, and her own body full with a child?¹ It had always sounded so easy once they were finally on board, so exciting and frictionless. Also, her own first crossing² had been smooth, at least Alice can't remember any feeling that is comparable to those now: all there is in this floating metropolis is friction and pounding and radiated heat³. And all the proportions in complete disarray, one couldn't help but thinking Lewis Carroll didn't have his original idea in a beautiful garden overlooking the English seaside, but in a vessel's bowels just like this one where the smallest suitcase, the tiniest body part like a toe, an ear ends up overcrowding an unmanageable amount of space.

"I wish one could sleep out here," the voice opposite of Alice in the dark said, a woman with the faintest French accent. "I've even tried to bribe a steward, but he said it's impossible. Maybe he also thought I was joking. But how could one be joking under these circumstances?"

"And this is only the first night," answered Alice, again calculating that it would be impossible not to be sleeping during passage, though it

was less about the not sleeping and more about the tiredness upon arrival in Europe.

“I’m Didi,” said the woman. But Alice just wanted this night to be over.

Alice’s eyes kept sinking from the page, from the horizon to a dim inward place. Despite her exhaustion she didn’t want to let herself go to sleep. She imagined the tiredness as sap, dripping from the edge of her rib cage, crystallising in the warm air and falling as a gemlike bit of color on a pyramid-shaped pile.

“Take this before dinner tonight,” said yesterday’s voice, which belonged to a woman with a hat-like haircut, neat and geometric, the hair dark with bits of white. The face very small, with almost too-precise features. Alice thought of a giraffe drawn in a kid’s book. Didi held a little pill on her hand. It didn’t say *eat me*, Alice realised to her surprise.

“Don’t worry, I got it from the doctor,” said Didi, “I was so miserable in the night. It feels like swallowing clouds.”

Alice took the little round.

“Do you mind if I take this one?” Didi pointed at the deckchair next to Alice’s.

“Please.”

“Will you tell me your name if I tell you a secret?” asked Didi, making her accent stronger than it was.

“I’m sorry. I’m Alice. Alice Kober from Brooklyn. I thought I had told you. But I am so tired, I heard the table’s shadow speak to me earlier.”

“What did it say?”

“Something about a coronation.”

Didi laughed while spreading out her towel on the chair. She wore a long and wide dress, plain but comfortable.

“The secret is they have a special stock of food for people who aren’t there for the meals in time. It’s nothing spectacular, but it’ll fill us up.” Didi looked at Alice as if she had just performed a magic trick. Alice shrugged.

“We can sleep here, outside, during the day. And at night we can sit somewhere, talk, and even get some food.”

“I don’t think that we’re allowed to do that.”

“Why not? Why would they get to tell us what to do?” Didi laughed. She produced another little pill from her dress pocket, held it up towards Alice before she swallowed it.

“Come on, I know you need it.”

“I don’t usually believe in people who claim to know what I need.”

Didi lay down, making pragmatic adjustments, closing her eyes.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be rude. I appreciate your help.”

“You’re a terrible liar,” yawned Didi. “Talking like a knife, that’s a gift.”

Alice had no idea what that meant. There was a knife, yes, but not in her mouth. It peeled away the skin from the skull, constantly scraping behind her eyes, amplifying the rocking unbearably. Through Didi’s fingers ran a wave-like motion, so peaceful and harmonic that it didn’t seem human at all. More like an articulate flock of birds or sea weed. Alice couldn’t bring herself to stop looking at Didi’s hand. As long as it was moving, both of them would be alright.

The sleep pattern normalised more quickly than expected, alongside with the extremities’ sizes. But it became a habit to sit at the far corner table in the restaurant after dinner, between the orchestral dance music in the ballroom next door and the muffled rattling from the kitchen. Alice worked on the inscriptions and Didi tried to write without thinking, bent her body in worrying shapes or conversed with her organs. Alice was never sure whether that was some sort of joke or a code for

taking a nap, but Didi insisted that she had to visit her inner parts regularly.

Alice also wasn't sure, at the beginning, if Didi's being with her was a joke or an escape from a husband with high-proof breath or a strong leaning towards endless rhetorical questions. But it turned out that Didi was also travelling alone and Alice's company was a welcome crossing between shelter and canvas. Alice was astounded to discover the many people Didi consisted of. Her gentleness and readiness to immerse herself in whatever caught her interest was what connected them. Her serene admiration for Alice seemed quite ridiculous to her, given how often Didi talked about something Alice had never heard of before: books, music, places, artists, many of them even from New York. In return, Didi didn't know much about Antiquity and made Alice talk about her work. In these conversations (free of both ignorance and over-ambition), Didi's way of listening and questioning made Alice's life exciting, funny and glorious. It was as if someone had flicked a light switch Alice hadn't even noticed before. "I like you, and I like me when I'm with you," Alice said, but it was not a confession or something which involved deep emotions. It just was the truth. "As long as it is true, everything can be said," Didi had once stated. Before having met Didi, Alice had been the same person all the time. A condition that now seemed like a waste of time to her.

They liked old couples, but only if the wife joined the conversation. They liked solitary people, but only if they had a profession they were interested in. Members of the crew they generally liked, but only after their shift had ended. They would smoke together, hear some gossip, and more often than not, be treated to leftovers from the kitchen or a glass from the bar. Alice and Didi were absolutely certain that the food which someone snuck out for them on a wrinkled napkin or in a warm hand

tasted way better than the real meals they were served on proper plates. Sometimes Alice felt like she had turned into a creature, half cat, half girl, from royalty: young enough to be ignorant about the concept of privilege. Didi had this tiny, content smile when she nibbled on a tarte or canapé, which must have been what motivated the benefactors to outdo themselves. Some, of course, had tried to sweet-talk Didi into some kind of service in return. In these situations, too, Didi had this tiny, content smile, but she would turn her head to Alice as if to listen to a sentence that had slipped her attention just a second ago. It was a gesture without ambiguity or artificiality, a curtain being drawn. At nights, Alice always walked Didi to her cabin before finding her way back to hers. Even though Didi assured her that she didn't have to take care of her, late in the evenings, Alice usually started to feel like a mother towards Didi, or at least what she supposed that might be like: wanting to be a blanket and cover the conglomerate of skin, hair and vulnerability, softly yet tightly.

On the last day, the coastline already in sight, she wore one of Didi's wide, flag-like dresses. They had changed their clothes for a photo that a steward took with Didi's camera. Alice, the Latin teacher, became Didi, the dance teacher, who had at some point in her life decided that she wouldn't waste any time on how to dress, ordering two identical dresses from the French-Japanese seamstress down her street, every season. It was petrol blue with little yellow dots. It had smelled like over-boiled milk, lingering sweetness against the pungent width of the sea. Didi had plenty of space in Alice's blouse and skirt. She looked like a girl playing at dressing like a grown-up, a girl with grey hair and grey clothes, even though they weren't really grey. Alice was startled, but she didn't have time to process the impression she had made on herself. The picture was

taken, and after the steward gave the camera back, Didi put a little slip of paper in Alice's skirt.

"This is my number and my address. If you need anything, you call me. If I'm not home, my housekeeper Cecile will answer, she is a little confused, so make sure you tell her to write down whatever message you want her to pass me and also let her read it to you. Sometimes she only pretends to be scribbling because she's too weary to go find a pen. When I was a girl, she took care of me and now it's sort of the other way round. It's so beautiful and peaceful when things become their opposite. Where was I? Oh yes, I'm looking forward to the day I open the newspaper and see your face, beaming with pride, because you've figured it out. This will be your message to me, your greetings across the ocean. D'accord?"

Alice nodded and smiled. "I'd love that," she said, pulling the belt open.

"Keep it, it looks wonderful on you," said Didi, "if you promise me to wear it on your way back." Alice hadn't thought of the way back, of crossing the ocean without Didi. All her inner images had concerned Oxford and Myres and Linear B. Even in her dreams, she had been handling Linear B tablets, most of them mysteriously wiped clean or the inscriptions illegibly small. In one dream it turned out that, once the signs were visible, it was plain English. When she woke up, Alice couldn't remember the contents of the inscriptions now easily readable, only the heavy coat of disappointment at having worked so hard for years to find out that it had been there, right before her eyes, all the time.

"If you don't like it, you don't have to keep it," Didi said.

"No, sorry, of course I like it. Sorry. I had just never thought about the return, which of course is silly. Going there was so important that leaving never entered my thoughts."

“Don’t worry,” said Didi, “I understand. Some journeys indeed have only one direction, even if they end where they started physically. I so hope that yours is going to be one of those!”

She stepped out of Alice’s clothes and stood there in her black and white swimming costume. The wind made the small blond hairs on her arms stand up. As Alice didn’t move to take off the robe, Didi put the clothes on Alice’s deck chair and went to the pool. She jumped into the water without making a splash, like a blade had plunged in. Alice heard herself panting for air, even though air was the only thing in abundance. She tried to untie the belt, but she had drawn the ends so close that the knot was tight like a pebble. Then Alice sat down. She imagined Didi, whose head moved through the water slightly bouncing up and down, sitting at a large breakfast table with a silver coffee set, croissants and a bowl full of fruit. Around her a wide array of colourful patterns: the wall-paper, the carpets, the curtains, the books.

Alice kept reminding herself that the bed was steady, as was the room, the house, the ground. The brain mixed up the angles relentlessly. If only she knew how to calm it down. If only she knew how to calm herself down, her belly filled with a combination of anticipation and fidgetiness that is reserved for children right before Christmas. As a child she would have itemised the presents she might get. A purple pencil. A magnifying glass. A casket with fish made from mother of pearl. As a woman in her early forties she was thinking of Myres, of walking up to his house, of ringing the bell, saying her name. Then she thought of the tablets, imagined some of them on a desk of hayfield green leather. The tablets led her, mercifully, to the corner of her brain where all the questions were stored in open drawers. She rummaged through them for quite a while, rearranged and re-rearranged them. Then a church bell rang, Alice wasn't sure if it was three or quarter to something, dragging herself out of bed. Was it morning back home now, or evening? Glistening grains of light trickling through her skull. She put on the clothes she had thrown on the biggest of her suitcases, unlocked her door and tried to go downstairs without making too much noise. The nighttime manager was asleep in a chair-sized room behind the counter, which was buried under a load of porcelain animals that Alice couldn't make out. She pushed the heavy entrance door open and took a deep breath of silent air. She was alone, but it felt different to being the only one on the streets of Brooklyn. There, it was a transient state which, especially at night, carried the suspicion of some sort of misunderstanding. The emptiness was full of

incidences, you just couldn't spot them in the dark. Whereas here, on this little street, Alice felt confined by the absence of daylight and people, the darkness was a blanket that covered her. There wasn't light in even one window. It was almost three, and everybody was asleep like they ought to be. Alice felt strong, almost invincible. She had made it that far and now it wasn't a sentence in her head or her letters anymore—it is hard to realise that in a little over a month I'll be in the same town with the Scripts, and actually under the same roof at times, not to speak of being actually able to talk to some who knows them⁴—, it was a fact, like the crisp smell of the pine, maple and linden trees enclosing the houses, the majority of which seemed to date back to the middle ages.

She turned left and the sudden presence of the Ashmolean startled her. As if it had jumped at her from behind the corner, with a mischievous smile. She looked at it, read the opening times on a plaque next to the entrance and rearranged the scale of the map in her head—what she had considered to be a walk of at least half an hour was less than ten minutes. She smiled. Then she walked on, to see how long it would take her to get to Sir Myres' home.

When she reached Canterbury Road she stopped. What if Myres or someone else from his house saw her? What was she thinking? Why would she walk here in the middle of the night? It was as if she had twisted her ankle: stepping into a void that wasn't actually there but wouldn't hesitate to break her foot. What was wrong with her? Before she could turn around, she had come undone. What would she even say to him? She hurried back, the crisp air now cutting into her cheeks and hands like blades of grass. She shouldn't be wandering around. She should be preparing. In her room she opened her suitcase and couldn't figure out what to wear. The chequered dress was a good compromise between formal and elegant, but it was quite warm and there was no way to open up a button or tuck in the sleeves. A skirt with a blouse and a

cardigan would be better temperature-wise, but looked quite bland. Alice pulled out every garment she had packed and placed it on the bed, the table, the chair. Nothing seemed to match. Since when was she thinking about what to wear? She used to make fun of women who spent time considering their wardrobe. Didn't they have more important things to attend to? Alice only had thought about the tablets, the knowledge that would be within reach. She hadn't thought about the body which would carry her to that knowledge. A fit of dizziness forced Alice to bed. She lay down on Didi's dress and the faint smell of her perfume slowly brought Alice back into the room. She slipped into it and brushed the rest of the clothes aside. She couldn't get up to turn off the lights: sleep hit her like an anaesthetic. Coarsely cutting out a stretch of time and replacing it with nothing but an ever-so dry mouth.

A visit to the Ashmolean Antiquities Study Room in Oxford is of great importance for my work, I wrote to David, head of culture of the Swiss embassy, asking him for a letter of recommendation. He adapted the text about the project as I had drafted it, changing “great” to “utmost”: “access to the resources at your institution would be of utmost importance to her work.” I like *utmost* a lot, so sophisticated and pressing on its own, more a monolithic peak than a word.

Having access to a real tablet for the first time, taking it out of its little transparent plastic box, putting the tag aside. Seeing and feeling what the photographs had never revealed: The tablets aren't flat (I've always imagined them like a flattened ball of clay, somehow ragged and not defined)—only the side which contains the inscriptions is flat, very flat actually, somehow polished. The back is up to a couple of centimetres thick and shaped like a half-moon, so that the tablets rock if put on their backs on the table. And the sides: absolutely straight and flawless, no fingerprints. The edges carefully rounded in even angles. So specific that there must have been moulds. In a mould, the surface, written on later, would be at the bottom, but this side is slightly wider than the back of the tablet, which would have been the upper part of the mould. How could the tablet be removed from a mould when the lower part is bigger than the upper? I kept running my gloved fingertips over the sides, trying to think with my hands.

The writing itself: accurately defined lines in most cases, carved into the clay with great (utmost) precision. It must have been a metal stylus, in some cases as thin as a needle. The line in many cases is absolutely straight, formed with some sort of ruler that might have been pressed into the clay.

On the backs, the fingerprints of those who made tablets: a deferred touch spanning over 3000 years, discontinued by the glove's thinnest layer of white rubber and my childlike astonishment. I recognise a small number of signs: sheep, chariot, fabric. The button, which in some instances means *and* and in others something else. I can read the syllable *po* and *ni*, because *pony* is my nickname. But, of course, I would need to learn Ancient Greek in order to really understand. My fingertips try their utmost best. Weighing the tablets in my hands, noticing every detail there possibly is. A knowledge that lies in the touch. An understanding that can't be translated into the words of any language, ancient or modern. An understanding that is nothing more and nothing less than presence wrapped in the thinnest layer of blankness. A layer containing all that was touched and didn't remain, and all that was touched and remained in silence.

The day you wrote the letter to Franklin, in which you asked him to make sure that Athene is on his side, has a great significance to you. It is August 24 in 1948, you are in Oxford with Myres, helping him get *Scripta Minoa II* published. He had wanted you to go to Crete to check the inscriptions' originals, but you couldn't do it as they weren't accessible, reburied in a vault to protect them from the war. Also, it wouldn't have been possible to get unpaid leave from Brooklyn College, given your sabbatical one year earlier⁵. Instead of going to Greece you are, during the summer holidays, visiting him again in Oxford to assist him with SM II⁶.

My second day in Oxford. In the morning, before the the Ashmolean's study room opens, I walked to St. Hugh's College, where you stayed in Oxford. It was parent's day and I was repeatedly asked if wanted to take a guided tour. I said no politely and tried behave as if I had a daughter of the right age, who just happened to not be with me right now, but usually was. I imagined carrying her sweater in my backpack and her water bottle, because she had insisted, against my advice, on not bringing a practical bag but a cool one. I imagined the softness of the sweater, of the embroidered banana tree flowers. But I couldn't imagine having a body which has the memory of having another one inside. I decided to leave my sunglasses on, and made my way through the college determined, as if I knew where to go, as if I was expected somewhere.

I saw the same buildings you had seen, I saw the dining hall, I saw the little chapel. I saw the garden and park and I wondered why you didn't write anything about it in your letters⁷. It must have been there in your day, too, and I guess the grass was already neatly cut. Maybe the little hoops waiting for croquet players were even in place. You just weren't impressed. What impressed you was how they talked Latin to each other⁸, how much respect the students had for the teachers. You made friends, I had read the day before in the Myres correspondence with Dorothea Gray, an archaeologist⁹. You kept exchanging letters and, of course, they are not preserved—at least not in the Dorothea Gray Papers at St. Hugh's archive and I don't know where else I could look for them. Even though I should now be used to be finding nothing, I get so excited by a new lead every time.

I had read the letters you exchanged with Myres a couple of times—on my way back to the Ashmolean I walked by his house at 13 Canterbury Road, just on the opposite end of St. Hugh's Park. Nowadays there is a fence, but back then his house might have been accessible through the trees. Because I had so much time left in the study room, I asked to see the Myres-Ventris correspondence. For no specific reason, just to make the most, utmost, of my time. I always feel this froth of rage rising inside when Ventris is involved. He is, after all, the main reason why you are portrayed as a cold, feisty woman, full of disdain for amateurs in general and Ventris in particular.

You telling him that compiling assumptions on Linear B in his Mid Century Report is a waste of time. That you were fatally ill at that time and couldn't even walk up stairs anymore is always overlooked. This is what struck me in the Myres letters: The last ones you wrote to him—containing a damning review of his manuscript for *Scripta Minoa III* that you were supposed not only to correct, but in fact to type for him—yes, you indeed are feisty in those (but nobody ever quotes from them). From how your handwriting has changed, you must have been in considerable pain. The letters are compressed into illegibility, what had been steady and round is now spiky and tipping over. The effort that writing demanded from you is so visible that reading your rants is doubly painful.

You allegedly made Ventris leave Oxford in August 1948: helter-skelter, disenchanted, humiliated even. The story that is told is the following: you two met there, during your second visit to Oxford, after both of you had agreed to help Myres with *Scripta Minoa*. You with the classification, Ventris with drawing the inscriptions. Letters had been exchanged throughout spring between the three of you on how best to go about the task.¹⁰ Ventris wouldn't have had any problem getting a job as King Minos' scribe, you joked to Myres after seeing his page design sketch (AK to SJM, 13 March 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence). But then Ventris flees the scene, apologising to Myres for his weak mind, for being a swine and letting him down (MV to SJM, 23 August 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence). His comprehension "I shall stick to my last" is quoted in this matter, taken as a hint that you were looking down on him, browbeating (what an excellent word) him for being a dilettante.

It is here, in Oxford, that Kober's and Ventris's stories dovetail for the first, painful time. Ventris had also been summoned to Oxford in the summer of 1948 to help prepare *Scripta Minoa II* for publication, and he arrived during Kober's visit. But, apparently cowed by the combined scholarly power of Kober and Myres, he quickly fled the scene, a pattern of abdication he would repeat throughout his life. (Fox 2013: 173)

And it is indeed a peculiar letter, this one, written on August 23, at Oxford station. It is an outburst, it is written in a voice that had never before occurred and never occurs after in Ventris' letters to Myres. Or to anyone else, in fact, as far as the letters in the Ventris archive (IoCS) are concerned. It is a hoarse voice that doesn't find its comfortable pitch. The hand that writes is reaching through the paper into the the dark.

**23 August 1948 ———Ashmolean
Michael Ventris to Sir John Myres**

Dear Sir John,

You will probably think me quite mad if I try & account for the reasons why I'll be absent on Tuesday morning, & why I should like to ask either Miss Kober, or the other girl that you mentioned, to complete the transcription. One would have thought that years in the Forces would have cured one of irrational & irresistible impulses of dread and homesickness.

*One would have thought
One just one singled out
From the lively many
One just one slowly yet
Not fatally grazed by the
Fields unwinding themselves
In between stilts and trust
One that one's just about
To be swallowed by coppice*

*That years in the Forces
Or hours on a train or
Instincts in a hollow or
Muteness in a scarp slope or
A second without breath or
The lifetime of a tree*

Would have cured one

Yes that one in the station's
Hall there the one with the blazing
Outlines who keeps circling his
Sturdy suitcase that doesn't have
Enough arms to put around him to
Touch his shoulder or hair or the
Drape of the neck and doesn't whisper
Or hum or comfort in any other way

Of dread and homesickness

One can't be cured reliably by
Dropping matter accelerated into
Family homes or farms or verticalness
In general because that's what one
Is sensitive to the case the shelter
The skin

Isn't it remarkable that the only force that should be at the centre of such weakness is a woman? Reluctantly, a woman is credited for great achievements. But without a doubt she is capable of having power over a man, so evil that he doesn't even care about losing his face in front of a living legend of the field he is working in. A man who has served in the army as a bomber navigator. A man who, as an architect, is used to working under pressure and also with difficult people. A man who is a genius.

A man is a genius if he's, in short, built from squared paper made out of rare and precious metal.

A genius is a man whose edges are extremely sharp, he cuts easily through fallacy and folly, not necessarily in this order, but behold, he might.

A man is a genius if his being is so lissom inside that it's almost liquid: permanent ink that levels him or makes him rise.

A woman is a genius if she tries to be a man, albeit the squares, the edges, the permanency spilled inside, all tipped and strident and hoarse.

Thinking about the established, dreadful woman scholar interpretation of the swine-letter is irreproducible to me. Why would someone who in blithe spirits participated in the pulverisation of Cologne be shattered by meeting someone who is more experienced in a certain field? But this logic goes both ways, probably: Why would someone who, in stable confidence, will solve the whole riddle in four years' time, collapse on a Monday night in a small town's train station for no reason at all? Sir John Myres made a note on the letter, following his usual habit, when he received it (August 24) and when he answered it (August 24).

To state the obvious: I was hoping to find this reply from Myres to Ventris in the Ventris Papers (IoCS), because it would have let me know, without doubts, whether or not there had been a meeting. But what is preserved in the archive is mainly the letters Ventris wrote to his wife Lois during his time in the army—creating his own army of texts, writing her every day and sometimes twice, at least at the beginning. Later on he combines his letters to her with his diary, to save him some time.

The voice I encounter there is confident. The only sign of insecurity is the number of letters, the large portion of the free time the writing must have taken up: it is writing that isn't telling or longing, it's not writing which is directed into the distance, but writing that is very much rooted in the realm of its surroundings. It gives the addressee a materialised presence, turning the paper into her body. A patient white body, delicate but clearly confined, a body that can be owned like a plot of land, promising soil. Crackling rime, solid blue. For years and years it awaits the ink, feeling it dripping down the throat as a light and steady stream. All this neat control went in Ventris' letter to Myres written at Oxford station: The sentences even wind up with mistakes and logical errors. The body reared up, becoming an inhospitable territory of its own.

**23 August 1948 ———Ashmolean
Michael Ventris to Sir John Myres**

But however much I tell myself that I am a swine to let you down after all my glib promises & conceited preparations,—I am hit at last by the overwhelming realization that I shall not be able to stand 6 weeks work alone in Oxford, & that I am an idiot not to stick to my own last. Perhaps its [sic] greater weakmindedness to throw up the sponge, than to grind on with something one's liable to make a botch job of—I don't know.

“I don’t mind picking the things up, a little walk will be good.” Alice looked at the woollen blanket which was wrapped tightly around the lower half of his body. Sir Myres seemed to live in an entirely different season. His hands held a cleanly-cut open letter.

“And I do have time.” He nodded with his eyes.

“What a shame,” he said, “He would have done splendid work, wouldn’t he?”

Alice nodded. His theories were one thing, but his handwriting was another. It looked like he used a stencil for every single letter he wrote. Alice imagined his face wrinkled from focusing so hard on accuracy. Wrinkled, but tidy. Alice thought of four absolutely parallel lines on Ventris’ forehead, not even meeting in infinity.

“Shall I talk to the press,” she asked, “to let them know?”

“We’ll find another solution. I have to make up my mind. A young man with a business and a family, a whole range of commitments. It would have been a splendid arrangement, though.” Myres’ voice ebbed away, but he didn’t clear his throat. Alice fanned herself with her notebook. She was in two minds about what was expected from her: sitting and conversing or leaving and getting something done. Myres himself didn’t seem to know either. His body was there, out of bed and dressed in a shirt too wide for him, in an extremely dark shade of blue, with golden cufflinks. In his thoughts, he was already finding ways to answer the letter without further embarrassing the young man or himself. “It was too

much to ask, but my father always said that no question can be voracious.”

“I’m sure he’d have loved to be of help,” Alice said and shooed away a fly that kept landing on her sweaty forearm. He indeed had prepared the whole thing quite systematically. She didn’t understand what had kept him from coming. An urgent job or a family emergency? But apart from the question of who should do the drawings now, she wasn’t unhappy about the fact that she didn’t have to deal with a second opinion that was based on god knows which assumptions, producing the most reckless ideas. And given the tone of his letters, he wasn’t exactly the modest type.

“Your brother has served?” Sir Myres asked as if this question was the logical continuation of a conversation that had been interrupted for some reason.

“He worked in a lab,” Alice answered. Sir Myres looked at her and then waved the letter.

“I should write to him before my strength fades.”¹¹

“Of course,” Alice said and her back popped when she got up from the antique chair that reminded her of a horse carriage seat. She put her notebook into her purse and straightened her skirt. She felt like a girl just leaving a private lesson. Probably it was because he wasn’t moving, couldn’t move, tucked into the armchair. Alice shook his hand and the letter shook a little in his other hand. Alice wasn’t sure about the subject of her private lesson, but she felt fairly well-prepared.

“Do you think I should write Mr. Ventris a note, too?” she asked, turning round at the door.

“I’ll include your best wishes,” Myres said in a voice that suggested complicity in the delicate domain of diplomacy—he would have done it anyway. He was handling the situation, whatever it was about, in the appropriate way. It was one of those moments when frailty absent-

mindedly made room for the grand man to appear, with all his customary aplomb. Alice smiled and suddenly felt how her neck released the tension from constantly leaning towards him or at least feeling like leaning, involuntarily sharing the assiduous attitude of the women in the house to be ready in every moment to support him, to carry some weight, to catch a word that was about to slip his mind.

“Very well then,” she said and almost curtsied, “let’s see what we can get done on our own.”

A find of utmost importance was a letter from Ventris to Myres written on Monday, August 16, in Col du Grand Bois in France, one week prior to the Oxford incident (MV to SJM, 16 August 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence). An unburdened letter to let Myres know that the family vacation took longer than expected, swims in the Mediterranean are mentioned, the kids, Lois, his wife. Ventris says he can't make it to Oxford before the beginning of the next week:

Dear Sir John,

I'm afraid our return journey is still taking slightly longer than we estimated, so that we won't be able to make it to Paris before tomorrow night, & England before Thursday. The car's been boiling on passes, & we've had the usual delays with customs & banks & officials—not to mention the lure of a Mediterranean bathe—all of which has made our return seem almost interminable. So I am afraid I shall have to put back to the beginning of next week coming down to Oxford—but I'll make plans to go on into October till it's finished, if necessary, & in that case I might be able to do the Linear A as well.

That means in all likelihood, that Ventris reached Oxford on Monday, August 23rd, the beginning of the week. And never even left the Oxford train station. Or he went to a hotel where he planned to stay, cancelled his room and left the drawing material there (“I have left my small board & 4 pads of layout paper, which may be useful”).

In other words, he arrived in Oxford and homesickness greeted him with wiry arms. His heart started to run through his body, pounding on everything with the remotest resemblance to a door, in order to get out. Ventris might have had a panic attack or a nervous breakdown. He might as well have quietly realised that, in fact, he hadn't been working on the Minoan problem since 1940 (see letter to SJM on Easter 1940: "I don't know whether you remember my writing to you a few years ago about some theories I had on the elucidation of Minoan. Actually I was only fifteen at the time, and I'm afraid my theories were nonsense [...] However, I have continued to work at the problem off and on, and I'm coming round more and more to the view that the language contained in the inscriptions is a dialect closely related to Etruscan." Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence). I have searched the whole correspondence with his wife Lois (IoCS, MV 010-020), which started in 1942 when he entered the army, for mentions of Linear B. There are only two:

Letter 21 in 1942, probably written on November 23 (IoCS, MV 010.1-40)

The other letter was quite a break. It turned out to be from J.L. Myres, who's No 1 man on early Greek + Minoan archaeology now that his partner Evans has died. He said he'd been studying my article, and wanted to know if I'd done any more since, as he was at work on the problem and his results agreed with mine on various points. He was really affable, so I've written him back deferentially admitting I haven't really done any more, but offering to put in some (humble) help for anyone who really is carrying the thing through. I hope he'll let me know how his researches are going, as he's got much more material to work on and he's a big shot, + he's very cautious, so whatever he establishes should be pretty echt. But I'm afraid it'll rather shake him to find I wrote the opus at 17—I mentioned it half out of conceit and half out of the thinking the whole thing was rather a joke anyway.

Letter 22 (IoCS, MV 010.1-40)

Yesterday I got around to the public library which is very nicely set up + spent the afternoon reading back numbers of the Architectural Review and looking at Highpoint & the houses at Holland and Cullers' drawings of exotic flowers. I also found a book by the archaeologist that wrote me the other day, in which he seems to have anticipated most of my theory—not quite all—unknown to me.

The projects Ventris was pursuing during his years in the army were a study to facilitate language learning which he considered one of the most important skills to have at a time like his: “I’ve got the full series of Basis and Essentials language books together now, and I’m beginning to make plans for a quite detailed parallel study of the chief languages of the world, which might end up as something publishable, but which is at any rate useful to me” (MV to LV, 24 May 1945, IoCS, MV 016).

“I hold fast to a desire for the progressive federal unity of the world: soon no place will be more than a day’s journey away from any other, and we don’t yet think in any commensurate way. [...] but in any case the man with a contribution is not now the man with the dreams, but with the all-embracing technical knowledge and view (often mutually exclusive, alas)” (MV to LV, 15 April 1945, IoCS, MV 016).

For a while, he worked on tasks from his architecture studies and sent innumerable sketches and variations of the block of flats to Lois. Then he designed their family home, relentlessly improving the floor plan. “If I alter the plan again, divorce me!” (MV to LV, 5 December 1943, IoCS, MV 010.1-40).

He, as a navigator, also developed a device which facilitated the determination of the plane’s exact position. He even instructed Lois to have a prototype built:

“With reference of the drawings of the perspector that I sent you last, in typical Ventris fashion I must ask you to do nothing definite with them, because I’ve now developed an improvement” (MV to LV, 7 May 1946, IoCS, MV 017).

He was thorough and greatly occupied with the tasks he set for himself. He kept revisiting his ideas and questioning his solutions. His strength and determination seemed to originate from the process itself, from iterating and improving. The importance of the topic he worked on resulted from the fact that he was dedicating his time to working on it.

To me, it seems that this is the most probable driver of him backing out of assisting Myres. He realised that the confidence to do the job came from Myres, not from himself, as Ventris had abandoned the whole field almost a decade ago. Or, as he puts it later in a letter to Bennett, he already then knew what Alice did not realise until later: Myres didn't know as much about Linear B as he thought he did.

"I have preserved cordial relations with Myres as far as correspondence goes, but I have been chary of enquiring after SMII's progress since a couple of years back when I offered to help him on it & then, rather disgracefully, backed out of it; largely because I felt the whole project was a bit out of hand & I didn't have enough knowledge or 'personality' to get it improved" (MV to EB, 1 June 1951, PASP, Ventris Papers, Box 2).

Maybe Ventris had imagined how he would walk up to Myres' house, what he would say. The same questions I made Alice ask herself the night before meeting Myres. I cannot know if that was true for her, but I am pretty sure that in cases like that a strange thing with dimensions happens: the other person, the one you admire intellectually is suddenly so superior that they make you small. Precisely by replying yes, they are saying a word that makes you feel unworthy. It is as if before, the proportions hadn't really been graspable. But through their reaching out the scale is fixed, perspective is determined by the line that the connection forms.

But nobody else who wrote about the Oxford incident took self doubt or insecurity into consideration. The longer I think about it, the less I understand the prevailing interpretation. Is it because Ventris mentions Kober in the first line of his letter? *Miss Kober or the other girl*. Accepting for the moment the assumption that there had been a clash, then Myres had witnessed it in some way: it must even have taken place at his house. Isn't it strange that Ventris *should like* Myres to ask Miss Kober? Wouldn't *the other girl* be easier to mention, in order not to remind Myres of whatever scene

had taken place earlier that day? Also, in the first letter that seemed to have been exchanged between Myres and Ventris since the accident – a letter from 21 December 1948 in which Ventris thanks Myres for sending him an article – he writes:

“If one believed that the Linear A and Linear B languages were different (as Miss Kober seems to do), one might be tempted to deduce [...] that it was in some way characteristic to the Mainland...” (Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

Why would he mention her if there had been a scene? Especially as this reference isn't relevant or necessary at all, as if Alice's theory is not only known to Myres, but Ventris had mentioned it to him in a letter in spring, before the whole incident:

“I have got into quite an interesting correspondence with Dr. Kober: she rather startled me by suggesting that ‘Linear A and B certainly do not contain the same language’” (MV to SJM, 25 April 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

The longer I think about it, the more certain I am that given what Ventris says in his letters and how, there was no meeting. There simply can't have been one.

The longer I think about the frivolous interpretation that it must have been Alice who made Ventris leave, the more cynical I become. I know that being cynical is very personal in this case. When I went through the Ventris papers to find other instances of weak-mindedness or failing to be on his own (what did he mean by *work alone* anyway, as he knew he would have worked with Myres and Kober) or acting on irrational & irresistible impulses, as he calls them in his letter, I not only learned how many bombings and operations he flew over Germany, safely noted in his flying log book (29 missions from July 1944 right to the end of the war, IoCS, MV 014), I also read that he seemed to have enjoyed them. I can't help but be cynical. Not on my behalf, not on behalf of the country whose wine-coloured passport manoeuvres me around the world, not on behalf of an era of debris that is always busy foreshadowing itself but nobody ever listens closely enough. I am being cynical as a reader, as a witness of power's heavily jointed face.

3.3.45

We got up yesterday at the very painful hour of 0115, and in actual fact the take off was about 7 o'clock. All the same it was one of our best trips—the final pulverisation of Cologne, with about 600 aircrafts on a very fine morning.

12.4.45

Yesterday was quite a pleasant reintroduction to the gentle art of operating. We did a daylight under quite clear conditions and at a comfortable (from a flying point of view) height, on Bayreuth. There was no opposition at all, and the countryside seemed quite without activity. I looked out for the Opera House at Bayreuth, but it was hidden behind the smoke. It was a very good attack, and I saw the bombs go down right into the built-up area among the shower of little red TIs.

This diary entry from mid April, in which Ventris goes on describing the beauty of the German landscape around the Taunus mountains, is decorated with a drawing of a plane circling a column of smoke. It is done in black ink, coloured with pencil. (Red, pink, purple.) Cut out and pasted on the paper.

This terrain is imponderable and uncomfortable (from a civilian point of view) because I know that there is no such thing as a simple connection or plain causality. But when I sat there, reading, I wanted to get up, point at the pages, at the drawing and ask someone: Isn't it downright impossible that a person who wrote this, a passionate and studious tourist in the face of mass destruction, could be a person who runs away from a job with a luminary just because someone else gave him a hard time? He had been introduced to the gentle art of operating, don't you know? Wouldn't he have known how to defend himself? Or to conveniently block out whatever he couldn't acknowledge?

Also, isn't it strange that if this meeting should have happened, one way or another, that you, Alice, never ever wrote about it to anyone? I understand that the park at St. Hugh's wasn't spectacular to you, piled up pulp, waving green against the stretched sky of different shades. But getting into a fight with a coworker, probably in the very house of Sir John Myres who to you is, like to Ventris, a guiding light¹²—that would have been news, would have been an incident that needed to be referenced, commented on even to Myres in the future. But when you mention Ventris later that year to Myres, it is with greatest nonchalance: “Most of your other questions I think were purely rhetorical. Ventris sent me a copy of his work, but I haven't had the time to even glance at it. Deroy sent me a copy of his bibliographical article in the *Revue Hittite et Asiatique*” (AK to SJM, 8 March 1949, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

Alice hadn't been to the Royal Oxford since her first nights in England, last year in spring¹³. Even though the room had been nice and the staff fine, her memories of the night were labyrinthine and rather dark. As if she had gotten lost in a city she was a stranger in. But how could one get lost on a way of two minutes—at least without the idiotic number of three suitcases, which had slowed down her whole journey¹⁴—the hotel almost visible from the tracks. She hadn't been lost and nothing unpleasant had happened. It was more actually stepping into the unknown, seeing it taking shape. No. Trespassing the obvious: that the unknown had had a shape, a material, a body all the time, that for others it had been a trite matter of course. It's only such a short moment during which amazement can occur. A wink. Then everything is already changed. That's the good thing about archaeology, Alice thought, that whatever is found stays exactly as it is. You might change, your knowledge might change, but the place, the artefacts they rest. Rest as remains and rest as peace and quiet. All the decisions have been made, for better or, more often, for worse. No contingencies left to find a solution for, all aspiration and ambition turned to stone. It was the human condition that one could discover preserved in detail, without having to deal with actual humans, with their pettiness, their rascality. Alice almost walked into a duck sitting motionless on the kerb, enjoying the sun and the breeze. She made a step to the side which flared her skirt. The duck didn't blink.

“What’s wrong with you, little fella,” she asked. The breeze gently ruffled the duck’s feathers.

“Did nobody teach you to give way to a lady?” The duck made a duck sound, but still didn’t move.

“Just be careful in the street, alright?” The duck looked at Alice then it walked away, in the middle of the kerb, proud and miffed like a pedestrian.

It’s a day for walking away, Alice thought, a day for dashing off to other jobs, more profitable undertakings. She couldn’t stop looking at the duck wiggling away from her, waving its little rump. She hadn’t been able to read Myres, if he was angry or disappointed with Ventriss he hid it well. But he did seem to be confused, given the erratic course of their conversation. Alice thought of inquiring at the hotel about the circumstances of Ventriss’ departure. Why wouldn’t he come by this morning and explain his reasons in person, which seemed like the polite and thus the British way to handle a situation like this? Didn’t Sir Myres deserve this much respect? Yes, it was a personal investment to work with him, but Ventriss didn’t have to travel across the globe. He was just an amusing train ride away from home. It was an investment, but also quite a contribution. Hadn’t he been eager to do this? He who had regaled the world with his first theory about Minoan while he was a schoolboy, drinking strawberry milk? Why would he walk away from the opportunity to prove to the world how indispensable he was? Alice shook her head. At the exact same moment, the duck jumped onto the bridge’s stone railing and took off.

1 “Katharina would have been pregnant with Alice when they arrived in May” (Fox 2013: 90).

2 As listed in her CV for the Guggenheim application under “work in archaeology”, Alice Kober had been to Europe once before, in the summer of 1939: “examination of archaeological exhibits in European museums, in France, Germany, Austria, Greece and Italy; examination of important sites in Greece and Italy; tour of Greece (under American School of Classical Studies in Athens) and study of newest work of the American, British, French and German schools.” (PASP, Box 56.6).

3 “The boat was badly overcrowded—four in cabins meant for two, and two in those meant for one. Conditions even in first class were bad, and in tourist unspeakable. I wouldn’t advise anyone to make the crossing, except in case of necessity, and certainly not in tourist class.” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 17 March 1947, Brooklyn College File).

4 AK to SJM, 6 February 1946.

5 “Myres expects I will go to Greece in February. It’s bad news, because I haven’t the money, and the best Brooklyn College can do is give me six months’ leave without pay. Six month is ample time for me and mother to starve to death, since I’ve spent all my money last year. I’ve been counting on the slowness of the Greeks, which would postpone the trip till summer. Then, with a year’s salary under my belt, and pay continuing, I could go to Greece under my own steam. Six months mean very little to me, but of course, they mean a lot to Myres. Well, for once maybe the Greeks will be slow when it would be to my advantage.” (AK to FD, 18 September 1947, PASP, Box 57).

6 “I told him [SJM] I might come to England this summer since the Cretan business seems out of the question for a long time, and he answered immediately and said he wished I would, because he could use my help.” (AK to FD, 15 February 1948, PASP, Box 57).

“But I want to come [to Oxford] very badly, and I think will manage in some way. Last time I wanted to see Minoan—this time I want to see people.” (AK to SJM, 15 February 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

“I shall be sailing for England July 21, and have about three months work to finish before I go. I have decided that the inscriptions must be classified according to content before anything useful can be accomplished with them, and want to finish a preliminary classification to show Sir John. It will not be the best that can be done, but will be better than the rather careless arrangement of Evans, and if possible, Myres will publish the classification numbers and Evans’ numbers, so that the rest of you will be spared a year’s work in making the preliminary classification.” (AK to JS, 22 June 1948, PASP, Box 58).

7 AK to Joseph Pearl, 17 March 1947, Brooklyn College File; AK to FD, 30 April 1947 (PASP, Box 57); AK to Allen Moe, 23 June 1947 (PASP, Box 56.17).

8 “It will interest you to know grace before and after meals is said in Latin!” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 17 March 1947, Brooklyn College File).

9 “Dorothea Gray just sent me a lengthy essay on Queen Mary, Queen of Scots, and Lady Jane Gray. In one of our conversations, which leap blithely from Nero to Sappho, and from tracing ancient mines by air to differences in English and American idiom, I confessed I’d never gotten Lady Jane Gray’s to the throne straight in my mind.” (AK to SJM, 23 October 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

10 “Dear Sir John, thank you very much for your own and Dr. Kober’s letters: to save trouble, I have sent direct to her a copy of this letter. [...] Thank you both for your comments on the conventions for damaged signs &c. I agree with Dr. Kober that signs should be normalized wherever possible [...] I agree with Dr. Kober about the need to indicate fully the condition of the tablet, but I would rather do the whole thing graphically [...] Finally, I enclose a rough draft of inscription 1, with the above conventions, and from Dr. Kober’s suggestions.” (MV to SJM, Good Friday 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

11 “Sir John is frailer.” (AK to FD, 9 August 1948, PASP, Box 57).

“I haven’t had much chance to talk to him [Myres], actually, because Lady Myres keeps him in bed Mondays and Wednesdays, and when I do see him, it’s only for an hour or so, and that time is full of Linear B, because I’m revising the vocabulary, which is in perfect chaos because he has been able to work only at irregular intervals, and then forgot about corrections which should have been made.” (AK to FD, 24 August 1948, PASP, Box 57).

12 “I hope you won’t be angry if I send you a Christmas package. Our shortages are annoying, but not acute. After all, it’s sound classical tradition to show your love + respect for a teacher by useful gifts—and in these days, our greatest teachers are often those we never meet except in a book, I do consider myself most fortunate because I met you. Now when I read something you wrote, I sometimes see your smiling at a secret joke. So forgive me because it gives me a selfish pleasure to do something for you.” (AK to SJM, 21 October 1947, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

“If she [Miss Swindler] had not told me in such glowing terms what she thought of you, I should never have dared to write. I am really very much in awe of that great historian, J. L. Myres.” (AK to SJM, 17 December 1946, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

13 “I realize from what you say that St. Hugh’s won’t be able to take me in when I come (the date I read Mar. 7 is probably Mar. 17—a slight textual emendation). I’ll get Cook’s to arrange reservations for me.” (AK to SJM, 8 February 1947, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

“Cook’s could not get reservation either at the King’s Arms or the East Gate Hotel, but did manage to get a room at Royal Oxford.” (AK to SJM, 6 March 1947, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

14 “The writing material isn’t for me either. I’m sending it ahead because last time [first visit to Oxford in 1947] was the first time I ever travelled with three bags, and it was terrible to feel I couldn’t move without a porter. This time I’ll keep my mobility.” (AK to SJM, 28 April 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

*Dictated, Typed, but not Sent:
Brooklyn College File*

Alice Kober's Brooklyn College (BCF) file has traveled with me for almost two years now. As it is printed on Letter size paper, it doesn't fit in any of my folders. I keep it in a plastic library bag. It was on my desk in Biel, in Stuttgart, in London, in Berlin. I knew I would have to write about it, but I dreaded doing so.

It was sent to me in December 2017, when I was in New York. I had inquired as to whether the Brooklyn College had a recording from the Menachmi radio show. The librarian answered no, but (to comfort me?) she photocopied the whole Kober file for me and mailed it to my then-home on 5th Street. When I looked through it, I found to my surprise that there were many letters in there that hadn't been in the Kober archive in Texas. Letters to Professor Joseph Pearl, head of the Classics Department at Brooklyn College, through which I met a different Alice. Different to the one who corresponded with Franklin Daniel and Johannes Sundwall. She must have been quite close to him, but nevertheless he was her superior and she had to be diplomatic to get what she wanted (like time off from school to deliver papers at conferences). But as one letter shows (see p. 380), she wasn't always successful: she apologises for criticising him, for never thinking before talking. There are also file notes regarding conflicts, even a letter from fellow professor Meyer Reinhold to Joseph Pearl who didn't want to be put together with Alice on committee work because of the "strained atmosphere generated by Professor Kober's presence" (Meyer Reinhold to Professor Pearl, October 30, 1947).

Then there was another sheet of paper, empty apart from the typed line “Report on Kober and Packer filed under Pope”.

I must have overlooked it the first time I went through all the documents (a lot of correspondence regarding the substitutes for Alice while she was sick, the sick leave in general, the financial side of her employment). When I saw it this spring, spreading the material on my desk, I hesitated to write again to the accommodating librarian. What would I receive? It could only be another conflict, couldn't it? The logic of my work seemed to invert itself, like a camera switched to auto mode, photographing an overly bright scene. While Alice is painted negatively in the context of Ventris' swine letter, it is agreed on that she was a good and dedicated teacher. This assessment is based on her committee work, on brailleing the exams for blind students. Also, the letter from Mrs. Lawrence Green¹ is a testimony to her capabilities as a teacher. I do not doubt that she was a good teacher and that she liked her job². But as a colleague, she seemed to have had the potential to be arduous. I even asked myself if I should ignore the letter from Meyer Reinhold, or at least dismiss it as an uncooperative or nasty move, maybe sparked by envy. In October 1947, Alice had just returned from her sabbatical, she was a Guggenheim fellow, maybe these facts alone were too much for Mr. Reinhold and he couldn't stand sitting at a table with her, being reminded that he wasn't given that amount of recognition, even though their paths were quite similar. Both parents had immigrated to the US from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was three years younger than Alice and had also done his PhD at Columbia, in Ancient History, soon becoming an expert on ancient Rome.

Maybe it was her eyes that always were a bit swollen and slightly empty, gently carried in dark circles, orbits of unrest. Maybe he couldn't stand seeing her looking at a paper or her notes, because the fact that she had to deal with mundane questions kept her from having groundbreaking ideas. Kober's presence made his and the others' efforts trivial, regardless of the fact that they, too, had their scholarly work, their ideas, their careers to pursue. Maybe he, over the course of a committee meeting, could get so angry that he had to excuse himself in the middle of a discussion that he had lost track of, walk to the teacher's restroom through the dim corridor smelling of faint hope, stacked paper and a sharp cleaning agent. There, he'd stand in front of the lavatory, shaking internally and not knowing what to do—he'd need to remove something from in there, somewhere below the heart and above the kidney, but how was he supposed to reach it?

Or was Alice really “temperamentally unsympathetic with democratic procedures”? Did she really “sulk or sabotage the work when she finds herself in a minority position, or imagines that she is thus placed”? Did she really “tend to regard criticism or rejection of her suggestions as personal affronts”? Could it really be true that “her views were often so extravagant that precious time was wasted”? Did Meyer Reinhold endure her attitude the “many years” he was employed as teacher at Brooklyn College (since 1938), and use the security of his newly granted position as assistant professor (in 1947) to speak his mind?

I knew that Alice would have inquired about the report on Kober and Pope, just because it was there. Not following a lead is an adulteration, she doesn't even have to tell me that, she just has to look at me from inside my head with those eyes of hers, cradled in certainty. So I did. The light yellow envelope was posted on July 23 2019 in Brooklyn, and waited for me when I returned from London. It feels like a small number of pages, 4 or 6. It can't have been a big conflict, if it was solved in two or three letters. I feel the paper clip in the top left corner. I don't dare to open it. I would rather go through the file I have read so many times already once more. This time there's one particular letter from Pearl that seems of importance.

10 May 1945 —————BCF
Joseph Pearl to Alice Kober

Dear Professor Kober:

Mindful of your vigorous protest against the use of the proportionate share of your contribution to the departmental fund for the purchase of the three books for the general good of the Department in connection with our new course Classical Civilization I, I am returning to our treasurer your proportionate share amounting to 0.39\$. The purpose of this note is to keep the record clear.

I cannot even begin to imagine how I would write a scene in which an internationally renowned researcher gets all worked up because of contributing 39 cents to the acquisition of three reference books. The letter from Professor Pearl was “dictated, typed, but not sent” as a note on the bottom of the page clarifies. The reason for not sending it could lie in the fact that returning her share and writing a letter about it is almost as strange as Alice’s protest in the first place. What can be gathered from the letters is that Alice either annoyed Pearl, or a colleague who then asked Pearl to intervene. There’s no further information on why Alice was opposed to buying the books. Perhaps she wasn’t happy with the new Classical Civilization I course or the person who taught it, or if she had issues with the books that someone had requested. Given her generosity towards her correspondents, especially Sundwall and Myres, to whom she would send packages full of treats after the war, it seems unlikely that it was a question of money (also the contribution to the departmental fund had already been made).

I imagine a conference room, with two big wooden tables in the middle. They had been pushed together despite their slightly different height and the fact that their edges were shaped in a way that created a fjord-like split on either side. There are chairs, wooden with leather padding, there is carpet, probably the colour of dried blood. Outside there's early evening, outside there's hope that the war might soon end. The hope is kindled by fires, fierce enough to melt stone. But this fatal amount of heat is far away from the conference room and nobody thinks of it now. There are ashtrays on the table and brittle air from smoking. There's a secretary, her slightly diffuse hair pinned up with tortoise shell combs. Her habit of scratching her ear with the pencil when she doesn't have to write something down. There is the Classical Department's body of teachers: soft bodies, especially around the middle. Bodies in shirts and jackets, bodies in blouses and skirts. If I imagine Alice sitting there, I can't help to inscribe my memory of faculty meetings upon her: sitting there and thinking of something else, this is how I had my best ideas. There were many meetings to which I brought little tasks, work which was not university-related or related to the meeting—tasks which I could solve without writing a lot down, but just some words, pretending to scribble. I wrote poems in faculty meetings. Why would she, who was always overloaded with work, spend her precious time following a petty discussion about which three books to buy?

But Alice was a professor, not an assistant: she could and probably wanted to leave a mark by her way of doing her job. So she was probably more interested in the details, she wanted her opinion to matter. No tasks to distract herself from the slowness of other people's thoughts, from their passion for discussing the most obvious things.

Maybe she is tired, maybe the chair's backrest is pressing into her back in a way that makes it hard to breathe. I cannot imagine her starting a fight without being unwell in some sense. Or, the most likely solution, something personal was going on. Not with chairman Pearl, but with whoever was teaching Classical Civilizations I. If I have to write how Alice's chest tightens up, how she ashes on the table or better: her papers while gesturing and pointing to that body across from her, that body enfolded in checkered fabric—pale blue and white—, if I have to write her rage and insistence, then there must be displeasure of some sort. A conflict which is not spoken of now, but which is major. Like: She had hoped to be teaching the course, but somebody else got it easily, or with a lot of effort. Or: She had wanted to go on sabbatical earlier (it was postponed because of the war, she says in a letter to Sundwall³), but one of her colleagues complained or didn't want to support her and thus she had to stay. I'd even seed a sentence in that earlier, actual event, the other person saying something like: "So yes, I can tip the scales. And you can't do a thing about it." The other person being more than one head taller, with a flimsy moustache. It would be easy to involve a broken heart or dented ego in this, but I have a strong feeling that Alice was too smart or busy to let something like that happen. Maybe this other person had been appointed Associate Professor before her, after much less time working at Brooklyn College⁴. And Alice had complained, either officially or in confidence and somehow they heard about it.

In a letter from March 3 1937 to Professor Pearl (BCF), Alice apologises for not once being able to think first and then talk: “I must some day learn not to say things first and then think them over later”. She has criticised Pearl, she writes, without intent. The conversation must have been about proctoring exams and she had refused to do it, because she had had to do it a couple of months earlier—which ruined her plans for taking her mother on vacation. “I realize now that you were quite right. Things being what they are, I am the only one who is free and available at that time. When I spoke I only remembered the entrance-exam. Proctoring I had to stay for at the beginning of the term prevented my mother from taking the vacation she needed badly since Father died. I didn’t say anything then because the assignment was fair, and I shouldn’t have said anything to-day.”

I encountered this impulsive, somewhat careless side only in the Brooklyn College File. Maybe the late, frustrated letters to Myres are an echo of it, too. But then there’s the pain taking over her body. In 1937 or 1945, there is no known illness. There’s just a woman in her thirties who seems to deal rather unflinchingly with things, unfazed by other people’s status or position. Maybe she was being a pain, maybe she knew it too. But she had her opinions or arguments, and why not make the others hear them?

Now the backrest of the chair is slightly rounded and soft, and Alice leans against it. She's lighting a cigarette and she speaks without looking up. She collects tobacco crumbs from the table with the tip of her right index finger and carelessly throws them on the floor.

"Why can't you buy the books yourself, like most of us do with our salary?"

"As I said they should be at hand for the students to consult, not for me. If I buy them, I would like to take them home at some point."

"Well, you can take them home after the students have read them, right?"

"I own those books already."

"I think the library should buy them, then they have a proper place, not just somewhere in that preparation room where literally anything is lost as soon as one stops holding onto it."

"The slides were found, Alice, and so was the model."

"The fund is meant to subsidise activities or purchases that cannot be covered by any other College fund. We're still waiting for the shelf to be replaced and weren't allowed to buy one from the fund. If it's now possible to do whatever we want with the money, then we should buy a shelf first."

"I don't need a shelf for my class. I need the books."

"I can't do a thing about it, can I?"

It's not a question of power, but of connecting the dots, being consistent. It is not even a discussion or argument. It's a matter of respect: following the rules and acknowledging how things have been done so far. I have wondered a couple of times if Alice might have had some autistic traits. If I imagine her in the conference room, going on and on about the three books and the 39 cents, she has to ignore the uneasiness of those who aren't taking part in the discussion: looking at their hands or at someone else, in their eyes, a train home or a sandwich from the deli. Shuffling, breathing, murmuring. Someone, most likely Pearl, trying to intervene. But she apparently doesn't care, or doesn't grasp the resentment in the room.

To get out of that baleful conference room, I decide to open the report on Kober and Pope. I cut it open carefully. Outside in the rain, two crows fighting over prey. What they try to snatch from each other looks like a rubber band, but probably is something edible. They jump and fly away simultaneously, their doubled weight makes them land on the roof again. Their feathery persistence splayed proud against the light grey afternoon silence.

It takes me a long time to read Helen Pope's letter—so many wings were drawn to the characters that the words keep flying up, settling on another line, just to flit away in the moment I find them.

On January 10 1943, Pope gives Professor Pearl her view of an “atrocious and absolutely unmerited attack” upon her by Miss Kober. On January 8, she had written to the College’s President Harry D. Gideonse about it and now Pearl is in charge of sorting things out. She opens her statement to Pearl with the assessment that she “should not be surprised if she [Kober] is suffering from megalomania. [...] Her ungovernable fits of rage, her insistence on rambling about herself at all times, her utter lack of affection or consideration for others, seem to me pathological.”

In the letter to Gideonse, Helen Pope is less medical but even more denigrating: “I deeply regret troubling you with the following sordid story, but it culminates a series of persecutions covering many years and appearing this term in such unreasonable forms accompanied by such uncontrollable rage that no amount of renunciation and tact on my part, I fear, will longer protect me from even bodily harm.”

The story behind it is that Alice was responsible for the department’s collection of slides and the projection equipment in room 2408, “the only department room with dark shades” (letter from Alice Kober to Joseph Pearl in January 1943, in which she gives him her view of the incident as asked to) and that Helen Pope used this room with the Greek Club without reserving it properly in advance. She sent Alice’s class, who were supposed to meet in 2408, away. When Alice walked by that room on her way to her office to get “chalk, my class cards and some other material I needed because of the unexpected change in plans”, Helen Pope told her that Professor Pearl had given her permission to use the room. Alice answered “in just about the words she [Pope] quoted in her letter that this was not the first time that she had done a thing of this kind, and that I considered her action unethical.” Alice, in her statement points out that, yes, the procedure around the slides and the projection room may not be practical, but couldn’t be avoided as long as there were no duplicates and only one room in which the light could be darkened—and that the department had accepted it in a vote.

“Then I turned and went to my office. She followed me, and while I was unlocking the office door, began to insist that she was quite willing to give up the room to me. [...] I told her that I did not wish to discuss the matter any further at that time. This is probably represented in her letter by the words ‘I won’t talk’, which I am certain I did not use. I did not see any point in any further discussion. I thought then, and I still think, that Professor Pope was fully aware that she was in the wrong and that she understood my position clearly. I did not feel justified in wasting any more class time on what was, after all, a fairly trivial matter.”

Alice’s tone is factual and consolidated. She suggests that maybe for Helen Pope, “the fact that she was my teacher when I was a Freshman at Hunter College makes it a little hard for her to understand that I am no longer a child, and cannot be expected to have the same attitude of respectful admiration for whatever she does. I see no reason why she should hate me for it.”

I am the chalk you carry, I am the paper you put up, I am the darkness soon to saturate the seminar room. I am the echo of your steps in the hall: a slow staccato, headed straight to common sense.

I am yet another solution to write that scene, the grotesque quarrel about buying those books. It has nothing to do with ego, with conflict, let alone with love. Not even autism. I am a formality which isn't a shell, but has soft, checkered flesh. A spine even, nerves and capillary tubes.

Maybe you just liked to stick to the rules, maybe it's as simple as that. Rules not as hollow constraints, but as rooms to live in. And it would make sense, wouldn't it: your work being so methodical, so consistent, no matter how complicated or exhausting the process to follow your methods might have been? You did it because you had decided to do it. The motivation was that it was necessary⁵. You didn't need anything else, no assertion or human softness like gratitude or some other reward. The price was to know that you carried things out the way they ought to be carried out. And thus you were unquestionably a part of the system, the culture your parents had chosen for you. A culture and a time of people arriving, staying, building futures and hopes. Doing things the way they were supposed to be done, I'd like to imagine, meant on a level below the linoleum of everyday life, to belong, to have roots.

I am sitting a couple of chairs to the right, next to the fjord. I can't see you from here, just your hands: your fingers are short, the skin is a bit dry. You prick the tip of your pencil into your ball of the thumb, leave it for a second or two, and when you pull it out there is a dot. It takes a moment until it is gone. You continue without looking or noticing. You let them talk about their books and you know that you are very close to reminding them of the regulatory framework regarding the department's funding, and I think they also know. That one teacher with the ill-fitting haircut is throwing glances at you. Probably they thought at the beginning, when you joined Brooklyn College, your strictness would pass. Like every other young teacher, you'd lose that part of your passion in the first couple of years which turn against you one way or another. But you didn't. You didn't lose, you gained, because you felt that someone had to be an example. Somebody had to care.

After all, you called Helen Pope an "unethical woman"—not unorganised or impolite or confused. Her lack of respect for procedure agreed on was a moral misdoing, rocking the very ground on which the College was supposed to stand. Not least undermining your responsibility and credibility.

It's like boys with a stick: they laugh and poke and laugh and poke the side of a cat until it gets mad and throws its claws lickety-split through the air. Then, the boys try not to cry but in fact, inside, they do. Outside, there's a one-upmanship in hating the cat. That is what is happening around this table right now, look, each one of them wants to be bold and pokes again, look at them, look how they are prancing. I respect you deeply for being the thing in fur that they are afraid of and thus dislike. I wouldn't fight for the rules like you did, I wouldn't be willing to let them trigger my rage and determinedness. But I live in another time, in different circumstances. And I am not strong in conflict either. You live in war time, a man's time. Their own words are the only thing you have at hand to rebuke them with.

And I think I sense this same admiration in the secretary who turns the pages of her notebook as if she was shutting a door in a stranger's apartment. She might not agree with you on the specifics, but in general she does see your point, gleefully.

Helen Pope, as a matter of fact, is not a man or a boy nor did she try to poke. But, let's be honest, reading the second letter enclosed in the envelope, she seems to suffer from persecutorial mania or some other psychosis. She mentions the FBI and a thing with her car in the first letter, the one to president Gideonse, and that she hadn't reported you but a German man, and thought you'd hate her because you thought she might have reported you. You write you have never even seen her car and don't know at all to what she might be alluding. In the second letter, Pope goes totally astray after announcing that she wanted to write about departmental problems: Policemen appear in unrecognisable formations, they ask questions about an accident and the car and then the letter is over without clarifying anything. Even though her accusations are similar to those made by Meyer Reinhard, it seems that she was very confused or in a bad place. She deforms your cloying dutifulness into a threat of aggression which surely is unfounded. Hardcore discussions, yes. Bodily harm, no way.

Pearl concludes his investigation with the recommendation to Gideonse to not take further steps, as the talks he had with both women involved seemed to have brought them closer together. That's the end of it, no more complaints or letters about her or you. You, the cat that pokes back.⁶

1 “I was just one of that lucky group of Latin students who, during less troublesome times some six or seven years ago, enjoyed Horace and Plautus and Terence under your capable guidance in the evening sessions at Brooklyn College. I wanted you to know how much it meant to me when you carried us through so that we had sufficient credit to consider Latin our major—despite the fact that you no longer wanted to teach at night. I hope this letter reaches you because I do want you to know, even at this late date, that I was one student who never believed or considered that Latin was ‘not practical’ and that whatever love and understanding I have for the classics, I attribute for the most part to you.” (letter from Mrs. Lawrence Green to AK, quoted in her Guggenheim application CV in the section ‘letters’, PASP, Box 56.6).

2 “Now [during the sabbatical] I am devoting fourteen hours a day to Minoan, enjoying the beautiful autumn weather. I hate to admit it, but I’m beginning to miss College already.” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 19 September 1946, Brooklyn College File).

“Es muss ja ganz wunderbar sein, wenn das Lehren endlich um ist, und man kann sich sagen dass man nur zu Lernen hat. Ich habe ein Jahr gehabt, und, obwohl ich viel Freude von meine Stunden als Lehrerin habe, ist es doch viel schöner nur meine eigene Arbeit zu corrigieren.” (AK to JS, 3 June 1947, PASP, Box 58)
“It must be wonderful when teaching is finally over and one can say that all that is left is learning. I had one year and even though the students bring me a lot of joy, it is a lot nicer to be correcting just my own work.)

“Here at Brooklyn College there is no connection between my scholarly work and my teaching. We’re beginning to teach only literature in translation—and to me this is anathema. I get so tired of pointing out that Gilbert Murray isn’t Euripides, and that Catullus is a good poet, even if the translations are—and I’m being charitable—second rate.” (AK to SJM, 30 January 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

“I’ve been home [back from Oxford] almost a month now, and haven’t done as much as I could do in a couple of days of uninterrupted work. It is annoying to have to stop what I am doing at 11 at night, often right in the middle of something, get ready for bed so that I can get up for school in time, then find that committee meetings, and unexpected visitors, keep me from continuing for a couple of days.” (AK to SJM, 14 October 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

3 “I do not want to make a mystery of my trip, especially to you, I wrote that I was on leave this year from Brooklyn College. This was a sabbatical leave, postponed because of the war. In addition, however, the Guggenheim Foundation, which gives grants for scholarly research, gave me a Fellowship for studying the Minoan inscriptions, with the understanding that I would write to Blegen for permission to examine the Pylos material, and Myres for that from Knossos.” (AK to JS, 25 February 1947, PASP, Box 58).

4 After being an instructor at Brooklyn College from 1930-1935, Alice Kober was appointed Assistant Professor in 1936 (see Guggenheim application CV). In a letter

to Franklin Daniel, discussing her financial situation at the college in comparison to the professorship at Penn, she says she is doing well for a woman and that her promotion to Associate Professor is overdue (AK to FD, 22 September 1947, PASP, Box 57). It finally was approved by the Board of Higher Education on 23 January 1950 (see letter from Secretary Carrie K Medalie to AK, 24 January 1950, Brooklyn College File).

In the same file there are also two forms indicating that the department had recommended Alice's promotion in September 1947, effective on 1 January 1949, and in September 1948, effective on 1 January 1950.

Based on a letter from the President of the College, Harry D. Gideonse, in November 1945, Alice Kober must have raised the matter of her promotion to him in 1945: "I have followed for some years the principle that the President does not see members of the Faculty on promotion matters when the Faculty committees and sub-committees are engaged with the same subject matter. An alternative policy would simply lead to a great confusion of functions." (Harry Gideonse to AK, 8 November 1945, PASP, Box 58).

5 "This is taking the long way to a solution, but since forty years of short-cuts hasn't produced very much, I think perhaps ten more years of doing it the hard way may be better." (AK to SJM, 30 January 1948, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

6 Alice Kober mentions Helen Pope two years later to Johannes Sundwall—apparently it had been her who had put Sundwall and Kober in touch—so she hadn't retired and interaction and maybe even friendliness was possible between the two women: "To-day I saw Mrs. Pope, who is, as I think you know, one of my colleagues, and thanked her for sending you my address. I do not think I would ever have had the courage to write you otherwise." (AK to JS, 22 September 1947, PASP, Box 58).

*The Most Unusual Student I Ever Knew:
David McClymont*

She swallowed a moan and kept walking. The pain made her heart beat faster. How could such a sharp stone happen to be in her shoe now, after almost eight hours at the school? It was too late in the summer for bees. Alice shifted her weight a little. There it was again, this time the pain was inaudible, its pastel pink swashing through Alice's leg and torso. Only a couple of more steps and she could sit down on the bench next to the entrance and fumble the malicious shiver out.

"I was hoping to see you," a young man said, not in school uniform, holding the door for Alice. "Are you alright?"

Alice knew him, but from a long time ago, longer than she could have ascertained. Their eyes met across the Atlantic Ocean, no wind, no waves.

"David," she said, "Mister McClymont."

He put his arms around her like a child, except that he was almost two heads taller than her, but when Alice's face, her whole body soft and unprepared for gravity, touched his chest he stepped back again. Maybe it hadn't been an embrace, maybe he had caught her from tripping, maybe the pain had made her faint for a split second.

"I'm sorry," David said, "I was going to drop a note for you, Miss Kober." Like he had done as a student in the breaks between classes with apples and pencils or pieces of chalk, he'd present an envelope plucked out of the air. If she had said something, it would have been the sentence that she had carried around in the hollow of her mouth for almost four

years: I cannot imagine having a child, but I can imagine losing one. This is what I've learnt from war.

"Excuse me..." Alice said¹, limping to the bench next to the steps and sitting down—the pain bright red now, raging in her body like lava—untying her laces, taking off her shoe, feeling the breeze through the stockings, seeing her toes as a solid slab of extremity through the nylon. She shook the stone out of her shoe, almost disappointed at its size, then breathing.

"I am very glad you returned safely," Alice said, "you look well."

David knew she was being nice, he looked better than many others, maybe, but not well. Even his mother had only recognised him after a second. Which made him, in return, not recognise her too—after all, he had never seen the face she has for strangers before. After three days, she still was touching his cheeks, his arms, his back, whenever he or she was around, checking the ripeness of her body's fruit. Sure, he had lost weight, sure, his hair was almost shaved off, sure, he had grown older. But he had no scars, no crutches, no loss of tissue or bone. You just need to eat a little, son, she said and blew her nose. Sometimes, it was almost impossible to believe that home was a place that had once existed.

"I came to see if I'd recognise my own old life," he said, pointing vaguely at the school. It is his voice, thought Alice, hoarse and cracking, as if he had just stopped screaming for a very long time.

"Good thing nothing ever changes around here. Just the paper got thinner and thinner."

"I know," David looked at the envelope "it doesn't take a magician anymore to make it disappear."

6 October 1945 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Mary Swindler

I wonder if, offhand, you would know the name of a good university which offers graduate work in numismatics. A really remarkable young man, without question the most unusual student I ever knew, has just been discharged from the army after four years of service, almost three of them overseas in active combat. Even as a freshman he was interested in numismatics, and his greatest ambition in life was to join the staff of some museum. He has come back, as some of the best of them do, convinced that his years of fighting have made it impossible for him to go ahead with the academic career he planned. I have tried to convince him that he should take advantage of the GI Bill of Rights, but since I know very little about numismatics, I could not make any specific suggestions. He really deserves every consideration, not for any sentimental reasons, as a veteran, but because he has a remarkable mind, and a tireless enthusiasm for his subject. I would be very grateful if you could tell me if there is any way he could prepare himself for the work he loves, or, conversely, if there are no openings in his chosen field, or—at any rate, how to go about finding out.

“You cannot have a student work for you. Not here. In our house.”

“David is a former student, Muttchen.” And it is my house, Alice said without any actual words, just by placing her hands flat on the polished walnut table looking out of the window. The Ericsons’² little boy had started to balance rocks again. Katharina set her teacup down, also without any actual words.

“It’s the right thing to do,” Alice said, “just as simple as that.”

“You know the neighbours. There will be stories.”

“Finally a story about me that involves a man, I thought everybody would enjoy this.”

Katharina got up so quickly from the table that her chair almost tipped over, just standing there, without anything to carry into the kitchen or back, her hands in mid air.

“I’m sorry, Muttchen. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“You never mean to upset, but you do. You cannot always make the world to your liking. And even if you could, you would still cause unnecessary trouble for yourself by inviting a young man to your house. You don’t know what he thinks you are offering.”

“A job, Muttchen. I am offering a very modest part time job to a brave man who has fought for our country and now can’t find a position he’s suited for. A job that I’d have to do myself otherwise.” Alice poured herself and her mother another cup of tea. The fight was over. Katharina never said anything more than once. And even that only if it was unavoidable. Before Ferrie died, he had reasoned with the children. He had

never felt that they knew the world better than their parents. He wasn't ashamed of his English. He wasn't ashamed of not knowing all the things they learned in their long school days. Before Ferrie died, it was almost never inevitable to say all that has to be said, all those angular words that made Katharina's ears ring.

Alice looked at her mother, her blouse with the little flowers that keep repeating themselves in an asymmetrical pattern, and involuntarily smiled when she tried to imagine offering herself to David. All her mind could come up with was the two of them in the classroom, Alice's fingers warm and slightly stiff, coated in chalk. There's a table, and herself and David are standing on either side. They talk and his eyes have their lissomeness from before the war, and he plucks a coin from the nothingness in between them.

"You could at least ask Willy to be here, too," said Katharina with almost no voice. She pulled the chair towards her and sat down, wood creaking. She had the feeling that her hands shook, but she kept them under the table and didn't check. Just like when she was a child, trying to hide from the parents the red streaks the teacher's ruler had left for whatever wrongdoing of that day.

"I'm sorry, Muttchen," said Alice, "I really am, but there's no other option here. I can't do the work in the college and this is the only other space available. You'll like him, he is polite and his voice is soft." Katharina nodded. Outside, the Ericsons' boy stretched his chubby left arm, his spine, he balanced on his toes to place a rock on the stack almost a head higher than him.

“Don’t you think it will be a bit strange to have student work for you, Aliceliebes? Here. In our house.”

“Because of what the neighbours might think, or because it is strange to help out a good man who has fought for our country?”

“You know what I mean.” Katharina stirred her tea, rotating the spoon itself as well, but in the opposite direction. A silver satellite in the orbit of a brass-coloured universe.

“No, quite honestly, I don’t know what you mean, it’s nothing you or anybody else has to worry about.” There is this bond between a mother and a daughter which, to Alice, is a translucent string of rubber. A type of resilience which Alice used to find reassuring. Then, she had had a dream one night after they had visited aunt Anna and her daughters: Alice was to give birth but somehow couldn’t, and in the end someone (her mother? her aunt? the sea?) had to tear the half-stuck infant out of her womb, but it wasn’t so much a child as a jellyfish with confusing tentacles still attached to Alice’s middle. When she woke up, like having been hit with a flashlight, she felt how the thing had been dangling between her inner thighs before her mother? her aunt? the sea? had come to her aid. Then, like someone adjusting the radio for a crisper signal, the feeling switched to the salty pain of those female line’s hands wrenching at her. It got weaker, but never really left. Probably that is true for most feelings, Alice thought, the gentle ones and the regrettable ones. The bond between herself and her mother was always on the stretchy side, so that Alice had to lean the opposite way in order to stay

where she was. Therefore Katharina had to lean, too, and the incline prevented the whole arrangement from collapsing.

“I know what you’re afraid of. But let me assure you, David isn’t interested in women of any kind. So you will be safe with him around, too.” Alice knew it was childish, but she enjoyed mildly shocking her mother, making her inhale sharply through her teeth, then to hold her breath and hope for a misunderstanding.

“I spend my whole life with these young people,” said Alice, “and I have plenty of time to observe them, whether I intend to or not. And, believe me, while David is sweet and confident with me, it’s too much for him to hold a sheet of paper when a certain Mister is in the room. His ears burn up.”

“Is that so?” said Katharina and finally put the spoon down. She took a sip and tried not to cough. Sweet and confident. Maybe, she thought, it wasn’t a bad idea after all, that young man coming over. Maybe if Alice got used to someone sweet and confident it could only help, the desire to be with someone, to enjoy the advantages of matrimony. Katharina defended her daughter’s life choices prompted by a university career against any criticism, but as deep as this respect was her trust in nature’s habit of joining the female kind with the male to make a whole. So when someone, which had happened more frequently lately, implied that Alice might not like men at all, Katharina made up a story. Now she could tell the one of the young, sweet and upright young man who, despite Alice’s assertions he wasn’t interested in her, adored her in the most affectionate, abiding way. The whole business of Alice employing him simply would slip Katharina’s mind.

“Yes, it is,” said Alice.

4 September 1946 ———PASP
Alice Kober to Franklin Daniel

Incidentally, since you are connected with a museum I have a request to make. If you should hear of any opening for a young man (I know they're scarcer than hen's teeth) I have a candidate, a former student of mine, now about 26, and a veteran. He was an expert on numismatics even while he was still in college—he taught me all I know about Greek and Roman coins. He really would be an extremely useful person in a museum. He is extremely accurate and careful, letters beautifully, has a genius for classification, can work with French, German and Spanish, Latin, and Greek and Hebrew inscriptions. At the moment he is helping me with the preliminary classification of Lydian, Lycian and Carian. He just has to be shown how to do something once, and then can be trusted to work on his own. He was taken by the army as soon as he got out of college, so he has no institutional experience. He has done some classification of coins and other ancient objects for private collectors in New York. If by any chance you should know of any museum work anywhere, he would, I sincerely think, be a find. I know his work best in ancient archeology and epigraphy, but his coins have made him familiar with more modern things as well. His name and address:

David J. McClymont

569 Tenth St.

Brooklyn 15, N.Y.

Please don't think I go about making a pest of myself for students. He is the only one I have ever tried to get a job for, and that is because he really deserves it.

It was a strange thing: Whenever David was there, working at the living room table, Alice's body had a strong desire to get up from her chair, to walk out of the room to the kitchen or the backyard and to do something there. Mostly she decided to smoke, because it seemed the most natural thing to do, but it could have been something completely else—tending to the dahlias³ that had been weighed down during the afternoon's rain, looking at the Ericsons' boy, trying to befriend an overly venturesome squirrel, examining her mother's latest and already abandoned garden project, which involved a couple of feet of chicken wire. Alice's unfamiliar urge to move wasn't a sign of nervousness, as a casual bystander might have assumed, smoothing over confusion caused by the former soldier, student, and calligrapher and quiet classifications worker, who would accept one cup of coffee and nothing else, no matter how much he was pressured. It was more of a warm relief that the work was being taken care of and didn't depend on Alice's attention and her presence, which let her stroll like a child who had thrown their kite in the sky, with fullest belief in the blueness and the string. Sometimes even the front porch was Alice's sky: she sat on the steps and saw David's back, slightly rounded from bending over the table. She tried to imagine her own back in the cinnamon-coloured cardigan over there, but she couldn't make herself appear on the other side of the window. It was him there and her here, under a ray of sunlight, calm and content. Only when David looked up and turned his head, as if he was looking for her, did she feel bad for abandoning him. She also felt bad for paying him so little, for

never being able to do it without the awkwardness that is so characteristic of all monetary affairs. The bills waited on the desk when he arrived and the question “have you seen the envelope?” was Alice’s way of saying that for the afternoon, time was up.

“Yes, I did,” he would say continuing with what he was doing, eventually stating that he didn’t have anything better to do anyway—sitting at home and being informed by his younger sisters about which Hollywood actor or actress had said or done this, or that it wasn’t exactly what he hoped life had prepared for him.

“The world just needs time to rearrange itself,” Alice said.

“But if history teaches us one thing, it’s that time is not what humankind needs to refrain from desolation,” muttered David. Some days, all the knowledge about the Greeks and the Roman Empire and everything from the past tilted over to smother his bones, unimaginably white amid all the tenacious substance. What difference was there in knowing that everything had been there already? Why dig it up, why put it in a display case, why learn it by heart? Maybe the way of the world could only be changed if there were bones in the heart, bones that could be buried and eventually washed up, bones as proof that for millennia, this was what kept matters on earth ticking over: the heart. It is even in the letters, thought David: earth and heart, why doesn’t everyone else see this?

“You will find a position that suits your skills. Maybe Franklin Daniel of the University Museum at Penn knows of something.” Alice put her hand on David’s shoulder and withdrew it when she realised that it wasn’t finding her mother’s softness covered in knitted wool, but a sharp tenseness, covered in shirt cotton.

“Maybe. Thank you again for writing on my behalf, you didn’t have to do that.” As if David didn’t know who Franklin Daniel was, given that there was always at least one of his letters waiting for Alice’s reply.

“I wish I could do more,” said Alice, offering David a cigarette. He took one, threw it in the air and caught it with his mouth. Alice laughed, as he had hoped she might.

“If the worst comes to the worst, I’ll put up a show to earn a living.”

2 March 1947 —————PASP
Alice Kober to Johannes Sundwall

Die schöne Überschrift hat einer meiner früheren Studenten geschrieben. Er ist ein eifriger Numismatiker und für ihn ist der Name Sundwall mit attischen Münzen fest verbunden. Er kam zufallsweise auf Besuch, als ich die Adresse schrieb, und bat um die Ehre, sie zu schreiben.

(The beautiful title was printed by a former student of mine. He is a keen numismatist and for him the name Sundwall is firmly tied to Attic coins. He happened to visit me when I was about to write the address and asked for the honour of printing it.)

Now that her bed was empty, David remembered how much it had puzzled him to see the sitting room turned into a bedroom. Her bed had remained upstairs of course, but the couch was covered with pastel-coloured linen and a duvet. The eggshell finish nightstand in the corner between window and wall, holding a glass of water, pill bottles, boxes, books and letters was nothing short of an obscenity. It was as if Alice was exposed from the inside, as if the line along which they had cut her open half a year ago, had suddenly sprung open. Where mastered decency had been, nothing was left but a gash.

She had been frail when she returned from the hospital, but she was always properly dressed, waiting for him downstairs when he came to work. She had to recover from the cure, in her words.⁴ David wasn't sure if she was aware that the x-rays had absorbed all the colour from her face. Even her clothes seemed faded, but David knew that was impossible. She would sit at the far side of the desk and work more or less silently on correcting the manuscripts Myres had sent her. Bursting out from time to time about unforgivable mistakes, pointing them out to David, waiting for his consent, then holding her breath for a while. Her mother made tea like she used to, but now she didn't only put it on the side board, but also poured it out. Katharina Kober looked more like a mother to David now, strangely enough like a young mother, with eyes ready to check on her toddler, wobbling along.

The bed in the sitting room was a confession of evanescent energy—probably also of Katharina Kober’s, who must have assisted her all these months more than David had first assumed.

“I just can’t walk upstairs,” said Alice, “right now.” Her hands fell into her lap, her palms turned up. Her eyes wandered through the room. Maybe even into the kitchen, where her toiletries stood on the shelf that used to hold the good tea set some distant relative had sent over from Hungary for Willy’s birth. Whenever there had been an occasion worthy of the good tea set, either no one thought of it or Katharina didn’t have time between the excitement and final preparations to get rid of the oily dust which covered all the pieces. She did clean it before putting it away, looking at the hut in the woods that was painted inside a golden frame. Katharina could smell the woods outside Prague where they had collected the seasons: wild garlic, blueberries, mushrooms, and fire wood. She longed, for a moment, to be at home, for Ferry to be alive, Alice to be healthy and sturdy and William to be little. She longed, for a moment, to smash that stupid little cup that didn’t know anything, but she simply didn’t have the heart to do it.

“I don’t want her to get up,” said Katharina Kober with a hard voice and thicker-than-usual German accent. In fact, it sounded more German than English.

“Yes, ma’am,” said David guiltily in the entrance, his jacket in his hand. “And I don’t want her to read the letters, it makes her upset.”

“Please, Muttchen, don’t talk about me like that, I can hear you, you know?”

“She is very weak.”⁵ This time Katharina Kober whispered and hid her sentence with the rustling of her bags. “I will be back in an hour,” she said, back at regular volume again. Then she gently squeezed David’s

forearm, and he had no idea what that meant. But before he could ask or read her face, she walked out of the door.

“She won’t leave me alone,” explained Alice, wrapped in a crocheted blanket, sitting on the recliner. David sat on his usual chair by the table. The last couple of afternoons had been pure visits and no work, which couldn’t keep Alice from putting out the envelope and forcing David to take it. She didn’t care that she insulted him with the money. She wanted things to be as they had once been. Paying him meant she was employing him, which meant she was doing her work. It didn’t matter that none of that was true. In fact, it wasn’t even clear whether or not the college would find a way to keep paying her salary, as she had been on sick leave for so long.⁶ David contemplated putting the envelope in the letterbox after having left the house, but he was afraid Alice would find it there and feel not only sick, but disrespected. So he took the envelope (and those to come) with him, stacking them on the window sill in his room. He could give them back to her when she was well again. Or, if she wouldn’t accept them, buy her one of these household-sized paper cutting machines he’d seen in the printing shop down the street.

“You know, when there was a fair in Prague, the women would go to the gypsy caravans and have their palms read. They didn’t believe in what they were told, after all it was just some gypsy gibberish, but still they had to hear it. And over the years they all became experts in future matters and they could feel and see things, too. Don’t believe a word, David, especially not those she was whispering. Would you hand me the stick, please?” She pointed at the walking stick which hung from the doorknob. David’s head turned to the window facing the street, but, of course, her mother was gone. He looked at Alice, at how small she was. He didn’t beg her to rest, to stay in that dowdy blanket for as long as she needed to recover, because he didn’t want to embarrass her and because he knew that no order ever goes away by begging.

David would later rewind this scene, her voice, her words and play them over and over again. But he couldn't see her face, couldn't recall if her eyes had a conspiring glare or if there had been a laugh in some far corner of her voice. She played a trick on him and it was so good that he envied her.

When he was helping Katharina to sort out her things, to decide what should go to the centre and what shouldn't he was shaking and she told him all the family moments she could remember. In the beginning, the stories were sparked by letters she read, books she found, or some other little object (she knew where every stone on Alice's desk had come from—or she was as good a cheat as her daughter), but after a while she just sat there, never in Alice's chair or recliner, her eyes half closed and talked. One day it was mostly about Prague, and even though David knew that the conversation didn't need any comment or question from him, he suddenly needed to know if Katharina really had foreseen Alice's death, if all the talk about recovery, about being better in two, three weeks or months had been merely a charade to keep her in good spirits. And if yes: why? Why not tell her the truth, the only thing she was ever interested in? Literally, the only thing Alice was dying to find. David knew that she would have wanted to stack the material herself. Probably she would have made an inventory or written instructions for the material to be used, how and by whom. She would have wanted to know.

“Had Alice ever been to one of those gypsy fairs?” he asked at a point of Katharina's story that seemed about right. She followed her own thought for a couple more sentences, then she returned to David's question like a missed a turn.

“What gypsies?”

“Those fairs in Prague where the gypsies read palms.”

Katharina looked at him with bewilderment. “I might be an old woman from the old world, but I do not believe in any mumbo-jumbo whatsoever.”

David tried to explain, but just caused more and more confusion. He wanted to drop the topic, just return to the monologue, but he had Katharina confused so thoroughly that he wasn't sure if her head was alright. She had to handle a lot, and she was indeed an old woman from the old world: maybe she just needed a rest. Only when he was on his way home that night did it occur to him that Alice had made up the whole story to undermine her mother. He stopped and for the first time in weeks he felt like standing up tall.

Look, Alice, I found him for you. I guess you'd like to know that he managed to find a position in a museum. A museum of money, which seems about the perfect match for a numismatist. The picture itself is quite silly, I agree. But apparently marketing is everything. I wonder how the motif was agreed upon. Was it a given that the curator would be photographed for the article? And then David was clowning about while the photographer got ready, and he suggested doing the same thing on the actual picture? It doesn't matter, I know, but that's how I look at all the original material, I can't help it. Trying to find a hint, even though I don't need a hint in this case, as nobody except me knows the link between you and this balding guy hiding behind a fan of bills. Anyway I couldn't stop searching for David McClymont for a couple of days, just because I know you cared so much about him, I needed to make sure he was alright.



Image 10: David J. McClymont—Reproduction from an original print of the United Press International archive, which I found on Ebay.

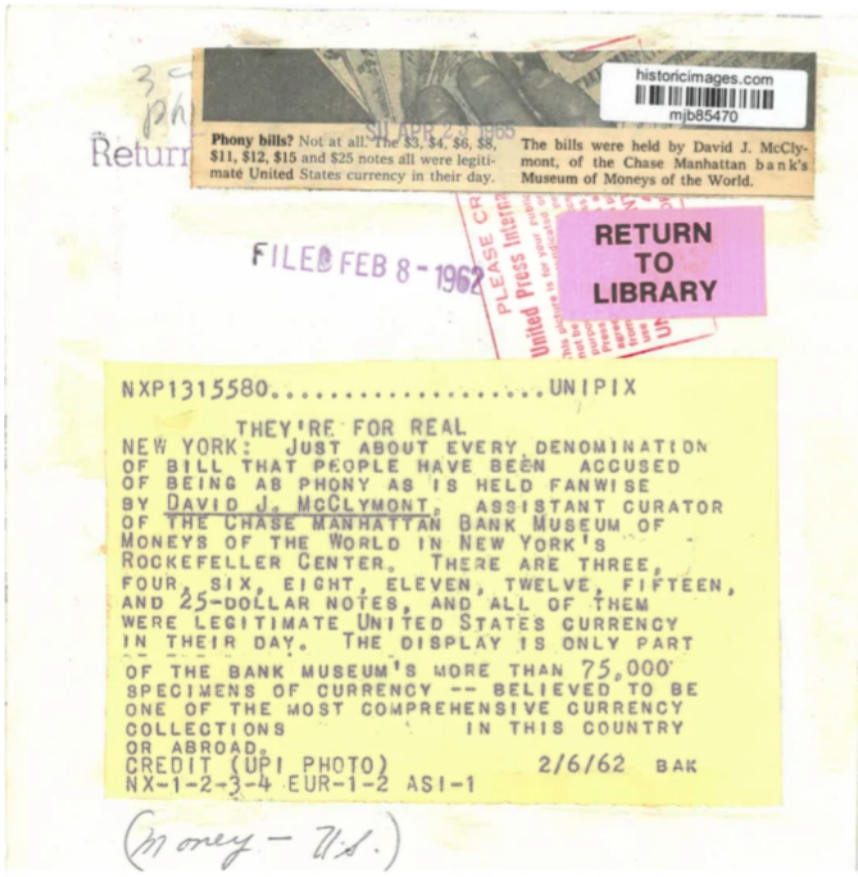


Image 11: Back of the above print from the United Press International archive

“I’m not up yet.” When would they finally accept that he didn’t have a job that required him to get up, and thus could just as well sleep in the mornings. And didn’t his sister, whose soft hand had just stopped touching his door, have her own life to put in order, like, finding a husband and not just talking about finding one?

“David, it’s the newspaper,” said Clara, “I think it’s something about those signs your former professor worked on. I thought you might want to know about it right away.”

“About what?” David’s life had become a narrow bridge without handrail. And despite the danger, his mother and Clara kept pushing past him, many times a day, for no apparent reason. David looked at the ceiling.

“I think it’s BEEN deciphered.”

“You think it has, or it has been deciphered?” David was already out of bed, putting on pants and a pullover over his pyjamas. What was wrong with these young girls, why couldn’t they be precise just for once? David opened the door. Clara presented him with a newspaper like with a relic, placed on both her hands, palms turned up.

“A guy from England did it,” she said.

“British Architect, in His Leisure Time Solves the Script Riddle and Shows That Early Greeks Had Ability to Write⁷,” David read, and the tablet depicted at the top of the article looked like a knife’s blade.

“That’s impossible,” he said, taking the newspaper from Clara’s hands.

He read and reread the article several times. Alice wasn't mentioned, not one single word about her articles or her achievements. Why would they omit this information? After all, she had been a New York resident and this was the New York Times, for god's sake.

"She's not mentioned once," David said, throwing the newspaper on the kitchen table with enough momentum to make it slide right to the floor. "Has everybody lost their sense of decency? Why wouldn't they show respect for her work?"

Clara shook her head. Of course she had no answer, she was the young one. The girl.

"Do you want a coffee?" she asked, but David was already putting on his boots and his jacket. He combed his hair in the hall mirror, using the soft brush that hung from a little string on a silver hook, ready to hand for dusting off coats. Clara thought she should have waited with the news, maybe she should have hidden the paper, but with David it was hard to know what pleased him and what upset him. All those moods. His dark carapace, as their mother said when he wasn't in the room. Clara closed the door, which bounced open after David had slammed it shut.

"Sir, you sure you want to buy all of today's Times?" The man at the kiosk looked at David with eyes that seemed to be remote-controlled from a force hidden to the spectator.

"Yes," David said.

"There're still stacks of 'em left, Sir."

"Actually, could you do me a favour and put these copies here away?"

"But if they ain't there, nobody's going to ask for the Times. It's like with dogs. They forget what they don't see."

"It's just. Well. Forget it."

"You're not buying anything? Sir?"

David had to turn away in order not to sob. Alice was dead. Even though he had known that there was no way she still could have solved the problem, this was irreversible. Now, all her work, all her time was rendered obsolete. With this article, Alice Kober had vanished once and for all. This Ventris guy had done it in his spare time. What about her spare time? What about all those years of working on the deciphering after work? David imagined this Ventris guy's face, probably round and glossy with joy. David imagined driving the tablet right into his fastidious heart. To hell with him. It should have been Alice. He wiped his face dry with his sleeve as he stood in front of her house. There was light on in the kitchen, but he didn't see Katharina or Willy. What did he want to tell them? If they hadn't seen it yet, all the better for them. But probably there would be some neighbours or relatives or whoever who would remember and cut it out for them. Killing Alice once again. David went up the stairs, then didn't knock. He noticed that the sun was shining, inappropriately bright. In the grass which marked the passage to the plot next door were tiny purple flowers.

Would she be happy? That, after all, there was a solution? He remembered a passage from her letters in which she wrote that she'd continue her work until someone figured it out. But she had been too modest all her life. She was interested in the knowledge on a superordinate level, as if it didn't have anything to do with power, with career, with fame. The fame that this Brit had taken from her now. David imagined him sitting over breakfast, the newspaper folded on the side, eating eggs or sausages, pretending that it was a morning like any other. David hit the wooden pole with his hand a couple of times. It hurt and he could breathe again. All those people at all their breakfast tables didn't know the truth.

"Mister McClymont," Katharina said. "I didn't expect you."

“Miss Kober, forgive me, I also didn’t expect to be here.” David’s knuckles started to bleed reluctantly. “I was...”

“You want tea?” Katharina asked, holding the door open for him.

“I don’t want to be a burden,” David said.

“Nonsense,” said Katharina.

Now that he was there he couldn’t pretend not to have seen the article. After Katharina had poured him a cup, he inched the newspaper towards her with the good hand. She read it motionlessly, didn’t say a word, just pushed it back to him.

“I always picture her in England,” Katharina said. “Do you remember how happy she was there?” David nodded. “Sometimes I think that I have to do this or that before her return. Washing her sheets. Getting sweets. Cleaning her window. I don’t tell Willy. I don’t tell anybody. Maybe she had helped this man. In some way.”

Then there was a thick silence, like a rope, twining around their memories. Outside the sun was still unaware that a parting was taking place. This time it was final.

1 “I’m not very good at expressing emotions, especially those I feel as deeply as this.” (AK to Joseph Pearl, 17 January 1949, Brooklyn College File) What Pearl did that Alice Kober is so grateful about is not explicitly mentioned, probably it has to do with arranging her (paid) sick leave or the letter is dated incorrectly and it is regarding her promotion, of which she was informed by a letter from the secretary on 13 January 1950 (see Brooklyn College File).

“I cannot really say what I mean. But I thank you from the bottom of my heart.” (AK to her colleagues at Brooklyn College, 20 November 1948, Brooklyn College File) Alice thanks her colleagues for the “lovely gift [...] seeing it will always remind me of what wonderful colleagues I have.”

2 “Wenn ich etwas nicht verstehe, kann ich meine Nachbarn, die Ericsons, um Hilfe bitten.” (AK to JS, 1 January 1948, PASP, Box 58)
 (“If I don’t understand something I can ask my neighbours, the Ericsons, for help.”).

3 “We seem to have either a deluge or a drought, and be in danger of suffering from frost-bite and heat prostration simultaneously. The dahlias in our garden started blooming at the end of June. They obviously didn’t know what time of the year it was.” (AK to SJM, 29 July 1947, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

4 “My health is, unfortunately, not what it should be. I was again in the hospital for six weeks and just returned home a week ago. I am now on sick leave. I managed to acquire something very unusual, and it took the doctors more than a month to find out what it was—and then they were stumped about a cure. I think I am now on the road to recovery. I hope so. I am not bed-ridden, but am at present house-bound, because 10 weeks in hospitals in the last 12 have weakened my legs so that I cannot manage the stairs. But enough about that.” (AK to SJM, 7 November 1949, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

“I can only work a short time each day. I have been out of school all last year and have to take sick leave till September. My doctors are not too encouraging about an early recovery.” (AK to SJM, 18 February 1949, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

“Now for a progress report. My doctor is extremely pleased with my reaction to the x-rays, and expects to effect a complete destruction of my unfortunate cyst. But it means at least three more weeks in the hospital—which I dread.” (AK to her colleagues at Brooklyn College, 15 October 1949, Brooklyn College File).

“I am still ill. That is, I am still recovering from the cure. I don’t know how much longer it will take. Neither do the doctors.” (AK to SJM, 17 April 1950, Ashmolean Museum, Myres Correspondence).

5 “I’m sorry Mother didn’t bring your letter sooner, but she didn’t want me worried.” (AK to EB, 15 August 1949, PASP, Bennett Correspondence).

6 “During the period of your absence we have been charging the salary of the substitute to the Special City Fund. However, under the regulations of the Board of Higher Education, we may not carry this arrangement beyond the period of sick leave to the credit of the absentee, which, in your case, was 60 days—the maximum allotment. [...] As you may possibly already know, the President is requesting a waiver of the By-Law to provide for an extension of your sick leave from February 1st to June 30th, 1950, with full pay minus the pay of the substitute (\$400 per month) and it is my sincere hope and belief that this will receive favorable action from the Board of Higher Education.” (Thomas E. Coulton, Dean of Administration, to AK, 14 February 1950, Brooklyn College File).

7 New York Times, front page headline, 9 April 1954.

Conclusion

The journey to you, Alice, was, more than I ever would have thought, a journey to myself. A journey to becoming the woman and the female author I want to be. Sometimes I think: the author you wanted me to become. The habit of addressing my thoughts to you, of seeing and judging them the way that I assume you would have seen and judged them, brought an internal voice into existence that is not yours but also not entirely my own. This in-between voice sometimes gently encourages and sometimes vehemently pushes me: who knows how much time I have left to do the work I need to do? How much more comfortable is my situation than yours? What is my equivalent of the decipherment? Where do I want to be or to arrive? The voice questioned me and, at times, this process was deeply unsettling. But trying to find answers made me discover a voice that I hadn't known before, a voice that was unfamiliar and yet mine.

The research planted words and ideas, some of which have already been written and realised, though most of them have not. Even though I'm writing a text titled "Conclusion", on a page with a number much greater than the page count of the books I have written so far, it doesn't feel like this is an ending at all. It is, and I think you'd support this assessment, a beginning. It's the beginning of thinking about how I want to tell your story in a book, for a wider audience. In our mother tongue. With gentle ink.

I am also hoping to write an article for an archaeological audience about the Ventris incident in Oxford. Because this scrap of new knowledge that turned up in between the archives and my writing, unexpected and shiny, is an important piece of evidence for the both of us. For you, because you deserve to be known as the warm and helpful person you were (at least at times). For me because it proves my intuition and my methodology were right: there is knowledge that can be found in writing and fabulating only.

The journey to you was a journey to other people too. I've talked about your life a lot in these last couple of years, and it always seemed to resonate. A dancer from the Netherlands who is involved with native Mexican dance asked me if I was channelling you—contacting your ghost or the ghostly you, to get all the answers I needed, or to be with you. I started to laugh, but he was dead serious (not-so-dead, in fact). I guess you would have laughed at this kind of suggestion, too.

Would you have liked the historic crime novel writer who was, after I told him the story of your life and how Ventris continued your work, quite convinced that you didn't die of cancer, but that Ventris killed you (to prevent you from figuring it out first)? That would cast a wholly different light on the alleged Oxford meeting, wouldn't it? It was quite fascinating to see how differently and instantly my interlocutors appropriated your story and made it theirs. It reminded me each time of how important it is to challenge and re-write, to re-tell and to offer alternatives to what we think we know. To remind ourselves of silence as way to listen.

As I have stated a good many times in this thesis, the work of Luce Irigaray was an important guiding star for the reflection of the process, of the writing, and on being a human and a writer in the world today. I'm sure you remember the letters you wrote to Myres and Blegen in which you asked them if they would grant you, a newly-appointed Guggenheim fellow, access to the tablets. And the excitement which took possession of you when

Myres agreed. Inspired by your courage, I wrote a letter, too. Not to Myres and Blegen, obviously, but to Madame Luce Irigaray. Not to see millennia old writing, but her, as a writer and the most poetic philosopher I know. To the effect that I met her in person in Paris in October 2019, and I will be collaborating with her on an artistic project together with Christian (as *Butterland*) throughout this year, 2020.²³ We don't know where it will lead us, but the fact that I have talked already over a shared piece of *tarte au framboises* with Luce Irigaray is unbelievably precious to me. The project is envisioned to unfold around four meetings in Paris, the first of which will take place just a couple of days from today, a mid-January Monday.

Before I return to your story and work on turning it into a book, I have to edit *Losing Skin*: the final draft is due in summer. Sometimes, I get a shiver, when I think about the book being published. About having to do readings, talk to readers, share my experiences and theirs. Am I really up to that? The cover won't say that it is an autobiographical or autoethnographical piece, it could be a collection of stories that I have been told. But what's the point in not revealing the truth? Then I think, for example, of Claudia Rankine's book *Citizen*, and how much I admire it. How much I admire her strength as a woman and a writer. You made me brave enough to try to take a stand, too.

Although I know that this is a beginning, that I'll be working for at least one more year on your story to turn it in to a book, and that, in fact, I am talking to myself when I say "you", it is incredibly hard to stop doing exactly this. It feels like I'm about to close a door, a door which I am not sure if I will be able to find again, to re-open later. Can't we linger in the hall for a little longer? I think I have cookies in my bag or crisps.

²³ This collaboration is supported by the Canton of Bern through the *Ici et ailleurs* grant scheme, which funds a novel collaboration between artists from the Canton and persons of interest from elsewhere. <http://www.ici-et-ailleurs.ch/les-laureat-e-s>.

Can't we just sit over here and have a look at the door to the room which has been opened, just to make us both disappear?

You take my hand, Alice, and we jump off. While we fall, we have time to take a good look at everything. I see the situations and scenes I imagined you in, in many cases inventing the surroundings was easier than imagining you. You weren't easy to fictionalise, because a something that fills a void commands a body and possesses a shape, both brought into existence by beams of light. A fiction has a presence which, despite all my cautiousness, could be taken as fact.

To go off writing, I must escape from the broad daylight which takes me by the eyes, which takes my eyes and fills them with broad raw visions. I do not want to see what is shown. I want to see what is secret. What is hidden amongst the visible. I want to see the skin of light. I cannot write without distracting my gaze from capturing. I write by distraction. [...] writing is first of all a departure, an embarkation, an expedition. (Cixous 2005 [1996]: 184-5)

So I invented the places to invent you in, I invented the people who I wanted to interact with you (the Moon Man, who I especially like, Dr. Moss, Laurie, Helen and the others). You didn't have to do much in those scenes to make your point. Sometimes you were cheeky and cold, sometimes you were insecure and soft. Sometimes you were in control, and sometimes you were at the mercy of somebody else. But you always retained your integrity. Maybe this was what got me on the track of the erroneous colportage of the Ventris "meeting": cracking up is something that never occurred to me. Even through the Pope incident, you stayed focused on your role and tasks, the personal quarrel was secondary.

Of course, the question of a romantic relationship, or at any rate a physical encounter, came up many times. In your letters, you never mentioned a longing for someone or a discontent with having your mother live in your house with you. I liked the idea that maybe you weren't interested in relationships because they were just a repetitive scheme that didn't pique your

curiosity. There was nothing to be discovered in this realm, just conventions to be followed, freedom to be restricted.

I cannot know if that was your opinion or not. And I don't want to. After all, what I wrote is fiction for the most part, fiction that tells not your story but the way I imagine your story. The longer I worked on scenes, the more my own experiences and feelings entered the text. Sometimes I explicitly took something I had seen or experienced and asked myself how you could have encountered that sort or feeling, in which context you'd have had a similar experience. In this realm in which our lives overlapped, I was often reminded of how H el ene Cixous described her writing process, between a dream state and being awake:

I always have a large notebook close to me and I tear myself from my sleep to write down all my dreams. The text, which is in the process of making itself, re-inscribes others on the text. It's in this way that all circulates between my life, my body, my unconscious, history, my text, and that everything mixes in me, like my own blood. (Cixous 2008 [1978]: 55)

You let go of my hand for a moment and our fingers intertwine. *Well, it was fun while it lasted*, you say. My fingertips on the back of your hand. The speed of our fall decreases.

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List of abbreviations

AK—Alice Kober

BCF—Brooklyn College File

EB—Emmett Bennett

FD—Franklin Daniel

IoCS—Institute of Classical Studies

LV—Lois Ventris

JS—Johannes Sundwall

MV—Michael Ventris

PASP—Program of Aegean Scripts and Prehistory

SJM—Sir John Myres

SM II—Scripta Minoa II

List of residencies

| | |
|--------------|---|
| 2019 | Landis & Gyr Atelier London six month residency in Whitechapel |
| 2018 | Akademie Schloss Solitude (Stuttgart) five month residency |
| 2017/18 | The Red House/canton of Berne six month residency in the East Village, New York |
| August 2016 | Herhúsið (Iceland) Month-long artist residency in Siglufjörður, together with Christian Müller |
| August 2015 | Halka Art (Istanbul) Month-long artist residency in Kadiköy, together with Christian Müller |
| January 2013 | Herhúsið (Iceland) Month-long artist residency in Siglufjörður, together with Christian Müller |

Full list of publications

Books

| | |
|------|---|
| 2020 | Nebensächlich. Nomade Experimental translations of poems by Israeli Poet Savyon from Hebrew to German, Edition Solitude |
| 2019 | Solitude Exercises Artist book with contributions by Ana Filipovic, Antoni Rayzhekov, Aykan Safoglu, Savyon, and Elena Morena Weber |
| 2018 | Imi fliegt/Imi s'envole Kids' book about domestic violence together with illustrator Serafine Frey, commissioned by the women shelter Biel Exercises for an Urban Cowboy Artist book together with Christian Müller |
| 2017 | Stürmisches Glück am Lake Louise Rethinking Pulp Fiction, romance novel published as Emma Allen, Die Brotsuppe, Biel Fortschreiben Artistic direction and project management for the publication celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Swiss Literature Institute in Biel and the Bachelor in creative writing. Die Brotsuppe, Biel |
| 2015 | Weisst du, welches Tier? Kids' book together with illustrator Jeannine Moll, die Brotsuppe, Biel 2 ½ Gespenster YA novel, Beltz & Gelberg, Weinheim |

- 2014 Vikingur
Collected short stories, published by Büro für Problem, Basel
- Øjnk
Danish edition of *Katertag*, Turbine
- ARMOR | AMORE
Graphic Poetry together with illustrator Nadia Bader, Die
Brotsuppe, Biel
- 2011 Katertag. Oder: Was sagt der Knopf bei Nacht?
Youth novel, published by Chicken House/Carlsen
Audio book, published by Silberfisch

Performances/Installations

- 2020 Die Mauer
Installation based on the Butterland audio drama *Die Mauer* in
the exhibition *Beyond Borders/Wände | Walls* at
Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, November 2020
- Zum Konvolut 119
Exhibition of the drawing-text-dialogue with artist Patrizia Bach
at gallery Lokal.int (scheduled for March, postponed to fall)
- 2018 Grünfels
Collaborative text and reading with music in the gallery lokal.int
in Biel, together with Manuel Naef und Hari Köchli
- 2017 ephemer
Text & voice in the piece by Christian Müller and Christian Kobi
for four voices, four reeds players and one Bridge, Musikfestival
Bern
- Das Unheil haust in den Sümpfen vor der Stadt
Interactive labyrinth reading, commissioned by Bieler
Kulturwoche Pod'Ring, together with Lara Hajj-Sleiman, Jennifer
König und Baba Lussi
- Im Zwischen
Texts and voice in Hannah E. Hänni's piece, La Voirie Biel
- 2016 Mein liebes Herz
Text-voice-sound machine performance with Hannah E. Hänni
(singer, Biel) and Philipp Läng (experimental instruments, Biel),
La Voirie, Biel
- Anpassungsfähig
Text installation in the Schlosstrasse, Berne, for the Transform
Festival Berne
- 2013 RAUM ICH
14 Mesostics for the dance piece *ganz im hintergrund, in der
landschaft* by the Biel based dancer Katharina Vogel (premiere
in June, Dampfzentrale Bern)

Full list of Butterland projects

Audio drama

- 2020 [Das Schweigen entziffern](#)
55' Audio drama about Alice E. Kober, commissioned by SRF, to be broadcast in fall
- 2019 [Childhood Stories Istanbul](#)
Poetic audio documentary, broadcast by German national radio SWR and MDR
- 2018 [Die Mauer](#)
Audio piece, broadcast by SWR and SRF
> Shortlisted for the ARD Pinball Award
- 2016 [Aus dem Reisewörterbuch](#)
Audio drama, broadcast by SWR und SRF, published as CD by the Biel Mail Art Edition Fästing Plockare
> Presented during Schweizer Hörfestivals Sonohr 2016
> Distinction from the International Audio drama competition Leipziger Hörspielsommer 2016
- 2015 [Das Universum ist eine komische Sache](#)
Audio drama, broadcast by SWR and Bieler Kulturbus Billi
- 2014 [Werthers versehrtes Herz](#)
Audio drama and live performance, first shown at Reheat Festival in Nickelsdorf (Austria)
> Presented during the International Audio drama competition Leipziger Hörspielsommer 2015
- 2013 [Childhood Stories China 2012](#)
Audio drama, broadcast by SWR, published as CD by the Biel Mail Art Edition Fästing Plockare
> Award: Jury's price of Schweizer Hörfestivals Sonohr 2014
> Shortlisted for Prix Phonurgia Nova (Paris) 2013
> Shortlisted for Hauptpreis des Berliner Hörspielfestivals 2013
- 2012 [Inventuren](#)
Prose miniatures/voice: Regina Dürig, music: Christian Müller, Frank Heierli, Beni Weber, limited edition published by Deszpot (www.deszpot.ch)
> excerpts broadcast by SRF

Live-pieces/Installations

- 2019 [AL NIENTE / NEAT LINE](#)
Performance writing & sound installation featuring Thomas Flahaut, commissioned by the General Assembly of the Sonart Professional Association of Freelance Musicians at Kunsthaus Pasquart Biel
- 2018 [Übungen am Spielfeldrand](#)
Stadium piece: Live audio drama, commissioned by PAKT The New Music Network Bern
- [Feeding the Hand that Bites us](#)
Space- and Sound-installation, gallery lokal.int in Biel
- 2017 [Little Literary Studio](#)
Participative prose production with passersby, East Village, NYC
- 2015 [Just Looking – Just Selling](#)
Poetic noise performance, commissioned by the festival Neue Musik Markt at Dampfzentrale Berne, also shown at: Hors Normes Festival, Vallée du Joux, und Nadalokal Festival, Wien
- [Les Soirées Festi](#)
Performance and food series for ten people at eight nights at Festi/Ligerz
- 2013 [Goodnight Salon](#)
salon installation at gallery arthur in Biel, musical lecture from the Iceland material for four guests every night during the whole month of March