

HAMLET

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Stop thinking about forever

with Johanna Blank, Gilles Jacot, Morten Knudsen, Selina Lutz

I had planned to finish the text for the exhibition by yesterday. Unfortunately, I had to get up so early that morning that I had a headache all day and could hardly get a word on paper. Later that evening, I sat at my mother's desk and caught myself releasing what I would call a reflex cry into the abyss of social media. Written over the blurry reflection of my exhausted self it read something like *Trying to write this f*ing exhibition text but ending up writing about everything but the exhibition. Send help. I just want to go to sleep.* As usual: I didn't expect anything. To my surprise, however, I received a lot of advice – suggestions about text content, writing process, or my sleep routine – with the winning tip being: *Stop thinking!* Really, I could have figured that out for myself.

The cursor flashes unnervingly. I feel pinned down by the demand that the title of the exhibition seems to be making on me. *Stop thinking about forever.* When my therapist fixates on me with slightly narrowed eyes waiting for me to continue my explanations, I look past her at the yellow leaves in front of the window opening to the right behind her head. Surely there must be something in there, I think to myself. But everything is as if blown away. All that remains is her gaze and my hands, which seek shelter between my folded thighs.

The blank space of the unedited document won't let me take my eyes off it.
Stop thinking about forever.

Tonight I will finish writing the text.

When I was a child, I used to keep a box. In it I hid secrets – letters to myself: I wrote down what was troubling me, expectations and wishes I had for myself, so that later I could check whether everything had changed for the better. Knowing that this box existed gave me the feeling of being in control of my own life. I wonder if a similar goal is pursued when we are asked at school to describe what we want to be when we grow up. Apparently, the most common dream jobs for girls (in the 6-10 age group) are in the field of nursing and care (the top dream job for girls today being a vet, as it was 5 years ago), while boys are said to be more oriented towards 'heroes of the time', such as policemen or astronauts (see blog post: *Study on dream jobs and career aspirations of today's children*). I recall each time this task left me confused and perplexed. This is not to say that I had no idols. On the contrary: my walls were covered with posters of Tokio Hotel and others. Looking back at it now, the choice of my idols could probably be read as an early indication of personality traits that would only fully show years later – and I'm sure there are so-called studies out there that undertake such analysis.

Does this incessant looking forward and backward in time prove the idea of 'coming of age' as a condition and linear sequence of actions that forever determine the course of life? But what if the direction of time changed against its linearity, if its chronology was questioned? *Stop thinking about forever. Timelessness versus time. If everything is moving-all-over-the-place-no-time, anything is every-thing. If this is so, how can I differentiate? How can there be stories?* (Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations*, 1980, p. 53)

15:28 In less than two hours the darkness of night will enter Oberwinterthur's neighborhood. I hope to be in a better writing mood after some Panadol and coffee:

When I looked at myself in the mirror at the end of a two-and-a-half-hour tattoo appointment this October, I wished for nothing more than for the ground to open up beneath my feet and take me in. This, of course, did not happen. Instead, I found myself so directly confronted with the consequence of my action that I could hardly bear the sight of myself. I felt disgust – at myself and at my own seductive exuberance. I remember meticulously, because the disgust seized every cell of my body, from which I would have liked to peel myself. Like a snake shedding its skin. Or better yet, like a lizard shedding its tail. But I thought I knew that the tattoo would keep me trapped in that very moment for the rest of time – a body modification that took my submission to the trends of times to the extreme. Didn't you understand anything? The 45 minutes of the subway ride back to Manhattan felt like 145. 145 minutes during which the freshly tattooed body grew into a disproportionately large boil that I capitulated to. The moral of the story? Well, actually there is none, because it took only about 12 hours until I recognized myself.

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Reconciliation set in the following morning. Nevertheless, the memory of the feeling sits deeply, otherwise I could have hardly described this in such detail. The tattoo as a means of appropriation or dispossession of the skin? I think the finality of the decision (I ignore any laser technology for tattoo removal and also the fact that said technologies will probably improve rapidly in the coming years) primarily confronted me with its only condition: Living with a body or its limits. ‚Forever‘ here means ‚until a decomposition of my body sets in or until my body dissolves into ashes.‘

Before my grandfather’s body was cremated two years ago in the fall, we experienced a roller coaster ride of emotions. Although he had already been subjected to weeks of medical observation, his suicidal tendencies were not taken seriously. My mother is convinced that her father was the victim of institutional failure, and that, if he had been 20 years younger, his clinical depression would have been treated at least to some extent. I believe that too. Still, the rationale with reference to age discrimination strikes me as one-dimensional. Certainly if kept in mind that illness, the finitude of the human body, and thus death were found to be structurally stigmatized with Foucault at the latest. It is difficult to understand what traces a human being leaves behind when they die. The material legacies of my grandfather were mostly dissolved after 6 months. And time may blur events before my eyes, but I remember the urn burial very well: there was a moment when I recognized him – the common memory of my grandpa being reflected in the reddened eyes of all the people gathered around that hole in the ground.

I was unsure until the end whether I should write about what is going to follow. Because it is proof of my tendency to kitsch and with this disclosure I feel quite naked. But there is a sensation that I would describe as ‚being infinite‘. Considering that the translation of this highly abstract concept into a subjective experience of the body has to cross quite a wide chasm, I myself am amazed at the accuracy with which this feeling can be defined for me. The origin of my definition is probably the last scene of Stephen Chbosky’s film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (my 15-year-old self’s favorite movie), in which Logan Lerman, Emma Watson, and Ezra Miller as Charlie, Sam, and Patrick drive through a car tunnel at night to David Bowie’s *Hero*. Just before the ‚tunnel song‘ kicks in, Charlie’s off-screen voice reads a final letter to himself: *There are people who forget what it’s like to be sixteen when they turn seventeen. And know these will all be stories someday (...). But right now these moments are not stories. This is happening. I am here and I am looking at her and she is so beautiful. (...) And you stand up and see the lights on buildings and everything that makes you wonder, when you were listening to that song on that drive with the people you love most in this world. And in this moment, I swear, we are infinite.* As for Charlie, for me it is this fleeting sense of connection with people that, in the simultaneity of extreme presence and detachment, somehow seems to transcend my experience of the world, of linear narratives, and of the coherence and rules of logic for just an instant.

When I started thinking of what to write about «Stop thinking about forever» a week or so ago, I felt lost. At some point I landed on a blog post from 2005 (see <http://forum.minitokyo.net/t33247>): User Winxfairykay (Teenage Samurai) asks the question *Which one is longer: Forever, Eternity or Infinity?*

Joemighty16 (Hope is an optimist) *I don’t feel like ‘forever’ is really forever, ‘eternity’... I just LOVE the word! :D*

Endsoftheworld99 (free and unfettered) *‘Forever’ is simply a word that we use to describe something that will never end. Unfortunately, it has been overused now-a-days and has well sort of become corrupted. People make wedding vows ‘forever’, but five years later, poof there they go, up in a cloud of divorce smoke or something like that. ‘Eternal’, a word which is not used as often as the other two, I think is the longest. It is kind of a mysterious word, and besides sounding more ‘powerful’ and ‘everlasting’ than the other two, eternal is used to describe many things that are beyond what our mind can comprehend. Like for instance ‘eternal life’, you really can’t think of what living eternally would be like because we can only think about finite things in a finite time.*

Shyguy570 *They’re all the same... forever, eternity, and infinity are confined to the existence of time. What beats them all? Always.*

Text by Antonia Rebekka Truninger