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# The transparent eye



A conversation on *being* and *reality*  
through the eye of creative practices

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Emanuela Agnoni

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“Fragmentation comes to be seen not as a distortion based on a failure to grasp the true nature of the self, but as the truth of what it is to be a self.” (Lloyd 1993 p.160)

## Introduction

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The fragmentary nature of the *self*, as a physicality containing an unembodied identity, as well as the nature of the *reality* in which the *self* is an active participant, are continually clashing with the human strive of making things whole, compartmentalizing things in order to comprehend them.

Our concepts of time as a line, language as meaningful sounds, reality as a dissected subject of scrutiny and our own bodies as frames of reference we use to navigate through life, are constructs that help us assemble the elements that constitute existence.

These ideologies we have adopted in everyday life seem to be capable of containing reality in the recipients we have created for it, and appear to be giving us a certain control over it.

One could picture this as a stone wall. Positioning each stone in a certain order the wall becomes solid and higher, protecting and sheltering, yet, at the same time, obscuring and covering.

Each stone being irregular entails the presence of gaps throughout the whole structure. The wall is not perfect and it is through these gaps that one can glimpse at the other side, feeling a wind coming in and beams of light shining through.

Aristotle believed that through metaphor humans are able to gather the meaning of things passing from one sphere to another. Words that are strange puzzle us, whilst simple language only tells us what we already know, but, through

metaphor we are able to move the mind, and through this movement hold onto something fresh, expanding on new possibilities, shaking preconceptions, moving into a new intellectual space. (Lloyd 1993 p.166)

In this sense, the metaphor, like a beam of light, is able to penetrate the stone wall through the negative space of the gaps, a space for movement and creation.

Thus, I would like to avail myself of a metaphor, or symbol, to link together the creative practices throughout which artists, writers and thinkers have reached through the gaps, expanding the absences with the purpose of better understanding what is present, or rather, exploring the fragmented status of *being* and the meaning of *reality* through challenging everyday conceptual bias, extending into new uncharted territory.

With a focus on converging these creative practices to a point of connection, I will begin weaving my web from the circular shape of an eye, to be more precise, the symbol of the *Third Eye*. Known as *pineal gland*, an endocrine gland situated in the brain, thus, a part of our physical body, the third eye also bears the meaning of the *mind's eye*, or consciousness, resembling a confluence between the tangible and intangible spheres.

This invisible eye, as the juncture between the private space of one's inner self and the outer space that enwraps everything else, cuts right at the core of the human being, between the flesh and the *soul*. It is the point of departure where each individual starts their journey towards experience.

Opening one's third eye, in the context of creative practices, would suggest allowing oneself to challenge their methods of "looking" at the world, thus, overcoming the walls of

constructed meaning, acknowledging their importance, whilst recognizing the gaps not just as empty spaces, but as spaces of potentiality.



## Chapter I

In this chapter I will explore the writings of the French Surrealist George Bataille as he introduces the term *pineal eye*, opening a conversation about *being*, through a unique use of language. I will also discuss the artwork *The Third Eye Project* by Takehito Etani which explores the fragmented nature of the self, focalising on perception and the body.

### ◉ Vertical Axe

*“The eye, at the summit of the skull, opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the Understanding, but is instead, an immediate existence. [...] Only human beings, tearing themselves away from peaceful animal horizontality [...] have succeeded in letting themselves be polarized by the sky.*

*The horizontal axis of vision, to which the human structure has remained strictly subjected is the expression of a misery [...] Thus the pineal eye, detaching itself from the horizontal system of normal ocular vision, appears in a kind of nimbus of tears, like the eye of a tree or, perhaps like a human tree. [...] In this transfiguration of nature the erection ceases to be a painful upheaval on the surface of the earth and it transforms itself into a vertiginous fall in celestial space, accompanied by a horrible cry.” (Bataille 1985 pp. 82 - 84)*

The French Surrealist George Bataille’s intertwining of words establishes a frame where language compares itself to the

“horizontal axis of vision” he mentions; a linearity to which humans have been strictly subjected, and which is the expression of a misery. The misery is the illusion of a straight line which takes one to the core of things, like the line of language, meant to explain, express and clarify.

Bataille disrupts this linear segment, bringing to the surface the fragments that constitute it, thus, revealing a transient mosaic of a multitude of words, these words bearing a resemblance to fragments of perceptions.

The writer’s unconventional style is autodestructive, yet, with a purpose for creation: it is a mirror showing the illusion of a pillar on which we stand assured, the pillar of reason, and this is highlighted by the immediate confusion of the reader in the reading of the passages.

Bataille manages to penetrate through the gaps of the metaphorical stone wall, using the same stones that constitute it to rupture the others. This outer frame he builds, he fabricates on vivid images which cannot be clasped, and, like a current of liquid screens, they do not belong anywhere. They do refer to familiar spaces, or rather, primitive sources, like the sky and the earth, yet, they place the reader everywhere and nowhere, sliding through the gaps of meaning, inhabiting the negative spaces.

Within this frame Bataille inserts a new one, which focal point resides in the figure of the *pineal eye*. Seemingly located in the skull, the eye, however, is described as an immediate existence, a part of an intangible dimension.

The term *pineal eye*, as stated in the introduction, refers nonetheless to the pineal gland, an endocrine gland situated in

the brain, which function and meaning have been greatly speculated about throughout history in both science and philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The gland, also known as “third eye”, has been charged with great spiritual meaning and it still maintains a symbolic status for debate about consciousness and the body, which brings us back to the power of metaphor.

In fact, via the introduction of this symbol Bataille slices again through another structure: the structure of being, specifically being human.

The *eye* carves a line between the body and mind, the latter one resembling a realm seemingly contained into this architecture of flesh and bones. In the passages the pineal eye detaches itself from the horizontal line of vision, hence, it separates itself from the constructs of the human world; taking the shape of vertical light, it becomes liquid tears, mutating into nature (the tree), only to merge with a human being once again (human tree). This almost “liquid” journey of images and movements portrays the severance between body and mind, mankind’s never-ending quest to unveil the essence of consciousness, a detachment with the physical sphere towards the encounter with existence itself.

Furthermore, the divided entity which is the human being, offers yet another severance, between physical (or sensory) and spiritual perception. As a matter of fact, the third eye is also known as *sixth sense*, the unexplainable “gut feeling”, which again seems to be located in the body, yet, again, resides in the abstract world of *intuition*.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix: *Pineal Gland*.

The physical entity of the human body, which, however, contains an abstract, unknown *essence*, is strongly linked to the phenomenon of perception because our perception of the world is affected by our senses, and yet, at the same time, our *self* affects it in return. The constant exchange that resides in that interaction is what makes up our reality.

Bataille's writing, in this sense, is an art form; every single word being minutely placed, like an artefact, in order to destroy itself and recreate itself again each time. Within it the writer subtly slices the concept of being using the sharp knife of a symbol, awakening the reader to the chaotic nature of existence.

In this respect, the art piece: "The Third eye project" (Fig. 1-2-3) by Takehito Etani offers a different take, dealing with yet the same concepts. The artist's device blinds one eye whilst showing to the other eye a live feed of one's own back seen through a surveillance camera. The camera offers a bird eye view of the person in a black and white grainy filter.

The unusual view casts the individual in a completely different setting, which does not cancel out the existence of the external reality, nor it does one's inner perception of it, rather, it somehow projects the individual in a completely new dimension. Here, the organic inner sensory awareness of oneself is pushed aside to make space for an alienating process to happen. Looking at one's own back through an alien eye, a disembodiment and strangeness take place into the intimacy of one's internal space.

The artwork links the body and the mind through an experience of perception in the physical world, challenging the wholeness

of the human perception by subjecting the artist's own body and physical awareness to the fragmentation of cognitive understanding and the senses. It creates a new perspective which severs the notion of the body as an intact framework for understanding reality.

His is a different take on the subject when confronted with Bataille's approach, in fact, whilst the French writer challenges the audience into processing information differently, he is still operating in the realm of language, therefore the reader still possess a certain control over the work.

Etani's piece, on the other hand, deals with the whole physical experience of a given *reality*, disrupting one's assumptions in a more enveloping way. Not even the artist himself can "escape" his invention, which seems to estrange one inside one's own body, exhibiting the alienation that follows.

Discussing the artist's work Pasek (2014 p. 20) elaborates on how *"many cognitive scientists have argued that our everyday ease and coherence in perception is an illusion, the result of active guesswork by various cognitive processes [...] key to this perspective is an acknowledgement of the cognitive gaps and compensations that occur outside of our conscious apprehension. An examination of the physical limitations of the body's sensory organs reveals that sensory information is inherently fragmentary"*.

Accordingly, "The Third Eye Project" challenges the audience into examining their own body as the *pivotal point* of perception which is often given as absolute.

Furthermore, the camera connected to the device, with its black and white grainy filter, does not render an absolute and faithful

clear report of the out of body experience, in fact, it seems to suggest that this experience must not be passive. One can only see one's back through the means of a mirror or a camera, but, as the work implies, there is not just one way of looking at things, there is not an absolute reality.

In this case the distortion of vision is a comment on the difference in which we experience the world as human beings, which will always remain subjective and unique, even when paired up with the "objective" eye of a camera.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: "*It is not how the world is that is mystical, but that it exists*". (Wittgenstein cited in Danvers 2006 p.277)

Wittgenstein's philosophy is centered on the experience of experience itself: if explained through language this will be empty due to the impossibility for it to be described or communicated, but, as experience, it is fully disorienting, the final confrontation with the ultimate enigma that is consciousness. Etani's "Third Eye Project", in this respect, does not only address questions on the nature of reality and the subjectivity we infuse reality with through our *being*, it also subtly opens a conversation about our role as observers.

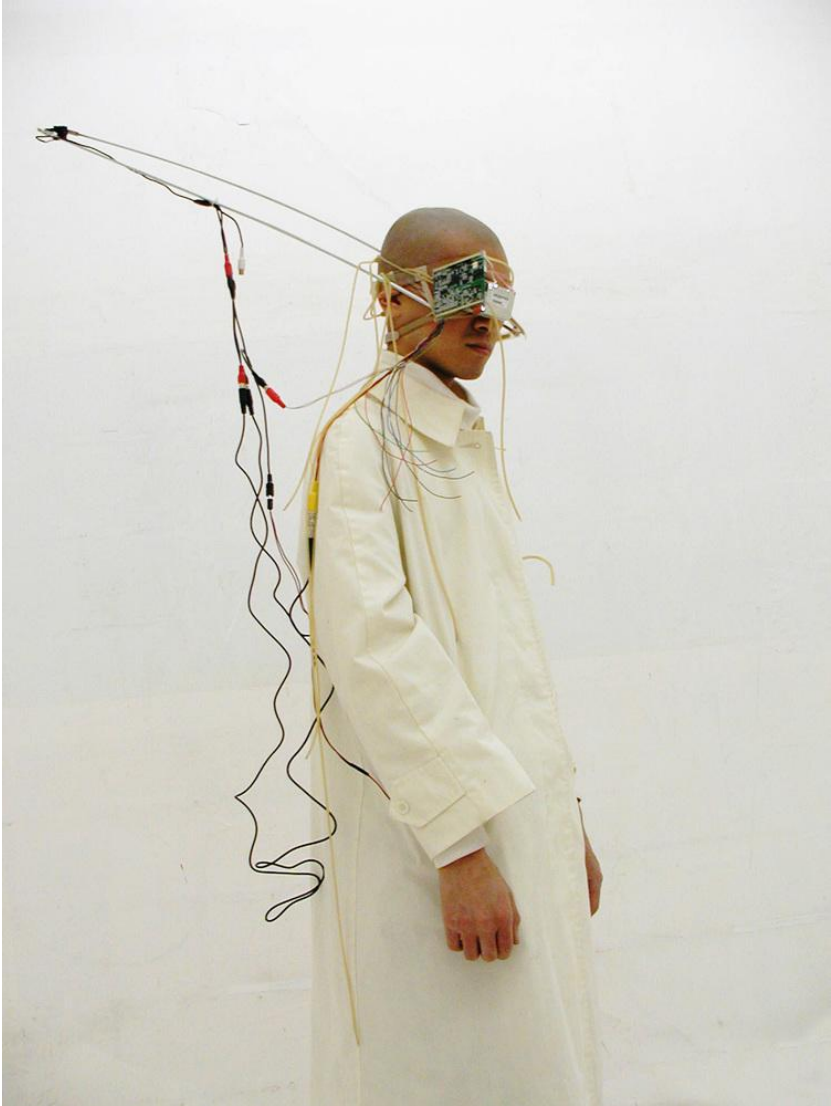


Fig 1. *The Third Eye Project*

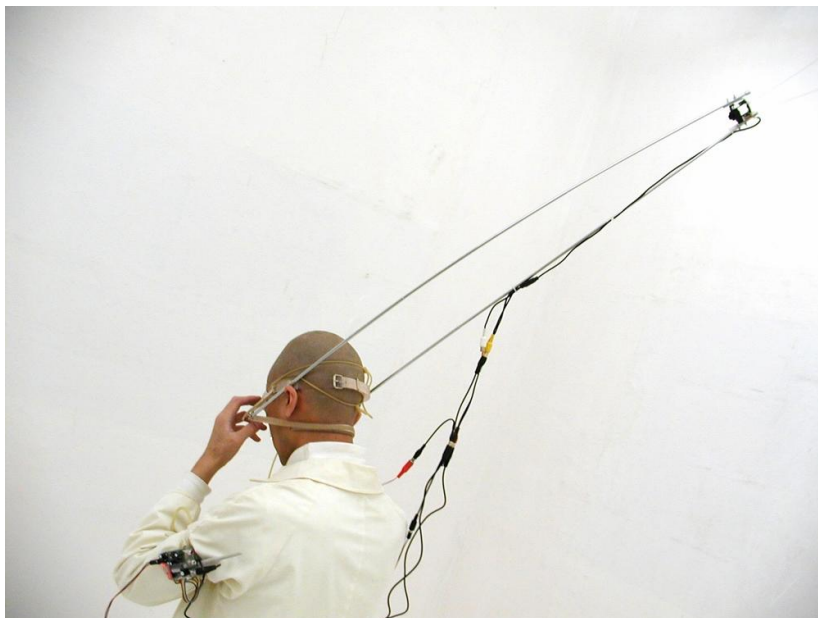


Fig. 2

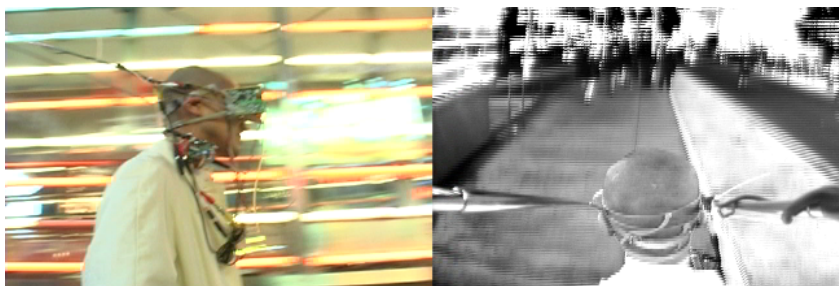


Fig. 3.



## Chapter II

In this chapter I will analyse the division between Western and Eastern approaches on the subject of “reality”, pairing these viewpoints with the creative practice of Gabriel Orozco, specifically his piece “Yielding stone”, which, through the utilisation of a spherical metaphorical body, investigates the constant movement of existence.

### ◉ The pursuit of reality through the Yielding Stone

The conference on *The Nature of Reality* (ICE at Dartmouth 2017), held in San Francisco in 2017 presents another example of the division that coexists within the human being, in the contexts of Eastern and Western cultures.

During the conference, Sean Carroll, a contemporary theoretical physicist, and Allan Wallace, a world-renowned author and Buddhist scholar, discuss the aforesaid topic opening a dialogue and confrontation between two crucial elements that make up the individual: the spiritual and the physical.

The first argument is made by Carroll (2017), whom mentions “Quantum Field Theory” which claims that we can make any particle that we interact with by smashing other particles together. Additionally, all the particles that are relevant to us have been discovered already, and the ones that have not been discovered yet, like dark matter for instance, are not relevant to us because either they do not interact with us, or they do so in

such a fugacious amount of time that it makes it impossible for us to detect them at all.

Therefore, he proceeds by arguing that the laws of physics being completely known suggests there being no life after death, because if the matter and information that constitute human beings is known to remain in the physical sphere, transforming into other substances, yet still existing under some other form, it follows that the end of one's existence does not mean the end of the particles forming that individual. Hence, if the particles are still present, even under a different form, one would still be able to hold comprehension over them (i.e. the particles still following the laws of physics).

Drawing on the discoveries of Copernicus, who observed that the Earth is not the center of the solar system, and Galileo, who discovered that there are other things orbiting around Jupiter too, not just the Earth, as well as Darwin, who showed that the existence of life and the origin of us as human beings are not "special", but a continuous with the physical processes here on Earth, Carroll attests that he does not believe that "*there is room in that equation for consciousness*". He concludes: "*The mind is difficult to understand because it is the most complex thing we know. But it seems to me that we don't need to invoke other stuff outside the laws of physics*". (2017)

Carroll's argument is immediately questioned by Wallace, who quotes the poet Muriel Rukeyser: "*The universe is made of stories, not of atoms*". (2017)

In the Buddhist philosophy, as Wallace explains, it is believed that the defining characteristic of human beings is that we are

able to understand meaningful information and we are able to impart it as well, in short, we are storytellers.

All the stories we tell begin with assumptions, beliefs, and often we cannot prove these beliefs within the context of our subjectivity, therefore we end up focusing on what we attend to, but *“often what we attend to is that which we wind up taking to be real, and that which we do not attend to fades out”*. (James cited in ICE at Dartmouth 2017)

In both the academics points of view reality seems to appear in layers, but, whilst Carroll seems to be quite certain about the scientific tangibility of those layers, Wallace scrutinizes the unnoticed gaps between them, offering fresh ground for new possible layers, new *stories*.

Interestingly enough Wallace quotes a contemporary quantum physicist to build up his argument:

*“One might be attempted to assume that, whenever we ask questions on the nature of the world of the outside, there is reality existing independently of what can be said about it. We now claim that such a position is void of any meaning. It is obvious that any property or feature of reality out there, so to speak, can only be based on information we receive. There cannot be any statement whatsoever about the world, or about reality that is not based on such information, and, therefore follows, that the concept of reality, without at least the ability and principle to make statements about it, is devoid of any possibility of confirmation, or proof. This implies that the distinction between information (knowledge) and reality is devoid of meaning.”* (Zeilinger cited in ICE at Dartmouth 2017)

The statement suggests that there cannot exist any knowledge of reality which does not involve the human presence within it. One cannot generate a picture of an objective reality because the information onto which one constructs reality is founded on the information one gathers about it in the first place. From that information, which must go through the individual, the latter one takes part as active participant, even if subconsciously, moulding it. Thus, the individual cannot remove him or herself from it, and it is from that information that he or she constructs reality. Furthermore, Wallace opens a new interrogative, questioning if, perhaps, before looking at the nature of reality, one should look at the juncture where reality appears.

Hence, maybe *“our perceptions are as real, or maybe in a certain sense even more real, than material objects”*. (Linde cited in ICE at Dartmouth 2017)

What Wallace is trying to get across is the concept that consciousness is imbedded into existence and it existed long before scientists started thinking about it, but it seems that, along the way, Western science started overlooking the nature of the observer. He concludes by attesting that we know more about distant galaxies than we know about our inner selves; we have left out something, and that is us.

*“Before the Earth was called a planet it was known as a wandering star. Before there were only stars, there were no planets.[...] The idea of wondering, of constant movement, and the movement of erosion, exposition to erosion [...] that is a planet. So the “yielding stone”, you can consider it as a planet, wondering. [At first] it was this cute little thing with marbles*

*like God. And then it was a whole field full of yielding stones, bottles, geometry, nature, a game. [...]This is reality. Where does it end? There is no end to the no-place, now earth, now sky. It helps to watch the stars. Some call the no-place a good night". (Orozco cited in Molesworth, Kury and Holland 2005 pp. 265-267)*

This statement by the artist Gabriel Orozco offers a new poetic angle on the multiplicity of layers constituting reality discussed above. With a probable nod of approval by Wallace, Orozco incorporates the observers as integral part of a picture of someplace that is indistinct and in a constant flux, nonetheless real. The artist's use of materials in response to his philosophical investigation provides a beautiful model of a landscape for human inquiry where art is used as the instrument for such inquiry.

Orozco seems to study reality through contemplating its constant movement where the observation resides in observing oneself observing. Being both observers and participants in this world we are ourselves part of it; in a way we are the *world's consciousness*. Thereby, the self, as the inquirer and inquired, and the material object, being shaped by the outside and the outside being shaped by the material object, form an harmony which seems to be closer to an Eastern school of thought.

Accordingly, his art practice is splendidly compared to the content of a statement by Joseph Campbell in the introduction to a book of interviews with the artist.

In the original source, *Myths to live by*, Campbell describes the artist's life as play. There is no looking ahead or backwards, but

the movement, the moment of play, is the exact moment of magic. He writes: *“Life as an art and art as a game - as action for its own sake, without thought for gain or loss, praise or blame - is the key, then to the turning of living itself into a yoga, and art into the means to such a life”*. (Campbell cited in Bois, Buchloh and Fer 2006 p.13)

Through materials and his frequent travelling Orozco looks at existence as movement, a sort of rolling stone, leaving marks and getting shaped, each mark, each trace affecting the one before and the one after. Hence, in his work “Yielding stone” (Fig. 4-5) he measures his whole body weight and rolls the outcome to generate a plasticine ball which is left rolling out in the street. The stone as the symbol of this continuous journey through what he refers as “no-place”, which is nothing less than reality.



Fig. 4 *Yielding Stone*



Fig. 5

## Chapter III

In this chapter I will examine how several Western and Eastern philosophies have approached the polarities of *being* and *nothingness*, *creation* and *destruction* through the contemplation of nature as primal source of knowledge. I will focus in particular on the art practice of Anish Kapoor and his approach on the subject via his methodology of making, which is extensively bounded to the idea of the concept of *sunyata*, or rather the doctrine of the *void*.

### ◎ The void as a space of becoming

*“Just look at what we are doing, endlessly making more and more plans for the future to relieve our plight. The agony is within. The lament of the reed flute plucked from the riverbed of rees; it laments with the agony of being separated from its source, and the player of this reed flute also laments with this separation from his source. And what is this source? It seems we have forgotten.”* (Nityabodhananda 2009 p.ix)

In the vedantic theory of yoga, *Ajna Chakra*, or third eye, is considered the sixth sense throughout which one can experience the manifestation of a reality that is otherwise intangible. (p.37) This transcendent manifestation recalls what Spinoza described as *the intellectual love of God*, that is the comprehension of the world as a whole. (Danvers 2006 p.83)



For Spinoza, in fact, every *thing* is part of a totality, that totality being God or Nature; nothing can exist outside of *it* because that would mean that *it* is finite, thus, God must be coextensive with everything.

If “*nature is the totality of what there is, then both God and Nature must be infinite, and therefore they must be identical, one unitary substance*”. (p.81)

The God of Spinoza has been described by Heidegger in a non-theological sense as an openness or emptiness in which all things appear, and, when one is awakened to it, one is moved by compassion. In the words of Zimmerman, unpacking Heidegger’s philosophy, human beings are a peculiar nothingness, a linguistic and temporal clearing in which things present themselves. (p.272)

These ideologies echo Indian metaphysics, specifically the concept of *sunyata*, or *emptiness*. This doctrine, also known as *doctrine of the void*, consists in not permitting oneself to be entangled in theories and views, rather, it encourages to observe and contemplate without assigning a role to objects, without gazing at the world with the intent of assigning meaning to it. The doctrine of the void is itself relative, therefore void. This concept might look anti-intellectual, but actually it is an attempt to expose the dualities that are inherent in conceptual undertakings, and it is well described by Caputo as “*the hard work of a kind of poverty of spirit*.” (p.273)

Another way to picture this would be through the symbol of the *ouroboros*, a circular shape raffiguring a serpent eating its own tail as to symbolise the cyclic nature of the universe and the polarities between life and death, creation and destruction.

If we consider the concept of creation, within science, it is described by saying that if one could see nature on a microscopic scale one would observe a frothing of particles and antiparticles popping up and then annihilating again, each manifestation being momentary and separated by absences.

Before the Big Bang there was nothing, then, as a consequence of quantum uncertainty, an expanding bubble of vacuum grew and it became the universe we now know.

If matter can collapse on itself and disappear into nothing, matter can also appear out of nothing due to certain violations of the law of conservation of energy. (Nityabodhananda 2009 pp. 15-16)

It seems that this *nothing*, or cosmic energy, from which matter springs, is the same *void* that has been described above among Western and Eastern philosophers.

Often, when trying to express the essence of these opposites, one finds that primordial shapes and forms, with their pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual language become the terrain onto which one can explore their nature.

Accordingly, in the catalogue on the art of Anish Kapoor at the Venice Biennale in 1990, the writer, reflecting on the conceptual theory behind Kapoor's work, remarks:

*"The concept of the spirit in art, articulated by both Hegel and Coomaraswamy, [...] emphasized the idea of a universal spirit which the artist was trying to establish a channel of communication with through the art object or the yoga of making it. Underlying this dramatic image is the premise, understood in both ancient and modern contexts, that the soul has fallen from on high, and its reincarnation as an artist is*

*one of its better chances of finding the way back.”* (McEvelley 1990 p.37)

This sort of pursuit for one's original source seems to be meticulously embedded in the process of making art, and, in these regards, the figure of the artist as the wanderer of truth, or the child of play, as we have observed with Orozco, is where the expression can take place. What is emphasized here is not the final product, rather it is the yoga of making it.

Returning to the metaphor of the reed flute, the pursuit of finding the source that we have forgotten about is what pushes us to undertake the journey, it is the starting point of a process of making, making ourselves in the world.

In Kapoor's work this journey is about creating objects, and selves, and it is depicted under the spoils of interruptions of space. His sculptures are immersed in it, they are not objects one can just observe and go past, rather, they are encounters, experiences mediated by material yet belonging to a dimension which is quite far from materiality, a dimension of spirituality. Kapoor's work encloses the poles of destruction and creation, embodying a womb-like interiority.

*“The womb that releases beings into the world becoming the tomb which receives them at the end. The emptiness within the source or container, or the blankness of the picture plane, is the void of potentiality.”* (p.20)

In his sculptures lives a primordial presence. Like a universal language that is secretly ingrained in all of us, his artworks speak from a solid and totemic place, a place stripped down to its core, like an architecture that belongs to dreams and visions, realms which we are seldom allowed to explore, but, when we do, we are truly free from logic and reason.

For sculptors like Kapoor intuition is ingrained into the process of making because intuition does not follow logic, on the contrary, it belongs to a dimension close to the soul.

Like poems, each sculpture is soaked in perceptions, each one being a story, each one universal and intimate. The artwork, like the poetic language, in this sense, is a token of these moments in which we start listening to that somewhere, which, like a magnet, needs to reattach itself someplace bigger and abstract. Through this architecture that appears to be built around us, this body that we possess with all its channels of perception, we are able to travel in between two realities, the enveloping outside space we inhabit and the private interiority which we inhabit too. These realms show us that the world is much more than what it appears to be, like an artwork is much more than just an object, but rather, another channel which opens yet other doors.

For the Minimalists, for instance (which one could say Kapoor belongs to, in a certain way), the audience assumes an active role because it is the audience who perceives the artwork, creating their own image, their own reality of it. Perception and the senses become the work of art, the artefact being just a channel through which something bigger is generated.

Like pieces of a puzzle, the experiences are a visceral, intimate and unique happening inside the individual, yet, channeled into a physical materiality, they connect each individual by a communal contemplation of a symbol.

Like a totem, this symbol is stripped from any unnecessary burdens, it is a pure simplicity and essence, which, in fact, recalls the pure essence of nature.

In other words minimalist sculptures are a contemplation of our

personal experience of the world through our senses, distinguishing us as individual subjectivities, yet, unifying us through the universal aspect of these senses and bodies we possess and share with our environments. Thus, artefacts can become tokens of the moments in which we stop being an entity, or a unit, and we start looking at ourselves as a collection of things: molecules, memories, encounters, experiences; all of which merges with the collection belonging to the world.

These tokens are symbols of one's inner and outer research, a learning process through contemplation, inquiry, but especially through making. Whether it means writing, mark making, sculpting etc. moulding one's place within reality is where one could start making sense out of it.

That is the moment of expression, or creation: when something springs from that place which has been described as *nothing*, a void which is so dark that one could not say if it is empty or full, a negative of what we can see with our two eyes, but also a positive of what we are able to see when we open a different eye.



Fig. 6 *Tomb*

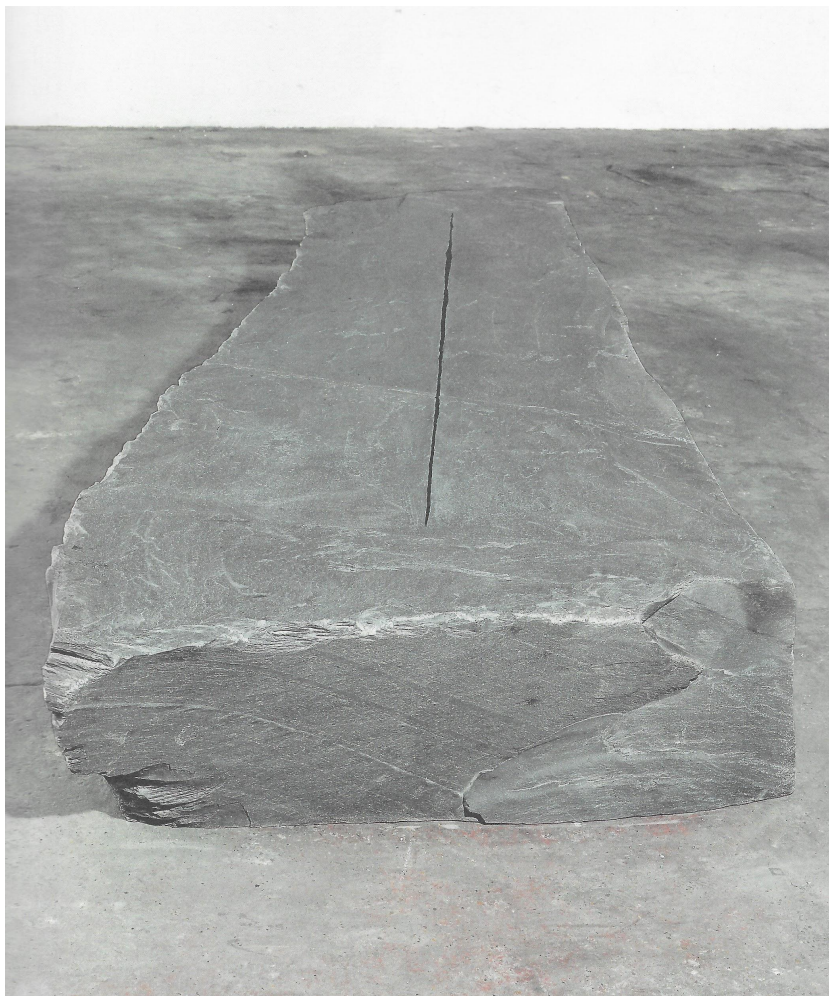


Fig. 7



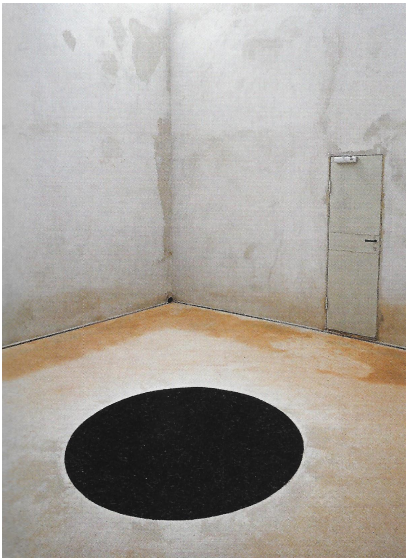
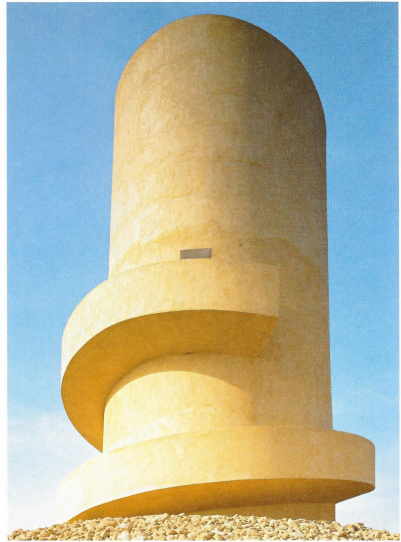
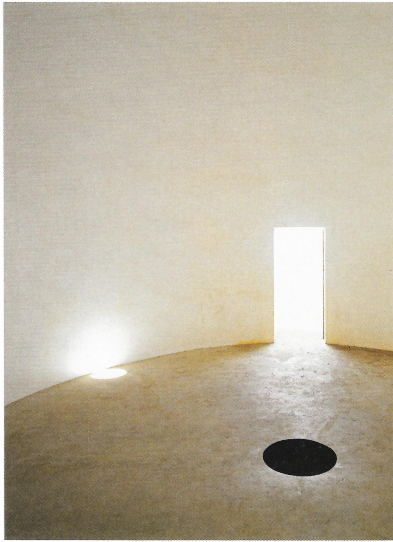


Fig. 8 - 9 *Building for a Void*





Fig. 10 - 11 *The eye in the stone*

## Chapter IV

In this final chapter I will analyse the paper “*Creativity and destructiveness in art and psychoanalysis*” by Patricia Townsend which offers multiple points of discussion regarding the role of the artist and the material within the creative process, whilst providing interesting analogies with psychoanalytic theory. Through these analogies I will explore the sculptural work of Louise Bourgeois, in particular her piece “*Eyes*”, in relation to the writing practice of Virginia Woolf and her distinctive use of language.

### ● Therapy of making

*“Outside the frame lies the external world organised accordingly to a “reality” shared with others. Inside the frame lies an internal world, a subjectively based organization of the self.”* (Townsend 2015 p. 128)

In her paper Townsend explores the relationship between artist and material in creative practices, comparing it with the relationship between mother and child, and, later on, between patient and therapist in psychoanalytic contexts. In her text lies another example of how the metaphor can travel through different spheres, linking them together whilst engaging in new approaches. As a matter of fact, the writer’s aim here consists in offering an insight into how we think about the creative

process, hence, explaining how expanding outside the limits of a field (psychoanalysis, or art) one could recognize certain links that might help in both psychoanalytic and art practices.

The writer defines the interaction between the artist and the medium as a “dialogue”, and she quotes the artist Louise Bourgeois (p. 121) in order to describe this dialogue through Bourgeois’s approach to working with stone:

*“I contemplate the penetrated cube for a long time. Then I try to express what I have to say, how I am going to translate what I have to say to it. I try to translate my problem into the stone. The drilling begins the process by negating the stone. The problem is how to complete the negation, to take away from the stone without altogether destroying it, but overcoming it, conquering it.”*

For the artist the moment of creation consists in a negotiation between the material, as an object for itself with its own qualities and presence within reality, and the artist, as she attempts to engrave her inner reality onto the object.

This relationship is compared to the one of the mother and child, particularly to the Winnicottian<sup>2</sup> notion of *mirroring*. In fact, when the mother gazes at her baby she becomes a mirror of the inner state of the child, “*what she looks like is related to what she sees there*”. (Winnicott cited in Townsend 2015 p.122) Just as being held as babies makes us aware of our physical boundaries, so it is that, through the gaze of the mother, the child is able to see a reflection of his or her own

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<sup>2</sup> Referring to the English paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott.

inner state, gaining a conception of his or her own being.

The mother's loving gaze allows the baby to see their reflection in her eyes just as the artist sees in a particular medium their hidden reflection, a vision that has not yet been carved, or painted or written about, waiting to be expelled by the artist's subconscious onto the physical medium. The process, rather than the outcome, is once again central, as it becomes a sort of metamorphosis, or rather, a moment of getting to know, compromising and establishing a relationship with the object, blurring the boundaries between object and self.

Townsend proceeds by comparing this relationship with the one between therapist and patient, particularly focusing on the work of the psychoanalyst and artist Marion Milner with an 11-years-old boy.

*"The boy used her as a pliable medium that he could mould however he wanted except that she also had qualities of her own to be taken account of. So his being able to make things out of his pliable medium depended also on his discovering things about it at the same time."* (Parsons cited in Townsend 2015 p.123)

In this case, the therapist becomes the space onto which the patient projects his or her inner self looking for reassurance, yet, just like the artist's medium, the therapist retains her own identity as a self. However, if the therapist allows herself to be moulded by the patient she can make an interpretation of the patient's behavior, consequently helping said patient, whilst, simultaneously, avoiding becoming just an object of projection. As the child discovers that objects exist in their own right it is necessary for him or her to submit the object to a process of

*destruction*; the object must survive this process and prove to be existent in the world as itself. For instance, in the case of the artist and the material, the material will have its own properties that cannot be changed, perhaps transformed to a certain degree, nevertheless, the object resistance to the *imagination* of the artist establishes the object's own character. This leads to compromises, as well as to new interesting outcomes that are not just mere portrayals of the artist's inner state.

Within the process of expression, however, lies a frame of containment. Described by Virginia Woolf as the "angel in the room", a ghostly figure embodying the servile nature of women as pictured by society<sup>3</sup>, in this case, anyway, we are referring to the "angel" as the audience, or rather the reception of the artwork. The artist, as a matter of fact "*must summon the necessary aggression to overcome these concerns (the audience), without losing the critical awareness of the conditions of reception*".(p. 126)

When the work is perceived in the frame it is perceived symbolically, while when outside the frame, it is perceived literally. (p.128)

Frame as a mental and, or physical space provides the juxtaposition of the mother as the frame and containment for the child, both physically and mentally, just as the therapist's room for the patient, and, it follows, the artist's studio as the frame within which the artwork lives symbolically.

In order for the subject to "survive" the outside of the frame the

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<sup>3</sup> Specifically regarding the Victorian Era from which the poem "*Angel in the house*" by Coventry Patmore is from, and which Woolf takes inspiration from to discuss the role of women in one of her papers "*Professions for Women*" (1931).

therapist needs to learn how to make use of her own experience as well as the “material” brought in by the patient so that she may “collage” together the dissociated fragments. The final aim being enabling the patient to do their own “cut and paste” by which they will be able to reconstruct old pictures and create new ones.

Returning to the artist's practice, in the case of Louise Bourgeois psychoanalysis plays a fundamental part.

In his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud described the grieving process after losing a loved one as “work of mourning”. As he explains, the ego must detach itself from the loved object by bringing it back as an archive of memories in order to move on from it and create new bonds.

Bourgeois's sculptural process, dictated by the physical movements of hammering, carving, scratching etc., constitutes a set of meticulous actions which suggest a detachment through physical undertaking. The physical labour ends in a concrete representation, for, as Freud also suggested, the work of mourning aims not only to sever the bond between the ego and the lost object, but also to internalize what has been lost, preserving it somewhere inside the subject's inner world, or, in the case of the sculptor, keeping it somewhere tangible, under the spoils of an artefact. (Morris 2007 p.229-230)

Bourgeois is significantly interested in the works of the unconscious, and one could observe how, through her sculptural work, the making process, as discussed above, turns into a therapeutic practice, helping the artist to understand herself.

It almost appears as she needs the artefact to tell her what she truly feels.

In a passage from an autobiographical text Bourgeois writes: *“Some of us are so obsessed with the past that we die of it. It is the attitude of the poet who never finds the lost heaven and it is really the situation of artists who work for a reason that nobody can quite grasp.”* (p.80)

In Bourgeois’s piece *Eyes* (Fig. 12) material and meaning are combined together beautifully, generating a sculpture which uncanniness one cannot restrain to contemplate.

The pink marble resembling human flesh brings a connection to the body, so do the eyes, which, once more, embody the fragility of the human spirit through the physical vulnerability of the human flesh. The gaze of these eyes, which do not belong to any body (pardon the pun), is silent as the marble they are made of, yet shattering as the primordial voice of stones when one contemplates them in silence. The primitivism, yet, softness of the stone is what the subversive writer George Bataille researched in Paleolithic art with the aim of locating the source of something he described as the “informe”, namely *“the destruction of specific categories through an ambivalent yoking of contraries with the power to destroy meaning.”*(p.60)

The artist Mary Kelly also refers to this in a different context, perceiving the Natural History Museum as *“a vast metaphor for the exploration of the mother’s body”*.( Kelly 1999 p.xiii)

Accordingly, in “Post Partum Document”<sup>4</sup> she tries to put *“this archeology of everyday life into that kind of framed space* (the space of the museum).” (p.xiii)

The focus of “Post Partum Document” in engaging in feminist

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<sup>4</sup> KELLY, M., 1999. *Post-partum document*. Los Angeles, USA: University of California Press.

discourses and contributing to their theoretical debates is not the trajectory I would like to take at this moment, because what appears more urgent in Kelly's statement is something far broader. It lies in the occurrence of the body, specifically the lifegiving body of the mother, as the primal source of life. This maternal body contains the secret to life, however it cannot unravel it. It is the constant pursuit for the first primal source of existence, which one could also refer to as Mother Nature.

After a certain circumnavigation we are back at the starting point: the body as the architecture given to the individual to start their journey into experience. In other words, the body as the seat of *being*. This dwelling is the only place where mankind can begin their quest for consciousness, as nature, in its primitive form, is the primal place for one to inquire about reality.

In some writings by Virginia Woolf one can recognise the individual's inquiry into reality through her use of symbols. Sometimes water, sometimes glass, the writer enables *mirrors* to turn into instruments for cutting through reality. They become delicate dimensions for explaining the fragility of perceptions, namely the fragility of life.

In "To the lighthouse" human minds are compared to "*pools of uneasy water; in which clouds for ever turn and shadows form*". (Woolf cited in Bressan 2018 p.89)

In "Between the Acts" mirrors become specks where the human soul can be externalised, fracturing the constraints of reality and fabricating new spaces outside of it, yet still being active within it: "*he saw her reflected in the glass. Cut off from their bodies, their eyes smiled, their bodiless eyes, at their eyes in the glass.*" (Woolf cited in Bressan 2018 p.92)



Through the act of writing Woolf's aim is to capture the fleeting moments that make up each individual consciousness and reality.

Just like the Impressionists were capturing what caught their eyes, corresponding to what was happening within, so does Woolf, operating in the meeting place of the inner self and the outside world. For the writer *"the power of visual experience stimulates its verbal translation."* (Bressan 2018 p.55)

In Genevieve Lloyd's interpretation of Woolf's essay "Death of a Moth" one can witness a moving example of the individual's inner battle to reconcile her fragmented being. This *being* made out of perceptions, memories and other components, is incessantly struggling in a heartbreaking race with time, namely death.

*"In a struggle which seems at once so marvelous and so pathetic, the moth crosses and recrossed the window pane. It is, we are told, as if a thin but pure fibre of the enormous energy of the world has been thrust into its frail and diminutive body - 'as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers had set it dancing and zig-zagging to show us the real nature of life' - life as it cannot be seen when it is so 'garnished and cumbered' that it has to move with the greatest circumspection and dignity. The moth struggles against the irresistible power of death, and when it comes death seems as strange as life had seemed strange a few minutes before."* (Lloyd 1993 p.161)

If for Louise Bourgeois the sculpting process is a mourning process of reliving the past in order to let go, for Virginia

Woolf writing becomes the instrument by which she recollects her dispersed *self*, fixing *it* into words. Her writings are deeply poetic and inextricably profound because rooted in intensively felt perceptions needing to be brought together so that one may leave them behind without a tormenting sense of loss.

In “A sketch of the past” Woolf talks about those moments which ‘come to the surface unexpectedly’, often leaving her puzzled in the face of reality. With maturity she begins to see them as revelations, tokens of something existing behind the apparent, and which, when put into words, becomes real.

*“The world takes on the form of a work of art in which we participate: ‘we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing in itself’.”*(p.159)



Fig. 12 *Eyes*



Fig. 13



## Conclusion

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The role of the artist is a role of storyteller. Her invisible third eye being a transparent film that divides the shared reality from the one by which each individual is separated. She translates something that exists, but can be seen only by looking through this spherical glass, peeking through the gaps of the stone wall of *reason*. The artist, like an archeologist, digging and researching, studying and observing through her invisible monocle, shares her discoveries with the audience to let them know that there is someplace else, there is more.

The stone wall of reason, like a web, is supported by the threads of language, conceptualisation and classificatory patterns, and it is fundamental for the human being to be functional, providing boundaries and safety from the puzzling mystery of life. So long as we recognise that it is woven by us. Losing sight of this would mean becoming entangled in a web that we have spun, convinced that the web is the one reality.

For George Bataille this recognition process is a violent turning of reason and logic, like clods of earth, with the purpose of letting new sprouts grow.

In Takehito Etani's work it is about making the audience face the illusory compacted nature of the body and its cognitive abilities, challenging the idea of body perception as infallible, thus, challenging the perceivable reality as the only truthful reality.

The same suggestion comes up in the conference on “the nature of reality”, where the two academics slice said reality in layers, exposing other lenses throughout which one can peek at the vastness of it.

Gabriel Orozco supplies these layers with movement, fabricating a microcosm where the observer is placed in under the form of a spherical body. Like a clay ball of existence, the artist follows its motion, capturing the traces left behind, for a split moment, on the thin surface of a photograph.

For Anish Kapoor building presences within the absence of space means making the cosmogonical void present. This void that contains everything and nothing, just like the human being, is disguised under the spoils of an encounter for the audience to experience, and, perhaps, reflect on in relation to themselves.

This primal sculptural language is also found in the work of Louise Bourgeois, for whom artefacts become fragments of the self in time. Each object infused with past memories and future expectations meets the outside world and reality. These objects expand the dimension of what reality can be, becoming tokens of a dialogue that the artist has translated for the audience in the form of sculptures.

In Virginia Woolf’s writings a poetic portrayal of the struggle of being human is displayed. The individual being a bundle of disparate things living inside a fragile body, struggling to navigate through the time and the space she inhabits. Yet, Woolf offers the solution for assembling these fragments of perceptions and *self*. By glancing at the mirroring reflections of water and glass, these volatile mirrors are understood as precious fleeting moments when the mantle of appearance is

lifted, leaving behind tokens of *life*. Attentively collecting and assembling them together she reveals their true nature, their being something real concealed under the transparent veil of the apparent.

*“Wholeness is glimpsed, single, distinct, in the wave falling, the boat rocking. [...] assembling the scattered parts of the vision within”*. (Lloyd 1993 p.160)

Our *stories* resemble multiple perspective narratives in modern novels, respecting their multiplicity, while making them a satisfying unity. As mentioned in the introduction, it is through metaphor that one is able to gather the disparate fragments of various multiplicities. Metaphor being an intuitive perception, or a capacity, to perceive a broader image of the diverse aspects of reality, allowing one to grip on to each piece, substituting and moving them as to generate new meaning.

So it is that each creative mind is no more than a mind that has challenged the wall of reason, transforming art into a *metaphor* for inquiring about life.

As beautifully put by Hermann Hesse: *“there is good and reason in us, in human beings, with whom fortune plays, and we can be stronger than nature and fate, if only for a few hours. And we can draw close to one another in times of need, understand and love one another, and live to comfort each other. And sometimes, when the black depths are silent, we can do even more. We can then be gods for moments, stretch out a commanding hand and create things which were not there before and which, when they are created, continue to live without us.”* (Hesse 1955 p.235)



Fig. 14 *Ouroboros* - English Cemetery, Florence, Italy



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## APPENDIX

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### 1: *Pineal gland*

Theories of the anatomical location of the spiritual component of man have their roots at the beginning of formation of philosophical thought and religions. (López-Muñoz et al. 2012 p.162)

In this regard the pineal gland has been a subject of intense philosophical speculation for more than 2000 years. (Nityabodhananda 2009 p.63)

López-Muñoz et al. (2012 p.162) believe that “*its unique topographic location, individual character within an organism dominated by paired structures, and morphological appearance have made this organ the subject of many physiological theories about the functionalism of the human body and philosophical principles that connect with its spirituality*”.

In *The Republic* Plato distinguished between three kinds of souls: an *appetitive soul* of basic needs, an *emotional soul* of sensory perceptions and emotions, and a *rational soul* of knowledge.

He stated that the soul is imprisoned in the physical body, and only after death it can travel back to the world of ideas.

Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that the *psykhé* (soul) was shared among all beings, and, whilst plants possess a *vegetative*

*soul*, animals and humans share a *sensitive* one, only humans, however, possess a *rational soul*, strictly interconnected with the intellect.

The hearth, for both of the philosophers, was the anatomical centre of the spiritual element.

In 131-200 AD Claudius Galen, following the school of Alexandria, described the soul as flowing in the form of air, its movement being “administered” by the pineal gland. (López-Muñoz et al. 2012 pp.162-163)

It is from Galen’s work that the French philosopher René Descartes drew from in order to develop the Cartesian neurophysiological doctrine.

Descartes believed that all cephalic and sensory organs were duplicated, except for the pineal gland which he declared as the seat of the soul.

In his last work, *Passions of the soul*, Descartes tried to clarify the way in which thought (mind) and extension (body) were influenced.

He described the pineal gland as moving in relation to thought, therefore the changing position of the gland resulted in a different perception of the soul. (López-Muñoz et al. 2012)

At the end of the 18th, and the beginning of the 19th century the Cartesian theories were completely ruled out as a consequence of scientific progress and discoveries.

Nonetheless, in the 21st century, the pineal gland is still quite a speculative subject.

Its function is to maintain circadian rhythm (our body clock) and to provide “light and dark” information through the hormone of melatonin. (Kumar, Kumar, Sardhara 2018)

The releasing of a bigger quantity of melatonin, when it is dark, points to its important role in sleep.

However some research suggests that the link between melatonin and sleep is not that simple to understand.

*“These researchers found that removing the pineal gland did not affect the activity levels of rats that had normal access to light and dark. They concluded that the function of the pineal gland may be more complicated than initially thought and that its role may vary”.* (Villines 2017)

The pineal gland, also known as third eye, still remains quite a mystery in the modern world, just so as the mind-body problem still remains unresolved.

