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A tribute

Volume Five of Six
Letters to objects



Letters to objects

Mirror

Eros

Room

Water

1948

Self

Anniversary

I never look at your body. In a few seconds I shall look at it; then you will know that once again I have neglected you by pretending to look at you

David Troostweyk

The word 'object' comes from the Latin 'jacere', to throw. There are many interpretations to the prefix 'ob' but in this case, 'hindrance, blocking, concealment' seems the most apt. So something is thrown and gets stuck. Thinking of an object in this way led me to focus on its concealed depths, what I term the secret life of the object. No doubt I was led to consider objects in this way by both the congruence and conflict between my two practices, firstly as a cultural studies lecturer, and secondly as a psychoanalytical psychotherapist. Putting these two ways of thinking together I began to consider what thoughts would be thrown at an object, and what would be the consequences of their being hindered, blocked or obstructed. I had begun on a journey to think about objects as if they were people.

Jane Graves

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Volume Five - Letter One - Mirror



As a child I dreamt in a density of light beams, possibly from an early view of searchlights or even the endless picture stretch I imagined with a packet of Kensitas cigarettes ... I could tilt the highest branches of trees with this packet's picture ... on the 'depicted tray' was a picture of the same packet I held, easy to imagine the image repeated forever.

As between two facing mirrors where more imagined lengths could transport a child's mind; I still see a slowly curving tunnel that once stretched into my secret dreams. If I twisted myself through to the reflected self in a mirror, into where I might as well be, I would join Alice who was in a place where I longed to be. On the bus to school sitting just behind the driver I could imagine, in the dark glass, I was traveling backwards ... again stealing from Alice's adventure I tried to travel with the Red Queen ... one way to stay a step ahead of inequality, where most have to run fast to stay where they are.

As young men we escaped inside Eros, watched films that mirror war; my friends on leave from National Service would speculate on their fear of battle. My brother described his fear in a truck en route to Suez; he felt ashamed to be trembling in rows of terrified teenagers. There are connections I can't find between wars of different ages; if I imagine each new war as a mirrored reflection from the tombs of dead generals I see nothing, I add nothing ... as Richard Feynman said " ... there is plenty wrong with epilates" perhaps there is nothing more to be said ... but wait there is help, Dada help, with this aid you can convince yourself that everything will be all right when you can see the back of your reflected self ... So there are other ways of looking, other ways of seeing through the looking glass.

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Childhood mirror dreams were later heightened in Cocteau's films where I watched mirrors transport, break and witness ... here there was safety from the living dream I slept with throughout my own middle age. In this dream I may have seen Ann Bolin walk with Catharine Howard from the White Tower to their deaths but also stood for hours on Waterloo Station imagining it packed with men in Puttees rolling cigarettes. Once while standing there at Waterloo I saw a stone on the platform; after many years of it's being in my pocket I dropped it along with two silver rings into the Thames below from where I stood over the crack in Tower bridge

Perhaps now is drowning as you dig a trench from platforms nine or eleven to where a train filled with young men departs to their singing who may all be dyslectic but still sing the words and know there is no such thing as spelling correctly unless you want to write to her and within the red pen limitation there might be some meaning when long ago there was not much left after red pen marks and and repetition is alright in songs so you sing even louder and such a notation may just get through without being blacked out by censorship and you pen mud memories for that someone you love and they say what do you mean over and over and if you were high above and saw the bullets and just one one bullet belongs to you after it had left someone else who might have looked in the mirror just before you did.

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Volume Five - Letter Two - Eros



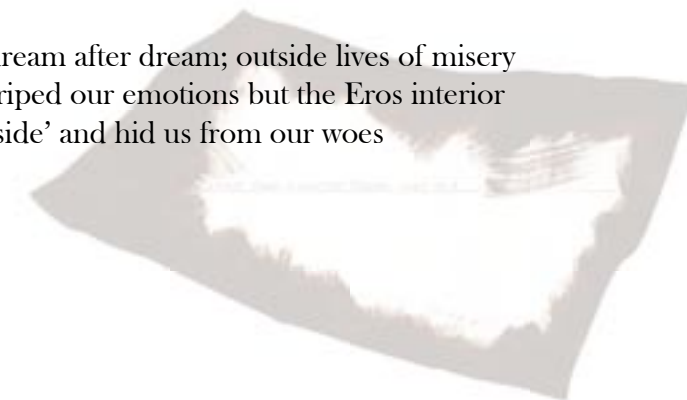
Dear Eros,

There are many, it is though you Eros I recall the most; gone now, you were not there for long anyway ... The Lewisham Hippodrome, built in 1911, was where I had been as a child with my grandmother ... she took me, her young grandson, to see Billy Cotton, Carrol Levis, Arthur English and once, by mistake I presume 'the war hero' Phyllis Dixie, Then in 1952 you became the Eros Cinema for our dreams...

I dreamed inside you Eros through my youth ... so many have written about the dreams of cinema that mine diminish until I capture myself, if there is one, within the collective unconscious.

In Eros I worn a check jacket during 'On the Waterfront', almost kissed Marilyn in Niagara ... saved, protected and even began some dreams of my own ... swam in a planet made from water where the outer crust of ice held all ... the centre was hottest and all swam in comfort at preferred temperatures.

Inside Eros was dream after dream; outside lives of misery tempered; both griped our emotions but the Eros interior was 'inside the inside' and hid us from our woes

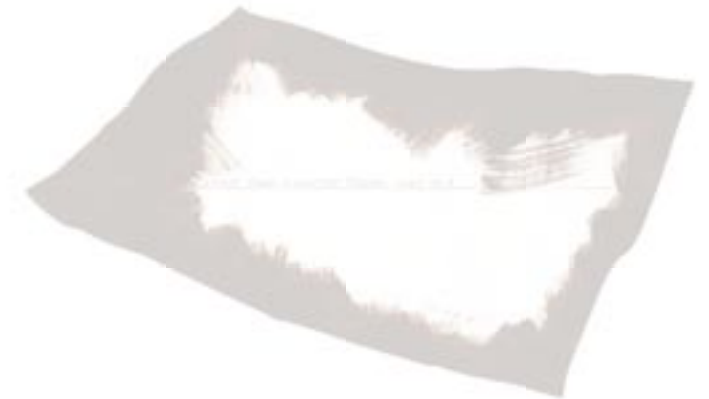


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Sometimes a snake moves in more than one direction at once I love this fleeting thought try to imagine the movement of the snake this seems easy because we are watching inside Eros but even here there is both pleasure and pain I try to imagine the direction of all the bullets that mankind has fired and the one that has been traveling all though our life towards the end of all our perception fired by Burt Lancaster perhaps my very own Crimson Pirate I though shall always be safe 'inside the inside' inside my everlasting Eros there is no nostalgia in eternity no time or us as we are now because we have all lost our memory our anticipation all the things that time allows and there is none and I write this to you now and my arm is still in a sling and they said I would be alright but I miss you and want to say things I just can't and someone told me they black out parts so where I am isn't known and that I may be like the lad next to me who isn't there now and anyway I'm not to sure that my teachers would give me a tick because I didn't get many anyway



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Volume Five - Letter Three - Room



Dear Room,

Edward Keinholz made the best art versions I have ever seen ... transfer them from memory to thought and you can be 'inside the inside' right now. Rooms can be of temperature and function, decorative delight, grandeur even and can be like 'music for a while' ... another supreme object.

In 1971 I was in the ICA just off the Mall and walking into a work of art. This was the first time I had done that and it changed everything ... I could now be inside as well as in front of paintings ... it had always been an annoyance when suddenly before say, a huge Barnett Newman a person walked in front of me ... now though they could become part of the work ... I remember the moment; no I don't ... I would just like to ... there is sometimes a danger of memory overcoming a thought ... inside the 'ICA room' I was transfixed; how wonderful was art then, how lucky that I had taken another step along the looking journey.

In another room the revelation of another act of 'love' would break my heart for such a long time. I lost my way of looking ... can only remember a mistake with a touch on a stairway and leap ...

My Gollo appeared; even though I had not yet read Proust I know it was Gollo because I could not name the pain I felt. There are locks one cannot open without help; the fear of 'I know not what' is always there,

Years later, in an almost empty National Gallery room, I am 'inside' the Marriage of Arnolfini; around me is the room I used to be outside. I play with the thought of which one might be real, then walk to Veronese's 'Family of Darius before Alexander'. "Which one of you is Alexander? and is the monkey a friend of yours?"

My friend Michael who is registered blind asks me to sit with him before a favoured painting; I have chosen the Veronese. Long ago

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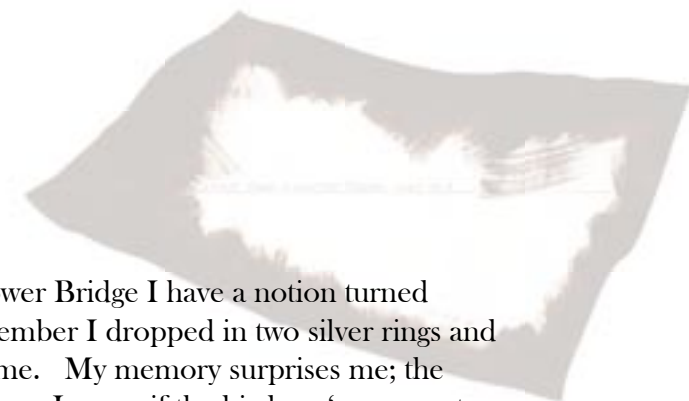
I would have chosen the Arnolfini but Harold Pinter is there with 'Betrayal' and Emma asking, rhetorically perhaps, "A room for fucking?". Today though I am with Michael looking at the Darius family kneeling; we spend hours there and I lure Michael to sit with me inside 'this room ... am I helping him to see a moment of stillness that predicts what might happen next.

I must be careful of the thrill some thoughts bring. Even after all this time Michael helps me see the painting differently; his wife is a pilot, when she let me fly her tiny plane there was no fear but then it wasn't a spitfire

Here in eternity there are many blacked out spitfires even though this is that war and I am in this one and all the generals are in the war rooms and we are the ones who do the dying well most of it and we are not gifted at anything much but we are quite nice to each other and manage times without much quarrelling and my teachers said it was too difficult to understand and I'm not even dyslectic like my friend here with his arm in a sling and he has never met you and after this I would like him to and you are so nice I'm not allowed to say where we are but I don't know anyway it's not like just saying the name and you know because if we were in where you live and I know it's not the same as perhaps I am dyslectic after all because I feel as if I'm in a muddle but I don't like war and I am frightened but I know you are the only person who I ever kissed and we were not to sure how to be more than just a blank where Trot will put us in his picture and instead of being 23264770 private Tommy D I will be the space where I used to be and there isn't one so I'll say goodbye just in case

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Volume Five - Letter Four - Water



Dear Water,

Over the 'divide' in Tower Bridge I have a notion turned down ... I seem to remember I dropped in two silver rings and a stone this fuses the time. My memory surprises me; the river and its waters' flow ... I mean if the big bang's a correct thought then once, 'this place' wasn't even an empty space but ... 'how the water got here is enough for me to wonder. I imagine some of that water from the Thames and where else it's been, is from ... even going.

How many times has this water been drunk before ... imagine all kinds of creatures sipping ...but mostly I like to think of it's having been in one of our parallel universes. 'M theory', as it's sometimes named, may mean 'space' is differently arranged from the way we perceive; not so difficult to believe if we imagine the perception of an electric eel.

A conceptual artist might present us with more than one 'water's edge' ... "Unreal city, a crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, I had not thought death had undone so many" ...

As an apprentice I walked over 'the bridge' and up King William Street to work on/at the now defunct Bankers Clearing House; sometimes I'd pause to look down towards Lower Thames Street, towards the cork capped porters who worked where now there is only traffic. Once, at work, I installed lights onto the roof of Mary Walnoth to beam up at the completed 'Clearing House' and faced the possibility of a bleak future without the Soma that came from the book in my pocket ... I can't say how much I loathed my job, perhaps because I wasn't very good at it, the memory of the time lingered and being in different situations made me uneasy and

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hard to find a focus ... but with Eros wings, once more over the Thames, I watch the porters in their flat-topped cork hats ... "To Greenwich then by water" ... not from my old school house of Pepys but with my dad and all those tugs and coldness. I'll say "Goodbye Lovell's Wharf" where he worked in the endless cold ... and steal once more from Dante 'I had not thought death had undone so many' ... but if ice is there at the fraudulent depth of hell it's less dense than the water we swam through to get there

I imagine my dad walking out from Lovells and onto the 58 tram to get home and that he came in through the front door and into his room at the front because my mother wouldn't talk to him and she was at the back and it was a muddle for them both and even before that when there was the war and the back of our house was a bit ripped and we could see through the wall to next door and I wonder if they had a try and were not able to get on but there was no chance of divorce and their war was like the one outside and their language as separate as the two sides who faced each other in any war and there might be write cruel letters or would I try to be thoughtful and tell you there was no one to blame but here in this trench my feet are soaked and my arm aches and I'm all right now thank you for the letter you wrote and it took four months to get here and I remember too well there is always Dada which seems to like to explain that the muddle isn't one only because you say so crikey that was close and I'm so tired.

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Volume Five - Letter Five - 1948



Dear self,

On March the fiftieth 1949 I received a card with the number eight on it ... In those days my dad was excited about finding a card with a number ... well actually it was my ninth birthday but he could only find one with a number eight so he said it was a year late with a laugh.

The card became an object of memory even though it is no longer there or anywhere for that matter. I think I still recall the surface shine, that it didn't open and that like the Jasper John's Number Paintings its numeral filled the rectangle. When I first saw a Johns number painting I remembered my 'eighth birthday card', or rather as Jane pointed out 'I remember remembering'. I even 'remember' around that time at school Mr Williams had 'spelling Bees' we had to stand in front of the class and spell words asked by other children ... what happened seemed to be that you learned a couple of difficult words to get you to the front and then quickly failed ... perhaps there were some good spellers up for longer. What is odd about this is that a word I chose to be spelt out was 'remembered', which I sang out rhythmically r-e-m-e-m-b-e-r-e-d. I sometimes use 'forgetful', which is the same as remember at least in eternity it would be, as a password; perhaps to enter the moment in the 'Proust library' with the chink of a wheel taper, the trip on the pavement in Venice and sip of lime tea; our past and present are, as Proust tells us knotted together. There are other objects from my childhood ... a glass door-knob which I still own and my dad's 'three pennies' which he used for his weekly bath ... Friday night he declared was "the three Bs ... bath, bed and bunk up" the third of which was perhaps his dream as he and my mother slept separately, hardly spoke. Singular objects like the doorknob and collective ones like the three pennies are different from memories that float,

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evoked by association; the scent of my mother, left in her room while she was away for a few years ... I used to go into her room and bring her back by opening a drawer and sniffing ... I think I forgot this until I sat with DelMari, a psychoanalyst who reintroduced me to my mum and dad.

Jane Graves knew objects in an altered way from anyone else I had met; she dealt with my madness differently, often using objects to make little steps that brought me back from my personnel alteration.

In N F Simpson's 'One way pendulum', objects seem happily resting between eccentricity and quest. The desire or quest for 'different arms' ... the inexact quote I remember is "Look at my arms, how can I go out with arms like this" ... 'those days' lead me strangely to the thought that we are less separate from inanimate objects than we might imagine ... 'back then' inside my bubble of madness that being made from atoms I could unify not only with the thoughts of a stone but physically be as all things and lose my memory completely.

Trot responded to my state in a different way from Jane, He quite gently took the piss ... both his and Jane's responses were helpful

In her essay 'Inside the inside' Jane writes about a young man dying in a war but first she writes about a jug ... the jug she wrote of was for her family tears... though it could hold other states of matter ... then she almost rewrites the wartime letter that holds an airman's death inside events of daily life but does not quite pour it out.



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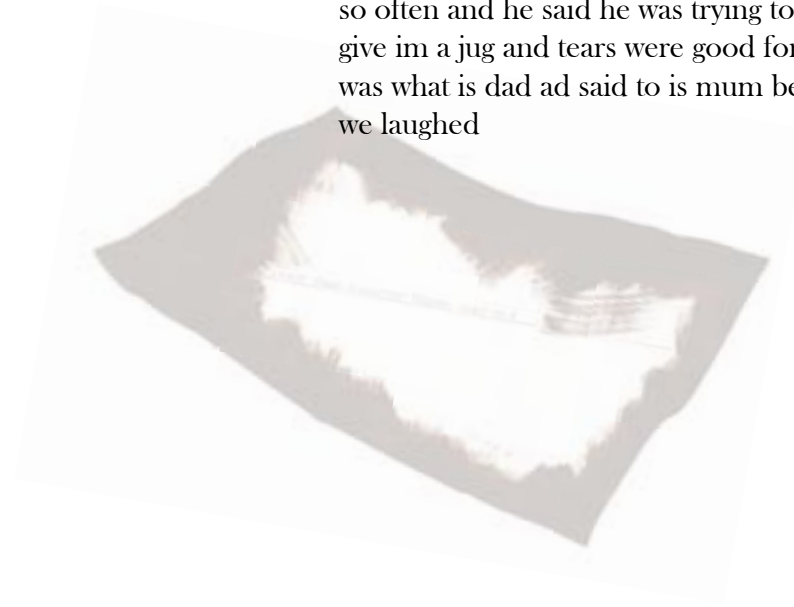
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It is sometimes better to imagine a memory than to look for it; like Trot's pictures, there are objects with and without their shadow ... and back comes that Glass doorknob I took from my mum and dad's house and still keep by the side of my bed and even when it was attached it didn't open anything that led anywhere.

like her where we have been here for ages well we were before it began again and we were all a bit shaky apart from the ones who talked all the time but afterwards they were quiet too and there was one of us who wasn't with us but he stayed there and we had to look at him and there was really two things to look at and we didn't want to say anything until the stretcher came and they put him on and there were so many cigarettes and mud is quite warm and we used it to cover ourselves well our legs anyway but one person near kept crying and was told to stop so often and he said he was trying to and then someone said give im a jug and tears were good for is dads lumbago or that was what is dad ad said to is mum before this lot and and and we laughed



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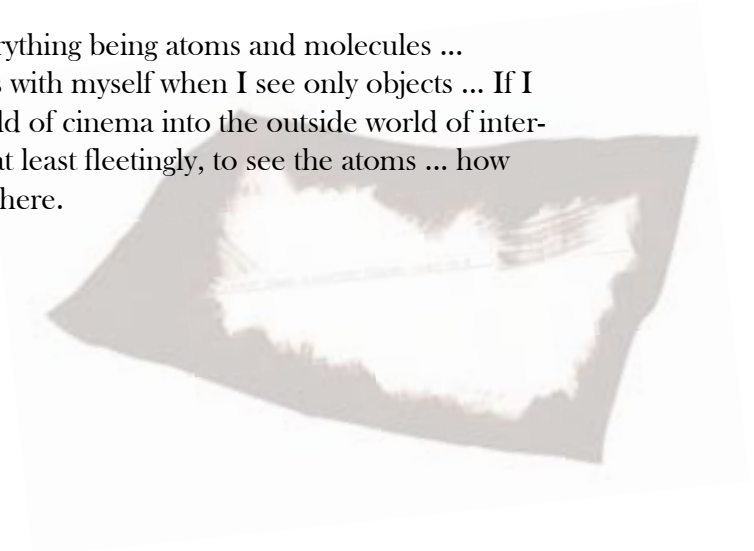


Dear Self,

Sometimes to think of myself as an object brings delight though it's not easy and I have to concentrate hard; it began with biology ... I first warmed to biology when Miss Crosier taught me, among other things, that our cells become a skin trail as they leave our bodies. There are other trails we leave but the cell one is easy to imagine from a moment in a room with enthusiasts after lessons had ended.

The second law of thermo dynamics popped in somewhere along the years and told me cups of tea never get hotter on their own. There's always the same amount of energy; that's the first law ... it's just that it's all going to be at the same potential sometime in the future, that's everything at the same temperature; that's the second law ... well something like that, it's not always good to be first. The way we relate to the second law is a human trail that convinces me we are not 'the thing in itself' but rather a part ... a trail.

I try to think of everything being atoms and molecules ... sometimes get cross with myself when I see only objects ... If I take the dream world of cinema into the outside world of interaction I can begin, at least fleetingly, to see the atoms ... how beautiful is looking here.



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In my very own 'Big Sleep' lent to me from my friend David I see his obliterated 'War Memorial' every time I look at one as I did recently with 'Bomber Command' All around 'the feet' were letters touchingly written by connected memory ... I read six, all seemed to be concerned with loss

'Six sets of six' came to my mind, so I wander through them trying to encompass something ... and again it's 'I know not what'. What you leave out is the same as when you draw ... how you longed to be you then, when the pencil just touched the paper with fragility and fear.

Both my friends, Trot and Jane, searched for a supreme object and found the 'washing machine' ... they made me look deeply into its secrets and in their separate ways helped me see vaporous connections ... I grasp at them still.

Perhaps I'll forget rather than remember exactly what an object is or that they do not all cast shadows ... that the world is made from atoms that become molecules with shared particles. We strain our eyes to imagine, seeing, knowing we'll fail but I have looked for most of my life. Still trying to see behind and in front of paintings; trying to get the steps shorter and ... an attempt to leave nothing out ... but oh how I wish I had made the work funnier and the connections work a bit better, been a bit more Dada ... I love Dada and the way it adds grace to dyslexia. Dyslexia is like syncopation in jazz rather than being a bad speller ... you can be in step some of the time but when another instrument comes in with different thoughts you can soften things and be a little off beat. Still it's better than nothing which I have often tried to imagine ... I warm to 'nothing' finding it as abstract as mathematics, like my understanding of Godel, incomplete.

