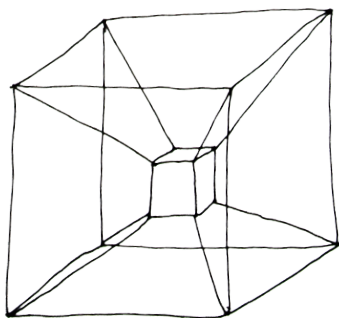who   am   I   ?

an explorative investigation of a curated research method
by Winke Wiegersma

who–am–I–?
an explorative investigation of a curated research method

graduation project
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This study deals with the question *who-am-I-?*. Not to find answers but rather to examine the question itself. Why do I, and presumably other people too, ask myself this question? Behind the apparent simplicity of the phrase lies a complex structure, which shapes the way we understand ourselves, others and the world around us. In this study, I aim to expose (part of) this structure in a creative and unconventional way.

To do so, this study addresses three questions. First, it asks whether a curated research method can be of value for scientific research. Rather than picking a specific discipline to depart from, I curated a research methodology to investigate this question, appropriating from existing research methods, theories and styles. Second, it addresses whether this specific approach can gain insight into the question at stake. Armed with this hybrid approach, I tried to dissect each dimension of the cube; the *who*, the *am*, the *I* and the *?*. Lastly, it looks at whether this unconventional approach can function as a self-experiment, challenging my existing research habits.

This resulted in four essays, each exploring a part of the question in their own way, through text and visuals. Consequently, this research offers an example of how an 'undisciplinary' approach can gain cross-connections, comparisons, associations and insights across fields, which otherwise would have remained concealed.

Who-am-I-? is three things:
An investigation of a curated research method.
An explorative dissection of a question as a research object.
A self-experimentation of a researcher.

'Thus, reader, myself am the matter of my book: there's no reason thou shouldst employ thy leisure about so frivolous and vain a subject.'
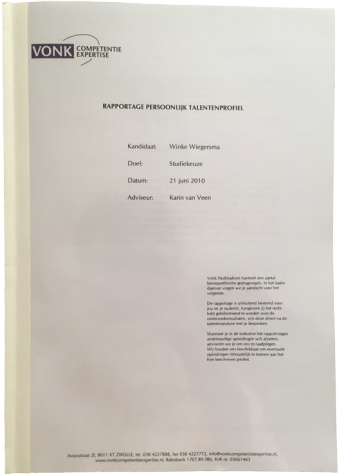—Michel de Montaigne

preface

In 2010, I took a personality test. The results were sent a few weeks later in the form of a booklet and a USB-stick. Is this me?

(This is not me.)

I am a potential.
I am a feeling.
I am a Cancer sign.
I am a Gelderse.
I am a number.
I am a thought.
I am a narrative.
I am a researcher.
I am a history graduate.
I am a body.
I am an adult.
I am a consumer.
I am a media technologist.
I am a step-sister.
I am a voter.
I am a step-daughter.
I am a step-granddaughter.
I am a dog person.
I am a friend.
I am a heterosexual.
I am an Instagrammer.
I am a nervous system.
I am a great-great-great-granddaughter.
I am a user.
I am a producer.
I am a walker.
I am a cyclist.
I am a username.
I am an identification number.
I am a cocktail of hormones.
I am a phone number.
I am a reader.
I am a fiction.
I am a writer.
I am an acquaintance.
I am a reality.
I am a Facebook profile.
I am a self.
I am an energy.
I am a millennial.
I am a great-great-granddaughter.
I am an observer.
I am an inhabitant of planet earth.
I am a length.
I am a width.
I am a volume.
I am a weight.
I am a colour.
I am a listener.
I am an animal.
I am a mind.
I am a size.
I am a past.
I am a future.
I am a voice.
I am a bundle of memories.
I am a smell.
I am Winke.
I am a sister.
I am a citizen.
I am a woman.
I am a date.
I am a student.
I am a person.
I am a daughter.
I am an employee.
I am an aunt.
I am a Dutch native.
I am a human being.
I am a freelancer.
I am a personality.
I am an individual.
I am a granddaughter.
I am an organism.
I am an animal lover.
I am a citizen of Amsterdam.
I am a great-granddaughter.
I am a European.
I am a substance.
I am a moment.
I am a flatmate.
I am a DNA sequence.
I am a now.

Is this me?

* The idea of the cube is drawn from a conversation with a professor of Philosophy at Leiden University, Dr. J.J.M. Sleutels, who previously used a similar spatialisation to address the question 'What are we?'. I applied it here as I found it useful to visualise the question. It should be seen as one out of many possible metaphors to do so. If this visualisation does not work for you, feel free to leave it aside.

It is not hard to come up with a potential answer. In fact, even when restricting my answers to singular nouns, I end up with a rather dazzling list of eighty-three. Which answer is the 'correct' answer? Is it the sum of all these answers—or more? Why does it prove so hard to give a definite answer to this question?

This work could have been a study into the multiplicity of possible answers. It could have been a quest to a single answer. It is neither.

Rather, this is a study about the question. Why do I ask myself this question, and why do others (presumably) do too? How can I understand this question? What implications precede this question? The apparent simplicity of the question conceals rather a complex structure—a structure which shapes not only how we understand ourselves, but also how we comprehend the people around us and make sense of the world we are living in. For, as the popular saying goes, should we not know about ourselves first, before we can know the other?

The question *who-am-I-?* seems to raise the following issues: the fact that it is a question, implies that there could be an answer: that there is 'something(s)' to 'know'. It implies that there is such a thing as an individual self ('I'), that this self exists ('am'), and that this self exists in the form of a specific human being ('who'). These implications are precisely the issues at stake in the present study.

Thus, the question *who-am-I-?* lies central to this study, not as the research *question* but rather as the research *topic*. Quite literally, as I will show soon, since one of the aims of this study is to dissect (part of) the structure behind this question.

Now, it might feel a bit odd to ask a research question *about* a question. It is not a tangible object, nor very concrete. Thus, before I will introduce the main objectives of this study, it might be fruitful to make the question a bit more comprehensible, indeed, to make it observable.

One way to do so, is to spatialize the question with the aid of a geometrical shape; a four-dimensional cube, or tesseract.* By placing each component of the question on a dimension of the cube, I can figuratively build my physical object of research. This helps me to separate the different parts of the question and allows me to look at each one individually.

On the first dimension, I place the *who*.
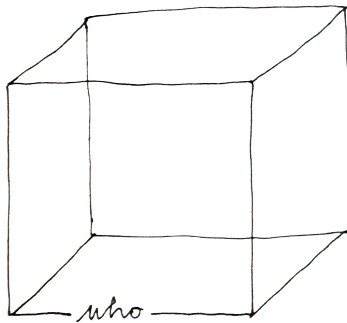
Who is an interrogative. Together with the question mark at the end, it constitutes the interrogative character of the sentence. *Who* could be answered by 'this or that person'—for it semantically contains both the categorisation 'person' and the determiner 'which'.

On the second dimension, I place the *am*.
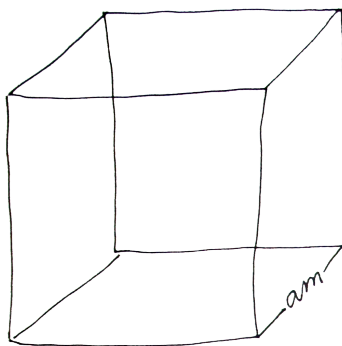
Am equals *I* to *who*, it connects them.
It entails the connotation of 'existing', of 'being.'

On the third dimension, I place the *I*.
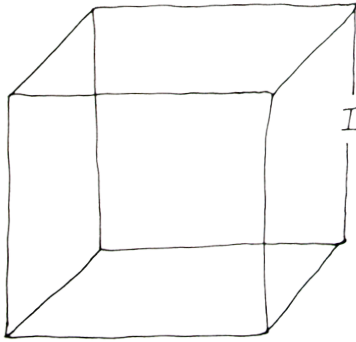
I is reflexive: *I* can only be an *I* for a self. It implies an individual.

On the fourth dimension, I place the ?.
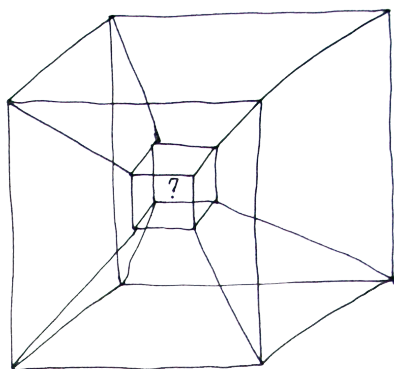
The question mark confirms the interrogative character, initiated by *who*.
It implies that there is something to be asked, and that there might be
an answer.

The cube implies that each dimension contains a large number of points. Together, they construct a grid of coordinates. Now, I could explore how many possible options, or points, of the *who* there are. Same for *am*, *I* and *?*. Combined, I would end up with a coordinate system of all possible combinations of *who's*, *am's*, *I's* and *?*.

This would be quite the endeavour. Therefore, this study will not be an exhaustive overview of all possible points in the grid of *who–am–I–?*. Rather, it will be an exploration of some points on each dimension that, to me, stand out and deserve a closer look.

I created my object of research. Wrapped around a four-dimensional space, it became a spatial volume. I place the question carefully on the examination table. I turn it around a couple of times: where do I start dissecting? I need a method, a plan of attack.

Where do I find a methodology to study such a research topic? The most closely related topic seems to be the 'self'; the implied subject of the phrase *who-am-I-?*. The self has been extensively studied by scholars in the field of philosophy; the field home to branches like metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, dealing with abstract notions such as 'self', 'being', 'identity' and 'knowledge'. From Aristotle's universal self and René Descartes' immaterial self, to the Buddhist non-self ('anatta') and Daniel Dennett's fictional self—to name but a few—the nature of the self has been extensively discussed.[1] Interestingly, most of these debates revolve around the question of *where* the self is located: in my body or in my brain; in a universal consciousness or in my imagination? The location, and subsequently the materiality, of the self seem to be a disputed matter.

I, too, could look at philosophy. However, I am not a philosopher, nor do I claim to be one. Many elaborate and excellent accounts have been written about the self—most of which I probably neglect, some of which I use throughout this research. Even though this research is not exclusively a philosophical study, I am indebted to various philosophers and philosophies, that help me construct my story. One example is *Het Ongrijpbare Zelf* (2013)—a study by Dutch philosopher and historian Jacques Bos—which offers a historical overview of Western philosophies of the self.[2]

Moreover, I realised that *who-am-I-?* can be seen as general—for *any* 'I' or 'self' could potentially ask this question—yet at the same time as particular—if *I* ask this question, it is about *my* self.*

How, then, can I dissect this strange object in front of me?

who   am   I

?
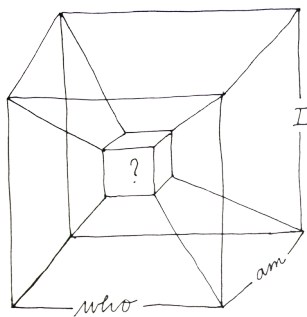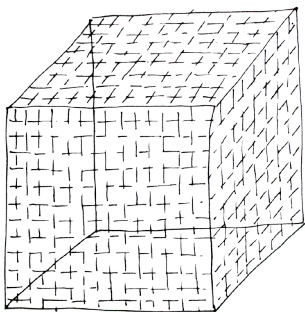
This brings me to the main objectives of this study. For, central to this investigation lie three questions.

I.   The question of a curated methodology: can a curation of unconventional research methods be valuable for scientific research and if so, to what extent?
II. The question of dissection: has the explorative dissection of the *who-am-I-?*-tesseract gained insight into this specific topic and if so, to what extent?
III. The question of self-experimentation: can this study function as a self-experimentation, challenging my pre-existing research habits derived from my background in historical research and if so, to what extent?

Thus, this research operates on three levels: respectively the method-level, the object-level and the researcher-level.
    Unsure of which discipline or method to apply to this question, I decided to build my own methodology. Even though many other approaches are imaginable, I opted for one that goes against the grain of the more common methods in scientific study. The main motivation for this decision is that this study does not only aim to explore the question *who-am-I-?*, but simultaneously to analyse how an experimental curation of research methods can do so. The assembly of this curation occurs in a rather associative manner: drawn from studies that I encounter, that I find interesting or that I want to experiment with. I will borrow, swap and extract elements from these approaches and merge them into an assembled methodology. Inevitably, I will do harm to these approaches. For that reason, I should emphasize that I use these approaches as *inspiration*, rather than *adopting* them completely. Whilst acknowledging the origins of my curated methodology, granting myself the liberty of extracting, moulding and adapting them to this study is in fact at the heart of this study.
    Ultimately, this piece is an hybrid exploration of the question *who-am-I?*—with myself as the single instance. It will most definitely not save any lives, nor will it have any other grand impact. However, it might raise some new questions, some new insights, some new tools to address this question about ourselves, whilst hopefully contributing to an understanding of how to approach scientific research from a more creative angle.

* (see p. 21) Throughout this research I will use both 'myself' and 'my self'. The first one is used in the colloquial sense, for example: 'I do this myself.' The second one, used more frequently, I use to differentiate between 'the self' and the specific instance of 'my self'. To clarify this difference, I added a space.

preface

Why am I me where do I go when I die what is where is who can accurately identify... I am I am I an object what is identity... I am human and not something else... am I a subject... your brain am I... something... being something... am I a... I am... I... will I ever... what... or am I nothing... because what does it mean to... I am... I think... because I think therefore I am... I know who I am because I am human and not something else if I know who I am because I am...

Examining *who-am-I-?* can cast me in a whirlwind of metaphysical and existential questions, such as 'why do I live?', 'why am I me?', 'where do I go when I die?', 'how do I know I am human?', and so on. It can lead me to question: 'where am I?', 'how am I?', 'what am I?', 'when am I?' plunging me into the metaphysical vortex of the 'ungraspable self'.

To avoid sinking (too deep) into this pool of questioning the meaning of life and the fundamentals of existence, I will draw some assumptions to depart from.

I assume that I am a human being and that I exist,

I assume that I am a self (in whatever form or place),

I assume that I am aware of being this self,

I, thus, assume that I am able to ask the question *who-am-I-?*. In turn, these assumptions give rise to complex concepts—'identity', 'individuality', 'consciousness'—to name but a few, which will be explained, employed and sometimes questioned throughout, but whose detailed descriptions or contextualisation will not be the core focus of the study.

curated research method

What elements construct this curation of research methods (CRM)? I say methods, but I should perhaps say approaches or fundaments, as they function as a substratum for this research, forming the basis from which I look.
I identify five 'fundaments':

      f.1   migropolis
      f.2   cut-and-paste
      f.3   polymath
      f.4   socratic conversations
      f.5   essais

F.1 functions as the overall perspective of this study, to a certain extent visible on the execution level. F.2 and f.4 are intermittently applied as research tools reflecting on the text, next to the general approach defined by f.3, whilst f.5 deals with the structure, goal, and tone of voice.

The first approach that I draw from is the research project *Migropolis. Venice / Atlas of a Global Situation* (2009).[3] It is the result of an extensive three-year long research by a collective of students from the Università Iuav di Venezia (IT) led by the philosopher Wolfgang Scheppe. It inspired me in two ways:

First, *Migropolis* uses a specific instance (i.e. the urban territory of Venice, Italy) as the object of research to study a generality (i.e. the contemporary global city). It is this twofold perspective that I appropriate and apply in this study: the relation between *the* self (generality) and *my* self (specific instance) that surfaces when asking the question *who-am-I-?*.

The specificity *and* subjectivity of the instance '*my* self' arguably make it less applicable for scientific research. Following the argument of the American philosopher Thomas Nagel in 'What is it like to be a bat?' (1974), due to the subjective character of experience, we are limited to our own subjective point of view.[4] This means that, according to Nagel, the only person able to know what it is like to be me, is, well, me. On one hand, this may be a discouraging conclusion as it implies that by definition nobody is able to understand what it is like to be anything but themselves, thus making the topic of this study rather redundant for anyone but myself. On the other hand, it could make a stronger case for the sampling of this study (n = myself).

The relation between the generality and the specificity, as drawn from *Migropolis*, and subsequently the tension between objectivity and subjectivity in the context of scientific research is the first fundament of this study.

Additionally, the interdisciplinary approach of *Migropolis* resulted in an innovative and creative study, combining personal stories, interviews, factual data, photography, and archival material in an aesthetically pleasing visual presentation, which included multiple photo series, infographics, and an exhibition. Simultaneously, it functions 'as an examination of whether there is visual knowledge and whether images have an explanatory potential, and if so, then how.[5] This encouraged me to look beyond the textual boundaries of scientific research and to adopt a more experimental form to perceptualise this study. For example, I use hand-drawn sketches throughout this research to examine and reflect on the text.

This brings me to the second approach, which developed through my initial search for a framework. I was inspired by Migropolis and figured that I could start with—quite boldly—borrowing their description. This resulted in the following exercise of cut-and-paste:

'~~Migropolis~~ [Who-am-I-?] has ~~two~~ [three] objectives. On one hand, it tries to explain ~~the globalized city~~ [the generic question *who-am-I-?*] using ~~Venice~~ [the specific individual, 'Winke'] as an exemplary prototype. Yet the process of defining the empty abstraction of ~~the term globalization~~ [the question *who-am-I-?*] quasi-microscopically within a specific territory concerns its second aim of inquiry. It concerns the ~~image~~ [methodology], which leads to the characteristic ~~method~~ [curated research method] of this visual [and textual] investigation. (…) The self-reflexivity of ~~Migropolis~~ [*Who-am-I-?*] entails a ~~second~~ [third] deployment: this book can also be read as ~~an~~ [a self-experimenting] examination (…).'[6]

The game of cut-and-paste is a form of blunt appropriation of existing texts. I cut and paste my own words and thoughts into the existing excerpts and reflect on what happens. It will be intermittently used throughout this research as it, for example, functions as a support for the next approach.

'It may sound wild, but who among you ladies might warm to the idea of jointly being undisciplined?'
—Annemarie Mol

At the end of the article 'Who Knows What a Woman Is… On the Differences and the Relations between the Sciences' (1984), Dutch professor of Anthropology Annemarie Mol calls for 'being undisciplined.'[7] Not to be confused with 'being interdisciplinary', which 'presumes a harmony between disciplines', Mol suggests a polymathic approach. In the article, Mol explores how different fields, such as genetics, psychoanalysis, and endocrinology, among others, understand 'what a woman is', without necessarily seeking an answer to this question herself. Rather than choosing a single scientific field (or a harmonious mixture of several) from which to approach a research object, she illustrates how different disciplines can construct different understandings of a topic—sometimes building on each other, sometimes clashing.[8]

A related example is the publication *The Body Multiple* (2003)—in which Mol asks herself a similar type of question; what is atherosclerosis? She recognizes the multiplicity of her topic: through the polymathic examination, each approach not only *understands* a somewhat different 'atherosclerosis', it also *enacts* a different kind: the pathologist examining an amputated leg deals with 'different' atherosclerosis than a nurse testing a patient's blood, yet they give it the same name. Mol concludes that reality is both multiple and uniform: the multiplicity of different practices and the perceived uniformity of using the same term.[9]

Could I view my object as both multiple and uniform? As the list of potential answers illustrated, there seems to be a multiplicity of possible ways to understand this question; yet it seems to speak of the same subject: the *I, my* self.

This study would like to answer to Mol's call, and tries to apply an 'undisciplined' approach. Now, this may sound like 'inconsistent' or 'uncontrolled' (which at times it might very well turn out to be). However, it is 'undisciplined' in the sense that it does not adhere to a single scientific discipline, nor aims for an agreeable mixture between fields. Instead, it seeks to draw on board different fields to use as a dissection tool, leaving space for clashes or incongruities.

This polymathic approach will not aim to be exhaustive. I will discuss a selection of different disciplines in relation to *who-am-I-?* and will reflect upon this. Therefore, the treatment of different disciplines must be seen more as an exploration, a proof of concept, rather than an encyclopaedic overview of disciplines.

—Winke Wiegersma
Mrs. Wiegersma, as part of your study on the
question who-am-I-? you chose to incorporate
conversations with yourself. Why did you choose
this style?

—Winke Wiegersma
Thank you for this question. Indeed. I was directly
inspired—or should I say, I copied—this style from an
interview between the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and
Peter Sloterdijk (Talking to Myself about the Poetics
of Space).[10] I realised that during this research,
I engage in a continuous dialogue with myself. Often,
this is a self-criticising medium: through these
conversations I scrutinise the thoughts, words,
texts, and so on, that I produce.

—WW
What has this to do with the Greek philosopher Socrates?

—WW
We know of Socrates through the writings of another
Greek philosopher—Plato. Socrates became associated
with the famous aphorism 'know thyself' or gnothi
seauton in ancient Greek, as he regarded this as the
'most important motive behind philosophy.'[11] We also
know through Plato that Socrates developed what is
now often called 'the Socratic method'. In a way,
these conversations could be seen as an internalised
Socratic dialogue—aiming to critically reflect. However,
these conversations are not dialectical, for they do
not seek to find a synthesis or a single truth.

—WW
Does this imply that I am a different person from you,
now that we start calling each other 'you' and 'I'?

—WW
It is by no means my intention to suggest any sort
of dualism, nor to satirise disorders dealing with
multiple personalities. It is merely a tool to
visualise the internal conversation and incorporate
this as a reflective dialogue into the story.

Finally, I appropriated the structure of the story. The question will be dissected along its dimensions. Each of these facets will be discussed in an essay.

I specifically say 'essay', as I am alluding to the work of the French statesman and writer Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592). The title of his lengthy body of work, *Essais*, stems from the French verb 'essayer', meaning 'to try', 'to attempt', and gave its name to the nowadays widespread literary genre.[12]

Moreover, *Essais* was an autobiographical endeavour of the mind. Montaigne tried to dissect his own thoughts, and by doing so, aimed to show his readers the inner workings of himself, in quite a bold manner: 'I desire therein to be viewed as I appear in mine own genuine, simple, and ordinary manner, without study and artifice: for it is myself I paint. (…) Thus, reader, myself am the matter of my book: there's no reason thou shouldst employ thy leisure about so frivolous and vain a subject.' Eventually, Montaigne elaborated on diverging topics in no less than 107 essays, bouncing, leaping and jumping between thoughts, contradictions, and observations.[13]

The essays that follow can loosely be seen as such an attempt, albeit in a slightly more concise and much more compact form than Montaigne's *Essais*. They are inspired by *Essais* insofar that they will not confirm, ascertain or prove. Rather, they will seek, strive and explore.

This resulted into the following division of three essays, which form the core of this study. Each of these essays will revolve around one of the dimensions of the cube; the *who*, the *am*, and the *I*. The titles are a nod to those of Montaigne.

Of distinction.
If the question *who-am-I-?* assumes I am a certain *who*, what is the *who* that I supposedly am? The interrogative pronoun *who* commonly refers to a specific person, an autonomous entity. This essay will explore the notion of distinction—where do I end and you begin?—in relation to the self.

Of change.
If the question *who-am-I-?* assumes that I *am* a who, then what does it mean to *be*? 'To be' has a descriptive connotation, it implies something fixed and factual. But does it then rule out flexibility or relativity? This essay will look at how 'being' relates to change.

Of uniqueness.
If the question *who-am-I-?* assumes that a certain who is an *I*, then how should we view the *I*? As a 'first person singular pronoun' it refers to a single individual and is used reflexively.* This essay will extend the case of distinction and will look into the uniqueness implied by the word *I*.

Now, one may say, what about the fourth dimension?
Not to worry, I have not overlooked the question mark. In fact, I will turn to it first—and start at the end.

To start with the question mark might feel a bit odd. However, it is necessary to start at the end since the question mark points to an important issue that deserves our attention before turning to the phrase itself.* That is, it raises the concern why it is a question at all; why I should consider and contemplate it in the first place. Thus, starting at the end will allow me to briefly reflect on the nature of the question, before cutting into the phrase itself.

For the sake of this study, I assume that (almost) every person contemplates on the question *who-am-I-?* sooner or later in life. In search for answers, some turn to psychologists, others to internet quizzes. Some look for an answer through artistic expression, others define themselves according to their social environment, their occupations, their beliefs, and so on. I realised that there exists a widespread fascination with exploring and finding out about the self.

We like to look at ourselves. Furthermore, we like to look at others looking at themselves (on September 25th, 2019 #selfie appeared in approximately 405 million Instagram posts). Arguably, the obsession with not only looking at ourselves but also extensively exhibiting this reflective gaze has led to an increasingly self-absorbed society, with some even hinting at an emerging narcissistic epidemic.[14] In the afterword, added in 1990, of his publication *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), social critic Christopher Lasch states 'that normal people now displayed many of the same personality traits that appeared, in most extreme form, in pathological narcissism.' In what he calls the 'theater of everyday life', people are more and more preoccupied with themselves, instigated by a 'society of spectacle' where there exists a 'proliferation of visual and auditory images'.[15] Lasch's observations still prove relevant nowadays, where my generation—people born between 1980–1995 and often dubbed 'millennials'—is often accused of continuous navel-gazing and self-absorption through self-exposure platforms offered by social media.[16]

However, looking at ourselves is not just a phenomenon of recent times. As early as ancient societies in Egypt, Greece and Rome, people are known to have observed themselves through mirrors, acknowledging its ability to reveal one's image, even though the exact formation of the mirror image remained a puzzle for a long time. Looking at the mirrored reflection received 'symbolic importance

because of its capacity to enhance visual acuity and to radiate light, the source of all beauty.' The mirror became an important device in the admiration of our own appearance and aesthetics.[17]

Ever since Narcissus fell in love with the beauty of his own reflection and faced his tragic death, however, there has been a flip side to this self-admiration. If I look at myself too much, too obsessively, I will be frowned upon. We can admire ourselves as long as we do so in moderation.

Furthermore, while *looking* at ourselves, whether in a mirror or through a selfie camera, might demonstrate the obsession with our own image, it remains different from asking the question who we are. Acquiring knowledge about myself requires more than just looking at my appearance in vain. Ever since the ancient Greek aphorism 'know thyself' was popularised through the writings of Plato, among others, retreating in one's own self became a virtue in order to better understand the world around us. Instead of presumptuous self-admiration, the mirror was understood as a tool to know myself, as it would literally confront me with my limits and the possibilities for improvement, showing simultaneously what I am and what I ought to be.[18]

Nowadays, with an astonishing 1.660.000.000 search results in less than 0,6 seconds, 'know yourself' has sparked an immense pile of digital self-help advice.[19] A quick browse through some of the results shows that 'getting to know yourself' will: 'make you successful', 'unlock your immense potential within', 'allow you to live your best life' and 'make you happy', among other attractive qualities. Furthermore, knowing yourself is made a prerequisite for achieving something in life.[20] The aviatic instruction of 'putting my own oxygen mask on before helping others' arises: turning my attention to myself would save me from unpleasant sounding things like 'fatigue', 'frustration' or even 'death,' and would allow me to deal with others better, suggesting self-knowledge relates to self-care.[21]

Susceptible to the appeal of potentially enhancing my personal fortune, I pondered on the question and realised that I had not seriously considered it before, although its presence seemed ubiquitous. Its ubiquity gave it a banality that made me wave it aside: *of course* I should 'know who I am'.

'Know Thyself! Most of us acknowledge that unless you know yourself first, you really can't achieve much in life.'[20]

—WW
But wait, do I not know already who I am?
I made a long list of nouns that describe me.
I can think of so many answers. Why do I need
to ask myself this question (and more importantly,
why should I dedicate this piece to it)?

—WW
As effortless as the list of answers describing
me previously may have looked, finding a
satisfactory one seemed more complex than coming
up with a bunch of singular nouns. Choosing one
automatically neglects the others. Moreover, we
could agree that 'Winke' or 'Dutch' are not the
answers sought: these are obvious,
I *know* this already.

—WW
So, if we assume that people can come up with
a list of possible answers, and we also assume
that they still ask themselves the question,
there must be *more*. What, then, should I be looking
for that I apparently do not already know?
    Am I supposed to look for some sort of summary,
an essence, a centre of myself? A neatly defined
nucleus labelled 'Winke', its 'true self'?

—WW
The British philosopher Gilbert Ryle argued that
this would be a categorical mistake. For, the
knowledge that I would seek through asking *who-
am-I-?* is not observable. He draws a comparison
with visiting different faculty buildings at the
open day of a university and afterwards asking
'where the university is', illustrating how it is
not a 'thing' that you can find or observe.[22]

—WW
Then, what is it?

This opens up a Pandora's box of metaphysical complexities, such as: what the self is; where it is; how it is knowable, and so on (all much debated, as I briefly mentioned before).

So, according to Ryle, it is not a 'thing' that I can find, but I am still looking for it since I ask myself this question? And I should still do so since it claims to be beneficial to my health and happiness. How paradoxical…

The apparent triteness of 'finding my true self' and the metaphysical complexities of its whereabouts aside, the question can exercise great prescriptive power on a practical level. Its potential answers can be enacted in a large variety of ways: politically, judicially, economically, ethnically, religiously, and so on. *Who-I-am-?* may influence where I can or cannot go, where I do or do not belong, how I am or am not treated. It touches upon important debates such as nature-nurture (am I completely defined by my genes or am I also influenced by my environment and upbringing?), free will (is who I am determined or do I have a say in this?), entitlement (because I am *x*, I have to right to claim *y*), stereotyping (because you are *x*, you must also be *y*) and discrimination (I am *x*, you are *y*, thus I will treat you differently). The question, then, seems to act on both a practical (or physical) and metaphysical level.

The question why people ask who they are, then, could be related to a complex and longstanding tradition of looking at and knowing about ourselves, the desire to categorise, describe and improve ourselves, as well as a wide variety of assumptions, for example the ability to define ourselves in *who's*, *am's* and *I's*.

This last assumption is what I turn to now. With the fourth dimension of my object exposed (at least, for a small part), it is time to return to the start.

I. of distinction

I will turn to the *who* first.

As an interrogative pronoun, *who* commonly refers to a person, an individual, a human entity. Rather than the question *what am I?*—which asks about the nature of the *I*—*who* categorically defines *I* beforehand; it restricts the potential answers to the type 'person' or 'human being'. For now, I will safely assume that I am a person, a human being.

Who, then, could be replaced by 'which person'. It qualifies the *I* in *who-am-I-?* as a demonstrative determiner: *this* person, rather than *that* person. The medieval philosopher John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) described this as 'haecceity', 'thisness': 'There is a haecceity in each individual substance, that which makes it *this* man or *this* chair or *this* tree, which accounts for its singularity and its distinction from all other individuals of the same kind. Thus, no matter how similar two individuals may be, they are still numerically distinct.'[1]

It constitutes a notion of distinction: the person *I* versus the person *not-I*, or, in more colloquial terms, the *I* versus the other. It implies separateness: I am a person, versus other persons.

If *who* points to a distinct human entity, how can I view this distinction; what is being distinguished from each other? What is the *who* that *I am*? This essay will explore the idea of distinction, and several concepts which seem to be connected to the self when looking at the *who*.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 'issues about knowledge of the self include: (1) how it is that one distinguishes oneself from others (…);'[2]

To know about oneself, is to know what differentiates one from the other (this could end up in a lot of negations: I am *x* because I am not *y*, not *z*, and so on). Indeed, why would I ask myself the question *who-am-I-?* if I did not already presume a certain degree of separation from others? I am a human entity, distinguished from other entities, and it is *this* entity that I want to know about.* Of course, the answer may still be: 'I am very much like everyone else', but that upholds the distinction through the comparison between me and 'everyone else'. It will be much less likely that the answer will be: 'I am *exactly* and *completely* the same person as this or that one.' (This, however, does bring me in the murky terrain of how many I's can claim to be one person). Again, it implies an underlying feature of distinction inherently related to the self.

of distinction

45

This degree of separation was studied in the context of neural computation by computer scientists David DeMers and Garrison Cottrell in 1993. In their study, they applied the method of non-linear dimensionality reduction (i.e. 'reducing the dimensionality of data with minimal information loss'[3]) to 160, 64 by 64 pixel, 8-bit grayscale face images. They found that, by filtering out the shared similarities between the face images, they could reduce the crucial information—the information that essentially *differentiated* one face from the other—to a mere 55 bits per image.[4] Without going into the technicalities of this study too much, important to notice here is the suggestion that the degree of differentiation between one (face) and another is essentially only a very small amount.

We like to think of ourselves as different, distinct. I am me, and not the rest. (Often, this has normative connotations: I am me, not you, because I am better / worse / prettier / uglier). However, simultaneously, as implied by DeMers & Cottrell, on the level of (facial) appearance we might not be that different after all. Moreover, on a social level, research has shown that human beings require a sense of belongingness (the need to belong to a certain group) and within such groups tend to display herding behaviour, that is, the tendency to socially align thoughts and behaviours, or conformity, such as behavioural mimicry.[5] Thus, there seems to exist a tendency for human beings to converge to a shared level of sameness; to *not* think of themselves as different.

Historically, the notion of separateness stems from a relatively recent line of thought in Western philosophy, which evolved around the individual. I say *recent*, as the notion of the self as a distinct individual is not as ubiquitous throughout Western thought as its current prevalence might suggest.

Arguably a very important figure for the development of Western philosophy, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was not particularly concerned with the self as a distinct individual. Though acknowledging the existence of individual organisms, he understood the self as a universal 'form' of human nature.[6]

Christopher Gill, a British professor of Ancient Thought, has described the ancient Greek conception of the self as 'objective-participant': the self as *part* of a society, which can be known *objectively*. The Greek maxim to 'know thyself', then, was not about the *subjective* knowledge of my own personal feelings and thoughts; rather it was about generic knowledge about the universal self.[7] The 'I-centred consciousness' was absent from Greek thought.[8]

According to Gill, the present-day Western conception of the self, described as 'subjective-individualist', developed under the influence of French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) and

German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). The Cartesian notion of 'the person as an 'I'-centred locus of self-consciousness and subjectivity' and the Kantian notion of 'the person as an autonomous moral agent' constructed an understanding of the self as a distinct individual, free-standing from its social environment.[9]

This distinction laid the foundation of individualism in modern Western culture: 'the individual as paramount.'* With the importance placed on one's own thoughts, expressing these thoughts is considered to be an act of distinguishing oneself from others. The self became understood as 'an entity that is unique, bounded, and fundamentally separate from its social surrounding.'[10]

Different terms seem to find their way into the story: 'autonomous', 'separate', 'free-standing'. They seem to be related to the idea of the self as a 'distinct individual', but how can we make sense of this? Let's make an analogy.[†]

* I specifically say 'Western' as not all cultures adopt this view on the self. Some excellent accounts have been written about different conceptions on the self, for instance, see: Hazel R. Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, 'Culture and the Self. Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation', Psychological Review 98, no. 2 (1991) and Harry C. Triandis, 'The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts', Psychological Review 96, no. 3 (1989).

† By no means does this want to suggest to be the only analogy that can be made in this case. This analogy is a mere example that I stumbled upon and found striking, worthwhile to explore.

of distinction

'In terms of the modern European understanding of human consciousness, there is also a suggestive congruence between islands and individuals. Islands have a marked individuality, an obstinate separateness that we like to think corresponds to our own.'[11]

I found a text online and played a game of cut-and-paste. The text is written by Fabian Neuhaus, assistant professor at the Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Calgary, Canada, for his blog (www.urbantick.org). In an entry on February 6th, 2019, he discusses the principles of islands and draws an analogy with the city as 'a set of islands stacked and enclosed on different scales like Russian dolls.'[12] I figured that, what Neuhaus does for the city-as-island, I can do for the 'self-as-island'.

> 'Detached from the ~~mainland~~ [other], the ~~island~~ [self] stands out from the ~~sea of water~~ [environment]. (…) They are defined by the separation of two different states of being. Prominently represented as wet and dry in the form of land and water, but it applies to other contexts too that draw a clear outline separating itself from the background. ~~Islands~~ [Selves] have a distinct form that is defined by a boundary distinguishing inside and outside creating two bodies. Being on either side of this demarcation line is part of its identity as an ~~island~~ [self].'[13]
>
> 'This identity created by the boundary internally supports a cohesiveness, a sameness that identifies against the otherness outside. Through its uniformity, the form issues power and asserts control over the territory created. ~~Islands~~ [Selves] are models of the world (…) Such an observation is based on the fact that ~~islands~~ [selves] are singularities that are separated through the framing powers forming the boundary. It is the isolation that makes the ~~island~~ [self]. In the way it is isolated from the surroundings it hosts an experiment of totality becoming a world-model.'[14]

Let me briefly turn to islands, first.
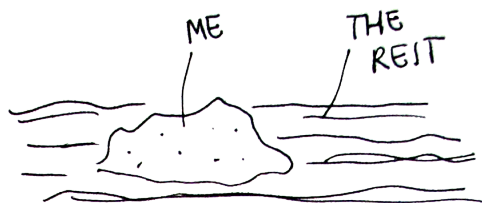
'They are easily definable, as the geographical feature between land and sea constitute boundaries. Living on an island gives you a defined border; lines on maps are arbitrary, beaches and cliffs are not.'[15]

An island is commonly defined as 'a land area completely surrounded by water.'[16] It is a spatial organisation of material (sand, rocks, volcanic debris) that rises above the water level and thus becomes distinct from its surroundings. It is considered to be a separate entity, cut off from the mainland and therefore often developed autonomously.[17]

One of the principles of an island is the clarity of its borders. We perceive a clear distinction between the island and the non-island: whether this is the land-water distinction, or the private-public distinction as Neuhaus encounters in his discussion of the city as an island. Neuhaus acknowledges the shaping force of the demarcation between island and non-island: precisely the distinction between these two defines the identity of the island.

However, the distinction sometimes also neglected the 'non-island': the island became 'an emblem of singularity, at the expense of the surrounding element.' This created a notion of separateness.[18] So, following Neuhaus' text, an island generally implies:

- Distinction: defined by a clear outline, bordering otherness.
- Separation: in a different state of being, wet versus dry.
- Isolation: standing out by itself, as a cohesive, empowered entity.

Suppose I am a distinct, separate and singular entity too, autonomously operating in an ocean of otherness. If I follow the tradition of Western thought, as discussed above, the analogy is a relatively simple one to make: the individual [island] is a separate and autonomous entity that is fundamentally separate from its social and environmental [spatial] surroundings. In fact, Neuhaus already makes the comparison with the self, as he quotes the definition of 'island' according to the Oxford English Dictionary: 'also an individual (…), detached or standing out by itself.' So, what does it mean if I make this analogy?

- The self-as-island is distinct from its surroundings, defined by a clear outline.
- The self-as-island is separated from the otherness due to different states of being.
- The self-as-island is a single, cohesive entity, standing by itself, formed and empowered through these borders.
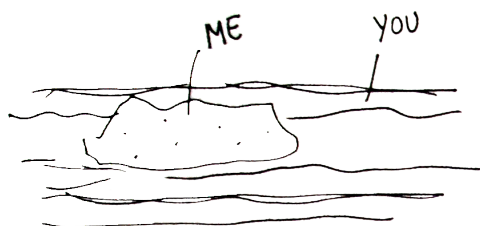
Anatomy can help me construct the analogy. Anatomically, I am a body: a spatial organisation of bones, organs, tissue and fluids which construct an entity, called 'body'. Anatomy also tells me that my body is finite: it has clearly marked boundaries. All the anatomical building blocks are carefully wrapped by my skin into a firm and fenced off bundle. In this way, the analogy upholds itself:

The self-as-body has a distinct form defined by boundaries; as I mentioned, I am a tightly wrapped bundle of body parts, enclosed by my skin, demarcating my boundaries, which creates the idea that I end where my skin ends.

The self-as-body stands out from the rest; visually, if I stand in front of a background, my body can be identified in contrast with this background. Spatially, if I stand on a flat surface, my body will extend three-dimensionally into space, thus literally 'standing out' from the flat surface. My body is a different state of being than my surroundings.

The self-as-body is isolated precisely because of these framing powers that form my boundaries; this is primarily based on visual and proprioceptive observation. I can see that my skin ends here and the floor starts there, but I can also *feel* that the skin ends here and the floor starts there. I am isolated precisely because I can experience my boundaries and subsequently not escape those boundaries; my point of view is restricted. This isolation also relates to incursion: both the body and the island are threatened by infiltration, due to their isolated position.
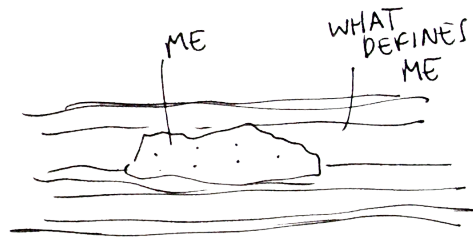
'*The Animal Figure of Mankind, I will similize to an Island, the Blood as the Sea that runs about, the Mouth as the Haven which receive the Ships of Provision, which are Meat, Drinke…*'[19]
—Margaret Cavendish

The materiality of the physical body endorses the analogy. Just as the material difference between the island and the water constitutes the island as a distinctive entity, the physicality of the body demarcates the self as a distinct package in space.

The analogy between islands and human body is not new. In the seventeenth century, the body-as-island was a well-known metaphor. Just before Cavendish, the English poet Phineas Fletcher had published a lengthy, allegorical poem, called 'The Purple Island' (1633). In a tough, densely written twelve cantos long 'allegorical atlas of the human body', Fletcher addresses issues regarding present state of anatomical knowledge, body versus mind, whilst simultaneously metaphorically commenting on English geography and contemporary politics.[20]

Fletcher's purple island lied firmly on 'sure foundation' (bones), through which run 'a thousand streams' (arteries, nerves, veins).[21] The body-as-island metaphor emphasises the view of the human body as a microcosm, and, moreover, establishes a corporeal separateness within a larger wholeness. Alike geographical exploration on new, unknown lands, the body is known through investigation.[22]

Again, I encounter the notion of isolation, yet also that of infiltration: the body-as-island needs to be protected and influences from the main land are a threat; metaphorically (and surprisingly accurate at present), Fletcher is referring to the political situation of England at the time. Thus, whilst an isolated position is desirable according to Fletcher, it runs the risk of being jeopardised.

—WW
I need to stop for a moment.

—WW
What happened?

—WW
I noticed that, whilst making the body-as-island
analogy, the feeling of neglecting my mind grew.
In all this talk about anatomy, I realised that I
inherently separated my mind from my body, along
dualistic lines: my self as a body—material, non-
thinking—versus my self as a mind—thinking, non-
material. In talking about distinction between
my self and whatever it is that surrounds me, I
stumbled upon a distinction *within* my self.

—WW
Ever since Descartes famously declared 'I think,
therefore I am', the Western understanding of the
self was constituted as an autonomously thinking
entity, hierarchically placed above the body: a
non-thinking, substantial entity. In Descartes'
opinion, what makes me a person is not my body,
but rather my mind—in his view, I would remain
myself with any other body.

—WW
Remarkably, Fletcher embodies the inner self of the
body-island through the human inhabitants of the
island, preluding Descartes' ideas (published a few
years later). By separating *mind* (inhabitants) from
body (island), the mind became quite literally an
inhabitant of the body, simultaneously implying the
possibility for these inhabitants (mind) to move to
a different island (body).

—WW
On the other hand, one could argue that Fletcher
goes directly against Cartesian dualism in the
sense that he establishes the mind as a *material*
entity: the inhabitants of the island, assuming
they are human beings, with a *body* and *mind*.

This of course in turn raises the difficult issue of what *their* minds subsequently are made of, which could lead to a sort of Droste-effect, described by Daniel Dennett as the Cartesian theatre.[2]

However, does the anatomical viewpoint on the self-as-island inherently imply a division between mind and body? Does it imply the body as a *non-thinking* self? Or even the *non-thinking* extendedness of my thinking, mental self? The duality I found myself prone to would answer positively.

For a long time, cognitive psychology has treated topics related to the self, such as self-recognition and self-awareness. Drawing on the dualist tradition, it treated the self principally as a mental entity, maintaining the internal distinction.[24] On top of that, it also maintained the external distinction, as it ascribed 'to the modern conception of the individual as an autonomous, delimited agent with a set of authentic characteristics. The individual and society are regarded as separate entities, thus implying the existence of a dualism between the individual and society.'[25]
However, scholars dealing with 'embodied cognition' or 'embodied mind' have countered this idea, arguing that there is a body-body problem instead. In *Mind in Life* (2010) for example, the philosopher Evan Thompson argues that 'mental life is bodily life and situated in the world, which means that the roots of mental life cannot simply reside in the brain but ramify through the body and its environment. It is simply an error to reduce mental life to brain processes going on in our heads.' Thompson states that a 'body is a center of action and not a house of representation.' We are not a brain in a vat, as Descartes once feared, but rather 'a bodily subject', since our brain is part of our body as an organ.[26]

—WW

Okay, so my anatomical viewpoint does not necessarily
eliminate the mind from the analogy, as I feared. But I
do realise, that in the Western tradition, the distinction
between mind and body is ingrained in the understanding of
the self.

—WW

Let's continue...

Fletcher warned for the threat of attacks from outside: it must be avoided at all cost. I could argue, however, that the self is subjected to infiltration on a daily basis. Not only subconsciously by pathogens, parasites or particulates, but also consciously, through the intake of nutrition or medicines, the autonomy of my body is jeopardised. In fact, I do not think I should desire the isolated position advocated by Fletcher, since these external influences for a large part allow me to exist and persist (arguably, even more ubiquitous than nutrition is the air I breathe that allows me to live). On a less tangible level, my self is infiltrated by sounds, visuals, smells, ideas, words, coming from the 'main land'—the world outside of my physical boundaries (but also from myself as I can hear and see myself, too).

It seems that influences from outside the self are not only inevitable, but rather desirable. Could I say the same of islands? Another game of cut-and-paste may help me:

> 'Islands [Selves] are the most graspable and the most slippery of subjects. On the one hand, they constitute a bounded, and therefore manageable, space. (…) On the other hand, they are fragments, threatening to vanish beneath rising tides or erupting out of the deep, linked by networks of exchange even as they appear to be emblems of self-sufficiency. Encapsulating both the comfort of finitude and the tease of endless proliferation, islands [selves] beg and resist interpretation. (…) Islands [Selves] are not pure: they are subject to breaching and incursion, both natural and cultural.'[27]

Let me turn to another earlier example of this analogy. William James (1842–1910)—American philosopher, psychologist and the so-called 'Father of American Psychology'—said:

> *'that we with our lives are like islands in the sea, or like trees in the forest. (...) But the trees also commingle their roots in the darkness underground, and the islands also hang together through the ocean's bottom. Just so there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir.'*[28]

Although often misquoted as 'we are like islands, separate on the surface but connected in the deep', this quote express the idea that there exists an external, universal consciousness (which structure James is unsure of) from which we all draw and 'in which many of
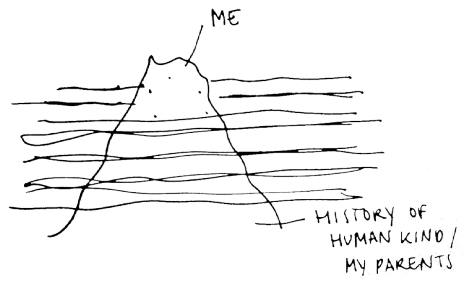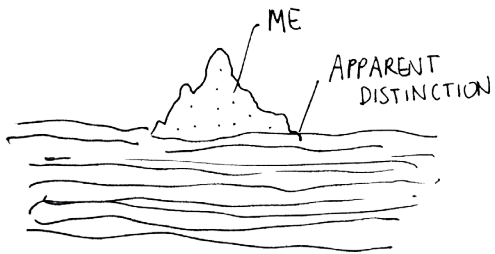
earth's memories must in some way be stored'.[29] Anyhow, James affirms the dominant notion of separateness, but hints at a continuous consciousness underlying this separateness.

Ignoring the full context of James' article, I take his quote to stretch my analogy a bit further. At first glance, the island analogy seems to fit within the Western tradition of viewing the self as independent, separate; an island in the sea: functioning autonomously, and so on. But once we start to dive deeper into the island analogy, it seems that both islands and individuals may not be that independent after all—depending on how you look.

Until now, I have taken the distinction as apparent, but it requires a second look. As James mentioned, islands are in fact connected to land. The presence of water creates the illusion of being separate. Is this distinction relative, based on an agreement? Then, how distinct am I from 'the rest'?

I turn to islands, again.

The definition of an island is a socially agreed one, through language: The United Kingdom is an island, but Australia is a continent, and so on. It is based on a notion of boundedness and size. The characteristic and defining boundedness of an island is lost when the landmass grows too large: we cannot imagine it as a distinct island anymore.[30] Then, a relativistic re-definition would be to say that every land is an island, as all land on earth eventually is surrounded by water and it is just a matter of agreement what we call island and what not. A nihilistic step further would be to say that nothing is an island, as when we drain our oceans, all land will be connected to each other.

But I am not draining any oceans.
Yet I am also not ignoring the connection, the linguistic construction behind the definition of an island.

Geographically, islands appear to be distinct entities. I perceive islands, as distinguished entities within a body of water, with clear borders. However, also geographically, islands are part of a complex environment, and are influenced by this environment. 'Islands are geographical features which can emerge, change and even disappear.'[31] Their perceived boundaries may not be so fixed after all. The borders of an island (in an ocean) will change every six hours due to tides; they will change due to erosion, waves and wind pounding continuously on their coastline; they will change due to larger issues, such as climate change causing sea levels to rise or lakes to dry up.

Then, the distinction between land and sea, the defining characteristic of islands as separate, singular entities in 'an immense oceanic void', becomes one of 'blurred margins rather than structured oppositions.'[32]

What does this mean for our analogy?

As we have seen, anatomically, the self-as-island adheres to the notions of distinction and separation (and perhaps less to that of isolation). However, as island borders seem to be much more arbitrary and fluid than they may appear, how does this apply to the self-as-island? How distinct are the boundaries of ourselves?

I will turn back to anatomy for a brief moment. If my skin defines the borders of my self, it is not as closed off as one might think. Though low, its permeability allows fluids to pass through. Now, one might say, this permeability does not change the outline of my body: I do not perceive any fundamental changes in the shape of my body overnight (assuming a healthy body).

In an online course description for a portrait painting class, I found the following description:

> *'A face is always moving, and can change its expression 'in the blink of an eye'. When looking at someone talking to you, their face often looks like a landscape of constantly changing emotions. Eyes, mouth, little muscles, skin tone, shadows: everything is constantly in motion.'*[33]

If I zoom in closely on my corporeal boundaries, my body outline is an ever-changing landscape. My chest rhythmically rises and falls due to respiration; temporarily growing and shrinking outlines. Bumps, cuts, bruises, lumps, spots, zits, wrinkles and lines; tiny eruptions or subterranean movements cause the borders to constantly move a tiny bit. Internal processes such as digestion, menstrual cycle or fluid balances cause swelling or shrinking, bloating or compressing.

I could understand my boundaries as mere corporeal: I end where my body ends. However, what if my skin does not define the borders of my self? What if my boundaries shapeshift per situation or context? I could argue that my boundaries rest on an agreement, too.

OTHERS

ME   PERSONAL
      SPACE

ME   EROSION
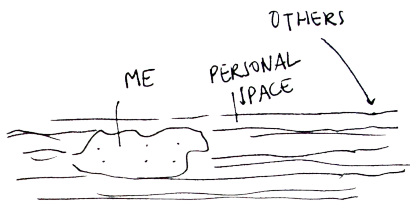
'Some thirty inches from my nose
The frontier of my Person goes,
And all the untilled air between
Is private pagus or demesne.
Stranger, unless with bedroom eyes
I beckon you to fraternize,
Beware of rudely crossing it:
I have no gun, but I can spit.'[34]
—W.H. Auden

This extension of the self could be looked at from the perspective of proxemics. Coined by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall in 1963, the term 'proxemics' entails the broad area of 'the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture,' for example, the different distances we maintain in relation to different contexts and people.[35] Although culturally dependent, many people—as W.H. Auden aptly described above—experience a certain 'personal space': a zone, external of one's bodily boundaries that one considers to be private and which should not be intruded uninvitedly. 'It might be thought of as a small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between itself and others.'[36] In his influential publication *The Hidden Dimension* (1969), Hall recognises four of such 'distance zones'; intimate, personal, social and public, each of which indicate a different distance at which interaction and communication occurs.[37] Thus, depending on the context, the size of this 'sphere' or 'bubble' may differ; for instance, for a stranger it might be much larger than for a close friend. This could imply that the boundaries of my self continuously shift depending on which person or which context I am faced with.

Indeed, Hall argues that it is a mistake to think 'that man's boundary begins and ends with his skin.'[38] Furthermore, through the different usages of space and the development of technologies, man has created extensions of himself, which together 'constitute one interrelated system.'[39] Hall illustrates: 'the computer is an extension of part of the brain, the telephone extends the voice, the wheel extends the legs and feet. Language extends experience in time and space while writing extends language.'[40]

The use of technologies, ranging from language to computers, from contact lenses to artificial legs, challenge the idea of distinct boundaries: when is a technology considered part of myself and when is it just a tool that I use? The philosophers Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi—concentrating on phenomenology and philosophy of mind—argue in their publication *The Phenomenological Mind* (2007) that 'the

lived body extends beyond the limits of the biological body. It doesn't stop at the skin.[41]

Another pair of philosophers interested in philosophy of mind, Andy Clark and David Chalmers, explored the idea of extending boundaries in relation to the mind in their well-known article *The Extended Mind* (1998), in which they argued that the boundaries of our minds are not bound to the brain, but extends to technology, such as language and writing. They remark that 'once the hegemony of skin and skull is usurped, we may be able to see ourselves more truly as creatures of the world.'[42]

The question of the extendedness of my self brings me to an important issue that arises from my analogy and that I have been bypassing so far. If the—distinct or perhaps not so distinct—boundaries of an island are in some way defined by its surroundings, what is surrounding my self? If I take away the ocean, an island loses its original distinction. What happens if I take away the otherness surrounding my self?

But then, *what* is this otherness? Is it the air around me that defines me? The objects around me that I encounter? The natural environment? My social environment? Other selves, human beings? Arguably, if I would take any of these things away, it would not be very beneficial for my existence—but would I lose my distinctiveness? For convenience sake, I could say that I am surrounded by all of these things: I am surrounded by the world.

Even though the island as such has disappeared, an island may actually not lose its distinction *completely* when the ocean is drained. I could argue that I would still perceive a difference between what was formerly known as the island—a beach, perhaps some palm trees, plants, houses—and what was the ocean—different coloured rocks, underwater plants, coral and so on. I could argue that, after the removal of the 'other', the distinction could still remain somewhat apparent—at least for a while.

However, for my self-as-island, a problem occurs. With taking away the world, I would disappear as well. (Unless, of course, I have an immortal soul that lives on forever, but let us not get into that discussion now). I seem somehow slightly more dependent on my surroundings than the island.
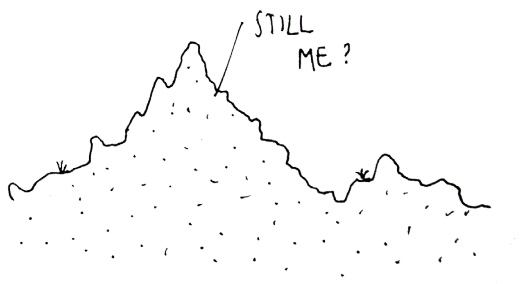
In Amsterdam (NL), the gravitational acceleration is 9,8128 m/s².

No matter how high I jump, it pulls me back down.

ME / ENTIRE
UNIVERSE

Gallagher and Zahavi explained this as follows: 'the body is not a screen between me and the world; rather, it shapes our primary way of being-in-the-world. This is also why we cannot first explore the body by itself and then subsequently examine it in its relation to the world. On the contrary, the body is already in-the-world, and the world is given to us as bodily revealed.' According to these scholars, I am in continuous contact with the world. Yet instead of 'a mere surface-to-surface contact', I am embedded, 'integrated in the world.'[43]

Does this idea dissolve the notion of distinction? If I am *part* of the world, can I still be distinct from it? Yet, I do perceive my self as an individual self, distinct from the chair I am sitting on, the neighbour next to me… Could the distinction *depend* on my integration in the world? The fact that I am part of an environment, allowing me to distinguish from it to some extent? These are just some of the questions that arose from this exploration.

For a final time, I will turn to my analogy. The English poet John Donne, a contemporary of Phineas Fletcher, wrote a lengthy, contemplative book, called *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes* (1624), towards the conclusion of his life. Here, Donne poetically claims, through a refutation of the island analogy, that 'man is a piece of the continent' instead.

> *'No man is an island entire of itself; every man*
> *is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;*
> *if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe*
> *is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as*
> *well as any manner of thy friends or of thine*
> *own were; any man's death diminishes me,*
> *because I am involved in mankind.*
> *And therefore never send to know for whom*
> *the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'*[44]

Now, I turn to the second dimension.

II. of change

Note on the complexity of writing about am

For some inexplicable reason (perhaps the metaphysical whirlwind), I have arrived to what I have experienced as one of the trickiest parts of this endeavour so far. The second dimension, the *am*, propelled me further in the field of metaphysics, into ontology, into the fundamental question of 'existence', of 'being', of 'the being of beings', leaving me buried in complex concepts but empty-handed at the same time. Perhaps my not being versed in the field of metaphysics could clarify this uncomfortableness.

However, there is one observation I could make: that there are different kinds of 'being'.* I could argue that, for instance, an inkpot *is* in a different way than a river is. The former holds a certain endurance and constancy (if it breaks, it ceases to *be* an inkpot) whilst the latter is only fixed in an abstract sense: its shape, course and content change continuously (note the cliché: 'you never walk in the same river twice'). Yet another way of being is that of the seed. The seed is a teleological kind of being: changes occur in shape and substance, but the potentiality to become a tree is already present in the seed. Now, the question remains: what kind of being am I? Am I defined at birth and unchanged thereafter—as the inkpot? Or rather continuously shapeshifting, never the same—as the river?
Is what I can become already determined—as the seed?
Or can this change?

The *am* operates on the tension between stability and change. It can affirm a certain relationship but at the same time has a temporal character: it affirms something *now,* suggesting that this could potentially change. This tension can be seen as more or less the common thread. What follows, then, is an attempt to make sense of this mountain, this muddle of the *am*. I decided to opt for a slightly different approach. Instead of aiming to construct a coherent story about the *am*, I present a loose collection of notes, covering topics that I consider to be related to *am*.

of change

'To see yourself as who you were ten years ago can be very strange indeed.'[1]

Note on the comfortable assumption of existence

Earlier, I determined my existence as one of the underlying assumptions of this study, in order to avoid the uncomfortable position of questioning everything. I reasoned: I exist thus I am able to ask this question. One could also turn this around: I am able to ask this question; thus, I must exist (this is more the Cartesian way). Assuming that I exist seems a comfortable thing to do. Challenging my existence can cause me to slide into a pool of existential uncertainty: what is there to believe if I cannot even believe that I exist? It evokes scenarios like the Matrix or a brain in a vat—am I living in a computer game?

Note on the implied existence in *who-am-I-?*

Moreover, my existence is not merely an assumption made out of convenience for the sake of this study, but, in fact, implied by the question *who-am-I-?* itself. The question could be rephrased to: *if I am, then who?* Or: *if I am, as which person?* (of course, assuming that I exist as a *person*, which is an assumption dealt with in the first essay). *I am* is a prerequisite for asking the question *who I am*.

Note on how I understand existence

Although the sceptics have once said that I cannot be sure of my own existence, I assume that I exist.[2] Furthermore, I will follow philosopher and psychologist Monica Meijsing (and probably others too) in understanding 'existence' or 'being' as 'being alive.' I exist as long as the organism that I identify with is alive. Life is a prerequisite for existence.[3]

Note on the ordering of chaos

If I follow the nowadays common theory that the universe started with the Big Bang, I could trace my 'being' back to the moment when all matter came into being. Following Stephen Fry in his recent work *Mythos* (2018), according to the Greeks, everything started with Chaos, 'a grand cosmic yawn.'[4]

Now, this may be a mythical story about an ancient people, but as Fry rightly points out, the modern conception of entropy acknowledges the eventual and inevitable return to chaos. 'Your trousers began as chaotic atoms that somehow coalesced into matter that ordered itself over aeons into a living substance that slowly evolved into a cotton plant that was woven into the handsome stuff that sheathes your lovely legs. (…) And when the sun explodes and takes every particle of this world with it, including the ingredients of your trousers, all the constituent atoms will return to cold Chaos.'[5]

Is my existence but a temporary episode of order in the 'yawning void' of Chaos?

Note on the pool of existential uncertainty or the questioning of everything

Over the course of this project, I realised that in my anxiety to fall into a pool of existential stress and uncertainty, I actually overlooked the metaphysical quicksand. Far trickier than the pool—where through its clarity and cleanliness the bottom remains clearly visible—the quicksand absorbed me, without quite knowing where it will lead.
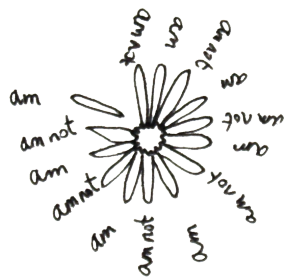
Note on whether I can claim to exist whilst I do not know what it is like to not exist

Calling from inside the quicksand, I wondered, do I need an understanding of a concept to claim its opposite? Can I claim to exist when I do not know what non-existence is? Or, can I be sure that this is what existing is, when I do not know what non-existing is? (The fumes may have gone to my head by now.)

If I ask, 'is my hair blonde?', I can empirically judge my hair to be blonde. I can do so, because I have a certain understanding of the concept 'blonde' in combination with the concept 'hair', 'blonde' being one of the possible properties of 'hair'.

Then, if I view 'is my ~~hair~~ [self] ~~blonde~~ [existing]?' or 'do I exist?' in a similar way (ignoring the potential empirical difficulties here), it assumes an understanding of both 'self' and 'existing'. However, it becomes problematic when I say that, just like blonde, 'existing' is one of the possible properties of 'self'. At first, this does not seem like a problem: I could imagine that another property would be 'not-existing'. However, when I treat 'existing' as a possible property of self, it implies that 'self' is something, without the property of existence.

Then again, is hair something without the property of colour? I could argue that such a property is essential to the being of hair. The Being of Hair! That in turn would mean that there is no such thing as 'being' itself, but rather that its being is constituted by the fact that it contains certain properties.

am

am not

am

am not

am

am not

you are

queer

am

am not

am

am

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 0

Note on the binary understanding of existence

Even if I am not completely convinced that I exist, there still remains only one other option; that I do not exist. I cannot exist just a little bit, or both exist and not exist. It remains an assumption that I exist; for I do not know what non-existence is like.

This is what I will call 'the binary understanding of existence.' Existence either fully *is* (1) or is *not* (0). This brings to mind a light switch: I did not exist and then, *CLICK*, I exist, until, *CLICK*, I do not exist. It implies only two moments of change: coming into existence and going out of existence. I could say that this roughly corresponds with being born and dying, but that of course depends on how one defines the beginning and ending of existence.

Although language may suggest otherwise (being 'half-dead' or 'barely existing'), existence can be understood as a Boolean expression. If existence means to be alive, life becomes this instance of '1' in an ocean of zeros. Or the other way around? Life as a sequence of ones, preceded and followed by a single zero to demarcate the change.

The fact *that* I am, does not seem to change during my lifetime. I am, I am, I am, I continuously am, by being alive. So, the *I am* does not seem subject to much change. It seems pretty stable. However, when we talk about *who I am*, it becomes a bit murkier. On the one hand, I experience the rather solid feeling of 'being me'; I do not switch bodies, or suddenly wake up answering to a completely different name or speaking a different language. On the other hand, there is much evidence that I am not exactly the same, that is, *identical* to my self that existed 27 years ago.

* Of course, in the auxiliary function the verb 'to be' can indeed indicate movement or change, or rather, something ongoing. For example, I am sleeping or I am walking.

Note on the affirmative character of 'to be'.

The verb 'to be' has an affirmative character. Something just simply *is* (in a certain way, certain place, a certain thing, and so on). Regardless of whether the statement is true or false, the statement itself affirms a certain claim. Often, this is a truth claim. 'The pen is on the desk.' Therefore, it has a factual connotation.

By definition, the verb 'to be' indicates a temporary stasis. If something is somewhere, something, somewhat, and so on, it in fact *is* this for at least that moment. It is not a so-called motion verb: a verb that indicates movement through time or space. Thus, 'to be' has a rather fixed and static connotation.*

As the French philosopher Louis Lavelle (1883–1951) argued in *Introduction to Ontology* (1947) 'the word 'being' conveys the feeling of an implacable exigency, of an invincible necessity. This one word suffices to pose the object it designates, to show that something is there, be it only that one word, and to exclude nothingness.'[6]

Note on the difference between 'A is.' and 'A is B.'

    In the same publication, Louis Lavelle illustrates the different functions of the verb 'to be'. Its most common functionality is as a linking verb, also known as a 'copula': *A is B*. It connects, or equals, a subject *A* to another subject *B* (with *B* being either a noun, adjective, verb, predicate, and so on). Important to note is that *B* in this case is not the object. The nature of the copula does not allow for *B* to be at service of *A*—rather they form a bond (even though there can be of course a hierarchical relationship between *A* and *B*: 'Winke is a human being' means of course that 'Winke' is just one individual in the larger class 'human being'). 'When I say *A is B* I am no longer referring to the being of *A* but to the impossibility of separating *B* from *A* in my thought. The "is" of the copula defines as beings of thought *A*, *B* and the bond uniting them.'[7]

    'To be', however, has another function aside from being a copula. In the case of *A is*, there is no subject *B* to tie to a subject *A*. Rather, the verb now takes on an existential role towards *A*. 'When I say *A is*, my affirmation ends with the being of *A*.'[8]

    Although both applications of the verb maintain its affirmative character, what they affirm differs. '(…) both the affirmation *A is* and *A is B* express two degrees of characterization of being, the first stating simply that *A is* part of being and the second that within the whole of being, *A* can never be found independent of *B*.'[9]

Note on what this means for my question

In the case of the question *who-am-I-?* the conjugation *am* clearly functions as a copula. It links a reflexive subject *I* to an undefined subject *who*. However, as we have seen above, simultaneously, it functions as an existential form. It holds an assumption regarding the existence of the *I*. In this case, the different purposes of 'to be' are not strictly separated; it is not either/or. Within the copula-function a certain existential claim is implied.

A subsequent question is whether the relationship established by the copula is a definite or constant one. To what extent does it determine my identity (forever)?

Note on the power of the copula and John Rawls' veil of ignorance

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), the American philosopher John Rawls (1921–2002) discusses the issue of equality. One of Rawls' main arguments is that if you do not know who you are or what you represent, you are much more likely to make just decisions, as you cannot lay any claims on a certain identity or history.[10]

The linking character of the copula 'to be' can assert a lot of power. By affirming the relationship or the equality between *A* and *B*, 'I' and 'something else', I have assigned myself a role, an identity (quite literally, as I identified myself with a certain entity *B*, through the affirmation of the copula) and thus, I could legitimise exercising the power relations that are related to this entity.

Now, an affirmation such as 'I am a student' may not immediately legitimise any grand claims (apart from demanding discounts) but one could imagine that identification with, for example, a certain religious belief, social status, or governmental role may act out and influence one's decision-making.

Rawls proposed the veil of ignorance: the idea that every actor 'forgets' its own social status, wealth, heritage, power, and so on, its own being or identity so to say, in the decision-making process. From this 'original position', Rawls argues, the principles of justice are established.

In the context of the self, it can be applied too. The philosopher Lammert Kamphuis rephrased Rawls' proposal of the veil of ignorance as follows: try to completely forget who you are, waking up in the morning.[11]

Note on trying to completely forget who I am when I wake up.

Day 1. 14.08.2019: Woke up at 07:17. Failed, due to remembering going to bed the night before.

Day 2. 15.08.2019: Woke up at 07:29. Failed, due to remembering a dream where I was myself.

Day 3. 16.08.2019: Woke up at 07:51. Failed, due to pre-occupation with being late to work, knowing that it was me that had to go to work, and it was my work, though the combination of the consumption of several alcoholic beverages and the trip back to Amsterdam the night before did cause a slight uncertainty as to where I was.

Day 4. 17.08.2019: Woke up at 07:32. Failed, due to recognising my bedsheets as mine.

Day 5. 18.08.2019: Woke up at 08:00, then again at 09:02. Failed, due to hearing something from the living room, and immediately recognising that it was my flatmate playing a record of Otis Redding, with my favourite song, Try a Little Tenderness.

Day 6. 19.08.2019: Woke up at 07:15, then again at 07:27. Failed, even though the night before I repeatedly told myself to forget who I am in the morning. I failed because when I opened my eyes, I immediately realised the constant flickering of my neighbour's television—which had left me insomniac last night—had stopped. Thus, I remembered that the night before it was me who got annoyed by the absence of curtains in my neighbour's apartment.

Day 7. 20.08.2019: Woke up at 06:30, again at 07:00. Would like to say that I experienced a brief, split-second moment of thinking 'what is this annoying noise' (being my alarm clock), but then I experienced no surprise as to where I was lying, or in which body I woke up. Maybe I should ask someone to relocate me at night to an unknown place and see what happens when I wake up there.

Day 8. 21.08.2019: Woke up at 07:00 with my first thought being: 'what is my first thought because I need to write this down to see if, perhaps, I do not know who I am.'

Day 9. 22.08.2019: Woke up at 07:00 but forgot to check if I forgot who I was, and then I already knew.

Day 10–14: I forgot to remember whether I forgot who I was, when I woke up these mornings, thus I lack the data for these days and suspended the research.
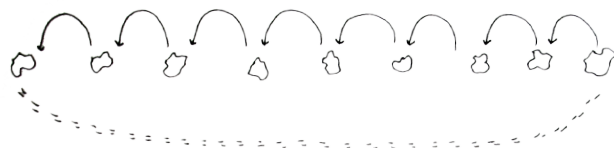
Note on giving some credits to John Locke (and neo-Lockians)

The failure to completely forget who I am or *that* I am when waking up in the morning can be ascribed to the fact that I am conscious of being myself. Even though much can be said against their theories, I have to give at least some credits to John Locke here, and the neo-Lockian thinkers succeeding him.

John Locke (1632–1704), an English physician and philosopher, categorised human being as two: Man and Person, the latter referring to the self as a conscious and rational being. One of the dilemmas Locke dealt with was the question of numerical identity; my sameness across time. What makes me *numerically* the same person as ten years ago?

Locke proposed the consciousness criterium for identity. In struggling with the question 'how come I am the same person as yesterday?', Locke answers: 'because you remember your actions and thoughts of yesterday.' According to him, my numerical identity is ensured *not* through a 'timeless soul' but through the remembrance of past actions and events.[12]

The English philosopher Derek Parfit elaborated and altered Locke's theory in the 20th century. He argues for 'psychological connectedness': the idea that today I am psychologically connected to yesterday, and yesterday to the day before, therefore creating a chain of connectedness based on memories.[13] Thus, my numerical identity—my identity across time—holds less value for Parfit, what is important is whether I experience a connection.[14]

As we have seen above, I remembered every day exactly who I am (or I forgot to remember to forget who I am, thus remembering who I am). This recognition of my identity seems to be based on a recollection of either events of the night before, dreams in which I occurred as myself, recognition of items, objects, or events around me when waking up. There seemed to be a continuity of recognition and recollection. Thus, in my inability to *forget* who I am in the morning, my memory is to blame, not only making me inherently 'the same self now as it was then,' but also making it very hard to forget who I am.[15]

Note on the sudden start of my existence

     In one of the philosophical books I am regularly gifted by my father, I encountered a passage by José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), a Spanish philosopher. He interprets life as theatrical play; he views the experience of my existence analogous to being on stage. At birth, I supposedly left the dark of a backstage and enter a brightly lit stage (I would assume that, even though the reference to the different light intensities was added by me, Ortega y Gasset pictured childbirth when making this analogy). I stand on my own stage of life and have to start performing, without prior knowledge, without knowing my role, my lines, without even so much as a dress rehearsal.[16]

Note on the 'actual' start of my existence

I was born on the 4th of July 1992, a Saturday, at 14:08 PM. It happened in the Rijnstate Hospital in Arnhem, The Netherlands. I was two weeks overdue and rather chubby for a new-born.

Did my existence start that Saturday afternoon? I could argue that I existed before my birth—I existed respectively as a baby, foetus, and embryo in my mother's womb. Did it then start at the moment of conception? I can only make an educated guess, but nowadays, conception dates can be calculated up to the minute. Or did I exist already before this moment, distributed in my parents, my grandparents, and so on?

In Western culture specifically, we tend to see birthdays as the start of our lives.* My birthday is something I associate myself with, not just through celebrations, but also as a primary identification measure. Most official documentation or inquiries require my date of birth, regardless of how arbitrary it may be. It has been socially agreed as the official marker of beginning of life.

who–am–I–?

Note on the semantic memory of my birthday

I do not recall being born. I was told by others: my mother, my father, my grandparents, my passport, my birth certificate. Without the official documentation and the affirmation of my parents, I could not have known.

Knowledge about my date of birth belongs to my semantic memory; the type of long-term conscious memory that stores factual information about the world. Because I do not have a personal recollection of this event, I have stored this chunk of information including several mental images of this event, based on the few photographs that exist of my birth. In this way, I have constructed a memory of an event that I never consciously experienced.[17]

The same applies for many events during my childhood: most of these memories are reconstructed later in my semantic memories through stories and photographs. Siri Hustvedt addresses this as follows: 'Imaginary and real events merge in a highly promiscuous manner in the human mind.'[18] Hustvedt uses an example about someone not present at a certain event, still having a 'vivid mental imagery of this event.'[19] Because I am told by others, I infer that the girl in the pictures is me.

Note on the inaccurate depiction of babies in medieval painting or the constructed views on childhood change

In the introduction to *The Early Modern Child in Art and History* (2015), art historian Matthew Knox Averett discusses the work of French historian Philippe Ariès. In his pioneering work on the history of childhood, Ariès argues that instead of referring to 'a period of biological development', childhood should be understood as 'a societal construct.'[20]

The understanding of childhood as a social construct rather than a fixed stage in the lifespan of a human being means that the perspective on human development or 'change' is also up for debate. According to Ariès, the contemporary conception of 'the child'—as premature, innocent, unfinished—did not prevail in the Middle Ages. Rather, children were considered miniature adults until the age of seven, after which they were considered adults (in a practical sense, too, as they started providing for their families).[21]

The depiction of children in medieval art can be seen as exemplary. The most frequently appearing child at the time was, evidently, Jesus Christ. Interestingly, he is always displayed resembling a grown-up or even elderly man—in miniature, resulting in rather whimsical figures. This homuncular depiction of Jesus became exemplary for the way other children were drawn at the time.[22] This representation of childhood illustrates how conceptions on the development of people are historically and culturally dependent.

Nowadays, we tend to believe the opposite: children are largely moulded, shaped, and framed through their constant interaction with their environment. 'Far from being formed once and for all in childhood, the individual self is in an ongoing process of construction throughout the individual's life through participation in narrative and discursive practices in social interaction.'[23] This notion allows for a more relational or distributed perspective on the self, where the self is 'a continuously changing and fluid history of relationships.'[24]

'Far from being formed once and for all in childhood, the individual self is in an ongoing process of construction throughout the individual's life through participation in narrative and discursive practices in social interaction.'

Note on Huizinga and Hebb

In 1938, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga published *Homo Ludens*, a lengthy account on how 'play' operates as a crucial element in the development of human culture. In play, the ordinary world momentarily ceases to exist, and is replaced by a fictional world. Detached from 'reality', play allows one to 'be different', to pretend to be someone or something else. Or, as Huizinga argued, 'we *zijn* en *doen* 'anders.''[25] The wide variety of roles, different identities or characters that we adopt and enact, teaches us from a very young age to sympathise with other people.[26]

Does our capability to role-play, to constantly change perspectives, suggest my self can be dynamic and adaptive? Arguably, the falsity of play can be brought against this; I *know* I am not myself when I play pretending to be someone else. Yet, as Huizinga states, the ability to play is an important factor in development of ourselves and our learning processes.

In 1949, the psychologist Donald Hebb discovered so-called 'Hebbian plasticity.' Known as Hebb's rule, this theory explains synaptic plasticity; how connections between different neurons are able to change under the influence of neural activity. In other terms, the physical changes that occur in the structure of the brain due to new experiences.[27] Through learning processes, our brain continuously alters the connections between neurons. Nowadays, Hebbian learning is applied to the field of artificial intelligence as one of the biologically inspired methods behind artificial neural networks, being 'one of the more plausible mechanisms for synaptic strength modification.'[28]

As such, it does not only illustrate how human brains are continuously adapting under the influence of new experiences (potentially stimulated by 'play', as indicated by Huizinga), but also how this learning forms the basis of (much of) our machine learning algorithms.

Note on the famous story of the Theseus' ship

Arguably one of the most notorious analogies regarding the problem of the transforming self is the ship of Theseus. Theseus—once a mythical king of Athens—owned a ship. It was thus Theseus' ship—recognisable by features such as its shape, its wood, its flag and the fact that, presumably, Theseus was on board. However, every now and then, wooden parts of the ship needed replacement: one by one, old ones were disposed, and new ones put in place. After a while, the entire ship was renewed. Does it remain to be Theseus' ship?[29]

In the ship analogy, one could argue: the *ownership* of the ship by Theseus did not change, thus the ship remains Theseus' ship, regardless of its material transformation.

If I apply this to myself, and look for instance at microbiology, my cells renew themselves on a daily basis. Old ones die, new spring to life. A popular myth says that once every seven years, all human cells have renewed. If the same logic applies to me as to Theseus' ship, then the substitution of materials should not matter for my identity. The ownership of the ship, the self, remained the same. Here we might stumble upon complications. For, in the case of Theseus, there exists an external party—namely, Theseus—which has the property 'owning a particular ship'. Vice versa does the ship have the property 'being owned by Theseus'. In the case of the self, the question is whether there exists such an external party that can claim ownership.

Is there a self that can say, regardless of any formal or material changes, I *own* this person, thus it is still me? This undoubtedly brings me back to the impossible question whether there exists a self, *independent* of my changing features.

Note on the abundance of evil scientist thought experiments

As a child, I used to watch *Madelief*, a Dutch children's television show broadcast by the VPRO in the 1990s. With its macabre and absurd scenes (tea gushing out of ears, pools flooding with blood) it was a rather peculiar children's show. In one of the episodes, Madelief—an eight-year old girl—boasts about once having lost her head in her mother's new washing machine. Together with her mother, the decapitated Madelief (her neck now a screw thread) goes to Dr. Lokkerbol, who luckily has a display case full of brand new heads. However, with her new head screwed on, Madelief looks into the mirror and resolutely says: 'No, this is nothing like me!'[30]

Striking, of course, in this example, is that Madelief remains the same person, regardless of her head. What is exceptionally interesting is how her mother has to guide the headless (and thus, sensory deprived) Madelief to the doctor's practice, but still continues to speak comforting words to her.

Madelief's head, in fact, illustrates a popular genre in philosophical discussions about the numerical self; the evil scientist's thought experiment. Many philosophers turn to the help of a malicious doctor who separates memories from minds, minds from bodies, to illustrate the complexities of the continuity of the self.[31] Again, the issue at stake here is the location of a continuous and constant self in relation to changing features.

Note on my inner homunculus

An equally materialistic and spiritual answer to the question of continuity was found by preformation: a theory developed in the seventeenth century, which 'proposed, very simply, that all living beings existed preformed inside their forebears in the manner of a Russian doll.'[32] Human morphology was incapsulated into the genealogy of their own being; pre-programmed by (a Christian) God, offering an explanation for the mysteriousness around conception, hereditary issues, and so on.

Nowadays, the theory is mostly associated with the rather bizarre idea of the homunculus; a tiny, yet full grown, adult human being that would reside inside of me, functioning as a sort of blue-print.* This comical little figure has caused quite the stir within the scientific field. Embryologist Clara Pinto-Correia explains how homunculi eventually became the laughing-stock of the scientific community that had moved towards more plausible theories, such as epigenesis.[33]

I could imagine the idea of the homunculus being far away, but perhaps not *that* far away from modern genetics—apart from fundamentally differing in appearance (tiny man versus a DNA molecule) and origin (spiritual being versus evolution). It is tempting to see the resemblance in the concept of something extremely small existing inside of me that to a certain extent is responsible for my appearance, behaviour, character, and so on, and the changes occurring herein. However, I must be careful. Regardless of the charm of tiny human beings, the way of being differs here. Drawing on the seed analogy discussed before, according to preformation, the teleological seed is not only pre-destined to grow into a specific tree, but in fact carries a tiny prototype of the final tree inside. In comparison, following genetics, the seed may contain a certain *telos*—that is, that it will most likely, assuming the right circumstances, become a certain type of tree—but which tree, how many branches, how tall and how leafy will depend on a large array of (unexpected, external and environmental) factors.

* Opinions within preformation differ greatly as to whether this 'preformed self' existed in the female egg, or in the male sperm.

self

time
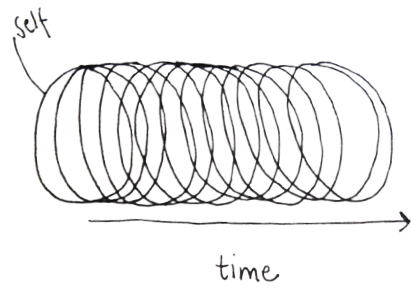
Note on my future self or the paradoxicality of becoming who you are

Apart from an explicit teleological connotation, the often-heard cliché 'become who you are!' is also paradoxical. For, transforming into something that I already am sounds rather conflicting, or at least confusing. Naturally, I should not take this phrase too literal and understand it as something along the lines of 'unlocking my full potential.' Its slightly adapted version, 'become who you *truly* are', is equally confusing. This would imply not only that there are multiple selves but it also adds a truth claim to one of them.

This deterministic perspective on the self upholds the idea that there is a defined and fixed core, which contains the true self, or a potentiality, that simply awaits its revelation. Someone who argued against this was the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. His existentialist ideas turn the phrase around: 'be who you become!,' by which he places agency in one's own hands and rebuts the idea of a predefining essence.[34] Here, Sartre distinguishes between 'néant' and 'être'; where the latter alludes to the type of being that is determined at its creation, the former refers to us, human beings, and our 'non-being' that can form and shape itself.[35]

Note on the meaning of present time

Does my present self exist? When does it become a past self? In language, we extend, stretch and pause time. We speak of the 'now' and 'present-time', but these terms are context related. 'Now' in relation to the Middle Ages can encompass the last 200 years of modern history, whilst 'now' in relation to the Cold War refers to only the past thirty years, or 'now' in relation to getting coffee is probably a brief moment of a couple of minutes.

'Present-time' may refer to the current time period we are in: the Holocene or, as some argue, the Anthropocene. Yet, no one will answer with a geological epoch when I ask them what the present time is. Our linguistic conception of the present is flexible and context-dependent.

Applied to the self, a similar fluidity can be found. A while ago, my father reminded me in one of our phone calls how a new life (new 'me'?) will begin after I graduate. My present self in the context of graduating will become a past self.

The present self lies on the fleeting junction of past and future; and it is on this crossing, where the affirmative character of 'to be' operates.
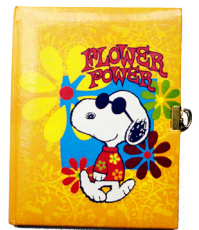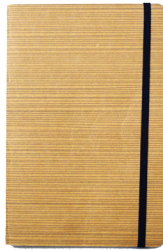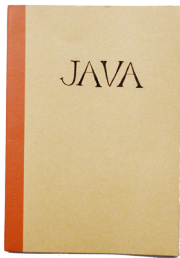
NOW

NOW

now

NOW

now →

time

* Contrary to the previous note, this would imply that no 'new me' will begin (or 'old me' will stop) after leaving university, in fact, nor will there ever. Rather, the 'old me' will continue in the changed form of the 'new me.'

Note on documenting the changing self

I kept a total of twenty-one diaries in my life. These diaries span almost twenty years—the first entry dates from December 1999. As a historical source, diaries are interesting for their 'subjectivity and temporality,' as they 'often prompt reflection on the self in time.'[36] People write diaries as a way to organise their thoughts or to deal with (difficult) situations. As such, it is often not just a continuous recording of experiences but also of feelings, thoughts, emotions, and so on. Reading these diaries (which I have not done) could offer a testimony of twenty years of such experiences, feelings, and emotions. Presumably, it will be very hard to locate exact moments at which I can say: 'Look, here I changed!,' yet with some certainty I can state that I have changed a lot over those two decades. And although I could probably still relate to much of what is written in these documents, I definitely do not feel identical to the seven-year-old scribbling 'Dear Diary.'

In *Personality and Science* (1965) Harold McCurdy, a professor in Psychology, offers an explanation of this apparent paradox between 'being the same' and 'being different' (and the absence of a clear moment of change). He argues that the past continues into the present.* He explains 'that history is concerned not with 'events' but with 'processes'; that 'processes' are things which do not begin and end but turn into one another; and that if a process P1 turns into a process P2, there is no dividing line at which P1 stops and P2 begins; P1 never stops, it goes on in the changed form P2, and P2 never begins, it has previously been going on in the earlier form P1. There are in history no beginnings and no endings.'[37] This process-based understanding of history is reflected in diaries as 'the narrative template of such a diary allows a continuous self-construction, a running report on identities both shifting and fixed.'[38]

Note on observing

In *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women* (2017), Siri Hustvedt cites a fragment of the famous novel, *Life: A User's Manual* (1978) by Georges Perec, in which the fictitious story of the ethnologist Marcel Appenzzell is told. In 1932, Appenzzell goes off on a venture to explore a certain people in the dense jungle lands of Sumatra, Indonesia. The following occurs (with some cutting-and-pasting on my behalf):

> 'Despite grotesque deprivations that result in his near starvation, the determined Appenzzell [researcher] pursues the Kubus [self] for years [months]. Although he is convinced that they are not a [it is not] nomadic people, he chases them [it] continually as they [it] pull[s] up stakes and move[s] into increasingly inhabitable, mosquito-infested parts of the island's interior. At last, the "cruel and obvious truth' dawns on the poor researcher. The Kubus [self] are [is] running away from *him*.'[39]

It might be time to acknowledge that my present-self-researching is influencing the present self that is, at least partially, this research. What physicists call 'the observer effect' (observation of a phenomenon changes the phenomenon itself), could be in fact the case here. Hustvedt adds, 'the anthropologist does not hover over his domain as a god might—looking down on an already-given reality. Like so many researchers, Appenzzell has forgotten his own role in the story, has left himself out, as if he were not occupying any space, as if he were an invisible Mr. Nobody.'[40]

In my attempt to explore the question of the self, am I changing this self that I am investigating? In reference to the title of Jacques Bos' book, is it running away from me, resistant to be grasped?[41]

—WW
I suddenly have to think of this dictum that
seems ubiquitous on self-help websites, where it
is said that 'I am not my thoughts'.

—WW

                  Well, does that not make sense? I can choose what
                  I think, or at least, I can choose to not respond
                          or emotionally attach to what I think.

—WW
Possibly, yes. But over and over again, it implies
that the self exists outside and independently.
It suggests that there might be something like an
Archimedean Point of Self, a point where a self
oversees everything (but does not want to share
its location.) I feel that during this exploration
we are constantly thrown back to the problematic
location of the self: it feels that whatever part
of myself I look at, it has already moved on,
escaped my grip, disappeared.

—WW

                  But if there is an Archimedean 'I' — how come I
                                am not aware of it?

III. of uniqueness

Recently, the head of Philosophy at Leiden University asked me: 'what about the palm trees on the island?'

What *about* the palm trees… So far, I have looked at the boundaries of the self: *where do I end and does the other start?* I considered if and how this distinction is influenced or changed; how do these borders shift and shape?

But what is there on the island itself? Which features differentiate me from others? How do people recognise me as precisely 'me'? Having reached my third and final essay, it is time to steer away from the coastline, into the hinterland.

On the third dimension I have placed the *I*—the first-person singular pronoun.

The *I* is reflective; its reflectiveness demands a certain level of self-consciousness from the speaker. I can only be an *I for* myself, and to be able to say *I to* myself, I need to be aware *of* myself (which, for the sake of this study, I assume that I am).[1] Subsequently, the *I* is singular; it suggests a single human being. It refers to me, and me *only*, as an individual person. It implies a certain uniqueness, not in the 'look-at-me-I-am-so-special'-way (although some would like to think so), but rather literally, as deriving from the Latin term 'unus', or 'one'—that is, there are no identical islands in the ocean.

Historian Richard Sorabji argues that this 'first-person-perspective' is fundamental to human beings and is ingrained in the self. As Jacques Bos explains, according to Sorabji this perspective proved evolutionary crucial, as it allowed us to survive.[3] However, opinions differ. Some argue, as we have seen before, that the notion of being a subjective and unique individual is not an inherent, universal and timeless quality of human beings. Rather, it is a perspective that has changed and shifted throughout history and differs culturally. With the Western subjective-individualist perception of the self emerging throughout the seventeenth century, it established itself in the eighteenth and nineteenth century under the influence of Romanticism. Cultivation of the individual became seen as a fundamental right, which emphasised the uniqueness of each individual.[4] When the self was conceptualised as internal and individual, the *I* became paramount.[5]

'Discover a unique ~~island~~ [**self**]!'
No two ~~Hawaiian islands~~ [**selves**] are alike (…) Each ~~island~~ [**self**] boasts its own unique personality, offering distinct adventures, activities and sights to its ~~visitors~~ [**researchers**].'[2]

Now, how to examine, how to dissect the *I*? Since asking the question 'who is the *I* in the question *who-am-I-?*' seems to me a circular argument arduous to escape from, I will instead focus on what I would like to call 'the claim of uniqueness.' How can I understand being an individual person, a unique human being, and how does this relate to being indivisible and recognisable? This essay will address dividing and multiplying, never-changing cores and ever-changing constructions. It will discuss the sum and its parts, parts pointing to wholes, and wholes summing up to one.

Aristotle once stated 'that everything which is, is one.'[6] This claim on unity resonated in, for instance, the beliefs of medieval philosophers such as John Duns Scotus and Thomas of Aquinas and later could be found in the monadology of the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Aquinas claimed that a human being 'has one and not many substantial forms.'[7] In this perspective, being 'one' may seem all too obvious, for, as far as I know, I am only one person with a single body. To what extent is this person a single 'whole'? The term 'unity' implies that somethings are united together and suggests that there is something that acts as a unifier.

Previously, we have seen the tempting idea of a never-changing, constant core of the self; an essence which ties everything I am together; something that can explain why I still am myself, even after significant changes occur, why I remain to be a single, whole, self.

Additionally, we have seen how this may be problematic. I have already mentioned Gilbert Ryle, who argued that to look for that single entity in search for the self is to make a categorical mistake. Yet, his university (composed of a large array of components) does seem to form a unity, under the umbrella term 'university.' All the parts of the university (buildings, students, professors, libraries, and so on) seem to point to one and the same entity that unifies them.
Nevertheless, the notion of unity in relation to the self has been contested a great deal.

In the article *The Self* (2006), anthropologist Naomi Quinn elaborates on the various viewpoints on the *non*-unity of the self. She paraphrases neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux: 'In my view, the self is a totality of what an organism is physically, biologically, psychologically, socially, and culturally. Though it is a unit, it is not unitary.'[8] Another similar perspective that Quinn presents is that of Wimal Dissanayake—a scholar in Asian culture and cinema—who defined the self as an 'imaginary singularity [that is] largely a product of self-representation.'[9]

LeDoux's perspective on the self as a totality gives rise to the notion of the self as a sum of different parts. Again, however, I end up with the problem of *what* is then tying it together as a whole?

As LeDoux insinuates by using 'unit' rather than 'unitary', there might be no need for a separate unifying entity—perhaps, by their sheer assembly, the parts construct the whole.

The famous British mathematician and logician Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) argues along similar lines. Very much an empiricist, he denounced any mystical or mysterious centre of an unchanging self, which supposedly would be holding me together. In a way, at least this is how I read him, he also denounces the outcome of the sum to be one. He simply states that there is a sum, or maybe not even.

He argues that if 'a thing' (which, in this context, would be me) has certain qualities, these qualities are not what defines the thing, rather 'it is defined by spatio-temporal position.'[10] However, instead of saying: 'I am a 'thing' that is in a certain place at a certain time', he continues, 'the 'thing' is to be replaced by the collection of qualities existing in the place in question.' Russell adds that 'we experience qualities, but not the subject in which they are supposed to inhere', drawing back on the bundle theory of the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776).[11]

Nevertheless, in the Western cultural and philosophical context, human beings are constructed and viewed as single individuals. This construction is enacted through practices such as the labelling of new-borns with a unique identification number—which in its turn emphasises the constructed singularity. Equipped with this validation of the individualist perception, I am allowed to do a wide variety of things (vote, work, apply for benefits, and so on). Simultaneously, this perception also determines the way in which I am held accountable. If I would commit a crime, and authorities would find me culpable of said crime, I—and only I—am held accountable. More importantly, I, in my entirety, am held accountable—instead of, for instance, the hand or weapon that may have actually committed the criminal act.

However, there exist cases in which the presumed wholeness of the culpable individual is broken down. For instance, the law of retaliation (an eye for an eye) could be seen as a way of holding only a part of the person accountable (although the person as a whole is still punished). Another case is that of the mental disorder defence—by which people are acquitted of crimes by reason of insanity. This states that the person in question is not considered responsible for their actions based on the reasoning that he or she was (temporarily) deranged. A remarkable example of this is homicidal somnambulism, or 'sleepwalking murder': in 1887, the French police detective Robert Ledru was assigned to investigate the murder of André Monet, only to find out that it was Ledru himself who killed Monet. He was found not guilty by reason of not *voluntarily* having murdered Monet (but he spent the remainder of his life under 24/7 custody—upon his own request).[12] As with Ledru, the

person's presumed singularity or wholeness is split into different parts; the sane and insane. Or rather, the insane (and thus, culpable) part is placed *outside* of the sane part; the separation of which can also be found in the phrases 'to be beside myself' or 'to be out of my mind.'

Let's take a closer look to some of the parts.

Recently, I found myself in the situation of getting braces. Due to an unfortunate turn of events (mainly, a failing dentist) I had never had them as a teenager—unlike 'everyone else.' Although the look of my teeth was not necessarily atrocious, one could safely conclude it was a peculiar arrangement of incisors, cuspids, canines and molars. More bluntly put: a chronical lack of space.

The overall response from my social environment upon this choice was rather unanimously: 'but your teeth are so *unique*!'; 'they make you *you*!'

Apart from (or precisely due to) wondering 'I hope more things than my teeth make me *me*,' I realised that my dental arrangement somehow had become a recognisable part, referring to me as a whole (as a 'unique' individual) for the people around me. It sported certain features (currently jeopardised under the enforcing pressure of dental brackets) that allowed for identification with the specific instance of my self.

The acclaimed uniqueness of teeth can be related to the role of teeth in the identification of an individual. As one of the five official identification procedures (others being DNA matching, fingerprints, et cetera) forensic odontology uses the remains of human dentition to identify individuals, in cases where other identification procedures are impossible due to disintegration or damage.[13] Due to their specific structure and composition, teeth 'are the hardest and well protected structures in the body,' which are resistant to disintegration and extreme conditions, such as high temperatures, causing them to decompose after death at a very slow rate.[14] Additionally, not only is the arrangement of teeth in the oral cavity 'unique in every individual,' but each individual tooth also contains a set of unique characteristics called 'tooth class characteristic'—making it possible to determine not only someone's identity, but also 'age, sex, ethnicity, occupation and habits.'[15]
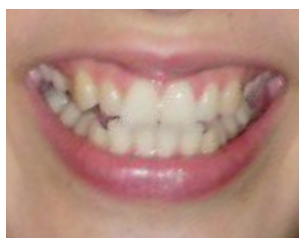
'Enamel is the hardest substance in the body and the only exposed portion of the skeletal system. Teeth are very resistant to thermal damage and blunt force trauma, and the dentition remains stable during tissue decomposition. The dentition is unique to a specific individual.'[16]

The example of forensic odontology illustrates how identification processes could be seen as a *pars pro toto*, or 'part taken for the whole'. As an example of the synecdoche, pars pro toto is a rhetorical trope where a fraction or component of an object (or concept) is used to denote the entire object. For example, among the most common examples are 'mouths to feed' where bodies are being fed, 'earn your daily bread' where in fact money for all living expenses is earned, or 'Holland', whilst all twelve provinces are meant.

In forensic odontology, human dentition becomes the 'part' that leads to the 'whole', the unique identity of an individual. Specifically, when remains of an individual become otherwise unidentifiable, teeth can point to who was once there. The absent whole becomes a derivative of the present part. The part-whole relationship can thus function without requiring the whole to be present. Recalling what LeDoux mentioned earlier, perhaps the whole is absent in the case of the self, too, perhaps it is an oddly behaving synecdoche where the whole is not only replaced by certain parts, but also constituted as such.

Hence, my apparent unity could perhaps be viewed as a construction. Siri Hustvedt aptly remarked: 'when a thing is named it emerges from an undifferentiated background into an illuminated foreground. It takes on a shape and borders.'[17] Naming something has a shaping power; it defines something as an entity which can be referred to by a certain name. When I asked my four-year-old niece 'who she is', she replied saying her name, without hesitation. One's proper name usually becomes the unifying term to refer to oneself. In a similar way, the term 'university' shapes and forms the arbitrary collection of people, buildings and books into a union.

Subsequently, it also relates to someone's acclaimed uniqueness. 'This is *so* Winke,' can be used to express a relation of uniqueness between literally anything and 'Winke'. The term 'Winke' becomes an all-purpose word that cannot only be used to describe my teeth ('*so* Winke') but also my taste in music ('*so* Winke') or my way of behaving ('*so* Winke'), and so on.

Yet, something odd is occurring with names.*
For, names themselves are rarely unique: most people share their name with a lot of others. Even though they

experience *their* name to be a signifier for *their* identity, so do the *x* amount of others bearing the same name. Furthermore, as Bertrand Russell pointed out, 'there are many men called 'Smith', but they do not share any property of Smithyness; in each case it is an arbitrary convention that the man has that name.'[18] Although studies have shown that there exists a relation between socioeconomic parameters and naming practices (i.e. your name can reflect a certain socioeconomic background, and thus, may not have been chosen entirely arbitrarily), names still remain mere labels that do not relate to or describe any inherent commonness that makes name sharers more alike.[19]

The relationship between name and name bearer is constructed through the continuous performance of the name, whereby my name becomes meaningful as a signifier to 'me'.

The same accounts for existing meanings or references, carried by names. Just as a name is rarely unique to a person, it is also rarely lacking pre-existing meaning. The tendency of people to name someone *after* something or someone else endorses this. A name, then, can point to many other things (a deceased family member, mythological figures, flora or fauna, and so on) apart from pointing to the bearer of the name. However, this person will not necessarily identify with every meaning of their name. They may associate with it or feel some sort of connection, but they know that when they hear their name, the caller is probably not looking for a bird or a long gone grandmother. In that sense, they are selective of what their name points to.

Under the denominator 'Winke', I could argue that I become a constructed (and selective) unity. Now, to what extent can this whole be divided in separate parts?

Let's do some maths.

Whilst researching this essay, I stumbled upon many references to 'indivisibility'. My understanding of the term was as much as 'I have a number x which cannot be broken into y pieces evenly.' How does this relate to an individual self?

Individual, precisely. Although in its colloquial meaning 'individual' became synonymous for 'single human being' or 'person', the etymology of the term discloses a way of thinking about human beings that can be traced back to early Western philosophy. Stemming from the Latin word 'individuus', individual literally means 'being indivisible.' The philosopher Boethius (ca. 480–ca. 525), for instance, described a person as '*naturae rationabilis individua substantia*', a rational, indivisible substance.[21]

Later, this notion of the indivisibility of human beings can be found in John Duns Scotus—whom we have seen before in the discussion of the concept 'haecceity' (thisness). He explained how 'there is a haecceity in each individual substance', making me *this* rather *than* that person. Scotus views indivisibility as the 'fundamental issue' of haecceity: the impossibility to divide an individual.[22]

The presumed indivisibility of the individual seems inherently linked to the existence of this individual. Anatomically, I could say I am a single body. However, anatomically, I am also divisible; we have seen this earlier. Through a microscope, I am not an indivisible substance; the microbiologist does not see a single unicoloured blob of 'me', but rather, smaller units, like cells, bacteria and, even smaller, molecules and atoms.

I could neatly arrange all the smaller entities, into which I can be divided, on a table. However, this act would inherently jeopardise my health, and subsequently my existence. If I would divide myself in actual smaller pieces (the thought of which is rather sinister), the property of 'being alive' would be lost.

'A thing has real unity in so far as it is indivisible.'[20]

'An indivisible good is a good that cannot be broken up into smaller units. Houses are a common indivisible good, along with TVs, Fridges, etc. Half a fridge is a meaningless measure.'[23]

Could I thus say that for the sake of maintaining my existence, I am indivisible? Half a fridge loses its functionality to adequately freeze its products. In the same manner, half a human being arguably loses its quality as 'being alive'. But, in *both* cases, this only occurs when I *actually* and *physically* cut these things in half.

Let's leave the cutting knife for what it is. A fridge can still be divided into different parts (freezing element, egg shelf, light bulb, and so on). However, these are now *categorical* divisions: a neuroscientist could look at a fMRI scan and divide the different parts of my brain based on their response to certain stimuli. Categorical division does not have to be purely anatomical (a psychologist could categorise my expressed thoughts, emotions or worries into different 'parts'), nor is the ability to divide me restricted to my corporeal boundaries (an archaeologist could divide me by categorising all the materials that she knows belong to me, in which case 'inseparability' might be a more suitable synonym).

Thus, dividing an individual seems possible. Nevertheless, it comes down to the definition of 'division'. Categorically dividing my organs, my cells, my thoughts, my emotions or behaviours, is possible because the actual act of division is omitted. When the microbiologist looks through the microscope, and she can acknowledge that I indeed consist of smaller parts, she does not *literally* split me into these smaller parts, nor does the psychologist or the archaeologist. The apparent union between divided categories is left intact.

Katherine Munn, a scholar in the field of ontology, talks about 'different granular perspectives.'[24] On a 'coarse-grained level', I might appear as a single unit (a cohesive body moving through space) whilst on 'the fine-grained level' of my molecules, for example, I may appear rather fragmented. She states that 'there are multiple veridical perspectives on reality.' Whichever perspective is relevant for someone will automatically filter the other perspective out.

With the knife off the table, the dividing effort is now found in the categorisation tool of each discipline; this means that my division becomes relative. For instance, what the microbiologist deems the correct and most common division, might not only be refuted by other disciplines, such as the psychologist, but could also be repudiated by fellow microbiologists, who claim to have found a more effective manner. Thus, divisibility becomes a matter of agreement.

This statement is a borrowed (and inferred) concept from political science. In the article *Uncommon Grounds. Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy* (2006), political scientist Stacie E. Goddard argues that 'indivisibility is a constructed phenomenon', rather than an objective characteristic of an issue.[25] She states that 'indivisibility is

of uniqueness

malleable', from which theorists have concluded that 'indivisible issues do not really exist.'[26]

Indivisibility in such a political sense mostly has to do with disputes. There exists a conflict between two (or more) actors, ranging from child custody to territorial claims. In this context, indivisibility is based on disagreement; indivisibility is the result of different opinions on divisibility. According to Goddard, indivisibility is thus a social construction, which acts as a stalemate between different parties, but which leaves the issue itself in fact divisible.[27]

In the context of my self, I turn Goddard's claim around: my divisibility is a matter of agreement. Which parts construct the 'whole' depends on the person dividing.

What if I look at that other mathematical operation, that is, multiplication? The idea of multiplying myself brings to mind yet another malicious experiment, but it sheds light on how we view our claim on uniqueness.

I came to think of multiplication when I encountered a thought experiment of the American philosopher Lynne Baker, discussed by Monica Meijsing in her book *Waar Was Ik Toen Ik Er Niet Was* (2018). Baker wonders, when cloned overnight into multiple versions of herself, which one of these Lynne Bakers would be the 'real' her? Every one of these exact copies of Baker will believe, drawn from their first-person perspective, to be the *real* Baker, but they are incapable of knowing for sure.

Without going too much into the details of this thought experiment, what seems striking to me in this example—and in fact, in many other likeminded examples—is the inability of the (Western) self to multiply. There must and can be only one *real* self. My duplicates may appear, act and behave in the exact same way as me, they remain mere copies of the original.

Yet again, we encounter the never-changing essence of the self! Only one of these Winkes holds some sort of undefined inner quality that would make her the *real* one. Monica Meijsing explains this obsession with finding the 'true, authentic inner self' as something rooted in Christian and Cartesian thought.[30] And this resonates in self-help literature, where I am meant to find my *true* and *only* self.[31]

Other than parallel worlds and daughter universes where my duplicates may actually exist, I am pretty sure that I am the real me. However, other people may not always be. We all know that extremely awkward moment of thinking you recognise someone, when instead it is not this person at all. What made me think it was you?
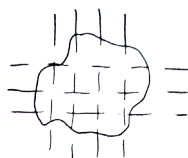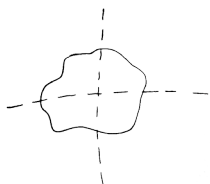
—WW
Remember before, when I asked you whether we are
two different people, now that I say I to me and
you to you?

—WW
your point being?

—WW
At the time, you dismissed this apparent dualism
as something that you did not want to go into,
upholding the notion that—even though we say 'I'
and 'you'—we are one and the same person. But!
Regardless of using the same name to refer to
ourselves, what if this unity that we supposedly
are is an illusion?

—WW
Richard David Precht, author of the popular book
Who Am I and If So How Many? (2011), quotes the
nineteenth century physician Ernst Mach: 'The
ego,' he asserted, 'is not a definite, unaltered,
sharply bounded unity.' There is no 'I' in the
human brain, only a jumble of sensations in
the animated exchange with the elements of the
outside world.'[28] If Mach is right, we are just
one of many sensations that fall under the
denominator 'Winke'. In fact, there could be many
more than just us two!

—WW
Hi there!

—WW
has joined the group conversation

—WW
Hey!

—WW
Okay, I understand. But still, I think it is
outrageous to think that we are not the same. We
have the same body, we have the same mind; unless
you believe that we are two distinct homunculi
inside of 'Winke.'

—WW

That sounds kind of funny, but no. It is rather
that as a person one can dissolve into multiple
I's. This idea is borrowed from the Italian writer
Italo Calvino who argued that, in the context
of writing, 'the person 'I', whether explicit
or implicit, splits into a number of different
figures: into an 'I' who is writing and an 'I' who
is written, into an empirical 'I' who looks over
the shoulder of the 'I' who is writing and into
a mythical 'I' who serves as a model for the 'I'
who is written. The 'I' of the author is dissolved
in the writing.'[29]

—WW

And is this not exactly what we are doing here?
You, for instance, could be seen as the writing
I, whilst I am more the empirical *I*—and together
we are constantly discussing this 'mythical *I*'
that keeps running away from us…
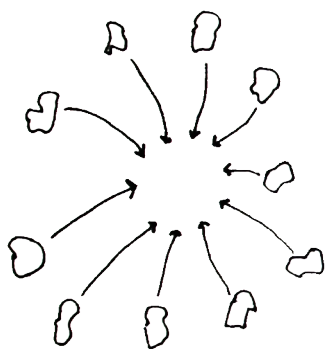
On the 9th of August, I searched for my bag on the patio of a bar. One of my friends had taken it inside, not really sure whose bag it was. To identify the owner of the bag, she looked inside. She saw a wallet (my wallet) and took out the driver's license (my driver's license). The small plastic card showed a pixelated, black-and-white photo of a face (my face). She inferred the bag was mine (this was what she told me afterwards). My friend thus recognised me as the owner of the bag, only after seeing my face on the driver's license.

In one of her essays, Siri Hustvedt argues that 'the face is the locus of identity—the place on the body to which we give our attention.'[32] Even though, earlier, we have seen how little faces may actually differ from one and another, it remains the focal point of recognition, of 'primary intersubjectivity', which babies of 'only hours old' recognise and imitate endlessly.[33] Often, when mistaking someone for someone else, once you see the face, you know you were wrong (or right). This predilection becomes apparent through multiple practices emphasizing the face as the place of identity (mugshots, profile pictures, #rearfie being much less popular than #selfie, and so on), but can sometimes also clash with other cultural or religious practices (in the case of the (recent) ban on public forms of face-coverings).

Furthermore, the inclination towards faces resonates in artificial recognition techniques. Facial recognition proves to be one of the most popular biometric-based identification methods as it does not require any active participation on behalf of the identified person (which is the case with, for instance, finger print recognition), the data is relatively easily retrievable and due to no required interaction with physical equipment, it is also non-intrusive.[34] The face is, compared to one's hand or one's back, rather feature-heavy. Although facial recognition technologies struggle with the fact that faces appear very similar in frontal view, even at a larger distance faces maintain a certain level of recognisability, which would be lost much sooner with, for instance, iris or fingerprint detection. It thus allows for rather rapid and accurate identification processes.[35]

A few months before, wearing blue trousers, a backpack of a famous Swedish brand, a black woollen coat and purple scarf, I walked into a university building. Approximately ten meters behind me, (another) one of my friends happened to enter, too. Both walking down the corridor, she called out my name.

She could not have seen my face, as I was walking in front of her and she entered the building after me. What then made her recognise me? What caused her to infer it was indeed *me* she saw? Possibly, it could have been the trousers, not modest in colour, but also once hers. Or, my backpack: the one I carry daily. Shoes, scarf, coat…

All could be possible pointers to me.* But then, these pointers are not specifically *unique* traits: so many people own a black backpack, black coat, and so on. Was it then my behaviour, the way I walked, or how I wear my hair? This friend did not see my face but inferred it was me, based on… When I asked her she could not remember. Some other part(s) than my face became a pointer to me; a combination of parts—in themselves perhaps not striking—but together recognisable as me.

In his article 'How to talk About the Nody? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies' (2004), Bruno Latour brings up an example of a former colleague, the neuro-philosopher Paul Churchland, carrying a picture of his wife in his wallet. Only, this picture was not of her face (which we would presume) but it depicted a coloured CAT-scan of her brain. As such, Latour explains, it is an example of 'extrasomatic resources (…) that allow us to be affected by others in different ways.'[36] Latour argues that the brain scan example shows our ability to become sensitive to otherwise meaningless depictions of data (which, for most lay people, the CAT-scan would precisely be). He continues: 'this sensitivity, this learning to be affected, will make us have a richer and more interesting understanding of others' personality than mere boring facial expressions.'[37]

In the case of my friend's recognition, she had developed a similar kind of sensitivity, which allowed her to infer my identity. The whole that she mentally constructed as 'most likely being Winke' was constructed by some arbitrary parts that, to another person lacking the same sensitivity, might have led to completely different 'wholes' or perhaps to nothing at all.

Although the *I* implies a certain uniqueness—that notion of the individual as a single, united entity engrained in Western thought—it proved hard to pinpoint this single whole as such. What makes me *me* seems to be a complex construction of a wide variety of elements that I (and others) relate to myself. Then, the acclaimed unity of the individual is rather 'a social artefact, a unity that covers plurality.'[38] The 'individual' should perhaps be replaced with the 'dividual'—a term originally from the field of anthropology illustrating different cultural perspectives on the self—adding a dynamic and divisible characteristic to its understanding; 'being made up of plural relationship that meet at the self.'[39]

Self

I started this study with a long list of potential answers to the question *who-am-I-?*. Arguably, many more answers can be thought of. Even though this list played no lead role in this study, its abundance of possible and diverging answers sparked the initial curiosity about this strangely behaving question. For, behind its apparent simplicity lies a complex structure of implications and assumptions. The exposure of this structure was the core of this study.

This study looked at each component of the question and aimed to dissect some of their implications. Respectively [*?*]—that there is something to know; [*I*]—that there is such thing as an individual self; [*Am*]—that this self exists; [*Who*]—that this self exists in the form of a specific human being. The manner in which this dissection was done, is specific to this study. Lacking a clear-cut methodology to start from, I built (or should I say, appropriated) my own. The chosen methodology did not aim to find answers or to proclaim truths. It did not seek to affirm, ascertain or prove, rather it sought to explore, investigate and attempt.

I carried out these experimental dissections with the aim to raise insights into three questions, operating on different levels. First, the method level deals with the question whether the specific curation of research methods as applied in this study can have a value for scientific research. Second, there is the object level, dealing with the question *who-am-I-?* itself. To what extent has the explorative dissection of *who-am-I-?* gained any insight into this specific question? On the third and last level, I turned to myself: can this study function as a self-experimentation, challenging my existing research habits? And, subsequently, what does it mean for my role as researcher to be also included in the topic, caused by the reflectivity of the *I*?

In this reflection I will come back to these three levels, which I will discuss in the order just mentioned. Per level, the reflection will be two-fold. First, I will turn inwards. What are the outcomes and experiences of this research in relation to the specific level? Subsequently, I will look outward. What does this mean for you, the reader, and perhaps even wider, in the context of scientific research? The following comments, observations and contemplations can thus be seen as an attempt to not end this story in a state of aporia, of puzzlement, as an attempt to make sense of these experiments.

'If the observation of simple emotions was the moon landing of neuroscience, the journey to the self is a manned voyage to Jupiter at the very least.'[1]

The construction of the curated research method (CRM) initially arose out of the struggle to find a fitting approach for the question *who-am-I-?*. The question somehow resisted a monodisciplinary approach; although strongly rooted in philosophy, it touched upon a large array of different terrains, such as psychology, linguistics, and history, to name but a few. Consequently, this constraint evolved into a curiosity to go against the grain of more common approaches in scientific study. I reasoned: 'if I could not find a satisfying approach, why not build my own?' This resulted in the creation, selection, and adaptation of the five methods and tools that I applied in this study. Entering rather unexplored terrains, the application of the CRM thus not only offered a way in which to examine this tricky question but, on a wider scope, functioned as an exploration of its own suitability as a scientific approach.

Before I discuss each method, I need to mention that the CRM was not pre-defined or neatly outlined from the start. In fact, it gradually evolved through the process of researching, specifically of the first essay, the *who*. Thus, the first essay could be seen as testing ground, which largely gave shape to the curation. Resultantly, the following explorations—that is, of the *am* and the *I*—were equipped with the recently formed CRM from the outset. At times, the application of the CRM in these explorations proved challenging. It became apparent that what had naturally emerged out of the research context of the *who*, sometimes behaved differently when applied top-down, onto the second and the third; the *am* and the *I*. Of course, the nature of this study did not demand the CRM to be a fixed entity. It allowed for flexibility and evolution. Even though the CRM was not further extended with methods or tools, after those five were established, emphases and nuances on different parts of the CRM shifted throughout the essays. Yet, simultaneously, the CRM also offered a foothold, a support, from which to start. Where the CRM-under-construction at times left me floating, in the end it became a floating device itself.

This brings me to the five methods themselves. What did their application mean to this study? First, the continuous shifting between the generality and a specificity, as drawn from *Migropolis*, proved a valuable fundament for this study as it offered a relational framework between *the* self and *my* self, embedding the specific in a more general context,

whilst in this context maintaining a specific perspective. Additionally, the visual extension of the text in the form of photographs and drawings provided another layer for exploring the question and its implications. In fact, many drawings stem from moments where I was struggling to find the right words. Through their visualisation, key issues did not only become more comprehensible but also added a playful element to the final work. Subsequently, the incorporation of both the polymathic approach of Annemarie Mol and the structure and aim of Montaigne's *Essais* allowed me to move away from absolute truth finding and towards explorative investigation. Then, the interceding conversations with myself allowed me to disclose questions, uncertainties and doubts that arguably appear in any research but often remain concealed. Finally, even though the cut-and-paste tool only intermittently appeared throughout the text, behind the scenes it played an important role in examining texts and applying theories.

Having discussed the components of the CRM, the term 'curation' itself deserves a closer look. For, this study may apply a curation of methods, simultaneously it reflects on the method of curation. 'As an extension of museum and gallery practices,' curation is 'an act of selecting, organizing and presenting items in the vein of an arbiter-editor.'[2] Curation is inherently linked to value—it is the curator's decision what gets selected and what does not, adding a certain importance and valuation. As such, curation 'perhaps first and foremost it is not a neutral thing.'[3] Thus, the assembly of the CRM was very much a personal selection on my behalf.

This resonates in two research techniques that emerged during this study. First, I realised that much of the CRM (and subsequently, the examination of the question, which I will address shortly) initialised with a rather simple 'I read something online…' I believe that the ubiquity of the internet, websites such as Google and Wikipedia, have changed and perhaps are changing the landscape of scientific research drastically. Not only the sheer accessibility of many scientific sources, but also bite-sized encyclopaedic information readily available have influenced the decision-making in this research. This offers advantages, yet also presents potential pitfalls. For, it allowed me to venture off towards all sorts of different disciplines, for instance, drawing the analogy with islands. Simultaneously, sources can become obscure—as information can be easily copied and pasted—which demanded a certain level of cautiousness.

Secondly, another part of this methodology and its realisation is its associative character. I recall a concept called 'selective perception,' which I once encountered in a zen meditation class. Selective perception is the idea that you encounter what keeps you preoccupied. During this research, I started to associate many things to 'the self' and realised that, the more I studied the question *who-am-I-?*, the more I stumbled upon it in my environment.

This needs to be taken in account when looking outward—when asking to what extend this CRM has value as a scientific research method beyond this specific case study. The methodology applied in this study could be valuable in a broader context for several reasons.

First of all, to what extent can this method gain any new knowledge? In a publication on epistemology, I found the following definition of knowledge: 'a. *scientific, objective* knowledge and b. *personal or direct* knowledge.'[4] Traditionally, these types of knowledge stand on opposing ends, the last one often falling outside of the realm of scientific research. Due to the choice of method—specifically the application of the twofold perspective from *Migropolis* on the / my self— this study looked at both ends. Consequently, the interweaving of both types of knowledge resulted in a mixture between the objective and the subjective. Perhaps the scientific claim of objectivity and repeatability of this study are jeopardised by this. Simultaneously, it could offer an insight into the inclusion, examination and contextualisation of more personal narratives in scientific research. This could be beneficial to opening up the (sometimes) rigid objectivity of scientific research to more subjective accounts, which could offer new perspectives.

Secondly, can this study be meaningful in a broader scientific field? To answer this, I must look at the (inevitable) question where this study can be positioned in this field. As mentioned, the chosen CRM impedes an comfortable fit within a specific discipline. In my attempt to answer Annemarie Mol's call for being undisciplined, I encountered many different disciplines, drifting about. A clear downside to this approach was the lack of a clearly defined theoretical framework, to safely be embedded in. As the methods are not discipline-specific, they run the risk of moving all over the place.

Inevitably, I often entered the field of philosophy. Whilst this research has often spun me off into a metaphysical loop of questioning everything, drowned me in the quicksand of existential anxiety—or any metaphor alike—I tried to make sense of it all. Now, undoubtedly, I have generalised, marginalised and distorted throughout this process, but I have drawn on various philosophies and philosophers to the best of my abilities. Yet, this study is not a philosophical research *pur sang* (whatever that may be).

reflection

* Coincidentally, much of this research has been done at two different university locations; strikingly, one houses the Faculty of Humanities whilst the other belongs to the Faculty of Science.

Where does this study then belong? Does it belong to the natural sciences? Social sciences? Or rather humanities?

Neither seem to comfortably fit, although the philosophical character of the topic may give humanities a lead. Reminiscing on C.P. Snow's seminal Rede Lecture, *Two Cultures* (1959), perhaps I hover in between. In this lecture, Snow addresses the conflict between the sciences and the humanities—a conflict mainly based on mutual incomprehensibility and misunderstanding. The gap is reinforced by the lack of dialogue between the two; different languages are spoken. Siri Hustvedt reinterpreted the disciplines on either end of Snow's gap as respectively the scientist and the artist.[5] Perhaps, this study is precisely that, an attempt to start such dialogue, to weave together (some of) the sciences and (some of) the arts. For instance, the associative character of my methodology is regularly found in artistic practices. Through this study, I have aimed to place this practice in a scientific context—resulting in what one may call an experiment of scientific art or artistic science.*

Then, without claiming to have built any lasting bridges, this research depends on both sides of the gap: on the scientific and the artistic, on the objective and the subjective. As Hustvedt accurately described:

> *'Many of the essays in this volume draw on insights from both the sciences and the humanities. They do so, however, with an acute awareness that the assumptions made and methods used in various disciplines are not necessarily the same. The physicist's, the biologist's, the historian's, the philosopher's, and the artist's modes of knowing are different. I am wary of absolutism in all its forms. In my experience, scientists are more alarmed by such a statement than people in the humanities. It smacks of relativism, the idea that there is no right and wrong, no objective truth to be found, or even worse, no external world, no reality.'[6]*

Thus, operating in the in-between, this research offers an example of how an 'undisciplinary' approach can gain cross-connections, comparisons, associations and insights across fields, which otherwise would have remained concealed.

Finally, I have to make one last remark on behalf of the contextualisation of the methodology—which will guide us to the second level of this research, the topic. Mol's call for being undisciplined needs to be understood in its feminist context. Hustvedt, too, criticises 'Snow's deafness of women's voices' on either side of his gulf—acknowledging the ongoing feminist endeavour to counter this.[7] Yet again, rather coincidentally, I encountered an article online which caught my attention. It referred to the 'autobiographical underpinnings of feminist research', arguing how these 'involve detailing what is usually hidden—for example, personal investments in a subject area, intellectual affiliations and their influence on the choice of research frameworks adopted—as well as an examination of the relationship between research and the private life of the researcher.'[8] Although this is an observation made in hindsight, and feminist research may have not played a leading role in my research, it seems a striking one to make.

On a second level, this study is about the research topic. First, I will briefly reflect on some of the insights I have gained through this examination and subsequently relate them to a broader context.

There are many ways in which I could have done this study. For instance, I could have looked at pathology—an often-found approach when dealing with the self—which examines the self by looking at its anomalies. I could have discussed 'being a millennial', 'being a woman' or 'being from a Western European (wealthy) country'—issues that have a certain urgency to them nowadays.

I did neither. This research tried to act on the layer behind these identity claims, with 'my self' as the point of departure, rather than an anomaly. This inherently caused me to ignore certain important topics. However, this was not the research studying those eighty-three odd claims I made in the beginning (in fact, each of them deserve their own research), but rather the layer below these supposedly self-evident claims. With this approach, I have shed light on what is often taken for granted about the self, the ubiquitous and ease with which the question *who-am-I-?* is employed and enacted.

I structured, moulded and shaped my question as a four-dimensional cube. I tried to fit it in a neat shape, but it churns, twitches and squirms; the dimensions sometimes overlap and refuse a straightforward and clear definition or explanation. One could argue that it is a rather brutal move, to tear the question apart and spatialise it—even if it was hypothetical and merely an auxiliary visualisation, both for me as the researcher as, perhaps, for you, the reader. It turned a largely philosophical and metaphysical topic into almost a (natural) scientific object: a creature that can be dissected. Through the exploration of each dimension one by one, I realised how much they overlap. How distinction endorses uniqueness, how change influences distinction, and how uniqueness is relative to change.

And not to forget, the question mark, easily overlooked but the ever so important marker at the end, which I discussed right at the beginning. Starting with a contemplation on why it is even a question in the first place, made me aware of the variety of uses of the question. In its colloquial sense, *who I am* might refer to my name, my job or which person I am in a photo. In a more spiritual sense,

who I am is something we ought to know, it is something hidden and mysterious that I need to find out (through countless self-help books and questionnaires). In a practical sense, *who I am* plays out a powerful role in shaping the world around us. Different identity claims may allow me or restrict me to do certain things, it may justify behaviour and diminish freedom.

Let's look at some of the main insights related to *who-am-I-?* as obtained through this research.

I.   The discussion of the question mark indicated how this study itself is very much embedded in the tradition of looking at the self. Thus, this study could be seen as an ultimate navel-gazing act of a self-absorbed millennial (remember Montaigne's quote at the start: 'so frivolous and vain a subject.') Simultaneously, it could also be seen as a critical examination of *why* we are staring at our navels in the first place (and how to stare at them).

II. In the exploration of the *who*, and through the analogy with islands, I gained understanding of the flexibility and relativity of my boundaries—which I initially thought to be rather solid. The apparent certainty of my physical borders turns the attention away from all sorts of extendedness and embeddedness. Additionally, the desire to be distinct from others is very much culturally and historically dependent.

III. The playful examination of the *am* placed my understanding of 'being' and 'existing' under close scrutiny. It was in this essay that I encountered the traditional Western idea of the 'never-changing locus of the self' the most. One of the main insights in this part was the observer-effect that this study may have had on my own self.

IV. In the final essay, dealing with the *I*, some of the formal qualities implied by the *I* were exposed. I gained insight in the mechanisms of what makes me *me*. I realised that the idea of a united, single, or whole individual might be much more fragmented and that identification operates as a *pars pro toto*; my acclaimed individuality is a derivative of different parts, pointing to me.

The exploration of this question behaved like a fractal tree: each path I went down, ten (or a hundred, or a thousand) other paths unfold before me, leaving me in a metaphysical forest of endless possibilities and questions. Perhaps, that is precisely the point. To return to Annemarie Mol once more, the dissection of who-am-I-? revealed the multiplicity of the self, as well as its perceived uniformity.

Inevitably, I encountered the problem of the location of the self. Even though I tried to follow Gilbert Ryle's argument of the categorical mistake, it remained tempting to look for that one specific locus of the self. This research has taught me that, in the exploration of the different components of the question, I kept chasing that spot—but it continuously ran away from me. Or, perhaps I kept pointing at something that is not really there, a void or a hole. Or, yet another option, whilst looking for that single tree, I overlooked the forest. Anyhow, it proved equally hard to either prove or circumvent the supposedly true locus of the self.

To a certain extent, the spatial connotation of the language related to the self endorsed this. 'Finding one's self', 'look for the true you!', 'reveal your inner self', and so on. It implies that there is something to be found and thus, that this 'something' has to have *at least some findable properties.* This may be misleading.

That the question mark coincidentally ended up (visually) at the heart of my *who-am-I-?* cube seems symbolic: if this research has shown anything, it is that at the core there is an uncertainty. Recently, I came across a thesis by a student from the Design Academy (Eindhoven, NL). He had metaphorically equalled the self to a donut: at the core there is a void, it is defined by the dough around it.[9] Maybe my cube has a hole in it too.

Then, what does this mean in a broader context?
To return to the term once more, this study is in fact a curation on multiple levels. For, the experimental explorations of the dimensions were too a process of selection, organisation and presentation, in which I made the decisions—safeguarding its scientific underpinnings, whilst allowing for a certain level of associative freedom. As I mentioned at the very beginning of this study, this was not an exhaustive overview of all possible points in the grid; rather it was an exploration of points, *that to me stood out.* The cube, to exploit the analogy a bit, then became a white cube—the exhibition space in which I carefully selected, organised and presented certain points, implications and observations of each dimension.

An important aspect, relevant in this context, is that 'fundamental to the act (…) of curating, is: 'organize the very same artworks in the very same space differently, give the exhibition a new title, and you

can potentially elicit an entirely different experience or reading of the contents. This suggests that an exhibition isn't only the sum of its artworks, but also the relationships created between them, the dramaturgy around them, and the discourse that frames them.'[10] Thus, what needs to be taken in account is that this study could have been selected, organised, and presented in a multiplicity of ways – each of them inherently influencing the outcome.

The subjective character of this question arguably makes it harder to draw broad conclusions. The manner in which I interpreted and subsequently examined the question reveals more about my own background and bias than about truth claims or generalities. The observations I made throughout this study may completely oppose other people's opinions about themselves, the self or the question *who-am-I-?*. Still, the insights raised through the dissection of the question can have meaning insofar that they have shown different perspectives and alternative narratives, at the same time questioning apparent self-evident claims in relation to the Western perception of a distinct, individual, and singular self. 'It cannot, in that case, attempt to educate and prove *the* answer, but might instead encourage unconventional ways of looking at and reading the ~~artwork~~ [self] and then the world.'[11]

Finally, on a third level, this study is about the researcher. Can this study function as a self-experimentation? And what does it mean to be included in the research, through the reflexivity of the *I*? These questions arose from the conflict between pre-existing research habits and envisioned outcomes that I encountered whilst executing this study. I realised that it could function as part of my research objective instead of an internal struggle that I needed to overcome.

It begs the question: who am I as a researcher? My background in traditional historical research demanded certain approaches, certain appropriate styles and a tone of voice. However, inevitably, a large part of this research relies upon this kind of research: literary review, combining voices and theories with observations and thoughts. It draws heavily on my background of critical reading, source analysis and reviewing (historical) texts. Furthermore, it was only towards the end of this study that I realised much of my background in museum studies, in curating, resonates through this research, too. Perhaps, through this self-experimentation I tried to let go of my occupational hazard and research routines, only to realise that—to a certain extent—I might just be a creature of habit.

During the research, I often heard myself think 'who am I to say this or that' (pun not intended). The risks of 'being undisciplined' resulted in a rather unsteady and ambiguous position as to where I could claim authority (after reading how many books am I entitled to rightfully claim something?) There was no existing framework to look for coverage, to turn to in doubt. Occasionally, this resulted in questioning everything—up to my own existence—which was not always advantageous to the progress of the study. In this uncomfortableness, I encountered the historical voice in me that wanted to balance everything, that looked for nuance, and wanted to (endlessly) put things in perspective, and which stood in contrast with the more explorative and undisciplined character of this study. In a way, the piece in front of you is the result of a continuous negotiation between these two.

One element that illustrates the departure from a more traditional scientific tone of voice, is the use of 'I' throughout this research. Instead of the 'third-person discourse of much academic writing' or the commonly used scientific 'we',

I often opted for a first-person singular perspective since I considered it suitable in the context of my question as well as an interesting point of view to experiment with. Whereas the common scientific perspective can be considered 'a bid to cleanse the text of subjective taint', I emphasised exactly this subjectivity, whilst simultaneously placing my self-as-researcher in a prominent position.[12]

What does it mean when a researcher takes such a position? The difficulty in this case is that it risks being meaningful only to itself. However, perhaps, this should not be seen as an obstacle. Its meaningfulness to me may not be one-on-one translatable to other people, but it may give an idea of how to experiment with one's own (scientific) beliefs, routines and doctrines.

In the end, I chose a methodology that was the closest to myself yet simultaneously the furthest away from what I am accustomed to. Through this, my hope is that I have stimulated at least some minds to wonder the next time they think: *who-am-I-?*

reflection

acknowledgements

acknowledgements

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