

In the momentum of the vestige  
or  
Reading Vestiges

Elejan van der Velde

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Written while participating in the  
program of the Sandberg Institute:

Studio For Immediate Spaces

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## PREFACE

Traces is the material I'd like to investigate through imagination, contemplation and in the end through writing. I stumbled upon this through a photograph I shot in an interior one day while I was working as a cleaner of domestic spaces, mostly at elderly people. The photograph shows a clock and to the right of that same clock, on the wallpaper, a trace of a clock from the past. A clock that hung there and, as I know after asking the owner, these two clocks never existed side by side. The clock shown on the photograph is an antique clock with a pendulum, hanging in front of greyish wallpaper with vertical lining on it. The pointers have rounded and pointy shapes and seem to be made of brass, just as the rest of the clock. The inner white circular part contains old roman numberings and states the name Jacques Alnias. At least that's what I first read, but after some searching on the web I came to the conclusion that the name is worn off and it should say Jacques Almar.

The thing that is most evoking in the picture is the dialectical relation between the trace and the object. They both represent a clock and a clock on its turn represents the concept of time. A whole world opened up to me through this picture, through the clock, through the idea of time, but most of all through the trace. The trace being the least defined thing in the image, and therefore the most interesting and open to interpretation and working on. This trace shows a sense of life, of a material memory embedded in the wall. I think the essence of life reveals itself in traces, in all the mistakes, the broken pieces we touch, the evidence of usage of things and surfaces, more than in the successes we encounter in life.

*What is the essence of a pair of pants (if it has such a thing)? Certainly not that crisp and well-pressed object to be found on department-store racks; rather, that clump of fabric on the floor, negligently dropped there when the boy stepped out of them, careless lazy, indifferent. The essence of an object has some relation with its destruction: not necessarily what remains after it has been used up, but what is thrown away as being of no use<sup>1</sup>*

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1 Barthes, R. The responsibility of forms, page 158, University of California Press, 1991

But what is the essence of the trace (if it has such a thing)? This is an essay about what I first found in this picture, and what I found after looking at other traces I encountered. The main focus of this writing is the creation of a typology of visible traces in interiors. The interesting for the interior traces is because they show us in them. They reflect Our Actions, our choices of hanging paintings on the wall, putting furniture in certain corners, our lack of or our determinate cleaning of the surface, choices that may not all have been made consciously, but still reflecting our personality. I admit beforehand that I am a subjective writer and that I will only describe what is important in certain traces for me. I dare not say that it could be a universally shared feeling, although I hope that my descriptions can lead to your own insight in what your personal interest in traces can be, or in other rather overlooked parts we encounter in our daily life, on surfaces, in objects, or floating in mid-air.



## TYOLOGY

The void comes to you as a revelation, it surprises, it amazes, sends you adrift onto your own imagination. The void appears over time, through the accumulation of dust on the surface where a thing or an object is hanging, standing, lying, and the trace appears only after taking the thing away. It is usually not made with an intention because it just appears on the spot where you hang your paintings, clocks, shelves, place your furniture etc. Actually it appears everywhere you place an object in a space. The more time dust and light particles alter the surface area in terms of colour or appearance, the more it reveals itself. In some interiors you won't find this trace because somebody is strictly tidy or moved in quite recently, but in a majority of places you'll find this trace, because there is no stopping the movement of the dust particles, which are able to travel for thousands of kilometres. The void trace has the ability to surprise, because it only shows itself after removing an object and this action can give the person the idea he or she discovered something in their domestic space which was covered before. Some might feel the urge to repaint the wall immediately because they tend to see only the dirt, some see a kind of beauty in this image. It is a revelation of a literal nothing, a piece of surface that has not been covered with the layer of dust that the rest of the surface embraced, because it was covered already by something else. But there is more to this trace than its appearance.

The theft of Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa in 1911 attracted an immense crowd of people from all over Europe, to visit and see the void where the painting hung before.<sup>2</sup> They came to see the void, the place, but not the thing itself since it was stolen. Thus the theft of the painting elevated its status even more. But what is the power, the driving force for wanting to visit the place, only to see the void? This explains to me that even though the painting is not there, the void left behind is maybe even more attractive. The void becomes the

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<sup>2</sup> Leader, Darian. *Stealing the Mona Lisa – What art stops us from seeing*, Faber & Faber, London, 2002.

This occurrence is the starting point for Darian Leader's about why empty gallery spaces are attractive and why we like to look at art.



protagonist in the piece, but only because there was this painting with this certain status. Just as the trace of the clock described in the introduction there must be something outside this trace. With the Mona Lisa it is obviously the status of the painting and the mental memory of the image that constitutes here the status of the void. With the described example in the introduction it is the shape of the trace together with the dialectic relationship it has with the other clock that is hanging next to it. The trace doesn't have a considerable status, but its attractiveness is based on the present object and the suggestive object. Not every void is as attractive and this has to do with the status of the object that was there before the void, or the shapes and the surrounding objects and elements that start having a relationship with this void.

The void is provoking representations, it lets you dwell in imagination, posing questions, what is it that has been here, or with what do I associate this shape. This trace goes further than the surface but opens up a world beyond. The visual language resembles that of the photogram or shadows, but where these two visuals are made in an instant, one singular moment, (of course we can discuss here that a photogram can also take multiple days to be made, but generally it is made in just a split second), the void trace is made in years. An accumulation of tiny moments, tiny moments that embed tiny particles that can result into something bigger, more visible, and more contrasting. The trace becomes matter made from elements that came together. Elements that gathered around the object, struck the surface, placing their marks to never leave again.

**The blot** is something that happens unintentionally. A shape which can appear on certain points as a line but always has something thicker, solid, blottier in it. It happens by spilling coffee, ink or any liquid material that gets caught by gravity or some other directional force. A blot made of powder is almost unthinkable, because as soon the powder would appear as a blot on the floor, the moment you would step into it, it would become a *smudge*.

What if the blot becomes intentionally? This can mean that

the blot is made with an intention or that somebody reads an intention in the blot. The last thing happens in the Rorschach tests, where a person is shown a symmetrical blot and this person is asked about his associations with the blot. Then this blot becomes a spider, a boat, a cloud, or anything that the person relates to the shape he sees. But in fact the blot is empty and doesn't want to be any other thing than the form it is. The blot is an amorphous shape. It has a shape but the general shape is not fixed, like the coffee stain from a cup, which normally follows the shape of the bottom of the cup, mostly circle shaped. With the blot it is not possible to define an archaic form. But what if someone were to try and make a blot intentionally? This would be a very hard thing to do. I imagine a person trying to make a blot. But is it a certain shape of blot this person is making? Is the blot then only a definition of appearance, but does not touch upon the aspect of shape? I don't think that a blot could exist as a perfect square or circle shape, because that would negate the idea of the blot which is the unintentional fluid trace. What if the person while making it doesn't have a determined shape but just wants to make a blot? After the making he or she does have to make up his or her mind if it is a satisfying blot. Which would mean that there is a certain expectation, without maybe consciously knowing what that expectation is, but this will become apparent after judging whether it is a good or a bad blot? This is what artists that use blots in paintings do all the time. They judge in some sort of blotty ethical way if it is a good or a bad blot, and if the appearance suits the surface they are working on.

The blot is a falling or flowing trace. The ink falls on the floor, or it slowly flows onto the table's surface. The image shows a slow movement, although the ink could have fallen down the table, after this action, the molecules in the ink want to cling together, they start a search for their next of kin until they stick together to a bigger constellation, slowly moving towards a whole, attracted by each other, wanting to be bigger than a singular individual smaller drop.

The **spatter** is a joyful trace. It is like confetti on the surface. It shows itself mostly in the shape of little drops like little points on the surface. Sometimes they are gathered around a big central *blot*. Sometimes spatters looks like stars with a thicker centre part where thin lines depart from and stretch outwards. It can be created by throwing a glass of wine on the floor, where the wine will hit the ground most of the liquid will strike but around this centre there are tiny drops bouncing up again and falling a bit further off centre or touching a vertical other surface like a table leg or the wall. It resembles the fun of water, of playing. In the lines and shapes created by the spatter you can see the movement of pleasure of getting wet on a hot summer day, or the refreshing act of washing. There is always a movement to discover in this trace and an accident. The spatter does appear a lot together with *blots*, but the difference with the *blot* is, that the *blot* is a trace with a heavy thick body which makes me think more of a thick and oily substance, while the spatter is airy, thin, an image of dispersion and the association with something fast and fluid like water. What they have in common is the liquid source they derive from. Spatters outside the world of arts and painting are never intentional in that sense. It is also joyful because it describes an instant, a moment that doesn't last more than a second. Even when the liquid falls from really high it doesn't take ages for the impact. Although spatters are also common in the crime vocabulary, for example when a bloodbath has taken place. Even then if I forget the ethical context, the image that I would get from it is like a feast, like the Spanish 'La Tomatino' festival in Buñol where all streets get covered in the red tomato juice.

Maybe your associations aren't as positive as mine, but what is undeniable is that the spatter breathes an explosion, a situation full of energy. The waterfall, which is only spatters at the bottom, is purely energy. The clashing of the water on the surface, the uncontrolled way the drops shoot through the air and land until they merge with the flat water surface. The same energy is visualized in the spatter trace, but then fixed on a ground. One moment of action got frozen and never able to repeat itself. Just as photography is the

freezing of a moment, the death of the object, the still image where all the energy has been drained from, as is the spatter a singular event, this is a moment fixed for just one time.

**The scratch** is sharp, smooth, shining, shooting, speeding, the swinging of a sword. The scratch is the destruction of a surface and when it's done with some force it embeds itself really in the material. The shape of the scratch is a smooth line with a possible slight curve; a hard etched line in the material. It comes into being by the movement of people, or the movement of objects on or against surfaces. The movement is an action; It is fast and one directional and happens somewhere between the interval of 0,0001 second and 10 seconds. The fastest scratch made could be for example a hand tool falling of a roof and just slightly tearing of a tiny layer of paint of the wall it touches for a millisecond on the way down. While a person scratching the door of a car when slowly moving alongside it, could take up to ten seconds.

The scratch, if made intentionally, could also be seen as cutting. When we cut, we scratch the material, but we do it perfectly. We can cut cardboard, to make our own shape from it. But somehow we would not call these perfect cut pieces of cardboard, scratched. The cut and the scratch are brothers but the cut is somehow the perfect little brother of the scratch, since there can be no doubt what existed before the other. The scratch is the imperfect line made by removing some material from the surface. A scratch can appear to be perfectly straight, but still there will always be some imperfection at the very beginning and ending of the line of the scratch, (the beginning could start shallow and become deeper in the middle part of the line and retreat from this valley towards the end.), while the cut, if made perfect, would have a steady cutting depth.

The scratch has a certain limit of how big it can get. Let's imagine a scratch with the length of two kilometres, what would have caused this scratch? The most common thing to see as the surface in this case is the soil of the earth, and the cause for the scratch could be an oil tanker ship stranded with the speed of 54

knots, or a jet fighter, or a space shuttle? Even though it could appear as a scratch on certain levels, I would rather call this trace that is made by a stranded flying vehicle on to the crust of the earth, a skid trail. It is made by a vehicle, and if a vehicle makes a crash on the bottom surface this is called a skid trail even in this big size. Maybe there exists a hand of God with a huge fingernail that could be the cause, but since I cannot imagine that to be real I take it out of consideration. There are of course machines that can cut the grounds beneath us, huge cranes, huge saw blades, but we'd be entering the domain of the cut before we know it. A scratch can never be bigger than the thing that made it, which doesn't mean that it can't be longer. On the contrary, most of the time a scratch appears longer than the object or thing it is made by.

**The smudge** is the touch. It is distinctive because of its physicality. The smudge is in essence something you would make with your finger, hand or elbow or another piece of limb together with some medium that makes it appear. This medium can be grains of powder, greasy substances, anything that stands out on the surface that is being smudged. It is something not linear and mostly solid. It can have any shape as long as it is not linear as such that it creates an outline or a thin straight line. If I would try to make a line by smudging, I would end up with something that can look from a distance as a line, but is in fact a smudge when looking at it closer. Let's say I would use my index finger to make a smudge, then I could draw a straight line on the wall, and it could look linear, but by having a closer look I would find it to be a solid, imperfect shape that has a rounded off beginning and ending and not a clear outline. Smudges are made by people; people with dirty hands, or dirty working clothes that fall on the floor. The smudge is always a human thing, the result of a directional action like smudge traces you find on doors that are always touched on a certain spot near the edge of the surface on a height between approximately one and one and a half meters from the ground.

What if a smudge was made, not by a person or an animal but

by an elemental cause? A smudge could be made by wind that would grab a few coloured grains on a floor and would sweep them with a directional force to one side. Or the rain could shift sand that would have become mud that could make a smudge with the direction downwards. Is this then still the smudge? Or should the definition of 'the smudge' be connected with us as subjects and if the subject of the trace that looks smudge like would be a natural element, I should define a new name? But what name then? When looking at the sides of the canal I can see lines or green slimy areas on the brick side that have a direction downwards. It's the tarnish on the wall with a direction caused by the gravitational forces that are applied on the raindrops. It is called Tarnish.

**Tarnish** makes our surrounding real. It is the trace we cannot control because it exists outside of our being. This is the trace that will overcome humanity when we will not exist anymore. It is mostly fed by a humid and dusty climate. We see it every day, in the shower, on the streets, on the side of an old building with a leaking drainpipe, in the vertical traces of water seeping through the cracks of bridges down the concrete walls, on floors, ceilings, really everywhere where we do not clean regularly.

Imagine living in a world without tarnish on surfaces this would look like something that resembles the google sketch up drawings; Plain surfaces with no texture; a plastic looking world. This is the case with brand new spaces or with the showrooms of interior stores, kitchen companies, or in general with showrooms. The spotless appearance makes the space breath plasticity and therefore unrealistic. Nowadays sometimes the showrooms are being used during opening hours, but still the spotless and tidy atmosphere is more present than the Real. I am glad that there are the unavoidable Tarnish traces everywhere, unstoppable, penetrating into all the corners of the world touching almost every surface that exists. It shows the world is a living thing. It gives the perfect surface a slight touch which turns the plasticity into something imperfect,

something we, maybe because we are as imperfect, can relate to. It brings the studio-like buildings into the world of the living. Tarnish is not a living organism like mold but it does create life in something that was dead before it touched it.

Can Tarnish become something useful, something productive? The paradoxical aspect to use a trace as something purposeful shifts the trace from the field of being a by-product, something that happens while we actually focus for a certain goal, to the field of being a goal in itself. Posing this question is already developing the trace into a tool, an object for use, but by doing this 'the tool' can't be seen as the trace anymore. But we can still see if there are certain traces, and in this particular case, traces of Tarnish that we can convert into a tool of functionality. Since Tarnish is most of the time something that is value decreasing and non-functional, it is even more interesting to see when this interrelation can change into the opposite.

After the casting of Bronze the acids used to colour the material can be seen as a functional Tarnish. But opposed to this colouring process, the items we can find in shops nowadays with an old looking character give us a fake kind of Tarnish. It looks worn, but it is not, and the Tarnish is just a layer of paint, but is not in itself the Tarnish. (But what I am looking for is not the Tarnish that makes something look old, but a way Tarnish is used as an improvement of a surface, separate from the visual aesthetic sense.) The oxidation of the aluminium actually creates a protective layer on the material. So the Tarnish on the material is directly preserving the core of the material. Or the actual oxidation layer is used for pigments like titanium oxide, charcoal or rust. These examples are very nice and joyful ways of being consciously busy with the chemical results we can get through applied science and research on Tarnish, but they don't comply with what Tarnish Is or what the Tarnish Wants. Tarnish is here to be bothering us and remembering us about the transition of matter and most of all that all matter is perishing somehow. It reminds us of the limited timespan everything has. The colour fades more every consecutive year. The display for the

ice creams they sell at the small town swimming pool is not as clear as one year ago. The blue background turned purple with a bit of yellow edges and there seems to be a haze all over it. This makes it hard to distinguish the real colours of the picture, but that doesn't matter anyway because the pictures are never the same as the actual ice cream you get in your hand, after taking off the wrapping, on which they put once again the same artificial picture. The window at the swimming pool was the lens helping the sun to de-colour the picture that was behind it and you can find lots of other examples by walking through the city and staring at the pictures behind the windows, or on the billboards that hold the same posters for years.

The appearance of the faded pictures that we find in photo books of our grandparents, are always different then when they were just made. I never saw a daguerreotype freshly made, and I wonder what a new daguerreotype would look like. A colour is always changing, over time, through usage, and paint brands like to advertise how durable the colours of their paints are. The sun is the strongest natural element to make a colour fade, and after that come the artificial light sources and the chemical ways of colouring. It doesn't only happen to photographic prints, but also on the carpet underneath that chair that has had the same position for the last ten years, under the lamp, the sofa, and the cupboards. You'll see the altered colour of the carpet and it can turn green into purple or in all kinds of shades of colours. This is much like the void trace, and the change in colour is also part of that trace, but the colour fade is also a trace on its own, with its own stage to perform on. And the difference is that it focusses on colour and the changing of the colour in an object or on a surface instead of looking at it as a surface that held an object for some time. The colour fade doesn't have a shape, it takes the shape of the surface and it takes the shape of the frame the light is send through. The Sun can shine through your window and only alter the colour of a small portion of the space. It touches only the places where the rays of the sun are able to reach. It works like a blanket of sun rays that falls down on top of things, gradually.



The tear or rip is accompanied with a violent act, with a violent sound to it. It always means to break something. No tear or rip is the same or it would plea for the existence of real coincidence. The Tear traces you'll find when the wallpaper has been removed by pulling it from the walls without preheating the glue behind the wallpaper. The tear has an appearance of clumsiness or a lax attitude. I mean this in the sense that this trace can look like somebody didn't took the time to nicely cut the material. It also has some kind of violence in its action. To rip something apart or to tear a paper is something that can be a gesture of frustration or indifference. It breathes this into the form it shows itself. The visual language of the notebook is different before and after you tear off a piece, to quickly write your grocery list on. First it is a notebook, with certain rectangular clean cut shapes, but after the ripping it gets distorted by the fuzzy nonlinear but moving line where the paper got ripped. The ripping of the paper disrupts the harmony of the notebook. Ripped surfaces are mostly made of fragile materials like paper, fabric or foils. Sometimes the ripping is done by the wind, like with the ripping of the fabric of a flag, which evokes always some kind of symbolism in me. It reminds me of pictures in the newspaper of protestors burning the flag of the party they protest against. The image of the ripped flag has something mysterious to it but also something already meaningful when reading it. While the wind doesn't have any political position, it does make this image and it is only meaningful to us because of our own symbolism we project onto it.

How good is the feeling to tear off the packaging of a gift, or a new bought thing. Although I sincerely envy the art of packing things they know in Japan, for me the packing is only a necessity for the blissful moment of unwrapping a gift. The tearing off the wrapping or the ripping of posters from the wall, the taking down of the remnants of a good party or the ripping of a paper before throwing it into the bin is a powerful or relieving act. It can also mean horror when it happens by accident, when you rip a piece of a new thing, like a new book or a new sweater. Or when a lightning bolt rips open the earth. The difference with the rip and *the crack* is

again the velocity of the making of the trace. The Rip is a mostly human momentary act opposed to the crack that is a timely commonly elemental act with a much longer interval between the conception of the trace and the moment this becomes clearly visible as such.

The crack moves from one point to the other, in a zigzag way, moving diagonally across, like a sailing ship beating a strong wind, trying to find the easiest way to come across. The earth's surface exists in pieces and between these pieces are spaces we call cracks. Some of the plates are moving on top of each other at the edges, some move in opposite directions or sideways. These are the biggest cracks existing that we can see with our naked eyes, maybe not the whole picture but from a helicopter view you can see the cracks structure; that of the crumbling line moving from one point to the other. A crack is showing a process of breaking and keeps on showing it through time. While the scratch in its essence is a line, a smooth, maybe slightly curved line, the crack is more the hesitating line, the line that appears in a less rigid way than the scratch. The typical scratch is made in an instant. A crack is a trace that takes more time to appear. A crack slowly grows on the wall, in the rocks of a mountain or between layers of paint that are starting to wear off. It takes time for a good crack to appear, and the line is crooked, not smooth and resembles in its way of lining, the crumbling of a material, while the scratch has a more fluent strong and lightness in movement-gesture to its appearance. If the scratch has the fast sound of a swoosh, than the crack would sound more like a deep and slow continuation of the consonants

c-r-r-r-r—g—r—r-g-gr-r-r-r-g-r-r-r-r-k.

The expansion is the breathing of matter. It is the expanding door that doesn't shut as nicely as it used to do, or the curve of the doorpost that has grown further away from the borders of the wooden door. The material reacts to the temperatures and the humidity, as it grows warmer it fills its lungs and as it becomes

colder and more humid, the material wants to shrink deeper into itself. It un-straightens the straight, skews the rectangular, makes plain surfaces curved. It is the time embedded in the material instead of just touching the outer layers of it. Sometimes I come across an old wooden door that I try to shut but the door just won't say click. Only when I put my waist against it and push really hard, does it fall into its place, and stays there. (There is almost nothing more annoying when you want to go to sleep than a door that is constantly wavered by a slight gush of wind. Slight enough to make it screech just a bit. In other moments I find it one of the most magical events I know: The slight movement of a door by the wind, something so invisible, but yet so apparent (or to say present) through the door and through the soft screechy sound. It just depends in what mood I am. But that is not what this is about. This is about the doors that do not close well. And not about doors in general but about the expansion of material, and how it shows its trace by the alteration of its original shape and form.) And every time you close this door it is scraping against the inside of the doorpost.

This expanding happens with every material, all be it in micro millimetres with the one material and centimetres with the other. Wood, metal, concrete, bricks, gypsum, are all capable of expanding. The expansion happens on the molecular level, when they get warmer, they need to release more energy and the distances in between gets bigger, as it grows colder, they prefer sticking together to save more energy. Even the freshly cut planks and beams at the local hardware store are curved because the material wood is so vulnerable to its environment. After cutting wood, it's always warmer on one side, where the saw blade hits the wood, there more heat will be produced than on the other side, and so it curves. When painting a thin wooden sheet on one side it curves to that side and the only solution is to also paint the other side.

The sag is always directing our built things downwards, towards the centre of the earth. Although you could argue for its invisibility, I consider this to be visible through objects and surfaces. Look at great

examples like the Tower of Pisa, the Canal houses in Amsterdam, the recent complaints in Groningen about the sagging of the ground underneath their houses because of the ongoing gas extraction or the partially collapsing of a lamppost on the bridge Ponte Milvio in Rome under the weight of hundreds little lovelocks in 2007. The alteration of the surface is powered by gravity. This force that pulls us all down, in the direction of the earth's core, together with for example taking away ground, or the decay of material itself in the houses and in the soil, makes that there is a very slow shift moving everything that is built on it. So we do not really see the sag, just like the wind, but we see its realization through other things, its actions. We know it exists because we can see the diagonal line of the canal houses when we look at them sideways, or the cracks that appear in the brick and concrete structures of houses.

Commonly the sag shows itself in large scale built things, but does it also appear on a smaller scale, in objects, in doors, chairs, tables, cups, pens, or papers? For a sag to become visible it needs a building structure, with a certain weight, since the more weight there is the more the sags driving force has to work with. A chair could get sagged, just as the table or the door. For example a door that is skew because the doorpost got sagged, can be a source of frustration because it doesn't close as it should. The door scraping on the floor makes it hard to move the thing. This is something different than the door that doesn't close because of its material expansion, since then there is an overall change of the material and not just only gravity at stake. A door always deal with gravity for that matter since it has to hang on hinges, but we only become aware of its Thingness and this relation with gravity when it's sagged. Might there be an expansion of the door then we have other causes to point at like time, humidity and temperature.

**The hole:** drill holes, burn holes, hollow holes, mine pits, porosity, black holes etc.

The hole is in its perfect archaic form circular and cylindrical. There is a distinction here between holes that we make with a drill and holes that come to existence without our direct action and intention.

I want to elaborate on the last one, since the first one cannot be seen as a trace after the moment of making, but only after the moment when it has lost its functionality. When I drill a hole in the wall, and use it to put a screw in where I then hang a painting is not a trace. The same hole becomes a trace the moment I decide to take away the painting remove the screw and leave it as such. Even when holes are made intentional, they can become a trace but only after their usage. As so many traces, they show the past usage and cannot enter the domain of traces before their time of their functionality has run out. The perforation of a stone is an example of holes that we do not control. They are made by the wind that moves the sand across the surface of the stone, over and over again, until it leaves its mark, or the water and the temperature that makes the stones weak on certain points and could result in the trace of tiny or big holes. The natural holes are most of the time not a perfect round shapes, and I could get into an argument here when something becomes a hole. Is shape something important to define a hole, or is it mostly about a material that has a void in it. A void that has been created by something else, and can have any shape? A void can be three dimensional for our naked eye, but just as well two dimensional if we think about the perforated piece of paper. But this void is a different one than the void I used to determine the void trace in the beginning. In this last type the void is actually not a physical void, but only an absence of the dust within the outline that the dust created, where in this hole-trace, the void is an actual physical three dimensional void; An open space with nothing in it (except for air and particles).

**The wrinkle** wrinkles, crackles, makes the smooth unsmooth and the new and plain into something used and faceted. It is the rippling of something that has lost its shine, like the silent water that becomes billowy when a stone gets thrown in. It happens the moment you unpack the jeans that were so carefully packed by the lady at the jeans store, and the crispiness starts to fade from that moment on. Wrinkling happens to almost every paper I touch unless I am very careful and attentive to it. Most of the wrinkles in my

papers appear while pushing the papers into my bag without care. They resemble me as a person, because I know there are people who can avoid wrinkling their paper at any time. But still they also have to deal with this trace in fabric, skin, and other materials. Wrinkles in skin and clothing can show that a person is a hard worker or a lazy sod. These are wrinkles which are subjective traces, they are inseparable from its subject: it's just how much you care, how orderly you are, how much you iron your shirts or not. Then there are also the wrinkles in our skin that resemble time in our face and body, which are not avoidable. They may be (temporarily) repairable or re-shapeable, but this won't last. The wrinkles in skin are most unwanted in some professional fields, like show business or for photo models. There they found a way to iron faces, and if that doesn't work, then they can always use some manipulation in the postproduction.

**The fluff** is airy and cloudy and travels by floating. It travels not as far as individual dust particles, but it can sure make a distance since there is not a real limit to its lifetime. The fluff can consists of particles of dust, hair, spider webs, or anything with similar lightness that is packed together but still light enough to be travelling on the air or on a small breeze that can take this fluff piece up from the ground carrying it to another spot. It is a movable trace, which can get stuck behind the radiator, a table leg, the door hinge. Or it can split up, and later double the size until it gets too heavy and start again with splitting up. It is a dynamic group of particles that are anyway travelling, and this reminds me of backpackers that meet each other, travel alongside for a while and then split up to go each his or her own way again. It is not fixed to a surface, unless it encounters something sticky, or moist. Or it gets caught in a corner, it can't get out anymore. Nevertheless it does have a relation with the space as a surface, not as apparent as the other types but still. It bounces against the walls and the floors, grows or diminishes in size when doing so. Fluff is the accumulation of dusty pieces clung together, wanting to make a group journey through our homes, or

through the outside world and on the way losing some parts or growing bigger with others. It resembles the fluffy seeds from flowers and plants, but its purpose is not to fertilize and mostly consists of small dead particles. Fluff can consist of a lot of traces from different origins and is therefore an interesting log of a certain space if you would molecular decompose it. An artist and museum director of JEMA Sean Miller started collecting dust since 1996 and archives this for his conceptual ongoing work the Art Museum Dust Collection. This idea came to mind when he was working as an exhibition technician for the Seattle Art Museum, where one of the weekly tasks was to carefully remove the dust from Art displays.<sup>3</sup>

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3 See: Miller, Sean. Cobb, Kelly. “Art Museum Dust Collection: Wearing Away Museum Grounds-Dust Bunnies, White Lies and New Measures” *Textile*, volume 8, issue 3, pp286 – 303, Berg Publishers 2010





POST FACE

A visible trace needs a surface to exist. Without a material surface there is no ground for the trace to appear on. But there are different ways of appearing for the trace. Thus first I made a division of three types of visible traces based on the property how they are born: By addition, by subtraction or by alteration. These three terms mean simply that either there is material added on top of the material of the surface, subtracted from the surface, or the material of the surface has been altered, without adding or subtracting any extra other material. This seems like a clear division in which I could try to fit in all the traces described in the typology, but the point of doing this seemed useless to me. I could have made a table to check every property with every trace, but even then there would be problems to solve. A scratch can be either a subtraction of a material, but scratching is also the naming of wildly moving a ball point back and forth on a paper. This could then move further into a discussion about language, but it is more interesting to search for the fundamentals of the trace, without minding whether we should call it scratches or stripes. Although when using writing as a method of investigation we have to deal with language, but to not get stuck in a language game about definition I allowed myself the freedom of just naming and defining, in order to continue thinking deeper into an essential part of the trace, and thereby not staying at the surface of the naming part. The division made above is a division based on the visual level, since the subject caught my attention through the visual, but divisions can also be made on basis of durability (permanence), movement (the velocity of the action of constitution), size (scale), strongest appearance (in terms of subjective evocation). These aspects are all in the text but not in a way that they give ample information for an honest comparison based on those criteria. Also there are numerous traces that are not in this text, and since this typology could be endless like a growing encyclopaedia, I chose the very few that spoke to me, and evoked a world within itself that I could get into, either by thought or by writing.

There is no trace without a past. It tells you that there has happened something and it took place in a time before the

moment you are seeing this. It can tell you something about a future expectancy of the situation. (Situation being here the whole space around it that is in some way connected with it, so a situation can mean the whole room as a space while there is only a small trace in the shape of a drop on the floor.) It could tell that the surface is rather old, or that a certain action is frequently happening on this particular spot (and could take place again the next moment). A trace can tell what has been on a surface, or for how long the surface has been. A trace can reveal the inner layers of a surface, or show the most used places in a space. A trace shows time in itself. A trace can be made in an instant, like a coffee stain, or it can take years for a trace to develop, like the expansion of a wooden door. In this last example the trace is a direct visualization of the time, here the trace is time. Wherein the first example time is a factor necessary for the birth of the trace, but not necessary for the prolonging existence of the coffee stain trace.

There is no trace without a subject making it. Traces get constituted by human (or animal) action or by elemental action where the human actions can be divided in terms of usage and accidents. The usage action means that a trace appears as a by-product while using and is unavoidable. The mug you use to drink coffee from gets worn after years of using it. The surface gets tarnished and eventually you'll throw it away because it is filthy and of no use anymore. But the trace is the by-product of a common usage of the thing (the mug). Where the accident is an action, unintended to happen, but it happens because of a lapse in concentration. When you let the same mug fall and it breaks into pieces, then multiple traces will appear at the same time: the shards of the cup, the imprints of the breaking of the cup into the surface of the floor and the coffee that got spilled on the floor. All these traces show the unintended, the non-concentrated moment that made the traces appear. The difference with the usage-action is that we are all the time preventing accidents from happening. We don't want to drop the mug, we don't want to spill the content of our drink on the floor, we don't want to crash.

The elemental actions are respectively humidity, light, wind, rain and fire. It is the tarnish on a tree or a building, the wind that moves things at such speed that they can break or the low temperature that breaks the service pipes. There is not much that we can do about the elements, but the traces they create do reflect us humans. As elements reach our homes, in our rooms, and around our objects, they create their traces and disperse their particles. In turn we can only do two things, fight back against the traces of elements, for aesthetic or hygienic reasons, or have peace with them.

I chose the selection for my typology based on its visibility, but while thinking of these visible trace also brought up the following question: what could be an invisible trace? And thinking further of the invisible got me into different directions. Because first of all we must make a distinction between the sensory and the abstracted invisibility. The sensible invisible traces we perceive directly, phenomenologically, with our other senses, through our nostrils, ears and touch. We all have experienced the scents when stepping into the bus or train in the morning and your attention gets caught by an air of perfume, or the mustiness in second hand shops. Or the squeaking of the hinges of an old door that is expressing the decay of the metal; the oxidation process that dried out the space between the pin and the outer rings of the hinge, rub against each other, producing a vibration in the air that we perceive as the squeaking sound. And also our haptic sense that can be involved in experience a trace when we feel the difference between a smooth lacquer painted piece of wood and a sanded rough part.

But the invisible trace is nowadays more present as an abstracted invisibility. As digital binary structures that represent digital pictures, video, texts, three dimensional objects and more. All of our digital media make and leave behind traces. We have cookies on our computer, we store most of our data in a cloud, but also on all our digital memory containing devices are traces on the hard disks or flash memories. Only these traces are so invisible that we cannot perceive them as they are, we cannot perceive them directly. We

wouldn't see by the structure what it is that the code represents, but actually we can't even perceive the structure unmediated, because we need a visualization device for that. What we can perceive directly from our digital media, is maybe a small disc, or a chip, and maybe if we look at those under a microscope we can see differences in between them. But in the end the digital empire is only about what it represents: the functionalities, the imagery, the characters combinations that form a code language that in its turn creates the language we are able to understand. Once I had the problem that I deleted the majority of my pictures, in a state of fatigue, from my hard drive. The first thing I did was google if I could somehow recover this data from my hard disk even though I deleted it, and I learned that a hard disk actually doesn't physically delete your data, but assigns the specific space that was used for the data, to be free to be overwritten. This meant that the data was still there, but the doors that lead to the used space on my hard disk where the images were housed had a little note on them saying that they were free to be taken by new data. So there is this time between the assignment of deleting, and the replacement of that space with new data, which is a kind of no man's land. That for me resembles all of the remote ways we store so much of our data. In a place where we don't have a map of, we don't know how to be there, but only know how to contact that certain place where we left our stuff that on its turn creates traces and traceability of its own.

In my search for the essences of the traces I found out that every trace should be considered individually and has a different way of working. Even within the types of traces there are single ones that can stand out the masses and others that are not appealing at all. Every type of trace is built up from different aspects like shape, motion, time, durability and so on, that can be defined and read but they cannot be put into a fair comparison. In some traces I can discover more than in others. In some moods I can read more stories in them then other times. Each trace has its own story which can

wake up a detective sense in us to find out what caused it. And knowing the cause doesn't necessarily have to mean it takes away the magic the beauty or the imaginative in the trace. Still when I come across bridges I am amazed by the green and black tarnish that shows itself alongside columns and walls and I see whole abstract paintings in them, although I know it is just a little bit of time, rain, wind and gravity that creates the image. The traces that we can find around us can help us have a different way of contact with our surroundings. Looking at traces in a non-judgmental way can learn us accepting the waste that is created, either by us or by the natural elements. It can show beauty in places we wouldn't expect it and it can summon worlds we haven't yet explored, fully.

We are living in a less direct material world and a more digitalized one where traces themselves seem to be a disappearing thing. We live in a culture where there is an easiness in the replacement of things in order to create a look of cleanliness and the New. At the moment we throw stuff away, we throw also its trace away. Maybe it is time to become more materialized again. To have some sense of the things around us we like to touch, feel and smell, besides the digital form of matter we indulge ourselves with, which nevertheless also has its big advantages. This must not be seen as a critique on our contemporary digital information- and imagery systems, but more as an essay to think about the value of the things we can see with our naked eyes, with our bare hands, our open nostrils, and our own ears. It's about an essence of a very small thing, namely the trace and what that could be, but maybe even more about the essence of being a living creature, and trying to be able to still have an unmediated experience of our surroundings that may or may not evoke a feeling or a memory.



