

The perfect future game (a closet drama)

By Lily Hibberd



Chance is a meeting with truth; fidelity to it changes everything.

The perfect future game (a closet drama)

Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, 2006

CAST

The Philosopher: Don Bridges

The Gambler: Drew Tingwell

The Dealer: Professional croupier

The perfect future game is a play in seven acts, in which two men play seven hands of poker. As a closet drama the play is a philosophical dialogue; designed to be read rather than performed live on stage it does not concern itself with theatrical action. The poker game introduces an element of luck but also of design, where there are only two alternatives: choices based on the hand that's been dealt, or the embrace of a love of fate that allows chance or probability to direct the future.

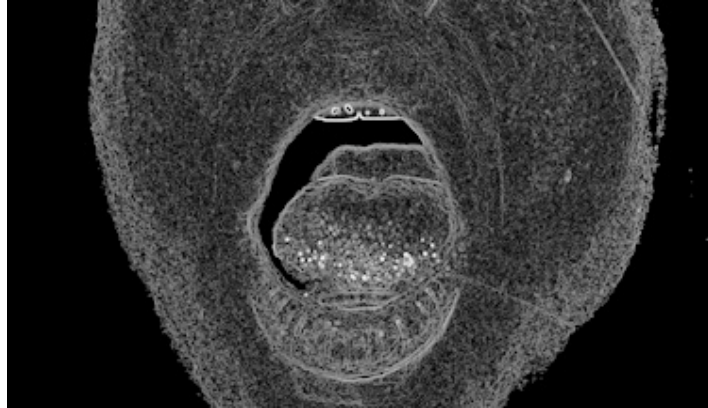
Seven paintings depict seven memories of a fictional character, the artist, who has returned to document the site of each remembrance. As dislocated moments they are wedged in a cleft of time, like screen memories, except they're not concealments, it is only that memory's return continually devours the future, thwarting time's progress. With the present being split in two directions at once, our encounter with the past remains irresolute (as it does with language and the future perfect tense).¹ *The perfect future game* manifests a promised emancipation: liberation through an unfolding of the past into the future, as the card game assigns each of the seven memories to a date in the 2007 calendar year. A formula has been designed by a mathematician that encompasses 365 days of the year, as the sum of all the pips in a pack of cards is equal to 365 (with the inclusion of the joker as a value of one). Wagering with one hundred 2007 calendars, the players steal time. And while scrutinising the individual memories, they expose the accountancy that incarcerates time within human constructs like language, clocks and the calendar.

The perfect future game is a propositional piece; it can be performed and played by anyone and the artist's memories substituted with those of any other person. The poker game will be live at the Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces performance, and the actors have been instructed to make their own interpretation of the script. A third stool is left free at the poker table, so an audience member can sit down and a player invite them to be dealt into the game.

Lily wishes to express her sincere gratitude to Don Bridges and Drew Tingwell for their inspired performances, Brian Furness the card dealer, Dr David Odell and his perfect future formula, Justin Clemens, Anton Ostoja, Jack Hibberd, and Harry Evans & Sons Billiards Tables.

¹ A compound tense used to describe an action that will have been completed before a reference point in the future.

ACT ONE: the mouth



INT. GAMBLING DEN *Time is irrelevant. Day or night, inside the club there's no reference to the hour. A felted table stands in the centre of the seamy room, illuminated by a low-hanging light. On the back wall are seven paintings with a piece of slate beneath each one of them. The table is arranged for a game of poker, with a deck of cards, a wooden box and piles of desktop calendars.*

Three attendant figures are silhouetted, as the rest of the room recedes into partly hazy obscurity. Of the three men only one stands, his back to us. The other two are seated at either end of the table on small stools. The wiry, boorish character on the left of the Dealer is The Philosopher, and the mean-looking man on the right is The Gambler.

The Dealer collects a pile of cards from the table, and smoke whirls under the light as he proceeds to riffle the pack with efficacy. He deals, five cards to each player, face down. The men pick up the cards from the felt and splay the quintet in their fists. Each looks across the fan of cards, at each other, and then back and forth for a good minute.

PHILOSOPHER [*Puts down his cards. Leers across the room at the painting of the mouth. Frowns, squints, then smirks. Mumbles inarticulately. Using both elbows, he raises himself up from the stool, which he slowly pushes back. Wanders over to the painting*] What do you think this picture is of? Is it her mother's tongue?

GAMBLER Who?

PHILOSOPHER [*Looking cautiously around the room, making sure there's no-one listening. Leans over, close to the GAMBLER's ear*] Her mother.²

GAMBLER [*Whispers crudely*] What's she saying, then? [*Drops a card on the floor, looks awkward, then gets onto hands and knees to pick it up, crawling under the table*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Regretfully*] "No". For the first time too. [*Lifts a finger to touch the painting but then seems to be aware of the taboo and looks over to the GAMBLER. Returning to the table, plonks back onto the stool and releases an exaggerated sigh as he studies the cards again*] Nothing. Nothing.³

GAMBLER I thought she said, "No".

² "Memories are formed first in the image of the other, primarily the care-taking parent..." Edward E. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, p.244

³ "Now the history of depths begins with what is most terrifying: it begins with the theatre of terror whose unforgettable picture Melanie Klein painted. In it, the nursing infant, is beginning with his or her first year, stage, actor, and drama at once. Orality, mouth, and breast are initially bottomless depths. Not only are the breast and the entire body of the mother split apart into a good and a bad object, but they are aggressively emptied, slashed to pieces, broken into crumbs and alimentary morsels." Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p.187

PHILOSOPHER [*Focussed on cards, shaking his head*] The earliest awareness of nothingness is in infancy, with our first experience of negation when, through mere absence, the Mother refuses to fulfil our desire.⁴

GAMBLER [*Raising his chin to the edge of the table, taps his mouth with one finger*] Maybe she's mute? [*After a long pause, as if to answer his own question*] Poker's meant to be a game of strategy but, really, it's a brutal buggery of time. [*Getting back up onto the seat*] As this man [*points at the DEALER*] riffles the cards, epochs turn like pages in a calendar, eradicating the days.

[*The DEALER nods, acknowledging the suggestion of power*]

PHILOSOPHER I'm opening. How would you like to play it?

GAMBLER [*Points rudely at the PHILOSOPHER*] You're asking me what I want?

PHILOSOPHER [*Jabbing a finger at him, insistently*] Yes, I am.

GAMBLER What a question! I want to win *everything*. [*Raising his voice, but with mock anger*] I want to be dealt the monster hand, I want to steal the pot, win the game, and take the scoop, if that's alright with you. [*Restacks his pile of 2007 calendars without looking up, wears a wry expression*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Fanning himself with his cards, coyly, pedantic tone*] Of course you do – only there is no bank, so we will have to play without the chips.

GAMBLER [*Eyes rolling*] Shit-house, this house is. [*Pause*] So, what're we going to wager with?

PHILOSOPHER The future...

GAMBLER And, what, [*cynically*] lock it up before it runs out?

PHILOSOPHER [*Nods insistently*] Why allow chance all the fun, when you can squander time all by yourself? Let's take the past and incarcerate it in the future.

GAMBLER [*Slapping hand on the table*] You're a good man and a bloody genius.

PHILOSOPHER [*Purses lips*] As a game of luck but also of design, we have just two alternatives–

GAMBLER [*Butting in*] –yeah right, it's a choice between the hand we've been dealt, or the embrace of a 'love of fate' that allows chance to direct us.

[*The DEALER raps table with his fingertips and looks at the PLAYERS with derision*]

⁴ "It is in nothingness alone that being can be surpassed. At the same time it is from the point of view of beyond the world that being is organised into the world, which means on the one hand that human reality rises up as an emergence of being in non-being and on the other hand that the world is "suspended" in nothingness. Anguish is the discovery of this double, perpetual negation." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.51

PHILOSOPHER [*Hushed, secretively*] You shouldn't be surprised that we are cheated by time. Calendars, cards, chance – they are all lies. We are just fending off the end, like flies off a tip. [*Swats the air, holds nose as if there's a stench*]

GAMBLER [*Stands up abruptly as if he's leaving*] That's why we're here wasting it. [*Sitting down again, slumped*] It's like rags in a hand, worthless.

PHILOSOPHER The fools we are, we are addicted to chance, when it's probability that rules time.

GAMBLER [*With condescension*] Did you know time can be measured in this game too? The numbers on the cards and calendars match up; there's 52 cards in the deck just like there's 52 weeks in the year, and as the calendar has 365 days, so the sum total of all the pips comes to 364, and the joker as a value of one makes 365.

PHILOSOPHER [*Running his fingernails over his scalp in nerdy, intense speculation*] Really? That is *fantastic*... so, at some point, the numbers were an emblem of time. [*Holds up one of his cards, revealing it to the GAMBLER*]

GAMBLER [*Grabs a pile of calendars and counts out 13 of them, showing off*] It's possible wise man, except there's twelve months a year and thirteen cards in each suit.

PHILOSOPHER They are only different because in 45 BC the Julian calendar shifted from the astronomer's reckoning of the lunar cycle to a 12-month year.

[*Taking one calendar away from the GAMBLER's pile with exaggerated aplomb*]

GAMBLER [*Sceptically*] Righteo.

PHILOSOPHER Recent calendar reformers want to equalize the length of each month, creating a calendar that has 13 months of 28-days each.

GAMBLER [*Abandoning his conceit. Takes back the 13th calendar*] Oh yeahhhh... there's another one they want to try, a 13-moon calendar that takes the uncounted days, the 365th and 366th, as "days out of time".

[*The PLAYERS pause to ponder in these facts, while taking up their hand of cards again*]

GAMBLER But come on, you're beating around the bush, it's your call.

[*Waving the back of his hand at the PHILOSOPHER*]

PHILOSOPHER What's the limit?

GAMBLER I reckon there's none at all... we can go all-in.

PHILOSOPHER Numbers are infinite but time runs out. We'd better make it eight years. [*Confidently, slides two calendars across the felt*]

[*The DEALER takes the calendars and starts to play with them*]

GAMBLER Hold it you bludger, not so quick! We can't play like this, the time's not ours to throw into the pot – we've been dislodged from the realm of remembrance.

PHILOSOPHER But those... [*faltering*] those paintings, [*makes a sweeping gesture to the works*] are *real* memories, we can tally our bets on them... [*Shoots a petitioning look*] Errrr... [*spins 360 degrees around on his seat, staring at the paintings*] they are fragments of her past, they have no place in time.

GAMBLER [*Laughing as if he's stupid*] That's why we *have* to gamble with them... aren't memories like that anyway?

PHILOSOPHER [*Putting his nose up to the cards, sneering*] Except screen memories, those image distortions that allow us to avoid facing what *really* happened.

GAMBLER We are what we remember ourselves to be... [*trailing off*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Cuts in, pedantically*] –each hand can set a day in the future for a memory, with the winner's five cards determining the date.

GAMBLER Like cartomancy. [*Pauses seeing that the PHILOSOPHER doesn't get it*] For your information, that's fortune telling with a deck of cards.

PHILOSOPHER [*Absorbed in his own thoughts, missing the point*] Five cards, one hundred calendars... I guess us gamblers are destined to spend life in the house of addiction. [*Rolls up shirt, aggressively wringing his bare wrists like a Chinese burn*] If the future is being detained by the past, we may as well give it a prison term now.

GAMBLER [*Puffing out loudly*] Shit, that's crazy... I've just remembered that I've got the perfect card-reading formula, nussed out by a mathematician for a predictive poker game we played back in the 70s.⁵

PHILOSOPHER [*Disdainfully*] You damn swindler!

GAMBLER Fuck you too, you fraud, [*mockingly*] you pretended to be a rounder, but you were cheating then too.⁶ [*Uses cards to make a rude hand signal*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Shaking his head, then shrugs dismissively*] But if we stake the future against the artist's memories, we can find them a place in time; a place of respite and containment perhaps?

⁵ **The mathematician's formula for the perfect future**

Selecting date from winner's hand (five cards). **CARD ONE** chooses the trimester by suit (Clubs = Jan-Mar, Diamonds = Apr-Jun, Hearts = Jul-Sep, Spades = Oct-Dec). **CARD TWO** chooses between the three months in the trimester. (The pack is divided into three groups: **1.** The Joker, any Club or Diamonds up to 3 are the first group, **2.** 4 of Diamonds to 8 of Hearts is second group, **3.** From 9 of Hearts on through all the spades is third group). **CARD THREE** chooses the week in that month, according to its suit. (Clubs = week one, Diamonds week two, Hearts = week three, Spades = week four). **CARD FOUR & FIVE** chooses the day in that week. (Treat the cards as numbers and count in a circle. For instance, a Jack (=11) in a week of 7 days ends up counting the 4th day of that week. For the second card just add their counts: a nine and a king = 9+13=22 = first day of 7 day week). A Joker would be equal to one. Consult the 2007 calendar to find the actual date and tell the winner what it is.

⁶ A rounder is an astute player who knows all the angles and earns his living (honestly) at the poker table.

GAMBLER *[Suddenly more sullen, lays his cards on the felt]* Okay I can see your point now...

PHILOSOPHER The bets laid in calendar years can be added onto the date that the cards designate for each painting. Time will be laden with time.

GAMBLER It sounds passable... *[Is still sceptical. As the PHILOSOPHER places the two-calendar bet again, he looks uneasily to and from the cards and the painting all the time. Picking up his cards, he slowly bets in turn. The DEALER shuffles the cards impatiently. The PLAYERS notice and hurry to trade in their cards, make the last bet and show their hands]*

PHILOSOPHER How is that for improbable, then? I've got the nut!⁷ *[The PHILOSOPHER turns over his hand. He and the DEALER break into silly laughter]*

GAMBLER What's it with you, you snarker?⁸ *[Pokerfaced, he looks to the PHILOSOPHER as he turns over, one card at a time]*

[It's the end of the game, and the DEALER slides the pile of calendars in the pot across the felt to the winner. Using the mathematical formula, he calculates the future date based on the winner's hand. The winner takes some white chalk, goes over to the first painting and writes the date across the piece of slate that sits on the shelf below it. He returns to poker table. The conversation continues all the while]

PHILOSOPHER *[Gets up and looks at mouth painting]* Desire can be a threat, you know.

GAMBLER Because it's impossible to possess?

PHILOSOPHER Desire's a threat.

GAMBLER With any luck, one day she'll win.

[Tableau. The lights fade out]

⁷ The best possible hand.

⁸ A player who wins the pot and then ridicules the loser.

Act two: the missing bluestone



[Lights fade up. The two PLAYERS are leaning in, talking privately]

PHILOSOPHER I haven't seen you in months. I thought you might have taken a tumble.

GAMBLER *[Jaded]* I didn't have a brass razoo. I hit some hard times, but it's all over now.⁹

PHILOSOPHER *[A bit impatiently]* So young man, are you going to act?

GAMBLER *[More spirited]* Luck's on my side. A bit of time out raises my odds.

PHILOSOPHER That *[points at the deck]* could cost you everything.

[DEALER takes the pack of cards, splits it expertly into two, shuffles by pressing the two halves together open-palmed. The GAMBLER and the PHILOSOPHER are fascinated. DEALER gives the cards to his right, the GAMBLER cuts them. Another immaculate shuffle, and out come the cards from DEALER's right hand, flicking across the table]

PHILOSOPHER Don't they look pretty?

[While the cards are dealt, the GAMBLER steals a glance at the second painting of the bluestone. As the cards land, they fall exactly next to one another in front of each player. They both pick up their cards]

GAMBLER *[Scowls]* There's nothing pretty about this hand.

PHILOSOPHER *[Irritably]* You are not supposed to talk, you know that.

GAMBLER *[To DEALER]* He's probably cheating.¹⁰

[The DEALER catches GAMBLER's eye. The GAMBLER winks]

PHILOSOPHER *[Turns to face the second picture, leans on the corner of the table and puts his feet up on the edge]* Isn't it strange how a place can remain fixed in one time.

GAMBLER How can you be sure she's found the same spot then?

PHILOSOPHER By retracing her steps in memory.

GAMBLER And going back there?

PHILOSOPHER I think that is what she did, yes. But she did not know the exact location. The photograph could be a fraud, a shabby bandage for an old injury.

[The PLAYERS place their bets]

⁹ Based on dialogue from the movie *The Sting* (1973)

¹⁰ Based on a scene from *Croupier* (1998)

GAMBLER Was it a done deal? Did she know what was she looking for...?

PHILOSOPHER [*Pause, looking at the painting imploringly*] A mislaid stone.

GAMBLER It was along the path she used to walk to school. [*Makes a wall of calendars, as an illustration. Removes one, putting it in his coat pocket*]

PHILOSOPHER In North Carlton?

GAMBLER Walking, absent-mindedly, she fell into a hole; the missing bluestone was a rift. [*Demonstrates the fall with his hand by walking with two fingers along the row of calendars*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Excruciatingly*] Nursing the injury, knee bleeding, there was nowhere to go. [*He pulls a knee tightly up to his chest and comforts himself placing a kiss on the top of it*]

GAMBLER [*The wall of calendars is now an impassable barrier*] She could not go on, nor could she turn back because her mother had gone. It was— [*sighs*]

PHILOSOPHER —what, an invalid situation?

GAMBLER Yeah, a chasm; timeless, terrifying.

PHILOSOPHER A crack-up! [*Claps hands loudly, puts them prayerfully together then slowly separates them*]

GAMBLER Rupture can be an agreeable thing, a reconciliation with truth, the same way that splitting the pack before shuffling produces a more even dispersion of numbers, a fairer hand. [*Nods to the DEALER*]

[*The PLAYERS trade in their cards*]

PHILOSOPHER I'll stand pat.

GAMBLER Oh, I don't know [*a good-humoured pause*] ...two cards. I'm rooted anyway. Right? [*Bluffing*] The French for splitting is *clivage* or cleavage, and in English the meaning can go either way, occurring, need it be said, salaciously, between two whole breasts.

PHILOSOPHER Indeed, [*puts down his hand*] to "cleave" means to hew, cut asunder, split, and stick fast. When something is halved, we tend to say cleft, as in cleft palate, [*chops at mouth*] but when doubled, we tend to say cloven, as in a cloven hoof [*chops between his fingers*] or a clove of garlic [*chops at a hand on the table*].

[*The PLAYERS organise their hands, while the DEALER collects the mucked cards*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Resuming*] The cleft is always bounded by two forms.

[*folding the breasts of his jacket, one over the other*]

GAMBLER [*Knowingly*] It's a piece of piss. Running backwards, there's a biological genealogy of cleavage, from breasts, right back to the division of cells in the embryo.

PHILOSOPHER [*Suddenly sceptical*] Yes, but for all this, the two words, to be cleft or cloven, do not share the same etymology.

GAMBLER [*Agrees*] Jesus... And in this a fatal confusion could occur: a loss of distinction between the clover, a symbol of good fortune, and the cleaver – such a vicious implement.

PHILOSOPHER [*Dramatic tone*] The violence is in the separation.

GAMBLER [*Little girl's voice*] “can't go to school... can't go home”.

[*The betting begins again. Neither drops out. The raising goes round three times*]

GAMBLER [*Quizzically*] But where the fuck did the stone go?

PHILOSOPHER Who knows?

GAMBLER Bluestone is pretty heavy.

PHILOSOPHER [*Moronic tone*] It would prefer to crack and fissure than crumble.

GAMBLER [*Sitting up, stiffly*] Stonehenge was hewn from the same rock....

PHILOSOPHER [*Relishing, in a know-it-all tone*] Oh yessss... it is a mineral called dolerite. Odd too that ‘doloros’ is a Greek word that means “deceptive”.

GAMBLER Shit, you're spot-on. She was tricked, it looked firm but there was no foundation.

PHILOSOPHER The stone has been replaced now. [*Getting up and standing behind the GAMBLER, pretending to be a dental surgeon*] You can see the concrete sets it in, like a dentist's filling.

GAMBLER [*Obediently tilts back head, opens mouth*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Examines the GAMBLER's teeth. Dentist's voice*] ...set back, like a wisdom tooth.

GAMBLER [*Joking, speaking with mouth full, pretending to be concerned*] Do I need a filling?

PHILOSOPHER [*Bursts out laughing*] Teeth are like little stones... Don't worry, [*soothing tone*] we can fix it. [*Steps over to the painting, studies it closely*]

GAMBLER See? [*Pointing*] There's no hole now, only the one that's remembered.

PHILOSOPHER The concrete cast memory's uncanniness... [*Returns to table, sitting down he fails to complete the sentence as he becomes absorbed in the poker game again*]

GAMBLER [*Waits a second, annoyed*] ...What the hell are you talking about?

PHILOSOPHER [*Ignoring him. Turns over his cards*] Well then captain, beat that!

GAMBLER [*Turns over as well, an eyebrow raised*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Accusingly*] I understand....

GAMBLER [*Impish*] Are you accusing me of cheating?

[The betting comes to an end. A winner is determined. The DEALER calculates the future date and hands it over to him. The winner writes the date across the piece of slate that sits on the shelf below the second painting. He then returns to the poker table]

GAMBLER *[Curtly]* That's it, I haven't got anything left.

PHILOSOPHER *[Admonishing]* Don't go 'on tilt' just yet.¹¹ *[More pensive]* I'd like to know who shifted such a heavy stone.

[Tableau. Lights fade out]

¹¹ "On tilt", a bad reaction to an unlucky hand resulting in uncontrolled wild play.

Act three: the broken clasp



[The lights come up. The GAMBLER walks around the table once, checking under it, as if he mistrusts the whole set-up]

PHILOSOPHER [*Unimpressed*] Have a seat, will you?

[The DEALER splits, shuffles and deals five cards to each player]

GAMBLER [*Sits down and is piling up the calendars into a tower, casually*]

Four years on this one, dealer. [*Points at the painting of the old house*]

[The DEALER, used to dollar bets, looks at GAMBLER like he's royalty]

PHILOSOPHER [*Perturbed*] Is that a wise start? A bet like that could put a real dent in things.

GAMBLER I feel lucky tonight.

PHILOSOPHER Oh come on, why don't you just...

GAMBLER [*Determined*] Four years in the game, dealer.¹²

PHILOSOPHER [*Irate*] You are throwing it away!

GAMBLER What's a gift, if you're not letting go?

PHILOSOPHER [*With ardour, hand on heart*] An object bestowed on a loved one to demonstrate affection.

GAMBLER The girl was given a bracelet – can you see it?

[The PLAYERS exchange cards. The DEALER gives them new ones]

PHILOSOPHER [*Pointing*] Is that it on the grass?

GAMBLER Uhhh, yes... [*pause*] it was made from white shell fragments.

PHILOSOPHER [*Sing-song*] The kind that seaside tourist stores sell...

[*Raises a hand to shield his eyes, squinting to look out to the ocean*]

GAMBLER She wore the gift because it was a special occasion.

PHILOSOPHER [*Apprehensive*] Where was she going?

GAMBLER On a picnic to Rippon Lea–

PHILOSOPHER Oh, the mansion...

GAMBLER Two friends were going to be there, they were impenetrably close, and the girl was anxious for them to accept her into the fold so she dressed in her best things.

PHILOSOPHER It was pointless. She even saw that she was to lose the gift in a premonition.

GAMBLER The clasp will have been broken. [*Holds up an imaginary chain. Yanks with both hands until the link breaks*]

PHILOSOPHER Remorse is magnified when you can see the betrayal ahead–

GAMBLER [*Spitefully*] –but the compulsion to be loved is overwhelming.

¹² Based on dialogue from the movie *The Sting* (1973)

[*There's more betting, back and forth*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Bets big. He's down to four calendars. He looks up at the GAMBLER. Their eyes meet, he's desperate*]

GAMBLER [*Picks up on the look, teases*] Are you down to the felt?

PHILOSOPHER [*Dismissive, bluffing*] Why was it precious? Who gave it to her?

GAMBLER Her father's mother. [*Getting sick of the topic*] Jeez, will you let it go?

PHILOSOPHER A string of shells as a lineage, then.

GAMBLER [*Pissed off*] A band of gold or a bracelet, whatever, both are worn as a sign of bondage, like a hand-cuff.

PHILOSOPHER [*Sympathetic*] Except the bracelet had a flaw – the clasp was weak and she knew it.

GAMBLER [*Apologetic*] Yeah, you're right. It could just have been misfortune, like "A Castle of Crossed Destinies".¹³

PHILOSOPHER And ignoring the omen... was that autoinfanticide?

GAMBLER As some old bastard said, "There is an appointed time for everything", even the end.¹⁴

PHILOSOPHER Loving your grandparents profoundly is weird because something lurks in ancestry.

GAMBLER And they're going to cark it before you, rupturing the chronicle.¹⁵

PHILOSOPHER You will be buried in the same graveyard. [*Stands up, steps in front of the table and commences digging a hole*]

GAMBLER Where maggots devour the entrails of each successive generation.

PHILOSOPHER [*Digging more furiously*] ...you cling to a birthright.

GAMBLER And, in time, the worms wriggle out of the crevices into open space.¹⁶

PHILOSOPHER [*Melodramatic*] Ah! Such is the fate of all vermin.

GAMBLER As the rain suffocates the worms in the soil, they are forced to the surface, where they die in the violent heat of the sun.

[*The PLAYERS trade in cards, still in a tête-à-tête*]

PHILOSOPHER Yet a connection to the past marks a singularity in history: confiscate that point and continuity becomes impossible, or like a wormhole, infinitely possible.

¹³ Italo Calvino's novel in which tarot cards tell a series of short, fantastic narratives.

¹⁴ Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

¹⁵ "...one's parents are remembered in (and as) a magisterial monument erected over one's ego, much as a gravestone stands over the body of the very person it memorialises." Edward E. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* p. 241

¹⁶ "Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being – like a worm." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.56

GAMBLER Just as the unfastening of the clasp annihilated her genealogy.
She's done for.

PHILOSOPHER Like an action that is going to be completed before a moment
in the future.¹⁷

[*The PLAYERS make more bets. The PHILOSOPHER looks at his cards and
makes a 'crying call'*]¹⁸

PHILOSOPHER [*With finality*] In the *perfect* future—

GAMBLER [*Cuts him off, joking irreverently*] —you can count all your cards in
advance.

PHILOSOPHER [*Cautiously*] Yes... maybe. [*Convincingly*] Popular legend
holds that the composition of a deck of cards has religious, metaphysical and
astronomical significance. [*Building in pessimism*] Like the calendar, gambling
is accountancy: recount the past, add the future, obliterate the present.

GAMBLER Nobody wants to lose. You've got to take your chances with chaos
though. Shuffling the deck messes with order.

PHILOSOPHER [*Contemptuously*] Yes, well you are talking about the
'gambler's fallacy', the mistaken belief that past events will affect the future
when dealing with random activities.

GAMBLER [*Shirking off the insult*] Bugger that. I'm done for tonight. [*Slow-
rolls out his hand. Raking in the calendars, without waiting to see who has
won, starts shoving them into his pockets as he gets up to go*]

PHILOSOPHER Hold on, that is impossible! [*Disbelieving*]

[*The DEALER and PHILOSOPHER look at each other in disgust*]

GAMBLER [*Haughtily to PHILOSOPHER*] You owe me 15 years.

PHILOSOPHER, [*With a deadly stare, reaches for his calendars. As the glare
goes soft, he flings three of the calendars across the table onto the floor.
Contemptuously*] I guess I left them in my room.

GAMBLER [*Blowing up*] What!? Don't give me that crap. How do I know you
aren't going take off like an outlaw?¹⁹

PHILOSOPHER [*Coldly, turns from the table, speaking to the room*] It was a
broken pledge, to carry on an inheritance, made worse for being a promise
undeclared.

[*The winner is determined. The DEALER calculates the future date. The
winner writes the date across the piece of slate that sits on the shelf below the
third painting*]

¹⁷ "What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming." Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 1981, p. 63.

¹⁹ Based on dialogue from *The Sting* (1973)

GAMBLER Remorse followed her into slumber.

PHILOSOPHER Nightmares re-instated the transgression, over and over.

GAMBLER The gaping wound's dressing repeatedly torn away.

PHILOSOPHER The mention of 'Rippon Lea' manacled her with dread.

GAMBLER Going back could have refurbished the somnambulant grief.

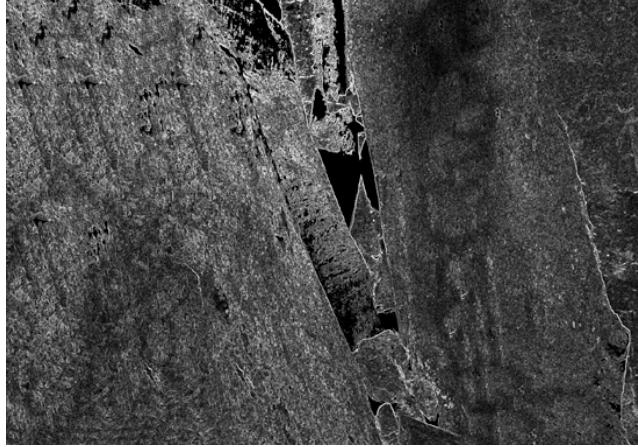
PHILOSOPHER The memory retained a similar power, although shadowy.

GAMBLER But when she got to the house she was numb.

PHILOSOPHER Memories, like dreams, are just reflections. The illusion shatters along with the mirror.

[The winner returns to the poker table. Lights fade out]

Act four: the rock cleft



[Lights fade up. The GAMBLER is standing, staring at the PHILOSOPHER, who is counting his calendars. The DEALER splits, shuffles and mutely deals five cards to each player]

PHILOSOPHER I have been losing non-stop for three days straight. *[Tugs on an ear, angrily]*

GAMBLER *[Patting him on the hand patronisingly]* Why are you crying? You'll fluke something soon.²⁰

[The DEALER watches their signals with concern. Both PLAYERS get on with arranging their cards]

GAMBLER *[Laconically, leaning on one elbow]* The pack, its suit symbols, numbered cards and court hierarchy, is not only a gaming device, it can be used to predict the future; it's popular religion, like tarot.

PHILOSOPHER *[Concurring]* Yes, the human mind loves to classify experience. Think of calendars, astrology and the elements, the cardinal points, lunar cycles, the virtues, and the temperaments.

GAMBLER *[Taps on the cards]* I bet you didn't know that the designs on playing cards have been used as an aid to indoctrination. Right?

PHILOSOPHER Of course I do, it's common knowledge. The images are archetypal, like the symbols on the poker machine; it's a magic system that ties gambling to pagan ritual.

GAMBLER *[Stands up with one foot on the stool to make a proposition. Points at the ceiling]* And we're fervent believers! In what, I'm not sure, but I'm worried, will the game eradicate or imprison the artist's memories? *[Twisting around, with one foot on the stool, to look at the painting of the rock cleft]*

PHILOSOPHER *[Grimly]* Rocks incarcerate time.

GAMBLER *[With a dramatic heave of his chest]* In ten thousand tons of history!

PHILOSOPHER Embedded in mud, their strata display the wounds of disastrous geological events.

GAMBLER ...where time is heavy, under centuries of suppression.

[The PLAYERS make their bets]

PHILOSOPHER *[Reverential]* The Grampians are weighed down with the same immensity, continuous and endless.

²⁰ Based on dialogue from the movie *Casino* (1995)

GAMBLER [*Diverted*] That rock [*points at the painting*] is in The Grampians, but it's not a landscape, there should be a girl in the picture.

PHILOSOPHER Was it a portrait?

GAMBLER Yeah. A girl was there, standing in between the two rocks.

PHILOSOPHER [*Earnestly*] Someone else was there to capture it. He was a photographer.

GAMBLER I reckon she was angry with him.

PHILOSOPHER Later on the camera became abhorrent, photography an alienating force.

GAMBLER I know the lens is malignant, robbing things of their true nature. But why?

PHILOSOPHER [*Definitively*] The camera is a machine of domination.

GAMBLER [*Cautiously*] Because the photographer determines what is captured?

PHILOSOPHER Yes, and in an insidious manipulation of history it pretends to be a stand-in for every other memory.

GAMBLER [*Leaps up, as if taking a series of rapid fashion photos, aggressively points and shoots, putting the camera in the PHILOSOPHER's face, jumping about and snapping from lots of different angles*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Austere, tolerating the idiocy*] Here's a timely quote: "To photograph people is to violate them".²¹

GAMBLER [*Points imaginary camera threateningly, like a gun*] Look how the camera becomes a predatory weapon, a phallus.

PHILOSOPHER [*Pushing it away, affronted*] I often have doubts about representation; vision is suspect.

GAMBLER [*Both hands drop to his side*] Yeah, seen through the lens of perception, it's all biases and lies. The camera gobbles time.

PHILOSOPHER And the man behind it is a thief?

GAMBLER Yes, only the pictures are even more penetrative than that, the man was remorseless.

[*The PLAYERS trade in their cards*]

GAMBLER [*Stands up and looks at the painting again*] Now I can see it, yesss... [*screws up his face, pauses*] the two rocks form a cleft.

PHILOSOPHER [*Intensely*] Both of them are leaning on her.

GAMBLER Crushing her little head... [*With pity*]

PHILOSOPHER The weight is unbearable.

GAMBLER Hang on, what if she had been crawling *into* the crack ...to hide.

²¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p.14

PHILOSOPHER [*Begs to differ*] No. Anger does not conceal itself in crevices, it prefers to find release in a crack-up.²²

GAMBLER The longer she's present in the photo, the more she's wedged into the past.

PHILOSOPHER That's not quite true. In a portrait the person is reduced to a trace, but it is an index that can be reset.

[*The PLAYERS make more bets. This time the action is rapid and aggressive*]

GAMBLER Now we know about the photographer, tell me about the other stone.

PHILOSOPHER [*Resolute*] It's the Mother, only the betrayal's twofold, them to her and herself to them.²³

[*The PLAYERS turn their backs to each other*]

GAMBLER [*Sotto voce*] ...in turning away, we abandon the person and the event.

PHILOSOPHER [*Shrewdly, turning back*] In the conjunction of hidden causes it's like conjugal relations – confusing.

GAMBLER [*Turning back as well*] But what about the future perfect tense?

PHILOSOPHER [*Pause*] I'm not sure about the reality of grammar, are the past, present and future really divided that way?

GAMBLER Yeah, it's hard to be sure: time is like bad sex – it keeps fucking itself over. [*Pulls a sardonic face*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Taken aback but continuing*] Hating photos is a way of despising the past. The things they document are the objects that we're embedded in.

GAMBLER The picture will always belong to him, and she's in it, in custody.

PHILOSOPHER [*Imploringly*] How is she going to be freed?

GAMBLER She has to take another photograph.

PHILOSOPHER A replacement? Yes, I agree, except the original was lost... discarded long ago. All she has is a memory.

GAMBLER Where was it taken?

PHILOSOPHER [*Irritated*] Like I said, in the Grampians National Park. Have you ever been there?

GAMBLER Yes, on a camping trip as a kid. But I'm telling you, it's very far away and too immense. How was she ever going to find that rock?

PHILOSOPHER Reminiscence offered nothing. Scouring maps drew a blank. Searching for it on foot was going to be futile.

²² "If one asks why health does not suffice, why the crack is desirable, it is perhaps because only by means of the crack and at its edges thought occurs, that anything that is good and great in humanity enters and exits through it, in people ready to destroy themselves..." Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p.160

²³ "They make their outward impudence their mask, as foxes, the better we may not see where they truly tend, nor their true black tergiversation beneath." John Fowles, *A Maggot*, 1985.

GAMBLER Tapping into collective memory, the artist typed in “Grampians and cleft” as an internet search, producing the words “Grand Canyon”, and she recalled that this was the place.

PHILOSOPHER There is a kind of synchronicity in events like that. Carl Jung held that coincidences are an effect of the collective unconscious...

GAMBLER [*Going right up to the wall, an inch away, staring at it's blankness*] But it was hard, many barriers went up along the way. Everyone she met as she travelled said, “No”.

PHILOSOPHER Because of the fire?

GAMBLER Yes but she walked on, into the burnt-out ends. [*Groping at the wall as if climbing rocks*]

PHILOSOPHER The remains were unrecognisable.

GAMBLER Recognition's unbearable anyway.

PHILOSOPHER In that place, at that moment, the past lost its supremacy.

GAMBLER [*Spreads feet and arms, pinned against the wall*] But as a body memory, the effect was crippling, bringing on a form of paralysis. [*Wriggles a finger, then a hand*] Feeling returns but it takes a while.

[*The PLAYERS show their hands*]

PHILOSOPHER What have you got?

GAMBLER Five of the best. Face cards too, mate. [*His fingers spread five cards on the table*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Getting up in disgust*] I cannot believe it.

GAMBLER [*Rakes in the entire pot to his side of the table*]

PHILOSOPHER If I didn't have bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck.²⁴ [*Starts to leave*]

GAMBLER [*Grabs him on the forearm, pinning it to the table*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Looks pissed off but torn. Slowly acquiesces, but to his addiction for the game rather than the GAMBLER. Halts, speaks without turning back to the table*] ...the only other apprehension is that the man still has the negative.

GAMBLER It doesn't matter... [*pause*] she's not there now.

PHILOSOPHER All those memorials, so many stones – “lest we forget” – but who wants to endlessly recall suffering? [*Raises hands in the air, beseechingly*]

GAMBLER [*Continues*] After climbing through the Grand Canyon and reaching the Silent Street, everything went blank.

PHILOSOPHER Remembrance is forgetting. She'd erased her own presence from the past.

GAMBLER [*Fanatically*] As the executor not subject of the image!

²⁴ Based on dialogue from *Casino* (1995)

PHILOSOPHER The photograph now tells the truth.

[A winner is decided. The DEALER calculates the future date and tells the winner, who inscribes the number on the slate. He's seated again]

GAMBLER I get it. Fucking brilliant. Memory's been wiped out; like a double exposure, by an irreversible encounter with light.

PHILOSOPHER Or recording over an old tape... *[After some consideration he looks at the DEALER]* Let's play again.

[Tableau. Lights fade out]

Act five: a grafted branch



[Lights come up. The DEALER is at the table with his duo of card sharks, who are surreptitiously signalling each other, while he deals the cards. The PHILOSOPHER pretends he's got a winning hand. It's too obvious; he's a poor bluffer]

GAMBLER [Boasting] ...then I started busting out high-stakes players. [Taps his fingers on some calendars before picking them up] Mate, are you opening? We need some action here.²⁵

PHILOSOPHER [Scratching his forearm] I am. I'd like to start with five years, thank you dealer.

GAMBLER I'll see you then.

PHILOSOPHER Good-o. [Raising his eyebrows. Seems happy with the game, and so he turns his attention to the painting] It's hard to tell what this one is of. [Squinting] Is it the joint of a tree-branch? I'm hopeless at morphology. Anyway, contrary to the rubbish about telling the years from the rings, trees wear their age on the surface.

GAMBLER [Looks addled, then defiant] People hang *themselves* from trees [pause] that is, when they're not being lynched.

PHILOSOPHER [Smoothing a sleeve with his hand] ...Princes Park is peopled by old elm.

GAMBLER [Gloomily] Is *that* where the tree is?

PHILOSOPHER [After reflection] Yes... they reach over the sky, enfolding us in their twisted, grafted limbs. [Wiggles a thumb back and forth between his front teeth thoughtfully] Looking up into the old trees made the girl's passing more acceptable, as if that sorrow was just a tiny fragment of the world, which it was because no one else felt it.

GAMBLER Mel had lived too long. She'd made a noose from clothes and strung it from the bunk bed. [Acts out the neck breaking, his tie the noose]

PHILOSOPHER [Whistles through his teeth] By the time you have realised it, [pause] you've lived too many years already.

GAMBLER [Rearranges his cards, bluffing that he's got a good hand]

PHILOSOPHER [Is irritated. Huffs]

GAMBLER [Dismayed] Jesus. Only sixteen!

PHILOSOPHER Years? [Ripping off his tie] People usually say things like: "such a waste", or "she was so young", but everyone went on without speaking another word.

GAMBLER Death produces silence.

PHILOSOPHER Once you're gone nobody says your name. [Hurls the necktie behind himself]

²⁵ Based on dialogue from *Casino* (1995)

GAMBLER [*Follows the path of the tie through the air with his head*] Not in the same way, no. “To be dead is to be a (future) prey for the living.”²⁶

[*A long, pregnant pause in the conversation. The DEALER stares at them as he does tricks with the pack*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Raising his head*] Can you hear that?

GAMBLER What?

PHILOSOPHER That sound. [*Leans an ear to the table*]

GAMBLER [*Looks at him as if he’s crazy. Then he hears the sound too. Puts his ear toward the wooden box*] It’s coming from the box.

PHILOSOPHER [*Drags the box closer. Puts his ear on top if it*] Yes.... it is, you’re right. There is a voice. [*Tries, unsuccessfully, to open the box*]

GAMBLER What are they saying?

PHILOSOPHER I can’t understand. It’s breaking up. [*Picks up the box with ear still affixed to it. Moves it around trying to get better reception*]

GAMBLER [*Keenly*] Can you hear them now?

PHILOSOPHER No. [*Frustrated. Gets up from table, tries one spot. It’s no good. Tries another, holding the box up in the air. Pulls it down to his ear and listens again*]

GAMBLER Someone’s trying to speak to us; they are from another time.

PHILOSOPHER Radio is *not* like theatre, it’s deaf.²⁷

GAMBLER For fuck’s sake, put it down you drongo!

PHILOSOPHER [*Realises his folly. Puts the box under one arm and foolishly brandishes a fist in the air. Returns to the table. Nonchalantly opens the bidding*] Make it five years this time.

GAMBLER I’ll raise you.

PHILOSOPHER [*Abrasively*] And raise again.

GAMBLER [*Looks at PHILOSOPHER very intently for a second*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Meets with his gaze*]

GAMBLER [*Pause, interrogatively*] She wanted to know why the girl had killed herself.

PHILOSOPHER Was it fate? Did she have a damn choice? [*After reflection*] Everyone’s going meet with destiny but we don’t rush to meet it early.

GAMBLER When you’re winning you feel invincible. When you lose, the world is at its end.

PHILOSOPHER [*Holding out his hand, palm up*] Sometimes the hand is bad; sometimes it’s good, we might even say lucky – either way, you have a choice.

GAMBLER [*Looks at the PHILOSOPHER’s palm briefly*] Awww, you see it’s like the cards, [*pause*] not luck but probability. It could all be predestined.

²⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.695

²⁷ Antonin Artaud declared, “I will never touch Radio again”.

PHILOSOPHER [*Draws back his hand, picks up the cards*] Some players have the power of prediction, they can see all the numbers.

GAMBLER [*Twitches, worried that the PHILOSOPHER has this power*] Tell me now, is it free will, or love of fate that *you* live by?

PHILOSOPHER [*With prophetic relish*] What if chance overwhelms all choice?²⁸

[*The PLAYERS trade in some cards*]

PHILOSOPHER Do you think you are unlucky?

GAMBLER [*Crankily*] Give me your hand again.

PHILOSOPHER [*Ignores him, continues to rearrange his cards*]

GAMBLER [*Crossly with a rising inflection*] Give me your hand!

PHILOSOPHER [*Cautiously puts his palm in front of the GAMBLER*]

GAMBLER [*Rambling*] ...here's the cleft. [*Running a finger down the 'life lines' in the PHILOSOPHER's hand*]

PHILOSOPHER If you could put it into physical form, it would be like a piece of fabric pushed into a gap. [*Suddenly realising what's happening, yanks back from the GAMBLER's grip*] Are you trying to read my palm?

GAMBLER [*Sarcastically, beautician's voice*] You've got such beautiful hands.

PHILOSOPHER [*Humourless*] The hands of a conjuror, a woman had told me once. Or a card sharp. [*Then vexed and suspicious*] Are trying to force my hand, then?

GAMBLER Gamblers are born liars.

PHILOSOPHER [*Nods*] And superstitious too.²⁹

GAMBLER [*Pedantically*] But what happens when the cleft is forced back out?

PHILOSOPHER As it expands, it's dispersed, like when you unfold a cloth.

[*Holding up an imaginary piece of fabric, demonstrating*] There's also 'dedoubling'. [*Tugging the lining of his sleeve*] which allows for a second complete entity hiding within the first to come out. For example, you dedouble a jacket when you remove its doublure or lining,

[*The PLAYERS make more bets*]

PHILOSOPHER Like an endless concertina – being seems unfathomable.

GAMBLER [*Perversely*] Inexplicable acts *always* have an explanation.

PHILOSOPHER [*Straightening up*] Let me tell you a story.

²⁸ "I am not "free" either to escape the lot of my class, of my nation, of my family, or even to build up my own power or fortune or to conquer my most insignificant appetites or habits. I am born a worker, Frenchman, an hereditary syphilitic, or a tubercular. The history of a life, whatever it may be, is the history of a failure. The coefficient of adversity of things is such that years of patience are necessary "to obey nature in order to command it"; that is, to insert my action into the network of determinism." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.619

²⁹ Dialogue based on the movie *Croupier* (1998)

GAMBLER I hope it has a goddamn ending this time.

PHILOSOPHER Will you hear me? It is about a journey and a girl.

GAMBLER [*Reluctantly assents, nodding*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Narrative tone*] After being away from Italy for many years, the girl is on her way to Verona to see her Father. It is 1567, and the journey is long because the roads are pockmarked and the transport slow. There is a castle. The walls surround an empty dwelling. They are stone cold. And the wind is cold. After a long journey, no-one's there. There's no fire, the stone is ice-cold. It was abandoned long ago. Forsaken, forgotten, she takes to the dark forest. Dense with trees, she runs through bracken and fallen branches. She flees, no that's not right; she *takes flight*. There's no escape. A thicket is her trap. A blackberry thicket... a snarl of thorns and branches. [*Makes his hands into claws*] The barbs entangle her, like a bird in a tiny cage.

GAMBLER The fabric snares, the skin fucking snags. [*Leans over, digs a fingernail into the PHILOSOPHER's arm*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Flinches*] The past has little hooks that pierce the skin. We are each tied to history in such a way that even as we run forward we're dragged back.

GAMBLER Shit. Does she regret making that odyssey?

PHILOSOPHER Being lost on the path of remembrance is a way of forgetting how you got there.

GAMBLER Did grief ensnare her?

PHILOSOPHER At first, yes, but the branches helped her to accept the girl's suicide; it was a consolation.

[*The PLAYERS show their hands*]

GAMBLER [*Assuredly*] Yeah, so there is a happy end.

PHILOSOPHER I think so. Only, the containers that give time its measure become a heavy burden.³⁰

GAMBLER [*Grimaces, then bellicose*] I want to smash the strongbox! Let's break it open!

PHILOSOPHER [*Dismal*] There is no going into the gone.

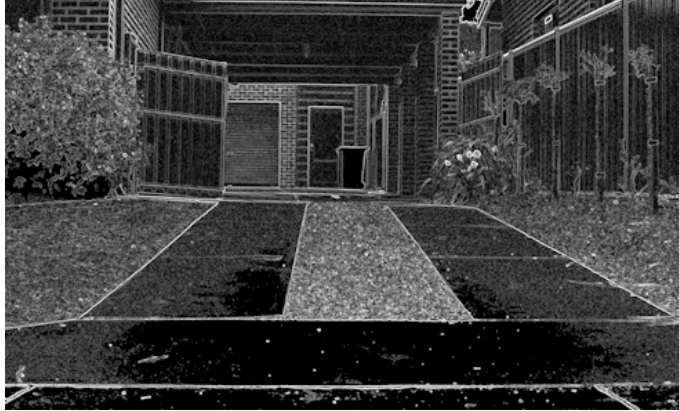
GAMBLER Not now, and not later?

PHILOSOPHER [*Suddenly expectant*]...it could be the time release we have been waiting for.

[*A winner is decided. The DEALER calculates the future date, and the winner inscribes the number on the slate. He returns to his stool. The actors form a tableau. The lights fade out*]

³⁰ "We make the future possible ... by envisaging it in terms of the past we bear in the viscosity of the present, allowing its remanence to arise in an act of foreshadowing *what might be* ... here a function of *what has been* and thus of the thickness of the past as it comes to bear on the present and the future." Edward E. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, p.278

Act six: the driveway



[The *PHILOSOPHER* is in deep thought, one elbow's on the box, which is on his side of the table. He snaps out of the reverie with a bit of a jolt and sits up straight. The *GAMBLER* notices the box again. Stares intently]

GAMBLER So, what's in the box?

PHILOSOPHER [*Head lowered, he shrugs*]

[The *DEALER*, interrupting, flicks five cards out to each player. They arrange their cards]

GAMBLER This one, [*pause, looking up at the sixth picture*] has a real story.

PHILOSOPHER I heard about it... she was leaving, is that it?

GAMBLER Did she know where she was going?

PHILOSOPHER Not really. Departure was the destination. [*Tries to turn his head back to front*].

GAMBLER Take it easy ... that's if you don't want to return.

PHILOSOPHER Yes, she was hoping it would be the last time.

GAMBLER But what was her destiny? She must have had one in mind.

PHILOSOPHER [*Definitively*] It was an interminable highway – the beginning of the end of the beginning.

GAMBLER [*Snorting*] ...isn't that just a driveway?

[The *PLAYERS* place a few bets. The *DEALER* counts them, stacking and arranging the calendars]

GAMBLER She drove straight there– she knew the place.

PHILOSOPHER She was going to her Grandmother's house but had deliberately forgotten that nobody would be home.³¹

GAMBLER [*Ponderous*] On second thoughts, the driveway's a dead end.

PHILOSOPHER The car stalled.

GAMBLER It must have been terminal.

PHILOSOPHER The present closed in, folding over her and she over it.

GAMBLER [*Despairingly*] Christ!

PHILOSOPHER Not at all – *she* was killing time.³²

[The *PLAYERS* trade in cards. *DEALER* gives them new ones]

³¹ “Not only can many mode of repetitive behaviour themselves be understood as types of forgetting – of “amnesia” in its literal meaning of “not-remembering,” the privation of memory – but our ordinary lives are riddled with vacuities, the pockets as well as the long stretches, of oblivion.” Edward E. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, p.306

³² “The Hatter and the Hare went mad together the day they “murdered time,” that is, the day they destroyed the measure, suppressed the pauses and the rests which relate quality to something fixed. The Hatter and the Hare killed the present...” Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p.79

GAMBLER Nothing expunges fucking pain; it gouges memory and punctures time. It had to be done: a handful of pills. The future, a deep, deep sleep.

PHILOSOPHER But an old man sees the car. [*Voice of geezer*] Who is this? Who is she? [*Voice of young woman*] Meddler! [*Narrative tone*] Telephones Grandmother. Crawls under the house with a torch looking for the spare key. The trousers are getting clay on them. It is claustrophobic. He helps her into the house. Fussing. Lights the gas heater. Into bed, sleep.

GAMBLER What are the chances—

PHILOSOPHER —of interruption? The odds were against it.

GAMBLER It wasn't her time.

[*Both PLAYERS start BETTING again. This is scripted for readers, but it's live action in the performance*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Points to the door, as if commanding that the GAMBLER should exit*] I abhor cheats.

GAMBLER Get over it! All men are bloody cheats, but first they dupe themselves.³³

PHILOSOPHER [*Sees the irony. Chuckles*] As we must to play this game. [*Throwing calendars in*] I'll raise five.

GAMBLER [*Likewise*] See you, and raise three.

PHILOSOPHER [*Grabs more calendars*] See and raise five again.

GAMBLER Five and call.

PHILOSOPHER [*Seethes*]

GAMBLER [*Slowly*] Raise two.

PHILOSOPHER See and raise two.

GAMBLER [*Sliding his palm off his chin, as an insult*] Raise three.

[*The DEALER shifts uncomfortably, it's become the biggest pot of the session*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Ignores the DEALER's apprehension. Points at the box, commanding*] Open it.

GAMBLER [*Pulls the box towards him and opens the lid, this time, easily. Looks in and dwells on the contents*]

PHILOSOPHER So, what is in there?

GAMBLER [*Reaches and warily pulls out a black alarm clock. Places it in on the table*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Uncertain*] Oh... I see.

³³ Dialogue based on a scene from *Croupier* (1998)

GAMBLER *[Draws out another clock. Also places it on the felt]*

PHILOSOPHER *[Rearranges one of the clocks to face the GAMBLER]*

GAMBLER *[Sets up the other clock facing the PHILOSOPHER's]*

PHILOSOPHER Two chronometers, each with their own time. *[Traces the movement of the clock's hands]* The hands rotate, circumnavigating the dial, spinning and travelling in orbit at the same time.

GAMBLER *[Suddenly the GAMBLER is an "authority" on the topic. Holds up two fingers to make a divider, measuring the distances between the stars. Expert's tone]* A celestial navigation, following the stars and movement of the earth – time through space.

PHILOSOPHER *[Peers around to look at the clock face]* Is there a moment when they are synchronised?³⁴

GAMBLER When their paths intersect... *[pause]* in a planetary alignment.

PHILOSOPHER *[Taken aback by his friend's learning]* Star-crossed...

GAMBLER It's a meeting at a crossroads on a dark night. *[Shivering, still in the voice of an expert]* An eclipse, where all the signs are at a standstill and you cannot navigate, because everything is in total obscurity.

PHILOSOPHER When spheres of influence overlap, time drags: the moon has gravitational pull of its own.

GAMBLER We've forgotten that time *is* physics... it used to be measured that way. A pendulum swings: tick-tock, tick-tock. The earth revolves: *[slower]* tick-tock, tick-tock... *[pause]* tock. Time appears to be meted out metronomically, only it's the opposite: in slowing down it's counting backwards.

PHILOSOPHER *[Turns the clock back-to-front]* What would happen if we turned back the clocks? Would the planets collide and time obliterate itself?

GAMBLER *[Panicking, shouts]* Stop!! Don't move them!

PHILOSOPHER *[Blithely disregards him]* I've worked it out... *[Takes a clock over to the shelf, placing it on one end. Saunters back to the table and stands over the GAMBLER, who looks up at him and beckons the PHILOSOPHER to sit down: there's a game to be won. The PLAYERS make their last round of bets]*

GAMBLER *[Fingers his remaining calendars. He knows he's won, but he wants to bleed it for every bit of drawn-out pleasure]*

PHILOSOPHER *[Going all-in]* See you, and raise three.

GAMBLER *[Pushes in the last three of his calendars It's a showdown]*

PHILOSOPHER Call.

[The GAMBLER puts down his cards. The PHILOSOPHER just stares at them for a second, lets out a deep sigh and slowly lays out each card]

³⁴ Einstein's synchronisation is a convention in relativity that looks at how to synchronize clocks at different places.

PHILOSOPHER [*Is aghast*] This just cannot be. [*Glances at the DEALER, who can do nothing but stand there in silence*]³⁵

GAMBLER [*Bitingly*] Don't solicit him, you bastard.

PHILOSOPHER [*Whining*] But we both want pure duration.

GAMBLER [*Parental tone*] It's like this: the game's never going to end because whenever we remember we get a fucking different past each time.

[*A winner is decided. The DEALER calculates the future date, and the winner inscribes the number on the slate*]

³⁵ Dialogue based on *The Sting* (1973)

Act seven: a gothic archway



[Lights come up. The two PLAYERS are facing the wall. The DEALER splits, shuffles and deals five cards to each player]

PHILOSOPHER What is this? *[Points at the seventh painting]*

GAMBLER It looks like the entrance of a church to me.

PHILOSOPHER Is it the same as the other paintings, a memory? Did she make yet another road trip?

GAMBLER *[Nodding affirmatively to both questions]* It was just an empty chapel.

[The PLAYERS take up the cards and weigh up the hand dealt to them]

PHILOSOPHER Was the timing wrong?

GAMBLER *[Holds out arms, pointing each way]* I guess so. Ten years ago, ten years ahead.

PHILOSOPHER “You should be loved, loved, loved”, he said, but it was at the beginning, thirteen billion years ago.

GAMBLER Jesus, really? After all that time? *[Humming a tune, a love song]*

PHILOSOPHER It was a cadence. *[Takes up an imaginary violin and slashes the bow in rapid strokes]*

GAMBLER *[Still humming. Stops suddenly]* Was it a musical trope?

PHILOSOPHER That’s when you know love is inescapable, as are all illusions. *[Acts out a magic trick, hidden cards up a sleeve, or behind the ear]* Even more seductive because they are untouchable, intangible.

GAMBLER And they incessantly repeat themselves... *[Exasperated]* Love is trickery and entanglement.

PHILOSOPHER Like a reprise, love is inculcated. Mercury, the thief, carries the Caduceus, a staff with two snakes. *[Moving chair slightly]* The snakes intertwine in an inverted unity. Its continuity is the double helix, a reversion to type, otherwise known as DNA, or destiny.

GAMBLER *[Bewildered]* Shit.

[The PLAYERS place their final bets]

GAMBLER I reckon you know the chapel, it’s in Woodend, on a hill, on the road out of town.

PHILOSOPHER *[Recollects]* She drove home down the Calder freeway at full speed listening to Haydn’s Farewell Symphony. Like a recapitulation, it happened at the end.

[*The PLAYERS trade in their cards*]

GAMBLER –she'd left long before.

PHILOSOPHER Although it's hard to leave. You never really do.

[*The PLAYERS make their final bets*]

PHILOSOPHER But at love's end, love cleaves to another.

GAMBLER [*With a reminiscent leer*] You look at your lover's love as yourself. It's a stupid, tangled transference, from one body to another.

PHILOSOPHER [*Vitriolic*] We are vessels in which pre-ordained memories are contained for a time before being consumed, [tilts back head to scull the wine: "glug", "glug"] like cellared wine to drunkards – by some decanterous thug.³⁶ [*Both laugh raucously, holding their sides*]

GAMBLER I can't do anything about it.

PHILOSOPHER [*Elegiac*] The couple enters the archway. They've gone, leaving her outside. Everyone waits. [*Stands up, collects his stool and places it by the wall. Sits down and looks down the road, waiting for a bus that isn't coming*]

GAMBLER She didn't get to choose.

PHILOSOPHER Marriage is ritual. [*Bows his head mockingly*] It commemorates the years of union in anniversaries, to forget all the others.

This is the use of memory:
For liberation—not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past.³⁷

[*The PLAYERS reveal their hands*]

PHILOSOPHER [*Aghast*] What are the odds of this happening?

GAMBLER Thousands to one... mate.

PHILOSOPHER I could have won if I had been able to bluff.

GAMBLER [*Arrogantly*] You idiot. It's all numbers. A spin of the wheel. A turn of a card. The time of your life. The date of your birth. The year of your death.³⁸

[*A winner is decided. He leans forward and takes the pot. The DEALER calculates the future date, and the winner inscribes the number on the slate*]

³⁶ "To the extent that events are actualised in us, they wait for us and invite us in. They signal us: My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it." Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p.148

³⁷ T.S. Eliot, from *Little Gidding*, Four Quartets, 1942

³⁸ Based on dialogue from *Croupier* (1998)

PHILOSOPHER [*Taking a deep breath, then plaintively*] When is it going to end?

GAMBLER [*Brusquely*] When the future's perfect. [*Alarmed, points out into the room in front of the table*] Look, the curtains are fading!!!

PHILOSOPHER [*Abashedly, abandoning his attitude*] Shall we draw them? [*Without hesitation, gets up in front of the table and draws a pair of curtains*]

GAMBLER [*Poetically*] It's not dark yet but it's getting there.

[*Lights fade out. The PLAYERS and DEALER leave the gallery. Lights fade up. The table is left in disarray, the result of the final round*]

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