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A Monkey Peeled An Onion... [In Search of Nothing]

2017

It is hard to visualise nothing, the absence of anything. Mankind has been contemplating about the mystery of creation, the emergence of something out of nothing, since the dawn of rational thought. What is nothing? What remains if we take all matter, the earth, the stars, all molecules, atoms, away? What does a vacuum look like?

The philosophers of ancient Greece addressed these questions to the power of logic, while eastern philosophers considered emptiness to be a state of mind. Through the ages the debate about the question if a true void could exist (and if so, how could it be defined?) shifted from philosophy to empirical scientific areas like physics and astronomy. This led to some of the greatest scientific discoveries and theories in history. Like Einstein's general relativity theory, Paul Dirac's theory of matter and anti-matter deriving from the vacuum, and the quantum-void, being examined in particle accelerators, showing an infinitely deep vacuum, filled with particles and buzzing with energy.

Our minds have developed a view of the world, based on our macroscopic sense of time and 3 space dimensions. It is within this mental construct that we describe energy and matter. Therefore it sounds paradoxical and counterintuitive that according to our current best theories, a region of space that contains nothing at all is still full of energy and seething with virtual particles, popping in and out of existence.

Fascinated by these counterintuitive propositions that do not seem likely to be true when assessed using intuition, common sense or gut feelings Marjolein Blom has researched the concept of the vacuum by examining philosophical and scientific theories about nothingness, matter itself and elementary particles.

This has resulted in a large body of images in which exactly the intuitive process plays an important role. Leading the viewer from Thales who claimed 'nothing' could not exist but to whom space would be as empty as it can be when all matter would be turned into its primordial form, water. To the mysterious dark matter and dark energy that both permeate space, but have been undetected until this day. And from the experiments from physicists as Casimir and Boyle to a visual experiment using all matter from Medeleevs table.

You take an onion and peel it and peel it, right to the heart, and there's nothing there. There must be something, you believe, there must be- you take another onion and start peeling it, keep on peeling, at last, nothing... Do you understand the sadness of this monkey? - Dazai Osamu, 'A Record of the Autumn Wind'