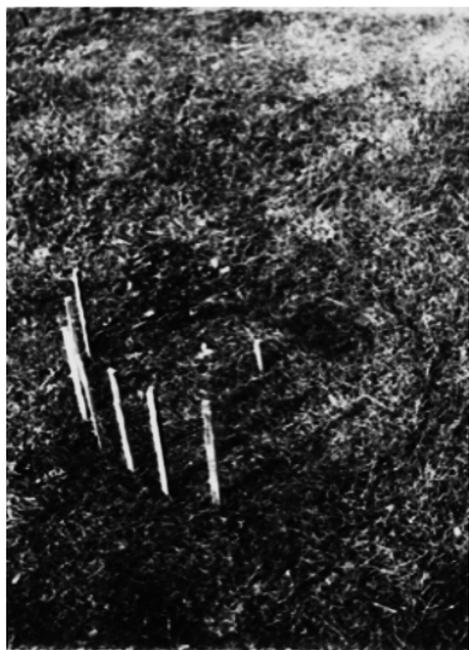


## EIGHT THINGS

It says, WOOD, TURF, LIGHT, SHADOW.

A shepherd takes his sheep to graze on grassy downs. IN A PLACE FROM WHICH THE CHEAP WATCH HAS NOT YET DRIVEN IT, he constructs a simple turf sundial to tell him when it is time to return his sheep for night folding. It says, HE MAY HAVE A LONG DISTANCE TO GO; it says, WITH NO CLOCKS WITHIN HEARING, he resorts to a turf dial. It says, IF THE SUN FAILS HIM, AND HIS DIAL CONSEQUENTLY DOES NOT WORK, HE HAS TO CALCULATE BY DEAD RECKONING.

This sundial says, in strokes of wood and earth, whispers and splinters: here are eight stakes driven into South Downs earth, and here are eight things.



1.

Edward Lovett of folklore and of this 1909 turf sundial says:

First, trace a circle in the dirt, eighteen centimetres in diameter, and the first stake driven perpendicular in the centre. One stake, on the periphery, 12 inches long, due south. It says, you ascertain the direction **BY MEANS OF ANOTHER MAN'S WATCH**, or of landmark bearings known to the shepherd.

One stake due west, and five more intervening in this quadrant: the hours of one to five inclusive. It says, **A SUNDIAL WITH SEVEN GNOMONS ON ITS CIRCUMFERENCE.**

**AT THREE O'CLOCK ON AN OCTOBER AFTERNOON, WHICH IS ABOUT THE TIME SHOWN IN THE PHOTOGRAPH, IT MAY BE ABOUT TIME TO RETURN TO THE FOLD, AND THE SHADOW OF THE THIRD STICK FROM THE MIDDAY GNOMON WILL THEN FALL ON THE CENTRAL STICK, AND THE SHEPHERD WILL KNOW THAT IT IS TIME TO START.**

Sundial said, I give you handfuls of dirt and light, and eight things time keeps at stake.

2.

At 19 minutes past midnight, the turf sundial emits blue light through a glass retina display.

24 minutes past midnight; Ed looks up what MacBook screens are made from,

28 minutes past midnight; sounds of typing and discontent,  
29 minutes past midnight, say the pixels in the corner of the display.

This is the digital clock and it says: 31 minutes past midnight.

Ed continues to type, chiselling away at the light emanating from the vast page before him.

This work is of staying in time, is LED backlit, and is silent; made from raw metals driven from the earth by human labour.

Digital clock records these slippery seconds and Ed knows the time—hours when the sun has deserted the dials and the shepherd has folded his sheep- we are **BEYOND DEAD RECKONING.**

3.

At 34 minutes past midnight, Ed notes that 19, 24, 28, 29, 31, minutes past midnight have slipped invisibly past him. The image of the turf dial lighting up the screen still says: THREE O'CLOCK ON AN OCTOBER AFTERNOON.

Sundial time is constant and still. Sundial time is a preserved body.

Sundial discards past light as it seeps into sun-bleached wood. Sundial-time is archive-time and the light is a slippage allowing directional shadow. Time is forced to stand still.

4.

On one side of the screen, Sundial is stoic; refuses to flicker, and the sun refuses to set.

When Ed watches this clock he does not watch the hours tick by – instead he watches himself outgrow time before one second has passed.

On the other side of the screen clock time trickles by like a stream; the small digital counter silently swells with numerical accumulation, recedes further away from Sundial-time.

From 1909 to present day, 981120 hours have passed.

Clock time passes in chunky splintering pieces and Ed keeps on staring at the screen, which is white with this blank document, burning, like a sun.

Ed stares again at the turf sundial – he has all the time in the world.

5.

Sundial time refuses to move whilst the digital clock refuses to stop, and Ed sits still in the middle, tapping his fingers on the keys, bathing in light and emitting shadow.

Words slip by like seconds, and discontented with them both, Ed looks again at the turf Sundial image, and the small digital clock.

981121 hours past midnight.

6.

Ed has been looking at this image for far too long.

Swimming through eight stakes and eight stripes, writing an outline with shadow and light.

White light, white page. Black shadow says absence; the shape of letters say, **HERE** are all the things time is full of.

Ed writes with digitally black ink on a glassy page. The material has been stretched from gritty earth to boiling point, it is cool to the touch, and it is creating light and shadow with language.

Language is an instructional shadow, is a line saying, **DIFFERENCE!** in the grass, and is slipping through the screen and smacking Ed in the face.

7.

Sundial says, **LIGHT**: Sun-bleached wood falls on the South Downs falls in stripes. Light/dark/light/dark/light/dark.

Digital clock says, it is 9 minutes past 6pm, silently slipping by in many hours and little words. Sundial is full but page is largely empty. The work of time is fast but the work of Ed is slow.

This turf Sundial is loud, it says, **HERE** are eight things driven into the earth, **HERE** is mud, grass, light, and shadow, **HERE** is time, and it's been fashioned in the shape of a wooden stake.

Sundial says, **SOUND**: breeze whistling, grass underfoot, wood hammering wood, downward pressure, earth.

3.

When Ed's alarm goes off on Monday morning, time echoes against the walls in tinny falsetto, dragging Ed out of shadow.

This is clock time, not body time. Body time chases Sundial time because the sun has been awake for hours, stroking the South Downs. The shepherd takes his sheep for their everlasting grazing, which hangs in the shadow of their folding.

Ed snoozes the alarm and slips back into sleep – he denies time and crawls back into his sleepy shadow – back into his body, and as he does every morning, slips away from time.

Eventually, Ed stops setting alarms in the morning, instead choosing to wake up with no clocks within hearing...  
CALCULATING BY DEAD RECKONING.

## REFERENCES:

Lovett, Edward, *The Simple Sundial of the Southdown Shepherds* (1909), in Gosset, Adelaide L. J., 'Shepherds of Britain - Scenes from Shepherd Life Past and Present' (Read Books Ltd, 2017)

*Turf Sundial*, circa 1910, Pitt Rivers Museum Photography Archive, ref. 1998.261.20.1, available from: [http://photographs.prm.ox.ac.uk/pages/1998\\_261\\_20\\_1.html](http://photographs.prm.ox.ac.uk/pages/1998_261_20_1.html) [Accessed 11/03/2021]

Rohr, René RJ, *Sundials: History, theory, and practice*. (Courier Corporation, 2012)