



# DEAR FRIEND,

The ancient Greeks thought about time and human narrative through the metaphor of a textile. Clotho (one of the three Fates) sat at her cosmic loom, before which stretched out an infinity of threads – each one representing a possible future. Clotho decided what would happen by plucking specific timelines, weaving them into the fabric of the present. As the textile stretched out behind her, it became history. Eventually, the cloth became worn and threadbare, until only tattered scraps remain.

There is one other important aspect to Clotho's task. Contemporary ideas about time (at least in the West) imagine that each individual is moving forward into the future, and leaving the past behind them. But Clotho is static. In this sense, the individual remains fixed in the present, and it is the future that comes to them, while the past is jettisoned.

The relevance of this metaphor is that I was recently asked to reflect on one of my first projects, a student publication at the Architectural Association called *Fulcrum* (2011–14). My relationship with time is not entirely like Clotho; I am unable to forget, which means that the tapestry of personal history never fades or falls apart. I sense the past as still going on. It is a place distanced from me by space, not by time. This is increasingly how others are experiencing the past, too. In the 1990s, for example, the 1980s felt like it was a very long time ago. This is because the only obvious material legacy was cars on the road, or some old street signs, the outdated style of a dentist's secretary (shoulder pads and a perm), and my parent's vinyls. Today, the 1990s feels contemporaneous with the present. A Google search makes no distinction between celebrity gossip that is 30 years old, or 3 days old – with the effect that it is possible to imagine the 1990s as a foreign country (inaccessible but real) and not a previous era.

For me, 2011 is still happening, as are all other years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds. The challenge, when trying to communicate this experience to others, is how to capture the spirit of that time. What did it mean to live in 2011, and how was *Fulcrum* a reflection of that?

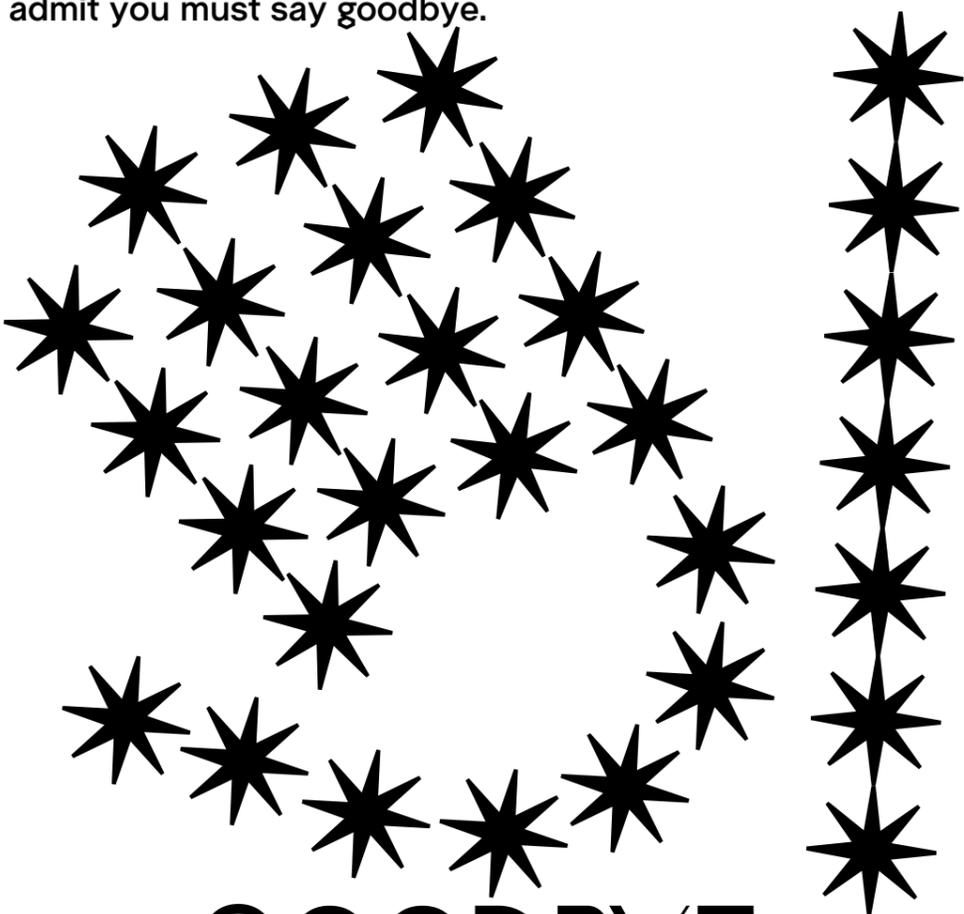
*Fulcrum* ran for 100 weekly issues, beginning the day Mubarak was deposed during the Arab Spring. After the 2008 crash, there was a tremendous spirit of hope for change. Obama's election campaign simply described the popular mood. But by 2010, it was clear that no change would come: Britain's government decided instead to punish the general populace with Austerity measures. I was at architecture school, and became increasingly active in the anti-cuts movements – large street protests by health workers, police and teachers against the reduction in budgets, closure of public libraries, increase in student fees, etc. All this eventually built up to the so-called August Riots (when anti-racism protests transformed into a week-long orgy of violence and theft; I saw buses set on fire in London, shops everywhere had their glass smashed, and parts of the city came under gang control). A few weeks after the Riots, the Occupy movement began. I found myself sleeping in a tent outside St. Paul's

cathedral, mobilised into participatory democratic processes, and learning about self-organisation and anti-capitalist economics. I gave lectures at Occupy's Tent University on strategies of resistance in militarised urban settings.

I was living in poor-quality social housing at the time, and like most 23-year-olds I was angry and frustrated that the world was imperfect. The background desperation and anger in the United Kingdom mirrored my own mood. More likely, I have always been a straightforward product of whatever time and place I find myself in. The idea for *Fulcrum* was to create a publication that would try to capture the spirit of this moment and amplify it to a broader audience. The format was simple: since I didn't believe in an absolute model of truth, or the value of singular voices, there should always be two authors writing on the same topic. This was intended to show that there is always more than one way to think about a subject. A thick line divided the two articles. This line is the literal "fulcrum" (a thing that plays a central role in an activity) and the publication as a whole was trying to embody the other sense of "fulcrum" (tipping point, point of no return).

I graduated the week of the 100th issue, and I was very clear in the final editorial that the publication had ended. This was to highlight the fact that the publication as a whole constituted one project. It was also intended to encourage other, younger students to start their own publications (which they did; there were several that came directly afterwards).

Today, the possibility of goodbyes has been significantly diminished. We used to stand at the dock and wave to a departing steamer. We used to stand on the platform and wave to a departing train. Now, it is impossible to say goodbye. No sooner is a loved one out of sight than we are getting messages from them. But even psychologically, it is important to know when a project is finished, and so to have the strength to admit you must say goodbye.



GOODBYE  
JACK SELF \*