

PETER SCHAIBLE

Pilgrim Monument little planet, 2012
Multiple photographic images blended
and stitched together, 12 x 12 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

URSULA K. LE GUIN

Calx

You wouldn't think it looking at me now, but I was alive once. In fact I have been alive countless times and died repeatedly, though for the first time each time. It is a peculiarity of individuality that life and death are always for the first time. You may wonder why I use the pronoun *I*, and all I can say is that, in my context, it is a convenient fiction, which it's best to accept so that we can go on without having to discuss what selfhood is, let alone what being is, or what it is to be. I am foraminiferous, so once upon a time, that is, countless times, but all quite long ago, I was alive and floated about in a mild not-very-salty sea in my tiny shell or test, which I shaped and pierced and ornamented in many delicate and imaginative ways, and died, having reproduced more of myself, or us, my kind—you see the pronoun problem?—before dying.

For uncounted time uncounted numbers of me floated about, drifted, hurried by currents and slowed in calm bays, lifted up and let down by the tides, which were somewhat more frequent then, and whenever I died, part of me, my shell or my test, drifted down, as all dead or unliving things try to do, toward the center of the Earth. In this we (not just my kind, all of us) obey the same kind of pull as causes the upping and downing of the tides, but the tides are caused merely by the moon trying to be the center, with nothing like such conviction as the center of the Earth, which has the last word, locally at least, on what down is.

So I would drift down when I was dead until I came softly to rest, often in shallow water, sometimes far deeper than the last dim blue reach of light, on an ooze or mud or bed made up mostly of my own dead self, though of course other people ended up there too. And there many of me lay dead while the rest of me floated about alive, inventing and constructing pretty little shells and tests, reproducing and eating and getting eaten, up in the warm waters in the sunlight and moonlight and starlight, till I died. It was a pleasant existence, and still is. After all, I haven't gone all to limestone.

The center of the world kept pulling all my recently dead self down onto the earlier ooze of old dead self, so my weight increased very much as the revolutions went on and more and more of me lived and died. I became a burden to myself. I made myself more comfortable by breaking my shells down into smaller particles and arranging them