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This work is a phenomenological and formal investigation into the tensions between the human tendency toward creativity and the institutional structures that control how that work is shared, including museums, galleries, public-art-funding government, social media, and the Academy. It is common for artists to be expected to work between assignments or bodies of work, as it were—artifacts of a creative process with a beginning, middle, and end. In this model, the initial goal is to execute an idea, and the final goal is to publicly display the work when it is finished, often to exchange it for capital. I propose a different model, where one's artistic life is devoted to the experience of inquiry and experimentation, where artifacts may become secondary to the process, and where the art objects are tools as much as the media that may have made them. These objects are impermanent manifestations of inquiry and may become assembled and disassembled without heartbreak or fuss, always in service to the process of learning. I find points of intersection and departure between my own multiple modalities as an artist, thinker, and educator and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, particularly as they address the concepts of, assemblage, multiplicity, repetition, accumulation, and ritual, and their metaphor for non-hierarchy, the rhizome. In a rhizomatic structure, all points connect through nodes, but removing a node doesn't destroy the connectivity of every other node. In contrast to arboreal thinking, rhizomatic thinking tends toward weighing the connections between things as more powerful than the things themselves.

ONE WORK: A RHIZOMATIC TREATISE ON THE CREATIVE ACT

by

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CHAPTER I: ON INQUIRY

i insist on asking
beautiful questions with
no real answers coming

cast a spell of learning–
inquiry witchery–
sing a song of being

this i'll ask of you now:
how will you counter this
drowning decrescendo?

CHAPTER II: ON CADENCE

These past few months, I've been working through questions about rhythm, place, and the activation of spaces between things. The space between things is something I started thinking about during my 100-day intersection intervention, during which time I went to the same street corner each day holding a large picket-style sign with a new message and image daily. This was a powerful experience for me, particularly in how it compared to my previous ritual project, Pilgrimage, performed through 1000 consecutive days of walking at least five miles. To wander through space like one observes a leaf floating on a stream, changing direction, pausing in an eddy of looking or listening, is one way to have an embodied experience in the space of the material world, and to stand tethered to a site and allow the world of the stream to rush past you, feel its current on your skin and stand against it, is entirely another. During this tethering, I wondered about what was happening in the space between me and the drivers as the distance closed, time stopped in a moment of eye contact, and then the space expanded until they were gone, sight and sound. This with pedestrians too, but at a different tempo. The polyrhythmic experience of pedestrian traffic, heavier at the hour, and the faster, steadier hum of automotive traffic created a palpable pulsation. What was happening in the moment of time-stop, when I would almost daily experience exactly one smile of surprise so pure-seeming that it cracked the casing of my heart a little bit. A series of beautiful heartbreaks happening through an electrical field. And did my unsmiling face break any hearts for a split-second through that space between us? I glowingly like to think so. At times, through the repetition of the motion of my body, supplemented by pulsing, repetitive music being piped through headphones directly into my brain, I forgot myself as I became more rhythm than man.

In his essay, 'Rhythm, Preceding Its Abstraction,' Deniz Peters writes:

the affectivity of rhythmic intricacy might plausibly be seen to take root. This is recognized by Peter Nelson, who theorizes an “emotional and aesthetic binding” inherent in rhythm. This binding is social in going beyond a simple, perceptual binding into the realms of bodily interaction and interpersonal negotiation. To Nelson, to “grasp a rhythm” is “to abandon conscious control . . . to the physical engagement of the body with sound . . . which is always, inevitably engagement with another body.” Nelson also refers to how durational space is distributed between sound makers, e.g., between mother and infant, and in African polyrhythm. Nelson conceives out-of-timeness within a shared durational space as the medium for expressivity in “the actual flow of the rhythmic narrative,” in his example, mother–infant interaction, where “minute alterations can have huge significance.” While Nelson’s line of thought helps elucidate the social ontology of rhythmic behavior, it only hints at potential causes of the affectivity of rhythm. He argues that Colwyn Trevarthen’s findings on mother–infant interaction, Gaston Bachelard’s thought on the significance of duration, and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of gift exchange all support the idea that the “temporal spaces between sounds or actions . . . are pregnant with meaning”—a meaning derived from the social juxtaposition of those involved in the exchange. (Peters 120)

I have experienced this “affectivity of rhythm” and its transformative aura through the intersection intervention as well as my durational walking practice. I consider the relationships between body, space, and time as I diagram embodied rituals like phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, circling the spaces between things, putting them in a jar with holes poked in the lid, pinning them to an ethereal mounting board to study them on their own and next to each other before casting a spell of time unstopping, releasing them back to their new positions between new things.

CHAPTER III: ON ACCUMULATION, IMPERMANENCE, AND THE GENERALIST

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari describe the structure of their thinking and the experimental, non-hierarchical format of the book containing it:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and. . . and. . . and. . ." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...). (Deleuze 25)

Figure 1. Multiplicity detail



When making work like *Multiplicity*, this is my shadowy, echoing mantra, “and...and...and...”. The time component of these work spells transforms labor into ritual, the weaving of a web with no finished outer edges. The disintegration of the work at the end is as vital as the making—the return of components to their state of potentiality.

I reflect on the rhizomatic spirit of Kurt Schwitters and the Merzbau, his ongoing domestic transformation that erased the boundary between his life as an artist and his life otherwise, his commitment to Merz and Dada and experimentation always evident in his work. I also look to Sarah Sze, marking time through a language of accumulated objects, marrying a painterly impulse with an architectural eye. As I work, I find roots in the artist-educators of Black Mountain College, for whom curiosity and holistic, multimodal learning were central-- their willingness to marry design, philosophy, and experimentation; the implication and use of their bodies in their work; their waves of togetherness and aloneness in their work. I attempt to see a pattern through Ruth Asawa's eyes. I open the windows to chance like John Cage.

Figure 2. Temporary sculpture



In the introduction to his 1975 work, *Synergetics: Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking*, Buckminster Fuller writes:

We are in an age that assumes the narrowing trends of specialization to be logical, natural, and desirable. Consequently, society expects all earnestly responsible communication to be crisply brief. Advancing science has now discovered that all the known cases of biological extinction have been caused by overspecialization, whose concentration of only selected genes sacrifices general adaptability. Thus the specialist's brief for pinpointing brevity is dubious. In the meantime, humanity has been deprived of comprehensive understanding. Specialization has bred feelings of isolation, futility, and confusion in individuals. It has also resulted in the individual's leaving responsibility for thinking and social action to others. Specialization breeds biases that ultimately aggregate as international and ideological discord, which, in turn, leads to war." (Fuller 3)

In praise of the generalist and defense of meandering inquiry, this treatise affirms my understanding of the relationship between my art practice and my learning and engagement with the world.

CHAPTER IV: ON DRAWING

Drawing as love.

Drawing as expulsion, as invitation.

Drawing as laughter, as prayer, as revenge.

Drawing as poetics, as physics, as line-dancing.

Drawing as meditation, as liberation, as propagation.

Drawing as home, as exit.

Drawing as curiosity, as dreaming.

Drawing as iron, as syncopation, as fury, as portal.

Drawing as mycelial network, as invisible jet, as elbow and hips, as bruise.

Drawing as ritual, as hyperbole, as onomatopoeia.

Drawing as blood and guts, as cicada wing, as business casual, as thigh-high boots.

Drawing as scrawling, as brawling.

Drawing as toupee, as seduction, as incantation,

Drawing as coding, as code-switching, as switch-hitting, as hitting one out of the park.

Drawing as care.

Drawing as surrender.

Drawing as afterthought, as schematic, as play.

Drawing as connector, as closing the distance—a diminishing line between two points.

Drawing as feeling, as doing, as being.

Drawing as courage, as presence.

Drawing as work.

CHAPTER V: ON LANGUAGE AND MULTIPLICITY

I am learning to pull language apart.

When I travel, one of the pleasures I experience is listening to the cadence and intonation of a language I don't speak or understand—to experience speech, conversation, the rhythm of a dinner party entirely through its formal qualities, without the interference of meaning. In the presentation of my thesis installation, I chose not to explain the work through an exhibition statement. I included a few text pieces and a few labels that I felt were necessary for the work, but mostly I allowed myself to trust the visual language of the objects and their relationships to each other and the space to do the thing I wanted the work to do: provide a place for communal inquiry and curiosity.

Almost all the exhibition's visitors came during its final two days. Because there were a number of guests in the space, I could surreptitiously witness people looking at the work. I watched them discover things around corners, moving through the space and then back again for a second look at something. I saw people pointing and talking and wondering together, observing formal connections, finding faces in things, looking in the ways they know to look. I also witnessed emotional responses to the work. More than a handful of people cried in the exhibition—acquaintances, people I knew well, and a few strangers. I loved not knowing what would resonate with whom. Before the exhibition, I made a social media post with six different exhibition posters with different images, titles, and concepts. It was amazing to see these posters reposted by other artists and particularly to see which ones were chosen by whom. To me, the exhibition was actually all of them, depending on the viewer's lens, and I was and am each of the

artists represented by the posters. I was not especially surprised to see which artist chose the graphic design poster or the austere photograph or the image of a younger me wearing a tambourine as a hat. I think of this Anais Nin quote: “we do not see things as they are; we see them as we are.” Our work mediates a relationship between ourselves and other people—a fulcrum on which rests a line of connection—and the work and the artist become what the viewer needs us to be.

Earlier versions of this document intentionally excluded contextual information about the work leading to and contained within the thesis exhibition. At times during the making of the work, it was suggested to me that I practice letting people read the work without my explanation, which was great advice, and which I followed as I crafted this document—supplementing the work with information in the forms of poems, charts, and lists without exposition. Like most things in life, however, scholarship requires a balancing dance; at the exhibition site, in conversation with my faculty committee, I agreed that some exposition would be helpful to provide context for the work, my practice, and their relationship to other contemporary and historical practitioners of art-making.

CHAPTER VI: ON AIR HOCKEY

When one begins playing air hockey, one grips the paddle tightly, awkwardly, for dear life, the strength of the grip forming a hopeful yet false sense of gravitational grounding. One's visual focus lies somewhere between laser-like intensity and the terror of an armed guard on night one, and the body responds. It takes time to loosen the grip and much more time until the grip starts to experiment. In the end, two fingertips barely touch the object's edge as they dance around, allowing a fuller and freer range of motion in the shoulder and torso. The paddle is no longer a tool; it has been swallowed by the hand, the wrist, and the elbow and is now part of the nervous system. Through practice, one might conclude, the air hockeyist will eventually control the paddle through telekinesis.

CHAPTER VII: ON RUSTED PAPER CLIPS

What is it about an orphaned, utilitarian object that has me rooting for it? I love these artifacts that once had a purpose and now are retired on the ground somewhere or unearthed from beneath a couch cushion long after a child is grown or just separated from the group.

Figure 3. An archival impulse



CHAPTER VIII: ON QUANTUM PHYSICS

everything is made of smaller things (!!)

!hm! identifying as art shelves ogler

hm, gr, move! identifying art seashells!

(!!) overidentifying harmless meth slag

Figure 4. Akua ink on Stonehenge, 15" x 22"



CHAPTER IX: ON INCONSISTENTLY APPLIED HIERARCHIES

ThEy MiGhT mAkE yOu SeEm CrAzY . -

Much Madness is divinest Sense -

To a discerning Eye -

Much Sense - the starkest Madness -

'Tis the Majority

In this, as all, prevail -

Assent - and you are sane -

Demur - you're straightway dangerous -

And handled with a Chain -

—Emily Dickinson (16-17)

CHAPTER X: ON GENEROSITY

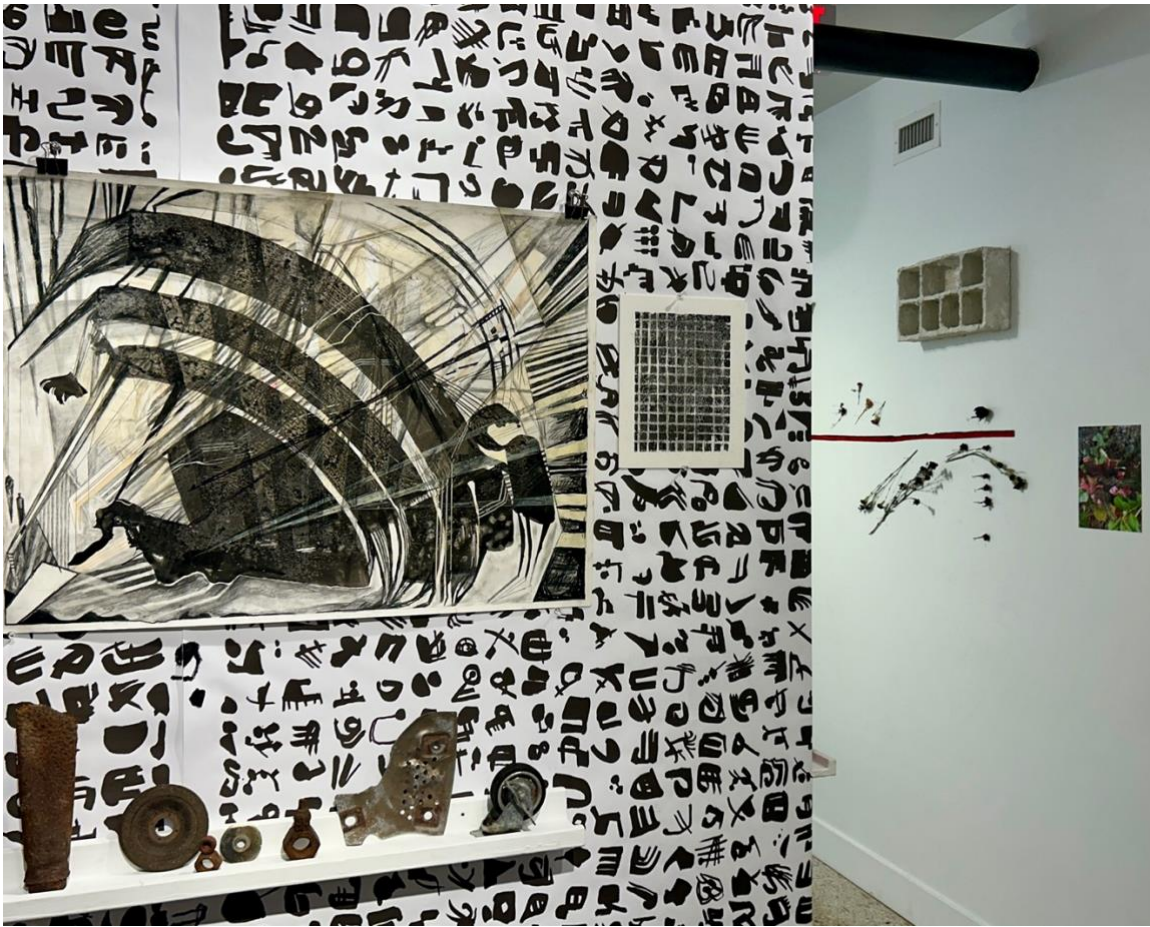
Throughout my time in the MFA program, I have had several conversations with faculty members and peers about how we do or do not embrace a spirit of generosity through our art practices and the work that comes from them. In the past, I have often chosen to give the viewers of my work, particularly in the realm of immersive installation, a smorgasbord of visual choices, often following an internal logic without an obvious external hierarchy. Some people find this tendency toward superabundance powerfully resonant; some find it unnecessarily noisy, and others fall somewhere in between. Initially, I intended to provide something for everyone in this kind of work and to allow them to “choose their own adventure,” devising their own path through the space. I understood that there were parts of my installations—subtle, hidden drawings among a sea of graphic images and objects, tiny written messages tucked into a molding—that would likely never be seen by anyone, but I still felt compelled to and enjoyed putting them there as discoverable to a patient, searching eye. I’ve come to rethink this approach somewhat for two reasons. The first is just the reality of when and where these installations occur, always quite limited in time and in spaces off the beaten path. In a week- or weekend-long exhibition, it would be challenging for a person to visit more than once for an extended period of looking, further complicated by the fact that I, the person who had to be present to unlock the door, am often in or near the space, making it potentially awkward for a visitor to be comfortable looking for any period of time. Secondly, we’re living in a time riddled with what I have heard described as “decision fatigue,” and I felt that phrase deep in my core. It increasingly feels ungenerous to ask a viewer who has already navigated four hundred decisions and taken the time to move their bodies across space and time to experience the art to also decide how to navigate it.

Through my recent work, I've understood more clearly the layers of my creative practices. On the one hand, I am committed to having an experience and devoted to discovery; I stand firm on my right to continue doing work that is vast, complex, and/or inundated. On the other hand, I have begun to see the formal public sharing of my work as more like a gathering I am hosting and for which it is my responsibility to be generous to my guests. I do not have a particular expectation for the people who experience my work, but I suppose I hope they will feel something closer to curiosity, reflection, or pleasure than have an experience of overwhelm or decision exhaustion unless that's the intent of the work—so far, it has not been the intent. While making *Multiplicity*, I reflected on Mierle Laderman Ukeles' feminist work and her "Maintenance Manifesto" as I thought about the relationship between the spaces I make through installation and the spaces I make as domestic practice. My home is filled with curiosities and oddities that get moved around constantly. Installing my work feels, in some ways, like preparing for a dinner party, fussing with this, making that just so, an infinite number of tasks to accomplish in a world and home and room that are eternally unfixed, in flux, changing, until there is a spell cast as the first guest arrives, a time stop, the curtain lifting, the set pieces rooted wherever they were last placed, and then the work, for now, is done.

CHAPTER XI: ON WAVICLES

Sometimes, you're the particle; sometimes, you're the wave.

Figure 5. *Multiplicity* detail



CHAPTER XII: ON THE ENORMITY OF GRIEF

the ease with which we floated

above and apart

the belief that our systems were working

the timbre of that laugh and its punctuation

always full of hope

and a little bit mean

[

]

Figure 6. Things from my pocket.



CHAPTER XIII: ON BIRD DREAMS

Figure 7. Birds dream of singing.



I have heard that birds dream, and studiers of birds think that what they dream about is singing. I came across this unliving sparrow fallen next to my truck's back tire. I briefly wanted to pretend that it didn't exist, as is sometimes the modern human way—to maintain a fiction, to not be inconvenienced, to get in my truck and drive to the studio. Leaving it there on the clean concrete with an ant on its eye also seemed impossible. I gathered some things from inside, walked the sparrow to a nearby green space, hummed it a small made-up tune, and wished it well traveling in its dream song, wherever that melody bears the bird's essence. The ants were already getting to work as I walked away. The sparrow was so small and its eyes so black—a one-ounce marvel—and I wanted to tell you about it.

CHAPTER XIV: ON IMPROVISATION, TINKERING, AND EXPERIMENTATION

we make do with what we have. if we are curious, we investigate the possibilities in what we have. as we come into the authentic part of ourselves that is queer, we don't have a map for moving forward unless our parents are also queer, which mostly they aren't. that isn't to say that all thinking people don't experience some version of coming out at as an individual with its own set of curiosities, preoccupations, and idiosyncrasies. growing up in a working-class catholic family in rural vermont, i experienced coming into queerness as an act of desperate improvisation, as did and do many others. we learn to protect ourselves. we learn when to hold them and when to fold them. we dance around truths, and we resist an abusive world by leaving it through escapist hobbies, creative world-building, and darker ways--however we can. forced exodus can be painful, but one cannot emigrate from one place without immigrating to a new one, and beautiful synergies are born of living liminally between the harshness of one world and the beauty of one being made.

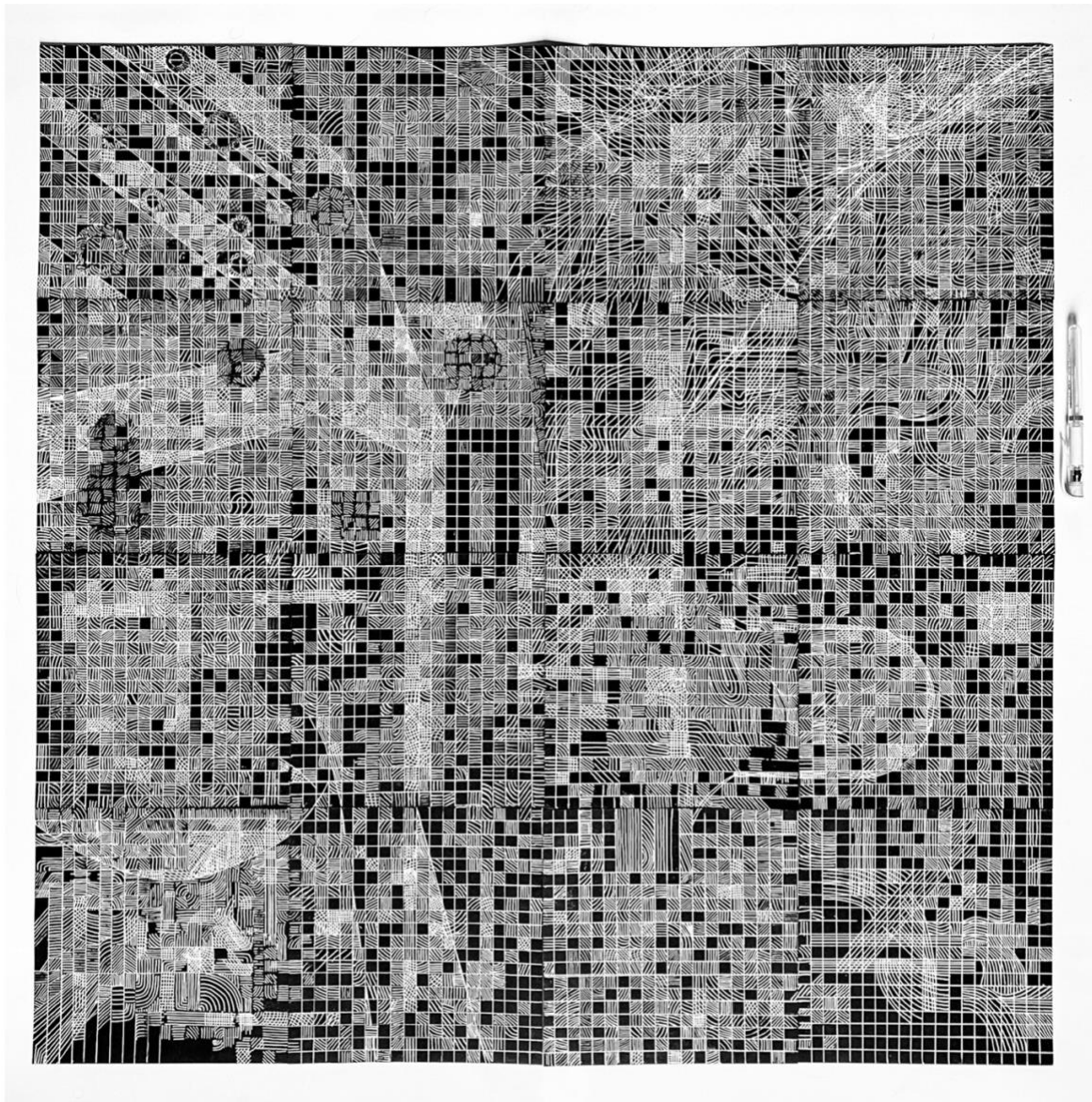
Figure 8. *Multiplicity* detail



CHAPTER XV: ON THE HUMAN SPIRIT

like stars resist the void

Figure 9. Modular drawing.



CHAPTER XVI: ON CRYING

I cry all the time now
My neurologist calls it
pseudobulbar affect
can cause laughing and crying
at times or in degrees deemed
inappropriate;
also called
emotional liability
A therapist once called it
seasonal affective disorder
and/or
major depression
or
persistent depressive disorder
and
generalized anxiety disorder
or/and
insomnia

When I helped that man
bleeding from his mouth
next to the off-ramp
stand up from the wreck of buckled metal
and held him against my chest
glass in his hair, the smell of coconut
–lost his heartbeat, found it again–
afterward
I cried
quietly
in the passenger seat
on the way to the museum
When that leaf swayed lazily
down from the clouds and
alight
on my shoulder
while i spoke of you
I cried then
inappropriately

I call it
paying attention

CHAPTER XVII: ON ATTENTION AND REPETITION

right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left
foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot
right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left
foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot right foot left foot
a highway median; buttercup constellations on a green grass sky
the blue jay outside my window at 4:47 am
10,000 synchronous fireflies; their cricket neighbors
one's own name on any day teaching middle schoolers how to live in the
world a brain-damaged, middle-aged man telling his stories

CHAPTER XVIII: ON BREAKING

out of fragments
 a curious tilting
the last time
 then
 the echo
did you know a job could break your heart?

the time before that
something ended
in that tangle of hangers in the closet chamber
and the sound that came through me
 a thunderous murmururation
pulverizing mountains
 singing to mice
 breaking apart
 splintering ice on snow crust
 everything
 still
you were not all that left me that night.

the first breakings were the breakings of waves,
 incalculable
 erosions
a birthday party bribe
an unending series of silences after
the toothless slamming of hollow doors
a farting boy on the bunk above, snickering,
shirts and skins and
other vulgarities, small shames and
cruelties,
pin-prick stars
 and the prayer
 dear god
 to be witnessed
 to be witnessed
 to be witnessed

i once spoke with a therapist
a durham man,
buddhist, kind,
with a voice so deep
you more felt than heard it
he held me by my darting eyes
uttered three words

— — —
my breath left my body and
sludge, ooze, putrid vapor
and then
a melody, a zephyr, glimmering moonlight
a breaking
an exorcism and
a witness
jesus christ how can those words
unmake me

this time, I break open
unfold into galaxies,
the rhythm of waves, grasshoppers,
skittering sand, frogsong,
a shattering into

— — —

CHAPTER XIX: ON RITUAL

Byung-Chul Han concisely describes ritual without nostalgia.

Rituals are symbolic acts. They represent, and pass on, the values and orders on which a community is based. They bring forth a *community without communication*; today, however, *communication without community* prevails. Rituals are constituted by *symbolic perception*. Symbol (Greek: *symbolon*) originally referred to the sign of recognition between guest-friends (*tessera hospitalis*). One guest-friend broke a clay tablet in two, kept one half for himself and gave the other half to another as a sign of guest-friendship. Thus, a symbol serves the purpose of recognition. This recognition is a particular form of repetition.”
(The disappearance of rituals 1)

Figure 10. Intersection intervention



CHAPTER XX: ON COUNTING

Mathematics is one way of describing the world, like poetry and music and visual art. I count to break big things into smaller things, which makes me feel more connected to the world. I count because I love numbers and the abstraction and idea of numbers. I count because I'm obsessive. I count because my emotional landscape is sometimes chaotic and yearns for order. I count to grasp the notion of space. I count to try to embody the idea of time. I measure because scale and scope provide information about how things work together and relate to each other. I weigh measurements against other measurements to understand how we make decisions, prioritize, and understand value. I measure because I love numbers and the idea of numbers. I measure because it can fill me with hilarity or sadness or contentment. I document the counting and measuring because it facilitates my understanding, because I can't remember everything, because everything is always in relationship with the things around it. The processes of counting and measuring and documenting a living experience each have their downsides. It's not always possible to fully appreciate the sound of a frog-and-wind duet when one is focused on the procedural steps of documenting it, for example, or even embracing the unrepeatability of a walk if one is even marginally interested in broadcasting the data about it.

Attention; a tension, as always.

MIND

the regular rhythm, stepping

MIND SOUL

the twoness of right-left, up-down,

MIND HAND SOUL

the repetition of breath

**M H S M S H M S H
M H M H M H**

the twoness of in-out, open-close

and the spiraling inward

1 2

the whorls and matrices of inner mapping

1 2

problem-solving into a void frontier

1 2 3

over, across, under, forward

1 2 1 2 1 2

here one moment, there the next,

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

bones and tissue, a motion machine,

1 2 1 2 1 2

a percussion, a repetition, a wonder

1 1 1

of the breath, in-out,

1 23 41 23 41 23 4

open, through, around, away,

1 2 1 2 1 2

“breathing in I calm body and mind;

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

breathing out, I smile,”

123451234512345

a mantra, a gift, an aspiration

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

1 1 1

and the threeness of mind, body, and spirit

123451234512345

1 2 1 2 1 2

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

1 23 41 23 41 23 4

CHAPTER XXI: ON SHADOWS

To shine a light is to create a second world.

Figure 11. *Multiplicity* detail



CHAPTER XXII: ON FUTILITY

seven red-winged blackbirds
woke me from a dream
now I hope that
you will wake
knowing
this

the world is murmuring
with or without us
we had better
just go on
to hear
it

let's stay in the dance, love
let the wind change us
with every step
might as well
enjoy
this

CHAPTER XXIII: ON THE POLITICS OF SLOWNESS

The slowness of walking is partly about the slowness of looking. When I step out of production-mode, an anxious sense of urgency gradually slips away, and I find myself taking as much time as I would like to look at a strange leaf or listen to the polyrhythmic patterns of windchimes chaotically ringing against the regular beeping of a garbage truck moving in reverse. Thus, walking places me, the walker, in a headspace of reflection and realization. Stepping out of a system rooted in distraction and consumption allows for more space to observe the system slowly and deliberately itself. The frenzy with which social media companies demand my short and intense attention to fifteen-second, monetized “video trends” becomes clearer when I step away and can examine the systems at play slowly and with intention. In Shari Tishman’s *Slow Looking*, the author describes a walking project of Paul Salobek, who “points out that ‘slow’ works in two ways. As a journalistic practice, it is the careful looking and listening slow journalists do to produce a nuanced story. But slow is also practiced by audiences because slow journalism invites audiences to linger in a story or a scene and inhabit it for a bit—such as photo essays in *One in 8 Million* allow us to dwell momentarily but unhurriedly inside the lives of everyday New Yorkers” (Tishman 29-31). As Byung-Chul Han reminds us, the art of lingering is essential to aesthetic experience:

The age of haste, its cinematographic succession of point-like presences, has no access to beauty or to truth. Only in lingering contemplation, even an ascetic restraint, do things unveil their

beauty, their fragrant essence. It consists of temporal sedimentations emitting a phosphorescent glow.

(The scent of time 62).

Figure 12. Walking ritual



CHAPTER XXIV: ON THE PRIMACY OF VISION

to ask an ophthalmologist: is the most focused gaze always the best information?
what do we gain and lose with clear focus? what would buckminster fuller think? what can we
learn from shadows from how they merge to form new shapes without fuss?

Figure 13. Shadows merge



CHAPTER XXV: ON WALKING

To go for a walk is to move in many directions at once.

Walking is a trance, at times—the regular rhythm of stepping; the twoness of right-left, up-down. The repetition of breath; the twoness of in-out, open-close; the spiraling inward, the whorls and matrices of inner mapping. During this time of introspection and transformation, I’ve started to become reacquainted with parts of myself that I disclaimed as a child—important things that reflect my humanity and not my productivity. Through walking, I’ve begun to reclaim tenderness. To sing to birds without self-consciousness, to tell a friend I like their voice, to make a tiny home for a bug. I think many of us are born tender, and then we learn to harden. Fear is a calcifier, and a carapace is protection. Can you remember being tender? I hope as I walk through the seasons of my life I’ll become softer and gentler until in my last breath I’m as tender as a newborn. To move forward by moving backward is a form of time travel. To move inward by moving outward is a journey between dimensions. Walking is a ritual of body and mind, moving at a different pace—a human pace—a path for noticing. We notice things outside our bodies in the actual world of trees and bugs, hollering workmen and double-stroller moms and a stunning amount of construction, joy-riders and whole families on bikes for the first time, litter and road bric-a-brac, noise, fried smells and waffle cone smells, bad paint choices, slivers of moon, getting to know how the same shadows dance with and around each other at different parts of the day, in different months of the year, getting to know the patterns of the place where I live, the timing of traffic lights, the texture of asphalt, bark, moss, moving water, crying, laughing, the rhythm of our own breathing, remembering what our bodies can do.

On my walks, sometimes I cry, which I'd learned how to not do long ago. I think of this time, these past four years, as my undeadening. My ritual of body and mind has expanded into a new realm, and while I'd set out to reach a blood pressure of 120/80, what I found was something like god. I hadn't really been looking or listening, and now I am. My walking practice is the core of my engagement with the world. Through it, I'm relearning to inhabit my body and breath, and experience wonder, which I believed I had aged out of--hearing frog song, the roar of combustion engines, noticing a tint and a tone of red in proximity, vibrating. I imagine my walking paths as needle and thread, connecting streets, buildings, disparate neighborhoods of complex people and their stories, joining parts of the city, stitching up the world. I am stitching up the world.

CHAPTER XXVI: ON ARCHIVAL LEANINGS

I cannot show you who I am without showing you my stuff: the earthly objects I find myself in consonance or at least harmony. In the last two schools where I worked, teachers would make home visits before the new school year to connect with families in their homes. It struck me as powerful to be invited into a child or adolescent's space and the excitement with which they shared their world through their stuff, inviting me to be served plastic food in the play kitchenette or thrusting an action figure at me as a catalyst for telling me about and showing me their imaginations. I sometimes feel this excitement when I invite someone into my creative workspace. I love seeing which of my things command their interest. Lately, I have described my lifelong practice of creation and materials management as an eternal redistribution of things in piles, like the marriage of plate tectonics and the caterpillar effect and this has me thinking about the performance of moving things from pile to pile in an eternal dance of hierarchies and taxonomies. For years, my creative materials moved between various spaces in my home and spaces in my classroom, as well as the scrap exchange of Durham and my car. At one point I had control of two vehicles, my current ride, a 2000 Toyota Tacoma, and a 1998 Toyota Echo, which was partially used to store things on paper.

CHAPTER XXVII: ON HOPE

sometimes courage gets called this

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