

# A ROCK AND A SOFT PLACE

*The mysterious is abundant in the everyday.*  
-Ann Ellegood

By Cara Levine



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# PREFACE

*I like the feeling of words doing  
as they want to do and as they have to do.*

—Gertrude Stein

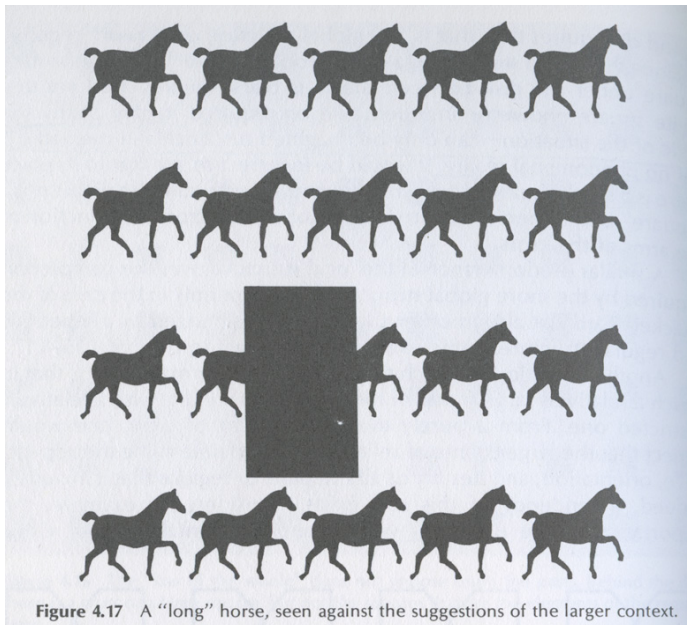
What follows is an encyclopedia of terms which relate to my artistic practice. Each section describes a single concept, an action, a problem, or a desire, that comes out of this practice. The terms are broken into three sections: The Physical, The Metaphysical and The Middle.

There are clear and constant themes, which are present throughout my practice, and as such, run through this text. They consist of ideas around the body, its relation to physical and metaphysical space; the appearance of something uncanny, out of the ordinary within an ordinary setting; the presentation of illusion or magic as both miraculous and failed, and an investigation of language as a flawed means for communication.

What began as a exploration of the language of my studio and the dilemmas in my practice, has become a somewhat indexical envoy into my mind. I have compiled poems, personal anecdotes, quotations, short essays, lists, footnotes, and visual references. The order of the text is so to help draw connections and through-lines, which result in a distinct *feeling* of the piece as a whole (or hole).

Though there are multiple streams continuously running through my work, ultimately, it comes down to a single struggle: The struggle to keep the loop open between what we know and what we search to know, between fantasy and reality, the ground and everything beyond.





**Figure 4.17** A “long” horse, seen against the suggestions of the larger context.

# THE PHYSICAL

*The ball isn't there for the body;  
the exact opposite is true:  
the body is the object of the ball;  
the subject moves around the sun.*

—Michel Serres

Gesto

Multistability/Anamorphosis

Anthropometry

What's Not There Might Be There Might Not Be There 1

Proprioception

The Man In The Chair With The Broken Leg

Lisa Bufano

Crutch

Trope/Trip

Throat/Mother-Tongue/Truth-Telling

The Black Hole 1

Hiding

Pigeon

## GESTO

*Gesto* [hesʃ-to] is the Spanish word for gesture: a sign, a movement, an act. It also refers to the face or expression. It is a reference to the whole; it is the tree that tells you of the woods. The distinction I draw from the Spanish word is in its sound. It whips through the air like a conductors wand. Gasping, it breathes its meaning.

## MULTISTABILITY/ANAMORPHOSIS

*A straightforward gesture can generate a whole host of metaphoric parallels. One has to pose a fiction very carefully hoping that some of these layers can accumulate on the top of the basic proposition.*<sup>1</sup>

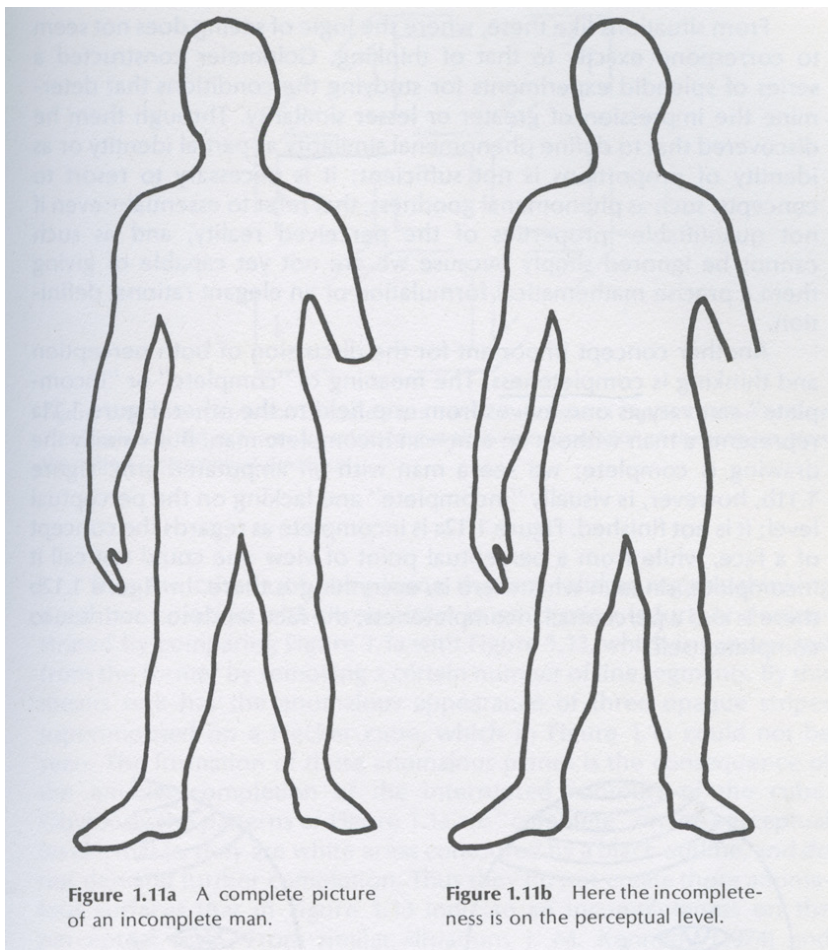
Multistability describes an image that visually shifts between two or more truths. It is the drawing that when focused on one element appears as an old lady and when on another morphs into an old lady. It is the moment when you are painting a wall and have to decide that you have done enough coats of white and that to a naked eye, the wall is white, though now, to you, it is mottled and not white at all. Our minds put it all together. This is similar to *gesto*, it is a type of gesture or gestalt.

Anamorphosis is a visual distortion or a morphing. This transformation might simply inhabit the visual plane, or it may extend into an imaginative one. An example of visual anamorphosis is the projection of an image at a strange angle, rendering it impossible to understand unless one changes his or her physical position to see it. At the moment of recognition, the indistinct image begins to take form, to morph. Merging visual anamorphosis and the imagination brings back the sinister shadow monsters splashed on the wall by the street-light from the window of a childhood bedroom.

Sometimes our mind fills in for us what is not there. Other times it leaves it blank. There are rules governing this. Visually, a lot depends on if the field is open or closed around a given object. As I get older, when I have found monsters on my wall, they have been *much* scarier than when I was a child. Then, my father could come in the room, open the window and throw them out. Now though, I am alone and must convince myself not to believe what I see.

1 Kapoor, with Baume, *Anish Kapoor Past Present and Future*, 38.

Here we see the human body dismembered, armless. Our mind only decides to “complete” one of the forms. What does it mean to have the open-ended-arm?



## ANTHROPOMETRY

We push energy around as we move around in the world. The space that contains us (air) is filled with resonance. This resonance is made up of millions of wavelengths: from sound waves to temperature waves to electrical currents. It is also filled with the energetic resonance coming from any living organism. Some believe *this* is what connects all beings, all humans. How does energy take up space? How does it relate to architecture? To the human scale? To the *feeling* of a space? Some people's field—field of energy, surrounding the body, as it is known, like an aura—is larger than others. Some people's field is softer, some rougher. Usually, without too much extra perception, we can feel these subtle differences.<sup>2</sup>

Anthropometry is a term used in architecture to refer to the measurement of the human individual. Specifically, it measures the volume of space a human individual fills. I like thinking about the volume of air that is displaced when I move into a new space—as if air has the same properties of water. Have you watched the bath fill and lose its water as you sink your body into it and then step out? We do this with air too.

Not only do we take up space, but we only understand our location/environment in relation to our bodies. *We would understand nothing without our*

<sup>2</sup> I want to write a footnote here on Amma. Amma is a transcendent being living today. The word Amma means Mother in Hindi. Amma herself represents the Universal Mother, devotee of Krishna. She spends her life projecting love into the world. She has gained fame for her world-hugging-tours. They are as it sounds: she travels the world and gives hundreds of hugs at each stop. It is her *darshan*—her offering. She will often sit for 9-12 hours only receiving people for hugs. During this darshan a very distinct energy is created from and around her. Her aura is not only visible but palpable on every level of awareness—you feel like it could be cut with a knife. As she sits and receives people the energy builds and builds. She is a holder of space and a conduit of love energy. She also runs a multimillion dollar disaster relief organization based from her Ashram in Southern India. I have received one hug, but have been in her field more than once. One personal anecdote from my experience with Amma (of which there are many) has to do with my drive to her center here in San Ramon. At a certain point on the 580 East I began to feel her aura. I was still miles from my destination but I felt her energy surround the car and draw me near. I felt no anxiety only love and warmth pulling me into her field.

*bodies.*<sup>3</sup> We percieve that the world is built for us. In fact, it is we, who build our evironments for our bodies: stairwells, doorways, windows, the height at which we hang our art, our mirrors, the handles on mugs, the depth of our tables and chairs, everything that goes in our hands. These details create currents by which we can maneuver the world. These currents are also limiting. We have somehow agreed upon what our bodies need, as if it is the same thing for nearly every body. I propose we re-imagine the rules and in so doing, re-imagine our world.

Imagine yourself walking. Imagine yourself walking down a set of stairs and one step isn't as deep as the one before. Your body falters, maybe trips. You weren't expecting that. It is both the body that is surprised, caught off guard and the body that registers the spatial misplacement. What would happen if you decided to put your left leg instead of your usual, right leg, in your pants first in the morning? How might this change the course of your day?

3 Unless one had such a deep connection to the mind/spirit/soul/energy that the body becomes merely a vessel for this life, then it seems, the body would be less important. But, I suppose, one still needs the body as a place to start.



*Had I ever faced a more paradoxical situation? How could I stand, without a leg to stand on? How could I walk, when I lacked legs to walk with? How could I act, when the instrument of action had been reduced to an inert, immobile, lifeless, white thing? -Oliver Sacks*

WHATS NOT THERE MIGHT BE THERE MIGHT NOT BE THERE 1



*Plate 3*

*The argument for the construction of experience: Our experience of the world is actively constructed by the unconscious principles that operate in the brain. -Ray Jackendoff*

## PROPRIOCEPTION

The etymology of this term comes from proprioceptor, which can then be broken into proprius, meaning “own,” or proper plus receptor—that which receives information from the body. My own etymology comes from personal experience, understanding of multiple languages and intuition. Proprio-ception. In Spanish, *propio* means, *mine, my own*, denoting an absolute ownership, specifically owned by the body. The second half of the word, *-ception* is also at the end of *perception*. *Proprioception*, becomes the perception of one’s own self.

Nevertheless, the concept of proprioception is more malleable than it might seem. If on a physical level the term relates to a person’s awareness of his or her body in any given space, what happens when the body performs in a way completely foreign to the mind which “governs” it? A well-known example of this is the Phantom Limb Syndrome, in which the feeling associated with a limb remains even after it is lost (due to injury or amputation). In the case of Oliver Sacks, from the above quote, the reverse happened: he severely injured his left leg and while the muscles and bones were able to heal, the nerves remained severed. His brain no longer understood that he *had* a leg there at all. He had no idea how to use it.

In my personal experience with a chronic ankle injury, proprioception is the kind of thing that comes and goes in its acuity depending on personal circumstance. Like with most things, when the body is working as it should, it goes unnoticed, it becomes fluid or invisible. And conversely, when it isn’t working right the body awareness increases. Over the years, I have been more and more aware of my body—its relation to space, temperature, time, nutrition and energy (my own and of others). I have had to describe in subtle detail the fluctuations of my case as it changes. Over the years, the injury has become somewhat like a catchall, standing in as either the seed or fruit of everything else going on in my life and body.

I wonder, with this intense of a feedback loop from mind to body, what

can I believe? How do things shift beyond my awareness? Interestingly, I recently met a massage therapist who told me he can open the body more deeply by tricking the muscles. He “pulls a fast one” on the mind. He does this by activating opposing muscles simultaneously. The muscle groups begin to get confused—how can they act in opposite ways at the same time? A sense of shock occurs in the body and suddenly something opens up. Without knowing what hit it, the joint is suddenly freer to move than it was before. It is a sneak attack.

## THE MAN IN THE CHAIR WITH A BROKEN LEG<sup>4</sup>

What has two meanings might very well have a hundred.

I came across the phrase in a book about how the mind develops thought patterns. It was used as an example of how a single phrase may mean something different to different people. I felt compelled by the phrase to try to unpack it visually. At first, it seemed to only have two possible interpretations: man with a broken leg or chair with a broken leg. Completing that interpretation I hit a dead-end. For me the phrase contained more. How many ways can a leg *be* broken? Can a leg be broken if there is no chair? How do we define broken? How do we define leg? How do we define man?

Attempt 2. (Opened loop)



<sup>4</sup> Jackendoff, *Patterns In The Mind*

Attempt 1. (Closed loop)



Plate 4



Plate 5

## LISA BUFANO: TABLE-LEGS

In her continuing piece, *Morphology Project*, Lisa Bufano incorporates prosthetic devices on all four of her limbs in a series of contemporary dance performances. She moves equally like an insect, a ballerina and a child whose got caught in a web. Due to a bacterial infection when she was 21, her fingers and legs below the knees were amputated. She continued to dance. As has always been true, the body *is* the object. But for her, there is total integration between body, prostheses and movement. She becomes an old English table at the same time that the table becomes a woman, each attached to the other, rooted in her physicality. In her words, “I am fascinated by illusion and simple animation. I’m drawn to the creepiness of fakes, things that reveal, transform, or have hidden compartments.”<sup>5</sup>

5 <http://www.body-pixel.com/2008/05/24/lisa-bufano-%E2%80%93-the-spiderwoman/>





*Plate 6*



76. The hypnotized swan simply follows the author's gaze, then his finger, by moving its head and neck. Its body is immobile.

*Plate 7*

## CRUTCH

Expand the idea of a prosthetic and you might begin to feel like you are fully bolstered on all sides. Sculptor and professor of art, Linda Fleming once told me that a prosthetic is anything that extends from the body: keyboard, car, glass, fork, couch, pillow, pencil, hat, to name a few. That doesn't mean *these* prosthetics are all helping you live a happier, fuller life. She didn't include our mental prostheses, which come in the form of coping mechanisms, with which our subconscious is fully imprinted before the age of eight.<sup>6</sup>

Traditional talk-therapy can enable one to become highly attuned to his or her behavioral traits but cannot really *change* the triggers. Hypnosis though, has the ability to re-imprint the subconscious. In hypnosis, the logical or conscious part of the mind—the part we exist in 99% of the time—is shut off. The work can be done on the level of the subconscious, thus allowing access to the first impressions on the mind. Freedom is found in the mind.

<sup>6</sup> Jenna Grayson, Hypnotherapist, Los Angeles, CA

*As I have argued, it is not that we do not know whether or not we believe, but rather that we cannot examine our interiors to find “belief” at all. -Simon During*



*Plate 8*

## TROPE/TRIP

“Trope (Greek: tropos) means swerving or

tripping; all language

swerves and trips;

there is never direct meaning.<sup>7</sup>”

This is a definition given by Donna Haraway in her *Companion Species*

*Manifesto*.

It complicates our age-old understanding of

the word meaning to turn.

I see this new definition as turning until dizzy.

It is saying that nothing comes back around exactly the same way twice.

She continues to say,

“My favorite trope for dog tales is

‘metaplasma.’”

Metaplasma means a change in a word, for example by

adding,

omitting,

inverting, or

transposing its letters, syllables, or sounds.

The term is from the Greek *metaplasmos*, meaning remodeling or remold-

ing.

<sup>7</sup> Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 20.

Metaplasms are a generic term for almost any kind of alteration in a word, intentional or unintentional.<sup>8</sup>

A single minute gesture

can completely alter the

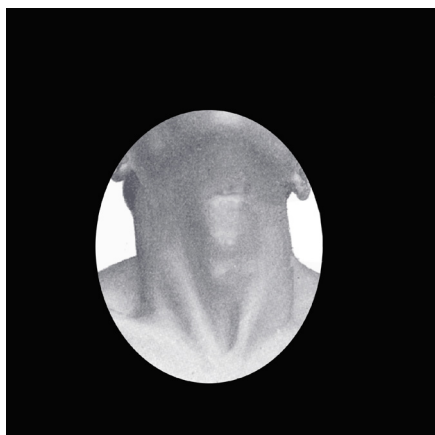
meaning of a word.

And gradually, as words continue to change, like in the game telephone, their meanings no longer resemble what they once were. I wonder if this is true with all story; as it continues to be told its meaning changes, its trope becomes

honed by the

tongue of time.

<sup>8</sup> Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 20.

*Plate 9*



## THROAT/MOTHER-TONGUE/TRUTH-TELLING

Paraphrased from Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*: A teenage son stands in the kitchen with his mother. He holds a camera to her throat. She says, “If I say anything intelligent, you can take a picture of it.”<sup>9</sup>

1. How can he judge what is intelligent?
2. How can he photograph what is said?
3. How can the throat convey any meaning of any kind without sound, without a face to give even an expression away?
4. Who holds more power? He who holds the camera or she who holds the voice?
5. What does a photograph steal? Freeze? Kill?
6. What is the relationship to the mother and the throat? The mother and language?

In a continuing photographic series titled *Face to Face* begun in 2001, artist Ann Hamilton, makes photographs inside her own mouth. She exposes exactly what her mouth *sees* and closes her lips to seal in the light.

Trinh T. Minha relates the nature of language to that of the mother,<sup>10</sup> each birth an offspring who resembles, but isn’t quite the same as she. As language traverses across borders it changes its form to conform to its new environment. Similarly, the child of any mother resembles her mother but only contains so much of her—as she courses through life, she becomes more and more a new, intact, individual identity with reflections of the mother throughout.

Similarly, Martin Heidegger describes language as essentially “the act of speaking” in the present and its western language names: “*glossa, lingua, lengua, language*” indicators that “Language is the tongue.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Trinh T. Minha, *Elsewhere, Within Here*,

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *On The Way To Language*, 96.

Thinking of the mouth and throat and my relationship to my mother: For no discernible reason, my mother eats a Fudgscicle and a navel orange before bed, in her bed, nearly every night. I use my tongue to eat, kiss, speak. (This may be our most important muscle. Necessary for multiple modes of survival.) This is complicated: I hate it when my mother tries to kiss me on the lips.

Most of the time, my words are my own, inclusive of my voice, tone, intonation, experience and truth. Sometimes though, my mother's voice comes flying out of my throat before I can catch it. You must know that feeling: becoming a ventriloquist's puppet. And, for months now, I've been eating oranges before bed, in bed.

In Alice Notley's *Descent of Alette*, Alette comes across the Universal Mother, in her Odyssey-like journey to save the underworld from being under forever. When she encounters the Mother, she is a headless woman, her body culminating at the throat. But this, miraculously, gives her the ability to speak only the truth. She says, the voice comes from inside her body and is pure, implying that it is uncorrupted by the mind. The throat is a site of vulnerability. Yet what is protected inside it, is the voice, is power.<sup>12</sup>

Amma, The Universal Mother living today in Southern India (see footnote 2), is not headless. When she sings though, she often throws her arms up overhead like a bolt of lightning has just tickled the base of her spine and sent its current all the way up and out the top of her head. Seeing this reminded me of Alette—of the traits this Universal-Mother-Truth-Teller-Figure that is piecing herself together as I continue on.

<sup>12</sup> Notley, *Descent of Alette*, 89, 92.

### Throat and Tongue:

1. It is the top of the digestive tract. The body begins breaking down foods in the mouth.
2. It lies in a belly (the mouth) held by the bodies' strongest muscles, namely the masseters, which hold the jaw-bones together. These muscles have enough strength to tear raw flesh from the bone. It is also the holder of stress and aches when you grind your teeth.
3. This is the site of the 5<sup>th</sup> chakra on *Sushumna Nadi*, the central energy channel of the body according to the Vedic system. The upper roof of the mouth, the palate, creates a gateway through which only purified energy can be transferred. Anything that passes this threshold to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chakras, has the potential to be transcendent energy. This 5<sup>th</sup> chakra is known as the center for communication, contained mostly by the throat. This chakra is blocked when one feels they "have no voice," or is not able to speak his or her truth.

*It is only today that I understand my mother tongue, and why my tongue is my logical mother. Sometimes those who have no mother throw themselves headlong into language.*<sup>13</sup>

The phrase *mother tongue* is almost too much to handle.

## THE BLACK HOLE 1

I entered a black hole. And I never want to go there again. This black hole felt like a lobotomy (or so I would imagine).

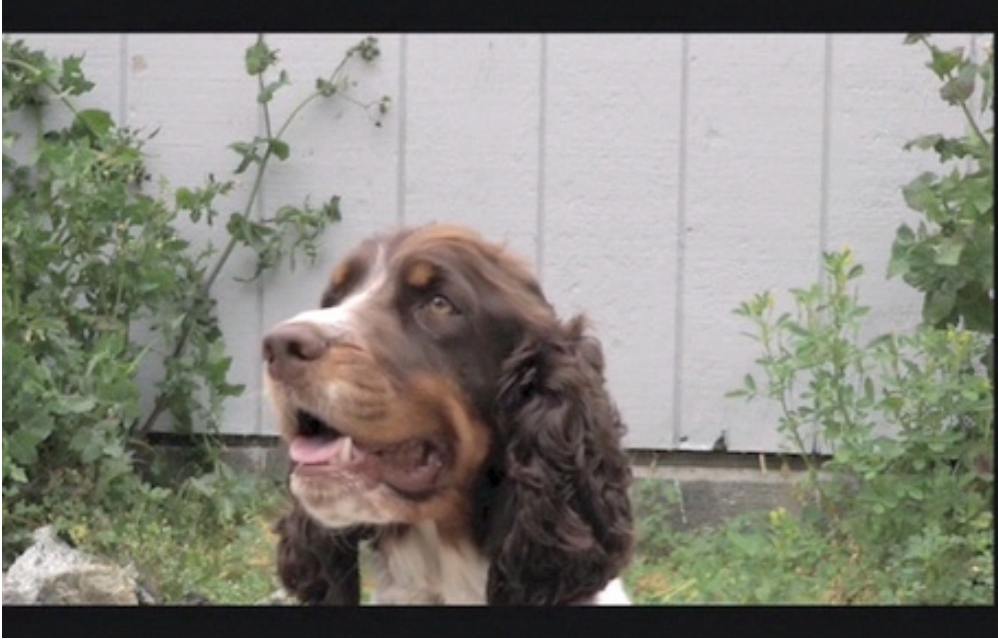
It was a Demoral-induced placelessness. Every two weeks (from September through November of 2011) I receive shots in my ankle.<sup>14</sup> The therapy involves multiple injections at the sight of my greatest pain—from ankle to hip. The needle is long, but that's not of real concern. In order for the patient, me, to endure the pain of the injections, I must be given a strong and immediate painkiller, Demoral. For some, it is an opiate. Not for me. I sink into a rabbit hole of unknown depths and profundity.

My alarm went off and my face was scrunched on the pillow. A dog pushed against me, his rump up against my back. There was drool. The time was lost. I wasn't awake. I weighed a thousand pounds and I was

14 When I was 20 a friend told me it looked like I was limping. He was a nurse, and he was right. What I didn't know, was that eight years later, I am still processing, mentally and physically, the same limp. I had been a runner with a supponated stance (meaning, I walk on the outsides of my feet). Gradually, over a long period of time, I over-stretched and wore down the Peroneal tendon (the tendon that runs all the way from the base of the big toe around the outside of your ankle bone to the outside of the knee) until it tore. I tried multiple therapies before agreeing to have the first suggested surgery. Four years in, I had a "simple" and "common" Peroneal Tendon Repair Surgery. I had the best surgeon in Southern California. I was healthy, active, young, strong, all those great things. It worked! Healing took place. I was to expect 3 months of immobility, then 3 months of physical therapy and about a year for total recovery. I was vigilant about following all that was asked of me. A year out from surgery it became clear I would need to go back again. The same tendon had begun to sublux, or slip out from its groove. I had to manually put it back in place. When this happened the ankle instantly lost all mobility. I had another surgery. This time, the same surgeon—who explained to me, in 23 years she had never had to repeat a surgery—she deepened the groove in the fibula through which the tendon runs and from which it was subluxing. Again, it worked! Again, vigilance. This time, there was even a renewed vigilance and discipline—I called on all kinds of healing: yoga therapy, meditation, energetics, homeopathic, naturopathic, and of course all the western methods too. A year and 6 months later the tendon began to hurt severely once again. Maybe from wearing the wrong shoes, this time, I had developed Peroneal Tenosinivitis—an inflammation of the sheath that encases the tendon, along with micro tears on the tendon itself. At 27, I had finally landed firmly in a new demographic: the chronically injured. Now, I am seeking multiple treatments to heal this version of this injury, including Prolotherapy—the injections I speak of in the above text. My mind is less vigilant, my body more resigned.

sure the bed had grown up around me; I was sunk in its center. Immediately I knew I've been in a black hole. I kept telling myself: I'm on drugs. I kept telling myself: I'm in the black hole.

Nearly 30 hours after the initial injection, its hold really, finally lifted. The word hate comes to mind. And lost and trapped and terror.



## PIGEON

*Man took the (free) wolf and made the (servant) dog and so made civilization possible.<sup>15</sup>*

I “took the (servant) dog and made the” other kind of (bird)-dog.

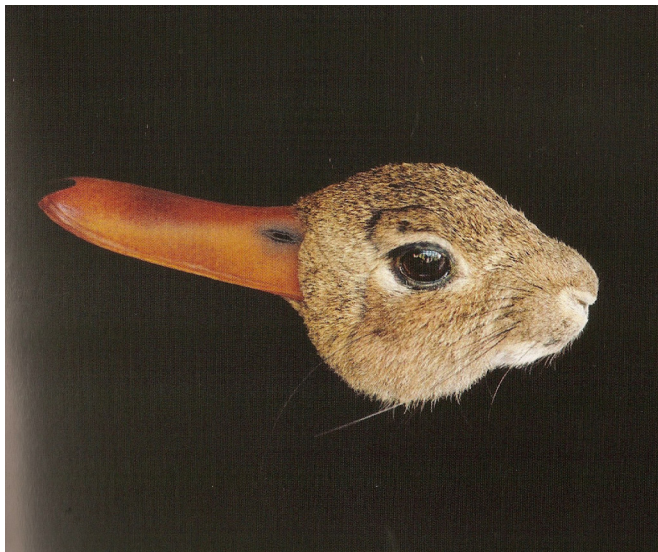
Pigeon is my dog. He is a 3-year-old-rescued-tri-colored- Springer Spaniel. His name refers to a type of bird, a pigeon. Sometimes, he takes off after one and I yell, “PIGEON!!” to call him back. I don’t think he understands the meta-moment upon us. In fact, this is one of his best traits: the absence of intellectual analysis. (He doesn’t care a lick about art, let alone know what it is). Nevertheless, he is named for another animal. I, along with my partner at the time, chose this name. Were we trying to hide his true identity? Or, did we know something about him intuitively that we were yet to find out? Does Pigeon the dog relate more to dogs or birds or people or what? He’ll never tell.

<sup>15</sup> Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 28.



Plate 10

*Animal mimicry and camouflage, used in wartime, to hide soldiers, vehicles, or buildings from enemy attack, offer a great number of examples of how an object can be completely masked, even when it is “out in the open” and, so to speak, “under the nose” of those who are searching for it. —Gaetano Kanizsa*

*Plate 11*



## ***HIDING***

When you hide, you  
lie.

Or you pretend, only  
Pretending is not  
benign  
though

What's worse:  
being found  
or not  
being  
found

# THE METAPHYSICAL

*Of time it may be said: time times.  
Of space it may be said: space spaces.*  
-Martin Heidegger

*Portal*

*Magic/Miracle*

*Camera Magician*

*Be Double Me, Double Me Be*

*Here, Only*

*The Black Hole 2*

*What's There Might Not be There Might Be There 2*

*Companion Species*

*Disappearance/Monstrosity*

*Claustrophobia*

*Problem, Probable Cause, New Thought Pattern*

## PORTAL

*What impels us forward, perversely, is an instinct to travel backward to Eden.*  
-Terry Eagleton



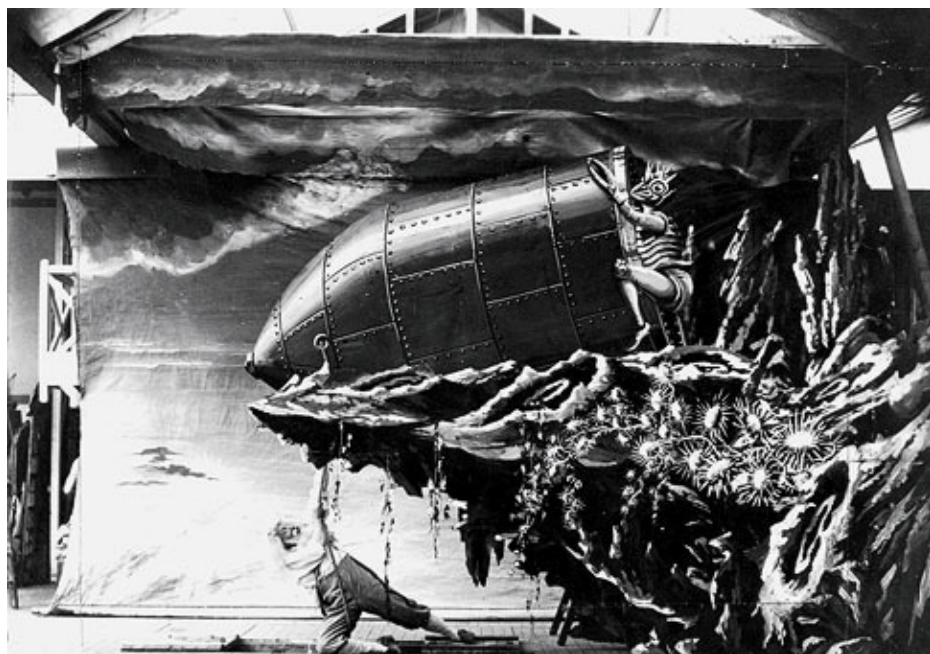


*Plate 12*

## MAGIC/MIRACLE

George Méliès, French innovator in filmic special effects from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, hated the feeling that he might be tricking his audience.<sup>16</sup> He didn't want the illusion to be mean-spirited; he didn't want to take this audience for granted. He used trap doors, slip cuts, stop-motion and tricks of editing to create his illusions. He created magic and as his career went on the illusions became more and more seamless. The crisis of consciousness around tricking the audience is what interests me. How do we create and maintain wonder without deception?

Méliès' job was to build a set. That set was illusion; it would never be real. What it depicted would never be real. And everyone knew.



*Plate 13*

(Yet we act as if we believe).

<sup>16</sup> During Najafi Interview, Cabinet Magazine

Magic exists only in the present. Simon During, author of *Modern Enchantments* writes “[it] was also rooted in the Greek and Roman time concept, which differed from the linear time of later rationality insofar as past, present, and future were seen as interacting with one another outside of contingency or causality.” To be “outside of contingency or causality,” means to be free from the constraints of past or future—nothing was and nothing will be, all is now. That means when experiencing the “wonder” of magic, all disbelief is surrendered, all belief is surrendered, everything is equal on the spectrum of real and unreal.

Secular magic, as defined by During in an interview he did on the subject with Sina Najafi of *Cabinet Magazine*, “is magic that makes no claim to be in contact with the supernatural—it’s not calling on hidden powers to act on the world.<sup>17</sup>” Implying that instead, it uses a power that is not hidden but accessible to anyone who seeks it. Does that mean it is mechanical? Based on physics? Or sleight of hand?

World-renowned magician, Harry Houdini (born Erik Weisz) became famous for using his physical strength and agility in performing magical feats. Besides performing traditional tricks, Houdini paved new avenues for magic to go down. His shows became spectacles of the human capacity for strength and endurance—freeing himself from any set of handcuffs, hanging suspended by his ankles 500 feet above a crowd of tens of thousands of viewers in large cities, constricted in a strait jacket, and fighting his way out; escaping chains and handcuffs while underwater; and mastering large scale and rapid disappearing illusions. This style set a new standard for secular magic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He wriggled and squeezed and fought and tore his way through any and every trap set for him. He drew attention to the body as his most important tool—through dexterity, discipline and focus he achieved his feats.

This is a point of access for me. I know my body and I know that when I

17 During Najafi Interview, *Cabinet Magazine*





Plate 14

release it and receive whatever is coming toward me to constrict me, I can set myself free. In Ju Jitsu there is an underlying philosophy of reception—your strength comes from taking the strength of your opponent, through a reversal of his charging energy. Your body must be loose and open, but strong and swift. If “trapped,” the martial artist will let go of his body before he acts in any other way and will often find himself freed through only this small act. I suspect this is one technique Houdini used to escape handcuffs and other traps.

In yoga as well, there is a concept called *Sukha/Sthira*. *Sukha* represents a soft, supple, receptive energy. And *Sthira* is absolute concentration, firmness and strength. The steel-blade sword is flexible enough to bend without breaking and strong enough to slice through silk cloth. Because of these characteristics, the sword as a metaphor is often used to describe the relationship between *sukha* and *sthira* as well as what takes place in the Ju Jitsu form. It is also absolutely relevant in the case of Houdini, who through his cultivated balance of these opposing energies performed wild escapes (and incidentally swallowed swords!)





Plate 15

Houdini, like Méliès, was focused on the truth in magic. He existed in a world encircled with supernatural spirits. After the death of his mother, with whom he was very close, he felt compelled to conjure her spirit.<sup>18</sup> He encountered hoax after hoax and made it his mission to expose these false acts. Through lecture and literature, he exposed the truth behind such tricks as spirit slate writing, spirit hands and even ghosts. Yet somehow we get the sense, through texts on Houdini, that he was still a believer. Annually on the day of his death, October 31, a séance is performed to bring his spirit back. It was written in his will, that for at least one decade, his wife Bess, or whomever followed him, try to conjure his spirit through séance.

Isn't this just it? The deeper inside the world of magic, the more *and* less one believes. It is like religion vs. science—they are not mutually exclusive. We want to believe. We want to connect.

18 *Houdini Art and Magic*, Jewish Museum Exhibit

When magic happens, secular or not, it creates a moment of revelation, astonishment and awe. One of the first questions is always how is it done!? The act seems to connote some kind of miracle—the question expanded is how can man do that? There must be something more. The boundary within the occult between what is secular and supernatural is blurry. Spiritual “magic” must not be called magic at all, but rather miracle.

*Plate 16*



*Plate 17*

## CAMERA MAGICIAN A LA WEEGEE<sup>19</sup>

1. Place a mirror perpendicular to the lens, halfway down the glass. Make a lake in the frame.
2. Place a prism in front of the lens. Create multiple of the subject in frame.
3. Shoot a video upside-down. Reverse the action.
4. Place figures in different places along a single perspectival plane. Create giants and miniatures.

<sup>19</sup> Weegee, *The Camera Magician* video

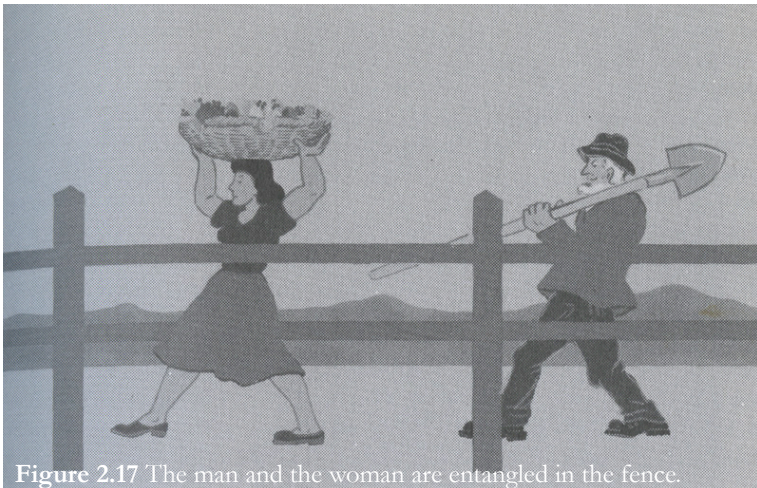


Figure 2.17 The man and the woman are entangled in the fence.

*Plate 18*





*Plate 19*



*Plate 20*

What Does Not Resemble Me  
Looks Exactly Like Me  
What Looks Exactly Like Me  
Does Not Resemble Me  
What Does Not Resemble Me  
Looks Exactly Like Me





*Plate 21*



*Plate 22*

## **BE-DOUBLE-ME DOUBLE-ME-BE**

What we know to be doubled, to be doubled: one fertilized egg splitting to become two identical twins, mirror reflections as same-thing-twice (or more than twice, as is the case in a “hall of mirrors”), reflections on water, genes passed along from parents to offspring, objects made in a factory (99% identical every time, always room for error), and recurring dreams.

What we don’t know to be doubled, and is doubled: two eggs fertilized at the same time to become two fraternal twins (still called twins, still sharing a womb, not looking alike, or being alike in any discernible way); mirror reflections as same-thing-twice but distorted, as in a wobbly or concave or convex circus-mirror; genes passed along to offspring appear/occur differently in nearly every instance (dependent on time, location, upbringing, culture, diet, lifestyle, chance); reflections on water; each object in each factory is touched by human hands (each knot in each shoe-lace tied onto each Barbie doll sneaker in the Indian factory is tied slightly differently); and recurring dreams giving way to lucid dreams giving way to personal power and presence.

## Important Doublings:

Groucho Marx walking through the mirror, *becoming* his mirror self in  
*Duck Soup*

My twin brother, as my double (of sorts), Jacob Caplan Levine  
Cora Emily Levine

Dostoyevsky, *Double*

“Only in it, is art’s mimetic character preserved, and its truth is the critique that, by its sheer existence, it levels at a rationality that has become absolute.’...Art’s truth depends on the tricks by which it raises dead enchantments. These tricks are open secrets which allow us to recognize the nullity of modern culture, and to come to terms with the fact that our artistic literary heritage, for all its power and charm, is not only mimetic and no only (in the main) fictive, but illusory. Because modernism’s stripped-down magic finally conjures up nothingness, it permits the exposure for those other, newer magics of an economically divided society.”<sup>20</sup>

Mimicry in general

Shadows

Profiles

Reflections

Above earth/Below earth (Incan Cross)

Prisms/kaleidoscope

Doubling as language translation: sound dubbing, one language interpreted through any other language, stenography, the sign-translator on stage right at a performance of opera, etc.

<sup>20</sup> During *Modern Enchantments*, 65.

Doubling as visual translation: illuminating, then filling the void; Rachel Whiteread's sculpture.

Crutches making four legs

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial

Palindromes: "Do geese see god?," "Ma is as selfless as I am," "Dammit, I'm mad!"<sup>21</sup>

Homonyms: *Fluke* = "-A fish, and a flatworm.  
 -The end parts of an anchor.  
 -The fins on a whale's tail.  
 -A stroke of luck."<sup>22</sup>

Miscomprehensions: *grey today* --> *great day*

The therapist repeating back to you what you've just said--only now you switch roles, from the speaker to the listener and you *bear* yourself.

Chirality: "The term *chiral* in general is used to describe an object that is not superposable on its mirror image."<sup>23</sup> What does it mean to be double but not be the same? If a reflection is always a reverse image of what's in front of it, what does it mean to see the same side the same way, twice? Listen to one's voice over again on a recording.

Representational art

Seven basic plots:<sup>24</sup> [wo]man vs. nature  
 [wo]man vs. [wo]man  
 [wo]man vs. the environment  
 [wo]man vs. machines/technology

21 Wikipedia, Palindrome

22 Wikipedia, Homonym

23 Wikipedia, Chirality

24 <http://www.ipl.org/div/farq/plotFARQ.html>

[wo]man vs. the supernatural

[wo]man vs. self

[wo]man vs. god/religion



*Plate 23*

**THE BLACK HOLE 2**

The internal gaze.

The other side of relaxation.

A sense of self.

The lack of place.

The lack of need.

The lack of self.

Stillness.

The land of paradox.

Agency and action without thought.

All knowing and all unknowing.

Completely full, utterly without.

Nowhere, everywhere.

## **HERE, ONLY**

In India, there is a conjunctive phrase used in spoken English. (Most likely this results from the evolution of British English in a post-colonial world). Nearly every time you hear the word “here,” it is followed by the word, “only.” The same goes for the word, “there,” as in “there, only.” I always feel a sense of loss when hearing these phrases—like the phrase is asking you not to assume too much or to take for granted that it could extend beyond only.

The phrase demarcates a boundary. I feel it internally yet it extends beyond my body, beyond even my physical place. It extends all the way to nation boundaries, and maybe further. It implies a hemming-in from all sides and an aversion to the acknowledgment of what might lie beyond. The constriction creates the lure of the other-side. Crossing it is escaping across the boarder into lawless territory. This country, India, claims 14 national languages, yet it is held “here only” by one.

Another phrase used repeatedly in India is “Native Place.” In asking where you are from, one might say, “What’s your native place?” For me, this is a question even greater than one of origin. I might say, Russia or Poland because that’s from where my family emigrated. But as an American, never fully rooted by a place, I don’t. I’ve moved 9 times in 10 years. I say instead: I live in San Francisco.

**WHATS NOT THERE MIGHT BE THERE MIGHT NOT BE THERE 2***Plate 24*



**COMPANION SPECIES<sup>25</sup>**

It's the story I made up as a child about the stick I picked up in the street. This stick, my first invented prosthetic, was to become my pet dog. It made the perfect beat as it skipped along the street while I walked. The stick was long enough that one end was the dog's leash and the other its body and feet. We walked, talked, sang. Sometimes we made it all the way to Sunny-Day-Park together, sometimes not. I would throw it far under the brush when the game was over so no one would know it was really a dog—it would have to camouflage as a stick until I could come out and play again.

25 Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 1.

## DISAPPEARANCE/MONSTROSITY

*The leg had vanished, taking its “place” with it.*<sup>26</sup>

Have you ever walked into a space and known it had been spoiled? Sometimes, something happens and everything changes. Sometimes this manifests in the energy of a physical space, and the body is what interprets this change.

Julia Kristeva writes of the abject: “Instead of sounding himself as to his ‘being,’ he does so concerning his place: ‘Where am I?’ instead of ‘Who am I?’ For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never one, nor homogeneous, nor totalizable, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic.”<sup>27</sup>

TV shows try to create this feeling in a place all the time: on *Law and Order* when the police first approach a murder site, the cast is in high alert, attuned to the subtleties of the newly corrupted environment. Yet, as TV isn’t real, this is pretty easy, pretty compelling to watch. In real life, or in personal experience, it may be nearly impossible, physically impossible, to re-enter a site where something traumatic has occurred—and it may be palpable to others outside of the experience as well.

This is really a question for Death: what else does You take when You takes the body? What is disappearance?

When I was about eight, I was in a pool with a boy who nearly drowned. He was drowning, but he survived. The boy, a teenager, tried to swim towards me in a panic and I froze. I didn’t know him. I didn’t know what was going on: parents were unaware. When I didn’t save him his movements became less jerky, his body hung on the top of the water for extended moments, face down, until he jumped and jerked again and hung again, motionless, until finally his parents did notice.

<sup>26</sup> Sacks, *A Leg To Stand On*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*, 235.

And then he was saved:

I remember him lying, like a slick plank on the edge of the pool and his body jumping as breath re-entered it. He was saved, though now, Death was on him and it was in the water too. I had felt It come to life in the black-bottomed pool, pulling him into Its deep vortex. The father's glasses fell off in the pool after he jumped in. My father, I remember, tried to get one of his shivering, wet children to go back in the water after the glasses. We refused. The pool had changed, irrevocably.

When does fear come? What power does it have? What had changed?

As I've gotten older, I've experienced other encounters with these amorphous shape-shifting energies. Once, as a teenager, I was sharing a studio with a ceramic artist and an ex-studio mate had a psychotic break in the space when we were gone. When we arrived the next morning, the space had been altered in a specific, precise and horrific manner and everything felt different (water poured into the base of every pot on the shelf, Dorito chips creating a path to a knife point-down in the center of the table top and strange, threatening words written in various places). Yet, we instantly referred to the experience as an it-happened and not a he-did-it. It took about a week, but eventually, we felt we had cleared the space of this trauma and could work there once more.

Our bodies felt the shift. What does it mean when the body is the receptor of the energy within a space? It is the vessel for experience, emotion and trauma. It becomes clear then how trauma is an associative, reflexive, repetitive experience.

*Our unconscious is still as unreceptive as ever to the idea of our own mortality.*

-Sigmund Freud

## CLAUSTROPHOBIA

*Trauma is the key word, the abstract, specialized, but perfectly empowering and generalizing word, the word that captures a whole lot of seemingly unlikely events.*<sup>28</sup>

My greatest fear has become the fear of immobility, spatial, physical and emotional immobility. According to Louise Hay, a self-proclaimed channel for spiritual energies and healer, ankle injuries manifest themselves as representation of guilt and inflexibility. My ankle injury, my albatross, keeps me in a tight grasp and seems to never let me free.

I have become claustrophobic. Once, tearing my head through the tight enclosure of a small tent, in the pre-dawn morning to gasp for breath. More than once, counting fish on the painted ceiling above the MRI machine I have lay in multiple times. In a crowd, panic simmers and roils up from my feet to the top of my head. I need to know there is a way out.

Hay prescribes affirmation as a way to create healing. I spoke the affirmation for ankles daily with the intention of warding off this feeling of inaccessibility to the world: "I deserve to rejoice in life, I deserve to receive all the pleasure life has to offer". I carried it with me too, so it could repel all on its own, as a barrier between me and the black hole I knew I could enter and would keep me from expansion.

28 Lury, referring to Hacking (1994, 45) *Prosthetic Culture* 12.

PROBLEM *	PROBABLE CAUSE	NEW THOUGHT PATTERN
Nail-biting, hair-twisting, lip-picking	Nervous, anxious, compulsion to pick.	<i>Slow down. I am moving at just the right speed. Nothing faster, nothing slower.</i>
“Car Sickness	Fear. Bondage. Feeling of being trapped.	<i>I move with ease through time and space. Only love surrounds me.”</i>
Inability to make a decision.	Fear of making a mistake.	<i>The choice I make is the right choice. This is the only life, there is no other choice.</i>
“Foot Problems	Fear of the future and of not stepping forward in life.	<i>I move forward in life with joy and with ease”</i>
Comparing of self to others.	Culture of self-identifications based on external achievements. Also, television, social media.	<i>I am connected to the Self and the universal love that exists between all beings.</i>
Over-achieving.	Fear of death.	<i>Nowhere to go, nothing to do. I am here.</i>
Chocolate dependent.	Over extended, energy-depleting lifestyle.	<i>It's only chocolate. I am grateful I am only addicted to chocolate.</i>
“Tongue	Represents the ability to taste the	<i>I rejoice in all of my life's bountiful giving-</i>

pleaseures of life with joy.  
ness”

Dreams about trauma to those  
most loved in one’s life.

Lack of control. Grief.

*Time is a continuum. I am in my right  
time. Everyone around me is their right  
time too.*

“Throat

Avenue of expression. Channel of  
creativity.

*I open my heart and sing the joys of love”*

Claustrophobia, feeling con-  
strained, stuck, trapped.

Fear of immobility.

*I am free. I am spacious. I am bound by  
nothing.*

Shut-down, unable to speak, con-  
stricted throat and chest.

*What I say has worth, has truth. I  
deserve to be heard.*

\*Form taken from Louise Hay’s *Heal Your  
Body*. Lines in quotations are taken from  
her book.

# THE MIDDLE

*At what point does one say of a man that he has become unreal?*

—Ann Carson



*"The Grass Grows From The Middle"—Deleuze*

*Equal Weight*

*Indian 5 Minutes*

*Levitation Chair*

*Centaur Vs. Mule*

*Rail*

*The Black Hole 3*

*The Trouble With Building a Hole in The Floor*

*Duchamp*

*The Set/Foley*

*"Willing Suspension of Disbelief"*

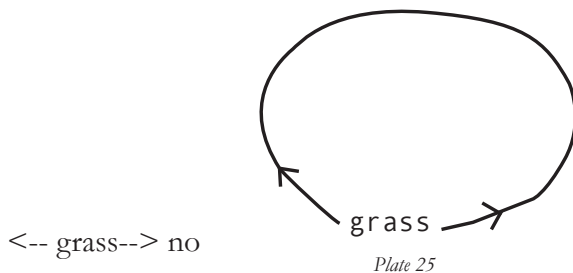
*A Horse of Many Colors: Problems and Logic*

*What's There Might Not Be There Might Be There 3*

*Fantasy*

*Language and Being*

**"THE GRASS GROWS FROM THE MIDDLE."—DELEUZE**



The idea here is a cycle. Growth comes from the center outward. Therefore, there exists a source from which a thing is more or less always true (see *Mother Tongue*). The growth continues to radiate outwards from the center towards opposite poles. Eventually, as all things do, those poles bend and the growth folds back on itself. Leaving us back where we started.

My mind grows from the middle. I imagine the dendrites in the cells in my brain growing outward like the branches on a tree, spine-y, multi-directional, but all attached at the same root. Thoughts are not linear, but sporadic and incongruous. I circle back to where I began, often—in that everything in the essay is essentially all about the same thing—but first I must take big leaps through time and space and all the middle-land too.

## INDIAN 5 MINUTES

“Time is not linear here, it is cyclical,” my friend Srinivas told me one day on a drive to the countryside outside of Bangalore, India. He said it nearly nostalgically. I think it came up after I reported yet another instance of my sense of time being turned upside-down: I ordered food for a large group and the man at the restaurant told me 30 minutes at first. Fine. I left and came back 30 minutes later. Then he flashed all ten fingers at me like blinking lights and said repeatedly, “ten minutes, ten minutes.” Fine. I left, came back. Again, “ten minutes ten minutes.” Another hour went by this way, blinking hands. They cooked all the food from scratch and it was delicious though I was over an hour late.

The Indian 5-Minutes is a concept understood by all Indians and Westerners who have been in India long enough. It is not the same as the relaxed Italian or Spanish 5 minutes. It is a sense that the work is happening in a very intense manner but don’t have any expectations about any supposed outcome. It is the extra 5 minutes (couple hours) the boss takes to go to the temple everyday before, during and after work. It is when the electrician comes two days after your appointment as if it is perfectly normal. It feels kind of like the world spinning and you cannot get a foothold. But once your life also exists in this cyclical time-spinning order, nothing else feels possible. It makes sense to haggle with the same auto-rickshaw driver everyday over the same 50 rupees (\$1). It begins to make sense, strangely, that the freeways and roads and infrastructure will never be completed, but always remain in a middle-place between torn up and renovated. It begins to make sense that the construction workers build their homes on the site of their work temporarily, moving their whole families to the newly pitched blue-tarp-walled, corrugated-steel-roofed shed. In the city, everything is churning and time is not its only reflection or ordering mechanism.

Being in the countryside with Srinivas felt like a time warp. We had space and air to breathe, a long meal, wine, noiselessness. On the drive back, Srinivas’s servants all rode back with us: husband, wife, child, and baby. They

insisted in sitting in the furthest back row of seats of the SUV despite our urgings for them to be more comfortable. The wife became ill on the ride to the city, throwing up in her seat as well as out the window. She wasn't accustomed to being in the car, on the country roads, or on any long drive for that matter. She was humiliated and didn't want us to stop for her. Yet for her, time was now speeding up and spinning too fast. Her body couldn't reconcile with India's middle-ness, between fast and slow, growing and decaying, country and city.

## LEVITATION CHAIR

Conundrum: there is a chair used to enable levitation (fake levitation). It is the apparatus behind the trick. If only, like a magic carpet (because that's real), you could sit in a "levitation chair" and float above the earth. Unfortunately, with what we have here, the so-called levitator is deeply and firmly rooted in the earth. But the illusion is seamless. In India, you can find yogi's who levitate.



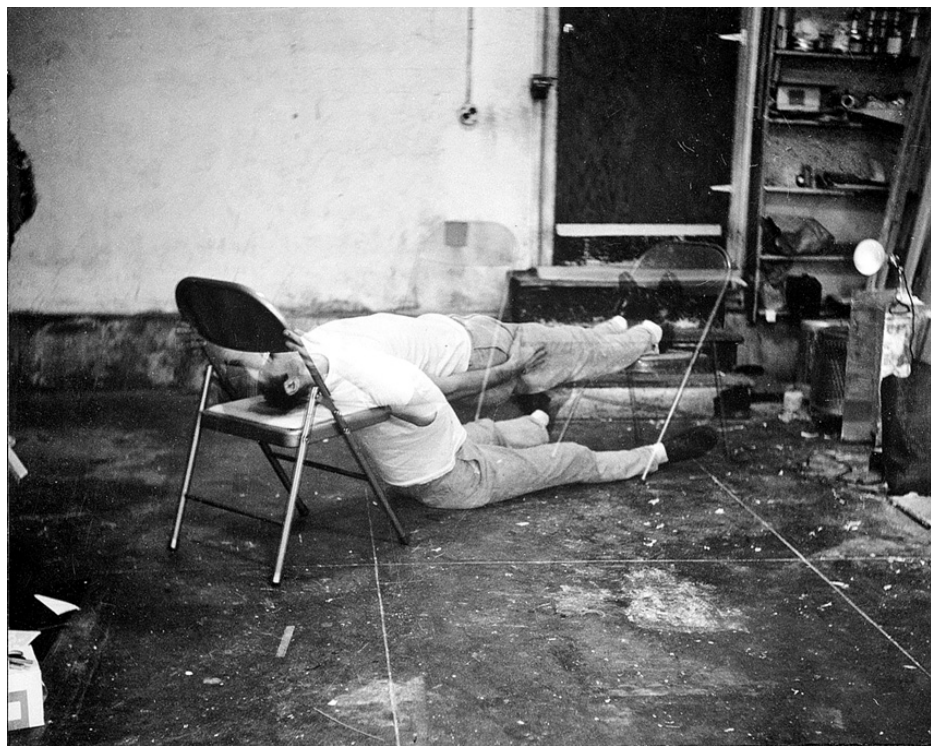
*Plate 26*

Here's how:



*Plate 27*

Bruce Nauman also failed to levitate:



*Plate 28*

*Plate 29*





*Plate 30*



## CENTAUR VS. MULE

Some things exist fully in multiple realms, namely, those of fantasy and reality. What is the difference between a centaur and a mule? A centaur is a mythical hybrid of two creatures while a mule is a new creature unto itself, brought on by the breeding of unlike species. The mule not only crystallizes nature's ability to adapt,<sup>29</sup> but also to completely morph. There is a fantasy-like quality to this. It doesn't seem like it could be real: a third species unlike the two from whence it came. Interestingly, mules are infertile. So, although they are a third species from two unlike ones, they cannot propagate on their own—keeping them locked in the realm of The Middle.

*SawHorseFly* is the title of an artwork I made in the summer of 2011 in Bangalore, India. It is also something I invented. It is a sawhorse strung between two buildings, appearing to fly. It is a centaur by name and a mule by image: the name a hybrid of words coming from outlying sources, and the object a new thing entirely, disrupted by scale, place, name and time. Terry Eagleton defines the aesthetic goal as, “to sensualize spirit with no loss of its transcendence....”<sup>30</sup> Can something be given form without giving up its significance?

29 “So the legless don't need to be taught to use crutches: it comes ‘unthinkingly’ and ‘naturally,’ as if the person had been practicing it, in secret, all his life. The organism, the nervous system, has an immense repertoire of ‘trick movements’ and ‘back-ups’ of every kind—completely automatic strategies, which are held ‘in reserve.’ We would have no idea of the resources which exist in potential, if we did not see them called forth as needed.” Sacks, *A Leg To Stand On*, 10.

30 Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, 243.

## **THE BLACK HOLE 3**

1. Wile E Coyote carefully places a black dot under an anvil which he is holding on a pulley so that when the Road Runner decides to stand just on the black dot (he never stopped to consider why the Road Runner might want to stand on the dot, there is no food or any lure nearby), he can release the pulley and the anvil will come tumbling down on Road Runner's head, squashing him once and for all! As well all know this is not what happens. Instead, Road Runner runs to the dot, comes to a screeching halt, and picks it up in his beak (on the ground the dot appears seamless, more like a hole—but that wouldn't make much sense, why would Wile E place a hole under a falling anvil? So I am giving him the benefit of the doubt, acknowledging its dot-ness). Road Runner turns around and races away at top speed with the dot slack between his bills. Wile E releases the pulley and begins his chase. He stops first where the dot had been only for the anvil to fall on his head. He recovers and keeps chasing. Road Runner places the dot in the middle of the road, which is now a version of the Golden Gate Bridge, only between two enormous red cliffs, not San Francisco and Marin. And we all know what happens next: Wile E falls in the hole!!! It became a hole!! He plummets to earth, the camera panning away as he gets smaller and smaller on the long long fall.<sup>31</sup>

2. Slap-a-hole-on-the-wall-escape-route.

3. Anish Kapoor has a black hole too. His is equally puzzling and form-shifting. Standing in front of a Kapoor Black Hole you feel like it could swallow you—its black is dense and dark, never ending. There is a softness to its texture as well. The angle at which it cuts the wall further creates a sense of never-ending space.

31 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFNx7YFwFfI>, Clip where Coyote sets up a black hole for Road Runner to fall into.

4.



Plate 32

## THE TROUBLE WITH BUILDING A HOLE IN THE FLOOR

What follows are photographs documenting my attempt to build a hole for the floor:



Plate 33

The completed hole:



*Plate 34*



*Plate 35*



The trouble with building a hole in the floor is that one cannot construct negatively. Say it again: build a hole. It doesn't really work. Either you have to subtract something or add to something. If you add to something, you are not succeeding in making a hole. A hole is a lack. When I constructed my "hole," first I cut a real hole, then I filled it back up with a black hole. The black hole was to stand in as an emptiness, to mimic an endless tunnel or portal to the unknown. I failed in falling through.

In *Sweet Violence*, his book on the nature of tragedy, Terry Eagleton writes, "...life is for striving, not striving for life...it all depends on whether you call it infinite striving or infinite nothingness."<sup>32</sup> This statement opens up the possibility for transmission of the unknown. And through that transmission, nothingness begins to take form. I want to know: does the thing taking form retain its nature as nothing, once it assumes that form?

32 Eagleton *Sweet Violence*, 249.

## DUCHAMP/ETANT DONNÉS

Duchamp is my grandfather—he is the Grandfather of the artistic lineage in which I place myself. Art was in every aspect of his selfhood, his existence. Famously, in his house, he built a doorway with one door that swung between 3 rooms, so if you used the door, you were always closing the room behind you to open the one in front. This was a playful way for him to explore and redefine the space in which he lived. Makes me question: what is a threshold? What are you closing as you open another door?



Plate 36

His final work, *Etant Donnés* was revealed to the art world 25 years after he retired to pursue a career in chess. Peering through a door keyhole one sees a woman reclining on her back. She is nude, her legs are spread and her head is obscured. Between her legs is a strange fold, a ripple—in place of a lifelike rendering of female genitalia—reminiscent of a tear. She lies on a pile of dried leaves and sticks and holds a lit candle in an outstretched left hand. Behind her is a landscape containing illuminated blue, green, and purple trees and a waterfall. He worked secretly on the piece for nearly 20 years. What is remarkable about viewing the piece, I have heard, is that if you let your eye wander the perimeter of the tableau you will see the edge of the stage, the armatures, the “how” it was made. He must have done this intentionally—with 20 years in the making. What does it mean to reveal the underbelly of the fantasy, the falsehood behind the voyeur’s gaze? Is this the illusion revealed? Why does he give it to the viewer?

*Hints hint in many ways.*

*A hint can give its hint so simply*

*and at the same time so fully*

*that we release ourselves*

*in its direction*

*without equivocation.*

-Martin Heidegger

## THE SET/FOLEY



*Plate 37*

And lightning by metal sheet.

## RAIL

The body was not meant to travel at the speed of rail. The soul could shake out. The skin could tear off. The threshold between *here\** and *there\*\** could be crossed.

\*the natural

\*\*the supernatural



Plate 38

## WILLING SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

*Officially, the suspension of disbelief enables us to engage with a more richly imaginative world than the one in which we live under rational truth. Suspension of disbelief seems to make it possible both to believe and not believe in magic.<sup>33</sup>*

Our dreams might be the closest we get to living in a land of disbelief, a land of magic. Everything is possible and nothing is real. I have had multiple dreams of losing my dog in the last month. Each is different. So far, I don't think he has fully died, but has only been in danger. Once, a man broke his leg, and Pigeon, my dog, jumped and jumped to protect me from that same man, falling on himself each time he leapt. He smiled this whole time. I on the other hand, approached the man who had attacked Pigeon and tried to hit and kick him. As my limbs set out in the space between my body and the attacker's, something slowed me down. By the time my fist or foot reached the man, it was moving so slowly it had no force behind it. In another, I saw Pigeon fall far down onto a grassy piece of earth. I looked over an edge about 40 feet above his plummeted body. In the most recent one, Pigeon jumped into a swimming pool at a party (normal behavior). Elk surrounded the pool; they were on the perimeter and inside the water. Pigeon attacked the large creatures in the pool. But they attacked back. One of them bit him on the neck and I saw him plunge to the bottom of the pool. I jumped in after and scooped him out. I pumped his chest on the side of the pool. Water came from his mouth. I asked him what had happened and HE SPOKE. He said, "Water got in my lungs and I couldn't breathe."

I woke numerous times in these dreams—as I do—and fell back into them. My conscious mind peers curiously into the universe of my subconscious. During dream-time, I am not wondering why certain things are occurring; I am but witness to them. My conscious is in the slippery place of neither here nor there—somewhere I know I am nearly awake and out of this far off land.

<sup>33</sup> During, *Enchantments*, 50.



Dreaming is not magic. In dreams, the impossible is possible and belief is taken for granted, while immersed. Once the mind emerges from its slumber though, a trap door is shut once again and the dream existed only in a far off world.



Plate 39

## A DOG

*A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a donkey. —Gertrude Stein*

## THE HORSE OF MANY COLORS: PROBLEMS AND LOGIC

In the film, *The Wizard of Oz*, the Horse walks out of the scene, and then reappears again, as himself, only a different color; thus, his namesake.

1. The first problem: how?

Answer: They used multiple white horses for this shoot and dyed the hair of each one with a different color with food coloring.

What is the white horse?

romance elegance grace strength form beauty radiance love fantasy  
(who in their right mind would dye this horse?)

Does white radiate all color?

Theoretically, black absorbs and white reflects all color. White is the color of many colors. It is also the color of absence. (It is: a whiteout, the color of a storm, a flash of light).

2. One could argue that a horse that is blue, as in *Oz*, is no longer a horse, as horses are not ever blue. If it is no longer a real horse, then it cannot be a real horse that changes colors, unless we are living in a fantasy.

*Oz* is a fantasy,  
the horse is real.

(When it comes to fantasy, I tend to feel tethered to reality, like a hot-air balloon filling with hot air just before take off. It pushes against the sky and pulls mightily on the rope attached to the peg sunk deep into the earth. A certain volume of air is displaced around the balloon but the balloon is always (even after take-off) a barrier, however thin, between whatever is out there and what is not. That volume of air, displaced, takes on new forms as the balloon fills and blows about and bangs on the sky; it's

something I'll never be able to touch or even see).

Scenario: A human and a dog dress up as horses . They are owner and pet, female human owner, male dog pet. The dog is significantly shorter than the human (being that he is on four legs and average medium-dog-size, this is logical). The human, woman, is also of average size. The horse costumes are made of one-sided, white painted, plywood cutouts of horses, sized proportionately to whichever creature will wear it. They live in a beautiful wooded environment, free of any other modern civilization: "nature." They have two sets of actions. First, the big horse and little horse stand in the wooded area facing one another. At times, a human-woman hand reaches for the dog mouth (from behind the horse costumes) to give him a treat for standing still and looking at her. They also run across a field of tall grasses, the small horse trails behind the bigger one.

Question: Is a horse made out of plywood and strapped to a human or a dog as much a horse as a real horse dyed blue? What makes a horse?

3. A plywood horse takes on the personality of the creature donning the costume, through sound and movement. Also though, the creature donning the costume takes on the personality of the plywood horse, through form.

The scale creates a mama and baby horse. This is true even if neither is really true.

4. If you wear a costume, how much of yourself slips into it, how much slips out?

The person and the dog are not quite concealed by the horses: human legs emerge from below the horse's belly, a dog's neck and face turn behind the horse's head.

There is a line in magic between wonderment and deception.

The owner of the dog, the woman, has an elder brother. When they were

children, the brother liked to make magic. He used his wit and charm to lure his sister in. He stole things, made them “disappear”; he knew things about her that only her journal knew, and he revealed her private thoughts as messages to strangers. He also shuffled cards and had a black wand with white tips. He also had a cape. He seemed to like that in magic, one person knew the how of the trick, while the other did not. If you know this, then you know everything. That was the brother’s role.

The woman now, years later with her dog, finds a renewed interest in magic. It is in the unraveling of the how all the while experiencing and opening up to the wonder. She hates being tricked and hates the feeling that someone else might be made to feel tricked. It is like feeling stolen. It is like feeling watched or followed or lied to and it doesn’t have anything to do with magic. She thinks.

In logic, almost any truth can be deduced from almost any start; there is a path. The path is marked openly for all to see. And you really can’t skip steps. If you collapse the path once you’ve made it to your final truth, and A leads to B, it may seem a mysterious result.

5. A horse that is multiple species is the same as a horse that is multiple colors, but maybe, actually, much more.

White is the color of purity. And ghosts. Also, plywood is completely flat; white makes it even flatter. What are flat white horses doing in a rich lush landscape? It is a romantic joke.

A horse of multiple species might be a horse that is also a person and also a dog. You have to believe, one might say. But it’s not the case. Belief, as a concept in magic, is actually the wrong pursuit. Belief will de-rail you. Belief is too big too tackle. Who cares about belief? It is about what is. This is a discussion of a horse that is a woman and a horse that is a dog, and a woman who is a woman, a dog who is a dog, and a couple-a horses who are a couple-a horses. Those things are given. Those things are known.







Plate 40

*The  
aphorist  
Georg Li-  
chtemberg  
(1742-  
1799)*

*once wrote:*

*"I said to  
myself: I  
cannot  
possibly  
believe  
that, and  
as I was  
saying it  
I noticed  
that I have  
already  
believed it  
a second  
time."*

*This neatly  
observes  
belief to be  
a phe-  
nomenon,  
though  
one so  
fleeting as  
to change  
its value  
even while  
it is being  
declared.<sup>34</sup>*

34 During,  
*Enchant-  
ments*, 48.





## EQUAL WEIGHT

In Freud's *The Uncanny*, he talks about the eventual merging of the homely (*das heimlich*) and the unhomely, or the uncanny (*das unheimlich*). The blurring of the boundaries occurs because "this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed."<sup>35</sup>

Like "the grass grow[ing] from the middle," these experiences reach out in different directions but eventually come to rest in the same ground. Is all experience circular? How much do we absorb as children? Do all experiences carry the same weight? Is there a way to know--either as the child or the adult--what will imprint?

As a child, I was obsessed with memory. I felt time slipping away. I remember realizing, all at once, that as I got older time would move faster. This terrified me. I compared my experience to those younger and older than me, knowing we were all on different temporal continuums. I have journaled since the age of 6. I wanted simply to record time passing. I had a sense of myself watching myself get older. I wanted to remember. I don't know why and I don't know for whom.

Now, in the fast clip of my late twenties, I am looking forward and back, forward and back. (As a child I thought only of back. Maybe as I age I will look more forward. Or maybe I will look more presently.) And despite all the meticulous recordings, I wasn't able to predict which experiences imprinted on me or why. But certain moments, movements, sayings, smells, have of course changed everything. The stacking of experience reminds me of the mud castles we used to make from the wet sand on the beach--you stack and stack handfuls of wet mud until they begin to blur into one another, making one wet, slippery, amorphous form--becoming ultimately impossible to distinguish what was the base and what the turret.

This feeling of time as a looping continuum relates to Freud's definition

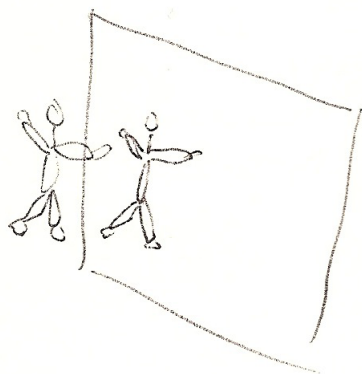
<sup>35</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, 134, 148.

the uncanny: the continuum creates a flatness and equality of experience. This, to me, is frightening. Freud writes that “the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.”<sup>36</sup> It is that re-emergence of what is known through personal experience in a new or novel form or context.

He continues to say that “an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth.”<sup>37</sup> This is when suddenly you see the creature who has up until this point only existed in your dream world, or when an inanimate object takes on life. These things shouldn’t be, but are: they cross over.

36 Freud, *The Uncanny*, 125.

37 Freud, *The Uncanny*, 150.

*Plate 42*

WHATS NOT THERE MIGHT BE THERE MIGHT NOT BE THERE 3



Plate 43

*Fantasy is always progressive.  
Never completely losing its grip,  
fantasy is always heading for the world  
it only appears to have left behind.*

—Jacqueline Rose

**FANTASY**

Let me push through  
this wall  
I mean, mirror. I see through the mirror.  
Do I?

What does through imply?  
throughout time, that on the other side  
of the glass has never left this side  
It has become thoroughly one-sided,  
A thoroughbred

I will jump in  
to the pool  
the glass will break around me  
but I'll be wet,  
no, ill be cut.

But I won't be through,  
will I?  
through means I need to dig a hole in the pool that has become the mirror  
that has become the wall to push through  
the hole...the hole the hole the hole  
Whats to stop the water from following me?  
Or, there's a black cloth under the water,  
I need only to hide

Not through = stuck  
where  
Ive heard the grass is greener

## LANGUAGE AND BEING

A couple of relationship charts are necessary to simplify the complexity of this topic. First is the chart below which maps some commonly perceived connections between the words *language* and *being*.

LANGUAGE → thought → experience → selfhood → BEING

There are many interesting studies and narratives around the case of a person reaching adulthood *without* language. In each instance I have encountered,<sup>38</sup> this results in near complete isolation from society and debilitated intellectual development. When language does come (or is taught as is the case with the stories I have found) a lightbulb of Pandora's Box proportions is sparked. The person's world moves into color.

Yet the question pervades: do we *need* language in order to understand life? As Oliver Sacks put it, "Is our humanity, so-called, partly dependent on language?"<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, do we need to understand life? What is there to understand (if not relationships)? These questions bring me to my next chart:

thinking/thought     $\sqrt{\int}$     feeling/knowing

One would like to believe that experience is constructed of more than language: the inarticulable feeling space of life is another form for experience. But how does it define itself without language? A few projected conclusions might be: it defines itself in the body, in memory and in an associative understanding of the world.

Because people survive.

In *On The Way to Language*, Heidegger asks, "But when does language speak

<sup>38</sup> Oliver Sacks speaks of cases of deaf children and adults without language in *Seeing Voices*. Susan Schaller recalling teaching a 27 year old man language for the first time in RadioLab's season 8 episode 2 titled *Without Words*.

<sup>39</sup> Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, 31.



itself as language?”<sup>40</sup> He continues with an answer, “Curiously enough, when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us. Then we leave unspoken what we have in mind and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched us with its essential being.”<sup>41</sup>

Here Heidegger is saying that language is at its purest in its absence. It seems to imply that there is underlying *knowledge* (of self, of life, of experience, of someone else) that both transcends and defines authentic language. How does this speak to cross-cultural communication, or even cross species communication?

We know that people speaking different languages are experiencing the world differently from each other because of the different limits that exist in each language. Many words do not translate across idioms. Yet there exist real human connections between people speaking different languages all the time. This is part of that shared experience which transcends language--to understand without having to *understand*.

This brings us to animals. What makes humans so compelled to connect across species? We are constantly telling and retelling stories in which animals express human emotions, in which animals are communicating on human terms.

Two stories of human-humpback whale communication have recently emerged.<sup>42,43</sup> In each the humans were able to free a humpback whale from fishing nets. And in each, after she was freed, the whale exhibited what appeared to be extreme gratitude. In the episode of Radiolab, a philosophy and science based radio show aired on WYNC, the whale rose to the surface of the water beside each of her rescuers and held the space long enough for them to touch her and read “thank you” in the constant

40 Heidegger, *On The Way To Language*, 59.

41 Heidegger, *On The Way To Language*, 59.

42 RadioLab *Animal Minds*, Season 7, Episode 1.

43 Saving Valentina, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBYPicSD490&feature=share>

gaze of her giant eye. In the YouTube video, after Valentina (named for Valentines Day, the day this took place) the whale was freed, she breached and performed by jumping out of the water for hours and hours. The sun was going down and the drivers of the boat eventually decided they had to leave though the show was still going on.

Of all other mammals, whales have one of the most advanced intellects. They have “language,” long-term companionships, birth and death rituals as well as coordinated and consistent family units. It is not much of a stretch to believe that these whales were communicating with their rescuers. Nevertheless, each was exhausted from hours of struggle and could have been severely disoriented. Especially of the whale in the Radiolab program, it seems she could have been dizzy or lost and trying to compose herself.<sup>44</sup> What seems most important here is that the *people* decided that the whale was speaking their language. The *people* needed to confirm the connection--they needed to create a story of cross-special relating by which to remember the event.

And for them, it was real. “But that doesn’t mean we should reject realism; only that, if we are to practice it, we need to keep in mind the distinction between realism and reality. To confuse the two is to lose sight of the difference between art and life.”<sup>45</sup> The divers felt a common language between themselves and the whale. Art or life?

44 RadioLab *Animal Minds*, Season 7, Episode 1.

45 Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 183.



## AFTERWORD

*...the unconscious is also, according to psychoanalysis, the place where all your other and better ideas can be found.*

*-Jacqueline Rose*

They say that just before or just after sleep is when the mind is at its most creative. This is because it is relaxed. There is space for the mind to wiggle--to move to and fro around ideas and to make connections that would otherwise be missed. This is the space where inspiration comes from. It also exemplifies *the middle*, as I am exploring in this body of text. It is the place in the mind that bridges the conscious and subconscious. Metaphorically, it is as connected as we can be to one's past and future, or to the above and under worlds.

One can access this space intentionally through deep relaxation, meditation, and hypnosis. (Certainly there are other ways as well, but these are practices in which I participate). In this space I have felt many different things but generally there exists: a heightened awareness of oneself, only truth, slowed time, and a physicality of the air around me. This can feel like I am safely under water, seeing my parts (aspects of myself both physical and non) float around me. Everything is real and everything is vivid. It feels like extreme presence. When I am drawn up from these depths, as in hypnosis, I quickly lose touch with the feeling of the space I had been in, and I remember it as in a dream.

I don't believe my art practice is about always trying to access this place though. I am equally interested in what keeps me rooted and what hints at the unknown. *This* is our one world, as far as we know it. And we experience it through many layers of awareness, and vastly differing realities. In the Vedic tradition, the body is broken into five *koshas*, or layers. They are

the *Annamayakosha* (the physical or food body), the *Pranamayakosha* (the energetic, breath body), the *Manomayakosha* (the intellectual, thinking body), the *Vijnanamayakosha* (the emotional body), and lastly the *Anandamayakosha* (the bliss body). These “bodies” are often mapped in concentric rings from the outside to the inside of the body. As in the Tantric tradition, I feel the *Koshas* as permeable rings--rather than having to excavate from one to the next over multiple lifetimes, always traversing towards bliss, I experience life fluctuating between these layers constantly. The humbling goal is to endeavor to experience life as close to constant bliss as possible. I suspect that in bliss there are no questions about here or there, there is only pure knowing.

Where does representation come in?

When I was twenty I hiked the Inca Trail with my best friend during a holiday break from the college year. We were there over their summer solstice, our winter, December 21st. On our final day of hiking, we raced the sun to Macchu Picchu. We clambered to the crest of the mountain above the ruins just as the sun reached the top of the opposing mountain. It rose into the point of a V made in mountain edge. As it peeked up and over this V, it poured into the valley, laying itself out on all the earth below. At this very moment in the Sun Temple at Macchu Picchu, an Incan Cross was completed by its perfectly cast shadow on the floor. The Incan Cross is a square cross. It is sunken halfway under the earth. The bottom half (underground) represents the underworld and the top half represents this world. As the sun hits the cross, the shadow it casts completes it--revealing the underworld. The sun that created the light on its back represents the heavens and spirit world.

I find that representation is the place to problematize--to make visual the dilemmas between the mind and body and between reality and illusion. In my work, I am always thinking about the relationship between this world and any other. Though my interest extends into differing reality experiences not only fantasy vs. reality, in my work “this world” generally refers to reality and “any other” to fantasy. I believe that fantasy cannot exist

This body of text courses through many ideas and connections that exist in my art practice. What at first may seem like incongruent concepts and problems, are all part of a web of connections I try to make through my visual work. Below is an example of a mind-map to this work:



The Inca's perfectly represented their state, as that of the middle--stuck between here and there. They employed both time and light to articulate the precision and ephemerality of this moment. The light creates the window into the world, but it is only available fleetingly. And of course, it is only a window, not a gate.

We, humans, have been looking for an “other” world since the beginning of history. Is it there? What would it mean if it were? Is all we have here and now anyway? How would our worlds change if we *knew* with certainty

we were living in one part of a longer continuum?

Some yogi's say that we are born with a fixed number of breaths and that in order to extend one's life, one must simply extend the breath. When the breath extends, the heart rate slows, fundamentally changing, not only one's level of anxiety and stress but one's experience of time--and thus one's experience of life. The breath, which occurs without thought again and again throughout all of life in tiny increments, has the power to change everything.

What else besides the duration of a single breath constructs one's reality? How do we each create and live out our own personal realities? What can we depend on? Are there universal truths? It is well recorded now that eye-witnesses to crimes are often the least reliable sources for investigators. They may feel 100% certain of what they saw yet their stories are only 50% likely to ring true to the event. Our memories fail us. Memory is not, as once perceived, a recording of an experience, but a construction of one. It is more like a painting being traced and filled in anew each time it is recalled.

Earlier in this text I write about the scarring or staining of a physical space after a trauma occurs. It is a commonly shared experience: a heavy fog-like feeling can fill in and pervade the interior of a space after a trauma has happened. I have recently learned that this, like all experience, is relative. It is relative to age, past life experience, community, location, and I am sure much more. I currently work one day a week at NIAD, The National Institute of Art and Disability. NIAD is an art center for developmentally disabled adults. On any given day there are about 40 artists there working in studios ranging from drawing and painting to mixed media sculpture. There, what I may have previously felt as trauma, is normalized through the culture of the place. At NIAD a seizure occurs nearly every other day. And when it happens, the rhythm of the place is barely disturbed. There is an ordinariness to the event that it is a non-issue. The raucous, loosely held-together, loving, all accepting culture makes space for someone to fall on her head (in a helmet) and move on as soon as she says she's ok. This comes as a surprising and refreshing change for me. I feel it as an open

ing of my perspective and experience. It makes me feel more safe to take risks.

Coming to the end of this document I am left with one pervasive question: What is real? Or rather, what isn't?

On my first day at NIAD, I saw through to another reality: Lucy, a thirty-something, obese, blind and developmentally disabled woman, charged down the hall and nearly shouted out, "oh yeah, I used to be a butterfly."



*If one is seeking the meaning of representation, then one has not gone from signifier to signified but merely from one signifier to another—and so on ad infinitum. Through this infinite displacement or slippage of signifiers, the initial problem is reduced to absurdity as any finite concept is reduced to meaninglessness through being involved with infinity.*

-Thomas McEvilley

## PLATES

1. Gaetano Kanisza, *Organization in Vision*, Figure 4.17.
2. Gaetano Kanisza, *Organization in Vision*, Figure 1.11a, and 1.11b.
3. Artur Zimesjki, still from *Oko za Oko (An Eye for an Eye)*, 1998.
4. Cara Levine, Attempt 1, *The Man in The Chair With the Broken Leg*.
5. Cara Levine, Attempt 2, Exploded loop, *The Man in The Chair With the Broken Leg*.
6. Lisa Bufano, Photo by Chris Butler, at <http://errantways.wordpress.com/2010/09/18/stilted/>.
7. Völgyesi (1966), Experiments with hypnotizing animals, <http://www.hypnosisandsuggestion.org/animal-hypnosis.html>.
8. Simon Cunningham, *Mollymuddle* 2011, in *Critical Dictionary*, 91.
9. Cara Levine, *If I Say Anything Intelligent, You Can Take a Picture of It*, image, 2011.
10. Cara Levine, still from video, *Follow My Eyes*, 2010.
11. Simon Cunningham, *Duckrabbit* 2011, *Critical Dictionary*, 63.
12. Cara Levine, sequence of stills from video, *We Have Lift Off*, 2011.
13. George Melies, image of set from *A Trip to the Moon (Voyage à la Lune)*, 1902 <http://www.flickr.com/photos/pritheworld/sets/72157604831238429/>.
14. . Houdini, *Houdini Art & Magic*, 191.

15. Harry and Bess Houdini Exposing Spiritualist tricks, c. 1926. Houdini, *Houdini Art & Magic*, 80.
16. Houdini, *Houdini Art & Magic*, 173.
17. Cara Levine, from photographic series *Houdini, This Hurts Me*, 2012, dimensions variable.
18. Gaetano Kanisza, *Organization in Vision*, Figure 2.17.
19. Cara Levine, from photographic series *Anthropometry* 7, 2012, dimensions variable.
20. Cara Levine, from photographic series *Anthropometry* 8, 2012, dimensions variable.
21. Cara Levine, from photographic series *Anthropometry* 4, 2011, dimensions variable.
22. Cara Levine, from photographic series *Anthropometry* 5, 2011, dimensions variable.
23. Cara Levine, from photographic series, *Houdini This Hurts Me*, 2012, dimensions variable.
24. Image of Indian Guru levitating from “The Secret Behind Indian Guru Levitation Revealed,” at <http://www.weirdasianews.com/2008/08/31/secret-behind-indian-guru-levitation-revealed/>.
25. Cara Levine, drawing on Deleuze quote, “The grass grows from the middle.”
26. Image of Indian Guru levitating from “The Secret Behind Indian Guru Levitation Revealed,” at <http://www.weirdasianews.com/2008/08/31/secret-behind-indian-guru-levitation-revealed/>.
27. Image of Indian Guru levitating from “The Secret Behind Indian Guru Levitation Revealed,” at <http://www.weirdasianews.com/2008/08/31/secret-behind-indian-guru-levitation-revealed/>.
28. Bruce Nauman, *Failing to Levitate in the Studio*, 1966.

29. Cara Levine, *Levitation Chair*, Mixed media, wood, concrete, steel.
30. Cara Levine, *Levitation Chair 2*, Mixed media, 2011.
31. Cara Levine, *SawHorseFly*, Digital C-Print, dimensions variable, 2011.
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33. Cara Levine, process images from the making of, *Untitled: Portal*, 2011.
34. Cara Levine, *Untitled: Portal*, wood, spray paint, mdf board, 60" x 60", 2011.
35. Cara Levine, *The Trouble With Building a Hole in The Floor*, digital c-print, dimensions variable, 2011.
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37. Cara Levine, photograph of sculpture undone, *Untitled*, dimensions variable, 2011.
38. Rocket ship from google.
39. Photograph of a mother tiger who lost her own cubs and was given piglets to bond with after falling into a deep depression. The piglets have imprinted on the tiger as their mother. The piglets dress is tiger print to camoflouge as little tigers. [http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl\\_tiger\\_and\\_piglets.htm](http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl_tiger_and_piglets.htm).
40. Cara Levine, still from video, *A Horse of Many Colors*, 2012.
41. Poster for *Royal Wedding* (1951) with Fred Astaire and Jane Powell, In it, Fred Astaire dances on all sides of a room--walls, floor, and ceiling.
42. Cara Levine, drawing from sketchbook, 2012.
43. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Bronx Floors Four Way Wall*, 1973.

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