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My whole universe in crumbs; at the center, what?: a meditation on the diary form

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Noa Mendoza

Media Studies Senior Project

5/10/20

Advisor: M Mark

my whole universe in crumbs; at the center, what?

a meditation on the diary form

This project, originally, had a clear direction. Not an ending (because there are infinite possible endings) but the idea that answers would come from the process of creation itself. This process was one of deconstruction and reconstruction. I hoped to cut apart different journals of artists and weave them back together to form a multi-layered rhizomatic text, a horizontal Frankenstein's monster on the operating table. Susan Sontag, Derek Jarman, and Audre Lorde's journals all spoke to me, for no other reason than my own interest in them as artists and, pryingly, as people. I sought to make meaning out of the blurring and dissolution of individual identities, to draw philosophical themes on journal writing and self formation out of this web. This is not to say that it was going to be beautiful-- the rhizomatic form of the text itself, I think, as well as my own limitations (I am working with the fragmented theories of my own subjectivity, very postmodern and also very self-indulgent) lend themselves to chaos and dissolution of the beauty of rational form. But, like the monster, this text was going to be sensitive, human, and call attention, through its parasitic construction, through the collaged and bulky quality of an accordion-text, to what it means to de-construct the textual body. Because of the enormous amount of sources that I was drawing from and cutting apart (literally physically in the process of collaging), I also was relying on the idea that the final product would somehow bring an editorial clarity to the postmodern philosophizing about the journal/diary form. That is to say, the philosophical paper, the written thesis, accompanying the final project felt important but not as important as the final project. It felt like an explanation and a justification for the

weird, exciting mutated-text, the final project, not an end in itself. And all of this written with the idea that I would be able to go back and revise the paper once the thesis itself crystalized into a concrete object that I could examine with the curiosity, love, and objective investment of an untrained but dedicated scientist.

However, circumstances have changed, and, without the resources of the institution that it was dependent on, this final material object isn't going to be realized. Thus, the final project has to change. I now find myself away from the open mouth of the Vassar institution. I must forge on without the resources and endless texts of the Vassar College Libraries, (to build the physical text), the Innovation Lab (to make the binding), and a wide array of minds to pick, be mentored by, collaborate with on this project (to help me understand it).

This being said, the events of these past couple months have also made me question the very nature of this project. The world is facing an unprecedented (yet sadly, predicted) health pandemic. The future feels scary, unstable. I am also extremely privileged in my ability to sit back and reflect on my own personal feelings about this situation instead of being sick, or being a health-care worker, doctor, campesina, anyone else on the front lines. But what I can offer, as a 22 year old graduating into this period of deep fear and instability, is a reflection on what I've turned to: journals. My own journal, under isolated quarantine, has been a crucial friend to me, a bearer witness to my continued existence. I've clung to the journals of a 22 year old going through another historical global crisis-- Jonas Mekas, a Lithuanian refugee during World War 2, who would go on to become "the godfather of American avant-garde film"¹. But in his journals, Mekas is reflecting on the meaninglessness, trauma, loathing that he feels toward the cruelty of

¹ Weber, Bruce. "Jonas Mekas, 'Godfather' of American Avant-Garde Film, Is Dead at 96." The New York Times. The New York Times, January 23, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/23/obituaries/jonas-mekas-dead.html>.

humanity during World War 2. The banality of everyday life that continues on during and despite war.

These days, I have been feeling sentimental toward the purpose of the journal (to clarify, I use 'journal' and 'diary' interchangeably in this thesis). I have been thinking about what a violent act it is, in many ways, to cut a journal apart. To use a journal, the story of someone's life-- often, in times of trauma, the only affirmation of one's existence-- to pull philosophy out of, to prove a point, seems in many ways, to destroy the journal. These words themselves-- *cut*, *pull*, operate upon the journal more violently than they deconstruct it. Frankenstein's monster was not born from nothing-- he was assembled from the body parts of corpses. What would it mean to honor, to respect, the corpse in the process of creating something new? My original idea was to break apart these journals to reveal the ways in which they are also windows onto the world. To create from a medium that is seen as rooted in human narcissism and subjectivity, a text that de-centers, de-stabilizes the very medium it is made from, and in this process, reveals the potential for connection.

It is interesting, now, to think about how the present moment both proves and disproves my original idea. I am beginning to think there is much more value in narrative than I thought-- in telling stories to testify to surviving hardships, the act of survival in existence often appears as a personal narrative structure. I am also beginning to think about how living and writing from a time of global sickness, isolation, and quarantine illuminates the human idea of existing in constant relation to each other and the world around us. The path my abstraction of the journal ultimately led me on was this same process of reflection: one of realizing that humans are constantly defining themselves in relation to everything else, to the Other. What was abstract

becomes more and more real when we are forced to see who we are in an unprecedented space and time. I am hungry to find where text and body meet, especially in a time that is deprived of touch. I am hungry to make that intellectual connection, not just because I want to, but because I have to.

So, I am going to take a more gentle look at Frankenstein's monster. Because this paper has become the product itself, the tactile act of collage, of opening and stretching out an accordion text is no longer going to be the medium through which this is read. Perhaps this speaks to the times we live in, in which much experience that feels as if it should be sensual and tactile is mediated through screen. Thus, the re-vision of the project becomes the final product itself. I am going to break down any pretext of non-objectivity and weave my own journal entries into the paper, my own life during quarantine. I am going to reflect on what it means to make this object *now*, what this process feels like now. In this way, I make a diary again out of the anti-diary.

6/31/19

I went on a great date with this girl named Violeta yesterday.... She was really sweet and easy to talk to and quick to laugh. And we sat and drank wine and smoked for like 3 hours and talked about our feelings on birthright and media theory and how we both write and how annoying it is that writing today is so centered on the self, blah blah.

Many people have thought a lot about this question and the answer is probably really easy. On one level, everybody has always written about themselves. So that's not new. On another level, there is a compellingly obvious connection between the rise of social media and the rise of the era of writing about the self, or from a subjective point of view. How do we come to understand this? One way, I was told in a class once, was through Lacan's theory of extimacy²--in this age we increasingly form ourselves, our intimacy, through the exposition of what is intimate, to the point of there being no distinction between the interior and exterior.

But blah blah because this explanation seemed like not enough. What is the underbelly of extimacy? What is at the heart of the interplay of writing, the intimate, and the outside world, the exterior?

Senior Project Proposal

11/3/19

² Pavón-Cuéllar, David. "Extimacy." SpringerLink. Springer, New York, NY, January 1, 1970. https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_106.

In addition to the rich historical situatedness of the diary, what originally drew me to this project was the contemporary resurgence of diary writing and writing about the self (autofiction/hybrid texts), a phenomenon I find extremely compelling when placed in dialogue with topics such as Big Data, the age of 'self surveillance', the age of Instagram. I am thinking I want the final form of my thesis to be a hybrid, multimedia text. I want it to feel both intimate and expansive, in the stylistic vein of *The Argonauts*. I conceptualize it as an online interactive text, where the base text is a compilation of the diaries/text that I will ultimately narrow down. Or, perhaps, as a blog (what is arguably the contemporary mutation of the diary), formed through a compilation of artist's diary entries. Right now I'm envisioning perhaps

In order to interrogate these questions, to interrogate the diary as a medium, I want to draw theory from the personal/personal from theory, to draw out a philosophical understanding of the construction of the self/intimacy through writing about the self, theories on performativity/artistic performativity/authorship, what it means to write oneself into existence, writing as an 'embodied' medium. In this aspect, I am drawing from philosophers such as Butler ("Giving An Account of Oneself"), Cavarero ("the paradox of ulysses"), Foucault ("technologies of the self") in order to examine the Othering of the self. How is being asked to narrate yourself (answer the question 'who are you?') a 'violence' against the natural, truthful fluidity of the self, how can we see diary writing, in the Deleuzian vein, as a constant state of 'becoming', can it be

3/12/20

To watch:

Kieslowsky movie, three colors

To read

<http://lobosuelto.com/cronica-de-la-psicodeflacion-franco-bifo-berardi/>

Kelly sends me a video called ‘journey into the cosmic womb’

“*Advenio*: to come (to), arrive (at), reach; to come on purpose; to come from outside, be imported; (of ships) to arrive, put in, (of other things) to reach, be brought, come into the hands of; (of physical conditions) to set in, arise, develop, supervene; (of dates and times) to come, arrive, to come in (in time)”

How to feel safe?

To cocoon myself in the wooden table my father sands every winter

To cocoon myself in Alice’s cabin room

Astronaut, saturn, moon, a kindly version of earth, slowed and made

The size of a palm

How many hours did she stare at this, at 14? What did she dream of? What was she angry about?

Did she feel so big?

At 22, flat on my back, talking to my father about the virus. How will you? How will I?

An astronomer from England dying of another virus a few years ago went to my home. The astronomer from England dying of another virus

looked up at the big blue sky and hated it. The astronomer thought of the olive trees of the other coast, and her grandfather, and the gray earth. There perhaps she thought of the craters of the moon. They understand, as things that have been bitten into understand, there is nothing more offensive than a blue day. She called up,

weightless sky! small hummingbird! what is this floating house?

How to feel safe?

I was, for a long time, looking at two books. One was 'The Argonauts' by Maggie Nelson. Like the word 'argonaut', I saw in her a hero for our time. An arbiter for how to write and think in this time, a sailor, speeding toward the shore, upon an ancient Grecian ship. Probably, most young people are hungry for a model like this. She spoke to me about a way to understand writing about 'you' that wasn't meaningless. That instead, drew on a vast web of people's thinking and wove it into the text. The text as pleasure, and the text as world. Her text, to me, felt like something to get swept away in, like a little boat (me: the text) on the sea (the text: the right questions).

October 2007. The Santa Ana winds are shedding the bark off the eucalyptus trees in long white stripes. A friend and I risk the widowmakers by having lunch outside, during which she suggests I tattoo the words HARD TO GET across my knuckles, as a reminder of this pose's possible fruits. Instead the words 'I love you' come tumbling out of my mouth in an incantation...

Before we met, I had spent a lifetime devoted to Wittgenstien's idea that the inexpressible is contained--inexpressibly!-- in the expressed.³

12/31/56 (Sontag)⁴

1. Nothing is interpreted
2. To interpret is to determine, restrict; or to exfoliate, read meaning into.
3. Interpretation is a medium by which we justify context.
4. To interpret a word is different from defining it; it means to specify a range of contexts
(*not* equivalents)

Kisses like bullets, soap flavored kisses, kisses from lips that feel like wet calf's-brains

Let go

Let go

Let

³ Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. London: Melville House, 2016.

⁴ Sontag, Susan, and David Rieff. *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks: 1947-1963*. New York: Picador, 2009.

Really go

3/26/20

In zoom class I said something kind of stupid because I hadn't really read the text that carefully, but true (from feelings sense), which is that the only texts I can read these days are about real people's lives mingled with someone holding my hand and giving me the philosophy to understand them

11/20/19

Deciding to start this thesis diary. No idea why. I'm telling myself it will somehow be a useful, a parallel practice, but i think i'm just fooling myself into feeling productive [edit, april 26th: note how it feels productive to simply catalogue time]. Anyway, ok.

-got into weird tangent about claude mauriac and le temps immobile

-french guy 1950's did like the OG argonauts

-then got into leiris

-I think that's taking me away from what i really want to be talking about? Getting too much into theory about what does it mean to diary, got confused about that vs. autofiction

-need to define what i mean when i say 'diary'

-for example RB would not technically be a diary, so I would have to use him on the margins

-but don't want to get too essentialist

-a little stressed because I don't have much philosophical background

-look into SCHOOLS of philosophy? Feminist philosophy, philosophy on touch

Izzy said:

Your thesis is

An archive of people's thoughts on themselves

An inventory of consciousness


Touch

Touch etching picture of the person

Piecing together the person

How to weave together people out of texts? How to make something new?

And then I came across the rhizome.

Isabel Braham 

Inbox - noam...goot@vassar.edu November 24, 2019 at

<3

To: Noa Mendoza-Goot



2019. 09 New
Materi...us.pdf

**New Ontologies and New Politics for Troubled Times:
Beyond Dualisms and Beyond Man?**

09/17

Deleuze and Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome"

1.

HOW BEAUTIFUL YOU ARE FROM AFAR!⁵

IN WHICH THE RHIZOME IS STILL, JUST, AN INTRODUCTION. AND THE IDEA IS A BEAUTIFULLY ACHIEVABLE IMPOSSIBILITY.

Like, the act of making up a definition for a word you do not know.

The process is the act of [definition](#).⁶

12/6/19 (thesis diary)

Ask for forgiveness from reader (footnote-lispector, what forgiveness means) in the constant jumping between postmodern theorists, philosophers. Perhaps in this incoherence some sort of coherence can be made, or perhaps it will become a sort of mirror to the medium of the diary itself, an exploration of the contemporary mind intermingled with a schizoid, fractured look at the contemporary. What does this exploration of the medium reveal? What does it reveal about me?

--

Roland Barthes states that his childhood can only be summarized in images:

“The Text can recount nothing; it takes my body elsewhere, far from my imaginary person, toward a kind of memoryless speech”⁷

⁵ Mekas, Jonas. *I Had Nowhere to Go*. Leipzig: Spector Books, 2017. (pg. 161)

⁶ Here there's an audio file

⁷ Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes*. Berkeley, California: University Of California Press, 1977. (page 1)

I'm borrowing from Barthes the desire to begin this text from a place of 'memoryless speech', to begin non-linearly, then to move into text once the life of a 'productive person' begins. To start from a place of 'irrationality', 'unproductivity' to fully display the body of the text.

Thus, I would like to begin with the image of a mushroom.

1/31/20

We echo an exercise that exemplifies the multiple layers of understanding going into this thesis: to view a mushroom as simply a mushroom. To view a mushroom as an organic being of nature, to view a mushroom as a small white dome that sprouts naturally from the soil, to view the mushroom and its ontological existence, what it feels like to taste, to touch, to smell, its raw, rubbery texture, its meaty smoky cooked flavor, the smell of the wet soil and the rain that precedes it (the space around the mushroom, the self --for mushrooms are asexual, naturally reproductive).

Then, we proceed to view a mushroom as a metaphor. In the vein of Deleuze and Guattari (G/D), a mushroom is a way to view the assemblage of a text. In the dead of night, mushrooms spring from the soil, from one mushroom rises another and another, sensitive, bulbous, to borrow from the scientific lexicon, a rhizomatic being that grows horizontally, sending out roots and shoots from its nodes⁸, growing in all directions. Rhizomes can manifest in a variety of different ways--

⁸ "Rhizome." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, April 17, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhizome>.

as G/D state, “rats are rhizomes [an image we will return to]...the rhizome includes the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed”⁹. For the sake of the text, I will choose to ask you to picture this rhizome as a mushroom, because of its bridging of the gap between the wanted and unwanted (parasite¹⁰ (me, contemporary theorists) vs. non parasite (the original texts themselves)) and its fleeting spontaneity, the earth, the soil, the tree, the body that can become dappled with fungi, with mushrooms. Also, because this is a subjective image, one of my own mind and my own explanation, and to bring an awareness to this, as this is a subjective text, one that is woven from other subjective texts (the diary as subjective text i.e. text on the subject ie creating the subject through text).

In this, I seek to explain the fluidity of this text, its sensitivity to the works (that is the diaries, the critical theorists, the art) that compose it. We can think of the rhizomatic text as an unstructured multiplicity that is in a constant state of becoming, in a constant state of responding *qualitatively* not *quantitatively*. This form parallels the production of the ‘self’ in the diary medium. Mushrooms, rhizomes, selves, as a multiplying and delicate structure, a honeycomb under the earth, the circle of a fingerprint, that grows with and under certain specific natural conditions.

This thesis therefore will seek to follow what G/D define as constituting a rhizome, in which the (principle 1) “*collective assemblages of enunciation* function directly within *machinic assemblages*” (pg. 7). It breaks the traditional subject/object dichotomy-- it is neither subject nor object. The text as a collection of multiplicities that run like an “abstract machine” (pg. 7), made up of infinite interconnected parts, breaking from the subject/object binary present in the

⁹ Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. A Thousand Plateaus. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. (page 7)

¹⁰ Serres, Michel. The Parasite. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

classical model of hierarchy-- the tree metaphor. This classical image is one used by G/D to contrast and thus explain the way that the rhizome is radical. The tree presents a clear beginning and end (the roots, the branches). In contrast the rhizome is a multiplicity (principle 3), that will always regenerate itself. A mushroom can be plucked from the soil, from the interconnected field of roots, and a new one will always take its place (principle 4). A rhizome is like the unfolded map, a map before it is given linear meaning, an aerial view of a space that stretches out in multiple directions. This digitally based, multi-media text will, hopefully, in its final form be able to be read/watched/listened to from any point, any point will serve as a gateway, a small mushroom to be plucked from a larger field. This echoes the way that diaries can naturally lend themselves to horizontality, can be entered/exited at any moment.

This thesis is formed by language, punctuated by image, video, sound. G/D state that a rhizome can be used to apply to non-hierarchical ways of thinking about the tangible world, politics, biology, economy "not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to diverse modes of coding" (pg. 7). In this way, beyond the textual base of the diary, I will draw from queer theory, gender theory, bodies/stories/texts that are, in themselves, a rhizome, in that they, in their dissonance, in their expression (queer artists), break traditional hierarchies of expression linguistically and sociopolitically. In doing so, I will explore what it means to 'embody' writing, to write the body into the text. While the 'base text' is diary, I will also draw from other literature that blurs the line of what it means to be a 'diary'-- autofiction, contemporary hybrid text, performance art, etc. exploring what it means to write the self into existence. This creates a necessary balance between exploration/definition of *a* medium (diary) and the contention/exploration of medium itself.

I will also seek to apply rhizomatic thinking to the physical medium through which such a text can be constructed. G/D created the term ‘rhizome’ in the year 1980, in a larger text, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), before these theorists could imagine a conception of the written word unbound by the linear physicality of paper, of the standardized movement of the reading of a book. G/D state: “The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out in a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.” (pg. 9) By putting my rhizome ultimately into the form of a digital website, I aim to play with notions of layering, of non-linearity, of horizontality that G.D imagined in the internet, the contemporary liminal space. That is not to argue that the internet in and of itself is something non-hierarchical, but rather, that it allows for the *potential of the creation* of such a space.

However, at its core, this thesis is one that is grounded in language/text, as well as in the diary as a medium. It will be formed by a base text of three different diaries woven together: Derek Jarman’s *Modern Nature* (1989/1990), Susan Sontag’s *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks 1947-1963*, and Audre Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* (1978-1979). By weaving these together, I aim to contend with, play with, explore, the idea of a diary as inherently linear, as inherently a progression of time. In this way, the thesis will serve as a mirror to the diary, and the diary as a mirror to the thesis, one that asks-- can the rhizome ever successfully contain the diary form/visa versa? Will this ‘structure’ work with the rhizome or against it?

This text *is* a rhizome in its organic and constant state of production, of becoming. However, that is not to say that the inherent structure of the diary itself is not antithetical to the very concept of

the rhizome. The rhizome form echoes, mirrors, contends with the diary as a medium. In the beginning of 'rhizomes', D/G/ state that their goal is: "To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. we are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied" (3) The goal of this thesis is somewhere between that and the individualistic notion of the diary itself. Not to define the diary medium, but to explore it. Perhaps this is paradoxical, perhaps not. The goal is to multiply the omniscient *self* in these diaries. To put them in dialogue with each other. In doing so, to create my own exploration of subjectivity, and, on a more surface level, of admiration. To both exemplify the individual, diffuse the individual, create a collection of voices, to reflect the contemporary fragmented parasitic self. What does this exploration of the medium reveal? Or, *everyone* who has ever written a diary asks, what does it reveal about *me*?

II

How to begin, once situated within a horizontal structure?

To begin with a plot of land, to plant a garden.

Or, to find a garden that springs from the soil

To pluck the mushrooms from the soil.

One way is to begin with the literal-- the organic, the body.

I began with a natural image because I wanted to talk about the texts as ‘natural’, as part of a larger environment/ecosystem. I wanted to put my ear to it, if that makes sense. Not to speak for it but to listen to what it had to tell me. I return to the image of an untrained but curious scientist.

The House of Science¹¹

Hey you! Dishevelled in the back pew

Slept all night with your temple to the earth

Ears filled with the roar of life

What are you doing here?

4/25/20

listening to this live stream of what would have been a pioneer works event, a woman is reading Rachel Carson’s poems with the sound of a violin in the background, patti smith reads emily dickinson + the video of the sky-- democratization of mediums? We can all watch this from our sofas, no need to be in nyc. But also how beautiful would this be together in a big room, your arm brushing a stranger’s...

Myth

¹¹ Elson, Rebecca. Edited Anne Berkeley, Angelo Di Cintio, and Bernard ODonoghue. A Responsibility to Awe. Manchester: Carcanet, 2001.

What I want is a mythology so huge
That settling on its grassy bank
(Which may at first seem ordinary)...

I had the idea that by cutting apart the journals of selected artists, whichever most spoke to me in the moment-- Susan Sontag and Derek Jarman and Audre Lorde, I could draw out of them philosophy. By cutting apart the philosophy of various postmodern thinkers, I could also weave them into the journals. A parasitic map made up of many different voices, seeking to understand both what journal writing is and what it means to deconstruct it.

“To be linked by the chain of existence and events, yes, but bound by it? No. I forge my own links, I am building my own monstrous chain, and as time goes on, perhaps it will begin to resemble, rather, a web”¹²

What does this map reveal?

12/31/57 (Sontag)

On keeping a journal.

¹² Words from Shelley Jackson’s art project ‘Patchwork Girl’, accessed through youtube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHUR6phuOrc>

Superficial to understand the journal as just a receptacle for one's private, secret thoughts-- like a confidante who is deaf, dumb, and illiterate. In the journal I do not just express myself more openly than I could do to any person, I create myself. The journal is a vehicle for my sense of selfhood. It represents me as emotionally and spiritually independent. Therefore (alas) it does not simply record my actual, daily life but rather-- in many cases-- offers an alternative to it.



Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Cover image (2002)

Of the concept of 'texture', Eve Sedgwich states that there are:

“two kinds..of texture..texxture is the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how substantively, historically, materially, it comes into being. A brick or a metalwork plot that still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making would exemplify texxture in this sense. But there is also the texture..that defiantly or even invisibly blocks or refuses such information”¹³

¹³ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. (pg 14)

I wanted to read the journal as a textured object. An object that, in itself, is dualistic, forms a complex relationship between writer and diary, and reader and diary, and writer and reader. In this way it holds the nuances of the concept of ‘texture/texxture’. What information does it reveal, and what information does it refuse to reveal?

To read the journal as one reads a body and the world-- to hear, taste, see, touch, smell the body--because the journal is a marker of existence of the body in the world. To open the individual journal up onto the world, onto a web of connection, and see what to make of it.

A refusal to read it solely from the point of view of the virtual age, to see the journal solely as a precursor to twitter, instagram, and other digital expository mediums. To take it out of a linear notion of the development of medium. A searching for the body, the journal, in time.

How to touch the diary? What does ‘touch’ mean?

Saturday February 25th (Jarman, 1989)

The storm blew itself out by two-- before returning at four with a sudden blast, illuminated by one brilliant lightning flash, and no thunder.

The question is ... whether our life takes place between an absolutely individual and absolutely universal nothingness behind us and an absolutely individual and absolutely universal being before us— in which case we have the incomprehensible and impossible task of restoring to Being, in the form of thoughts and actions, everything we have taken from it, that is, everything that we are— or whether every relation between me and Being,

even vision, even speech, is not a carnal relation, with *the flesh of the world*¹⁴

The foghorn sounded for half an hour and then all went quiet.

Buffeted in my sleep like a boat on a high sea, I never cross the night without waking.

The flesh is the body inasmuch as it is the visible seer, the audible hearer, the tangible touch—the sensitive sensible: inasmuch as in it is accomplished an equivalence of sensibility and sensible thing¹⁵

I can't quite remember when it was different. I slept quite soundly for forty years; then something changed. Perhaps I wake myself in the case I die, unconscious, at the low ebb of the night. Berman's hour of the wolf...

it's a cold night; but suddenly I'm up and pissing in the dark..

In the morning the storm has torn up a mountain of kelp which floats backand forth in the foam at the sea's edge. The wind is up again, seagulls float ever closed as if I gave off some imperceptible warmth in the cold. I beat the tide which is racing in, and find three stones for the new flower bed.

"Flesh" furnishes the capacity for turning the world back on itself, to bring into play its reflexivity. Thus subject and object are inherently open to each other for they are "constituted" in

¹⁴ Falk, B., Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lefort, and Alphonso Lingis. "The Visible and the Invisible." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 80 (1970): 278. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2218411>. (p.139)

¹⁵ Merleu-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pg 5

the one stroke separating the flesh into its distinct modalities.”¹⁶

Perhaps, better than summary and quote, an image could be

best used to describe the concept.



Single Breath Transfer (Michael Joo, 2017, Mold-blown glass. Photo: Tim Pyle)

Michael Joo’s ‘Single Breath Transfer’¹⁷:

With *Single Breath Transfer*, I inflated bags I found on the street outside of liquor stores and bodegas with breath from my lungs, then quickly froze their form with liquid nitrogen, and made a ceramic mold that was passed to a glass blower, who filled the form with their own exhalation. The resulting vessel is a record of transfer.

How to synthesize this way of phenomenological understanding with thinking about the journal?

February

I found an exciting dialectic of flesh and text in the voice of Astrid Neimanis, post-human feminist philosopher. In ‘Bodies of Water’ (Bloomsbury, 2017) Astrid Neimanis describes what it means to think of the body through a watery lens:

To think embodiment as watery belies the understanding of bodies that we have inherited from

¹⁶ O’Loughlin, M. Ways of thinking about being: Explorations in ontology. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 15, 139–145 (1996). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00367523>

¹⁷ “Michael Joo.” Art at a Time Like This. Accessed May 10, 2020. <https://artatimelikethis.com/michael-joo>.

*the dominant Western metaphysical tradition. As watery, we experience ourselves less as isolated entities, and more as oceanic eddies: I am a singular, dynamic whorl dissolving in a complex, fluid circulation. The space between our selves and our others is at once as distant as the primeval sea, yet also closer than our own skin—the traces of those same oceanic beginnings still cycling through us, pausing as this bodily thing we call “mine.” Water is between bodies, but of bodies, before us and beyond us, yet also very presently this body, too. Deictics falter. Our comfortable categories of thought begin to erode.*¹⁸

This type of thinking spoke to questions I was asking-- can the diary move beyond its limits of the individual human? How to think about it in an open, expansive, ‘watery’ way?

Post-human feminist phenomenology holds in itself many contradictions that I found crucial to thinking through the contradictions present in the act of diary reading and writing. In Neimanis, I also found a way to synthesize many different philosophical voices on embodiment. To put the fragments together in a cohesive way. She draws a lot of meaning out of the dialogue, “the space between”¹⁹ the seemingly contradictory paradigms for viewing the body-- of french feminists, phenomenologists, and post-humanists. I will offer a brief glance of one of the ways Neimanis uses phenomenology to think through embodiment, one that is in no way a sufficient summary of her argument but that offers insight into my own pathway of thinking about the

¹⁸ Neimanis, Astrida. “Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology (Link to Open Access HTML).” *Bodies of Water : Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. Accessed May 10, 2020. https://www.academia.edu/28107193/Bodies_of_Water_Posthuman_Feminist_Phenomenology_link_to_Open_Access_HTML_.

¹⁹ Neimanis, Astrida. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. (pg 123)

journal.

Neimanis begins her chapter “How to think (about) a body of water: Posthuman phenomenology between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze” with a discussion of Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty sites the body as the source for all meaning, what fundamentally affects and situates us as part of and in the world-- he “presents us with a body that emerges from various debts and connections to other bodies, whereby bodies are always chiasmically entwined with the world.” (Neimanis 120).

Deleuze, on the other hand, the co-designer of the conceptual rhizome, and, clearly, a big believer in destabilizing the hierarchy of a humanist vantage point, is critical of Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology for situating the human at the center of the making of meaning. Neimanis states:

“In Deleuzian rhizomatics, a body is defined primarily by what it ‘can do’ and what can be done to it, while still maintaining the body’s metastability as a whole. While human bodies certainly differ from one another, they are a particular kind of body that exists because of certain thresholds for affecting and being affected” (Neimanis 45).

Therefore, Deleuze also *situates the human*, while not at the center, as a point of reference of existence-- “Deleuze doesn’t have a problem with the installation of the human but rather the installation of the human at the center” (Neimanis 45). She reconciles this with the thinking of Merleau-Ponty in finding agreement, in the essence of the phenomenological lens, that

bodies are both “open and permeable and permeated”, “bodies are open and permeable, permeated. This understanding emerges most strongly in what Merleau-Ponty (1968:149) calls the flesh of the world-- a ‘mesh’ of elemental being in which all beings participate, entangle, and intertwine. Merleau-Ponty (1968:123) also refers to this intertwining of bodies as chiasm--not a ‘fusion or coinciding of’ body and world, but rather, an ‘overlapping or encroachment’ such that ‘things pass into us, as well as into the things.’” (Neimanis 49).

Thus, being human means the disillusionment of boundaries between our own bodies and the body of the world-- our very embodiment means a “more than human” contact with the world (Neimanis 45)

Thinking with both Merleau Ponty and Deleuze is a way of destabilizing the notion of human outside of world, while still thinking through the notion of *contact*, reciprocity is what creates meaning. Everything and everyone is in a constant meaning-making exchange of exposure onto each other, of touch, of flesh and world.

“One cannot read a diary and feel unacquainted with its writer. No form of expression more emphatically embodies the expresser: *diaries are the flesh made world*...these aren’t just books that were written; they’re books that have happened” (Lejeune, xviii, emphasis mine)

Thursday 27th, April (Jarman, 1989)

The cold wind has fallen, the sea has turned an opaque jade. I rummage through my books-- the Wordsworth still has some markers of faded red and blue papers, used for a collage all those years ago. Dorothy's journal captures the day:

'I never saw such a union of earth, sky, and sea: the clouds beneath our feet spread themselves to the water, and the clouds of the sky almost joined them.'

I walk in this garden

Holding the hands of my dead friends...

From this initial desire to examine the journal in a tactual, haptic way, I began to push further into thinking of how the concept of reciprocity could lead the journal to open up onto the world.

In the chapter “the Paradox of Ulysses” in her book *Storytelling and Selfhood*, Adriana Cavarero argues that hearing the narrative to one's own life is essential to knowing who one is. That is, the self forms through the narrative interaction with another. She describes the famous scene of Ulysses returning home from his quest, sitting at the court of the Phaeacians. What she calls “the paradox of Ulysses” is the moment in which Ulysses weeps upon hearing the story of his heroic actions narrated to him:

“In hearing his story, then, Ulysses is moved to tears. Not only because then narrated events are painful, but because when he had lived them directly he had not understood their meaning. It is as if, while acting, he had become immersed in the contextuality of the events...

Now Ulysses comes to recognize himself as the hero of this story. By fully realizing the meaning of his narrated story, he also gains a notion of *who* is it's protagonist" (Cavarero 18, emphasis hers.)

The "paradox of Ulysses" is the concept that one can only know oneself from the point of view of another. Ulysses only recognizes himself as the protagonist of his own actions once he hears someone say so. Cavarero is drawing from philosopher Hannah Arendt, who had theorized previously about this web of everything and mutual appearing. In Arendt's words:

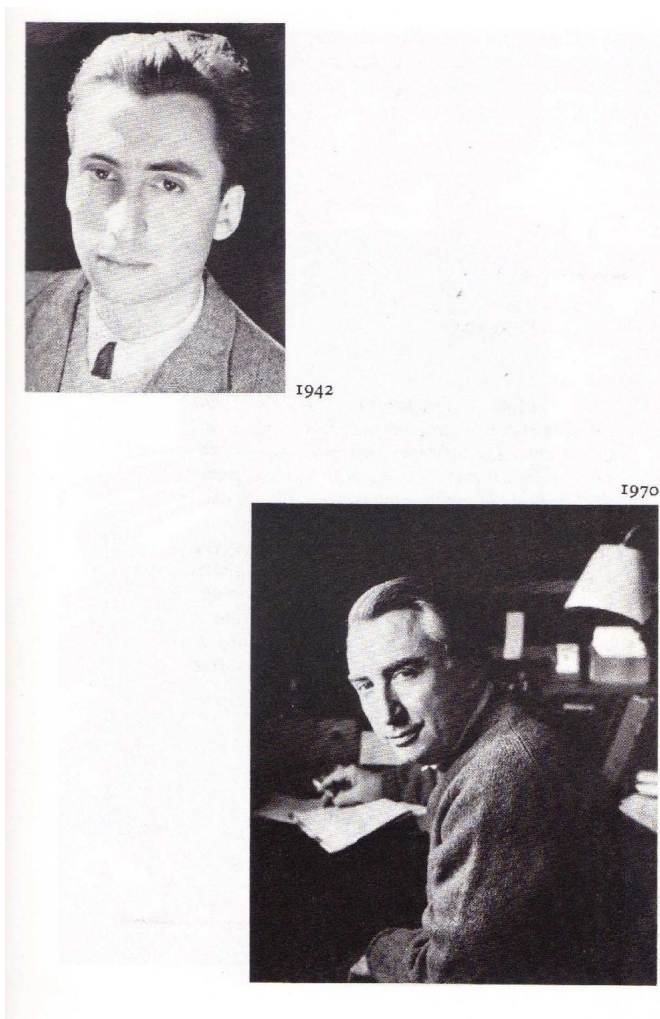
"The world in which men are born contains many things, nature and artificial, alive and dead, all of which have in common the fact that they *appear*, and are therefore destined to be seen, touched, tasted, smelled, to be perceived by other sensing creatures"²⁰

Cavarero argues that Arendt thinks, in this sense, of beings in existence with a type of "radical phenomenology" -- an early prototype, perhaps, to the 'radical feminist phenomenology' of Neimanis. Arendt posits a dialogue of existence among all things:

"existing consists in disclosing oneself within a scene of plurality where everyone, by appearing to one another, is shown to be unique" (Cavarero pg. 20).

²⁰ Arendt, *The Life Of The Mind* (1977) p10, referenced Cavarero pg. 20

It is only through the eyes, the voice, the mirror, of the Other, that one gets to know themselves. And this paradox, this web of appearing, is something that every person and every thing in existence--every person, mountain, lily pad, pencil--shares.



Barthes, RB

“But I never looked like that!”--How do you know? What is the “you” you might or might not look like? Where do you find it-- by which morphological or expressive calibration? Where is your authentic body? You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image; you can never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens (I am

interested in seeing my eyes only when they look at you): even and especially for your own body, you are condemned to the repertoire of its images

As I write this, I am also reading and thinking about the way that Anne Carson deconstructs the paradox of desire in the opening of *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), her meditation on the concept of romantic desire. She discusses how desire is described by Sappho with the term “bittersweet” , this term in itself a paradox. This is a shifted translation, because in its original Greek the term ‘bittersweet’ would sound more like ‘sweetbitter.’ I am going to use the mutable mirror of language here to think of bittersweet as a paradox and thus of *a paradox as bittersweet*.

Carson interprets a stanza of poem by Sappho, one in which the poet depicts a scene of watching a man interact with the girl of her desire, which is commonly read as being a poem about jealousy. She states that the poem is actually not about the three individual people, “but about the geometric figure formed by their perception of one another, and the gaps in that perception. It is in image of the distances between them. Thin lines of force coordinate the three of them...the man who listens closely as a poetic necessity...”²¹

He seems to me equal to the gods that man

Who opposite you

Sits and listens close

²¹ Carson, Anne. *Eros the Bittersweet: an Essay*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017. (page 15)

*To your sweet speaking (LP, fr.13)*²²

The man in this poem is a ‘poetic device’ necessary for Sappho to illustrate her desire toward the girl she loves. We can extend this to see why this web of three is necessary-- Sappho is only able to illustrate her desire, her interiority, through contrasting her inability to listen to “the sweet speaking” of her love to another figure.

Just like Ulysses, we exist as beings fundamentally exposed to one another. It is not ‘the argonaut’, a lone brave soldier, but ‘the argonauts’, a web of brave soldiers, together at the helm of the fast speeding ship. A web is created, “formed by the perception of one another” as necessary to understanding the self. The paradox of existence (one can only know oneself through another), like the paradox of desire, is *bittersweet*.

What does this have to do with the journal?

The journal, like touch, is reciprocal. The journal is a mirror. When I write a journal, I am sure that it will one day be read by a future self who will gain meaning from this narrative. I place what is intimate in an exterior place in order to look back on it later and understand myself. If this sounds like a reference to an individual sitting in the quiet dark oak of a confessional, it’s because it is.

²² Carson. *Eros The Bittersweet*. Page 15.

In *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault looks back to Puritan journals and examination of consciousness in the Christian Era to give a historical account of journal keeping. There is a religious nature to self exposure, the intimate coming outside of the self, one that is:

“not only a relief but a pleasure...

Rousseau confesses in order to justify his own existence. He would constitute a self, in writing, as he feels himself to be. And he will hold this self up as an alternative before the gaze of a public that only he has been able to see” (Foucault, *technologies of the self*, p105, emphasis mine)

[edit, April 7th: I am re-reading this now with William Major’ essay²³, “Autopathography as Resistance” in mind. Something that seems obvious to add here now is a nod to Foucault’s analysis of the power dynamics of confession: “in the manner of Michael Foucault’s well-known analysis of the dynamics of confession, the potential power of confession to change the self has in fact been predetermined by the cultural desire for sameness and normality, and women have to a large degree internalized their own oppression.” Lorde states “in the cause of silence, each one of us draws the face of her own fear-- fear of contempt, of censure, of some judgement... most of all, we fear the very visibility without which we also cannot truly live”²⁴

²³ Major, William.. "Audre Lorde's "The Cancer Journals": Autopathography as Resistance." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 35, no. 2 (2002): 39-56. Accessed May 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/44029981.

²⁴ Lorde, Audre. *The Cancer Journals*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2006.

The action of journal keeping implies both a public-- whether that be a future self, or, in the case of diaries to be published, an actual Other.

There is also a concept of time-- some past self writing to the future self, trusting that one day the future self will look back and make sense of these fragments.

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Phillipe Lejeune is a French theorist who thought a lot on diary, and often wrote his studies in the diary form themselves. He posits diary writing, as a historical medium, as emerging from Antiquity from two different planes. One were the officials journals, often kept by heads of households, that kept official records, documents, chronicles of income (account books). These, while written in the linear style of a diary (dated, bound together) were not personal nor subjective (p52), but literal 'accounts' of the day. The other vein in which diary writing emerged from is not as steeped in linear time, but in the ancient practice of the examination of the consciousness, of "caring for oneself" (53-- quote from foucault here). Phillipe states that the examination of one's consciousness can **even** be traced back to Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), who states, in his *Golden Verses*: "what good or ill have this day's life express'd? Where have I failed in what I ought to do?" (53).

This ancient practice of self examination, however, did not lead to diary writing. **It was often expressed through writing on tablets, then letter writings (?);** These self examinations were not necessarily written for the self, nor given any temporal order (Lejeune 54): "they are immersed in an eternal present, always immersed in eternal death".

What we now know as the contemporary diary practice emerged much later-- the merging of these two forms, accounting and reflection-- when the spiritual practice became a christian practice: "the first Christians revived the Stoics' spiritual exercises for their own purposes-- with a "repressive twist" (Lejeune 54). Lejeune traces this to the development of the Christian calendar, the formation of a collective consciousness of time as something linear, measurable. (7). The Christian practice of the spiritual journal, of the confessional journal, linked the practice of self-examination with the practice of confession.

In “On Diary”²⁵, French literary theorist Phillippe Lejeune sees the diary as a medium that is entirely shaped by time. He traces diary writing as having emerged from two different places. One was the official journals, often kept by heads of households, that kept official records, documents, chronicles of income (account books). These, while written in the linear style of a diary (dated, bound together) were not personal or subjective but literal ‘accounts’ of the day. The diary also has roots in the ancient practice of the examination of the consciousness, of “caring for oneself” (pg. 53). Phillippe states that the examination of one’s consciousness can be traced back to Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), who states, in his *Golden Verses*:

“What good or ill have this day’s life express’d? Where have I failed in what I ought to do?” (Lejeune 53).

These self examinations however were not necessarily written *for the self* (rather, for a higher power, for God), nor were they given any temporal order. What we now know as the contemporary diary practice emerged much later-- the merging of these two forms, accounting and reflection-- when the spiritual practice became a more rigidly defined Christian practice: “the first Christians revived the Stoics’ spiritual exercises for their own purposes-- with a ‘repressive twist’ (Lejeune 54). Lejeune traces this to the development of the Christian calendar, the formation of a collective consciousness of time as something linear, measurable. The Christian practice of the spiritual journal, of the confessional journal, linked the practice of self-examination with the practice of confession.

²⁵ Lejeune, Philippe, Jeremy D. Popkin, and Julie Bak. *On Diary*. Honolulu, T.H.: University of Hawaii Press, 2009.

Foucault states: “the presumptive unconverted self was confronted with the word of God met through daily self exposure of journal keeping.”²⁶

What began with a practice for God, became a practice for the self as God. the creation of the self as Other, and the mutual web of understanding of the self as Other.

The journal is the self split into the other.

Holding your own hand, helping yourself across the trespass of time.

To understand this reflection, we must first turn, for a few moments, toward the meaning of ‘time’.

“A diary is not only a place of asylum in space; it is also an archive in time. I escape the present and make contact with a vast future. I lay by provisions for a future writer, and leave traces for a

²⁶ Martin, L.H. et al (1988) Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault. London: Tavistock. pp.16-49.

future adult whom I am helping by recording his history, someone who will later help me better understand the confusion I am experiencing. *We* are helping *each other* across time. (Lejeune pg. 324, emphasis mine)

2/28/20

The diary is in a constant state of becoming. It is movement in text. in the inherent linearity (dated entries, forward motion of time) of the text we can map a progression of the diary author's life. An event, a thought, a moment in time. A written moment of stillness, even, is a progression of time. A diary makes peace with the seemingly paradoxical act of existing in all different temporalities at once: writing about the moment just after the moment has passed,. Reflecting on the past under a diary entry dated in the present. Constructing the future. The diary is a textual body marked by time, it is a material recording of existence. In this way, the diary is a body and reflects the body. The universal truth about the body, about all bodies, regardless of context, is that they are born, they grow, they decay. The diary reflects and contends with the forward motion of this truth. Susan Sontag becomes *Susan Sontag* in her journals, lives in the overwhelming present of youth, consciously constructs her imagined future. Derek Jarman grows a garden, makes notes on beauty, picks September's harvest as his body decays. His diary is steeped in stillness, reminiscence, the recording of a life, the clutching of it as one clutches a fistful of flowers, as it draws to a close. The temporality of the diary reflects the temporality of

the body. That is not to say linear, but rather, an infused temporality. Both are markers of the passage of time.

I chose Sontag's 'Reborn' and Jarman's 'Modern Nature' as foils through which to examine the meditation on time at different points in the artist's life-- the beginning and the end. Still versus accelerated, marked with urgency and marked with reflection.

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3/23/20

This is making me realize the importance of a house with a balcony. A house with an opening to the outside. If our pasts inform the houses we build when we're older, what I want is a house with a balcony, a deck, a garden. I would like to plant some small purple flowers and mint right there. I wonder with what eyes I'll look back on this diary with.

June Sunday 11, 1989 (Jarman)

A letter from the Folkestone Herald alerted me: the Sun wanted to buy their photos of me.

Meanwhile the lawyers' letters to the People and the Mirror have produced an apology and a correct reporting of my HIV status under the headline 'Del's not Dying'.

A motorbike draws up and a hapless reporter from the Sun clambers off. This is his third trip down here from London.

'Do you mind if I photo you?'

'Yes, but since one way or another you're going to, we might as well do a good job of it. Not in front of the house, on the beach

..

'You look uncomfortable,' he remarks

'Not as much as you should.'

'Oh?'

'I'm writing a diary, which I'm publishing. You're today's entry. When all is said and done what I choose to write will, I expect, be the only trace of your life. Your memory is in my hands.'

Jarman is aware that he is writing a journal to be published. In Lejeune's eyes, perhaps this would give it a certain inauthenticity. For me, it was an interesting study in the many layers of publics (himself, his public) that he was writing for. He is also very aware of the journal as a keeper of time, as a time-capsule, an object of memory. There is an immense power to this-- he issues an extremely powerful, violent condemnation of the paparazzi man-- the ultimate punishment, to be preserved in an in-complete and unflattering way in this text, "the only trace of your life" in these pages.

12/25/48 (Susan Sontag)

What, I ask, drives me to disorder? How can I diagnose myself? All I feel, most immediately, is the most anguished need for physical love and mental companionship-- I am very young, and perhaps the disturbing aspect of my sexual ambitions will be outgrown-- frankly I don't care. [In

the margin, and dated May 31, 1949, SS adds the words: Nor should you.”] My need is overwhelming and time, in my obsession, so short.

Sontag’s journals were not originally meant to be published. It was only after she died that her son, David Reiff, went back and edited and published his mother’s journals. David himself states that she would not have wanted them published, but because she had left all her papers to UCLA, he felt it was best for him to publish them with a touch of editorial power, before someone else did²⁷.

Lejeune defines the journals form in two ways: the journal is a “series of dated traces” which “the diarist can neither *compose* nor *correct*”²⁸.

3/5/19

The diary is a map of days, weeks, years. It is not a map of seconds or centuries, let alone time that is incomprehensible to us-- nanoseconds, eternity. it is mapped in relation to time that is understood/lived by the body. However, it also reflects humanity’s subjective experience of time. It is contradictory in that it is both linear and circular: “the diary is virtually unfinishable from the beginning, because there is always a time lived beyond the writing, making it necessary to write anew, and one day, this time beyond will take the shape of death (191)”

This vein of thinking allows us to move beyond the typical understanding of the diary as

²⁷ Eder, Richard. “Young Sontag: Intellectual in Training.” The New York Times. The New York Times, December 31, 2008. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/01/books/01eder.html>.

²⁸ On Diary, pg. 179

an elaboration of linear time (as in, Lejeune's historical account), to the diary as an account of a being in time. Of a being coming into existence, reflecting on its own existence.

Time exists in overwhelming layers in the diary-- as what structures it and what it is permeated with. Time is linked to both the date book and to the act of confession to absolve our past selves for our future selves.

Kris Kraus

February 9, 1995

“It’s now 2 o’clock in the afternoon and as I copied these out lines from your book by hand I felt a shudder of connection with myself when I was 24, 25. It was as if I was right back there in the room on East 11th Street, all those pages of notes that I was writing then, tiny ballpoint letters on wrinkly onion paper about George Eliot, diagrams of molecular movement and attraction, Ulrike, Meinhof and Merleu-Ponty. I believed I was inventing a new genre and it was a secret because there was nobody to tell it to. Lonely girl phenomenology. Living totally alone for the first time, and everything I’d been before..was breaking down...The arteries of the hand & arm that write lead straight into the heart, I was thinking last week in California, not seeing then that through writing it’s also possible to revisit a ghost of your past self, as if at least the shell of who you were fifteen years ago can somehow be recalled.”²⁹

²⁹ Kraus, Chris. 1997. *I love Dick*. New York, N.Y.: Semiotext(e).

“Language is, in Weinrich’s words, “an essential heterogeneous reality”

There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity. Language stabilishes around a parish, a bishopric, a capital. It forms a bulb. It evolves by subterranean stems and flows, along river valleys or train tracks; it spreads like a patch of oil. It is always possible to break language”³⁰

Just as the medium is defined by its relationship to time, it is also defined by its fragmented form.

Holding your own hand, helping yourself across the trespass of time.

If we take our architects, Gilles and Deleuze’s, words to be true, “it is always possible to break language”. The word ‘break’ implies a certain violent act. It implies to fragment by force.

I am going to draw in Judith Butler to speak to this. In ‘Giving An Account of Oneself’³¹, she debates the ethics of the question ‘who are you?’. To paraphrase from an Atlantic article³² I read on asking the question ‘how are you?’ during a global pandemic, *we need better questions*.

³⁰ Deleuze & Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia [University of Minnesota Press, 1987] p 7

³¹ Butler, Judith. “Giving an Account of Oneself.” *Shifter Magazine*, January 2005. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823225033.001.0001>.

³² Fetters, Ashley. “What to Ask Instead of 'How Are You?' During a Pandemic.” *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, April 24, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/04/should-i-still-say-how-are-you-during-a-pandemic/610639/>.

For Butler, this question is contingent on a dialogue between two people that is always inherently uneven. Being forced to answer this question, to sum one's own life in a narrative made comprehensible for another person, is an act of violence. That is, we are all appearing to each other in mutual misrecognition, in a mutual web of forever unsatisfied understanding. And as Butler states, "for us to revise recognition as an ethical project, it would have to become, in principle, unsatisfiable" (Butler 28). Butler seeks to create a "critical opening" for discussion of the "normative horizon within which the Other Sees and listens and knows and recognizes" (28).

Back, briefly, to Sappho's poem referenced in Anne Carson's *Eros Bittersweet*:

He seems to me equal to the gods that man

Who opposite you

Sits and listens close

To your sweet speaking (LP, fr.13)³³

Butler draws from Cavarero's claim that the 'I' is constantly defining itself in its act of exposure to the Other (in a 'dyadic' loop), in which the politics of existence consist in "learning how to best question this constant and necessary exposure" (Butler 24), to question the ethics behind being asked ('who are you?') to narrate one's own life. Precisely because of one's own subjectivity, one's position in the interior of one's own mind and life, it is impossible to view oneself objectively, to construct a coherent, singular, cohesive narrative: "there are, then, several

³³ Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*. Pg 13.

ways in which the account I may give of myself has the potential to break apart and to become undermined.” The narrative account requisite on the exposure to the Other, mediated through spoken or written language, is always “partial, haunted by that for which I have no definite story.” (Butler 27).

If we view the journal as a dialogue between the self/the self-as-other, then can we view the journal as creating a window in what Butler calls the “Hegelian mirror” of mutual self-recognition (Butler 27). I would argue that we CAN find an ‘Other’ that can meet us on a level playing field, can hear us and understand us without the intrinsic power dynamic of appearing-onto-the Other (outside of the power dynamic of time), that is the future/past selves of the journal.

This is what drew me to the radical act of fragmenting the journal.

My breaking apart of these diaries was a meditation on the suspension of all narration,

“suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence, seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence that demands that we emanifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same” (Butler 27).

Fragmenting various journals and turning them onto each other was like holding mirrors up to mirrors up to mirrors, a glance, briefly, into the webs of dyadic self- understanding formed by interior reflection made exterior. However, as I got deeper and deeper into the act of

fragmentation, more and more questions surfaced. How much do these reflections upon reflections distort and disempower the original life? And is there a difference if the journals are meant to be made public or not? Is there an ethical difference in answering ‘who are you?’ for yourself or for others? Or in the name of others?

I am going to turn to Roland Barthes, now, who himself seemed frustrated and entranced by these notions.

Roland Barthes’ *RB* is a strange, giddy, obsessive little autobiographical text, one entirely written in fragment form, organized alphabetically. Susan Sontag wrote often about Barthes’s use of fragmentation, in her essay ‘Writing Itself’ she writes about Barthes’s distinct fragmentary style, one that echoes the form of her diary (and all diaries):

Barthes uses the “the start-and-stop method” with “multiple openings and closures,” allowing “discourse to become as differentiated, as polyphonous, as possible”³⁴

Fragmentation, the abstraction of the narrative is liberating. In the words of Sontag, it creates many openings in a text. It allows for freedom from the constraint of narrative form, for the creation of a horizontal, not vertical text. This fragmentary style is what I saw as key to the creation of the rhizome: not drawing entire narrative texts together, but fragments, pieces, from each. This takes the form of the diary and destabilizes it-- weaving together different fragments

³⁴ Maunsell, Jerome Boyd. "The Writer's Diary as Device: The Making of Susan Sontag in *Reborn: Early Diaries 1947—1963*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1-20. Accessed May 11, 2020. doi:10.2979/jmodelite.35.1.1.

of an already fragmented form, taking away the time stamp of the date-- and also exaggerates its original structure.

Barthes himself notes this architectural feature of the fragment. Of himself, he states:

“Liking to find, to write *beginnings*, he tends to multiply this pleasure: that is why he writes fragments: so many fragments, so many beginnings, so many pleasures”³⁵

January 1957 (Sontag)

Notes of a Childhood

Gammon + spinach. Anthony Rowley.

On the train to Florida: “Mother, how do you spell pneumonia?”

Sitting on Gram’s bed Sunday morning...

All the lies I told

³⁵ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, pg. 94

Perhaps he himself was both inspired by and plagued by the use of the fragment. Which, as I went discovering while piecing together this thesis, often leaves more questions than answers. The space between fragments, when multiplied by so many as to form a long text, begins to feel overwhelmingly empty.

“To write by fragments: the fragments are then so many stones on the perimeter of a circle: I spread myself around: my whole universe in crumbs; at the center, what?”³⁶

Fragments are like constant beginnings. The pleasure of the quick thought, the capturing of the momentum of the present moment. Although Barthes worked often with this form, ironically, he publically detested the journal.

“I’ve never kept a journal”, Roland Barthes declared in 1979, ‘-- or, rather, I’ve never known if I should keep one’. The form itself, he continued, was inferior and ‘unnecessary’, a ‘minor mania of writing’ (deliberations introduction). ‘Stricken [...] with a kind of insidious disease, negative characteristics-- deceptive and disappointing’.

He asked (himself): How to keep a journal without egotism? That is precisely the question that keeps me from writing one (for I have had just enough about egotism)³⁷

³⁶ *RB*, pg. 93

³⁷ Neil Badmington (2016) *Deliberations: the journals of Roland Barthes*, *Textual Practice*, 30:2, 205-208, DOI: 10.1080/0950236X.2016.1129722

Yet, despite these statements, upon his death it was discovered that Barthes had perhaps been hiding a penchant for diary writing, with two long journals (one published in 1977 following the death of his mother and the other written in 1974 during a trip to China. The posthumous publication of these journals is debatably unethical-- in his essay on Barthes' 'Mourning Diary' in the text I am drawing from here, 'Deliberations: The Journals of Roland Barthes', Antoine Compagnon begins by stating that he "reads the journals" that were never intended to be published "in discomfort" (*Deliberations*, pg. 5).

From taking a glance at these journals, we can gather that Barthes saw the immediacy of the journal form as the only way to cope with the grief of the death of his mother. It was the only way to deal with the impossible burden of mourning, the way mourning distorts and negates all lineal sense of time-- "by a negative formulation, mourning is the perfect illustration of the connection between narrative and time. In mourning, to reject narrative means to reject time-- time for living...a pure repetition of the instant" (*Deliberations*, pg. 7). Despite his rejection of the idea of the journal form, Barthes displayed an obsessive fascination with the main tenets of journal writing-- fragmentation, marked lineal time--

'Mourning diary' is "written on a series of 331 slips of paper that Barthes prepared himself by cutting sheets of typing paper in four. It was found in a filing cabinet containing 13,000 slips of the same format, which were reordered in a process of 'perpetual recomposition' throughout Barthes's career, and used in the production of his fragmentary works" (*Deliberations*, pg. 41)

Deliberations: the Journals of Roland Barthes is an interesting text on one level because of its meditation on the contradictions of barthes's form. But on another level, I find it interesting that so many scholars took to write an entire text just on these contradictions. What are these layers upon layers of questions about the diary? Why do we care to interrogate it? Why do we care?

Perhaps I can re-direct this question toward questions that arose in the process of making this thesis. I'm going to conclude with the present.

3/24

Today I woke up at 7. I was jetlagged and anxious. Called viole. Put gloves on, went downstairs, made coffee. Tightness in chest/cough... Felt accomplished for feeding myself. The oil leaked through the paper plate

Went on a long walk. Read mekas. Talked to marcy from across the kitchen. Writing while she falls asleep 4 hours ahead. Her breath on the phone. We keep journals to give meaning to our lives. That has never been more clear to me than now. I keep feeling the need to record things, to keep myself from completely disappearing.

Disaster capitalism

profound/essential workers vs disposable vs bourgeoisie

Lives vs livelihood

We will never go back..

Viole and i talk about how it's unethical to have kids now

But i really always wanted kids

Cuomo passed budgets with cuts to health care, biden= dream of return to normal pre trump,

can't go back

Can't bundle corporate bailout and family relief

Appearance of authority without substantive context... i hate when my mom says andrew cuomo will save us

5/3

The monstrous house you carry with you always. The monstrous house you find tattooed on your arm.

The desert wind and the way banality, every day, coalesces around and through events of trauma or the unknown. A global pandemic is a series of days strung together, absence of moments of extreme action, an extreme inaction, eating oatmeal because you ran out of groceries, computers computers, sleeping without alarm, the anxiety of the every day. The banality of evil, she said, sipping a cup of coffee, anxiously.

What's interesting is that the letter implies desire. It implies a back and forth. The benediction monk on a podcast told me that the original anxiety is birth anxiety and anxiety is ACTUALLY something to be desired..

Anxiety comes *anxious* from the Latin root angh

Tightness, painful, choke, squeeze

The choking of the baby through the vaginal canal (the monk's words not mine)

A list of books i read during a global pandemic. A list of movies i watched during a global pandemic. A list of people i called during a global pandemic. Meals cooked, papers written, blouses worn, dishes washed, cups of coffee drunk, etc. etc. infinitum. The banality of evil = perhaps that we are the evil = that we can exist still in our banality.

My initial inclination was to destroy the diary. To explode it. To destroy the narrative of the diary, to exaggerate its fragments, to plant a rhizome from its remains. I think I was sitting on a bit of a grudge about the constant writing about the self of the modern era. I wanted to interrogate it, to affect it. But I am coming to realize in a moment of trauma, of morning, the importance of piecing together the fragments and allowing them to tell their own story.

I am going to go back, finally to one journal that was lost in the shuffle-- when I left Vassar, I left many things behind, a few of which were books that were once central to this thesis. Audre Lorde's "A Cancer Journals" were meant to be woven in throughout the rhizome, alongside Sontag and Jarman. However, her little book did not make the move . I am unable to get another copy now (as it seems to be not widely printed until October of this year, when

penguin random house is set to re-release it). However, in the process of attempting to procure a PDF version online, I stumbled upon a little molehill of gold: William Major's essay "Audre Lorde's 'The Cancer Journals': Autopathography as Resistance".

Major describes the complex, liberatory way Lorde uses the journals she kept during the process of fighting breast cancer to create a manifesto of the self, for the creation of a radical, multiple-faced subjecthood, rooted in blackness, femininity, lesbianism, and bodily difference. He begins his argument questioning postmodern literary theory and criticism tendency to look down at the 'I' of autobiography, to see the 'I' as the self, "as variously compromised by bourgeois, transcendental, or androcentric assumptions and associations"³⁸

Major asks-- what does this distancing from the self, "the potential consequences of a radical disengagement from the idea of autonomous selfhood" mean for the marginalized self, the self that is erased by heteronormative patriarchal society? (40). I circled this quote, and wrote back in the margins-- yes, is this my problem?

In trying to disperse the selves of the diaries I was working with, to open them up onto each other, by cutting them apart, was I unintentionally and a bit naively, diluting the journal a point of de-politicizing and muting the queer, the decaying body, the different body, the feminine, etc-- those identities that make these voices so powerful and put them in community with each other in the first place?

³⁸ Major, William.. "Audre Lorde's 'The Cancer Journals': Autopathography as Resistance." pg 40

The Cancer Journals, as Major argues, is a way of writing from the self that forms multiplicity and forms community. Lorde intentionally draws theory out of her life, and records her experience as a radical, political, and personal act of salvation: “the need for the speaking subject to become both speaker and theorist allows that subject to take some form of control over the reception or mediation of experience” (Major 53). To disperse “masculine models of transcendence”, it is vital to write the voice of the feminine (of the black/lesbian/the diseased body etc.) into existence, and, to go beyond this, to form community, to give voice to, the multiplicity “Lorde loses her breast--we can not forget this fact-- but of course such loss happens not only to her, nor the effects of her experience limited to her private sense of identity; indeed, one can make the argument that the text undercuts the very idea of a private and inviolate subjectivity” (53). This is *thinking with water*, in Neimanis’s words, a lived example of the feminine, the fluid, the transcendence of the lineal/masculine norm, a way that the diary can function both.

Sunday December 8th 1989 (Jarman)

...David asks me on the way back how I thought of all this. The truth is I didn't-- you start with one thing and end with another

Frankenstein is a self-referential monster, and this is why he endures the test of time. This is why “Frankenstein’s monster haunts queer art”³⁹-- Frankenstein is the unnatural body, “The

³⁹ Fox, Charlie. “Why Frankenstein's Monster Haunts Queer Art.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, October 13, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/t-magazine/art/frankenstein-monster-queer-art.html>.

transsexual body”, the queer body, the operated-upon body, one that is “an experiment in empathy for the supposedly unloveable” (47). Frankenstein is a touch-stone for queer artists, and for any non-cis white straight male person, that reclaim the monster, not as a symbol to be pitied but as an empowerment of the body that does not fit the norm, that is seen as ‘ugly’ (47).

I came around my bed and stood in front of the mirror in my room, and stuffed the thing into the wrinkled folds of the right side of my bra where my right breast should have been. It perched on my chest askew, awkwardly inert and lifeless, and having nothing to do with any me I could possibly conceive of. [...] Somewhere, up to that moment, I had thought, well perhaps they know something that I don't and maybe they're right, if I put it on maybe I'll feel entirely different. I didn't. [...] I looked at the large gentle curve my left breast made under the pajama top, a curve that seemed even larger now that it stood by itself. I looked strange and uneven and peculiar to myself, but somehow ever so much more myself, and therefore so much more acceptable, than I looked with that thing stuck inside my clothes. For not even the most skillful prosthesis in the world could undo that reality, or feel the way my breast had felt, and either I would love my body one-breasted now, or remain forever alien to myself (Lorde 44)

Lorde's point, Major's point, and my point here is immense power in the self-referential.

Whether that means writing a journal for your self, or writing a journal for others, there is an emancipatory power in the exploration multiplicity, not when it is emptied of meaning, but when it is filled with more meaning, that leaks beyond the individual, to the communal flesh of the world beyond it.

There is no conclusion because this is a circular text (there are infinite possible endings). I think this is also a text that I will go back to and re-think, because there is no clear ‘theory’, rather small mutable insights that I’m drawing out of the bodies that create this text. Just as Lejeune states: the journal continues on, indefinitely, it is antithetical to the very nature of the diary itself to name an ending.

“A diary is turned toward the future, so if something is missing, it is not the beginning, but the end that changes in the course of writing it. When I meet up with the future, it slips away from me by showing up once again in the beyond. To “finish” a diary means to cut it off from the future and integrate that future in the reconstruction of the past” (191)

Perhaps the diary is ‘finished’ once the diarist is dead and the diary itself is published. That could be an answer here. But by picking up their words again, it’s possible that this text challenged even this possible ending.

3/7/20 (Sontag)

“One must distinguish ‘the truth’ from ‘the truth about.’ It is true that 1) it was snowing and 2) Aaron Nolal put milk in the coffee he brought me. But the truth about, e.g. I.’s and my

relationship is not an inventory of what has happened, what was said, done. It is an interpretation, an insight.

... there are degrees of “truth about”

What a delicate instrument language is”

What a delicate instrument language is!

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