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HOOKS and NETS and BONES: the search and forty-odd poems

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

by

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Abstract

Attraction and seduction play a role in all areas of life. They are not always tied to beauty. The abject is both fascinating and repulsive. Recognition of the precarious state of the self results from viewing the abject. Ritual is used to mark the passage from one state of being to another. The taboo is often transgressed within the realm of ritual. Taboos are in place to be broken. The act of transgression is dependent on the context of that which is taboo. Performance is often ritualistic. Performance differs from other visual art forms in that it allows for direct interaction between the artist and the audience. Violence can be seen as taking place in various degrees, and on many levels. Violence is more than a physical act. Language is always omissive. The act of translation can never be accurate. Language is an act of translation.

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I search for words
that won't float
that won't sink
I search for a place in my mind,
in your heart, in the mountains
for a pool
deep enough to swim
for a current
strong enough to sweep us away
Perhaps even for a waterfall.

Leaping in

The search began in the dawn. The morning fog hindered finding of the missing. Difficulties arise when one seeks the unnamable. It became a rebellion against the haze. Truth was portrayed as the answer to all turmoil.

The wounds had closed and become infected. Rebellion forced a reopening of the wounds. A thorough examination and cleansing of the injury was required to speed the healing process.

Looked for anything that would bring understanding. Looked for anything that would help me be someplace else. I looked to flesh my bones. Huck Finn, and Jean Valjean provided nourishment for my skeleton. They were great runners. Endurance running keeps one skinny.

The rebellious act is an artistic endeavor.

Rebellion rarely changes the world. Often times, the insurrection affects a smaller universe. The invention of the camera proved that the eye is at the center of the image-taker's world. The rebel can only hope for limited change. The rebel holds a mirror not towards the self, but rather, to the immediate environment.

The graduate student, excessively prudent
safe in every way
do what they say, it'll be o.k.
and don't forget to wipe that stuff off your nose.

Searched the darkest places I could find, and discovered demons could be friends.

A wound is more than a piercing or cutting of the skin; a wound penetrates and exposes the interior to trauma. If the wound occurs within, outward symptoms will be the expected compliment. Injuries blur boundaries, force reconciliation between the inside and the outside. If reconciliation cannot be reached, then the result will be at the very least discomfort, at the most death. The wound that isn't seen is much more difficult to comprehend, but is far easier for the other to live with.

Crazy o.k. in a darkened haze,
 slow slide,
 long ride,
 and the blood of the bull
 on the back of the throat
 begs smashing into another day.
 Slicing minds,
 making finds
 of precious pearls
 Wanting to get at the sand
 where it all began,
 a festered wound.

Pain can put one in shock. Shock is an evolutionary response that increases a being's chances for survival in times of trauma. Shock can hide pain, it can allow for the enactment of impossibilities. One can run blindly through years and years of dense bush when in shock. Memories can be lost in this trauma reaction. Shock is a quick fix, a temporary healer.

Pain is little more than electronic impulses sent to the brain in reaction to particular trauma. Glimmers of hope burn through the haze. If one accepts the pain, examines and acknowledges it, it is no larger than it is. With acceptance and acknowledgement, healing becomes a possibility.

Staring at it from the bottom up
 will make one wince.
 Not from fear of gods
 or goddesses,
 nor the black heat of hell.
 More likely, the furrows on the brow
 are plowed in the darkness and bleakness
 of the living.

The bus was warmer than my sweater. And I asked myself how far it was that I
 wanted to go. How much longer could I stand the heat? The color of my mood changed
 shades somewhere around ten o'clock. I was almost back to the four-plex, almost lost in
 a book on habitats and habits. Then the question shifted: how far was it that I wanted to
 go? Looked over the edge quite often, but seldom jumped. Once, I bled to write on a
 blackboard. Once they shaved me with an overpriced cheese-slicer. Once I looked up
 from an unfair fight and saw the gentle nod of unexpected friendship.

For a while I thought that language held the answer. I thought words were
 feelings. Then I recognized that words are fingers, pointing towards, the event, the
 particular thing, and massaging emotions. Overlooking the think-shop, he asked me how
 I thought I would act if I were confident. I told him I would have to think about that one.

Think too much,
 a fractured crutch,
 holding up the work
 that never was.
 Marking glory,
 the oft-told story
 makes for a really good critique,
 but on its own,
 its just a bone,
 too hard except the marrow

What have I learned? What does it mean to believe in that which I have learned? I have known far more people that knew how to be right than I have who knew how to be wrong. This 'rightness' is not just for individuals, it mostly belongs to institutions, cultures, and academies. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron put forth the idea that "all pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence..." (Bourdieu and Passeron, p. 5) The notion of truth is still embedded within the educational system. The 'museum' and the 'academy' are still seen as keepers of the truth. The pedagogical role of these structures is entrenched in validation and reproduction of a history that is proving to be incomplete and often false. If I do not recognize that I am a product—victim—of my education, I will never have much to teach.

Violence can be looked at as something that happens in varying degrees. It is a subject that can make people uncomfortable, the odd sense of discomfort that one feels in the bowels when one is caught being voyeuristic with the self; the sense of not being satisfied when one looks in the mirror. Violence has an inherent relationship with power, the use of power, and more often the attainment and reinforcement of power. Violence depends on meaning: if meaning is not shared by all parties in a relationship or situation then force, intimidation, omission, manipulation and coercion will be used to force one will upon the other.

With a sense of joyful wonder
 I looked into the broken thoughts,
 touched gentle on the painful plain
 where almost used to dwell,
 found freedom lies within the leaks
 spilling out upon the floor
 Smiled loosely wretched, longing,
 something more than poor
 Breathed deeply of the cracks that formed
 when I was wanting more.
 Docile in the mourning.

When I am making art, what am I doing? Art is not just the object. It is not just the making. It has to do with the willingness to explore. Art is not the artist. The object is not the artist. Process is a selfish act. Preconceived notions create a sinkhole difficult to escape. One can only imagine the vastness of the crevasse without looking over the edge; one can only imagine the feeling of wind against the skin without leaping. One can only leap.

A hundred poems I write,
 a thousand dreams of fright.
 One chance,
 no two, that they just might be right.
 So do your work, and push, and
 push, as hard, and push
 as your most intimate moment.
 The object is your lover

We are prohibited in many fashions. We are codified and socialized within families, class structures, institutions and norms. These boundaries serve to provide a form of social stability; there is a need for rules. Anarchy is not utopia. Transgression of taboo is attractive and seductive. The roots of the need for transgression lie within the impossibility of existing outside of ourselves and in our desire for immortality.

The lure is a tool of seduction. To the fish it is the seducer, that which awakens desire. Beautiful tools of cruelty disguised as a source of satisfaction. The lure is perceived as nourishment. The role of predator and prey is rendered ironic when the lure is used; it is as a predator that the fish is prey.

The net is more formal than the hook. It can be used in combination with the lure and therefore catch and hold the predator, but most often the role of the victim is much more passive. The use of the net entails knowledge of the habits of the prey; what are the prey's habits, routines and preferred environments. Do they repeatedly follow the same general path? Do they usually stop for rest or nourishment for a particular time at a particular place? Do certain things hold their interest? This knowledge can be used to violate the prey.

Discontentment
becomes resentment
when the barb will not work free.
A want to write
turns to fright
when its snagged in a net of desire
loneliness
looks for caress
in the most unyielding places
like pillows, bones, and stones
alone.

On a hook, in a net, the victim struggles for freedom. Both are methods of entrapment and containment. Both involve physical tension. The line, hook for a tail, is taut from the pull of the current, the fish, or the snag. The line, which is the skeleton of net, is stretched and tested by the wind, the current, the prey. They are imbued with death and dying. Ultimately both involve a release from the tension of the cord--a return

to the wild, a life in captivity, or death--which any choice could be seen as a form of freedom.

The net or hook, without a victim, is a violent act waiting happen. They are *almost actions* filled with inherent questions. Who or what is the intended victim? What would it be like to be seduced by the beauty of the lure, impaled on the hook, and held by its barb? How does one get ensnared in the net? How hard would one struggle to be free of the web? Am I already caught? Have I already been seduced by the lure? We can see ourselves as powerless when confronted by the violence that permeates these implements.

With vision dust, the prairie wind
and the smell of old decay,
the bones I chase
provide a place
of gentle gropes and senile ropes
without a place to sway
dance freedom found in knots,
but yet the weave and pensive grieve
paint heroes lost in rot.

Bones, also, are imbued with implications. They imply death, decay, vulnerability, and a somewhat stable sub-structure for life. The skeleton exposed is a crossed border, a breach of the boundaries between outside/inside, illness/health, life/death etc. We are reminded of the cyclic nature of our world, reminded that in life we are not 'continuous being' and it is only through death that we contribute to the continuity of it all.

Decay: privileged place of mingling, of the contamination of life by death,
of begetting and of ending. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 149)

Decay directs us to some difficult questions: what is it like to die, and what would it be like to live forever? Perhaps this is one common net from which we attempt to free ourselves.

Life is the net from which we cannot escape the freedom of death.

The wound can resist closure and attempts to expel that which doesn't belong. Exposing the interior means being open to disease and infection as well as love and healing.

One must keep open the wound where he or she who enters into the analytic adventure is located—a wound that the professional establishment, along with the cynicism of the times and of institutions, will soon manage to close up.....It is...a heterogeneous, corporeal, and verbal ordeal of fundamental incompleteness: a 'gaping,' 'less One.' For the unstabilized subject who comes out of that—like a crucified person opening up the stigmata of its desiring body to a speech that structures only on condition that it let go—any signifying or human phenomenon, insofar as it is, appears in its being as abjection. (Kristeva, p. 27)

The wound without exposure doesn't heal as fast as the exposed wound. Containment, or closed wounds, can be places of safety and security. They can also be places of infection. Blood clots faster in the open air. We all seek security in confinement in as much as we all adhere to codification and social norms. All cultures and sub-cultures have codes and rules of behavior. These nets—which contain or constrain us—keep things out as well as in. There is a risk of infection with both exposure and containment.

We can heal to a point of deformity.

Breathe, breathe,
you heady slaves of spring,
wizards of the winter
and last year's shade
Fidelity, you soil,
to root and seed, and
wanton need.
Echoes scream the sky.
Birth pristine,
delinquent green,
drinks drunk the thirsty eye
defining hues of hollow
where yet another branch resides.
Colliding brother,
brush of color,
conversations with the wind,
sympathetic serenade of webs,
of weeds, of wings
Whisper, whisper,
lest you wake the beast.

Attraction, Seduction

I examine the giant hook with immense fascination. Was this lure everything that it appeared to be? Did contentment reside on its barb? Life in a small prairie town is idyllic. Sensuous mornings sipping dark roast, serenaded by a winged choir. A small town studio is usually in an old school house surrounded by wind and friendly folk. One can't argue with an endless supply of inspiration blowing by the door. There is a gregarious country store with fresh bread and eggs. Of course, the sense of community in a village is paramount. The attraction of this lure isn't as flashy as some others, but there is something about the way those elevators go to sleep in a prairie sky.

The attraction is too much to resist. I am convinced that this lure will satisfy my desire for a peaceful life. I take the bait, and we move into the smell of diesel fuel.

Attraction and seduction are related, but are not the same thing. More fish are attracted to the lure than are seduced by it. The lure can be followed and investigated without desire overriding curiosity. I am seduced when I believe that the object of my desire—the seducer—will satisfy that desire.

Today I swam to pray
the river
that you danced right through me.
Erode a larger hole
in the weakened stone
that seems to be my heart.

When seduced it is amazingly possible to cross over into areas of taboo. Seduction alludes to the erotic. The kiss, the touching of 'forbidden flesh' and in general,

a mixing of bodily fluids, are all parts of eroticism. The erotic is a door; it is a transgression. It opens the way to behavior that is not usually acceptable.

We use the word eroticism every time a human being behaves in a way strongly contrasted with everyday standards and behavior. Eroticism shows the other side of a façade of unimpeachable propriety. Behind the façade are revealed the feelings, parts of the body and habits we are normally afraid of. (Bataille, p. 109)

Dating, engagement, and marriage are some of the rituals that make transgression socially acceptable.

Caverns caves and crevasses
Dents, wrinkles and religion
Hiding places, sliding places
trickles of fear and an arch
in the back
Tight like a bite
or a line going slack.
Whelmed, almost over
the inviting darkness.

The erotic is an attempt to break down borders. We long to not be alone. The abject is a key player in eroticism.

The body's inside...shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its content. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 53)

Seduction provides an opportunity for us to attempt to break free of the self, to become one with the other. Seduction can be seen as related to our desire for what Georges Bataille has described as 'continuity.'

Longer dark and shorter warm,
 even the reds and yellows
 are hiding
 from the cold.
 The smell of the earth
 is like Saturday mornings,
 and not wake up till spring.
 I'd hibernate with you.

Attraction is directly related to curiosity. Curiosity about whether the object of desire can fulfill the desire. It can be seen to be an inspection of the boundaries. Seduction, on the other hand, while also relating to desire, can be seen to correlate with belief. Seduction occurs when there is a belief in place that the object of desire will provide fulfillment. Seduction crosses boundaries.

Prison in a revolving door,
 walking through and wanting more
 Wrenching bile and slowly smile
 face rivers
 sourced from quivers,
 running into pools
 alkaline on clothes and pillows.
 Making gains, gentle pains
 and tenuous strains.
 Why the knitted brow?

The first cage I stopped at constrained an ugly bird. It was a bird craving attention to the point that it had plucked most of its own feathers. Skin is a funny color on some birds and tends to make them unattractive. It is curious that I found this disturbing creature's need for me so seductive. Rarely have I encountered any being so in need of love and attention. The bird pressed itself against the spaces between the bars in its attempts to touch the love offered through my fingertips. The pleasure I felt in

scratching this bird was such that the itch might as well have been my own. The desperate need I felt in this animal overwhelmed me, attracted me, and seduced me.

The bird in the second cage looked no less haggard and needy than the first. This remarkably forlorn looking creature was almost a mirrored image of the other. It took me half an hour to stop my finger from bleeding.

Weighted wonder of the heavy heart,
guts floating
fret on walking winds
and a place to start
the wander burden
down an impulse path.
Beaten ground,
the silent sounds
shrieking out a shouldered past
bent bliss, the bouldered kiss
seeks fluid flows
and sacred blows.
Waiting,
contemplating,
accept the heavy heart.

Abjection

I catch a glimpse of ribs and matted hair. The grass was longer than the fur. My stomach bobbles, not wanting see the dried flakes of crimson that are inevitable. I look away.

The next time I turn the corner, town is fifteen minutes away, it actually takes an hour; I look a little closer. It is dead, a corpse, its fur a reflection of the long grass that is consuming it. Why can't I look away? Why do I want to look closer? I know it will have a stench about it, and yet sometimes the most eerie of smells attract us in their repulsion.

Gravel goes searching for wheat roots; the wind has only been quiet twice since we moved here. Getting out of the car is relatively smooth, but unease festers as my eye falls on three weeks worth of death. The emaciated ribcage tells my nose what to expect. I am not disappointed; the odor turns to bile as it hits my lungs. Confronted and contaminated, I continue on. I touch it gingerly, and yet not gently, with one of my steel-toes, and dance backwards as if it is going to grab my ankle. Reveling in the assault on my being, I become voyeur, closer than life. It wasn't until much later that I came to examine my reaction.

I watch them rot.
 They love decay.
 Principles, like maggots,
 begin to fray
 the edges which once
 provided life
 now sweep them away.
 The future frightens me

When one is confronted by the abject, one is put into a position requiring an examination of the limitations of the self. It forces us to accept the interior, and the certainty of death

...refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3)

The exposed interior, decay and carcasses represent a breaking down of the structures that are inherent in our language, self-images, and socialization. We are all soft on the inside. The particular thing itself is not the source of this sense of fascinating revulsion. It relates to the fragility of self. The object is not the abject.

The abject does not locate itself within a particular space. It acknowledges the existence of another space, crosses over barriers, forces the observer to confront the border.

It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4)

It is the space/non-space which these objects push towards that gives cause for discomfort.

Abject materials, through their references to the 'disturbed identity,' can challenge social taboos by exposing elements of the bodily interior. Death, blood, excrement, carnal fluids and decay all encompass two key elements found in the theory of abjection.

[The] theory of abjection draws on two key elements: a blurring of the boundary between the self and other...and the notion of 'base materialism' introduced by Georges Bataille. (Whitney Museum of American Art, p. 7)

The object can allude to emotions and desires that already reside in the human psyche. The observer is compelled to confront what Bataille calls the 'discontinuity' of life, the fact that we, in our perceptions as selves, cannot exist outside of ourselves.

It is a lump of pouring empty
 pushing hard against the ribs
 A cross of servile stitches
 straining closed the festered wound
 A gem of lonely headstone
 for the gods that used to be
 A weighted prayer too heavy
 to be thrown at the sky
 Screaming bones picked clean
 by ears afraid to hear
 Wanting to be fleshed, sleeping skinned and bare.

Discomfort, the result of being affronted by the abject, is an acknowledgement of what Kristeva defines as 'want'. What is it that we want? Do we desire to be the other?

There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 5)

The 'fetishized product,' the 'object of want' is not the want we *experience*. We desire the impossible—to exist outside of ourselves—and impossibility leads to suffering.

The anguish of desire...so great as to be more like its opposite, suffering.(Bataille, p. 19)

A paradox exists here if we accept that there is continuity to the universe. Alone is the net we are all flailing in; the net is the void, a space that is inescapable. It could be a hook. We desire to not be alone.

His birth, his death, the events of his life may have some interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned with them. He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity. This gulf exists, for instance, between you, listening to me, and me, speaking to you. We are attempting to communicate, but no communication between us can abolish our fundamental difference. If you die, it is not my death. (Bataille, p. 12)

We struggle with our inability to exist as the other. The abject resides on a boundary; it lives in the certainty of the other and in the uncertainty of self.

Our aloneness is what we confront; it is that which we desire to subvert, to escape. Discomfort is the result of a confrontation with our discontinuous selves. We do not exist outside of ourselves. Desire is linked to the want for continuity: it is death we fear, but it is death itself that allows us to contribute to the continuity of the world. This is one source of abjection: life/death is an inside/outside relationship.

Ambiguity is disturbing because in it, meaning is obscured, layered, and difficult to classify. A net of obscure discomfort is cast when the mind/body is confronted by the diseased definition.

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9)

Ambiguity is acute. It resists the comfort zone in that it affirms the menace; it does not allow for easy categorization. It acknowledges pain; it acknowledges the other.

Established boundaries around social norms can be called taboos that are blurred and broken within abjection.

Desublimatory investigations of abjection within art...imply not so much a lack of cleanliness or health as an assault on the totalizing and homogenizing notions of identity, system and order. This base materialism in art confronts and transgresses social prohibitions and taboos, reenacting psychic traumas, personal obsessions and phobias, and challenging the stability of our bodily gestalts. (Simon Taylor, p. 59-60, *The Phobic Object in Abject Art*)

Pain exists in the boundaries that it crosses. Individuals have varying thresholds of pain. Once the limit is reached the body rebels. Pain's companion is desire, in that it is never complete without healing. The absence of pain is a simile of the 'other,' and therefore pain does not exist without desire. Pain is

best described as a kind of peculiar and disturbing momentum, it shifts from the area of injury into a pool of base pain, telling us to change, flee, fix, or cure. (Goodeve, p. 229)

Pain is not a bad thing; it communicates injury. Without pain the wound does not get the attention it needs, and injuries worsen. Pain releases the desire for healing.

The sight of the first incision was mesmerizing. As the meager layer of fat was penetrated the swollen muscle assaulted the slice, yelling at the open air. The anesthetic was injected at the base of my spine. Legs dead, I couldn't feel the wound. They were cutting me for my own good. The blood had no place to go. Muscles are sheathed in a tendon-like substance that doesn't stretch very far and the contingent club-foot was not extremely enticing. I had been an exhibit since I got there. They had all read about it in

the textbooks and were anxious to see the real thing. Morphine and attention, what more could a young man want?

The wound was left open for eight days, allowing circulating blood to reach the foot. Daily, nonchalant nurses removed the bandages, cleaned, and revealed the inside of my leg. At first the sight of the ruptured muscles bothered me, but by the time the leg was ready for cosmetic reconstruction I almost enjoyed the spectacle. The spinal didn't take effect for this operation so they put me to sleep. I really wanted to watch.

I am still able to run.

Alibis, like blown leaves
escape the form
Marking some change
in the weather
Stripped bare to branches
searching for spring
begging another shot at the summer
Skeletons can't block out the sun.

I too have caught the scent
of discontent
and have known the grave and gravel hole
of rock,
manor for the soul
Tasted sweet defeat
and meat, emaciated life
Almost rotund,
yet come undone,
gaunt, searching for the spring.

I too have spent the mourning
licking at the dew,
turning stones and chewing bones
in search of something new,
incurred the debt
and rarely slept the ache
I wake the walking stone
Settled in the hollow,
made for those who follow,
cracked, fragments of the thing.

Ritual

Ford vans built in 1974, one soon learns, require frequent stops to fill up the oil and check the gas. Eight hours into the journey I had worked out that the van was costing me thirteen dollars an hour on the highway. I had been trying to shake free of the body-shop for the last three years. Five days a week—sometimes six—I had undergone a daily routine. Each morning I ritually codified myself with a shower, a shave and the donning of clothes that held an odor only recognizable to those in the profession. I drove the same route each day, and if I had time, I would stop at Robins for a fritter and a double cream.

During the summers, the ride home sometimes included a dunk in the outdoor pool. This weather dependent exercise made it clear that the smell of chlorine could almost disguise that of bondo. The winters afforded a shower and a beer.

Each stop I made reinforced the sense that I was walking out of one identity into another. I was stepping away from the smells and responsibilities of one life into another. Smells I had only caught wisps of enticed me, attracted me, offering new hopes and second chances. It wasn't until I wet my head while kneeling on a stone that I became acutely aware of the passage I was marking.

Touched some stones,
some skinny bones of trees
massed in shallow water
that used to be.
Scared like hell,
almost fell
deeper than a conversation
in a mountain town.
Not quite showers,
two live flowers
fight against the cold
only killed the one

What is ritual? Is ritual of significance in our object driven society? The term conjures up images of religious sacrifice, witchcraft, funerals, celebrations of puberty, wedding gowns and sermons. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ritual as “a prescribed order of performing rites,” or as “a procedure regularly followed.” Rituals will often mark passages; they codify the performer. Ritualization has been described as “the stylized repeated gesturing and posturing of animals.” (Grimes p. 36) This ‘repeated gesturing and posturing’ is not limited to the animal kingdom. Through our own behavioral patterning and the repetitive nature of human life, ritual pervades, it “codifies and maintains...images of self and society.” (McLaren p. 3) The external markings brought on by ritual generally demarcate an adherence to the code of norms expected in any given role.

Brook, thrown onto stones,
 grief of clashing clouds
 Granite notes of tears
 resound off rolling mountains, aquatic
 symphonies,
 moving with the spring
 Telling tales of fins and fishhooks;
 Hiding like a lie, a dart of fright, a fond caress
 Waiting to be drunk
 by seas, and breeze, and rivers.

Brook, sculpting rhythm stones
 in the dance of clouds
 Held by fertile light,
 searching for a waltzing pace between the sands
 that cower
 waiting to be made.
 Telling tales of colder places,
 higher than a leap, a shallow breath, a bead of sweat
 Waiting to be drunk
 by beasts, and trees and lovers.

Rituals, like performances, can be repeated many times but can never be reproduced. This is because the event is located in the participants and therefore grounded in the present.

No interpreter of a ritual stands ideologically naked or is immune from the political ramifications of his [her] observations. (McLaren, p. 81)

The participants—subjects/objects—of ritual fabricate the moments. Their continual reaction and interaction, and their personal interpretations /translations are bound completely to the moment. As such they completely resist reproduction.

Ritual can be used, in many ways, to bridge gaps or to allow for passage between apparently contradicting positions such as life/death, childhood/adulthood, winter/spring, etc.

There are several ways in which ritual has been cast as a mechanism for the resolution of basic oppositions and contradictions. (Bell, p. 35)

Ritual, even in animals, can be seen to recognize social conflict within a set of parameters. Often-times ritual transgresses normal behavior and, within organized confines, breaks taboos.

The conversation that started about noon had gotten off to a great start. First, we discussed some of the hypocrisies evident within our environment. Sometimes when talking, the talk travels on a spiral, outward in; this conversation traveled inward out. We theorized on the role of painting within the contemporary context.

The spiral lead outward, and later over Max's daily drink special we started to question the role of *art* itself within contemporary constructs. We painted word-pictures about the differences between art and science. Much later, we also talked of art being about questions and of science being about answers. Celine was really pissed that I didn't phone earlier.

Transgression and Taboo

My hands crashed
against her flesh
making pebble talk on wrinkled stones.
And the darkest thing around
was the death of leaves that had fallen
harder once the wind
had finished eroding all
the empty limbs
holding up the sky

I became the quiet solemn one when the wound was still fresh. I needed to flee, to fix, to heal. Change had to occur. The injury itself was not obvious, although, on reflection, the symptoms should have given it away. Hidden afflictions make their presence known. Not all frontiers should be explored. As young children we are not consciously aware of the boundary until it has been crossed. I was bleeding on the inside.

Go beyond one limit and face another. Pain is experiential; it doesn't make room for thoughtful reflection. I reacted out. I was creative in my rebellion to the ache. It seemed that nobody could hear me scream. The shrieks became quiet and furtive, more difficult to notice. Amazingly, even the loudest of noises can recede into the background.

Shockingly young to be a thief, I became better at it over time. Whelmed in the pool of base pain, I salted the wound and picked at the scab that began to form. Taboos had been violated. Within translation there lies a void in which meaning can be lost. I translated the violation of my person into transgressive acts of my own. I was little aware of the infection that had settled in the wound. The infected wound requires much more time and attention to heal. I eventually learned that stealing was not healthy for me. Still, I couldn't stop running.

The fascination we have with what is dangerous, implied pain and violence, the erotic, as well as blood, and corpses, has to do with boundaries and taboo. The pierced body is a search for limits of the body, its endurance and possibilities; it is an exploration of the boundaries around the self. Piercing can be seen as an effort to open up, to expose the interior and as an attempt to provide a threshold which by crossing over, the self becomes the other.

Too strong,
 what's going on
 You've never said
 that torture was a part of life.
 Just a taste
 is never enough,
 a lick at the fruit
 makes a bite too much to bear,
 and a meal is enough
 to kill the appetite.

Our social structure is demarcated by the taboo. Transgression is not abnormal, perhaps it can be seen as something to be expected.

The taboo is the threshold beyond which the prohibited is possible. Organized transgressions of the taboos are the expected compliments of prohibition....just as explosion follows upon compression. The compression is not subservient to the explosion, far from it; it gives it its increased force....Concern over a rule is sometimes at its most acute when that rule is being broken, for it is harder to limit a disturbance already begun. (Bataille, p. 65)

Somewhere there lies a line, perhaps as subjective as the assessment of the art object. That which is taboo for one is seen as normal for the other. Rules are put in place for a reason, difficult to define at times but there is always a reason. Apparently 'rules are made to be broken.' The contradiction occurs here. Does this apply to all rules and

taboos? Georges Bataille says “the taboo is there to be violated.” (p. 64) War is a great example in that it legitimizes murder. Within this context we catch a glimpse of the differing levels of violence that are found around the transgressive act.

The transgression of the taboo is not animal violence. It is violence still, used by a creature capable of reason. (Bataille, p. 64)

It is possible to hypothesize that, because of the subjective nature of taboo, and its reliance on context, without a keen sense of awareness many commonplace actions can be seen as transgressive.

Expulsion time for letting go
 of erosion souls
 demanding ones
 and those that live their masks,
 illustrations of desire
 sidestep of the thoughtful gaze
 and wrestling friends
 on beds
 of nails
 just words

Poetry

Running is rhythm, a symphony of breath and heart accompanied by a drumming of the earth.

We all feel what poetry is. Poetry is one of our foundation stones, but we cannot talk about it. (Bataille, p. 24)

There is a cadence to life, many beats to dance to. In death we contribute to the continuity of it all. Can't stop the rhythm.

Found me at a standstill
raining on my soul to beat
upon a drum
Made me
dance the quiet frenzy
like a prayer
creeping,
keeping gods alive.

Woke me from the summer
the lick of frost so fragile
hearts can meet
Made me
shower in your shivers
like a prayer
sleeping,
keeping gods alive

Caught me dead out running
drumming on the earth with feet
and yards of empty
Made me
lick clean the salted wound
like a prayer
weeping,
keeping gods alive

Performance

The first time I did a performance I was plagued with questions: Why am I doing this? Am I trying to express something beyond words, or is this somehow easier than doing another essay? How will I affect the audience? Am I addressing/confronting my own personal demons, or are they societal? Will it hurt?

It had been six weeks and my sternum was starting to heal. It was different than when I had the stroke in that this time it had been my choice. I chose to let them use an expensive saws-all on my chest, chose to allow them to expose my heart to the sterile air. An hour and a half to get in and two hours to get out, it only took the surgeon three minutes to put in the two stitches needed to close the little hole where the clot had formed. The shock to my system was less traumatic than after the stroke. I can only guess that, although physically more trying than the stroke, the surgery did not confront me with my mortality.

For those four days many other people broke my physical barrier. I had been pierced, probed and cut by a wide range of professionals, those subcutaneous anglers. Now it was my turn; the private medicinal revelation of my interior needed to go public. I decided to pierce my own. If the stays in the hospital showed me anything, it was that it is relatively easy to pierce the skin. Maybe if confronted enough and directly, abjection becomes normal.

Red wine makes for poems,
 steam makes for sweat,
 life makes for dying,
 mistakes for regret.
 Beauty might be in the eye
 of the beholder.

Performance challenges the notion of separation between subject and object, as well as the void that exists in traditional forms of art making between the audience and the artist. Peggy Phelan, in her book Unmarked, discusses French-born, performance artist Sophie Calle's work; 'where seeing and memory forget the object itself, and enter the subject's own set of personal meanings and associations.' The boundary between subject and object itself becomes blurred in the realm of performance. "In the celebratory process we cannot detach the participants from what they participate in, the subject from the object." (Turner p. 19) The identity of subject itself is questioned within performance's sphere. Who is watching whom? The audience and the actor both observe each other, and all take part in the "performative aspect of seeing" (Phelan p. 147) where once seen, a thing comes under a barrage of subjective personal biases and influences.

In her essay "The Ontology of Performance" Phelan theorizes that performance is bound to the present, and is an "attempt to value—rather than define—that which is non-reproductive, non-metaphorical." (Phelan p. 152) She also feels that performance resists documentation, and that "performance's being... becomes itself through disappearance," (p. 146) and as such cannot be accurately translated into other mediums. Performance is a disruption of the object through an intervention of the present. Once the body, the

performer and the audience are no longer interacting—the essence of the present—and the ‘gestural action’ ceases, the performance becomes marked by its absence.

The audience might be a victim. The audience does not stand free from the social learning imbued in this role. Most of us have been trained to be good spectators. The performer can utilize this trait to violate the spectator. “In performance art, the audience from its role as sadist, subtly becomes the victim as it is forced to endure the artist’s plight sympathetically, or to examine its own responses to voyeurism and pleasure.” (Rosenthal, p. 69) Within this deconstruction of the spectator/performer binary, the performer continually shifts between the roles of violator and victim.

The last performance was less ritualistic than the previous ones. The goals were much more pedagogical. The spectacle was designed to *force* the audience into confronting a break- down of the boundaries found around and within traditional pedagogy. I wanted to bring French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘pedagogical act as an act of symbolic violence’ to the surface. I chose to pierce the flesh on the back of my arm with etching needles. The skin found above the elbow joint, protecting the triceps, is flexible and does not have many blood vessels or nerve endings. I have never gone to so great lengths to make a mark on an etching plate or an audience as I did on this day.

Four people left the room during the performance. I am not sure if it was the weight of the Jansen’s Art History books pulling on my skin, or the tension of the technical paraphernalia straining the wound, that made them squeamish. In either case, I

became acutely aware that I was in the role of *violator* when I performed this pedagogical act.

Some want for words extreme
polished beyond
glimmers of reflections,
that can't be found in waves
jubilant in their finish

Some desire punch, straight thrown
and hard to see
the linear foreshortened
large in the blinding bliss
of hardwood meeting faces

Some desire beautiful,
ambiguous,
impossible realities
kisses of the winter
forgetting bout the spring

And there are those who love
to live below,
above acceptable,
beyond where most exist
waiting for extinction.

Violence

The five-piece out of Chicago wasn't the best I'd ever heard but they had a decent beat. I wasn't scheduled to work that night so I went instead to break the loneliness. There was almost always a party on. When the band decided it was time to relinquish their music makers for refreshment I decided to do the same. Making my way through the blue I grabbed Dana and we went to burn one. It was a ritualistic thing for us. Most of us had a couple of things in common: we all had black belts and we liked to relieve the pressure by burning herbs.

Work began on my return. A racial slur had erupted into pandemonium. The band had been slogging tapes during the break and one of them had made his pitch to the wrong table. 'Fuck off nigger,' they had snarled so he hit one. This wasn't Chicago and they were the ones in the gang. The two combatants had moved into the kitchen, and with the rest of the boys trying to get in on the culinary action it became my job to block the doorway. We had an understanding, the boys and I, and so far I hadn't been pushed into doing something I didn't want to do. I was sure that this would be the night. Finally the cops showed up; they were the only gang in town bigger than the one we were facing down.

It still astounds me how people in their desire to impress will jump on a speeding train not built for passengers. A couple of patches and a handful of wannabes tried to storm the band-room. Some bodies spent the night in jail and no charges were laid. The band left town within the hour. My opinion of the police department was not enhanced on this night. I had ended up working for three hours by the time the winds stopped

blowing. I didn't get paid for the short shift, the boss didn't even buy me a drink. When the bar closed the waitresses made up for it.

Our society is founded on the paradoxical notion that violence is wrong and that as we have evolved we have also developed a capacity to live above violence. In actuality violence is still an integral part of society. It has become much more shrouded in our notions of civilization. Sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and victimization are inherent in our social structure. We promote stereotypes. We teach our knowledge as truth. We glorify superiority.

Probing wrinkled earth,
lowly mud mutations, bones of
reckless sky.
Eating paths of glory,
heartburn
into time of bile
Feeding crows and ravens
before the rot is free
carvings on the wind

Pouring wrestled earth,
history not found by those who
search the falls
Pools gather sediment,
dirt words,
pieces of the past
Killing wants and wantons
before the cutting blow
settles on the mind

Pushing ruptured earth,
not stopped, just moving dye,
staining tombs
Encrypting wounds in surface,
festered
wind and quiet mourn
Grace for moon and sunshine,
temporary gravestones,
residue defines.

The violent act can be tied to notions of survival. Violence is sometimes connected to what I will call *instinctual desire* in that it is rooted in the desire to live and the desire to procreate. Instinctual desire is enacted upon newly defined boundaries. Survival has been redirected into issues of employment, social status, and materialism. Perceived threats to any of these will result in acts of violence of varying degrees.

We assume that civilization rejects violence. Ironically, this rejection of the notion of violence does little more than reinforce this instinctual reality.

Man must combat his natural impulses to violence. This signifies an acceptance of violence at the deepest level, not an abrupt break with it; the feeling responsible for the rejection of violence is kept going in the background by this acceptance. Moreover the urge to reject is so persistent that the swing of accepted violence always has a dizzying effect. (Bataille, p. 69)

We have been taught that society has evolved beyond cruelty and yet while murder is taboo, war is acceptable.

Religion, like a pigeon
drops ounces of usefulness
everywhere it flies.
Don't get it in your eye.

Perhaps cruelty is the point at which violence becomes unacceptable. It is the point at which the violator becomes indifferent to, or even gratified by the suffering of another. The violent act used deliberately to cause pain or suffering is defined as cruel. It would appear that the separation between violence and cruelty is inhabited by intent. This is the point at which the act of omission enters the realm of violence. The act of

omission is often used to inflict suffering on the insubordinate. History is full of omissions.

Muddier than crystal cut,
 healing wounds infect the blurring words
 chewing on my mind,
 creating noise and feeding blind
 Discourse
 and the halting flow
 marking gravity,
 flailing, falling, flying,
 frosted phrases,
 passing phases,
 and haggard hazes
 itch for the wetting stone.

Radical thought, translated into action directed towards particular circumstances, results in prohibitions from the prevailing authorities.

Prohibitions eliminate violence, and our violent impulses...destroy within us that calm ordering of ideas without which human awareness is inconceivable. (Bataille, p. 38)

Language relies on order. Language often disguises the very violent nature of prohibition.

At times violence is as dependent on the victim as it is on the violator. It can be a gunshot; it can be word, a look, a picture, a gesture, or an omission. If the predator understands the instinctive responses inherent to the prey, it can use these responses to enforce its own power. The best fly-fishermen understand the hatch and in so doing can take advantage of the predatory nature of fish.

Leech, on the barb
wrenches towards death
Longing for the freedom
offered by the bottom feeder

Begging to be swallowed whole,
anything is better
than the nibbling of the little fish.

Language

Words cut deeper
than a master gutter
point towards the
heart
and lungs
and yet can never be
a sculpture.

She asked me to describe the hole in my stomach to her. It was somewhat like a void between my self and myself. Perhaps it began with a game, played between adult and child—skin the bear (bare)—that I could not recall. Translating it, naming it, began to categorize the hole. I said it was the sense of self worth that I didn't feel. Naming the hole transformed it, allowing me to give it a face. It was the kind of face learned in stories of horror. Mostly it leered, sneered and snarled. This entity was not any more easily described than the void. I tried to say pain, but I could really only feel it.

Naming the hole built boundaries around it, contained it in a face. Next she told me to ask the face for a gift. Upon asking for a gift, one was given and I came to realize that demons can become friends. Translation, the imposition of boundaries, is not always a negative thing.

The sublime, the abject, and the unimaginable are not the same but are each 'unnamable.'

The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 11)

Language creates boundaries. Language acts as a barrier; lets us think we can define ourselves. Language is a great pretender. Language is not necessarily limited to writing and speaking. Everything we *do* is a form of language.

Whoever says *language* says *demarcation*, *signification*, and *communication*. In this sense all human practices are kinds of language because they have as their function to *demarcate*, to *signify*, to *communicate*. To exchange goods and women in the social network, to produce objects of art or explanatory discourses such as religions or myths, etc. is to form a sort of *secondary linguistic system* with respect to language, and on this system to install a communications circuit with subjects, meaning, and signification. (Kristeva, 1981, p. 4)

Everything we *are* is not a form of language. That which we *experience* is not language; language becomes involved in the interpretation of being and experience. This is the great paradox in language. It can never be. There is a question as to whether language is the mother, or the servant of thought.

La langue is a prerequisite for speech to occur; but at the same time, there is no language in the abstract without the occurrence of speech. (Kristeva, 1981, p. 10)

This is yet another paradoxical void created by language. We cannot perceive ourselves without it, and yet we cannot perceive ourselves with it.

Pain and ecstasy can be seen to reside outside of language. They are primal, they take us to a place that existed before language.

Rituals and codings notwithstanding, pain is an intrinsically altered state that disrupts and momentarily destroys all social connection and meaning. As such it locates experience in a presymbolic, or imaginary, level where the hierarchical organization of language still has not taken place. The world, at this level, is an integrated mass of sensorial images unfiltered by the intellect, a place that can only be reached, once civilized, through

radical states such as ecstasy or pain—two extremes joined at their peak.
(Olalqiaga, p. 262)

These two experiential states do much to break down the body/mind dichotomy that is prevalent in our contemporary world. Perhaps they allow us to go to a place that existed before language, the unnamable place. As newborns we live in experience.

There is always a separation between word, syntax, semiotics, definition, and the object. It is not necessary to perceive this void as a negative. Foucault, addressing the relationship in Rene Magritte's work between title and painting, recognizes a 'gulf' between the seen and the named.

And yet in this split and drifting space, strange bonds are knit; there occur intrusions, brusque and destructive invasions, avalanches of images into the milieu of words, and verbal lightning flashes that streak and shatter the drawings. (Foucault, 1983, p. 36)

This unimaginable place, this space where thought can't occur, is outside of demarcation. In a space that cannot be defined—only alluded to—exists the possibility of the universal.

Jesus never wrote a goddamned
Thing
It was those he disciplined
that put the words in his mouth

William Monroe, in his book Power to Hurt hypothesizes that when beings read they become the performers in what I will call the interaction with words.

The notion of performance can help us explore the mysterious process whereby stories and poems enter the realm of ethics by affecting us and becoming news. Our intuitions, and assumptions about agency suggest that texts do not force their virtues on readers or inject them with attitudes; at the same time, if stories and poems are strategic scripts that contribute

to the making and unmaking of persons, then their energy, their power to hurt, is inherent (though latent) in their symbolic configuration. (Monroe, p. 25-26)

The words themselves do not contain the power to hurt. It is the ability of words to point towards the event as it is relative to the performer's life. The configuration of symbols must forever be a representation, with performer providing the necessary interaction with the 'strategic script.'

Little more than nothing,
 sense of what
 returned is worth
 The fear of risk too great to take;
 the smell of almost
 overwhelms
 the dangle stretch,
 the ragged breath,
 and
 just about beyond
 the dream that didn't wake
 Or wait
 because the smell of almost
 overwhelms
 the stringent subtle cries
 of those who want to learn
 the nothing left to teach,
 marked,
 a carnival
 for those with no way out
 without a mask.

In the *Translator's Notes* for This is not a Pipe, James Harkness quotes Foucault from Les Mots et le choses on some of the problems found when one attempts to use one language to translate another, although he does not literally describe 'painting' as a form of language.

The relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the others terms; it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendor is not that deployed by our eyes, but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. And the proper name, in this context is merely an artifice; it gives us a finger to point with; (p. 9)

Moving from this point, I again assert that the act of translation is always fallible, whether it be a translation of experience to thought, thought to speech, or visual to verbal, etc. The translation always includes omissions.

When the subject stands at the place of the want that founds it, the fetish becomes a life preserver, temporary and slippery, but nonetheless indispensable. But is not exactly language our ultimate and inseparable fetish? And language, precisely, is based on fetishist denial ('I know that, but just the same,' 'the sign is not the thing, but just the same,' etc.) and defines us in our essence as speaking beings. Because of its founding status, the fetishism of 'language' is perhaps the only one that is unanalyzable. (Kristeva, 1981, p. 37)

“The tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name
The unnamable is the eternally real
Naming is the origin
of all particular things.”
(Lao Tzu, p. 1)

There is an undeniable connection between language and violence. Language is, by its very nature judgmental. Violence has a direct relationship with power, and violence does not need to be overt. Power is the capability to force will upon a subject.

Power henceforth belongs to discourse itself, or rather to the act of judgement expressed in speech and in less orthodox and much more

implicit fashion, in all the signs (poetry, painting, music, sculpture) that are contingent on it. (Kristeva, 1981, p. 132)

Foucault also discusses a relationship between power and discourse, and the ability of language to separate events from history.

Dialect has a way of evading the open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and 'semiology' is a way of avoiding its bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm platonic form of language and dialogue. (Foucault, 1984, p. 56-57)

Language is never the event. Language can only serve to reduce the event into an act of judgement, an act of suppression. This is one of the ways that language is imbued with inherent violence.

Directed words, harmonious brush strokes, and simple folks are burning moments in time. Illusion spans a dozen lifetimes of chasing bones. The mark that is made passes grade but doesn't interfere with scratching of the back, propriety, and social norms until later.

My quest is one of understanding why I often don't understand. It is easy to blame circumstances, situations, blood clots, brain rots, and a lack of proper training. I pose a threat when I am questioning, not theory—theory is right because it is naught but theory—but situations and individuals. This is socially unacceptable; this will damage one's future. This is art. Not the only form that it takes, but the directed query breaks boundaries and crosses borders, takes art out of the realm of the elite. It is important to have art break down walls.

The last poem of the night
is bound to be a long one.
The last drink of the night is bound to be
poured over cubes of regret,
almost cold enough
to send a body home without a jacket.

Leaping off

My first day of arm-fishing was not successful in the sense that I did not hook the prey. I changed lures a dozen times and spent much of the day refining this new technique. Technique, although not easily discernible to the untrained eye, is integral to even the most mundane of tasks. There is always a struggle involved when learning and improving technique.

I was not alone in the floating rubber raft. I was depending on others to tend the oars and the cameras. Far from harmonious, the day involved several unmet expectations as well as instances of personality conflict. The float was longer than I had assumed so the last hours were spent hurrying the journey.

I pulled out the fly rod in desperation before we reached our destination. This was video, I thought; we can fake the fish-catching scene, I thought. Ten minutes of fly-casting and I hooked a seven inch rainbow. Matt whipped out the camera and caught what he could on tape. I was not completely content with the concept, but felt we had enough footage to fool the viewer. For some reason the fish sequence did not show up on the film.

A week later two of us went and tried again. Things felt a little better in that it was a beautiful day and we were in no way hurried. Fishing from shore, I worked the river and Matty worked the camera. On this day snags and deadfalls were continuously parts of the struggle. We had some laughs and fished the likely looking spots. Two hours into it I became anxious over the possibility of failure and once again began to

contemplate staging the result we were after. Interestingly, some of the staged shots did make it into the final cut.

Finally, we came upon *the* spot. I could feel it; Matty could feel it. It was a nice point of land, jutting out into the river, and mostly clear of casting obstructions. It provides a deep drop-off along with a strong current-break. Three minutes of fishing *the* spot and the struggle took on different dimensions. It was a large whitefish and my gear performed remarkably well. This time it was the fish's struggle. I played the fish longer and harder than I should have in my attempts to ensure adequate camera coverage. Once the fight was over it was a struggle for me to revive the fish. I was afraid for its life.

I was extremely exhausted for three days following the event. I had not found the experience to be physically trying so I choose to believe that it took the fish those three days to recover from its experience, and therefore, I also needed to grasp the extent of its exertion. Some forms of knowledge cannot be intellectualized.

This piece is linked to the other pieces in my show, through several notions. Simply put they are the concepts of *catching*, *holding*, and *letting go*. Hooks, nets, and bones allude to the struggle that is inherent within these concepts. The struggle is the search; it is the journey. I am extremely grateful that it is possible to find contentment, humor and beauty within the struggle.

Bare
as flesh escaping bones,
as sweat furrowed and the brittle brow.
Bare,
running footed in the briar,
in the cold of a shallow bar, and knuckles
grasping knuckles.
Bare
as smiles,
autumn fallen
wanting sap, the slap of leaves
leaves branches bone.
Bear
cuddles earth,
reduces girth, and sleeps,
and sleeps till then.

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