# IT STARTS WITH GRAVITY AND MOMENTUM

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**Abstract**

Outlined here is a trajectory of research into the relationship between identity and narrative, with a particular focus on how that relationship subverts the boundary between mainstream and margin. Drawing on a Lacanian analysis of language as a fixed structure that the subject is molded to fit into, I propose that, through narrative, identity is a similar structure that draws on both verbal and nonverbal communication. Not to be misunderstood narrative and identity are not static, as the one informs the other and the other shapes the one a feedback loop forms that evolves as minor shifts in popular narrative and social norms develop.

One major role of both narrative and identity performance is to identify sameness and difference. In the second section, paradoxes of sameness and difference are unpacked, and a healthy skepticism of context (how difference is framed, or the parameters of any given difference) is supported.

Moving into more concrete material, the third section analyzes the communicative means of narrative. Championing the cinematic image (and afterimage), superficial veneer, sentimental flourish, ornamentation as being inextricable from deeper meaning to the point of supporting a claim that 'deeper meaning' doesn't exist since it is defined only through an understating of surface. Any attempt to separate meaning from its surface is a disservice to representation.

The fourth and final section deals with how this surface changes. Jumping off of Kristeva's ideas on grief and atemporality, I work with material metaphors and cultural tenets to interrogate how the fabric of society is altered in times of crisis. Major questions in this section are: After the trauma, what is the goal of recovery? What is it to 'get over it'? Do we desire a return to a previous state? Is such a return possible and should it be desired in the first place? Trauma, crisis (personal and social) leave the surface irrevocably changed and denial of that change is potentially irresponsible. Each scar is a new story.

# IT STARTS WITH GRAVITY AND MOMENTUM

"It is impossible to say just what I mean!, but as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen"
  - TS Eliot

The image is projected from the mind, the projector throws the images on the screen, the screen absorbs the image - is inseparable from the image, the screen becomes skin - the projection becomes clothes, the skin and the clothes become one - inseparable.
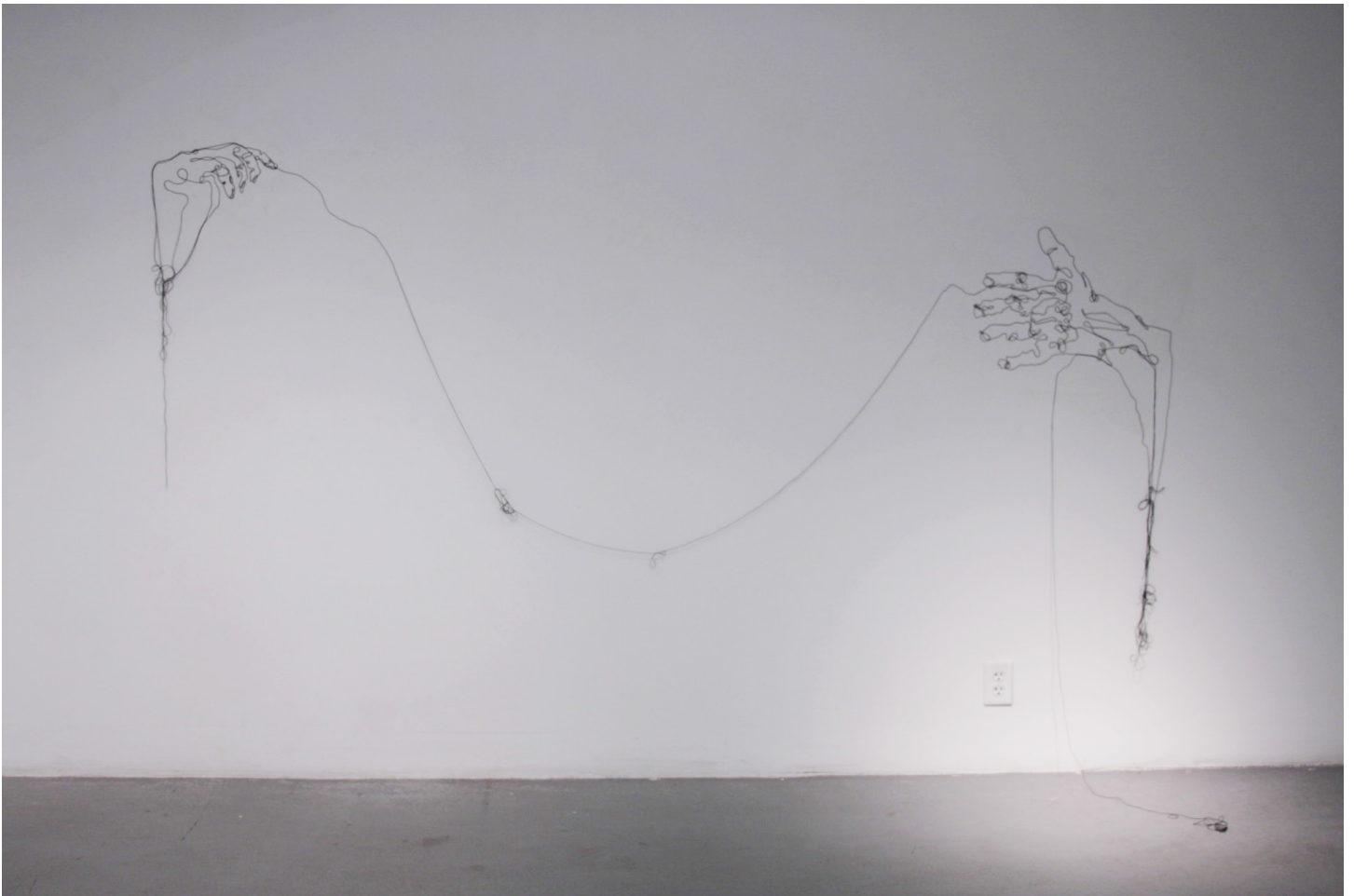
**FEEDBACK LOOP**

"There are no new ideas. There is only new ways of making them felt" - Audre Lorde

"We are born naked, the rest is drag" - RuPaul

Imagine a wheel, smallish, thin like a bicycle. No spokes, no hub, completely hollow, just the outer rim of the wheel itself. The wheel is charged, not powered by electricity, more like it is made of electricity, you can feel it on your skin like static. It has a faint crackling hum. It turns, it is a charge constantly falling forward and feeding back up from behind. It doesn't stop. "You can be anyone, anything." This statement is the first turn of that wheel. "You can be anyone, anything," and at first blush, this is a very liberating and empowering statement. Unfortunately, it's one of the first cultural deceptions we willingly overlook. The truer statement would be, "you can be anyone or anything you hear about." The stories we hear tell us who we can be, and how we can be that person. I'm nineteen and watching a VHS of comedian Margaret Cho talk about watching old American television as a child, and she only sees familiar Asian faces as background extras on the 70s sit-com M.A.S.H. She jokes about how this early image shaped her dreams of moving to Hollywood and being cast as an extra in a Merchant-Ivory film, perhaps the camera will slowly pan past her as an exotic prostitute in an opium den, paisley rugs, silk robes, and all. That was the height of success she could envision, hours of static feeding in to support that vision.

Identity is not passively inherited though, we express and display as much as we consume. When shopping for our "self" in the world of images, we are rarely allowed custom designs. As we adhere to the identities that are offered up to us, we are, by default, complacent in perpetuating those limited selections of identity. The actor Paul Lynde refused to stifle or choke out his sexual identity, but in order to embrace it when being "out" was unacceptable in mainstream culture, he could only enact it in the limited and dubious terms that were provided; the pinched smug smile, the simpering voice, and of course, the limp wrist. Throughout the 60's Lynde put those affects on with pride and used them as a weapon, but a counterpoint of that gesture was to retell the story that there was only one way to be a queer man; he was in effect telling any home viewers who might be *friendly with Dorothy*, "See? They say this is how fairies act, and look! I'm a fairy and this is how we act". This validates the mainstream's limited image of queer identity and similarly plays out on any marginalized identity. The charge he put out fell directly in line with the expected current, but had a different pitch, it burned a different color, it was on a different frequency.





The Mysterious Medical History of Ada Vism

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The Mysterious Medical History of Ada Vism

When I was a teen I knew where my desire lead me, but struggled more with where that left me on a social map. My mother's best friends, uncles Tom and Fred, were not blood relations though still family. They were fun and loud and proud and are laughing in every memory I have of them, outside the last few. Though, my love for Tom and Fred did not translate in emulation, I was not interested in show-tunes and drama the same way they were. I preferred ripped jeans black tee-shirts and blue hair where they donned soft pastels and fine silks. I saw a single identity being conducted through movies and television and news and my family, only one way to be gay. When a friend gave me a copy of Francesca Lia Block's Baby Be-Bop a thin charge fell forward in a new direction, and for the first time I encountered the possibility of different kind of queer, one that was punk, tough, earnest. Captivated, my interest then lead me to discover that the fictitious Dirk was modeled after the very real Darby Crash who was Jan Paul Beahm' s final (stage?) persona. Before that I believed that there was no way to add variables to a queer identity, but Darby and Dirk offered a few swerves in the charge forward.

These collective experiences—the way we hear and retell stories about ourselves—creates a feedback loop of narrative and identity. This constantly turning wheel between representation and identity (we take in representation, and re-enact said representation for someone else to take in and re-enact themselves for yet another to take in and so on and so on...) cycles at an electrically charged clip. So where does the power of acceleration and resistance reside within this feedback loop? As the images, narratives, and identities pass through we should ask "what do I absorb and what do I let fall away? What elements of the narrative can I champion and what can I subvert? How do I achieve that? How do I envision the argument between binary and fluid identity? Do my ideas from The Passion Of Joan Of Arc function best as a direct image quote? Why am I, in today's world denied donor status; why do I still carry a shadow of dirty blood?" The feedback loop is a potential space for radical intervention.

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## EVERYTHING IS BETWEEN NOTHING AND THING

When asked to imagine the white of snow, or black from moonless nights subtle differences will appear in everyone's rendition, the same is true off their concepts of one and zero. Not just abstract, this instability of conceptually rigid binaries translates to the lived world, into day to day interactions.

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For over a decade my unofficial husband, Peter and I have relied on bicycles as our primary transportation. When we ride together he is often setting the pace. He didn't know that I do this (it was reading this that cued him in), but when I am following him, I try to match him. Not keep pace with him, but try to correspond with the movements of his body, right, left, right, lean in, left, right, straighten up, left, right, left. It never quite works, always on different bikes, different styles, different sizes, different gears. Inevitably I lag behind or encroach dangerously close. I always know this is a futile task, I know there are too many variables too many differences to let me actually correspond his rhythm, but I still try, at least once nearly every time I am following him.

One time I dissected a Hardy Boys book. I had not read this specific adventure, but, knowing what I know of the Hardy Boys clichés, I took all the pages, shuffled them, and illustrated them on a sewing machine, one page at a time. The goal here was to see if some distilled identity of Hardy Boyshood (some part of a collective unconscious of western boyness) would surface, but of course this was bad science: I had no control group, and I carried a great bias. Here I manifest myself not as The Mad Scientist stitching together disembodied pieces, but as The Bad Scientist, because I was feigning objectivity. The creation was a collection of unbound pages, able to be rearranged by anyone into whatever story they wish to concoct out of these untethered glimpses and clichés. This thing ended up resting somewhere between one and zero; it held no knowledge of that particular book, but still knew all about what surrounded it; it was an incomplete thing just as much as it was an incomplete nothing.

Back on the bicycle, it is not just the game of designed failure that keeps me trying to correspond to Peter. I constantly try to understand how we connect or how we perceive connection. So I know that I will never really correspond, but those





Boyhood Memories of an Unread Book

brief moments when I do get two or three strides in before the rhythm brakes are so satisfying. Those moments are about the ways that we connect, each subtle connection is weak fleeting and tenuous like a single strand of thread it can be easily broken, and is easily broken. A thread (serving its use) is connective tissue as it binds two forms, it is the physical manifestation of connection. The quality of thread can unpack the moment of touch as it is acted on the surface of the skin; it's drape, twist, it's break, even it's fray.
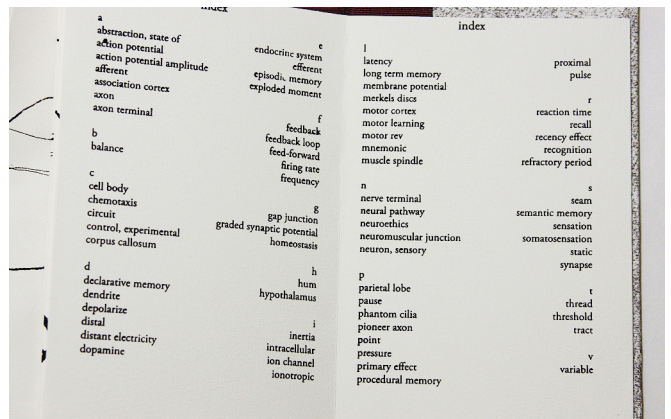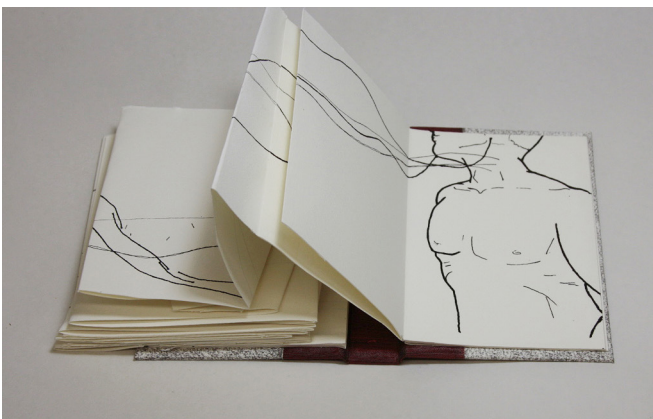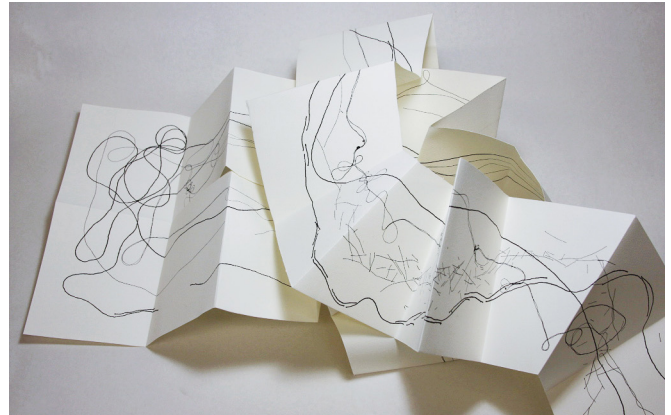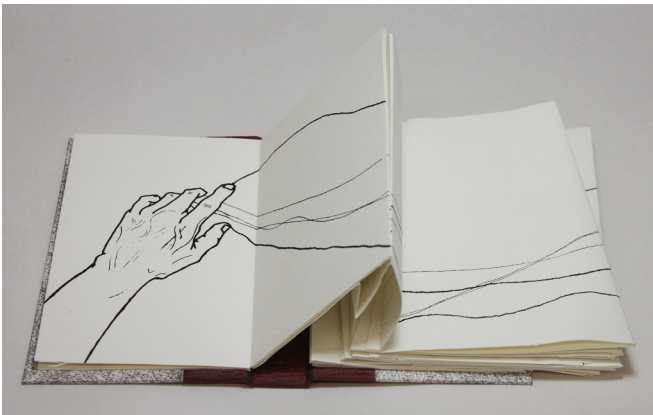





Somatosensation

Even though it is very poetical, the image of a single thread stops short of illustrating connection because we all know that subtlety and tenuousness do not define the range of human connections. We all have sustained relationships, and they are not arbitrary, something else is at play. There is some variable that the single thread is blind to; although that variable is thread-like too. Interpersonal connections defy their flimsy nature as they build up and intertwine. As thread is built up it forms clumps and knots and can be twisted into rope. The strength of rope is the accumulation of tenuous and subtle connections.

I'm thinking again of two humans on a bicycle; even if fleeting moments of correspondence are an illusion of connection, there is a confusing contradiction within the inability to correspond fully. Two humans, on two bikes on the same street on the same path; these elements that identify sameness also define the parameters of differences as well: different people, different bikes, same street but different times, same path but different experiences of it. Assigning sameness or difference has no relevance on a thing itself, such assignments are reliant on arbitrary parameters: being, vehicle, location, race, gender, dimension, mode, denominator, form, frequency, grain, pitch, yaw, tone. If I take up the common relationship of black and white, within this parameter of difference there is an expectation of sameness: that black is self similar just as white is self similar. But the black of hand dyed cotton is unstable; any given iteration may hold more or less pigment than another. Likewise, The sheen of a white surface offers different perceptions of white; any possible stability is imperceptible.

Though these expectations of sameness or stability are not tenable, it does not negate the usefulness of binary difference as language. What I mean by this is, even though a rigid and idealized binary opposition is a dangerous model to uphold, that doesn't mean it can or should be rejected outright. Such a structure of difference, taken lightly, can be used to expose a full and nuanced spectrum between their oppositional points. Putting this idea into an everyday example: a gender queer identity is communicable because of an established expectation of a gender binary, but again the binary needs to be understood as an unstable and unsustainable abstract.
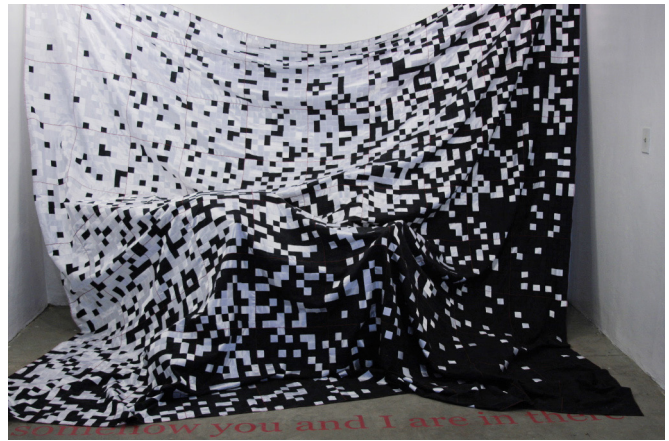


Somehow You and I are in There (installation view)
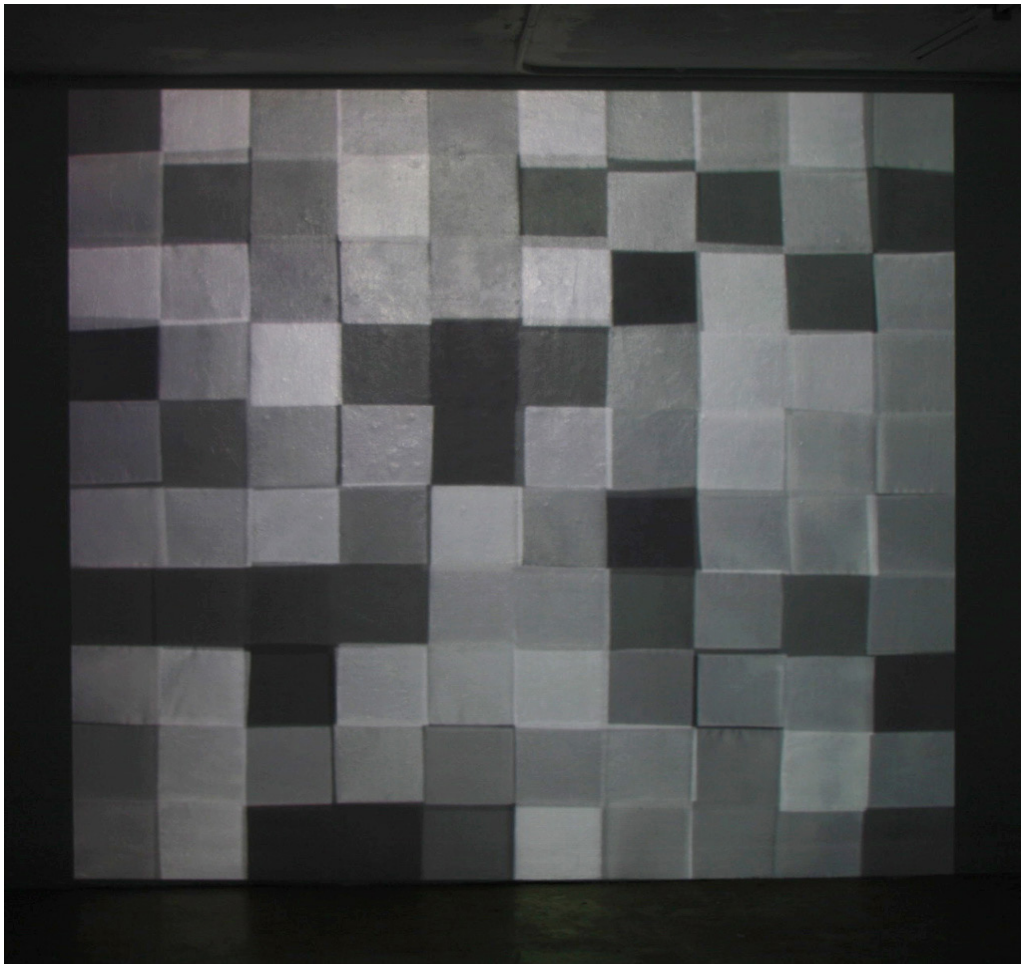


Somehow You and I are in There (video still)

## SURFACES AND CODES

Dizzy like a disco ball is fact amid drama. The gossip in Kenneth Anger's <u>Hollywood Babylon</u> presents Hollywood as a place devoid of truth, a "wonder world of make believe...dream factory....dreamland, somewhere else; it was the home of the heavenly bodies, the glamor galaxy." Anger collected the most torrid version of various tabloid rumors, tales of lust and murder and drugs hosed down with glamour. And it is not enough that they are low tabloid rumors, it is clear that he has sought out the most lascivious version of each. He polishes his reports with alliteration and spices them with innuendo and a little wink. Hollywood Babylon is a world where the truths behind the fictions take up the same seductive gleam as their highest film productions. The puppet masters are part of the play, the dreamers become dreams themselves. If one finds an earnest fact, it transforms instantly into a glistening story to circulate as soon as it is voiced. On the streets of Hollywood Babylon the gloss of narrative is contagious, it will cover permanently anything that gets close to it.

**Ziggy Stardust performed live, that happened; look here's proof**

In this muddled world of fact and fiction flipping over one another are actual human lives, and I have to question (regardless of how distant we are from their deaths) if Anger's tales trivialize life to the point of decadence. But I find a critique and criticism of that same decadence simmering in Anger's prose. He seems to be bending the charged wheel toward a personally developed sense of justice; he often sides with the underdog, the exploited worker or ingénue. He tends to punish the corrupt or arrogant, those who overreach beyond the bounds of empathy to active infliction of human suffering. He is not a reporter, nor is he a historian; he is an artist who knows how to bend a story and channel a charged wheel.

"Histories, like ancient ruins, are the fictions of empires." - Todd Haynes

The trope goes like this: there is a building - always a home, old but undiscovered to the protagonist. In the building there is general mystery but one room is more potent than the others. This room is unsurprising, if it is a bedroom it looks like a bedroom, likewise if it were a dining room or study. The furthest the room gets from banality is a possible out-of-timeness, unimportant anachronisms. This room is troubling to the protagonist though there is no apparent reason. But wait! In the corner, or behind that lamp, maybe above that loose base-board a small bit of wallpaper is peeling up. The protagonist smooths it down, investigates the seam, and then peels it back. At first tearing just one small piece very gingerly, but with more confidence and purpose starts to remove large sections of the wallpaper to finally reveal hidden truth.

As the viewer we know more than the protagonist at this point, we know that there is a dark history in that home, we probably already know that this particular room is the center of that dark history, we may not know the details of the clue that is being uncovered but we defi-nitely know it is there. No new context is being revealed to the audience like it is for the protag-onist. It would be the same for us if the wallpaper were pulled back to reveal the exact same wallpaper beneath. The lan-guage, the matter of this scene is more important than the clue being revealed; the soft lighting, an ominous though nonthreat-ening sound-scape, a camera that starts high and wide then



moves to follow the protagonist's shoulder and even tighter onto their hands as they absently rummage through objects and knick-knacks, and finally the reaction shot. The writing is on the wall and it reads "the writing is on the wall."



Broken Scaffolds,

Where is the meaning in this moment? Is it the McGuffin of a clue, hiding for years behind decorative paper? Is it the wallpaper itself, giving us a cultural context for where danger lurks? Is it the atmosphere, or the act of discovery? Is it in the skill of the actor? Or the literacy of the audience? I don't know, and I've decided to stop asking myself. All the possibilities listed above share something, they all exist on the surface of narrative, on the screen. Every possible locus of deeper meaning is a shiny distraction if viewed from another angle. This is part of why a reductive search for meaning rubs me the wrong way. Once an analysis starts to turn away from trivialities or superficial details in favor of meatier content, I question what is happening to the narrative, to the story, the person it came from and the person it will land on. It is in the superficialities that agency over narrative exists, it is the idiosyncrasies that give storytelling democracy. A search for an irreducible core is to deny the power of variation. A reduction of superficial details can lead to an oppressive homogeneity, but, entertainingly, removing the constants and the tropes and focusing just on the oddities, then variants present something else.



Broken Scaffolds

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET II: FREDDY'S REVENGE, or a horror of internalized homophobia

"He's inside me and he wants to take me again." -Jesse Walsh

"There is a man inside me and he wants me to do terrible things" - me misquoting Jesse Walsh

  In 1985 Jesse Walsh's family moves into a new house.  He goes to a new school, but is still as awkward as ever.  He can't sleep, he keeps to himself, he avoids eye contact, he slouches and turns his shoulders inward.  But despite all that, pretty Lisa Webber takes a shine to him, unfortunately Jesse has a bully problem: Ron Grady.  The handsome, popular, athletic Grady teases Jesse, pantses him on the field, wrestles him to the ground, pins him, holds him down, immobilizes Jesse with the weight of his body.  The hostility and aggression slides away the longer they touch each other.  After having held each other close, having shared sweat and flesh, Jesse and Grady are now fast friends.   As time passes Jesse's internal tensions build, he feels that a monster is controlling his desires or he fears that his desires are monstrous. "You have the body, Jesse, but I have the brains" the voice in his head whispers.  Troubled Jesse sneaks out at night, finds himself at seedy clubs, and has confusing encounters with older men.  By day Lisa is there for Jesse, caring and supportive.  She loves Jesse, and she longs for him sexually.  In the cabana at a pool party Lisa makes her move.  Disgusted by his own body as he kisses Lisa and caresses her breasts, Jesse's tongue is alien when he tries to go down on Lisa; he flees to be comforted at Grady's bedside.  Jesse confesses everything to Grady, how he is afraid to dream, how he is losing control, how the thing inside wants him to do terrible things.  Though Grady is kind to Jesse this encounter doesn't go well, Jesse and Grady will never see each other again.  Lisa, remains steadfast in her love for Jesse insists that she can fix everything, that her love can keep the monstrous desires at bay, that if Jesse is diligent and focuses his love on Lisa the thing inside will be forever quieted.  And she is right, everything becomes as it should be, Jesse and Lisa are a happy stable couple; aside from the occasional uncontrollable inappropriate outbursts that Jesse desperately tries to laugh off and ignore; a twisted mockery "I'm happy! I'm healthy!.... I swear, just LOOK at me! … I'm normal, I'M NORMAL!"



Only the thing inside seems to understand, "He can't fight me, I am him."

  This is not the read most people had when *A Nightmare on Elm Street II: Freddy's Revenge* was released, but for some these themes were clear.  An obvious wink-wink, nudge-nudge to a queer audience, and a poignant, inclusive critique of toxic heteronormative expectations (a rare position for mainstream cinema at the time).  In 1985 Mark Patton starred as Jesse Walsh.  This was his first leading role, he was new to Hollywood from Missouri, and more importantly he was candid about his sexuality.  On the set of Freddy's Revenge, Mark met David Chaskin, the screenwriter who wanted to add an element of threatening homoeroticsim to heighten the titular monster's danger.  Eager to address turmoils Mark had himself lived through, Mark worked through the subtext of Jesse's struggle, figuring out how to make this demonized coming of age story resonate.  Regardless of their different intentions, Mark and David were faced with opposition.  Early screenings of the film yielded a vocal public, put off by the homosex-

ual tones within the film.  When the director and producers addressed the negative feedback David denied any involvement with the queer themes, leaving Mark alone to shoulder all the blame, and giving the impression that Mark's own homosexuality could not be overcome to play straight.  Mark moved on and started reading for his next roles.  His agents offered him a marriage of convenience; casting directors offered him another opportunity to bring a queer identity to the screen on the condition that his public face must play straight; a twisted mockery "I'm happy! I'm healthy! ...I swear, just LOOK at me! ... I'm normal, I AM NORMAL!"  Within a year Mark Patton walked away from acting, happily.  In 2010 David Chaskin admitted to intentionally writing queer tensions into the film.

Common codes used here to demonize queer desire: lust is presented and an abject monster, gay sex is equated with death as straight sex is equated with salvation, other homosexuals in the film are presented as rough lowlife punks and abusive predators, queerness should and can be conquered from within, normalness (even if fraught) is preferred.  These codes were deftly skewed with Mark's agency over the feedback loop.  By slightly shifting the narrative away from a threatening queerness, he opened a space to be skeptical of imposed normalness, and he was able to transmit empathy to viewers who were burdened with homophobic oppression and heteronormative expectations.  That kid in the audience, Mark Patton, Jesse Walsh; all of their stories play out at once on the screen, as Jesse's image is projected onto a flat, empty field.  In the movie theater, the shallow reflection of Jesse's image comes with Jesse's story and with that comes Mark's story and with that comes the story of that kid in the audience, all simultaneously present and flattened out on the screen.  There is nothing behind the screen, the projection travels no further, all is on the screen surface skin.

## ONE AFTER ANOTHER: STITCHES: TIME AND WOUNDS

The idea that the feedback loop as electrically charged is significant because of its movement and momentum, but also because of its time.  Within the scale of human experience, the speed of electricity is instantaneous, yet there is a path that is traceable.  In here is a paradox: a path is sequential, temporal,  yet electric conduction is instant, without duration.  The paradox is purely a semiotic one, it contradicts itself in description, though understandable in common experiences.  This Paradox of time and sequence is similar to  how labor is understood, all actions, each step one after another, to produce a thing is conflated into the instant of consumption that thing.  Stitches become exemplary of this paradox, they are an index of time and labor; each one its own moment, but then understood as a single, complete form instantaneously.  (The experience of this paradox also has a side effect of erasing labor and a laboring class)



Rend & Mend

A needle pulls thread through one surface and a second and draws them together. Stitches bind two forms at the service of a new form, this is how garments are made. But also, stitches bind two forms at the service of an old form, this is how garments survive. Formation and maintenance share the stitch. That seems important. It might have something to do with the labor vs its goal: the stitch is one labor; it is indifferent to whether it is constructing the new or maintaining the old, it is what it is a needle drawing surfaces together by piercing one and then a second with thread in tow. In this light creation and maintenance are indistinguishable by their labor. One may argue that (given that each stitch is a stitch in the way that every stitch is the stitch) a structure is never competed if it intends to survive. Or, that to cease labor on a structure is to ensure its failure. When a needle pulls thread through one surface and a second and draws them together, there is notable difference if the act is creation or mend; the difference is not in the stitch or even meaningful to the stitch in any way. This difference is our responsibility, a burden of our value judgments. A structure (or garment if you will) that is built of stitches, one after another, and is then offered as single complete product is suffering from the electric time paradox; its labor has been erased. It is also our burden that we accept the terms that this garment is complete; we are then also complacent in accepting the terms that the whole of the garment (labor and all) is undone with the development of a small hole. One's response to a small hole is crucial; is the garment discarded, or repaired with a needle and thread, rejoined at the seam, or a little scrap from somewhere else can cover that worn elbow. Now the difference between construction and maintenance starts to act on the surface. The mending stitch is often visible, or at very least can be felt by the wearer (a bit thicker, or bunched up more than the rest); it stands out from the original design; it reveals a notion of a before and an after. The labor is no longer conflated into an instantaneous moment. The mend makes visible labor of both construction and reconstruction.

True, the mend is a product of labor, of work; just as true, the mend is response to critical failure/ the rend/crisis/trauma. Trauma is often thought of as something to get over, getting-over is an under addressed theme when we talk about trauma. To be clear, getting over is the idea that the crisis is to be endured until a return to the previous state can be restored. Also that this endurance is to be performed privately, or at least invisibly. When we say we should leave someone to grieve on their own terms, we are giving them space to make their own terms, but also suiting our own comfort by allowing ourselves to turn away from bearing witness to pain, we are opting out of sharing in the grief, an active denial of empathy.

I am not sure where the idea of *getting over* comes from, how old the phrase is, or even if it is regional, but it is troubling. The structure of *getting over* looks like this: current state, then crisis, grief, getting over it, and finally returning to pre-crisis state. The problem with this model is that crisis/trauma/ the rend is not a passing affect or fluctuation, it is a change in state of being. Getting over denies the nature of crisis/trauma/the rend, denies its permanence. If we look for alternative to getting over we may turn toward a model of interminable repair, where the rend is not to be cured, moved past and



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ultimately forgotten; instead the rend is to be made familiar, mediated and kept. Part of this process will find a subversion of time, one will lose time in the time of becoming familiar with the rend, there will be a stuckness, being trapped in a moment, like a needle skipping on a record. It is just one second, the same second, over and over again, proceeding itself and following itself. The skin of that second expands amorphously past its bounds, across day and night, it slips into action and sticks to rest. This is how one becomes familiar with a rend, understands its terms. This is how one knows there is no undoing of a rend, but the rend is not a fatal impasse. Next, one finds a difference between a mend and a cure, and then finds a path to work through. You see, a cure seeks to eradicate the unwelcome condition; a mend works with the state of the unwelcome condition, evaluates its raw edges and brings them together, re enforces weak areas, and fills in gaps. Here, labor is found, a stitch draws two forms together and builds strength out of the change in form it enacts. The stitch also reinforces the timelessness of the rend, with each second a new stitch, one right after another and each the same as the last. All mends, even the ones that are expertly executed and invisible, will leave the surface forever changed. The rend and mend become one form, but do not dissolve away.

Sewn into this metaphor between grief and a garment is an aesthetic exercise that can ripple out and become support for how to consider larger difference, change, and even refounding structures of power. If we consider how meaning is found on the surface screen skin, then there is just as much meaning in how we treat the surface screen skin. Who does it serve to hide a scar? How can one (or a mass, for that matter) truly quantify invisible labor? How safe is it to consider repair a reduction in value? How much anxiety to we tie to a crisis, how much energy is expelled trying to undo a rend that will not be undone, and when it is not undone do we just myopically move on to look anxiously at another rend and simply claim that the last one has been dealt with (that was last week's rend, I'm over it).

The language of identity - the feedback loop we are thrown into - dictates our options, the forms of our identities; but it also responds to our choices, it is sensitive to our touch. Identity as a language is simultaneously fixed and fluid. And that charged wheel will continue to career forward without intentional navigation; a bicycle, with enough speed, will drive forward without a rider. We determine when to let momentum have its way, and when to turn; at what moment does Paul Lynde really turn up the sass? This is how bodies become visible in the narrative, how the screen welcomes skin and how surface brings them to life, makes them legible. Of course this is the slow belabored development of language, possibly a development that suits the comfort of mainstream at the expense of the margin (how long does it take for slang to enter the dictionary, if it ever does). As narratives expose new configurations of identity, not all are welcomed with revery and open arms. Some narratives, and identities they illuminate, are met with crisis and violence that leaves them marred, rent, vulnerable to obscurity. Response to that rend is just a important as how the feedback loop is driven, if not more so since the mend is capable of trapping history in the skin.

On the surface screen skin we see structure, rend, and mend all at once. A mend tethers the charged wheel; a mend gives a surface screen skin a narrative, it exposes labor, the efforts of redirection, a history and a trajectory of its development. Every scar has a story. A visible patch is unashamed. An augmented structure embraces the fluidness of democracy.

"Because they will try to convince us that we have arrived,
That we are already there, that it has happened.
Because we need to live in the place where we are truly alive,
Present, safe, and accounted for.
Because we refuse to allow our writing, songs, art, activism
And political histories to be suppressed or stolen.
Because we refuse to be embarrassed about the mistakes
And faults and choose to move forward
With a political agenda bent on the freedom of all." - Le Tigre

## ENDNOTES

Notes on the feedback loop:

Lacan gave us a structure of language that is always and all ways already all ready. He posits that the subconscious functions in a similar way as the sign, as the sign exists away from the referent so does the subconscious exist abstracted from the subject. The ends of this line of thought is that the sign is not just an apt metaphor for the subconscious, but that the sign is actually the home of the subconscious; that the Freudian slip is insufficient because it describes an isolated moment when the subconscious peeks into the world through language, rather we live in a state of constant Freudian slip, forever exposing our desires through language as it slips and we slip and we all slide together. The structuralist framework, that language is a fixed form that human experience must be bent and shaped to fit with, is prototype to identity-as-feedback-loop, charged wheel. Where structuralists focused on language and the subconscious, I shift my interest to worlds of the non-verbal, aesthetic markers and identity markers: speech patterns and tone, body language, stance, strut, fashions; a Freudian slip becomes a frauline's slip.

Central to my belief that narrative is a radical space is in the history of various civil rights movements. The power of the personal narrative has been a cornerstone to the public action of these movements. To be heard on one's own terms is an impactful strategy that invites empathy to pass over rigidly drawn boundaries. Most recently the work of artist L.J. Roberts and activist Buck Angel rings loudly with the ability to accept, embrace, and then alter the meaning of stories we inherit.

Notes on everything is between nothing and thing:

*The Radicant.* Bourriaud's critique of postmodern reason brings to light specific pitfalls of postmodernist multiculturalism. Though built with the best of intentions, to invite everybody to the table, an inherent hierarchy was overlooked; that the invited are present at the grace of, and for the benefit of the hosts. Also accidentally manifest was a fetishism of multiculturalism, that reductively chained cultural production to its exotic histories, emphasis on exotic with all of the spectacle and othering that comes with it. Bourriaud proposes, among other things, that a tonic for these pitfalls is found in the act of translation, that translation necessarily reduces hierarchical underpinnings. He supports this by illustrating that in translation both parties must view each other as divided by language, but equals within their respective languages. From that position collaborative work is done to produce a third space, that of the translation, which is not built at the expense of one party over the other, nor for the benefit of one party over the other. Bourriaud's translation helped solidify my interest in informed, intentional navigation between seemingly oppositional forms.

Notes on surfaces and codes:

Vito Russo's *Celluloid Closet* examines the role that Hollywood played in writing the queer identity as we know it, though does not shrink away from the ambivalence that comes with that history. Russo doesn't investigate *A Nightmare on Elm Street: Freddy's Revenge*, but his careful and critical analysis of cinema history coincides with my breakdown of the codes and cues at play in Jesse/Mark's story. Russo looks at the queer identity as being shaped with shame and hostilities from the dawn of cinema. Russo proposes that many of the traits that we now find embedded in queer identities (especially the sissy) were concocted for the screen as a way to communicate and exert moral power over homosexuals. Russo traces many movements of queer identities within cinema history, but remains diligent in exploring a constant push/pull being played out. On the one hand there are those imposing decency and taste standards; standards not limited to, but always affecting how a queer body gets represented, and (more often than not) punished; on the other hand Russo recounts the efforts of those representing sympathy and visibility to queer populations. For the first half of cinema's life, any success in the form of sympathetic visibility would be met with new codes of conduct and renewed list of forbidden words: no pansies grew in Hollywood gardens.

Also influential to this section is Allan Sekula's *The Body and the Archive*. Sekula states that when facing the function of the camera "we are confronting, then, a double system: a system of representation capable of functioning both honorifically and repressively." This duality of the camera is a phenomenon that I return to again and again in my work; the subtle shift in the camera turns it from the glory of a Hero to the shame of the Other. This oppositional possibility of photographic representation is not directly addressed in Russo's work, but the truth of it presence is undeniable. Russo's analysis of the way the camera is used to punish the homosexual, and at other times, used to identify with a person who is homosexual correlates with Sekula's take on the camera's muddled ability to simultaneously provide portraiture and archetypes.

Notes on one after another:

Julia Kristeva *Intimate Revolt:* "In the Zeitlos, then , I see a way of taming death by inscribing it immediately and simultaneously as instinctual force and unconscious representation, energy and psyche, having a specific temporality that does not temporalize, and this contrary to life and consciousness, although inseparable from them." Kristeva supports Freud's model that states: simply naming one's trouble does not insight its immediate cessation, troubles must become familiar and worked through even though the patient's trouble will resist the working through process. Kristeva even expands on this working through process, and presents (in contrast to Freud's concept of overcoming) a notion of interminal therapy; that the patient's trouble is not to be cured, moved past, and terminally forgotten, instead the trouble is (through analysis) to be made familiar, mediated, and kept in continuous management. Kristeva's practice of interminal working through does not mean prolonged suppression of one's trouble, instead she supports allowing one's trouble proper time for itself; that one's trouble needs its own expression otherwise prolonged build up will result in catastrophic breakdown. "...death takes its time in time (death wastes its time in time) and, by being absorbed in unbound time, becomes a source of serenity and indulgence. In fact, on the psychological level, this experience at the crossroads of time and the timeless should not make us pessimistic but kindly and indulgent." …..in support of embracing a continuing critical practice; to be interrogating the choices we make, the actions we take, even the indulgences

and entertainments we consume; to never cease investigation of our next revolt.

A key point to Kristeva's revolt is that it cannot happen in absentia or effigy, aesthetic experiences can illuminate for us new language/thought, they can provide a map through grief and with grief, they can haunt us and make us question our stance, but in order to actually internalize that new thought, survive grief or haunting we must take it to another person, we must engage the actions of speaking subject and listening subject. Creative practices should not be mistaken for an alternative to speaking/listening with another person; creative practices are powerful metaphors that can be deeply emotional and personal, but are only what they are: metaphors. Though they provide a needed space for critical creativity and equally critical audienceship; they are requisite public tools for the following proposal.

A great acknowledgment needs to be made to Judith Butler. Obviously her analysis of gender as performance underpins most of the work here, Butler has also provided a decisive counterpoint that I attempt to navigate. One that states the natural evolution of language to include the marginalized is not just too slow, but is actually just a device to perpetuate the center's power over the margin; that the grueling pace that the center demands of the margin for inclusion is simply teaching complacency. Therefore once the marginalized are considered part of the mainstream they have developed a pattern of obedience that perpetuates the center's hierarchical power over the only-slightly-less-marginalized margin.

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