Mirror Lamp Press

July 2021

No.2 LOOP

About

EDITORS

Gwen Burlington
Eoghan McIntyre

PROOFREADER

Jen Wade

PUBLICATION DESIGN

Paul Mulgrew

WEB DESIGN

Clio Meldon

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO

Rebecca O'Dwyer

the arts council an chomhairle ealaíon
funding visual arts
artscouncil.ie

@mirrorlamppress

Contents

Renèe Helèna Browne

Renèe Helèna Browne is an Irish artist working in film, sound, and writing. Browne is 2021-2023 Talbot Rice Resident Artist with Edinburgh College of Art at the University of Edinburgh. They have been shortlisted for the 2021 Sunset Kino Award with Salzburger Kunstervien for excellence in contemporary film and video, have screened work with the European Media Art Festival No. 34, and have been commissioned by the Project Arts Centre in Dublin this year.

Rachel Donnelly

Rachel Donnelly is a writer and editor based in Dublin. She is a co-founder and editor of DRAFF (draff.net), a living archive of contemporary performance. Upcoming projects include: THIS IS NOT A DRAMATISATION _ THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING (August 2021, Project Press), an edited collection of conversations between artists about performance; and A Hard Rain Fell (forthcoming, 2021), film short.

Ruth Clinton

Ruth Clinton is an artist and musician living in Sligo. She makes exhibitions and publications in collaboration with artist Niamh Moriarty and is a member of traditional singing group Landless. She co-founded the traditional singing session, 'The Night Before Larry Got Stretched,' the Sacred Harp Singers of Dublin group, as well as a weekly old-time session in Sligo. Recent exhibitions and performances include Spilt Milk Festival, International Women's Day for Solas Nua, Washington and Tradition Now.

Rob Doyle

Rob Doyle is the author of three widely acclaimed books, all published by Bloomsbury: Threshold, This Is the Ritual, and Here Are the Young Men, which has been adapted as a major film. His writing has appeared in the New York Times, Observer, TLS, Vice, and many other publications, and his work has been translated into various languages. He is the editor of an anthology published by Dalkey Archive Press, The Other Irish Tradition, and the book In This Skull Hotel Where I Never Sleep, published by Broken Dimanche Press. His next book Autobibliography will be published later this year.

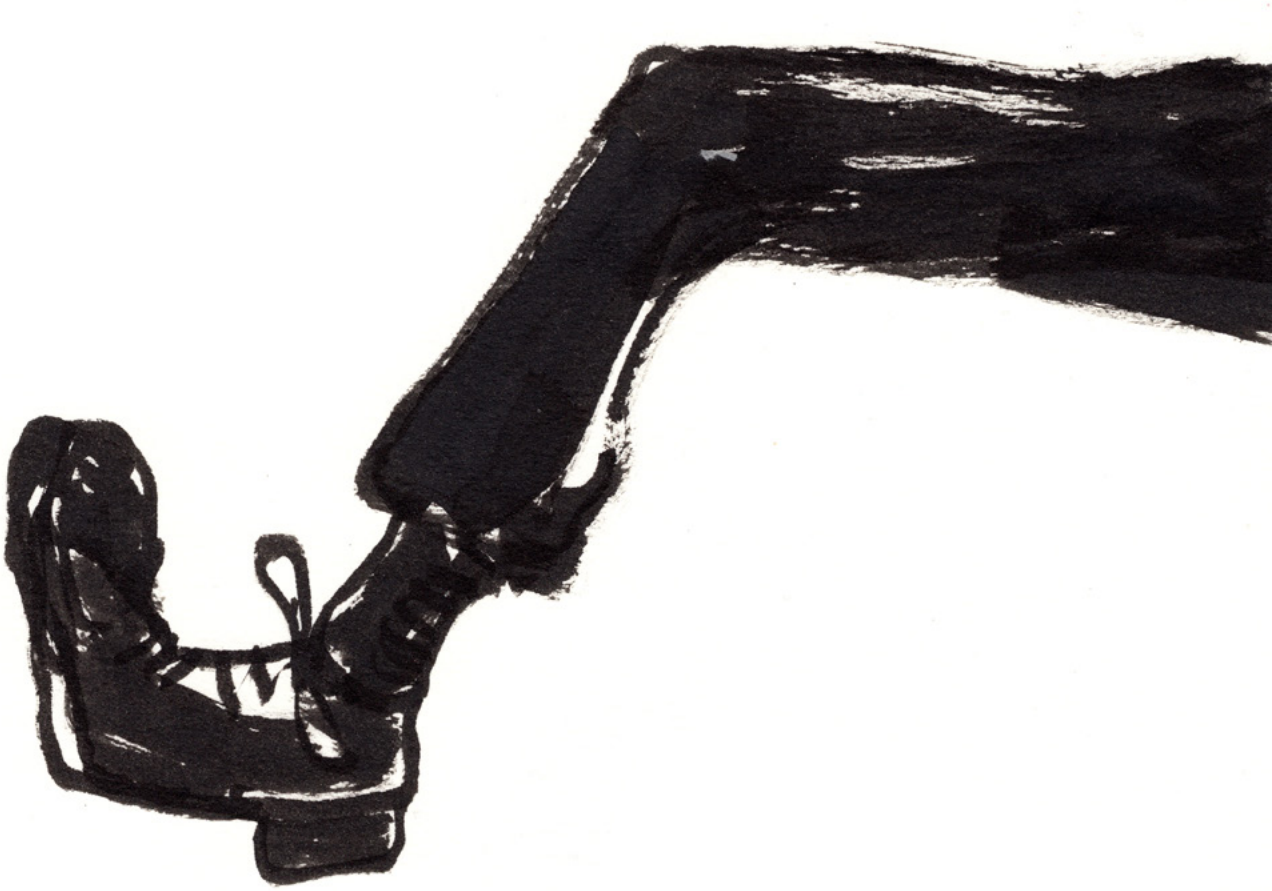
Sheilah ReStack

Sheilah ReStack is from Caribou River, Nova Scotia and is currently Associate Professor and Chair of Studio Art at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. She is recipient of the Howard Foundation Photography Fellowship (2017) and recent Canada Council Project grants (2020, 2017, 2015, 2013). Her solo work explores embodied use of photography, and last solo show Hold Hold Spill (2020) was at Interface Gallery, Oakland, CA. Her collaborative practice, with partner Dani ReStack, engages with videos and installations that use documentary, fantasy and form to offer new narrative structures.

Stephen Dunne

www.stephendunne.org
@stephendunnestudio

Stephen Dunne is a visual artist from Dublin, currently based in Virginia, Ireland. He is a graduate of the Royal College of Art in London and of NCAD in Dublin. His practice operates across the registers of painting, drawing, moving image and the investigation of speculative and theoretical fictions. Works are produced in a spontaneous manner and attempt to draw upon the unconscious as a source material, investigating an idea of delirious narrativity as a means of production.



The lithographs of Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) are by turns hilarious, scathing and melancholic. Little of Parisian life of his time escaped Daumier's social critique, reflecting the habits, fashions, and faults of late-19th century French life.

The art world, and in particular the Salon art exhibition, was frequently the target of Daumier's mockery. In a lithograph from 1865 Daumier portrays two women chatting within the exhibit. One of the pair appears particularly upset by the multiple nudes on the museum walls, exclaiming, "Still more Venuses this year... always Venuses!... as if there were any women built like that!"

The Salons of that time were so filled with portraits of the Roman goddess that Daumier had already made the same joke several times before. In 1864, in a print titled *View of a studio the final week before the exhibition*, Daumier depicts three incredibly panicked artists, working in unison to complete a painting before the opening of the Salon. When one worries that the paint will not dry on time another responds, "What does it matter if it's not dry, it's Venus rising from the sea!"

We mention these works of Daumier as they demonstrate that loops, returns, and repetitions are an inherent part of both the production of art and the critique of it. Daumier's mordant exclamation "Always Venuses!" could apply to his own work almost as much as the walls of the Salon of that time. Art movements are typified by artists continuously returning to the same subject, until the repetition results in an agitated stillness that renders the works too distant from contemporary life.

This second issue of *Mirror Lamp Press* explores the different uses and functions of repetition within contemporary art, performance, dance practice, political discourse, music and literature.

The Irish writer Michael Harding describes traditional Irish music as a "repetitive hum that dissolves the ego until only the tune remains. The musician becomes engaged in an act of surfing the notes, rather than controlling them." The artist and musician Ruth Clinton writes of her own music practice as a way of forming collectivity and fellowship, while examining Irish trad's frequent appropriation within an ethnonationalist agenda.

In our *Word* section Rob Doyle analyses the highly curious affinity, and subsequent spat, between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, which culminated in Kim labelling the then American President a "Dotard". Doyle looks at this strangely reciprocal pejorative term, which contains negative connotations of both infancy and old age.

Repetition is an essential element of dance practice, as a method of memorisation and honing technique. Rachel Donnelly examines the relationship between habit and repetition with reference to the choreographer Trisha Brown's *Accumulations*. This work by Brown demands a performer adopt a set of gestures in sequence, until the point where too many are added for the performer to memorise.

The House of the Rising Sons is Renèe Helèna Browne's explorative response to *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*, a fantasy novel by Larry Mitchell. The narrative of this uncategorisable 'libidinous fairytale-*cum*-manifesto' is used by Browne as a guide for their own arts practice.

Sheilah ReStack's work is often made in response to a specific geographical context; marking the trace of a 1920s racetrack with chalk, or testing ways of recording her journeys around Pictou Island, off Nova Scotia. Her diary entries pair an exploration of these projects with personal and everyday moments.

These collected texts are juxtaposed with artworks by Stephen Dunne, works that are alternately intimate, mysterious, funny, and strange. Figures multiply and fray, or appear to be fusing into one, in drawings and paintings that are both instinctual and evocative.

The essays and artworks assembled here illustrate various aspects of the phenomenon of the loop within contemporary culture. They are not intended to coalesce into a single cogent argument, but to form an interdisciplinary exploration of repetition and cyclicity in tones variously provocative, irreverent, and critical.

Gwen & Eoghan

Seachain an Bhearna

Ruth Clinton

"Seachain an bhearna, le do thoil" (Mind the gap, please), reads the scrolling text display on the Dublin-Sligo train.

"Seachain an bhearna, le bhur dtoil" (Mind the gap, please), says the announcer's recorded voice over the train PA.

The warning phrase in written form is aimed (in second person singular) at me, the solitary reader, to hear with my mind's ear. The spoken version, using the second person plural, addresses the whole carriage as a collective of listeners.

∫

I will try to describe my understanding of collectivity in traditional music—or at least what we have been calling 'traditional music' since the end of the nineteenth century. In my practice as a musician, I sing (mostly) English-language, (mostly) old Irish songs, and play Irish and American tunes on the fiddle, often in the

context of an informal pub or house session.

I find a sense of community through the music, of mutual empathy attained through a shared purpose. However, I am aware of how Irish traditional music can be appropriated, and can prove exclusionary to those outside the categories of white, heterosexual, non-disabled and cisgender. Although trad can offer an insight into (some versions of) history, I don't believe that a personal connection with that history need be a prerequisite for participation in or enjoyment of the music. I look to the embodied experience of playing and hearing the music, as well as its ecstatically repetitious form, as a means of discovering the emancipatory potential for community-building within.

Irish traditional music today is often associated with a romantic, almost mystical ideal of 'Old Ireland', complete with rustic peasants, gallant heroes and plucky red-haired maidens. This is an obvious exaggeration. However, this construction of Irish identity, compiled, according to cultural historian Joep Leerssen, from visions of an ancient, pre-Norman aristocracy intersecting with charming and homely countrypeople, was

promoted by Gaelic cultural revivalists at the turn of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth as an authentic expression of Irishness[1]. At the same time, there was suspicion from these 'nation builders' towards the people who actually practiced the culture they were appropriating, for example, Feis Ceoil co-founder Annie Patterson's assertion in 1914 that some 'rustic performers' could be merely inventing tunes and pawning them off on collectors as 'ancient music'. Other aspects of the music, perhaps taken for granted now as being 'traditional', are in fact relatively modern—and commercially motivated—inventions. For example, the convention of playing three tunes per set, twice each, is more likely to have been influenced by the length of one side of a 78 rpm record than by ancient custom.[2]

Lillis Ó Laoire, sean-nós singer and scholar, writes of the spurious connections made by the Gaelic League between vernacular Irish-language singing and Indian, Asian or North African singing. He argues that these speculations were motivated by a separatist, cultural nationalist agenda that sought to distance Irish music from the European mainstream, which was considered to represent

the ‘colonial elite’[3]. Ó Laoire is not attempting to confer some kind of ethnic purity or superiority on sean-nós singing but to counter the exoticising impulse that ultimately renders it ‘hermetic, ahistorical [and] timeless’.

I mention these examples—following Martin Dowling and Tes Slominski[4]—to attempt to destabilise the notion that ‘traditional’ Irish music as we play it and hear it today is an expression of a timeless Gaelic essence, only accessible to some. These ethnonationalist narratives have also proven historically exclusionary, one obvious example being the lack of recognition given to the role of Irish Travellers in preserving songs and dance tunes which may have otherwise been lost. Fiddle player Martin Hayes expresses a wish that, secure in the ‘diversity’ of our national identity, and no longer in need of these origin myths, we can begin to think about trad on the plane of ‘pure music’[5].

∫

Donegal fiddle player Con Cassidy spoke of the ‘red mist’ that falls down over a person’s eyes when they are utterly immersed in the music[6].

Without abandoning trad to the ahistorical void, I want to think about how the experience of being absorbed in playing and singing repetitious melodies—over many years, potentially—can lead to a state of mind from which meaning and empathy emerge.

A typical two-part tune consists of sixteen bars of notes, configured into varying but idiomatically consistent patterns. The notes themselves are only a starting point for the infinite variation, embellishment and expression that each player gives to the tune, potentially differing with each performance. Playing one short and simple melody on repeat creates an immersive, mesmeric drone within which each part of the tune calls for the next, infinitely. My own fiddle playing is still a work in progress, so I'm often primarily focussed on merely playing the notes in the correct order and as tunefully as possible. However, on certain occasions, alone or in company, I find I can really listen to the music, almost as though it's coming from somewhere else. Everyday concerns of the world are temporarily suspended, leading to a kind of hypnotised entanglement of self with sound.

Likewise with singing, when the words and music are truly embedded in my memory, I find I can properly inhabit the story and the emotion of the song. Songs with a well-known chorus create an opportunity for participation that can produce feelings of fellowship between singers. I experience this both through the physicality of the sound of many voices raised together and through the shared sentiment produced by certain lyrics. Singing old songs, whose stories feel both timeless and timely, grants access to a continuum of performance along which the songs are minded by individual singers over time. Songs are passed around, by oral, aural or printed means and adapted to suit the singer's voice, aesthetic taste and historical context. Personal interpretation, however, does not confer ownership over the music and the singer's ego is subsumed by the song, which is in fact a piece of community property.

The song 'Lovers and Friends' encapsulates these ideas of community strength within an evolving musical tradition. Written by Sean Mone, a singer from Keady, Co. Armagh around the time of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, it has already entered the canon of 'traditional' songs

performed at singing circles around the country. The song sharply criticises the hypocrisy of Church and State, who use their power to "berate us, deride us, separate and divide us / in the hope of their version of heaven". Mone celebrates the enduring strength of friendship in the face of institutional oppression, recognising that solidarity can persist like the "mountains and rivers [that] will by far outlive us". I have often sung along with these words in a room full of people and felt, however briefly, a real sense of mutual understanding.

"So fill up your glass that future and past
In harmony be determined.
For there's more friendship poured out in one bottle of stout
Than you'll find in statute or sermon."[7]

∫

Crucially, singing and playing trad does not feel like an historical re-enactment or exercise in nostalgia. It approaches instead—for me—a temporary pause in the relentless productivity of capitalist life, during which the music can be rehearsed entirely without purpose beyond

the enjoyment of and connection between players and listeners. Although there is of course widespread commercialisation of trad, it does not define it.

In the context of a group session, I think that feelings of cross-community concord—fleeting and contingent as they may be—can arise through an active, shared participation in the music: listening to each other, singing along, dancing together, or even the ubiquitous foot-tapping. Martin Dowling describes a 'mutual recognition' that occurs as musicians submit to the constraints of the form, leading to life-long friendships and a loosely connected global community of people who practice trad[8]. I try to cultivate an attitude of respectful fascination with the music of previous generations, absorbing as much as possible from old recordings, but not imagining that the clock stopped with any one particular rendition.

House dances, commonly held in rural Ireland before the introduction of the conservative, church-led 1935 Dance Halls Act, were a source of entertainment and social cohesion. People played, sang, told stories, and danced sets that had evolved from nineteenth century European

quadrilles declared un-Irish by the cultural revivalists. Ballad sheets sold in cities and towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served as a kind of community news, concerned with local events and ordinary lives, although the form was derided as 'frigid' when it arrived from England in the 1600s[9]. These examples are given to reiterate that trad music as we practice it now has never been an expression of 'pure' Irishness, and has frequently (if imperfectly) facilitated community interaction independent of any ethnonationalist agenda. It is an ever-evolving tradition that has given—and will continue to give—joy, comfort and fellowship to those who choose to lose themselves within it.

1. Leerssen, J. (1996). Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representations of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century. Cork, Cork University Press.

2. Dowling, M. (2004). 'Rambling in the Field of Modern Identity: Some Speculations on Irish Traditional Music'. Radharc. Pages 5/7, 107-134. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25122346 [viewed April 2021].

3. Ó Laoire, L. (2013). 'Sean-nós Singing and Exoticism', The Journal of Music. https://journalofmusic.com/focus/sean-nos-singing-exoticism [viewed April 2021].

4. Slominski, T. (2020). Trad Nation: Gender, Sexuality, and Race in Irish Traditional Music. Middletown, Wesleyan University Press.

5. Hayes, M. (2004). 'Tradition and Aspiration', The Journal of Music. https://journalofmusic.com/focus/tradition-and-aspiration [viewed April 2021].

6 Dowling, M. (2004). 'Rambling in the Field of Modern Identity: Some Speculations on Irish Traditional Music'. Radharc. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25122346 [viewed April 2021].

7. Mone, Sean. For full performance see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLrEUzDsXEc

8. Dowling, M. (2004). Rambling in the Field of Modern Identity: Some Speculations on Irish Traditional Music. Radharc, 5/7, 107-134. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25122346 [viewed April 2021].

9. Moulden, J. (2006). The printed ballad in Ireland: a guide to the popular printing of songs in Ireland 1760-1920. PhD Thesis. NUI Galway. https://aran.library.nuigalway.ie/handle/10379/5020 [viewed April 2021].

Accumulated Hours: Repetition, habit, and time in the work of Trisha Brown and Samuel Beckett

Rachel Donnelly

Something must be repeated to become a habit. Something must be repeated to be integrated into muscle memory, so that it can become reflexive and unconscious. I butter my bread without considering the angle of the knife. I eat my sandwich without considering the movement of my jaws or tongue, the swallowing in my throat. Habit is itself a habit, as well as a failsafe device – it saves us from the perils of too much attention. Do we die a little in habit? I have never been able to bear walking the same route too many times in a row – my senses thicken and go cold. I want to be plugged into the hum of my surroundings, so I prefer to take a longer route for its difference.

Does a dance become a habit for a performer, when they've repeated it many times? Or can we come to presence through repetition? American choreographer Trisha Brown's 1971

work *Accumulation* is built on repetition. It stacks distinct actions one by one, the dancer (or dancers) accumulating movements in the pattern 1, 1-2, 1-2-3, etc. I have watched the video of the first performance of *Accumulation*, performed by Brown herself at the New York University Gymnasium, repeatedly. There is no sound on the film, but the piece was performed to the Grateful Dead's *Uncle John's Band*. Brown stands centre stage, in a long-sleeved white top and flowing red trousers. The work progresses in a rolling rhythm, the accretion of a series of discrete movements within the same four beats. Here is Brown herself on the structure of *Accumulation*:

One simple gesture is presented. The gesture is repeated until it is thoroughly integrated in my kinesthetic system. Gesture 2 is then added. Gesture 1 and 2 are repeated until they are assimilated, then Gesture 3 is added. I continue adding gestures until my system can support no further additions. The first 4 gestures occur on the first 4 beats. The subsequent gestures are packed into that one measure.

I get out of bed. I get out of bed and pick up my phone. I get out of bed, pick up my phone and walk to the kitchen. I get out of bed, pick up my

phone, walk to the kitchen and fill the kettle. I get out of bed.

In a letter to Brown, her friend the choreographer Simone Forti wrote: "I find myself thinking so much about your dance. As an approach to Time and to accumulation and to return which I find liberating and guiding... I used to stretch both hands to the future. Now I've been stretching one hand to the future and one to the past, and my house seems to be building up a lot stronger."[1] These words by Forti remind me of something Samuel Beckett wrote about time: "The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomenon of its hours."[2] And here is art historian Susan Rosenberg on *Accumulation*: "The movements... are accumulated with the right arm and de-accumulated with the left in simple gestures."[3]

Time rolls out behind us, and stretches out before us, and we stand pinned at the centre of time, in presence. Or out of presence, in habit.

Brown saturates her body with gestures within a limited timeframe until they become automatic, rolling through her torso and limbs within the ambit of 'bend', 'stretch', 'rotate', the body's main pathways. Does the automatism of the movement free her from the tyranny of time, and bring her to pure presence? The German choreographer Pina Bausch considered repetition transformative: ''Repetition is not repetition. The same action makes you feel something completely different by the end."[4] At what point, then, does repetition turn into habit?

I texted a friend, a dancer, about the experience of performing *Accumulation*.

Me: Does it become automatic when you get it? Or are you always counting hard?

Friend: It becomes automatic. To a certain degree.

Me: I'm writing about the relationship between repetition and habit. And time. Like the automatic actions you make in your daily life, and then the automatic movement of a learned choreography.

Friend: Hang on let me think… the counting is kinda part of it. But that becomes automatic.

Me: But one type of "automatism" lives in presence, whereas mundane daily habit is the opposite of presence. Know what I mean? Like, you're very present when doing the Accumulation choreography, I imagine. But not when brushing your teeth. But both are automatic in some sense.

[delayed response]

Friend: Sorry mum arrived. Yeah I think that's true to a certain degree, but it's also in large part a question of muscle memory and at what stage of knowing the material you're at. You can do material that is in your muscle memory while thinking/focusing on something completely different – like what to have for dinner. Big difference between the various stages of knowing movement: learning (requires huge presence/ concentration), rehearsing (concentration dilutes to include other concerns), performing (movement lives in the body and presence is completely fractured – like time is no longer linear in the same way etc.)

Me: Yeah I get you – but I think in performance, you wouldn't be thinking of your dinner or whatever – there'd be a concentrated attention? (Or ideally) Like if you were performing Accumulation. You'd be in a "flow" state.

Friend: If it was your 20th time performing it, you might well be [thinking of your dinner].

Me: Haha. Yes.

Friend: [replying to "flow" state comment] *Yeah that's a good way to describe it*

Habit is a framework that allows us to tame time – as Beckett also wrote, "a compromise effected between the individual and his environment".[5] Many of Beckett's own characters inhabit physical repetition. In his early novel *Watt*, written in France while he was in hiding from the Nazis, the repetition resembles the mundanity of daily habit: "Here he stood. Here he sat. Here he knelt. Here he lay. Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed..."[6] (this passage continues for some time). In his 1981 television play *Quad*, language is abandoned, but not physical repetition. Four hooded figures in long robes navigate the four sides of the stage and its diagonals with rhythmic tramping, along strictly

defined pathways. The repetition in *Quad* is not tied to any mundane activity, as in *Watt;* it's purely abstract, closer to *Accumulation* than my daily round of switching on the kettle and brushing my teeth. Though he was not a choreographer, Beckett specified in the stage directions that it would be better if the performers had "some ballet training". The notation for their movements reminds me of Brown's score for *Accumulation*, for example: "Course 1: AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA".

Some Sufis practice repetitive whirling as a form of meditative worship, arms outstretched on either side. This is a form of *Dhikr*, certain repetitive practices in Islam that focus awareness on Allah. In the Sufi Whirling Dervish dances, the aim is dissolution of the ego through repetition, the achievement of pure presence. It's a question for contemporary dance, improvisation versus set choreography. The assumption is the former requires absolute presence and concentration, and the latter allows the mind to wander away from the body's current reality. But what if repetition, as the Sufis seem to think, allows for dissolution of the ego, for plugging in to that elusive hum of the universe?

For Beckett, habit reconciles the pain or elation of the full awareness of our being in space and time, with the practical requirement to make something of our days, to move forward with projects, plans, tasks. When habit is suspended, what is revealed to us are "...the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being."[7] Habit is a double-edged sword that brings the unfamiliar crashing down to earth, emptying "the mystery of its threat – and also of its beauty."[8]

My dancer friend is breastfeeding her newborn. Her nightly repetitions accumulate in the sluggish, pale and monochrome small hours:

Friend: Try cross latch on the right. Try cross latch on the right, baby refuses. Try cross latch on the right, baby refuses, switch hold. Try cross latch on the right, baby refuses, switch hold, baby refuses. Try cross latch on the right, baby refuses, switch hold, baby refuses, try cross latch on the right again. Try cross latch on the right, baby refuses, switch hold, baby refuses, try cross latch on the right again, baby latches.

It's a habit at this stage, repeated many times,

integrated into her muscle memory. But there is dissolution of ego in it too – repetition as confirmation of devotion. I think again of Forti's words to Brown in her letter about *Accumulation* – they've been coming into my mind repeatedly since I first read them: "I used to stretch both hands to the future. Now I've been stretching one hand to the future and one to the past, and my house seems to be building up a lot stronger." Habit binds us to the past and to the future simultaneously – the retreading of yesterday's pathways, the promise of treading them again tomorrow. Repetition of abstract movement holds us in the present moment, like the Sufi turning around their own axis.

Without moments of clarifying presence, our lives would pass us by in monochrome, muffled. Without habit, we would never move forward. The moment repetition turns into habit might be something like the birth of time passing. I watch the video for *Accumulation* again in silence, still not understanding how Brown so seamlessly integrates the growing sequence of movements into the same four beats. It's like watching the known span of a life fill up slowly, with all that will pass through it.

1. Rosenburg, S. (2012). *Trisha Brown's Notebooks.* Cambridge, MA: OCTOBER 140. October Magazine, Ltd. and MIT Press.

2. Beckett, S. (1930). *Proust*. New York: Grove Press. Page 8.

3. Rosenburg, S. (2012). *Trisha Brown's Notebooks.* Cambridge, MA: OCTOBER 140. October Magazine, Ltd. and MIT Press.

4. Kisselgoff, A. (1985). *Pina Bausch Dance: Key Is Emotion*. New York Times. Available online at: https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/04/arts/pina-bausch-dance-key-is-emotion.html

5. Beckett, S. (1930). *Proust*. New York: Grove Press. Pages 7–8.

6. Beckett, S. (1973). *Watt*. London: John Calder. Page 203.

7. Beckett, S. (1930). *Proust*. New York: Grove Press. Page 8.

8. Beckett, S. (1930). *Proust*. New York: Grove Press. Page 11.

The House of the Rising Sons

Renèe Helèna Browne

The Faggots and Their Friends Before Revolutions is a sometimes-confusing collation of notes on the power of an open body and mind, and care as resistance. In the process, it is also a fable on interdependence as a radical act. It extends far beyond the limits of a story, or of a manifesto, but instead swims in the murk of a multi-genre, mind-wobbling piece of writing by Larry Mitchell and drawings by Ned Asta.

The book is set in a place called Ramrod, also known as 'the devastated city' among its oppressed populace. Pinetree, one of Ramrod's inhabitants, survives here through a mentality of certainty. He is able to mimic 'the men' perfectly in the outside world and acts accordingly when prompted by them to work. He does this fervently from dawn to dusk, leading a regimented existence. He cultivates objects that the men require to both sustain and further their empires, wields their language of the corporate, and their starkness in the impersonal. Because of this, he has money,

allowing him the privilege of a solitary home. Though his pleasures in this space are few, designed only with organisation and practicality in mind for the one person home.

Inside, Pinetree quietly dreams of company. He longs for the murmur of other voices and the friction of other bodies. He conjures up fantasies of the unexpected, of the unplanned, and unpractised. Beyond his adeptness in being alone, Pinetree imagines himself making elaborate meals, beautiful furniture, and soft shapes for him and his friends to enjoy together. In a journal, he writes of chaos and vulnerability. He details experiences he imagines could form in their debris. He muses on the romances of sharing spit and food and longings. He draws bodies entangled together sleeping in the daytime and moving quickly to music at night. He mocks-up outfits to be worn and skins to be removed. He redraws new faces for himself every day and writes songs of love, kinship, and rebirth.

Pinetree writes down his ideas but diligently stores them away in terror at the thoughts of their realisation. While these ideas are the tools necessary for a personal revolution, he hides from

them and his mind becomes a sealed vault to possible happiness. Instead, he accepts loneliness, along with the artificial safety it nurtures in him. As a result, Pinetree's mind lives entirely in the realm of fantasy. He achieves this through paper as a mode of continued remembrance that he is, in fact, not where he wants to be, and not who he wants to be, ever. Pinetree writes down so that he doesn't forget but he also represents his desires so that one day, when he's uncertain and unbrave enough, he can share them with others.

The transferring of these thoughts, from brain to paper, the explicit emphasis Pinetree's fantasies place on sharing, has become, for me, a way to think about reasons for having a practice. I have often wondered why someone has made something, why they choose a specific thought from the mind and put it onto specific paper (or other) to then share it with the specific (or unspecific) people around them. This makes me consider why I might carry out a similar task. Sometimes I think, why make work at all when the idea itself can be stored so neatly in the mind?

Sometimes, under the light of the moon, Pinetree escapes his regime and sets out along the

pathways of the unexpected. Certain here only in his invisibility, he experiences moments from the journals locked up at home as he ascends into rituals of the brief encounter outside. He releases and takes in, exchanging his body in ecstasy with the other faggots. He adopts their codes and their languid lusts and he feels, for these brief moments, at home. Then he clambers to close his buttons and wipe his chin on the walk back, before opening the doors to his quiet little house, and settles down to sleep.

Like Pinetree, I want to remember the possibilities that my brain has afforded me. His outrageousness, his freedoms, and his most delicate of desires are archived both in the lines of his notebooks, and in his night-time excursions. They wait impatiently in their unresolved dry states to be swelled in the light of day, and by others around him. But these ideas, when they stay in that form do not allow for the leaks and stains of interaction. Just as, if I am to move beyond the ideas trapped in my own notebooks, I must somehow allow for the unstable and open space that interaction requires.

Activities, akin to those locked up by Pinetree, are acted out in reality every day beyond him

on Pansy Path. Here ideas are fantasised, written down, and then embraced and expressed by the faggot community of the devastated city. Together, the House of the Heavy, Horny Hunks, the Gay as a Goose Tribe, the No Name Tribe, the Boys in the Backroom, and the House of Angel Flesh, assist each other with any skills the other is without to make their ideas a reality. Inside their custom-built houses, they share lovers, recipes, gossip and clothes, all while together defending their union against the men. Rituals of the brief encounter are stretched out here on Pansy Path, and embedded in this community as a practice of the everyday.

I think more and more that I too make things, or simply only encourage myself to make things, in order to try and forge this kind of sharing as a reality for myself. To perhaps force myself into opening up the ideas, to unfold their corners and push their infancy into something more grown in the world as a way to find out where I, myself, want to be. This, for me, is akin to the relationships, activities and structures on Pansy Path above. I too want to feel the warmth that flourishes in these lively Houses with others.

As an idea for my own House, I am building an oral archive of 'Urania', an early 1900s publication on gender and sexuality. With this House then, I am not building as such, but rebuilding. 'Urania' was first 'built' as a privately circulated journal in 1916. It was, in its richness of knowledge and breadth of sharing, a manifesto for living akin to that of Pansy Path. Linking the emotional, physical, astrological, and social intricacies of life as encounters its readers could face together, instead of alone. The process of building one's own House is daunting though. It requires hope, a spirit so distant a feeling of late; and passion, one always flickering in and out, amid the distracting beams of daily life. It requires laying these foundations of feelings and forming rooms around them to invite others in. In my notebooks, rebuilding Urania is a proposal to extend feelings of connection and of longing in trans embodiment outward to reach other people in my own devastated city. To do so, I am asking other people to share their voices with me and speak the words of their ancestors as a way of structuring this choral home. Some of the people I'm asking are those both already either close to me, or at a slight distance, with the hope of

making tighter the binds of connection between us. While others are people I long to connect with, elders that have, through their words, work, and just sheer existence, have brought feelings of empowerment and pride to myself and my peers.

In *This Little Art*, Kate Briggs muses on the intimacy of writing about and translating the work of Roland Barthes. In it, there is a passage where she describes the activity of reading the same book as another person as an interaction: 'a way of being together… That startling, sometimes discomforting, effect of accelerated intimacy, as if that person had gone from standing across the room to all of a sudden holding your hand.' This intimacy, a mode of connection that can only happen through sharing, is currently not within my reach. The emails to invite the people together to form my House are, although drafted and ready, still unsent. I am entirely afraid of making this kind of connection. Scared inside my own little well organised solitude before the loudness and uncertainty that needs to occur in making my House a reality.

This fear is a debilitating one, and much at odds with the constant task of making in the studio.

The motivation to go back each day to work, and rework the ideas on paper in order to try and form something uncertain and unbrave enough to ask others into my life. On more positive days, I see the studio as a place of unresolve, awaiting my attention and care to make sturdy enough shapes for others to consider. This process, for me, requires the vulnerable fantasy building that Pinetree so stringently commits to in his continued representation of a life he wants to live. It's a work that, if I am to commit to it with a similar dedication, to send the emails and invite others to join me, then I must consider, by making the oral archive, whom do I want it to speak to?

Pinetree, in his journals, speaks to those that also yearn for the physical, emotional and social embraces of bodies together in space. He writes for anyone alone to feel connected, to feel the joys of play, of taste, of sound and of touch. For the glorious resistance and resilience in holding each other together, and feeling the heat of being held, amid the ruins of his devastated city. I have spent years unsure while making art about whom it is that I want to speak to. I remember hearing another artist once describe good art as

having ‘something for everyone’ in it. Proposing that otherwise is a failure if not connective to a broad spectrum of people. This mind-set, the type of work, and the reasons for making it, are something I think about when I wonder if the thing I’m making has a truth to it. I want to always make work that is subjective and by doing so, is nothing for everyone. This form of practicing, as attempts at a truth, requires in me a confidence that my ideas, hidden in notebooks or in my brain, are useless without the action of questioning in the studio and without inviting others in. The truth, of which I think I will always search for, demands in me the hope that Pinetree holds in his fantasies. It asks for sensitivity to what I, a specific person living in a body in the world, feel and long for, am without, and am in abundance of. These considerations shape the life I choose to live, and as such, I believe should also shape the reasons for entering the studio each day.

In a reading of my birth chart recently, the text said that I form my closest bonds through the sharing of my work; that the brief encounters of inviting people into the studio, or Google doc, or drafted film, are ways to propose, to make better, and mainly to think anew as an intimacy with

them. These objects, in their rough unfinished states, are both admittances, like Pinetree, that I am never where I want to be, and proposals to find out where that is together with others. In the moments of connectivity, by sharing these proposals with people, my initial ideas get beyond just the remembered and the archived. They become both the furniture and the soft things that myself and those I've invited sit on together, and start to build something uncertain with each other.

Pinetree eventually stumbles upon friendship amid his secret and brief night-time encounters. There he meets Lilac, Loose Tomato, Hollyhock, and Heavenly Blue, all dazed by their own fronts of aloneness. Together they decide to build a loud and beautiful home together. They call it The House of the Rising Sons. Under one roof, they begin to heal their wounds by showing them to each other. With a new confidence in uncertainty and sharing, Pinetree begins to assert his desires and politics beyond the walls of the newly nourished home. He goes out into the devastated city with a sign simply saying 'Freedom' and sits in the streets with it. Confused and threatened by the delicateness of the gesture, the Men render

Pinetree unsafe and lock him up. The rest of the Rising Sons then run away from their home to live with the fairies, who receive them with open arms. They long for Pinetree desperately and wait up late each night praying he will come to them. As The House of the Rising Sons begin to fall into another hopeless night of sleep together, they awaken to the most beautiful notes being sung close by. Suddenly, Pinetree, singing his newest song, skips through the front door. He is finally home.

In choosing to rebuild Urania, I want to make something that, together with others, deals directly in the politics of remembrance. As Pinetree writes down to not forget, I want to carve out the space to ask what has never changed about the queer body in its relation to its social, political and intimate spheres? And what has been lost within the seams of this history that can be now reshared and so remembered with the help of others? To do so, it's been important for me to consider the glory of being memorable, the particular mark that legacy inscribes on particular bodies, and the discourses and institutions that choose what's worth not forgetting about. I understand that in order to be unbrave enough

to gather my House together, I need to imagine that this oral archive can speak directly to those that have spent their lives needing to but unable to hear anything like it. And, in turn fill the air around them with the voices of their own devastated city.

1. Briggs, K (2017). *This Little Art* London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Day of the Dotards

Rob Doyle

Three years ago, in our generation's tawdry cover version of the Cuban Missile Crisis, then-US president and noted *Wrestlemania* contestant Donald Trump got into a very public spat with chubby boy-tyrant Kim Jong-un. We all remember the classic lines: Trump's biblical warning, for instance, that North Korea would face 'fire and fury the likes of which the world has never seen', or his taunt in a speech to the UN that 'Rocket Man is on a suicide mission'.

Now, all of this was wildly entertaining, in spite of – or perhaps due to – the backdrop of potential Armageddon against which the geopolitical dick-swinging played out. It was also instructive, to me at least, in that it brought into my awareness a curious word that hadn't hitherto been part of my vocabulary. In response to Trump's insults, Kim Jong-un released a bluntly ad hominem statement in which, after condemning Trump as 'surely a rogue and a gangster fond of playing with fire, rather than a politician', he twisted the knife by

declaring, 'Action is the best option in treating the dotard who, hard of hearing, is uttering only what he wants to say'. Lest Trump didn't catch the slur, Jong-un repeated it in the final line of his 500-word denunciation: 'I will surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged US dotard with fire.'

Dotard! How apt it sounded even if few of us had any exact idea what it meant. The dictionary Merriam-Webster recorded that searches for the word were 'high as a kite' in the days that followed the Supreme Leader's smack talk. The Oxford English dictionary defines a dotard as 'an old person, especially one who has become physically weak or whose mental faculties have declined'. Its etymology is traced to the fourteenth century: a merging of the verb 'dote' with the suffix 'ard', the latter which often forms nouns of a derogatory import (eg. drunkard, blaggard, laggard, dullard). Archaic burn! Less forcefully, the Merriam-Webster definition of 'dotard' is 'a person in his or her dotage'.

It's this suggestion of both *doting* (the way you'd dote on a little baby) and *dotage* (a period of senility when one becomes babyishly vulnerable) that gave the word its peculiar charm, popping

up amid apocalyptic rhetoric from two ridiculous yet menacing world leaders. The charm was enhanced by how 'dotard' sounded like something a schoolteacher might bark at his worst pupil in a fit of ire. Naturally, Kim Jong-un did not deliver his statement in English, but in Korean, and so he didn't actually use the word dotard: the original insult was 늙다리 미치광이 which, if Google Translate is to be believed, in fact means 'old-legged maniac'. (In a social media post the South Korean singer Jihye Lee translates it as 'old beast lunatic'.) The Supreme Leader is believed to have spent his schooldays in Switzerland, where he was a dreamy fanboy of Michael Jordan and American basketball generally, and where he most likely took English lessons. According to a report in *Newsweek*, 'Many claim that Kim understands and speaks just enough English to have an informal chat, and that his English language skills are not strong enough to hold formal negotiations'. We can speculate that North Korea's state translators decided on the wording before Jong-un gave the translated text his stamp of approval.

By mocking Trump for his advanced age, and the decline in virility and cognitive power that ageing induces, this dastardly authoritarian leader

– who'd had his uncle obliterated by anti-aircraft guns in an early assertion of ruthlessness – placed himself in curious harmony with the chorus of liberal opposition to Trump. Even before he was elected, outraged commentators were arguing that Trump was mentally unfit to be president – that, as a septuagenarian, he was in the grip of a cognitive decline that made his ability to, say, keep his fingers off the nuclear button less than assured. In June 2017 *Slate* published a typical article, by Jacob Weisberg, titled 'Donald Trump's cognitive decline'. Weisberg founded *Trumpcast*, an oppositional podcast that spent four years pushing conspiracy theories premised on the belief that the American public couldn't possibly have elected Donald Trump and so it must have been the Russians. Following the *Slate* article, *Trumpcast* invited a series of mental health professionals on the show to discuss the ravages of the president's suspected dotage. In January 2018, *The Atlantic* published an article titled 'Is There Something Neurologically Wrong With Donald Trump?' in which the writer, James Hamblin, analyses such incidents as Trump drinking a glass of water while giving a speech ('The gesture was like that of an extremely cold person cradling a mug of

cocoa. Some viewers likened Trump to a child just learning to handle a cup'). I could go on. Such obsessional articles were a cottage industry in the Trump years, as meanwhile any number of viral videos invited us to laugh at Trump's slurred speech, confused gestures and incoherent rambling.

It may be a bit gauche, a bit ill-mannered of me to point out that few from this age-shaming cohort could be heard to wonder aloud about cognitive decline when that silvery dote, Joseph R. Biden Jr., was elected as Trump's successor. Joe Biden, let's not forget, is four years older than Trump – 78 – but more to the point, he is visibly *much* frailer, less virile and less sharp than Trump. While he seems to be a fundamentally decent man (insofar as the word applies at nuclear-access levels of American power), the dearth of comment about his obvious dotage is telling. If neither we, nor Kim Jong-un, quite have it in us to put the boot into Biden the dotard, it's because we sense he's too frail, too vulnerable, too past it to be worth attacking. In calling the current president of the United States mentally deranged, or hard of hearing, or a dotard, we'd be punching down.

There's another interesting thing about the word dotard, namely its proximity, both phonetic and semantic, to 'retard'. Although we might have scrambled for the dictionary when Kim Jong-un issued his statement, on a near-subliminal level we intuitively knew that this thirty-something leader of an imperiled, paranoid, nuclear-armed, communist totalitarian state was calling the president of the United States of America a derivative of 'retard' (just as the implied phallic-symbolic images were unavoidable when Trump declared: 'Please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!'). Now, the word 'retard' merits an essay of its own, one that might touch on the word's recent transition from being crass yet commonplace to a potentially cancellable taboo ('the R-word', as I've seen it referred to among magical-thinking language vigilantes on the usual forums). It's 'retard's adjacently offensive edge that lends 'dotard' its potency, not least the hard, mean ugliness of the final four letters: if 'ard' as a suffix gives nouns a derogatory spike, then 'tard' is positively toxic.

All of which begs the question of whether, in

the event that 'dotard' were to *catch on*, it would likewise become taboo and sound as genuinely nasty as 'retard' does now. Today's quaint jibe is tomorrow's unprintable offence, and after all, it's hardly less uncivilised to ridicule someone's advanced age as it is their being mentally disabled. (Might we, I wonder, eventually refer to dotard as 'the D-word'?) Of course, all of this 'dotard' semiotics is, like much of the nihilistic comedy we as a global audience consumed between 2016 and 2020, very much by the by. A year after their mutual trolling, negging and rocket measuring, Donald Trump met with Kim Jong-un in Singapore in 2018, becoming the first sitting American president to meet a North Korean leader. And when they did meet, according to Trump, 'we fell in love.' Afterwards they exchanged twenty-seven letters (doting letters, we must imagine).

If a cliché of romantic cinema is to be believed, vexation can pre-signal a heady erotic chemistry. Might it also be the case that the insult – uttered, shouted, texted or tweeted – is embryo to the lover's endearment, the sigh of devotion, the whispered sweet-nothing? One day he's calling you dotard; the next you're sweethearts.

Notes on Walking, Traces, Mothers and Photographs

Sheilah ReStack

April 15, 2021

I got an email from Eoghan today. We were at a residency together in Ireland three years ago, where he saw my project, *The Invisible Inside the Visible*. He wondered if I would write about it for this publication. In that project, I searched for, and found, a forgotten landmark in the fields next to the rural community of River John, in Nova Scotia. The landmark in question was a rumor – a physical trace of a racetrack that existed in the 1920's. That era had been one of economic prosperity for this and other Atlantic province towns, who relied heavily on wooden boat building. However, each time I tried to find the track, both with and without guidance, I was unsuccessful. As with many things I want to investigate, it became an art project. I started to gather hand drawn maps and verbal accounts from longtime residents of River John, of where they thought the track may have been located.

What became quickly clear was that the track existed – at least within the collective oral history. Its physical location varied depending on the respondent, but the idea of the track was a touchstone for a community history. The location and references varied, "by Meg's Beach; by Scothorn cottage before it burned; by where the cranberries show in fall.". All of these descriptors worked to place the track in relation to contemporary usage, and alive to the respondents lived experience.

When I ultimately found it, it was through touch.

I laid a mark of chalk by walking where I felt the rise in the land. It appeared, like a revenant from the past. Viewed from above, it yielded itself. When it rained that night, the chalk disappeared.

The image remains–a photographic proof/ proving. Separated, but also attached, to its history. Right now, it lives mostly in oral history of those who live in River John. It also is in the land itself– where it slowly is called back into the earth and covered by grass, come summer.

April 17, 2021

Must drive Rose to school. She goes two days a week.

April 18, 2021

I realize that I always wanted marks that would trace ordinary movement.

April 19, 2021

I wasn't done with the marks made by walking. I wasn't done with trying to find something hidden, to make something be seen in the everyday motion. A latent indication. Eryn Foster invited me to be part of *Pictou Island Portage* in 2013. The idea was to see what happened when a group of artists were tasked with traversing the small island (7.5 km one way) every day for a week. I dragged a piece of wood each day, 15kms—using it as a crude pencil with chalk attached to the end. I wanted to make a line of my movement, a repeated gesture. I imagined the lines would stay, would persist, would be

photographed from above, would make a proof of the voyage. I imagined a repetition leading to photographic reveal of a body's persistent existence. But the mark disappeared with the traffic of the day. It became just another type of scattered dust.

April 20, 2021

Rose doesn't want to go to the pod, so she can stay with me. My meetings are online today, thank goodness for zoom backgrounds that hide the reality.

April 21, 2021

Somehow, always, the relation of the photograph is important; somehow the photograph gives form. When I realised my plan was failing to draw a line from above of journey on Pictou Island, I had to look at other ways of gathering marks. I wore photo paper on my feet for the daily trek. The images that resulted were abstractions—lumen prints torn and ripped by the road.

The final images could have been mistaken for scraps, trash. But they were, also, a photograph. Durational in its acquisition, abstract in its reveal.

April 22, 2021

These days, if I don't make myself, I won't go outside.

April 23, 2021

After Pictou Island, I kept on making the walking prints. They became a hinge, a way for me to relate my lived experience to photography. The mundane image of movement—ordinary movement now. The photographs acquired in this manner symbolize the in-between of time, like the way a morning disappears with errands and the jobs you can't quantify. I remember feeling vindicated somehow, when marks would show themselves in the developer, like I finally found a way to say eff you to the decisive moment, and its singularity.

April 24, 2021

I tape the photo paper to my feet and then go about the day. I accumulate them in the closet and hen enough are ready to process, I peel the tape off; develop and fix them in the basement; run the prints in clean water in the tub; squeegee them on the walls of the shower; dry them on the bedroom floor.

April 25, 2021

My mother is coming to visit and it feels unfamiliar to be making the guest bed after this long.

April 26, 2021

The walking prints are like a kind of DNA, a stable connection with thinking and making through lived experience. I often place walking prints on top of my figurative photographs as a disruption, a change of register, a way of pointing back to the body, movement, touch as origin. The walking prints sometimes look like a forgotten

piece of paper, crumpled and dirty. They are my way of marking unseen time.

April 27, 2021

I crave a structure that can incorporate this tattered, but/and photographic, document. I lean the prints, held in plexi, against angle iron; against concrete; against a rock. The fragile balance is their tension. Their equilibrium is like the mystery of how a day is constructed: the moment of connection with my daughter, the way in which the racetrack appeared for one brief moment from a hundred years ago, and then disappeared. I want the purview of the photograph to include unpredictable transformation: the body as a tool, materials pushed together to reveal a contingent and ephemeral conjunction.

April 25, 2021

I don't know what an embodied photograph is, even though I often talk about it as if that is what I am making. Right now, I am just thinking about

how to make it through the semester of teaching, and not forget Rose's viola lesson, again.

April 26, 2021

Maybe it means I want to push my body right up as close as it can get to this factual medium. I defy it to refuse my touch. I want to claim proof through the pressure of my body upon the material itself.

April 27, 2021

The queer shape of a day.

When I am walking with photo paper on my feet, I feel the absurdity of the gesture. Yet, the curiosity about what will be revealed trumps the extra noise I make when walking, the failing tape on the shoe, the stares. The walking prints are a frayed residue of a day, a movement of a body through ordinary space. I want to think of these prints like a new mark of time – even though they look like a piece of trash with the dirt and holes worn in.

Perhaps an embodied photograph is a search for a new kind of feminist timekeeping. An ordering that holds domestic labor and care on equal footing with external/public labor. This new timekeeping is kept in the dirty scraps of abstractions I call photographs. And the unpredictable balance of rock, angle iron, plexiglass, water.

April 28, 2021

I think of how these materials hold together—registers of use with misshapen intentions. They allow a different way of being balanced in space, of considering what constitutes a balance. I am reminded of how Sara Ahmed speaks of queer ways of inhabiting as, "…when we aim to shatter what has provided a container."[1] My work is to shatter the way in which we procure a photograph, to retain the trace of the body, the residue of bodies in place, to hold that up and balance it–as some kind of proof of new inhabitation.

1. Ahmed, Sara *What's the Use* Duke University Press: London, 2019 p 209

Artwork: Stephen Dunne

Page 02
At Least There's Company, 2021, ink on paper

Page 03
Into the Void, 2021, brushpen and ink on paper

Page 04
Cloudface, How Are You Feeling?, 2020, oil on primed paper

Page 05
An Angry Lump, 2019, ink on paper

Page 06 & 07
Image detail: *Who's Turn Is It Now?*, 2015 ink on paper

Page 08
Timekeeper, 2016, ink and acrylic on paper

Page 13
Neither Here Nor There, 2021, watercolour & ink on paper

Page 23
Thought Knot, 2021, ink on paper

Page 24
Perriot's Dream, 2014, ink on paper

Page 34
Image detail of *The Mystery Unfolded When The Television Rang*, 2020, ink on paper

Page 35
Atomised, 2006 ink and watercolour on paper

Page 47
Voidhead, 2013, ink on paper

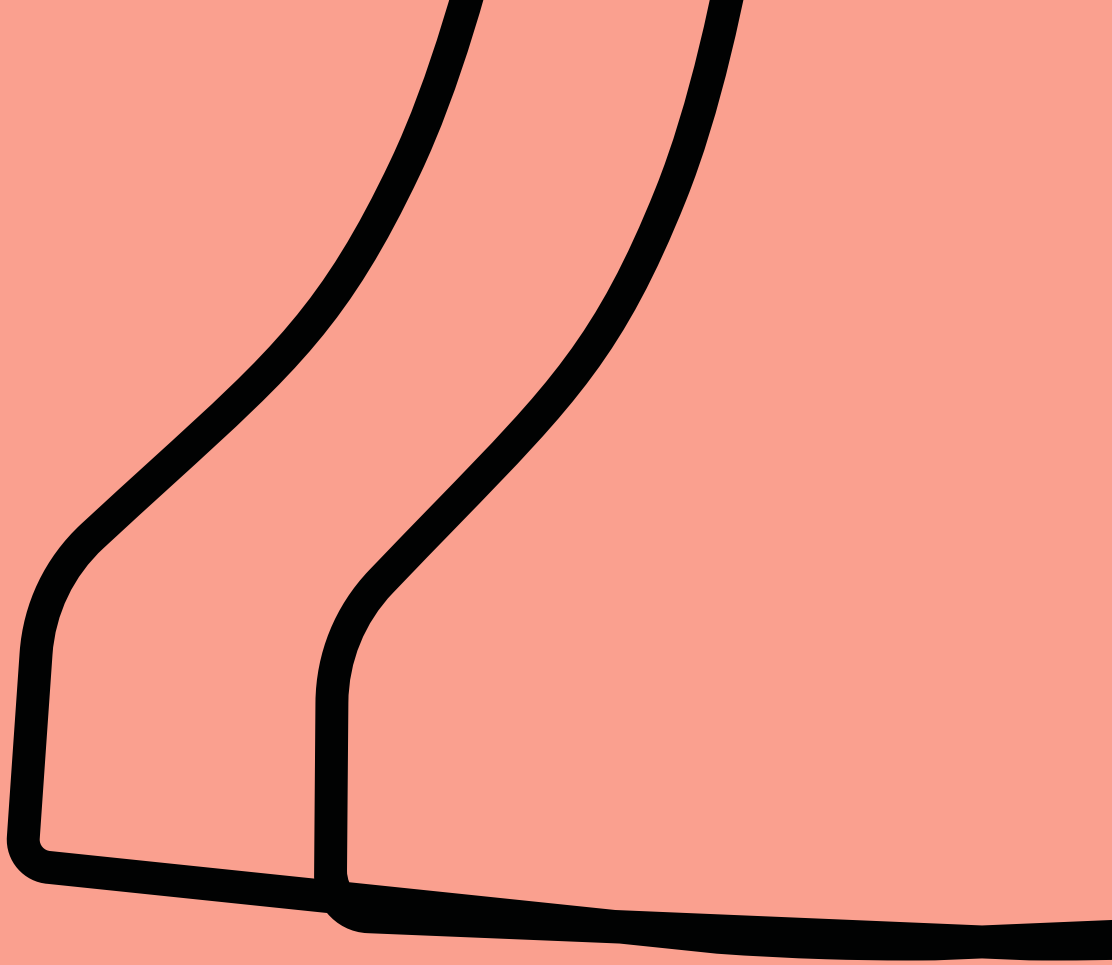
Page 48
Aether or Ether, 2021, watercolour on paper

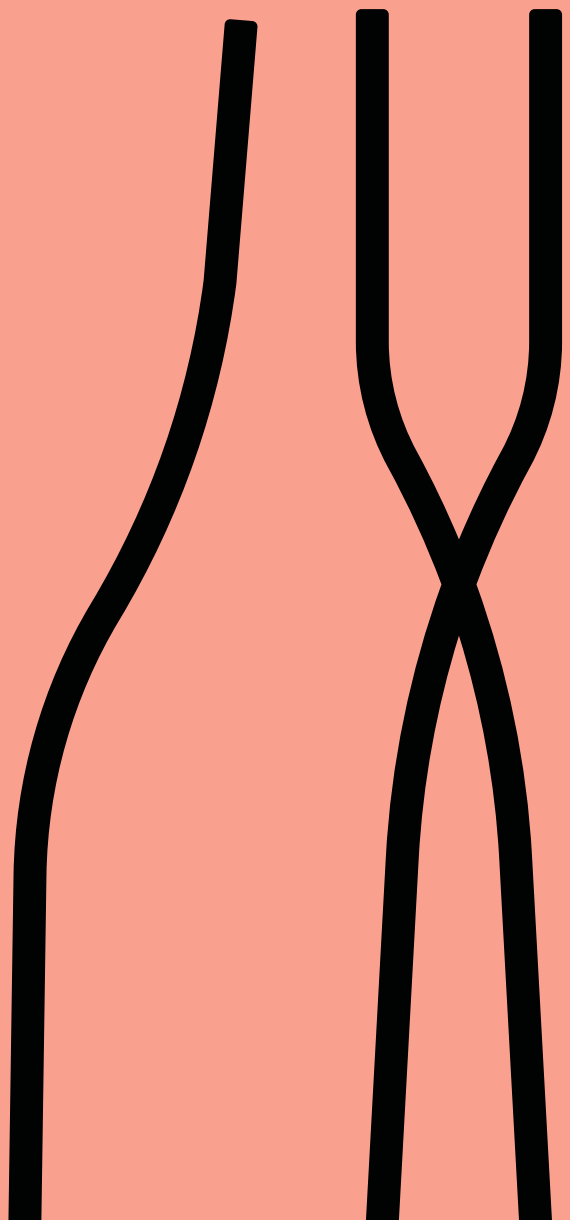
Page 56
Flowerface, 2021, ink & watercolour on paper

Page 68
Gamboge Daydream, 2021, watercolour on paper

Page 70
One Thing Becomes Another, 2021, ink on paper

www.mirrorlamppress.com
info@mirrorlamppress.com





No.2 Loop