MULTIPLE AND MOVING

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Glass in the Department of Glass of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI.

Approved by Master’s Examination Comittee:

__________________________
Rachel Berwick
Head, Department of Glass, Thesis Chair

__________________________
Jocelyne Prince
Associate Professor, Department of Glass, Thesis Advisor

__________________________
Lisi Raskin
Head, Department of Sculpture, Thesis Advisor

MAIA CHAO
Abstract

This document maps my negotiation of the art practice as experienced in school. It is a record of development, evaluation, narration, articulation, reflection, argumentation, and continual redefinition. I consider the physical and social realities of the studio practice as they relate to my needs, values, and desires on a personal and global scale. Flitting between the mundane and the fundamental, the center and the margins, this thesis reflects my mental topography as a series of parts whose relations to each other are multiple and moving.
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CONTEXT

We’ve been on a path for a long time now to the political, environmental, and social wars of the present. In a time characterized by flux and indeterminacy, it is here that I hope to pin some things down. As the violence of global capitalism creeps closer and closer to the lives of my friends who resist—and the unfortunate reality is that personal loss is the most effective disruption of complacency—I am compelled to write what I think.

This document contains things I’ve learned, things I hope for, and things I reject. Most of all, it’s an attempt to be honest and to challenge the lapse built within me between my values and my practice. How long are we going to criticize things without changing them, or at least vigilantly naming our hypocrisy? Art school is a good place to start. I am well aware of the potential embarrassment invited by dated proclamations made in writing. But if I’ve learned one thing this year, it’s that there’s not that much time. And that quieting your own doubt and dissent does not make you or the people around you happier or more positive but instead causes alienation much
greater than that of an honest discursive debate.

The exercise of writing a thesis in this moment forces me to confront the inextricability of the global and the personal. This year a racist, sexist, malignant narcissist has become president. Things are getting worse but they never were good in the time I’ve been here or before that: Clinton turned prisons into a public housing solution, Bush started the Iraq war and oversaw the near collapse of our economy, and Obama bailed out the banks while deporting more immigrants than any other president in U.S. history. Two young friends of mine committed to a better world are no longer living, and I am graduating from art school in the warmest year on Earth, yet.

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I find this document hovers in the vicinity of corny self-help books, with their drop-shadowed text and prescriptive advice for an efficient, organized, happier, simpler life. I’ve always been fascinated by such guides, and more generally in the claim of products that offer universal solutions to unique problems. The appreciation is akin to that of clip art and the stock photo in their attempts to be at once specific and general in order to encompass a range of experiences.
While initially embarrassed upon realizing my proximity to this cliché, I also realize it is no coincidence. The self-help book aligns with a vernacular of normalcy and standard that has long held my interest, dating back to the birth of my childhood alter-ego, Eveny Chefa. Eveny is a girl’s girl. She’s basic but reliable and always friendly. She has long acrylic nails and a tight pony tail. She works as a cashier at Harland’s. She is not the owner, she is the humble manager—opening and closing the store, and interfacing with customers. She taps her fingernails on the cash register while waiting for receipts to print. She’s organized, she smells good, and her feet are usually sore (in a good way) after a long day’s work.

My interest in the everyday and the mundane led me quite naturally to ethnographic research. And while I am quick to question the artist’s claim to ethnography and its methods, my background in anthropology is a useful context for understanding the origins of this document. Having come to art school two years ago on the tail of a series of ethnographic research projects, this document traces my observations and assessments of a new culture in which I am now embedded. I negotiate the cultural demands and ideals of the art practice as it coalesces and collides with everyday needs and long-term aspirations.

Founded in violent histories of colonialism, anthropology is based in the politics of the self and the other. Necessarily self-reflexive, the ethnographer must grapple with an inherent desire to understand “the other”—a desire potentially compassionate and all too problematic. For me, art making presents an alternative to the scientific approach to such curiosities. That is not to say that I seek to escape these problematics in art—on the contrary, I hope to hold them close as critical and ethical tools. I recognize my simultaneous respect for and difficulty with ethnographic research methods, as I came to understand them through the negation of my own urges, judgements, and questions that are fundamentally
based in a system of biased values.

Accordingly, I turn my attention toward the institution and culture of art as I’ve come to know it in graduate school. I embrace the prescriptive nature of the manual, and I exercise the biased voice that I worked hard to eliminate in the social sciences. This document thus oscillates between the blunt instrument of the self-help book in a context of “caring capitalism” and a transparent document of honest searching. It traverses the genres of a journal, a rant, an editorial, a textbook, a memoir, and a satire. Rather than calculate myself out in pursuit of objectivity, I dig into an abundance of messy judgements.
The idea of the “studio” is as much a fantasy as the idea of the “artist” is a fantasy.

[...] The stage of the studio is necessary, though, to enjoy the tortures of procrastination, for the enactment of the melodrama of solitude, for the playing out of visual monologues.

It is an anachronistic luxury to have studio-time and studio-space for the celebration of perpetual creative crisis, for the charging and discharging of moods, and for the invention of feelings. Being aware of this probably accounts for always feeling slightly guilty while in there as well.

The studio is the claustrophobic vault of the self-feeding vampire. It is the stew-dio ... an alchemic laboratory for inspiration, stagnation, confrontation, resignation, procrastination, contamination, inflation, reflection, intoxication, regression, invention.

[...] The studio initiates work as finally the only way out of the swamp of self. The jump to action from the pull of the sofa is an act of survival, a leap to freedom, the jump into the abyss, the fall into the sky. It is breaking out of the prison of the studio into the freedom of the work.

-Charline von Heyl
Ego Mass
Table, Mirror, Chairs, People
Right: Detail
2015
CIRCLES

It’s been several months since I’ve drawn a circle. The irony of inventing a quick and easy series—doing something to do something—is that as soon as it becomes something it exists in the past and then the question turns toward the future. Will it continue? Will I continue? Can I sustain this? Should I sustain this?

One purpose of Circles and Tangents was to rid myself of the burden of making. An art studio is overwhelming. I have books I’ll never read, materials I’ll never use, and a list of ideas so embryonic and abstract I cannot face the idea of bringing them into being. The emails, the materials, the labor, the anxiety, the measurements, the errands, the decisions, the implications, the audience, the context, the history, and the fear.

I yearn for the days of the desk and computer. Within a safe and uncreative environment, I can avoid the threats of Home Depot, a corporation that is at once the joy and the doom of the distractible artist. How can I walk by the door display without pause? It would be absurd not to consider the puzzling and profound set up of doors that open to other doors.
Neither here nor there, a perpetual act of entering and exiting at once. The doors are each distinct in design: crystal windows, gold handles, craquelure or sleek and modern. The door to one’s home is a critical decision. How do you want to project yourself to the community? What message does it send about your class, your race, your values, your taste?

I’d of course need to walk through the door display to experience the experience, and then, as I make my way down the other aisles I’d have to invent ideas for other projects that I would half-heartedly begin to plan. I’d start to collect materials for the nascent idea that only just occurred to me in the setting of consumer mania, and then I’d realize, with profound and sudden disappointment, that I came for something else and have gotten off track.

What did I need to get again? Why am I here? I’d leave the store with the parts to a few different projects and a slew of objects that I liked but don’t need and don’t have an intended use for. But I’m more likely to use something if it’s close to me than if it’s at Home Depot. So I err on the side of buying, knowing that I can always return an item, if I remember to.

Eventually, after shuttling the purchases around in the back of my car for a few days, I might unload them at my house or studio. There, they’d rest pressingly asking for consideration, attention, and assembly.

Okay, back to the circle. All I need is standard paper, a pen, a compass, a computer, and a printer. Draw a circle free-hand and then assess it with a compass. Try to learn from each attempt. Reflect on my methodology. I will never draw a perfect circle but there will always be something to talk about. Psychologically known as circumstantial thinking, I often think in circles, starting somewhere, going on long tangents and eventually getting back to where I began (most of the time). This is my forte. I can make each circle so much more than a circle.
I need to be in a certain mood. I need to feel capable. The tools are so rudimentary that even approximate substitutes for them might do: Don’t have a compass? Attach a string to a pencil. But that would mess up the system I’ve set up for myself. And I set up that system partially to help myself out and make things easy but also partially so that I’d have an excuse to not do it when the basic tools I need are not within arm’s reach. I don’t want to compromise the integrity of the exercise by changing the variables of tools!...The things I let myself get away with.

The one place where I am likely to find all the right tools, with few other excuses to not draw a fucking circle, is my studio. But being at my studio means that I have mustered the energy to get out of bed, ignored the question of what I would do that day, or perhaps made a plan only to pretend I had one, eaten, and hydrated, cleaned the dishes, gone to the bathroom, shampooed my itchy scalp, exercised, answered text messages, responded to emails, gotten enough sleep, didn’t get distracted by a book, didn’t have a panic attack about the day, didn’t have anyone asking me to be anywhere, didn’t have an assignment to do, didn’t have a phone call from my
Methods: I honestly can’t remember that well. See confession below. Based on the mark I would guess that I started around 12:00, and moved clockwise. Most likely drawn on top of my lap top.

Plans and expectations: I treated this as a warm up (see confession below). So I believe it was drawn with haste.

Results: It is quite squat. Underdrawn from 11 to 1, overdrawn from 1 to 4 and underdrawn from 4 to 9, according to my protractor circle.

Notes: Confession- This is actually the 23rd circle but I did it as a warm up and without much intentionality. I was going to exclude it because it didn’t ‘count’ in my mind; I did not approach it with the same seriousness of the other circles. But I decided that this totally violated my developing research. I feel a bit embarrassed. If I were a politician and this activity were important, this omission would cause public outrage. Sort of like Hilary Clinton’s private email account. Except this doesn’t matter at all.
mom, didn’t have a looming task in the near future that I would need to begin or at least fret about not beginning.

Once I got to my studio, assuming I brought my keys and my phone and found a decent parking space or had the energy to bike, I would need to not be overwhelmed by all the clippings scattered about, and all the materials that whisper their potential for transformation.

I would need to not be interested in the modules of wooden railings, not imagine the curving, snake-like forms that could begin and end without purpose—in no relation to a stair-case except for implying its absence. Familiar but alien. The objectness of the object. The railingness of the railing. Not its assistance, meant to recede, but it’s utterly uselessful presence. Becoming an object as soon as it doesn’t serve us while retaining itself and its relation to us enough so that we are implicated and perplexed. What is this railing doing if it is not serving me?

I would need to not consider the hours of the woodshop, only just below me—such a resource will never be closer to my studio, so I would also need to not feel bad about how little I’ve used it. And I would need to not think that I should go check the schedule downstairs posted on the door, or go into the history of my photos in which I took a photo of the schedule the last time I was there, which is buried within photos of friends and other projects and other works and other artists to research.

I would need to not feel the presence of my dirty dishes, the remnants of burritos, Amy’s soup, microwavable lasagna, and old tea bags even though I’ve vowed to do the dishes on time because last time I stored a covered bucket of dirty dishes soaking in plaster and water for three weeks, dumped the foul-smelling concoction down a shared sink in the hallway, clogged the sink, made the whole building smell like sewage to the point that, after desperately spraying fragrant hairspray
that I inherited in my studio from the previous tenant, I went to the store below to buy antibacterial spray and upon coming back encountered my peers on the ground floor (three floors below my studio) who were complaining about the sewage, at which point I promptly concealed the spray I had just purchased to conceal the fact that I was the sole originator of the rotten smell pervading all the studios of all the fine arts students—a smell so potent it seemed to be an emergency that the janitorial staff would have to investigate, calls and
complaints inevitable.

I would need to not see the list of emails about the museum piece I’m working on in which we pay people who wouldn’t otherwise go to the RISD Museum to look at art and share their thoughts for $15 per hour.

The piece is as much made of emails as anything else. Emails to people who didn’t used to distract me but who now invite me to endless meetings and refer me to other colleagues who I would be foolish not to meet because I should take advantage and maybe they’ll give us funding. The thing about getting people to fund something is letting them rephrase your project so that they feel they thought of it or at least reshaped it significantly. And if you want things to move quickly, you have to find a way to convince them that they have contributed; that the project has undergone some improbable transformation within one hour that helped it move from good to transcendent—from unfundable to fundable.

I would have to not see the objects around me from my childhood that I shrink wrapped for a display case installation that used up at least twenty hours of my time when it was meant to be a quickie that did not involve a massive piece of plexiglass that cost over $100. And I would have to not think about organizing the objects, compiling them, thinking about where each object belonged, respectively, in the space of my home or that of my parents. The objects would need organization and labeling. I’d have to consider whether I wanted to keep them around, whether I wanted to return them to different places in my home, wanted to throw them away, wanted to give them away, wanted to not forget about them and put them somewhere prominent enough that they’d be present for future epiphanies but yet not obtrusive.

I would have to not think about all the archaeological texts I’ve been reading, or how I’ve been wanting to copy archaeological illustrations in pen, in pencil, and in sculpture. I would
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have to not think about the efficiency of drawing as it is approached in archaeological illustration—the idea of a diagrammatic drawing method that is universal, useful, descriptive, and functional. That shows a vase’s form, thickness, superficial decoration, and constructing methods in one self-referential drawing. I would need to not think about how the drawn line might be analogous to wire or how a flat image mapped onto a round surface mutates, stretches, collapses into a new drawing on a curving plane—something that could be done by the vacuum former in the lab below me (such a resource will never be closer to me than it is now, so it would be foolish to postpone its use because I’ve been meaning to do it).

If I vacuumed a flat drawing onto a pot, the drawing would describe its history through its physical stretching, the space it traveled across and the ways it needed to change while remaining continuous and without rupture. A draped drawing describes the form through its mutation. People were doing this long ago, architects finding the natural fall of curves so they could build with gravity rather than inventing an unnatural curve that would require maintenance and structure that defied the laws of nature.
I would have to not think about the objects that might be good as central points of analysis for the project in which I ask professors to speak about the same object from different disciplines, deconstructing the thing from various angles. I would need to not think about that book that surveys the role of objects in American literature, which would probably be very useful. It’s intimidating to ask smart people to think about something because what if that something has histories, implications, obvious fictions or historical roles that I am oblivious to? So I shouldn’t email any of them before I’ve read that book and the other few books that author has written, as well as the books related to Thing Theory, which I still don’t totally understand and about which this project is not necessarily based but which I should probably understand because the piece is about things and the theory is called Thing Theory.

I would need to not think about how I want to email a ceramics professor to see if I can get into throwing and then not hesitate about whether or not that’s the best use of my time. What am I going to do with ceramics? What will my course load be? Which classes am I taking and which ones am I probably not able to take? Which ones seem unique to this institution and its resources? Which ones seem valuable and expensive as opposed to ones that teach me things I might be able to teach myself if I ever actually made the time to teach myself?

I would also have to not think about the fact that taking a ceramics class is something I really wanted to do genuinely and also feel obligated to do based on my grant research this summer in which two professors—an archaeologist and an acoustician—met with me in Poitiers, France about my interest in acoustic pots embedded in the walls of medieval churches and how I had to sort of make up a project I didn’t have in mind to get them to talk to me and not be completely perplexed about the ambiguous stuff that I’m doing and can’t describe because I don’t know what I’m doing. I would have
to not think about how I eventually said to them that I would make an installation in which I create a small space whose surface is completely covered by ceramic pots that resemble the forms used in medieval churches. Presumably these pots would be thrown by me because when I said that I knew how to throw clay I was really saying a truth of the future in which I had learned to throw vessels and had become good enough to do many consistently at a productive speed.

I would need to not think about how I should really resolve how this grant was going to yield something I could show that would be relevant outside the fact that everything I do relates to everything I do because I do it. And I would need to not ponder the idea that maybe such an installation would be cool, though it seems a little too straightforward—one to one. But maybe straightforward is good and maybe I just have to do it. But the thing with people saying “you can’t know until you do it” is that doing it can take days, weeks, years, and doing it means you have dodged all the distractions, desires, guilt, excitement, and fear that would permit you not only to start but to continue.

Žižek says that to start writing he pretends he’s not writing, that he’s just playing. But that’s Žižek. When I pretend not to work I draw circles and analyze them and then realize that I’ve

*pots acoustiques*
turned my play into work that consequently repels.

I would also need to not think about my ridiculous ‘artists to research binder.’ I would also have to not glimpse the piles of notes from critiques of previous works that would probably be really useful but aren’t I supposed to be moving forward? I would have to not think about how when I go through my crit notes I also need to research each concept and artist that is mentioned in those notes. And I would have to not think about residencies and the places I could live if I were to get a residency that were longer term. I would have to not think about finding a studio in Rhode Island, and having difficulty getting there every day because, if it’s difficult now it’ll be impossible then.

I would also need to not look at the comical lists I’ve made of projects I want to do that reside within my computer, my papers, my agenda, my calendar, my notebook, my sketchbook, and my binders of things that were supposed to help me feel organized but instead make me feel fragmented.

I would need to not realize that I’m hungry and thirsty and need a break. I would need to not realize that I’ve been meaning to write to my grandmother and call my grandfather and clear the photos off my iPhone so that I can take more photos. I would have to not think about the copyediting gig I’m doing and all the emails I need to send about image rights to use in the publication that’s supposed to come out this fall, but how is that going to happen? I would have to not be watching a lecture online and then decide a few minutes in that I wanted to watch a different segment.

I would have to not think about the thermoforming project and all the possibilities of product packaging. It is on the one hand so boring, so tired, and too easily aligned with trends of art about trash and art about consumerism and art about mass production. But on the other hand it’s so interesting and aesthetically pleasing and bizarre. The plastic pack-
ages that hover over the things we buy. They are things we look through, that shape the way we think, that protect and disappear at once. The packages resemble that which they hold and physically conflate the object of the commodity with its advertising materials, its intended context, its quality or essence. An invisible membrane of capitalism used to seduce the consumer while keeping them at a distance that can only be overcome through purchase, when that thing held in its plastic casing can be held in your hands. A union between consumer and consumed.

I would have to not think about the fact that I plan to build packaging for the casts of packages until the succession of packages turns into a generalized basic form—an abstract unit. What does it mean to abstract an object?

I would have to not think about the wall of direct plaster casts from the plastic packages I’d collected, and how I plan to spackle them to the wall, embedding them into the built environment. The gesture would hopefully invoke an archaeological tone—the things that last far beyond our short-term plans for this Earth. I would need to not think about how I have so many pictures on my phone that I want to examine and consider from Pompeii and from all the museums that I visited in addition to the medieval churches.

I would need to not think about rotating the objects in my studio around their central axis—the way that ice skaters spin and morph into new forms that almost look like they are still because they are moving so fast. I would need to not think about how I also think the thermoform packaging might be relevant to Harland’s, my imaginary store since the age of six.

I would also have to not think about all the voice memos I need to transfer to my computer from all the transactions I’ve recorded and don’t know what to do with. Maybe I will transcribe them. Should I reenact them? Write scripts for them? Have people perform them? But I already plan to reenact
home videos with my sister when she comes home soon. And then I also want to record an interaction with her and restage it so that the original is indiscernible and they both acquire a certain truth and authenticity.

And that also relates to that unfinished idea of filming myself faking a series of yawns, then watching that video to prompt genuine yawns and so forth, using fake input to yield real output. I’ll have to figure out how to convey the layers of the video—I could film myself watching the video, but I don’t really want a shiny Mac laptop in the video. Maybe it could be a video monitor but I’ll need to make this a priority to get a video monitor into my studio and then shoot myself watching the video watching the video and getting tired. The problem with a piece about yawning is that I quickly lose interest and want to go to sleep. But maybe it could be a helpful sleep aid. The others I’ve tried don’t work: melatonin gave me a prolonged panic attack, Trazadone made my legs tingle, Sonata made my psychiatrist’s patient mistake a lamp for a duck, and marijuana endows everything with a heightened glow.
worth staying awake for.

The boundarylessness of contemporary art can render the contemporary artist a victim of potential, and here I am, the star of my own melodrama, *The Tortured Artist*, where every decision rings of that which it is not. The little voice insists that no obstacle is immoveable because who is the artist who gives in or gives up?

Take a breath and draw a circle. Feel the pen, the movement, the heat, the page, the seat, the surface, the air, the light.
Dear Eva,

It will be almost a month since you wrote to me and you have possibly forgotten your state of mind (I doubt it though). You seem the same as always, and being you, hate every minute of it. Don’t! Learn to pay “fuck you” to the world once in a while. You have every right to. Just stop thinking, worrying, looking over your shoulder wondering, doubting, fearing, wanting, hoping for some easy layout, struggling, gasping, confusing, itching, scratching, mumbling, stumbling, grumbling, humming, stumbling, mumbling, rambling, gambling, tumbling, scrambling, hitching, hatching, biding, and all the rest of it.

April 14
bitching, moaning, gibbering, hating, biting, horse-shitting, hair-splittin', nit-pickin',
piss-tackling, nose-stickin', ass-gougin',
eyeball-poking, finger-pointin', all-yaws,
swearing, long waitin', small stepping,
rip-eyeing, back-scratching, searchin',
perchin', besmirchin', grindin', grindin' way at yourself. Stop it and just

DO
Try out these tips to improve your written identity!

LETTERS
- Use a consistent font and size.
- Make sure the font is legible.
- Use a variety of font styles to add emphasis.
- Use proper spacing for better readability.

NUMBERS & SYMBOLS
- Write numbers clearly and distinctly.
- Use proper punctuation marks.
- Use consistent symbol usage.

UNDERLINE
- Use a single underline for emphasis.
- Avoid overusing underlining.
- Use underlining sparingly for important points.

Try out these tips to improve your written identity!
THE STUDIO PRACTICE
I got up at 9.47 A.M.

Michael Sesteer
C/O Olmenhove
Naarderstr. 63
Laren N.H.
Holland
Air Mail

On Kawara
140 Greene St.
New York, N.Y.
10012 U.S.A.
When I first moved into my studio at school I was very confused by the space. I had one studio space in Pawtucket prior to school, but it was temporary and felt like the inside of a tractor trailer, except it was located on the top floor of a four-story mill building that usually smelled of artificial syrup flavors (vanilla, coconut, strawberry), which emanated from the vape company downstairs. In five months I only ever saw one person on my floor. It was really hot, I didn’t install an air conditioner, and I therefore worked naked and fell asleep often, if I was able to get there at all. When I got overwhelmed I shopped at the nearby Ocean State Job Lot, buying things I usually didn’t need. I made one installation which I didn’t share with anyone.

My studio at RISD is much nicer. Supreme, really. Looking onto downtown Providence—sometimes I think to myself, “It’ll never get better than this.”

I was perplexed by this glorious, spacious studio. I felt the need to occupy every square foot of it at once, and that any failure to do so was a loss of opportunity. I would have thought it would come more naturally to me, with two artist parents. My mom paints in her studio, my dad builds big things in his shop. But what do I do?

THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

After move-in, the paranoia set in. I sat at my desk twiddling my thumbs, or more likely refreshing my email inbox. I suppose the mindless action revealed some deeper desire to connect with a network of people over the internet—to feel less alone while ironically surrounded by hundreds of graduate students. But everyone in the building seemed so busy. I could hear that they were busy, making noise, moving things. I, on the other hand, wasn’t making any noise because I didn’t know what to do that would make noise.
My neighbor was clearly doing things, lifting things, walking back and forth. I heard the work happening on the other side of my wall and felt scared. She was drilling into the wall we shared. Should I be drilling something right now? What is she drilling and what should I be drilling? How is she already making things with such physical conviction?

A few days later I walked into her studio to find it transformed. It was packed with things in contrast to my relatively empty studio, save the heavy duty looking equipment my dad passed down to me, which gave the impression I did heavy duty things that I did not do. People complimented me on my vice, my metal work table, and my tools.

I complimented Katie on her studio—the warm lighting made a big difference. I saw she had mounted bookshelves on the wall we shared, which explained the drilling from the other day. I had thought she had been making Art, but she had just
been mounting shelves. Turns out there’s lots of time in the studio that isn’t art making. You also need to hang things, install lights, move things around, make it cozy. Such a fact seems obvious, but it was not at the time.

**OBSESSION**

I started to go a bit crazy in the studio. My racing thoughts became amplified in a room by myself. It reminded me of the obsessive patterns I developed when living abroad.

I moved to Spain on New Year’s Day in 2012 and soon after purchased an overpriced cell phone using my limited Spanish vocabulary. I paid something like 40 euros. A few days later I discovered a cheaper 20 euro flip phone and dedicated the subsequent weeks of my life to selling my phone in order to recover the 20-some euros I shouldn’t have spent. After posting the item on Spain’s version of Craigslist and going to every secondhand cell phone store that I could find in Madrid, I ended up at a pawn shop on the outskirts of the city. I felt supremely anonymous. No one in the world that knew me knew I was there. I was attending a Spanish university with 90,000 students, and there were no checks and balances,
no one to tell me that I was displacing my anxiety—hours and
days of my life—onto a transaction that was said and done. I
turned down social invitations as if I had somewhere to be.

So there I am, standing in line in a pink and white pawn shop
with a logo that has settled in my mind as a face looking dis-
satisfied. My number flashed on the screen, and I brought my
cell phone, now three weeks old, its charger, and myself up to
the counter flanked by plastic privacy dividers. The Spanish
man bruskly took my phone, for which I had paid 40 euros,
looked it up on his computer, and offered me 8 euros in cash.
He said something in Spanish beyond my skill level along the
lines of, “It’s not advisable,” or “I can’t advise you.” 8 euros.
There I stood, at the culmination of my mission, with a crappy
phone whose value had depreciated by 80% in 21 days.

These neurotic stories hail from unfamiliar contexts, where
isolation breeds circular, mindless obsessions. My dad likes
to tell the story about his extensive search for a particular
luggage accessory when living alone in Japan. He spent hours
shopping for the attachment that joins the two handles of a
bag, yielding one single handle that can be easily gripped.

Weird things happen when you’re left with yourself.

**PERFECTION**

Once I made a table. It had interchangeable legs. I was learn-
ing woodworking for the first time. I bought twice the lumber
I needed and happened to choose an exotic and endangered
wood that I should not have purchased. I changed the size
and purpose of the structure many times. At one point it was
a desk, then a dining room table, then a table for a humidifier
and dehumidifie, then a side table, and now it’s an awkwardly
tall end table that is too low to fit your knees under and too
small to put much of anything on. That’s what happens when
you don’t decide on anything.
I became tormented by the lathe. I did not take breaks to gain perspective. I fixated, determining proportions, deciding on height, choosing the wood, changing my mind, and spending hours preparing myself to make a single irrevocable cut. Precision is a tempting vortex. I must exclude it and the ensuing turmoil as best as possible.
STRATEGIES: NOTES TO SELF

The studio can be a chamber of feelings. What is exciting in one moment can be deeply disappointing in the next. What seems doable in the morning can seem impossible at night. While I am the first to dismiss my problems as privileged ones, the everyday reality of war with my mind is not one that can be defeated by dismissal, inaction, and rationalization. Tricks, mantras, and discipline are paramount.

May I be at peace.
May I enjoy this moment.
May I rest.
May I acknowledge conflict.
May I be present.
May I feel lonely.
May I find joy.
May I be gentle.
May I be content.
May I feel sad.
May I listen.
May I be open.

Follow: Listen carefully and distinguish what you want to do and what you should do. Write up a plan. If you know that you’ll be tempted toward another project or task, delineate why your plan makes sense and follow it with trust. Remind your doubt that you already considered alternatives, and that it is no longer of use. Send it on its way.

Let go: Move away from the fear that you may look back at something you made in the past and regret it, cringe, look away. The things you make are timestamps in a log that indicates what you were doing and when—singular and incontestable because each piece simply stands in relation to itself and its circumstance.

Clean: You are not an artist who thrives in messes. You are scattered but you don’t prefer it this way. You don’t like sched-
ules that change day to day and you don’t find a mess liberating. Before leaving the studio, tidy up. Always do the dishes before leaving. Respect the space, as it has the capacity to inform and reflect your mood.

Rest: You thought it might send the wrong message to have a couch or futon in your studio. You might come across as a bum, but more likely you would want to be a bum. You thought, “If I make the studio a place of work and work only, then I will work when I’m there.” Turns out if you defy the desire for comfort in a space that you’re supposed to frequent, you will increasingly find ways to work in other places that are more comfortable. A year later, you put a couch in your studio. Though you don’t use it much, it’s there as a gentle reminder that you can rest. You do not need to reject fatigue or exhaustion.

Read: Visiting artist Jen Bervin led a poetry workshop where she described her transition from visual arts to writing. She said that she carried with her the idea that she had to produce. She had acquired this mentality while at art school, where she felt the constant pressure to be showing new work. She lamented to a writer friend something like, “I’m so busy writing, I wish had more time to read.” Her friend replied, “But reading is making.” Though you are still trying to fully implement this value into my practices, it is true and it is primary: reading is making.

Cook & Eat: Any lifestyle that starts with optimistically homemade lunches and devolves into bi-daily microwaveable meals should be questioned. You almost only eat frozen dinners in plastic packages. You rarely cook and you don’t have much of an appetite. This is not necessary. You can cook. You can eat. Better yet, you can eat with people. There are very few things that should take daily precedence over these needs and desires.

Seek help: You’ve been treated for an anxiety disorder, ADHD,
and a nonverbal learning disorder composed of poor executive functioning and strong abstract thinking. You do not need to believe it all to benefit. Find ways to rephrase pathologies—think as much about strengths as weaknesses. Change therapists when you need it. Therapists’ websites are really fun to look at.

**Exercise:** It makes a difference. Use the time to gain perspective. If it’s tricky to set aside that time from work, then integrate that need into your work. This is precisely the purpose of *Fit Crit:* to talk about art, meet other artists, visit their studios, and work out simultaneously.

**Go out:** People are funny. People are weird. People are great. People are disappointing. People are surprising. People are smart. Meet people. Go out. Call a friend. Host a dinner. Call a grandparent. Visit your parents. Stay with your sister. Go to karaoke. Go dancing with someone. Invite someone you don’t know that well.

**Talk:** Practice talking to yourself, and when you feel unsure as to how to keep yourself company, refer to Mark Baumer’s videos and take comfort in his ability to embrace the wonder and the violence and the fear of this world wholeheartedly and with patience. David Reed says that when he is in his studio he is “in a conflicted emotional and perceptual state,” but that he takes comfort in the words of his friend: “[He] says while working in the studio he feels both completely alone and in the company of others. Perhaps […] while I paint, I can pretend that I am talking with Felix across his kitchen table.”

**Participate:** Stand up, organize, and resist. Join the prison abolition movement. Join community collectives to support those around you. Volunteer your time to share your fluency in bureaucratic procedures. Use your ESL skills to tutor Hispanic migrants. Volunteer to babysit for your neighbors. Use your car to give free rides to medical appointments. Drop your plans when a protest is organized last minute. Make the time.
Celebrate: The thing about working with yourself all the time is that there aren’t clear boundaries or markers in time. The result is a blur of a year where you worked and worked and some bad things happened and some good things happened but you often experienced them alone. It’s hard to celebrate alone. Possible celebrations include, going to the flea market, going to Chinatown, going to Jordan’s Furniture in Warwick and watching the water/light show, going to the cash register store, going to New Hampshire, staying at an inn off of Route 44, or going to the $10 “spa” at the top of Omni Hotel.
“Ask [your doubt], whenever it wants to spoil something for you, why something is ugly, demand proofs from it, test it, and you will find it perhaps bewildered and embarrassed, perhaps also protesting. But don’t give in, insist on arguments, and act in this way, attentive and persistent, every single time...”

— Rainer Maria Rilke
MATERIAL AND WASTE

Between buying, collecting, and saving I have acquired a mass of materials with which I am not sure what to do.

INVENTORY

Fake apples, fake grapes, extension cords, a drill, drill bits, storage bins, a large green cloth, large blackout curtains that smelled like Smartfood popcorn (because they're carcinogenic), a three hole punch, Post-it notes, Exacto knives, binders, a printer, printer paper, a filing box, manila envelopes, plastic sleeves, butterfly clips, markers, scotch tape, staples, tiny pins, pins with numbers, SD cards, dongles, wireless headphones, headphones with wires, an audio speaker, extra camera batteries, little figure people, a cactus I killed, rocks, my head phones, my pills, my wallet (credit cards, ID cards, insurance cards, etc.), shrink wrapping plastic, a heat gun, a fan, lamps, clip on lights for warm lighting, a clip-on fluorescent light for my tool area, a
whiteboard for notes, a whiteboard marker, books about archaeology, books about art and anthropology, books about social practice, books about video art, books about public art, books by Michel Foucault, books by Walter Benjamin, books by Arjun Appadurai, a nice pencil set, a nice Sharpie set, air-dry clay in grey, air-dry clay in red, buckets for mixing paint, buckets for mixing water, Higgins ink, Sumi ink, a tool set for clay (the knife, the clay string thingy that cuts the clay, the pointed tool that makes dots, the flat tool for smoothing, the needle for poking, the brush for scraping, the diamond for something, the scooper for scooping), a storage unit, sandpaper (grits 80 to 600), steel wool (super fine, very fine, and fine), long pieces of wood to place between the cross-beams on the ceiling, plywood to serve as a table top, christmas lights, regular curtains that don't smell like Smartfood popcorn, curtain rings, a curtain hook, long threaded metal dowels to tape together as a long curtain rod (it sags), kinetic sand, paper maché, Aljisafe, plaster, a glassblowing pipe, a punty, kevlar sleeves, a blow hose, clogs for plantar fasciitis, sneakers for plantar fasciitis, clear Epoxy Clear, Plastic Wood, Titebond wood glue, Elmer’s Glue All, Duco Cement, Gorilla Glue, neutral PH adhesive, fancy wood chisels for chiseling wood, Gorilla Wood Glue, Scotch Maximum Strength, candles, contact cement, microwaveable meals, Loctite plastic bonder, instant-mix epoxy, three glue guns, that green powder stuff for mold making, a wireless doorbell, a fly swatter, a floor drain, a plaster bandage, multipurpose gloves, bungee cords, twisted mason line, table top sign holders, folders, MDF, Apoxie Sculpt, a wooden board to go across a red bookshelf found in the street, name badges, a pack of wood screws, machine screws, bolts, nuts, ferrules, more bits, long nails, short nails, stop nuts, anchors, an extra drill battery, utility hinges, flat corner braces, lag screw eyes, corner braces of all sizes, t-bar things for fortifying t-shapes, plastic hooks, metal hooks, fancy illustration markers, binder clips large and small, paper clips, an SD card holder, business card paper, thick paper, photo paper, plastic apron, cloth apron, plastic gloves, rags, protective masks, a welding cap, scrubs, Duct tape, painters tape, more painters tape, silicone sticky strips, black tape .5 in., 1 in., 2
in., electrical tape in red, green, blue, yellow, duct tape, silicone tape, Velcro, more masking tape, Dremel bits, a Dremel, a staple gun, staples of different sizes and depths, steel wire, monofilament fishing line, green twine, black and white twine, needles, white twisted mason line, blue thread, red thread, black thread, elastic line, thin monofilament, darker wire that leaves darkness on whatever it touches, tiny wire for jewelry making (I only needed white but had to buy the pack of pink, green, silver, white, black, blue, red, gold), more bungee cords but longer, yellow thread, white twine, off-white twine, natural looking twine, blue yarn, green string, blue string, cable ties of three different lengths, 12-gauge utility wire, other ambiguous metal wire, packing foam from which you can pluck certain sections out, pliers, clippers, a Japanese saw, a tiny Lazy Susan thing, a wrench, some more pliers, the long orange clamps, the shorter black C-clamps, more wire clippers, two levels that are accidentally the same size, an 18-inch ruler, an L ruler, several flexible putty knives, a hammer, a stubby hammer that fits in my backpack easily, safety goggles, screwdrivers, more clamps but the kind that you clip on by squeezing the back ends of the handles, wide-format printer paper, another kind of wide-format printer paper, power strips, bins to hold things, some plywood, a lot of plexiglass, some more MDF, sanding blocks, Scotch Brite, paint brushes, thick black juicy markers, Micron pens, charcoal pencils, china pens/wax pens, wide paintbrushes, narrow paintbrushes, square paintbrushes, round paintbrushes, long paintbrushes, short paintbrushes, wooden paintbrushes, plastic paint brushes, oil pastels, colored pencils, Reeves crayons, more pastels, Exacto knife replacement blades, a wire brush, tiny pliers, more replacement blades, a syringe thing, Premium Fine Art pencils, a kneaded rubber eraser, 2 Staedtler Mars Plastic erasers, a Pink Pearl Paper Mate eraser, graphite stick pencils, a swirly ruler that looks like waves, a protractor, a triangular ruler, a ruler for architects with little toilet shapes and bathroom shapes, cardboard boxes with foam, plasticine, grey water-based clay that dried out, a calculator that prints receipts, isopropyl alcohol, a pink sponge, a purple sponge, a yellow sponge, trail mix, 4 yellow saw horses with adjustable heights, a metal work
table, two plastic tables, some lamps, a dolly thingy, a wire corner-shelf thing, a big stepping stone, another big stepping stone, a broom, a screen (like the ones on porches), a large bin of random spare wood, another bin of random spare wood, a roll of white sticky paper that might go on a car window or something to block out sunlight maybe, a twisty swirly rod of wood, strips of plywood, strips of MDF, mirrored plexi, mirrored tiles, strips of plexi (some scratched, some protected), sticky vinyl, marble-looking contact paper, wood-looking contact paper, clear contact paper, large sheets of BFK, a bunch of wooden dowels of different heights and widths, a bunch of metal dowels of different heights and widths, more paper, some cardboard tubes, a big piece of mahogany lumber, more BFK paper or something like it, a 2x4, cardboard tubes, a Poplar turning blank, a ladder, a big metal vice, milk crates from back alleys, a mahogany turning blank, small cardboard boxes, big cardboard boxes, a bunch of plastic bags, those white tiles that are commonly used with little specks in them, marble tiles, ceramic tiles, grey tiles with little specks in them (maybe linoleum?), squares of thin cork, squares of thin foam, primer paint, grey paint, a bunch of vacuum formed plastic, packaging collected off the streets and from Brown's Science Labs, about 30 cups of individually packaged Playdoh, 10 burner flip phones, a price gun, replacement receipts, price tags, carbon copy receipts, a credit card swiper thing from the 90s, old credit cards from my parents, a sign for Harland's, blank brown paper bags, 2 boxes of “Thank you” bags, some PVC pipe connections, some metal wheels, some plastic wheels, some plexi tube things, a paint roller, three more putty knives, a bunch of cheap paint brushes, those plastic painter pyramids that keep something elevated while it dries, hooks for my peg board of tools, wooden caps for the end of a wooden rod, curving wire things (maybe from a lamp or a bucket), plastic hooks that I didn't need but wanted to cast, connected black hooks that look fancy (like they’re for some kind of conference room), a bunch of filled sketchbooks, even more empty sketchbooks, a couple plastic portfolios with photos, drawings, or prints, a futon with a salmon-colored fitted sheet, some grey bins for clothing and toiletries should I stay in my studio overnight, a fake tele-
phone I made out of wood when I was little, some plastic drawers, a metal pencil holder, the usual pens, pencils, scissors, a 12-inch ruler, tacs, a paper cutter thing, some plastic folders, a tablet thing that you plug into your computer to draw or make illustrations, a square plastic box I liked the size of, a video camera that only works when it’s plugged in, a fancy Tascam voice recorder that’s really complicated to use, AA and AAA batteries, more headphones, a point and shoot camera, a pencil sharpener, several old sweatshirts, wood molding samples from a wood molding business, 12+ clipboards, a bunch of misprinted pamphlets from Look at Art. Get Paid., KS4, brown wax, red wax, duct tape, a toy car I used to pull glass stringers, a big hollow core cast that cracked in the annealer and is super heavy, a bunch of safety glasses, spare clothing, Styrofoam sheets, Art Boards made by Elmer’s glue, square sheets of colorful paper, an illustration Bristol paper pad, another illustration pad, another illustration pad, a spiral-bound notebook, a plastic pallet for paint, a metal frame with plexi glued on it that I never finished making, big buckets of Magic Sculpt in flesh color, a game camera to spy on animals, a set of needle and thread from Chinatown, brown masking tape or packaging tape, a Leatherman with 7 tools, homemade stanchions with wooden poles stuck in plaster, a sign holder drilled on top of one of the stanchions, a big gray trash bin from my dad, a smaller gray trash bin from downstairs, a brown trash bin that my pro bono ADHD coach gave me (she used to put leaves in it), a smaller white bin that isn’t really a good size or shape, a rickety old stool, thick blue paper, more contact paper with darker marble patterns, a roll of sheet stickum to make something sticky and adhesive, brown paper, old photographs that are rolled up, vellum, tracing paper, clear plastic paper, pads of newsprint, pads of off-white paper, frames with mats, a bunch of lithograph prints, a plastic mold of little faces, a set of Sculpey of various colors, Sculpey that looks like stone, green plasticine, a wood-grain stamp set for clay, matte medium, white acrylic paint, yellow acrylic paint, green tempera paint, and ink pad for stamps, a Crayola finger-painting kit, test-tube holders in blue, yellow, orange, a leather case that holds the wooden chisels, a wooden hammer thing,
tools for intaglio printing—a burnisher, a needle, copper plates, some copper plates that are coated/sensitized, a smock my mom gave me, paint from the previous people who used this studio, bags of sand, green extension cords, yellow and black extension cords, a big glass dome that was dropped on the floor before getting to the annealer, thin sheets of wood, fake wood paneling, plastic-forming stock for the vacuum former, a gray filing cabinet, a hook that goes over the door, my Ziploc vacuum sealer, microfiber cloths that don’t scratch plexiglass, plastic cups, spray paint that looks like sand, napkins, Ziploc bags, disinfectant spray, big sheets of paper to cover the floor if I’m working on something dirty, big sheets of plastic to cover the floor if I’m working on something dirty, a bunch of notebooks and printed PDFs that I haven’t read or haven’t used, a metal tool box, a cloth case for my tripod, pink spray paint, yellow spray paint, mint spray paint, Universal Mold Release, gap sealer, clear silicone caulk, black silicone caulk, silver spray paint, gold spray paint, spray paint that looks like stone, spray adhesive, red spray paint, light blue spray paint, Rustoleum protective enamel, wood finish, red spray paint, terracotta spray paint, plastic dip spray paint, seafoam spray paint, black matte spray paint, white primer spray paint, clear semi-gloss spray paint, matte-finish spray paint, gloss clear spray paint, frosted glass spray paint, Tung oil finish, spackling paste, Goo Gone, glass casts of my joints, dried paint that I peeled off the floor, nuggets of glass that I cast, foam Styrofoam balls (different sizes), red oak fitting for a railing, a laser cut positive for sand-casting, a futon, large frames for a movie poster that I never used, a blower thing that is supposed to serve as a fan but I am not really sure because it takes in air from the backside and puts it out to the left so you have to be in a particular spot to feel the breeze, reusable grocery bags, a yoga mat that looks like it has bamboo on it but it’s really just skeumorphic foam, a jade plant, hard drives, gym clothes, socks that I don’t like to wear, underwear that I don’t like to wear, my computer, my metal mug for tea, my backpack, my charger, my phone, my planner, my keys, my earbuds, my jacket, my scarf, my sweater, my sneakers, the underwear I’m wearing, the bra that I’m wearing, the heat tech
shirt that I’m wearing, the jeans that I’m wearing, the wool socks that I’m wearing, the slippers that I wear in my studio, a green bucket that says Eco-Smart on it, another green bucket that says Eco-Smart on it, a bigger green bucket that says Eco-Smart on it, a black bucket with a spout for pouring, a red bucket with spout for pouring, green Styrofoam blocks for floral arrangements, a bunch of plaster casts, a sanding wheel, a grinder wheel, an old saw thing that makes a really loud noise and it’s really old so I’m scared to use it, a paper shredder, plastic gloves, a rectangular broom that you push away from your body when sweeping, a small hand-broom, a dust pan with a really steep incline that makes it difficult to get dust into because it must surmount such a big hump, ceramic bowls, a ceramic coffee filter, plastic blue cups, silverware from IKEA, a Café Dumonde mug, a Chinoiserie-looking bowl that was digitally printed (bought at Marshall’s), a bumpy bowl that I wanted to cast, a Japanese cup that my sister got me with little Japanese characters on it, paper towels, coffee filters, quick oats, wasabi crunchy chickpeas, honey, tortilla chips, soy sauce, nuts, original roasted ground coffee, dried lentil soup, dried split peas soup, dried couscous lentil mix, canned minestrone soup, canned lentil vegetable soup, lemon tea, IKEA plates, jasmine tea, little cups of creamer (that evaporated), ginger peach tea, some apple cinnamon oatmeal, black tea, Earl Grey tea, a hot water boiler, I Love Lemon tea, a plastic toaster, a sponge with one rough side, veggie dumplings, bagels, quinoa, burritos for the microwave, cream cheese, bottles of water from the program I hosted at the RISD Museum, iced tea from the same program, pomegranate juice from Ocean State Job Lot, a Pro Bar that my dad had left over from his cross-country trip, a stepping stool that I bought in college, mirrors, broken mirrors, sheets of cardboard, broken glass, glass sheets that I cut that I don’t need, Kind bars, a bunch of napkins, a bunch of plastic plates, a can opener, plastic cups, fortune cookies, tinfoil, green napkins from the Christmas Open Studios last year, the FLAMMABLE-Keep-Fire-Away Cabinet, Spaghetti-Os, Progresso Tuscan-Style white bean soup, Chex Mix, Ramen, raisins, a bunch of plastic bags, fake plants from a project I did, plastic packaging samples that I ordered online, plastic tongs, a wine
glass, a vase made out of clear tape, a bunch of terra-cotta pots, a bin of toilet paper, disinfectant spray, plastic trash bags, Lysol wipes, lotion, ice cube holders, a tracer machine that you have to use in the dark, a bin of random things from a previous project, chopsticks, a book holder, a jewelry case, a snow globe, a wooden hand mannequin, a frame with a silhouetted picture in it, a Shania Twain Concert VHS, another VHS, a basket, a piece of toast made out of foam, a bunch of small white cardboard boxes, a wave maker that goes inside an aquarium, thick rubber bands, a headband I wore in middle school, a Venetian change holder, insoles that I cut out for myself, a Will Smith CD, a Britney Spears CD, a fan, plastic columns for wedding cakes, a bed riser to make a bed taller, dentist tools, a Japanese ink calligraphy kit, and a book about bugs from my childhood.

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That’s just some of the material stuff that I am currently aware of in my studio. There’s also electricity and heat, the price of this property, and the 1.56 million homeless people in the United States. I am sure most artists feel that our excessive material dependency seems incompatible with the future of this planet. I also realize my practice isn’t even that materially based. And I also recognize that, even if it were, one artist’s footprint is nothing next to animal agriculture, factories, corporations, etc.

Nonetheless I find myself questioning why I have all of this stuff. What am I going to do with all of it? Or if I get rid of it, where will it go? How can I live more simply? What does a life look like with fewer things? With fewer things, one needs less space, which is cheaper, which allows one to work less to pay for a studio, which frees up time.

I also feel ambivalent about the necessity of the car for a studio practice. What can you single handedly lug onto the bus and manage to bring home? Or if you get a Lyft, is the driver
ok with driving with a six-foot pole resting diagonally across the passenger’s seat and extending out the back window? I can’t quite imagine the everyday workings of life without a car, but I’d like to make space for the articulation between need and convenience.

What is a studio practice in Providence, Rhode Island that isn’t aided by a car? What would a studio practice look like with only buses? What if you did not make the assumption that you should go out of your way to get exactly what you “need” for the piece? How would that change the businesses that you patronize? As we get faster phones and faster computers, and personal cars and isolated homes, gaps grow wider in the name of efficiency and convenience. Does the artist who opts not to use these tools make it harder for themselves? Is it possible to “compete” if we choose not to go faster in a world that prioritizes speed?

MODELS

Mary Mattingly’s art very literally addresses these concerns as she deaccessions possessions, records their history in the global economy, and assembles her remaining material belongings into large bundles which she performatively rolls, walks, and pushes to the ports from which they came. Her practice is oriented toward a post-human reality and it is important. But what does it mean to make art with similar politics of making without necessarily making the art about it?

I am not sure my practice as I am coming to know it requires a studio. I know it’s not just a space for physical things, but for thinking, focusing and creating. It’s a space that is there if you need it. You can leave things as they were, you can close the door, and you can come back the next day to it unchanged. But what artwork can be made without a stu-
dio? And what social relations can be fostered when working outside of a studio in a locked building? And how does a work made in the studio index its origin—a closed room? In response to this very question, Gabriel Orozco asserts:

*For me, it has always been important not to have a studio, not to have a permanent assistant, not to have secretaries... The way the work is produced affects the final result—not just the politics, but also the aesthetics. I don’t want the responsibility and inertia of a production machine...I didn’t want my work to enter the abstract bubble of formal circulation, was part of that. I try to make language confront reality, the reality of the street and what goes on there. That’s how I’ve developed a lot of my artistic activities.*

This malleability, in which a work indexes its contextual origins, is quite literally manifest in *Yielding Stone*, in which Orozco rolled a ball of plasticine around the city, where it collected the material and impressions of its physical journey.

Orozco’s position is quite convincing to me, especially as someone who is endlessly interested in the everyday practices of humans. At times I wonder if the studio is antithetical to my values and interests.
Pull, Mary Mattingly, 2013.
IDEAS

A consolidated, incomplete, abbreviated list of some ideas, which vary in size, tense, unit, and quality.
Draw a map of my studio everyday. Chart the footprints of the objects to track how they move over time. Scream in a field and map the distance of it. Begin a project about filler words in different languages. Shrink wrap cheerios. Organize my belongings by weight. Collect nubbies (also known as pills) from the sweaters of my friends. Photograph statues of lions throughout the area—typically found in front of Portuguese homes. Sort through photos according to IMG codes and find interesting diptychs. Make toy cars out of rudimentary materials. Shrink wrap all my dishware. Set up a station to shrink wrap other people’s things so they can encounter them as new. Film something at a drive thru as people pass objects back and forth that don’t really make sense. Date the objects I own in relation to
the year I acquired them. Research fictional diseases and medicines. Measure water using the metric of time. Have Zoë dance to a song and then write a song based on her movement, without knowing the original song. Make things based on Braque still lifes. Make business cards with my family tree on it so I have an answer when people ask me, “What are you?” Write systems of measurements and their translations on a wall. Build horizon lines into objects. Repair things using Sculpey. Study Chinese mandarin classifiers and make a sculpture. Go to the cash register store and determine the average color of the cash registers. Take pictures of dentists mouths. Make stencils of my body. Engage with cardinal directions as embedded in the language of Gugu Ymithir. Make a structure to sing in. Make collages of local and global leaders. Clamp objects to my table where they belong. Make objects that fit into standardized racks or shelves. Draw a table cloth with the red checker pattern. Hide a radio transmitter inside a photocopier. Play with the stock photos in picture frames. Make characters for all the mispronunciations of my name: Mia, Maria, Maia, May-uh. Think of ways to make the studio by day into shelter for a homeless person at night. Make an ode to the button. Do something with my grandfather’s quotes: “I don’t know, I just don’t know,” “It’s all relative,” and
“Well, well, well, pussies in a well.” Make an installation with a humidifier and dehumidifier, based on dad’s story of his dad’s second or third marriage. Make objects that fit between bodies as physical manifestations of relationships. Take pictures of hairstylists’ hair. Record cashier greetings and farewells. Record all my transactions. Find friends who like to talk and put them on a phone in a gallery. Make sentences of words I shouldn’t forget. Do something with all those home videos, especially the one where the shot just lingers on an empty swing for forty minutes. Pair photos with objects depicted in the photos. Play with the linguistic difference between “it’s a new day” and “the day has returned.” Something about notions of center—Japanese people point to the nose while Americans gesture toward the heart. Push things up hills. Write a review of the best cash registers according to me. Put things on wheels. Eat graham crackers with loud classical music. Map the coverage of Maya community radio stations, since they don’t actually know where the signal reaches. Research Guatemala’s billboard erasure. Roll radio through Cajolá, Guatemala on a cart. Think about the fact that Germany and Spain are on the same time because of Franco and Hitler. Place feather flags in front of a museum to highlight the discursive overlap between the Museum and the Auto Dealership: REPAIR, FINANCE, BODY, PAINTING, PRE-OWNED, etc. Think about ways to help
people getting out of prison—what if every family brought one person into their home?
Make Roman glass forms with packing tape.
Make paper models of all the cameras I’ve ever owned. Do something with my price gun. Do something with Dad’s story about the white man. Use the audio from UCSB’s Linguistic Corpora. Photograph the holes in my studio.
Shrink wrap rocks and things. Shrink wrap boulders. Look for stones that have faces—the phenomenon is called pareidolia. Repair broken ceramics with wire and glue. Ask people to analyze random objects—to read culture as text. Translate a video in Spanish polysemically—with various different possible or interpreted translations. Read at least one hour a day. Take clay casts of negative space between architecture and my body. Offer therapy for artists. Physicalize diagrams of vases—cut them in half, complete them in other ways. Paint portraits of my therapists. Make a video documentary of Jiri and Ana who live in the old bunker on the cliff in Santander, Spain.
Use all of Zoë’s audition tapes for something. Do something about Chinoiserie as strange synthesis of Chinese-ness as projected, desired, and imitated by and for European consumption. Write an essay in response to Bruno Latour’s essay on critique. Interview artists about projects that never happened. Request sketches and models. Offer free childcare for those who need it. Make a list of all the items I’ve lost. Remake them. Play with the fictional opportunities of the credit system—buy and plan a trip to Bermuda that allows for a fleeting reality supported by financial investment that can be retracted and refunded. Do something that requires fitness and exercise. Play with the Laughing Hot Line. Film the objects in my studio with a handheld camera, which can be masked by a static stencil of
the object to measure the slight movement. Think about ways to live more cooperatively while still maintaining comfortable privacy. Use job interview questions and interview my family members or have them interview me. Reconstruct Harland’s. Launch a Shamaia Twain tour—pleather pants and mesh t-shirts mandatory. Borrow or work with the art in doctors’ offices. Rehearse getting from place to place. Make art for friends based on their needs or desires. Make a book of the all the transactions that I’ve recorded. Play with the questions asked for password security. Print a grid onto loose sand. Make a series of transaction windows. Explain the importance and hierarchy of things. Encase ceramics in hot glass. Make new forms out of sherds using plaster or Magisculpt.
I LIKE THE WAY THESE SMELL

CUSTOMER
I have a question. Um, I am trying to transfer just like, trace an image—

CASHIER
(CASHIER interjects cheerily as CUSTOMER continues to talk.)
Mmmh!

CUSTOMER
and get the, transfer a carbon paper—
Mmmh!

CASHIER
so that it goes onto—

CUSTOMER
Yeah.

CASHIER
like this printing plate.

CUSTOMER
We have blue and red purpose paper, and then we also have graphite transfer paper—

CASHIER
OK.

CASHIER
So, this one is about, I think it’s like, twenty by twenty-six. And it’s about like ninety-nine cents a sheet, whereas these ones are giant, and they’re a lot more expensive.

CUSTOMER
Oh, whoa. OK, yeah. I definitely need small—

CASHIER
OK.

CUSTOMER
and just like pencil.

CASHIER
CASHIER (cont’d)
Yeah.
Every summer my parents took us on a family vacation to Block Island. These were formative trips—one summer I got my cat at Littlefield’s Bee Farm and another summer I learned about the bankruptcy of authority.

I was about eight years old. We were at Bethany’s Airport Diner, where you could eat breakfast and watch the tiny planes land and take off. It was a grey day. Zoë ordered her usual eggs benedict without the eggs.

Dad and I walked toward the landing strip and stood behind the chain-linked fence. On the other side, the air traffic controller was pacing the pavement. She looked anxious.

Her walkie talkie blared, “Are we clear for landing?”

She looked up at the sky, squinting, as if reading an inscrutable sign. She turned to us, behind the fence, with a pained expression on her face. She looked back up to the sky. She hesitated. It was grey and foggy—certainly, I thought to my 8 year old self, she had more tools to assess the situation than I did!

Again the voice blared, this time with more urgency: “Repeat: Are we clear for landing? Do you copy?”

She looked with panic at the sky, searching for an answer. Wavering, she looked back at us, as if to seek our opinion. She lamented, “I hate when they make me make these decisions.”

She turned up to the sky once more and reluctantly declared, “All clear.”
Circles and Tangents // Paper, ink, graphite // 8.5x11” // 2015, ongoing.*

Reflecting on the antagonistic aspirations of handmade symmetry, I assigned myself the task of drawing a perfect circle— an impossible feat. Seeking to assess and learn from each attempt, my evaluative criteria shifted from fixed quantifications to subjective reflections. With each circle I became aware of new variables— surface, position, posture, intention, time of day, lighting, mood, location, hunger, and so on. The experiment transformed into a meta-study of methodology. Opening up rather than closing in, the perfect circle grows increasingly unattainable but leads me to tangential discoveries.


Look at Art. Get Paid. (LAAGP) is an independent program designed by two artists. The program pays people who rarely, if ever, visit art museums to come to an art museum, look at art, and share their thoughts. Invited as guest critics, the participants are paid $75 for 5 hours of work. The study aims to understand art and the museum as experienced by the demographic majority not served by these institutions. LAAGP defrays the compound costs of a museum visit such as transportation, childcare, and opportunity cost. The program highlights the roles of money and labor in relation to museum attendance. Historically, museums have sought to enlighten and civilize a public. LAAGP asks: How can the museum be “enlightened” by those who are not presently served by it? With 41 participants, the first iteration of LAAGP took place in November 2016 at the RISD Museum in Providence, RI.


A resurrection of the store I invented in my basement as a child: Harland’s. The shrink-wrapped deals combine groupings of my possessions from various points in time—childhood toys, trophies, college books, artwork, social studies projects, and more.

Page 19: A studio experiment to reconstruct a cup with sherds and wire, 2016.*


Page 26: Images of artist yawning, 2016.*


Page 30-31: Point of Purchase (POP) // Performance with sculptures // Materials: Oak, acrylic, stocking, PVC, sink strainer, contact paper, epoxy, sand, foam, patio drain, disinfectant spray, vacuum former, hand lotion // 2016 // Photo by Daniel Stern.

Customers are asked to wait in line while they watch a single overworked and cheery clerk manage four transaction windows simultaneously. Each window holds its own logic. The objects of service are provided by the patrons themselves, who temporarily surrender their belongings for slight transformation and improvement. The attendant sanitizes shoes, vacuum seals pocket contents, moisturizes hands, and critiques client signatures. The peculiar services augment the use of the body, property, and identity within capitalist modes of exchange.


Page 35: Measurements of Authenticity // 2015 // Installation with real fruit, fake fruit, and found objects.*

Real fruit and fake fruit are suspended on a horizontal plane in space, balanced by found objects from the studio. Together, they rotate; dada poems, arbitrary equations, visual lexemes. As the organic matter dries over time, the equilibrium dissolves leaving scattered debris and floating axes.


Page 44-45: My psychiatrists and therapists in chronological order from left to right, top to bottom.
https://www.therapists.psychologytoday.com
https://www.zencare.co
https://www.brown.edu
http://health.usnews.com


Page 57-59: Mapping my presence in specific moments in time created by unique convergences of infinite ever-shifting variables // Video Still and Hand-drawn Map // 2015.*

How far can I extend through space? Despite complex technologies, the only accessible and suitable tool that can distinguish the voice from other frequencies in space is the human ear. Standing in the middle of the woods, I belted as loud as I could at the highest note that fit comfortably within my vocal range. The note was an A440– a musical standard known as the Concert A, which musicians use to tune their instruments. Over the course of 6 hours, my partner walked the perimeter of my voice, dropping GPS pins at the nebulous threshold where my voice became indistinguishable. In seeking to map something as immaterial as the voice, this pseudo-scientific endeavor is fraught with imprecision produced by changing conditions in the environment, the subject, and the researcher’s tools. Variables proliferate: temperature, humidity, precipitation, time of day, volume of voice, amount of ear wax, etc. This project presents the scientific method of mapping with admitted subjectivity, foregrounding the relationship between the researcher and the researched, an element often minimized in claims to objectivity.

Page 60: My Business (Cards) // 2016.*

In the spirit of Adrian Piper’s My Calling (Cards) 1986-90, I use the
familiar and standardized format of the business card to respond to a single racializing question often asked by complete strangers: what are you? Before making these cards, I used to cooperate and patiently chart my lineage. My grandmother was born in China but came to the U.S. when she was 11. No, I’ve never been to China. No, I don’t speak Chinese. My dad doesn’t either. Well, I’m a U.S. citizen. No, I’m a native English speaker. Actually, my mom is blonde. That side is Irish, German, French. My parents met in Ohio though, not China. No, I was born in the U.S. 

The seemingly innocent act can cause me great discomfort. Whereas a business card is used to network or draw connections, I use mine in response to an act of othering. The gesture is at once generous—I’m going above and beyond what a stranger deserves to know—and harsh, in that my preparedness underscores just how unoriginal the question is. The complexity of the family tree gestures toward the magnitude of the question and the real people implicated in it.


In pursuit of an immersive acoustic space, this blown glass dome is designed to facilitate vocal experimentation between two individuals. Inside this reflective space, partners can experience the uncanny phenomenon of resonant frequency: one’s own voice becomes indistinguishable from the other, creating a fleeting and visceral moment of union. Plans are under-way for live duet performances with local singers.*


Page 67: A transcription of one of many recorded transactions in the past year.*


*Made and photographed by Maia Chao,