

I remembered
I am happy



A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts in the Department of
Digital+Media of the Rhode Island School of Design

by

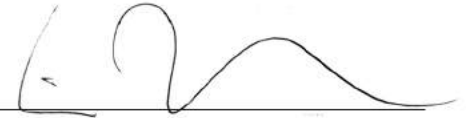
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2017

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To tomorrow.

*I know everything will be better when you
arrive, but we must keep missing each other.*

Midnight comes and it's today again.

*That's fine. I'll wait for you another night.
Thanks for giving me hope anyway. I think it's
the best thing I have.*

(Hi mom, and dad, and Jie.

*Look! I've made a thing. I hope it makes you
happy.)*

with special thanks to

Shona Kitchen &

Matt Kenyon &

Lisa Morgan &

Jonathan Sun &

Mimi Cabell

ABSTRACT

this journal is a collection
of thoughts on small actions
and repetition
and getting through getting places

ON *TITANIC* AND OTHER BOATS

In early April 1912, three years of construction on the British passenger liner RMS Titanic finally came to an end, amounting to roughly 7.5 million US dollars and one unsinkable ship. In 1997, this amount of money, adjusted for inflation, would have brought the ship to a value of about \$120 million. Crew wages were anywhere between a 1997-adjusted \$300 and \$1,700 per month, with the most expensive cargo priced at \$1.6 million—and while it's impossible to value the lives of the 1,300 passengers on board we will, out of naive interest, mention that in the months after RMS Titanic's collapse, charity concerts and relief funds brought in about \$7.3 million to survivors and families of the deceased.

For the same amount of money—plus three or four tens of millions of dollars more—James Cameron and Jon Landau produced the three-hour-fifteen-minute Oscar-sweeping 1997 film *Titanic*. Between a high prestige ship and a star-studded blockbuster; which was worth more?

In its time, RMS Titanic was not considered a small project. To be sure, it was never thought of as the ordinary feat of mechanical reproduction that shipbuilding is today (in 2005 Korea's Hyundai Heavy Industries alone built one \$80 million ship every four working days¹)—but also, it's strange that this boat has perpetrated our culture so deeply. In the scheme of things, one shipwreck is all but a blip of human history, and even less so when considering the comparable sinking of RMS Lusitania (1,198 dead) three years after; and even less so when considering the manufacturing of the U-boats that torpedoed Lusitania; and even less so when considering the World War that built and launched those torpedoes; and then considering the Great Depression; the Roaring Twenties; the Industrial Revolution; the Middle Ages, the Ottoman Empire, the Edo Period, the fact that all of this has happened within only the tiniest fraction of the Earth's existence.

In the scheme of things, there is little in the world that matters very much at all. Our being here is temporary—even our collective memories of Mozart and Shakespeare and Feynman will eventually be erased by the expansion of the sun or the impact of a comet or any other big astronomical event. The half-life of humanity has been clocked by geologists to be about 1,000 years², with our monumental sculptures last to go; and yet we still wake

1 James Brooke, "Korea reigns in shipbuilding, for now", <http://nyti.ms/29bHdyE>.

2 Steven Ian Dutch, "The Earth Has a Future", 10.1130/GES00012.1.

up in the mornings, picking at quarters to pay for our local brew coffees. We save money for small pleasures and tell stories to ourselves. Last week I brought a city friend to my suburban hometown, and we pulled off to the side of the road to watch a patch of fog on the trees. We compared childhoods, my friend taking photos of every bit of nature as I stood numb for all the boredom and nostalgia of returning to a place I'd left years ago.



The entirety of my childhood was spent living within the same 20 mile radius around Clarksville, Maryland. From what I remember, the town's best feature³ was the crispness of the air, the scent of which seemed to always perfectly match each season. The emptiness of the place didn't bother me until I left it. After all, I knew a secret to suburbia: the way to stretch out 20 miles into an infinity, was to be a runner. I loved running but was never good at it, and so each mile would take an eternity to cover, and in each mile there was time to think, and time to listen to the same three songs on repeat, and time to breathe in the perfect air.

When I moved to New York I stopped running almost entirely. There's just no need to run when there are so many things to see at every turn, and no appeal in the process when smoke and cars pollute each block. The mindless joy of stretching space is lost--even if you went up to Central Park, or over to the Hudson River, there are too many

3 The town's *only* feature.

buildings, and too many tourists, to remember if you have covered any distance. The only thing worse than running the city blocks would be running at the gym, the city NYSC's packed with rats on their treadmills, surrounded by sweat and stale musk, going nowhere. I was spoiled by the fields and forests of my oak- and cedar- hometown.

That said, in the years I lived in New York I always imagined running as a part of me, if only in the fact that I would occasionally mention it to people I was meeting for the first time. These are the questions people like to ask, "what are your hobbies" and "where are you from", "what do you do", and so on, and so forth. Even if it was no longer applicable, it was a way of defining my past. I would say I missed running, but in truth, talking about it was enough to satisfy any need to do it.

Besides, if I did go back to run, I'm sure it would be agony. "Every day off training is two days back", or something. After finishing the day's run and getting over the fresh scent of the air, the suburbs are quite boring, and markedly less romantic than small-town life is supposed to be.

The problem is, you spend years and years in the slowness and the silence and when you are gone, you think of how unnecessary the stress of the city grind is, and you feel sad and guilty for leaving. But also it is impossible go back—now the world is expecting more of you than sweatpants and Uggs and big box warehouses where you are bound to see the same three people getting groceries every week. The only way to win is to say you are busy now, but how great everything used to be. You take patches of nice memories

and move on.



I guess there's some comfort in our ability to forget, our ability to invent rosy memories of our hometowns and re-cast Titanic as art and entertainment. If we extend this forgetting even further we might be able to return to our expanding sun, our global warming, our unstoppable comet, and find some quiet relief in the apocalypse of our future. The deaths of things doesn't have to be so morbidly taboo—after all, for an anxious person it helps to be reminded that time always erases our small blunders.

On some level, this forgetting might even be the secret to sustaining some level of happiness. Our understanding of life becomes a matter of scale, measured only by the heaviness of our thoughts. The universe continues to pulse without us, expanding infinitely into a space we can't even imagine, permanently affected but never bitter about our being. Because we are small, we are allowed to choose what is important to us. We choose what it means to be happy, and in this happiness, we are free.

GAME

Blink very slowly
Until you can no longer feel
the weight of the world

GAME

Things have not all
gone to plan
But everything seems
to be ok
Press X to sigh in
relief
then repeatedly tap Y
to keep up the good
work

LOOK

When you stare at one spot for a long time everything slowly gets blurrier and blurrier until eventually there is nothing to see at all but also as soon as you look away the world snaps back into focus

A PHOTO TAKEN BY MY DAD, AT DEEP CREEK, MARYLAND



HERE MARKS THE HEALING

She sank into the cold of the earth and felt everything disappear but the light of the stars and the smell of the sea. She had been afraid for so long, and what did she have to show for it? Every open wound seals itself in time. For now, the water would churn against her feet, unbearably soft and rising slowly, waves riding waves in sweet excitement to meet her. Maybe it wasn't as romantic as she imagined it to be. The air was too salty, and the sand too rough, and after all, she was not alone with her thoughts but together with a bickering family three minutes down the shore. But in her memory she was here, perfectly still, just beginning to feel whole again: puzzled together piece, by piece, by tiny impenetrable piece.

GAME

Gently tap Y
to numb the pain
Continue tapping
until you feel safe

GAME

You are a rock
thrown out to sea
by a child learning
to skip stones
for the first time

SMALL PLAQUES FOR STUPID THINGS



ON THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE THERE'S A SMALL
PLANET

On the surface of that small planet there's a small town
In the middle of that small town we stare at our feet
and walk towards the future, forgetting how quickly the
future becomes the past
And how quickly the past becomes parts of our memory
And how quickly our memory becomes parts of us;
dear in our minds; and soft, and warm, and flickering,
and never as good as the future,
And so we keep walking

Is your life not a narrative?
Is there no arc in which you achieve all your dreams?
You're a series of short poems about other people—
is that not enough?

GAME

REAL LIFE SIMULATOR

It doesn't end
until you do



PROVIDENCE

The studio is always relatively empty in the mornings. Even at the end of term when we all end up in a huddle at our desks next to the laser cutter, our cohort as a whole has a tendency to stay up late, sleep in late, and trickle in student-by-student throughout the afternoon. It was no surprise that when I left the building at 10 a.m. two days after finals, suitcase in tow, the space was empty. There was no fanfare in my departure—I would see everyone in just two weeks time—but I did want to say goodbye to at least a few people.

At the front of the building I hopped into an Uber bound for the airport. As we left the city we sped by a divide on the road, small and made of the same grainy rock material all road dividers are made of. It was unremarkable except for a black graffiti tag written in the most innocent handwriting: “EVERYTHING IS OK”. The second I saw it I wanted to stop and take a picture, to send the message to all the people left in Providence. In my head I even asked the driver if there was any way to “pull over, please? Sorry but

I’ve just seen something in the middle of the road”, but of course, as soon as I imagined it, the moment for action had passed and I became not an eccentric art student stopping traffic for illegal anonymous reassurances, but a normal taxi passenger, phone in hand and looking out the window.

As I lined up to check my bags, I got a text:

“Where are you?? Didn’t hear you in studio...”



I can never quite believe how quickly people can come in and out of our lives. We aren’t even aware of each other’s existence; if we passed on the streets we wouldn’t think twice of it; then, by some circumstance, we become so attached that while we are en route to other places, we think of each other. Sometimes we are attached for a while, sometimes—most times—we slowly drift back to being strangers.

I think a lot about what will happen when I separate from my classmates, how quickly we will drift or if we will at all. It has all happened before. I have graduated from kindergarten. I have graduated from fifth grade, from junior high and high school, from university and piano lessons and chem lab partners. People leave each other for all sorts of reasons, and when we graduate we (ostensibly) do it so we can grow into our next lives. Even if the separations become more numerous as we age (more connections, more break-ups, more lives, more deaths), they don’t seem to get easier.

The moment we leave we are doomed to receive a pain doubling our fondness. But also, months later, we recover. Any attempt to meaningfully reconnect requires a conscious sustained effort. It's easier to separate.

For as much as I wish I actively kept in touch with lost contacts, my anxiety and my guilt and my laziness keep me at bay, and besides—I'm not always convinced the interactions would become anything too meaningful.

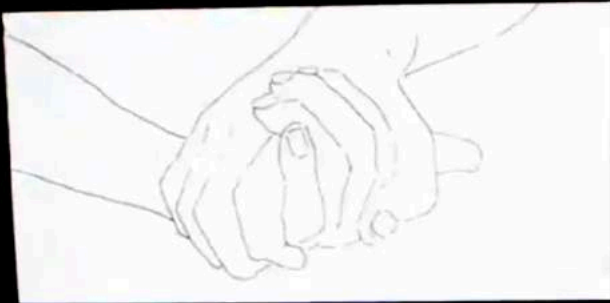
For now, I think, the most we do is spray paint messages to each other, and to ourselves, and leave them in places where we can't linger long.

And this is what art is.

—(*Everything is ok*)

blood is not beautiful

nothing's ever poetry
until we say it's so



GAME

It is getting easier to
get through each day.
Repeatedly tap X
to grow into your
happiness.

GAME

You are the X button
tired of being
repeatedly pressed.

HOW TO KILL ANYTHING¹

time and distance

time and distance

1 Alternate title: How to Cure Anything



An eraser's only job
is to break its own body
fixing the mistakes of other men

KINTSUGI

There is a Japanese art—*kintsugi*—in which ceramics and laquerware are repaired with gold seams. Though it was first developed after the accidental breaking of a Chinese tea bowl, it grew popular to the point that collectors would intentionally smash pottery to be stitched with gold.



On September 20th I invited my roommate out to dinner, keeping quiet the fact I had not made any other friends in my first year here in the city, keeping quiet the fact that I was sad because making conversation made my heart race and my hands sweat and the fact that, the more I picked out words in my head the harder it was to vocalize them. I ordered a slice of cake for dessert and paid for both our meals, then went home to finish schoolwork.

A month later my parents would send an email saying sorry they forgot my birthday. A month after that I would meet someone who had recognized the name of a childhood

friend I was texting. And then I would meet someone who had never received a Christmas gift but was happy I got them a coloring book three weeks before December 25th. And then a year would pass, and another year, and I would move to a different city, and I would make a few new temporary friends, who all bonded over how lonely they felt, and when another few years passed I would leave and come back to all these people again, and in that time I would think, how glad I was to have them, and how precious they had become, but how funny it was that they had gone on living their lives at the same time that I was going on living my life. It is hard to imagine the world going off in a hundred different directions while I moved along on my own path, but here we were. Together we sculpted a world, each of us a body, connected by our own golden road.

hello world!	HAPPINESS! Is coming
hello	happiness is? coming
77	happiness is coming...
45	Happiness IS coming
hello	happiness, Is Coming
hello60	Happiness? Is coming—
helloheala	Happiness: is Coming
hello again	HAPPINESS IS coming
Happiness	happiness “is, coming”
happiness	Happiness Is. Coming
happiness is coming	happiness Is, Coming?
Happiness is coming	happiness IS COMING
HAPPINESS is COMING,	Happiness is Coming:
happiness is! COMING	HAPPINESS? is coming?
Happiness Is coming!	HAPPINESS...is coming
happiness is COMING.	Happiness—IS COMING
Happiness is Coming!	happiness. IS? COMING...
HAPPINESS is coming	Happiness is Coming,
Happiness is...coming!	Happiness IS? COMING
happiness...is coming?	HAPPINESS is coming

ABSTRACT (REVISITED)

I've been thinking a lot about how weird it is that we all spend time pretending to be happier than we are. And this isn't just about social media—like all arts and entertainment, Facebook and Instagram are little more than reflections of our selves, made more dramatic by their creation and curation via their own addicted consumers. The truth is we are unendingly performing ourselves, online and off. We revel in the fragility of our lives, complete with flaws to fit our tragic hero tropes—but in the midst of all our acting, we are generally indifferent to everything around us. As I sit here writing, I'm neither happy nor sad. I wish I was ecstatic. I can remember moments of feeling safe, and good, and invincible, but it's a hard thing to recreate.

My work is obsessed with many things. I find comfort in the joy of the ordinary, the relief of repetition, small things for my anxious brain to grab onto. There are all things that feed into a larger obsession, of finding and maintaining happiness. It's a problem that's been tackled many times before. A quick Google search comes up with a growing list

of New York Times self-help best-sellers amongst hours worth of “how-to happiness” TED talks, along with blog posts describing everyone else's personal paths to Cheryl Strayed “Wild”-style self discovery. Everyone has found the solution to the happiness bug (fulfilling work! Fulfilling relationships! Abandoning greed!), but no one ever tells you how to implement it.

A constant happiness is hard to build, and I'm starting to believe it would be smarter to work on minimizing unhappiness than on maximizing happiness. After all, pain is not solved by pleasure. Parents who lose their children do not fix their suffering by throwing parties and lapping up margaritas on tropical island resorts. If it's really true, that there is no light without dark, or good without evil, and there is no happiness without sadness, then those who suffer most must agree: indifference is not the worst state of being.

A sustained apathy can be problematic, for sure—but all in all, there is something soothing in the hours we do nothing but nothing. In this quiet I find myself most optimistic, that there is a happiness coming.

And so my obsession stands. There is no world in which happiness is permanent, nor should there be. There is too much to gain from suffering and boredom, though I'd hope these emotions are as spare as possible. In the end it is better to be hopeful than not, to have faith in the future and to think of nothing else but the fact that happiness is coming. Because it is—it is coming, it is coming, it is coming.

30 Dust to Dust

Game. The player is an astronaut, just returned to earth. As long as the player holds space(bar), they are allowed to move forward through the seasons. A piece about being homesick for a place you were only a visitor to, and the loneliness and desparation of holding onto this cheap replacement that only shares its name with the thing you're missing, and the beauty you're allowed to witness by moving forward.

36, 49 Hold to Hold

An installation, activated when two people come together to interact with the piece. The only instruction given is "hold to hold"—when doing so, a poem is generated and projected for the audience. The "activators" of the piece are shown an intimate animation of hands holding each other, while a constantly changing public-facing poem sits between them. An exploration of the imperfections of human-to-human connection, a pursual of mechanism as meaning, and a practice of using technology as a means of mediating our experiences.

James Brooke, "Korea reigns in shipbuilding, for now", <http://nyti.ms/29bHdyE>.

Steven Ian Dutch, "The Earth Has a Future", 10.1130/GES00012.1.