

2013

One Breath/ One Line

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ONE BREATH/ ONE LINE

A Thesis Presented

By

THERESA ANTONELLIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2013

Department of Art, Architecture, and Art History

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With sincere gratitude, I acknowledge the contributions of my committee members, professors Susan Jahoda, Shona Macdonald and Sandy Litchfield. Without their generous encouragement, confidence and wisdom, this paper would not be in your hands today.

I dedicate my thesis to my parents, who taught me to do everything well.

ABSTRACT

ONE BREATH/ ONE LINE

MAY 2013

THERESA ANTONELLIS, B.A. MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

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The scale of the body, the accretion of marks, the pace of the breath and a list of rules, underlie the work. These are parts of the process. I give myself over to the process. The drawing is evidence of the process. During process, there is constant struggle for dominance between the points of attention. Limitations of the body, habits of the mind, observation of the breath, and action of drawing compete for dominance. When are equal, the state of meditation arises. To me this is ultimate freedom. The intention is the viewer will also find freedom in contemplative viewing of the drawings. Finally, drawings serve as a collection of evidence against loss of time, loss of self, loss of the body.

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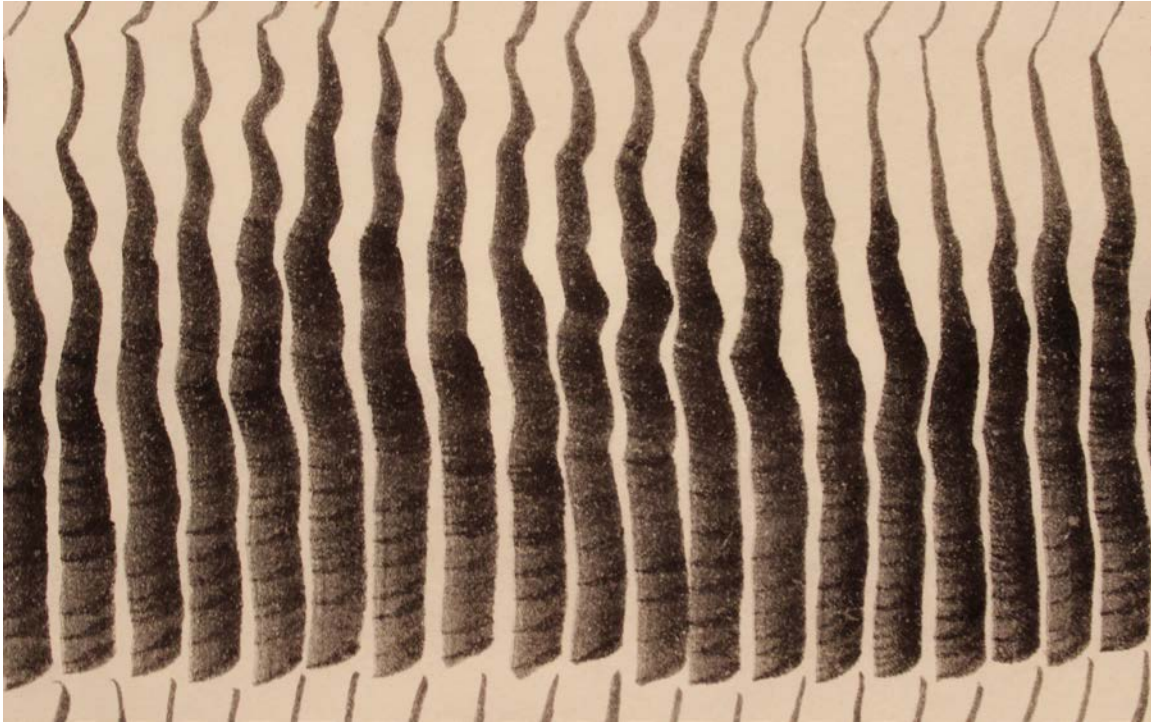
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CHAPTER 1

EVERYTHING BEGINS IN THE STUDIO



1. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, detail

The most satisfying moment in the day: stepping into the studio and shutting the door behind me. The weight of the world falls away, and I am safe from the demands and contentiousness of the work-world. How long have I been away? Returning, I feel immensely relieved; it's as if I have made a long trek away from a noisy city, up a mountainous dirt path to a hermit's hut, welcomed by silence. Not just the silence in the absence of people and political maneuvers, but one more profound. The stuff in my head ceases to talk back to an imaginary ministry of opposites. My eyes fall to drawings and books assembled here; an assembly of the true, the honest, and perfect. And within my drawings are solutions, answers and responses to the world out there. Drawing is as close

as one can get to perfection. “Turning my back to the world”, in the potent words of Agnes Martin¹.

Layers and levels of commitment weave together an aggregate of agreement, bringing meaning to the space of the studio. Commitments made to my professors, who bring gifts of insight, commitments made to the University of Massachusetts Art Department, who provided this precious space, commitments made to my student loan. And commitments made to my future self to *pay* the loans. These sentiments are hardly a romantic view of the studio, but an honest one. Having made peace with obligations, one is able to go beyond them. Meaning provides the underpinnings of happiness.

In the studio, one is finally free of the territorial, having achieved the ultimate territory: no obligations to negotiate, no compromises, nobody to obey. The enormity of it at times may intimidate, overwhelm. Within these walls one must decide, and deciding one must live with the consequences. (Even so, may this not be the last studio, but one studio, in a lifetime of studios.) One may exercise authority, yet there is no harm done. Beyond the studio door, every getting, every accomplishment comes at the expense of another’s loss. Within the solitude of studio, one is temporarily absolved of material obligations. Given this freedom, given this territory, and range, what next? A process begins: an encounter between my art and myself. Convictions I bring to my practice: visual art is political, is a confrontation, and is transformative. The three are intertwined, inseparable, without clear boundaries, like three interlocking gears.

Art is political, but also practical. Philosophers have considered the practice, description and distribution of ethics their territory, and themselves the sole arbiters. I say, *no*, they are not. My point being, visual artists do not require the philosopher to intercede on our behalf. ‘Artist’ may substitute for ‘painter’: “Philosophy finds itself driven to cross-examine painting...because painting is engaged in an exploration that escapes its mastery, something it fumbles to grasp, and even fails to conceive... Philosophical thought readily uses ideas to protect itself, while painters are wary of them. Philosophy is deprived of the adventurous fumbling of the hand, torture and opportunity

¹ Martin, Agnes. Writings. ed. Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwarz. Kunstmuseum. Winterthur. 1960. Pages 35-40.

all at once, that makes the painter always try and try again.”² The practice of art precedes the practice of philosophy. The non-verbal experience supports the verbal. In my practice and method, I’ve accomplished just that, prioritizing practice over theory.

As I fumble on the path forward, physically wrestling with the material, making micro-decisions, I am embracing this and rejecting that. The cumulative affect of these countless decisions, made autonomously, is no less than right and wrong in the space of the work, in the space of my studio. “The development of an imagined piece into an actual piece is a progression of decreasing possibilities, as each step in execution reduces future options by converting one-and only one-possibility into reality.”³ Each mark on every page is a decision made. Each mark is made in response to the mark made previously, and is a response to the quality of materials and to my breath at that very moment. And each mark influences the marks (and breaths) to follow. The physicality of the material; ink, paper, body, breath, informs every decision. This practice, with its commitment to these materials and to these rules (*see Appendix*) is transformative. By transformative, I’m indicating at very least, a range of beneficial influences that affect my mental and emotional outlook. At most, the practice feeds my spiritual needs in the same way that practicing yoga or taking a really long walk in nature does. My ability to think clearly, make connections and feel inspired is enhanced. I hope that my audience may sense the same influence, but as Agnes Martin so dryly put it, “The responsibility of the response to the art is not with the artist.”⁴

Art is a confrontation. Perennial pursuit of inquiry requires the studio’s solitude, the studio’s spaciousness and the studio’s schedule. The space is available 24/7; the space is devoted to one alone, and accommodates all necessary materials and books. These seeming luxuries are in fact prerequisite to the work. With these givens, the artist may confront herself, may confront fear, and confront the artwork.

² Jullien, Francois. The Great Image Has No Form, On the Nonobject Through Painting. trans. Jane Marie Todd. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009, page 46.

³ Bayles, David Art & Fear. Santa Cruz, The Image Continuum, 1993, page 16.

⁴ Martin, Agnes. Writings. ed. Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwarz, page 32.

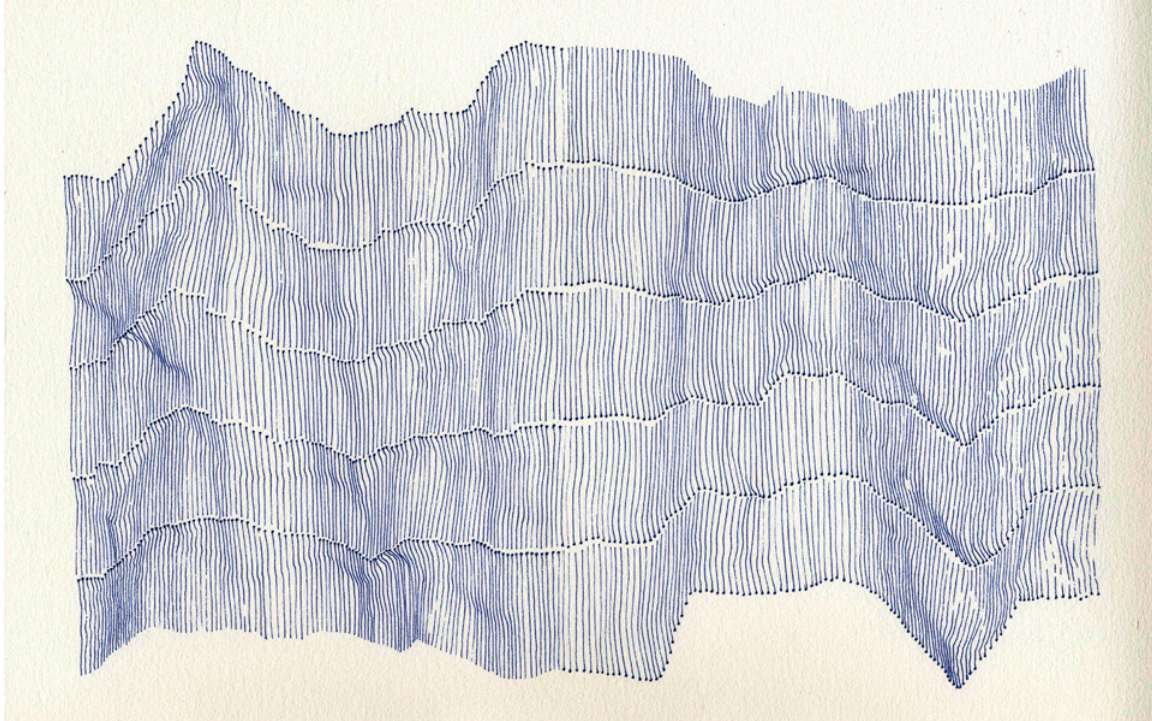
There is no predetermined goal. As artist, I ask open-ended questions, and I confront myself. At arbitrary points of achievement (the thesis exhibition, or any exhibition, wherever the art is viewed), new questions arise; the viewer confronts the image, and the image confronts the viewer. In this present drawing practice, in the largest drawings I'm working line-by-line and keeping the scroll rolled up, concealing the work from myself. Concealing the drawing from myself, allows me to keep my process faithful to body based actions and rule based decisions. The moment I unroll the 20-plus-foot drawing on mulberry is the first moment I see it in its entirety. I too, am the audience. What I see surprises me and delights me. It is the sum total of chance interactions of body + materials, unburdened by aesthetic decision.

When I see my large drawings, and respond to them as visual objects, another step of engagement follows. I see a range of visual associations in the image. My responses range from delight to fear. I see in it: nature, (all the elements), the body, cast-off detritus and death. I see relations to accounting, ancient forms of writing, unreadable artifacts. I see influences from Asian arts, Agnes Martin, domestic arts. I see an image mysterious enough to invite imagination and specific enough to evoke specific memories of places and things and sensations.

The variations in marks and rhythmic changes are due to bodily and mental limitations. The whole of the image floats up and down on the paper's surface, depending how fatigued my arm was. Where I lack concentration, the image looks a little broken. When I'm really focused, the lines are cohesive, and I can 'read' a record of breath. To me personally (which is to say, not important that the audience knows this), the finished drawing is a record of accomplishment, of myself being with myself. A record of time spent listening to my breath, observing my thought process, and mark making in tandem with and the process. The prolonged attention on body, on breathing, creates a space within myself, within the body and within the mind; I am aware and observant and not judgmental. This interior space within is an extension of the external studio space.

CHAPTER 2

EVERYTHING MAY BE MADE BY HAND



5. *Meditation Drawing X*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013

I peer into early memories, looking for evidence of *why* I think the *way* I do. Looking back into the past, a continual hum of making and dense activity of shared production is behind everything I remember. Winters brought an abundance of knitted hats and scarves and matching mittens in colors and textures and the predictability of three meals. Catholic holidays required specific and generous menus. My parents, grandparents and aunts each made separate courses, which were then collectively assembled in one home. (Using a small juice glass, my sisters and I formed raviolis one by one, from the pasta dough my grandmother mixed, counting them up to one hundred.) Summers brought gardens, birthday parties that required at *least* one cake, frosted, made

in the kitchen. If my mother made chocolate cake, one of the grandmothers would make vanilla cake with coconut flakes in the frosting. Canning season brought baskets of tomatoes, corn, cucumbers, pears, apples and grapes to the kitchen to process. I watched, (never helped) sorting of grapes, boiling the grape jelly in a huge pot on the stove, pouring the purple syrup into jars, finally pouring paraffin wax on top. The canning jar shelves were built under the basement steps, just for storing kitchen-canned goods. A sensible set of three plywood shelves held clear glass jars of jelly, pears, and tomatoes. An oft-heard command was "go downstairs and get a jar of..." to start a meal or to complete dessert. This very the same kitchen offered Pop Tarts, Lipton Cup-o-Soup, Cool-Whip and every kind of boxed breakfast cereal, without contradiction or irony. The 'DIY' concept didn't exist. This making of everything and anything was an expression of ability, a capable hand, and an aesthetic of and towards the domestic arts. I suspect it was also a demonstration of affluence to have enough suburban property to grow a vegetable garden.

There were the odd teaching moments: my father showing me the workbench he'd built, how the hand tools were organized on the wall, how power tools were placed with cords wrapped, how the vice held something I needed to nail, by screwing down the handle. On another day, how the tendons in chicken's leg, when pulled, operated each individual puppet-like toe on the chicken's foot. Missing its body, the claw still obeyed laws of movement and connection. Other times, my father showed me how seeds were saved from the flesh of a tomato, carefully washing them and laying them on paper towels to dry. How a slender branch of a tree can be cut just so, and another branch from a different tree may be gently attached, bandaged and thus made to grow. How dozens of incredibly small lettuce seedlings are coaxed apart one by one, to tease away the delicate root threads, and to make a special slurry of fertilizer to water each one, after they are safely planted. This is what I learned; tools are good and useful for making things, the body has connections, and accumulation of repetitious actions leads to transformation.

My early environment conveyed the unspoken directive that one can make anything, and one should make ...*something*. I rarely made anything in the kitchen or in the basement, the two powerhouses of making and doing in my childhood home. I responded to my siblings' and parents' expertise within the domestic spheres by

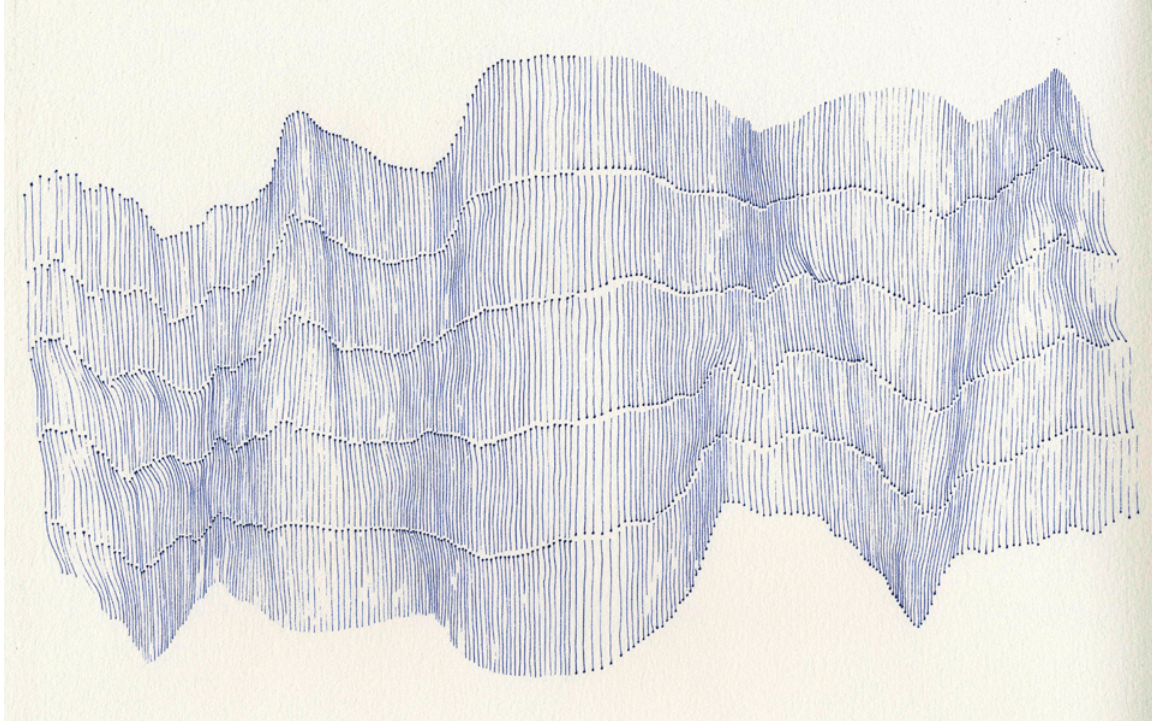
abdicating competition and staking claim elsewhere. Left to my own devices, I retreated to one corner of a large bedroom shared with three sisters. I painted, drew, cut and pasted. I arranged collections of rocks, shells and buttons. An uncle who worked at IBM brought me brought reams and reams of computer paper, held together at edges; zig zagging out of a big box, its borders punched with ribbons of holes.

The paper was given to all of us, but I felt sure this material belonged to me, and kept it in my bedroom, under my desk. With the paper, I was given permission to do as I pleased, accountable to no one. Whenever it ran out, my mother would ask my uncle to bring another box. These apparently endless boxes of paper, essentially limitless, provided freedom and safety to do as I pleased. Unlike the kitchen or basement in which everyone was an expert authority, the paper was my own territory. Without the threat of failure or pressure of expectation, I found within the space of the paper: freedom, safety, and independence. I filled it up. That box of paper represented everything important about the artist's studio: space, freedom and power.

Given these early environmental messages about making, about processes, and about repetitious actions, I see a direct path from familial proclivities to my present personal choices in art making. Useful, valuable and beautiful things arise from the repetitious and the cumulative. Labor intensive, hand made processes are the foundation of the transformative. The handmade is imbued with the maker's authority.

CHAPTER 3

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED



6. *Meditation Drawing IX*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013

Once a month, I spend a weekend with my 89-year-old parents. Approaching ninety, maintaining an independence and self-sufficiency that's impressive by any standard. At breakfast time, newspaper and coffee is on the table. My father reads the comics first, and then the obituaries. Eventually he gets round to the editorial pages, the metro and the money sections. My parents share their opinions freely on the topic of the day, (Thanks to them, I'm a Democrat and together we bemoan the fact that three of my siblings somehow became Republicans). But it's their reading of, and interpretation of, the obituaries that fascinates me. My parents have lived in the same town all their lives, and take scrupulous care to know how they are related to everyone around them. By related, I do not mean blood relations, although family is absolutely, unspoken priority.

My parents know how, by what path, everyone is connected to everyone else. They recount to me trails of connections of names and places, as if to anchor them more firmly in a world that is slipping from their grasp. They tell me details of connections between their own lives and the lives of everyone around them. They are walking archives of a constellation of relationships. This is their map of the world. It includes not just farthest reach of blood ties, extending to Canada and Italy, but also describes geographies of service, of friendship, of marriages of workplaces and wartime commitments. When they recognize a name in the obituaries, (and a week does not go by, now, when I hear from them that a some one they knew has passed) they trace invisible lines. After recognizing a name, they expand the obituary from a mere listing of survivors, to an extraordinary map of connections. They recount, leaning on each other's memories, as they alternately contradict and agree with each other and fill in the gaps, stories that that are beyond me, but strong as steel rope to them, as they place a name securely in the perfect order of things, That's their map of the world.

As my parents describe intricate topographies of relationships, I listen, but it's all beyond my reach. I hang on their words to fix it in my own memory and carry it forward, as if I might manage to carry them, alive past death and past their end-dates. But something else is passed to me. The phrase, "everything is connected", is so overused, and so trite, it begs dismissal. I use the term only to describe in shorthand a broader and deeper philosophy that I witness my parents practicing daily. They make sense of themselves, only in context of relationships to others. This is the thing that I feel transmitted through their narratives. A web extends through names, through histories, through geographies, not in theory but in fact. This transmission of core belief informs my worldview, and therefore my art practice.

Last week, sitting around the kitchen table, my parents were describing which of their parents and aunts and uncles were born here in the states, and who "came over." My father's mother, Carmella, was born here, but her older brothers were born in Italy. My father strained to recall his uncles' names, eyelids clenched tight in concentration. Then the unthinkable happened. The names leapt out of my mouth before I knew it, filling in the horrible empty missing space, those gaps in my parents' memory that I vigilantly look

for and at the same time negate. “Matthew and Dominic,” my own voice startled my parents and myself. This is my parents’ story. My role is to be the passive listener, absorbing pictures of the past, but never, ever, the author. Things change.

Everyone sees something different in my drawings. Some of the visual associations viewers make include fabric, skin, landscapes, wind, water, or bodies of water and topographic maps. When I’m making the drawings, my focus is on the materials and the process. There’s no intention of representation. I’m purposefully focusing on my breath, and all the interior sensations of breath, together with the activity of mark making. I deliberately spread my attention around the body. While I’m immersed in the process of it, I experience states of mind that are similar to those evoked by being in nature or viewing natural patterns. To me, being in a natural setting allows me to have transformative experiences of being connected to nature, and by extension, to everything. When I take a walk in a beautiful setting, I notice natural patterns. When I’m noticing patterns in nature, I feel better. To be clear, the drawings are not representations of natural patterns or drawing of nature. The drawings are *generated* by the mark making, tied to my breathing cycles. This distinction is vital. I agree with Agnes Martin’s declaration, “We cannot reproduce reality or represent it concretely. It is ineffable.”⁵ Knowing that reality is not to be represented, brings us closer to it, as there is no desire to separate from it as subject/object. The experience of being connected, or of sensing connections, aids us in being at home in the world.

⁵ Martin, Agnes. Writings. ed. Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwarz, page 113.

CHAPTER 4

EVERYTHING IS ABOUT THE BODY



4. *One Breath/One Line, process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, detail.

This is the question I seek to unwind: why this work, and why now.

These body-centric, artworks, utilize functions of breath and boundaries of the body. At the foundation, the drawing is generated by my breathing cycles and range of motion in my wrist. Each and every line is equal to one in-and-out breath. Each line is only as long as my range-of-motion in my wrist, plus the length of the drawing utensil. Layered on top of, or secondary to the rigorous body-centric references are rules. No crossing, no erasing and not so much space. Lines are drawn as close as possible and as straight as possible, except when they aren't (close or straight) in which case they must return to these

qualities as soon as possible, but not at the expense of losing cohesiveness. When the lines are very close, they aren't very straight. When they are straight, they aren't very close. It's physically difficult to do both.

In seeking roots of the work, and describing my process, I feel compelled to hesitate. I want to be fiercely protective. *The Artist in His Museum* comes to mind. Like Peale in his self-portrait, lifting the red curtain (danger ahead!), to reveal his collection, hand outstretched, beckoning the morbidly curious to tour elaborately staged taxidermy. Just as the preserved, glass-eyed fur, full of stuffing is not a rabbit; the memories I've curated and resuscitate are not my life. It is a story I tell myself everyday so that things make sense. Bringing attention to my past feels like this image, and uncomfortably close to cathartic. And like Peale, and Ann Hamilton and others, my work must parenthetically acknowledge death.

I watch my parents slowly lose control of their fragile bodies, knowing that's my fate, if I'm lucky. I hope to make it to ninety, but who knows? The body is the locus of human experience. It is, at best, temporary. I think it absolutely fitting response to uncertainty, and to recent events beyond my control, that I turn my attention inward. I withdraw my attention, and direct it inward to focus on the small, the modest, the incremental and interior. To focus on the unseen, which may be more durable and more real than the unreal in the long run. Compelled now, by sudden awareness of my parents' mortality, and my own mortality, the thought of death serves to compress and distill experience to the essential. Blanchot gets to the point,

“My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address: it is there between us as the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated, because it contains the condition for all understanding. Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain; it exists in words as the only way they can have meaning. Without death, everything would sink into absurdity and nothingness.”⁶

Even though I dread and protest what aging is doing to my parents, (the kindest people I know) I acknowledge aging and death as limiting and formative forces in my work. My

⁶ Blanchot, Maurice. *The Work of Fire*, 323-24, <http://pasaudela.blogspot.com/2005/08/beatitude-blanchot-and-death.html>

work, its process, focuses on breath, signifying both the beginning and end of conscious life.

There is a thread that connects these drawings and this practice, now to then: seeds planted when I was sixteen. Training in figure drawing and in yoga began at the same time. Concurrently training the body, while learning how to draw the body, provided an acute awareness that was embedded in my own bodily fibers and tissues. Drawing the body was equivalent to the visual organization and mapping of the body's external and physical realities. Doing yoga and breathe control, was an *internal* organization and mapping of the body. Both are ways of coming to terms with being in the body. Both are ways to inhabit, embody, and be present / represent the body. There's no straight path from there to here, but a series of detours, failures and mysteries.

When I was in high school a thoughtful and generous assistant art teacher invited me to attend weekly figure drawing sessions in Waltham, at Brandeis University. That was an indelible event for me. It was a huge privilege to sit with a class of college-age women artists drawing, and even more, to be part of informal critiques. A seedling artist-identity was formed, and my drawing practice was informed. Next year I transferred to a small independent high school, where the arts program provided figure drawing. There were three solid years, of drawing from the body. Even though my college education was interrupted, I still practiced drawing from the body, and continued the practice when I returned to college.

For me, the problem with representing the body is, it will always be contested territory. Not only is the representation subject to misinterpretations by viewers, artists themselves will be forever (and not subtly) responding to "male gaze." I kept all the drawings ever made from the years of drawing from the model. But witnessing viewers (and even artists and models) misinterpret and apply sexist interpretations to perfectly good work, led me to find other ways to reference the body. Given that the problem of the gaze is only more complicated today, with cameras and the camera's audience infinitely multiplied, images of the body are difficult for me to behold, as often as they are abused by both media and by individuals. This sentiment expressed by Amy Poehler sums up the problem.

What should we be looking at and watching these days, in light of recent events...what do these images do to our brains and to our heart. And ask, how we should look at them and when we should look at them...what do I want my eye to see? How can I stay informed without exploiting people and without harming myself? This idea of wanting to be informed and know the story and people behind the story.... and also not using images and pictures as a way superficially connecting, as a way of getting a reaction from myself or from others, and using images, and therefore using people. Everywhere is a picture worse than the one before. I wonder if we could soften our hearts and minds and our eyes. I wonder if we can give our eyes a break. And see things a different way by talking or reading or listening. It's ok to not be looking at what everyone else is looking at. To know what you are ready to see or not see.⁷

“Without exploiting people and harming ourselves” is how I'd like to be looking. I am as hungry for the visual as the next artist/ consumer/ browser/ owner of three 'devices.' I believe we can all give our eyes a break. Not only by turning away from exploitive images, but also, as Amy suggests opening and softening other senses to make sense of what the eye sees.

I am deeply interested in the body as temporary home, as root of experience, and drawing as extension of the body and drawing as replication of sense perception: the body as a reservoir of knowing. Paul Chan, in conversation with Helen Molesworth, states, “A renewed interest in the nonverbal--this Lacanian fog outside of language...when people feel like the landscape around them is falling apart, they go back to what they are directly in touch with, like the body”.⁸ Chan describes how I feel at the moment. My landscape is doing that exactly, falling apart. Aspects of my personal, family and professional life are in flux. Normal levels of uncertainties have escalated. Chan continues, “The body in relationship to some kind of traumatic encounter with another or society or itself produces an awareness...the awareness of all of that pain”.⁹ My daughter, who has always lived on the west coast, has moved to the east coast. My parents, who have always been fiercely independent, now require help. Going back to the body and driven back to territories beneath the skin, makes sense to me, mentally,

⁷ Poehler, Amy. <http://www.upworthy.com/in-a-week-filled-with-tragedy-amy-poehlers-advice-for-self-care-is-like-a-warm-virtual-hug-2?g=2> accessed April 22, 2013

⁸ Molesworth, Helen. Dance/Draw. Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art, 2011. P.37

⁹ Molesworth, Helen. Dance/Draw. Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art, 2011. P.37

emotionally and in my art-making. The landscape ‘out there’ cannot be traversed; I will count breaths, and make mark after mark after mark, until the world turns. Returned to a private landscape that I have temporary control of, directly in touch with the body, I draw from it.

In my artwork, the process is a wrestling with body, breath and mind, to resolve crushing oppositional forces. “Traumatic encounters” threaten to overwhelm me. Even on the best day, with trauma at bay, the awareness of impending losses color my perspective. The act of drawing, and more emphatically *this way of drawing*, I reclaim possession of the body. I assert possession even if only a temporal possession, of the moment. This is my space, this is my breath this is time, am here. Here is evidence. Locating the most humble and inconsequential movement: the breath. Locating the merest ability: to grasp a pencil and put its mark to paper. These two actions are primal moments. Both actions pinpoint autonomous, the first autonomous moment of in one’s own body. The breath marks the entry of the newborn into this world, and the pencil stroke, initiates the child’s entry into the world of the literate.

In this artwork and in these drawings, both actions are fixated, repeated, circling the world but never landing. The transient being crosses the threshold lingering in liminal worlds neither here nor there. Magnifying this one movement all out of proportion is a metaphor for the trauma. In action of drawing, it is not quite drawing in any traditional sense. I push each mark into the paper, whether ink or pen or graphite, each mark is driven into the page and physically embedded or etched into the paper. Each mark bears a transition from empty to full. Each line contains narrow/ broad and light/ dark, just as the breath has a passage from empty to full.

Each line is dependent upon each breath. I make the mark on the paper for the duration of the exhaled breath. I reposition my hand on the inhaled breath. For the duration of the inhaled breath, I gather energy and I closely observe the line I’ve just made. During the exhale, I release the energy and I make the mark as nearly physically alike to the quality of the breath. As I focus on the actions of breathing and of mark making, I am spreading my attention around the body. Listening, observing, witnessing.

When successfully in focusing, transported to transcendent timeless thoughtless mental state. The breath breathes itself, and the lines make themselves. When I am successful, the drawing feels like less effort and more dancing.

The evidence of success in the images is cohesion in the overall drawing that I cannot consciously make. The completed drawings appear to have the same qualities of skin, hair, clouds, water or breath. They undulate. They feel natural. They have similar variations that might be observed in nature, when water or wind interacts with earth, or grass, or paper. If I must see, this is what I would choose too observe; the elements in nature night or day, always possess a fascination I never tire of. “Wind in the pines”, in Asian art history, is shorthand code for transcendent experience one may have when closely attuned to nature, and completely immersed in the present moment, while watching or listening to an ephemeral and fleeting phenomena.¹⁰

There is the visual and material debt I owe to traditional Asian arts; felt pen ink looks like Japanese inks, and mulberry papers are in fact traditional papers for everything from window panels to painting and printing. When I was very young, less than ten years old, my mother brought me to make regular visits to the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, “then and now, the greatest and most comprehensive repository of Japanese art outside Japan”.¹¹ Thousands of traditional Japanese art objects were amassed when the country was literally casting off its feudalistic Shoguns and embracing everything western during the Meiji Restoration. I only remember being free to wander galleries that were, at that time, crowded with art, and being fascinated by prints, scrolls sculptures and paintings in the Asian art galleries. Unsophisticated, I recognized an attraction whose roots flowered in my work today. Asian scroll paintings I viewed may well have been based on breath-control methods. “At the starting point of painting is the regulation of breath energy (*li qi*) that the painter gathers up in himself.”¹²

These drawings represent territories of the hand made, of the body. Each drawing represents an occupation of space and time, a testimony to having breathed, having been in the body, and having been here now. The breath itself has the singular quality of being

¹⁰ Hirota, Dennis. Wind in the Pines. Kyoto, Japan Asian Humanities Press, 1995.

¹¹ Benfrey, Christopher. The Great Wave. New York, Random House, 2004. Page 76.

¹² Jullien, Francois. The Great Image Has No Form, On the Nonobject Through Painting. trans. Jane Marie Todd. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009

subject to both conscious and unconscious control. At the boundary of the unconscious and conscious a threshold: a place and where body and mind meet. The mind may control the breath, but only to a point, and at that point (which changes) the body must have the breath. I cannot will myself to cease breathing, but I may be able to will myself to longer or shorter breaths, or will myself to become aware of subtle breath sensations in my body. Yoking the action of breath to the action of drawing enforces observations, awareness and focus on the breath. The yoking of the action of observed and willed breath to the action of drawing, sublimates the drawing process. My awareness of the mark making vanishes and reappears. My awareness of my breath vanishes and reappears. In following, and working with the breath, there is a suspension of anxiety.

My motivations underlying the process, strike a chord with critical interpretations of Agnes Martin's. "Choice of calm over chaos...has the force of psychological imperative. A need to seek stable patterns in a world full of unpredictable change, to get beyond the disharmonies of embarrassment, hope, desire, loss, guilt and fear, to find a mechanism for serenity that is fine tuned and ever ready."¹³ Rodger's interpretation of Martin's motivations strikes like an arrow to the heart. For me, viewing Martin's work, in person, at DIA Beacon and reading Martin's "Writings," were affirmations that provided permission to me work in my own way.

Mark by mark, breath by breath, I've traveled across the 25 feet of mulberry paper in about as many hours. I have made a map of my breath, its tensions, its repetitions, its spasms and the occasional complete loss of will and failure to attend, evidenced by messiness. I made this map by hand. And as I make the map, I also traveled the map, with my breath and with my mark making. In this way of making traveling I suspend death, decay and destruction. This in no way to say I escape or evade human mortality. I am confronting human mortality, by way of being/drawing/ breathing.

¹³ Rodgers, Timothy. In Pursuit of Perfection: the art of Agnes Martin, Maria Martinez, and Florence Pierce. Santa Fe, N.M. Museum of Fine Arts : Distributed by the Museum of New Mexico Press and the Museum of Fine Arts, 2004. Pages 111-124.

APPENDIX: TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Technical Information and Process.

Materials used:

One Breath/One line Versions 1 & 2, each measuring 37" x 310"

Charcoal-gray felt tip pens on natural mulberry paper from Hollanders Paper in Michigan

Dark Meditation Drawings I through VI, each measuring 37" x 24"

Graphite pencil on black mulberry paper from Hollanders Paper in Michigan

Meditation Drawings I through X, each measuring 12" x 22"

Blue ballpoint pens on Hahnemuhle paper from New York

Rules:

1. One line per breath
2. Length of line limited by range of motion in my wrist.
3. Each line is drawn as close together as possible, but not so close to touch the previous.
4. Lines are as straight as possible.
5. Every line is dependent upon the previous line for form, width, depth and length.
6. Rules 4 and 5 are interdependent.
7. No corrections are made and each mark is permanent.

Process:

With the exhaled breath, one individual mark is drawn.

With the inhaled breath, I gather up my energy, and reposition my hand.

The focus is divided equally between physical, mental and visual observations. My observations are focused on: breathing sensations, the mark-making, visual aspect of the drawing and the thought processes.

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Artist at Work



Theresa Antonellis at work on *One Breath/One Line* in Studio Arts Studio 222 at University of Massachusetts, Amherst in February 2013

DIGITAL INVENTORY

1. *Meditation Drawing I*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
2. *Meditation Drawing II*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
3. *Meditation Drawing III*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
4. *Meditation Drawing IV*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
5. *Meditation Drawing V*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
6. *Meditation Drawing VI*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
7. *Meditation Drawing VII*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
8. *Meditation Drawing VIII*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
9. *Meditation Drawing IX*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
10. *Meditation Drawing X*, Hahnemuhle paper with blue ballpoint ink, 12" x 22", 2013
11. *Dark Meditation Drawings I through VI*, 24" x 37", Black Mulberry paper and graphite, 2013

12. *One Breath/One Line, process 1*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013
13. *One Breath/One Line, process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013
14. *One Breath/One Line process 1*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, left view
15. *One Breath/One Line process 1*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, right view
16. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, right view
17. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, left view
18. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, detail
19. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, detail
20. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, detail
21. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, detail
22. *One Breath/One Line process 2*, 37" x 310", Natural Mulberry paper and felt-tip pen, May 2013, detail