



To Hold a Body

Gray Snyder

Before I proceed

I must first thank the individuals who made this project possible. Since returning to this school, post-pandemic, I have been shown in the most beautiful displays, the porous borders between my work and my relationships. So many of my projects have been fostered in collaboration, so much knowledge building occurred in conversations. I am so grateful to those who helped me chart my way through this expansiveness.

I am lucky to call you a mentor and a friend.

Special thank you to:

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Vail Co-op for being a safe and grounding space during a year of such destabilization

My friends and family for their endless care and support

Arts Engine for their generous Funding which made this Project possible

Dedicated to Khunta and Laura







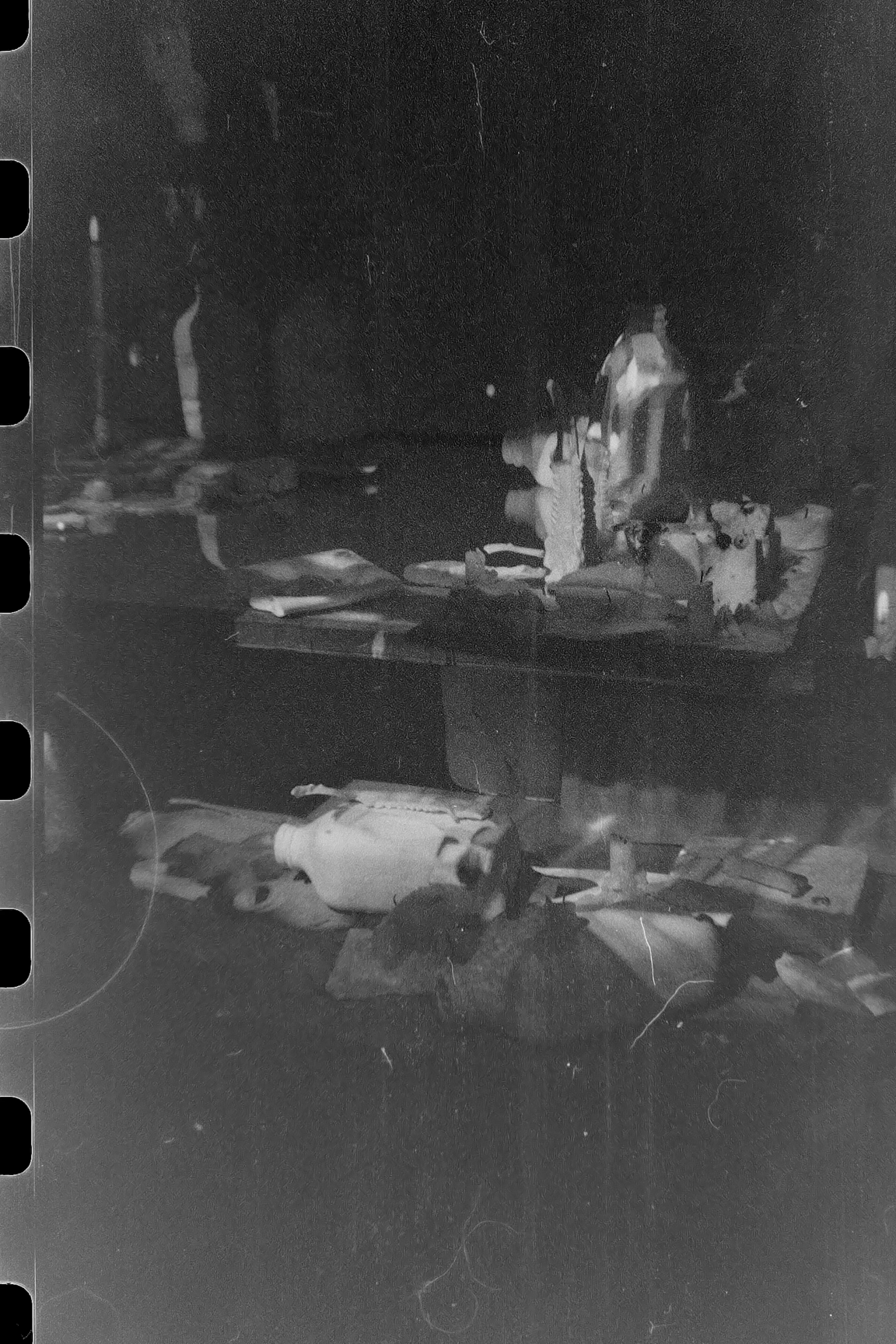












To Hold a Body, 2023

Gray Snyder

Video projection, audio soundscape slipcast ceramics, beeswax, soy wax, paraffin wax, tallow, cyanotyped muslin

*After years a dresser becomes an altar
While steady hands carve inlets and wombs
Time erodes purpose, mutates it
Into something unfamiliar, unpractical
Drawers erupt, disrupt function
The Object becomes the Body*

While attending funeral services and ceremonies for my grandfather, Wanchai, I found myself reexamining my understanding of the man I had known. During acts of communal remembering, I saw unfamiliar vestiges of him in recollections from other mourners. I wondered how the inconsistencies of memory can create opportunities for transformation, and how memories of a person can be held and constructed in spaces, objects, and rituals.

To Hold a Body is an entropic altar that serves as an effigy for individuals I grieve and as a reminder that these relationships can remain active and expansive through acts of remembering. In my ongoing relationship with grief, objects have served as access points into the past. I have tethered ephemeral memories to enduring objects in hopes of sustaining the memory through time so that I might be able to preserve an accurate recollection of the past. But each re-use of a mold involves tearing and erosion, eliminating the possibility of these objects being perfect reproductions of the last.

Letters from Khunta

I.

*In a white room the child clings to an unanswering dancer
assortments of vessels sit beyond reach
dishes of almonds, cashews, and walnuts collect upon the
wheel
a few pills are cast beside a jar of salt, supporting a tiny spoon
perched upright. An effigy occupies the bed,
as lights flicker overhead. The evening body becomes
the object of mourning.*

*steady steel propulsions
of spun aluminum joints
rotations abandon familiar orbits*

*crushing the cycle and the skeleton
an act occupying only a moment,
then a slow sputtering away*

human shrapnel scars this sidewalk

II.

*for twenty years
the freighters charted the darkness
witnessing the familiar
and further complications
with each passing over
a limbo mapped annually by increasing needs
for laboring bodies
and doctor's reports*

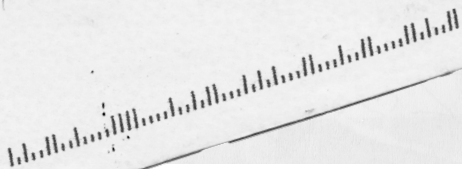
*muscles transformed into tightrope cables
Bleached wax smoked and light pierced the weaving
softness waned towards ongoing constrictions
and limbs foreshortened turned to stone
vestiges of the presence I could have known
hours collect upon words which collect into sentences
the man's refusal from atrophy. Lines gather into
scaffolding, carbon bonded and dripping cyan
endings fade upon the return
wicks remain wet and burning
a table set and attended by ghosts*



P.S. I saw you on the wedding album. You look grown-up little bit and very cute. Grandma Beeky told me that you are a good dancer,



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In August

of 2022 my grandfather died in a hospital in Sarasota, FL. During the days leading up to his death he became nonverbal and refused to eat. My grandmother prayed to god every day not to let him die while she was out of the room. She was one of two people which witnessed the final moments before his exit.

My earliest memory of my grandfather, my Khunta, involves neon yellow/green tennis balls, walker legs, and hanes white socks and sandals. I remember the maroon pillow which cushioned the wooden chairs which overlooked the living room of their old split level house. The man carried the sound from tinkling glass vessels of dried nuts. Skin wrinkly and tan, twinning the dried apricots from the pantry. Often in the company of familiar neighbors like the ceramic salt cellar spoon duo, which often shared space with a glass of morning old water and an assortment of pills. He was always small, even before his muscles began to atrophy. My grandmother said she was nervous for their first date because she didn't know whether or not to wear heels. As his condition continued to decline his already limited mobility worsened and with this he began to shrink. An ever condensing man.

I think to some extent I have been grieving him for years. Upon each visit, I would return to him older and with more experiences of the world. Going through college made me feel as if every part of me was becoming increasingly accelerated. There was this sense of distance that grew as I gained a growing understanding of the incommensurable loss that comes with losing control of one's body. When he was close to death, members of my family would comfort themselves by saying that in death he will no longer be confined by his paralysis, that his spirit will soon be able to dance, bike, play guitar and soccer, see his mother, do all the things he has been deprived of for so long.

Khunta had two funerals, the first being a familiar open casket service in a grey wilted funeral hall. Before he died Khunta told my mother and uncle that he didn't want any-

one other than immediate family members to view his body. I thought about his wish as the coffin door remained propped open while friends and friends of family and friends of friends and husbands of whoever trickled into the room to pay respects. Who would be the final guest who sealed the coffin shut?

I remember slowly kneeling over my grandfather's body as I carefully observed the made up face that the mortician had concocted for him. His orange brown skin appeared a bit more grey than usual, his wrinkles, a bit too fuzzed from the dustings of facial powder and there was something uncanny about his shy smiling mouth.

The first time I saw someone this done up was at my great grandmother's funeral. At nine years old I recognized that the transformed body in the box as no longer bein her. I remember being uncomfortable as I watched other mourners hold her cold hands and kiss her leathering cheeks. I felt guilty for my discomfort. Efforts from my family to reconcile the absence of her warmth, resulted in the approximation of a familiar and loved face interpreted through the eyes and hands of a stranger.

The second funeral occurred in his home, with our immediate family, plus the company of five Theravada Buddhist monks from Orlando, FL. The monks had driven two hours from their monastery and emerged from a Dodge grand caravan into a home warmed by the smell of Thai food and candlelight. As the monks led us through the ceremony of chants and prayers, there were many interweaving objects which served as metaphors for Khunta's spirit's journey through life and into death. There was an altar in the corner of the room with a portrait of him, a glass bowl of water, incense, roses, a brass Buddha, a ball of string, and a tasting platter with one of every dish being served by Auntie after the ceremony.

Traditionally, this funeral ends with the cremation of the deceased's body, as this ceremony takes place on the 7th day after death and is seen as the final severance of the departed from the living world. A release towards rebirth. Khunta's body had already been reduced to ashes by then.

The different ways in which the materiality of the body was emphasized in the Catholic versus Buddhist funerals speaks to different ways for remember the deceased and

the different needs of the living from the dead to work towards closure. I began to wonder about the dichotomy of presence and absence between the two funerals and how the semantics of a loved one's body and regional funerary practices impact processes of remembering approaches to methods of healing. With one ideology suggesting the body as a permanent container for through the normal practices of injecting chemical preservatives and the craft of mortuary makeup, the other appeared to view the body as temporary and the self as infinitely changing by necessitating the disintegration of the body for the soul's rebirth.

During a conversation with one of my professors, we discussed her experience of laying her father to rest in an urn of pure sea salt and placing it into the fluctuating motion of the Mississippi river. In being unable to track the movements of his ashes, there was no way for her family to determine there being a stretch of shoreline on the Mississippi where he was not. We agreed that embracing and accepting the body's continuous change and fragmentation helped us better hold or quantify the people that we had lost, as we could recognize that even after their death, our relationship with them would fluctuate for as long as we remembered them. By granting their remains the ability to fluctuate, degrade and transform, they once again become active entities and in our strange but comforting opinions, continue living.

The catalyst for ***To Hold a Body*** occurred while attending these funeral services and ceremonies for my grandfather. A few months after he died, my grandmother requested my family to gather once again for an additional ceremony for family and friends near Chicago. The evening of the memorial, I listened to stories and witnessed tears shed by his former co-workers, friends and family. I was able to imagine him, walking around a Chicago plaza while on his lunch break, traveling on business trips for his banking job, and playing soccer with people who later grew into the roles of uncle. They were beautiful and mundane and unfamiliar.

A year into my life, my grandfather was struck by a car while biking. While the driv-

er was unharmed enough to flee the scene, the damage to Khunta's spine left him mostly paralyzed from the neck down. During that act of communal remembrance, I felt my understanding of my grandfather expand as I was introduced again and again to his younger self through the memories of others. I became aware of how different vestiges of "self" permeate the porous and corporeal borders of others, and how this creates inconsistencies and opportunity for transformation.

While processing my grief I spent a lot of time thinking about the decades which Khunta spent restricted by body, and attempting to imagine what his life looked like before the accident. I began questioning where the self is housed, as my fictional reimaginings of the stories from the memorial felt like more fitting remembering of Khunta than my own. Since taking a digital studies course and being exposed to cyberfeminist theories like the avatar through the writings of Donna Haraway and Legacy Russel, I have been questioning the idea that we—and every facet that constitutes our selves, only extend as far as the edges of our physical bodies. When listening to these decades old stories I found comfort in imagining Khunta's avatar, a younger man, with more hair and moderate muscles. His calves would have shown signs of regular exercise with friends and nephews. His hips would be limber from the excessive dancing he'd do with me and my younger cousins. His fingers would've remained callused from his metal guitar strings used to pluck love songs for my Grandmother.



Grandma and Khunta in Western Springs, IL

A note from the artist

Truthfully, I do not know what this Portfolio has devulged into, or when exactly it began to become what it now is. all I know is that I would like to be done.



The First Altar

Between the period of 2009 - 2015, Khunta mailed my family a dense shoebox's worth of handwritten notes. In content the cards were often concerned with birthdays or checks from his quarterly dividends. Despite him often only writing out a hundred words or less, accumulated in those cards are hours of labor. He sits in my memory, with a sheet of notary paper, a pen in hand as he painstakingly carves out each inky character. And I watch as he patiently writes out the line *I love you* over the span of five minutes.

I began to shape his handwriting into a portrait of his withstanding devotion to those he loved, despite his battles with paralysis. I scanned his letters, photoshopped away extraneous details, printed them in greyscale onto transparencies and arranged them on a piece of 3.5 ft by 5ft muslin, treated with a cyanotype solution. The idea behind the form of the altar was to perform a material representation of the entropy of his aging body. While creating this altar, I was researching the work of Gustav Metzger, an artist and political activist. As I worked through material explorations and their capacity to express a portrait of my grandfather's relationship to his body, I became invested in the pieces and processes that Metzger later coined under the term auto destructive art. The form of auto destructive art (ADA) is innately political as it was a reaction to WWII and the Nazi regime, striving to redefine art and bring light to the relentless atrocities of the time. Unlike traditional art, ADA emphasizes the destruction of the art object as the art, rather than the preservation of the object¹. The idea of laboring over work as a means of leading to its inevitable disintegration, felt pertinent as I continued to reflect on Khunta's journey through atrophy and his later release through cremation.

Having seen examples of fabric being dipped into beeswax to create temporary structure, I decided to use this technique to create an entropic altar from the cyanotyped

muslin. I would dip the blue cloth into beeswax and subsequently let it mold and harden around the surface of two milk crates, in order to imply the presence of a small table below. By removing one of the milk crates and placing a vase of flowers above the other, I aimed to create a contradictory sense of structure both present and absent. For my performance, I was interested in the lack of control that I had seen in Gustav Metzger's ADA work. I placed candles on the surface of the altar with the expectation that the heat from the flames would slowly melt the beeswax coating the muslin, resulting in an impending deflation or complete burning of the altar. Evidence of altar's unadulterated form would then only be accessible through the memories of the viewers and the documentation footage.

For my final performance I lit the altar in the senior studio space and as a result blew out the flames once the muslin began to catch instead of letting it burn away. I then took the documentation video of my performance and ran it through a patch in the video editing program TouchDesigner, which created an artificial video looping effect, which distorted the viewer's sense of temporal placement within the act of the altar burning. This distortion of time is an essential element to how I have experienced grief. I wanted to visually question the assumption that the path towards recovery is a linear one and so created a video which could depict the start, middle and end of the burning could all exist in motion on the same plane with one another. I projected this video back over the burned altar and mapped it so the edges of the physical altar and projected melted into one another. As the projection ran, I played a short audio clip of looping chants performed by the monks during Khunta's second funeral. My inclusion of audio was in effort to make the performance more immersive and to elicit, for viewers, an experience of semantic satiation; the phenomena of a word losing its meaning and transforming in sound and texture upon the oversaturated repetition of the word.

After this iteration of the altar, which like the earlier poem I similarly titled *Letters from Khunta*, I resolved that I would like the next iteration to be another durational performance utilizing projection and audio, though this time it would lean further into it's

¹ Metzger, Gustav, and Mathieu Copeland. *Gustav Metzger - Act or Perish! A Retrospective*. Nero, 2016.



I also embroidered the borders of Bangkok, Western Springs and Sarasota onto

A very special
I Khunta did
in Thailand To
I'll never meet
man and dad if
is to attend
campaign - Urban
y meet each other
ve and accept
- will be
never know
into new group
em turn out
of friends
Technology

Happy Birthday
to you and family
and friends
Love you
Khunta

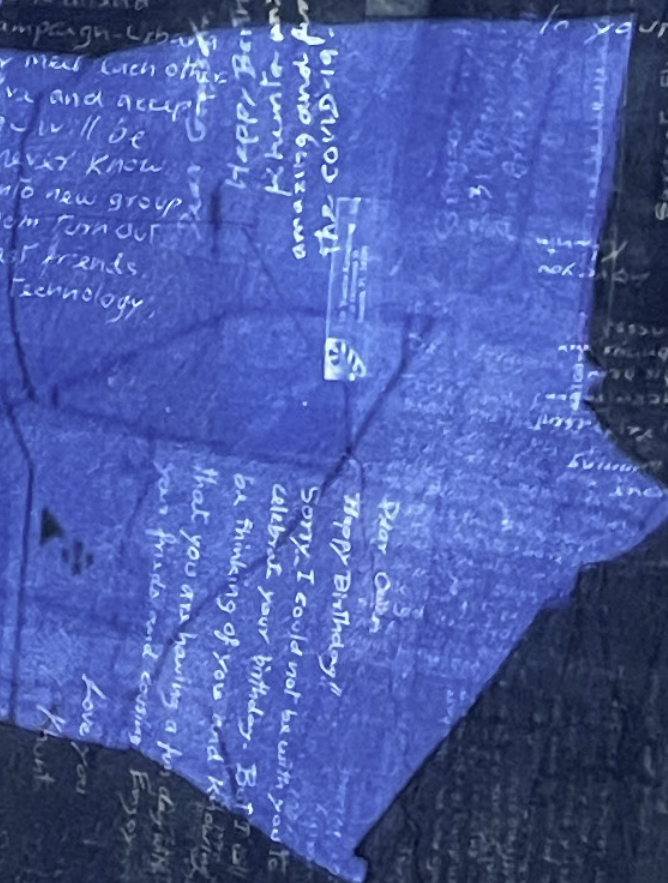


I have been going for physical
therapy. I will be done very soon
more love

I miss you. Please extend my love
to your parents for me.

Sambod, Phnom
October 16, 2008

Dear Khunta
I love you
I miss you
I hope you are well
I hope you are happy
I hope you are healthy
I hope you are successful
I hope you are loved
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed



Happy Birthday
to you and family
and friends
Love you
Khunta

Dear Khunta
Happy Birthday!
Sorry I could not be with you to
celebrate your birthday. But I'll
be thinking of you and Khunta
that you are having a fun day with
your friends and family. Enjoy!

Love you
Khunta

I have been thinking about
you and your family
I hope you are well
I hope you are happy
I hope you are healthy
I hope you are successful
I hope you are loved
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed

Love you
Khunta

Enjoy today and
day as your special
day



parents and
and grandchildren
I hope you are well
I hope you are happy
I hope you are healthy
I hope you are successful
I hope you are loved
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed
I hope you are remembered
I hope you are missed

alamy

the muslin. This detail was not as noticeable after dousing the fabric in beeswax.

Gustav Metzger

1961

Metzger wears a gas mask while painting three nylon curtains with hydrochloric acid, causing them to disintegrate



Letters from Khunta

2022

Audio of monks chanting at the second funeral, Cyanotyped muslin, beeswax, twine, found candles, found flowers and vase



own destruction.

I left Letters from Khunta asking these questions:

How can the materiality of the sentimental object influence how we conceive of/remember a person?

How can I physically express the ways the self extends beyond the borders of the body through the use of metaphor and sensorial stimulation?

Where are our loved ones stored within our different mechanisms for reminding and can our awareness of this help us remember them more fully ?

What is the role of ritual in our remembering and how does it operate if our memory returns to us changed every time we exercise the means to recall it?



Stills from the documentation video of
Letters from Khunta

M a k i n g The Second Altar

As I continued to conduct material experiment while further unpacking my experiences at my grandfather's memorial service and my shifting understanding of him, I began to chart moments when I have witnessed vestiges of myself and others extending beyond the borders of the body and into physical space. I began to consider where in my life I've felt my fragments of self housed in the external vessels of objects, places and documents. While tracking these fissures, I was reminded of the writings of digital feminist theorist Legacy Russell, and their concept of multiplicity, written in *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. While tracking these fissures, on the importance of recognizing our own multiplicity in order to radically reimagine our innate potential. In accepting our liberated from the oppressive categories which fracture and force our innately vast, intersectional, fluctuating, and contradictory selves into ill fitting containers², I have become more conscious of the way that I've experience and when I notice my many wriggling selves which inhabit this single body. My interest in our ability to access and recognize our multiplicity through looking to external objects as extensions of ourselves led me to Karen Barad's essay, *Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart*³

In her essay *Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart*, author Karen Barad discusses about the optical phenomena of diffraction, explains it's relevance in feminist theory and its origin in physics. Barad establishes diffraction as a force which troubles dichotomies and binaries while referencing the works of feminist theorists Trinh Minh-ha, Gloria Anzaldúa, Donna Haraway and physicists Neils

Bohr and Francesco Grimaldi. By physics experiments with queer outcomes, unexplainable when exercising binary thinking, Barad establishes her conception of diffraction as a force of multiplicity through the prevalence of multiple-truth contradictions and differences.

To tow the line between physics and theory, Barad cites the notorious split-slit experiment. In the experiment the electrons exhibit this queer behavior operating as both waves, and particles, depending on the context from which the experiment is observed. This experiment undermines science's reputation for objectivity by demonstrating the potential for multiplicity, while also showing the way that strict dichotomies and classification can stifle scientific progress. The experiment's multiplicity is contingent on material and temporal conditions and thus the behavior of the electrons is able to shift in and out of such a phenomenon, with the important and radical takeaway being that there is always the potential to change, to return, to become. Accessing and recognizing multiplicity allows for identity to traverse time nonlinearly, to occupy multiple realities, to rework and iterate through space and time.

After reading the way in which Barad used the double-slit experiment to inform and further feminists discourse on the concept of multiplicity I began to consider the object as also being a site for housing and exhibiting multiple truths. Just as Khunta's body was involved differently between the two funerals, the semantics of an object, and one's behavior towards it often depends on the the context that it is being approached from. In the case of objects of sentimental value, there is nothing that needs to change to the materiality of the object for it to gain the utility of evoking memory. In this way, the act of sentimentalizing can transform an object beyond its original use and into something which might contradict the very reason for it's production. And as evident in the split-slit experiment, because the context is often personal, the object's proximity to sentimentality is conditional. The object is just as able to be observed through the eyes of someone outside of the context, and thus can always return to being used as it was originally designed for.

² Russell, Legacy. *Glitch Feminism a Manifesto*. Verso, 2020.

³ Barad, Karen. "Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart." *Parallax*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2014, pp. 168-187.

Having lived within the landscape of Ann Arbor, MI for approximately two decades, my experiences and memories had the time to accumulate in physical spaces around town. With each space each containing its own vast and contradictory contexts. A campus of brick and mortar vestibules, which provides opportunities for time travel and reconsideration in in-between spaces, shaped by relationships fractured and mended. Inflated boxes gorge themselves on identities and associations of academic prestige, evidence of progress, moments of outsidership, memorializations for afternoons spent cheaply, and perversions of library study spots. These meditations on how our intangible and shifting relationships to time, memory, and identity can be contained by physical objects and social spaces led me to the essay *Death, Memory and Material Culture* by Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey.

Hallam and Hockey use an anthropological lens to examine the phenomena of material culture being used to mediate our memories of the deceased through. The authors argue against the assumption that the dead are sequestered from the living by charting cultural instances of reemergence of the deceased into the lives of the living. Specifically, how fragments of the deceased have been intentionally stored in seemingly static objects and embodied memories, across in many civilizations across time. Hallam and Hockey argue that the cultural phenomena of tethering ephemera to objects, can be observed across societies as a means of coping inevitable deterioration of memory. By imbuing objects with memories, there is the hope that the memory might retain some of the material's resilience and allow for an objective and true memory to be accessed again and again. It is easier to find false comfort in tethering the immaterial to tangible or cultivable objects like jewellery, furniture, places, smells, then worry about the inevitable decomposition of memory.

In my research I have become fascinated by the ways in which I see these compulsions for preserving an individual emerge in my own rituals of remembrance, and tracking back how these methods first emerged in my relationship with grief.

After losing a close friend at the age of 14, I remember coated my hands in the familiar scent of her Hempz original lotion. Her family invited me and others over to sequester her clothing and belongings in the arms of brown paper bags. It was a strange experience, floating through her room and belongings, flipping through in search of dog eared pages, and delving into desk and dresser drawers. Disregard after disregard for all previous conventions of privacy.

In the years after I would wear her clothes and notice the ways they laid differently on our bodies. I would wonder if they'd still fit her now. I slept with a T-shirt of hers for months and treasured its residual scents; remnants of her which grew fainter as I steadily eroded the threads. I amassed gigabytes sized evidence of her presence and our friendship through compiling records of her digital footprint. I listened to her Spotify playlists while visiting the landmarks in town synonymous with specific songs. A ritual to retrace her steps and view this town through her movements

After reading *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, I reflected on my fixations on permanence and transience, and the desire to replicate in times of grief. replication as futile attempts towards retention. I observed the ways in which individuals attain closure by allowing the body of the deceased to transform into object, as I had when I was nine, and subsequently allow the objects to stand in for the body, as I did with Laura's clothes.

object→body / body→ object

With my practice steadily moving towards the intangible materials of video and projections, I began to worry about the difficulties of displaying my work after losing access to the white boxed institution. I began to consider the materiality of my mediums more and became interested in the historical uses of clay and wax as both metaphorical and physical stand-ins for the body. With my interests in auto destructive art, wax became a particularly intriguing material to serve as metaphor for

cyclical patterns of deterioration and reimagination, as it has historically be used to do so through in a myriad of forms spanning funereal effigies for British royalty to wax limbs known as ex-votos which are strung up in some Brazilian churches, tokens for God asking for recovery from an ailment affecting the cast limb.



wax ex-votos hanging from a church ceiling in Brazil⁴

I decided to pivot my project toward the unfamiliar processes of plaster mould making, slipcasting, silicon mould making and wax candle casting so that I could indulge in the act of creating many multiples and amassing an altar through the assemblage of these many separate parts. By recreating many multiples of the same objects, I also hoped to treat each object a bit less preciously as I experimented with different processes of destruction. And in creating multiples, the chance for inconsistencies and to occur from wear and tear or downright mistakes was higher.

During process of creating candles, there are windows of time, when the beeswax has just cooled enough that the texture mimics the elasticity of flesh and the warmth mimics the presence of life. I was interested in how the just modifying the materiality of the piece could add so much conceptual depth. In order to further explore this medium's materiality and to challenge the previous order of transformation of body into object and object into body, I decided cultivate my own wax out of beef fat in order to make something that was both body and object at once. Through the slow laborious act of rendering tallow, I to become immersed in this intimate transition. I cleaned off the fat, severing once useful organs and grissel from the soft glissening oil slab.

This rendering occurred towards the beginning of my work with wax and thus was

one of the first instances that I remarked on the amount of passive time wrapped up in the medium. This need for passive time appears across different processes of mould making and casting. In the process of creating plaster molds, requires at least 45 minutes for the liquid plaster to set up. This pattern is echoed in the processes of melting the wax, waiting for the clay slip to set, waiting for the wax to melt, waiting for the excess slip to drain out or harden, waiting for the candles to set, waiting for the candle to burn. There was a lot of waiting and uncertainty about the outcome, and hoping things would work out, and forgetting to turn off the hotplate at night, and anticipating and waiting and anticipating and impatience and waiting and and and, having to accept the need to wait as a true outside of your control and learning that patience may be a virtue but that it will also save you a lot of time.

My friend, Mira Simonton-Chao first made me aware of the potential of creating ceramic objects from the process of slipcasting. I had been worrying about the cost of the materials necessary to create the the amount of ceramic moulds I had originally envisioned, even with the funding I had received from Arts Engine. I also had many moments where I felt seeped in ridiculousness as I hopped and crawled across my studio floor, weaving my way through obstacles, just so I could pour one cup of brightly colored silicon sludge solution into another. And though the wax is more tangible than my previous work, it was not designed to endure. But then again neither are the unglazed ceramics. An altar of precarity, assembled through patience and caution, the disassembled one handful at a time, the reassembled, repositioned, recreated.

Throughout this object work I continued to refer back to the practice of Felix Gonzalez-Torres and his work with *memoriam*, as described through the eyes of Bell Hooks, and told in the short essay *Subversive beauty: new modes of contestation*.

⁴ Odedina, Sarah. "Rooms Full of Wax Legs: The Strange and Moving Tradition of Ex-Voto Offerings." Atlas Obscura, Atlas Obscura, 10 June 2021, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-strange-and-moving-gifts-left-at-a-brazilian-church>.

In her essay, *Subversive beauty: new modes of contestation*, Bell Hooks positions beauty as the subversive function of sustaining life in the face of deprivation. Hooks discusses how beauty is wielded this way in the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Gonzalez-Torres' work centers around experiences of intimacy, grief and loss, and our capacity to know love and death. He once stated that the beauty in his art is not contained in the object itself but in the moment of art/viewer interaction.

Gonzalez-Torres' work occupies moments of habituality, monotony and consists of ubiquitous yet semiotically dense objects like beds, lightbulbs and graphs. Gonzalez-Torres' ability to transform these ordinary objects into intimate and specific portraits of a person, through small but devastating gestures inspired me to leave the video of the altar's burning unedited.

The metaphor for the deterioration of a loved as the removal of mass from his piece like his 1991 piece, *Untitled (portrait of Ross)*, makes the work autobiographical by implicating the emotions and actions of the audience. It is this quality, this invitation from Gonzalez-Torres' work to make sense of the world, to witness the truth of his testimonies and their presence in our lives, that Hooks centers her essay around. This balance of producing an intimate work that still gestures into the experiences of the audience was a quality I aspired for my project to have since reading the essay at the start of Fall 2022.



Woman interacting with *Untitled (Portrait of Ross)* at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago²

Now As I write about my work in conversation with *Untitled (Portrait of Ross)*, i see them both as using metaphors for these non-representational portraits in attempts to provide alternative metrics for quantifying the incommensurable loss of a loved one. My pro-
5 Eckardt, Steph. "The New Met Breuer Wants You to Take Candies, Not Photos." W Magazine, W Magazine, 13 Mar. 2016, <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/felix-gonzalez-torres-candy-the-met-breuer>.

duction of the altar became my ritual. The need for passive time became built in it. As I continued to work with moulds and amass more pieces for this accumulating altar, I began to realize how well the process of casting works, and their illusion of identicalness worked well as a metaphor for processes of memory and the revisiting, recontextualizing and reconsideration which happen during recall.

I plan to write a long section here to discuss the making of the Audio Soundscape with Sam Uribe Botero, the man who mixed it.

Imagine that we will talk about the influence of *32 Sounds* a film by Sam Green over the composition of this piece.

Imagine that we will talk about the contexts of the sounds which transformed into landscape.

monk

chants

testimonies by family, friends and coworkers

*two separate hour long sound walks
one a loop between Vail Co-op
and the Hatcher stacks,
the other a loop from Vail Co-op*

audio from the burning of the altar

During/After the Burning

A school years ruminations on grief, life, objects, body, wax, clay and metaphors coalesced in *To Hold a Body*, an enduring video installation which investigates the influence of material culture and rituals on the production and transformation of memory. This project speculates on memory recollection as an accumulation of ever fluctuating abstractions, with each act of recalling producing a slightly different memory from the previous one.

With this piece I attempted to understand the nebulous nature of memory through the process of mould making. Although I did not recognize this until later into my work with mold making and casting, the process of casting multiple objects from the same mould acted as metaphor speaking to the misconception of memory as objective and unchanging. *To Hold a Body* was built out of ritual of returnings, waitings and releases. Upon every exit, each object leaves its silicon or plaster womb slightly changed from when it entered.

The moulds transformed into metaphor while the process of casting transformed into ritual. The objects became bridges between myself and those I remembered through their forms. Materials became methods of quantification to help me better understand myself in periods of grief and mourning.

Through the creation of audio and visual stimulants this landscape of materials and metaphors serves as access points into amorphous vignettes of the remembered. *To Hold a Body* aims to question the assumption that the self only extends as far as the body through asking viewers to consider and reflect on their experiences of reencountering or re-considering a relationship after a loved one's death. Through the acts of sharing memories, listening to specific songs, or revisiting significant places, we can witness the expansive facets of the self in the absence of the body.

After lighting the left half of the altar, I realized that in my efforts to complete the filming before 4am, I had not taken the time to step back and take in the body that I had spent the last 3 months building and the last 7 months ideating. The video camera was raised barely high enough to catch the reflection of the mirror. I did not have another camera to document the burning in photographs or video. And with each regret for what I would have done differently, more of the candles disappeared into smoke and I stood still as I watch months of work literally burn away, puddle and evaporate.

There is so much more that I would like to write about this, and I know that I will, but for now I will leave it at this. But know that I am proud of this project and intend to continue casting from my moulds till they completely erode or are lost to time.











BFA Thesis Project
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