

# ***Salpique:***

*The backlash of the things that are given to me that I can give to you, that is all.*

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Everything in my life feels connected. Like the math that helps us understand the quantum physics and the microcosmos. To understand one thing, you cannot study it on its own. Context makes something what it is.

Conversely there is uniqueness and individuality that is unwaveringly inherent in an individual. Some people call this a soul, I think. To me, it is hard to see but lovely to discover. Everyone glows & sparkles if you can get close enough. Knowing someone is another iteration of the same thing, as is knowing oneself.

I am loathe to believe connection and singularity are mutually exclusive. The nature of my practice is in a sense, the balance of how these two ideas form a dichotomy, their interplay with one another, how that relationship plays out. Individualism and collectivism are two concepts that often rage against each other being parsed in consecutive iterations by different groups. If you are lucky, you align with a group in all the ways that are important to your individuality & understanding of existence. If you are like the rest of us, you must forge your own path. And it is backbreaking.

My past has made me into a cautious person. I don't know how to explain this in a way you can understand because I tend to feel misunderstood. Simply put, I am an extremely sensitive person & I always have been. To everything. But more intricately, I can pull the sinew of my life out and understand how each strand has formed my current understanding and relation to the world. That is what my practice is, I think. Airing out things that I do not understand or protecting them from harm until they are strong enough to be free of me. As I understand each piece on their own, I am building a lattice to create the whole of myself. As I watch others do the same and interact with them, we are woven into each other's orbit: in entropy and creation.

It is exhilarating and exhausting to navigate the intercession of one's own existence continuously. Some people have a destination in mind, or multiple destinations. Some people are content to float with the current. Most practice both things in different areas in their life. And often, it happens that disagreements on when & how to float and pursue arise causing division.

Division can cause harm, but I am not convinced that it is inevitable. Conflict can also be the basis for curiosity, understanding, and the calamitous contradictory nature of being known. I want to be seen & I want to see you. Observing all things has been a continuous spring mouth of joy and wonder in my life. Being observed often comes from within the protection of a void, with so many sharps present. I like the vacuum. It is beautiful in its own way. But it takes work to get there. And work to stay. If you desire to see the vulnerability in this place, I invite you to peel off each squamous preconception to life's refracting axioms, and wear my eyes. If you let me wear yours too, it goes faster. I'm not sure it is possible to do one completely without the investment of the other.

I dare you to hold my gaze & attention. We can both win this game if we want to.

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I write in circles because I think in circles. I hope you have a strong stomach & sea legs.

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*Special thanks to Shiloh, my heart and blood. Gratitude is owed well to all the friends who brought me to this moment: Kay Turnbull, Thomas Lazzari, Ethan Snow, Isabella Tallman-Jones & Andrew Heidesch. I would've never made it without you. Thank you to all the professors and my committee who guided me, Eileen Wallace, Jon Vogt, Melissa Harshman and Jon Swindler. And last but never least, thanks to June Clary for all the times we've had together and all that are yet to come.*

## ***Entropy:***

- *The cards we are dealt.*
- *Limits. etc.*
- *People's perception of who we are and what we can do and why we are doing what we are doing. (the other)*
- *natural disaster.*
- *The meaning of being disabled*
- *The experience of being mentally ill with a poor support system.*

During my time in graduate school, I was diagnosed with disabilities & mental illnesses.

Specifically: Attention deficit hyperactive disorder<sup>1</sup>, anxiety<sup>2</sup>, depression<sup>3</sup>, with the possibility of autism<sup>4</sup> and borderline personality disorder<sup>5</sup>. The overlap in symptoms between each disorder and the observed symptoms of others is such that the feeling is as familiar as my own skin and as foreign as the atmosphere on another planet. My mind understands but my body cowers<sup>6</sup>.

Being disabled seems straightforward enough, you know? It seems to mean that a person cannot function within the regular parameters of society & should receive accommodations so they can

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<sup>1</sup> NIMH, "Attention."

<sup>2</sup> NIMH, "Substance Abuse."

<sup>3</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "DSM-5 Changes." Table 9

<sup>4</sup> DSM-5 "Autism Spectrum Disorder."

<sup>5</sup> NIMH, "Borderline Personality Disorder."

<sup>6</sup> Brom et. al, "Somatic Experiencing."

achieve equality<sup>7</sup>. But this is not the case. Or rather, everything gets dicey the more invested you become in the disabled community.

There is something called a victim complex<sup>8</sup>. It is not a useful way to exist. It is when you perceive that you are being treated unfairly by those around you & that everyone owes you more than what you have. It is a valid state of being. The disabled community is full of victims whose identity & issues double up on oppression concerning race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and neurodivergence. Each issue is compounded by it's adjacent neighbors and everything becomes too heavy to carry. It is too much for an individual to bear. So we seek community.

Community though, is complicated<sup>9</sup> because it involves having an in group, and having an "other"<sup>10</sup>. Privilege becomes confusing when there is an overlap of generosity and jealousy. This is the crux of desire. Wanting to have something. Wanting someone else to experience something. Opposing desires. It is complicated enough. Now add systems of power to the mix.

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<sup>7</sup> "Americans With Disabilities Act."

<sup>8</sup> Dan Brennan, "Victim Mentality."

<sup>9</sup> Carola Huttman, "Helping Write."

<sup>10</sup> Choi JooYoung, "Theory of the Other."



Figures bend, leap and sway in torment or deliverance from it. There is the comfort of having a body that is everlasting, or perhaps mortal and the horror of chronic pain reassert itself when certain actions are performed. Additionally, the faces and bodies of these figures exude emotion in abundance.

There are no disabilities on my roster that necessarily align with chronic pain, but there are common comorbidities across mental illness. Anxiety and depression often co-occur<sup>11</sup>, as do ADHD and anxiety<sup>12</sup>, while BPD is not thoroughly understood. It has been posited that childhood trauma and a general sensitivity to the world (physically and mentally) are two contributing factors<sup>13</sup>. BPD is one of the only disorders here that can go into remission or be cured. The rest are lifelong. Society's infrastructure creates a friction in interaction with the world. The systems that have been built to uphold order and conventions have deep cracks. And I slither through.

Does coping get easier? I don't know, I don't know. But it is enough. This is enough. I will say it until I am sure as I want to be.

I began my interaction with mental health practitioners in the fall of 2020. It was discussed that I had been coping mainly through dissociation<sup>14</sup> and derealization<sup>15</sup>. Everything felt fake, and I would often notice myself losing awareness and cognition during teaching, lectures,

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<sup>11</sup>Rogers, Wieman & Baker, *Anxiety Comorbidities*. pp 77-103

<sup>12</sup> Larry Silver, "Not Just ADHD."

<sup>13</sup>Michelle Pugle, "Causes of BPD."

<sup>14</sup> The feeling of being unreal. Often one feels inhuman or uncanny. It is difficult to see my reflection as being me, and often my own hands look foreign. I also will feel like I am driving my body instead of inhabiting it. As if my self was lagging behind my body like a plastic bag kite.

<sup>15</sup> The feeling that your surroundings are not real. This can be dangerous because it is difficult to understand the consequences of one's actions and impact on others, especially when co-occurring with a BPD episode. It is difficult to drive because I stop comprehending safety, space, and velocity.

conversation, and class. With guidance and time, I relied less on the unhealthy strategies and became more aware of my consciousness and its tether to reality.



As an unforeseen consequence, BPD blossomed in what had been a void of emotion and coherence. The jarring faces of the figures reflect the intensity of emotion that course through me when an episode is triggered<sup>16</sup>. Feelings of fear, panic, cruelty and loathing spiral around continuously. It is not predictable how long an episode will last. It can be from 2 hours to a week or more. The absence of dimensional space floats the figures untethered to coherence. In their purest form, they bear the judgments of others while exposing their emotional experience. They have no choice because they are overcome with feeling. And it pours from them.

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<sup>16</sup> Erica Cirino, "Splitting."



I need rest now. I need a nap, I need to breathe, I need to exist without trying. But everything rotten that was buried fermented the earth above it. The foundation of things was soft and treacherous, hungry for weak ankles and knees. Instead of rest, I began sinking. I felt like I was everything; spacetime folded over itself until it was compact enough to create an event horizon in my retina. I did not like being a black hole. I do not enjoy an existence of endless consuming evermore. There is no glory or salvation in war. Only grief I think. Although there are always beautiful things hidden in the present.

For as long as I have comprehended myself, I have conceptualized my role as that of a fighter. My identity was built from rage and justice and pain. I yearn. Why anyway? In turning over my

yearning, I revealed sadness and longing and pity and confusion and so many things. The most precious piece I discovered was desire.

What is the point of desire and why do we feel it? If its fruition is to be fulfilled, why do we desire things beyond our reach? Trees communicate with fungal networks.<sup>17</sup> They can see. I want to be a tree. I want to photosynthesize in the sunshine. Chlorophyll instead of blood. What a disturbing phenomenon to be made out of meat.

There are so many threads that wove together this labyrinthine tapestry of understanding that I can't quite parse what each one is made of. Desire's point is to be itself. Desire is a feeling.



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<sup>17</sup> Richard Grant, "Do Trees?"

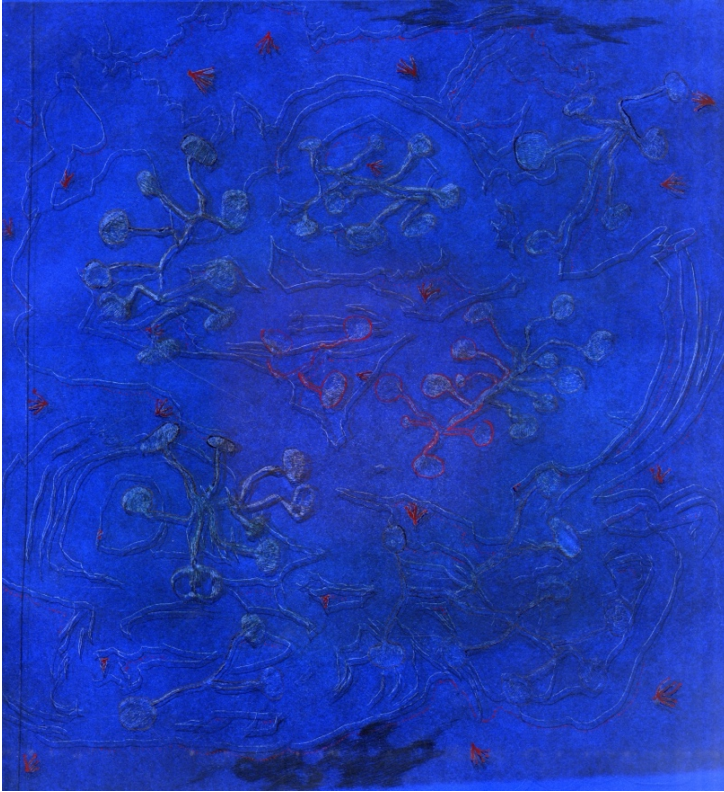
## ***Creation:***

- *Observing & seeing,*
- *Knowing & understanding,*
- *negotiating*
- *learning*
- *discovery.*
- *All my tethers to reality and to here and now.*
- *June saying I am not afraid of you.*

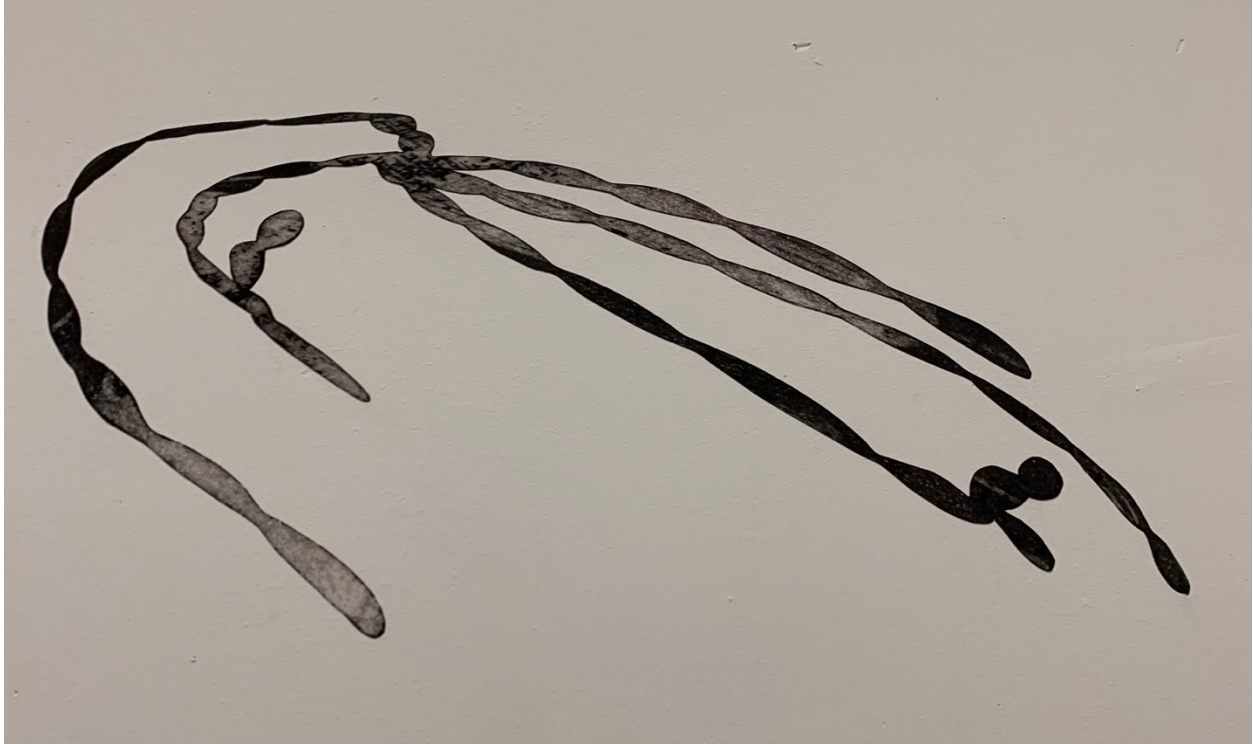
The sharpest edge I have found to cut through the thick sludge of whirlpool thoughts is distilled reality. Note that this is not a coping mechanism of my own volition. I had to be taught gently how to see my own hand without panic<sup>18</sup>. Maybe it is evident that an artist should be able to observe for 5 consecutive minutes the shape, color, texture and vitality of their best tools. But being still for a long while was an opportunity for rancid horror to descend into my basal tissue. The tremors begin. I breathe without oxygenating my blood. Dizzy spells. My mind is convinced I'm dying. I'm sure death is near. And I am afraid of the reality, finality and unknowable nature of it.

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<sup>18</sup> This is an exercise taught in ACT therapy. One of the main practices focuses on mindfulness and being present. You eventually learn to edit and observe your own thoughts and feelings through becoming "unhooked" from them, but first you are taught to sit with your feelings. The observation of one's own hand is an introduction to meditation. Jane Butt, "Mindfulness."



But self-reflection alone becomes rubbery, grainy and difficult to swallow. So I moved to learning to observe the way breath flows through you. The way a fire consumes and provides. The feeling of being baked by the sun. Tactile and sensory input that could be processed at my natural pace, without a limit or standard was the first bandage I wove. My sensitivity to noise prompted me to make my first pieces as lithographs, with imagery that was abstract but still vaguely figural. The motion, weight and color of these pieces translated to line and tone in etchings. The depth and clarity of ink on paper was once more regurgitated and processed through digital media and scale. When encountering a piece that has been enlarged beyond the expanse of a human body, the ruptures and flow of each form feel indifferent, naturalistic, and ancient in the way of the ocean. A monolithic scale casts the Anthropocene and singular nature of one's humanity against the ebb of time, the insistence of space and the glib nature of consciousness.



The nature of emotions inside me is in shapes, heat, light, and color. In a synesthetic array, the process of befriending the primordial soup of my guts came before the ability to directly contend with the disparity and contradictions of my mind. Learning to map the labyrinthine lattice of nerve endings that had been shut down and dampened through repeated exposure and ignorance bore an understanding that language and speech were never able to reach. My subconscious expressed this in the expressions of face and body of my figures. Their twisted limbs and hot blood razed through anger, spite and justice. Tenderness, pain and wretched misery are present in a figure who is too weak to hold a straight line. Their postures often crumple beneath their own weight and the water pressure of so many tears. Needle teeth and claws are a warning sign, that spit and danger broil close at hand. And the most precious of all these is the tender caresses, the gentle holds and the soft touch of a sharp blade to fingernail. The sweetness of pets and sleep are

such a rarity in the depictions because these things must be protected. They are formed to share intimately and must be handled with care and attention.



The masses are a fickle thing. They know how to stampede and riot, which are good and necessary things. But the nature of listening to the silence of breath is so delicate that it has become a scarce occurrence in my work. More often it is seen in a glance or plant or star in the surrounding area.

## ***Maintenance/coping:***

- *Making it so I can think and see.*
- *Decompression & intake control.*
- *Synesthesia & autism & stimming.*
- *Meltdowns & shutdowns*
- *making & implementing systems, fine tuning. Something feels off until it feels right.*

Synesthesia<sup>19</sup> impacts my understanding of the world in ways that made little sense until I became aware of its presence in my experience. Objects contain personalities, and often gender. Colors prompt motion, action and feeling. Colors and numbers overlap one another. 4 is black, heavy, burnished, and monolithic. 2 is growing and expansive in all directions, like the big bang or the roots of an interconnected forest. Beautifully chaotic, and unmappable.

Input and output are the most sensitive of systems. Experiencing light, sound, time etc. is an incredibly variable and dependent thing. It fluctuates daily & is affected by so many things. Vyvanse made me feel too much. I needed to knock myself out with alcohol. I cut my hair. I shave my arms. I take off my glasses when everything is so sharp it burns. I must have adjustable input if I am to continue functioning. I am learning to adjust or cope.

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<sup>19</sup> In essence, the overlapping of multiple senses. Like cross referencing, but not with any discernable rhyme or reason.



Output is different. It is a combination flavor of tangy and bland. It is so thick I cannot swallow. Or breathe. I fear suffocation. Output is the process of release, expulsion, or labor. Every time it is different, and I can never predict if output will assist my state of mind or drag my frail neurons through the process of reinforcing pathways once more.

*Right now it is difficult. I feel my mind wants to rest. It is deep underwater. But I know there are good things within the depths that I can use. Algae for air. Detritus. So I am coaxing out my words.*

Expulsion feels like ants crawling in my blood. It is very few thoughts and so much somatic being. I need to get something out. I feel like I am exploding, or I am going to go insane. I am holding too much. It is a high intensity emotion & comes out as yelling, punching, itching, throwing, jumping, shaking. It is dangerous and people fear me when I am in this state. It could be called splitting. It could be called a meltdown. It is a violent rage that won't let me sleep or

think. It could be called hypomania. It could be called psychosis. These are all words I have used before. These are all words my friends and doctors have given to me or that I have found.

Accuracy matters when you feel everything. People have told me they hate labels. I hate the incoherence of their codependence on the speaker. I'm trying so hard to make sense.

I'm trying so hard to make sense. It is rare that a person can make sense of the things I expel. But sometimes if something has no form or lattice to grow on, it must first be expelled in order to come to fruition. I will write words that sound poetic with convoluted meaning. I scribble and doodle and scratch. I crumple things up. I pour my hands into my work. It can be good too.

There is so much electricity rushing through my forearms, you might receive a static shock. This is a relief. This is release.



The labor comes when there are essential tasks to be done and few spoons.<sup>20</sup> Labor is amenable though, like maintenance and care. Art is holy & maintenance is art<sup>21</sup> so maintenance is holy. Care is nestled structurally in the bedrock of the banal. The banal is holy. This is the whole concept of being present or mindfulness.<sup>22</sup> You have a body which is also your mind. The two coalesce in tandem to exist without contradiction and with congruency. Sometimes it works.

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<sup>20</sup> Spoons are a measure of energy coopted by the autistic community. Everyone has an allotment of spoons for the day and once you are out, you're out. It is sometimes possible to recharge spoons through activities or rest, but mostly, recharging requires sleep. Jaqueline Raposo "Spoon Theory."

<sup>21</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Manifesto."

<sup>22</sup> Russel Harris "Overview," 2-3.

***End:***

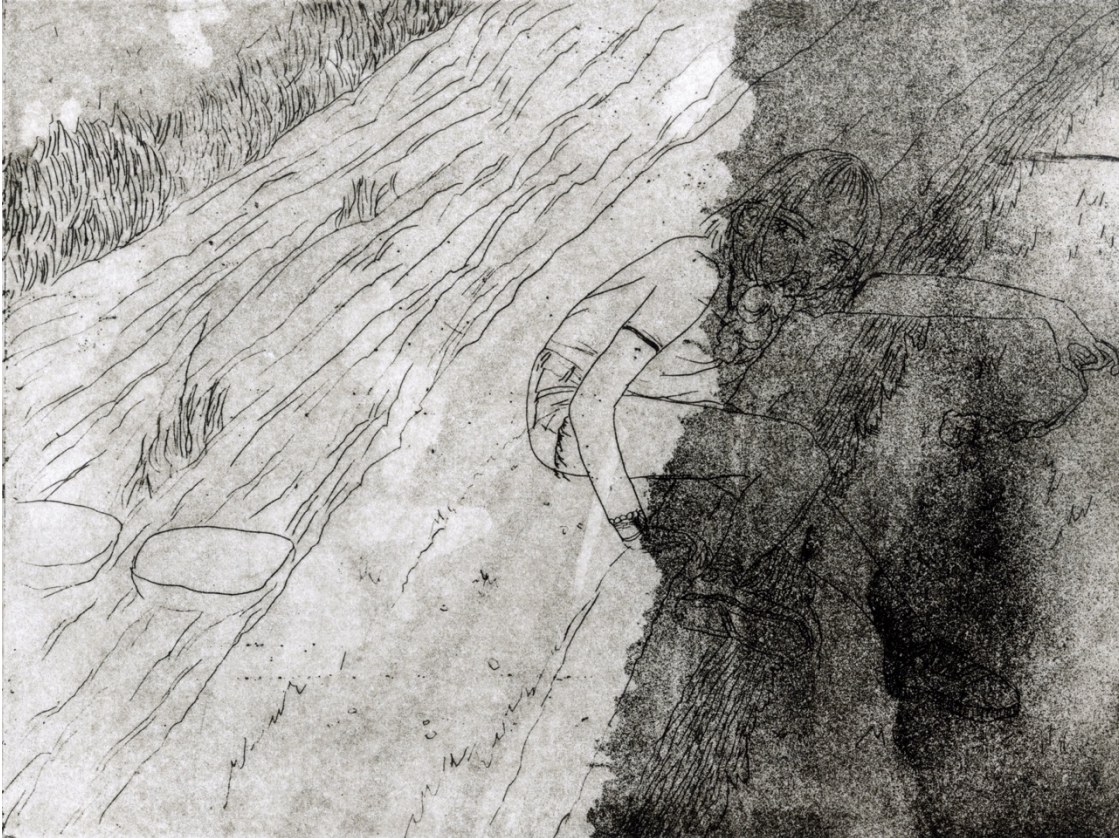
- *What we owe each other.*
- *Joy and pleasure are good. They are not the same as rest though. And we need them.*
- *I want to ask you questions too. & I want to listen.*



Feelings can tell us things about our needs, our past or give us the motivation to correct our course. To exchange desire for fulfillment is dysfunctional in my mind and body. They dance around each other in a false dichotomy, sometimes merging or pulling or creating a holding pattern. Desire is set up as the means, and fulfillment is the end. But if you travel in a circle, it all comes back around to start over. I cannot indefinitely exist in a state of pure satisfaction. How long would it take to grow bored of the feeling? There would be nothing to compare it to. Feelings are especially fleeting, and I forget them easily.

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There is an element of surrender, sure. But essentially for me I think, also agency and navigation. These are not mutually exclusive either. I try like so: instead of engaging opposing forces in a war of victors and the conquered, I hold every experience in my hand. I switch them between left and right to feel their shape and weight. I watch them move and be still. I study their colors and light. I learn them first, only after which I can create. I must personally know the thing's powers and weaknesses and skills and such. Every phenomenon has unique life and desires. You can fear the desire or rage against it or see it through. But often, and maybe always, the desire of a thing is to exist as itself. To stretch and fill the lines that have been carved into the tenderest of shapes. It is simple and undoing. Watch it move. Keep it safe, help it along, let it practice its own strength. Let it practice knowing. Let myself practice trusting. Let it all be and let yourself be a thing that keeps wanting. Desire is not a sin. It is life and will and the beginning of the universe. Or so I imagine.



The beauty of being human is that we can all trade who gets to be the higher power. We all take turns, and sometimes the person in charge does something that hurts you. It hurts. It pains. It is inevitable. But then, sometimes, you get to create your own world. It is a beautiful thing to behold. You can fill it with your treasures: The things you love & the people you love. And good things to keep and enjoy and share and to give away. As much as I can, I will bear the pain of sorrow and grief for the joy of love and connection.

But I know my own limits. I know my strengths and weaknesses. And I know what is beyond my ability. Human nature is also a higher power we surrender our individuality to. The substrates of power in our specific possession can be shaped into many things. Historically, the move has been to create a mold of goodness to which the moral and righteous ascribe. This is not a cunning or

salacious practice. Values and standards are guides<sup>23</sup>. Linking groups together in this way gives them agency. The proof is in the rigidity of empathy and understanding. It is necessary to create dynamics in which we are harmed less. It is good to listen and understand others. Humans are expansive carrying a breadth of meaning and sentimentality. Our nature and upbringing provide us with easy and sure paths to reach these things. But there are other things to be gathered through the integration and extraction of the self in a relationship, a community, a home. Everything I have, I have because I desired it. But these things come to me through the virtue of connection with people and experience. Chaos plays its part as well.

And then it comes back again. All over again. It is important to savor satisfaction. The concept of being satisfied. You know. It is just as important to love as many of the pieces as you can. Or to find something beautiful and watch it glow in the light. Maintenance is work. Our feelings and understanding of ourselves and others, is maintenance too. Of course maintenance is tedious. Time itself is tedious, never ending and never changing. So is entropy.

See all of these bridges of light and words I have built for you. Did you follow me? Chaos of the universe cannot be tamed or controlled. But it can be embraced. Rest assured it will embrace you back. Or don't, the embrace is the same regardless.

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<sup>23</sup> This is also an idea adopted from ACT. Harris, "Values," 1-2.

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