work and Work

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work and Work

by

Rebecca Baldwin

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts Studio Art, Hunter College
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2019

Thesis Sponsor:

May 13, 2019
Date

Carrie Moyer
Signature

May 13, 2019
Date

Paul Ramirez Jonas
Signature of Second Reader
Dedication:

To my paintings I will never forget you.
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TxtPlay April 11 - April 27, 2019, Installation View
Introduction

I spend most of my time at work digitizing correspondence from the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century to the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Paper letters with intricate script that I can barely read.

Digitization is happening in every institution for access and preservation of cultural heritage. In my tenure at the New York Public Library I have created 181,219 captures. I tend to shy away from participatory works. I am a hypocrite because I make participatory work. I have entered into an unspoken contract now. Despite my reluctance to perform and participate I feel I must in engage with the hope people participate in my project. I stopped making art for 7 years. I lied about it for 3 then started telling the truth about not making things. Part of the reason I came back was that I didn’t see my voice like mine in the conversation and I was starting to feel like I had something to add that was missing.

"work and Work" is a chart that spans between 2004-2019. It illustrates my work/job in the left column and my Work/art in the right column. The far left of the chart is a vertical timeline that flows throughout the whole document. Life influences art.
When I first moved to Brooklyn I got a job off of craigslist decorating red velvet cakes at Cake Man Raven Confections at 708 Fulton St. I started at $8.00 an hour, working roughly 40 hours a week. My rent was $800.00 and a weekly unlimited subway pass was $75.00. I worked upstairs with a couple other decorators. I was not very good at it but I found a niche icing the cakes that were meant to be sliced. I made cream cheese icing using three Kitchenaid mixers and refilled the confectionary sugar bins with the 50-lb bags. I got better at writing on the cakes and a career highlight was writing “Happy Birthday 50 Cent” on a cake. Eventually I made it up to $10.50 an hour. Years later 12 former employees filed a class action lawsuit for back pay and failed overtime payments. I was not owed any money so I was not a part of the suit. The workers won.

During this time I also was applying to graduate school and working in my studio-bedroom on 449 Troutman street. I had just graduated from RISD and attended Skowhegan, so I was expecting to get into any graduate school I wanted. I was making very strict work: I called my paintings “shaped canvases” but really I was just choosing images that were already rectangular in shape and painting them in a solid color. I was looking at Ellsworth Kelly, Peter Halley, Post-Minimalism and End Game Art. I am almost 100% sure I did not see myself as a woman artist and also did not seek out female-identified painters. I was terrified that I might be seen as a one trick pony but still made it anyway. Towers — two grey stretched canvas bars butted next to each other. Terror Spectrum 5 — the chart Homeland Security used display the threat level the US was under, I thought it looked like an Ellsworth Kelly spectrum painting so I made it. I also made a Bar Graph, Equals Sign, Pink Triangle and a Race Track Painting.

My work has been boring for years.
My second job in the city was working for an artist. I will not use the name of this artist because he is still making work and I decided to cut all ties. However, I will show images of the work because no one has ever seen it. I started at $375.00 a week. I worked with 4 other people in a building on West 25th Street in Chelsea. At the time the artist had three spaces in the building, a unit on the 8th floor, a unit on the 6th floor overlooking the rusty, dilapidated High Line, and a large exhibition space in the basement.

This artist was obsessed being like Jeff Koons so he modelled his staff, space, and output after Koons. He was in his 70s and made his money as a heart surgeon. During my time with him, he would have 5 shows a year for himself in his basement gallery but never managed to sell any artwork. Myself and a rotating cast of four other assistants painted his paintings. I would help the artist layout his paintings with Photoshop. These sessions would involve me sitting at the computer, working in Photoshop, with him barking orders over my shoulder: "No! Darker." "No! Lighter." "No! Smaller." "No! Bigger." "Perfect." "Wow you are so good at this program." He wanted the images to be rendered at 33 x 33 pixels. There was also a 66 x 66 pixel option.

Then, I would print the files with an inkjet printer onto large 33 x 33 inch canvases. The canvases would be painted on pixel by pixel with matching latex house paint from Home Depot. The next part of the process was silkscreening a grid of circles over the pixels, turning the squares into dots. Below is a sample of the work I helped make. The job was ok until it wasn't. It was easy, I liked the people working there, and we would go to fancy lunches and dinners with the artist. He gave us holiday bonuses, paid vacations and birthday presents (Louis Vuitton bags, bracelets from Tiffany's and Hermes ties... I sold my bag on ebay and bought a chop saw). Hanging out with him was a large part of the job. It always felt like a temporary gig that was 40 hours a week and seemed to have no end unless I quit or he died. I was making $505.55 a week by the time I quit. I left with an open invitation to return.

I was working very diligently in my studio bedroom and applying to graduate school. I had a setback the first time I applied: I never made it off the waitlist for Yale. I was upset but kept on going.
I had an easy and steady job so I felt like I’d be okay. I decided to re-apply to graduate school in next cycle to see what happened. My work became a little bit more complicated than the rectangles. I made a Less Than or Greater Than sign, Searchlights, a Full Reception sign and shaped canvases of mountains, streams and rainbows. I was trying to figure out how to make work that directly addressed my sexuality and started sneaking in references to rainbows and The Sound of Music. I was excited about the work and felt like I was getting better with materials and construction. I started using Flashe and better paint. My newfound focus on materials, construction and paint application was in reaction to the job and my boss’s disregard for the materials. I put together another application and reapplied to Yale, Columbia and USC. I got an interview at Columbia and was eventually waitlisted. My interview was bad. I was taking pointers from a hot, white straight man and thought I could pull off the same bullshit but really it made me look like a bitch. I brought my own slide carousel (slides!) to the interview with extra slides in it from art history to further illustrate what I was thinking about. I also asked the panel why I should pick Columbia, but I can’t recall their answer. In the studio I was thinking about Ellsworth Kelly, Caspar David Friedrich, Elizabeth Murray and Agnes Martin, and I had a cute tagline that said: “Memories and Minimalism — we will never forget you.” I really liked that time in my studio, my work felt like it was getting better and more complicated. I got better at making shaped canvases and got better with paint. My references were more layered and I felt stronger with painting. I didn’t get off the waitlist and into Columbia. The department head called the wrong number. I picked up the phone and he did not ask for me. I went off my rocker after that happened.
Nokia 6236i rings from other room.
Becca was expecting a call, climbs down lofted bed and answers cell phone just in time.
Becca: Hello?
Gregory: <with a virtuose tone> Hello!
This is Gregory Amenoff from Columbia University and Congratulations, Jessica, you will be apart of the incoming class.
Becca: <pauses> But, I'm Rebecca.
Gregory hangs up phone
Becca: Hello?
Line is silent. Becca returns to bed and cries.
2007

I quit my job with the artist on 25th street to get the hell out of there but also to work for Danica Phelps.

Subject: looking for some stripe painters
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 2007 21:57:46 -0500

Hello friends,

I am sending out a group email in the hopes of being able to find a few people to help me paint stripes ASAP. I just got my new computer set up, so there are a lot of friends who's addresses I don't have in here, so if you could spread the word, I would so hugely appreciate it. I'm offering $10.00/hour. It's fun. It's in Brooklyn, Prospect Heights. We listen to music, talk, paint stripes. It's seeming to be 10-6 at the moment, but that's flexible, and I would prefer five days, but that's flexible too. It's for a deadline for the Armory, but it should go till April, and maybe beyond. There are 2 people here so far, and I would like 4-5 at all times, if you know anyone who is interested, please let me know! Thank you so much,
Talk with you soon,
Danica

I was eager to work with a queer, woman artist who was showing and doing pretty well. I was interested in the conceptual components to Danica's work and liked keeping track of money with a system of red and green lines. My first couple months I worked, with five other assistants, in her studio which was an extra bedroom in her building in Crown Heights and undergoing renovation. Painting shades of red, green and grey lines on strips of paper with gouache was the main gig. The stripes recorded how much money was coming in and going out and how much debt she was accumulating. The largest panel we painted documented the loan she took out to buy the very building we were working in. One of the green panels showed the sale of work at the Armory and the red panel recorded outgoing expenses ranging from $5.00 at a bodega to (this was very surreal) to the paychecks going her studio assistants. I worked several months painting the stripes. In my experience of working for artists, I would first be hired to do a task like painting stripes or washing silkscreens. Then the artist would realize that I had other skills such as photography, scanning, Photoshop, image processing and organizing files.

My studio practice during this period was very strained. I was ashamed that I a hard time making things and had difficulty believing in anything I did make. I lied about making art to my friends, most of whom were deep into their graduate programs. I worked on half-hearted ideas and I wasn't sure why. Forcing myself to make something, I made Table and Chair with Richard Artschwager in mind and reworked Triangle, turning it into Cautionary Pride.
Danica decided to hire me full-time to scan and organize the past artwork and develop an archive. I also got hired to do the same kind of work for Ryan McGuiness. I think both jobs were $10.00-15.00 an hour. On my resume I list:

2007 Studio Assistant, Danica Phelps, Brooklyn, NY, 2007
Responsibilities included:
Painted straight lines with gouache.
Scanned, color corrected and archived images.
Aided in the day-to-day studio operations.

2007-8 Studio Assistant, Ryan McGuiness, New York, NY
Developed a custom database using Filemaker Pro.
Aided in silkscreening.
Worked on Illustrator files.

I didn’t have a clear goal for either my studio work or career. I took the rejections from graduate school really hard and felt lost. Around 2004-07, making one’s path through the art world appeared to be very clear. The artists CVs were almost identical from gallery to gallery. Successful people seemed to attend the same schools and residencies. Amongst my friends, avoiding a good job was a badge of honor. Better to have a a gig that didn’t matter or was infrequent so you could stay in the studio. At the time I saw grad school as a way to be saved from the stress associated with the ho-hum world of employment. So when acceptance to graduate school didn’t materialize, I felt abandoned, unable handle the dream anymore. My friend Alexis was completing her first semester at Yale and dragged me through the application process for the third time. I did not advance to interviews. Most people around me would talk about how applications are a crapshoot but, to me, it seemed like some people are really good at shooting crap.

I had more time to work in my studio but less confidence to do so. I started trying to directly talk about being gay. I saw a program at MoMA of feminist video art. I went to every screening. This is a complete list of the programs I saw:

- FEEDBACK: THE VIDEO DATA BANK, VIDEO ART, AND ARTIST INTERVIEWS

Thursday, May 17
10:00pm, Program 1. Excerpted interviews by women artists, curators, and curators reflect issues that have influenced the development of feminist video art. Most women’s programs are focused on the 1970s, but this program also includes Maria Tatar, a woman who worked on the VDB Collection, footage by The People’s Video Theater of the first women’s liberation march in 1971, and a 20-minute section on film. Program 30 min.

11:00pm, Program 2. Leslie Bresnihan: An Interview. 1975 ed. 2003. Bourgeois’s remarkable career spanned the modern and postmodern era. Her early sculptures are pioneering examples of American surrealism, and her later explorations of female identity have profoundly shaped contemporary art. 31 min.

Friday, May 18
7:00pm, Program 3. Lee Krasner: An Interview. 1980 ed. 2004. Krasner, one of a few women who played a major role in the transition from modernism to Abstract Expressionism, has been the subject of many exhibitions and books. Her early sculptures are pioneering examples of American surrealism, and her later explorations of female identity have profoundly shaped contemporary art. 31 min.

Saturday, May 19
4:00pm, Program 4. Myrna Loy: An Interview. 1936 ed. 2004. Myrna Loy was a successful actress in the 1930s before turning to politics. Program 30 min.

15:00pm, Program 5. Joan Mitchell: An Interview. 1975 ed. 2002. Mitchell is one of the few women who played a major role in the transition from modernism to Abstract Expressionism. Her early sculptures are pioneering examples of American surrealism, and her later explorations of female identity have profoundly shaped contemporary art. 31 min.

When working as a studio assistant, the phrase “aided in day today studio operations” really means “I house sat for you when you were at Art Basel and I walked your dogs.” (More on this when I get to Dorothea Rockburne.) When I took the full-time job with Danica, I would have to dog sit and house sit, and was bad at both. I had been under the impression that I’d be organizing images for her archive. On my first day as a full-timer with Danica, I was pulled into the hallway, told that she had just let go of all the other assistants and that this was their last day. I was fired just as abruptly weeks later after two of my paychecks bounced. I was paid in the end.
The Ryan McGuinness job was a pretty straightforward image management job. I wrangled images, tracked down titles, and did image processing. I was also on hand for cleaning silk screens and easy Adobe Illustrator work. The job was ok. I liked the separation it had with his life and studio. I was glad I didn't go to lunch with him or have to take care of his pets. I created a simple FileMaker database and file storage for him. Once the system was set up, I was let go on my birthday. He gave me a really cool level as a gift.

Interspersed between working for Ryan and Danica was a job at a high-end frame shop, Baobab Frames. I scrambled after I was fired from Danica's studio and got the frame shop job. Ostensibly I was being interviewed to put stuff in from Danica's studio and got the frame shop job. I improved my FileMaker skills and got really good at tracking orders and creating labels. The job was stressful and deadline-oriented and I didn't like the office vibe. I was having a hard time surviving on three jobs that paid only $15.00/hour. Although they were all oddly art-related, they were also stressful jobs and didn't really seem worth it. It was confusing to be working in the 'art world' and having a terrible time. My brain was impressed with the idea that I was an artist assistant but it felt like a terrible time. My brain was impressed with the idea that I was an artist assistant but it felt like a terrible time. My brain was impressed with the idea that I was an artist assistant but it felt like a terrible time.

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The voices I was looking for were surfacing. This video program in addition to the exhibition "High Times, Hard Times" were helping me to see myself represented. I was learning a lot in this period about the artists no one ever told me about. This is the description for the catalogue:
In the late 1960s, the New York art world was, famously, an exhilarating place to be. New forms, including performance and video art, were making their debuts, and sculpture was developing in startling ways. In the midst of it all, experimental abstract painting was pressing art's most iconic medium to its limits and beyond. High Times, Hard Times fills a gap in coverage of this moment in history, recapturing its liveliness and urgency with more than 42 key pieces by 38 artists who were living and working in New York at the time. Many of those featured artists have contributed personal statements reflecting on the work, its meaning and the social scene that surrounded it, including Lynda Benglis, Mel Bochner, Roy Cohn-Jeppesen, David Diana and Peter Young, Guy Geeslin, Harmony Hammond, Mary Heilmann, Cesar Paternosto, Howardena Pindell, Dorothea Rockburne, Carolee Schneemann, Alan Shields, Joan Snyder, Franz Erhard Walther and Jack Whitten, as well as one curator and one critic, Marcia Tucker and Robert Pincus-Witten. The critic Katy Siegel and the painter David Reed have written essays that focus, respectively, on the work's explosive artistic and political context, and the experience of being a young painter living in New York during these years. Additional pieces by Dawoud Bey and Anna Chave focus on race and gender in that milieu. Color illustrations of every featured work, along with supplementary historic photographs from the period, ephemera, biographies, a timeline and a bibliography round out a beautiful, much-needed book, a complete reference on a crucial era.

Nancy Angelo's *The Nun and the Deviant* struck a chord with me and felt like I needed to make work in response because I was feeling a bit like a nun and deviant myself. These 10-ft tall, cut paper figures are of a Nun and a Dyke. The idea also extends to photographs of myself dressed up like a nun and a dyke in a set made of paper. The set was taken from Cindy Sherman’s early studio shots. I was getting angry. I hated that Agnes Martin was seen as a crazy reclusive lady and her paintings were seen as ‘pure.’ I had a show at a gallery in Chicago and went to Oxbow.
Even though I had an open invitation to return to the Chelsea studio, I was tired of freelancing. I remember my dad pushing me to go back there but I knew this was a bad idea. I slid back into the old job, earning $505.55 a week, by making terrible paintings for a rich guy. I continued to do this for three more years. During this time I stopped making art altogether. I started drinking on the job, too many times to count. The whole situation felt like study hall/rubber room purgatory. It killed my art; I had my role in this too.

I signed a lease on a loft downstairs from my current apartment and hoped that this move would help bring back my ideas. I tried to make a nice bedroom for myself. I set up the studio and asked myself what it was about. Maybe it’s ok not to make something right now. Maybe it’s all right to turn inwards and think. Maybe it’s all right to make movies and cooking and counting calories. I started running and going to the gym. I started dating and going to movies.
2009

I turned my studio into a garden. I had plants and flowers and dirt and bugs. I learned about indoor gardening. Looking back I can see this was an art project that I didn't have the language for yet. My friend Alexis moved to Berlin and had a show called Becca on Elizabeth Street on the Lower East Side. (I went by 'Becca' this whole time... if that changes things.) The show was in an empty space that she was given free reign over and allowed to do whatever she wanted. She interviewed me on a very high pedestal/perch object. She brought my room into the gallery, and shot video while touching the stuff in my room. She also half made these weird sculptural paintings and made me alter them. She was tricking me into making art again. I can see that now. I love her for this.

I put myself on match.com and eventually started dating someone seriously. I made no art after the collaboration with Alexis.

Still miserable working for the artist in Chelsea, I picked up a second job working for Dorothea Rockburne with illusions that assisting an artist again would be inspiring and help me in my own studio. It paid $10.00 an hour. I came in a couple times a week to clean her house and empty the litter box. I am also pretty sure I was scraping lead paint off the tin ceiling. I fell through the ceiling of her bathroom when I was working on renovating a loft storage area. My legs popped out over the toilet. It hurt but I was ok. I also painted the bathroom and went shopping for a particular kind of canned cat food. I did not touch or move or interact with art during this apprenticeship. This is how I described the job on my resume:

2009

**Studio Assistant, Dorothea Rockburne, New York, NY**

*Responsibilities include:*

1. Assisted in day to day operations of running the studio.
2. Built out a storage space.
3. Renovated a raw portion of the loft into a guest room.
I was fired without explanation by her lead studio assistant over the phone. I was okay with it.

I knew I had to quit working in the Chelsea basement. I spent my days at work applying to jobs and working on my resume and cover letters. I could not stand this work anymore. I could feel myself getting depressed and my brains melting behind my eyes. I knew I wanted something stable, something flexible, something with health insurance. I was sick of working for artists.

I found a listing for a job at the New York Public Library: a photographer in the imaging lab. I applied to it online and then did a little extra. I researched who the manager was, figured out where the building was (a former parking garage in Long Island City), I went to the building and asked if I could drop off my cover letter and resume to the manager. The custodian said he could leave the letter on his desk and asked if I would be good at this job. I said I would be good at this job. I got a call from HR two weeks later. I knew I would be there for a while. My starting salary was $30,500 with benefits and a paid vacation. While it was a pay cut from working for the Chelsea artist, I was desperate for something new and the library felt like a noble direction. It was such a relief.
I quit drinking during this time and just barely started thinking about art again, about how angry I was when I went to the galleries and felt like something was missing, a conversation I could add to. Girlfriend and I moved in together and, about 6 months later, I got a tiny ass studio that I never worked in. We broke up shortly after I got it and I had to let it go to pay rent on a new apartment. I don't have anything I made during this time because I really didn't make anything! Girlfriend and I went to so many weddings and I practiced in my wedding drag. It took a lot of energy to stay sober and be this kind of girlfriend. This might have been my art at this time. Learning how to make brisket and latkes and looking good at straight southern weddings.
My job at the library remained the same. I got a raise and felt slightly more comfortable. I moved to Sunnyside, Queens and walked to work at the library. I started an Airbnb at this time to offset rent. At work I lead my coworkers in negotiations with the union about getting a title change and pay raise. This process took many years and I learned a lot. Like how to keep a record of information, how to present a case to the union, where to find salaries of equivalent jobs at other institutions. This process really made me feel like the union had our backs and that our work was being supported and cared for. The work itself is very static. It does not change very much. I have worked on the same manuscript project for three years. At this job personal, interpersonal and management changes affect the environment more than the work itself. I started getting very bored.

I no longer had a studio. I didn't know anyone in Sunnyside and felt disconnected from my friends. I wanted to trick myself into finding a project I cared about, something that was easy for me to do. I enrolled in a Photography 1 class at LaGuardia Community College, paid for by the library. After 15 years, I made it back into the darkroom. It felt good observe the world, to look around and to trust my eyes and my brain. We were asked to propose a final project. I wanted to do something that would force me to reconnect with my friends and art. I decided to take photos of my friends and acquaintances inside their studios. And to talk about their work and to have a studio visit. I got to meet with people I fell out of touch with. I got to talk about paintings and photograph people with their art. This project did two things for me: it forced me to think visually and to see that my old connections were still sound. Doing visits with my friends in their studios made me want a studio of my own. I had successfully tricked myself — I wanted start making work again.

Luckily both the NYPL management and Human Resources were on the side of the workers so the negotiations were a smooth but slow process. Eventually we did get a title change and, after two contract negotiations with the city, we are now making $61,000 more than twice my original salary. Working towards the title change is something that I am very proud of and am pretty sure would not have happened if we didn't do it ourselves with help from management and the union. Work continued in its dull, normal way. This is a detailed description of my work:

Trello, a free workflow management system, alerts me to start Box 75 of the Century Company records. I go to the in table and take the gray metal reinforced box from the bright white room and move the box to a workstation in a dimly-lit grey room. Inside the box, letters are signed by name of a person or company. The folder system changes from project to project. I open up the work order to start populating the folders with the heading that corresponds with the folder the letter was found in. One letter = two captures recto and verso. Then I repeat this process roughly 250 times until all the records are populated with images ids. Letters are usually uniform sizes so I can set the camera on the copy stand at one height for the whole box. Once the letter is in focus, color balanced and a lens cast generated I can start photographing the letters inside Century Box 75. I pull up my chair to the copy stand set a folder of letters on a green metal cart. I align my color checker at the top edge of the frame, adjust the strobes and begin to shoot. It takes about one week to process, shoot and upload one box. One box from the Century Company project can generate around 1800 captures. The images then go from my computer on to the server to be checked for quality. If there are no issues with the box, the images are uploaded into the repository. Delete box from computer. Start Box 76.
The Century Company records is one of the largest collection the digital imaging unit has photographed. The project has been going on for two years, generating a total of 250,000 captures. This repetition gave me time to realize I needed to make changes.

I rented a studio in Long Island City for four months so I could make the work for my application to the Hunter MFA Program. My re-entry paintings are a funny group of ideas. I was thinking about the painting as an object and how its shape can be a thing. Yoga mats and protest signs felt new for me and I liked the simplicity of materials. I also made monochromatic paintings that my friends hung up after eating chicken wings, leaving their greasy handprints to be absorbed into the ground. In retrospect, this action was the beginning of working with performance and other people in my studio. I had fun in the studio and it felt right again. I enjoyed making work that felt the an extension of my older ideas. Mostly I was excited to see myself make something; it was definitely what I was missing. I applied to Hunter and was accepted for the Spring. I moved out of my LIC studio because it was $800.00 a month and not a permanent option. My studio work was still something that was strained. I was excited to have get a studio at Hunter and knew in my gut that I was not going to be painting.

The Library and my boss were incredibly supportive when I went back to school. Tuition reimbursement, flexible hours and a boss that understood art really helped me stay focused. I decided to try working full-time at the library while also going to school full-time. I could continue working and I would be able to adjust my work schedule every semester to my school schedule. However I starting falling behind at work and dozing off in the afternoons. It was hard to keep stay on top of my work tasks while sustaining an artistic practice. I compared myself to an all-in-one printer/scanner/copy machine that can do it all... but not necessarily well. I hit my production numbers and would do the 35 hours a week. I used a lot of my vacation and sick time to get through tough months with big school projects. I am grateful for the patience of my manager, Eric Show, for bringing me back to center with my job when I fell too far off. He also allowed me to have the space and flexibility to do this important work that I desperately needed.

This is a chart of my monthly statistics of photos captured

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Orange Paintings</th>
<th>Protest Signs</th>
<th>Yoga Mats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>February</td>
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<td>December</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first semester working in my studio ideas just came out and I wanted to work on everything. But you can’t.

Candlestick.us is a guided meditation navigating the participant through a vast Google search history. Using the phone as a meditation tool, scrolling through endless swipes of text, the participant will be guided to reflect on their own searching practices and bringing mindfulness using technology.

Movements:
- Swiping slow
- Swiping fast
- Stop swiping and read aloud one word on your screen
- Glass cracked
- Connect to wifi
- Become re-focused with your phone. Please perform your usual ritual. Are you checking your email? Social Media texts? When you are finished, please look up.
- Notice how words become phrases

Have you ever searched for this?

Now I’d like to read aloud what is on my screen at this very moment. After I read please read aloud one by one what you see on your screen. Once the person next to you finishes, you can start. Don’t worry about how much you read or how little. Don’t be afraid to laugh or to feel awkward just bring your attention to the information. All read.
During this time, I was thinking a lot about how data can be displayed differently and be felt and focused on. How could I combine the concepts of Big Brother/Google saving your search history and of a higher power aligned in my work. I wanted to see if I could merge two modes of being: frantic searching internet on your phone, with meditation.

One surprising component to this project is that some participants thought I found their personal search histories and found a way to display them on the phone in real time. The participants could relate to my searches could this data bring people together?

When I entered Hunter, I was struck by the gap between the price of tuition and the cost of the real estate of our studios had they been rented to us in the 'real world.' The Hunter MFA Program in Studio Art only occupies four floors at 205 Hudson. The corporate tenants, including WeWork, operated at with a very different overhead than the emerging artists working floors below. 'I have never had such a nice studio with a woodshop, computer lab, A/V cage, faculty, and classes. I was thinking about the value and found it frustrating when fellow students would complain about anything in the program. I found that their dissatisfaction about sharing studios, not having windows, not getting the classes you wanted, etc. to be very short sighted. One aim of Invoice Reality Management was point out the deal they were getting. I also hoped that a good old fashioned bill would bring awareness to the support we have rather than continue to focus on what the program may lack.'
All occupants of 205 Hudson Street were invoiced an estimated value of their studio and use of the facilities at 205. An itemized list with values were created based on the features of each studio space. Windows, views and square footage are used to access the value of each space. The letter itself is a white business envelope with a cellophane window displaying the occupants name and studio number. This envelope was slid under the each student’s studio door. Inside the envelope was a return envelope and invoice with a description of the charges. Below, a perforated section to be included with payment. Payment is broken down into artwork, stories, feelings or a conversion with me. The payments are kept in a binder with copies of all the invoices. Not all payments have been collected. This studio should be $1750.00 a month. Tuition as of 2016 is about $8,000 a year.
Landmark is a performance at an AirBnB in a landmarked loft building on Canal Street. Participants were asked to name where they lived and to stand on the square with a number. The number on the square represents the price per square foot of where they live. Breakfast was served with discussion. I was thinking about value and cost. I wanted to talk about money in critique and talk about where we were all living. My aim was to create a sense of discomfort, as some students lived in Battery Park and Tribeca while others lived in Queens and Brooklyn. We talked about why and how we live where we live. Tiny, temporary, shared bedrooms in Battery Park. Or too many roommates in Bushwick. The conversation could have gone deeper and talked about class and gentrification, in a more critical and direct way, as well as the politics of AirBnB. During this time I was airbnb-ing a room in my apartment in Sunnyside, and thinking about moving back to Brooklyn.
As I took out more student loans, I started thinking more about my debt. I wanted to talk about this in class so I looked back to candlestick.us as a means of structuring meditations on debt. I made a website meditation tool that displayed my income and my debt. When you scroll down the left column of numbers scroll down and the right column scrolls up.

$200.00  -$93.78  
$700.00  -$121.94  
$1,094.63  -$115.50  
$1,051.87  -$2.00  
$0.05  -$31.65  
$0.13  -$11.21  
$1,094.63  -$32.81  
$0.21  -$28.31  
$75.00  -$12.08  
$84.00  -$14.57  
$109.00  -$16.56  
$15.00  -$19.51  
$225.00  -$5.10  
$1,104.42  -$332.07  
$300.00  -$7.25  
$9.99  -$4.77  
$1,104.77  -$7.99  
$400.00  -$14.42  
$50.00  -$12.87  
$49.00  -$3.69

I guided participants to think about the debt they have incurred. I asked where the debt lives in their body and, if they are comfortable, to say it out loud. We reflected on the feeling of indebtedness and how it feels to owe something. I had bags of pennies and rocks for the participants to but on their body to feel the weight of debt. In this project I was not discussing whether debt is bad or good. Knowing I couldn't change my current situation, it was a way for me to help accept my own financial debts and to think about them directly without trying to change the situation.
Banner hung outside MFA building after the 2016 presidential election. The rule about signage on the facade of 205 Hudson was invoked to cut the project short.

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From: Hunter MFA And BFA Studios
To: Undisclosed recipients

Signage on facade of 205 Hudson

Today at 3:00 PM

Dear Students,

We were contacted by our landlord this morning and reminded that putting signage on the facade of 205 Hudson Street is against our lease agreement. When this occurs our Public Safety officers are required to remove it. Thanks for your understanding and cooperation.

Best,

Tim

MFA Office at 205 Hudson Street
Mid-Program Cafe was a sandwich cart that I ran during Mid-Program Review, an intense review of student work during which the entire faculty and student body come together three-days. The process is both exhausting and exhilarating, necessitating frequent snacks to keep energy levels up. Inside jokes abound. The sandwiches are named after professors: all white male professors had white bread; all adjuncts were snacks. I really liked doing this project. It combined my interests in cooking and making slightly-veiled, snarky jokes. Mid-Program Cafe was taken up by other students in later semesters and continues in various manifestations dependent on interest.

What Carrie Said
Smoked salmon, cucumber slices, yogurt goat cheese-Schmer, dill, sprinkle, salt & pepper on pumpernickel or rye.
6$

Day old Items
the Drew & PRI
2$

Narl's Insight
Buffalo sausage, brown sugar, horseradish, sour cream & scallions on whole wheat or white.
9$

Andrea's Monday Tutorial
turkey & bilt & slanky smith
a piece of sea salt & ground pepper on whole wheat.
9$

Website containing documentation of scores and events done inside open houses throughout Tribeca. For this project I was inspired by conceptual artist George Brecht's scores and events. His scores made me laugh because the actions reminded me of the rituals home buyers perform to test out a property, like turning the water on and off testing the lights. These mundane activities feel like Fluxus scores. I documented myself attending open houses for multi-million dollar apartments in Tribeca; in particular, I focused on ones owned by Trump or shown by Trump real estate agents.
I recorded my interactions with the real estate agents. When I was alone in a space, I performed the scores and documented myself with a selfie stick. I made gifs from the images. The score I wanted to perform the most was Puke Piece. I thought I could take syrup of ipecac and halfway during the showing vomit and leave. I was thinking a lot about an action performed by the 1990's activist group Queer Nation, which became known for “outing” celebrities and other in-your-face actions. For a protest against an Italian restaurant that discriminated against a queer couple, QN members descended on the restaurant, took ipecac in the middle of the meal and vomited everywhere. In ruining the meals of the other customers, the action used mayhem and vomit to highlight pervasive homophobic attitudes about how one “catches AIDS.”

The real estate market and Trump presidency was/is nauseating. I felt sick and wanted to do some low-key vandalism. I ran into problems. Syrup made with ipecac is no longer manufactured. I ran in and out of pharmacies in Chinatown trying to find something that would make me puke. I asked a friend for their recommendations. I looked online. It was not going to happen. So I went the Yves Klein “Into the Void” route and used trick photography. It did feel like an action to waste the real estate agent’s time.

George Brecht. Event Scores c.1963
WMFA is a radio station that broadcast around the location of the MFA Program at 205 Hudson Street. Interviews were conducted with the faculty and students about art, teaching and getting a master’s degree. It was an excuse for me to get to know the faculty in a different way: to talk about them and not myself. I was also interested in creating a smaller audience and developing a range of experiences from the same work. The live interviews in the studio with an audience were very intimate. The room felt like it was alive and people were really interested in learning about the interviewee. I was influenced by the Video Data Bank interviews of artists and felt the need to get to understand the people around me. The scope of this project was also bigger than I was used to. It was something that had the ability to move beyond an art project and into the actual world of podcasting, broadcasting or beyond. This is project that continues to hold potential and I see myself returning to it. And I plan to keep adding to the interview archive over time. This project was my love letter to Hunter.
Debt Meditation Movement 2: Collective Failure asked participants to crawl under a large, heavy rug and attempt to level the surface of the rug by using their bodies. I go around assessing the flatness of the rug, while asking people to adjust their bodies in order to raise and lower parts of the carpet. I ask the participants who find this task easy to ask if their neighbor needs help. The participants, although working together and trying to level the rug, can never fully succeed. This task is designed to fail. I was thinking about the performance props used in The Judson Dance Company and the Greek myth of Sisyphus, charged with the endless task of rolling a massive boulder to the top of a steep hill. Whenever he neared the top, the rock would roll right back down again and Sisyphus was thus forced to start his labor all over again.
The last part of debtmeditation.us is Collective Success. Participants make their way out from under the rug and I instruct each person to hold on to a large circle of rope. I talk about support and distribution. Holding the rope, we talk about a time we felt supported. As group we lean back and feel as we are supported in the whole. We sit down using the tension of the rope and each others bodies to stand again. When the movement is finished the circle of rope is left on the ground and the meditation is finished.

As I continued to work full-time at the library while attending school, I started to feel frustrated by the overall attitude towards a full-time employment at Hunter. Some of my fellow students also had full-time jobs and I felt like we needed support and to be acknowledged that we are doing something hard. The idea for the Full-Time Club was to spread awareness that some of us don’t have the kind of flexible schedule expected in school. Full-timers have to make hard choices in how to spend their time, often missing studio visits.

The Full-Time Club is a gathering of Hunter MFA, BFA and MA students pursuing a degree while working full-time jobs. As a group, we aim to build a community of workers and students to provide support for each other. We are a group that understands the balancing and sacrifices that go into working while finishing your degree. While we have different reasons for setting up our lives in this manner, the fundamental idea that unites us is financial. We hope to leave the institution with as little debt as possible while producing artwork at very high levels of care and rigor. Living under these conditions is stressful and we feel a lack of support and understanding from the institution, bosses, faculty and fellow students. We serve as each other’s cheerleaders and sounding boards.

We hope to serve as an example and alternative to the idea that art degrees require massive loans and career gambles.

- Do you work 30+ hours a week?
- Do you work over 120 hours a month?
- Are you a parent or caregiver?
- If you answered yes to any of these questions you qualify to join today!
The Full-Time Club existed in doodle polls that never had a final meeting time as well as posters and a song. I did one Full-Time Club performance for open crit because I had to stay late at the library to make up hours. I did a FaceTime projected onto a wall of the crit room while I worked at my job. Then I gave a tour of the lab.

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*Sung to the tune of "Union Maid" by Woody Guthrie*

**Lyrics by Patrick Costello and Rebecca Baldwin**

The Full Time Club's a club, we never meet at all  
We're here for each other to say fuck this shit I'm tired.  
It's really just a job and I still have student loans,  
I work real hard but I'm still real broke.  
I'm tired.

No, I can't meet early, I'm coming from work.  
I'm coming from work, I'm coming from work  
No, I can't meet early, I'm coming from work,  
I'm coming from work till I shut my eyes.

When I talk about work I'm talkin' about a job  
I'm not at school makin' art, although I rather would.

Don't you tell me to quit my job.  
Professor, it not for you to say.  
The full time club has got my back  
they will help me get through the day.

No, I can't meet early, I'm coming from work.  
I'm coming from work, I'm coming from work  
No, I can't meet early, I'm coming from work,  
I'm coming from work till I shut my eyes.

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*Full Time Club Posters*
I text, we text, you text our parents text. The communication comes rolling in all at once jumbled together throughout the day. Threads of conversations between people communicating in the easiest form right now. The texting script, all the threads woven together chronologically, can show the complexities of someone’s life. In one 5 minute period you can: get a text from work, your mom, your partner, your friend, your ex, your babysitter, your kid, your credit card. This form of communication can highlight the different types of persons one person has to be. A daughter, a co-worker, a lover and roommate mixed together minute by minute. We change seamlessly between these modes of operation. Texting is easy. Texting falls short. I wanted to see the conversation threads reenacted and performed. To bring a physicality to the stiffness and the boringness that we use to interact with each other. Texts are not meant to be read aloud.

TxtPlay started as a simple idea of people reading aloud in a circle together. The configuration comes directly from support groups I have experienced. Initially I was interested creating the most casual performance structure possible. During the first iteration my classmates were the readers. I printed scripts that consisted of one month of text messages. I assigned roles the day of the critique; the result was rough but people seemed to enjoy the structure. I liked the casualness of assigning roles people reading and viewing printed out images on the ground.

I spend most of my at work time digitizing correspondence from the early 19th century. Paper letters with intricate script that I can barely read. Digitization is happening in every institution for access and preservation of cultural heritage. In some cases the originals are destroyed or put into deep storage. For the txt play I am interested in making all digital exchanges into physical interactions. In my tenure at the New York Public Library I have created 181,219 captures. In the life of this iphone I sent and received about 300,000 text messages. I am used to turning the physical into the digital and creating constant digital content.
When the piece was first performed I didn’t ask my friends and family if it was okay to convert their texts to me into a score for a public performance. I have had to do a lot of emotional work since developing TxtPlay to ameliorate my relationships with those involved. Now the work feels more like a negotiation with my loved ones which means that I have to be flexible about what remains in the script, what pictures will be shown, and how people appear based on an edited version of their own texts.

The editing process was daunting. For one group text conversation, there could be 150,000 records. Each group got different rules on what to keep. For example, in the coworkers thread I left in complaints about chairs, requests to check camera focus and discussion about candy. For my mom’s thread, I kept the many times she wrote about trying to get rid of something. Any message that was sent to multiple threads — a picture of my dog for example — would be left in the script. Once I had the script edited down to 500 pages, I put everything together chronologically in Excel. Then drastically cut the script down 80 pages. Initially the arc of the “story” would be bigger and that I could sculpt the data into a more traditional structure. But it quickly became clear that there were tiny arcs embedded within the different exchanges that were quickly resolved. This gives both the script and performance a mundane quality which reveals both the pleasures and absurdities of everyday life.
I cast only LGBTQ and gender non-conforming people to read for the play. I wanted to highlight the concept of the chosen family and the way interconnectedness of texting becomes a diagram of such choices. TxtPlay blends the home, workplace, and the internet in the set. A large blue rug with clean corporate chairs around low rotating grey "Lazy Susan" table. Along the outer edge of the table are three dimensional emojis. The colors of the set are blue, grey, black and white to simulate the operating system in the iPhone.

Actors playing the parts of Mom, Dad, Co-Worker, Co-Worker/Roommate, Roommate, Myself and Girlfriend, sit in a circle around the table with the emoji balls. The actors are wearing a baseball jersey with the role they are playing on the back. Each person has a script they read from.

The emojis are made of yellow paper pulp, silicon and have a handmade quality to contrast digital emoticons. I wanted a contrast between the playfulness of the props and the dry effect of the script. The compelling objects also became important visual cues in the gallery when the performances were not taking place.
The actors look like they are members of a team. The emojis orbit around the image pile for the actors to select and throw to each other. Throwing the balls and jerseys invokes team sports that have a simple visual organization I borrow from. Bold colors, clean lines and simple relationships form from these signifiers. A game is going to happen.

When the script depicts an emoji the actor selects correct physical emoticon ball and throws the emoji to the person that they are sending the message. When the script says "<image>" the actor selects the image they are sending and places the actual photograph into the center of the table. As the reading continues the images accumulate in the center of the table creating a physical representation of the cloud. When the script says LINK the Internet performs the corresponding song.

Color photographs are in a disorganized pile in the center of the table. Blue and grey baseball jerseys are draped over the back of the chairs. The set looks like a giant board game.
Conclusion

Life flows in the two columns of work and Work. It is an illusion that your job and your studio practice are completely separate. Is the goal to have one column? From my observation that is a myth. Even someone that mostly supports themselves with the sales of their artworks has to do tasks that feel like the “lower case w” work: like sending emails, traveling for lectures, doing paperwork, hiring assistants, doing taxes, teaching, applying to opportunities. Ideally the work/Work supports each other.

Like the TxtPlay it is difficult to conclude a piece that has no ending. My work and Work will continue. The information in columns will shift from left and right as my life continues.

In this process of charting the commitment an artist makes to make the Work happens every day. The Work is something that happens by doing, the making. My W/works have been boring for years. ; )
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Group of people looking at phones
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Group of people meditating

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