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AGGREGATION AND SATIATION: FINDING MEANING IN REPETITION

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Samantha Buchanan

25 Pages

May 2015

In my work, I see repetition, but also complexity and variation. This supportive statement examines my interest in the aggregate, in forms composed of multiples, as well as the repetitive processes required in their construction. I look at the ways in which predictability, recursion, and rhythm function in my repetitive practice, as well as how the energy expended throughout the process manifests in the matter of the work. What I intend for the viewer is the perception of a holistic and simultaneous sensory experience.

AGGREGATION AND SATIATION: FINDING MEANING IN REPETITION

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SAMANTHA BUCHANAN

A Supportive Statement Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

School of Art

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2015

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AGGREGATION AND SATIATION: FINDING MEANING IN REPETITION

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SAMANTHA BUCHANAN

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Sarah Smelser, Chair

Morgan Price

Gary Justis

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S.B.

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CHAPTER I
DISORDER OF THE MULTITUDE

The Process of My Practice

In the summer of 2014 I devoted most of my studio time (and studio space) to a yet to be titled work that I temporarily refer to as *dark things*. *dark things* is an ever expanding piece composed of sewn black paper pockets stuffed with polyester fiber and attached to a fabric armature in an intertwined arrangement that will eventually result in a massive swarming knot-like structure. *dark things* is not my first piece to require repeated ritualistic motions. I am drawn to the aggregate and I approach the initial components of such collections as if they are infinitely generative. More than just a multiple, every element leads to the production of another element which results in an inevitable growth of these accumulations into even larger masses.

Beyond demanding significant energy and time, the repetitive action required in the cutting, sewing, and stuffing of the individual components of *dark things* was usually tedious and often uncomfortable—yet I was reluctant to stop or alter my process. Recently, however, perhaps due to my annoyance with discomfort, though more likely due to my impatience with monotony, I began questioning my attraction to both the aggregate and the repetitive action that is required for these pieces. Though accustomed to frequent reflection on my work, I realized that I had rarely considered the demanding activities that were required in its construction. I found myself curious about how



Figure 1: *dark things*, component pieces

predictability, recursion, and rhythm function in my repetitive practice, as well as how the energy expended throughout the process manifests in the matter of the work. I started my investigation into these questions by first looking to the writings, works, and interviews of two artists who also seem to share my affinity for repetition: Jackie Winsor and Yayoi Kusama.

Construction Envy

I have long held an interest in the self-organization found in nature. In a piece titled *Zeitgeber*, I use the circle, often considered the most efficient form for self-organization and order in biological systems, to reference among other things the cycle of the circadian rhythm. It is this interest in inherent order that draws me to the raw yet balanced qualities found in Jackie Winsor's sculptures. The contrast between the rough texture of the wound hemp and the smooth uniformity of the dowels in *#1 Rope* continues to prove particularly appealing¹. I find mystery both in its improbable sturdiness and in the empty spaces amid the grid of the repetitive components. I feel an urge to dissect it and am oddly jealous of the hours Winsor spent winding the hemp around the joints. Though I cannot speak to whether others share this construction-envy, I am not alone in my appreciation of her endurance. Recognition of the tremendous labor and effort required for Winsor's work is a constant throughout the writings about and

¹ <http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/330>

interviews with her. Irving Sandler went so far as to describe Winsor as an artist “obsessed with seemingly absurdist, labor intensive, repetitive work.”² Yet what remains absent from conversations about Winsor’s studio practice was any acknowledgement by the artist that her processes were difficult. This absence led me to my first important realization about myself and my own practice: I am a wuss.

Despite not sharing a bond of complaint about our ailments, I do find common ground in an inspirational experience of Jackie Winsor’s. In an interview with Whitney Chadwick of the Oxford University Press, Winsor spoke of a moment during a visit to China when she found herself in a small room filled with one thousand Buddha statues. She stated, “You enter this little square room and become completely surrounded by buddhas. You are in Buddha's belly, really. It was deeply moving.”³

I am familiar with the distinct but somewhat ineffable feeling of being swallowed up by one’s environment. I have experienced it in unique and rare moments at sea while at great distances from land and surrounded on all sides by stars, and I have also experienced that same feeling more regularly while exploring large cities or hiking in forests. I am drawn to the immersive and unending surfaces of such environments, and to the subjective and curious mix of uneasiness and nurturing that they induce. Once you are within the woods, there are no longer clear boundaries; the woods as an aggregate seems to lack a definable beginning and ending in its complexity. This can be the source of an unease that is difficult to pin down.

² Sandler, Irving. *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s*. New York: IconEditions, 1996. Print. pp 30

³ "Oxford Art Online." *Interview with Jackie Winsor by Whitney Chadwick in*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/public/page/winsorinter>>.

Immersive Compulsive

In some of my recent work, draping suggests a similarly uncertain relation to an environment. The draping in *Green Things*, a work composed of several hundred manipulated green streamers, is meant to imply a covering—a shelter perhaps, or maybe



Figure 2: *Green Things*, installation, 2014

an organic material that spreads. The individual components seem fragile, but as a whole it can sustain more than one might think. In both *Green Things* and *dark things*, I

oscillate between feeling that these are protective forms, ones that can provide cover or comfort, and forms to be reckoned with, ones that might overtake me or swallow me entirely.

This evocation of an engulfing sensory environment, which is an intended effect of my aggregates, is an objective that Yayoi Kusama has certainly achieved. I find myself again in the Buddha's belly when experiencing the immersive and compulsive repetitions of Kusama's *Infinity Mirrored Rooms*⁴. In these mirrored installations her infinities take me toward the cosmos, in her 'Accumulation' series these infinities continue, although

⁴ <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/kusama-and-infinity>

this time with a stronger emphasis on the tactile. In my own accumulations I too prefer alluding to an environment that can be touched—perhaps this desire for the tactile is what leads me to build greater and greater surface areas in my work. In addition, *dark things* shares a strangely familiar shape with the protuberances of Kusama’s *Compulsion Furniture*, a shape I can’t quite put my finger on. Yet despite these similarities, I cannot claim to share the same obsessive tendencies as Kusama. I suspect my practice, or my fondness for the aggregate, is less about “self-obliteration,”⁵ as Kusama discusses, and more a desire for an increased awareness of my senses and an intimacy with the materials that furthers that relationship.

Repetition: The Rhythm of The Sublime, The Mundane, and The Annoying

Around the time of my completion of the six-hundredth component of *dark things*, a new neighbor moved in above me—a trombonist for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Sharing space with the musically inclined is something I am well accustomed to and is an experience I usually welcome. Yet despite my familiarity with band practice and the dampened sounds from above or below, the neighbor introduced a new audible presence: extreme repetition. He practiced what I was told were articulation exercises, consisting of short repetitive trombone buzzings in different scales, and he was dedicated.

These exercises occurred with regular frequency and for roughly twenty minutes at a time. To be clear, unlike a previous neighbor who *attempted* to play percussion on Sunday mornings, there was nothing bothersome about the trombone buzzings. I felt a communal appreciation for our repetitive practices and often noticed a similar rhythm

⁵ Applin, Jo. *Yayoi Kusama Infinity Mirror Room - Phalli's Field*. London: Afterall Books ;, 2012. pp5

between the trombone and my sewing machine. After years of failed attempts at learning an instrument, I had finally started my own band. Though the neighbor eventually moved his practice to his own studio, this brief period of harmonization led me to think that perhaps I could answer some of my own questions about my attraction to repetition through an examination of repetition in music.

Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, Director of the Music Cognition Lab at the University of Arkansas, characterizes repetition as the “handprint of human intent.”⁶ She explains that by performing an act more than once a person is reinforcing the act’s intentionality and eliminating the accidental. Her reference to the human body (handprint), and the human endeavor (intent), separates these acts from the type of identical duplication found in mechanical reproduction. However, her interpretation of repetition does not seem to fully embrace chance and variation, two things that I welcome in my repetitive practice. Perhaps what I found to resonate more closely to home (or studio) is Margulis’s discussion of the *semantic satiation effect*: the reduction of a word to meaningless sounds as a result of repeated uninterrupted articulation. Margulis describes the effect in music as resulting in a “more direct confrontation with the sensory attributes of the word itself.”⁷ Typically deemed an auditory effect, I initially considered semantic satiation only in relation to the sounds of my practice: the repetitive movement of the sewing machine, the cutting of the paper, the crinkling of paper, and so forth.

Rather quickly, however, I determined that there was no reason to discount my tactile and

⁶ Margulis, E. (2014). Why we love repetition in music – Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis – Aeon. [online] Aeon Magazine. Available at: <http://aeon.co/magazine/culture/why-we-love-repetition-in-music/> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2014].

⁷ Margulis, E. (2014). Why we love repetition in music – Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis – Aeon. [online] Aeon Magazine. Available at: <http://aeon.co/magazine/culture/why-we-love-repetition-in-music/> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2014].

visual involvement—certainly the experiences of texture and color also morph or collapse due to repeated exposure.

As I reflected on the possibility of this expanded version of the satiation effect I kept returning to Margulis’ use of the word “confrontation.” Was she implying that a sensory experience is something that might entail an aggressive approach or perhaps even an experience that is often avoided? This idea of a more assertive encounter with the senses, particularly that of touch, appealed to me. Material exploration figures prominently in my practice, but rarely had I acknowledged how much enjoyment I found in the handling of the materials. Margulis prompted my consideration that my process, and all of its sensory dynamism, is of equal importance to the outcome or object that I am producing.

Three Interviews

Despite this illuminating recognition of my fondness for process, which in retrospect seems rather obvious, I felt that further exploration of my repetitive tendencies was needed. I was again inspired by my experiences with the neighbor and decided to look to other repetitive practices outside of the visual arts. I approached three people who also repeat a task without much variation for an extended period of time: a farmer, a competitive distance runner, and a practitioner of Vipassana meditation. I chose these individuals because I felt that they might offer the best insight into the ways the body and mind function in response to the physical and personal process of repetition. Each of the three discussions revolved around the same series of questions and addressed such things

as physical movements; discomfort; environments and surroundings; rhythms and patterns; and awareness.

KayCee, the farmer, graced the cover of the New York Times style section several years ago. She and her partner were featured as members of a younger generation of metropolitans who were opting to leave the city to begin small agricultural businesses in rural communities. Of course nothing says farming like the style section, although KayCee's interest in farming began long before the explosion of farm-to-table restaurants and Slow Food cookbooks. She began her career as an elementary school teacher in New York City, but always had one hand in the dirt, spending her summers working on farms until she and her partner eventually started a farm of their own. KayCee now combines her love of teaching and her love of farming through her urban gardening education program and her YMCA farm project in upstate New York.

KayCee is an enthusiastic and conversational person, yet her responses to my questions regarding her repetitive practice were direct and concise. At the time KayCee was harvesting green beans, an activity that requires a lot of squatting, scooting, and plucking. Surprisingly, out of the three individuals, KayCee alone claimed no physical discomfort during her activity. She described her mental state or her presence in the field as being "zoned out." She was unaware of others around her, though sometimes she would hear the sounds of bees buzzing or dogs barking. Occasionally she would daydream and at times she thought about other tasks to be done on the farm, but mostly she thought about beans. This struck me as an impressive level of focus, but something that I cannot truly relate to in my own practice, as my mind rarely remains with *dark things* alone.

Unlike KayCee, Kate, the competitive distance runner, has more choice in where she performs her repetitive activity and perhaps this is why she describes more of an awareness of her surroundings. During training Kate opts for quiet, non-trafficked areas usually at the Chicago lakefront or in the suburban forest preserves. She eliminates boredom through observations of her environment, often choosing to run at dawn or dusk, times of day when the sky is changing. Only when experiencing pain does Kate think about her physical movements—her activity trains her body, but she is more aware of the activity of her mind. She talks about her practice as free from distraction allowing her to sort through, or problem solve, other issues in her life. She refers to her repetitive practice as an outlet. She also acknowledges the endorphin rush.

I expected my practice to have the most in common with KayCee's. We both participate in a repetitive activity that we greatly enjoy, but ultimately this activity is a means to an end: a job, in a sense, that produces an object. Running is not Kate's job. She has separate employment, which is impressive since she runs anywhere from an hour to three and a half hours daily. I did not expect to have much in common with Kate as I tend to fall into the run-only-if-being-chased category. That is not to say that I'm not athletic in my own way, just that my own way is not quite as determined as Kate's. When Kate mentioned that she was considering running a fifty mile marathon I could not help but feel that there was a bit of madness to her practice—but then I suppose some might find madness in twelve hundred sewn black paper pockets. I did, however, find similarities in our two practices. Beyond just a bit of shared madness, I also felt a connection to Kate's response of having an awareness of mind over body. Mine was not a singular awareness of the task, that KayCee spoke of, but more a general emphasis on thought over action.

During studio visits, faculty and visiting artists frequently mention a Zen-like meditational quality to my work. It is almost always tacked on as an addendum to a different statement usually addressing the quantity of components laid out before them. I am always curious, though oddly I have never asked, if meditation is something they practice and if they use the assistance of prayer beads or some other multiple to achieve their desired state. I wonder what it is about repetitive action or my construction of the multiple that so frequently leads one to consider a meditative practice. I myself have no formal experience with meditation beyond the five minutes of relaxed breathing that Rodney Yee guides me through at the end of my “Energy and Balance Yoga” DVD. Yet this is not to say that I am not searching for or experiencing the same mindfulness that one strives for through meditation.

I have known Nikki, the practitioner of Vipassana meditation, for many years, though it was not until recently that I realized the extent of her meditational practice. Nikki “sits” each night for roughly thirty minutes, but her practice also includes frequent weekend meditational retreats, as well as an annual ten day silent retreat. During these longer retreats Nikki alternates between sitting and walking meditation from approximately 6:00am to 9:30pm with breaks for meals and a teaching by the retreat leader.

Out of the three people I conversed with, Nikki is the only person to discuss extensively her awareness of her mind, her physical movements, and her surroundings. Nikki explained that, “Vipassana is about noticing the experiences of your senses (it includes the mind as the sixth sense) and how transient they are.” She wrote about her awareness of the motions of breathing, for example, in which she finds rhythm, but not

predictability. Despite often having closed eyes, Nikki also spoke of being quite attuned to her surroundings, noting sounds that she might not otherwise hear. I suppose that none of these responses surprised me, as even my yoga DVD successfully instructs me to listen to and be mindful of my breath and surroundings. What was unexpected was the freedom or acceptance of Nikki's experiences. She described part of her meditational practice as "just allowing [her] attention to drift to whatever sounds, sensations, etc. are capturing [her] in the moment without much thought." Eventually she returns her attention to her breath, but the experiences of other sensations or thoughts are not unimportant.

It was suggested to me by a couple of different artists that I might enjoy the writings of Agnes Martin. Though not a Buddhist by religion, Agnes Martin applied Zen philosophies to her daily life, which was evident in her writings and her artistic practice. In a video interview Martin explains that she "[has] a vacant mind in order to do exactly what inspiration calls [her] to do."⁸ When asked later in the interview if she meditates, she replied that she "used to meditate until [she] learned to stop thinking and now [she] doesn't think of anything."⁹ Perhaps this statement is Martin's way of reinforcing her belief that artists over-think their process, but it struck me as a commonplace about meditation that seems false. Nikki may always return her focus to her breath, but it is that awareness, *in concert with* her other thoughts and sensory experiences, that comprise her meditational practice.

At the end of answering my questions about her repetitive practice Nikki added that my curiosities about my own practice remind her of the myth of Sisyphus. She

⁸ "Agnes Martin Interview (20:00 Version, 1997)." *Vimeo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Nov. 2014. <<http://vimeo.com/7127385>>.

⁹ "Agnes Martin Interview (20:00 Version, 1997)." *Vimeo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Nov. 2014. <<http://vimeo.com/7127385>>.

explained that contrary to some beliefs that Sisyphus' life was meaningless as it was constructed of only repetitive action, the Buddhist interpretation sees the act of repetition, without concern for outcome, as a metaphor for enlightenment. She wrote that, "an acceptance of the fate of rolling the boulder up the hill only for it to inevitably roll back down and performing this repetitive task mindfully would be living a meditation of sorts." This is a lovely way to consider a repetitive practice and certainly something that I will contemplate as I continue my work with the aggregate, but I can't help wondering if Sisyphus ever had any concern that with one false move the boulder might roll back and crush him.

Finding Meaning in Repetition, or, I got Schooled by John Dewey

In my contemplations, I began to question whether the sewing machine patterns that I had composed with *dark things* and therefore, *dark things* itself, lacked an outward sense of rhythm. I thought back to Nikki's description of her awareness of breath in which she found rhythm but not predictability, and wondered if my repetitive patterns were too predictable, too monotonous. Though each of my hand-sewn components varies slightly in shape, I allowed for only slight deviations in size and color. As *dark things* grew increasingly expansive and resembled more and more an oversized knotted string of prayer beads, I wondered if my repetitive process was my own personal meditational practice that translated to the viewer as nothing more than a grouping of identical units rather than the complex sensory experience I had envisioned. I also wondered if my previous consideration that my process and all of its sensory dynamism was of equal importance to the object that I was producing would not be evident in the work unless the

viewer was also able to experience the repetition as a *rhythmic* pattern as well as a repetitious one. In this sense, I wanted my works to be more than just an aggregation of meaningless repetition, I wanted them to exude the meaning, the vitality, and the harmony that I felt in them. My investigation of the significance of my process was now shifting to a greater consideration of the perception of the viewer.

In John Dewey's book, *Art as Experience*, he differentiates between repetition and recursion, claiming that repetition is composed of "material units" whereas recurrence or "esthetic recurrence" is based on relationships. He explains that, "Recurring relationships serve to define and delimit parts, giving them individuality of their own... Thus the parts vitally serve in the construction of an expanded whole."¹⁰ In a response to Dewey's philosophies, Philip Zeltner compares simple repetition to that of Eighteenth Century music which he refers to as "sewing machine music."¹¹ Zeltner argues that too much attention is paid to strict repetition without allowing for the development of relationships—essentially, the music is monotonous. This is a key point, and it gives voice to my concern that repetition needs more than aggregation, it needs meaning—it needs *rhythm*. Both Dewey and Zeltner compare the rhythms found in music to the rhythms found in the relationships of recursive patterns, and Dewey in particular argues that repetition without meaningful relationships is empty.

This concern remained with me as I shifted my attention from *dark things* to my *Woven (Repair)* series, which I initially began not as an aggregate series (though composed of multiple units), but as an investigation into repair and amendment. I was

¹⁰ Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch, 1934. Print.

¹¹ Zeltner, Philip M. *John Dewey's Aesthetic Philosophy*. Amsterdam: Grüner, 1975. Print.

conscious of Dewey's argument of repetition becoming monotonous and concerned with how I might construct a clearer sense of rhythm within the work. Though I again allowed for little variation in the size of the components (in this case strips of fabric, vinyl, and

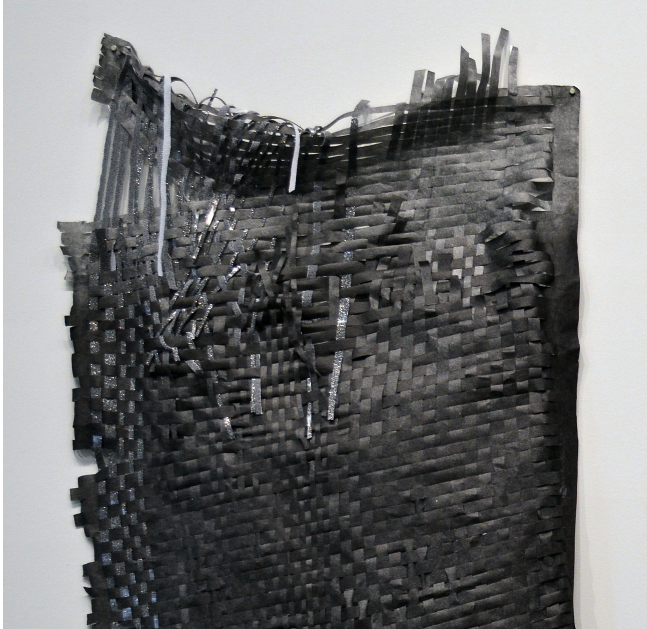


Figure 3: *Woven No. 1 (Repair)*, detail, 2014

printed paper) I did attempt to establish more formal rhythmic relationships by varying the texture, radiance, and juxtaposition of the materials. I regarded the rigid peaks and tenuous separations in the weave as figures on a sagging ground—viewing the grid as a pattern of stability, one that I used as a measure

of deviation and deterioration. I find that it is the woven paper grid in contrast to the fabric-like sagging of *Woven No 2 (Repair)* and the fragile separations in *Woven No 1 (Repair)* that define and elucidate the changes that have occurred.

The repair series brought to the surface a crucially important aspect of my work that I had not been able to give voice to earlier: the material in these works had life. They were *repaired objects*, more than just repetitions, they were an amendment of a material thought lost to the decay of time; as rescued from the disorder of the multitude and put back as a finite-yet-still-complex reconstitution. I infused rhythm formally, through intervals in shape and structure, but also conceptually through the pattern of deterioration and repair.

Returning to the Band: Rhythm without Repetition

In David Byrne's book, *How Music Works*, he discusses media scholar, Marshall McLuhan's theory of Visual and Acoustic Spaces. McLuhan argued that the majority of society has shifted from an acoustic culture to a visual one and that this sensory transformation began with the invention of the Gutenberg Press and advances in print media. He believed that visual space is perceived in a linear fashion through a central focal point and proceeds along a timeline—as opposed to acoustic space which he thought to be perceived all at once, in multiple co-existing layers. In his theory, McLuhan argues that acoustic space requires that figure/ground relationships be perceived in the same moment, not along a linear narrative as found in visual space, but instead as a more unified simultaneous experience, one that as Byrne states, “like sound, is all around you.”¹²

I believe that I achieve, with some success, a sort of simultaneousness in the *Woven (Repair)* series. In many ways these works are almost oceanic in nature, creating a field where specific focal points may come and go, but are experienced as moments in a network of an immersive surface. Conversely, I think that to fully appreciate those areas that break the ground, the tenuous gaps and the rigid protrusions, the viewer is required to have a previous understanding of the weave from which the forms deviate. This, I feel, creates a more linear experience, requiring a knowledge of one area before advancing to the next.

¹² Byrne, David. *How Music Works*. San Francisco [Calif.: McSweeney's, 2012. pp324

Challenging myself to create a more concurrent and encompassing viewing



Figure 4: *Intervallics (No. 10)*, 2015

experience was my intention when I began the series of prints, *Intervallics*. I approached them as a type of distance or rest between more ordered elements, leaving behind the security of the grid and relying instead on the relationships between color patterns. I began the series by printing full page flats of blues, allowing for slight variations in transparency and color, and encouraging the roller mark in some, while striving for

a true flat in others. I followed the same process to roll out flats of pinks and yellows, but prior to printing those flats over the blue I removed a portion of the ink using a large piece of foam, similar to something one might find in a couch cushion. This method of essentially sponging the ink off of the matrix became a very physical process, often requiring that I use various parts of my body to apply certain pressures to achieve different marks. My hands, for example, were wonderful for producing small areas of subtle and diffused ink, but when I wanted to remove larger areas of ink it was best to sit or lay on the foam. Having such a different type of physical contact with the matrix resulted in an entirely altered and beneficial experience in my making of the work. Often when creating an aggregate piece I concentrate on only a small section of the collection at a time—I am hunched over and maintain a visually singular focus. Constructing the

individual components of an aggregate is not conducive to seeing the whole. The physical nature of printing the *Intervallics* series required that I literally get off of and move away from the matrix in order to see the impressions that I left on the flat ink. In this way I was removing myself from the work while also allowing myself to become the viewer. This in turn made me less concerned about my process and more thoughtful of the viewer's experience.

My inspiration for *Intervallics* arose from, in part, the Pace Prints collaboration with James Turrell, *Suite from Aten Reign (2014)*, which was intended to capture the sense of the vibration of light that one experiences in Turrell's installations¹³. Turrell states that he "make[s] spaces that apprehend light for our perception, and in some way gather it, or seem to hold it."¹⁴ I have experienced one of Turrell's Projection Pieces and was amazed to realize that the solid white cube was not something that I could touch, but instead a projection of light that my hand simply passed through¹⁵. Turrell further points to the way our own unique experiences shape our future and present perceptions when he discusses how we view light:

"The same frequencies come into your eyes through a difference of context of vision, and are perceived differently. We actually create this color. Color is this response to what we are perceiving. So, there isn't something out there that we perceive; we are actually creating this

¹³ <http://www.paceprints.com/2014/james-turrell-prints-and-process>

¹⁴ "Interviews and Articles." *Conversations.org: Greeting the Light*, by Richard Whittaker. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 May 2014.

¹⁵ <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/4084>

vision—and that we are responsible for it is something we're rather unaware of.”¹⁶

This idea of responsibility is interesting, in that he is saying that we preserve some of the agency of our own perceptions, to our own individual volitional power to control our surroundings. As Byrne would point out, much of the way we perceive things is influenced by factors in our culture, and our surroundings in general. The non-human elements of our environments hold significant influence; the technologies that we use to perceive, and the ways that we perceive color as mediated by certain restrictions. Byrne points to the Ivilik Inuit who do not define space using visual language, but instead identify it through their other senses, which he speculates might be due to their visually stark surroundings in Labrador.

We are accustomed to, in a way, a perception mediated by certain restrictive filters so with *Intervallics* I attempt to use these filters to create a more acoustic space by relying on the viewers' familiarity with natural light to expand their sensory experiences through memory and recollection. In this way I hope to eliminate the linear timeline of McLuhan's Visual Space by relying on a pre-existent understanding, a previous knowledge, that the viewer brings to the work. I hope to further increase the concurrent viewing experience by obscuring the figure/ground relationship, inviting the viewer to slowly sink into the ethereal blue only to then become aware of the subtle shift to lavender to pink and back to blue (or perhaps in reverse order). In oscillating between

¹⁶ "Interviews and Articles." *Conversations.org: Greeting the Light, by Richard Whittaker*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 May 2014.

these subtle variations, the viewer is able to establish a distinctly rhythmic viewing pattern.

Back on the Grid

In the *Stills* series, I use the same subtle color variations as I did in *Intervallics*,

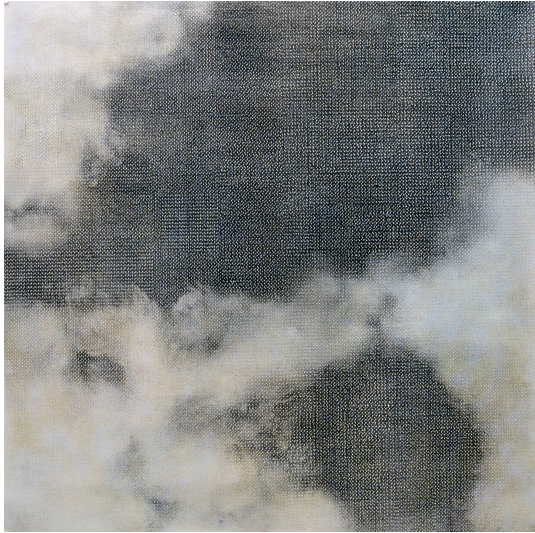


Figure 5: *Stills (No. 1)*, 2015

but with a slightly bolder palette. I reintroduce a grid-like configuration in the hopes of merging the rhythmic viewing pattern found in the relationship between adjacent colors with the recursive orderly patterns of the *Woven(Repair)* series. I am curious if this will create a perceived cycle of breakdown and repair/order and disorder. I

also, rather unwittingly, return to the aggregate through my construction of a matrix speckled with 32,000 dremel marks. Though created with the same dremel bit, the marks in the matrix differ slightly depending on the angle of my body while working, the amount of pressure I applied, and the speed at which I worked. These variations result in a narration of my actions which emerges through alternating patterns and differences in mark. As I wipe and sponge the ink from the matrix I obscure and eliminate this personal narration, but I also reinforce the subtle shifts in figure/ground. I am still striving for an acoustic, non-linear, sensory experience, one that still evokes a vibrant rhythm, in this case found in the spaces between order and entropy.

Some Final Thoughts on My Thesis Exhibition

I found that assembling an exhibit is a very similar process to that of constructing an aggregate—it is much easier to focus on the individual works than to construct the



Figure 6: Thesis Exhibit Installation

exhibit as a whole.

The gallery space is worn and provided numerous challenges during installation, but it was the arrangement of lighting that proved particularly

problematic. Certain works, primarily the *Intervallics*, require fluorescent lighting to emphasize the subtle variations in color and the shifts in figure/ground. The illusion of a tactile, almost three dimensional quality to the *Stills*, on the other hand, requires a softer but more direct light. How to illuminate one without washing out the other was the question and resulted in some rather creative positioning and removal of lights. A more pristine environment, one which might allow for natural light or at least more flexibility in arrangement, is something I hope for when showing this work again. Ultimately though, the lighting challenge was resolved with at least some success as one faculty member commented that she felt she could reach her hand into *Stills (No 5)* and touch the transparent grid. She went as far as viewing the work from the side to make certain that it was indeed flat.

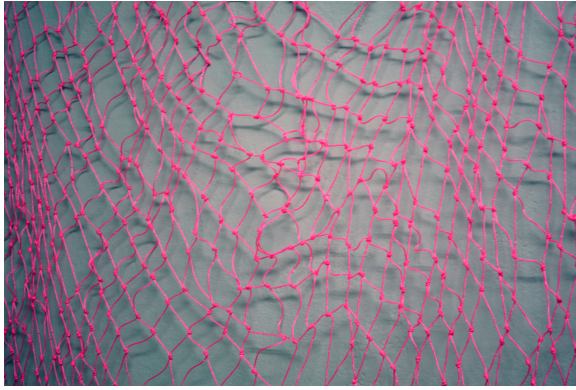


Figure 7: *This WILL Hold You*, detail, 2015

The exhibit contains only one truly three-dimensional work, *This WILL Hold You*. Originally begun as a quick study for future woven paper pieces, *This WILL Hold You* is an eight foot by eight foot, fluorescent-pink, knotted-rope wall

hanging. Though not practical as a functional object, this work resembles something of a hybrid between an oversized fishing net and a square hammock. There is little uniformity in the netting, with large spaces between knots, and gaps that certainly aren't conducive for containment. My original intent was for this work to function as a different method of exploring figure/ground relationships. The gaps, the knots, the wall, and the shadows all contribute to a sense of patterning, rhythm, layering, and increased depth. They each compete for the viewer's attention, but they also function as a concurrent whole. This work, however, also does much more—it emphasizes both the unity and variation within the exhibit. Hung directly opposite the *Intervallics* series, *This WILL Hold You* shares a



Figure 8: Thesis Exhibit Installation

similar, yet much bolder palette to the work it mirrors. In this way these pieces echo and reinforce each other, but *This WILL Hold You* also asks the viewer,

through contrast, to pay particular attention to the slow speed of *Intervallics*. The entire exhibit, in fact, requires a patience and dedication from the viewer that may be difficult to meet. The work reveals itself slowly through oscillations in subtle color variations and transparent layers of alternating patterns, but these are rewards that do not come from a quick viewing. With this in mind, I am curious of the degree to which this exhibit will be successful, since it requires a slowness in an environment where slow is often not an option. From this concern, *This WILL Hold You* gets its title. On the surface, the title references the apparent unsoundness of an unfinished hammock with too many holes, but it also, on a very personal level, references my desire to net or hold the viewer in place.

The Finale

In my work, I see repetition, but also complexity, difference, and rhythm. It is not about the repetitions, rather, it involves repetition. To reduce *dark things*, or the dremel-marked matrix, or the strips of woven paper to a conversation only about repetitive action is to fail to recognize the complexity and the expansive possibilities suggested by the variation in the repetition, and to overlook the aspects of the work that take shape as individual vibrant pieces.

Such is the paradox of repetition that my three interviewees, in their different ways, all illuminated. Whether one is running great distances; harvesting an abundance of produce; or deep in meditation, repetition is, of course, the same, and a part of it is certainly without discernable meaning. However, there is much that happens within the repetition, concurrent with the repetition, and as a result of the repetition that is in fact what constitutes vibrancy and meaning itself. To *only* reduce repetition to a series of

repeated actions, shapes, or patterns, is to miss the point that even with such a seemingly singular focus, there is much more going on.

To my surprise, it was Nikki’s repetitive practice that resonated most similarly to my own goals for my process and the resulting work. Both my repetitive practice and my work involve linearity and simultaneity—there is a repetitive one-by-one-by-one process, but there is also a concurrent whole that emerges from this linearity. What I intend for the viewer is the perception of what might be called a holistic and rhythmic meaning. A simultaneous sensory experience and a *visual* satiation that help create a sense of harmony and variation that both reinforces and re-infuses a sense of newness and presence to the work.



Figure 9: Thesis title wall and Installation

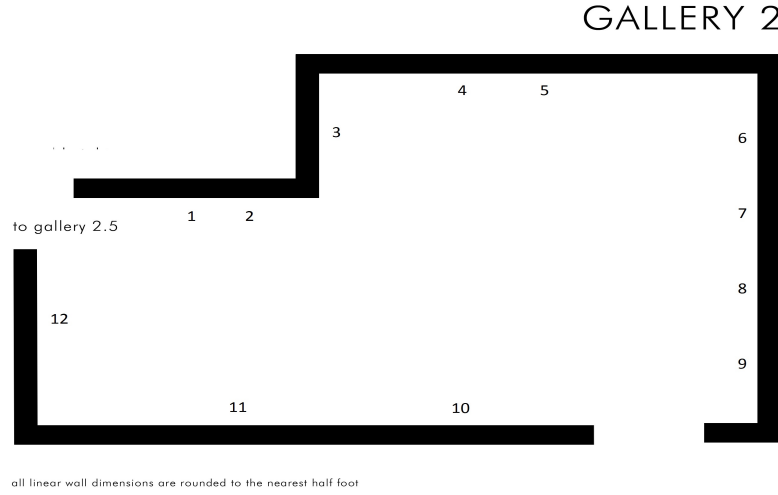


Figure 10: Gallery Layout

Image List:

1. *Astronomical Twilight*; 2014
2. *Civil Twilight*; 2014
3. *Stills (No. 1)*; 2015
4. *Stills (No. 3)*; 2015
5. *Stills (No. 4)*; 2015
6. *Intervallics (No. 10)*; 2015
7. *Intervallics (No. 9)*; 2015
8. *Intervallics (No. 8)*; 2015
9. *Intervallics (No. 7)*; 2015
10. *Stills (No. 2)*; 2015
11. *Stills (No. 5)*; 2015
12. *This WILL Hold You*; 2015

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