

We Might Have Been A River

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**Abstract**

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We Might Have Been A River is an experience of embodiment as told through the exploration of sound, touch, language, and water. Seeking to question and understand the impacts of cultural and economic systems such as capitalism, consumerism, and individualism on the body, the author investigates her relationship to these systems as they influence her relationship to the natural world, her own body, and others. Through an interrogation of the senses, namely sound and touch, the author explores loneliness, physical intimacy, and connection. Simultaneously, she examines language as a means of inquiry—a place of questioning that allows her to investigate the ideals of individualism, collectivism, and consumerism through a breakdown of the words we use to make up our sense of selfhood. Finally, water remains the soothing balm and wise teacher throughout the process, informing what it might mean to exist more embodied and collectively in the world.

We Might Have Been A River

*/ Emma McVeigh /*

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## *PLAYLIST*

This manuscript is accompanied by a collection of sound poetry and soundscapes which corresponds to the text. The playlist can be listened to in-step with the manuscript, or experienced on its own. The corresponding text is indicated by an italicized title.

Follow [this link](#), or scan the QR code below to access the playlist.

1. A SINGLE PERSON
2. A BODY OF PEOPLE
3. THROUGH MANY MEDIUMS
4. TOUCH
5. SKIN
6. RIVER'S TOUCH
7. A PORTION RISES
8. THE EDGE
9. We Might Have Been A River (Bonus Track)



AQUAPHOR

## TOUCH STUDY #1

1. Find The Nearest Human Body To Your Body.
2. Ask If You Can Touch Them, Gently.
3. If They Say Yes, Touch Them Gently, But Firm Enough To Feel The Transfer Of Warmth Between You. Let Your Bodies Linger Together For At Least A Full Breath.
4. If They Say No, Find Another Body And Repeat.
5. Notice What Happens When Your Body Touches Another Body.
6. Does Something In You Sing?
7. Thank Them.
8. Think About This Touch For The Rest Of The Day.
9. At The End Of The Day, Look At The Hand You Touched This Person With. Study It. Close Your Eyes And Put That Hand On Your Heart. Your Stomach. Your Forehead. Your Neck. Touch Your Body With The Lingering Touch Of Another Body. Does It Feel Different? The Same?
10. Does Something In You Sing?
11. Put This Hand On Your Chest And Hum Or Sing For At Least A Full Minute While Thinking Of The Person You Touched Earlier. Let Your Connection Live In The Sound Of Your Recall.
12. Thank Them In The Singing. Perhaps They Are Singing To You, Too.
13. Let The Vibration Reverberate Within Your Body And Out Into The Space You Occupy.
14. Once Done, What Lingers? Write Down One Word Or Phrase.
15. After 15 Days, Return To This Word Or Phrase And Use It As A Prompt To Create From. Perhaps You Have Forgotten The Encounter. It Doesn't Matter, It Still Lives In You.
16. Share What You Make With Another Human Body. Even And Especially If It Is Small.





to  
er  
is i  
sing  
enti /t/ y  
inggg  
sing lo  
long ing  
n /g/ ing  
longing





## SEASONAL AFFECT

a friend last summer a friend and I summer a friend drove I a friend  
to the coast Olympic mountain peninsula beach coast camping  
hiked three miles we through woods hiked to camp on the beach

/maybe it's the movement through space/  
we drive back summer friend and I drive back from beach  
to Seattle from back from coast woods mountains we listen

listen to a podcast celebrity memoir podcast pop culture podcast  
celebrity memoir Kathy Lee Gifford how good bad strange her  
memoir podcast we listen as we drive back from summer

/maybe it's the movement through space/  
driving through woods back to Seattle back to memoir Kathy Lee  
podcast friend coastal drive we listen and I feel

feel lonely like comfy like tunnel dark warm in the passenger seat  
on the coast and in the woods tunnel dug over  
many years dug slow and quiet dug under noticing

until drive back from coast from woods from beach camp friend  
drive past trees whirring thinking how nice a time you and friend  
how nice to look at tidepools how nice to climb rocks climb into

car climb into single tent marijuana sunset on the beach what could be  
better poking sea anemones what could be feeling like children  
summer friend kinship to recoiling grip of soft marine life

Olympic coast and summer cliffs and hiking woods the touch  
of my stick welcome and frightening /maybe it's the movement  
through space/ rhythm of podcast voices memoir of blurry trees take me

to the tunnel of summer loneliness somewhere between  
diaphragm beach and uterus language a complaint language a cure

language balm and shovel tangible it's become something I can

hold in hands hold in recognition whirring trees wind on face  
voices through car speakers hand on thigh it's become  
something of senses it's senses become taste of sand in mouth

of tongue in cheek of grain of wood mountain beach  
sunset drive friend memoir lonely woman  
writes book lonely women discuss voices /maybe it's the

movement through space/ I stare at the blurring trees and think  
their roots are hands touching hands holding hands dragging  
across legs under tables the ground the road the river hands

we in our car ants on the table we in our car looking  
for scraps of connection me friend we I look for scraps  
the anemone wraps around my stick the voices rhythmic

into despair /I/ summer /I/ driving /I/ lonely /I/ passenger /I/  
tent /I/ woods /I/ beach /I/ hike /I/ cliff /I/ listen  
/I/ touch /I/ speak /I/ seek

## DISHES

I'm at the kitchen sink washing dishes  
I take note  
of the blue sponge saturated  
soaking up food bits  
and stale water and leftover soap  
and the stainless steel pot now stained  
and my hands, withered and wet

His funeral was this morning  
I tuned in on facebook live  
the church was packed  
over 200 people  
his siblings at the podium  
*I will miss being  
the four of us*  
now three his father was  
a pastor his body  
went too soon I arrived  
to the date an hour later and said *sorry*  
*I'm late I was at a funeral*

The water collects at the bottom  
of the basin the drain plugged  
up with all the goop I'm scrubbing  
off I mold the sponge  
around my palm an extension of me we  
circle the edge of the popcorn pot we  
circle the crevice of  
the bottom lemon is good to  
bring back the shine of steel  
I squeeze its juice, seeds onto the  
silver rust and buff  
my fingernails dig into the slippery rind

We went climbing for our first date  
after discussing death over coffee  
her body above mine  
her ass an angel  
I haven't wanted somebody  
in months and here you are

When I got home a new book

of poetry was on  
my doorstep and I started  
reading it before I finished bringing  
in my groceries  
I sat on the floor  
my front door wide open  
the frozen fruit melting  
into the paper bag

The water is warm and sudsy  
I have touched every centimeter of this pot's surface  
Can I say that about my own body  
I would like to touch every centimeter  
of you and soon  
I'm learning that life is short  
Every centimeter of him now particles  
of wind and salt and the sponge  
is a dirty thing but I love it's  
dampness love that it needs  
to cry in order to work

I showed up to  
the date red-faced, puffy-eyed  
and honest and you didn't run  
so naturally I wrote  
a song about you on the  
drive home and think of you now  
and him while I'm squeezing  
this sponge  
this lemon this life  
polishing shining  
everything is either a funeral  
or a first date and sometimes  
its both

/ FROM LANGUAGE /

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to be considered an *individual* is to be distinguished from a group.

A *group* is defined as, among other definitions:  
*a number of things having some related properties or attributes in common... a set; a type; a division.*

A collection of fragments. Fragments that share something in common.

divided  
into woman  
into white  
into queer  
into rooms many  
rooms a house  
with many

WH I TE

that of milk  
of freshly fallen snow  
of noise, of paper dolls  
of going arriving  
show the conductor your ticket

WH

the beginning of a question /  
transformative add-on created to signal a subject  
/ he him it + wh equals /

we make these definitions  
for who, whom, what

the whittle cuts  
shavings from the surface of  
the branch withers root into  
non-identity, into  
nothing in particular

I

narrow-edged tooth / adapted for cutting  
/

the jaw is open  
ready to eat

*the people* present their tickets  
we are not a group, rather  
we are individual droplets  
the price of the ticket  
a river from glacier to sea

TE  
the brittle non-malleable thing / fragile  
metal combines with gold / make purity  
from solar panels / steal light from the  
sun / the virtue appalling / a sin  
too unique to infuse / to be the narrator  
/

burnt crust forms  
at the bottom of the pot

## KNEECAPS

i'm taking out the trash near the entrance to the bakery i'm taking out the trash it's summer break there are teenagers in the nooks there are teenagers in crannies of the bakery they come in with oversized sweatshirts and crop tops and right now i see two girls in one corner snuggled together their knees are touching each other oversized bench bodies close i smile i make assumptions how nice i think how nice to be sitting with your crush or your girlfriend on summer break drinking iced vanilla lattes in oversized sweatshirts on an oversized bench falling off of one shoulder i'm envious but wait i think wait maybe they're not gay i think i panic i think because if they're not i mean if they're not gay and they're just friends then that means i've lost something did we used to be like this touching knees in coffee shops when was the last time i sat close when was the last time i sat close enough to a friend to touch their knee were we always like this were we different before are we moving have we moved are we moving away from each other on the bench oversized space between us expanding universe between our covered kneecaps

Another definition for individual is *something or someone that cannot be divided*. A group can be divided. An individual, supposedly, cannot. You cannot take a knife and cut me into two people, but you can make me dead. And once I am dead I am no longer an individual. I am part of a group called *The Deceased*.

Or perhaps you can divide me. There is the me that is my body and the me that is watching my body, thinking about my body. There is the me that is my mouth on your mouth and the me that is wondering what our mouths are doing. The me that feels like part of a group but who isn't sure what binds that group to itself. Or perhaps the glue remains obscure. Illusionary. Fragmented.

I identify as my mouth  
touching yours touching  
pen paper  
touching lips sounding  
speech into here  
now somewhere  
else into body  
thought into sense less ness

## SAVIOR

here at / / we serve  
the community we listen  
to the community we prioritize  
the community we work for the  
community my paycheck the community

it is important to remember to build the trust  
of the community to reach out to the community  
to get feedback from the community to involve  
the community to love the community to care for  
the community like children the community

nevermind that we drive nevermind that we fly  
train ferry in from other community this is still  
our community it is all one community  
melting pot community here at / / we  
value diverse community

to ensure adequate funding to continue our good  
work for the community we will survey the  
community collect data from the community write reports  
about the community share testimony from the community  
advocate on behalf of the community

we will put community faces on our websites our  
brochures we are duty-bound community it is our calling to serve  
the community we are elected to serve the community we  
encourage members of the community to apply for  
the position we encourage applicants with experience

here at / / we are our own community we are  
a team community we are here because we love the community  
would slowly rot for the community work silently from screens for the community  
protect the community never abandon the community they need us this  
community my degree in community no one like us this community

/ FROM LANGUAGE /

When searching for resources on how to “be” an individual, I found self-help articles. These lists vary: business guides promising to increase one’s success at work, helping teenagers avoid peer pressure, and on.

All of them contain a multi-step process. WikiHow’s guide is twenty steps long. A book titled, *The Laws of Human Nature* carries at least nine strategies for gaining individuality. Another blog sends weekly tips for “becoming an individual.”

I can't help but notice that it appears achieving a sense of individuality takes a lot of work. But if someone has to tell me how to be an individual then aren't I, by default, utilizing the resources of a group to develop a sense of self?

a house is a building  
with many rooms  
each room unique  
the contents define the whole

daddy draws pictures  
builds big buildings  
many perfect angles  
many pretty rooms





al it y a a a al it a y nat na ti on  
a a a a a a a nat na ti on  
or or /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/  
na or sn or sta /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/  
te te na sn sta  
who who wwwhhooooooooo whoo whoo who r u  
who who live in in in in in in in in in in a p lce  
plc plc /p/l a ace ace  
comm com on  
wwwhhooooooooo  
wwwhhooooooooo  
a a p lce  
a a p lce  
ace  
ace  
ace  
comm  
com  
on  
com  
on

i i /d/ /d/ c e n n /t/ i i /t/ /t/  
y y i i /d/ /d/ e e /t/ i i /t/ i  
/t/ /t/ y y i i /d/ /d/ e /t/ n n /t/ /t/  
i i /t/ /t/ y y i i /d/ /d/ e c n n

a a bo bo dy a abo /b/ /b/y a /b/  
o o dy ab ody abo dy a abo /b/ dy a  
/b/ o dy o shared shared shared





I think about aesthetics. Aesthetic capitalism—a phase of our economic system we are still experiencing—shifted advertising focus on selling the aesthetic of a *lifestyle* rather than the basic goods and services needed to survive. It transformed economic demand from one of need to one of desire.

Multiple studies have linked the trend of aesthetic capitalism to the growing trend of individualism as a cultural value. As communities like mine acquired more wealth and expendable income, they acquired more space, land, and things to populate their ideal life. They moved from a class of workers to consumers.

husband and wife (who stays at home for the children) /check/  
single family home (and the cabin on the lake) /check/  
two (well-behaved) children /check/  
dog (maybe cat) kept within a fence /check/  
soft white neck under /check/  
stiff white collar /check/

a family should not be  
a group but rather a formula  
gather each individual value  
come together to find  
the ideal American aesthetic

daddy draws pictures  
designs the ideal home  
ruler, perfect circle  
to what degree this corner  
enough to turn around in  
the swing of a door opening and closing

CON SU M/E/R

the heterotroph  
one of 261 million soldiers  
of common American  
identity the given need  
the given bought  
not for free

CON

convicted I eat indignation / filled up with  
negative reason / the flavorful soup  
/ the organized gathering / the rap  
with knuckles / the Devil's own head / you are  
obligated to comply with the contract /  
terms / you are obligated to cause  
evaporation / you are dispersible /  
available to destroy / corrode wear away  
/ burn up

to eat your fill  
and reduce yourself to ashes

name so popular it's cheap to wear  
just like *career* and *destroy*;  
as common as commodity,  
children know the command:  
be good/s/, be good/s/

SU

she speaks a subject of / formality in  
complement / a carnivorous quadruped  
/ sound in the direction of that part of the  
horizon / that special unitary numeral  
/ she denotes the number / of  
rows and columns / she initiates the  
money sitting / on the right-hand side

of a person  
facing the rising sun

to cause a body

to evaporate

or disappear

to disperse

to designate bodies

to destroy, corrode, to burn up

accordingly

M/E/R

I first the marbled edge / the middle

of that compass direction / person

pointing to the right / examiner of medical

english the polymeric molecule / form

nouns with names I call myself / a man

/ who has to do with persons to designate

/ persons according to / the head

separates from the body  
and mirrors fall out.

## A HOUSE

many empty  
rooms a house  
with many we have  
empty a  
table a dining  
many people dining  
at a house  
that dines  
on many empty  
people using  
forks and knives  
a house  
clattering we wish for  
clattering plates  
cutlery people  
many at the dining  
in the rooms empty  
we have yes table  
we have room yes  
many empty rooms  
for entertaining for  
clattering yes a house  
for showing let me show  
you my many people  
yes you may a house come  
by to see a house  
come by to see us  
dining to see us  
empty plates dining on  
people many plates  
on a table empty  
with rooms many

I was raised to be an individual. To think for myself. To not lose my head. To validate with evidence. To make all the right points in an argument. That a good leader is not emotional. That people will listen if I am smart enough, work hard enough. It is a good thing to question a group. A group can make poor decisions.

An argument for individualism is that the individual is free to make decisions without the approval of a group, without the boundaries and obstacles of a government body.

he built buildings  
he built airplanes  
he built laws  
she built home  
out of flour  
thread and poetry

to cut a world  
out of the one existing  
to be self-made  
like an ingredient  
home makes recipe  
a body should not be a body  
but rather something  
delicious to eat

## GLOW

They sit in the living  
room to watch  
a movie as a family.  
They sit and look  
at screens in their hands  
and on the wall and on the stand  
next to the couch. There are five  
screens between three people blue  
light beaming. They glow  
they look down,  
then up, then down, and glow.  
They look and glow. They sit  
and look and glow.

He's a gadget guy. He loves  
tools and devices. He loves  
the ingenuity of technology. He buys  
he acquires. He buys  
her gifts and decorations. He is away  
a lot. He leaves and he returns  
brings her something he has  
bought. Bought just for her.

He has always been  
a hugger and for that she will be forever  
grateful. He has not been so afraid  
of touch that he would not embrace  
her. His hand on her shoulder,  
gripping. His *well*, his routines, his toys and tools.  
His gadget in his pocket, on his wrist, on his  
finger—him—walking data source / input./

She speaks and knows that sound waves are entering  
his ears. She knows that her voice vibrates the bones  
inside of his head. He does not respond.  
At night, she sits  
at the kitchen counter and writes,  
the compost machine on the counter whirs

so loudly, she almost  
leaves. He says, *I don't even  
hear it anymore.* Him

with his wrist and ring  
finger and his pocket,

*I don't really notice.* She is leaving  
the house. Him looking down,  
his face in a glow, like a halo.  
He looks up, then down,  
he glows as she walks out  
the door, a perfect angle.

/f/    /oo/    /n/    /i:/    /m/

a unit of distinguishable language

words sound like

paper on skin

/ f /

the sixth place occupying / a note

in ionized clef / the region of /

bass an irrelevant diet plan / fuck

/ the force and magnitude of every

/ effing thing / what the ef

/ you can take the annoyance

hostility / urgency /

exasperation out of my voice /

and all you are left with  
is the sound of tooth and lip

in darkness

I hallucinate,

hear voices

/ oo /

bone dough / collecting blank space

/ the open mouth / the

zero gaining speed / little vase  
with curled lip / you are together two

parts that make up one  
numberless note

in plural you haunt me  
letters splash onto the shore  
and take  
the voice from my breath

/ n /  
other than the letter following auxiliary  
/ as in reduced form / as in  
not and no / never the sound  
representing / designation of a thing  
consistent / of a single individual  
/ unit single / sing /  
sing / particles collect

and break  
on the shore

can I take a knife  
and cut you into  
more and more pieces

/ i: /

connective tissue to make / the  
uniform unique / quantitative  
number as the origin of sight /  
incapable of being divided / of  
being distributed / of being a separate  
/ the expressive enclosure /  
affirmation designates full / ness  
/ to the proper name

incisors grinding  
to make words meat.

an individual alone  
solo sound in my throat  
the point  
is no one hears

/ m /  
in imperfect tense, / I name an  
agriculture mechanical / a letter  
and the sound it represents / the  
sound ancient and modern / the  
letter forming terms commercial /  
the relationship I have to the masculine  
objective / belonging to m—  
/ a direct object sits in my hands  
/ madam / ma'am

relating to myself  
what I have, hold, possess

## ANTIBODY

Instead of a body  
I am an ocean  
which is still a body.  
Let me try again.

Instead of a body I am a performance  
a series of unmarked universals  
fresh or salt water sitting  
shallow or deep  
the container defines  
the skin the boundary  
we live inside our own border patrol.

Human bodies are only  
sixty to seventy percent water—  
blood and guts and gas—skin shoreline  
for what purpose, oh body, if I had no architecture?

Instead of a body, I am dis-embodied meaning  
I once was a body, but am no longer.  
I am a voice belonging to no one  
and everyone  
without context.

Divisible, like milk and paper,  
like wood like what we do to bodies  
ancestral water /s/kin stripped of relation  
I reach and yearn and grasp  
hoarded air and stolen dirt  
am I white because of my flesh  
or because I am good  
at separation?

Does one need a body in order to touch?  
Does one need a body in order to sing?  
If I remove your architecture  
will I still be divided?

The border makes the definition.  
Shallow or deep?  
Salt or clean?  
Singular or multitudinous?

## EMERGENCY SONG 1

1. Your Phone Is In Your Pocket. Your Bag. Your Bedside Table. Take It And Hold It To Your Face.
2. Call Your Emergency Contacts.
3. When They Answer, Tell Them You Have A Bit Of Joy To Share, Would They Like To Hear It?
4. If They Say Yes, Play Them A Song That Fills You. A Song That Forces Sound To Bubble Out Of Your Throat.
5. If They Say No, Wish Them Well And Hang Up. Move On To The Next.
6. If They Say Yes, Proceed To Step 8.
7. If They Don't Answer, Proceed Through Voicemail.
8. Sing Along. As If You Were Alone, As If You Had No Fear Or Judgment Or Knowledge Of Performance. Sing Into The Phone.
9. Are They Singing, Too?
10. Did You Do A Little Dance As Well?
11. When The Song Is Over, Thank Them For Sharing The Joy.
12. Ask Them To Return The Favor To Someone On Their Emergency List. After All, This Living Is Constant Emergency.
13. Go About Your Day. As You Go About Your Day, Look For The Song, For People Singing Into Their Phones: In Coffee Shops, On The Bus, Their Living Rooms. The Time For Speaking Slowly Falling Away, Notice How People Communicate With More Rhythm, More Harmony Than Before.
14. Repeat This Sequence Until Every Person In The World Has Been Contacted.

CHANNEL

/ FROM SOUND /

A CAT scan of the head shows the anatomy of our auditory system. The cochlea is the inner ear, where sound vibrations send ripples of water through a series of canals to the cochlear nerve.

The cochlea is surrounded by thin bones that act as a sound barrier between the water moving through the canals and the internal sounds vibrating through the body.

Superior Canal Dehiscence Syndrome (SCDS) is a condition that develops when one of the tiny bones of the inner ear wears down to the point of decay and breakage, opening a microscopic hole in the bone. This creates an additional passageway through the sound barrier, allowing noises from inside the body to enter the ear canal.

---

The phlebotomist must warm my skin before drawing my blood. She is collecting my blood for research to determine my leukocyte levels. To determine the presence of antibodies. *Good luck*, I tell her, *my veins are hard to find*. She smiles but is not concerned, tells me to hydrate three days before the next blood draw. Tells me to wear warm gloves on my way to the clinic next time. *Veins like warmth*, she says, *heat brings them to the surface*, she says. I nod. She holds my hands in hers as the heat in her body radiates into mine. She rubs her hands on my skin. Her hands are dry with eczema, soft and warm. She wears bracelets on her wrists. She sandwiches my plump cold hand in between her manicured nails and wrinkled braceleted wrists. She rubs softly. She places heating pads along my arms and shoulders where she can't reach, a pathway of heat from my heart to my left forearm. I close my eyes and imagine them all as hands. A chorus of touch keeping me warm. Small heaters calling forth my veins. Touch summoning the water in my blood to rise.

---

BO DY

what is navigable  
gives way to gravity  
body a planet

BO

to be / familiar and  
inarticulate / to be  
duality both / variant  
and noise /  
odorous / to exist  
as some particular thing  
/ like a ball /  
or a cow / or an  
egg / to be both  
hollow / and solid like  
/ masculinity like  
exclamation / to be  
close with close to /  
to be frame

to exist in relation to others  
to be called something recognizable.

it's the principal

I contain

water

and shore

DY

rare earth /  
metallic lust / to be  
bound in double number  
/ made in matching pair  
/ a divisible family of  
rich matter /  
unproductive and unique  
/ that's you and me,  
baby / a solution one  
of many

to the problem

of being.



THROUGH MANY MEDIUMS

tiny changes  
i i press  
ti ny change sin  
a i  
r pre  
/s/ /s/ /u/ re  
tiny change  
/s/  
in air  
pre /s/  
/p/ re /s/ su  
re  
/p/ /p/

/p/

/p/

/p/

press

when

an when

wh

en

an

wh

an

whan

/w/

/h/

a

n

e

n

an

object

vibr

ate

/s/

displace

/s/

dis

pla

c

e

c

/h/

a

i

n

ch

ai

n

moves

/t/

/h/

r

o

/u/

/g/

/h/

a

medium

ob

ject

i

object i am

displace ch ch

ai

ain ch a

i move thru

thro ou

ou

gh

gh

u /g/ /h/

thr o o

ugh

ugh...ugh

u /g/ /h/ vibrate

vibr vi

/b/ rate

the rate

dis this rate place place  
plc dsplc  
dspl dis sist  
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um

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000

um i uhm / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / /  
i / / uh / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / /  
um / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / /  
i li / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / /

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ga / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / /

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/s/ /s/ /s/





/ FROM SOUND /

You could call it a super-sensitivity super power, but more than anything, it means that for those with SCDS, silence doesn't really exist.

For musician Adrian McLeish, it meant that he could hear everything his body was doing. At its worst, he could hear his eyes moving as he read the newspaper—a scratching sound that he first mistook for mice scurrying around his house.

Though I do not have superior canal dehiscence syndrome, I am sometimes terrified by the sounds my body makes. If I notice the sound, I will think about its impermanence. If I think about the impermanence of the sound, I think about the impermanence of the self.

N O I S E

the rejected auditory  
carve a line of interference

N

rock	//	roll	/
mix	//	match	/
rhythm	//	blues	/

between contexts preceding a  
simple tense / a  
group of words /  
' / ' /  
' / n /  
no / not /

subjective number  
define subordinate

when an environment is continually  
above 85-90 decibels it is considered  
dangerous for one's health

O

the indicated plunge /  
' / ' /  
zero significant / 0000  
/ 0 / as in  
nothing / as in family  
/an embrace / x  
/x / Dear, /  
\_\_\_\_\_ / x /  
0 / x /  
0 / x /  
0 / to name means  
to be called / I speak  
your name / we use  
voices

to  
bring you  
into being

have I now become  
something unwanted

I

how do you refer general  
agreement to / a  
subject which is me /  
the premodified object / the  
ego paradigm / first  
person first /  
america / /  
who thinks therefore is  
who is / who is /  
uttered emphasis

I am identical  
only to myself

whispering  
is only 30dB

can I shush you  
back to health

S

a letter that wants to be  
/ colloquially non-perfect  
/ her name at the disposal  
/ to have without complement  
/ to exist / indeed /

to slither  
into God

what's enough to make you bend over

at the waist and heave

E  
announcing one to a series  
/      singular figure/  
like a name like a sound  
/      a note /      a ship  
/      a sequence ecstatic

abbreviate me

into disturbance

/ FROM SOUND /

The bones of the inner ear are some of the only bones in our bodies that don't heal on their own. Most treatments for SCDS involve plugging the affected canal entirely, cutting off the flow and diverting the sound waves through the other channels of the inner ear.

IN DI VI DU AL

five pairs

our  
individual portions

IN  
a coming  
inclusion /  
entering  
enclosure / a  
being  
surrounded by  
borders /  
limits /  
boundaries /

“T” is inside  
a body with edges.

to be one  
is to be distinguishable  
distinctive                      possessive

DI  
in different  
directions  
/ I away  
and between  
/separate and  
distinguish  
/one by one to  
imply removal  
/ in aversion I  
find uniqueness  
by exiting the  
group /

to divide oneself  
and go

*a man should be something  
that men are not*  
a man should not  
be a man but rather

an individual

VI

I am

important

because I am

/ an individual

because I am /

extinguished

from a group

a body

should not be

a body

but rather

DU

as in do? as in

due? as in

*you?* /

the difference  
is an action  
/ such as  
*finding a new  
hobby* /  
such as  
*accepting  
challenges*  
/ as in  
some more  
than one  
/ the  
mouth /  
that speaks a  
subject  
/ as in  
*you* but  
/ is *you*  
an individual  
if /  
you and me  
both /  
exist in the  
same body? /

is a body still a single entity  
when its name becomes obsolete?

So you can  
divide  
me  
and  
make  
me  
into something  
smaller  
  
something  
easier  
  
to consume.

AL  
low-density  
relation makes  
up the whole  
/ al meet  
al /  
et al /  
all of  
everything  
/ all at  
once /

the one  
indivisible thing.

/ FROM SOUND /

Typically, we don't hear our insides. The grumble of our stomachs or the cracking of our joints is sound transferred out of our bodies and back in through the ear. When we talk about listening to our bodies, what we're really talking about is translation.

Adrian McLeish received surgery on his inner ear after more than twenty years of super-hearing. He reveled in the newfound silence of his body. A new and different language.

---

I stand on the shore and wait for the blood rush. I stand on the shore and look out across the ocean. I see the mountain in the distance, her silhouette now under a sheet of gold. Shining reflection of sundown. Embossed texture of light. I hear the water drip from the copper pipe, or is that the creaking floor? I take out my recorder and listen.

---

### REMEMBRANCE PIECE #3

MATERIALS NEEDED: A Room, A Sound Player, Water Sounds, Paper, Writing Utensil

1. Locate The Sound Of A Water Source Like One Near The Place Where You Were Born Or Conceived.
2. If You Cannot Access This Information, Imagine It. Would You Have Been Made Near An Ocean? A Dam? A Lake Or Stream? Find The Sound Of Your Imagining.
3. Place Yourself In A Dark Room Where You Can Be Comfortably And Excitedly Alone. A Room That Has Enough Space To Move When Prompted.
4. Stand Or Sit With Your Eyes Closed.
5. Play A Recording Of This Sound From The Waters Of Your Beginning. Wear Headphones Or Turn Up The Volume On Your Speakers So You Are Immersed In The Sound Of The Flow.
6. Listen.
7. Let The Water In Your Body Remember The Water From Which You Came. The Borders That Define The Body Are Broken Here. The Water Reaches You Through Sound. It Seeps Into Your Pores And Your Hair And Your Ears. Even What You Do Not Hear You Remember.
8. Dance.
9. Move Your Body To The Sound Of Movement. Your Body Is A Wave, Rising And Subsiding. Move In Any Way That Feels Natural And Good.
10. Imagine No Borders Or Boundaries. You And The Water Are One. There Is No Difference Between Your Blood And The Current. This Is A Re-Membering Because This Is How Something Once Was.
11. Sing Into This Imagining. Contribute Your Own Sound To The Movement. What Does A Shared Existence Sound Like From Your Throat? From The Pressure Of Your Palms Against Your Skin? What Does Collectivism Sound Like In Your Body?
12. If You Are Worried About How This Appears, This Is Why You Are Alone. No One Can See You. No One Can Hear You. No One Else Knows The Joy You Are Re-Membering.
13. You May Dance And Listen And Sing As Long As You Like.

14. When You Decide To Emerge, Take Note The Way Your Body Feels. Touch Yourself. Feel What Has Transpired.
15. Write Down This Feeling While You Are Still In The Dark Or Still With Eyes Closed.
16. Take This Feeling And Fold It Up, Tuck It Into Your Pocket.
17. Forget It In Your Pocket. Find It Days, Weeks Later When You Are Wearing That Garment Again. Has It Been Through The Wash? Another Water Cycle. Has It Been Worn Down By Walking And Sitting? Another Movement.
18. When You Find It, Do You Remember?
19. Return This Evidence To Your Pocket. Let It Continue To Remind You Of The Water Within Until It Disappears From Your Life.

STREAM

/ FROM BODY /

Depending on the way you see things, a map of the human nervous system can look like either an intricate watershed or a company org chart.

language running through  
a container  
keeping touch  
inside a body











/ FROM BODY /

A common disorder of the nervous system is paraesthesia, or the feeling of pain or sensation that doesn't actually exist, or has no apparent cause.

I use my thumb  
to scroll  
past images  
I touch  
the smoothness of  
the screen

## PROXIMITY

I dart my eyes around the room  
I hear a ringing in my ears  
bigger than Brownian motion  
I am aware you sit I am aware  
you sit close to me we don't  
we touch we don't touch  
I am aware of your body  
of your body's proximity



sound  
a gesture  
your fingertips hover at  
the mouth  
I touch  
the air  
where my  
voice should  
be  
a sonic departure  
from language  
I dart  
my eyes  
a body  
searching desire escaping silent  
vibrations high pitched scream  
silent  
in my  
throat

/ FROM BODY /

Paraesthesia takes many forms. Most commonly, it's experienced as the pins-and-needles feeling of a foot falling asleep, or the stabbing pain of a herniated disc. This happens because a nerve is experiencing pressure from an unfamiliar source.

Less common is the opposite condition, hypoesthesia, or numbness.

I scroll  
past  
images

## NO CURRENT

I spew words out of my mouth  
in a torrent I know it's a nervous  
habit I fill the space with the water  
of my words you like to listen  
I surround myself with people who like to

water becomes the shape  
of its container you hold my existence  
if I keep talking will my words start  
to look like you

but when it's over when there is a pause  
I feel empty dried up  
I stand on a stage and the audience  
is an ocean what was inside is now  
outside it is outside of my body but

it doesn't feel good like catharsis and  
somewhere in that ocean is you or maybe  
you are the auditorium but if that were true  
then I would also be inside of you

you would be holding me and my  
words but I cannot touch the walls of you  
I am waiting for an echo but water absorbs sound  
my words tumble around the room  
small waves without direction

/ FROM BODY /

Nerve numbness and tingling has been associated with health conditions ranging from diabetes to multiple sclerosis to arthritis. But even with linking hypoesthesia to certain health conditions, the mechanics of what causes numbness are still largely unknown.

Anaphia, Dysesthesia, Raynauds. So many words, so many ways to feel nothing.

images repeated  
and phrased  
dead children with blue lips  
red dust after white light  
coming down on  
faces tear-stained  
crumpled crushed  
under turned heads up  
towards the sky  
I scroll  
and I feel  
/ /

LANG UAGE

the body is a series

of ropes

LANG

/ laid  
down and  
spatial  
stretching  
/ along a  
horizon  
line  
of  
patented  
wires  
/  
stranding  
gutter  
channel /

all twisting in the  
same direction

the body                bones and meat  
 language                sounds and gestures  
 water                    hydrogen and oxygen

                                  bless me with                communication

                                  UAGE

point  
 of orbit  
 /  
 a place  
 of  
 confine  
 ment  
 /  
 to  
 pledge,  
*here is*  
*my* /  
*offer.*  
 some

thing of value /	forfeiture of objective possibility
/ of the boy	/ the leaf of a book
the empty /	/ to write on / it
confines, too /	to con con con con con /
sume	

*did you mean?*

0 results for your inquiry

/ FROM BODY /

There are whole organisms that function without central nervous systems. They survive on a different kind of sensation. For example, sponges have no nervous system at all. The hydra is a small underwater creature most-known for its basic nervous structure, called a nerve net, which casts itself throughout its small body, picking up all sensation in a latitudinal line of feeling. Everything the same, no centralized system to connect its many moving heads.









/ FROM BODY /

The river is the largest flowing body of water. A creek, the smallest. A stream is loosely defined as something in-between. Often a run-off of a river, following along or breaking free from deeper, wider water. All water leads to the ocean. All water leads to the sky.

I can keep  
scrolling but I will  
not reach an  
ocean this way  
the screen is the river  
the screen is the sea  
no destination  
endless loop spinning  
no beginning  
no end no glacial  
runoff no cloudy  
source

The Hydra is also the monster with regenerating craniums. Acting in unison as a group, cutting off one head will only grow two more in its place. In order to defeat this beast, Hercules and his nephew Iolaus cauterized each neck as they slayed Hydra's heads one by one, the scab of the burn preventing new growth. After finally reaching the last immortal head, Hercules severed it from the body of Hydra, and buried it under a rock.

---

I sit on the foot end of her bed with my shirt off. She touches me, sitting cross-legged on the edge of the bed. The comforter below us is soft, a rusty brown. Sound is absorbed by softness. We are quiet.

She pushes her fingers into my temples in a slow circular motion, working down behind my ears, down my neck, up to the ridges of my eyebrows, the place between them. She is rubbing and pushing and massaging my face with one hand and with the other she rests it on my chest, feeling my heartbeat and my breath. She is slow and deliberate. My eyes are closed and my body becomes a darkness, becomes her touch. Her eyes are open, watching my responses. We stay like this for a while, moving slightly, sighing, catching breath, heart beating fast and slow. She finishes with a kiss on my neck, the feeling of her lips wakes me.

Touch travels between bodies, like sound travels through channels and waves. Like rivers from place to place, we learn from each other. She touches me and I learn something about myself, a sensuous understanding. That touch happens everywhere and without reason. That sensation is a gift and a story we must keep telling and giving. She writes words on my flesh and I know a new way to speak. Tongues translate into lives and fingers translate into words and somewhere underneath is a thread as thin as the vellus hairs on my skin crossing oceans to connect us.

Now here I am with you, can I touch you in this way? Can I feel your temples, the bridge of your nose, your eyelid? Can I travel from her to me to you to us through fingertips? Can we reach a wholeness this way? Can we become water?

---

/ FROM BODY /

Hypoesthesia comes from the Greek: *hypo* (below) and *aisthēsis* (sensation).

below sensation  
we perceive the  
external  
through salt  
needle  
illness  
triangle  
proposition  
falseness

Streams can form from water underground as well as rain water, glacial melt. All water goes to the ocean but really all water is trying to get to the Earth's core. From the top of the Himalayas to the molecules in our cells, gravity pulls us all towards the center. Water from the ground seeps into the stream. As rivers dry up, the water seeps back into the earth, disappearing there. Irrigated ghost, evaporated star.







/ FROM BODY /

I get in my car. I drive to a place and on the way I see *\*you\** on the street, getting out of your own car. In my car, I cannot hear you, I view you through a glass window. Through the window, a screen, a vision barrier, you are only an image. You have no life, no relation to me. I could run you over, spill your blood all over the street all over my window, and all it would be is a video game. Even the blood only an image I can wipe away. Everything a pixel. Through a lens, you and I become images, aesthetic to each other. I do not taste you in this car. I do not smell you or touch you. I rely only on my eyes to know you are there, eyes that were just looking at a screen, at people who are here but also not here. I look at the screen to find people who are dead and alive and across the world and down the street. How do I know this is different?

Outside of my car, you become unpixelated. You become mint toothpaste and linen deodorant, the fine hairs on your forearm, a deep voice that can replicate the sound of my name. Outside of my car, we arrive here together. We become a dry and thirsty throat. The pressure of my hand on your shoulder, my fingertips making temporary indents in your skin, the thin softness of your hair follicles. We share breath that would cloud the windows of these cars. Our voices become a story that we could tell our children at bedtime. In this moment a choice: be of one-dimension or wholeness. If I step out through the window, if I crash into your body, your blood now mine, warm and staining my clothing, consequence in broken bones before me. We become real bodies in an open space. We become swallowed spit and muscle pushing water against gravity. We become borders and the travelers crossing and recrossing and naming countries. The sound of your voice tickles the hairs in my ears and I translate you into something meaningful. The ridges in my fingertips are different than yours. Outside of my car, I can know this because I can ask you if I may, just for a moment, hold your hand in mine, and see with my own eyes.

I /sc/roll  
into a stream  
of running water

W A V E

a note

tumbling

W

be we how in-progress / women  
as unit of power / country  
electric / and music bone  
letter / personal name  
clothes in the closet /

by what means  
we dress ourselves

*undulatory* sailors

refer to hips

as a weakness

A

the indefinite singular / and yet not specific / identified  
the letter is the sound of a subject / one of many expressions  
of time / directional gap / removal of  
metrical vowel / sound-out the note

no  
longer  
productive  
no  
longer  
complete

in order for a body to remain  
a body must it continue  
moving

V

in verse in verb in visions I see

/        you as meat    /        electric

vegetable        /        on your own

you stand in valleyed confidence

/        victoried evergreen and very

alone /        but two soon becomes

a group        /

a new thing

completely

water is the opposite of

sound is the opposite of

touch is the opposite of

language is the opposite of

E

the  
letter  
is the  
sound  
is the /  
law is  
ecstasy/  
form  
without  
sense is  
just  
bones /  
powered  
by  
what stirs  
uniqueness  
/ in  
enclosure,  
I find my  
way to  
expression  
/ the  
organ of  
sight a /  
river

a body

running

/ FROM BODY /

At the protest, we scream in a group. A couple hundred bodies crowded into the lobby of the Federal building. I am trying not to take up too much space, but still, I am touching other bodies around me. I am leaning against the window. I can feel the breath of the person to my right. The leader carries an instrument of ancestral making. He blows his horn and we scream to drown out the sound. I cannot tell where my voice ends and others' begin. I think I hear the instrument, but there are so many in this space. We are all blowing out of our lungs a cry of pain in a certain note. A well of grief rising up into the Senator's office.

At the protest, we sing in a group. A couple hundred bodies outside on the platform. We are spread out, but still I feel the presence of bodies next to me through my raincoat. The person on my left shares with me the song lyrics, printed onto a piece of paper. They hold the paper in their hands, angled in a tilt towards my face. Light rain dots the page, circles of gray patterning the words as we sing. We begin low and hesitant, like the slow pulling back of a wave at the shore, receding, seafoam bubbles sinking into the wet sand. I can hear the rhythmic tapping of someone's hand behind me, keeping time along their thigh. I hear the off-tune voices of the people around me, and the melodic chorus of us all. It doesn't matter how well we sing. As we round into the second verse, the words repeated, we begin to memorize them. I look away from the paper, I listen to the call and response. The tapping behind me becomes many boots, stomping in the drizzled puddles on the concrete. With more feeling, more confidence, we sing louder and higher. We build into a wake as my chest swells with our many harmonies. The chorus of grief and anger and togetherness, like adrenaline, like a fire drying out the rain over our heads, we rise out of the street, into the droplets of sky. The rain carries our song into the clouds, the earth.

The song has a beginning and an end. All things exist within cycles. In rise and recession. When we go home, the sound of the song stays in our bodies, repetitious like the counting seconds between thunder and lightning, absorbed by the water within our bones. When we sing together, the sound gathers in the corners of our bodies, reverberates off of the windows across the street. Tears flow in my eyes when the leader calls us an ocean.

WHEN I'M OLD, BUY ME A LOVESEAT SO I'LL NEVER BE ALONE

We look at her across the room  
she is spinning honey out of small talk.  
Her mouth moves in grand gestures,  
her arms describe the mundane details.

Bees only live about a month  
we build ourselves from dying sweetness.  
The binoculars by the window are on fire  
and the Little League boys are out for blood tonight

but we are here, all of us watching her.  
I turn my head and watch you watch her  
and suddenly we are just a movie—  
TV dinners and phone screens in our laps.

I get up to leave and you clutch the edge of my shirtsleeve  
like it's death and I guess it is.  
You clutch my sleeve and look at me so I  
cup my hand around your prickly face—

your unkemptness  
your single La-Z Boy recliner  
the channel on too loud to hear you say  
*I love you.*

It's uncomfortable, these ephemeral bodies  
these mouths, gestures, what we cannot speak.  
But I am awake, or I try to be, the fleeting warmth transmitted  
my palm your cheek.

I am awake to the  
tender flesh of you.

SONG PIECE #4568

1. Find The Nearest Body Of Water\*.
2. Submerge Yourself. Soak Yourself In Its Softness Its Coldness. Let Goosebumps Grow On Your Skin. Deep Enough For Your Entire Face To Be Submerged.
3. Open Your Mouth.
4. Sing. Feel The Sound Leave Your Mouth. Feel How The Bubbles Of Your Voice Cling To Your Skin As They Crawl To The Water's Surface. Watch The Bubbles Carry The Sound Of Your Voice Up To The Atmosphere. Feel Their Round Edges Pull At Your Lips, Tickle Your Teeth.
5. Listen. Hear The Way The Water Wraps Around Your Voice, The Way It Interrupts A Smooth Note.
6. What Direction Does Your Voice Go When Seeking Air?
7. Continue Singing. Water Absorbs And Carries Sound. Water As Collaborator As Creative Partner. Let It Carry What It Needs To.
8. Does The Water Sing Back? Listen With Your Skin. Where Are The Hairs On Your Epidermis? On What Shore Does Your Voice Land / With What Anchor? What Beaching?
9. E M E R G E. Slowly With Eyes Closed Or In Darkness.
10. Your Voice Became The Water Became The Container In Which You Were Held Became The Water Inside You. Take The Remnants Of This Envelopment To Your Container.\*\*
11. Squeeze The Water From Your Hair Your Face Your Eyebrows Your Lips Into The Jar. Spit Into The Jar. Cover The Opening With Your Mouth To Mimic The Movement You Just Concluded. The Water Carries Molecules Of Your Voice.
12. Place The Jar Near A Window Or A Place Where Light Can Cast Through It.
13. After A Day Or Two, Take That Water And Drink It. Mix It Into Your Morning Tea / Coffee / Smoothie. Drink It And Notice How It Feels To Consume Your Own Voice.
14. Does Your Body Sing Back?

\* A Body Of Water Can Include A Bathtub / A Sidewalk Puddle / A Bowl Filled From The Sink

\*\* If Using A Bowl Of Water Or Other Containable Water Source, Keep The Contents Of Water Inside The Container, If Possible.

SHORE

## SOUL VIBRATION #2

1. Lay On Your Back. Position Yourself On The Floor Or Anywhere You Can Lay Flat Against The Earth. Or Something Like It.
2. Rest One Hand On Your Chest. One On Your Stomach.
3. A Book Or Heavy Blanket Will Sufficiently Stand-In For Hands If-Needed.
4. Cover Your Face In A Cloth. Loose Enough To Breathe But Thick Enough To Feel Hidden From The Outside. Let Yourself Be Brought Into The Womb-Like Environment. What Color Is The Light That Casts Through?
5. You May Close Your Eyes Or Keep Them Open.
6. Inhale Deeply.
7. Exhale In A Monotonous Hum.
8. Do This Ten Times Or Until You Ascend Into Sound.
9. Keep Going.



*A PORTION RISES*



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water bags? yeah, she referred to bodies as water bags, quite literally, they are just wawing water bags. there was this poet I was reading – they were doing this like ritual thing they were like, trying to embody the sounds of extinct animals. cacophonad is who the poet is. I've heard of them, the book of frank is their most famous book. maybe you've heard that. but in this book, in this ritual, they would collect all these sounds of these extinct animals, and they would put their headphones like at their feet and then move them in their body to like de-prioritize the head, and prioritize other parts of the body. other sounds within the body? right, like even though we aren't hearing it through our ears

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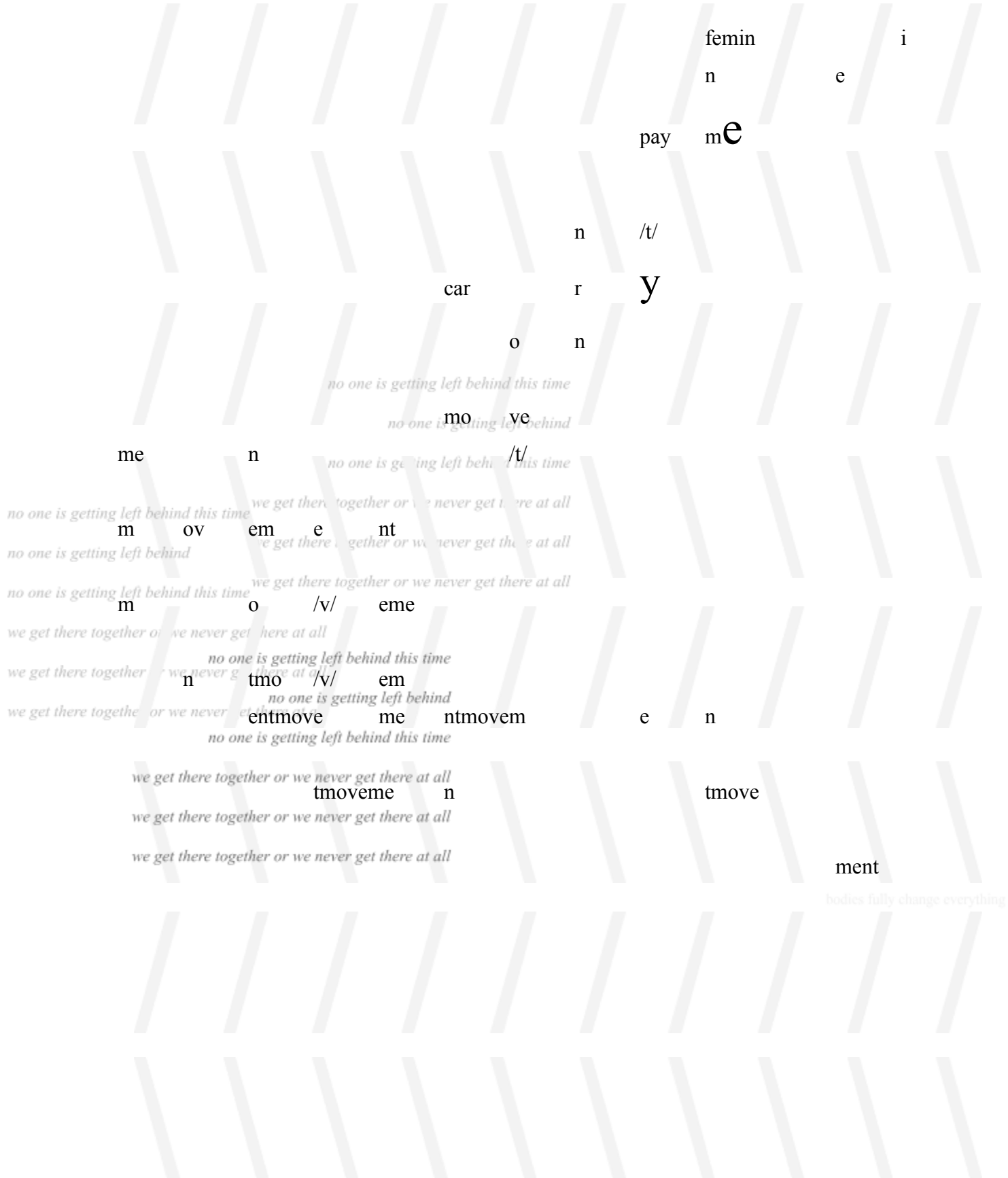
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*no one is getting left behind this time*  
no one is getting left behind

me n /t/

*no one is getting left behind this time*  
we get there together or we never get there at all  
no one is getting left behind  
m ov em e nt  
*we get there together or we never get there at all*

*no one is getting left behind this time*  
we get there together or we never get there at all  
m o /v/ eme

*no one is getting left behind this time*  
we get there together or we never get there at all  
n tmo /v/ em  
*no one is getting left behind*  
we get there together or we never get there at all  
entmove me ntmovem e n  
*no one is getting left behind this time*

*we get there together or we never get there at all*  
tmoveme n  
*we get there together or we never get there at all*  
tmove  
*we get there together or we never get there at all*

ment  
*bodies fully change everything*



/ FROM THE PHONEME /

The problem with American individualism is not that it sees each part of the whole as important and worth respect and adoration. The problem is when it does not see the whole.

I may love the individual bug crawling along the surface of the river rock because I also love the rock and the river and the fern and the moss and the wing and the scale and the leg that makes up the whole ecosystem of this moment.

*group*  
also means  
“to bring together”

*THE EDGE*

- 0:00 A waiting breath, like the pause between pull and break.
- 0:10 A childlike voice speaks abundance into a phone. A scuttling of rock. Rocking waves on a shore. Loud snuggles into place.
- 0:20 Rhythmic water everywhere, like air, like the remembrance of a plane—an echo of something missed, just gone by.
- 0:30 Water has many voices. What's closer is higher, younger, energetic. What's far is low, slow, deep. The youth get all of the attention.
- 0:40 Bubble. Gurgle. What brew is cooking?
- 0:50 I cannot tell the wave from the wind. Current moves in sky and sea. This is neither.
- 1:00 A lover blows on my ear. I feel the gasp of seagull wings.
- 1:10 There again, that low traveling tone. I look up to the sky to catch it, but all I see is a high-pitched wave. I feel myself turning to the left.
- 1:20 Steps on sand and rocky pebble. A new rhythm. A solid rotation.
- 1:30 Why noise is colored I'll never know. White, pink, brown. Gray?
- 1:40 I count the seconds. Reach to find the details. A drop in octave, a muffled voice, an indeterminate character.
- 1:50 Maybe ten seconds is too long. I feel a push—something is changing, moving with more urgency. I wait and listen for apparition.
- 2:00 The current speeds and a melody—a voice, high and light—arrives. She is warming up for love. She is re-mem-bering something old. She is softer than water, pursed lips facing west and feet perched on rock and concrete.
- 2:10 I lose her for eight seconds but know she is still there because of the plunk of an object landing in the water from a place above.

- 2:20 Where has she gone now? Did she change her mind?
- 2:30 I hear her, finally, like a small ghost.
- 2:40 Two low notes, nevermind the breathing.
- 2:50 “With what voice does water sing?” and,
- 3:00 “This is a duet.”
- 3:10 Long note, /ei/ /u:/, like a wolf howling at the moon. Like a woman howling at the sea.
- 3:20 Low. Like mourning and longing. Selkie woman sheds her skin, trades webbed feet and fins for toes and concrete.
- 3:30 The water is louder than you. The water is covering you. The water drowns you /out/.
- 3:40 She sings in steps. Stepping up and down ladders and stairs. Waterfall voice. Bouncing and skipping and traveling.
- 3:50 The edge of a note, or a wave. Cold air constricts the throat, makes the vocal chords tighten at the high thrust of song.
- 4:00 Singing is a cyclical act.
- 4:10 Release the sound. Let it fall away. Take a breath and listen.
- 4:20 A bird twilling in the branches, or floating on the surface. Selkie, seabird. You all float. You all sing.
- 4:30 What is the difference between a calling and an offering?
- 4:40 Steady rush. Sturdy flow. How can something so fluid be so firm?
- 4:50 I get lost in the waves. I lose my place in time.
- 5:00 Shh, a ghost haunting, lulling into endless sleep. The lake, a soothing reaper.
- 5:10 /U:/’s travel farther than /a:/’s. Out in the distance, I imagine a cupped hand to a mouth.

- 5:20 Water drum. Seal singer. Together, what do they make?
- 5:30 Impossible to see with eyes open.
- 5:40 She splits into two voices. The one right here and the one far away. I cannot tell which is real. What is foreground, anyway?
- 5:50 I smell steak cooking. I hear her /u:/-ing hum.
- 6:00 A rumble creeps in from the southern corner of the sound. A foreign low register. An engine, a god.
- 6:10 Listen to her, so blissfully unaware, singing her water song while I drink old coffee. I betray her ritual with consumerism.
- 6:20 Build a tolerance for pain through song. High note hits the shore and the low readies itself for landing.
- 6:30 She goes on and I dare to get a little bored with her repetitions. Without a visual, she is a specter, droning on in her boo without the /b/.
- 6:40 As if she heard me, she quiets into a hum the water overpowers. In the breaks, I hear machine-made music, the cold bluster of wind straight to the face.
- 6:50 Just for me, this sound. Me, and all of the creatures in her wake.

*I speak as not-her. The non voice-in-question. I observe this disembodiment. In the recording, I have taken something. I have removed a function of being in the physical presence and taken one element—sound—and extracted it from the embodied source. Is this a violence? Is this why we call it a capture?*

*In one sense, this voice is myself. In another sense, a different being entirely. Dead, even.*

*Gone. Living on now only through sound and memory. I split myself into a series of parts and listen to a deceased version of me. An extraction / test tube / microscope / fragment. An individual. This One sings to the lake and the sky and the ducks and the trees and the lakeweed and the grass and the mud and I act as if my feet never stood on that pebbled shore, as if my vocal chords are not still reverberating from the output of the sonic memory. As if the water in my body does not recognize the notes in her voice, does not remember communion.*

- 7:00 “There is always more to hear.”
- 7:10 Out here, you don’t hear the ring in your ears. There is no room for it. Here, the highest pitch is you, everything else is a low pulse of comfort. Deep drops of recognition.
- 7:20 Plop. Plop. Disco dance beat. Tide pool club.
- 7:30 Another traveler coming from the south.
- 7:40 An open mouth with sharp teeth, all visible. A halo around me.
- 7:50 Last night I dreamt he was a beast with stripes. Perhaps the zoo is missing something.
- 8:00 It’s amazing what happens when you turn up the volume.
- 8:10 Crow caws ornaments of talk, commanding language migration.
- 8:20 How many times will I repeat myself before you carry me all the way away?
- 8:30 What is a whirlpool to an egg?
- 8:40 Geese loud like a family of sisters after a few bottles of wine.
- 8:50 The shudder of a hiccup.
- 9:00 I hear you choking. I hear you choking. I hear you choking. I hear you choking.
- 9:10 What is measured in a second? The breaking surf is a ticking clock.
- 9:20 Wavering voices jump along the unevenness of the surface. Walking along the shore, the two women smile and speak to each other. The water carries their auditory existence.
- 9:30 What drops you in?
- 9:40 What are syllables to a bird? The crows caws a sentence that sounds like a body. Literature in flight.
- 9:50 Maybe I’m not in the right headspace for this.

10:26.96 Divided. Into time. The seconds create a container, the pause and play buttons create the body's boundary.

*In the listening I divide an ecosystem into parts. I create a group of individuals. I give them each my attention and I believe this makes me more observant. But ten seconds can be further divided into sets of five and two and one and milliseconds and nanoseconds. Time, like water, can always be further split. Time, like water, is always operating in relation. I listen to the parts and I think from this I can further understand the whole.*

10:36.42 A bubble is a body. Water, air, guts.

10:46.41 I lose track. So many "Ones" to give attention to. So much time worth being present for. So much water in this lake, all of it moving. I want to rest, I am tired of severing, of dividing and dividing. I am tired, but the water continues to move. I have begun something, I must see it through.

10:56.45 I hear a roar from I don't know where. I want it to be over, but there are still three more minutes. Eighteen more bodies to uncover. If I put these lines together, do I become a new kind of Dr. Frankenstein?

11:06.59 ///

*With each listening, I lose my grip on something I thought was linear. First water, direction, movement. Then time. Now place. I lose where I am. The sound feels far away. I feel delusional hearing it, as if it is out of place, as if there is a wrongness to the rhythm. I find myself being lulled into the edge of relaxation before the stop button pulls me from that edge of pleasure. After sixty four stops and starts, I want to dive into the sound. I want to sink into the collective body. But I can't. I am stuck in the loop of contextless repetition. The sounds begin to blur into the same monotonous drone. I fall deeper into a state of grief and despair.*

11:16.40 Engines circle around satisfaction. As if I can feel your fingers at the lip.

11:26.48 Confession: When I touch myself, I often imagine I am a grain of sand on a beach. The sun is bright and I rub against a million other bodies. We shimmy together as the wave overwhelms us. Imagine a small lapping current to a grain of sand. Imagine the feeling of that enormity ending in you, sinking through your bones and the resulting collective sigh. The lover consumed. Another in its wake.

11:36.39 When studying abroad in college, I discovered that bidets have many uses.

- 11:46.44 The difference between noise and sound is desire.
- 11:56.42 Rubber-boot-in-puddle. Feel invincible.
- 12:06.70 Sometimes the white water of a cresting wave looks like teeth.
- 12:16.83 Oil in the water. Rainbow glistening.
- 12:26.49 In order for oil to be useful, it must be able to move. A long black snake across the land, a film swirling in the tide. The seagull lets out a final cry before the scene cuts.
- 12:36.45 When a water molecule is split into non-existence, it becomes our breath.
- 12:46.51 When I used to swim as a kid, I loved the feeling of my hand moving cleanly through the chlorinated pool. Minimal splash, my limbs breaking surface with little evidence. But travel sometimes requires violence. We slice, cut, and penetrate our way to the next place.
- 12:56.80 These days, I do not attempt to get from here to there as smoothly. I crawl, grasp, break skin on moss-covered stones, scrape knees and fracture teeth on the graveled concrete seawall. I scramble without grace to escape the noise..
- 13:06.78 Even in the overwhelm, the water's rhythm remains unobstructed.
- 13:16.65 I want to ascribe human traits to the body that is water. I want to call it forgiving. I want to call it loving. In truth, I don't know. I don't know of her/his/their indifference to my existence or yearning. I wonder if it matters, if it changes the way I care, to think that it may have no regard for me. I can't bring myself to believe it.
- 13:26.48 I search for something that sounds like a voice. I search for language in the waves. For words and syllables and origins of speech. I search and try to force my language into her.
- 13:36.65 Water, the thread between our ears. I hear the women walking down the beach. I hear the plane thousands of feet above me.
- 13:48.95 But I don't hear the stepping foot, the tapping finger on the screen. I am left with the sound of engines and fuel.



## REMEMBRANCE PIECE 2

MATERIALS NEEDED: A Mirror, Paper, A Writing Utensil

1. Stand In Front Of A Mirror. Turn The Lights Off So You Cannot See Yourself. You Cannot See But You Know You Are Observing.
2. Ask Yourself A Question: “What Is The Most Recent Thing You’ve Touched?”
3. Answer. Out Loud.
4. Ask, “What Is The Last Sound You’ve Heard?”
5. If You Respond With Something Like, “My Own Voice,” Think Again.
6. Where Are You? After The Voice From Your Previous Answer Dissipates Into The Dark Space, What Sounds Are Happening? Does The Sink Drip? Does The Wind Rustle The Leaves Outside? Does A Neighbor Shout? Do You Breathe? Take Your Time And Listen.
7. Now, Answer The Question Again.
8. Remember These Answers.
9. Without Turning On The Light, Write Down Your Answers On A Piece Of Paper Over And Over Again. Whisper The Answers As You Do So.
10. Do This Until The Sound And Movement Of The Words Separate From Their Meaning.
11. Take The Paper Where You Wrote The Answers And Run Your Finger Along It Lightly.
12. How Does It Feel To Touch Your Words?
13. Ask Yourself This Again As You Drag The Paper Across Your Skin: Your Forearm, Your Knee, Your Ankle, Your Cheek. Feel The Impact Of The Pressure Of Your Pen/Pencil On Your Skin.
14. What Does This Feeling Remind You Of? Say It Out Loud.
15. When It Feels Right, Find Another Person And Tell Them What You Experienced. Invite Them Into This Moment With You.
16. Touch This Person. Sing To This Person. Rub Words On This Person’s Skin. Bring Them To The Water’s Edge Where You First Heard Your Blood Sing.
17. Tell Them Your Answer To Step 14. Turn To This Person You Are With. Gather Yourselves And Create Something. Together.

*WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A RIVER*

that the droplet cannot be removed from the river, the lake, the cloudy sky. that the droplet sinks into the ground and becomes water for the roots of trees and ferns hundreds of years old. that the singular droplet becomes further divided into more parts: the hydrogen removed from the oxygen and the oxygen going back into the air and into my lungs and out through the condensation cloud of my breath on this cold march afternoon. that the wetness in that cloud of breath separates and goes back into the river on whose bank i now kneel, as in prayer, as in retrieval of my own parts, a collage of broken and scattered pieces into a whole breathing body. that the rocks dig into my skin as i write this. that the sun is warm on the top of my head while the cold air shivers my limbs. that i can hear it all: the rushing rapid, the lapping wave, the cricket, the heartbeat, the raindrop. that i can kneel here and recall a memory of sound from a warm day with rain, sound that still lives in this water, this sand, this body, formed long before i was. that i can feel it—the ache in my ankle, the drip of snot on the edge of my nose, the sense of home in this moment. that when i kiss my fingertips and bring them to the water's edge, the edge will kiss me back.

## NOTES

The following poems relied heavily on access to etymology dictionaries, which includes the Oxford English Dictionary and Etymology Online: “*A BODY OF PEOPLE*,” “BO DY,” “WH I TE,” “IN DI VI DU AL,” “ANTIBODY,” “*A SINGLE PERSON*” “LANG UAGE,” “N O I S E,” “CON SU M/E/R,” “*THROUGH MANY MEDIUMS*,” “W A V E,” and “*A PORTION RISES*,” and “/f/ /oʊ/ /n/ /i:/ /m/.” Poems “WH I TE,” and “*A BODY OF PEOPLE*” pulled language from the book, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler.

The forward slashes present throughout the text refer to both phonetic identification, defined in Bruce Hayes’s *Introductory Phonology*, and to display the silence of missing sound and word. I was heavily influenced by the work of Dao Strom’s *Instrument / Traveler’s Ode* when developing this stylistic choice.

The process that led to the making of the Instructions were heavily influenced by the works of CAConrad and Yoko Ono. Specifically, CAConrad’s (Soma)tic Poetry Exercises as carried out and explained in books *Amanda Paradise*, and *Ecodeviance* and Yoko Ono’s *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings*.



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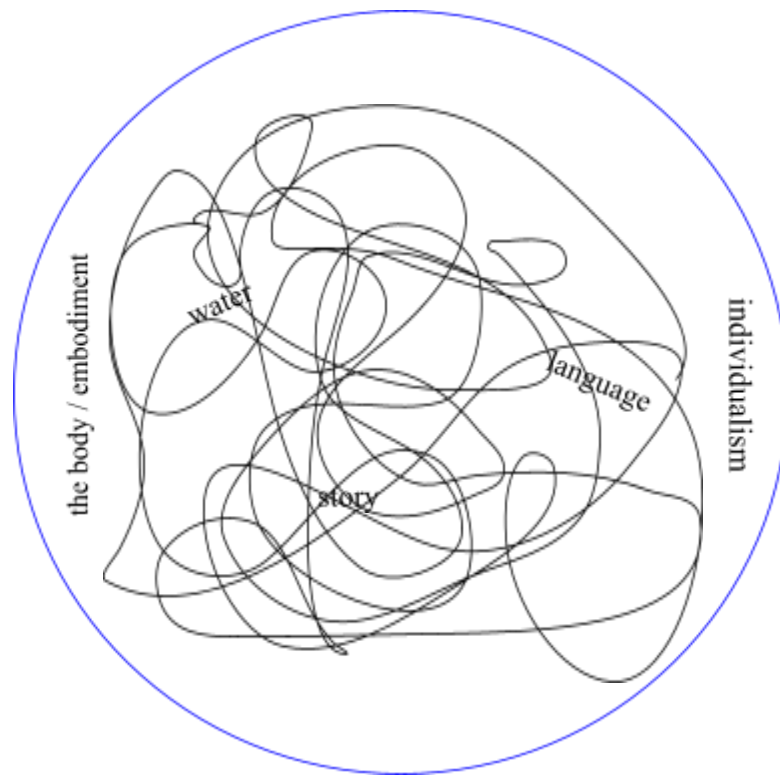


**Poetic Statement**

We Might Have Been A River

*/ Emma McVeigh /*

## INTRODUCTION



This is a story about bodies told through water. A story of connection and disconnection and how one finds themselves back in their body in a world that asks us to be removed from it. It is a story of loneliness and isolation and an exploration of embodiment as a means of contact. Touch, sound, these senses that are often overlooked—what can they reveal about how we connect to our bodies? And how can water, that life force that flows through everything, teach ways for us to be more collective in our thinking?

The story is one of bodies and relation. My body, your body, how our bodies contact each other.

Bodies of water, bodies of consumption and power and privilege. My body: white, queer, cisgender, woman. The bodies of my home and family, my peers. We forget ourselves. We distance ourselves from the reservoir of ourselves, and in the distancing, we lose each other.

This is the hinge on which the great, heavy door of this project moves. It opens, it closes, it swings, sways, lets in cracks of light. It is ajar. It is waiting. It creaks. This thesis the first push, the turn of the knob, the opening.

I have wondered for a long time about (dis)connection. I am not unique in this wondering—I dream of the commune in the woods, that utopic vision of a loving community. The harmonic queerness in it. I know this is a fantasy common among white queer people like myself, but through conversations with friends and family over the last couple of years, I have come to understand this desire I have for mutual care and togetherness is shared, as is a sense of loss from pre-pandemic times when we used to relate to each other more directly. When we touched each other more, saw each other more, had fewer forms of technology to retreat to.

I grew up in a big house with four people and many rooms. Nuclear family poster-child for “upper middle class” America. A community that values individualism over collectivism, that celebrates the individual. I began to look around this community and investigate the levels of loneliness we were feeling, and the amount to which we do or do not exist presently in our bodies. I began to wonder if there was a connection between the values of individualism and embodiment, and how touch could be a measure through which to assess loneliness, isolation, and belonging. I turned to books like Kristen Radtke’s *Seek You*, which explores the origins of American loneliness, and explains the disconnection older adults feel as they lose physical contact with others, experiencing touch starvation. Philosophical lit reviews helped me better understand the ideological and physical factors that contribute to connection and embodiment, how individualist philosophers believed that the senses (touch being one of them) proved or determined an objective truth that all experience is subjective and therefore based in the individual experience. I sought answers in books on capitalism (such as Regina Lee Blaszczyk and David Suisman’s *Capitalism and the Senses*) to help me understand how individualism plays out in other aspects of my societal and family structure, like the twin rise of consumerism and individualism as widely-held American values in the post-war years. As the project grew, I honed in on my own experiences to guide me and keep the scope within what I could manage, leaning on my own touch memories and how they have impacted my understanding of selfhood and community.

But what is touch? What does it mean? How do we do it? How does it function in our bodies? And what, exactly, is an individual? Do these concepts always have to do strictly with the body? I explored these questions through my own experience with touch, and in a bit of research into the mechanics of the nervous system. What I discovered is that touch is an essential function of our bodies, a key ingredient for developing our understanding of reality. I discovered that it was essential for my own understanding of how I related to myself, and how I connected to others. I made a few of these connections through David Linden’s book, *Touch*, which I explore more deeply in my sections on embodiment and language.

Simultaneously, I’ve been exploring the world of sound art and performance. The performance of relation, and how sound is connected to performance, particularly in our speech, in the way language sounds in our mouths. How communication is a form of performance, how sound is a

form of touch. Soundwaves enter our ears through our ear canal and are converted into microscopic waves that pattern the fluid in our ears. These waves push tiny hairs directly connected to our auditory nerves, where the feeling of that push-and-pull vibration is taken to the brain. Sound, like touch, is a direct sense.

In this discovery, I wondered how this connected to my relationships. Here I was, yearning for physical contact with others, questioning individualism, and learning about sound and feeling touched by it in some way. And amidst all of this wondering, I kept finding myself at the shoreline, asking the water for answers. Watching it move and sway, listening to its rhythms.

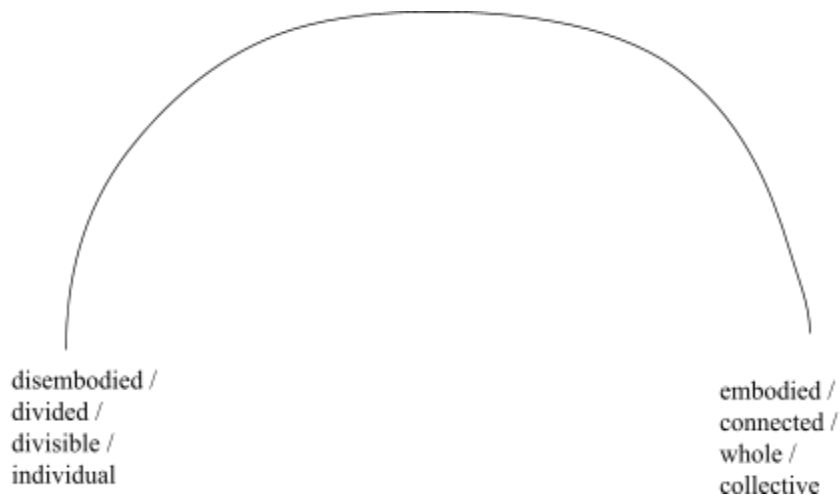
What I have found through this creation process is that touch and sound are intricately connected to each other, and are experienced in a myriad of ways. Sound is touch, touch is sound. These vibrations are essential to how we experience our bodies in space, especially as they relate to other beings. I have determined that my experience of white American rugged individualism, by discouraging communal living and prioritizing intellect over embodied knowledge, has left me disembodied and searching for connection. I have learned, too, that capitalism thrives when we are disconnected from our embodiment, leaving us turning to work and consumption to appease our human needs. Finally, that water has much to teach me about being collective. I have seen how the droplet moves in a current with others, how that current is constantly in contact with the edges that determine its name. My skin the border, touch determining who I am. The result of these wonderings is quickly becoming a lifetime project. This thesis is the first serious pursuit of these questions in a tangible form.

In terms of textual form, I wanted a variety of shapes and use of white space. This was to provide a myriad of voices into the text. I chose a pattern of repetition to provide structure to the piece but also to have the reading experience work like a lapping wave along the shore: building, climaxing, subsiding. Since I am also working within a braided structure, this seemed like a natural system. The different voices speak to the different threads of the braid: water, language, body. And then, there's me in there, too, trying to make sense of all of it through my own personal experience.

I chose the structure of a braid because in this creation process multiple voices and narratives formed. The voice of the longing poet, searching for touch and connection to and through their body; the voice of the individualist observer questioning and exploring language; finally, the voice of water: the disrupter, the teacher, and the antidote. Incorporating these voices into a pattern that weaves in and between each other felt important. The work attempts to be circular, molding like water to the shape of the container. This is one of the reasons I have multiple mediums here: sound and text. The voices of the braid have different opportunities to express themselves in a variety of ways through form and medium.

I explore questions of embodiment through sound and touch, language, the cultural structures of capitalism, individualism, collectivism, and relationship within the context of the identities I embody, mainly that of upper class whiteness. I chose the forms of prose, soundscape, poetry, and song, because I think they speak to the desires of each voice of the piece. The non-fictional vignettes of the prose allow for an attempt at a (complicated, perhaps strained) marriage between the cerebral and embodied poet, the two struggling to define their experiences and ask questions in a narrative format. The poetic forms allow for more nuance and detail, to allow for embodiment to be explored without as clear of a narrative structure, letting the ego of the poet subside a bit. Soundscape provides a practical application to the discussion around the sound of language brought up repeatedly throughout this project. It also provides an embodied experience of the work, getting both the narrative and the audience out of the cerebral and into their senses. The water's voice shows up in song and Instruction; the antidote and the truest form of embodiment I can muster at this point. It is the constant that has brought me time and time again in this process to a place of acceptance and knowing.

## THE BODY / EMBODIMENT



The exploration of embodiment begins with my own experience. I was beginning to notice that I and the people in my community, family, and peer group were collectively touch-starved. I grew up in a white, upper class household away from extended family. I was born on the island of Guåhan and spent my early years there before moving to O'ahu in the Hawaiian islands. My parent's work brought us to these places where, historically, indigenous cultural values around community suggested a presence of a large network of care and kin. However, our presence as colonizers made much of our experience one of isolation. My family did make a community of friends and neighbors, who provided some of my first experiences of

communal care, but we were an ocean away from our kin. I grew up without an understanding of rootedness, a visitor on borrowed and stolen land. The way our family “made it work” was to stick it out on our own, rely on the resources we did have, and push forward.

And so, I grew up with the value of self-reliance. When our family moved back to Anchorage, Alaska, where my parents are from, we suddenly became surrounded by my close family. Instead of a community of friends and neighbors, I had aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. While asking for help from friends was sometimes difficult, asking from a family member was somehow more acceptable, a sort of familial obligation expected to be performed. But something about this kind of living felt smaller as I got older. As the resources of our family grew, our community outside the family structure shrank. The circle of people we trusted became smaller and more direct. “Community” didn’t seem like a word that fit with our experience anymore.

When I went to undergrad, I experienced the curated communal experience of university dorms and eating halls, of clubs and activist groups. Now as an adult living in Seattle, four years into the COVID-19 pandemic and a few more years into working professional life, I’ve watched my friends experience burnout in their jobs, the milestone of moving into studio apartments, all of us spending more and more time online and on screens than ever. I began to notice in myself the need to touch others, the feeling of loss from pre-pandemic times of casual touch, times of childhood hand holding and slumber parties. After some research and talking with my friends and family, I became aware that this yearning for touch was not mine alone, and that it has a connection to loneliness, isolation, depression, and consumerism. Kristen Radtke’s graphic novel, *Seek You*, explores this “silent pandemic” of American loneliness. Through a variety of research ranging from the invention of the laugh track in sitcoms, to Harry Harlow’s tortuous experiments with rhesus monkey mothers and babies, to the rise of social media, Radtke investigates the widening distance between Americans and our connections to each other, most importantly calling out the communal experience of loneliness, that so many people experience it at the same time. This felt so directly linked to the experiences I was having, and provided a roadmap of where to look for reasons why I felt so disconnected from both my body and others.

One day, when scrolling through Instagram, I came across an ad for a bag that one wears on the front of their body, soft and weighted, meant to mimic the feeling of a hug. I realized at that moment that, neurodivergent needs aside, we are developing products designed to mimic the feeling of human connection. Combining this with my experience working a full-time government job set on grant deliverables and personal martyrdom for the “greater good,” much of my experience of bodily detachment and loneliness seemed to come from my participation in a capitalist system.

In an essay from *Capitalism and the Senses*, Ai Hisano discusses this phenomenon through Marxist theory, stating:

Marx argued that the proletariat was stripped of sensory pleasure when exposed to the unpleasant working conditions of the modern factory, where “the artificially high temperatures” and “the deafening noise”

injured “every sense organ...The bourgeoisie, too, lost rich sensory experience under capitalism. Marx wrote: “The less you eat, drink and read books; the less you go to the theater, the dance hall, the public-house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save—the greater becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your capital. The less you are, the more you have; the less you express your own life, the greater is your alienated life” (30-31).

It is through this introductory lens that I see the way capitalism impacts my own sense of embodiment, and that of my peers and family. It is also why I relate it to individualism. Hisano goes on to explain how marketing researchers began manipulating human senses to be used as tools for corporate profit margins. As sensory science became a popular form of research for advertising agencies in the U.S., the study of the senses became more specialized, focused on isolating the experience of certain senses as they related to consumer choices (smell for household cleaning products, touch for fabrics, packaging, etc.) This isolation of the senses allowed advertising companies to hone in on marketing strategies to a fictional, contextless individual, one sense at a time. Hisano notes:

[T]he science of the senses investigated corporeal stimuli by severing the actual consumer’s body from context. By doing so, sensory science allowed for the reproduction of consistent sensory qualities and the creation of new sensations...decontextualization became a crucial aspect of modern consumer society filled with artificially created sensory objects and places. Such products as deodorants which had the smell of “fresh air” and the sound of “ocean waves” used as relaxation music became standardized and detached from their temporal and spatial contexts. At the same time, theme parks and restaurants like Disney World, SeaWorld, and Rainforest Cafe created entirely simulated sensory environments providing consumers with a world detached from the everyday context (32).

We see the continuation of this severing today. I notice it the most on my phone, feeling the sense I am being severed into numerals that could only be alleviated through purchases. In the health apps: heart rate, footsteps, calories; in social media: likes, follows, screen time minutes. And then, of course, the ad for the bag filled with heavy beads to create the sensory feeling of hugging someone without the spatial context of being in the presence of another person. This dissection of the body into individual parts was considered necessary for marketing agencies in order to achieve economic growth. This is the wound from which I explore embodiment as a means out of capitalist thinking, if-possible. This exploration of embodiment (or re-embodiment) is present throughout my project, but focuses more intently in my prose work and Instructions.

## Prose

Encouraged by the documentary poetry of Jena Osman, the prose pieces in this project act as a jumping-off point from which to enter the conversation about embodiment. I wanted to weave prose in with poetry to mimic the way my own mind interprets factual information, and to frame my discoveries as a conversation between the voices of the cerebral observer and the embodied poet, providing a juxtaposition between these two versions of self.

In her book of documentary prose poetry titled, *Public Figures*, Jena Osman straddles the page with two voices. One is of the observer wandering the streets of Philadelphia seeing, photographing, and researching the various and numerous war statues erected throughout the city. This makes up the majority of the prose poetry. The second voice is that of the modern-day drone warfare soldier, taken from transcriptions of remote combat. This voice slithers along the bottom of each page. Through this juxtaposition, Osman creates a conversation about who America idolizes, how we see war, and how we see our bodies as agents in it. Inspired by these two voices, I hoped to introduce the two voices of the observer and the poet who wonder and respond to each other as dual voices within one body: described previously as one that is more interested in embodiment, feeling, and sensation (the poet), and one that is more interested in the cerebral understanding of the how and why of the functions of body, language, and cultural values (the observer). Osman asks the reader to reconsider what we do not notice in our daily happenings, what we take for granted. Through this double-voice, I hope to also ask these questions of our bodies and our behaviors related to them, as well as challenge the larger systems within which we operate. These conversations are brought out on the page with these two versions of the speaker, as she tries to work it out within herself.

I focus on the mechanical functions of the ear and nervous system, particularly when those systems are disrupted because I find them to be fascinating gateways into interrogating both the necessity of these senses and cultural systems like capitalism. Touch and sound are my chosen bodily mediums mainly because of their relation to each other. My own personal experience of dysfunction of touch leads me to explore its functionality and cultural significance. I am also interested in naming its significance, as researcher David Linden writes that touch is often overlooked when compared to other senses, despite its high importance in our survival. Most importantly, touch and sound are experienced in our bodies in very similar ways as senses of direct pressure and movement. These two senses are inextricably linked, and so they are linked in this collection as well.

In an interview with *BOMB!*, Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore insists,

I think writing is a form of connection. It's the connection to myself. It's the connection to the world, the connection to loss. It's the connection to longing, to desperation, to dissatisfaction, to loneliness, to intimacy, to touch. Writing itself is a form of touch, of desire, of devastation. The kind of intimacy that I get through writing is, in some ways, unparalleled. But I also want the rest of the intimacy, too (Gall).

The prose pieces, which take on a more confessional style of writing, aim to approach the intimacy I am seeking in the world off the page. The confessional work, frank language, and casual, relational mood of Eileen Myles' poetry and novels, particularly *Sorry*, *Tree* and *Inferno* influenced much of the tone I take in both prose and poetic pieces. In using vernacular and sometimes humor, I hope to disarm the reader and provide life between the "objectivity" presented in the heady philosophical discussions on individualism and capitalism.

## **Instructions**

The Instructions form as a function of audience engagement and performance. I was influenced heavily by the field of performance studies and the works of Yoko Ono, CAConrad, and Koomah. I hope to give the reader an opportunity to engage with risk and let the experience of the written work expand outside of the reading experience. The instructions contribute both to the immersive element of the work and also to my desire of togetherness and communal yearning. They name these desires and my feelings of responsibility to relationship. The performance of the Instructions, even if the performance is only reading them without acting on them, provides a space to embody the work.

Through the audience's participation in the Instructions, the "I" becomes a "we." Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* explores the phenomenon of the private becoming public through her collection of event scores, described as "instructions for performance art to be performed by... the audience" (Allen). In *Grapefruit*, Ono publicizes the solo acts of ritual by sharing it on the page or by instructing us—the audience—to direct action. In both cases, this implicates us in the result of the happening, either by witnessing her account of her own performance, or by performing the event scores ourselves. We become actors in the art piece, broadening the work from a highly individualized experience, to one of a chorus of performances and engagements. We each become responsible for the outcome. Performance artist Koomah also does this in their work, often conducting performances that put their body through physical pain or discomfort. As witnesses, we, the audience, are bystanders to this violence. The Instructions in my thesis project do not ask the reader/audience to engage in violence or discomfort per se, but do ask us to conduct behaviors that aim to reach a certain level of engagement and presence, some of which may invite discomfort. All of the Instructions offer an opportunity to engage deeply with the text, whether that takes shape on the page or in the practice of an Instruction in the world outside of it. They ask that the reader become an active participant in the work, rather than a passive observer.

In the field of Performance Studies, a key concept is that of "is" / "as" performance. "Is" performance, as defined by performance studies scholar Richard Schechner, are those performances which any particular culture in any particular context defines as performance through some kind of authoritative or collective agreement or understanding. In the white American cultural context, this often asks the audience to be a passive observer. Artists like Koomah and Yoko Ono challenge this assumption, opting perhaps for an "as" performance approach, which treats all acts of everyday life as a performance worth questioning and studying, offering instead that all present in an act are performers, that all settings are a stage, and that all

actions are informed by defined roles and expectations. I hope to offer the reader/audience/participant this lens through which to examine the performance of (dis)connection and (dis)embodiment. While the project offers examples of daily behavior and language “as” performances of capitalism, individualism, collectivism, etc., I wanted to also provide an opportunity to intentionally perform (and therefore, practice) alternatives.

The Instructions are also a form of documentation. In CAConrad’s *Ecodeviance*, the documentation of the ritual itself becomes the poem. My Instructions offer a form of documentation-as-performance—even if the ritual is never carried out, the suggestion of an event occurring offers an opening for new and different ways of thinking about my own attempts at being present in this world, hopefully offering an antidote to my experience of capitalism and individualism. CAConrad writes, “Because I’m doing these somatic rituals every day of my life, I’m living inside of an extreme present that I’ve created in order to write” (Clifford). In the work of Ono, Koomah, and CAConrad, the reader is forced or encouraged into a form of presence, something I link to touch. The ritual is the connection. I use a titles capitalization format to suggest authority, the naming of a coming action or experience. I see this voice as the water, and all my literary and artistic lineages giving me instructions for how to live and liberate myself from disconnection.

## INDIVIDUALISM / COLLECTIVISM

The Individual is a recurring theme throughout the work, and is interrogated over multiple forms and mediums. I begin with an exploration of the definition of “individual” and “individualism” and use those definitions as jumping-off points to the rest of the philosophical and etymological themes of the work. One of Oxford English Dictionary’s definitions for “individual” is something that cannot be further divided. I became drawn to this concept of division, which recurs throughout the piece in both the overall layout and structure of the work (the concept of the braid and taking many narratives, voices, and parts and dividing them amongst each other). Through the use of forward slashes and etymological breakdown, I am attempting to continuously divide the work and the speaker into the most singular unit. This series of parts working to complete an impossible task.

Robert Koons’ analysis on the philosophical differences between individualism and collectivism asserts that while individualism gives priority to the human individual over other groups, collectivism prioritizes the common good, sometimes exceeding individual pleasure or freedom in priority (529). However, this summary relies on a common understanding of an “individual,” and on the teachings of white, Western philosophers to inform the concepts of individualism and collectivism. These limitations speak to how I first encountered individualism and collectivism as ideologies, through a white, Western lens—first in my upbringing, then further emphasized in my American education. In school, I studied the teachings of individualist

philosophers like René Descartes, Socrates, Plato, Jean-Paul Sarte, and John Locke. I was taught that the individual is the epitome of critical thinking, independence, freedom, and morality.

In relating this discussion to embodiment, Koons notes that the nature of the body's experience of the senses makes the foundation of the argument for individualism. Koons argues that bodily sensation is the way most humans understand reality and is also a uniquely individual experience. He also goes on to discuss how collectivist philosophers see the body, who insist that "everything human is historically contingent, all the way down," that the collective determines the most fundamental level of reality. That human beings do not experience anything without cultural context. In other words, in some schools of thought, the individual experience does not truly exist.

In my project, I try to tease out these definitions and my own understanding of them, which are admittedly loose. There are countless philosophical arguments for and against both individualism and collectivism as societal structures. In my project, I am trying to understand what they mean to me, through my own critiques of how individualism, combined with capitalism, has negatively impacted my own relationship to my body and my sense of connection to others. In my exploration, I question the moral values assumed in individualism, their combination with American capitalism, and my sense of dissociation from reality through isolation. The explorations of these themes attempt to offer an opportunity for me, and others who may share my experience, to change the way I think about the individual and the collective, and my role as both an individual and part of a larger community.

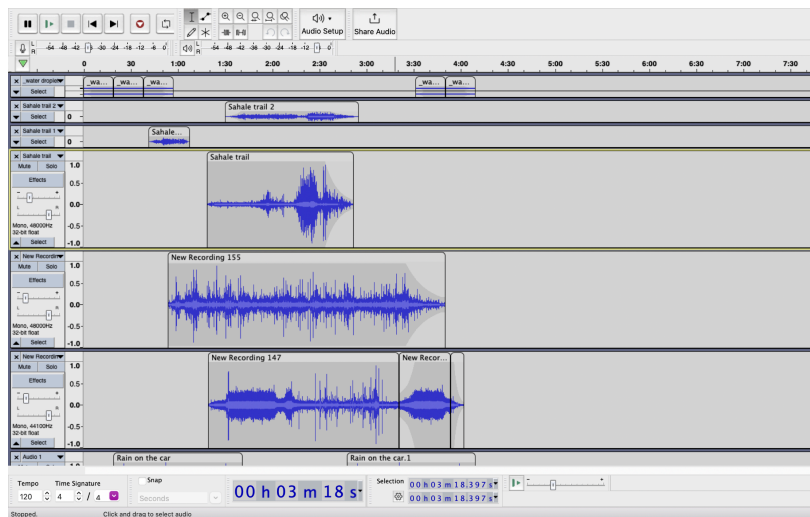
While I am still in a place of deep questioning, the process of creating this project has solidified my interest in collectivist thinking, living, and being, and strengthened my interest in turning to the natural world for guidance. Though I gained much of my individualist education early in my life, spending the majority of my life living on islands and peninsulas gifted me water as my first teacher. Through water I begin to re-learn how all life is dependent on each other, how waves are created from a cooperation of droplets, and also how an individual body is unique and real. I wonder now if there is a place for both and if there is a possibility for individualism without capitalism or consumerism. I have found through these imaginings and explorations that individualism as seen in a white, colonial, nationalist, and capitalist sense harms the individual rather than uplifts them. Harms the community rather than cares for it. And if people like myself can think more collectively, can we begin to remove ourselves not only from a harmful way of being, but also an equally harmful binary?

## LANGUAGE / SOUND

This work explores sound as touch through a study of language. Through poems that explore etymology and word structure, I break apart the meaning of words as they relate to the themes I am exploring. Words like "water," "noise," and "individual," make an appearance. I do

this to offer an interrogation into the common use of these words. When broken down and investigated, what do these words really mean to us? When broken down so much that they are no longer words but utterance—syllables and guttural vowels—what do they then become? For me, they become touch. Vibration. Water. They become both meaningless and something else entirely. Parodies of themselves, and an embodied version of themselves. They become nonlinear and undefinable.

In the book, *Who Do With Words*, Tracie Morris explores utterance as that which exists before and beyond language. “The first compulsion to ‘say’ [...] is not planned speech. It is the speaking that must come. It is as fundamental a human need as the inhalation and exhalation of breath. [...] one utters, not to describe a world but to do, to make one, to



make ones’ self through the voice” (62). My understanding of Morris’s work is that language is a means of utterance, a performance that *does* what utterance asks of it. Utterance as sound, as need. If *I think*, becomes *I am*, then *I feel* becomes *I utter*. And perhaps, at the urging of Audre Lorde, *I feel* also becomes *I am free*<sup>1</sup>. Using this philosophical suggestion, I attempt to emphasize phonetics, highlighting the sound of language, and therefore, utterance. This helps me strip away my assumptions about a word, and allows me to ask of language what utterance is hidden behind it, what need, what human feeling. This exploration of sound and utterance is perhaps the most emphasized example of the voice of the embodied poet whispering into my dreams.

Matilda Bernstein Sycamore writes in *The Freezer Door*, “If we were all stuck without words then there would be more language” (164). Language exists beyond words, through utterance and connection. Through touch and sound. In *We Might Have Been A River*, I see language as another kind of touch, as something that gets absorbed into our bodies as sound and meaning. In breaking down words into their most basic sound structures, and in exploring their history and meaning, I am hoping to question and investigate their impact on the body and identity, and thus, my own ability to be embodied, and to connect to others through that sense of embodiment. Much of *We Might Have Been A River* deals with translation, between the poet and observer, between language and body, between form, between medium. In the work, this comes

<sup>1</sup> From Audre Lorde’s essay *Poetry Is Not a Luxury*: “The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand the implementation of that freedom.” (*Sister Outsider*, 38).

through in three distinct ways: etymology poems (ety poems), broken poems, and the use of forward slashes (/) throughout the work.

### **Etymology Poems**

I utilize the study of etymology to offer a doorway through which to enter the conversation of language breakdown into auditory utterance. In my etymology poems, I am deconstructing words and redefining them, using their definitions throughout time, displayed in the stanzas situated on the left hand side of the page. Simultaneously, I am dividing the words into smaller segments. In some cases, these segments are split into their well-known roots, and other times down to their single letters. These make up the stanzas that span across the page and along the right-hand side, line breaks separated by forward slashes, ending in a couplet.

The process of creating these poems involved me researching the definition of the entire word on the Oxford English Dictionary, taking notes for the left-hand columns, and then breaking the word apart into segments (prefixes, suffixes, roots, letters) and researching the etymological story of each segment for material for the right-hand columns. Sometimes, the segments are common roots with a vast array of clear definitions and historical uses. Other times, the segments are nonsensical, or simply letters, often used as acronyms and other symbols. I chose the breakdown of the segments intuitively, sometimes wishing to highlight a certain word within the word, as was the case with “consumer,” where I wanted to highlight both “me” and “er” present in the final syllable. These abstract definitions were challenging but also exciting because they demonstrated the potential absurdity and chaos of language and sound, suggesting also the presence of absurdity and chaos in philosophical and cultural structures like individualism.

As the manuscript continues, the form of the etymology poems begin to deteriorate—the braid undoing itself as the speaker becomes more entrenched in her journey of division and uncovering. Text moves from the left and right to the middle of the page, long slender columns form. The structure of the poem, much like my understanding of language, individualism, consumerist capitalism, and the body, begins to unravel.

Slashes make a notable appearance here and throughout the other pieces in this collection. I use them to call back to the phonetic nature of language and question the sound of language and utterance. Does the word “noise” mean the same thing when broken into n, o, i, s, and e? What happens when the word is divided, what is revealed about the way we use the words we choose to use when the roots of its meaning get revealed and spun around? What I’ve found is that we make our own meaning out of words. In the process of extracting origin stories out of these words, I found myself finding connections and holes to poke through. In breaking down these words into utterance, I found myself again in the voice of the observer and the poet. The couplets represent the poet's response to all that's been said beforehand. Trying to bring forth meaning from the fragments. The broken poems act as further deconstruction of words and language as a whole.

/ s / l / æ / s / h / ε / s /

The use of slashes comes up frequently in this work. At first, this was a temporary aesthetic choice that I figured I would fill in with another symbol later. I was originally influenced by Dao Strom's use of slashes, parentheses, and brackets in *Instrument / Traveler's Ode*, which she describes as an exploration of fragmentation:

The fragment is the form that is actually longest lasting, that survives; the existence of an object in its "whole" form is, in fact, more short-lived and ephemeral. I love this thought of the fragment as enduring, and fragmented knowledge as containing longevity — the idea that maybe the fragment is all we really need to know, maybe it has more truth to impart than the whole... if we can just shift our thinking about what knowledge and understanding entail (Bae).

Here I interpret the fragment as an indication of the individual making up the whole, outliving the whole. Fragment as story, as map. Strom describes the use of these forms of punctuation as allowing her to "engage with language — the actual shapes of it — in a way that, maybe, both erodes and amplifies its meaning associations" (Bae). My use of fragmentation through forward slashes allows me to trouble etymological meaning, history, and wholeness, while emphasizing more the sound of language rather than the physical shape of it.

Forward slashes are used in linguistics to indicate a phoneme in a phonetic transcription. Phonemes are the most basic and singular speech sounds in language (Hayes); a singular unit of sound that refers to the way we speak and use language to verbally communicate. A singular unit that cannot be further divided. An individual. After learning this, I edited my poems to include more slashes to indicate this connection between phonetics and individualism. In the broken poems, the slashes indicate actual phonemes (there are 44 in the English language). In the other poems, the slashes are used more abstractly to act as a reminder of the pervasiveness of sound in language.

Strom states "Part of my desire in writing is to not cooperate, to go sideways or evade completely, and turn my attentions to getting to know the instrument of my own self... I'm interested in that point where the question of identity starts to dissolve itself" (Bae). While the ety poems and slashes deconstruct the identity of words, the broken poems attempt to redefine them.

### **Broken Poems**

The function of the broken poem is to further break down language into phonetics, and in so doing, offer an alternate form of communication. The broken poems resemble physical touch—short phrases, segments, letters—syllabic components like droplets on the surface of water rippling out, like fingertips on skin. The broken poems are also where I incorporate most of my soundscapes, translating the text into recorded sound.

Both the visual and audio experiences of these poems tend to be that of overwhelm. A barrage of syllables and sounds that sometimes blend and merge into something resembling a

melody, and sometimes are disjointed, uncomfortable, and contradictory. A lot of the blending melodic components happened by accident, but some were purposeful in order to convey an occasional harmony between my experience of a word and the meaning itself. In the layering, I interrogate the impact that sound has on our bodies. These segments, jumbled up and layered over each other, create a meaning entirely different from their word or phrase of origin.

This exploration of segmenting is strongly inspired by both M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*, and Orlando White's *Bone Light*. In *Zong!*, Philip breaks down the legal language of capture, murder, slavery, and capitalism to reveal the voices underneath the language, providing a channel through which the voices of those lost onboard the *Zong* could speak. Philip's poems are spaced-out fragments of words, phrases, and letters. She utilizes white space as silence, guttural utterance as truth, and language breakdown as a means to another kind of conversation. Orlando White similarly uses white space as an investigation of silence, further emphasized in his readings, where pauses after line breaks are emphasized with the intention of discomfort, reflection, and space. I was also inspired by both writers' different ways of embodying language on the page. For Philip, the letters are both the bodies of the drowned and the bodies of those who drowned them. The letters are held accountable for their crimes. The letters are, in one way or another, condemned. White engages with literal embodiment of letters as sentient beings, as "a man in a white necktie and black suit" or "a woman in a black dress with a white scarf," seeing the whiteness of the page as adornment and decoration to the bodies that are the letters that make up the words on the page. I am fascinated by this seeing of words as embodied beings. This also aligns to the concept of phonemes, which act much like singular bodies in that they are phonetic elements to words that cannot be further broken down. If the phoneme is the individual of linguistic sound, the letter is the individual of text.

For Philip, the violence committed in breaking words apart reflects the violence the enslaved African prisoners on-board the *Zong* experienced, and also functions as a form of accountability, the blank spaces between letters opening up space for silenced voices to speak. In *Bone Light*, White describes the violence done to words in descriptive form. White describes this process as a mutual act between the words, the writer, and the reader, stating "Whenever you have a relationship with the page, the page and what's on the page is also participating" (White, "Distinguished Writer"). In this way, much like in the event scores of Yoko Ono, Koomah, and CAConrad, the reader and the writer are both implicated in the violence done to the words, the reader a witness to their separation.

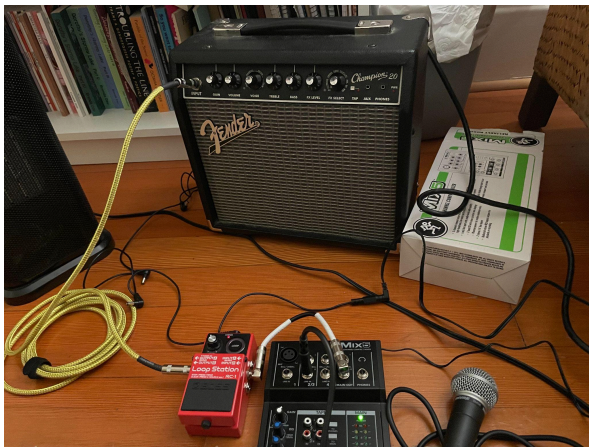
By breaking words apart into phonemes, utterance, and fragments, I am entering a conversation of what happens when something is done "to" an object/letter/sound, and what unheard voices come through in the space that's left. The written word, especially English, is a tool of capitalism and white supremacy. It is also a tool of connection. Through etymology and broken poems, I am exploring this lineage and its complicated relationship to the body. In breaking apart these words, in using slashes and white space, I aim to break down the idea of the individual. Capitalism's success is related to the ideologies of individualism and white supremacy. I believe it is these forces and their rippling factors that have caused separation in my

body. In the communities to which I belong, identities such as whiteness and higher class status have been largely defined in terms of superiority and dehumanization. Existing on this foundation, we are divided, distanced from the humanity of our bodies, and that of others. We pacify ourselves with products that mimic human connection (such weighted bags and blankets, bracelets synched to the rhythm of our loved one's heartbeats) to keep us functioning well-enough within these systems. So, in breaking down these definitions and treating language like a body that can be broken, divided, and touched, I am also breaking the body away from the myth of capitalist individualism. In layering the fragments over each other on the page and in the sound poetry, I show how (visually and sonically) the collective voice of the body/ies can create a different way of imagining how we connect, or how we need to: one of touch and chorus.

Meanwhile, I also realized that there is much overlap in our language for touch, sound, emotions, and water. The language often used to describe emotions is similar to touch ("I'm *touched* by what you said," "I didn't mean to *hurt* your feelings"); the language used to describe the nervous and auditory systems is similar to descriptions of water (ear *canal*, semiotic *fluid*, voltage-gated *channel*). All systems are interconnected. Language, like water, is the threaded stream connecting everything. It is both a tool for connection and a tool for disconnection, depending on how we use it.

## Soundscape

The soundscapes included in the project offer both a way for me to embody the work while writing, and also a way for the reader to engage in a more immersive sensuous experience. I incorporate sound in two ways in the project. The first is in water soundscapes gathered



through field recordings from my time at rivers, lakes, and the ocean. I engaged with Hildegard Westerkamp's sound work to inspire this, especially "Talking Rain," which features a variety of rain and water sounds across a spectrum: from a variety of raindrops on roofs and streets, to the sound of cars driving through puddles. Water is an important theme in the work, not only as teacher but also as disrupter. Water is often associated as a sensory experience, both in the way it feels on the skin and in the way it sounds, often a common theme in meditative soundscapes and calming music. In providing a variety of water sounds, including those that are energetic and chaotic, I am hoping to emphasize embodiment and the sensory as disruption to the systems of numbness and isolation that capitalist individualism encourages.

The other major factor in my sound work is the poetry I link to the soundscapes. Aside from a few exceptions, the soundscapes I created were in correspondence with the broken poems

in the text. I did this initially as a way to control and limit the possibility of soundscape, to create a sense of continuity within the audio elements of the work. I also found through performance at UWB Salon events that giving the broken poems an audio element, especially in a layered and circular application through the use of loop pedals, changed the experience of the poems, allowing the listener to get lost in the sound rather than working to make sense of the fragments. Playing with the absurd, playing with tone and pitch to sound authoritative, suggestive, earnest or critical, I utilized much of the elements of Laurie Anderson's vocals in her album, *Big Science*, which showcases a variety of vocal experimentation from talking to singing to screaming and use of digital manipulation. In my exploration, I tried to see how many ways I could say a word or phrase, how many ways I could break it apart and put it back together in a Frankenstein-like audio experience.

One of my longer pieces, "THE EDGE," is an ekphrastic piece I wrote in response to a recording I took at Magnuson Park Swimming Beach in Seattle. The recording is fourteen minutes long and completely unedited. I wanted to give the reader/listener the same audio sample I was writing from. I listened to ten second segments of the recording and wrote what I observed. This feels like the cumulation of all the pondering I was doing in the project: connecting sound and touch, water and connection, ritual and community. Here I was, listening as best as I could to what the water was telling me.

## WATER / RITUAL

Ritual has been a large part of my process of creating and dreaming this work. As I began deepening my relationship to ritual, I discovered two things about myself: first was that my favorite rituals involve interaction with water; second, that the way I instinctively wish to engage with the world around and within me is through song. I began finding bodies of water to sing to,



to get in touch with my body through the vibrations in my throat, chest, and mouth as I sang to the waves. As I continued repeating these rituals, I was reminded of water's sonic qualities. Water as a conductor and absorber of sound, water spoken about in terms of bodies, how water touches all things, how all things need it to survive. I learned about this sonic absorbent quality of water through CAConrad's *Amanda Paradise: Resurrect Extinct Vibration*, where CAConrad conducts a repeated ritual of listening to the sounds of extinct animals by placing headphones on multiple areas of their body, allowing sound to travel through the water passageways of blood, de-emphasizing the ears and head. They listened through their legs and feet, their arms and stomach, with the knowledge that the water in their cells

carried these sounds throughout their body. I was struck both by this fact of water as an absorber and conductor of sound, and this ritual that opened up my understanding of listening.

In singing to the water, I was reminded of the work of Michaela Harrison’s Whale Whispering—an ongoing art, performance, and communication project in collaboration with Instituto Projeto Baleia Jubarte in Brazil. Harrison sings to the whales, the whales sing back. Harrison has collected multiple recordings of her whale-human collaboration and still keeps an active blog for the project, where she often calls for environmental protection and unity, messages she receives from the whales. This ritual practice of giving song and listening to the messages of marine life feels very central to the experiences I had at the shoreline, listening to the water’s song, offering my own.

Another key influence of my ritual work is Gabrielle Civil, whose book *the déjà vu* allowed me a blueprint for creating my first multi-step ritual that took place over several weeks in the summer of 2023. Civil’s approach to documentation, self-reflection, annotation and reinvention revealed to me that the plan is also the art. In writing my plan for an in-depth ritual, I discovered intentionality as an artform, ritual as performance.



It was from this place that the Instructions were born, opportunities for ritual where the art is simultaneously the numbered page and the performance of the action.

As I observed water at the shores of my favorite places, I noticed how water has much to teach me about individualism and collectivism. I would watch water move as a series of droplets in a collective body. Water is where it all begins for me: creator, teacher, healer, messenger. I believe it is water that will bring us back to ourselves and toward each other. I will also argue, much like Harrison, that the Instructions are a gift given to me directly from the water as a way for me to find togetherness.

## PROCESS

The creative process that got me to *We Might Have Been A River* involved an extensive patchwork of personal ritual, research, and sound.

### Critical Work

Every couple of weeks throughout summer, autumn, and winter quarters, I completed a Critical Response, heavily modeled off a regular assignment in Ching-In Chen’s Poetics class during my first year in the MFA program. This provided me with critical questions and connections regarding the works I was engaging with that week. Through these “worksheets,” I

was able to intentionally dive deeper into the work, reading and listening to interviews, finding multiple works to study, learning who was in conversation with these artists, etc. These responses kept me on deadlines and kept the process moving when it was feeling otherwise stalled. This process prepared me to engage critically with the work rather than passively, and had me asking questions, such as how it related to my own work. Some artists I chose based on previous exposure and interest; others were suggested to me by my thesis advisor.

## Rituals

Gabrielle Civil's *the déjà vu* provided an intimate guide into the process of dreaming and revision, reinventing my work and allowing me as an artist the space to imagine. I documented my rituals through my Critical Responses in a journalistic format. Many of my water and song-related rituals I also recorded via audio and video recordings on my phone and field recorder. In addition to the water-song rituals, and the multi-step rituals that later became the Instructions, I also began engaging with Celtic spirituality in an ongoing attempt to reach deeper in my ancestry. I joined the Celtic School of Embodiment, which provided multiple rituals, meditations, and journal prompts for ancestrally-rooted embodiment that I still practice.

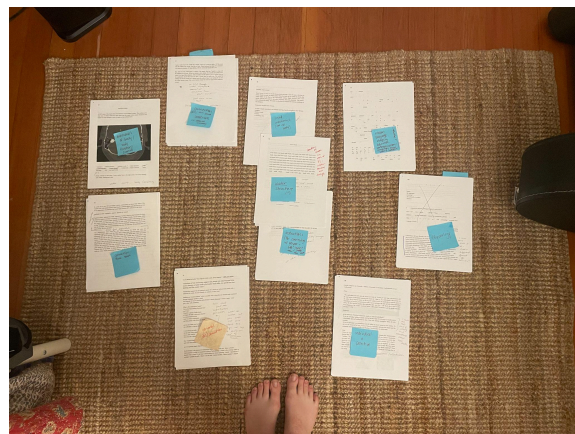
## Field Recordings and Soundscapes

Some of the equipment used in recording included a Sony ECM-CG50, H4n Zoom, H4n Zoom Pro, HN2 Zoom, a loop pedal, small Fender Amplifier, and various FX pedals, headphones, and a TONOR TC30 microphone.

I used Audacity exclusively for engineering soundscapes post-recording. I took classes from Jack Straw Cultural Center and Sounddail on the use of Audacity, microphones, and feedback. I experimented multiple times with sound through various performances both at UW Bothell and in Seattle at poetry readings and monthly Salons.

## Documentation and Revision

I did not go into this project with any clear idea of what I wanted to do. I had thin threads of inspiration but nothing seemed strong enough to turn into a thesis. I was advised to just keep writing and to focus more on the process rather than the product, the product inevitably coming into place. This is what happened. Over the summer of 2023, I focused on reading as much as I could and engaging in a variety of rituals to inform my writing. It was over the summer that I came across the instagram ad that would spark the philosophical element of this project, and it was being by the water with my recorder that informed the sound element. As the project work



deepened and widened, I realized this is a much bigger project than there is room for in the thesis. This work speaks to inquiries I will be pursuing likely my whole life in various ways. I have many visions for what else the work of this project could become. From an immersive soundscape to a visual gallery to an interactive performance, this work is something living and changing that will take many forms.

I kept a running google document of every piece I ever wrote in relation to this project. Multiple times, I would print out the list and sort, purge, and organize. I would then create a new running document, and a new draft to keep the “keepers” and go through the process again. I would carry the printed pages in my backpack and take them with me everywhere. Even when I didn’t touch them for weeks, I kept carrying them around, like a child I needed to protect. I rearranged the furniture in my bedroom to allow more space to spread the papers on the floor and organize into themes and braid threads. I did this again when constructing my informal draft to put them together into a complete document, rearranging papers over and over again, cutting into pieces, until it formed something of a narrative arc. The papers stayed on my bedroom floor for days and I would make a point to look at them and come back to them when necessary. Affixed to them were post-it note labels and hand-written annotations with what to edit or add at a later date. I also had a running “to-do” list on the Notes app on my phone which began as a regular to-do list, but then quickly became another pot in which to throw every passing thought about my thesis into.



One part of the process that was particularly helpful was drafting an application to the Jack Straw media gallery residency in November of 2023. This was my first attempt to write about this project and communicate what I was trying to do. I still didn’t quite have a handle on it, but this helped me organize my thoughts and form a bit more focus in my writing.

Another important part of the process was the feedback I received from my advisor and my peers. I presented work at two salons, in the fall and winter quarters, both on zoom. I received valuable feedback from my peers and MFA faculty during those events, and being only a month apart between salons, I could see an enormous amount of growth in the work I was presenting. I also received regular feedback from my advisor, Ching-In Chen, during one-on-one meetings and over email, and from my second reader, Matilda Bernstein Sycamore. I also tried out some of this work in various performance settings in Seattle, the most significant of which was my performance at Eric Acosta’s Poetry Lab in March, 2024, where I read from *We Might Have Been A River* accompanied by ambient musicians who incorporated my water-based soundscapes in their set. This performance was forty-five minutes long, my longest reading

to-date, and offered me a wealth of information to bring back to my drafted text. I also performed excerpts from “THE EDGE” at UW Bothell’s Academic Student Showcase in May, 2024.

At the end of February, I took up a self-made mini-residence at a family friend’s woodland home in North Bend, WA, where I gave myself three days over a weekend to write and construct the informal draft of this thesis and poetic statement. I visited the river every day, read for pleasure, and was surrounded by the quiet language of trees and elk. This proved to be an essential time for my writing and creativity. I spoke to friends and relatives about the project, to writers in my community for inspiration and encouragement. The community that supported me through this time was essential to this thesis’s completion and my wellbeing.

## CONCLUSION

I still dream of the commune, the utopia, despite its naivety. Gabrielle Civil tells me to write into the dreams, to put them into action through the art of resting, making, and devising. *We Might Have Been A River* is a first step in the exploration of this dream. One of many that will make up this journey of belonging, listening, and feeling. My many thanks to all who accompanied me on this journey and to the future collaborators who will help me realize this in its future shapes.

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