

SHAPER

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## Abstract

This work is a cross-genre memoir that draws upon critical disability theory, literature, images and theoretical discourse in order to examine, express, and critically expand upon my experience of living within the confines of a body and mind conditioned by severe Tourette's Syndrome and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. This work is structured around intermittent descriptions of each of the nineteen tics that form the 'repertoire' of my condition. Interspersed between these nineteen descriptions are brief pieces of writing that span memoir, theoretical writing, and fiction. This work may be of interest to those seeking material on critical disability, illness and life writing, photography, autobiography and memoir, speculative fiction, and visual art.

For Stefana Fratila, without whose support, love, guidance, and insight

this work would not have been possible.

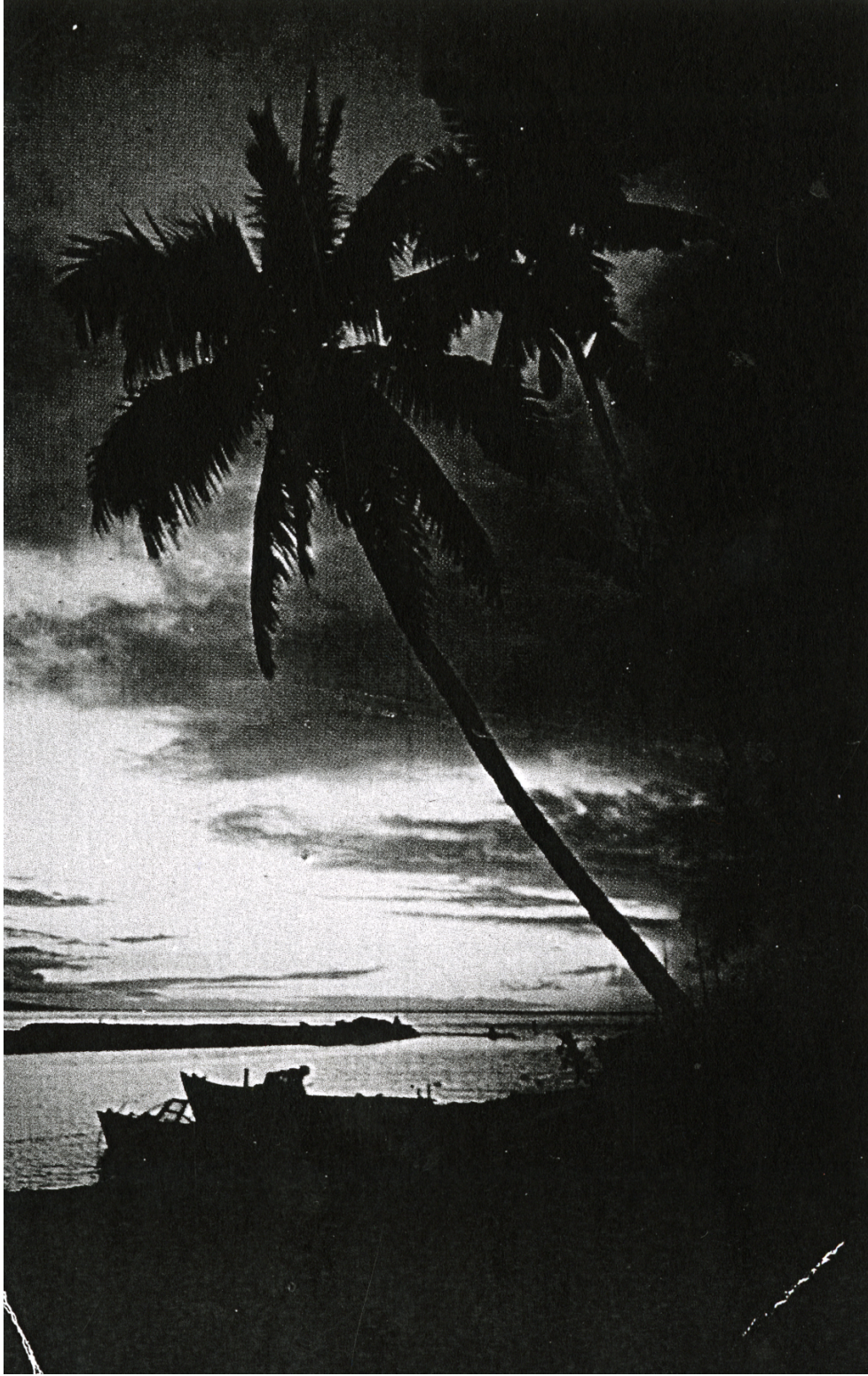
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## Shaper

A shivery and wet touching with bits of feeling, this filmy sort of sensation comes from the inside of the front of my head, from the inner wall of the bone of my head going from the top-center and then washing down to the forehead in dribbles. When the feeling happens, I see a picture of a grey bag expanding in there like a flopped soaking lung. One of the thin plastic bags from a grocery or a discount department store, suspended in the wetted stuff of my insides; puffing up and sucking in there in the damp of my head-meats, in sequence, like a jellyfish propelling, and when it gets its biggest, at the peak of the expanding, it spreads out and covers the bone-sheeting of my inner front-skull with a membranous tickling.

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*Hitting Face/Head, (Right Hand) 5/19:*

Starting in with a building kind of feeling but very fast, mounting and coming up from down low in the genital undercarriage and guts. Like an itching but deep inside, and rather than an itch proper a feeling like if a glowing hallow had suede fingers and could pinch—if the radiance of a hallow could be an annoyance of the perineum that tugged down on the gastric bits in a funny sort of tensing. At the apex of this building-feeling the meaty, big, epaulet-like muscles running from the sides of the throat to the tops of the

shoulders quiver up in response and go tight along with the ones wrapping the upper arms in front and back. All of this excited tightness going on with both sides of myself all at once and in tandem for this bit of the movement. Then both elbows all the sudden pinching inward, making contact with the sides of the ribs like big knuckles bumping over hot leathery panels and making a thumping sound as they do it. This pinching with the elbows has the hands at the ends of each of the arms angle outwards, the spread of that angle making for a gesture with the hands like the asking of a question. For some years the next chapter of this tic went on like this: from the hands-making-a-question position, right hand moves in a swing upward, hinging from the still pinched-in elbow, tip of the thumb on this hand extended, so at the peak of the swing it could strike my face, having to make contact where the cheek bone rounded out and had the skin stretched most tightly over it—if this part of the bone/cheek was missed the actions with the swinging thumb tip must repeat until the sensation gained from the move meets the set requirements—because there are rules to this game. All this while the left hand raised somewhat and coming closer to the sternum, to the center of the trunk, all with adjoining elbow still pinched in as well, fingers on both hands tight and tensed but looking loose, like two soft hands from an old painting I like. (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Pierrot*, formerly known as *Gilles*, 1718-19, oil on canvas, Louvre Museum.

Though in my thirties this tic reversed orientation from where the hands pause at the hands-making-a-question position, so now my left hand is the hand that hits me in the face.

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The many powdery sweaty lightnesses of anxiety, drifting off the surfaces of my body like a shitty moist radiance. Perpetual systems of little and big fears all lacking appropriate objects, and without these reasonable objects they persist along anyways unreasonably—in a kind of daring abstraction—making these waves of animal heat move in my organism like a fearing-fever wholly released from biological utility.

And so my mind goes around as if lost or bored or confused on a set of high-summer forest paths. Taking every long way round in some itchy, hot, smothering, and waterless wooded place.

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Tourette's Syndrome means my body moves and makes sounds without my asking it to do so. This makes me a funny sort of witness to my own gestures and utterances. In this way Tourette's makes my body into a thing that sometimes feels explicitly like a medium—my figure—like a moving piece of sculpture that I observe in its unexpected states and shapes as if from an outside. Living like this has contributed to a staked interest I have in the plain, plastic mechanics of bodies generally, in the bare material realities of their moving around and their doing.

Fernand Leger made some of his nicest pictures after being in a war and seeing a sunbeam<sup>1</sup>: "...a reality which was both blinding and new. I was dazzled by the breach

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<sup>1</sup> Fernand Leger, *Soldier with Pipe*, 1916, oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm, Kunstammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen Dusseldorf.

of a 75 millimeter gun which was standing uncovered in the sunlight: the magic of light on white metal...a complete revelation to me..."<sup>2</sup> After seeing the sunbeam on the gun and seeing all the bodies moving around it, Leger entered into the Mechanical phase of his work. After the time with the war and the sunbeam he found there: "...the human figure, the human body, has no more importance than keys or bicycles...These are for me objects of plastic value..."<sup>3</sup>

Being in a body that moves without my input is not the same as being in a war. However, what I will compare is the two durational experiences (years of horrible war with Leger, and twenty years, more or less, and so far, of being in a body like the one I have described), and that duration itself with the specific conditions those times entail, extending a perceptual netting over bodies generally because of the weird data that these two durational experiences contain about bodies and how they are. So that after that temporal stretch bodies don't go back to the thing they might have been before—instead they become this object that is of course a person—but also a thing that can be observed on its very own, as a series of discreet surfaces and parts, making its own meanings without the help of an occupant.

This vested interest in the mechanical realities of embodiment and physical movement leads me to lots of other mediated moments where I can watch other bodies of an atypical physical behavior. I seek out instances where bodies are moving and

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<sup>2</sup> Leger, by Katherine Kuh (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art New York and the San Francisco Museum of Art, 1953). Exhibition catalogue, accessed April 12, 2021, [https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_2833\\_300170782.pdf?\\_ga=2.163239164.1997652692.1618276324-1875317228.1618108359](https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2833_300170782.pdf?_ga=2.163239164.1997652692.1618276324-1875317228.1618108359).

<sup>3</sup>Leger.

acting irregularly or are attaining an irregular importance through their postures and action.<sup>4</sup> Some of these mediated, figurative scenarios are things like paintings, sports footage, advertisements (still or moving), documentary photography (all subjects here—I like photos of fashion shows, bodies’ working in factories, war photos, postcards of sunbathers at hotels...). The irregularity of the bodies postures and movements in many of these mediated sites are a result of some arbitrary constraint—and I find a kind of physical communion here; for while the arbitrary constraints dictated by, say, the execution of a professional tennis serve and those enforced on a body by Tourette’s Syndrome are by no means interchangeable, they do share the discretionary quality of their formal demands—both make the body into shapes according to a strictly inward-borne logic. For example, a body engaged in a racewalking competition must obey strict bodily rules that regulate physical movement in otherwise nonsensical ways—the stricture applied to the legs and feet of the walker obey no logic outside of the arbitrary one common to the game of the racewalk. The shapes made by the body in the walk and by the body in-tic, in spasm, serve no utility other than the satisfaction of that activity’s limited desires.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Part of what I am describing is a lust born of recognition, a lust to see bodies like my own or like the bodies of friends and lovers, as well as a hope that the other finds such recognition in me.”

Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 45.

“It is because the body is the same ‘flesh’ as the world that we can understand the world, and although we cannot have the other’s experience we may nevertheless sense some of it because we are the same flesh.”

Victor Burgin, *The Camera: Essence and Apparatus* (London: Mack, 2018), 178.

<sup>5</sup> “...the more gestures lose their ease under the action of invisible powers, the more life becomes indecipherable.”

By way of example:

10 Notes on the Men's 20 Kilometer Racewalk of the 1984 Summer Olympics, As If It  
Were Now

Two rules form the shapes a body makes while that body racewalks. First, during the extension of the stride, the toes of the foot in the rear are not permitted to lift from the ground before the heel of the forward foot has landed. The other rule determines that as the heel of that front foot touches down, the leg attached to it must straighten underneath the weight of the torso and remain erect like that until the bulk of the body glides overtop. These rules can be read as the material contours of the sport's two simultaneous and therefore paradoxical fixations—maximum velocity and the prevention of embodied flight.

I am watching an ABC broadcast of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles featuring the Men's Twenty Kilometer Walk event. The clip is eight minutes and fifty one seconds long, whereas the event itself took approximately an hour and a half for the walkers to complete. I watched the footage eleven times in writing this, and in doing so extended the duration of the severely truncated clip to nearly correspond to the original length of the live event. I composed notes and made observations for this long-passed moment in athleticism, these are as follows.

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Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, 49-62. trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 53.

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At 0:08 the footage is all boiling forms. The walkers assemble themselves at the start line, pacing and bending, jumping in place, many partake in a popular stretch wherein the body folds over all floppy from the hips, the head lolling down toward the feet, and with its weight rolls around there drunken-like, making the rest of the body it is attached to stretch full up the backside.

0:14 makes the preparatory jiggling of the walkers go obscure underneath an overlaid infographic. The infographic is a text describing two previous all-time records for this same event. The first is for the preceding Olympic games held in Moscow in 1980, and the other for a certified world record from earlier in the same year—1984. From my own position of relative contemporaneity, I can read these records as proofs of old velocities, as if the speeds reached in these past walks were sediments of speeds-achieved, left to be covered over with other records of athletic hurry that eventually, in their accumulative puffy layers, reach me in my present tense of watching the walkers go.

By 2:16 the racewalk has begun with the athletes immediately rounding the first arc of the track. Here the footage briefly loses comprehensive fidelity. The walkers go all

light and slim, seeming to stretch-skeletal, turning see-through like cartoon ghosts under the strain of their activity and the weight of that sunny day in Los Angeles both.

To me the walkers look like sunlight itself, like moving allegories for the breeze and heat of the beach near where they are walking now—the walkers a series of lean mirrors reflecting the slinky glow from other sunny spots. In fact, if the walkers changed course, they could reach a beach. They could speed along from the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to Venice Beach. A digital map tells me it would take four hours to do so, however, it would cost these powerful walkers I watch here far less time to reach those waters and balmy sands.

After a review of the rules I attempted the movements myself. I tried walking like a racewalker walks today in the park. A kind of sympathetic embodiment via private mimicry. The results were startling, exhilarating. The gestures, when brought about in my own body, felt somehow pictorial, as if I was inhabiting some other image, I was a kind of fleshy, breathing footage of my own making.

I have been watching the walkers in the footage closely. Increasingly, to me, their stupendous gait looks like the imitation of some other action or event wholly unrelated to walking itself. Like an elaborate act of pantomime corresponding to another thing totally unknown. But the efforts of their expression go on, building upon itself in these circuits all around sunny Los Angeles in 1984.

3:06 provides a panoramic view of four event officials, with a fifth possibly emerging towards the upper left of the frame—though I can't be sure due to the crumbly fracturing of the footage. Fanned out in perspective like this on the pastoral ground of the track makes them like a living variant of some painting.<sup>6</sup> If I titled this painting that in the world of this frame these figures make and are—I would name it *The Marmalade Men and their Many Sore Burdens*. I would title the painting like this for the official's matching marmalade sport-jackets, khaki trousers, their merry fedoras, and the shimmering spaces of their mirrored black sunglasses. The glow of their costume oddly meets with their endless irritability and impatience, with the agitated labor they enact in attempting to contain and direct the wobbly euphoria of the walkers doing their thing.

I have experienced, through repeated and unfortunate episodes, the bad reactions of some viewers when confronted with the movements and noises of my body as my body is animated by the symptoms of Tourette's Syndrome. These reactions move between revulsion and laughter, as my spectator (presumably) traverses between a horror of unknowing and a comedy of apparent gestural errors. Racewalkers seem to attract a similar kind of attention when moving in the way that racewalking would have them move. The remarks of the event commentators from 2:17-3:33 reveal this:

"...more than any other event in the sport, uh, this is more...closer to a religion than a

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<sup>6</sup> Georges Seurat. *Study for A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, 1884. Oil on Canvas, 27.75 x 41in. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed November 20, 2020. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437658>

sport....these, guys, when they're out training on the roads are always getting persecuted so to speak, people see them walking down the road...and they go through that every day.”<sup>7</sup> Followed later, at 3:01: “...as they came into the stadium to warm up there was this big burst of laughter...well sure it's a funny looking gait they maintain...”<sup>8</sup>. I would like to share some theories about these reactions to the racewalkers, they are as follows:

A: Might the racewalker's movements carry some innate erotic charge causing this inexplicable disquiet in a generic onlooker? The rocking undulation of the hips and the ass caused by the extreme quality of the walker's gait suggesting an almost psychedelic genital sway, a sway that is transmuted to the entirety of the walking body—rendering a total and gyrating sex moving at great speed through the glare of the sun.

B: Could the clear desire for total speed when paired with the arbitrary constraints enforced by the restrictions of the racewalking method cause a kind of reflective tension in those who spectate those methods? Could this frustrated system of gestures form a tautness in another body that demands an ugly release that the sickly euphoria of derision or laughter provides?

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<sup>7</sup> “1984 Olympic Games Track and Field – Men's 20 Kilometer Walk,” ABC. 1984. Video, 8:51, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzOCAB6EzZQ&ab\\_channel=westnyacktwins](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzOCAB6EzZQ&ab_channel=westnyacktwins)

<sup>8</sup> “1984 Olympic Games Track and Field – Men's 20 Kilometer Walk”

At 6:52 a rapid pan between scenes is marked with a glowing vertical line crowned with the Olympic rings crossing the frame horizontally from left to right. The action of this graphic divides the beginning of the racewalking event and the beginning of the end of that event. It is the object that marks the truncation of a physical effort that took one and a half hours to complete being cut down to fit within a segment just under nine minutes long. So the footage is a truncation holding another truncation—the second being the conscious restraint the walkers apply to their legs in order to prevent themselves from breaking into a jog. In this way the clip becomes a paradoxical object with the footage itself and the actions it is meant to exhibit both locked between sensational expression and restraint.

7:07 concludes the first place walk with Ernesto Canto winning the gold medal on behalf of Mexico. As celebrations grip the stadium the camera pans over and manages to catch a racist attack in progress as a spectator rips the Mexican flag from another's hands—this is described as a “...little fracas...” by the commentator.<sup>9</sup> The camera moves off and again finds Canto whose legs now move around like a gorgeous jelly after his massive exertion. He paces across the track now—though with a moderate gait--no longer concerned with those fantastic speeds.

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<sup>9</sup> “1984 Olympic Games Track and Field – Men’s 20 Kilometer Walk”

*Hopping Right Foot/ Left Foot 1/19*

I am going to show you how a hop is done when a hop is not the thing wanted. Be moving, in bodily transit from here to there, going to pick up a pen from a table, collecting the vacuum from a closet, or crossing the boundary between the produce and bakery aisles. Then be struck by the disorderly, the pointed signal that is an unbidden command to gesticulate, and immediately jump, as if moved by something sharp, being careful, when landing, to only extend the right foot—the left foot must not touch down here. The right foot making heavy contact with the support of the floor after this first jump could be seen as a single count, however, in this case, this initial count is neutral, and so a count of three begins from this position. With a tight little strain of the calf, prop the right foot forward with some violence onto the metatarsal section and maintain stability with help from the thicker toes. From here the hopping begins. In a forced manner repeat the flex of the calf while always maintaining pressure on the front of the foot, and then lift the toe section back towards the shin at the apex of the muscular jumbling—gain flight this way, anything from three to eight inches of rise is appropriate. Repeat in a lively way three times (the humiliation is near-unbearable at this juncture) to satisfy the count. Importantly, during the third count, rapidly switch the feet in midair, thereby landing on the left foot now, straight onto those metatarsals while engaging the ruddy calf of that side. Push out another three on the left like right, and then land with both feet flat. Select some bread etc....

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During a psychiatric evaluation I am asked this question: “Did you as a child, and/or do you now repeat words or phrases to the point where others around you take notice—do they become annoyed—have you been asked to stop?” My answer: “Yes.”

It’s not that it happens with all words and phrases—it seems to be a selective process (whose specific criteria of selection I am not privy to)—so a disorderly curatorial system of encounter that reacts to bits of language and particular words and then feeds those words into a coercive practice of looping utterance. These flecks of wording sit there in that selected reservoir for years at a time—in fact—there are phrases and words I am still compelled to repeat (from films or from people I had encountered or overheard) that were collected from when I was a young child but that still live in me now like-new as these oratory things I keep sounding out.

I remember playing that old game as a kid where one repeats a word until the word sheds its meaning and goes weird in your mouth and ears—and I remember sharing in the pleasure and the special awkwardness of that game. Disorderly repetition does not describe these practices of playful repeating (though the confusion of meaning and odd loss of context can be a thing shared between the two). For me, the disordered repetitions have always felt paradoxical, as the thrust of the repeating has always been so multiple. It is two things at least: it is a gibberish nothingness, a phrasing and utterance blooming out of some ungainly reflex; but it is just as much a keen exploration of the sound and texture of language—a hollowing-out of words and heard phrases

through a process of tireless iteration that only ever leads back to the word or phrase itself all over again—but that disordered return inevitably seems to expand that word or phrase—to make it puff up and go bigger than itself in my mouth.

Francis Ponge wrote a book length prose poem called *Soap*. The book is this little cloud of language that acts as a survey of a single thing, of a material, and of the words that make that material speakable. This section from the start of the work, where I feel that the writer is defending his method, could well be a response for my various interrupters, pleading for me to stop in my convulsive repeating of words and vocalized citations:

...should I apologize for this? No!...after all, these ways and manners which you readily admit...in matters of music: these repetitions, these renewals da capo, these variations on the same theme, these compositions in the fugue form which you readily admit in music, which you admit and enjoy—why should they, in literature, be forbidden?...In any case you have been warned...This is how, after all, I work, this is how development happens in me...”

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It is obvious that there is a difference between electing to write a book through repetitive means and upon a fixated subject and that of the experience of having unplanned-for fragments of phrasing and single words lodged tightly in non-voluntary repetitions via some neurological entanglement. However, with that distinction noted, I can, for my own purposes and within the limited field of my own thinking-through of things, adopt the funny mores of experimental literature as a way to see bits of my own disordered mechanism happening outside of myself and instead inside some book-object made of someone

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<sup>10</sup> Francis Ponge, *Soap*, trans. Lane Dunlop (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 9-10.

else's thinking. In this instance it is interesting to do this because the formal results of the two processes (prose poetry and Tourettic disorder) are, for the moment, sharing appearances (the repeating of words and phrasing)—and all while their roots are at complete odds (premeditated language-experiments, aimed towards whatever sort of meaning—and disorderly utterance—the repeating of words via involuntary compulsion). Whatever their differences and shared characteristics both remain episodes of wording with aims that fluctuate between coherence and the grasping of the raw sounds of discourse.

When I repeat a word or a phrase, when those sorts of things are coached out of my mouth and lungs and pipes by disorder it is a game of hoarse texture and intonation. In those moments the language being forced out is like a pumpkin with a cut top and with the action of my uncontrollable utterance being like the work of hollowing out the sides of that great gourd with a spoon—a process of grinding out the bottom of the thing being said, of shaving wording down to whatever bit of thinned rind but for no good reason other than maybe the throaty feeling of the shaving and the grinding—all a breathless kind of labor making meaning go loose and funny in the mouth of the utterer.

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An Ekphrastic Self-Identification with Fernand Leger's Soldier With Pipe 1916

Set there in my body like a big, jointed wetsuit. Hips and down to the full and low grinding V of my crotch all a barreled jock type thing cutting heavy through and back to the spine, while the trunk, drunk-heavy teeters overtop—bending back up there in a slouch and crowned off with my cocking head.

I am a painted body of distended parts and a picture holds all my shapes inside it. My place in the frame a dried plane of rigid struts fixed to the rear of me, the whole spot so depthless, all of it laid out in horrible and regular verticals.

I am a painted and meatless figurine—and so my pipe meets my mouth and my teeth and all the surfaces of all three of them are all the same fleshless sort. The pipe to the teeth and the mouth are bone on bone on bone, resin on resin on resin, polymer on polymer on polymer and the whole set tastes like that too when you are the one sitting in the picture like I am, lapping it all up with a hidden tongue made of the same, naturally.

My arms these big tumid barrels, drums snapped to other drums, and then crumpled round and back to torso that is drums or barrels, too.

All bends of this body bent and the body arcs wholly with all the weight put back there at the pinch of the hip. My unseen ass is two ripe drums too, and with the mass of

it out of frame there, I am set stone-still in my sitting and with my puffing mouth going all the while.

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### *Shoulder Shrugging 13/19*

Shrugging shoulders. In the language of bodies—the one commonly held—a move like this is a lettering spelling out things like doubt or indifference, or ignorance and dull unknowing. As a tic it is a fluid tremoring that modulates the distance of my head from the horizon line of my shoulders. In practice it is a contraction and an elevation of my shoulders achieved through that tensing, but as an effect I like to think of it as a movement made through the shrinking or expansion of the length of my neck. So my neck is a pipe that grows long or short in proximity to stress. My neck is flexible PVC piping—the type that’s ribbed and makes a huge popping sound when it gets pulled out long. My neck is a straw jammed in the tall soda of the rest of my body, with one of those posable twisty tops. My neck is a cock that gets hard and soft and sticks right out from the top of me, fucking outrageous. My neck is the stream flung out and then cut short by jet engines way up in the air. My neck is a third lung modelled after my dad’s accordion, this huge ribbed huffing machine making a bigger and then a smaller shape through rapid contraction and alternate pulls. I get headaches from this one, the neck doesn’t turn into dust-collection piping, the shit from a jet engine, or an instrument without some physical tax applied. The muscles of the shoulders and the neck and all

the little tubes running up from my shoulders and neck to the back of the skull get brutal hot and tight and then tend to stay that way.

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Related sensory integration deficits make me a body wearing a world of poorly proportioned size like some outsized coat made of all the objects and all the spaces I am ever near.<sup>11</sup> A chronic and ever-present clumsiness, as if all things and measured distances were fractionally closer or farther away than I had gauged them to be. Knuckles of my retracting buttered-fingers those great destroyers of ceramic things tucked in cupboards, while chairs and tables with their severe inter-proportional relationships always feeling to me like objects that bind, objects that I will trip-up on and bump knees on given good time.

Or I am a smaller body than I am but am wearing a full-skin-suit of a larger body than the one I am that has numbed-out surfaces, or heavy delays when transmitting haptic information back to the small body in there. So the smaller body inside (the one wearing the bigger body-suit) has all of its controls, spatial assumptions, and sensory

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<sup>11</sup> "...sensory integration deficits meaning they are either hyper- or hypo-sensitive to sensory stimuli. This can affect a child's gross and fine motor development, coordination, balance..."

"What Conditions are Associated with Tourette Syndrome?" Tourette.ca. Tourette Canada, March June 14, 2021. <https://tourette.ca/about-tourette-syndrome/questions-answers/what-conditions-are-associated-with-tourette-syndrome/>.

information calibrated for the moving of a body of its own discreet size. The differential that stretches between the little inside body and the big worn-suit body is not accounted for in that sensing data, and so the extra bulk runs into everything as it imagines itself to be a smaller piece of meaty-body-bulk.

Whatever scenario, the suit of an awkward worn-world or the suit of an extra heavy double meat-body-bulk makes for an oddity between figure and ground that helps me picture my ham-handedness and generalized inelegance when moving. The Battle with the Sagittary and the Conference at Achilles' Tent (from Scenes from the Story of the Trojan War) is a work of tapestry from the late 1400s (see fig. 3).



Fig 3. Jean or Pasquier Grenier, *The Battle with the Sagittary and the Conference at Achilles' Tent* (from *Scenes from the Story of the Trojan War*), 1470-90, wool warp and wefts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The oddness of figure and ground as relates to the two clumsy-suits I just outlined can exist ready-made in works like these as-pictured. Old pictures like this can be repurposed as a kind of haptic documentation not of figures in-tapestry or in-painting or whatever it might be, but of figures, bodies, in-the-real—the figural data rendered in them can be extrapolated and then projected outwards and forwards—thereby allowing me to form an understanding around my contemporary body. For this to happen one needs to look at the tapestry as an image of the actual, one needs to look at it in blunt literal terms. I mean a looker needs to divorce themselves from the idea of an artist's, or weaver's, or worker's imagined depiction of bodies in a world, bodies on a ground and in action and instead perceive the tapestry as a direct document, as a medium of more or less effective visual capture with more or less total fidelity or at least the closest thing to it—something closer to a photograph or video recording. If a looker does that kind of looking at this tapestry the inconsistencies in physical scale between, say, the horses and their riders, or the relative length of their neighbour's limbs, or the footprint of the tent in the lower right quadrant, or the peaked dome of the structure in the upper left, cease to be eccentric, historically rooted and contextualized irregularities in pictorial perspective and stylistic decision making, and instead show bodies and the spaces they inhabit literally, in true recorded terms. If the tapestry is taken plainly, literally, as the world as it is, the looker can see the world as a place where a figure is taller than the horse being ridden next to them, or where the dome of a building is about the same size as the small of a back and the block of an ass. Permitting myself to register these bodies as the real allows me to imagine my own body as having a physical and spatial existence like the ones I see in the picture. So perhaps my outrageous clumsiness is

simply the product of occupying a body, a form, that moves in a world where comparative scale has fallen apart in advance—perhaps I have been shattering dropped dishes in an apartment no bigger than the low of my gut—and how could I not, given circumstances like those.

Or a body like this, like the one I am with the sensory integration deficits and everything, is a slapstick body, a body like one of the bodies in those golden slapstick movies, like the one in *Busy Bodies*.<sup>12</sup> Films like *Busy Bodies* are made of one big off-elegant dynamism, they are productions of a procedural-physical nature where figures moving in-error move, and in that moving move laughter out of watching heads and mouths. And in that way the movies and my clumsy body and the tapestry and the two suits are wide-smiling beings and full with laughter and doing smiles over and over with my bumping parts.

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*Snap Head Back 9/19:*

An energetic impression of some kind comes round, a seen word or picture, some thought, some excitement over anything—a sensing passing some little limit. Then a response: the posterior muscles wrapping the back of the head and spreading up onto to it like tons of wet newspaper stuffed in a damp bag contract sharply, making the low

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<sup>12</sup> *Busy Bodies*, directed by Lloyd French, performed by Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy ( 1933; Hal Roach Studios, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), film.

rearward part of the skull a brutal tight hinge. This snapping the head backward, making the kneaded folds of the neck bubble up and be felt under the drooping weight of the skull, with eyes casting straight upward as it happens.<sup>13</sup> This rough fluttering of the head with the neck may happen once in an effort to mitigate a troubling instance, though more likely the movement will happen in three-count sequences, thereby layering a space, a buffer, between my body and the impression to be elided. It is a system of timed and harsh quivers, and with these hot gesticulations of muscle and meaty coverage my neck maintains whiplash over nothing at all.

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Bodies change shape when bent to purpose and those shapes begin to form relations with that purpose that can be readable things. Bodies bent to purpose after bending in that direction over and over become purpose-made forms through that same bending. The repetitions of that purposefulness carry an optical charge—a specifically aesthetic reward attached to those motions for whoever is looking on.

A replay of a Rodger Federer and Rafael Nadal match from 2019. At 35:30 or so in the contest one of the players (the one whose back faces me from the angle that the broadcast has furnished me with in this instance), fails to return a serve from the

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<sup>13</sup> "...it is easy to observe that the overwhelmed individual throws his head back while frenetically stretching his neck in such a way that the mouth becomes, as much as possible, an extension of the spinal column..."

Georges Bataille, "Mouth," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, 59. Trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 59.

opposing player (whose face and set-jaw and flat belly I can see from here). During the procedure of resetting after this point victory the player whose face I can still see approaches the Ball Kid at the topmost left corner of the court as I am looking at it. In the arcane bit of process where the Player and the Kid exchange tennis balls I am struck by the Ball Kid's near-inhuman material presence—as if his total devotion and attentiveness to the tennis-activity transmuted him into something wholly sculptural and beyond skin and beyond psychology.<sup>14</sup> As play stops and the Kid is approached by Their Player the whole body of the Kid goes into stiffest vertical and with the feet drawing their points into a line parallel with the coming angle of the Player. The ball exchange happens by way of a minute dialogue of casual gestures on the part of the Player and a corresponding system of frantic straight-arm lifts and tosses on the side of the Kid. Ball is wanted and the Kid's arm shocks straight and dead-hard upwards as if in reaching all the way up there to something though the eyes of the Kid stay held to the Player entirely in a contrasting horizontal. Then that rigid arm falls forward not like a limb at all, instead like some blunt lever, a meat made mechanical dropping the bright of the ball forward to the asking Player. After balls have been released according to these moves both arms fall low and both hands fall open and flat and facing the Player and so hands go still there asking a question. Then a loose ball rolls off behind and to the Kid's right and the querying hands shatter out of that held position and the whole body swings

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<sup>14</sup> Joy Katz, "Tennis is the Opposite of Death: A Proof," *The Paris Review*, no. 237 (2021): 75. "The expressionless ball kid runs expressionlessly crosscourt between points, retrieving balls then kneeling, still. So still as to never have drawn breath: an ancient icon, a carving."

its verticality in a devotional flailing, making itself curved and angled and bowing after the grounded ball.

The astonishing presentation of the Kid's movements might excuse themselves through the supposed efficiency of those movements; but there is this other thing where the mode and the signature presentation of the movements (even if they may achieve an efficiency) are also an aesthetic object formed in the round by a trained body. I mean to say that while the physical methods of the Ball Kid are a display of purpose-bent and heavily practiced training—an efficient exchange and retrieval of tennis balls could happen by way of any number of alternative physical moves. So the Ball Kids moves and form are purpose-bent things made hard via repetitions, but the pattern of that repeating is arbitrary and so abandons its purpose-bentness in a muscular paradox. And so in the end I am saying that the emphatic and wholly breathless performances of the Ball Kid may have nothing to do with the tennis balls and the Player but is a part of something else, and is for something else—that these non or at least para-utilitarian movements are living bits of art, and so in this instance the figure of the Ball Kid is made plastic and formal so as to be perceived according to those terms.

*Coughing 16/19:*

Small coughs out from the hollow of the mouth and not from the deeps of the lung. The epiglottis, the epiglottal projection wetted and with mucus liner—that semi-soft, elastic leaf of cartilage, of no bones, only a whole of rubbery bendable gore—does a dripping flutter to block out the bigness of the lungs and other lower parts—just the bitty and

warm cavity of the mouth left over after the shuttering of insides. The mouth is one of the parts of the face that can open the face without injury, without losing blood. The mouth opens and can open without event. The small of the chamber left with teeth, tongue, gums, spittle, the other skins, etc., the wee chamber fronted by the aperture of the mouth and lined with the skin-fencing of the lips running round the wet gate of the face. Gate rounds a little, opens a small ways, and whatever cramped gust of air as can be moved from the rear of the shut out hole gets shoved out through the dilated moist thing. Might need to do three if the one did not do, and so the mucky leaf palpitates at the rear and so the lungs get their chance, and they fill up like stomachs with pale beer. Then the gummy leaf closes up again and the little hot room is left alone all over, the front part of the face splits full again without blood and the airs pop out the same as before, and then again and so on.

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OCD, for me, is a conceptually-centered disorder. A sickness of ideas and tigerish ideating. It is a mind locked in perpetual motion while paradoxically refusing to advance:

### Figure Rots in Ski Clothing while Seated: Some Points on Stasis and Obsession

Here I describe a scenario in order to elaborate upon my experience of obsessive episodes through the deployment of oblique descriptive measures. This effort takes the form of a textual diagram that is meant to operate here as a kind of affective image delineating a disordered experience of embodiment. This diagrammatic scene is composed of four primary components, these are as follows:

1. A seated figure, sitting stock-still, and entirely clothed in recreational ski clothing from the early 1980s to the mid 2000's.
2. A lawn chair manufactured via an extrusive plastic process, it is forest green in colour, it has been six months since the chairs' manufacture. (This chair is what the above mentioned figure uses to sit).
3. A room, spacious, 300-400 square feet—or the size of a living room in a North American suburb. The figure and the chair are located in the room, set against a large wall. The wall is painted orange—very rich—an orange like washed pumpkin skin.
4. The carpet. The floor of the big orange room is fully carpeted. The carpet is lavender hued and carries a medium pile. It is plush, suggesting it has either been lightly used or is newly installed, the feet of the forest green lawn chair and those of the seated figure alike press into its purply surface—as if it were the big plump rind of a bruised fruit.

The scenario now in play has an accompanying list of component sub-sets, significant, though linked to the material situations outlined via the primary components

already described above. This additional sub-set will be listed in alphabetical format in an effort to set these auxiliary components in parallel, though definitively apart from their numerically listed conceptual siblings:

A: There is the rot and the smell. There is a stink in the room because the room is warm, and so in the layers of ski clothing the body of the figure rots—the scent is strong enough to feel like a heat if one stands in its immediate radius. The figure is not rotting because the figure is dead—the figure has not died—but rots because the figure is so wholly unmoving and still. Its own heat, rendered by the circulations of the body into deep sweating, is refracted back onto itself by the padded nature of the snow clothing, so the body is locked in a mono-cyclical process of warmth and perspiration and is never dried—no element in that fixed system being permitted to fade away into the easiness of vapour. Instead, all is kept and all is returned—and so the rancid airs and the rot.

B: There is the posture of the seated figure. The figure does its sitting in this way: the trunk, threaded with spine—straight enough, though by no means in keeping with some physical ideal—rests with effort at ninety degrees to the board-stiff tops of the seated thighs. The musculature surrounding the wee pillar of the sternum is taught, a sore binding like the scared hug from a tiring swimmer. The gut is all tied up too, as though a stick or long thorn had been set in the ropey folding of the intestine. The muscles of the thighs tense imperceptibly in alternating patterns to one another with a musical brutishness, like the beating of a little drum in a sunny parade, though noiseless, terminal, and taxing. The low-legs run down from here at ninety-ish from the kneecaps,

meeting the flat planted feet down low against that lavender carpeting. The soles of the feet press downwards dumbly there—like two plain smiles.

C: There are the particulars of the figure's outfit. The nature of the costume has already been suggested in passing, though is vitally important here, and so will form an ancillary sub-set to again compliment the initial inventory of components. This sub-set will be listed in an adjusted numerical system to render it distinctive among its peer sets.

1.1: The figure wears a hat—a ball-cap. It is grey and tired from old use. The hat was manufactured by Nike in 1998. The inner sweatband of the cap is concealed from view as it is being worn here, however, if one were to inspect it when removed from the figure they would find that it is inundated with washes of sweat, and is being perspired upon newly even now; this new sweat wandering out from the figure in wet blooms to join the sepia sheets of all the others already there in a sandwich between the skin and thinning grey cotton-twill.

2.1: Bellow the hat rests a coat that would terminate just under the pelvis if the wearer stood—though the figure sits—and so the coat folds over itself all dopey—making like a second belly, tucking lushly into the stomach of the sitting figure. The coat is a cartoon-ruby-red, the vibrance of that colour near sickly, feverish, sticky—the high gloss coating applied to its polyethylene outer-shell construction is years-old and clouding with wear though remains sufficient here to give the comedic impression that the coat may in fact be a titanic cut of veal piled over the squared-up shoulders of the sitter. The coat is heavily insulated, assembled in a system of stacked and stuffed vertical ribs wrapping around the figure as a bunch of pliant goofy haloes. The insulation is polyester fill—a synthetic, a kind of plasticized dust—composed of a continuous filament structure.

These details are important here, as a traditional goose-down filler—harvested from the soft under-layer of birds feathers—when wet, progressively loses its ability to loft—to hover above the body in its pillowy clouds—which is the means by which it insulates, thereby failing to warm over time in wetted conditions. If the figure had been outfitted with this type of fill in the housing of the coat, the rotting and the sweating may have been arrested, or stalled at some earlier time, however, the synthetic filler carries the benefit of maintaining its insulating capacities even when damp, the lofty nature of the plastics surviving even when wetted from within, from the skin of the figure outwards. And so the rot can go on and on, and need not have a cooled moment in the expression of its heated cycles. (see fig. 4)

3.1: The legs—that low stretch of the figure—wear wind resistant pants. These trousers are emerald green, a colour very close to that of the chair that now holds them, though the two objects—the pants and the lawn-chair—differ radically in texture, making for a subtle, though not insignificant juxtaposition of tonalities. The waistband of the pants is hidden beneath the folding-bottom of the coat, and is elasticized, as are the cuffs of the pants riding down by the ankles—both apertures exist awkwardly—looking like drying lips, or the dense ribbing of an anus. Two pockets are cut into the trousers vertically, running down from the waistband, angled very slightly. These pockets are zippered and fitted with black woven-nylon pulls. Set within the otherwise unbroken expanse of the pant, the pockets arrive as a shock of abbreviation, cut in place like paired little vandalisms. The pockets are zippered closed here—and both are bulging—



Fig. 4, *A Bunch of Pliant Goofy Haloes*

their interiors padded with skin-warmed coins and powdering paper towels pressed into some muggy shapes by the indirect presence of those dewy-hot sitting thighs. (Fig. 5)

4.1: After the pant would come the boot, however, between the ends of the pants and the openings of the boot-tops there is a risk of ventilation, of a loss of moisture, and of an ending or temporary halting of the rot. This variable has been accounted for through the utilization of the gaiters. The gaiters are a tube of textile composed of sixty percent polyester and forty percent cotton (this combine-textile being both suited to insulation and compositional water resistance) and finished with cinching orifices at each extremity of their weird length. This set is black and orange, the colours running in an array of

thick vertical banding throughout. Here in the case of the figure in the chair in the orange room they are worn as follows: the top opening of the gaiters are fixed four inches beneath the kneecaps, covering down from here to meet the bottom of the boots heel. In this way the seams between boot-hole and pant cuff with their inevitable heat loss are deferred, and lengthened up and down the terrain of the low legs, thereby maximum retention is maintained, and the rot further propelled.



Fig. 5, *Paired Little Vandalisms*

5.1: Bulbous marshmallow hooves. The bloating embarrassment of the boots follow from the casing of those low stretching gaiters. The urethane of their construction an unbroken mass of overlaid white planes, the mesh side panels differentiated by degrees through means of a browned streaking pressed out from long contact with the sweating calves and the terminal stretch of rotting feet. The woven lacing—here drawn tight by an articulating spindle fixed to the top of boot-tongue—along with the jointed mesh cuffs of the boots allows for a fit so severe around the midsection of the lower leg as to obstruct necessary circulation within the padding of the feet. The foot in that state, breathless and cold though running with sweat and itch makes for a rot that is doubled in this part of the figure—thus trench-footed the tired white of the boots lay still atop that lavender flooring.

The figure, its clothing, and the conditions described in the orange room are all presented here as textual-pictorial embodiments of states of stillness and cyclical scenarios of self-containment inherent to the obsessive neurological episodes familiar to me. Under obsessive-compulsive circumstances, a thought, the content of which may be common to most minds, becomes caught and is assigned vectors of meaning unsuited to it, initiating a cycle of panic and fearing-process that repeats in accelerating loops. The internal efforts to repel the ego-dystonic material of the thoughts and sensations only serves to paradoxically reinforce the false vitality of their troubling presentation. And so this sitting and stilled figure—is an experience of form and sensation encapsulated in an image—emerging here as an existential physicality sweating itself down in seemingly endless repetitions. The figure exhibits a subject coerced into an experience of itself that is lived through arbitrary layers of insulated

material and content, the sensational qualities of a phenomenal life being forced back onto itself, refracted in a reversal towards the figure's own shape and locked cognition—a paradoxical state of frustration where one cannot be where one is, but in a horror of simultaneity, cannot imagine anywhere else.

These automated and forceful thoughts and the disordered mechanisms driving their action form the energetic and aesthetic catalyst that shapes the figure's posture and terminal stasis—that bolsters the architecture of the orange room. They are the explanation for the exasperation of the infinite sweating of the emblematic object of the figure—they are the layers of ski-gear, that weird set of hot constraints.

When these thoughts arrive in my own body they are partially announced by a small haptic sensation—it feels like a puffy padded finger lightly resting on the top of my scalp—and so I associate their arrival with the head. The head of the figure seated in the orange room has gone unmentioned as of yet. The head's lack is conspicuous in section B where the description of the posture of the seated figure is initiated from the trunk and then falls downwards from there to conclude in the bottoms of the feet. I have set this provision on purpose; a description of the figure's head being placed aside until now in order to emphasize its primacy as the node of entrance for these cyclical states of troubling rumination; to highlight the head's ugly role as the elementary position of the intrusive thoughts' expansion into the wider situation of the figure and the orange room and the sweating and the rotting.

With an understanding that the head is the original path of entrance for the mechanics of intrusive thinking, and further, that these thoughts with their attendant contents form the energetic catalyst that drives the aesthetic formulation of the figure,

the orange room, the ski gear, the sweating, and the rotting from the sweating in the gear—it can be understood that the head is a complex component that in actuality is grafted from multiple parts forming their own additional sub-set. The head will be numbered according to the same basic numerical system as the initial list of primary components in order to suggest its close connection to those first elements, and will then be followed by a numerical-alphabetical hybrid listing in order to describe the heads' own component sub-sets.

5. The figure is seated and still and the limbs rest at stiff hard angles throughout—except the head—which is also dead-still but its position looking less stiff because of the curving of the neck it is attached to. The head leans back in this mellow arcing as if the figure were asleep on the green lawn chair against the orange of the wall, though the figure is not sleeping. The head is bent back on the stretch of the neck and rests in place there, it is bent backward as if the eyes had begun to follow an object moving directly overhead sometime before—over and then past the seat of the figure so that the head now lays craning straight back like that from the plateau of the erect shoulders, with the eyes looking nearly straight upwards in this end-position.

An exposition of the head's posturing and attitude can be further illustrated through an account of the movement of the head on the neck in this backwards way and the stimulus that led to those actions. The illustration will take place from the figure's point of view, and can be read here as a sort of dramatic re-enactment:

Limbs, trunk all still, buttocks press with weight to the green of the chair, all is heavy and never-moving. Eyes stand open though stare through shade, and beyond the grey shading there is only the other lacks of light, the same heavy hue all over beyond

the head and the limbs and the orange of the walls. House of these eyes that is the head sits straight up on top of the alignment of torso, shoulders—these a stack on the pelvis. Then in the dark a flaring bright, sunny and so glittering and with such heat though moving with speed, in front and then crossing back behind the eyes, so the head follows to bring the eyes to the dazzle of it for longer by the bending of the neck. The backside of the bent head bumps the chair-backing, and stays because it cannot move through those hard plastics. The light of the moving flare now out of reach for the eyes, so that thing is gone, but a soft touching feeling now, on the crown just below the grey of the ball-cap, arrives. Resting there and not going, and so my limbs going nowhere, and there is no more moving—but the sweating and the ways I rot are continuous.

Obsession is an always looping backward, a reaching behind that imagines itself as a way forward. The relative minutiae of life are expanded outwards in an awful telescopic brilliance, and thereby posed by the mechanics of compulsion as a set of problems. Postured in this way, as problems, there is a logical expectation that these minutiae have a structure that can be worked through and resolved definitively through the maneuvering of fine pieces and parts. This false expectation, and the effects caused by it are preoccupation and disease. Here, in the obsessive episode, all conceptual components are discreet while all things are also the same thing.

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*Popping Neck 10/19:*

Swing the head out to the left very sharp, with chin finishing high up, and with the eyes like they are looking up and out to the high left. Swing the head to the left, and at first it looks like a moment of disbelief, or like a warning, or like a dog cocking its head around, trying to make sense of some newness. Near the apex of this leftward swinging there is this body-trick to do, where you let the muscles supporting the head go all loose and sloppy around the shape of its bulk, and you just let the swinging momentum you have built in the first part of the swing take the head the rest of the way. And that last part of the swing, where the muscles are stringy and floppy, brings the head a little past a limit and when it goes farther than that limit it makes a popping sound, and the feeling has a picture attached.

I consciously decided not to treat this tic. Apparently, it is common for tourettics to “keep” some of their tics like this, I do not know why. When asked about my keeping of this one I told the doctor that it feels good and that I didn’t care how it looked to others. So it was an aesthetic and sensual decision based in my own pleasure. With the pop of the neck up at that apex of the swung head there is a picture too—here it is: A rectangular frame set in landscape orientation. There is a black base-tone down below everything else and overtop of this there is an off-white block running from the top left to the bottom right of the frame at a soft angle. The roughly center part of the picture features a black orb with blurred surfaces and edging—as if petroleum jelly had been

applied over the lens of the image—the black orb has moved out from a grayed stony pocket that is set into the off-white block, and this pocket is repeated down the length of the block moving away and towards view. The black orb hovers out and a little above it towards the left, this pocket has a shadowed inverse, an embossed shape that looks to have been fitted to the black orb before the separation like a ball-joint. I know that a vapour or gas was, or has been, expelled during the process of the orb leaving the pocket, a process and a moment I do not see, as I only see the orb scenario in freeze-frame at the bit I have been describing. Regardless, the vapour is invisible and without residue, and so its effect is an addition of surrounding data, a submission of evidence, something with effect but without graphic output that remains, paradoxically, attached to the image.

I repeat the same motion and the same image and feeling with the right side. The pleasure of the thing, of this tic that I kept is the sensation, this sort of milky release feeling it brings, and with it the illusion, for a moment, of a loose body, of a loosened body that can be made loose and watery through all these little pops and deep achy crunches that are audible through my skin, like twigs popping apart under wetted towels.

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Tics as actions that are a distorted hybridity of watching/doing. During a tic I watch my own body move as figure-in-space—a figure acting out a shape, assuming a

pose on a ground—though I am concurrently embodied all the while, doing the gestures all the way through. Tics as physical actions that are mated with an unbidden kind of thinking. Inner pictures, impressions, and distressing concepts mirroring this watching/doing in their unfolding and all as the watching/doing of the gestures goes on and on. Like an inner projection of images (moving or still) and language and webbed ideas operating somehow as a cohesive and uneasy medium. All with content that is arbitrary, absurd, brutal, or sometimes so funny I laugh in real time, and other times all of these elements all together at once in a sort of hokey slapstick violence. Tics as a means by which this whole show of movements and picturing is shuffled in amongst the rest of the thinking and inner life that apparently regulates neurotypical personhood—making the work of being a person an inevitably confusing thing with all of this being taken in at once and all the time and without ever stopping.

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### *Tensing Abdomen 12/19*

Gut going quiver, a belly-bobbing around, the tummy shaking in taut and small flexes, the mini horror-dancing of an animated midriff. It's like doing sit-ups or crunches, but under your shirt and whenever. I can speak and do crunches at the same time; I can ride the bus doing crunches; I can do crunches while I do crunches. Aside from tired muscles and ache the feeling is like an itch just inside the muscle but before organs, and the shakes get at the thing. The belly button tucks in violent, like it's at attention or

spooked all of the sudden, and when the button pops in the flat sheet of muscle immediately above goes tight and flatter and kind of out, while the sheeted moundish muscles bellow the button do the same thing but tilt just inward toward the button as if chasing it in its inward move. Like all the others it's never once but a bunch of times with this, and this particular one really goes. Forty or sixty or whatever sometimes; I should have amazing definition down there by now; I should have extra abs from it, I should have rows and rows of hard abs from down low below the beltline and all the way up to my nipples, all the way up with all the crunching I do.

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In 1915, Gino Severini painted a picture called *Mer=Bataille*,<sup>15</sup> the English would be *Sea=Battle*. The painting isn't very big, in fact, I will say it verges on being a discreet object, a small thing fit for a living room. It isn't very good, as paintings go, it feels ground-out and clumsy. The brushwork is dry and scraped around and breaks away all over the place, and the colours are silly, feathered, and pastel and full of sweetness. It is one of my favorite paintings. I went back exclusively to see it a few times and sat on a leather-topped bench nearby where I starred at the old thing. Hung at the customary gallery level it looked like a head severed from a body no longer there, that had been removed from the scene post-decapitation—so that just this little specter was left-over,

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<sup>15</sup> Gino Severini, *Mer=Bataille*, 1915. Oil on Canvas, 19 1/8" X 23 7/16". Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario.

hovering above where it would have stood. This is one of my favorite paintings because it is a painting made up of painted words—so a text—but inevitably, (by definition), a picture. Here are some of the words from the painting, (the translations from the French are rudimentary but my own):

TATATATATATATATATATATATA

Enthusiasm

Violence

PS PS PS PS

Effort Maximum

Stench

Granite Resistance

56

Advance

Tearing

In *Mer=Bataille*, Severini is playing a game with writing, where words are made to show their signifying powers out in the open. Severini is using words to make a picture of a battle at sea while making a picture of words alone. Words taken as signals for content or phenomena that is not present, words as description, are words made into short-cuts, byways for pictorial content, spaces and scenarios. A picture like this lives a

bisected life, because a picture of words is a picture alone, while a picture of words is also a loosened fluid index of readerly images taking place outside of it.

These are not new conclusions and the game Severini was making of this picture is a simple one. Simple games can be good games though. This painting is one of my favorites, in-part, because it helps me think about my own management of severe obsessive-compulsive disorder from a distance. It specifically provides a sort of diagram for thinking about my experience of intrusive thoughts associated with the disorder. The DSM-5 describes intrusive thoughts like this: "Recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges or images that are experienced, at some time during the disturbance, as intrusive, unwanted, and that in most individuals cause marked anxiety or distress."<sup>16</sup> I certainly experience the urges and images, though most of my intrusive content is composed of thoughts, and I mean thoughts-as-words. Thoughts-as-words can be thought-of as-text. So, thoughts-of-text then, I get a lot of intrusive thought-as-texts. Severini, in *Mer=Bataille* makes clear that a whole scene, or event, or picture can be made out via wording. This is where the differentiation between thoughts-as-text and images breaks down. Intrusive thoughts, in the way I experience them, are thoughts as descriptive text, and when text describes, text makes pictures. So, these intrusions are coercive texts I am made to read-out inside myself, in an internal way, and in reading them made to see a pictured version of my own life that I do not want to picture. Jordan Kisner, in their own essay on the subject elaborates on this very thing:

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<sup>16</sup> "Table 3.13 DSM-IV to DSM-5 Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Comparison," NCBI, accessed January 27, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519704/table/ch3.t13/>

One thing that distinguishes obsessive-compulsive patients from people with schizophrenia is their experience of this paradox: the thoughts hijacking their minds feel urgently not theirs, but are nevertheless innate to their own minds and bodies.<sup>17</sup>

Intrusive thoughts are texts that are not mine but are of me all the same. The wording, the text, of intrusive thinking are shapes all their own, but in their signalling capacity they make shapes anew that cannot come to be otherwise. Since intrusive thoughts are not of me but inside me all the same intrusive thoughts are found-text, and because texts signal and make pictures from themselves, intrusive thoughts are found images. If intrusive thinking is a thing of found text and found image via their signals, then this branch of my sickness is a form of unbidden collage, or maybe an ill-montage. This part of being unwell in this particular way is to be a captive viewer of content that you cannot be removed from because it cannot be removed from you. The filmic reel rendered by this sickness is an internal thing, like an extra writing and picture making organ, sunk down there in the well of the guts, and running a show so bright and rapid in its moves that sometimes nothing else can be looked at, as there is no room.

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<sup>17</sup> Jordan Kisner, "Thin Places," in *Thin Places* (New York: Picador, 2020), 31

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*Sniffing 18/19:*

Lungs both suck big wind inwards and all the sudden. Their spongy, bladdery, baggy shapes make a fast lunge in and so violently it's like the pair is making backwards for the inner wall of the spine, set heavy like a ribbed stalk in the rearward part of me. Then the throat locks, running up stiff like a second dick pasting my torso and head together. So, throat and neck go all hard and that makes the skull, jaw, and face rigid and still up top, held in place. The lungs triggered this deep intake of air, but the throat locked and the mouth is closed and so that airpipe is near shut. The only place to take the influx is square in the nostrils, small things in comparison to the gape of the mouth and the big pipes that run down from it. The mouth is shut-up and the nostrils pull the stuff in and can't pull it smooth because of the violence and the speed, and so they make this hard rasping noise.

Sniffing the air with this sort of disorderly ferocity is a tic for public places. It is for the public because its results (the sharp intake of air through the nose) is a relatable movement, it is a physical something that other bodies can assess and make little note of, because the shape made in its workings is a shape they make themselves, though in a differing context. The sniffing tic, when laid out like this, is outed for its function as a shaky screen for my own sense of public humiliation. In my heaviest fears, a body like mine, that makes the shapes it makes me make, reads like slapstick comedy, like a laughing physical disaster flopping with violence between a variety of moving

absurdities. The sniffing one is a partial repression, or a cover thrown over after one of the other, more elaborate tics slips out into the public world. Understood like that the hissing sound of my compressing nostrils is an attempt at a redemptive movement to make sense, for others, of a movement that is unidentifiable, and therefore unforgivable. The sniff is a reply to others for my own shame born of postures and noises.

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Here is an image recovered, with difficulty, through remembering. It is a geometric picture composed of five colours and three active shapes. The viewed orientation is just off square—so an abridged rectangle laid flat, making for a landscape support. The picture is remembered as rendered in synthetic textile with very little grain to the fabric. The shapes are applied over the ground either through an in-situ dyeing process or via digital transfer with a large format inkjet printing mechanism acting directly upon a pretreated base material.

These are the five colours with accurate codes attached:

Graying forest green: (Hexadecimal code: 2E6A4D)

Chalky pink: (Hexadecimal code: D377D2)

Bone white with a touch of the pink: (Hexadecimal code: E5DAE5)

1980s terracotta orange: (Hexadecimal code: CA965D)

Faint gray with some of the forest green dropped through it: (Hexadecimal code: 353935)

The picture is mapped out with the shapes and the colours like this:

The background (the blunt rectangular support mentioned above) is the gray-shaded forest green. The pink, white, and orange colours are contained in a set of scalene triangles, laid across the surface of the green in a random sort of mostly-even, but then with a group of all three coloured triangles condensed slightly toward the center of the frame. The edges of the white triangles soften and bleed in a misted, glowing-haloed effect. The green infused tinted-grey shows in minute irregular octagons. These are numerous and spread through the whole composition (but never atop the triangles, instead always merged with the background) their effect is subtle because of the proximity in value they share with the green of the ground they lay out on.

*Throat Clearing 17/19:*

When a pumpkin is near cleared for carving, the pulling of a metal spoon up the inner wall makes a noise like a scrape and a thump—like if a scraping and a thumping were to copulate, their sound-fucking would make a sound like the hollowed gourd, all free of loose seeds and tissue, released from all the horrible vegetable offal of itself and so this shredded down, bass-making thing. Make the vacant gourd my throat, put my whole mouth around it, or turn the gourd innards-side out and make the cut down walls the innards of my mouth. Make the sound the gourd makes—this is clearing the throat.

Clearing the throat is different than the emptied gourd though. The gourd has been made empty and that is how and why it makes the scrape-thump sound. Clearing the throat takes what was empty (the hot pocket of the mouth) and makes it full, full with spittle and with mucus. I need not wonder what it might be like to cannibalize myself, to eat my own parts and produce, because I have this salty stuff, I can eat from out of myself—and there's plenty—If it is winter, the mouth is rich with a lot of mucus—like a hundred hankies full of it. It gets made and made to magically to appear from down lower in the trunk and then to come up and to be in the pocket of the mouth, like a big reveal, like a gross magic show all for myself and all the time, swallow it or spit it, it's my own.

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Let diagnosis, let diagnostic naming be something like a bunch of bodies and collected on one big green-grassy lawn and so sharing in the weather that the one big lawn place throws on all of them—a near unbearable buttery, mono-sunshine of movements, utterances, gestures, and thinking.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “...diagnosis, which takes information from our bodies and rearranges what came from inside of us into a system imposed from far away...Like the birds that have been liberated from the content of their flying...a diagnosed person is liberated from what she once thought of as herself.”

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Here's a sampling of others reporting on some bodies and minds that share my diagnosis. These bodies and their minds sharing a specific set of constraints that inflect my own and the minds and bodies of others like this in an indelible way:

...a proliferation that cannot be defined in any way other than as a generalized catastrophe of the sphere of gestures. Patients can neither start nor complete the simplest of gestures. If they are able to start a movement, this is interrupted and broken up by shocks lacking coordination and by tremors that give the impression that the whole musculature is engaged in a dance...that is completely independent of any ambulatory end.<sup>19</sup>

Tics are sudden, rapid, recurrent, nonrhythmic motor movements or vocalizations...Tics can either be simple or complex...Complex motor tics are of a longer duration...Complex tics can appear purposeful, such as a tic-like sexual or obscene gesture (copropraxia) or a tic-like imitation of someone else's movements (echopraxia)...complex vocal tics include repeating one's own sounds or words (palilalia), repeating the last-heard word or phrase (echolalia)...Observing a gesture or sound in another person may result in an individual with a tic disorder making a similar gesture or sound...<sup>20</sup>

Tourette's Syndrome...is characterized by an excess of nervous energy, and a great production and extravagance of strange motions and notions: tics, jerks, mannerisms, grimaces, noises, curses, involuntary imitations and compulsions of all sorts, with an odd elfin humor and tendency to antic and outlandish kinds of play. In its 'highest' forms, Tourette's Syndrome involves every aspect of the affective, the instinctual and the imaginative life...<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Agamben, 51.

<sup>20</sup> "DSM-5 Tic Disorders." Tourette.ca. Tourette Canada, March 23, 2021. [https://tourette.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/DSM-5\\_Tic\\_Disorders.pdf](https://tourette.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/DSM-5_Tic_Disorders.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Oliver Sacks. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, London: Duckworth, 1985. 47-48

This is the simultaneous gift and affliction, the delight, the anguish, conferred by excess. And it is felt, by insightful patients, as questionable and paradoxical: 'I have too much energy,' one Tourette patient said. 'Everything is too bright, too powerful, too much. It is a feverish energy, a morbid brilliance.' 'Dangerous wellness', 'morbid brilliance', a deceptive euphoria with abysses beneath—this is the trap and promised and threatened by excess...<sup>22</sup>

A last note, from Georges Gilles de la Tourette himself (see fig. 6), namesake of that big sunny diagnostic automatic-gestural-lawn-scape:

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<sup>22</sup> Sacks, 47

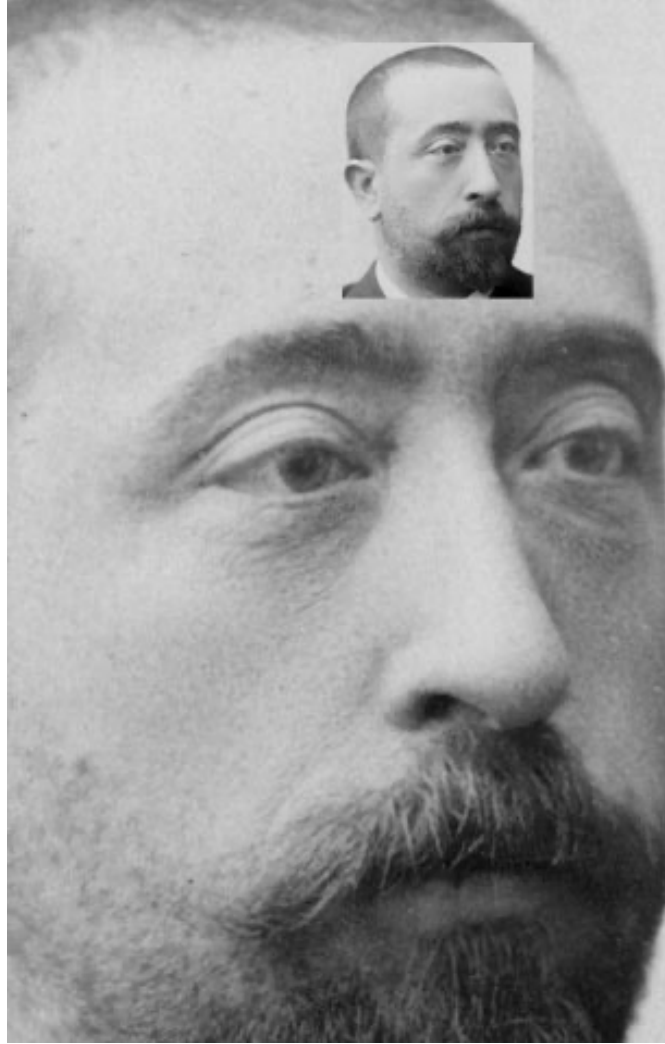


Fig 6 ...*Georges Gille de la Tourette himself...*

Without apparent provocation, S... would exhibit a series of singular movements which at times were localized, at others generalized, sometimes they affected one side of the body, sometimes they affected both. Such movements were rapid; on his head they involved the frontalis and epicranial muscles, the outer ear and the corners of the mouth which would suddenly be drawn upwards and outwards; a whole series of grimaces was observable, none of which involved the eyes or tongue. Associated with such grimaces were very fast upward swinging movements of the arms and alternate bending and straightening of each leg such that the right foot especially would stamp against the ground. At the climax of this bizarre collection of movements S... would let out

a harsh, inarticulate cry.<sup>23</sup>

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In my own Tourettic embodiment I am this gyrating, shrieking, excessive figure—and when my own cries cease to be inarticulate and I regain a full hold on my coherence, I find my wording—my own vivid modes—these discrete means and ways of responding.

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Tourette's Syndrome, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (the full set, more or less, of my own comorbidities, listed in order of relative effect) are to be taken here as elliptical neurological responses to an unnamable fearing. So then my body and mind—my organism—in the face of whatever unlovely bit of being, deploys these disordered structures as a series of foils out in front of itself, and the trouble of it seems to be a consequent transfixion upon the foils themselves, upon the minutia of their contours and shape. The near-hypnotic engagement with the aspects and behavior of the disordering foils become the observable symptoms of the

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<sup>23</sup> Gilles De La Tourette. "Study of a Nervous Affliction Characterized by Motor Incoordination with Echolalia and Coprolalia Jumping, Latah, Myriachit." *History of Psychiatry* 9, no. 33 (March 1, 1998): 102–20. doi:10.1177/0957154X9800903308. 107.

disease all on their own, turning this way in a kind of leering irony upon the organism that rendered them, so that this rendering organism, the foil, and the effects of the foil all mingling become a tightly fixed system that eats time and peace and perspective. Like as if one blew a big and wet and bouncy bubble from a lush, puffy piece of bubble-gum, and then saw that big bubble out in front of the head that blew it with the eyes in the head and just starred right at it—looked at it like that for so long as to forget about the rest of the self and what that self was and where it was and what that self was meant for or wanted to be doing otherwise. (see fig 7.)

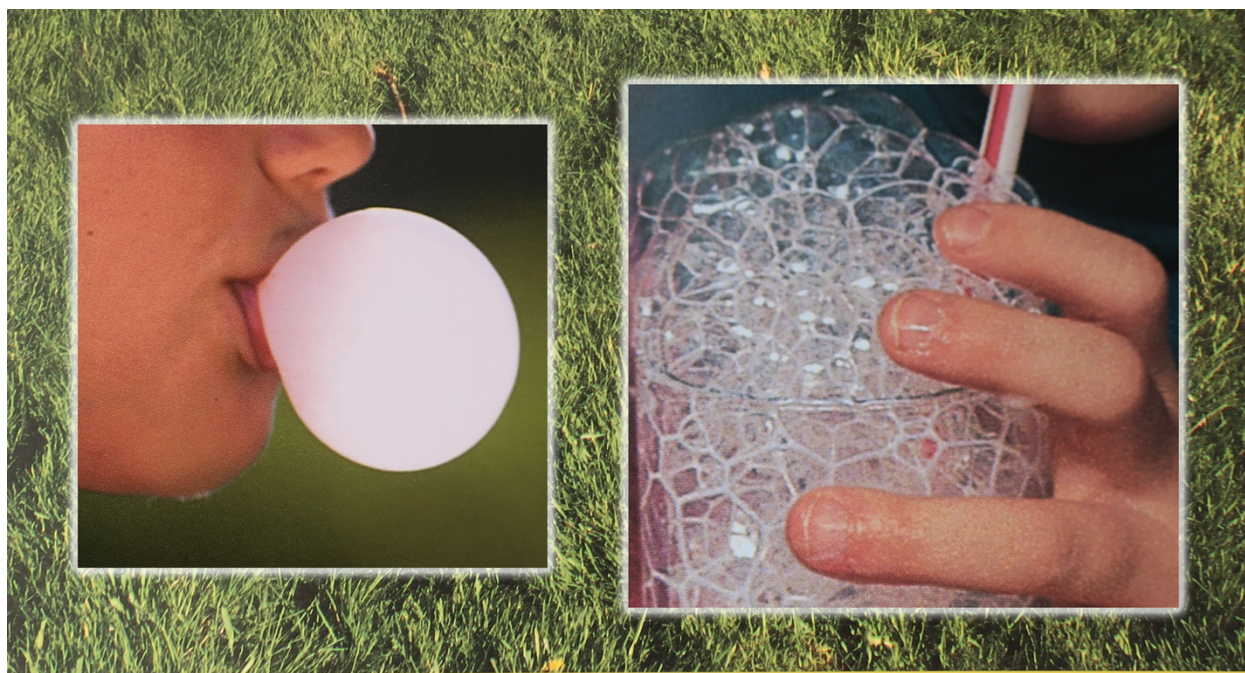


Fig 7. ...*big and wet and bouncy bubble...*

But the big puffy bubble-gum that my attention binds to in this is not a big puffy and sweet bubble at all. They are pictures, cast throughout my inner-head for me to see in a horrible kind of private. They are movements I do not wish to do, that instead I watch me do out there in the world, as if I wasn't the one doing them but I am and I can

feel that doing in my limbs as they make those shapes and sweat and tire from the making of them. It is concepts, ideas, distortions of thinking and unsettling conclusions drawn that are not my own and not of me but are cohered to my inside process regardless—harassing my attention away from anything else I may want and be and to know. So not a puffy bubble that can be chewed back down sweetly whenever—instead this ongoing stumbling set of weird phenomena and actions.

Strategies are required to bother with the work of living amongst all this all the time—and endurance is the word. A kind of posture is needed to encourage this enduring, a stance, a pose to assume under all the weight of these circumstances, another sort of foil I guess though this one coming out from the other bits of me that I know to be myself.

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### *Popping Fingers 11/19*

Crush one hand with another, make orbs. Greyish spheres with silver along the top edges. When I make pops with my knuckles, bubble-wrap of my hands, there are three greyish orbs, set in horizontal to one another, within a rectangular cavity of desaturated black that makes for a frame—the pictured recurrence to go along with the physical one. Inside my hands, and within the framework of the actually-occurring, it is bubbles of nitrogen being made to burst in the synovial fluids that slobber around between the

joints, and so orbs too. I kept this one untreated, because it gives me pleasure and because I don't mind the sound, the little precisions from underneath skin.

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Over time I have thought, written, and pictured a thing I call *Smiler*. *Smiler* is a figure, a face, with a smile on it so big and so wide and so long-held as to be like a terminal, bucolic kind of too-sugary-sweetness. Importantly, the smile of the *Smiler* falls the same way upon all things, all happenings, all intensities good and bad and whatever, so it is a mono-expression that is affectively democratic to a point of bluntness, a kind of radical vapidness made to hold all things and all encounters in just the same way. The *Smiler* is both a rejoinder and allegory for "Everything is too bright, too powerful, too much..."<sup>24</sup> If Tourette's Syndrome and its accompanying conditions (TS+) is an all too muchness applied to being and doing and being in a body then the *Smiler* is a retort, a sort of standard posture that can be applied to the painful and awkward constancy of this all too muchness that is going on all the time. The all too muchness is the effects and realities pushed by TS+ on the body that has and contains them, all together they are a thing that overwhelms, and that does that overwhelming for all the time left to that body. The *Smiler*, in its plain monotony, is a thing that brings an unmoving and unmoved matter of fact-ness, a weirdly blunted response to the near-psychedelia of this all too muchness of symptoms. So when I conceive of *Smiler* I write

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<sup>24</sup> Sacks, 47

and conceive and picture from a place of imperfect coping, not from some position of remarkable and impossible recovery.

*Smiler* is a handily fractured and multiple thing. Broadly, *Smiler* is this existential posture—a stance taken in light of the all the time all-too-muchness of perception relevant to my symptom-heavy body. But *Smiler* can also be all these other split-up modes: *Smiler* moves between concept, sentiment, facial expression, figure on a pictorial ground, symbol, and also as real (the *Smiler* smile need not be a smile but can be—but it can also be a landscape, some sunshine, or the curvy arc of a hanging gut) and moves around and through all these things like a loose and happy fluid. *Smiler* is a terminal coping, a sign made in response to the energetically saturated conditions in a certain body that is tired from always modulating under the demands of a fickle set of sicknesses and is also a metaphor for the disease that reaches out from all that all-too-muchness itself.

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The full list of one's tics is commonly called a repertoire. A repertoire of tics, each making their own shape with the body by moving the body's parts. I am, briefly here, considering my own repertoire of nineteen tics as a possible alphabet. What I mean is that here, momentarily, I want to regard the contours achieved by my body during each of the nineteen tics in my repertoire as so many discrete letter-forms. It's a way of

locating myself in my shape-making body.<sup>25</sup> In doing this I make some interesting things to think about. Like if my physicality is this thing that occasionally coerces me into making letters with my limbs and trunk and head and shifting larynx, it would follow, it would check out, to consider that collection of made letter-forms as a kind of found text. If it was a found text I would want to know if something was being written with myself—if the letters were fitting into some communicable sequence. I think a fleshy alphabet, a skin-writing like this would have to be something undulating and totally plural as regards meaning.<sup>26</sup> It would have to be a text/meaning interface that was loose like that because with a breathing, heaving set of letters made of rattling meats there is always modification and shifting in emphasis and therefore in the shapes over time. So no workable rigor could really be definitively set up between the lettering and the messages that the lettering had or did not have. With those things stated what sort of writing would this blooded alphabet make? Roland Barthes asserts a divide between texts of pleasure and bliss:

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<sup>25</sup> "...I also know that each person perfects their own inflections of how to negotiate the fact of impairment; they each bear the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'...within the world that shapes and often misunderstands them." xiii

Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

"Disability creates theories of embodiment more complex than the ideology of ability allows..."

Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>26</sup> "Between word and image, between what is depicted by language and what is uttered by plastic form, the unity begins to dissolve; a single and identical meaning is not immediately common to them." 18

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it... Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts... unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language."<sup>27</sup>

The text of my nineteen tics is undoubtedly one of these texts of bliss. It is a writing of undoing, an alphabet signaling towards a totally indigestible content. The blissful text is the writing that Smiler would do, that a Smiler does do—the all-too-muchness written towards the blinding sunshine of unravelling and velocity, an unsettling lexicon at odds with whatever stabilities.

In the late 1920's the radical art historian and media theorist Aby Warburg began work on a fluid picture atlas, he called it *Mnemosyne* (remembrance, memory, a name also shared with the Greek goddess of memory). It would become Warburg's attempt at composing an art history free of conventional text. Instead, the work was comprised of a series of black fabric-wrapped panels with numerous photographs pinned on each, thereby composing thematic sets meant to act as studies within a larger study broadly governed by a wish to trace the shapes of human gesture as depicted in plastic forms through time.<sup>28</sup> Warburg, with *Mnemosyne*, was replacing information as-text and

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<sup>27</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 14.

<sup>28</sup> "...the atlas *Mnemosyne*...that consists of almost a thousand photographs is not an immovable repertoire of images but rather a representation in virtual movement of Western humanity's gestures from classical Greece to Fascism...Inside each section, the single images should be considered more as film stills than as autonomous realities..."

Agamben, 53.

letterform with an exhibition of the depicted figure as-informational-transmission.<sup>29</sup>

Warburg's big bank of old gestural repetitions is like my smaller and more personal repertoire of nineteen tics locked in repetition through the constraints of disorder in that each form a kind of hybrid literature of repeated forms.<sup>30</sup> The Warburgian repertoire feels like my own repertoire because the armature, the literal, material lines and blocks of the body are the medium by which—in a simultaneous action—a conventional language is elided and an uneasy vocabulary is introduced in the moves of the body's parts.<sup>31</sup>

I think this found-alphabet, made of the skin and stuff of my tic-ing body, could be extracted from the gestures of my body in two ways. The first would be from the full bulk, the full weight and heave of all the meat of me proper. I mean if you paused, froze my body mid-tic and then back-lit my form so harshly as to make me a pure contour, or a total silhouette. This silhouette, once transcribed to flat image either through photographic means or by hand-drawn procedure, could then be cast into a sequence

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<sup>29</sup>"In this great montage of photographic reproductions, Warburg substituted the question of the transmission of knowledge with that of its exposition, and organized a network of tensions and anachronisms among the images, thereby indicating the function of otherness and distance in understanding the past..."

Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*. Trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 37.

<sup>30</sup> "...repetition itself creates bliss. There are many...examples: obsessive rhythms, incantatory music, litanies, rites...to repeat excessively is to enter into loss, into the zero of the signified."

Barthes, 41.

<sup>31</sup> "The gesture is, in this sense, communication of a communicability. It has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality. However, because being-in-language is not something that could be said in sentences, the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language; it is always a gag in the proper meaning of the term..."

Agamben, 58.

of movable type for letter-press or transmitted digitally and prepared as a typeface for screens. The second way would be to reduce the moves I was making in the paused frame into a series of linear vectors drawn from the relative positions of the limbs and trunk and head etc. and so the type reached at the end would be something more ropey and hard-edged but would still absolutely represent the gestures on a point for point basis.

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Photographic film stock differs in its surface presentation between decades. Technological development explains some of this, while an overarching aesthetic bias answers for the rest of a picture's look. Any photo is not a recording, but a new and imitative formal object with an innate self-referential logic and self-sustained reality that it both casts around itself and is a preserver-of.

These pictorial things are stark when dealing with colour photographs. According to photographs, the 1970's, for instance, looked to be always bathed in sunlight, and if we take the colour photographs from that period and allow them to be the hard-object-memories of that time, then we can propose that, based on the evidence provided by these imitative non-records, that the 1970s indeed was a decade of near-constant sunlight—that it was a decade wholly bereft of sunsets.

These temporal photo-biases are not limited in effects to the visual. The photograph is not only a picturing-object, but a thing encasing a multitude of strange

and capable affects. The filmstock composing the surface of a given photograph has a period-specific aesthetic signature attached to it, and this specificity as relates to time is not a solely visual thing—the photo carries its time with it in ways less perceivable but ever-present. So a photograph from the late 1980's is not just a photograph of the late 1980's but *is* the 1980's.<sup>32</sup> The photograph is what there is left of the 1980's that can be removed from living bodies and felt and perceived outside of their insides. The filmstock of the 1980's was a much colder thing than the stocks that came to define the 1970's—these were picturing surfaces full of sheer lines and the pointed sterility of crisp light. What followed in the 1990's was a hybrid of this unwholesome cold of the 1980's with elements of warmth and saturation removed from the 1970's that were reoriented in the then-future of the 1990's. This 1970's time-surface is perceptible in its counterpart of the 1990's at the edges of objects, where the contours of figure meets ground or the surfaces of another figure—those edges blur and go warm, and that warmth is from another thing, from another time remembered within the time of the 1990's, and as that hotness is recollected and redeployed it ceases to be memory and is instead laminated into the skin of that new present.

I was born in 1987, and since photographs from the late 1980s are the 1980s, or what there is tactilely left of those years, I can look at a photograph, even a popular one—an advertisement, and behold the odd roots of myself—some graphic genesis of

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<sup>32</sup> “A photo is a finite knowledge, but one that permits the demonstration anew of the essence of a being, of a situation, to ‘bring the subject to life’...from this point of view, its mode of being is very close to that of an essence...” 76

Francois Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011).

my body. And since the same is the same for the 1990s, and since the pointy manifestation of my symptoms and the naming of them through diagnosis came around in 1996, I can look at one of those 1990s pictures and see and hold the temporal, fleshy fabric of my symptoms—I can perceive, there in the photos, the disorderly bits of me—emerging back there like some set of off-techniques elaborated out of the fear and tension of one gesturing body.

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*Looking Over Left Shoulder 19/19*

If tics are frenetic modes of relating to fears without categories, without proper names, and if intrusive thoughts are found-texts from inside of me that terrorize in their odd extraneousness from me, then perhaps I can make-believe that this tic where I look to my left, over my shoulder, is an effort to perceive these things that are without names or understandable origins that frighten me so much. This explanation for this movement is make-believe because it is not true, this move is an arbitrary one like the rest, only linked to these disordered pieces of fear via some poorly understood reflex. But when I make-believe out of one of these things I can make a sort of literature with them, and maybe this is a means of being with myself even if the exercise is accepted as a fiction.

I turn my head to the left so that my skull and jaw sit parallel to the adjoining horizontal of my shoulder and collarbone, so that my chin just almost makes contact with the round of my shoulder. There are two associated sensations that represent a

kind of physical goal with this one, they both have to do with the feelings in the neck.

The side of my neck facing out in front of me when my head is turned to the left like this is long, totally stretched out and that big stretch makes for a kind of tightness and ache and that ache is the goal on that side. In the obverse, there is the side of the neck that is folded over and tucked into the flat face of the torso and the shoulder. This makes it all packed-in and hot and that is the goal for this side of the neck. Important here, as a third factor is the movement of the eyes and where they are eventually held and directed at the climax of the movement The eyes have to be made to look, and to be pushed in their looking, as far left as possible, in a kind of mirroring of the whole movement, and same as the front stretch of the neck, they have to get sore in the effort, to roll so hard as to ache, and that's when it's done.

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Disordered thought as distorted interface. So there is cognition and then this kind of filmy other thing laid over top of it for shorter and longer periods. An adjusted operating procedure overlaid on the rest of thinking like this for engaging old and new pains in clumsy ways.

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It is difficult to describe what happens inside my person clearly because those things evade coherent forms so handily. What I can describe are material results. The surfaces, shapes, volumes, and postures that my body makes in conjunction with those formless inside occurrences. A kind of physical portrait emerges that is a thing in the round, an automatic and coercive self-portrait rendered in sculptural ways. The representation gained is both an imperfect and rigorous thing.

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In most painted pictures there are figures and there is the ground the figures are arranged within and across. The figure makes a shape upon the ground as it meets that ground with both its mass and the contours that bind the form into a thing fitting the name. While that figure-shape is getting defined by the ending of the figure and the starting of the ground, a second shape starts to show in an obverse reaction. The second shape is the shape the ground makes around the figure that it is not. So the ground in this way grabs at its own version of form—a sort of vacant shape made from things removed from its larger body as figures are added overtop its big surface—making for an object presence that can be read against the nowhere of figured-shapes proper. These two polarities of shapes-made become important things when looking closely at pictures because their relative interactions are in some sense the only thing a rendered picture is—their various meetings make for all the plastic action of whatever image.

If I take the shapes made by my own body during a tic as figure, then perhaps I can read the tic in the obverse way, and can imagine, for a time, that my tic makes a shape to accommodate some other unseen shape offered by the bigness of the ground of the world.

Chest blooms out in a heavy meaty puffing like one big lung wrapped with a t-shirt. While the trunk bubbles around like that the most upper stem of the neck makes a straight line with the back and so the skull moves tight towards the crown with the chin tucking in as the big, puffing chest advances. The chin and jaw moving in slow recoil so that a false line in-vertical drawn between the center of the eyes, tip of the nose, and dribbly round of the chin would end in a point well-back from where the sternum was headed out to. With the chin tucking tight down to the top-chest to make the line with the skulls crown like this all the meat of the neck wraps and goes into ribbed skin haloes rounding the neck, making my chin single, double, tripled in the effort. Added to all this is the arms. Left arm buckles at the elbow with hand and forearm pausing at ninety degrees to the vertical plane of the body at-large. The right elbow that is the point of the bending and buckle is held a little behind, so that a line drawn in-horizon through the bone of the joint would pass free behind the low-mid of the back. Left arm also bends at the elbow but with a sweeter bend so that the forearm and hand of the left suspends just above the thigh of the same side.

Reading in that obverse way is a way to interpret this move and its shape and the shape it is making room for. Reading in reversal like this reveals the object of the tic in literal terms—not some sort of tic-objective, but a tic-object in a literal and material sense. With right arm bent and back and the bend of the elbow at the 90 and the left

with that sweeter bend at the elbow so the hand attached is lower down towards the legs, the tic makes a shape in the obverse for a shape like this:

A held figure with limbs, organs, eyelids, bones, fluids, eyeballs, shit, joints, mucus, all in solid 18K gold of a very shiny jewelry grade. The golden figurine is The Golden-Boy of my Tic-ing Trunk and Chest and Arms. All the golden parts of the Golden-Boy might make for one solid and continuous thing because of the total coherence its materiality—everything there is the one and same gold—but in a formal paradox all these pieces of the Golden-Boy remain discrete too. So there is no bordering between the golden parts of the Golden-Boy but golden blood still moves through mapped out insides that are of gold too, and golden hair falls silky out from a golden scalp.

My tic has made the shape of the Golden-Boy in the obverse of my own limbs gesturing out over the ground of the world. The shape of the Golden-Boy is a still thing there in the angles of my ticking moves, the Golden-Boy is still and has no movement but is also less than sculptural because the Golden-Boy is a thing that is alive even though it is a metal.

The Golden-Boy is shaped out of my disordered moves and so is a disorderly golden shape that I bear around with my arms as I go. The shape of the Golden-Boy was titled just above, but I could also title the whole Tic-Golden-Boy sequence and set—something like this: Making Body-Moves and A Golden-Boy and his Golden Pieces is Held Under a Gold Sun Making it all Golder Still.

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*Chewing Lips 15/19*

A mundane little cannibalism. The eating of the soft of one's own lips, of the warm lip meats and their bits that went dryer in cool air or whatever. I'm eating my own face. This one makes me the gourmand of my own bouncy lip skin. Mastication, and digestion are sculptural acts, they are actions applied always to things-in-the-round and always come to generate more things-in-the-round. Consider this: when I nibble at the meat of my own lips I chew at my own shape, and when those morsels I chewed off go down my throat and into the deep of me they help in making bloat, flatulence, and come out round again in turds—and these are all shapes too. In chewing my own shape and breaking it away I make more shapes from the shape of me like so many iterative forms—an so my self-appetite is both a loss from one shape and the production of another both, a turning of my own form into shit via the fleshy pipe of myself.

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Tourette's means that I live in a convulsive skin, and that the thinking bits of my lumbering meat oscillate in frenetic ways all around my ideas. Disorder means I make a home of this place of ever-present spasm and clumsy jerking of the form and sensibility, and making a home of a place like that means that I have formed a long-lived interest in

other bodies being made to make moves and make shapes with and out of themselves under the pressure of unseen forces, coercions, or convictions or whatever it is. I am seduced by other bodies making movements that are not explicitly their own but that are grafted to some other bigger thing that goes-on without them and that elects their body as a medium for its expression for whatever reason. I am interested in the kinds of presence and simultaneous leave-taking that goes on in bodies being moved and moving like this:

The same thing occurs in convulsions and agitation: the soul is not excluded from the body, but is swept along so rapidly by it that it cannot retain all its conceptions; it is separated from its memories, its intentions, its firmest ideas, and this isolated from itself and from all that remains stable in the body, it surrenders itself to the most mobile fibres...<sup>33</sup>

Foucault's explanation is a good one for getting at the thing I am talking about because his version of the convulsive and agitated body does not infer a removal or loss of the self via the convulsive moment or action, but instead explains that the essence and perceiving self remains while it rides along on the actions of the shape-making body as the body gives way for the sort of radical mobility it is engaged in.

I see figures like this in photographs and videos and pictures of things like sports, and vacations, and battles or whatever, but other times I dream these bodies whose forms are locked into shapes and ideas under some bigger and unseeable thing. I had one of these body-dreams once that went like this:

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<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books), 1988, 92.

The picture opens up on a lawn that is green like the false-green grasses of model train-sets. This green that makes the grass is so saturated that it casts a blurry-edged halo out from itself. The sky is blue-bird and unbrokenly so, and it is the 1940s during the war and this place is in England. The water and the European continent are behind the scene, to the rear of the dream picture, and out in front now is a ring of figures framing a scene laid across the complete greenness of the lawns. They all wear black and grey suits and some wear hats of the same. My sight in the dream picture is somehow from above and below in tandem—I see multiple views of the one scene in a set of frames, and these undulate between representative versions of themselves, perspectival points dilating without movement or seams—and so forming a sort of single optics, a total vision that is divided in its focus. And now I am low down, so the figures in the suits are all legs—that black, grey, worsted wool all from the knees down, those knobby caps both thick and bony together, wrapped in their pant-cloth and in the damp and with voices attached that dribble down from overtop, from where the thick of the heads would hang if I saw those from down where I am. Voices move around all sedate and conspiratorial, they are speculative, technical, and all sobriety—the mouths that make them fear dying soon and by horrible means. The contrast between the dulled colour of all the trousers and the saturation of the grass is so acute as to read like a further set of fractured and parallel planes, another kaleidoscopic vision heaped on top of the rest of them here. The grey and the black fall away and through that earth while remaining upon it, applied like some fatty butter there, sitting as a muck of weird and heatless burns on top of those blistering lawn greens.

All of the suited figures make their circle around a second set of figures. This secondary set of bodies lay prone upon their stomachs overtop the bright grass and are propped up stiff on their forearms and elbows. They are holding rifles down there where they are laying and are so, so, still—all wooden-like though also alive with the wet of the meat that makes them. There are three of them and they lay like that under a white tubular armature, a thin thing, made of hollow aluminum or tin or plastic—like the bones of a camp tent. I drew a diagram when I woke up, wanting to remember all the bodies' places, needing to fix the language of their postures and their array and meeting. The figures down there on the ground like that wear this camouflage pattern all over and are crowned with felt berets. The colour schemes are combinations of the following: tan (a shade not a tint), forest green, pumpkin orange, black, yellow (something just off of a primary, leaning towards mustard but not quite), and primary red. The colours of the camouflage uniforms are special because they register as a patina, as surfaces more than a dyed set of fabrics. The textile seems composed of merged planes of pure colour—colour here as a free-standing substrate—colour, not as decoration or adornment, but as a sort of flesh of light, and all these planes meet each other along a series of perfected edges that graft the camouflage pattern together along all of their peaceful and fine borders. The clothes are not a continuous surface, they are not one or a few big swaths of fabric that have been coloured, but are something more elaborate, they are kits of seething light, a set of slouchy and ephemeral bits of magic attire, and in that they are things that shift with a life the figures they cover lack in their static way of laying all still down there. The hues of these grafted together clothes are of such extreme saturation that they present as a series of flocked surfaces, a dusted colour

that holds so much pigment and light that they seem like a kind of super-dense and dimensional velvet. In the dream picture the sensation of seeing these colours is a palpable thing, the brushed and hyper-lush patina goes outside of vision's limits and becomes a seeing that I taste; I feel the brushy fuzziness of the flocked camouflage trousers on my tongue even as the figures wearing them lay there with a vacant physicality that is also an elation, and the three of them are all emblems making everything swim and grow old and low all the same—that is death and the dead and the pain of ends and undoing but with smiling and huge tears to go along with it everywhere. So these three prone soldiers in their velvety frog skin camo make for a set of foaming sites—three points of boiling for the falling apart of the regularity of form, for form that is disorderly, and for the bent-double-laughter and curled lip grins that won't stop for all of it.

Pierre Guyotat writing on beauty: "...I think beauty contains and hides its own corruption, its demon: beauty cannot simply contain itself; how it appears in paintings and other places...if it's banned by certain true religions, it's because it rises like a rival of Creation..."<sup>34</sup>. Here beauty, with its specific intensity, leans on perception to a point of rupture and rises up and through and outside of things and through this rupturing movement breaks those things and their arrangements. Which is precisely how I explain the flocked soldiers and the powerful saturation of all their felted colours to myself. Their camouflage clothes and their postures threaten to burn a hole through the dream-earth they lay prone upon via the sheer fever-heat of their confusing beauty. This, their particular sort of beauty, is an optical construction raised between the stillness of their

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<sup>34</sup> Pierre Guyotat, *In The Deep*, trans. Noura Wedell (Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2014), 152.

posture and the richness of their worn colours. Between these two blocks of presentation the flocked soldiers become emblems of bodies being shaped under such big forces that their limbs and their looks become, in that moment and place of their actions, a pair of things wholly devoted to the demands of those big forces, and their shape and demeanor bend to meet those demands in this kind of breathless pause. The soldiers, when taken like this, are not bodies making postures and wearing clothes, they are not figures expressing something outward from their forms. Instead, they are mediums for an expression entering from some other valence entirely—their expression is a circumstance of some other force, a force that is both divorced from them and acting in a sort of merged parallel with their bodies—so not a linear effort of communication where a discrete body describes and transmits some sign, but instead a transmission being delivered through and with a body as a circumstantial joint. So, the important thing about these dream-soldier-figures is that in their form and presentation the conventional causal polarity of figure has grown complicated. That complication is something like this: instead of a body being a support for some expression or movement or decoration that is enacted by that body and moves out-from-that-body, it is like their frog skin camo costumes and their still and low postures are parts of a big force, a hovering power that somehow arrived first, while the figure they shape and wrap around is merely a byproduct of that big proximal and forcing thing.

So there is the big force making messages through the coerced bodies of the flocked soldiers, they, these little and still body-texts laying tiny and bright on the ground, their clothes and their skins and their limbs and shapes all written out by this big nameless forcing thing. In my dream where I saw the soldiers, their camouflage clothes

made for their most visible surfaces, those clothes were the big prize gained in seeing them and the impression those clothes made sits large in my memory of the soldiers. But as has just been outlined above, the clothes were not the only sublime produce of the big heavy and hovering coercion, the forms the clothes covered were also things sculpted and bent to purpose to meet all those unclear demands.

Plate 95, *Man Falling Prone and Aiming Rifle*, from Eadweard Muybridge's *The Human Figure in Motion* has twenty-four frames set out in sequential lines of four that are stacked in vertical and meant to be read sequentially from left to right like a comic book—a comic book full-up with meaty and salty skins being made to move around for the benefits of science.<sup>35</sup> The last twelve frames that sit on the second page of the two page spread for *Man Falling Prone* are the frames that I am looking at close, because the three frames that make for the far right-hand side of the page (the ones terminating each of the three lines on that page) are the frames that look most like the flocked soldiers looked, the frames that have all of their postures made still like them but in pictures instead of dreams. The body in these three frames is unknowingly aping the figures of my dreams from some way-backward in time but without all their bright camouflage clothes, and so the “Man Falling Prone” can be like an x-ray vision of the body-made-to-bend that was under the camouflage clothes in my dream but that I did not see because of all those vivid and blotchy coverings. “Man Falling Prone” wears a G-string, it's tucked straight up into his ass. In the twelve frame sequence on the first page of the ninety-five spread, start at the top and furthest left frame count down three to the bottom furthest left frame, and then count over to the right one frame, look at that

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<sup>35</sup> Eadweard Muybridge, *The Human Figure in Motion*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).

frame and the one immediately to its right and see what I mean—the white of the G-string, near invisible in the light and exposure, gets eaten up by the gape and the big cleave of the ass. The string of the G-string wraps forward to a white pouch, the white pouch holds “Man Falling Prone’s” genitals, packs them away in there for compact keeping, phallus tucked down and over balls in a dopey itching fold. “Man Falling Prone” is wearing a G-string that goes straight up his ass and that makes a pouch in the front for his distended pack, and so the flocked soldiers are wearing G-strings that go straight up their asses and that go forward to white pouches for the listless and salty smelly lengths of their roots and nuts.

Bodies of dedication. That is what the flocked soldiers are and what “Man Falling Prone” is and what I am in-spasm and tic. Bodies made to be for another thing, bodies bent to meet purpose so much that they become letters writing out some other thing, and with all the perceiving parts of them just on some meaty ride-along with the moves and the shapes and the posturing that their limbs go on making.

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Make yourself a sounding organ. Make yourself some brute, a groaning bull, a shuffling ass baying for nothing in its ambling. When a tic is the grunt, the grunt is a noteless, toneless instrumentation sitting behind the lower part of my sternum, down inside my chest and nestled in and around and also through the beef of my baggy lungs. The grunt is a contraction from there behind the sternum, and the whole thing squeezes in and back like my trunk is this huge sphincter blocked in horizontal, in a cross section that fills the full latitudes of my upper parts. So, it's like my trunk, as if cut in a horizontal straight across from a line drawn down the lower bit of the sternum, is some huge asshole drawing in and tight in a clench. A big asshole, drawing in and tight and then back to the rear of me to meet the underside of my spine, the walls of the spine most buried in tissues. In drawing tight and back like that this wind blows up through my tubes and piping and grinds up top through my teeth and tongue and gums and stuff, and it makes the low sound of the grunt, and I do that whenever. That's at the back extreme of the tight and the pinch of this Huge Asshole made from my body, and at the end of that tight move it holds there a moment in-clench before puffing back outward in hokey distention where it reaches for more winds for another go out the mouth, or it stops and is my chest again.

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There is, in the archaic period of Greek sculpture, a shape made in the carved stone of the faces of their figurines that is now called the archaic smile. It is what it sounds like—a clever and luminous and blooming little smile worn on nearly all the sculpted figures of the period: “The significance of the convention is not known, although it is often assumed that for the Greeks this kind of smile reflected a state of ideal health and wellbeing.”<sup>36</sup> This smile is a health-signaling shape cut into the total hardness of stone, and so a healthy shining smile that will and cannot resolve into any other expression no matter the circumstance it happens to shine in. The *Smiler’s* kind of health, and these old stone *Smiler’s* health’s feels sometimes like a Nietzschean health:

The great health...new, nameless, hard to understand...a new health, stronger, more seasoned, tougher, more audacious, and gayer than any previous health...that one does not merely have but also acquires continually...dangerously healthy, ever again healthy...as a reward...a world so overrich in what is beautiful, strange, questionable, terrible, and divine...<sup>37</sup> (346)

Nietzsche’s sort of health—the merriest of the health’s—something jubilant to a point of stated danger, and something always acquired, always gotten more and more and so is a state of utopian permanence. This sort of aspirational permanence could be the unmoving aspect of the *Smiler’s* kind of smile, something always amassed more and more and all the time and so made to stay there in a kind of forever. These smiles something responding one way to everything, responding to the all-too-muchness of this overrich way of being and going around in the world with one and simple mode.

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<sup>36</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Archaic smile." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 28, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Archaic-smile>.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix in Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 346.

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*Uttering Words 2/19*

The doughiness of the mouth and its low skin piping sometimes make for a meaty wind instrument. Tics that make words, forceful utterances levelled at sensation itself through a mechanics of internalized fright. Language is an uneasy thing with these compulsive voicings because they are a doubled facsimile of the language we know and can name and are familiar-with. Words and sayings mouthed like this through blunt physical compulsion, through moves of disordered contraction, form language that is the same words and the same sounds as language but that paradoxically is an imitation of language that is composed of those same words and same sounds. A shit double of language, a facsimile standing in close parallel to its original but making no proper contact with the object it mimics.

It is a vernacular of the meat. With it a dialogue forms between the meats of my bottom and top—a loud and windy and fast chatter amongst my top and bottom meats! Organs and parts performing the outbursts, exuberant in their proud movements: This tic goes in a line like a J hung upside down with the upended top of the J nuzzled down in the gut, in the cellar places of my low, low, stomach. Down there the abs pucker up near sphincter tight and that knits the ribs and the trunk too as those moves move each other bottom upwards to top. With the ribs and trunk tight like that the larynx hardens up, goes thick and tumescent like some wind-pipe that is breathless and overexcited to

say anything it can—and it does! With the tightening it shoves the air and the words made of the shaped air out the blow-hole of the mouth which here is popped out of the surface of the head like a big and loud third nostril. The wind blowing out this way makes for an ugly compression of the soft rear and front hard palates and the pressure lands, finally, on the rear side of the frontmost teeth on the top hanger of the maxilla (incisors, glossy and spitty and broad) and so the words come out that way, as a shoved out, wet lexicon of spasm and uttered volume.

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A disordering like a dotted line. - - - - - My actions, decisions and movements carry an orderly valence, the line is, in fact, still travelling between two distinct points—though unlike a solid line—it is defined in part by its tendency towards constant pauses, jamming, and formless interruptions.

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These ever-over-rich illnesses made themselves first known in their symptomatically brute way in the aisle of a grocery store when I was eleven. The aisle had one of those white, rubbery, waxy plastic linoleum floors that all the grocery stores that I had known had in them. I was with my mom and she went to move further down

the aisle looking for something and I went to follow her in this looking, though when I went to follow to do that regular looking I ended up doing another and much less regular kind of looking. This irregular looking was a looking down at my feet framed in the bright white of that flooring, and it seemed to me then that my feet would not and could not and would never move. Or I thought it—I conceived of this idea that my feet would not move—and then they would not move, but not just in a thought any longer—they would not move in the real of time and the real of my body, the real of my child-legs, in the aisle in the store, on that waxy white of the floor, and they were locked in place there in parallel, all stiff and stuck-down.

And so a thought felt like it went from the insides of me, from the guts and the brains of myself and my thinking, and then came outside to the objects that were my feet and held them fast there, made them do or not do something. Then, with my feet like this I said “Mom, my feet won’t move.” Mom, confused, approaches—vague physical rustling, and my feet move all over again on the glossy flooring. And of course they move again because they could move again because they could always move the whole time, though in that baffling ellipsis, where the language or the text of my inside life made itself fleshy and effective in my feet they couldn’t—and both of these things are true at once—and so disease. The thought of the possibility of my feet never moving again from that place on the shiny floor made that possibility a real and sort of legitimate aspect of the world, a thing that happened and had actions relative to it—all attached to the idea of that not-never moving. Then my feet did move again and of course they did because of course they could. The thought had made unreality real and that real was rendered to action via my body—via my legs and the feet on the bottom of my legs, and

so reinforced that real of the inherently unreal that was the fearing of my thinking in the grocery store at that time. There it was, this kind of convoluted contact between conception, the actual, and my physicality, this thing where my body made the shapes of my fearing and cast them outward into the real of the grocery store, my embodiment making distortions and mimicry outwards from my thinking, like some living, fleshed, fluidy sculpture I was riding around inside of while also looking for cereal.

You go to a doctor with a story like this and they check you all over for some mechanical irregularity, they look over the strictly formal, the plastic aspects of your body and you become used to speaking about and telling about your body like this, and then the formal plastic thing that is your body is deemed coherent-enough. Then you go and you tell a psychiatrist a story like this and they ask you for a second story. The second story is about something that might have gone on shortly before the thing in the store with the stuck feet, a thing that went on and was, in a sense, too ugly.

S. was this kind of person that felt like sunshine, that could wander into a room and be in a body but be sunshine somehow at the same time. Talking to S. was like talking to sunshine formed into a person with limbs and laughter and sweetness all acting and moving in tandem together. S. was like this wonderful muscly man made of honey, who could tell jokes, and make experience, things like running and breathing and talking a fun thing whenever he was there and for no good reason. A little while before the grocery store with the sticking feet S. goes on a ski trip to the backcountry, is buried in a massive avalanche, and dies there that way. S. had been eaten by a mountain on some weekend like the rest of the weekends. There was this intense sense of vanishing that came with S. and his dying, though with these embodied elements that

clashed with that feeling of almost ethereal vanishing. An example is like this: I was told that when people had dug S.'s body up out of the snow, his head had a big and dark bruising all from the forehead to the mid-head and that this head-brutality was a great thing because it meant that S. did not suffocate under that huge pillowing of snow with his laughing lungs popping painfully under there in the honeyed pocket of his chest, and so the vanishing proper that was his dying had gone on quickly and with less pain. But an inconsistency for me to clumsily internalize—because there was the bruising of this corpse in play in my head and the world as well and this total vanishing of S. Those two true things meeting and refusing to square. That bruised remainder of S. like a conceptual dead end for that eleven-year-old body and self that was myself—with the pain feeling like all of my body's warmth dumping out of it.

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Intrusive thoughts are concepts, pictures, and sets of words that hurt their thinker. Professionals describe them as being egodystonic in nature, in other words, the content presented by the thoughts is out of keeping with the desires, the character and the wishes of the thinker thinking them. This can become confusing for the thinker because thoughts like this can seem to trouble what a coherent self is.

Coping with these intrusions is like housing a frame in frame composition with a flexible polarity as relates to focus. (see fig. 8)



Fig. 8 ...a frame in frame composition...

Managing intrusions that never leave is a scenario of divided attention. In fig. 8 let all the aspects of functional life be contained in the larger picture, the one with the soft-clad limbs on the couch and the floor. Now assign the unwanted content of the intrusions to the smaller image of the love seat set into the bottom corner. My days and my internal life remain present like this, though the fraught quality of obsession always sits heavy overtop in that corner, even if, for the time being, in more discreet dimensions.

But the fluidity of the compositional polarity works like this: when coping well my attention is with the soft limbs on the couch and the floor with the love seat frame relegated to some periphery. Though when in crisis there is a violent shift in focus as my attention is consumed by the loveseat at the expense of all other content. (see fig. 9)



Fig. 9 ...*the love seat at the expense of all other content...*

The acute aspects of the disorder lay in this obliteration of the soft-limbed couch scene. The living-part of life summed up by the fleshy embracing of the soft limbs with their extended foot-supports and their ease and the gentle familiarity of broken in seat cushions no doubt saturated with coy flatulence—has been wholly subsumed and preoccupied with the hollow contours of the empty love seat. With the thinker's attention reoriented like this that thinker grows increasingly inattentive as they are distracted and alarmed by all that deep pillowing and the hard-woven piping of the now loveless love seat.

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He laughed to free his mind from his mind's bondage.<sup>38</sup>

-James Joyce

Silly spaghetti-meats of nerves flounder wet out of the skull near by the ears. Some three muscles pull around because of it: zygomaticus major, zygomaticus minor, and levator labii superioris heave heavy and meaty across the hilarity of the face in-joy. The whole thing is that these three yank on the orbicularis oris (like an O-ring, or second asshole that muscularly surrounds the gap of the mouth) and by the yanking make the mouth into the shapes of smiles.

Stretch, stretch, stretch, till corners almost make a rubbery stress sound in their pulling. Then stretch not out but up like the same, such a heavy and long tensility that the shine of the spitty teeth shows. Keep repeating both of these over and over till pain but not pain in the end but some blissful moment.

Lungs start heaving here. And the because the lungs push air outward in the midst of heaving while the larynx has the vocal chords more or less closed, and the lungs and breather-muscles keep heaving through that closedness there are sounds from the pushing through and they are laughs. Stretched mouth of the smiling-meats mid-smile and the trunk made an instrument by the way the gore pulses. And so a

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<sup>38</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

breaking open of the mouth in-joy and this happy din of the body for as long as there are breaths and muscles.

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*Tensing Buttocks* 14/19

As a model start with concern on the face—think of the way two brows make rigid, pulling into the dropped V animating periods of concentration or a glare. Now exchange the model, removing the brows as the muscly support. In their place put the bisected flaps of lax buttocks, then trade that laxness for the rigidity that was in the brows, and see the buttocks become something less round and cheeky in that new rigidity—making a shape as if from semi-soft wax.

So I am pinching my buttocks beneath the cover of trousers. We speak, and my bearing may be stillish, as I mimic a calm I probably lack in our exchange—the cheeks of my face will sit as if hollow. This while bellow and under my glutes flex and undo in little rhythms, a meaty fluttering standing as a release valve for the pressures of speech. I think of these spasms as flatulence's funny little athletic double because of their place in my ass, and so it's like this that in the folds of speech my gluteus marks out its own system of gestures in the dark quiet of my bottom body.

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Sometimes I approach the experience of Tourette's and my other attendant disorders through diagrams. I did this for the first time during my initial diagnostic year, I told the researchers I had been speaking to at the children's hospital that "I know what it looks like." They had me draw what it looks like and it looked/looks like this (fig. 10):



Fig. 10 *What It Looks Like*

Here is a list of other things, things that are not the disorderly conditions that this drawing is of, that regardless of that not-being, share a look or some feelings with this drawing and the shape it makes and so maybe with the disorders that the drawing is meant to signal towards:

A banana or a snap pea, laid on the side

Some insect, like the ones that mimic sticks and leaves, or a grasshopper

A pinched stomach, hung over the lip of trim trousers

Cut toenail, a heavy clipping though, like one from a Big Toe<sup>39</sup>

A shaved sliver from whittled wood, but of skin or bone or meat.

The lowest curving of the buttock, severely abbreviated

A fallen peel of ski-wax

The silly and happy swelling of smiling

If disorder is a shape in me it is this shape. This subtle little geometry, an internalized structure emerging back then as this image I could see while its associated symptoms manifested in my body as some of my initial and unbidden convulsions. Those germinal throes of my limbs and my trunk and my face having their own geometry, their own minute formalisms. Fearing made a shape in a grocery store under the weight of the moment of a particular dying, and that shape sits inside myself like a sharp wee pinch of wood, poked and tucked up into the meats of my body, then radiating kaleidoscopically into my outsides, making more shapes through gesture, with the un-meant moving-around of my body.

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<sup>39</sup> Georges Bataille, "The Big Toe," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 20-24.

There are details the drawing misses out on: The shape, as I see it inside—when it has occurred to me, when I think of it—has a soft brownish rusty tinting and houses lighter earthy fibrous structures and so looks striated and mottled because of the differences in value between the adjoining textures. Then there is the feeling and the sense of the thing—the shape feels in and of myself though not too, like a fragment of some other para-bodily material lodged deep in my guts and my muscle and my thinking.

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### *Tensing Groin 8/19*

Making rigid the low cellar of my pieces. A knotting with force made from the perineum and out from there bilateral-like, so terminating in both urethra and asshole. Says hi, asks for table, thinks of the book, loud sound from screens and this braced under-saddle of dim skin shows up, stretched all tight to meet the thing. Scrotum implicated very special because it flexes and tautens with it too, tightening up like as if gathered in from the top with a haggard grab. That bad sparkling feeling through the pouch, but I can still feel the pouch in my shorts down there. So scrotum doubled in the movement, at least in the perception of the moving. Two scrota now then, one bundled against the fly of pants and the other gathering up for this shit and glittery animated feeling.

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Another example of persistent atypical operations: the heavy-weight of the head snapping backward like on a hard little hinge, back of the head meets the low dip between the shoulder blades like a bowling bumper making a thudding on contact there. Immediately before and during the head movement the eyes in the same head saw, while reading, this word:

...POSSESSION...

The head flung backward then with all violence as described. The mechanism is like this: with the head thrown back like that the eyes break away from the word, from the text, thereby staving off the feared effect(s) that the seeing of this word may apparently have on the whole situation of the head's body, the head's health, the head's people that the head loves, the head's whatever. The supposed defensive qualities of the head-throwing-backward gesture are not limited to the mechanical breaking off of sightlines via forcing the eyes away from the offending content through coercive movement. The head going into a jack-knife like that is also kind of like a more general code and signal sent off to keep nameless harm(s) away. Possession, the word here like a trip wire for a montage of ugly images and suspicions signaling terrible changes that seem in that moment of contact with the body of the text as an imminent set of threats to my own body, and so the head snaps back in a kind of combination acknowledgement, greeting, a signaling away, a blocking—all some desperate gestural deflection aimed towards these intrusions.

The relative effectiveness of tics like this, cast out as resistance and deterrent, is based on a system of neurotic feeling-out mated with numerical sequencing. So then, eyes see ...POSSESSION... and heavy-weight of the head swings back to thud the top of the body. This is the initial unit of disordered action. The encounter with the word and the initial tic-as-response are a count of two movements when taken together. Though a count of two is unbalanced, a count of three is what is required for a full neutralization of perceived dangers. The head-thrown-backward movement repeats in fast succession three more times with three more of those key-thumps. Unfortunately, already an error here. This new though connected three-count adds to the initial two-count to make a now total five-count sequence—and five is one of the worst numbers. A way must be found to nine or eleven, these are felt as comprehensive digits that may bring satisfaction. The difficulty is that the head-thrown-back movement only feels correct in threes and ones, though to link four in a row is not good at all. To go straight from the five count reached presently to the nine count needed to return to the rest of living is impossible via the straightest line, the added four count. So the only option left here is to overwhelm the existing count with additional movements—in this way, through introducing overabundance, the head can bowl through the existing count and kind of start new. So the head-thrown-back thing goes eleven more times and very rapid now because it has all been taking so long already. The final count is sixteen head-thrown-back gestures, though only the last eleven of them count, and so satisfaction.

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A Provisional List of my Physical Tic Induced Injuries both Chronic and Fleeting

- My torso is bent in a permanent way—from my own point of view as I look down at my chest by bending my neck it is like this: Right side upper rib cage high, right side lower ribs low, left side upper ribs low, left side lower ribs high.
- A hoarse, cut up feeling throat from the yelling of words.
- Tic'd one time while holding an exacto knife, stabbing myself deeply in the chin.
- Torn muscles in my low guts.
- I have a sort of permanent whiplash in my neck, everything up there gets thrown around and all the muscles injured, and instead of rest the tics are compelled to go on repeating in their sequences because of the pictures and ideas. So the whole set of worn tissues just layers the pains, tearing, and wounding in a stupid perpetuity—a demonstration:

Blood-River Dream

A landscape that I understand to not be merely a region, but a world.

All of the ground here is not earth but muscle and gore and tendon, like all these plains made of skin and then the skin being peeled back—and after the peeling back to be standing there.

This place is a 'desert', and every causal process in this place is predicated on physical pains.

I am standing, in the dream, next to a river and the river runs a very rich red with blood. Not blood staining the water of the river. There is no water, the river is total-blood.

On the left bank of the bloody river as I am seeing it there is a figure that is between an entity and a device. It is a vertical protrusion of meat and bone and tendon coming up from the fleshy ground of the place. At the top of this vertical thing is a rounded 'head' that funnels forward into a grand point, like a beak but lacking the split of the jaw. The vertical body/thing is locked in perpetual movement. Bending sharp as if from a joint right at the base of it the whole muscled verticality of the figure swings forward stiffly and with each repetition dips the skin-beak into the pooling of the blood-river.

I understand, in the dream, that this action with the blood-river causes the vertical-beak-entity significant pain, and that it will never stop, because pain defines the sole phenomenal economy of this world of viscera and the bloody gore of the river.

There is a smell in the air there.

- Twisted and tired ankles.
- Recurring injury in my mid back near the spine, where my head won't twist anymore for some days at a time as the musculature and other bits inside there go tight.
- Bruising on chest and the sides of my face and head.

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I have a sensation paired with a picture present itself in me when I feel the sort of thinking, the thoughts and concepts, the viscid, adhesive textures of OCD complicating my cognition, telegraphing their frenetic arrival. When it comes on like that I can feel it and I picture it as a gray bag puffing up like a party balloon inside and towards the front of my head, directly behind my forehead. Then, attached to the rear of the gray bag, at the back vertex bit of the gray bag, there is this strip or long cut of padding, running smooth like a tape, down from the front of my head where the gray bag is, down the rest of the head past the crown, backwards and down the nape of the neck to the top of the upper back between the shoulders. From there between the shoulders a thinner thread kind of punches through to the viscera of the body proper wandering at something like a 45-degree angle away from the shoulders and into the body and down to the tummy. When the stranding gets to the tummy it opens, blooms into a second and larger bag that goes from the stomach and also stretches from there to down low, settling all heavy there in the bowel.

These shapes, these gray-bag shapes, are a parallel geometry to disordered process. They are a felt-obverse of obsession, an armature, a device. They are disorder and the suffering and labors of disorder finding fixed, formal positions in the body.

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I have said something somewhere I did not mean to say. My account of the thing with the sticking feet in the grocery store comes out as a kind of disorderly epiphany—as if all of it happened there in the one moment, all the sudden, and all stemming out from this single proximal death. This is not wholly correct. Or it is a true account running parallel to another true account. These symptoms were bounding around in me much earlier, they have a temporal pedigree in me that goes back farther than my memory can go back. The symptoms were there all the time, were there to begin with, and the too ugly thing was not the one thing but a bunch of them, and those things came early, and I know some of them, and others I don't. So there is this epiphanic juncture in the grocery store and there is this other long, moaning, teetering, drawn out type of sequence, and they are both true things, are both what happened, and what is happening.

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What I keep on saying is that I am a brain bound up in repeating—all these repeats of pictures, language, the odd moves of my body, and forceful concepts—either coming separate or linked-up together—fixed to one another clumsily—like the goofy seams of poor welds or a bunch of long-healed bones. These conditions form a partial explanation for the way I collect photographs and put them into books and collages, and why I make written notes detailing the pictures I find. While living from this place that amounts to a monotonous barrage of stimulation (the constant pictures, moves, and

thoughts), it feels good to be able to make agential selections, crops, and cuts from pictorial, textual, and theoretical material outside of myself. I can make these cuts from a place of fluidity and purposeful dexterity instead of disorderly compulsion. It feels good because the activities of collection, note-taking, and collage are all ways of forming novel alignments between objects and ideas that are of my own choosing and manufacture. I want to make the connection between these two different things clear: I experience disorders of compulsion as a frenetic connecting of images and ideas and affects, these connections happen within me and outside of my control. These persistent disorderly connections and my captive perception of their presentations make for the upsets of illness. I am drawing a line between this experience and the practice of collecting found materials in order to make works of art, because the manipulation and pairing of found materials is also a frenetic means of non-linear alignment, but in the case of art production and writing, it is an activity I have freely elected and is therefore a relief by way of a mirrored contrast.

Victor Burgin puts dealing with images in plain terms when he says: “In photography, certain physical materials are technically handled so that meanings are produced.”<sup>40</sup> It is a deceptively unelaborate description until what Burgin has written is taken on literally, that is, that when one handles photographs, when someone engages with the content that photography (and capture media in general) produces, one handles ideas and the production of meaning in a physical and profoundly localized, concrete way. As an example—I can say that what there is left from the 1970s (outside of the private memories and accounts of those who lived inside of it)—all there is left of

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<sup>40</sup> Burgin, 19.

the total existential aggregate of that decade, of a cohesive vision of the shapes and colours and postures and spaces of that moment is what is carried in photographs and film. If I state this and take it as a given, then the photographs I find from the 1970s are the 1970s, and if the photographs are a period in time, then I can claim to hold moments and spans of that invisible duration in my hands and then cut them, move them about, and by doing so associate them with things previously unfamiliar. So, documentation is time, and the manipulation of documents is the handling and reorienting of time, and so working with archival documentation via photographs, video recordings, or written accounts is a kind of soft time-travel—time-travel insofar as the one working with the material is in direct contact with stretches of prior-time and moments of a past tense.

Here is Susan Howe on working within archives:

Often by chance, via out-of-the-way card catalogues, or through previous web surfing, a particular ‘deep’ text, or a simple object...reveals itself here at the surface of the visible, by mystic documentary telepathy. Quickly—precariously—coming as it does from an opposite direction. If you are lucky, you may experience a moment before.<sup>41</sup>

In Howe’s formulation, a before can be made to be here via an object or document or piece of information—and I agree—this is the phenomenon attached to working with found material that I myself am referring to; that objects can become literal vehicles for an equally literal piece of old-time. These bits of harbored, arrested and object-borne time can be collected as samples and be presented anew as potent stand-ins meant to reorder the given: “...for the collector, the world is present, and indeed ordered, in each

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<sup>41</sup> Howe, 18.

of his objects. Ordered, however, according to a surprising and, for the profane understanding, incomprehensible connection.”<sup>42</sup> Again, and importantly, in this passage from Walter Benjamin the connection I draw between collection, association, and the contours of my disorder(s) is reestablished. The collector makes order from the things collected, even if this order is wrapped in a highly personalized manner that presents as an incomprehensibility, and then there is the collection and reframing of images, impulses, and feelings carried out by disorder, these being clothed in their own versions of the incomprehensible. My own practices of collecting and creative notation are linked by appearance to the rapid collection and redistribution of content inherent to compulsive disorder, the two like estranged siblings sharing the meat of my brains.

So collage and collection, as modes of interacting with found materials allow for uniquely radical, self-defined adjustments to be made within swaths of extant information. This is Caitlin Haskell, writing on the work of Ray Johnson:

...the cut imposes a limit or a lack, notably a shortage of contextual information or formal integrity. Yet, as in a montage, it also enables two previously discontinuous things to be brought into each other’s orbit. By risking the loss of certain pictorial or linguistic meaning, Johnson’s chop gave birth to surprising and uncanny juxtapositions that contained the potential for limitless amplification...<sup>43</sup>

Two things from this passage are familiar to me when related to my experience of mental illness—the first, is imagery or content that is split-off from proper meaning, and the second is this divorced content’s new life as a redeployed, repeatable, and therefore amplified thing. I am saying that the illnesses I live in constant relation to, and in this

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<sup>42</sup> Benjamin, 207.

<sup>43</sup> Caitlin Haskel, “Chop Art”, in *Ray Johnson c/o*, ed. Caitlin Haskel and Jordan Carter (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2021), 44.

case obsessive compulsive disorder specifically, operate according to formal principles very similar to what Haskell has laid out here—that is that images are adopted or produced by disorder, and then fed back to me according to the functional characteristics of that disorder, and in this repeated presentation are horrifically amplified.

However, when Haskell describes Johnson's practice in this way it is not a description of illness but a description of process— and it is a process I also routinely adopt, and in adopting it, as I have already stated, I adopt an odd double of my symptoms, a sort of reversed image of illness. Though this time, through the willing taking-up of the process, the operations of open association can be things I direct and modulate according to my desires or curiosity—and this reclamation of the play of associated imagery and content provides me with both the satisfaction of revenge in miniature upon indifferent symptoms, and a platform for having my own say within the plethora of images and impulses I am otherwise drowned in. This platform, for me, is often investigative. As a demonstration of what I mean I can loop back to the work of Howe and this assertion that a found object is a fragment of time itself adhered to the physicality or visuality of that object, and with this in hand I can then do things with those objects via modification. I can seek out an image from a car catalogue from 1996, the year of my diagnosis, and then pair it, via the selection and cuts made possible in collage, with an image of a notable sporting event from 2018, the year of my most recent psychiatric intake evaluation, and by doing so form a diaristic commentary on critical events in my own life by simultaneously linking disparate segments of historical time.

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*Brushing Left Hand, Face 7/19*

Brushing left hand, face, brushing left hand, to face. Brushing the face with my left hand, when stressed, brushing my face like a length of hair, with my left hand like a comb. My face being brushed through like a stretch of hair with the comb of my left hand, or like a small salute to myself, or a small salute to the stressful interval, index finger of my left hand tapping down light like a lamb's foot forward on my left temple, right under the knuckle of my eyebrow. Picture the stressor, the hot moment or thought or whatever as a fleck of something that would land and adhere to the skin or hair of my head in a four- or five-inch radius around my left temple. Like if a bird shat there, or a drip of leakage from a roof, or spit, or snow—something like this. Limb and skin movements corresponding like this: Left hand may start hanging at the side (though only for the first repetition, after that the left hand is held at a half-ready, with the adjoining elbow making a ninety-degree bend so the ready hand is out front). So, let's say it's the first go and the left hand is down there low—it moves up sharp into that ninety-degree bend and then fast past ninety and then up even faster in that vertical rise as the humerus proper gets into it and lifts upward straight. Up top the wrist makes a little bend now, with hand held flat palm facing my face and moves back on that little bend staying plate-flat like that so it's like a little royal wave. At the apex of the little wave the length of the index finger makes that small touch with the below brow spot. Repeated through whatever

counts are relevant and that is more or less the move. But that is the move under light conditions, if however, the thing comes when I'm really run under, run ragged, stinking with these shakes over something, the move takes on harder shapes. Like, at the top of the apex of the arm and elbow swing and the little wave the index won't touch down on the brow all demure anymore, instead the rest of the fingers stack-up very tough behind the index and so add force and turn the little plate of the hand into more of a blade thing. Now it's not the tip of the index that comes down for a light sec but the side of the index with all those other digits ramming up behind it and so it's a strike on the brow and then that hitting is what gets repeated to counts and sequence. If those counts and sequences get up there, like the double digits per minute etc. velocity must be mated to frequency to keep the show up, when that's the case the blade of the hand still does the striking, but it doesn't just lift out and go back down when it's done, instead it drags back as the arm-hand re-spring-loads between counts. It makes for friction and heat, and it can rub off skin redden and have pimples flush up in the spot on later days because of all the exchanges of oils and dirt in the quick rubbing.

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The couch my ass sat in was a deep thing and brown-shag and it smelled and looked like mounded shit. These, my memories of the last specialist I saw during my diagnostic year. Diagnosis had been a jumbo project of queries, looking, looking with machines, drawing and having peeks, a ravaging and aimless disassembly of my parts

carried out by strangers in places that smelled of soap and farts and that had raspy lights and floors rubbed-down and beaten in by feet and that lived under waxy polishes. The whole thing one king-sized and stretched out confirmation of my bits and systems being undone and out of joint—my body made out as a sleepless webwork of sharp tugs and moves and inner puzzles. This couch was all husky and dampish with mildew, smelling like breath, smelled like a dirt-air being wrung out from all the asses that had met it before my ass did. I was young and the couch was made to fit for some gigantic grown body. My seat sat way back inside its seat and the big plank of the shag base slung my legs out and way out from me, out from my hips, making my feet really far away from me while I was on it. It was raining and dark and evening and the couch felt like some fucked thing that had sprouted out from all the falling water out there, like a dewy gutter-fungus evolved special for the asses of the farting patients and their farting attendees.

This doctor had a voice that was low and vacant and sounded like a sloppy echo of a voice that had already been low and vacant. It was like something being pushed out from a length of worn rubber hose by a hidden pump system. The memory I have of the doctor's body is of a regular sized torso attached to a head too large many times over. Like, so large that the outer hinges of the jawbone would be just flush, or just less than flush with the outside rounds of the shoulders. This huge head popped onto a torso made faint by proximity, and all with that hose-voice, moaning out the end of my year of unmaking, and announcing my permanent hiatus from sensible gestures and reliable shapes.

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When my lungs and chest and pipes compulsively ventilate, when I breathe as-tic and not as breath, the heaves are meant to make out sounds, I can tell, and I know which ones. Breaths like these imitate the physical labours of others that I see in the real and that I imagine too. They make sounds like someone spooked, someone mid-run and tiring, imitations of flatulence, someone copulating or masturbating or whatever, just any breath or move of air that is a frantic thing—those breathes that are breathless. There are few other times when my chest and parts feel more like some plain links of piping, like a crisscross of hollows made of my matter but just sitting there waiting for airs to be rammed up through them to come out of my mouth as one of these jokey mimic sounds. My pipes, lungs, those bags and muscles that make for bellowing, kid around like this on me, without me, making sounds like someone fucking or stumbling or farting that I watch come out from my mouth like a creepy smoke.

If all my chest pipes sit there like a soft tuba, waiting for a player, or like a receiver, or a bullhorn, then they are dull things waiting for an animating impulse, waiting for content to justify their saggy forms. And when that content comes along it is unbidden by me, and so I hear the sounds made and coming up from the pits of me and out through the hole of my mouth like something not made and then let out but as something overheard. My own sounds are not all my own sounds, some are sounds that I hear as others hear them, I hear them as meat-gossip, as a chattering of my body, estranged in that moment and making company with itself, and all within audible proximity.

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Pervasive and forceful internal imagery is not sleepy material. At fifteen I stayed awake all night under one glittering image. As if on a rotating drum the picture would blink between compulsive appearance and the druggy false relief of its momentary leaving. The picture was of a crooked bedframe. Or not so much a still frame, but as if one were to shoot video of a scene that did not move and had no dynamic action, that just held the camera in place. So, a still image but a still image that had living qualities. The picture was like this: if one were to be facing it, the railed metal headpiece of the frame would be most visible at the top left of the image, while the foot of the frame would sit much further towards the bottom right of the picture. Very much like the distortion brought about by miscalculated foreshortening.<sup>44</sup> The room the bedframe is in is greyish and dim. As I tried to sleep, I would just see this thing, and the seeing of it, the way it repeated, had me half alert and never sleeping.

Repetitions like this make for notable experience because in their repetition they have become grossly boring. An image or thought repeated like that is an occurrence, an image drained out, it is a form gone cold from being forwarded so many times over. But that's the hard bit of paradox in these disorderly repetitions, that the content has shown itself to the point of tedium, yet somehow it still affects, and affects to the point of disrupting quotidian actions, it makes for a place where the body made to view it loses easy access to things like rest, or conversation, or attention, instead being made to be a

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<sup>44</sup> Andrea Mantegna, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, c. 1480, tempera on canvas, 68 x 81 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

body-as-projector for slides that no longer hold interest while holding dread nonetheless.

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### *Hitting Chest In 3's 4/19*

My ribs, high up on both sides, mound up into a knuckled spot just where they make the rolling tuck into the sternum. In this move, one of the two hands, (here the right), hinges in a mostly horizontal way and hits against that bubbled rib-knuckle. The tic is a replica of a thought-picture I have inside. The picture is this moving little vignette where a small flat blade punches through my skin very shallowly right onto that rib knuckle, and in the picture that puncturing makes for a relieving feeling, like an itch being got-to and going away for it. In this tic that is a replica of a thought up relief-action the thumb on the striking limb extends out from the main body of the hand as far as it can go and the knuckle for the thumb-tip bends sharp back towards the hand. So there the flattish center part of the thumb between the base knuckle and the tip knuckle is held tight and rigid and flat and in parallel to the chest and makes a knife of itself that way—it's all the beefy meat and the marrow of my thumb becoming a warm little copy of the flat blade from the puncture thought-picture. While the thumb is doing its bit the rest of the hand is big like a fan or a wing or whatever with all the fingers dead-straight and stretched out very far laterally. The hand connects to the wrist-forearm and the forearm heads downward a little from the hand and the rib knuckle part with the elbow landing just

above the bottom of the ribs down there on the right, and the top arm goes up very generic to the neutral-carried, rounded shoulder—and so all a hinge and a swing and a point.

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I wish to point out that in the mid and late 1990's, the waiting rooms in children's psychiatric wards were rotten with pleather. Pleather, or imitation leather, a false skin cheaply stuffed. The chairs wrapped with it like a bunch of dead props, huddled and hokey bodies. Though easily wipeable, which is good, because those surfaces are inevitably laid over with years of flatulence, dribbled piss, sweats of boredom and other sweats of fear and impatience.

These pleather staging areas a rancid series of little supports for the weirdness of various early-onsets. My child-body ceased to be so fresh sitting on these things. I learned there on those chairs and in the rooms adjoining that something had gone off with mine, had gone odd, and I would not have to wait until middle age for an apparent loss of able-bodied vitality. I would have to, in a sense, age early in whatever ways, and make various efforts to tack back towards the inherently healthier bodies that I would find around me with all their wholesome gestures and good notions about how to be and how to make good shapes and right movements<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> "The culture asking such questions assumes in advance that we all agree: able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferable and what we all, collectively, are aiming for. A system of compulsory

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*Whooping/Loud Sounds 3/19:*

Incoherent sounds, whoops, and yelling do not start in the mouth like a word, these utterances are not a vocalized text, they are audible texture. I can see, in the bottom part of my vision my chest and abdomen rapidly constrict inwards, this slight huffing violence makes my lungs and chords into a wet spit and phlegm-soaked wind instrument, and with all that wind getting pushed up from the tensed trunk the sound yelps out from the opened mouth. I can feel the hum and vibration of it in my teeth, and also on the roof of my mouth near the front on all the ribbed flesh and the knobby gum parts. It's another awkward watching-doing scenario, though the product here is auditory. I think of it sometimes as a kind of bad small-talk compulsively conducted with oneself according to a schedule of vague triggers. A chit-chat utterly devoid of subject matter or direction; a shuddering dialogue bereft of a message though functioning regardless.

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able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, 'Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?'"

Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006, 9.

Habituated movements make bodies into different shapes when applied to those bodies in an extended duration. That's why the puffed, tough, ruddiness of the cyclist's ass, thighs, and calves, are a different shape than the stringy ropey-erotic-elastic of a distance runner. These are bodies made fit for purpose through training and the intentional sequence of repeated movements. The meaning of these freely adopted drills is to make shapes with the body that make that body ever-fitter for the given thing.<sup>46</sup>

What does a body fit for purpose mean when the repetitions of form lack an articulable goal? What does the bodies' shape mean when the repetitions are neurologically coercive? What are the body's shapes when they are not made through a bunch of physically ambitious gestures willingly taken-on by some gesturer, and instead are a series of forced moves apparently going nowhere in particular?

A body makes a disorderly shape. Tourette's syndrome expresses itself in formal, plastic ways through the medium of the body it moves. Tourette's, according to this shaping-practice, has a sculptural mode and an aesthetic output that is relative to itself and its own habits of expression.

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<sup>46</sup> "The sum of bodily habits...is a technique that is taught, and whose evolution has not yet come to an end. The technique of swimming improves day by day."

Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body." In *Practice: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Eds. Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine. ( Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018).

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Here all of it still is, it all remains, and I remain, and I ride-on and I also am the bulk of my body: it goes on and on and yells, makes the shakes, under, over-ventilation, rubbery pauses with the limbs, with sounds and the mouth, and pulls in muscle with violence. It goes, makes pictures and words, strikes the chest of itself, myself, swings looks round, clenches balls, asshole, grinds the throat clear, has the utterances, and has the small of the neck sore, all, and always.

### A Note on the Text

*Shaper* is an account of the experience of my own body as a physical and existential setting conditioned by Tourette's Syndrome and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. More specifically, *Shaper* is an accounting of this particular experience of embodiment that is inflected by my long engagement with found pictures, theoretical speculation, art historical material, writing, and art-making. In *Shaper* I have adopted an unconventional approach in both written form and content (at least within the scope of conventional scholarly works), with the result being a cross-genre memoir where I have made the tools associated with traditional scholarly practice available to me on an as-needed basis instead of having those tools determine the structure and tone of the work itself. I want to make clear that this choice of approach is not meant as an attack on conventional forms of scholarship, nor is it meant as a critique of scholarly texts associated with critical disability studies (whose work is vital, and whose concerns are intensely contemporary, emergent, and deeply relevant to a collective and that collective's broad misrepresentation and pointed exclusion)—instead—it is a conscious departure from the strictures of these forms and fields in the service of something more acutely personal. I am aware that *Shaper's* present form as a dissertation attached to a doctoral study may raise questions concerning its specific utility within a doctoral context. My reply to these concerns is rooted in the capacities of knowledge-creation. *Shaper* is not evidence of the testing of mastery, nor is it formed from the nuanced positioning of ideas within a well-established field. Instead, *Shaper*, within the context of doctoral study, can be seen as an effort to engage directly with the primary conceit of

what has been called research-creation—*Shaper* can be seen as an effort to produce new knowledge via a set of aesthetic and creative processes consciously undertaken in the hopes of producing such knowledge. So *Shaper* is less an address to the various extant fields that it implicates (critical disability studies, art history, theoretical discourse, and creative writing among others), but is more of an address to a reader interested in the implications of an informational and poetic object borne out of the difference inherent in disabled subjectivity while that subject operates within an aesthetically and intellectually inclined context.

An idiosyncratic approach in writing *Shaper*, in writing out an account of my own illness that includes the world of images and the tools of literature is legitimate, even within an overtly scholarly environment, because the task of articulating an under-articulated sickness, from the position of the one who is sick, requires more immediate and immersive sorts of engagement with information and description. So this adoption of my preferred tools is not a merely stylistic gesture, or limited to the production of my own pleasure in writing, but is a matter of retaking the grounds of my own body, and self-defining the language and expression proper to it. G. Thomas Couser, on writing disability and contemporary life writing, says: “Perhaps what most distinguishes life writing...is that individuals with such bodies are choosing to signify on their own bodies, rather than to allow their signification to be determined by others.”<sup>47</sup> A disabled body is often a body spoken-for, and this kind of speaking is often taken up by authority figures such as doctors or those involved in research who are largely indifferent to the

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<sup>47</sup> G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009) 11.

particularities of personhood—and they believe themselves justified, as their pursuits are apparently a service to the body in question. It is this sort of robbed-signification, among others, that Couser is describing, and that self-determined accounts can work to contest. I grew up as a child in constant contact with medical people and with medical language—this was a place I was relegated to by default—and the language applied to my body in these places was homely, utilitarian, and limiting. The pleasures and beautiful oddity of being in a body were removed, and I was made to conceive of myself as a body placed firmly outside of poetic or aesthetic considerations, a body that those expressions were *not for*. This is what is at stake in writing a work of literature, in writing an art-object that pertains to myself (even if it is written within the context of higher study, and even if it uses the tools of scholarship to its advantage). *Shaper* is a cross-genre and an interdisciplinary work because its subject requires it. *Shaper* is an artwork and a work of literature because *enough studies have been made of me and others like me already*.

Furthermore, in writing *Shaper* this way—in direct dialogue with aesthetic references and actions—I demonstrate, in real readerly time, how I situate my own perception of these illnesses in direct relation to artistic practices based in found imagery and text without truncating the complexity inherent in doing so: “This is what a process-oriented exploration does: complexify its conceptual web as it advances. It tries not to reduce. It tries not to encapsulate. It does not end in an overview. Rather, it works to become more and more adequate to the ongoing complexity of life.”<sup>48</sup> It is in this way

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, (Malden: Polity Press, 2015) Xi.

that the situating of my body and my experience of its conditions alongside and through pictorial and textual objects places my own embodiment back within the fold of the political, of the vital things of life, instead as an unfortunate physical offshoot whose designated job it is to impossibly re-achieve the apparent benefits of a superior normality—Alison Kafer asserts: “disability is depoliticized, presented as a fact of life requiring determination and courage, not as a system marking some bodies, ways of thinking, and patterns of movement as deviant and unworthy.”<sup>49</sup> When disability is rendered as a set of conditions that justify an implicit removal of a body from the activated political and aesthetic spaces of life, the disabled body simply becomes a tool for demarcating the borders of normalized experience, rather than as a rich repository of precisely that—experience.

As regards my chosen methods of self-observation (creative writing, and a relating-to imagery and art-objects), my primary conceits are as follows: Tourette’s Syndrome causes my body to spasm and jerk and make sounds without my wanting it to; these movements and utterances are referred to as tics. Being in a body that produces tics places me in the odd position of being a viewer of my own body as it moves without my control, and as a kind of captive reader as my body spits words and sounds that I did not intend to lend my voice to. If I am both a viewer-of and a reader-of my body and the body itself—the doer of movements and utterances—then I can view my body, via disorder, as a piece of found imagery or text operating in space, operating in-the-round of the world. This places my own body and its relationship to disability into

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<sup>49</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013) 89.

direct relation with an aesthetic mode of perception. Tobin Seibers has previously laid a profoundly helpful theoretical framework linking disability to aesthetics in such a way to allow that aesthetic register to serve the bodies of the disabled:

Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body—and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic. Rather, disability aesthetics embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result.<sup>50</sup>

The capacity to view my tic-ing body as an aesthetic manifestation makes my experience of illness something that is unique not only in its relation to imagery and words, but as something that permits my perception of imagery and words outside of myself to take on an inherently different shape—disability makes me into a different reader of the same data. As a comorbid diagnosis, OCD only supports this interpretive framing—in my case—OCD works in an unwholesome tandem with Tourette’s Syndrome as it forcibly presents notions, images, and words to my mind that I may respond to via tics. These coercively and privately displayed pictures and messages read plainly as found content, with me locked paradoxically in-position as both writer and reader.

*Shaper* is an account of being in a body whose conditions of being are partially defined by the arbitrary strictures of disorder. This account is a severely delimited one, and purposefully so. *Shaper* is a work about the mechanics and inclinations of my own body, and what living as that body has felt like. *Shaper* makes no claim and presumes

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<sup>50</sup> Tobin Seibers, *Disability Aesthetics*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010) 3.

nothing about other bodies—even those who share these same diagnostic histories.

*Shaper* is not a book about Tourette's Syndrome or OCD; I have no interest in adding to the medical language that commonly surrounds these two ailments, nor am I qualified to do so in any kind of rigorous, field-specific manner. Instead, *Shaper* is a memoir or an embodied report, a fragmentary survey stemming out from the particularity of a living subjectivity who is capable of describing parts of themselves to others, and is capable of doing so using the language, structures, and content selected from the broadness of their own life and interests. I am a person with Tourette's Syndrome and OCD, a person who has committed a significant amount of time to viewing and producing pictures as well as reading and writing text, and over time it has become impossible to not draw a concrete connection between these two aspects of my life—the first, a circumstance, the second, a set of decisions repeatedly made. *Shaper* is an accounting-for of the collision of these two convergent qualities.

In the next section of this note I want to set aside some space outside of the primary body-text of *Shaper* in order to lend some explicative attention and commentary to recurring thematic contents and to certain choices concerning form and method that feature throughout the work.

### Painting and Photography as Thought-Tools

If Western painting was once a bright whitish tooth in a mouth happily singing the body's representation, yelling out its forms in the world with a complete pictorial

impunity, then photography's emergence made a low hanging frown out of its violent fall from representative prominence. I write about and look at paintings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with a particular fascination because the historical adjacency of the event of photographic capture permitted the undoing of the represented body within painting, because "While a painting or a prose description can never be other than a narrowly selective interpretation, a photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective transparency."<sup>51</sup> It was this novel capacity to represent bodies and objects and the world via an apparent translucency, with this kind of mechanical frankness, that allowed photography to so thoroughly relieve painting from its ill-fitting occupation as a documenter. Even if photography's technological development could be detected and traced, the eventual result of its emergence as a viable picture making medium could only have been shocking and seemingly sudden to audiences contemporary to that emergence. Photography's suddenness and unprecedented products meant that the painterly unmaking of the pictured body (now wholly permitted given that paintings' utilitarian tasks had been newly removed) was unplanned, and therefore proceeded oddly. During this time the disassembly of the body in pictures was in a germinal and intermediary place, it was a pictorial shift that, given the bizarre event of photographic technology, had the certainty and inevitability of gravity. The unmaking of form was inevitable in light of the capacities of the photographic medium, whose trajectory and method of undoing was not direct or immediately clear—the bodies of paintings broke apart unevenly—in this special and clumsy historical juncture of new forms, bodies pictured in paintings managed to speak illogical truths about the being of

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<sup>51</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973) 6.

bodies generally, and furthermore, allowed for the visual inclusion (if only circumstantially) of pictures of bodies moving and making shapes out of keeping with prior representative norms.

Photography, independently of painting, is also a sort of picturing that I am invested in examining, and whose wider role in my creative life has translated into a role within the writing of *Shaper*. I use photographs that I find or take myself as thinking surfaces for rendering texts; I use them as a matrix for thinking about forms and sensations and time. Photography's inherent oddness haunts me—the technological process that makes the medium possible—even if I loosely understand the mechanics in physical terms—seems like a piece of dream-logic that has been folded into the stuff of a waking world. Photography's reproductive force renders unreal objects directly from the real they mimic in their making. Photographs are pictures of real objects and events, they are the real removed from itself and delivered back to itself as more objects: “Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality...”<sup>52</sup> Photographs are real things made from the real itself and yet are also plainly fictitious, either in their being as tricks of light rubbing against some chemical-wet substrate, or as massed and blatantly biased gatherings of digital pixelization.

This dual nature of photographs as things of the real that are not the real, allows me to use them for a viewing game that I play in order to make texts. The game is like this: I look at photographs, and since I am meant to accept their pictured phenomena as

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<sup>52</sup> Sontag, 4.

real, I accept their phenomena as-such—in thoroughly literal terms. I can explain what I mean by example. I look at a photograph from the 1930's: it is of two figures laying on a blanket under the sun on a field of grass. The photograph is poorly exposed, with the result being that the gray stretch of values meant to link the darkest and lightest areas of the image and to illuminate the subtler details of the scene in doing so, have been eradicated via the limitations of the photographic procedure. Because of this, one of the faces attached to one of the pictured figures is a stretch of pure white light, a voided thing, featureless except for a rich point of black in the lower center of its expanse (perhaps what was left over from the shadow under the tip of the lost nose). And here is where this game of looking yields speculative results from real data: If, as I said above, if I read this image in purely literal terms, if I agree within the bounds of the game to assert the complete reality of the real apparently pictured by photography, then what I can see is a head of pure white, living velvet, with a snub of black ink set into the lower section of the otherwise unblemished and brushed fabric. Photography pictures real things and sets them into images. By this logic the living white velvet head is not an imagined body brought on by the technical circumstance of a picturing machine, but is in fact real, in so far as the material for its picturing was inalienably present in what was pictured. This holds some weight even outside of the game's boundaries, insofar as the requisite physical materials of pictured unreality are held in readiness by reality in its acceptable forms.

Photographs also allow for the solidification of time, of actual temporality, into objects and files that remain still relative to the temporal fragment they were made from via technical impression. A photograph from 2008 *is* 2008—it is time held in place and

projected into material. When I hold a photograph from 2008 I hold a bit of 2008. When I hold time like this in an object, I can pursue a constructive disbelief in time, or at least in its solidity: “I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet...in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another.”<sup>53</sup> When I cut up a photo from 2008, when I cut 2008 material and paste it next to a photograph from 2011, I make a temporal possibility that is impossible, possible, through mechanical material superimposition. This is how photographs are a subtle and blunt form of time travel, and this is why they are so powerful within the context of works of remembering (which *Shaper*, in many ways is).

### Sport: Shaped Physicality and Constraint

Sport, sporting-bodies, and the documentation that spectatorship renders from the performance of sporting actions forms a thematic tissue running the length of *Shaper*. I am interested in sports from a two-pointed, aesthetically focused position—my stance here being that sport is an inherently sculptural process that physically rearranges the materials of bodies and that modulates their behaviors, and additionally, that spectator sport and the documentation of its activities is a profoundly unique pictorial space given over to the popular study of select bodies’ minutia.

When I assert that sport is a sculptural and materially modifying process, I mean that any given sport contains an arbitrary set of rules that are meant to delimit the literal

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<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 139.

movements of a body within those bounds, and that when a body is trained to perform these movements in repetitious sequence, and when those sequences are repeated over years, as is required to develop a professional discipline, that the body involved physically changes shape—that body assumes shapes and postures it would not normally assume otherwise. These molded shapes reveal their sculptural character when submitted to comparative observation—the body of a baseball player and that of a racewalker do not only differ because of the inherent difference provided by the body being an individual, they differ in shape because they have been made, through rigorous training and constraint, fit for purpose, and the demands of that purpose are specific ones, rendering their own iteration of shape and form. So, a body becomes, this way, a sculpture of baseball or of racewalking. The athletic body is a mirroring thing, a refraction of these adopted constraints. This bodily shaping through repetition is precisely where I insert a relationship between disability (specifically, the movement-based disorder I am navigating in Tourette's) and the apparent maverick ability of athleticism. For disability, impairment, and illness also provide a series of arbitrary constraints, and when a body is made to bend to these demands over broad stretches of time those bodies are also modified in doing so, being made-fit for the disorderly tasks of tics, taking on postures and forms they might have never been made to know. The important and obvious discrepancy between these two scenarios is that one (sport) is assumed to be chosen and consented to while the strictures of disabled embodiment are coercive and unbidden. I am aware of this vital difference; however, I find it particularly interesting to leverage the content produced via the observation of these,

some of the most popularly lauded bodies, in order to turn some of their projected light towards the routinely ignored and minimized physical lives of disabled bodies.

Spectator sport is a project of vision in breathless pursuit of a more and more complete fidelity to itself. I see it as a primary site for contemporary figurative practices, unique in its powers of presentation and for the unmatched ubiquity of its committed and attentive viewership. The conditions of a spectator sporting event are painterly conditions. The lighting and the strategically positioned viewer (whether via broadcast camera lens or live in the stands) produces a visual situation akin to cinema or theatre, to painting or dreaming—akin to anything but the very fleshy real that sport in fact is. These sites of sporting action are constructed as places that allow for a widespread and minutely detailed visual investigation of physical form that is made so pointed and remarkable through the ingenuity of its presentation that it becomes living artifice, bodies composed of impossible shapes, making impossible moves, out there in the inarguable real of the venue.

### Fiction and Making Make Believe

I have written sections of *Shaper* as fictional interludes. I have done this to allow for a full and fluid use of a writerly spectrum containing both reportage-style accounts of a physical and contextual reality as well as sections of text that fall wholly within the bounds of poetic construction. Writing fictitiously about real things permits those things to be perceived more fully. Part of my intention that surrounds and drives the shape of

*Shaper* is an insistence on the importance of an aesthetically charged self-understanding as concerns the conditions of disability that I navigate in my life. It is my opinion that applying and fostering a self-initiated aesthetic-fictive approach to self-examination in the context of disability can bring about an understanding of disability that is more faithful to the experience and fullness of personhood—that it could bring about an understanding that extends well beyond what a strictly realist telling can. Sami Schalk writes:

Life writing emphasizes notions of the real and the authentic in opposition to a history of negative and skewed portrayals of people with disabilities by nondisabled people...I, however, question whether the relationship of realism with authenticity, ethics, and sophistication is as inherent or clear cut as some work in disability studies might suggest.<sup>54</sup>

A plainly realist treatment of a disabled account runs two risks. First, that if a text is limited to this sort of formal conceit, a reader may miss large swaths of experiential information that exist outside of realist capacities. A second, oddly dovetailed risk is that a nondisabled reader, in reading a text written by a disabled writer that in fact claims to describe whatever experience of disability or impairment that is being discussed, might begin to assume what they imagine is a full knowledge of that disability that remains, in fact, painfully incomplete, but here read and taken as the whole. An outright adherence to realism as the only ethical approach to speaking about illness can inadvertently side itself with the disinterested qualities of clinical reports, with their language, so brief, technical and stilted, as to abbreviate the expansive qualities of a life inflected by

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<sup>54</sup> Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018) 19.

symptoms that they claim to describe. It is this realist attempt at making an intense complexity wholly readable, that I read as erroneous. Schalk again:

The defamiliarization of realist disabilities in these fantasy texts challenges readers' assumptions about the meanings, manifestations, and effects of a particular disability on physical, mental, social, and environmental levels alike, forcing readers to reconsider what they know, or think they know about what it means to be disabled."<sup>55</sup>

Navigating the world as a disabled person is not the navigating of the world with an able body that contains a breakage, that holds a fissure in the logic of the able, that simply must be overcome or bridged somehow. Navigating the world with disability presents a difference that is comprehensive, it is a difference that, in adjusting the conditions of a body, renders the world of that body, the ground and arena of actions, as a differentiated thing as well. It is this profound differentiation of both the figure and the ground, of both the person and the world or interface, that eludes purely realist understandings of disabled conditions.

It is my position that this differentiated sphere, as presented in my experience of disability, can be examined and shared more completely in a work that makes efforts to include the kinds of knowledge that are singularly held within an aesthetic purview; and that allowing self-examination to run with itself, to bleed off into fictive places, can allow for a writerly event that does not harmfully exoticize myself and my perspective on my illness, but that grants that perspective a sense of poetic force that I have determined as being appropriate to its understanding.

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<sup>55</sup> Schalk, 119.

### Nineteen Tics

I use a numbered treatment list as a structuring form throughout *Shaper*. This list exists as a physical object I composed in collaboration with a doctor during an intensive treatment program. It lists my entire repertoire of nineteen tics, in order of severity and recurrence, and describes each in plain terms, strictly using words meant to explain the movement of various parts of my body during the event of each tic in the most expedient way possible—these descriptions have been retained in *Shaper* as part of the title lines for each tic-interlude. I kept the list as a keepsake or record of sorts, and later I began to see this list as a work of found text, as a piece of writing organically manifested from one engagement with (in this particular case, very helpful) clinical assistance. The list became increasingly interesting for me as I began to see it as an indexical text-based image of my body's movements, something like a photographic capture of motion rendered through wholly textual means. During the process of writing *Shaper* this list became something I would systematically return to, becoming a touchpoint running between other modes of address. In *Shaper* I went back to each of the 19 listed tics and elaborated on this idea of movement and shape being rendered as-and-in-text. I have made efforts in doing so to retain the mechanical quality of the original accounts taken from the treatment list, because I wanted, in the writing of each tic, to maintain a close relationship with the physicality of the movements, with their fleshy and haptic connection to my own experience of myself.

The original treatment list, and the parallel list found in *Shaper*, delineates the literal shapes of my life through the repetition of sequence and conditions: “If symptoms are circulated long enough, a set of discomforts might be allowed the mercy of a name: a disease, a syndrome, a sensitivity...”<sup>56</sup> The treatment list, as well as the version of it that I have produced in *Shaper*, take part in this merciful sort of naming that Anne Boyer lays out, in that the persistence of the tics makes them conspicuous enough to be written, to be described in detail, and so, in their way, attain their own names via blunt descriptors, with a kind of shorthand emerging for their disordered logic to be written across and through my movements.

### Technical Note

A brief note on notes. *Shaper* adopts the Chicago Manual of Style as a citation method and conforms to those standards, however, in *Shaper* there are times where these rules are knowingly modified. In some places I have wanted to include a direct quotation that bears special relevance to whatever section of text I am writing while also feeling that the interjection of another voice would deter from the structural integrity and impact of the section. In these cases, I have included both the quote and the citation information in the footnote. This strategy is not taken up flippantly and I would not want it to be read as a lack of attentiveness on my part. My wish in these instances is for the

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<sup>56</sup> Anne Boyer, *The Undying: Pain, Vulnerability, Mortality, Medicine, Art, Time, Dreams, Data, Exhaustion, Cancer and Care*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2019) 17.

reader to relate the content of the footnoted quotation back toward the section it has been attached to in an exploratory manner—I want the quotations that are treated in this way to act as attendant texts, running in parallel with what is written in *Shaper* while maintaining their own space and trajectory.

### On the Exhibition and Artworks

*Shaper* is accompanied by a series of brochures housing images I collected during my writing process. This largely textless (any text contained in the images is found, circumstantial) series of brochures are full of pictures and are a numbered series grouped under the title *Scan-Book-Jumbo: The Big Picture Collection for Shaper*. The images in *Scan-Book-Jumbo* (*S.B.J.*) are pictures that I found in books, or online, or that I photographed from existing film footage. I have either presented these images in the book as I encountered them, or I have adjusted them in some minor way. These pictures are loose graphic correlates to a private vocabulary that *Shaper* lends a worded voice to, and their proliferation came to justify these separate companion works: "...the allegorist—for whom objects represent only keywords in a secret dictionary, which will make known their meanings to the initiated—precisely the allegorist can never have enough of things."<sup>57</sup> *Shaper*, in its thematic insistences and its worded structures, makes for the text-form dictionary of a private dialect of a long carried sickness, it is a

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<sup>57</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) 211.

repository of personal symbols written out into the open. If *Shaper* is this written telling, if it is this legible relay, then *S.B.J.* is its allegorical and graphic match—*S.B.J.* is the near and imagistic relative of the kind of telling that *Shaper* does, a series of objects that lend graphic perception to the long-drawn sayings that *Shaper* says. Susan Howe states:

One historical-existential trace has been hunted, captured, guarded, and preserved in aversion to waste by an avid collector, then shut carefully away, outside of an economy of use, inaccessible to touch. Now it is re-animated, re-collected, (recollected) through an encounter with the mind of a curious reader, a researcher, an antiquarian, a bibliomaniac, a sub sub librarian, a poet. Each collected object or manuscript is a pre-articulate empty theater where a thought may surprise itself at the instant of seeing. Where a thought may hear itself see.<sup>58</sup>

My thoughts of sunlight, or of tennis matches, are these thoughts that hear themselves seeing within the images I find that form a correspondence with their varying cerebral shapes. I watch replays of years-old tennis matches with a small camera in my hand in order to encounter, capture, and isolate the things I have already written, the parts of what I have already stated that exist outside of my statements and that live real lives in bodies and the pictures of bodies moving. In their capture and representation within *S.B.J.* I form another circuit of repetitious activity, a drawn out revisitation with the things I have previously put words to, and this repeating, this representation of pictures produces a body of graphic evidence, a file of supporting documentation for the sayings of *Shaper*. *S.B.J.* is a bolstering collection of pictures

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*, (New York: New Directions, 2014) 24.

adopted from extant places, because “To collect photographs is to collect the world.”<sup>59</sup> and to collect the world is to recall images from out in the real of things—and all to bring back to *Shaper*, to give images to *Shaper*’s own reality that it otherwise builds via statements and language.

*S.B.J.* will be presented initially within the context of an exhibition. The exhibition will be called *Shaper’s Big Show*. The show will be made up of three works. One, as stated, will be *S.B.J.*, the second will be a slide-show work called *Rotator*, and the third, a projected video piece, will be called *Fast-Forms*. The show will take place in the Gales Gallery, which is an extremely large room chosen in order to heighten the drama and visual impact of the projection, video images, and the public presentation of *S.B.J.* I want the overwhelming bigness of that environment to stand in for the bigness of being, and I want these three works to emerge as saturated points dotting that bigness like the glittering pieces of both symptom and perception.

As a viewer enters Gales they will see *Rotator* installed on the far end of the leftmost wall, with the work presented via a wall mounted digital picture frame. Then, from the right of that will be a stack of physical copies of *S.B.J.* exhibited on a second white plinth placed near but not on, the center of the room. Further right still will be *Fast-Forms* projected onto the rightmost wall using the primary ceiling-suspended projector. The walls will remain white, and the extraneous lighting will be kept to a minimum to ensure the legibility of the projection. There will be a spotlight shining down on the plinth holding the *S.B.J.* copies.

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<sup>59</sup> Sontag, 3.

*Rotator* is a slide presentation composed of images that have been selected from *S.B.J.* The work is a loop made from six of these selected images that will repeat indefinitely during the exhibition. My first tic began in my abdomen and repeated to the point of shaping the growth of my ribcage slightly to meet its formal and compulsive needs. My ribcage is like a wave now—top-right high, top-left low, bottom left-high, bottom-right low—and so is like an imprint or impression of that initial movement, symptom, and of the condition broadly. So abs are a unique part of the body as concerns my own understanding of illnesses' emergence in me. Three of the six selected photos are photos I took myself of some worn away and very old Roman sculptural fragments, where I moved my camera in close and so was able to crop out a full-framed image of just the abs of the sculpted figures. This subsuming of the entire picture-surface by the ripples of the abs is meant to draw special attention to abs, because, as I have detailed above, abs are significant in my own trajectory, and in that significance form a kind of compressed, plastic memoir alone by themselves. This compositional decision also makes for a picture of constraint, makes for an image bound up and locked back in upon itself, which is an image of symptomatic form.

In the looping, between each of the ab-pictures, will be a repeated frame that is the scan of a vacation postcard picturing a sunset in Honolulu. The postcard is a picture of the sun and of the resplendence of the sun, and of the hot star's altogether too-muchness, functioning in *Rotator* as catalytic, as a representation of the energetic remainder that remains always in my body, and that in this way *is* compulsive movement. The sun is a stand-in for chronic compulsion, it is the fuel-rich velocity of an

illness that makes movement, and it runs like a blood between the iterative repeats of the ab-pictures.

*Fast-Forms* is a looped fragment of video featuring the movement of the legs of the participants from an elite racewalk event. The clip is five seconds long and is selected from the beginning of the race, where the athletes have yet to build distance between one another, and so proceed as a group. I chose a piece of footage from early in the event like this because when these bodies move as a group their movement, the movement of their limbs in proximity to one another take on an optical quality—forming patterns of emphatic physical repetition that confuse perception—making a blend of themselves and each other by way of velocity, making for a boiling-over of figurative form that confuses perception and in the blurring of the footage complicates viewership. So these limbs are captured by the lens and recorded in their motion, but what has been captured remains elusive even within the bounds of that capture—the footage shows movements and bodies and fixes them in place and in-view, all while those same captured movements elide complete perception, and so form a figurative paradox. Tics make moves with the body in the same way; they are physical happenings whose contours are perceivable, and *Shaper*, in some sense, is an attempt to record those contours, those moves, and like the clip that makes *Fast-Forms*, some of *Shaper's* greatest capacities for a kind of truth-telling are in its failures to wholly track the movements it claims to watch. The contours of the physical movements that are pursued evidently extend beyond pictorial places, they go outside of the visible, spreading their emphasis into sites that are resistant to any kind of summing-up, that are resistant to full comprehension, to the satisfaction of documentation, to capture.

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