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Light on, baby. No future

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B.F.A. Thesis
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ABSTRACT:

This project is a realistic depiction of the circularity of experience. As Images of ourselves and our experiences become increasingly inescapable, the repetitive and nonlinear nature of those experiences is amplified. This issue is explored in looking at contemporary artists/filmmakers whose handling of inundation in representation and narrative distinctly embraces multiplicity. Queering structures of representation, the work holds a mirror to the way that we experience living, encountering images, narrative structures and memories.

Introduction:

Small chapbooks with matted (or cropped) subtractive clippings of vernacular photography are storyboarding a meandering film and essay. This strategy is the glue that binds this collage (our colloquial assemblage) into a cohesive whole. The photos as wholes (never shown to the audience) are autobiographical, but their cropping limits that specificity. The trimmed image is a symbol/icon for a more categorical experience or scene. In sequence, this temporal collage of image, stasis videography and social alignment speaks to contemporary experience. Specifically an experience that through extensive digital archive pushes us deeper and deeper into the past, constantly threatening to drown us in past pain pleasure. We are trapped in Hollis Frampton's *Pentagram for Conjuring Narrative*, what does constant submersion (reliving our past atop or present project or future) do for our critical understanding of ourselves. I will point towards an answer through my subsequent investigations — outlined in the script that follows.



Light on, baby. no future

It's pessimistic, patronizing, and a little bit sexy.

I intend to have children, though many forces make it less likely. (debt, depression, economy of art practice, queer identity, discomfort scars¹ from "sperm donors").

An associative game that generated titles for the title cards, generated *Light on baby/ No Future*. Add a comma and a period and it's a drive into the abyss.²



Cry fall dad. Sweet.

Heterosexual male dad model has the problems of the model dad, male heterosexual. But is he that? Or is he just a product? For the worse, the father is a product of the father. He replicates himself. Social, and engaged in activities outside the dynamics of the family (this is not little house on the prairie, this inland California) dad can participate: (1) actively (seeing other people, men, work place, family parties, in laws, the paternal family, block parties) or (2) passively (TV, old photos, Cinema, literature, comics, advertisement, shopping, people-watching) in the proliferation of family.

Of course, this is not the only breeding ground for Cry fall dads but it is a ubiquitous one³.

I didn't have a dad when i was a kid. I have a recurring dream -- it's kinda stereotypical , i guess.. I am walking with my now stepdad and the road splits between us and I can't get back to him and he is getting further away... That's pretty much the only dream i ever remember

"Daddy broke it, mommy fix it"

"If you're bad I'll take you to the baby store and swap you in"

"I'm gonna take you back to the daddy store and trade you in"⁴

Do you want chicken mcnuggets?

No i'm not hungry.

He got them anyway

And we ate them together.⁵



(in front of or up against)

Who's your best friend

Sexual assault, friendship, overlaps in experiences

Has this ever happened to you?

When we talk about the fun parts of sex but not the painful,
I can't think about one without the other

I want to equate our pain in our experiences
But they weren't the same

Processing injury to a body

What is done cannot be undone
Only done and redone
I wake up yelling⁶

This repetition is less comforting

Back to sleep, into the guardrail



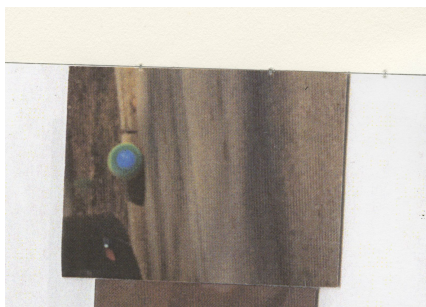
Ball from G's dream

G had a dream about a green ball the night before the morning we drove past it.
Consumerism traps; a learn behavior, like boyhood.

Rolling Rock tastes like wasting time. Running or rushing .

It, like your car, drives you to an abyss.

It wasn't a dream, it was a skateboard video i watched before bed.



Ball returns

Repetition, pleasure and pain, and the uncanniness

I find repetition comforting. Products are cycles of inheriting. Deja vu doesn't bother her because she's happy to accept that time isn't linear. she finds peace in the past existing at the same time

as the present. The good times are here now too. I find this approach more painful than pleasurable. I have been thinking about it wrong. Because past present future exist at the same time doesn't erase the linearity. Time can be linear *and* concurrent.



Ouch. If

Pain, need

now I need you too much
but you don't think I'm sure I will be happy with her

you can come over now
I need to be with you
I need to be you.
I don't have you but I'm not too sure you have her either
You can come over now



Sister as model

The unpredictability of the child's body
A Sister's body is a model for your body in the future
Women's bodies exist in comparison
You Develop a bodily empathy with the sisters body, with herself.

Conflation of selves. —The strength of your love is the strength of your self worth

Identity as sisters, one of many, existing as a multiple.⁷

The most important thing is Being a mother and having a mother,
Being a lover and having a lover
Conflation of identity with another.

But what about a queer disruption?

Sister as model:
A Conflated and complicit love⁸

Born into a family of six kids, “Four girls, two boys”, I am a middle child; my body’s future was fated by two sisters before me. My education was predetermined by an older brother. I followed them dutifully.⁹



Eating, watching, indulging in scary man

Women. Women in relation to men

Can we take pleasure in our own objectness? Yes. Should we? A more difficult question. But maybe it's a bad one? Instead, maybe we should consider the pains of objectness. Shortterm and longterm¹⁰

That is what they sold and that is what you bought. By so did your sisters, and your mom, and her mother too...

I'm a product of all of the bad things¹¹.

you would tell me “You’re my favorite” and i felt so bad,



Little boys. Oh bother! Existential crisis

Can i play. no

Games only boys can play.

My little brother is overwhelmed.

He doesn't like when there are too many noises

She cries when it gets too late

To put them to bed,

I turn the lights on and off real fast.

To put them to bed,

I turn the lights on and off real fast. Like lightning. They like that.

"I saw you smiling at my baby

Sorry he is such a little flirt."



(My arm hooked.)

“Is it fine that I’m over here?”

What does it mean if she picks up the dinner check?

Money, sex, delusions, desires, ambition

I am a parasite.
My Arm Hooked.

Existential Anxiety and the Privileged

He said “It never occurred to me that people do things not to become the best, essentially--
other people have hobbies”

Well we never thought history would remember us.

-we’re just helping each other navigate the capitalist wasteland

We are operating in different worlds, but for a moment it overlaps

Random alignments propose salvation



T, O, U, C, H, O, F, S, I, N, G (1969)

Intimacy, violence, romance

But the day you cross the threshold and leave the parents house, it turns out touching exists outside the family. *YOU CAN* hit people outside the family. The rule breaks. Without it, hitting family becomes wrong, but also close touches can be nonsexual, non-familial, non-gendered. But is this a momentary garden of eden? Can this last?

As a soft child grown in family molds, those are the recognizable shapes. A close friend is a sister, until she has a boyfriend and leaves the house. You finish the story, elope. You abandon the present and see only the road to hell. A replication is in cycle.¹²

How do we break the pattern? *No Future* is a sexy, albeit morbid escape route.¹³

But trapped in images of family. Who can make me a new image?¹⁴



(Long hair, don't care)

Cry, fall, dad, sweet.



(lamp inheritance)

Drowning in past pain and pleasure
Voice is so bodily.

I'll be your mirror

Authorship, performance, collapse

Hannah, thank you for reading.
Empathy through narcissism
Narcissism through empathy¹⁵

Lamp inheritance, nana waiting

Familial loop

Familial loop
My grandmother waited in the airport,-
I cried in the airport¹⁶

I just wanted to know

I just wanted to say¹⁷

Endnotes:

1. Discomfort scars are the psychological residue of violating experiences.

2. The images in the book are crops of vernacular photography from my personal archive. The cropping limits the specificity of the image. In most images the gestures are familiar and recognizable to a degree. These crops, like the gestures in the film, contain multiple associations and hold space for projection from the audience's experience. An arm on a shoulder can be seen as sweet, or a display of possession; the image contains both.

3. Su Friedrich's *Sink or Swim* handles notably related subject matter. In 26 sections A-Z, Friedrich tells anecdotes about her relationship with her father. Using footage of many daughters and fathers in public, Friedrich implies that her personal narrative is not exclusive to her. Many children represent her narrative, and her narrative represents many children.

4. My work consists of multiple narratives. It is a collage of stories from my own experience, that others shared with me and appropriated or imagined stories from collaborators. In this sense, the work rejects an individual authorship. The content is that of a conversation entered into consensually. This rejection of individual authorship extends beyond the text/audio to the source footage and photographs, which are taken from my sister's facebook, my friends' phones, my mother's childhood home videos, my point and shoot (photographers variable).

5. In *Light on baby, No future* (video), the narration includes personal stories and commentary from multiple people, though they are all read in the same voice. The narrator is acting as a reader, not an actor; her tone is consistent. Read not acted, any hierarchy among the sections is removed, though some deal with heavier subject matter. In my work, this suggests a different way of looking at experience; one devoid of climax.

My use of this strategy was informed by Omer Fast's piece, "The Casting," in which an actor is telling two stories which get progressively more confused and conflated. One is a grave story of trauma in Afghanistan and the other a strange dating experience. The juxtaposition is jarring as the formal qualities of the piece flatten the hierarchy between the two narratives.

6. I am talking about a confusion of linearity and a lack of climax.

"Queer is that which by definition troubles the idea that we can know what we see and installs durationality, and its corollary qualities of undecidability and unknowability, at the heart of meaning. We could even argue that *queer is that which indicates the impossibility of a subject or a meaning staying still*, in one determinable place (Jones 174-175)."

The closed system I am presenting, the compilation of scenes of relative inaction that could represent a continuation into forever, sets the film up to disrupt and queer experience through time.

7. *Light on baby, No Future* uses my sisters as well as myself, or rather, my sisters as myself (my extended self). Our personal histories are so tied, our identities so conflated and my empathy for them is so deep, that in many sense we are the same. My sisters serve as the most direct example (our faces are similar, our origins the same), but this concept of my extended self is occurring elsewhere in the collaborative appropriation of the materials that make up the video and text.

8. An older sister chases her younger sister around with a razor, so no one else will. Tasked with navigating a misogynist society together, sisters help each other adapt to, and internalize gender rules.

9. The diaristic mode provides entry to the viewer, generously allowing them to relate and project. Maggie Lee's *Mommy* repurposes old home videos and photos collaged with her current work in a diaristic confessional mode. Telling the story of her own life as much as that of her mother. The piece is powerful in its unapologetic, even aggressive, use of exclusively vernacular language. The visual language is vernacular with home videos and family photos as source material as well as the aesthetic of the iMovie video editing. The text and tone of the written and spoken language are openly vulnerable, indulgent and honest. Leading the viewer into her headspace seamlessly, having set up her own formal rules, Lee has complete control over the expectations of the viewer.

10. There is a particular weight to, and power in, using oneself in video work as a woman.

11. The "bad things" here are damaging interactions with men. Recognizing how deeply relations with men shape you, as a non-man, is recognizing the reality of the patriarchy. In a sense, the early psychoanalysts were right.

12: There is a tendency for platonic or queer relationships to become "chosen family" because the family is so personally and culturally ingrained. Those roles hold impossible expectations.

13. "No Future" is Lee Edelman's radical take on queer theory. He proposes the abandonment of "The Child" as the only way to escape heteronormative hell and achieve queerness.

14. Edelman's proposition is a rhetorical, theoretical one. Though one can incorporate it into their personal philosophy, the images of family are ingrained and inescapable. Societally, "No Future" is not a *viable* option (it is called the death drive). I am not making Edelman's argument. My work understands deep familial love, and in that understanding seeks to engage with it, to examine and complicate, not reject, it.

15. Narcissism and empathy are inextricably tied. Though often used to stigmatize and pathologize women and queer people, narcissism can be a productive mechanism for enabling wider empathy in performance, especially when reframed by women and queer people. The

reclaimed narcissism I am referring to is most closely related to Amelia Jones's interpretation of the term:

Narcissism -the exploration of and fixation on the self- inexorably leads to an exploration of and implication in the other: the self turns itself inside out, as it were, projecting its internal structures of identification and desire outward. Thus, narcissism interconnects the internal and external self as well as the self and other (Postmodernism, Subjectivity, and Body Art, pg 46).

The hope is that in using this narcissism, closing the space between the self and the other, performing a fixation of the self causes the viewer to feel implicated and thus empathize. This theory informs my choice to use myself in my work without moderation.

16. An extension of the lack of hierarchy among the narratives, I am also flattening time (or age). The dated film and the contemporary footage are equalized by exporting everything at the resolution of the lowest resolution source.

17. Though Maggie Lee's *Mommy* is told in a very linear sequence, the chapters are able to be viewed as separate. The piece can be screened as a traditional film, or installed in a multifaceted installation. With different parts looped on separate televisions, the viewers can come in and out of the film at their own discretion. Choosing to order and time spent with "sister," "daddy," etc., as they navigate the rest of the exhibition.

Light on baby, No Future (video) is designed as a loop rather than a film with a beginning or an end. This is to function in an installation space where viewers can enter at any point, welcoming them to come in and out. Allowing the pacing of the editing of the footage to guide their judgement on when they have seen enough. This relates to the cyclical nature referenced elsewhere. The film does not end or start, just as there is no designated section for the contemporary or archival footage. As these cycles themselves lack the clear delineation that one might expect, or be used to seeing. The same can be said for the book, though a reader is more accustomed to being able to flip (come in and out).

Conclusion:

This project is operationally “emotional realist” by which I mean a realistic depiction of the circularity of experience. In a clip, I look for a type of integrity in the behavior captured, generic (regular or familiar) behavior patterns whose performance is for the people around, not for the camera. It prioritizes an unedited unfiltered perspective on experience. Queering structures of representation, the work holds a mirror to the way that we experience living, encountering images, narrative structures and memories.

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