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rites and passages

by

Sarah M. Timberlake

B.A. , University of Colorado, 1980

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of the

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requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art

1989

This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by

Sarah M. Timberlake

has been approved for the

Department of

Fine Arts

by



Garrison Roots



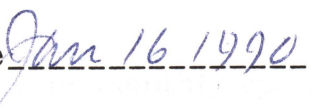
Antonette Rosato



Claire Farago



Scott Chamberlin

Date 

If I take the word obsessive in the sense that I understand it, I would say that life is very obsessive. The heart beats obsessively, when you walk you have to put one foot in front of the other and that is also obsessive. Being obsessive is being alive.

Are you connecting repeating a mark...with instinctual organic process?

Not at all!

Niele Toroni, 1989¹

Obsession: to occupy the mind; preoccupy. To engage fully, engross the mind. A reoccurring thought. A repetitive action. To the exclusion of all other motions or thoughts. Over and over and over.

How can I speak of obsession when I am the one obsessed?

Rituals. Passages. Things we do repetitively that keep us alive. That give us a sense of security. That mark us in the world and tell us who we are. That mark a passing of time. Everyone has them, marks them. Passages, marked by rituals: your 16th birthday and your 1st driver's license; your 21st birthday and your first legal drink. Then there are the repetitive rituals of life: get up in the morning, take a shower, go to work. Perhaps having a morning cup of coffee is part of this ritual; you can't leave the house without it. We all have them.

Life is cyclic. A woman's life is marked by her monthly cycles. Repeating. Recurring. Like the ebb and flow of the tide. She counts the days between cycles to give herself a sense of her place in time.

We count the days to give ourselves a sense of our place in the universe. Humans have counted cycles for eons, the passing days and nights, the phases of the moon. Repetition is a part of life. It gives us a sense of security.

Why are we always so concerned with where we are?

Ritual. Procedure. Way of doing things. Routine. System. Order. Regularity. Continuity. Sequence. Serial. Rhythm. Rhyme. Chanting. Breathing. Heartbeat. Meditation. Contemplation. Introspection. Wisdom.

How can I speak of obsession when I am the one obsessed?

Potential is the record of a ritual. The ritual of stringing enough wooden strips to nearly fill a fifty foot rope: repetitive and obsessive. As I worked on it, I rolled it up to fit in the workspace I was using. It became an enigmatic form, one filled with possibility and potential. It could be so many things: a bridge, a fence, a ladder...You could sit on it while it was rolled up; you could string it from wall to wall and lie on it. The making of it became a process of contemplation. The sculpture became a record of a ritual, and an object of possibilities.

Potential. Essence. Possibility. Capacity. Feasible. Probable. Capable. Opportunity. Choice. Idea. Concept. Discovery. Creation. Inspiration. Chance. Implication. Dream. Desire. Hope.

"Our representations of inspiration are far from perfect for perfection is unobtainable and unattainable."

Agnès Martin²

It seems to be in our nature as humans to try. Fail. Try again. Keep trying. Keep failing. We are not gods, but we yearn to be.

Diabetes is a disease of control. Of ritual. Of measurement and limitations. Of repetition. Of unconscious results of conscious

decision. Of trying to find freedom within the perimeters of disease and treatment. I have lived battling it all my life. It influences all that I do. Living with it is like walking a tightrope. Either side is death: too much or too little. One can never leave it. Yet to stay on it is so hard. Perfection is expected. Perfection is never achieved. Diabetics tend to die at an early age.

My work is influenced by this fact of my life, and at times addresses it directly. Both the book **Existence** and the sculpture **Diabetes: Path of Least Resistance** speak of just a small part of being a diabetic. The book is a journal of one month of blood tests and insulin dosages, and the resultant blood sugar levels throughout the day. One schooled in diabetes understands the rituals the book portrays. One unfamiliar with the disease sees a record of the ritual of my daily existence; an obsessive repetition, like a heartbeat, only conscious. Dealt with daily it becomes a fact of life, almost unconscious, and thus a ritual of security as well as survival. One identifies with the disease and its daily care. The sculpture is confrontational: it forces the viewer to confront it, as a diabetic, or anyone with a chronic disease, must confront that disease every day of their lives. One cannot move across the gallery without either stepping over the piece or moving around it; a diabetic cannot face a moment without having to cope with the disease. The sculpture is made of three balancing beams, symbols of the "tightrope of control" one must walk as a diabetic. The urine testing cups full of sugar on one side of the beams refer to the effects of being "out of control," having too much sugar in the bloodstream (which then "spills" into a diabetics urine, filling it with sugar), a sure means of death to a diabetic. The cups with the ashes in them refer to the opposite effect, that of having too little sugar in the bloodstream, another sure means of death to one with the disease. The beams are 10" high, an uncomfortable height to step over, as diabetes is often an uncomfortable disease to live with. They act as a barrier in the gallery, as diabetes is often a barrier to certain aspects of life. Following along the piece, walking down its length, is therefore the "path of least resistance," a difficult and limiting path to walk, but actually the one that is the easiest to follow.

Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. Where have I been? Where am I going?
Passages. Birth and rebirth. Change. Transition. Death and
rebirth. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. We are born. We live. We die.

"Types of order are forms of thought."

Mel Bochner³

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27
28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73
74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96
97 98 99 100

2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50
52 54 56 58 60 62 64 66 68 70 72 74 76 78 80 82 84 86 88 90 92 94 96
98 100

1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 21 23 25 27 29 31 33 35 37 39 41 43 45 47 49
51 53 55 57 59 61 63 65 67 69 71 73 75 77 79 81 83 85 87 89 91 93 95
97 99

Why are we always so concerned with where we are?

The sun rises, passes over the earth, sets. Night comes, passes over
the earth, wanes. The sun rises. Sets. Darkness falls. Wanes. Each
day different. Each day the same. Each night the same. Each night
different. The earth revolves.

How can I think of obsession when I am the one obsessed?

Count to ten. Count to ten again. Do this ten times. Do this until it is
all you can think about: the numbers. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Do this
until the doing of it completely consumes you. Do this until the rest of
the world fades away. Do this until the numbers become a way of

life. Don't think of anything else. Do this until you reach a state of grace.

100 2x4's also comes out of my being influenced by a life of repeated ritual. The finished 2x4's are simply that: finished 2x4's. They hold potential, and at the same time a certain negation of that potential. So much wood, yet too finished to be thought of as raw lumber. Could you build anything from it? Would you want to build anything from it? **100 2x4's** is about the finishing of a hundred pieces of wood, not about the hundred 2x4's themselves. The piece is meaningless if viewed conventionally as an object; it is the process that is important.

Meaning. Idea. Sense. Metaphor. Interpret. Convey. Context. Visual. Verbal. Literal. Plain. Understanding. Open. Question. Significant. Intelligible. Doing. Meaning. Action. Reaction. Making. Construction. Sculpture. Art.

How can I speak of obsession when I am the one obsessed?

All I make is influenced by my life. For at the beginning and at the end, it is all I have.

The book **Endings** is a personal contemplation on life. **Endings** is a book about death. I was obsessed with death for a long period while I was young. As a diabetic it hangs over my head constantly, the result of the disease being out of control for any length of time is death. We all fear death, it is the final unknowable journey we make. Yet we trivialize endings as well. With **Endings** I wanted to poke fun at death: humor as a way to stave off the fear of the unknown and unknowable. Garbage cans and gravestones, dialogue taken from trashy dimestore novels, and a poem about a relationship breaking up. What is important here? Isn't it all the same in the end? Is any of this as serious as it so often is taken?

Theories. Ideas. Interpretations. Questions. Wonderment. Pursuit.
Answers. Meaning. Form. Function. Process. Product. The task.
The result. Does the end justify the means?

I still ask the same questions I did as a child.

Before I die, I want to look back on my life and know that I have
lived.

¹Jeanne Siegal, "Real Painting: A Conversation with Niele Toroni", ARTS, October 1989, 50

²Agnes Martin, "Reflections", ARTFORUM, April 1973: reprinted in Looking Critically: 21 Years of ARTFORUM Magazine, Amy Baker Sandback, ed. (Ann Arbor, Michigan; UMI Research Press, 1984), 141

³Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," ARTFORUM, December 1967: Looking Critically, 74.

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Sandback, Amy Baker, ed. Looking Critically: 21 Years of ARTFORUM Magazine. UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor Michigan. 1984

Siegal, Jeanne. "Real Painting: A Conversation with Niele Toroni." ARTS. October 1989

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts
Sarah M. Timberlake
has submitted this written thesis
as a supplement to the creative thesis
20 slides
which are in the permanent possession of the
University of Colorado and recorded with the
Department of Fine Arts

Approved by Barrison Root
Chairman of the Committee

Antoinette Rosato
Member of the Committee

Chia-Fung
Member of the Committee

Scott Churchill
Member of the Committee

[Signature]
Chairman, Department of Fine Arts

Slides and Medium

Mixed Media	8'x 20'x 15'	100 2x4's(right side)
Mixed Media	8'x 20'x 15'	100 2x4's(center)
Mixed Media	8'x 20'x 15'	100 2x4's(left side)
Handmade Book	8"x 12"x 1/2"	<u>100 2x4's</u>
Handmade Book	8"x 12"x 1/2"	<u>100 2x4's</u>
Handmade Book	8"x 12"x 1/2"	<u>100 2x4's</u>
Pine, polyester rope	40"x 48"x 10'	Potential
Pine, polyester rope	40"x 48"x 10'	Potential
Pine, polyester rope	40"x 48"x 10'	Potential (detail)
Mixed Media	10" x 4'x 36'	Path of Least Resistance (front)
Mixed Media	10"x 4' x 36'	Path of Least Resistance (side)
Mixed Media	10"x 4'x 36'	Path of Least Resistance (detail - ashes)
Mixed Media	10"x 4'x 36'	Path of Least Resistance (detail - sugar)
Installation	8'x 8'x 8'	"Reading Room"
Handmade Book	13"x 10"x 3"	<u>Existence</u>
Handmade Book	13"x 10"x 3"	<u>Existence</u>
Handmade Book	13"x 10"x 3"	<u>Existence</u>
Handmade Book	12"x 9"x1/2"	<u>Endings</u>
Handmade Book	12" x 9"x1/2"	<u>Endings</u>
Handmade Book	12" x 9"x 1/2 "	<u>Endings</u>

