

BODY, MAT, MARK-MAKING

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## ABSTRACT

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I explore painting and drawing through a binding of its performative activity with the practice of Brazilian Jiu-jitsu. Constraints are put in place to impose constant and abrupt switching between mark-making and grappling activity. The repetition involved in this structure fuses these two distinct activities into one. The experience of *mushin* (no-mind), a state one enters when deeply immersed in martial art activity, overlaps into the process of mark-making. This experience of mark-making subsequently influences the activity on the mat. Affect, as a pre-cognitive entity, participates alongside conscious activity in this feedback loop of influences. From this view, I revisit the idea of constraint and *mushin*. The resulting works depict fragmented bodies-in-process, produced under a state of *mushin* that involves the constrained combination of unconscious and conscious, mental and bodily influences.

## DEDICATION

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I would like to dedicate my thesis to my mother Diane Maisonneuve, for without her unconditional love and support throughout my life, I would not have been equipped with the necessary tools, strength and determination to achieve this important milestone.

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## PREFACE

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Prior to my graduate studies, I had pursued studio practice and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) as separate disciplines. Each had its own developed system of psychological preparation, information processing, method of analysis, and form of movement. Moreover, these systems were designed to achieve goals that seemed to me to be entirely distinct. I had in fact narrowly perceived BJJ as offering very little outside of its context, other than providing a regular physical release from my art practice that I took "more seriously". Over time and largely without conscious effort, the two disciplines began to entangle. My struggle with theoretical concerns related to my studio work was increasingly clarified through combat sport-related analogies. Paintings began to be more efficiently resolved while skipping rope in the studio. Planning out my grappling move set via hand-drawn diagrams and fragmented figures opened a new departure point for my drawings. Bodily movements in the studio were increasingly economized and effective leverage points were considered when lifting, pushing, stretching, and manipulating objects and art materials.

In spite of the prominence of the body in contemporary art practices and discourses, martial arts, combat sports, and sports in general remain rarely treated subjects. From this observation, I was led to explore comparisons from different angles between painting/drawing and BJJ. On a surface-level analysis, one can identify obvious contrasting points between the two disciplines. Fine artists can generally allow themselves great flexibility in terms of time, space, and material constraints, and "success" in the field is often debatable depending on one's interpretation of this achievement. The sport version of BJJ on the other hand imposes a much

more stringent system with time limits, spatial confinement, and bodily possibilities where winners and losers are clearly defined after a match.

It is largely due to my experience and understanding of BJJ that I began to explore ideas related to constraint, *mushin* (no-mind), and affect theory within my practice. When considering the organization of the BJJ gym, it becomes clear why I am interested in the interactions between brain, bodies, and boundaries. The immobile walls and rigorously defined geometric parameters of the competition mat set the stage for performances by unpredictable, yet physically vulnerable human bodies. One's competitive spirit can be diminished during the gritty physical exertion while another is able to push through his/her body's signal to rest. Rules and durational limits are in place while bodies, like paint, layer, mingle, mix, and overlap. Within the gym, it is only through these constraints that BJJ practitioners are made to focus on specific objectives; it is only through rigidly defined constraints that the body might succeed in performing spectacularly. But human vulnerability becomes apparent when hyperextensions, uncomfortable pressure, cramped calf muscles, and bruising happens in the process. Similarly, paint and drawing materials may inconveniently crack, smear, smudge, or drip in one's systematic practice. My interest lies in experimenting with a painting and drawing practice that is intimately connected with rules and durational limits as derived from the sport aspect of BJJ while these tensions are continuously at play.

My interest in weaving notions of constraint together with my studio practice also stems from my experience in painting graffiti. In my previous illegal painting sessions I submitted to far more material, spatial, and temporal restrictions than in the studio. A piece could only be

produced with the few materials brought on site, on a (found) surface that was deemed appropriate for the task, in an estimated time limit thought to be sufficient before attracting unwanted outside attention. Here, as in a successfully focused BJJ training session, the imposed constraints forced not only immediacy but also a satisfying sense of closure to the experience. In the studio however, I have often felt paralyzed by the overwhelming number of options. In addition, when thinking about having to paint somewhat frantically while experiencing varying levels of anxiety, I became interested in exploring art production under psychological states that differed from the usual comfortable, meditative studio practice. My thesis then involves a fusion of interests from both studio (in the traditional sense) and out-of-studio contexts to unravel my key themes. Emphasis is placed on the experimental application of a constraint-based model for art discourse and production, rather than an exclusive focus on the relation of my work to art theory and history.

## THE CLASSICAL GREEK RHETOR/ATHLETE

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The notion of a mind and body training in parallel in athletics is already apparent in ancient Greek culture. Greek gymnasiums from the classical era were purposely structured to train both the mind and body in one architectural space. I would like to introduce my paper with the following excerpt about intermingled rhetoric and athletic practice which resonates nicely with the spirit of my research:

... the connections between the two arts [i.e., rhetoric and athletics] emerged from daily habitual movement between athletic and rhetorical activities. While anointing and dusting his body, a young Athenian citizen in training might be seduced by a sophistic discourse on friendship, love, or the art of speaking well. Likewise, while listening to such lectures he could be called to anoint himself and prepare for a grapple in the wrestling room. The discursive movements, bound as they were with bodily training, emerged as an art of becoming that overlapped with and repeated the very movements and methods in gymnastic training." (Hawhee 131).

## CONSTRAINTS FOR THE WORKS

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<i>MUSHIN SPARRING DRAWINGS</i>		
Structure	Rounds per Drawing	Total Rounds
3 min. sparring round with training partner + 3 minute drawing round (repeat)	1	65 (13 per session)
Materials: graphite, blue pen, red pen, black pen, pink highlighter, white acrylic paint on 8 1/2" x 11" rice paper		

<i>MUSHIN SOLO DRILLS PAINTINGS</i>		
Structure	Rounds per Painting	Total Rounds
3 min. solo drill + 3 minute painting round (repeat)	5	15 (5 per session)
Materials: dark grey spraypaint, medium grey spraypaint, light grey spraypaint, fluorescent pink acrylic paint (with large brush), white acrylic paint (with mini-roller), light grey gesso (with mini-roller), matt medium on 80" x 60" canvas		

Upon being granted permission by the owner to conduct *Mushin Sparring Drawings* at my BJJ training gym (OpenMat Mixed Martial Arts), I subsequently set up appointments to meet my training partners outside of class hours. Every session adhered to the following structure:

Sparring:

1. Started the timer counting down from three minutes;
2. Shook hands with my training partner;
3. Sparring with my training partner (basically a "match" at a reasonable pace and intensity to avoid injuries);
4. Timer went off, and I immediately headed to my drawing station right outside the matted area.

Drawing:

5. Started the timer again, counting down from three minutes;
6. Began drawing spontaneously with any of the self-imposed selection of materials at my disposal;
7. Timer went off, wiped my hands, and headed back to the matted area to begin another round of sparring.

Sessions for *Mushin Solo Drills* were similar in structure. Like *Mushin Sparring Drawings*, the planning was relatively laborious and time-consuming while the actual production period was intense and brief. The process involved more emphasis on repetition in the BJJ-related activity, and a greater bodily involvement in the mark-making process compared to the drawings:

Solo Drill:

1. Started the timer counting down from three minutes;
2. Performed a "break fall" (controlled fall onto my back);
3. Performed repeated "hip escapes" (technique to create space with hips to improve position) across the room;
4. Performed a "technical stand-up" (considered a safe way of getting back onto one's feet)
5. Repeated until timer went off;
6. Immediately headed to the spray-painting booth with my (video) camera and timer.

Painting:

7. Put the camera down;
8. Put on disposable glove;
9. Put on respirator;
10. Started the timer again, counting down from three minutes;
11. Began painting spontaneously with any of the self-imposed materials at my disposal;
12. Timer went off, wiped my hands, and headed back to the matted area to begin another round of solo drills (hip escapes).



## CONSTRAINTS

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Constraints in art, BJJ, and everyday life situations may take shape in different forms. It is worth identifying their root of influence in order to shed light on their form of impact.

According to Elster, there are three types of constraints that can guide an artistic goal: intrinsic, imposed, and self-imposed. Intrinsic constraints are the built-in limitations inherent to material. This could mean human or object limitations in regard to their physical capabilities. Imposed constraints involve an external influence, such as when an artist is commissioned to complete a work with specific guidelines. And self-imposed constraints include restrictions put in place by choice from the artist.

My thesis-related artwork and research paper were subject to these three constraints. The intrinsic constraints related to my body and my chosen materials. The self-imposed constraints in some way derived from the sport aspect of BJJ, and to my restriction to a small assortment of materials. And of course, the constraints imposed by York University—to complete the various components by a fixed deadline—inflected the process as a whole. In addition, the production of *Mushin Sparring Drawings* could only take place during specific time slots that were ideal for both my training partner and I, during specific gym hours that did not interfere with other classes.

In all of the work, the intrinsic limitation of my body's ability to manipulate materials through varying states of exhaustion had a direct effect on the outcome. Marked gestures varied in precision depending on the number and intensity of the previous sparring or drilling rounds.

Nonetheless, it was conceived as a realistic time constraint to physically endure in both the BJJ and mark-making actions. Also intrinsic to the process was the role of the support. In *Mushin Sparring Drawings*, the fragile rice paper absorbed the weight and consistency of both dry (graphite) and wet (paint, sweat) marks that continually tested the strength of the delicate surface. The relatively durable unstretched canvas on the other hand easily supported the water-based paint and spray-paint. Elster's definition of intrinsic boundaries would also include my technical abilities to draw and paint. Whether enhanced or compromised due to the anxiety-inducing context of real-time performance, the success of my works depended on my skill to construct both compelling images and intriguing interpretations of partially articulated bodies-in-process.

The paintings and drawings were subject to three-minute rounds. All drawings were to be completed in one round, while the larger surfaced paintings were granted five rounds. In *Mushin Sparring Drawings*, I used drawing tools and a paper format often used for mapping out my BJJ move set: graphite, ink, an eraser, and white acrylic paint (as "correction fluid") on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Patches and puddles of acrylic could be pushed across the resisting rice paper for so long until they became dry and permanently fixed in place. During moments of mixing and overlapping, graphite marks revealed themselves subtly under thin coats of white paint, thin red ink marks bled, and fluorescent pink highlighter marks created visual focal points with their saturated vibrancy. This project subsequently inspired the production of *Mushin Solo Drills Paintings* where my entire body was physically involved in the mark-making. The wet materials could only fix themselves in place during the ensuing drilling round, giving the pieces a much more layered aesthetic. Intrinsic and self-constraints were continually interacting: the time limit

ensured an urgent pace; the frenetic decision-making affected the roughness of the marks; the time of paint drying impacted decisions for subsequent material use; sweat puddles dripped, and buckled the delicate paper. Within the ostensibly rigid parameters, material and spatiotemporal factors were constantly influencing the production of a not-so-rigid output.

Although many forms of drawing and painting allow for indefinite editing, the self-imposed time limit of three minutes strategically restrained me from an open-ended freedom to revise. When completing a drawing after sparring, the sheet was immediately put away. Although *Mushin Solo Drills Paintings* allowed for five chances to edit, it was mandatory to leave the piece as it was when the timer sounded in the final round. The pressure of an ongoing countdown reflects the imposed pacing of a BJJ match, ultimately preventing any kind of prolonged, real-time analysis or judgment. This need to self-impose a rule set to prevent endless possibilities is common to artists, and is precisely what Elster calls *maximization*. That is to say, attempting to maximize artistic value according to one's constrained criteria for what constitutes high value art (200). In my case, by removing the option to undo, all traces from drawing and painting are laid bare, and a productive tension is created to provide a stake in the outcome.

In addition to the durational constraint, a different type of pressure was present through the constant, abrupt switching between athletic training and mark-making. This type of repetition as a strategy mimicked the predictable structure of a BJJ training session and provided a reliable center of focus to suppress distracting thoughts and other external noise that may have disrupted ongoing momentum. The predictability involved in knowing the exact materials and

constraints that I faced in the moment is what allowed for a (constrained) freedom to take shape on both the mat and on the support.

Yves Klein, a dedicated practitioner of judo before he found success as an artist, put forth an art practice that was very much in line with the constraints, repetition, and precisely calculated nature of the martial arts body in training. In fact, he had identified a decisive point where a clear transfer of experience and ideas from judo to art took place:

Klein thus made a direct connection between his body paintings and judo. Indeed, these paintings, which he called *Anthropometries*, manifest the conception inherent in judo that the body is a center of physical, sensorial, and spiritual energy and that its power resides in the disciplined release of its energy to the outside. They also evoke the shadowy body image left by judokas on the dojo mat after they have fallen down. Klein had been sensitive to this kind of imagery from the very start of his involvement with judo, and now, just after he had stopped teaching and practicing, he made it the centerpiece of his art (Stich 172).

BJJ has its roots in Judo, and, while they share a focus on close-range grappling, they differ greatly in their positional emphasis: Judo has traditionally focused on the stand-up portion while BJJ concentrates more on the groundwork. Therefore traces of these bodily energies on the mat are even more prominent in BJJ. Although it was not my aim to create a mapping of human bodies, my works were very much about the kind of disciplined release that is described by Klein. That is to say, my own bodily energies from the sparring/solo drills were released as referenced bodily energies on paper/canvas. The physical exertion, bodily sensations, and euphoric adrenaline rush could not be separated from the mark-making process, particularly after repeated switching between the two practices. This resonates with Cheetham's remark that "In certain ways the canvas and judo mat were interchangeable, or indeed one, for Klein, as were his art and life" (100). Taking into account their traditionally understood functions, both are

essentially spatially constrained material surfaces onto which bodily actions take place. They provide a stage for possible success, failure, tentative or fluid thought and action, and conditioned habits. In both the drawings and paintings, all of these aspects are a part of the process and possible viewer interpretations.

Intrinsic to the mat/canvas is its fixity. That is to say, its denial of surface size modification that is normally an option in a digital format. When deriving a set of constraints from a specific source such as a martial art (e.g. the intrinsically uneditable mat/canvas), tension is both created (in the productive sense of creating a stake in the outcome) and liberated (from the daunting scenario of dealing with endless possibilities) from the constraint of creating a personalized system of self-imposed constraints. According to Klein's *judoka* friend, Jean Vareilles, Klein was technically sound on the mat but was ultimately unconcerned with the sport-related dimension of the martial art (Klein, Ichiro, Whittlesea, *Appendix*). This highlights a significant difference in our respective interests. Despite this, he did transfer elements that undoubtedly relate to the competitive experience. For example, Vareilles also pointed out that Klein transferred "rigor, mental discipline, extraordinary energy, concentrated in the repetition gestures from judo to his art and life" (Klein, Ichiro, Whittlesea, *Appendix*) as seen in his *Anthropometries* series. The disciplined approaches of the type outlined above describe a practice that firmly discourages options to deviate from initial intent in order to achieve Elster's definition of maximization in his own art.

The role of constraints can be further elaborated within the context of daydreaming. This specific form of disconnecting from one's reality allows for an infinite number of manifestations,

making it quite tempting to abuse its boundlessness. Elster cites an example of a couple that suffers consequences from enthusiastic adventures in unrestrained daydreaming:

... they were choking under the mass of detail. The visions blurred, became jumbles; they could retain only a few vague and muddled bits, tenuous, persistent, brainless, impoverished wisps.... They thought it was happiness they were inventing in their dreams. They thought their imagination was unshackled, splendid and, with each successive wave, permeated the whole world. They thought that all they had to do was to walk for their stride to be a felicity. But what they were, when it came down to it, was alone, stationary and a bit hollow. A grey and icy flatland, infertile tundra" (Perec qtd. Elster 184).

From this perspective, we can make a clear case for *constrained* daydreaming as a more ideal alternative. This highlights a key concern for any artist's continual search for self-imposed guidelines in order to avoid this sort of empty feeling of desolation. For example, meaning and value is produced in my work from "daydreaming" that transpires within narrowly defined, unalterable parameters. And any opportunity to daydream in between the drawing/painting and BJJ-related activity rounds was eliminated by the self-imposed immediacy of the rapid transitions between the two

One problem that may arise from setting one's own rules is the tempting choice to cheat. Elster illustrates this by describing a game of solitaire where one is expected to follow his/her own rules until it is convenient to disregard them in order to continue the pleasure of playing. But in order to maintain "joy, durable, satisfaction from tension and tension resolution", one may consider partnering with someone as a preventative measure (184). This particular strategy was employed in *Mushin Sparring Drawings*. The dynamic involved with the participation of

my training partner disrupted those (very) tempting moments to draw beyond the time limit, or take a break in the middle of a sparring round due to exhaustion.

Video recording both drawing and painting sessions served to further this aim. While the camera induced a feeling of being watched by an external authority or referee, the footage also now serves as proof of the works' complementary performance aspect even though it is excluded from the thesis exhibition. The decision to only show the drawings and paintings places emphasis on the works themselves. The viewer should experience the pieces with an understanding that intense, physical exertion took place in the form of grappling or drilling by viewing the title of the piece as opposed to feeling invited to address distracting issues about the athletic performance itself (e.g. sociological critique, relationship to my training partner, whether I won or lost the sparring rounds, etc.)

Repetition, as a crucial self-imposed, structural constraint, provided the process with productive, predictable anticipation. The systematic repetition involved was responsible for binding together the grappling and mark-making activities to the extent that the two-part process became intimately bound into an assembled entity. The discipline of music, like BJJ, is firmly “grounded on the repeatable experience” and offers a constructive analogy for “thingifying” in repetition. Rahn explains that “Repetition tends to reify a passage – to set it apart from the surrounding context as a “thing” to be mused on, abstractly considered, and conceptualized as a unit.” (Rahn, qtd. in Margulis 43) This “thingifying” was further reinforced by deciding to shorten the BJJ/mark-making rounds to three minutes instead of imposing a typical six-minute sparring timeframe as derived from BJJ training. A contrast of this productive effect would have

been to spatiotemporally isolate the two activities to the extent that they remain just that - two separate experiences. Such a displacement would ultimately compromise the potential of a dynamic feedback loop from which various factors (e.g. habits, physiology, conscious and unconscious thinking) can be made to influence each other.

From the understanding that bodies are in a constant state of process as opposed to the fixity intrinsic to the canvas/mat, it is worth revising Elster's idea of an intrinsic constraint. If by "intrinsic" we include the "physical limitations of human performers" (Elster 191), I would like to put forth a fitting analogy that redefines its constraining powers. I propose that the body as an intrinsic boundary is more comparable to the experience of securing an armbar in BJJ. Since one's bodily limitations (e.g. technical abilities in both art and combat) are constantly changing, the constraint in this case is a constantly shifting fulcrum point. In the case of the armbar, one's goal is to force a hyperextension of the opponent's elbow joint (as fulcrum), which is attached to a changing body in time. It is then useful to acknowledge the nature of this constraint in order to leverage output in both combat sports and art.

Working with intrinsic, yet dynamic constraints (such as the shifting limitations of an individual human body) introduces a degree of unpredictability to the equation. Self-imposed constraints can be implemented at the outset of a project, but may also be realized at some point during the process of production. For example, parameters may be modified after one deems the results they entail fail to conform to logistic, conceptual, and form-related expectations. In the case of *Mushin Solo Drills Paintings*, the changing nature of my own body warranted a necessary constraint edit. During a test run in the performance space, I realized a pre-existing injury was preventing me from performing certain techniques on the concrete floor. The athletic



portion of this series was then altered to accommodate my new limitations. Since it was mandatory to have realized *Mushin Solo Drills Paintings* in one take without interruptions, unstable intrinsic material constraints had to be dealt with in real-time. For instance, spray paint caps would sometimes clog to various degrees (sometimes completely), affecting the type of mark that fixed itself onto the canvas. This represented a re-shaped constraint of the medium's capabilities. Due to the self-imposed temporal constraints, there was no opportunity to replace dysfunctional materials. Dynamic intrinsic constraints, or failures within intrinsic constraints, became acknowledged as essential, mutable components of the process constantly pressured by imposed and self-imposed constraints.

## MUSHIN (NO-MIND)

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In most cases of art or athletic practice, one will at some point experience a state of flow, a complete immersion in the present moment. Thinking of my own tendencies to undergo such a state in producing martial arts-inspired work, I would like to direct attention to the Zen Buddhist concept of *mushin* (or *mushin no shin*).

No-mind is mushin. Mushin is the key to Zen and the martial arts. The state of no-mind is free of discriminating thoughts, judgments, analysis, or preconceptions. In such a state, one acts naturally, freely, marvelously. No effort is *mui*, an expression favored by Taoists. One interpretation of *mui* could be "perfect equilibrium" between action and stillness, or in the case of judo, between the hard and the soft. Once that state of being is realized, action (technique) is executed effortlessly in unlimited variations. The character translated as magic is *shin*, which can also mean "divine," "deity," "essential," or "core" (Stevens 121).

This idea of an essential balance between action and stillness figures prominently in BJJ as well as in my own studio practice. This productive means of exploring effortless uses of leverage happens due to specific circumstances. It may involve conscious motivation but cannot be activated on command. An artist may decide to consciously "will" the completion of an unfinished in the same way that a BJJ practitioner may will brute force in order to one-up an opponent. These strategies may result in success, but a dependence on brute strength, either on the marking surface or the mat, ultimately limits one's potential to the known boundaries of the body or mind at a given time. If one imposes "will" for desired results in these scenarios, there is often a more efficient use of leverage available that might be ignored or overlooked when the simpler expedient of brute force is employed.

Eugen Herrigel describes his journey in taking up the practice of archery in order to satisfy his curiosity about the Zen experience. Although he does not specifically mention the term *mushin*, he does elaborate passionately on a crucial point in his development that his master confirmed as a key access point to Zen: "... nothing definite is thought, planned, striven for, desired or expected, which aims in no particular direction and yet knows itself capable alike of the possible and the impossible, so unswerving is its power - this state, which is at bottom purposeless and egoless..." (Herrigel, 37). He goes deeper, and frames this particular moment as *right presence of mind*, and states that "the mind or spirit is present everywhere, because it is nowhere attached to any particular place" (Herrigel 37). This sort of detachment is precisely what allows one to act "naturally, freely, and marvelously" within the acknowledged constraints (e.g. of the canvas/mat/target) as outlined by Stevens' description of *mushin*. In the context of my adrenaline-fueled drawings and paintings, the power of resilience of focused, objective-less action was put forth and effectively sustained due to the self-imposed structure of repetition and durational limits.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Klein's reference to the concept of spirit and form common to many traditions in Asian philosophy shows evidence of his interest in Eastern thought as it was connected to judo. Although I have not come across any specific mention of the term *mushin* in the Klein-related literature I have read, Cheetham explains that "Judo was one of his ways to a Zen sense of nondivision and presentness" (103). Such threads in Klein's line of thought lead him to re-imagine the context best suited for his art. For example, he experimented by hanging his monochromes in both of his Judo schools in Madrid and Paris, where he was able to "consolidate there the active meditation common to Judo and the monochromes" (Cheetham

100). Cheetham goes further to explain that "both were sources of "sensibility" in the important sense that with each type of monochrome one could move from the embodied, material presentations on a defined surface to a sense of Zen limitlessness and oneness of spirit and form" (100). Just as the monochrome was intended by Klein to produce a shift of focus from material to immaterial experience of spirit and form, Herrigel's experience in handling the bow and arrow functioned in the same vein. An initial, conscious moment of the object-oriented situation eventually evaporated into non-conscious, *mushin*-charged right presence of mind.

Klein's dojo was then a site not only affording physical training, but a holistic honing of spirit and form. The *judoka*'s actions and spirit, through repeated drills and sparring rounds, were tightly woven with the viewing experience of the monochromes. A feedback loop of holistic entities was effectively put in place by Klein, enabling practitioners to be affected by the monochromes during the practice of their throws, and in turn, view the monochromes under a non-object-oriented state of *mushin*. The always changing, body-in-flux constraint participated in the circuitry of influence on both the mat and drawing/painting support. As a result of this experiment, Klein's dojo exhibition functioned as an alternative model to the conventional, quiet perception of work in the gallery and museum.

As mentioned in the introduction, the practice of mind and body was the norm in the Classical Greek gymnasium. It was structured this way on the grounds of the following practical basis: "... Isocrates points out, in at least two ways: 1) unified training in athletics and oratory provides a program for shaping an entire self, and 2) the two arts draw from similar pedagogical strategies wherein the respective instructors impart bodily and discursive forms of expression" (Hawhee 6). These pedagogical methods with "parallel rhythms, attention to detail, and broad

application" figured prominently in the feedback loops in the gym (Hawhee 6). Drawing from my previous quote about Greek gym training structure where a rhetorician/athlete listening to a lecture could at any point be called to present himself to the wrestling mat suggests that, at least in some cases, it may appear priority was given to athletic training. Although it was more likely they perceived no distinct boundary between the two kinds of activity. Neither was solely mind nor body. In my mark-making/BJJ-related activity sessions, rigid time structures ensured equal duration, giving both activities opportunity for feedback loop participation.

## AFFECT (*MUSHIN* REVISITED)

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From selected perspectives of affect theory, I propose a refined model of the *mushin* practitioner that more accurately describes the type of body-in-process participation involved in my works that I will call a Mushin-Affected Body (MAB). In the previous examples of the ancient Greek gymnasium and Yves Klein's dojo, I highlighted attempts from the past that effectively set up constrained environments to inspire a perceptual and active collapse of mind and body. The ancient Greeks practiced the honing of rhetoric and athletics in such close proximity that a circuit of mutual appropriation was produced. Klein, in his Judo and *Monochromes* believed in unifying spirit and form. The idea of a MAB acknowledges the mind and body acting in parallel, but goes further in recognizing affect as an autonomous participant in the assemblage of entities at work in *mushin* (Massumi 96).

This re-configuration, as applied to the works in my exhibition, recognizes the realm of affect as a consciously inaccessible space that inspired action on the mat and marking surface. It is pre-cognitive, where habits, or "tendencies" come about from "pastnesses opening onto a future, but with no present to speak of" since this unconscious, fleeting moment passes "too quickly to be perceived, too quickly, actually, to have happened" (Massumi 91). It draws no relation to the "raw domain of primitive experiential richness" because the fleeting moment, or realm of *potential* is excluded from the mind and body experience (Massumi 90-91). It is precisely by means of eluding conscious awareness that affect becomes equipped to activate *mushin*.

Affect's connection to unplanned habits resonates closely with Herrigel's experience in archery where "nothing definite is thought, planned, striven for, desired or expected" (Herrigel 7). Once a MAB is activated through affect, it is continually at risk of fading if not properly fostered. Ahmed argues that sustaining an affect involves work in the form of repeated habits (40). In BJJ, repeated actions such as drilling sweeps (to score points) make our body react towards the right direction associated between objects (dominant positions) and sustained affects (*mushin* affect). The MAB in action, both on the mat and marking surface, is constantly feeling, and relies on a flow of repeated habits to prevent excessive real-time problem solving. Constraints are then no longer acknowledged as limiting boundaries but rather as enablers that define a track for focused and valued *daydreaming* (Elster 185). In contrast to the idea of using brute force, "one "wills" it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on socio-linguistic meaning, to enter linear action-reaction circuits, to become a content of one's life - by dint of inhibition" (Massumi, *Autonomy* 91). Object orientation may be driven on a conscious, experiential level but *mushin* activity on the mat and marking surface involve both pre-cognitive and conscious influences. The present-less realm interacts with the present, continually affected and affecting over time.

This pre-cognitive realm, primed by habits to inspire action without effort or judgment, is the body's capacity to act. On the mat, my training partner and I embodied MAB when we displayed strong intent in the way arms reached out for grips, legs tangled to set up offensive action, and hips positions switched to set up contortion of an opponent's limbs. Such actions exemplify previously inculcated structured repetition. The heavy physical exertion in BJJ induces neurochemical transmitters into the complex concoction of *mushin*, such as dopamine

and endorphins. As a result, the MAB experiences a pain-deadening, pleasurable high that rewards risky behavior, and is said to increase abilities to link ideas together (Kotler 66-67). This state is vastly different from the usual, contemplative, meditative experience in the studio that parallels more closely the experience of the archer. The fact that the drawing/painting and athletic activity were intimately connected in time and space charges the work with conceptual emphasis on process. The work is produced *by* a MAB, it does not simply reference or represent the MAB.

As mentioned before, affective activity is separate (or at least separable) from lived experience. A clear distinction can be made between activity in the realm of potential and the realm of emotion. Affect shifts in and out of "emerging semiosis" as opposed to "untrammelled chaotic flux" or "categorical emotion" (Munster 110). Passion, rage, or shame may arise from spontaneously scribbling patterned lines, scrawling bodily shapes, or smudging graphite across the surface. As Massumi explains, "Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the *capture* and closure of affect. Emotion is the intensest (most contracted) expression of that capture..." (*Autonomy* 96).

Upon reflecting on this, the drawn and painted marks may be interpreted as emotional output escaped from affect, although it was not my intention to translate in visual form my personal emotions. Marked gestures were likely dramatic in form due to my immediately preceding engagement in controlled violence. Interestingly, among the neurotransmitters involved in this activity is *norepinephrine* which helps suppress overt, emotional bursts (Kotler 67). It is due in part to the presence of this neurotransmitter that my MAB could be more



effectively sustained. Given the current status of my body, depicting the kind of finesse as depicted by a calligraphy expert would have been impossible considering the frenetic nature of the project (unless perhaps I had been rigorously habituated to do so). Of necessity, the drawings embrace the provisional, unfolding, and fragmented.

The intrinsic, dynamic limitations on the body's activity are dependent on its *proneness*. This capacity to act relates to the Greek term *hexis*, a term widely used to describe one's bodily disposition in rhetoric and athletics. In line with the Greek gymnastic notion of mind and body acting in parallel, Empedocles stated that alteration in *hexis* lead to changes in thought (Hawhee 265). We can then see how an affect, as a dynamic realm of potential that configures bodily disposition, can activate *mushin*. Habits shape the disposition, which then primes one to activate *mushin* without dependence on sheer will.

In a way, the fragmented nature of the drawings also reflects the structure of grappling instruction. Hawhee points out evidence of this ancient tendency in a wrestling manual from the second century CE: "set up in the middle and engage the head from the right. You envelop him. You get under his hold. You step through, engage. You throw him with your right hand. You are thrown; having attached from the side you throw left. You throw him off with your left hand. You turn him around. You entwine. You turn around. You engage with a grip on both sides." (142). Through the repetition of chaining together fragments, one acquires a bodily rhythm that enables a forgetting of fragmented, conscious instruction (Hawhee 142). For instance, in *Mushin Solo Drills Paintings*, the repetition of the drills effectively modified my disposition to achieve and sustain *mushin*. This also led to the leaked experience of *mushin* from athletic training into

the painting space, which brought about its own capacities to modify *hexis*. This illustrates a circuit of feedback where constant changes in intrinsic bodily constraints that come about through affect can inspire new developments in both martial and visual artistic practices.

## CONCLUSION

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Due to the goals of this paper, I purposely omitted ideas concerning the potential of my art inspiring my grappling practice. It is worth mentioning though that, in the spirit of novelty emerging out of the feedback loop, my three-minute drawing activity at the BJJ gym inspired an instructor to consider experimenting with a similar class structure (i.e. three-minute sparring rounds following a three-minute discussion/problem-solving rounds), effectively “thingify”ing” sparring with *mushin*-charged learning. The feedback loop will continue to propel new ideas within my practice, as it did in the many underdeveloped experiments that led to my thesis exhibition.

The idea of an artist imposing constraints on themselves is obviously not a new one but I do believe it merits more attention as a key topic in the arts. We all live our lives in response to intrinsic, imposed, and self-imposed constraints, which ultimately shape our sense of identity and how we decide to navigate in a complex world of conscious and unconscious influences. In my particular case, the strategy of repetition offers unique perspective through its direct connection to constraints, as revised through the understanding that bodies themselves are constantly in flux. When the structural constraint of repetition is figured in the theory of affect, we may then go back to the work of Yves Klein's *Monochromes* for example, or other works that have explored similar themes such as Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraints* or Robert Morris' *Blind Time Drawings*, and assess their pieces through a re-modeled lens.

My research and theories within the framework of constraints, *mushin*, and affect has pried open new directions for my drawing and painting practice, and ultimately redefined my views about art planning, production, and reception. I do hope that by bringing back questions previously put forth by the ancient Greeks and Yves Klein, in conjunction with contemporary theories related to constraints and pre-cognitive activity, I may help set something in motion within, as well as beyond the specifically artistic context. The mind-body-affect triad is fitting for our time, one that consistently praises the cognitive over the corporeal.

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## APPENDIX A: EXHIBITION IMAGES

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The following images are from the exhibition titled *Body, Mat, Mark-making* by Scott Harber at the Special Projects Gallery at York University from April 12-18, 2015.













MUSHIN SPARRING DRAWINGS



structure : 3-minute sparring round + 3-minute drawing round (repeat)

1 drawing per round

13 rounds per session

5 sessions total

brazilian jiu-jitsu training partners : michael fung, tiffany bayliss, professor eliott bayev

MUSHIN SOLO DRILLS PAINTINGS



structure : 3-minute solo drilling round + 3-minute painting round (repeat)

5 rounds per painting

1 painting per session

3 sessions total

brazilian jiu-jitsu training partners : (none)

