The Phantom and its Reflection: Representing Absence

By

Gardiner O'Kain

BFA, The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, 2006

A THESIS ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF APPLIED ARTS

in

Visual Arts and Media Arts

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

2012

© Gardiner O'Kain, 2012

Abstract

In this paper I demonstrate my understanding of absence as a recurring theme in my own practice. I reflect on the theme of absence in an abbreviated art historical and literary context, and use theory, poetry, film and philosophy that address the phenomenon of absence, to investigate the value of absence as a theme in the production of my own images and objects.

Absence is central to my practice in large part because of the nomadic[1] childhood that has shaped my ways of relating to people, places and language. For this reason, I see the study of absence as a compelling element of ontology; as a way to situate my art practice and as a line of inquiry that is essential to my creative productivity. In this paper, and in light of the theme of absence, the reader may discern three predominant motifs: failure; language; the sea.

[1] The term, "nomadism" is used in different ways by different theorists. For example, Deleuze and Guattari mete out a complex definition of nomad art as having "'close-range' vision…and 'haptic' space," (492) and use the term to describe a way of considering history in a non-linear way: a "nomadology" (23). While these ideas may apply to my own work, I am more interested in the term, "nomad" as it is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary: "a member of a people who have no fixed residence but move from place to place usually seasonally and within a well-defined territory." The question then becomes, "What is my 'well-defined territory, and what am I doing here?'."

It is also my intention to demonstrate through the structure of the writing, a specific approach to creative thinking and working. In this text the reader may move through the work according to her or his own peregrinations and make her or his own connections between and among those ideas.[2] So while the thesis is specific: it is about my research; my aesthetic sensibilities; my journey, and my belief in the significance of absence in cultural production, the writing style is a way of acknowledging that an idea acts like a living organism. An idea is sustained and changed by every hand that turns it over to inspect it.

[2] See especially footnote 23, on Graham Badley.

Introduction to the Table of Contents[3]

This is a thesis in the shape of an archipelago[4]. It is meant—in both content and structure—to demonstrate my way of working, and to emphasize the fact that it is written by an artist[5]. Inspiration for this unconventional structure is taken from a number of sources including that of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, in which the authors make distinctions between smooth and striated space[6], and examine them as interrelated structural components, using fabric, music and the sea as models[7].

---

[3] See footnote 11, on footnotes.

[4] The archipelago is Nicolas Bourriad's metaphor for the "altermodern," a synthesis of modernism and post-colonialism, in which the artist is a cultural nomad and "displacement has become a method of depiction, and...artistic styles and formats must henceforth be regarded from the viewpoint of diaspora, migration and exodus," (np). These viewpoints are types of absences.

[5] I employ the thesis-paper format as a conceptual space, in which academic scholarship is given a poetic voice and visual presence.

[6] "Smooth space and striated space--nomad space and sedentary space--...are not of the same nature...smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space," (474-475)

[7] "...the sea is a smooth space par excellence, and yet was the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation. The problem did not arise in proximity to land. On the contrary, the striation of the sea was a result of navigation on the open water," (479). See also, figure 2, *The Bellman's Map*.

While the content focuses on specific ideas, I propose that we, as producers and consumers of art, approach writing and thinking as a territory to which we bring our own methods of navigation, both smooth and striated. And so the writings here are organized in a way that mimics the peripatetic[8] nature of my own methods for generating ideas. In other words they are purposely unorganized, and invite the reader to apply to them, her or his own striations, or trajectories[9] [10].

If the Table of Contents makes it seem as though there is a correct place to start, I can assure you there is not. Approach this thesis from any direction. Start with any chapter.

---

[8] There is something about physical movement that shapes thinking. The body and the brain move together. Aristotle knew this. It is alleged that he liked to think and to teach while walking around the Lyceum, and that these peripatetic lessons were unusual in an academic setting because of their improvised and informal qualities (Barnes 8-9). In art, one may draw a parallel between the act of walking and the act of the gesture. The gesture, especially when made repetitiously as it is in quilting (see figure 4, *Lay/Lie*), or in the systematic running-out of a ball-point pen (see figure 7) can become part of a contemplative, meditative or palliative practice. The repetitive gesture becomes a pilgrimage in place. Where does this pilgrimage take us?

[9] In some ways, this thesis is like a quilt. Deleuze and Guattari employ the quilt as both a metaphor for and an emblem of nomadism and migration. They describe a patchwork quilt as, "An amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways..." and that "...A quilt comprises two layers of fabric...with a filler in between. Thus it is possible for there to be no top or bottom... [Historically], we see that there is a shift from...embroidery...to patchwork...It is as though a smooth space emanated, sprang from a striated space, but not without a correlation between the two, a recapitulation of one in the other, a furtherance of one through the other...Patchwork, in conformity with migration, whose degree of affinity with nomadism it shares, is not only named after trajectories, but 'represents' trajectories, becomes inseparable from speed or movement in an open space," (476-477). See also, figure 6, *Lay/Lie*.

[10] Paul Richards' article, *Kant's Geography and Mental Maps*, explains Kant's position on the phenomenological experience of locating ourselves in space. (See also, **Your Trouble Reflected**, page 34). According to Richards, Kant understood that "space stems from the mind," and that, "the human mind has built into it a spatial schema [which] lies at the root of all thinking about, and knowledge of, the world; because it is only when the chaotic signals transmitted by the world to our senses are 'mapped' into it that any recognition of meaningful patterns can take place," (4). My aim here is to create an opportunity for the reader to locate themselves in this thesis by employing her or his personal "schema," so that the thesis may be re-made with each reading.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

All images are of artworks made and documented by the author, unless otherwise noted.

Acknowledgements

How strange we are in the world, and how presumptuous our doings. We feel helpless and incongruous, each with our tiny candle in the mist. Only one response can maintain us: gratefulness.

-Matthew Goulish (19)

I had no idea how much work the business of crafting a thesis would require. Other people knew (if you are reading this paper, then I am talking about you). These people guided me, but never too much; they saw me fail, and didn't hold it against me; they told me to keep going even and especially when there was no land in sight. For this I am grateful.

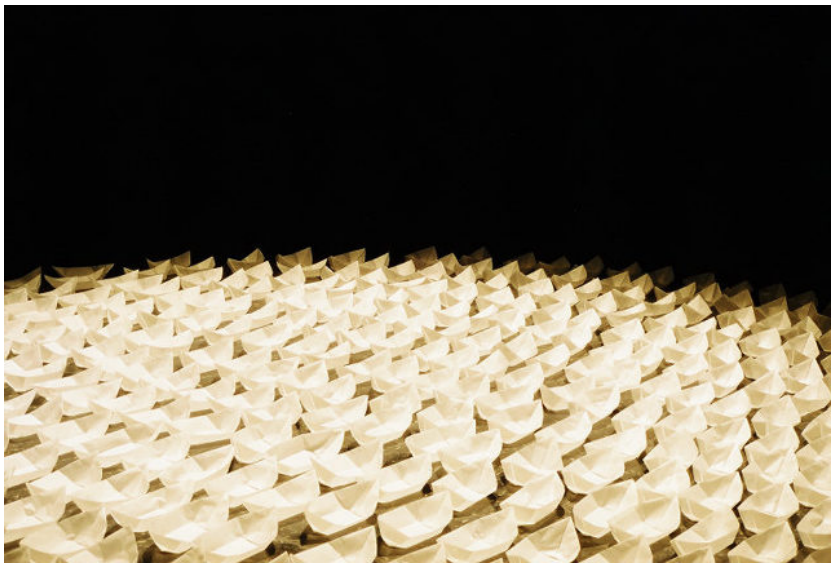

Fig.1: Still from *Safe Passage*, 2007. Paper, dimensions variable. Installation at SoHo/Chelsea20 Gallery, New York.

Dedication

(In recognition of support, influence, and forbearance)

To my teachers and supervisors: **Elegy for an Image**

To my fellow students: **The Sea**

To my family, to Kalman: **Is There Something Missing?**

To Cy Twombly: **Your Trouble Reflected**

To Theresa Hak Kyung Cha: **Words Fail Me**

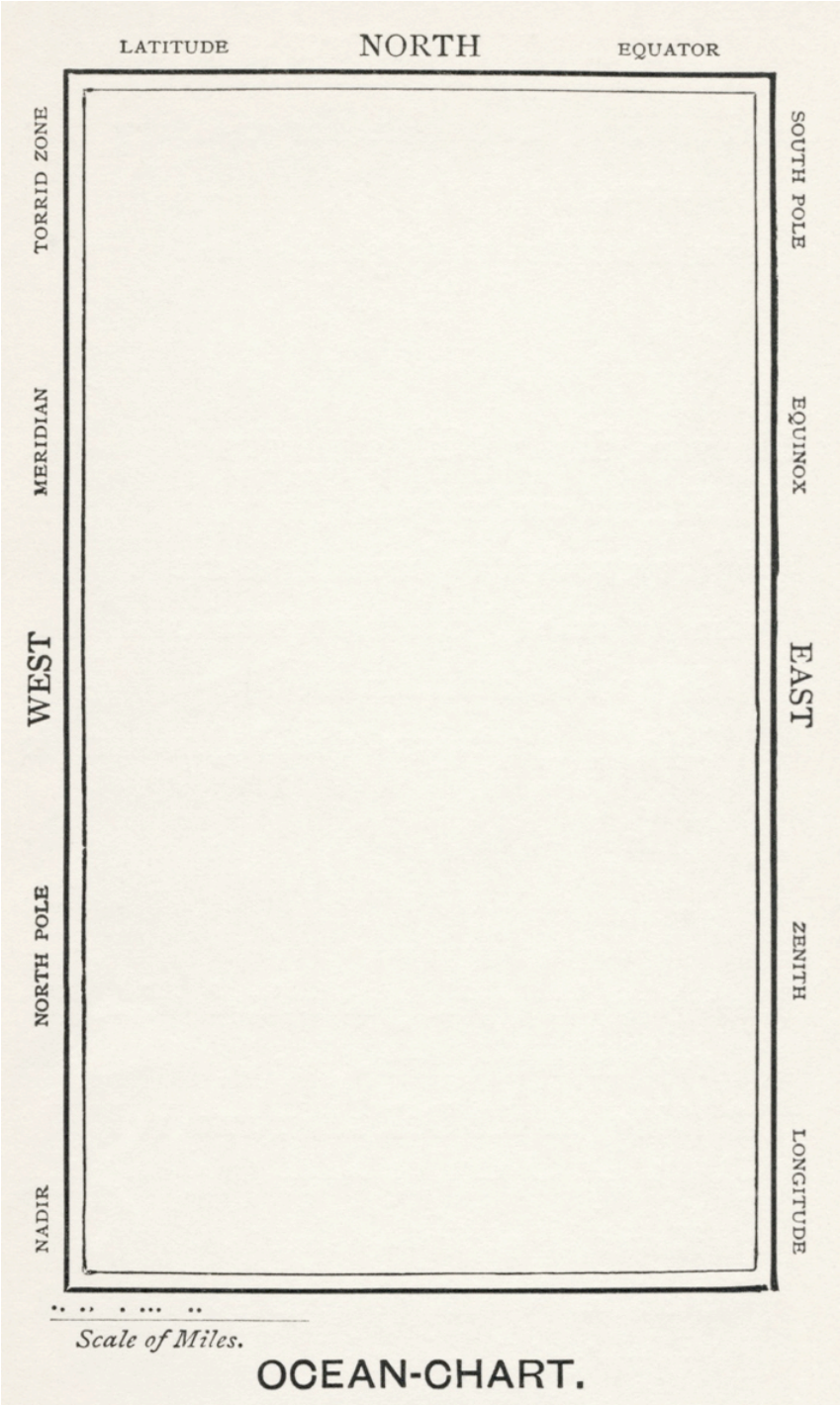

Fig. 2: Henry Holiday, *The Bellman's Map*, 1876. PD-US.

This is Not the Introduction

Perhaps you have chosen a safe route through this thesis, being careful to finish one chapter before moving on to the next, and always in order. If that is the case, then you are starting here. It's a good place to begin.[11] [12]

[11] A footnote about footnotes: to keep footnotes on the same pages as the hypertext to which they refer, and because of the volume of footnotes employed in this paper, you will notice several pages that are dominated by large, empty spaces. This is caused by what--in editorial jargon--is called "avoiding widows and orphans." I find this term especially fitting in relationship to the theme of absence, for it refers to those who are left behind. Because of the peripatetic nature of my practice, I think of the ideas, sketches, and projects that I have left unfinished as "orphans" of my own making. Eventually, my meandering brings me back to them. The artworks associated with this thesis were all at one time, orphaned.

[12] Not coincidentally, the separation between text and footnotes creates a horizon line on the page. That which rises above the horizon may be related to the "heavens" or the ecstatic phenomenology of aesthetics, while that which floats below may reflect the "earth" or the grounding influences gleaned from research, or they may simply provide an explanation. At the same time, ecstatic and informed may merge or trade places. This horizon is permeable. Even an actual horizon line, is only a construct of our imaginations. See also, footnote 14, on ecstatic and informed, and footnote 14 on Yin and Yang.

Perhaps you have taken an uncharted route through this thesis and you are only now getting to this chapter. If you are this sort of reader, then I offer you the following encouragement: You have arrived here at just the right time[13].

[13] See also, figure 2, *The Bellman's Map*, which illustrates the usefulness of a blank map. With it comes the accompanying excerpt from Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of The Snark*:

> He had bought a large map representing the sea,
> Without the least vestige of land:
> And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
> A map they could all understand.
> "What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators,
> Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?"
> So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply
> "They are merely conventional signs!
> Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
> But we've got our brave Captain to thank:
> (So the crew would protest) that he's bought us the best--
> A perfect and absolute blank!"

While the structure of this thesis is itself a metaphor for the nomadic methodology of my art-making practice, the main text and footnotes represent two approaches to practice: the ecstatic and the informed[14], respectively (though not to mutual exclusion).[15] For the purposes of this paper, the terms ecstatic and informed refer to two phenomenological approaches to making and viewing art: simply put, the ecstatic refers to the visceral; the informed refers to the intellectual.[16] These terms may find their parallels in Deleuze and Guattari's "smooth and striated" space, and in the words of artist and theorist Lee Ufan[17] who has been especially influential in the evolution of my aesthetic sensibilities. My own practice, in both art and writing, privileges an ecstatic approach.

---

[14] I borrow the words "ecstatic" and "informed," from Matthew Goulish who says:

> A creative artist, just like a creative audience member, may function as informed or ecstatic, or may switch back and forth at varying moments of the performance. But if the artist's intention is to step outside of the language to the extent that such an action is possible, and function creatively as an ecstatic over a sustained period of time, then no difference between two moments is insignificant. Stepping outside of familiar languages requires an attempt not only to generate a new language, but also to reinvent the very notion of familiarity (34).

The term "ecstatic" refers to both the emotional and embodied noumenon (see footnote 32 for definition) of art viewing and art making, while the term "informed" refers to the intellectual aspect of the phenomenology of art viewing and art making. By "step[ping] outside of the language," (34) we attempt to free ourselves from the limitations of intellectual knowledge.

[15] As in the concept of Yin and Yang, for any thing or any condition to exist, that thing or condition must have —and partly embody—an opposite.

[16] In *An Explanation of Beauty*, Nishida Kitaro re-imagines the Kantian idea of beauty. The Japanese word, *muga* can be taken to mean "detachment" (in the Japanese Zen sense of the term) which, according to Nishida, is integral to understanding beauty. It can also mean "ecstasy". In other words, one must have the ability to forget the self in order to see beauty, and this state of "no-self" is an ecstatic state. One must *absent* oneself in order to find an intuitive truth rather than an intellectual truth, (212-213).

[17] Lee Ufan explains his approach to invoking the ecstatic, "Art is poetry, criticism, and the transcendent. There are two different paths that lead to it. One is the embodiment of one's internal images. The other is the combining of one's inner thoughts and outer reality...I have chosen the second path, the path of encounter between inner and outer," (Art of Encounter, 10).

The invitation to read the chapters in a nonlinear progression is a reflection on the rhizomatic or Deleuzian "smooth"[18] nature of aesthetic thinking. If we see a text's structure as a metaphor, then the idea, "The medium is the message,"[19] finds its echo in literature, when the metaphor becomes the method (and it follows that the method becomes the message).

---

[18] In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari, discuss the non-binary qualities as well as the discrete characteristics of space. "Smooth" space is rhizomatic, and nomadic, while "striated" space is linear. One of the models they give is that of felt versus woven fabric (474-476), and this—in turn—makes me think of the haptic qualities of quilting which combine both types of textile. See also, figure 6, detail, *Lay/Lie*.

Another of their models is "the Maritime Example," in which they write:

> For the sea is a smooth space par excellence, and yet was the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation. The problem did not rise in proximity to land. On the contrary the striation of the sea was a result of navigation on the open water. Maritime space was striated as a function of two astronomical and geographical gains: *bearings*… and *the map*...For before longitude lines had been plotted…there existed a complex and empirical nomadic system of navigation…It is as if the sea were not only the archetype of all smooth spaces, but the first to undergo a gradual striation gridding it in one place, then another, on this side and that, (478).

I include this model because the sea is a recurring motif in my work. See **The Sea**, page 5.

Additionally, it is important to note that figure 6, *Lay/Lie* is evidence of my interest in the conflation of word and image, thought and feeling. The medium may suggest a feminine aesthetic, labor and repetitive gesture, and the outsider status of traditional crafts, but a more significant interpretation may be related to W.J.T. Mitchell's description of the word-image relationship as "...a constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. What varies is the precise nature of the weave, the relationship of warp and woof," (1081).

[19] Marshall Mcluhan. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*.

As a way of convincing you that I am not the first to do this, I present three examples of structure-as-metaphor: Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night A Traveler*[20]; Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*[21], and Matthew Goulish's *39 Micro-lectures: In Proximity of Performance*.[22] My choice to write an unorthodox thesis

---

[20] *If on a Winter's Night A Traveller*, by Italo Calvino is a series of seemingly disjointed stories presented as ten "first" chapters told by a number of personae, and unified by a sub-plot in which fictional readers repeatedly try and fail to locate a "second chapter". The titles of each first chapter turn the table of contents into a sentence that is in itself a reflection of the book's refusal to provide a middle or an end:

> If on a winter's night a traveler
>
> Outside the town of Malbork
>
> Leaning from the steep slope
>
> Without fear of wind or vertigo
>
> Looks down in the gathering shadow
>
> In a network of lines that enlace
>
> In a network of lines that intersect
>
> On a carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon
>
> Around an empty grave
>
> What story down there awaits its end?

[21] Cortazar's novel may be read in three different ways: by reading the chapters out of numerical order and according to the direction of the author; by reading the chapters *in* numerical order, or by reading the chapters in a random order, determined by the reader.

[22] Matthew Goulish's influence in my work began when I studied with him at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. The first chapter of his book instructs the reader:

> I did not intend this book to have a beginning, an end, or a middle. I did not intend it to become a book at all. I intended to pull together thoughts that I considered important. I wanted to express them by letting them sit next to one another…Consider this book like an interrupted performance. The writer left the stage because of a sudden illness, which has now become prolonged. The writer will not return. I have been asked to stand in…Please remember I am only a substitute…Always remember that this book is not important. That other writer, that other performance, that other book that will now never be written—that was the necessary one. (3-4)

If by blending anecdote, metaphor, and intellectual inquiry, it seems that my own approaches closely emulate Goulish's style. It is probably because they do.

has its roots in the arguments made by Graham Badley in his article, *Academic Writing as Shaping and Re-shaping.*[23]

My own metaphor-as-method is demonstrated in this thesis, in two ways: first, the organization of the chapters echoes a peripatetic way of thinking and making art. While there is no correct order to the chapters, each contains themes that resurface in other chapters. These connections allude to the core ideas of the thesis; second, the body of the text is written in prose whose aim is to engage the reader's aesthetic sensibilities, while the footnotes reflect the research, influences, and inspirations that form the foundation of my practice.[24] It is important to note that the footnotes are as much a part of the content of this thesis as is the main body of the text.[25] Additionally, the Index serves as an alternative map through—or a summary of themes within—the text.[26]

---

[23] In this article (please note that all italics are the author's), Badley argues that the value of language is in the way we re-shape it to meet our needs. He says that academic writing serves us best when it is a "*constructive and creative process of learning or transforming what we know*, whereas 'writing up' sounds more like *an unconstructive and uncreative claim to be stating what we already know*," (212). Badley goes on to say that, "[w]riting is a beginning to the production of knowledge...This approach to the complexity of writing also takes us a long way from the banalities of 'writing-up'...Our writing then becomes a form of *learning by doing, learning by trying, learning by experimenting*...Each piece of writing becomes a *reflective and reconstructive essay,*" (214). Further, the author argues for a re-imagining of academic writing in which, "The new forms of academic writing should encourage a creative *re-shaping* of all existing genres as well as an enthusiastic admission of new *shapings*, such as bricolage, the kaleidoscope text and the patchwork text, into one general, undifferentiated, academic text," (217).

[24] While the footnotes reflect the underlying ideas and concepts that inspire the main text, the reader should not expect the footnotes to be written in a strictly academic style.

[25] See also, footnote 11, on footnotes.

[26] The significance of major themes is identifiable by virtue of the frequency of repetition in the Index. For example, by referring to the Index, the reader sees that the word "horizon" appears on seven pages of this thesis.

Rather than thinking of this as an archipelago[27] it may comfort the reader to think instead of this paper in the shape of a boat,[28] and to allow the Table of Contents and Index to stand in for chart and compass[29].

[27] See the **Introduction to the Table of Contents**, page ii.

[28] See figure 1, *Safe Passage.*

[29] Alternatively (but also related to my practice), think of this thesis as a textile, with a warp and a weft. Think of it as a text-ile, or mix the metaphor and think of it as a text *île.* And here I must ask for the reader's forbearance, or offer a warning to those who are just starting here: puns, double meanings, and conflations of words are also addressed in my art work. They are included in my writing because they are a part of my practice and a very real way in which I make connections between ideas. See also, figure 6, detail Lay/Lie.

Fig. 3: *Horizon Drawing 1 (working title)*, 2011 Graphite on illustration board, area of detail 11"x14"

Failure is the Only Option

It is widely understood that both language and images are incapable of conveying meaning in a holistic way. The signified is absent from the signifier. This painting of a pipe is not a pipe.[30] Yet we are undeterred.[31] Why? Is there something in the *attempt* to convey meaning that conveys more than the words or images impart? Is the *attempt* itself a referent for the Kantian *noumenon (Critique of Pure Reason, 185),*[32] is the *attempt* the *ding an sich*?

The subject of absence especially lends itself to this question, because it inherently defies representation. To represent absence is to negate that which one seeks to invoke. And so, with this impossibility a given, we must accept that failure is the only option.[33]

---

[30] Similarly, it is possible that these pieces of paper are not my thesis.

[31] One man sees another, desperately searching the kitchen for his house keys. The first man asks, "Where did you last see them?" The second man says, "In the bedroom," the first man asks, "Then why are you looking in the kitchen?" The second man answers, "Because the light is better in here."

[32] Noumenon: the unknown, or a thing that is not perceptible to our sensible knowledge.

[33] See also, footnote 44, on Matthew Goulish and failure.

The Sea

Is it any wonder that artists and writers take to the sea? The language of the water is a lexicon built on metaphors, and until the availability of air travel in the early twentieth century, the sea was the only way from "here" to "there." It could be seen as that which connects us to--or separates us from--the "other."[34]

The sea is a referent for that which is absent. The act of looking out to sea is an act of longing and anticipation; an act that begins a journey, real or imagined; an act that reaches toward the infinite; an act that wishes for someone to come home. It is the haunting compulsion to be in a place that is "no-place."[35] There is a word in the Japanese language for this "no-place," *ba*.[36]

---

[34] On the subjects of the sea and absence, Dionne Brand says:

> " The word *gaze* only applies to water. To look into this water was to look into the world...how magnificent and terrifying. The sea was its own country, its own sovereignty. There was always some uncontrollable news from it. Either it had taken a fisherman or it was about to wash a house away. It was either taking a child or would take a child. To take a child. That type of away was the most fearsome news," (7).

[35] See footnote 73 on Bas Jan Ader.

[36] *Ba* functions in the Japanese language as a conjunction, and emphasizes a transitory quality. Lee Ufan, in interpreting the work of philosopher Nishida Kitaro, says, "the desirable work of art is one that becomes a world of place seen by turning it into nothingness through limiting conditions. Nishida's philosophy is remarkable for connecting nothingness with place," (190). The "limiting conditions" of my own work are related to mediums (quotidian materials such as paper, graphite, ball-point pen and thread or string), and aesthetics (which tend to be spare).

The allure and sublimity of the sea is described by Herman Melville in *Moby Dick*[37] and is echoed in artworks as varied as the quilts of the late-nineteenth-century Eastern seaboard[38] and the *Horizon Series* photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto.[39] It is the sole subject of Abbas Kiarostami's short films entitled, *Five: Dedicated to Ozu*.[40] Perhaps there is also an element of the sublime[41] in the ungraspability of absence.[42]

37

> "Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coeties slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?--Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep...Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land...No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in...Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?...as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever...And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all," (3-5)

38 According to author and quilter, Linda Eaton, in maritime communities, quilting was a method by which women would pass the time, while waiting for their partners to return from the sea (18-21). This tradition may be seen as a type of meditation (by busying the hands, the mind is quieted), an act of faith (in anticipation that the quilt would be put to use by the reunited couple) or as a way to make one's own journey-in-place, substituting nautical knots with literal stitches. See also footnote 16, on "intuitive truth."

39 Sugimoto says that his black and white photographs of the horizon at sea articulate his feeling that, "this is the creation of the universe and I am witnessing it," (Art 21)

40 Filmmaker Ozu Yasujiro remains a key influence in my work. His films are best recognized for their use of stationary camera angles, and for their portrayal of the disintegration of the Japanese family structure in modern Japan.

41 The Japanese word *yudai* (sublimity) suggests that certain aesthetic conditions may evoke an awareness of the ephemeral beauty of a world in which change is the only constant (Richie 71).

42 In his article, Art: Reaching for the Sublime, Peter Bensen uses the motif of the sea to interpret Kant and to apply the idea of the sublime to modern art. He writes, "We experience the sublime...when confronted by something we cannot fully grasp or understand, but which prompts us to strive towards such understanding...this restless motion, like that of the sea, never reaching a final conclusion, is strangely pleasurable. So the incomprehensibility of modern art is part of its pleasure. When we begin to feel we understand some aspects of the artist's intentions, this prompts us to try to understand more, but the strangeness and complexity of the work constantly eludes us."

Fig. 4: Detail, *Absence Drawing 2* (working title), 2012. Paper, and graphite. Area of detail approximately 6"x10"

Absence and the Souvenir

When I think of absence depicted on paper, I also think of Aiko Nakane.

Aiko Nakane was educated first in Japan, in the arts of Shodo (calligraphy) and Ikebana (flower arranging), and later during the 1940's, at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago.

While a student at the Art Institute, Nakane made occasional trips to visit her family in Japan. She would return to Chicago with small gifts of paper and brushes for her fellow students. Eventually, they started requesting more than she could fit in her suitcase. And so, in response to demand, she opened a paper shop on Clark Street. For the rest of her life, she provided us, local artists and bookmakers, with paper and brushes. She died in 2004, and her family closed the shop in 2007.

I have souvenirs[43] from Aiko's. When the shop was preparing to close, I collected small scraps of paper trimmings from their "free" bin. These still sit in my desk, in a little envelope, probably too small to be used for anything purposeful.

---

[43] Susan Stewart says this of souvenirs: "The double function of the souvenir is to authenticate a past, or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time , to discredit the present. The present is either too impersonal, too looming, or too alienating compared to the intimate and direct experience of contact, which the souvenir has as its referent. This referent is authenticity," (139). Perhaps this is also the role of art: to serve as a referent that authenticates experience.

While high-quality Japanese paper is still available at Chicago's larger art supply stores, the experience of shopping at Aiko's was an aesthetic one, and it remains unmatched. Every purchase was wrapped carefully and elegantly, and, more remarkable, Aiko's daughter, a woman in her 50's, would make you wait for your receipt, as she deftly, with a few spare marks, drew a picture of a cat on it. "So that you will remember to come back," she said.

Like many Chicagoans, I have my material souvenirs of the little paper shop.

Still, the more meaningful souvenir is the absence itself.

An Interruption is a Type of Failure

"Why are there so few Western artists informing your practice?" This was the question that Randy Lee Cutler asked after I submitted my Contextualization Exercise in a course at Emily Carr University. I had included an essay by Gao Xingjian and art works by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Lee Ufan and Jen Bervin. Reading this question, my first thought was, "But there are *too many* Western artists informing my practice!" My thinking was interrupted by this question. Sometimes an interruption changes the course of a thought.[44] Sometimes, an interruption requires an answer.[45]

---

[44] Matthew Goulish makes failure-as-interruption the through-line in his practice. I take from his methodology that failure is the greatest asset to a creative practice. Rather than being the opposite of success, failure is instead, an interruption that redirects a trajectory and creates its own kind of peripatesis. Failure is central to my thesis artwork, in that absence is impossible to portray. I hope that the result of my efforts to represent absence will yield a catalogue of failed attempts.

[45] Perhaps my focus on Eastern artists and writers is an attempt to create a balance in my research, or to reify my personal mythology as a mixed-race Asian-American. This willful straying from the Western canon is itself a type of absence: a vacillating errantry that is typical of mixed-race identity, wherein it is possible to identify as sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes fully neither (see also footnote 49 on *tertium quid*). By attempting to temporarily absent myself from my Western identity (of course this is not really possible: another failure that informs my practice), I assert my dissatisfaction with the limitations of that position. This may be related to what Edward Said identifies in his book, *Orientalism*, as the phenomenon of using the "other" to solidify one's understanding of one's own identity. In other words: I know better who I am, now that I know I am not you, (43-44). In my practice, stepping outside of known territory, allows me to better understand that territory from which I come.

The fact is that Western artists' influences may predominate in my work.[46] [47] For me, Western influence is inescapable. And this is one of the reasons why I try to pay closer attention to Eastern influences.[48] By privileging nonwestern influences and by working around the theme of absence, I investigate a type of otherness--a *tertium quid*[49]--that is specific to being biracial.

---

[46] While a continuation of Minimalist tradition is evident in my works, in that I favor limited palettes, spare compositions and economical applications of materials, my aesthetic is also shaped by my investigation of Japanese aesthetics, in which *ma* (the space around or between things) is seen as a dynamic formal element. It is impossible to deny Western influences in almost any post-colonial art practice, and I accept this fact, but I also reserve the right to position myself in the liminal space that Nicolas Bourriaud calls the "alter-modern."

[47] See also, **I See Why**, page 28.

[48] See also, footnote 50 on dismantling the colonial model.

[49] From *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, "tertium quid:...'some third thing'...Something (indefinite or left undefined) related in some way to two (definite or known) things, but distinct from both."

In truth, what interests me is the art and theory of artists who are nomadic, or outside the dominant discourse, who have broadened their roots or have been born into a culture that was not their parents' culture, or combined methods to create a hybrid practice.[50] Perhaps there is an emotional resonance here that guides my interests.[51] I also look for a common aesthetic expression among these artists (and myself).[52] Does the experience of identifying as an outsider—a nomad—color ones sense of aesthetics?[53] All the artists in my Contextualization Exercise, including the lone non-Easterner, Jen Bervin are connected by their status as outsiders (either by the distance from their "homelands" or by dint of their medium),[54] and by the fact that they are all both writers and visual artists.[55] Does this hybridity indicate a necessity for language-image conflation that is part of the outsider's toolbox? Are language and image used for navigating through unfamiliar or hostile waters?

---

[50] In the late 1960's Lee Ufan was embraced by East Asian artists for his promotion of a "polycentric" art world that would dismantle the, "hierarchical colonial model, (*Marking Infinity*, 29)

[51] As a Japanese-Irish-American, raised by my Irish-American mother, aesthetics were the first tangible connection that I felt with the other side of my heritage. In lieu of language and in the absence of that side of my family, Japanese aesthetics drew me in, acted as a surrogate and informed my personal mythology.

[52] In an interview conducted by Nakao Chiho, Kimura Shoshin explains the aesthetics of absence in the Japanese tea ceremony when he says, "It is an art that goes beyond the beauty you can see with your eyes, asking you to develop an aesthetic understanding of that which is not present, the minimalist beauty that is created when everything interacts harmoniously around a single space. The value of the tea ceremony can be found...in that type of beauty which cannot be seen." (Niponica, 11)

[53] The "outside" is also addressed in relationship to Japanese aesthetics and the tea ceremony. Sen Soin, a tea-ceremony master who was educated as an art historian says, "As demonstrated by the expression 'the beauty of the imperfect,' [*wabi sabi*] the Japanese find beauty in the margins--we have a mindset that seeks out beauty in the incomplete." (Niponica, 12)

[54] I refer here to Bervin's quilting which falls under the aegis of "craft" as much as it garners recognition for being "high art."

[55] Bervin received an MA in Poetry at The University of Denver; Gao Xingjian won a Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000; Lee Ufan is a widely published philosopher and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha published *Dictée*, an allegorical biography of her mother and grandmother.

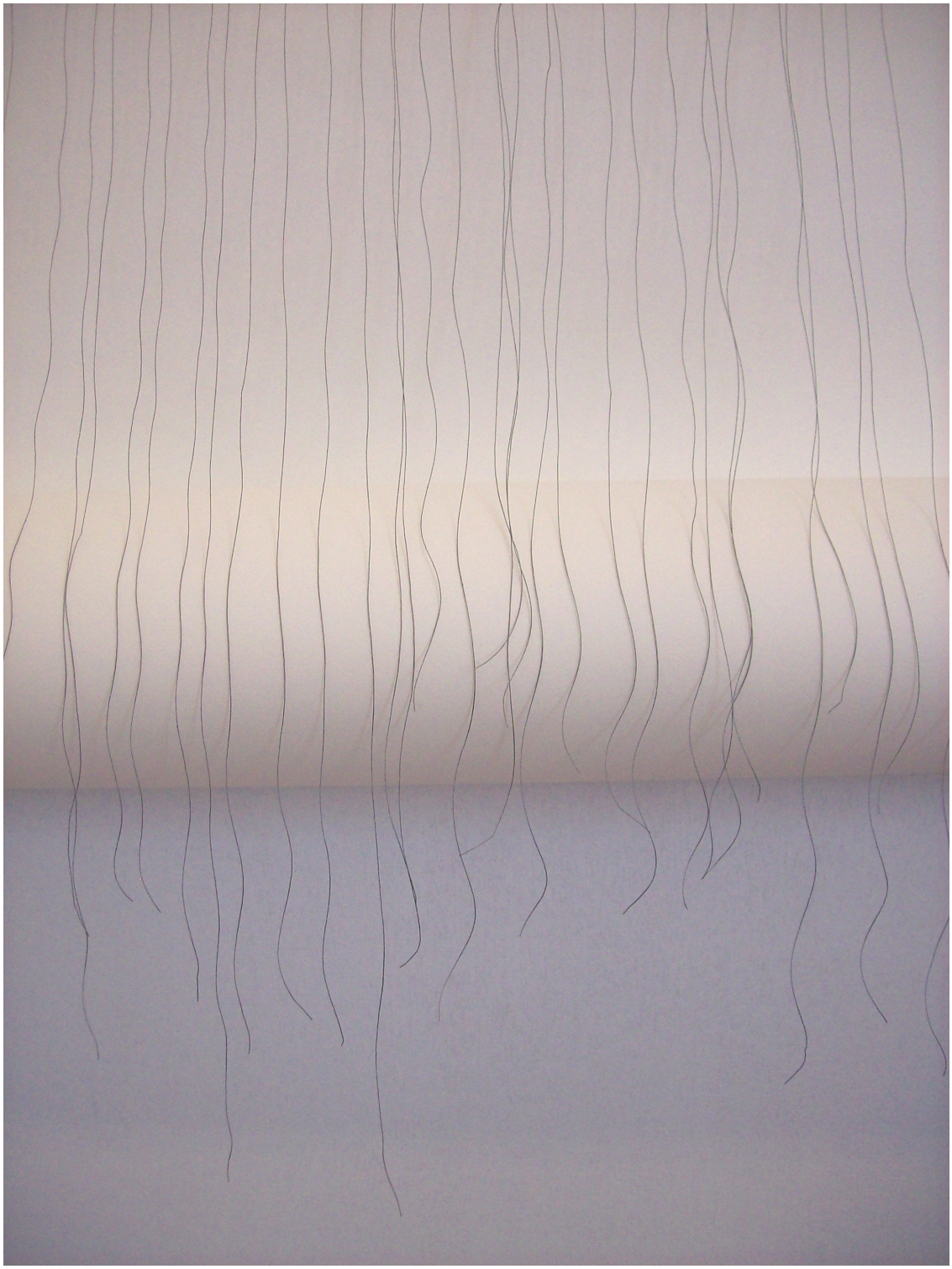

Fig. 5: Detail, *We Discerned Vessels So Far Off...We Doubted If We Were Not Counting Our Eyelashes*, 2011. Paper, graphite, and thread. Dimensions variable.

Paper, Pencil, Pen, Thread, and String

The itinerant nature of my methodology is evident in both my way of thinking and in the mediums that emerge in my expanded studio practice. In the spirit of *zuihitsu*,[56] the more mediums I know how to use, the more methods I have for investigating different ideas. However, for the purposes of this thesis project, I limited my mediums to paper, pencil, pen, thread and string. Ultimately, the found objects shown in Here+There (the Thesis Exhibition) stand in for what is not there, and act as souvenirs of this reductionist trajectory[57].

Jerry Saltz says of the artist Andrea Zittel's work that there is liberation through limitation and that this ethos may be related to the I Ching (n.p.). For me, setting limitations is a way of tethering myself to an idea. By narrowing my focus I foreground the element of line.

Line (as horizon, text, or measurement) is the apparatus with which these works are made.[58] Line is mutable in the same way that ideas are mutable. Line conjures meanings that may include tension; poetic metre; borders; boundaries;

---

[56] The word, *zuihitsu* is the Japanese term for working in an improvisational manner--literallly, "Following where the brush leads," (Richie 12).

[57] See also Elegy For an Image (on page 32), and figure 7 (page 33)

[58] With exhibitions such as *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, (MoMA, 2011), we begin to see evidence of a contemporary interest in the mutable nature of line and its relationship to ideas. This feels modern and smart, but the acknowledgement of the elegant simplicity, and the conceptual potency that is contained in the element of line, was made long ago, by Leonardo da Vinci. In his typically prescient manner, he said, "Line has in itself neither matter nor substance and may rather be called an imaginary idea that a real object," (*On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, 23).

and connections. Line is both versatile and limiting; it fixes or obscures meaning; a line can be salient or implied; it can tether or isolate. The elemental nature of line provides parameters for my praxis. This limitation anchors the work and allows the line to come around, to connect, to meet its origin and in so doing, to take a shape.

What Becomes an Absence

The experience of absence is a common bond among people. But what is absence? More specifically, what is the absence within us? It is the taken-for-granted-but-impossible-to-describe.

Absence is an abstract noun. In investigating the meaning of the word, most dictionaries offer only a limited explanation that relies as much on what absence is not, as what it is.[59] [60] In thinking *around* absence, it is helpful to create a list of different types of absence, and related words. For the purposes of my practice, the evolving index of absence includes the following words: silence[61]; errantry[62]; aporia[63]; omission; estrangement; vanishing; exile; shadow; nomadism.[64]

---

[59] See also, **Words Fail Me**, page 23.

[60] Fittingly, the meaning that the word "absence" wants to convey, is itself absent.

[61] Susan Sontag writes about art and the absence of the subject in "The Aesthetics of Silence." She says, "Whatever goal is set for art eventually proves restrictive, matched against the widest goals of consciousness. Art itself a form of mystification, endures a succession of crises of demystification; older artistic goals are assailed...maps of consciousness are redrawn...The later version of the myth (of art) posits a more complex, tragic relation of art to consciousness

[62] See also, footnote 72, on *maborosi.*

[63] An impasse, doubt, or paradox. In his book, *Aporia*, Derrida wrote about what he called, 'possible-impossible aporias," (78-79) situations whose possibility was dependent of their impossibility, (Reynolds, n.p.).

[64] See also, footnote 1, on nomadism.

Words Fail Me[65]

If art work falls short of describing absence, then by comparison, the English language makes images and objects seem at least heroic in their attempts. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (in an uncharacteristic display of inexactitude), defines the word "absent" mainly by what it is not, "not present...not existent," (6). It is some comfort to me that decades of editing, by experts in the nuances of the language, still yield only a vague and indirect definition of the word. We are in this together.

Language figures prominently in my art as well as in my methodology. I often look to languages other than English to locate more precise articulations of ideas. I have found the Japanese language to be especially useful in thinking about absence. In a section of this paper called, **The Sea**, I discuss the word *ba* ("place" as a transitory thing, a conjunction).[66] Two related words (also

---

[65] These words refer to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's 1975 performance piece, *Aveugle Voix* (Blind Voice).

[66] See footnote 36.

Japanese) are *mu*[67] (emptiness) and *ma* [68] (negative space, but please read the footnote). I find these words and their subtle (untranslatable) distinctions helpful in understanding the theme of absence. I can say with some confidence that my work is not about *mu* (at least not in the nihilistic, Western sense) but it is about *ma.*

Instead of representing absence, I represent *around* absence. Think of the stars that comprise Pleiades.[69] This faint constellation is visible only when one looks slightly away from it. Center it in your field of vision, and it vanishes.

Absence is a type of blankness that is recognizable only because of its once-being, or not-yet-being a presence. Absence can mark a loss: can be a product of longing. Absence can be an exile, seen from the perspective of those

---

[67] This word, *mu* is the only text that appears on the grave marker of the late Yasujiro Ozu, a filmmaker whose work figures largely in my retinue of influences, and whose films frequently reflect on the dissolution of the Japanese family structure following WWII. So although I choose to focus on *ma* in my own work, *mu* is a related concept. The two terms are separated by a matter of degrees rather than leagues. *Mu* means emptiness.

[68] Andrea Day gives the following definition of *ma*:

> The Japanese spatial concept is experienced progressively through intervals of spatial designation. In Japanese, *ma* the word for space suggests interval. It is best described as a consciousness of place, not in the sense of an enclosed, three-dimensional entity, but rather the simultaneous awareness of form and non-form deriving from an intensification of vision. *Ma* is not something that is created by compositional elements; it is the thing that takes place in the imagination of the human who experiences these elements. Therefore *ma* can be defined as **experiential place** understood with emphasis on **interval**.

[69] The word Pleiades refers to the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione. The etymology of the word is debated, interestingly, and according to the National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center's website, one of the suggested meanings comes from the Greek *plein*, "to sail." Again, we return to the sea.

who stayed.[70] Absence is the vacuum that opens in the wake of leave-taking, evident to both the leaver and the left.[71]

Sometimes, absence is a temptation; an errantry that draws one away from one's life; a recurring, self-inflicted deterritorialization.[72] [73]

Concurrently, absence can be a souvenir or the referent for what lies within us. [74] [75]

What if you don't know what you are missing? This is supposed to make life easier—not knowing what you're missing. This is not really an absence. An

---

[70] See also footnote 11 on Widows and Orphans

[71] Dionne Brand writes, "When you take a journey, you are no longer yourself. Already no one knows you any more, neither your family nor your friends. The day you decide to leave, the tablecloth seems foreign, the room where you have slept forever seems unfamiliar, as if someone has left it already," (90).

[72] This particular concept is illustrated in the film *Maborosi*, directed by Kore-eda Hirokazu. *Maborosi no hikari* means "phantom light," and may be equated with the lore of the will o' the wisp, in which ghostly lights lure travelers into bogs, the lights recede as the person approaches, much in the way that the horizon recedes when one moves towards it. In Kore-eda's film, a widow comes to terms with her husband's death when she realizes that for unexplainable reasons, some people are lured away from their lives.

[73] Think of Bas Jan Ader, and his 1975 performance, *In Search of the Miraculous*, in which the artist set out (ostensibly) to cross the Atlantic in a 12'-long boat. He was never seen again. See also footnote 37 on the "ungraspable phantom of life."

[74] In his book, *Cape Cod*, Thoreau says this of star and sea-gazing: "whatever we see without is a symbol of something within, and that which is farthest off is the symbol of what is deepest within," (201). Earlier in the text, we find what may amount to a metaphor for this idea: "We discerned vessels so far off...sometimes we doubted if we were not counting our eyelashes," (121). See also, figure 5, *We Discerned Vessels...*

[75] See also footnote 43 on souvenirs.

absence comes to life only when we recognize it. We pour our breath into it and absence takes its shape.[76]

We can also fabricate an absence by willfully undoing a presence.

When Robert Rauschenberg erased a drawing by DeKooning, he had been spending a lot of time erasing his own drawings. He wanted to use drawing to describe Nothingness. Erasing drawings seemed, to him, to be the sensible way to do this. Erasing his own drawings did turn out to be meaningless—but not in the right way. Not in the way that said, "Nothing!" The "Nothing!" that Rauschenberg wanted to represent required a presence that had more gravity than he felt his own drawings possessed. So he got a hold of a DeKooning…an important one, one that said, "Something!" It was made with oil and crayon and charcoal. And Rauschenberg erased that. It took him a month. The important drawing that was once on that piece of paper, was replaced by an equally meaningful, and hard-earned absence, (ArtForum).

---

[76] What is the shape of absence? If you have already read **Architects and Heroes**...(page 28), you might remember that I propose the term Roundness to describe the temporal quality of Absence (see footnote 83). Gaston Bachelard says, "images of *full roundness* help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside. For when it is experienced from the inside, devoid of all exterior features, being cannot be otherwise than round," (234). I see Bachelard's equation of being (or presence) with roundness as complimentary to my equation of absence with roundness, for absence is itself a type of being. Roundness as an aesthetic manifestation of illusiveness is also demonstrated in the ancient tradition of Tantric Hindu meditation imagery, from which I borrow shapes for my Absence Drawings (see figure 4, Absence Drawing). The Tantric meditation aids, originating in seventeenth-century India, are careful renderings of shapes, often ovoid, round or triangular. They are flatly painted and float in compositions that emphasize the tension between positive and negative spaces. They are evidence enough for me, that minimalism did not originate in New York in the 1960's.

To recognize an absence remember this: you will know it when you don't see it.

Architects and Heroes (I See Why)

Cy Twombly[77] has been a touchstone for my art practice since 2002, when I first saw his work *Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor*, at the Cy Twombly Gallery in Houston, Texas. Renzo Piano designed that museum for Twombly, and it was not the last time that the artist and architect would sustain each other's work (and in turn, sustain me).

In 2002, I went to the Cy Twombly Gallery almost by accident, when I meant to go to the Menil Collection and the Rothko Chapel. This is where my journey began.[78]

I am not the first to stand in front of *Say Goodbye Catullus…* and be moved to do something drastic. There is a story that a visitor to that gallery was found standing nude in front of the painting. At the behest of a diplomatic security guard, she eventually put her clothes on and went away, leaving in the guest book, "The painting makes me want to run naked."[79] What I wrote in the guest book was, "The painting makes me want to be an artist," less sensational perhaps, but equally impulsive, and with longer-ranging implications.

---

[77] By this I mean that Cy Twombly's work is an answer to my question, "why make art?"

[78] *Say Goodbye, Catullus...*is about Orpheus' journey to the underworld. While I do not equate my decision to pursue a life in the arts with a journey to the underworld, I think it is important to acknowledge that much of Twombly's work, because it finds its inspiration in Classical literature, is about journeys--often across water. We have at least this much in common. See Figure 3, *Horizon Drawing 1*.

[79] Ralph Blumenthal. "A Celebratory Splash for an Enigmatic Figure." *The New York Times*, June 4, 2005.

It was there, ten years ago, in Houston that I picked up the end of a thread and followed it.[80] Now I am here, thread still in hand.[81]

Although the formal qualities of my art work may or may not be directly or explicitly influenced by Twombly's brand of expressionism, it was the ecstatic experience, of standing in front of S*ay Goodbye, Catullus…* that changed my course, leading me to abandon the life that I had already built, to pursue a BFA at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Five years later, the Modern Wing opened at The Art Institute of Chicago. Like the Cy Twombly Gallery, it was designed by Renzo Piano, and the opening exhibition was a survey of Twombly's paintings and sculptures. This occurred in the same week that I graduated, and walked across the Pritzker Pavilion stage, across the street from the Modern Wing. Once again, I claimed Twombly and Piano as sentries who watched over another milestone in my practice.[82]

And five years after that, as I delivered my masters thesis proposal in July of 2011, The New York Times reported that Twombly had died in Rome.

---

[80] Thread and the lines they make are recurring motifs in my work. See figure 5, We Discerned Vessels So Far Off..., and figure 6 Lay/Lie. See also, **Paper, Pencil, Pen, Thread, and String**, page 20.

[81] Some threads ask us to follow, others show where we have been and act as tethers that guide us back to the shore. Think of Theseus and Ariadne.

[82] It should be noted that I acknowledge my application of a type of "magical thinking." The meanings that I ascribe to these coincidences are created by me and for me. I see meaning in them because it serves me to do so, providing an imagined map (my Kantian "schema," my Deleuzian "striations") that I use to reassure myself that I am in the right place, headed in the right direction.

In that moment, the subjects that my proposal addressed--distance and longing--were upstaged by something related, but greater: absence.[83] [84]

[83] It is important to acknowledge the place of absence in art history: to differentiate it from Minimalism's interest in the void. Absence is distinct from the void by virtue of its ineluctable relationship to presence. Where the void describes an absolute state, absence is predicated on presence. Additionally, it may be useful to consider some of the philosophical theories about absence and presence. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger suggests that conditions of being (which could also be called "presence") include three distinct characteristics: Findingness, Thrownness, and Falling. Findingness is the quality that makes being (or presence) identifiable by virtue of its placement or situation; Thrownness suggests that being can only move forward in time, and Falling is being's self-awareness. These are the conditions that make a presence. While I am not certain I have interpreted Heidegger accurately, I do recognize that his approach can inform my own investigations into the characteristics of absence. If we apply Heidegger's categories to absence, we adopt some flexibility in their usefulness. For example, Findingness can also be applied to absence, in that absence has a relationship to place (for an absence to occur, some thing or some condition must take its leave of a particular place); Falling, applied to absence reminds us that in order for an absence to be an absence, it must be recognized as such by someone. (Think of the expression, "you don't know what you are missing.") Without recognition, an absence is merely a non-state or non-being. Thrownness does not apply but could be replaced by some other term that addresses the dual trajectory of absence. In terms of time, an absence can exist in the shape of something that once-was, or in the shape of something that has-not-yet-been. Perhaps "Roundness" is a fitting term (See figure 5, *Absence Drawing*).

[84] See also, **What Becomes an Absence,** page 22.

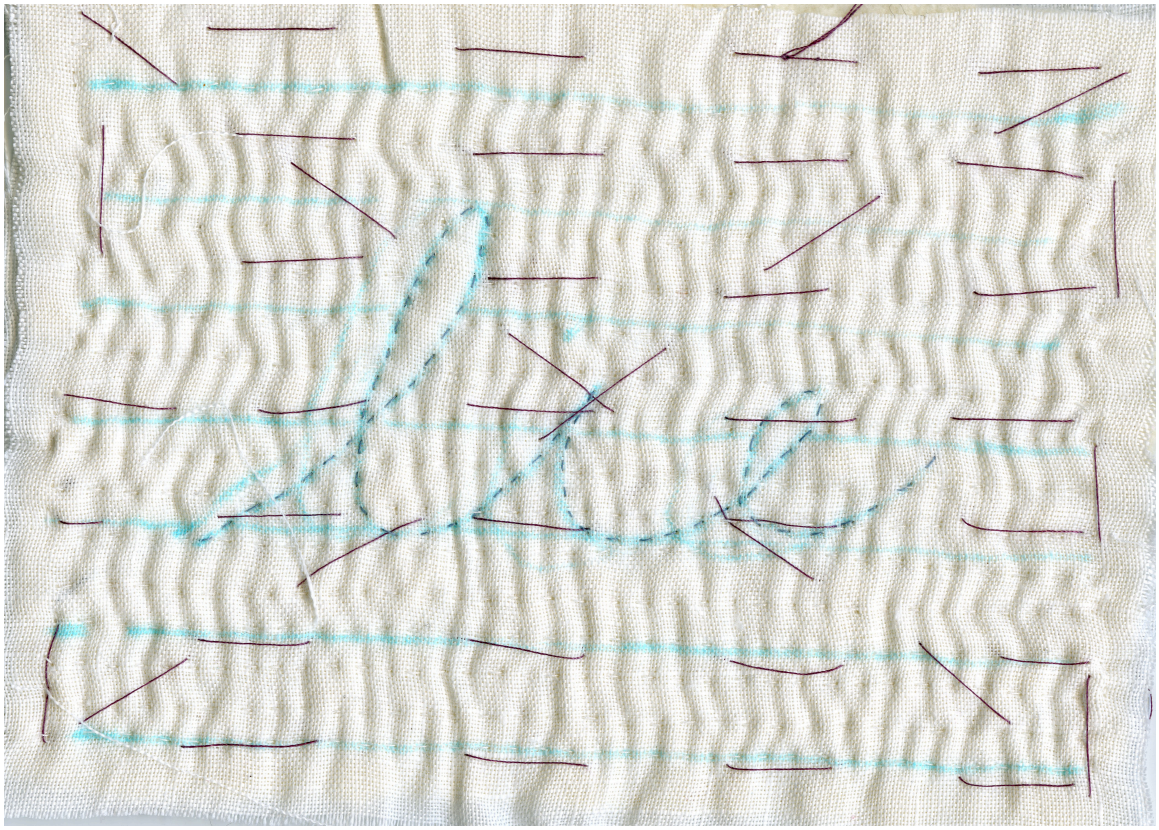

Fig. 6: Detail, *Lay/Lie*, 2012. Scanned image of linen, thread, and ink. Approximately 4"x5"

Elegy for an Image

I tried to draw absence, and for a year, the marks almost vanished from the page. I tried to draw absence and instead I got nothing.

Like nature, art hates a vacuum, so found objects moved in and they filled the empty spaces[85]. These objects are referents for something missing and greater[86] [87]: a card stands in for the book; a page for the thesis; a length of string for the space between me and the horizon. The absence of the artist, or at least the absence of the artist's hand[88], leaves the viewer with minimal markers: objects that do not know they are art[89] [90].

I tried to draw absence but absence has a presence that cannot be drawn. More important, absence has a presence that cannot be erased[91]. I tried to draw absence but absence intervened.

---

[85] See figure 7 on page 42.

[86] A referent for things I meant to make, but couldn't.

[87] The objects are things in the Old English sense of the word, *thyngian*: "to parley, to confer...to address, to give voice,"(Pinsky, 29)

[88] By this I mean the absence of my drawings.

[89] Rather than make a minimal work that is meant to say nothing about the artist (which actually tells the viewer quite a lot about the artist), I would rather make a minimal work that engenders a Sontagian stare, as opposed to a look, and that says, "I am in here somewhere."

[90] In "The Aesthetics of Silence," Susan Sontag says of "minimal" works, "Such art could also be described as establishing great "distance" (between spectator and art object...)...distance often is involved with the most intense state of feeling, in which the distance of coolness or impersonality with which something is treated measures the insatiable interest that thing has for us." (np)

[91] See page 26, Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased DeKooning.*

Fig. 7: Installation view, Here+There: MAA Thesis Exhibition, Charles H. Scott Gallery, July 2012. Photo credit: Kai Mushens.

Your Trouble Reflected

How is absence embodied? In the most literal sense, if the body itself experiences an absence, as with the loss of a limb, how does the remaining physical entity understand that loss? In many cases, it does not.

V. S. Ramachandran is a neuroscientist. He is interested in the way images change the brain's perception of the body. He treats amputees who experience phantom-limb pain. He uses deceptively simple techniques. One of Ramachandran's patients came to him, complaining that for months, he had felt that his amputated, phantom hand was clenched in a painfully tight fist. He could feel the muscles cramping, and the finger nails digging into his palm. The pain kept him awake at night. His mind knew the hand wasn't there, but his body did not.

We used to think this was caused by damaged nerves at the site of the amputation, but Ramachandran believes that it has more to do with a "map" of the body that exists in the brain, and that, "every point on the body's surface has a corresponding point in the brain." He thinks that images help us to re-draw our body-brain maps.[92]

---

[92] See also footnote 10 on Kant's mind maps.

To do this, Ramachandran stood a mirror on a table, parallel to the patient's nose. The patient put his arms on the table, one on either side of the mirror: the right arm beside the reflective side; the left stump beside the non-reflective side. From the patient's perspective, the reflection of the right hand in the mirror, appeared to be where the left hand would have been. The patient clenched his right hand to approximate what he felt the phantom hand was doing. He watched the reflection--what appeared to be the phantom hand. Then he opened his right hand and saw the "left" hand opening too. And his body could feel the phantom hand opening.

This is what images do.

Sometimes our bodies do not know what our minds know. Sometimes, our bodies need an image.

I first heard of this story in a lecture at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago by artist and writer Lynda Barry. Barry suggests that the only way to comfort the phantoms in our lives, "Is to see your own trouble reflected in an image."

What does that image look like? To represent absence, I choose a place to start. It is not the right place, but it's all I have. I start by omitting, I start by clearing a space.[93]

[93] See figure 4, Absence Drawing.

Is There Something Missing?

Absence may be approached from different directions: that of the absented, and that of the one who was left behind. Nomads dwell on both sides of absence.[94]

When I left Vancouver in the summer of 2011, the last review that I had with Kristina Lee Podesva brought my attention to works that I had neglected in my sketchbook for some months and years. Coming back to them, I saw that they are relevant to this bigger picture of distance, longing, and absence.

I noticed these orphaned works, on the eve of my own absence (from family, from the sea shore, from my studio in the corner of the Mitchell Press building) and it became evident that a need for connecting with people is the silent core of my fascination with absence. Concurrently, it became evident that a tendency to vanish is also at the core of my fascination with absence. If I use art to make these connections, can I also use art to facilitate my own vanishing?

Along with making lists of categories of absence, another way to think around this subject is to think like a dictionary and to ask the question: what is

---

[94] The same may be said of a number of marginalized groups, including people of bi-racial backgrounds. See also, footnote 49 on *tertium quid*.

its opposite? To say, "presence" may be overly facile, but it is not inaccurate. Perhaps it is better to say that the opposite of absence is, "being there."

This reminds me of the Vancouver artist, Ron Terada's show, "Being There," that was recently at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art.[95]

I accidentally found the show during a field trip with my Art History students. We were there to see paintings by the Chicago Imagist, Jim Nutt, but I turned right when I was supposed to turn left, and was faced instead with one of Terada's works, a large, illuminated sign that said, "Stay Away From Lonely Places." Around the next (also the wrong) corner, was a green, reflective highway sign that said, "Entering City of Vancouver." And suddenly absence (from family, from the sea shore, from my studio in the corner of the Mitchell Press building) was made manifest, and at the same time, negated.

I felt encouraged.

---

[95] October 2012.

This is Not the Conclusion

Perhaps you have taken an uncharted route through this thesis and you are now at this chapter, with more to go. If you are this sort of reader, then I offer you the following encouragement: You have arrived here at just the right time. Think of this page as a clearing[96].

Perhaps you have chosen a safe route through this thesis, being careful to finish one chapter before moving on to the next, and always in order. If that is the case, then you will be inclined to think of this chapter as a conclusion, and perhaps you will be disappointed. After all, I have stated that the chapters of this thesis may be read in any order. To make this chapter a "conclusion" in the traditional sense of the word, would contradict the philosophy of beginnings[97] on which I have based my writing, and would pretend to deposit you at the horizon line, which I assert is unattainable.

---

[96] In Reinhard May's book, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources*, the author asserts that the German philosopher took inspiration from Asian thought. Heidegger's idea of the "clearing," may have its roots in the Chinese word, *wu*. May interprets *wu* to mean, " There where there is nothing," and asks us to imagine a dense forest in which a space is cleared of vegetation, creating an open space, into which light shines (32). Perhaps this is the function of absence, to create a clearing, a place for light to enter.

[97] To illustrate this philosophy of beginnings, Matthew Goulish uses the example of the Buddhist monk who says, "Now that I have attained enlightenment, I'm just as miserable as I was before,"(64). In other words, all we have are beginnings. For this reason, I see conclusions as a construct that may limit the way we read (either a text, or an image).

If this is not enough for you, please return to Elegy For an Image (32), or Paper, Pencil, Pen, Thread and String (20), or Failure is the Only Option (10)[98]. Alternatively, please accept figure 8 (below), paying special attention to the parenthetic title.

Fig. 8: Detail, *5000 Feet, Pentel R.S.V.P. BK-91-9 (I Have Run Out of Ink), 2012.* Ball-point pen, paper. Area of detail, 14"x11."

[98] In lieu of a conclusion, a reunion, a repetition, a return.

Works Cited

Ader, Bas Jan. "Still from In Search of the Miraculous." Photograph/ performance. Patamagazine. n.p. 3 Jan. 2009. Web. 5 April. 2012.

"American Artist Who Scribbled a Unique Path." Randy Kennedy. The New York Times Company. 5 July 2011. Web. 5 April. 2012.

American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. Print.

Anonymous. "Tantra Song." Painting. *Siglio Press*. n.p. n.d. Web. 5 April. 2012.

Badley, Graham. "Academic Writing as Shaping and Re-shaping." *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 14, No. 0, April 2009, 209-219. Print.

Barnes, Jonathan. *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

Barry, Lynda. School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Columbus Auditorium, Chicago, IL. Nov. 15, 2010. Visiting Artist Lecture.

Bensen, Peter. "Art: Reaching for the Sublime." *Philosophynow.org, Issue No. 18,* Philosophy Now. Summer 1997. Web. 27 October 2012.

Blumenthal, Ralph. "A Celebratory Splash for an Enigmatic Figure." *The New York Times*, 4 June 2005. Web. 12 March 2012.

Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Canada: Doubleday. 2001. Print.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Altermodern*. Scribd.com, 4 Apr. 2010. Web. 27 Apr. 2012.

Butler, Cornelia, Catherine de Zegher. *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*. New York: Department of Publications, The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. Print.

Calvino, Italo. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Trans William Weaver. London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979. Print.

Carroll, Lewis. *The Hunting of the Snark: An agony in 8 fits*. University of Adelaide, Southern Australia. 2007. Web. 5 April 2012.

Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Print.

The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971. Print.

Cortazar, Julio. *Hopscotch*. New York: Random House, 1966. Print.

Day, Andrea. "Ma". *Buildings & Cities in Japanese History*. Columbia University, 1998. Web. 14 March 2012.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Aporia*. Trans Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. Print.

Eaton, Linda. *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection*. New York:Abrams, 2007. Print.

F*ive: Dedicated to Ozu*. Dir. Abbas Kiarostami. Behnegar, 2003. Film.

Goulish, Matthew. *39 Microlectures: In Proximity of Performance*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Print.

Jamme, Franck André. *Tantra Song*. Los Angeles: Siglio, 2011. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Forgotten Books, 2008. Web. 03 May 2012.

Maborosi. Dir. Kore-eda, Hirokazu. Perf. Makiko Esumi, Tadanobu Asano and Akira Emoto. TV-Man Union, 1995. DVD.

May, Reinhard. *Heidegger's Hidden Sources*. Trans Graham Parkes. London: Routledge, 1996.

Melville, Herman. M*oby-Dick or, The Whale*. New York: Penguin, 2001. Print.

"Memory: Hiroshi Sugimoto" *Art21: Season 3*, Episode 2, 2005. DVD.

Mitchell, W. J .T. "Word and Image." Art In Theory 1900-2000. Ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. 1081-1083. Print.

Munroe, Alexandra. *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2011. Print.

Nakao, Chiho. "Chanoyu: Japan's Tea Culture." *Niponica* 2011:11. Print.

Pinsky, Robert. Gulf Music: Poems. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. Print.

"Plaiades Mythology." *National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center (Arecibo Observatory)*. n.p. n.d. Web. 02 May 2012.

Reynolds, Jack. "Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 17 Nov. 2002. Web. 18 Mar. 2012.

Richie, Donald. *A Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2007. Print.

"Robert Rauschenberg Discusses *Erased DeKooning.*" *Artforum*. Artforum Magazine. n.d. Web video. 05 April 2012.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 1977. Print.

Saltz, Jerry. "A Thorn Tree in the Garden." *Artnet Mag*., 2006. Web. 14 April 2011.

Sontag, Susan. "The Aesthetics of Silence." *Aspen*. No 5+6, item 3. Ubu.com. n.d. Web. 10 Oct. 2010.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Cape Cod*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866. Print.

Ufan, Lee. T*he Art of Encounter*. Trans Stanley N. Anderson. London: Lisson Gallery, 2004. Print.

Xingjian, Gao. *Return to Painting*. Trans Nadia Benabid. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. 2002. Print.

Yamaguchi, Tomoe. "Preserving Tea Traditions." *Niponica* 2011:12. Print.

Index