Between Control and Letting Go

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Standoff

1. Step to the end of the board
   untangle
   overpowering dread.

2. Turn and face the windows
   don’t look through to the trees
   just beyond.

3. Lock gaze with the black
   strip at the end
   of the board

   take a breath.

4. Close eyes

5. sound rushes in.

   Boards bounce,
   swimmers kick,
   lights relentlessly hum down.

6. Open eyes,
   raise arms,
   lift up onto toes
   let the board begin to pulse

   3, 2, 1, go.

7. Instructions, clear in my mind
   don’t translate, my body remains fixed,
   firmly planted to the metronomic board.

   3, 2, 1, go.
Stay.

8.
It was the wrong
pattern, that was all.

Change the pattern.

1, 2, 1, 2, 3, go.
1, 2, 1, 2, 3, go.
1, 2, 1, 2, 3, go.
1, 2, stop.
No, this isn’t working.

9.
Find a new
pattern, try again.

1, 2, 3, 4.
1, 2, 3, 4.
Go on 4 Ingrid.
1, 2, 3, 4.
1, 2, 3, 4.
1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4.

10.
Legs begin to shake, tiring
from the standoff between
two inches of metal,
three meters of air
separating my body

and the water.

Sound collects overhead
drips thickly, down
into my ears, bursts
past my eardrums, spills over
into my vision

casting the blue
board, the red
windowsill
into varying shades of gray.
Minutes pass.
I stand
trapped inside my countdown.

Suddenly something changes.

The noise begins to lift
light floods back into my eyes

3, 2, 1, go.

A simple act
circle arms, bend legs,
let the board push me
up and back into the air.

Ceiling and water blur into one,
I feel the water approaching beneath
kick out and grab my hands,
disappear
beneath the surface.

11.
Step to the end of the board
untangle
overpowering dread.
I step to the end of the board. I see light and I see water. I spend time in this space. These are the core experiences of diving that I am trying to communicate through my artwork. As a painter, I first attempted to capture this experience with paint, but I quickly began to ask myself how to paint water and that led to questioning how to paint time. I was trying to capture the moment in which time, space, and image coalesce in my experience. The image is central to my work and even as I moved away from representation, time and space remained embedded in the moment of stepping to the edge of the board and looking down. At that moment, that image is everything: it’s time and space; it’s an image and it’s water. Thus throughout the year, this strong visual moment has been at the center of what I have been trying to capture. In this time, I have cycled through a series of steps, becoming tangled in the “hows” and trapped in an attempt to capture the visceral experience of diving. The reciprocities between the two practices have made me realize that, at this time, the process matters more to me than the end result.

My first approach to this thesis began with a painting of a diving board made with oil paint. While making that painting, I began to notice how light affected water and to focus in on light and how to capture it. Playing with paint as if it were water led to an exploration of water, movement, time, space, and light. Feeling that perhaps oil paint was not the proper medium to capture this very physical state, I proceeded to experiment with the use of cyanotypes as a way of painting with light. Cyanotype is a form of photography that is exposed in UV light. It captures light by recording it, rather than transcribing or translating the image through the gestural effect of painting with the artist's hand. I worked with reflections and shadows that I found at the pool,
trying to capture the environment that so fully captivated me at every diving practice. I made prints of the diving board and in my attempts to prime the material to hold the cyanotype, I found the connection between diving and making art that I had been searching for.

During my first experiments with cyanotypes, I tried several approaches to capturing reflections off the water at the pool. The movement of those reflections combined with the time tied to the exposure process spoke to my idea of a “water clock” encompassing water, light, and time.¹ Those first tests, however, also showed that since the light reflecting off the water continues to move, my cyanotypes required more time to expose than the sunlight available at the pool provides. I had to move the paper continuously in order to keep up with the movement of the sun around the pool or not much of an image would be exposed onto the paper. As a way to solve the exposure-time problem, I started to use larger pieces of canvas that would capture the sunlight as it moved around the pool area.

I have always wanted to capture the movement of the shadows cast on the diving board by the railings that line each of its sides. These are the shadows that I obsessively watch each time I stand at the end of the board, slowly rocking up and down, an action in diving that is called *priming*. The shadows run in two dark strips along the board, bending and flexing as the board bounces. At this stage I hadn’t quite figured out how to best apply cyanotype to canvas, but I believed that the canvas had to be primed before the cyanotype materials were applied. A canvas usually needs to be prepared with a primer or undercoat before being used. Priming ensures better adhesion of paint to the surface, increases paint durability, and provides additional protection for the material being painted. During my class critiques, there was interest from fellow students and faculty in the board and the action of priming before diving. From these class discussions, two questions arose: could I get a diving board and stand at its end priming for a dive and could this board exist in the gallery space?

I wasn’t struck fully by the unintentional duality of the word “priming” until I attended a talk by artist Annette Lemieux in which she spoke about the process involved in her *Pacing* painting. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston explains that “in an effort to make the creative act as dependent on the body as the mind, Lemieux walked across the raw canvas with paint-covered

¹ See Annex for *The Water Clock*
feet. Revealing traces of a monotonous trek, Pacing could signal a fretful moving back and forth for a solution or possibly a feeling of entrapment.”2 Lemieux’s piece Pacing helped me realize that I was asking myself how to prime a canvas that was meant to be a board, and if I were to prime it in a traditional sense with a brush, I would be missing out on the vast conceptual connection between diving and painting.

Fig. 1 Annette Lemieux, Pacing, 1988, Latex on canvas, 152.4 x 487.7 cm (60 x 192 in.), Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. Fig. 2 Ingrid Henderson, Untitled (unconventional mark-making documentation), 2018, Gesso on canvas, 152.4 x 304.8 cm (20 x 120 in.), Wellesley.

These thoughts led me to experiment with the gestural and performative act of priming the canvas with my feet by performing my approach to a dive. I set up a video camera to document the process, secured my raw canvas to the floor, and rolled out a piece of butcher paper the length of the canvas next to it. At one end of the canvas I placed a tin where I mixed gesso and water as my primer (the first layer of gesso is traditionally cut with water so it better absorbs into

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the canvas). I then began by stepping into the tin and coating the bottom of my feet in gesso and stepping onto the canvas performing my diving approach: Three steps, jump feet together, hop on left, right knee up, arms swing down, around, and back up again while my legs compress and then straighten as I jump up into the air.

I stepped carefully off my canvas onto the butcher paper and walked back to repeat the process. I carried out this process continuously for 25 minutes, and as a result, I had a canvas that was coated in footprints and drips that captured physical records of my passage across the board. Each pass slightly differed from the one before, marks built up over time to create a map of my movement across the board. Soon after making this piece I learned that the cyanotype solution can only adhere to natural fibrous materials, as the chemical particles create covalent bonds with the cellulose on the surface of the plant material. I learned this as I watched the striking image of my first large exposure wash off completely. I had two additional canvases that I had also meticulously prepared and my time investment had been substantial. I felt frustrated in the moment, yet had begun to realize that this mistake gave me an insight: I needed this detour because it had placed my body directly at the center of my work. In particular, stretching the canvas on the floor had created a metaphor for the diving board and I saw a path forward.

As I retrace my creative process I see that I had started with a two dimensional representation of a diving board, which quickly led to the two dimensional representation of water. This prolonged tangent into water is a journey that made sense because it was the overwhelming image flooding my retinas as I stood at the end of the diving board. Up until this point, my focus had been on freezing visual moments of water and light into a two dimensional space using a variety of painting strategies, but there was nothing personal in the way I was creating these images. With this new gestural experiment, I had finally made it back to diving—a physical experience I have embodied during the eight years I have been competing in the sport. The presence of my body began to speak to me. I had spent the past two years of my art practice circling around the idea of communicating my experience of diving and I had finally stumbled on the impetus through errors, constraints, and exhaustion.

I can also now make a connection to other works of art that deal with the body and come from unconventional mark making that have influenced my process. They include, amongst
others, Richard Long’s *A Line Made by Walking*, William Anastasi’s subway drawings, many pieces by Janine Antoni including *Loving Care*, and Tony Orrico’s performative and time-based pieces. I was always interested in these gestural works and had contemplated how I might use embodied mark making within my own artwork. It wasn’t until the diving board piece, however, that I envisioned a way to make a piece that fit this tradition and that felt unequivocally my own.

(from left to right, top to bottom) Fig. 2 Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967, Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper and graphite on board, 375 x 324 mm, London, Tate. Fig. 3 Janine Antoni, *Loving Care*, 1993, Performance with Loving Care hair dye, Natural Black, Dimensions variable, Photographed by Prudence Cumming Associates at Anthony d’Offay Gallery, London. Fig. 3 William Anastasi, *Untitled (Subway Drawing)*, 2009, Graphite on paper, 8 x 11 1/2 inches (20.3 x 29.2 cm), Collection of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum © 2012 William Anastasi. Fig. 4 Janine Antoni, *Loving Care*, 1993, Performance with Loving Care hair dye, Natural Black, Dimensions variable, Photographed by Prudence Cumming Associates at Anthony d’Offay Gallery, London.
I now return to the action, to stepping to the end of the diving board to take a dive that I would have preferred not to have taken. In choosing to remain a diver, to remain within my sport, I persisted. The initiation of an action begins with a decision. Since decisions often feel difficult to make, I take smaller actions to put myself into a state where I am able to make a final decision and take the intended action. Henri Bergson, the Nobel Prize winning French philosopher who lived from 1859-1941 wrote about how we are influenced by what surrounds us, how we perceive it, and the nature of free will. In his extended essay, *Matter and Memory* he writes:

> But if my body is an object capable of exercising a genuine and therefore a new action upon the surrounding objects, it must occupy a privileged position in regard to them. [...] As it has not to choose, so neither has it any need to explore the region round about it, not to try its hand at several merely eventual actions. The necessary action will take place automatically, when its hour strikes. But I have supposed that the office of the image which I call my body was to exercise on other images a real influence, and, consequently, to decide which step to take among several which are all materially possible. And since these steps are probably suggested to it by the greater or less advantage which it can derive from the surrounding images, these images must display in some way, upon the aspect which they present to my body, the profit which my body can gain from them.3

Bergson writes that the human body can take original actions in the world. In contrast, he notes that without external factors acting upon it, the human body will remain in stasis. Therefore, when placed correctly in time and space, the human body will act appropriately such that the person can gain benefit from the activity. Bergson’s point here is that humans can make choices to put themselves into a state where an intended action can occur. Thus, applying Bergson’s idea to diving, when I, as a diver, step to the end of the board, I have set an intention to make a dive. From the end of a board suspended above the water, my perception and choices narrow such that making a dive is my next logical step.

The philosophical concept of intentionally taking small actions as a means to guide one’s body and mind to an eventual goal is also applicable in art. Artist Eva Hesse often used play in her practice, experimenting with materials and allowing them to guide her eventual creative act.

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For example, these notes from her notebooks about a series of drawings made from tangled rope suspended in space describe this process:

Climbing around, getting things up, moved about, around and hung. Four hands changing, manipulating changes. Things to allow, things to happen. Suspended hangings enabling themselves to continue, connect and multiply. Hung irregularly, tying knots as connections, really letting it go as it will, allowing it to determine more of the way it completes itself. Non forms, non planned, non art, non nothing.

Undated, ca. Dec. 1969 | You must begin making small things so that starts the cycle going. Doing begins things and it continues. It is always that way, as one piece leads into the next. As it was I never remember working on one thing; it always is in at least pairs and further ahead . . . doing perpetuates doing—and thinking. It works for me.⁴

⁴ Eva Hesse, directed by Marcie Begleiter (Zeitgeist Films, 2016).
2. 

Don’t look through to the trees just beyond.

As I stand at the end of the board, I can see trees just beyond the window. The early morning happenings of chirping birds and busy squirrels pulls me through to the window. Inside and out don’t mean much three meters up. I raise my eyes and take a breath. “Inward double,” I tell myself. Lift my arms up and out to the sides, fingers straightened and together, palms flat and facing forward. My body mirrors the lines of the board, long straight vertical interrupted by a horizontal.

In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson observes how perception relates to focus:

> In the degree that my horizon widens, the images which surround me seem to be painted upon a more uniform background and become to me more indifferent. The more I narrow this horizon, the more the objects which it circumscribes space themselves out distinctly according to the greater or less ease with which my body can touch and move them.\(^5\)

When we allow ourselves to perceive a wide horizon, the intention of our action dissipates. I warn myself not to look at the trees because the world outside will bring me outside of myself and away from the action that I intend to take—the action of diving that feels so difficult, even though I know the dive well. To help myself focus, I stop my eyes from gazing through the window. Instead, I keep my focus near and immediate so that I can take action on my intention and make myself take the inward double.

3. Lock gaze with the black strip at the end of the board
take a breath.

I fix my gaze onto the black strip at the back of the board, with two black bolts the only thing connecting the board to the platform that keeps it suspended above the water. I take a breath, holding it deep in my stomach just past when it is comfortable, before slowly releasing it back into the air.

The beginning of my ritual is marked by these two actions: the practice and the superstitious string of planned behavior that will allow me to make the choice and take the dive. I begin to quiet my mind by focusing on the strip of black fiberglass that marks the back of the board that remains a constant.

When I oscillate up and down at the end of the board, it is important to fix my eyes on something stable. The majority of the board flexes and bends as my weight pushes it down and then it pushes me back up. The black strip at the back of the board, near the hinges, is the connection point, where the moving board (an object that has the potential to bend and flex) and the fixed structure meet. It would be possible to find a point outside of the board, potentially a point on the wall or window behind the board, but I lose this point when I go to another pool. Therefore, I choose the black strip because every diving board has this strip, and so it is the only thing that remains fixed and constant, regardless of where I am.

Choosing to focus on an unchanging point is a directed action. It grounds me in the knowledge that, regardless of where I am, I will take predetermined steps that will allow me to leave the board. This is a ritual and not a habit. A habit is something that is done automatically, while a ritual is part of a plan that is part of a larger set of actions. It is something outside of the action itself that I have designed as a way of starting my dive. Through this ritual I am trying to control my emotions and direct my thoughts.
4. Close eyes

I close my eyes, shutting out the world for a moment just to be. Through a window that never quite closes a draft snakes in, disrupting the thick pool air. The swirling temperatures eddy out, concentric circles drifting, bumping lazily, flowing steadily across to me. A cool breeze licks across my feet displacing the warmth that hugs my body, sending it out in spirals. I stand in this slowly churning space, a pocket of time removed, and tinted a deep red. Outside light filters through drawn lids glowing boxes float across darkened crimson, after-image staining into my retina.

Closing my eyes metaphorically translates to turning to a new page in a sketchbook or to smoothing my hand across a blank sheet when I am about to start drawing. It’s when I’m about to pour paint, but pull my hand back for a moment to decide where best to let it flow. The closing of eyes is a resetting, or a resettling, getting into a space and getting it locked-in in the way that I want it to be.

In the scope of a project like this, it is hard to fathom closing my eyes. When I was finally immersed in my process, my pace was frenetic and there was no time for a resetting. Closing my eyes is part of starting something new and I have been working on this project for nearly two years. I undertook new challenges, but in each case, they were only after a period of waiting for materials, people, situations to become aligned and when they did, I acted and quickly.

Interestingly, the best example of the state affected by “closing my eyes” is demonstrated in how I wrote and reflected on my process. I took notes in a journal and then typed them into the computer. Before I took action to revise or reorganize, I read through my journal. The act of reading and pausing to see what I had before moving on was like closing my eyes at the end of the board.
5.

Sound rushes in.

My eyes remain closed, sealed against the warm light tickling at my eyelids. My ears, however, have no such protection: indiscriminate gateways through which the sounds of the pool proceed through the air, saunter into my ears, and pass unperturbed into my brain. Once there, these sounds gather strength as they march defiantly into my consciousness, refusing to allow me to forget where my body remains.

I stand on the board. Around me, my teammates and coaches are in and around the pool, slapping the water, calling out, laughing. As much as I might wish to be in a place by myself, I am part of the world, and the noise of the world impinges on me, even as I seek to hold myself separate. Bergson writes on intensity and how they impact a conscious body in space and time:

In fact, I note that the size, shape, even the colour, of external objects is modified according as my body approaches or recedes from them; that the strength of an odour, the intensity of a sound, increases or diminishes with distance; finally, that this very distance represents, above all, the measure in which surrounding bodies are insured, in some sort, against the immediate action of my body.⁶

Bergson makes reference to how other objects and beings in the world influence consciousness by proximity. The intensity of a sound depends on its distance, but in the confines of the pool, distance is relative and there is no escaping the immediacy of the noise build up. In his 1994 book, Audio Vision: Sound on Screen, Michael Chion explains that the brain is much quicker to make meaning from a short unit of sound, as compared to visual input. He writes:

Sound perception and visual perception have their own average pace by their very nature; basically, the ear analyzes, processes, and synthesizes faster than the eye. [...] the sound trajectory [succeeds] in outlining a clear and definite form, individuated, recognizable, distinguishable from others.⁷

⁶ Henri Bergson, Matter and memory, 5.
This sensory phenomenon reflects that, while I stand on the board, my brain continues to process and identify sounds as they come into my ear—a fact that is exacerbated by the multidimensionality of the perception of hearing when compared to the the ability to focus on something stable with the eyes.
6.

3, 2, 1, go.

*I reopen my eyes and lift up slightly onto my toes and then quickly release my heels, letting my fall set the board into a controlled rock, rhythmically oscillating up and down beneath me.*

I pass in review my different affections it seems to me that each of them contains, after its kind, an invitation to act, with at the same time leave to wait and even to do nothing. I look closer: I find movements begun, but not executed, the indication of a more or less useful decision, but not that constraint which precludes choice.8

As I stand at the end of the board I have two choices: to dive or not to dive. I have initiated the movement by getting myself to the end of the board, and I have set the board into motion by priming. Priming is an action whose very name indicates an intention not yet executed. I have not yet decided to dive. The indication is there; I am standing on my toes, rocking up and down. I have put myself into this situation, so that the only decision left at this point is to dive. But even at this point, there is nothing outside myself that can force me to choose one way or another.

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7. Stay.

I call up, I compare my recollections I remember that everywhere, in the organic world, I have thought I saw this same sensibility appear at the very moment when nature, having conferred upon the living being the power of mobility in space, gives warning to the species, by means of sensation, of the general dangers which threaten it, leaving to the individuals the precautions necessary for escaping from them.  

Standing at the end of the diving board, I can call upon my memories of all of the previous times that I have performed this action. Memory reassures me so I can make the dive. But I linger because another part of my body senses the danger that threatens. I escape the slap of the water by staying put.

In the process and artifacts that resulted from this thesis, stay is all the places where I have been stuck. For most of the process, that is where I have lived. The artist Eva Hesse wrote extensively about the blocks and frustrations she encountered throughout her career. In fact, in a letter to a close friend and fellow artist Sol LeWitt, Hesse explains that the space of creativity where she is able to produce art is also a space in which she can feel completely lost.

April 2nd, 1965. Dear Sol, it is to you I want to talk about what is on my mind. I trust myself not enough to come through with any one idea. So I fluctuate between working at the confusion, or non working at the confusion. When not actually at work, I nevertheless struggle with the ideas. [...] I find nothing I do gives me the feeling that this is right. Constant frustration and failure.

Like Hesse, I also work within confusion. If I am not experimenting with materials and process, I feel stuck and aimless. As soon as I have perfected a technique, I am finished with it. I feel that what I’m producing is predictable. I am fascinated with the process of making art, exploring questions and experience.

A recent visiting artist to Wellesley College, artist Anna Hepler, described a similar idea during her artist talk. Speaking about her own process, she said, “If you know too much about what you’re doing it becomes too much like work. [...] Making work is a way to be alive in the present.”

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9 Henri Bergson, Matter and memory, 4.
10 Eva Hesse, 2016.
11 Feb. 15, 2019, Collins Cinema Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA.
8.

Change the pattern.

“Thursday November 19th. I’ve turned over a new leaf. I will try another way. Made drawings for children on Saturday. They were colorful. Red, blue, yellow, green. In squares, each one a letter of the alphabet. It set me off again because they are different. Just enough to make me wonder where I am going, and is there an idea, or too many different ones?”\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Eva Hesse, 2016.
9.
Find a new pattern, try again.

As I have worked through this thesis, I have made a series of decisions on how to proceed. I would often find myself blocked as I began to make my way down a new thread of experimentation. These blocks arose from uncertainties about the subject matter I was exploring, the approach and choice of materials and form, and their relationship to the questions I was trying to answer. They often conjured unintentional questions of their own. At these moments of pause I would become frustrated, yet inclined to find a way forward, either by experimenting and problem solving or by moving in a different direction.

In a letter to a close friend, Eva Hesse describes her difficulties getting started in a new space. She plays with the materials around her with no clear intention, experimenting with possible routes to explore.

Dear Rosie, I want to explain what I’ve been doing. In the abandoned factory where we work, there’s lots of junk around. I have all these months, looked over much of the junk. I finally started using some of it. I’m working on masonite. On this I build forms with glue and paper. On some forms I’ve glued cord. Yesterday and today I worked on a three dimensional contraption.¹³

Hesse continues: “Not finished yet but it is weird. I just don’t know. The old story. Defeatist. No patience. Or just not sure what I really want it to be.”¹⁴ This expression of exhaustion and frustration resonates strongly in my own process. In another letter, this time to friend Sol LeWitt, Hesse writes: “I sit now after two days of working on a dumb thing, which is three dimensional. And I should go on with it, but I don’t know where I belong. So I give up again.” This last quote exemplifies the cycle of working and stasis that I share with Hesse.

¹³ Eva Hesse, 2016.
¹⁴ Ibid.
10.
I stand
trapped inside my countdown.

Three two one go. Three two one go. Three two one go. Three two one go. Three two one go.
I pause my internal count for a moment as my body continues in time with the board: up down,
up down, up down, up down, up down, up down, up down, up down. I begin my count again,
matching its rhythm to the metronome bouncing beneath my feet.

up down / up down / up down / up down / up down / up down / up down / up down
three / two / one / go / three / two / one / go

My count continues for several more beats, resets, and then continues anew using a slightly
varied form. My body plays out patterns of patterns, each version promising a different outcome,
only to fall apart once I realize nothing has changed and I’m still stuck to the board.

The cycle of infinite looping as I am priming for a dive was noted by one of my coaches.
He pointed out that it seemed to have become my diving practice. Every time I stood with the
intention to dive, but remained in place had started to create physical habits and emotional
reactions that predicted future repetitions. He suggested that I set a new foundation. “Just forget
the dive,” he said. I climbed the board, walked to the end, primed one two three, and jumped
instead.

In my life, as well as in my art work, the above experience is exemplified. The longer I
wait to start and repeat a process, the harder it is for me to do so. My first attempts to harden
cyanotypes above diving boards took a lengthy process of researching materials. I went through
several tests before finally finding the consistency I was looking for and once I had settled on it,
I was stuck on the logistics and planning. I continued making smaller tests as a way of delaying
the production of the large piece until I felt completely ready. Upon urging from my advisors, I
finally made my first attempt at the pool. Waiting to make the work made it harder to start
working again, just as it had been harder to make the dive.
Suddenly something changes.

3, 2, 1, go.

A simple act
circle arms, bend legs,
let the board push me
up and back into the air.

In one of his letters to Eva Hesse, Sol LeWitt encouraged her to allow herself a release of her consciousness in order to allow her work to continue. He wrote:

It would be better if you had the confidence just to do the stuff and not even think about it […] I know that you (or anyone) can only work so much and the rest of the time you are left with your thoughts. But when you work or before your work you have to empty your mind and concentrate on what you are doing. After you do something it is done and that’s that. After a while you can see some are better than others but also you can see what direction you are going. I’m sure you know all that. You also must know that you don’t have to justify your work – not even to yourself. Well, you know I admire your work greatly and can’t understand why you are so bothered by it. But you can see the next ones and I can’t.15

When I am practicing a dive, the intensity of analysing each step makes each of them to exist as an individual action. That deconstruction transforms the bigger picture into abstraction. The only way I can return to the dive as a whole integrated motion is to release some finite control and allow my body to do what it knows to do. As Bergson writes, the thinking happens before the action, but once the action occurs, consciousness is no longer needed to complete it:

Lastly, I interrogate my consciousness as to the part which it plays in affection: consciousness replies that it is present indeed, in the form of feeling or of sensation, at all the steps in which I believe that I take the initiative, and that it fades and disappears as soon as my activity, by becoming automatic, shows that consciousness is no longer needed.16

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16 Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory, 4.
Once I have gotten over a diving block, it's not a definitive resolution. The next time I go back on the board, I will have to repeat this process. At times it will get better and for a while; I might feel confident and in control of my actions and reactions, but it can hit me out of nowhere and I am completely stuck again. Stasis can make moving forward feel impossible. I was once stuck on an oscillating board for almost 2 minutes while six judges, twenty-three competitors, and an entire crowd waited for me to dive.

I have come to realize that all I can do is take it one dive at a time. It doesn't matter how long I stand on the board; I know that my name will be called. I will have to climb up the ladder to the board for each dive and, at some point, my brain will release my body from its hold and allow the meet to continue. I have to accept that the dive will happen whether I control it or not, and in letting go of control, I am able to regain the confidence I need to finish the meet. By narrowing my view of time—releasing my memories of past dives, cutting short my anxieties for future ones, and allowing myself to exist in that moment removed—I am able to allow the present to continue.

Allowing myself to exist in the present and fully engage with the task at hand allows me the freedom and space to achieve the result I am looking for. I don't know how long it will take, what form it will take, or where it will lead. By accepting these unknowns, I am reassured in the certainty that, if I allow the process to continue, I will answer these questions when the time comes. I have come to understand that the completion of this process (be it a dive, art project, poem, or this thesis) does not mean the next task will be any easier to complete. This is why I see my work as the process and not the end result. To fully understand what I am trying to communicate, the viewer must be able to feel the weight of this moment as I do. They must have an experience in time and carry the experience away with them. A recent conversation with Professor Frank Bidart about poetry perfectly captures how I feel about my art practice: To use his words: “The material has a pulse.” My work has a pulse; I am not imposing it; it is there if
the viewer catches it. If the viewer spends time with the work, it is accessible. It exists in the interaction between its pulse and its audience. The pulse is a link of my experience and that of the viewer.
Today is Monday. By this time next week I will no longer be a diver. How will that affect my thesis? This past week has been one of the hardest weeks, diving wise, that I have had in a long time. I wonder how much of that has to do with this small existential crisis, and if magnesium has anything to do with it. Supplements are weird, because I know most of them are crap and don’t work, but I don’t know if this is coming from my skepticism towards chiropractors and vitamins (which comes from my mother), or if it truly could be contributing to my anxiety. Something that I find kind of interesting to think about is the fact that a lot of my anxiety is compartmentalized, or at least, I guess it’s really not normally when I am feeling more confident in the rest of my life I am able to separate diving and life. Sure, a dive might make me nervous, but I know I’m going to have to do it no matter what, so I get up and think about what needs to be done, and I get on with it. Now I feel the anxiety I have during practice sitting full in my mind at all times, sloshing over at any time any excess stress is added. Weirdly, this precarious bucket of anxiety has taken away my ability to be content with being alone. Much like in practice, I feel the tension.

At the beginning of practice my body is always tight. I stretch it, and I feel it loosen some of my tension, especially when I stretch my hip flexors. But as practice goes on, I feel my muscles lacing themselves into tighter and tighter bunches. I try to ignore it, try to take one dive at a time, but the net tightening around me, inside me, pinning me to myself as muscles wrap around and constrict. Try to stretch again, try to loosen the knots that make me want to scream, but they hold fast. It’s weird how trapped I often feel in my own body. When compared to others, my mobility is far better, so I don’t know what measure I am comparing it to when I feel “tight.” Tighter than what? If I can move more than most people, does that mean they feel even worse? I often feel so tight that I would do anything to feel relief, but when I go to the ATR they just kind of shake their heads and say, “I don’t know what to do with you.” Or they will do treatment, but it won’t do enough to help me, so then I leave feeling more tight because I know that I won’t be able to get treatment for at least 24 hours.

Comments from meeting with Frank Bidart:
“You know, there is a word that I think is tremendously useful here, I certainly use it in my own writing and that’s the word pulse. You have to locate the pulse of this material, and that’s what you want to render on the page. Pulse has to do with bodies, or things that become objects in time, as they relate to each other, and if you can get the pulse right, you can say anything in that pulse. So in a way you have to have all of the words in your head, or all of the moves held in a
kind of suspension, and figure out what pulse they have—what unites them, or divides them—and then find a way of putting that down on the page.

“Because what you read was wonderful, and you read it with a lot of pulse, but I have a feeling that on the page it didn’t have all that pulse. The phrase doesn’t have to say it all, it’s got to say it in the pulse of the material. The material has a pulse. You’re not imposing that on it; it’s there if you catch it right. The pulse has to do with your experience, of you as a viewer or someone who’s taking it in. What is the pulse of that thing that you are embodying? And it’s not something that you can just will. You have to feel it, and then find a way to put it down on the page, and find a way to use line breaks and spacing and stanza breaks. The fact is, space on the page has a relation to time, and the time of something aloud is related to the way space exists on the page.”

(Talking about the numbers/patterns) “In other words, there is a kind of internal musculature, internal set of pushes and pulls that you want, that internal musculature to be what’s on the page.”

“You know what Mies Van Der Rohe said about architecture: ‘less is more.’ And you know the thing is that’s not always the case. You have to have a feeling for when you give more, and when you give less. And I imagine diving itself is like that, and in a way you have to have a ruthlessness and courage to put that rhythm on the page and not think about the rules, of grammar, or the rules of how you put these things down in a poem.” - Frank Bidart

Journal:
Sunday, 02/10/19
“Jim said something interesting at practice the other day, he told me that my 403c on 3m was much better than on 1m, because I took it up more and had a better ride of the board. I agreed with him and said that I always rushed it off the board on 1m because I was always worried about getting it around in time. Jim said, “Well isn’t that interesting. You’re a self fulfilling prophecy. By worrying that you won’t have enough time, you are changing your action, rushing off the board, not getting as much height, and so you end up not having enough time just as you predicted.” I thought this was a good metaphor for a lot of things I have been thinking about in terms of time, life, diving, and art. I want to try to write about the fact that my season (and probably diving career) is almost over, and how stressed that is making me.”
From midterm reflection:

A comment made by visiting artist Adriane Herman resonated with me when she said,

I find the migraine aspect of that other print [interesting when you said] ‘this is purple because I had a migraine,’ because this is very much about you and there is something very personal. It’s your life, but the migraine is even more personal. There’s something there, and for some reason it makes me think about Matisse. You know the cut outs, but you know the cut outs evolved because he was ill, he was in bed and so he had to work with scissors instead of painting. And so thinking about the body not only in strengths and skills, but weakness and limitations.

I found this comment to be very eye opening because when I had been showing people the cyanotypes that had weirdly exposed and turned purple, I was always justifying it by explaining the history of it, telling the story of how I got a migraine and couldn’t deal with the cyanotypes immediately. However, when I was thinking about the piece and its final presentation, I never thought that would be in the final description. I thought it was a given that I would leave that out in the final presentation of the piece because it would just distract from the intention behind it. However, now that I think about it, if the piece is all about the physical experience of diving, this migraine caused me to miss almost an entire week of practice. At the end of that week we had a huge meet that I actually was able to compete in, but I was very aware the whole time of the remnants of this migraine that were still in my head.

I am not currently sure how this will factor into the final presentation of these pieces, but I think this was an important comment to hear because it made me realize that there was a choice to be made on the subject of what to include. This connects to a comment Herman made earlier in the critique when she brought up the artist Paul Pfeiffer. In some of his videos he erases certain key aspects of an event, such as erasing the players from the court and just showing the trophy floating around, or erasing boxers from the ring. She brought up the question to me “What’s key here?” and I think that is important to keep in mind as I continue my thesis.

From *A Letter to Diving*:

b. Pain.

Pain is an elusive feeling that is both impossible to remember and impossible to forget. The pain of a slap is not what stays with me, it’s the feeling of utter loss of control; that instant when I am no longer flipping but falling through the air. When a dive becomes a crash, an entry a
concussion. It’s the moment before I hit the water when I realize that something is wrong. I am about to experience pain, and that there is nothing I can do about it. That moment after I slap when I realize that when I get out of the pool I am going to have to try it again, but this time with the memory of the searing pain fresh on my skin.

Freewrite 02/03: 13 Ways of Looking at a Diving Board
When I dive, I seem to find myself in several states of mind. There is the ideal state, in which I am fully aware of what I need to do, fully intent on following through. There is no difference between my mind and my body. I step on the board, settle my eyes onto the black rimmed end and take a breath.

Three steps, together, hop on left, right knee up, arms swing down, around, and back up again, launching me into the air.

This feels right, this is diving. When I come out of the water I can listen to the corrections Jack gives me and on the next dive I will try and feel where those fixes need to be made. This is the part of diving that I love. Breaking an action down into the smallest bits, in order to understand how it works at a fundamental level. For me, just doing a dive without understanding what I am doing to control it is not enough.

The pool was hidden several floors down, and the old fluorescent lights cast the pool into an unsettling lime green. The hot tub was broken and the deck was fairly cold, so we were given a small bucket and a warm hose to share between all of the divers. The meet warmup began and soon I was through my 1 meter list and headed up to 3. When it came to my back dive I froze, terrified of going over. It was all I could think about as I stood at the end of the board, heels hanging out over empty air.

One, two, three, go.
I’m going to over-rotate.
One, two, three, go.

I don’t know what to do, my legs shake and I seem to have forgotten how to even jump off the board. When do I circle my arms? What do my legs do?
“Ingrid, go. 3, 2, 1, go.” Zach calls, and my body responds. I jump up, tuck into a ball, and then press out into a straight line again, arms stretching out at the water quickly approaching beneath me.

The Water Clock

How do you paint time?
I have always been interested in the ability that water has to both set a time, but also to hold a viewer in a seemingly endless moment.

As a child I often felt that life under the water was simply slowed down. If I dropped something into water, it still fell, but it would fall slower. Under the water, all outside noise was blocked, but the noise inside was magnified. When the falling object would eventually hit the bottom, it didn’t matter where I was in the pool, as long as my head was under the water I could hear it as if I was right next to it.

I loved being in the water so much, not just to swim and play with my friends, but I loved submerging myself into the magical world of slowed gravity and magnified sounds to simply experience what the water would show me.

I was always jealous of my dad, whose lung capacity far surpassed that of my own. Some of my earliest memories of the pool are of watching my dad disappear into the water for what felt like hours, but was probably more like minutes. He would swim down to the bottom of the deepest part of the pool and just sit there, looking up at the underside of the surface. Every so often he would blow out a circular ring of bubbles and watch as it grew bigger and bigger as it sped towards the surface, often breaking into my giggling face as I stared down at him from the safety of the air.

I always begged him to teach me how he did that—how he stayed down under the water. Every time I swam to the bottom I would panic once I got down there, my lungs desperate for air. I would kick off the bottom with all my might and burst out of the water, spluttering.

I felt like water had a clock, and air had a clock.

The air clock was the clock we all lived by: the bell tower clock of cities and traffic; the chicken timer clock of a sticker for every 10 minutes of violin practiced and only 30 minutes on the
computer; the forgotten clock of delayed bedtimes and rushed mornings. The air clock was noisy, and busy, and full of people.

The water clock was different. The water clock drifted rather than ticked. It was the clock of waves: constant, yet unpredictable. Whenever I would submerge myself in the water I would momentarily fall into the rhythm of the water clock.

If I sat under the water my hair would flow around my face, catching different currents, each strand eager to explore wherever the water would take it. I would look around at the water surrounding me, often times staring at the underside of the surface as it caught the light and played with it, tossing it back and forth. Too soon, however, I would start to feel the tug of the air, calling me back to the surface. I would try to ignore it, telling myself the words my dad had taught me.

*Just stay calm. I took a deep breath. I have oxygen in my blood. If I relax I will be fine.*

It never worked for long though. More often than not, I would give up after a few prolonged seconds and shoot back up to the surface to catch my breath, once again fully a part of the air clock.
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