

Sifting Shimmers

Re-Writing the Family Cookbook



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Faculty Co-Chair

Art has traditionally served as one of the most important vehicles for generational transmission.
-Kaja Silverman

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To my mother who was a feminist in her own right, and to all the women who have come before me who have given so much of themselves to carry forth a richly complex tradition that has served the family in so many ways.

*And above all....*thank you to my family, Gary, Santino, Francesca and Lucca for all their support and willingness to give me the time to fulfill my passions and dream.

Introduction:

I can no longer rely upon old habits. At one time, I copied from other artists with little thought for content. I once preferred a studio practice where I could be alone in my own space. I once sought praise for my technical abilities to create what I considered aesthetically pleasing visual images. I once defined my artistic practice according to specific categories.

All of this has changed.

My time at VCFA has shifted my consciousness. I am barely able to continue regarding things from the viewpoint to which I once subscribed. As I alter the status quo, I challenge my identity as an artist, and individual, and my aspirations. Far removed from a place of comfort, I am willing and anxious to leave.

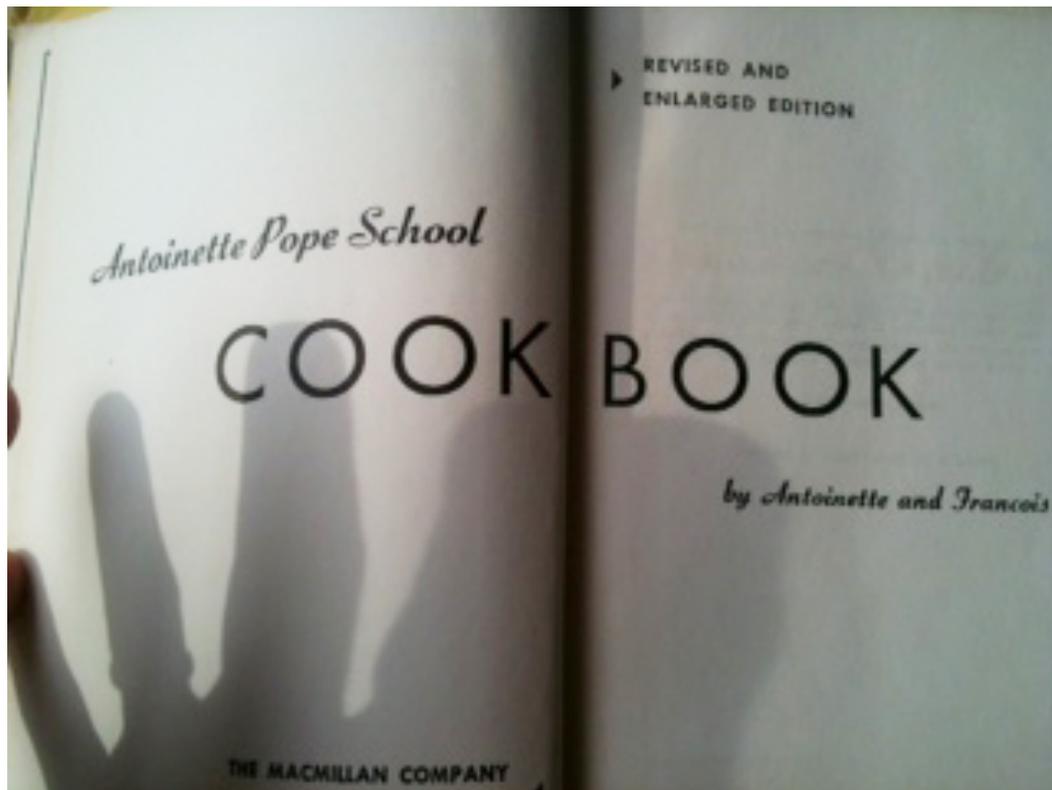
I now think about the fragmented episodes of daily living and affects played out in the ordinary. I think about my own movement through the world and the way my unconscious state has been poked into conscience awareness. I see the personal and the cultural in a bigger frame, as I construct and deconstruct the expected and unexpected.

My own experiences have come to inform and direct my explorations. My creativity has expanded by connecting the dots to something that was already there. My voice has become a rich and fertile resource for critical investigation and artistic exploration.

This process paper is organized in the form of a cookbook, arranged in the general chronological order of the courses that make up a meal. The introductions to sections and recipes provide background information on the origins and definitions of certain key ingredients.

In writing this paper, I referred to the format of one specific cookbook, the *Antoinette Pope School Cook Book*. In a sense, this cookbook was the family bible, containing many of my family's recipes. Legend has it that my grandmother wrote this cookbook in collaboration with Antoinette Pope in the 1950s. Both Italian immigrants, these childhood friends shared a rich cultural culinary heritage. Although never credited, she developed and contributed many of my family's recipes to this cookbook as well as to the curriculum of traditional Italian cooking at *The Antoinette School of Fancy Cookery in Chicago*.

All of the recipes included in this paper are part of an extended family culinary collection assembled over a period of four generations.



Ingredients:

5 cups of Interruptions: It is the interruptions of our lives that provide the rich and fertile content for our work. – *Humberto Ramirez*

1 pound of Affect: Deleuze would say, what can a body do? It is affected, impinged upon but it also affects. – *Marie Shurkus*

A Pinch of Performance: In the act of performance there is an understanding of art rather than a fixed notion. – *Ashley Hunt*

1 cup of Knowledge: Knowledge can never be transparent it is always political. – *Michelle Dizon*

1 part Feminisms: What is feminism for if we do not continue the work? – *Faith Wilding*

10 cups Experience: Start your process from where you are, from a real and personal place. – *Ulrike Müller*

1 tablespoon of Creativity: Good art destabilizes your expectations. – *Michael Minelli*

2 cups sifted consciousness: Rearticulate what painting could be. – *Carlos Motta*

½ cup Possibilities: Try something different, something you have never done before. – *Janet Kaplan*

2 parts Social Practice: What are the events in your life that guide you to be an artist? – *Dont Rhine*

1 cup Spectator: What kind of questions do you want the viewer to ask? – *Sowan Kwon*

1 pound Social Production: Challenging preconceived ideas is a sort of dismantling. – *David Deitcher*

1 tablespoon of Creativity: Being creative is a human right to all. But as an artist we engage in this larger conversation, a more intense discipline that extends beyond being creative. – *Cauleen Smith*

2 teaspoons of Postmodernism: Research your materials as a way to express content, as a way to move from Modern to Postmodern. – *Todd Bartell*

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Recipe

Stems from the Latin present participle of *ingredī*, meaning *to go* or *step into*. Both the terms *recipe* and *receipt* refer to a formula or set of directions.

A set of instructions for making or preparing something, particularly a food dish.

Synonyms:

Additive, constituent, element, factor, fixing, fundamental, innards, integral, integrant, making, part, part and parcel, piece

Antonym:

whole

A recipe introduces a set of directions, a formula, a method, a procedure, a technique, and an inquiry. It is an assemblage of ingredients, answering such questions as: what is the correct mixture, what do I add, what do I take out? It describes a process. What is this process, and how does it relate to my process of making art? These are questions that I have been asked and have been asking since the first day that I arrived at VCFA.

Ingredients and the recipes that they make up have a particular relationship with different orders of knowledge and representations of meaning, which have been arranged over centuries in every culture. Just as a relationship exists between words and language, ingredients and recipes share a similarly reliant relationship, functioning as part of and belonging to a greater whole.

What are the foods that nourish and make up a meal?
What are their histories and how do they get passed on?

Flavorings:

My father used his vacation to draw. He found solitude in the basement, bringing a variety of graphite H and N pencils and an artist pad with him. He drew the same subject every year: portraits of various saints who had granted him some sort of redemption and portraits of each of his six children. I often sat beside him, mesmerized by the way in which he created an image from a few simple lines. I watched, as he drew one portrait after another, meticulously incorporating each line, tone and highlight to fill in the eyes, nose, and mouth. He often worked in silence, completely in the flow, and I was satisfied with the stillness, wanting to take it all in. I sat and watched him for many years, until I found myself with better things to do as a teenager.

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Family

From the Latin word *familia* "servants of a household," "family servants, domestics;" also "members of a household," including relatives and servants, from *famulus* "servant," of unknown origin. First recorded ancestral sense. Household" sense. Those connected by blood. Whether living adj. meaning "suitable for a family."

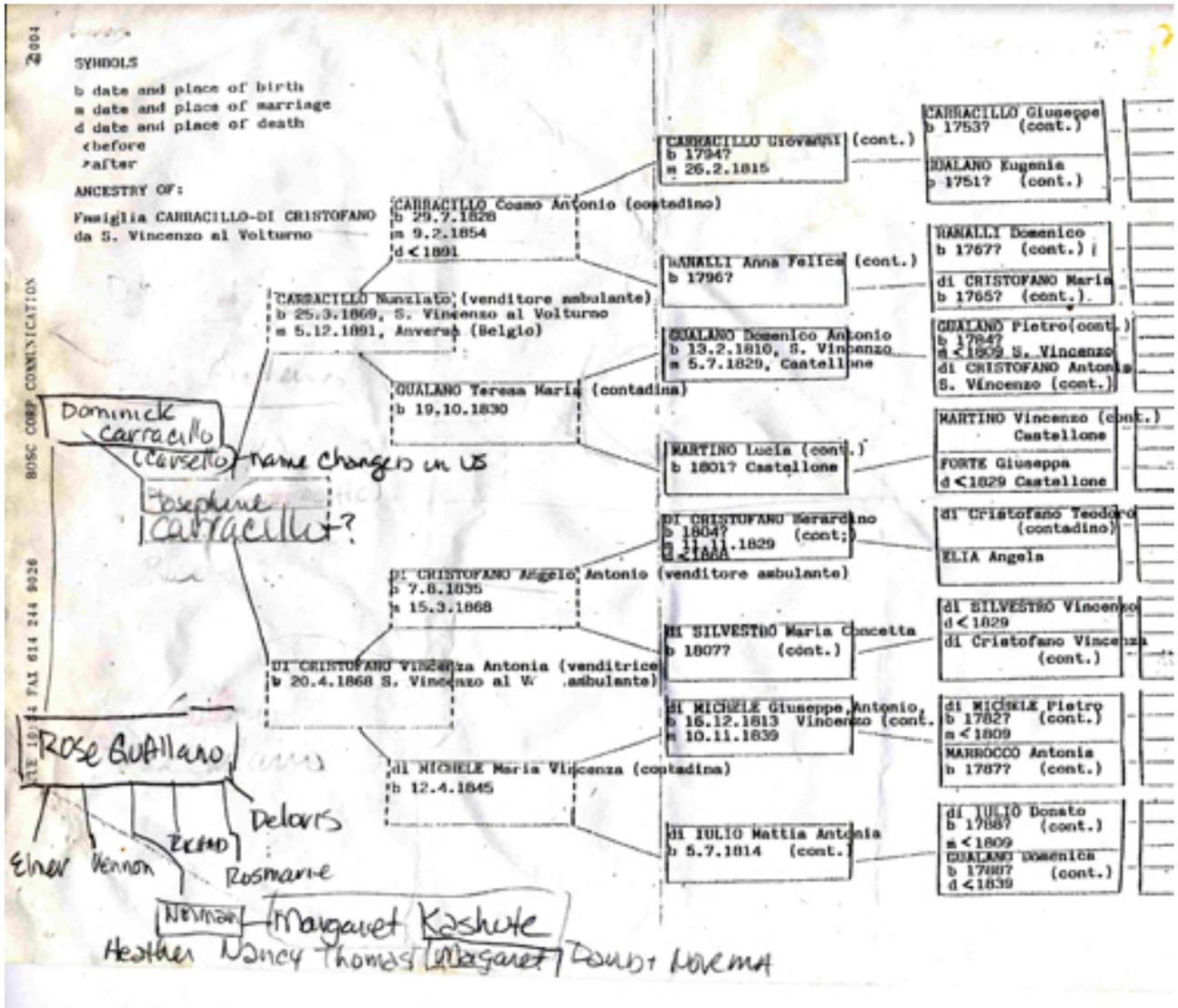
Surrounded by over fifty family members: my immediate family, cousins, second cousins, aunts, and uncles, all lived on the same street within a four-block radius of one another in a Chicago neighborhood, my childhood appeared utopic. We would gather together for every birthday, holiday, communion, confirmation, graduation, and any other social event in order to celebrate and share a family meal.

When I was young, I would chase my cousins through the house and hide under the dining room table, half listening to the dinner and dessert conversations, which always centered on food, religion, and nostalgic memories of past descendants. As I grew older, I often wondered, whom these people who came before me actually were. What similarities and differences did we have, generations apart from one another? I was given some answers to these questions by a second cousin who had been to Italy and spent years researching and tracing my family lineage.

Initially, I was taken aback by the repetition associated with my grandmother and grandfather's last name – Gualano – that was passed on from generation to generation. The mapping of names revealed repeated intermarriage of blood relatives since the seventeen hundreds. I wondered about this lineage dating back over three hundred years and the associated histories and codes of knowledge that have come to construct who I am.

How am I part of this history? What ingredients make up the past?
How do I assume generational language? What analogies do we share over time?

What is the materiality of these histories?



Family Genealogy provided by St. Annunzia Church in San Vincenzo Italy, 2001

The point where narration begins and ends always lies in relation to historical information. (Stewart, 1993:X)

The rhythm of memory is neither stagnant nor quiet; it bends time, infused with a dynamic force. My grandmother Rose Gualana Carsello was the matriarch, the carrier of all of the secret family recipes handed down to her by those who came from the old country in the Abruzzi region of Italy. The family recipes were secrets only granted to those inside the circle. They carried our histories, our traditions, our assumptions hidden in categorical language and procedures of a recipe.

Rose's power was palpable in her lifetime and continued to be felt even after she had passed on, when she was remembered for her service. I vividly remember when she passed away; I was 8 years old. For years to come, the extended family spoke of her as though she were still present and sitting in the same room with all of us. At times, I believed that she was, that she had never died, that her death was nothing but a dream. This symptom of my family oddity was accompanied by a belief in voices relayed from the grave by ghosts, as though dreams and lives were merely remnants of yesterday. Nostalgia has a way of never allowing mortality to take hold. The denial of death lay hidden in nostalgia, alongside the longing to hold on to memories left behind.

Rose's extraordinary contribution was her ability to cook for her family. Her food was love. I remember eating her freshly homemade ravioli, stuffed with ricotta cheese; her homemade pastas, sauces, and gravies; turkey stuffing, and a multitude of sweet delights as though it were yesterday. Each week was a feast, as we gathered every Sunday with the elders, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and second cousins to share the family meal. In a sense, these gatherings provided the foundation for the formation of my identity, as they instilled in me a set of values, rituals, and traditions.

The making of the meal was the object of our happiness, bringing family together in shared communion. As a child these family moments appeared utopic, not until much later did the secret recipes reveal the fragility and tensions that lay hidden by signs of unity and acts of giving.



Important Facts about Measurement:

There are two ways to measure for accuracy: one, by weighting; the other, by standard measuring cups and spoons. We must emphasize that in order to have excellent results with our recipes, standard level measurements must be used, and the method of procedure must be the same as ours in every detail. (Pope, 1953:xi)

1 lb. granulated sugar = $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups	3 lbs. spinach = 1 peck
1 lb. confectioners' sugar = $4\frac{1}{2}$ cups sifted	1 lb. utter = 2 cups solidly packed
1 lb. brown sugar = $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups packed	1 lb. vegetable shortening or bland lard = $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups solidly packed
1 cup egg whites = 8 to 11 whites	1 lb. maple sugar = $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups
1 cup egg yolks = about 12 yolks	1 lb. molasses = $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups
1 lb. shelled almonds = 3 cups	1 lb. bitter chocolate = 16 squares
1 lb. shelled walnuts = 4 cups	1 lb. dates = 2 cups
1 lb. shelled pecans = 4 cups	1 lb. raisins = 2 cups packed
1 lb. shelled peanuts = $2\frac{3}{4}$ cups	1 lb. shredded coconut = 6 cups
1 pt. milk = 2 cups	1 lb. marshmallow = 4 cups
1 qt. milk = 4 cups	1 lb. almond paste = 2 cups packed
1 lb. popcorn = 2 cups	1 lb. cranberries = 4 cups
1 lb. dried apricots = $3\frac{3}{8}$ cups	1 lb. whole wheat flour = 4 cups
1 lb. bread flour = $4\frac{1}{4}$ cups sifted	1 lb. corn meal = 3 cups
1 lb. cake flour = $4\frac{1}{2}$ cups sifted	1 lb. rice = $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups
1 lb. lard = 2 cups	1 lb. tapioca = 3 cups
1 lb. currants = $2\frac{3}{8}$ cups	
1 cup bread crumbs = $2\frac{3}{4}$ ounces	

The sacrifice of relationship is the ritual of initiation into patriarchy – Carol Gilligan

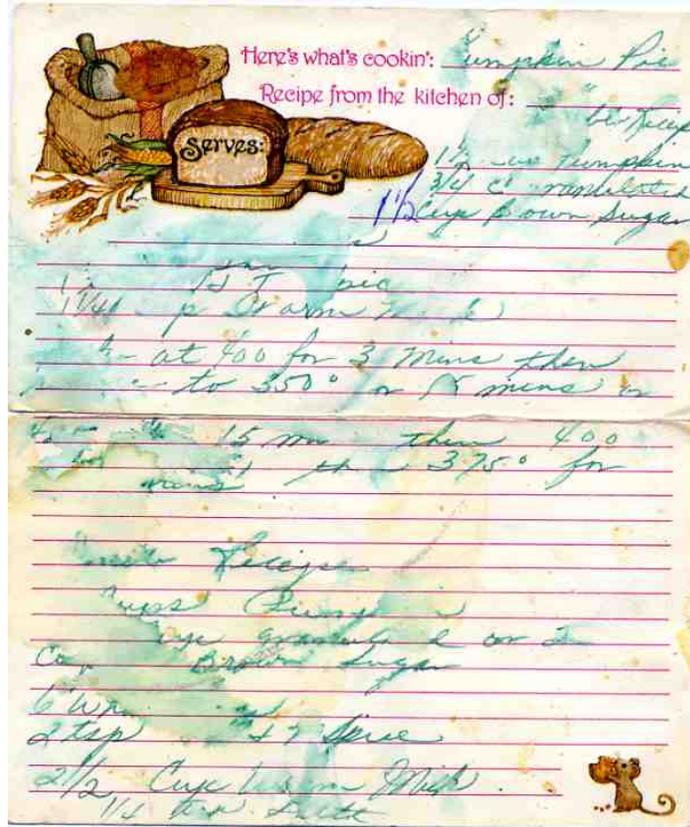
My mother was no stranger to a large family setting. A coal miner's daughter from the hills of West Virginia, she was the youngest of thirteen. The family endured a great many hardships. In the years of the depression, her father died of black lung, leaving the responsibility of raising a large family to her mother. Only five years old, she watched as her mother struggled to keep a roof over their heads, eking out a meager living ironing shirts and sewing clothing for the people in her small town.

I recently found a picture of my mother while rummaging through old family photo albums. Reading Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* gave me insight into understanding my memories as I reflected on this photograph. Like Barthes, I was mesmerized seeing my mother young, and beautiful. I remember her always looking her best when she dressed up to go out, but I did not recognize her in this photograph, it's a history I do not know. I saw my mother's purest essence, before she was consumed by traditions and service. I saw her kindness and exuberance for life that "belonged to no system" only to herself.¹ Most of my memories are of her in the kitchen cooking for her family. Only through the photograph can I read her essence, looking closely, I am reminded by Barthes that this photograph lies in the fiction of nostalgia and there is no way to return.

Married at the age of thirty-four, she was indoctrinated into the ways of her new family. A seemingly simple order to be accepted into the family, she spent every weekend of the first year of her marriage learning how to cook the family recipes. Cooking lessons were required, just as an obligation to uphold tradition was ensured via the female. The recipes stemmed from traditions and heritage, passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter and daughter-in-law, each of whom dutifully carried on the traditions. Each woman made gravies every Sunday morning, homemade pastas, pesto, spinach pork stuffing, calamari, breaded shrimp, desserts, cakes, and more!

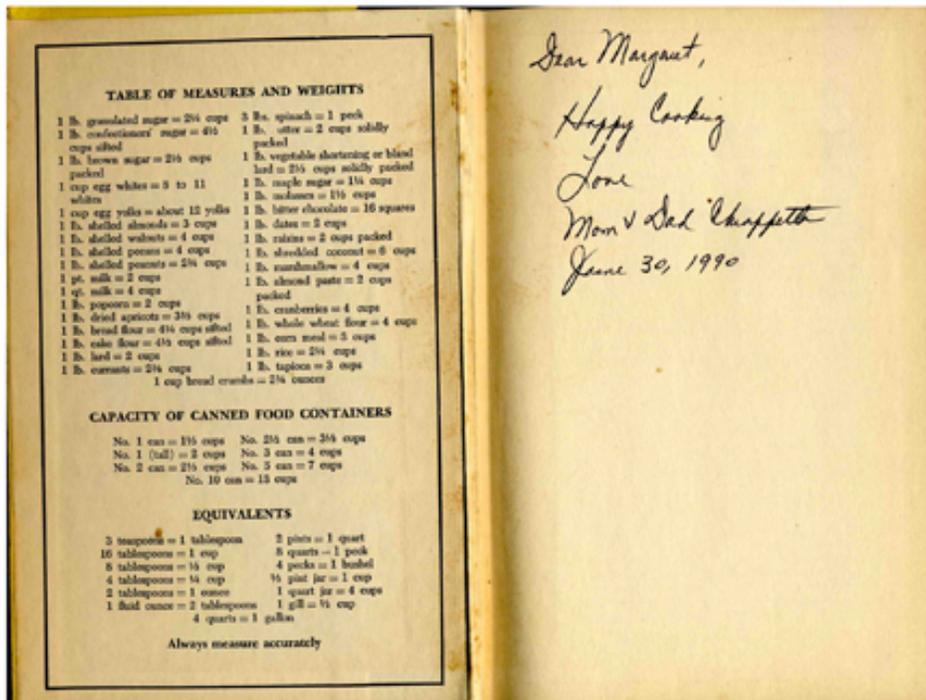
Over time, my mother came to recognize that the objects of the family's happiness and its demands were never those of her own. She was the outsider, the Other, never able to make the ravioli taste quite like Rose's or to measure up to the family's expectations. Shrouded in secrecy, she was given no room for obstacles, and the family would often gather to discuss what to do with her secret life of unhappiness.





Nobody could make pumpkin pie the way she did, with a sweet, creamy filling and a delicious flakey crust. Always a contribution to family gatherings, her signature recipe gave her agency and acknowledgment by those who judged.

Thumbing through my recipe box, I noticed the pen marks were smeared by water, the directions no longer legible. Just as she sits in a chair staring out the window, no longer with these memories. From inside her shell she occupies a space that is quiet, yet I hear her spoken and unspoken words.



Antoinette Pope School Cookbook, 1953

The finest and tastiest recipes came to me, complete with their own traditions and kitchen secrets, living and hiding within my histories. On the night before my wedding day, I was given a ceramic box, filled with my new family's recipes and my own copy of Pope's cookbook. This gesture granted me the privileges of both families' recipes. I was not sure how I would navigate through this situation. How would I choose between the two gravies? Ours was a meat sauce, and theirs was marinara. We made ravioli, and they made gnocchi. Our turkey stuffing was made with pork and spinach; theirs was a plain bread filling. More importantly, how would I navigate and repeat tradition. It was complicated and political. What did I want to take, and what did I wish to leave behind? How would I unravel the yarn of lineage?

The word “history” comes from an ancient Greek verb meaning “to ask.” One who asks about things—about their dimensions, weight, location, moods, names, holiness, smell—is an historian. But the asking is not idle. It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself. —Ann Carson¹

What is the context of this story? Why is it relevant?
What truths am I longing for?

This story is not so much about food, but rather, about an assemblage of forces and acts of transmission.

Transmission of family values as they move through time, forging identities. Transmission of a female language, situated within a patriarchal order. Transmission of generational links and assuming histories. Transmissions of fulfilled and unfulfilled promises within a family structure. Transmission of analogies, shared through birth and death. Transmission of sensation and its forces. Transmission of belonging, finding connections and meaning.

¹ Anne Carson, *Nox*, (Canada, New Directions: 2010) 8.

Appetizers:

For an elaborate meal it is not necessary to include a large variety of heavy foods in the menu. The object of these appetizers is to stimulate the appetite rather than dull it. Therefore, they should be well seasoned and small in size. (Pope, 1953:1.)

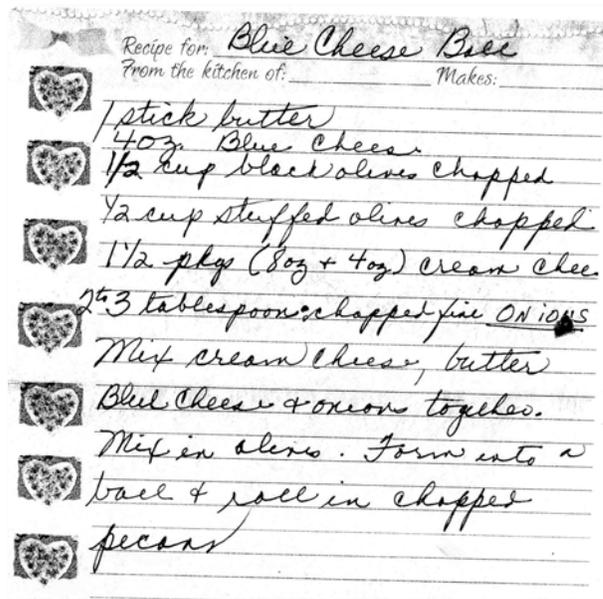
Ingredients:

William DeKooning

Mark Rothko

Robert Rauschenberg

Hans Hoffman



Upon entering VCFA, I defined myself as a painter and I was staunchly set on remaining a painter for the time. I knew what MFA programs did to painters, and I was determined not to have this happen to my practice. I recall my initial conversation with Jessica over the phone.

Margaret: I am looking for a program that will not push me away from painting.

Jessica: You won't be pushed away from painting, Margaret. The faculty will encourage experimentation, but they will not ask you not to paint.

Margaret: How many students hang a final show with paintings?

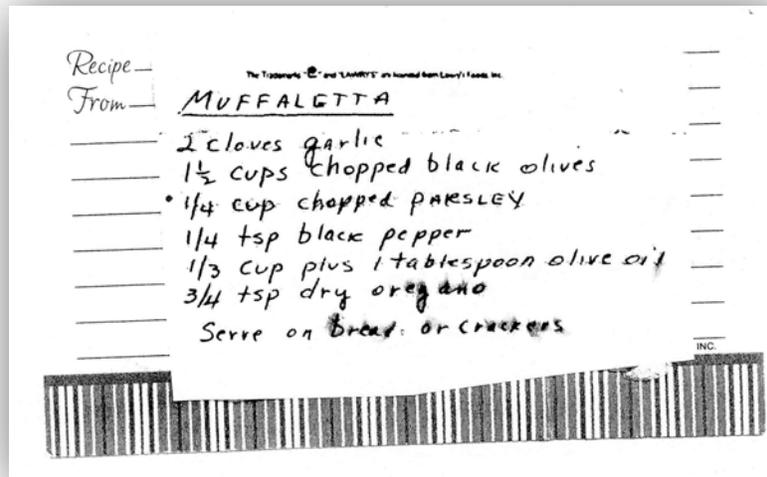
Jessica: That depends on the individual artist and the class. You can call some of our alumni and speak with them directly; I can provide you a list of phone numbers.

Margaret: Okay, I will do that.

I called various alumni. Still not completely sure, I made visits to the three graduate programs I was considering. Meeting Jessica was the deciding factor for me, she gave me the time to answer my questions and share students' works. Everything seemed to line up and I knew after meeting with her this was the place for me.

Traveling from Chicago to Montpelier, thoughts of doubt and excitement swirled in my head. Did I wait too long, held up by interruptions and obligations? Or was it the right time, coming with rich and varied life experiences? My journey from Chicago to Montpelier seemed surreal. I pinched myself in the cab all the way from Burlington to Montpelier in order to make sure that I was not dreaming.

Meeting my class in College Hall for the first time, I was surprised there were eleven women and one man. I must admit initially I was disappointed by the lack of diversity in our class. My judgment was quickly proven wrong by the differences each one of my peers brought to the program. Together we navigated all there was to do in such a short condensed amount of time. Keeping up with the schedule proved to be overwhelming. I watched people make lists, highlighting where they should be at what time. There was so much advice to be given in such little amount of time. I quickly realized in my first encounter with all the students and faculty that this experience would be a rare opportunity to share with artists from a range in age groups and locations who brought with them various viewpoints and multiple disciplines. I was ready.



Prepare: While attending a class in the Continuing Studies program at The School of the Art Institute in Chicago, I had a teacher ask me why I wanted to paint like a dead man who lived fifty years ago. I did not know how to answer his question and I did not think much of it at the time.

Simmer: Much of my art education had been focused on a Modernist way of looking and making art. I was drawn to the famous abstract expressionist William DeKooning, Mark Rothko, Robert Rauschenberg, Hans Hoffman and many others. I studied them with one desire, to make art like them. Often my emphasis was in the technique itself, applying paint, mixing colors, experimenting with mediums, and laying paint down onto a smooth surface.

Remove from stove and cool: What I have come to realize in my graduate studies is how much of my art practice was tied to Modernist ways of thinking expressed in the sense of solidarity that was exclusive to male artists and contingent on their genius abilities and an old school Western model.

Serve: Immersed in a critical and historical framework, Postmodernist ideas and Postmodern art became available to me, and I certainly was ready for this new position for my art practice.

Ingredients:

Make

Show

Value

Repeat

Mix: Why did I come to VCFA? I would respond much differently today than when I entered the program, two years ago. I thought I came to have an opportunity to teach, get gallery representation, to have more opportunities to sell my work, to be acknowledged as a “real artist”, to have my work validated by its value, to find and establish a consistent way of organizing my practice. This experience of making art is always driven by outcomes.

Turn basic dough: What I did not realize was that I was *all* wrong. My reasons had nothing to do with making art; they were desires and constructions that rationalized my art practice, making it worthy of the time and commitment it demanded. My naivety about the process was becoming clear.



Energetic Flow, Entrance Image, 2009

Soups & Salads

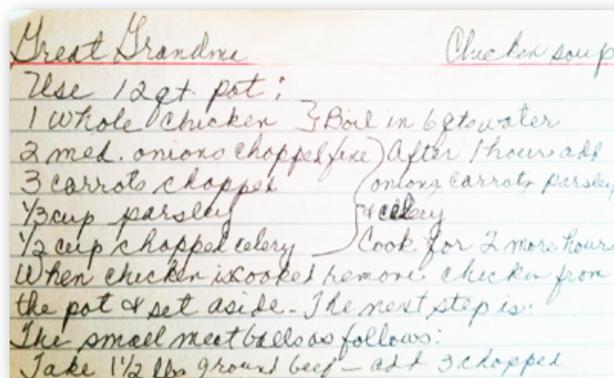
It is an established fact that vegetables are the richest source of vitamins, which is essential in maintaining good health. All ingredients used in a salad should be fresh and strong. Various types of vinegar may be used for variety. A top-grade vegetable oil may be used instead of olive oil unless distinctive flavors of olive oil is preferred.

Ingredients:

Arturo Herera

Laurie Anderson

Craig Owens



A Conversation with the Chef and Student:

We met in a small café in Wicker Park in Chicago. I was very familiar with this neighborhood, which was close to where my family gathered on Sundays. Back then, it was a place where Italian immigrants had built their churches and settled. Today, the streets are lined with trendy cafés and pastry shops.

I was a big fan of my art teacher's work, and I was excited to meet him and show him my work. I brought several rolled-up canvas paintings and sketchbooks, and we found a table large enough for me to spread them out. I explained that I had submitted this work to VCFA as part of my application portfolio. I was working with abstracted figurative form, and more specifically, with the spine as a means of conveying energy within the body. I was exploring intangible energetic fields in and out of the body. He looked over my works, quickly scanning each. "This work is not very good. The color is muted together; there is too much going on. I don't know where to look. And what does the phrase "energies in the body" mean?"

"Well," I stumbled. "It is through the spine that energy moves through the physical body. I am interested in these energy fields, both inside and outside of the body."

"What does that say about you? These are big, general ideas. This work is missing your voice."

"Well, it has to do with the ephemeral nature of the body," I returned.

"You are talking about vague universal ideas." There was a lull in our conversation for a moment, "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"What do you expect from this program, from this experience?"

I thought for a moment. "Well, I would like to grow as an artist and focus on my process."

Glancing over to the other side of the room, then back at me, he continued. "Because I am going to be honest with you. You are coming to this a little late. Do you expect to show your work in a gallery when you are done?"

"Well... yeah..., sure I would like to be represented by a gallery."

"Well I just don't want you to be disappointed, there is a lot of competition in the art world and you have to make yourself stand out, I am not sure how you will do that." There was an under current, a patriarchal tone present. I wondered if he would have asked this question if I were male. I needed to clarify that I was not new to making art.

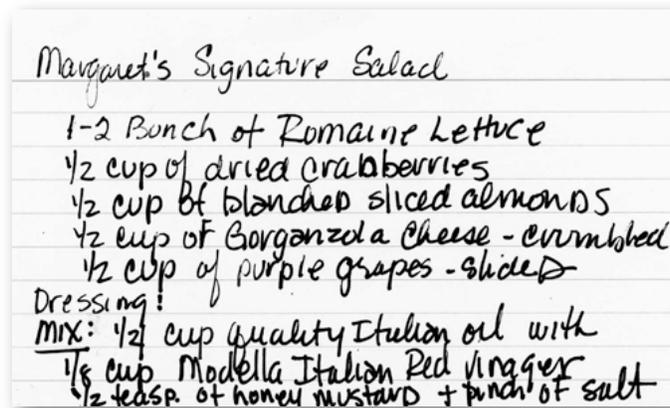
"Look, this is not new experience for me, quite the opposite. I have spent my whole life making art, as far back as I can remember. For now I would just like to focus on being here and where I can go with this work, let's focus on the process, OK?"

"OK, do you have anything else to show me?"

I had my sketchbooks, but they were just filled with my doodles.

I opened them up and handed them to him.

"I am a compulsive doodler. I doodle while waiting for others



I have been named after this salad; I am asked to bring it to all gatherings.

Conversation with the Chef and Student:

“These are good. Why don’t you work with these?”

“Because they are not really my art. They are just doodles from my day.”

At that point, my phone rang, and I knew that I needed to answer it, as I had warned my family to call me only in case of an emergency.

“Uh, excuse me for a moment.”

“Hi, Mom. Can you tell me where my red shirt is?”

“Yes, your shirt is in your right-hand top drawer. Don’t call me in the next two hours unless it’s an emergency, okay? Love you, bye.

I hung up the phone.

“That was really beautiful. Was that your son?” “Yeah.”

“That’s what your work should be about — your family. It shows up in your doodles.”

My spine straightened. “Well, I really do not want to make work about my family. I am an abstract painter, which has nothing to do with my family. Besides, if I plan on getting into galleries, I have to consider the fact that the art world and family do not seem to mesh. I do not know of many famous female artists working today that have families. In fact, I purposely do not share my family life in art circles so that I am not immediately judged to be a serious artist.”

He sat for a moment and concluded, “Okay, I think you should focus on these doodles. Blow them up and make them into large paintings. I would like you to make 8-10 large 8-ft. paintings from these doodles this semester that would be ready to hang in a gallery.”

“Okay,” I responded, diligently taking notes.

I left the meeting with a feeling of uneasiness, and I wondered if I could measure up to his expectations. Our meeting clearly had not gone the way that I had expected. I was jolted by an immediate sense of subjectivity regarding my position as an artist. Yet I was left with a question that lingered and that repeated itself throughout my graduate

Conversation with the Chef and Student:

experience. What were my preconceived notions about making art? I kept asking myself over and over: can I set aside my expectations; my control and let the process take on its own form? This is difficult for me, I become anxious.

I focused on creating a composition with clean and articulated lines in order to remove the “clutter” to which my AT referred. I was looking at Arturo Herrera’s paintings, and I was drawn to the way he used a simple line to create complex compositions. Not surprising, Herrera’s work had similarities to the contemporary style I had been attracted to in my AT’s work. As a way to work through the modernistic trappings I subscribed to, I adapted this clean, uncluttered strategy in this body of work. I was confident that the three large six-by-eight-foot oil paintings would impress my AT. They hung stapled to my studio wall; upon entering, there was an excitement in his tone.

“These are great. I did not believe that you could pull it off. These paintings are better than I had expected.”

A sense of satisfaction came over me.

“Thanks. I am pleased with them as well.”

We continued with a discussion as to how the compositions operated aesthetically, their line quality, how I mixed the medium, how the marks functioned to create form.

When I returned back to my studio the following day I felt somewhat satisfied with the work I had made, but deep down I knew I wanted more, I just was not sure what that *more* was at the time.



Arturo Herrera, *When Alone Again*
Latex on wall, 2001



Untitled, Oil on Canvas, 2010

Conversation with the Chef and Student:

I continued recording objects and encountered landscapes, events and emotions. These doodles became the content of the next set of paintings. I created three more large format paintings, this time with overlapping lines referencing my daily doodle drawings, one day's doodles over another's. Using the paint like an ointment, pigments suspended in a recipe of combined mediums, I built up the layers, while maintaining an overall flatness, characteristic to abstract painting. These again met with approval, and I was filled with a sense of accomplishment.

"These compositions are working really well, and the line quality is excellent." He moved closer to examine the paint strokes and exclaimed, "Wow, I think they are better than mine."

Something about his comment startled me. I knew that I was painting like him, but at that moment, I realized that I was painting *for* him. Although I thought that this was some of my best work aesthetically, I began to question the authenticity of these paintings, and I became increasingly uncomfortable and confused about the work and my process. I was clearly painting in a rote mode, executing a style and content aimed to garner approval *and* with a preconceived intention that the work could hang in a gallery and compete at the level of what my AT deemed to be gallery work.

We ended our last meeting with a discussion around my fortunate set of circumstances in the domestic sphere. The conversation had a strange twist.

"You know, you are quite lucky that you have a family. So many of my artist friends and I, well, we gave up family for our work. It is difficult, almost impossible to have both. Some have come to regret it later."

I nodded and then responded, "Well, it's funny that you say that because I am envious of your freedom, your ability to move through the art world so freely. I have made compromises in that way."

He concluded, "Your work is really great, you really surprised me, Margaret. I really think that you could show this work in a gallery."

I left feeling somewhat ambivalent, trying to make some sense of what just happened. Somewhere in the course of the six months I had lost my desire to make paintings with the intention and expectation to hang them in a gallery. I began to realize through my visual culture readings this mentor experience had offered me an entry-way into new ways of working. I pushed forward with a new assemblage of knowledge, and my interest no longer lied in the line quality of abstract compositions but rather in questions of language and representation within a patriarchal cultural order.



Untitled, Oil on Canvas, 2010

Unaware at the time, I eventually realized that the content of my paintings were addressing the codes that were circulating in my discussions with my AT. Our dialogue was operating within the structures of patriarchy with its dependence on opposition. Subtly but decidedly the subject of the artist, the female, the mother are constructed and implicated in all the trappings of language, while so much else is left out, forced to the edges, crumbs to be cleared away. Understanding the constructed subject became imperative as I moved forward. In the process of creating sculptural objects of fragmented female body parts I was asking myself, what is the language of female representation?

In his essay “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism” Craig Owens diagnoses the discourse of representation in postmodern conditions. What was an epiphany for me was Owens’s own confessed epiphany, when he realized that the feminist dialogue can be articulated in no other form than that of a patriarchal language. Owens contends that discourse is rooted in patriarchal language and its underlying assumptions, embedded in universal ideologies within modernist works as well as in the representation of the ideology of postmodernists. In both arenas, in order for women to be represented, they must assume a masculine position. It is impossible for women to express themselves otherwise or to be represented in any other terms. In other words, in our patriarchal social order, all language defaults to male. How, then, can gender and sexual differentiation be fully articulated, representing multiple meanings, if language is only available from one, the signifier (male), and not from the other who is signified (female)?

Laurie Anderson comes to terms with the fact that as an artist, she found herself in the masculine position, the subject of the male gaze. Laurie Anderson’s multimedia performance *Americans on the Move* at Carnegie Hall in 1981 addressed patriarchy and language in the actual act of transferring meaning from one place to another. Anderson introduces a schematic image of a male and female nude in outer space. The male nude image is placed as an emblem onto a rocket that is sent to space in the hopes of extraterrestrial communication. In reading this image, the man comes to represent all earthly beings; thus, “it is the man who speaks, who represents mankind. The woman is only represented; she is (as always) spoken for.”²

Laurie Anderson, Americans on the Move, Carnegie Hall, 1981



² Craig Owens. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983) 4.

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Access

the ability, right, or permission to approach, enter, speak with, or use; admittance. The state or quality of being approachable, a way or means of approach³

Ingredients:

Strategy

Visual Language

Communication

Convey Meaning

Audience

Access

Conceptual experience

Arriving back in Vermont for my second residency, I was excited and unsure about hanging my newly styled paintings. I had worked hard this first semester, creating eight six-by-eight feet paintings as I was instructed. What would the faculty say? How will they respond? I hung three paintings with bungee cords, serving as a metaphor for the tensions imposed by the demands of contemporary culture in the everyday.

Certain critiques have a major impact, usually the ones that sting the most. This was the case with my first critique with Humberto Ramirez. When I spoke about the work to my critique group, I spoke about my small narrow scope of how I travel through my world. Humberto was quick to suggest that when I present my work I should more carefully consider the words I use to convey meaning. He told me that it is extremely important when presenting one's work to be aware of your audience and not to expect my audience to see things that are not there. "I cannot access what you are saying in this work. The work does not go there, I can't find that. What is your strategy for communicating your visual language? Where does that put me as your audience?" I was not sure and I did not know how to answer his questions. Humberto suggested that the work needed to offer something more tangible, more specific that allowed the viewer to read intentionality.

³ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/access>

Prepare:

It's very tempting for artist to try to explain themselves. Especially after the experience of art school, where one is always asked for clarification and reasons for things... The problem is that explanation can easily slide into justification, and justification can easily turn to apology... We need to ask ourselves this question: am I providing access to the work, or trying to justify it ?⁴

Directions:

Visiting artist Kenseth Armstead asked for my artist statement, which I read from a prepared statement.

My studio project is an exploration of the ephemeral in everyday mark making as it makes its way into a space of importance. I mapped a female visual language through my movement through domestic space”

“What is ephemeral about paint on canvas?” he asked me. “I do not understand what you are trying to say, it sounds like a bunch of artist jargon without any concrete concept to back it up. Could your grandmother understand this explanation? The work must operate on that level, otherwise you have lost most of your audience?” His point was well taken and I questioned if I was getting lost in contemporary artist jargon and buzzwords floating around campus.

Kenseth challenged me with another question that would change the way I worked from this point on:

“What would I do if I did not paint? “

“I don't know, I have always just painted” I responded.

“Well I think this is a good challenge for you.” Think about how you can take these two-dimensional lines into a three-dimensional space.

My discomfort was high, what would I do if I did not paint? I did not know if I was up for this challenge but what I did know is I had an urge, an itch to leave painting and explore new fresh possibilities that were not limited to a specific set of materials and ways of communicating.

⁴ Nayland Blake, <http://www.naylandblake>.

Poultry & Stuffing:

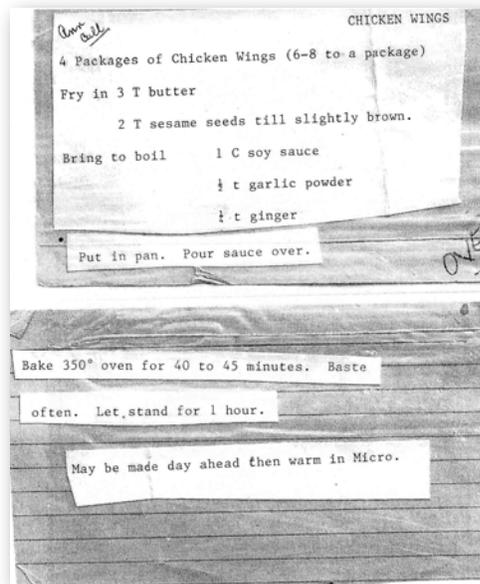
Today poultry of all kinds is available at any time during the year and should not be served only on special occasions. Now the trend is toward ready-to-cook poultry because these commercially packed birds are scientifically raised by experts, and only the best quality is branded by packers. (Pope, 1953:126)

Ingredients:

Kaja Silverman

Jim Drain

Louise Fishman



In the process of developing the paintings a visual language registered my movement in and through ordinary domestic space. The marks were, in a sense, self-reflective of my fragmented life, as I rushed from one place to another, attempting to meet the needs of all of those in my care. What emerged was a connection to the act of nurturing as a symbolic order of signifiers.

I came to make certain connections and gain an understanding of how language and signs make meaning through Kaja Silverman's text *Subject of Semiotics*. Silverman draws upon semiotic theory and the works of psychoanalytic theorists in order to explore the ways in which patriarchal language operates through culture. Silverman applies Lacanian psychoanalytic theories to masculine and feminine sexual division. The recipe for constructing a gendered subject follows below.

Gendered Subject:

1/2 part Signifier

1/2 part Signified

1 part Symbolic Signification

1 part illustration

1 part cultural order

a dose of motherhood

Mix: Beat together a dose of motherhood with ideal illustration until a smooth consistency develops. *Let this stew. Lack* --the unary signifier that intervenes and alienates the subject from phenomenal experience—will emerge from this mixture and become the signifier, giving rise to desire, which imprisons the subject into a state of never fully being satisfied. Within Lacanian theory, desire is affirmed as an absolute condition and is codified along the lines of sexual differences.

Blend: The symbolic order of culture is folded into the concoction described above to produce women's nurturing. Representing a categorical subject through the normative function of language sets exclusionary gender norms, which idealizes certain expressions of gender while producing forms of hierarchy and exclusion. Female nurturing is cradled in this complex set of relationships, inscribing the woman into a socially conditioned experience and producing fragmentation.

Ingredients:

Fragment
Cut Up
Assemble
Reassemble

Cut into pieces: A fragmented orientation continued to appear and reappear in the following semester's body of work.

Season lightly: My visual cultural readings initiated new thoughts and I wanted to convey a sense of fragmentation and entanglement from this new feminist vantage point. David Deitcher suggested I look at Louise Fishman's works from when she abandoned her minimalist-inspired, grid-like paintings and began making work that reflected women's traditional tasks. These works required the sort of repetitive steps that characterize activities like knitting, piecing, or stitching without so much clutter. I found some connection to Fishman's work; there were aspects of her materiality that resonated with me in both the simplicity of her taste and clarity of her content. However, I was far more inspired by Jim Drain's fiber works, they evoked an organic energy that was complex, witty and funny. I like humor in artwork, I think it is a good strategy for communication. The sensation of laughter draws me in, often asking me to think harder, and ponder what the artist is trying to say.



*Louise Fishman, Untitled
Oil Canvas, 2010*



*Jim Drain, Sight Unseen, Fiber and
mixed media, 2007*



Fragmentation Series: Painting and Fiber Materials on Canvas, 2010-11

Ingredients:

- Cut
- Disjoint
- Combine

Combine all ingredients and whisk: With these influences I began a drawing and painting series based on female body parts. I made several loose drawings and took them to paint on canvas. Wanting to move the materiality into similar sensibilities as Fishman and Drain, I recreated aspects of these drawings and other figurative representations that took the shape of armored and headless females, by combining fibers, threads, yarn and gauze.

The images no longer appeared fragmented; the image of a whole body had returned. They seemed to step backward to a stagnant orientation that relied on figuration for its representation. Michael Minelli's critique confirmed my doubts "These figure drawings are like an architecture, while your sculpture is organic, we are organic, but all the materials that we live with are not...I am tired of this figurative work.... I see too much of it...I know how much it took to make this work but it is not interesting, it falls flat for me."⁵ Still further, I saw the disconnection as faculty members interpreted the imagery as disjointed and unresolved, unclear, and lacking content.

⁵ Notes from Michael Minelli's Critique, Third Residency, Jan. 2011

Ingredients

Content

Aesthetic

Materials

My first critique with Todd Bartell in my first semester was the beginning of an ongoing dialogue about materiality and content. Todd empathically insisted that my content be reflected in the materials I chose to express it. “Research your materials as a way to express content, as a way to move from Modern to Postmodern. Be selective of what materials suit your vision. You must consider how content, aesthetic and materials intersect to convey meaning.”⁶

Now in my third semester my artist teacher Amy Honchell was also challenging me to use materials relevant to my content. Why use paint when you are thinking about food, why not use frosting? Each time we met she would ask: Why does it have to hang from a wall? Each time she challenged me to open up new modes of delivery that I had not considered.

I was looking at a lot of artists, but I was clearly drawn to Eva Hesse’s work. Her work challenged the formal and material choices that destabilized the relationship between the aesthetic and the conceptual. I wanted to create this type of relationship as I began to understand the importance of a working relationship between content, material, and aesthetic concerns.



Eva Hesse, No Title, 1970
Des Moines Art Center

⁶ Notes from Todd Bartell Critique, Second Residency, August, 2010

Add all the chopped ingredients into the bowl: Through rigorous studio labor, several sculptural objects took shape in new forms that alluded to fragmented body parts. Working with various fiber materials gave me a lot of potential to create different techniques. The process involved repetitive steps that characterize activities like knitting, piecing, or stitching with collected materials that most often find their way into landfills; milk cartons from Starbucks, tires from the bike shop, and consumed items that filled my home, referencing aspects of my fragmented life style.

Rhythmic folded plastic forms created new shapes that resembled a female torso and womb. Consumed objects wound together with string, netting and various electrical and electronic wires folded into a nest like structure eventually taking on the form of female pelvis and hipbone. At times I felt in sync with my new practice of making sculptural objects; at other times I was in conflict, not knowing what I was doing and where these forms were going.

The material and work was very labor intensive as is so much the case with all my works. I have always associated hard work and arduous labor with the aesthetic appeal and success of my work. An aesthetic sensibility is what I am always striving for. What is aesthetics, and how does my aesthetic sensibility communicate meaning? These questions were asked of me over and over again at each residency.



*Fragmentation Series
Torso, Plastic Milk Cartons, 2010*



*Fragmentation Series, Pelvic Bone,
Wires, netting, and found objects, 2011*

Lemon Chicken

1 Tablespoon soy sauce
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
1/2 cup lemon juice
2 Tablespoons lemon peel
2 cloves garlic chopped fine
1/4 cup oil

Combine above ingredients +
refrigerate for 1 hour.

Place 3# chicken skin side down
in shallow roasting pan. Brush
with melted butter. Cover pan.

Bake at 400° for 30 minutes
Turn chicken over + pour sauce
over chicken. Lower heat to
325° - and bake for another 30
minutes. Cook uncovered.

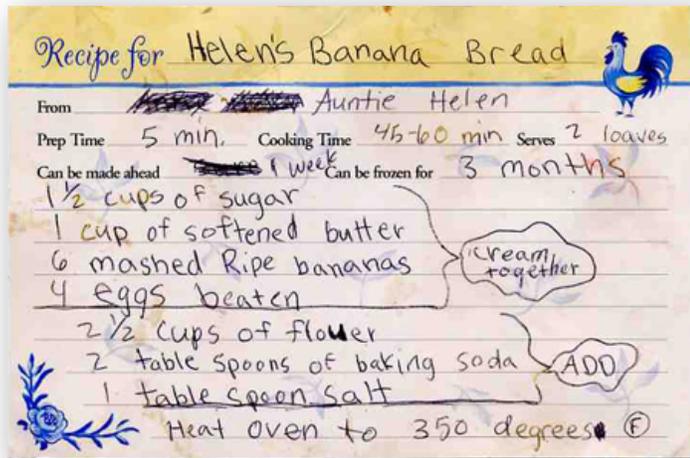
Enjoy

Yeast and Sweet Breads:

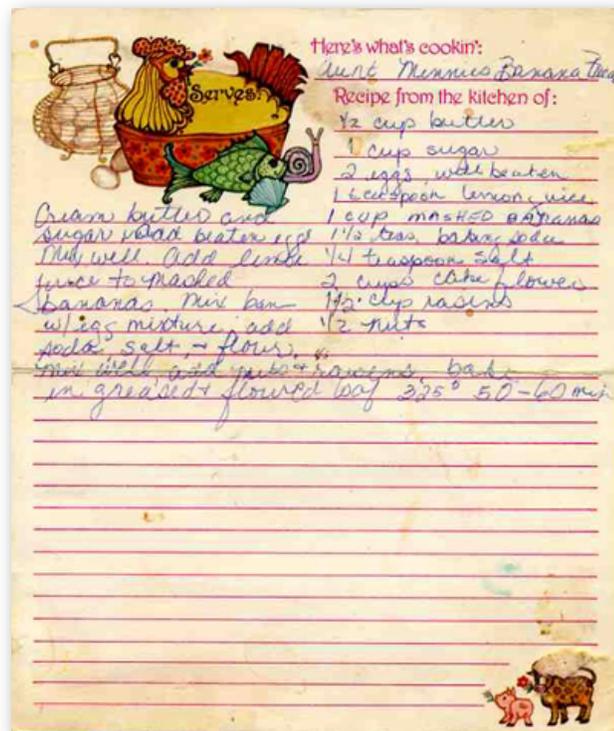
In preparing yeast dough, liquids should be scalded in order to destroy any microorganisms that might interfere with the action of the yeast in developing the dough. Because flour and other raw product are not always uniform in quality, it may be necessary to use more or less flour than suggested in our recipes.
(Pope, 1953:283)

Ingredients:

Ana Mendieta
Kaja Silverman



Over time, most of the recipes acquired ownership. One's name was always associated with your particular contribution. She was always applauded for her banana bread; she always gave the credit to her pan.



A rival competitor for the best banana bread recipe amongst family members.

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Kneading

To mix by pressing.

Notes: Specifically, this means to make into a uniform mass, as by folding, pressing, and stretching with the hands or manually manipulating someone's body, usually for medicinal or relaxation purposes.⁷

The process of making bread requires adding flour, kneading, adding more and kneading until I know when to stop. It's a flow of creativity without an agenda. When the process unfolds, there is a sense of imminence and uncertainty. I am uncomfortable with uncertainty because it feels like a free fall that I can't control.

Doubt, questions, and preoccupations shape and provoke my process. I find myself thinking that I know what I am looking at, yet everything remains uncertain. When do I know when to push and when to wait? What ingredients should I add, and what should be omitted? What are the measurements? One-cup, two cups, three cups?

Measurements:

Observe

Inquire

Reflect

Make

Let go

Shape the dough: Trusting the process suspends judgment and allows yourself to be lost in the midst of de-familiarized things, in uncertainty. Engage in a critical dialogue with yourself, and allow silence to be loud.

Place into a sprayed bread pan: Process opens up possibilities to participate in critical pedagogy and to experiment in a relevant, relational art practice.

⁷ <http://thesaurus.com/browse/kneading>

Assemble and reassemble: From the recommendation of my new artist teacher Crista Donner I engaged in a daily practice to allow for experimentation. Crista set some parameters and directed me to make a daily image in response to the one the day before, *and* to record a written reflection to document my thoughts at that moment of creation.

I liked this idea; it liberated me from always having to work towards the production of a finished product. At times uncomfortable and uncertain, the process forced me to let go of old habits of control and completion.

Marinate in its juices: My wall expanded over time, fashioning a mixture of days, thoughts, encounters, all running into each other. The process was organic; without a planned agenda there was no beginning or end. I became aware of the moments that occurred in between the making. This pause made time for reflection, time to sit, marinate my thoughts and soak up what each day's image meant, or not. I was content with this process, which was surprising.

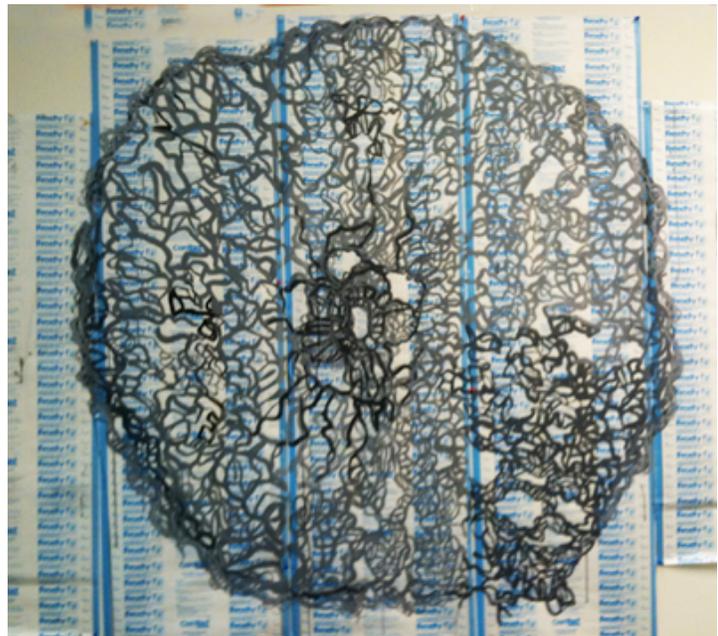
Bake: A round spiral shape and doily shape repeated itself day after day. These shapes resurfaced as I moved into my next body of work.



Daily Practice, Japanese paper, acetate, ink, acrylic, thread, wire, 2010.



Untitled, Ink tissue paper and wire, 2010



Untitled, Ink on contact paper, 2011

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Doily

A small ornamental Matt
A small napkin
Used during dessert course
Thin woolen fabric
Affordable woolens
Cheap but classy
Household item
Similar to points on a Cartesian coordinate system



Untitled, Tagging with flour, corn meal, spices, and Stencils, photographs, 2011

Ingredients:

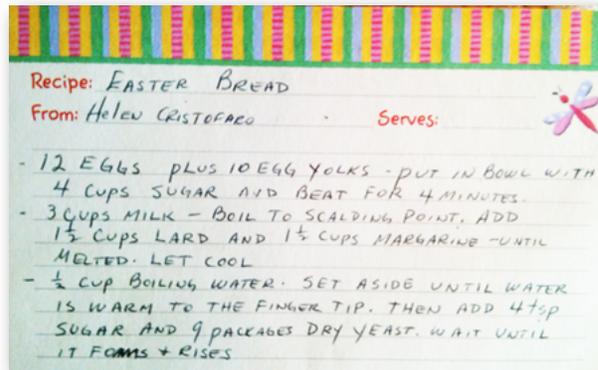
Flour

More trouble is encountered in measuring flour than any other ingredient. After many years of experimental work, we have concluded that the most reliable way to measure flour is to sift it directly into the measuring cup, having it slightly overfull, then to level off the surface with the edge of a knife or spatula. (Pope, 1953:?)

Influenced from daily practice, I took the doily image into a new direction. There seems to be an interplay and cultural association emerging. I decided to recreate the doily into a tagging performance. Identifying specific locations that referenced my own personal geographies I tagged the doily shape onto the ground with several different foods, flour, farina, sugar, paprika, curry. I documented the site, returning day after day to document the changes, the ingredients stepped on, blowing away and decaying into the ground.



Doily Tagging, Vermont College of the Fine Arts, August 2011



Ingredients:

Universal Truths

Difference

Other

Use basic dough: When I first saw Ana Mendieta's work, I was powerfully drawn to her images and the universal ideologies that accompanied them. Seeing them again recently at the Art Institute of Chicago again reconfirmed the strength of her work and the influence it has had on my own. Her earth body projects constituting the core of her works were based on her own body and silhouette, which she developed into an array of earth goddess figures and universal forms. There is a seductive quality to Mendieta's images, as they inscribe the eternal feminine, which represents women within an eternal mother archetype.

Creating representational images of females comes with its trappings, and I reconsidered Mendieta's works after reading Mira Schor's text, *Wet*. Schor elaborates, Mendieta "presents a limited view of the form and experience of femininity out of the limitless possibilities of femaleness... the constant repetition of unquestionable generic Great Mother is deeply, and now, poignantly problematic"⁸ In other words, by ignoring the patriarchal undercurrent in the concept of primordial nature and reproduction assigned only to female nature, Mendieta obscures rather than clarifies the ideology of the dominant male over female nature.

Challenging notions of universal truths, feminists elaborate on the homogenization of the human experience, arguing absolutes dislocate those in the margins while operating under a patriarchal ruling power. Simone DeBeauvoir confronts this persistent myth stating, "such myth encapsulates maternity both worshiped and reviled: the mother brings in life and heralds death. Although the female appears as the privileged "Other", the soul of the world, her passivity projected through nature condemns her to an eternity of the "Other".⁹

⁸ Mira Schor, *Wet, On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Duke University Press, 2007) 66

⁹ Simone DeBeauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, NY: Oxford Press) 262.

Dissolve Yeast:

Through an immersion in these feminist studies, I identified my own similar universal tendencies. Like Mendieta, I used myself as my own subject and created a female silhouette out of sifted flour. I photographed the image every day for a month as the flour disintegrated, which added a performative nature to the project. Through the ingredient's transience nature, impermanence, instability, and decay are all suggested. These instabilities point to the analogies we all share in both birth and finitude, while instilling a sense of vulnerability in the female image. The origin of earthiness and mortality are further explored as metaphoric associations. Aesthetically I like these images, but I am ambivalent about them in the same way that I have become ambivalent about Mendieta's works. Like Mendieta they obscure, rather than clarify, further adding a vague and uncommitted quality to the female figure represented.

Kaja Silverman gave me a place to think about inherited universal beliefs as she proposes fundamentally rethinking the politics of visual images. In advocating for different relationships, the visual image can open a complex play of relationships at work, questioning absolute certainty as pure difference, and defining art as a space of relative observation and ever changing meaning.



Ana Mendieta, Silueta Works in Mexico, 1973-78, C-Print



Impermanence Series, Sifted flour Photograph, 2011

Meat and Casseroles:

It is generally conceded by the best scientists that a liberal protein allowance is required for optimum health and that food of animal origin, such as meat, are of high nutritive value. In addition to this, meat has an important place in meal planning because of its appetite appeal and satiety value. (Pope 1953: 62)

Ingredients:

Faith Wilding



Ingredients:

Doing
Service
Labor

Chop and place into pan: During my first faculty review, I presented a range of work, from my entrance images to the projects I was currently working on going into my third semester. During our meeting, my advisors David Deitcher and Michelle Dizon recognized “a compulsive act of doing and making that seemed to appear over and over” in my work. I had never thought of my work in this way and pushed back, replying, “Yes, repetition is in my work but it is a technical component, and is not part of my conceptual framework.” Dietcher calmly replied, “You know your work is a lot about doing... and...often doing is distraction, an avoidance that prevents us from sitting still and listening to our own voice. I think you should think about that.” When I left the meeting, I was agitated.

A semester later, Mario identified the same tenacities in my work and suggested that I think about the act of doing in relation to the act of service. I contemplated Mario comment and reflected back on the similar observations that David and Michelle had made the previous semester, this time a bit less defensively.

Broil on high temperature: I started to question why I was so inclined towards repetitive and compulsive acts of labor in my work and why I consistently have the tendency to feel that there must be intensive labor involved in order for my work to have value. I began to draw a parallel to the labor that I valued in my art to the labor expected and performed by the female subjects in my own familial setting. I decided not to abandon my compulsive working habits, but to instead incorporate the act of doing as a strategy to convey ideas of labor and acts of service as a starting point.

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Waiting

noun: a period of waiting; pause, interval, or delay

adjective: serving or being in attendance

verb: to remain inactive or in a state of repose, as until something expected

happens to continue as though one is in expectation of one's time¹⁰

Ingredients:

Build

Stop

Wait

Begin

Repeat

When I was young, my mother often referred to a waiting place called *limbo* for those who were not in service to others according to the ways and rules set by the Catholic Church. *Limbo*, or the Catholic term *purgatory*, was an intermediate place where souls caught between the two extremes of heaven and hell were required to wait to either be redeemed or cast away.

Those in limbo were able to be redeemed from an eternity of waiting through the prayers of others and act of service. I was reminded of this holding place as I read Faith Wildings poem "Waiting". In the valorization of all of her products and her labor of love, Wilding points to what Kelly identifies as phallic mother and the signification of the female role in servicing others.¹¹ She condenses a woman's entire life into a monotonous, repetitive cycle of waiting for life to begin while serving and maintaining the lives of others. Viewing Wilding's performance I was further inclined to understand this relationship in regulating the feminine to ideas of a universalized goddess or mother, nurturer, provider and server.



Waiting, A 15-minute monolog, scripted and performed by Faith Wilding in the Performance program at Womanhouse. The full text was published by Ms. Magazine in 1972, and in the Appendix of "Through the Flower" by Judy Chicago.

¹⁰ <http://thesaurus.com/browse/waiting>

¹¹ Mary Kelly. "Art and Sexual Politics" *Imaging Desire* (MA: MIT Press, 1996) 5.

With the inspiration of Wilding's performance, I initiated a project documenting my own acts of waiting in a similar vein. Setting specific parameters, I crocheted one continuous doily shape, waiting, watching, and helping others carry out their activities and daily needs.

The ongoing crocheting took place in various public places and brought awareness to the often-invisible hours that women devote to activities geared toward propelling and holding lives together. I was ignited by the interaction and engagement with the public space, and I found the exchanges therein to be stimulating in terms of further critical inquiries that extended far beyond my own four studio walls.

The doily's original purpose to protect precious objects while decorating its surroundings was an underpinning metaphor for the creation of the art object. As the object took form it evoked new meanings, transmitting idea of the passage of time in the act of nurturing. The conditions of waiting pose an intimate connection to the consequential holding place in *limbo*.



Waiting, Crocheted plastic string, 2011 Definition of Cooking Terms:

Ingredients:

Clarity
Seeing
Feeling
Understanding

Critique has always been a time of judgment or criticism that hinged on my peers, teachers or viewers' subjectivity. Often, I would let arbitrary likes and dislikes of others define how I viewed the success or failure of my works.

At each residency I experienced a plethora of contradictory interpretations and responses from faculty, peers and guest critters, each one challenging me to reconsider critique as a learning process. Many of these encounters broadened the ways in which I read works of art.

Michelle Dizon's critiques imparted new ways of looking and seeing art. Her strategies were not based on arbitrary likes and dislikes, but rather conceptualized as a form of social knowledge production in the context of looking, seeing and understanding the signification and coding of visual languages. Dizon in her confident strong voice moves the group away from subjectivity towards a collective read.

Michelle Dizon elaborates on the process of critique before we begin. "In some crits you have someone tell you about your work. What that presumes is that it is an interpreter, this is a special language, as the artist you accept it as truth. It is hard to know where the criticism is coming from, is it coming from work or is it coming from judgment. Ultimately, it can be very disempowering. So my thinking focuses on a collective reading; it hones the tools we engage to look critically.

If we take seriously the idea that there is intentionality, then how is it that spectators can be open to what an artist is actually trying to tell us? To activate the site of a reader or spectator, Saussure tells us, is actually a political question. When we think of the spectator not as a passive receiver but an active maker of meaning, there is kind of a shift in the relations that actually has to do with larger power structures. So let's consider in this critique how meaning is communicated."¹²

¹² Recordings from Michelle Dizon Critique, Feb 3. 2011

There is no failure, only feedback. – Robert Allen

Intuitively clear, Dizon shares with the group a place to *enter* and to *be in* the artworks. She begins the critique with a meditation to create a clearing.

Prepare: Remove thought. With each breath we can create a clearing, an opening to a stage of possibilities to what can enter that is new and different from what we know.

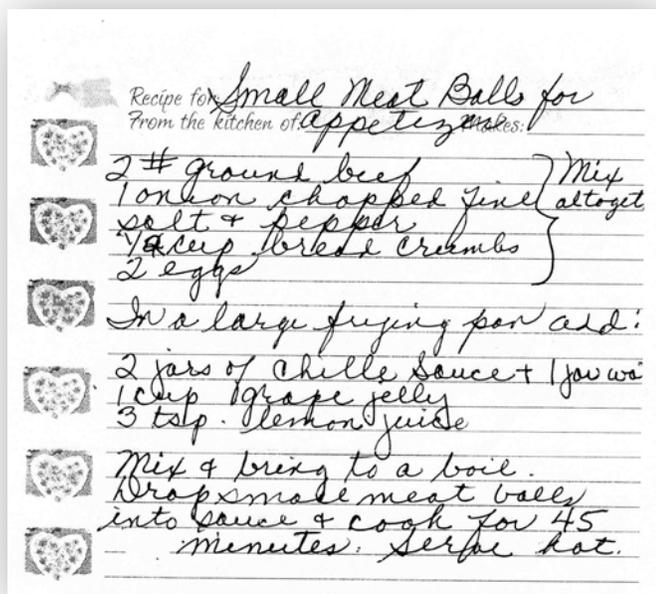
Add: Where would you stand to encounter the piece: What is typically the frame of the piece?

Add: Look at every thing up to and including the frame, not specificity but everything else in between. That means lighting, spacing, presentation, scale.

Add: Move closer, can you describe the materials used? What kind of genre and historical relevance do the materials take on?

Question: Bringing together all the elements of this piece, where do we feel we are led? ¹³

¹³ Recordings from Michelle Dizon Critique, February 3, 2011.



The size of the meatball was always an ongoing discrepancy in taste. My mother made large meatballs and the other side of the family made them small. There was always an on-going debate over how the size of the meatball impacted its taste.

Seafood:

Until the last few years fish bought at our markets were not cleaned, which discouraged the homemaker because it entailed too much preparation on her part. Today, however, fish can be purchased ready to cook.

Ingredients:

Judith Butler

Mary Kelly

Grant Kester

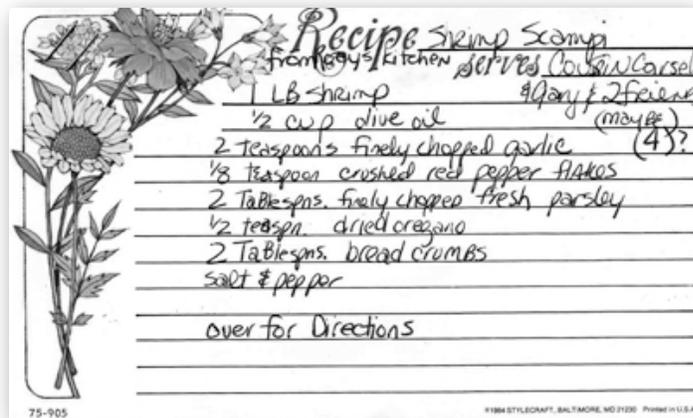
It is not a question of knowing whether this intersects you but rather of whether you yourself could become interesting under new conditions of cultural creation.¹⁴

I am feeling a need to escape my studio, the four walls feel binding, narrow, limiting. I want to see a world outside my studio. I want to hear my voice and voice of others. I wanted a link to experience, actualities, and sensations.

I am looking closer where the places of visibility, and invisibility express themselves. I have taken my practice outside the studio to observe and listen to what moves around me. Outside my private space I am beginning to make a connection between art and the richness of the ordinary and familiar. In these in-between spaces sits a vast reservoir of generally unnoticed, trivial, and repetitive actions where the markers of the normative live.

My work is shifting dramatically.

-Excerpts from my journal, December 2010



¹⁴ Guy Debord, *Towards a Situationist International*, 195

Ingredients:

Observe

Gather

Describe

Focus

Edit

Synthesize

During my candidacy review, Ulrike Muller challenged me again to consider ways of working that extend beyond the obvious “to come up with imagery that is more precise and sharper than saying doily, apron, nest equal nurturing.” Ulrike challenged me to think about how images can evolve from a process of observing and describing.

To Start: How do I make up a bigger picture that involves multiple reference points? How do I enter my process from a real and personal place?

Fold in varied ingredients to open connections. Look outward instead of inward. Talk to people and take notes from conversations. Gather and describe information through observations, witness and connections. “In this way you can start your process from where you are, from a real and personal place. Move outward from there.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Advisor Committee Review, Third Residency, August 2011

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Ordinary

of no special quality or interest; commonplace; unexceptional plain or undistinguished: ordinary clothes. 1. of no special quality or interest; commonplace; unexceptional¹⁶



A Photographic Spectacle, Digital Photographs, October 2011

Ideas stem from everyday. I have always used my camera to edit the world around me. Through the lens, I can see specifics in generalities. Lately, I find myself photographing generally unnoticed, trivial, and repetitive actions in the ordinary and familiar. Taking pictures from real life the photographs serve as a slice of information, markers for the norm.

I am finding relevance in a closer view of ordinary moments, oddities and affects that catch my eye. I am looking, understanding their affects on the normative in the everyday. I am taking note of the unexpected in repetitive sameness that plays out in the ordinary. There is so much more to think about, so much to see outside my studio. Ordinary life has become my canvas.

-Journal Entry, October 2011

¹⁶ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ordinary>

*All expressions of agency occur within particular contexts of ordinary life.*¹⁷

Ingredients:

Attention

Witness

Affect

I have a way of compartmentalizing information, a symptom that reveals itself when I get stuck in the process. It is hard to break out of this linear way of thinking when culture programs a one-way direction; the habitual becomes a way of knowing.

When I get off the linear map, I am able to escape the limitations of linear order. I like to wander and to drift. I define my desire to drift not as an aimless act but one of a witness. It's a sustained attention to the experience of being connected to the world. Consciously occupying in-between space creates a moment of pause where I reflect, interrupt, and defy expectations. Within the mixed capacity of in-betweens "something emerges, overflows, exceeds: a form of relation as a rhythm, a fold, a timing, a habit, a contour, or a shape comes to mark the passages of intensities in body-to-body/world body mutual imbrications."¹⁸

I am trying to understand affect in all its complexities. What does it mean to be affected? How do repetitive acts in the everyday become normalized? How are they organized by affect's indeterminate nature?

The issue of affect reveals itself when I allow myself the time and space to become conscience, when I am in witness to the manifestation, materiality, and ongoing permeation into the familiar of daily life. Affect is an abstract force that rises and falls in the space that is generally unnoticed, existing "along side or generally other than conscious knowing."¹⁹ It surrounds us, suspended in a rhythm, a hum with tempo and duration. The hum has a continuum that quietly living in the unnoticed routines, repetitive actions, and experiences that make up ordinary life. It's a force that is subtle yet powerful, seeping deep into our unconscious. The *essence* of affect is what matters, meaning "not what something is, but *how* it is, or more precisely, *how* it affects and *how* it is affected by other things."²⁰

¹⁷ Stephen Johnstone, *The Everyday* (London: Whitechapel, 2008) 12.

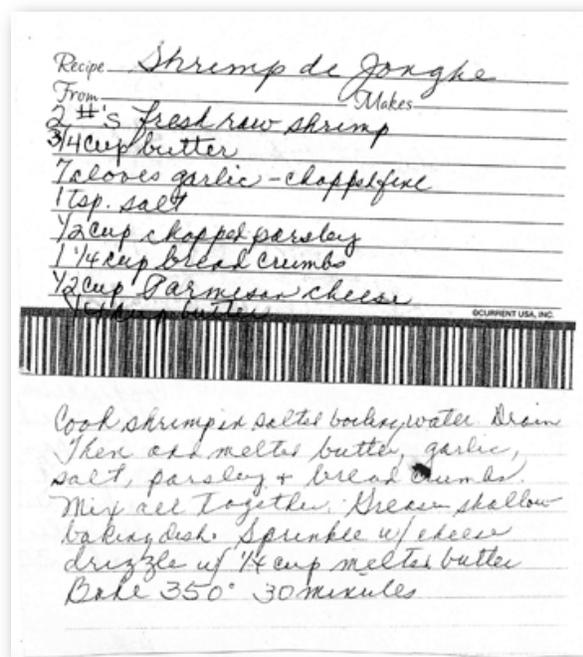
¹⁸ Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010) 13.

¹⁹ Seigworth & Greg, 1.

²⁰ Seigworth & Greg, 8.

The complexities of *affect* reside in its invisibilities that seep into and circulate passing “body to body, world to worlds.”²¹ Affect hides in the in-between-ness, where there is a pause from thought to thought, action-to-action, borders and thresholds that make up the in-between spaces. It seeps into the crevasses, the inside cavities, unseen spaces, normalizing through neutralizing. It accomplishes neutrality by opposing polarities and contradictions. This neutrality is not made up of gray tones with progressive values, but rather a uniform grayness that comes to define existing conditions where sameness and commonplace prevail, enforcing realities, which are no longer blurred.

Affect comes to supersede the everyday in its strictest sense. What are the different affects that make us act, feel and think in different ways? How do I find a language or form that can adequately convey its complexities, ambiguity elusiveness?



²¹ Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010) 1.

At this point I understood the importance of a social practice and why I needed to engage in a larger conversation, a more intense discipline that extended beyond being creative. I wanted my work to begin to function as a transport from private to public space within a framework of generative discourse. I make a leap, I sign up of Don't Rhine's social collaborative visual culture group. I find myself treading in deep water.

Ingredients:

Connect

Interact

Listen

Collaborate

Participate

Prepare: I was thinking about the place that I occupy, I have always operated from the edge looking in, but live my life in the middle or perhaps even to the right in a traditional domestic space. It is a conflicted space being on the inside and outside, a dichotomy on the threshold of rejection and fulfillment. I invited the idea of an exchange in social spaces, which took shape in the form of participation as a way to explore and questions of representation and gender.

What constitutes the self in binary gendered conditions?

What are the implications for gendered roles based on individuals' histories and social structures?

Where does the place of gender reside?

What is the language and gesture of gender?

Mix Together: The recipe called for the works of contemporary theorists Judith Butler and artist Mary Kelly to guide my inquiry. Kelly's Post-Partum Document rooted in Lacanian theory, provided me a visual reference for the limitations of language and its inability to operate as a stable signifier. Judith Butler's text *Gender Trouble* reshaped my assumptions about how gender identities are categorized and meanings of gender identity constructed. Butler imparts, "Representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject".²² In this sense, being a gender is an effect that constitutes a constructed subject. I recognized how epistemology and language produce seductive and simplifying dualisms, and the notion of gender as gendered identity is derived from a subjective point of view that can never be objective.

²² Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 2.

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Collaborate

to work, one with another; to cooperate, usually willingly, to work with another or others on a joint project, to work jointly with others in some endeavor²³

Grant Kester defines the term “dialogical projects” as collaborative art practices that create a relationship between artists and viewers, essentially shifting the understanding of the aesthetic.²⁴ What emerges is a new set of insights that incorporate multiple senses and perspectives generated from artists, collaborators, and viewers. Relinquishing the production of objects shifts the concept of art based on self-expression to one based on the ethics of a community exchange, thus synthesizing the artist in collaboration *as* the art object itself. The aesthetic *is* the collaboration. I had long been working in a conventional model where the subject participates in a dialogue based on an individual and physical experience of liking or not liking based on personal subjectivity. In the dialogical model, the subject is formed through discourse and intersubject exchange itself. I developed my collaborative project *Collaborative Voices: Uncovering the Architecture of Gendered Identities* based on these tenants.

Add: My inquiry addressed the social construction of gender and representation and the conditions of their existence within the realms of domestic space. Butler tells us that the fact that gender is constructed allows for critical critiques that challenge the notions of subjects and the roles that they play.²⁵ Contingent on this condition my investigation entailed an exploration of representation and the conditions associated with its production. I interviewed twenty female participants, where I explored the presumptions of the categorization and restricted meanings of gender identity and the ways in which epistemology and language produce seductive and simplifying dualisms. More importantly this process became a laboratory for my own self-reflection. The power of each encounter lay not in their similarities, but rather in the antagonisms revealed, as the dialogue delved deeper into exploring the particular aspects that render identity and individuals’ unconscious awareness of their own social constructions.

²³ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/collaborate>

²⁴ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)

²⁵ Judith Butler, “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire,” *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 3.



Collaborative Voices: Photographs from Interviews, 2011

Marinate: One of the several questions prepared for the interview addressed categorical language that made up the way in which each participant organized, named, and compartmentalized self.

What are five categories or roles that define your identity?

mother, friend, resource, reliable, funny, • loyal, loving whimsical, fun loving, spirited • mother, wife, daughter, friend, dog owner • independent intense, loyal, social, seeking • caretaker, supporter, runner, reader, friend • teacher, caregiver, housewife/slave, nurturer • mother, wife, friend, daughter, sister, leader, coordinator • caring, thoughtful, tenacious, nurturer/motherly • mom, friend, daughter, wife, sister mother, grandmother, daughter, nurturer, intuit, • sexy, pink, activist, mother, lover • worker, maker, artist, mother, wife, • daughter, mother, sister, aunt, friend • lover, caregiver, nurturer, hard worker • worrier, strong, patient, understanding, kind • outgoing, enabler, liberator, mother • object, caretaker, teacher, lover • mom, driver, cook, knitter, helper • mother, wife, sister, friend, volunteer • community activist, mother, friend, strong women

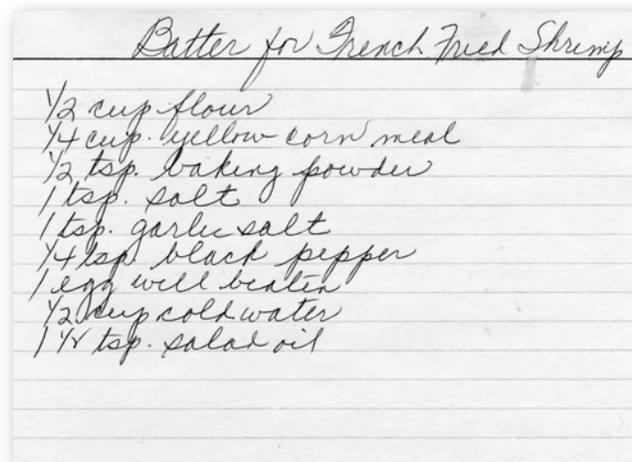
Combine: Through the process of collaboration, I found I became a listener instead of a doer. I stepped back from the constant tendency I have towards making to observe and maintain an awareness of shifts in voice and tone, body language, and facial expression. My transition from hesitation to action, from thoughts to process, from passive to scrutiny all became part of my process.

The dialogical process required me to step out of my studio and engage in a host of duties, including making lists, writing and rewriting questions, taking notes, arranging meetings, meeting for coffee, having conversations, paying attention to others' conversations, listening keenly, recording, compiling sound tracks, observing, paying attention, becoming aware of the sounds and rhythms that make up the everyday, and being in the moment. This was not an easy course; I agonized every part of the way, and found myself often wanting to fall back into comfortable ways of making art. I also struggled between making material objects from a variety of materials and conducting interviews. Yet over the course of the semester, my interest in only object orientated aesthetics shifted. As the work evolved with interaction I was drawn to the exchange between artist, participant and viewer. The process of thinking, acting, interacting, and reflecting contributed at some level to a deeper and critically considered body of work.

The nature of translation and subjectivity in my project presented the biggest challenge. I was cautious about a stereotypical portrayal of female representation. Presenting a generic form of the female as mother and nurturer within a given class structure limited the possibilities and differences in female representation. As a result, translation and authorship were two specific challenges. Indeed, each of the steps involved in the project's development entailed a political selection process that was inherently unavoidable in this social process.

Through the dialogical process I served as the inquirer, assembler, recorder, translator, and transmitter of a personal and collective language. I recorded our interactions, trying to determine if they were mine to use. Still further, I questioned whether or not the process amounted to a true collaboration, as the one-to-one encounter was controlled by my own set of parameters. I struggled with presenting my collaborative experiments as a valid body of work at the residency wondering where to go with this work and what authorized this aesthetic? I asked Dont Rhine, my advisor, and he suggested I use it to inform another body of work; in other words it was research. I was satisfied with that answer, still unsure where or how I would reference the hours of recorded interviews. At the same time I became intimately aware of the importance of noting the intricacies and to maintain a continuous activity of documentation.

Working as a collaborative team within my visual culture group opened new ways of thinking about the nature of the aesthetic in a postmodern dialogue. Every group member had clear intentional goals and I took careful note as to how each group member defined their aesthetic within their own collaborative project. The aesthetics initiated by the members of the group fell outside an academic language that I was familiar with. This was an important aspect of my learning process as I was able to draw from my peers as much as I drew from my own collaborative project.



Over one hundred years old, always included as part of the traditional seven fishes served on Christmas Eve.

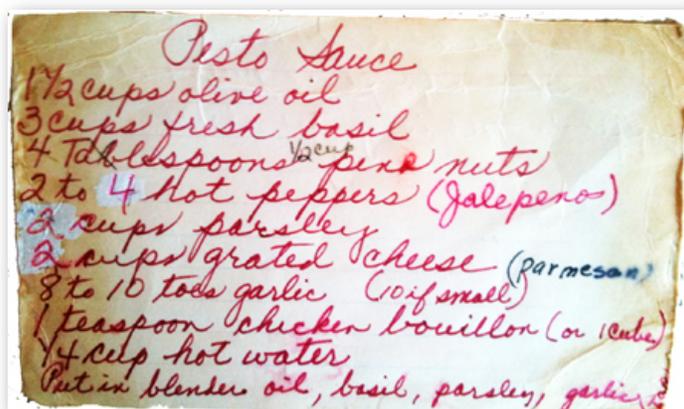
Gravies & Sauces:

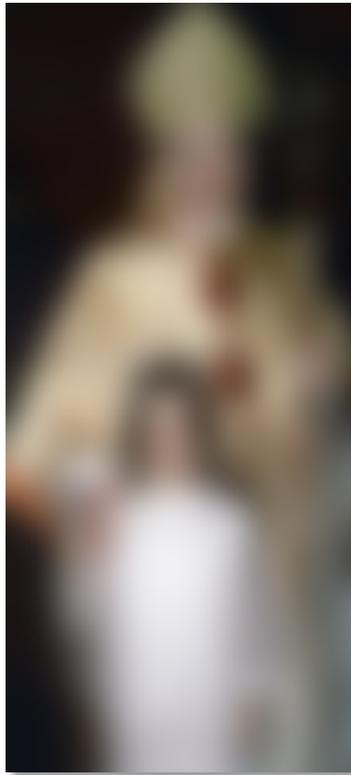
The gravies and sauces were the most revered of all of the family recipes. They were the staple of our culinary history, passed on from one generation to another. These important recipes were secret, only to be shared with members of the family.

Ingredients

Kaja Silverman

Leonardo da Vinci





The day of my first holy communion the bishop came to our house for a visit, to bless the entire family and me. My mother was so excited she could hardly contain herself. She made all the different sauces as a special offering for his presence. This photo hung in the kitchen from that day forward.

Ingredients:

What is the risk?

1/2 part Reveal

1/2 part Conceal

1 part local

2 parts being in the world

The challenge of finding a personal voice without focusing solely on its locality remained an ongoing critique throughout all of my residencies. I struggled with directing a personal tone, which was identified as “very localized,” to an expanded view that looked outward. Each time I returned to hang my work, it seemed as though the critique of my “localized point of view” became louder.

During my first residency, Humberto suggested, “While your object of reality is being a mother and a woman in the world, it is not necessarily what the work needs to be about. Make your work a formal documentation. Have a space to explore other things, other than the day-to-day grind. Be more of an advocate and critical of views of gender, and move beyond your narrow scope.” During the next residency, Ulrike Muller encouraged me to “move beyond my narrow scope that seems to appear to be limited to my visual and conceptual experience.”

A semester later in my faculty review, both David Deitcher and Michelle Dizon identified the lack of personal connection in my writing and art works. In these, they urged me to make a connection to my own lived experiences and to find value in rich and fertile resources for critical investigation. As I digested their advice I was hesitant. I am selective, often secretive about exposing my own vulnerabilities. Further, what did I have to offer? What could I contribute to the world? What does it mean to be culturally viable?

I must admit at this point I was confused. On one hand I was being told to draw from personal experiences, and on the other hand I was told I was being too narrow, too local and to extend out into a larger frame of reference. I was not really sure how to occupy both positions. How do I maintain an emotional connection and show how my thinking is connected to a larger political question? At a certain point during my third semester these two critical messages intersected. In my video performance *Feeder*, I drew from my own emotional narrative while leaving ambiguities and questions open for viewers’ own interpretations. In this process, I was making art about something very personal and something that is very much about being in the world.

Rose's Meat Sauce

1lb of sirloin, ground beef
5 neck bones
5 cloves of garlic chopped
4 tablespoons of oil

Heat oil and brown garlic
Scoop out and place in bowl
Add sirloin beef and neck
bones and brown.
Add garlic back into the pot

2 cans of tomato paste, small
15 fresh peeled tomatoes
1 large can of tomato puree
1 bunch of parsley and Basil
Add tomato paste to meat
and 2 cans of water. Simmer
for 10 minutes. Roast tomatoes
in oven for 10 minutes, peel skin
and add to blender. Mix. Add
mixture to meat with the can
of tomato puree. Simmer for 15
min. add parsley, salt, pepper. Cook for
2-3 hours.

Rose's meat sauce was made every week and served on
Wednesdays and Sundays.

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Analogy

A similarity between like features of two things, upon which a comparison may be based -Similarity or comparability²⁶

In considering my own identity I desire more than the dualities and oppositions representation has to offer. Perhaps because I find myself in a position of privilege I am able to ask for more. Wanting more has pushed me to think about new ways and other possibilities for making art. I want to know how an artist can think beyond representation in order to locate and liberate the differences and sensations hidden in overtly familiarly.

Silverman's text *Flesh of my Flesh* became a pivotal text at this point in my process. The density of Silverman's academic analysis required me to read and reread the text. Each time that I returned to the text, every word seemed to speak directly to me, imparting a relational connection to my own complicated generational factors. Citing the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Silverman draws parallels to the many reinterpretations of this myth from the beginning of time. Reading this story reminded me of my own Catholic upbringing, as this myth was recounted over and over in my childhood teachings, albeit with a different set of characters. I saw my mother's life intertwined in this story, her devout beliefs in original sin so intricately encrusted in this myth.

I find some answers as Silverman moved beyond these limitations and engaged me in another way of looking, a system that is more inclusive rather than being limited to the binary of him/her, effectively "binding us through a single line of connection."²⁷ She points to analogies that humankind share, not as an ideal, but as a point of connectedness and possibility: "what links us to other beings— what makes all our stories part of the same book."²⁸ Through the relationship between the mythical characters, Orpheus and Eurydice find equality in the analogies they share in death. Orpheus looking back marks Eurydice and woman as the source of death. It is not until they share finitude that they can walk together as equals.

Silverman remarkably finds a desire to belong by pointing to death or finitude as the primary force of unity. Moving out of separation Silverman notes, "Finitude marks the point where we end and others begin, spatially, temporally, it is also what makes room for them— acknowledgment of these limits allows us to experience the expansiveness for which we yearn, because it gives us the powerful sense of our emplacement within a larger Whole."²⁹

²⁶ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/analogy>.

²⁷ Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh*. (California, Stanford University Press, 2009) 74.

²⁸ Silverman, 74.

²⁹ Silverman, 4.



*Leonardo da Vinci,
The Virgin and Child
with Saint Anne, 1508*

Because art privileges similarity above all other relationships, it is able to reveal these connections to us. Not every work of art exercises this capacity; some offer us only fleeting and partial glimpses of resemblances that connect us to our fellow beings, and others elide them altogether. However, there are songs, poems, paintings and buildings that help us to see that we have appointments to keep in the past, in what had gone before and for the most part extinguished' and that we must go there in search of places and people who have some connection with us on the far side of time.³⁰

Silverman's ability to actively see our connectedness and analogies through art was incredibly compelling. Concretely, Silverman analyzes the works of Leonardo da Vinci and contemporary artists James Coleman. Silverman points to da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* to relay ideas of generational transmission. What is the transmission of female language? Bringing together images of three generations of the same family, maternal bodies are arranged in a triangular relationship connected through repeated gestures of reaching and holding on to one another. Motherhood is explicit in this painting, da Vinci uses the mother's unusually generous lap and "connects her to her son in the same way he connects her to her mother: through a visual correspondence."³¹ In this way imitator, transmitter, and receiver all work in conjunction with one another. Most fascinating Silverman identifies the three generations as contemporary with each other, and "although each of the human figures constitutes a distinct person, none of them is an individual" in that, they are all connected to one another. "Unlike paternal transmission, which plays out in linear time, analogies that connect to everyone, to everything else in the *Virgin and Child* are reversible and potentially transformative."³²

Through these works, I am compelled to make meaning from my own generational bond as part of my art process. Using Silverman's analysis as a guide for rethinking the fabric of social structures, I challenged myself to move into uncharted territories, to explore my own thread of lineage suspended with all of their complexities in a rich generational language.

³⁰ Silverman, 65.

³¹ Silverman, 146.

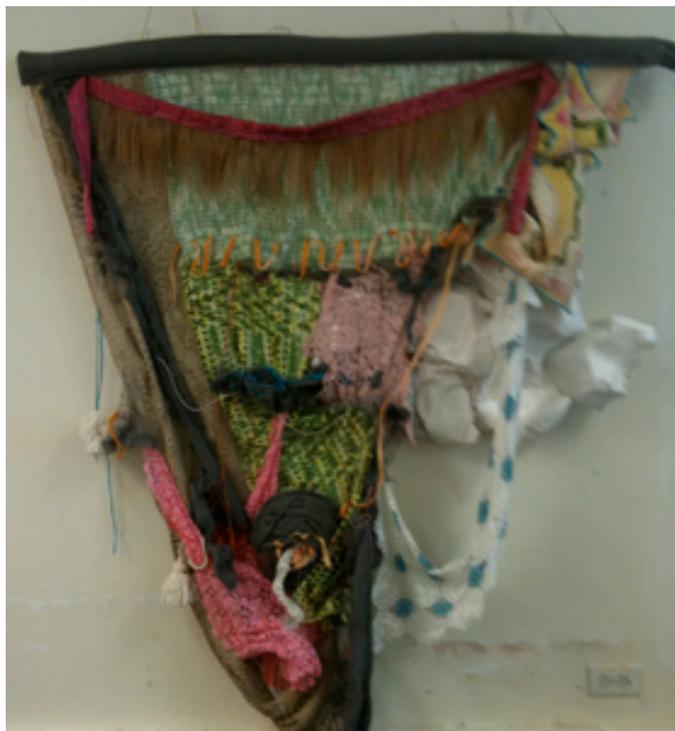
³² Silverman, 155.

I spent the entire summer thinking about Silverman's text. I began to dissect my own generational language, its gaps and continuations, the women that have come before me, and the ghosts they have left in my path. This was a transformative moment for me personally, and as an artist as I felt compelled to go deeper into my own story without hesitation.

The culture of cooking and family has defined everything for me between growing up and into my adulthood. At times family and the importance of tradition provided my greatest joys and also my greatest struggles. They are always in contradiction.

I assembled a collection of photos, stories, and family recipes that make up my family traditions. I sorted through all my recipes and aprons that have a permanent home in my kitchen. Stacks of index cards filled with very old, old, and some new recipes fill my cabinet drawers. Along side of them is another drawer filled with aprons and doilies that have been bestowed upon me, as the keeper of old relics, as gifts for birthdays and holidays, as tokens of labor.

Incorporating a similar process that I used in my daily practice the semester before, I stitched together old dollies, wallpaper remnants, yarns, strings, wire, steel wool, and human hair, and words from the recipes into a wall hanging.



Untitled, Doily fabric, string, and wire, ribbon, plaster, hair, and scouring pads, 2011

Next, I worked with the aprons recreating them first in paint, repeating one, over lapping the other onto plastic sheets, referencing time and lineage connection. I questioned if paint was the right material? How was paint and aprons connecting and making meaning? My AT suggested frosting, and I agreed with her. I made batch after batch of frosting in the thickness of glue and built up layers into an apron form, preserving it with a sugar varnish. It was delicate and I liked its impermanent nature and fragile make up. Entombing the frosted apron onto silk fabric enclosed in a clear box plastic box, suggested fragility and preservation while pointing to metaphors for both mortality and immortality.

Making these objects provided me with thoughtful moments for reflection and assessment on what the nature of my voice was in this work? Visiting artist Cauleen Smith helped me understand my apprehensions and to further identify formal systems I had adapted as working and not working. In her critique she suggested, “The aprons lock us into a very specific narrative and keep us there. The ideas of which you speak can travel beyond your personal narrative. The fact that your personal narrative serves as your engine gives the work its richness. Because you are so clear about the voice, you can utilize materials, ranging from paint to plastic to video, to create something that represents what speaks. Decisions related to material selection need to be just as vigorous as the ideas and questions asked. The question remains as to why one material should be selected over another or why they all exist together. How do the objects work together within the space? With every body of work you need to figure out a new formal system, you have to give yourself a set of problems to occupy for a period of time. Doing so can take a very long time, several years even.”³³ A fleeting thought, *this is getting more and more complicated.*

I was not sure at this point, but I knew I wanted more latitude, more direct human connection. Cautiously and with great doubt, I approached performance as a medium to find the locus of resemblances, complexities and significations that occur in familial structures.

³³ Cauleen Smith, Critique, Fourth Residency, August 2011



Aprons, Acrylic house paint on plastic, 2011



Apron, Cake frosting on silk encased in a Plexiglas box, 2011

Pasta

Pasta was the main ingredient for family's specialties. Served every Wednesday and Sundays pasta was the stable food. Belabored homemade noodles were made for special occasions and served in many delicious savory dishes.

Ingredients:

Mary Kelly

Larry Sulton

Martha Rosler

Sarah Ahmed

Nayland Blake

Definition of Cooking Terms:

Happiness

The etymology of happiness relates to the question of contingency. From Middle English “hap” suggests chance. Or “Hap” to be good or bad. Hap is often translated as happiness. Something good, relating to good fortune.³⁴

Sarah Ahmed insights on *affect* and happiness gave me a way to understand further specific aspects of familial hierarchies I was addressing in my performance video *Feeder*. Ahmed’s essay *Happy Objects* explores how happiness functions as a promise that directs accumulated positive affects through good feelings. Happiness most often is considered a feeling, yet Ahmed considers happiness as a happening. She points to family and its orientation as the object of happiness: “it is not necessarily the feeling that passes but rather the orientation shared toward those object as being good”, such orientation shapes how family is made and kept.³⁵ What has become particularly central to my work is Ahmed’s inquiry into how the family sustains its place as a happy object by identifying those who do not reproduce it. Who and what are crucial questions in sustaining the affect of good feelings and the promise of happiness that defines families.

The range of responsibilities required of a “good subject” necessitates many hours of doing or service. To a varying degree doing provides hope for the promise of happiness. Ahmed suggests that such orientation “shapes what we do; you have to *make* and *keep* the family, which directs how you spend your time, energy and resources.”³⁶

We judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us. Subsequently, what passes through the passing around of happy objects remains an open question. The promise is a way of calling forward a response of loyalty and a sense of being in the body. Ahmed suggests if loyalty promises to maintain happiness then un-loyalty or the “kill joy” causes unhappiness. In this sense, my mother was the kill joy, refusing to share an orientation toward certain things as being good, because she did not find the object that promises happiness to be quite so promising.



³⁴ Sarah Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Durham & London, 2010) 29.

³⁵ Ahmed, 29.

³⁶ Ahmed, 38.

I came across the photographer Larry Sulton and found some common threads between his photographs and Ahmed's writings on *affects* in family relations. In his book, *Pictures from Home*, Sulton creates images from childhood memories while viewing the familial relationship through his adult eyes. Sulton's photographs explore the complex sense of family through what is pictured and left un-pictured. I like the way Sulton complicates the sense of power and identity in the tale of domestic happiness. His methods of investigation are smart and critical. His use of past and present through his personal reflection gives the viewer a space to reflect honestly on family life in both utopic and dysfunctional states. Sulton's work speaks in a very personal way and the honesty of his work resonates with me.



Larry Sulton, Sitting on the Bed, photograph 1986.

Rose's Ravioli's - Cheese + Meat Filling

Dough: 1/2 teasp. shortening melted
 1/2 teasp. salt
 1 egg slightly beaten
 2 cups sifted flour

Melt shortening and combine w/ salt, beat egg yolks
 + 1/2 cup warm water. Beat in 2 cups sifted flour
 a little at a time to form medium dough.
 Turn out onto well floured board and knead gently,
 a few minutes till smooth. Cover bowl or let stand.

Roll into rectangles. Arrange about
 1 teasp. of filling over dough, cover with
 other half of dough. Press dough in
 corners, cut into squares, lay onto bed sheet
 for four hours.

When ready to cook lower gently
 into rapid boiling salted water
 for 20-25 min!

Homemade raviolis were only for special occasion and always for the holidays. She worked for days making the dough, cheese and meat filling, and the red meat sauce to pour over. She pressed one after another with her prepared fillings, and then arranged them row-by-row on her bed letting them stand and take form. She proudly served the traditional dish every Christmas Eve, plating them first, ladling the gravy and cheese on top. Every time she first serves to my father waiting for approval. He always takes the first bite and without hesitation exclaims, they are good, but not as good as my mother's. One day she found the courage to stop making them.

Definition of Cooking Terms:
Performance

Bringing my work into a performative gesture was becoming more certain for my mode of communication. Reading Mary Kelly's "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism" initiated my interest in the notion of performance as an object. I had never thought about this relationship, I had always looked at performance as a form of art for those who did not engage in traditional materials. Kelly suggests that performance and installation art ruptures the pictorial paradigm centered in the discourse of modernism. In relation to the signifying system of pictorial text, the discursive systems of painting and exhibition practices pose a dilemma of unknowing for the viewer. The pictorial text remains unattainable because the signifier is not visible, only readable. In contrast, the performance artist provides an empirical domain with a universal object, the body, and brings authenticity of experience through knowable and experiential signifiers within space and determinate units of time.

The performance provided a moment when the pictorial space was disrupted by the instance of temporality. The temporality or intrusions of time and space became the essence of the pure art, no longer relying on the physical object itself. My interest peeked in the Kelly's idea that the signifiers of creative labor (gesture, color, matters) are replaced by the figure of the artist in person, image, and/or gesture. The mark once made by the act of gestural drawing is replaced by the gesture itself with its play of presence and absence within the pictorial space. What is taken away from pictorial text or the painterly signifier of bodily gestures is given back in photographic form as the visible body, and the gestures of performance bring the signifier to another space.³⁷

I was also looking at many artists working in performance in combination with objects including, Kimsooja, Nick Cave, Sharon Hayes, and William Pope L. I was inspired by the dynamic qualities their works conveyed; they were not flat and static, but rather they moved and evoked sensations. I wanted to understand and adopt their strategic languages as a way to communicate interlinking motifs. Watching Martha Rosler's "Semiotics of the Kitchen" was instrumental in thinking about how to re-see and re-learn concepts within domestic space and a learned language. Her straight on visual approach also helped me think about and edit my picture plane.

³⁷ Mary Kelly. *Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism* (MA: MIT Press, 1996) 92.



Untitled, 2011

There are certain metaphors that arise with the impermanence of food, its nature governed by the laws of time, as decay inevitably sets in. These instabilities point to the analogies that we all share in both birth and finitude. Thus, the offering of a meal brings communion with life and death through its ephemeral nature and its construction.

I am creating from the place in which I currently find myself, moving in and out of a state of exhilaration, uncertainty, and at times, clarity. Drifting in different directions, confronting avoidance, I find myself caught between words and wordlessness, quiet and gestures, space and confinement, embodiment and ghosts.

-Journal Entry, July 2011

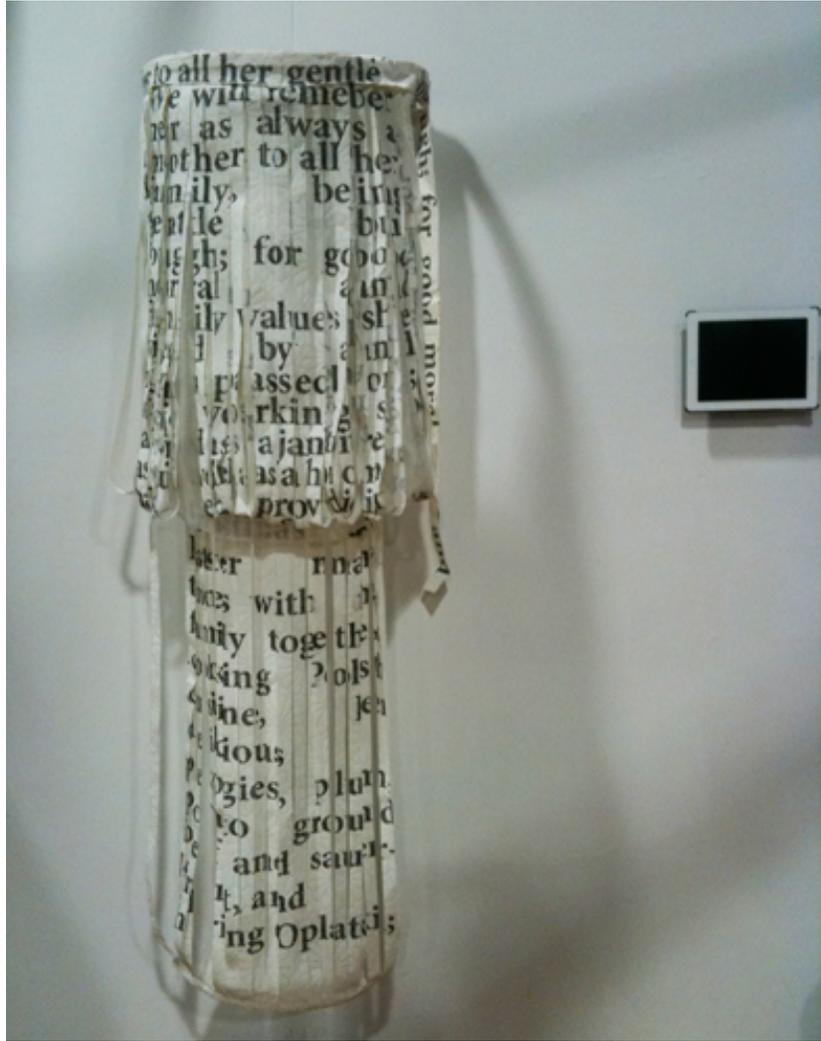
Prepare: Now in my third semester my goal was to create a far more complex sensibility than I had created in the past two semesters. I was beginning to realize that my own artistic subjectivity could operate as both a product (painting) and labor (performance) to both secure and inscribe gestures.

Raise heat and stir gently: I had been holding onto the words from the eulogy for quite some time. Written by her sons, the sentiments stirred two opposing emotions, it was beautiful and at the time extremely problematic. Being remembered for service to others is honorary, but the homage revealed a set of circumstances I desired to escape. I wanted to use these words but I was hesitant, uncertain, and uncomfortable. I was unsure whether they were relevant for an expression in art and more importantly if they were mine to use. I recognized the language presented me with a point of contact to tell a bigger story. For the first time I felt I was articulating what many of the faculty members had asked from the beginning: to create a critical contemporary dialogue, derived from individual experience rooted in a social discourse.

“She was always a mother to all her family, being gentle but tough; for good moral and family values she lived by and then passed on; for working so hard as a janitress, as well as a homemaker, providing so well for her family; for her pride in her Polish Heritage, being a great cook and baker—never serving the same meal twice in the same week and never letting anyone leave her home without some food. She was always at home in her kitchen; for her ability to cook Italian to Polish to Chinese cuisines; for her enjoyment in celebrating Christmas and Easter many times with the family together, cooking Polish cuisine, her delicious perogies, plum, potato ground beef and sauerkraut, and sharing Oplatki; for her Italian cuisine, the best lasagna with tiny meatballs, and who could forget the deep dish egg frittata in a 14” round frying pan as we anticipated whether she could flip the frittata without it dropping to the floor; for her love of gardening, canning all the vegetables to be used during the year. May these gifts and all those that we hold in our hearts, now continue to live on in her family and friends and be shared with others.”³⁸

Using performance and video as a medium gave me the flexibility and tools to achieve a deep level of complexities. I shot take after take, first with cakes and then pasta. Each time tweaked a detail in lighting, repositioned the subjects, adjusted the timing and movements, sound and tone. I made concise choices with regard to the manner in which I directed the filming, casting, set, and editing with acute attention to details.

³⁸ Eulogy for a family member, April 20, 2009.



Installation at Fourth Residency, August 2011

The point where narration begins and ends always lies in relation to historical information (Stewart, 1993:x).

Ingredients:

2 parts Subject
1 part Family Structure
1 part Measurement
5 parts Service

Boil noodles: Drawing from my own personal narrative, the content of the video performance was in a sense, autobiographical, and at the same time it drew upon several layers of complexities inherent to most familial structures. Presented with a sense of humor it depicts a forceful act of feeding a passive character as she reads the words of the eulogy. The interaction takes place between an arrangement of three figures in a triangular formation, a metaphor for Holy Trinity as well as DaVinci's use of the triangle in *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*.

The birthplace of the subject is primarily located within the structure of family, initiating one's cultural and social identity. It is a complicated structure often filled with ideas of utopia as well as contentions, contradictions, and containment. The uncut video sequence interrogates the fragility and tensions of family structure through the subject of cooking. Moreover in the process it raises questions of history, memory, family and labor.

The words of the eulogy suggest a deep sense of sentimentality, while at the same time they immortalized its subject in terms of a specific gendered subjectivity, rooted in labor and service. The relevance of the mother figure illustrated anchors the family, holding them together through her offering of loyalty and service. Ahmed's makes an important point in that the general orientation of the family offers a promise of happiness in return for loyalty.³⁹ Ahmed's suggests the family sustains its place as a happy object by identifying those who "do not reproduce its line as the cause of unhappiness." In this sense, those who do not continue to reproduce the loyalty challenge the promise itself.

Add Sauce: Confronting personal relationships, conveying a sense of who I am and my personal narrative was a risk. Knowing that it was quite possible that I could show up at the residency and fail miserably, I was terrified and hesitated to show this work and equally terrified to fail. In my own doubt, I decided to play it on a small monitor in my gallery space, hoping it would be viewed as a secondary piece. At the last minute I arranged to have it in the viewing room as part of my installation.

³⁹ Sarah Ahmed, "Happy Objects," *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Durham & London, 2010) 29.



Feeder, One channel performance video, 4th residency, August 2011
<http://vimeo.com/39611542>

Ingredients:

Conflict

Recipient

Force

Tensions

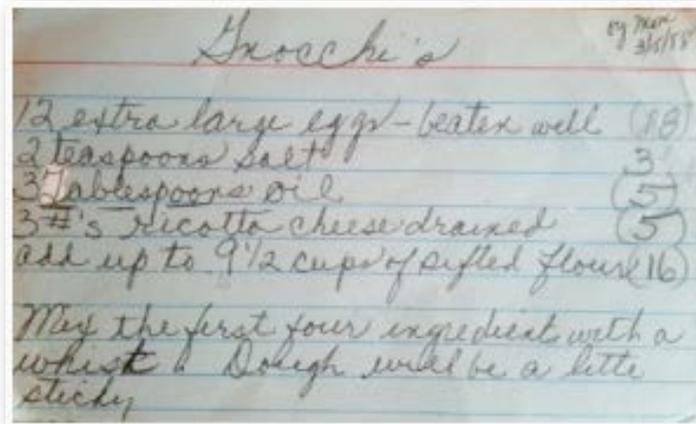
Combine ingredients and stir with rigor: I am always surprised by the varied readings I receive in the critiques at each residency; this fourth residency was no exception. My first critique of the residency with Humberto Ramirez reassured me that the performance video communicated the content I had intended.

“I am very excited about this work. The content you are looking for has the most layers. It is the piece that really delivers what you are after. It is complicated, it is problematic, it has a lot of unresolved issues and that’s what makes it really interesting. The domestic space you are alluding to is there. Your main character is completely passive, as a recipient who is being forced fed, there is a very strange and repulsive thing going on there as the food keeps on coming, it is complicated, it is not tidy, if you will. These kinds of rituals are forced fed, you can say no to them, and they just keep on coming and how do you navigate and negotiate them. All of this is working really well. The relationship between the feeder and the relationship with the one being fed is fraught with a form of tension and potential violence right as well as nurturing which is sort of like the family...the family is really a screwed up place, right. All our pathologies are due to the family and it is sort of where we unload our pathologies onto our children. It is the birth of the subject and it is a complicated place. There is an uncanny dead-on strategy in the way you address its complexities.”⁴⁰

Add to the mixture: Faculty member Mario Ontiveros stopped and asked if I had a minute to talk. His excitement was apparent, “You have taken a big leap here, but there is still a resistance. You have painting, object and video. The painting is good, no question and you can stay there and be perfectly happy. But if you want to take the leap and take a risk that brings you to a completely different place, a very cotemporary dialogue, then you need to follow the direction you took with the performance in the object work. It asks questions that are far more interesting and critical than what you have done in the past both in your paintings and the object works. However you need to consider the way you place both the performance and object in the same space. You have not done that here.”⁴¹ Mario’s direct assessment gave me permission to step out of a set of closed parameters and take risks, to allow myself to fail in order to grow.

⁴⁰ Humberto Ramirez Critique, Fourth Residency, August 2011

⁴¹ Conversation with Mario Ontiveros, Fourth Residency, August 2011.



Cool: Marie Shurkus took careful note of the pronoun “she” as the first word in the script. We do not know who she is, only that she provides an ideal, a present perfect for others. Clearly reading the underlying messages as “women’s work” and its inherent service as invisible labor. Marie points out, “Non-monetary value places a sense of value through immortalization.”⁴²

What is exchanged and transformed into value through a system of signs and oppositions? In Gayle Rubin’s essay the *Traffic of Women*, she articulates the kinship system relies on the acts of gift giving and local exchange that cannot be separated; they are entangled with one another in socially determined ideas of value and power. The relationship between gift giver and gift taker establishes a mutual relationship for exchange, in which the commodity “labor” becomes a “thing” exclusively for the exchange. Marxist analysis may be applied by looking at the sexual exchange in terms of capital and classification of women. An unpaid labor force, made up of primarily women, upholds the family and domestic duties, while contributing to the surplus value and capital gains of those in power. More specifically, the work of Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property* locates the subordination of women within the exchange of labor and the mode of production.

⁴² Marie Shurkus Critique, Fourth Residency, August 2011.

Fold In: I knew at this point the relationship between materiality and content was pivotal for moving forward. As I was shifting my ideas of materiality into different directions, I was making work with new life and vigor. My security of “making something” was displaced from painting to making objects and video work. Still, moving forward into my last semester I remained unsure of what I wanted to convey and what materials I wanted to work with. During my graduate review, Ulrike and David helped me find some clarity as I moved forward to my final semester.

“You have moved from painting, to sculpture/installation to video and I feel like you are bringing things along, what are you thinking about that?” I responded, “I think I am a little confused on the direction I would like to take and the medium I want to work with going forward.” Ulrike continued by challenging me to question my process “ how does the video fit in your object making?” “I have always been a maker of objects, this was the first time I used video as a medium, and I must admit I felt very unsure I could achieve an aesthetic value in the same sense as a painting or sculptural object.” Ulrike suggested that I view the video as an object as well and I could have both making objects as what you called things and performative objects in the same space.

Again, my compartmentalized ideas and ways of making art were challenged. David recommended I look at Nayland Blake’s work. I was immediately drawn to Blake’s relational aesthetic between object and performance and drew parallels to my performance video. He demonstrated how performance and objects could work together communicating a similar theme in varied materiality and I wanted to achieve this type of relationship in my next body of work.



Nayland Blake Feeder, 1998



Nayland Blake, Gorge, 1998,

Cakes and Desserts

There are hundreds of cake recipes, but if they are analyzed you will see that the cakes are closely related and come under one of two categories: the butter cake family and the sponge cake family. As you prepare the various cakes, it will be interesting to note that they branch out from a few basic recipes. Each recipe, however, is distinguished by certain characteristics. (Pope, 1953:322)

Ingredients:

Gilles Deleuze

Janine Antoni

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

A VERY IMPORTANT INGREDIENT:

I once had a teacher tell me that if I did not have a place to work, I would never make any works. I agree. I am reminded of Virginia Wolf's "A Room of One's Own". She describes the importance of having one's own space in which to create and expresses an overriding concern for women artists to have conditions necessary to make art.

Having a space in which to work has been a constant struggle for me. I like having a home studio because I can work late at night. Yet wherever I set up appears to be problematic in some way. My supplies, which are all stacked in bins, get moved around from space to space, into corners and attics, becoming less and less accessible to me.

When I began the program, I moved my office into my bedroom and my art studio into my office. I liked it, and the light was nice, but I felt crowded. Making large paintings and sculptures requires more space. I needed space in order to be able to perceive the manner in which an object sits in space. There never seems to be enough room for such a view.

This semester, a large unheated (cold) studio space was bestowed upon me, and I must admit that I was thrilled. I was finally able to spread out and had enough room in order to step back and take a look. This space became invaluable, but at the same time, it made me feel like a fish out of water. I did not know what to do with all of this space; I had shifted around for so long that it had become a part of my process. After several weeks had passed, I was unsure as to whether or not I liked working there. I was far away from my everyday life, and there were no interruptions, other than my phone. All of my tools were too far away from one another. I decided to condense everything into one corner and to work there, but I still can't seem to find my groove or get into the flow. Of course, I am not about to pack up and leave quite yet, but soon enough, I may need to find the right space.



I stayed up until two in the morning, making four-dozen lemon knot cookies for the annual neighborhood cookie exchange. I get strangely excited about this exchange of delights; it generates a distinct sense of nostalgia. I remember my mother staying up late into the wee hours of the night to prepare this traditional Italian cookie. Lemon knots were the signature cookie for the holidays, and she spent hours hand-rolling dozens of cookies into knots and dipping them into a thick lemony icing.

Finding myself in the same situation late at night, I formed one cookie after the next filling the baking trays. As I repeated my mother's labor, rolling the dough into a rope and forming each cookie into the shape of a knot, I thought about the knot as representative of what held generations and merging family traditions together. I thought about my grandmother and mother, my mother-in-law, aunts, sisters, sisters-in-laws, cousins, nieces and my daughter together intertwined in a generational language. Our distance and closeness knotted in cultural and familial codes.

A silence where words are never spoken, only felt as female vibrations. Knotted together are our blurred expectations and loyalties to serving and bringing lives together to experience an endless stream of happiness in return for a bestowed immortality.

Traditionally, cookie exchanges were a way of sharing family recipes with others. At the cookie exchange, I noticed that half of the trays were filled with perfectly shaped, store-bought cookies. I was disappointed, I felt gyped. I was expecting and desired homemade cookies and recipes to go along with them. Bringing store bought cookies to an exchange seemed weirdly like cheating and, quite frankly, rather tacky, at best. While sampling the treats, I reflected upon this modern dilemma. The store-bought treats felt dismissive and lacked effort. There is certain sentimentality in the idea of homemade for me that evokes a sense of caring and well-being. I like this feeling. Longing. Enormous longing. It is difficult to explain. I push back and come back.

Sensations are given but it is the force that constitutes the condition of sensation. –Gilles Deleuze

Important Ingredients:

I turn to Gilles Deleuze to consider the process of becoming, rather than being. He gives another way out of representation, pointing to habit and memory as key factors in producing a fixed representation of things. Deleuze's fundamental question, "what are the conditions for the production of the new (an image, a thought)?" makes way for the process of becoming.⁴³ Positioning ideas within sensibility itself "defines them in terms of their immanence to experience itself."⁴⁴ In another words, the force that lies behind becoming is sensation.

In considering Deleuze's writings I was drawing from new artists that I had never previously considered, Janine Antoni, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Zoe Leonard to name a few. Their works seemed relevant to the performative nature and relational objects towards which my process seemed to be moving. I find Antoni's work very compelling in terms of the way in which she uses highly specific materials, including chocolate, soap, and lard, to articulate complex relationships that encompass herself performing in order to create sculptural forms. In particular, *Lick and Lather* a series of chocolate and soap female busts presents a complex interplay of presence and absence, trace and reference to female construction.

I am equally inspired further by Gonzalez Torres's attention to sensation as an integral part of his work. He reminds us of our ephemeral nature through his offering of candy and the taste of life. The pile of candy corresponds to the weight of his partner. All those who take a piece share in a collective communion with one another by sharing in the weight of his partner's death. Gonzalez-Torres's works suggests an in-depth understanding of how different materials could address formal aesthetics and still have a narrative that is emotionally powerful, in a clear and simple execution.



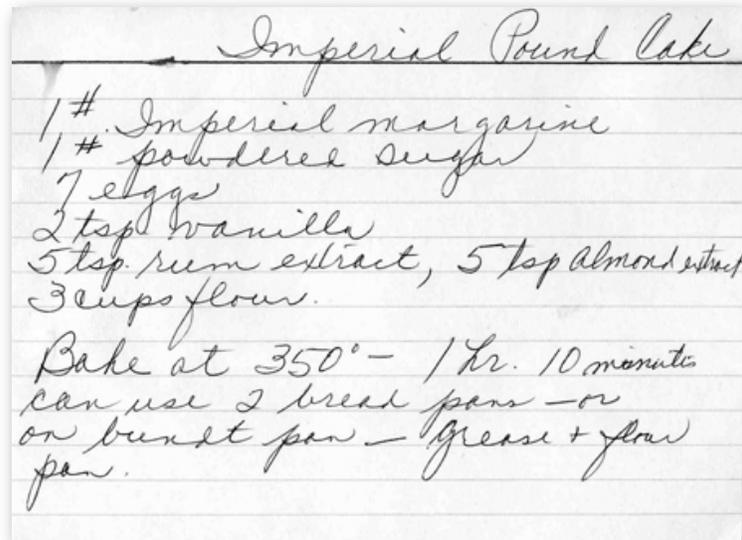
Janine Antoni, *Lick and Lather*
Portrait busts, cast of chocolate
and soap, 1993



Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Untitled (Chicago)

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Minneapolis: (University of Minnesota Press, 2004) xxii

⁴⁴ Deleuze, xxii.



A conversation at a family dinner in the summer of 2011

Would you like a piece of pound cake?

Yes, I love your pound cake.

I just made four, one for my doctor, one for my nurse, one for the butcher, and one for Dad.

That's a nice gesture.

I just want to thank people for helping me and to show them my appreciation.

That's a nice way of showing your appreciation.

I have made over one thousand pound cakes over the last five years.

Yes, for the last five years, she has made a pound cake nearly every day. She is amazing.

That is a lot of pound cakes. How much time do you think you have spent making pound cakes for others?

Well, I'd have to do the math. Maybe around 1000 hours or more.

Planning a Meal: Being clear and articulate about my strategies for my content and materiality was essential at this point. What other ways are there with which to activate the materials? What other forms can they take on? Will my final graduate show be contingent upon objects or will it consist of a range of works completed during the year?

I worked on developing a strategy with references that played on the physical sensations of the visual, taste, and sound. Expanding my material possibilities to include the use of ingredients and food was a direction that seemed appropriate. Food preparation and sensations became my starting point for developing the aesthetic. Looking inward as well as outward, I planned for an installation that included several components comprised of performance videos and sculptural objects. The objects are made out of perishable materials –baked cakes taking the form of bricks and stone slabs. Their relationship between object and performance references the invisibility of labor, and points to and the affect of happiness and its loyalty as prevalent in maintaining inherent in familial structures. Furthermore, putting Silverman’s ideas of analogies into context, the use of ingredients as a medium suggests mortality as expressed through impermanence, instability, and decay.

Preparing: I began by listing various key questions related to the direction I wanted the work to give itself.

1. What will the relationship between object and performance in the work be?
2. How can I connect and make the contradictory role of art as a system of objects evident as both relational and corporeal?
3. How will the system and strategy of sensorial experience play a role in the transmission and effect of the work? Sound, taste, smell?
4. What is the sense of space and the place of the body in the work itself? How does the viewer move through the space, and does the movement link the viewer to the organization of power?
5. How is affect mobilized and engendered and read as a social force in the works?
6. What messages are embedded in the work? How does the historical role of the female within the domestic space get translated?
7. In which theoretical text is the work rooted?

Prepare: I initially proposed making a life-size gingerbread house for my final graduation show. But as my process progressed, I realized that I was relying on the same predictable imagery that Ulrike Mueller identified in my graduate review. I decided to let go of any preconceived notions of what the work would be and to allow the process to determine the over-arching theme. I began to make pound cakes, and more and more cakes.

October 5: I began to construct a gingerbread house today and am having doubts about how I am going to be able to make and transport it across America. After all, they are cookie slabs.

October 10: I am beginning to think that the gingerbread house locks into a too specific narrative. The pound cakes were sturdier and I like the metaphor for generational links and home. I think that I will make more and see what comes of it.

October 14: The pound cakes can be stacked like building blocks or bricks, and they seem to offer far more possibilities. I have begun to build a wall or the beginning of a dwelling with them.

November 2: I made one hundred pound cakes today. I am not sure where this is all leading, but I like the feel of it. I think that I will keep on baking.

-Journal Notes, October–November 2011



1000 Pound Cakes Wall, 2011



1000 cakes,
hours, minutes, seconds
5 lbs, 25 lbs, 50 lbs

Promise
Limbo
Happiness
Secrets
Loyalty

Outbound
Inbound
Car Wash

Cut and Bake: I was inspired by Janine Antoni's verb list (lick, gnaw, and lather) as well as Richard Serra's verb list compilation: *Actions to Relate to Oneself*, both described their actions played out their works. Similarly, I created my own list of verbs. Over the course of the semester, I journaled action verbs associated with the measurements, time, and labor involved in the process of making cakes, lists and quantities of ingredients used, and coded language that define female. Using stencils, I pressed selections of this assembled language into the dough and baked their impressions into the cakes.

Cool and Arrange: I continued making more bricks and flat cakes experimenting with a range of aesthetics from cooked and burnt cake colors, shapes and textures. Arranging them in relation to one another, I assembled them onto the floor in a maze-like manner so the viewer may walk through the space but in a careful way as to not step on and break the cakes.



Cake Stacks, Installation, 2011



Sifting Shimmers Installation
Assembled baked flat cakes and performance videos, 2012

Ingredients:

Eggs
Brown Sugar
Corn Syrup
Flour

I began by initiating performances with the ingredients that I was using in the cakes in a public space. It seemed to make sense to bring the work outside of the domestic space, rendering forces, which are so often invisible, visible. The video camera has become an important tool for my communication. I wanted to capture more than just still images. The social landscape to which I was paying attention included movement, sounds, and interaction. I was interested in those who became part of my space and the way in which our bodies communicated something about the manner in which we think, feel, and speak to one another. The space became an interaction between myself as the performer, and the random characters that participated in the play of actions.

An integral part of social exchange in participatory space requires an active awareness of oneself and one's surroundings. The creative process of listening and paying attention, making time for openness to non-action and observations of sound and space attempts to gain insight into the specific connotations and nuances of a given site. Grant Kester suggests that the act of "aesthetic listening" allows for a sensory encounter with a work of art, in which one can become receptive to or open to social interaction.⁴⁵

With these details in mind, finding the appropriate landscapes for each performance took precedence. Selecting specific locations, I recorded myself in the act of preparing each specific ingredient found in the cakes. The materials are the ingredients themselves, flour, eggs, sugar, and corn syrup, and they are left open for interpretation through the performance. Viewing the performances together as one work of art, the viewer is meant to fill in the story between the gaps of place and time and its relation to objects. An exchange also takes place between the viewer and the artist (me), who is the performer, as I appear in another guise, namely, in that of the maker, the laborer.

Of course, I had grave doubts; I viewed the whole thing as an experiment. My art teacher Ellen Rothenberg confirmed the direction of the performances to be working, saying, "Let go of your doubts, this work is very strong. It is the interruptions inherent in a domestic life that bring complexities to the work. I think what you are dealing with in this work, the family structure and its complexities in the video is good, far more complex than your sculptural object pieces. I think you should continue to investigate and inquiry into these relationships. Moreover, taking the work out into the public space adds an oddity that asks the viewer to question what exactly you are doing and why."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Grant H. Kester. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 106.

⁴⁶ Notes from personal journal, Sept. 1, 2011.



1000 Hours, 1000 Cakes,
Video Performance 2012
<http://vimeo.com/45843763>

Integrating the performances into an installation that included the cakes proved to be the next challenge. Together multiple objects operate in relation with the performance videos. The installation incorporates several performance videos, flat cakes, and pound cakes, all working in conjunction together. In that, the content derives from multiple complexities of meaning. There is a pleasurable sensory interaction offered through the aroma of the cakes, and its affect in relation to ideas of homemade. On another level, the aroma and delicate nature of the cakes convey impermanence, and instabilities while in the same vein pointing to memory and ideas of home and well-being. Equally important are the strategies invoked to record labor both in terms of time, and measurements, which hold up and maintain such attributes. Still further ideas of containment, visibility and invisibility all point to an obscured reality in everyday domestic spaces.

Ambiguous in nature the performance/object relationship initiates questions and viewers are invited to participate in their own self-realization and interpretations in an open-ended offering of physical sensations through sight, sound and smell.

Canning & Preserving

For maximum nutritional value, only the freshest and best food should be canned. Inspect it with an eagle eye, discarding all blemished or rotted portions. Produce that is imperfect before processing may spoil the rest of the food in its container afterward, producing color changes and encouraging the formation of mold or gases.

*Memory, and imagination, perception and experience are intimately connected.*⁴⁷



Impermanence Series, Flour on Cement, Photograph 2011-12

Ingredients:

Memory

Transmission

Point of View

How are recipes canned, preserved, altered, recreated, connected through histories in a thread of lineage? What is the experience that unfolds and transmits a vocabulary? How do they hold conditions that operate as assumptions?

Point of view is a particular narrative gesture offering two possibilities: partial and complete. What remains silent is the third and anonymous possibility—blindness.⁴⁸ What is my point of view? What have I left out? What are the images that go unrealized, invisible only to reappear again?

These are the conditions for the production of anew; the conditions for the genesis of an image, or sensation, at the same time the condition for the destruction of the cliché.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. (New York: Basic Books, 2001) 22.

⁴⁸ Susan Stewart, *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, The Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 3.

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) xxiii.

Ingredients:

Inquiry
Reflection
Knowledge
Production

Like a recipe that gets passed on the making of art continues to be made and remade. At one time I was perfectly content with drawing and painting, there was a safety in knowing how to create an image through repeating a process over a period of many years. I know now this process belongs to an old model where technical abilities and aesthetics define process. These rules are outdated for me now. Limiting my art practice to painting and drawing no longer serves me. I realize how limiting my art practice was by the categories I assigned myself as an artist. I no longer feel I need to answer the predictable question “what kind of artist are you?” with a reassuring categorical answer. I am not sure what kind of artist I am anymore, and it is hard to explain to others. What I do know is I can rely on my process, which has progressed in expansive ways, where intuition leads, critical inquiry guides, and reflection evolves my practice.

Throughout the last two years I found myself continually questioning and doubting the direction of my work. The right image, the right aesthetic, the right color, I realize there is no perfect recipe to an unpredictable experience. My process has evolved from copying, to doing, to seeing, to knowing. I rely on the tools of inquiry, reflection, and knowledge to guide and lead. In trusting myself, my senses, my present moment, I allow for my process to be filled with rich possibilities and new diverse modes of delivery. For me, this is a liberating and exciting place to be.

I move forward carrying on my traditions with an awareness and force that initiates shifts through a critically engaged art practice.

(Almond filling)

1 lb. almond paste (~~meringue~~) crumbled
up fine.

2 cups sugar

3 eggs (beaten)

Mix the above two ingredients, adding the three
eggs and flavoring. Press in a bowl and divide
it into equal parts. *Chill overnight*

////////////////////

Roll in flour

Artist Statement:

Making art has been the driving factor through out my life and one that has governed most, if not all my decisions. My motivations fueled by passion have always been my initiator. Yet, allowing process to take on its own form with a sense of imminence, uncertainty and vulnerability has challenged me to reach far beyond the act of making, initiating a habit of looking and an awareness where the visible and invisible unfold.

My artistic process is an exploration shaped by my experiences and observations that connect the dots to something that is already there. Fragmented domestic episodes are my subject and everything I see and do fits within this archive. The constant choreographed construction and reconfiguring of identity that happens within the performance of the ordinary are framed by power dynamics. I seek a language, a gesture, an aesthetic form that speaks to its elusive marks on the normative and its assemblage of forces that come to forge identities. Working with overlapping themes I often utilize a strategy of humor and sensation for serious contemplation and meaningful aesthetics. I have addressed gender roles and issues of obscured labor, food and familial narratives, mapping the everyday as a visual language, and the negotiation of public and private in the formation of feminist agency.

My graduate show *Sifting Shimmers* is an installation that explores invisible and underlying power dynamics that play out in the most mundane routines within domestic space. Making and eating traditions nourish our bodies and connect us to our families and histories. Using my family culinary traditions as a starting point, I investigate the inherent complexities and fragility of familial structures framed by the promise of happiness. Pointing to the visceral forces beneath and alongside a generational language my interest lies in what remains unrealized, unspoken, only to reappear again. These references are apparent through my materials, hundreds of baked cakes and their ingredients. Food preparation and sensations is a starting point for developing the aesthetic. The site-specific installation combines objects, video projection, and performance as a vehicle to connect viewers in a participatory experience. Viewers are invited to participate by looking, sensing, smelling, and recognizing the familiar while being initiated into a sensory experience that plays on memory and ideas of home and well-being by recognizing the familiar through smell and taste. Playing on polarities, the foods transient perishable nature also suggests impermanence, instability, decay and point to generational familial pathologies.

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Entrance Artworks- January 2010



Entrance Artworks List:

1. **Untitled 1**
Pen and ink on paper
Size: 22 X 30
2008
2. **Untitled 2**
Pen and ink on paper
Size: 22 X 30
2008
3. **Untitled 3**
Pen and ink on paper
Size: 22 X 30
2008
4. **Untitled 4**
Pen and ink on paper
Size: 18 X 12
2008
5. **Untitled 5**
Pen and ink on paper
Size: 18 X 12
2008
6. **Untitled 6**
Oil on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2008
7. **Untitled 7**
Egg tempera on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2008
8. **Untitled 8**
Oil on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2007
9. **Untitled 9**
Oil on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2008
10. **Untitled 9**
Oil on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2008
11. **Untitled 11**
Mixed media on paper
Size: 20" X 36"
2008
12. **Untitled 12**
Mixed media on paper
Size: 24" X 36"
2009
13. **Untitled 13**
Mixed media on paper
Size: 24" X 30"
2009
14. **Untitled 14**
Egg tempera on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2009
15. **Untitled 15**
Egg tempera on birch wood panel
Size: 20" X 33"
2008
16. **Untitled 16**
Egg tempera on birch wood panel
Size: 20" X 28"
2009
17. **Untitled 17**
Oil on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2008
18. **Untitled 18**
Oil on birch wood panel
Size: 24" X 33"
2007
19. **Untitled 19**
Encaustic oil on birch wood panel
Size: 40" X 38"
2009
20. **Untitled 20**
Water based mixed media on paper
Size: 22" X 30"
2009

Exit Artworks - January 2012



1000 pound cakes 1000 hours, Installation, flat cakes, pound cakes, flour, spices and video, 2011-12



Mixing, Performance, 2011

Corn Syrup, Performance, 2011



Brown Sugar, Performance, 2011

Rolling Dough, Performance, 2011

Butter, Performance, 2011



Eggs, Performance, 2011

Flour, Performance, 2011

Corn, Performance, 2011

Exit Exit Artworks - January 2012



Impermanence Performance Series, Sifted Flour, Photographs 2011-12