

THESIS

SYSTEMS OF UNCERTAINTY: ACTING AND UNDERGOING

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ABSTRACT

SYSTEMS OF UNCERTAINTY: ACTING AND UNDERGOING

For most of my life, I have sought to understand how systems within the body function and engage with one another — how a healthy and organized structure can undergo rapid deterioration stemming from networks failing to communicate properly. The body is supported by an abundance of systems that are introduced to aging, disease and other biological effects throughout our lifespan. The transformation that takes place in the physical self when introduced to a biological disruption is the basis of my body of work *Acting and Undergoing*. The confrontation of my body's mortality was spurred by my family's genetic predisposition to autoimmune diseases. The organized structure of systems in our bodies lacks the security or stability many people enjoy. In my sculpture, *Acting/Undergoing*, thin, precarious wood structures work to support plush fabric pieces that are actively overtaken by black forms. Viewers looking at my unpredictable structures are confronted with their own bodily relationships — as one that is intimately familiar yet shrouded by the unknown.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
SYSTEMS OF UNCERTAINTY: ACTING AND UNDERGOING.....	1
PART I : THE BODY.....	3
PART II : STRUCTURE.....	10
PART III : LINES.....	13
PART IV : CRAFT.....	16
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	20
FIGURES.....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	31

SYSTEMS OF UNCERTAINTY: ACTING AND UNDERGOING

My practice deals with the uncertainty of the human body. I use the words “acting” and “undergoing” in tandem to create an understanding of erratic bodily processes. These two words operate as a push and pull action that our bodies engage with daily. They both engage in a body system at opposite extremes, in which our bodies move back and forth between.

Acting is the position of a healthy structure that builds upon itself. It’s a way of progression, moving forward positively and productively to organize our biological systems. When we move our bodies through the world, they rely upon the physical realm to propel ourselves forward; this is our default way of existing. I intentionally use this term in my practice as a charged and active word that is “doing something,” as the Oxford Dictionary states, or to “fulfill the function or serve a purpose.”¹ In my body of work, acting is created in the work as thriving conditions that build on top of one another, acting on the structural forms.

In contrast, the word Undergoing serves as the stress and pressure of a biological disruption forced upon a system or body. A biological disruption is a term coined by sociologist Michael Bury as “a concept that is derived from qualitative narrative analyses examining how people make sense of their illness in the context of their lives.”² To undergo is to submit to the actions of outside forces — to resign oneself with an experience outside of your control. Undergoing is found in my thesis work *Acting/Undergoing* as a visual disease with black forms twisting and attacking the plush pink lines (Fig. 1). The pink lines begin to turn on themselves as

¹ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Acting.”

² Gill Green, Jennifer Todd, and David Pevalin, “Biographical disruption associated with multiple sclerosis: Using propensity scoring to assess the impact,” *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 65, Issues 3 (August 2007): 524-535, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.03.007>.

they grasp the wood structure for stability and order — visually creating tension and change in the forms' original will to “act” as they are pushed into a state of response.

The duality of acting and undergoing are found throughout my body of work. Working in tandem as well as opposition against each other. By defining these two terms I can better articulate the actions existing within my thesis work, *Acting/Undergoing*, as a way to understand the nuances of the human body (Fig. 1).

PART I : THE BODY

I view our physical bodies as a sort of bystander to our life; they are present for events, yet they hold uncertainty in their actions that feel outside of our control. It is my belief there is a type of dualism that exists between mind and body. Separating the two is largely debated, and I approach the conversation by recognizing the effects of having a functional mental state in conjunction with a malfunctioning physical state. The relationship with our physical selves is largely taken for granted until we are faced with “a loss of health and/or declining functional abilities, which serve to bring the physical reality of the body to the forefront of their awareness.”³ Many people take their health for granted. When properly functioning, they are in an event of acting while their physical body provides ongoing stability. In contrast, when confronted by a loss of health the product of dualism between mind and body appears and we feel betrayed by our physical selves.

I am confronted by this body-mind dualism due to my family’s predisposition to a multitude of autoimmune diseases. Autoimmune diseases are conditions where the body’s immune system begins attacking healthy cells they mistakenly view as foreign invaders like germs, bacteria, and viruses.⁴ Why the body begins to turn on itself is still a mystery, and autoimmune diseases can be attributed to genetics or a variety of environmental factors, but the true cause is unknown.⁵ This type of disease can be treated with different effective therapies that can assist in suppressing symptoms. However, a diagnosis of an autoimmune disease is a life sentence — there is no cure.

³ Laura Hurd Clarke, and Alexandra Korotchenko, “Aging and the Body: A Review,” *Canadian Journal On Aging*, vol. 30 (September 2011): 495-510, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4072651/>.

⁴ “What’s the deal with autoimmune disease?” Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard University, last modified May 2018, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/whats-the-deal-with-autoimmune-disease>.

⁵ Harvard Health Publishing, “What’s the deal with autoimmune disease?”

I am witness to my parent's imprisonment with different autoimmune diseases and recently have begun the battle with my own health as I fight against the genetics I have inherited.

Michael Bury, who coined the term “biological disruption,” has written about the effects of chronic illness on those diagnosed with conditions like Multiple Sclerosis and Rheumatoid Arthritis. He effectively writes how

illness, and especially chronic illness, is precisely that kind of experience where the structures of everyday life and the forms of knowledge which underpin them are disrupted. Chronic illness involves a recognition of the worlds of pain and suffering, possibly even of death, which are normally only seen as distant possibilities or the plight of others. In addition, it brings individuals, their families, and wider social networks face to face with the character of their relationships in stark form, disrupting normal rules of reciprocity and mutual support.⁶

Confronting a disruption seems like a distant possibility to many but became my reality and changed my view on the materiality and mortality of the body. When biological disruptions are introduced to a body, they impact all aspects of that person's life. This involves a “re-evaluation of the relationship between the now-visible disease and selfhood.”⁷ Healthy acting bodies get to coexist with their selfhood or mind with little regard as it is a distant possibility to see life exist in any other capacity. However, while undergoing a biological disruption the body and mind become separate as one feels like an attack on the other — an intrusion to one's life. Those living with a biological disruption are then faced with the “uneasy balance which is struck between seeing the condition as an outside force and yet feeling its invasion of all aspects of life.”⁸ This overtaking, separation and push and pull is found in my work *Acting/Undergoing*, as healthy plush forms become engulfed into the black tuberous matter (Fig. 2).

⁶ Michael Bury, “Chronic Illness as Biographical Disruption,” *Sociological Health*, No. 4 (July 1982): 169, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.ep11339939>.

⁷ Bury, “Chronic Illness as Biographical Disruption,” 172.

⁸ Bury, “Chronic Illness as Biographical Disruption,” 173.

Several years ago, my father was diagnosed with the autoimmune disease Primary Progress Multiple Sclerosis (PPMS). This diagnosis challenged my family to confront the fragility and fleeting nature of life while the disease began to form lesions on his spinal cord and brain, causing irrevocable damage. Seeing a disease shorten my father's lifespan caused a shift in the security I felt about the body as a source of stability and as a grounding physical vessel. Watching my father's declining memory functions, vision, speech, and mobility were to view the process of aging sped up to immediate outcomes. We expect aging effects to happen slowly throughout our lifetime, subtly affecting us as we enter old age. We do not expect to complete twenty- or forty-years' worth of aging in a mere ten-year span from the diagnosis.

As we age, many of us experience moments of distrust in our body — there is a loss of innocence experienced as our bodies change. As children, we have limitless freedom in how we move and act, and experience being invincible. In the transition to adulthood, the human body begins to naturally age and no longer has the same elasticity in comparison to a child. The aches and creaks in our bones become louder, and our muscles feel repetitive motions the next day as a reminder that we are no longer insurmountable. These changes in the body are normal and experienced worldwide as our material being slowly deteriorates with age. These themes are found in my work as I explore how aging and the relationship to the body changes either naturally at a slow pace, or rapidly as in the case of undergoing a biological disruption.

Confronting a biological disruption affected the type of work I was making. This change can be seen over the past three years during my time at Colorado State University. When I arrived in 2017, my practice was focused on investigating the serendipitous nature of systems and I celebrated the complex interconnected structures formed in the body. The work *Islands* reflect this examination of systems as I took rope and bound it, end to end creating circles repetitiously

joined together (Fig. 3). The beauty of these connections was celebrated as they functioned in unison, meticulously using thread to bind the rope with precision and intent. The rope acted as a circuit, and once bound together allowed for the passing of information through the entire structure like a system of neurons. Each bound circuit represented a single component of a much larger system, shown by how the rope looped back and forth and created a net-like structure (Fig. 4). The system created was interconnected at every point, where any movement of the rope in one location would ripple across the form causing a change in the other side.

I approached biological systems with similar optimism in 2018 with my installation *ACGT* (Fig. 5). The white, clean, synthetic rope used had a sheen that gave the material an ethereal glow. The absence of color except at the connections of one rope to another gave this work a softness in considering genetic codes as an architectural presence. Once again there were no broken links or loose ends due to my investment in creating chains of information in a completed and acting system. I focused on the way information passed throughout the body, like connections from one neuron to the next. When the link becomes broken, that information or signal in the body becomes lost. The rope was bound meticulously with color codes referencing DNA and is overlaid with clear thread to further form a protective layer over the rope (Fig. 6). In viewing this earlier work, it is evident the intention was to bind one end of a rope to another to establish a resolute, solid connection.

My thesis work, *Acting/Undergoing*, has built upon earlier investigations of systems, though with a new focus on illustrating more authentic realities of how our biological systems function. These systems are messy and complicated, acting and undergoing at the same time. We care for them with steady intention but also desperation during times of disruption. I no longer use a pure, healthy, white color, which is found in *Islands* and *ACGT*; instead, my current work uses warm

bodily tones of pink, red and orange. The colors reference the material qualities of the internal and external body — blood, organs, flesh, and similar body parts. In *Acting/Undergoing* colors are used that balance soft, warm tones in floral and nostalgic prints to bright, sometimes obnoxious and unnaturally saturated pinks and oranges (Fig. 7). The connections between plushy forms are burst open despite desperate attempts by the thread to lash back and bind two forms together (Fig. 8). In other moments, there is a deep sense of care as the stitching intentionally mends a rip in the fabric and I act as a caregiver to the sculpture's fragile structure (Fig. 9). My work confronts the reality of being human, of flesh and bone, and the process of undergoing biological disruptions as we age, experience disease, and move through the world.

In examining the effects of unpredictable outside forces on a body, I am drawn to Julia Kristeva's writings on abjection in her essay *Powers of Horror*. As a person's body becomes distant and unfamiliar through biological breakdowns, one is confronted with the feeling of "a failure to recognize its kin," a symptom of uncanniness according to Kristeva.⁹ She writes,

A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now carries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards.¹⁰

Other visual artists explore the scope of abjection as written by Kristeva in various bodies of work and through a diverse range of materials. Kiki Smith, Mona Hatoum and Sun Yuan and Peng effectively evoke abjection through shock, a sense of otherness, and a spirit of healing. Kiki Smith makes visible in her work the bodily functions we find shame and embarrassment in like urination, menstruation, and vomit. Impacted by the death of her father and the loss of her sister

⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.

¹⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 2.

to the AIDs crisis, Smith makes clear the lack of control we have over our bodies in her career of work. Smith has said, “I grew up in a family with lots of illness. There was a family preoccupation with the body.”¹¹ I have found similarities in my work to how I address abjection, yet my work balances between coming undone and by being in a process of repair. It returns a biological disruption to the state of acting, even if for just a moment.

Art critic Hal Foster’s view of the abject relates to my concept of acting and undergoing. He writes, “the abject is what I must get rid of in order to be I at all.”¹² We exist as our full self or “I” when we are in a state of acting; undergoing is a disruption in our body, and we see this as “not me” and what we must rid ourselves of to leave the unfamiliar space of abjection behind.¹³ The pink plush linear forms in *Acting/Undergoing* oscillate between acting as something familiar, to undergoing a process that feels “radically separate” from ourselves.¹⁴ I use floral fabrics that are stitched together with the recognizable zig-zag quilting stitch (Fig. 8). Quilting was a part of my childhood, which is a history I share with many others — as an activity we grew up doing, or the quilt as an object that we grew up having. Quilts are commonly gifted by our grandmothers or passed down through the family as an heirloom. I associate those fabrics and stitches with familiarity and nostalgia for my grandparents. My grandparents provided stability and structure to my family by bringing us together, much like the patches sewn together on a quilt. The quilting stitch creates a feeling of nostalgia and comfort for many people, which acts as a point of reference to welcome the viewer into my work. When the plush lines begin to twist and knot around each other they undergo a physical disruption that visually squeezes,

¹¹ “Kiki Smith,” Biography and Legacy, The Art Story, accessed March 10th, 2020, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/smith-kiki/life-and-legacy/>.

¹² Hal Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” *October* Vol. 78 (Autumn 1996): 114.

¹³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 2.

¹⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 2.

chokes and rips the forms apart. They no longer only portray an acting stable form, for their “emergence of uncanniness”¹⁵ creates discord in the viewer. The physical and visual weight of the twisted lines clinging to the wood structure becomes what Kristeva refers to as a “something” which the viewer no longer recognizes.¹⁶ The work is on the edge of familiar and in the same breath, is alien. To acknowledge the foreignness of the form’s movements is to be confronted by the fear of the unknown, a disruption that is “not me.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 2.

¹⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 2.

¹⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 2.

PART II : STRUCTURE

Growing up, I was fortunate to be raised with a family that provided consistent stability and security through their actions and words. Their established stability extended to the way I viewed the physical body as dependable and steadfast. We project this belief onto our bodies as our homes or structures of stability, assuming we have control over how they respond. However, this sense of security is affected through biological disruptions outside of our control. When confronted by our mortality, that sense of security feels finite. The structures employed in my thesis work illustrate the fragility and uncertainty of biological disruptions. Structure is defined as “the action of building,” “something arranged in a definite pattern of organization” and “as the arrangement of particles or parts in a substance or body.”¹⁸ There is a sense of movement in these definitions, as what is acting upon itself creates a foundation, a pattern and a sense of order, as well as hierarchy, strength, and organization. Subverting this notion in my work meant confronting the fleeting structure of our body, which has an expiration date and is in a constant state of uncertain change.

In *Acting/Undergoing*, the forms use a wood structure that creates order with a grid-like patterning (Fig. 10). Swiss Designer Josef Müller-Brockmann states that “the grid is an organizational system that makes it easier to read the message.”¹⁹ In many ways, we would like our bodies and the systems they occupy to follow this order that the grid provides. We want to be able to read them in a simplified way which can provide comfort and stability. I attempt to create a grid network with the wood structures acting upon each other to support, build and create a

¹⁸ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, s.v. “Structure,” accessed February 12, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/structure>

¹⁹ Alina Cohen, “For Artists, Grids Inspire Both Order and Rebellion,” *Artsy*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-artists-grids-inspire-order-rebellion>.

sense of organization. However, upon closer inspection, the built structure is nonsensical. Almost like scaffolding on a building, the viewer questions if the structure is acting upon itself to build, or if it is undergoing a process that is taking it apart piece by piece.

The grid acts as a point of reference to enter the work yet subverts this notion by turning the structure into a non-structure. Structure and non-structure are words often used in disaster risk reduction plans.²⁰ Structural measures are put in place to reduce the impacts of hazards to create resilient forms that create shelter, order and reduce risk. Examples include dams, levees, ocean wave barriers, and tornado shelters. Disaster Risk Reduction plans use the word non-structure to define “measures not involving physical construction which use knowledge, practice or agreement to reduce disaster risks and impacts.”²¹ Though I investigate disruptions in the body, the use of disaster applies to both natural disasters and the body with this definition. I use non-structure in my work with a purposeful lack of knowledge or disregard of standardized physical construction. The grid no longer acts as a system to reduce disaster risks and impacts. In its process of undergoing a disruption, the grid turns to survival mode, as wood is lashed together haphazardly in a desperate attempt to “fix” or hold up the structure and plush forms (Fig. 11).

Patterns are found in creating order much like the grid as people crave a sense of stability. “Humans try to detect patterns in their environment all the time,” pattern researcher Arkady Konovalov said, “because it makes learning easier.”²² Understanding our world through understanding patterns, therefore, makes grid-like structures much like the ones Sol LeWitt built make sense to the viewer and create pleasing experiences. My work has the language of the grid

²⁰ “Structural and non-structural measures,” Terminology, Prevention Web, last modified February 2nd, 2017, <https://www.preventionweb.net/terminology/view/505>.

²¹ Prevention Web, “Structural and non-structural measures.”

²² Ohio State University, “This is your brain detecting patterns: It is different from other kinds of learning, study shows,” *ScienceDaily*, May 31st, 2018, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180531114642.htm.

but relies on the uncertainty of these lines, both acting and undergoing, to subvert the structure. This creates a type of anxiety that surrounds the lack of understanding or control when viewing my work. The forms hold a sense of uncertainty as they balance precariously with the weight of the grid displaced, creating top-heavy structures with off-center balance, as though they are on the edge of falling over. This lack of organized structure or pattern making instills a sense of fear and anxiety in the viewer and me as the maker. Neuroscientists write:

The ability to use past experiences and information about our current state and environment to predict the future allows us to increase the odds of desired outcomes, while avoiding or bracing ourselves for future adversity. This ability is directly related to our level of certainty regarding future events — how likely they are, when they will occur, and what they will be like. Uncertainty diminishes how efficiently and effectively we can prepare for the future, and thus contributes to anxiety.²³

Uncertainty is the catalyst in *Acting/Undergoing* affecting the ways we can “prepare for the future.”²⁴ Anxieties about my material self are visualized in the work, inviting the viewer to confront their own relationship to their body as a structure.

²³ Dan W. Grupe, and Jack B. Nitschke, “Uncertainty and anticipation in anxiety: an integrated neurobiological and psychological perspective,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, vol. 14 (July 2013): 490, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3524>.

²⁴ Grupe, and Nitschke, “Uncertainty and anticipation in anxiety: an integrated neurobiological and psychological perspective,” 490.

PART III : LINE

The use of line has been integral to my way of making for its ability to be fluid and ever-changing in three-dimensional space. Line can be viewed on a micro to macro scale as complex net-like systems are formed when individual lines cross and weave together. Line is a fundamental visual element and creates both a sense of structure and movement in my work. However, I am also interested in investigating the line through an anthropological lens. Tim Ingold, a social anthropologist, who has written extensively on the history of lines, writes: “Life is lived not at points but along lines.”²⁵ My practice uses lines to document our paths in life and connect our experiences as they weave together to create complex, tangled nets. The use of line has frequently appeared in my work, as I have investigated the way rope and other fiber-like lines can be an agent of change, as its materiality is not static but has fluidity and movement in its revolving presentation. By working with these malleable materials, I am not trying to establish fixed points — instead, they exist in a state of flux much like the human experience. The fiber lines shift and move to embrace the subtle changes that occur each time my work is displayed, never to be replicated from one arrangement to another.

Line becomes an ongoing process in *Acting/Undergoing* — each time my sculptures are presented, it is open to change as the work shifts in its orientation from one site to another. These forms are a product of installation art, as the work is largely created on-site with its visual elements directly responding to its surrounding environment as well as the environment the work creates within itself. Shifting and settling in the unstable wood structures cause the wood lines to break and detach from what once were secure connections. Max Kozloff writes in *The Poetics of*

²⁵ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 116.

Softness that “an object that *gives in* is actually stronger than one which resists, for which reason it also permits the opportunity to be oneself in a new way.”²⁶ I allow these objects to shift and change while permitting their authenticity to renew. Authenticity to how their structure relates to a constant changing orientation and space due to the strain of travel that each work goes through when moved from site to site. This causes my sculptures to shift and change as they are lashed back together in new ways as different parts break or move. This allows the work “to be oneself in a new way” as a form that is genuine to how we experience life and move our bodies through a variable world.²⁷ The work is an ongoing process where the life changes of each piece are documented from the initial acting creation to undergoing its eventual demise.

A system of complexity emerges as the wood lines, plush fabric forms, and thread binds together. The forms are connected by fabric lines and thread that binds itself to the wood as they arrange connections between two points, bind together and cling to the wood structure. I consider the human body as I construct my fabric plush lines. Kozloff writes, “Regardless of how abstract a soft sculpture is, it will unavoidably evoke the human.”²⁸ By evoking the human body in my forms, I deal with the complexity of their interactions through Ingold’s theory on the Life of Lines. He questions, “what happens when people or things cling to one another?”²⁹ Ingold believes:

There is an entwining of lines. They must bind in some such way that the tension that would tear them apart actually holds them fast. Nothing can hold on unless it puts out a line, and unless that line can tangle with others. When everything tangles with everything else, the result is what I call a meshwork.³⁰

²⁶ Max Kozloff, “The Poetics of Softness,” in *Materiality*, ed. Petra Lange-Berndt (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2015), 91.

²⁷ Max Kozloff, “The Poetics of Softness,” 91.

²⁸ Max Kozloff, “The Poetics of Softness,” 90.

²⁹ Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

³⁰ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, 3.

Acting/Undergoing creates a meshwork as the bundle of lines found in the wood, fabric and thread tangle within one another (Fig. 12). The forms cling to one another while attempting to establish systems of acting or undergoing.

Fabric is created from a complex system of numerous lines woven together — I work with rope, thread, and fabric for their line quality on a micro to macro scale. Textiles are made up of tiny micro lines that when woven together create a larger structure and meshwork, tangling together to create a surface. The materials I use are made up of numerous individual lines that rely on each other to create a “whole” or acting system.

Like many strands of a rope. A whole that is made up from individual parts is a totality in which everything is articulated or ‘joined up’. But the rope is always weaving, always in process and — like social life itself — never finished.³¹

The lines in my work find themselves in a state of being “never finished,” as they shift and move in the work, rearranged each time it is one display. This relates to our physical bodies, as they are always in a state of movement; a state of acting when we move through the world fluidly — “joined up” in the right ways (Fig. 13). Or in other instances, the strands of rope find themselves unraveling, grasping to put itself back together as it undergoes a process outside its control. Our bodies exist in a state of weaving as much as they exist in a state of unraveling. Our internal lifelines have a deep complexity as they ebb and flow, documenting our social and physical paths in life.

³¹ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, 11.

PART IV : CRAFT

My artistic practice is heavily rooted in craft — as a way of making and thinking, while also recognizing the generational lineage of makers I come from. I approach craft by looking at the writings of Richard Sennet, as well as contemporary art historians like Glenn Adamson and Maria Elena Buszek who have become leading thinkers in contemporary craft today. Buszek writes about how craft is directly tied to labor and a sense of discipline in her article *Labor as My Medium*.³² There is a dedication to the labor I employ through handiwork, however, I am inspired by artists like Tracy Krumm’s viewpoint of craft to understand the “why” in what I create. Krumm writes:

[To] discover what craft can do to build community and how craft and making has always been a bond, a necessity and way of communicating information around the world. Craft has the power to link us culturally, intellectually, economically, and ecologically to others. Craft is a way of thinking about and making relationships with the world.³³

In my practice are the relationships and histories communicating back and forth to each other as I use traditional making methods in a contemporary context. The ability to make “relationships with the world” places my work in a larger conversation to better understand myself as a maker and link myself to others. Historian. M. Anna Fariello also makes the case “that craft theory cannot be assimilated neatly into that of contemporary art but instead merits its own language and measures.”³⁴ I believe craft deserves its own analysis and by providing language to its unique properties I establish its relationship with my practice. A relationship through traditional

³² Maria Elena Buszek, “Labor is my Medium: Some Perspective(s) on Contemporary Craft,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 50, no. ¾ (Fall 2011): 72.

³³ Maria Elena Buszek, “Labor is my Medium: Some Perspective(s) on Contemporary Craft,” 75.

³⁴ Maria Elena Buszek, “Introduction: The Ordinary made Extra/Ordinary,” in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 13.

approaches such as skill, engagement, as well as how generational learning relates my body and to my practice as a way of being.

Craft as a way of making is evident in my commitment to the materials and processes in my practice. Being fully dedicated in a craft mindset involves engagement with materials through exploration and repetition, leading one to master the nuances of a material or subject matter. This provides me with skills to intimately understand the history, boundaries, capabilities, tools, and context of a given material. Richard Sennett explains:

[A]s a person develops skill, the contents of what he or she repeats change. This seems obvious: in sports, repeating a tennis serve, again and again, the player learns to aim the ball different ways.³⁵

Using repetitive techniques supports my investment in intimately understanding the capabilities of my chosen materials: wood, fabric, and thread.

The legacy of craft is upheld throughout communities across different cultures and generations; it is often passed down from one generation of artisans to another due to the amount of time and practice needed to achieve a sense of skill. I am evidence of generational learning — my grandmother was a skilled seamstress who taught my mother who then taught me how to sew. My mother’s family comes from generations of farmers based in Wisconsin and growing up in the country you could not easily go out and buy new items. You had to fix the rips in your clothes or craft your own outfits from scratch. We were all raised to sew with a “fix-it-yourself” attitude instead of buying new. Growing up, when I did go shopping for clothes, my mother would always say, “why buy it when you can make it?” The philosophy of making or repairing, and not buying new, was instilled upon me at a young age. My home is a living example of how

³⁵ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsmen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 38.

this value was passed down to me as evidenced by my shoe rack, entertainment stand, throw pillows, duvet cover, shelves, picture frames, clothes, and more that I have handcrafted.

My grandmother was raised during the Great Depression, a time when families were hard-pressed for sourcing fabric. Many quiltmakers at this time were forced to utilize every scrap of cloth they had — from old clothing and flour sacks to old bed linens.³⁶ This way of making gave origin to the scrap fabric quilt we recognize today.³⁷ With the value of resourcefulness passed down to me, the fabric I source in my practice exclusively comes thrifted or secondhand. I am interested in the stories held by fabric and their experience while their scraps pass from one family to another. Susan Stewart defines these remnants of fabric as souvenirs, writing:

We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative.³⁸

I believe fabric participates as a souvenir to communicate the human experience in reportable events. Once individual moments are quilted together, they share stories of the collective human experience, much like our biological life that acts and undergoes. Our bodies document reportable events through scars, fractures and other injuries that may be visible to the eye or not. My quilted plush lines reflect this history as they are cut and sewn back together, mended in places of tearing, and distorted out of their control by black tumorous forms. As I quilt the found fabric remnants together, I work to preserve their histories and stories. While parts of my father have become lost to his biological disruption, I attempt to preserve the pieces that construct him

³⁶ Brenna Riley Gates, “Scrap Quilts: A Mini History Lesson,” *Quilting Daily*, June 6, 2017, <https://www.quiltingdaily.com/scrap-quilts-a-mini-history-lesson-quilting-daily/>.

³⁷ Gates, “Scrap Quilts: A Mini History Lesson.”

³⁸ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 135.

in the same way. As his caregiver, I mend the pieces of him back together like the fragments of fabric in an attempt to restore his materiality and reportable events I feel have “escaped us.”³⁹

Actively confronted by the deterioration of memory and bodily functions within the genetics of my family, I have found myself in the role of caregiver. While facing the deterioration of my father’s health I took notice of how I responded to the objects and materials in my studio. I began to deeply care and become the caregiver for them as evidenced in the plush fabric lines where I actively bind together areas where they have burst open. Lashing together the soft fabric lines together, determined to fix their deterioration, and trying to restore them to their original selves. I see craft as a way of being a caregiver to my objects as I intimately learn from their movements, capabilities, and boundaries to respond in their specific language. With this knowledge and reciprocal relationship formed, I attempt to care for them through their journey of acting and undergoing in my practice. As I found myself shifting from daughter to caregiver in my personal life, my studio practice has shifted from calling myself an artist to a collaborator. I seek active collaboration with my materials to tell their story as much as tell my own.

To work in the language of craft can be challenging to define. I understand myself through my way of making, my materials used, and action given to the way of being in my practice. Craft is a dedication to my materials, and the values place on being “bound to the hand.” Glen Adamson insists that “craft be considered primarily as a way of thinking rather than a way of making or using.”⁴⁰ This is evidenced in the ways I see the language of craft extend beyond the materials I use, to how I relate my family history and body to craft. My generational knowledge has shaped my approach to materials and instilled a set of values as I navigate

³⁹ Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 135.

⁴⁰ Maria Elena Buszek, “Labor is my Medium: Some Perspective(s) on Contemporary Craft,” 68.

through my life and practice as a caregiver. Craft encompasses all in my practice and these components are integral to my way of being.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

My studio practice deals with the struggle of being human, of a material and physical self that is capable of living a life outside of our control due to biological disruptions. Found in my work are the anxieties and betrayal felt by the deterioration of my body and of those I love. I create to understand the human experience as tangled lines filled with uncertainty — undergoing disruptions one moment and acting upon each other the next. With patience and empathy, I act as a caregiver to my non-structures. My way of making and identity is owed to my family's generational lineage of craftsmen, which has integrated into my genetic makeup and artistic practice. My genetics further reflect the biological makeup of those in my family as I have inherited their predisposition to autoimmune disorders. The generational passing of craft and disease are linked in my family history and my sculptural forms act to recognize this biography.

FIGURES



Figure 1, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing*, 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 2, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing* (detail), 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 3, Lauren Faherty, *Islands*, 2017, rope and thread, approximately 14 x 50 in. (various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 4, Lauren Faherty, *Islands* (detail), 2017, rope and thread, approximately 14 x 50 in.
(various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 5, Lauren Faherty, *ACGT*, 2018, rope and thread, approximately 1 x 24 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)

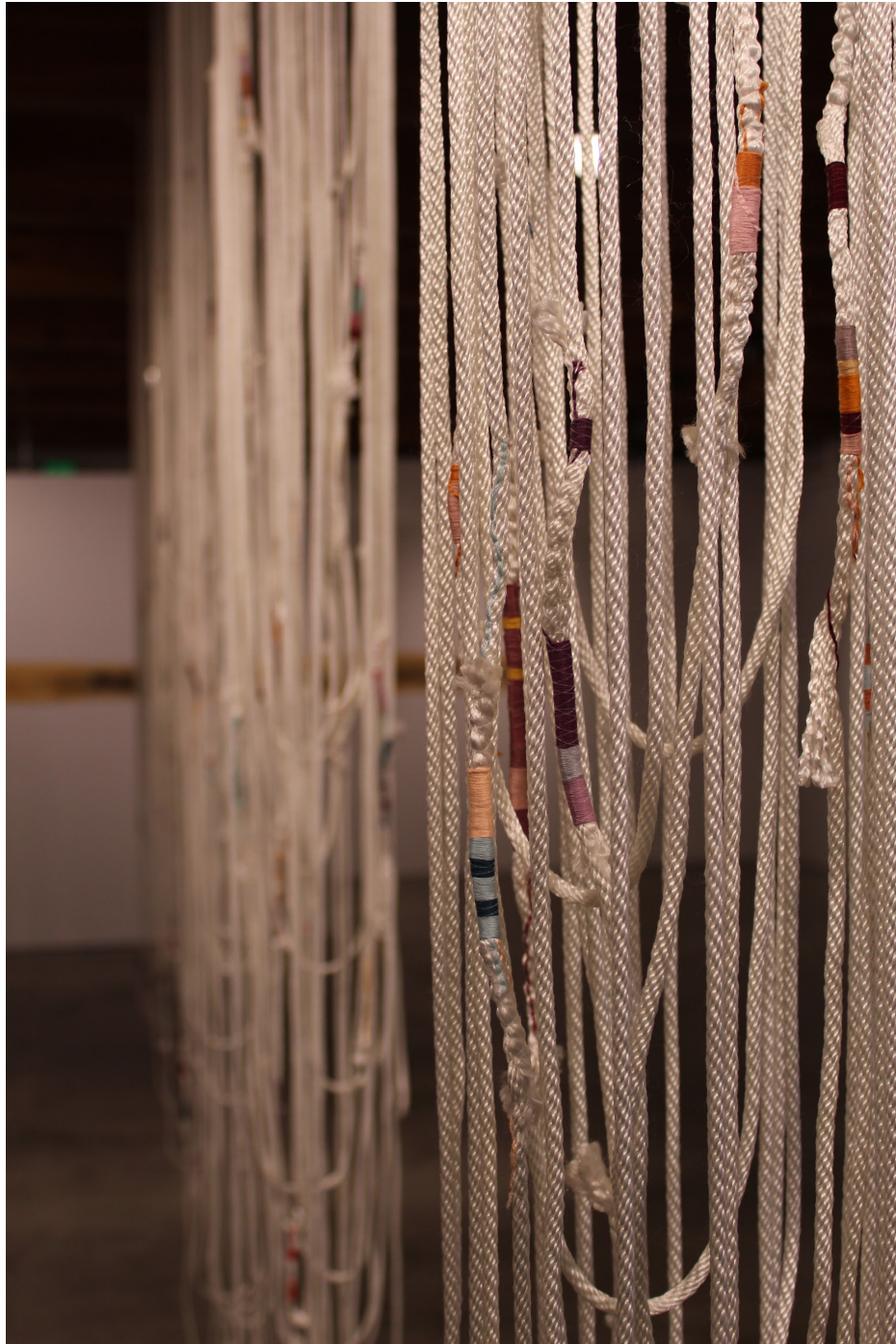


Figure 6, Lauren Faherty, *ACGT* (detail), 2018, rope and thread, approximately 1 x 24 ft.
(various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 7, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing*, 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 8, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing* (detail), 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)

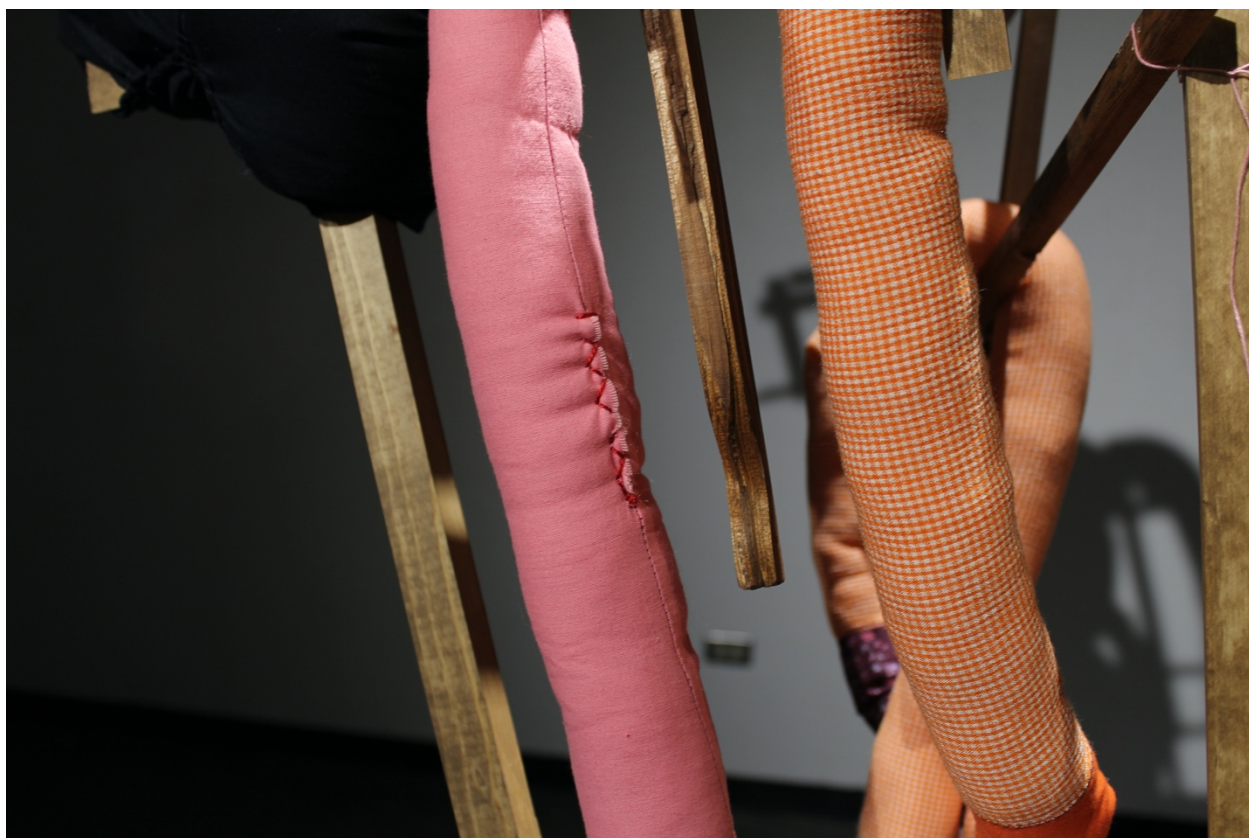


Figure 9, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing* (detail), 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 10, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing* (detail), 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)

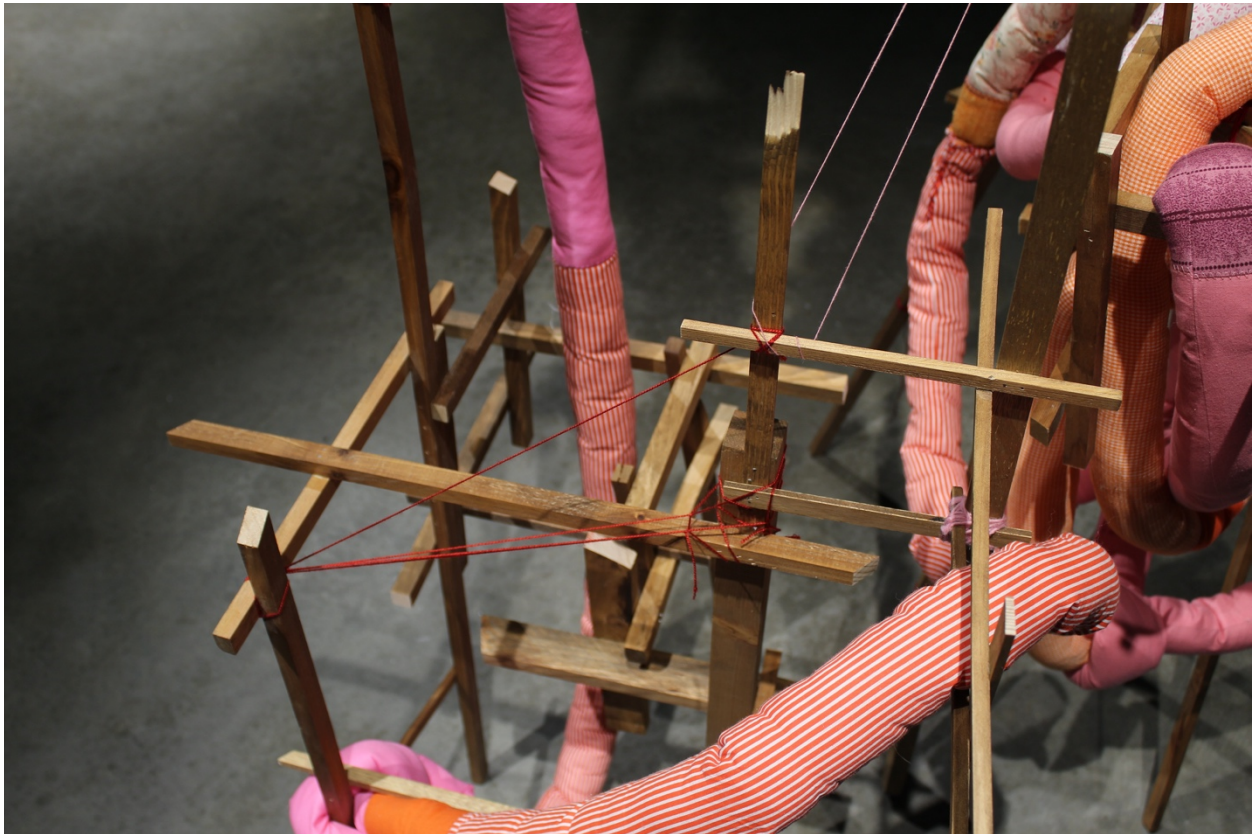


Figure 11, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing* (detail), 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 12, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing* (detail), 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)



Figure 13, Lauren Faherty, *Acting/Undergoing* (detail), 2019, fabric remnants, thread, polyfill, wood, approximately 3 x 9 ft. (various dimensions based on installation)

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