

Illinois State University

ISU ReD: Research and eData

Theses and Dissertations

3-26-2021

Searching : Waves

Spencer Molnar

Illinois State University, spencer.molnar@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Molnar, Spencer, "Searching : Waves" (2021). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1392.

<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd/1392>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ISU ReD: Research and eData. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ISU ReD: Research and eData. For more information, please contact ISUREd@ilstu.edu.

SEARCHING : WAVES

SPENCER S. MOLNAR

27 Pages

This supportive statement examines a philosophical conception of the self and how it can be identified through experience, consciousness, and perception by focusing on a human inclination to rationalize, or concretize, that which is everchanging. The methods of exploring this concept were achieved by examining the formal structure of composition and materials through the process of visual art. By pushing against historical traditions of creating spatial illusions in visual art, we can conclude that the legibility of an artwork is equally dependent on the experiential world as it is the social construction of image making. The question that is left unanswered through this examination is whether perceiving a self as an object instead of a process is a result of rationality or compulsion.

KEYWORDS: Aggregate, Anattā, Ātman, Closure, Embodiment, Gestalt, Mania, Melancholia, Perception, Rationality, Self, Art, Painting, Philosophy

SEARCHING : WAVES

SPENCER S. MOLNAR

A Thesis Supportive Statement Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Wonsook Kim School of Art

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2021

© 2021 Spencer S Molnar

SEARCHING : WAVES

SPENCER S. MOLNAR

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Melissa Oresky, Chair

Nathania Rubin

Tyler Lotz

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Melissa Oresky, Nathania Rubin, and Tyler Lotz, for giving me the skills to trust my process and for nurturing me in such a way that I was able to develop this expanded concept that coincides with my visual art. It has been a journey and I cannot express my gratitude enough. I would also like to acknowledge my family for supporting me while pursuing my artistic career. The support that my family members gave was unprecedented. Thank you to everyone else who I have not acknowledged, you know who you are, and I cannot thank you enough.

S.S.M.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
FIGURES	iii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II: SEARCHING THROUGH FORM, MATERIALS, AND CONCEPTS	3
Form	3
Juxtaposition	4
Materiality	6
Expectation Conditioning	6
Embodied Vessels	9
CHAPTER III: PROCESS	11
CHAPTER IV: THE RUBBLE	14
CHAPTER V: AGGREGATE	16
CHAPTER VI: FINDING BALANCE AND UNNECESSARY RATIONALITY	21
REFERENCES	26

FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Spencer S. Molnar, <i>It Billows #2</i> , 2021	3
2. Spencer S. Molnar, <i>Cycles</i> , 2019	3
3. KELTIE FERRIS, [<i>Cleopatra</i>], 2015. Acrylic and Oil on Canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY	5
4. Alexa Meade, <i>Blueprint</i> , 2010, c-print	8
5. Spencer S. Molnar, <i>In Flux</i> , 2021	9
6. Spencer S. Molnar, <i>Waves</i> , 2021	9
7. Spencer S. Molnar, <i>Aggregate (Weaving) #2</i> , 2021	18

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“the Radiance of Drift and Doubt is the sage’s only map. He makes no definition of what is right but instead entrusts it to the everyday function of each thing.”

– Zhuangzi¹

¹ Zhuangzi and Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: the Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2009). 15

The other day I found myself laying on the floor and looking up at my ceiling. This funny thing happened when I tilted my head backward. I continued staring at my ceiling and looked across the perspective of the room. I got this funny sensation in my head because my eyes were upside down but seeing right side up. Suddenly, my ceiling looked like someone else's floor and it became strangely enchanting how such a familiar place looked so different to me. My door frames looked like low mounted windows. The stucco ceiling looked like carpet. The bottom of my cupboards looked like unfinished countertops. Aside from the ceiling light fixtures that looked like inconveniently placed glowing orbs in the middle of a walkway, everything else appeared rational from this viewpoint. If not for my awareness I would have forgotten I was upside down.

CHAPTER II: SEARCHING THROUGH FORM, MATERIALS, AND CONCEPTS

Form

I am a painter, and over time I developed an affinity for a set of forms, materials and concepts that I began to renegotiate, rearrange, and experiment with. The first of these motifs I will talk about are the forms I use, specifically what I call ‘spiral-forms’ and ‘brick-forms’. Spiral-forms are the result meditative drawing, typically starting with a pen that archives the circular ‘churning’ motion of my arm. The pen mark refers to my hand while also resembling the track of a spinning top that is wobbling around searching for its center of balance. The closed off lines show no apparent beginning or end to the activity of the mark. These spiral forms are then translated into painted forms that echo the preliminary sketches.

The Brick-forms manifest as rectangles, squares, or other capsule-like forms. The overall shape of these brick-forms often changes but the difference between the brick-forms and the spiral-forms can be identified through the collectivist quality of the brick-forms. These brick-forms can be stacked, rearranges, and/or repeated. The collective gathering of these forms allows for the identity of one brick-form to be integrated into a larger form that results from the grouping, similar to how fish form schools, or a flock of birds. Albeit new, weaving has also been introduced to the into my vocabulary of forms. An aesthetic that suggests the entanglement of elements and conveys that separation of poles are not as clearly defined as one might think.

Figure 1,
Spencer S. Molnar,
It Billows #2, 2021



Figure 2,
Spencer S. Molnar,
Cycles, 2019



Juxtaposition

Thin : Thick

Above : Below

Transparent : Opaque

Solid : Hollow

Spirals : Bricks

Background : Foreground

Smooth : Rough

Intense : Neutral

Juxtaposition's create spectrums. While the extremes exist on the periphery, the space between these contain multiplicity, a mixed state of being. These juxtapositions mean nothing to me other than the stimulation that results from my disposition. I am interested in locating the sweet spot in the middle and imagining something teetering on the balance point. I imagine how those extremes might overlap, and what colors they would make. My work exhibits something similar to the moment of transition from one representation to the next, an expression of the mixed state between the two poles. I often think about Keltie Ferris's early works that convey out of focus foregrounds.

By using sprays, the marks of Ferris's paintings are left with blurred edges and a lack of clarity between an individual mark's boundaries. The similarity of colors and forms group together and become larger shapes collectively. The 'out-of-focus' quality of the mark complicate the separation, or expectation as to what is figurative and what is background. This type of reversal and unexpectedness is what I enjoy most in contemporary painting and music.



Figure 3, KELTIE FERRIS, [Cleopatra], 2015. Acrylic and Oil on Canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash,

In an interview with Stereogum, the musician Johnathan Pierce from The Drums spoke about something similar to the effect of existing within this mixed state that is present in much of this music and personal life.

There's sadness in every song. Hope and despair are sometimes feelings that are closer together than we think they are. Sadness and joy play with each other. When I'm feeling joyful, there's a ribbon of sadness in that joy — I always feel it. When I'm feeling sad, there's something that feels beautiful about that moment. Maybe it's just the purity of a strong feeling. It reminds you that you're human and alive. There's a joy in that, as subtle as it is.

Materiality

Paint can be applied in many ways to a canvas. It can be stained into the fibers, it can sit on the surface, it can be dry brushed on, it can be dimensional and chunky, it can be slick, etc. Historically, a work of fine art aimed to distract the viewer from its materiality. It was more desirable to create work that made you see past, or not even recognize the material construction of the work. Today, artists seem increasingly interested in the exploration of materials, and admire the distinct qualities that paint, for instance, can express. This divergence from tradition started with the availability of the camera, that ultimately put painting into a state of crisis. Over time new aesthetics were embraced, possibly out of necessity, nevertheless the crisis led to new exploration and experimentation that was very different from the academic painting of the 19th century and earlier.

Expectation Conditioning

Paint is very similar to concrete in the sense that it starts viscous and over time solidifies. Oil paint can take weeks, months, sometimes years to dry completely. Once the oil paint is dry, there is very little flexibility to the material. If the canvas were to expand and contract below it, the paint will eventually crack. Because of these limitations, artists were trained to follow a formula of procedures. The “fat over lean” rule allows you to build a painting that is flexible so over time there will be less cracking to your painting. The under layers of a painting should be leaner than the upper layers.² This technical procedure of following the fat-over-lean rule is less fascinating to me than the ‘expectation-conditioning’ that the principle has led to. For one thing, this rule is only necessary for oil paints, it seems. Due to the flexibility of acrylic, and modern

² <https://gamblincolors.com/fat-over-lean/>

engineering of commercial paints, cracking is less of a concern. But generally, painters continue to follow this rule. As a result, people have come to expect this process to be evident in the work. In other words, people have been trained to see in, what might be called, a ‘rational’ way.

As I mentioned earlier, one main objective of painting was to hide the materiality, to transcend the two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional illusion. By the time the camera became more accessible, the approach to painting transitioned. Colors became flat instead of dimensional. The use of gradations became less desirable in order to emphasize the two-dimensionality of the surface. The edges of the frame were emphasized as well. The functions of painting became increasingly focused on emphasizing the flat surface rather than an illusory image. In other words, the frame became a surface rather than a window.

Alexa Meade is one artist who toys around with conditioned expectations. Meade does use paint, but her challenge to traditional approaches is in perceived depth. Rather than a two-dimensional surface, Mead starts with the body or other three-dimensional objects as her canvas. She then paints

For every organism has built-in expectations. And problems arise, most characteristically, when some of these expectations are disappointed...The growth of knowledge always consists in correcting earlier knowledge...The growth of knowledge always consists in correcting earlier knowledge...There is simply no new knowledge without some kind of earlier knowledge, some kind of expectation, upon which it is a modification. And such modifications occur especially when earlier knowledge runs into trouble – for example, when an expectation is disappointed, when it gives rise to a *problem*.

Karl Popper, *Myth of the Framework: In defense of science and rationality*. 156

over the three-dimensional forms to appear as if they are flat expressionist paintings. In person her work is more sculptural than anything else, but by photographing her painted stages and figures she essentially converts the three-dimension into a what appears to be a flat two-dimensional painting.



Figure 4,
Alexa Meade, *Blueprint*, 2010, c-print

These expectations also affect material relationships. For instance, impasto is dimensional, so its inherent qualities typically portray foreground or figurative elements. The use of such material qualities to depict a sky, that is typically perceived as flat and passive background, confronts the viewers expectations to decode, or translate an image from material to spatial illusions. Given that the impasto utilizes less intense colors than the ‘figurative’ aspects that are beneath the impasto, the materials challenge what is foreground and what is background, or what is an active (dimensional) brushstroke and what is passive

void. This quality is even more apparent when spray paint settles upon tactile impasto and optically flattens the dimensional forms.

Embodied Vessels

To my knowledge there have been two narratives regarding painting: the painting as a surface or the painting as a window, but hardly ever as a vessel. A painting was either a frame that stood between the viewer's world and the painting's world, or the painting as a surface. Yet, in reality, every painting exists between these two polarities. A painting is physical and illusory, albeit one more than the most often, but nevertheless existing within a state of duplicity, a mixed state.

As a painter, I have come to understand my paintings as vessels. This concept is not unfamiliar to ceramicists who often make connections to the vessel and the body. This is to say that the body is a vessel, but this notion is uncommon in regard to painting. I cannot necessarily convey this interpretation of a painting to my viewer, at least not directly, but I do toy around with the notion by subjecting forms to the physical boundaries of the frame. Shape forms often nudge up against and do not continue beyond the edge of the frame.

The relationship I share with my materials, forms, and concepts of a painting's ontological existence aid the production of a work of art that exists within a mixed state of transition. One between illusion and object; our world and its.

Figure 5,
Spencer S. Molnar,
In Flux, 2021



Figure 6,
Spencer S. Molnar,
Waves, 2021



Divergent thinking “the ability and disposition to produce a great variety of ideas with freedom to switch from category to category.”³

³ Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. The Free Press, 1993. 106

CHAPTER III: PROCESS

I have two primary passions: philosophy and painting. I use philosophy to develop creative concepts and make connections. It serves as something like a cerebral sketchbook. However, the role of my painting practice is more enigmatic. When people would ask me about my ‘artistic process’ I had difficulty answering. I never quite understood what ‘process’ meant. To me the word sounded like a recipe, or an assembly line with predictability. When it came to painting, I never wanted to have a recipe. I wanted exploration. Articulating different expressions required different use of color, form, and composition. Now, I find myself repeating colors, forms, and compositions to search and dig deeper. I am starting to see that process is more like the thing that makes you tick. It is how you participate in the world and how that relates to your practice. It is life and it is embodiment.

To the average citizen, my practice must seem quite erratic. My relationship with the studio oscillates between joy, anxiety, and catharsis. My studio is usually a mess. I leave tape everywhere. Pencils, pens, paint, and charcoal are scattered throughout the space and often get stepped on. I frequently misplace things in my studio. Dried paint chippings scrapped from my pallet are left in piles. I neglect my brushes more than I should. Leaving them in water or on the countertop as the paint dries to a plastic. I have become very good at repairing these brushes and finding new ways to make use of their damaged bristles. When I paint, I move around a lot. I bob my head and lip sync to a Death Grips song followed by Elliot Smith. I take my paintings off the wall and put them on the floor, then on a tabletop, then my lap, and back on the wall. I use tape, razor blades, charcoal, and a sharp straight needle meant for sculpting that has a bent tip. Paint is applied via brushes, rags, pallet knives, or sprays. I scrape at the surface and patch up holes in the canvas.

If my stockpile of prepared canvas is out, I prepare for a visit to the wood shop. Building canvas is meditative and ritualistic for me. The first cut; a beveled edge down the length of a wooden strip. Second cut; two 45-degree angles for each side of the frame. I then use a Japanese technique with string and wood blocks to glue the frame in place. When the glue is dry the next day, I measure and divide up the canvas. Once I have stretched the canvas, I apply the gesso, always remembering to flick the canvas between layers to hear that beautiful reverberation of tightly stretched canvas. The prepared canvases are then left to cure overnight before I start to paint.

Between painting sessions, I spend much of my time thinking, sketching, planning, reworking, reading, and watching tv. If I sketch, I usually just grab a piece of mail on my coffee table and quickly create crude compositions and diagrams that will eventually be thrown away. I constantly look at images of my in-progress work and think. I either work out compositional issues on old mail, or directly on the image with my smartphone or tablet. Very often these times outside of the studio are simply avoidance. My studio space is shared and at times it is difficult for me to interact with others unless obligated. The word 'home' becomes a euphemism for enabling social anxiety. If I can make it to the studio I am reserved and often turned away. These visits in particular are brief.

If I am lucky, I drive to the studio with my music loud and feeling jovial. I become welcoming to visitors who pop into my studio and say hello. I become disproportionately productive and forget to eat all day until my stomach starts to rattle as I lay down in my bed. I am able function well on just a few hours of sleep and little food or drink. I feel very confident in my talents and work ethic. I become more enthusiastic about reading and my terrible comprehension seems to be curbed for the moment. I get lost in my work. What often reminds

me of my lethargy is the feeling in my legs as they become feeble and wobble as I stand up from crouching over my work. I stay focused and on task, but it feels like a trance. When this wave recedes, I drift back into my isolated head space. Reading, writing, thinking, scribbling. I float between these modes, and over time I became aware that in some form or another my work suspends these moments in flux.

The fluidity, change, and movement of the emotions, as they occur in the ever-changing cyclothymic process, may be compared to the pictures of a cinema, as contrasted with a “still” photograph. Indeed the psychiatrist, observing a manic-depressive patient for the first times, or as he undergoes one of the many undulations in mood, from melancholia to euphoria or from hypomania to a depression, is reminded of the experience of entering a movie during the middle of the story. No matter where one takes up the plot, the story tends to swing around again to the point where it started. The examiner may observe the manic-depressive patient first in a manic reaction, later in a depression, but eventually, if followed long enough, in another manic reaction. Like the movie which is a continuous but constantly changing process, the cyclothymic process is also continuous even though for the moment the observer is attracted by the immediate cross-section view. This conception of change, or constant undulation of the emotions is much more accurate than a static appraisal.⁴

⁴ Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. The Free Press, 1993. 34

CHAPTER IV: THE RUBBLE

My weeks are spirals, not circles.

Revisiting emotions and memories while experiencing new ones.

My months are slowly erected by individual moments that build a tower surrounding me.

The structure has an open roof and a spiral staircase.

I look up to see the sky shrinking as the walls grow taller.

I start running up.

As I climb higher the bricks start trickling down.

The floor shakes beneath me before the structure crumbles and takes me down with it.

I notice beautiful colors being cast on the surface of the bricks as I fall.

The bricks look as though they are swimming through the air as wind strikes them.

I hear the calming reverberation and guttural echoes as the bricks hit the floor.

I cannot feel the weight of my body as my mind races through the fall.

The impact is sudden, but soft like a plush pillow.

The bricks land around me as if the whole thing was a controlled demolition.

Sediment settles to the bottom producing a fuzzy, soft appearance over the rubble.

“Two aspects of thinking in particular are pronounced in both creative and hypomanic thought: Fluency, rapidity, and flexibility of thought on the one hand, and the ability to combine ideas or categories of thought in order to form new and original connections on the other.”⁵

⁵ Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. The Free Press, 1993. 105

CHAPTER V: AGGREGATE

“If the self is eternal and without thought processes, then it is evidently inactive... what activity can there be of something which is unchanging?”⁶ -Shantideva

The Buddhist conception of the self is that it is imperceivable because the self is in constant flux. Instead, an individual is compounded of multiple factors that are constantly changing, being affected, and affecting the world around them. This is not to say that the identity of an individual is not perceivable, but it is to say that because of this constant change, there is no permanent substance that can be called the self.

I was fascinated by this concept of Anattā because have not had much exposure to the self being more akin to a verb than a noun. Understanding a bit about this philosophical principle allowed me to internalize this to a certain extent and become more aware that I change regularly as an individual.⁷ I am affected by and affecting the world around me. And that every instance I encounter will change my perception and understanding of the world around me.

However, this is quite different, a total reversal even, of the Hindu principal Ātman that expresses that there in fact is a conception of the self that is unchanging. “the true self of an individual beyond identification with phenomena, the essence of an individual.” Ātman is more

⁶ Śāntideva, Kate Crosby, and Andrew Skilton, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). 52

⁷ W. (2021, March 09). Ātman (Hinduism). Retrieved April 14, 2021, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80tman_\(Hinduism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80tman_(Hinduism))

similar to my Western conception of the self. It is in many ways a solidified understanding of the self, more a noun than a verb. The juxtaposition of these conceptions of the self has motivated

“Aggregate is one of the three principle ingredients of concrete. It comes in different sizes, starting from sand and then moving up to larger particles. And, these particles fit together to produce a dense material. So in concrete, these pieces of aggregate are bound together by a mixture of cement and water. To produce a material that is initially moldable, and with time develops strength and becomes stiff.”

What is aggregate? - The Bare Essentials of Concrete - Part 2. (2015, May 26). [Video].

YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL-a43q6VoM>

my practice. It is even possible that this motivation was trying to communicate something to me that I was experiencing yet unaware of.

By no means do not intend to present myself as an expert of Buddhist or Hindu philosophy. Rather, as a visual artist I am compelled to interpret these concepts through means of visual psychology, and as to how my painting practice has been a vehicle for me to explore my own conception of the self. Gestalt, for instance expresses that humans are inclined to observe whole

forms despite the absence of one or more of their parts. Closure explains why we perceive lines on a road instead of dashes, or why someone sees faces in clouds. In many ways, closure helps explain as to how a person can feel a self. The self is felt in just the same way that a face is seen in the clouds.

Closure shows us that humans have inner tendencies to rationalize. Take water for instance, the oceans are constantly in flux, a single droplet of water does not belong to one ocean, but we generally accept the distinction of the Pacific from the Atlantic. The Eastern

thinker, Zhuangzi, also uses water as a metaphor for the self. He states, “[Water’s] ability to flow and to stop makes its presence plausible, but even then it shows no definite form.”⁸

Here is where I diverge into my own philosophy of the self. My conception of the self seems to fall somewhere between the Buddhist and Hindu understanding. Unlike water that will at some point belong to the Atlantic, then the Pacific, I will always be myself. If I happen to be depressed one day and happy the next, I am not two different persons. I may be free flowing and ever changing as an individual, but I do not view myself as a person in the same way that I view a raindrop to water. If anything, I am the ocean, the vessel, and the water is in me.

Dare I suggest that the self is more closely related to concrete than water? Similar to



Figure.7, Spencer S. Molnar,
Aggregate (Weaving) #2, 2021

paint, concrete becomes strong and rigid, but it starts off viscous and only given time does it solidify. This sounds very similar to conceiving the self as a noun again. But I do not intend to convey the self as permanent. My conception of the self is located somewhere between the Hindu and Buddhist understanding. The ‘concrete’ self will also become subject to its surroundings.

Even when concrete solidifies upon a surface, over time it will respond to the surface below. If the surface below is prepared and

⁸ Zhuangzi, *Essential Writings*. 10

cared for well enough, the concrete on top should last a significant amount of time. If not, the concrete will quickly crack and crumble. The concrete itself must also be prepared with care. The presents of air pockets should be minimized, and there should be a balanced mixture of water, binder (cement), and aggregate to insure proper setting of the mixture and weathering over time. In construction, aggregate is just one component of the concrete mixture – but concrete is an aggregate itself, given that it becomes “a whole formed by combining several (typically disparate) elements.”⁹ A very similar definition to that of gestalt.

And like the self, concrete requires maintenance. Eventually it struggles to hold its own weight and will inevitably crack, shift, and sink into the ground below. It is then decided whether to let the remaining structure crumble away into the earth beneath it only to eventually become aggregate itself, to repair it, or to repave the entire thing all together. The concept of the aggregate allows the self to be more structural than water would, but it also implies a need for careful planning, understanding, and moldability.

⁹ AGGREGATE: Definition of aggregate by Oxford dictionary on LEXICO.COM also meaning of aggregate. (n.d.). Retrieved April 14, 2021, from <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/aggregate>.

“The link between mania and depression had been noticed for centuries. As early as the second century A.D., for example, Aretaeus of Cappadocia observed that “melancholia is without any doubt the beginning and even part of the disorder called mania; so too, Alexander of Tralles (c. 575) wrote that individuals tended to have cycles of mania and melancholia, and that “mania is nothing else but melancholia in a more intense form... Alternating and interwoven patterns of mania and depression were well described by seventeenth-century writers, and Michel Foucault gives a vivid summary of the work of one of them, Dr. Thomas Willis:

In the melancholic...the spirits were somber and dim; they cast their shadows the images of things and formed a kind of dark tide; in the manic, on the contrary, the spirits seethed in a perpetual ferment; they were carried by an irregular movement, constantly repeated; a movement that eroded and consumed, and even without fever, sent out its heat.

Between mania and melancholia, the affinity is evident: not the affinity of symptoms linked in experience, but the affinity – more powerful and so much more evident in the landscapes of the imagination – that unites in the same fire both smoke and flame.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. The Free Press, 1993. 34-35

CHAPTER VI: FINDING BALANCE AND UNNECESSARY RATIONALITY

the more interesting and difficult questions that were asked, the more new answers they were induced to think of, the more they were shaken in their opinions, and the more they could see things differently after the discussion – in short, the more their intellectual horizons were extended. Fruitfulness in this sense will almost always depend on the original gap between the opinions of the participants in the discussion. The greater the gap, the more fruitful the discussion can be – always provided, of course, that such a discussion is not altogether impossible ¹¹

I often experience apprehension when attempting to reconcile opposing perspectives. I do not know whether I should continue forward or turn around. At times I will question my previous convictions, realign myself, then fall back to my original disposition. Bouts of depression lead to doubt. States of stimulation bring disproportional confidence. The transitional, or mixed state of both serves as inspiration of creative exploration and create tension within my own experience, and within my painting compositions. An interest of existing within these mixed states of melancholy and craze have been noted and romanticized.

The creative significance of the tension and reconciliation of naturally occurring, opposite emotional and cognitive states in artists with manic-depressive illness or cyclothymia (its milder temperamental variant), and the use of art by artists to heal themselves, are examined as well. The rhythms and cycles of manic-depressive illness, a singularly cyclic disease, are strikingly similar to those of the natural world, as well as to

¹¹ Karl Popper, *Myth of the Framework: In defense of science and rationality*. 35-36

the death-and-regeneration and dark-and-light cycles so often captured in poetry, music and painting. ¹²

Philosophy has even explored ways to find purpose and acceptance to the cyclical rhythms of the natural world. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Albert Camus

argues that life is essentially meaningless, although humans continue to try to impose order on existence and to look for answers to unanswerable questions. Camus uses the Greek legend of Sisyphus, who is condemned by the gods for eternity to repeatedly roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll down again once he got it to the top, as a metaphor for the individual's persistent struggle against the essential absurdity of life. According to Camus, the first step an individual must take is to accept the fact of this absurdity. If, as for Sisyphus, suicide is not a possible response, the only alternative is to rebel by rejoicing in the act of rolling the boulder up the hill. Camus further argues that with the joyful acceptance of the struggle against defeat, the individual gains definition and identity. ¹³

The philosopher, Donna Haraway talks about an action of "staying with the trouble". She describes the evolution of social structures and constantly resolving one 'trouble' only to be confronted with the recognition of a new one. In a rather contrived way, Haraway's *Staying with*

¹² Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. The Free Press, 1993. 6

¹³ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "The Myth of Sisyphus". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 18 Feb. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Myth-of-Sisyphus>. Accessed 26 March 2021.

the Trouble is an absurd act with no final resolution. But are Camus and Haraway being rational?
Am I being rational with my overindulged pseudo philosophy of painting?

Freud's theory of the typical origin of a neurosis falls entirely into our schema of explanations incorporating both a situational model and the rationality principle. For he explains a neurosis as an attitude adopted in early childhood because it was the best available way out of a situation which the child was unable to understand and cope with. Thus the adoption of the neurosis becomes a rational act of the child ... But if we thus explain everything in terms of the rationality principle, does it not become tautological? By no means. For a tautology is obviously true, whilst we make use of the rationality principle merely as a good approximation to the truth, recognizing that it is not true.

But if this is so, what becomes of the distinction between rationality and irrationality? Between mental health and mental disease?¹⁴

Throughout the process of constructing these concepts in tandem with my artwork, I seem to have discovered something about myself. Things that I have experienced and did not recognize because the only way I can understand the world is through my own subjectivity. In other words, what is rational to me may not be "normal" or rational to another. Before coming to this awareness of myself I tried to speak universally by constructing a philosophy of painting to rationalize my artistic interests and practice. I vaguely tapped into my subconscious by repeating forms, colors, and processes to formulate visual art. The juxtaposition of my meditative practice of building canvas and cognizant trance while painting. Of my passive cerebral periods of research, sketching, and writing vs my active productivity in the studio. Of my clean precision of

¹⁴ Karl Popper, *Myth of the Framework: In defense of science and rationality.* 179-180

remapping digital to analogue, or simply the aesthetic quality of my work in juxtaposition to the untidiness of my studio. And just my general “ability to combine ideas or categories of thought in order to form new and original connections” is echoed in the confusion of expected spatial illusions and material relationships. My paintings are an expression of how I experience the world between states, and how I search for rationale.

Like waves.

“The whole is something else than the sum of its parts, because summing is a meaningless procedure, whereas the whole-part relationship is meaningful.” -Kurt Koffka

REFERENCES

AGGREGATE: Definition of aggregate by Oxford dictionary on LEXICO.COM

also meaning of aggregate. (n.d.). Retrieved April 14, 2021, from

<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/aggregate>

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "The Myth of Sisyphus". Encyclopedia Britannica, 18 Feb. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Myth-of-Sisyphus>. Accessed 26 March 2021.

Camus, Albert, and Justin O'Brien. *The Myth of Sisyphus: and Other Essays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1959.

Fall, N Goné., Linda Nochlin, Maura Reilly, Geeta Kapur, Michiko Kasahara, Joan Kee, Virginia Pérez-Ratton, Elisabeth Lebovici, and Charlotta Kotik. *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*. London: Merrell, 2007. Koffka, K. *Principles of Gestalt*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1936.

Fat-Over-Lean. (2016, January 12). *Gamblin Artists Colors*. <https://gamblincolors.com/fat-over-lean/>

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2016.

Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. The Free Press, 1993.

Popper, Karl, Alan Ryan, and Ernst Gombrich. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Popper, Karl, and Notturmo. *The Myth of the Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality* (1st ed.): Routledge, 1996.

Śāntideva , Kate Crosby, and Andrew Skilton. *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

What is aggregate? – The Bare Essentials of Concrete – Part 2. (2015, May 26). [Video].

YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL-a43q6VoM>

Zhuangzi, and Brook Ziporyn. *Zhuangzi: the Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2009.

W. (2021, March 09). Ātman (Hinduism). Retrieved April 14, 2021, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80tman_\(Hinduism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80tman_(Hinduism))