2002

Thin place

Kerri Rosenstein
The University of Montana

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thin place

by

Kerri Rosenstein

B.A. in Psychology, Gettysburg College, 1998

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

December 2002
language nonsense non-linear little
intuition alone free accumulation
process whole empty lines
potential social pieced
intimate private listen compulsive
talk time soft slow
materials pressure ephemeral layers
communication writing open round
culture calm constant rhythm
place pattern walking sound
journal end big and small isolation
mapping quiet white disorder
health white comfortable
emotion cyclic warm
dialogue ineffable simplicity
raw waiting soul
connect books personal
stream water play
fluid repetition patience
lucid unfixd dissatisfaction
ds spontaneous simple
need sensuous insecure
thought ease immature
story acceptance anticlimactic
space piles continuous
sense groups unfinished
essence sorting discovery
change
Just home from a walk in the rain. I think most clearly when I am out walking. Alone. Talking to myself without anyone listening. Was thinking about how to write this thesis. I want it to be consistent with the way I make my work. I want the thesis to be an extension of the work - a comprehensible, verbally articulated whole.

I will write this thesis in the essence of a journal. Bits and pieces. The writings will come from my journals and from reflecting on significant topics and events, as well as my continuous thinking. The entries will not be ordered chronologically, but more so by the order they are associated with or applied to one another. The order of events and time in a linear manner is subordinate to the place I currently occupy with this body of work. Progression and development do not occur in a straight line. Accumulation gains priority over chronology. The entries will suggest my influences, approach to materials, and processes of working and thinking. It is my hope and effort that this thesis will be approachable in the air that it is written. That a reader will approach it like a drawing or sculpture, an abstract piece of work that can be entered on personal experience. It is not intended to be read straight through from front to back, but instead opened and closed, read in random order. In its accumulation, I offer an intuitive sense of the work rather than a direct explanation.
Belief & technique for modern prose - list of essentials

- Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
- Submissive to everything, open, listening
- Try never get drunk outside yr own house
- Be in love with yr life
- Something that you feel will find its own form
- Be crazy dumbsaint of the mind
- Blow as deep as want to blow
- Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
- The unspeakable visions of the individual
- No time for poetry but exactly what it is
- Visionary tics shivering in the chest
- In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
- Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
- Telling the true story of the world in interior monologue
- Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
- Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
- Accept loss forever
- Believe in the holy contour of life
- Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
- Dont think of words when you stop but to see picture better
- Keep track of every day the date embazoned in yr morning
- No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
- Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
- In praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
- Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
- You’re a Genius all the time

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Chuang Tzu (4th century B.C.) lists a series of ways towards leading a psychologically comfortable life:

- relinquishing competitiveness
- listening to your own mind for guidance
- seeking out solitude
- abandoning the search for happiness
- cosmic humility - responding with boundless vitality and joy to all things

Lao Tzu (6th century B.C.) notions of the *uncarved block*:

The *uncarved block* pertains to the state of potential being that coexists with the many concrete actualizations of being; it contains countless potential forms.

It is a form in which no particular form has been carved yet. It maintains potentiality.

“It waits,” as Agnes Martin says in reference to her grids.

The *uncarved block* connotes simplicity, plainness, genuineness in spirit and heart. A state of mind characterized by care, openness, balance of tranquility and activity - a positive quality that does not imply blankness.

It implies parts merged into one. Unity.

George Santayana (late 19th/early 20th century European philosopher):

“So long as we live in the moment and make our happiness consist of the simplest things - in breathing, seeing, hearing, loving, sleeping - our happiness has the same substance, the same elements, as our aesthetic delight that makes our happiness.”

I was not raised religiously. I grew up believing in the voices in my head. Talking to the sky. To deep breaths of fresh air. Closing my eyes up to the sun and the moon and the stars. I never really understood much about religion and spirituality. People around me seemed to talk about them as part of the same thing. Confused and ignorant, I didn’t ask many questions. Spirituality was more of a soulful sort of thing. Whatever soul was. I didn’t really know, but I liked it. My own ideas of soul and soulfulness. And I thank my parents for letting me figure this stuff out on my own. Somehow, I think it makes me believe in whatever I come up with more than anything anyone could teach me. It’s about my own experience in being. It’s about trusting my intuition. I am making it up as I go. Just sensing my way through. And when something or someone reveals something in me, connects to something I believed in all along but never put my finger on, I go a little wild inside.

Clarity.
Caught a 9:30am minivan out of Copacabana to La Paz. A good smooth tranquil ride. And a lot of time here is spent in transport. Being in transport lends to a peculiar state of mind. Passively watching land pass like a state of dreaming. A blurred state of inaccessible overstimulation. Not being able to hold on to anything. Unable to touch it, to feel it, to really get at it. Only to humbly accept its passing. And this is how I often feel. Like I can’t hold on to moments. Can’t get at them. I succumb. And agreeingly let them go. But not really. I try to accept the essence of their total. All the moments together as one. Because for now everything seems unreal, outside of me, like I am not truly here.
At night I had to paint it.

Can you I hope you had a good day? Thank you for taking me to the river. Sorry about the fridge again.

See you tomorrow.

-Ken
Yesterday I painted Ethan’s fridge. I have been timid to paint. I am a bad painter, full of empty potential. I could be an alright painter, but I can’t seem to get it to come out. And then as I was walking out the door yesterday, something came over me. I looked out the windows. It was sunny and the wind was blowing. I turned back. Pulled paints out of the cabinet, put on music, took off my shirt, and started painting. It felt good. Real good. But everything I painted was bad. Bad painting. And I was ashamed. The fridge turned into a mess. With a letter painted over it to Ethan. An apology for ruining his fridge.

But I felt good.
1:10pm in the studio

David has suggested I look into the *grid*.

Most systems of writing are based on a grid. I have always tended towards horizontals and verticals. No diagonals. But I do not like plaid.

A grid is an open place. A space before writing takes place. The open field of potentiality before it has been marked. An initiated place that has been opened. It provides a place. A space.
1:28pm alone in the studio

These days I prefer knitting.
I am not a good knitter. I only recently learned how to knit last summer in Bolivia. Just knit and purl - I don’t know how to do much else.
I find myself looking forward to going home at night to knit. Knitting when I am tired and cannot do anything else. Knitting until I fall asleep. It calms me. Quiets me.
One night I was frustrated. Realized I would rather knit than go work in the studio. And so I stopped and thought about it.

rhythmic
patterning
organized
logical
systematic
calming

Maybe these are qualities I am needing.
Mentally organizing these thoughts I became motivated and awake.
Started cutting stuff into pieces - squares and rectangles - and arranging them, putting pieces together.
Letting go of some of my overflowing thought to relax. Calm.
Playing puzzles.

Thinking back, the pieces are starting to fall into place. My affinity for Agnes Martin, and other artists such as Sol LeWitt, Eva Hesse, Wolfgang Laib, Richard Long and Gunther Uecker. Indigenous artwork. My pleasure in Louise Bourgeois’ talk of pattern, math, solution and narrative. Bourgeois once said that rehearsing abstract patterns helped her “wrest order from mental turmoil.”
monday around 9:35pm at my table on front street

Unless we break the whole into parts, how do we know that the whole is not just a part of some other bigger whole?

The whole becomes somewhat inconceivable when the intricacies of the parts are acknowledged. But likewise, the whole consumes the parts, melding the intricacies. They become inseparable.
The whole becomes more whole by seeing the parts that come together to make it whole.
The parts become whole and the whole becomes parts.

My life occurs in parts - pieces that together make it whole.

Not a new idea.
in the studio with cathryn

What is the strongest quality of your work?
    Intuition

What is the weakest quality of your work?
    Self-doubt

Funny how that is.
Sarah is pregnant. The baby’s due at the end of June.
Some people think the baby will come early. She thinks so too.
I went to visit her today up in the north hills where she is the caretaker
of an old homestead. I like to go there. It is a quiet and calm place. The
energy she stirs there is warm and soft and welcoming.
I have been preoccupied with school and my work. I am sad I have not
been more present for her during her pregnancy.
Together we water the garden and string a clothesline of wet laundry.
I catch myself in moments of awe watching her.
She is beautiful. The whole deal is beautiful.
Her belly button has popped out and I am quite fancied by it.
I like to touch it. She humors me and giggles a little when I do.
The skin is soft. It feels different from any other skin I have ever
touched. I don’t know why I am so drawn to that mini protrusion, but I
refrain from resisting myself.
I ask Sarah if it tickles. She says, “It feels like a thin place.”
I assume she means it feels like a place where the skin is thin. Thinner
than the rest of her flesh.
But by the way she says it and then smiles at me I understand she
means something deeper. And so I ask.
“It feels like the closest you can come to actually touching the baby.
My mom used to talk about thin places a lot when we were growing
up.”
She goes on some more to try to explain the concept of thin places to
me, and as I am attentively listening my mind and body start bursting
with adrenaline. I am dancing inside of myself. I hear the words from
Sarah’s mouth entwined with the convolutions in my head that make
sense to all that I am trying to do in my artwork. In this moment, all the
different aspects of my work, all the seemingly disparate bodies and
directions, cohesively meld into one. My mind goes wild.
A man place three places some four place same three places

17
I left Missoula heading for the ocean. I love the ocean. I love water.

As I drive down from the Cascade Mountains into western Washington, I am amused to hear myself making up songs to the green and blue colors I see. Singing songs to water.

My mind goes back to the idea of thin places.
I can’t get it out of my mind. And I don’t want to.

I get to the Olympic Coast and head down to the beach. Rialto Beach. Straight to the water. Put my bare feet right in it. Touch the water and lick my fingers. Thought about all the days as a kid choking on the saltwater of the Atlantic Ocean. It is the place I come from. The ocean.

I love the ocean. To me, it is a thin place.

The lot of my drive has been filled with thoughts of my work. I am consumed by this new notion of thin places and what it means to me.

I scribble down some possible titles for my thesis show.

   a thin place
   some thin place
   thin places
   thin
   the space in-between
   a plethora of failures
   writings and notes
Heather and I are up early and head down to the tide pools. Heather has studied marine biology. She knows about these things. Sea stars, barnacles, seaweeds. And snails.

She tells me if I put a snail in my hand and hum it will come out of its shell. Heather is a sweet and soft person. I figure that’s what happens when she hums. Like a horse whisperer. A snail hummer.

I pick up a snail and, like every other time I’ve ever picked up a snail, it curls up inside of itself. Instinct. All my attention goes to the snail. Everything around me seems to fade out. Like I went into the shell with the snail and have found a calm sort of quiet in myself. I take in a deep breath and hum. A steady smooth hum.

It feels good. I feel it inside vibrating. I hear it inside and outside of my body.

And the snail reaches out. Extends its body full-stretched. Arched up in simple grace.

a year later. backpacking on the north olympic pacific coast

Backpacking north towards Lake Ozette, Kevin and I stop to play in the tide pools. We are in awe of the bright orange and purple sea stars. We peel them off of the rocks to hold them in our hands. Slowly, they curl inbetween our fingers and around our palms and grip themselves to us. Security. Instinct.

I try the snail humming. The same thing happens. Again and again. The snail senses the calm. It is eased by the humming. The wise and sensual intuition of snails.

When I feel myself rattling unsettled inside, I hum. My work is the manifestations of me humming.

...It was high tide and I skirted around the waves. Walking north. I couldn’t see much. The fog was thick. I collected round stones. I don’t know why. I liked the round stones and so I picked them up.

Maybe that’s part of my process these days. Collecting stuff. The act of collecting. Gathering.

I also collected mini wishing stones. Little stones with rings around them.
Yesterday, I collected little pieces of flat driftwood.

When the tide stopped me from going further I settled into a curved log on the shoreline and put down my rock-loaded pack. Watched the water. Tried to escape thought. Tried to sit up straight and breath deep.

Watching the ocean felt good. Listening and following sounds. Isolating a sound and following it.

The weather has turned cold and it is about to rain. When the tide rolled out enough space for me to scoot by, I headed back to camp.
I can’t help it. I have to ask Sarah more about thin places.
“Is this an idea your mother made up?”
She tells me it is an old Celtic idea.

I am glad to know a source and make plans to spend the next day in the library researching.
But I stop myself.
I decide I am excited with my own understanding of what a thin place is. It is all making sense. I do not want to be disappointed or confused or misled by the actuality of what it referentially means.
I resist the urge to delve into books.
I decide to trust my intuition.
I hear myself explaining thin places to Kaya. I am excited and see she understands. My attempt at explaining is clear. Its relevance to my work is in agreement.

A thin place is a place inbetween. Inbetween here and there. Inbetween this and that. Where one reality permeates another. It is what makes up an edge. Like if you put two pieces of paper together they make a line where they overlap. It is not this piece of paper or that piece of paper, but the inbetween that makes the line. It is the transition. Our bodies sense thin places just outside of awareness. A thin place is the closest one can get to the intangible. The inaccessible. The ineffable. It is an ungraspable sensation. It is a feeling of being on the edge of something big but not being able to get at it. It is abstract and often discarded. It is the material that exists between a thought or a sensation and the communication of it. It is the lucid formlessness of an idea or experience.

When I am by the ocean I feel most alive, and yet most afraid. Most aware of extreme emotions. Invigorated to the highest levels I know of being alive. Powerless and vulnerable and contently at ease with such selfless awareness.

When I touch Sarah’s sensitive belly button, it is the closest I come to touching the abstract world between the one I live in and the one her baby lives in. When I am working, it is the closest I know how to come to the manifestation of thin places. It is an effort to manifest what I cannot grasp. It is a way to communicate what I cannot communicate.

And for a fully attentive viewer, in their participation, is the fancy that I feel when I touch Sarah’s one-inch outty belly button.
I wanted to make something, a real long continuous something. Something that went on. A piece of knitting that would be cast-on for about 20 feet and then cast-off. A piece that was beginning and end but no middle. And by there being no middle, that middle is what would come into question. A piece that marked continuous transition. Transition as destination. And because the piece would be so long (and later I realized it would need to be much longer), even the two ends of that beginning and end would come into question. A piece about coming and going but residing only in those abstract places of not being somewhere other than inbetween. It was an idea I’d had for a long time. It was more of a feeling than a form. And now my instincts were making form out of that feeling.

I have never been good at saying goodbye. I am the kind of person who drags out goodbyes. When I sense company is departing, or a long drive is ending, or some sort of closure is due in some way, I become uneasy. If I don’t drag it out, I often do just the opposite. I draw an end abruptly.

Mary Ann has pointed out that anything fixed makes me uncomfortable. I can’t deny it. She has found words for what had been, to me, an indescribable part of my character. One day I ask Mary Ann to look at some of my work. She says, no. I don’t understand. She says. I’ll meet with you when you finish something. We go our separate ways. I am frustrated. A week or so later, she asks if I have finished anything. I tell her, no, I don’t like finishing things. I confess. She tells me to resolve them. And there’s the resolution. Not finishing them as resolved. Got it.

So, I take this ball of gray alpaca wool I got in Bolivia and get at the project. I cast-on as much as my needles will allow and cast-off. Leaving the knotted knit rope attached to the wound ball. The wool is too dark and thin and bumpy, that the idea is lost in a little homemade rope-like thing. I go to the yarn store in search of longer needles. I tell Susanna what I want to do and she teaches me a knitting stitch that is the same sort of idea. I buy a ball of thick, natural, felted wool. I spend the evening knitting the ball into a rope-like thing. Making it felt good. Felt right. But looking at the thing made, something was not right. It was just that, a rope-like thing. Something about the material was still not right. The idea persisted. The material had to be closer and more connected to me. I ripped an old painting into shreds. Tied the ends together into a continuous strand and knit them into a rope-like thing. Colors and marks from my painting showed through. Material and process united. It felt right. It feels right.
And the aesthetic of these things has changed. People comment they are ugly and clumsy. They don’t respond to them the way they used to respond to my paintings. Some people have even told me to stop. But I don’t stop. I don’t feel self-conscious about these paintings the way I used to. The formlessness of them appeals to me. They are not beautiful objects. They were never intended to be.

And lately I think about the nature of being attached to things. Any things. And we tend to be attracted to beautiful things. But the more attached we get to beautiful things, usually, they become less physically beautiful and more deeply, intimately beautiful. Like an old blanky, or a favorite pair of boots, or a poem kept folded in a shirt pocket. And sometimes we think, how can I get closer to that beautiful thing? Like we want to eat it or consume it somehow. Take it in. It becomes no longer about the beauty of the thing but the relationship with it. And sometimes to actually get closer and more intimate, it means destroying, or altering, or taking a risk of losing it. And somehow in that act, we allow it to enter into a new and deep place within us.
Some days I feel like I’m going crazy.  
Like I need to be removed from the sweet and social world.  
Things will be going well and then all of a sudden something will 
knock me down.  
And I will catch myself gnawing my teeth. Grinding them.  
Clenching my fingers. Tensing all the muscles in my body that I am 
only aware of in these moments.  
Scratching my scalp. Digging to get in there and fix the malfunction.  
And sometimes all I can do is remove myself. Take myself to another 
place.  
Usually it means I need to get home. I like to be at home.  
I like fresh air.  
I like to be barefoot.  
Nothing restrictive.  
I am not crazy.  
Other people feel this way.  
I came home tonight and wrote on rocks.  
Again, I am at ease.  
Got to go through it all. We all do. Somehow.  
There is a quieting in patterning. No new idea - I know. Lots of artists,  
shit, lots of people, revel in the peace of patterning.  

- tribal people
- crafts people
- crazy people
...

Something that goes on and on.  
Free of the anxiety that comes when things end.

And so it seems, the more I am making my work, the less I am writing in my journal. The more I am engaged in my work, the less time I spend running and stretching. It isn’t the form so much as it is the need. My needs persist; form is flexible.

I am constantly adjusting and improvising, sensing myself in relation to things around me. As I imagine we all are. Our bodies ceaselessly adapting. Continuous movement engaged in indeterminate and unfixed relationships.

It makes sense that we would find pleasure in things that are repeated. Biologically. Naturally. Physiologically. Artfully.
I grew up drawing and painting. Some kids grew up building things. I probably did that too. That’s something we all do - we make stuff. I remember drawing and painting. And writing. Mom tells me I used to draw and write on anything. Everything. I would go to work with her when I was little and dig through the office trash for something to make marks on.

My grandfather was a painter. A drawer. A taxi driver and an artist. As I get older, I feel more like him than most of my family.

I think it must be genetic, or biological, how some people think more 2-D or 3-D. How some people approach things physically, while others more emotionally or mentally. Some people are more balanced than others. Maybe we start out one way and learn how to move our weight around. And at some point, maybe it all starts to blur.

Many artists have attempted to erase boundaries between writing, drawing, painting, sculpture, and so on, to the point where naming and categorizing seems impractical. It is all work, a body of work about more than just a medium, not limited to a medium. Mel Bochner once said, “Boundaries are only the fabrication of our desire to detect them... a trade-off between seeing something and wanting to enclose it.”

I applied for an MFA in painting and drawing. Being somewhat hypergraphic, someone who writes obsessively, I approach things two-dimensionally. But then things change.

In a way, it’s how you look at it. Perspective.

Lately, I think a lot about perspective. In a broad sense, perspective. How we position ourselves in relationships. I think painting has always been concerned with perspective, in some way or another. Whether conveying some sort of physical or mental or emotional perspective. Ultimately, perspective is a choice. How we choose to see things. (Okay, so some of it’s physiological.) Whether it be contained within an object, or on a surface, or extended to an actual space, what we see and feel is determined by how we position ourselves in relation to whatever it is. Physically, mentally, emotionally. How much we choose to change and vary our perspective determines what and how much we will see, what we will feel.

According to principles of vision, we need light to see perspective. In a physical sense. So, light becomes a part of this too. And vision, for that matter. But when we start talking about perspective that is not necessarily physical, likewise, we enter a different kind of light, a different kind of vision. A metaphorical sort of light for a metaphorical sort of sight.

It is in the lightest and in the darkest places we are able to see the most.

---

AI ABILITY

A woman of all the earth, a touch of a simple because she was once sixty.

READ BOOKS

A man in a red and a pink and purple cloth, and the lady, and the lady.

IN BETWEEN

In between the pages, there was a woman, the woman, the woman, the woman, the woman.

COLORED PIGS

Colorful pigs everywhere, in every color, in every shade, and they were all singing a little song, a little song they were all singing, and they were all having a good time, and they were all having a good time.

A FEATHER

A feather on a man's head, and the man, and the man, and the man, and the man, and the man.

A BRANCH

A branch with a long and a short end, and the woman, and the woman, and the woman, and the woman.

A LITTLE CALLED PATTY

A little called patty, and the lady, and the lady, and the lady, and the lady.

A BOX

A box with a blue and a yellow lid, and the lady, and the lady.

A TABLE

A table with a blue and a yellow lid, and the lady, and the lady.
We went to Elizabeth Dilbeck’s home today.
Elizabeth is 70 years old and blind. She makes ceramic sculptures.

I thought about how she has had to surrender the insecurity of people looking at her. That uncomfortable, self-conscious feeling we get when people look at us.

I felt the vitality of our energies. The strength of her senses. She didn’t know what I looked like, but she knew more about me than most company. I felt open and exposed, like I couldn’t hide. I was drawn to her. My focus, my trust.

I found a book in braille on the table and leafed through it. It was a book of poetry she wrote. Wes saw me feeling through the pages and told Elizabeth, Kerri makes books too. She asked me what I make books about. I fumbled for a way to describe the sort of books I make. Nonsense, I told her, books of nonsense.
She said, I’ll tell you some nonsense, and went into a story about... I don’t remember. It was random, seemed to be going nowhere, but in telling the story, she was smiling, excited and playful. I smiled too. The sharing was more important than the story.

Nonsense makes sense.
Language lifted out of context. Language turning in on itself.

“To make sense is to enliven the senses. To make sense is to release the body from the constraints imposed by outworn ways of speaking, and hence to renew and rejuvenate one’s felt awareness of the world. It is to make the senses wake up to where they are.”

Nowhere in a description of sense is nonsense excluded. Just as right and left brain are parts of one brain, feminine and masculine parts of one being, yang and yin parts of one unit, nonsense and sense are parts of whole sense.
Nonsense seems disordered, nonlinear, indecipherable and incomprehensible. But maybe it is an order, an order that is just that. An order with no particular form or context.
Transition. Change. An ongoing process without fixed boundaries.
Nonsense is a sort of abyss. A place of unknown where all things get answered. A thin place.

“Nonsense is ‘good for nothing.’ When you’re ‘good for nothing,’ you aren’t in a hurry to get anywhere - the journey becomes the destination.”

As we were leaving, Elizabeth asked me to hug her. I melted a little inside and leaned into the chair where she sat. I startled her, which similarly frightened me. My hair fell around her. She breathed in my breath. She touched me. It was as if I felt her seeing me, when actually I was seeing her feel me. She gracefully touched my hair, my face, my shoulder. I was embarrassed for how I take touch for granted. She told me I was beautiful. It had nothing to do with the way I looked. And for the moment, I believed her. I felt beautiful.

monday night in a hard chair at a hard desk, thinking about unity

Nonsense coupled with patterning culminates in unity.
All colors add up to make white, and black.
Emptiness amounts to potential, openness.
Silence makes audible what we do not hear.
Dimmed consciousness leads to ultra awareness.
Personal addresses universal.
Repetition and multiplicity suggest oneness.
Cycles are constant and yet fleeting, transitory, ephemeral.
Completeness lacks beginning and end.
Nothing is something.

We tend to distinguish between polarities.
But only with obscure disparity.

There is an internal fulfillment that comes from recognizing cohesive wholeness.
Conceptual ease. Balance.

"In art it is hard to say anything as good as: saying nothing."\(^1\)

And like all things I know, I don’t know, it seems.

---

I accept that my work may invite and yet ward off.
I realize that is somewhat consistent with much of the art I am attracted to…
Robert Ryman, Cy Twombly, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Joseph Grigely, Gertrude Stein,
Antonin Artaud.
…And the people in my life. The people I attract and the people I am attracted to.
Keeps things a little unknown. In a sexy sort of way.
Familiar and known, yet unfamiliar and enticing.
My work is manifestations of me. It is only likely my natural walls and ways of
protection get entwined with everything else.
There is no intention to be evasive or sneaky. More so, a craving to be open.
The work is inviting in that it is obviously language. It evokes communication. But upon
further effort and closer examination it is impenetrable in a traditional manner. It doesn’t
translate to the language we expect. So, in not making direct sense it could ward off,
frustrate, or turn someone away.
And I wonder if that’s about control.
When we can’t have control do we surrender to another form, another level of acceptance
or understanding? Do we surrender and accept it as a sensual sort of abstract language?
I visited you last winter and you asked me to tell you something. My mind was full and I thought, here’s my chance, make it good. I stood quiet. You waited. And I realized you couldn’t hear all the talking in my head. Under pressure, I had to forfeit the moment. I said I had to go. That I would write you a story, something to give you.

A year later now, I write you stories. Stories that read more as sort-of drawings. I tell you little things I don’t know how to say. Maybe the notes don’t amount to anything, but the transaction, the method of communication seems aligned. Just by writing and going through it all, I feel the conversation has happened, the story delivered. And when I give you the detritus note, the residue of my thoughts, I feel the connection is that much closer.

Sometimes we say things and we don’t really hear what is said. Being quiet often makes the most sense, but even then, we sometimes still don’t hear.

Language is a perpetual problem. ...Or maybe it’s just the form we tend to give it.

“Sharing is essential to understand one’s self deeply.”

There is an innate impulse to communicate. Not necessarily to say something, but to engage. A need for meaning and connection over particulars. It is a way in which we connect with and make meaning of our circumstances, our surroundings, our existence. Humans are first and foremost social beings, part of a pack. Agnes Martin once said, “Human beings are herd animals. And I decided that to live properly you stay with the herd.”

Lately, I notice I prolong certain interactions. I know they have expired and yet I linger. I wait until I am cut off. I walk away annoyed at myself for allowing the moment to grow awkward. It’s as if I think I am going to get at it. Whatever it is that I can’t get at. The more sensory, intuitive, abstract parts of the conversation. The parts I have to accept knowing without knowing, without scrambling and shuffling words. Understanding by not trying to understand. Apprehending without rationalizing.

When I go home, I play with everything I felt happen in the interaction. I try to trust myself, my insight, my gut.

It’s not always easy.

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9:18pm on the clock in the studio that is wrong, it is dark outside.

I remember walking down the hall in high school with Chris one day. He told me I had style. I laughed. Stylish was far from anything I emanated. He knew it was funny too, and backed himself up with, you’ve got your own style.

I remember going shopping in high school with Erika one day. Erika was stylish. She wore sassy, bright colors. She would pull out cream, tan, white, brown, black shirts and sweaters and laughingly say, hey, this looks like you, Kerri. It’s your color - none.

I’d never thought much about it.

I saw color in them.
I keep running into this idea Sarah spoke of as *thin places*. In books on communication, language, spirituality, myth, art, physics, literature, philosophy... the concept of *thin places* persists. Authors refer to it by different names, but many acknowledge a similar sort of thing.

It is. *Thin place.*

It is known by many names, this potential space - hypnogogic state, meditative trance, aesthetic devotion, writer's high, white space, and in alchemy the albedo. ...It is the space where artists wait, and mystics, also madmen. It is imagination’s crevice, the space between two worlds where everything is more than it seems and images unfold.¹

There must be a middle ground, a place between two worlds. There must be a place where inner life can find the validation to hold itself together. At the same time there must be a place where outer life can open itself to imagination rich enough to offer meaning. ...a place to play in trust so strong it becomes a way of life.²

Where edges are softened, boundaries are blurred, contrasts are muted. But subtlety is gained. Imagination is heightened. Perception is altered.³

I do not insist on things being new. In a way, I favor mundane, persistent themes. How they accumulate and relate, how they evolve. The more things repeat and go full circle, the more rudimentary and essential they seem to be, (generally). How we all come to some of the same things, the same issues, the same ideas on our own, in our own way. Louise Bourgeois once said, “The subject is only subject; all our subjects are the same: anything I say would apply to any of us. So it’s not a mystery. The mystery resides in what you do with it.”⁴

We try on different forms, different ways. I think we tend to go back around to our original form, first impressions, instincts. What we knew before we thought maybe we didn’t.

It makes sense I was making all sorts of connections in my research. Good, juicy connections that were overly exciting me and affirming me.

How silly of me to be surprised.

² Ibid, 99-100.
A thin place exists just outside of awareness.
It is sensed.
It is a state of being, in a moment.
It may arise from an over-alert sense of consciousness,
but more often from a level of dimmed consciousness.
Dimmed consciousness.
List of Images

*holding* (detail), 2002, mixed media on wall, 120x964 inches.  

Agnes Martin, *On a Clear Day*, 1964, gesso, acrylic, pencil on canvas, 72x72 inches.  

Photograph from Bolivia (Kerri Rosenstein, 2001).  

*ethan’s fridge*, 2001, tempera paint on fridge.  

*sitting* (1 of 12), 2002, mat board, approximately 1.5x1.5 inches.  


*in between us*, 2002, lithographs and pen on plastic, approximately 60x60 inches.  

*miles with you*, 2002, tar paper, stamp paper, ink, approximately 5x160 inches.  

Photograph of Sarah’s belly (Kerri Rosenstein, 2002).  

Journal page (Kerri Rosenstein, 2002).  

Photograph of Pacific Ocean sea star (Kerri Rosenstein, 2002).  

*by the ocean* (group of 16), 2002, ink on stone, size varies.  

Photograph of Pacific Ocean horizon (Kerri Rosenstein, 2002).  

*black knit rope*, 2002, alpaca wool, size varies.  

*little dances*, 2002, mixed media on canvas, size varies.  

*by the ocean* (detail), 2002, ink on stone, approximately 3.5x3.5 inches.  

Wolfgang Laib, *Milkstone*, 1987-9, white marble and milk, .75x48x51 inches.  


*coils* (detail), 2002, graphite on paper, size varies. 35

Robert Ryman, *Constant*, 1987, acrylic on board, 43.2x42.6 inches.

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