



Aftermaths

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Revisiting an article written for *Body, Space and Technology* in 2012–13, in conversation with the authors' life circumstances of that period, poetic text and imagery emerge in the aftermath of loss. The resulting performance script/score is composed in three episodes which are interlaced with reproductions of photos as watercolor paintings.



Ten years ago, I lay on an IKEA couch with our two dogs and tried to write my body back into existence after an experience that is called a ‘missed’ miscarriage. The room was small and the walls, which had been textured at some point prior to our residence in the house, were painted pea green. There was a shelf of books, and doors with glass panes that made translucent the boundaries between the room and the garden, between the room and the rest of the house, between the room as a moment in time and everything that had transpired before and would transpire, endlessly, after. Attached to the room was a half bath, where I found myself a few times trapped, my internal organs having not yet adjusted to the cascade of spontaneous changes. My body didn’t know how to pee properly anymore. The basset hounds flanking me – one in a crescent against my belly, one in the curl of my bent legs – were warm and itchy, breathing the slow, deep breaths of resting animals. It was me, the dogs, and the writing.

The writing I was completing at this time ten years ago was an article for *Body, Space and Technology*, composed in the Fall of 2012 and published in the Winter of 2013, entitled ‘Going Home: Mike Kelley, Mobile Rhetoric, and Detroit’ (Anderson and Haley, 2013). The environmental circumstances captured in the excerpted italicized passage above were some of the most potent, the most present and have, subsequently, been the most abidingly persistent aspects of these moments in my proliferating remembered imagination of this period. Yet, of course, I wrote about none of this in the article that emerged from this place. Instead, the *BST* article worked exclusively through questions about the life, the thinking and the untimely passing of the artist Mike Kelley. In the ten years of aftermath of writing that piece, however, I’ve revisited the ideas and words in that essay again and again with a desire not only to adjust what I originally wrote about Kelley, but also a desire to invite my lived experience back into that writing, where perhaps it should have been from the outset. I was writing about Kelley’s sense of body and sense of place, and his use of art as a technology of paradox in representation, at a time when my own sense of body and sense of place had escaped me and I was using writing as a technology to find my own way back home.

I gave myself the assignment to create a performance text for *BST* during this ten-year anniversary, wherein I would, as I note above, invite my lived experience back into the writing. I anticipated that I would correct what I wrote. I would argue with my (former) self. I would question. I would endeavour to excavate what was lost from the beginning and what had been, somehow, simultaneously both lost and found in the interim.

What emerged from the experiment are three poems – or perhaps just words organized into a kind of poetic structure that follows the pattern of speech that I used to compose and record them in the first instance. But these poems fail to meet the criteria of the assignment I set for myself, in the sense that the lived experience here has not been sewn back into the writing from ten years ago at all. They fail so completely, I feared, that they

should not be sent along at all. Yet, they've persisted over these weeks between proposal and submission. And they've insisted to me (privately), that they still somehow belong to that original article. That they came from him (it). And I think I realize now why. No – this lived experience isn't sewn back into the original. And there is, in point of fact, no critique of the original embedded here. Not because a critique isn't possible. But because this is not the aftermath that the original prompts. The pieces here are all about the children. The children that were born after we lost that first one. And the pieces, whether shaped by the circumstances of that original loss, or shaped by our absorption in the sadness around the loss of Kelley, who we did not know, but who meant something to us in ways we've never fully been able to understand, make clear how much our experience of parenting has been knitted tightly together with all of our deepest fears that these children won't survive. Or that we won't survive. That everything is so god-awfully, blindingly contingent. And yet that, within that awfulness, and that blindness, and that contingency, the most beautiful and the most perverse qualities of our lives – the art of our lives, if that doesn't seem too embarrassing to write – are necessarily intertwined with those fears that we will not make it. That we cannot make it. That we are of this world but not made for this world.

So the writing is a house. There isn't a way back home. But the writing is a house where some of these artifacts can breathe. And the images. Richard made these images. I asked him how he arrived at drawings of photographs that he then painted with watercolours, since this has not been his practice.

Richard: I (originally) thought just photographing the photographs would do something.

Mary: What did you think it would do?

Richard: I just thought it would create a further distance. A photograph is a representation of experience. And I thought it would expand that space in between the experience and the representation of it further. Or distort it. But still look like it. But it didn't do that.

Mary: Why do you think it didn't do that?

Richard: I have no idea.

Mary: Why does this approach (with the drawing and the watercolours) work?

Richard: This one's more physically altered. More faded. Like a photograph that's been stuck in the rain.

So here are our memories and our photographs that have been stuck in the rain.



Figure 1: Hands in a Box of Treasures.

Image: Richard Haley.

Forensic Account

sitting on the green couch eating yogurt with granola

feeding bites to Oliver

careful not to include any raisins in his bites

I call to Emilia to ask how it's going with the work I asked her to do –

the quiet meditative practice of inviting one's inner wisdom to reveal itself

to answer the question of why one might choose

to get off at a bus stop they had been told

was not theirs

of why one might choose to, as they put it,

'spank' their brother and then explain to their mother

that they did it because they had read about it in an old book

(even though the moment in this particular book was discussed extensively with mother, who was clear that while things like this used to happen, that it is not customary for this to happen anymore, that it is understood that parents are not permitted to hit their children ever for any reason – and that is a conversation one has had with mother many, many times on many occasions – just like the conversations about the location of the bus stop)

have these conversations been forgotten?

did one think that mother had forgotten them?

but mother is a water elephant, child.

part of the herd Hasan saw at Victoria Falls,

on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe,

passing along the cliff's edge

where the water rushes and disappears

into three hundred fifty-five feet of gravity

the devil's pool,

a natural infinity pool,

on the edge of a sheer drop.

And this herd,

this elephant herd, passes splashing across this devil's pool,

only steps from that sheer drop.

With complete clarity of purpose.

With some sense,
 some internal compass composed of
 muscle and bone and electricity and synapses.
 Synapse,
 also called neuronal junction,
 the site of transmission of electric nerve impulses
 between two nerve cells (neurons)
 or between a neuron and a gland or muscle cell (effector).

The handwritten notes Emilia has taken while
 watching her math class video:

Everyone can do well in math.
When you learn something your synapses fire
Some parts of your brain light up when you are estimating
Being good at math doesn't mean you are fast at it
to deeply understand thing and relate to them
When you make a mistake (sic) your brain grows.

Some internal compass composed of
 muscle and bone and electricity and synapses.
 Slow down, Emilia.
 Slow down.
 Give that dotted half note in Greensleeves its three beats.
 Give it its time.
 Give it its space.
 The song isn't allowed – isn't free, isn't permitted, isn't able –
 to be the song if those dotted halves don't get
 their three full beats.

.
 .
 .

We only have this window of time.
This little window of time.
And it's closing.
It's closing.
Like the sunset sounding chord progressions in Grand Central Station,
the next song in your lesson book.
Like the sunset seeming passage
in the last lines
of the last story
in our *Complete Tales of*
Winnie-
the-
Pooh,
baby blue cover missing,
pages lived right through,
stories told
on told
on told
in years two
and three
and four,
sitting for hours
- hours, reader -
in the fat, bunched, cocoon
of the blue velveteen chair.
Adjacent to the fireplace.
Facing the windows.
Ten foot ceilings.
She can't possibly be listening,
I think.
She can't possibly be listening

to these hours and hours
of stories on end.
But it turns out she really is.
She really does.
And she tells back to me,
independently, unprovoked, unsolicited,
what has happened and what it means
in ways I never could have thought to think:

So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.

And so you see it's not only a sunset seeming passage. It's the final image in the book. The joined silhouette of the boy and the bear, as seen from behind, legs lifted, bent into an effervescent asymmetrical *pas de chat* (step of the cat), suspended in flight above the silhouette of the grassy earth, mid-skip, towards the endlessness of the pink horizon. Sheer drop. Water rushes and disappears into three hundred fifty five feet of gravity. This is the sunset they face. With the silhouette of a bird above, just out of reach, just over the beyond, on the edge of the picture, where the pink fades to white.

And she retreats to her room to give it all some more thought.
To try the stream of consciousness version of inviting her inner wisdom.
Because if the meditative version isn't bearing fruit, maybe it can be scratched out,
brain on pen on paper on brain on paper.
And as she retreats I come across a picture from last night.
Last night, I think it was.
Or the night before.
Oliver, like a wild, relaxed, perplexed lion, is laying in the green grass.
With a green top.
And navy blue terrycloth shorts.
He is anychild.
He could be any child from any time.

Jane and Michael.

Scout and Jem.

The boy.

And the way the camera has captured him, it appears that he is not laying in the grass, not laying on the ground, not drawn into the weightedness of bodies in reality, but rather hovering inches, centimetres above the grass.

Like a spaceship.

This is an effect of the camera, which in the after-sunset and without a flash, was reaching toward the image to try to grasp at any light left, to apprehend and thereby to produce light in its effort.

So the grass and Oliver, himself, are far brighter than they are to my eyes, than they are to the view of the camera.

But the camera goes to a setting it calls NIGHT.

And the camera determines that it will perform a function it calls Auto (3s).

And the camera displays a message for me that says:

Hold still.

And I hold still and the camera collects the light:

one.

two.

three.

And Oliver is christened a cherub.

And the grass, divine, the Sistine Chapel.

I see the image because – I don't know why.

And I see the image because – I don't know why.

But I see the image and I remember that I had intended to send it to Richard.

And I send it to Richard.

And it is 12:10.

And at that very moment I hear the distinct, unmistakable sound of choking.

Oliver?!

A lion's roar is so loud because it's vocal folds form a square shape. This shape essentially stabilizes the vocal cords, enabling them to better respond to the passing air.

And the whole of my body is propelled in the air out of the couch and up onto each foot,

grabbing the ground with force toward that sound.

Oliver?!

Oliver?!

And Oliver is in the white room.

And his mouth is wide open as if a snake with jaw unhinged and his tongue protruding and he is grasping with his hands into his mouth toward his throat attempting to extract an object I can't entirely see.

And I can still hear his crackling breath, I think.

I can hear the sound of air being drawn, being sucked into his body, against the resistance of some obstruction.

And everything is happening so slow and so fast:

Oliver?!

Reach for the head.

Oliver?!

Reach into the mouth.

Oliver?!

Extract the object.

Tiny plastic object.

Baby blue.

A piece of a piece of a toy.

A trolley.

A word which he pronounces with extra articulation around the *tr*- and extra roundness in the shape of the mouth and extra enunciation of the *l*'s all for the love of Peppa.

Peppa and George.

Oliver?!

Oliver?!

Oliver?!

Is there anything else in there?

Is there anything else?

No!

No!

No!

He shakes his head.
 And he cries.
 His tongue is dark.
 Is dark blue, I think.
 I am looking at the night sky of his tongue,
 of his mouth,
 I am the camera reaching toward the image trying to grasp any light left.
 Hold still:
 one.
 two.
 three.
 And Oliver is christened a cherub.

The message from yesterday.
 The message Richard left on my phone when Emilia and I were buying her dance clothes.
 The message he sent before I sent the picture today:
 Your son took off all of his clothes.
 Need help.
 He is dumping salt on the floor and sticking toys in his butt cheeks.
 Won't stop or put on clothes.

And we are back at a park in a neighbourhood where we don't live anymore. Five years ago. Circa Emilia's birthday. Mom visiting and watching as all of the children in the park chip through the gravel with their pounding feet and hurtle themselves down the slide. My mother, in her darkness, says:

It's a wonder any of them survive.

For god's sake, Mom. For god's sake.

But -

her wonder -

her wonderment -

she's not wrong, is she?



Figure 2: Oliver in a Bear Suit.

Image: Richard Haley.

Intermezzo

[an aside]

[an ellipsis]

blue light

spiegel im spiegel

(lit. 'mirror(s) in the mirror')

there is a thing I do
 when I leave the house
 away from the children
 or prepare to drive the car
 with the children in it
 which is to
 visualize the space they are in
 showered in blue light

this is because
a woman at Emilia's preschool
let me know
that this was a trick I could do
to protect us

Catholic woman
who worked at a kind of a clinic
where they supported pregnant women
hoping they wouldn't choose abortion

and this is pre-Roe
or

I should say
before Roe was taken away

and Roe are salmon eggs
and there is a
baby Roe
because, of course,
the decision did not come in time

the court decision
determining the fate
of the unborn child

the fate of the child
having been determined
by the absence
of the court decision

blue light
I have to imagine it just right
I have to see it in every corner
I have to believe it covers every square inch
of cubic volume

of the space surrounding
the house
or the car
or wherever
they are

but the blue light may be
why we are seeing
precocious puberty
in E

because it interferes with
the body's release of melatonin
a hormone
that makes us feel drowsy
and interrupts
other aspects
of paediatric endocrinology

so what I am
asking is
do they sell
melatonin
at Walgreens?

blue light
and this is vintage
from the time when Emilia and I did a lot of driving
to dance
and violin
and music together
and swimming
and parks
and snacks

and shopping
and the car was in
two accidents in less than six months
so the blue light
was a protection
the woman said
for the time when Emilia is in a carseat
in the backseat
and *spiegel im spiegel* comes on the radio
and she says
being four
that it sounds
a little bit sweet
and a little bit sad
all at the same time

spiegel im spiegel
mirror(s) in the mirror
and we haven't had a car accident since
but I have to imagine the blue light
just right
I have to see it in every corner
I have to believe it covers every square inch
of cubic volume
of the space surrounding
the house
or the car
or wherever
they are

[an aside]

[an ellipsis]

blue light

she has the wingspan
to play my full-sized violin now

and I don't know
where to place the pad
in my undergarments
in such a way
that I won't bleed through
while I am waiting on the stage
to give the arts achievement award

tie the blue wool blazer
around my waist
while I stand at the podium
something very Gen X
you just deal with things by yourself and get on with it

and I am taking my old birth control
that expired 15 months ago
one at a time
and sometimes four at a time
and last night I took two
or was it three
because it felt more orderly
to complete the row
in the blister package

so what I am
asking is
do they sell
melatonin
at Walgreens?



Figure 3: Emilia in the Leaves.
Image: Richard Haley.

The Bone

key sounds

ignition turns over

seatbelt slides

[cough cough]

internal combustion engine hum

tires rolling carbeast over pavement

Jim sat across
the conference table
from me
and
told me I was
an HSP

he then explained

electric window rolling down

that this is an acronym

electric window rolling down

that means

windshield wiper

windshield wiper

highly
sensitive
person

he also told me
I should read more
Lacan

the clouds today
are sleepy

depress clutch to shift

soft
like my puffy eyes

swoosh

swoosh

swoosh

they're like a
storybook version of
puffy eyes

a real version of

	swoosh
	swoosh
puffy eyes	
are	
dark	
	shift
and hollow	
a dark and hollow eye	
	deceleration
a 45 year old eye	
	deceleration
which catches the shadows	
	shift
	shift
	shift
pools	
	accelerate
pools of shadows	
	shift
that rest	
	accelerate
in the space	
beneath your eye	
reminding of	
the bone	
beneath	
bone which	
ten or	
twenty or	

thirty years ago was not
 so apparent
 because the tissue
 around the eye socket
 was more supple
 resilient
 robust

pillowed

soft
 like
 the morning clouds

but the bone now
 the outline of the bone
 is more prominent
 and

people are made to feel
 they have to spend more time
 and money
 using products
 to conceal
 that space
 a space
 for which they use a product that's actually called
 concealer

decelerate

accelerate

swoosh

car growl

shift

shift

shift

conceals other things, too
 depending on how old you are
 the condition
 of your skin
 your feelings about
 how flat
 how matte
 the surface of your face
 should appear

shift

shift

a flat
 a matte
 surface
 upon which
 new textures and colors
 can also be applied

clutchclutchclutchclutch

but
 I love my bone

accelerate

I love that
 sunken
 dark
 pool
 appearance

I love it
 because
 at least
 I know
 it's there

I know it's really there
 unlike
 other things
 in the architectures
 of my imagination
 which I have built

I have built
 like,
 as, Jim suggests,
 the highly sensitive person
 that I am

an HSP
 which he says
 fills the plays of Tennessee Williams

oh, I say

of course
 of course

and I begin to speak for him
 in the southern dialect
 which was the dialect of

seventy five percent
 of the people I came from

accelerate

shift

shift

accelerate

these giants

shift

of my childhood

accelerate

Jim doesn't seem to pick up on how
exquisite
my dialect is
having
been crafted
from so many years of listening
listening
to the dreamy questions
and
angry tirades
of a generation of people stuck
between
profound
life obligations

shiftshift
shift
shift
shiftshift

circumstantial
mitigations
that trip
to
Oberammergau
that Nana
had planned
and Papa
sitting
painfully
silently
in his single

comfortable chair
 in his bedroom
 listening to
 baseball
 on the radio
 making it clear
 she would never go
 she would never go
 and I would never go
 with her

shift

the fate
 which meant
 far less to me
 at the time

accelerate

than it did to her

shift

accelerate

Papa
 the only
 member of the grandparent royalty
 that was not raised
 with a southern drawl
 but which he
 devised
 in his much later years
 when all of the rest of them were gone
 as if to reclaim the soft sweet curling space
 of their language

shift

shift

shift

to

accelerate

appropriate it

for his own

quaint

purposes

why am I so sad?

decelerate

is the sadness

decelerate

beneath

what was once

the anger

is it

truly about

care

such a deep care

accelerate

shift

accelerate

accelerate

shift

accelerate

for the precious things I love

or

is it

about fear

that the thing I thought I had

I didn't have

it was in my mind

it was
 made up
 this
 deepening
 this
 new
 version of connection
 because
 each age
 demands

decelerate

that the parent

hum

orchestrate

shift

an
 elaborate
 new
 connection
 based on these needs
 which become apparent to us
 only after
 they've already manifested

you're
 always
 so late
 to arrive
 at the party

shiftshiftshift

shiftshift

decelerate
brake
parking brake crank

now
I don't know
what's left
I feel like we've
broken up
and she's
just
lingering
like a
moon
that might
soon be loosed
from the gravitational forcefield of its planet
or
even stranger
it already has been loosed
but it's
obliged
to do the dance
for a bit longer
but
you can see it tipping
you can see it tipping
its rotation is
asymmetrical
and
the symmetry
of the mother planet

is tipping

a bit

too

and the moon

has no idea

where it's going

it's only

outer space

in the dark

dark pools

dark pools

but boneless

without even the hint

of the trace

or the undercurrent

of calcium

mineralized

and it's all happening

now

she brushed her own hair

she twisted it into a kind of

loop

kind of a

half

bun

that's wrapped

around

and under and through

she did it

herself

she didn't
wait
dutifully
with a brush and
the elastics
and
and give me instructions
on how to style it
she
decided to do it
herself

and
she's
beautiful

and she's
strong
and she's
capable

she's
all those things

and I want
nothing more
than to somehow
hold her

every

atom
in my body
wants to
hold her
even just

in my
consciousness
I need to know
that she's
immediately
adjacent
[to me]

eight years ago
was the halloween that I was
washing my hands and
glimpsing myself in the mirror
and
in the reflection I saw the
shower curtain shaking
as Emilia liked to do

having not yet
learned to walk
she would climb
into standing pose
next to the
bathtub and
shake shake shake the curtain
shake shake
shake the curtain

it must have
had a nice feeling
and sound
as an extension of her own little
toddling body
but somehow

in this
iteration of the exercise
in the
fraction of a moment
between
my seeing the reflection
of the motion
and my
turning around she had
fallen down
fallen right down
on her face
so profoundly
I can feel the sound of the
smack
in my trunk
I can
feel the sound of the
smack
of her
face
of her
eye
on the
tile
floor

small
square
pastel
tiles
smack
on the floor

she didn't know how to fall
yet
she didn't know how to put her hands
down in front of her
or
anywhere
beside her
to stop the fall
to
lessen the impact

and so on halloween
a snowing halloween
she was dressed in the
pink
skeleton
pajamas
with a
large
black
eye

so spooky, indeed

five years ago
five
five years ago
she had her first
piece of chicken on the bone
she called it
chicken on the bone
bone chicken
little fingers

grasping

teeth

searching

biting

swallowing

chicken

on the bone

was something

one of the other children

had had

for lunch

that she wanted, too

the confidence

the clarity

of eating

a chicken

on the bone

one

step

further

away

from

whatever it is

we had built

together

over here

she would now

build

something

new

in-
dependently

car door opens
car door shuts



Figure 4: In the Grass in the Dunes at Oval Beach.
Image: Richard Haley.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Author Information

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Richard Haley is Assistant Professor of Teaching, Department of Art & Art History, Wayne State University. He exhibits and curates regularly. With Felecia Chizuko Carlisle, he developed TIME/FRAME/MATTER, which brings artists together to create works in real-time, to experiment with the live broadcast as a medium, and to discuss ideas about the transmission of material and objects through virtual space. With Anderson, Haley has co-authored articles for *Performance Matters*; *Adjacent*; *Theatre Topics*; *About Performance*; and *Body, Space & Technology* and the volume *American Dramaturgies for the 21st Century* (Sorbonne Université Presses).

Reference

Anderson, Mary Elizabeth, and Richard Haley 2013 Going home: Mike Kelley, mobile rhetoric, and Detroit. *Body, Space & Technology*, 12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/bst.54>

