

Keep doing this until it comes together

I have started and restarted this essay seven or eight times. Unintentionally in the spirit of the exhibition, perpetually beginning, rehearsing, reiterating. My desktop has become a cemetery and periodically I have been robbing from the graves of previous drafts with unremarkable file names as their epitaphs.

041025_perpetualrestart_draft_1.docx
041425_perpetualrestart_draft_2.docx
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042125_perpetualrestart_draft_5.docx
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Starting again offers both clarity and frustration and while this essay is not an obituary, it is a speculation on grief and memory through repetition and labour.

My initial impulse was to talk about the in-betweens, the before the again, the ambiguous space after the end of an edition but prior to repetition. What happens in that pause? Maybe the absences are essential parts of the whole; maybe what isn't there can tell us just as much as what is. But when I sat down to resolve these thoughts in writing, it didn't feel earnest, or right or the best fit. It felt too abstract and unattached, maybe a little cowardly.

I mused on that Deleuze text¹. It's right there in the title, difference, repetition, difference and repetition. But a dense, theoretical close reading of the works in *The Perpetual Restart* feels like a great disservice to their vulnerability and thoughtfulness. A thousand other people can unravel Deleuze's ideas in a more interesting and articulate way than I can. Instead, I've sat in my own grief and manufactured a web of thoughts.

Why do we repeat things? Out of necessity, out of compulsion, out of comfort, out of fear, out of punishment, out of pleasure, out of boredom or some combination of these, maybe it's just in our nature, biological. We aren't the only creatures that make and seek patterns. At some point the repetition has to stop though, a house is built, a life is lived, a job is done, the world ends, and what is left? The memory of it all?

There is work in redoing and repeating, and all four artists in *The Perpetual Restart* unwind complexities around this labour. For these artists, the rhythm in their labour is not just materially generative, but cathartic, ritualistic, curious. Repetition serves a purpose, and process becomes a site in which memories or imaginings or versions of selves can be remade.

Some of this labour feels more visible, inherent, known. This is best seen in the work of Ally McKay, who has adopted the role of Sisyphus, continuously and diligently performs a task without resolution. The work is unassumingly funny and familiar. Failing and failing again, failing better², her own Beckett walk³. Beneath the futility of this unwinnable game, Ally reckons with personal assumptions of self. What is her appetite for failure? What does it mean to fail publicly? Through the ham-fisted exposure therapy of repetition can she find an antidote to anxieties? Each iteration of this impossible task is coupled with a marginally different, new version of Ally or maybe there is no new self, just the product of all one's experiences compounding.

Like Ally, Tess Mehonoshen's physical labour is a means to get to something underneath. Through excavation, Tess interrogates her relationship with home and place, loss and longing. Clay taken from the grounds of her family home behaves as a keepsake; a period piece remitting memories. Despite Tess transforming fragments of place into relics, this doesn't feel entirely nostalgic or sentimental. After bearing the remains of what used to be home as a boulder on her back, the repetitive act is a thruway, a means to get from one place to another through durational, embodied mourning. It is an odd and private archive, cataloguing significance that we can only glean a part of.

The invisible labour of grief and the gravity of place can also be found in Annelize Mulder's work. Annelize has counterfeited a floor plan from memory. Building an approximation of something close to home but not quite. She has distilled memories into something tangible, creating an opportunity to revisit a place that remains out of reach. This structure could be seen as a memorial, and certainly, it has emerged from a hunger for something significant and familiar now lost, but I think it builds on that. It is a retelling of all the things it once was fractured, edited and distorted, not a replacement or proxy but an anchor. Another kind of archive, chronicling and recording memories as a contingency, so they don't evaporate or slip away.

As with the other artists in *The Perpetual Restart*, labour emerges in multiple ways in Sharna Barker's *Self-portrait as spider*. Sharna unpacks and repacks parts of herself through metaphor. Spider as mother. Spider as maker. Spider as architect. Just as the labour of spinning a web results in something fragile and temporary, the labour of remaking yourself is semi-permanent, subject to change. In this way, she has positioned herself as unfinished, growing, nomadic. Sharna's self-portrait resists certainty and instead adopts a frame of temporality, shaped through undoing, redoing, leaving and coming back, finding gaps and filling them. This fluidity is coupled with the corporeal exaggeration of eight legs. For most people, that is six too many, but here it is a body reiterating built through the physical labour of casting and recasting.

As I was spending time with the practices of Ally, Tess, Annelize and Sharna, I found myself searching, seeking memories I hadn't spent much time with lately. I lingered on one particular memory, well, a memory of a photograph. A picture of my brother and I as toddlers. We are sitting in pyjamas, the kind that has that ribbed, coloured neckline, maybe mine is a onesie because I'm so little, we're under a Christmas tree surrounded by ripped wrapping paper. I think I was too young to remember this moment happening but, I've created a false memory, with the borders of the photo melting away and revealing the peripheries beyond the camera lens. A kitchen to the right and a screen door to the back garden. It feels so vivid, so nostalgic, but it isn't my memory, it's a fantasy. For the longest time, I felt guilt for experiencing grief for things unrelated to death, but this fraudulent memory makes me kind of sad. I run the thought again, my brother and I are players on photographic paper.

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¹ Deleuze, Gilles., 1994. Difference and repetition. Columbia UP.

² Beckett, Samuel. 1996. Nohow On: Company, III Seen III Said, Worstward Ho. Grove Press

³ Bruce Nauman, 1968. "Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)" "Bruce Nauman: Make me think me," Liverpool Tate

- Familiar and comfortable pains

Keep drawing lines until it comes together

- A defence against the reality of death
- Too many days at sea

• Getting lost in a mess of having done this before

- The further I get away from that place, the closer it follows me

• Planning my garden, leaving spaces for the roots to grow between seedlings

- I wonder how quickly that language would return to me.
- A zoetrope of cut outs estimating parts of my life.

• I swear that word used to mean something else

• Wet air caught between mountains

• Grief in the abstract

- How to cut glass
- Find some privacy to make a fool of myself

• Inside my head I'm anywhere I've been before

- Plugging the entry of an ant hill with your finger
- Important work trying to be as unimportant as possible.

• The faint hum of pain

- Things we hoard to cultivate sadness

• A Dremel hammering, burring, engraving

- No more editions and no more spaces between

• Satellite sorrow

• Fear of travelling downhill because of the climb back up

• Mouth full of ice

- Now my fingers wear deep scarification, post cards to remind me that this will happen again

• My relationships run in syndication

• My body endlessly expanding as I fall asleep

- The feeling that every step is an addition to an unbroken line

• Words getting stuck behind your teeth