1. **Trembling**

***Carcasse, tu trembles?***

***Tu tremblerais bien davantage, si***

***tu savais, où je te mène.* (Turenne)**

*Trembling is the act of being-affected - a passive acting that merely makes the body vibrate, that unsettles substance. The self trembles at being touched, awakened, roused; it trembles as much at the feeling of its fragility as in the desire for its freedom.* (Nancy on Hegel)

**This paper consists of a few sections that correspond to, not so much a chronological order, but an ongoing discussion Patrick and myself have had regarding our two seemingly disparate professional practices/ adventures in knowledge production. Our objects of study or focus align and diverge. Where Patrick addresses the medical discourse of dyspnea, or shortness of breath, I have returned to a heinous crime scene involving apprized French Marxist philosopher/political scientist Louis Althusser as accounted by Geraldine Finn in her book *Why Althusser Killed His Wife?* There are obvious conflicts that emerge from overlapping writing practices, especially between two people who “sleep” in a bed together. Domestic bliss. What am I able to say in front of you, and what is held at bay? What is the point of such a preface at an academic graduate conference?**

We hope this is less of a paper than an attempt: we might not be able to articulate anything about breathing or the philosophy of the body, but I think we want you to feel something.

**2. Respiration**

I really can’t stress enough how much my work does not come from a position of *authority.* Not only because I have only the most brief of education in paramedicine, but also because people *can’t breathe*, I wanted to frame the physiology of respiration more thoroughly within its political life.

The patient (literally, “one who suffers”) who is unable to breathe, suffers dyspnea. But what is dyspnea? It is more informally understood as the sensation of feeling short of breath, and is a desperate sensation, characterized by an extreme sense of tightness around the chest and the feeling of an inability to consume enough air. It classically manifests with an increased respiratory rate (breaths per minute) and increased breathing effort, observed in how the sufferer positions themselves (if they are able to), and how much effort and concentration they must apply to be able to meet the demands of their body with their reduced capacity for ventilation.

For medicine, dyspnea is the subjective experience of being unable to ventilate enough oxygenated gas to meet the oxygen demands of the body’s tissues. It is concerned with the rate of breathing, the volume of air moved, the efficiency of exchange between the capillaries and the air sacs within the lungs, the ability of the blood to carry oxygen, the elasticity of the lungs themselves, the ability of the chest wall to expand and contract to cause the pressure changes that drive ventilation. But, this form of knowledge corresponds to a way of relating that, while *useful*, contains an apparently necessary alienation. Without an almost violent understanding of the interior of the body, it is not practicable to make interventions that will alleviate someone’s dyspnea. Indeed, the persons working to relieve the symptoms couldn’t possibly adopt sympathy, or else they’d be consumed by it. But in so many other ways this is precisely the logic we militate against. This alienation is a form of forgetting, one of the many where, when any person would be abraded by the demands of the moment, they must forget themselves in order to meet them. Is it too much to say that this forgetting of ourselves is also the forgetting of the other? The memory of the other, that medicine forgot through knowing, is what we seek to cultivate through love and thought. The next question, then, is, How do we fight alienation, but embrace difference?

**Here we are in a bind as we go through the motions of compartmentalizing the practitioner. What part of the practitioner is being bracketing off? The part that is sympathetic. The practitioner is a rational agent. In order to be a professional, emotional baggage has to be left at the door in order to save a life; you have to sever a capacity for empathy in part to be an efficient labouring subject and in another way to *potentially* save a life. And, yet, this positive turn you take here, whereby alienation is a necessary means to, let’s say care for the other’s body, where the practitioner must lack sympathy and forget, is also the moment that very accurately describes the men of science. Geraldine Finn writes in *Why Althusser Killed His Wife*:**

**“[there is not] the possibility of a Science [...] that is not violent: that does not, that is, presuppose and thereby reproduce the rationality and intentionality of dualism, and the politics of division, domination, and denial which is its condition of possibility and its end” (GF 17).**

**In her introduction, she describes how her essays are polemic and intentionally aggressive to mirror critiques against Helene (Althusser’s wife) as being ‘overly opinionated.’ Finn adopts a polemical form, because she’s pissed off, which risks her being dismissed as merely upset, because the male scientist, Louis Althusser, had the privilege of persisting to the point of writing a memoir, *The Future Lasts Forever*, that eloquently and articulately describes how efficiently he killed his wife. He had the privilege to *write* - while in a psychiatric ward, to, dare I say, poetically narrativize this crime scene of strangulation/choking as a massage. In other words, an intimate act between lovers not a violent act against a wife by her husband.**

**What happens when we don’t want to talk about or take seriously Althusser’s gendered violence, because he’s taught us how our subjects come into being?**

1. **corporeality**

**And what of the body? The body that is already decaying, dying, then led further to its ending by way of state violence, racialized violence, the police. And what of the theory of the body? The academic rigour that goes into deciphering the failed body, the moving body, the ill-equipped to quit body. I am concerned about my body sitting here in front of you and next to Patrick Morrison, and recorded by Alex Muir, to be made available to others to do with what they will. I am concerned about what sitting in the classroom has done to my body. I bought a kneeling chair so now as I write papers I’m forced to pray. During her seminar held at SFU Harbour centre, Rebecca Schneider made reference to her ability to articulate, she had acquired the language to pontificate in the way that forcefully conveys a message to the listener. From prefacing her laboured voice (the opposite of voicelessness), she then became excited for the potentiality of, what she framed as, “a purposeful error.” (And as an aside, the relentless manner in which “the failure” (i.e., failure to write a poem that moves, failure to be an ally and support the ones you love, the failure inherent to whiteness) transmutes into a new contemporary problem: failure has become a replacement for guilt. And we all know guilt is a worthless emotion as it disconnects us from our bodies. (cf Deleuze).) Schneider, referencing [blank], says how “groping” is how we come into our gestures and our embodied skill sets through errors. Then - she reached for her water bottle and missed, using *this* as a concrete example of purposeful error, of failure. No - failure is when you try and reach for that bottle and unintentionally miss it. Slight panic. Gleam of sweat. You’re found out. You hope no one has seen the tremor in your hand. This tremor is private. Not shared. No potential.**

**Patrick and I might be falling into a calculative, overly didactic, overly creative trap at this point. What I want to point out, and this has also spawned from my collaborative efforts with About a Bicycle, that the theory (i.e., affect, performance, precarity, panic), and the rhetoric that begets it, turns sour, serious turned shitty pop-song. You know the one, the song where you don’t need to know the lyrics, you can quote bell hooks without having read the book. You can have read the book, but not have lived the content.**

1. **Althusser/Helene (strangulation/choking)**

**In the aptly titled *The Future Lasts Forever*, Louis Althusser describes how he murdered his wife (Hélène Rytnam) by strangling her:**

Helene, also in a dressing-gown, lay before me on her back.

Her pelvis was resting on the edge of the bed, her legs dangled on the carpet.

Kneeling beside her, leaning across her body, I was massaging her neck. I would often silently massage the nape of her neck and her back. I had learnt the technique as a prisoner-of-war from little Clerc, a professional footballer who was an expert at all sorts of things.

But on this occasion I was massaging the front of her neck. I pressed my thumbs into the hollow at the top of her breastbone and then, still pressing, slowly moved them both, one to the left, the other to the right, up towards her ears where the flesh was hard. I continued massaging her in a V-shape. The muscles in my forearms began to feel very tired; I was aware that they always did when I was massaging (15)

**I begin with such an excerpt from his memoir not to villainize the depressive, but to conflate the submission to ideology with the way the depressed subject submits to himself and to the depression itself.**

**Althusser says the cause of representations in ideology of the imaginary relations of individuals to the real relations in which they live has to to do with materiality of ideology --- using imagery from Lacan's mirror stage -- you perceive yourself in this, a whole self --- you are a baby blob, it is imaginary, it is spectacular -- it's a misrecognition, you aren't really this whole discrete individual.**

**Why do you have to have a theory of ideology if you're a Marxist -- it's a very difficult thing to work out---who is this person who can map cognitively? --- how do you navigate? If we don't like the way things are going, if we don't like it, we need a ‘theory of revolution’ -- or enough distance from this thing that you don't like. Tilling soil only remixes the weeds for the next planting.**

**LIKE MURDERING YOUR FUCKING WIFE.**

**People resist the idea of the explanation of how the world works, there needs to be a way of explaining that resistance, ideology is a theory of that resistance. even if you know how something works, you don't know -- you act in contradiction to what you know (what you remember).**

**Are we possessed by our depression? When all we know, all we can talk about in order to participate in the social is to confess depression. Like ideology, do we submit to our depression – there is no way out – how many times have I screamed at my partner: make *it* stop, as though it were a symbiotic parasite feeding on my insides. I would be so lonely without it. Depression can lie to you – it can tell you that you are the only one experiencing it.**

**Agency in relationship to the interpolated subject. how do you give agency back to the conceptual poet or to the ideologue. w/o blaming the depressive for their depression.**

**The depressive cannot live without a question. I think that the germ of every question contains its answer – both in an absolute and conceptual way. Questioning we can’t get away from. But, maybe, there is something about the interrogation that’s dispensable. Why do I question? If I can’t accept questioning as a mode of being, what do I have? What, through questioning, am I attempting to form? What form does questioning give me?**

**Althusser killed his wife. Men in our circle are rapists. How do we make these conversations in our supposed circle more obvious and transparent than they initially pretend to be? We don’t want to be as bad as the male-feminist who has figured out how to properly check himself on paper, but can’t pull through in real life, can only pull out.**

**“We should not therefore be surprised by Althusser’s “stormy relationship” (*whose* relationship, *whose* storm? At least there was life left in Helen to be taken), his “periods of severe depression,” and his final destruction of his wife.” (GF 7).**

**When you no longer identify with that identification, feeling seamlessly connected to that world. When I can no longer identify or align myself with someone who *loves* Althusser or Kenny G or Christian Bök or Vanessa Place. Like that bitchy adage about forgetting more than we’ll ever know, what have they forgotten that we haven’t?**

**Geraldine Finn recalls the media surrounding the death of Helene Rytnam - no the text of the dailies read like this:**

***When Louis Althusser Killed his wife, reports of the killing read like obituaries for his death, not her (“It was the end of the career of one of France’s most eminent post war intellectuals”). As if the tragedy was his and not his wife’s, who we were routinely informed was ten years older than him, opinionated and argumentative, sometimes sharp of tongue, and not much liked by the couple’s friends (3)***

**What part of Althusser killed his wife? He mentions in his memoir how his subject came into formation by proximity to this highly argumentative and opinionated woman. At times the memoir reads as though he is in fact putting Helene out of her misery - for who would desire to continue living in this ash-filled capitalist hell hole? But, let us not be fooled, as his being came into formation through Helene, he then found the source for his sickness, for why he is so ill under late-capitalism: if he kills her, he kills a part of his subject. The subject that is fully entrenched in a system with no escape. No pleasure. No hope. Product of god/ideology.**

**But the more disheartening tick about Althusser is how I and many of the About a Bicycle collective members came into their sense of knowledge production. Often if not always it was through our male professors who offered the first gesture of generosity. But we were angry that last session of AAB, because many of us didn’t know that Althusser had killed his wife. Mercedes Eng, in particular, alumna at SFU, her MA project was on indigenous murdered and missing women -- and she only found out last year that Althusser killed his wife. Why should this go unnoticed and unmentioned when we learn to pontificate and articulate a map with a Capital S and a lower case s -- the answer key to our subjectivities.**

**Althusser, in fact, failed to describe interpolation, and how it becomes internalized. If one is diagnosed “depressed” then one is rarely treated like a fully formed subject. However, the sensation of depression is totalizing. There is no way out of the self when depression persists. *People are looking at you.* Depression often expresses itself privately and can seem apolitical, however, political depression and sadness are far from abstracted from their source.**

1. **Parable of the child**
   1. “Race, class, and gender violence cannot be understood in isolation from violence against children.” (Toby Rollo May 1 2015)
   2. “Remember that the force of the term "man-child" is predicated on the denigration of children.” (Toby Rollo Dec 10 2014)
   3. “Children are never allowed to express themselves openly on their own oppression without scorn or laughter.” (Toby Rollo Mar 10 2014)

I’m always aware of the degree to which relying on adjacency defers work onto others for whom it is more vital (or else it would have been done). I’m also aware that it’s a bad idea to introduce new ideas late in the game. But maybe by loosening things up we can tie them together. We’ve come through feelings, frames, time, the body.. I think our last question is, What have we forgotten?

I imagine most everyone here has had the experience of being winded as a child; running into something, falling, suffering a blow to the torso, and experiencing paralysis of the muscles of respiration. The next sensation is perhaps a mix of struggle, panic, fear. This isn’t dyspnea, but it serves to provide a locus for talking about a clinical concept subjectively.

People who can’t breathe, especially those who *tell you*, are very sick. Part of being able to feel normal (that is, *no longer sick*) is to be insulated from others who are. People who don’t suffer don’t experience suffering, don’t suffer *abstractly*, don’t manifest suffering as such. They don’t embody the memory of suffering, regardless of whether or not they empathize with it--they have *forgotten* what it feels like to be sick. In this instance, others are people for whom you have no anecdotal experience of their subject position. This inability to experience is not made up for by memory.

As it has to be, of course. You can’t just remember being winded and, whoops, cease breathing. But how do we make up such a separation? How do we emancipate others from our inability to relate, and ourselves from our inability to remember? And what about kids, who we all were once and nonetheless have left behind? We can ask, Do you remember what it’s like to be a kid? But the secret answer is no.