

Hoist (Act I)

You had the notion of creating mobiles but in your body you kept reverting to the sensation of a hoist. Your compulsion was to conflate the two in their respective acts of balance: the former which denotes something capable of movement, not stationary; the latter speaks to being raised, elevated and fixed via a strap or a clip. It is this detail which feels significant: the urge to make visible the sense of being suspended, moveable yet tethered. The sense of being acted upon.

Considering the equilibrium between vulnerability and its relationship to resistance, Judith Butler writes that 'The very term 'mobilisation' depends on an operative sense of mobility, itself a right, one which many people cannot take for granted'. She argues that we do not all have the supports in place through which to demonstrate our vulnerabilities freely: for example, to march against cuts to services or for women and trans people to use our streets safely.

As a support worker you used medical hoists to aid a person's movement from one place to another, perhaps from a chair to a bed. It always struck you that in the supposed safety of this act there was the sense of innate danger, even when one was so close to the floor. As a disabled person you automatically assess your physical surroundings for possible hazards. The steel frame of the apparatus

moved slowly, but as its castors hit the edge of an electrical cable or the sole of a slipper, it caused the sling - which was attached to its hoist - to swing slightly, over and back. Perhaps it was the posture in which the sling held the body which emanated the precariousness of its suspension: the body already so close to the ground is cradled in a foetal position and is in this instance, dependent upon others to ensure it remains unharmed.

The sling can also be understood as a device from which to launch something, to upend something.

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You had the notion of casting limbs, yes you would call them limbs because for one thing, they posit a gesture. What you mean is that they speak to vulnerability, a vulnerability to be rehearsed or enacted against the hostile architecture of the gallery.

You had the notion of creating suspended limbs which may not survive, may need to be bound and rebound together.

They were to be poured into the world and you would observe how they behaved, unwieldy and fallible, awkward. Protesting.

Sticking out.

They were prone to breakage. And when this happened sometimes you would create a ligature, binding them together somewhat clumsily.

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In the workshop which is your garden shed you prepare the moulds: long, thin and tubular; you mix the materials and watch as your work bleeds and drains in all directions, sets too quickly, or not quickly enough: you attempt to fasten the pieces to the steel frame supporting the roof but you do not have the mobility or enough limbs of your own to achieve the desired outcome. You persevere; you are adamant that this gesture be made visible against the backdrop of the gallery.

Judith Butler writes: 'No one moves without a supportive environment and set of technologies'.

If it is necessary to expose our vulnerabilities to the world so that we might demonstrate how our bodies are being acted upon, it strikes you that sometimes the word 'support' is used to shore up a paternalistic drive to provide stability - in exchange for compliance with heteronormative, capitalist values.

Giving and receiving support, like artmaking, is an act of trial and error.

Prop (Act II)

A prop is an object used in a play to stand in for something. In this play you needed to be propped up but you didn't know how to ask for that.

On the arrival of S, your support worker, you observe the physical putting together of your bodies once unknown to each other, you consider the shape of your respective bodies and how they work in tandem.

Do not read aloud: Not knowing how to communicate a need creates a silence and this work silently gestures towards what it is that I need. I cannot imagine what it would feel like to not spend the working day accented by the possibility of falling and by various shades of pain which build to a crescendo by early evening. Must we show ourselves as vulnerable? You are not sure how much of this you should reveal to S.

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Porosity = on the one hand it is necessary to be porous, to allow people in to help.

On the other hand, in the instance of the sculpture, porosity weakens it: it may shift, crumble, seep, merge to become something else. It may refuse to survive.

When S arrives you are nervous.

I say to you: Think of support as a narrative, a storytelling strategy, an assistive device as it were - for when you don't have the words - or can't locate them.

I remind you that all narrative is plastic, mutable, movable.

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I see you. You have never felt so averse to your work. Yet you cover all of the bases: the stools to reduce time standing, stooping, to alleviate pain. The makeshift tables occupying every room in your home. The crutches, sticks and props you use to make your way around. Yet here you are now, flying from your work like a hand from an open flame.

Your 'fight or flight' response is in full bloom.

You use the window of the workshop, a portal onto the garden, to breathe yourself into some other perspective.

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Your home is a shifting series of workshops and designated areas of production. These extend from your bed, to your sitting room at the front of the house with the big window which saturates everything in light. The sofa has been removed in favour of a work table with a view of the mountain and the horse-chestnut tree your grandmother planted. Through the front hallway where a collection of amorphous delivery boxes and saved wrapping materials cling to each other underneath the stairs and into your kitchen, in which the floorspace is inhabited by sculptures curing; propped up or pinned down by various ad-hoc means: a walking stick borrowed for a day, masking tape smeared to the tiles underneath to keep everything in position.

There are sketches with measurements and scribbled attempts at visualisation in piles on the kitchen table keeping company with shopping lists and children's drawings to be placed to one side whilst you eat.

Through the back door to the outside tap, an old rusted garden furniture set and a broken clothes horse used as a support from which to carry out sanding, polishing, spraying, sealing.

Upstairs on the landing you make the longest limbs because this is the most expansive, cleanest stretch of space you have in which to cast.

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S bears the brunt of the physicality of the pour as you steady the mould from a stool underneath; you are all collective arms and legs as you work mostly in silence, save for a bump or a nod or sound or a motion towards aiding the digestion of the fluid down into its tubular length, much like an intestine extended along the floorboards. The liquid requires guidance and encouragement.

As you cast the work it burps and squelches in a scatological soundscape.

S watches for air locks and tends to these while you hold the mouth open.

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Inside the sliding door of the garden shed there are two large plastic tubs gleaned from the local farm supply shop, one yellow, one black. They are filled with water and set upon a bench for ease of reach: a dirty one and a less dirty one for dunking fresh resin from mixing buckets and tools. The water is changed regularly by S, who strains the silt so as not to block the drains in your home. S is mindful of such things.

S is sensitive in her movements so as not to stand back or move too quickly, she can hold her body impressively in a variety of stances to save herself knocking off of something fragile in the compromised space around you both.

She operates in a manner so that you don't have to explain things at length.

Sometimes you feel as though you've gone mad because you are in the habit of doing everything by yourself, [where have I put that drill bit? I need to put it back where it belongs before I forget], which dissolves to a sense of relief as you realise that S has done it, before you have even thought to ask her.

After your first day with S you notice that the considerable pain, usually impossible to ignore, like a drunkard arriving home from a night out and waking the neighbours, has not yet made its presence known.

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In the workshop the tubs of water hold the cold absorbed in the first frost of the season, the kind of cold that ‘would skin you’ as your mother would have put it.

You work to prevent your foot from getting below a certain temperature because it’s difficult to come back from that and anyway the required processes are tedious. Your foot shuns energy like the moon reflects light. The pain is akin to that fat ache you associate with having your extremities plunged for too long into a bucket of ice.

Outside the workshop a crow uses the hard edge of a concrete pier to break the shell of a snail, releasing the delicious meat inside.

# Sling (Act III)

On the landing of my home I consider the shape of my body propped on a stool and the shape of S's body as we stoop in a synchronised style to transfer the longest of the limbs to a safer place.

The negative space between the floor and the object is charged with the knowledge that its survival is dependent upon our bodies working collectively.

To work independent of one another would secure the demise of the sculpture. A movement not negotiated will increase its liability to snap. We underpin what the other is doing, sliding our fingers at strategic points under its surface as we perform the lift and transfer.

We allow the limb to slide onto its desired fulcrum loosely in our palms, then lay it to rest upon a pillow stolen from my bed.

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The art work is an entity to be cared for and respected in all of its inconvenience and unreasonable requirements. People said ‘are you sure you should be doing this?’ to which I replied ‘this time it’s different’. I continue to make excuses for the work which aggravates my injury, even as it stares back unblinkingly, somewhat callously in my direction. The work does not care for me in the way that I must care for it. The value of our labour in this exchange is at odds with the value of the artwork itself. Yet there is something integral to this fact which I am compelled to lean towards.

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You had the notion of creating suspended limbs which may not survive, may need to be bound and rebound together. The ligature in language such as 'ae' in English and French reflects how support functions - it is an entity crossed with and joined to another entity to create a new character - a shift of form from one thing to another - an assimilation - a push together.

Limbs float out stubbornly flaunting their fragility against the gallery setting, begging the question, what will happen if they touch us or if we brush off of them?

We negotiate the world in our bodies - alert to our collective potential. Against the backdrop of the gallery we are heightened to the effect our presence enacts upon the other, that which we orbit with such care in this particular context, with such critical awareness. You try not to feel cynical about this.

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In the workshop, you glance outwards through the sliding doors and focus your gaze on the horse-chestnut tree your grandmother planted almost a century ago. You visualise yourself in its branches, safe from imaginary predators, conjuring the perception of a child resting in the crook of its limb.

For the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, the earliest sensations of being held are integral to our ability later in life to hold ourselves together after a trauma. Your pain is loud today, so you shift your attention to consider how our evolutionary past is always present within us, your pain response closely linked to the automatic nervous system which remains the same as it was when we needed to escape the advances of a sabre tooth tiger. You observe that the tree is flowering architectural pink and white blossoms.

What is it called, when a plant is cut back too much or gets a harsh winter and the result is that this yields more growth? You think of this often - recall thinking about it with other artists; a friend reports that it wasn't the right conditions or support that grew them into an artist, it was a lack of nurture that compelled them to find others to grow them. Is that not true of flowering plants, immobile as they are, they rely upon others to survive?

When you arrive at the gallery to install the work you place the limb inside it's sling horizontally, about a metre from the ground.

It floats there.

You are standing close by, your attention turned to another, and perhaps there is a change of pressure in the air or someone breathes outwards and it slides silently forwards upon its own weight and down, hitting the floor below, transformed into tiny fractured pieces. You imagine lying next to it on the concrete, safe in the knowledge of what falling apart feels like.

#### References:

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