These things add up

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THESE THINGS ADD UP

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by
Sara C. Hopp
B.F.A. Syracuse University, 1999
August 2002
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the members of my thesis committee: Lynne Baggett, Richard Cox, Greg Elliot and Kirsten Noreen. I appreciate your time and encouragement. Special thanks to Kimberly Arp, my committee chair, for his patience, support and understanding. Thanks also to Leslie Koptcho, a consistent source of motivation during my time at Louisiana State University.

I am grateful to my friends and family who have provided strong support throughout the thesis process. Thanks to the printshop grads: Kathryn, Lori, Alison, and Chris. Andy, Jenny and Andrew, you have always been there to provide me with the necessary support or distraction and I cannot thank you enough. To my parents, Pat and Bryon Buikema, and my brother, Jamie; this would not have been at all possible without knowing you were always standing behind me. To Buddy, I have no words for your patience and understanding, for your standing at my side. Thank you.
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ABSTRACT

These Things Add Up explores thoughts about time, accumulation and evidence. As time passes, there is a constant accumulation of tangible and non-tangible information which must be processed. Moments, conversations, thoughts, observations and sensations all contribute to this saturation of information and the creation of a layered space and time. Information which is consciously or unconsciously selected for notice becomes evidence of identity and personal history. In this same process, memory and the anticipation of the future are incorporated into the present.
THESE THINGS ADD UP

Past and future surround the present, leak in through unclear boundaries. Living in the present, eyes sting at the junctions with past and future. Existence in multiple tenses. Simultaneity that cannot be seen and has no witness. Movement through the present moment and into the next happens inside of plus-time, inside of tangible time. Plus-time: my particular perception of the world, inseparable from an awareness of the passage of minutes, days, seasons, years; perception woven into the continual and ever-fluctuating present. A time of the conscious mind, language, process, and linear motion.

Stand in plus-time and there is another time right beside it, invisible and touching skin. Minus-time against my skin like looking at shadow on shadow, like the anticipation of smell. The subtle and still-seeming field of constant motion. Unresolved edges on this temporal extension of the self. A slight disturbance, surrounding the body like a shadow in reverse. A silent minus-time. Minus-time: the opposite of plus-time, the world before I construct it, a time before and without time. A silent time without language. Influencing but not influenced by plus-time, minus-time is the source of memory and the origination of history. A time of continual process and the probability of simultaneous movement in all directions.

I stretch my arms and at this absolute periphery of my body there is a slight difference in the air quality; minus-time flows through my fingertips. I touch this space which anticipates and precedes the body, which anticipates and precedes thought. A transparent overlay that slowly dissolves what has been and anticipates the hazy contours of what is becoming. Looking for it is like spending days trying to see the air and finding it like opening both eyes wide under water, slow sway and viscous resistance, the ocular burn.

Mute minus-time seeps through into plus-time, inscribing itself into the air, into skin, blood, into thought, into accumulating weight. Invisible patterns form and are
occasionally made visible; forms that are briefly recognizable by the body or the mind. Minus-time permeates the atmosphere, permeates my body, running through bloodlines. Minus-time thought is carried deeply in the body, running through the blood, penetrating to individual cells, seeping from capillaries, imprinting itself on skin as a bloodthought. Blood holds time and time takes the form of the body.

These things add up in minus-time, invisibly and in silence. These things fall next to my skin, in piles all around me, and occasionally I am afforded a sense of this continual movement in the space surrounding my body. The addition never stops; incessant burial. Evidence is lost even as more is found. Silent forces turn visible, patterning and structuring space. The minus-time accumulations form an invisible landscape; the atmosphere turns viscous.

These things add up, falling through the convoluted space of time without time, gravity pulling. The slowly growing pile, the slowly filling field. Weight channels into the ground, ever increasing transfer of forces. A glimpse of this accumulation overwhelms vision, overwhelms thought. Movement in a space beyond vision seeping into the present; minus-time leaking into plus-time.

I transcribe this accidental glimpse into plus-time evidence, making something that is solid and tangible. Fingerprints piled through long and narrow space, rigidly containing and constricting movement, forcing the pile ever higher. History and memory are held in skin, so I press my pigmented finger to paper, inscribing a succession of particular moments that move through my body. I watch mountains slowly form.

Time accumulates and moments stack on top of one another, begin to look the same. The space takes on a gray cast; continually falling weight steals color which fades as time is stacked on itself. Values disintegrate and become dulled atmosphere. Patterns emerge, structuring the empty spaces.

Pockets decay at the bottom of the pile, underneath the growing crush, gray spaces forming and running down the page. Weight presses downward, pushed by the constant addition to the pile by what is still coming. History loses form, leaks out of skin, the result of pressure and accumulation. Fluid of memory dripping into the ground, saturating it. Rivers slowly form, carrying away what is beneath, carving cliffs.
I stretch my arms and minus-time flows through my fingers, channeling between my hands, unwinding briefly before my eyes. The still-seeming silent space briefly anticipates and then flickering images stretch themselves across the long and narrow support. Moments sprawl across my field of vision. I watch words fall from my mouth and clot space, fall from my mouth into piles on the ground. Elements, particles, sliding, coming to rest on top of one another, covering, filling, pushing out the air. As time passes, the noise of the words increases, the letters and sounds become illegible, indistinct. Constant addition over time becomes excess of sound and vision.

The accumulation beginning on the left side of the field, long and narrow to push it forward, to quicken the pace. A pile of unnamed units growing, increasing with time, with a turn of the page. I read text that inscribes itself into space. The beginning of the progression seems predictable, as if I could refer to charts to anticipate the progression. Then it breaks apart, minus-time seeping into plus-time causing information overload and saturated sight. Color and form homogenize, words fall, never become legible. All that remains is unintelligible proof, no indication of what it was.

I make a record of the event, the brief leakage, in book form so that I can carry it with me, so that I can refer to it later. The simultaneity of the book echoes the simultaneity of existence in multiple tenses like minus-time surrounding the body. Each visible field carries the memory of what has just been experienced and the anticipation of what will come. An event shown frame by frame contrasted with the possibility of experiencing the evolution at once, like looking at a time line, studying the results.

Minus-time thoughts flash through my mind like ribbons, like reading ticker tape. I study the signs and symbols, turning them into words, learning them like a language of recovering memory and preserving evidence. A language born of constant addition and necessary subtraction. Speech that exists in states of constant change and increasing weight. Words that taste like honey and pierce skin. Words that start brushfires. Words that make the ground freeze. They fall at my feet.

Keeping track of the days, trying to fix down these moments of minus-time seeping into thought. Trying to identify the source, to guess the conclusion, what will happen after
enough glimpses have compounded. Looking for thought patterns. These words fall from my mouth and I gather them together. I keep records on long strips, constricting the field of information, easy to run through my hands, easy for bloodthoughts to print themselves onto paper. I suspend the bundled evidence and gravity pulls at the words, the ground craving the absorption of history and memory, the increase in density.

I collect the evidence, day after day, hoarding tiny pieces. I collect the evidence so that I can destroy it and take what remains. Neutralize the ugly reminders of how it had been. Change the story. I spend thirty days recording thought, time, and date. I collect small pieces of what it was, pull them from minus-time, from memory, and give them a plus-time form. Watch them change with the movement through the continual present, through plus-time.

Burn the text, destroy the evidence, the carefully amassed collection of the particular. Turn the days into something else, create ragged remnants. Change the form of time. The actual fades, can only be reconstructed using mute witnesses, that which remains. A form of absorption by the present.

Mix the ash with neutralizing salt to preserve it in a form that I can carry, that does not burn my skin. Eliminate that which is dangerous. Wrap the piles in colored cloths to separate one day from another, to look for patterns. Bind the packages carefully so that none of the transformed time will escape. Wax them to create a skin, protect the contents, fix the moment.

I carry these bundles with me into the unpredictable futures, as if sometime far from here I could put it back together, chart what happened, look objectively for what went wrong. Anticipation of regret like preparation for unpredictable futures, like stating a foregone conclusion. Small reconstructions of minus-time to carry with me, these plus-time reminders of both past and future. These things added up and made something else. Small grains of history bundled tightly; suffocation in stillness and silence. These carefully bound masses of particles. Carefully bound masses of the particular. The preciousness of what remains.

I stand still and collect my own history; continually adding weight. I become comfortable in my own space, familiar with the pieces that I have culled. Move into a stranger’s space and I see only the accumulated evidence; things had already added up and the piles were dense. Unfamiliar with the processes and knowing only the results, I try to reconstruct this unfamiliar
history; to fabricate a biography so that I can make sense of the results. So that I can account for the strange tremors in my blood.

Bloodthoughts change form in close proximity to a minus-time incongruous with my own. I try to balance my own weight with another’s invisible increases, search for ways to minimize the differences. Looking in from the outside, reconstructing times, places, dates with scant evidence, I scavenge images from a history that is not mine. Surround myself with masses of foreign bodies, as if I could chart the formation of the piles after they had added up.

Days spent playing biographer, secretly taking bits of a stranger’s skin. The thinnest pieces, small fractions of an ounce. Red bloodthoughts imprinting themselves, recording the history that I imagine for this other. Small squares forming impermeable surfaces, holding incongruous forms. Stacking vellum with its history printed indelibly, bloodthoughts bound together. Preserved and organized with wax and thread; silent stifled presences. It was months until the pound.

I study what remains, examine the frozen accumulation of another; the dense and hazy piles. The shape of the outside only suggests the shape of the contents. I record the evidence of my own days to hold against the alien weight, adding the weight of paper and graphite to the weight of thought. As if the writing would make it heavier. I take evidence of skin, my own history imprinting itself into wax. I make fragile and demanding copies of my eight fingers, sentient extensions of myself. Small and complicated forms steeped in and etched by minus-time. Memory given a body.

I fill thirty-six envelopes with this evidence of skin. Eighteen days carefully recorded in two envelopes per day, documentation in false skin and text, my own history combining with invented biography. Trying to create a heavier and more accurate record; double evidence and double mass. I color code them, as if this time could be reassembled. Intending to send these things away from myself to offer as proof, instead I carry them with me, unwilling to part with the weight. A silent dialogue with myself, absence against density; letters never sent, instead buried in the body. Words rub off in the carrying, are absorbed by blood. Skin smells of memory. I watch as moments turn into something else.
The landscape is slowly rising all around me, rising underneath my feet. Moving through continuous plus-time, surrounded by minus-time, occasionally afforded a glimpse of the constant accumulation that surrounds my body. The overwhelmed landscape that grounds minus-time, lying just beyond my vision, seeping into my present tenses. I covet these glimpses, the resulting bloodthoughts, convert the precious evidence into a form that I can carry with me, learning my own history, guarding against memory loss. And these things keep adding up, a constant loss of evidence.

I stand still and the ground sinks underneath me, my weight always increasing. I pick things up even as they continue to fall; the need to stop time, the burn to increase, to take up more space. I move them through my hands to remember, move them to forget.

Collecting the present as it turns into the past, evidence lost even as more is found. Carefully culling small pieces of what it was; feeling my way along the shape without being able to see it. The processes are critical. Time turns into evidence and I try to bridge the gaps between now and then. Process gives form and structure to unstoppable time, weaving them together, forming patterns.

Gathering my identity slowly. The body carries the evidence of what has been and how I changed the story. The body carries the smell of memory and the anticipation of the future. These things add up and occasionally I can sense it, turn that sensation into tangible plus-time evidence to carry with me. Salvage some of the evidence before it is lost by the constant accumulation. It never stops.
Sara Hopp was born in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, on June 23, 1977. She is the daughter of Pat and Bryon Buikema, and older sister to Jamie Hopp. Sara attended St. Cassian’s School in Montclair and Forest Avenue School, Glen Ridge Middle School and Glen Ridge High School in Glen Ridge. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Syracuse University, where she graduated *cum laude* in May of 1999. Sara then attended Louisiana State University, and she expects to be awarded the degree of Master of Fine Arts 2002.