

2011 and River
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When I was younger, my brother and I would construct long chains of construction paper rings. There was one ring for each day, and though I cannot remember when we started, I am fairly certain that they were 30 rings long. When the rings were gone it was Christmas, and tearing one ring off the chain gave us a sense of control over the passage of time. Every day we would wake up, tear off one of the rings, go about our day, and wait anxiously to awaken the next day and repeat the slow erasure of the multi-colored paper chain hung above our bedroom doors.

I used to view weekdays in a similar way: wake up, think (happily) about how I was one day closer to the weekend, or dread being one day closer to the week. Weeks did not consist so much of days, but instead contained markers: Wednesday was the middle of the week, so Monday and Tuesday were simply incrementally closer to the middle, which was in turn only two days away from the weekend. The weekend, though seeming to be a real destination point, marked another upcoming event: the beginning of the following week. Fridays were normally free of any sense of time, but Saturday became the day before I would be dragged to church, another upcoming marker (Sunday). Sundays were dreadful simply because it was the day before Monday, and a sense of impending doom would be marked by the passing of hours on Saturdays. Even though my brother and I outgrew the construction paper chains, the process of waking up and being one day closer to something in the future became the way I viewed time. A paper chain extending out into eternity.

I am not sure when I started noticing all of this, but I found a way to apply this non-presence in time, waiting, incrementally counting days, to all aspects of my life. There was a breaking point, of course, that happened to coincide with my first year out of graduate school. I made lists that I never completed, I rarely ate, slept a lot, hid out in my studio apartment, and overloaded myself with freelance work, performances, and deadlines for new works. I created a situation in which the chain of rings would never end, but simply grew longer. Creating a longer chain was really what I did.

It took a long time to retrain my perception of time, but 2011 was the year I did it. I heard myself, one day while teaching, explaining to students why I love Mondays. Every week I get to start over, fresh. In fact, every day I get to. Every day somehow seems filled with endless possibility, and though there is still the part of me that wants to neurotically work out every detail of the future, predict, analyze, respond (etc.), I find my thoughts permeated with some general sense of awe – sheer multiplicity, possibility in the world.

The art I care the most about, that I study, that my friends make, that I make, has this quality of possibility, multiplicity, but most importantly, of presence. Whether a work simply tunes one's attention to something already present in the world, or carves out a space to activate something, it is presented carefully and for itself. Success in these fields depends on observation and awareness right now. In a way, there is simply now and all now's possibilities.

I once had a lesson with Larry Polansky in which he mentioned that a useful compositional tool was considering the following: is what I am doing enough to activate something that I find exciting? Am I highlighting it and then getting out of the way? Am I letting the world in? What is the minimum amount necessary to assure these things? And, perhaps most importantly, does a particular work have the possibility to spawn more works? Does it have the potential for more possibilities, for multiplicity?

Dedicating one's life to work like this, one would think that I would have noticed the rift between my

personal conception of time and that represented, or even championed, in the art work I liked. My critiques or feelings about the success of a particular work would invariably be the exact opposite of how I lived my life. There is no attention to detail, the work missed numerous endings, it ignores the context it finds itself in, why was that presented in only one form, what happens if it was done again, etc. All frequent responses to art work that never were applied to my own life. With art I was calm, present, open, attentive, in awe, but in my life I was a paranoid, stress-filled, distracted mess.

I recently was in New York and, while riding the subway, found myself wondering if anyone had made any field recordings inside of a subway train. I was sure someone had, and frankly it seemed uninteresting as a recording. Nonetheless, simply sitting on a subway train, listening, paying attention to the sounds, was a lovely moment. Why would I want to put that on a record? Wouldn't that simply ruin it, the translation (certainly impossible) of the experience? While enjoying the overall environment, and in particular the sound, I found myself mesmerized by the "no exit" stickers at the end of the train car. I could see two of them, one facing me and one backwards (at the end of the next car), and as the cars moved, their position relative to each other changed. No Exit [forwards], No Exit [backwards], varying distance. Again my impulse was to document it somehow, but it was simply a moment and I was happier to be there for it.

Mark So was at my apartment recently and arrived with a piece, as a gift, that completely floored me. Five transparencies, to be overlaid (possibly) atop one sheet of paper. In the upper left corner of the piece of paper is what could function as a title and Mark's name (the two together being enough to indicate a score). In the bottom right, the date (8 december 2011) and location (los angeles) it was written. In the center, a river of possibilities.

Using text from Ashbery's poem, "River," Mark derived a procedure for scattering letters across the center of each transparency, as well as the single sheet of paper (becoming a riverbed of sorts). The text from the poem is given a clear orientation on each sheet, with space between each letter, each punctuation point. Holding the assemblage together, looking at each sheet individually, holding a certain number of them together, all are possible ways to activate the piece as reading event.

Nonetheless, there is something about the way the text has been arranged that defies simple reading. The text certainly looks like words, but it is not quite readable. This is enhanced by viewing the transparencies/sheet of paper in different groupings. At the same time, the way light reflects off the transparencies, the busy-work of shifting the pages around, activate the piece as textual material. Letters or punctuation on transparencies underneath others seem to sink into the background, though shifting the entire assemblage slightly has the ability to emphasize or minimize this effect.

A river: endless possibilities, an ever-shifting stream of particles in motion. Thinking about a river as object seems to ignore the multiplicity present in it. Thinking about a river as a collection of individual components misses the object quality of it. Like sound, water is always in motion, and is always both a collection of things and a thing itself.

When asked where this current stream of work came from, Mark recounted a driving experience which I cannot exactly remember now. Prone to taking road trips across the country, much of Mark's work derives from a real sense of being-in-the-world. Postcards from Mark (while traveling) arrive in the mail for me occasionally, looking like they were sent from the seventies or eighties. Unannounced, they are some of my favorite semi-regular gifts. Frequently the postcard is a picture of some somewhere, on the back is sometimes a phrase, sometimes a name, other times a word. Sometimes they suggest titles, sometimes they are more elusive. I have a collection of them, and I love them.

As best I can remember, Mark was driving late at night, and had an experience similar to the one I had on the subway. There was the sense of a moment, indicated by (if I remember correctly) a sign, the fog, his car, a second sign, and a general being-thereness. Similar to me, Mark felt inclined to document it somehow, but how? It was more than simply text, and translating it to a score seemed to miss the actual nature of the moment. Using a component would not do it, nor would making it do something else (and really, what was it?). The only true way to appreciate the moment was simply being-there. Allow the moment to happen, and hope for possibilities.

The possibilities came after many failed attempts to get at that same feeling in his own work. While I find it hard to believe that the attempts Mark described were actual failures, insofar as trying to get at the whatness of that experience, I can imagine how certain realization/documentation strategies would fall flat. At some point, though, something like “River” came about.

Is “River” a score? Certainly not in the traditional sense. What would performing it even be like? Any real sense of “performance,” or activation, seems to happen when one simply spends time with “River.” Shifting through the pages, experimenting, reading, viewing. The whatness of the event, whatever it was, lead to a multiplicity of possibilities. More specifically, being attentive and present yielded other pieces, for lack of a better term. “River,” then, is both a product of this presence attitude and a way to echo, perhaps, the very whatness of the event. It is always both, oscillating back and forth, between document and event, score and text, reading event and text-as-object.

A facsimile of “River” is included on the next page.

