

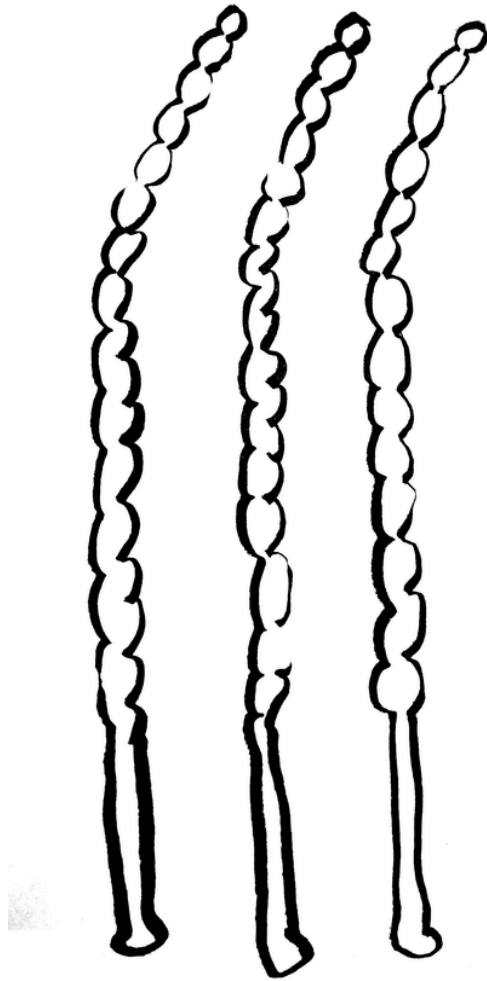
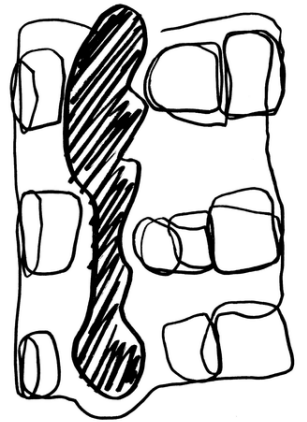
Stoic affection

For several years prior to this residency, I focused my practice on new materialism, a niche branch of study centering the agency of nonhuman matter. I got deep in the weeds with the theory, extricating its implications for contemporary ceramics. I attempted to break down how working with clay and interacting with ceramic objects (inviting them to interact with us), was a key part in the process of attuning oneself to the vibrancy of things, of material. This could heal the nature-culture rift, I thought, it could help us survive capitalism, could create varieties

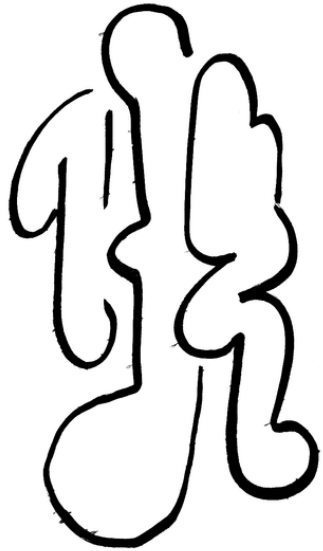
of empathy and intimacy we've never seen before, could arm me with an unmatched ability to collapse the artist-viewer-object triad into ecstatic oneness! It's the kind of theory that is so encompassing, it's difficult to make material, to make visual, in one's work. Present in my interpretation of new materialism was also an abundance of holes, in particular a fallacy that Maggie Nelson articulates in her book *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*, "The presumption that making a sculpture or writing a novel is somehow on par with entering into an intimate relationship with a viewer or reader, with all the emotional responsibility such a relation typically entails, is a mistake."

Since moving to Minneapolis a year and a half ago, I've rounded a bend on the horseshoe that I'm sure I'll continue making laps on forever--shifting from an intellectual query to a relational grappling with my own overwhelming weakness. It becomes an attempt to transform the lack of emotional responsibility that inhibits me from experiencing substantive intimacy (a prerequisite for arriving meaningfully into the oneness I've fetishized for my entire making life). I'd like to think this pivot has something to do with social responsibility as well, centering real actions of care that have culminated here on the page, unlike my previous body of work which began on the page.

I fear I have the bitter and alienated temperament of a Dostoevskyian protagonist and a chronic difficulty effectively communicating affection and warmth, probably because I was homeschooled or for any number of reasons that bear no relevance here. Underneath it all, I have enormous reservoirs of care and tenderness for those around me. The rub lies in my failure to transmit it to those people. This failure hinges on doubt and fear. The doubt and fear cause distress, and I have an inability to tolerate this distress. So, the path out would be an indefinite, unsexy cultivation of distress tolerance. Here, I found something I feel like no one tells you, so I based all my

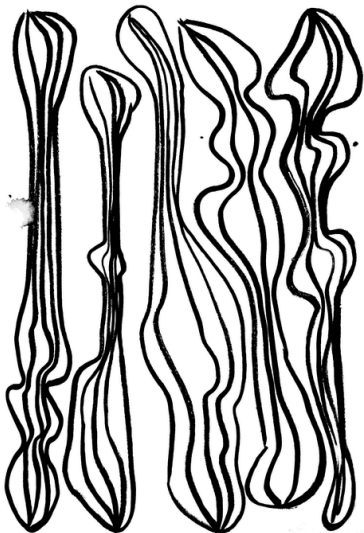


work around it to try to get the word out. Being giving of affection has nothing to do with getting more in touch with your feelings, but rather being less in touch with them through discipline, fortification, and control. Only then can you express true warmth. Selflessness and tenderness are one. Affection mandates a release of the ego, a stoic handling of one's interiority. (Association with the specificities of stoicism as the school of thought founded by Hellenistic philosopher Zeno are rather incidental, and I certainly disavow any oppressive regime that has invoked this philosophy.)



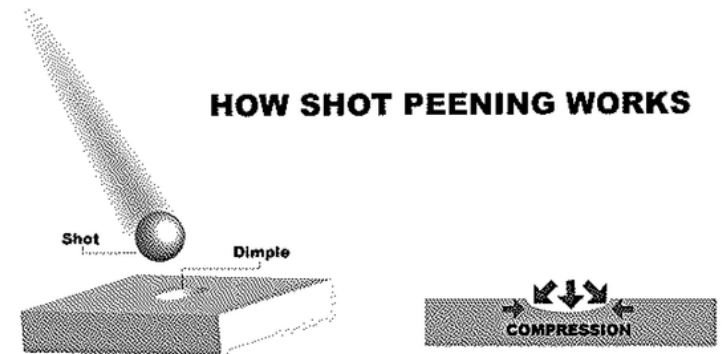
When many of the pieces here first began, I had not yet articulated these ideas. I was collecting molded cardboard pulp packaging inserts, mostly out of formal interest, simulating these forms in clay, and making things to fit inside them that would be inviting and contained an idea of penetration, which I'm perennially circling around. When I stepped back from these early iterations, I saw those tools as an expression of my impulse not just to penetrate, but to reach across, first and foremost. As wholesome and revelatory as this kernel of insight was, clear to me too was the fundamental irrationality of producing a number of breakable, unidentifiable ceramics instruments for the purpose of communicating something potentially incommunicable. Somehow I did not associate this irrationality with weakness, but rather saw it as a key sign of the absurdity of the Becoming they represented, a sign of an ill-informed earnestness that is present, *and must be accepted*, within every gesture of affection. I chose to fully embrace this irrationality, and took it to its natural conclusion, following the line of thought that the greater the number and variety of tools I make, the greater the chance that one of them would work to deliver the perfect gesture of stoic affection in a given moment.

A spilling over.



Shot Peening

My tools and their usefulness situated themselves over time in an imaginary place called the Shot Peening Park, the mythos of which is woven throughout this body of work. In the Shot Peening Park, I never feel indecent or obscene while giving care. Every careful gesture is well received since there is no end to the variety of tools and prosthetics available for such purposes, to act as an extension of the self. The park grants forbearance to those that pass through it. Clunky, maudlin, and fragile vestiges of care are abraded away before they can be misunderstood. Deep wells of intuitive knowing are abundant in every corner and the park is vast.

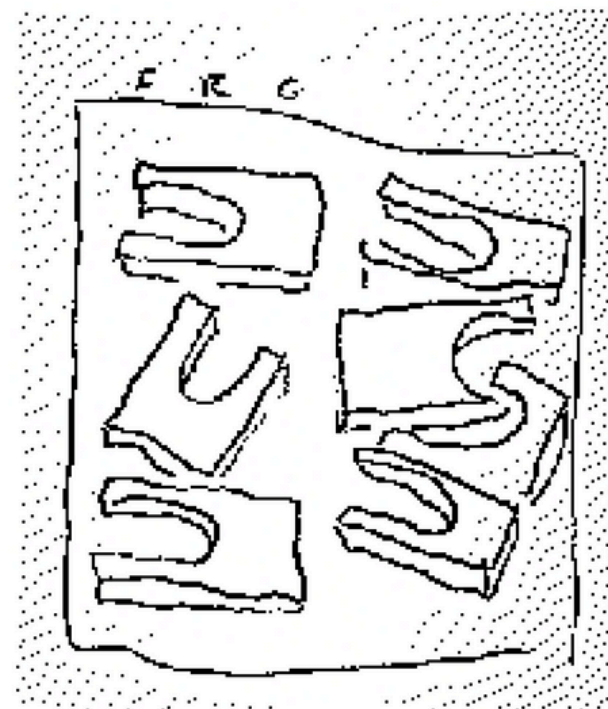


One late night, as the park was just beginning to emerge, I was surfing the web for information about the realm of things imbuing strength through excessive force. I found my way to engineering abrasives dot com on a page called shot peening. Wow, what a humorously providentially named process to find in the midst of making this series that secretly has everything to do with actualizing my terminal dick envy. The webpage informed me: "Shot peening works as a cold mechanical impact treatment accomplished by striking a ductile metallic surface with multiple high-velocity shots. In shot peening, small spherical shot bombards the surface, dimpling it and causing compression stresses. As the media continues to strike the part, it forms multiple overlapping dimples. The surface compression stress strengthens the metal, ensuring that the part will resist fatigue failures, corrosion fatigue and cracking, and galling and erosion from cavitation."

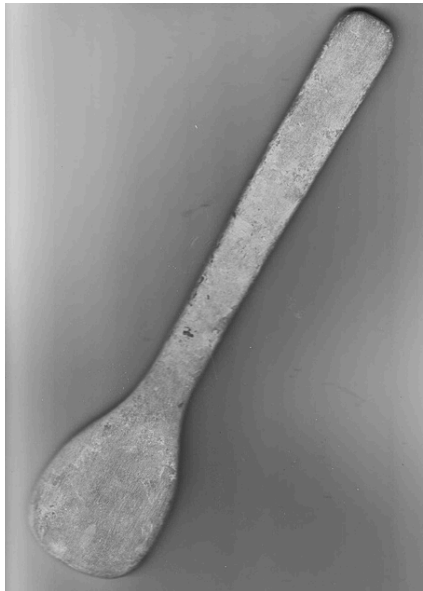
Shot peening plastically spreads the surface in a way that prevents microcracks and fatigue, in a way I believe we all want to be plastically spread. Every act of stepping out in vulnerability, every selfish thought batted away, every act of affection born, because that too is hard to bear, is like a shot blasted into one's constitution. The Shot Peening Park is at work in me and through me.



& that's not even to mention the stoicism of the medium of choice in this show. part of the thinking is, these tools will grant me a stony undergirding, given that they're clay, which comes from eroded rock and returns to stone. (how much violence does it require to become gentle?)



Inmost



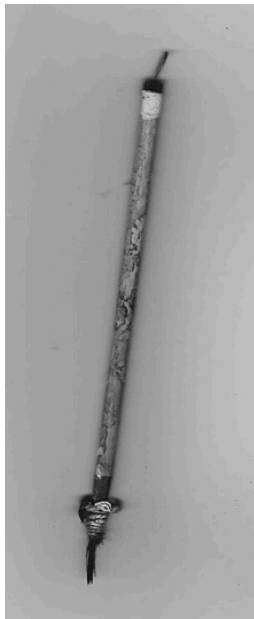
This is the tool I used to make this piece.

The molded pulp shipping forms I take inspiration from are the most troubling kind of instrument of care. The quality that makes them good at cradling is the same



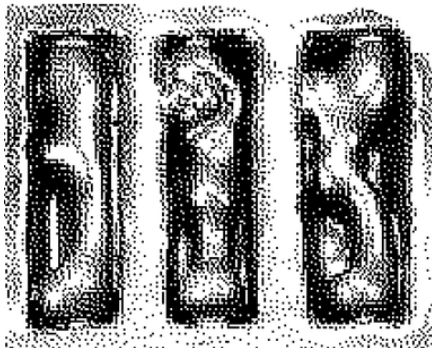
quality that makes them single-use. They are wasteful in their specificity. Care is inefficiency, Ross Gay reminds us in *Book of Delights*.

Shot Peening Park: View From Space



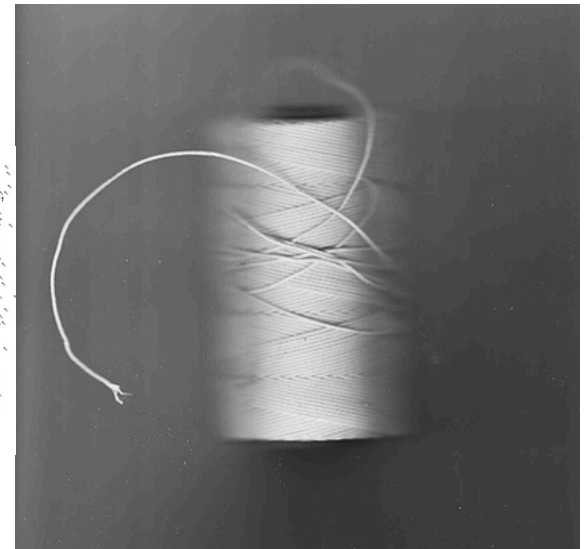
This is the tool I used to make this piece.

I can see my house from here.



Forbearance Holder I, II, III

When I was 18, I fixated on the idea of accelerating wisdom. Having seen the obvious ways the acquisition of knowledge could be sped up, there similarly had to be channels I could go through to become wiser faster, and I became obsessed with locating these channels (because I felt I was running out of time).



This is the tool I used to make this piece.

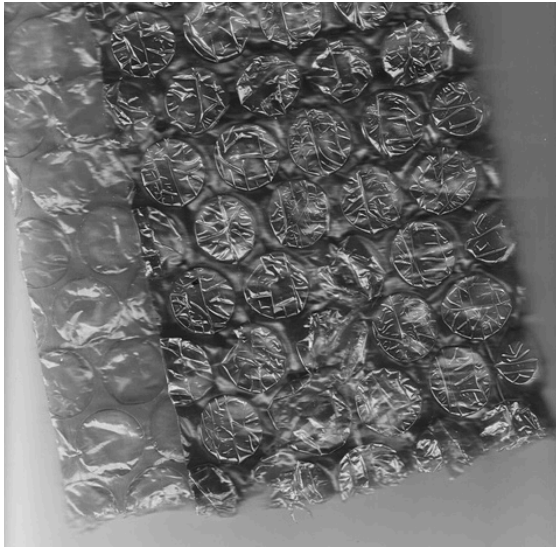
Now I'm 25, I no longer fixate on wisdom at all and I no longer pray for it. I pray for forbearance and I'm preoccupied with acquiring incredibly high thresholds.

These are holders for the forbearance reserves I'm building up.

Tool Portrait I, II, II, IV, V

These are portraits you might find in the galleries and museums of the Shot Peening Park.

Throughout this residency I tried to ground my thinking and making in a rhizomatic framework, in the sense presented by Deleuze & Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. A rhizomatic structure is lateral, decentralized, and heterogenous, as opposed to an arborescent structure which is hierarchical, binaristic, and stable. The horizontal orientation of these portraits literally



This is the tool I used to make this piece.

comes directly out of my desire to bring a rhizomatic sensitivity to every act of affection (every act of penetration). Stoic affection hinges on the tolerance of the disgust I presuppose everyone has towards me. This presupposition implies an arborescent structure in which I occupy a lower position than my peers. The texture of these objects has to do with visualizing the sensation of absorbing a psychic hit every time I withstand mental pain and become present in the Deleuzian assemblage--playful, indeterminate, dynamic. Bearing this, forcing myself into the rhizome, throbs.



through a stoic practice,
one finds relief from one's appetites

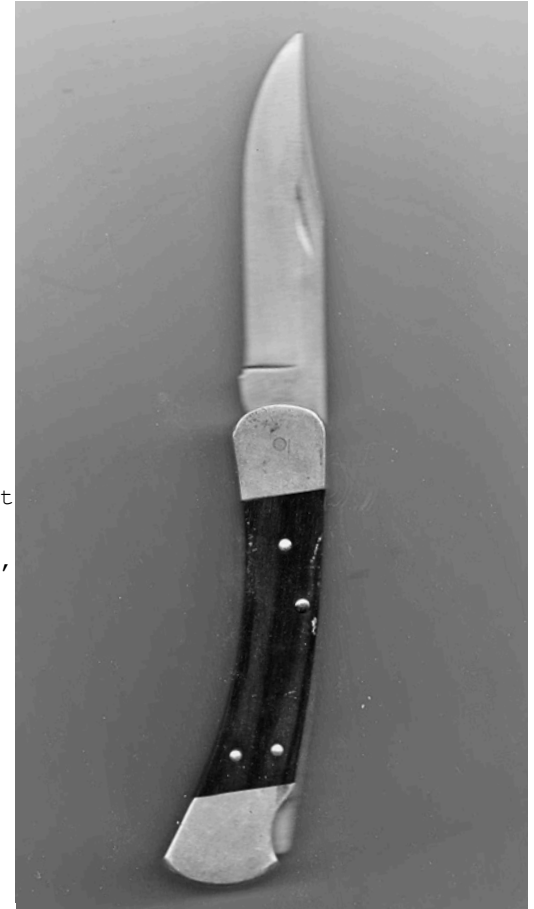
Withstanding

The feelings controlled through stoic discipline are not repressed into oblivion, but rather channeled into subterranean caches where metal grinds on metal to process them. Above these caches, a runny, sludgy byproduct collects.

In *On Freedom*, Maggie Nelson quotes Wendy Brown from *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, "'A liberty whose conceptual and practical opposite is encumbrance cannot, by necessity, exist without it; liberated beings defined as unencumbered depend for their existence on encumbered beings, whom their liberty in turn encumbers.'" The book charts out a framework that decidedly does not pit freedom against obligation, but rather paints freedom as being rich with obligation (internally), and I've pulled from it to make sense of my own double-bind within the stoic affection puzzle. Encumbrance, in various forms, of oneself is necessary to secure both the liberty and the pleasure of others. (It's not a zero sum game but rather the necessary condition of an abundant and multiplying chain reaction.) The inward tolerance of encumbrance is not an aggressive picture but rather characterized by its outward placidity. There's a stillness to the byproduct held in this piece, emerging from something volatile and slightly rotten.



still, distress tolerance
is a throbbing



This is the tool I used to make this piece.

Tool Plateau I & II

To make affection clear to others requires an insistence of it. To break through one's own fears of giving and of vulnerability requires an insistence. These tools are just meaty enough to effectively be at work within the Insistence.



These are the tools I used to make this piece.

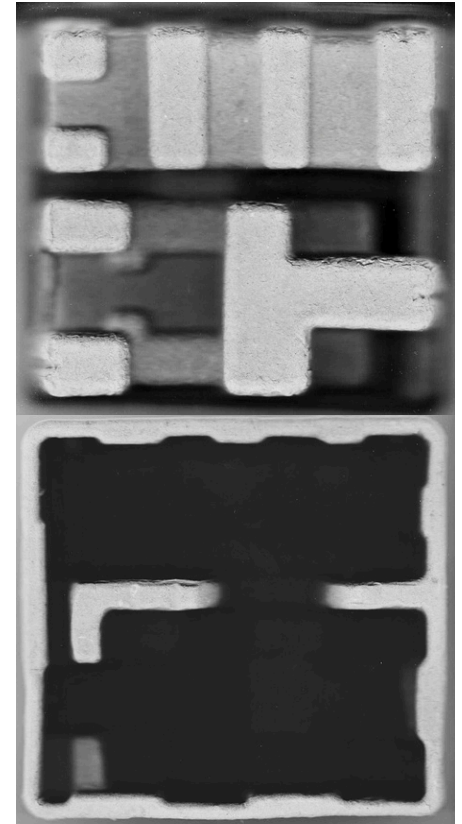
To Deleuze and Guattari, "A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus...We call a 'plateau' any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome." Every Body Without Organs is also made up of plateaus! The Body Without Organs is an aspirational concept, made up of the intensities that are left when you strip away significances and subjectifications from the body (the opposite of what psychoanalysis does). It isn't emptied of organs, but a dismantling of the organization of organs we call the organism. My understanding: the BwO is the reason you can have sex with someone's elbow or their voice. A body without organs is nondesire as well as desire. It leaves with nothing more than a name as the trace of an intensity. How divinely stoic. How divinely feeling.

Shot Peening Park: Map

(If you zoom far enough into Shot Peening Park: View From Space, you will see this map).

Limitations are a vital part of affection in both directions: the restraint of feelings in order to be giving of affection, and the flavor of boundedness inherent in what constitutes a sensation of affection. To create a sensory experience, you must enforce limitations, if only momentarily, on someone. Think of the literal confining motion of a hug. Life seems less tenuous, less fragile given limits. The tools comprising the plots of land in the Shot Peening Park are bound by their trays. The table dimensions binding this map are the same as the dimensions of my work table which bound the creation of this work during my residency. The spirit of the park is the generosity found only through contraction (while carefully avoiding the "forms of cruelty" Maggie Nelson Nelson alludes to, which "are commonly shoveled under the name of care.")

(Maybe: one can't be boundlessly merciful in a boundaryless environment)



Note: some of the bits that comprise the streets, ponds, streams, and alleys of Shot Peening Park: Map were created by Olivia Comstock and Fran O'Farrell.

Shot Peening Park: Research

Once I produced an arsenal of tools for stoic affection, it was necessary to test them as actual, material means of transmission.

I moved to Powderhorn when I arrived here from Montana. My neighborhood has been the site of fertilization for the pursuits documented in this handbill. The tenderness I expect to find in the studio continually surprises me by showing up more often in the domestic space and proximity to it, so it was fitting that I conduct this tool research in the hallway space outside my bedroom. Directly behind the subjects of the video is my bedroom door. The video piece documenting the resulting research is soundless. Printed here are selected excerpts from transcripts of conversations between me and neighbor-subjects during the tool testing.

NEIGHBOR-SUBJECT 1: What were you thinking about making them?

ARTIST: I was thinking about tools I use in the studio. I was thinking about sex toys a lot. I was thinking about the cow tools comic of course

NS1: Of course, that's what I first saw when I saw these.

...

A: What do you think of the grey ones right there?

NS1: I like this one a lot because it reminds me of the fetal position. Which is something I find myself in a lot.

A: Oh yeah.

NS1: All curled up...Yeah these ones feel a lot more human than some of the other ones...and some of them looks like bones like this one. And some of them I just really feel perfect to put on the body...can you put this one in my dimple?

A: How is it?

NS1: Nice...how does it feel for you?

A: Very satisfying

NEIGHBOR-SUBJECT 2: It's nice that this edge is, like-I feel like I'm often wanting a pressure in the center of my palm. Do you ever get that feeling?

ARTIST: I do, absolutely. Yeah...this is a little mini version of that one.

NS2: Wow! So funny that there would be a little mini version of such a specific and yet random thing.

A: Do you want to feel this, in your palm?

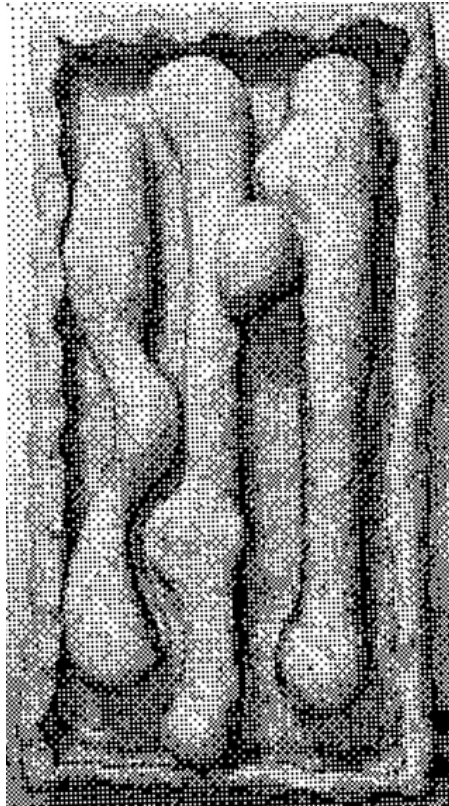
NS2: Mhm...oh yeah. But actually, ok. Just a little more, yeah. Mhm. Yep. That's right in the middle. That's great.

A: Other hand...Here?

NS2: A little this way...uh huh...may I try and do yours?

A: Oh yeah.

affection/affectation



agape/agape

...
NS2: They're long, you can hold them. Then they have these little doodads.

A: Yeah.

NS2: Perfect for the middle of the hand.

A: Definitely.

NS2: Or for sort of being little wands.

NS2: That's true. Bippity boppity.

...
NS2: It also gives me like, electricity vibes I would say? Like these two little ends are each gonna have a spark. Which I guess could go in a cattle prod direction but I was also just thinking like a movie, like uh, magic wielder tool.



This is the tool I used to make this piece.

NEIGHBOR-SUBJECT 4: I'm intrigued to be honest with you.

A: Intrigued?

NS4: Yeah yeah yeah. Wow. It's sort of um, some of them are sort of like a gun rack.

A: Can I join you?

NS4: Mhm...This is sort of a. Sort of um. The testicle.

A: Yeah. What else do you see?

NS4: These ones are almost like a bone. Femur-y. This one especially...some of them are a bit more organ than they are tool.

...

NS4: I'm interested in how they hold each other.

A: Like this?

NS4: Woah. The way they are fitted. The way they're like, they're bent but not bending.

A: Mm. Like this?

NS4: Yeah. Exactly.

ARTIST: Are they reminding you of anything?

NEIGHBOR-SUBJECT 5: This one looks like a talon. And also sort of a wish bone. A lot of them look like dildos. This one looks a lot like a carrot. I like this one...it's interesting, I feel like I'm having a hard time thinking outside the box.

A: That's ok, you can think inside the box.

NS5: I'm looking for tools I already know of.

A: Oh yeah.

NS5: Like I'm wondering if any of these can get this knot out of the back of my head. Maybe my carrot can.

A: Could I help you with that?

NS5: Hahaha, sure. Do you think this is the best tool?

A: I think that's a great choice. I think it's already working.

NS5: I feel like there's definitely some back massagers in here. Have you used any of them for that?

A: No actually.

NS5: Really?

A: Really. Wow, this tool is illuminating the universal truth that a big knot is really just a small knot with lots of hair around it...Ok, I think this is out enough to maybe even try the talon through your hair. What do you think?

NS5: Go for it.

A: I think that was very effective.

...

A: Ok, what caught your eye as back massagers?

NS5: Oh, good question.

A: This?

NS5: Yeah, I think that could do it. And then we should try this one and this one. Ok go for it. Yeah...have you seen those things? Do you know what I'm talking about? That people use to massage their back?

A: Are they more squareish kinda?

NS5: No, they almost look like a, like a bow shape?

A: Oh to massage yourself, I have seen that.

NS5: Yeah but why, you should never massage your own back. You should always find someone to massage your back.

A: I agree, right. That's definitely part of the ethos of this project I would say...how's that?

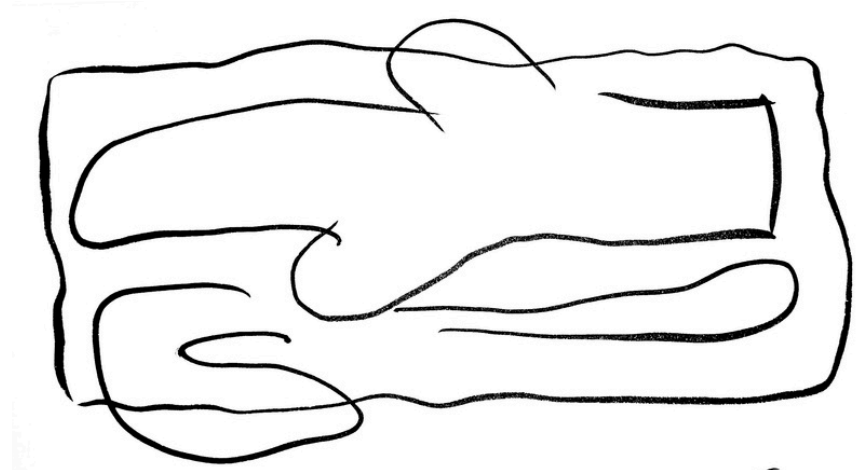
NS5: That's awesome.

A: Ok, let's try this one. Maybe good for focusing on areas of tension...Can you feel it melting away via this tool?

NS5: Oh yeah definitely.



The context for the research was an open-ended invitation to use the tools. Withholding any prompt or structure for the research resulted in an uncovering of multivalent, highly lateral affection-giving. My neighbor-subjects used the tools on other tools, on their own bodies, and on my body in addition to receiving affection through the tools from me. Watching the footage, I was touched by how gently the subjects handled the tools. They set them down so delicately, evidencing an abundance of care--an indirect but coreshaking delivery of affection.



Stupidhead Compassion (in conclusion)

At some point this spring, I was describing the ingredients of stoic affection to a friend, who asked me if it was like the wise half of the wise compassion-idiot compassion dichotomy. I admitted I was unfamiliar with what he was referencing, and he explained this framework, coined by venerated and flawed Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Given the ableist and harmful origin of the word idiot, here I'll refer to it as unwise compassion. Unwise compassion consists of the things we give people because we can't bear to see them suffer, encompassing the things we think of as niceness--accommodating others' impulses, creating pleasantness, courteously smoothing over conflict. Wise compassion is complex, it requires seeing beyond what makes ourselves and others feel good, reaching past gratification, acting out of true empathy in a way that may mean denying the desire.

I was tickled by this irony, since stoic affection was occasioned by my need to work on exactly the basic, surface skills that comprise unwise compassion. I've just mangled unwise compassion into its most complex form in order to explain to myself how it works. The only means I've consistently, proficiently showed care through is the criticality and penchant for nuance that tough love requires (there is nothing easier to me than loving someone by denying them that which they don't need). Embracing the foolishness of producing an excess of ambiguously formed tools, of creating a place consisting entirely of tools, has wound up being part of my case for this "head empty" compassion. This is part of a larger deconstruction of notions of efficiency, arborescence, and success. It's not that I would have us discard the discernment and prudence we bring into the hairy bits of our lives as activists, members of families and studio, and neighbors, but rather re-tool the affectations we couch these things in.

