

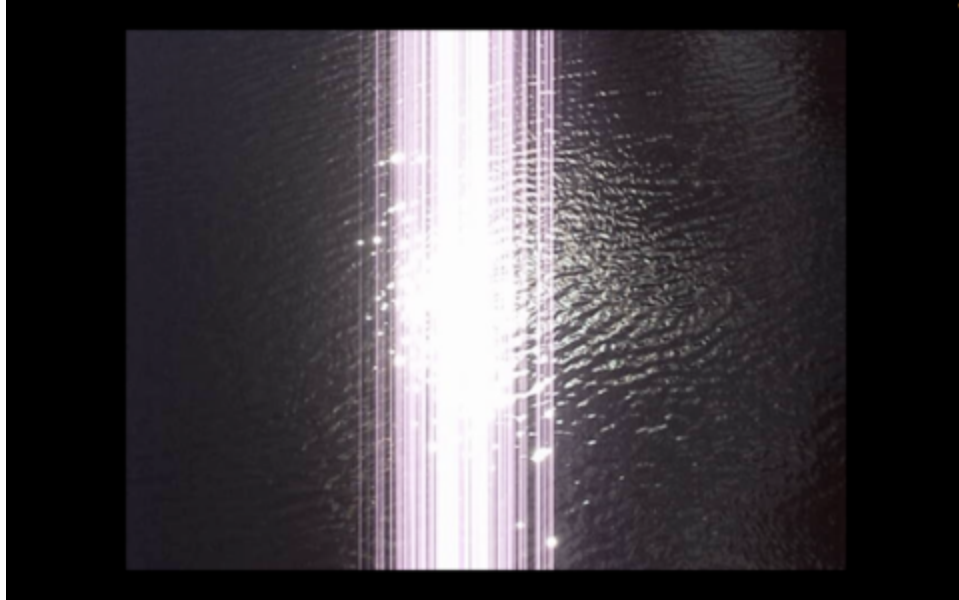
# Text on Practice

## Aratrika

In my practice thus far, image-making has been the first step to discovery and meaning-making. I follow the rhythms of my body and surroundings to make images and then look back on them and see what they could mean to me, what narrative they create for me and my experiences. In this text I discuss my work and process thus far, and also talk through some recent shifts I've noticed while thinking more about my practice in a broader context.

### **Portals, a film**

I have been working on a short film for the EYE-project, titled "where is a portal?". It is a 3-minute long, 4:3 film made up of clips taken on a 2000's digital camera. The footage retains the in-camera colour and light and the sound is the raw ambient sound from the footage itself. It is a visual poem about gateways to other worlds I noticed, looked for and found, or were thrust upon me in my everyday life. I call these 'portals' — moments that are transportive, taking you to new places, away from where you were a moment ago. Where you are taken is what you make of the film. Like the winter sun shimmering on the water outside my window, a disappearing and reappearing shadow of my hand on the plastic train seat, a box of wet orange fruit at night. I made it by spending a few days shooting as I went about my daily routines and travels, whipping out the digicam whenever something caught my attention. Then, closer to the deadline, I sat down and looked at the footage all together and used my newfound Da Vinci Resolve skills to see how I could bring a sense of rhythm and flow to the clips so they could inform each other.



Prior to starting this program, my practice has leaned more heavily on making photographs rather than moving images, for various reasons like access to equipment, software, storage, my physical ability... and the process of taking a photograph on a camera, of choosing where to arrange your frame and clicking, has always felt transportive to me, as if the process were a portal, and the outcome a portal to the process. That's where the seed of the idea of this film comes from. I transposed that into making moving images; for the first time, I intentionally began a project with a topic in mind, shot footage for it, and pieced fragments together in a video editing software. As opposed to my usual image-first approach, which is to be quick to reach for my camera in moments of euphoria when a great song comes on, when I spy a tree branch on a walk that soothes my restlessness, in rare moments of stillness of seeing my shadow on the sidewalk. And at a later moment, looking through my archive and seeing what common themes emerge – nature at night, bodily fluids, spaces with a sense of memory... and grouping my favourite pieces together, playing with their form to work out what the outcome means to me (something I'm still working out). Portals was also my first time shooting on this old digicam and discovering its textures and rhythms.

This project also made me consider portals as unique from person to person, moment to moment. Something you not only stumble upon, but also ones you search for and create. I was talking to a friend about how your portal is telling of you and your desires. It's also telling of what you want to escape about your reality. A feeling of going elsewhere, like another world is possible and within reach.



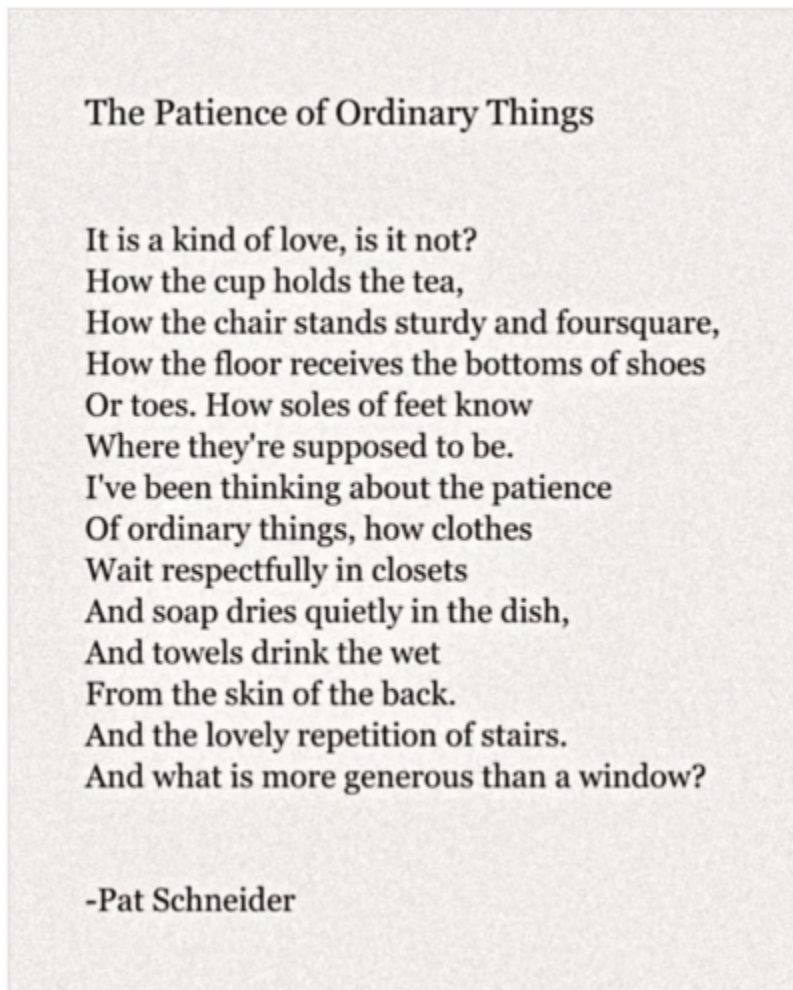
It has not been so much a part of my research thus far, but in feedback on my work from colleagues and tutors, I have learnt that there is a rich tradition of lens-based diaristic work, like “Fifty Minutes Grid”, a photographic work of Moyra Davey (2006). Coincidentally, around the time I was recommended her work was also the time I had been considering working with collage as a medium of play and sketch.



Moyra Davey, *Fifty Minutes Grid*, 2006. Twelve C-prints, tape, postage, ink, 30.5 x 44.5 cm each; 94 x 137.2 cm overall. Photo courtesy Moyra Davey, CNW Group and Scotiabank.

Although I haven't studied poetry as part of my research, poems often ground me in my practice because they are accessible, and an almost momentary transporting to another world. I find

poems, like photographs, to be portals. For instance, this poem titled “The Patience of Ordinary Things”, by Pat Schneider (2003) really speaks to what drew me to making this film.



### **Untitled Project, collection of moving images**

As part of a different ongoing project, I have also been gathering self-recorded clips of myself, mostly in my room where I spend most of my time, often along with clips of things I see from my bedroom window. Because what is more generous than a window?

The clips are of me, dating from 2019-now, alone in my space, performing daily routines, dancing to a song, close shots of my body like my eyes, hair, hands, or mouth while eating lychees, looking into the camera. The videos are all in portrait, taken on my phone, handheld or leaned against a nearby object. These videos are taken on different days but always in moments of solitude, such as after a shower, or while relaxing on the balcony. I am moved to film something because of a certain sound I hear, the way I see light hit my body, certain textures of wetness or stickiness, or extreme emotions of joy or sadness. These clips are often taken using glitchy or over-processed-looking filters. The videos retain their original sound,

some of which are a song playing in the background, or the sound of the rain, or leaves rustling in the wind. My current vision for these clips is that of a montage (by the process of putting them into a video editing timeline, playing around with them in terms of order, duration, colour, taking note of what themes or narratives emerge, and experimenting with various iterations), or a multi-channel video installation in a space, maybe automated in a sense via a software like TouchDesigner (a skill I would like to pick up). There may or may not be overlaying audio or text that builds a narrative.



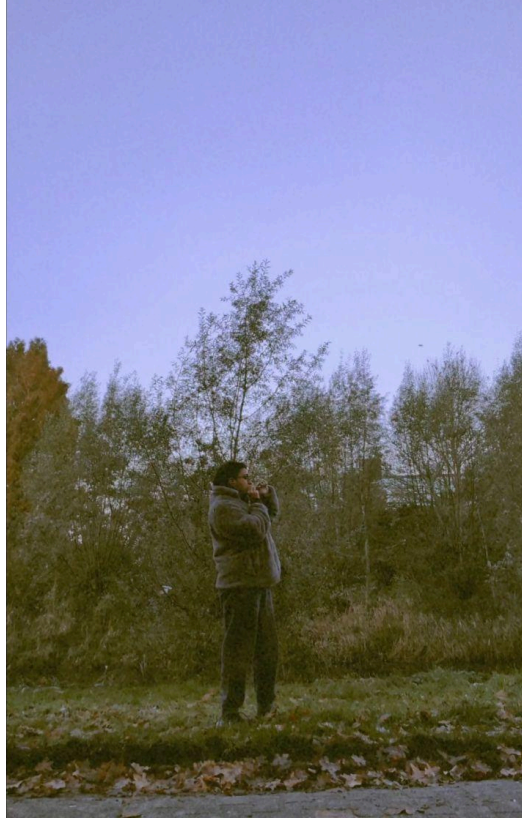
Looking back, my reasons for taking this footage have evolved since I began this program. Initially, I was interested in the interaction of camera movement with disembodied details of the physical body and live sound. I was also interested in what quality distortion and overlaying filters can bring out in these videos, and in the materiality and textures of the surface of the screen. What does it mean to manipulate a digital surface, whether the manipulation happens in-camera or in post? I wanted to explore what kind of mood these combinations of techniques can elicit in video work.

The other reason for my interest, which has grown in significance these past few months, is that I am interested in the ways we choose to depict ourselves, and who has the agency to choose and build their identities. It is interesting to me how this is discussed in the poem “On Seeing and Being Seen”, by Ama Codjoe (2022):

### On Seeing and Being Seen

I don't like being photographed. When we kissed  
at a wedding, the night grew long and luminous.  
You unhooked my bra. *A photograph  
passes for proof*, Sontag says, *that a given thing  
has happened*. Or you leaned back to watch  
as I eased the straps from my shoulders.  
Hooks and eyes. Right now, my breasts  
are too tender to be touched. *Their breasts  
were horrifying*, Elizabeth Bishop writes. Tell her  
someone wanted to touch them. I am touching  
the photograph of my last seduction. It is as slick  
as a magazine page, as dark as a street  
darkened by rain. When I want to remember  
something beautiful, instead of taking  
a photograph, I close my eyes.  
I watched as you covered my nipple  
with your mouth. Desire made you  
beautiful. I closed my eyes.  
Tonight, I am alone in my tenderness.  
There is nothing in my hand except a certain  
grasping. In my mind's eye, I am  
stroking your hair with damp fingertips. This is exactly  
how it happened. On the lit-up hotel bed,  
I remember thinking, My body is a lens  
I can look through with my mind.

This reflection I have been engaging in has led me to realise that Performance could be a fruitful creative strategy to further explore in this project.



### **A recent shift**

I'm writing this in a moment of what feels like a shift in what I value in the outcomes of my practice. In the past year or so, I have been grappling with things happening in the world that were once in the back of my mind, but are now in the forefront as I go about my daily life. The genocide in Gaza, the ongoing mass death and disabling event of the pandemic, my delayed introduction into anti-caste schools of thought, to name a few, are things that have led me to become (for lack of a better word) more radicalised. I am more cognisant of the world's response to these events, and critically and urgently considering my role in them. Perhaps moving away from home has provided me with the space for a clearer sense of my position to come about. Which now has me questioning... What does this shift demand from my practice? What is the space in my existing practice, if any, to incorporate these new elements into it?

These are big questions I'm still finding tools to work through. A possible answer I have to the second question can be illuminated by this quote from a 1993 Toni Morrison interview published by The Paris Review,

I think of beauty as an absolute necessity. I don't think it's a privilege or an indulgence, it's not even a quest. I think it's almost like knowledge, which is to say, it's what we were born for. I think finding, incorporating and then representing beauty is what humans do. With or without authorities telling us what it is, I think it would exist in any case. The startle and the wonder of being in this place. This overwhelming beauty—some of it is natural, some of it is man-made, some of it is casual, some of it is a mere glance—is an absolute necessity. I don't think we can do without it any more than we can do without dreams or oxygen.

A possible entrypoint for these new elements into my work is the relationship, or possible tension between finding the beauty in the mundane, and the rapidly worsening lives of people under casteism, capitalism, imperialism. Is a radical commitment to finding beauty in your everyday life a possible tool of counterbalancing overconsumption and the industry of death, of true connection? In terms of tension, I'm thinking of the function of time: of the urgency of the issue of growing atrocities around me, and the neutral pace of my daily routine. Where does this tension begin and what does it illuminate?

With these in mind, I'm envisioning moving forward by spending a lot of time playing and sketching, maybe trying different media like collage and photo and text and see what that brings up for me. I want to get out of my head and channel my energy into making and see where that leads me. I want to use playing and sketching as a tool to explore this shift in me, and to use this shift in me to explore my work.

I also want to return to my practice of making more photographs. I feel like the program so far has been focused a lot more on moving images (which I want to continue exploring), and I think returning to the feelings of extended time and compact information I find in photographs may provide me with fertile grounds for further contemplation.



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