

September 11th - October 24th 2015

# Every Little Bit Hurts

Zoe Kreye

Lindsay Ljungkull

Anne Riley

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# Every Little Bit Hurts

Setting the tone. If you are so inclined, you might accompany your reading of this text with the following video/audio clips:

Brenda Holloway's "Every Little Bit Hurts": [https://youtu.be/kZf\\_rppcnm8](https://youtu.be/kZf_rppcnm8);

The closing scene of Claire Denis' 1999 film *Beau travail*: <https://vimeo.com/105411522>;

Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill": <https://youtu.be/wp430dtAAkM>.

For now, hold those thoughts, I may come back to them later. But first, let's take another *dérive*, and spend some time considering the science fiction writer Octavia Butler. The central character of Butler's novels *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) is Lauren Olamina, a teenager living in California in the mid-2020s. With a birth defect that is the result of her mother's prescription drug addiction during her pregnancy, she is affected by a condition called hyperempathy: a psychosomatic condition in which one actually feels the pain, or pleasure, that one witnesses in another. In the near future that these two novels are set in, climate change, financial ruin, resource scarcity, and a host of other factors

have led to the complete collapse of society as we know it. In this reality, where violence has become the new norm, Lauren Olamina's condition as a hyperempath, or "sharer" as those with this condition are sometimes called, is particularly complicated.

Though the concerns of Anne Riley, Zoe Kreye and Lindsay Ljungkull's works in *Every Little Bit Hurts* do indeed seem quite far from the concerns of Butler's post-apocalyptic science fiction novels, I've returned time and again to this idea of the hyperempath throughout the process of working on this show. For the "sharers" in Butler's novels, their empathy with other beings<sup>1</sup> is not only felt emotionally, but literally felt in their own body. In the novels this quality defines the essential worldview of Olamina's character as she works towards the building of a new society, even amidst the ruins of what remains around her.

I see a parallel in Butler's imagined malady and the real world theory of quantum entanglement. This might be a stretch based on only a few texts I have read on the subject,<sup>2</sup> but the theory goes that certain pairs of subatomic particles, like photons, are intrinsically connected regardless of the distance between them. In these cases, any action performed on one particle in the pair would, more or less, instantaneously affect the other particle. Einstein refers to this as "spooky action at a distance." While

any real scientist would be quick to point out that properties like this in the sub-atomic world can't be misconstrued as being immediately perceptible in the world around us, I'm still interested in dwelling on this notion of a link between two entities across space. Extrapolating from Butler's narrative and my two-bit understanding of science, what resonates for me here is this idea of proximities, and the suggestion of some kind of entanglement between beings across a distance that is literally felt.

In science fiction, a writer works with the possibilities of science, rather than the realities of science. Kreye, Ljungkull, and Riley are all involved in an active imagining of the possibilities for a form that extends beyond its aesthetic properties, towards an engagement between bodies. How can forms contain relationships? What are the possibilities for a form to mediate a knowing of someone, or oneself?

Zoe Kreye's *Our Missing Body* is a collection of ceramic sculptures, movement, textiles, foam blocks and hand-drawn newspapers. Though the movement in the work may not be immediately apparent in the final product, elements of movement and the body are present throughout Kreye's process. The artist worked with slabs of clay in her studio: pressing them over, around and in-between various parts of her body. The resulting

sculptures are rough, bearing the marks of the hands that formed them. Yet, through their abstract lumpiness, a body is visible, or at least suggested, in the empty space defined by the clay: a pair of legs, the cup of a hand, the bend of an elbow. What we are left with is an impression—a physical residue of a body that was once there, the hollow of a form.

In the gallery these objects are placed around the room on blankets and foam blocks. The soft supports, neutral palette, and the low arrangement of the ceramic sculptures suggest an engagement with the body of the viewer: something beyond a visual encounter.

I first encountered these objects in Zoe Kreye's home studio. As we talked about the pieces, I examined the objects, first by sight, associating their shapes with the body, and then by touch, holding them against my chin or wrapping them around my arm. I recall having first had a feeling of trespassing, of being an intruder into an intimate space that wasn't mine, but after that came a more prolonged sensation of closeness, and the sudden awareness of my body occupying the space that another body once occupied. As ceramic vessels these were objects that contained both a presence and an absence, facilitating a relationship between my body and another. Standing among the objects now, I see them both as mirrors,

reflecting back on me, and as lenses through which I can attempt to know an other. I keep seeing Kate Bush in the soft-focused video for “Running Up That Hill”: dancing, intertwined with her partner, yearning to occupy that other’s body for just a moment as she sings, *“Do you want to feel how it feels?... C’mon, baby, c’mon darling, Let me steal this moment from you now. C’mon, angel, c’mon, c’mon, darling, Let’s exchange the experience, oh...”*

As an artist with a parallel interest in movement practices, Kreye often works with collaborators to develop embodied interpretations to her ceramic forms. At Western Front, these elements will be further explored during two scheduled workshops in which Kreye will guide participants in a close encounter with her work.

The title of Riley’s series of work is taken from a text by American theorist Karen Barad, who writes, “When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself. Perhaps closer.”<sup>3</sup> In the first of Riley’s works for this exhibition, she has arranged a pile of 62 plaster casts of her hands holding themselves. Produced with a soft mold-making medium designed to be used for only a single impression, Riley poured into this mold over and over again, each successive plaster cast showing the

degradation of the mold. Elsewhere, the mark of the artist’s body is worn on the walls of the gallery, in the residue of indigo dye tracing the lines of her body following a series of prior choreographed movements. A video work, installed in the bathroom adjacent to the gallery, reveals a camera as the lone spectator of the performance. Here, we see Riley momentarily occupying an interstitial space for a solitary action. Set to the soundtrack of Donna Summer’s “I Feel Love,” the denim suit, the pulsing disco beats, and the dim lighting take us to the darkness of a lesbian bar.

Riley speaks of the walls and closets that her queer indigenous body encounters. These walls and closets—both interior and exterior—resist and constrict her movements, just as she continues to push against them. Continuing from the text above, Karen Barad asks, “If the two hands belong to one person, might this not enliven an uncanny sense of the otherness of the self, a literal holding oneself at a distance in the sensation of contact, the greeting of the stranger within?”<sup>4</sup> Barad goes on to explore the mechanics behind touch at a sub-atomic level, explaining how, for a physicist, touch does not in fact involve any actual touching. Rather, what we sense when we feel the pressure and the closeness of touch is instead the repulsive force of negatively-charged electrons resisting one another.<sup>5</sup> Like Kreye’s ceramic vessels, Riley’s

plaster sculpture intimates a physical touch between two bodies that is never actually there. The artist noted that in the repetitive making of the 62 casts, she even began to recognize the hands as those of her sister, or of her mother. What do bodies know or remember of their histories? Riley's mother is originally from the Fort Nelson First Nation in Northern B.C., but moved to Texas where Riley and her twin sister were born. Though Riley never lived in British Columbia until recently, in this work, she suggests that perhaps she never left, that she has always been here, "in the land, in [her] people, in their hands, in their eyes." <sup>6</sup>

Watching Riley's body move alone in this room, I keep coming back to *Beau travail*. Though Claire Denis' 1999 film warrants a more extended synopsis, I'm citing it here primarily because of Riley's affinity to the character of Galoup: a master sergeant in the French Foreign Legion whose struggle in the film concerns issues of power in relation to the hierarchy of the military structure and unrequited homoerotic desire. In the film's final sequence, Galoup, played by actor Denis Lavant, stands alone in the dark of a mirrored dance floor smoking a cigarette. Corona's "The Rhythm of the Night" plays while Lavant saunters around the floor, moving slowly, quietly, before busting out into a frenetic dance. Just as the dance of Lavant's character expresses his breaking-free from the closeted

desire that burdened his character in the film, Riley's works explore the freedom of touch in a queer space, and what it means to be close but only "nearly as close as oneself".

Lindsay Ljungkull's *Darkness Silence Touch* (2006)<sup>7</sup> is a 16mm film with live narration and music that is played through a modified turntable. It is composed of three parts: *Brenda Holloway vs. Conflicting Systems of Power, Attempting to Bridge the Divide*, and *I never really learned how to play (Does that matter?)*. In part one, the artist points to the incompatibility of electrical standards around the world, explaining how a turntable made in one country will play at the wrong speed in another. To demonstrate this, the artist, who is present in the room during the screening, plays a 45 RPM EP of Brenda Holloway's "Every Little Bit Hurts" at the slowed, distorted speed at which a turntable manufactured in the USA would sound if it were operated in the UK. In the film's second and longest segment, the artist is framed in a medium closeup, addressing the camera. She asks a series of questions, pausing after each to give space for an answer. Again, the artist, present in the audience, holds a microphone and answers herself in real time.

The film was made when Ljungkull was a young artist just completing graduate school. Though originally shown not too long after it was first

shot, the film has held the promise of being ever in flux on subsequent performances as the context of the work and Ljungkull's life has shifted through time. In each iteration, Ljungkull's past self interviews her current self, posing questions that are dry, scripted. Her character is split and interrogated across times and tenses; she is at once herself, while also performing a character of herself. The live performance is an added layer to the work that renders malleable the rigid nature of the 16mm film, temporarily collapsing the distances between what we remember and what we imagine of ourselves.

I've listened to Brenda Holloway's "Every Little Bit Hurts" continually throughout the process of making this exhibition, but only recently came across a clip of her performing live on American Bandstand. I had never seen footage of Holloway singing, and, great as it was, what captivated me most was the post-song interview with Dick Clark. Holloway was seventeen at the time of the performance, and the interview uncovers moments from her childhood, including Holloway as a seven-year-old singing in the bathtub, or speculating about her future as a performer. Though perfectly poised and confident as she speaks, I can't help but dwell on the vulnerability she expresses in the song, the yearning for the lover who has left to come back. The artists in this exhibition speak to the vulnerability of extending oneself,

making connections through traces and impressions, both courageous and searching. *Every Little Bit Hurts* reflects on these instances of closeness and distance, regaining intimacy in its embodied responses.

-Pablo de Ocampo

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<sup>1</sup> In the book, Lauren encounters a pack of feral dogs and they have to shoot one of them. As Lauren witnesses the dog dying, she feels its pain.

<sup>2</sup> I'm referring here to two texts, though the astute reader would likely be able to locate a more comprehensive volume on the subject: Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2004); or for a more quick read, Paul Maliszewski, *Several Failed Attempts to Explain Quantum Entanglement* (<http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/several-failed-attempts-to-explain-quantum-entanglement>)

<sup>3</sup> Karen Barad, *On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am* v1.1 ([http://womenstudies.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/on-touching-the-inhuman-that-therefore-i-am-v1-1.original.pdf](http://womenstudies.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/on-touching-the-inhuman-that-therefore-i-am-v1-1.original.pdf))

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Again, I'm playing fast and loose my characterizations of complicated physics. For a more detailed account, try Richard Feynman, *The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (1985).

<sup>6</sup> Anne Riley artist statement on the work.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the performative nature of Ljungkull's work, it is not physically present in the gallery, but will be performed at Western Front on October 8 at 7pm.

# Artist Biographies

**Zoe Kreye** creates interdisciplinary art projects that explore transformation, collective experience and negotiations of public space. Her work looks to engage the public in relations and aesthetics, with the goal of building inclusive, bottom-up associations that have the potential to be small catalysts for change within dominant social systems. Often looking outside the realm of art, her projects take the form of clubs, workshops, rituals, dialogues and journeys. Her focus is to encourage people towards self-reflection and a deeper engagement with themselves and society. Recent projects include *Unlearning Walking Club* (Unit Pitt, Vancouver), *Unlearning Weekenders* (<rotor>, Graz, Goethe Satellite, Vancouver), *Soft/Union* (The Apartment, Vancouver), *Eat Talk Connect* (City of Richmond) and *Überlebenskuns.klub* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin). She completed a Masters in Public Art at the Bauhaus University Weimar, specializing in community engagement and participatory strategies, and co-founded the Process Institute, an artist collective based in Berlin. She currently lives in Vancouver and teaches Social Practice at Emily Carr University.

**Lindsay Ljungkull** is a Los Angeles-based artist and editor who works in photography, film and video. She received a BFA from Otis College of

Art & Design and an MFA from the University of Southern California. Her films and videos utilize the first-person narrative structure in order to directly address the viewer and explore memory, translation, self-performance and narrative. Her films have screened at venues including Freewaves at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Artists Television Access, San Francisco; Show Cave, Los Angeles; and the 2006 Frieze Art Fair in London.

**Anne Riley** (b. Dallas, TX) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Vancouver. Her work explores different ways being and becoming, touch, and Indigeneity. Riley is Cree and Dene from Fort Nelson First Nation, and received her BFA from the University of Texas at Austin in 2012. She has exhibited both in the United States and Canada. For the past year she has been in a working mentorship with Vancouver-based interdisciplinary artist LAIWAN, supported by the British Columbia Arts Council.

## Credits

Technical Director for Anne Riley's video: John Fukushima

## Gallery List of Works

### 1-4. Anne Riley

*That brings the other nearly as close as oneself*

2015

62 plaster molds of the artist's hands,  
denim markings, video, found music

### 5. Zoe Kreye

*Our Missing Body*

2013-2015

Clay, hand-dyed textiles, foam, ink on  
paper

## Screening/Performance

Thursday, October 8th @ 7pm

Grand Luxe Hall, Western Front

Free Admission

Lindsay Ljungkull

*Darkness Silence Touch*

2006

16mm film/performance, 25 min.

& Performance by Zoe Kreye

