

Artist: Monica Anna Day
Performance: Placeholder

Post 1

Perhaps it is no mistake...

...that the researcher/artist contemplating the topic of displacement has always been unsettled and uncomfortable with the idea of home.

Of course, the irony is not lost on me now that my "home" has never been truly threatened. While my mother and I were often domestic refugees, and more than once we fled in the middle of the night from one shaky relationship or another, the upheaval was always limited to the small scope of her dubious choices of romantic partners, and the radius to me, her only fatherless child. But in every other way – politically, economically, racially, environmentally, socially – "home" was always available. Whether I ran from it, wrestled with it, or even recognized it, was one of many unrealized privileges in my life.

Attachment to a home was ill-advised, so I avoided making one. Having the flexibility to pack a bag and leave, quickly settle in a new place, adjust and blend into the new environment – these were the survival skills I learned in my childhood. And they have served me well throughout my life.

Until, they didn't.

Like when I had children and learned that little people like security, predictability, and schedules. Like when I had a mother with dementia to care for and needed to remain nearby during her waning years. Like now, during a global pandemic, when, for the first time in my life, my passport is worthless, and as an American, I am welcome almost nowhere.

Clearly, the Universe has a particularly dark sense of humor. As my research on *displacement* begins, I am in the most intense period of *emplacement* I've experienced in my life. As I prepare to interview people who have been displaced, I watch the democratic institutions I have taken for granted my entire life disintegrate under the rule of a wanna-be authoritarian. As I begin to allow myself to feel place-attachment, I simultaneously must consider whether my own displacement - either by choice or by force - is imminent.

Suddenly, everything I have taken for granted in my life comes to the foreground. Whereas trees have always just been *trees* and birds have been *birds*, I now find myself trying to learn their names. I feel an irrepressible urge to plant a vegetable garden, to know my neighbors, to log into my memory the smell of the rain, the feel of my feet in nearby rivers and ocean. To more consciously hold this place inside of my being, and to give this place my attention. Whether it is in preparation of a goodbye, or whether it is in belated recognition of a lifetime of relationship, remains unclear, and unimportant.

From my vantage point as researcher and an academic, I acknowledge that *Placeholder* will not be a personal journey, but rather I will attempt to be as faithful as possible in amplifying the voices and experiences of those generous ones who will be my "subjects" in this inquiry. However, from my vantage point as artist, I also recognize that the only way to transmit the stories of others is to be as conscious and aware of one's own story, and to understand the whys and the ways that we are pulled towards a project such as this.

So for today, this is where we begin. A glimpse of my story, just like my feet in the river. Too cold to go in any further, too slippery to stand up. But here. Very much here.

Welcome to *Placeholder*.

Post 2

Date: September 28, 2020



Placeholder Logo

Ways of Knowing

In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer recounts her story of gathering degrees all the way to a doctorate in Botany, only to realize how far away that journey led her from embracing the inherited wisdom she already had as an indigenous woman. Until she attended a small gathering of Native elders who were talking about traditional knowledge of plants.

“A Navajo woman without a day of university botany training in her life spoke for hours and I hung on her every word. One by one, name by name, she told of the plants in her valet. Where each one lived, when it bloomed, who it lived near, all its relationships, who ate it, who lined their nests with its fibers, what kind of medicine it offered. She also shared the stories held by those plants, their origin myths, how they got their names, and what they have to tell us. She spoke of beauty...To a new Ph.D. this was humbling. It was the beginning of my reclaiming that other way of knowing that I had helplessly let science supplant. I felt like a malnourished refugee invited to a feast, the dishes scented with the herbs of home.” Pg. 44

While my circumstances are different, my sentiment feels similar to Kimmerer as I make my way through this project. I know in my bones, just like you do, that bodies instinctively and biologically form all manner of attachments - to people, to places, to things - and these attachments inform every aspect of our lives. I also know, just like you do if you consider it for a moment, that these attachments are not theoretical or conceptual, but rather they are formed through our senses and stored in our cells.

As an artist, and as a coach and facilitator, I rely on this instinctual knowledge. I read cues from bodies, and I lead people back to body wisdom when they have become separated from it. But in this sea of academia where I am currently swimming, this instinctual knowledge is not recognized. Even if it is considered, you are still told it must be validated in these specific scientific ways (ie methods) in order to be "credible."

I want to take this on. Not because I need to be deemed "credible" - that is a younger woman's game - but because when body wisdom is missing, so are the desperately needed solutions to some of the world's biggest challenges. Like displacement.

This week, I've begun to outline the "method" I will use to gather "data" about how displacement impacts bodies. There are hoops to jump through. An Institutional Review Board to give a stamp of approval, an adviser to sign off, participants to sign on. All with a backdrop of a global pandemic that requires a disembodied approach to gathering embodied wisdom. But none of this is my challenge.

My challenge is to continue to remember what I know, even as I visit this other world of knowing. To walk in both of these parallel worlds, even as I build a bridge between them.

Post 3

Date: November 13, 2020

We continue riding the waves -- of covid, of our creativity, and of our capacity -- respecting limits while also, defying them.

But the time has finally come. The performance of Placeholder takes place tomorrow, Saturday, November 14th at 3pm EST (10pm in Cyprus). I will be alone (well, with one steadfast friend!) in a black box theater, livestreamed from the Gallatin Galleries on the campus of NYU.

I will say right now, this was not the journey I expected when I proposed it back in May. In many ways, it has challenged everything I have taught for years, while also, asking me to layer new ways of knowing with those that come easily to me. Like everything else in life right now, it feels like I am trying to make sense of a story while also living in the middle of it.

As every aspect of performance that gives me confidence gets stripped away -- no live energy in the room, no faces on the other side of the screen, no ways of taking the temperature of the group -- I must go with what I have. My own sensations. My own knowing. My own instinct.

Some people think that getting on a stage is frightening, but they have no trouble in front of a camera. I am the opposite. My nervous system prefers the live link to other bodies. It is not lost on me that I have been displaced from my own comfort, while discussing displacement.

I guess we should take comfort in the fact that the Universe has not lost its sense of humor.

Look forward to seeing you...uh...to being seen that is..on Saturday!