Hyperactivity Detox

The Experiment Method

From April 15 at the strike of midnight to April 17, I turned off my phone and computer and told myself, "I will not work for these three days. I will be bored. I will do nothing."

I put myself through a voluntary hyperactivity detox. As an experiment of my own design, I set the controls and variables. I had doubts: it felt a little like Jennifer Sullivan's video work "One Week Walden," where the artist secludes herself in a camper in her father's backyard in upstate New York for a week, going inside to check her email. What revelations could come from just three days of unplugging and experimenting in a work detox? Then I considered Miranda July's film The Future, where a couple disconnects their Internet for a month to focus on their lives and goals only to see their relationship, lives, and everything around them unravel. It was disconnection (yes, fictional) that was life-altering, and in only a month.

In the past hour, I've texted friends. I researched rental cars for an upcoming visit with my mother. I ordered an email tarot reading for guidance in areas of my life that feel uncertain and weigh me with anxiety. I've contacted the company I do freelance transcription work for to check in about my availability and assignments. I made and ate toast. I connected with a presence-based collective here whose yoga classes I've been attending. I read half an article written by a lecturer at a satellite University of Michigan campus about walking away from a job he loves because of the continued underpayment of lecturers and non-tenure track faculty. An hour, and this is a sampling. I also drank coffee, breathed, thought probably a million things, and pet my cats.

Time is weird. An hour, three days, or a month. Each minute holds limitless potential for how we use it. This essay is my account of a three-day experiment: what I learned, or think I learned or am learning, about time, connection, work, meaning, life, love, isolation, being, boredom, addiction, presence.

Sunday at Midnight

I turn off my phone while the DJ was spinning Hotline Bling at a queer dance party. In the five minutes prior to powering down, I check my email, Facebook, Instagram, and text a loved one. Nothing to note. Look at my phone and wonder if there was anything I need to Google. Can't think of anything. Stare at the screen for a minute longer and...

Walking home with two friends, I discuss "productivity hacks," my impending visit with my mother, a friend's upcoming performance, and being tired.

When I arrive home, I realize the clock that I had set and made sure was working before I left for the evening had stopped ticking. Sigh. I think, "I will have to find somewhere to buy a watch tomorrow."

Before falling asleep, I read in bed with my two cats. I do not know when I fall asleep. There are strong paint fumes in my apartment, and I wonder if there was a dangerous leak or if I am having a stroke. I wonder what would happen if all three of us die in the nighttime from some chemical leak. Think, "Maybe if this is how we die, that is okay. I am at peace." I lay in the quiet and drift to sleep without a guided meditation playing from my phone. The silence is wide and comfortable: how it holds me.

Sunday Morning

I wake feeling anxious. Should I get out of bed? What will I do? It is okay to rest, I tell myself, there is nothing you need to do. I have no idea what time it is. I doze for a while. I imagine it is late afternoon, but I have no idea. It is raining.

There is nowhere to be. Nothing to do. I am not letting anyone down by resting here, taking a breath, for a minute. I tell myself to release that wrenching in my gut. I pull myself from bed and make coffee.

Later

If I'd thought ahead, I could have gotten addresses and written letters. That's too much "DOING." This desire to tell others is just a reminder to think about the differences between LIVING and BEING SEEN WHILE LIVING or perhaps CREATING AN IMPRESSION OF A LIFE aka KEEPING UP APPEARANCES. Success perhaps is a mirage. Elusive glory that we keep desperately clawing for, and yet how entertained I am by my cat continuing to attack the string attached to the end of a stick. I admire her self-awareness.

Sunday 3:42 PM

I am sad. I do not know why I am sad.

I wander around my neighborhood and see a chair parallel parked where a car should be.

Sunday PM

Mission to find a watch.

Walking home from the hardware store, I feel uncomfortable and sad.

Arriving home, I contemplate not going to yoga, but I do go, and it is healing. The instructors guide us through the chakras, one at a time, reminding us, "You do not have to do anything you do not want to do."

I bike home in the rain, and I think about the Aries new moon. I bathe.

Bath thoughts: Celebrate the things you do show up for instead of grieving the things you miss. The intention I set at yoga tonight was PRESENCE. I reflect on addictions as modes of escaping presence. Compulsive behaviors. Work addiction: how I attempt to escape my feelings of inadequacy shaped by my experiences of trauma. Fears of never doing or being enough. Giving too much of myself to others or to work. Poor boundaries: putting others' needs, personally and professionally, before my own.

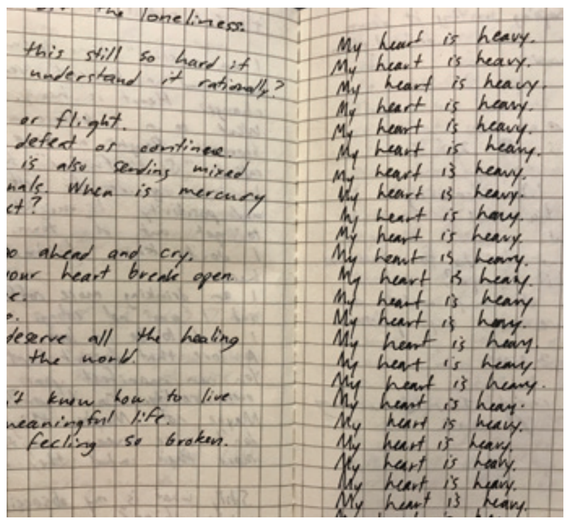
Why did I wake up feeling anxious? Keep telling myself: there is nothing you have to do.

Epiphany: Hyperactivity detox is not about doing nothing, but about rediscovering doing consciously.

Why do I never turn off my phone?

Monday 8:30 AM

So proud that I woke up at a decent time naturally. Made coffee and took a decongestant. Was a little bored! Thought: what do I do with myself until yoga? Started reading Sontag. Was drowsy. Decided to nap. Woke up at 11 and missed yoga. Was feeling sad and guilty but reminded myself that I can go to yoga later and that is okay. Rested more. Pet Ginny.



Liz Scofield, Field Notes (Excerpt), 2018

Every time I see my little notebook I think it is my phone and I get excited.

I wonder how it will be to see her tonight.

I am thinking of cutting off my rattail.

Monday PM

I feel guilty.

I feel like I'm not doing this right.

I feel like I am wasting time.

I feel a little sad.

I feel like I am killing time until yoga when instead I should be present in this moment not concerned so much with the meaning of it all.

Arrived early to meet S for yoga. Knocking on door to no avail. Don't know how to reach someone without a phone. A little sad.

Monday Evening

Went to yoga and maybe she doesn't love me anymore. Had a difficult conversation. Came home and wrote her a letter. Didn't know what else to do. No one to talk to. I'm sad and hurting. Took allergy medicine and melatonin hoping to fall asleep. It's 10:30pm.

Tuesday 12:37 PM

We continue to fill up our lives with work because otherwise we face our meaninglessness, loneliness. Everyone has a laptop. Little squares avoiding each other.

Tuesday 2:09 PM

You can manifest your own reality. Can't you? Maybe not. Maybe things don't ever mean anything more than what they are. Still, what is my obsession with doing?

Just go ahead and cry. Let your heart break open. Release. Let go. You deserve all the healing in the world.

I don't know how to live a meaningful life. I am feeling so broken.

Tuesday 4:20 PM

feel like caving

got haircut

cried

what to do for two hrs till yoga?

stare at my watch and stare at my phone

4:22 PM

I caved. Turned on my phone.

Called her.

CONCLUSIONS

I'm late submitting this essay, but matters of the heart, healing, and self took precedence this week. I am honoring needing more time to process than the deadline would allow. I am honoring my need — to dive deep into my heart, its murky mess, and to hold.

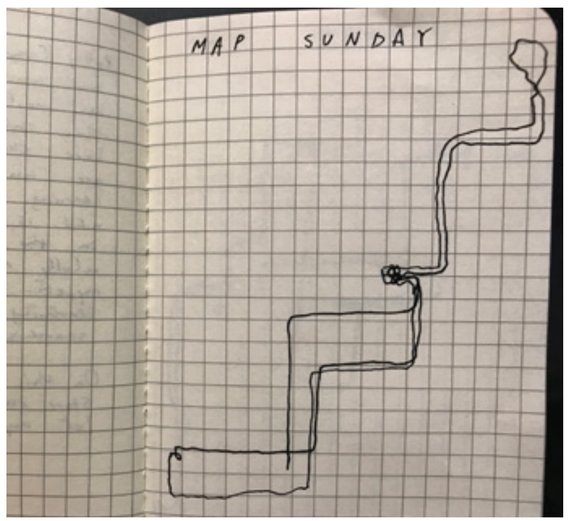
After all I am learning: I am meaningful and enough regardless of this essay, my practice, relationships, all the things I have held onto to imbue life with beauty and meaning. I have lofty conclusions I could propose from this experiment. I am going to release the urge to package this up with a clear direct meaning so I feel validated, so I feel like I've contributed something.

For what it's worth, I'm turning off my phone more, calling instead of texting, and thinking more consciously about boundaries, needs, time, and the Magickal potential of Life and Being.

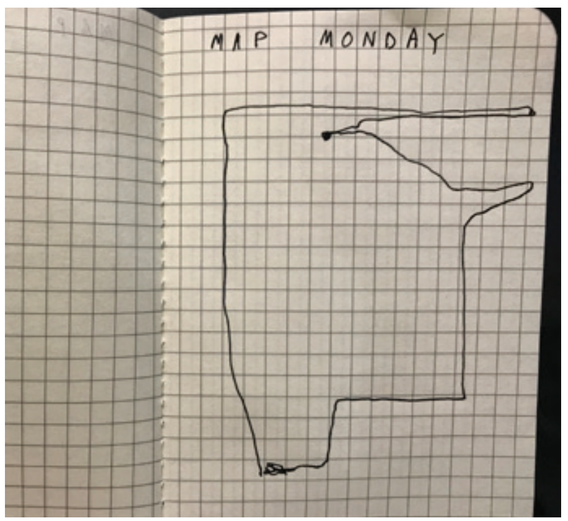
You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Being is and has always been enough.

I'm going to leave this essay raw. It is not perfect, yet it too is enough.

I am on a bus to New York, and I am in love with everything.



Liz Scofield, Map Sunday, 2018



Liz Scofield, Map Monday, 2018

Liz Clayton Scofield is an artist and writer based in Baltimore.