

PRESSMARKS

LEXICON OF THE PRINT VIGIL

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Introduction

The studio an artist enters seems quiet. It is not. The tools speak in their own register - the hiss of a roller across the slab, the breath of paper lifted, the tap of a finger on the metal cooled by the night air. Below those sounds, a quieter register still: the working language of printmaking, pulled and worked in across the years until it has lodged in the friction of the process itself. Said aloud or held in the mind, the words fold into the body of the studio. They press meaning past technicality.

These words are old. Other bodies worked them before this one. Each time, the words received what the body and the matter had left in each other – never truly explained, deposited. They have been working in the same room for a long time, the discipline of the words and the discipline of the making staying unresolved into one whole thing forever.

For twenty-four hours, the Print Vigil was taking impressions off this language. This Lexicon is an imprint of that duration - the relation pressed into the page, through repetition and function, distillation and sensation. Through what arrived without being called for.

Print Vigil opens the pages. Somatic Chronograph frames them.

Eight working terms between, in the order they arrived. The matrix holds no entry here.

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Print Vigil

The printer's hand knows the weight of the roller before lifting it. The shoulder knows the angle of the next pull before the eye does. Head, wrists, hips, the lower back. None of this is new.

Not a first effort. Not a feat. The same terrain, to be covered end to end. This time, like any other time, will be different.

Outside, the canonical hours pass - Vigil, Lauds, Prime, Terce. Inside, the body's hours pass in their own measure: the second wind, the long flat afternoon, the ebb before sunset and the exhale of the final pull.

PRESSURE

The ink resists the slab. The paper resists the ink. The press resists the hand that turns its wheel. Pressure is what arrives when none of these give way and none refuse entirely - varying with the viscosity, the temperature, the hour. The body is in this list too. It is never the same twice. The hand discovers what pressure is by giving and receiving it.

In the early hours, this is calibration. The wrist tests, adjusts, tests again. The press answers in the give of the roller, the lift of the sheet. Intention and response sit close enough to read.

The gap has been spent down. Pull by pull, the difference between what the hand intends and what the press receives has been paid for - in breath, in time, in material. What is left is the nuance of touch. The final degree of the lean and the clout: the wrist knowing this sheet from the last, this second from the one before it. The calibration has not stopped. It has entered a finer register. This is the apex.

The ink, the fibre, the cooling marrow of the press, the edge of the blade - each defending its form, each pressed against by the other. The canonical bell at Terce, through the studio wall. Every hand that has worked this press has left its measure in the frame. The print not yet made is already pressing back. The sheet between them, taking its weight from both.

PULL

The weight goes through the shoulder, into the press, into the ink, from the matrix to the page. The word was a verb before the press made it a noun. Pulling: the action going on. A pull: this event, this mark, this thing the press made nameable. The printer pulls a pull - the noun still carrying the verb inside it. One word for what asks the whole body to prove its presence, on the beat, on the breath.

In the early hours, the pull is drawn in before it is given out. The body pulls into the accumulated choreography of the studio - the breath gathered, the wrist measuring the resistance before committing the weight. The gap between intention and gesture is still readable. The work proceeds by checking itself. Then the checking stops, the rhythm arrives.

Pulling through the monotony, the commitments and objectives. The hours pass in pulls. Each one a held breath let go: the weight committed, the roller moving, the ink transferred, the sheet parting from the matrix. The body stops consulting itself. The breath organises where the mind did. The inhale gathers. The exhale is the pull. The same event, apprehended twice.

Pulling off. The sheet lifts. What the press and the body and the matrix made between them comes away in the hand. Verb into mark, action into thing - the pull has settled. The body pulls in the air, and the next pull begins.

IMPRESSION

The sheet kisses the matrix and is lifted away. The mark leaves residue of the charge that passed between them under weight. And stays - impressed with itself. It carries the conditions of its own making: the viscosity of the ink at midnight, the temperature of the room at four, the dampness the paper has taken from the studio's air, the angle of the wrist. The body's angle. All of it in the paper. Straight, perfect, wonky, tired, offbeat, present.

What the paper takes, the body takes too. The blister on the palm. The ache in the shoulder. The callus at the heel of the hand where the press leans in year after year. The scuff on the press frame where the body's weight falls, the dried ink in the thread of the wheel, the old registration marks no one cleaned away. Both surfaces carrying what the encounter left - the body and the press, the sheet and the matrix, each one a record of what pressed against it.

The print is the impression on the paper. The blister is the impression on the body. Counterparts to the same charge. When the matrix is cleaned and stowed away. The impression is what outlasts the meeting.

A word is an impression too, made to impress.

The hiss at the word's end extends to the blade touching on the screen. The syllable on the ear. Stays.

REGISTRATION

The small correspondences of registration hold the work together across time. Two layers. Three. Eight. The print-matter accumulates. Registration holds each layer in correspondence with the last - the form grows as the layers find each other.

It depends on the body. The eye that aligns the sheet, the hand that lowers it, the attention that judges *here* against *there*. The body holds these in relation as long as it can hold itself in relation. That is what registration costs across the hours - the persistence of a single aligning act, repeated, each time the same and each time slightly different.

Strive all it may, it does not hold. Not across twenty-four hours. By the deep middle, a layer lands a millimetre from where the last one did. Then another. The distance between is exactly this much left to give. Somewhere between the hold and the exhale.

Held to the light, the drift is the record of what the holding costs. The layers stack at slightly shifting angles - the syncopation of the hand-pulled print growing more honest as the body grows more tired.

Drift is record. The layers at their truest where the body could no longer hold.

OVERPRINT

The mark below shows through. The mark above modifies what it finds. Depth appears where there was only surface.

This is how the print holds time. Each pass holds the hour that made it: the measured accuracy of the early pulls and the drift of the middle hours. Against the light, the layers stay legible through one another. The first hour beneath the twenty-second. The pull that landed exactly beneath the pull that drifted.

The print syncopates, the second line does not cancel the first. Displacement produces depth. The layers answer each other. The paper becomes complex - itself - weighted. What the layers stack is the witness - the past of the work in the present of the work, held there for whoever lifts the sheet to the light.

The depth is real. The transparency that made it possible is real. So is the risk - every overprint is a wager that what came before will show through the irreversible entanglement.

The paper remembers.

PROOF

A sheet lifted as a weather forecast. A single pass and reading - a question the work puts to itself through the body. Evidence of what the time has done. Transmutation completed.

The body stands back. A different gap now - the printer's eye no longer one with the press, witness to what the press and the body made together. The science of the alchemy.

Proof is the print's willingness to be scrutinised. Calendar, clock, barometer - the *somatic chronograph* on a single sheet, kept aside. By the time it is read, the work has moved past it. The proof holds what the work was willing to show at that hour. Only that.

What it held was only ever on loan. The mark of striving, kept aside, then passed.

One sheet. One pass. The measure of what the hour cost in this weather front.

REVEAL

There is always a small gathering of breath at the point of reveal, even at the hundredth pull.

The hiss of stiction before the eye arrives: the paper separating from the matrix, the sound already telling the body the temperature of the room, the viscosity of the ink, the ratio of the last pull. The proof begins in the ear and works through the body.

The exhale. The electrical charge passing through. The quantum moment splicing imagination in half.

The print is rarely what was planned. What lifts away is what the encounter became - the room's air, the fibre, the bonded dust, the hour.

The body recognises what it sees before it can name what it sees. The hand has already moved to set the sheet down, the eye is already reading the layers, the shoulder has already begun preparing for the next pull. Recognition runs ahead of language.

STATE

In printmaking, state applies to the multiple. The same matrix, the same image, printed across its changes - first state, second, fifteenth. Each change documented in a proof. State does not mean finished. It is a configuration the work passes through - recorded, witnessed, then moved past.

The book that I am making has no such states. Every impression in it is different. Each carries the responsibility of its own existence - the mark is what the hour produced and nothing else. It cannot be recalled.

The book itself is a state. All of it - the twenty-four hours, the pulls and the pressures, the drift and the registration, the overprints and the reveals - one configuration, witnessed once. To declare it is a political act: in a culture of finished products, the declaration insists on the transparency of becoming. A first state of this *Book of Hours and Breaths* collected in folios, trimmed, bounded. The second, if it comes.

The body reaches its settlement alongside the matrix. The muscle-memory of the Vigil finds its shape. What the body holds and what the paper holds are the same event in two registers.

State is the material plane of Spinozan bliss - the active recognition of the power that drove the effort, recorded in the paper, held in the body. But the recognition is not satisfaction - a state is the point at which becoming briefly declares itself and goes on.

The last sheet. The wheel slows.

Somatic Chronograph

Now the studio quiet in a different register than it was. The ink dried where it dried.

The body has been its chronograph: the recording, the recorder, and what is recorded, in one substance.

Twenty-four hours have passed through it - written in the wrist that knows the roller's weight without lifting it, in the shoulder that has measured a thousand pressures, in the breath that has counted itself in pulls. The body has kept the time the entries name. The press has kept the time the body kept.

The print holds that duration in paper.