Breaths.
Colors.
Thoughts.

There’s something about traveling, something about the break in routine, speed of out-of-body moving through steel, carbon, aluminum bullets, and stillness of mind that I find worth holding onto. Moments of transition. Being.

Here. What are generally blurred

thoughts
back seats to the prompt, the posed question, the assignment

colors
dots, deconstructed, plucked from a Seurat, pilfered from a Signac

breaths
in and out involuntarily courtesy of smooth muscle magic

are now purposefully in focus on this ride home through the Midwestern countryside. Side-country. Second-country.

The focus isn’t voluntary, I have to focus on the farthest, slowest moving trees to avoid being car sick. Sick-of-cars.

On the ride, five layers of speed swim through my aqueous humor, then hit my lens, vitreous humor, retina, and optic nerves to confuse my occipital lobe.

I look past the concert highway- the blurriest of greys, the moving road side railing, the slower moving weedy edges, even slower farm land rows of thanksgiving remains, to the slowest trees, thankful for an anchor. Sorry, Morton, that was indeed a slippage of Nature as metaphor.

Nature generated this poem, the things that touched me that I touched through it, my focus, purpose to focus.

In the stillness of my bullet, I had the space-time to ask

What does nature generate for me? | | What does nature generate me for?[^1]

[^1]: I want to tell stories about the way things have come to be historically, socially, constructed and real. I hope to make medicine more holistic through this approach as an Ob/Gyn who uses traditional and biomedical practices. Tsing, Alaimo, and voices of the bees taught me that the toxins that contribute to infertility and birth deformities are not isolated chemicals but cycle in capital, agricultural, labor, and industrial markets. They are not only toxic not only to consumers but the overwhelmingly migrant labor force that pick the Western world’s produce. I want to tell these historical, legislative, and legal stories to my patients and listen to their stories of how they understand their bodies as situated and embodied materiality (Alaimo and Heckman 2008) to better
An attempt to Gaze:

Chandelier above, three painted walls surround,

I alone with a lion,

A wild encounter through LCD screen.²

The screen blanked, Imagination empty, Memories helpless.

Third portrait of a lion. Third virtual intersection of those big cat eyes and mine. They say third time’s the charm,

But cat eyes, no not smokey cat-woman eyes sponsored by Covergirl ©,

Are still a mystery to me.

Mane, savannah, shrubs, safari form patterns too perfectly recognized without intentionality, pause, focus,

A perfect cerebral evolution against the Open,

In favor of human eyes,

I can draw those with my eyes closed.

Background-playgrounds, feast for contemplation

Leaking uncontainable blue-green webs

Spidery slippages shimmering shudders

Ice water hits smoke hits lips hit

Reflections in water

care for them as a physician-advocate. I imagine physicians to be advocates for the environment not for the means nor the end of producing “healthy” people, but to care for one is to care for the other as landscape is “the configuration of humans and nonhumans across a terrain… both social and natural,” (Tsing 2005). To be a story teller like Uma Adang is to know deeply—to be a student of the sciences, history and philosophy of science, art, anatomy, and politics through the process of living as a curious student of the life cycles we are embedded within. I wanted to participate in an active form of learning through doing by painting a series of snapshots inspired by the concept of the gaze, which I imagine, after reading Bailly, to be a way to access knowledge, emotions, and the metaphysical across boundaries. Exploration of the gaze through painting, however, seemed to be an incoherent endeavor as I am meeting gazes two degrees removed from their presence. 1. The image I create on canvas 2. Copied from a virtual images from my mind and online. What this practice generated for me was not a more refined understanding of the gaze, but the process of painting in relation to how we experience reality through our imagination.

² The interaction of gaze through technology is also present in “Visitors” where moving human and gorilla gazes are met through the camera lens, extending our senses with machinery. It’s not just animal gazes that we meet but that of human as divergent and varied from each other, reminding me of the imagined and real boundaries between humans, animals, society, nature and the unsatisfactory resolution of simply blurring the boundaries or destroying dichotomies not just because they are so entrenched, but because incomprehensible difference, untouchable majesty are also beautiful. “Visitors” is still sitting with me, I am trying to listen to the backgrounds that it have be brought into the foreground, but I’m not sure how I can “become with” the film by anything I have taken away from it cognitively. Our language is limiting. Emotionally, I felt a more intense version of the stillness enshrouded by speed and vigor I felt on the ride home through the country-side. Interestingly, vigorous stillness is also what I feel while painting, perceptible only after I emerge from a work mentally drained from what feels like hours of inactivity.
They too are a mystery,
Yet, ray diagrams and optics are crystal,
And mirror mornings, my every blemish, clear.
Vascular structure of bee wings beat, beats me,
Drosophila, on the other hand, breed familiarity.

Amuse-me while I elaborate: morphogenetic signaling pathways like Notch regulate transcription factors and other signaling pathways like epidermal growth factors to produce differentiated vein patterns. Drosophila wings become a model example of cross-talking between morphogenetic pathways.

But please, I am not a lab rat
Counting flies, ebony bodies, red recessive eyes,
Amateur anesthesiologist,
Frequent contributor to the Erlenmeyer flask labeled fly morgue,
Am I?
A ponderer of the bees’ kneeds
What are bees’ wings, what were bees’ wings, what will bees wings become
When they too join the drosophila in the morgue matrimony?
Meeting the gaze of a lion, bee, eyes of pansy pedals
Was a cybernetic hunt to trace them down digitally
To fill the void in my imagination of these species

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3 This line is reflective of the impending negative potentiality of our drastic evolution with the bee and the biopolitical relationship that has remade them. Kosek asks, “To ask only what has happened to the bee to cause this crisis is to miss the more fundamental question. How has the changing relationship between bees and humans brought the modern bee into existence in a way that has made it vulnerable to new threats?” (2). Bees too have become an extension of human senses. They have already become the new drosophila. The developed western world, however, largely faces only Burt’s Bees and Yankee Candles, missing not only bees’ gaze but the entire emotional and material being of the bee itself. Will facing the bees’ gaze break the dissonance or is it only powerful as a symbolic call for ethicality and a green revolution, a metaphor?

4 Like Cornelia, I paint to create an ascetic, form, compositional ideal, not particularly to convey a message with content. But in doing so, there is no way to ignore the presence of content. Cornelia can focus on the form because she is so deeply knowledgeable about the content already. Cornelia states, “In the end, the picture is everything. Nobody sees the insect itself” and Raffles describes the insect as “aesthetic logic, as coalescence of form, color, angle,” (Raffles 30). I, however, struggled with how to convey the essence of a lion, cracks in soil, layering of pedals because to create disturbance, dissonance, I needed to make these subjects legible. In the end, Raffles states, “subjectivity proved to be a stubborn presence,” a presence that stared me down as much as the gaze of a lion through the digital screen. The medium of pain is more giving than language, or more specifically, the English language. I wonder if I were better at Chinese or Hopi, I would find it easier to convey emotions with words, not needing to resort to trite metaphors, something I struggled with in the process of writing the poem.

5 For Tsing, familiarity with nature is for her a step towards realizing the multi-species interactions, as she states “You visit the spot enough, and you know its seasonal flowers and its animal disturbances; you have made a familiar place in the landscape.” To paint anything and convey its essence, I have to spend time with it, develop a relationship, even if only through a screen, to let
Hunting for familiarity, I met humility in ignorance
Shame in unknowing, momentous shame to start knowing
Impetus for clarity
Of the space in between, fizzing with potentiality

myself be nourished by Nature. The process of painting let me know that I was thoroughly unprepared to convey the gaze because I was a stranger to desertification, lions, the meeting of water and soil, water and light rays, the segmentation of bees, and the way pedals connect to stems and each other. Technology allowed me to become closer in knowledge in but farther away in understanding through alive experiences because I could google daises instead of seeking, smelling, touching real ones. The images that occupy my imagination and my canvases are reflections and productions of tropes, the elemental lion in safari, not something singular created in the process of becoming with between me and another. Heaney writes “You could tell the weather by frogs too// For they were yellow in the sun and brown// In rain” a way of telling that is not a replication or replicable by anyone else. For me then, it is not an attempt at gaze that is worth noting but the only singularity emerged from the process, my struggles with cheap paint, burlap canvas, unkempt brushes, and paucity of imagination.

Together, the series of paintings and this poem, form my attempt to tease out the connections between slowness, spaces for emotional and relational exploration, and the possibility and limits to technological extensions of our senses. It was an attempt to enter a space where I know I can find calm and to see what can come out of that stillness in combination with laden concepts like the gaze. I found that not only am I ill-prepared to portray the gaze through art, the concept of the gaze is limited, even just purely physically, as I wanted to paint the gazes of mosquitos and flies with their multi-surface eyes as well as “gazes” of non-animal life, but both of those tasks were too difficult for my large, clumsy brushes and my clumsy understandings of those species.

I do not wish to say much about the paintings, but I will note the intention behind different forms of media. With the overlay of different forms of 2-D art, I wanted to play with the boundaries between constructed, real, original, manipulated from the “original” acrylic paint on canvas, to the painted lip cutout, to the ink printed factory and cigarettes. I also wanted to play with belonging and what elements might appear to belong to the audience and in what combinations (like cigarettes and lips, but not lips and reflections of greenery in water) and how elements that seems like they don’t belong next to each other (but that do exist all around in the material world but are hidden from sight or outside common activity spaces create discomfort) and what that discomfort generates.