

# Mind-Meandering as AD(H)D Methodology: An Embodied, Neuroqueer Practice of Art-Making and Resistance in Dialogue with Kurt Cobain's and Lee Lozano's Journals

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## Biography

Michelle Attias is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Arts Administration, Education and Policy at The Ohio State University, with a dissertation research focus on neurodivergence and its intersection with artmaking and art education. A practicing artist, Michelle has worked as a commercial artist, muralist and art educator in Columbus, Ohio, and has brought a variety of community projects to fruition through collaboration with arts organizations such as the Greater Columbus Arts Council and Ohio Arts Council. As a program manager for the East Asian Studies Center at The Ohio State University, Michelle designed K-12 outreach programming bringing local artists to high poverty area schools to enrich students' art experiences through community projects, art installations and cultural presentations. Michelle holds a dual BA from Dickinson college in Fine Arts and English Literature.

## Abstract

**Examining my embodied experience of AD(H)D as a methodological approach to arts-based research, I engage in dialogue with Kurt Cobain's and Lee Lozano's journals. This research explores the process through which three neurodi-**

vergent individuals (including the author) use journaling as a site of political resistance to cope and respond to negative social discourses, creating new narratives. Journaling is a private activity, and a unique window on AD(H)D mind-meandering, an embodied, neuroqueer artistic process used to investigate AD(H)D through encounters with the everyday through story, poetry, sketches, grocery lists and rants that seep and leak into thoughtful reflections. Positioning my journal responses with other neurodiverse artists through the lens of critical disability studies, I observe tensions, commonalities and divergences in process, identity, and an abandonment of dominant discourses. Exploring these internal emotional landscapes, intentionalities, subjectivities, lived experiences, challenges, imagined realities, and daily encounters, my journal entries in conversation with Cobain and Lozano reject and expose ableist discourses, embedding intentionality and agency.

## **Keywords**

artmaking, neurodiverse, AD(H)D, neuroqueer, arts-based research, Kurt Cobain, Lee Lozano

## **Introduction**

In this study, I focused on two neurodiverse artists, Lee Lozano (b. 1930-d. 1999) and Kurt Cobain (b. 1967 – d. 1994), randomly selecting sections from their journals and using *mind-meandering* to engage in a process of artmaking. Informed by my bodymind experience of AD(H)D, *mind-meandering* is my neuroqueer artmaking practice, which I am proposing is a methodological approach to research. This methodological approach is documented through a reflexive, mixed media process which uses symbolic imagery and conceptual poetic experiments

to disrupt and reframe dominant discourses of AD(H)D. Utilizing a critical disability studies lens, this research aims to inform parents, educators and medical model professionals about a neurodiverse person's journey to become an active subject, renegotiating conditions of identity in relationship to negative medical model discourses.

To understand what I mean by neurodiverse, it is necessary to consider the social context of this term. Beginning in the late 1990s, the neurodiversity movement emerged in response to negative discourses of pro-cure and anti-advocacy groups and their campaigns promoting fear of autism as a disease of epidemic proportions (Langan, 2011). Perspectives and voices of autistic people were omitted, as parents and researchers dominated the “voice” of representation (Langan, 2011; Ne’eman, 2010; Singer, 1999; Yergeau, 2018), favoring the use of normalizing behavioral and psychopharmacological therapies (Ortega, 2009; Yergeau, 2018). These therapies align with traditional medical model approaches aiming to “fix” individuals with disabilities. Although much of the discussion in the early part of the movement centers around autism, neurodiversity as a term includes all brain-based differences. These differences are considered natural, human variations (Kapp et. al, 2013; Manning, 2016; Ne’eman, 2010; Runswick-Cole, 2014; Silberman, 2015; Spandler et.al., 2015; Wexler, 2011; Yergeau, 2018). The movement continues to expand categorically as other brain-based differences emerge. In contrast with medical model narratives of disease and disorder, neurological differences are repositioned in terms of their potential advantage. This paradigm shift creates pathways for AD(H)D to be considered as a “positive force ... enabling alternative and creative ways of thinking, knowing and apprehending the world” (Price, 2017, p. 338). This creates an opening for AD(H)D embodied ways of learning and communicating, empowering AD(H)D voices and considering artmaking as an alternative rhetoric of expression (Prendergast, 2001).

Understanding AD(H)D and other neurological differences through the lense of neurodiversity destabilizes culturally dominant definitions of normal (Price, 2017). Therefore, a core value

of the neurodiversity movement is the rejection of pressures of conformity, as forced normative behaviors are the product of a society that rejects diversity, whether it is neurological or based on other essential characteristics (Graby, 2015; Manning, 2016; Silberman, 2015; Yergeau, 2018). All neurological differences result in complex lived experiences, producing a “shared sense of disempowerment as rhetors” (Price, 2017, p. 339). This sense of disempowerment supports the use of alternative formats for expression, such as artmaking.

Arts based research (ABR) has entered many art education discussions as a socially responsible and accessible research framework, which expands the scope of qualitative inquiry through disrupting traditional positivist research practices (Eisner, 1996, 2008; Halpin, 1989; Leavy, 2015, 2018; McNiff, 2018; Rolling, 2011). Although experimental in theory, ABR is often retrofitted into the pre-existing structures of “conventional humanist qualitative methodology” (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 603), clinging to objectivity, measurement, quantification, and predictive validity (Lather, 1993; St. Pierre, 2016, 2018), which reinforces traditional power dynamics between researcher and subject. In this study, I envisioned ABR as a post-qualitative method, queering its prescriptive applications through the embodied practice of *mind-meandering*. Such a move focuses on process over product, blurring categorical distinctions between researcher and subject seeking out “the conditions under which something new, as yet unthought, arises” (Rajchman, 2000, p. 17). Not so much concerned with producing something about AD(H)D, but instead concerned with what can be learned through AD(H)D, my research draws a direct correlation between AD(H)D thinking through conceptual processes that span journaling and artmaking practices. As an individual with AD(H)D, I identify as neurologically queer, or “neuroqueer.” The term neuroqueer resists definition but erupts out of the collaborative work of autistic bloggers Nick Walker, Ibbly Grace, Athena Lynn Michaels-Dillon and Melanie Yergeau (Yergeau, 2018). One can identify as neuroqueer, if their identity “has somehow been shaped by the actions of being neuroqueer, or neuroqueering” (Yergeau, 2018, p. 27). My identifica-

tion as neuroqueer has been a process of understanding a vast assemblage of experiences and encounters in which I found myself and continue to find myself to be a misfit—a relational understanding which continues to shift with time. This neurological lens of difference is how I process my world, and therefore can't be separated out from who I am. For the neuroqueer, neurological differences are part of identity and essential to understanding of self (Corker & French, 1999; Manning, 2016; Runswick-Cole, 2014; Yergeau, 2018).

The neuroqueer surfaces rhizomatically from the concept of “queering,” which represents the move to claim “queer” as a political identity category. Although queer has historically been a category which includes a diverse group of non-heteronormative sexual identifications and practices (Grzanka, 2019), the term “queer” has most recently been conceptualized to encompass all that which is antinormative and counter-hegemonic (Grzanka, 2019). Such a broad conceptualization spans the numerous “ways in which different bodies are marginalized and made to be queer in the eyes of the state as well as in their own communities” (Hanhardt, 2019, p. 148). “Queering” therefore captures the subjective experiences of all individuals who fail to uphold the norms of social life, including individuals with mental and physical disabilities. Some critical disability scholars have identified the conflation of heterosexual and able-bodied norms (Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2003; Yergeau, 2018) broadening discussions of disability through the dismantling of social expectations of normal.

Neuroqueer is drawing a direct connection between LGBTQ experiences of “passing,” “closeting,” with the experience of having to simulate required social performances to pass for normal, or having to conceal natural physical and emotional responses in social situations (Manning, 2016; Yergeau, 2018). Unedited, there is something identifyingly queer in my social performance, which leaves people to constantly question my meaning. This has always fueled my engagement in artmaking, as I could express myself without judgement, in my own time, with my own voice.

The neuroqueer exposes the intersectionality of lived experience, as rigidly defined identity categories reinforce existing power structures (Butler, 1990; Chan et al., 2019; Grzanka, 2019). By contrast, queer theory views identity as a constellation of multiple unstable positions. This intersectional approach to disability is a critical step toward linking activism between social identity categories, as normalizing processes are applied to all bodies. Such a move presents a new politics of possibility. The neuroqueer represents all individuals who deviate from the neurological norm, creating a new lens to view those with neurological differences as sites of queer possibility, removing the normal heterosexual gaze to expose a lived experience uncharted and unexplored. With this lens, Kurt Cobain and Lee Lozano can be fully appreciated in their resistance to dominant expectations of normal.

## **My Neuroqueer Obsession with Kurt Cobain**

Coming of age in the early nineties, it would be hard to escape the media obsession with Kurt Cobain. American artist, musician, songwriter, and performer, Cobain was best known as the guitarist and frontman of the alternative rock band Nirvana. Cobain's iconic influence and social justice advocacy continues the legacy of punk, long after his death. Countless publications have covered his short rise to fame and even more media outlets broadcasted his suicide, seeking causation in ableist narratives perpetuating the myth/conflation of madness and genius. I loved listening to *Nirvana* and embraced the culture surrounding the emergence of their first album "Nevermind," and later the MTV Unplugged sessions. I related to this music on a visceral level, its anger and isolation, and the experimental use of sound, all of which mirrored my own feelings of being different.

My personal obsession with Kurt Cobain came when I first read a copy of his journals. At the time, I remember feeling a strong sense of identification and familiarity with the embodied experiences he described, as well as his artistic process revealed in the free form, stream of

consciousness writing, and the seemingly random associations and fragmented bits of the everyday. Images, doodles, sketches, poetry, and story are all bound together in a formless montage with no desire for resolution. He seemed to be in a constant state of seeking and becoming. I thought to myself, *this is my AD(H)D brain, and this is my art process*. I remember thinking that Cobain's identity, revealed through the songs that I heard on the radio, was a watered-down representation of who he was, and that the interesting parts had somehow been edited out. I connected with Cobain not as a counter-cultural hipster, but as an artist.

I learned of Cobain's early diagnosis of AD(H)D, a neurological condition characterized in medical model narratives by overactivity, impulsivity, poor concentration, and deviant social behavior (Reid & Valle, 2004; Timimi, 2009; Wexler, 2011). Similar to other neurological conditions, "disorder," in the medical model narrative, is housed within the individual, with little to no consideration of environmental and sociocultural factors which work to co-construct it. I received a late diagnosis of AD(H)D, accompanied by conflicting feelings of clarity and ambiguity. On the one hand, earlier experiences made more sense in the context of my AD(H)D, but at the same time, new information attached to this diagnosis both diminished and misrepresented me.

### **Investigating the Neuroqueer Impulse to Journal and Record: Lee Lozano**

Thinking about ways to engage with Cobain's journals, I began researching another neurodiverse artist, Lee Lozano. Lozano remains a controversial figure, recognized as the most significant female conceptual artist operating in New York during the 1960s, only to disappear by 1972 from the public eye. Much *info-fiction*<sup>1</sup> shrouds this disappearance which ranges from her associations with CBGB<sup>2</sup> and the punk scene in the 70s (notably Joey Ramone), to her eventual return to her parent's home in Dallas, Texas, in the early eighties, funded by cousin Mark Kramer who claimed the move was prompted by the death of Mickey Ruskin<sup>3</sup> (Lehrer-Graiwer,

2014). This was not a happy return, as Lozano is described to be troubled and volatile (Lehrer-Graiwer, 2014, p. 93). Perhaps most troubling is what little is known about such a high-profile person during the last thirty years of her life. Known to have struggled with anorexia, Lozano was also reputedly diagnosed with schizophrenia, although no record of such a diagnosis exists (Applin, 2018; Lehrer-Graiwer, 2014). American art critic and activist Lucy Lippard, a contemporary of Lozano's, described her as extraordinarily intense, and "the first who did the life as art thing" (Lehrer-Graiwer, 2014, p. 97). Between 1961 and 1972, Lozano produced 11 small notebooks and three larger "laboratory notebooks," documenting in detail her thought process as she engaged with her work (Applin, 2018, p. 27).

Lozano in 1969 describes in her journals, *Dialogue Piece*, a conceptual piece in which she would invite another person to her apartment for an exchange. After, in her journals, Lozano would not refer to any content from the dialogue yet would rate its success. Lozano never defined dialogue. We know from her journals that dialogue was interpreted broadly as in terms of exchange and included non-verbal information, or what she liked to refer to in her journals as ver-BALL!<sup>4</sup> Dialogue for Lozano was not limited to a verbal exchange.

Thinking about the process of journaling differently, I started to question what Lozano's journals *know*, and how this information can inform our understanding of neurodivergence. In what follows, I situate this study<sup>5</sup> in the neurodiversity movement, which privileges the voices of neurodiverse people, who are often spoken for in medical model discourses.

### **Embodied Methodology: Queering Arts-Based Research Through *Mind-Meandering***

Artmaking is the space of thought and inquiry for Cobain, the neuroqueer, the artist, and the researcher who wishes to dwell inside of the experiment, open to the unexpected discovery. Engaging in an experimental artmaking practice is the space for those who don't wish to discard



what “seems too strange to count as science...[as the] too strange is...the provocation, the knot, the world kicking back” (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 607). Focusing on process over product through this post-qualitative approach which defies time and structure, turns ABR inside out to consider artmaking as a queer tendency of neurodiverse individuals, containing a rich minefield of information. Strange bodily impulses and repetitive obsessions, hypersensitivities, and non-normative social performances contain rich information with which we can better understand the lived experiences of those with AD(H)D, as well as other neurodiverse individuals.

This research is predicated on a foundation of *strange*. It’s strange to dialogue with a dead person. It’s strange to hear the voice of a neuroqueer in a rock star who achieved mass popularity. It’s strange to see within Cobain’s artistic process an opening through which new information and discovery can occur. It’s strange to imagine a journal entry, something we conceive as statically located within a book, to be a living, breathing, and continually evolving container of thought. I am in love with strange.

My definition of a journal entry is therefore not a definition and it certainly is not limited to one artistic format, but instead should be seen as a departure, an exploration, a violent explosion. Queering disciplinary silos within the arts, journaling for the purposes of this research is defined as a neuroqueer process of investigating through experimentation, dancing between ephemera, sensation, affect and memory, exploring through experimental writing, narrative, collage, citation, post-conceptual poetry, image-making and sculpture, taking a leap to see what might be discovered on a whim, by accident, through the “process of process” (Richardson & Walker, 2011, p. 10). I am not alone in my process, as I will be dialoguing with Kurt Cobain’s and Lee Lozano’s journals, participating in queer acts which purposefully depart from categorical limitations.

In conversation with the journals of Lee Lozano and Kurt Cobain as primary documents, I gathered information for this research through a multidimensional, layered process between

artmaking and experimental writing forms. These processes “talked” to each other as I experimented, curating and arranging citations from the journals of both artists, medical model questionnaires, descriptions, and narratives of AD(H)D and depression, as well as my own personal journals. *Mind-meandering* through these conceptual experiments, I generated additional “data” through making art works that continued to evolve until new information was revealed. The layering of works demonstrates AD(H)D *mind-meandering* as it investigates through artmaking and experimental writing processes. This back-and-forth dialogue has no predetermined format. Choice in media and approach was decided with all of the impulsivity of my AD(H)D bodymind, without fear, changing direction on a whim. Just as thoughts meander through my own brain, intertwining with each other and producing an embodied experience, which is decidedly different from neurotypical brains, *mind-meandering* is an iterative, multidimensional, unplanned yet purposeful way of working. Journaling through the process provided a launching point only to return to artmaking, meandering, dancing between media, and bending time.

### ***Mind-meandering***

Spacing out, or what I like to refer to as *mind-meandering*, is a process immediately familiar to me when I enter Kurt Cobain’s (2002) journals. Cobain was a recorder of embodied information. The journals are filled with sensory laden descriptions, emotional rants, lists, stories, fantasies, poetry, sketches, and experiments linked together in a seemingly random series of associations. These associations wander between the everyday and the invented, shaping reality through experiment, the purpose of which is not to arrive anywhere conclusive but to continue to explore identity and subjectivity through process. Couser (1997) views the spontaneous process of journaling as unique in its capture of subjective experiences in ways unavailable to autobiography, as it “does not await the resolution” (p. 6). In not seeking a destination, journaling remains true to the day-to-day nuances of the neurodiverse bodymind, rendering journals a

potentially unique site to mine for information.

Cobain's journals display *mind-meandering*, a process of creative problem solving and dialoguing with the self. In collaboration with the journals, I used *mind-meandering* as a methodological approach for this research which explores the embodied experiences of AD(H)D. Artmaking is not only informed by my embodied experience of *mind-meandering* but is a direct product of it. My bodymind itself is the method, the cite of distillation, the runaway train of thought. Embodiment is conceptualized in part as A. Abby Knoblauch (2012) defines it, "a physical motion and the knowledge that might stem from such motion, sensory or bodily response, and a metaphorical and physical connection between the body and writing" (p. 51). Bodies, according to Knoblauch (2012), become agents of knowledge production, creating language and meaning. Embodied knowledge proves a potent force to reckon with, though it is often met with resistance in the academy (Cedillo, 2018; Knoblauch, 2012).

*Mind-meandering* is how I think and feel and sense and relate in a space of experimentation and discovery, not confined to one specific medium, but instead is a process of intertwining disparate components and associations. *Mind-meandering* meandering is how I cope and react to situations, drawing on stories, poems, songs and sensory memory. *Mind-meandering* is the way I approach my artwork and my writing – collecting impressions, scraps and pieces, writing from the inside out in a non-linear montage. *Mind-meandering* describes my professional history, with its seemingly random jobs, educational opportunities and choices, which somehow feed into each other like a tapestry. *Mind-meandering* is the way I engage with problems, drawing on multiple knowledges to address them. *Mind-meandering* is how I experience time, lost in memory, absent from the present, there, but not really there. *Mind-meandering* contains what Jose Esteban Muñoz refers to as "ephemera" (Muñoz, 1996) or residual traceings and connective associations of experience which contain truths of queer presence and queer identity. *Mind-meandering* privileges these ephemera which bleed into my artmaking practice and

inform everything that I do. *Mind-meandering* is who I am as an individual, representing an embodied neuroqueer perspective and self.

Time features prominently in the experience of *mind-meandering*, as this process requires sufficient time to engage with thoughts, memory, space, materiality, the sensory world. The following is my internal thought process as I engage in *mind-meandering*.

*First find an uninterrupted block of time. At least four hours. Spend the first hour letting go of thoughts that tell you all of the things that you should be and do. Sit outside and notice the silence, the air on your skin, the way the light hits the garden. Imagine what lives in the earth beneath your feet. Make a mark on the page. Make a decision which sparks another decision. Lose track of time. Don't find a block of time. Be physically present in the meeting, trying to focus, but feel your mind fly out of the narrow confines of your body to think about the parts of a cell, the infinity of the universe, to remember your own first gasping breath, to dwell with the characters in the book you are reading, think of poetry, think of those you love, escape to that other place... lose track of time...*

Time for me has always been sticky. Rosemarie Garland Thompson's (1997) book *Extraordinary Bodies* presents the concept of the normate body, an ideal subject characterized by the absence of disability. The normate is the imagined ideal in a society which privileges white, male, able-bodied productivity, physical and emotional perfection, and rational thinking. No particular person, the normate represents an ideal to aspire to—a standard with which to measure and compare the disabled body. The normate can perform to capitalist notions of time, meeting the requirements of the nine-to-five schedule without complaint. My bodymind has never fit this normate template. Nine-to-five jobs left me drained and exhausted. The test always required more time than I was allotted. Time slips through my fingertips like water

through a sieve.

“Crip-time” is the disabled bodymind’s experience of time, presenting an extreme contrast to normate time in its counterproductivity (Johnson & McRuer, 2014). Kafer (2013) states, “Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip-time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (p. 27). *Mind-meandering* mandates the physical and emotional need for crip-time by breaking away from structured time. I don’t always have control of when it comes on. It is not always a choice to participate in this bent stretching of time. It is almost as if my body has developed an internal mechanism for crip-time, while I remain in the neuronormative temporal moment. I am fortunate to work in an environment which values *mind-meandering*, tolerating my quirkiness and granting me space to use my mind in productive ways such as writing (Samuels, 2017). But this was not always the case.

Crip-time is a component of *mind-meandering*, capturing the temporal otherness of sporadic but intense productivity, contrasted with the physical presentation of a body needing to do nothing, ignoring the productivity clock. Samuels (2017) notes that crip time is also sick time. My bodymind requires crip-time. My bodymind requires time to let go and to *mind-meander*, tripping over emotions and memories, time to sort and to heal. But it also requires the time to explore with intensity that which others don’t understand or care about. Engaging in *mind-meandering* diminishes the need for sick time, as these intense pursuits restore me. Johnson and McRuer (2014) define crip-time as an internal struggle in which one slows time to care for one’s disabled body, to “attend patiently, carefully and collectively to varied sensations on the one side, and, on the other, the neoliberal compulsion to get better and to be better/sensational/exceptional–quickly...” (p. 138). *Mind-meandering* requires crip-time, time to reflect and consider that which appears strange and unproductive, time which slows for better understanding, time to take care and to withdraw.

*Mind-meandering* is an AD(H)D method of thinking through the bodymind as it becomes

an active site for creative, productive output. Representing a complex bodymind relationship, *mind-meandering* is characterized by intensity, featuring random states of hyper-productivity, information absorption, sensory seeking engagement, emotional sensitivity and devout leisure.

*Mind-meandering* makes connections between disparate information and seeks non-linear associations which straddle a universe of possibility. *Mind-meandering* is where experimentation occurs, where subject matter that is interesting can be pursued without a timeline, without direction and without expected outcomes. *Mind-meandering* means letting go of neuronormative time and being idle with one's thoughts. Time is elliptical, with the past experienced in all of its emotional intensity as a living future. Strange impulses are embraced without fear. *Mind-meandering* permits the disorganized and messy processing of emotions and experiences to generate new understanding of events. Thoughts can linger and the body is permitted to relax, which paradoxically opens up the mind to engage creatively and make art. *Mind-meandering* is my preferred state, and one I enter periodically as I write this. . .

*Feel.*

*You need to make something. Need to resolve your thoughts, no matter how abstract, into a physical thing, which proves to the world your purpose. This is your voice. You were here. You have left your mark. Understand the importance of making the thing, in a world which desires obsolescence. Dwell in its importance. Attach meaning and stories to the thing. Physically experience the process of making the thing. Revel in its thingness, the feel and the weight of it. Learn from the process of making it, about the world and about yourself. Use the thing to communicate your purpose. Use the thing to communicate. It is all about the materiality of the thing, which takes on a life of its own. Still, the thing is your best chance of ever being partially understood. Instill in yourself the desire to make something you can touch.*

*...embodiment, time and space and sensory experience fold in on one another, and even though I attempt to delineate between them, their boundaries erode. In this process of process, between artmaking experiments, I am a transient between borders. I am homeless in this space, a little bit desperate in this space. I am at home in this space. I purposefully seek out this space. I need this space...*

*Confuse yourself. Fight what you know should be ordered, next steps, logical, rational. Embrace your confusion instead of hating yourself for it. Remove your sense of what happens next, what you can expect to happen. Forget about the lie of safety, the guarantee, the support systems, all you know and take for granted. Forget what you know about yourself, because your identity is always in a state of flux, and will always be mutable. Embrace your mutability. Get lost in all that you don't know. Wade through the swamp without direction. Know that there is no right direction. Let go of geographies, maps, instructions, plans, answers.*

*Notice all information.*

*Rank all information of equal importance.*

*Feel overwhelmed and avoid all information.*

*Get excited by new information.*

*Use emotions. I use the overwhelming emotions that wash over me in fits of rage, and I destroy the thing I am making. Lose what is most precious. Dismantle the structure. Tear it up into pieces. Purification by fire. This is terrifying to some. But sometimes, it is the structure which gets in the way. I have no fear of destroying the structure. I have been doing this my whole life.*

*Feel the panic of having to catch up, the panic of not understanding the instructions, the panic of not having enough information to make a decision, the panic of not*

*knowing what to do, the panic of being alone, the panic of opening your mouth and no one seems to understand the words that are coming out. The panic of loneliness when no one seems to understand. Get to know this geographic place.*

*Choose to get lost in memory. Sometimes, sitting there staring out the window waiting for inspiration, I just drift away.*

## **Lee Lozano's Dialogue-based Performances and Cobain's Journals**

My engagement with Lozano's and Cobain's journals is a kind of dialogue in which a written text sparks a response. But what does it mean to dialogue with someone who isn't there? To begin to dialogue with a text, I contacted a fellow graduate student and artist and invited him to have a dialogue about Lozano's journals. Personal, philosophical and ingenious in their exploration of process, Lozano's journals read at times like lab notebooks for her conceptual work only to shift to personal everyday moments, always seeking new information about her world. In preparation, I photocopied pages from the journals and brought them with me. Reading the entries together, responses to different statements were triggered and an easy and satisfying dialogue ensued. Below you will see the ephemera of my conversation—the residual tracings and evidence that a conversation took place, lacking in complexity and resolution, static and fragmented.

Lozano states: "Dialogues exist solely for their own sake," and that no notes and recordings should be taken. Since I am interested in dialoguing with Lozano's journals, I chose to engage with dialogue differently, using the journals as a springboard to think about what a dialogue with a text might look like. We recorded some of our responses, producing the ephemera you see here—residual evidence that a dialogue took place (see Figure 1), which you see in the hand-written responses which have been taped onto the surface of the photocopied image in contrasting yellow tape. These tracings become the remnants of a process in time but remain



insufficient to capture the complexity of our exchange. Absent are the emotional undertones to our conversation, and our own internal dialogues informed by our histories as we engaged with Lozano’s words. Absent are the bulk of words exchanged. Everything was reduced down to a few pairings of statements to represent all that transpired between us. This material evidence created a departure point—an opening where additional dialogue-based performances could potentially evolve. I began to see how I might engage with the journals of Cobain to produce something new, or what Lozano would refer to as “new information.”

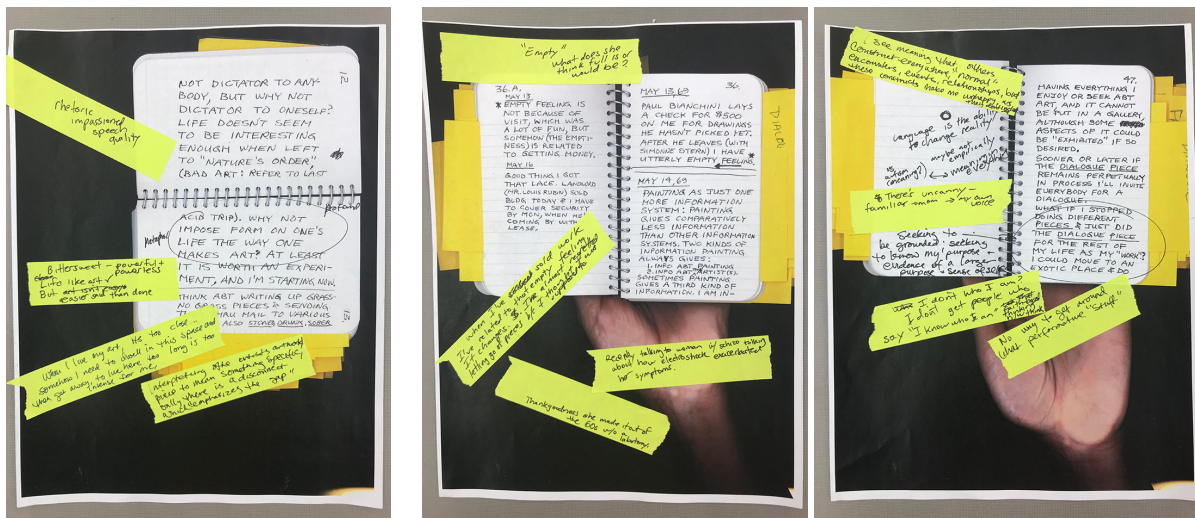


Figure 1. Dialogue with Lozano’s journals. Photocopies of hand-written notes taped on pages from Lozano’s journal. Photo courtesy of Michelle Attias.

## Neuroqueer Dialogue with an Entry from Kurt Cobain’s Journals

Kurt Cobain translates a neuroqueer embodied experience using poetic language to bring attention to feelings and experiences typically not expressed in normate life. This creates space for other experiences of the world. Leavy (2018) states that “a poem becomes embodied experience when audiences feel *with* rather than *about*,” and she cites Hirschfield (1997) to note that this use of poetry brings “something previously nebulous to the realm of the expressed” (p.

226). An example of Cobain's (2002) internal struggle to understand what it means to be happy is contained in the sketched-out lyrics for what would become the Nirvana song "I think I'm dumb" (p. 119). When asked if it was hard to come up with ideas, Cobain (1993) stated in an interview with Erica Ehm for MuchMusic:

I just notice that people expect more of a thematic angle with our music...you know...they always want to read into it. And before I was just using pieces of poetry...and just garble...just garbage...you know, just stuff that would spew out of me at the time, and a lot of times that I write lyrics it's just at the last second because I'm really lazy...so and then I find myself having to come up with an explanation...

Embedded ableist performance expectations aside, this statement exposes Cobain's process, which contains many characteristics of *mind-meandering*. And despite what Cobain states of his work, it is difficult to read the journals as anything but intentional. I began to engage with the journals, responding with a critical disability studies lens and my own embodied experience (see Figure 2).

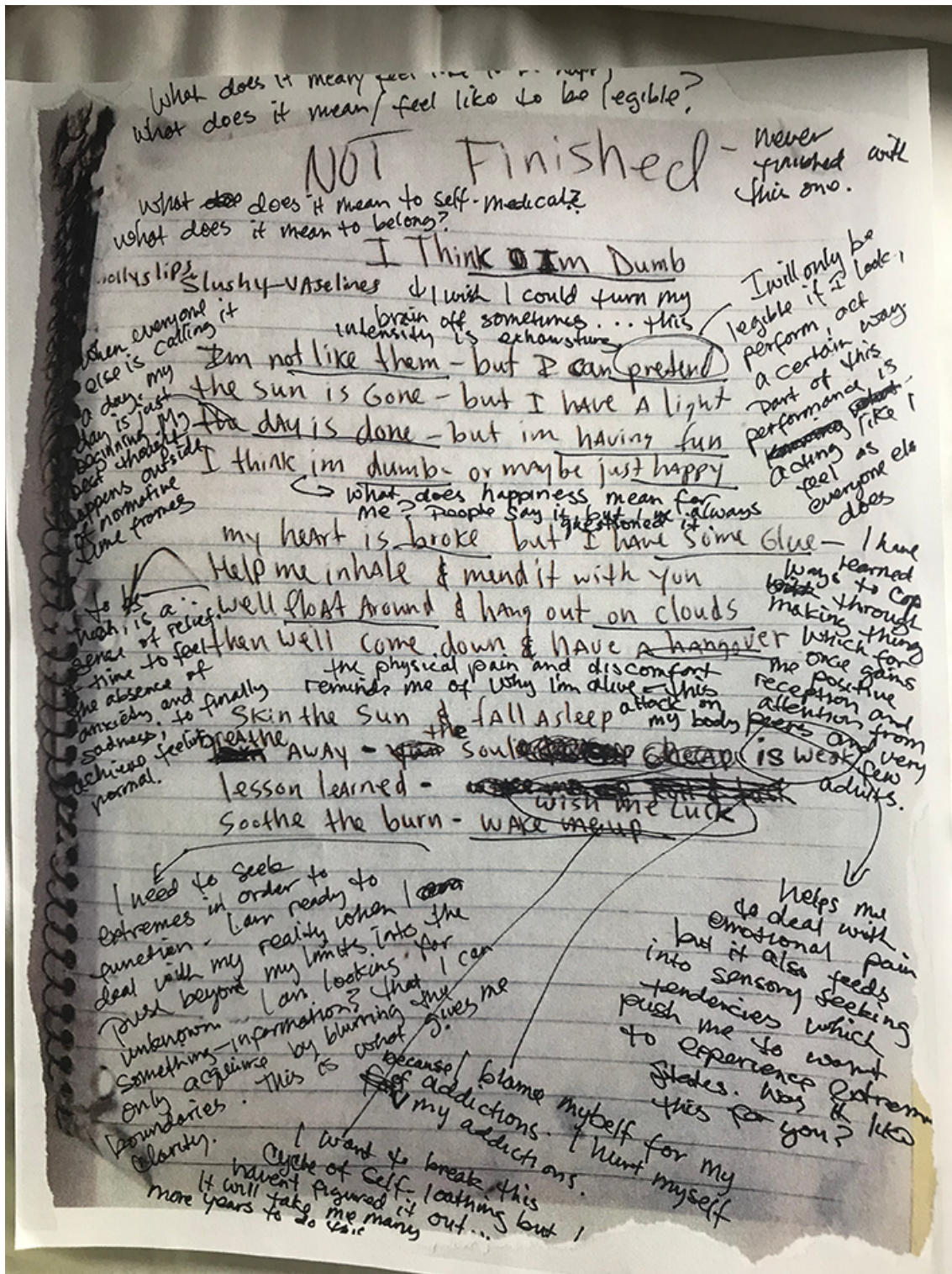


Figure 2. Critical disability studies response to Cobain journal entry. Altered photocopy of Cobain's journal with hand-written responses. Photo courtesy of Michelle Attias

I imagined entering a dialogic space with Cobain and capturing my own embodied experiences in identification with and support of the work that he created. My goal was to do more than simply interrogate the text. I wanted to arrive somewhere new. I began by creating utterances in response to Cobain's words. In the spirit of Cobain's (1993) process, I let it all just "spew out" onto cheap notebook paper, without worrying about whether or not I was producing something good. I focused on feeling and imagery. I then took the entries and cut them up, to place them in conversation with each other (see Figures 3-5). I laminated them, which was a purposeful choice as I wanted to use materials that are clear, like mirrors, glass, plastic, cellophane, petroleum jelly, isomalt crystals, among other materials.

The choice for transparent materials represents the myriad of ways in which neurodivergent individuals experience loss of legibility. In the case of Kurt Cobain, the neurotypical gaze appropriates him as a subject while simultaneously erasing neurodivergence from his narrative. Neurodivergence often coincides with individuals either being labeled and targeted for deviating from the norm, or disappearing entirely from view, or in the case of artists, taken up and appropriated and made responsible to conceal a significant part of themselves from which creativity often emerges. Identification as neurodiverse is often camouflaged by what Tobin Siebers (2004) refers to as "the masquerade," the pressure to appear normal, in control—happy. In the case of Kurt Cobain, I argue that legibility as a neurodiverse person continues to be absent from discourses about him. His narrative perpetuates our social understanding of the tortured artist, with little information given about the social forces surrounding him, or the ways in which fame commodified his life adding increasing stress and pressures to perform.

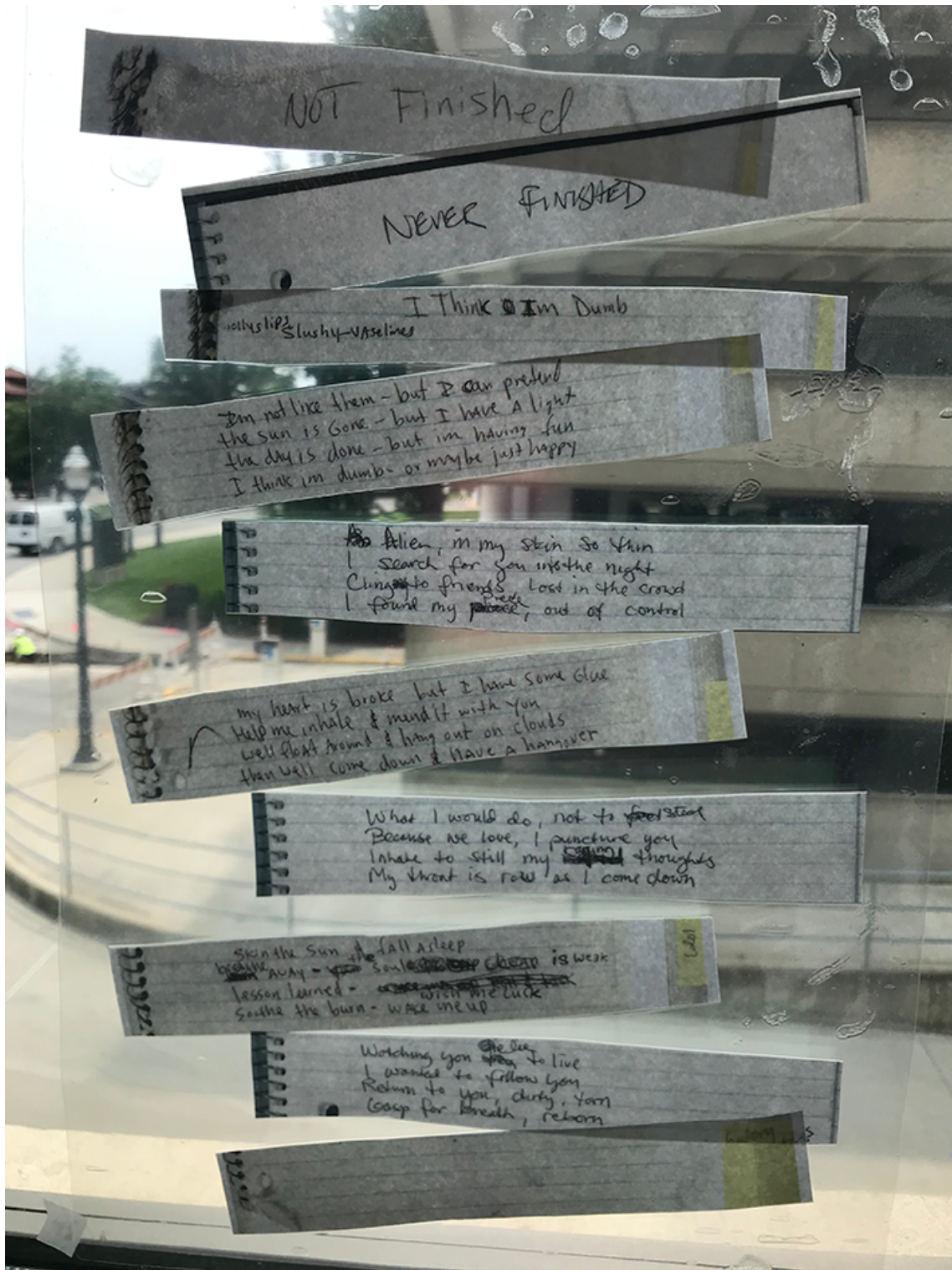


Figure 3. *Deconstructed journal entry 1*. Shredded photocopy of Cobain's journal mounted on transparency and a window. Photo courtesy of Michelle Attias.

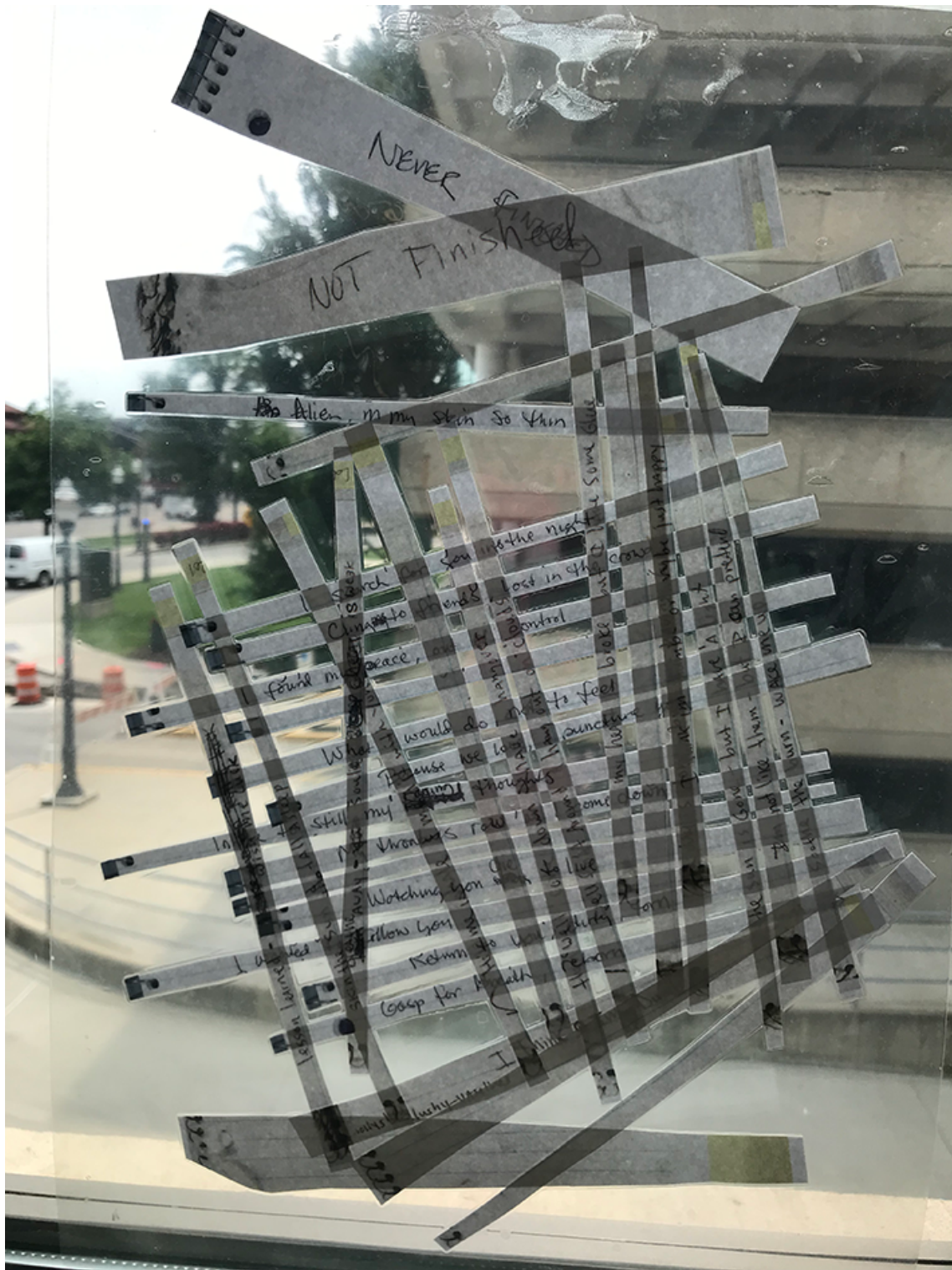


Figure 4. *Deconstructed journal entry 2*. Shredded photocopy of Cobain's journal mounted on transparency and a window. Photo courtesy of Michelle Attias.

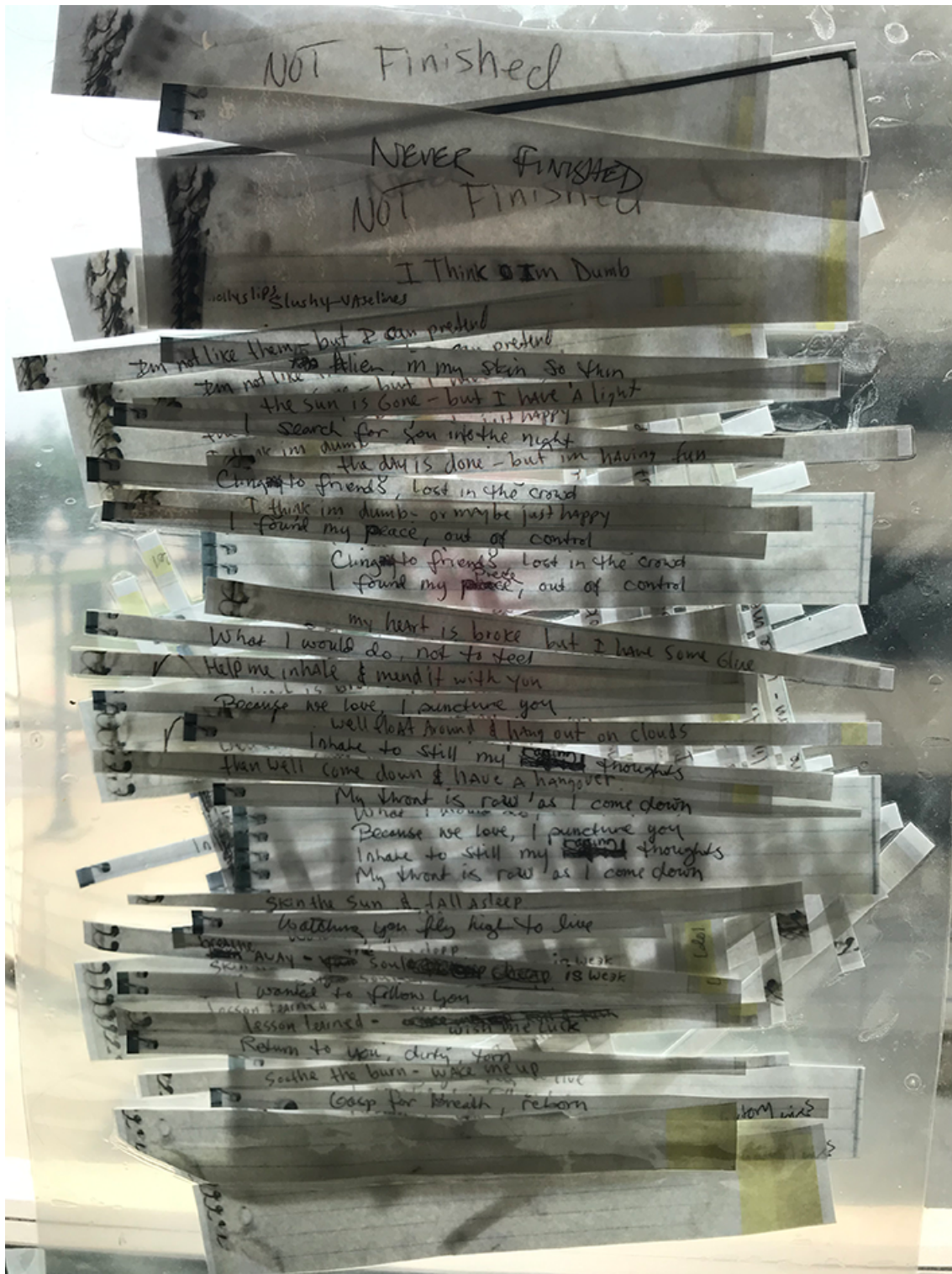


Figure 5. This images shows how both Cobain's and my journal entries become even more fragmented, as I continue to deconstruct them.

## Close-ups

Although I found these initial artworks visually interesting, I still felt like I was clinging to the structure of a famous song. My goal was to get away from what the song meant literally, and to get closer to the materiality of the experience contained in Cobain's words. The challenge is to represent an exchange of thought, and to do so in a way which produces something tangible; something that feels real. I began to photocopy my laminated sheets, and played with the enlargement feature on the copier, enlarging sections which could become their own micro-utterances (see Figures 6 and 7). Looking at the images produced, exposed the following found poems in haiku format.

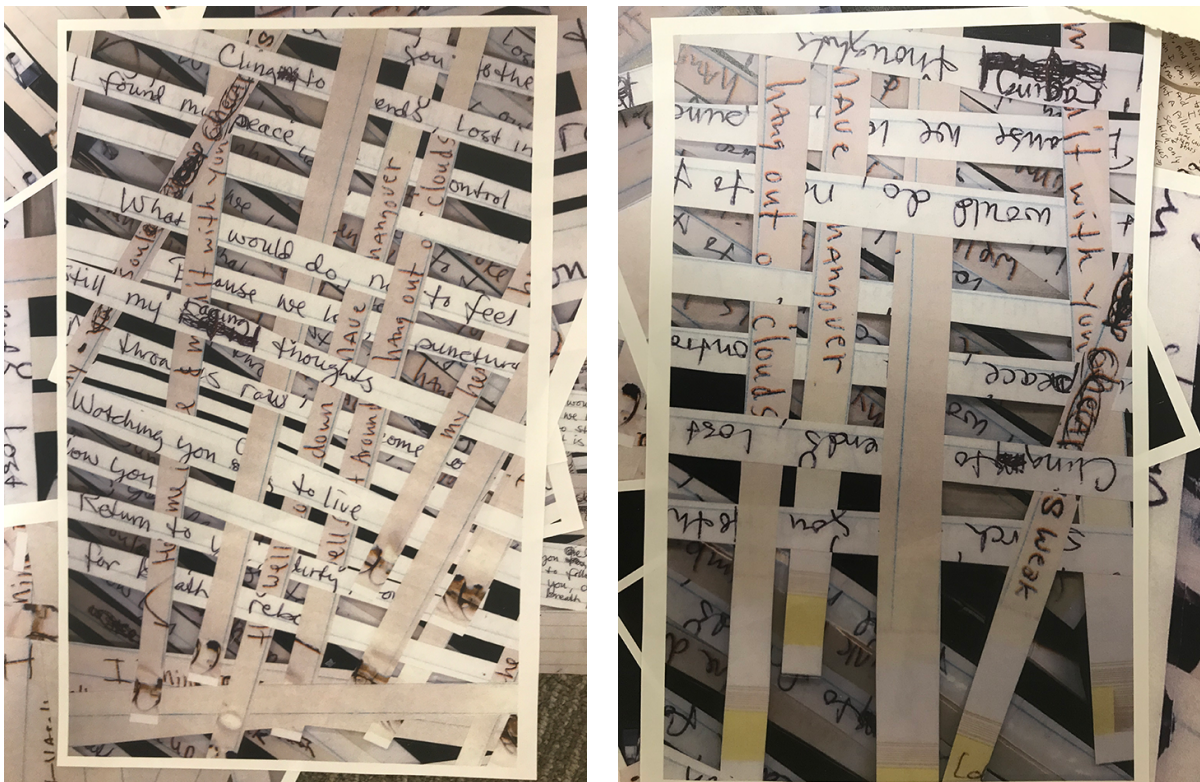


Figure 6. & Figure 7. Detail of *Deconstructed Journal Entry 2*. Photo courtesy of Michelle Attias.



These short haiku poems reflect different themes such as emotional intensity, loss, self-medicating/escape, and hope for catharsis/transformation.

(my voice)

Clinging to ends lost  
What i would do not to feel  
My raging thoughts, raw

(Cobain)

Weak with you I hang  
Over hang out my heart, broke  
But I have some glue

(our voices combined)

Wish me luck to fall  
Sleep, breathe away, soul is torn  
Gasp for breath, reborn

I sense in them physical, emotional, and spiritual fluctuation. What is expressed is often emotional conflict centering around self-medicating and escape as an unsupported means to deal with pain and loss. Although I found these interesting as fragments, much of the original entry felt like an exploration of what it meant to self-medicate, and I didn't find myself discovering something new. Since new information was missing from this experiment, I moved on.

Thinking about the ever-present negative ableist discourses of pathology in Cobain's writing, I wanted to work with a third voice in my poetry thought experiments. I wanted to incor-

porate the medical model voice, as it tends to embed disease within the individual in a flattened way which smothers the voices of the neurodivergent. I chose to use several AD(H)D questionnaires, which I downloaded from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). I chose two questions from the questionnaire which I thought might be referring to Cobain in the context of this song, in particular “Do you have any trouble sleeping” and “Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking or drug use?”

Equally important to the text contained in this image (see Figure 8) is the abstract image of me in the background. This tracing is the ephemeral reminder that human bodies are attached to these words, and these bodies are both ubiquitous and absent from discourses. The pink of my cell phone case creates a fleshy blob where the shape of the head and the face should be. In looking at this image, I recall my efforts to disappear from view, as a younger person dealing with AD(H)D. I erased my picture from my middle school yearbook, the ink wearing away easily with my red pencil eraser. The mirror brings to mind the distortions neurodivergent individuals see when looking at themselves from the outside. And the background becomes a dark and depthless pool. I am left with many impressions when I look at this image, the collision of my academic research with my memory.

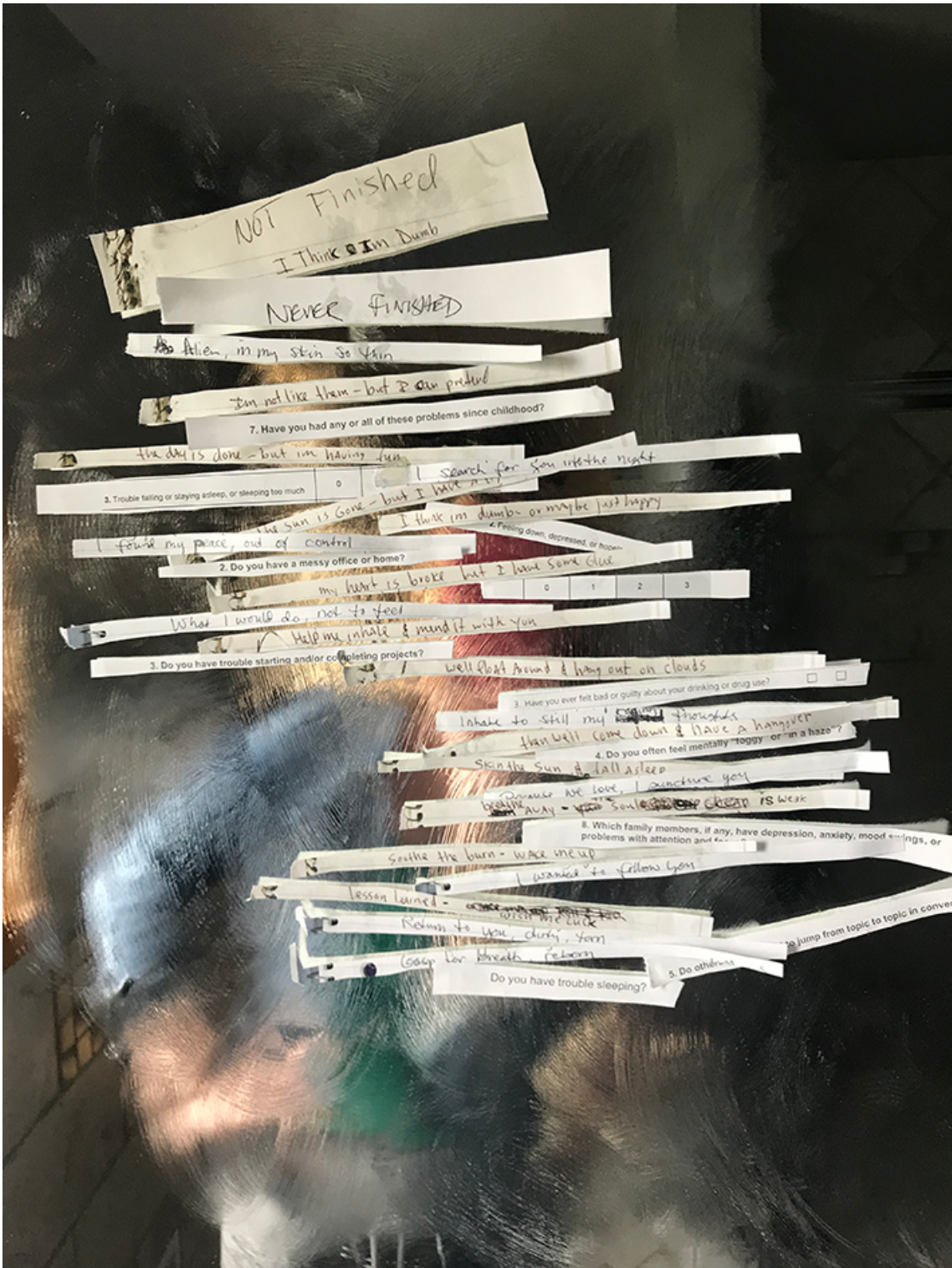


Figure 7. Talking back to medical model discourses. Photo courtesy of Michelle Attias.

I transcribed the words as they appeared and used a text mixer/ poem generator to create an *Ars Criteria*<sup>6</sup> poem from the transcribed text.

**Trouble Sleep (excerpt)**

I think  
I'm dumb  
    Never finished

I think  
I'm dumb  
    Never  
felt bad or  
in  
my raging  
fun  
    I Trouble sleep

Because we love I  
puncture  
    you have trouble to fall  
asleep  
    Because  
we love  
    I puncture you

I Trouble sleep  
    Because we love I puncture you often, feel  
    Help me  
Return  
to feel  
mend it with you  
Breathe  
sun and  
    my skin,  
    so thin

I love how this random poem turned out, not because of its quality, but because I was surprised by the emphasis and pattern of the words “trouble sleep.” There are multiple moments in the

poem, where there is an active statement of “I trouble sleep,” which triggered for me the many purposeful ways I would stay up late into the night, making art with others, engaging in conversations. This was a joyful time, a choice and a statement I associate with agency and purpose. This poem captures the tension between the racing brain which can’t seem to slow itself to relax into sleep, and the conscious and purposeful brain choosing not to sleep in order to engage in creative pursuits. Capturing this was a surprise to me. Thinking about sleeplessness in this way prompted me to write the following poem, which summarizes my own embodied tendencies to be information seeking, and how these tendencies lead to purposeful troubling of sleep.

### **I Trouble Sleep**

remembering cigarette holes  
  Burned  
    into clothes that were not mine  
Conversations lasting for hours  
The smell of rain and damp and tight old spaces  
The closeness that happens between those who are seeking  
  *information*  
Always falling short of answers  
  
I trouble sleep.

## **Learning Through AD(H)D and Privileging Neurodivergent Thinking**

Exploring the journals of neurodiverse artists Cobain and Lozano through the embodied artmaking practice of *mind-meandering* changed my understanding about the lived experiences of those with AD(H)D, and reframed medical model discourses. These discourses are so embedded, it was helpful to use a post-qualitative, ABR approach and multi-media, conceptual artmaking practice to break through assumptions. AD(H)D embodied thinking functioned like a spiral—moving between different media, gathering information and journaling throughout

the process. These tendencies drove an iterative practice of journaling which produced process events, triggering memories and sensations lurking under the surface—ephemera containing rich information about the lived experience of AD(H)D. This information is useful for parents, educators, and medical professionals who encounter these individuals, shedding light on misunderstood behaviors and social performances which deviate from the norm. This activity is also significant for the individual with AD(H)D, as journaling proved to be a rare opportunity to assert one’s voice in resistance to medical model constructions of AD(H)D as a disorder.

The concept of neurological queerness provided a useful framework to think about alternative modes or “rhetorics” of expression for neurodivergent individuals. This has led me to view the process of journaling as a unique space for those who interpret sociality differently and express themselves in different ways. Journaling is a private activity, a dialogue with the self, an artistic process where chaotic thoughts can be released, without expectations of structure, order, or clarity. Artmaking exercises focused on process not product, such as that which is proposed in this paper, are helpful for those on the AD(H)D spectrum, for whom neuronormative communication structures can feel elusive and repressive. Privileging AD(H)D embodied practices of *mind-meandering* capitalizes on the advantages of neurodivergent thinking. This research produced a neuroqueer, free-form practice of journaling, which doesn’t work against neuroqueer bodies, but instead through them, supporting neurodiverse bodies as sites of knowledge production.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Info-fiction* is a term coined by Lozano. Never defined by Lozano, info-fiction is interpreted by art historian Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer (2010) as “self-knowledge as a combination of empirical information and fiction/private fantasy” (p. 95).

<sup>2</sup> CBGB's was a night club located in the Bowery District of New York City, where many punk rock and new wave bands performed during the 80's and 90's. The letters stand for 'country, blue grass and blues.

<sup>3</sup> Max's Kansas City bar was a nightclub and restaurant located at 213 Park Avenue South in New York City, a frequent gathering spot for musicians, poets, artists and politicians throughout the 60s and 70s. The bar closed in 1983 after the death of its owner, Mickey Ruskin, who was known to financially support struggling artists.

<sup>4</sup> As the term ver-BALL implies, sex for Lozano was another form of communication.

<sup>5</sup> This pilot study is part of my dissertation, which focuses on AD(H)D as embodied methodology, explored through conceptual artmaking and journaling processes.

<sup>6</sup> Literally translated to “art of criteria,” Faulkner (2016, 2018) conceptualizes *Ars Criteria* poems as emerging out of the “intersection between scientific and artistic criteria to offer considerations in that shaded middle space” (p. 663). Often created with text mixers, these poems are sites of inquiry and demonstrate “artistic concentration, embodied experience, discovery/surprise, conditionality, narrative truth, and transformation” (p. 663).