

The Release/A Personal Continuation of Intentionality

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The Release

I mark through the motion from step-out to wrist flick, three separate times, before finally releasing the disc.

Woosh!

My eyes follow the spinning disc.

Clank! Rattle!

The harsh sound of plastic striking metal fence rings loudly through the abandoned baseball field, but I barely notice. The noise is an afterthought.

“How did you feel about that one?” asks one of my captains. She knows I am asking myself the same question. “Decent flat release, but not quite what I was going for. Not enough curve, too much wobble. I need to angle the disc and snap my wrist more for this OI flick¹.” She gives me a thumbs up in agreement, and I prepare to throw again, paying extra attention to any adjustments. This process repeats for the next hour, and ends when my concentration fades. Any throw past this point is futile.

This semester, I was offered a roster spot on the Pitt Womxns Ultimate A-team, Danger, after a month or so of try-outs. As a true rookie from a dance background, I knew I had a lot to catching-up to do with regards to strategy and skill, but by the end of try-outs, I had already grown too attached to the implicit advocacy for intentionality and respect embedded within Ultimate’s guidelines than to shy away from the opportunity. Hence, for the past two months, I have spent much of my time in an abandoned baseball field, launching disc after disc into a metal fence, making the most of every throw. Like every Ultimate player, my goal is to be able to predict exactly how the disc will reach its final destination from the moment I release it, and deliberately apply each calculated throw during a game.

My goal is to master intentionality.

¹“OI flick” translates to outside-in forehand throw. If thrown by a right-handed person, the disc curves around to the right of the thrower, before reaching its final destination.

Like Ultimate, *Urban Tumbleweed: Notes from a Tanka Diary* by Harryette Mullen bathes in the elegance of being intentional with 366 successive vignettes of her day-to-day observations, in the form of Japanese tanka poems. While some tankas cleverly describe flowers and sidewalk litter, others pose questions of reflection and reaction, and all are anecdotal evidence that “head and body are connected” (Mullen vii). Similar to my intentional mental and physical preparations before throwing a disc, Mullen’s routine “tanka walks” (Mullen vii) are moments of meditation, centered in presence and observation.

I can’t help but wonder, then, how Mullen’s disc will release.

When a disc releases, it has direction, speed, and angle of attack. As I alluded to previously, the purpose of drilling each variation of throw with control over the disc is to maximize one’s ability to apply the most strategic throw during a high-intensity game. In *Urban Tumbleweed*, Mullen drills the practice of conscious observation and consequently becomes, “a bit more aware of [her] environs” (Mullen viii). Throughout her tanka journey, Mullen’s experiential eye is both expanding and adjusting: her observations, while still fact-of-the-matter, incorporate a more personal and integrated voice as the days advance. Take for example, when Mullen writes about two instances about 200 tankas apart. Both tankas reference birds in flight, yet carry vastly different connotations. The first is a darling depiction of a hummingbird coming towards Mullen: “Hummingbird alters its course, zooming closer to check out the giant hibiscus flower—only me in my red summer dress”(Mullen 26), while the second is enlaced with satire, cuing the reader to reflect on more human, societal topics, like immigration policy and distrust: “A bird flew across the border and when it came to rest, was suspected of being an alien and possibly a spy”(Mullen 100). In the latter tanka, Mullen is still observing, but her word choice and incorporation of personal tone presents a more nuanced situation to the reader.

I imagine that Mullen, with every tanka, is recalibrating her place in her environment, like an Ultimate player fine-tuning their release. In doing so, she releases a more focused, intentional throw.

Not only does Mullen release the disc efficiently, but also strategically to her audience. In Ultimate, “making green” is a concept of creating space on the field to maximize the area for offensive play. It is crucial that the team with the disc creates enough open space, so that its players can maintain possession and flow [of the disc] with greater success. Throughout *Urban*

Tumbleweed, Mullen indirectly “makes green” within her observations. It is impossible to ignore the opportunities of thoughtful expansion within Mullen’s tankas—the consequent conversations regarding societal intentions and implications underlying her playful, satirical examinations of an imperfect world.

One example is particularly powerful in its ability to “make green”: “No, sweet light crude oil and saltwater don’t mix well at all. What’s worse, they make a terrible toxic dressing for oysters and fish.”(Mullen 76). Initially, I deduced that Mullen was commenting on an oil spill in the ocean. In my subsequent readings, however, I realized that by comparing oil to something that humans eat, Mullen paves a path and “makes green” for her readers to empathize with the living creatures suffering from human-induced oily water. Her use of clever metaphor—oil-spill as toxic dressing—and intentional word-choice—i.e. “sweet light crude oil”—allows for easier absorption of harder-to-digest conversations and situations. Whether it be in the form of progressive conversation or a curved, backhand pass, the beauty of creating open space lies in how it facilitates the contextual application of one’s intentional practices. Not every decision is perfect, but developing places for strategy, negotiation, and discussion play a crucial role in achieving desirable goals.

Though I can cite many parallels between sport and general society, it is just as important to acknowledge their differences. I am drawn to *Urban Tumbleweed*’s simplicity: anyone can go on a “tanka walk” and take mental or written note of what they see. However, I realized that its easy accessibility is what makes it difficult and unattractive.

It is easy for me to prioritize patient intentionality within the realm of Ultimate, yet I struggle to implement it outside of the sport. I believe that this is the lack of “Spirit Of The Game” (SOTG) in a productivity-driven society that neglects compassion and compromise. Because Ultimate is played without an official referee, all players are expected to know the rules to call and resolve any infractions; SOTG is the honest cooperation governing the game. Players, whether on the field or in the sideline, should be observant of gameplay at all times—be truthful and transparent in both their actions and reactions. The difference between an enjoyable game and an unpleasant one, can be a matter of intentionality. While Ultimate’s SOTG and emphasis on intentional practice is engrained into its infrastructure, society has constructed a culture that focuses less on the accuracy and quality of our actions, and more on measuring them through

hours and dollars, labels and power. The general public is in a state of unconsciousness; overworked and disconnected, detached from the unknown and unseen.

When I think of those who brush-off the looming climate crisis, who invalidate the indisputable presence of racial injustice and wealth inequality, I believe it is not due to a lack of intelligence, but rather a lack of willingness, that prevents the acknowledgement of their existence. While some, especially those withholding certain privileges and positions of power, can choose to ignore such socioeconomical issues and denounce fact-based evidence and research as “fake news” when it becomes unfavorable, a majority of human beings cannot. How many problems—corruption, poverty, discrimination, the climate crisis—could be better off if not for a lack of consideration for others, for the detrimental lack of spirit in our societal game?

Observation is just the first step of intentionality: an orientation towards the present. However, it is equally important to recognize one’s reactions to such observations. *Urban Tumbleweed* serves as a case-study into what “is” and provides a space for questioning and reflection of what “is not”.

Like every throw, may each tanka bring intention and direction—reader’s discretion advised.

A Personal Continuation of Intentionality

(Trigger Warning: Eating Disorders)

“Enjoy,” says the lady working the register, handing me the freshly-baked delight.

Eager, my tongue melts through the layer of hardened icing protecting the pillowy dough. I close my eyes and imagine each granule of cinnamon sugar hugging my taste buds, as if begging to never be forgotten.

A lovely, nostalgic dessert. My mind begs to bask in its aroma.

I should be content with this sugar-sweet moment. After all, nothing beats the first bite of a freshly baked cinnamon roll, right? Yet, a familiar, domineering guilt accompanies each and every bite. While I try my best to focus on enjoying the cinnamon roll, it’s hard to ignore the unsolicited, pessimistic parade adding commotion to my vulnerable thoughts.

For the past couple years, I've been working to silence this "parade" of *anorexia nervosa*, a psychiatric eating disorder of underconsumption. What started as a means to drop a few pounds to please my parents, dance teachers, and societal diet-culture, prompted much more than just dangerous weight-loss; I lost my emotions, relationships, and experiences too.

When I finally decided to start recovery from my eating disorder, the term "intuitive eating", or eating to honor any and all hunger signals, made several appearances. Essentially, it is just another term for normal, non-disordered consumption: eating when you want to, stopping when satisfied, with no limitations or rules. Yes—thanks to the \$72 billion dollar diet and weight-loss industry that feeds off of society's idealization of "thinness" and insecurities—there is actually a separate term dedicated to what eating, an instinctive and evolutionarily advantageous behavior, should look like (Research and Markets, 2019). Though "intuitive eating" may seem redundant and easy to those who have never experienced disordered eating, I placed it high on my kitchen shelf, next to my beloved cinnamon roll, just out of arms' reach. Near the beginning of my recovery, intuitive eating seemed like an unachievable goal; I couldn't imagine a day where I would no longer plan my day around when and what I ate, nor restrict certain food groups from my diet. Intuitive eating during recovery is just another form of intentionality—being mindful of my hunger cues, pro-actively engaging with them by eating, continually keeping destructive, diet-culture mindsets to a minimum. Intentional recovery is both a tedious and tiring dedication to self-care, but I know it is a uphill battle worth fighting for.

I don't recall my recovery journey as a way to elicit pity, nor is it a cry for help. Rather, I tell my story to reiterate the importance of intentionality. My eating disorder made me selfish and deceptive—ditching my friends' birthday celebrations, throwing out homecooked meals behind turned backs—in the name of pleasing societal constructs by losing weight and being self-disciplined. I was disoriented with no goal but to lose more and more weight. I was an Ultimate player who aimlessly flung their disc into the abyss. I was a tanka walk without a care for the world that surrounded me. My lack of intentionality led to me to hurt myself, and consequently those around me.

During my recent transition to college, there have been several times where I've felt overwhelmed and lonely, and contemplated giving in to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Reading Harryette Mullen's book, *Urban Tumbleweed: Notes from a Tanka Diary*, and composing my

essay on intentionality, reminded me life is rich beyond being thin; I cannot fully appreciate its richness in a state of self-deprivation.

I will eat that cinnamon roll, prioritizing its marvelous melodies of nutmeg and cardamom above any lingering cadence of guilt.

No void is filled with emptiness.

Works Cited

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Assignment Instructions:

Choose one of your Revised Essays to include in your Final Portfolio. You may edit or revise substantially, or hand in as is. What matters is that this a piece of writing you are proud of, that you feel is representative of the work you have done this semester. Then, write a 600-word introduction (or epilogue): a brief essay on any subject--perhaps reflecting on your writing or on a recent encounter with the natural world. Or both, or neither. Here too, this should be an example of the kind of work you are able to do now, at the end of the course.

(Instructions for the essay, without the epilogue):

Using “Lessons in Survival” as model and inspiration, compose an essay in which you review one or two of the texts you’ve read in this class. The point is not to simply summarize the book(s) nor to praise or criticize, though you should think of your reader as someone who may not have read the text(s) under review. How has this work affected your thinking—about climate change, your own and other peoples’ embodied relation to the natural world? What do you appreciate about this work, and what do you find perplexing or troubling about it? Where can you trace connections to your own experience and that of people you know? What additional research might help you to increase your understanding and more deeply consider your most pressing questions or concerns? If you like, include an image or two, as Raboteau does.

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