

On not being there and the benefits of being lost.
by Kara Hearn

Part 1. On not being there.

Part 2. The benefits of being lost.

(and the temptation to leave it at that)

Part 1. On not being there.

To not be there but to also make note of not being there and to even document not being there and to even sometimes perform not being there is actually one very round about way of being very squarely there. What happens when one disassociates or tries to disassociate or performs disassociation, not surreptitiously, keeping it especially from oneself, as is normally the custom, but when one does it rather insistently and consciously? Does an awareness of ones leaving, vacating, hiding immediately undo the benefits (the temporary bliss of

unconsciousness or invisibility, for example), the very benefits of hiding, vacating, leaving? I ask you, can one disassociate emphatically?! Can unconsciousness (and consciousness I suppose by extension... or retraction (one or the other)), can unconsciousness be extended and retracted all at once? I have no idea. What I do know is that this task, this lively, underhanded, tamped-down, dramatic dialogue has not left me alone in quite some time. It demands my attention. It demands to be reckoned with always and in every which way. It will not let me be.

Part 3. A word on leaking.

My grandmother is 100 years old. She was born on December 25, 1907. She's pretty great. She has had a super interesting life and is still funny and witty and kind and gracious, but she is also totally out of it a lot of times, more and more everyday. Dementia is a disassociation of sorts, the mind receding, departing from something- what exactly, I don't know. The thing that strikes me though, when I see her now is this sensation that she is kind of leaking, that 100 years of carefully contained feelings and thoughts and memories are, not pouring or seeping out, but trickling, leaking really- however and whenever they please, betraying her former image of herself. What was once a steady, consistent, satisfied, and self-satisfied rock of a woman is now a smattering of anger, innocence, bitterness, silliness, sadness, fear, and confusion, beautifully contrasted by hours of absence. It is a grandmother I haven't known before and despite how painful it is for everyone, especially her (I imagine. Maybe. It's hard to know.), despite how painful it is, I kind of appreciate it. My innards can relate to her more completely than before- the chaos, the confusion, the imperfection. My outtards fear the day when I too may leak. What on earth will I leak? When my great Aunt Lela, my grandmother's sister, had dementia years ago before she died, my grandmother liked to say, shaking her head and looking very disappointed, "Lela is gone. She's just a shell of herself. The Lela I knew is gone." I hated it when she said that, in part because it seemed like an excuse, a justification for the family to disassociate, to leave the terrifying, leaking Aunt Lela physically and emotionally alone in that nursing home. But it also made me mad because I didn't know if it was true or not, this idea that she was gone and the

stuff she was saying was just a dying mechanical spasm of a vacated body. I'm still not sure. I imagine it both is and isn't true or that it really doesn't matter. Either way, I better do some leaking now in the sanctioned, insistent dementia of my art practice.

Part 2. The benefits of being lost.

Despite great, exhaustive efforts I spend much of my time being quite lost. Whether or not I acknowledge this from day-to-day is another matter. And despite this consistent state of flopping around, something in me seems to know exactly where it is going, or at least, it is my only comfort to believe so. At any rate, and this brings us to the benefits part of the discussion, I am and have been lost and really it is quite unpleasant. But, obviously, there are benefits. I am sure of it. For example, being lost has a way of insisting that one find one's way until one is inevitably lost again. That's good. Also it keeps one in a constant state of scramble, which, I'm sure you agree, is a very humbling way to move about- another benefit, no doubt, to some. And, of course, being lost can be terribly overwhelming, not an obvious perk, except that it is so very consistent with the actual state of things, which seems useful enough, especially in that it leads us to the next matter.

Part 4. On being gone, like really gone.

When one is in the practice of not being there, one cannot help but consider the possibility- alright- the inevitability of being gone, like really gone, dead and gone. It really is quite a pickle to find oneself in- after all that effort to get un-lost, to only find oneself on the verge of being gone, really gone, dead and gone. What to do? The only thing to do, or *one* thing to do, and something, clearly, must be done. The thing to do, it seems to me, is to do one's best to inhabit that narrow un-heroic-ly, heroic corridor between barely being there and being gone, like really gone- to inhabit that little corridor hugely, greatly, strongly, mightily, terribly, awfully, extremely, decidedly, exceedingly, tremendously, like nobody's business- to fill it up until it spills right over and leaks on out.

The end.