NAYDA COLLAZO-LLORENS
An Exercise in Numbness & Other Tales

ARTIST STATEMENT:
An Exercise in Numbness and Other Tales evidences and furthers my ongoing inquiry on how we perceive and process information, often dealing with navigation, memory, language, displacement, simultaneity, hyperconnectivity and noise. The exhibition consists of a series of networks, an interconnected system encompassing multiple references and conceptual strategies. It requires different types of interpretation, as the work ranges from the retinal to the conceptual, from the literal to the symbolic, and from the tangible to the elusive. *An Exercise in Numbness and Other Tales* reflects on the intricacies of our mind and the way we try to cope with a complex world that is as much about data overload and hyperconnectivity as it is about distancing and dissociation.

BIOGRAPHY:
Nayda Collazo-Llorens, born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is a visual artist working in various media, including drawing, prints, video and installation works. She received an MFA from New York University and a BFA from Massachusetts College of Art. She is a 2012 recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. Her work has been reviewed in The New York Times, Art Net, Art US, Art Nexus, and Art News, among others.

www.naydacollazollorens.com

COMFORTABLY NUMB (Detail)
Printed matter from magazines, newspapers and other sources, and found text, 2012

Nayda Collazo-Llorens

An Exercise in Numbness & Other Tales

James W. and Lois I.
RICHMOND CENTER for Visual Arts

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Gwen Frostic School of Art
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September 6–
October 5, 2012

GALLERY HOURS

Monday–Thursday	10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.
Friday	10:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.
Saturday	12:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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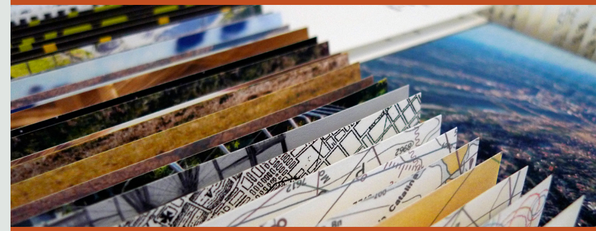
Art Direction: Paul Sizer Design: Lauren Laheta, Frostic School of Art, Western Michigan University.

James W. and Lois I.
RICHMOND CENTER for Visual Arts
Gwen Frostic School of Art
Albertine Monroe-Brown Gallery

UNFOLDING THE TRIANGLE (Detail)
Wall installation with reflective tape, mixed media on paper and text installation view at the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, PA, 2009



UNFOLDING THE TRIANGLE
Archive of collected material (Detail), 2009

Nayda Collazo-Llorens: The Consistency of Chaos

by Kathleen MacQueen

> The environment is what's left to man after he's lost everything. Those who live in a neighborhood, a street, a valley, a war zone, a workshop – they don't have an "environment;" they move through a *world* peopled by presences, dangers, friends, enemies, moments of life and death, all kinds of beings. Such a world has its own consistency, which varies according to the intensity and quality of the ties attaching us to all of these beings, to all of these places. It's only we, the children of the final dispossession, exiles of the final hour – who come into the world in concrete cubes, pick our fruits at the supermarket, and watch for an echo of the world on television – only we get to *have an environment*. And there's no one but us to witness our own annihilation, as if it were just a simple change of scenery, to get indignant about the latest progress of the disaster, to patiently compile its encyclopedia.
>
> The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* [1]

Do we live within the world (as part of it) or do we live on the earth (as a source of exploitation)? The degree to which we are integrated with or alienated from community, culture, neighborhood, relationships, a glistening puddle after rain, the tentative smile on a cashier's lips, deer at the edge of the Interstate, or catastrophic news on the radio is the degree by which we manage to connect echoes of information with vectors of existence. We are obsolete. This is true. But we are not yet finished in spite of the doomsday predictions of tabloid press or the pessimism of dissidents. Creative interventions are possible and it is to inject imagination into this equation of estrangement that I introduce the work of artist Nayda Collazo-Llorens. *"Even on a warm day in winter / insects fly / and when it rains / the sun slips through / as it has all year."* [2]

Nayda Collazo-Llorens is not content to patiently tally the encyclopedic data of destruction. She intervenes imaginatively into life to compute an alternative that reaches the fringes of chaos but is never completely random. Accumulating a sequence of daily drawings to chart her relation to touch, sight, and sound, she conducts a practice of everyday life that includes discipline without precluding chance. Transmissions like sonar across space and into the depths of oceans gather the detritus of communication — leftover signs, headlines, notices, and emblems of authoritative pronouncements as well as gestures between lovers — bits and pieces of code reconstituted into a topographical mapping of our psyches: desires we dare to dream, fears we strive to ride, and conflicts we mark with the resonance of existence.

In a collision of surfaces — real and virtual — Ms. Collazo-Llorens reconstitutes imagination's potential, pulse as well as impulse, a kind of *hyperconnectivity* that relies on the multidimensionality of perception. She invites us to join her, beginning with a discussion that she and I navigated in an effort to discover the experience of *consistency, which varies according to the intensity and quality of the ties attaching us to all of these beings, to all of these places,* and to all of these truths and lies that place us within this world (and others).

KATHLEEN MACQUEEN: Let me play with a thought and I think you (and your viewers!) will catch on in a moment… There you are, minding your own business, walking across time, and suddenly, up swells a crisis…

boom!

…the bottom falls out from under you,

linear time collapses or **e - x - p - a - n - d - s**

…you are not sure which it is — but you are aware of a sudden rift in continuity. A step forward becomes next to impossible because the past has loomed up like an expansive bubbling miasma breaking into your foundational existence. The present has scattered itself all across the living room or lawn or perhaps the studio or exhibition space. Your toe is in Nairobi while your left elbow rests at tea in Dublin and your belly (your center) has gotten lost somewhere in the Bermuda Triangle!

I think you see now where I've taken us (shall I go on or do you want to enter the conversation here?)

This is, of course, the space of information but it is also the space of trauma. Originally trauma was used to describe a physical wound just as pain is considered a condition of the body but both became apt analogies of psychic reality as well. Given the overwhelming flow of information that enters our sphere via the internet, smart phone use, newspapers, radio, passersby on the street, and chitchat in public spaces, we live a scattered awareness that asks us to become, like Alice, small one moment and oversized the next. We are capable — and many contemporary artists live this time-travel as ordinary movement — of shifting from Istanbul to Caracas to L.A. within the span of a few days, even hours. This means, that in a sense, our contemporary lives place us in the discontinuous frame of reference that is psychologically akin to traumatic experience: incongruous, disrupted, and seemingly random.

NAYDA COLLAZO-LLORENS: I guess life is a process of constant negotiation. That is why I am fascinated by the concept of navigation, which I relate to coping.

We are continuously navigating through various time/space realms — is it necessary to distinguish between time and space, I wonder? — it is non-stop, even when time seems to stand still. *Layered* is too simple a term to describe it; and so is *non-linear* as it affirms the consistency of Euclidean geometry. We could try *hyperconnected* or *rhizomatic*. The point is that once you start that journey—and I believe we have always been in it, could that be possible? — there is no way of tracing your way back, because there is no back or forward, but movement in all directions: infinite angles, in, out, around, micro, macro — yes, like Alice! I am talking about navigating that space where so many things, including data, thoughts, feelings, and experiences may at points amass, connect, repel, collide and collapse. There is your "scattered awareness." I am glad that it implies some awareness, so there must be a glimpse of hope.

KMQ: There must always be hope but perhaps not where we expect to find it!

NCL: A few years ago, I read the book *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media* by Mitchell Schwarzer. He traces how our perception of architecture (and space) has changed throughout history due to advances in transportation and media technology. He analyses the differences in experiencing the world on horseback, in a train, car, plane, and through photographs, films and literature. Now, add the Internet and all its virtual possibilities and overwhelming amount of data. And while we are at it, add our own context, emotional lenses and filters, memories, fears, etc.

It's traumatic but also fascinating.

KMQ: These ideas were first presented by Wolfgang Schivelbusch in the 1970s and 80s in relation to the impact of industrialization on human perception and anxiety. *The Civilizing Process* by Norbert Elias had just been republished and his ideas on the relations between individual agency and sophisticated (also controlling) social networks were extremely influential on social anthropologists, including Pierre Bourdieu as well as Schivelbusch and later Schwarzer, who apply this notion of a frame or lens to the interface of social and perceptual systems. This is even related to Marshall McLuhan's technological determinism: the way we receive information influences our conception of reality. Or as Ludwig Wittgenstein puts it in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." One could call it the intersection of objective conditions with subjective experience – what we know exists, what we are predisposed to accept as natural conditions, and what we contend is our actual inclination – they don't always align and what you suggest in your work is that the multiple layers of physical and mental awareness is often undermined or pitted against phenomenological perception that holds no rational ground. There are navigable networks and there are layers of unanticipated intrusions.

recalculating…

NCL: I would go further and say that "unanticipated intrusions" are often impossible to discern since they are part of navigable networks. I understand interference to be something very broad, which may originate from within or from an external source, and which may be tangible or elusive. It is all shuffled together as we continuously shift between different states, whether we are aware of it or not.

KMQ: Are we talking about shape-shifting or perceptual shifts? Can you give me a concrete example?

NCL: Shape-shifting is totally possible in my imaginary worlds *(switch to amphibian mode)* but I was referring to perceptual shifts. An example would be when a particular smell takes you back in time to a specific time/place; for a brief moment you loose awareness of what you are doing in the present and allow that memory to take over.

Code-switching, which in linguistics refers to the use of more than one language within a sentence or conversation, would be another example. As someone who continuously switches between Spanish and English, I am as curious about the shifts themselves as I am about what triggers them. This is something I have explored in some of my text-based works, such as *ESCaperucita & Little Flying Hood.*

KMQ: Yes, I see now, in your disjunctive narrative, we see *unanticipated intrusions* as emotional alliances. We could also re-imagine a political realm. According to a dissident group in France:

> Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by ***resonance***. Something that is constituted here resonates with the shock wave emitted by something constituted over there…An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire – a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density. To the point that any return to normal is no longer desirable or even imaginable. [3]

We've spoken of your work before in terms of vectors but what of shock waves or *vibrations*, *always taking on more density*? The context of your work is the human psyche, disparate and unknowable, yet manifest in the actions we undertake. Can we imagine the tenor – or latent actions – of your work as political?

NCL: Yes, there is a reflection of those concerns, particularly as they relate to systems of chaos. In mathematics, even when dealing with simple systems, the more connected and interlinked they are, the more turbulent and chaotic they become.[4] This certainly helps define the world we live in, given that our lives, societies, governments, corporations, communication systems, global markets and the environment are so interconnected. It helps in understanding the global financial crisis, climate change, wars, etc. But, it doesn't help in giving us tools to fix it. I don't see our world becoming less turbulent and chaotic anytime soon. Do we just let it implode or could we disrupt it?

I am interested in the idea of resonance and shockwaves as a mode of navigation and disruption, with the possibility of impacting other systems and frequencies. In past works, I have explored the concept of reverberation as a metaphor for time and memory, and have been interested in the phenomenon of echo in terms of its navigational use (echo sounding, sonar, etc.). The concept of noise, which is also present in my work, is quite intriguing to me, whether we talk about unwanted or meaningless information/data or whether as a by-product of something else. It is not only what fills our daily lives in terms of audio/visual communication/pollution but also a curious space to navigate, earnestly but playfully.

In terms of the psyche, my interest in all of these ideas, such as disruption and interference, lies in the fact that they can also work for us, not only against us. As we try to navigate through simultaneously internal and external noise-infested spaces, there is the possibility of growth and awareness — not unlike the use of echoes to communicate and find our physical location. In my work, disruption and interference often suggest a break that allows us to pause, feel and breathe. It may offer an emotional connection, factual information, or imaginary strategy.

KMQ: As you say – interference does not always result in a confused state of being. With our own free-form conversation, which presumable could have led us anywhere, we have now landed where I hoped to go next: that is, the method and means of your work! You scavenge, collect, and find space for a limitless supply of random triggers: articles, words, signs, thoughts, ideas, and existing visual stimulus that comes from a wide range of information sources including the web, social networking, news media, advertising, informational brochures, small objects, and texts whether literary, popular, or intellectual. These clips are kept in boxes, almost like a trove of abstract treasures to bring out when you set to work on an installation; it can take days to see it through, as you meticulously draw a visual thread from a random assortment of detritus, as you refer to them. Why is this detritus? A wearing out, rubbing down, disintegration, refuse…

NCL: I don't mean detritus as in waste or trash, but as in leftovers and scraps of information, be it visual or textual. As a matter of fact, most of my previous works that dealt with found, collected and archived information were text-based. In the past few years I have started to use non-textual triggers as well, such as drawn marks, and found images and diagrams that I alter, as in *Unfolding the Triangle,* a series of site-specific works through which I have explored location as an imaginary, physical, geographic and psychological territory. In these, I have examined the Bermuda Triangle, which encompasses my native Puerto Rico, as I stretch, distend and unfold it onto the exhibition site.

The fragments or bits of information that I use in my works are capriciously collected in a very subjective manner, even if arbitrarily and seemingly random. They can be organized—and they are, for practical purposes, in the boxes you mention—by content, visual format, chronology, in relation to location and site, personal or fact-based, real or fictitious, etc., but I am much more interested in a rhizomatic archive that we can experience, than in a hierarchically organized database. The point is not the safekeeping of the material, but the possibility of creating something new with it.

KMQ: I imagine a long process of involvement for this current installation for the Richmond Center. A slow unfolding of craft whose stimulus comes from the rapid-fire motion of information overload but whose process is meticulous, time-consuming, and attentive to space and context….a building-up in response to a breaking-down. *Techne* meets *poiesi*. Or perhaps *techne* and *episteme*. Craft, art, and knowledge merge as our *scattered awareness* coalesces into a perceived experience of being-in the world. You offer both the detached reading of peripatetic memory and the palpable beat of existence. As I remember it, I discovered your work initially as a poem stretched across the risers of steps. I read as I climbed; it was the experience of an embodied mind or of a thinking body.

I like to think of your boxes of "debris," "cast-offs," "disconnects" as little boxes of magic from which you conjure your own interference into my distracted thoughts of the day. In this way, as your work has changed, so too has it remained the same all these years: an open system that infiltrates complacency with resonance *to the point that any return to normal is no longer desirable or even imaginable.*

[1] The Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, 74.

[2] From "Year's End" by Kathleen MacQueen (unpublished, 2011).

[3] The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2009), 12-13.

[4] *High Anxieties: The Mathematics of Chaos*. Dir. David Malone and Mark Tanner. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2008. Film.