

# A Manual for Saving Head

Text by Ruth Skinner, annotated by  
Lili Huston-Herterich

Exploding<sup>1</sup> head syndrome is fairly common, though some people experience it more often than others (hence: syndrome). An outwards explosion<sup>2</sup> of sound interrupts in the middle space of sleep,<sup>3</sup> the auditory complement to dream-falling and the bodily jolt that follows. The blast can be defined—a familiar voice says a name or phrase, clear as day—or cacophonous, blurted, unfiltered.<sup>4</sup> Everything we've already heard is experienced all at once as something sudden and surprising, a necessary discharge of too much accumulated sound.<sup>5</sup> Leftover dribbles find themselves with nowhere to go but back out,<sup>6</sup> and maybe for momentum they congeal to each other: audile group mentality prompts fragments<sup>7</sup> to compose themselves<sup>8</sup> into startled/startling symphonies.<sup>9</sup> So the experience of something quick (exploding!) betrays ingredients from many encounters,<sup>10</sup> revocalized<sup>11</sup> (by the head, but not the mouth) and layered into something new. Numerous soundings into one<sup>12</sup>; or, a very analog kind of sampling. All residues of encounters at once. All audio afterimages at once. Much too much time in one go.

“People are losing their gloves like crazy.”<sup>13</sup> – Lili

*A Manual for Saving Head*

Lili Huston-Herterich

Zalucky Contemporary

November 23, 2019 - January 25, 2020

1. The tufted rug is based on an illustration from a book called *A Manual of Braiding*. This image was accompanying a chapter that could have been titled “A Manual for Braiding Bread.”
2. The illustration is in motion: either exploding outward or folding inward, at either a celestial or an atomic scale.
3. The making process is mechanical and repetitive – thread the gun, tuft a row, thread the gun, tuft a row, change thread, tuft a row. This space and time I compare to what you call the “middle space of sleep.” Some in-between state of consciousness, where the body is the leader.
4. Yesterday I was rolling the words Manual for Braiding Bread in my head, Manual for Braiding Bread in my mouth - Manual for Braiding Bread, Manual for Braiding Head, Manual for Saving Head. Saving head. Like a meditation: save your head. A transformative slip of/ into focus.
5. Save your head from the excesses it has received and not yet had a chance to catch up with. Summon the middle space of sleep to conjure a bodily jolt. A transformation of states: sleep to waking.
6. In making anything, there is always something left over. Things have nowhere to go so they stick around, just move places, perhaps change elemental states.
7. In North America, standard darkroom photo paper size is 8 by 10 inches. In Europe, I found only 9.5 by 12 inch sheets. This is the size that fits into most boxes, most bags that can be carried on a body.
8. Six sheets of standard size paper are tiled together on the ground below the enlarger lens, in the pitch black.
9. The moments of exposure, in 2.5 second intervals, are the only times the composition, having been laid in the dark and seen only with the fingertips, is ocularly visible.
10. After the flash of light from the exposure fades, fabric, printed glass, a scrap of metal, dental floss, a plastic Grimace, are added, and positions shift. Another exposure commits these changes to memory. The image is an accumulation, a layering of these moments in darkness.
11. I have been reading about how the formation of thought happens in the process of speech, specifically when in conversation with another person. I walk around the house vacuuming, talking to myself, rehearsing potential conversations, at least trying to articulate out loud what I intend to say, or what I could say, or what responses I could possibly have in conversation so I don't lose myself. Perhaps there is socially or culturally something about the way that I am coded that means I struggle to make space for hesitations in the process of dialogue. As if we can't afford the time. As if the conversation, the opportunity for those thoughts, is so urgently dependent on that one moment of conversation. As if what we think, what we experience, is at risk of abandoning us if we don't instrumentalize them, ASAP. Don't sleep and turn it into *something*. Give it an *end*. *Conclude!* As I write to you Ruth, I realize even this is a kind of rehearsal for our conversation. Even though together we did consent to an unfolding, an indeterminacy, an ongoingness. Even then, I rehearse. –*I take days to respond so yes, “rehearsed” carries over even here. I already wrote you this: My old vacuum just died (donated from a European friend who hated her vacuum, is very picky, bought a new one and gifted this old one to me, poor soul, who only used a broom). I bought a cheap new model: ridiculous, sexy looking, and much lighter. I'm re-learning how to clean my house with it. My house is never cleaner than when I have other work to do. On a recent housesitting stint, I used their name-brand vacuum to clean some of the dust they overlooked. It felt like a severe imposition. I try to repurpose/ massage that anecdote into something worthwhile for you, reader.*
12. The resulting image sits tiled on a bed of black velvet: a deceiving singularity. Such theatre.
13. I haven't seen an autumn this colourful in years. –*A gardener has just told me this colour is because our usual autumn frost came late.*

## Thank you:

Katharina Cameron for so many things: company, affirmation, honest feedback, love. For my left foot.

Abby McGuane, for the pleasure of working alongside her in the studio, for our conversations in the studio, for ongoing support, and for helping install the exhibition - lifting frames, giving eyes.

Elizabeth Huston-Herterich, for her company at the sewing table.

Meg Huston, who encouraged me to go back for the old pink velvet curtain, and who taught me to sew.

Werner Herterich, for his forever support of my decisions as an artist.

Tor Jonsson, who cut the tongues out of a perfectly good, although cracking, pair of boots in order for the company to issue a new pair under warranty, and let me keep the destroyed ones. For his support, both intuitive and active, and his love.

Nadia Belerique, for ongoing support, conversation, love, humour. For her inspiring practice, and also for sharing her studio space the past month, which became invaluable for production and focus.

Laurie Kang for ongoing support, a particularly memorable High Park walk and studio visit with Baby, and her explosive and powerful practice.

Ruth Skinner, who reached out in Rotterdam, who read my writing, who listened and paid attention, who wrote about this exhibition, and who I am grateful to have started a conversation with.

Parker Kay, for his ongoing support.

Serge of Iron Age Design, who allowed me time for decisions, and welded steel frames.

Fernanda Faria of Akau Framing, who made black velvet dreams come true and allowed me to occupy her workspace to finish mounting the photogram prints.

Sonia Mangiapane, for independently working to repair the formerly defunct Willem de Kooning Academie's colour photographic darkroom, and convincing the academy to reopen it in 2018.

Librarian at the TextielMuseum in Tilburg, The Netherlands who introduced me to the first edition of The Manual Of Braiding by Noémi Speiser.

Gera Bikker at the Willem de Kooning Academie for her guidance in how to use the tufting gun.

Don Lee at The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity for providing the time and space I needed to reconnect to working in a colour darkroom.

Joni Low, for a long, productive and generous studio visit this month.

Kate Briggs, for reading my writing.

Katarina Zdjelar and Liesbeth Bik for their attention.

Juliana Zalucky, always for her trust and support.