
I began the day in a moment of thinking that the most important thing I would ever write would be the thing I needed to write right then, and this was strange because I wasn’t yet sure what it was I wanted to say though I was full of the urgency to say it. It would be the most important thing I’d ever written about my living, about what I saw and what I understood in that seeing, through all the adjacent objects, and what words I would give to that experience and who I would call out to to say “this is what, this is how.” But the thing I was writing wouldn’t be the thing I needed to say until something transformed in me, turned on or closed down, in the way the experience I wanted to write about became the thing that needed to be written. It was a sudden slowing down, and this happened despite the rain outside. It was raining, I’d had to walk through the rain. And when I arrived I didn’t come to the experience immediately. I moved slowly through the exhibition. You never know what’s going to happen to you and you don’t always know you’re carrying something with you that may have accumulated in your walk or over the day or over the past five years and it would be impossible to know the size of the thing once you realized you were holding it: it’s massive, larger than the building you’re standing in, it’s minute but feels like fire in your hands. You don’t know, you’re touring a show at a museum. And I was trying to stand outside of the writing of this writing so that I could feel what was coming, so I could connect the rain to the feeling that something important was happening and, in the moment of it happening, I wasn’t happy. I was uncomfortable; a car had nearly run me over. It had rained as I was walking; my blond leather boots were wet, and this wasn’t how I wanted to capture the experience. I wanted to begin already inside the thing I was holding, which was separate from the weight you may or may not have been carrying when you entered that room but most probably were carrying because at the very least someone had almost hit you and you had to throw your body to save your body and this was something that darkened the space inside you, or rather blasted the space with a hard terrifying light, so bright and noisy that you went a little dead to withstand it. I couldn’t name all the times I went a little dead and was certain that there were many times of my going
dead without my even knowing it, because all day small things happened and sometimes they were just about being in the wrong place at the wrong time but sometimes they were about someone saying no to you because you were black or rather because you weren’t white and maybe this was on your mind because of the city you were in when the car nearly struck you, when you were walking in the rain outside, when you entered that museum. But when I enter a museum something quiets in me and this has everything to do with architecture, so, though I might have been carrying something that weighed on me and was massively miniscule, I was in a kind of structure that talked to me as soon as I’d entered it, so entering was like, “Hey Renee, what do you think,” and the question would trail off because it was as if the space was open to whatever I might say. “I think…” I’m sure I began to answer somewhere in me where I wasn’t a little dead and let the ellipses hum. You were always answering what you thought in how you moved across the floor, in how your blood pounded in your body, as you moved your hand toward something you’d never touch, inscribing labyrinths in the air, and somehow it’s the not-touching that leads to your sublimation. It was strange how I’d been standing in place for a while, just gazing at these images, a composition of figures I could never have imagined, and something was being undone in me, but for a long time I didn’t know it. Maybe I was pretending to take in the show, going through the motions of gazing without yet gazing. But gazing somewhere where what I saw was exactly what I needed to see to unload the thing I was carrying, which, in this case, I knew I was carrying, because of the car that had nearly hit me and how this filled me with rage. I had been standing in the dark gallery where Kahlil Joseph’s Wild Cat was playing on three screens brought together in a triangular form, where the triangle hung between the ceiling and floor, and beneath the triangle, on the floor, in its own triangular shape, was laid out a mound of dirt. The screens were like a triangle tipped over, lying on its side, so that when you were standing there at the threshold of the room you looked at what would be the bottom of that tipped over structure; and extending from each side of that rectangular shape, which formed the floor (knocked over) or the back of the triangle, was another rectangular screen, these two met at a V on the opposite side of the room. This was Kahlil Joseph’s presentation of his film Wild Cat, but the screens were translucent, so none of the images landed. There were three channels and three screens but
the screens were like the surface of water so this was a different kind of viewing than I was used to. Each image seemed to fall into the one behind it. I had been standing in the back of the gallery, at the V, when I noticed I wasn’t breathing or I was breathing but so slowly, with so much distance between breaths, that this breathing was like making a tunnel in the space. I was standing at the back of the room and at the end of the tunnel when I finally saw what I was seeing (the tunnel had formed as a consequence of my seeing but I didn’t know this yet: you’ve walked a mile out across a field but because of what you’re carrying you think you’re still sitting on that bench but you can’t sublimate until you realize you aren’t there anymore). I didn’t know how to begin describing what these images were because I didn’t know how to compose what I’d seen rather than merely list what was there. How do I account for the sound accompanying the images on the screen, a music that was like tones being shot out of something, let loose in an airless room, a sound that gathers and slows down but refuses closure: it pushes you, farther into the tunnel of your experience. I’m saying “tunnel” but what I mean is something wall-less, a containing that doesn’t enclose yet forms around you anyway; a feeling that becomes a place or an awareness of the mind changing, something clearing out but what’s vacated putting a kind of pressure on you, pulling you long and back. I hadn’t seen what I was seeing before and I didn’t want to know whether it was real; I didn’t want to know the story behind these figures: black men in cowboy hats, riding horses and bucking on bulls, black people in the stands watching these events of the men, black women in dresses that seemed centuries old, moving their bodies like birds, two black youths riding a tractor or dune buggy, one of the youths in a fancy white dress; the girl in the dress later walking through the rodeo, everything dusty, dusk everywhere. I couldn’t put names to what I was seeing. I didn’t understand the time of these figures. Some of the faces were old or tired, staring into the camera, or looking out the front door; in one of the shots, there was a television, but mostly this was a landscape without technology. Their clothes were important; fabric was time and time seemed to dislocate these people. And I was in time but as experienced through a tunnel where something still bounces off your body and you realize you’re being consoled. “I am being consoled,” I felt in my body and was stunned and sat for a long time in the wake of those words. These figures, their shadow-states, their floating in and out of each other was taking care of something that had
never been touched, and the day where it was raining and a car nearly ran me over began to recede, being replaced by a deep unknown. I didn’t want to know who these people were; I was beyond asking if they were real. Yet, in trying to say what was most important to my living about what I was seeing, I needed to get at the other presences in the room or in those projected images or in me or in the space between me and those things, in something becoming disclosed, something clearly outside of language, because I had been writing for fourteen hundred words and I still hadn’t come close to this reckoning. It wasn’t the fact of seeing these scenes, shot in black-and-white, shot out of time and beyond time, slower than time and breath; it wasn’t the story of these people riding bulls, living some rural, impoverished life—these were not what had opened me into a tunnel; my body some form of perception. It seemed to have something to do with the making of the film itself, taking blackness and ringing all whiteness from it, whiteness as a way of seeing, another thing I carried, and in the slowness, in the silence, a pattern discloses as if, just in that moment, it has emerged out of the earth, as yet written or comprehended, without value, judgment, category: not denied because not graspmable.