

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

# **CURRENTS 123: TAMARA JOHNSON**

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GALLERY 301

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

## ***Centrifuge, 2024***

**duration: 13:28**

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### **Part II: Narrated Script**

My ears seem uneven, and my throat lower down, near my guts. The living room is at a funhouse angle; everything smells sweet and rotten, and each gagging step feels like the first step off a merry-go-round. Trying to find equilibrium, I press against the wall, close my eyes, and swallow, and it's gone. For now.

I have always been quick to nausea—seasick on boats, car sick from tying my shoe, forever locating the closest barf bag on airplanes. But these attacks, growing more frequent each day, were different. Searching for answers, I became aware of a strange fact: we have “crystals” in our ears. These crystals, known as otoconia, can become dislodged and float around, causing your world to bend.

The condition is called benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, or B.P.P.V. Besides finding it difficult to say, I also found it difficult to talk about. My ailment was met with skepticism, confusion, and a bouquet of home remedies. My closest family and friends were slow to believe me. It felt like I was a little crazy.

Around the time of my dizziness, I began working on a screenplay for a character I called Goo Girl. Goo Girl is an anti-superhero whose body episodically falls apart in novel ways.

Scene one: She is at work in the field—a swampy forest with power lines overhead. Her occupation, scientist, journalist, or hobbyist, is unclear. She collects small objects resembling body parts in the wild, like foraging for mushrooms, and places them in labeled baggies. While collecting, she begins to sense a surge of radio-like interference. It's invisible, but all around her, the air becomes hot and filled with a dull sound. Despite feeling dizzy, she continues her work.

Scene two: The surrounding interference grows more potent, and she becomes disoriented. She begins to spin, slowly at first and then faster, until she transforms into a massive tornado.

Scene three: Landscape turning, her body is a complete blur, and she finally breaks down into gumbo. As her tornado body turns outward, the world around her breaks down and dissolves with her.

A spinning body denotes a transformative state. It can be an expression of the joyful, crazed, possessed, trapped—a transcendence of gender, class, confines of circumstance, or a body on the brink of something else, something other.

Spinning can summon a second self, impressing the body with supernatural powers, deflecting bullets and jumping over fences, or a triple-axel landing with 420 pounds of pressure on an icy surface. It's playful, a release of pleasure. The spinning body longs for a moment remembered but never experienced, never reached.

The female protagonist in Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* is stuck in a looping and refracting nightmare. At various points in the film, she finds herself in different thin slices of the moments before her death. Do these events ultimately occur during waking life or just in a dreamscape? The film is never explicit - both ideas are possible simultaneously.

One cure for B.P.P.V is a series of head gyrations called the Epley Maneuvers. The maneuvers involve moving the head into four different positions sequentially, taking advantage of gravity to roll the tiny bits of calcium carbonate out of the more sensitive parts of the canal and back into more benign territories.

When Vanna White debuted on Wheel of Fortune, she spun after walking through the curtain, introducing her body as a turning machine for the next 40 years.

The Wheel of Fortune is the tenth card in the Tarot deck. The card showcases the goddess Fortuna, also known as Lady Luck. Similar to spinning Sufis, who

engage in whirling worship of celestial mechanisms, Fortuna represents a cosmic connection with forces greater than ourselves.

The first incarnation of the wheel on Wheel of Fortune was created in 1975 by a man named Ed Flesh. It consisted of cardboard, paint, and lightbulbs. Years later, in 1983, its spiritual cousin, the carnival ride commonly called The Gravitron, first appeared at a seaside amusement park in New Jersey.

The Gravitron, a peculiar contraption, envelops its riders within a wholly enclosed space adorned with angled, cushioned panels, lights, and loud music emanating from the combination DJ and operator at the center. With the world around us accelerating into tighter and tighter loops, the Gravitron feels resonant. It often feels like someone else is choosing the music, and we are reduced to spectators of the blur.

Having a child is a tiny and wonderful disaster that tears a hole into your life. Like the main character in Gogol's short story "The Nose," this piece of me has detached itself, and it's wearing clothes and making friends—and creating her own spinning world. The sweetest breaks are at night when I am alone in the tub. I open the drain, and a thin vortex appears. I watch it dance into an hourglass of disappearing water.

In *Meshes of the Afternoon*, Deren composes a shot of four steps, like life emerging from the primeval ocean. She wrote to curator James Card in a letter: “Those four strides, in my intention, span all time.”

With a baby, time is reduced to lazy loops, repeating little routines, weird rhyming songs, the same short books, and the same game of Ring-a-round the Rosie. Diapers, bottles, we all fall down. We play together with constituent parts of language. A canonical babbling makes a music out of these tiny parts. Non-lexical vocables slip and fall forward. A spinning word soon triggers a tiny tornado.