networks of experience: art and (dis)embodiment

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Networks of Experience: Art and (Dis)embodiment

Any encounter between an audience and a work of art is experiential. Beyond this universal dimension, much of contemporary art asks more of its viewers than just viewing. Art that demands physical attention, emotional labour, or visceral reactions crosses into a new territory and invites varied modes of experience, including those of memory, haunting and tradition.

This conference invites investigations of experience in contemporary art, across its various embodied practices: artists’ lived/personal experience as embodied in their art; the experiences of spectators and audiences; and experience as cultural legacy/history, including experiences of colonialism and decolonization.

Meet the Graduate Cohort

This conference was created and developed by OCAD University's graduate cohort of the Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories (MA) program:

Madeleine McMillan holds a Master’s degree in the New Media stream of the Contemporary Art, Design, and New Media Art Histories program. She received her BA from McMaster University in 2016, with a Combined Honours Degree in Art History and Multimedia Art. Her artistic practice and research favours video art installations, projections, found sound environments, and abstract paintings. Her focus of research stems from an interest in projection art, and the ways in which the mutable screen can be manipulated by the artist in order to establish new meanings, either through a site, nature, or in human action. She is currently a PhD student in the Media Studies program at Western University.

Samantha Robbie-Higgins is a second year graduate student in the Contemporary Art stream of the Contemporary Art, Design, and New Media Art Histories Program at OCAD University. She received her BFA from OCAD University in 2014 and was also enrolled in the OCAD University Off-Campus Florence Program between 2013 and 2014. Her project draws on and challenges concepts around kitsch/souvenir objects that replicate the Renaissance Maestro Michelangelo’s *David*. While investigating the history of the *David*, The Grand Tour of Europe, Greco-Roman traditions in sculpture, as well as theories on aestheticism and kitsch, her project aims to understand the metaphysical attributes that arise from an extremely specific object. Can these objects be a separate entity from the original or is *David* itself kitsch?

Alessia Rose Pignotti is a practicing conceptual artist and graphic designer from Toronto, Ontario, who engages with ideas of the human experience of art and design. She recently completed a Master of Arts degree from OCAD University in the Design stream of the Contemporary Art, Design, and New Media Art Histories program in 2019. She received an Honours Bachelor of Arts from the University of Toronto in a joint program with Sheridan College in 2017. Recently, Alessia has been working as a Graphic Design Teaching Assistant at Sheridan College and a Research Assistant at Wapatah, a centre for Indigenous Visual Knowledge at OCAD University.
Rachelle Sabourin is a writer, editor and arts administration professional in Tkaronto/Toronto, Ontario. She holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History as well as a graduate Curatorial Studies diploma from York University, and a Master’s degree in Contemporary Art History from OCAD University where her research focused on contemporary graffiti practices in Toronto. As co-founder and editor of Cross Process, Rachelle is proud to work as an independent publisher with her business partner Calin Stefan. CP brings together local artists and writers from smaller communities beyond the downtown core to collaborate and create a gallery in book form.

Katherine Walker is an art historian, writer, and art educator from Toronto, ON. She recently completed her Master of Arts degree from OCAD University in the Contemporary Art, Design, and New Media program. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts from Queen’s University, where she studied Art History and Classical Studies. Katherine is currently working at the Station Gallery in Whitby, ON, as their Community and Education Coordinator.

Shohreh Golazad is currently pursuing a Masters at OCAD University in New Media Art History and is also a practicing artist, translator, and research assistant.

Juan Escobar-Lamanna has an MA in new media from OCAD U and a BA in cinema and media studies from York University. He studies videogames and online videogame communities, focusing specifically on the relatively new practice of speedrunning and the speedrunning communities it spawns and is looking to continue this research as a PhD student. His interests lie in trying to find ways in which these videogame-centric practices and the people involved can help create new ways to study community formation and show why playing videogames can create unique social experience.

Land Acknowledgement

OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

On behalf of the CADN Graduate Cohort, we would like to extend a special thank you to our keynote speaker, panel presenters and sponsors, as well as our Graduate Program Director, Dr. Keith Bresnahan, for his support in the development of this conference.
Dr. Erin Manning, Concordia University

Nestingpatching

In this talk I bring into relation two practices – Helio Oiticica’s Nests and SenseLab’s schizoanalytic work on the material practice of thresholding. Thinking-with Laura Harris’s work on an aesthetic sociality of blackness, I explore the aesthetic yield in practices that foreground emergent collectivity. With the specter of a pragmatics of the useless always in the offing, I explore the artful potential of processes that orient toward an approximation of proximity and compose with the minor socialities that come alive at this interstice.

Erin Manning is a professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University (Montreal, Canada). She is also the founder of SenseLab (www.senselab.ca), a laboratory that explores the intersections between art practice and philosophy through the matrix of the sensing body in movement. Current art projects are focused around the concept of minor gestures in relation to colour and movement. Art exhibitions include the Sydney and Moscow Biennales, Glasshouse (New York), Vancouver Art Museum, McCord Museum (Montreal) and House of World Cultures (Berlin) and Galateca Gallery (Bucarest). Publications include For a Pragmatics of the Useless (Duke UP, forthcoming), The Minor Gesture (Duke UP, 2016), Always More Than One: Individuation’s Dance (Duke UP, 2013), Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009) and, with Brian Massumi, Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience (Minnesota UP, 2014).
About the Speakers

Daniel Walker (University of Alberta)
Daniel Walker is an MA candidate in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture program at the University of Alberta. Walker's current thesis research explores three experimental art practices with relation to design, ecology, and aesthetics.

Angel Callander (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)
Angel Callander is a writer and art historian from the Niagara region, currently living in Toronto. She recently completed her M.A. Kunst- und Bildgeschichte (Art History and Visual Culture) at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Under the supervision of Dr. Inge Hinterwaldner, her Master’s thesis focuses on women’s performance art as the locus of historical conceptions for what constitutes “womanhood” as a material, social category, as well as speculating a future ontology of womanhood through post-human theory.

Mark Terry (York University)
Mark Terry received his PhD from Toronto’s York University defending his dissertation – The Geo-Doc: Remediating the Documentary Film as an Instrument of Social Change with Locative Theory and Technologies. His research has recently been adopted by the United Nations for its annual climate summits.

Katie Lydiatt (Carleton University)
Katie Lydiatt is a first year MA student in Art History and curatorial studies at Carleton University. Coming from an interdisciplinary background in art history and communications studies, her interests often encompass contemporary art and new media and their impact on memory and identity. Her current scholarly research centres around issues of memory in contemporary Canadian photography.

Angela Glanzmann (University of British Columbia)
Angela Glanzmann is a queer settler, artist and art worker currently based in the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Sélííwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations (aka Vancouver B.C). She received her BFA from NSCAD University in 2013 and is in the second year of her MFA at the University of British Columbia. Her practice revolves around video, performance, sculpture and installation. Her research is currently investigating connections of post-trauma, affect, labour, precarity and their latent markings on a body.

Julia Prudhomme (McMaster University)
Julia Prudhomme is a curator and artist living and working in Winlaw, B.C. Julia researches, writes about, and curates exhibitions focusing on artistic process, arts labour, and feminist critical theories, in addition to having completed a Master of Fine Arts (UBC). Julia has contributed to art galleries and artist-run centres in numerous capacities for over ten years and continues this work as a PhD candidate at McMaster University in Communications, New Media and Cultural Studies concomitant and Executive Director at Oxygen Art Centre (Nelson, BC).
Andrew Bailey (York University)
Andrew Bailey is a PhD candidate within the Art History and Visual Culture program at York University. His research focuses on new media art that is in dialogue with video game culture, with an emphasis on works that interrogate how video games are affected both materially and conceptually by the processes of time. Andrew also holds a MA in Art History & Curatorial Studies from York University, and a BFA in Printmaking from OCAD University.

Adrienne Matheuszik (OCAD University)
Adrienne Matheuszik is a multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto, Ontario. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from University of Ottawa and a Graduate Certificate in Digital Technologies in Design Art Practice. She is currently an MFA Candidate at OCAD University in the Interdisciplinary Masters in Art, Media and Design. She has exhibited in Canada and the United States.

Daniel Evans (University of Alberta)
Daniel Evans is an interdisciplinary artist from Edmonton, Alberta. Operating in the expanded field of printmaking, he incorporates 3D modelling, rapid prototyping, and virtual- and augmented-reality technologies alongside traditional printmaking and drawing. Evans studied at MacEwan University (Dip.), the Alberta College of Art and Design (BFA), and the North Wales School of Art and Design (MA). He is currently an MFA candidate in printmaking at the University of Alberta.

Parker Kay (The Centre for Experiential Research)
Parker Kay is a multi-disciplinary artist and writer currently working in Toronto, Canada. With a Bachelor’s of Fine Arts degree in New Media, Kay’s practice looks at the rise of Network Culture and how the proliferation of digital communication has permeated our lives and marked our landscapes. Kay is currently the director of Pumice Raft, a researcher and collections manager at The Archive of Modern Conflict, and on the board of directors at Art Metropole.

Emily Cadotte (OCAD University)
Emily Cadotte is of settler ancestry and is a current Master’s student at OCAD University. Emily completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Concordia University in Montreal. She has worked as an arts administrator, most recently as Assistant Curator of the Thames Art Gallery in Chatham, Ontario.

Brayden Burrard (Concordia University)
Brayden Burrard is an art history and occasional curator who is interested in photography, relational aesthetics, and the emergence of conceptual and Fluxus art during the late 1960s. He is completing his doctorate in art history at Concordia University. This research explores artist networks, the distribution of photography, and the development of Canadian art institutions both locally and internationally as aspects of nation building.
About the Artists

Three artists were selected to present installation artwork addressing ideas of “Networks of Experience: Art and (Dis)embodiment” at the Open Space Gallery in Toronto. This exhibition was on display throughout the duration of the conference from March 15-16.

**Angela Glanzmann (University of British Columbia)**
*What am I supposed to get out of this? (2018)*

*Biography on page 6.*

*What am I supposed to get out of this?* is an installation that examines the affective and somatic possibilities of the psychotherapeutic technique known as Eye Movement Desensitization Re-processing (EMDR). EMDR uses repetitive bilateral stimulation that activates the left and right sides of the body to help patients process trauma. Through listening to the body and memory, neural pathways are able to be rerouted, and patients are able to slow down or stop distressing beliefs. Where does space exist for a potential of survival in a traumatized body? How can healing as a concept be examined critically in our bodies?

![Image](image1.jpg)

*Angela Glanzmann, What am I supposed to get out of this?, 2018.*

Video for installation, 10:48 duration.

**Andrew O’Connor (Independent Scholar)**
*Polychromatic (2018)*

*Polychromatic* is an interactive installation featuring colourful aqueous streams of video feedback that playfully ebb and flow with the motion of its viewers. The work serves to disrupt one’s visual awareness by evoking a state of multiplicity while viewers become a dispersed presence of their recorded self, reflection and silhouette.

Andrew O’Connor is a visual artist and designer. Born in Hamilton, O’Connor is a co-founder of OPTICKS, a local experimental light art initiative, and DIY artspace Hamilton Audio Visual Node (HAVN). He is a recipient of the Media Artist Creation Project grant from Ontario Arts Council, as well
as two City of Hamilton Arts Awards for Media Arts and Arts Administration.

Madeleine McMillan (OCAD University)

*Unstill (2016)*

*Biology on page 2*

*Unstill* is a conceptual critique on how viewers experience motion based artworks in a gallery setting. With a combination of analog and digital media, the central idea behind the work is to expose the motion and dimensionality that has the potential to occur in a painting. Movement would not be expressed properly without the support of digital media, and it becomes necessary for videography to play a critical role in the development as well as presentation of the final piece. A painting is a stationary object, and within fine arts it is common for a painting to depict a static image or “still life”. Viewers are meant to observe but not participate. *Unstill* is a work that intends on bringing the viewer into the experience.
Abstract

Attitudes towards women as measures of all deviation from societal norms, beginning with the female body in itself, are often situated into the social conscious that justifies their exclusion from political and economic life. For those whose womanhood intersects with other axes of oppression, such as race or queerness, capitalist society has further embedded traditions of abjection and exclusion for what threatens the purity of whiteness and maleness at the core of universal humanism. In examining these historically anchored conceptions of women’s bodies as monstrous and volatile, analyzing these categorizations in the flesh is much more potent, being forced to confront the traumas of their materiality. This paper investigates how many women in performance art have positioned themselves in such a way to showcase the material conditions of being racially, sexually, and/or ‘naturally’ other.

Keywords: performance art, body art, womanhood, women’s performance art, abjection, Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta, Adrian Piper, Orlan, representation, body as medium, the explicit body, monster theory

The bodies of women in historical, social, and cultural dimensions are anchored to conceptions of fragmentation, monstrosity, and abjection. The woman as monster, as the first deviation from man as the measure of humanity, is particularly bound to attitudes towards menstruation and pregnancy. Certain texts from the medieval period frame women as both fascinating beings containing the secrets of human generation; and dangerous, volatile creatures that contaminate life with the spectres of death. For those whose womanliness intersects with other axes of oppression, such as race, capitalist society has further embedded traditions of abjection and exclusion for what threatens the purity of whiteness and maleness at the core of universal Humanism.

Performance and body art, in contrast to other art forms, emerge as a means of direct confrontation with the matrix of socio-cultural and historical inscriptions on the bodies of women in various categories, making direct contact with “the real.” Though the ontology of performance is necessarily ephemeral, such that it only exists for the duration of the performance itself, the directness of its communication of enfleshed, embodied experience is unparalleled by other art forms. Artists such as Adrian Piper, Ana Mendieta, ORLAN, Gina Pane, and many others, have used performance to negotiate the fissures of various subject positions within the elusiveness of womanhood and its many assemblages. Experimenting with dualisms of presence and absence, noise and composure, nature and artifice, these artists reveal the complexities implicit in categories of difference, dismantling desire aesthetically, and showing us the subject in abjection. “Am I object, or am I subject?” Being woman is impacted by certain expectations of representation and the rupture of the public and private. The objective is not to insist on an essential or univocal unity among women, but rather to identify the many fractures within this category of “woman” that are explored through
affinity and collective antagonism to certain homogenizing gestures of social organization.

Certain embedded notions of women’s bodies as monstrous, volatile, as objects of scientific inquiry, as a genre of otherness in the matrix of the human being, become more potent when analyzed in the flesh, thus forcing us to confront the traumas of their materiality. While this is difficult for the writer, it is less so for the performer using their own body. Many women in performance art have positioned themselves in such a way to showcase the material conditions of being racially, sexually, and/or ‘naturally’ other.

Realms of experience are thus made tangible and visible; the constant spectres of fragmentation, fetishization, abjection, and monstrosity are laid out in all their leaky uncertainties. For Carolee Schneemann, the body in performance “has a value that static depiction… [and] representation won’t carry.”¹ The subjectivity of women, in particular, is “a deeply constituted (and never fully coherent) subjectivity in the phenomenological sense, dynamically articulated in relation to others… in a continually negotiated exchange of desire and identification.”² Catherine Elwes views performance art as offering women “a unique vehicle for making that direct unmediated access…. She is both signifier and that which is signified.”³ Violent histories of extermination, colonization, and dissection are inherited by the female body by virtue of its very existence. Through the performative act, women artists reiterate the formula of their bodies as legible grounds of semiotic process, but on their own terms and to their own ends.

To quote Amelia Jones, the body as a medium pinpoints the “inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body per se; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body.”⁴ That is, bodies are always already apprehended in the manner that determines whose body – whose Being – matters and whose does not. The body in performance, especially the woman’s body, yields itself “as fundamentally lacking in self-sufficiency… that would guarantee its plenitude as an unmediated repository of selfhood.”⁵ If you, and everyone “like” you, has been systematically barred from claiming full human status, selfhood is often concatenated by the traumas and territorializing assemblages handed down through the legacy of Humanism. But in this artistic arena, the body is able to show, concretely, some of these forces that perpetually come to bear upon it. Rebecca Schneider’s term “the explicit body” denotes a performative use of the body as a ground for concrete signification. These works of the explicit body in performance address “the ways such work aims to explicate bodies in social relation.”⁶ Inter-relationality is made flesh. In feminist work, and often in work by women artists that is not made with an overtly feminist agenda, the explicit body “interrogates socio-cultural understandings of the ‘appropriate’ and/or the

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² Ibid, 13.
⁴ Ibid, 14.
⁵ Ibid.
appropriately transgressive—particularly who gets to mark what (in)appropriate where.”7 That women’s bodies have so often been marked throughout history as ‘inappropriate’ outside the realm of male desire is the first clue that women using their bodies in performance to “explicate social relation” is already a transgression of sorts. This kind of performance is less concerned with interrogating desire and ‘the gaze,’ and is more concerned with direct confrontation.

Drawing attention specifically to one’s sexual and/or racial otherness can be an act of explication in itself, as it positions the self as unapologetically extant despite all the efforts that have been made to subdue or extinguish it. In Schneider’s words: “Like a public secret, or the equally oxymoronic notion of a public private, the female body, or the body of the Other, becomes emblematic of the scopic field itself.”8 The spectator is hereby beholden to acknowledge the consequences of the crime of being other. The situation of woman is historically impacted by “[t]he relationship between an assumed ‘real life,’ an assumed private sphere, and the public secret of representation.”9 The woman’s explicit body in performance de-familiarizes “the terrain of her body as given to signify masculinized desire,” which is necessary to illuminate the material conditions of belonging to certain categories of being.10 The spectre of inappropriateness, of being “too much,” poses a danger to hegemony as it epitomizes “the politicized link… between sexuality, vulnerability, and power that is [otherwise] ‘hardly able to be seen.’”11 Technologies of secrecy are deployed as a means of masking the assemblages that establish a particular social order, therefore reducing the chances of it being challenged. A woman’s body is always already a site of the battles being waged to limit her access to power, to forcibly negotiate the boundaries around her, and to surveil her social ‘appropriateness’; for women of colour, even more so.

Referring specifically to Black performance artists, Tavia Nyong’o returns to the notion of the Black body as property and what it means to use this body as artistic material: “If black people have historically been reduced to [their] bodies—bought, sold, displayed, and used as chattel—what does it mean for an art form to take that former commodity as its medium? Is it an act of reclaiming? Healing? Theft?”12 Disentangling the body from its violent systemic and linguistic objectification involves imagining new cartographies of subjectivity. Performance is necessarily not object-driven, instead relying on the “process of its making”; the body features “as an accumulation strategy, as a means of inheriting history.”13 Nyong’o highlights the fact that the perspectives of feminist, trans, and queer artists “represent not so much a subset of performance as an analytic through which the entire field should be interpreted—in much the same way, and for the same reason, that the field of Black studies does not pertain solely to Black people but serves instead… as ‘the critique of western civilization.’”14 Performance functions very much as a tool to excavate “the unconscious zones of

7 Ibid., 3.
8 Ibid., 66.
9 Ibid., 72.
10 Ibid., 73.
11 Ibid., 77.
13 Ibid., 27.
14 Ibid.
culture and expos[e] them to dramatic, often emotional upheaval” through its necessarily embedded dimensions of embodiment, intersubjectivity, and affectivity. In her 1970s Mythic Being performances, Adrian Piper created an alter-ego by cross-dressing in an afro wig, Zapata moustache, and sunglasses (Figure 1). This act of drag was less about “highlight[ing] the incongruity of gender” and more about the creation of a character who had Piper’s exact personal history, but with a completely different external appearance. She would walk the streets as the Mythic Being, filmed by artist Peter Kennedy, repeating a mantra and documenting how people around her would react. Nyong’o refers to this act as a “radical inscription of black masculinity as becoming-other” as part of a larger process of becoming-imperceptible. By taking up a position that could be considered both Black and queer, Piper “disrupts the politics of respectability and the sexed and gendered silences upon which such a politics has long depended.” In other performances, Piper took this will to disrupt respectability politics much further, such as in her Catalysis series (1970-73), in which she would ride the bus with a towel stuffed in her mouth, get on the subway at rush hour in stinking clothes, or enter a library with a hidden tape recorder playing loud belching sounds. Piper’s explication of what constitutes inappropriateness and indiscretion within the social body is amplified by her position as a Black woman, forcing a direct confrontation with multiple dimensions of identification and social contracts.

In the field of representation, the body is rendered a legible sign system based on its in/visibility. “Being represented” is often a homogenizing gesture lacking in discernment for difference, and as such does not constitute an accurate reading of all subjects. Additionally, it is constituted hierarchically and with no intention to restructure itself. Politically, there is a strongly held belief that “visibility of the hitherto underrepresented leads to enhanced political power.” Following Sylvia Wynter’s critique of Humanism, any endeavour to “better” the state of the oppressed in the current structure is already a failure. An inadequate awareness of the relation between “visibility, power, identity, and liberation has led both groups [on the political Left and Right] to mistake the relation between the real and the representational.” Representation carries with it the spectres of stereotyping and homogenization that are necessarily mimetic and always already mistaken for an emblematic truth. The relationship between self and other is necessarily textured, not least of all by political and epistemological encounters. The trope of visibility, then, is often left unexamined in all its dimensions and consequences for what it is to see and/or be seen.

Peggy Phelan designates visibility inevitably as “a trap”: “it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonial/imperial appetite for possession.” Figured into this
political canon of representation is the contemporary prominence of identity politics with an emphasis on visibility, which insists that being seen is a priori empowering, but which overlooks or otherwise snubs the material conditions of certain subject positions that make being seen a potential threat. This is not to suggest that a strategy of complete invisibility is an adequate solution, but, as Phelan notes, “the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying.”24 From within this discrepancy is the assumption that “selves” are capable of being sufficiently represented “within the visual and linguistic field.”25 Politics of visibility are tethered to capitalism’s unyielding appetite for new markets.26 That is to say, identities are useful insofar as they are commodified and exploitable; embodied subjects are valuable insofar as they are productive. Women’s bodies are degraded in capitalist society for many reasons, not least of all is the contested “value” of biological reproduction for a money-driven economy, which necessitates a new way of thinking the relationship between production, reproduction, and representation.

A well-implemented strategy of two-fold appearance and disappearance, presence and absence, is a valuable asset for women and their bodies. Situating ‘woman’ in between the binary of presence and absence enacts a strategy that suggests this is epistemologically the only way the woman can exist. Which is to say, being complicit in a simultaneous in/visibility or dis/appearance de-sanitizes other boundaries that are often negotiated for women by mechanisms outside of their control, and allows for a sort of nomadic semiosis that is not affixed to male desire or capitalist production. As Schneider explains, “women are invisible to the degree that they are visible—that is, as visible, woman will be read relative to man, while man is also read relative to man.”27 Having situated himself linguistically and semiotically as the measure of all humanity, all beings on the spectrum of the human are thus also determined by their relative position to man. Schneider continues that a woman endeavouring to “be other than representative of the phallic order, can paradoxically find herself striving to appear as invisible—to make her disembodiment apparent.”28 This struggle for or against representation, visibility, and invisibility is anchored to a deeply encoded order of who is allowed to represent what, whose invisibility is obligatory, and what forms of visibility are appropriate for whom. In the work of Ana Mendieta, many of her performances in the 1970s served as documents of erasure. In her work, the body had a “fugitive appearance” comprising “the disembodied trace of the real.”29 Through this performative strategy of corporeal absence, there is a separation of image, location, and identification from each other. Thus, the work turns its attention to the social body in an endeavour to “think the outside, the heterogeneous as a site of restitution and dissolution.”30

In her “shroud” works, such as Mutilated Body on Landscape (1973), Mendieta lay under a white sheet stained in blood with an animal heart over her chest. In a piece from her Silueta series,

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 10.
26 Ibid., 11.
27 Schneider, The Explicit Body, 117.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
informally known as Black Ixchell, Iowa (1976), the artist lay mummified in black fabric on top of a white sheet with a ritualistically patterned border of her handprints in black paint (Figure 2). The use of shrouding as disguise marked her body “as an object of violation or distortion in order to displace a recognition of it as woman as a fixed identity that one can read off its surface.”\(^{31}\) Through this simultaneous in/visibility, Mendieta undermines the surface representation of woman. Thus, she focuses less on the construction of identity in itself, and instead highlights “the violence of experience which the social formation of identity entails” by means of “the subject of sacrifice and crime around the body as woman.”\(^{32}\) Mendieta assembles her response to this issue of sacrifice in particular from Octavio Paz’s notions of death and renewal. What she believed to be absent from this account of the sacrificial body in Paz, however, was that its object was necessarily woman.\(^{33}\) For her, then, woman was the conditioned link between nature and death; thus, her position remained always “outside the social, displaced, in a state of exile.”\(^{34}\) Exile, for Mendieta, was a personal matter as well, having been sent away with her sister from their home in Cuba to the United States as young adolescents. They were political exiles by extension of their father’s activities as a counter-revolutionary.

In Mendieta’s work, the personal and the social are absolutely inextricable. She posits the conditions of loss, absence, and dislocation as being anchored in the very conception of womanhood, and especially for non-white women. She felt the pressure to conform, in both her art and life, to “Americanize” herself, as a brute-force method of coercing her to all but vanish. Implicit in this particular spectre of assimilation in Western culture was the demand to turn her cultural heritage into something commodifiable. In a contemporary Western context, difference is conceived more and more as a consumable “mix’n’match style,” something that cannot be “taken too seriously,” such that “histories of oppression and experiences of exile or exploitation [are] simply nasty particulars ignored by applying a ‘fun’ face to a history of colonial appropriation.”\(^{35}\) In her performance work particularly, Mendieta turns spectres of loss and displacement into something present, “literal, exigent, palpable.”\(^{36}\) Her turn to earthwork was an endeavour to re-root herself in a place, however temporarily. The Silueta more broadly, then, becomes a symbol “for those who are victimized by the ideology of the nation-space.”\(^{37}\) In this series of performance-earthworks, the woman’s silhouette is always figured with legs joined together and arms raised, emulating the ánima sola – the wandering soul. She is carved into the earth, covered in flowers or blood, washed away by the ocean, or set on fire. Through the use of this particular figure, Mendieta dislodges the notion of woman as inherently bound to the earth. Rather, the series articulates “the negative dialectics of exile,” manifested through a woman who “occupies a borderland, homelessness, wandering, a solitude that yearns for an imagined community.”\(^{38}\) Mendieta’s point of departure is woman in exile or in death –

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 123.  
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 124.  
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 127.  
\(^{34}\) Ibid.  
\(^{35}\) Schneider, The Explicit Body, 119.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid.  
\(^{38}\) Merewether, “From Inscription to Dissolution,” 131.
death that is unrelentingly present in life. Exile comes to be expressed not through place, or placement, but through that which is missing.

What is perpetually articulated in Mendieta’s work is the body as material and as woman. In contrast to the strictures of history that have placed Woman as the eroticized, the monstrous, the “defilement,” her treatment of the woman as subject is freed from these degradations by instead examining a realm of experience that is expressly concerned with a more positive dislocation. The elements of abjection in relation to social and sexual identity are fixed to the body in myriad ways. A “return to the body” is personal – but not only – as it poses its own set of challenges to the usual textures of categorization. In the period following Mendieta’s untimely death in 1985, the forces bearing upon selfhood and categorization have drastically changed, not least of all politically and technologically. Mendieta’s work had been firmly rooted in traditions of the abject as demarcating the liminal spaces between life and death, inside and outside, both corporeally and socially. Her use of bodily fluids like blood in combination with woman-as-material, and social inscriptions of race, nationhood, and identity reveal the experience of being erased and cast out of the social organism, deployed instead as a lining for its “outer membrane.”

Contemporary uses of the abject also make use of this “return to the body,” but in such a way that incorporates an exploration of the present and “produces an excessivity that problematizes the absence/presence duality and opens up new cybernetic definitions of subjectivity.” If the “unity of the subject” is under constant threat of loss and dissolution from abjection, the entanglement of the state apparatus with a cybernetic machination is yet another challenge to subjectivity. Cybernetics is characterized by its hostility to impulse, unpredictability, mystery, and opacity. This threat of dissolution and fragmentation has historically underpinned the enactment of numerous systems of categorization, placement, and assemblage that aim to exclude the portents of annihilation. Thus, abjection actually constitutes a crucial negative relation in the assembling of social and individual identification. Necessarily an unclean process, abjection interrogates the limits of pain, endurance, selfhood, and catharsis. Pain, then, symbolizes both the “rupture of social homogeneity” and the reworking of identity. Christine Ross explains that “one attempts his or her subjectivity through the abjection of the other, or never quite succeeds in differentiating the self from this abjected other.”

Much like Humanism, abjection is defined just as much by what it excludes as what it includes. In the abject performances of women, abjection functions as “a strategy that seeks to disrupt the Kantian definition of aesthetics as pure pleasure,” and as such casts the body as a ground of unpredictability. At this juncture, the woman’s body shows itself as an expression of historically embedded ambivalence: as volatile threat and object of sexual desire. The abjected other is

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39 Ibid., 133.
41 Rina Arya, Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 95.
42 Ibid.
43 Ross, “Redefinitions of abjection,” 150.
necessarily figured as an object of difference that cannot be controlled within the confines of the order which have been built around the social body. Purposely breaking with categorization and resolution by means of the paradoxical abject “is subversive insofar as it manifests the failing of a subject to correspond to the predictable, disciplined, coherent body of contemporary discursive formations such as medicine, law, and psychology.” Following Judith Butler, bodies that matter (and bodies that don’t) are produced within the social matrix that necessarily contains an abject territory. As such, bodies are manifestations of inscribed norms, that must satisfy ideal paradigms “to ensure his or her subjectivity so as to not be abjected, excluded, and marginalized into the spheres of nonsubjectivity.” The “exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed” is inclusive of those who hover around zones of indistinction, to the extent that it defines them in order to cast them off. Performing abjection can thus effect a “complexifying” of the body by enacting its own failure or refusal to be incorporated.

For women, this subject position is often rooted in simultaneous visibility and invisibility, presence and absence. Additional dichotomies of inside/outside, attraction/repulsion, organization/disorganization, pattern/randomness have the effect of creating a sort of endless and arduous liminal passing between distinctions by performing, or choosing not to perform, to the standards of territorialized assemblages. As explained by Leisha Jones, “Beings, whose lives are defined by their societies as deviant, may move in and out of certain social spaces as sometimes-subjects. This could involve a sort of mimesis… enough to ‘pass’ for or move through regulative and context-specific criteria.” The sometimes-subject is necessarily restricted to its ability to perform, and thus is in a state constant flux. Deliberately integrating those negative grey zones of “mortality, catastrophe, noise, unpredictability, …nonorganicity, and contingency” as the primary constituents of one’s body requires a will to dramatically redefine one’s subjectivity. This newfound complexity is a foremost threat to the stability of the ‘inside,’ and therefore embracing the contingencies of randomness, loss, and failure “actualizes the unforeseeable potential of the system to adapt to ‘noise,’ that is, to what seems to be a distortion in the transmission of messages or a catastrophe within the environment.” A body that embraces dichotomies is one that cannot be programmed, and thus does not fit. Complexifying the body and the subject through dualism is threatening insofar as it suspends zones of distinction that determine where bodies are socially and politically located.

In the work of French performance artist ORLAN (hereafter Orlan), especially in her surgical performances of the 1990s, the face, the woman’s body, and the social conventions surrounding the territorialization of appearances, are all dismantled through a physical abjection. Orlan works in a tradition of what she terms “Carnal Art,” which takes the conventions of social and religious impacts on bodies and the self-portrait, distorting and reconstructing the figure through contemporary technological means. This art does not necessarily desire pain, and “does not look for it as a purifying

44 Ibid., 152.
46 Butler, Bodies That Matter, 3.
49 Ibid.
source, does not consider it as Redemption”; the surgical operation itself is deployed as a technology of fragmentation.\textsuperscript{50} In her “Carnal Art Manifesto” (1989), she writes: “Carnal Art is not against cosmetic surgery, but against the standards it carries and which are inscribed particularly over women’s skin.”\textsuperscript{51} For her 1993 surgical performance, Omnipresence, the surgical theatre was set up in Sandra Gering Gallery in New York and broadcast via satellite to fifteen institutions across the globe, including galleries in Paris, Toronto, and Banff (Figure 3). Typical of all her performances of this nature, she remained awake and talking throughout the surgery. The surgeon, Dr. Marjorie Cramer, inserted protruding implants above both of Orlan’s eyes, as well as in her chin and her cheeks. Orlan was “conscious but locally anesthetized, and it is therefore the spectator who suffers as a result of this discomfort produced by images of the operation.”\textsuperscript{52} In the act of ultimately detaching her face from her body literally, in order to insert features that do not correspond to the human face under “normal” conditions, she also detaches her new face figuratively from the social body that disavows the kind of aberration she has intentionally enacted on herself.

This act for Orlan is a self-monstering. It is a “rebirth as a ‘girl born without a mother’… Allegory of the Beauty and Beast, myth of… Medusa.”\textsuperscript{53} Like the performance work of Gina Pane, such as Le lait chaud (Warm Milk, 1972) and Psyche (1974), in which she would cut her cheeks or eyelids with a razor blade (an action to which the audience reacted by yelling, “No, no, not the face!”\textsuperscript{54}) Orlan’s action is a repudiation of aestheticism; in the words of Michel Thévoz, a “profanation of humanistic values.”\textsuperscript{55} The woman’s face has historically been a ground of semiosis. In her “refacing,” Orlan makes visible a very specific arena of both physical and metaphysical violence particularly for women. In several performance-operations, Orlan would read from a text called The Dress by the Lacanian psychoanalyst, Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni:

> This skin is deceptive… in life one only has one skin… There is an error in human relations because one never is what one has… I have an angel’s skin but I am a jackal; I never have the skin of what I am. There is no exception to the rule because I am never what I have.\textsuperscript{56}

This text, for Orlan, described a particular fissure in one’s identity, between the internal and the external, in which many women in particular feel very detached from their appearances as being largely performative. In her face-cutting performances, Gina Pane claims to have hit a crucial nerve: “the aestheticism in every person. The face is taboo, it’s the core of human aesthetics, the only place which retains a narcissistic power.”\textsuperscript{57} Orlan’s “flayed” face inhabits the space between the polarities of beauty and monstrosity, “the binary facial unit” which shifts her place on the spectrum of humanity further towards the nonhuman.\textsuperscript{58} The performance delights in its abjection, its incorporation of

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Bernard Ceysson, “ORLAN the ultimate masterpiece,” in Donger and Shepherd, ORLAN, 31.
\textsuperscript{54} Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones, eds., The Artist’s Body (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 120.
\textsuperscript{56} Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, La robe: essai psychanalytique sur le vêtement (Éditions du Seuil, 1983), 95, quoted in Donger and Shepherd, ORLAN, 42.
\textsuperscript{57} Gina Pane, “Performance of Concern: Gina Pane discusses her work with Effie Stephano,” (1973), quoted in Warr and Jones, The Artist’s Body, 120.
ambiguity, dualism, and contingency. The face, according to Camilla Griggers, is not necessarily within the realm of nonorganicity. Rather, it is “social production, and as such it can be disintegrated from the organic body and reterritorialized as a more perfect expression of a socially constructed code.”

By reconciling her face with pieces of non-human origin, Orlan re-incorporates the incorporable and relishes in disrupting Kantian aesthetics by becoming grotesque.

Orlan shows how literally penetrable and “unstable” her body, and nearly all bodies, are capable of being. Even once her face is reattached, it is virtually unrecognizable. Griggers refers to Orlan’s strategy as breaking away “from [the] semiotic overcodings of feminine beauty… entering a realm of signs beyond the biunivocalization of the beautiful and the ugly, perhaps even beyond the register of the human.”

Beauty for women is nestled firmly into the territorializing assemblage of gender, a key part of determining and indexing a woman’s humanity. Ugliness, like monstrosity, is constructed and embedded semiotically so that it may be cast off to the margins. Implicit in this will to decode ugliness is a need that both Mary Anne Doane and Luce Irigaray have expressed, which requires “a new imaginary of the body that would enable women to speak the sexual differences of their bodies.”

In a patriarchal culture that places such importance on male desire, ugliness speaks for itself. That is, it is generally forced to remain silent as its signifiers already communicate that it has nothing of value to contribute to the existing order.

According to C. Jill O’Bryan, Orlan’s performance-operations “elucidate the long history of misogynist essentialism equated with identifying the woman’s body as inferior and opposed to that of the male.” Her actions turn her private body into a “public body,” which places her “within the trajectory of the public dissection theater.” Here, she mimics the medieval trope of the woman as medical object and container of horrifying secrets waiting to be unearthed. Orlan’s surgical performances endorse “a collapse of a binary structure that polarizes (and hierarchizes) the monstrous.”

By way of her sexual otherness, she visualizes the link between pleasure and death, a phenomenon that also informed the principal subject of most Surrealism, especially Hans Bellmer’s poupées. Death as the erotic annex of life, further articulated in the work of Georges Bataille, maintains that “Beauty is desired in order that it may be befouled; not for its own sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of profaning it.”

Both Orlan’s reassembled face and Bellmer’s doll sculptures contain the same predicament of representation: “what is behind the image, informing it, inspiring it?” While anything that approaches a proper answer to that question is much more complicated, there exists in both cases an extensive history of the woman, the monster, and women as monsters: simultaneously alluring and repelling, a mysterious ground of signification. Orlan

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61 O’Bryan, Carnal Art, 113.
62 Ibid., 116.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
66 O’Bryan, Carnal Art, 120.
deploys cosmetic surgery as a technology and exposes its bifurcation into the realm of abjection. Various forms of fragmentation are imminent everywhere. By interrogating faciality as a territorialization, Orlan cracks open its powers of identification to reveal the potentials of liminal passing between woman as human and woman as monster.

This conscious dissolving of the woman into the body of the monster makes for the purposely confrontational visual of an enduring trope. It epitomizes the longstanding fear that monstrosity will “endanger the very sanctity of discrete entities by suggesting in a visceral way that [its] edges might bleed into ours.” Monstrous corporeality evokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s grotesque body, the body always in the act of becoming. It perpetually “builds and creates another body” and “ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surfaces of the body.” In essence, it “confront[s] the terror and anxiety of the grotesqueness present in each of us”; this fear of becoming abject that so often informs the need to abject the other. By investigating gender and women’s sexual difference as monstrosity, artists manage to invoke, and consequently solder together, numerous archetypes of women and femininity. Rather than ever truly ‘representing’ the woman as a homogenous figure, they walk the tightropes of presence/absence, nature/artifice, inside/outside, being/nonbeing. Women-monsters do not simply exist as embodied subjects, but are instead exemplified and suspended “in allegories, to be conveyed as feelings, intensities and qualities, leaving no scope for fixations and projections.” Hers is a multifarious femininity that necessarily incorporates much of the inhuman topographies of being. Acknowledging the ancestries of the female monster embraces her fully, gives her the authority to take up space, and establishes that she is not afraid of her social, corporeal, and sexual abjection.

Image List

Figure 1: Adrien Piper, Mythic Being, 1970s, documentation of performance
Figure 2: Anna Mendietta, Silueta series, “Black Ixchell,” Iowa (1976), documentation of performance
Figure 3: ORLAN, Omnipresence, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1993, documentation of performance

Biography
Angel Callander is a writer and art historian from the Niagara region, currently living in Toronto. She

68 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 317.
70 Yvonne Volkart, “This Monstrosity, This Proliferation, Once Upon a Time Called Woman, Butterfly, Asian Girl,” Make Magazine (August 2000).
recently completed her M.A. Kunst- und Bildgeschichte (Art History and Visual Culture) at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Under the supervision of Dr. Inge Hinterwaldner, her Master’s thesis focuses on women’s performance art as the locus of historical conceptions for what constitutes “womanhood” as a material, social category, as well as speculating a future ontology of womanhood through post-human theory.

References


Mark Terry, PhD (York University, Toronto, Canada)
Retraining Our Perception: Semiotic Storytelling in Ecocinematic Documentaries

Abstract
While acknowledging earlier classic environmental documentaries such as *South* (1919), *Rain* (1926), and *The Plough That Broke the Plains* (1936), and others, ecocinema, or as it is sometimes referred to, the eco-doc, is a relatively new sub-genre of the documentary film that is developing its own style as it is so closely related with informing both public and power about issues that impact all of us. This goal of audience engagement leading to powerful and influential action is what many scholars believe the eco-doc with its perception-altering mode of storytelling make the sub-genre successful in advancing progressive social change, perhaps one of the most effective styles of social issue documentary filmmaking.

Keywords: Documentary film, eco-doc, ecocinema, semiotic storytelling, The Antarctica Challenge, audience engagement, social change, slow cinema, cartography.

There exists much scholarship on how the documentary film, its styles, forms, and modes, along with its accompanying technologies and exhibition platforms, can be used to enhance its ability to successfully influence and inform those charged with creating social change. This paper focuses on the theory behind one sub-genre, in particular, and its semiotic approach to storytelling: ecocinema. I argue that this specific approach augments the documentary film’s ability to inform power and influence social change in a fashion unique to other documentary sub-genres.

Ecocinema covers a lot of ground, literally, metaphorically and even geospatially, and so for the purpose of this paper I will not be examining the fictional films that comprise this critical area. Instead, I give particular attention to the environmental documentary – or as it is commonly known, the “eco-doc” – in its early forms and explore how new and emerging theory and practice are shaping its use as an instrument of global change in socio-political and geo-political policy and educational practice. A fair question to ask is why has the environmentally themed documentary been privileged with its own set of production theories; what is it about stories related to environmental issues that require special attention to move audiences to action more than other documentaries examining other social issues?

One of the answers often provided in ecocriticism is that ecocinema addresses environmental issues that are global in nature and few other social issues are as comprehensively universal to the human experience as those of the environment. Ecophilosophical theorists such as Scott MacDonald and Felix Guattari advocate that a retraining of perception is required in all socio-political and socio-economic areas, including the way environmental documentaries are made and used as communication tools to inform power. In his essay *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, Guattari argues for the need to change the way we understand environmental issues in order to act on more effective levels:

We cannot conceive of solutions to the poisoning of the atmosphere and to global warming due to the greenhouse effect, or to the problem of population control, without a mutation of
mentality, without promoting a new art of living in society (Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 20).

Guattari’s “mutation of mentality” calls for a change in the way we think and for new ways of telling stories about the environment to change the way audiences understand the presented data and what this data means to our planet and our relationship to it. The use of film to reveal the world in terms of environmental themes goes back to the very origins of film itself. Some of the very first environmentally themed documentary feature-length films were aimed at bringing unknown parts of the world to the rest of the world, in particular, the polar regions seemed to hold special interest.

Films like *South* (1919), *Romance of the Far Fur Country* (1920), *Nanook of the North* (1922), and *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926) were all shot wholly or in part in either the Arctic or Antarctica. With the exception of *South*, Sir Ernest Shackleton’s film log of his exploratory voyage to Antarctica, the other films showcased ethnographic profiles of Indigenous peoples (Inuit and Sami, primarily) native to these frozen climes and probed how such communities were impacted by cultural, national, capitalistic and technological colonialism.

Curiously, the genre is coming full circle as new theory suggests a return to this expositional observance, but now with newly inserted semiotic, implicit narratives to establish Guattari’s “mutation of mentality”, the primary goal of ecocinema, as Scott Macdonald claims in his essay *The Ecocinema Experience*:

> “The fundamental job of eco-cinema…is a retraining of perception, as a way of offering an alternative to conventional media spectatorship” (MacDonald, *The Ecocinema Experience*, 45).

Both MacDonald and Guattari are convinced that environmental issues require a new way of being seen and understood in order to have humanity change its relationship with the environment. Therefore, the traditional methods of audience engagement used in documentary film with environmental themes need to be similarly adjusted.

**Performing the Database Documentary:**

One of the ways this is now being done is with technology that introduces new ways of recording and manipulating images, both in terms of enhancement and distortion. These new tools have afforded the documentary filmmaker creative new methods of storytelling. DJ Spooky, aka Paul D. Miller, is a digital artist who, like his cinematic forerunners, created an ecocinema project (which he refers to as a “product”) showcasing a polar region, Antarctica, in his database documentary concert *Terra Nova: Sinfonia Antarctica* (2008). His experimental piece is not a traditional documentary, inviting a traditional viewing experience, rather his is a film performed by the filmmaker, as images of Antarctica play out on two big screens. DJ Spooky mixes music along with live performances provided by a pianist, violinist and cellist. At times, the filmmaker provides live commentary, as opposed to descriptive narration, explaining why he made the film as it is playing. This unusual artistic approach pays homage to the early days of documentary’s “animated lectures” and silent film’s “musical accompaniment”, but while reminiscent of these pioneering days of the documentary, Spooky’s modern use of these audio techniques has an altogether different intent:
“I think that people need to hear Antarctica because it is at the edge of the world... New York is probably one of the most mediated places on earth. If I have a conversation at a café, someone will put it on a blog. If I walk down the street, someone will put photos of it on Flickr... Antarctica represents a place mediated by science” (italics are mine) (Shembel, 345).

Spooky’s goal appears to be introducing a relatively unknown part of the world to the people of the world living outside the scientific community, a community he claims Antarctica has previously been exclusively mediated for. The disparate visual content includes the traditional tropes of icebergs and penguins, but also anthropogenic images of early exploration, scientific research, flags of the signatory nations of the Antarctica Treaty, and cartography which all speak to man’s attempt to understand, colonize and tame this last of the world’s wild frontiers. By introducing the continent in this manner, Spooky demystifies this unknown land and declares our impact upon it for the purpose of engaging the global community in the environmental issues Antarctica has, issues that impact all of us.

Non-traditional narratives play a big role in ecocinema projects such as this. Instead of guiding the audience through a story with subject interviews and narration, innovative ways of informing documentary audiences are utilized. Spooky’s focus on audio – live voice, sound effects and music – is one way in which ecocinema is experimenting in retaining the attention of its audiences. The non-linear screening images without apparent context to any traditional narrative is another way. With this method, coupled with live audio cues, audiences are challenged to construct their own story, to be the film’s editor as it were, and assimilate the database of images presented to formulate their own, story and conclusions.

By providing an entirely new environment for viewing an ecocinematic documentary, as DJ Spooky conceived with his live audio performance and database documentary montage, the semiotic messages of the media fragments are rationalized and conceptualized by the audience mentally and applied to action socially. Unlike an activist documentary that boldly instructs its audience to act, ecocinema provides as much data as possible with both explicit and implicit narratives allowing the audience to derive the importance to act on its own thus yielding a more self-conscious, self-motivated activist.

**Semiotic Storytelling:**

In Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema 2* book, he explains that the time-image in film imbues meaning through speed, and when we distort that speed we change our perception, breaking the cliché, as Kara Keeling, Stanley Cavell and Carl Plantinga all assert, to cause the viewer to think actively as opposed to view passively. Much of ecocinema documentary employs this method of duration distortion and is sometimes categorized as “slow cinema”, a style in which the scenes are uncomfortably long to the point of forcing the audience to question why. Conversely, introducing unnatural fast speed to scenes also alters the way audiences traditionally view documentary cinema.

For example, in the eco-doc *The Antarctica Challenge: A Global Warning*, the 2009 film employs these ecocinematic techniques of time distortion. We will examine two scenes featuring glaciers to demonstrate this technique. The first clip is a long pan without narration and runs forty
seconds, a lengthy period of time in film to capture a scene in which nothing happens. The slow pan was designed, specifically, to reflect and underscore the slow movement of glaciers. Historically, the melting and subsequent movement of these frozen rivers is very slow; and so, this scene is equally slow, intending to emphasize this fact. Once this has been established to the audience, the next glacier scene is antithetically sped up.

The second clip is a zoom from space using satellite photography quickly lands on the Pine Island Glacier on Antarctica’s west coast, the largest ice drainage basin in the world. Once the glacier location is established, time-lapse photography shows the uncharacteristic rapid movement of the glacier as it moves freshwater ice from the land to the sea. The semiotic hyper-speed time-image presents an unfamiliar perception of a glacier to affect the audience to a degree that enables them to see the urgency in taking action and in demanding political re-action.

The Anticipatory Mode:

A final examination of a theory unique to ecocinema is one developed by Juan Francisco Salazar, a Chilean documentary filmmaker and theorist who advocates an additional function to the documentary genre: anticipation. In his essay, Towards a Poetics of Documentary, Michael Renov identifies four fundamental functions attributable to documentary practice: to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyze or interrogate; to express. In Salazar’s essay, Anticipatory Modes of Futuring Planetary Change in Documentary Film, he proposes an altogether new purpose for the documentary film in general and for ecocinema in particular: the anticipatory mode to “act as a modality to render an anticipatory futuring of socio-ecological change” (Salazar, 44).

Salazar develops his theory by referring to how visitors experienced Expo 88 as chronicled in Tony Bennett’s 1991 paper The Shaping of Things to Come: Expo 88. In this essay, Bennett describes how visitors of the event held in Brisbane, Australia encountered exhibits and technologies of the “future”. He explains that “World Expos project the future in the form of a task to be performed in the present” (Salazar, 44). By engaging with these future technologies, the park visitors make them concrete in the present providing the guests with an experience that allows them to create “an anticipatory futuring of the self”. Salazar argues that the same engagement is being introduced and sought by the filmmaker from their guests, the viewers in today’s social issue documentary film and in particular, those with environmental themes. By seeing what the future may hold, the audience is asked to “future” themselves in the present to participate actively in avoiding environmental calamity, a form of cinematic crisis management.

The anticipatory mode promises the events depicted in the film are not just possible, but probable, requiring the audience to act in the present to prevent that which they experience in the film’s future. Witnessing what the future will hold is presented by laying out a scientific data set that projects future actualities, such as in the History Channel’s series Life After People.

The viewer is once again self-motivated to act today to prevent a calamity to come or to maintain current action to ensure an environmentally safe future for themselves. Like Renov, Salazar acknowledges documentary’s capacity for rendering desire in an audience – in this case, a desire to live in a utopian world that the film promises or a desire to escape the dystopian world the film promises. Salazar sees the role of documentary film as “instantiating the future by rendering it
present and giving it a concrete form”, a process he understands as instigating stronger audience action:

…documentary cinema can potentially transcend the mode of desire, to encompass a modality of intent: to promote social change and induce a sense that a deep socio-ecological and economic transformation is needed to confront the uncertainties posed by a liquid future…thus permitting viewers to engage with anticipatory modes of futuring of the planet (Salazar, 45).”

By concretizing the future in the present, it becomes both a real and perceived reality of the present built on a convincing depiction of the future, which accomplishes something rarely considered in a medium that is commonly known as a technology that captures the past. These three examples – Terra Nova, The Antarctica Challenge, and Life After People – illustrate how semiotic storytelling methods are being used in ecocinema to retrain our perception so we become self-motivated to act – the ultimate aim of the eco-doc.

Alexa Weik von Mossner explains this in her book, Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology and Film: “The primary importance of eco-cinema is to affect our automatic, visceral response and emotion...to make (these films) artistically successful, theoretically powerful and culturally influential.”

If ecocinema does achieve these goals, it may be establishing a successful model for other social issue documentaries to employ in their attempts to move audiences to act and affect progressive social change.

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Biography

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Katie Lydiatt (Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada)
Engaging the Filmic Other: An Analysis of the Reconfiguration of Spectatorship in Feminist Video Art

Abstract
Expanding on phenomenology and feminist theory, this paper will focus on two films; Joyce Weiland’s Water Sark, 1965 and Lisa Steele’s Birthday Suit with Scars and Defects, 1974, as key examples of how new aesthetics and modes of viewing were employed in early video art, in an effort to reshape spectatorship and increase intersubjectivity and body corporeality. Using the metaphor of a skin-like membrane in these works, I will argue that the screen no longer functions as a barrier between subject and viewer, but instead forces the spectator to engage with the film in an act of intimacy, and confront the situation of their body in relation to the subject.

Keywords: spectatorship, embodiment, video art, second wave feminism, Lisa Steele, Joyce Weiland

Film and video are often understood as strictly visual media, lending their spectatorship to be understood in terms of its displacement of the body and emphasis on site as the primary relational mechanism between viewer and subject. Phenomenological scholarship has alternatively suggested that vision should be understood as embodied and material, containing the capacity to involve the entire body in the practice of spectatorship. Looking at spectatorship as a full body experience became especially prevalent with the advent of video art in the 1960s and 1970s, as artists themselves began to value video’s embodied and material qualities. In Canada, several feminist artists began taking up video as a means of addressing feminist concerns, and used what Laura Marks calls “haptic visuality” to renegotiate new modes of spectatorship. Viewing the image as a connective tissue, or skin, between audience and subject, became an attractive way to challenge and reject conventionalized cinematic ways of seeing. Affective aesthetics and video’s capacity to produce them were beneficial to the expression of feminist concerns in Canada which revolved around the deconstruction of the ways in which mass media had previously fixed and produced sexually defined power relations.

Expanding on feminist thought and affect theory, this paper explores a particular historic moment in which video art and feminism intersected in Canada as a means to renegotiate spectatorship. Using some of the early experimental films of Canadian artists Joyce Weiland and Lisa Steele as case studies, I will argue that this engagement with haptic visuality was a political act which sought to deconstruct previous notions of spectatorship through an emphasis on materiality and embodiment, both which lent themselves to the cause of Second Wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s.

This paper begins by discussing haptic visuality and the ways in which affective aesthetics fit well within the feminist critiques of Second Wave Feminism in Canada. I will then explore three films: Water Sark, Hand Tinting, and Birthday Suit with Scars and Defects, to illustrate how these aesthetics were employed and how they shifted the relationship between viewer and subject. Lastly, I will suggest why this shift in thinking about spectatorship as haptic is useful when discussing video art and film more generally.

To begin, film scholar Laura Marks once articulated the relationship between viewer and subject by proposing that skin can be used as a metaphor for the ways that video signifies through its
Like skin, Marks argues that the image is impressionable and conductive, something one brushes up against like another body. It is used as a connective tissue between the subject of the film and the spectator that “touches” the film. Well before Marks posed this metaphor for the surface between film and viewer, the union between phenomenology and film studies was becoming well established. Phenomenologists’ emphasis on lived experience became an effective way of thinking about film and its orientation towards the spectator, acknowledging that perception is not an alienated activity but an embodied phenomenon. This provided ample possibilities for feminist artists in the 1960s and 70s who were interested in using the body as a platform for discussions of autonomy, performance and identity. Aesthetic cues such as hyper pigmentation, sporadic movement, synesthesia, distorted angles, and purposeful errors became beneficial tools for feminist video artists at this time, as they called attention to the material and embodied quality of both the video and its spectators. Through the asserted materiality of the film and the subjectivity of its creator, these films worked to interrupt direct access to the female body while negating the notion of the universal female experience which dominated previous feminist discourse. The screen, what it signifies and who for, became a porous mechanism, much like Marks’ concept of skin, which was able to renegotiate temporal distance and assert feminist concerns. In her discussion of haptic visuality Marks states, “haptic looking tends to move over the surface of the object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze.” These haptic aesthetics can be seen reflected in three films: Joyce Weiland’s *Water Sark and Hand Tinting*, and Lisa Steele’s *Birthday Suit with Scars and Defects*.

**Water Sark**

As a feminist video artist working in the 1960s and ‘70s, Joyce Weiland is most well known for her political multimedia and video works which address Canadian nationalism and feminist issues. In her 1965 experimental film *Water Sark*, the artist addresses the notion of the domestic as an inherently feminine space and attempts to deconstruct it, calling attention to her fusion of the housewife and the filmmaker and also the constructed and material properties of the screen. Taking place predominantly on the surface of her kitchen table, the visual plane is dominated by a series of glasses, mirrors and prisms which serve as reflectors of varying colours and textures. Establishing the table as what author Lauren Rabinovitz refers to as a “domestic altar,” Weiland utilizes the mirrors to call attention to and distort her person, which is seen filming in a process of “ritualized self discovery.” Her curiosity towards her own reflection in the film suggests a playful reclamation of female domestic space, disrupting voyeuristic spectatorship as her form becomes amalgamated with the shapes around her. By interweaving the experience of water pouring into a glass with random juxtapositions of her own body, the feminine self is woven with sensorial experiences of light and colour. Through these haptic visual strategies, Weiland resists the voyeuristic, distant gaze of the spectator and subverts the domestic space as a site of deconstruction.

Peppered throughout the 13-minute film, Weiland has curated a sequence of purposeful errors and spontaneous splotches of light and colour. These purposeful errors call attention to the

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material nature of the film. The viewer is no longer invited to interpret the female form and space in their own manner as their engagement is highly interrupted by Weiland’s subjective choices. While asserting bodily autonomy, these visual strategies further incite multiple senses in the viewer, making their engagement with the film much less passive and more intimate. It is in this combination of visual disorientation and the presence of Weiland’s body that subvert the distancing effects present in traditional cinema and use haptic visuality as a strategy to renegotiate spectatorship.

Hand Tinting

Weiland repeated these strategies in her 1967 film, *Hand Tinting*. Made out of a collection of outtakes that Weiland took while working as a camera operator for a Job Corps documentary, the film consists of loops and reversed images of young African American women who were brought from rural areas to be taught typing during the Equal Opportunities Act of the Civil Rights movement. As an act of resistance to what she referred to as a “pacification programme,” Weiland filmed the women dancing and singing between takes, and used these clips to create *Hand Tinting*, which employed phenomenological and experimental strategies to resist the ways in which these women transpired on screen. Full of small movements and actions, gestures begun but not completed, the incomplete movements of the girls take on ritualistic and rhythmic sensations, replicating the disorienting nature of *Water Sark*.

The film progresses in a cyclical matter, never settling on one shot for very long. Each frame is presented in a different garish colour cycling between red, pink, green and blue, separated by coloured and monochrome screens which show perforated light seeping through the cloth backgrounds. These perforations are purposeful errors placed there to refer to traditional notions of what would be considered a “feminine craft,” and also seek to call attention to the tangible and material quality of the screen. The coming together of colour, perforations, music, and frequent interjections and frame changes, creates a similar feeling of synesthesia as *Water Sark* did, and forces the viewer to engage with the film more than just visually, calling attention to their bodily senses.

While this film must be recognized for its slightly problematic discussion of the experiences of women of colour by a white filmmaker, it deserves credit for its attempts to disrupt the ways in which visual codes are prescribed to black women’s bodies. Scholar Kay Armitage states that “Weiland selects images of disenfranchised women of colour which, under her treatment, construct a pre semiotic examination of social rituals as pure rhythm and deconstruct facial and bodily signs of oppression and resistance.” In *Hand Tinting*, Wieland utilizes the screen in a similar fashion to *Water Sark*, as a skin-like membrane which makes the materiality of the film evident and reclaims visual autonomy. While Wieland’s film practice engages with haptic aesthetics in more overt ways, referencing the tangible nature of the film screen, conceptual artists such as Lisa Steele engaged haptic aesthetics differently: interested less in the embodiment of the video as a medium, but the ways in which the body as a subject could engage affectively with the viewer.

Birthday Suits with Scars and Defects

Canadian conceptual artist Lisa Steele is a pioneering video artist and founder of VTAPE

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in Toronto, Ontario. Interested in issues of identity, technology and performance, Steele engages with haptic aesthetics in different but equally effective ways to Weiland. In her 1974 work *Birthday Suit with Scars in Defects*, Steele employs haptic visuality in an effort to sculpt a self-portrait which engages with the viewer on an intimate and authentic level, while simultaneously asserting control over her own body without manipulating the surface of the film in any way. The capacity of video to engage the spectators sensory organs without overtly mediating the surface of the screen was attractive to Steele, who wished to, as she states, “speak back to the sea of images within the mass media that profess to be authoritative sources for what it is to be a woman.”

In this work, Steele videotapes herself autobiographically in the nude on her 27th birthday. Using a minimalist approach, she scientifically transcribes each mark on her body, documenting the events that left the marks on her skin. Despite the objective and clinical nature of the video, the inscription of time on her body is seen as a result of the body's subjective experience. However subjectivity and autobiography play out in rather unique ways in the film. Steele asserts through the ways she describes and refers to herself that her scars and defects are the result of her locality inside of a fleshy body-as-matter, rather than as a subjective person with a trajectory in the world. For instance, many of the scars which cover Steele’s body are the result of both clumsy accidents, and natural bodily mutations such as the removal of a lump in her breast at age 24. That said, she does not assume that her body is merely an object in the world, but one which acts and confronts the viewer.

The subjective nature of the autobiography is further deconstructed through the clinical distance Steele imposes between herself as a person and the body that she intimately shares with her audience. By affixing the camera in one area and moving around it, Steele asserts her control over the views of her body that the spectator can engage with. Despite the use of the camera as an observational tool in this way, Steele also utilizes it to garner intimacy and intersubjectivity. This is emphasized most clearly through the technique of zooming in the work. Focusing in on certain areas of her body, the dramatic zoom of the camera removes the subject momentarily, and Steele's repetitive circling of the scars on her skin renders a sense of haptic visuality. Through the techniques just discussed, Steele calls attention to the embodied nature of both the film and herself.

Throughout these aesthetic techniques, Steele also engages in a subtle discussion of gender. Although appearing completely nude in the film, Steele’s body takes on an asexual nature through the clinical and descriptive frame employed by the artist, however her gender is constructed through the suggestion of feminine attire. Signified female through her bikini tan lines, Steele’s gender is downplayed in the film and replaced with an emphasis on her body’s tangible physicality as an object within an electronic medium. The materiality of the body called upon in these patches of flesh reduce the body to organic matter which demystifies the ascribed gender we see in these lines.

In its definition, embodiment is the experience of being in the world, thinking and experiencing through raced, classed, gendered, and abled, aged bodies. The tension created between Steele’s embodied experiences and the materiality of her body run parallel to the ways in which she uses haptic visuality to engage the viewer. French philosopher Pierre Levy has noted, “the dialectic of being requires that we mutually integrate the point of view of the other, and that we reciprocally signify one another in negotiations. By putting ourselves in the other’s position, we accept the dialectic of substitution.”

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relating to the film subject, yet Steele continuously fluctuates between intimately engaging with the viewer and keeping them at a distance. Brushing up against the spectator, Steele utilizes the intimate space of video art to suggest that there are universal elements to bodily habitation, and embodied ones which set us apart.

Like Weiland, Steele employs aesthetics of disorientation and confusion through the zooming and fragmentation of her body and asserts her subjectivity by attracting and controlling the ways in which we ascribe gender onto her. Despite Steele’s aesthetic differences, her insistence on the deconstruction of the body through the film, brings her and Weiland’s critiques in line with the distinct concerns of second wave feminists and the capacity of film to incite a more embodied viewing practice. In the liminal and situated world of the film encounter, feminism and phenomenology find a fertile ground for dialogue.

This paper has explored the ways in which haptic visuality was employed in feminist video art in Canada in the 1960s and 70s, and the effects that it had on spectatorship. Looking at three films by Joyce Weiland and Lisa Steele to illustrate this point, I have posed that video artists in Canada utilized the materiality of the screen to assert feminist concerns by disrupting the way the viewer engages with the subject on screen. By engaging in an intimate construction of feminine space and female subjectivity, the viewer is able to realize the constructed and situational context of embodied experience. Weiland and Steele can be seen as two artists who engaged these new aesthetic strategies, effectively demonstrating video’s capacity to incite bodily corporeality despite its dominant interpretation as a visual medium.

Through an analysis of early feminist video art aesthetics, this paper contributes to the dialogue of experience and embodiment by discussing the way that haptic visuality reframes how we understand our orientation towards the film subject. Calling for a more robust understanding of the ways in which we engage with film as spectators, this paper has suggested how conceptualizing visual media as haptic and embracing its affective qualities can be significantly useful in realizing films capacity to diminish boundaries between subject and viewer, and between vision and the body.

**Biography**

Katie Lydiatt is a first year MA student in Art History and curatorial studies at Carleton University. Coming from an interdisciplinary background in art history and communications studies, my interests often encompass contemporary art and new media and their impact on memory and identity. My current scholarly research centres around issues of memory in contemporary Canadian photography.

**References**


Abstract
My symptoms of post-traumatic stress manifest themselves via disassociation, recurring night terrors, having the acutely embarrassing and unpredictable inability to recognize faces. Having a physical fight/flight/freeze response at the sight of generic looking white men or from being in crowded rooms or bars or dance venues. I am either hypersensitive to sudden pain, or I am so hyposensitive, that I sometimes think that I am dead. I also haven’t seen my naked body in half a decade without gagging. I see this hypersensitivity and hypervigilance as similar to how mothers can summon up freak strength to lift a Volkswagen Beetle to save their trapped baby by themselves in times of distress. Except in this case, I’m the mom, the baby and the Volkswagen Beetle all at once.

Keywords: affect theory, autotheory, feminist theory, queer theory, sexual violence, visual art, PTSD

This past July, I got a text message from my younger sister. I opened it and read “Hey, can I run by something by you quickly before I send it to the fam?”. I was on Vancouver Island and on the way to a remote campsite that had no cellphone service. The tone of the text message seemed casual enough, so I didn’t reply and decided to leave it until the next morning when I was back on the road. When I reached reception again, my phone dinged. A new message appeared which read: “Okay so I was hoping to give you details over the phone, but alas this will have to do. So I’m doing an action with Greenpeace which will most likely result in an arrest but I’m with a really experienced team and they cover all the legal costs and support.” I immediately tried to call her but her phone was turned off. I sent her a good ten or so text messages knowing that they wouldn’t go anywhere. I didn’t know where she was, who she was with or what exactly she was doing. I started to slip into a time that I had with her earlier in March. We were out dancing with friends one night when she told me that she would be back and disappeared into the crowd. Already feeling generally uneasy about being in a crowded space that I didn’t know, I panicked too much thinking that something was happening to her and started drinking more. When she did return to the group, I drunkenly yelled at her. I made her cry.

Back to July on Vancouver Island. Later in the day, I got an email from Greenpeace that a protest was happening on the Ironworkers Memorial bridge in Vancouver. This was the action that Steph was referring to. She was helping climbers hang over the bridge to block marine traffic with beautiful handmade anti-pipeline banners. She was absolutely going to get arrested. And after 36 hours of occupying the bridge, she did. She and her companions were faced with criminal charges, that were blessedly dropped in October. And as I finish typing these words, the National Energy Board just released a reconsideration report for the Trans Mountain Expansion project, giving the Trudeau government another chance to approve the pipeline. This is not over.

When I think about this story with my sister, part of me feels pride, part of me feels anger, part of me feels a bit jealous in a weird unfortunate sibling way, and I definitely felt a deep terror at the thought of her getting hurt or arrested. I feel like an asshole for feeling this way because I should be fully supportive of her and the cause that she took up. But I feel grief because a very selfish part of
myself knows that it’s because she is braver than I am. Of course, there are many ways that we can all take up causes in our lives, we all have roles in combatting oppression, but I can’t protest in the way that she can.

It took me years of feeling guilty for not being loud or fighting hard enough a specific kind of justice for myself and for the chronic damage that it caused. That is, until a few years ago I witnessed a deep hell unfold in the news where a man in Halifax who was literally caught by the cops raping an unconscious woman in his taxicab, DNA proof and everything, still walked away free and acquitted. When that happened, I walked away from imagining that I would one day be listened to by the Canadian justice system about my own experience. With that in mind, it is imperative to point out that although I have been failed by the police and the justice system, black and indigenous folks, the poor, the disabled and trans people face so much more violence when seeking justice through the courts.

When I think about how the justice system fails us who try and have tried to report sexualized violence, I have been feeling so frustrated because what’s the point of provision of details about abuse when they don’t get listened to and just cause damage and further trauma? Where can silence also be an option when seeking justice?

I felt sick writing this, and I feel sick reading this.

With my current research, I’m looking at the conflict between gestures of confession or provision versus the gestures of refusal or quietness. I want to look into how they function in bodies that have been traumatized by gender based and sexualized violence. More specifically, my research is about my body, because it would be naïve and dangerous to lay claims in regard to the traumas and embodied experiences of others. I know I am not alone, I know that so many of us hold deep raw wounds that are always being grappled with, and I want to argue that these echoes of violence end up affecting the art that we produce or not produce, the spaces that we inhabit or avoid and the experiences that we either welcome or fear. This violence has a repercussion into the production of material culture and the participation in various “art worlds” because traumatized bodies always have to make negotiations with safety and survival first. In The Human Strike, Claire Fontaine leaves room for this tension. She writes, “Human strike can be a revolt within a revolt, an unarticulated refusal, an excess of work or the total refusal of any labour, depending on the situation” (Fontaine 29). So how can we channel this strike to these art worlds?

How much personal confession do I have to provide to prove that I’m unwell? Does it matter if I’m seen as unwell or brain damaged or traumatized? How do I have to articulate it? Through well researched critical theory, medicalized theory and philosophy? What I would rather do is get to articulate these things by myself, for myself and talk about sickness and pain and violence in ways that are much more affective, experiential and somatic. Although, I feel like I’m doing something very very very very wrong by telling strangers deeply intimate and painful parts of myself that are for the most part invisible in public life. I know that this is a research forum where I am supposed to speak about my academic research and how it pertains to my artistic practice. But right now, this is my research. I want to talk about the mechanisms of trauma and how they work in relation to time, language, the
sensory and the social. Disability scholar and activist Johanna Hedva has coined the term Sick Woman Theory to speak to how “most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible” (Hedva). The “Sick Woman” is anyone facing illness, disability, trauma, violence and oppression.

I have been thinking a lot about the various forms of protest that a body can perform especially in connection to these aspects of protest that Hedva describes.

How does protest constantly function in a body that signals a need to rail against a spectre of violence that isn’t always there but is also always there? Especially in a queer female body in this particular flaming dumpster fire of time and space.

This is where the term Soft Protest has been swirling around in my head for a while. I would define Soft Protest as a kind of protest that is embedded in the body. Protest in general requires the presence and actions of one or many bodies. Softness holds connotations of femininity, fleshiness, and a queering of understandings of strength. Soft Protest is in the muscles, fats, bones and it is happening at all times. It is an affect, a constant feedback loop inciting violence within itself and working to fight off the violence all at once. Within a post-traumatized body, I argue that Soft Protest is comparable to a similar mechanism as an autoimmune disorder. Elements of a body misrecognizing itself, then turning on itself but resisting itself all at once. A body becomes a site of danger as it is the source that conjures up the idea of danger over and over and over again. How can someone trust themselves, their senses, their realities, when they are chemically crying wolf?

“Triggers and Flashbacks”

The DSM-5, also known as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, is a manual used by medical professionals, psychologists, counselors and social workers, that sets criteria to diagnose patients with psychological disorders. With Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the criteria that is currently in place for this condition has a set of sub-criteria that are composed of categories like “Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli after the trauma, in the following ways”, “The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced, in the following ways” or “trauma-related arousal and reactivity that began or worsened after the trauma, in the following way(s)” (DSM-5). The professional through clinical or counseling sessions, looks out for this criterion within a person, ticks off the boxes, and there you have, a traumatized subject.

My personal symptoms of PTSD manifest themselves via disassociation, recurring night terrors, having the acutely embarrassing and unpredictable inability to recognize faces. Having a physical fight/flight/freeze response at the sight of generic looking white men or from being in crowded rooms or bars or dance venues. I am either hypersensitive to sudden pain, or I am so hypo-sensitive, that I sometimes think that I am dead (a phenomenon known as depersonalization). I also haven’t seen my naked body in half a decade without gagging.\(^1\) I see this hypersensitivity and hypervigilance as similar to how mothers can summon up freak strength to lift a Volkswagen Beetle to save their trapped baby by themselves in times of distress. Except in this case, I’m the mom, the baby and the Volkswagen Beetle all at once.

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\(^1\) Editing this paper for publication brings me some relief. After many months of intense exposure therapy, I do not experience this distressing phenomenon with the same intensity as when I originally wrote this paper.
Of pressing into a bruise
I talk a lot of victimhood, but I also want to illustrate how my body is inherently violent. My body is unruly and liable to harm others because it is constantly fighting off spectres of violence, and misrecognizing threat, like with the story with dancing with my sister. This body also enacts systemic violence every day. As a settler, I enact violence by benefitting off of stolen Indigenous land, how I contribute and participate in the ongoing colonial project. The grants and scholarships that I have received for my practice come from sources funded either by fossil fuels, resource based extraction, real-estate based displacement of communities of colour and contribute to gentrification and the annihilation of other species. In regard to generational trauma and cyclical violence, I have inherited aspects of racial trauma from the Indo-Caribbean part of my family. With the advent of the study of epigenetics, cases are being made that trauma is embedded in our DNA (although empirical scientific research historically has marginalized and colonized many other forms of knowledge and research on this subject), I carry ghosts of other people in my body, along with ghosts of my own. But because I look lily white, my visible whiteness lies in contrast to some members of my family and I benefit from my visible whiteness in ways that they cannot. Within the state of white supremacy, my own white looking body sets them as an Other. I have extremely distinct childhood memories of white strangers asking my Granny if she was our caretaker, then complimenting her because my sisters and I were on such good behaviour in public. I am complicit in White Supremacy and have a lot of work to do.

How much energy does one spend on choreographing sanity and functionality?
Before I accept my offer to UBC, I have to know, where is he?
Erin tries to find out on Facebook for me.
She just tells me Alberta.
It helps loosen my ribcage that has tightened over the past few months. But not quite. Is he still an artist?
I make the decision to drop out of the program if I find out that he is in it too. I will give up my SSHRC money. I don’t care.
My peripheral vision is never as sharp as I want it to be. And I have to drive with just my side mirrors across the country from Halifax to Vancouver, my car is too packed with my things.
I hit Alberta and I start passing other cars more, my thighs get sore from being so tightly clenched and from pressing the gas with such intention. It’s so fucking needless and I know it.
When I stop to make myself eat, a swarm of hornets descend upon the car. There are so many dead moth corpses smeared all over the hood and windshield, still warm from the engine. So I stay in my seat and wonder what the odds are if he is in this specific Subway Restaurant out of all the Subway Restaurant franchises in Alberta.
I try to sit in the air-conditioned building, but I literally cannot stop looking over my shoulder.
My hands feel like when you get a shot of Novocane from the dentist, I can’t feel the paper towel as I dry them in the washroom. I’m leaving the Subway, I’m leaving my body. I walk to the car. I can’t really remember anything except the colour gold until I see the mountains, they look like clouds. I start to cry because I am overwhelmed and I am unraveling.
The Ghost of Pauline Oliveros

Proprioception is a somatic understanding and a biological mechanism of how our bodies hold and move themselves in space. It is how we can feel the bones in our feet when we press against the ground, feeling air bubbles traveling through our gastrointestinal systems, feeling the popping of a joint in or out of place. It can also mean how we can balance ourselves, use our limbs to orient ourselves in the dark, or knowing the grip needed to clasp an object. Affect theorist Brian Massumi speaks to how “...proprioception folds tactility in, it draws out the subject’s reactions to the qualities of objects it perceives through all five senses, bringing them into the motor realm of externalizable response.” (Massumi 59) This sensing/listening runs deeper past the skin, down into the flesh, ligaments and bones of a body. I make linkages to how trauma is stored in the body through proprioceptive memory and how “proprioceptive memory is where the enfolded limits of the body meet the mind’s externalized responses and where both rejoin the quasi corporeal and the event” (Massumi 59).

No Healing

What does the verb healing indicate?
The way I understand it, it implies a closing of a wound or a return to a whole, or a stasis, or a lack of pain or infection. Healing is a trendy term right now. I can’t even go on Instagram without seeing mindfulness app advertisements where you use your phone to practice breathing wherever and whenever you want. One of them told me that happiness is about perspective. My advertising algorithms know that I’m “sad”. Because of this, the term “healing”, feels uncomfortable for me. It is a word that gets glibly thrown around in the neoliberal narratives that make up the self-care industrial complex. Our bodies are only useful to late capitalism if they are whole and functional, thus a constant imperative to “heal” always feels like its lurking. Neoliberalism tells us, it is our responsibility to individually heal ourselves and if we can’t do it, too fucking bad. Yes, I would love if all of those physical symptoms that I mentioned before go away. I can’t even begin to imagine what that would look like. Maybe it’s time for me to finally go on medication. But I don’t want to heal, if that means returning to a stasis of being okay with our current socio-political conditions.

Queer Feminist Scholar, Sara Ahmed writes “about “no” as the work you have to do in order not to reproduce an inheritance...To get a no out you have to do more than say no; a no needs somewhere to go” (Ahmed). I love reading Ahmed’s work. she holds a lot of optimism in her writing and thinking. It makes me hopeful that even though I feel very little optimism right now about so many things, she does. My “no” wasn’t listened to then, but I want to say no now. Over and over and over again. I’m probably going to be angry for forever and somehow, I am okay with it. It’s held deep in my body. It’s a deep reverberation that moves cells and soft tissues slowly and surely. So maybe

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3 Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004. I admit I sometimes feel a deep kinship for Lee Edelman’s “No Future” (aka: fuck you) stance on things. I appreciate the sentiments of refusal that Edelman uses in regard to the figure “the child”. I want to transpose “healing” in this manner to critique neoliberal narratives of recovery, healing and care. Audre Lorde is no doubt rolling in her grave right now over capitalism’s co-opting of “Self-care”. However, I can’t reference this without acknowledging the work of many queer, feminist and indigenous scholars who have some very well-placed criticism of Edelman’s book *No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive* because of its limited scope of futurity, reproduction and who this writing serves.
in relation to Ahmed’s optimism, I am always generating, I am always saying no, my body is always protesting softly.

Image List

Angela Glanzmann, “February 2010 fold August 2017,” A Mom, a Baby, and a Volkswagen Beetle All At Once: Soft Protest Within a Traumatized Body, 2019

Angela Glanzmann, “(Don’t even get me started on sexual intimacy),” A Mom, a Baby, and a Volkswagen Beetle All At Once: Soft Protest within a Traumatized Body, 2019

Angela Glanzmann, “headspace,” A Mom, a Baby, and a Volkswagen Beetle All At Once: Soft Protest within a Traumatized Body, 2019

Biography

Angela Glanzmann is a queer settler, artist and art worker currently based in the xwməθkwəy əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations (aka Vancouver B.C). She received her BFA from NSCAD University in 2013 and has recently completed her MFA at the University of British Columbia. Her practice revolves around video, performance, sculpture and installation. Her research is currently investigating connections of post-trauma, affect, labour, precarity and their latent markings on a body.

References


Julia Prudhomme (McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada)

Promissory: On Russian Cosmism and Matrilineal Archival Memory

Abstract

This paper explores the archival artistic project, Promissory (2018) alongside theoretical underpinnings of matriarchal memory and the contemporary renewal of Russian Cosmism. Through the procedural and formal aspects of the artistic works presented herein, which manifest as a digital collage fabric installation and 35mm slide projection montage, I consider the fragmentary yet personal stories, ephemera, and embodied lineage generated by my Great-Grandmothers. Fragments lead to fiction, fiction leads to lacuna, lacuna lead to the radical imaginaries brought forth by both my personal archive turned visual representation and the Cosmist movement’s interest in the archive, art and immortality. Spiritual and material, Promissory approaches archival studies with a feminist spirit between living and nonliving entities in finding an affective place among these culled spectres, and spectral spaces.

Keywords: Matriarchal; Russian Cosmism; radical imaginary; feminisms; archive; lineage; inheritance

I begin this paper by evoking Jacques Derrida in his lecture, Archive Fever (1996) as I disguise myself in order to investigate the archival drive through inheritance, through what I here describe as matrilineal archival memory. Derrida suggests: “[i]nheritance leaves only its erotic simulacrum, its pseudonym in painting, its sexual idols, its masks of seduction: lovely impressions. These impressions are perhaps the very origin of what is so obscurely called the beauty of the beautiful. As memories of death” (1996). In the process of conjuring spectres through fragments of voice and image, I further look to the contemporary re-activation of Russian Cosmism (Groys 2018, Serkova 2018, Vidokle 2015). Seemingly disparate trajectories—matrilinearity and Russian Cosmism—overlap to interrupt the archive via the radical imaginary.

The title of my project, Promissory, indicates something to come: conveying or implying a promise; as well as alluding to a legal document between two parties. Zelda Fitzgerald’s favourite word, a meeting between “promise” and “sorry.”

Promissory, as a visual artwork, enacts my matrilineal archive that contains scanned images of diaries, letters, and photographs from my Great Grandmothers, Grandmother, and Mother. This archive exists on an external hard drive, an accumulation catalyzed by my move out-West seven years ago. The line: “she always had a suitcase packed” is well-known in my family, illusive and fantastical to this day.

In thinking about matrilineal lineage with the archive, I am interested in investigating topics such as motherhood, madness, generational traumas, and death/dying. As a theoretical framework, I turn to the contemporary re-activation of Russian Cosmism: a philosophical, historical, and artistic movement, whose origins we may trace from 1772 to 2000 (Groys 2018), to provide a meeting point between my personal archive and my larger, artistic project. A compelling body of thought, Cosmism incorporates science fiction, space travel, museum practices, and revolution-building, and at its core instantiates radical imaginaries, a generative universe fantastique capable of reimagining artistic production as concerned with nothing short of symbolic and physical immortality (Groys 2018, Serkova...
Can each successive telling generate something entirely new? The answer likely depends on the listener. I will explore in the theoretical discussions surrounding *Promissory*: the fraught process of inheritance—contending with feminist lineage and non-linear timelines—evolving into ways of approaching time, the past, and the archive. Suturing connections between matrilinearity, materiality, and narrative, to realizations of archive-as-self-reflection and the alter-imagined exhumes a constellation of voices—like a forgotten comet ever returning through the void—an ellipsis speaking this project (Gacheva et al. 2018).

**One: Story (archive) and matrilineal lineage, passing, motherhood, madness**

*A background actor is empty of an inherent identity—a ghostly epiphenomenon haunting the set and blurred edges of the screen. Portraying the quotidian roles of corpses, bystanders and inaudible speakers, they occupy an indistinct role between prop and person.*

- Julia Feyrer, *Background Actors*, 16 March - 21 April 2018

Diaries and letters connected matrilineally are quotidian, interior, yet through their processes of reading and writing these documents remind us of a certain shifting externality in time/space. Parallel descriptions, date and time and location, accounts of the weather, miles crossed, money spent—I return to LuLu’s travel diaries always hoping to find some new intimacy, a parting of the veil, some incommensurate thing that might signal her personhood in the contemporary. Throughout her impeccable compilation of essays, readings, and poems, Quinn Latimer returns to similar attempts to parallel coincidence among daily fragments sifted through in the everyday. Among the coincidences: *distance*, a notion that includes literature, letters, physical and imagined: “[distance] suggests a landscape over which those letters (art as much as literature) that contemplate that very landscape move or pass” (Latimer 2017). Letters, down through the passage of years, take on a nostalgic visuality: not simply of the lost personhood, but also of a gone world.

Language can barely contain such longing, and we are left to sift meaningless, compositional questions, and the critical choices made by women who write themselves across landscape, across the span of a century, such as the manner in which something is written, “a dialectical situation of intimacy and constant movement—closeness and compulsive itinerancy and release—that seems to define a certain […] sensibility that naturally extends to the netlike work of the artwork itself, at least in this moment” (Latimer 2017). The archive, in this sense, permeates traditional binaries of self and other, private and public, and, enters into a third, digital space as contextualized in the artistic process and in this writing.

*Promissory* attempts to transcend spatio-temporalities in its translation of archival experience. Similarly, Shaunna Moore and Susan Pell propose, “autonomous archives present a framework for understanding the archive as a creative, world-making process that contributes to shared knowledge of the past and has the power to transform modes of public engagement” (Moore and Pell 2010). Autonomous archives present the potential for multi-vocal pasts and “emergent publics,” namely those who “use the space of the archive to critique dominant narratives of official history and ensure that the diversity of their experiences is represented within broader collective memories and heritage” (Moore and Pell 2010). The potential of archives, when communities actively critique and
engage with official “records,” often erupts in the creation of community-based archives as contested sites for affective transmission (Cvetkovich 2003) by imaginatively constructing alternative modes of archival practice. Concurrently, physical and familial lineage through digitized matriarchal ephemera attempt to incorporate embodiment and the everyday within the archive. Along this lineage, my role is conflicted as I straddle the inside and outside, real and imagined corridors of repeated stories and felt traumas.

Yet, spaces of silence evade confrontation. This sense of effacement is echoed by literary scholar Miglena Nikolchina whose work on matricide investigates theorist Julia Kristeva and writer Virginia Woolf in the text, Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf (2004).1 Wherein, “Nikolchina suggests, Woolf’s account of ‘strange spaces of silence’ separate the utterances of women who might otherwise have been our foremothers” (Sayers 2006).2 Such reminiscences account for gaps in the matrilineal literary line, but also in seeking of surrogates and silences that occur in feminine/feminist literary voices, akin to an unknown dance, invoking Kristeva’s phrase: “dancers who suffer as they speak” (Sayers 2006). Yet, the event of death summons a rupture in the matrilineal narrative, an opportunity to sift beyond elliptical appearances (Nikolchina 2004).

Following notions of matricide, feminist madwoman studies trace inherited ideological discourses—wholly believed and enacted practices upon bodies. Developed alongside the rise of capitalist institutionalization3, the figure of the madwoman, coupled with the notion of matricide, overlap to outline the archive’s connections to each other and to myself, my tongue-tied, as ways of understanding our loss of connection with the matrilineal line. Yet, empirical assumptions linger in the contemporary as “embodiment and the imperatives of the physical […] a matrilineal legacy” implying the transference of madness through genes, through the reproducing, doubling, splitting female body (Donaldson 2011). As insider, as activator of this lineage, wherein traumatic memory collides with social convention and marginalization, I feel an intense amount of empathy for each vague retelling of LuLu and Maria’s lives, their respective traumas, their time spent in institutions or running away, the rationalization of their personhood by relatives, possessed through inheritance. This empathy transforms to extimacy4, an outward feeling of melancholy stirring, in Elizabeth Povinelli’s adoption

1 Miglena Nikolchina’s writing also touches upon Russian Cosmism in her book, “Lost Unicorns of the Velvet Revolutions: Heterotopias of the Seminar” (2012). This text discusses the periods of tumult in the 1980s and 1990s Russia and eastern Europe relating to totalitarian regimes and the development/suppression of philosophical thought.
2 Kristeva proposes two types of temporality: cyclical and monumental, both typically associated with female subjectivity (Kristeva 352). Kristeva and Pollock propose an expansion beyond framing ‘women’s time’ as maternally constituted wherein the feminine is considered a “structure which transforms the violence of desire into the tenderness that allows others to live” (Pollock 45). Instead, by insisting that the maternal or feminine subjectivity, as it is structured in patriarchal systems, are void of or deflected from desire and death, in turn emptying out the role as purely reproductive. The feminine is therefore likened with severance, a physical and ideological break—focusing upon the psychoanalytic presupposition that privileges the phallocentric moment, when the child is removed from the mother rather than considering the entire maternal process as a whole. Reclaiming feminine subjectivity and temporality through ‘women’s time’ proposes a shift in the perspective of the body and embodiment in toto.
3 Including the institutionalization of medicine, as proposed by Silvia Federici, who similarly argues that the transition to capitalism must acknowledge the incredibly violent legacies that have composed it: genocide, colonialism, sexism, and affective labour (“The Accumulation” 62 & 71), noting that Marxist conceptions of primitive accumulation is actually a fundamental characteristic of capitalism rather than a precursor for capitalism (“The Accumulation” 63 & 91). Federici illustrates the necessity to include the subjection of the female body under capitalism through societal practices that govern land (e.g., commons, peasant communes, etc.), class (e.g., capitalist creation of the poor), reproduction (e.g., shift from midwifery to medical male professional), and the body (e.g., prostitution, witches, starvation, disease, children)(“The Accumulation” 71-89).
4 Extimacy, refers to Elizabeth A. Povinelli’s adoption of the Lacanian term in Geontologies: A Requiem
of the term as, “intimacy turns into extimacy, to use the term created by Jacques Lacan to define the existence, within the most intimate sphere of the I, of a “foreign body,” that which is external to the individual and with which one identifies” (Povinelli 2016; Callanan).

Like Julia Feyrer’s exhibition, *Background Actors* (2018), my matrilene wander about, now, in my construction and simultaneous deconstruction of their lives, their stories, their personhood, and their ghosts. A certain failing refracts in the archives’ own functional shift from legal device to “institution of historical research […] finally, morph[ing] into [a] hybrid institution based in public administration and historical research alike…” (Spieker 2008). Throughout these shifts the document remains, pulled from circulation, preserved and re-contextualized, emerging in its new form as something quite Other’d (Spieker 2008). The female body, reproducing its lineage, mediated in process, morphing and mutating across time/space/memory.

**Two: Collage and the artistic project, process, materials**

*Genealogy is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.*


Archive scholars Ann Laura Stoler (2002) and Annette Farge (2013) take up authenticity and the archive as metaphorical functions. Form is integral to content in the archive, while maintaining the potential for “a rethinking and imaginary of collections and of what kinds of truth claims lie in documentation” (Stoler 2002). Meaning-making in the archive relies upon interactions, relations and connections between and among documents, lived experience and framing (Farge 2013; Stoler 2002). Such a reinforcement of fiction in each contemporary activation of the archive and its contents attends to the collapsing of preconceived notions surrounding the archive: as heretofore preserving, ordering and rendering the past.

My archive—in its formulation and rediscovery—exists in my everyday. Scarves, costume jewelry, photographs, and linens worn and created by my Great-Grandmothers passed on make up the fabric of my interior life. This lineage in which I participate: each woman’s story imbued with a sense of ambiguity through repeated *tellings*, a sense of fantasy with each new detail divulged in conversation and written document. During the process of collaging the digital archive for this project, I documented additional objects to flesh out my images of her. Poppy pods from my garden are scanned, scattering black seeds on the glass. A reference to a family story in which Maria planted poppies to remind her of a homeland—somewhere between Germany and Russia—and, depending on the teller and the audience, she was arrested for cultivation of a narcotic, or at the very least reprimanded for this act.

Each element chosen, cut, masked, layered and altered within the digital collage results in

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5 Their fiction dealing quite centrally with the psycho-sexual and intellectual development of women and with the meaning of femininity; moments, told, handed down as avant-garde to the time, yet, such a repetition would be false to normalize (Biddy Martin on Lou Andreas-Salome).
six works of varying sizes. Inspired by the work of contemporary artists: Danh Vo (Vietnamese/Danish) and Tiziana La Melia (Canadian), I sought to print the collages on fabric in an effort to speak to fragmented *unknowing*, ephemeral in its vacancies, like a tooth troubling the socket of a molar that was never there, along the gaps, passings, and translations across time and space, coupled with the simultaneous urge to codify each individual scanned image prior to beginning the collages. From this response, a 35mm slide projection evolved as a means to mediate the object-turned-digital into yet another, new object: the slide, affording the opportunity for montage—a temporal collage—through the magic and nostalgia of the seemingly defunct apparatus: the projector.\(^6\) A nod to this past technology, the slides offer a new physicality to the scans, referent to the collages, and a bodily blinking with the change of each slide, akin to a group viewing a personal travelogue.

My impulse towards installation for this project echoes an entry made on Tuesday, 24 August 1943 by artist Leonora Carrington in her book, *Down Below* (2017)\(^7\)—a fear of drifting into fiction yet instinctively compelled to play with authenticity. My Great-Grandmothers, LuLu and Maria, are spectral figures for me, imagined, activated by story and object. My own understanding of their lives, their personalities, their traumas is mediated to a point where they merge into one figure, one being, one tragedy: lost to the ravages of time, imagined in a sort of mutable play, my own sensibilities and memory shifting their life stories as needed—much in the way art functions. Both digital and slide imagery take on these fugitive variations, including found imagery and outside references: such as etiquette texts (Vanderbilt [1952] 1972), Harold Pinter’s play “The Birthday Party” (1960) and Joan Didion’s essay “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream” (1966). Each borne from coincidence, these external sources induce a certain anxiety, from gestural manipulation in collage and montage to narrative representations of women as those who rely on fiction to substantiate them, much as the “truth” of family pastoral, equally material and phantasmagorical.

Fragments are integral to the gesture and composition of collage. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh utilizes “anomie” or “anomic” to discuss the artwork of Gerhard Richter (1999), terms I find intriguing as they cohere with my discussion of collage, fragments, and my own engagement of archival art in the work of Promissory (2018, Images 3 - 8). Anomie is a condition in which society provides little moral guidance to individuals—a breakdown of social bonds between an individual and the community, consequently revealing these relations as porous and resulting in fragmentation of self and social identity (Buchloh 1999; Foster 2004). This *no place* of utopia is transposed to the archive as a site of the utopian vision as aspirational, but also critiquing the contemporary (Buchloh 1999).

Collage—or montage—as methodology, making the ordinary strange through cut, assemblage, layering of symbol/image/object demands the time-place-ment of experience—a nowness of existing fragments composed into a new organization. Ben Highmore looks to the Surrealist art movement and their project—to access the dream state—to employ collage as an intervention of

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\(^6\) During the experimental installation of this work at McMaster University (11 April 2018) my projector broke, the lamp suddenly darkened, a new lamp not fixing the issue. Dr. Mary O’Connor graciously ran home to retrieve her slide projector from her basement. Upon returning, she told me about a sudden remembrance—the last time that she used the projector with her Mother. A profound exchange heightened by the matriarchal focus of this project, layered with each interaction, failure (technical) and shift.

\(^7\) “I am afraid I am going to drift into fiction, truthful but incomplete, for lack of some details which I cannot conjure up today and which might have enlightened us. This morning, the idea of the egg came again to my mind and I thought that I could use it as a crystal to look at Madrid in those days of July and August 1940—for why should it not enclose my own experiences as well as the past and future history of the Universe?” (Carrington [1988] 2017).
rules or conceptual practices (Highmore 2001). As a socio-politically situated movement, Surrealism—in its attempts to rectify the horrors of, and lingering from—post-World War II, de-valued social order in favour of their own order of things. A sort of joyful and yet violent throwing upwards of everything known about the world, the everyday, just as Marie I and Marie II declare, “Nobody understands anything / Nobody understands us / Everything’s going bad in this world / […] / You know what? / If everything is going bad / …so… / …we’re going… / …bad / …as / …well!!…” in Věra Chytilová’s Czechoslovak New Wave film Daisies (Sedmíkrasky) (1966).  

Three: A Vaudeville on Mankind in Time and Space: Russian Cosmism and the archival turn

Skin, like photo paper, is a permeable membrane sensitive to the outside world. It retains memories of past touches: caresses, cuts, burns. The cuticle is a protective filter between flesh and nail; enlarged, it recalls a landscape divided into territories. The boundaries between external and internal, macro and micro, open here to material transformation.

- Fia Backström, A Vaudeville on Mankind in Time and Space, 23 February - 8 April 2018

If we compare an archive to a grave, then reading, or more precisely research, will be the path toward exhumation, and an exhibition, as it were, the resurrection.


In these contexts, what is the art museum if not an aggregate of the fragments of rituals? What else could it be? Whoever heard of a museum of the museum? An archive of itself? In turning to the exhibition—albeit peripherally—throughout this work, let us now turn to the theoretical underpinning: the contemporary re-activation of the movement, Russian Cosmism, in which the museum is situated as sanctified site and a model to perform rituals towards immortality. In an attempt to expand upon notions of the archive regarding matrilineal inheritance and corporeal mortality, Russian Cosmism provides an atemporal, atypical grounding in multiple other futures within a constellation of thought, periods, and movements without a ground, at all, in some ways condemning genealogy and futurity as rather a series of interpretations to consider the institution (museum), the body (corpse), and material phenomena.

Philosopher Boris Groys introduces cosmism as history formally contending with death, seeking to re-articulate it from a “new point of view: history, the past, and the graveyard become a field full of amazing potential: nothing is finished and everyone and everything must continue” (Groys

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8 This film is important to note as it responds to WWII through the playful absurd adventures of Marie I and Marie II, but also because it was a state-sponsored film that was quickly banned by authorities and even resulted in the exile of the director, Věra Chytilová.

9 “A Vaudeville on Mankind in Time and Space” refers to the exhibition of photography and installation by Fia Backström at Callicoon Fine Arts (New York, US), which ran from 23 February - 8 April 2018. The exhibition title also references Harry Martinson’s space epic, Aniara, A Vaudeville on Mankind in Time and Space (1956). The archival turn refers to Ann Laura Stoler’s article, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form” (2002)

10 In 1874, Fedorov, considered a forefather of the Cosmist movement, begins his twenty-five-year post at the Rumyantsev Museum Library. This position is integral to Fedorov’s writing and consequently Russian Cosmism in the contemporary re-activation as a central focus on the archive, the museum and the library runs throughout the movement centrally and its off-shoots. (Information accessed via “Timeline of Russian Cosmism” website, Gacheva, et al. 2018).
This point of view not only attempts to reorder all life at various points between 1772 to 2000, but is also informed by social relations with natural phenomena, including: a comet that reappears every 60-70 years (Gacheva, et al. 2018); blood transfusions for immortal life (Groys 2018); to the co-incidence of sun spots with political revolutions (Vidokle 2015).

A child of trauma, Cosmism looks to transform society by dissolving apparatuses of oppression. Engaging the site of the museum, the archive, the commons, as means to liberate the present not only for future generations (as seen in political movement rhetorics), but also quashing fear of an afterlife as engrained in religious and nation-state rhetorics. Its origin point vague, Russian Cosmism serves as a double-bind on both my archive and my personal relationship to it as a way to speak of/to the myriad issues present in linearity, futurity, and the re-making of home. To speak the names of but a few: distance, loss, isolation, the unknown, nostalgia and its malcontents: memory, fantasy, forgetfulness, erasure, also war, the politics of disentanglement, and the small inconsistencies that make stories “true” through endless repetitions.  

In Natalya Serkova’s discussion on the archival methodologies of Russian Cosmism, she consults translated texts and exhibitions that expand from the movement. The inconsistencies and contradictions that litter the movement could irritate a reader, yet as Serkova and other contemporary champions of Russian Cosmism like Boris Groys, Anton Vidokle, and Anastasia Gacheva perpetuate in their work the possibility for a re-engagement of these considerations to inform expanded readings. Serkova suggests that we approach Russian Cosmism’s archive “parallel to it, along its own time-space trajectory” (Serkova 2018) echoing feminist approaches to the archive as discussed in Ann Cvetkovich’s archive of feeling, which looks to community and volunteer-driven lesbian and gay archives in America as institutional critique (2003).

Such approaches seem appropriate to the project of archiving the cosmists, too, as they advocate the body (not so much the sexual body but the present, phenomenological body) as unified with ecological, technological and philosophical apparatuses that attempt to interrupt the present moment (here, traversing periods of famine, totalitarianism regimes, civil and World wars, to name a few), Serkova states: “with the cosmist body’s headlong flight into the here-and-now, the ruptured, severed spiral ends falling on our heads could be fruitful, supplying new viable shoots, coupled with the germs of the speculative present: the spring’s mobility would nicely facilitate hybridization. In the end, only a hybrid, constantly mutating cosmist project can maintain its momentum. The cosmist worm with a thousand eyes shall finally emerge from the soil to catch a sunbeam and reflect it off its shiny skin” (Serkova 2018, Image 9).

Conclusion

The capricious geopolitical climate of the present, replete with its roving beginnings and shuffling ends, not only structures an impossible, unstable future of ecological, social, political and nuclear fallout, but a very basic fear towards a future. This contradiction, coupled with our increasing connectedness with technologies that provide us with a constant influx of information—for good or ill—seems prescient of the recent re-activation of Russian Cosmism within artistic and critical theory

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11 When discussing the installation “Sixteen Ropes” by Ilya Kabokov (Russia), Sven Spieker draws parallels between failure and the archive by suggesting: “When an archive has to collect everything, because every object may be come useful in the future, it will soon succumb to entropy and chaos” (Spieker 2008).

12 For example, “Art Without Death: Russian Cosmism” at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (September 1 - October 3, 2017)(Serkova 2018).
circles, in particular, *e-flux journal*. While I might not be jailed, exiled or executed for expressing my beliefs, uncertain futurity links the present with Russian Cosmism’s flares and redactions throughout its numerous archipelagoes of instantiation, between 1772 to 2000 (Groys 2018).

A present-ness contested, the archive may be necessary in shaping time, yet its very technology is contested, too: only the postmodernist schizoid recalls the necessity to continuously exile herself. Rebecca Comay describes the archive as trauma, stating: “[…] the archive, condition of possibility of remembrance, exceeds and confounds the time of history. The collection, source and reservoir of recollection, is itself suspended in the immemorial” (Comay 2002). Such liminal spaces are explored through the artistic archival project *Promissory* (2018) and the re-activation of Russian Cosmism, and might be best bookended with Derrida’s repeated phrase “to come” (1996). A certain futurity, ambiguous and exterior, containing an emptiness, a haunting—is at once unified and fragmented. Structures of the past collide with radical, imaginary futurities, not necessarily utopian or promising, but rather sharing a drive towards alternative ways of conceiving societal and temporal time.

The potentiality of cosmism regards the procedural exhumation of all things having once lived: humans, animals, bacteria, but with this also memory. How might such a cacophonous rupture of memory’s voices shift the present moment? How might we approach the archive of those materials and memories if all is exhumed, all immortal? How does the precarious female body situate itself among such intense bringing forth of newness—in concept and in material?

Memories of trauma are here vague, existing at a juncture as precarious memories and precarious bodies. If memory of trauma is expunged from folk memory we run the risk as a civilization to plunge ever more into the heart of violent regimes, totalitarianism and the sorts of massacres that my Great-Grandmother(s) bore witness. The archive as a collective form of remembering, its codified universal experience demonstrates accident and failure of societies, as much as the archive is a site of triumph for the nation-state. Archives, here, when confronting the radical imaginary of the matrilineal archive, the artistic project *Promissory* (2018) and Russian Cosmism offer a double-bind toward such precarious, complex bodies and memories.

**Image List**


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Abstract

In my new media art practice, I use augmented reality as a medium and a tool to explore the liminal space between the physical and digital, using it as a metaphor of the liminal space of mixed-race identity. Augmented reality digitally adds an unseen layer of information to physical objects, where the digital is only revealed through the use of a mediating device such as a mobile phone or head mounted display. In this body of work, I use science fiction imagery as a way to address narratives about technology, identity and liminality.

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Mixed-race Identity, Science Fiction, New Media Art, Mixed Reality, unity, ARCore, Google, mobile

Augmented Reality (AR) exists at the boundary between the physical and the digital, it overlays digital information onto physical space through video-see-through devices such as a smartphone or a head-worn display. While Virtual Reality immerses the viewer into an entirely digital environment to create a physical experience of virtual space, AR immerses the viewer in a virtual experience of physical space. AR is a developing technology that has been used in art galleries and museums to overlay additional information about the artworks, or to provide more detail for the viewer to investigate. AR is also being used as an educational tool like Google’s Arts and Culture App which allows viewers to view artifacts in 3D through their mobile devices, placing the objects in the users space which they are then able to physically move around or manipulate through the app. These are uses of AR as a method to provide more detail or context about physical artwork or artifacts, but AR also has the potential to critically examine modes of spectatorship and the formal qualities of media art, facilitating embodied interactions within digital and physical space.

In this paper I investigate how augmented reality can be used as a critical medium to address issues of embodiment and spectatorship, as well as its role as a metaphor of revealing unseen layers of information as it relates to revealing unseen layers of identity in my own work. I will show examples of AR art from my practice and discuss the potentialities of the medium to make conceptually and critically engaged work. I will be referencing Cyborg Portraits, a series of digital portraits augmented with their original digital assets to re-complete the scene through AR. This series is taken from a broader body of work dealing with the boundary between physical and digital realms and the relationship to liminal identities. The mediated unveiling of AR art, functions as a metaphor to address unseen or unrecognized layers of identity specifically addressing mixed-race identities. Using the discursive approach to identity as theorized by Stuart Hall and the experience of mixed-race identity through personal experience and anecdotes of other mixed-race artists and writers, I will show the similarities between the process of identification of mixed-race subjects and the process of viewing AR art; both of which are mediated and context-contingent processes.

Hall argues that “identities are never unified and... are increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization and are constantly in...
the process of change and transformation” (4). The construction of any identity is inherently a process of bringing together different discourses and histories. Being mixed-race, the “intersecting... practices and positions” in constructing identity are even more apparent. Especially when the layers of mixed-race identity are not recognized by others and one is assumed to be only part of one’s identity or completely misidentified. Artist Kim Yasuda describes her identity as a “temporal heritage … in a constant state of redefinition” (Bolatagici 79). While writer Malcolm Gladwell describes his experience of feeling more like one side when around the other (123). As a white-presenting mixed-race person, my own experience of identity is that it is often something that must be revealed through communication, identified or misidentified by others. The process of revealing the sometimes-unseen layers of mixed-race identity is a mediated process, through social context or communication. Mixed-race identity is in a constant state of change, where identity and identification are contingent on social context and require mediated unveiling to communicate to others who may misidentify.

To engage with mobile-based AR, the viewer must have a smartphone and the dedicated app. AR exists only within the context in which it is viewed and the information that is revealed is contingent on the physical space. Cyborg Portraits uses ARCore and Unity to augment physical images with digital objects. The digital objects are modified versions of the original digital assets from which the physical images are made. Through the AR App, the viewer can see the objects from the images in clearer detail within physical space. While AR can be anchored through many ways, whether that is through GPS or position tracking, this series uses image markers to anchor the digital assets to physical images. When the viewer first sees the images, the fact that they can be augmented will be unclear because by using image markers to anchor the AR there is no obvious barcode or symbol to communicate that the images can be augmented. Once the viewer has used the dedicated app – the correct context – to view the work, the 2D images are augmented with 3D digital objects that re-complete the image, creating an interaction that is simultaneously physical and digital. The moment of mediated unveiling happens within the context of the device, much like the mediated unveiling of identity which happens within different social contexts.

AR art can facilitate an embodied experience with the virtual in physical space, it “networks the immateriality of invisible art onto the spatial dimension of the immediate environment. With AR art, a digital installation [emerges/merges] into the physical experience of our bodies as we wander within its invisibly annotated milieu” (Gould 26). In AR, the digital assets are always associated with the markers or GPS coordinates but are only made visible through a mediating device. The digital elements of AR are merged with the physical space of viewing. Mediated through the screen, the viewer looks through to see the digital objects within physical space. In her book *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles describes the mediating function of the screen: “Virtual reality technologies … make visually immediate the perception that a world of information exists in parallel to the ‘real world’, the former intersecting the latter at many points and many ways” (Hayles 14). One of these intersections is AR, where the parallel world of information is overlaid on to the real world. At this intersection, digital information and physical space are merged and experienced simultaneously. Hayles argues that the boundary between physical and digital is based on “the cultural perception that information and materiality are conceptually distinct, and that information is in some sense more essential, more important and more fundamental than materiality” (18). This leads into what Kate Mondloch describes as the tendency to look through screens as if looking into another world (4).
What then, does it mean for the viewer to look through their screen at a live-feed of their immediate surroundings annotated with digital information? When viewing AR art, the focus is not on looking through to another world, but rather looking through to the real world with the addition previously unseen information. While AR does merge physical and digital, AR is not a perfectly equal mix of the two. The role of the screen in AR work makes the experience of the physical and digital primarily enabled by digital technology and interactions, however the presence of digital information in physical space can facilitate physical interactions in response to that digital information.

Amanda Starling Gould argues that, "though AR art behaves as an intangible object, it still manages the traditional artistic act of taking place: it happens, and it inhabits place and obliges the viewer's body to do the same" (26). The viewer must navigate the space populated with digital objects, causing the viewer to think more about their position within the space and in relation to the digital objects. Mondloch describes a model of spectatorship in gallery-based spatial experimentation through screen-reliant installation which can also be applied to the experience of viewing AR. She argues that “the viewer is both ‘here’ (embodied subjects in the material exhibition space) and ‘there’ (observers looking into screen spaces) in the here and now” (62). This doubling of perspective facilitates embodied experiences with digital objects through AR art. In looking through the screen into the physical space of the gallery, the viewer is more aware of their movements within the space – either by moving away or around the digital objects to preserve (or break) the illusion that the objects are there.

**Cyborg Portraits** is a series of computer-generated images featuring a digital copy of myself. The three images depict scenes of illuminating and blocking the copy from view, similar to the completed composition of the AR. The images feature illumination through simple shapes, and the materiality of the digital copy is reflective, furthering the interplay between illumination and obstruction. In AR, the original digital copy is re-inserted over the 2D image, so the viewer can see the object in 3D. The images are displayed in lightboxes to further reference the screen as the threshold between physical and digital realms. While the images have some illumination they are mostly dark, and when viewed through AR the digital objects are a light grey in colour so that the viewer can see the digital objects in more detail, even while the AR is obscuring the 2D image from view.

Within the series Cyborg Portraits, the AR objects are small and while they do not influence the viewers physical movement through the space, they still encourage the viewer to look from multiple perspectives. The AR assets complete the composition to show the viewer the 3D asset from which the image was made, often obscuring the original image. The viewer is then encouraged to look back and forth between the mediated view of the screen and the physical space without it, comparing and evaluating the un-augmented image and the completed AR composition. These works exist at an intersection between physical and digital realms, relying on the mediating device of the phone to reveal the AR components. The viewer is presented with the digital information that causes them to re-evaluate their initial assessment of the 2D image. This comparison between the physical and digital, as well as the importance of the role of mediation is meant to critique assumptions based on superficial information. AR in this case, functions much like the process of revealing or identifying otherwise unseen layers of identity.
Biography
Adrienne Matheuszik is a multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto, Ontario. Matheuszik has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Ottawa and a Graduate Certificate in Digital Technologies in Design Art Practice. Matheuszik earned her Masters of Fine Arts in the Interdisciplinary Masters in Art Media and Design at OCAD University in 2019 where her research explored issues of mixed-race identity, mixed reality technologies and science fiction aesthetics.

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Further Reading:
Daniel Evans (University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada)
Archipelago

Abstract
In an increasingly data-driven and algorithmically automated world, a clearly delineated boundary between physical and virtual existence is no longer possible. Search histories, social media, purchases, medical records, location history, and other forms of commodified information all converge to create externalized profiles beyond the control of their originators, that nonetheless have tangible impact on experiences in the physical world. All too frequently, these acts of profiling reproduce entrenched systems of power and control, even as they obfuscate the process of reproduction. This dual-natured existence evokes the shapeshifting seal figure known variously as selch, selkie, silkie, or kopakonan: a liminal figure that mediates between two worlds, between land and sea, negotiating the boundary by donning and removing its sealskin—an apparatus that both is, and somehow is not, part of its body. This project is a speculative world-ing; a re-imagining of data visualization through the lens of folklore.

Keywords: Selkie, Folktales, Data Visualization, Data Violence, Google, Targeting, Surveillance

1. Never a Complete Rupture

Seals were believed to be former human beings who voluntarily sought death in the ocean. Once a year, on the Thirteenth night, they were allowed to come on land, strip off their skins and amuse themselves as human beings, dancing and enjoying themselves (Visit Faroe Islands 2019).

In August of 2018, I downloaded the location history from my Google account. The file ran to 246 megabytes; tens of thousands of pages of closely spaced plain text. Between 700 and 1500 individual entries for each day between December 26th, 2016 and now (averaging one entry every 90 seconds) describe my exact GPS coordinates, often accurate to within a few meters, along with a conjecture of what physical activity or mode of transportation I was involved in at the time. Each island in this Archipelago is constructed from one day's worth of location tracking data. They are not at scale, but the ratio is exact: 1/100 of an arc minute to one meter. They are laid out according to a polar coordinate transposition of the Coligny calendar, a 2nd century Gaulish calendar that attempted to synchronize the lunar month with the solar year (Lehoux 63). This attempt to integrate two discrete, yet equally valid, means of quantifying time had a syncretic resonance the mythic sealskin as the locus of mediation between physical and virtual spaces; the liminal reconfigured as littoral.

2. An Undercurrent of Desire

Well, it happened one day that the goodman of Wastness was down on the ebb, when he saw at a little distance a number of selkie folk on a flat rock. Some were lying sunning themselves, while others jumped and played about in great glee. They were all naked, and had skins as
white as his own. The rock on which they sported had deep water on its seaward side, and on its shore side a shallow pool (Neil 266).

My Google user profile currently lists 50 active labels or tags that are used to personalize the advertising and recommendations I am given on any of its platforms. A further 9 tags would be used had they not been manually disabled, though I have no recollection of doing so. I am not entirely certain how “Cats”, “Parenting”, and “Jazz” ended up in this list, nor how they are weighted against other tags that are actually present in my screen time; the algorithm that controls all of this is neither accessible to me, nor likely within the realm of my comprehension. Nevertheless, these are the categories that I have been placed into by an organization that at least maintains an appearance of transparency—I can see these tags, and switch them off if I choose (whether these tags represent the entirety of Google’s profiling, or just the portion the company is comfortable sharing with me, is another matter entirely).

The organizations purchasing targeted advertising on platforms such as Google and Facebook have categories of their own, many benign, others far more predatory. “Welfare Mom w/Kids. Pregnant Ladies. Recent Divorce. Low Self-Esteem. Low Income Jobs. Experience a Recent Death. Physically/Mentally Abused. Recent Incarceration. Drug Rehabilitation. Dead-End Jobs—No Future,” read the desired advertising targets of a recently closed for-profit educational institution that, during its heyday, received nearly 90 percent of its funding from tuition paid with federal student loans—loans that nearly two-thirds of the institution’s students would default on as they spiraled deeper into poverty (O’Neill 72).

3. The Boundaries of Intimacies First Needed to be Built

The old man stood up and left him, and Conneely never laid eyes on him again until the day he died. The time went by until May Day came, and at the dawn of the day, Conneely hid himself in the cave. Later on in the day he saw three seals coming up on to the rock. Each of them took off the hood, and threw it behind them into the cave, and they were the finest women that ever raised their faces to the sky. The youngest was the most beautiful of all. When the three women jumped in to swim, Conneely picked up her hood and shoved it inside his shirt, next to his skin; he kept the other two in his hands. He waited there until they came back to the rock. When they saw him with the hoods in his hands, they asked for them, but he refused. They started to wail at the top of their voices, saying that their father would kill them, if they weren’t home early in the evening. He threw her hood to the eldest, and the other two were still pleading for their own. He then threw the second hood to the second woman. The two seals jumped into the sea together and went off (O’Sullivan 118).

Over the course of my 20s, I experienced a phenomenon that may be unique to me, and in any event is highly localized to a narrow phase of digital history: witnessing the first email addresses of everyone I grew up with gradually fade from use, only to return, one by one, as necromantic echoes, revivified by spammers. In the late 90s and early 2000s, Hotmail was ubiquitous; it was, at least to my knowledge at the time, the most visible platform that was both free, and independent
of an internet service provider. It also had a (probably critically under-reported) security vulnerability that, at least for a few weeks in August of 2001, allowed anyone to log in to any known account with the password “eh”.

It was also how I kept in touch as we grew older and apart; unlike many of my peers, I was not an early adopter of social media. These correspondences trailed off over the course of years, as people moved on to other platforms, other email services; other lives. And then one day the first one arrived: a message from the address of someone I hadn’t spoken to in years, proffering discount Cialis with astonishing grammatical creativity, and with the previous owner’s entire contact list copied out in the “To:” header. They came at irregular intervals for the better part of a decade after that: chain letters, implausible surgical enhancements, pharmaceuticals of every variety; proffered by bots dressed in tattered scraps of a stolen skin.

4. A Soft Form of Control

So the sea-lass went with the goodman and stayed with him for many days, being a thrifty, frugal, and kindly goodwife. She bore her goodman seven children, four boys and three lasses, and there were not bonnier lasses or statelier boys in all the isle. And though the goodwife of Wastness appeared happy, and was sometimes merry, yet there seemed at times to be a weight on her heart; and many a long, longing look did she fix on the sea. She taught her bairns many a strange song, that nobody on earth ever heard before. Albeit she was a thing of the sea, yet the goodman led a happy life with her (Neil 267).

A 2016 audit of CalGang, an internal policing database created in 1997 to profile suspected gang members across California’s 58 counties, listed 42 individuals who were less than a year old at the time of their entry. 28 of them were entered for, purportedly, “admitting to being gang members” (Howle 39). In total, a full 23 percent of the database’s entries lacked adequate support to justify their inclusion. Most individuals profiled in the database are not aware of it, nor do they have any means to contest it. This data, collected and maintained without public transparency or government oversight, has been used illegally as evidence of gang affiliation in court prosecution, and, more startlingly, for employment screening purposes (Kravetz 2016).

The first of these neonatal CalGang members entered the labour market between 2013 and 2015. By this time, over 70 percent of minimum- and low- hourly wage jobs had replaced human review of applicants with automated systems developed and maintained by third-party contractors such as Kronos (O’ Neill 105-107). Like the database, these automated systems are opaque in their operation, and function with little to no oversight. There is no mechanism for feeding data back into the system; of evaluating how the selected applicant performs compared to other potential applicants considered. As long as it is able to winnow down a pool of applicants to a select shortlist, there is no reason to question whether or not the system is performing as intended. Imagine a succession of such systems, armed with CalGang data, impassively blackballing an erroneously flagged applicant (most probably already marginalized by class and race) over, and over, and over again. There is no justification given, and there is no appeal. Only the persistent, damning verdict that they have failed.
One day, while he was out at sea fishing with his companions, he realised he had left the key at home. He announced to his companions, ‘Today I shall lose my wife!’ – and he explained what had happened. The men pulled in their nets and lines and rowed back to the shore as fast as they could, but when they arrived at the farm, they found the children all alone and their mother gone. Their father knew she wasn’t going to come back, as she had put out the fire and put away all the knives, so that the young ones couldn’t do themselves any harm after she’d left (Visit Faroe Islands 2019).

In the United States, the FBI claims that the scope of its facial recognition database encompasses half of the country’s adult population. Every time we tag ourselves in a photograph, we contribute to machine-learning datasets becoming ever more adept at identifying pattern and consistency across a spectrum of contexts. In becoming “visible” in digital spaces, we also interpolate ourselves as users under this system. Yet any of the most common facial recognition algorithms are available as free open source implementations. What would these tools look like, in manifestations other than the punitive? A digital bloodhound set to find missing persons by scanning the background figures of Facebook photographs? A structure that leverages microsegmentation and targeted messaging to connect vulnerable populations with social assistance, rather than predatory advertising? Perhaps something simpler, such as a publically accessible breakdown of average insurance rates by postal code; a means of revealing an otherwise invisible redlining. Or is this line of thinking merely another attempt to dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools (Lourde 113)?

Her five sons followed her to the shore but failed to find her. They returned home, crying for their mother. When Conneely returned home in the evening, the house was half-burned, his wife had gone, and the children were wailing for her. He sat down with them and he, too, cried his fill until morning. As soon as the children got up in the morning, they went down to where they had seen their mother go into the sea, hoping to see her. And they did. She came in close to the shore and spoke to them. And there wasn’t a day came during the next five years that they didn’t go down to the sea, and she came every day and talked to them. When the five years were up, she told them that they would never see her again (O’Sullivan 119).

We cannot allow ourselves to forget that our perception of virtual spaces as sovereign, or as a form of public commons, belies their actual status as privately owned, albeit built on decades of state-funded infrastructure (Hu 147). Similarly, to ascribe agency for systemic data violence to algorithmic systems alone allows us to displace our own complicity in upholding and maintaining them. Our data-doubles, our mediating skins, offer only the illusion of disembodiment. They are merely displaced, stored on physical drives in data centers, many located in former military installations, and networked with physical cables following the paths of last century's railroads (Hu 91). A map, as ever, of money and sovereign power.
7. The Body Remade in the Image of Data

A tinge of gray faintly illuminating the mottled clouds in the eastern sky was heralding the approach of dawn...(Colum 2 479)

There were very few Conneelys in Errismore at that time. But you couldn’t count all of them that descended from the five sons of the seal-woman...(O’Sullivan 119)

A tinge of gray faintly illuminating...

...I did not mean to fall asleep. I was sunning my silver stomach on a desolate rock in the shallows, basking in the heat reflected off of the violet waves, breathing the kelp-spattered air. I had only closed my eyes for a moment when he slipped up, silent as a spear-fisherman, and sliced through the skin of my back just as easily as tearing paper (Valente 379)

A tinge of gray faintly illuminating...

...The man that caught her was one of those who watched the weir over on the Island... (Colum 1 478)

A tinge of gray...

My skin is gone, but I belong to no one. I am no seal and no man. The skin calls to me, but I cannot answer.

*Please,* I would say. *You are killing me* (Valente 381)

Within a system that obfuscates its oppressive metrics, seeing, looking, and finding are powerful tools for re-worlding. Yet the mechanism of the search itself is co-opted as a form of labour that generates commodifiable data while further interpolating the searcher through ever more specific profiling. We must look beyond the carefully demarcated sightlines. Subverting the search; re-imagining (and re-imaging) our second skins; reclaiming them from the status of commodities produced by an asymmetric interaction.

**Image List**

![Archipelago (still), Daniel Evans, 2019, Virtual Reality](image1)

![Archipelago (still), Daniel Evans, 2019, Virtual Reality](image2)

![Archipelago (still), Daniel Evans, 2019, Virtual Reality](image3)
Biography
Daniel Evans is an interdisciplinary artist from Edmonton, Alberta. Operating in the expanded field of printmaking, he incorporates 3D modelling, rapid prototyping, and virtual-and augmented-reality technologies alongside traditional printmaking and drawing. Evans studied at MacEwan University (Dip.), the Alberta College of Art and Design (BFA), and the North Wales School of Art and Design (MA). He is currently an MFA candidate in printmaking at the University of Alberta.

References
Abstract
The concept of interstice emerges in many fields, to the point of ubiquity. It is micro and macro, existing in both human-made and organic systems. Certainly what has come to be recognized as the gallery space is no exception. While the interstice invites contemplation on its in-betweenness and the histories of the destinations it is between, the non-place is a fact of supermodernity. As defined by French theorist Marc Augé, the non-place is a transitive space that eliminates histories except for those in which it makes spectacle. My paper examines approaches of interstitial engagement in the gallery context, and how certain treatments transform the museum into non-place. I consider the space between works on exhibition (their interplay), the temporal interstice (the striking and installation of one exhibition into another), and the architectural interstices of the interior of the gallery or institution. Through a method of contemplation, my paper finds that the spaces between are worthy of the same criticality lended to art objects in an exhibition.

Keywords: interstice, non-place, museum architecture, in-between, liminality

The past two years I have spent much of my time observing a specific part of Highway 401 between Toronto and Windsor. The drive is predominantly pastoral, sometimes broken by light industry; for the most part it drifts by unremarkably. I have begun to think more about this nothingness between destinations, and how it might serve as an analogy. As the city of Toronto approaches, a particular moment occurs when the driver passes through a series of layered overpasses with an almost mountainous presence—they command authority. These monuments of infrastructure evoke a certain terror and awe as I imagine the weight of them crashing down overhead. Sublime in the Kantian sense, they denote an arrival, and a break from the meditative monotony that came before. This experience recalls an interview with artist Tony Smith, in which he reflects on an illicit adventure taken with three students onto the incomplete New Jersey Turnpike in the early 1950s: “The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn’t be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done.”

The constructed nature of the highway—something so utilitarian and artless—meets the ineffability of the transitive, a space through which thousands of people pass each day without ever meeting. A poetics emerges from this nameless place between destinations. If spaces can be defined by their occupants, what of the unoccupied or temporarily occupied spaces? These are the places where most users neglect to assign meaning. By registering destinations as places, everything that falls in between becomes non-place. However, this settler-oriented and capitalist perspective limits spatial understanding: viewing ostensibly unused open spaces as wasted or virtually non-existent. All land—indeed, all space, whether domestic, agricultural, industrial, defined by borders, or without definition, contains a history and therefore a politics. While this may seem obvious in the context of a globe plagued by land disputes of all scales, the implication for the space between is that it is never a space of nothingness. It is an interstice.

The concept of interstice emerges in many fields, to the point of ubiquity. In medicine, it can mean the small spaces or gaps between parts of an organ or between cellular structural elements of tissues. Also used in architecture, the term traditionally refers to areas that house the mechanical systems invisible to most users of a building (HVAC, plumbing, etc.) Interstice exists in human-made and organic systems, both micro and macro. Certainly what we have come to recognize as the gallery space is no exception.

Returning to the idea of ‘non-place,’ a neologism coined by French anthropologist Marc Augé, place is positioned against non-place “like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten.”\(^2\) Precisely paralleling Augé’s observation is again the example of the Canadian highway: a state-funded development built on treaty-land, containing histories of erasure, resistance, and resilience which undergoes constant cycles of construction and demolition.

But how do the concepts of interstice and non-place play out in the milieu of the exhibition, and how do they overlap with curatorial conversations about liminality? While the interstice invites contemplation on its in-betweenness and the histories of the destinations it lands between, the non-place belongs to supermodernity: a transitive space that eliminates histories except for those in which it makes spectacle.\(^3\) Spaces in the museum have the ability to be either of these, depending on the efficacy of design or the way users interact with them. Liminality however, implies a movement from one stage into the next, functioning as an ellipsis. While sharing the similarity of transition with interstice, liminality asks for progression and forward movement while interstice bounces dialectically between two or more points. Meanwhile, non-place is mired in a stasis of meaningless reproduction.

By placing these hypothetical conceptual spaces over the brick-and-mortar of the gallery or museum, curated areas reveal themselves as either successfully contemplative, or failures of supermodernity. That which has been contrived will become non-place, while the serendipitous or unexpec-
ed will become interstice. My interest is not in setting-up a false dichotomy, but to offer a curatorial consideration in response to the hypermodern non-places of mass museums, more akin to people movers in airports than places of critical thought. The interstice I have analogized arrives by chance. However, thoughtful or novel placement of art objects can produce the same results in the exhibition environment. That is to say, the in-betweens of an institution deserve as much curatorial consideration as its destinations or art objects—which I hope to demonstrate throughout the rest of this meditation.

I have identified three scenarios within the gallery or museum whose affective potencies can be altered by their interstitial treatment. The first instance is the space between works. The amount of “breathing room” allocated to one particular work has long been a curatorial consideration based on intuition and experience more than any kind of spatial formula, speaking to the affective or poetic nature of interstice. The second is temporal interstice, most closely associated with ideas of liminality: that of the striking and installation of one exhibition into another. This interstice is an example of Augé’s palimpsest. The third is the transitory space created through the architecture of the gallery or institution, to be understood as the hallways, stairwells, and lobbies of the building. Each of these play out in distinctive ways but contribute to the holistic reception of a visitor’s experience.

\(^2\) Marc Augé, Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity (London: Verso, 2008). 64.
\(^3\) Ibid. 89.
I: proximity

The proximities of artworks in a shared exhibition environment culminate in an overarching dialogue. Likely the most considered from a curatorial perspective, unconventional approaches can result in delightfully unusual and even radical presentations. The collaborative work from collectives PA System and Embassy of Imagination featured in the Art Gallery of Ontario’s Every. Now. Then, titled *Towards Something New and Beautiful + Future Snowmachines in Kinngait*, places an historical work of Canadiana by Lawren Harris, obscured by a baseball cap, in proximity to aluminum cast sculptures of snowmobiles by youth from Kinngait, placed in a semi-circle around a linocut topography.

In the negative space, this juxtaposition contains the convergence of the two implied histories of the works. In this interstice, the viewer considers the exoticism inherent in Harris’ work, with the drastically different lived experiences of the young artists who actually occupy the landscapes depicted in his painting. These experiences manifested in the representations of vehicles that traverse this land, their surrounding position part conversational, part confrontational. This gesture of placement plays out like an equation: the Harris work as one integer and the Kinngait works another, the space in between becomes the plus or minus. The purposeful space between activates the works. In a non-place, the space is passive—the comparisons are contrived or non-existent.

Furthermore, Harris’ colonial gaze erroneously identifies the landscape depicted in his painting as uninhabited, therefore lacking identity or cultural history. The placement of the Harris painting on a symmetrical white marble backdrop, hung above eye level, implies an altar or reliquary. By eclipsing the painting with a hat, a successful reclamation of exoticism takes place using thoughtful spatial placement. It nods to a colonial history and present, without giving the viewer complete access to specific traumas contained in the object of the hat.

*Towards Something New and Beautiful* reminds the viewer that the north is not non-place—the ahistorical space inside the painting belonging to the colonial imaginary is non-place, because of its repetition that is static. More than considering the aesthetic implications of this installation, novel approaches transform each artistic component into something much larger than the sum of its parts. Admittedly this installation could not have come together without its privileged position of having access to Group of Seven works, however, as seen in my next section, smaller institutions can achieve similarly impactful presentations.

II: continuity

The high turnover of exhibitions at most institutions makes the gallery walls a palimpsest by nature. One show comes down: scraping the vinyl from one didactic panel, painting the surface white to make room for the next. Only the faintest trace of words are left behind; the ghost of one exhibition carries into the next. Although somewhat challenging to achieve, an opportunity presents itself to imbricate thematics between exhibitions. Wood Land School (2017) based out of SBC Gallery (who forewent their name for the duration of the year-long 2017 project) in Montreal illustrates an unconventional approach to temporal interstice. Changed installations were not considered exhibitions but “gestures,” of a cohesive whole. This undertaking grounded itself in Annie Pootoogook’s *Coleman Stove with Robin Hood Flour and Tenderflake* (2003-2004), leaving it on display for the entirety of the

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4 Taqialuk Nuna, Cie Taqiasuk, David Pudlat, Moe Kelly, Koonoo Akesuk, Latch Akesuk, Tommy Quvianaqtuliaq, Saaki Nuna, Janice Allooloo, Christine Adamie, and Nathan Adla.

The newly installed works could be informed or anchored by this particular drawing, while the drawing demonstrates its versatility and breadth as a result of its changing surroundings.

Naturally, not all examples of this will be quite so apt. Most public galleries will plan their years out systematically, identifying key audiences for certain shows in order to maintain attendance statistics with operational grants or funders in mind, with apprehensions such as “we can’t have two intersectional feminist shows in a row.” Ideally, the staying power of one exhibition will bleed into the next, be it aesthetically or thematically. This interstice establishes institutional narratives, although at the risk of becoming stale, repetitive, or self-referential. The temporal interstice between shows does not aim to pigeonhole the institution into a singular focus but instead bridge one concept into the next, keeping the gallery in a constant tension of temporal liminality. The in-between of exhibitions can establish fluidity between thematics that are often perceived as incongruent. One exhibition might offer a critique of the one that preceded it, invite a comparison of exhibition content, or simply affirm that their themes deserve discourse. The Wood Land School example demonstrates the range and nuance of First Nations art, demanding more than single tokenized exhibitions.

III: contemplation

The atriums, the stairs, the meeting places, and the waiting places are where texts are read, thoughts are collected, and discussions are had. Here is where people watching and social interactions take place. These places exist outside of the immersive confines of the exhibition space, yet they also act as a barrier or separation from the external world: they form a segue of sorts. They are therefore ideal places for digesting the content of the show and forming opinions about the work. Of course, not all galleries have (the luxury of) this intermediary space for visitors. Oftentimes the most candid and genuine conversation about the work takes place in an area of reflection still relatively immersed in the exhibition space. These conversations arise organically between two strangers, a visitor and museum staff person, or between friends, and contrast with sometimes stiff, docent-led tours or overtly didactic curatorial statements on the walls of larger institutions.

Augé offers that the real non-places of supermodernity “have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their ‘instructions for use,’ which may be prescriptive, prohibitive, or informative.” 6 We find these instructions for use all throughout the gallery setting: ‘look at the gestural marks . . . ,’ ‘please do not touch,’ and ‘this work was produced in 1996, when . . . ’ In many cases a mere necessity—providing too much didactical information can incite disassociation. However, thoughtful design can rekindle the magic of wandering and impart a sense of getting lost in the space.

There are many different approaches to the treatment of intermediary spaces in institutions; one example of a carefully considered approach is Moshe Safdie’s stairs in the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. The descent is designed to be slow, each stair like a small platform that forces the user to either take two diminutive steps or one excessively large step. Either way, the effect is to focus attention on your own movements and body, and to heighten spatial awareness as you take in the monumental interiors around you. Other approaches might see intermediary spaces turning into destinations or spectacles of their own. Clair Bishop observes in Radical Museology, that, “‘starchi-

7 Augé, 77.
tecture’: the museum’s external wrapper, has become more important than its contents […] leaving art with the option of looking ever more lost inside gigantic post-industrial hangars, or supersizing to compete with its envelope.”

Institutions may choose to spectacularize these spaces outside of galleries or not, but ultimately this decision will frame the visitors’ experience of the exhibitions inside, as well as inform the ways they will gather, socialize, and discuss the work upon entering and exiting.

IV: towards a poetics of interstice

The space between can ground concepts and provide context, and is therefore worthy of the same curatorial considerations as the art objects inside of it. It is more than the emptiness between two things, being hardly empty at all. When I think about presence, I think about something I cannot see but that hangs in the air and makes itself known—I wonder if these are ambient sounds whose waves can be felt but barely heard. The watercolourist considers negative space differently from the oil painter: she has no white pigment, only the neutrality of the page, precisely preserving areas to maintain their pristine state, while allowing other lines bleed into each other, inventing new muddy tones.

The idea of negative space in three-dimensionality is a falsehood. It places sight above all other senses, rejecting the felt presence of sounds and smells that fill these supposedly empty spaces. The interstice, by contrast, does not see a hierarchy of senses; it animates all of them, and all spaces, whether they appear to be occupied or not. The interstice is the troposphere through which we pass, moving between all other things whose densities are enough to make themselves impenetrable. Underwater, gravity affects us differently: flesh undulates with the current, bodies are suspended between floating and sinking, everything touches through the connectivity of fluid. On land, the invisibility of sparse air molecules lets us easily forget that we are all in contact. Nitrogen and oxygen hold many histories they refuse to tell. Light particles pass through us. We are not containers; our edges are blurred and porous.

Biography

Emily Cadotte is of settler ancestry and is a current Master’s student at OCAD University where she is researching the role of the regional gallery in confronting populist rhetoric. Cadotte completed a BFA at Concordia University in Montreal. She has written for Canadian Art magazine, and worked in arts administration at the Thames Art Gallery in Chatham, and at the Blackwood Gallery in Mississauga.

References


“Towards Something New and Beautiful Future Snowmachines in Kinngait, 2017—

Parker Kay (The Centre for Experiential Research, Toronto, Canada)

Internet Mysticism and Urban Re-Embodiment

Abstract
Since the release of Age of Empires, and games like it, we have arrived in a time where bandwidth is nearly limitless and the grid is global. There is an undeniable drive towards access to everything, everywhere, all the time. Google Maps, Earth, and Street View have shown us the details and boundaries of the planet yet the desire to indulge in the unknown remains. This can be seen in the recent, and fervent, interest that online communities have shown towards myths, astrology, and conspiracy theories—a phenomenon known as Internet Mysticism. Internet Mysticism leverages the ever-growing data available online and their infinite permutations and combinations in order to augment the unknown in the world around us.

Keywords: Internet Mysticism, Anti-Sublime, Data Visualization, Mapping, Geography, Gaming, Mediated Space, Place, Urban Exploration, Psychogeography, Embodiment

First, an insecurity:

I’ve never felt very comfortable with the title of artist.

I find that my experience is more like an explorer or archeologist. What compels me to make work is not a period of inspired creation but rather what I would describe as uncovering buried treasure.

The drive to construct a compelling narrative within an academic framework turns facts into ready-made plot points. This sense of discovery often comes through the creation of parafictions that are not history, but cannot be called not-history. Although these tactics have been abused in politics and the media lately, their narrative qualities have the potential to greatly augment the experience of the city.

Toronto is defined by its multiplicitous perspectives and I think it is important to address that my perspective is fixed on the corporeal city-dweller and the embodied experience of the city that follows. In other words, how do we understand the ways in which space affects the experience of the body in all its fleshy existential precariousness? Toronto is a city of 2.8 million people and occupies an area of just over 630 km²; however, the question the embodied perspective asks is:

how big does the city feel to you?

It is precisely the intensity of the individual experience that is the kernel of exploration and discovery.

Urban exploration and an embodied experience of the city has seen a total paradigm shift with the rise of an Internet-aware culture and the proliferation of digital communications. What used to be a practice limited to the physical exploration of urban infrastructures like subway tunnels, storm drains, off-limits or abandoned buildings, relics and ruins, bridges, and all manner of architectural abnormalities has now evolved to possess an additional digital layer of experience. Google Earth (2001), Maps

Streetview (2008) now render a version of these spaces, which used to be only accessible to the physically able, but now can easily be explored through nearly any modern screen-based product. We have witnessed a duplication of souls that places the embodied experience in two versions of space at once. The digital city is an ever-growing mosaic of two-dimensional images that coalesce around us to form a hyper-real representation of our urban centres. However, a counter narrative has emerged: the hungry consumer pushes advancements in these technologies to be faster, higher resolution, more accurate, and all-encompassing while they also burn with resentment stating that these applications have cannibalized serendipity and are erasing the unknown. With the ability to experience the city through the mediation of screen-based technologies, how does embodied urban experience change?

I would like to take you through a narrative with three distinct acts that will explain how we conceive of embodiment within a hybrid urban space where the physical collides with the digital:

Act 1 (setup): The Disappearance of the Unknown
Act 2 (conflict): The Anti-Sublime
Act 3 (resolution): Internet Mysticism

Act 1 (Setup): The Disappearance of the Unknown

Although defined by the subjective experience, urban exploration has always also been driven by the desire to engage with the unknown. To articulate the allure of the unknown I would like to share an anecdote from my childhood:

In 1997 I was seven years old and unbeknownst to me there was a videogame company called Ensemble Studios operating in Dallas, Texas that was about to release a real-time strategy game that I would quickly become obsessed with. This game was called *Age of Empires*. It focuses on European historical events between the Stone Age and the Classical period, putting the player in the role of commander, royalty, and deity with the playable characters following your every instruction. At the outset of each game, the user starts with a few hunter-gatherers who are huddled around a primitive hut, surrounded by a seemingly infinite black void that represents the unexplored territory beyond. The player then sends their naive and devoted hunter-gatherers into the unknown to find resources or more likely certain death. As the game progresses, the exploration of the map creates a visualization resembling a network: an array of pathways and roads connect the disparate villages and burgeoning cities. Eventually, the end to a given game comes when the player conquers the opposing civilization—or is conquered. Interestingly, though, this end usually comes before the map can be fully explored. The unknown looms even in the face of a predetermined point of resolution. What this suggests to me is that the game developers had the foresight to see that the visualization of the unknown was a major component of the gameplay. The shape of the network that the player delights in creating is only visible through the juxtaposition that is inherent to the unexplored territory that remains. That which appears to be negative space, representing darkness, is what creates the opportunity for adventure and discovery.
In its infancy, Google Earth appeared to users as a haphazard mosaic of images of varying resolutions. North America’s largest cities looked like a patchwork quilt where each tile represented a different capture from the camera aboard the Landsat 7 satellite. However, even in its original rudimentary version, the novelty of being able to find a satellite image of your own home became curiously profound. This marked a very important moment in the trajectory of digital space mediating a connection between the body and physical space. Being able to see your home, captured from this alien vantage point, signified that you are seen—you exist. This self-affirming moment cast the individual into a dual role of both the voyeur and that which is being viewed.

These satellite images and geographic information systems (GIS) have become increasingly convincing, as if we are spying on our neighbours, checking up on loved ones, or vicariously exploring possible vacation destinations in real time. With the launch of the newest version of Google Earth (version 9.2.78.1) in 2018, we see the addition of 3D modelling to render cities not only from a top-down bird’s eye view, but now from any perspective the user desires; like a videogame. With this new update, cities around the globe now bear a striking resemblance to the user-generated cities within Age of Empires; however, there is one glaring difference. The presence of the unknown and the darkness that compels exploration has been a casualty to the unwavering and unstoppable thrust for technological perfection. As we move towards a digital facsimile of the physical world we must stop to think about the elements of experience that this omits and why.

Google Maps is a service that realizes a desire to be able to control the relationship between human beings and the landscape, to dominate the scale associated with nature and the built world. In art historical terms, this compulsion to wrestle with the natural landscape is known as the sublime. However, in the moments we gazed at our homes through Google Earth, for the first time, the sublime saw a reversal.

**Act 2 (Conflict): The Anti-Sublime**

During the romantic period (approx. 1800 - 1850), artists rejected the scientific rationalism brought about by the enlightenment in favour of leveraging strong emotional experiences as aesthetic inspiration. The source of these experiences, termed the sublime, came from confronting the vast, unknowable qualities of nature. The sublime provided people with the faculties to articulate the threshold between the body and nature without being totally consumed by it.

In 2002, one year after the public launch of Google Earth, Russian new media theorist Lev Manovich described the feeling of often being moved by data visualization projects. Manovich describes this as the appearance of the anti-sublime, an experience that promises to render datasets “that are beyond the scale of human senses into something that is within our reach, something visible and tangible.”

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The anti-sublime turns the artists’ gaze away from the natural world and towards individuals. It is clear that in light of the constant stream of data that continues to grow second by second, the sublime could no longer only come from looking out at nature, or up at the stars; instead, it would come from an examination of the self. The 1,100 operational satellites currently orbiting the Earth, gazing down with precise views of humankind indicate that the sublime is no longer a void, it is a mirror.\(^5\)

A notable example of the inward turn of the anti-sublime came when it made its way to the mainstream media in 2006 as *Time Magazine* announced that their person of the year would be “You.”\(^6\) By devoting their annual award to you, meaning you, me, and all of us, *Time* acknowledged the arrival of the second generation of the Internet, which was defined by dynamic user-generated content and social media. This period of the Internet’s history ushered in an era of heightened narcissism, with the anti-sublime as a major factor. As social media grew more prevalent the digital experience moved farther away from the concerns of the body and instead towards notions of idealized representation. Within psychoanalysis, the definition of a narcissist is when a person “cannot distinguish between an image of who they imagine themselves to be and an image of who they actually are.”\(^7\) The narcissist can only see the idealized image while the actual self-image is lost. The anti-sublime has blended the digital image with the notions of the self-image into a nearly indistinguishable chimera.

The anti-sublime represents a shift in the cultural consciousness away from an embodied notion of space in favour of a screen-based interiority. In 1935, Walter Benjamin articulated a connection between consciousness and space when he, “described two ways of perceiving the world: contemplation, and distracted perception. Contemplation is the way we perceive a painting, when we take the time to look at it, really. Distracted perception is the way we perceive buildings when we walk in the street. It is the way we see the world when we don’t take the time to look at it, really.”\(^8\) Situationist Internationale member Guy Debord describes this as a form of the *dérive*. Debord’s *dérive* adds a layer of humour to Benjamin’s *flânerie* that encourages a “playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects.”\(^9\) This method highlights the connection between the physical geography of the city with the pliable mental landscape of perceptive emotions. The *dériveur* is meant to sever all ties with what they know of the city in order to be open to new experiences. Places of work, spots where you were broken up with, your favorite bookstore, or a house where your friend used to live all must be suspended to knock yourself into a psychogeographic tabula rasa. Although the anti-sublime focuses the individual towards an acute interiority, the extent to which this sense of self is mediated by screens causes a move away from an embodied experience of the city and towards the digital.

In Chloé Galibert-Laîn’s film titled *Flânerie 2.0* (2018) we see a similar interest in the evolution of

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urban exploration and the appearance of a digital layer. Flânerie 2.0 contrasts shots of strolling Parisians with clips from the film Paris N’existe Pas (1969).\textsuperscript{10} We see the main character of Paris N’existe Pas, an artist named Simon attend a party where he smokes magical ‘dope’ which causes him to see past visions of Paris overlaid with his present. Simon wanders the street looking for artistic inspiration but is overcome with this time travelling double exposure. Galibert-Laîné uses time travel as a device to discuss the way that the contemporary urban flâneur has been distracted by screens. The screen-based flâneur is consumed with distracted perception, fixated on the representation of the body as a roving dot on their Google Maps screen.

\textit{The stroll becomes the scroll.}

Through narration, Galibert-Laîné makes an important observation that “perhaps the radio station switcher, the television zapper, and the internet clicker is the evolution of Benjamin’s flâneur.”\textsuperscript{11} In the closing scene of Flânerie 2.0, we see a split screen depiction of the dérive in Paris. On top, we see footage from Paris N’existe Pas, the camera appears to be mounted on the hood of a car speeding through the crowded Parisian streets. The second, a modern view of the same route seen through the lens of Google Street View - each click of the mouse drives the viewer forward through the blended image sequence. The anti-sublime has not erased the dérive from today’s modern cities; however, the embodied experience has receded into the background, waiting to be revived.

\textbf{Act 3 (Resolution): Internet Mysticism}

Internet mysticism is a term that represents the injection of the unknown into screen based flânerie. With access to a limitless archive of information online, we have the ability to answer nearly any question or prove any thesis. In 2017, 3.7 billion humans used the internet and Google processed 40,000 searches every second.\textsuperscript{12} When I did a Google search query for the sentence “how fast does a Google search take”, I was returned with 11 billion results in 0.76 seconds. With 90% of the internet’s data being created in the last two years it is clear that humans have an exponentially growing pool of data to reach into to satiate any possible desire.\textsuperscript{13} However, as the ability to find answers becomes increasingly accurate to an almost forensic degree, there is a growing desire to explore the corners of the internet that are unknowable—this is the mystical internet.

Emerging in only the last few years, internet mysticism is the pursuit of a realm of online knowledge that is inaccessible to the intellect and is only accessible through deep contemplation or self-surrender to some sort of unknowable, and ungoogleable, power. Simply put, internet mysticism is a desire for the mysterious, the celestial, the occult, and the conspiracy minded within the hyper logics and infinite choices of the internet.


\textsuperscript{13} ibid.
In a New York Times article written by Amanda Hess titled “Astrology Is Fake but It’s Probably Fine,” Hess claims that the rise of astrology online is not necessarily a sign that there is an increase in people who believe the positions of celestial objects actually have an effect on your personal life. Instead, Hess proposes that this is evidence of a desire to move away from the algorithmic coldness that dominates the internet in favour of intuition and empathy. On the opposite end of the spectrum of internet subcultures, the rise of conspiracy theories can also be attributed to this type of quest for the unknown within the mystical internet. On the surface these two subcultures seem at odds; however, what they share in common is a practice of narrativizing the unknown through the infinite permutations and combinations of data available online.

Canadian artist Jon Rafman showcases internet mysticism with his project “Nine Eyes of Google Street View” (2008). Using the objective lens of Google Maps’ street view, Rafman leverages the so-called neutral gaze of the images to augment the stakes of the depicted scene. Each image transforms into a still from an unfolding narrative. The intrigue of the image along with Google’s GPS invites the viewer to fill in the remaining details of an imagined three-act structure. Internet mysticism transforms the inconsequential into the tantalizing. An example of this could be what looks to be a supernatural event caught on camera that, in reality, is easily explained by a camera glitch. However it is in the indulgence of the possibility of the compelling narrative that the unknown makes its return. As the name would suggest, internet mysticism is most clearly seen in the evolution of online subcultures and the re-narrativizing of the internet’s data; however, I am interested in exploring how this has affected the practice of embodied urban exploration.

In 2001, it was the novelty of seeing ourselves from space that thrust us towards the image-obsessed web 2.0 that we live with today. From that point forward it became more and more likely for people to experience physical space via digital mediation. I would spend hours exploring cities on Google Maps, using street view to try and glimpse views of interesting architecture or areas that are off limits to physical visitors. Moreover, since Google Earth’s release, millions of people have grown up in a time where the experience of physical space is not just mediated by the screen, it is defined by it. How then does the experience of physical space change when it has been preconditioned by the disembodied lens of Google Maps?

Seeing images of ourselves from the vantage point of satellite images has become the new normal. Re-embodiment now comes in the form of the urban explorer seeing the digital layer, manifested through digital communications and the internet, all around them. Because the digital experience of space often precedes the physical, the small micro details that are only perceptible through physical exploration take on a similar narrative quality to those found in internet mysticism. Now, when the urban flâneur makes the transition from the digital to the physical, they do not take the point of view of

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the limited omniscient overseer like in Google Maps, but rather a character within the larger narrative that is unfolding in physical space. It is this juxtaposition of scales that makes you aware that you have a body. The oscillation between the macro (digital space) and micro (physical space) is what creates the opportunity for a re-embodied urban space to appear.

I would like to end with a recent example of how this method works in practice. There is an oasis at the centre of Toronto that defies all categorization. Just north of Davenport and Christie, Wychwood Park was founded by artists Marmaduke Matthews and George A. Reid in 1874. The goal of Wychwood was to create a natural haven for artists to cultivate inspiration. The neighborhood has many intriguing elements such as: the unique presence of Arts and Crafts architecture, suspicious deaths, famous residents like Marshall McLuhan, and traces of the now hidden Taddle Creek. Wychwood Park is also one of the only examples of a planned neighborhood in Toronto and, although it was amalgamated into the city of Toronto in 1909, it has remained under the jurisdiction of a private council made up of the residents. Practically speaking this means that services like road maintenance and property bylaws are handled by the residents, and the neighborhood itself is deemed to be publicly accessible private land. As a result of this unique designation, the mysterious Wychwood Park is one of the few neighborhoods that is not available on Google street view, nor is it visible on Google Earth due to its dense tree canopy. Wychwood Park defies the anti-sublime, it is un-google-mappable, and is private and public simultaneously — this is internet mysticism physically embodied.

Upon my first visit I reveled in discovering what was unavailable to me online. Even entering through the front gates felt as if I was walking across a line into the unknown. As I explored the neighborhood I could visualize it from above and it was as if with each step I was uncovering unexplored territory like I was one of the characters within Age of Empires, not the player in control. I noticed small details like a covered boat on the shore of the stagnant pond that used to be Taddle Creek that I had seen in an article published 10 years earlier. Frozen in time, this boat is an example of how micro details of place become plot points in an unfolding narrative. Indeed, as I walked by no. 3 in Wychwood Park, the former residence of Marshall McLuhan, I started to understand the zeal behind his civic activism later in his career. Perhaps it was not only that the proposed Spadina Expressway would increase traffic, a modern scourge to progress in McLuhan’s view, but rather that it could potentially destroy his precious Wychwood. McLuhan’s description of Wychwood resonates with my own wandering experiences of the Park; he describes it as “a place to play.” He goes on to say that, “at play, man uses all his faculties; at work, he specializes. A place like St. James Town is specialized. It is not, and can’t become, a community. It’s built on a few concepts, rather than precepts -- programmed around traffic.”

Internet mysticism shows the value in this type of playful narrativizing of place that conjures the allure of the unknown. Moreover, when the narrative moves from digital to physical space, it is the inclusion of your body within the narrative that creates a deeper understanding of the physical location as well as your body within it.

Internet mysticism is two things:

1. **wayfinding device**

In the case of Wychwood Park, and many other locations like it, internet mysticism can be used as a compass that pushes towards the liminal. It would be shortsighted to claim that internet mysticism is in some way responsible for the peculiarities of Wychwood Park. Of course, the Park’s history goes back over 130 years and has been advanced and altered by a countless number of faces and factors. However, it is through the lens of internet mysticism that this sheltered oasis shows itself. By understanding the cultural conditions that define how we see, and shape, the urban environment, the city-dweller is armed with the tools to augment even the most inconspicuous of urban spaces. Internet mysticism’s focus on constructed narratives is the antidote to the anti-sublime in the face of aggressive technological progress.

2. **cultural paradigm**

As the preceding pages show, internet mysticism is a product of now. It encompasses a response against the hyper-narcissism brought about by Web 2.0. It suggests that perhaps in the darkest corners of the all-knowing-all-consuming Internet we can find the unknown, again. This unknown, however, is not found in one piece but rather as an array of bits that call to be assembled. New York based urban explorer Steve Duncan remarks that to see a single image of Times Square is not enough information to develop a true understanding of it. To accurately process, and truly understand an image of Times Square, one would need to see the network of sewers beneath it that stop it from flooding, the corridors for electrical conduit that power the bright lights of Broadway, and of course the series of bridges that bring people onto the island of Manhattan. Duncan makes a case for how the urban explorer can leverage internet mysticism as a tool to develop this multiplicitous perspective of cities. The unknown continues to loom large, drawing us towards it for a new adventure, even if we are the ones who are creating it.

**Image List**


Biography

Parker Kay is a multi-disciplinary artist and writer currently working in Toronto, Canada. With a BFA in New Media, Kay’s practice looks at the rise of Network Culture and how the proliferation of digital communication has permeated our lives and marked our landscapes. Kay has led experiential walking and cycling tours with the Jane’s Walk Festival and the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA); and has worked on projects with Myseum of Toronto and the Vancouver Biennale. His recent publications include “A Cube Has Six Sides” (2016) and “100 Ears: Celebrating 100 years of Dada” (2017), with recent exhibitions at Sibling (2019), The Loon (2018), Motel Brooklyn (2017), The Toronto Reference Library (2017), and TOWARDS (2016). Kay is currently a researcher and archivist at The Archive of Modern Conflict and on the board of directors at Art Metropole. www.parkerkay.com

References


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