UJAH

UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF ART HISTORY & VISUAL CULTURE

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The *Undergraduate Journal of Art History & Visual Culture* (*UJAH*) is a free student journal published by the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory and the Art History Students' Association at the University of British Columbia.

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UJAH's editorial team would like to acknowledge that we work and learn on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people.

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Letter from the Editor–in–Chief

It is with great pride that I introduce the tenth issue of the *Undergraduate Journal of Art History and Visual Culture*. *UJAH* has reached the double-digit mark, and I'm thrilled that this publication has continued to evolve and expand as it marches forward in time. This issue showcases the work of over twenty talented students, exhibiting the diversity of research and creative expression within the Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory. What's clear from the papers, artwork, and reviews published this year is the power of expressive media: to control narratives, surveil the public, and maintain systemic structures; but also, to assert the humanity of the marginalized, explore ever-shifting identities, and call attention to the overlooked. I hope that this issue can archive how we as students and scholars think about art in our current moment.

I'd like to extend my thanks to all of *UJAH*'s editors for their tremendous insight, commitment, and ability to navigate both discourse and diction with confidence. Special thanks to Grace Chang for their tireless dedication and optimism while performing their duties remotely, and to Hubey Razon for his reflexive approach to the unwieldy task of design. I am also indebted to our on-campus advocates and collaborators, in particular Greg Gibson, Ignacio Adriasola, and the Art History Students' Association, who are as firm believers in the powers of publication as I am.

It's been a privilege to spend the past three years bringing *UJAH* to life. Thank you for your support, and I hope you enjoy Issue 10.

Hailey Mah, Editor-in-Chief

Letter from the Managing Editor

The ever-famous Lizzie McGuire once said, “This is what dreams are made of.” Here, in your hands, was once a dream manifested—born out of it a beautiful example of what can result when we come together sharing common joys and a belief in the power of student-driven publications.

As usual, this would not have been possible without the tireless work of our editors, whose knowledge and passion in what they do breathes life to this journal. My endless gratitude to Hailey Mah—for her leadership, dedication, and drive. She embodies all the integrity and compassion of *UJAH*. I am in awe and indebted to Hubey Razon, for capturing the essence of this issue and creating the piece of literal art in your hands (right now, as you are reading this). My deepest appreciations to Greg Gibson and AHSA for their guidance and support as we embark on this journey year after year. Last but not least, thank you to our contributing artists and authors. In these pages you will find their fearlessness, vulnerabilities, and hard work. They make each UJAH issue unique in its own and full of endless possibilities.

It has been my pride and joy to be with *UJAH* these past three years. Thank you for sticking around for all this cheese, and I hope you enjoy and learn from Issue 10 as much as I have.

Grace Chang, Managing Editor

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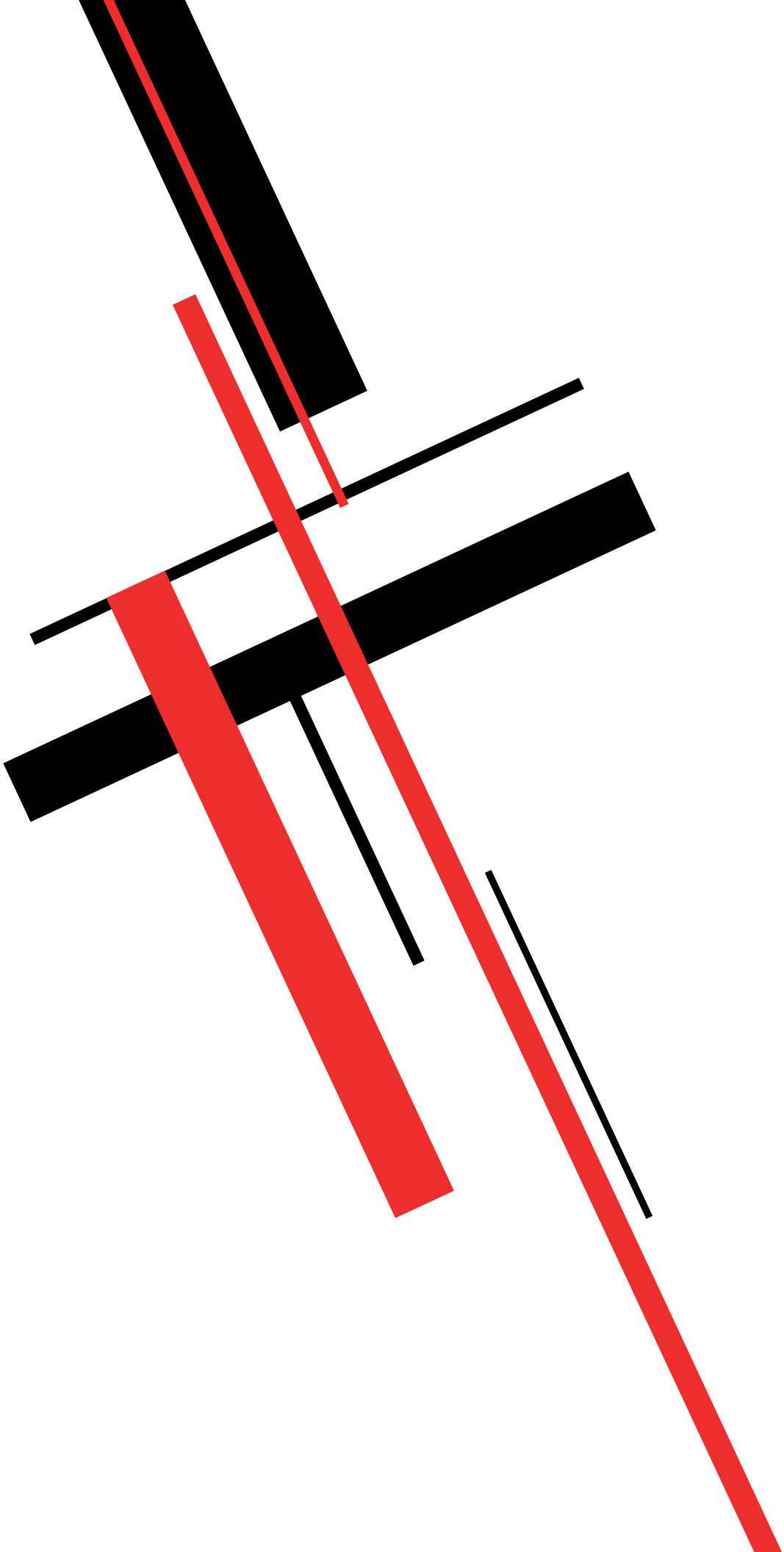


Articles

Breeding Colonial Photo-Literacy

Yasmine Whaley-Kalaora

Photography, while sometimes thought of as an objective medium, has played a significant role in generating a cohesive national image for Canada. The notion of *breeding* colonial photographic literacy refers to the way images were manipulated in order to generate a way of reading photographs. In this paper, I will focus on Canadian residential school photographs as archival documents and how their contextual presentation impacted generations by presenting false understandings of these schools. Through this research, I will begin to unpack colonially imposed ideals of progress on our photographic literacy—that is, the way we read and interpret photographs—to further understand where these ideals are constructed. Through curated photographic propaganda, the Canadian government supressed the horrifying reality of residential schools. The photographers never portrayed the ways Indigenous children were taken from their families and stripped of their culture and traditions. Instead, they were instructed to capture domestic school scenes to promote the national project of Indigenous assimilation into Canadian culture. To begin, I will briefly examine one photograph of a residential school in Kamloops, B.C., to illustrate the disconnect between curated documentation via photography versus the lived experiences of many. Then, speaking to Allan Sekula's work, I will break down what photographic literacy means and approach some delicate aspects of what Sekula calls "photographic discourse." I engage with the work of Indigenous scholars Crystal Fraser (Gwichya Gwich'in) and Zoe Todd (Red River Métis/Otipemisiwak) to address the colonial nature of the archives themselves and how this affects various interpretations of Canadian residential school photographs. Taking up the work of Krista McCracken and Gabrielle Moser, I will address the use of archival photography and the role the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee (COVIC) played in forming a hegemony within the colonial national image both within and outside of Canada. Then, circling back to the photograph, I will further my analysis of the image, revealing how assimilation and colonial progress become synonymous through these propagandistic photographs of reformation and how colonial hegemonies are maintained through visual representations of Indigenous peoples.

First, I would like to acknowledge that as a mixed-race woman of Canadian-Turkish descent, I have not lived the same experience of oppression as Indigenous peoples have in Canada. As such, I am not attempting to convey the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples subject to the residential school system or the experiences of those still enduring the continual disruption caused by ongoing legacies of colonialism. Rather, I write with the intent of acknowledging the imperially driven nature of the photographs to produce a more dynamic understanding of the one-sided photographic narrative.

In order to understand the nature of these photographs, it is critical to review the social and political landscape of the time. Passed in 1876, the Indian Act granted

Figure 1. Basil Fox, Photographer. “Practical sewing class at the Kamloops Indian Residential school.”
From: Canadian Government Archives: Residential Schools: Photographic Collections, c.1958 or 1959.

Figure 2. Photographer Unknown. “The hockey team of the residential school of Maliotenam, Quebec.”
From: Canadian Government Archives: Residential Schools: Photographic Collections, c.1950.

“These photographs were taken with an agenda; one that abides by the imperialist understanding that Indidgenous people will benefit from adopting the hegemonic way of life. This notion, in and of itself, is intrinsically colonial.”

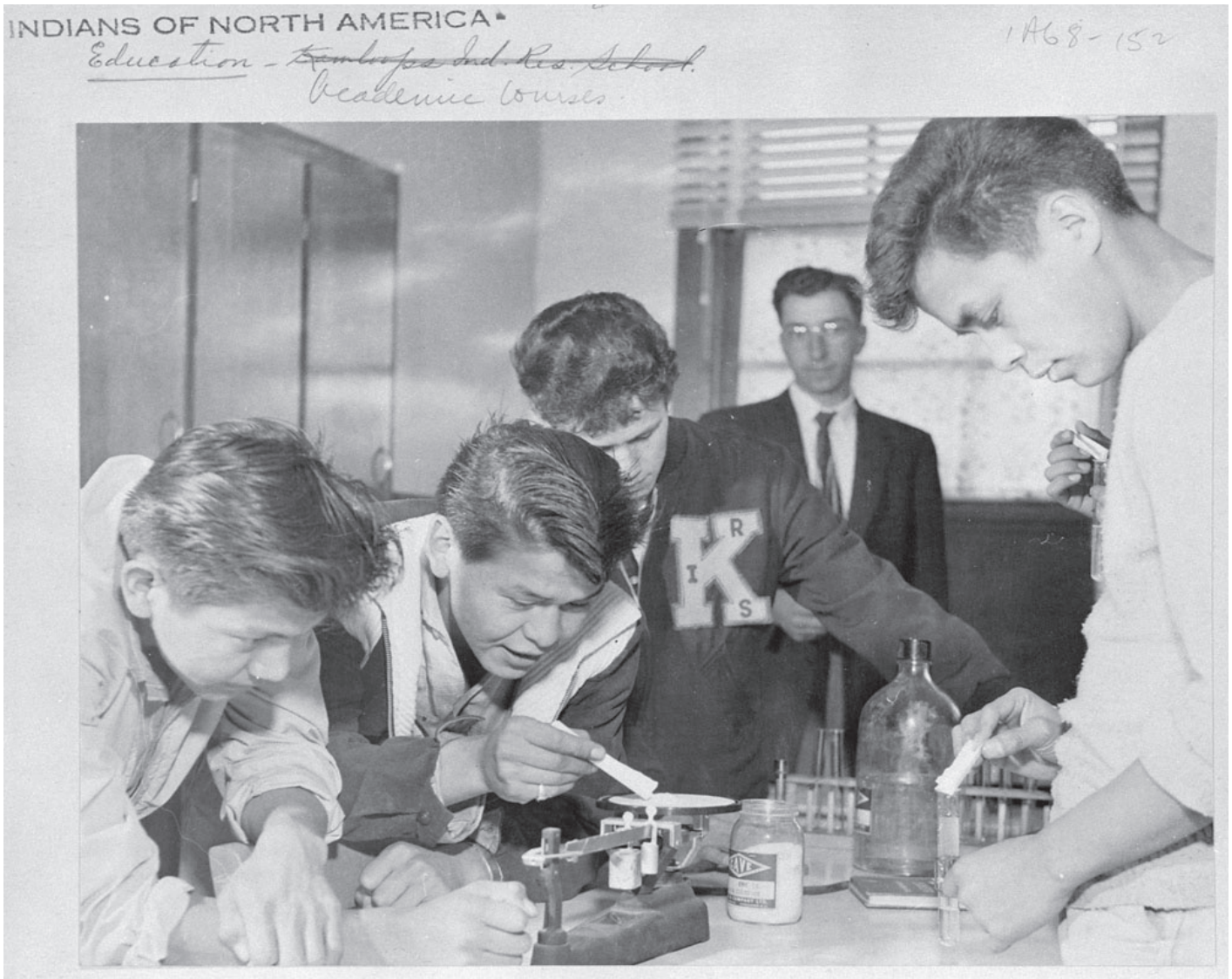


Figure 3. Basil Fox, Photographer. “Chemistry Class Kamloops Indian Residential School, British Columbia, ca. 1959.”
From: Canadian Government Archives: Residential Schools: Photographic Collections, c. 1959.

the Government of Canada an unprecedented amount of control over the lives and land of Indigenous peoples. This included the regulation and definition of status, the decentralization of women in communities, the creation of reserves, and many other paternalistic policies which still impact communities today. In this spirit, residential schools began to open across Canada as a way to enforce the government's policy of assimilating Indigenous children into Canadian society. These schools were portrayed as centres for learning made to benefit Indigenous children, but in fact worked to conform students to new norms. This included the eradication of Indigenous languages and culture, effectively creating a rupture between many parents and their children who left home at age four and did not return until they reached sixteen. In many cases, educational classrooms were abandoned in favour of having the children do manual labour to maintain the schools themselves. Furthermore, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse was common in many residential schools and, overall, children who attended these schools had a mortality rate higher than those Canadians who served in the Second World War.[1] Ultimately, the intention was to teach children in accordance with imperial pedagogical ideals to prepare them to enter into Canadian society. Photographers were sent by the government to the schools to take pictures of daily activities which would then be used to portray the success of assimilation. The Library and Archives Canada (LAC) website hosts a collection of residential school images including class photos, images of the schoolhouses, and of domestic scenes such as young girls learning how to sew or young boys playing hockey (Figures 1, 2). These photographs were taken with an agenda—one that abides by the imperialist assumption that Indigenous people will benefit from adopting the hegemonic way of life. This notion, in and of itself, is intrinsically colonial.[2] The images were curated to foster an idyllic understanding of residential schools and promote the narrative that these schools were benevolent tools of Anglicization. This narrative was predicated on the false settler assumption that their way of living was superior to that of the Indigenous peoples.

Figure 3 is an example of one such photograph demonstrating the colonial agenda of propagating Indigenous assimilation.

The photograph was taken in a classroom and there are five full figures in the frame. The camera is focused on the foreground where four Indigenous students, all boys, can be seen leaning over a table with a scale and other contraptions on it. The title of the image, "Chemistry Class Kamloops Indian Residential School," leads the viewer to surmise that they are in the middle of a science experiment. The four boys are gazing down, each one looking at a slightly different place as if they each have their pre-designated tasks in this moment. All are involved and none is portrayed as idly watching. According to the archives, this photo was taken in 1959; however, even without the date a viewer can estimate the era the photograph would have been taken, based on the Euro-Canadian outfits the boys are wearing: long-sleeved shirts with collars and letterman bomber jackets with the school patch on the front. These outfits were common among Canadian schoolboys in the mid-1950s to early 1960s. The fifth full figure in the photograph is standing in the background. A white man, presumably the teacher, is watching the boys work. The photo appears to be glued to a paper background and is stamped "Indians of North America." Under this heading there are a few handwritten notes; one reads "Education-Academic Courses" and near this is a scratched-out line which reads "Kamloops Ind. Res. School." Many elements in this photograph speak volumes about the power structure at play through the tendentious arrangement of the photograph, which I will speak to. However, because my argument speaks not only to this photograph but to a broad range of colonial archival photos, it is necessary to delve into some of the theory behind this discourse.

To allow for a more comprehensive reading of the image, it is important to look into what photographic literacy means and note some things to be aware of when engaging in photographic discourse. In his work "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," Allan Sekula, American theorist and photographer, postulates that "Photographic 'literacy' is learned, [it is the result of understanding that] 'reading' is the appropriate outcome of contemplating a piece of glossy paper."[3] For some cultures, recording visual snippets of the three-dimensional world as photographs is not something of concern. However, for others, recording the world photographically is part of information exchange and there is an understanding that the photograph symbolizes something in the real world. This concept has been learned over time and through prolonged exposure to the medium of photog-

raphy. It is important to be aware of the subjectivity involved when photography is used as a mode of communication, or as Sekula calls it, "photographic discourse." He points out that "[a]ll communication is, to a greater or lesser extent, tendentious; all messages are manifestations of interest," which stands as a precaution to viewers. [4] Sekula argues: **"[B]e wary of succumbing to the liberal-utopian notion of disinterested 'academic' exchange of information. The overwhelming majority of messages sent into the 'public domain' in advanced industrial society are spoken with the voice of anonymous authority and preclude the possibility of anything but affirmation."**[5]

People must be aware that the images they are viewing are biased, regardless of whether or not an individual or a governing body is behind the creation of the image. There is no such thing as completely unbiased knowledge production. Thereby, viewers must be hyper-mindful of both their sources for information and the motives of the producers creating that information.

When unpacking colonially imposed ideals of progress in regard to our photographic literacy, it is important to consider who holds the archives. In Canada, there are a few sites that hold archival information that pertains to Indigenous peoples. Traditionally, universities, the state, and churches held the bulk of the archives; however, recently this has been expanded to include private and corporate archives, as well as Indigenous governance archives. In Fraser and Todd's work *Decolonial Sensibilities: Indigenous Research and Engaging with Archives in Contemporary Colonial Canada*, they point out the importance of acknowledging the "colonial realities of the archives themselves."[6] Regardless of who has the records now, the documentation that makes up Canadian archives relating to residential schools was recorded by government staff and church administration who worked in conjunction with government programs. Because of this bias, it is hard to grasp the full narrative behind the images. Due to the fact that "the majority of archival documents in Canadian archives have been produced by non-Indigenous people: namely white men who dominated exploration, political," and, I would argue, academic and artistic realms, our national archives are implicitly colonial in perspective and entirely colonial as a construct.[7] This colonial archiving stood to produce national imaginaries and one-sided histories which were conceived to be the complete collective national experience during the construction of the imperial nation.

This kind of one-sided contextualizing of documentation is what Sekula advises people to be wary of as he points out where the misconception of photographic truth comes from. He argues that this myth stems from the perceived transparency of the medium itself. A photograph is understood to be a literal re-presentation of the world, thereby any propositions made with this medium are seen to be truthful. What people don't always understand is "that the photograph is an 'incomplete' utterance … That is, the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context-determined."[8] Photographs in and of themselves are not the full picture, so to speak. The images are restricted to what the photographer chooses to include in the frame; therefore, the information conveyed through the image itself is limited. This is particularly relevant when photography is used in knowledge production; any text that accompanies the image can influence a viewer's perception of that image and therefore their perception of the truth of the situation itself. This unequal contextualizing of documentation stands as a crucial factor in creating biased histories and allowing colonially imposed ideals of progress to be perpetually read into archival residential school photographs.

In recent years there has been a growing awareness regarding the colonially hegemonic nature of archival information relating to Indigenous peoples in Canada. Krista McCracken, a public historian, addresses this in their essay "Archival Photographs in Perspective: Indian Residential School Images of Health" and notes how, as of 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been working to re-document the history of the Canadian residential schools as a means of creating a more complete historical narrative, one that considers not just the perspective of the colonizer, but also the voices of Indigenous peoples. They point out how "the TRC's process brought to light [archivists'] colonial relationship with Indigenous communities and the impact which that relationship has had on the archival record."[9] McCracken explains that "[h]ow a photograph is named and described shapes how researchers understand the events depicted in the image. Oftentimes, in residential school images, the photographer and the archivist would silence the student point of view"

by posing the students in certain ways and leaving out the students' names.[10] This knowledge production, being done from a place of authority, allowed residential school images to manufacture partial and false narratives through providing incomplete context for the photographs. As such, they can easily mislead a researcher's comprehension of the narrative.

Writer and educator Gabrielle Moser speaks to the importance of context—how a photo is named and described—in her essay "Photographing Imperial Citizenship: The Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee's Lanternslide Lectures, 1900–1945." She notes the distinction Shawn Michelle Smith makes regarding the difference between photographic evidence and photographic meaning; what visual cues can be seen in the photograph itself, and what the viewer's understanding of the visual cues are. Moser explains, quoting Smith, that "photographic meaning is contingent, malleable and notoriously unreliable: 'Photographs as *evidence* are never enough, for photographic *meaning* is always shaped by context and circulation, and determined by viewers. Photographic meaning results from what we *do* with photographic evidence.'"[11] In other words, it is not enough for a photograph being used to depict history to stand alone, void of context. Since photographic meaning is determined by the framework it is presented with, it is crucial that the framework has not been skewed by the agenda of those producing the images. It is this subjectivity in providing photographic context that produces one-sided narratives which are then studied as historical fact, further perpetuating the settler-colonial hegemony in Canada and other settler nations.

"When unpacking colonially imposed ideals of progress in regard to our photographic literacy, it is important to consider who holds the archives."

Because photography as a medium was historically understood as a transparent re-presentation of the world, people did not think to question the nature of the display or contextualization of photography. Today, with the Internet and continually expanding media resources, it has become easy to acquire a diverse range of information from a variety of sources on a given topic. As long as we consider the subjective nature of many sources of information, we can use this range of knowledge to piece together a more accurate version of a given story through contrast and comparison. However, this has not always been the case. Before the chaos of mass media, knowledge production was generally limited to mobile nations who could afford to travel

and spread information. Who got to tell whose story? This is where colonial ideals begin to play heavily into our photographic literacy.

One particular project that stands out to me as extremely influential in constructing and promoting colonial ideals was the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee, or COVIC. Gabrielle Moser has written extensively on COVIC and describes it in her essay "Developing Historical Negatives: The Colonial Photographic Archive as Optical Unconscious." A collection of over 7,600 photographs taken by amateur photographer Alfred Hugh Fisher documented the peoples and land held by the British Colonial Empire. These images were viewed as lanternslides, images that would be projected onto the wall, in classrooms around the world between 1907 and 1910.[12] This project was propagated to stand as a compiled geography lesson for children in Britain and among the newly developing colonies. However, "the COVIC project not only attempted to capture the empire and its people, but to build a photographic catalog of what it meant to look and feel like an imperial citizen."[13] In this way the project had a covert—yet in retrospect, blatant—imperial agenda. The slides were not intended as a simple teaching aid; they were created to foster a preconceived and unified understanding of what the imperial nation looked like in attempts to unify the colonies. Children living in England would view slides about the colonies whereas children living in the colonies would view slides about the "Mother Country." The project did not vary its approach from audience to audience; each lecture was meant to be conducted uniformly and, in this way, it disregarded the individual lived experiences of people in the imperial nation. COVIC was a geography lesson teaching a false one-sided narrative of colonization. In her work "Photographing Imperial Citizenship," Moser points to how the context in which the photographs were presented made a one-sided narrative possible. She notes how the project fostered colonial photographic literacy as it "stressed the importance of sight in encouraging feelings of imperial sympathy in students."[14] The lanternslide lectures were structured to form a unified image of the colonial saviour which stood to perpetuate hegemonic hierarchies of "us" verses "them"; or, the colonizer over the colonized. In the case of COVIC, supposedly objective photographs were used to promote an extremely subjective narrative about what imperial life was like, fostering a notion of colonial success and progress through the spreading of colonial education.

If we consider the role of photography in both Canadian residential schools and the COVIC lanternslides, we begin to see how the perpetuation of colonial racial hierarchies connects to the medium itself. Photographs, in the context of lanternslides, peaked around the nineteenth and were used until well into the twentieth century in churches, classrooms, and city halls as visual aids for anyone telling a story. Moser makes a poignant argument, stating, "By choosing to employ the same technology, the COVIC series borrowed lessons about racial inferiority and imperial improvement from concurrent religious, anthropological and propagandistic presentations, drawing from the visual databank they would have constructed in the minds of viewers to construct similar hierarchies of race, class and gender."[15] Photographs as lanternslides were used to support and promote a narrative, often one with a religious or colonial agenda, which bred a form of photographic literacy embedded with racial superiority among its viewers. Moser points out that missionaries would take "before and after" photographs of colonial citizens "to demonstrate the 'benefits' of religious and imperial intervention in [I]ndigenous life," and justify the projects of assimilation.[16] The concept of "before and after" photographs became a way to prove reformation projects were beneficial to colonized peoples; the "after" photos were documentation of assimilated individuals which meant the reformation projects were a success in the settler's eyes, thereby making assimilation synonymous with colonial progress.

Looking through the residential school photographs posted on the LAC website, it is easy to see a trend in the kind of photographs taken in the schools. There are many class photos of students, as well as photographs of children during lessons or taking part in sports. However, there are no photographs that indicate anything negative regarding this assimilation project. The photos tell a narrative of education and community which is far from the whole story. Figure 3 stands out as an intense representation of colonial hegemony and the staging of narratives that promoted successful assimilation. As previously mentioned, one of the first things noticeable about the photo is the clothing the boys were wearing. A patch on one of the

boys' jackets is clearly visible. The patch is a large letter "K," which stands for Kamloops, with the letters "I," "R," and "S" sewn on to the larger letter. In the 1950s and 1960s, these school patches were a feature of letterman jackets indicating which school a student belonged to; in this case the patch denotes that the student attends the Kamloops Indian Residential School. The patch indicates a sense of ownership over the individual, working as a confirmation of assimilation. By wearing this jacket, the Indigenous boy in this photograph is seen to have adapted to Western culture; this statement in and of itself would have been read as a marker of colonial progress which is indicative of why the boy wearing the jacket would have been carefully framed in the centre of the picture. The second noticeable aspect is gender; the people in this image are all male. This is interesting, as most of the other classroom images contain both male and female students, with a few exceptions; only male students were photographed while participating in sports and in science class, whereas the only images of female students were captured during sewing class. Historically, like many other fields of study, science and sports have been male dominant whereas sewing was seen as a woman's task, as caretaker of the household. Thereby, stressing this type of education in regard to Indigenous students allowed gendered learning to be sustained in Canada. Through this perpetuation of traditional Western learning methods, Indigenous children could be integrated into the pre-established gendered hierarchical structures in colonial culture.

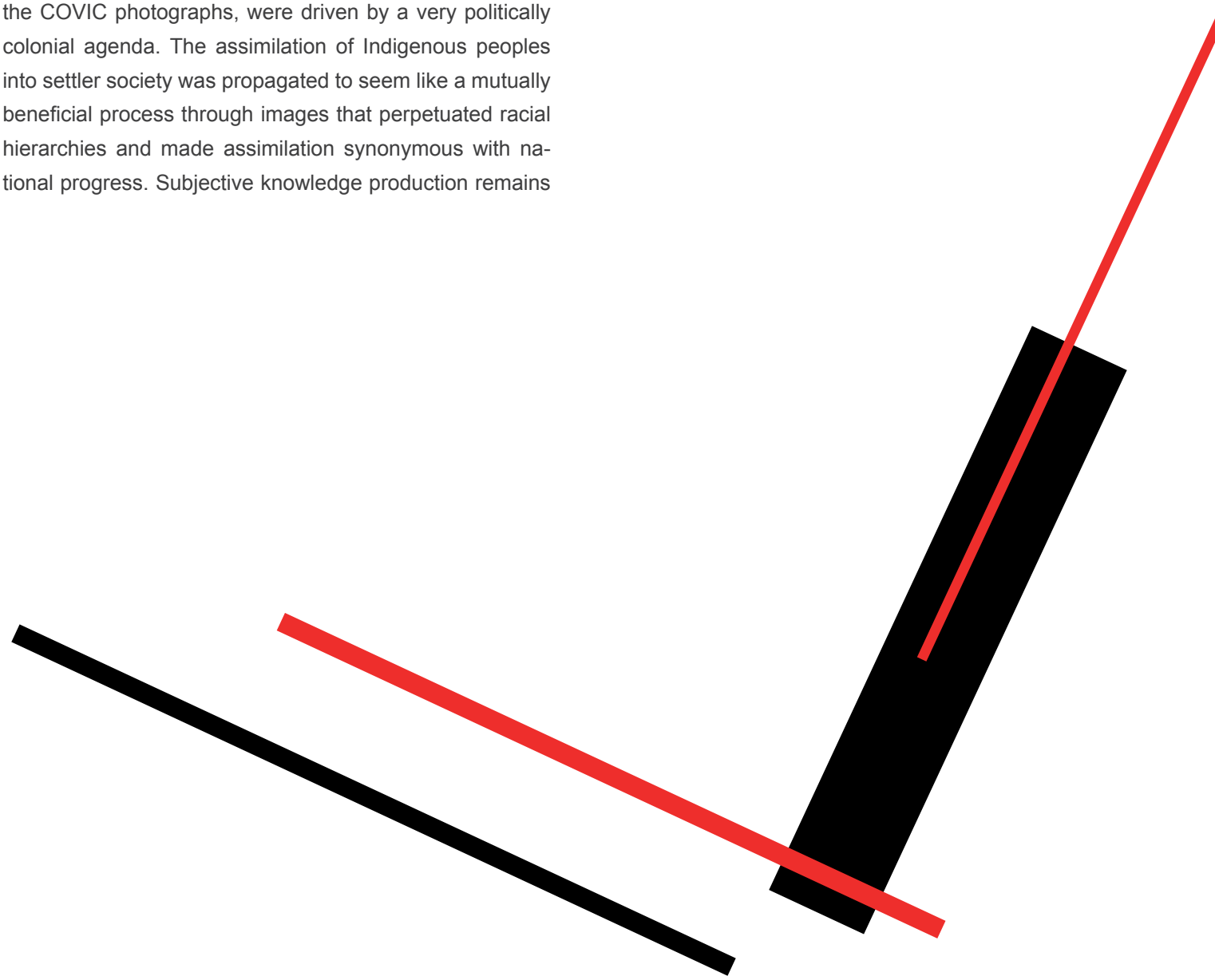
In her essay "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation," African American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins speaks to these "notions of naturalized gender hierarchies promulgated by the family ideal," speaking in particular to the "sex-typing of occupations in the paid labor market and male domination in government, professional sports"[17] and a variety of other fields of study. Collins speaks to the ways in which the Western nuclear family unit propagates hierarchies that are then paralleled and naturalized in society. Because the nuclear family promotes a patriarchal household, this male dominance is then translated into society and into the workplace. It is interesting to note, however, that Indigenous children were not being educated to follow high-paying career paths, like many of the white settlers were, and yet they were photographed in ways that implied they were receiving well-rounded education through these government programs.

Another striking thing about Figure 3 is the placement of the figures, with the four boys arranged around the table and the teacher looming behind them. This set-up of figures is a loud visual demonstration of colonial hegemony. The white male teacher standing and watching the young Indigenous male students plays into naturalized age hierarchies that intersect with racial hierarchies. As Collins explains: "racial ideologies that portray people of colour as intellectually underdeveloped, uncivilized children require parallel ideas that construct Whites as intellectually mature, civilized adults," which, based on the logic of the Western family ideal, entitles the "adult" figure to authority over the "child."[18] The photograph can be simply read as the teacher teaching the students, or further understood as the white settler teaching the Indigenous, as the latter is seen to be intellectually inferior to the former. It is in this way that this photograph serves a dual purpose in establishing hierarchies of age (man over child) and race (white settler over Indigenous resident).

While researching the LAC website, it is impossible not to notice that the majority of subjects in the residential school photographs are left unnamed. However, some photographs have had names added to the original annotations. In 2002, Murray Angus, a teacher at Nunavut Sivuniksavut Training Program, proposed *Project Naming*, a project intended to foster intergenerational communication and give Indigenous peoples the chance to re-contextualize images from their history which are situated within the archives. There is an open call up on the website asking members of the public to reach out if they have information regarding any of the photographs in the collection. The descriptions on the website heavily reflect the biases of settler society since most of the annotations in the archives were taken from handwritten captions found on the physical photographs themselves.[19] The students were left unnamed in the photographers' notes because they, as the subjects, were not the real focus—rather, the photographers were employed to capture scenes of assimilative progress within the school's walls. By identifying and naming students, this project begins to give some agency back to the subjects photographed. *Project Naming* holds the ability to decolonize archival information and begin chang-

ing the general understanding of the structure or colonialism.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the research done here only begins to unpack the complex history of where colonially imposed ideals of progress come from, and how these preconceived standards have come to affect our collective photographic literacy. However, recognizing the subjective nature of archival information is a crucial starting point in re-claiming and re-writing false narratives of colonial history, particularly in regard to the Canadian Residential Schools. An understanding of perspective will allow room for new narratives to surface, giving a voice to those who have been systematically silenced throughout the history of this colonial nation. The manipulation of photographic evidence did not start with digital photo-editing programs; it came from long-standing de-contextualization of images, which, in cases of the residential schools and the COVIC photographs, were driven by a very politically colonial agenda. The assimilation of Indigenous peoples into settler society was propagated to seem like a mutually beneficial process through images that perpetuated racial hierarchies and made assimilation synonymous with national progress. Subjective knowledge production remains a powerful tool in swaying people's opinions of a given topic; however, understanding the historical impact these hegemonic narratives have had may begin to change how we see things in the future. Initiatives such as Project Naming are particularly relevant in regard to the residential school photographs as opening up communication between those who hold the archives and those whose histories make up the documentation is one way to re-contextualize these photographs and begin to decolonize the narrative of Canada's archival information.



Notes

1 Daniel Schwartz. “Truth and Reconciliation Commission: By the Numbers” CBC News (June 03, 2015). Accessed February 03, 2019. https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-by-the-numbers-1.3096185.

2 In this context, colonial refers to the ideology of European settlers invading and replacing existing societies.

3 Allan Sekula, “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning,” in *Artforum,* 13, no. 5, (1975): 36–45 , Reprinted in *Thinking Photography* ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan,1982), 86.

4 Ibid., 84.

5 Ibid.

6 Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd, “Decolonial Sensibilities: Indigenous Research and Engaging with Archives in Contemporary Colonial Canada,” *L’Internationale* (2016). Accessed November 14, 2017. http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/54_ decolonial_sensibilities_indigenous_research_and_engaging_with_archives_in_ contemporary_colonial_canada.

7 Ibid.

8 Sekula, 85.

9 Krista McCracken, “Archival Photographs in Perspective: Indian Residential School Images of Health,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30, no. 2 (2017): 164.

10 Ibid., 167.

11 Gabrielle Moser, “Photographing Imperial Citizenship: The Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee’s Lantern-slide Lectures, 1900–1945,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 16, no. 2 (2017): 200.

12 Gabrielle Moser, “Developing Historical Negatives: The Colonial Photographic Archive as Optical Unconcious,” in *Photography and the Optical Unconscious*, ed. Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski (Duke University Press, May 5, 2017): 229.

13 Ibid., 231.

14 Moser, “Photographing Imperial Citizenship,” 197.

15 Ibid., 201.

16 Ibid.

17 Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation,” in *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (Black Well Publishing, 1998): 66.

18 Ibid., 65.

19 Archives Canada. *Project Naming*. Library and Archives Canada (September 28, 2018). Accessed February 04, 2019. http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/project-naming/Pages/introduction.aspx.

B.G-Osborne, *A Thousand Cuts* (2018). Installation view at The New Gallery's +15 Window Gallery, Arts Commons. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Ideology, Censorship, and Transgender Media (Mis)Representation:

What Role Has Film Played in the Marginalization of Transgender Subjects, and How Might Queer Art Aesthetics Pave the Future of Representational Politics?

Shai Ophelia Kehila

On September 4, 2018, Calgary Arts Commons asked Ontario born transgender artist B.G-Osborne to censor and edit their artwork, *A Thousand Cuts*, which was critiqued on grounds of nudity, swearing, and profanity. They were also asked to remove a poster commemorating the names of transgender murder victims, which notably included no swearing, nor profanity. Osborne chose to remove their work from the gallery instead. This is not the first time Calgary Arts Commons has been accused of censoring a transgender artist; in 2006, they placed a wall in front of *Gaylord Phoenix in the Flower Temple* without seeking consent from artist Edie Fake. Contrarily, Calgary Arts Commons did not see issue hosting Jordan Peterson, who has famously spoken against Bill C-16, in July 2018. The controversy around Osborne's work, and the censorship it received, is especially nuanced considering the nature of *A Thousand Cuts* (2018); a compilation of transgender representations in popular film and media. In other words, it was not forty-one years of film, but the artist's compilation of transgender bodies in film—that was considered profane. Responding to the critique canonized against *A Thousand Cuts*, Osborne extended a public statement in which they invite us to question the political and conditional eviction of their work from public space: "If you are cisgender and you were offended by this work: think about why you were offended. Are you trying to protect your children from what you perceive to be vulgar representations of bodies? Are you comfortable with the violence that is perpetuated against trans people, but offended by five or six swear words and a flaccid penis? If you cannot accept seeing a penis on a woman in a movie (…a cisgender woman with a prosthetic)—think about the other types of transphobia you might perpetuate in your daily routines…It seems you are afraid of the questions this video will raise in the minds of your children, or in yourself."[1] In light of this event, and in solidarity with Osborne, I hope to initiate a discussion around the politics of artistic display; interrogating art as it resists and re-affirms the symbolic order, and representation as it configures the normal and the perverse. This essay aims to examine the contentious role of film and media in the marginalization of transgender[2] bodies, whilst attending to the ways in which Osborne's work offers a queer critique of, and a potential disidentification from, violent (mis)representations of transgender bodies in film.

In an interview with Kristen Hutchinson, Osborne shares that they drew inspiration for the title of their work from the phrase "death by a thousand cuts," signifying a "slow, cumulative process in which bad things keep happening until the point of destruction."[3] The title further pairs an astute homonym with "cutting" as a technique in film; two denotations that contextualize the material implications of transphobic hate crimes, and the physicality of film as a medium. Through three screens, Osborne layered narrative, tone, visual, and auditory sensations; displaying filmic representations not as singular sites, but juxtaposed to illustrate an ideological pattern; a collective, cohesive,

portrayal of social reality. In the words of Osborne, the three-channel transmedia work confronts "cinematic tropes and the erasure of transgender people in mainstream media…through a crescendo-like composition ranging from humorous to violent—but always inauthentic—representations of trans individuals."[4] Hence, *A Thousand Cuts* unravels the way in which media is strategically enrolled to labour political ideology, and by extension, attends to the violent, lived implications etched within the politics of representation.

Media representation speaks to the ways in which knowledge is constructed and transmitted about communities, locales, experiences or attributes through a particular narrative or ideological framework. Braudy and Cohen stress that films "are the unconscious instruments of the ideology which produces them"[5]; always saturated in social and political context, produced through, and simultaneously reproductive of, ideology. While representations do not create or change events, they are powerful in that they construct and transmit knowledge through which real life is made intelligible. Indeed, media plays an instrumental role in the culturally contingent process of social learning and surveillance, whereby people are enrolled to accept and enact on premeditated cultural markers.[6] Given the ways in which media informs social learning, representation acts as a powerful tool for conditioning members of society to accept and partake in hegemonic configurations of the symbolic order.[7] Transgender scholar, activist, and media critic Joelle Ruby Ryan introduces the discourse of transgender (mis) representation through an alarming hypocrisy; while "trans people are often victims of violence and not perpetrators of violence," media "has been more interested in portraying the exact reversal of the transgender victim: the transgender sociopath."[8] A report by Human Rights Campaign on anti-trans violence found 2017 to be the deadliest year of the decade. Moreover, transgender people were found at a higher risk of experiencing discrimination, unemployment, homelessness, depression, and barriers from accessing basic needs and resources such as healthcare.[9] The *Trans Murder Monitoring Project*, which analyzes the rates of homicides of trans and/or gender-diverse people worldwide, notes that in the US and Europe, transgender people of colour were disproportionally vulnerable within the demographic.[10] Strikingly, while the average person has a one in 18,000 chance of being murdered, for transgender people this figure jumps to one in

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B.G-Osborne, *A Thousand Cuts* (2018). Installation view at 15+ Windows Gallery, Arts Commons. Photo courtesy of the artist.

twelve.[11] The material implications of anti-trans violence were woven into *A Thousand Cuts* through a large poster included in the exhibition, which listed the names of all documented[12] murdered transgender victims in the last two years. Osborne wrote on their website that this plaque "serves as a reminder to the viewership of the common consequence of transgender expression, especially for trans women of colour."[13]

Ryan argues that violence towards transgender people did not spring spontaneously, but rather, that such violence is political, historical, and has been actualized through repeated cultural and media conditioning.[14] Indeed, filmic representations such as *Psycho* (1960), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), *Terror Train* (1980), *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994), *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), and *K-11* (2012) demonstrate over fifty years of media where a transgender body is constructed as a site of terror, criminality, and monstrosity. In addition to the murderous transgender subject, other damaging tropes which are touched on in Osborne's collection are, but not limited to, the beautiful tragedy/death of transgender victims (*Albert Nobbs* (2011), *The Adventures of Sebastian Cole* (1998), *Boys Don't Cry* (2000), *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), *Soldiers Girl* (2003)), romanticized and binarized transition narratives (*Normal* (2003), *Tomboy* (2011), *Laurence Anyways* (2012), *Ma Vie En Rose* (1997), *The Danish Girl* (2015)), deceptive/seductive transgender bodies (*The Crying Game* (1992), *Ace Ventura* (1994), *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (2005), *I Want What I Want* (1972), *Naked Gun* 33 (1994), *Soapdish* (1991)), humorous and pitiful transgender bodies (*Crocodile Dundee* (1986), *Desperate Living* (1977), *Zoolander 2* (2016)), and fake transgender bodies (e.g. cis men in dresses) (*The World According to Garp* (1982), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), *Tootsie* (1982), *White Chicks* (2004), *Big Momma's House* (2000)). Indeed, a lineage of filmic representations have done significant damage to the transgender community, through which "by association if not by definition, transgender has become negatively coded."[15]

Not all the films listed here appear in *A Thousand Cuts*. These categories and their respective films were inspired by the work of Osborne and several other scholars, namely Joelle Ruby Ryan, Julia Serano, John Phillips, and Jeremy Russell Miller.

The violent history of invisibility and misrepresentation is not limited to the sphere of popular media and film, but has historically extended to spaces of critical queer and feminist scholarship. Professor, filmmaker, and transgender scholar Susan Stryker critiques queer studies as historically complicit in the censorship of transgender subjects; the dismissal, and at times, the complete omission of transgender voices, demonstrates academia's homonormative tendencies; "a privileging of homosexual ways of differing from heterosocial norms, and an antipathy (or at least an unthinking blindness) toward other modes of queer difference."[16] Canadian feminist scholar and professor Vivianne Namaste also critiques the shortcomings of transgender representation within queer academic initiative, which often fails to account for the complex lived experience of gender variant people. She argues that representations of transgender subjects are "produced through erasure."[17] Meaning, through a lack of autonomous, varied sites of visibility, alongside limited accountability within scholarship, academia produces media which is limited in its sphere of enquiry, which is disconnected from transgender people positioned as subjects of investigation, and which consequently reinforces the "obliteration of transgender people from the social world."[18] The lack of institutional accountability within media and academia further extends to the artworld, as evinced by Calgary Arts Commons in the case of Osborne's censorship. Indeed, while cis actors are entitled and permitted to (mis)represent transgender subjects in media, and while cis spectators are encouraged to consume and circulate misrepresentations, institutional forces demand the eviction of representation produced by sovereign transgender subjects—which become "too offensive when looked at through a critical/trans-lens."[19]

Contrary to the cis spectator, the transgender subject who consumes filmic misrepresentation is left to grapple and defuse the social codes, meanings, and stigmas attached to their abject bodies. Hence, media greatly impacts the knowledge construction, socialization, and experiences of transgender people. Mclnroy et. al. analyzed the impacts of media representation on Canadian LGBT youth, and found that despite increased access to overall representation, participants reported quality rather than quantity to be "the most critical aspect"[20] for their experience of positive visibility. Participants reported "one of [their] biggest challenges was that representations were pre-dominantly one-dimensional and stereotypical…[and] not representative of their lives."[21] Therefore, the queer identity

B.G-Osborne, *A Thousand Cuts*, 2018. Still. Photo courtesy of the artist. See endnotes for more on this compilation of stills.[*]

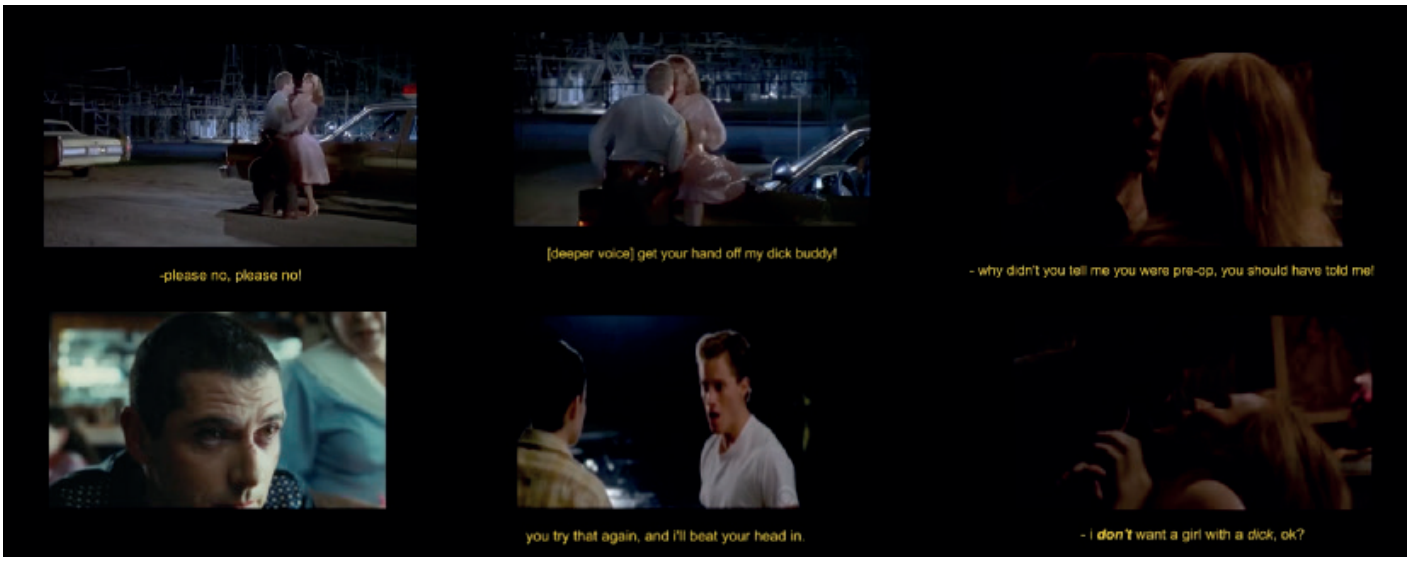
B.G-Osborne, A Thousand Cuts, 2018. Still. Photo courtesy of the artist.

formation process is a site of struggle; where minoritarian dispositions clash against social constructs and definitions in "an attempt to chart and enact identity from a minoritarian position, that either works with, or to resist the conditions of impossibility that dominant culture generates."[22] Scholar and activist Eli Clare shares his situated knowledge as he grappled with the tenuous process of constructing a transgender subjectivity; "I'm hungry for an image to describe my gendered self, something more than shadow-land of neither man nor woman, more than a suspension bridge tethered between negatives."[23] Clare imparts his own desire for representation and role models during his queer identity formation process; "without language to name myself, I am in particular need of role models. I think many of us are."[24] Since media provides critical information for queer people struggling to articulate and unpack how gender integrates into their lives, misrepresentation can be highly damaging, and can encourage alienation and internalized shame.[25] Considering the ways in which representation impacts the socialization of transgender people, and considering the breadth of negative and inauthentic representations of transgender people in popular media, the discourse of representation characterizes tremendous concerns for the transgender community. Misrepresentation has done significant damage; not only to the self-concept of transgender people, but through negatively coding the transgender community as abject in social space.

Feminist theorist, philosopher, and literary scholar Julia Kristeva coins "abjection" in film as homed in certain bodies, attributes, or locales, metaphorically assuming uncontrollable threat, immorality, and perverse pleasures.[26] For Kristeva, "abject" becomes monstrous through embodying significant threats to the symbolic order of society; crossing social borders and risking the realm of hegemonic social security and regulation.[27] Through situating abjection within certain bodies, media cautions the viewer of that which threatens the symbolic order—reaffirming the status quo which the abject (racialized, gendered, sexualized) threatened. Like Kristeva, Leila Fielding argues that sites of abjection in media function as political polemics; the abject is constructed and evolving, cautioning against a myriad of social transgressions, reflecting and responding to social norms over time.[28] Thus, abjection in film can be examined as reactionary to, rather than the cause of, social fears; and given the prevalence of transphobia in society, Ryan suggests that it is perhaps unsurprising that representation of the transgender body is overwhelmingly negative.[29] Ryan attends to the threat transgender subjects pose to the symbolic order of binary gender, which regulates the smooth functioning of hegemonic (cis-het-sexual) norms, and which is produced, perpetuated, and enculturated through the strict regulation of gender and sexuality. Given that gender norms and hierarchies are "the building blocks of our current masculinist culture,"[30] Ryan argues that non-conformity to essentialized notions of male and female "transgresses one of the most sacred of cultural taboos."[31] This taboo is elaborated on by Namaste, who argues that the queerness of transgender bodies destabilizes the very existence of binary gender cosmology by "interven[ing] not just as a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself."[32] Consequently, the transgender abject is threatening precisely because "more than any other practice or identity, [transgender] represents the prospect of destabilizing the foundational presupposition of fixed genders upon which a politics of personal identity depends."[33] Ryan argues that adherence to gender normalcy is maintained through "the deployment of figurative gender cops, who police and survey behaviour through the meting out of punishments for slight and substantial infractions."[34] Film too, argues Ryan, functions as a tool of surveillance and regulation; produced in light of social threats, and in service of "masculinist, heterosexist, and gender-normative agendas."[35] Meaningly, the transgender abject fundamentally works to labour binary gender normativity through policing gender transgressions; cautioning spectators that violating the symbolic order necessitates fatal result. Through the transgender abject in film, cisgender spectators can safely engage with gender transgression and its monstrous outcomes; reestablishing the firm line "between their own sense of 'normalcy' and the abject deviancy of the cinematically constructed 'other.'"[36] In this way, the monstrosity of the transgender abject in film functions as a didactic tool, which re-affirms the value of sex-gender purity.

Fielding further problematizes the impact of transgender representations in film; not only are these representations completely disconnected from the lived experience of transgender subjects, but they also project upon the audience "negative, distorted perceptions of gender

B.G-Osborne, *A Thousand Cuts*, 2018. Still. Photo courtesy of the artist.



B.G-Osborne, *A Thousand Cuts*, 2018. Still. Photo courtesy of the artist.

transgression."[37] Since the symbolic order is transmitted and maintained through social policing, a connection can be made between media representation and the violence enacted on trans bodies; both function through the desire to re-affirm the status quo which the transgender subject queers. While media misrepresentation might be identified as institutional efforts to diffuse and debase infractions from the cosmology of binary gender, anti-trans violence can be seen as the social penalty for transgressing hegemonic gender scripts; interpersonal attempts to "restore the supposed purity of the sex-gender system established under patriarchy."[38] Through the perpetual coding of the transgender body as a site of abjection, Ryan argues that the transgender subject inherits the public identity of a "polluting person" who is always in the wrong, who unleashes public danger, and is deserving of punishment. Thereby, anti-trans violence "becomes symbolic: it is about killing everything that the person represents."[39] Thus, the dehumanizing representations of transgender bodies in media not only promotes false social conceptions of transgender bodies, but also creates a social script through which violence against gender transgression becomes justifiable.

In this way, media discourse is a powerful arm of cultural and ideological spin doctoring which works to reaffirm structures of power, and the transgender abject in film serves as a subconscious lesson in gender-normative-supremacy.[40] I conclude with Ryan, who reminds us that while a lineage of trans monsters reveals little about the transgender community, it does reveal the colossal vulnerability of the symbolic order of binary gender. Indeed, within the transgender abject, we see a purposeful reversal of reality and a "blatant portrayal of scapegoating," whereby the smooth functioning of the symbolic order depends on the othering, deviance, and degradation of a marginalized people.[41]

The perpetual banishment of gender non-conformity to the locale of madness, tragedy, and perversion functions as a tool for re-affirming hegemonic conceptions of what is normal, natural, and safe. Through de-naturalizing and vilifying the transgender subject, film subconsciously works as a disciplinary mode of power, affirming the viewer's divide between gender normalcy and the tragic, deviant, otherness of the transgender abject. While media constructs the transgender subject as a site of marginality and abjection, José Esteban Muñoz, a critical queer theoretician in the fields of visual and cultural studies, examines abjection as a potential locale of self-determination and willful defiance. Muñoz posits "queer failure" as a mode of critiquing the political utility of "normalcy" as it is characterized by the state.[42] Ergo, he situates queer people's "failure" to operate through state sanctioned forms of normalcy, as a potential mode of autonomous defiance—a critical refusal to succumb to the dominant logics of power and discipline that mark conventional modes of "success" as defined by cis-hetero-patriarchal capitalist societies. Through critiquing the etymological investment in cis-hetero-patriarchal forms of organizing around norms and politics, Muñoz suggests that embracing and harnessing the "failures" entailed in minoritarian subjectivities might offer a mode of defiance and coalition for the queer, minoritarian subject.

Further examining the potentialities of enacting survival and even resistance from the position of the queer abject, Muñoz theorizes "disidentification" as a deliberate, performative mode and tactic employed with the aim to unsettle dominant ideology and oppressive discourse; "resist[ing] the interpolating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus."[43] Muñoz frames disidentification as a hermeneutical tool of decoding "cultural fields from the perspective of a minority subject" who is disempowered in dominant representational hierarchies,[44] and furthermore, as a performance and praxis of resilience and resistance "produced and rooted within a deep critique of universalism and dominant power bloc."[45] Hence, Muñoz offers the framework of disidentification as both strategy and praxis; which works to unsettle the dominance of the gender/sex order, and which offers potentiality for alternative modes of visibility, queer culture-making, and critical intellectual work. Meaningly, through destabilizing socially constructed codes and oppressive discourse in the direction desired by the queer, minoritarian subject, disidentification can work to throw severe doubt on the dominance of normative fiction, thereby warranting new modes and strategies of self-enactment and resistance that expand beyond the limitations and violence of the present.[46] Thus, Muñoz offers disidentification both as a mode of survival in light of, and resistance in spite of, dominant hegemony—and—as a process that envisions "a blueprint for minoritarian counter-public spheres."[47]

It is within the dialectic interplay of systemic violence and queer resilience, of marginality and resistance, that I advocate for the importance of envisioning frameworks which amplify, re-centre, and de-subjugate the voices and knowledge of transgender people; which elaborate on their complex and varied lived experiences; and which resist the violent impact of invisibility and misrepresentation. Considering the tenuous struggle to navigate transgender subjectivities without access to positive and varied representations, autonomous visibility is crucial not only for empowering transgender subjects, but also for contesting and dismantling the historical dominance of violent, pathologizing, transphobic narratives in cultural spheres. I echo Stryker, who calls for an insurrection and re-centring of the "subjugated knowledges"[48] of transgender people, who have knowledge "of their own embodied experience, and of their relationships to the discourses and institutions that act upon and through them."[49] Likewise, I echo Muñoz, who calls for an attentive recognition of the "ephemeral" realms in which queer textuality, narrativity, and community-specific knowledge take form; which is embedded in "acts and various performances of queerness," and which "stand as evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities."[50] Indeed, in spite of the materialities of censorship and exclusion, transgender people have continued to enact alternative modes of existence, negotiation, and creation. Thus, a radical and critical intervention is fundamentally contingent on the move towards transgender self-representation and scholarship, which amplifies the voices of transgender subjects, and which is authentic to the lived experiences of transgender people. Through Osborne's work, I hope to offer a possible correspondence between the framework of disidentification and the potentiality etched within queer art aesthetic. Art as a space where queer lived experience—which often remains marginal and ephemeral—takes material and public form; as a potential locale for disidentification, for negotiating alternative visibility, and working to avert the hermeneutical injustice produced through systemic erasure.

A Thousand Cuts occupies an interesting point of contest; while the work displays a collection of (mis) representations that have done significant damage to Osborne's community, they were appropriated as so to create a new site of media with a significantly oppositional

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message. In *A Thousand Cuts*, media is both critiqued and created; while the clips collected by Osborne enrolled the medium of film to labour and transmit transphobic ideology, Osborne queered, reclaimed, and repurposed these violent misrepresentations in order to lead the viewer of *A Thousand Cuts* to a message of critical and political defiance. Demonstrated within this interplay is the pharmakon of art and media; historically used both as a tool for labouring, circulating, and normalizing oppressive politics, while simultaneously homing an unofficial site for potential refusal, self-determination, and resistance for the queer, minoritarian subject. While Osborne's work demonstrates the ways in which film has been historically employed to circulate violent, transphobic misrepresentations, the medium of film simultaneously offered Osborne a point of re-entry; to create new sites of representation, to instigate a queer/trans critique, and to re-centre their agency and voice as a transgender subject. In this way, Osborne not only identified, but utilized the locale of abjection; exploiting "its energies and its potential to enact cultural critique."[51] It is within this queering of dominant media that I would like to frame *A Thousand Cuts* as a work that mobilizes disidentification as praxis; Osborne "situates [themselves] in history and seizes social agency," as a "strategy of resistance within the flux of discourse and power."[52] Through performed disidentification *A Thousand Cuts* queerly critiques, and queerly desires; Osborne critiques the relationship between images and bodies in film, which by extension, calls for imagining "a remade public sphere in which the minoritarian subject's eyes are no longer marginal."[53] Through extending and inviting viewers to queer the relationship between images and bodies in film, *A Thousand Cuts* not only makes a statement about misrepresentation, but directs the viewers to consider the ways in which transgender bodies have been historically constructed, and to consider the importance of transgender visibility for themselves. Through creating a work that performs disidentification, queerly resists oppressive discourse, and extends critique to viewers, *A Thousand Cuts* initiates a collective process of queering, which by extension, charts imagined departures from critique onto envisioning, and desiring, alternate realms of futurity and hermeneutical defiance.

While it is important to acknowledge and mourn the violence and censorship enacted by Calgary Arts Commons, Osborne's refusal to conform to oppressive systemic censorship is significant—and with broad implications. While Osborne's censorship reveals the lived effects of gender surveillance, it also reveals the threat, power, and impact of transgender subjects taking up space, performing resistance, and shaping their own visibility. Osborne describes *A Thousand Cuts* as a work in progress which they hope to continue refining, expanding, transforming, and exhibiting in the future.[54] The process of interrogating power as it is organized across gender, race, and sexuality is likewise ongoing; rooted in the lived materialities of systemic violence, and embedded in queer acts of resistance, refusal, and creation. In this way, perhaps the processes of disidentification and creation are intertwined within the same political project; both emerging from the insistence for alternate relationships, politics, and queer landscapes. As Osborne urgently puts it; "trans people are still being murdered at a seriously alarming rate, misrepresentation will continue to happen in mainstream media, we will try to take back our image and tell our own stories, cisgender people will keep being offended, and we will keep fighting."[55] Within the interplay of violence and resistance, Osborne's work exposes the "efficacy and, indeed, necessity for strategies of self-enactment for the minoritarian subject"; that enact and negotiate autonomous modes of culture-making and intellectual work centred in the lived experiences of transgender people.[56] Indeed, without the work, visibility, and resistance of transgender subjects, media will continue to dominate the production of social codes which currently work to police and justify the marginalization and violence enacted on the transgender community.

I urge us to remain attentive and critical of the ways in which power—through representation, institutions, media, and discourse—naturalizes, authorizes, and perpetuates exclusionary forms of political organization, evicting those who fail or refuse to adhere to social norms and regulatory practices. Considering the ways in which media, academia, and institutional forces work to re-affirm the dominance and purity of the symbolic order of binary gender, I assert the way in which this piece was received, and censored is not coincidental. Rather, I posit the response of Calgary Arts Commons as one that reveals the fragility of the symbolic order of binary gender and the institutional gatekeepers which aim to maintain it. I echo the insight

of Muñoz, who prefaces that "bad sentiments can signal the capacity to transcend hopelessness"[57]; the spatial term of abjection can simultaneously embody prospects of resistance, and can "contain the potentiality for new modes of collectivity, belonging in difference and dissent."[58] It is in queer acts of thinking, scholarship, writing, and performance" that Muñoz envisions alternate relationships, politics, and queer landscapes being imagined, and perhaps being fashioned.[59] Through attending to the political power and potentiality within Osborne's work, I advocate for the multiplicities and possibilities couched within queer art aesthetics; which offer not "an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations."[60] Through critiquing representation, performing disidentification, and instigating a trans/queer critique, *A Thousand Cuts* elaborates on the ways in which art homes potentiality for queer resistance, culture-making, textuality, and intellectual work. I would like to situate queer art as a mode of attentiveness to our history for the purpose of re-thinking our future; queerness not just as an identitarian locale of being, but as a performance of doing—for and towards—queer futurities. Within queer art there is a longing "that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present," and which insists "on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."[61] In this fashion, I consider *A Thousand Cuts* as a work that performs a queer refusal of the violence etched in the here and now, and which works through an insistence for potential, alternative, transformative modes of representation, and being in the world.

Notes

* Primarily, *A Thousand Cuts* communicates a coherent set of messages through a longitudinal collocation of clips that mirror, juxtapose and interact with one another. In *A Thousand Cuts*, the three-panel screen presents three cuts at a time; many of which start and disappear against the natural flow of the other. Considering this, I made the choice to build my own compilations of stills from Osborne's work; meaningly, some are not true to their order in *A Thousand Cuts*. In making my own compilations, I hoped to present some of the storylines which the viewership of *A Thousand Cuts* will have slowly come to view relationally throughout the artwork; but which fail to be communicated fully when taking stills from the artwork at a given time. A link to view *A Thousand Cuts* in its entirety and a complete list of all the films used in the piece can be found on The New Gallery's website at http://www.thenewgallery.org/a-thousand-cuts/.

1 Osborne, B.G. "Open letter to viewers." The New Gallery, 2018.

2 For the purpose of this essay, I use the term "transgender" in its broadest sense; whereby "trans/transgender" functions as a pseudo-umbrella term—albeit a problematic one. I ask the reader to read transgender not as concrete, nor as categorical indeterminacy, but rather, allowing for varied modalities of (dis)identification from the normative definitions and bodies, even as they are imagined within the category of transgender itself.

3 Osborne, B.G. "Exhibition Description." The New Gallery, 2018.

4 Ibid.

5 Mast, Gerald, and Marshall Cohen. "Film theory and criticism: introductory readings." (1980), 689.

6 Grant, Barry Keith, and Christopher Sharrett, eds. "Chapter 8, An Introduction to the American Horror Film, Robbin Wood": *Planks of reason: essays on the horror film*. (Scarecrow Press, 2004): 107-140, 108.

7 A term coined by Jacques Lacan, which attends to the imagined hold and regulation of social hegemony and ideological convention. A smooth functioning of the symbolic order is dependent on the inculturation of subjects through regulation and policing which works through institutions, linguistic communication, and interpersonal relations.

8 Ryan, Joelle Ruby. *Reel Gender: Examining the Politics of Trans Images in Film and Media*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2009: 1-323, 190-192.

9 http://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/A_Time_To_Act_2017_REV3.pdf.

10 "The majority of the trans people reported murdered were trans women of colour and/or Native American trans women (eighty-five percent), and in France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, which are the countries to which most trans and gender-diverse people from Africa and Central and South America migrate, sixty-five percent of the reported murder victims were migrants" (TMM, 2018).

11 Ryan, *Reel Gender*, 190.

12 Statistics around "documented" transgender victims is likely to be greatly under representative. Familial, cultural, and community attitudes all contribute to whether or not transgender subjects choose to be "out," and furthermore, to whether or not their communities choose to report them as transgender once they become victims to gender based violence.

13 Osborne, B.G. "Exhibition Description." The New Gallery, 2018.

14 Ryan, *Reel Gender*, 191.

15 Phillips, John. *Transgender on Screen*. New York; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 85.

16 Stryker, Susan and Stephen Whittle. *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 7.

17 Namaste, Viviane K. *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. 265.

18 Ibid.

19 Osborne, B.G. "Open letter to viewers." The New Gallery, 2018.

20 McInroy, Lauren B., and Shelley L. Craig. "Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction and impact of LGBTQ media representation." (*Journal of Youth Studies* 20, no. 1. 2017): 32-46, 39.

21 Ibid.

22 Muñoz, José Esteban. "Performing disidentification" *Disidentification: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. Vol. 2. U of Minnesota Press, 1999: 1-34, 7-8.

While subjects who undergo the complex psychological process of "identification" assimilate to the social models provided and projected onto their bodies, the disidentifying subject "encounters obstacles in enacting identification" (8), in that one is either unable to identify or conform to "the ideological restrictions implicit in identification site" (7).

23 Clare, Eli. "Gawking, Gaping, Staring." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 9*, no. 1 (2003): 257-261. 260.

24 Ibid.

25 Kosenko, K. A., Bond, B. J., & Hurley, R. J. (2016). "An exploration into the uses and gratifications of media for transgender individuals." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*: Advanced online publication.

26 Kristeva, Julia. "Approaching abjection." *Oxford Literary Review*, 5.1/2 (1982): 124-149.

27 Kristeva, Julia. "Powers of Horror," translated by Leon S. Roudiez. (1982): 4.

28 Fielding, Leila. "To what extent can portrayals of Norman Bates in 'Psycho' and Buffalo Bill in 'The Silence of the Lambs' be interpreted as reflecting the values of a transphobic society?" GRIN Publishing. 2012. section. 1 para. 4.

29 Ryan, *Reel Gender*, 188

30 Ibid, 187.

31 Ibid.

32 Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 14.

33 Stryker, *Transgender Studies Reader*, 2.

34 Ryan, *Reel Gender*, 184.

35 Ibid, 232.

36 Ibid, 185.

37 Fielding, 2012, sec. 1, para. 2.

38 Ryan, 190. "While the average person has a one in 18,000 chance of being murdered, for trans people this figure jumps to one in twelve. Over-kill characterises many of these crimes. This means there is more physical violence used than is needed to produce death. There is an almost maniacal level of hatred used that is about more than just killing the person. The violence becomes symbolic: it is about killing everything that the person represents."

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid, 235.

42 Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity* (NYU Press, 2009) 169-183, 173.

43 Muñoz, José Esteban: *The White to be angry: Queer Transexions of Race, Nation, and Gender*, Social Text, No. 52/53. (Autumn - Winter, 1997). 80-103. 83. DOI: 10.2307/466735.

44 Muñoz Performing disidentification, 25.

45 Muñoz, *The White to be angry*, 96.

46 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

47 Muñoz, *Performing disidentifications*, 5-6.

48 Through drawing on Foucault's theory of "subjugated knowledge" (Foucault, 81); knowledge that is systematically "buried and disgusted" (Ibid), masked and censored, alongside knowledge which has been "disqualified as inadequate…located low down on the hierarchy" (Ibid, 82), Stryker attends to the struggle for recovering history against systemic marginalization, and moving towards accounting for community knowledge and lived experience (13).

49 Ibid.

50 Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*. 1996: 5-16, 6.

51 Muñoz, *The White to be Angry*, 96.

52 Muñoz, *Performing Disidentifications*, 1-19.

53 Ibid., 24.

54 Osborne, B.G, interviewed by Kehila, Shai Ophelia, email exchange, 2019, January 19.

55 Osborne, B.G, "Open letter to viewers." The New Gallery, 2018.

56 Muñoz, *Ephemera as Evidence*, 11.

57 Muñoz *Cruising Utopia*, 76.

58 Ibid., 177.

59 Muñoz, *Ephemera as Evidence*, 6.

60 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

61 Ibid.

Portrait that Protests: Sofonisba Anguissola's *The Chess Game* of 1555

Clara Huang

In the painting *The Chess Game* (1555), Sofonisba Anguissola depicted her younger sisters and their nurse in a natural setting as they leisurely engaged in a chess game. The theme of chess for a genre scene, and its portrayal of women, sparked curiosity, given the gendered and sexualized implications surrounding the image of female players that were prevalent in Italian literature and paintings during the Renaissance period.[1] "This made *The Chess Game* (1555) an interesting case to critically examine the artist's intentions: the portrait was a private work and not commissioned by a patron or produced for an intended market, in which Anguissola would have the artistic freedom to experiment with her subject and composition."[2] It became crucial to see how Anguissola had simultaneously worked through the artistic demands of portraiture theories and social decorum to preserve the honour of her sisters. As current art historical and feminist discourse evolved, the recognition that Anguissola gained moved from her fame and technical virtuosity to her artistic and critical intentions in subverting the gender politics in the representations of women and defying the assumptions of female artists dominated by the patriarchal narrative.

Sofonisba Anguissola (1535–1625) was born to a small noble family in Cremona.[3] Her father moved in scholarly circles that were currently partaking in humanist discourses. As a result, Anguissola and her sisters had the privilege to receive an education in art, music, and literature as well as enjoy leisure activities, such as chess.[4] Her skills had earned recognition from her contemporaries, such as Michelangelo, Giorgio Vasari, and Anthony van Dyck, with the latter painting a portrait of the artist in her nineties during his visit in Palermo.[5] By 1559, Anguissola was called to Madrid to be the painting tutor and lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth of Valois, and she soon became an official painter at the court of Philip II.[6] Anguissola's merits led art historian and curator Sylvia Ferino-Pagden to dedicate a book to the artist, where she referred to Anguissola as "the first woman painter" to achieve such high prestige during her lifetime.[7] Of course, as other female artists appeared in earlier documentation, this does not suggest that Sofonisba Anguissola was the first woman ever to be become a painter or to practice painting worth noting. Rather, she was precedential for a woman to advance her status through the public recognition of her profession as a painter.

A career in artistic production, whether sculpture or fresco or oil painting, was hardly an ennobling one in early modern society because the work relied on manual labour and skills that were associated with craftsmanship.[8] Notably, it was from the Italian Renaissance that the categories of "art" and "artwork" gained prominence and gave rise to the idea of the "artist" as someone defined primarily by creativity and intellect rather than manual skill. At the same time, the field had always been male-dominated, with women systematically excluded from education in and practice of fine arts. Women who had the opportunity to be

Sofonisba Anguissola, *The Chess Game*, 1555. National Museum, Poznan. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

trained in painting at the time were often nuns who drew miniatures in books, but in most cases, were daughters learning from their painter fathers, such as Lavinia Fontana and Artemisia Gentileschi.[9] These practising female painters were commonly devalued as assistants working out of economic necessity rather than painting to make a career for themselves.[10] Social restrictions, such as those prohibiting women from studying anatomy and nude models, also hindered their artistic development and deprived them of equal economic opportunities to compete for public commissions.[11] Since Anguissola was from the upper class and was a legitimized royal portraitist, most male critics withheld from belittling comments in their critiques of her works, a professionalism denied to other female artists, such as Gentileschi, whose work was either neglected or written about in a negative light.[12] Without the social privilege enjoyed by Anguissola, many female artists were doubly attacked by gender and class discriminations.

Having her loved ones as models, though, gave Anguissola freedom from patrons' demands and the ability to design her own compositions, experiment with artistic ideals, and engage with the theoretical debate of paintings on her own terms. Italian authors and practising artists during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had written treatises on the subject to lay out criteria not only for good portraiture, but also for other painting genres.[13] Among this body of literature, there were three main aesthetic and rhetorical aims endorsed in common: to achieve life-like verisimilitude; to inspire viewers through depictions of moral nobility; and, to hide nature's defects through beautification.[14] In other words, Renaissance intellectuals had agreed that a good portrait should not merely portray individuals

based on their physical likeness, but rather, create an idealized profile that shows the sitter's virtue—although it was often achieved at the expense of material truth and identification. To see how Anguissola had incorporated these concepts, let us start by looking at the formal sophistication of *The Chess Game.*

The colour intensity was brilliantly applied for a variety of subjects: luxurious fabrics were illuminated by saturated hues, the sisters' fair, but rosy skin was brightened by the tenderly blended colours, while the trees' leaves and the background faded into diluted shades. Like a theatrical curtain, the tree revealed an open landscape behind it that had been rendered in a serene ambiance, the rivers and castle formed layers before the vista melted with distant mountains. The tactility of the painting was another pictorial achievement of verisimilitude. From the lustrous pearl accessories, to the delicate lacing and embroidery on their garments, and from the nurse's wrinkled face to the smooth carpet and the wooden chessboard, various materials and textures all had a high degree of realistic tangibility. The vibrance in tones animated the figures and layered the bucolic scene in a naturalistic manner, allowing the viewer to immerse in its life-like appearance and beauty.

"With a chain of actions and reactions built in, *The Chess Game* broke portraiture away from its limitations as a 'static image.'"

Anguissola created a dynamic world that pulled the spectator inward. Her construction of space was believable, in that the painting seemed to create a virtual extension that connected the viewer's space with the pictorial space, and the reach of our view was furthered by the idealized patterning of land giving spatial depth. In the foreground were Anguissola's sisters, from left to right: Lucia, Europa, and Minerva.[15] The two elder sisters were playing chess, while the youngest sister and the nurse acted as observers. The exchange of looks between figures coupled with our immediate eye contact with Lucia seemed to break down the barrier of the two-dimensional medium, leading the viewer to engage with the figures more as subjects and less as plain pictorial objects. The slightly foreshortened table was cropped and pushed forward, as if the viewer was sharing a side of the table with the figures, sitting beside the two players across from Europa. Due to this perspective, the viewer was looking while being looked at, simultaneously the spectator and the receiver of Lucia's triumphal stare. Thus, Anguissola's painting did not simply offer a naturalistic representation of her sisters; rather, it

introduced them as individual beings in which the circulation of gazes guided the viewer through the narrative of the game, and made the viewer a participant to finish the round of narratve.[16]

With a chain of actions and reactions built in, *The Chess Game* broke portraiture away from its limitations as a "static image," in which its usual lack of narrative often made it devalued as a painting genre.[17] Unifying individual portrayals in a collective activity, Anguissola had blended portraiture and genre painting as an early example of conversation piece.[18] This innovation aimed to overcome the generally contradictory, and often dismissive, attitude towards portraiture.[19] While the dignity of Aristotelian mimesis valued empirical observations and could achieve great likeness, it was simultaneously disdained for being too close to nature.[20] Therefore, artists were advised to not only idealize nature, but also to visually translate the "conception" of the subject, to reveal the person's inner qualities, and to portray the idea of the person.[21] Renaissance theorists and practising artists such as Giorgio Vasari and Vincenzo Danti agreed that the processes of idealization would elevate a "natural portraiture," or *ritrarre* of truthful imitation, to an "intellectual portraiture," or *imitare* of conceptual images.[22] The narrative should reveal personalities, and these personalities would in turn animate the narrative. Anguissola vividly captured each sister's individual character: Lucia had a calm but confident smile as her hand was about to advance. Europa grinned and teasingly looked at Minerva whom, perhaps surprised, held up her hand in a graceful acknowledgement of her defeat. Showing an intimate sibling relationship and the joy of atmosphere, Anguissola's *The Chess Game* had exemplified the ideal portraiture of *imitare*.

This was commended by Vasari when he saw the painting at Anguissola's house in 1566, after she had already left for Spain. When discussing Anguissola's work, art historians Mary Garrard and Fredrika Jacobs cite the Renaissance critic's comment on Anguissola's virtuosity as having a "breathing likeness."[23] More specifically, Eleanor Tufts found Vasari referred to *The Chess Game* as "most carefully finished" where Anguissola had made the figures "appear truly alive and lacking speech only."[24] Vasari's description had made a critical recognition that she had grasped the intellectual principles of idealization to execute her inventive ability with exquisite skills.[25] Anguissola was exceptional as a female artist in receiving such praise, since women were generally regarded as lacking the ability to think conceptually and they could only ever, at best, copy from nature but never elevate it from the material to the ideal.[26] According to patriarchal ideology at the time, greatness could only be found in men, because it was determined to be an essentially masculine quality, one rooted in the Renaissance ideal of virtue, which was defined by heroism, civic morals, and intellectual cultivation (all exclusively the domain of men). By comparison, virtue for women was strictly confined to chastity, virginity, and domesticity.[27] To say that Anguissola had successfully integrated a naturalistic portrait with an added layer of narrative content and psychological interaction from her own invention was to acknowledge that she went beyond the mimetic transcription of nature.[28] Instead, it was to recognize that Anguissola had the ability to conceptualize and idealize her subject matter from observed truth into a harmonious composition and a well-designed visual story, which had demonstrated the elevating component of intellectual effort that had come to define a great artist. Just as Anguissola did not have an independent entry of her own in Vasari's *Lives*, but was rather mentioned under other male artists' lives, the title of a "great" artist had never been and could not have been assigned to a female.[29]

The gender-transgressive contradiction would need to be reconciled, as Vasari supplemented the remark that the female ability to "make living men" enabled her to reproduce them pictorially as a part of her "natural function" to give birth.[30] Such biological attribution re-stabilized the hierarchy that locked women in the domain of the body and essentialized by the womb, forced to be both physically and symbolically "lower" than the upper domain of the mind, which was thought to belong to men alone, as it was the seat of rationality and accordingly attributed as masculine.[31] Under this dichotomy of the sexes, equating Anguissola's creative and procreative capacity allowed Vasari to naturalize the contradiction by depreciating her intellectual capability.[32] And this—the negation of women's intelligence—is what *The Chess Game* would overturn.

Since the fifteenth century, the game of chess was regarded as a cultured, intellectual activity favoured by aristocratic men. Embodying a courtly air, chess was con-

sidered as a "battle of reason" based on players' knowledge of rules and strategy.[33] Since the game required rationality, it was deemed as an intellectual and thus fundamentally "masculine" pursuit.[34] Yet all of these were only applicable when the game was played between men. Early modern French and Italian literature had developed some precarious implications for female chess players, which suggested that a female participant would "corrupt" the game by compromising its nobility and rationality, because the female presence would turn the chess match into a game of flirtation between heterosexual players.[35] Carrying on this notion, paintings that thematized female chess players were often built on the character of courtesans, and under this context, chess would serve as a sign of female seduction.[36] The chess game, then, had become highly sexualized entertainment. With every advance being erotically charged, sexual passion was taking over virtuous reason, in which the male player would fantasize about his female opponent submitting herself in defeat.[37]

Anguissola's *The Chess Game* defied such sexualized framing. On one level, her all-female setting desexualized the representation of the chess game from any erotic connotations. She disrupted the sexualizing objectification of her sisters into images of beauty or male desire by having Lucia directly address the viewer. Lucia's gaze then took up a certain degree of control in the viewership by assigning the viewer to the position of a witness for her own and indeed Anguissola's narrative. Enhanced by the familial bond, these noblewomen were safely observed by a female artist without the intrusion of a male presence.[38] The honour of the sisters, as well as that of the artist, was protected by the acknowledgement of their father in Latin inscription on side of the chessboard, which indicated the artist was the daughter of Amilcare Anguissola. The sisters were dignified not solely by the typical feminine virtue of chastity and social propriety but by their refined choice of leisure activity that affirmed their noble pursuit and intellectual ability in playing the strategic game of chess.[39]

However, interpretations that suggested the sisters as intellectually "equal" to men would dismiss a level of potential subversion that was implied by the war-like nature of the game that had yet to be translated into this all-female context.[40] The chess game was a commonly used metaphor for writing on political subjects, and interestingly, it also seemed to reflect the power relations in real-world politics, particularly that between the genders. In the late fifteenth century, the Italian rules of chess had changed to give the Queen more freedom in mobility, turning it into the single most powerful piece in chess.[41] Interestingly, the change echoed its contemporary political tide in the rise of female rulers across Europe, notably most Isabella of Castile in Spain and the powerful patroness Isabella d'Este in Italy.[42] The newly empowered Queen was symbolic to the power balance between genders as it turned chess into a metaphor for the "battle of the sexes."[43] Lucia had just taken down the Queen, held in her left hand, and her right hand was in the direction to checkmate the King.[44] The female victory here synthesized the gendered double meanings of chess into one statement: winning the battle of the sexes through winning the battle of reason. And this victory was not solely Lucia's but also her elder sister's—after all, the knowledge of cultural implications and visualization were brought to us by Anguissola.

Although *The Chess Game* was a private work held by the Anguissola family, it soon entered the houses of eminent collectors throughout Europe.[45] However, since the nineteenth century and perhaps propelled by the conservatism of the Victorian age, Anguissola was almost erased from the art-historical canon, where her unsigned works were attributed to later male artists in Italy or those working in the Spanish court.[46] Up until the late 1970s, Anguissola's paintings were being "rediscovered," along with other past female artists, kindled by one of the feminist movement's mandates to explore women's own history.[47] This of course did not come without contention. One of the fundamental problems that female artists faced within the discourse of art history and feminism was that they were marked as singular exceptions, in which their artistic achievements could be overshadowed by their gender. A female artist was often remembered as "the first woman," rather than as an artist with an array of accomplishments and in dialogue with her historical and social context. Even in a positive light, this mode of acknowledgement was very similar to that being employed by men—that the notion of a "woman artist" was an "oxymoron," and she must be a "miracle of nature" because it was unnatural or incompatible for a woman to become an artist, and that whenever a case did exist, it was an "exception" in the dominant discourse.[48]

"Anguissola had contested the conventions of her time, which she worked upon to subvert against, as a woman and as an artist."

At the same time, it was usually a very high recognition to be described as an "equivalent" of a great (male) artist, such as Titian in the case of Anguissola with Renaissance portraiture.[49] This equivalence did not, however, suggest that Anguissola was literally an equal to or equally "great" as Titian, but rather, the name Titian functioned like a benchmark in measuring Anguissola's achievement, as a numerator, on the basis of Titian's, the denominator. Thus, this method of indication conveniently placed Anguissola within the hegemony of male-centered art history discourse, where she, a female artist on her own, was posited as a negative—a sexual and ideological other—that must be formalized by a positive, a recognizable male self. In using Titian's name as a sign of "great artist," such description inevitably framed Anguissola in the process of following or emulating an example par excellence, instead of becoming or being one in her own right. "While biographical monographs like Tufts's survey were significant in mapping the presence of female artists throughout the history of art, it was of equal importance to investigate the conditions that mediated their oeuvre since artistic production was inevitably conditioned by the social contexts that it operated under, as argued by Linda Nochlin in her 1971 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" and put into practice in the following 1976 exhibition *Women Artists*, *1550–1950* curated by Nochlin and Harris. As recent scholarships aim to undo the homogenization of female artists as a singular category, it would be more urgent to look at how the works of individual female artists were in dialogue with their specific contexts and, as taken up in Garrard and Jacobs's research, to consider how they voiced critical comments and engaged with the art historical discourse. Finally, a closer analysis on an individual work could direct us to see how female artists had negotiated different ideas of women and of themselves in visual representations."

Among the three essentials of the Renaissance portraiture theory, the emotive quality of nobility seemed to come into play, as *The Chess Game* is now a half-a-millennium-old story of woman's defiance and victory that could inspire today's viewer. The portrait transgressed the gender politics in visual representation and cultural references. The artist redefined the "femininity" of her female subjects with the "masculine" virtue of intellectual cultivation that reclaimed the representation of her sisters as individuals with agency and resituated the female chess players to the realm of nobility. Anguissola had contested the conventions of her time, which she worked upon to subvert through her portraiture, as a woman and as an artist.

1 Patricia Simons, "(Check) Mating the Grand Masters: The Gendered, Sexualized Politics of Chess in Renaissance Italy," *Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (1993).

2 Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, *Sofonisba Anguissola* (Washington, D.C: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1995), 31; Mary D. Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1994): 615.

3 Ann S. Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists*, *1550–1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 106.

4 Ibid., 577.

5 Ibid., see footnote 43.

6 Ferino-Pagden, 10; Garrard, 617–18; Fredrika H. Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 76.

7 Ferino-Pagden, 10, 12; Jacobs, 74, see footnote 2.

8 Ferino-Pagden, 33.

9 Ibid., 10.

10 Ibid., 1, 33.

11 Harris and Nochlin, 43.

12 Ferino-Pagden, 13.

13 Luba Freedman, "The Concept of Portraiture in Art Theory of the Cinquecento," *Zeitschrift fur Asthetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 32, (1987): 63–67.

14 Ibid.

15 The identification of Europa and Minerva differs between sources. This essay follows Sylvia Ferino-Pagden and Patricia Simons in identifying the youngest sister in the middle as Europa and the elder sister on the right as Minerva. Opposite identification can be found in Mary Garrard's and Fredrika Jacobs's articles.

16 Jacobs, 94.

17 Ibid.

18 Simons, 70. Harris credited Anguissola and *The Chess Game* with helping to "create the portrait conversation piece"; see Harris and Nochlin, 106. Conversation piece refers to a smaller, informal type of painting that shows a group of figures, usually in full-length, enjoying a conversation or a leisure activity in a domestic setting or a country landscape. This specific format had became very popular in England during the eighteenth century and was often used for composing group portraits of family and friends; see "Conversation piece" in the *Oxford Dictionary of Art* and the *Oxford Companion to Western Art*. Although the terms emerged due to this later trend, group portraits of social gatherings and paintings of chess-playing were not new in sixteenth-century Italy, for example *Game of Chess* (1540s) by another Cremonese artist,

Giulio Campi, discussed in Simons, 69.
19 Freedman, 81.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 76, 78. Italics in original.
22 Freedman, 70, 82; Jacobs, 89.
23 Garrard, 556; Jacobs, 77.
24 Tufts, 21.
25 Jacobs, 84, 94.
26 Ibid., 99.
27 Garrard, 573.
28 Jacobs, 94.

29 Katherine McIver, "Vasari's Women," in *Reading Vasari*, ed. Anne Barriault, (London; New York: Philip Wilson and the Georgia Museum of Art, 2005), 180.
30 Jacobs, 78; Garrard, 574.
31 Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971), *Woman, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 147, Taylor and Francis Group, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429502996.
32 Jacobs, 84, 92.
33 Simons, 59.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 67, 70.
36 Ibid., 69.
37 Ibid., 65–67, 69.
38 Ibid., 71.
39 Ferino-Pagden, 31; Garrard, 603.
40 Simons, 59–60.
41 Simons, 60; Garrard, 602.
42 Ferino-Pagden, 11; Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of The Chess Queen* (New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2005).
43 Garrard, 603.
44 Ferino-Pagden, 31.
45 Ibid. The painting was first held by the Orsinis in Rome, and then the Farneses by the end of the century, before being purchased by the Bonaparte in Paris.
46 Ibid., 12, 60; Eleanor Tufts, *Our Hidden Heritage: Five Centuries of Women Artists* (New York: Paddington Press, 1974), Preface, XV.
47 Ferino-Pagden, 13.
48 Garrard, 573; Jacobs, 83, 94; Nochlin, 150–52. Vasari called Anguissola a *miracolo* during his 1566 visit; see Jacobs, 94. Poet Angelo Grillo described Anguissola as a "*miracolo di natura*" in 1589; see Garrard, 573, footnote 35. The notion of "unnatural" was taken from Nochlin, 152, where she quoted John Stuart Mill: "Everything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural."
49 Jacobs, 74. Many Italian art writers and biographers placed Anguissola's name alongside Titian. Some of her works were incorrectly attributed to Titian until reassessment in the twentieth century; see Ferino-Pagden, 12.

Mieko Shiomi: Claiming the Self through Action and Object

Connor Watson

A hallmark of the Fluxus movement was to look for a humorous, sexual claim to the self through bodily, visceral means. Mieko Shiomi seeks to psychologically reorient and claim the self through action, thus creating an awareness of the three distinct relationships between the self and nature; the self and the body; and the self and the other. For Shiomi, the body and its various interactions with the material environment around it are conduits through which awareness of these various psycho-sensorial relations can be achieved. Rather than enacting the visceral being for subversive means, Shiomi encourages an awareness of being by inciting the viewer of her works to enact creative, individual, and bodily events. Her focus on individual experience and freedom sets her apart from more radically inclined Fluxus artists such as George Maciunas, who sought awareness through collective action. Instead of simply challenging or pushing against established norms of art, life, and sociality, Shiomi offers alternative modes of engaging with these spheres. Furthermore, Shiomi's artistic experiments can be read as a model for a holistic global experience and inter-subjective connectivity. Shiomi's model, as I have identified, contrasts with neoliberal models of globalization that instead emphasize networks framed by private capital and reinforced through technological development. In contrast, Shiomi's model relies on accessibility to shared experience and creativity.

Mieko Shiomi explains the logic driving her practice as one that intends to intervene in the sphere of the real: "Unless we try to enrich our lives, I feel there is no meaning in doing art."[1] What I would like to explore is how Shiomi's work encourages its viewers to enrich their lives, and the ways in which the artist goes about addressing the individual as well as the collective in her practice.

Shiomi was born into a moderately wealthy family in Tamashima, a small town near Okayama, Japan. Her father was a choral conductor, and her mother regularly sang classical songs to her. Shiomi began taking piano lessons at nine years old and eventually became highly trained in classical music. With Okayama being subjected to air raids in the summer of 1945, her engagement with music was interrupted by the events of World War II. Her postwar effort to learn music was strained by her having to share a piano with others, but nonetheless, she persisted.[2] Another avenue of Shiomi's artistic development was the natural world, which could owe to her being raised in a fishing village on the Seto Inland Sea, surrounded by ocean, lush hills, and animals, which provided ample opportunity for engagement with the natural world.[3] This interest in nature would later come to manifest in Shiomi's extensive use of water in her work. Elaine Morgan has noted that in psychoanalytic thought, fluids have strong connotations not just with the body, but more specifically with the female body.[4] In this sense, Shiomi's practice can also be seen as a feminization of visual art practice, significant in the male-dominated art world of 1960s New York.

In 1957, Shiomi entered the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, studying music theory, history, and aesthetics while taking lessons in composition

on the side. Later in her academic career, she formed Group Ongaku (Music Group), an experimental band that included four fellow classmates, leading to experiments in improvization and the use of unorthodox sounds generally considered non-musical, such as those of everyday objects like a vacuum cleaner. In this way, her reframing of everyday objects, sounds, and materials both forces a re-consideration of the banal in the everyday and collapses the difference between high art and the commercial world. Undoubtedly, Shiomi's technical and creative background in music informed the way she constructed non-musical pieces and how she sought to reconcile the relationship of the self and the other in an increasingly urbanized and globalized world.

The Self and the Outer World/Nature

Shiomi's preoccupation with nature sets her apart from other Fluxus artists whose works also take up the organic and the bodily. Shiomi's concern is less with the body as sexual, that is, inherently experienced through its relation to the other, than she is with the body as a complex, intensive tool for interacting with the world around it. For Shiomi, the body is a conduit for realization of the self as internal being, as opposed to one that is defined by its enacted place in the world. Most prominently, the artist explores the body through its relation with the natural world. In an interview with Sally Kawamura, Shiomi states that she "does not describe herself as being against consumer society."[5] This runs in strict contrast with, for example, Fluxus organizer George Maciunas, who was community oriented and vehemently anti-consumerist, especially in regard to the world of art. Taking influence from John Cage's experimental music composition classes at the New School, Maciunas's views can be summarized by a quotation from the *Fluxus Manifesto*, written by him in 1963:

… purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual," professional & commercialized culture ... PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART, ... promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals ... FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action.[6]

"Instead of simply challenging or pushing against established norms of art, life, and sociality, Shiomi offers alternative modes of engaging with these spheres."

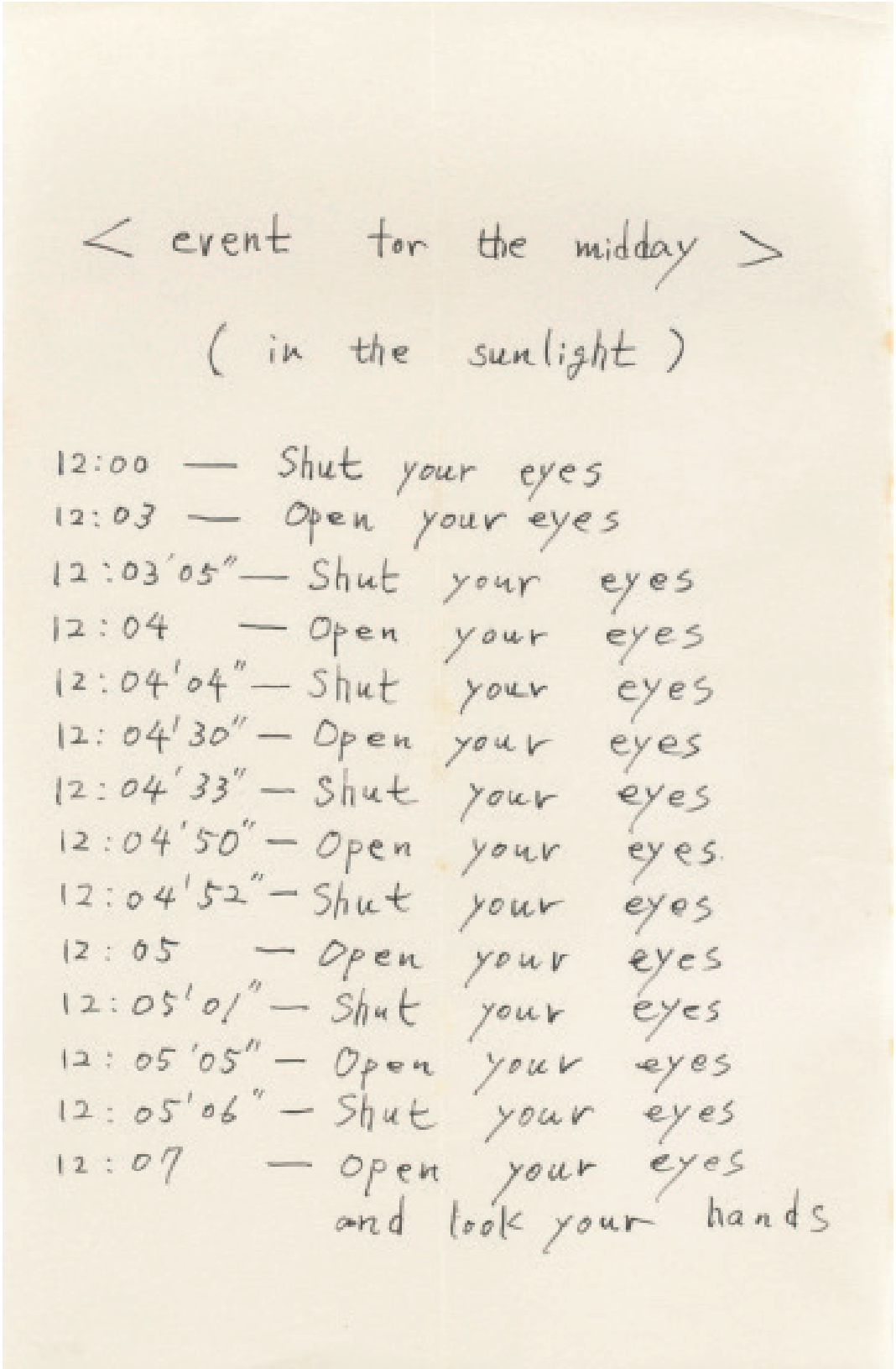


Figure 1. Mieko Shiomi. *Event for the Midday in the Sunlight,* 1963. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Despite her indifference to taking an explicitly anti-consumerist stance in her work, Shiomi's works, often immaterial or interpretative, still undermine the commercial frameworks of the art world. Kawamura argues that by "bringing people to an awareness of the natural world, her works are more empowering and may possibly push individuals towards a sense of community and towards the valuation of small incidents and experiences over commodities."[7] Important to note is that Shiomi's work often makes use of water, or other materials that are fluid, emotive, ephemeral, or in some way transitional and temporally bound. The use of fluid and the emphasis on the ephemeral could be linked to various processes of the body—the word *Fluxus* itself implies change or difference. For Kawamura, this invokes a recognition that the natural world is in a perpetual state of transformation. With the advent of global capitalism, beginning in the nineteenth century, it becomes impossible to talk about the natural world without also talking about its exploitation and subjugation by Western and Western-modelled powers for the production of commodities—including Japan. Kawamura notes that an acceptance of change contrasts with a desire to purchase commodities in order to buy a sense of security.[8] This critique makes sense when considering that in the aftermath of World War II, in both the United States and Japan, there was a massive boost in industrial production that led to an explosion of the middle classes, resulting in widespread consumerism and therefore mass culture. This mode of identity through consumerism became the dominant mode of defining the self in postwar Westernized nations (in other words, a sense of stability through persistent association with commodities led to a stability of identity that did not account for the internal self in a meaningful way). Two works in particular emphasize Shiomi's concern with nature, *Mirror*, and *Event for the Midday in the Sunlight* (Figure 1), both from 1963. Both pieces are event scores, consisting of a card with written instructions describing a series of actions to be performed. The pieces are conceptual by nature, as their form is mostly a practical means of communicating a set of performance actions. *Mirror* instructs a performer to:

Stand on the sandy beach with your back to the sea.
Hold a mirror in front of your face and look into it.
Step back to the sea and enter into the water.[9]

Kawamura notes that that this piece may have a disorienting effect on the performer, as the relationship between seeing and feeling is reversed—"instead of seeing the environment she is about to enter and being aware of her face by feeling, she sees her face and is aware of the environment she is entering through feeling," which can create fear or hesitation.[10] She also suggests that the performer may enjoy this sensation and feel as if they are merging with the sea. Eventually, when the performer has backed far enough into the sea, the water may become deep enough that they will lose their footing, and be surprised by their submission to the environment.[11] However, I would argue that any submission to nature is secondary to the submission to one's will to complete the piece, however uncomfortable or strange it may feel. There is a trust in one's judgment, but also in nature, that is required to perform the piece.

The Self and the Body

Kristen Stiles argues that after the Gutai movement, physical expression became a defining feature of postwar Japanese avant-garde art, with use of the body as "a response to the threatened ontological condition of life itself in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the advent of the atomic age."[12] It is in this context, slightly removed from the wartime atmosphere of her childhood, that Shiomi began to create event scores that sought to negotiate life and the body post-disaster. In this sense, these works about the body can be seen as a way of considering the relationship between the internal and the physical self, as well as their complex relation to the outer world. *Event for the Midday in the Sunlight* is an event score that encourages a confusion or disorientation of one's senses through the medium of the natural world. This piece instructs a performer to close and open their eyes seven times in seven minutes after noon. Performance of this piece can lead to a sort of disorientation, in which the performer has to negotiate between the purposeful action of opening and closing their eyes and the natural world's visuality that they are forcing themselves to take in. The sunlight is a crucial force in this piece, as it intensifies the difference between states of open and closed eyes. Midori Yoshimoto notes that this repetition of eye movement can be compared to the playing of a musical instrument in that, similar to "the quickening of music, the duration of keeping the eyes shut becomes shorter as the

Figure 2. Ben Vautier. *Dirty Water*, 1964. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 3. Mieko Shiomi. *Water Music*. 1965. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

time goes by."[13] On opening the eyes for the final time, the performer is to look at their hands. By focusing on one's eye movement, one is made aware that the human body is a living organism that functions unconsciously.[14] This also calls attention to the constant effects that the natural world has on our perception, regardless of whether we are made aware of this or not.

In order to further highlight Shiomi's unique approach to the self and the body, I would like to bring these works into a dialogue with that of other Fluxus artists, whose work around the self and the body take an approach that is more about recognizing the visceral and sexual aspects of such. For example, Ben Vautier's *Dirty Water from Fluxkit* (Figure 2) and Shiomi's *Water Music* (Figure 3) from the same *Fluxkit* (mail-order boxes by Maciunas containing Fluxus pieces by various artists) have the same design—a glass bottle with a dropper and a label designed by Maciunas himself. *Water Music* contains instructions on the label that read: "1. Give the water still form; 2. Let the water lose its still form." The performer is free to interpret this set of instructions as they see fit, resulting in a thematic doubling—both in medium and execution. This claiming of the self is entirely different from Vautier's *Dirty Water,* a bottle and dropper that in essential form almost exactly mimics Shiomi's work. Effective in its associations to the inherent dirtiness of the body, the piece is subversive as a mimic-commodity. Jacquelyn Baas notes that sex and nothingness are among the favourite topics of Fluxus artists,[15] and Natilee Harren posits that "so many Fluxboxes catalogue the bodily vicissitudes of ingestion, exfoliation, penetration, and being penetrated. We are meant to ingest the dirty water, put our finger in the hole, slip on the glove, and soil the washcloth. Difference and separation are short-circuited through an obsessive fixation on the bodily grotesque."[16]

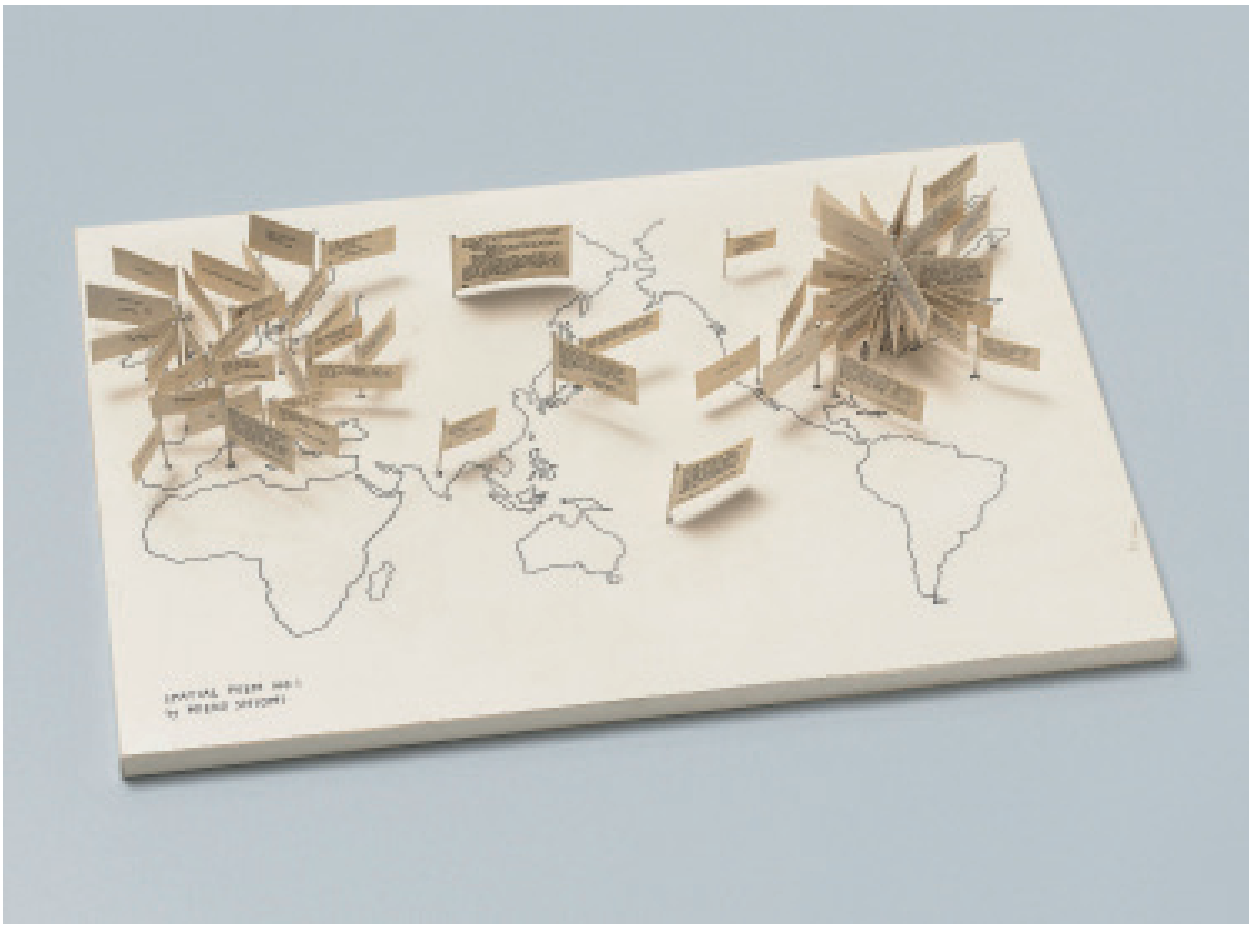


Figure 4. Mieko Shiomi. *Spatial Poem No. 1*, 1965 . The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Shioimi's work, in contrast, is in no way about the visceral, "dirty," or sexual, but larger questions of *what am I*?

The Self and Other

Shiomi's work is ultimately focused on the inter-subjective, whether it be one's re-communing with nature or person to person. Shiomi's series *Music for Two Players* involved performances in which strangers who share the same year, month, day, and time of birth were invited to perform actions that involved them being together without actually speaking to each other. Further, these works emphasize the individual's awareness both of their own being and their being in the presence of another. This is effected not only through the stillness and silence that the exercise necessitates, but also through the mirroring enacted by the participants. In other words, each participant's being is emphasized by the other's, and each is made painfully aware of this fundamental fact of interconnection. Though potentially uncomfortable to perform, these works demonstrate an immense focus on intimacy and sensitivity. Or rather, this intimacy lacks the bodily elements of other contemporaneous Fluxus works, as it does not draw its effect from one's solitary touching of an object, but from the interaction between beings it invokes. Yoshimoto notes that because the two partners in the performance must mirror each other, this allows for an alteration between viewing the performance as between the self and the other, and between the self and self-reflection.[17] *Music for Two Players I*, made in 1963, invites two participants to stand apart from each other, with an assistant who dictates both participants' distance from each other and when they are permitted to move. The varying distances stipulated by the score offer the participants a new perspective with each distance interval, inviting a sensorial reset with each change. This event

score re-creates the everyday situation of seeing someone that one has not met before, but concentrates and modulates it, encouraging a thoughtfulness that one does not usually accord the passing of a stranger. In this sense, Shiomi is slowing down the pace of the everyday through the production of works that encourage a sort of intimacy that would be completely inappropriate and uncomfortable outside the realm of performance.

Music for Two Players II, of the same year, is even less action-based, asking that the participants "in a closed room pass over two hours in silence," doing anything but speaking. This absence of language as a means of communication forces the performers to seek to communicate through more corporeal means, namely gesturing, touching, and eye contact. Another way to consider this is that communication is still allowed, but the use of any type of verbal communication is strictly barred. Alternatively, performers could choose to not communicate at all, but to simply be together. By removing our de facto mode of communication, Shiomi puts an emphasis on simply being. Stiles posits that Fluxus events "draw attention to the behavioural processes that relate thinking and doing," potentially causing a revision of these behavioral processes that can create alternative procedures and patterns for the reconstruction of thought.[18] With these two works, Shiomi seeks the reconsideration of behavioural, emotional, and rational processes via a reorientation with the external world by performance.

"Shiomi's mail art functions as a proposition for a global model of connectivity based not on efficiency or totality of experience, but as a model based on shared experience, collectivity, and intimacy."

The Global-Spatial

Beginning in 1965, Shiomi began a project that sought a new orientation of self, that of a global orientation. In an interview with Yoshimoto, Shiomi explains that she became frustrated by "the inconvenience of communication," by being "physically restrained to one place at a time." This concern extended to the formality and institutionalism of holding events in special places such as galleries or concert halls. Shiomi recalled the limitations of working within a small artists' community in New York, feeling that "art should be alive everywhere all the time and at any time anybody wanted it."[19] This led Shiomi to conceive of *Spatial Poems*, a series of nine mail-art events occurring between 1965 and 1975, in which approximately 230 people from over twenty-six countries participated, including Shiomi's friends from Fluxus and other areas of her life. For each event,

Shiomi sent out over one hundred invitations, asking the recipients to perform an event written on an event score, and then send back documentation of this performance explaining how the performance went (i.e., did it go as planned? Were there any unexpected results?). Yoshimoto reminds us that mail art had existed since the 1950s, but was mostly used as a one-way process—for artists to send art to their audiences. Shiomi's conception of mail art was fundamentally different in that she made it possible for global events to happen simultaneously, and for communication of these events to be reciprocal. After receiving documentation from each event, she would send the collective results back to the participants.[20] Later, Shiomi constructed what she called an "object poem," consisting of three-dimensional map boards with the responses she received from friends printed on small flags, and located each flag on the map corresponding to the respondent's location (Figure 4). I would like to add that this is both the result of and defined by an era in which global travel had become common, and an increasingly global flow of information, cultural practices, and capital was being aggressively developed both in the governmental and private spheres. In other words, in order to feel the profound intimacy present in Shiomi's work, one has to have a certain amount of awareness of the world that exists outside of their immediate surroundings. The era in which Shiomi was producing these spatial poems falls just short of the neoliberal era, in which economic deregulation, digital technologies, and new media have fostered an incredible global transference of material capital and immaterial capital that has resulted in rapidly increasing inequality, feelings of social isolation, and environmental devastation.[21] Stiles posits that "Fluxus actions and events extend poiesis into praxis by linking corporeal and ontological significations to actual social and political situations."[22] Shiomi's mail art functions as a proposition for a global model of connectivity based not on efficiency or totality of experience, but on shared experience, collectivity, and intimacy. For this reason, it is pertinent to continue to revisit Fluxus, and especially Shiomi's work, as relevant models that urge us to question our everyday actions, our creative potential, and the ways in which our awareness of self relates to how we perceive and respond to global events and issues.

Notes

1 Michelle Elligott and Mieko Shiomi, "Interview with Shiomi Mieko, Part 5: Q and A Part 1." Post. https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/22-interview-with-shiomi-mieko (accessed January 3, 2019).

2 Midori Yoshimoto, "Music, Art, Poetry, and Beyond: The Intermedia Art of Mieko Shiomi," in *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 141.

3 Yoshimoto, "Music, Art, Poetry," 141–42.

4 Elaine Morgan, *The Descent of Woman* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 4–5k3i.

5 Sally Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental: Mieko Shiomi's 'Events,'" *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, 3 (November 2009): 312–13.

6 Maicunas, *Fluxus Manifesto I*.

7 Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental," 313.

8 Ibid.

9 Mieko Shiomi, "Score for Mirror as it appeared in V TRE," (Fluxus newspaper no. 1), 1964; reprinted in Armstrong & Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, 164.

10 Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental," 320.

11 Ibid.

12 Kristine Stiles, "Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions," in Schimmel, *Out of Action*, 228.

13 Yoshimoto, "Music, Art, Poetry," 148.

14 Ibid.

15 Jacquelyn Baas, "Sex," in *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life*, 71.

16 Natilee Harren, "Fluxus and the Transitional Commodity," *Art Journal* 75, 1 (May 2016): 61.

17 Yoshimoto, "Music, Art, Poetry," 154.

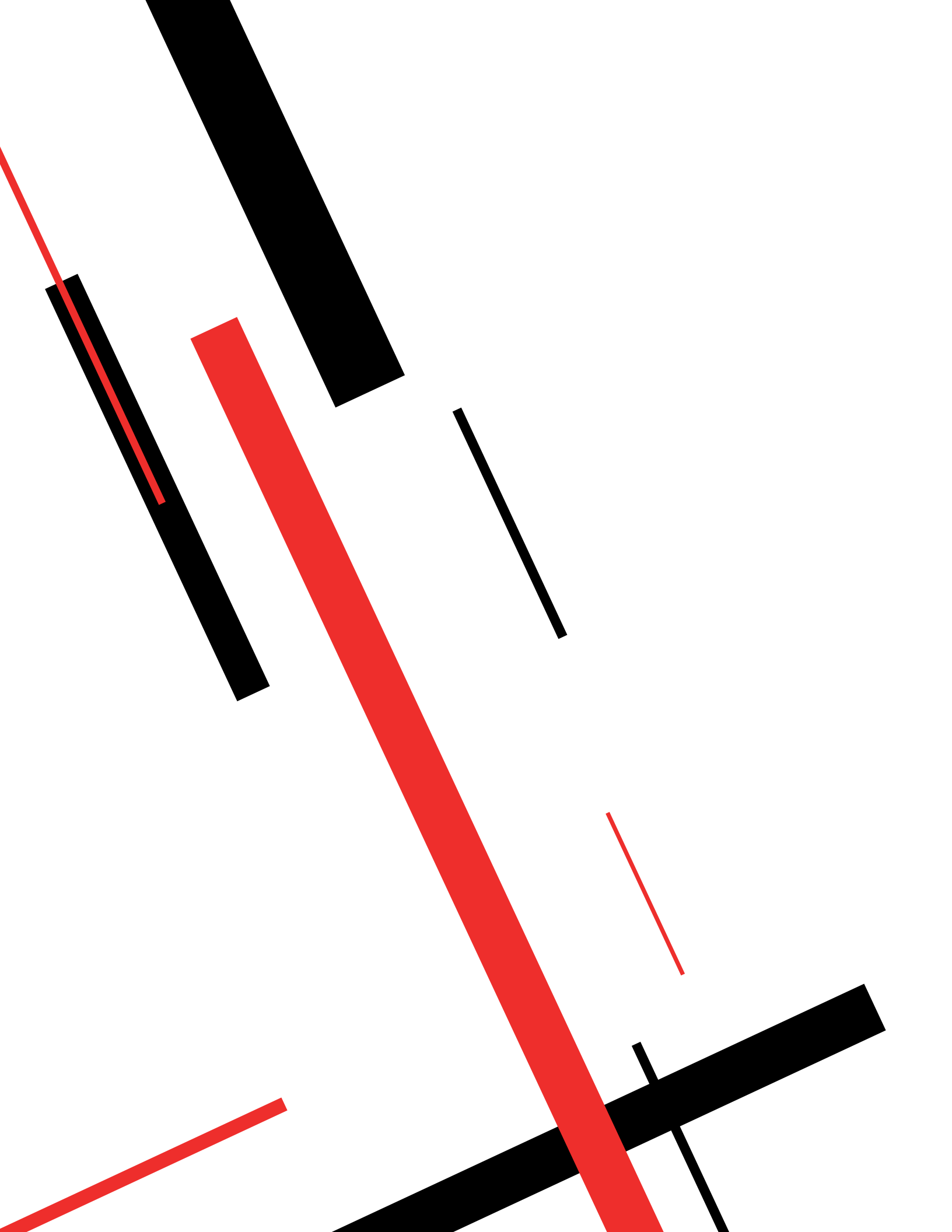
18 Kristine Stiles, "Between Water and Stone—Fluxus Performance: A Metaphysics of Acts," *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Janet Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993), 65.

19 Yoshimoto, "Music, Art, Poetry," 155.

20 Yoshimoto, "Music, Art, Poetry," 155.

21 See the central argument in Larry M. Bartel's *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, and also Noam Chomsky's *Requiem for the American Dream*, which provides social analysis beyond the economic effects of neoliberalism.

22 Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 94.



Reviews

Reclamation, Beauty, and the Palindrome in *Dana Claxton: Fringing the Cube*

Lucas Beatch

The transmission of Lakota cultural memory [is] not only a way of showing love, but of actually loving- a performative act of generosity and respect. A responsibility and a gift-giving that is also a way to survive ... imparting a clear message: 'we have survived, we are today, well-adorned, in joyous celebration of our heritage as Native Americans.'[1]

From October 27, 2018 to February 3, 2019, visitors to the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) had the unique opportunity to view the first ever survey exhibition of prolific artist Dana Claxton. For UBC students, *Dana Claxton: Fringing the Cube* holds special significance: Claxton has been a faculty member since 2010 and was recently appointed Department Head for Art History, Visual Art and Theory. This review highlights a few of Claxton's pieces; however, it is important to acknowledge that the exhibit houses a much larger oeuvre of work than what I am able to mention here. While the show was curated by Grant Arnold, Claxton was invited to actively participate as well as select pieces from the VAG's permanent collection to be in dialogue with her work. When I asked her about the decision to include other works, Claxton replied that it was the VAG who suggested it. What guided her selection was generosity (central to much of her praxis) and the intention to open up larger discussions around her work. Additionally, she added, "the idea of having my work with Elizabeth Z[vonar] and Bill Reid and Steve Shear amongst others was dreamy! And then the ancient indigenous tools- [this] VAST opportunity allowed me to show my thoughts about art, culture etc in the gallery space… I was able to make pairing and groupings never seen before."[2] The curated pieces both complement and augment Claxton's work, which is both visually enticing and richly embedded with meaning. Questions regarding representation, beauty, labour, spirituality and Indigeneity are intrinsically tied to her work. *Fringing the Cube* features a circular floor plan, allowing it to be read both forwards and back. The beginning and ending of the exhibition are obscured and interchangeable, much like a palindrome, reflecting a Lakota understanding of the world as a timeless continuum.

Walking up the stairs at the VAG, I was immediately struck by the intensity of a life-sized photograph titled *Cultural Belongings* (2016). The piece literally glows—it is illuminated through the use of an LED 'firebox' placed behind the photograph. Labels in the gallery acknowledge that Claxton's 'firebox' is an Indigenization of the 'lightbox' developed by Vancouver-based artists Jeff Wall and Rodney Graham.[3] In placing this work in conversation with that of the Vancouver school (a group of artists in Vancouver who began working with photoconceptualism in the 1980s), she demarcates her own positionality as an artist. *Cultural Belongings* counters stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples, such as those by early twentieth century photographer and ethnologist Edward Curtis.[4] The piece shows a woman wearing a cream wool designer

Dana Claxton, *Cultural Belongings*, 2016, LED firebox with transmounted chromogenic transparency. Collection of Rosalind and Amir Adnani

dress and matching heels, draped in a long buckskin robe with various Indigenous belongings trailing behind. She is photographed in action, moving forward whilst holding high a Lakota dance stick. Tradition is brought to the present in this work. Various beaded accoutrements drip down the subject's forehead, masking her face and concealing her identity. Claxton explains how her image operates—or rather, refuses to operate—as a traditional portrait, stating that "the gaze is disrupted for everyone. Only the sitter can see the viewer."[5] Thus, this work renegotiates the traditional power dynamics of portraiture. The figure is shielded by the protective layers of beading. In this, she rejects our cannibalistic nature to consume through the gaze and takes back control of the body.

Moving clockwise through the gallery, the next space features the installation-video-performance piece *Buffalo Bone China* (1997). Centered in a dimly-lit room is a pile of broken Royal Albert china piled neatly in a circle. A video projection plays directly behind the pile, depicting grainy footage of buffalo. Performer Anthony McNab Favel appears in the footage and while we can see him screaming, his voice is muted. Through this, Claxton articulates both the rage emanating from the subject, and the simultaneous silencing of Indigenous narratives. Settlers drove the buffalo to near-extinction, transforming the bones into fine china for the European elite, all while decimating a food source and way of living for many Plains peoples.

Part of the strength in Claxton's work is its ability to draw us in with seductive colours, vibrancy, and beauty. Once you pause to contemplate the work, the bigger messages interwoven through her work reveal themselves. This is seen in series such as *Indian Candy*, where a dialogue of objectification, power dynamics, displacement, and reclamation is unveiled. As put forth by curator Grant Arnold, "[t]he *Indian Candy* project can be seen as the assembly of an archive made up of pictures from other ar-

chives, in which acute remediation […] draws attention to and seeks connection with suppressed histories and subjectivities."[6] In this series, Claxton takes up images taken from Google searches of the "Wild West," including a lone white buffalo, an image of Tonto from *The Lone Ranger*, and Osage prima ballerina Maria Tallchief. These images are overlaid with intense colour—flooded with magenta, purple, or cobalt blue—and are shown pixelated to highlight the disconnect between the subjects and viewer.

Before returning to *Cultural Belongings*, viewers are bathed in a serene blue light while peyote healing songs emanate from a four-channel video. This is *Rattle*. What we are witness to is "a visual prayer attempting to create infinity… [m]uch like a palindrome […] the double of images emphasizes the notion that creation on earth and in the sky reflect each other to create an existence of timeless continuum—with no ending."[7] This makes distinguishing between the beginning and end difficult and reflects a Lakota worldview. Claxton mixes ceremony with art and reclaims what has historically been normally viewed in the museum as artifact—the rattle—to a spiritual object which was made to be used, and thus disrupts the power of the gaze again.

Continuing with the theme of the palindrome, Claxton's show can be read from various entry points and represents a continuum of ideas in tandem. Through multi-sensorial engagement, the work on display encourages the viewer to stop, take their time, and reflect. In her practice, Claxton has been known to "mix, meld and mash Lakota traditions with so-called Western influences" in order to critique the ongoing legacies of colonialism.[8] This is further highlighted by the pieces from the VAG collection that she curated. In any exhibition, meaning is conveyed through active engagement, and Claxton facilitates dialogue and reflection by juxtaposing pain and beauty. Claxton notes, "Indigenous people have been structurally dehumanized in all facets of life in North America, whether it's through education, through the state, through the church. In some ways, my work has attempted to show us as human beings."[9]

Dana Claxton, *Buffalo Bone China*, 1997, mixed media installation with single-channel video, broken china, stanchions and rope. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery. Purchased with financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Program. Photo: Don Hall, Courtesy of the MacKenzie Art Gallery

Notes

1 Jodi Archambault Gillette in Dana Claxton: *Fringing the Cube*, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2018), 64.

2 Dana Claxton in discussion with the author, February 1, 2019.

3 Museum label for Dana Claxton, INDN *Ironworkers*, Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, October 26 2018.

4 Fueled by the salvage paradigm of this era—when settler society legitimately believed the disappearance of Indigenous culture was near—Curtis worked obsessively to document over 40,000 photos of Indigenous peoples whilst simultaneously denying their place in contemporary society and positioning them as frozen in the past.

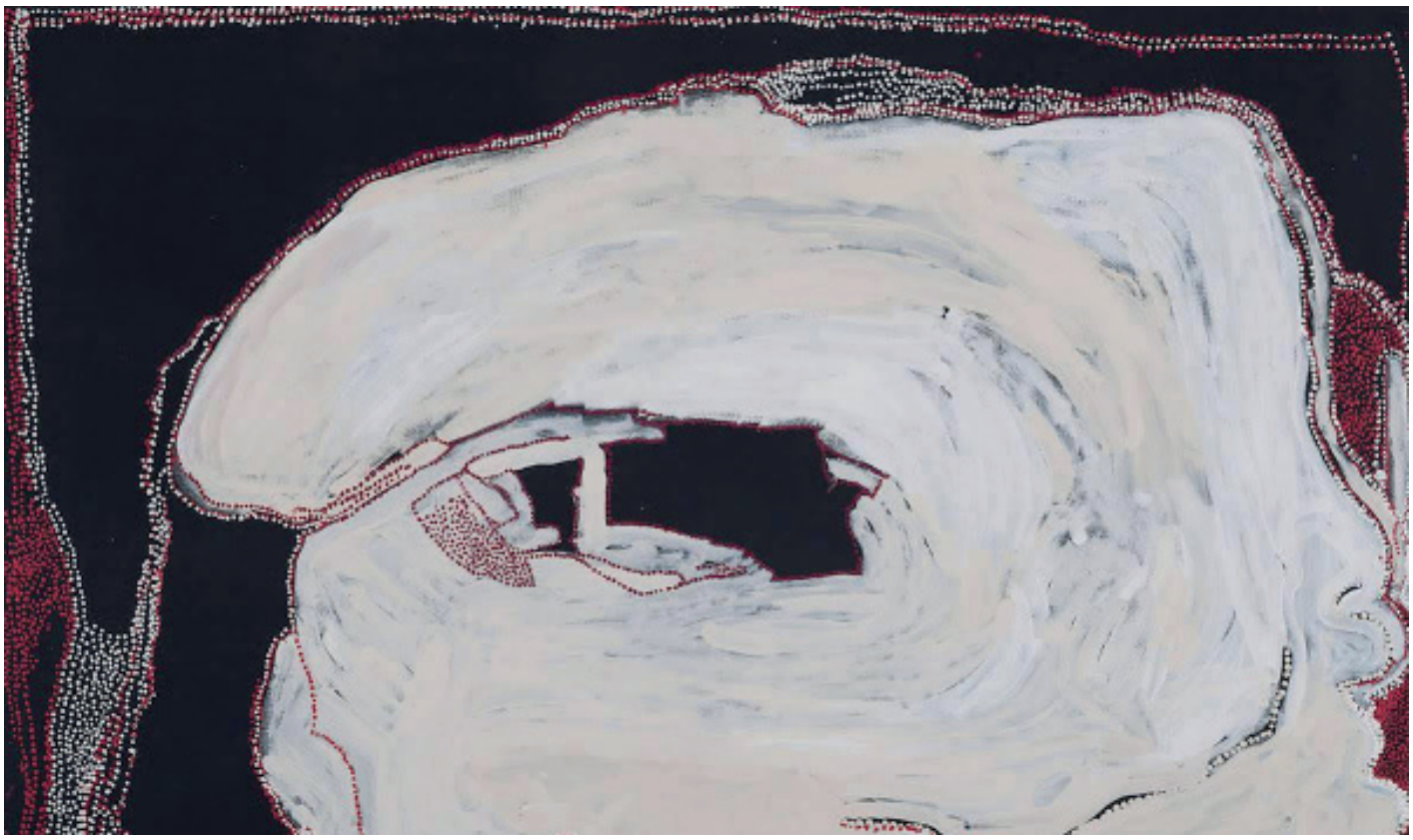
5 Dana Claxton in discussion with the author, November 2, 2018.

6 Grant Arnold in Dana Claxton: *Fringing the Cube*, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2018), 28.

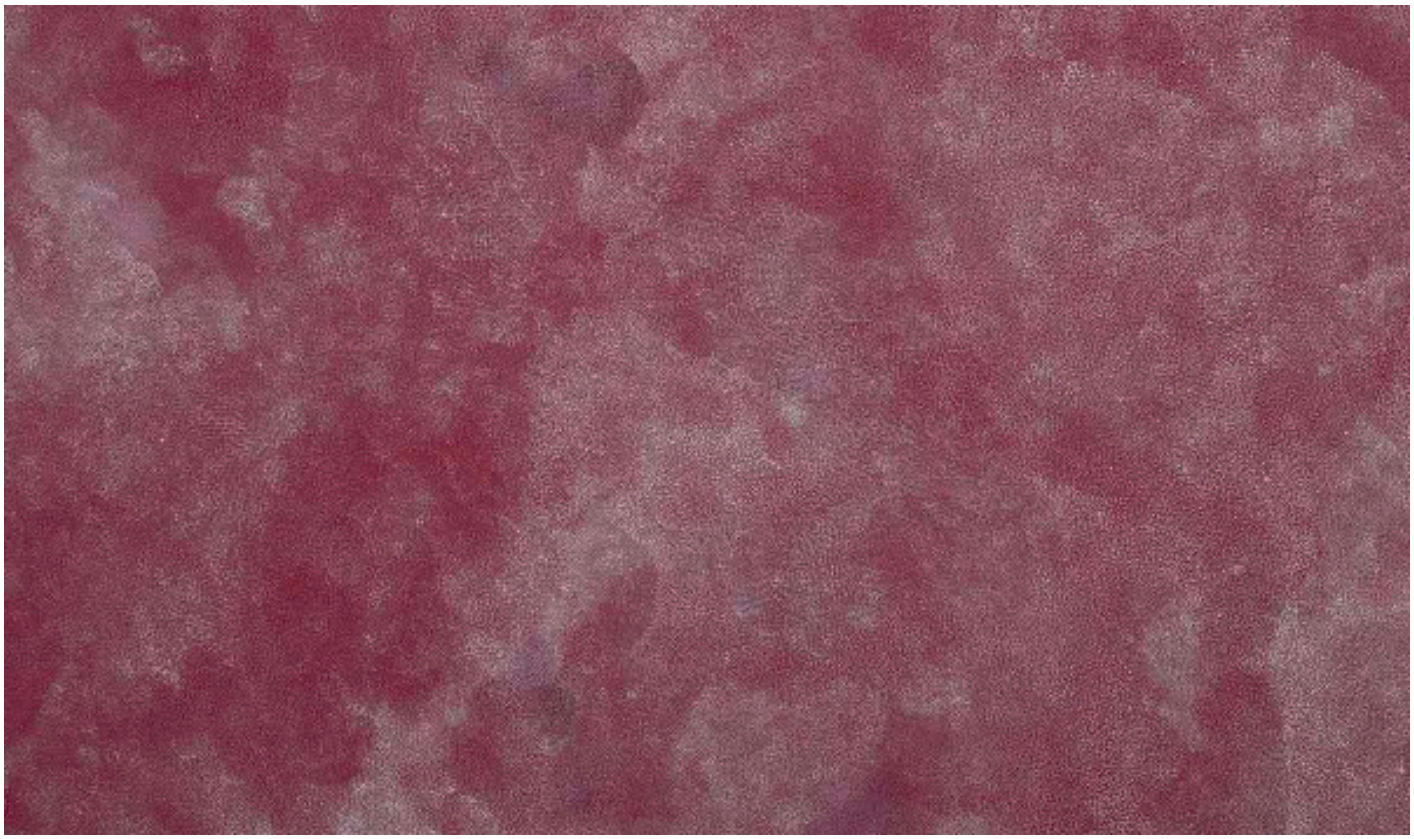
7 Ibid, 54.

8 Vancouver Art Gallery. "Dana Claxton Press Release." Vanartgallery.bc.ca http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/media_room/pdf/VancouverArtGallery_DanaClaxton_PressRelease_FINAL.pdf (accessed Feb 1, 2019).

9 Dana Claxton: *Fringing the Cube*, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2018), 10.



Carlene West, *Tjitjiti*, 2015. Photo by Sid Hoeltzell.



Angelina Pwerle, *Bush Plum*, 2010. Photo by Sid Hoeltzell.

Painting as Personal History: Examining Critical Curatorial Practice in *Marking the Infinite*

Yuko Fedrau

Outside the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, a tall banner advertising *Marking the Infinite: Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia* stands next to the entrance; it is a cropped and enlarged detail of Carlene West's *Tjitjiti*, with stylish red polka dots outlining a rough white brushstroke. The banner sparked my imagination, leading me to picture sprawling Yayoi Kusama-esque patterns enveloping the entire gallery, displaying the work of "contemporary women artists from Aboriginal Australia" and grounding their work in the present. However, the experience of the exhibition proved to be quite different from what I was imagining. The abstract patterns did not fill the gallery with installations and new media as I hoped, but were limited to rectangular canvases hung on the blank walls, with the exception of some drawings on bark or sheets of paper.

Upon entering the gallery, I was first introduced to Angelina Pwerle's *Bush Plum* (2016), a red painting on canvas filled with a myriad of tiny white dots. The rectangular spotlight subtly illuminating the work made it glow, and the white dots were asymmetrically scattered to create organic, cloud-like forms. The painting depicts "little white bush plum flowers," or *arnwekety*, a plant native to the Ahalpere country whose spirituality has a "powerful presence in the land."[1] Pwerle states that the bush plum is her father's "Dreaming," a concept that roughly translates to a family-specific visual motif passed on through generations that represents spirituality, myth, and family.[2] Indigenous groups throughout Australia have different versions of "Dreamings," or "Dreamtime," portraying different creation narratives which are generally reserved for members of the community.[3]

Whether the artists in the exhibition are referring to their Dreaming or not, most of them include some form of repeated intricate pattern of dots or lines (or a combination of both) on canvas, although artists such as Nyapanyapa Yunupingu use bark as a base for their paintings. Each artist seems to have a different signature mark-making technique that they consistently use on many of their works. Two pieces that stood out to me were Gulumbu Yunupingu's *Ganyu (Stars)*, 2004, and *Garak*, 2011, where the artist painted intricate motifs onto the surfaces of cut trees. Hundreds of X-shaped stars in white scattered with ochre and brick red dots envelop the surface of *Ganyu*, while *Garak* uses the same colour palette and markings to create a thinner, less symmetrical pattern. Around two metres tall, the trees were propped up at the base as if they were growing out of the floor of the gallery. The wall text beside the work identifies them as Larrakitj poles, which were "used by Yolngu peoples to house the bones of their dead."[4] These hollowed eucalyptus trees, decorated with detailed designs, were traditionally made after the death of a family member to guide them to their spiritual homes. The wall text states that "in the 1980s, artists began making Larrakitj for the art market, departing from the strict conventions of ceremonial design, [becoming] less concerned with symmetry and, in the 2000s, began exploring

the surface features of the trunk, utilizing imperfections as integral parts of its expressive form."[5] I found this perplexing, as the description completely omits any mention of European colonial influence in the creation of commercial Larrakitj. This suggests that Yolngu Larrakitj artists decided to abandon the "strict conventions of ceremonial design" to break out of rigid traditional structures, rather than to respond to an economic demand. The description clearly ignores how the Larrakitj's meaning was transformed by the art market, instead focusing on the formal qualities of the poles themselves.

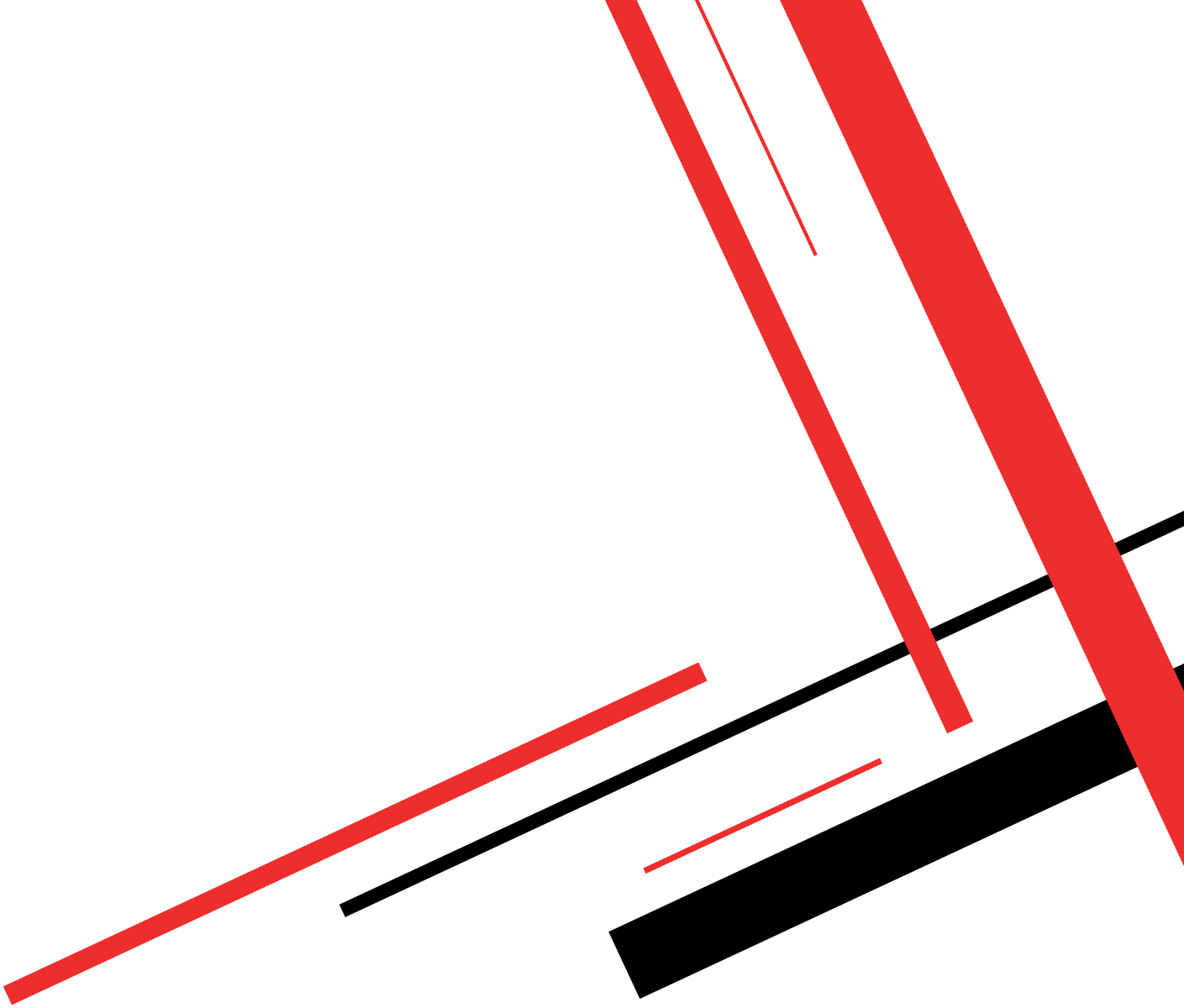
The entire exhibit seems to share this focus on formal qualities as well. All of the artworks in the exhibit are undeniably beautiful, and the viewer is encouraged to get lost in the visual language. The exhibit does this in several ways: first, because the gallery space is divided up into sections according to each artist, the viewer will find several works by one artist placed next to one another, making the viewer spend time with one painting style at a time. Each wall colour is picked to match and complement the imagery in the paintings. This way of presentation is seamless and undisruptive to the viewer, letting them indulge in the aesthetic qualities without acknowledging the violent histories that many of the artists are responding to in their work. It is perhaps a good time to point out that this exhibit, originally organized and curated by William Fox and Henry Skerritt at the Nevada Museum of Art, features artwork entirely from collectors Debra and Dennis Scholl's private collection in Miami, Florida. The Scholls, both former lawyers and real estate developers, are now known as a "power couple" of the arts serving on boards at the Tate Modern, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Pérez Art Museum Miami.[6] The current exhibition at the MOA, organized by Dr. Carol E. Mayer, could have been a great opportunity to critically intervene in the neocolonial structure of the art market, yet her efforts weren't apparent enough for me to pick up on.

The centre room of the gallery, which features Regina Pilawuk Wilson's artwork, best exemplifies this uncritical compliance with languages of display that the curators take up in this exhibit. In this room, a huge floor-to-ceiling painting, *Sun Mat*, 2015, depicts a circular shape that expands out from the centre like a mandala. It is nicely spotlit and contrasts dramatically against a black painted wall. Facing the painting are two meditation chairs, encouraging viewers to sit cross-legged and stare at the hypnotic painting in front of them. Apparently, based on the modes of display and the lack of context in wall text about this work, the viewer is encouraged to use the painting to guide their meditation. I found this incredibly unsettling, as I had a hard time connecting the cross-legged meditation pose (generally used in Hindu and Buddhist meditative rituals) to the Dreamings in Australian Aboriginal traditions, other than by essentializing non-Western "spirituality" into one large amalgamation. This is especially disheartening when you read Wilson's interview found in the exhibition pamphlet, where she explains:

My grandfather and grandmother used to make big fishnet, before Europeans came to Australia. We call it syaw. […] I forgot the stitch because the missionaries took us in, and my grandparents died. My big sister told me to do the story on painting for our children and grandchildren, so they can remember what our ancestors used to do a long time ago. She drew it on the sand, on the dirt, and told me to paint it. I've got to paint the story on the canvas. It's like our history.[7]

What does it mean for museum-goers to engage with the artwork in this uncritical lens, to only be able to understand Wilson's act of colonial resistance when they flip to the last few pages of the exhibition publication? When the artists themselves are working to resist assimilation but are picked up by Western art dealers and collected by people like Dennis and Debra Scholl—who state that "Aboriginal art stands on the same terra firma as Euro-American centric art"—it is no surprise that the context is lost in the aesthetics.[8]

Given that the Museum of Anthropology seems to be taking visible steps towards de-colonizing the museum, *Marking the Infinite* felt lacking in critical discourse about the origins of how Indigenous artwork has historically been collected, and its roots in colonial plundering. While my appreciation for the artists themselves deepened, this exhibition mostly helped to remind me of the importance of ethical curatorial practices. Hopefully, future exhibitions can highlight the powerful personal histories embedded within these artworks and bring them to the forefront of the conversation.



Notes

1 Wall text, *Bush Plum, Marking the Infinite* (Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, February 2019).

2 Carol E. Mayer, *In Her Words: Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia* (Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, BC, November 1 2018–March 31, 2019), 13.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Wall text, *Larrakitj Poles, Marking the Infinite* (Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, February 2019).

6 Jean Nayar, "Power Couple Debra & Dennis Scholl on Redefining Miami through Art & Culture," *Ocean Drive*, December 15, 2017. Date Accessed: Feb. 24, 2019. https://oceandrive.com/debra-and-dennis-scholl-on-redefining-art-through-art-and-culture

7 Carol E. Meyer, *In her Words: Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia*, 17.

8 Victoria Stanley-Brown, "Dennis and Debra Scholl donate contemporary Aboriginal art to three US museums," *The Art Newspaper*, Oct. 24, 2017. Date accessed: Feb. 5, 2019. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/dennis-and-debra-scholl-donate-contemporary-aboriginal-art-to-three-us-museums

Environmental Memories: Genevieve Robertson's Carbon Drawings at Access Gallery

Fiorela Argueta

It was a cloudy afternoon when I entered Access Gallery—the grey palette of the sky was echoed by the large-scale drawings hung on the walls of the artist-run centre. My curiosity guided me through the space, where I noticed the small details of the drawings: their lustrous grittiness and their naturalistic impressions of leaves and bugs. There was one drawing that was made up of four white buckling papers that showed the shadow of a tree… or a brain… or even a cell under a microscope. These drawings looked like impressions a science or art student would make if they were investigating or recording naturalistic phenomena.

On exhibition at Access Gallery were the carbon drawings from Genevieve Robertson's *carbon study: walking in the dark*, curated by Katie Belcher, which ran from January 12 to February 28, 2019. Robertson's practice includes going on walks in unfamiliar landscapes, and it was during one of her walks that she began collecting carbon from the debris left by the constant fires in the Kootenay area of British Columbia, which have lately occurred at an almost annual rate. The drawings were an exploration for Robertson as she reverted back to the fundamental mediums of carbon and imprinted fauna onto the white buckling paper. It was from Robertson's return to the origins of nature that her large-scale carbon drawings began taking form.

From December 5 to January 5, 2019, Robertson was invited to be an Artist-in-Residence at Access Gallery where she worked on actualizing her investigations into works that would later be exhibited. During this time, she had already begun such investigations during her walks in the Kootenay: moments to pause and reflect in the world where climate change is daunting and, unfortunately, forthcoming. Our current political climate seems to make no effort in employing more sustainable methods for a greener and less polluted future. The detriment of industrial damage towards biological life has been widely denied by North American politicians and passed over as "fake news," but it is very much real. An eerily prescient occurrence experienced by Robertson was discussed during her artist talk at Access Gallery: just when she was about to finish her drawings for the upcoming exhibition, she ran out of carbon and had to contact a blacksmith to obtain the material so she could finish her works. It is an ironic microcosmic occurrence, yet it is not an improbable one for the macrocosm: one day the earth will completely run out of fossil fuels and there will not be anyone to turn to.

It is no coincidence that a scientific rhetoric can be applied to Robertson's work as her media are extracted natural resources. Furthermore, the end result of her studies speaks to a fossilized and preserved existence of life itself. The biological imprint of nature will soon go into its half-life period where the elements in her works will go through the process of decay and nature will recycle it in future processes. This scientific reference ties in to world politics and the underwhelming response by political structures to address the depletion of Earth's resources. Apart

Installation view, *carbon study: walking in the dark* by Genevieve Robertson at Access Gallery. Photo by Rachel Topham.

Installation view, *carbon study: walking in the dark* by Genevieve Robertson at Access Gallery. Photo by Rachel Topham.

from a biological understanding, there was a collective psychological aspect to these drawings as well: they appear to be Rorschach drawings, calling out differing meanings from a myriad of people.

Robertson's work is a result of mixing various media that speak to different environmental concerns. Alongside carbon, she uses honey—a resource that will soon be considered a luxury if the bee population continues to dramatically deplete. It is worth noting that Robertson's carbon drawings signal the artist returning to Earth-derived resources for their works. As a result of all these media combined, there is a grittiness to Robertson's carbon drawings: they are not smooth and refined; rather, they are purposefully left rough—similar to the beautiful imperfections found in nature itself. This also adds a textural quality to her work that entices a sensorial apparatus, as though the gallery has turned into an encapsulated environment that demands our physiological attention. This experience is similar to the curiosity we would have if we were walking in a forest: we notice minute details, such as small insects or a weirdly-shaped tree. This is further emphasized by the organic impressions present in the carbon drawings as Robertson used insects and plants as stamps. In a sense, Robertson begins a process of fossilization of organic beings in her study, and a viewer is left to walk in this environment of fossilized organic life, attempting to make

sense of the space the artist has created in the gallery.

Robertson's *carbon study: walking in the dark* exhibits carbon drawings that reflect on our environmental blueprint and the political climate surrounding sustainability concerns. Robertson simply leaves us with an impression of what once existed, which as a viewer raises the existential and taxonomic questions: What about humans? Will our personal memory remain only as a faded impression in the distant future?

Installation view, *carbon study: walking in the dark* by Genevieve Robertson at Access Gallery. Photo by Rachel Topham.

Symposium

The Undergraduate Art History Symposium aims to foster a supportive environment for research at the undergraduate level. Accepted students present their research in order to receive feedback on their scholarly work and showcase undergraduate research regarding art history and visual culture at UBC.

The fifteenth annual Undergraduate Art History Symposium took place on April 3, 2019.

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The Perfect Ontological Nightmare: Understanding Alex Da Corte's *Slow Graffiti* as Monstrous Drag

Karina Greenwood

The spectre of queerness has haunted both Mary Shelley's original novel *Frankenstein* (1818) as well as many of its subsequent adaptations and derivatives—making it rich source material to play with and explore a diversity of queer themes. This paper examines Alex Da Corte's film *Slow Graffiti* (2017) for its use of Frankenstein's Monster as a vehicle to communicate nuanced ideas about the artificiality and performance of identity. Da Corte's film is a nightmarish shot-for-shot recreation of Jørgen Leth's film *The Perfect Human* (1967). Full of garish colours and absurd props, Da Corte's film features the artist dressed as both Boris Karloff and Boris Karloff in character as Frankenstein's Monster, performing a series of mundane tasks with a grotesque or monstrous twist. This paper examines how Da Corte's work engages with and transforms its progenitors: Shelley's novel, Karloff's performance, and Leth's film. Furthermore, I argue that Da Corte's embodiment of Karloff and Frankenstein's Monster should be viewed as a kind of drag performance: one that appropriates not codes of gender, but several ontological states of being, in order to trouble normative categories of identity. Da Corte's choice of one of the most significant monsters from Gothic fiction, one already embroiled in a discourse that confuses boundaries, makes his use of the character as part of a drag performance a highly effective and subversive one. Da Corte's incarnation of Frankenstein's Monster is the ultimate deconstruction of the perfect heteronormative, stable-bodied human: not only does he perform multiple levels of identity, but he also exposes the normative identities themselves to be artificial and constructed.

Memory, Space, and Selfhood in Transition: Yin Xiuzhen's Heterotopographic Vision of Beijing

Yue Yao

Since the mid-twentieth century, upon the founding of the People's Republic of China and the undertaking of economic reforms, the city of Beijing has undergone a period of intense urbanization and renovation. The capital city's former imperial organization, characterized by stratification and polarized power dynamics stemming from its centre, was made obsolete by the emerging new expansive cityscape on its periphery. This shifted residential space and perspectives, leaving local residents in a state of displacement and uncertainty. As an artist born and raised in Beijing, Yin Xiuzhen engages with these changes both as an observer and a victim. Through reconnecting with the city through her memory, Yin works on a map of personal memory to reclaim agency in a geographical state of dislocation and alienation. Since the government has destroyed many familiar sites, all that remains is heterotopography—a place in the placelessness. This paper explores the introspective vision of Yin as she re-maps her memory, space, and selfhood in the heterotopographic city. Her installation piece *Ruined Beijing* (1996), featuring construction debris resuscitated in a counter-site, commemorates the lost and ruined places in the city. She created *Portable Beijing* (2001) five years later, the first piece in the series *Portable Cities*, which featured a new way of understanding her relationship to the city. Acting as an anti-site, the work reterritorializes the city through hand-manipulated clothing garments which navigate between present and past. In these five short years, the paradigm of her visions between memory of the individual and transformation of megacities has shifted. In a rapidly transforming landscape, Yin contemplates new social negotiations by paralleling the reflection, interaction, and reconstitution of the outside world in her artworks, becoming a cartographer of both memory and Beijing at the turn of the twentieth century.

Wild Revival: The Photography of Edward Curtis and the Fetishization of the Wild West

Jacinta Jones

Between 1897 and 1930, Wisconsin-born photographer Edward Curtis undertook the task of travelling across North America in order to visually document various Indigenous communities. Curtis's undertaking was met with a deep fervor, as he was haunted by the looming pressure of colonial efforts that claimed these cultures and traditions would die off before they could be recorded. The consequent works were of an unprecedented magnitude, and Curtis's photographs were soon compiled within a forty-volume collection entitled *The North American Indian*. Although the photographer was well aware of the impact European colonization had on his Indigenous subjects, he made an active choice to present the "traditional Indian" in his work, rather than a contemporary one. Using Curtis's photography and legacy as a guide, this paper will look at how his work resonated at the time, and contributed to the nostalgia-driven stereotypes of Native Americans in popular culture to this day. By advertising Native Americans as if untouched by white settlers and in a pure, "primitive" form, Curtis actively cultivated the fictitious trope of the "noble savage" in his portraits. *The North American Indian* has undergone periodic moments of "revival," particularly with the increased circulation of the collection in the 1960s and 70s, which coincided with an increased popularity of the Western genre of films and literature. The traditional way in which Curtis chose to present Indigenous bodies complemented the fetishization of the "Wild West" in popular culture, which spiked in relation to American desire for escapism during the era of the Vietnam War. This paper will unpack how Edward Curtis's photographs manipulated the narrative of his subjects, and effectively became symbolic of the perceived success of Western civilization over "inferior" peoples.

Unbound by Preconceptions: Urination and Abstraction in the Artwork of Cassils and Andy Warhol

Alexandra Chalier

This paper compares artworks by Cassils and Andy Warhol, discussing the queering of minimalist and abstract expressionist art, and the very different goals and functions that each artist achieves. Cassils's durational project and installation *Pissed* began after the 2017 court case of Gavin Grimm, a transgender boy who was denied the right to use the bathroom of his choice at his public school in Virginia. In response to this injustice, Cassils proceeded to collect their urine in plastic medical sample containers for two hundred consecutive days. This effort culminated in the display of all the accumulated urine in a massive glass cube at the opening of their show at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York. A potent protest, this work is an expression of both rage at the system and of intergenerational love from one transgender person to another.

Andy Warhol's *Oxidation Paintings*, created in the 1970s, are a facetious parody of Jackson Pollock's macho approach to painting. The works, which the artist colloquially referred to as "piss paintings," consisted of canvases covered with shiny copper-based paint, upon which Warhol and his friends then urinated in order to oxidize the copper and change its colour. Urine is an unusual but crucial component of both bodies of work, transgressing social norms and upsetting the hierarchy of the art world with its connotations of dirtiness and impurity. Through the use of abject material, these artworks make tangible the abjection of the queer subject in society.

Artists

The Outsider within the Image: Tyler Homan and the Deconstruction of Bias

Sarah Anderson

Responding to the weight of our digital world, Tyler Homan's work creates a space of stillness, a moment to reflect on visual boundaries that shape us. Meeting in his studio space on a cloudy day, we vented about surveillance, data collected from DNA testing kits, the future of digital consciousness, and Instagram culture at-large. While contemporary society is filled with material for mass confusion and anxiety, Homan's interpretations of these concerns offer a respite from this chaos. Street photography void of human figures, digitized film collages utilizing scanner glitches, mixed media distortions with paint and repetitive forms: in his work, we find a space for emotion and deliberation of our current position in society, one dominated by visual material that is increasingly deceptive or differential to our known reality.

"The amount of imagery we're exposed to every day is insane," says Homan, when asked what he finds inspiring. "I don't think we realize how much imagery we're consuming in a day…this constant spam of images that is attacking us affects our physical presence in this reality. We're creating this new online reality for ourselves based off images and videos, but photography and image-based things are inherently [biased]. So, I think the over-consumption of media I have [had] has led me to this realization that everything on the Internet is very curated. I don't want to say it's fake, but we're just in this fascinating space where we're starting to create this new reality based on something that people still think of as a truthful medium." Bemoaning the chicken-and-egg conundrum of truth within a digital space, Homan stresses the effects of the manipulation currently driving so much of our visual output. "The methods [companies are] using to advertise to you now—using people—it's this personal level that's so impersonal," he insists. "It's this sneaky way…someone takes a picture of themselves on the beach and there's like, an advertisement on it and even though you know it's fake, I think seeing that image still affects you no matter what."

"So I think this is sort of what inspires me, just this influx of technology, which I think should be critically looked at." Homan, enthralled in the subject, is quick to ensure he doesn't present himself as a luddite. "I do think obviously technology has its benefits, and I think it's good that we're like a little more connected because we can learn more about social issues, but I think also this immense connectivity can also be harmful. At the end of the day, technology is a great way to spread messages, but it's just interesting to think about while technology can be used for [increasing social awareness], it's still owned by the rich. And the rich have all the power, and they're obviously trying to stay in power, and so while I do understand that in a way we're progressing, [the Internet's] very curated, or could be very curated. Even just algorithms, they can be against you, or they can work for you. Privacy that you should have is now becoming erased and every part of you is becoming known

Untitled (Fall 2019). Photographed by Hubey Razon.

by people who can use it against you."

Homan grew up in Calgary, and when I asked how his creativity was expressed as a child, he noted his father's love for science-fiction. Watching *Star Trek* was accompanied by his father's prophetic remarks about the speed of technology and the future that awaited: "Since I was like 5, he's been like, 'technology's getting' crazy! Soon they're going to be implanting stuff in people!' And like, now, they're starting to implant stuff in people." Aging up into a world where one must reckon with the fundamental materiality constituting our personhood, Homan feels increasingly compelled to question how our physical security is valued.

"Privacy is a big theme in my photographs…these images deal with protection as well as privacy in public space." Homan's photograph *Untitled (July 2018)*, an image of a parked motorcycle with a clear plastic sheet over it, addresses these concerns. "I was just sort of looking at it and I found it very intriguing, the sort of protection of material possessions that we see, and something that can say so much about a person. So I find if you're protecting valuables, such as a motorcycle or, say, your car, I think that's such a loaded image. We're in a capitalist society that values nice things, so I find it sort of compelling, that preservation of material things. And also while this one's clear in this image, some car covers are obviously opaque,

Untitled (Fall 2019). Photographed by Hubey Razon.

so it's a little bit of privacy as well."

Over Homan's shoulder, hung on the studio wall, I see *Untitled (August 2018)*, a photograph captured on a typical Vancouver street on a summer afternoon. In front of a large geranium and a house encased in shadow, a shallow inflatable pool leans against a white picket fence. The sun is setting, and the figures have left the scene. The only marker of their earlier presence is the pool, gently rested in order to drain the hose water it ostensibly held: a record is formed from an intimate moment.

"I think *[Untitled (August 2018)]* sort of speaks to this absence, this sort of aftermath of someone enjoying a summer pool," says Homan on the photograph. "There was no one there when I took the image, it's just sort of this isolation. There's the kid pool held up against the fence, keeping you from [it]. I think a lot of my work is viewing…is being viewed as me as an outsider, for sure."

There's an indulgence in the kind of looking Homan employs on his walks throughout the city, a temptation fuelled by strangers' open curtains, and blinds yet to be drawn. As we share anecdotes, we agree this kind of gentle snooping is a significant representation of how humans look, and also, best done at dusk, before people realize their home has become a tableau. Negotiating this intimacy, whether as a pedestrian or in one's own home, is a phenomenon reflective of how Homan positions himself behind

the lens. Embracing the inability to look away—whether from a car accident, a fellow bus passenger browsing their phone, or a woman hanging her laundry in the sun—creates a relationship with these moments that's structured around the public and the private. Wondering how the position of an outsider influences what he decides to capture, I asked Homan if the distance and anonymity with the subject are the driving force in how he's framing his images.

"I think that by distancing myself [my photography] becomes a very [biased] and almost selfish way of taking pictures… going through the world and trying to document how I see things is a very personal and very self-centred viewpoint. Like, I'm documenting something that's happened in the past, and how I'm looking at it now… I'm creating a narrative within this image, but it could mean nothing that I'm portraying it as. So I think that perspective—and thinking of my photography in that way—has led to me to this sort of distortion, and the idea of trying to push my hand in photography."

This distorted perspective is utilized in a number of works, including *107 Attempts to Destroy the Intangible* (2018), where a scanned image, originally taken on film, is dissolved into a blank page, and ultimately bound into a book. Homan's paintings use negative space and geometric blocks of colour to distort the photographs underneath, playing with structures of privacy and our perspective on the image. These works all emphasize the photographer's bias, framing the depersonalization of the photograph as a bewitching yet futile endeavour.

"I think like even just bringing the camera to your eye and creating this abstract chunk of time: that's what you chose to take a picture of, that's what you chose to frame, I don't think that's a universal image," says Homan, rejecting the idea that photography is an objective process. Because I took it, it's very [biased] to how I think. In that way I find photography is just fascinating and why I think it's very important that we think critically about how image-based work is being used. I think I'll continue taking pictures of just everyday things [because] that's one of my favourite things to do and sort of how I got into [photography]. But I think my art has started to accentuate that and sort of delve into technology, and how images are sort of used in technology, like the Internet, for example."

On that note we turned to his scan art: medium-sized prints of film photographs manually distorted on a household scanner. After our earlier discourse on manipulation in digital spaces, I was curious about Homan's process behind scanning as a technique and medium. "With the scanner art, [*Untitled (January 2018)* and *Untitled (March 2018)*], I'm trying to get across and sort of emphasize the amount of bias in images and how much is constructed. So I wanted to distort the background, make it sort of messy, but also leave my fingers in [the image] so you can tell I am the one who's done this, the artist's hand, or whatever. You can see the process of what's going on, kind of juxtaposed with an image, which is supposed to be seen as real life, but is actually just me curating something or documenting something how I saw it."

In seeing the development between the first and second scans, I got a strong sense that many more are on their way. I asked Homan what his plans are for this method, and what pathways he sees this gesture taking. "With the second scanner work, Untitled (March 2018), I was looking at sort of fragmenting them a little more, so I actually kind of cut up the image as well. I wanna try and make it a little bit bigger; I'm sort of looking into making an installation with a bunch of scanner images and also starting to incorporate my body parts into it. Because I with this sort of method of altering things, it sort of brings up ideas of the digitalization of human beings…especially because I shoot with film, I think it's interesting digitizing this analog medium." Given his current involvement with the concerns of digital consciousness, as well as the formation of bias within the image, a route in which Homan's work de- and reconstructs the representation of himself could synthesize several of his theoretical concerns, finding forms that both explain and challenge the current state of being in our advancing technological society.

Homan's practice questions our understanding of the image, as it stands in traditional photography and in increasingly dystopian digital spheres. In collapsing various image-making processes together theoretically, Homan creates moments for emotive reflection on what it means to construct an image. As our digital landscape expands, he will continue to place us in positions of viewership that challenge our perception of privacy, and question our consumption of the image as truth.

Untitled (Fall 2019)

Untitled (January 2018), Untitled (March 2018)

Gender, Branding, and Nationality in Bojana Bozin's *The Fraternity*: Identity Assemblage for the Twenty-First Century

Maxim Greer

To comment on her fragile, moving sense of identity as an assemblage artist and art historian, Bojana Bozin has been developing *The Fraternity*, a triptych series of wooden boxes featuring single word text slogans. Bozin's project toys with recognizable brands to create a representation of the artist's unstable sense of identity and place, notably featuring a subversive re-working of the hot pink Barbie trademark using the three text slang slogans of "brother" or "bro": "Bruh," Bruv," and "Brate." In a summary of her piece, Bozin comments that she wants to tie all of her "complex nuances of being, cultural heritage, commercial capitalism, subversion, gender norms into a neat package that also reflects my Canadian identity." Indeed, Bozin was quick to denounce any singular reading of the piece that I bring forward in my initial questioning, making for an intriguing interview and a more open-ended, unsteady reading of the piece. The key word that comes up in our meeting is "nuance," which to the artist represents her desire "to not have just [one] or two core meaning[s] coming out of the piece, [she wants] to convey both nuance and instability." The trademarks affixed above the logos also reflect this nuance, mixing coyness with antagonism (LU—"love you;" FU—"fuck you"). Further—as is the nature of branding—the logos exist in physical form on the boxes as well as online through the artist's social media, widening the scope of Bozin's praxis.

On the topic of gender, Bozin holds that her piece functions as a multi-pronged critique of capitalist femininity and of fragile masculinity, as well as the general narrowness of gender identity. Through a textual subversion, Bozin takes a male expression of fraternal belonging and transfers it onto a feminized colour scheme, which emasculates the slang. The Barbie logo, which is inherently tied to feminine childhood experience, has the effect of infantilizing and feminizing the essentialist masculine expression. Further, the ubiquity of the logo mirrors the ubiquity of the saying in masculine cultures, pointing to how gender is cultivated in popular and folk culture—a nod to the fragility of such totalizing notions. Asked if the work is a response or can be related to the notion of toxic masculinity, Bozin nods, saying it can function as a mocking of the fragility of certain males when being presented in ways that are not considered masculine. This enables Bozin to cleverly use the exclusionary and essentialist slogan of the fraternity against itself. On the other hand, Bozin states her work is also about "creating change and making space." Thus, simultaneously, her work creates space for others to identify with the "fraternity." Merging a masculine saying with a brand infamous for mediating femininity pushes Bozin toward a challenging of conventions of masculinity. By welcoming in groups that are tradtionally excluded or marginalized, such as women and LGBTQ+ folks, Bozin creates space within the "brotherhood." Bozin seems to favour interior antagonisms over alienation as a way of deconstructing gender roles in society. She has coded this into the work formally through the use of lighting, intending

for the light emitting from the piece to grow stronger as more boxes are illuminated, in order to "[further] the notion that many perspectives add to a brighter experience."

Just as with gender, Bozin works with the idea that a sense of nationality is socially constructed, and therefore the assembled pieces reflect the construction of one's identity. For Bozin, they reflect her own experience of nationality as one that is in flux. The "Bruh" box represents contemporary North American slang, an example of how "Canadian contemporary culture is adopted, assimilated and augmented from American culture." "Bruv" is the British representative of her identity. "I was raised on British programming and lived in the UK as well, always seeing it as the perfect median of my Western upbringing and European cultural heritage," states Bozin. Lastly, "Brate" is the distinctly Serbian (or rather former Yugoslavian) component of her birthplace. Indeed, when talking about the confluence of nationality and with macho-masculinity, Bozin's states that her birthplace of Serbia is particularly notable for being "a highly male chauvinist culture." Stacked together, the boxes function as a lightbox, a nod to Vancouver's contemporary settler art community, such as Jeff Wall and Rodney Graham, as well as contemporary Indigenous artist Sonny Assu's piece *Coke Salish* (2006), which to Bozin is a way of "recognizing my position as a settler and paying homage to the unceded [I]ndigenous territory on which I was raised."

With all these contextual avenues tied into the piece, the clever strategy of assemblage and brand subversion enables Bozin to cast a wide net of critique to

The Fraternity, set of light boxes, 2018.
Courtesy of the artist.

complicate notions of gender, belonging, and nationality. Toward the conclusion of our interview, I asked Bozin if she was aware of identity assemblage theory, specifically in the work of queer theorist Jasbir Puar. To Puar, assemblages are a series of configurations that become entwined, but readily realign and change in accordance to spatial and temporal shifts. Furthermore, Puar holds that, assemblage accounts for the shifting and mobile relationship that bodies have to the nation state, challenging the idea that identity categories are fixed and stable. As I mentioned this, Bozin began nodding, and related this concept to her own experience of shifting identity as a transnational subject, which is in turn exemplified by *The Fraternity*. Indeed, the mode of composition of *The Fraternity* itself can is designed to the work to be re-assembled, swapping one out or leaving them as singular pieces to alter their meaning.

Though *The Fraternity* displays a triptych-like reflection of the artist's cultural identity, room for future iterations of brethren to come into creation is possible, as the intent of the piece is to show the potential for continued assemblage. Therefore, *The Fraternity*'s flexibility and the sense of identitary motion reject the idea that an artwork, a brand, or an identity is ever static.

This interview took place on Tuesday, January 29, 2019.

The Fraternity, set of light boxes, 2018.
Courtesy of the artist.

Alien Evolution: Chubing Liang

Kristin Conrad

In Chubing Liang's third-floor studio in the Audain Art Centre, afternoon sunlight (rare for Vancouver in January) illuminates stacks of canvases. The end of a folding table is littered with empty cups, figurines from Kinder Eggs, and an eraser shaped like a peanut. Chubing wears all black and bright yellow shoes. Also known by her given English name, Crystal, Chubing is a conceptual artist graduating from UBC in Spring 2019 with a BFA in Visual Art. Her large body of work has a strong aesthetic, rooted in personal experience. Chubing's work mainly explores identity and connections between people and places. While developing her personal approach, she also confronts the reality of having migrated from China to Canada. This move has affected her artistic practice and introduced both new themes and materials into her work.

Chubing describes her art practice as primarily driven by personal experience over theory, but inspired by individualism, existentialism, and emotionalism. She began taking classes in painting and drawing at the age of four, and found it was a way to express herself to people in a way that made them both pay attention and understand her—never expecting to make it her career. After coming to UBC to study business and computer science, Chubing decided to change her major to visual art because she didn't want a job she didn't love. At UBC, Chubing moved away from more traditional mediums to experiment with photography before moving into printmaking, mixed media, and installation art. She now prefers photography in combination with graphic forms or installed to create a space.

Some of Chubing's work explores her identity as a Chinese woman. However, she describes her sense of place as "floating." After being born as the second girl under China's one-child policy, she was sent to live with relatives as an infant until her family became citizens of Macau. While this experience originally made her wish she had been a boy, Chubing notes that she has now accepted her identity and is exploring what that means. It's like "half and half," she says—in a sense she is excluded from China but also included. "When I was young, I always felt unfortunate because I couldn't just grow up with my own family. But later on, I think I'm also lucky because I gained love for two families." She made the decision to move to Canada because she had no relatives here. "The reason I wanted to move from China and come to Canada is because I don't know why I'm there. I was born there. So it was my parents' hometown but is it my hometown? I have to figure it out."

In Vancouver, Chubing discovered conceptual art for the first time. Taken in her home, her photographs *To Be Home, To Belong* / 浮世常如寄，幽棲即是家 (2018) feature marks of temporary living such as IKEA furniture, bare walls, and stuffed pets. She still doesn't feel quite at home in Vancouver, but more like "Vancouver is a part of [her]." Rather than a direct translation from English, the second part of the title is a continuation of the sentiment in Mandarin from a poem written by a Christian missionary to China—mirroring Chubing's own lived experience in-

side and outside of her home country. She describes these characters as representing the idea that "where you're settling is your home, so don't worry too much about it." In this series, a capture taken through blinds as a truck parks across the street at exactly the right time embodies the recurrent theme of waiting and watching in Chubing's images. Similarly, *Pigeons in Downtown Vancouver* (2016) patiently documents a series of pigeons in downtown Vancouver, and *Waiting for a Bus that Arrived on Time* (2015) investigates a bus arriving and departing from a stop. "Just stay there and experience," she says. "Based on the experience, I can probably find something [to photograph]." Even an article she was assigned to read was turned into a meditation as she cut out every word from Susan Sontag's "The Aesthetics of Silence" and painstakingly reassembled them in alphabetical order for *Silence 1* and *Silence 2*. "In the cutting and pasting, I really felt what silence is, because I wasn't thinking about anything else."

Over time, Chubing's mediums have evolved along with herself. Her series *Alien* (2017) involved removing plants from their soil and encasing them in resin. Since the work was first created and photographed, it has changed as the plants become less lively and green. This is part of the piece now, and Chubing did not know what to expect. She says that once it has been created, the artwork is out of her control. The symbolic removal of roots from soil mirrors Chubing's own feeling about identity. "I'm Chinese but I'm not really Chinese," she explains. "Once the plants are removed from soil, they can become just themselves… it's like when leaves fall, they return to their roots. As the leaves fall down, they become part of the cycle. So, when the plants become alien, they're outside of that cycle in a way that makes them totally individual."

There is no question which art has to answer for Chubing. However, it can peel back layers and expose another layer of reality one may not have originally noticed. Other projects she has completed, like a series based on a number of questions she asked strangers, explore what an individual is really about. She describes the layers people apply like "texts"; race, gender, and religion are like labels on containers. One photograph of a row of empty and label-less water bottles seems to be a visual reminder of this (*A Study of Water Bottles*, 2018). While Chubing describes her work as directed by personal experience to focus on identity and society, upon "zooming out" from herself to the environment she finds herself responding to social, political, and cultural issues.

One such example is *RYB*, an installation which answers to the sexual abuse of schoolchildren in China by presenting four walls of brightly coloured paintings and a table of child-like plasticine sculptures within a darkroom. When the lights are turned off, painful messages—previously hidden by phosphorescent and UV-reflective paint—are revealed. Concealed behind the colours and revealed by darkness are the words "Help" and "It Hurts," many-numbered eyes, and other creepy sayings. While "RYB" serves as an abbreviation for the primary colours red, yellow, and blue—which are used in this exhibit—RYB Education is also the name of the preschool company which employed a teacher in Beijing who abused her kindergarden students.

Chubing's installation *Wall* (2018) and print series *404 Error* (2018) were also inspired by social justice, responding to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women of Canada. Wall is a child's ready-made wooden swing facing eight pieces of newspaper screen-printed with various permutations of a symbol reading "404 Error. Nothing Found." *404 Error* is a series of thirty-six art prints which feature Vancouver landmarks, maps, and screaming children all obscured by the imprint "404 Error. Nothing Found." In the future, Chubing says that she would like to continue commenting on social, political, and cultural issues with her artworks.

In search of her own individuality, and wondering what that means for others, Chubing has produced an impressive body of work. She plans to return to China after graduating, and will again re-explore her identity—this time including what it means to have Vancouver as a part of her. Her style will still be based on her own experience—because, as she says, "I can't make something that I do not belong to"—while making new connections and relationships between things.

Chubing's work can be seen in the 2019 Visual Art Graduating Exhibition and on her website at chubingl.com.

Alien, plants in resin, soil, 2017. Photographed by Hubey Razon.

Towards Knowing the Unknown: Noelle Celeste on Avatar Creation and Empathetic Digital Spaces

Julia Wong

The first time I saw Noelle Celeste's work was during a group critique at the end of a course on the role of theory in visual art. We stood in a darkened room watching a compilation of appropriated media footage. In her work *Dreamscape*, footage from *The Great Gatsby* (2013), *Spring Breakers* (2012), and Rihanna at the 2015 Met Gala were overlaid on top of each other, fighting for our attention, reflecting a reality of the oversaturation of imagery in our day to day lives. I was struck by the way her work seemed so familiar and alien at the same time—her use of popular media coupled with pseudo-philosophical narration evoked both tender familiarity and self-reflexive discomfort in a pursuit of capitalistic perfection. Though Celeste continues to explore relationships and narratives within technology, her practice has evolved from utilizing appropriated material to a more organic approach.

"It didn't really have the effect that I wanted," Celeste says about her appropriation work. "For some reason I wanted people to be emotionally invested in the characters that I was portraying, but no one really cared."

This all changed when Celeste began using avatars in her work in 2018. The avatars, editing, and composition of her videos reflect an aesthetic from an earlier digital age.

"This low-brow aesthetic has a really wide appeal, and is hypo-realistic, as opposed to hyper-realistic. It's [a] very 2000s Internet style, like *Sims* or *Second Life*," Celeste says. "[This] makes people feel nostalgic for a simpler time, it resonates in that way. It brings us back to that feeling that we have that power, that we've conquered something great and it's not the opposite way around."

Celeste's avatars reflect this ambiguous power dynamic between the user/creator and technological product. Avatars are particularly loaded in their function—avatar bodies act as transliterations of their creator, and enact their will in digital spaces. This blurring of the avatars' functional ability is further obscured by their existential ruminations, and deteriorating state, often employed in Celeste's work. Celeste cites American artist and filmmaker Ryan Trecartin, German artist and theorist Hito Steyerl, the avatar creations of Cécile B. Evans, as well as Ed Atkins as her artistic influences. Celeste mentions that Atkins helped her discover CrazyTalk, the program that she uses now in avatar creation. Other programs she uses are Adobe Premiere and After Effects.

"The program that I use is really rudimentary, it's not very advanced so you only have certain options that you can use as a base. You can manipulate it, but it's hard to do that without screwing everything else up," Celeste says of the program CrazyTalk. "I don't mind the constraints. A lot of the time the dialogue comes from the constraints of a program, like [my avatar] can talk about how she isn't fully realized and she's mad about it or something."

In *Untitled (Weather Girl)*, an avatar who appears to be fulfilling the role of a weather forecaster begins by telling the viewer that it will be warm this weekend, before reflecting on the transient nature of her existence. She says,

Untitled (Weather Girl), video still, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

"Warmth doesn't give you a sunburn. I—I've never had a sunburn before." The screen begins to glitch and the avatar re-appears with drifting dust particles and light flares, reflecting on the fact that she does not understand the concept of warmth. "I only understand weather through numbers. But you understand numbers as light. You can feel light. I'm not photosensitive," she laments.

"I wanted to create a character and give them agency," says Celeste about her avatars. "I think the dialogue contributes to a sense of her own consciousness. She contemplates her existence but in a virtual world. My script has a lot of technological terms in it, but a viewer might hear it and in some way reinterpret it and imagine it in some way that relates to them. [The dialogue] came out from me reading how X-rays work. How we have to take out our computers and our electronics and separate them, and this has something to do with corruption. When I'm learning about how things work on the Internet or I'm learning a new program, I'll find something interesting or a random glitch and I'll be fixated forever."

One such fixation was the discovery of an Adobe preset of light flares—a digital replication of what had been an accidental occurrence of natural light through a camera lens. This pre-set stuck out to Celeste because it lacked a functional purpose, seemingly created for the sole enjoyment of the person who created the program. These light flares, alongside dust particles`, and empty spaces are often used in Celeste's work as emblematic of the void-space of the Internet.

"We don't necessarily have to make so many mistakes when it comes to information and knowledge, [and the Internet] kind of undermines us in that way, so there's a feeling that we're left with the unknown, the unknowing. All that's left for us, really, is this making meaning out of things versus this solidified knowledge," she explains. "It's also often why my dialogue comes out of nowhere. A lot of the times it's not very linear, there are no real conclusions. It's [the avatar] in a spur of the moment feeling of an existential crisis or combatting a trauma."

In *A_passive_agressive_conversation.mp4*—a two-channel video on separate screens—two deteriorating entities are in a heated conversation on the nature of their being. On one screen the back of an avatar's head is pictured with a dripping skin-like texture that eventually co-opts the

Morph, video still, *A_passive_aggressive_conversation*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

entire screen. On the other is a forward-facing avatar who is beginning to pixelate and becomes more and more abstract.

"This piece visually communicates transience best—the two panel screens and the peephole in the beginning. We're being constantly watched, and everything is being penetrated. Even if we can imagine the Internet being this square space like a computer or a screen, it's being penetrated," Celeste says.

The two entities in the piece argue about the futility of resisting their deterioration. One of them accuses the other of being "pretentious" for resisting their fate, saying, "You just get absorbed as fragments of scattered information, you'll probably be ugly for a bit, but eventually you'll be a smooth flat image again." Celeste cites Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" as inspiration for the script, specifically the line that reads, "Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum…"

"I was obsessed with this idea that we're constantly absorbing pixels. It's kind of beautiful, but a little bit scary," says Celeste.

When I ask Celeste why she wants the viewer to care about her avatars, she responds by saying this:

"With the Internet, it emphasizes this need to create meaning for people and the Internet in turn emphasizes what is meaningful to them. Even if you disagree with what someone is trying to impose, the fact that we are able to analyze what they're saying for ourselves is a way that we don't have to normalize certain ideologies. It's a more empathetic and open space. That feeling of caring for [the avatar] is an empathy and awareness of someone else's meaning or version of reality. Maybe if we're open to this idea that we know less than we actually know, we'd be less imposing of ideologies."

In a time when contemporary anxiety around the scope of technology and digital intelligence is so high, Noelle Celeste's avatar work reminds us of the ability for technology to consider fundamentally human notions of existence and emotion, and argues for the possibility of digital spaces to be poetic and nuanced.

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