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We Think We Are Not: Embodied Knowledge and Queer Practice

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**WE THINK WE ARE NOT: EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE
AND QUEER PRACTICE**

By

Sarah Hollows

B.A. St. Catherine University, 2011

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

(in Intermedia)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

August 2016

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Thesis Advisor: Susan Smith

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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I hesitate to name it. The kind of work that I do and the shape(s) it takes has never been one thing. It changes in material and form just as my perception of the world and place within it continues to swell and shift. I listen and think and make and do. I ask for vulnerability from collaborators and audiences alike. I use the body as both research and material. With the information gathered I work both independently and in partnerships creating immersive audio-visual installations as well as relational experiments. In the spirit of hospitality and reciprocity, the viewer is frequently envisioned as an active participant in conceptualizing (and in some cases manifesting) the meaning *and* material of the work. As a way of “making do with what we’ve got” I tend to use the most accessible materials, equipment, and spaces. I rely heavily on human behavior and identity to contextualize work in both conceptual and concrete ways, which means that most often I engage with intimate communities of friends, lovers, and family. Regardless of the group involved or intended outcome of a particular work, I’m interested in spending time with the invisible matter that comes to life between people once a memory is culled or a new understanding is initiated. Bodies moving through space and time or positioned in subtly altered realities with every day objects allows for an investigation of being in and understanding the

world that is entirely unique to the human experience. Pre-recorded audio is frequently utilized as a sort of internal monologue made external inviting audience members to become a part of an ongoing dialogue of wonder that began somewhere else who knows when. Whether working on a project independently or in some variety of collaboration, I am in constant conversation and interplay with other thinkers and tinkerers. Through this work I am seeking methods of engagement with the world that rely on kindness and thoughtfulness in the face of violence and greed, multiple understandings versus absolute truths. In practice I am/we are collectively considering what we think we know and envisioning/co-creating possibilities for meaningful existence in the future.

DEDICATION

to Rachel, for all the rooms where our ideas sit together and grow.

to Kris, for always looking back to make sure I'm still with you on the trail and for translating ideas with me into meaningful forms.

to Zus, for reminding me that I'm doing enough and for wanting to know about it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
INVESTIGATIONS IN STILLNESS, REPETITION, DURATION AND SILENCE.....	1
POSSIBILITIES OF TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PROCESS/PRACTICE	16
Materials, Tools and Methods	16
Theories that ground me	19
<i>DIO: Do It Ourselves</i>	25
<i>Begin at the Beginning of the End</i>	26
THE COLLABORATIVE THESIS.....	28
Review of Queer Theory.....	28
Collaboration Itself: out of out loud together	32
UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1 & 2, Spring 2016.....	33
PORTFOLIO.....	47
Yes/No, November 2013	47
What you believe is happening to you, December 2013	49
an Unknown Activity, December 2013	51
“I never knew you, yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you if that would save you”, March 2014	53
Bridge, April 2014	56
Settlements, April 2014	58
The Gift of Fear/American gHosts, October 2014	60
Every now and then I fall apart, April 2015	61

The Museum of What's Left, April 2015	65
after leaving, they become	67
Things are like things are not what they seem: a queer performance workshop about being present in and with your body and being playful in and with your mind, October 2015	70
(w) h o l e, December 2015.....	72
UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1 & 2, Spring 2016.....	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR.....	85

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Photo of <i>The Artist is Present</i>	4
Figure 2. Still from <i>Cafe Muller</i>	7
Figure 3. Drawing of a map from birth to death in <i>an Unknown Activity</i>	12
Figure 4. Photo from <i>Appearances</i> by CAG.....	13
Figure 5. Participants in <i>an Unknown Activity</i>	14
Figure 6. Photo from <i>I never knew you, yet...</i>	17
Figure 7. Photo of <i>Settlements</i> outside zero station	21
Figure 8. Photo of the <i>Settlements</i> lean-to	22
Figure 9. Image of Ana Mendieta's <i>Silhouette</i>	24
Figure 10. Photos from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , the book shelves	33
Figure 11. Photo from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , close up of garments	35
Figure 12. Photo from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , couches	35
Figure 13. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE Vol. 1</i> , the hallway	36
Figure 14. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE Vol. 1</i> , legs	37
Figure 15. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , legs part 2	39
Figure 16. Photo/still from the <i>difference between concrete and cement</i> , projected	40
Figure 17. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , kitchen table	40
Figure 18. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , making biscuits	40
Figure 19. Still from video of <i>Yes/No</i>	47
Figure 20. Still from video of <i>20 seconds with your own heart</i>	48
Figure 21. Still from video of <i>What you believe is happening to you</i>	49
Figure 22. Participants in <i>an Unknown Activity</i> at various stages	51
Figure 23. Drawing of a participant's map from birth to death, <i>an Unknown Activity</i>	52

Figure 24. Writing on an envelope left by a participant, <i>an Unknown Activity</i>	52
Figure 25. Photo from <i>I never knew you, yet...</i>	53
Figure 26. Masked page from <i>The Bridge</i>	56
Figure 27. Photo of the lean-to in <i>Settlements</i>	58
Figure 28. Photo of <i>Settlements</i> at Zero Station.....	59
Figure 29. Photo from <i>The gift of Fear/American gHosts</i>	60
Figure 30. Photo from <i>Every now and then I fall apart</i> part one	62
Figure 31. Photo from <i>Every now and then I fall apart</i> part two.....	63
Figure 32. <i>The Museum of What's Left</i>	65
Figure 33. Objects in the sink from <i>The Museum of What's Left</i>	66
Figure 34. Objects on the shelf inside <i>The Museum of What's Left</i>	66
Figure 35. <i>Two Bottles</i> from <i>after leaving, they become</i>	67
Figure 36. <i>gwen's bumble bee</i> from <i>after leaving, they become</i>	68
Figure 37. <i>stuff</i> from <i>after leaving, they become</i>	70
Figure 38. Photo of an activity about objects telling stories from <i>Things are like things...</i>	70
Figure 39. grass mustache from <i>(w) h o l e</i>	72
Figure 40. flower pit from <i>(w) h o l e</i>	73
Figure 41. corn dog from <i>(w) h o l e</i>	73
Figure 42. chicken breast from <i>(w) h o l e</i>	74
Figure 43. flower chest from <i>(w) h o l e</i>	74
Figure 44. Photos from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , the living room	76
Figure 45. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , close up of garments	77
Figure 46. Photos from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , couches	77
Figure 47. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , legs	78
Figure 48. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1</i> , hallway	78

Figure 49. Photos from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE</i> , Vol. 1, legs part 2	79
Figure 50. Photo/still of <i>the difference between concrete and cement</i> projected onto the hallway wall	80
Figure 51. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE</i> , Vol. 1, kitchen table	80
Figure 52. from <i>UNDERTHEIR/WHERE</i> , Vol. 1, making biscuits	81

CHAPTER 1

INVESTIGATIONS IN STILLNESS, REPETITION, DURATION AND SILENCE

Between words is silence, around ink whiteness, behind every map's information is what's left out, unmapped and unmappable.¹

A mentor once introduced a collaborative performance I was a part of by stating, quite simply, that *we learn by doing*. She suggested that something very important is happening when we put ourselves inside of the very thing that is in question. Even as one of three artists responsible for creating the event she was introducing, and considering myself a performer for the majority of my life, I had never thought of performance in quite this way before. It transformed from what I thought of in my youth as another form of creative expression to an act of inserting myself into the process of questioning, inviting viewers to participate in that process, and letting that negotiation be a part of the performance. What might it look like to investigate in this way, and could pulling back the curtain to reveal an operation of curiosity create a space for community to grow? Where do we store the information produced by such a situation, and if we don't store it, where does it go? How long does it exist (does it have a shelf life?) and what makes it grow? What might it become? What kinds of activities or experiences trigger an understanding of the invisible matter that we store inside our bodies without having/giving it meaning and what can we learn from these?

For me the process necessarily includes both periods of solitary reflection and communal dialogue. Thinking about my own observations and embodied experiences as a record keeping collection already underway (in a storage facility that is also capable of transmuting that knowledge) transformed the way that I orient myself to art making and life, to the past as well as

¹ Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, 161-162.

possible futures. I began thinking of my body not only as a venue for performance but as a lush site for field studies regarding the relationship between embodied knowledge and consciousness.

I started by sitting inside of my experiences (literally) and letting myself become aware of everything around and within me. I wanted to give all of my attention to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings that might be hiding behind shadows, underneath napkin folds, inside my eardrum or caught between two of my teeth. To notice was the first step, then the task of getting well acquainted with the boredom, discomfort, distraction, frustration and uncertainty. They creep in just when you think you've taken it all in, just when you think you know what's what. They're familiar modes of being for anyone who has ever had a patterned experience of waiting (as the youngest of eight with working parents I have considerable stores of that). But I wanted to get beyond the familiarity of these experiences, to learn how to ask critical questions about things and feelings that I thought I understood.

This is both context for my research process and in part the set up for a confession: I get a great deal of pleasure out of minimalist performance that involves duration. But pleasure doesn't really get at the thing of it. In her book *Swallow the Fish: black feminist performance art practice*, Gabrielle Civil writes that performance art has *something* to do with erotic power, "It's just not solely self-gratification or for the gratification of others. It is something for both and neither."² There is something about a breathing body holding still, or repeatedly performing an unremarkable, ordinary action for an extended period of time - with few to no entertaining, beautiful, or fascinating distractions – that, when also shared by a viewer, highlights the embodied experience of time and the impermanence of human life. It is also a visual reckoning with a kind of internal process that often remains out of sight. In her book *my body the buddhist* Deborah Hay earnestly and beautifully examines the intelligence held within her own body and translates those experiences to a world that deals in language. She writes, "We are Dying. We

² Civil, *Swallow the Fish*, 289.

think we are not. This is a good argument for giving up thinking.”³ I don’t believe Hay is suggesting here that we all stop being critical thinkers and move through the world completely untethered to our thoughts forevermore. Rather, I think the idea is to create opportunities for our minds to let go in order for our bodies to access their full selves.

The desire to be present in the body durationally and with an audience is a subtle attempt to enter into something shared in the myriad of relationships we have – not only between artists and our various audiences but between best friends and lovers, immediate and extended families, biological, ethnic and cultural communities, neighbors, strangers, politicians, oppressive bosses, teachers, children, customer servants, doctors, elders, folks who live on the street and those we may never meet. Here I am and there you are – I’m asking you to see me by seeing you. You see that I am alive and perhaps it makes you curious about what it is that I am doing, for that matter what it is that *you* are doing. You thought you knew what it meant for all these years but now that you see it paused (for what, you’re not ashamed to say, is far longer than necessary) or repeated (for what, as far as you’re concerned, is an outrageous amount of time) you’re beginning to second guess your ideas. The ground beneath you has started to shake and you can’t help but wonder what else may have another explanation. Suddenly you’re filled with questions where opinions and absolute certainty used to reside. You reach for your phone instinctually and then put it back in your pocket. In the time it took you to look away nothing has changed about the scene in front of you but you’re seeing it in a new way. You look to the person standing next to you and wonder if they see it too, what they’re feeling. You dare to ask.

Analyzing the work of Deborah Hay, Bill Bissell compliments the way that Hay so deeply engages with the question, “How do we understand the life of our own bodies?”⁴ He’s writing about the rigorous exploration of knowing through and in the body that Hay commits to.

³ Hay, *my body the buddhist*, 1.

⁴ Bissell, *Communities of Consciousness and the Begetting of Deborah Hay*, 5.

The movements she choreographs aren't meant to be representations but rather modes of understanding in and of themselves. I think about this when I consider how and why I move the way that I do during rehearsals and performances, what it is that my body is seeking to uncover. It is not unlike meditation where there is a focus extended from my consciousness to my extremities. Even when I am holding still I am engaged with what is happening – which is apparently nothing. Though I can feel, and believe that, if observed closely enough, it can be understood that there is altogether *something* happening.



Figure 1. Photo of *The Artist is Present*⁵

A dear friend of mine described her experience of *The Artist is Present*, sitting at a table across from Marina Abramovic during the artist's retrospective at MoMA. Abramovic is somewhat of a celebrity after almost 40 years of works that test human limits and challenge

⁵ *The Artist is Present*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, 2010 © Marina Abramovic, Courtesy of the Marina Abramovic Archives

viewers out of passive spectatorship. In this performance, Abramovic sat quiet and still for hours every day for the full extent of the exhibition while visitors came to sit across from her. My friend said that before she arrived in New York, even while she was waiting in line for hours at MoMA, she didn't give a shit about performance art and was dubious about whether or not this was going to be *worth her while*. She didn't understand why everyone was making such a fuss about some famous lady who decided to spend her time sitting at a table and letting people come and sit with her in a gallery. "That's it?" I asked suspiciously, "that's it," she replied, "and you have no idea how much *it* was."

She tried to explain to me what she thought had happened and how significant it felt. We both agreed it was likely something I'd have a hard time understanding without experiencing it myself. Abramovic herself acknowledges the difficulty in describing the exchange that happens between herself and her audiences, "Every human being has energy, and to receive it, I learnt to receive energy from the air, from the sun, from the moon, from the human being, from anything, and then I give it back. You can't describe it. It is just, how can we describe, how can we see energy? I just feel it!"⁶ This description highlights the challenge of writing about and translating the substance of performance and embodied experience.

In my first year as a graduate student I took a class on performance art and meaning making. On the first day of class we work-shopped durational performance. We were directed to pair up and sit in silence, as close to one another as possible, maintaining eye contact until informed that the activity was over. We were completely unaware of how long it would last – and something about the unknown of the duration had an occasionally maddening effect. The class was blocked for three hours and we were only about an hour in. It took a few minutes to orient ourselves to the assignment. My partner and I had a difficult time not smiling or laughing (a

⁶ Huhn, Rosi and Aude Barras, "Seeking New Territories to Explore." *An Interview with Marina Abramovic*, The GROUND.

defense mechanism perhaps, it isn't common practice for most people to hold eye contact with another person for more than a few seconds at a time). Our bodies fidgeted through discomfort - knees knocking gently into each other's caps, toes shifting to touch tips and then retreat. But eventually we settled in, grounded ourselves and steeled our faces.

Things began to feel and appear fuzzy, unclear. Even the face of the person sitting across from me, who is one of my dearest friends, became less solid than I normally perceive it to be. The edges of his face started to blend in with the background of the room, he somehow didn't look familiar anymore and almost didn't look human. My mind wandered and wondered how I might be shifting in appearance from his view. I felt my legs go numb and a heightened awareness to all my other senses. After 45 minutes of uninterrupted stillness, silence, and eye contact our professor thanked us for being fully engaged on our first day of class and said, "see you next week," as she walked confident and cavalier out the door. We all sat for a few more minutes in silence, almost unable to break away from the activity. Perhaps we were nervous to enter into a world where things that had previously been understood as obvious and fixed were beginning to come apart.

In an interview with Martha Wilson at *BOMB* Magazine William Pope L. remarks, "I'm suspicious of things that make sense. Maybe I'm afraid of it. False security. Whereas contradiction does make sense to me. When I was able to accept that something could be true, and not true, I felt at home."⁷ Pope L. is talking about understanding that things that seem contradictory can in actuality be simultaneously true, and that his practice is in many ways dedicated to finding ways to get people to see that simultaneity. After participating in the aforementioned durational performance experiment I began to understand what Pope L. was talking about. I thought I had known my friend – his face, his physical being and emotional characteristics. If spending time with his eyes could present me with a whole new vision of the

⁷ Pope L., "Artists in Conversation," *BOMB* magazine.

architecture of his face, what might it do to my understanding of his whole being; how might it change my understanding of his relationship to the place we were in?

I became obsessed with practicing minimalist performance and duration. I wanted to know more about what could happen (what was already happening unbeknownst to me) in the ordinary everyday activities, objects, and spaces that I had been taking for granted. Pina Bausch drew my focus into repetition. When something happens over and over again is it really the same? What is the relationship between time and the body in the multiplicity of seemingly identical events – what can be observed from revisiting the same action or gesture over and over and over (and over and over) again.



Figure 2. Still from *Café Müller*⁸

⁸ Bausch, *Café Müller*, May 20, 1978.

In the image above of Pina Bausch's *Café Muller*, performers stand in the middle of a room full of chairs, silently directed by way of physical adjustment by a third performer. They play out a scene on repeat of gestures that begins with the man and woman holding each other, kissing, the woman collapsing as the man grasps her until she falls to the floor and quickly leaps back up to hug the man tightly. For 3 minutes the scene plays out with the man and woman following the direction of the third, who re-enters the scene every time they return to their embrace. The third performer repeatedly returns to walk them back through their gestures after the woman falls to the floor and jumps back up to hold her partner where she is seemingly either forgetting or resisting the next set of actions. By the last two minutes the two don't need the intervention of the third and continue at an increasing pace until they are utterly exhausted and cannot go on. Their heavy breathing is audible and the clumsiness visible through the muscle memory of their activity speaks to the fatigue of the familiar. The two slowly move away from one another and the dance becomes a new scene. I'm interested in the way that viewing repetition (or experiencing it, as a performer) offers another (and another) chance to see something that was missed the first go round. And because it is repetition and not a perfect replication there is room for accidental or even intentional difference, evolution, fatigue, and lost detail. What happens when things slow down, when they freeze and stay that way for hours or days, even a year? What can the embodied experience of time teach us about the ways we experience our lives?

These were some of the questions that I wanted to explore in *an Unknown Activity*. It began as a participatory existential meditation with a small and trusted group of individuals. I wanted to experiment with the ways that people consider our experiences in the time and space of being alive and dying, and how we clumsily figure out ways to translate and share those experiences with others. Perhaps most of all I wanted to create a space for people to wonder.

I identified 15 people who, in the short time that I had been living in Maine had experienced to be "mutually trusting colleagues." I constructed an invitation to what I decided to

call an Unknown Activity, borrowing language from Andrei Monastyrski of the Collective Actions Group (CAG), and I emailed the invitations to 15 hopeful participants. One person did not respond, one declined, 13 accepted, and 11 showed up to the event. Once I heard back from everyone I sent out a notice to expect an email on the morning of the event by 5:30 a.m with directions of where to go to participate in an Unknown Activity. For about two weeks there was a mystery sitting inside the heads of everyone I had invited. This unknown thing was going to happen, nobody knew what or where, or who else would be there. It was my hope that these cumulative unknowns would have the effect of building what Monastyrski refers to as “pre-anticipation.”⁹

Participants got up somewhere around 5 a.m. on the morning of the event and waited for an email. It directed them to proceed to the black box theater in the IMRC building at the University of Maine and to be ready to enter by 6 a.m. They came to the space and perhaps wondered all the way there in their sleepy heads: *What will it be? What will I see? What's going to happen to me in there?* The doors opened and they were met with several layers of instructions. There was a sign that welcomed them into the space for the next three hours. On it I thanked them for understanding that I wouldn't be able to answer their questions and invited them to feel free to take off their shoes. They moved further into the space to where I was seated at a desk typing on a typewriter (over the course of those three hours my job was to type a rough translation of the sounds I was hearing with my back mostly turned to the group and field of action, except for moments when I would stand to reset the camera and tape recorders which were both on for the duration of the event) surrounded by manila envelopes that had been laid in a semi circle around the desk, one for each participant.

⁹ Monastyrski, translated by Kalinsky, Yelena. “Preface to Volume One,” *Moscow Conceptualism*.

Inside the envelopes each person would find another sealed envelope, a large folded piece of paper, a pencil and a sharpie. Inside the next was another sealed envelope and a card with the instructions: *Draw the map of your life, from birth to death. Try not to worry about how it looks. Then open the next envelope.* Inside the next was another sealed envelope and a card with the instructions: *Walk the map of your life. Take all the time and space that you need. Then open the next envelope.* So they followed these instructions, which were ultimately sort of simple but also very personal and had the potential to be deeply emotional. They drew and walked their maps and sort of quietly established some collective norms, moving through everything rather quickly considering the span of time allotted. And then they finally opened the last envelope to find that it was empty. And what then? What would they do and not do within that time and space, with one another? What was it supposed to mean? Some of them decided that the empty envelope marked the end, that the activity or event was over. Some looked to me, only I'd already noted that I wouldn't really be of any guidance. Some meditated, some wrote notes, some whispered secrets into the tape recorder.

This was the loveliest moment for me (and unfortunately, by my own design, I didn't get the experience of watching it). As everyone unfolded the last and tiniest handmade little envelope my back was turned typing away, so I didn't see the moment when each individual carefully slipped their finger under the flap to discover the final emptiness and wonder if there'd been a mistake. Wonder if I'd forgotten to put something in their particular envelope, or if it was intentionally missing something that everyone else had gotten. It's in this moment where the activity really becomes an event, at least for me and presumably the CAG. Claire Bishop writes,

The event's existential presence takes place in the viewer's consciousness (as a state of "completed anticipation") and thus cannot be represented: [quoting Monastyrski now] "The only thing that can be represented is the thing that accompanies this internal process, the thing that takes place on the field of action at the time."¹⁰

¹⁰ Bishop, "Zones of Indistinguishability: Collective Actions Group and Participatory Art," E-flux.

That thing on the field (or in this case, on the theater floor) which is essentially nothing, or at least might appear to be nothing, is actually a teeming sea of invisible thoughts, doubts, questions, emotions, ideas, boredom, tiredness, confusion, possibly disappointment but at the very least, curiosity.

What physically happened was like the vessel for all that was happening internally for all of the participants. The documentation - which takes the shape of maps and notes, paper airplanes, pencil shavings, torn up envelopes, video and audio recordings and typed interpretations of sound - is like an obscure palimpsest of the thoughts and emotions and physical manifestations of what was happening inside, which ultimately cannot be documented but can only be recalled, interpreted, discussed and carried forward - if that is indeed what each participant chooses to do with their experience.

To bring the experience to a full circle, or tetrahedron or infinite Venn diagrams, there was a post-event discussion on December 6th wherein 5 participants came together to reflect on their experiences and to interpret their meaning. I tried to offer a bit of context at the discussion and to answer some questions, but mostly I wanted the space to be for the participants to reflect and share their experiences with one another, and for myself to begin identifying patterns and distinct experiences. There is also a living document that all of the participants have access to and are currently continuing the process of reflecting on and interpreting their experiences.

I should note that while this work was hugely informed by the actions of the CAG, and my intentions were shaped by their main theorist Andrei Monastyrski's writings, I was also directly inspired by a work by Bill T. Jones titled *Still/Here*, in which he traveled around the country developing movement phrases, with untrained dancers, of life and survival in the face of illness and potential early death. His work is arguably very different from the design of this piece, but the idea to draw and walk a life map from birth all the way to and through death was pulled directly from *Still/Here*. Attempting to envision and walk towards and through one's own death

was a critical part of this piece, even as it was impossible for many to do. Monastyrski might disagree with me for having so much action on the “demonstrational field” to distract from the moment of “completed anticipation,” but perhaps that is a nod to the differences in our contexts, in our day to day experiences, and in the time(s) in which we are alive and dying.

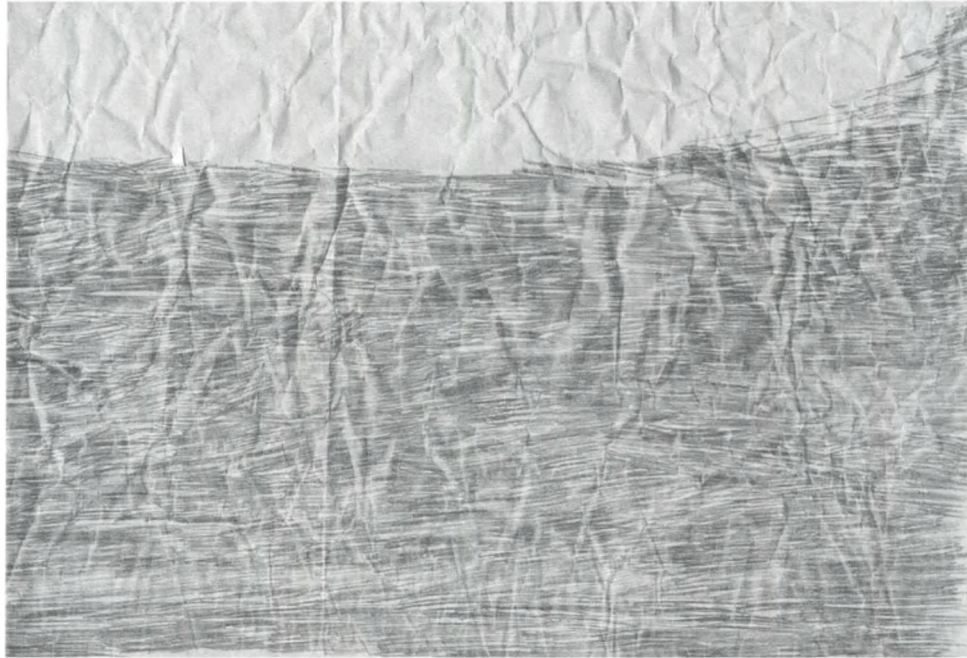


Figure 3. Drawing of a map from birth to death in *an Unknown Activity*



Figure 4. Photo from *Appearances* by CAG¹¹

¹¹ CAG. *Appearances*, Moscow, 13 March, 1976. In *Appearances*, organizers of CAG invited their trusted group of participants via telephone to an open field where they were told to wait. After a while two figures appeared at the opposite end of the field and slowly approached the group. Once they arrived the two figures handed participants cards explaining that they had completed the experience.

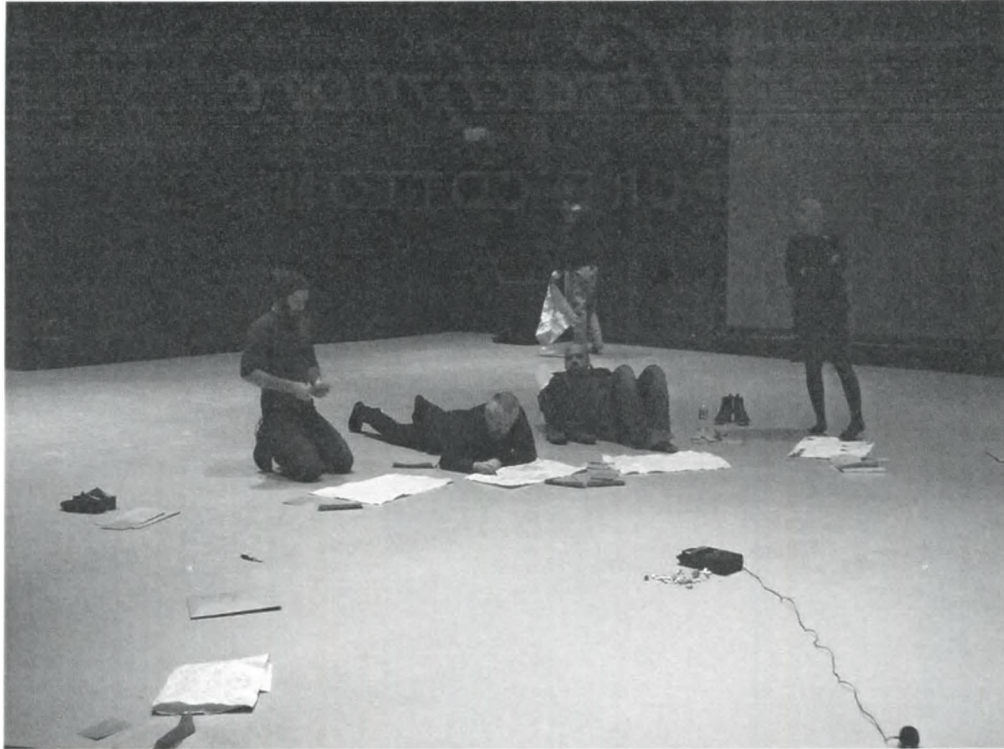


Figure 5. Participants in *an Unknown Activity*

While participants in *an Unknown Activity* were not directed to remain silent, minimal conversation was encouraged. This was in an effort to create a space in which multiple forms of engagement and observation could occur, where language was not the primary mode. In addition to its frequent uses in performance art, silence is often utilized as a strategy in puppet and masked performance as well. Peter Schumann describes the language of Puppet Theater as,

[A]n experiment which strips words and sentences of their secondary fashionable contexts and condenses quantities of habitual gossip into singular terms. The puppets need silence, and their silences are an outspoken part of their language. In puppet language words sing and stutter in the mouths of singers and stutterers who are especially equipped for this task... [which is to show] an ongoing struggle to come to terms with the naming of things by their right names in a slow, haphazard way.¹²

I identify with this clumsy process Schumann is describing. It gets at the struggle we all face in making sense of the senseless and conceptualizing both the simple and complex. Though I am

¹² Schumann, *The Radicality of Puppet Theater*, 5.

less inclined to suggest that things have a “right name” – on the contrary I am far more interested in uncovering the multiple names that things (objects, ideas, people) can have. Something is communicated through the combination of giving life to an inanimate object and giving voice (or in the case of performances without language) performing meaning through that symbolic creature/person/object/idea. It was as a result of my experience with mask and puppet performance that I became fascinated by the idea of bringing life not only to inanimate but invisible and immaterial things. Suddenly the idea of making the invisible visible took on a whole new meaning and possibility.

In addition to my influences in the puppet world it would be outrageous not to acknowledge the innumerable artists who came before and opened up space for audiences, observers and participants alike to access artistic work in non-traditional/alternative ways; who utilized the absurdity and *surreality* of reality, and who engaged with the dynamic materiality of immaterial and conceptual elements. In a sense they instilled a subconscious expectation for the unexpected, and awakened the senses so that a work might be approached as something to be *felt* and experienced, regardless of whether or not it is understood (either in certain or uncertain terms). There is a connection for me between the boredom, duration and silence utilized in the musical compositions of John Cage,¹³ the durational performances of Tehching Hsieh,¹⁴ Marina Abramovic,¹⁵ and Bas Jan Ader,¹⁶ and my affection for abstraction, the obscure, absence, repetition, silence and stillness. Something about the embodiment of an experience that is detached from the specifics of language speaks to notions of queer thinking and queer methods (more on this below).

¹³ Cage, *Four minutes, thirty-three seconds of silence*, 1952.

¹⁴ Hsieh, *One Year Performance(s)*, 1978-1986.

¹⁵ Abramovic, *Great Wall Walk*, 1988.

¹⁶ Jan Ader, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 1975-.

CHAPTER 2

POSSIBILITIES OF TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PROCESS/PRACTICE

The following is the product of investigations and critical consideration of the methods and theories that inform and shape my artistic practice. I will begin with the conceptual foundations of my practice, and then outline the materials, tools and strategies that facilitate project development and exploration. I will discuss my ever-evolving hybrid methodology and give a step-by-step guide to how a project comes to be. Finally, and appropriately in collaboration with my artistic partner Kris Mason, I will explain how collaboration is an integral part of the process of both my art and life, how the two inform one another, and how ultimately the borders between them are increasingly less clear.

Materials, Tools and Methods

My materials are, for the most part, very accessible and surprisingly malleable:

- the seemingly invisible “matter” of relationships and shared experiences
- the articulation of ideas grown out of those processes (“thinking” or “being” as material)
- silence, stillness, duration, repetition and abstraction
- isolated senses
- my body and the bodies of willing participants and/or collaborators
- place and the specific historic, cultural and geographic details that hold significance there
- items that others have discarded (food, waste, cardboard, recyclables, etc.)
- methods or items that others have deemed no longer useful (handmade crafts, handwritten letters, typewriters, tape recorders and other non-digital based medias)

- time – via duration (of a performance/installation itself or regarding the process of an ongoing project), repetition (again), memory and the use of technologies from multiple time periods

Objects and behaviors seen as outdated, wasteful or no longer useful carry with them memories and translatable stories of the past. Within that territory there can be hidden histories. If a body, gesture, even a piece of trash, once transformed, can encourage a person to see that familiar object in a new way, how might it change the way they see and interact with the world around them? How might a familiar behavior played out over and over and over again in an unfamiliar or unexpected way, in a new context or space change the way one thinks about that behavior.



Figure 6. Photo from *I never knew you, yet...*¹⁷

¹⁷ Photo by Kris Mason, 2015.

In the piece *I never knew you, yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save you*, the familiar gesture of outstretched arms paired with an empty vessel was frozen and held for an extended period of time to exaggerate the human experience of time and patience, to invite kindness upon a situation of vulnerability, and to illuminate the effects of time on a person's strength, sense of self, sense of hope, etc. Long held eye contact between the viewers and myself was to illustrate the relationship we have to one another simply by being in the same place – a plea to be seen even if and when it is uncomfortable. *I am here, you are there, we see each other in this space*. Together we have the opportunity to contemplate existence and from that render some sort of substance to walk away with.

I see materials and spaces as extensions of my artistic attitude and intent. They are accessible – meaning either free or relatively inexpensive, easy to find or, in the case of bodies and private spaces, immediately available. As I'm interested in accessing hidden, forgotten or lost information elements of place and material may also be somewhat nostalgic, missing themselves, or surprising. The element of surprise is used as a way of initiating a shift in thinking that someday might lead to a shift in behavior, which in turn might take away a little of the suffering in what visual and video artist Shirin Neshat refers to as “the crisis of the human experience,” and put in its place a moment of kindness or generosity.¹⁸ I want to live in a better world. But defining “better” and making it are collaborative endeavors, neither of which do I want or aim to do on my own. In the words of Bourriaud, “[I'm] learning to inhabit the world in a better way” and I'm doing it in and through a variety of relationships. I give a damn and I'm searching for kin.

My method is situated at the crossroads of performance art, relational practice and collaboration. Performance is a framework that is inherently in and of the body, and bodies hold onto, understand, and communicate knowledge in ways that are wholly different from humanities based research methods. They are simultaneously cultural signifiers as well as venues for

¹⁸ Neshat, *Transcending Biography – Woman of Allah, Resident of Chinatown*, 216-220.

understanding. As my work engages with and attempts to activate something in and about human modes of being, there is something beyond creative or artistic expression that is necessary. This is where I pull the thread between work that is expressive, work that is participatory, process and community oriented, and work that raises more questions than it provides answers.

Theories that ground me

My work is grounded in queer, feminist, critical race, decolonization, standpoint and performance theories. These are buzz words that mean to get at the kind of critical thinking I am informed by regarding the intersections of various gendered, racial, ethnic, spiritual, generational and abled identities, as well as the socio-economic and cultural values, behaviors, signifiers and dynamics that play out in human relationships. This is the foundation that assists in my identifying the complex shifting locations of identity, and facilitates an examination of the multiple perspectives held by myself and the community of participants involved in any collaborative and/or participatory work. This is one place where research and methods bleed into one another: theories inform the ideation of a particular work, the process of creation and realization, as well as the ongoing cycles of review and evaluation that occur throughout and “after” each work.

Considering the historical and political contexts of the time and place I am working in, I am always aiming to deconstruct, challenge and be challenged by binary modes of thinking, making and doing and to consider how all of these theories are embodied and communicated via bodies and place. I am continuing my research through written texts that include the dynamics of human relationships, strategies for community organizing, “invisible” histories (which is to say those that have been marginalized and/or erased by the dominant representation and circulation of history from the perspective of a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy). But my practice is

firmly grounded in embodied research – which involves observation, and bearing witness via all of the senses, participating in dialogues and documenting processes.

For example, *Settlements* was a durational performance done in collaboration with Kris Mason focusing on histories of racism in Maine and the United States, and the erasure of the colonization of the indigenous people of Maine. We used material objects, time and space to explore and reflect on the stories we tell about place and identity. In using historical documents and everyday materials (such as bleach and corn starch), *Settlements* looked closely at what has been obscured in the telling of our national history, as well as the ways that whiteness, as a symbol of racial superiority, functions in this obscuring process. Over the course of seven hours we pasted documents from this history to a lean-to against Zero Station, a gallery in Portland, Maine. This process was a way of asking: what day-to-day behaviors and activities are contributing to the maintenance of not knowing about this history? What are we doing to remember? What are we doing to forget? What shelters us and what are we building towards? Stored underneath a makeshift shelter just beside the lean-to we were constructing, we had piles of the documents available for reading, with typed translations, as the 17th century script was difficult to read.



Figure 7. Photo of *Settlements* outside zero station¹⁹

¹⁹ Photo by Yeshe Parks, 2014.

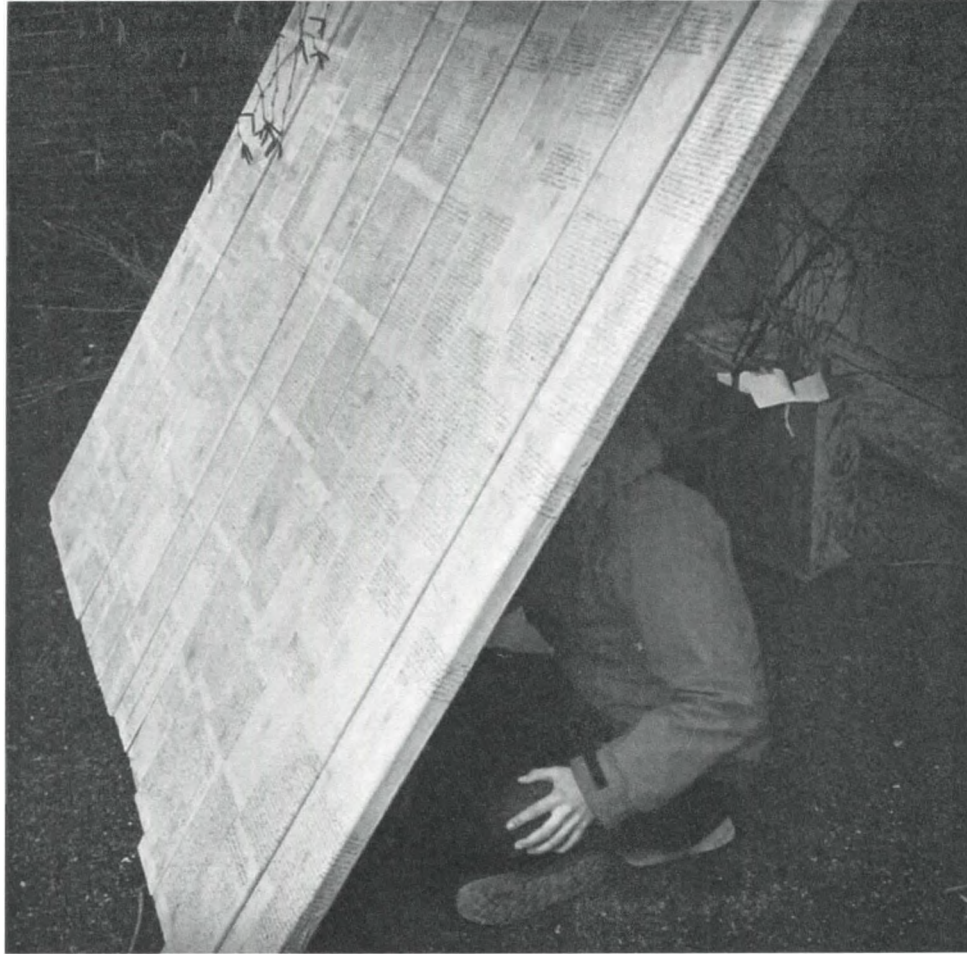


Figure 8. Photo of the *Settlements* lean-to²⁰

In terms of methodology, I am particularly inspired by the practice of Deborah Hay outlined in her book *My Body, the Buddhist*. In it she acknowledges having never been trained in critical theory, but that as a dancer and choreographer she “studies riddles.” These riddles take her down rabbit holes stored inside the “53-trillion celled teacher” that is her body. “For example,” she writes, “what if where I am is what I need? As a dancer, I will notice what occurs when I *imagine* every cell in my body at once is getting what it needs moment by moment.”²¹ In contrast with Hay, in addition to schooling in performance and dance, I also have a background in critical theory, history, and literature. But rather than utilizing their associated methodological

²⁰ Photo by Yeshe Parks, 2014.

²¹ Hay, *My Body, the Buddhist*, xxiii.

frameworks for artistic research, I am more interested in the theories that inform me existing as conceptual context and material content within the larger practice. Things that help me to understand what I'm doing and why and have less to do with *how* I'm doing it. In his essay, "In Defense of Performance Art," Guillermo Gómez-Peña writes:

We theorize about art, politics and culture, but our interdisciplinary methodologies are different from those of academic theorists. They have binoculars; we have radars... We chronicle our times, true, but unlike journalists or social commentators, our chronicles tend to be non-narrative and poly-vocal... Our main artwork is our own body, ridden with semiotic, political, ethnographic, cartographic and mythical implications.²²

There is something powerful about conceptualizing one's own body as both a vehicle for exploring various territories, and as a territory that continues to grow and transform throughout that exploration. In the process of being present, observing, documenting and presenting ideas (no matter what form) by myself and in community with others I am in pursuit of creating through discovering what is stored away inside the body. This can happen by myself or in collaboration with others, in both private and public spaces. No matter how or where it is happening, mine is a process that seeks to engage with hidden forms.

As a performance artist who uses the body to explore issues of identity I have been particularly informed by the work of Ana Mendieta. Through multiple media Mendieta investigated her Cuban identity and displacement while also exposing a performativity of gender exploring the female form via masculinity and androgyny. Using both the presence and absence of her own body her work is ethereal and otherworldly while also being firmly rooted in physical form. Some of her work has a peaceful almost meditative quality, while other works offer a stony critique of violence against women, evoking death and spirits through blood and earthen materials. My interest in photography and video as a method for exploring identity and the body's matter and meaning has been significantly influenced by Mendieta's works.²³

²² Gómez-Peña, *In Defense of Performance Art*, *pocha nostra*.

²³ Frank, Priscilla. *The Haunting Traces of Ana Mendieta go on View*, HuffPost Arts & Culture.



Figure 9. Image of Ana Mendieta's *Silhouette*

In *Post Production*, Nicolas Bourriaud writes that art “tends to give shape and weight to the most invisible processes,” referring particularly to those that are becoming less and less visible in the globalized world.²⁴ Along with a community of collaborators I develop new works while reading articles, staying informed on current local and global cultural events and issues, interviewing friends and strangers, prototyping performances and installations. I explore everyday objects by spending time with them in observation, and consider the body’s relationship to them, as well as to time, space and location. This means that there is a perpetual dialogue going on between the “existing” knowledge that serves as research material, and that which is “produced” by the process itself.

I am looking to history, memory, myth, systems, language and behavior as the “invisible processes” that serve as theoretical backbones, conceptual and material objects in my work. Though at times they are invisible, intangible or immaterial, I engage with them as if they function in reality, have weight and *can* be seen if given appropriate attention. My practice is about finding ways to measure and feel that weight, to name and question what it’s about, and to set a looking glass directly in front of the results and watch as everything shifts in response. Drawing from humanities and performance based research, as well as socially engaged and participatory practice, I am creating a hybrid method that collects information from all these modes and evolves in process. The following are two descriptions that get at this hybrid form.

DIO: Do It Ourselves

This is altogether a politics, aesthetic, and mode of practice. The idea stems from traditions of DIY (Do It Yourself) culture, and reaches outward relationally. It is a means of resisting a capitalist aesthetic in which everything is about the individual who, if they’re doing American identity right, has enough money for whatever they need in a land where everything is

²⁴ Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, 32.

for sale and consumable. DIO is a practice that welcomes the frustration and confusion that can come from proceeding thoughtfully forward into the land of inconvenience and uncertainty. It is about starting from a place of not knowing and letting that be ok, because moving from “nothing/not knowing” to “figuring it out” is an integral part of the process. It’s about pooling together resources and learning together how to find what you don’t already have or have access to. Imagination, patience and stubborn hope are often required in this type of doing, and when it’s done in community with others who are willing to be vulnerable and willing to learn in their bodies something invisible is created that can then also be engaged.

Begin at the Beginning of the End

This part of the process in any project follows and overlaps the one described above. Each project is inevitably informed by those that precede it. As one process begins to end there will inevitably be an evaluation period in which both I, and any participants, have the opportunity to reflect on what was effective, clear, and engaging and where there might have been gaps. This is likely something that will transpire throughout the process of developing and manifesting a project (hence the focus on *process*), and the information collected from any shared reflections will serve as fodder for projects yet to come.

Steps

- 1) (begin at the beginning of the end...) start with either one or some combination of: concepts and themes; specific sites or spaces; places, people and materials, and then identify gaps, questions, invisibilities and challenges.
 - a) if beginning with multiple items from above, start playing with different combinations
 - b) if beginning with one, begin library and online research, conversations, interviews, and in-the-field observations

- 2) “get messy” with and explore materials: prototype masks/puppets; create and attempt micro-performances; host performance events and activities; facilitate storytelling and/or group conversations, extemporaneous writing exercises, movement or stillness in space. Observe, reflect and document along the way
- 3) spend time with frustrations and challenges and discuss them with as many people who are willing - not as a means of getting stuck but in an effort to continue moving forward and improving upon the experience
- 4) put the “messy” materials in conversation with one another - recombine, eliminate excess and irrelevancies
- 5) test new versions in multiple spaces, reach out to audiences, community members, collaborators and/or participants for feedback
- 6) “rinse and repeat”: begin at the beginning of the end...

This is the outline of a practice that is ever-evolving. It will undoubtedly experience amendments, and shift in time as the processes and people I am involved with continue to root themselves, expand and re-assemble. The key here has been to identify the theories and methods that have largely informed the practice thus far, and to recognize some of the elements that have not yet found their way out of my working process. As I move forward with each new project my understanding of my place in the world and in relationship to those around me grows and gets filtered through the work. The work is both a method and a means for finding a meaningful existence as I attempt to understand it.

CHAPTER 3

THE COLLABORATIVE THESIS

For the Intermedia MFA, we set out to collaborate on our thesis - in our research, making/instigating work, and writing the paper itself. As artists, our individual practices sometimes use different medias, mediums, materials. For example, Sarah more often uses the body and sound in her work, whereas Kris can be found engaging with sculpture and craft materials, however these distinctions aren't static. Sometimes we both work with and/or use very similarly. Found materials, text, language, fiber, paper, and the social/duration/time as materials all play a key role in both of our practices.

We were interested in doing a collaborative thesis for a few different reasons. The first stemming from some of what was just pointed to. We do differently and sometimes we do similarly and there are a lot of interesting cross-overs and conversations that come out of this. But also, we sometimes do and make together and have spent the entirety of our time in the Intermedia MFA program thinking about collaboration. In our collaborations, we often bring aspects of our individual work to the table and have been exploring relational aesthetics, participatory practices, performance, sculpture, and installation together. This collaborative thesis is an exploration of these ideas, the linkages and differences between our individual practice, as well as collaboration itself and the possibilities of a queer collaborative thesis.

Review of Queer Theory

Throughout both of our individual thesis writings we have made mention of the word queer – queer theory or queerness as a practice, and now a queer collaborative thesis. Since it is such a fundamental concept in our work, and because it may require more explanation, we are including a brief review of queer studies as we see it in both of our papers.

Queer theory or queer studies is an area of critical studies stemming from post-structuralism, feminist theory, and LGBT activism in the late 1980s and early 90s. Sharon Marcus writes about the history of queer theory, noting that the term *queer* emerged in reclamation of a sexual slur that lacked an association with any particular gender or sexual identity. This offered an alternative to the LGBTQ soup that was more general and inclusive, emphasizing solidarity over individual identity. In addition to this, with its etymological connotations with weirdness or being unfamiliar or unexpected, the term has expanded beyond this umbrella function to reference the transgression of any norms. The idea of *queering* something can refer to transgressing or perverting something, connoting sexuality without explicitly requiring it.²⁵

A key issue in queer theory is a challenge to gender essentialism. Gender essentialism is the idea that one's gender is both biologically determined by one's sex (natural) and that there are fundamental and intrinsic differences between two genders, man and woman. Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, among many others, have contributed to this critique. In the *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault's analysis of sex, power, and knowledge, he outlines how sex and sexual identity have become central to systems of power in modern western culture. In this analysis Foucault also highlights how bodies and sexuality are produced through the exercise of power relations.²⁶ In *Gender Trouble*, Butler expands on Foucault's analysis, arguing against gender essentialism by highlighting the social construction and performativity of gender - that each person's gender is a copy of stylized acts for which there is no original.²⁷ For both, social constructions and power relations produce each other and are the basis for the norms and stereotypes we have of gender and sexuality.

A post-structuralist critique of binary systems is important in understanding the impact of queer theory on ideas of gender and sexuality. Both Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick highlight

²⁵ Marcus, "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay," 191-218.

²⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

²⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

how gender norms have sexuality norms embedded in them which all depend on the “other” for their definition. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick argues that these binary systems are not fixed or essential, but rather socially constructed through discourse and liable to shift and change over time.²⁸ As the queer theory of Butler and Sedgwick seeks to challenge the boundaries between gender and sexuality norms, they also highlight the instability and flux of gender and sexuality.

Another facet of queer theory, or perhaps queer studies more generally, is the work many writers have done to produce a queer history. Often hidden or suppressed, many queer writers, like Judith Halberstam and Leslie Feinberg, have developed histories and narratives through both auto-ethnography approaches as well as research to uncover past histories of sexual and gender diversity. What emerges in these works, and more broadly in the domain of queer studies, are themes of reclamation, of making visible the suppressed or contradictory, of the fluidity and instability of identities and oppositions, and how power and culture produce and shape nature.

Throughout queer theory and queer studies there are themes of instability, flux, and contradiction. In 2011, Halberstam wrote *The Queer Art of Failure*, a self-proclaimed “low-theory” text in search of alternative notions of success via a reclamation of failure as a queer strategy.²⁹ Similarly, Ivan Coyote and Rae Spoon’s autobiography, *Gender Failure*, embraces the idea of failure as a part of the authors’ identities and key in understanding the limitations of the gender binary for all identities.³⁰ What these two texts highlight is the transformation of queer strategies from sexual deviance and transgression to broad ideas like failure and success. These strategies maintain the presence of the body while moving beyond issues of the body in response to systems of power, capitalism, and hetero-normativity.

²⁸ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

²⁹ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

³⁰ Spoon and Coyote, *Gender Failure*.

All this language and history about sexuality, identity, politics, solidarity, and change provides a lens through which we see the world and a mode of operating that guides our work. There is a theme of utopias that comes out in more recent queer works, like José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, which argues for queer collectivity and the importance of both critical dissatisfaction with the present and a political/social imagination of the future. Esteban Muñoz writes that "queerness is not yet here," and that queer aesthetics has the potential to "map future social relations. Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."³¹ As we continue to articulate the relationship between queerness and our creative practices, we are exploring these possibilities for another world.

Gordon Hall, in talking about the role of abstraction as a potential political strategy in art making, asks, "When real change needs to be made, can we afford to be abstract? Isn't survival a question of being as articulate as we can?" This question is something that has come up for both of us a lot in our work. What does it mean to be politically oriented – politically outraged even – yet to be making work that is not visible as "activism"? However, Hall goes on to argue that "turning to abstraction as a refusal to make sense according to prevailing modes of understanding, abstraction as a possible path around the structural logics responsible for unacceptable socio-political realities." Indeed, as Hall notes, there have been many movements throughout art history that have used abstraction in this way, including surrealism, dadaism, and minimalism.³²

Another movement that informs both our work and had a particular impact on our thesis project, was that of the Collective Actions Group (CAG). They were - and are - a group of artists and self-identified "mutually trusting colleagues" formed under the intensely restrictive circumstances of Communist Russia in 1976. They formed with the intention of creating "shared

³¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 1.

³² Hall, The IMRC and Intermedia MFA Artist Lecture Series, March 17, 2015.

privatized experiences” that offered relief from the otherwise highly prescribed collective experiences being enforced in their day to day lives. Interestingly, in the article “Zones of Indistinguishability: Collective Actions Group and Participatory Art,” Claire Bishop notes that, “Soviet artists did not regard their work as political but rather as existential and apolitical, committed to ideas of freedom and the individual imagination.”³³ The work of the CAG, Gordon Hall and José Esteban Muñoz speak to this need and desire to resist the dominant structures and systems and imagine new possibilities for being and making.

Collaboration Itself: out of out loud together

In many ways our interest in collaborating on our Intermedia MFA thesis is a gesture toward these queer resistances. As artists who are both interested in slipperiness over absolute conclusions, and contradictions or tensions within familiar materials, spaces and bodies, we emphasize the process as much as the product or outcome of a project. For us, the process is the space where questions surface and new understandings emerge. It is no surprise, then, that our attraction to queer theory and determination to deliberately muddy the water that separates life from art would lead us to creating a collaborative artistic method. Collaboration is arguably a queer approach to finding, making and exploring meaning. It is a humble and hopeful fuck you to the rugged individualism that is so valorized in American society and an honest acknowledgement that not a single person has ever gotten anywhere in this world completely on their own. Queering or queerness then serves as a conceptual, political, and methodological approach to ways of being in, understanding, and co-creating the world. It is (g)littered with questions, uncertainties, contradictions, and multiplicities and it is for all of those reasons why we chose it as a pivot point.

³³ Bishop, "Zones of Indistinguishability: Collective Actions Group and Participatory Art," E-flux.

An important thing in thinking about collaboration in our practice(s) is the nonlinear, continuously evolving, and permeable nature of our working, thinking, and making together. Following with the approach to art where the boundary between art and life is challenged and blurred, our collaborative process also expands into daily life and is an active part of our friendship. As both friends and collaborators, there is hardly a thing that we do that isn't thought through and processed together. This plays out in conversations about life and relationships, discussing political and social issues, as well as thinking through art, making, and the meanings of our work. Therefore, collaboration itself is a critical strategy, an orientation, and an artistic practice.

UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1 & 2, Spring 2016



Figure 10. Photos from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE*, Vol. 1, the book shelves

For our thesis project, *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE* we created an immersive installation and performance in our home on Frenchmen Street in New Orleans. Participants were invited to the installation/performance by handwritten letters mailed to their homes. The invitations served as a save-the-date for April 2nd and otherwise said very little about the event other than that it would be “a night of immersive performance and art.” They were instructed to RSVP via text message and encourage to keep it to themselves. Two days before the event, we sent out follow up texts with a specific time to show up to our house. Because of space limitations, we broke our participants into two groups and two waves of the performance, each having between 9-15 people.

On April 2nd, the first group arrived at 7pm. Sarah greeted them at the door and invited them into the altered living room, (see Figure #). We removed all of the normal wall decorations and moved the two couches, which normally border the room, to the center of the space. We covered the TV with a patchwork of undergarments and shrouded the bookshelf in a mattress pad. All of this was to disrupt the expected experience of our guests and to straddle between entering the private space of a home and the public space of an art venue. Sarah thanked the attendees, handing out a sparse program, and instructing them to make themselves at home in the space. People sat on the couches and on the floor. She then said “I’ll be right back” and left through the curtain wall leading into the hallway. Moments after she left, the lights turned off on their own and the audio from *(no)body* began to play consisting of altered voices describing experiences of their bodies.



Figure 11. Photo from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, close up of garments



Figure 12. Photo from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, couches



Figure 13. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE Vol. 1*, the hallway



Figure 14. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE Vol. 1*, legs

When the excerpt from *(no)body* finished, the video piece, *The difference between concrete and cement* started playing on a projector at the end of the hallway. “Scene Two: Hallway” was announced, in reference to the program, encouraging participants to move into the hallway. In the space leading up to the projected video were sculptures of fragmented bodies installed against the wall, on the floor, and hanging off of a shelf (see Figure #). Again, this space

was altered from its usual form, with all the items from the hallways shelf removed and the existing wall decorations and storage areas shrouded in white cloth. *The difference between concrete and cement*, a 59 second video, repeated three to four times each performance. The video focuses on a pair of bare feet being covered with a seemingly unending supply of white socks, presumably by the hands that are attached to the body of the feet, before being interrupted by Kris in the kitchen on a laptop.

The difference between concrete and cement is an exploration of obscurity and obscuring, that blurring of distinguishability - things inside other things and/or being multiple things at once – as well as repetition and accumulation and how they play out in, on, and with the body. This is accumulation as the softening of edges. There is a resistance to resolution, an engagement with choices, and whenever the body is there, identity comes into play conceptually, whether you want it to or not. The effect of monochromatic layering (white socks on white socks) is a part of the altered and covered aesthetic of the first two spaces: the multiples of undergarments and coverings in the living room as well as the body fragments in the hallway, things inside other things, and the semi-visibility of difference and multiplicity. If you don't look closely or didn't see it happen, you might not know or realize what something might be and how our assumptions about people, objects, and experiences shape our perceptions. The video, and the immersive performance as a whole, is an exploration of the performativity of everyday actions – from the interaction between hands and feet in the video to the lived in home. *The difference between concrete and cement* is an experiment in the space between documentation and fabrication as a parallel to the event itself being in between performance and installation.



Figure 15. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, legs part 2



Figure 16. Photo/still from the *difference between concrete and cement*, projected



Figure 17. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE*,
Vol. 1, kitchen table



Figure 18. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE*,
Vol. 1, making biscuits

Partially visible through another curtain wall separating the hallway and kitchen, participants could see Kris briefly before he left the doorway. Lights turned on in the kitchen, “Scene Three: Kitchen” was announced by Sarah, and a new audio piece began playing. Participants slowly moved into the empty kitchen to find a space relatively unaltered, with traces of baking and coffee drinking left on the counter and table. Biscuits were baking in the oven while a timer counted down on the oven clock. The audio – excerpts from non-linear field recording style conversations between Sarah and Kris both about the project and as snapshots of everyday life in that space - played for about 4 minutes. At the end of the audio, and after a pause, we emerged into the kitchen and invited everyone to Scene Four: Backyard through the backdoor. In the backyard there were light snacks and beverages, including the biscuits that were baking in the oven.

The first round of participants was encouraged to stick around and hang out while Sarah and Kris conducted the second wave of the evening. We intentionally left without declaring an end to the scene or the performance. At 7:40 the second wave started – a much larger group than the first due to participants arriving late and bringing companions. The event proceeded in the same fashion as the first, with participants being lured throughout the installation. At the end, they were similarly invited to Scene Four, but unlike the first group that entered an empty backyard, they entered a scene of people talking and hanging out, unsure if the event or performance was over or to what degree those outside were “in on it” or if more was to happen.

We intended for the last scene to blur into any other kind of social evening at our home – to leave the end undefined and allow for whatever happened in that time and space to be a part of the installation and performance itself. The biscuits were included as a gesture of an ongoing process; our guests were consuming the material of a project we began before they arrived. We also structured the event, which was in many ways a guided experience of an immersive installation, like a performance – a performance without bodies. Throughout the parts of the

installation there was a constant theme of bodies and identities, fragmented and obscured in an altered home space. The live bodies, our bodies, were performed as traces throughout the event. In part, this served to highlight the bodies that were there, the participants and the fragmented bodies in audio and sculpture, as well as the bodies that were absent.

As site-specific artists, we are thinking about the historical context of this place, our apartment in the lower Seventh Ward of New Orleans, a historically black neighborhood. We are also thinking about who we are in this place – newcomers to this city, two white people moving into a majority black part of town, taking up space in a place which is starting to feel the pressures of gentrification. Rising rents, racial displacement, and empty houses being rented to tourists rather than residents are all happening all around us. Alongside these issues, we are also responding to the rise in sexual assaults that have happened in our neighborhood since moving here and the reality that it is not safe to be out alone at night, and that it is sometimes not even safe to be alone in your own home. On a larger scale, we are also considering the patterns of police violence against black people that have been made visible by the Black Lives Matter movement, and how that plays out in this city, the corrupt New Orleans Police Department, and the disproportionate policing of black neighborhoods and incarceration of black people. Louisiana is known as the prison capital of the world, with one out of every fourteen black men incarcerated.³⁴ All of these dynamics are at play in the background/foreground of this project as we are developing it.

As a participatory installation and performance held in our own home, and as an event that is largely by, about, and for queer people, we chose to invite a small group of participants that we know from our queer community here in New Orleans. This served both to build off of the intimacy and community already present among this group of people, to use that as a material in the project as a whole and to provide a safe space for the exploration of bodies, sexuality, and

³⁴ Chang, “Louisiana is the world's prison capital,” May 13, 2012.

kinship. Yet many of the people in our queer community, and most of the people that we invited to the event, are white. This highlights for us the complex nature of racism and segregation in our daily lives. This raises questions for us about who our audience is and why – who do we make work for? How does racism impact our work? How can we resist racism in a way that is authentic to the work and to possible future participants?

The context and site of this event, and our process of creating it, were full of these complexities. We recognized a need to pull in and take care of ourselves and community. We were able to do this without *overtly* grappling with the racial tensions in the work and in our neighborhood because of our own racial privilege. As white artists, we don't ever have to address our own race, if we don't want to, nor are we expected to make work about race at all – which is something artists of color don't get to choose. We are simultaneously grappling with the racial tensions and privileges that exist in our lives, communities, and in this project – that *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE* was a thing embedded in a context shaped by racism, white supremacy, and segregation – and recognizing the ways in which we only partially addressed it.

As a project about gender, sexuality and queerness – we are exploring individual and collective bodies and identities. In addition to our own bodies as well as the bodies of our guests, we are considering the body of the house (a container of multiple relationships, cultural histories, and identities) and the tensions between public and private spaces, public and private parts, and how, who, and what we share. The site specificity of this work is tied to our home on Frenchmen Street in the seventh ward of New Orleans, but is not engaging with this particular geographic community directly. Rather, it is the *site* in which our bodies/ourselves, who are continually navigating what it means to take up space inside and outside of our home, chose to engage a very specific community – all of whom are connected by an identification with queerness and friendship with the two of us. Inviting a small, select group into our home is an obvious gesture to curate a private experience. Dressing our living room and hallway in all white undergarments,

bed coverings, and stuffing points at the concept of the personal brought out and into the open. In the third space, the kitchen, where audio fragments from various conversations between both us played, Sarah can be heard saying, “The history of this particular house and who has lived here before us, what bodies are present and what bodies are not present.” Our choice to have our (white) bodies be absent from the performance beyond glimpses and traces, the fragmented body sculptures made of various shades of tan, brown and black nylons, and the disembodied voices in the audio from the first scene are all ways in which this work covertly explores the complex histories of race and displacement, and the intersectionalities of race and gender in the queer community of New Orleans.

UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, as an immersive performance installation, draws from the strategies of participatory art making. David Goldenberg speaks about participation as a methodology in a conversation with Patricia Reed, suggesting that participation “operates as a communicative glue within the art system, breaking down orthodox categories and hierarchies of artist, curator, institution, and audience.”³⁵ We are interested in breaking down hierarchies and boundaries between these roles in art and making, just as we are in the distinctions between public and private, and art and everyday life. A way of breaking down these boundaries is to activate art experiences and engage across them. Portland State University’s MFA in Contemporary Art Practices program describes participatory art as a mode of making that focuses “on building a relationship with the viewers of art who become co-authors rather passive onlookers,” noting that, “[t]he relationship between artist and participant is two-way, often public in nature, and is based on exchange, sharing and interaction.”³⁶ For us, *UNDERTHEIR/WHER* as a whole was not fully realized until our invited participants came through and spent time in our backyard and in the house installation.

³⁵ Goldenberg and Reed, “What Is a Participatory Practice?” Fillip.

³⁶ Portland State University’s Art & Social Practice website.

Because of the ephemeral and experiential nature of *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE*, we chose not to record the event itself, but rather to photograph the space before and after. We are here thinking of recording as traditional documentation in the form of photographing, filming, or audio recording a live experience. Because of the intimate and vulnerable nature of the event – a small group of individuals invited to our house without knowing exactly why, what would happen there, or who would be there – we did not want to add an element of surveillance to the experience. In addition, to use more discrete recording seemed to cross an ethical boundary. We were not present in most of the spaces and hidden recording without getting permission beforehand was not something we were willing to do.

While we were informed by our concerns about surveillance in documentation, there is also an element of the experience as a whole that defies documentation. Bishop writes, “The event’s existential presence takes place in the viewer’s consciousness (as a state of ‘completed anticipation’) and thus cannot be represented,” she then quotes Monastyrski: “The only thing that can be represented is the thing that accompanies this internal process, the thing that takes place on the field of action at the time.”³⁷ Documentation is a fraught element of site-specific work. Nick Kaye expands on this in his book, *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation*. In writing about site-specific art documentation, Kaye notes the need to be sensitive to documentation’s limits – to “concede the impossibility of reproducing the object toward which [an artist’s] statements, speculations, fragments, memories and evocations are aimed,”³⁸ – and to make choices about how and what to document that fits the work. Documentation and representation are necessarily limited, offering the viewer/listener only a fragment of a complex whole. As our bodies were absent from the immersive performance installation, so are the bodies

³⁷ Bishop, "Zones of Indistinguishability: Collective Actions Group and Participatory Art," *E-flux*.

³⁸ Kaye, *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation*, 215.

of our participants in our documentation. However, this absence is incomplete. There are always traces of human interaction and experience left in and on the objects in any given space.

For us, the lack of live documentation highlights other presences, pointing to the various absences and blurred boundaries in the work. Kaye writes about distinctions between things coming under question in site specific work: “a blurring of the opposition between a *work* and its *contexts*,” and how this plays out in documentation as well, “where documentation is a tactic of the site-specific work, the distinctions between *documentation* and *notation*, between that which is *remembered* and *anticipated*, *recorded* and *produced* may come under question.”³⁹

Interestingly, a number of our participants reported that they thought we were discretely recording during the event. This was as a result of its mystery as well as the use of audio recording throughout, particularly the fragmented audio of our own discussions in the kitchen.

For the thesis show at the University of Maine in Orono, we have installed *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 2* in the Lord Gallery. *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 2* is an installation using the materials from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1* to create an altered home-like space. This installation is part evolution and part reconfiguration; it is documentation as material, a translation of a site-specific work into a new context. In response to Kaye’s observations about documentation, in particular where “the site’s documentation is used to foreground the paradoxes of representation itself,” we continue to be interested in absences and presences in the work (and in documentation). While this iteration of the project as a whole is not only documentation, we do recognize the traces of *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1* that live on in the materials. As a nod to this, and to that aforementioned paradox, we have hung framed photographs from the April 2nd event in the installation. There are also the stuffed nylon sculptures, a small couch, and a book shelf to recreate a similarly altered living room space. *The difference between concrete and cement* is projected on the wall above the couch and audio from

³⁹ Kaye, 217.

the video fused with audio from *(no)body* and the kitchen plays from hidden speakers. There are homemade biscuits and remnants from the baking process that remain throughout the exhibition. Participants are invited to be in and interact with the space and the objects in it.

UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 2 follows in the vein of *Vol. 1* as an investigation of the boundaries between public and private in life, art making, identity, and bodies.

CHAPTER 4

PORTFOLIO

Yes/No, November 2013



Figure 19. Still from video of Yes/No⁴⁰

Yes/No was a performance experiment in co-authorship. For two minutes of improvised performance, participant viewers were given the directive to, one at a time, either say *yes* or *no*. Yes indicated that they would like for me to continue moving in the same general way that I had chosen, and No indicated that I should change some element of the movement – including direction, speed, level or style.

⁴⁰ Video by Kris Mason, 2013.

20 seconds with your own heart, December 2013



Figure 20. Still from video of *20 seconds with your own heart*⁴¹

During this interactive performance I stood at the center of a circle of a group of classmates/willing participants. After announcing the title, *20 seconds with your own heart*, in reference to an excerpt from a text we had all shared, I gave each of the participants, one at a time, 20 seconds of uninterrupted eye contact while they returned the same back to me. This piece was an exploration of both intimacy and collective vulnerability.

⁴¹ Video by Kris Mason, 2013.

What you believe is happening to you, December 2013



Figure 21. Still from video of *What you believe is happening to you*⁴²

This performance/ritual emerged out of a desire to find connections between all of the disciplines I am coming from and as a means of processing the recent death of my grandmother. It included 4 scenes: me whistling the song *Memory*; approaching the audience members and asking them each individually the question *What do you believe is happening to you?* allowing for a brief pause and then responding *What you believe is happening to you*. I read a short story about my mother and I caring for my grandmother on her death bed, and finally performed her death to the accompaniment of a tape recording of my voice reading excerpts from Gertrude Stein's *Many, Many Women*.

The process of developing this piece began with a five page long list of project ideas that were organized under the name *Healing Death*, which were all, in one form or another, related to this loss. The title *Healing Death* came both from the moment when a body can no longer be

⁴² Video by Kris Mason, 2013.

healed on its way to dying, and my experience that the moment of death has the potential to be not only related to grief and sadness, but also the initiator of the healing process itself.

My first assignment was to pick a few of these projects from the five page list, get messy with them and see where that brought me. First I sculpted a mask out of clay and papier mache (which was originally intended to represent my literal grandma as well as a sort of symbolic grandma-figure-as-storyteller for whatever performance was to come). Then I walked away from it for several weeks because the symbolic rendering of my deceased grandma was just too fucking much for me to handle, let alone wear and attempt to create a performance out of. So I read poetry about death and dying. I read about puppetry and mask performance, and the colonization of indigenous lands. I thought about the connections between land and bodies - about my body, and my grandma's body and my dad's body. I began to envision a way to connect all of these ideas in some way. I distanced myself from *Healing Death* and decided to create a spinoff performance titled *What you believe is happening to you* which, instead of a list of ideas, would be contained within the boundaries of a single performance.

In the beginning I was quite hesitant to work with the mask itself, so I started developing a movement vocabulary, which I recorded on several videos, without the mask. Eventually I created what felt like an unfinished rough and clumsy sketch of a mask performance incorporating writing of my own, as well as the words of poets and historians who I found having similar conversations, albeit in different rooms, at different times, and from a wide variety of standpoints. Though I had originally intended to continue working on this performance after its initial rough debut, it became like a sort of purging ceremony that I haven't felt a need to return to since.

an Unknown Activity, December 2013



Figure 22. Participants in *an Unknown Activity* at various stages

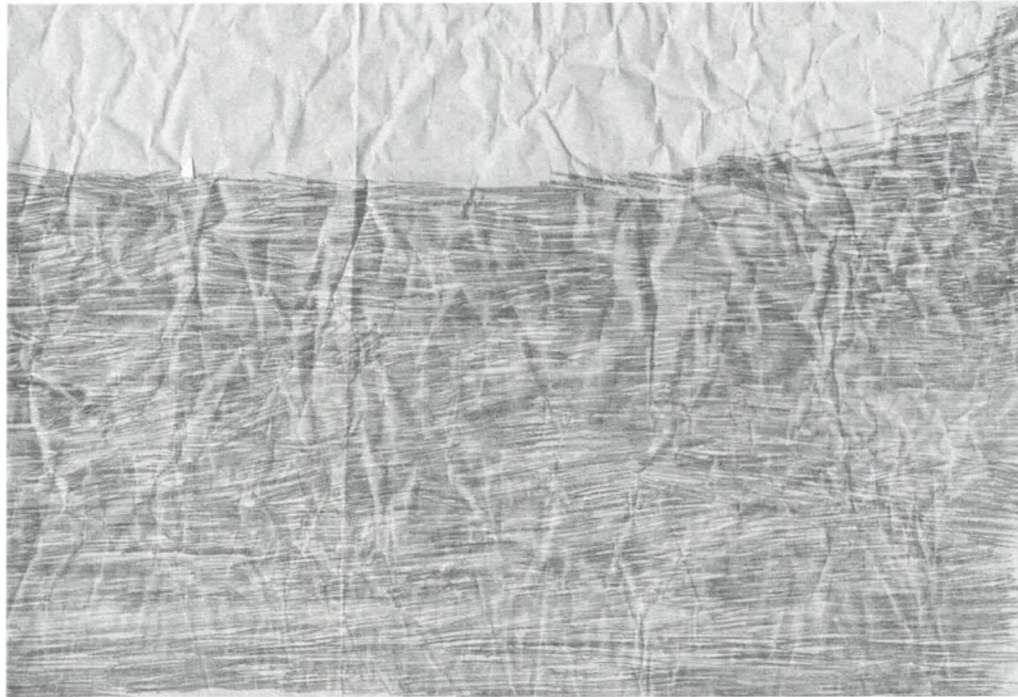


Figure 23. Drawing of a participant's map from birth to death, *an Unknown Activity*

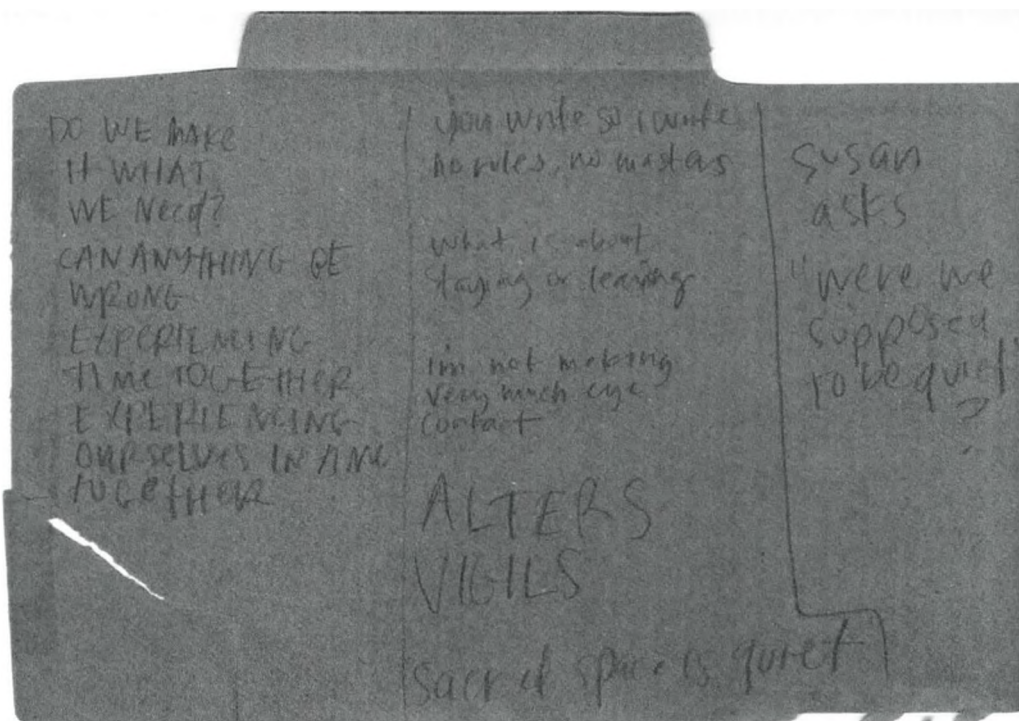


Figure 24. Writing on an envelope left by a participant, *an Unknown Activity*

“I never knew you, yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you if that would save you”, March 2014

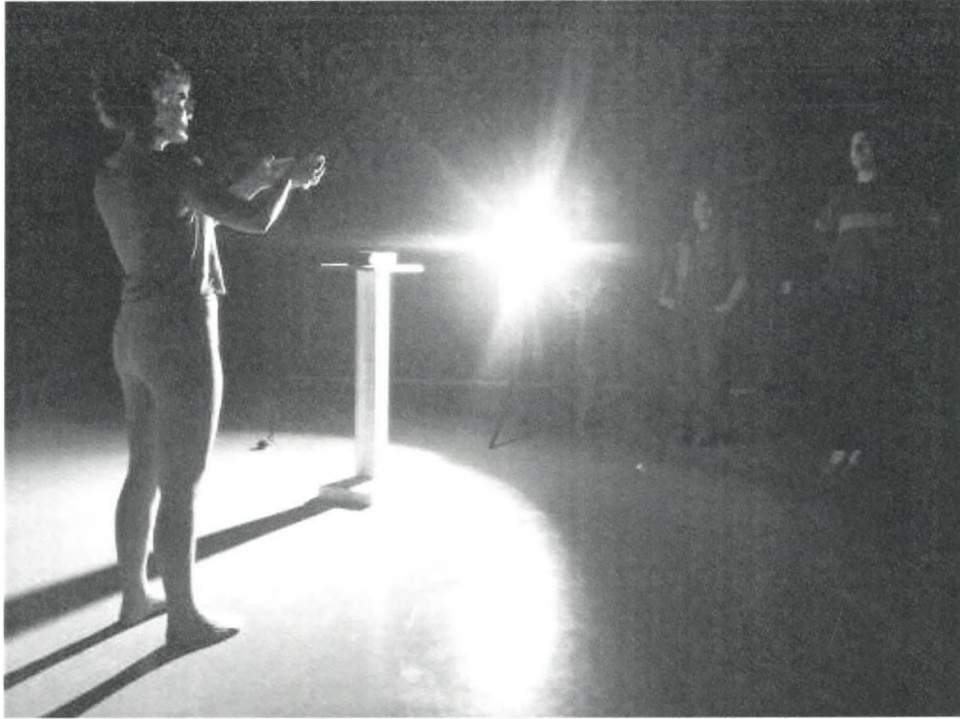


Figure 25. Photo from *I never knew you, yet...*⁴³

This interactive performance began with a member of the audience being handed a post-it note with the above title handwritten upon it. They were asked to read it aloud to the group before entering the black box theater space of the IMRC. The theater was in nearly complete darkness except for a work lamp illuminating the space where I stood wearing only a well-worn t-shirt, translucent tights and underwear. I held an empty glass bowl between two outstretched hands for approximately 17 minutes while the following narrative played in my whispered voice on a cassette player:

It's ok, you don't have to look away. What will you do, I wonder? Will you look me in the eyes? What do you see in there? Do you remember being born? Close your eyes. Do you remember when you were new and alive and everything was what it hadn't been moments before. When are things new like that? Close your eyes! By the time I was born we had already been to the moon. Sometimes I forget to consider what it must have taken to get that far. What are you holding onto? What is that about? Are you ashamed? When

⁴³ Photo by Kris Mason, 2014.

you look back on it now, do you have regrets? Do you feel your body change; the blood rushing to your cheeks? What if you let go? What if we disagree? Do you remember growing taller and losing teeth? Did you slam the door? Open your eyes. Remember when you laughed so hard you came undone? What do you see now? Can you see what I'm feeling? What happened? Did you ask everyone? Can you hear me? Do you want to know what I'm thinking? Why aren't I as kind as I could be? What does it take to give something of myself? How do I let go? Will I remember? Come closer. When will we learn to forgive ourselves? What happens when this thing that was a certain way just isn't anymore? Who will you be then? Do you want to know what I'm thinking? What can I do? What if it isn't enough? How do we keep not doing something? What are we doing? What will I make of myself? Why haven't I yet? Do you understand what's going on? Can you believe it? If I never have children will there be anyone to take care of me when I die? How could anyone be disposable? Who isn't worth your time? Here I am. "I never knew you, yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save you..."

The recording of the above internal monologue could barely be heard underneath static interference that I had added to the recording to draw the viewers in – to coax them into getting closer to me in order to hear the questions being asked. The monologue repeated one time, words and phrases more recognizable the second time but also competing with a louder form of interference (which carried associations of rain, a crackling fire, an avalanche, crumbling walls, ripping seams). After the second round of the above monologue there were 3 more minutes of static interference before the performance ended. I maintained a stance holding the bowl with visible difficulty allowing the audience/viewers to engage with me however they felt called to do so. This project was a consideration of what it means to be vulnerable and strong (even erotic?) simultaneously; how these associations affect our decisions to interact with, our ability to see parts of ourselves in, even struggle alongside of, strangers and friends.

I wanted to draw attention to the fact that we are in relationship with one another, and isn't it absurd how often we take that for granted? There are all kinds of invisible/silent or unintelligible/internal things going on within and around each of us all of the time, how can we begin to look closer to try and understand some of those things that we take for granted, or even the things that we never knew were possible. I was exploring what I can do with my body and words to slow down time, to create a sense of connection/tension/wonder either between friends,

stranger(s) and myself; to get people to feel that we are alive and in community? To consider what that means in terms of our responsibilities to one another.

An empty vessel suggests both an offering and a request/plea. If you can't see what (if anything) I'm holding you don't know which it is until you engage with me in some way.

Similarly, the standpoint of the questions (meaning, from whom the questions are stemming and whom they are addressing) can shift throughout the piece, signifying that the audience can be both the recipient and subject of the various questions and hopefully allowing them to identify with a variety of perspectives. How much can we ask of another? What happens if you dare to trust a stranger with your own vulnerability, to do something with them because you can see yourself somewhere in or tied to their situation? How far are you willing to go for another person's well being? What influences the lengths to which we will or will not venture, and how might I be able to push that boundary? This is a way to communicate about and interrogate personal and collective systems of value.

Bridge, April 2014

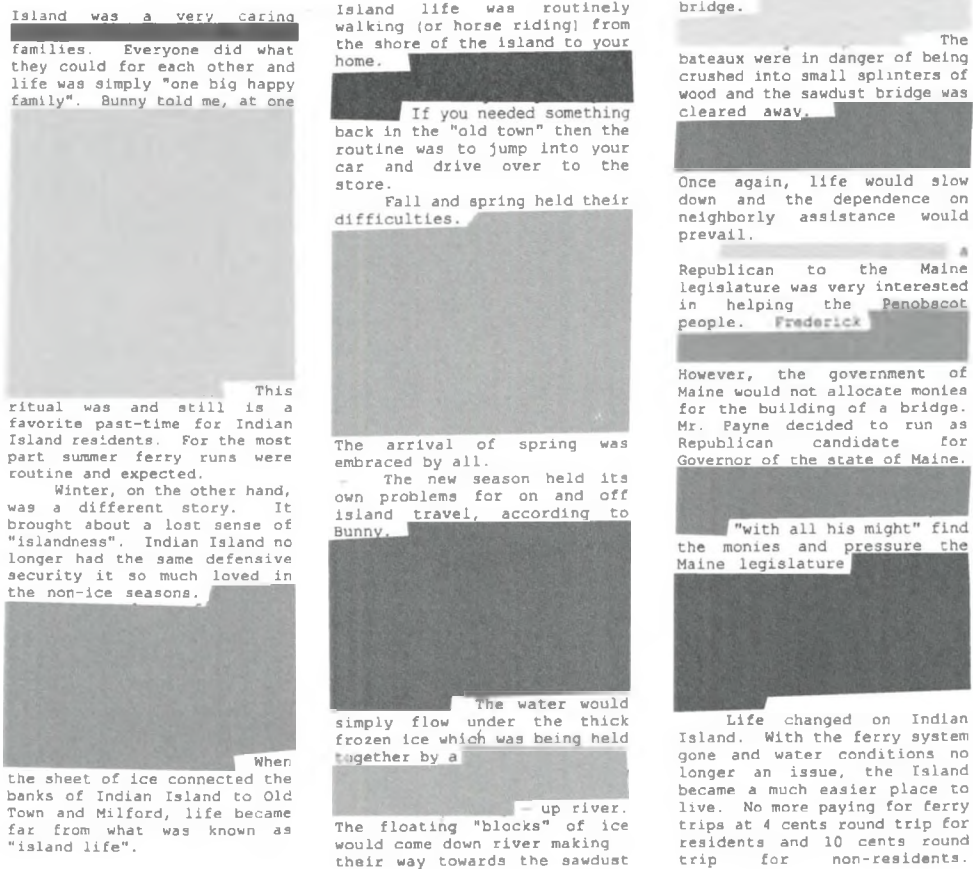


Figure 26. Masked page from *The Bridge*

Installed as a part of the Graduate Student Expo in 2014, *Bridge* is a video, audio, and text based work made in collaboration with Kris Mason and Yeshe Parks. On the screen, a video played of three perspectives from the bridge that connects Old Town, Maine to Indian Island, the last remaining land of the Penobscot people in the United States. The video is masked by blocks of color based on what each of us could recollect after filming – that which we could remember was masked, while that which we forgot was left visible. This same process was applied to the story, *The Bridge*, by John B Mitchell, written about the bridge in the video. The story was split

into three sections. Each of us read a section and then recorded ourselves trying to retell the part of the story we had read. Whatever we remembered, we blocked off in the printed text of the story, and whatever we didn't recall was left visible. Each audio piece could be listened to in connection to the text.

Bridge is an exploration of borders and contrasting recollections - physical borders in land as well as the borders or boundaries in the mind that emerge in the process of remembering. The spaces between what was memorable and what was forgotten, the territory that is both of no consequence and a significant crossroad. With a focus on place and history, Bridge documents what is left behind in the distinctions between and overlaps of our shared recollections of the bridge between Indian Island and Old Town, the state of Maine, and the United States.

In thinking about the place or non-place of borderlands, this work is an attempt to be in, engage with, and disrupt the notions of border spaces that function solely as lines of distinction. Borders as places where things meet; boundaries as convergences as well as symbols of separation. What happens to the forgotten and/or 'un-notable' details? Do these elements of a place or event serve as signifiers of situational or cultural privilege? And if so, how do we deal with that?

Settlements, April 2014

Materials: bleach, 15 boards of 2" x 6" x 12' lumber, cinder blocks, tarp, ladders, plywood, bricks, papier mache paste (cornstarch and water), white bodies, historical documents printed on white paper.

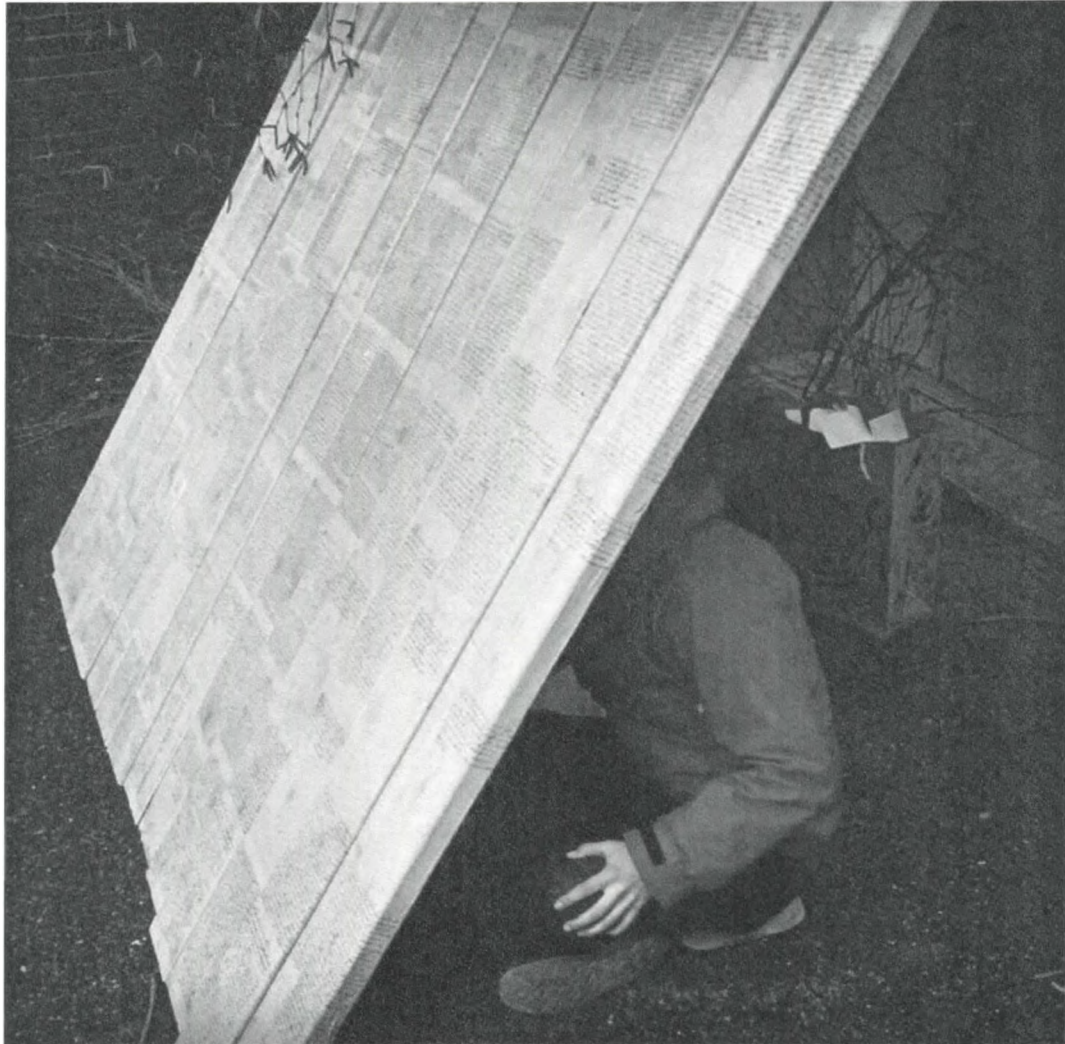


Figure 27. Photo of the lean-to in *Settlements*⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Photo by Yeshe Parks, 2014.



Figure 28. Photo of *Settlements* at Zero Station⁴⁵

Settlements was a collaborative and durational art work developed in collaboration with Kris Mason for outdoor performance in Portland, Maine considering what we do/don't know about how we got to where we are. This performance investigates the stories we tell about place and identity, focusing on histories of racism in Maine and in the United States. Specifically, this project considered the colonization of the indigenous people of Maine. In using historical documents from this period and everyday materials (such as bleach and corn starch), *Settlements* looked closely at what has been obscured in the telling of our national history, as well as the ways that whiteness, as a symbol of racial superiority, functions in this obscuring process. Over the course of seven hours we pasted documents from this history to a lean-to against the Portland, Maine gallery, Zero Station. This process was a way of asking: what day-to-day behaviors and activities are contributing to the maintenance of not knowing about this history? What are we doing to remember? What are we doing to forget? What shelters us and what are we building

⁴⁵ Photo by Yeshe Parks, 2014.

towards? Underneath a secondary makeshift shelter, we had piles of the documents available for reading, with typed translations, as the 18th and 19th century scripts were often difficult to read. In making this shelter outside of Zero Station we were engaging in a kind of settling – mimicking a part of the process of settlement or colonization, and also creating a space in which we could settle for a moment and remember or learn more about this part of our own history.

The Gift of Fear/American gHosts, October 2014



Figure 29. Photo from *The gift of Fear/American gHosts*⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Photo by Kris Mason, 2014.

This socially engaged ephemeral performance was born out of a desire to interact with and respond to that which haunts us (as human beings, and as Americans in particular). It was designed in response to a local culture of fear and a national culture of violence. The experiment began when I left my home in Orono, Maine on the evening of October 31st, 2014 and over the course of 3 hours walked door to door dressed in a mask and robe - as is the tradition of young people across the country on Halloween. When offered candy I declined and instead silently presented a small, handmade papier mache lantern as a gesture of kindness and hospitality to a consistently stunned, delighted and uncertain recipient, paused for a moment of recognition, and walked away. This action was an invitation to consider our communal relationship to the unexpected and to that which we fear – how do we decide who and when to trust? What are possible reactions to uncertainty and discomfort and how might kindness interrupt that? What happens when we offer something of ourselves to strangers?

Every now and then I fall apart, April 2015

Materials: standard issue parachute without lines, 20 electric fans of various shapes and sizes, cotton rope, and extension cords.



Figure 30. Photo from *Every now and then I fall apart* part one



Figure 31. Photo from *Every now and then I fall apart* part two⁴⁷

Every now and then I fall apart was an experiential installation and performance in collaboration with Kris Mason and Rachel Nelson. For twenty minutes Mason, Nelson and I improvised movement of our bodies, the fans and the parachute exploring limits and horizons, expectations of failure and success (both in material and performance terms) processes of attachment and detachment as they connect to a variety of landscapes - internal/relational terrains, gravity/levity, and the limits of life. At the end of the twenty minutes we all stepped out from

⁴⁷ Photos by Kris Mason, 2015.

underneath the parachute and the materials remained as an experiential installation open for reflection of and on these landscapes.

The process of creating this installation - identifying and locating materials, assembling them and negotiating their relationship to one another as well as their relationship to us, the collaborators – was in itself a part of the project. Although we had collaborated on numerous projects in the past, we were thinking of the research, development, and installation of this work as an experimental preliminary model for an ongoing collaborative practice. How might we create a framework of collaboration within and in response to change, distance, time, and attachment? This project served as a foundational jumping off point for the research and development of our collaborative thesis framework.

We are considering what it means to experience - and reckon with - multiple, contradictory realities at once: falling, flying, motion, stillness, tension, connection, expansion, levity, bursting, supporting, lifting, lightness, gravity, loss, control, and heights. How can we let something go without letting everything go? Utilizing research in queer theory, embodied practice, durational performance, intersubjective epistemologies, the ideas of failure and wasting time, assemblage, and re/upcycling objects, this project connects threads between both of our individual art practices and seeks to explore materially our theoretical/conceptual concerns.

The Museum of What's Left, April 2015



Figure 32. *The Museum of What's Left*



Figure 33. Objects in the sink from *The Museum of What's Left*

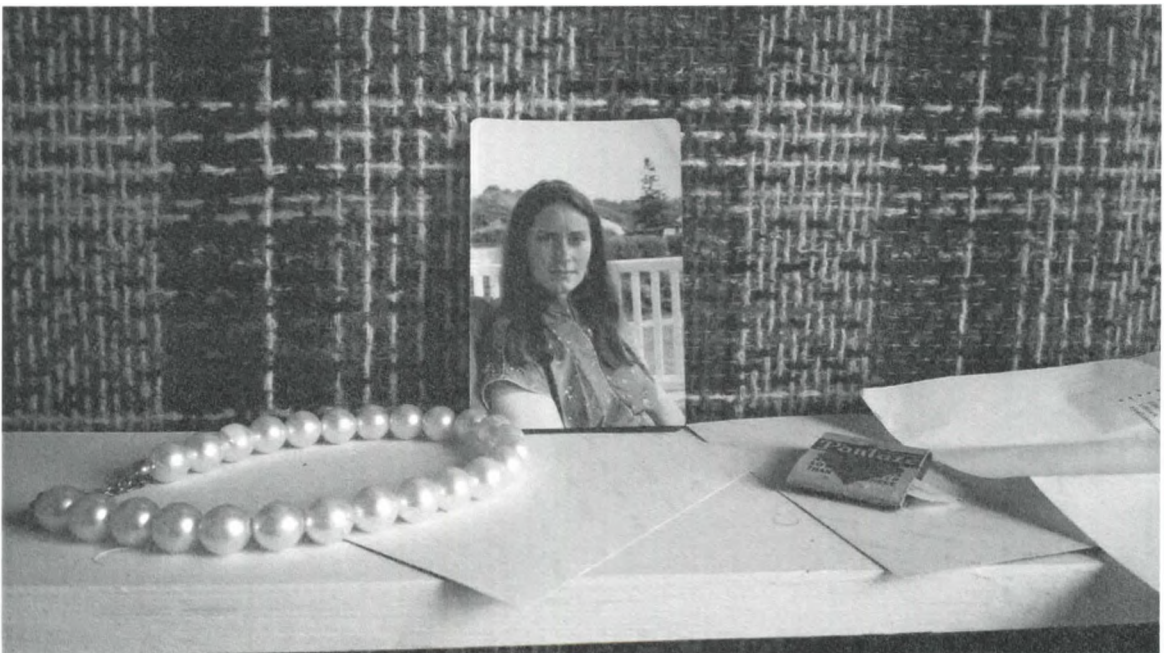


Figure 34. Objects on the shelf inside *The Museum of What's Left*

after leaving, they become



Figure 35. *Two Bottles from after leaving, they become*

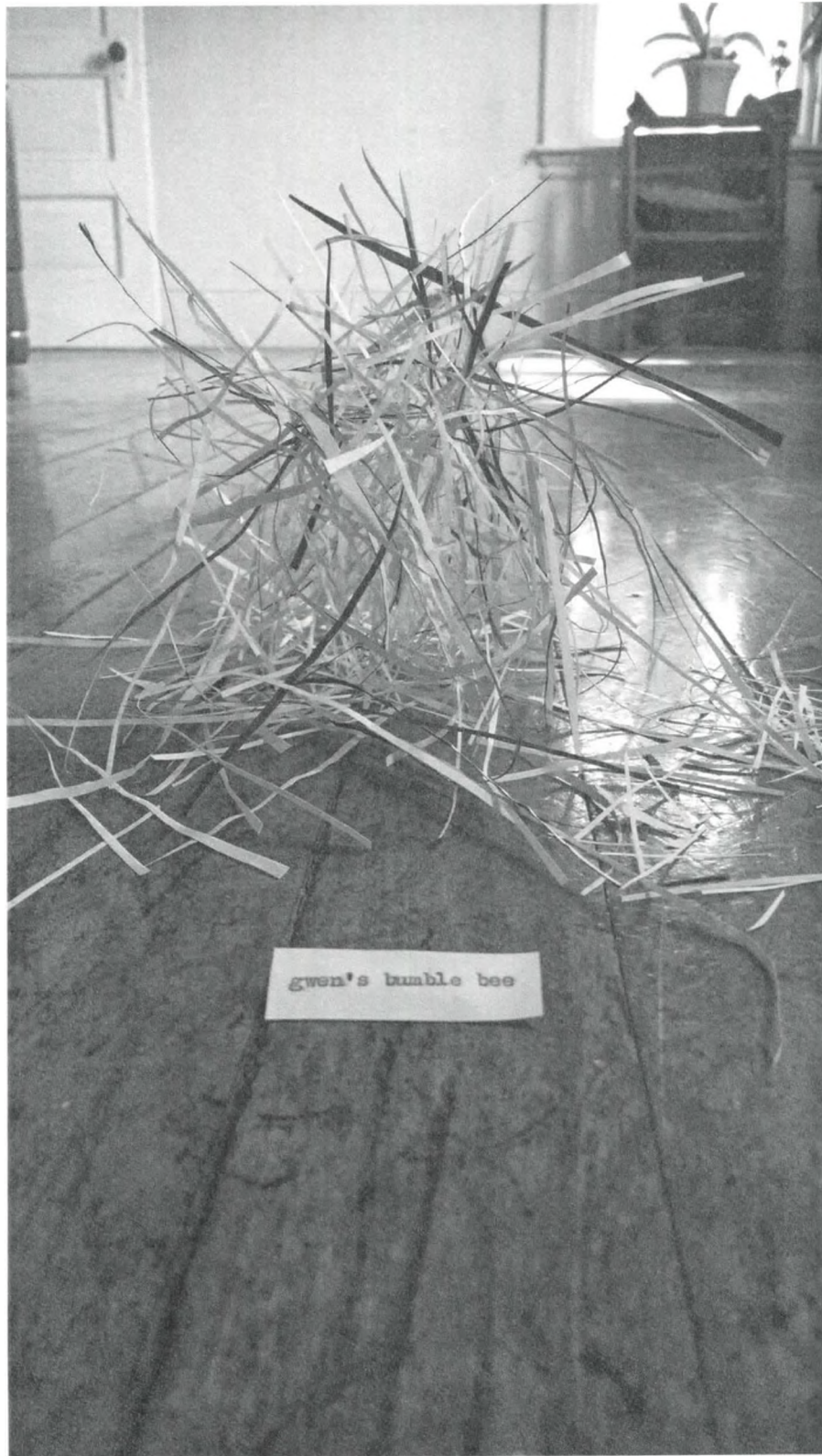


Figure 36. *gwen's tumble bee* from *after leaving, they become*



Figure 37. *stuff from after leaving, they become*

After *The Museum of What's Left* closed, the group of collaborators equally distributed the remaining items and determined how to deal with them individually. I titled my collection *after leaving, they become* and gave myself the following constraints: not to add but only subtract from the given materials of the objects I was responsible for, and to include some element of each distinct item in the final installation(s). Each piece was given its own title and installed for a day in a gallery space along with the other collaborator's works.

Things are like things are not what they seem: a queer performance workshop about being present in and with your body and being playful in and with your mind, October 2015



Figure 38. Photo of an activity about objects telling stories from *Things are like things...*⁴⁸

This immersive installation and workshop was designed specifically for a group of theater students at Hollin's University working to create original performance works involving

⁴⁸ Photo by Rachel Nelson, 2015.

queerness, bodies, identity and sexuality. Together, over the course of 4 hours, we explored radical storytelling practices while inside of an immersive installation on the first floor of a house that I assembled prior to their arrival for the workshop. Students entered into the space they knew to be a professor's home and discovered a tower of chairs stacked like a barricade on top of the dining room table, all of the paintings were reversed on the walls and hung eschew, books were turned around on their shelves so that titles and bindings weren't visible but the seemingly empty leaves of pages were.

During the activity in the above figure, students had been invited to bring with them an object. After everyone placed their objects in the middle of the room we silently took turns making minimal adjustments to single items and creating a story out of their physical relationships to one another. This was a warm up for a similar activity that followed in which students were asked to tell a true story from their lives related to gender, their bodies, or identity. After everyone told a story we went around the group again, but the second time each student was given the task of re-telling someone else's story. Memories fail, details are lost, plotlines converge and melt together. This activity is a practice in establishing trust through shared vulnerability and care while creating a shared vocabulary/language for developing collaborative performance works.

(w) h o l e, December 2015



Figure 39. grass mustache from *(w) h o l e*



Figure 40. flower pit from *(w)hole*



Figure 41. corn dog from *(w)hole*



Figure 42. chicken breast from *(w)hole*



Figure 43. flower chest from *(w)hole*

(w)hole is an ongoing community engaged photo series being shot in various parts of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. This piece is about queer bodies as landscapes and containers, landscapes as bodies of cultural markers, and both as things we are continually navigating and have the capacity to (re)chart insofar as we can imagine their wilderness. In conversation, play and collaboration with each person I photograph, we are engaging with what is presupposed as natural and "unnatural" or inauthentic regarding identity and bodies, what makes a person whole, holes and hairs - where it grows and doesn't, is trimmed and isn't, what goes in and comes out of which holes, and how all of that is in constant dialogue with the topography, history and culture of place. After each photo shoot I ask for the collaborative subject to refer me to someone who they are connected to within the queer community of New Orleans to be the next subject as we co-create a living map of this community.



Figure 44. Photos from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, the living room



Figure 45. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, close up of garments

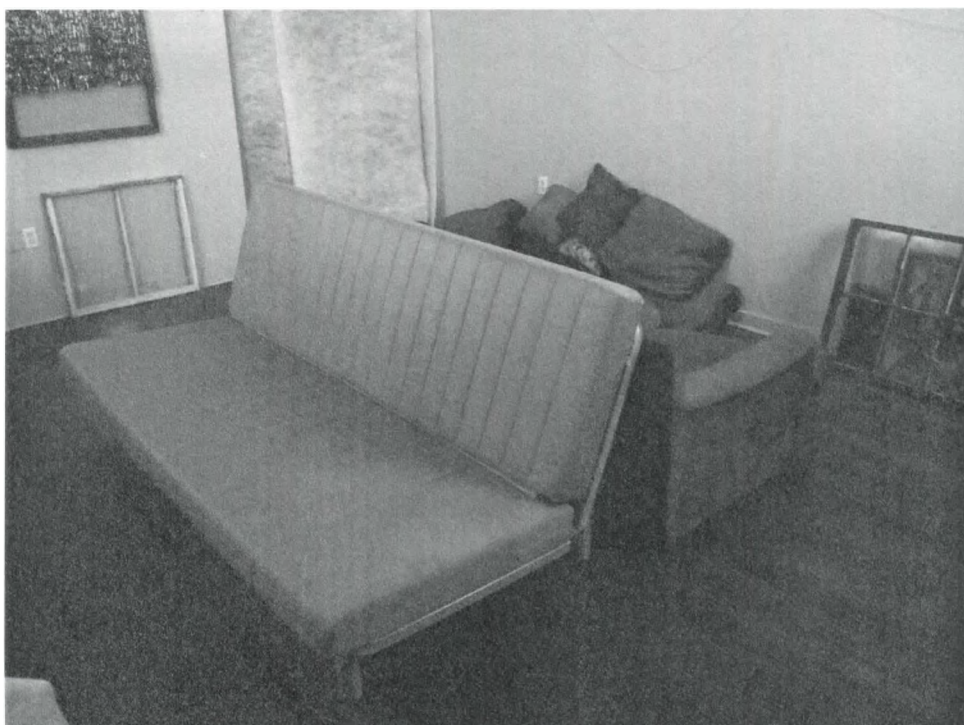


Figure 46. Photos from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, couches



Figure 47. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, legs



Figure 48. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, hallway



Figure 49. Photos from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, legs part 2



Figure 50. Photo/still of *the difference between concrete and cement* projected onto the hallway wall



Figure 51. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, kitchen table

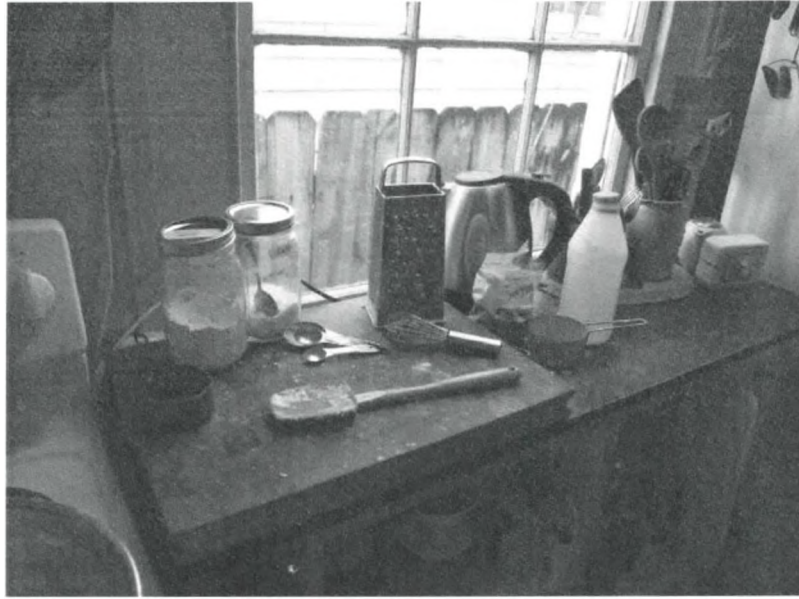


Figure 52. from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1*, making biscuits

For our collaborative thesis project, *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1 & 2*, Kris Mason and I created an immersive installation and performance in our home on Frenchmen Street in New Orleans as well as a reconfiguration of this event in Orono, Maine for our thesis show, *Without Borders VIII*. In New Orleans, participants were invited to Vol. 1, the installation/performance in our home, by handwritten letters mailed to their homes. On the night of the event, they were lured through a performance without bodies that included installation, sculpture, video, and audio and culminated in the backyard. *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE* explores bodies, identity, and the tensions between public and private spaces, public and private parts, and how, who, and what we share.

For the thesis show at the University of Maine in Orono, we installed *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 2* in the Lord Gallery. *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 2* is an installation using the materials from *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1* to create an altered home-like space. This installation is part evolution and part reconfiguration; it is documentation as material, a translation of a site-specific work into a new context. In response to Kaye's

observations about documentation, in particular where “the site’s documentation is used to foreground the paradoxes of representation itself,” we are interested in the absences and presences in the work (and in documentation). While this iteration of the project as a whole is not only documentation, we recognize traces of *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 1* that live on in the materials. As a nod to this, and to that aforementioned paradox, we hung framed photographs from the April 2nd event in the installation. There are also the stuffed nylon sculptures, a small couch, and a book shelf to recreate a similarly altered living room space. The difference between concrete and cement is projected on the wall above the couch and audio from the video fused with audio from (no)body and the kitchen plays from hidden speakers. There are homemade biscuits and remnants from the baking process that remain throughout the exhibition. Participants are invited to be in and interact with the space and the objects in it. *UNDERTHEIR/WHERE, Vol. 2* follows in the vein of *Vol. 1* as an investigation of the boundaries between public and private in life, art making, identity, and bodies.

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Sarah Hollows is an interdisciplinary and collaborative artist based in New Orleans, Louisiana. She explores identity, relationships and the human experience through the body in stillness and in motion, ordinary objects and everyday spaces, ephemeral activities, photography, sound and sculptural installation.

Sarah was born August 25, 1984 and raised up in and around the Twin Cities of Minnesota. In 2011 she received a Bachelor of Arts degree from St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN in Critical Studies of Race and Ethnicity. After working as a community organizer and baker for several years, she decided to pursue a life of artistic practice and creative inquiry at the University of Maine in Orono. While there she further developed a practice in embodied research, performance and collaborative, relational activities. In the Spring of 2015 she moved to New Orleans where she began exploring immersive installations in private spaces as well as ongoing socially engaged collaborations. Sarah is a candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Intermedia from the University of Maine in August 2016.