

**MOTHERGINGER, THE STORE:
A CONTAINMENT SYSTEM OF ONTOLOGICAL IN/DETERMINACY**

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A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design.

Thirthing Gallery, Markham, Ontario, November 20-27th, 2020

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2021

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to articulate a Sculpture as a phenomenon that can be experienced from inside and outside simultaneously in response to a non-linear conception of time. Through my practice-based research, I situate distraction as a productive form of knowing and utilize an onto-epistemological framework to explore performance as the labour of intra-action that materializes the art object (or phenomenon). I position containment as a technology to understand the entangled nature of humans, environment, and economy, and I explore Motherhood as a condition that requires an individual to be both subject and object. I draw on the work of many theorists, but central to this paper are the discussions of gender, material and ethics that I encountered in the work of Silvia Federici, Karen Barad and Zoë Sofia. Through my methodology of simile making, I situate the historical costume of Mother Ginger as an ongoing iterative artwork that invites viewers into it to reflect on relationships to the material and consumer world around us.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
SECTION 1: Theoretical Framework.....	7
<i>ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGY</i>	7
<i>COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGY: SIMILE + GAP</i>	11
SECTION 2: The Thesis Exhibition.....	13
<i>MOTHERGINGER</i>	13
<i>AS A STORE</i>	26
SECTION 3: A Conceptual Model.....	30
<i>CONTAINHERS</i>	30
SECTION 4: The Labour of Making.....	37
<i>PERFORMANCE: MEASUREMENT + LABOUR</i>	37
<i>THE DANCING BODY</i>	45
CONCLUSION	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY	55

LIST OF FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1: HAND DRAWING OF DIFFRACTION PATTERN PRODUCED BY TWO POINTS IN SPACE	11
FIGURE 2: MOTHERGINGER SIGN	14
FIGURE 3: SKETCH OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST BALLET’S VERSION OF MOTHER GINGER	15
FIGURE 4: BAG RACK	16
FIGURE 5: PROMOTIONAL POSTER	17
FIGURE 6: INSTALLATION VIEW OF MOTHERGINGER	18
FIGURE 7: INSTALLATION VIEW OF MOVING BLANKET	19
FIGURE 8: STILL OF PERFORMING WITH MOVING BLANKET	20
FIGURE 9: INSTALLATION VIEW OF GREEN SCREEN	21
FIGURE 10: INSTALLATION VIEW OF GUDETAMA EN POINTE	22
FIGURE 11: RAINBOW LOOM HAT	23
FIGURE 12: THE SKIRT IS A STORE: MULTIPLE PERFORMING BODIES POUR OUT OF IT.	26
FIGURE 13: MOTHER GINGER’S SKIRT AS A DWELLING	30
FIGURE 14: FLIP IT UPSIDE DOWN, IT’S A CONTAINER	30
FIGURE 15: THE CONTAINER MUST BE MADE, BUT BY WHO?	37
FIGURE 16: MULTIPLE BODIES MAKING MEASUREMENTS	37
FIGURE 17: SELF-PORTRAIT AS A MOTHER IN DRAG AS THE YOUNG MAN IN DRAG PLAYING MOTHERGINGER	39
FIGURE 18: SCREEN SHOT OF MOTHERGINGER’S INSTAGRAM @MOTHERGINGER_THE_STORE	43
FIGURE 19: WEARING A SKIRT: A MEASUREMENT-MAKING BODY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE CONTAINER.	45

INTRODUCTION

Making sculpture offers me a sense of stability and tangibility in an increasingly virtual and unstable world. Before starting my MFA, I had become interested in descriptions of the speculative time-complex, a term proposed by Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik to describe a disorienting experience of time where the future creates the present. This non-linear time is a response to the complexity of networks operating across virtual infrastructures. Within this complex, “human experience loses its primacy, as do the semantics and politics based on it”.¹ How is it possible for bodies to hold together while partaking in a system not built for human bodies, and which requires those bodies to be open, exposed, multiple, available? Coming into the Interdisciplinary Master’s of Art, Media, and Design Program, I wondered if sculpture had the capacity to speak and act within a virtual experience, providing some anchor points with which I could orient myself in this speculative temporality while still retaining its materiality. What would a sculpture look like as a system that could function across spatial and temporal distances? Would it be an object experienced from two positions simultaneously?

One of the core tenets of my practice is that the work I make arises out of my lived experiences and functions physically/magically/psycho-therapeutically to offer some articulation relevant to the world in which I partake. I have a tendency to change outfits multiple times throughout the day (even if I am at home alone all day), and I started to realize this might be a strategy I had developed for holding myself together as an individual inhabiting multiple roles: lover, mother, daughter, woman, friend, teacher, worker, artist... What roles and subjects did I not have clothes appropriate for? What might these look like, and in what context could I share them in?

¹ Avanessian, Armen, Suhail Malik. “The Speculative Time Complex”, In *The Time Complex. Post-Contemporary*. ([Name] Publications, 2016), 7.

My thesis project is a store called *MotherGinger* which functions as a containing device for sculptural garments that I use to explore subject formation. My research with this work has focused on the question: *What capacity does a costume have for modelling a system that functions across spatial and temporal distances and that can be experienced from inside and outside simultaneously?* In seeking an answer to this phenomenological question, I focused on a secondary question: *Do the limitations of physical bodies in a virtual system create conditions where distraction, or the inability to concentrate, becomes a way of knowing?* A type of grammar perhaps? *MotherGinger* models a container technology as a tangible theoretical model for how sculpture can be experienced from inside and outside simultaneously. The sculpture materializes through measurements made by competing demands for attention in the encounter. This project was first exhibited at Thirthing Gallery in November 2020, and it serves as my thesis exhibition. However, as I am exploring the capacity of this work to function across spatial and temporal distances, the project will carry on in other iterations building upon each overtime. While I will make references to this in the following pages, it is not a focus of the thesis paper.

My research questions are focused at two levels. First, I am interested in the overall structure: the network, temporally contingent experiences, and large concepts like global warming that Timothy Morton refers to as hyper-objects.² Second, I consider the minutiae of experience, the subjective world I physically encounter in day-to-day life. I visualize this double interrogation as an enormous garment *and* the materializing body that gets into it. My choice to focus on these two aspects of the work, while difficult for me to conceptually navigate within this paper, are evidence of my insistence on needing to learn to function from two places simultaneously as *both* object (the concept) and subject (the variable experience within it).

² Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

In my early installation work (2004-2009), I utilized architectural threshold spaces to explore the ontological experience of being between places, showing how barriers between spaces are also the connections between them, breaking down inside/outside, public/private binaries.³ These installations functioned representationally, situating the viewing experience outside of the installation. In 2015, I began to focus on clothing as the locus of a similar boundary where an interior subject meets the exterior world to situate the viewing/feeling body as the site of the non-binary moment.⁴ I explore this dynamic further in my current thesis work, creating situations where it is possible for viewers to enter the clothing, creating an experience aimed at focusing attention on the observing/being body.

Over the last thirteen years, I noticed that my experience of motherhood echoed some of the problems of subjectivity arising from living in today's virtual/physical world. My thesis work builds upon an iterative project I started in 2010 called *The Artist's Studio Is Her Bedroom: A Choreographed Statement of Autobiographical Art Making* that addressed some of my concerns around motherhood/subjecthood as a public/private dilemma.⁵ I continue to explore how a singular subjectivity can be the container for multiple subjectivities in this new work.

In our increasingly networked world, it feels pressing at an individual level and at a larger political scale to understand and develop a physical grammar of living multiple positions simultaneously. I believe that being able to live this grammar will give the capacity to live a healthy and embodied life amidst the pressures of the virtual world. In this thesis I explore how

³ See *Gingerbread Wall* (2004), *Objects to Move the Assemblage Point and Other Tools* (2005), *Proscenium Home* (2007) and *Window Display* (2009) at www.ericastocking.com

⁴ See my exhibition *Erica Stocking* (2015) at Artspeak in Vancouver: <https://artspeak.ca/erica-stocking-2/>

⁵ See the latest iteration of this work in a video tour of the project given by Kimberly Phillips while it was installed at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver in Spring 2020: <https://www.contemporaryartgallery.ca/video-podcast/video-tour-ericastocking/>

sculpture might offer the possibility of living dualities: Sculpture is a model by which to not only depict, but also feel, a dynamic position that is inside/outside, certain/uncertain, finite/infinite, figure/ground at the same time. I am seeking an epistemological perspective on the formation of bodies so that the ontology of a diffracted experience of the world can be a cohesive position from which an individual might operate. This is the onto-epistemological approach: that knowing arises from being, that knowing is an embodied practice. As you read this thesis alongside me, I invite you to feel in your body the ontological responses that create or negate the epistemologies referenced herein.

When my kids were little, I would often wake in the morning flat on my back, my body stiff and immobilized. To my left would be my one-year-old asleep with my boob in her mouth, and to my right my three-year-old: splayed across the bed, her arm in my hair and both legs flung across my belly. Somewhere on my pillow our cat would be curled up, purring. My arms would be bent up over my head making space for the kids, and I felt like a prone version of the central figure in Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*. This is a body making space for other's bodies. This is a figure functioning as a ground. This is a body unsure where it starts and stops. This is a body tired, sore, cranky, and yet surrounded by and filled with love. In the last few years, I have felt an intense short circuiting of life around me, within myself, in others, and in loved ones who have been unable to hold it all together and are tapped out. The intensity of the hurting right now seems unbearable. As individual and collective bodies we fall apart. I hope that making and experiencing art can give us tools to hold ourselves together in alternate ways when the tools we have fail us. Sometimes these tools look like costumes. Sometimes the tangibility of a cloth welcomes my body, holding it in a way that I conceptually and physically cannot, and I relax.

How does that feel/does that what I feel?

I am interested in phenomenology and focus on lived experiences in my work while grappling with the subject's relationship to objects, questioning the location of consciousness in an environment. Specifically, I identify with a Heideggerian phenomenology that puts existence before consciousness – yet I am wary of this position as open to structural inequalities of subjecthood and have immensely enjoyed feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's work in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* to this end as she explores how orientation is a construct, not a given. This is one of the reasons why I have chosen a framework of onto-epistemology, it recognizes that the act of becoming conscious is a relationship between multiple points, allowing for subjective experience, but not assuming its position or fixing it.

In this paper I utilize an onto-epistemological framework and a theoretical model of container technologies to approach the sculptural object as a phenomenon that materializes through performance. My utilization of performance is related to aspects of measurement and labour. This position is inspired by my reading of the Italian feminist scholar Silvia Federici, whose work on women, the body, and capitalism has been greatly influential to my practice over the last few years. In her latest book she speaks of the “natural limits” of a body, and I explore the implications of this through quantum physicist Karen Barad's observations about how matter comes to matter.

This paper is organized into four sections. In the first section I review onto-epistemology and my comparative methodology of simile. In the second, I situate the exhibition *MotherGinger* as a simile in relation to artistic precedents of stores. In the third, I explore container technologies as a conceptual model for *MotherGinger*. And in the last section I discuss how I employ performance as a practice-based research method where my active performing/labouring body is a measurement tool that creates matter which picks up on Federici's suggestion that

identifying “natural limits” of the body can provide the beginning of a common ground and a reclaiming of the body in contemporary capitalism.

After I pry the little bodies off and away from me, and gingerly get up with my now 80-year-old-feeling back so as not to wake the sleeping bodies, I get dressed. The act of getting dressed begins our daily choice of how we will move in the world: what clothes we put on anticipates the activities and environments we will find ourselves in: Adam and Eve cast out of the Garden of Eden clothe themselves and, as Simone Weil observes, “These are garments. ‘They were ashamed of their nakedness’”.⁶ A baby is born and is immediately swaddled; an astronaut leaving earth’s atmosphere needs a highly engineered space suit. Isn’t it interesting that the first spacesuit was designed by Playtex, a lingerie company well versed in the intricate and intimate needs of the human body?⁷

What we wear affects how we feel in a situation, as much as how we are perceived. I find clothing to be a useful object to explore the negotiation between a subject and the world in which the subject is formed. A garment is understood to be made *for* the surface of a body. I intuitively understand that I can get inside of it, and I experience it in relation to my body. This could be prompted by the empty space within, the association of trying clothes on in a store, or the familiar action people take every day in getting dressed in the morning. The *act* of dressing is a performative one, making all clothes costumes to a certain extent. What space is there in our day for play, for joy, to dream?

⁶ Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 68.

⁷ Fishman, Charles. “The improbable story of the bra-maker who won the right to make astronaut spacesuits”, In Fast Company, July 15, 2019. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90375440/the-improbable-story-of-the-bra-maker-who-won-the-right-to-make-astronaut-spacesuits>

SECTION 1: Theoretical Framework

ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGY

Have you ever experienced a moment when you wake up in the morning, and for a split second you are not sure where you are? Some feeling in your body, some memory in your head... That is the location of the theoretical framework I operate from: It is the moment upon waking from sleep — a coming to consciousness where one's reality re-assembles, where the distinction between dream and real is not so clear. I think of it as the “not quite”: not quite *here* or *there*. For me, this is a process of re-membering, re-assembling, of putting subjectivity back together every morning — consciously or not — within this, my specific body. It is a practice of locating myself in the world, in a particular time and space.

I invoke in this re-membering moment Karen Barad's onto-epistemological perspective which recognizes that being and knowing are an entwined dance. With a PhD in theoretical physics, Barad brings to feminist theory and new materialist discourses a focus on the ethics of matter. In their book, *Meeting The Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of matter and Meaning*, Barad explores “the epistemological and ontological issue that quantum physics forces us to confront, such as the conditions for the possibility of objectivity, the nature of measurement, the nature of meaning making, and the relationship between discursive practices and the material world.”⁸ Their work builds off physicist Neil Bohr's lesson at the heart of quantum mechanics that “we are a part of that nature we seek to understand.”⁹ Barad puts forward onto-epistemology as a framework that recognizes “knowing is a material practice of

⁸ Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), 24.

⁹ Barad, 26.

engagement as part of the world in its differential becoming.”¹⁰ In the text, “What is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice” they describe how observing a vacuum always introduces something into it which leads to the observation that “the agencies of observation are inseparable from that which is observed.”¹¹ The classic example of this dynamic is Bohr’s two slit experiment that demonstrated that the act of observation registered light as either a particle or a wave.¹² This means that *how* something is explored does not merely produce reactions (i.e., fast or slow particles), but substantially changes *what* that thing is (light is a wave, or it is particle). Quantum ontology tells us that individual objects do not pre-exist, but rather are formed in the moment of observation “where *phenomena* are the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies.”¹³ This demolishes the classical view of the world in which objects have “determinate boundaries and properties that precede some interaction.”¹⁴ When I encountered these ideas, I found ground to explore sculpture as a dynamic system that could operate in a speculative time-complex. *Phenomena* describes what I had been exploring in my early installation work: that the space which seems to separate things is also the space that ties them together. Barad describes this as a “cut together-apart (one move).”¹⁵

I find this approach useful as I consider how in our “networked” culture, different perspectives (occupied positions in space) are registered simultaneously and appear to shrink time (since there is no space to be measured). As individual bodies we are limited by our

¹⁰ Barad, 89.

¹¹ Barad, Karen. “What is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice”. In 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, Number 99, (Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 6.

¹² See Chapter 2 of Meeting the Universe Halfway for Barad’s discussion of this.

¹³ Barad, “What Is The Measure of Nothingness?”, 7.

¹⁴ Barad, 6.

¹⁵ Barad, Karen. “Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart.” *Diffracted Worlds - Diffractive Readings: Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 4.

capacity to position ourselves based on the limited reach of our senses. The tools we utilize for locating our positions in virtual space have become organized by larger systems that can encompass wider swaths of people and experiences, and our reach itself is thus fully mediated. Franco “Bifo” Berardi, an Italian philosopher in the autonomist tradition, refers to this condition as that of governance where “[g]overnance produces pure functionality without meaning, the automation of thought and will.”¹⁶ Chus Martinez, a Spanish curator whose work I have been following for the last few years, pushes against this condition and references the philosopher Vilem Flusser to point out that we need “a language that measures as well as maps, describes as well as depicts. There is no single language, discipline or realm of knowledge that can alone handle the task of dealing with the world.”¹⁷ The nature and notion of measurement is at the core of quantum physics, and Barad’s position that “[m]easurements are world-making: matter and meaning do not pre-exist, but rather are co-constituted via measurement intra-actions”¹⁸ gives a tangible description for approaching the grammar of the language Martinez refers to. What does a language that “measures as well as maps” feel like? Barad uses the term intra-action rather than interaction very intentionally:

The usual notion of interaction assumes that there are individual independently existing entities or agents that pre-exist their acting upon one another. By contrast the notion of ‘intra-action’ queers the familiar sense of causality (where one or more causal agents precede and produce an effect), and more generally unsettles the meta-

¹⁶ Berardi, “Bifo” Franco. “Cognitarian Subjectivation.” (E-Flux Journal, Number 20, 2010), 3.

¹⁷ Martinez, Chus. “Forget About the Middle Class.” (Mousse, Volume 52, 2015), 177.

¹⁸ Barad, “What Is The Measure of Nothingness?”, 6.

physics of individualism (the belief that there are individually constituted agents or entities, as well as times and places).¹⁹

Intra-action acknowledges that both the observed and the observer are co-constituting each other through the process of measurement; “Intra-actions are practices of making a difference, of cutting together-apart, entangling-differentiating (one move) in the making of phenomena.”²⁰ In this way the tool of measurement experiences both sides (or at a quantum level the in/finite possibilities) of the cut simultaneously. Might we say that sculpture as a system is then a phenomenon rather than an object to acknowledge this intra-action?

I make sculpture, which takes a variety of forms and materials. I make sculpture because it helps me get close to the world, because it helps me understand it, because it has the capacity to create something material which tells my body how to understand the situation of it. Sculpture as phenomena shifts, grows, and changes: This is the capacity for grammar that art has. It recognizes that the encounter between a viewing body and a sculptural form is one of ontological in/determinacy: a relationship of infinite potentialities of determinate positions. A poetic entanglement of becoming. The most beautiful description of an electron I have encountered is Barad’s: “the electron is a structureless point particle ‘dressed’ with its intra-actions with virtual particles: it intra-acts with itself (and with other particles) through the mediated exchange of virtual particles.”²¹ I borrow this description as a metaphor for the body continually waking up to the world: a bare point particle dressed in in/determinate possibilities.

Applying an onto-epistemological approach to making sculpture means thinking the context, objects, and subjects simultaneously because they are all intra-acting. This is why I

¹⁹ Kleinman, Adam. “Intra-actions.” In *Mousse* (no. 34, Summer 2012, pp. 76-81), 77.

²⁰ Barad, “What Is the Measure of Nothingness?”, 7.

²¹ Barad, 14.

position sculpture as a system instead of object, because there is a set of interrelated elements that comprise the sculpture. What is a grammar of the in/determinate? *MotherGinger* is something to play with to find/learn this grammar, as my doll,²² my avatar,²³ my naked electron dressed in infinite potentialities.

COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGY: SIMILE + GAP

I use a comparative methodology in my studio practice which I refer to as a *simile*. In a simile, a comparison using ‘like’ or ‘as’, *this thing/situation/here-where-I-am/the installation of MotherGinger* is “like” *that thing/situation/there-that-I-remember/a retail store/a theatrical set/a gallery*. The key is that “it” *isn’t* “that”: the experience is neither, thus challenging classical ontology. This is an *and-not*²⁴ situation, a positive and negative, light as particle and wave at the same time it is neither. Seen through onto-epistemology, the experience of a simile could be understood as diffraction pattern produced by the difference between two points in space.²⁵

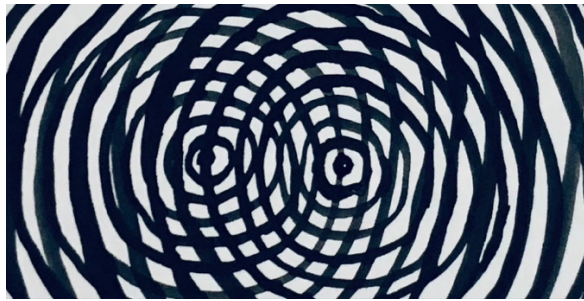


FIGURE 1: Hand drawing of diffraction pattern produced by two points in space.

²² See Hal Foster’s discussion of dolls in “Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties: Anthropomorphic Avatars in Dada and at the Bauhaus,” In *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, (Sternberg Press: 2011).

²³ See the digital Avatar Instagram Influencer Lil Miquela (@lilmiquela)

²⁴ This is a phrase I learned in a dream I had in January 2021, where I was talking to the New York artist K8 Hardy who was driving a bus I was travelling on.

²⁵ Barad’s discussion of diffraction builds on Donna Haraway’s initial use of diffraction as a cultural analysis tool to replace reflection as a way of knowing, thus shifting the concept of difference from oppositional to collaborative. See Chapter 2 in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* for a further discussion on diffraction patterns.

By making artwork as simile, I make space, a gap, within the viewing encounter. This gap is the space where the “art” occurs, where imagination is activated, where im/possibilities collide. In bridging a gap, assumptions are made, prejudices are often reinforced, and our own biases become clear. And yet — surprise, delight, fancy, and new perspectives are also possible. It is here the political potential of art is located,²⁶ not in the specific content of a work but in the space it makes for thinking. The gap allows a moment of pause that activates our brains and bodies to negotiate our relationship to these things. In a simile, a viewer must locate themselves between places, between the thing they are encountering and the ideas of the thing they are encountering.²⁷ It is a spatio-temporal practice that spans a physical and virtual field, a triangulation,²⁸ where the viewer themselves becomes the known piece of the measurement device.

A simile runs alongside: it is the “not quite” or uncanny quality I look for in my work. Here the art is an *and-not*: it *is*, and yet...it *isn't*. This is what a costume can facilitate in a play; it is a tool to locate the actor physically within the story, and yet still understand oneself as outside of it at the same time. This is true for both for the viewer and for the actor. What diffraction pattern is produced by being inside and outside at the same time? Does the very concept of inside and outside as pre-existing conditions simply reiterate a classical ontology, and instead we must think of these states as being produced by intra-acting agencies?

In her discussion of oceanic states (which I liken to swimming in the void), Artist and scholar Jackie Wang suggests that crucial to the process of materialization “an artist must

²⁶ Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (Verlag:1977).

²⁷ Harman, Graham. *Object Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. (New York: Random House, 2018). Harman describes how in a metaphor the viewer replaces the object.

²⁸ Triangulation, or parallax, is a strategy for measuring objects at great distance from an observer based on a change in the observer’s point of view: see these explanatory videos for a quick introduction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Saw1Eg2iZaI>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwIMmJs1f5o>

oscillate between different modes of perception and awareness because the oceanic state, like dream states, resists signification.”²⁹ This oscillation functions similarly to the Pilates springs I use in my Original Yin Qi Gong practice where the springs are built to oscillate and absorb the minute tension in my muscles that use them.³⁰ Significantly, the springs work best when you fall asleep while using them, and the conscious mind can take a backseat to the intelligence of the fleshy body. An artwork built to oscillate can function in the same way, absorbing tension in viewers' bodies, inviting a dream state in which the mind rests within the intelligence of the physical body.

A gap is needed for oscillation to occur, and we can see oscillation as the process of measuring this gap or experiencing the diffraction in order to situate ourselves in relation to large, complex (unreachable) objects. If in the facilitating environment of an economy that anticipates my commodity needs before I even have the chance to desire them, “the space is so saturated, the pressure of all which wants to be heard so strong that I am no longer capable of knowing what I want,”³¹ then there is no gap to be crossed, no measurement to make, and thus no way to materialize the space (the object/myself) which holds the void within.

SECTION 2: The Thesis Exhibition

MOTHERGINGER

MotherGinger, The Store is an ongoing iterative project conceptualized as a sculpture that stores, or gathers, my ongoing explorations with clothing into subject formation. In the

²⁹ Wang, Jackie. *Oceanic Feeling*. (Montreal: Friendship as a Form of Life, 2017), 15.

³⁰ Original Yin is a practice developed by Albert Chang to train individuals in healing practice using gym training techniques. He operates a gym by the same name in Vancouver, BC.

³¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication*. (California: Semiotext(e), 2012), 28.

following pages I will share the first iteration of this project which occurred in November 2020 at Thirthing Gallery, a new gallery situated in the light industrial neighbourhood of Markham, Ontario.

Walking into the exhibition, a body first encountered the title wall on which a sign carved in foam, sickly green and wet with resin, hung.



FIGURE 2: *MotherGinger* Sign.

That body might have heard Australian Pop singer Kylie Minogue’s newly released album *Disco* playing. Or perhaps, unable to visit in person, saw the related Instagram post and heard my invitation via Minogue: “Jump in my ride (beep beep), we gonna have a good time. We gonna have a good time....”³²

I get dressed in the costume of a store called *MotherGinger* when I go to work as an artist. The name comes from the beloved drag character in Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* ballet who wears an enormous hoop skirt concealing eight young dancers. *This* Mother Ginger appears for one dance in the second act of the ballet during a banquet held in honour of Clara and the Nutcracker Prince, the protagonists. The young dancers emerge from Mother Ginger’s skirt to perform acrobatic tricks while she fawns over them before ushering them back inside and

³² Minogue, Kylie. “Fine Wine,” track 14 on *Disco* deluxe edition. BMG, 2020, Spotify.

waddling off stage.³³ I am fascinated by this costume: the skirt is like a tent, a dwelling, a container, a gathering tool.



FIGURE 3: Sketch of The Pacific Northwest Ballet's version of Mother Ginger

Not only does the dance evoke a birthing or multiplying of children, but the children also return to the skirt as if it is their home, their resting place. I am reminded of baby chicks running under a mother hen. I am reminded of my children as toddlers tangling themselves up in my skirt when meeting strangers. In the exhibition setting, one encountered these eight child dancers as mannequins wearing garments that the *MotherGinger* boutique stocks, as you, dear viewer, learn in conversation during your visit. Yes, *MotherGinger* is a store. Dressed in this store/costume of *MotherGinger* I think I am big enough to make space for you. I'm held sturdily enough to offer you a ride, even if I don't know where it will lead.

As a mother, I am concerned about our young people. I am concerned I don't have the skills to navigate my children through this era of social media, vast information, and capacity for communication at our fingertips. French philosopher Michel Serres describes these young people

³³ Intended as a bit of comic relief, the short dance seems more vaudeville than ballet and harkens back to the Commedia Dell'arte origins of the character's children. They are sometimes referred to as Polichinelles and are inspired by the character Pulcinella who plays a double role — as master and servant conversely depending on the encounter.

in *Thumbelina: The Culture and Technology of Millennials* as able to “manipulate several forms of information at the same time, yet they neither understand it, nor integrate it, nor synthesize it as do we, their ancestors. They no longer have the same head.”³⁴ He goes on to compare them to Saint Denis who, having been beheaded, picks up his head and walks on: “After the beheading, what is left on our shoulders? An innovative and enduring intuition. The learning process, which has fallen into the box, has left us the incandescent joy of invention. Has this condemned us to become intelligent?”³⁵ Serres’s description is perhaps the most hopeful perspective I have encountered in literature on the effects of technology on our brains. It opens for me the possibility of learning a grammar located a headless body.³⁶ After all, being headless does not mean we are unthinking.³⁷



FIGURE 4: Promotional Poster

³⁴ Serres, Michel. *Thumbelina: The Culture and Technology of Millennials*. (trans. Daniel W. Smith KINDLE EDITION), 19.

³⁵ Serres.

³⁶ Or remembering one.

³⁷ For an engaging description of gut intelligence see: Enders, Julia. *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ*. (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2015). And for an earlier, but drier account of this connection see: Gershon, Michael. *The Second Brain: Your Gut has a Mind of Its Own*. (Toronto: Harper, 2003).



FIGURE 5: Bag Rack

The first room of the exhibition after the title wall contains a single sculpture consisting of a tubular steel rack with eight small canvas bags with an M+G painted on either side.³⁸ These bags are the perfect size to cover your head, hold your head, or perhaps just carry your phone, keys, and wallet. At any rate they are an invitation to shop — perhaps a nod to an “It” bag many fashion brands get their legs with. Onto-epistemology recognizes that *how I am thinking is a way of being*, but it also “affirms that ontology changes with epistemology.”³⁹ Serres might hazard that indeed we will be headless in the future we are headed toward.

Passing through what appear to be the cheapest IKEA shower curtains, if you notice these sorts of things, is the second room of the *MotherGinger* exhibition. Here are the eight

³⁸ The rack is in fact a replica Eileen Gray Adjustable Table E1027 turned upside down and propped up on foam strips.

³⁹ van der Tuin, Iris. “Diffraction as a Methodology for Feminist Onto-Epistemology: On Encountering Chantal Chawaf and Posthuman Interpellation.” In *Diffractioned Worlds - Diffractive Readings: Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities*. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 71.

mannequins I mentioned earlier. Along with Thumbelina's headless state, we might need to recall the concept of the body without organs introduced by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari in their book *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.⁴⁰ For, at a surface level, these bodies are all bone with a thin layer of flesh. Exoskeleton structures of plaster and latex are aspects of bodies in space: legs, head, pelvis, shoulders... Situated as they are, we might call it an installation. The white plastic curtains describe the four walls, and we intuit we are inside something: A store? A gallery? The shower? This is a *Show... er*? The music playing evokes a trip to the mall, and the drop ceiling and pod lights are reminiscent of an office space.



FIGURE 6: Installation View of *MotherGinger*.

⁴⁰ Deleuze, Gilles, Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 19.

The mannequins here, if they were undressed should you be so lucky, might strike you as variables as they do for me. Not bodies, but placeholders reminiscent of the X you might find in an algebraic equation. Not something, but anything, and by being anything, resolutely being something. They stand in as potential, as body-voids. The mannequins ambiguously fill the void of the garments they wear, and consequently ask the viewer to negotiate them as we might a body without organs. In that intra-action the garment's possibilities materialize, as costume, prop, fashion garment, or sculpture. The experience of the exhibition encounter holds open through simile the space for diffractive mattering to occur depending on how the viewer situates themselves in the encounter. Let me share a few of these *phenomena* with you.



FIGURE 7: Installation View of Moving Blanket



FIGURE 8: Still of performing with *Moving Blanket*

Moving Blanket is made to protect you when you're trying to keep warm, when you don't feel yourself, when you'd rather be a well-protected object than the Artist-subject who makes it. It is made from a moving blanket I found in Plug In Institute of Art's prep room while I was on a residency there in 2018. There are holes cut into the blanket at sporadic intervals in which you can insert your various limbs, making it a multi-purpose sheet to form around awkward bodies. "Strike a pose...Shake that thing from left to right...move it like that you're dynamite...show the world who you are (see you at the bar),"⁴¹ Minogue narrates.

⁴¹ Minogue, Kylie. "Fine Wine," track 14 on *Disco* deluxe edition. BMG, 2020, Spotify.

Costumes hold both physical (material) and conceptual (virtual) space for a body to mediate between abstract and tangible, visible and invisible, potential and finite. They are objects which contain subjects, or objects which *are* subjects that hold bodies as objects; forms that contain narrative either by their surface qualities or the bodies which activate them.



FIGURE 9: Installation View of *Green Screen*

Green Screen Collection allows you to inhabit the meta-subject of the vector: the nameless body who inhabits the body-which must-be erased. Holes puncture the green screen morph suit revealing flesh, prompting the pleasure of skin in the garment of its erasure.



FIGURE 10: Installation view of *Gudetama en pointe*

And here are a pair of shoes: *Gudetama en pointe*. These are a child's ankle boot whose soles have begun to detach, painted to be paused in their moment of dissolution. They are painted yellow and white in honour of the lazy anime egg. As footwear too cheap to fix properly and not meant to last, they become high-heeled shoes on feet too big to fit. Walking in an-other's shoes transforms how you move and what those shoes can do: Kylie asks us "Won't you be, won't you be, won't you be my dance floor darling?"⁴² as the soles flap open and closed in response to tentative steps.

⁴² Minogue, Kylie. "Dance Floor Darling," track 10 on *Disco* deluxe edition. BMG, 2020, Spotify.

There is a certain proximity between things where the difference is small, and their separateness becomes unstable, causing oscillation to occur. This is the moment I am always looking for in my work. Where it doesn't land, doesn't sit down, doesn't rest, but *almost* does resulting in an experience of the uncanny, which has been theorized as the moment at which the separation between subject and object is called into question.⁴³

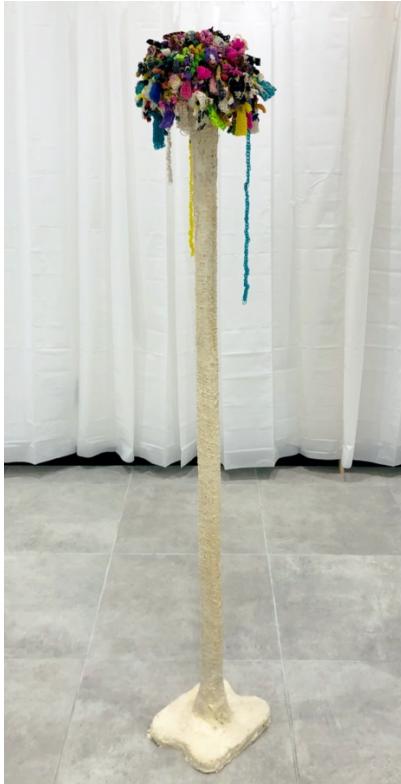


FIGURE 11: *Rainbow Loom Hat*

There are stories to tell and reading lists to exchange over each outfit in *MotherGinger*. As the artist, I also played the role of floor staff or gallery attendant, talking about the materials and ideas with visitors to the exhibition. One thing many people tried on was the *Rainbow Loom Hat*: Rainbow Loom was one of those Christmas 'It' toys, consisting of a small loom and a

⁴³ Welchman, John C. "On the Uncanny in Visual Culture." In *The Uncanny by Mike Kelley, Artist*. (Germany: Verlag, 2004). Welchman explores the idea put forward by Samuel Weber in discussing the uncanny as a scene, rather than a topic or concept, where the division between subject and object is called into question in a scene.

crochet tool to hook and loop tiny elastic bands together to create bracelets and charms. It marks the first time I experienced how substantially the way children would learn had shifted. In 2014, when my daughter received the toy as a gift, it had just been named toy of the year. Upon opening the package there were barely any instructions on how to use it, which surprised me until I realized that there was a website referenced, and on this website were instructional videos.⁴⁴ The era of YouTube tutorials ensued, resulting in masses of rainbow-loomed Disney princesses, dancers, cartoon characters and so on...leaving me to wonder: what do I do with all this productivity? How can I rationalize the production of these masses of plastic bands for my child's entertainment? It weighed heavily on my head, figuratively and now literally; by forming the actual material residue from this period of my life into a hat, I materialized the metaphorical weight to open up the possibility of carrying it with me. I moved, not only the anxiety but also the time period, outside of my own head and gave it a tangible location in the world. Further, putting it on a head calls attention to the spine supporting it. Now embodied, the weight becomes quieting and comforting as it acts on my nervous system. In this way, the costume invites a collapse between theoretical and lived experience, and between the abstract and the tangible at the site of bodily experience.

All the phenomena that I presented in *MotherGinger* arose out of an intuitive impulse: With the shoes, I wanted to paint them. With the morph suit, I wanted to cut into it. With the Rainbow Loom bands I wanted to gather them together. I used a variety of construction techniques and processes, but all the clothing present in the exhibition involved some transformation or translation of a material within arm's reach in my domestic studio environment: children's crafts, my mother's shirt, old shoes I was going to throw out (The morph

⁴⁴ <https://rainbowloom.com/pages/all-level-rainbow-loom-instructional-videos>

suit had been kicking around the studio for a few years waiting to be used in this project or that, never really finding its home). Through material transformations the phenomena become markers of time i.e. The shoes having lived one life as an ankle boot, are ready to live another as pointe shoes. The older life of the material is embedded within the new garment whose meaning is often contingent on the older material's story. The material operation is cumulative and in this process the materials of the phenomena gain density, and as a result I like to think of them as having a stronger gravitational pull than their predecessors.⁴⁵ In this way, a cumulative material process is, theoretically, connected to the capacity to shift, however miniscule, a spatio-temporal plane.

I want to briefly review the key elements of *MotherGinger* that will continue to carry through future iterations of the work. First is the sign *MotherGinger* which stands as a symbol or brand. Second is the presence of eight bags that exist as a metaphor for the eight heads of the children, or polichinelles. These bags are also a nod to the container, or carrier bag,⁴⁶ technology *MotherGinger* models while simultaneously extending an invitation to the viewer to shop. The skirt is the third element, and it was present in the Thirthing exhibition as white shower curtains. The skirt holds the architectural space of the sculpture. Fourth are the eight mannequins, or the polichinelles, that represent Mother Ginger's children, the workforce, or the variable subjects *MotherGinger* holds. These mannequins could be thought of as plinths that hold the bodily context that the viewer encounters the clothing within. The last element is the clothing presented within *MotherGinger*. These clothing phenomena will change with each iteration as I create new work through different lived experiences. One new piece I worked on during the writing of this

⁴⁵ Gravity is the physically observable result of the warping of space-time by objects of mass. The more mass an object has, the more it causes the fabric of space-time to warp thereby seeming to increase the gravitational pull of the object.

⁴⁶ Le Guin, Ursula K., *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (Dancing at the Edge of the World, 1986).

paper is *Hemorrhoid Jacket* – a suit jacket honoring the unspoken place of hemorrhoids in many people’s day-to-day lived experience.



FIGURE 12: The skirt is a store: multiple performing bodies pour out of it.

AS A STORE

Two artistic precedents inspire my use of the store as a vehicle for my own artistic output: *The Store* (1961), a project by artist and sculptor Claes Oldenburg where he occupied a shopfront studio in New York and sold paint and plaster sculptures, and *The Shop* (1993), a storefront that YBA artists’ Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas operated in London where they hosted parties and sold paraphernalia they made such as cigarettes, photos and t-shirts. Both projects created a temporary store/shop context for the display of objects made by the artists. By positioning the objects/phenomena I have made within a store setting, I utilize a similar approach to imply that these things go forth into the world *as things of* the world. The third room in the installation of *MotherGinger* further suggests the quality of store; behind an opening in the curtains, which at first might be assumed is the gallery back room, is a small makeshift change room with a mirror and a few more garments related to the ones on display. Here there are more

shoes, a replica of the dressing gown, another moving blanket and additional lingerie pieces. From a theatrical perspective this could be the wings, where costume changes are made before the performers go back on stage. From a store perspective, this invited the viewer to shift to shopper by creating a situation where it was possible to touch and try on the garments, becoming an actor within the work.

A recent example of a work that invited a shopping experience in the midst of an exhibition was the exhibition *Possessed* at The Whitney Museum of American Art in 2018, by the Brooklyn-based design duo Eckhaus Latta. Similar to *MotherGinger*, this exhibition was organized using a triptych approach. The first room, more of a hallway, displayed glossy product shots of Eckhaus Latta's clothing. The second room was a functioning store with clothing displayed for purchase on sculptures made by their artist friends; these commissioned artworks were not for sale. The last room offered three office chairs for viewers to sit in front of a bank of TVs showing live footage from stores which stock Eckhaus Latta clothing, including the exhibition room viewers had just passed through. The exhibition required the presence of the viewer as a consuming subject. It reached out into the world where the clothing circulated, but also cut into the heart of the museum, implicating the art viewing experience both as and facilitating the clothing's value as commodity. It would seem subject (viewer), object (clothing) and context (retail condition) are particularly positioned within the total installation of *Possessed*, but to what end?

A review of the exhibition in *The Brooklyn Rail* pointed out that "*Possessed* is an honest for-profit store. *Possessed* is not concerned with art's boundaries and definitions, but with whether our ability to buy and sell a work is part of what we find attractive about it. It suggests

that how we might own an object is, now, inherently part of how we value its aesthetics”.⁴⁷

Exchange value becomes the measurement of artistic value reflecting how, in capitalism, a large part of how we position ourselves as bodies in the world is in relation to what we consume and how we consume it. The Eckhaus Latta brand is an example of the dominant economic model where multiple bodies labour for a single larger economic body. In *MotherGinger* this dynamic is reversed and a single body labours for multiple bodies. Whereas Eckhaus Latta is a functioning brand that produces two seasonal collections a year created with the aid of employees, *MotherGinger* is a one-to-one ratio; it can only be as big as the capacity my body has to produce it, and only in the timeframe available.

MotherGinger did share with *Possessed* the possibility of purchasing the garments, thus facilitating engagement outside of the exhibition. However, in the installation I did not display prices, nor did I explicitly let people know they were for sale unless it came up in conversation. This differed from *Possessed*, where the clothes were tagged with prices, and none were given for the artwork-furniture created for the exhibition. It was important to me that the cost of the garments was not part of how they were physically encountered, though I advertised them as for sale in the Instagram posts I made throughout the exhibition. Giving prices seemed to take away their autonomy, positioning them as things to be had or owned, not to *get into* and *become* with. Additionally, it pushed the installation too far into the realm of “store” and lost the theatrical quality I wanted to retain. By doing this I chose to highlight the garment/phenomena’s costume quality over their commodity quality. As sociologist Jean Baudrillard notes: “The obscenity of the commodity derives from the fact that it is abstract, formal, and light in comparison with the weight, opacity and substance of the object. The commodity is legible, as opposed to the object,

⁴⁷ Cappetta, John. “Eckhaus Latta: Possessed.” In *The Brooklyn Rail*, (ArtSeen, October 2018).

which never quite reveals its secret, and it manifests its visible essence — its price.”⁴⁸ *Possessed* was an exhibition about commodities. While *MotherGinger* evoked the commodity, she is a costume, an object to get inside, a thing to play “with” that takes the form of a store.

A retail store has a flow of commodities into and out of it but, as media scholar McKenzie Wark points out in her recent book, in addition to re-sourcing commodities, large retailers deal in information, collecting data, which is then sold and used. Wark describes this as an asymmetrical relationship where “your job, for which you are not getting paid, is to train a machine algorithm to know what the “human” is when seen entirely from the perspective of consuming.”⁴⁹ This collected data is used to train algorithms which increasingly shape the human subject as consumer; as consumers we are in an intra-action *with* the capitalist environment. As this dynamic is no longer solely describable in commodity capitalist terms and has in recent years gone by financial capitalism or surveillance capitalism, Wark suggests that capitalism has been superseded by a new economic system, one she calls *vectorialism*, where *vector* describes the infrastructure along which data flow, creating wealth for the ones who control it.

As a store, *MotherGinger* is a quintessential costume, or container, filled in a period of abundance and emptied in a time of lack. A store is stocked with product when it is available and is emptied of that stock when an individual (lacking “that thing”) needs it. *MotherGinger* acts as a model for this dynamic, but instead of *things/objects* she responds to the vectorial economy and stocks *whos/subjects*.

⁴⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication*. (California: Semiotext(e), 2012), 26.

⁴⁹Wark, McKenzie. *Capital is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* (New York: Verso Books, 2019), 9. I also hear an eerie echo here of the unpaid reproductive labour that capitalism required of women to undertake: see Federici, Silvia. “Wages against Housework” (1975), In *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. (New York: PM Press, 2012).

SECTION 3: A Conceptual Model

CONTAINHERS



FIGURE 13: Mother Ginger's skirt as a dwelling

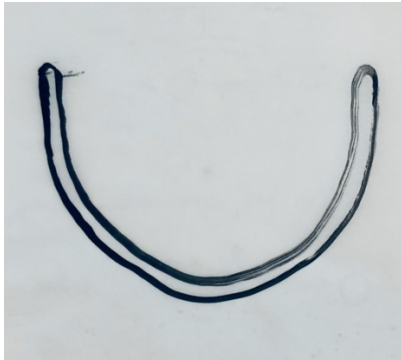


FIGURE 14: Flip it upside down, it's a container

Zoë Sofia's essay "Container Technologies" greatly influenced my thinking over the last year. Sofia, who also publishes under the name Sofoulis, is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. In this essay published in 2000, she outlines a theoretical framework for the study of containers and the re-sourcing that occurs through them. She positions containers as tools to understand the entangled nature of ourselves, our environment, and our economy. Sofia points out that the container is frequently an overlooked technology due to its close association with traditionally female functions of holding, preserving, and supplying in domestic settings. As such, they are often theorized as passive. Drawing from the work of Gregory Bateson, D.W. Winnicott and Martin Heidegger, Sofia shows

how “the container is a structurally necessary but frequently unacknowledgeable precondition of becoming.”⁵⁰ She compares Winnicott’s theory of the maternal “facilitating environment” that the child develops within to the relationship between humans and our environment both natural and artificial. In doing so, she shows how a facilitating environment is a necessary background for subjectivities to form. By identifying these facilitating environments as containers and discussing inherent biases of technology, Sofia shows how the maternal environment is taken for granted by a child. It is this same dynamic (of taking for granted) that occurs between humans and our environment, both natural and constructed.

As I indicated earlier, *MotherGinger*’s namesake is a character in Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* Ballet. She is thought to be modelled on a popular candy tin in Russia where the bottom of the skirt is removed to access the bon bons inside.⁵¹ The mother here is a figure who stocks sweets that are always accessible through her skirt in a time of need. I cannot help thinking of Silvia Federici’s exploration of how the witch hunts in Europe paved the way for capitalism,⁵² which was taking hold when the *Nutcracker* was created in 1892.⁵³ The devaluation of women’s bodies, and knowledge, set the stage for their labour to function as the naturalized “free” reproduction of labourers: a facilitating environment.

⁵⁰ Sofia, Zoe. “Container Technologies.” (Hypatia, Volume 15, Number 2, Spring 2000, Project Muse, Indiana University Press), 188.

⁵¹ “The Sweets of the Nutcracker” July 24, 2019, <https://australianballet.com.au/behind-ballet/the-sweets-of-the-nutcracker>

⁵² Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

⁵³ Vladimir Lenin published *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* under the pseudonym Vladimir Ilyin in 1899. In it he argued that feudalism was dying and the rural communes in Russia had already been wiped out by capitalism. I enjoyed a narrative account of this state in Leo Tolstoy’s 1878 book *Anna Karenina* which incidentally was turned into a ballet in 1979 and 2005 both with music by Tchaikovsky.

Containers are often theorized as passive, but Sofia insists on the active state of containing and considers containing as a form of action in itself.⁵⁴ Utilizing an intersubjectivist approach, Sofia points out that subjecthood is “formed in a space whose holding and supplying are understood as the result of maternal labours, actions requiring effort and care.”⁵⁵ The person cannot come into being “without the (m)other’s activity in creating a “facilitating environment.”⁵⁶ This means that as much for the child as for the (m)other, they are intertwined in the formation of an other’s subjectivity. The subject (child) and object (mother) cannot be untangled. Crucially, the (m)other as the container-object must also be the subject-who-shapes-itself-as-object through her labour to make room for the possibility of an other within herself. This situates the experience of the “(m)other” as an individual that must operate as both subject *and* object: a condition of contemporary culture whereby users of a social media network, for example, must create themselves (a profile, for example) and then labour to maintain and function through it. To be both subject and object, one must occupy different positions in space/time simultaneously.

These conditions of social media seem to demand that we begin to understand ourselves as both autonomous *and* non-autonomous subjects within a network: an *and-not* condition. In her article “Black Box, White Cube, GrayZone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention,” Art historian and critic Claire Bishop describes an oscillation between attention and distraction as the current viewing conditions of contemporary performance. She acknowledges the human limitations to achieve this state of viewership and references fellow art critic Jonathan Crary who points out that “the requirement to be both attentive and distracted is, however, unfulfillable: the

⁵⁴ Sofia, 190.

⁵⁵ Sofia, 190-191.

⁵⁶ Sofia, 184.

ideal subject of neoliberal capitalism is not in fact a human at all, but a computer, able to multitask and perform several procedures simultaneously.”⁵⁷ But this is not necessarily true: the conditions of motherhood often demand just such a multitasking from people not necessarily equipped to function in this way. Remember my body splayed on the bed trying to sleep, nurse the little body beside me, while preventing the other little body from kicking me while also keeping it asleep? This condition echoes Adrienne Rich’s despair of her fate as a mother “to serve a function for which I was not fitted.”⁵⁸ Here, distraction becomes the *modus operandi* to attend to the competing demands on one’s attention in order for new lives to emerge. As we will consider through Federici, the question is: who benefits from this distracted attention? Who benefits from the (m)other’s exploitation? (M)otherhood is a grammatical model for understanding this lived reality of the contemporary subject who is “caught between competing notions of public and personal, subject and object, physicality and virtuality, being institutionally shaped and being self constituted.”⁵⁹

I find this interesting to consider in relation to Michael Fried’s critical analysis of artist Tony Smith’s experience on the New Jersey Turnpike where he notes that “what replaces the object — what does the same job of distancing or isolating the beholder, of making him a subject, that the object did in the enclosed room — is above all the endlessness, or objectlessness, of the approach or onrush or perspective.”⁶⁰ Today, the “onrush” might be the quick pace of the virtual social environment we experience, and the endlessness or objectlessness

⁵⁷ Bishop, Claire. “Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention.” (TDR: *The Drama Review*, Volume 62, Number 2, Summer 2018), 37.

⁵⁸ Rich, Adrienne. “Anger and Tenderness” from *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). In *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood*. (Seven Stories Press, 2001), 81.

⁵⁹ Bishop, 40.

⁶⁰ Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 159.

might be the facilitating environment of the vectorialist economy. The onrush demands you to be a subject. I am interested in being an object. An object-container appears inert and available, but it holds an unknowability, an in/finite potential within it both literally and metaphorically.

It is the void in the container, and the store, which is the location of re-sourcing⁶¹ — a redistribution of supply which fundamentally shifts a human experience of time and space. The temporal plane shifts when a container is filled in a moment of abundance and emptied in a moment of lack, creating a levelling whereby human experience is contingent not on the rhythm of supply of the natural world via seasons, but on the human's own created/conditioned environment. An example of this is the simple shift from eating oranges only when one is in an environment and season where oranges grow to being able to eat fresh oranges within a northern winter. In Sofia's words, a container "can be filled from a source, then itself becomes a source of what it has kept and preserved."⁶² In a sense, the store selling oranges operates *as* a warm climate. Which might indicate how the vector controls the subjects which use it. The algorithms on YouTube are fed data on an individual's viewing habits one moment, and the next it can supply videos which would satiate those viewing habits, effectively replacing the very subject who is using it. Our use teaches the algorithms the shape, look and feel of the subjectivity it is containing, yet our use is shaped by the very same algorithm.

We gain autonomy in the minutiae of our online interactions if we consider the dynamic of supply and demand by which our economic system operates as a containment technology. It is, as Zoë Sofia points out, the void in a container that "is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, the nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as holding vessel,"⁶³ and as subjects (as the

⁶¹ Sofia, 192.

⁶² Sofia, 192.

⁶³ Sofia, 191.

void-potential in our economic system) we can engage in ways which measure our limits, our specificity. In a vectorial economy, viewed in this way, it is the producers of the data which hold the real power, which gives an indication why containers have been conceptualized as empty and divorced from their contents; it makes that power invisible. The void-potential is contingent on the presence of the object: a material location or phenomenon in the world arising from an intra-action. In *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*, Brian Rotman, a philosopher with a background in mathematics, explores how “it is only by virtue of zero [the number sign] that infinity comes to be signifiable in mathematics.”⁶⁴ He shows how this dynamic is at play in art and economics through the vanishing point and symbolic money, respectively. Denise Ferreira da Silva, a black feminist scholar, ethicist and artist, explores this valorization of the void-potential in assigning blackness a 0 value in her unsettling of the ethical program governed by determinacy.⁶⁵ Through this she shows how the 0 position is one of power. It is in this logic that we also recognize the devaluing of those bodies/subjects which act as the facilitating environment for others. As Toronto writer NourbeSe Philip succinctly puts it: “Woman as Other constitutes one of the building blocks of the patriarchy; Black as Other, one of the building blocks of white supremacist ideologies.”⁶⁶ There is a crucial investment in Others/ (M)others being empty or having a 0 value so that they can be used or controlled.

⁶⁴ Rotman, Brian. *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*. (California: Stanford University Press, 1987), 71. Rotman’s work supports a historical onto-epistemological perspective. See his discussion of French Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne writing himself writing in his autobiographical Essays: “When Montaigne affirms that the self he is depicting cannot be separated from the process of depiction, that it is ‘in some sort formed’ by the very activity of framing its portrait, he is articulating[...]the illusion of anteriority, the fantasy of a world of the ‘thing’ - in Montaigne’s case some unitary, preexistent, waiting to be written, ‘true’ self - prior to a domain of the ‘sign of the thing’ which represents it.”, 45.

⁶⁵ Ferreira da Silva, Denise. “1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = $\infty - \infty$ or ∞ / ∞ : On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value.” *e-flux* (Journal no.79, February 2017).

⁶⁶ Philip, NourbeSe M. *Bla_k: Essays and Interviews*. (Toronto: Book*hug, 2017), 89.

Recent feminist methodologies strive to restitch that decisive split between the subject and object, echoed in the container/void split, by recognizing that a co-creating is inherent, and that subject/object and figure/ground cannot be exclusive. Inside and outside are experienced simultaneously, contrary to Merleau-Ponty's assertion that in the experience of one hand touching the other we flip back and forth between touching and being touched.⁶⁷ By recognizing co-creation, by recognizing intra-actions, we further develop the emotional grammatical language to describe and recognize what this experience is. I often have Kacey Musgraves's song "Happy & Sad" in my head as I work in *MotherGinger*: "Is there a word for the way that I'm feeling tonight? Happy and sad at the same time. You got me smilin' with tears in my eyes. I've never felt so high...."⁶⁸

Let us consider *MotherGinger* as a sculpture that models this grammar of the *and-not*. A container as the condition of (M)otherhood, a system that shapes and is shaped by the void within, a costume within which subjectivities develop, a sculpture held together by my (the artist's) maternal labour of care, attention, time, and giving of my body, myself. A container that holds the space for others: other subjects, other objects, other possibilities.

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 133.

⁶⁸ Musgraves, Kacey. "Happy & Sad," track 8 on *Golden Hour*. MCA Nashville, 2018, Spotify.

SECTION 4: The Labour of Making

PERFORMANCE: MEASUREMENT + LABOUR



FIGURE 15: The container must be made, but by who?

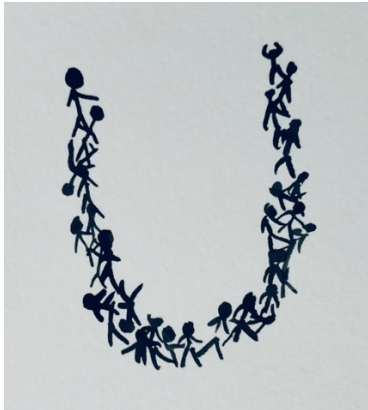


FIGURE 16: Multiple bodies making measurements

Like an algorithm trained on a data set, *MotherGinger* might be an analog to Artificial Intelligence (AI), and my experience is the data set it is trained on. This places my body and experience, or performance in the world, as a *measurement tool*, not as the subject of the work. This also points out a limit of the thesis; it is created from the specificity of a female subject position. Yet the garments stocked by *MotherGinger* are not limited to containing my subjectivity, for they can be filled by anybody who cares to get into them - this is their in/determinate potential. Their constraint rests their capacity to entice, to invite, to seduce. And so, I have an ethical responsibility to determine how these garments are constructed — what do I

reach for in my environment? What material do I grapple with? What ethics do my impulses reveal?

In this section I will explore how my labouring body functions as a form of measurement that reveals physical manifestations of the container through its capacity and limitations. Let's begin by revisiting Karen Barad's description of measurements as "agential practices, which are not simply revelatory but performative: they help constitute and are a constitutive part of what is being measured. In other words, measurements are intra-actions (not interactions): the agencies of observation are inseparable from that which is observed."⁶⁹ This would suggest that the virtual and physical are intra-acting with each other in a way where there is not a clear distinction between the two, and so there is cohesion between the container and that which it holds.

Sara Ahmed is a feminist writer and independent scholar whose writing on orientation is a phenomenological counterpoint to Barad's work. Both Ahmed and Barad show the queerness of space. Barad does this through a focus on measurement, situating the mattering of how and what we measure (literally makes matter manifest). Ahmed's focus on the orientation of the phenomenological body shows that "spatial relations between subjects and others are produced through actions, which make some things available to be reached."⁷⁰ It matters then what I have available to reach for, placing my subjecthood at the center of the work. Must I then perform?

⁶⁹ Barad, "What is the Measure of Nothingness?", 6.

⁷⁰ Ahmed, Sarah. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 52.



FIGURE 17: Self-portrait as a mother in drag as the young man in drag playing *MotherGinger*

Georgia Sagri is a Greek artist whose performance practice I was introduced to early in my research for *MotherGinger*. Her work is influenced by her ongoing activist and political work, and she often places her working body at the center of her performances, as in *Semiotics of the Household* (2018), where she unpacked and then repacked the contents of her suitcase creating a line across Hester Street in New York City. She claims no mastery or subject position within her work. Initially I was taken aback by this position, as it seemed clear to me that the work is centered on her. In working on *MotherGinger* however, I have come to see that Sagri centers her specific subjective body as the measurement tool, but by doing this it becomes a stand in for a body, neither placing her subjectivity at the center of the work nor removing it. Rather, her subjectivity matches the performed subjectivity and seems to return the body to object in this way, protecting the space of an unnamed or potential subject at the core of the work. Possibly, by making the subject at the center of the work a labouring subject, we intuitively understand, through our conditioning, that this subject reproduces the environment for

other subjects and so is understood to fade into the background, leaving a body sized hole for the viewer to fill.

In a similar way, my body in *MotherGinger* becomes useful as a body-tool, as it matches my specific subject position as a mother. While the individual garments arise out of this experience, it is not about *me* specifically but rather reflects the lived experience of my body in a subject-position of mother as that body which makes space for other lives. I use my bodily experience to find the moment where the work I am making functions as a simile by recognizing my own limits, registration of affect, impulses, and intuitions in the making and performing of *MotherGinger*. My relationship to the artwork itself is then one of care and a giving over of my body to the body of the artwork. In this way, I seek to engage qualities of the uncanny and the abject from a perspective rooted in my, female, experience.

In a conversation with Silvia Federici for her monograph *Georgia Sagri Georgia Sagri*, Sagri proposes that performance is to art as reproductive labour is to work.⁷¹ In the unpacking of this statement, Sagri and Federici discuss how an artist's labour both reproduces the artwork and reproduces the artist: This is the labour of being an artist whether one is making performances or objects. The act of labouring immediately poses the problem of exploitation for an artist — specifically by the art market and urban development. Instead of this being a bleak condition, Federici takes it up as a tool for conversation, saying we all must make some compromises to live, but we can talk about these compromises, and the experiences of our lives, to understand how exploitation works. Who benefits from exploitation? The condition of exploitation is one of the largest problems we are facing as a world today: exploitation of people, natural resources, ourselves. If the core of capitalism is exploitation of labour so that surplus value is created,

⁷¹ Sagri, Georgia, Silvia Federici. "A Conversation." In *Georgia Sagri Georgia Sagri*. (Sternberg Press, 2018), 17.

Federici asks: “Who is the ultimate beneficiary of housework or the artwork that people make?”⁷² Who uses and builds upon the ground that is created through this labour?

There is no simple answer to this question, but it is a sharp tool to cut up our socio-political systems to collage a new temporality where exploitation, if it could still be called that, is *mutual* and therefore articulates new horizontal, or symmetrical, models for being in the world.

Sagri proposes that the medium of performance can be used in other fields as a political tool because it can create the conditions for a community to form within an emotional field:

Labouring creates an emotional field (a facilitating environment) for a community — or a communal subjectivity to form within. This labouring is performed by the artwork through the artist. Performativity then might name the dynamic/response-ability of the contents of that field to partake in the creation of their own container. The formation of this community is a political body and marks a potential shift in role of the artist; if not for exploitation in the market, where is the artist’s laborious role to occur? In the political field? Not in politics, i.e. government, but in the creation of a polis in which different languages can register through the integration of affective and cognitive labour with each other. Federici points out a false dichotomy since “there is no real separation between knowing and feeling.”⁷³ Federici tells Sagri that artists can help people “to turn their experiences and their suffering into a source of knowledge.”⁷⁴ The labour of perennial distractions creates a movement between the container and its contents, a movement that measures and maps, creating the material of the container.

In considering performance through the lens of reproductive labour, we can identify how the *doings/performance* are related to the labour of being an artist that creates and care-takes

⁷² Sagri, 17.

⁷³ Sagri, 21.

⁷⁴ Sagri, 21.

artwork, and that the *beings/sculptures* are works/objects that labour to reproduce themselves while labouring in the service of creating conditions for community. *MotherGinger*, as a brand, takes on this dimension of sculpture-hood (a condition of not-subject/not-object) that emulates the person-hood conditions of companies in our current economy which labour and act. The installation sets the conditional field in which to connect and create conversation and action.

Our bodies are continually entangled in our experience of an object and its properties, mine as the artist making a work, and yours as a viewer/encounter-er of the work. As observers of each and of our own experience, we intimately effect what it is that is experienced.

Scientifically speaking, the observer cannot be disentangled from the experience.

Phenomenology takes a similar approach; as Sara Ahmed points out, quoting Merleau-Ponty, “Spatial forms or distance are not so much relations between different points in objective space as they are relations between these points and a central perspective — our body (1964:5).”⁷⁵ The presence of our bodies implicates us as agents in the experience, but does not give us agency over the experience.

In the studio, my body is a measurement device to find the oscillating, uncanny feeling I look for. Through this feeling, I intuit the limits of a form that is and/not, neither/both, subject/object, identifying a location and form of an entity as event. I used my body as the measurement tool in deciding how the things of *MotherGinger* were situated. During the installation, this meant setting up the work and walking about to see how it *feels*. In deciding how to set up the gallery space to achieve a store-theatre feeling I first placed the mannequins, feeling my way through them, registering my affective responses to the space: what height are they at, what position are they gesturing? How does their spacing lead my body? I dressed the

⁷⁵ Ahmed, 8.

mannequins and adjusted them based on the rhythm that each spoke to the other, paying attention to the colour and form. Next, I put two walls of the curtains up to create the three spaces with gaps in the curtains to walk through. It felt too choppy, so I added the third curtain, and I paused here for a while unsure if I wanted the fourth wall covered, which would completely enclose the space, or if I wanted to leave the wall open which would gesture to the gallery as a theatrical space or the gallery as the “fourth wall”. I chose to close this wall off to increase the intimacy of the space around the mannequins and evoke more of the feeling of being inside the skirt of *MotherGinger*. The “fourth wall” aspect moved to the Instagram platform, which became the virtual window or “fifth wall” of the space. Here a gap was created between experiencing the physical space and experiencing the virtual representation of it on social media.

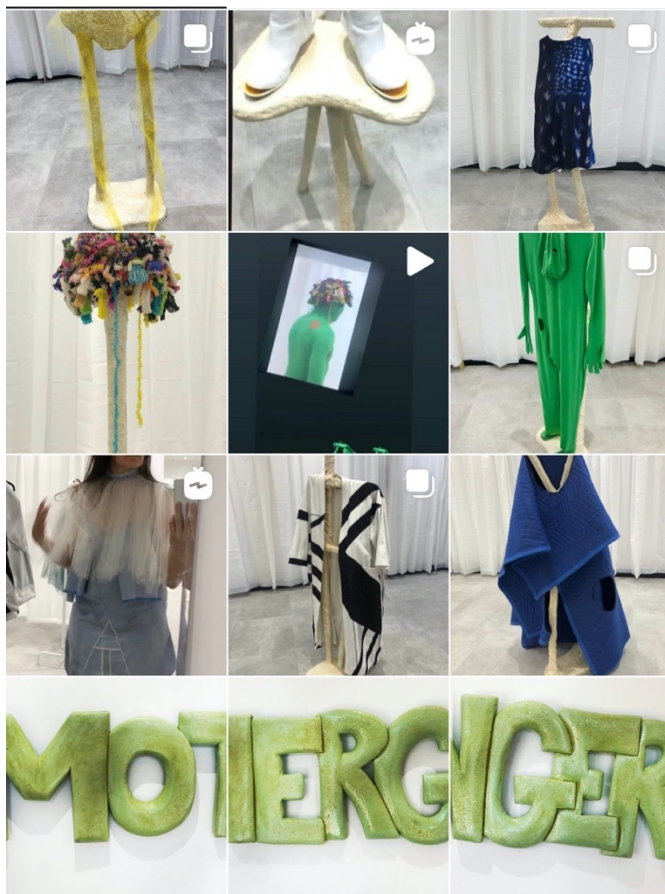


FIGURE 18: Screen shot of *MotherGinger*'s Instagram @motherginger_the_store

In my early work I often evoked situations of theatre and store, such as with *Objects to Move the Assemblage Point and Other Tools* (2006) and *Proscenium Home* (2007). In both these cases the installations, evoking a store and an apartment respectively, staged tableaux where the viewer could see the scene via a window but could not enter. In *MotherGinger*, the Instagram platform functions comparably to this window while the exhibition welcomes a body into its core; one could stand within the scene *and* look into it. I situated *MotherGinger* in these two contexts simultaneously to produce another space of diffraction. This is how I approach making sculpture in an expanded time complex, where sculpture is not defined by a static mass of material, but a moving set of parts and relationships which hold material together in an ever-changing mass.⁷⁶ The sculpture is the surface of a collective body to dance in, a situation where I am both inside and outside of the thing at the same time.

⁷⁶ We could also think of sculpture in the time-complex as an extension of Rosalind Krauss's conception of sculpture in the expanded field: Krauss, Rosalind. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 35-47. Earlier in my studies at OCADU, I explored how the expanded field of sculpture is a theoretical plinth that safeguarded a modernist conception of sculpture in a moment where the boundaries between disciplines were crumbling — albeit fruitfully. The conditions are similar now, though in relation to vectorialism, and I anticipate exploring this relationship in future work along with another problem of sculpture that I did not have the space to properly deal with in this thesis work, and so have shelved. This is the problem of sculpture Krauss addresses in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977), which is the representation of time utilizing static materials. Umberto Boccioni thought that the "problem" of using sculpture to "represent time unfolding through motion" (41) became one of fusing two separate modes of being "in which the object would participate". On the one hand is Absolute Motion depicted through inherent and static characteristics of the structure and the material, and on the other is relative motion—the contingent existence of the object in real space through the movement of the perceiver.

THE DANCING BODY



FIGURE 19: Wearing a skirt: A measurement-making body inside and outside of the container.

In 2011, the Institut für Kunstkritik organized the conference “Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism” to discuss the recent return of the figure in contemporary art. In her presentation, Caroline Busta, a writer, and assistant editor at Artforum at the time, noted two threads of this figurative return. On the one hand are sculptural objects that assume a human-like form as in the artwork of Cathy Wilkes, Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison. On the other is the artist’s own body performing at the center of the work, and Busta cites Emily Sundblad and Merlin Carpenter as contemporary examples of these artistic practices.⁷⁷ In *MotherGinger* I take up both positions: I create work through my labour that assumes a human-like form, *and* insert myself into it, performing (on a virtual platform) to create a secondary experience, or potential for image circulation.

I had planned to post installation images of *MotherGinger* daily on Instagram during the exhibition, and the overriding feeling I wanted to achieve was energy above the quality of the

⁷⁷ Busta, Caroline. “Body Doubles.” *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*. (Graw, Isabelle, Daniel Birnbaum Eds. Sternberg Press, 2011), 41-48.

post. I wanted to communicate the immediacy of the things, to give people a tangible sense of the costumes through my engagement with them. As Oldenburg wrote in relation to *The Store*: “A show ——! Forget the commercialism and vanity of the long-prepared show. A show is the gesture of being alive, a period —— before as well as during.... A look into one’s continuing daily activity.”⁷⁸ The Instagram portion of the project responds to this quality of playing and showing, as Oldenburg aptly put it, with the focus on the energy: Standing within *MotherGinger*, I will dance these clothes for you, I will wear these clothes for you, I will show these clothes for you, I will play these clothes for you. I often paired these videos and images with music to activate the image.

During the 2011 conference in Frankfurt, art critic and historian Hal Foster discussed how the ambiguity of human-like forms and their ambiguous art status were compelling to artists in the early 1900s as they resonated with the “ontological uncertainty” of the time.⁷⁹ Stefan Deines, a philosopher invited to respond to Foster’s contribution, pointed out that during this time “the status of and the relations between people and objects, and machines and commodities were increasingly less clear,”⁸⁰ as is the case again today. In this climate, I believe representing *and* activating figures becomes a tangible way to explore human experience in an increasingly AI driven world. It not only depicts objects in the world but activates them as well.

I approach sculpture from a post-human perspective, where sculpture is not a static body/object, but one that lives, breathes, grows in and of itself. Iris van der Tuin is a feminist epistemologist specializing in gender studies and new materialism. She suggests that in our

⁷⁸ Oldenburg, Claes. *Store Days*. (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), 15.

⁷⁹ Foster, Hal. “Philosophical Toy and Psychoanalytic Travesties: Anthropomorphic Avatars in Dada and at the Bauhaus.” In *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semicapitalism*, (Sternberg Press, 2011), 21.

⁸⁰ Deines, Stefan. “Response to Hal Foster.” In *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semicapitalism*, (Sternberg Press, 2011), 36.

current climate, “‘Network theories’ of distributed agency (administered by human subjects) are no longer sufficient. A posthuman understanding neither places the Subject in the center nor attempts to remove him like [Object Oriented Ontology] does, but rather opts for a proper placing of subject, object and instrument in an agential and material-discursive environment (an ‘assemblage’, to speak with Deleuze).”⁸¹ This perspective clarified for me that the material-discursive environment of an installation *is* an assemblage body, a phenomenon, a sculptural form, within which subject, object, and instrument (measurement tools) are placed.

In play, human consciousness fills and animates the void within the objects it beholds, projecting a sense of self into an other position, one that is not contingent on reality. I can occupy both the position of a toy (I am thinking specifically of a doll), the position of my real-life body, and the larger context of the intra-action, creating a network of materializing possibilities. In this way, playing with dolls might engage Object Oriented Ontology or New Materialism as lines of inquiry invested in “cutting across the Kantian deeming impossible of reaching the Thing-in-Itself”⁸² evoking in the midst of make-believe play a “desire to think without presupposing dualist structures such as subject and object, word and world, nature and culture.”⁸³ And so, I return to my practice as (figurative) sculpture: a material practice of holding together/apart a form which subsequently holds potentialities in the world.

MotherGinger holds a void-potential for those who play with her. Multiple costumes/phenomena are presented within her, and not only do these costumes have the capacity to change (as there are alternates in the third room) but each time someone dons one, new

⁸¹ van der Tuin, Iris. “Diffraction as a Methodology for Feminist Onto-Epistemology.” In *Diffraction Worlds — Diffraction Readings: Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities* (New York: Routledge), 71.

⁸² van der Tuin, 69.

⁸³ van der Tuin, 68.

possibilities are realized. Like the electron dressed in infinite possibilities, the void at the center of a costume is dressed in infinite possibilities.

Labour gives limits to the body — but when we subject others to the labour of our own body there is no limit to the size and reach of that body. While this offers beautiful possibilities for working together, it often is subverted into working for the profit of a small number of people. If the potential materializations of a body are infinite (as we seem to believe in the case of multinational and multi-brand conglomerate companies) then there is no closure to the object/body, and it remains a pure subject — ever open, malleable, and available — the very semiocapital⁸⁴ condition which those multinational conglomerate bodies-without-limits rely on.

In her book *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*, Federici addresses a legacy of poststructuralism and cautions that “there is something we have lost in our insistence on the body as something socially constructed and performative.”⁸⁵ She points out that “the techniques of capture and domination have changed depending on the dominant labour regime,”⁸⁶ and so from industrial capitalism to financial capitalism to speculative/cognitive/ surveillance capitalism the methods of controlling the body have absorbed once radical positions of the post-human and led to an increasing

⁸⁴ Semiocapital is an idea originally introduced by Jean Baudrillard and subsequently picked up by Franco “Bifo” Berardi, among others, in recent years to describe the stage of capitalism where the economic model has seeped into all areas of life. In his essay, “Cognitarian Subjectivation”, Berardi describes the condition of neuro-psycho exhaustion resulting from semiocapital production. He charts the reasons for this through neoliberalism and the rise of economic rationalization that organizes contemporary experience. Cognitarians produce semiocapital with the tools of creativity and language, and the value produced resides in the creation of new layers of meaning that become so numbered that the original sign is obscured. Not only does this lead to an instability of the sign, but labour conditions for cognitive workers are also precarious. Karen Barad makes a distinction between objective indeterminacy and epistemological uncertainty in her discussion of the void, which is of use to consider here: The conditions of precarious labour could be seen to give a freedom, but this is linked with semiotic production and is therefore more a problem of epistemological uncertainty which creates a psychic stress more internally crippling than a condition of objective indeterminacy.

⁸⁵ Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. (Oakland CA: PM Press, 2020), 119.

⁸⁶ Federici, 122.

mechanization and digitization of the body. Federici suggests dance as a form that can be used in reclaiming the body in contemporary capitalism because “the act of dancing is an exploration and invention of what a body can do: of its capacities, its languages, its articulations of the strivings of our being...dance mimics the process by which we relate to the world, connect with other bodies, transform ourselves and the space around us.”⁸⁷ And I should clarify that the “other bodies” are not just human ones, but bodies of water, land, and refuse, animal, insect and otherwise. This is the tool we have: to listen, to move, to act. Can this also be applied to economic bodies? By identifying *MotherGinger* as the specific body of an economic avatar, can I dance an intergenerational, gender-bending, multiplicity-in-a-singularity dance? The act of dancing keeps the reach and breadth of a body supple and mobile, but still located in a finite body — one that needs water and bathroom breaks. One that needs to breathe. These are modes for measurement. *MotherGinger* is my avatar, my alibi, my stage, my plinth so that I can dance for you. So that you can dance for me. She is a bit of comic relief in the unending dream sequence of confectionary delights.

Federici proposes that the natural limits of the body can provide the beginning of a common ground. Through reclaiming the natural limits of the body, we can make “a body that reunites what capitalism has divided [...]in a world where diversity is a wealth for all and a ground of commoning rather than a source of divisions and antagonisms.”⁸⁸ Federici does not say how this would work, but she does say that

By the body as a “natural limit” I refer to the structure of needs and desires created in us not only by our conscious decisions or collective practices but also millions of

⁸⁷ Federici, 123.

⁸⁸ Federici, 5.

years of material evolution: the need for the sun, for the blue sky and the green of trees, for the smell of the woods and the oceans, the need for touching, smelling, sleeping, making love.⁸⁹

These needs and desires are tools of measurements, intra-actions with the larger world, to identify the limits of our bodies, and to find a collective “we” that accounts for difference. How are these limits experienced? In death, in hunger, in pain. In joy, exhaustion, tears, anger, laughter. One of the measurement tools I use is laughter — where the impulse to laughter is an indicator of the materialization of something. Many of the clothes I share in *MotherGinger* make me laugh. Over the duration of the exhibition, I found myself in a situation where I would think of what I wanted to post but find myself unable/unwilling to follow through on it. In those moments, by accepting the physical limit of my body and taking a breath — or a few hour-long breaths — I would find my way to action where my impulse took me elsewhere. This is an example of how my distraction, or inability to concentrate and follow through on something, told me something about the shape and form of *MotherGinger*. It was as if the materializing-*MotherGinger* said to me via my distraction, “not that way, not that way — but this.”

By linking the production of *MotherGinger* (the store) to the labouring of my own body, I have limited the size and expression of this economic body. By this act I consider how I might function as an object in this world, albeit an object that feels, thinks, and acts within my environment. In this way, the focus is not my ability to push forward my subjectivity and individuality into the world (as an Instagram artist-brand for example), but to maintain my objecthood in the world, objecthood having specific limits. It is at the encounter with these limits — or in the liminal encounter — that I engage with and in the world at the surface of my “form”.

⁸⁹ Federici, 120.

This liminal encounter maintains the void within, maintains the secret, the ontological indeterminacy at the core of being.

CONCLUSION

One of the things I have found comforting through my research is realizing that no matter what I *think* I can do, be, achieve, I am still bound by this body — not in a way that closes down possibilities, but that gives finite and tangible form to that expansive imaginative body. It's the same when I experience a range of emotions in a brief time span: it is grounding to breathe because breathing reminds me that all those emotions originated in the same body. I received a rude reminder of this in late January 2021 when I hit my head and got a concussion. My body and brain became extremely sensitive to their limits, and I have been learning these limits at a cognitive level that is enmeshed within my physical body. Not only is my body limited by the need for food, for sleep, for love, but so is my mind. I have observed the limits of the cognitive and physical intra-acting with each other in moments where the concussion forces me to back away and rest. I can only say and write as much as my body and brain allow. As I heal, my body has taken me back in time to injuries and situations from 16 years ago, reminding me that my body, too, is a container: filled in a moment of excess it gushes forth in another time and space when my container-body can no longer contain. This limit on my body has demanded a different temporality for my thesis, and I have been challenged in learning to think and write in small chunks of time.

My primary research question asked how a costume can model a system that functions across spatial and temporal distances and be experienced from inside and outside simultaneously. My objective in doing this was to articulate a form of sculpture that could speak to, and within,

the speculative time-complex. For sculpture as a material object to remain as a viable practice for me, I had to discard the cartesian conception of sculpture as an object pre-existing an intra-action, which meant letting go of an object representing something, and rather understand it as the carrier of something; the sculpture as a container is suitable to the time-complex because a container is already an object where the speculative future acts on the container-object in the present. I chose not to theorize costumes but activated an existing costume (Mother Ginger's) to make a simile in order to see what capacity it had for modelling an object that could move in time and space. I found that as a container technology (a store), it reflected some of the exploitative practices of capitalism and became a model to consider new forms of capitalism (or vectorialism) as containing subjectivities. I explored the construction of the container by utilizing performance as a measurement device to see if the limitations of a physical body created a condition where distraction becomes a way of knowing within a materializing intra-action. The moment of having one's attention pulled away from something else is a way of touching upon a form that is amorphous, a shifting changing phenomenon experienced in a moment of oscillation, that I don't have agency over, that I can't fully get outside of. The object created by this measurement positions the artwork as an experience of being inside and outside simultaneously; I partake in the intra-action, both as the maker and as the viewer, but cannot grasp it because I am in two places at once, or rather stand in the place of it. As I grasp at the object made with my intra-action, it falls apart in my hands (dematerializes because I have positioned myself in one of the locations removing myself from the material I seek to grasp). The studio practice, therefore, is a learning to hold, and speak of, things lightly— to sketch the work. This is where dancing is helpful. Dancing keeps one light but embodied, moving and responding to the shifting moment. It becomes a way to feel the limits of my distracted body – pulled from this group of

dancers/garments *here*, to that one over *there*, partaking in the moment that extends beyond my skin. What capacity does sculpture have then to function in the speculative time-complex?

I used an onto-epistemological framework that centers the body as a site of experience and limitation, and my practice-based research located performance as the labour of intra-action which materializes the object. The garments one encounters in *MotherGinger* might prompt us to get dressed differently, or not at all. Modelled as a store/theatre, the work asked viewers to consider their embodied response to the work, as shopper, player, or viewer. With increasing abstraction of the capital system, we partake in multiple objects, many of which are designed for the exploitation of resources for personal gain. In response, I've felt compelled as an artist to create objects to collectively experience the world in common, and this thesis arose out of my search for a method of art-making that can construct such objects.

I have applied the method of centering my body as the measurement tool to the fabrication of this paper. The pieces of ideas I have chosen to support my thesis work are that material at my mind/arm's reach in this post-concussion moment. Many concepts I have worked with over the last two years resisted me as I pulled this writing together – they were out of arms' reach and tucked away under a semi-opaque screen my cognition can't clean. I have focused on articulating the structure of an in/finite subject at the center of materialization, and in doing so touched briefly on the ethical implications that the scope of this paper could not do justice. Instead, these questions indicate the next steps and direction of my research: what does it mean for a body or subject to hold others? What are the ethical implications of this? How is this negotiated across different subject positions?

This thesis did not explore a history of objects, dive into theories of subject formation or the rich history of fashion, clothing and garments, not to mention performance theory. This work

is intended to be shallow; materializing at the surface, it skirts deeper philosophical and ethical questions about how we situate our bodies and experience, about how we form and are formed by others which relate to pressing calls to decolonialize our collective bodies. Accepting my limits meant showing up where I was, in the moment of not fully grasping at a cognitive level what I was working with and rather feeling those forms taking shape in the mud of material practice. I knew I needed to reconcile Barad's quantum material perspective and Federici's feminist reading of capitalism with my studio practice: these were ideas pulling at me over the last two years.

I *want* to believe that distraction can be a way of knowing, because distractions are an ongoing part of life. But I must also acknowledge that distractions keep one at the surface, and sometimes the loss of depth hurts. Costumes are located at the surface, and in trying on Mother Ginger's I have inched closer to a grammatical model of living as networked individual. Through this thesis I hope I have offered enough measurement for an object (M)other that labours to materialize, however momentarily. May she accompany you on your journey, as she will on mine.

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