

Mischief and Curiosity as Survival Strategies in the Supermodern World

by

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A Thesis Exhibition and Supporting Paper presented to OCAD University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts,
Interdisciplinary Masters in Art, Media & Design Program

OCAD U Graduate Gallery,

205 Richmond Street West,

Tunnel Vision Exhibition August 22 to September 6, 2013

Toronto, Ontario, Canada,

September 10, 2013

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Master of Fine Arts, 2013
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OCAD University

ABSTRACT

My thesis exhibition, Tunnel Vision, is the culmination of a series of investigations into the “non-places” of supermodernity that Marc Augé has described in his writing. In this work, I seek to engage viewers in a tactile, sensory experience that may serve to combat the alienation of disembodied social relations. I use humour as an invitation to establish connections with people through playful and interactive artistic propositions. My works draw attention to human needs for physical exploration and social exchanges and I hope that connecting with viewers as they engage with my work will provide moments of temporary collectivity. My theoretical investigations have delved into the possibilities of readjusting people’s experiences of space and the literature that I address includes De Certeau and Jeffrey Hou’s writing about inventive human behaviour and appropriations of space that react to societal constraints and imbalances of power.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my warmest gratitude to my extremely knowledgeable principle advisor, Jessica Wyman, and insightful secondary advisor Ginette Legaré. Their engaging critique and rigorous analysis concerning my research has been invaluable throughout my development. I also wish to thank Kate Hartman for her feedback and supervision during my first year of the program, Jan Verwoert for his unforgettable discussions in Banff, and Lucy Stein for her invaluable support during my studies in Glasgow. I would like to thank all of the OCADU staff in the Department of Graduate Studies including Dr. Barbara Rauch, Allison Rowe, Gale Allen, and Alice Brummel. I am also grateful to all of the faculty members that instructed and guided me throughout the program—especially Dr. Lynne Milgram, Dr. David Cecchetto, Luke Painter, and Dr. Michael Prokopow.

I would like to thank all of my friends who supported me throughout this project, assisting me with various aspects of my practice, namely, wearing my art, climbing into it and photo-documenting actions for me. A heartfelt thank you to Nathalie Sheppard and Anna MacLean and to Daniel Rueck for his endearing encouragement. I would like to extend sincere appreciation to all of my fellow graduate students, my dynamite cohort, as well as the friends I have made in other programs and the cohorts above and below me. Finally, I would like to thank SSHRC for its generous support of my graduate research and FQRSC for supporting my final semester of studies. I have been immersed in extraordinary talent throughout my program at OCAD U and I look forward to celebrating future successes together.

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INTRODUCTION

My work provokes and reveals the actions of curiosity. The human gestures that I employ while making work are very often reflected in the behaviour of viewers inspecting my installations. There is a great deal of reaching, leaning, bending over, crouching, looking, prying, listening, stacking, and stretching. I believe that this emergent behaviour in the viewing of my work promotes physical inquiry and action through the questioning of how, what, and why my objects are made. It is my aim that these inquisitive actions that my audiences display when engaging with installations might affect ways that they question and negotiate moving through the world.

My practice is interstitial, I experiment between historicized boundaries of art by working and presenting outside, inside and in-between: in the street, in the home, in the studio, in the mountains, on seashores and in the gallery. Sometimes I construct social spaces that have the potential to reinvigorate what Jen Budney (2005:12) identifies as the innate human desire to participate in the creation of un-alienated community.

Visual and tactile works and art-actions that I create offer viewers a chance to become active while they experience my work. My artistic investigation involves creating spaces that allow margins of artistic practice and viewership to expand and/or even dissolve. I aim to dismantle distinctions between seemingly isolated practices like painting, sculpture etc. by creating work that allows for an overlapping of media and techniques. This approach has sprouted out of post-modernist trends whereby a practice is not defined in relation to a given medium but in relation to logical operations on a set of cultural terms (Krauss 1986 in Budney & Blackwell 2005:24).

My work addresses deeply-rooted human desires for movement and adventure. I draw inspiration from the myriad ways humans have constructed relationships to space, place, self, others, and the non-human world. One of the ways that this emerges in my practice is through the portability of the work itself—much of it folds up and transports easily like the collapsible architectures *Skully* and *MissChief in my Tent* (see figures 2 & 4). These works directly reference the practices of nomadic societies while at the same time evoking the carnivalesque. Contemporary political and economic structures have virtually eradicated nomadism as a viable life-choice, which causes me to question what freedom in the West actually means. It occurs to me that the entire notion of freedom is supported by a sturdy, interrelated network of *unfreedoms*. This structure supported by the state through legal, political, economic, social classification and control manages to stratify people through a series of invisible yet constraining procedures and protocol in space. My work questions the origins of normative uses of and habituated behaviours in particular spaces by exercising my own agency within my practice and taking some works outside of gallery walls and outside of ‘safe zones’ of proscribed installation or predictability. My work emerges from unexpected encounters within my environments including space, place, objects, people, plants, and animals. It is for this reason that I embrace chance and accident as primary research methods both in the studio and in the world.

Questions that have informed my thesis work include:

1. How might an artistic practice reach viewers in a way that makes them acutely aware of their own agency, embodiment and connectedness to the world?

2. How do the (urban or rural) spaces we inhabit serve as an extension of the individual?

What roles do history and social institutions play in generating the built environment?

What is the relationship between space and power?

3. To what extent can my artistic work express and represent physical, social, and political aspects of contemporary culture? How does society produce forms, and how do these forms reproduce society? In what ways do my artworks accommodate human behavior and adapt to human needs?

4. How can I facilitate moments of playful participatory action through art-engagements that foster temporary collectivity? How might I challenge notions of art objects and living practices as static in a recombinant practice that proposes a model of improvisation and adaptability?

Throughout my project I have visited and revisited the following questions: How can my multi-disciplinary practice reach an audience by simultaneously inviting viewers to recognize and then venture out of normative behaviour? To what extent can I achieve this by establishing curious and playful sites both outdoors and in galleries that celebrate actions and reactions as moments of potential transformation? Can my works highlight a physical occupation of space that confronts embodied identity and its multi-sensorial role in relation to oneself, to one another and the world at large? Can artistic, tactile engagements, playful actions and forums for social exchange combat feelings of alienation and isolation? Can humorously sexual artworks challenge deep-seated body-politics of fear and shame in contestation of the polymorphous techniques of power that

operate in our society through repressing pleasure, enforcing censorship, and threatening bodily harm (Foucault 1978, De Certeau 1988)?

I have investigated various aspects of public and social space in urban environments; these are the channels through which power, stratification, culture, institutions, law, etc. contribute to the creation/inhibition of lively social spaces within these settings. After several outdoor performances and considerable reading, I have come to realize that what is most important to me is the role of power dynamics (of cultural and institutional practices, laws and subsequent behaviours) and their effect on our bodies in space. The primary aim of my project is to create artworks that can challenge instrumental thinking and hegemonic action in a reflexive manner. I draw attention to and subvert actions that law enforcers use to uphold the law (by threat of bodily harm) by performing these actions upon materials.

Michel De Certeau (1984) has noted that instruments of torture and threat used by law enforcers include items/objects “that are made for squeezing, holding up, cutting, opening, or confining bodies” (141). I re-appropriate these actions by employing them in my material manipulations. Actions that I perform upon materials when creating works include stretching, cutting, sewing, puncturing, pulling, injecting, dripping, weighting, suspending, balancing and allowing gravity to take effect. When performing these actions upon materials I allow “mistakes” that happen along the way like spills, leaks, frays, falls, and stains to permeate the work. I am familiar with volatile messiness within my own body and day-to-day life and am comforted by imperfection and leaky realities of desire. My works are designed to stir the viewer’s body in recognition of their own living

experience as layered and multidimensional: as potential sites of desire, celebration, shame, punishment, guilt, and resistance. These actions and feelings are explored throughout my body of work that aims to reveal connections between our physiology with social and political realms.

Political theorist Jane Bennet (2010) identifies an "ethical and aesthetic turn" in political theory inspired by feminist studies of the body and by Michel Foucault's work on "care of the self." This turn, she argues, helped put "desire" and bodily practices, such as physical exercise, meditation and awareness of sexuality, back on the ethical radar. Bennet notes that although this movement has been criticized by some as favouring soft, psycho-cultural issues of identity at the expense of harder political issues (human rights, environmental sustainability, economic justice etc.), she argues that bodily disciplines are themselves political and constitute a whole (underexplored) field of micro politics. I fully support Bennet's argument that in order for any significant and ethical changes in society to take place, human moods, dispositions, and cultural ensembles must be hospitable towards such transformation (xi-xii). Jan Verwoert (2011) argues that societies only come into existence when people *feel themselves in relation to one another* and that for this to happen, there must be some people to generate and channel the feelings that allow for all people to relate. Verwoert views this generation and channeling of feelings as work and has coined it *affective labour*. He argues that art and thinking can contribute to this zone of sentience (271-72).

The modern world has produced numerous political and cultural concerns pertaining to ways that the state has infringed upon holistic individual and social

perceptions of the body. My work concerns how the (over)regulation of spaces contributes to the production of behaviour and cultural activity. In particular, I am interested in the alienating effects of capitalism, industrialization and the over-commercialization of public spaces. Although I touch upon these ideas throughout my praxis, which emphasizes human agency through my physical engagement with materials and accessible art experiences, I am especially concerned with responding to the physical, spatial, emotional, psychic and psycho-sociological conditions of my own life as a child of the early 80s from a dysfunctional, working class, Canadian family.

I come from an under-privileged family troubled with addiction, abuse, mental illness, incarceration and serious money problems. I was an eager and engaged student who was fortunate to have stumbled upon interesting opportunities throughout my childhood, which allowed me to experience some success outside of the home—at sports and in school. Maintaining friendships and involving myself in various communities outside of my family kept me busy and feeling connected during times when it was difficult to endure the instability of my home-life. I believe that it is for these reasons that I am drawn to connect with others through aspects of my artistic practice and that my personal history is the reason why so much of my work aims to combat isolation by conveying the message ‘you are not alone’.

As a result of my socio-economic background, I consider myself an artist who comes from the margins, and whose work questions normative practices. As Vito Acconci (2005) has noted, it is from a marginal position that one can comment on and contradict the main body of the text in a culture. I feel that I have a non-establishment perspective

on public versus private space, class differences, self-definitions, notions of ‘free time’, creativity, consumerism, ecosystems, and access, by reflecting on my own ability or lack of ability to participate.

My artwork responds to the spaces that we inhabit and poses questions about how and why we feel the way we do within them. It is my aim to demonstrate the malleability of space *and* behaviour by playfully challenging constraints. My experiences have led me to approach life as a series of ongoing negotiations between resisting control, following my desires and embracing the unexpected. I question fixity and stability because according to my own experiences, nothing has ever been particularly stable and conditions have always been *subject to change without notice**. Natural and social scientists alike support a view that matters within our physical and social world are continually transforming. My work confronts human concepts of stability and predictability underscoring them as impractical, hilarious and absurd.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Spaces, Places and Non-Places

My theoretical investigations have delved into the possibilities of readjusting people’s experiences of space and the literature that I address includes Marc Augé’s (1995) writing about supermodernity and, the increase of “non-places” and their contributions to feelings of alienation today. I also investigate Michel De Certeau’s (1988) and Jeffrey Hou’s (2010) writing about inventive human behaviour and appropriations of space, while referencing sociological and anthropological texts

concerning the social production of spaces and places. Augé, de Certeau, and Hou are the main authors to have influenced my artistic thinking in the creation of objects and performances designed to foster tacit experiences of social interaction and exchange.

Having consulted interdisciplinary texts, this literature review establishes a grounding of my interests on topics of public space, cityscape, space and place, and navigating the everyday, all of which are important to my interactive and participatory art practice that traverses public and gallery spaces. I am interested in creating works that are accessible and relevant to a wide audience, works that can foster moments of collectivity by dissolving barriers between people rather than establishing and perpetuating them. I believe that my humorous social art practice can bring people together by highlighting shared desires and experiences that can combat feelings of alienation and isolation.

Marc Augé's book (1995) *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* touches upon a few of the issues that I seek to address through my practice. Augé argues that supermodernity produces non-places "A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital...where the habitué of supermarkets... and credit cards communicates wordlessly...a world...surrendered to solitary individuality..." (1995:78). He recognizes that in today's predominantly capitalist and technocratic environments, material excess and overabundance are enmeshed in our daily habits. He argues that many of our daily routines and actions in public spaces are monetarily driven and that the advent of online purchasing, ATMs, self-checkouts, and other technologies emphasize solitary transactions (rather than social ones), which can lead to a depleted collective social and cultural life.

Place is a principle of meaning for people who live in it and across cultures there are three common characteristics: people want them to be locations of identity, of relations, and of history (Augé 1995:52). Keeping this in mind, a place without any of these attributes is defined by Augé as a non-place (1995:78). Non-places are isolated places, both tangible and intangible, where social relationships are unlikely to occur as they are tailored to the individual and the generation of capital. These are places like parking lots, networks of electrical wires, people isolated in cars, cubicles, and the air space through which signals, sound waves, and satellites transmit.

Perceptual space has been defined by human geographer David Harvey (2006) as the ways we process the physical and biological experience of space neurologically and register it in a world of thought. *Material space* is quite simply recognized as the world of tactile and sensual interaction with matter, it is the space of experience (278). Both Lefebvre (1999) and Benjamin recognize, like myself, that we are not only material atoms floating in material world; we also have imaginations, fears, emotions, psychologies, fantasies and dreams (Benjamin 1999 in Harvey 280). These emotive aspects of human existence permeate the works that I create. Sharing this work enables me to claim soft, psycho-cultural issues of identity as valuable inquiry leading to an increased understanding of my relationship between self and the world.

We live in a moment when people are spending more and more time in non-places. Lefebvre (1999), Low (2003) and Hou (2010) argue that space is socially produced and according to Merleau-Ponty (2002 [1945]) our sense of space arises at the intersection of movement and place. Augé argues that places are formed when people overlap in relationships where history and identity are relevant, and that places are diminishing with increasingly

individual time spent in non-places. What does this mean for our perceptions of space and place today? My art practice aims to reinvigorate human desires for movement and place making by enlivening perceptual and material spaces and transforming them into relational places. With artistic action, I mark spaces in time, with history (for those who witness my actions and carry them in their memories) and through documentation of my actions, while welcoming the emergence of individual and collective identities through interaction.

I am interested in collective social space production in an artistic context and the generation of new meanings that can occur when public spaces are creatively appropriated. Many authors whose work I summarize in this literature review support insurgent uses of public space for greater participation in constructing shared spaces as forums for creative action. These authors (Augé 2010; Barber 2001; Barker 2009; De Certeau 1988; Hou 2010; Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003; Lefebvre 1991; and Merker 2010) argue that engaged activity within public spaces is necessary for living cultural production.

As demonstrated by the Occupy Wall Street protests since September 2011, there is widespread concern about who owns and controls public spaces. The look and feel of urban spaces clearly has effects on behaviour. However, Amin (Amin et al 2000 in Hubbard 2010:3) argues that such design-centered theories offer an impoverished take on the distinctive sociality of cities—proposing that what is needed is urban scholarship that takes the city seriously as an object of study without lapsing into environmental determinism. Hubbard (2010:4) underscores the importance of space in social, economic and political city-life emphasizing that it needs to be recognized and re-imagined in order to foster creativity and vitality for urban dwellers. Both Hubbard and Amin suggest that without such explorations, it is difficult to determine how the

trajectory of urban life might be changed through new ways of living, occupying or imagining cities.

It is argued by Franck and Stevens (2006:3 in Hou 2010:12) that insurgent uses of public space give rise to the ability to transcend the hegemonic logic of leisure and consumption by cultivating creative improvisation, new perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. When I perform and present works outside of studio and gallery settings like *Freedom Goggles* (see fig.1), *Seeing through Rose Coloured Glasses* (see fig. 9), *Washed Up* (see fig.19), I use my own body and the bodies of my models to act in public sites, creating events that enlist the arguments of the above-mentioned authors in the production of socially engaged public spaces. When performing outdoors I participate in conversations that would not occur without my artistic actions instigating them. In this way, I use my works as tools for social interaction.

I am interested in how texts concerning public interaction and cultural production (Augé 2010; Barker 2009; De Certeau 1988; Hou 2010, Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003; Lefebvre 1991; Merker 2010) can reflect the practices of viewership proposed by the presentation of my work in galleries as well as in outdoor spaces by enlisting viewer participation and feelings of connection. I present creative uses of space and objects designed to nurture (even if only temporarily) a social fabric that can pierce the “solitary individuality” noted by Augé. I achieve this by offering interactive and tactile art experiences to viewers where they can witness or experience works like *Eyeless Mole* (see fig.11), and *Mr. Sandhands* (see fig.10). These works aim to enliven playful social experiences and all of the works that I create in this vein are generated with the aim of creating spaces for humour, play, and exchange. These artistic approaches are informed by the arguments of Henri Lefebvre, Setha Low and Jeffrey Hou who

propose that space is socially produced and that the social construction of space relies on human interaction. This is precisely what the social aspect of my practice aims to illuminate and maintain.

Touchy Feely

My role as an artist enables me to interrogate the texture of urban everyday life regarding my own experiences of public (social) and private (domestic and internal) space. I reflect upon the differences between how these spaces make me feel and aim to interrupt feelings of isolation through exaggerated representations/enactments. *Mr. Sandhands* (see fig.10) is an example of a work that was produced as a multiple and was designed for wearing. It is comprised of multiple pairs of sand-filled latex gloves, each attached to a short piece of rope with duct tape. These were piled on a plinth in the *Fingertip Memory* 2012 and *Tunnel Vision* 2013 exhibitions. I specifically do not offer a set of directives or a 'how to' guide when presenting various tactile works because I find it stimulating to learn through the observation of individual discoveries. For example, with *Mr. Sandhands* (see fig.10) I needed to be present to hand them out initially. When I could, I would greet someone entering the gallery by offering a pair with a phrase something like: "Here, try these on; they're soothing". Many people took turns wearing them throughout the exhibitions in a number of ways: on heads, shoulders, necks and arms. People held them and laid them on the backs of their hands, they slapped each other with them and enjoyed arranging the pile of pairs on the plinth as well. Seeing *Mr. Sandhands* on others reminded me of massage, groping, comfort, hugs, Japanese lady pillows, and a weight on one's shoulders. It was brought to my attention that this work functioned to express a desire to be touched but complicated that desire through the grossness of the latex gloves, which

allude to social and medical sanitization inherent in our post-AIDS reality. Though I designed the hands to rest on peoples shoulders to offer a feeling of comfort, like being held, or a loneliness therapy device, this work functioned in multiple ways and I am still uncovering new actions and implications through sharing thoughts and feelings with my audiences through conversation and play.

Verwoert (2011) recognizes all practices aiming to create and sustain conviviality as forms of *affective labour*. According to Verwoert, the labour of affect is associated with empathetic behaviour: witnessing, taking on, and bearing the weight of the emotions of others noting that “The labour of affect is the sustained effort of keeping oneself exposed to feelings” (272). My practice exposes feelings of vulnerability, resilience, loneliness and desires for creative physical, mental, and social activity. I aim to open up possibilities for audiences to feel connected with me, my work, their own feelings and/or others through artistic propositions that portray wacky representations of my own experiences in the world. These feelings include isolation, togetherness, power dynamics, fecund and decomposing relationships, pleasures, discomfort and defeat. *Be my guts*, 2013 (see fig.25), a wearable pile of soft, shiny “guts” on the floor of Tunnel Vision, did not receive as much physical attention as I thought it might have, perhaps because nobody was eager to feel “guttled”. Perhaps it had to do with the fact that only one person could wear them at once whereas with *Mr. Sandhands* people could feel like they were one of many people with dangling hands on their bodies. Maybe it had to do with the size of the work as it was not as discreet as *Mr. Sandhands* and required a more extroverted, performative viewer. Not all of my artistic efforts are successful in the aim of establishing

viewer participation however; as long as I am able to establish connections with my audiences I feel successful.

Wigg(I)ing Out

I situate my work in galleries as well as in the context of everyday spaces and activities, which has been supported by my engagement of the scholarship of De Certeau in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. I see my own practice of staging artwork outside of the gallery and in outdoor public spaces, in terms of what De Certeau calls "*la perruque*" (1984:28).

This term (literally translated as ‘a wig’) describes the everyday practice of subverting an established order by using a constraining framework for work that is creative, free, and precisely not directed towards profit. De Certeau sees *la perruque* as creative activity that signals a return of the ethical, of pleasure and of invention within an institution: law, society or workplace. *La perruque* is a tactic that constitutes ways of operating and ways of using a constraining order by establishing within it a degree of plurality and creativity. This arises through an art of being in-between that can enable one to draw unexpected results from a given (and limiting) situation (1984:30).

La perruque emerges throughout my practice in ways that I approach the installation of my work. I respond to space and/or architectural features, which means that the presentation varies depending on the physical setting. Walls, windows, earth, lampposts, and electrical outlets are often enlisted as unexpected visual and structurally supporting components of the work. In this way, my practice is responsive and combines the calculative with the improvisational. I use what is available to me and, similar to another of de Certeau’s musings, engage with the art of “making do” (1984:29). de Certeau addresses the interrelation between

cultural techniques that camouflage economic reproduction, differentiating between uses, strategies and tactics in spaces of work or leisure. Wherein *la perruque* (a tactic) introduces artistic tricks that can graft onto a system that reproduces partitions through behaviour that is place-specific (work or leisure) *la perruque* is not itself place-specific or able to produce space. Uses and tactics refer to differences between *modalities* of action and the *formalities* of practices (1984:29).

Tactics in Practice

The San Francisco collective ‘Rebar’ is an example of a group of intervention artists that has identified parking spaces as niche spaces within the urban landscape and redefined them as fertile terrain for creative social, political and artistic experience. They claimed a new physical and cultural territory by challenging the existing value system encoded in everyday space by renting a parking space to create a temporary park complete with grass, a tree for shade, and a bench. They thus transformed a densely paved and car-oriented area into a place where people could rest and socialize.

A year later in 2006, Rebar organized a global one-day event in forty-seven cities to replicate their intervention on a global scale. Logistics were complicated by the fact that different legal codes had to be negotiated in each location. Participants paid their parking meters and exercised their option to do something other than park cars in the small piece of real estate that they, for the moment, “owned”. The event operated in niche-spaces, exploiting a legal loophole in a radical yet unthreatening tactic that worked to destabilize the system of spatial commodification it critiqued (Merker 2010:46). In this way, Rebar refers to their

practice as one of “tactical urbanism”, which is defined as the use of temporary revision to urban space to seed structural, environmental change (2010:49).

Similar to the members of Rebar, I believe that deep organizing structures (social, cultural, economic etc.) have a two-way relationship with the physical urban environment: they both produce the environment and are *reproduced* by it. Three strands of their practice that echo aspects of my own include: tactics, generosity, and absurdity. By creating public situations between strangers, we both create cultural value that does not rely on commercial transactions. I notice that when performing or staging an intervention, there is an air of suspicion present from some people. Purves (2005) has noted that when unregulated acts of generosity are interjected into an environment of commercial consensus, a cognitive disruption occurs that can be equated with “a blow against the empire” (22-44).

Tactics like *la perruque* do not obey the law of place, and are not defined or identified by it. They are not any more localizable than technocratic (and scriptural) *strategies* that seek to create places in conformity with abstract models (De Certeau 1984:29). What distinguishes tactics and strategies for De Certeau are the “*types of operations* and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces...whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces”(30). Deploying a tactic means that one “must vigilantly make use of the cracks that...open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers...poach them...create surprises in them” (1984:37).

Anthropologists Jeffrey Hou (2010) and Joshua Barker (2009) outline how insurgent spaces are created—namely by appropriating, reclaiming, pluralizing, transgressing, uncovering, and contesting privatization, over-regulation, and surveillance of public space. I utilize a

number of these tactics when staging works outdoors by creatively appropriating and reclaiming public spaces that function as temporary and playful social magnets for interaction. Some examples of how I employ tactics in my own work include the act of staking my tents *Skully, 2012* and *MissChief in my Tent, 2012* (see fig. 2 & 4) into the earth at Grange Park in Toronto and in Banff National Park, Alberta.

In neither case did I seek permission to stake my art on municipal or federal property, and in neither case did my action cause damage (though both were technically illegal). Due to the temporary installation (in each case, one day) I was around to witness a number of passers-by happen upon them, and observe responses of curiosity and surprise. By presenting my work in this manner I created what Hakim Bey refers to as Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ). These are spaces that are temporarily altered to liberate an area (of land, of time, of imagination) from formal structures of control, which then dissolve to re-form elsewhere (Bey 1991:104).

De Certeau elucidates another kind of production, differing from tactics and strategies, called “consumption”. Consumption for De Certeau is quasi-invisible as the action both uses and reveals itself on and through people rather than on its own products (31). Augé identifies the ego as a culprit in this cycle of excess and consumption within supermodernity wherein he has observed the individual in Western society prefers to interpret information delivered to him/herself by him/herself (Augé 1995:37). Augé argues that individual meaning (or identity) production is supported by an advertising apparatus with talks of the body, the senses, freshness of living and political language hinged on the theme of individual freedoms. He suspects that emphasis upon individual versus collective action contributes to local anthropologies and

systems of (Western) representation where categories between identity and otherness are given shape (Augé 1995:38).

The artworks that I create enlist the literature addressed in this section in layered complexity. I reclaim and transgress public spaces with the aim of reinvigorating physical exploration and social exchanges. These moments function in reaction to feelings of alienation resulting from increasing time spent in non-places. I subvert advertising strategies using my own body and the bodies of models to carry messages of my artworks. *Freedom Goggles*, 2012 (see fig. 1) is one example of work that highlights the absurdity of individual, excessive consumerism, notions of work, success, and achievement that are enmeshed in social understandings of bodies in space, surveillance, how time is ‘spent’/‘used’, and political and economic agendas. Contrary to establishing and perpetuating categories between identity and otherness, my work functions to highlight values of collectivity through shared experiences of humour, (mis)behaviour, and curiosity.

2.METHODOLOGY

Cross-disciplinary Research

A range of literature in art and social sciences as well as my own creative actions and experiences has informed my cross-disciplinary research methodology. Art-based research encourages the integration of different methods and has allowed me to merge heuristic self-inquiry in the studio with data gathered through observational note-taking, sketching, photography and video documentation before, during, and after interventions and gallery installations (McNiff 1998:49). Reflexive-interpretation is a research methodology that I have incorporated throughout my projects; this approach recognizes that personal experiences of

culture, language, perception, and ideology permeate research practices. Reflexivity is a cyclical process of gathering and processing data in preliminary research and in the (final) textual product (Alvesson 2000:249). In my case, information has been drawn from literature, staging exhibitions, visiting those of other artists, and my interaction with live events and documentation material. Through these activities, questions and ideas surface throughout individual and social processes of creating and reflecting upon work that often lead me in unforeseen directions.

The More We Get Together

Scholar Gail Weiss (1999) argues that the “experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is...mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies” (1999:5). In artistic projects I am interested in fostering a sense of corporeal collectivity by creating tactile artistic propositions that allow similarities to emerge between people. I achieve this by showcasing works that underscore shared experiences of embodied identity as sites and events of pleasure, celebration, aging, and isolation.

Collectivity emerges in viewership of my work through speech and action: sharing, reflecting, co-operating, laughing or physically willing work to move. In this way, viewers are enlisted as agents with the potential to change the way that the work is viewed and experienced by others (Bourriaud 2004). Arendt’s (1981) definition of collectivity engenders a form of power that is not measured in terms of strength, violence, or the law, but a power created through the ephemeral coming together in momentary gestures of speech and action. The “space of appearance” in which these momentary actions take place are sites of protests and celebrations. These sites do not bear the markings of traditional political spaces but rather animate the spaces of everyday life by temporarily transforming them through reciprocity and

rationality (Arendt 1981 in Springgay 2008:2). Very often I display visual works that are not intended for handling/physical interaction and I have witnessed that these are also capable of bringing strangers together in moments of speech and action—through bending, peering, questioning, conversing and chuckling with one another.

Cooperation has played an important role in my projects both inside the gallery and in urban and rural public spaces. Very often, my friends and colleagues have helped me to realize projects by acting as models and guinea pigs during the creation and initial presentation of my works. At times, curious passersby cooperate by temporarily becoming part of the artwork as they activate it through exploration and model behaviour to others. When working outdoors, I integrate the surrounding landscape making use of its possibilities. These experiences of bringing work out of the studio into the world are exciting as I encounter characters and challenges that keep me responding and adapting in the moment.

I welcome conversations with my audience and have made efforts to be present whenever I have work installed. During gallery exhibitions held in Toronto I have done my best to be around throughout the run of each exhibition. When staging performances/interventions outside, I am always nearby, usually with a camera in hand. If someone passes with an inquisitive gaze, I smile as a friendly invitation to chat. Some people do, curious to find out what is happening while others hurriedly continue on their way.

Arendt (1981) argues that our reasoning faculties can only flourish in a dialogic context (in Passerin d'Entrèves 1994:127). Talking with people kindles ideas for instigating new work and creates opportunities for interaction that are important to me. The conversations I share allow me to gain an understanding of how someone else perceives and experiences the world

and more specifically, my work. Elizabeth Grosz (1995) has recognized the circulation of ideas as a process of scattering thought, scrambling terms, concepts, practices, forming linkages, and as becoming a form of action (through conversation and creative expression). She also notes that thinking (and exchanging ideas) can be regarded as a point of transition from one (social) stratum or space to another (1995:126). I feel nourished in the action of establishing comfortable ground with strangers and exchanging ideas. I have notable work experience with sensitive and diverse populations including homeless and mentally ill individuals, stroke survivors, children, tradespeople, students, and other spectrums of society encountered in the service industry. When presenting work outside, I keep a sketchbook with me and take note of conversations with passersby, which prove as invaluable references. Looking back to these notes allows me to reflect upon discoveries and new iterations of work.

My research and creation methodology responds to Shusterman's (1992) argument that the separation of art from reality and everyday experience brands it as practically worthless and "isolates it from practical life and socio-political action". Shusterman recognizes that the challenges of practitioner-researchers is to "restore the link between practical or lived experience and the aesthetic...to demonstrate how, in artistic practice, this realizes a mode of knowledge generation that has application beyond immediate points of production and consumption of the artistic product" (Shusterman 1992:52 in Barrett 2007:116). I operate on the premise that it is important to connect one's creative practice to daily experiences that other people can relate to.

I have collaborated in the past with professional photographers and with friends willing to act as photographers and videographers while I wore or performed work. Attempts to achieve

aesthetically appealing compositions of photo-documentation have been difficult when working with non-professionals—especially when my objective was to use selected archives of intervention and/or performance events to display as artworks in exhibitions. This sometimes frustrating process lead me in the direction of working with models so that I could operate the camera, offering me agency in the process of generating as well as editing documentation material. A few examples of working in both manners throughout my MFA include *Who's Pulling the Strings* 2011 (see fig.2), *Freedom Goggles* 2011 (see fig.1), *Seeing through rose-coloured glasses* 2012 (see fig.9), *Skully* 2012 (see fig. 2), *Mr. Sandhands* 2012 (see fig.10), *Eyeless Mole* 2012 (see fig.11), *Moving Mountains* 2012 (see fig.5), *Look what I can do*, 2013 and *Washed up*, 2013 (see fig.21).

Lucky Chance

Whether my art is staged outdoors or indoors, I enjoy experimenting in zones of unpredictability. My default approach to studio creation involves multi-disciplinary aleatory engagements that allow for and rely upon chance to influence my process-oriented approach. This method loose and self-reflexive exploration enables me to recognize myself in the way that something hangs: flaccid and forlorn, or stands: triumphant and erect. I open myself up to opportunities of discovery by not always knowing exactly how my ideas and objects will come to be, or be received. Carter notes profitable results emerge with project flexibility when working individually or collectively across disciplines (2004:9).

My studio practice is informed by previous training and experience in painting, drawing, sculpture, fibres, performance, installation, intervention and photography. When working in the studio in an aleatory manner, I can spend long hours creating intuitively in a meditative state.

Muscle memory informs my material handling; however, it is essential to my practice that I remain open to indeterminacy.

Design-Methodology

Design-methodologies emphasize planning, designing, developing and deploying an idea. I occasionally use this approach when I have a clear idea of a finished artwork that I wish to realize. Though this methodology is less flexible, I enjoy the challenges of manifesting an idea into a three-dimensional object. I used this approach in the tent projects *Skully* and *MissChief in my Tent* (see fig. 2 & 4). In both cases the process began with a sketch and then a paper maquette. Patterns, scales and dimensions were recorded for translating into a fabric and wire models before creating full-scale objects. The decisions made in this part of the process are most important as the behaviour of materials and objects change when considerably increases in size are made. The smallest mathematical error can make weight distribution, shape, and tension prone to distortion.

I am sometimes contemptuous of the creative restrictions inherent in a design-oriented methodology, but have found that it can be rewarding to work within these restrictions. There are always multiple solutions to a problem, and the trial and error process is like a game of efficiency. Logistics including the cost of materials, size, portability, construction time, aesthetic appeal, storage requirements have become increasingly important in my practice. This design-oriented method of working contrasts with my usual approach, which embraces undetermined exploration.

I have noticed that despite parameters in previous design-oriented projects, the aleatory aspects of my practice inevitably materialize. The progression of work that has developed throughout the *MissChief in my Tent* project is an example of this emergence in my practice. In

Banff, Alberta, the mountain tent that I had originally conceived was a staked object to be placed in and to mimic the Rocky Mountain landscape. The project was inspired by personal reflection and research about the numerous ways that humans socially construct ideas of nature, which influence how we experience natural landscapes. My aim was to construct my own version of ‘nature’ within a National Park.

Despite careful planning, however, the project went through multiple transformations in the ways that I conceived of and displayed it. I took photographs of the painted tent staked in a Rocky Mountain valley, both from the inside looking out and from the outside looking in (see fig.4 & 7). These photographs, in turn, inspired me to create a performance titled “*Moving Mountains*” that involved me and another person walking across the landscape inside the tent as though the structure had legs. I filmed this action (see fig.5) but refrained from doing anything with the video right away. During the *Lucky 13* IAMD group exhibition at the Gladstone Hotel in 2012, I displayed the tent along with a few photographic compositions. At the time I believed the tent had to be standing and taut so that the painted inner and outer surfaces would be visible to the audience. In order to do this, I had to re-make poles and steel bases suitable for indoor use, and sew sand tubes and velcro along the bottom edges to add weight to the structure (see fig.8) as the original tent was designed with aluminum poles and pegs for staking into the ground.

Once the exhibition installation was complete I felt disappointed with it. I was bored of making/performing objects in a particular space and context and then transporting that same object into a gallery context next to a picture of it in its original location on the wall. In addition, I was not pleased with how falsely situated the tent appeared indoors with its new steel bases

that prevented anyone from going inside. By then it was too late to change anything and I regretted showing this iteration in the first place. I had just been in Banff on a residency where I had created and installed the work initially and had generated a body of painting, drawing and sculptural work that played between the floor and the wall (see fig.12). These works were created with tactile materials and an earthy, sexual subject matter. That was the work I was excited about showing, but it had already been decided that my tent would be featured at the entrance as the visual ‘welcome to the OCAD U graduate student exhibition’ center piece.

Once the exhibition was over I stored the tent carelessly on the floor of my studio without any of its internal/external supporting structures, and that is when I suddenly became attracted to the object in its deflated state. The tent, like any number of objects that we surround ourselves with, has the potential to be activated by human use or to be ignored. This piece has become reinvigorated at XPACE Cultural Centre during the group exhibition *Storied Telling* in August 2013, curated by Amber Landgraff. The curator and I met last winter for a studio visit and discussed how to improve upon the presentation of the mountain tent. For this project I displayed the video footage of *Moving Mountains* in Banff, AB next to another video that showcased a reenactment of *Moving Mountains* across an urban Toronto landscape. On the floor, I tossed the painted canvas tent leaving it to wrinkle and wilt.

When I was a kid...

I believe that I am drawn to staging works in urban and rural environments due to my formative experiences living on the margin of a rural and urban landscape while growing up. This location greatly influenced my perception of environments, which could feel and appear drastically different depending on whether I stepped outside my door (where cheap

development properties were sprouting like weeds) or whether I cycled 1km north towards the Thames River Valley in London, Ontario. Littered parking lots, asphalt, concrete, vinyl siding and brick fell away when headed towards refreshing smells and sounds of water, wind and trees. Densely populated townhouse complexes and houses ended abruptly and I could suddenly be surrounded by corn and soy fields, passing gravel pits on rough trails towards the river. My childhood buzzed with insects, animals, and lawnmowers, and my friends and I had a choice between crawling through half-built houses and underground sewage networks or hopping on bikes towards the forested valley.

The artworks that I create are manifestations of my curiosity and engagement with the world around me. David Harvey has recognized one's spatial consciousness or "geographical imagination" as something that "enables an individual to recognize the role of space and place in their own biography, to relate to the spaces they see around them, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and organizations are affected by the space that separates them" (Harvey 1973:2). My primary inspiration for creating art stems from my observations of changes in spaces, places and recognizing how changes in my environment affected me physiologically and socially. When I create in the studio, I engage with media that enables me to translate observations of the fantastic, funny, and pathetic world we live in regardless of whether I have used a design, art-based, or reflexive methodological approach.

For me, the action of creating art is similar to learning how to tolerate a difficult family member. It involves pushing, pulling, yielding, combining materials/conditions, and learning about resistances, resiliencies and breaking points. These actions are engaged in my material practice, and are reflexive of emotional, physiological, and social assessments and actions. Loo

Always Look Back

Usually I am not able to properly reflect upon my works and fully understand the ways that they function in response to current culture, challenging societal norms, and revealing personal and/or collective desires until some time has passed. My material choices and methods of construction begin intuitively it is not until I finish a work that my intentions become clear. I have an obsessive approach to studio creation that relies on movement and momentum. When I am generating work there can be so much of it at times that I simply cannot be bothered to become overly precious with it. This enables me to take risks like cutting, tearing, spilling, folding, burning and combining pieces into new work.

Somehow, I have developed the ability to be carefully careless in my storage practices. What looks like a disorganized heap to one is actually an organized and carefully inventoried mess to me. I know where and how to step lightly in my studio whereas visitors may not. This *can* be a problem but thankfully a good deal of my work is somewhat indestructible. *Cute Couple* (see fig.14) for example rests in a heap when not stretched on a wall and fabric pieces are easily folded and shelved and works like *You(r) Tube* (see fig.15) and *Yeth Pleathe* (see fig.17) fit into small boxes which. Juxtapositions between durable and delicate works and materials in *Tunnel Vision* underscore themes of vulnerability and resilience intrinsic to my practice and all living systems including social, political, and biological networks.

4.RESEARCH AND CREATION

Shake that Body for me

Throughout my degree I have come to understand my practice as an ongoing 'body of work' that is much like my own physical body, somewhat permeable and adaptable. I employ everyday materials and present them in altered contexts to portray figurations within a cartoon-

like vocabulary of the body that allude to pop-culture, porn and fashion magazines. A few materials that I have been working with recently that are showcased in the Tunnel Vision exhibition include light bulbs, fruit netting, plastic, rubber bands, nail polish, silk, fishnet stockings, braids, and bows (see fig.42-49). By acting as the mad-scientist-artist-experimenter, I dissect my subjectivity, analyzing the motivations and movements of physical, mental, and emotional activity and reflect upon how this action is affected by the spaces I inhabit. I strive to connect with others through my practice in the hopes that we can better understand ourselves both separately and together. In my practice I underscore that we share space with other living beings (people, plants and animals) and I wish to ask: what else can we share?

My thesis project has expanded and evolved beyond its original intention to examine bodies as a location of threshold. Similar to a Spinozist notion of affect, I recognize the body and its capacity for activity and responsiveness (Bennett 2010:xi). I examine skin as the barometer of sensation and recognize its role as threshold between a warm, wet inside and the outside world. In my artworks I create casings that mimic skin and reveal actions of dressing and exposing it. Reflecting upon the actions of concealing and revealing within and between bodies, homes, galleries, institutions, cities, as well as urban and natural settings, has enabled me to generate a body of work in an attempt to understand the many distinctions between public and private spaces and modes of behaviour.

Spacing Out

De Certeau's close examination of environmentally specific behaviour resonates with my own observations of people. His consideration was likely influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) attempt to explain how we perceive our highly codified landscape through the terms

doxa and *habitus*. *Doxa* are deep, self-evident beliefs that not only explain how the world works, but are reinforced by physical environments. Space has been recognized as a strategy and/or technique of power and social control by Low (2008:30), which raises questions about the way space is used in everyday urban life. The assumed neutrality of space conceals its role in maintaining the social system, meanwhile instilling particular ideologies and scripted narratives (Yeager:1996 in Low:2008,30) which is what Bourdieu recognizes when explaining that “every established order tends to produce (to varying degrees and with very different means) the naturalizations of its own arbitrariness” (1977:164). *Habitus* is defined as our ways of operating within these beliefs and structures: “The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent to be nonetheless “sensible” and “reasonable” (1977:79). I believe that by disrupting sense and reason through defamiliarized presentations and actions in my practice, the very boundaries of the status quo can be challenged, questioned, and redefined.

A Hierarchy of Materials

I am inspired by the semiotics of dress, hierarchies of material culture and the changes in severity of social judgment, shame, and pride evident in the dichotomy between rural and urban aesthetics and distinctions between good and bad “taste”. In my artworks I often incorporate materials that employ languages of the provisional with elements of luxury. I repurpose used bedclothes and combine them with materials of human-ascribed value like silk and fur as seen in *Last Legs*, 2013 (see fig.25). I am curious about how a hierarchy of matter/materials has been socially constructed, and the space between necessity and desire.

Scholar Robert Shields reflected upon Lefebvre’s ideas of space, positing that spatial extension, scales and character are the common elements, measure and loci of all materials,

resources, and finished products, be they businesses or “culture”. He argues that the simulated world of hyper-capitalistic advertising images relies on the tactile and weighted work of three dimensions (material space). Objects and materials are often re-presented and re-spatialised to include imagined literary and cinematic spatialities to convey and connote social aspirations. “Mere rocks may be scripted and analyzed as a blend of different moments, modes and forms of spatialisation” (Lefebvre 1999:150). This brings me to question the real versus the imaginary: if all things “real” were first imagined, then by trade (as a professional imaginer) am I participating in shaping the “real” world? To what extent can I respatialize objects and materials in a manner that underscores the ridiculous and seemingly solidified socially constructed meanings that surround and produce our understanding of objects?

Strange Brew

During the creation and presentation of my work for Tunnel Vision I employ defamiliarization as a technique for critically engaging with the ‘status quo’ and question the origins of accepted everyday practices. Defamiliarization is a term that was coined by early 20th-century Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky (Rivkin & Ryan 1998). Although he created the term to address the mechanics of literature, it is now widely used in addressing what many creative disciplines can achieve by re-presenting the ordinary in a strange light. Defamiliarization enhances perception of the familiar by engaging audiences in a slowing down of the reading and comprehending process. This sets the mind in a state of radical unpreparedness to cultivate the willing suspension of disbelief (Wall 2009:20). Like the act of repeating a familiar word over and over again until it becomes unusual, a common concept/practice can suddenly become strange and arbitrary when presented in a peculiar light.

The palettes, formations, and textures evident in *Tunnel Vision* evoke flesh and supporting structures within the body as well as bright colours common to decorating bodily exteriors. In *Ass-Makeup*, 2013 (see fig.16) the garish and strange properties of human decoration in the hunt for a mate are compared to colourful patterns and displays found often in the animal kingdom, like baboons, or the inviting, furry swirls on four-legged female rumps. *Tunnel Vision* showcases an exploration of visual work that examines sexually charged content by addressing the rich ecologies of physical, mental, emotional and magical properties (heat, expansion, excitement, engorged organs, orgasms, eggs, and babies) that can evolve when two or more bodies come together. My work investigates emotional terrain as inseparable from physiological, social, and spatial influences. Instincts are interpreted as feelings and as a valid network of negotiations between self and others. While making works for *Tunnel Vision* I was inspired by sexual appetites and the volatile tensions that occur between bodies (animals, plants, and insects) during natural selection and the actions and reactions of attraction and repulsion. The spring thaw and active ecologies of my surroundings while generating the work in this exhibition provided a platform for mapping a spectrum of (e)motions in the procreative drive.

Works in this show reference (predominantly female) preparatory actions for public/social appearances including dressing, fashioning hair, and applying cosmetics. *Tunnel Vision* addresses my conflicting pleasure and disdain for participating in such actions (shaving, painting nails etc.) that have become ritualized preparations for public appearances. These actions that are sustained by questionable advertising and economic structures respatialize and ‘script’ the body in a similar manner to Shield’s observations of consumable objects.

Tunnel Vision is a show populated with pieces that draw from day-to-day relationships between self and the world. I view the works in this exhibition as a framework for making my daily personal experiences and observations public. The social and cultural terrain I traverse is explored reflexively throughout my practice via material choices, locations, and invitations for participation. I reflect upon my multi-dimensional appetites in the search to love and be loved and am interested in the physical and ideological differences between public and private spaces and how these variations determine parameters for “acceptable” behaviour and expression. My observations of human behaviour and how it can change depending on the proximity to nature, origin of culture, economic status, and choice of gender performance/representation are translated into visual works that manifest in unpredictable combinations.

Part of my urge to combine unlikely materials is purely aesthetic: I find it exciting to engage with contrasting textures and colours. However, after reading Bennet’s (2010) *Vibrant Matter*, I have begun to read the materials I enlist even more closely. I consider their culturally signifying qualities as well as their generative qualities via interrelationships with other matter: potential to transform, catalyze, decompose, be recycled, etc. I keep an eye out for and collect potential materials that have been discarded in the studio, on the street, and found objects from rural areas.

As someone who was raised on very little, I have a propensity for repurposing materials and objects with little inhibition in my attempts to make/do things myself. My work does not rely upon expensive equipment or facilities as I can sew at home when I do not have access to a studio. My DIY approach employs an empathetic attitude toward that which has been discarded which allows me spend less and up-cycle otherwise disposable materials. This reduces my

economic investments while contributing to an ethics of sustainability. For these reasons, I believe that my work can make an important contribution to the heated debates on the global effects of free trade, outsourced labour, and heady consumerism.

Transformative Learning Theory

Tactile work in *Tunnel Vision* like *Time Scales* (see fig.18) among previous tent and wearable projects invite people to physically enter my work, walk around it and will it to move so that they can experience it with their entire body and being. For me, such viewer participation allows me to extend an invitation to my audience to join in an exploratory zone where we can learn from each other—whether through physical or conversational engagements. This space of learning from one another is recognized in pedagogy as transformative learning theory. Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness in any human system, collective as well as individual. This expanded consciousness is “characterized by new frames of reference, points of view, or habits of mind as well as by a new structure for engaging the system’s identity” (Kasl & Elias 2000:233). Transformation of the structure of consciousness is facilitated when a learner is confronted with a complex cultural environment because effective engagement with that environment requires a change in the learner's relationship to his/her/the group's identity (ibid). It is my aim to foster individual and/or collective transformation by stimulating perceptual and material spaces, which can come about through the presentation of art-based research and art actions (Sullivan 2010:119).

I aim to engage my audiences’ awareness of perceptual and material spaces and resilience of their own bodies and identities by creating work out of materials with strikingly flexible capabilities. There is a great deal of tension in and among the works in *Tunnel Vision*: stretching, exposing, balancing, hanging, employing the force of gravity, wrapping, and

constraining materials. I have chosen to contrast tension and retraction with rubbers and elastics that are likened to muscle actions within the body. These can also be interpreted as individual or collective tensions, acting as markers of mental, emotional, psychological, social, and/or sexual tensions. The qualities of tension and release evident in my work can be likened to job stress, the climax of an orgasm, or a nervous breakdown. The vocabulary I use in the construction of work is reflexive in the sense that it references daily actions and emotions of work, stress, and care.

I was able to go to Scotland for three months of intensive studio practice this past spring where I worked towards a solo exhibition *SEX MAGIC*. Working under the supervision of painter Lucy Stein, and with a studio at Southside Studios in Glasgow, I found the experience of creating work independently and outside of an institutional setting to be incredibly productive for my studio practice. Situated in a large studio, I kept two walls for display and used the rest as an experimental chamber covered with works in progress. I had never before had the opportunity to reflect upon my work on white walls for such an extended amount of time. In the past I found the transition from studio to gallery to be drastic and full of all kinds of negotiations—most of which have been spatial. My studios have always been full of storage however this time, fewer transitions were required leading up to the *SEX MAGIC* installation. The only problem I discovered was that I had “lived” with some of the pieces for so long leading up to the show that I “knew them too well” and felt apathetic towards them. This allowed me to recognize that I crave new perspectives and the unexpected when presenting my work, which is likely why my practice thrives on improvisation and adaptability.

This spring, while in Glasgow, a number of people remarked that my work employed an evidently female visual vocabulary. Touch, taste, and smell have historically been understood as interior sensibilities, characterized as emotive senses and gendered female (and therefore of lesser value) (Classen 1993:28). Simone de Beauvoir's (1974) account of the body "as a situation" has enabled feminist theorists to move beyond antinomies of sex versus gender, biology versus social construction, and nature versus culture. Toril Moi (2004) argues "each person takes up constrained possibilities that gender structures offer in their own way, forming own habits and variations on those possibilities or actively trying to resist or reconfigure them"(in Kruks 2010:265). I believe that this creative act of resistance and reconfiguring is precisely what I seek to do within my life and my practice with regard to the "contortionist formats modern life makes us fit into" (Fowle & Larson 2005:23 in Merker 2010:53).

Tubular

In *Tunnel Vision* and in my artistic practice in general, I use the unifying motifs of tubes and tunnels to emphasize interconnectedness of living matter and the inseparability of the senses. This iconography crops up as a theme relating to inner bodily functions, root systems, rhizomatic structures, portholes, pathways and burrows. Tubes function to connect one thing to another, whether this operation is observed within the human body (capillaries, veins etc.), plant systems, or cities. Sometimes I think my head is just a tangle of tubes because I reflexively connect one idea to another when installing my artworks in a recombinant fashion as demonstrated *You(r) Tube* and *Superdrug*, 2013 (see fig.15) in the *Tunnel Vision* exhibition. I use existing tubes like used bicycle inner tubes that can be sliced, cut up, stretched, pinned, woven, sewn, nailed and reconfigured as demonstrated in *Cute Couple* (see fig.14). I also use surgical and refrigeration tubing, and even pasta noodles evident in *Infinighetti* (see figure 10).

Throughout my tactile practice I aim to highlight and sensualize representations of my observations and experiences of the world. Many of my works are the results of questioning the consequences of today's living and working conditions upon physiological and social well-being. I believe my art-based research contributes to a timely investigation with regard to increasing solitary transactions in non-places of satellite transmission that *serve* to connect us to people and the world. These intangible non-places (like the internet, and cell phone usage) promote a new form of individual tactilism that requires our interactions with the hard surfaces of machines: computers and smart phones etc. I argue that these interactions are lacking the sensual engagement historically associated with sociability, which underscores my aim to physically re-materialize the (increasingly) immaterial fabric of everyday life.

5.POST-EXHIBITION REFLECTIONS ON TUNNEL VISION

The works in Tunnel Vision were produced while I was attending a residency from April-July in Glasgow, UK. A great deal of my reading, research and creation leading up to my time abroad was focused on transforming public spaces into places where people could experience temporary reprieve from the alienating supermodern world (Augé 1995) and its effects upon people in public and private spaces and the increasing number of “non-places”. I created a number of performances and interventions that addressed my concerns with changes in today's social relations that feel alienating by presenting opportunities for interaction between me and my audience. Throughout my studies I have also been compelled to create objects that are intended for viewing in gallery exhibitions without being “used” by their viewers. These are the kinds of works that I focused on producing in my studio in Glasgow--objects that blend techniques of

painting, sculpture, and performing actions (like stretching, balancing and breaking) upon materials. I immersed myself in a rigorous daily studio practice, creating and allowing works to exist alongside others with a distant notion that these objects might come to coexist in my final exhibition with documentation photographs and/or video work that captured moments of my public performances.

In this zone I was able to visually create reflections that addressed the myriad research interests I have pursued and respond to my observations of a new country, city and culture. I re-familiarized myself with a steady regime of studio production with the aim of integrating my interests and observations of everyday materials and actions into the artworks that I generated. With the general concern of how the body acts and is affected by the spaces we inhabit, my work progressed in an increasingly specific direction. A feminine aesthetic emerged that toyed with ideas of women's preening and display practices that I found to connect visually with seductive displays of art objects. Parallels between bodily and gallery display tactics are revealed in the works of Tunnel Vision through multiple approaches toward understanding desire and fetishization. Cheeky takes on aesthetic languages of fashion and design began to emerge in my art objects, referencing metaphorical generational shifts through a matrilineal passing of patterns, palettes, secrets and (dis)tasteful decoration.

I was working also towards a solo exhibition at the end of my time in Glasgow. After making friends with a couple of professional clowns and magicians who were also visual artists, I decided to create an event that would allow all of these wonderful talents to be shared. I proposed the exhibition title SEX MAGIC and asked my friends to

perform and contribute work to a group show in the Dacha Gallery. As we worked towards realizing this event, I prepared work for my exhibition in the white cube space. The works that I created in Glasgow for SEX MAGIC are in large part the works displayed in Tunnel Vision with a few exceptions.

In Glasgow I did not show any photographs or performance documentation and the only painting present in SEX MAGIC was the silk piece *Time Scales*, 2013 (see fig.18). In Toronto for Tunnel Vision it was important to me that I demonstrate my breadth of practice so I included the painting *Taming my Beast* which was created in Glasgow (see fig.23 & 24) as well as *Time Scales*. Both of these works were painted with a range of materials including dye, ink, wine, coffee, tea, ashes, makeup, nailpolish, charcoal, pencil etc. In Tunnel Vision previous and recent performance documentation photos were displayed including *Look what I can do* and *Instant Rayplay* (see fig.21 & 40). This outfit designed for performance was made in Glasgow but was not included in SEX MAGIC. Tunnel Vision featured performance shots of me on a Scottish rooftop and in the sea in Spain.

I had considerably more room to display in Toronto for Tunnel Vision as I made a pointed effort to utilize empty walls outside of the gallery and visually lead viewers from the Duncan St. entrance, up the stairs with my inner tube title wall and through the hallway spaces toward the gallery with the placement of *Freedom Goggles* and *Seeing through rose coloured glasses*. In Tunnel Vision I also wanted to exhibit a few objects designed for interaction like *Mr. Sandhands* and *Be my guts* (see fig.10 & 25) which

could be worn, and *Last Legs* (see fig.25) draped around the pillar which could be hugged, squeezed, fondled or groped.

I view my practice as an inextinguishable parasite—one that I share a life long symbiotic relationship with. It flourishes when it can appear upon my body and we continue to thrive through the continuous wearing and performing of works in a variety of locations. In some cases like *Mr. Sandhands* my art can physically latch onto people. Many of my works cover a lot of ground conceptually and physically due to reflexive forms and materials and in the ways that pieces are portable: I can fold them and carry architectural paintings, tents, and wearable sculptures with me across various cityscapes, parks and countries to perform them in multiple locations.

My work is not necessarily place specific; it is versatile and adaptable and the reading of it changes depending on the context in which it is presented. Although this statement might sound true of many art practices, I believe that my actions of repeating performances and creating new iterations of particular works like *MissChief in my Tent*, 2012 and *Instant Rayplay*, 2013 allows me the opportunity for an ongoing investigation of the potential variations that can emerge from engaging in action with the same object repeatedly.

I have only begun in this manner during my MFA program. I believe that by giving myself permission to spend more time with my objects (of viewing, performing or interaction) the more insightful and reflective I can become about the implications of my practice. This extended approach towards utilizing and acting with/upon my objects has created a productive, constraining framework to work with. I have noticed that adhering

to one element—a performative suit, still allows a breadth of possibilities and my performances and installations have become more exciting and engaging for me and for viewers.

I approach the installation of works in galleries as though individual pieces are components of a larger puzzle. Though this installation is comprised of individual works that are installed next to one another, I see each iteration of an exhibition as an installation itself. Whenever I choose to re-present works I rearrange them by responding to the space and improvising with them in a manner similar to ways I work in the studio—cutting into, braiding, adding upon or removing elements thereby transforming pieces each time they are presented. In this way, I embrace mutability and view my practice as process-based and continually evolving.

Although Tunnel Vision was staged in the graduate gallery it was not simply a display of objects. It included paintings, sculptures, and performance documentation photographs but also functioned as a sensory indulgence chamber with works that could be worn and touched like *Mr. Sandhands*, *Be my guts*, and *Last Legs* as well as observed. The installation was unified by a palpable sense of humour that emphasized a tactile language of bodily actions like standing, collapsing, dressing, decorating, squeezing into and out of skins, clothes etc. Regardless of medium, works underscored the act of seeing as a corporeal activity in a manner capable of bringing body and mind together for viewer's confronting/experiencing artworks in this exhibition.

Tunnel Vision was part installation, part performance but primarily a location for me to interact with people who entered. I have been working for a number of years

towards using my art as a tool for social interaction and I value the spectrum of reactions that have emerged from my audiences while performing, generating and presenting visual and interactive work for Tunnel Vision. In Spain when I had finished shooting *Washed Up*, 2013, I tossed my *Instant RayPlay*, 2013 suit into the sea and was filming it being swallowed and spit out by the waves. It travelled a fair distance from me towards the center of a bay where people began to gather bent in curiosity. I believe they were expecting an unusual and alive animal. Other reactions with wearables like *Freedom Goggles*, 2012 that I have received from security guards have been less amusing. I have often been asked to remove myself and refrain from taking photographs in malls, lobbies, subway platforms, and elevators. Some examples include inquisitive or suspicious looks, surprised smiles and laughter and occasionally being asked to remove myself and refrain from taking photographs in malls, lobbies, subway platforms, and elevators. It is my aim to create lighthearted exchanges through laughter and/or conversation by invigorating sensual, spatial exploration through creative activity that transgresses social norms and behaviour through the possibilities of social exchange. In this manner, my practice pivots on an axis of tangible objects and intangible emotional motivations and outcomes.

I engage in creative actions in public and in gallery spaces where I affectionately welcome participation by being present, offering and inviting people to try on, touch or share works. In the gallery I feel more comfortable approaching people and offering works for viewers to experience than I do when working in public. For example, in Tunnel Vision I would point towards the knotted pile of tubes on the floor *Be my guts* (see fig.22) noting that it could be worn and similar to *Mr. Sandhands* (see fig.10); a

variety of engagements and reactions emerged. Some people were eager to play while others were more reserved, preferring to watch others participate. Only a few people were willing to brave *Be my guts* and I suspect it is because the tubes are so large and that there is only one set. The few that did engage wrapped their neck and head in a tubular helmet or draped them around the neck and shoulders letting them dangle. I did notice that people would not wear them for long compared to the amount of time people would spend with *Mr. Sandhands*. These were worn on heads, shoulders, necks and arms. People held them and laid them on the backs of their hands. They slapped each other with them and enjoyed arranging the pile of pairs on the plinth in numerous ways, transforming what I saw as a discard/drop off area into an interactive sculpture that was constantly changing. I found these creative audience actions exciting and will definitely pursue instigating situations in my future practice that invite creative interaction and participatory, mutable sculptures.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of my MFA was to artistically transform indoor and outdoor urban public spaces into places that could foster temporary moments of collectivity. I achieved this by staging performances and interventions that created accessible art experiences in galleries, parks and on street corners. It has been important to me to create works and spaces that allow for human interaction, conversation and participation as these moments of collectivity can counter the isolating effects of a predominantly capitalist, technocratic environment. Augé argues that we live in a paradoxical time; globalization supports notions of unity of terrestrial space while simultaneously multinational networks grow strong and despite our hypermobility,

we all yearn for a connection to land and roots (1995:34). Augé claims that the world of supermodernity does not match the one in which we believe we live in because we have not yet learned how to observe it. He states that we must relearn to think about space (1995:36).

When considering the fragmentation of today's social fabric within supermodernity (an individualized and computerized megalopolis), I have aimed to present my projects as therapeutics for deteriorating social relations. De Certeau (1984: 46) has suggested that a politics of such ploys should be developed that would offer reprieve from the logics of technology, classification, and isolation of people. Weiss's argument that our experience of embodiment relies on interactions with other human and non-human bodies (1995:5) supports the focus of my projects which propose that we can only know ourselves in relation to others, and our environments. These are the tangible relationships that I aim to produce through my works that operate in multiple locations. It is my aim to temporarily mitigate ambient fear and individual and collective anxieties by generating opportunities for physical, social activity and exchange.

By resisting spatial-behavioural conformity, I believe that through my practice I have at times succeeded at dismantling social barriers that perpetuate isolation. Through artworks that are as bizarre and absurd as the world we live in, I have been able to establish even ground for conversation, interpretation, and reflection amongst strangers. Visual cultural theorist Irit Rogoff (2005) states that collectivity is something that takes place when we "look away" from normative power relations and instead engage in a meaning-making process that views audience members as co-participants in the creation of an event. A number of my works have succeeded

in this respect, and though not all of my work depends on audience members acting as co-participants, I plan to continue creating art that can foster a sense of collectivity.

My research led me to interrogate the spaces that we inhabit and investigate the relationships between social, political, and economic structures in the formation of private, public, (increasingly) privatized public spaces, and non-places. Through artistic creations I have posed questions about how and why we feel the way we do within particular locations. This has included observing the effects of and challenging parameters of normalized behaviour. These investigations have manifested in two and three-dimensional works, as well as through performances and interventions that take place within the gallery as well as outside in parks and on the street. This theme of outside (public) versus inside (private) is revisited throughout my practice regardless of medium or methodological approach.

Throughout my research, the body has become central to my investigation as site and as event. I recognize my own body as a sensuous, leaky, beautiful and grotesque basin of surprises that has the ability to act and react, become actor and/or acted upon. I both question and participate in presentation practices related to the body including “doing” hair, makeup, nails, etc, and am interested in how we mediate and are mediated by the world. Visual consumption of the body both in the art world and on the street influences how, what and why I create figurative representations with the aim of revealing the camouflaged connections between individual, social, political, economic and aesthetic relationships.

I believe that my work contributes to the artistic field with a critique of contemporary living conditions by physically and reflexively implicating my subjects of critique: space and its effects on behaviour as actual material and/or setting of/within the work itself, e.g. public

spaces, bodies, wearables, and disposable everyday objects. My use of fabric creates approachable work as fabric intimates lived experience. We clothe ourselves, sleep in, and wash with cloth; fabric is familiar in our lives. I use textiles and other materials to create tubes and tunnels that represent connective tissues: networks that evoke the body and address the interrelationship between my artworks, people, and environments.

Augé argues that transmitted spatial overabundances available to us on line and through television are universes of recognition rather than universes of meaning and experience (which ethnology has traditionally studied) because our connection to specific locations is not tacit/experiential knowledge (1995:33). When individuals come together, they engender the social and organize places. Augé argues that supermodernity only deals with individuals (customers, passengers, users, listeners) identified (name, occupation, place of birth, address) only upon entering or leaving a (non)place. Since non-places are the space of supermodernity, Augé notes that the “social game is being played elsewhere” and that “...the non-place is the opposite of utopia: it exists, and it does not contain any organic society” (Augé 1995:112). This is precisely why I feel that my practice-based research is important in my aims to reinvigorate physical experiences of space and sociality through artistic projects.

My ability to question, parody and transform spaces into places where people can encounter art, one another and move differently within them (ducking, bending over, peering, etc.) has contributed to changing my audiences’ experience of space. My public interventions and performances that involve a physical taking up of space are very much about asserting myself as a powerful individual with agency but they also function to offer others a chance to participate in micro-political acts by piercing the urban, mundane

codes of behaviour by engaging in creative, spontaneous acts. Those who witness these actions might be inspired to approach spaces that they travel through and occupy with a renewed curiosity that could lead to increased engagement within environments, society and the world at large. Art educator Renee Jackson argues that noticing the world around us with concentrated sensory attention (sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch) can lead to heightened cognition. She argues “...once we engage with the world, we can begin to reflect upon it, developing and attending to our invisible components: imagination, conception, judgment, (and) emotion” (2006:52). With this in mind, I propose that my installations and performances, which are the products of imagination, conception, judgment and emotion, can function as spaces of individual and collective critical inquiry. Within my practice I plan to develop kinetic, cooperative and spatially interactive works in ways that empower viewers and passersby as agents. It is my aim that by provoking physical acts of curiosity, exploration and discovery in the context of art experiences, audiences who encounter my work might pursue an interrogative approach towards perceiving how and why we act and move through the world. Perhaps the embodied movements of curiosity that I enlist from my viewers could translate into an interrogative muscle-memory, one that might be activated in the wider context of combating docile acceptance of problems, in personal realms, surrounding environments, and in the world at large.

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