

**Delirious at the Borderlines: Limit Experience and the (Im)Possibilities of Representation**

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Master of Fine Arts, 2013

Andrew Fabo, Interdisciplinary Art, Media & Design Program

OCAD University

### ABSTRACT

In the series *Delirious at the Borderlines* I ask how representational methods like montage, automatic drawing and historical referencing are best enlisted to portray a near-catastrophic health crisis. Bataille, and Blanchot sparked my interest in the extreme limits of experience demarcating the gap between delirium and reality, the transgressive and normative, and of life and death. I deploy the works of artists Felix Gonzalez-Torres and David Wojnarowicz, and authors with multivalent positions regarding aporias, unsolvable riddles. They illuminate my exploration of contested liminal zones and the alterity of the constituents of such nether-worlds – immigrants, heretics, incubi, the infirm, and AIDS patients. Theories of adaptation and translation informed by Linda Hutcheon and Jacques Derrida were deployed to elucidate methods of intertextuality (literary and visual) and the palimpsestuous (formal and art historical). These strategies are manifest in my digital scrollworks and drawings as they interrogate the (im)possibility of death and its representation.

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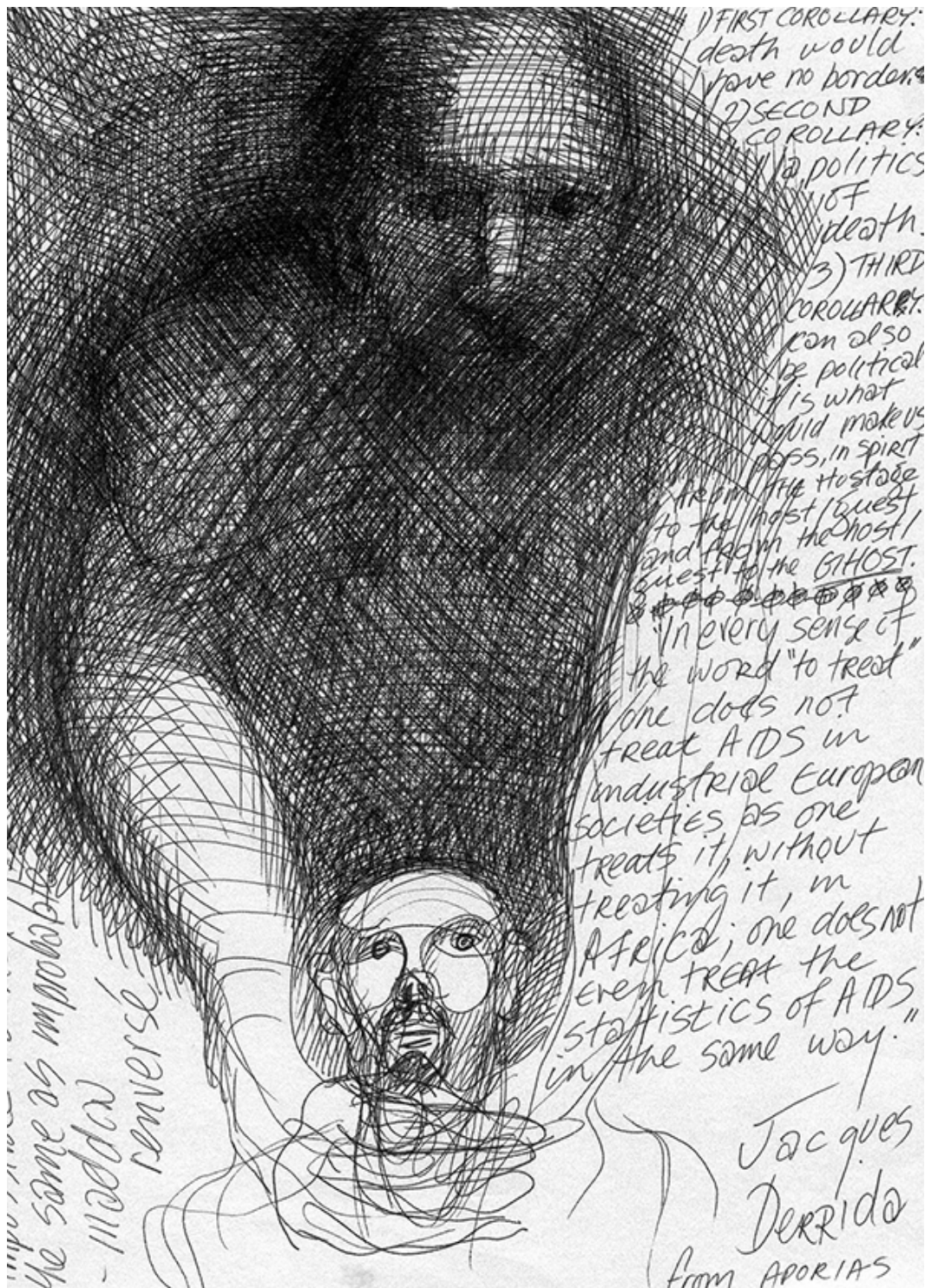


Figure 1



## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the peak of the past summer I woke up delirious in a hospital room bed, a space that's a physical manifestation of a liminal space between the public sphere of the seemingly healthy and the finality of the grave. A near-catastrophic bout of *pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia took me to a terrain of linked liminal experiences, caught between life and death, waking and sleeping, reality and hallucination. Immediately after release from medical treatment, I embarked on a series of drawings mirroring my experience while it was still fresh. Using practice-led, self-reflexive methods, I produced a body of work consisting of drawings and digitally-constructed images in scroll form as an urgent response to experience, while reading texts by various key writers who have probed death and other extreme corporal experiences, including George Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida. Jacques Derrida, in his book *Aporias*, gives a reading of death through the lens of the limit-experience theory first expounded in the writing of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot. Derrida in a reflection of finitude and its boundaries states that:

Dying is neither entirely natural (biological) nor cultural. And the question of limits articulated here is also the question of the border between cultures, languages, countries, nations and religions as well as that of the limit between a universal (although non-natural) structure and a differential (non-natural but cultural) structure. (Derrida 42)

In reflecting on my work in this context, I realized that as much as I tried to utilize this disaster in order to create more direct, affective work, art historical references appeared both explicitly and implicitly on the page. What are the reasons for historical referencing

in art and is it possible to make work that is free of it? Does this instinct undermine my attempts to convey experience? By reading my methodologies through the theories of mimesis, alterity, and adaptation of Michael Taussig and Linda Hutcheon I examine how imperative the storytelling and representational impulses are for an artist. Anthropologist Michael Taussig's expanded notions of mimesis –where any reproduction of an object, image or experience is mimetic – and his assertion that the mimetic impulse is inherent in human interaction, relate to this project in particular and my own practice in general. More so than most artists of my generation, I have made meaning by referencing and repurposing images or movements from the span of art history. Using recent theories of adaptation by critical theorist Linda Hutcheon, I examined this methodology of art historical referencing in relation to my own representational strategies of adaptation of artworks, translation of literature, appropriation of images and objects, and the pastiche of iconic images. As well, the experiences of two artists Felix Gonzalez-Torres and David Wojnarowicz, who were my contemporaries and also addressed the HIV/AIDs pandemic and their personal health crises and limit experiences in different ways, became contemporary art historical references for me.

The artistic representational methods, both conceptual and material, that I have employed convey my experience but they also transmute and codify that experience, mediating, translating and distancing it. The representation can never be the experience; it is always adapted, translated, appropriated, mimetically referenced or rendered. These representational strategies are nuanced in their difference and form a chain of associations that can spiral out into a calamitous cyclone, often devastating attempts to

represent catastrophic extreme experience. My research and creative work grow out of a core question: how does one render corporeal catastrophe? Because of my background as an artist, I am more comfortable with a practice-based method of confronting questions of how one images the impossibility of one's own death but the labyrinth of aporias and liminal spaces gives me a contradictory cartography for dealing with core ontological questions.

## 2. ORIGINS AND MOTIVATIONS, CONCEPTS AND EXPERIENCES

If death is the real, and the real is the impossible, then we are approaching the thought of the impossibility of death. (Blanchot *Writing the Disaster* 121)

There are many apparent lines of demarcation that present themselves in one's lifetime such as the borderlines between nations, or the divisions between wakefulness and dreaming, reality and artifice, the transgressive and the permissible, the possible and the impossible. Perhaps the most definitive line of separation in most people's minds is between life and death. However, extreme experiences, like catastrophic health crises, war, natural disasters, or psychotropic drug experiences, can call into question the logic of binary divisions and force one to consider liminal terrains that manifest in disrupted border areas. To frame the origins and motivations for the research conducted and the works created in this thesis, I offer a brief autobiography of experiential and conceptual explorations of the liminal.

To write one's autobiography, in order either to confess or to engage in self-analysis, or in order to expose oneself, like a work of art, to the gaze of all, is perhaps to survive, but through a perpetual suicide – a death which is total inasmuch as fragmentary. (Blanchot *Writing the Disaster* 64)

Coming of age in the 1970s, I was very aware of limits, of dividing lines that were policed more vigilantly than today. As a queer youth I had consciously crossed the line by coming out of the closet at nineteen and was determined to incorporate my queer

experiences into my future art practice. I was not understood or encouraged by my undergraduate instructors at the Alberta College of Art, most of whom were working in the modernist idiom of post-painterly abstraction promoted by art critic Clement Greenberg, a major influence in Western Canada because of his frequent visits. Even after moving to a larger centre, Toronto, I felt like someone working on the edge of the limits as a queer-identified painter who was interested in imaging the male body. Two visibly queer British painters gave me confirmation of the validity of my pursuit and reflected the polarities that I vacillated between: the reverie of the expatriate David Hockney picturing a paradise of Los Angeles gay domesticity; and the delirium of the Londoner, Francis Bacon, imaging a visceral theatre of existential intensity with hints of sadomasochistic practices when the male body is represented. Enticed by a reverie of understated hedonism (the heaven of spacious California) or a hallucinatory evocation of flesh (the hell of claustrophobic Soho bars and studios), I eschewed the polarities, learning to live with the contradictions of drawing from both of them.

To counter a number of detrimental boundaries dominating the art world in the late 1970s, I joined forces with a number of like-minded young artists to form a collective, ChromaZone. In his comprehensive view of 20<sup>th</sup> century Canadian painting, *The Concise History of Canadian Painting*, Dennis Reid provides a historical context for the initiative: “At the beginning of the decade [1980s] Fabo, Johnson and Girling, frustrated by the lack of interest in their work from both dealers and public institutions, and concerned that even parallel galleries seemed to favour performance, installation and new media over painting decided to take matters into their own hands.” (Reid 415) Our first project was a

gallery in a second floor apartment on Spadina Avenue, which exhibited loosely curated thematic group exhibitions. The standard view of ChromaZone was that it was a painting gallery but the facts prove otherwise. As Reid additionally notes: "...the Collective certainly shared common values about art – principally the key role of colour (Chroma) and the centrality of content reflected in a sense of the immediacy of the issues of the real world." (Reid 415) Rather than bound by an allegiance to a medium, we were interested in an art about daily lives that the prevailing formalism had disdained. We deliberately cultivated an ideology of inclusiveness, defying entrenched boundaries we showed work in every medium, and worked at showing artists who had previously been disregarded on the margins: queers (premiere exhibitions of Stephen Andrews, Pat Jeffries, Rob Flack), Arab-Canadians (Jayce Salloum and Jamelie Hassan), Asian-Canadians (David Chong, Pauline Choi, Sasha Lee) with a strong roster of women artists.



*Figure 2.*



*Figure 3.*

Ironically it was the catastrophe of a global pandemic of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s that finally brought queer voices, including my own, in from the margins and into a more central focus of the art world as the decade proceeded. Unlike my parents, I never had to flee a country devastated by war, but AIDS put me on the front lines of quite a different type of war, one that was waged in hospitals, in the laboratories and clinics, on the streets, in the media, in the legislatures and in my body. I learned about the aporetic nature of life and death by seeing two lovers and two of my closest friends die before my eyes. With every death, I witnessed a beloved (a subject) become a corpse (an object), a startling event that no logical description can reconcile. Bataille helped me conceive the moment: “Anguish is no less than intellect, the means for knowing, and the extreme limit of the ‘possible’, in other respects, is no less life than knowledge. Communication still is, like

anguish, to live and to know.” (Bataille *Inner Experience* 39)

Impelled by Bataille’s ‘possible’, the one attempts to portray the indescribable. I began to move away from painting to working in various drawing formats (including bookworks, installations) that were more immediate and more amenable to conveying information about the virus, the epidemic and my experience with it.

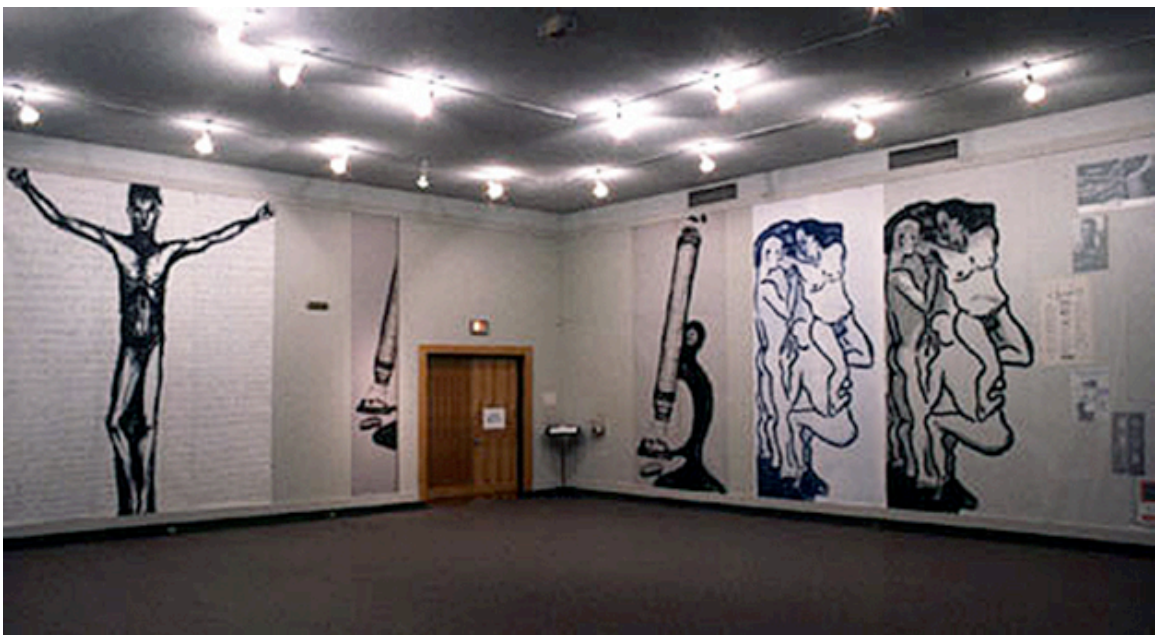


Figure 4.

Throughout my career I have had the double moniker of artist and activist often simply by showing up and being declarative: being honest and open about my sexual orientation and HIV status and making work in response to my position in society. For the first decade of the AIDS pandemic, the mainstream media and politicians assiduously avoided mention of HIV/AIDS let alone probing analysis of the crisis. By default it was left to the cultural sphere, and specifically the most politically engaged, primarily queer contingent



of that world, to keep the information flowing and keep HIV/AIDS before the public. With thousands around the world making videos, staging plays, writing books and essays and poems, creating paintings and drawings, singing songs, the issue was discussed and information was disseminated through a parallel cultural system. The decade went by with neither Ronald Reagan nor Brian Mulroney mentioning AIDS in public until the very end of their double terms. The old saw that art can't change the world is perhaps true when it's one isolated artist but a movement of expression has considerable impact and agency, and I was very much part of that movement making works in drawing, painting, poster and video form often in collaboration with Michael Balser.



*Figure 5.*

Sometimes specific issues were taken on and information was very much part of the message, but it was political in that context to also make work about loss and mourning, about valuing those who we lost.

Afflict the comfortable; comfort the afflicted. (Paul Thek, text of a work, 1985)

In the summer of 2012, a near death experience with HIV-related *pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia brought me to an even more intense bodily knowledge of the limits of experience. Initially, this AIDS related pneumonia produced what seemed like an ascetic, monastic experience. Bundled up in an isolation unit, I opted to have neither a television nor a phone in my room and only occasionally visited by nurses sealed in plastic safety garments, wary of transmission of a mysterious infection before I was diagnosed with the non-infectious pneumonia I knew I had. Exhausted, overwhelmed by the intensity of the previous year, I relished the solitude and isolation. The world had stopped happening and I had time to think in my austere chamber in spite of the invisible anvil someone had mistakenly left on my chest.

It took a week to confirm the diagnosis that I had predicted to anyone who would listen, but it was certain that I had a respiratory infection and Prednisone, a steroid hormone commonly used in countering asthmatic attacks, was administered for a fortnight. The Prednisone made me noticeably manic, speaking rapidly in what seemed to me to be inspired gusts. But an even more overwhelming side effect was sleep hallucinations spilling over into my waking hours with detail-embroidered lucid dreams. The unexpected visionary deluge was not frightening to me – having come of age in the sixties, I was no stranger to hallucinogens – but I did find the unremitting rapture to be arduous.

Many of these hallucinations were remarkably vivid and cinematic and in most of them, I was able to take in the settings in great detail. The dreams featured incredibly well

portrayed individuals, none of whom I recognized from any previous contact in my life. Repeatedly, however, even the most sympathetic of the stream of characters eventually transformed into an eroticized incubus or (less frequently) a succubus wishing to crush the air out of my chest. I was familiar enough with Norse and Teutonic folklore to know that this response was almost a cliché of mental construction but that irony seemed to amuse me. If I woke up, the narrative would be interrupted but amazingly the minute I returned to sleeping state, or even closed my eyes, the narrative would continue from where it left off.

Sharply detailed visions were punctuated with their murky opposite: a generalized sensation of an amorphous hulking, masculine and muscular giant, forming from the fogged atmosphere of the room, his arms wrapping around me in a crushing embrace. Sometimes it was an object rather than a being that materialized out of the vapor: an iconic form of great weight, alternately an anvil or cannonball, burdening my breathing, intertwining sensuality with panic of impending suffocation. Bataille returned to me once again.

Perhaps for the first time I was able to make palpable, corporeal sense of his preoccupation with eroticism bound to death in both his literary and theoretical texts, texts that I had always found compelling but had ultimately eluded me. In an analysis of sadomasochism in loving relations Bataille proposes “that death is near, and death is the symbol of all sensuality, even that modified by tenderness. Here is the violence of lovemaking without which sexual love could not have lent its vocabulary as it has done to

describe the ecstasies of the mystics.” (Bataille *Eroticism* 242)

Falling ill with an HIV-related pneumonia was an intense experience that forced me to reconsider my subjecthood as a person living with AIDS, to look at the possibilities and impossibilities of extreme or limit experience as my body was battered against the demarcations that we take for granted between life and death, waking and dreaming, hallucinations and reality. I had once before contracted this AIDS-defining opportunistic pneumonia but had never been hospitalized for anything AIDS related, and it had been more than twenty-five years since I tested positive. Unleashed like a natural disaster in the middle of my graduate studies, this health disaster derailed me from my original thesis explorations of the creatively generative aspects of friendship, and forced me to ask how I represent death, delirium and transgression in my practice. First came three declamatory posters and then a torrent of drawings. While in my hospital bed, I began creating a new body of work in my mind.

The drawings were a flood of images that attempted to capture the intense hallucinations and metaphorically speak of both the illness and some of the deleterious effects of the treatment. However, all the while that I streamed the drawings, I intuited that they may have autonomous resonance as drawings but would also serve a utilitarian purpose as component parts of a series of long vertical digital prints that would be the primary works of my installation. My scrolls are palimpsests layering photographs (hospital rooms, microscopic depictions of pathogens, portraits of myself), component drawings (exploring the delirious dreams), fragmentary texts (both hand written and computer-

generated) layered over watery fields of colour made with inks. The aqueous nature of the medium was a deliberate choice, because I wanted a medium that reflected the fluidity of distinctions in a liminal world. Also I'm using juxtapositions that create a sub-narrative within the works, indicating the signifying capabilities of various historical styles. A viewer schooled in art history would recognize the intertextual dissonance created by layering decidedly postmodern narrative images over modernist fields of colour.



Figure 6.

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ARTWORKS

MOURIR– S’attendre aux limites de La vérité  
(Jacques Derrida *Aporias* ii)

Inspired by the corporeal insights into Bataille’s work provoked by my near death experience and by the unstoppable proliferation of images I was drawing of my delirium, I commenced a program of research into related theoretical works that would help me locate my experience and my response to it. I began by tracing the genealogy of Bataille’s concept of extreme experience, one that now resonated with me in a bodily mode, which lead me to Blanchot, Derrida and Foucault’s consideration of extreme experience. Then, to follow through on my concern for the seeming inevitability of explicit and implicit art historical references in what I considered to be direct, affective, unmediated representations of my own experience, I turned to Michael Taussig’s consideration of mimesis and alterity as fundamental acts of representation and Linda Hutcheon’s study of adaptation and intertextuality. And to locate my own limit experience and its representation in contemporary art history, I looked to the artworks of two colleagues who did not survive their extreme experience, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and David Wojnarowicz.

#### 3.1 Limit Experience: Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida

Few thinkers have created a more vexing, contradictory and nuanced body of writing around death and its mysteries than Georges Bataille. Bataille was a gifted dilettante dabbling in many fields like anthropology and economics in which he had no formal

training, yet he contributed novel views that still resonate. In the early 1930s he became ill with tuberculosis and nearly died. In a recuperative journey to Italy he experienced a rapture that led him to the writing of his incantatory, fragmentary text, *Inner Experience*. It stands in defiance of a rational ideal of the Enlightenment and casts its lot with Nietzsche's philosophy, in style structure and content. Like Nietzsche he was interested in extremity, privileging subjective and sensorial experience over reason and scientific empiricism. In his Nietzsche-soaked manifesto *Propositions*, reprinted in the compilation of selected essays *Visions of Excess*, Bataille proclaims: "Ecstatic time can only find itself in visions of things that puerile chance causes brusquely to appear: cadavers, nudity, explosions, spilled blood, abysses, sunbursts, and thunder." (Bataille 200) He later concludes his fifteen propositions on an even more fervid note: "Universal existence, eternally unfinished and headless (acephalic), a world like a bleeding wound, endlessly creating and destroying individual finite beings: it is in this sense that true universality is the death of God." The limits of death, transgression, disaster, viscera, nothingness, and the sublime are evoked but not defined by Bataille in the former pronouncement and he then invokes the stakes as a sacrificial ultimatum in the latter.

It was strange to be immersed in readings by Bataille and Blanchot about friendship and loss when I was caught in the maelstrom of my own health crisis this past summer.

Negotiating the liminal swamp on the extreme border between life and death, I recognized that elements of this vortex of themes have constantly recurred in my oeuvre, and it may be possible to channel an embodied understanding of these as indefinable, proceeding with a simultaneous sense of heightened skepticism and faith.



Blanchot is a writer who Bataille took under his wing and was influenced in style, structure and thought by the eccentric writer. Patrick French reflects on the oddly detached and cerebral yet fiercely loyal friendship of the fellow writers that is most strongly articulated in a memorial essay, *Friendship*, that Blanchot published in the year of Bataille's death in 1962: "This dis-engagement or de-description is, however, inherent to the mode of friendship envisaged by both Blanchot and Bataille. Their friendship, otherwise their communication, is one which withdraws from presence and immediacy in differing ways...[their texts] seem to gesture towards each other, on either side of the limit of Bataille's death, texts on two sides of the tomb, to form an asymmetrical reciprocity." (French 32-33) While Bataille dominated the passionately intellectual coupling with Blanchot, the extraordinary sharing of precepts and concepts in their essays is indicative of an intensely intimate intellectual and emotional exchange. Both writers have given me an understanding of the inherent violence of the spiral of representation as it breaches the limits of the possible.

My initial work researching the generative aspects of friendship was an attempt to move away from my former autobiographical strategies but my physical collapse brought my focus, out of necessity, back to an overwhelmingly self-reflexive state; it made sense to try to image this intensity of surviving a catastrophic situation. With the idea that I needed to portray myself stripped down and confrontational towards the viewer, I scheduled a photo shoot with a friend in the studio, imagining that the photographs would dominate the scrolls. Those works have turned out otherwise, but perhaps there is an

explanation for this impulse and its subsequent transformations in Blanchot's thoughts:

"To write one's autobiography, in order to confess or to engage in self-analysis, or in order to expose oneself, like a work of art, to the gaze of all, is perhaps to seek to survive, but through a perpetual suicide –a death which is total inasmuch as fragmentary."

(Blanchot 64)

In *Technologies of the Self*, Michel Foucault speaks of techniques which "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality." (Foucault 18) He lists ascetic practices like fasting, meditating, journal writing, and other types of self-reflection as such techniques and I regard self-reflexive art practice to be equally as potent in this regard.

"Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot try through experience to reach that point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or extreme. They attempt to gather the maximum amount of intensity and impossibility at the same time." (Foucault, Trombadori 27) These are comments from an interview in *Semiotext(e)* that art historian Martin Jay has quoted to reinforce his views of Foucault's aporetic notions on experiences and the self: "What Foucault seems to mean by limit-experience, then, is a curiously contradictory mixture of self-expansion and self-annihilation, immediate, proactive spontaneity and fictional retrospection, personal inwardness and

communal interaction.” (Jay 159) There’s a certain self-righteousness that creeps into Jay’s analysis as he describes Foucault’s penchant for “mind-expanding drugs, sadomasochistic sexuality and risk of actual death” but he at least resists the cliché of characterizing Bataille as a meek librarian “who hypocritically preached violence and transgression,” as Breton and Sartre did at the time. (Jay 159, 161) If any heterosexual male in French intellectual circles could embody an Otherness to warrant scapegoating attacks, it would be Georges Bataille and he certainly raised the ire of the territorial André Breton whose benign version of Surrealism was called into question by the disturbingly negative visions of Bataille and a talented coterie of dissidents including homosexual writers like Michael Leiris and Marcel Jouhandreau.

### 3.2 The Riddle of the Monstrous Other: Kearney’s Monsters & Derrida’s Aporias

These figures of Otherness occupy the frontier zone where reason falters and fantasies flourish. (Kearney *Strangers Gods and Monsters* 3)

Irish philosopher, Richard Kearney, accounts very well for the societal dynamics of alterity, which creates xenophobia, scapegoating and worshipfulness with all its accompanying contradictions and resentments. He elucidates a trans-historical and transcultural sweep covering monsters and demons, gods and outsiders in biblical times, current popular film and gaming culture, colonialist epochs, terrorist contexts, Shakespeare’s England, Joyce’s Dublin, contemporary art and religion, providing

valuable insight into the reactionary impulses of numerous societies.

Monsters terrify and intrigue for another reason too: they defy borders. Monsters are liminal creatures who can go where we can't go. They can travel with undiplomatic immunity to those undiscovered countries from whose bourne no human travellers – only monsters – return. Transgressing the conventional frontiers separating good from evil, human from inhuman, natural from cultural, monsters scare the hell out of us and remind us we don't know who we are. (Kearney 117)

The negativism of Bataille and Blanchot's limit experiences would never call for an attempt to bridge these divides but Kearney insists that such a "denunciation ultimately denies any form of dialogical inter-being between self and other." Otherwise we may find "that the experience of irreducible alterity is at bottom indistinguishable from the experience of irreducible abjection." (Kearney 9)

*Aporias* by Derrida brought me to the limits of intellectual comprehension of Otherness, alterity and limit experiences. It takes the form of two chapters, the first dealing with the finitude of death [*Finis*], the second the waiting for death [*Awaiting (at) the Arrival*]. It is a wicked joke that the end comes first and the waiting last. The journey through this labyrinth is alternately exhilarating and dispiriting. Kearney's border-crossing Other is back – this time as the *arrivant* and the multiplying shadow of the *arrivant*. The immigrant, the nomad, the Roma is as persistent as the shadow of death in the book. However, the darkest interloping shadow is a German one; Derrida filters his questions about death through Heidegger's fundamental text, *Sein und Zeit*. Freud, Blanchot, Ariés, Levinas, Hegel, Kant, Aristotle all wait on the edge of the crowd but it is Heidegger who

Derrida takes on most directly in this crowded chaotic waiting room especially in the second chapter on expecting death. The waiting is more painful than the decisive moment. In spite of the difficulties of comprehending his intertextual arguments, the reading of *Aporias* delivers a melancholic pleasure as strong as in Dylan Thomas's or Emily Dickinson's poetry on the conundrum of death. Derrida spins a spectral cyclone of alterity as he moves from French, German and English texts, language and contexts: hostage > host > gast > hôte > guest > ghost > geist. There is a deliberate strategy of singling out and underlining translation difficulties, borders, limits, extremes and impossibilities throughout this short text, emphasizing the otherness of death as well as its proximity; the death that matters is always *my* death.

### 3.3 Mimesis and Adaptation: Taussig and Hutcheon

Following through on my concern for the seeming inevitability of explicit and implicit art historical references in what I considered to be direct, affective, unmediated representations of my own experience, I turned to Michael Taussig's consideration of mimesis and alterity and Linda Hutcheon's study of adaptation and intertextuality for insights. Art historical references have always been a key element of my artwork; two early paintings of mine, *Laocoon Revisited* (1981) and *The Craft of the Contaminated* (1984) are exemplary of my redeployment of artworks from the past for contemporary purpose. *Laocoon Revisited* (1981) reprises *Laocoön and His Sons* (ca. 20 BC), a life size work in marble attributed to three sculptors from the island of Rhodes - Agesander,



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Athenodoros and Polydorus - showing the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons Antiphantes and Thymbraeus being strangled by sea serpents. My 1981 version repurposes the original as a celebration of male sexuality and eroticism intertwined with the dangers of the mysterious new “plague” that was killing gay men. *The Craft of the Contaminated* is based on Gericault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819), a depiction in the French Romantic style of an actual tragic shipwreck where many lives were lost. My 1984 version relocates the original in an explicitly Canadian context, and the lives lost are those deemed “contaminated,” a double reference to the germ warfare conducted against First Nations by European colonizers through distribution of intentionally contaminated blankets and clothing and to the those deemed contaminated by HIV. Two

texts in particular gave me a new perspective on the importance of art historical references in my work: *Mimesis and Alterity* by Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig and *A Theory of Adaptation* by Toronto literary scholar Linda Hutcheon.

### Mimetic Magic

Taussig explores alterity within a post-colonial framework, looking at how the Cuna of Panama and Columbia have employed mimetic techniques in their complex relationships with their white colonizers. Like many indigenous peoples, the Cuna created carvings that portrayed the colonizers. Taussig wonders:

why these figures, so crucial to curing and thus to Cuna society, should be carved in the form of “European types.” In short why are they Other and why are they the Colonial Other? This question leads to still more of a particular and particularizing sort, because in asking it I am, as a “European type” brought to confront myself in the form of an Indian figurine! What magic lies in this, my wooden self, sung to power in a language I can’t understand. (Taussig 7-8)

With good humour, Taussig, as anthropologist, tries to untangle this situation where the hunter becomes the prey. In doing so, he accomplishes two things that speak to my project. First, he re-theorizes mimesis away from its traditional art historical confines of realistic representation. In his estimation, mimesis includes all forms of reproduction – technological (photography, film), theatrical, and art historical referencing – and he posits the primacy of mimesis as a cultural tool. “This discovery of the importance of the mimetic is itself testimony to Benjamin’s enduring theme, the surfacing of ‘the primitive’ within modernity as a direct result of modernity especially of its everyday-life rhythms of

montage and shock alongside the revelation of the optical unconscious that is made possible by mimetic machinery such as the camera and the movies.” (Taussig 20) Because of his interest in vocal mimicry he extends this notion of mimesis into the vocal and theatrical.

Second, he mounts a critique of traditional anthropology and therefore western cultures in their reductivism regarding other cultures. “To call these reflections on Western culture an ‘inquiry’ suggests that the anthropological project can continue unabated with the same old desire for intellectual mastery of the object of study and the same old desire for the enigma of the ‘powerful explanation’.” (Taussig 236) In this the reversal of the roles with the Cuna observing and recording the white colonialists, there may be a correspondence with “reverse discourse” (Foucault 1:101) in Queer politics by taking on the mantle of the strictures of the psychiatric/sociological classification of homosexual and using them as political point of departure.

Taussig’s involved inquiry led me to wonder if my adaptations, sometimes burlesqued to the point of pastiche, could also partake in this mimetic sorcery, oscillating between the magic of the copy and the fact of the real: “To get hold of something by the means of likeness. Here is what is crucial in the resurgence of the mimetic faculty, namely the two-layered notion that is involved – a copying or imitation, and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived.” (Taussig 21) His discussions of the “art of quotation” indicate that this connection is not fatuous.



### The Incessant Palimpsest

Similar to Taussig's expansion of the concept of mimesis, Linda Hutcheon, a noted theorist of irony in postmodernist artworks, asks her readers to consider an expanded notion of adaptation that goes beyond the common notion of adaptation of novels into films. Rather she wants us to look at the whole spectrum of mediated representation including video games, operas (she's an opera buff), traditional visual arts, independent film and video, and digital media, as forms of adaptation. She observes: "Given the large number of adaptations in all media today, many artists appear to have chosen to take on this dual responsibility: to adapt another work and to make of it an autonomous creation." (Hutcheon 85) With a nod to Walter Benjamin she emphasizes that good stories are there for the recounting (Hutcheon 2) but adds a caveat as she cautions us to not allow the ubiquity of adaptations to regard them glibly: "adapters' deeply personal as well as culturally and historically conditioned reasons for selecting a certain work to adapt and the particular way to do so should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general." (Hutcheon 95)

Another important aspect of Hutcheon's proposed analytical framework is the "palimpsestic pleasures of double experience" (Hutcheon 173) where our attention swings back and forth between the "original" and the "replica" and enjoying the comparisons that are evoked.

For audiences, such adaptations are obviously “multi-laminated”; they are directly and openly connected to recognizable other works, and that connection is part of their formal identity, but for also what we might call their hermeneutic identity...the connections with other works in adaptations are extended ones, not passing allusions. (Hutcheon 21)

As evidenced in the descriptions of two early paintings of mine, *Laocoön Revisited* (1981) and *The Craft of the Contaminated* (1984), my work has consistently manifested what Hutcheon refers to as “palimpsestuous intertextuality” (Hutcheon 21) in any number of ways: directly referencing a historically recognizable work of art; referencing a genre or period of art history; and by layering and juxtaposing images from various historical periods or sources into the “flatbed picture plane” (Steinberg 82) of the work.

Another spinning cyclone of related meanings arose for me out of Hutcheon’s *Theory of Adaptation*. I had meant to use two Symbolist poets, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, as mirroring case studies for the artists, and the books of their poetry I owned had an English translation across from the original French text. I often marveled at the difference in the meanings of the poems and I was sometimes frustrated by what I thought were miscalculations by the translators. In reading Hutcheon, I began to rapidly link elements of translation > adaptation > appropriation > imitation > mimesis > referencing > pastiche into small spinning dust devils of thoughts.

### 3.4 Between Reverie and Delirium: Regarding the Lives and Works of Felix Gonzalez-Torres and David Wojnarowicz

To locate my own delirium and limit experience and its representation in contemporary art history, I looked to the artworks of two colleagues who did not survive their extreme experience with AIDS, Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) and David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992).

The initial appeal of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work is its singularity, a singularity that becomes a multiplicity. By singularity, I don't mean its exceptional character, although it certainly has that. Rather I mean a single thing that is doubled, as we see with his work "*Untitled*" (*Perfect Lovers*) (1991), consisting of two clocks in synchronous time. But more than likely, that one thing is multiplied over and over, as we see with his piles of identical wrapped candies (*Untitled [Portrait of Ross]*, 1990), the strings of white lights (*Untitled [Placebo]*, 1991), the strings of beads (*Untitled [Golden]*, 1995), the stacks of paper with the same printed image (*Untitled [Death by Gun]*, 1990). With the presentation of a singular object doubled or multiplied, he imbues that object with a single, almost painfully reductive meaning. He often stated that the intended audience for his work was a single person, his ailing (of AIDS-related infections) lover Ross Laycock, so the multiplying object stands in for love: the light of love, the sweetness of love, the globules of love. It is the condensation of affect that moves me in Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work. His impulse for poignancy contained by austerity always contradicts our expectations of the minimalist aesthetic. His piles are not grey gravel or

mounds of loam, or a mountain of pennies but indulgent spills of foil-wrapped chocolates that the viewer is invited to take away with them. A gallery filled with what seem to be white cubes shift into stacks of paper with a text or image printed on them and the visitor is invited to take a sheet from the top of the stack. When the single thing in his other works is not love, it is likely to be an absence signifying death: the empty bed, the liquid wasteland of the waves, the void of grey-scaled sky with a doomed bird in flight, all completely untitled works. There is a sorcery that occurs when Gonzalez-Torres makes subjective meaning with everyday objects, disrupting our usual expectations of mimesis to tell the tale of a love threatened, a love lost.

I have always valued Gonzalez-Torres' work as a critique of my own methods. The commonality that we share is our subject matter – queer love and desire, the AIDS pandemic and the ensuing loss of friends and lovers – and we also share a strategic use of art historical referencing (his sources come from a much narrower field of minimalist sculptors and text-based conceptualists like Tony Smith, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Smithson, and Dan Flavin). But the greatest appeal of his work to me is that it provides a critique of my own practice, an aesthetic antithesis that I can test my own impulses against. In my thesis work, I have attempted to temper my own delirium with the meditative limit experience representational strategies of this artist who speaks of desire without imaging the body and who creates incredibly affecting art works of reveries with seemingly banal objects.

David Wojnarowicz's visceral work has more immediately apparent implications for my

work. In both his paintings and drawings you see a similar approach to layering and collaging. He often worked on surfaces that are made up of found materials (maps, supermarket posters, photographs, grids made from photocopied dollars or magazine images) and he layered images from seemingly eclectic sources to create meaning associatively. It is possible that his range of referencing is even broader than mine because, along with art historical periods (Classical Greek & Roman, Renaissance Dada, Surrealism), he also mirrors a broader spectrum of popular imagery, including underground comics, commercial illustration styles from various decades, pulp and science-fiction genres and stenciled graffiti styles. His impulse is towards *horror vacui* and the palimpsestic, so the layered images are crowded into the canvas with extreme juxtapositions where photos and stenciled images share space with painted or drawing representations. As in my case, he often collaborated with his partners (most notably, photographer Peter Hujar) and friends, allowing him to move fluidly into film and video works. Wojnarowicz's art proposes delirious limit-experiences of another sort, testing the demarcations that we use to reassure ourselves. A prodigious writer of journals and fiction, he kept dream journals and made many corresponding images of sleeping males. The line between sleep and death is tested in many of these collaged paintings since it isn't always clear that the men in slumber are alive.

David Wojnarowicz was infinitely resourceful in devising ways to create complex pictorial narratives. With a voracious appetite for images, he borrowed from historical art sources like multi-narrational Breughel paintings, Dada collages, palimpsestuous Cy Twombly paintings and medieval illuminated manuscripts, as well as "low art" sources

like Robert Crumb cartoons, instructional manuals from the 1950s and 1960s, pulp fiction graphics and encyclopedia illustrations.

There was a period in the early eighties when I felt quite restricted by the medium of painting, which seemed so bound by the single image. In the midst of the disastrous AIDS pandemic, painting seemed almost mute, not at all able to handle the communication of intricate information and multifaceted storytelling. Wojnarowicz was one of a small group of artists who devised strategies for representational complexity. Using juxtapositions, layering, pictorial insets, multiple panels he creates associative meaning that is able to reflect the complexity of our media-saturated society. Twenty years after his death, his art has gained new importance as audiences are more capable of comprehending his overall aesthetic and political project and his representational strategies, which continue to echo with and inform my own.

When I first thought of writing about both Gonzalez-Torres and Wojnarowicz, I planned to make an analogy between their aesthetic instincts and those of two of the most influential Symbolist poets, Stephane Mallarmé and Arthur Rimbaud. Wojnarowicz donned a cardboard mask with the visage of Rimbaud and did relational performances wearing it on the subways and in public markets as well as having photographs taken in private acts of shooting up heroin or masturbating. Rimbaud and Wojnarowicz both were precocious gay youths who ran away from home in their teens and survived on the streets finding accomplished older lovers (Verlaine and Hujar) as mentors and protectors. Both were prone to hallucinatory over-heated imagery, and both had strong self-destructive

tendencies. Mallarmé on the other hand had a similar thoughtful disposition similar to that of Gonzalez-Torres; his innovation was in understanding the fundamental forms of his literary practice, and therefore revolutionizing the medium by introducing free verse, concrete poetry, chance and blank space (the white page) in literature. Gonzalez-Torres reinvigorated Conceptualism by re-inscribing its fundamental forms, something he was able to do because of his exceptional understanding of its inherent structures. Reverie rather than delirium was the prevailing mood of Mallarmé's poetry and the artwork of Gonzalez-Torres. I see myself and the work I have done for this thesis as oscillating between the two polarities, constructing yet another form of liminal space.

#### 4. METHODS: From Iteration to Automatism

An arts-based research is a praxis of proliferation – an organizing system that informs by eroding predeterminations, un-naming categories, and swamping the pretense of objectivity. An arts-based research methodology interrogates in a way that generates turbulence, ambiguity, the miscegenation of categories and an expanding discourse that proliferates possibility and seepages of alterity rather than reducing them. Hence arts-based methodologies can unleash torrents of unabated work flow.

(James Haywood Rolling Jr. *A Paradigm Analysis of Art-based Research and Implications for Education* 102-114)

I have laid out in detail in previous sections of this paper my practice-based, self-reflexive model of artmaking based on questioning the representational possibility of an extreme experience, in my case a near-death experience. The opening quote to this section aptly summarizes the turbulent proliferation and unabated work flow that was produced from within the delirious liminal space where the boundaries between life and death collapse. However my experiential practice-based methodology has also been

consistently grounded in art historical references, and as such I have adapted art historical practice-based methodologies as outlined previously.

One historical legacy of modernism is that painters and drawers tend to work in series, barely reflecting on this method being an iterative process: you create a work, take a step back and evaluate the results, and make the next one based your evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the previous works. However artists have used various techniques to free themselves from the perceived rigidity of the iterative method. Mind-altering drugs, alcohol, meditation, random choice (including cut-up collaging, grabbing images helter-skelter from magazines, playing image roulette on the internet) have all been used to counter the calculated consciousness of the iterative process.

The most widely known of the counter-iterative methodologies is automatism, a method devised by the surrealists to tap into the subconscious mind and free oneself from the predictable banalities of the rational mind. Poet and leader of the Surrealist movement, André Breton, borrowed the technique from Pierre Janet, a pioneering French psychologist with whom Breton had studied with as a medical student. Janet used automatic writing as a therapeutic technique for hysteria and published his thesis on the topic in 1889. After the First World War, Breton began experimenting with the method as a literary technique and the artists associated with the surrealist movement, André Masson and Joan Miró in particular, quickly adopted the method. Automatism became a major methodology of abstract art, adopted and adapted by the American Abstract



Expressionists, the Québécois *Automatistes* and the French *Tachistes*. Dennis Reid (Reid 235-53) gives a compelling account of how Paul-Émile Borduas navigated his own work and that of his *Automatiste* protégés in a course between the influence of the Surrealist leader, André Breton (who fled WWII Europe for the Gaspé and New York City) and the overwhelming energy of the Abstract Expressionists who were to first exhibit in Montreal in 1950. While the “principal inspiration for the Montreal movement remained Surrealism...Borduas clearly feared the absorption of the Automatists in Breton’s ambitions for a rejuvenated world movement of Surrealism.” (Reid 240) However the French painting scene was also evolving rapidly from automatic techniques and *Automatiste* painters Riopelle and Leduc “began to associate with painters in Paris [the Tachistes] who, like the Abstract Expressionists in New York, had developed a free abstract style from the theories of Surrealism.” (Reid 240) Automatism is so ubiquitous as a studio method, that few artists realize that it was controversial a century ago, but it remains vital to the production of many artists.

Working in an automatist manner is proliferative, because it attempts to temporarily suspend the evaluative step. By working quickly and building a momentum, entering a trance-like state, surprising images can come to the fore. Despite its appeal, I am not as naïve in my expectations of this method as the surrealists originally were. I know full well that my conscious mind enters into my art-making process and that I do not enter a state while drawing that escapes the past that shapes my subjectivity and constructs my identity. In fact I visualize the extreme experience of the delirious past and the adapted

art historical past overtly in my work. I consider the method for my drawings and scroll-works as a reformed automatism, as “directed automatism” where I predetermine the arena of interest and possible image (i.e. my hospital hallucinations), engage in a proliferative, more traditionally automatist form of drawing that is more delirium inspired than conscious, then revert to a more evaluative form, reinstating judgment in the form of an editing process days after.

Because of my extensive studio experience, I was able to sketch out images in my head while convalescing, passing the quiet hours constructing images in my mind. However the “directed automatist” methodology that I employ is not predicated on replicating the images that I have imagined. Rather, I come to the blank page with a constellation of possibilities of image and improvise on the mentally pre-rehearsed repertoire. I draw for hours building up momentum that becomes trancelike and there are always surprises that come from the stream of consciousness. The most powerful images are usually the least contrived. Using the most pointed drawings to emerge from this method, as well as various images gathered at various points in my experience and subsequent research -- hospital rooms, medical images of the fungal pneumonia cysts, the molecular make-up of Prednisone, portraits of myself taken shortly after my hospital sojourn -- I have constructed intertextual digital scrolls to create a quasi-immersive environment for my culminating exhibition, intending a replication of the limit experience for the viewer.

## 5. THE EXHIBITION: Delirious on the Borderlines

Delirious on the Borderlines is quite simply mounted, using north and south walls that afford the most clear running wall space. The north wall is hung with an aggregation of drawings from two different series that I created in the fall after my hospital stay. One series explores the hallucinations that I was having during my illness, particularly the monsters, incubi and demons that seemed to creep into the delirium, as cyphers for the Otherness of death. The second series uses fragments of Rimbaud's and Mallarmé's poetry that deal with breathing, self or finitude. They are often in both English and French but not necessarily equally emphatic. Sometimes the French fades or gets lost in chroma or over-layered texts; sometimes the English does so.

The second series also often pictures lines of very similar looking bearded men, their arms and lower torso melding into a wrapped mummy-like forms, that one could find in a crypt or morgue. This references the seriality of Warhol (which is often sepulchral), and hints at the serial components of animation. In this way I allude to work around AIDS that I created in the late eighties at the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. At that time I argued in several lectures for conferences on the cultural dimensions of the AIDS pandemic that memorial work around the issue was not to be regarded as less political than the didactic, activist work of Gran Fury and Act Up. And we are not so far removed from that terrible time.

With current drug regimes that became available by the mid-1990s, the incidents of AIDS

deaths have been greatly reduced and people have been lulled into a false sense of security around HIV/AIDS. Many think that the “magic bullet” has been found and that, because fewer are dying, nobody is being infected by the virus anymore. However, statistics show that HIV/AIDS continues as a global threat that knows no boundaries. An estimated 33.3 million people worldwide are living with HIV, 15.9 million of whom are women. There were 2.6 million people estimated to be newly infected in 2009, 400,000 of them children. In 2009 alone, AIDS claimed an estimated 1.8 million lives worldwide. In Canada, the impact of HIV is also increasing with more people living with HIV infection. At the end of 2008, an estimated 65,000 people were living with HIV infection (including AIDS), representing an increase of about 14 per cent from 2005 (Public Health Agency of Canada).

Not everyone can tolerate the drugs – they are essentially chemotherapy for life – and the virus, like all viruses, has a nasty way of mutating so that certain medications become obsolete even as the pathogen becomes more virulent. The mainstream media, while not as puritanical as it was in the 1980s, has now lost interest because it is an old story and politicians can only find votes for supporting HIV funding and research among urban populations, if then. So once again it is incumbent upon artists to keep the issue before the public and to make work that engages the new contexts of the pandemic. In addition to responding to the core research question in this thesis – “How can one represent extreme corporeal experience?” – there is an activist objective that is a component of this exhibition.

### Viewing Two Drawings and One Scroll

Looking at three selected component parts of the exhibition, two drawings and one digital scroll, will clarify the ways that I tackled these two objectives. The first is a drawing of the incubus, part of a series created in late September and early October, 2012. It is a fairly simple drawing done with a lithography crayon, allowing me to render with a fluidity that resonates with the bleeding watercolour, thus enhancing the dream-like mood.



*Figure 9.*

The spectral figure is conjoined with the sleeping/dying man and his reaching towards the throat of the passive subject can be read as either tender and loving or menacing and homicidal. The redness of the hand could be the glow of passion or it could be the stain of blood. This ambiguity, coupled with the fusion of the two figures, undermines the

notion of “otherness” that the image at first presents.

The second drawing is from a later series of drawings in which I simultaneously explored issues of corporeal presence and issues of translation that were frequently appearing in my chosen texts by Derrida, Blanchot, Bataille, Mallarmé and Rimbaud. Multilingual and captivated by all aspects of language, Derrida often addresses the challenges and contradictions of translation constantly throughout *Aporias*, even recounting how Cicero “goes so far as to worry about the crossing the borders of language, thereby increasing his own anxiety about the translation of the word for border, precisely.” (Derrida 5)



Figure 10.

Frequently, I experienced a similar anxiety around translation especially when I regarded the considerable liberties taken by the translators of poems by Mallarmé and Rimbaud.

Interestingly, the intrusion of adaptation was more severe in the Mallarmé’s poetry,

perhaps because of his meditative, idiomatic engagement with the French language.

My series of drawings featured poetry fragments of both poets that addressed breathing (souffler > respirer > haleter > aspirer > exhaler), a bodily function that I understandably became obsessed with during my bout with respiratory illness.

The serialized male figures, meant as surrogates for myself, are the same yet different in each representation and the melding of their arms into their torsos and the welding of legs again creates ambiguity: are they bound in bed as patients or sheathed corpses? The lack of agency of these armless men, swathed below the groin, conveys vulnerability. Some of the drawings of this series dissolve into a cacophony of translations where I overlay my conflicting interpretation of the Mallarmé lines over the ones in the version I found in my source edition. In this particular drawing I did not differ with the translator and chose, instead, to highlight a key word in the passage: revivify. A word that makes flesh my own resurrection.

*Delirious Scroll #1*, a digitally constructed image printed on paper, is one of five vertical scrolls in the exhibition. The base layer that the image is built upon is an iteration of the “revivified” drawing that I previously described. The difference in this version is that the rest of the poetic fragment is omitted and only the accentuated word remains in front of a similarly rendered row of men with goatees. A large profile of myself is layered over the lower two-thirds of the image, opaque around the nose and eyes and hair but becoming transparent towards the neck. A rendered model of Prednisone, the pharmaceutical that caused my hallucinations, creates a diagonal band across the bottom of the scroll and an

anvil, the weight that I felt on my chest in my infirmary, floats above my head ominously. At the top of the scroll is a purple veil dappled with the protozoal cysts of *pneumocystis carinii*. A drawing with a profile of a pained male exhaling a pale blue funnel into the air against a backdrop of a Rimbaud verse about respiration, glows in the dark silhouette of the top of the head like a movie screen in a blackened theatre. “It is dark disaster that brings the light.” (Blanchot 7)



Figure 11.





*Figure 12.*

## 6. CONCLUSION: Inconclusive observations

Friendship is not a gift, or a promise; it is not a form of generosity. Rather, this incommensurable relation of one to the other is the outside drawing near in its separateness and inaccessibility. Desire, pure impure desire, is the call to bridge the distance, to die in common through separation. Death suddenly powerless, if friendship is the response that one can hear and make heard only by dying ceaselessly. (Maurice Blanchot *Writing the Disaster* 29)

The above statement by Blanchot moves from friendship to an endless reenactment of dying. Desire is allowed to permeate this transition. I feel the same transition took place during the progression of my thesis project, as I moved from a topic related to friendship to a confrontation with death. The fading > failing> expiring > vanishing > dying took place in the studio through drawing, and the reconstruction (resurrection?) took place in at the computer through digital compositing.

What does it mean to ask a research question that I know cannot be answered? It marks me as a (re)searcher with quite different objectives than a scientist – even than that of social scientists. My initial questions were about demarcations between life and death, transgression and acceptability, hallucination and reality. I wasn't expecting to find answers but as an artist, I need to ask questions that are beyond articulation, to stumble around in a wilderness not knowing what I'm looking for, how I'll find it, or what I'll do with it if I do find it. So when I explored these borderlines > frontiers > limits > extremes > demarcations, I never intended or hoped to find a delineating wall, delimiting boundary or even the infamous line drawn in the sand.

Months of contemplation through drawing, reading, note taking, and writing have made me realize that my questions around friendship are not so far from the ones that I have about death. In my hallucinations and dreams, desire and dread made their presence felt in confusing communal contradiction. The collapse of one world made possible another.

I raise my ink-laden brush to paper thinking: “How do I picture my own death? The possibility of my death? The impossibility of my death?” I surprise myself by reaching beyond my mark-makers, my inks and brushes, for the seemingly musty tools of several millennia of images from art history. Derrida asks himself: “My death. Is it possible?” (Derrida 21) And he reaches beyond his typewriter into a dusty archive from several millennia. And then we hope that a magical transformation can be made with hopelessly inadequate tools.

And yet I did learn something crucial. I have come to understand that the scorn directed towards the plague-ridden, the heretical text, the transgressive artwork, the unsuccessful suicide, and “illegal” immigrants while specific to their particular circumstances, is a scorn that derives from an aversion to alterity. I think a more profound acknowledgement of this ever-present trace of that abhorrence will transform the studio work immensely.

Part of my evolution has been towards a deeper engagement with various ideas and aesthetic positions that I was already familiar with. The polysemy of texts and artwork has always been apparent to me but my sharpened understanding that I didn’t need to have a definitive interpretation of an essay by Derrida – that, in fact, he was skeptical of

the possibility of such a thing – decreased my apprehension and increased my pleasure in reading a number of “difficult” writers as sources in my research.

In recent years I had come to be embarrassed by my instinctive resorting to art history in creating my work, but through my reading, contemplation and responses in studio and at the keyboards I determined that this rich method of intertextuality was an asset rather than a crutch or burden. Being more conscious of its possibilities as a representational strategy, particularly through my reading of Hutcheon whose ideas spilled over into my reading of my other sources, will help me in the creation of future work in terms of both form and content.

As I age my testing of borders and limits is psychological rather than physical. I am less likely these days to be Foucault in the California desert delirious from taking lysergic acid diethylamide and more likely to be like the remarkable portrait artist and house-husband, Don Bachardy. He met his life-long spouse, writer Christopher Isherwood, the year I was born and settled in for an unglamorous domestic life, with his brushes, inks, drawing tools and books filling a their little bungalow.

At the end of my research, my illusive ontological questions became a basic methodological one: what creative patterns and strategies can I identify in my art making process and how can I reinforce the productive ones in order to continue to generate challenging work?

But then the cyclone of delirium reappears and spirals out of control again.

*I was kidnapped by a very rowdy gang of young queer artists – all male – who were alternately obsequious and admiring, then, vindictive and jealous. None of them I actually recognized – they were total fabrications of my subconscious. They hollered and whooped as they wrestled me down and threatened to manacle and torture me and do unspeakable things that they insinuated I would enjoy. I struggled in resistance but they eventually dragged me a few blocks away to a wild party - a cocktail party in a derelict multi-floor warehouse that opened onto terraces, studios. I continued to struggle but they finally stripped me in front of a party crowd with a diverse group of revelers and the gang chained me to the floor. The room went totally black and when the lights came up slightly, I realized I was no longer shackled and the crowds had disappeared. In fact I was now in an alleyway. I picked myself up and began the trek home but realized that I was lost and the walls were actually a labyrinth and not the bricking of a laneway as I thought. As I followed the corridor I saw a silhouette of huge man cast against the wall, but I could not see him yet. As I approached the corner I realized that his head cast an odd shadow that seemed very beast-like. I turned the corner and, there before me, stood a huge bestial monster – a minotaur with an amazingly muscled torso of a man, the hooves and horned head of a giant bull. As he pulled me towards him, he began to dissolve, his swarthy materiality becoming a dark vapor in the foggy evening. And yet the gaseous form retained a muscular strength as it embraced me. The initial pleasure of the embrace gave way to panic as he began crushing me with an ever-tighter hold. Delirious, sweating, and suffocating – on the brink of expiring – I opened my mouth to call out but no sound escaped.*

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**Delirious at the Borderlines: Limit Experience and the (Im)Possibilities of  
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