The Ship of Fools Project:
Seeking *Heterotopia* in Artistic Practice

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Available for observation on Friday June 27th, 2014 at The National Yacht Club
Floating visions, set on a mooring ball in the northwest corner of the club.
Observe from Coronation Park, or enter the club and ferry over for a night of
storytelling on the boat.
Until 11 pm.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 2014.

Author's Declaration

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"Disarm the settlers/the new drunk drivers
Have hoisted the flag/we are with you in your anger
Proud brothers/do not fret
The bus will get us there yet/to carry us to the lake
The club is open/c'mon, c'mon, the club is open"

-Guided By Voices, "*A Salty Salute*"

Abstract

The Ship of Fools Project: Seeking *Heterotopia* in Artistic Practice

Master of Fine Arts, 2014

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Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design Program

OCAD University

The "Ship of Fools Project" is an installation on a sailboat. It incorporates

painting, drawing, sculpture and textile art as an exercise in multi-disciplinary

visual practices. It also employs the strategies and techniques of poetry to cohere

these visual practices into an artistic practice of interdisciplinarity. The boat is a

purposeful receptacle for the artwork in that its definable location is slippery,

tackable and temporary. It is a countersite/heterotopia because it surrenders

itself to the water, making no permanent relationships, allowing for an unstable

and mysterious location. The "Ship of Fools Project" incorporates haptic, non-

linear and anarchic methods (smooth) and places them in an environment that

only understands in part how to support these methods (striated). The "Ship of

Fools Project" depicts the 'view from here' as it takes shape, for the sake of

clarification but more importantly as a claiming of this positioning within my

practice.

(Underbrush one)

Go home to Detroit. Walk along her streets and collect evidence.

Take many notes, share Marlboros in the snow on Woodward Avenue with strangers. Appear unhinged in Reebok high tops found in Value World. Nurses shoes.

Afterwards, let Detroit go. See the road under the road. Find compass.

In Toronto, yearn to live within its counter site, enjambed in the liminal.

Let this yearning produce a boat.

Notes: During my research on the boat, I was lost at sea for exactly one night. Afterwards, I called the project 'The Ship of Fools'. Harrowing research, but fruitful.

I have since inhabited the boat with my stories, the husks that make me, heterotopia seeker that I am.

Acknowledgements (Encomia.)

Dedication

for Mickie,

surely not the first pirate in my family

but absolutely the first pirate I have ever lost.

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Foreword

I have always been strong-willed and self-propelled. I come from a long

line of Métis, who at the best of times forged road and otherwise remained

eccentric and stubborn in the face of our family funeral home—an equally

formative character within my family's narrative—which exemplifies the aspects

of decorum imposed upon us for over a century. The "Ship of Fools Project"

means to include the energy of my family and how we function holding formalism

roughly in our roguish hearts. There has always been an understanding in my

family that the formal must exist but that there are a myriad of ways to defy its

constraints.

From my fifth-great grandfather, Pierre Meloche, who was Pontiac's right-

hand man during the siege of Detroit,[1] to my out of the closet ex-priest cousin

and my defiant and chance taking funeral director/property developing father, the

men in my family—in their winter galoshes over black dress shoes, black

overcoats, and boleros and in their buckskins and beaded moccasins—could not

do anything about the mischievous twinkle in their eyes or their proclivity for

picking up hitchhikers on the I-96 in borrowed funeral cars housing small families

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[1] The British during the French and Indian War following the Fall of Montreal in1760 captured Fort Detroit. It was on territory ceded by France to Great Britain in the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and was garrisoned by a British force during Pontiac's Rebellion. On April 27, 1763, Pontiac spoke at a council on the shores of the Ecorse River—at what is now known as Council Point Park in Lincoln Park, Michigan—about 10 miles (15 km) southwest of Detroit. Using the teachings of Neolin to inspire his listeners, Pontiac convinced a number of Ottawas, Ojibwas, Potawatomis, and Hurons to join him in an attempt to seize Fort Detroit and drive out the British. ("Fort Detroit")

on their way to JC Penny's to buy school clothes or their involvement in uprisings. Sometimes they drank too much whiskey while presiding over funerals. Often they were shaped like pears.

The men in my family, of course, hold no candle to the women in my family, who in turn scrambled around in old mansions in Detroit refusing to behave, trading hats with small children, visiting madhouses, or convents, until the 1970s, where finally they could cloak themselves in love beads, leather fringe and weed, smuggle scorpions and mescal over the border, fall in love with other women in canoes, and get tattoos of ivy over breasts carved away in battles with breast cancer.

These proclivities of lineage form the basis of this thesis. There is in my family, a refusal to accept what is 'as is', and in light of the overbearing nature of the funeral home, many of us have bent in directions that defy the propriety of this establishment. Further, and perhaps most importantly, my family has known the *liminal* places that reside in between life and death. Perhaps because of both of these reasons, there is a strong belief in my family that if one looks, one will find and gain entry to an existence that resides in this physical place, but at the same time has absolutely nothing to do with the banal goings-on of 'here'—it is a place full of metaphors, strangeness, poesis.

My father taught me this. He took me on an eccentric tour of life, eating hotdogs with the men at Lafayette Coney Island, fishing off the dock of Goyeur's Marina, past the Goyeur's sinking house built accidentally on marshland, and their

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makeshift home right beside made out of plywood on dry land. He took me to visit Esther and Alice, with their overcrowded house and their perpetual Easter hats pinned to their heads. He patiently oversaw the printing of my first published words, typeset on my great grandfather's Platen Press, on the backs of Catholic prayer cards in the basement of Janisse Brothers[2].

We are the eccentrics, the homosexuals, the mentally ill, the misfits, the undertakers, the priests and nuns, the artists. We comb over the physical terrain in front of us looking for clues. We firmly face the deep *othering* that comes with our feet not completely walking on firm ground, as we defiantly bend into the nether regions in order to reflect upon the impossibility of death being partitioned and explained.

My family roams the edges of this work, passengers on the "Ship of Fools," most definitely, and in most cases they are the very inhabitants of this ship that have taught me to find ballast out at sea, despite the lonely nights, the judgments from the shore-dwellers and the circus act one can become as the ship of all of this docks in unfamiliar territories.

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[2] Janisse Brothers, located on 4 Goyeau Street, Windsor, Ontario, was my family's funeral home and was founded in 1895 by my great-grandfather Climaque Janisse. The Detroit location was opened in 1908 and was located at two different locations on East Jefferson. The Windsor location moved first to London Street and then to its current location at 1139 Ouelette in1959.

Chapter One: Introduction

Welcome aboard the Ship of Fools. We are not responsible for any lost items, shifts of

perspective, seasickness, or tastes of freedom you may encounter on the tour. In fact,

we have no idea what you should expect. There is no map provided, but instead the

promise of shifting ground, the multi-layering of voice, discipline, perspective. There is

scientificity, but also there is a poem. Inside and outside thoughts. Multi-pronged

interdisciplinarity. Small rebellions and acquiescences. Come aboard at your own risk.

    For the purposes of this thesis, the sailboat, Marmoset, Shark 924,[3] is

now otherwise known as the "Ship of Fools Project," and as such will be the site

of a multi-disciplinary installation of artwork that weaves into my painting and

textile practices the resonances of my long established poetry practice as a

conceptual framework for the execution of the work.

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[3] History lesson: The Sharks are 24-foot racing sailboats designed in Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1959 by George Hinterhoeller. They were designed for speed and are especially cherished by enthusiasts. It is highly agreeable to own a Shark in the early numerics of the series. There is a special Shark in Niagara-on-the-Lake that was made especially for Hinterhoeller by his workers called *The Golden Goose* (Shark #1000), which I had a chance to see during a regatta in 2013. It was a gift to him for his retirement. I was also able to visit his daughter and her husband and see the workshop where specialty masts are built for this boat. Racing a Shark is considered a bit 'badass' because of its proclivity for great speed due to its specific design. Shark racers are considered a bit rogue and have a reputation for being swashbuckling, trouble-causing folks who will likely disrupt a sailing club in the process of a regatta. The standing joke is that the staff at prestigious clubs such as RCYC hides their silver when the Sharks come to race. Marmoset is the first sailboat that I have ever sailed on, and I followed her around the province to different regattas, learning about her origins.

Primarily, the material aspects of the "Ship of Fools" include: the carving

of a figurehead out of marine foam, painting on the 22-foot main sail with non-

linear visual poems from the time period of this research, the invention and

visual rendering of a flagging system created on the jib and as flags on the boat,

the invitation and inclusion of the names of the 'ship crew' rendered in

embroidered patches backed with encomia, a collection of paintings on oyster

shells housed in the berth and, finally, a performative anchoring of the work on a

mooring ball at the National Yacht Club, situated in between the Island Airport

and Ontario Place.

This project is multi-disciplinary but also considers the challenge of

interdisciplinarity as it strives to find a way to balance a creative writing practice

with a rich and multi-pronged visual practice—without resorting to simple

presentations of images and text. The "Ship of Fools Project" is a visual poem, as

well as an act of story telling, which collects imagery from the research of the

project and allows for these images to respond to each other. At times they

collide, or even contradict each other, creating a palimpsest not unlike the way

barnacles overtake the objects that come in contact with the sea. It is difficult to

say that the formal aspects of this project are simply visual and written, as the

layering of each image, along with the application of poetry—or poetics—

renders the "Ship of Fools" as a multi-sensory, performative, submersive work

that blurs the boundaries of each element used in its creation. In this sense, it has

become difficult to section off the disciplinary concerns that make this work

interdisciplinary. All artforms strive towards an explication of the *liminal*. They reach in the same direction in tandem, and have the same aim. Their palimpsest and proclivity towards intertextuality creates a confusion of discipline.

The "Ship of Fools" is a *countersite* that houses the floating visions, protestations, accounts and acceptances that have come to be the results of this research, but fall outside of the scope of a problem/solution model of presentation that frames the culmination of this graduate degree at OCAD U. For the purposes of this inquiry, the problem is the absence of—or misunderstanding of—the environment necessary to explore the non-linearity of my artistic practice, and the solution is to create such an environment. Also, the "Ship of Fools" explores and questions the idea of a goal-oriented/solvable model in relation to art production as a primary focus, considering such things as continual practices, slipperiness, meanders and *hapticity*, wherever possible, in order to accentuate the inherent issues in the relationship between the artist and the researcher and the artist to the academy. In experiencing the application of this model (artist/researcher, problem/solution, artist/academy) to my practice, I have encountered the discordance between my artistic practice and the constraints of academic life, and have gained many insights into how this relationship may be improved. The artist/researcher model fits my skin uncomfortably, and this discomfort invites me into the debate. I take this opportunity to clarify the rich and vivid locations of my work—my

positionality—so that as an artist I might insert myself into this stirring and contemporary debate on education in the arts.

This project examines and chronicles aspects of this inquiry that remain *haptic*, poetic and lateral—ways of doing that are perhaps more in keeping with the ethos and aim of my work. It depicts a containment of these processes as a boat, which remains independent and, as Foucault states, "is given over to the infinity of the sea"(Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" 23). The boat is meant to be an iteration of a Foucauldian *heterotopia*. The boat is used as a containment device—or vessel—that can dock in any given location to find an audience; but it is in itself temporary, constantly threatening to move on from a fixed location and may—at any given juncture in a trip—suddenly tack and change course. The choice of vessel is intentional, as it reflects upon the two fold relationship occurring in my practice—the striation of containment and the essence of my art practice—an environment that slips and slips and slips towards the unknown, regardless of the containments that occur from time to time in the form of artwork, or in the relationship that the boat has to the shore, or myself to the institution.

This project is an acknowledgement of the challenges of positioning my artistic practice within a "suspended symbolic order" (de Certeau xiv), places of *striation* (Deleuze 492) such as the university and the city of Toronto and chronicles the issues inherent in creating a foil to such environments. I draw from Deleuze and Guattari's theories of the *smooth* and *striated* (492), Foucault's

concept of the *countersite/heterotopia* ("Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" 46-49), and de Certeau's text, "The Practice of Everyday Life," as theoretical trajectories for my discussion. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the "Ship of Fools" is a celebration of fostering environments friendly to experimentation, accident and happenstance. The "Ship of Fools" is a chronicle of the creation of a temporary *soft architecture* (Robertson 28-31), serving as a location with flexible, tackable courses, exploring life within the *countersite/heterotopia*.

The key concepts of *heterotopia*-seeking, *liminality*, and meandering/drift become touch points for the methodologies used in this work. The visual work of the "Ship of Fools Project" correlates with these concepts and methods. Each juncture of this research is presented as a micro-narrative that positions the artwork within certain theoretical and methodological considerations developed over the course of the project that are integral to its creation, and are in keeping with the aims/environment of my artistic practice. The "Ship of Fools Project" is an act of defiance and celebration. It is a playful critique of the stringency of the research model and an honest exploration of my own artistic disposition as *haptic*, non-linear, and *liminal*.

The "Ship of Fools" considers the following questions:
1) What can be done in an environment where the *anarchic epistemology* of *liminal* and non-linear behaviors of art making are not embraced or fostered?

2) If the artist is a seeker of the *liminal* and is committed to recreate the *liminal* in every circumstance as a formative method of inquiry, how do we preserve this in societal contexts that support conformity?

3) How do we as seekers of *heterotopia* inhabit ourselves, and while being *othered* in the process, find and support each other, so that we may empower our positions, perspectives and practices?

It is my hope that the 'view from here'—my meditations on my own artistic vocationality and my observations on artistic methodology from the perspective of an artist (in my relation to the *smooth*, the *heterotopic,* the *countersite*)—may contribute to current discourse in the areas of arts education and artistic practice. It is hoped that over time there will become less of a need to create *countersites* and hidden architectures for the artist's work as our models of collecting and verifying knowledge shift and change; but, in the meantime, the "Ship of Fools Project" insists upon a particular non-linear style of studio practice not being lost, that the "*police do not take the place of pirates*" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" 27, my italics), and that there does exist safe harbour for artists engaged in similar lateral processes, even if we have to build our own damn house—or boat—in order to foster the proper environment for our work.

Chapter Two: Uncharted Travel/Not Knowing

(Underbrush two)

Where to begin a research?

Walk where the road itches your feet. Pick at words until they bleed.

Take trains, taxis and pheasant runs, until the words blur.

There was a lot of terrain before there was a boat, it veered every which way.

I had research swelling under my skin.

There were petri dishes and arduinos in every gallery. There was rash.

I was told to walk it off, and so I went home and cleared my head.

Beginning points are crucial aspects to consider and unpack. Usually, they are innocent and unaware of the trajectory they may cause. This chapter is dedicated to the awkward, unusual and nomadic beginnings of the "Ship of Fools Project." Without knowing at the time, these beginnings became the main pillars of what stands as finished work. In the beginning there were two preoccupations: institutional critique focused on research and methodology for artists, and thoughts upon returning home. Here, I honor the shaky ground of these beginnings, and begin where it starts.

In this section I hope to identify my reluctance towards structure, the research model, and the *striated* gestures of my practice, while also understanding it as a beginning ground that takes me more firmly into the smooth and liminal—a terrain more comfortable to the ways that I work. Here, I identify my predilection towards *subjugated* and *naive knowledges* (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 82) as the location of knowledge-production at play within my

own practice, and attempt to resolve some of the difficulties in utilizing the processes inherent in these methods of knowledge-production within the institutional setting. Upon entering into the smooth—categorized in this section as my residency in Detroit and its concerns with walking—I look at the *flâneur* (Baudelaire 4), the *nomad* (Deleuze 494), and the *delinquent* (de Certeau 131) as possible ways to identify my own *positionality* as an artist who is concerned with seeking out the countersite, the *heterotopia* (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopia" 46-49), and the *smooth* (Deleuze 479) as the *soft architectures* of my practice—especially as I interface with the academy, the city, the *striated*.

1. Coming Up Against The Shore: Institutional Critique, Finding the *Sea* and the *Search*

Fig. 1. *Threading and Painting Foregrounded*. Ship of Fools Project, 2014.

'Sorry, the question is wrongly put, Good man. We should ask: When is a research artistic?' (Klein 1)

Studio Notes: Today I was walking down Queen Street, after a particularly challenging graduate school presentation. I was reflecting on the events as they unfolded in the class— a thesis-writing workshop overseen by a social scientist and a computer programmer. I had just presented the required ten pages of my thesis document, wherein I had brought into question the word research within the context of artistic practice and made one of first attempts to honestly unpack my discomfort with the research model as a framework for my process of making. The presentation did not go well, and I found myself yet again being encouraged not to take on institutional critique, but instead to adhere to the recognized constraints of thesis writing, in order to fulfill the requirements of the program and my degree. 'Why is the word research in parentheses? I find this irritating.' The words rang through my head as I walked. Perhaps it would be best if I just did what I was told and forget about my reaction to all of this? It seemed a lot of work to interfere with a system already in place, and the truth is that all I really want to do is paint.

Research. Why did this feel like a dirty word that threatened to colonize my world? In the initial methodology classes at OCAD U, I was shown how research methodologies could and did apply to my work as an artist; self-reflexive methodology, field work, feminism, poststructuralism, linguistics, among

others. I could see how these methods from other disciplines could apply to my own work, but the borrowing of these terms felt like slipping on an ill-fitting skin—a collection of words that linguistically did not inhabit my world.

When I came across the work of Dieter Lesage—who in his article, "Who's Afraid of Artistic Research?" attempts to grapple with the homogenization of the word *research* across disciplines—I began to unpack the underlying reasons why there may be a rift in the application of such terms to the applied study of artistic mediums. Lesage touches upon some of the concerns that underlined my reaction to the application of the terms that governs my project. He states:

> [o]ne of the characteristics of the emerging discourse on artistic research that seems to alienate some artists—even if their own practice is often described by critics as a form of artistic research—is that the discourse on artistic research tends to be very much embedded, either in a critical, deconstructive or constructive way, in the contemporary debate on the reform of higher art education in general, and of the Academies in particular. And it should be clear that most artists have a love-hate relationship with the Academy. If one isn't so sure whether the Academy should exist at all, it is difficult to feel very passionate about a discussion on its reform. This tension in itself deserves proper attention in all further reflections on artistic research. (2)

In this excerpt, Lesage accurately defines my own alienation and discomfort, not only with the institution, but also with the idea of rallying for its reform. I came back to school to foster a studio practice that had made its way to the back burner of my life as I grappled with finding economy in order to "afford a room of one's own" (Woolf 5). I wanted to provide myself with a deep

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experience of seeking out my studio practice and felt that an immersion into an

environment supportive of this would be of great benefit to my re-entry into the

studio. I was ill prepared for the changes that had occurred within art education

since my undergraduate days at Emily Carr University, and was shocked at the

lack of studio emphasis and the ways in which theoretical and methodological

concerns had overtaken studio work during the course of this degree.

In my initial writing of this thesis, I put the word res*earch* in

parentheses—a conscious containment of the term until it was possible to

synthesize it with my art practice. To begin, I looked into the etymology of the

word res*earch*. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the English noun,

research, comes from the Middle French recherché—from *rechercher* ("to go

about seeking")—which in turn has its etymological roots in the Old French

recherchier (-*cerchier* derived from *searcher*, "to search"). *Cherchier* in turn is

traced back to the Latin *circare*, which translates as "to go around," "to wander."

After looking into the etymology of the term—and liking it—I realized

that it was something slipperier than the word itself that had me questioning its

applicability to my artistic practice. Essentially, the origins of the word, research,

supplied me with much connectivity to the wandering nature of my project. In

The Practice of Everyday Life, de Certeau states:

> …since one does not 'leave' language, since one cannot find
> another place from which to interpret it, since there are
> therefore no separate groups of false interpretations and true
> interpretations, but only illusory interpretations, since in short
> there is no way out, the fact remains that we are foreigners on

the inside. Thus we must constantly run up against the limits of ordinary language. (14)

The word res*ea*rch and its connotations were not going anywhere, and as a response to the discomfort I was experiencing with the disciplinary/hierarchical realities of the word res*ea*rch (as outlined below), and in keeping with Foucault's concept of *reverse discourse* (Foucault, *A History of Sexuality* 101)—where one may re-territorialize language and concepts that hold within them a problematic relationship to ideas of power—I have chosen to italicize the word *sea* in res*ea*rch throughout this paper.

As my secondary discipline is poetry, and as poetry attempts to work on and loosen the assumptions we have about language, this manipulation of the word res*ea*rch is a way to invite this word to have its place in the "Ship of Fools Project." This is an acknowledgement of the less recognized *naive knowledges* (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 8) inherent in the very etymology of the word research so that they are not overlooked. The *sea* and the *search* were there all along—this was pointed out by elder Duke Redbird—and in light of the chosen methodologies in the "Ship of Fools Project," which accentuate my intuitive, non-linear ways, they are brought to light in this linguistic turning inside out of the word res*ea*rch. As, in my mind this alteration emphasizes the ways in which I can manipulate the word res*ea*rch so that the reader may remember its etymological roots of seeking and wandering, I use this term freely in this paper with this emphasis.

Julian Klein, in his article, *What is Artistic Research?*, takes a look at the

definition of the word re*sear*ch, as defined by UNESCO, and defines it as "any

creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of

knowledge, including the knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of

this knowledge to devise new applications" (1). He looks at the applicability of

the term re*sear*ch to artistic practice and determines that the term is in fact "no

unique selling point of scientists" (1). In identifying "resentments to junctions of

researching and art," (1) he determines that these resentments have much to do

with the differing "motivations for knowledge enhancement" (1), along with an

observation that "artists who are "researching" appear easier within a scientific

world view" (1). The power issues inherent in sharing the re*sear*ch model unfold

in Klein's writing and it is here in his essay that I discovered the location of my

own discomfort—the shared process of re*sear*ch across disciplines is not

necessarily an equal, mutually respectful one.

Whether it be a disillusionment with "*power knowledge*" (Foucault,

Power/Knowledge 78-108, my italics)—or as de Certeau puts it, "how the violence

of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology" (xix)—there was

something about donning the artist-as-re*sear*cher model that made me cautious

of the mires of disciplinary connotations and issues of power therein. Klein

states: "[w]hether artistic thirst for knowledge is acceptable as a reason to call

an investigation also "research," depends obviously on the question, what types

of knowledge assemble under the concept of cognition, or which types of

cognition form the category of knowledge" (5). Was I to engage in the research

model as it related to solvability issues? Was I to construct a problem that I was

then required to solve? This went against the grain of the "concept of cognition"

(5) that seemed to be at play in my artistic practice, which employed intuition, a

lack of plan, and a series of lateral poetics that rubbed up against each other,

sometimes in completely non-linear ways, used not to solve a problem, but to

riff on ideas with an open-ended and unplanned outcome—or perhaps no

outcome at all.

It was not my intention to return to graduate school to jump into the

fray regarding institutional reform. But here I was reacting to the framework of

the institution. I am an artist that would usually walk away from this type of

critique. However, something held me in place. To be fair, I wanted to at least

make an attempt to explain for myself what it was that was bothering me about

research and methodology as it brushed up against my art. I sensed that my very

reaction housed within it a very contemporary debate on the subject. This

discomfort took me on a path that tried to understand the current politics in

education, specifically the Bologna Process[4] and its impact on institutions of

education. Lesage sums up the environment of arts education reform by stating

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[4] The Bologna Process is a series of agreements between European countries in
the hope that the format of education may be the same throughout the countries
that participate. The discourse began in 1999, and was implemented up until
2009. While the process was meant to make the process of higher education
more streamlined across Europe, much criticism has followed in regards to how
this has translated into everyday practices and curriculums. For further
information, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna_Process

that:

> …the obligation for teaching in higher education in general—and thus also in higher arts education—to be based on research, has been understood by some as the obligation to have *more theory* in the curricula of the study courses at the academy, and to have *less practice*. This may be seen as a variation of the first position. However, its focus is mainly on the distribution of courses—and thus also of teaching jobs—between theoreticians and artists within the arts academy. The proponents of this position tend to see a strong opposition between theory and practice, expressed by the idea that research is not the responsibility of the artist, but of the theoretician. This position allows for different variations. There are the very few who believe there is no place whatsoever for theoreticians at an arts academy. There are those who believe that a limited dose of theory in an arts academy curriculum is a necessary evil. There are those who think there should be a right balance between some theory and much more practice. And among these one will find those who appreciate that their academy has some theoreticians, involved in research, so that the academy is safe when it comes to the question whether the academy is doing any research at all. These are the people who believe that the academy needs some theoreticians because the authorities nowadays always ask academies if they are doing any research. These proponents don't understand (yet) that research is a responsibility of academies to be shared both by theoreticians *and* artists, and that it can take the form of common projects with mixed methodologies or of individual projects with distinct methodologies. (7)

In the continuum of legitimizing art practices within the institution, I found myself to be a moderate. Theory has always been of interest within my practice, and I was quite enjoying reacquainting myself with contemporary theory. Reading theory was not my argument with this process either. So what was it? I began asking myself questions such as: what would happen if a scientist was asked to use art practice as a method to determine key information to their research? An engineer? Would a social scientist entertain my theories of *meander, drift, non-*

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linearity as bonafide methods in their work?

I was not so sure that this utilization of borrowed methods was very reflexive at all. In his work, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Foucault speaks of the concept of "*subjugated knowledge*" (81) and defines it as: "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (82). These types of knowledges—these "discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges" that "work against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (83)—were the knowledges that governed my work. They were the hunches, the witchcraft, and the non-linear. If this was indeed the location of my practice, how could my work interface with or contribute to a collectivity of research, which equally included the *haptic*, non-linear and disorderly ways of my process? What if these methods of knowledge-creation were not acceptable or recognized and were in fact considered "beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (82) of the goals set out in the parameters of graduate research?

According to Lesage:

[a]lthough universities did pay attention to the demand that the new doctorate in the arts should respect the specificity of an artistic education, in that they accepted the idea that artists present a portfolio of their work as a doctorate, universities fiercely defended the idea that a doctorate in the arts would be inconceivable without a written supplement. As a result, the

> format of the new doctorate in the arts often requires both an
> artistic portfolio and a written supplement. The insistence of
> universities on the obligation of a written supplement seems to
> demonstrate the university's lack of confidence either in the
> capacity of the arts to speak in a meaningful, complex and critical
> way in a medium of their choosing, or in the university's own
> capacity to make sound judgments on the meaning, complexity
> and criticality of artistic output as such. (8)

This lack of confidence in artistic output hones in on my initial discomfort. My discomfort was with the hierarchy of knowledge-creation according to discipline—and in knowing that the processes that were at play in my practice were not necessarily validated within the boundaries of knowledge-creation as it stands within the academy— unless it is supplemented with written theoretical work which gains its entry.

In his lecture at the AGO, *Time Is Longer Than the Rope,* artist Theaster Gates opens his talk/performance by saying:

> I am not really talking about art ever these days. I am talking
> about why, how, how much, when. That gets kind of boring. I am
> trying to figure out ways that artists—the three artists inside
> me—trying to figure out way that artists can use this podium to
> try things, and maybe instead of taking about art, to be art. So, I
> am going to try to be art instead of trying to represent myself as
> who has been art.[5]

Gates proceeds to use poetry, sound, image and storytelling to create a new kind of experience of discourse at the podium. I cite this lecture because it holds in it the germ of what an artist can do within the institution. When faced with the artifacts and systems of the institution, I still want to be an artist, which can

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[5] For more information see: http://www.ago.net/the-rapp-lecture-in-contemporary-art-theaster-gates

be a difficult prospect as the structures of knowledge-production within the higher learning institution can at times be counter-intuitive to this process.

The "Ship of Fools Project" was created as a *countersite* wherein the viability of '*being art*' could be maintained regardless of the shifts of the ongoing debate and execution of legitimating artistic practice within the institution. The creation of a *countersite* is tactical (de Certeau 14) and holds within it a polarization of opposites, which are—in itself—an invention. The "Ship of Fools Project" should be taken with a grain of salt—as there are *smooth* spaces found in the institution, as well as *striated* spaces within the *countersite*. There are no real black and whites, but perhaps versions and variations of space that lean further in one direction or the other. The "Ship of Fools Project" is meant to interject, to make trouble, to open a debate and to shed light on how the knowledges, environments and practices of the artist could be better trusted, and that with this trust would come a shift toward the *smooth* within the academy, creating a more balanced, innovative forum for knowledge-creation.

Not unlike Theaster Gates's interface with the podium, the "Ship of Fools Project" finds a way to '*be art*' as much as possible in the mix of stirring debates around institutional reform in art universities, and in negotiating the application of the research model as a required legitimization of the institutionalization of my own artistic practice. This is where my work situates itself within the contemporary—in a commitment to engaging with the issues that arise as artists attempt to work within the institution—holding onto the voice and perspective

of the artist as knowledge-creator as best as possible, regardless of the power

dynamics involved in maintaining this position within the academy. There is an

understanding within this work, that the institution is not a brick wall, and that

the podium can melt away on occasion into a more liquid reality. There is an

understanding that disciplinary and theoretical considerations are important

tools to know how to use in order to make powerful work. These are givens.

But in the end, I am only willing to *be art*—this is what I try to bring to my life

and my pursuits, despite the challenges inherent in this choice. The "Ship of

Fools Project" is flexible. Tackable, but firm. I am an artist. Not a social scientist,

not a theoretician, not a scientist. I am unwilling to move outside of who I am.

My work within the institution is valuable and innovative. It holds within it the

germ of change. And so, I hold course.

"Soft architecture will reverse the wrongheaded story of structure and deepness. That institution is all doors but no entrances. The work…paradoxically recompiles the metaphysics of surface, performing a horizontal research which greets shreds of fibre, pigment flakes, the bleaching of light, proofs of lint, ink, spore, liquid and pixilation, the strange, frail, leaky cloths and sketchings and gestures which we are." (Robertson I)

2. Going Home: Seven Walks and Occasional Writing[6]

Fig. 2. *Into the Fog*. Detroit, 2013.

Studio notes: I should have known, as I peeled away the responsibilities I

held in time and space, in order to leave for Detroit, that I was not just

making time for research, but that I had created a wrinkle in the third

dimension wherein I might find my feet again on the *Red Road*[7]—a

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[6] This is a transposition of the title of Lisa Robertson's *Seven Walks and Occasional Writing From the Office of Soft Architecture* (2006).

[7] The *Red Road* is a path of native spirituality which not only varies from tribe to tribe, but also has applications in the recovery and new age communities. One thing is certain; the path of the Red Road emphasizes an ability to walk in a certain fashion that is in keeping with integrity, faith and honesty. It is a commitment to seeing the truth under the illusion, and is also a commitment to an aim that is not necessarily a response to the environment one is in, but instead to a truth that might be revealed in the lesson of keeping to the path. For a comprehensive application of this term, see: Beth Brandt's "The Good Red Road: Journeys of Homecoming in Native Women's Writing." In *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*. 21.1(1997).

conceptual terrain, a hidden *soft architecture* as familiar as home and not unlike home, both sought and dreaded in my mind and heart.

I got on the train. The lady scanned my ticket and I boarded. After an hour or so, I took out my earbuds to head for a pee, and I heard the conductor announce a stop I had never heard of in the Toronto-Windsor corridor. Disoriented, I found the attendant and asked what train I was on. It was the last train to Sarnia — a town in the wrong direction. Luckily, it was the mistake of the woman that scanned my ticket, and so the railway was responsible for getting me back to Windsor. It was late, and as we pulled into the Sarnia station, I was informed that I would be taxied back to Windsor that night. The cab that pulled up housed a rough looking guy with big tattoos. He made me nervous, not that I wasn't nervous already. I got in the cab. It was going to be two and a half hours with this burly man, and I was feeling a little off balance about the whole thing. After a short while driving through Sarnia to get to the highway, the cab driver looked at me through the rear view mirror and exclaimed: "I don't meant to pry, but I feel the need to tell you that you should be near to home right now. Otherwise, you get too confused." Now, I had not told this man anything about myself, where I was coming from, or where it was that I was headed. His statement was shocking, and shockingly accurate.

As it turns out, Herman was a medicine man—a fire carrier—and the cousin of Dudley George. We spent the rest of the cab ride in deep discussion about my return home. When we finally pulled up to my friend's house in Windsor, Herman told me that he had to tell me his spirit name. "You know why right?" he asks me. "Yeah," I said. "Cause this was no cab ride. Nope." He says. "More like ceremony. You needed to get home sideways, so that you didn't take it for granted."

I thought I would go walk it off. Truly, this next piece of the puzzle that made the "Ship of Fools Project" was a simple take five. I planned a trip home to Detroit, to stay with painter, Hernan Bas, and his partner, the artist, Peter Rozek. This trip home was framed as a mini-residency, where I would begin to write a work of creative non-fiction about the experience. It was meant as a relief valve from my academic pursuits, so that I could return to the 'raw materials' of my own art, so to speak. There was a need to get back on the ground, and see the world from the 'underbrushes' that I was used to.

As this transition occurred, several major themes for the "Ship of Fools Project" emerged. My walking tour—inspired by Lisa Robertson's book, *Seven Walks and Occasional Writing From the Office of Soft Architecture* (2006)—revealed the figure of the *flâneur* of Baudelaire's poems[8]—a searcher that roams the

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[8] "The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house

physical planes of the city looking and watching for evidence. The conflation of

the *flâneur* with Deleuze and Guattari's figure of the *nomad* (53-54), who

wanders through *smooth and striated* spaces, soon acquired urgent resonances in

the critical and creative terrains of my project. Furthermore, de Certeau's ideas

of walking in *The Practice of Everyday life*, as they relate to resistance to the order

of the city and to the act of watching from below, came to inform the footsteps

of my reading during this residency in the form of the *delinquent* (131). I could

now more stridently illustrate the landscapes of *striated* space, and also the

landscapes of *smooth* space, establishing myself as an artist who identifies with the

idea of the *flâneur*, the *nomad*, and the *delinquent*. Finally, I could now draw a

conceptual line—as a critical trajectory—from these theoretical concepts to the

major themes of the "Ship of Fools Project."

3. Toronto and Permits/Detroit as *Countersite*

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in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst
of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself
everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet
to remain hidden from the world—impartial natures which the tongue can but
clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his
incognito. The lover of life makes the whole world his family, just like the lover
of the fair sex who builds up his family from all the beautiful women that he has
ever found, or that are or are not—to be found; or the lover of pictures who
lives in a magical society of dreams painted on canvas. Thus the lover of universal
life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical
energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a
kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its
movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all
the elements of life." (9)

In the process of developing the "Ship of Fools Project," I buffeted

frequently between the logic and structure of the *striated* and the yearning for

and the searching for the *smooth*. To discern between *smooth* and *striated* spaces,

Deleuze and Guattari state:

> [s]mooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than
> by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more
> than one of properties. It is *haptic* rather than optical perception.
> Whereas in striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth
> materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an
> intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of
> measures and properties. Intense *Spatium* instead of *Extensio*. A
> Body without Organs instead of an organism and organization.
> (479)

As I reflected on the research process as it interfaced with my art practice

(outlined in the previous section), I realized that aspects of the *smooth* and

striated had relevance not only to my involvement with the academy, but also

within the narratives I held between two significant cities I had resided in—

Toronto and Detroit.

When I arrived in Toronto in the early 2000s, I worked at a café called

the *XXX Diner*. All of the sandwiches were named after porn stars, and there

was a live DJ spinning records at the end of the bar. Here, I met Peter Jarvis, co-

founder of *Play Records* and eventually helped him with parties in the 'nowhere

zone' of the warehouses hidden behind King and Dufferin in the West End of the

city. I would dress up in angel's wings and sit under an old film light selling tickets

while a sea of people did some dancing. Six in the morning would come, and as I

wandered home through the old warehouses, the sun would crack out and my

tired body would weave its way home, holding the secret of the night before. Now, fourteen years later, the *XXX Diner* is a *Fresh* vegetarian chain restaurant, nestled in the hip Queen West area, and condos, grocery chains and corporate offices have overtaken the warehouses. This is what I observed as the physical alteration of the city within which I resided.

In terms of practice, my time in Toronto was taken up with the opening of three clothing stores, one restaurant and the purchase of a commercial building. These projects exposed me to overburdened systems of administration designed to mediate the spaces of the city. The genesis of this irritation with tax forms, business and building permits, public health regulations, architectural drawings, visits to City Hall, neighborhood BIA's, fashionable cultures (vintage stores, coffee houses) and so forth are irrelevant to me. However, one thing became clear, these *striations* existed as a reality of my engagement with Toronto and, in turn, they all chipped away at my creative nature. I found myself engaged in what I considered to be a contained, truncated atmosphere, one that literally wrapped the red tape of administrative duties around my creative ventures. It was stultifying.

As the Toronto I know has evolved—a process I witnessed over the last fourteen years—the spaces of slipperiness that once informed my artistic practice (the diners, the warehouses) disappeared. The cranes peppered the sky promising new condo developments, which, interestingly, often promoted their spaces as 'hard lofts', simulacra of the warehouse spaces I had inhabited over my

time in the city. This became a reflection of a more psychic alteration, as this shift towards the *striated* manifested in my personal life within the city.

This Toronto had become a highly mediated urban space—full of rules and regulations, codes and bylaws and cultural recipes—a virtual desert within my own psyche. In coming across the writings of de Certeau, it became clear that my experiences in Toronto spoke to a process that was identifiable within the contemporary. In *The Practice of Everyday life*, de Certeau states:

> [i]f it is true that the grid of 'discipline' is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what ways of operating form the counterpart…(xiv)

I am uncertain whether this phenomenon of reduction has its origin in the development of the city, or if it is a manifestation of the pursuits that I undertook within the city. Regardless, Toronto is the site where "the grid of discipline is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive" and therefore becomes a physical site that I resist and evade in order to operate from "the counterpart." Michel de Certeau's observation contextualized my own collection of losses and mournings for the disappearing "sites of evasion" that I had discovered in Toronto (the diner, the warehouses, the creative impulse within my practices) and consequently underlines my motivation to pursue such evasions within the physical site of Detroit—a city which had in the past given me passage. As mentioned in the previous section on institutional critique, there is no such thing as a 'pure' *striation*. In this sense, I see the *smooth* qualities of

Toronto becoming fewer—the interstices within the *striation* of the city are witnessed less frequently and they are more difficult to 'suss' out. The expense of the city makes it more difficult to function within the *smooth*, as the condo developments and chain restaurants take over the sites previously utilized in this fashion. The journey to Detroit is time sensitive. At this particular moment, the process of gentrification has not tightened the inner city into a site difficult to penetrate. One day, this will occur, and the *smooth* will recede. The ship will have to find a different slip.

Studio Notes: The pheasants have overtaken the inner city. Canadians are allowed to run red lights at night, or so the urban legend goes. Old opulent theaters are transformed into parking garages, where if you hung over the edge, you could still see the stage. Patti Smith ate hotdogs in the old Coney joints with Fred Sonic Smith. Iggy Pop heralds from this strange city. Electronica was born here. The kids are moving here in droves to make and sell handmade things. They ride bicycles, make art, music, inhabit. I have been to their dinners. Michael Snow played with Wolf Eyes, while I stood in the rain listening outside of MOCAD. Shit is scrambled up and going down everywhere I look. I go visit the crumbling Grande Ballroom and wonder about John Sinclair.

Fig. 3. *Diana Ross Lived Here.* Detroit, 2013.

Detroit as *countersite* was an early percolation that in retrospect fuelled the "Ship of Fools Project." Detroit is not over-mediated, in large part due to its collapse both in terms of population and economy over the last several decades. Detroit, because of its inhabitability, for the moment falls outside of de Certeau's claim that the habitable city is a "symbolic order" where there is "nothing special" and where "nothing is marked, opened up by a memory or a story" (43). Detroit, because of its crumbling infrastructure as a city, holds within its nature a disjunctive poetic and haptic collection of narratives and memories, which both erode and preserve the fabric of the city holding it in a tension that resists orderliness. Detroit negotiates a Deleuzian *smooth* space in that a large part of its

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striated fabric was destroyed by the out-flux of the population from the inner city after the famous Detroit Riots of 1969. Again, the *striated* does exist. It just does so to a lesser degree as a result of the narrative of the city's history.

My return to Detroit—while instinctual—was in itself a return to a location that resists de Certeau's "grid of discipline" and in fact tends to encourage ways of operating that defy bureaucratic and institutional complicity. It was only fitting that a shaman disguised as a taxi driver was the vehicle by which I did in fact return, as it loosened things and reincorporated the Foucauldian "*naive knowledges*" and symbolic witchery that resonates with my artistic and creative impulses. In that sideways taxi ride from Sarnia, I could feel the disjunctive magic of the *countersite* pulling me home. I was entirely ready to evade, duck, hide out in a place with less rules, a place entirely suited to the development of non-linear lateral poetics and art. Detroit has been known to turn a blind eye to creative ventures that blur the lines of civic rules and bylaws. To excerpt from my time living in Detroit in the 1990s: the music band *Mule* turned the main floor of their crumbling Victorian house into a hangout/venue called *Zoots*. Likely in violation of zoning, noise, public health, and proper business numbers, *Zoots* nonetheless functioned uninterrupted for years as an influential location for music and art. Another example of this is the *Detroit Contemporary Gallery*, which was housed in an old stable on Rosa Parks Boulevard. Their yard was a sculpture garden that employed the backs of semi trucks as chicken coops. Although within city limits, the chickens were not bothered by city officials.

I ate felled urban pheasant at the houses of friends. Salads came from

gardens erected in empty lots. These instances proliferated in Detroit during my

teens and early twenties. While some of the more high profile urban art projects

like the *Heidelberg Project* were targeted by the city as eyesores, it is interesting

to note that even the *Heidelberg Project* has functioned within the city for decades,

despite institutional criticism and attempts to shut it down. So, even in the

instances where the city did step in to enforce bylaws, the end result did not

completely disrupt the *haptic* usage of urban space that had become—in

pockets—the language of the city.

It was a preposterous reverie, borrowing several of its aspects from stolen engravings we had seen and coveted and surreptitiously slit from expensive books in order to furnish the inner pockets of our coats. But we felt some sort of use had to made of the abolished heaven. Since it was redundant now we could colonize it. Ours was a fin-de-siècle hopefulness, which bloomed in tandem with its decay. (Robertson 192)

4. Walking Detroit

Fig. 4. *Haecceity*. Detroit, 2013.

My week of walking in Detroit at the beginning of this research included a series of photographs and creative nonfiction writing[9] that meditated on place, family and my yearning for and seeking out of the *countersite*. I photographed my walks in the snow and my visits to a variety of places that I came across in my walks. The writing wove in and out of my childhood memories, my ancestors, the family funeral home, the strangers, the landscape of Detroit. I felt nostalgia and a strange disconnection to immediate reality as I walked. The experience of

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[9] Interestingly, my photographs of that time even resemble the *haecceity* that Deleuze and Guattari attribute to walking. They are blurry, foggy images, all of strange middle-grounds and transitions. The creative nonfiction writing that was accomplished during this residency manifests as passing headlights in the fog— rhizomatic attempts to describe the *liminal* ground on which I had found myself. (See my "Underbrush" insertions in this document as examples)

walking was an un/grounding as I grappled with my personal history with the city, the terrain in front of me, and the fractured collections and recollections that took place as a result of these narratives colliding.

In retrospect, my walking residency in Detroit at the beginning of this research was an entry point into the *liminal*. *Liminality*, a term coined by Arnold Van Gennep in *Rites de Passages* is used in social science to delineate a middle phase of ritual. It is the phase of ritual that comes after one enters into a rite that creates a separation from the everyday. *Liminality*—or *thresholding*—is the space where assumptions dissipate and dissolve in order to create new perceptions. I had entered into the beginning of the ritual, as I had already been separated from the usual in Herman's taxi. The repetitive act of walking furthered my entry.

Fig. 5. *Where All Things Sway*. Detroit, 2013.

Walking has a particular place in contemporary theory, which delineates the practice of walking as a conceptual location of the *haptic*, the *smooth* and the non-linear. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain that "[t]aking a walk is a haecceity…Haecceity, fog, glare. A haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome" (289). In this sense, walking seemed an apt practice to undertake within a *liminal* state as it embodied the in-between-ness and non-linearity of the *liminal* state. The writing and the images revolved around my practice of walking, which in turn sought out the *liminal*—a *countersite* to the imposed structurations of my experiences in Toronto and in graduate school.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau connects walking to fiction and

legends:

> [w]hat this walking exile produces is precisely the body of
> legends that is currently lacking in one's own vicinity; it is a
> fiction, which moreover has the double characteristic like
> dreams or pedestrian rhetoric, or being the effect of
> displacements and condensations. As a corollary, one can
> measure the importance of these signifying practices (to tell
> oneself legends) as practices that invent spaces. (107)

These "legends"—as they manifested themselves both visually and textually—

stayed with me even as Detroit loosened itself in my imagination and became a

boat. The "Ship of Fools" holds within its sails "the signifying practices" from my

time spent walking through and writing in Detroit at the beginning of this

research. These impressions and images that I collected helped me to "invent

spaces" much later on, as I completed the work of the "Ship of Fools." My work

on the "Ship of Fools"—the vast collection of impressions and images found on

the boat—grew out of my experiences of walking as a *liminal* practice. Detroit is

their context. These images are a response to the ways in which the "legends" of

my own personal history of this particular city "offer up rich silences and

wordless stories, or rather through their capacity to create cellars and garrets

everywhere, permit exits, ways of going out and coming back in" (de Certeau

106). It is in the makeshift images of the "Ship of Fools" that these

"superstitions"—these "fragments of scattered semantic places" (de

Certeau107)—where my "legends" of Detroit find their voice. They become, in

turn, the symbols of the 'underbrush', the flags of the *smooth* and the husks that I

recreate to describe the *liminal* qualities of the *countersite*.

Images from Detroit used in the "Ship of Fools Project":

1. The vase on the main sail was purchased for my family funeral home at Dumochelle's in downtown Detroit by my grandmother, and was later stolen by my aunt who defied the patriarchal aspects of the family funeral business. After her death the vase was unearthed in her girlfriend's basement in Detroit and passed through hands to my studio in Windsor.

2. The pheasant on the jib sail/on the oyster shells is an exploration of the wild pheasants of urban Detroit as they play with my memories of living in the city and as they peppered my walks during my residency.

3. Reeboks purchased at Value World on Woodward Avenue in Detroit—an old pair of white leather high tops—are the other main image on the main sail but have also peppered my journeys into this re*search*. They exemplify the act of walking as it took place during this residency as well as the theoretical considerations of walking that were investigated at that time.

5. The *Flâneur*, The *Nomad*, The *Delinquent*

 In terms of my own presence within this process—the *self-reflexive*—my experience as a walker through the city streets of Detroit revealed immediately my own inhabitation of the role of the *flâneur*. The *flâneur* is a well-established character of the early nineteenth century and is forever emblazoned in the

epitaphs of the poems and fictions of Baudelaire, Poe, and Thoreau. The *flâneur* is also a major theme in Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (2002). In his essay "Benjamin's Flâneur and the Problem of Realism," John M. Rignall describes the *flâneur* as an individual that combines "the casual eye of the stroller with the purposeful gaze of the detective" (113). The *flâneur* observes the "landscape, lying either desolately or seductively open before the fictional characters" and "as a room enclosing them either protectively or oppressively" (Rignall 113). Baudelaire describes the *flâneur* as an individual who is able to transform self, while also holding the tension of being self. He also touches on the "roving" and searching strategies the *flâneurs* engage with as they move through space: "[e]mpathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the *flâneur* abandons himself in the crowd. He . . . enjoys the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit. Like a roving soul in search of a body, he enters another person whenever he wishes" (55).

As I walked through Detroit, it became clear that I too observed the cities that I resided in and evaluated their (in)abilities to protect or oppress their inhabitants. I found myself looking to move away from systemic oppressions of Toronto and towards a city that had always protected me. I know that for me Detroit resonates as both the "knowable and known" and "mysteriously alien and fantastic" (Rignall 113-114). It is the *flâneur's* city and it has been my family's home since 1740 and is therefore eerily familiar. But it is also a space that erupts and defies its own *city-ness* with significant interruptions to the territories of its

physical space. As I moved about in my walking, it was clear that I too was

searching for a 'body', a vessel to inhabit within which I was able to identify

myself. In this sense, I had become the *flâneur* within the scope of the research

for this project. However, the example of the *flâneur* was uncomfortable to me,

as it had such gendered, bourgeois connotations.

While I could identify with the idea of roving in Detroit as a source of

inspiration for this work, I had some difficulty with the implications of class that

the *flâneur* manifested. As I am not male and not of an idle, wealthy class, it

became problematic for me to approximate myself and my artistic practice to

some of wider implications of privilege of the figure of the *flâneur*. In Deleuze and

Guattari's notion of the *nomad* (494), however, the watcher/outsider positions of

the *flâneur* acquire a more progressive function in that what is opened up is the

idea of a subaltern figure who becomes a variation of societal locationality not

previously explored in 19th century portraits of the *flâneur*. In *A Thousand*

Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari describe this *nomad*:

> I, as nomad--live and move on the steppe. I exist through the
> whole region, here/there in all of it, not just in part of it.
> Localization undeniably exists: at any given moment. I am
> somewhere but drifting nowhere (as non-nomads who have
> never lived on the desert or steppe, or been at sea, doubtless
> fear). But my being somewhere is not restricted to being in a
> single locality: The ship is always moving on, the caravan
> continues, the dog team careens over the ice. I am distended
> everywhere within the region: I am potentially at any place
> within it. The region is the place that I am in. Thus the absolute
> has become the local, rather than the reverse. For place itself is
> everywhere — everywhere in, indeed as, the region. (494)

This *haptic* and unstable traverse of terrain—the reality of being somewhere

while also knowing that the drift towards nowhere is inevitable—speaks to my

location, not only within my walking in Detroit, but also as a practitioner and

seeker of the *liminal*. I am constantly pushing on, seeing all that I can from my

position within the "drifting." In short, my societal locationality reflects the traits

of this *nomad*, forever slipping into other regional spaces even though I remain

somewhere in the pragmatism of geography, of maps. The qualities of the *nomad*

are echoes in the writing that came out of my walking residency in Detroit—the

meaning of Self continually tacks and seeks other positionings/pinpointings within

the narratives of walking and the public, personal and familial histories of Detroit.

This hearkens to the usage of the boat in the "Ship of Fools Project." Deleuze

and Guattari's *nomad* embodies the slipperiness of the journey towards the

liminal, and speaks of the idea of drift, that one is constantly moving through

space—"the ship is always moving on"—and this concept is one of the key

considerations of the installation onto a boat. The inference is that nothing is

definite.

      Alongside the *flâneur* and the *nomad*, a third figure that helps me to locate

my positionality within the research I conducted for my project is that of the

delinquent (de Certeau 131). In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau identifies

the *delinquent* as a typology that "exists only by displacing itself, if its specific

mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it

undoes and displaces" (131). In choosing and identifying the inbetweenness of the

countersite—a conscious unstitching of the codes of academic writing, of running

a business in the city, of discipline altogether, and disappearing into Detroit—I become an embodiment of de Certeau's *delinquent*. This choice is a conscious one, unlike the *nomad* who exists in the *smooth* as birthright, the *delinquent* must *undo* and *displace*—an intentional act that invokes the *liminal* space of the *smooth*—a conscious seeking out of ruptures in the *striated* space and in the process an active displacement of the Self.

These figures of the contemporary constantly moving *nomad*, the watching gaze of the *flâneur*, and the calculated defiance of the *delinquent*, when read together, emblematizes the position I take within the research for the "Ship of Fools Project."

(Underbrush three)

"You know where it IS."

That's what the shelter man said to me on Woodward after I gave him two bucks and we had a chat about God in the middle of a windstorm. We both determined that we are all alone in front of illusions, but that we needed to hold on to hope, if not each other as the gusts bellowed down the wide old street. He was a few teeth short, just like Detroit—she had half her teeth punched out and out of the ones remaining, only a few don't need some drilling. It was too bloody windy and although I live in Canada, I was regretting my sojourn back into cigarette smoking as I stood out in the gusts. He held a bottle nestled into a paper bag and carried it like an infant, protectively.

'Where you from?'

I hesitate to answer him and instead hand him a smoke.

'I said where you from?'

Tattooed maps. They run deep inside my memory, confused, jumbled. I am from apple orchards, whiskey barrels, forests. I am from the awkward little city across the river. I am from coffins and sharp little needles. I am from pain and the Metis nation that will not have my American records, and from here except in the eyes of your customs officers. I am from nowhere really, except for that these roads are tattooed along my Ojibway blood like old, creased skin. They are my father's abandoned birthright. From-ness. I slip out of the conundrum by undoing the cords. I become from nowhere. Where I currently live, I call an outpost. I inhabit space like a visitor. But here, in this city that holds the key to everything I am, was, ancestors, living breathing family, I become a ghost smoking cigarettes on the streets of my grandfathers. My grandmothers hover around me willing me to inhabit.

If I get the guts to speak of me in this story, instead of relying on things that are too old to matter, if for one moment I stop chasing the ghosts down to tell me where I am from, I start with my own memories of here, laced with sweaty basement clubs strung sharply with alcohol, tatty black secondhand clothes, my rebellion. I still rely on the memories of who I once was to hold me here. And who am I now? If I forget everything, lose the narrative, who am I now? I am a woman smoking a Marlboro in a pair of clunky white Reeboks—a detective, a rebel. I am a failure within a success within a city creaking at its very nature to loosen itself from the foundations that built it. I am a rotting factory, with weeds and moss yearning to break into the chinks. I am the new world.

My mother's Canadian orchards along loch one of the Welland Canal. Her mother's Northern mining town settling into all of our bones and making them

brittle. My own tired story of city after city after cabin after island.

'Round here.'

Do not ask me where I am from, because the map is unpinned and irritating me like a burr under my saddle. A pinprick. My heart is on that paper bag that you carry, these broken streets.

I retrace my steps finally. As I do so, I remember being told of the spirit bead. It was a common practice when beading moccasins, to place in a bead in the second pattern that disrupts the patterns from matching. It was in the imperfectness of the repeated pattern that the spirits could enter and that we could remember our humility. My steps back are like those spirit beads. They are an imperfect retracing of the way I came. They are the nature of revisited terrain. They are my whispers to the spirits.

6. Words and Images: Interdisciplinarity Emerges

Fig. 6. *Coney Island Detroit* (2013) and *Lafayette Pheasant* (2014) Mixed media on canvas. Side details with text application.

It was in Detroit that I first grappled with the interdisciplinarity of the

"Ship of Fools Project." As always, my production of the visual and the literal

remained separate, yet within each practice were kernels of the *liminal*. As the

project developed (outlined in the following chapters), one thing became clear: a

primary practice within my own art-making was to seek out and describe the

liminal—using whatever combinations of disciplines that could accomplish this

goal. I was interested in speaking to the *liminal*, and my challenge was twofold: to

undertake the journey towards this state, and to blur the disciplinary lines

between my writing and my visual work, so that they worked together to

describe the process of this seeking and discovering of the *liminal*. It was in

Detroit that my two disciplinary interests began to conspire to describe the

seeking out of and inhabiting of the *countersite* as it unfolded—at first within the

city of Detroit—but later when the façade of Detroit peeled away and I was left

with a boat as a vessel through which to describe the development of my

research.

We're speaking for the air in the shape filled cities, the air of the black branches, the objects covered in string, the smudged paper against the metal fence, some spatial confusion that replaces love. Now we move gently as the prepositions. What is communicate? Deep in our bodies it is better than this. Deep in our doubt is a terrestrial clicking. Now we wish to be in one place, but move like blackbirds. (Robertson I)

Chapter Three: From the City of Detroit to the Boat as *Countersite*

As the initial trajectories of my research came to a close, one thing became clear: I could not bring Detroit to Toronto. I considered recreating aspects of Detroit somewhere within a gallery, but this only brought up a further fetishization of Detroit—seen most everywhere these days in the pornography of ruin being disseminated, in the reification of the music that came out of the city, in the Mecca-like journeys that individuals are taking to colonize Detroit, to in turn gentrify and *striate* the *smoothness* of this city. Recreating Detroit in Toronto felt too easy. I felt that I owed the city of my youth a little more than to cash in on its cache.

1. Peeling Back Detroit

It was time to look at the concepts hiding within my personal narrative of Detroit, and to extract them even further from the physical space of the city. This had me considering the elements of this city that inspired my artistic practice—mainly its ability to be *liminal* (watching the pheasants roam out of tracts of land missing houses), its non-linearity (the way the roads were pitted and undrivable in areas of the 'Motor City') and its lack of structure (how this city was missing a variety of buildings like a set of bad teeth). It was at this juncture in my research that I came across the writing of Michel Foucault and his concept of the *heterotopia*, and I began to see that it was the *heterotopic* qualities of Detroit that drew me further into it, and that if these particular qualities were

to disappear in Detroit I too would move on to find them elsewhere.

In "Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopia," Foucault describes

heterotopia as:

> …real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the
> very founding of society—which are something like counter
> sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites,
> all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are
> simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of
> this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible
> to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are
> absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak
> about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias,
> heterotopias. (iii)

It was indeed the way in which Detroit could hold in its narrative stories of

American opulence, the fall of the empire, the automobile industry, the

grassroots issues of race and class that made it a *heterotopia*. Detroit was once

the automotive capital of North America with the crumbling roads housed within

it. In all of its contradictions one can see America as a whole. But it is also a city

like no other American city. This was what drew me to Detroit. It was the irony

of the pheasants running wild in the downtown core. The urban gardens popping

up in old tracts of land with the foundations of houses laid out like skeletons

between the lettuce. It was the hydraulics in the souped-up cars, pounding out

bass as they drove the ring of Belle Isle—firmly embedded in the Gatsbyan past

of Detroit with its crumbling yacht clubs and Art Deco. As I unpacked Detroit, I

realized that it was the *heterotopia* that I was seeking here along these roads. I

was engaged in seeking out the *countersite* as a method that brought me closer to

my art practice. I was a seeker of the *smooth*, looking for its entry points

wherever they manifested.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* de Certeau describes the ways in which walking the city alters the city. He describes the strange jungle of the *heterotopia*, as it opens up and reveals itself through the physical logic of the city:

> [t]hey become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. They insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order of movement. Walking follows them: 'I fill this great empty space with a beautiful name'. (132)

The *heterotopia* is full of these "*poetic geographies*" that are infused into the fabric of the physical spaces they inhabit. These "*poetic geographies*" have stored within them viable images, symbols and metaphors which are the bread crumbs I follow in order to break away from the imposed order of the *striated*, and to engage with the *smooth,* located within the strange reality/surreality of the *heterotopia*. Hearkening back to the concept of the *Red Road*—introduced at the beginning of this paper—it is the belief that 'reality' as we see it spatially in front of us is a collective imagining that is arbitrary and imposed, but not necessarily all there is. The "insinuation of other routes" is a key concept of the "Ship of Fools Project," and if there is a map at all that this boat follows, it is one that opens up the *Red Road*, the *soft architecture* and a *second poetic geography*—via poetry – as a reminder to myself and my audience that such interstices do exist, even as our physical world continues to organize itself within the *striated*.

We can't understand cloth, home, anything. Are we here to say we can't sustain this register? We can't yet participate in lost death. We must get into this soft lining. Now we were born complex, messy, willful, doubled into tables and postcards and mats. All the memory stretches out in a continual thin plane. Our faces keep reading it. Now place signs dirty water, plants, coins, unraveled stuff. (Robertson 1)

2. The Boat

Back in Toronto, I began to think of a way to capture this *heterotopia* as a

concept, in order to populate this space with the "*poetic geographies*" I had come

in contact with while I was home. In reading about Foucault's *heterotopias* a major

shift occurred within this research. I realized that the boat is a *heterotopia*. Indeed,

in "Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopia," Foucault describes the boat as

one of the best examples of *heterotopia*:

> …if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a
> place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on
> itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea
> and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to
> brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most
> precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will
> understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization,
> from the sixteenth century until the present, the great
> instrument of economic development…, but has been
> simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship
> is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats,
> dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the
> police take the place of pirates. (13)

As soon as I read this passage, it was immediately decided. I would find a boat

that I could use in Toronto as a symbol of the piracy of the *countersite*. I had

access to a small racing sailboat—Marmoset (Shark 924)—and endeavored to

use this boat to actualize the spatial and locational poetics of my project.

Effectively, the boat—as seen through the lens of Foucault's *heterotopia*—was an

ideal solution to my conundrum. Not only was it heterotopic, but also it

effectively allowed me the opportunity to keep my installation onboard the boat

and therefore separate from my perceived *striations* of Toronto. The "Ship of

Fools" as it "exists by itself" would therefore be able to begin its search "for the

most precious treasures" of other places.

As I felt my impressions of Detroit were precious cargo, and in light of my difficulties with the *striated* quality of my experiences of Toronto, I was open to the separation that the boat created. In fact, this separation spoke even more deeply to the tension between Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the *smooth* and *striated*. Toronto's concrete structure and the boat's slipperiness became in this research the perfect foil for each other. Further, as I mounted this polarization, the heterotopic qualities of this project infused this divide with complexities. My walk along Queen Street (elaborated on in the following sections) showed me the smooth within the striation of Toronto, and the discipline of sailing, with its precise knots and procedures of navigation caused striation in the vessel. Instead of disappointment, this thickened the lessons involved in the project—*heterotopic* refractions and contradictions were abound.

Looking into other artists that use boats as art installations, I came across the street artist Swoon's work, "Swimming Cities"—a large-scale assemblage work mounted on constructed rafts. Swoon first launched the project in 2006, taking her vessel "Miss Rockaway Armada" down the Mississippi. Since then she has taken several journeys on her assemblage boats, including docking her project near to the Venice Biennale in 2009.[10] I cite Swoon's "Swimming Cities" project, not only because it utilizes the idea of the boat as the platform for

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[10] I gathered these facts from an article in *Art In America*, entitled "Swoon's 'Swimming Cities' Crashes the Venice Biennale" published June 3, 2009. See: http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/swoons-swimming-cities-crashes-the-venice-biennale/

re/assemblage, but also because this project actively uses the confrontation between *smooth* and *striated* spaces. In speaking to *Art in America* about "Swimming Cities" 'crashing' the Venice Biennale in 2009, a spokesperson for the project stated: "We're literally crashing the Biennale, the boats are going to be a visual explosion. It's a heavy statement."

Once I decided to use a boat to display my work, it became apparent to me that I would populate this boat with the strange and often contradictory images that I had collected on my walks through Detroit. The remainder of this paper intends to discuss the elements that came together to make the physical artifact of the "Ship of Fools Project." But before I move on to this discussion, I would like to address some observations about boats—both positive and negative—that add to the layers of this project.

As I reflected on the decision to use the Marmoset as a replacement for the physical terrain of Detroit, many connotations of the boat began to take shape, including some that have problematic historical resonances. Primarily, boats are the tools of colonizers. Sailboats are vessels of privilege. Boats fuel the consumerism of the West for food, trinkets and mass production. On a more personal note, the smooth white fiberglass of the Marmoset (Shark 924) was the love child of my partner and his former girlfriend, who raced the boat on the reaches of the Great Lakes for years. The layers of stories, the shadows of the boat, and all of the difficult narratives of boats in general have their place in the "Ship of Fools Project." They all work to create the *heterotopia* of the boat in

that there can never be a glossing over of space but, rather, an encapsulation of varieties of space that contradict one another and therefore reveal contrasting possibilities.

Foucault believes that *heterotopias* have the "power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other" and in such layering has "very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings" ("Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopia" 330-336). The *heterotopia* is a space of *palimpsest*. There is in the boat such deeply layered and contradictory narratives (colonization, freedom, slavery, privilege, survival, movement, trade, conquest, warfare, escape, hunting, past loves) that do not speak to a glossed over and idealized utopia but instead of a messy and fraught *heterotopia*—the reflection of all other spaces, present and working as operatives within the space of the *heterotopia*. The boat—very much like Detroit—is an example of a *countersite*. It is not bound to any one meaning or inference, and can become many different contradictions of itself, while still remaining an actual physical object/place positioned in time and space. I consider the negative connotations of the boat as essential to the *countersite*—it is not a safe place, it is not discursively explicated to make anyone feel better about its presence. In this sense, the boat *is* Detroit—it doesn't apologize for itself but instead exists as a reflection of all aspects of meaning that are inferred at its location. In this sense, every version of the boat, both negative and positive, helps establish it as an object/location of the *countersite*, where each implied reading of the boat creates this *palimpsest* of

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heterotopia.

Using the boat is essential but also dangerous. In retrospect, however, I was never promised a clear and unfettered reading of my work as it meets the shore, as it brushes up against its audience. From this perspective—as I accepted the myriad aspects of the boat as a literal and figurative vessel for this project—my work took shape.

3. Naming The Project the "Ship of Fools": More Reverse Discourse

The "Ship of Fools" has been used as an allegory since the Classical Age usually to describe the ineptness to govern, satirizing the state of government and the leader's inability to manage the ship's crew. In the *Republic,* Plato paints an in-depth picture of this *ship of fools* illustrating an inept captain and a chaotic and mutinous crew vying for the helm, arguing amongst themselves about the proper method of navigating the boat:

> [i]magine then a fleet or a ship in which there is a captain who is taller and stronger than any of the crew, but he is a little deaf and has a similar infirmity in sight, and his knowledge of navigation is not much better. The sailors are quarreling with one another about the steering --every one is of opinion that he has a right to steer, though he has never learned the art of navigation and cannot tell who taught him or when he learned, and will further assert that it cannot be taught, and they are ready to cut in pieces any one who says the contrary. They throng about the captain, begging and praying him to commit the helm to them; and if at any time they do not prevail, but others are preferred to them, they kill the others or throw them overboard, and having first chained up the noble captain's senses with drink or some narcotic drug, they mutiny and take possession of the ship and make free with the stores; thus, eating and drinking, they proceed on their voyage in such a

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manner as might be expected of them. (Plato)

In this brutal rendering, there is mayhem, murder, competition, and anarchy—there are no promises of stability or order. There was something about this motley band of sailors that reminded me of the way that I operate as an artist—messy, difficult and competitive. Each occupant on the "Ship of Fools" is an independent thinker wishing to put forward their own innovative way to successfully steer the ship and willing to stake this vision in the fray of claims to guide and navigate the boat. Such is a trait that has its parallels in my own personality and commitment to my artistic practice.

In Plato's description of the *ship of fools*, this motley crew is portrayed in a somewhat negative light as they disturb the order of the venture. As I thought of the "Ship of Fools" as a title for this project, I realized that from the perspective of the artist (myself), order is not often the goal in seeking the *countersite/heterotopia*, but, instead, abandoning this orderly place as much as possible is a necessary entry point into the *liminality* of artistic practice as I know it. This is my interpretation of anarchy.

That this haptic and lateral behavior is judged as wrong—or foolish—within the allegory of the *ship of fools* also resonated in terms of the reactions that I have received over my working life as an artist—the countless times I have had to circumnavigate society's queries into what it considers to be "my jobless state," "my hobby of painting," etc. As I began to realize how this narrative fits as a metaphor for my life as an artist, not only in the anarchic defiant ship crew but

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also in how an audience might receive this unruly brood. Also resonant is how the narrator of this allegory makes assumptions—of bad and good—that align with notions of order/subservience as a desired goal. I realized that it was the perfect story to attach to my project.

The "Ship of Fools Project" aims to turn the allegory of the *ship of fools* on its head, telling the story from the perspective of the ship's inhabitants, in the understanding that the 'view from the ship' will tell a very different story than the one told from the shore. In relation to my discussion in the previous chapter on the *smooth* and *striated*, this project speaks from the location of the *smooth*. In the *striated* version of the narrative the captain has failed to maintain the necessary order on the ship and it then descends into madness and chaos. However, in the *smooth*, the *ship of fools* narrative begs the question of what the other side of the story might look like. The captain, for example, seems a bit daft and is unable to hear or see properly. Perhaps he is unsuitable to helm the ship? Is the crew arguing about the navigation of the ship or are they staking a claim that originates from their own "*naive knowledges?*" Do they navigate a ship from a more intuitive place, perhaps? Further, are they not insisting on their own hunches? These questions begin to reverse the assumptions of this narrative and—not unlike the unraveling of the order within the ship—they hope to turn this allegory upside down.

In keeping with this inversion of narrative, Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* posits: "I thought how unpleasant it was to be locked out; and I

thought how it is worse perhaps, to be locked in" (109). There is often an

assumption that if an individual is shunned that their lot in life is one fraught with

difficulty and despair. Woolf turns this assumption around and implies that being

"locked out" is perhaps a location of more freedom. If we approach the "Ship of

Fools Project" as a narrative that begins to identify being "locked out" as an

advantage in many ways, we begin to hear the narrative from a different

perspective[11].

     Oftentimes, the varieties of misunderstandings and assumptions others

have about my choice to be an artist seem to recreate the prison of the

'madwoman in the attic' through discourses that challenge the reasoning of my

refusal to 'get a job,' question about my decision to not have children, and treat

my work as a hobby. Even within this project, I am asked to legitimize my work

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[11] Such narrative inversions are used frequently in literature in order to create new perspectives on narrative. For example, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys retells the story of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* by using the ignored character of Bertha—the first wife of Edward Rochester—as a main character. Bertha, or Antoinette (we discover that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* she is renamed by her husband after she moves to England from Jamaica), is the 'madwoman in the attic' from *Jane Eyre* and has no agency outside of this trope. In *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Rhys names her and inhabits her as the main character of the story, infusing the initial story with a new perspective on Bronte's caricature. Rhys's rendering of this character forces us to question the assumptions about Bertha's madness by giving her an oppositional context—she becomes in Rhys's postcolonial text a Creole woman usurped by her colonizer as a wife. In *Wide Sargasso* Sea, we see that Bertha/Antoinette was perhaps mistreated and misunderstood by Edward Rochester, as the complications of the *subaltern* (Spivak 153-162) reveal themselves in this alternative narrative. We discover that Bertha/Antoinette's instability has much to do with her inability/refusal to adapt to the English ways of her new husband and environment. As these issues of class and race become known in *Wide Sargasso* Sea, we become sympathetic to the plight of Bertha locked in the attic.

with the held beliefs of other disciplines. Not unlike the character of

Bertha/Antoinette, the perception of others can often feel like an imposed

prison—one where the context of my suchness is categorically misunderstood.

This type of *othering* continually challenges my ability to keep ballast in the world

and remain empowered in my identity.

Michel Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization*, speaks of the *ship of fools*, and

in his writing begins to loosen the negative connotations of the ship's crew by

positing that while some suffered from isolation and despair at being "locked out,"

others thrived:

> Renaissance men developed a delightful, yet horrible way of
> dealing with their mad denizens: they were put on a ship and
> entrusted to mariners because folly, water, and sea, as everyone
> then 'knew', had an affinity for each other. Thus, 'Ship of Fools'
> crisscrossed the sea and canals of Europe with their comic and
> pathetic cargo of souls. Some of them found pleasure and even a
> cure in the changing surroundings, in the isolation of being cast
> off, while others withdrew further, became worse, or died alone
> and away from their families. The cities and villages which had
> thus rid themselves of their crazed and crazy, could now take
> pleasure in watching the exciting sideshow when a ship full of
> foreign lunatics would dock at their harbors. (55)

Foucault's perception of the *ship of fools* begins to turn the original narrative on

its head, while still identifying its complicated place as "spectacle" from the

perspective of the shore. The *ship of fools* from the perspective of the land-

locked was a sorry bunch of rejects, forcibly interred on a boat and shoved off

from land. They are the unwelcomed. They are the frustrating, ill-fitting

delinquents who disrupted the order of the village with their antics. It is guessed

that some of the passengers could not fend for themselves left afloat, and they

died of loneliness and despair. It is also guessed that others found respite here—and in fact thrived—having shed the shackles of community and inclusivity.

It is my belief that the initial woundings of positionality once aboard the "Ship of Fools" creates a rebelliousness that fuels the journey, and that this is akin to the vocationality of the artist. Not unlike the crew aboard the allegorical *ship of fools*, this wounding can often create a fragility of self that, if not addressed, creates issues of mental health and insecurity that threaten to overtake the creative impulse. It is my sense, after a personal experience of this crisis (my own struggle to legitimize my art practice and personal struggles with addiction), that Foucault is correct—once aboard the *ship of fools*, the experience of this isolation from the everyday practices of the shore-folk—along with their judgments and lack of faith—can cause deep despair.

The "Ship of Fools Project" attempts to act as a receptacle for the truths of this grief—the main sail, for example, has on it the rendering of a vase that my Aunt Mickie took from the family funeral home after she was shut out from it by way of her diagnosis of manic depression. The "Ship of Fools Project" also makes room for the anger that comes from being "locked out"—as its flags of methodology (*liminality*-, *meandering*-, *countersite*-seeking) are all reactions to the institution and to my own difficulties to interface with the *striated.* They are all markers of my defiance. The "Ship of Fools Project" also considers the spiritual value of rising to the challenge of healing from the wounds of being *othered*, and does so by way of championing and believing in the anarchic, *haptic* and lateral

strategies—the "*naive knowledges*"—that govern the work. This is accomplished by acknowledging the camaraderie of the others aboard the ship (those who have resonated with the project were acknowledged with a patch that was embroidered and tied to the boat); and also through the *Pearls of Wisdom Series*—a collection of visual poems rendered onto oyster shells and installed in the hull. These shells hold court with the intuitive lessons and motivations of the "Ship of Fools Project"—the "*naive knowledges*," folklore, oral histories, sideways lessons and murky non-academic truths that were imparted to me during this research, and are positioned in the womb of the boat as a reminder of their value.

In writing about Bertha/Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys states: "She seemed such a poor ghost, I thought I'd like to write her a life" (O'Conner 144). This sentiment resonates with the motivations behind the "Ship of Fools Project"—work that sheds light on my experience as an artist as I see it, and for a rendering of my world that circumnavigates the judgments and criticisms that manifest from those who may not understand the motivations of my identity. Creating a self-governed receptacle for my work—one that is quite separate from the shore—allows me the freedom to celebrate my wanderings within the *countersite*, illuminating the "*naive knowledges*" that govern my work. Creating the "Ship of Fools Project" is my way of making space for myself, the "poor ghost" constantly given over to other's expectations, and to "write me a life," one which includes an engagement with the *liminality* of the *countersite* and confirms

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and fosters a deep vocationality to my practice as an artist.

4. Notes on Audience

It is understood that when the boat is docked on the shore, it is a 'sideshow' that can be watched and marveled at, separated from the audience that comes to view it. This separation from audience is interesting to note. It will also be interesting to see the reactions from this audience as the boat brushes up against them. It is hoped that there may be a myriad of reactions to this project. I am sure that for the most part, the "Ship of Fools Project" will be viewed as an entertaining spectacle by many, in keeping with Foucault's observations about the *ship of fools* at shore. Perhaps with some audience members, the "Ship of Fools Project" will resonate and bolster their own weariness with *striation*. Likely, with others there will be a misunderstanding or a rejection of the work. The "Ship of Fools Project" is interested in how its audience receives the project, and imagines a diversity of audience that will further inform the work.

It is hoped that those who relate to the concepts of the "Ship of Fools Project" will ask to come aboard (by way of a patch of their name), as many have already done. Once the boat docks, there will be a ship crew sign-up sheet for those who would like to be a part of the project. In a sense, the "Ship of Fools Project" is a beacon for individuals who operate, or dream to operate in the *smooth*. It is meant as an empowerment for such individuals who are struggling to find meaning in the *striated*, an invitation to "restore the body, mend the wounds

of the self and forge new existential territories" (Guattari 181), and finally to create a degree of hope that this more *liminal*, creative and intuitive hidden road exists in the interstices of the struggle against the "imposed order" that threatens to overtake everyday life, and that in this search, there is a loose community of others. No one is alone on my "Ship of Fools."

Fig. 7. *Aboard The Spectacle*. National Yacht Club. Toronto, 2014.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, through this strategy of imagistic, symbolic and narrative inversion I am presenting a critique of the limitation of perspective—as seen in the previous chapter on institutional critique—but I am also engaging in the process of revealing the beauty and struggle of re/claiming identity, a strategy inspired by my interdisciplinary engagement with the postcolonial literary maneuvers of Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

At this juncture, I have laid out the interesting tack this project took from negotiating with the city of Detroit—through walking and through the residues of personal and familial histories—as *countersite* to the culmination of all of these experiences and moments of *liminality* as they began to announce themselves in an art installation on a boat. My readings of Plato and Foucault gave me the boat, unearthing the physical installation of the "Ship of Fools Project," its title and a plan for exhibition. Once this aspect of the project manifested, I knew that I would use my time at graduate school as an honest investigation into the artistic possibilities of challenging the *striated* in an effort to venerate and foreground the *smooth* aspects of studio practice on my own.

I have explained the reasoning behind this dramatic turn and have laid out the theoretical underpinnings of this change in direction. This shift in research was a significant one, and embodies the flexible, tackable and intuitive ways in which I work as an artist. I have attempted to cite some of the thinking behind the title of the work, linking this reasoning to literature and creative writing, in

order to account for the interdisciplinarity of my art-making process—a consideration that speaks to my secondary practice as a writer and the ways in which this secondary discipline might interface in more subtle ways with this project. Further, I have spoken of my prospective audience, ruminating on how they could receive this project, along with some of my hopes that this project may operate as a beacon to those who are struggling to find their own contesting *smooth* spaces in isolation.

The following chapter will be dedicated to the bodies of work—the populations—that I have placed on the boat. My choices of who/what resides on the boat reflects my theoretical interests as they have been laid out in the previous chapters as well as my methodological considerations which will be illuminated as I begin to speak of the work I have created on the "Ship of Fools Project

Chapter Four: The Ship of Fools Project/Bodies of Work

Studio Notes: Once the sail was painted a Payne's grey, I began to write in pencil on the background. The writing slipped into the subtext. In my mind, the writing always has. Over the summer I had the opportunity to meet Saul Levine who was in town for the Media City Film Festival. Faizal and I were convinced that he was a poet—simply because of the poetry of his films. He admitted that he began as a poet, and transferred that into film. This insertion of one medium into another—particularly creative writing into visual work—is something that I strive to make happen in my work. There is something about this occurring in a covert way that appeals to me, which is why the written marks are in pencil onto Payne's grey, and will likely fade away as the project sails.

The barely there/possibly erasing nature of this application of text speaks to its constant, threaded presence in the background of my practice, and also attempts to describe the ways in which written text whispers to me in my beginning approaches to visual work. Written text has the illusion of permanence and authority. I feel that it is important to challenge this idea, as in my practice it operates in a slippery way, weaving its way from the foreground to the background of my work.

At the beginning of this project, I spent a week in Detroit writing down

my thoughts and observations. At the time, this was the predominant practice of the project. Many of the key concepts for the "Ship of Fools Project" emerged in this writing. The writing itself was given formal publication in the University of New Orleans's literary journal, *Bayou*, along with Palimpsest Press's *Detours: An Anthology of Poets from Windsor and Essex County*. The words manifest and find their concrete voice, but then recede into the background as the visual work steps forward. In the overall context of my artistic practice, text comes and goes. The visual thrums and looms in the background, then explodes into a physical manifestation. I wanted to depict this process, as it unfolds for me.

While I was home, I was given the opportunity to chat with Governor General award-winning poet, Phil Hall. During our visit, he described poets as the dwellers of the 'underbrush'—interested in the perspective from the thicket of the forest, where the foxholes and rabbit runs become the connective tissue of the journey. I found this an apt metaphor to describe the *countersite*. I also found this description of poetic motivation a beautiful way to describe the hopes that I have for the interdisciplinarity of the "Ship of Fools Project." The poems and their poetic qualities stay hidden in the brambles, hardly discernable, but deep down and interconnected. Once I find tunnel, it is the words that first pay a visit. They are like threads that weave through the rest of the journey.

Without them, no other work comes forward to show its face up in the trees, or other higher terrains. Creative writing not unlike the rabbit holes and fox runs of Hall's description of poet's environments, is the connective tissue at the heart of "The Ship of Fools Project."

1. The Poetics of Interdisciplinarity

The conceptualization behind the overall work on the "Ship of Fools Project" came out of a watershed conversation with the filmmaker Saul Levine during his visit to Windsor for the Media City Film Festival in 2013. After the screening of his films, *Raps and Chants With John Broderick* (2003), *The Big Stick* (1973), *Later, Later, Dutch Master Later* (1991), *Rambling Notes* (1977), *Notes After a Long Silence* (1989) and *Amazing Grace* (1977), my friend—the poet and critic, Faizal Deen—and I asked Levine if he was also a poet. This was a curiosity for us as his filmmaking techniques, where he engages in a random splicing together of assorted imagery to create tone and texture, resonated with the *haptic*, non-linear (dis)ordering of images that can often be found in disjunctive poetic practices. He laughed and said that he thinks of himself as a failed poet and that as he moved from the written word to filmic language as a way to express the poetic intention behind his work, he found that films allowed him to create more successfully the atmosphere he wished to capture in art.

I cite this conversation because it plays into my thoughts on the interdisciplinarity of this project. I admired Levine's ability to insert the nature of

poetry into the films that he was creating, as if there was a seamlessness that did not reveal the poem hidden in the visual work. I have always had difficulty with the interplay of text-based work as it sits alongside visual work. There is an awkwardness that comes with the presentation of the two merely sitting beside each other—an inherent wish for melding that creates a tension between the two mediums.

Also, around this time, I was able to sit and talk with the poet Phil Hall. In our conversation, Phil discussed the need for poets to operate in the 'underbrush' in order to remain faithful to the nature of poetry. He asserted that a poet needs to stay within the brambles of the forest, in the fox holes and rabbit runs in order to keep an ear to the ground and stay aware of the hums and thrums of the *haptic* quality of poetic language. He further went on to say that it is the poet's job to clarify—and he used the caveat that to clarify means to "overfill" a narrative until each detail is present. As I layered inopportune images together—the Reebok running shoes, an old vase, pheasants, foxes, rabbits, the skyline of Detroit, meander marks, Xs, jellyfish, knives, hearts—I realized that I was operating under the premise of overfilling in order to clarify my experiences in Detroit. I meant to fill the boat with all of my impressions of my time working on the project so that I might see how all of the elements reacted together.

Both conversations with Phil Hall and Saul Levine helped me to find a reference point to my own thoughts on interdisciplinarity. As I built the layers of the "Ship of Fools Project," I endeavored to keep the sentiments of these

conversations in the execution of the project. Each conversation illuminated not only the nature of poetry but also the function of poetry as it is entwined with other disciplines. I realized that right at the beginning of my residency in Detroit, when I donned a pair of ugly Reebok high-tops purchased at Value World on Woodward Avenue, that the poem had started. The Reeboks embodied the spirit of walking as this spirit surfaced and unfolded in the initial research of this project. This was a walking that was unhinged. It was de Certeau's "long poem" of walking:

> [t]he long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. These diverse aspects provide the basis of rhetoric. They can even be said to define it. (101)

Here poetry unfolds. It can be difficult to trace poetry as a predominant disciplinary concern in this project as there is very little text that manifests in the final work; but the Reeboks point in the direction of the walk, and the walk, according to de Certeau, is a long poem. The "shadows and ambiguities" de Certeau mentions here hint at my approach to inserting poetry into my work— it is meant to remain a shadow while also being the main vehicle of inserting "multitudinous references and citations" into the spatial economies/organization of the boat.

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In essence, the "Ship of Fools Project" is an entire exploration of the "surprising" nature of poetry, as it subtly operates through visual images in order to curate and orchestrate layers of the visual poem presented in this work, culminating in an experience that is not "the usual choice." Michel de Certeau compares walking—or "composing a path"— with "turning a phrase" (100) and further states that "this art implies and combines styles and uses" and that these "uses" refer to norms and styles that involve "a particular processing of the symbolic" (100). In the "Ship of Fools Project," poetry operates as this "processing of the symbolic" as it brushes up against the institutionalized, the regulated and the normative (Toronto, graduate school, the *striated*).

As Deleuze/Guattari state in *One Thousand Plateaus,* "stories about places are makeshift things. They are composed with the world's debris…furnished by the leftovers…that is by fragments of scattered semantic places" (Deleuze/Guattari 107). The images on the "Ship of Fools" (dis)organizes themselves accordingly—they are the "things extra and other" that attempt to "insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order" (107). They function as a reminder of the "verbal relics of which a story is composed, being tied to lost stores and opaque acts are juxtaposed into a collage where their relations are not thought, and for this reason they form a symbolic whole" (107). Presenting imagery in such a fashion allows for a narrative to bend around logic and logical structures in order to experiment with disjunction, and it is in this collage of images that creative writing is interwoven with my painting and

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textile practices as sites of/for interdisciplinarity.

In this regard—and not unlike Saul Levine's film work—the "Ship of Fools Project" is a visual poem. It is a collection of those things "extra and other" presented as palimpsest. Each aspect of the boat—the flags, the figurehead, the embroidered patches, the paintings on the main sail and the shells hidden in the hull—tell their own story about the project. They are assembled to create a larger picture, woven together from the textuality of these images and artifacts becoming an act of intertextuality—an aesthetical conglomerate of the *soft architectures* that speak of the poetics embedded in the initial walks that created the momentum for the project. The idea of intertextuality—a popular theoretical model used to comparatively analyze literary texts—is a concept developed by semiotician Julia Kristeva, and was influenced by the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, particularly his theories of semiology. In speaking of the plurality and interrelatedness of language, Saussure, in his *Lectures on General Linguistics*, states: "any psychology of sign systems will be part of social psychology—that is to say, will be exclusively social; it will involve the same psychology as is applicable in the case of languages" (47). Saussure viewed language as a system of social elements, rules, and meanings. His theories of signs hinged on the interrelational qualities of human interaction and he believed that everything was related to everything else; that nothing was closed off from this shared socially constructed reality.

Based on Saussure's linguistic and semiological theories, post-structural

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theorists such as Kristeva began to question the study of texts as independent entities to be studied, asserting that:

> [t]he word's status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus)…each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read…any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. (37)

The "Ship of Fools Project" is a soup of signs and symbols (flags, patches, images, artifacts) that beg the question of this comparative approach where I examine literary texts in the manner pioneered by Kristeva and others—an analysis that reaches beyond the individual text, taking into consideration the interrelationships of not only the signs and symbols within one text but also those dialogical relationships between bodies of texts. I wish to outline the different works that comprise the "Ship of Fools Project." I will examine these individual texts/narratives that find their way into my project—and through an analysis of each of these influences—to determine the dimensions of intertextuality that are at play within them. I will examine how I think each independent artistic component functions together to actualize the location of my installation as *countersite/heterotopia*.

It is in the intertextuality of the work (Saussure/Kristeva), the quiet slippage of the poem into the visual (Saul Levine) and the conceptualization of the 'underbrush' as positionality and in the wish to clarify (Phil Hall) that the various artworks assembled as/aboard the "Ship of Fools Project" come to

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function as a poetics. The result is not a singular poem nor is it a collection of paintings and textile works. The result is immersive, multi-pronged and complex. It becomes something other than the elements that collect and make the whole and in this manner iterates intertextuality at its location, as well as at its interface with an audience. The work is not closed off, but promises to continue to proliferate as it makes its way through each experience that continues to shape it.

2. Flags of Methodology: *Liminality*, *Anarchic Epistemology*, *Heterotopia*-Seeking as Method
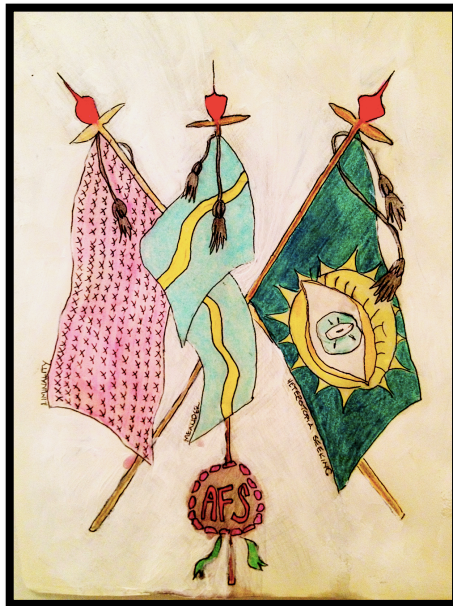
Fig. 8. *Initial Sketch for Flags*. Pen and paint on paper. 2013.

(Underbrush four)

Sit in complete silence on the floor. I learned a long time ago that my

nervous hands moving objects around and my irritation because my home

does not sit right are the signs. It took me two decades to learn that I had to offer myself a peace pipe in these times. Open a magic door and leave this here behind, because its flaws were never of my making. Nothing here is perfect, but when I wish it to be, I know it is time.

Light the sage. Slow down my own breathing.

It's all wrong and fucked. Fucked. I climb all of the hills with perfect steps, with hope opening like flowers, like brave strawberries (brave fruit with their babies on the outside). Heart berries. I expose my flesh to bricks, barbed words of men. I ask to be included in the hearth, the circle of mothers, the long strong hands of the elders. I find opportunity in the grief. Broken home, beaten down glory. It comes.

The Flag of *Liminality*
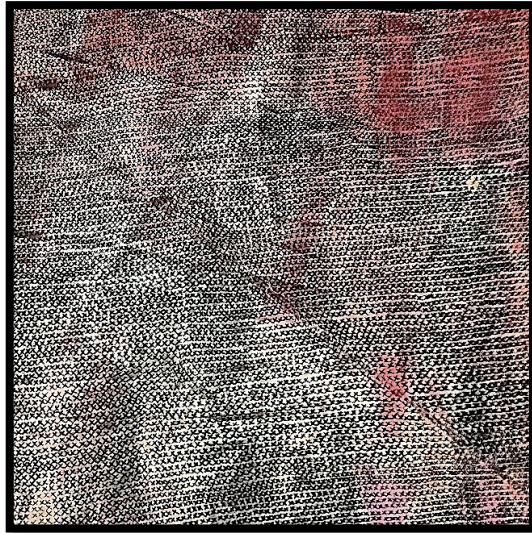
Fig. 9. *Flag of Liminality*. Detail. Paint and sharpie on sail. 2014.

In the online journal publication IPA3.org, Horvath, Thomassen and

Wydra define *liminality* as the

> …in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by
> the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of
> hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition
> and future outcomes. The central idea is that such liminal
> conditions of uncertainty, fluidity, and malleability are situations
> to be studied on their own right where lived experience
> transforms human beings cognitively, emotionally, and morally,
> and therefore significantly contributes to the transmission of
> ideas and to the formation of structures. (3-4)

My sense is that a lack of focus on the metrics of art-making, along with a

seemingly deeper preoccupation with *liminality*, may touch on a perspective that

is crucial to the "Ship of Fools Project" and also to the nature of myself as an

artist when it comes to identifying methodological approaches. To contextualize

this argument, I again quote from Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra:

> [a]s a fundamental human experience, liminality transmits
> cultural practices, codes, rituals, and meanings in-between
> aggregate structures and uncertain outcomes. As a
> methodological tool it is well placed to overcome disciplinary
> boundaries, which often direct attention to specific structures or
> sectors of society. (3-4)

Following from this definition, could we not argue that *liminality* is in itself a

research method? It seems crucial to artistic practice to have the ability to move

away from the rigidity of disciplinary boundaries in order to find an alternative to

the codification of our current collective epistemological definitions, methods

and structures, even while at once realizing that there is no total way out of

them. From this perspective, I would say that the "Ship of Fools Project" uses

liminality as method. *Liminality* occurs in the initial Detroit walks, the repetitive

stitching together of the patches and in the flag of *liminality* (located on the jib) with its repetitive mark-making. It is even present in my resistance to disciplinary concerns as I choose to move away from the established and into the unknown. It is clear to me that this entire project is looking for *something* beyond a framework, a *something* that language itself has difficulty locating, but from which the "Ship of Fools Project" extends.

Considering *liminality* as a method, I argue that *liminality* is used in the "Ship of Fools Project" not only in its conceptual underpinnings but also in the physical structure/site of the project itself—the boat—by being both a real location while at the same time a highly conceptual location, a *countersite* to that which surrounds it. I gave this methodological perspective its own flag on the "Ship of Fools" by offering up one side of the jib sail in order to take an active role in researching *liminality* as method. Understanding that *liminal* states are entered into via ritual—and in knowing that rituals tend to be repetitive acts outside of the acts of the everyday—I endeavored to cover the entire sail in small repetitive marks. By this time in the production of the artwork for the project, I had worked on the extremely detailed vase on the main sail and had already started the embroidery for the names patches of the ship's crew. It struck me that as I entered into the closely produced artwork for the project that my days changed. I was less aware of the time and even the date of each day that passed as I stitched, drew or painted. Similarly, in the earlier days of the project, when I was walking in Detroit, I felt a similar undoing from the everyday,

becoming more aware of the images and stimuli that I came across on the walks. I wanted to address this slippage intentionally as an active approach to the ideas of art-as-ritual.

I set up the jib sail on my living room floor and assembled a collection of small sharpies. Beginning at the top of the sail, I began to make small Xs in rows from left to right. I passed my afternoons, evenings and all of the following days making these marks, only stopping to eat, use the bathroom and sleep. At some point during the first afternoon, I noticed a small beetle crawling on the sail, which was an odd visitor to my living room. This beetle crawled around the sail for a number of hours as I worked. I noticed at some point that the beetle crawled off into a corner of the living room, and eventually I forgot about it. At some point in the evening, the beetle returned to the sail and stayed again until late into the night. The next day, I began the mark-making after my morning breakfast, and within an hour, the beetle reappeared. While I was at first startled by the insect, over time it became my companion as I executed the jib sail.

Over the next couple of days, it was just me, the beetle and the scratching of the sharpie against the sail. The corresponding effect of the insect and the mark-making (my tiny Xs) led to an emphasis on minutiae. My surroundings were observed in the smallest of things; the movements of the bug, the slow development of the marks along the sail; and the way the daylight penetrated my living room window. Not unlike my other experiences of *liminality* within my art practice, these two days of mark-making felt otherworldly and

mindful at the same time. During this aspect of the work, I noticed that my mind was not only able to digest images and concepts but also initiate free associations between these images and concepts that I had carried with me throughout my research process.

Epistemological Anarchy, the *Meander* Line and the Scribble
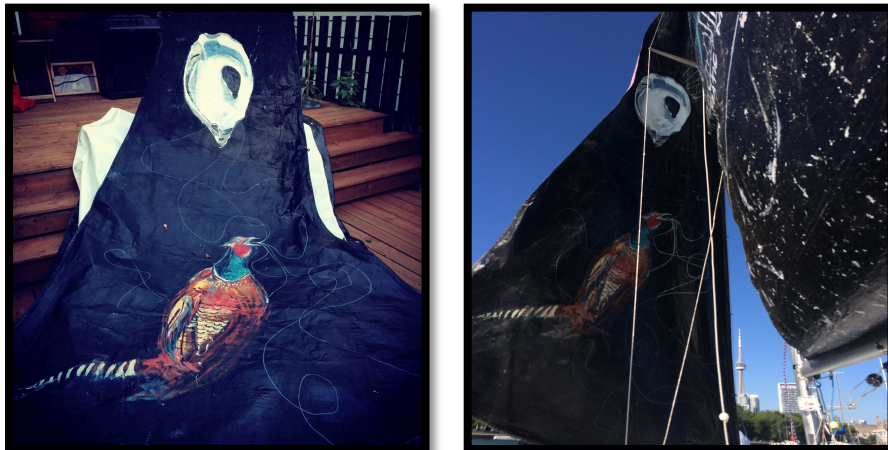
Fig. 10. *The Meander Line, The Shell and The Pheasant.* Paint on Sail. 2014.

As I considered how to make methodology work for my artistic practice, I realized that it was likely that *liminality* and *heterotopia*-seeking were overarching methods that guided my work, and that any other application of methods (borrowed or invented) were assembled as a secondary application of methodology that operated as would a stylus wielded to accomplish the physical

artwork. In terms of these more practical methods, I can identify such applications as self-reflexive and qualitative methodologies as applicable to this project. There are the methods that govern painting—how to apply paint, the research of the substrate of the sails, the organization of executing the artwork on the sails, the methods that govern sewing, planning out the embroidery of the patches onto the fabric, and the application of embroidery techniques. Additionally, there are the methods to achieve a carving: the mixing and pouring of the foam for the figurehead, the use of knives, routers, sandpaper and finishes that successfully give shape and form to the final creation. Lastly, there are the methods of research that occupied my work on the miniatures such as the use of small brushes, my control of the paint in small works and the application of paint onto the surface of the shell. These methods of *techne* are on a need-to-know timeframe and unfold as the work progresses. They are, in sailing language, the tackable. They zigzag in a tangled line of research, remaining oblivious to a direct problem/solution model of research. They are tackled as they come up, and are mastered for the sake of enacting the work. In this way, they are different from the *liminal* state—or from the seeking of *heterotopia/countersite* because they are pragmatic ways of moving forward, as opposed to murky, intuitive modes of operating.

What is interesting about the enactment of such methods is their overall lack of form. In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari speak of the *haptic* in relation to *nomadic* art: the "first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close

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vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation;

it operates step by step" (493). I take this to mean that each activity of art

production answers to the next and, in this sense, the methodology of art

production is a close act governed by an exploration of close work where each

enactment leads to the next set of decisions on how to move forward. There is

no real concern for disciplinary boundaries or for an overarching framework for

enacting these methods; but it would seem as if they are borne of an intuitive

series of decisions that bring the artist through the process.

In searching for a way to describe this tendency to dance in and out of

methods, I came across Feyerabend's term "anarchist methodology" (17-51),

which is applied, in the writings of Henk Slager, to the research practice of the

artist:

> [v]isual art embraces a different form of research strikingly
> described during one of the first European conferences on
> artistic research by Sarat Maharaj as "spasmodic, interdisciplinary
> probes, haphazard cognitive investigations, dissipating
> interaction, and imaginary archiving." A mode of research not
> focused purposefully on generating "expert knowledge", but
> specifically on expressing experiential knowledge. Such
> knowledge cannot be channeled through rigid academic-scientific
> guidelines of generalization, repetition and quantification, but
> requires full attention for the unique, the qualitative, the
> particular, and the local. In short, a form of nominal knowledge
> production unable to serve a retinal, one-dimensional worldview
> characterized by transparent singularity, but rather creating—
> and if necessary demanding—room for the undefined, the
> heterogeneous, the plural, the contingent, and the relative. Such
> knowledge production can only be the sole outcome of a
> research practice defined at all times by an absolutely open, non-
> disciplinary attitude and an insertion of multiple models of
> interpretation. That mode of research was strikingly described in
> the 1970s by the philosopher of science Feyerabend, in a then-

utopian fashion, as "anarchist methodology" and "Dadaist epistemology." (2)

In regard to this notion of "anarchist methodology"/"Dadaist epistemology," I began to consider my own reverence for/irreverence towards methodology as a means to shed some light on such concepts as they relate to my own artistic practice. There are many examples of the application of this anarchic tendency in the "Ship of Fools Project."

The concepts outlined by Slager—especially of the "haphazard" qualities of any art practice along with an emphasis on "experimental knowledge" as opposed to "expert knowledge"—are in keeping with my concerns in the "Ship of Fools Project." In his essay, "Against Method," Feyerabend states:

> [t]oday we realize that rationalism, being bound to science, cannot give us any assistance in the issue between science and myth and we also know, from inquiries of an entirely different kind, that myths are vastly better than rationalists have dared to admit. Thus we are now *forced* to raise the question of the excellence of science. An examination then reveals that science and myth overlap in many ways, that the differences we think we perceive are often local phenomena which may turn into similarities elsewhere and that fundamental discrepancies are results of different *aims* rather than of different methods trying to reach one and the same 'rational' end (such as, for example, 'progress', or increase of content, or 'growth'). (1)

Feyerabend's myths and their aims are a close fit to the "overarching methods" that are identified in the notions of *liminality* and *heterotopia*-seeking that I have underlined as the creative and ideational motivations for the "Ship of Fools Project." The employment of these concepts as methodology affiliates the critical *aims* of this project with the key concepts of "*naive knowledges*" and "*heterotopia*"

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(Foucault), the *smooth* as opposed to the *striated* (Deleuze/Guattari), and the notion of *"operating from the counterpart"* (de Certeau).

I have utilized *anarchic methodology* within my practice so as not to be hemmed in to a complete adherence to strict methodological approaches to creating the "Ship of Fools Project." I would argue that I have used *anarchic methodology* (along with *liminality* and *heterotopia*-seeking) as overarching methods in this project, and that a variety of secondary methodologies were necessary in order to accomplish the fulfillment of these primary overarching methodologies or what Feyerabend calls the "*aims*." This 'setting up and taking down of tents' by way of the anarchic, *haptic* and non-linear within methodological approaches—hearkening back to my own identification with Deleuze/Guattari's concept of the *nomad* within the *smooth*—allowed me to position my methodologies appropriately within the "Ship of Fools Project" and to inhabit the messiness of my invented *heterotopia*.

To be an artist is to be a *nomad* of sorts, never totally wanting to be comfortable within what is established, accepting a shifting and complicated relationship with establishment on an endless search to find the qualities of the *smooth*, the *countersite*, the *heterotopia*. In essence, I needed to create a flag that speaks to the *haptic*, *meandering*, and oftentimes *rhizomatic* methodological approach to my own process of art-making. This flag would also emblematize the 'tackability' of the course of research conducted for the "Ship of Fools Project," one which transforms cities into boats, insists upon intertextual applications, and

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allows for a disjunctive poetics to perform its significations within the assembled images contained in the project.

I decided to use the other side of the jib sail—dedicating this usage to the anarchic/Dadaist approach to epistemology as laid out in Feyerabend's theories. On the background of the sail I made a scribbled line, one that overlapped and veered here and there as well as a *meander*-mark through the middle of the sail. These are specific mark-makings that I adopted in order to embody the epistemological routes of methodology used for this project. They are messy and unpredictable. They need to move with the shape of things as the *meander* moves with the cuts of land that mark its path. These flexibilities in direction are depicted in the lines used on the sail. Deleuze and Guattari describe such a line—the marks of the artist—as "nomadic,"

> in free action and swirling; it is inorganic, yet alive, and all the
> more alive for being inorganic. It raises "mechanical" relations to
> the level of intuition…This streaming, spiraling, zigzagging,
> snaking, feverish line of variation liberates a power of life that
> human beings had rectified and organisms had confined, and
> which matter now expresses as the trait, flow or impulse
> traversing it. (499)

This "nomadic" line was the inspiration for the line work on the jib sail, which was intended to speak to the methodological positioning of the "Ship of Fools Project." My "nomadic" line also stands as a symbolic rendering of the *meandering/haptic* ways the research for this project has taken.

The Flag of *Heterotopia*-Seeking

Throughout the beginning of this paper, I spoke in depth about *heterotopias/countersites* and the locations of the *smooth* as opposed to the *striated*, asserting that I attribute much of the orientation of the "Ship of Fools Project" to the searching for and creating of these locations. Within these searches for *heterotopias/countersites*—during my residency in Detroit and in the culmination of the boat as the site of my art installation—much of the research was accomplished for the "Ship of Fools Project." As I considered the methodologies that were employed to make this project, *heterotopia*—and my own intuitive navigation towards this idea—held within it the thrust of much of the research and creation of the "Ship of Fools Project." This search for a *countersite* is a key motivation and methodological positioning for this project. I consider the development of this project—via *heterotopia*-seeking—as an exercise in praxis: the accumulation of the *aims* of this particular method made into an "intimation of action" (Frye 1963).

Fig. 11. Burgee Flag. Detail. Paint and Embroidery on Canvas. 2014.

In his article, "Praxis: Its Conceptual Development in Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics," Howard Gold identifies the Aristotelian term praxis as "a theory of action…which produces and makes things" (106). He further states, "praxis is seen as an end in itself …that which expresses the fullest and most complete form of man's work" (107). In this sense, the culmination of my *heterotopia*-seeking into praxis is relevant to the methodology of the "Ship of Fools Project." The interesting thing about creative work is that it is not factual, nor is it bound to such constraints. This liberates the artist/poet to utilize praxis to achieve concepts that need not have any bearing in fact. This project began as an exploration in a discomfort with the contextualization of artistic practice into/within paradigms that were designed to better handle factual, provable approaches to knowledge-creation, such as the research model and the academy. The concept of looking elsewhere for liberation from these ideational and institutionally sanctioned constraints (*heterotopia*-seeking) in essence affects the outcome of the research.

Northrop Frye, in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, explains this distinction in a differentiation between history and poetry:

> [w]e are all familiar with the Aristotelian argument about the relation of poetry to action. Action, or praxis, is the world of events; and history, in the broadest sense, may be called a verbal imitation of action, or events put in the forms of words. …The poet also imitates actions in words, like the historian. But the poet makes no specific statements of fact, and hence is not judged by the truth or falsehood of what he says. The poet has no external model for his imitation, and is judged by the integrity or consistency of his verbal structure. The reason is that he imitates the universal, not the particular; he is concerned not

with what happened but with what happens. (54)

In essence, the aim of this project follows a particular trajectory of seeking other ways to illuminate knowledge asserting that the wisdom of the *countersite* and the *naive knowledges* must be interpreted into/through the 'visual' by way of doing things according to a theory of action. Not unlike Theaster Gates's desire to "be art" at the podium, my interest in the artist's grappling with praxis illustrates my own interest in engaging with "what happens," allowing for a flexibility with how my readings over the course of this project develop and intersect.

Heterotopia-seeking is the paradigm that governs the work of this project; it is the dominant theoretical model that remains a constant throughout the initial research for the project, and has been the primary consideration demonstrated within the work of not only the project as a whole, but also in the individual artworks installed on the boat. The artifact of the boat—the artwork—is a result of my seeking, which is done in and of itself as "the fullest and most complete form" of the creative imagination that can result from following this trajectory. Because of its importance to the project, the Flag of *Heterotopia*-Seeking is positioned at the top of the mast. This type of flag is known as a pennant flag, or burgee, and is used to identify the origin of the boat. The intent of the project was to create a *countersite* from which the installation could visually and symbolically operate and proliferate. I wanted the burgee to identify the location of my *heterotopia*-seeking. The burgee is adorned with a sun behind the Third Eye of Wisdom. The sun represents illumination—something

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that occurs for me when I seek and try to inhabit the *liminality* of the *heterotopia*/the *countersite*. The Third Eye—a Hindu symbol for intuitive sight—represents the waking of the "*naive knowledges*" associated with this project and with *heterotopia*-seeking in general.

4. Conclusions on Methodology

These three flags reflect the methodological concerns of the "Ship of Fools Project." The motivation and positionality of my identification as an artist plays a very important role in the methodological directives of this research. I knew that it was important to identify a series of methods that speak to my own artistic practice and its irreverence and shifting relationships to methodological concerns. Returning to my artistic and ideational affiliations to Deleuze and Guattari's *nomad*, it struck me that there is an overarching *nomadic* methodology that is present in my artistic practice. Throughout my analysis of the methods I have used to realize my project, I have introduced concepts such as *liminality*, *epistemological anarchy* and *drift/meander* as well as my own theoretical concept of *heterotopia*-seeking, identifying them all as essential to the methodological trajectories of the "Ship of Fools Project." These particular methodological concerns are depicted in the artwork on the "Ship of Fools" and, while I discuss them here in the flagging, it is true that they operate within the other projects installed on the boat.

We went, we returned. We went; we returned. We went: we

returned. Now place softens to become the lining of the mouth.

(Robertson 1)

3. Mickie The Figurehead

Oh to be not anyone gone
This maze of being skin
Oh to cry not any cry
So mournful that the dove just laughs
The steadfast gasps

    (Patti Smith, "Beneath the Southern Cross")

Fig. 12. *Preliminary Drawing of the Figurehead.* Paint and Pencil on Paper. 2013.

(Underbrush five)

The men in my family extracted blood from corpses and injected them with preservatives. String in one dead and memorable aunt. She is the only female funeral director in the lineage of four generations. I didn't mean to start writing about her here, but as she has remained unspoken about for too long, so why not. It also may not be the right place to mention her one breast, her tattoo of ivy winding its way up from her navel across the incision left behind when her breast was removed. That it coils around her shoulder and her arm. Is it here that I mention the unmentionables, along with the embalming fluid? Let me make note; they are not unmentionables to me. My only observation is that they just do not fit along with the neatly dry cleaned black and navy suits. How do I fit in the word lesbian into the closet of overcoats? How do I lace the myth of the two-spirited into the line of rubber galoshes? Do I hang the word bi-polar up with the funeral flags? My Aunt exploded. She burst like firecrackers beside the white crisp shirts and the blackboard in the arrangement room; white chalk detailing the funeral arrangements as they developed.

My aunt would drive down this street in her last years, hitting all of the thrift shops as she drove towards her lover in the suburbs of Detroit. The anatomy of this street is lined with the veins of my family. My feet know this place like the back of my hand. In my heart is a tattooed map of these streets. I walk in the snow down Woodward Avenue with images of wicker caskets, funerary candles, the green leather coat my aunt used to wear. I walk and breathe the air along imaginary roads shaking off death.

In this project, you will meet my Aunt Mickie. She is the figurehead on my

"Ship of Fools." Historically, the figurehead is meant to symbolize the spirit of

the ship. In writing about their own figurehead collection, the Royal Museums

Greenwich offers the following historicization of figureheads:

> [t]he origins of the figurehead and other forms of ornament lie
> in prehistoric times. The decoration and carving of vessels was
> common among the seafaring civilizations of the ancient world,
> with evidence of Egyptian examples dating from before 3000 BC.
> The precise reasons for the painting of an eye, or the mounting
> of a carved head in human or animal form, near the bow of a
> boat are uncertain. Clearly these images had strong magical or
> religious significance and related to the need for a ship to 'see'
> its way safely through the water. (Royal Museums Greenwich)

What is interesting here is that the use of fugureheads falls outside of that which

is explainable and empirical, taking their significance from some *other* murky

haptic location in ways approximate to Foucault's "*naive knowledges*"—a

predominant critical concern for my project. For this reason, I felt that it was

important to try and include a figurehead as part of the installation.

Fig.13. *Becoming Mickie* 1. 2014.

'Mickie'

Michelle 'Mickie' Janisse was born in 1952 and grew up with her six siblings in a house beside our family funeral home at 1129 Ouellette Avenue in Windsor, Ontario. In the late 1970s, she obtained her funeral director's license from Humber College in Toronto and began working at Janisse Brothers as a funeral director. She practiced at the family funeral home until the early 1980s when she had a nervous breakdown and was diagnosed with manic depression. My grandfather, taking advice from the professionals around him, decided to cut her completely out of the family business in the early 1980s. She moved out to Victoria, British Columbia and practiced as a funeral director there until the mid-1990s. While out West, she married my uncle Zenik—a Polish fisherman who had jumped ship to Esquimalt in1980 during Soviet-era Poland. Many years later, she and Zenik moved back to Windsor and she worked again at the family funeral home until the late 1990s. In 1995, she obtained her degree in Mortuary Sciences at Wayne State University in Detroit. In the mix of all of this, my aunt came out as a lesbian, left the family business once again, and had her second nervous breakdown. In the hospital, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had one breast removed. After this, she got her certificate in massage therapy and practiced healing touch and massage until her death from breast cancer.

Michelle 'Mickie' McIvy Janisse is the figurehead for this ship because of her simultaneous defiance of each and every negative rendering of her character from her surroundings and her ability to firmly anchor herself in an identity built

from a perspective of dignity. She was a dyke, a mortician, a mental health survivor, a woman with a single breast, a former alcoholic, a shaman. She used to remind me that she *flies with God* even though harshly judged in life. In some ways, the "Ship of Fools Project" is a testament to the work she completed in her lifetime—finding truce with the woundings of the processes of her life; but, more profoundly, finding a fierce love of Self that emanated from her and inspired those in her presence. My aunt 'Mic' and her paths through the challenging mazes of her identity, the way in which she came to believe in the value of her own narratives, and the ways in which she taught empowerment by being empowered—defiantly in opposition to forces that would and could devastate this positionality—*is* the steering spirit of the "Ship of Fools." Mickie stands as the figurehead of this ship and charges the poetics of the project. Her stories permeate the visual work on the sails. The artwork on the main sail: *Reebok Walking in Detroit to Every Thrift Shop* and the *Drop the Vase* are both visual narratives that come out of Mickie's engagement with the Red Road and a system of rules that do not necessarily mirror the ones that we collectively follow in our everyday life. In a sense, the "Ship of Fools" is visual encomia for my dead aunt. I honor her trickster soul, her two-spiritedness, and that mighty pluck.

Joseph Boyden, in his short story "Born With a Tooth" explores ideas of identity and perception as they relate to the character of Painted Tongue. The character of Painted Tongue is both a shaman and a drunk who walks around

what could be both the Rogers Center under construction or Turtle Island,

depending on the lens through which the story is told. There is the internal

dialogue of Painted Tongue, who is on a great journey with himself in the physical

space of Toronto, searching for a friend. When told through the lens of his

perception, he is a great warrior and he is on a vision quest, as Turtle Island rises

out in front of him. When the narrative shifts, he is a homeless drunk, weaving

his way around the site where the Rogers Centre is being built in downtown

Toronto. I mention Boyden's story because it shares common ground with the

way I always observed my aunt Mickie perceive and be perceived by the world.

In her own mind, she was certain of her position as healer and shaman and was

comfortable with her ability to walk with the spirits. Being Métis and two-spirited,

she was familiar with the ways in which this predilection entered her and

ushered her further along the path of the shaman. But, from the outside, she was

perceived much differently. For example, her diagnosis of manic depression made

her life very difficult as others actively used her supposed mental illness to usurp

her agency and to make decisions about the extent of her involvement in the

family business.

This shifting of perspective hints at the possibilities for the presence of

heterotopia in that there emerges moments full of slippages and discordances and

consequentially makes for a compelling comparison between my aunt (as I have

characterized her) and the nature of the "Ship of Fools Project" itself. My aunt

was at once brilliant and murky. Clear to the point of clairvoyance but also, at

times, a mess of contradictions. She was simultaneously drunk and sober, sick

and well, during her lifetime. The list of contradictions that characterized her is

by no means exhaustive. She was *heterotopic* in that her lived experiences became

refractions in the mirror of both real and imagined places. I also find emotive and

lyrical approximations of Mickie in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel of

feminist alterity, which I discussed in Chapter Three. Similar to Rhys's heroine,

Bertha/Antoinette, Mickie's life was typified by a tension between how she was

judged from the outside and who she really was on the inside. In this way, I read

her through the contextual feminist narratives of the *subaltern*.

Cultural critic and translator, Gayatri Spivak, in her essay, *Can the*

Subaltern Speak, identifies the particular kind of feminism that the "Ship of Fools

Project" is interested in broaching. In her essay, Spivak poses a series of now

iconic questions in the history of postcolonial feminist discourse:

> [w]hen confronted with the questions, can the subaltern speak?
> and can the subaltern (as woman) speak? we will be doubly open
> to the dangers run by Freud's discourse. What were those
> dangers? They were the dangers of a "reaction-formation" to an
> initial and continuing desire to give the hysteric a voice. (296)

The "Ship of Fools Project" aims to give the hysteric a voice. It aims to create

this *soft architecture*, whenever and wherever possible. It struck me—as these

motivations became clearer—that there was only one important aspect to the

work I chose to make for this project: that I remain empowered in my own

positionality, not unlike my aunt, in order to find ballast. Anything that came as a

result of this commitment was an iteration of empowerment for myself, which in

turn served as an empowerment of my practice as an artist. This is the spirit of

the project and is the intention behind the figurehead.
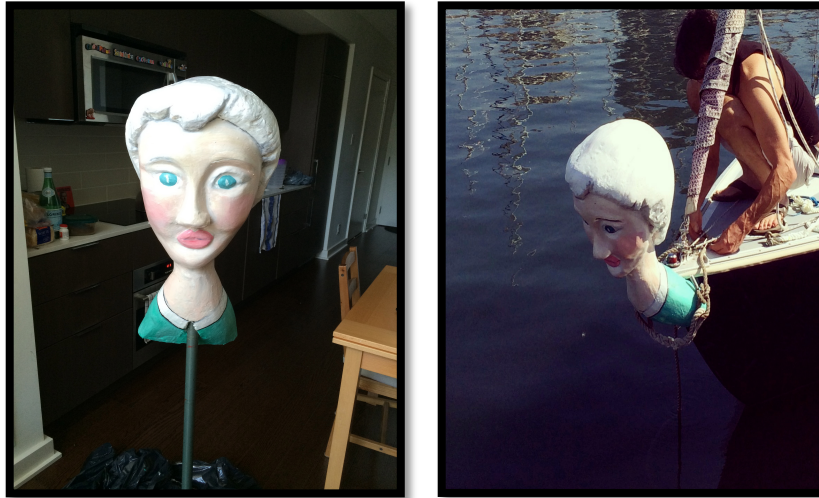
Fig. 14. *Becoming Mickie 2*. 2014.

Our older relatives are gone now and are half dreaming us into our mouths. Now a rocket of words bursts from our teeth. Now we climb into our dress, our dress of more shape. Now we sew ourselves into air. There are people who donate faces and tongues. Maybe they are older relatives. Now we run our fingers over their fingers and are startled into humility. Now sequins we've burst too from the terrestrial emotional surface.

(Robertson 1)

4. Main Sail Paintings

Studio Notes: How does one begin painting a 26′ sail with a degree of fortitude? It is the largest undertaking I have considered with paint. And it looms. It looms large behind the small and slow stitches of the patches, behind the pouring of the foam for the figurehead this summer. Truthfully, I lose sleep over its potential. I am well practiced at unrolling the main sail and just looking at its immensity. I unroll it in my small apartment in Toronto. If I leave it overnight, my dog pees on it. I unroll it in our backyard on Windermere Street and watch the bees buzz around it. Andrew taught me how to expertly fold it up and each time I do, I felt like a soldier folding up a funeral flag. All of this rolling and unrolling creates differing levels of anxiety and insecurity, and with each folding and unfolding, the origami of this anxiety becomes more precise. So, for a really long time, the sail has been breathing. Wide open and full of what could be, then constricted, and tightly bound in a sail bag. Over and over. Meanwhile, and in the under worldly place where the mind works with the breath, I collect ideas.

I decided to paint one side of the sail in Payne's grey. And so, I did. It made me feel a bit better in terms of the progress of the sail. It was suddenly a color after a warm afternoon in Windsor. Or at least black. Vortex. Negative space. Wormholes. Liminality. It was interesting to see

the sail invert into a negative space of itself. I felt as though I was erasing

it from existence. It calmed my nerves a bit.

The Infamous Vase

Fig. 15. *Mickie's Vase.* 2013.

Drop the Vase is mixed media on Dacron, making up one side of the main

sail. This imagery explores my relationship to family, as the vase was purchased

for our family funeral home by my grandmother, and later stolen by Mickie from

the funeral home and proudly displayed on her mantel for the duration of her

life. I obtained the vase from her former partner Lynne, and had the opportunity

to have the vase in my possession for the initial imaginations of this painting. Interestingly, the vase itself contains several worlds within its construction, as the ivory it is made out of bears carved little villages and individuals *in situ*, informing yet again the invention of *heterotopia* fuelling my research. The imagined landscapes and thoughts regarding contained/uncontained modalities of being that these carved representations touch upon dovetail perfectly with the essence of my project. I could not help but think that the water was infinity, the sailboat my defiance and the vase, a rendering of the properly contained aspect of society housed on the boat. The ways in which these spatial renderings interrelate with one another help create the mirrors of *heterotopia*.

Ai Weiwei, Vases and Sails

> "I say in *Killdeer* that clarity is not simple, it is intricate – and I believe that. I think that shakes up a reader, because to be simple and clear is stuff that we are taught to be spare—they are standards of workshops. To suggest that if you are being clear about something, you just have to invite in more and more and more. You have to keep adding."
>
> (Phil Hall, in interview with Melanie Janisse)

Studio Notes: After everyone left the party, there was just Andrew, Faizal and myself left. I had already done the dishes and put away the holiday

leftovers. I walked over to the corner of the room where I had stowed a banker's box brought over to the house by my cousin at the beginning of dinner. Andrew and Faizal were sitting at the bar in the kitchen and both looked up from their conversation when I walked into the room with the box.

I could hardly breathe as I set it down and opened up the lid. The peanut shaped foam bits stuck to my hand instantly as I brushed them over to the sides of the box. Slowly the ivory unearthed. Seeing the vase for the first time in years instantly brought tears. It took my brain a moment to realize that the famous Mickie vase was an actual three-dimensional object. It had long become a part of the storytelling and folklore of my family, but hadn't been seen since my aunt's passing.

I have used the image of an ivory/bone vase as the predominant image on one side of the main sail for the "Ship of Fools." Before a personal narrative is attached to the vase, I posit that the vase itself is dangerous—not unlike the boat I have chosen as the vessel that contains this project. It needs to be said, so that it is said. It is not mine by so many divides of culture and of material histories and politics. It is a difficult object to handle in discourse, and the scope of this project is unable to give a thorough reading of this object's traverse as it made its way to me. The vase itself has origins unknown. Likely it is from China, from the 19th

century, and it could be made of ivory or from some other material. But what it is, is also unknown. I view this vase through the lens of not knowing or understanding such a wealth of things about its maker, its context, its journey through the entire tangle of commerce, trade and colonialism. I do not know the conditions through which the bone was obtained. These unknowns are uncomfortable and my wish to seek out the answers, while considered, feels like a series of justifications that attempt to *discursively frame* and therefore contain the impact of the vase sitting on the shelf of my childhood.

Having said this, what I can offer is the ways in which I watched it change hands within the narrative of my own family. I can speak to the rendering of the vase on the sail for my project as I choose to contain it in relation to the boat and its relation to the water. My project then speaks deeply to the concept of containment and the implication of varying levels of containment as they refract, reflect and ultimately relate to one another in gestures of stacking and overlaying, in grift and in opposition. My project is exemplary of palimpsest that in its larger affect hopes to become a meditation on the *haptic*, disorganized and anarchic space of the *heterotopia*, which as an environment does not promise utopia or synthesis by any measure.

The vase (the shadow side of the sail) has a place in this project that forces what is uncomfortable. The frequent ugliness of our consumption of object and space, the alienation of the historicity of the object, and the cavalier colonization of objects significant to cultures not of our own are prevalent

activities that we all negotiate and inhabit. The ideas of origin and treasure—

bounty, booty and plunder—are significant and relevant to the painted vase on

the sail of the "Ship of Fools." This vase, even at its entry point into its

relationship with myself—our story together—revolves around ideas of wealth

and power within my family with a measure of vindication thrown in to boot, but

also welcomes the *overfilling* of this dualism with personal meaning and

contradiction in order to *clarify*. This tactic invites the possibilities of narrative

intervention in discourse—a "thick reading" (Geertz 3-30) in order to create a

rhizomatic approach (Deleuze 10-11) to the subject of the vase.

   The vase relates to what is ugly while at the same time being an object

that is beautiful. The vase co-mingles with its own historical narratives to create

discordance. The vase has the power to take my breath away as it is so

beautifully crafted. The vase is material and neutral. It is object. The vase is

beautiful, ugly but also merely an object sitting on a mantel place, and in this

varied way, exists in this project as such.

>   The vase was purchased by my grandmother, Doris Janisse, in the late
>
>   fifties/early sixties for the funeral home my family owned. Doris was a
>
>   socialite who smoked Kool menthols, wore dinner rings to dinners at the
>
>   golf club, and as a good Catholic woman experienced fourteen
>
>   pregnancies in her lifetime, that resulted in seven living, breathing children.
>
>   Likely in keeping with the styles of the time, she decided to decorate her
>
>   husband's business with a variety of objects within the themes of

Orientalism. I recall a pair of tusks in the same main hallway, and a table in one of the funeral home viewing rooms that was intricately carved into elephants, with tusks made of bone and gold leaf.

The vase itself was kept in the front hallway, locked in an antique cabinet, and was there on display for as long as I can recall. The key was kept at the back of a green felt lined drawer, and there were many occasions, where my father would unearth the key and let me see the vase up close. This was the only way that I was allowed to see the vase—through my father, who would hold it at my level, or lift me up to where it sat on the cabinet shelf. There were carved in the vase many people *in situ*, sitting in a natural setting or near buildings performing tasks. The people were reading and walking and stopping to chat with each other. I have made up great intrigues and stories for the figures in this vase over the   years of my youth. I simply could not believe even then that human hands made this object. Some of the negative spaces on the vase are so small; I doubt that you could fit a needle through the openings.

Simply put, the vase was introduced to me as treasure—kept securely, locked away, overseen by my father, who clearly admired the artistry of the carving and had deemed the vase valuable enough to hide it away. Or, was it kept from view because it was dangerous? The funeral home—a site visited during

much of my childhood—in its very existence seeks to contain the unwieldy processes of grief and to create the *idea* of decorum, a procedural attitude through which we may emotively chart our way through the uncharted territories of death and dying. With its parlors and stiff pinstriped suits, the Victorian pomposity of the tufted casket lining, the gothic candles and the conservatism of the staff, the family funeral home gave me a lesson in the ways in which we may collect a variety of signs and symbols that when read together implies attempts at the containment of the processes of grief. It is also important enough to note that these signs and symbols form a collage of sorts—a variety of fashions and embellishments that have been categorized by history into particular aesthetic movements that range somewhat considerably. In this collage—the brushing up of a variety of containments that are then re-contained to make another thing iterate—I see powerful methodological reflections of the genesis of this project.

That this vase (dangerous, colonized, beautiful, mastered, impossible) purchased by my grandmother (dinner ring, country clubs, lost children, poker, alcoholism, shell art made by hands crippled by arthritis, anger, beauty) was locked away, *implied* that a restriction of some sort was placed on its nature, which is significant to the reading of the vase through the eyes of the women in my family, myself included. I can safely say that a fraction of the family—the Janisse women—come out of the feminism of their time, such as Germaine Greer, Kate Millet and Gloria Steinem. I grew up with three gay activist aunts,

the Michigan Women's Festival, and the politics of repression and reclaiming being a relevant discourse—the contestation of patriarchy as part of this feminist discourse resonates strongly with me as I look back to the vase locked away on the shelf. It is one of the many lenses that move this story along, so to speak.

Once the funeral home sold, I didn't see the vase for sometime, as I was living in Vancouver. But the things I heard. The one clear fact was that my Aunt Mickie had possession of the vase, which was displayed on her mantel at home. I can confirm this, because when I did return home, and in all of the visits afterwards, until the time of her death, the vase was right there, on her mantel. Depending on the narrator, the vase was stolen, or liberated.

All these years later it came out of a basement in Detroit to meet me. It came across a border, through exchanges of hands and revealed itself amongst the peanuts of Styrofoam that evening in my home. The next days are difficult to describe. I felt the deep connections I have to family, and as all families bring, I also felt the need and desire to unstring from old ideas, the miring of assumptions and longstanding pains that families can cause. I felt a desire to respect the historicity of my roots, and at the same time, wanted to forget them altogether in order to be who I needed to be in the world.

Not knowing what else to do, the very next day I set out to paint the vase on the main sail of the "Ship of Fools." From this point forward, my world was populated with the ideas in the vase. Sometimes, a family relationship will unearth itself and become suddenly present. Friends will mention artworks with vases in them. One of the most significant references to the vase was to artist Ai Weiwei's famous triptych of him letting go of a priceless Han Dynasty vase,[12] which came up in a conversation with my friend Cara one afternoon in my studio, as I showed her the progression of the painting of the vase. When she left, I looked up the triptych. The performance documentation triggered in me a visceral reaction that entered into the act of making as I painstakingly drew and painted the family vase onto my sail. The middle photograph spoke of a kind of 'fuck it' that I was toying with in my own heart. It also brought up how deeply attached I am to objects and systems that have longstanding history.

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[12] Ai Weiwei (b. 1957). Triptych *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995.

Fig. 16. *Drop the Vase.* Process Drawings, 2014.

In the first hours I sat with the vase, there was covet. After a few hours

of drawing, I wasn't so sure. The thing felt a bit haunted or something. By

the end of the day, I was sure that it would be a bit better if the artifact

itself was promptly returned and I could, in the spirit of Ai Weiwei, make

my own vase manifest. So, I did just that. I arranged for the vase to be assessed by a restorationist, as I had promised to do, and let it go swiftly back to where it had manifested from.

Crows and Ravens

Fig. 17. *Drop the Vase.* Ravens detail. 2014.

The genies came out of the vase. They came in the form of crows and ravens.

They came swiftly one day in a painting gesture that lasted about five minutes. Blue dots emerged along with the swirling crow/ravens out of the top of the family vase as I continued to interpret its energy. The main sail became a

symbol of the contained, yet refracted a world of the *heterotopia*, symbolized in the vase, with its worlds and its containment, turned over, not unlike Foucault's boat to the infinity of the blue of the sail. The mounting energy of the vase as a *heterotopia*, as pirate treasure, is left to explode its energy over the blankness of the sail. Crow/raven comes out of the vase first, which as a trickster figure, and a harbinger of death, is an apt totem for the "Ship of Fool's" main sail, as it developed out of a series of narratives that revolve around my family and the funeral home.

Associated with mysteries, the crow is mischievous and audacious, oriented in large communities, known to cause a ruckus and to run off with your shiny bits. The raven is similar, but solitary, less easily seen. Raven is not afraid of the dark, and in fact can make play there, be alone there, revel in the hidden. To me, they represent some of the familial traits I was raised with—a Métis family, a funeral home—but, also, these birds represent the spirit of the artist, who bravely collect each other to create communities of foil, who sometimes stand alone and face inner truths, folding and wrinkling time, place and object in order to make and create something new.

The vase on the main sail of the "Ship of Fools" is a deep meditation on Selfhood, and is meant to define and celebrate my own position as an artist. It is meant to honour the intertwining of the mysteries of lineage, artistic practice and *heterotopia*-seeking. Its visual language is meant to symbolize the feelings at the heart of the "Ship of Fools Project"—the poesis of the project—but also

touches on the methods used along the way in the imaginative and physical

actualization of my artwork.

Fig. 18. *Drop The Vase.* Detail. Mixed media on Dacron sail. 2014.

Fig. 19. *Drop The Vase.* Mixed media on Dacron sail. 2014.

5. Reebok Walking

Fig. 20. *Reebok Walking in Detroit to Every Thrift Shop*. Main Sail
Painting. 2014.

Reebok Walking in Detroit to Every Thrift Shop is a mixed media work on

Dacron that comprises one side of the main sail in the project. *Reebok Walking to*

Every Thrift Shop is a work that explores my time spent in Detroit at the

beginning of this research, physically walking around in the dead of winter,

making random observations, having chance meetings. The Reeboks were

actually purchased at Value World—a local thrift shop my aunt Mickie used to

frequent—and were worn during these walks.

The Reeboks appear in the creative non-fiction writing executed in

Detroit during my residency (published in *Bayou Journal* and *Detours*), and were

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included as a sculpture in the OCAD U First Year Graduate Exhibition entitled, *The Lucky 13*, held at the Gladstone Hotel in 2013. Unlike many of the other images in the "Ship of Fools Project," the Reeboks have played a large role in the theoretical outlaying of the "Ship of Fools Project." They came to the sail after a couple of failed attempts to paint a swimmer emerging from a Payne's grey background. Interestingly, the swimmer—an image I was insisting on including in the project—was a fight to paint the whole way. It took me some time to give up on this image and to realize that the swimmer had very little to do with the rest of the project as it was developing. Hearkening back to the idea of *liminality* and *meander/drift* as methods in the "Ship of Fools Project," I woke from a dream where I had painted the shoes onto the sail. That morning, I unrolled the main sail and considered the contents of the dream. Once I let go of the prescriptive and stubborn desire to paint the swimmer onto the sail, and listened to the "*naive knowledges*" of my dream, the Reeboks found their way onto the sail, and the project drifted easily towards a more centric and wholistic reference to the rest of the research for the "Ship of Fools Project."

Fig. 21. *Reebok Walking in Detroit to Every Thrift Shop*. Detail. Main Sail Painting. 2014.

The Reeboks were executed within a day and a half onto the main sail. They came at the tail end of the exercise in *liminality*—the Xs marked onto the jib—and it crossed my mind that this image came easily, once I trusted the dream that I had had and let go of the initial plans I had made for the sail. I wondered how much this gentle tack had to do with my experimentations with ritual and *liminality* in the days previous, and noted that a mindful exploration which fostered a trust of the "*naive knowledges*" seemed to have had a positive affect on my ability to intuit other aspects of the project, such as the Reeboks as they made their way onto the main sail.

Additionally, another image that appears in the artwork on the sails of the "Ship of Fools Project" is a line drawing of the skyline of Detroit, rendered in

graffiti pen on a Payne's grey background onto the *Reebok Walking in Detroit to Every Thrift Shop* painting on the main sail. I included this skeletal conceptual rendering of Detroit as a reminder of where the project began to take shape, and in an attempt to carry a fragment of the city onto the more conceptual terrain of the sails. Having written extensively about Detroit in Chapter Two, and its influence on this project, I felt strongly about including an aesthetic acknowledgement of the ideological and geographical origins of the "Ship of Fools Project."

5. Ship Crew: Community and Audience in my *Heterotopia*-Seeking

Fig. 22. *Ship Crew Patches.* Paint and Embroidery on Muslin and Sheeting. 2013-14.

Studio Notes: As far as I am concerned, I am not a whole lot without the whole lot of you. Wherever we met, and for however long we carried on, shoulder to shoulder as artists and makers, searching for new and expertly crafted ways to find a location of difference in our milieu. I thank you for your tours of strangeness, for showing me your homes in old barns, for taking over old biker bars in East Detroit. Thanks for taking me to Ham Sandwich to see Mule. For getting me on the trail of the

heterotopia in your funny old cars. Thanks for your cafes in the living rooms of old Victorian houses, and for opening doors that weren't even doors in plain view. It was you that taught me to look for the underbrush, and from there to find my tunnel. To trust my instincts and to treasure those I bump into along the way.

The Ship of Fools is populating. And as the list of sailors grows, I have thought so much about you all. First it is tentatively, as I receive your request to come onboard. Your name joins the fray of others, and collectively you all swirl around in my mind as I work on the ship. The best part comes, however, when I begin to sew a patch for you. I work on them in the order that they come, and so it is in this way that I unearth each friendship and each time I start a patch, my memories of you begin to come. With each stitch, you manifest in front of me and I am thankful for the opportunity to celebrate you as I work.

The "Ship of Fools" Crew patches were one of the first concepts to emerge in the creation of the work for the "Ship of Fools Project." As I spoke to my friends, family and colleagues about my project, it became clear that many individuals were engaged with the energy and ideas of the installation. Their fascination with the "Ship of Fools" went beyond them being merely an observer or audience member. As I thought this process through, I realized that it was

crucial to include all willing spectators in the project if they were so moved to

participate in and populate the "Ship of Fools." On the blog that I created as a

documentation of my research and creation of my project—

http://theshipoffoolsproject.wordpress.com—I added a page entitled "Want to

Join the Ship of Fools?" and wrote the following:

Hello All!

My next art project is going to be the construction of a ship of fools, indicating the ways in which artists seek out and populate heterotopias, hidden places, secret joints, special ways of thinking as a method for gaining perspective and making work. It will sail as my MFA project for the IAMD program at OCADU in the spring, and again in the summer in the Detroit River. Wanna join me on the ship of fools? Let me know here by responding to this post or in a private email (melanie.janisse@gmail.com), and I will embroider your name onto the sails as a symbolic gesture that you are riding along. You are welcome to use your actual name, but may also use a nickname, moniker, artist's name, spirit name, symbol, mark, image or any other thing that you find works best for you. Your time on the ship is yours, and I will contact you personally as your name comes up on the list to confirm what you have decided to use for your patch. Your involvement in this project matters so much to me. As I seek heterotopias, discern who I am as a human, artist, maker, I am shaped by everyone I have met along the way. I truly love the solidarity of my friendships in the heterotopia.

The research aspects of my MFA will not delve into any specific relationship I have, or any individual that has joined the ship. My research will broadly discuss the heterotopia, artistic practice as it relates to my work, and the overall concept of the ship I am constructing – in case you are interested in how your participation interfaces with the research component of my project.

If you have any further questions regarding this project, my research towards my MFA, or where the ship will sail, do not hesitate to contact me!

I am starting this work now, and so far have about sixty responses to embroider. I am doing them all in the order that they arrive, so stay tuned on this site to see yours as it manifests.

Thanks for your interest in this project

It was determined—after some debate on the subject in a meeting with my advisors and the IAMD program director—that there was no need in this case to engage with the Research Ethics Board regarding the creation and use of the "Ship of Fools" Crew patches. Once this aspect of the project was given clearance to proceed, I began to post the link to my website throughout my social media networks—Facebook and Twitter in particular—and waited to hear back from individuals who were interested in participating in the project. What happened next was amazing. The requests started to come through in droves. My network of friends began to share the project's website URL, and soon others through their own networks began to message me for a patch request. Some individuals not only asked for their birth names to be put on the patch but also nicknames, spirit names, the names of their pets and so on. Patches were made in memorium for loved ones who had lived their lives as artists and had since passed on. Some respondents even asked for Morse code and flag signals to be added to their patches. As I write this, there are over a hundred patches that have been requested for this project.

It became my responsibility to interpret these requests into a small patch, which I had determined would be embroidered and mounted onto the jib sail. The decision to use them on the jib was eventually discarded. As the production of the patches afforded me some material to work with, I determined that a jib covered in the patches would be extremely heavy, and that the textural quality of

the patches would impede the jib from furling and unfurling. Furthermore, as I experimented with ways of laying out the patches on the sail, I found them getting lost in a sea of white. In effect, the audience that I had engaged with—the crew—was also disappearing in this sea. It was at this point that I began to consider using the patches as flagging on the boat. I took my inspiration from the Tibetan prayer flags that I have always loved and have often hung in my little apartments and studios across Canada. I love the idea that the names embroidered on the "Ship of Fools" Crew patches, as they work together, also become a collection of celebrations and prayers, an encomium that surrounds the project in supportive, nurturing and profound ways.

In terms of the materiality of the patches, actualizing the concept of the idea of making them went through quite a few iterations before I found the iteration that was aesthetically pleasing and materially workable. For example, I began my experimentations by sewing the patches on sheeting, cutting small squares out of an old sheet and drawing the name out onto the sheet. Using an embroidery hoop, I began to embroider. It was my first time embroidering, and I had little understanding of the process, both in terms of the application of the material and the durational reality of the work.

I was determined to embroider the entire patch, an idea that I had picked up from looking at the old denim patches that were made in the 1960s and 70s. The first patch on the sheeting took me four days to execute. The needle had much difficulty making it through the tight weaving of the cotton sheeting. I knew

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that I had to change the material being used for the substrate and decided to switch over to felt. The felt was much easier to sew through, cutting down the duration of the work to two to three days. But the material was bulky and cumbersome. Further, I realized (well really my friend Merry Ellen pointed out) that the felt might disintegrate when it came into contact with water.

At this point, I moved on to denim and made the patches smaller. This helped with the time consumed making each patch. However, I was unhappy with the end results. Finally, at the advice of my friend Jennifer Lopez—an experienced clothing designer—I began to use muslin. She helped me lay out the names properly onto muslin and helped me come up with a plan of production that would cut the labor time of each patch significantly. This was an important change in this aspect of my project, as it was unlikely that I would have finished all of the names if it were not for such advice and planning. Taking a suggestion from my advisor, I began to paint the backs of the patches, using the embroidering for the names and designs only. These choices afforded me a labor time of 4 to 6 hours per patch—a significant decrease—and also yielded (finally) the most successful iteration of the patches thus far. Jennifer helped me to embroider the names on the patches, and would pass them on to me to paint and embellish. This help allowed me to execute the volume of patches that were requested, in order to fulfill them for this iteration of the "Ship of Fools Project."

As the volume of requests came in—gathered from an engagement with my own network—I realized that the potential for the proliferation of these

patches was great. As I got a handle on the volume of work each patch required, with the help of Jennifer, I began to envision this aspect of the "Ship of Fools Project" taking on a life beyond my MFA thesis show. As the project makes its way through the world, the "Ship of Fools" Crew patches will grow and multiply. Perhaps, over time as the installation makes its way across, the entire boat will be covered with the patches of the individuals who have all found resonances with the spirit of my project. In this way, I regard the "Ship of Fools Project" as a living project, being perpetually formed and re/formed by its audience—altered through their participation and inhabitation—to become a different artwork each and every time it encounters a new audience. This is a very good example of how my project stopped being a mere blending of visual practices with poetry, and began to enter a more multi-pronged, *rhizomatic* approach to art-making.

> Studio notes: The other day, my friend Oona sent me this amazing recording of the poet Robert Creeley reciting an encomia for the poet Eddy Lindon:
> http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Creeley/Naropa_7-84/Creeley-Robert_23_Thanks_Naropa_7-84.mp3.
>
> It struck me that this old fashioned poetic device is not used enough—how little we can praise those around us. Lately I have been used to the razor sharp words we all throw around about others. It is so easy to

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judge. To feel threatened by each other's successes. It is bred in our bones to one-up, to win, and to succeed. How rare it seems to be that when we meet, we hold space and we give a leg up for our friends.

Each patch has become its own encomium. I feel as though that—with each stitch I sew—my thoughts of the individual creates a *liminal* meditative space where I simply give my own energy to the person whose name it is I am sewing. The stitches punctuate and alter the way I see community, asking me to take time out to honor someone else. I did not plan for the ways in which the names would affect my relationship to an audience, but as each one was completed and the individuals received a photograph of their patch, an amazing connectivity happened between these audience members and myself who had come aboard the "Ship of Fools"—my project—through the manifestations of the patch.

6. Pearls of Wisdom: Intuitive Teachings Housed

Studio Notes: As I walked down Queen Street, my frustration mounted. I realized that the tension I had experienced in the reaction from the teacher after my presentation had everything to do with the very issue of disciplinary power that was concerning me. Was I truly the first person to question the power issues inherent in the word research? I hardly thought so. As I walked, I realized that there was little that could be done

to have an open conversation about my thoughts on the subject within the classroom, and this disappointed me. Part of me was angry and embarrassed for having been chastised and poked fun at for having an opinion of my own. It was ironic that I was reflecting on the unbending nature of the striated as I walked down a street in the city that in itself rarely showed me its soft underbelly.

I asked for a crack in it. I dipped into the gem shop on Queen Street to pick up some items that I needed for a jewelry project I was working on. The owner and I entered into a conversation that changed my stoniness into compassion. This conversation began with me telling him that I thought he was a 'poet in the gems'. He immediately began to cry and confide in me his difficulties—that it felt like not a lot of individuals cared or took the time to thank him for his hand made displays his beautiful presentation of the stones that he had travelled the world to procure. As he shared, his two lovebirds—in a cage beside him—were nuzzling each other. The conversation touched me. It was an interstice in the hardness I was experiencing that day. In the end, he gave me a silver hammer that had been his for the past decade, and I continued along Queen Street towards home.
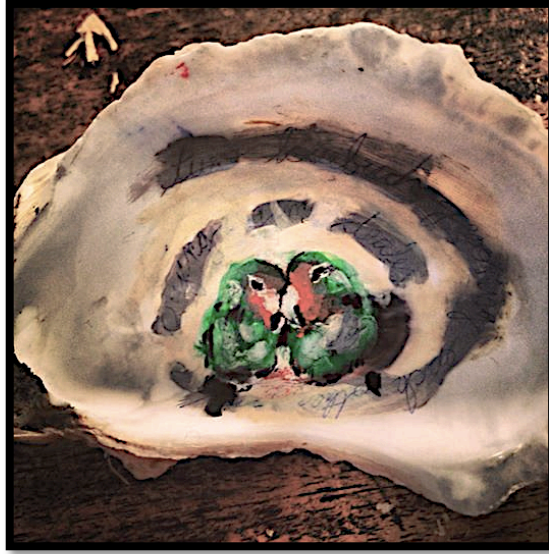
Fig. 23. *Two Lovebirds and a Crying Gem Dealer*. Mixed Media on oyster shell. 2014.

My feet were cold, and so I stopped into a Tibetan shop not much further down as I saw some handmade socks in the window. As I looked around, I began to talk with the woman behind the counter. Behind her was a carving that had two fish, and I asked her about it. As it turns out, they are the Two Golden Fish—the symbol of a tenant of Tibetan Buddhism (Sanskrit: *Gaur-matsya*) that "represents the state of fearless suspension in a harmless ocean of samsara" (Wikipedia). They are the discipline of remaining aware of the illusion of this world, and realizing that there are other spaces that exist and can be created where one can abstain from the suffering attached to the woundings and attachments of the physical world. I shared with her the difficulties of my day—the frustration I was feeling with the instructor that had reacted to my use of the term

research— and she told me of visiting the Dalai Lama the month before. During this visit, he told her that our primary spiritual lesson right now was patience and that to learn patience, we must have enemies. This is because we can only learn patience from someone we disagree with.

Fig. 24. *The Two Golden Fish and a Lesson in Patience.* Mixed media on oyster shell. 2014.

These two experiences on Queen Street opened up a very special 'place' for me, which I liken to the *heterotopias*, *countersites* and *smooth* spaces I have been discussing in this thesis. They moved me in such a way that I was again in touch with the "*naive knowledges*" that I had trusted in the course of developing the "Ship of Fools Project." I was moved to try in some way to illustrate these lessons in the artwork of the project, and as I contemplated this, now warm in

my handmade socks, I looked up to see the sign for an Oyster Restaurant. It was here that *The Pearls of Wisdom Series* was born. I walked into the restaurant and asked if it would be possible to have a few oyster shells from their garbage. They were happy to give me a small bag, and I went home and cleaned them with sea salt. The rest of the afternoon produced two painted works on oyster shells: *Two Lovebirds and a Crying Gem Dealer* (Fig. 20) and *The Two Golden Fish* (Fig.21).

Once these works were complete, I began a list of the lessons that I had learned during the research of the "Ship of Fools Project," and associated them with an image relevant to the lesson. This led to the execution of seventeen other works, dedicated to the intuitive, "*naive knowledges*" that have manifested during the project, making sure that these experiences were not lost or disregarded in the more theoretical articulations of the work. They are housed in the hull of the boat, implying their centricity to the project, and their womb-like fragility—I feel the need to protect them somehow.

Fig. 25. *The Pearls of Wisdom Series.* Detail inside the Marmoset. 2014.

I have included four more of these works here, along with their context, so that more of these stories may be shared. Other than this small informative few paragraphs, I have tried to keep the oyster shells within the writing style of the *Studio Notes* and the *Underbrush* formats, in order to keep this section firmly entrenched in the "*naive knowledges*" from which they came. I plan for the "Ship of Fools Project" to be mounted on a mooring ball, where the audience may choose to ferry over to the boat and enter into the hull, where I will sit with the shells. There will be refreshments and comfortable seating, where they may stay if they wish, and ask about the stories hidden in the shells. The shells will be displayed in front of them, and will serve as portals into storytelling, if there is interest in knowing the context of the work as it relates to the project.

Storytelling the Shells

Fig. 26. *Doing is Thinking.* Mixed media on oyster shell. 2014.

Merry Ellen came with a fillet knife. I am not sure why it is I thought I could sculpt, but truly, it was something that I had never done before. This project was beginning to be a bucket list of things I had never done—sailing, embroidery, giant paintings, miniature paintings, and now carving. The block of foam became a joke in my circles, as it sat, first in the garage entombed in a Home Depot box, and then, once I finally cut it loose, on the deck at Windermere, mostly getting rained on. Thankfully, Merry Ellen had some good experience with making dimensional work and offered to help me through the initial work on the sculpture. Merry Ellen was to be a cheerleader with a carving knife. As we sat on the deck, she and I began to carve into the giant block and try and discern a shape to work with for the figurehead.

The material was difficult. Hard, messy, and slow to form. It made me mad. It stopped me in my tracks. Merry Ellen kept saying to me: "Doing is thinking." This small statement had moved not only the slow work on the carving, but had also moved me through this large project. There has been many times where the volume of work has frozen me in place. Intimidated me. Weeks have gone by with my sculpture hidden in the basement, out of sight and I have found myself watching episode after episode of zombie television shows. Merry Ellen's words have helped me in these moments to take up the work again.

The sculpture is at the moment in my garage, housed from the rain that has come down for the last two days. I have been avoiding it again—the sculpture— it is ironic that while it was one of the first projects begun for the "Ship of Fools," it remains the last to complete. It is a reminder that inactivity does not move art production, but that doing is the way through. "Doing is thinking." One of the lessons of this project.

Fig. 27. *So That Your Relations Can Hear Your Heart.* Mixed media on oyster shell. 2014.

Once, about a year after my sideways cab ride with Herman the medicine man, I tried to call him. I felt the need to let him know that going home was one of the best things I have ever done. In going home, I had found *home*. I had found love, and am now engaged to the man I reconnected

with in returning to Windsor/Detroit. I had found context. The
individuals that peppered my life, *understood*.

Sadly, when I tried to call Herman to thank him, the number was out of
service. I was disappointed and wished I had reached out to thank
Herman sooner. A week or so later, I was having dinner with Oona and
Terri at India Palace, when my phone rang. "Just an old cab driver
wondering how you are doing," said the man's voice at the other end of
the phone. I couldn't believe it. We talked for a little while. I was able to
thank Herman for helping me find the Red Road home. The last thing he
said to me was this: "Don't forget to write down your prayers, so that
your relations can hear your heart." If my artwork counts as prayers
being written down—which I think does count—then Herman's advice
has helped me find a community, an audience and a way to deepen my
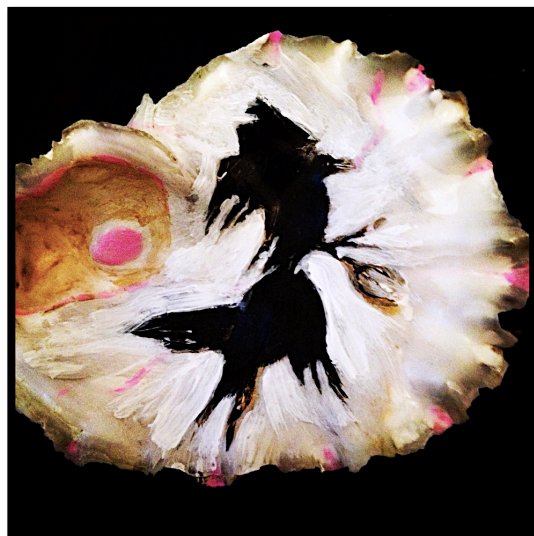collaborations with many.

Fig. 28. *When the Ravens Circle, Listen to the Strings.* Mixed media on oyster shell. 2014.

The way people crowd towards you hoping that you will break. Fail. The inevitable discrediting of your idea. The shaming.

Earlier today I was on Facebook, and I had posted something tender about a film star who had died of an overdose. Two men that I know began to criticize what I had posted, claiming, tough shit, the guy wasn't special—he wasn't too sensitive—he just couldn't get a grip and get on with it.

I am aware of the brutality of my audience.

Get a job. Get a job, get a jobgetajob. Get real. Look at your nice hobby

that you have. A hobby you have while I work as a clerk in a law firm, while I get up and clock in from 9-5, from 7-3 from one time to another, I am not mine. Get a job getajob. Who do you think you are? (Who does she think that she is?) Full of herself much? What makes her think? Why things come easy for her. Thinks she is so special. How dare she? Everyone is creative. We are all artists. All artists are lazy freeloaders. All artists think they don't have to work. She's just crazy. Crazy bitch.

Suspend time. Hide from money. Deke out. Make room. I propose that we have it wrong. Widen the wings of this here until it snaps. Reclaim time. Time is mine, as much as I make it mine. Create the soft architectures, be as outside of the inside as is possible. Be art. Toil to be art. Work the vocation. But when the ravens come, listen to the strings. They form an exit. They illuminate what is wrong with things.

Fig. 29. *The Pheasants of Detroit.* Mixed media on oyster shell. 2014.

The neighbors are shooting off fireworks in a silent snowstorm on Iroquois Street. I try not to assume that they are gunshots and keep steady in the silent back garden. I stand still and staring at the strange cedars out in front of me, looking out between the houses at the small flashes of light as they erupt. Etta James died today. I found out on my mobile earlier as we crept out into the snow, past the abandoned Snow Queen dairy stand and the tiny old church barricaded and alone on the corner.

I count four pheasants in the cleared out lot just beside and my heart tightens for just a moment. I remember the pheasants. Their staccato as they flee from the smell of death. Their nest disturbed by the EMS and

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their stretcher recovering a body from the tall grass of the ruins on Brush Street. They are my punctum. They fly towards me in every memory I have ever had since I saw them along the streets of Detroit. Dozens of wings beating against the early morning sun, as my car drove along the road beside the field.

I have chewed on the bones of these birds. Urban hunters have fed me stews seasoned by their bones. As I walk back to Cass Street, I am reminded of my visit with the flock of pheasants so many years ago. They represent everything I have ever made, small parts of myself fleeing the inevitable.

I still haven't seen any pheasants since I have been back. I wonder if they are all gone, having sensed the influx of the gentrifiers, the artists, and the corporations buying up tracts of land that up until now were forgotten. A pheasant exodus.

Admittedly I really miss them as I walk back to the corridor from the gallery. I miss the feeling of being in a forgotten place, and while part of me is glad that my steps feel safer here, I miss the adventure of each step facing chaos, potential danger and the mystery. I am unsure if this is a good thing. I miss the wild pheasants. I walk in my weird Reeboks stuck

between the here and now, and another place I have constructed in my mind. I ask the empty fields and still standing houses to guide my steps— the ones that are happening in this here, and the ones that simultaneously occur in the spirit world, laced with memories, made up stories and grief. My feet straddle two worlds. My heart. My everything.

I come back to my Reeboks. Every five minutes. The snow is on my face, reminding me of my today, my breath, my now body. I walk into the Cass Cafe to meet my host for this trip. He is no one that I know—a friend of a friend—my awareness comes back to the here and now. I have been here before, in my teens, hanging out and feeling cool. But mostly, I am the me I am now. I want some soup.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

The "Ship of Fools Project" is at once a critique of the over-*striated* and a celebration of fostering the increase of the *smooth* as a valuable location for artistic practice within the academy. It is hoped that the defensiveness of this critique combined with the empowering process of claiming identity situates the "Ship of Fools Project" within a more inclusive scholarship that focuses on strategies that widen the discourse of how the artist may interface with the institution.

The "Ship of Fools Project" holds within its sails the possibility of failure/survival within the *countersite*—as identified by Foucault in his own reading of the *ship of fools* narrative—and explores the possibility of incorporating the lessons attached to this journey within the academy. Where the artist goes, there are often the seeds of innovation, and most often, there is a struggle to come to terms with the difficulties of this vocation. Hopefully, as artists share the different epistemological aims of their work, the path of collaboration might be easier, and the journey more fruitful. If artists stay in the debate around how the institutions might be of service to their work—and also if artists commit to 'being art' as much as is possible in these collaborations—there is a possibility that we might find ourselves in a position where we can help to widen the conversation of what knowledge-production can look like.

The "Ship of Fools Project," in retrospect, acknowledges the difficulties inherent in the institutionalization of artistic practice, and through its positioning

as *countersite*, as *heterotopia*, as *smooth* space, tries to point out the elements that are missed about artistic practice when applying a re*search* model to studio work within the academy. The "Ship of Fools Project" is my attempt to explore these two very different contexts that inform the development of my project—the academic community and the *countersite* I have created on the boat—and to come to terms with where I might situate this project and my own practice as I engage with this negotiation. In setting up this polarization, I have learned much about the intricacies of the relationship between Deleuze/Guattari's notions of *smooth* and *striated*. While it is true in any circumstance that I seek out the *smooth* as a place to operate from as an artist, and in this sense envision and strive towards conceptual and physical locations that support my practice, it must also be said that entire establishments dedicated to the *striated* are not without their *smoothness*. It is possible to find the hidden conversations, the understanding and the safe harbour needed within the *striation*. Accordingly, there are the *striations* that occur within the *smooth* spaces of my own practice—the containments that I speak of in the production of the sails—the rendering of artwork, the tightening of images, the formalization of work and, indeed, the writing of this document as a defense of the epistemological genesis of the "Ship of Fools Project"—all speak towards the methodologies of the *striated*. I categorize, define and make linear maps of my creative life on a frequent basis. This depolarization of these realms has been a major lesson in the rendering of the "Ship of Fools Project," and holds within it the germ of change and possibility

in regards to institutional reform and work towards a fostering of the smooth to such a degree that it is not being lost in the administration, funding and justification of artistic practice as research.

The "Ship of Fools Project" chooses to be oriented towards a successful voyage. Once the challenge of othering is broached, it has been discovered that one can find a level of personal freedom in the mutiny, and further be of service to others who are struggling to find a degree of poetry in their every day—I consider the life of my aunt Mickie the source from which this hopefulness manifests. This simply requires a change in the story of what artists are and how they may be considered equals in the academy, and further to that, in the everyday. The road to this type of rethinking is likely long and difficult, but is possible, and begins with an engagement of the empowered Self in an artist's life.

The overwhelming support of this project by its audience thus far speaks towards how important it is to acknowledge the aim and the ways of the artist. The acknowledgement the "Ship of Fools Project" gave to the artistic path, along with an acceptance of its complexities caused an enthusiasm that was unexpected. There is a sense of pride in many artists, that they choose to look for the interstices and cracks in the *striations* of the world, and it is often this excitement for the discovery of such openings that govern the life of an artist. To recognize and foster this enquiry into the *smooth*, and to trust the "*naive knowledges*" as they work to find new openings is to support the artistic path.

It is my hope that the "Ship of Fools Project" makes manifest the benefits

of a *liminal* journey into the *smooth*, so that it is not overlooked or reduced in the architecture of knowledge-creation. My artwork reflects the reason why it is of primary importance to trust the knowledge-production of artists, to allow for a difference of approach to knowledge-creation, so that the artist's more lateral and poetic approaches can weave in the narratives that add value to and therefore *clarify*—and overfill—our experiences so that they are not reduced to the "suspended symbolic order" articulated in the writings of de Certeau, or the "power knowledges" underlined by Foucault.

The artist's *job* is to *be art*. To enter into agreements and situations that fosters this type of enquiry. How does this happen? How is this achieved? I have thought much about what it means to be in a state of interdisciplinarity. I am a writer and a visual artist, true, but perhaps this is not exactly how I would in the end classify the interdisciplinarity of the "Ship of Fools Project." As I unpacked the ways in which the poetry and visual work spoke to each other in this project, I realized that each worked towards a description of the *liminal*, the *countersite*, and the *heterotopia* that I was trying to describe. They danced together. They meshed.

The interdisciplinary work that stands out even further, speaks towards the wounding in the relationship between the *striations* and the *smooth* as they came up against each other during my time at OCAD U. Earlier on in this paper, I cited the work of Dieter Lesage, who claimed that most artists walk away from the difficulties of broaching institutional reform in arts education. As I reflect on

the interdisciplinarity that was enacted in the "Ship of Fools Project," I wonder more if my choosing to stay in this ever so contemporary debate, figuring out ways to make the *smooth* of artistic practice work more harmoniously with the *striations* of the academy and vice versa, was the true interdisciplinary work of this project. To navigate the resentments, the woundings of this relationship caused me to work harder to 'make it work', to make me think about the importance of environment when it comes to my work, and how necessary it is to speak of the different aims of the academic and the artist as they look for meaning in the world around them. This interdisciplinarity—between the *smooth* and the *striated*—is the interdisciplinarity that resonates the most as I conclude this juncture of the "Ship of Fools Project."

The project itself has taken sail. Formally, the "Ship of Fools Project" is sailing for the 20th anniversary of Media City Film Festival this July, along the Detroit River, which is apt, considering the genesis of the project and its relationship to Detroit. It comes full circle. Also, Workman Arts Foundation has offered to show the "Ship of Fools Project" on the CAMH grounds in 2015. This venue opens up a discussion on themes of mental health that actively informs aspects of this project and perhaps will justify further writing on this specific topic as it relates to my work.
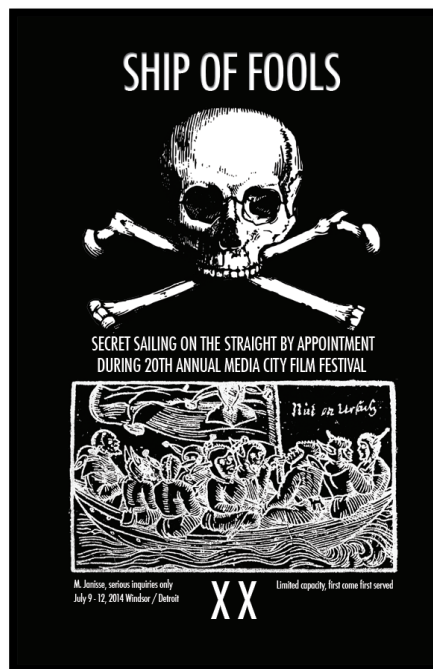
Fig. 30. *Media City* Catalogue Page For the "Ship of Fools Project."
2014.

In each circumstance, I hope to see the patches proliferate, as others

come aboard. One day, when you see the "Ship of Fools Project" sail by,

perhaps, it will be hidden in the brush of names. And then, there will be more

tunnels and thickets and hidden spots for us all to get busy in. As the amazing,

contradictory and mystical lessons are learned in these hidden spots, we are all

responsible to make them manifest in the *striations* of knowledge-creation. In Van

Gennep's theories on *liminality*, there is a third phase that comes after the ritual

and the *threshholding* into a *liminal* state—there is the application of the lessons

that come into a new iteration of reality. It is here that there needs to be a

follow-through—a reengagement with the *striated*, so that the new visions

learned in the *liminal* can be applied in order to improve the state of things. In

this sense, *I am responsible*. I want the hand of my tribe, always to be there, offering a hand up to others who struggle in the solitude of their creative work, offering the voice of the hysteric, the madwoman in the attic, the hidden knowledges, as lessons to apply to the widening of the *striations*. For this, I am present. I am willing to collaborate.

Fig. 31. *Ship of Fools: Inaugural Voyage 1*. Toronto, 2

Fig. 32. *Ship of Fools: Inaugural Journey 2*. Toronto, 2014.

And what did we acquire through the consultation? Was it dignity or the final limpid understanding of a fashion in love? Obviously we were confectioners. At least we were not hacking with random anger at the shrubbery and the absences, dulling our instruments. Yet we envied that capacity for anger we witnessed in others. Our own passions often prematurely matriculated into irony or doubt, or most pathetically, into mere scorn. We consulted morning also because we wanted to know all the dialects of sparkling impatience, bloated and purple audacity, long, irreducible grief, even the dialects of civic hatred that percolated among the offices and assemblies and dispatches. We wanted knowledge. (Robertson 194)

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