

Camoutopia: Dazzle, Dance, Disrupt

by

Mary Elizabeth Tremonte

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Mary Tremonte  
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Ontario College of Art and Design University

## **Abstract**

*Camoutopia* examines the ways in which silkscreen printing and social engagement mutually inform one another to create complex experiences and enact social change. Camouflage functions as a visual metaphor for social intersections I am facilitating, through shared interests in queer aesthetics, collective experience, and embodied exchange. In its failure at representing nature, camouflage calls into question what we consider natural, and in the tension between passing and dazzling, acts as a queer aesthetic. The silkscreen printing process, overlapping layers of color, creates areas of pronounced intensity, a lens and framework through which to view things *differently*. This phenomenon extends to social dynamics; the unanticipated and intense happens in the intersection, what Manning terms *engendering*, a process of becoming rather than being. I apply a pedagogical approach to print production and social events, after Helguera and Bishop, and draw from Muñoz's theoretical framework of world making and futurity, giving form to Federici's *feminist reconstruction of the commons*.

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## 1. Introduction

The name *Camoutopia*, a portmanteau of camouflage and utopia, reflects the intentions of this work: a world-making project to activate potentials of camouflage pattern through social space and discursive activity. *Camoutopia* is a joining of theory and practice, of knowledge creation through making and doing, a repeated series of visual and social intersections and interactions. For two weeks at a flex studio at Artscape Youngplace, I designed and silkscreen printed various camouflage patterns onto paper, mirrors, fabric, and cardboard boxes, to build adaptable environments I call *printinstallations* – a compound of print and installation, coined by artist and Carnegie Mellon University professor Ayanah Moor. The 12 x 12” cardboard boxes, covered with printed patterns, were used to build walls, stools, and a DJ booth, simply altering space. In their everyday-ness transformed, they are an expansion of the potential of the here and now, one of many means to physically manifest a utopia, a “no place,” towards which we reach but never arrive. A corner of intersecting printed mirrors extended the space, and also enabled in viewers a reaching towards, of utopia and futurity.

*Camoutopia*'s site at Flex Studio Gold, a repurposed kindergarten classroom at Artscape Youngplace, the site of the former Shaw-Givens School, predicated the project's emphasis on transpedagogy and interaction. The classroom was altered with an additive printstallation of camouflage patterns, as well as patterned materials for participants to wear and interact against and with each other. This temporary camoutopia was a space for socializing, learning, dancing, experimentation, and above all building connections and community through these activities. In the context of this patterned environment, I programmed a series of events: parties, a workshop, and facilitated other social and

pedagogical activities, that are also an enacting of utopia. Building both physical and social space in the here and now, is a means of enacting ethics and ideals of critical thought and social support. *Camoutopia* is a confluence of these practices, print activated through discursive activity, social activities enhanced visually through dazzling aesthetics, and the creation of new visual, social, and theoretical intersections.

*Camoutopia* suggests other potentials, horizons of queerness and collective experience that are manifested through experiential activity. In this project, my definition of queer is suggestive of potentials beyond the here and now, including but not limited to gender and sexuality, harkening to a definition of “queer” as something strange and unexplainable.

Research questions of this project include:

How is camouflage pattern a particularly queer aesthetic?

How does the tension between blending in, or passing, and standing out exuberantly, or dazzling, directly mirror queer performativity of identity---of “realness,” and of engendering, or *becoming*, rather than *being*?

How do dance parties also create a space of engendering, to make a space for new relations?

How does collectivity function in the organizing of parties, in pedagogy, and the act of making, to build community across difference?

Finally, how do the material properties of overlap and intersection in silkscreen printing form a way of visualizing intersectionality?

In addressing these questions, I recontextualized and activated camouflage’s potential symbiotically by creating queered camouflage patterns and then activating these patterns through discursive activities. Camouflage is a visual metaphor for social intersections that I am intent on facilitating, in shared interests of queer aesthetics, collaboration, collective

experience, anarchy-feminism, music and dancing, and social change. The overlap is sometimes discordant and disruptive, sometime harmonious, and is not easily predictable. I can invite individuals into a space together, based on their skills, interests, and potential attraction and connections to one another, but how they will actually interact is unpredictable, particularly in these structured yet open-ended activities. Similarly, while I can methodically test and anticipate some of the aesthetic results of patterns of color overlapping, some of these visual intersections can only be experienced in their creation. Camouflage can be used to hide, or pass. It can also allow one to stand out and dazzle, confusing perception, so we don't know what we are seeing. This work makes a case for the relevance and importance of visual pleasure and of serious fun as a political project. Through a practical and critical examination of the transformative potential of dance parties and collective activity, I demonstrated their correlation with social change, communicated aesthetically with camouflage pattern and signifiers, such as silkscreen printed patches and bandanas. I endeavored to draw people together and connect them through shared interest, collaboration, and collective making, creating a synergy that is greater than the sum of its parts.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the methods of my practice-led research and activities that have contributed to my thesis, as well as the thesis project at Artscape Youngplace on April 2-12, 2014. In my literature review I will discuss the theoretical framework for my project, including camouflage, semiotics, transpedagogy, world making, and dance parties as transformative practice, as well as other artists working in a sympathetic way. I draw from performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz's theories of queer performativity as sites of utopia, performance studies theorist Erin Manning's concepts of engendering, and scholar-teacher-activist Silvia Federici's

anarcha-feminist views of the commons.

In the methods section, I will outline my silkscreen printing based work in creating artist multiples that act as signifiers, as well as clothing and printinstallations. I will also discuss relevant activities with Justseeds Artists' Cooperative, as well as the ways in which this cooperative work has enabled collaborations and partnerships with others working creatively for social change. This will include socially engaged projects at Broken City Lab for Windsor's Mayworks and organizing an exhibition and intersectional programming of Justseeds portfolios on migration and prisons. I will expand on the practice of "printing in the expanded field," a term I adapted from artist, educator and writer Pablo Helguera and art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss. I will further focus on socially engaged projects working transpedagogically in distinct spaces with both a general public and specific collaborators. I will discuss *Public Action*, a summer publications residency at the OCAD Student Gallery that I co-facilitated with artist and educator Shannon Gerard, and *U.G.L.Y.: Unified Geniuses Living Young*, a collaboration with the AGO Youth Council and artist Echo Railton. In the following chapter I will discuss dance parties and DJing, events that I organized or participated in, collaboration, interventions, and ways of documenting these ephemeral activities.

Finally, I will discuss my thesis project, *Camoutopia*, which is a culmination and demonstration of the methods I have developed over time, as well as the creation of new work in this expanded field of print and play.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Dance Parties as Transformative Practice**

The serious business of world making, of enacting alternate potentials, can happen through serious fun. Through a practice of organizing and DJing dance parties, temporary artist-run pedagogical projects and social spaces, as well as silkscreen printing in the expanded field (in the context of protests and marches), I have used self-reflexivity to build upon, extend and make more efficient, my existing practices. Alongside these practices I have also done extensive autoethnographic research into artist, musical, and queer cultures in Toronto, to understand how I intersect with this new-to-me context.

Dance parties can be a transformative means of world making, but this potential is often dismissed as merely hedonistic entertainment. Meanwhile, dances have long held an important space in queer and antiauthoritarian organizing, in creating safe spaces for social activity and courtship, as well as a means of fostering emotional bonds outside of the space of meetings and activist actions. While there is no longer an urgent need for covert queer dances in the context of contemporary Toronto, queer bodies, particularly trans bodies of color, continue to be policed and sometimes violently assaulted, even in the most diverse of metropolises. The danger is magnified in less diverse and urban spaces. (Peeples 2013)

Parties may not seem like activist activities or spaces of critical discourse, but they are crucial to queer world making. The dance floor is “a space where relations between memory and content, self and other, become inextricably intertwined...the dance floor as a stage for queer performativity that is integral to everyday life.” (Muñoz 2009: 56) I frame these temporal spaces as T.Q.Z.’s, or “Temporary Queer Zones,” in a tongue-in-

cheek nod to Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zones, or T.A.Z. (Bey 1985, 1991) These temporary spaces for free expression, often claimed without waiting for legal permission, include the Reclaim the Streets (RTS) movement of the 1990's in Europe and North America, a reclaiming of roadways as communal spaces for parties, to open up public space in a protest of car culture. They are a utopian gesture of enacting an alternative beyond the restrictions of the here and now, and a political statement that the status quo is not enough. T.Q.Z.'s are a similar political and world making project. Academic Ken Moffatt describes some of the transformative potentiality of queer dance parties, through the lens of *Vazaleen*, a series of parties organized by Toronto-based artist, DJ, and impresario Will Munro:

Munro's conceptual, artistic experimentation with gender, diversity and boundaries is key to understanding the event *Vazaleen*. Munro imagines a space in which all that is normally perceived as grotesque and abject is explored. The bodies of participants at *Vazaleen* are imagined to be open-ended and irregular rather than symmetrical and balanced. Participants can relax into the communality of imperfect bodies and porous boundaries rather than the individualizing forces of fastidiously perfected beauty. (2006)

Moffatt's description of communality and porous boundaries also resonates with Erin Manning's theories of engendering, of *The Politics of Touch*: "I am reaching toward a space I will create with you... Your body becomes an extension, not of my self, but of its improvisatory nature, an extension of our capacity to enter into relation." (Manning 2007: 126) Rather than viewing bodies as fixed in identity, we can conceptualize them as continually in a state of becoming, in relation to others. Manning shares sympathetic ground with Muñoz's concepts of queer temporality and futurity, as she conceptualizes gender "...as operative within a vocabulary of the not-yet (or not-quite-yet) is to begin to think gender as engendering and bodies as mechanisms for the rethinking of time and space." (129) In the space of a dance floor, participants intra-act with one another,

blurring and crossing boundaries of identity. Further,

“The concept of engendering invites us to think the process of gendering bodies differently, emphasizing the manner in which bodies individuate, evolving into forms that highlight nonlinear dynamics and unpredictable potential of matter’s trans-formations.” (Manning: 117)

Engendering is a way of framing this meaning-making and connection between bodies. A tactic to draw bodies together in the first place is through identification, using visual language to communicate a distinctive aesthetic that speaks to specific audiences, not generalized ones. Munro used this tactic for *Vazaleen*, working on his own or with artist and silkscreen printer Michael Comeau to create hand drawn colorful silkscreen printed posters for his events. (Figure 1). These posters have both a queer and a punk aesthetic, employing visual cues that speak together to these intersecting facets of identity.



Figure 1. Silkscreen printed posters for *Vazaleen*. 2001-10. Will Munro and Michael Comeau. Image courtesy of Michael Comeau

I have also used this as a tactic to speak to specific audiences that I hope to attract, whether designing and printing posters myself or in collaboration with others (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Various hand-drawn and silkscreen printed fliers for events in Pittsburgh and Toronto.

Queer dance parties are also a space of *disidentification*, of assigning alternate meanings to popular culture, rejecting existing readings and reclaiming mainstream pop songs as our own. Muñoz explores the term disidentification in his book of the same name (1999), as well as in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), referencing the ways

in which dominant signs and symbols, often ones that are toxic to minoritarian subjects, can be reimagined through an engaged and animated mode of performance or spectatorship. Disidentification can be a world-making project in which the limits of the here and now are traversed and transgressed. (2009: 169).

At a queer dance, this happens through both covering pop tunes, as in the music of Lesbians on Ecstasy or Chicks on Speed, or in juxtapositions within DJ mixes, allowing



songs to work with and against each other, in the context of a room full of queer bodies, to create subversive meanings that speak back to oft-misogynist and homophobic popular music. Two powerful recent examples of a cover taking on a life and power of its own are rapper Angel Hayes' cover of Macklemore's "Same Love," in which she recounts her own coming-of-age struggles with homophobia as a gay woman, and J. Mary Burnet and Kaleigh Trace's "Ask First!" a cover of Robin Thicke's ubiquitous and nonconsensual hit "Blurred Lines."<sup>1</sup> As the artists explain,

Art is powerful and we are in awe of rad artists who write political rhymes. Writing this song and making the video is one of the ways we're doing our best to promote enthusiastic consent and sex positivity in a shitty, heteronormative, patriarchal culture that objectifies women, normalizes rape, and blames survivors for their assault because they had "blurred lines" or because something they said, did, or were wearing made their perpetrator 'know they wanted it.' We don't want to have to listen to Robin Thicke tell us he knows we want it over such a damn catchy beat. We wanna dance to music that's sexy and radical. (Burnet and Trace: 2013)

This work speaks to a powerful agency in reclaiming popular culture, reproducing it with a difference, one that speaks to feminist queer values of sex positivity and consent, while appropriating a catchy beat. I inserted this song frequently into my DJ sets through the summer and fall of 2013, particularly when "Blurred Lines" was requested. The do-it-yourself nature of these practices of covering, without asking for permission, dissemination through online networks, and then listening and moving to these tracks together are effective means of spreading a pleasurable politics. These choices contribute to dance parties being a space of a commons, of being with and sharing resource.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Ask First!" video: <http://vimeo.com/70304632>

<sup>2</sup> <http://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/about-2/>

<sup>3</sup> *The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation* was an interdisciplinary conference

## 2.2 Socially Engaged, Participatory Art, and Transpedagogy

While Claire Bishop discusses the “social turn” in art, towards socially engaged art practices, (2006) Pablo Helguera discusses the “educational turn” within these practices, discussing its inherent tensions and misconstructions. The social turn refers to the surge of interest in socially-engaged art practice, which is supported by a proliferation of biennials, as well as publicly-commissioned support for such works, particularly in Europe. As Bishop explains,

The intersubjective space created through these projects becomes the focus—and medium—of artistic investigation. This expanded field of relational practices currently goes by a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art. These practices are less interested in a relational aesthetic than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity—whether in the form of working with preexisting communities or *establishing one's own interdisciplinary network*. (2006: 179) (emphasis mine)

This last point is a key goal of my work in Camoutopia: to strengthen various pre-existing community bonds but also to strengthen and expand my own interdisciplinary network. In Bishop’s view, what links these disparate works are

...a belief in the empowering creativity of collective action and shared ideas. This mixed panorama of socially collaborative work arguably forms what avant-garde we have today: artists using social situations to produce dematerialized, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life. (Bishop 2006: 180)

In a North American context, Helguera more specifically frames the recent interest in education as an art practice as “pedagogy in the expanded field,” (2012) as discussed in an interview with Helen Reed as part of *The Pedagogical Impulse*. He articulates the necessity of understanding structures of education as well as structures of art, not collapsing the two but working across them (hence, the term *transpedagogy*).

The very distancing that some collectives take from art and the blurring of boundaries between disciplines indicate an emerging form of art-making in which art does not point at itself but instead focuses on the social processes of exchange. This is a powerful and positive envisioning of education that can only happen in art, as it depends on art's unique patterns of performativity, experience, and exploration of ambiguity. (Ibid)

There are myriad examples of transpedagogy in Helguera's own work, the most well-known perhaps is *The School of Panamerican Unrest*, a nomadic project that had the artist traveling the entire Pan-American Highway in a mobile schoolhouse, conducting performances, discussions, and screenings along the way, seeking connection between different regions.

From 2002-2006 I was a collective member of a similar traveling art project, *The Projet Mobilivre-Bookmobile Project*, a touring exhibition of zines and artist books housed in a 1959 Airstream trailer that had been converted into a mobile exhibition space. Tour guides traveled with the work and facilitated workshops on bookbinding and zine making, as well as artist talks and discussions on independent media. The project was based in both Montreal and Philadelphia, but some collective members such as myself lived outside of these areas. *Mobilivre* tours brought independent handmade media to locales outside of urban centers and provided a means to intersect with a variety of audiences and communities through a free exhibition and interactive activities. This type of mobile pedagogical and media-based art project was extremely formative for my own practice, working outside of centers and with intersecting interests and audiences, from artists to zine geeks to seniors to school children. A *Projet Mobilivre* book is slated for release in April 2014, and many of the core collective members involved with the project, such as Leila Pourtavaf, Onya Hogan-Finley, Ginger Brooks-Takahashi and

Courtney Dailey continue to create critically engaged work, be it visual art, music, writing, or curatorial projects.

At a talk that I attended on February 20, 2014, Helguera drew upon his extensive experience organizing public programming at art museums (an experience similar to my own), articulating the importance of programming in displaying and experiencing contemporary art; *the event is the thing*. This reinforced my own intentions to program a series of events in the context of my thesis exhibition; the social exchanges are critical to the creation and interpretation of the work.

*The Pedagogical Impulse*, a research-creation project of artist, curator and scholar Stephanie Springgay through The University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), sits at the intersections between social practice, knowledge production, pedagogy, and "school."

The project includes a series of "artist-residencies" that take place across a number of educational sites in Toronto, Canada in order to examine how artists are engaging with pedagogy as spaces for the development of new critical practices, and the potential critical and imaginative engagements that occur when such art practices are located in collaboration with schools, teachers, and learners. The participating artists...work with collective, participatory and social methods and address issues of learning, knowing, and relationality in their existing practices.<sup>2</sup>

Examples of projects include *Walls to the Ball*, artist and sports enthusiast Hazel Meyer's construction of basketball nets with high school students, or *Ask Me Chocolates*, artist duo Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed's collaboration with an elementary school class to create limited edition artist multiples made from chocolate. One of the interviews included in this project, "Doing Horizontal Work in Vertical Structures," is with Syrus Marcus Ware, who coordinates youth programs at the Art Gallery of Ontario. I worked closely with Ware while a guest artist with the AGO Youth Council, and observed

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<sup>2</sup> <http://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/about-2/>

horizontal pedagogy in practice, as we worked collaboratively with a team of 20-30 youth ages 14-24, working with antagonisms and cohesions in social dynamics as well as our creative practice. I will discuss this project in greater detail within the methods body of this thesis.

Of crucial inspiration to my practice is (Sister) Corita Kent, a progressive nun who headed the art department at the Immaculate Heart College in the 1960's, working primarily in serigraphs, who saw herself as "more of a teacher than an artist" (Ault: 45). She orchestrated large scale collaborative projects with her students, transforming the aesthetics and activity of a traditional St. Mary's Day celebration (1959) as well as many installations for corporations, such as IBM (1965, 1966), inserting messages of nonviolence, peace, spirituality and joy across religious and consumer contexts. Her pedagogical rules continue to resonate with progressive art educators, and they were the first print that Shannon Gerard and I made to test OCAD's new risograph printer, during Public Action (see *Methods*). Corita's rules include, "Nothing is a mistake. There's no win and no fail. There's only make," and, "The only rule is work. If you work it will lead to something. It's the people who do all of the work all the time who eventually catch on to things." (Ault 2006: 46) Like myself, she was drawn to silkscreen prints as a democratic medium; "...it enables me to produce a quantity of original art for those who cannot afford to purchase high-priced art...the distribution of these prints to everyday places of work pleases me." (16) These words describing Kent's methods resonate deeply with goals for my own work:

With enthusiasm and a celebratory position on life, through her teaching and through her art, Corita opened the way for various forms of liberation in the many individuals and institutions she affected over time. Heightened awareness, analytic consciousness, aesthetic innovation, political activism,

collaborative spirit, collective experience, visual pleasure, intellectual empowerment, and serious fun are just a few of these forms. (49)

Claire Bishop further interrogates pedagogical art practice, acknowledging the gaps in assessing it on terms of either social or artistic merit, and calling instead for a rethinking of both categories, through working through and across the two.

Like all long-term participatory projects, this art must tread a fine line of a dual horizon – faced towards the social field but also towards art itself, addressing both its immediate participants and subsequent audiences. It needs to be successful within both art *and* the social field, but ideally also testing and revising the criteria we apply to both domains. Without this double finality, such projects risk becoming ‘edu-tainment’ or ‘pedagogical aesthetics.’ (2012: 273-74)

This suggestion of thinking through these practices together resonates with scholar Donna Haraway’s embrace of contradictions, of holding multiple ideas simultaneously, but without discrediting either, rather, bridging them to form new methods of knowledge creation. Bishop further recommends that “we learn to think both fields together and devise adequate new languages and criteria for communicating these transversal practices.” (274) This tension points to some of the inherent challenges and strengths of any interdisciplinary program, but particularly one centered on research creation: how do we work across different fields to make something new, retaining while challenging their ontology? In a lecture by gender and queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam on February 7, 2014, they questioned the disciplinarity of academic institutions, period, noting that the existing disciplines have not changed in over 200 years, and often are no longer relevant to the ways in which we actually research and create. This is an extreme position, but it does push us to think in new ways, *queering* academia. Here I use the original definition of queer, as something strange, and employing it as a verb, as a framework that *does* something. A queering of disciplines, of defying categorization, reflects the complexity

of the world in which we live, of the nonexistence of absolute truths, and in my work I continue to strive for more complexity, not less.

In making political, or socially engaged art, I continuously face the option of approaching work didactically, in order to communicate a message effectively. One way to work through these didactic tendencies is to work cooperatively, as I do with Justseeds, to present a multiplicity of perspectives that can all speak truth to power, rather than a singular truth from a position of authority. While individual works may be proscriptive in tone, they are a didactics from below, rather than a top-down sort of banking system from above. I approach this project with such collaborative openness and inclusivity, while maintaining an aesthetic and intellectual rigor; I believe it is possible to do both.

These recent readings framing pedagogy as an art practice (art that *does* something, rather than is *about* social change) (Helguera 2012) have enabled me to reframe and think critically about the role of pedagogy in my own work, and best practices for projects that aim to create social change through discursive practices. Sometimes mutual education is the goal, sometimes recognition and visibility, and sometimes pleasure and serious play.

### **2.3 Free Universities and a Feminist Reconstruction of the Commons**

Aside from these examples of transformative art education, there have been numerous iterations of educational projects that situate themselves as counter-institutions, spaces for skill sharing and critical thinking, organized horizontally, cooperatively and collaboratively. Locally, Toronto had the Anarchist Free University (2002-2008), recently exhibited as part of the *Centre for Incidental Activisms #2* at the Art Gallery of

York University, Pittsburgh has the Pittsburgh Free School, and there are countless iterations in Europe, such as the Copenhagen Free University. Most such educational projects began long before the Occupy movement of 2011, and thrived in Occupy sites due to the organizing of alternative structures that had already been in place for years. A key framework I consider in the construction of *Camoutopia* is of the commons, more specifically a “feminist reconstruction of the commons,” to borrow a phrase from Silvia Federici (2012). Federici notes that,

A feminist perspective on the commons is important because it begins with the realization that, as the primary subjects of reproductive work, historically and in our time, women have depended on access to communal natural resources more than men and have been most penalized by their privatization and most committed to their defense. (2012)

The commons are a space of shared resource, of feeding multiple birds with one piece of bread, and of intersection based on common interest, rather than a singular identity.

Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), as well as the recently released collection of essays *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (2013), are extremely relevant in thinking about labor, property, and value. In looking to the roots of a system, we can look to other ways left out of the narrative, and a different future, both opposing and proposing. Federici has been a big advocate of the Occupy movement, a widespread contemporary commons in practice. Indeed, I first met her at a speaking event when we were both in Copenhagen, and she had been spending weeks at Zuccotti Square, “I bring good news from America, for a change!” she noted that the structures that Occupy participants created were possible due to years of deep community organizing, and prefigurative politics that had already been enacted for years. Prefigurative work makes utopia a here and now, in space and structure, as well as a then and there in the continual



negotiation of interpersonal dynamics, of working across difference. Federici was part of the movement for wages for housework in the 1970's, the crux of her work being an acknowledgment of free and underpaid labor's role in both capitalism's early growth, and perpetuating neoliberalism. The issue of unpaid labor will resonate with most students and those working in the arts, with unpaid internships taking the place of entry level paid positions. Rather than struggling to do more with less, a counter-tactic can be to do less with less, but more together, and towards the aim of building community rather than building careers, careers that very few working artists will actually have. Rather than perpetuating an unjust system, many artists have been building counter-systems, a reality that was acknowledged during the State of Blackness Conference at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto in February 2014.<sup>3</sup> I come to my desire for a commons from many angles, from a background in grassroots activism and punk and do-it-yourself culture as well as queer world making through art and performance. As Muñoz noted, in an essay about LA punk band The Germs,

The challenge here is to look to queerness as a mode of 'being-with' that defies social conventions and conformism and is innately heretical yet still desirous for the world, actively attempting to enact a commons that is not a pulverizing, hierarchical one bequeathed through logics and practices of exploitation. (Muñoz 2013:96)

My own experiences in punk organizing, be it the Mr. Roboto Project, Project 1877, or multiple house and generator shows (all in Pittsburgh) speak to this simultaneous urge to reject American culture's values of racism, sexism, homophobia, jingoism and consumerism, but also to come together and create the spaces we need, to be with each other, to survive and thrive. To *oppose and propose*, to take a phrase from Movement for

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<sup>3</sup> *The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation* was an interdisciplinary conference that took place at Harbourfront Centre on February 22, 2014 in association with OCADU. <http://thestateofblackness.com/>

a New Society. (Cornell 2011) From this perspective I came to *Camoutopia* with the intention of building a temporary social space in the here and now, reaching for, and at times experiencing the then and there of queer potentials, of futurity.

## 2.4 Semiotics and Signifiers

Insofar as I am interested in how meaning is made, while recognizing the impossibility of creating a universal interpretation of terms and aesthetics, I look to basic semiotics, as well as subcultural and queer frameworks. *Signification* refers to the interpretation of a sign, both its denoted, or given, meaning, and its multiple connotations, the extensive process of referents for a term, always already socially constructed and informed by context. (Danesi 2004: 12) In photographer and art critic Hal Fischer's *Gay Semiotics*, he uses this framework of signifiers to examine how they function in gay male culture of the late 1970's, bridging academics and lived experience. Fischer notes that,

Traditionally western societies have utilized signifiers for non-accessibility. The wedding ring, engagement ring, lovelier or pin are signifiers for non-availability which are always attached to women. Signs for availability simply do not exist.

In gay culture, the reverse is true. Signifiers exist for accessibility. Obviously, one reason behind this is that gays are less constrained by a type of code which defines people as property of others or feels the need to promote monogamy. The gay semiotic is far more sophisticated than straight sign language, because in gay culture, roles are not as clearly defined. On the street or in a bar it's impossible most of the time to determine a gay man's sexual preference either in terms of activity or passive/aggressive nature. Gays have many more sexual possibilities than straight people and therefore need a more intricate communication system. (1977)

While this study is quite dated, and we may no longer categorize gay and straight behavior into such absolutes, I find Fisher's structuring of gay semiotics helpful as a starting point, particularly how gay codes work *within and against* straight codes. Fischer

discusses gay types that refer to masculine archetypes, such as the biker, the cowboy, the classical beauty, and elements of dress that communicate preferences for activities, most explicitly gay hanky code. Fischer also notes, “gay people have developed a semiotics intended both for identification and/or invisibility within the larger culture, as well as communication among themselves.” (Ibid) This double-coding resonates with my own work of making artist multiples intended to express a queer aesthetic, for a queer audience, but that are open and accessible to a wider public as well; a bear hanky, for example, that refers to gay bears and hanky code, but also to a widespread human affinity for animals. This use of a semiotic code also speaks to my experience in DIY punk culture, of badges, patches, clothing and dress that proclaim specific political and musical affinities.

In 1979, media theorist and sociologist Dick Hebdige wrote *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* to articulate various youth subcultures of Great Britain in the 1970’s, such as punks, mods and teddies, and the political and social weight of these very precisely coded styles. He describes these styles as a Refusal, which philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1964) and later Muñoz (2009) would refer to as a Great Refusal, and queer theorist Lee Edelman (2009) would refer to as the death drive: refusals of social norms, be they compulsory heteronormativity, monogamy, or ultimately social reproduction.

The meaning of subculture is, then, always in dispute, and style is the area in which the opposing definitions clash with most dramatic force...As in Genet’s novels, this process begins with a crime against the natural order...But it ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal. I would like to think that this Refusal is worth making, that gestures have a meaning, that the smiles and sneers have some subversive value, even if, in the final analysis, they are, like Genet’s gangster pin-ups, just the darker side of sets of regulations, just so much graffiti on a prison wall. ( Hebdige 1979: 3)

Throughout *Subculture*, Hebdige continues to return to writer Jean Genet, equating his queerness with a deeper social refusal that continues to resonate in the more contemporary queer theory that I cite. I pull from these particular sources because they insist on the importance of clothing, style and performance as forms of signification, of signaling defiance and also of communicating desire to others. This emphasis on worn signifiers is also about choice. The decisions to either adopt hegemonic values and goals, or disidentify with them; these choices can be expressed through style and behavior. A visual signifier that has been used in a great variety of ways is camouflage pattern.

## **2.5 Camouflage Origins**

Camouflage pattern has a given connotation of military or hunting; used to hide as a predator, while escaping notice as prey. Such patterns are extremely popular in contemporary civilian culture, by both those who feel an affinity with military or outdoor culture, and those who position themselves against such values, in a mode of disidentification to carve out space and alternative meaning through recontextualizing a signifier of dominant culture. Through disidentification, camouflage pattern has potential as a queer aesthetic, as Muñoz has noted,

a desire to reproduce nature with a difference, with a desire to entertain the impossibility of another world, another time and place, where that natural represents a queer potentiality that is rendered unimaginable in the straight time and place of the performance principle. (2009: 139)

Camouflage can also personify a spirit of collectivity and cooperation, working across difference, in its distinct components that together creative a disruptive aesthetic (and here I use the term *disruptive* to describe both the type of pattern, and the types of social affects that I hope it encourages). Camouflage pattern can be a means of aestheticizing third wave feminism in this way, maintaining contrast, antagonism and difference, while

working together in a synergy of common cause. The survival strategy of passing, a social camouflage, parallels the use of camouflage by military and hunters to hide, imitating the use of camouflage by animals in the wild. Further, the conceptual framework of camouflage, of mimicry to disguise and blend in, directly mirror queer performativity of identity---of “realness” in the case of drag ball culture, a safe space of performance and fantasy. *Realness* is a performance of identity, a way to become the other through imitation of dress and attitude. Realness is rooted in drag culture, explained in detail in filmmaker Jennie Livingston’s 1990 film *Paris Is Burning*, and recently popularized by *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, a drag reality television show hosted by America’s first drag superstar, Rupaul. *Realtree*, a name brand for a type of hunting camouflage pattern composed of photorealistic patterns of trees, including pine and maple, has become extremely popular with minoritarian subjects, including punks, queers, and people of color in both categories. Perhaps due to its denotation as a hunting aesthetic, associated with masculinity, people who do not fit into dominant hunter categories of white and male respond to it in a myriad of ways, serving *Realtree realness*. In *Female Masculinity* (1998), Jack Halbertstam discusses the disconnection of masculinity from maleness, and how masculinity’s performativity only really becomes evident when individuals who are not white or cis male exhibit masculine traits or behavior; it’s only in a shift away from what might hegemonically be perceived as “natural” masculinity that we can call what we deem “natural” into question. Likewise, *realness* creates a space to call into question what is natural or real, and I believe that RealTree consciously and subconsciously resonates with so many people because of this complexity.

How do queers, particularly those whose gender does not fit stereotypes, or neatly into a binary, continue to perform identity outside of safe spaces, on the streets and in their

daily social interactions, in the workplace, at school, in the home and on the street? Is it appropriate and critically relevant to make analogous the mortal dangers that soldiers and prey face when camouflage is unsuccessful and the dangers of homophobia, transphobia, harassment and gay bashing that queers face if their social camouflage is unsuccessful? I propose that this connection does exist, and that there is rich meaning in the place where camouflage pattern in clothing, social camouflage, and queer theory meet.

At the onset of this research, I investigated the roots of camouflage pattern, to understand its origins, theoretical implications, and the full extent to which the military, hunters, artists, and fashion designers have used it in their work. Camouflage can have multiple readings, and acknowledging the multiple contexts in which it operates, as well as its creative, interpretive uses outside of a military or hunting context, provides a framework for my own work. This look to the past enacts a queer temporality, a reminder that things were not always as they are, that can help us to perceive phenomena in other ways, through alternative readings. Muñoz sees queer art and especially performance as a lens through which to argue for a queer sense of time and place, of how queer futurity is, defined through the work of critical theorist Bloch: "...the not-yet-conscious is an essential route for the purpose of arriving at the not-yet-here. This maneuver, a turn to the past for the purpose of critiquing the present, is propelled by a desire for futurity." (2009: 30)

A search for origins led me to artist and naturalist Abbott Thayer's theories of counter-shading and disruptive pattern in *Concealing Coloration in the Animal Kingdom* (1909), preceding by several years the First World War, where disruptive pattern was first used in a military context. Many innovative contributions to camouflage's development were also from artists, and interestingly, artists carried out the work of

camouflaging military vehicles, structures, and clothing for the United States and Europe throughout the First and Second World Wars, serving their countries as camofleurs. Thayer's cousin Barry Faulkner established the New York Camouflage Society in Greenwich Village, and with several other artists started a US camouflage unit, setting up a workshop near Dijon in France. (Newark 2007: 70) Gertrude Stein famously recounted in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, a conversation between Picasso and herself, "All of a sudden down the street came some big cannon, the first any of us had seen painted, that is camouflaged. Pablo stopped, he was spellbound. "C'est nous qui avons fait ca," he said, "it is we who have created that."<sup>4</sup> (Behrens 2009: 8)

Painter Lucien-Victor Guirand de Scévola created a technique, influenced by Cubism, of disrupting the surface of artillery with abstract, irregular patterns. This technique was known as *zébrage*, due to its resemblance to zebra stripes. (Blechman 2004: 274) Initial responses to the use of camouflage on military dress support my notions of a queer reading of these patterns; much public opinion felt that "camouflage was thought to be unmanly or effeminate. A genuine soldier stands his ground. He would rather fight than switch." (Ibid) French camofleurs were known as 'les barbouilleurs' (meaning scribblers or smearers) by fellow soldiers and a skeptical public. (Ibid) The shift in military uniforms towards concealment, rather than proud visibility speaks to the practical concerns of modern warfare techniques, particularly the invention of the airplane. (Newark: 54) As in the previous mention of camouflage's switched use on hunter and prey (and a soldier is simultaneously both), invisibility became necessary for both surviving and thriving. Muñoz describes camouflage as a queer aesthetic, particularly through Andy Warhol's *Camouflage* series. 2009: 131-46) Through attempting to

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replicate nature in camouflage pattern, and failing spectacularly, the use of camouflage pattern in art allows us to reframe what is considered ‘natural.’ Warhol, as well as other artists who have queered camouflage, such as Christina Zeidler, reproduce “nature with a difference” (169)

Thayer’s research is a reminder of camouflage pattern’s roots in biomimicry, a useful framework alongside its military meaning, and a companion to my ongoing research into “nature’s queer performativity” (Barad: 2011) and “biological exuberance” (Bagemihl: 1999). A look to these origins can assist us in the process of reassigning meaning, layering a subtext behind the denotative military or hunter meaning.

## **2.6 Artists and Camouflage**

While artists were in part some of the inspiration for camouflage’s military uses, they have also worked with and against these readings. Artists have also employed social camouflage, coding, in their work, and art historian Jonathan Katz has written extensively about camouflage and coding employed by queer artists in the 1950’s and ‘60’s, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, John Cage, and of course Andy Warhol. Katz notes that,

Queer artists, not surprisingly, did what queers have always done, because it was all they could do, constructing distinctions through the recontextualization of the extant codes of culture in such a way as to carry affections unrecognized under the very nose of dominant homophobic culture. (1998)

This feeds back into my discussion of semiotics, gay semiotics, and the use of codes by minoritarian subjects to communicate with one another, underneath the radar of a dominant reading of their work. One of the last bodies of work before his death, Warhol’s *Camouflage* series replicated the US Army’s woodland camouflage pattern with



silkscreen ink, in a variety of color ways and scales. Warhol had wanted to successfully tackle both abstraction and the theme of war, and found the subjects converging in camouflage pattern. Using a piece of US ‘woodland’ camouflage as source material, he manipulated its scale and color palette in a large series of silkscreen printed canvases. He also mixed the patterns with portraits, of himself, Joseph Beuys, and the Statue of Liberty; also of Leonardo Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* (the subject of a previous body of Warhol’s work). This remixing of a military signifier, with a variety of Day Glo color combinations that have nothing to do with blending in, could be interpreted as a queer aesthetic. The queer aesthetic of Warhol’s work allows a different reading of what is natural, and pushes the horizon beyond what is imaginable; art can spark the political imagination and open the possibility for change, through unleashing new potentialities. Muñoz notes of camouflage that, “once it moves to the realm of the aesthetic the form is reactivated and made to perform in ways that do not correspond to the coercive and pragmatic structures of the performance principle.” (2009: 138) This reading of the radical potentiality in a queer reading of camouflage, particularly through art resonates with me strongly.

Toronto based artist Christina Zeidler’s *Simulacra* project (2012), presents a contemporary and female queer lens through which to examine camouflage patterns. Given the opportunity to utilize high-quality printing equipment to create an installation in a shipping truck, Zeidler designed immersive wrap-around wallpaper of woods patterns with contrasting silhouettes of animals, and more significantly created a series of *Queer Camo* footstools, featuring a camouflage pattern that mixes photographic RealTree-esque disruptive tree patterns with neon-colored Warhol-esque camouflage

patterned shapes mixed together.<sup>5</sup> This work speaks to an intentional queering of camouflage, beyond the name alone, and to queers, particularly queer women, spending time together camping and relaxing in nature. This work references lesbian separatist communities, such as the Michigan Women’s Music Festival, and queer back-to-the-land projects, such as *Ida*, but in a clean, sleek, urban fashion; the woods is digitally created here. In blending “natural” scenes with digital reproduction, it playfully utilizes visual mimicry, while situating queers in their natural environment, in this case, an urban environment. To read it through Muñoz’s lens, “Queer aesthetics attempt to call the natural into question... Warhol’s [Zeidler’s] camouflage attempts to bring out a radical impossibility in the world of the natural.” (Ibid) One could view this through a lens of performativity, but I prefer to see it as also an extension of reality, through the production of “realness.”<sup>6</sup> Another art example worth noting is a collective project of members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) called *Combat Paper*, who create fine art papers from pulped military uniforms. *Combat Paper* conducts workshops with veterans to transform their own uniforms, a moving and literally transformative process that can assist veterans in working through post-traumatic stress disorder and other remnants of combat. In co-founder Drew Cameron’s own words,

The story of the fiber, the blood, sweat and tears, the months of hardship and brutal violence are held within those old uniforms. The uniforms often become inhabitants of closets or boxes in the attic. Reshaping that association of subordination, of warfare and service, into something collective and beautiful is our inspiration. (2007)

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<sup>5</sup> Zeidler spoke about this work at length in a visit to Directed Interdisciplinary Studio course with Johanna Householder and Ian Carr-Harris on September 19, 2012. See also Dick-Agnew, David. “From Ikea to Art.” *Azure Magazine* (online edition). November 16, 2012. <http://www.azuremagazine.com/article/from-ikea-to-art/> Retrieved April 14, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> See *Paris Is Burning*, Jennie Livingston’s 1990 film about New York drag balls in the 1980’s, for extensive explanation of realness. This film is also referenced and sampled in Azealia Banks’ 2012 song “Fierce.” “Realness” is also part of the specific lexicon of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, a popular television show on Logo TV, hosted by America’s First Drag Superstar, RuPaul Charles.

This work concerns the materiality of camouflage-patterned clothing, and the lived experiences embedded in this clothing by its wearers, using collective art practice as a space for healing. Justseeds collaborated with IVAW and their Operation Recovery campaign (calling for an end to redeployment of troops with post-traumatic stress disorder), and created a street poster campaign and then print portfolio called *War Is Trauma*; Combat Paper created the covers for the folio of prints. Cameron created a new body of Combat Paper work as part of *Uprisings: Images of Labor*, a Justseeds exhibition that took place during the Southern Graphics Conference in Milwaukee, WI in March 2013, creating handmade paper from pulped civilian military and patriotic gear, such as baby onesies and American flags.

My own material production with camouflage pattern began with my print for the IVAW portfolio, *Exuberant Resistance* (2011) (Figure 3), in which I made a repeated pattern from the IVAW logo, printed in two intersecting split fountains, or “rainbow rolls” as they are commonly referred to (I also like “sweet fades”). I later did a collaborative multiple with artist Shaun Slifer, *Queering the Treesit* (2012), a remixing of truck decals marketed towards hunters, with queer wildlife content. We altered an image of a buck approaching a doe by making both elk male, creating a decal with Slifer’s vinyl plotter, and a silkscreened bandana, with hunter orange ink on Realtree patterned fabric (Figure 4).



Figure 3. *Exuberant Resistance*. 2011. Silkscreen print on paper.  
Figure 4. *Queering the Treesit*. Collaboration with Shaun Slifer. 2012.  
Silkscreen print on Realtree patterned bandana, cut vinyl sticker.

More recently, I designed a digital deer camouflage, riffing on Canadian military digital camouflage patterns. I hand drew the deer and other shapes, using graph paper, scanned them, and laid out layers in Photoshop. I then silkscreen printed these patterns in a variety of color ways. I chose two to tile into a larger pattern and print onto cotton jersey with OCAD's inkjet printer. I later sewed this fabric into a belted dress (Figure 5), and may continue further iterations of this design in clothing. Digital deer are one of the patterns in use in *Camoutopia*.



Figure 5. *Digideer Camo*. Silkscreen prints on paper, inkjet print on fabric. 2013

## 2.7 Social Camouflage

Social camouflage, the ability to pass, in terms of gender, sexuality, race, or legal status, and the inability or decision not to,<sup>7</sup> and potential dangers therein, is incredibly relevant to this discussion, and has real bearing on lived lives. Camouflage can be a tactic in moving safely in public space, and using it in strategically dazzling ways can draw attention to and demonstrate solidarity with the struggles of invisible populations, not only queer. Bandanas, for example, have been a visual signifier in the Toronto migrant justice movement, worn by migrant workers to protect their identities on a recent march

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<sup>7</sup> I recognize that these are two different things, trying to pass and failing, and *refusing* to pass.; there are very complicated and various gender and sexual realities in different contexts, such as the *travestis* of Brazil, transvestites with plastic surgery, often sex workers, who occupy a different gender identity than transvestites or transgendered women in the United States. This example is addressed in Don Kulick and Charles Klein's essay "Scandalous Acts: The Politics of Shame among Brazilian *Travesti* Prostitutes" in *Gay Shame*, edited by David Halperin and Valerie Traub. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010. pp 312-338.

across Ontario, and silkscreen printed and distributed by migrant justice group No One Is Illegal for the 2012 May Day march.<sup>8</sup> The immigrant youth movement in the United States has adopted some of the media tactics of gay rights, encouraging undocumented citizens to “come out” as undocumented. There is also a growing movement of *undocuqueer*, highlighting the heightened danger of deportation for families that cannot enjoy the benefits of marriage, and the double stigma that queer immigrants may face in both their home countries, and in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Several prints in the 2012 Justseeds portfolio *Migration Now!* address undocuqueer issues, including those by DREAM Act agitators Felipe Baeza and Julio Salgado, and my own. This intersectionality is important to me, and I will address it through programming and visual content of *Camoutopia*.

Just as dance parties are typically apolitical in their purpose, or would outwardly appear so, camouflage is also worn without such political intentions, in a contemporary postmodern context that designifies potentially loaded symbols. It has the potential to be read in myriad ways, perhaps counter to my own intentions. This is a problematic area of my subject matter, and I aim to address it through embracing the contradictions and potential misreadings, in the spirit of Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, “...about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humor and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honored within socialist feminism.” (1990: 190-91)

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<sup>8</sup> Based on meeting with No One Is Illegal and Radical Design School in preparation for the *Justseeds: Migration Now!* exhibition that I organized for February 2013.

<sup>9</sup>“United We Dream (UWD), the largest national immigrant youth organization, has committed itself to ensuring that undocuqueers are represented at every leadership level. In 2011 UWD launched the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project (QUIP) to bring the LGBTQ and immigrant rights communities to the table in an intentional and strategic manner. QUIP seeks to organize and empower undocuqueers, queer immigrant youth and allies via grassroots organizing, educational and advocacy efforts.” (Gutierrez: 2013)

## 2.8 Dazzle Camouflage

I place dazzle camouflage in its own section, as it presents a unique read on theory and practice. Artist Norman Wilkinson developed dazzle, or razzle-dazzle, at least in part inspired by Cubist distortion of perspective, as Picasso bemoaned, for naval vessels in 1919. Wilkinson explained the method of dazzle in a speech in 1919, “to produce an effect by paint in such a way that all accepted forms of a ship are broken up by masses of strongly contrasted color, consequently making it a matter of difficulty for a submarine to decide on the exact course of the vessel to be attacked.” (Newark: 74) Dazzle camouflage could be a whole paper in and of itself, and several books have been written focusing exclusively on these patterns and their application in military, clothing, and art. A significant merging of military pattern with the carnivalesque in civilian life, predating camouflage pattern’s popularity, occurred through the Dazzle Ball. Just after the Armistice ended World War I, the Chelsea Arts Club threw the Dazzle Ball at the Royal Albert Hall in London. *The Times* correspondent reported that,

The very fact that this disruptive coloration broke up the usual lines of form gave to many of the costumes a grace and charm as delightful as they were unexpected...even the freakish creations held the suggestion of a new kind of wonder, the ‘camouflage of men and women...Here, it seemed, was token, unmistakable if bizarre, of some of the things which the dark years have achieved, of the breaking of bonds, of the setting free of the spirits which dwell within the forms of things...the hailed a new world, swifter, gayer, more adventurous. (88)

Dazzle has been explored in contemporary dance parties, for example by DJ collective Spins and Needles who threw a Dazzle Party at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa in April 2010,<sup>10</sup> a contemporary take on the Dazzle Ball. Dazzle camouflage’s intent is to *confuse* rather than *conceal*, a concept I highlight in my work. Printing patterns onto mirrors and extending space, while placing the viewer inside that space, speaks to this

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<sup>10</sup> See Spins and Needles website: [www.spinsandneedles.com](http://www.spinsandneedles.com)

confusion, ideally in a manner that speaks to futurity, to unknown potentials. Razzle-dazzle military camouflage was new to me, although the term “dazzle camouflage” is colloquial slang amongst anarchist activist circles, as a way of calling out seeming political correctness that distracts from one’s problematic behavior.

Camouflage can be used strategically in a variety of ways, to blend in, stand out, distract, or confuse, and I aim to utilize all of these potentials through pattern creation and discursive activities to put them into use.

### **3. Methodology**

In my practice-led research I utilize collaboration, community, identification and disidentification, and curating discursive space, including dance parties, discussions, and workshops. These practices are engaged through a material practice of drawing, printing, sewing, and installation, and social practices of DJing, teaching and organizing. I will discuss these practices through the descriptions of projects that are part of my research, including the work of the thesis exhibition and programming.

#### **3.1 Printing in the Expanded Field**

Silkscreen printing forms the basis of much of my material practice. While I am extremely proficient in it as a process, I also find that it is often the best tool for the job. It is expedient, allows for easy variation in color, combinations, and layering, and is portable and adaptable. I have used it as a basis in educational programming for many years, in socially-engaged programs for youth as well as “printing in the expanded field,” at marches and protests, in women’s’ shelters and community centers, and in galleries for



workshops and sometimes directly on the walls. I use the term “printing in the expanded field” as a riff on Pablo Helguera’s “pedagogy in the expanded field” (2012, see previous note), which is itself a reference to Rosalind Krauss’s “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” (1979) Each of these reference points refer to site-specificity, and I apply that lens to silkscreen printing in specific contexts, outside of the studio, and often with people who don’t identify as artists. I have taught hundreds if not thousands of people not only how to print, but how to make a photographic silkscreen, and have set up simple silkscreen printing studios in a variety of contexts. Through youth programs at Pittsburgh’s Andy Warhol Museum, I co-created RUST (Radical Urban Silkscreen Team), a temporary print and design studio that occupies storefronts in different Pittsburgh neighborhoods, working with youth from that neighborhood, each Summer from 2008-2011. In addition to setting up these temporary silkscreen studios, we also experimented with portable setups to expose and print screens offsite, running weekly hands-on activities at the farmer’s market, and using the site as a means to discuss food security with RUST artist members and public participants. My teaching collaborator Heather White and myself have also presented and enacted this practice in Niteroi, Brazil, as part of the Museu de Arte Contemporânea (MAC)’s Macquinho (“little mac”), an art and social change-focused community center in the neighboring favela. We set up and troubleshoot facilities and led workshops with educators, youth, and children, with an aim towards entrepreneurship as well as creative expression.

As a member of Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative since 2007, I often use silkscreen printing to engage with movements for social and environmental justice. Over the past two years I have worked with Radical Design School, No One Is Illegal Toronto, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), and Windsor Mayworks to organize silkscreen

printing activities in the expanded field, at political art exhibitions and marches. Radical Design School,<sup>11</sup> a Toronto-based collective that offers art and design-based workshops as well as design services for social movements, co-organized a series of dinner workshops to discuss content for migration-themed bandanas for the *Migration Now!* exhibition that I organized at the Graduate Gallery in February 2013. RD conducted a live silkscreen printing activity during the event's opening, printing bandanas with attendees, that they could keep as a memento of the exhibition, and discursive object to initiate future discussions. In Windsor as part of Mayworks events, I hosted several screen-printing workshops, as well as live printing at the end of the Mayday parade (Figure 6). Participants printed bandanas and to wear and banners to carry in the parade, as well as to keep as souvenirs of the event. We used a silkscreen printing cargo bike that Justseeds member Dylan Miner had customized for his ongoing project *Native Kids Ride Bikes (2008-present)*, which had just been exhibited at the Art Gallery of Windsor.



Figure 6. Silkscreen printing at Windsor Mayday 2013. Photo Courtesy of Broken City Lab

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.radicaldesignschool.net/>



Figure 7. Silkscreen printing with QuAIA at Toronto Pride 2013.  
Photo courtesy of Radical Design School.

I worked with QuAIA and Radical Design School on a silkscreen campaign for 2013 Pride, to design and print placards for the marches, and running live silkscreen printing at the Dyke March and Pride Parade. This intervention extended visibility to their message of resisting pink washing<sup>12</sup> and created a space for sympathetic public to become participants in their quite critical insertion of politics into Pride (Figure 7).

A different extension of silkscreen printing's potential is through *printstallation*, a term I learned from artist and professor Ayanah Moor when I spoke in her class of the same name at Carnegie Mellon University, using print to construct and intervene in three-dimensional space. Again, in working with Justseeds, we approached the challenge of translating small flat rectangles into three-dimensional space by working collectively in a variety of ways; enlarging images through projection and tracing; building sculptural elements both to hold prints and respond to them, and executing large scale pasted murals of repeated prints (Figure 8).

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<sup>12</sup> Israel's marketing of its state as a hot and tolerant haven for gay tourism. See Queers Against Israeli Apartheid's website, <http://queersagainstapartheid.org/gayisrael/>



Figure 8. *Refuge*. Justseeds. 2011. Silkscreen and relief prints on paper. Installation for Biennial of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia. Photo courtesy of Justseeds.

For *Uprisings: Images of Labor*, we took a different strategy: we turned the gallery into a temporary print shop, underscoring the theme of labor by having artists executing the hard, repetitive labor of printing right in the space. This also allowed us to work together directly to pull large scale prints, and share skills as we worked, an activity we rarely get to share, as we are a decentralized group who tend to print in our own locales. We hung finished prints on lines between the high walls of the gallery, and hosted a free two-day series of talks during the (rather expensive) conference, with artists and local organizers on topics related to printmaking, creative activism and interventions (Figure 9). Dan S. Wang noted,

The programming created exactly that which our social movements need now, spaces in which partisans since dispersed by defeats and exhaustion can freshly connect, educate each other, exchange views, and be visible to one another. In an art event Justseeds created temporary conditions for what

arose organically during the capitol rotunda occupation in Madison, the occupation of Zuccotti Park, and (on an incomparably huge scale) the occupation of Tahrir: a social forum. After 2011, the constituent elements of social movements are searching for space within which to locate themselves. Justseeds, with special effort by the Milwaukee-based members, has that space for a little while. In as potentially cold a gallery as the Union Art Gallery, this was a feat of social engineering equivalent in spirit to raccooning the birdfeeder. (2013)

This project was an excellent use of extending resource, creating a space of a commons in the gallery, and highlighted the intersectionality of our work. I will use this tactic as well in the space of *Camoutopia*, utilizing the exhibition as a temporary social center and site of production; the social and educational activities are part of the work itself.



Figure 9. *Uprisings: Images of Labor*. Justseeds. 2013. Installation view during programming. Photo courtesy of Justseeds.

My further excursions into print's potential include silkscreen printing onto unconventional materials, such as mirrors. I made a temporary and portable printstallation of these mirrors in December 2013 (Figure 8), and designed and printed further designs onto mirrors for a mirrored printstallation in *Camoutopia*. I experimented with cut vinyl on mirrors as well, for better durability, but one cannot achieve the same fades as with silkscreen printing. This body of work is still experimental, but I find its potential for experiencing the work as a participant, as well as the melding of worlds, quite exciting. It also manifests visual horizons of futurity and possibility, of reaching towards the other self.



Figure 10. *Cruising Camoutopia*. 2013. Silkscreen print on acrylic mirror. Installation view.

While I have engaged with several new processes over the course of my master's research, such as risograph, inkjet printing onto fabric, and stop motion animation, silkscreen printing continues to be a technique I hold in my back pocket and use extensively. It is often the best tool for the job, and is an easy technique to encourage participation.

### 3.2 Identification, Disidentification, and World Making

I use disidentification, a term from Muñoz, as a world making practice to reframe dominant signifiers, such as insignia of scouting, military, and hunting patterns, sites of performed masculinity. Through a practice of renaming and reclaiming through a filter of politicized and queer aesthetics, minoritarian subjects can reimagine dominant symbols, allowing them to take on new meanings through use. I designed *Queer Scout Badges* (Figure 11) originally as silkscreen printed patches distributed to participants at an Operation Sappho: Queer Scout party. Operation Sappho was a Pittsburgh-based dance



Figure 11. *Queer Scouts Poster*. Offset lithographic print. 2011. *Queer Scouts Merit Badges*. Embroidery floss on twill. 2011-2012.

party for queer women and allies that I organized from 2006-2012, making a monthly temporary queer zone, generally in the context of “straight” bars. I then made silkscreen and offset posters, followed by embroidered badges. To date I have distributed almost 2,000 of these badges, primarily in North America, but extending to other continents, including Asia, Australia, and Europe. This new symbol forms a kind of identification between wearers, a way of promoting recognition and visibility, and community building through these tactics.

Building upon the continued success of Queer Scout badges and posters, I continue to experiment with this technique of redefining symbols, through creating original patterns and placing them into social contexts, as in the case of my ongoing series of Animal Hankies. In this case again, an image evolved between mediums and uses, in this case first a poster for *Printervention*, an exhibition of political prints referencing Works Progress Administration (WPA) posters of the 1930’s, taking place first in Chicago in Spring 2010, and later iterated as a street campaign in Detroit during the US Social Forum in June of that same year. My poster, *Let’s Go Cruising*, was a commentary on the historical and contemporary policing of gay cruising zones, and signage to deter this activity. The bear hanky is a reference to gay bear culture, and gay hanky code. I then printed actual bandanas with the bear design (Figure 10), and soon moved on to wolves (for a Wolf Dyke themed Operation Sappho), otters, beavers, and other animals in the gay pantheon. Many people identify with these animals, aside from a gay iconography, and thus they serve multiple meanings, created by users. They appeal to queer audiences, with a queer aesthetic, but stretch outside of those audiences as well.





Figure 12. *Bear Hanky*. Silkscreen print on bandana. 2011

While I often make work for art contexts, galleries, museums, and artist run centers, much of my material practice has its richest meaning made through its applied use. An queer animal icon bandana or queer deer digital camouflage pattern only comes into its own when worn, by multiple users, in contexts both explicitly queer and not. In this way we can expand what we think of as queer sites, queering the lodge, queering the streets. This builds upon independent curator and writer Rebecca Uchill’s descriptions of curating discursive space, and of the limits of discursive space within art institutions, “through common practice – making all participants to some extent complicit or subsumed in its structure and efficacies...made available a more positive negation act: of looking to possibilities beyond given realities and structures.” (2012: 41) This positive negation act of looking beyond resonates with Muñoz’s theories, both of queerness as horizon and futurity, the not-quite-here, and of disidentification.

Disidentification is a key tactic in queer world making,

the way in which dominant signs and symbols, often ones that are toxic to minoritarian subjects, can be reimagined through an engaged and animated mode of performance or spectatorship. Disidentification can be a world-making project in which the limits of the here and now are traversed and transgressed. (2009: 138)

Muñoz is speaking primarily about performance, but he extends it to visual art as well, in discussing queer aesthetics vis-a-vis Andy Warhol's work. In the case of camouflage pattern, meaning can be resignified through aesthetics of color combinations and the patterns' components, and their potential can be activated through discursive activity, including dance parties. For example, I designed and silkscreen printed a *RealMaple* remix of RealTree pattern, using actual Canadian maple leaves to expose the screen. The patterns were printed in neon colors and interspersed with images of queer deer, on an editioned silkscreen printed poster for *Calling All Velvet Horns*, a fantasy dance party (Figure 13). This work is in the tradition of Bruce LaBruce and GB Jones creating *JD's*



Figure 13. *Calling All Velvet Horns*. 2012. Silkscreen print on paper and Tyvek jumpsuit, with stitched details.

zine, writing about queer core as if it already existed, which brought itself into existence through others reading *JD's* and believing in the world they created. I made these posters in October 2012, only two months after moving to Toronto, from a feeling of frustration at my lack of community and party organizing opportunities. In the face of scarcity, I created a world of abundance, making up a series of fantasy parties that I wished I was organizing, in the hopes that these ideas may take on a life of their own in the world, and speak to others. Whether *Calling All Velvet Horns* actually happened or not doesn't seem to matter to viewers at a later date; the idea of a "realtree realness fall fling" where "the treesit is open" communicates enough about this event, and after the fact in matters little whether it happened or not. Helguera spoke at length about this impossibility of actually representing an event to those who were not there. He also creates work about fictional histories or art objects, examining how the discourse around an object or event is what endures, not the documentation of a time-based work. This tactic also harkens to General Idea, of creating ephemera and signifiers around a fictional event, such as *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion*, a tactic of *performative fiction*. I also printed RealMaple onto one-piece Tyvek coveralls for the DJ, and bandanas for guests to wear and keep. This early experimental project was an effort at world making, at "fake it til you make it," at performative fiction in the absence of desired realities. It was inspired by *JD's* and General Idea, and my early readings of Muñoz's interpretations of queer performance as world making.

### **3.3 Transpedagogy**

#### **Public Action**

Public Action was planned and executed quickly, and a primary goal was to demonstrate what is possible with a publications residency at OCAD, utilizing the space of the Student Gallery. In reflecting on the goals, methodologies, and expected outcomes, we reached many of our objectives and fell short of others, while unanticipated new relationships developed. The project capitalized on the sharing of resources, in this case, time, space, and equipment. Participants made use of access to silkscreen printing, which was primarily facilitated by myself, including assisting those new to silkscreen printing to teach them a new skill, and assist them in their work. A highlight was working with Queers Against Israeli Apartheid to create placards and posters for Pride, as well as facilitate a live silkscreen printing activity at the meet ups for both the Dyke March and Pride. Public Action participants also made use of the new risograph machine, to create posters, zines, and other artist multiples, and the program was an opportunity to experiment with this new-to-us technical process.

I facilitated inviting the visiting artists for the project, Paul Kjelland, Leila Pourtavaf, and Agata Mrozowski, and attended to their needs over the course of the residency. I facilitated several of the evening Night Schools, a series of thematic presentations and discussions in the evening with food. The Night Schools had varying degrees of attendance, and seemed to work best when the speaker promoted it to their networks as well as our Public Action network. Artist, activist and curator Maggie Flynn's evening discussion on the archive, for example, was very well attended by a diverse and interesting group, who all contributed to a lively discussion. Some of my recruitment attempts, particularly towards graduate students, fell short; even when people agreed to

participate and demonstrated excitement at the project, in the end only one out of the three students I identified followed through to make work.

A positive outcome of the project was working closely with several First Generation students, and nurturing a relationship between publications and that program. An additional highlight was the strong participation of artist and educator Anthea Black and her nano publication students, who organized a very successful small press exhibit/fair for the closing party of Public Action.

I had the opportunity to DJ two events at Public Action, including promotion and organizing of events. The first, a clothing swap/dance party at the midway point of the program, was a surprising success on the clothing swap end of things, and a surprising flop of a dance party. We learned that there is a thriving subculture of clothing swap-goers in Toronto; people came with rolling suitcases and meant business. The dance party aspect of the evening, however, was so poorly attended that dancing happened in only the most minimal of ways, amongst my close friends who came to support me. This was even after over 70 people said they were coming on Facebook. In assessing this failure after the fact, we noted that the timing was all wrong; people don't want to dance at a gallery at 8:00 on a Friday night, unless there are abundant other reasons for being there. There were several other key events also happening that evening, including an opening at the Gay and Lesbian Archives, and University of Toronto graduation. Reflecting upon this failure helped me understand that for events to be successful there needs to be deep and real community support for such happenings. This is key; these events intend to both exemplify existing communities and bridge them to create new relationships, but the

investment from others, beyond the core organizers, is key to this happening in a real way.

Additionally, we originally planned to put more public into Public Action, with street art and other interventions. By the end of the program, however, we hadn't realized these projects. A key for future residencies could be to directly invite artists with those practices to participate, or more directly plan wheat paste excursions into the weekly schedule. This could have been a Night School project, for example. In the end, much of the lack of participation came down to timing; June is a busy month for undergraduate and graduate students alike, and even non-students, with Summer events such as Pride. While we had some strong participation facilitated by Summer Printmaking/Publications instructors, those students were also very busy with intensive summer course work.

Some key points I took from this project are the importance of timing, considered collaborators, audience, and communication. My previous experiences in teaching youth programs via the Warhol Museum prepared me to be flexible, and respond to unexpected opportunities as well as to redirect at times when our course wasn't working. I was able to facilitate a variety of participants with different intentions, interests, and skill sets.

### **U.G.L.Y. (Unified Geniuses Living Young)**

U.G.L.Y. was a collaboration between the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) Youth Council, artist Echo Railton, and myself, with Echo and I acting as guest artists, and Syrus Ware facilitating as the director of youth programs, in September-December 2013. This was an experimental project for the youth council, in that we were collectively artists in residence in the Community Gallery of the AGO. Accordingly, public space and public making was a running theme of our project. We made our process transparent by

moving the youth council's meeting table to the gallery, and we worked there weekly in the space and on the walls, altering the space with an additive mural as well as our brainstorming notes. We made a group uniform, vests and sashes and flair (silkscreened patches, patterned fabric, and pin back buttons) inspired by both gallery guard uniforms and scouting gear, as a way to build our group identity and also differentiate ourselves from the more general public moving through the gallery space. We structured art making activities with group social dynamics in mind, seeking a balance between directives and structure, skill sharing, and building relationships between new members of the council, which transitioned with a new group of participants in early November; the Halloween party marked the first week of both old and new youth council members working and playing together. Through collective making in the following weeks, social bonds were strengthened and delineated amongst members of the group. Through mural painting, silkscreen printing, wheat pasting, costuming, and installation, members of the council made aesthetic decisions and divided labor to make this multifaceted project. I observed that some activities, such as silkscreen printing and pasting, lend themselves particularly well to group work, and the art activity was a means to facilitate relationship building. Accordingly, these activities are part of the programming of Camoutopia.

The mural began as a black and white wall drawing for our Halloween party, predominantly ghosts, pumpkins and trees. During the party, we traced the shadows of participants with neon Day Glo paint onto the wall, adding another layer and a trace documentation of bodies in the space. After the party, we transitioned the space into a focus on camouflage patterns by filling in the areas between the outlines with various shades of khaki and green. The resulting mural, a synergy of bodies in space and structured collaborative camouflage pattern was extremely satisfying to Youth Council

members as well as AGO staff and the public. (Figure 14)



Figure 14. *U.G.L.Y. Camouflage Mural*. Collaboration with AGO Youth Council and Echo Railton. 2013

The final phase of the project, building towards our Shiny Glow Party finale (an idea that we came to collectively) involved creating both camouflage and reflective surfaces, both as installation elements in the gallery, and to wear, to further group identity while maintaining our differences. This is a feminist approach of differential movement, in working across difference, maintaining individual identities rather than trying to collapse into a singular whole, while working together through affinity with common ideals and goals. As writer and professor Chela Sandoval notes, “such lines of affinity occur through attraction, combination, and relation carved out of and in spite of difference.” (1999: 248)

The patterns that we created had varying permutations, and each member of the group



adapted their use of these patterns in making flair for their uniforms during the Shiny Glow Party. While we had intended for these worn items to help form a group identity, it was in working together to make collaborative artwork that group cohesions and tensions actually emerged. A further site for developing community and group identity through active participation is the dance party.

### **3.4 Dance Parties, Participation, Social Engagement**

A key component of my practice is curating discursive space: dance parties, discussions, silkscreen printing workshops, collective making and moving, inviting intentional collaborators as well as the public. These activities underscore preexisting relationships that have developed over time since my move to Toronto in August 2012, as well as new relations and combinations that can form through the synergy and process of this group work. A key facet of this work is to identify and share resources; in the face of scarcity of affordable space, yet an abundance of critical thinkers and talented creatives, it only makes sense to share resource. In our current climate of austerity, the active building and use of a commons, of shared resource and abundance rather than scarcity, feels more prescient than ever. Federici and Muñoz's observations on the formation of commons resonate in my own work of organizing events.

While it is difficult to frame collaborative activity as part of a masters thesis, working together, cooperatively if not collectively, allows for new knowledge creation, a process that Erin Manning refers to as engendering. In her book *The Politics of Touch*, she describes how “normative discourses can be subverted, in this case through a reaching-toward enacted through shared touch that produces infinite variations of movements....Touch as a reaching-toward is not a question of Being. It is a question of

becoming.” (114) The new knowledge that can only come in this space of engendering, and in sharing resource, is a key component of my work, enacted primarily through dance parties and silkscreen printing.

I have been DJing for nearly two decades, initially playing hardcore punk and indie rock records on Carnegie Mellon’s university’s radio station in the late 1990’s, and later at Pittsburgh house parties to benefit various local causes, from a friend’s medical bills to anti-coal mining activism. I shifted to organizing benefit parties and community dances from an activist and DIY perspective; making safe space for people to come together intentionally, for courtship, mutual aid, and community building. Poet and organizer Sarah Claire Morton (ne Susan) and myself started Operation Sappho in 2006, filling a perceived gap in queer nightlife. Now there are many such parties, and recently Sappho ended, after a year of co-collaborators continuing to organize the party in my absence. Part of my draw to Toronto was to be a small piece of a larger, more diverse and multiplicitous network of activist and queer communities, to work with more experienced DJ’s and event organizers, to learn and also contribute in a different way. To my surprise, queer gatherings in Toronto are not larger in scale than in Pittsburgh, and in fact can sometimes feel much smaller, as there are so many (save larger parties like *Yes Yes Y’all* and *Business Women’s Special*).

Through many nourishing conversations, connections and a slowly expanding network, I am gradually building up a DJ practice in this new context. I DJ a monthly party at the Beaver, a queer bar in the gallery rich area of Queen Street West/Parkdale, with a legacy from artist-DJ-impresario Will Munro, who co-owned and ran the bar and made it into a community space for young queers, day and night. I also DJ occasional parties at the Henhouse, a small queer bar in the same neighborhood, with a similar

history of community space, from its previous owners, musicians Katie Sketch and Jenny Smyth. I have DJed many events at OCAD's Student Gallery and Graduate Gallery as well as in larger art institutions, such as the Art Gallery of Ontario for their First Thursday program (February 2013), the Power Plant for their Student Night (October 2013) and Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, for the opening night of the Gay Heritage Project (November 2013) and the Rhubarb Festival (February 2014). While these DJ gigs are not always framed as master's research, many of them are, particularly the monthly parties at the Beaver and the Henhouse, and they contribute to a longer-term goal of making connection in Toronto.

Through curating these spaces, I have experimented with temporary installations as simple space transformations, as well as the dance party as a venue for distributing printed artist multiples. This accelerated in organizing *Sweaty Bones x Mary Mack* with artist Heidi Nagtegaal when she was in Toronto this summer to do a residency at Feminist Art Gallery (FAG). *Sweaty Bones* is an art event as well as a dance party, and we curated artists, DJ's and performers from our circles, bringing together different networks, and creating a maximalist multimedia experience at the Henhouse. At the Beaver, simple printstallations have included a wall of brightly colored fabric patches (Figure 15) silkscreen printed with critical theory about queer dance parties, politics of touch and disidentification, that participants could choose and take with them as a reminder of the event.



Figure 15. *Stumpgrinding Study*. Silkscreen print on fabric, installation view. 2013

Organizing dance parties can be a reflexive practice as transformational research, exemplified in artist and art theorist Graeme Sullivan’s description as, “a kind of research activity that uses different methods to *work against existing theories and practices* and offers the *possibility* of seeing phenomena in new ways.” (Sullivan 2010: 110)(emphasis mine) Dance parties are a space of engendering, of becoming rather than being. Meaning is made in the relations between participants, which shifts over the course of the event as new participants enter, and new wordless encounters are made through moving together, encounters that sometimes intensify to touch or verbal exchange. As Erin Manning so poetically describes engendering, “I am reaching toward a space I will create with you.” (115)

My self-reflexive analysis of selected past activities, including parties that I organized and DJed, informs my new activities. The dynamics of both the parties’ organization and their execution, includes site, themes, playlists, aesthetics and décor, economics,

choosing collaborators, and experimenting with alternative archives, means of documenting ephemeral activities. The queer dance party is a sustainable practice, emotionally, culturally, socially, politically, and even economically, as it provides a sustaining energy in all these areas. For many people new to town, or new to a culture, selective public spaces such as these provide an initial entry point to meeting like-minded folks. Other such spaces that can act as entry points, and sustaining spaces for communities to gather include record stores, info shops, and independent bookstores. Sadly with rent increases and diminishing traffic due to online sales, many of these brick and mortar spaces have closed down, even in the scant time that I have lived here. Over the past 18 months I have considered and sought out the resources I had in Pittsburgh, as well as those particular to Toronto, including a network and community of people, both to organize with and to attend events, access to spaces, and access to other resources such as in-kind support and institutional resource extraction. I have slowly built networks, through many nourishing conversations and cross-pollinations, which has led to access these other resources. In turn, I am noting the gaps, and what I have to contribute. This information has informed the programming I planned for Camoutopia, seeking to address deficiencies while also contributing materially and actively to new potentials, even if they are temporary.

#### **4. Camoutopia: Dazzle Dance Disrupt**

*See Appendix for Further Exhibition Documentation*

Rather than organizing a traditional exhibition, my thesis project was a series of discursive programming as well as an exhibition of prints and installation. I worked out

of a repurposed classroom space at Artscape Youngplace, the former Shaw-Givens School, and borrowed some of the aesthetics and structures of community centers. The room was altered with additive printstallations of camouflage patterns on the walls and sculpture in the space, as well as patterned materials for participants to wear and interact against and with each other. These events create multiple opportunities for visiting and interacting with the exhibition, as well as add to the meaning of the work. Participants extended the uses and meanings of these patterns as well as connections with one another. This temporary camoutopia was a space for socializing, learning, dancing, experimentation, and above all building connections and community through these activities. I worked with a prefigurative politics of creating structures and spaces in common, demonstrating a lived ethics of generosity and cooperation rather than competition. This explicit extension of shared resource is a feminist reconstruction of the commons (Federici: 2012) based on shared abundance rather than individual scarcity to build community.

#### **4.1 Exhibition**

The space of Flex Studio Gold is altered with several printstallations: *Cruising Camoutopia*, a corner of silkscreen printed mirrors, and lightweight wooden panels that already have a layer of silkscreen prints from U.G.L.Y, to be further pasted onto over the course of the exhibit. In the spirit of Corita Kent's box installations, I ordered 100 blank 12 x 12" boxes, painted and pasted with camouflage patterns, to build adaptable walls as backdrops for mirror reflection, and with cushions they become low stools for gathering.



Figure 16. *Camoutopia*. 2014. Installation view.

I set up a mobile silkscreen printing studio and a DJ booth, an expansion of the Safe(r) Space DJ Nook that I made in April 2013. I printed these bandanas ahead of time and continued to do so during the run of the exhibition, particularly during workshops. They are a visual multiple distributed beyond the time and space of this exhibit.

One section of wall was designated as an ongoing archive, of event ephemera from the past two years in Toronto, as well as printed materials from participants in programming, both trades printed elsewhere, and examples of work generated during the silkscreen workshop.

#### 4.2 Events

*Camoutopia* programming included a Toronto printer mixer, a silkscreen printing workshop, a discussion on theory and practice, and two dance parties. I envisioned that this space would act as a hub for folks from different backgrounds

to come together to print, discuss, and connect through these activities. On the topic of inclusions (and by their inverse, exclusions), some of the programming of my thesis show is by invitation, creating an intentional social space, while other events are open to a wider public. Events were always open to drop ins (save the silkscreen workshop in the interests of space and supplies), but I extended invitations to particular participants who I thought would intersect well with the work.

The Toronto Printer Mixer, staged as a soft opening, created a space for printers to meet and mingle, discussing techniques, projects, and material needs. Participants were invited to write “haves” and “needs” on the blackboard, building a culture of open exchange. For example, one participant had contacted Justseeds earlier in the day with silkscreen equipment but no shared space to use it, and she attended and networked with others who had a need for equipment. Justseeds artist Jesse Purcell was seeking other artists to silkscreen at his new studio, and this event was an opportunity to share that information and connect. Some visitors brought a print to exchange with me for a printed multiple of their choice, and I added their work to the living archive wall of printed theory patches and event posters. The Toronto printers mixer had the intended outcome of strengthening and expanding existing networks, making a space to meet and discuss potentials for sharing resource.

The silkscreen workshop was promoted as an introduction to silkscreen printing, and while it was pay-what-you-can, participants were required to pre-register, and I limited space to ten slots. Back in the Winter I had met with SKETCH, an arts education organization serving homeless youth, who recently relocated to Artscape Youngplace, to



discuss a workshop that Jesse Purcell and myself are teaching as part of the Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts. Julian Diego, SKETCH's printmaking educator, connected me with SKETCH artists to assist me in preparing the installation and facilitation of *Camoutopia*. We discussed potentially utilizing some of their equipment for my workshop, but they weren't quite ready yet at the time of *Camoutopia*. However, while silkscreen printing in *Camoutopia* one afternoon, I met Kingi Smith, designer and owner of Peach Berserk, who runs silkscreen printing workshops at Youngplace. She offered access to a light table for exposing screens that is stored right across the hall from Flex Studio Gold, which expanded the initial scope of the workshop. Participants sent images to me in advance, so I could adjust and print them out, and then we exposed, developed, and printed them during the workshop. Participants included OCAD faculty, graduate students, and some strangers who I met during open hours at *Camoutopia*. They learned the basics of silkscreen printing, created printed materials that they took to commemorate the show, and left examples of their own designs that I added to the space. Facilitating this workshop emphasized for me the need for accessible silkscreen printing in Toronto, and the desire for participation for future workshops that Purcell and I plan to teach together.

The "Real Talks" discussions grew out of informal conversations that I have had with many individuals in Toronto, both friends that share an affinity for queer and feminist theory, and event organizers who repeatedly face similar challenges. I identified areas of affinity between several writers whose work resonates with me: Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Silvia Federici. While they discuss similar ideas of queer theory, anarcha-feminism and the commons, Halberstam and Muñoz do not reference Federici. I am curious about this lost opportunity for intersection, and through discussion I intended

to expand approaches to communing, and means of making utopias. This topic fed into the second part of the discussion, “This Is a Safe(r) Space,” about the challenges in creating events that are accessible and intentions towards safe(r) spaces.

Part of the concurrent programming of my thesis project was organizing and DJing a series of dance parties, both at night in bars such as the Beaver and the Henhouse, and artist-run spaces such as Unit 2, and a T(ea) dance during the afternoon at Gold Studio, as a homage to gay culture and also a method of making dance parties accessible for those who avoid bars, going out late at night, or have mobility impairments that preclude them from entering spaces with inaccessible washrooms. Organizing both types of parties allowed for a greater range of participation, and the attempts at reaching towards full accessibility hopefully assisted in creating a sense of welcoming and inclusion. In the end, the particular friends and colleagues who I had in mind for the daytime tea dance did not attend; the attendees were mainly people who would also attend my parties at night. Such a variety of factors feed into event attendance, and even with many years of experience it is difficult to predict the formula that allows for widest participation. I look to other means of measuring success beyond attendance numbers, such as the impact on those who participated, and what I can learn from each experience. The depth and quality of interactions and cumulative effects of strengthening existing communities are difficult to quantify and evaluate, but many participants from both types of parties spoke to their energizing effects. These events beget future events, and continue to resonate in relationships formed and memories, held in artifacts and collective consciousness.

### 4.3 Results

As earlier discussed, the evaluation of socially engaged art presents its own unique challenges. In working across disciplines, in art, pedagogy, and social spheres, one always runs the risk of the work falling short in one of these areas; potential unintentional results are good activism/bad art, edutainment, and symbolic gestures that don't actually "do" anything. Additionally, such works have primary and secondary audiences: those who are participants in the creation of the work, and those who experience it after its creation, often through documentation. As Helguera notes,

Because of the strengths of the communities created through such performative experiments, in them authorship is tenuous at best and the process of exchange is so important that an outcome visible to an outside observer---"the product," in an art market sense---may or may not be that relevant or even materialize. Finally, the boundaries between artwork and experience are blurred, in the same way that authorship and collectivity are blended, documentation and literature are one, and fiction is turned into real experience and vice versa. All components of a traditional structure of production and interpretation are turned around and resignified. Nonetheless, this resignification rarely is done for its own sake---we could call it a Feast of the Ass with an agenda. Because of the insertion of the pedagogical element, the exchanges that take place in these experiences are constructive, in a direct or indirect fashion. Artists take their tactics from the replication of institutional structures, but allowing carnivalesque interactions both validates the experience as an artwork and still manages to be constructive. (2011: 70-71)

In Helguera's eyes, then, this pedagogical element is what makes for constructive exchanges in a project. Further, it is crucial to work reflexively, responding to situations, and shifting the course of the project accordingly. Over the course of my graduate study, I have shifted my tactics in response to situations as they have arose, moving towards a greater emphasis on pedagogy and the intersection of printmaking and social practice. What this type of project can do, is to create unexpected social and visual pleasure in the intersections of difference. Knowledge is created through collective experience. My role is that of designer, curator, and

facilitator, carefully planning an open ended collective project that participants from a variety of backgrounds and experiences can engage with.

Again, organizing events, particularly dance parties, may not seem like a transformative practice, but through reflexivity they can be a world-making tool, through informed and serious fun. One participant in the “Real Talks” discussion noted that our circulating of these ideas keeps them active and alive. Further, safe(r) space is an impossible ideal, but one which we reach towards in setting our intentions for the temporary spaces of events, and working through conflicts as they arrive. This reaching towards an ideal that is not-yet-here parallels reaching towards utopia, always on the horizon. As another participant noted, building safe(r) spaces, is therefore is a utopian world-making project. Further, although the daytime Tea Dance wasn’t as attended as I had hoped, the experience of dancing in the sunlight in a colorful and welcoming space with a welcoming group of people was freeing. Manifesting this experience opened up the potential for future such events, which could have a greater impact in collaboration with spaces and organizations that have an existing audience, such as 519 Bathurst Community Center.

The night time after party at Unit 2, a studio in the Sterling Lofts, after the closing of the exhibition, was extremely active and well-attended, the dance party so many of us needed. Unit 2 is the live-in/studio space of musical duo LAL, Nicholas Murray and Rosina Kazi, who generously host a variety of events in their space. It was important to me that the event was not at a bar; this location precluded unintentional in attendance. It is out-of-the-way, although neighboring many other such studio/sometimes event spaces, and so guests were by and large there by choice, not by chance (as often happens when events are in a bar). This contributed to the feeling of a community dance, as one attendee

noted, “Everyone here is awesome!” This is not to say that the event was exclusive or clique-ish, but rather that attendees were respectful of one another but also ready to freely dance and socialize. Attendees represented overlapping circles of my own Toronto community; activists, artists, queers, OCAD graduate students, and close friends, many people intersecting multiple circles. I transported the DJ booth from *Camoutopia* to Unit 2 for the event, the aesthetics adding to the festive mood of the event. DJ duo Bro & Sis (Logan MacDonald and Hazel Meyer) and DJ Glitclit (Lido Pimienta) lent their talents for the night, and furthered our intersectional intentions. The after party stands out as a highlight of *Camoutopia*, and I plan to throw more events at Unit 2 in the near future, including benefit parties.

In the process of silkscreen printing patterns, overlapping layers of bright translucent color create areas of pronounced intensity. One can extend this physical process and aesthetic result to social dynamics; something new and intense happens in the intersection, an engendering in the space between, a process of becoming rather than being. The print is a way of fixing the new space that is created. In a pedagogical approach to print production, the social and aesthetic possibilities of this process collide, transferring new knowledge to both fields, and creating a new field in the area of intersection, much like a Venn diagram (a popular example to illustrate the qualities of overlapping inks).



Figure 14. *Camoutopia*. Detail. 2014. Silkscreen print.

I made this connection between theory and practice in the process of preparing for *Camoutopia*. A hot pink layer added to a preprinted background is a pink lens that intensifies everything behind it, visualizing the powerful potential of intersections. Print and social activity mutually inform one another to create complex experiences.

##### **5. Summary, Implications, Recommendations for Future Research, Conclusions**

The goal in all of this activity within the space of the exhibition was to activate the artwork and to foster further intersections and connections between participants. Through these activities I have gleaned different interpretations of this work and also identified

further resource gaps in Toronto that I believe I can speak to in future endeavors. I have further research and projects planned that are a continuation of the methods and practice of *Camoutopia*.

One such gap in resource is affordable access to silkscreen printing. I am teaching a silkscreen printing course at Workman Arts in May, and Jesse Purcell and myself are teaching a free silkscreen printing workshop for Toronto's Mayworks Festival of Working Arts, at SKETCH's new print studio at Artscape Youngplace (which wasn't quite ready for use at the time of *Camoutopia*). We are also exhibiting *Uprisings: Images of Labor* and *Migration Now* at SKETCH as part of Mayworks. SKETCH has a commitment to social justice through art education, and I feel is a natural fit for Justseeds and my own practice. The site of *Camoutopia* in a shared space with SKETCH furthered these connections.

In Summer I am collaborating with Nicholas Murray and Rosina Kazi (who perform as the musical duo LAL) and nail technicians on *Social Plastics*, an interdisciplinary project organized by artist-activist Eugenio Salas. *Social Plastics* is a series of site-specific art installations, musical performances, and nail art sited at two family-owned nail salons in the Danforth neighborhood of Toronto. The work will develop as we meet and work together, but tentative plans include further silkscreen printing on mirrors, and designing patterns that can be applied by skilled nail artists, valuing their labor and technical expertise. Salas and I met and worked together closely on the QuAIA silkscreen printing project for Pride 2013, and our intuitive and mutually educational working dynamic influenced his decision to invite me to work together again.

In June I will install an iteration of *Cruising Camoutopia* at the Gladstone Hotel as part of *That's So Gay 2014*, curated by Syrus Marcus Ware. This adaptable installation

will have a different impact on audience depending upon site, and within this group context the choice of other artists' work reflected in my own will create new intersections and dialogue, in addition to the interactions with audience. I will release a *Camoutopia* publication in conjunction with this exhibition of the work, which will include documentation of activities, excerpts from this written thesis, and multiple patterns.



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**Appendix: Documentation from *Camoutopia: Dazzle, Dance, Disrupt*.  
April 2-12, 2014. Flex Studio Gold. Artscape Youngplace. Toronto, ON**



Top: Installation view from *Camoutopia* workstation  
Bottom: Silkscreen printed paper ready for pasting

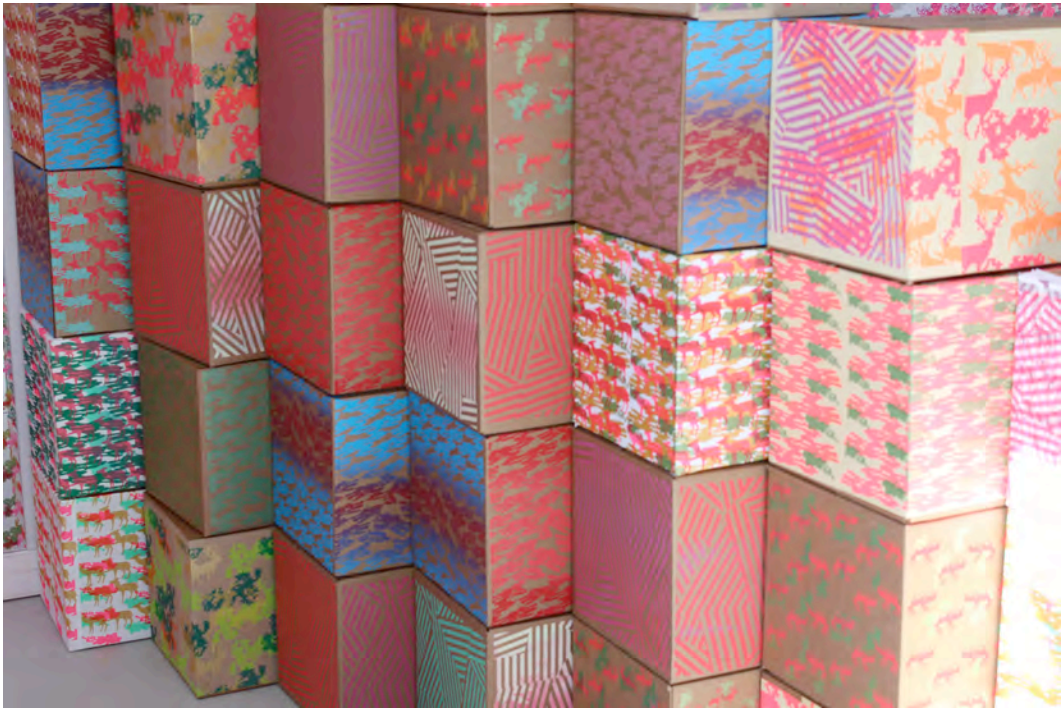


*This Is A Safe(r) Space Camoutopia DJ Nook*



Top: Detail of *Speaker Cozies*

Bottom: DJ's Bro & Sis (Logan MacDonald and Hazel Meyer) at *Camoutopia After Party*

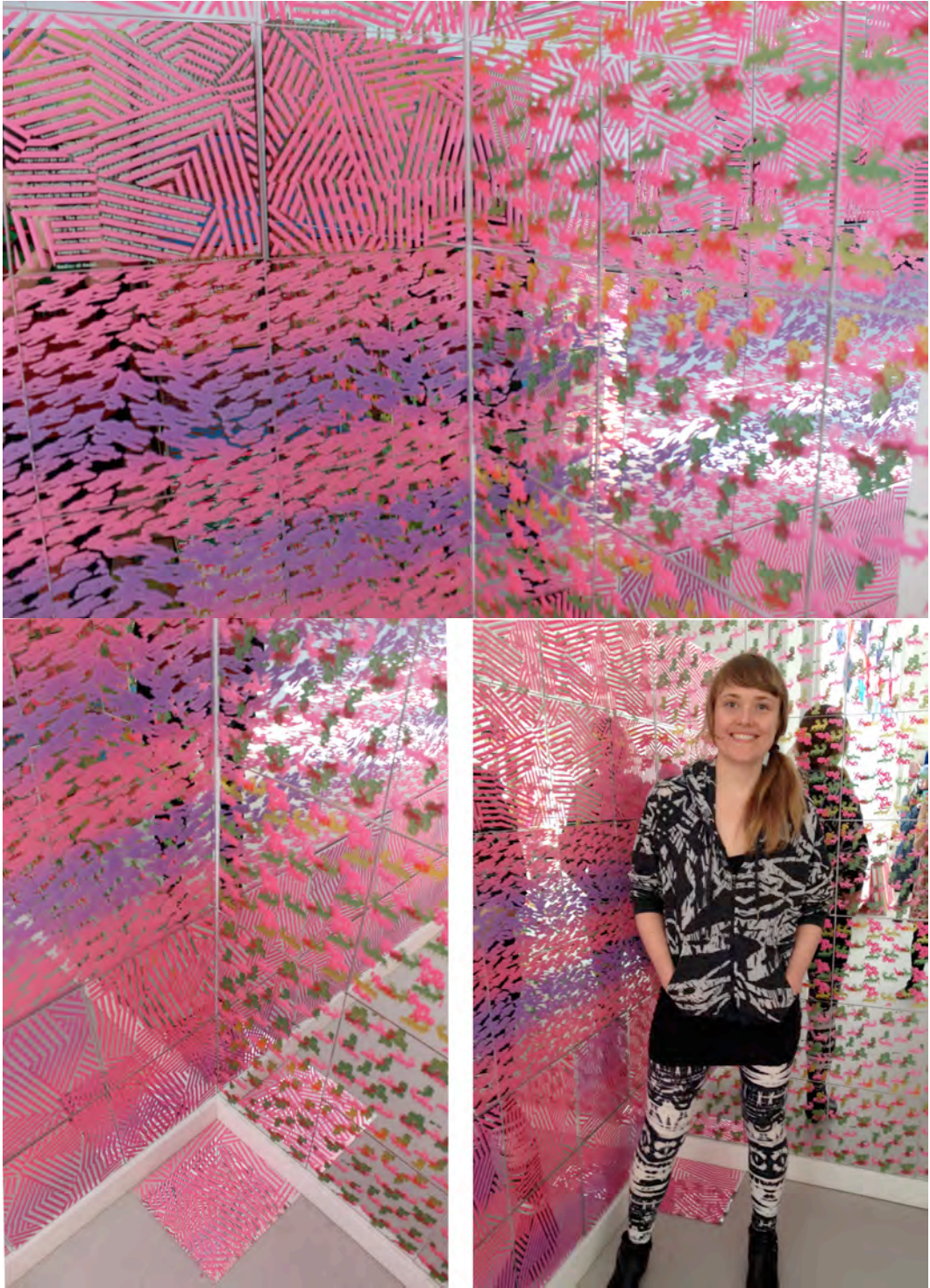


Top: Detail of *Building Camoutopia* Boxes  
Bottom: Installation view of *Camoutopia*

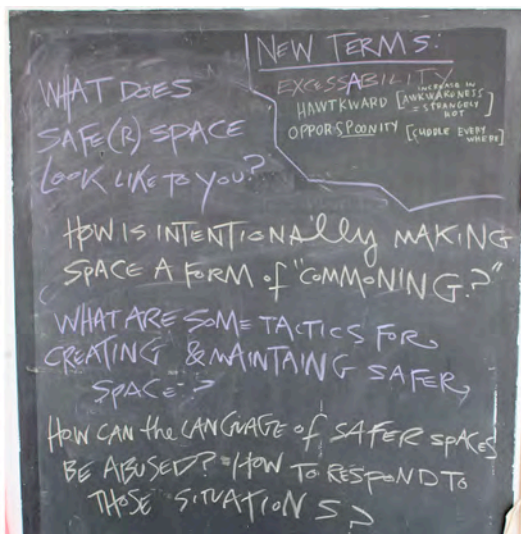
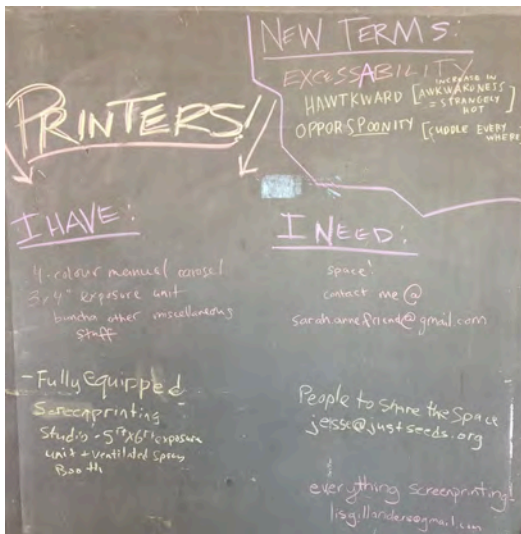


Top: *Camoutopia T(ea) Dance*  
Bottom: Silkscreen Printing Workshop





All Images: *Cruising Camoutopia*



Top Left: Blackboard after *Printer Mixer*

Top Right: Blackboard after *Real Talks: This Is a Safe(r) Space*

Bottom: *Camoutopia* Discussion Zone