

**SOME NERVE:
INVISIBLE DEBILITATIONS, EXPLOSIVE
RESTRAINT AND THE IN-VALID**

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Bachelor of Fine Arts [Great Distinction], University of Lethbridge, 2009

A Support Paper for M.F.A. Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS (ART)

**Department of Arts
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA**

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ABSTRACT

Some Nerve: Invisible Debilitations, Explosive Restraint and the In-Valid engages sociological, critical and feminist frameworks to examine the cultural and political encoding of normative human behaviour. Through kinetic objects, drawing, photography, video and performance, my work considers marginalized others and the subversive destabilization or appropriation of identity and subjectivity available in theories of the grotesque, in body art, and in autobiography. Personal historiographies, transgenerational trauma, and postmemory together form the investigative structure of collective identity and personal narrative.

The new, embodied postmodern subject embraces identity that is unstable, open, changing, and that blurs the lines between self and other. By drawing parallels to historical medical and psychoanalytical treatments, I look at contemporary discursive methods that pathologize bodies and behaviours and construct “disease.” Prosthetics and body restraints become metaphorical indicators of social constraint and civic silencing. Inspired by literature, popular culture, science fiction, and self-help books, my work explores physical and ideological impediments, interpersonal conflict, explosion and restraint, repression and acting out.

A Nervous System is not only a vital system inherent in an individual body; systems of nervousness also signal a condition of cultural anxiety produced by precarious political and institutional power structures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my MFA Supervisory Committee for their support and for encouraging me to pursue a masters degree in the first place: to Taras Polataiko, for his rebellious and quirky spirit, and for challenging me to be bolder; to Don Gill for his humour, honesty and intelligence, and for teaching me to think about everything; to my Supervisor, Mary Kavanagh, for her exceptional mentoring, for her honesty, patience and willingness to be personal.

A sincere thank-you to Catherine Ross, Mary-Anne McTrowe and Kevin Sehn for technical assistance, for their willingness to put aside whatever job they may be doing to help, and their ideas for the best way to get the job done.

A heartfelt thank-you to my friends and family: to Robin for his insight, encouragement, support, and technical help. A thank-you to Skye for enduring “boring” art openings, putting up with all the “weird” stuff around the house, and for his humour. Thanks also to my parents and parents-in-law for support, encouragement and time, and to my friends for their love, acceptance and for laughing with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
APPROVAL/SIGNATURE PAGE	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF IMAGES	vii
<u>INTRODUCTION: <i>Some Nerve: Invisible Debilitations, Explosive Restraint and the In-Valid</i></u>	<u>1</u>
Theoretical Concepts, Material Practice	3
Found Objects and Gender	5
Personal Narrative	6
<u>CHAPTER ONE: SOCIAL/ HISTORICAL <i>OTHERS</i></u>	<u>7</u>
Otherness: Reclamation/Subversion	7
Mind/Body Dichotomy: Feminist Theoretical Perspectives	7
Grotesque, Carnival, Abject, <i>Informe</i> , Uncanny: Theoretical Considerations in Material Practice	9
<i>Informe</i> /Formlessness: Spit, Slime, Secretions	16
<u>CHAPTER TWO: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELVES</u>	<u>21</u>
The Return of the Repressed: Surrogates, Psychoanalysis and Biographical Narratives	21
Thesis Exhibition <i>Some Nerve: Invisible Debilitations, Explosive Restraint and the In-Valid</i>	22
Video: <i>Every Body Was Afraid</i>	22
Photographs: <i>Surrogates</i>	25
Cardboard, paper cut outs: <i>Friends, Family, Foes</i>	29
Religious Prescriptions: Hysteria, Vibrators, Antidepressants and Behaviour Modification:	
<i>The Be(Happy) Attitudes</i>	30
Objects, audio: <i>Captivity</i>	35
The “voodoo” doll: <i>Sadie (My Sadie)</i>	36
Kinetic sculpture: <i>A Horse in Motion</i>	37
Text, Illustrations: <i>Ideas Laboratory/Archive</i>	37
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	<u>39</u>
REFERENCES	40

<u>APPENDICES</u>	44
Ideas Laboratory / Archive (Selection of 6 from 23 Ideas)	44
IMAGES: MFA (Art) Studio Production, 2011 – 2013	52
IMAGES: MFA (Art) Thesis Exhibition, September 14 – 28, 2013	61

LIST OF IMAGES

IMAGES: MFA (Art) Studio Production, 2011 - 2013

1. <i>Untitled</i> , Experiments in Performance, Lethbridge Arts Days, 2011	52
2. <i>Fault Lines</i> , performance, sculptural object, Lethbridge, Alberta, 2011	52
3. <i>Miranda</i> , kinetic sculpture, University of Lethbridge Faculty of Fine Arts Exhibition, 2012	52
4. <i>Blow</i> , video stills, 2011	53
5. <i>Moulting</i> , video stills, CASA Inaugural Exhibition: <i>Transitions and Transformations</i> , Lethbridge, Alberta, 2011	53
6. <i>Hot Tail</i> , performance, kinetic sculpture, Parlour Window, Lethbridge, Alberta, 2012	54
7. <i>Metamorphosis</i> , performance, sculpture, 2012	55
8. <i>Drool Machine/Leak Body</i> , kinetic sculpture, 2012, 2013	56
9. a.), b.) <i>Untitled</i> , studio objects, 2012	56-57
10. <i>Head Gear Studies</i> , 2013	58
11. <i>Ortho Ensemble</i> , video stills, 2013	59
12. <i>Friends, Family Foes</i> , paper cut-outs, 2013	59
13. <i>Friends, Family Foes</i> , paper cut-outs (on motorized platform), <i>work in progress</i> , 2013	60

IMAGES: MFA (Art) Thesis Exhibition, September 14 - 28, 2013

14. <i>Surrogates, Friends, Family, Foes</i> , Installation view	61
15. a.), b.), c.) <i>Friends, Family, Foes</i> , Installation view, detail	62-63
16. a.), b.), c.) <i>Surrogates</i> , Installation view, Six Selected Polaroids, from collection	63-64
17. a.) Every Body Was Afraid, <i>video</i> , installation view, video stills	65
18. a.), b.) <i>Head Gear</i> , Installation view, detail	66
19. <i>The Be(Happy) Attitudes, Captivity, Sadie (My Sadie) and A Horse In Motion</i> , Installation view	67
20. <i>The Be(Happy) Attitudes</i> , sculptural object	67
21. a.), b.) <i>Captivity</i> , sculptural objects, audio	68
22. a.), b.) <i>Sadie (My Sadie)</i> , sculptural object	69
23. a.), b.) <i>A Horse In Motion</i> , motorized sculpture	70-71

INTRODUCTION

Some Nerve: Invisible Debilitations, Explosive Restraint and the In-Valid

Some Nerve is a Master of Fine Arts thesis that includes a written component, studio production and a thesis exhibition. For this degree I have completed numerous video, audio and photographic works, prints, drawings, kinetic sculptures, and performances.¹ The thesis exhibition includes six photographs in light boxes, cardboard cut-out drawings, five sculptural and kinetic objects, and illustrations.

Over the course of the degree, I have experimented with public performance and new materials in the studio. I have presented at three conferences and my work has been accepted to two online publications. I have exhibited in various venues throughout western Canada, and have attended several residencies and workshops.²

This paper explores my art practice as it has evolved from collecting and reassembling found objects, to incorporating these objects into an exploration of the grotesque, to reinterpreting historical or medical objects used in physical and/or psychological disciplinary and corrective treatments. I look at the significance of objects in relation to constructions of *otherness* through a feminist lens. Prosthetics and body restraints in various works become metaphorical indicators for contemporary conditions of social constraint, silencing, and powerlessness.

In Chapter One, I look at the body and the social and historical constructs that position *others* as outsiders. The mind/body dichotomy at the heart of western philosophy ensures an exclusive and oppressive hierarchy that positions women (and other *others*) in the margins. Women's historical association with the body is attributed to an exclusion from subjectivity.³ Subjective, unstable, decentred experience is relegated to the feminine other. To deconstruct ideas about subject identity, I subvert or appropriate hybrid and metamorphic aspects of the grotesque, body art and performance. Sigmund Freud, Georges Bataille, Rosalind Krauss, Yve Alain Bois, Julia Kristeva, Mary Russo, and Mikhail Bakhtin

¹ *Blow*, video, 2012; *Miranda*, kinetic sculpture, 2012; *Hot Tail*, performance, kinetic sculpture, 2012; *Metamorphosis*, performance, installation, 2013; *Drool Machine*, kinetic sculpture: 2013; *Body Spill*, studio objects, sculpture, 2012/13.

² Selected works include *Moulting*, video, in CASA's inaugural *Transitions and Transformations* exhibition, *Mutopia 7*, a residency and workshop at The Banff Centre led by John Grzinich with M:ST; a paper presented at The University of Western Ontario (department of Visual Arts); a publication in the journal *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org>.

³ Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters With the Vulnerable Self* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002) 1.

articulate theories of the uncanny, *informe* (formlessness), abject, and carnival. Power, social control, discipline and punishment are examined in institutional structures, interpersonal relationships, and in the individual body.

In Chapter Two I expand on the historical and medical pathologization of normal and “abnormal” bodies to include family history and personal narrative. I illustrate how historical and contemporary agency is undermined and how marginalized *others* are constructed through the language of “disease.” By assessing a range of treatment methods including historical medical and psychological instruments, prescription medications and apparatuses intended to improve the body aesthetically, I examine how authority is exercised and internalized through institutional language, personal relationships and the individual. Power is examined through a series of affiliations: primary objects, kinship networks and interpersonal relationships. Longing, desire, aging, love, hate, revenge, intercourse, and trauma are explored in my Thesis Exhibition, *Some Nerve: Invisible Debilitations, Explosive Restraint and the Invalid*, and theorized through postmemory,⁴ transgenerational trauma, collective narrative and the familial gaze. Such luminaries as Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse, artists whose lives and production have become blurred as their art is read through biographical and psychological lenses, have influenced and inspired my creative process.

The challenge of this degree has been merging theory and practice, academic tradition and intuition in the process of art making while explaining the work within the limitations of language. I have employed both an intuitive, stream-of-conscious method of working and a literal, language-based approach to transform theory into visual form. I prefer to engage intuition and the unconscious because it privileges chance, embodied knowledge and personal narrative; this is reflected in the most recent work.

Some Nerve has multiple readings; it can mean both fear and courage.⁵ To have nerve means to act out or to engage in socially unacceptable behaviours, unconcerned with consequences. Nerve also implies

⁴ *Postmemory*, described by Marianne Hirsch, is memory that is “delayed, indirect or secondary.” In the example she gives of the holocaust, postmemory is mediated by the father-survivor but is determinative for the son born after the event. This means the son experiences an ambivalence in the sense that he has both a passion and distance towards his father’s experiences due to lack of understanding. See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1997): 13.

⁵ Taylor Clark, *Nerve: Poise Under Pressure, Serenity Under Stress, and the Brave New Science of Fear and Cool*, (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2011): 16.

fear. To have “some” nerve signifies having *some* courage or partial confidence, possessing an intermittent boldness as in the case of an art practice marked by exhibitionism and retreat, exposure and obscurity.

“Nervous System” also carries a double meaning: the nervous system is an individual’s “cylindrical bundles of fibres”⁶ which determine voluntary and involuntary functions; it is also a system of nervousness, or cultural anxiety brought about by political and institutional power structures and socialization. These *Nervous Systems*, which are themselves precarious in their own ways, operate to produce fear with the goal of exercising power and control over citizens and societies. How they operate to undermine individual agency, to deplete human beings of their cultural/social capital and political voice is pertinent to my research.

Theoretical Concepts, Material Practice

To tie in disparate themes and practices, interests and theories, objects and media that recur in my work, I turn to the idea of the *Bricoleur* as one who “actively draws together disparate strands to produce new and sometimes transgressive meanings.”⁷ Fluctuating between control and chaos, experimentation and formula, chance and reason, I invite the absurd and irrational, sabotage and failure into the process of art making. I embrace contradiction, paradox and hypocrisy. I provide dichotomous explanations while simultaneously criticizing them: my art practice on the one hand, touches on ideas of containment, restraint, sublimation, repression, reason, boundaries, order, systems, rules, symmetry, beauty, what is clean, holy, godly⁸. On the other hand I explore the lower side: chaos, leakage, explosions, orgasm, vomit, swears and slang, screams, cries, emotions, asymmetry, dirt, unclean, unholy, ungodly, the devil, the earth, water, darkness, the gutter, the periphery, the margins. The arbitrary delegation of good and evil, mind and body, male and female that are collectively decided, agreed upon, and perpetuated by contemporary restrictions, is an important part of this investigation.

The “explosive restraint” considered in my material practice includes objects and images that reflect containment and ooze, restraint and violence, rigidity and excess, inhibition and exhibition,

⁶ “Nervous System” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nervous_system, Accessed June 9, 2013.

⁷ Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies*, 219.

⁸ Ewa Kuryluk describes the top and the right as the place reserved for male and god in grotesque imagery, while the bottom left is reserved for the devil and the female. See Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: the Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques*, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 16, 17.

repression and explosion. The “In-Valid,” a term used to refer to the disabled body, also implies what is untrue, “based on erroneous information or unsound reasoning.”⁹ The emphasis on different syllables shifts the meaning of the term while bringing up questions of social and cultural ideas about who is *valid*, and who is not. The infirm, the weak, and the feeble – definitions of invalid – denote a vulnerability that is shared by all human beings and challenges ideas of *otherness*. Mental afflictions that render the functional body dysfunctional, or the state of being ‘wounded in the mind’ are what I call “invisible debilitations.”

Hélène Cixous, in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, speaks against the history of patriarchal consequences and implores women to write, to speak up and be visible.

And I too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn't open my mouth [...] I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself: You are mad! [...]

(for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a [...] divine composure) hasn't accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble. [...] writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural - hence political, typically masculine - economy; that is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that is frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never *her* turn to speak – this being all the more serious and unpardonable I that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.¹⁰

Cixous addresses themes reiterated in my research pertaining to language, speaking out or silencing, shame, madness, desire, repression, normalcy, subversion, and (female) monstrosity. While she acknowledges the historical silencing of women in patriarchal structures and that there is no such thing as a generalized concept of one “woman,” her call to women to speak out through writing is a plea that goes beyond the verbal text. As I see it, she implores women to speak out with their whole selves, mind *and* body; *she* must put *herself* into the text, and “write herself,” to be valued in history and to be present in the world.¹¹ This confirms the importance of the body in art. In performance or body-based works, the body that has been denied and discredited may “write” itself, may speak, and make its mark in a visual way. Cixous claims

⁹ *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. “invalid.”

¹⁰ Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” In *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends, Second Edition*, edited by David H. Richter, (Boston, New York: Bedford Books, 1998): 1454.

¹¹ Cixous, *Laugh*, 1454.

that 'woman' commits an act of transgression by simply opening her mouth in public. By “writing,” (speaking, performing, being present) women take up the “challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus”¹² and will break out of the imprisonment of silence – rather than accepting “the margin or the harem.”¹³

Found Objects and Gender

Found objects have significant meaning in my work, and are often repurposed or altered. By adopting the Surrealist practice of “visiting flea markets and second hand stores to find beautiful objects most people consider ugly: bric-a-brac, pop objects, and urban debris,”¹⁴ I incorporate, alter or repurpose such items in my work. The Surrealist “fondness for trash, eyesores, rejects, peeling surfaces, odd stuff, kitsch,” reveals an egalitarian attitude toward subject matter.¹⁵

Objects gleaned in my art practice include tree branches from urban streets, “feminine” objects,¹⁶ and personal ephemera. My collections of everyday objects, images, and instructions examine taxonomies of gender and constructions of social identity.¹⁷ As signifiers of culture, objects reflect who we are, what we do, and how we treat others. A relationship between objects and bodies is explored in this paper as objects intended to enhance, control or correct (mainly) women’s bodies and behaviours. Playing the role of “imposter archaeologist”¹⁸ gleaned rejected and underprivileged objects led me to examine everything that exists in the periphery, including marginalized *others*: outsiders, freaks and misfits categorized as deviant or abnormal.

¹² Cixous, *Laugh*, 1457.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: Noonday Press, 1977), 79.

¹⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*, 78-79.

¹⁶ “Gendered objects” such as nylon pantyhose, plastic hair curlers and other found or secondhand store items are employed in my work are not used exclusively by women but have a historical precedence and are importantly used to improve or maintain youthful or infantile beauty, sexuality and appearance.

¹⁷ Objects and images from popular culture influence gender identification through a process of early socialization. These images saturate our visual environment and structure our knowledge of others, the world and ourselves. Everyday objects are the most powerful influence on identity construction, precisely because they are ordinary and everyday. See Anna Wagner-Ott, “Analysis of Gender Identity Through Doll and Action Figure Politics in Art Education,” *Studies in Art Education* 43 (2002): 246.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1321088> Accessed August 1, 2013.

¹⁸ I coined this term to describe the act of collecting and uncovering similar to an archeological dig, but of objects around me as a non-accredited, non-professional, anti-specialist, resisting proper accreditation.

Personal Narrative

Making work in an academic context demands that knowledge be contextualized in a rational, art historical, critical, and theoretical framework at odds with a material practice based on human emotion and vulnerability. The tension and dissonance between formal language and symbolic material forms can be both frustrating and invigorating. My recent work favours personal narrative and lived experience as I unearth my grandparents' traumatic experiences in World War II. Their survivor story is infused with shame and secrecy that influenced the next generation. The complexity, contradictions, paradoxes and hypocrisies that played out in my family of origin, positioned us as outsider in myriad contexts.

I value the biographical information of artists and writers, including Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, Jana Sterbak, Franz Kafka and others, which draws attention to their particular social, historical and political contexts and experiences. Transgenerational trauma, postmemory, collective identity and the autobiographical work of Bourgeois and Hesse are important references because their personal challenges with primary objects, identity, and gender, inspire and inform their subject matter and material practice.

CHAPTER ONE: SOCIAL/HISTORICAL *OTHERS*

“What is clear is that the strength of the western logos as a symbolic system depends in large part on defining those who are other, those who escape normative identity, if they successfully resist total exclusion, as marginal and dangerous.” -- Margrit Shildrick¹⁹

“The search for a form of morality acceptable to everybody in the sense that everyone should submit to it, strikes me as catastrophic.” – Michel Foucault²⁰

“The reason is that the female is, as it were, a deformed male . . .” – Aristotle²¹

Otherness: Reclamation/Subversion

This chapter explores how otherness is constructed socially and historically and examines the incessant past and present *othering* of women. Discourses in alterity, or otherness, include the formation of the self (the ‘I’), which is dependent on the *other* to determine identity.²² To declare what the self *is not*, takes place internally as well as externally. While otherness is “configured in terms of class, gender, sex, race, nationality, ethnicity and so on,”²³ the postmodern idea of the self allows the possibility that new identities can be multiple, fluid and ambiguous. The modern subject has depended on the monstrous *other* to secure its position as subject.

Mind/Body Dichotomy: Feminist Theoretical Perspectives

Feminist and cultural theorists suggest that the fundamental philosophy that contributes to the oppression of *others* in western discourse is mind/body dualism located in the Cartesian modern subject. This dichotomy is hierarchical, privileging mind over body. The body, devalued, is associated with female, animal, and nature and is to be transcended or overcome.²⁴

The idea that women are somehow more closely linked to corporeality and biology stems from patriarchal assumptions dating back to ancient Greece, when philosophy established the body as a “source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason.”²⁵ It was purported that reason should rule over

¹⁹ Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), 4.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*. Translated by Alan Sheridan and others; edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman. New York: Routledge, 1988.

²¹ Aristotle, August 9, 2013, <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~hist.380/aristotle.html>

²² Esther Peeren and Silke Horstkotte, “Introduction: The Shock of the Other,” in *The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities*, edited by Silke Horstkotte and Esther Peeren. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 9.

²³ Peeren and Horstkotte, “Introduction: The Shock of the Other,” 9.

²⁴ Elizabeth Grosz. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 4.

²⁵ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 5.

irrational appetites of the body, just as ideas mattered more than material forms.²⁶ Cultural theorist Elizabeth Grosz credits misogynist patriarchal assumptions with relegating women to a secondary social position by confining them to bodies that are “frail, imperfect, unruly, unreliable” yet at the same time vulnerable and in need of patriarchal protection.²⁷ This overdetermination of woman to the corporeal involves a patriarchal detachment with a privileged access to women's bodies and services.²⁸

Further, the motif of autogenesis, which is the idea that man created himself out of nothing, is connected to ideologies about freedom in Western history, what Susan Buck Morss describes as a “narcissistic illusion of total control.”²⁹

Yet present feminist consciousness in scholarship has revealed how fearful of the biological power of women this mythic construct can be. The truly autogenetic being is entirely self-contained. If it has any body at all, it must be one impervious to the senses, hence safe from external control. Its potency is in its lack of corporeal response. In abandoning its senses, it, of course, gives up sex. Curiously, it is precisely in this castrated form that the being is gendered male – as if, having nothing so embarrassingly unpredictable or rationally un-controllable as the sense-sensitive penis, it can then confidently claim to be the phallus. Such an asensual, anaesthetic protruberance is this artifact: modern man.³⁰

This exclusive and oppressive hierarchical privileging is the impetus for exploring the subversion of identity and subjectivity in my research and material practice. Working with concepts of the grotesque, carnival, abject, *informe*, uncanny, social control, restraint, and autobiographical narratives, my goal is to undermine the concept of the Cartesian dichotomy and imagine a corporeal subjectivity based on embodied experience in connection with others.³¹

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

²⁷ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 14.

²⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered,” *October* 62 (1992): 8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778700>. Accessed July 22, 2013.

³⁰ Buck Morss, *Aesthetics*, 8.

³¹ Elizabeth Grosz describes the necessity of acknowledging and privileging the physical body in order for a sense of place and connection with others in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994): xii, while Sarah Cohen Shabot takes this argument further to incorporate the grotesque as the quintessential postmodern subject that encompasses intersubjectivity and embodied experience in her article “The Grotesque Body: Fleshing Out the Subject.” in *The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities*, edited by Silke Horstkotte and Esther Peeren, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 57-67.

Grotesque, Carnival, Abject, *Informe*, Uncanny: Theoretical Considerations in Material Practice

I first came to the concept of the grotesque when I created a wearable tentacle-like suit and recorded my performance underwater. I “transformed” myself into a hybrid human-octopus.³² The grotesque is often portrayed as deformed, hybrid or metamorphic,³³ with ambiguous gender and bodily excess. Associated with “the earth, corrupted flesh, the sexual, and the scatological,” the grotesque can include plant, animal and human imagery.³⁴ Grotesque imagery defies nature and the beautiful and includes ugly, monstrous hybrid caricatures such as the centaur, griffin, Minotaur, satyr, and sphinx.³⁵ While the classical body – transcendent, monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, rational and individual – is the ideal of the high culture of the Renaissance, the grotesque body is, conversely, open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, changing, low, and carnivalesque.³⁶

The grotesque body can be described as a body that “transgresses its own limits.”³⁷ In other words, it is not a closed or complete unit, separate from the rest of the world, but outgrows itself, is open, ambiguous, and unfinished. It lacks clearly defined boundaries.³⁸ Because of these characteristics, Sarah Cohen Shabot defends the grotesque as an important site for the new, embodied, postmodern subject.³⁹ The grotesque imagines a reality that is fluid, changeable, heterogeneous, and disorderly, through irrational, absurd, distorted or exaggerated imagery.⁴⁰ The grotesque is emphatically fleshly and embodied (because the body is excessive or exaggerated), and offers the potential for interconnectedness as opposed to the separate, immutable Cartesian subject.⁴¹ In this way, the grotesque undermines ideas of western symmetry and idyllic beauty while playfully subverting the ideals of the rational, pure mind.

³² By placing my body in the work, I “transformed” into a hybrid imaginary being. During the recording of the performance, I shared the pool with a competitive swim team who physically collided with me at one point. It appears as though the beast is ravaging or consuming the swimmer, amplifying the differences between the “freak” outsider and the synchronized, uniform team.

³³ Frances S. Connelly. "Grotesque." *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics. Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press. <http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0244>. Accessed August 1, 2013.

³⁴ Connelly, “Grotesque.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), 8.

³⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1984), 26.

³⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 26.

³⁹ Sara Cohen Shabot. “The Grotesque Body: Fleshing Out the Subject”, in *The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities*, edited by Silke Horstkotte and Esther Peeren, 57-67. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 57.

⁴⁰ Shabot, “The Grotesque Body”, 57 - 58.

⁴¹ Ibid., 60.

In the work *Miranda* (2012),⁴² I incorporate grotesque hybridity as machine, animal, and human representations are ambiguously merged. The sculpture consists of a plaster and foam human midsection and is cast from my body, from waist to upper leg. An articulating wooden tail protrudes from the lower back near the buttocks. A 12-volt electrical motor is secured to the “body” and powers the tail that rotates in a circular motion. The tail becomes rigid and then flaccid with each rotation.

Miranda is inspired by the fictional novel *Geek Love* by Katherine Dunn, which tells the story of the Binewski family whose travelling circus, the “Carnival Fabulon,” stays in business with the help of their deformed, “freak” children who were physically mutated by the chemicals and radioisotopes ingested by their mother during pregnancy. The Carnival Fabulon is a place where norms are abhorred and outsiders are regarded with suspicion. One night, a hunchbacked albino dwarf discovers the otherwise “normal” *Miranda* onstage at a strip club, exposing her small tail.

The tail in *Miranda* is an example of excess: a characteristic of the grotesque. Physiological anomalies, described in medical literature as malformations, deformations, anatomical curiosities, or “cosmetic stigma,”⁴³ expose ideas about non-normative bodies and show how language, history, social context, and other factors determine whether an attribute will be valued or viewed as a congenital defect.

The similar seduction/repulsion can be explained by the *uncanny*. Freud describes the uncanny as that which is familiar and frightening, homely or domestic and is visible, but ought to remain hidden. It includes what is obscure or inaccessible to knowledge, like an animate object that doesn’t move or an inanimate object that moves: wax figures, dolls and automatons.⁴⁴ In many of my works I animate inanimate objects to provoke a sense of the uncanny and to ambiguously morph machine, animal, and human bodies to playfully destabilize identity.

The monstrous and the grotesque undermine the Cartesian ideal to imagine a new corporeal way of being with others. Margrit Shildrick parallels monstrosity and vulnerability as human conditions that

⁴² Exhibited in Faculty of Fine Arts Exhibition (University of Lethbridge) 2012 and at Annual Graduate Student Association “Meeting of the Minds” 2012 (University of Lethbridge) conference.

⁴³ Biswanath Mukhopadhyay, Ram M. Shukla, Madhumita Mukhopadhyay1, Kartik C. Mandal, Pankaj Haldar, Abhijit Benare. “Spectrum of human tails: A Report of Six Cases” *Journal of Indian Association of Pediatric Surgeons* 17 (2012): 23. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/darius.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=70543724&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, Accessed August 14, 2013.

⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud. “The ‘Uncanny.’” 1919, 4 - 5. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>. Accessed July 1, 2012.

threaten security and self-sufficiency. We are always vulnerable, she argues, because the monstrous isn't contained outside ourselves, it is within: "...what is at issue is the permeability of the boundaries that guarantee the normatively embodied self."⁴⁵ In other words, the position of "normal" identity is constantly shifting and is not guaranteed. Our identities are never stable, closed, or static as with the Cartesian subject of modernism, but change, shift and morph, allowing us to blur the lines between self and (monstrous) *other*. Because women have been associated with the body in all of its unpredictability, they share the threatening aspects of the monstrous. As Shildrick acknowledges the focus on "quasi-human beings" who have consistently confirmed the "normalcy and closure of the centred self,"⁴⁶ the monstrous *other* has assisted the modern subject in securing "his" self.⁴⁷

When it comes to figures of "embodied difference,"⁴⁸ bodily anomalies, mental illnesses, deviance and debilitations (whether conceptual, metaphorical or material) in my work, ethical considerations that explore a multiplicity of identity beyond normal/abnormal, good/evil, realized by the way my work attempts to contest the hierarchy between the monstrous and the normative (or at least draws attention to difference, especially where women have been called monstrous *other*). The ambiguity and unpredictability between the self and other is acknowledged in terms of fluid identity and our shared vulnerability.

The grotesque, uncanny, and carnival are considered in the work *Hot Tail* (2012). *Hot Tail* was a storefront window⁴⁹ performance where three live performers and five animated sculptural objects moved in time to a rhythmic choreography triggered by the viewer. Five human midsections, cast in plaster and foam with rotating tails, (similar in form to the work, *Miranda*), stood in front of the human performers. The viewers outside triggered a motion sensor and activated the entire production. The performers were instructed to move only when the machines powered up and the lights started flashing. The performers, with their backs to the viewers, swayed in a left-right motion, causing their identical wooden tails to swing back and forth in unison. The viewers controlled the production; through their voyeuristic curiosity, they

⁴⁵ Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁹ "Parlour Window" was an exhibition space run by David Hoffos and Mary-Anne McTrowe in downtown Lethbridge, Alberta.

initiated the “red light freak show”⁵⁰ activating the push-pull, seduction-repulsion characteristic of the grotesque.

Hot Tail is sensual and playful and evokes the spectacle of the carnivalesque as a place where bodily exposure, containment, disguise and masquerade, abjection and marginality, parody and excess may be delighted in. “The masks and voices of carnival resist, exaggerate, and destabilize the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain high culture and organized society.”⁵¹ The carnival allows social control to be abandoned as hierarchies are subverted.⁵² The carnival is the place where the normal order of things is inverted, and the marginalized, the common, and the outcast may be temporarily released from their roles.⁵³ While carnival lasts, it is a special time with its own rules. It is an escape from the normal way of life and has a universal spirit of revival and renewal.⁵⁴

While the figures in *Hot Tail* do not allow the viewer access to their bodies, they tempt and undermine desire as the boundaries of the window contain the excess of spectacle. The grotesque is often associated with seduction and repulsion, but in this case, the performers seduce and deny. In this way, they privilege the interior space (or the interior of the body). The “cavernous female body,” is associated with what is “earthy, material, hidden, dark, immanent and visceral.”⁵⁵ *Grotto*, Italian for cave, was coined during the Renaissance when ancient Roman ruins, villas, and baths were excavated.⁵⁶ The mythology of the cave is characterized as a trap and a place of shelter, protection, and imprisonment. This is reiterated in the interior of the woman’s body, where the womb offers the child liberation from the body, but could bring dire consequences if the child remains trapped inside.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ A red light district is an urban area devoted to prostitution, characterized by the red lights and window spaces in which scantily clad women display their bodies to draw men in for sex. In Amsterdam, the red light district dates from the 13th Century. See Melanie Abrams, “City of (red) Lights” in *History Today*, 59 (2009): 6.

“Freak show” refers to the 19th Century travelling exhibitions of physical deformities and anomalies popular in England and America. Deviant and unusual bodies have undergone different perspectives over time. See Fordham, Brigham A Fordham, “Dangerous Bodies: Freak Shows, Expression, and Exploitation” in *UCLA Entertainment Law Review* 14 (2007): 207-245.

⁵¹ Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 62.

⁵² Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8,7.

⁵⁵ Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 1.

⁵⁶ Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas*, 11.

⁵⁷ Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas*, 20.

Feminist theorists, who do not necessarily negate the association of women to the body, look to playful, subversive representations of femaleness as abject and grotesque with the intention of resisting fixed rules and categories.⁵⁸ While carnival may reinforce ideas about the taboo body, the pregnant, ageing, and marginalized body⁵⁹ and never completely bring about social change in dominant culture, the value of carnival is in its symbolic models of transgression.⁶⁰ These models of transgression and images of unruly women can be problematic, but hold potential for new models of representation or utopian possibilities.⁶¹

In the performance *Metamorphosis* (2012), I continued my exploration of hybridity and metamorphosis inspired by Franz Kafka's novella of the same name.⁶² During the performance, I acted out a series of rituals by binding and strapping my limbs into "insect legs" while suspended from the ceiling in a canvas harness. The insect legs were constructed from tree branches, joined by hinges similar to a marionette hinge. For the duration of the performance, I emitted a variety of high-pitched screams, screeches and other vocalizations (singing along to a modified version of the audio in Yoko Ono's 1970 video *The Fly*), while "transforming" into an insect, "performing madness" and acting "hysterical." By performing unruly, inappropriate behaviours, I intended to question the historical construction of women's "diseases" and the out-of-control body.⁶³

My vocalizations mimicked the "performances" of the "hysterics" in the Salpêtrière Asylum in Paris, France.⁶⁴ Jean-Martin Charcot, the influential professor of clinical diseases of the nervous system, who diagnosed and analyzed female patients suffering from "hysteria," encouraged a sense of theatricality

⁵⁸ Fiona Carson, "Feminism and the Body," In *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2001), 117.

⁵⁹ Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 56.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶² In "Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka, the main character wakes up one morning to discover he is no longer human, but an insect. See Franz Kafka, 1946, *Metamorphosis*, trans. A. L. Lloyd, (New York: Vanguard Press), 1.

⁶³ As with Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, and Franz Kafka, the artist's biography is important to my practice and to this work in particular. I identify with Kafka on a personal level. Plagued by doubt and self-loathing, he wrote obsessively but despised his own work and felt it was never good enough.

⁶⁴ From 1863 to 1893, Jean Martin Charcot was the professor at the Salpêtrière Asylum in Paris, France. The Hysterical attack was characterized as "tonic rigidity", "grands mouvements" also called "clownsomeness" because of the acrobatics produced were circus-like, and vivid emotional states such as "terror, hatred, love", and then a delirium of sobbing, tears and laughter and a "return to the real world." Evidence of the disease was photographed in *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* and the patients' "erotic misbehaviour" was widely publicized. See Rhona Justice- Malloy in "Charcot and the Theatre of Hysteria" *Journal of Popular Culture*, 28 (1995): 133, 134, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.darius.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9601232328>

at the Salpêtrière. Patients “acted” their hysteria as they performed “erotic misbehaviour”⁶⁵ in front of the camera for a photographic publication.⁶⁶ It also seemed patients learned hysterical movements, gestures and vocalizations after they entered the Salpêtrière. Charcot sometimes had his patients dress in costume as he delivered lectures at the hospital amphitheatre to audiences intrigued by the hypnotized hysteric.⁶⁷ Due to the prevalence of the disease and the growing interest in hysteria, Charcot and other physicians began to diagnose patients more frequently simply because they were seeking and expecting to find hysterical symptoms. This contributed to speculation about the validity of the disease.⁶⁸

The medicalization of the female body, which was seen as “susceptible” to hysteria, is reified through discourses in science and medicine, psychoanalysis, and institutionalized social relations according to Foucault and reiterated by Anne Balsamo.⁶⁹ In this way, language and communication perpetuate accepted hegemonic ideologies about disease and deviant bodies. These “power relations” — a collection of practices that produce cultural effects — operate to exercise control over the body.⁷⁰ As such, taken for granted “truths” about the hysterical female body, which was culturally constructed and institutionalized, come into question.⁷¹

While Foucault articulated frameworks that construct ideologies about the necessity to control the female body in terms of correction and cure, he missed a fundamentally important disciplinary method — gender — as an “organized, institutionalized, system of differences that constitutes the individual body and renders it meaningful.”⁷² Feminist theorists have attempted to draw attention to this omission by reminding us that the body is culturally constructed but is also flesh and blood and that both nature and culture are “mutually determining systems of understanding.”⁷³

Women have been scrutinized for their behaviour throughout Western history. The unruly woman is a common caricature, beginning with Eve in the Garden of Eden. In early modern Europe, a popular

⁶⁵ Rhona Justice-Malloy. “Charcot and the Theatre of Hysteria.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 28 (1995), 134. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.darius.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9601232328>. Accessed August 1, 2013.

⁶⁶ Justice-Malloy, “Charcot,” 134.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁸ Justice-Malloy, “Charcot,” 136.

⁶⁹ Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 20.

⁷⁰ Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, 21.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 23.

adage calls woman, “an imperfect animal, without faith, law, fear, constancy.”⁷⁴ While men were thought to have acquired bad behaviour from how they were raised, women were believed to be physiologically determined. Physicians in the sixteenth century described women as containing cold and wet humors. (Men were hot and dry). This meant women had a changeable, deceptive and tricky temperament. “Her womb was like a hungry animal; when not fed amply by sexual intercourse or reproduction, it was likely to wander about her body, overpowering her speech and senses.” While males suffered from “retained sexual juices” as well, he was able to control himself through study, wine or work. Women, however, considered more fragile and unsteady, just became hysterical.⁷⁵

The performance, *Metamorphosis*, also considers American art historian and critic Amelia Jones’ articulation of body art as a potential means to “dislocate or decenter the Cartesian subject of modernism.”⁷⁶ Jones uses the term “body art” instead of “performance art” to describe works that emerged in the 1960s to mid 1970s that may not necessarily take place in front of an audience, but involve an enactment of the artist’s body. The “body/self” she describes, with all of its racial, gender, and sexual identifiers *reveals* “the hidden body that secured the authority of modernism.”⁷⁷ By exposing the body and performing the exaggerations of sexual, ethnical or other non-normative bodies, the artist dispels myths of the detached, universal, authoritative modern subject.

The female body in art and commercial work has historically been an object of the male gaze. The female body, as a potentially fetishized object, embodies “lack” because of the absence of the phallus.⁷⁸ Amelia Jones describes this distrust of revealing the body, due to a Marxian distrust of art forms that elicit pleasure. That is, art that seduces rather than repels could bring about passive consumers rather than active critics.⁷⁹ And yet, body art, rather than distancing the spectator, solicits them, draws them in to an exchange with others, and offers intersubjectivity.⁸⁰ While criticized for its narcissism, body art has a place

⁷⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975): 147. Accessed November, 2012, www.fll.vt.edu/Bixler/theoreticalreadings/zemon.pdf

⁷⁵ Davis, “Women on Top,” 148.

⁷⁶ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1.

⁷⁷ Jones, *Body Art*, 14.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

in the exploration of interconnectedness and turns the subject (paradoxically) outward.⁸¹ In the same way, the open, protruding and grotesque body blends with the world, connects with others and offers ideas for a new, embodied subject capable of undermining and moving beyond the modernist ideal. Feminist artists appropriate the grotesque in their work as a method of undermining the separate, Cartesian ideal. Through my performance of unruly, awkward, erotic, and regressive vocalizations and movements, *Metamorphosis* draws attention to the historical pathologizing of women's sexuality and mental illness.

Czech/Canadian artist Jana Sterbak has worked with restraint, mechanical objects and the body, pointing to power and disciplinary measures. She questions how social and psychological processes shape individuals and how we subjugate ourselves to this power through self-surveillance. Some of her works involve the body directly, as in *Remote Control I and II* (1989), where two male assistants lower a female participant into large caged crinolines. She may manoeuvre through the space through an electronic remote control device, but her body is rigidly constrained in the apparatus and her feet do not touch the ground. Sterbak's docile bodies reflect restrictions on the corporeal.⁸² Sterbak manages to evade dichotomous hierarchies in her work. Bruce Ferguson remarks that configurations of power are within the physical limits of the crinoline as oppositions of control and loss; technophilia and technophobia and so on are simultaneously engaged, blurring boundaries.⁸³

Informe/Formlessness: Spit, Slime, Secretions

The excesses of the body, and the body that is uncontained, protruding, and open to the world (characteristic of the grotesque), find parallels in the *informe*. The *informe* or formlessness is described by Georges Bataille and expanded on by Yves Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss in *Formless: A User's Guide*. Formlessness isn't immaterial; rather, it includes everything that resides in the gutter, the discarded and disgusting. It includes base language such as swears and slang, socially unacceptable behaviours, and abject bodily detritus. It concerns what doesn't make sense or add up. As with the grotesque, it resists fixed rules

⁸¹ Ibid., 46.

⁸² Diana Nemiroff and Milena Kalinovska. "Jana Sterbak: States of Being," *Woman's Art Journal*, 14, (1993): 52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1358434>. Accessed July 30, 2013.

⁸³ Nemiroff and Kalinovska. "Jana Sterbak," 52.

and categories. It is described as an uprooting or slippage of reason, a slide towards lowness, (towards the lower bodily organs). In this way, the *informe* is an attempt to *bring things down*.⁸⁴

With this in mind, I constructed *Drool Machine* or *Leak Body*. It is a small sculptural object powered by an extremely slow (1rpm) motor. A reservoir of liquid drips intermittently from an orifice at the rear of the object, leaking a colourless, odourless fluid.

Michel Leirus describes spittle (or drool) as inconsistent, with indefinite contours. It is imprecise in colour and humidity. Spit is “unverifiable and non-hierarchized” which makes it a perfect symbol to undermine hierarchies – “spit is the very symbol of the *informe*”...⁸⁵

Drool Machine incorporates hybridity, merging machine and body. It plays on the term “snail trail,” a slang description of vaginal lubrication produced during female arousal. The slime or spittle produced by the *Drool Machine/Leak Body* is intended to be a witty and subversive undermining of misogynist loathing of the (female) body.

Sartre, according to Rosalind Krauss, articulates his disgust for the *visqueux* (slimy) and the female body that produces it. The *slimy* is neither solid nor liquid: “This flaccid ooze...does not have the resistance of solids; instead, as it clings stickily to the fingers, sucking at them, compromising them, it is docile.” Sartre favours solids, which are like tools and can be taken up and put down again, having served their purpose. “But the slimy, in the form of the gagging suction of a leech-like past that will not release its grip, seems to contain its own form of possessiveness.”⁸⁶ Sartre characterizes slime as feminine: “yielding, clinging, sweet, passive, possessive.” It is a substance that compromises the autonomous subject. “This idea of slime is a threat to autonomy and self-definition due to the suffocating nearness of the mother.”⁸⁷

In other words, as a concept, and a gendered object, slime is incorporated in *Drool Machine* to subversively undermine the privileging of solids and the privileged modern subject idealized as rational and autonomous. This substance, neither solid nor liquid, is indecisive. It occupies a position of otherness, and resists the dichotomous privileging of mind over body: it interrupts and disrupts autonomous control with

⁸⁴ Yve Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Informel/Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 16, 17.

⁸⁵ Bois and Krauss, *Informel/Formless*, 18.

⁸⁶ Rosalind Krauss, “‘Informe’ without Conclusion,” *October* 78 (1996), 92.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/778907>. Accessed February 24, 2012.

⁸⁷ Krauss, “Informe,” 92.

the undeniable presence of the (out of control) body. The vulnerability of the body leaks out of the machine. The idea of leakage, of precarious boundaries, fluid identities and resistance of fixed categories is realized in this work.

The incontinent machine mimics human stages of infancy and old age marked by “regressive”, slow, out of control functions, and bodily abjections. The abject, like the carnival, “disturbs identity, system, order. [It] does not respect borders, positions, rules.”⁸⁸ The carnival deals with what is common to all; so is it with the abject, in the sense that the abject concerns what is expelled from the body: vomit, shit, and so on. The abject is not an actual object, but is described as a threat. It both seduces and repels the subject. It exists in a place where meaning collapses. Julia Kristeva looks at the abject as separate from the subject, and yet is/was part of the subject. The abject is where the body borders on life and death - we expel so we might live; we expel until it is we who are expelled, therefore the corpse is the epitome of abjection. Abjection of the self occurs where there is loss of being, a rejection and/or altering of the self. It is related to the maternal body, which must be rejected in order to become a fully realized self.⁸⁹

Building on the *informe* and corrective treatment methods, the project *Ortho Ensemble* (2013), includes facial restraints and corrective medical implements inspired by orthodontic headgear. Spoons, spatulas, pacifiers, candy and other household objects are incorporated into a wearable restraint that inhibits speech. Language is distorted as a metaphor for social compliance, communication ruptures, powerlessness, and silencing. The mouth, “the visible sign of intelligence,”⁹⁰ is compromised.

In *Ortho Ensemble*, performers sing and recite texts while wearing the homemade headgear. The texts concern ways in which people or groups are silenced.⁹¹ Because Western culture has placed tremendous privilege on spoken language and has positioned language and speech as a sign of intelligence, *Ortho Ensemble* draws attention to speech that cannot be communicated because of conditions where

⁸⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, tr. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

⁸⁹ Kristeva, *Powers*, 13.

⁹⁰ Bois and Krauss, *Informe/Formless*, 18.

⁹¹ Examples of silencing include the use of fear of consequences by organizations: governments, social and familial groups or individuals to keep people from speaking out and/or the use of punishment to exercise social control. While a certain degree of social constraint is necessary for a civilized society, governments that employ civic silencing through laws undermine democratic freedoms.

autonomy is compromised.⁹² Slime, drool and spittle are considered in connection with the mouth (speaking and language). Michel Leirus reiterates this, describing spittle as that which “...lowers the mouth—the visible sign of intelligence – to the level of the most shameful organs...given the identical source of language and spittle, any philosophical discourse can legitimately be figured by the incongruous image of the sputtering orator.”⁹³ What is most important here is the struggle to say something you cannot say because of social or political silencing and a threat of consequences.

Strategic *othering* can be found in many real-world historical and contemporary conditions of systematic social constraint. The science fiction novel, *The Chrysalids*, by John Wyndham, takes place in a community that places the highest social and moral value on normal genetics and physical superiority. Rules and consequences are imposed to control citizens. Mutations occurring in humans and animals, such as excessive or multiple body parts: “a two-headed calf, a four-legged chicken”⁹⁴ are a constant threat. Called “Deviations” and defectives, these human and animal mutants are “Blasphemies” and “Offenses,” are “hateful in the sight of God,” and subject to punishment in the form of banishment or death.⁹⁵ What is interesting about this text, while it is fictitious, it names bodily anomalies (monstrosities) as negative and the body as a site of personal and moral responsibility, subject to punishment. The community enforces moral obedience through repetitive lectures (by parents and church leaders), targeted language (songs and rhymes, slogans), geographical separation (to maintain “cleanliness” and “purity”) and strict laws that result in exile or death enforced by government and religious authorities. Everyone in the community agrees upon what is considered normal.

While it is important to acknowledge that upholding norms is a critical aspect of society because deviant acts threaten social order,⁹⁶ and punishment is necessary to reinforce social values, moral bonds and social cohesion,⁹⁷ deviance is *created* when social groups make rules that apply only to particular individuals. By applying these rules to others, and labelling them as outsiders, they create otherness.

⁹² A further discussion of this kind involves examining social value and worth in human (and non-human) beings where speech and language are not the only determinants of intelligence; nor is intelligence the means of privilege, inclusion, or oppression.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁴ John Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* (London: M. Joseph, 1955, 1975), 22.

⁹⁵ Wyndham, *The Chrysalids*, 16.

⁹⁶ Peter Adler, *Constructions of Deviance: Social Power, Context and Interaction* ed. by Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 8.

⁹⁷ Mark S. Cladis, Ed. *Durkheim and Foucault: Perspectives on Education and Punishment* (Oxford: Durkheim Press, 1999), 19.

Deviance, then, is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender.”⁹⁸ Those who hold the power to control the normative order make and apply rules onto others. In this way, dominant groups impose their rules on the marginalized. Ideas about “valid” or “invalid” bodies are based on a set of collective decisions concerning which bodies fit inside the boundaries of what is considered normal and abnormal.

Examining constructions of otherness, transgression, and deviance through theoretical discourses of the body includes an investigation of language and objects that are employed to marginalize or exclude, along with “institutional structures and techniques which measure, correct or supervise and determine what is considered normal or abnormal.”⁹⁹ While Foucault offers a model to critique punishment and social constraints for their vast effects on “normalization,” and conformity¹⁰⁰ he also addresses power and control through the “cultural transformation of the meaning of body practices and bodily markers of identity.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, eds. *Constructions of Deviance: Social Power, Context and Interaction*, Fourth Ed. (California, Thomson Wadsworth, 2003): 4.

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 199.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Cladis, *Durkheim and Foucault: Perspectives on Education and Punishment* (Oxford: Durkheim Press, 1999), 5.

¹⁰¹ Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 20.

CHAPTER TWO: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELVES

“Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't "try" to do things. You simply 'must' do things.” –Ray Bradbury¹⁰²

“Universities should be teaching courses on instinct. Students should be encouraged and taught to listen to their hunches. To love, honour and obey their gut feelings. When logic is part, the intuitive part of the mind, the one that takes the bigger leaps, gets a shot at the steering wheel.”

-Terry O'Reilly¹⁰³

The Return of the Repressed: Surrogates, Psychoanalysis and Biographical Narratives

In this chapter, I explain the Thesis exhibition *Some Nerve: Invisible Debilitations, Explosive Restraint and the In-Valid* that explores power, conflict and silencing in the context of interpersonal relationships including friendships and 'primary objects' (the family).¹⁰⁴ These kinship connections create the institutional structure that is fundamental to human development through early socialization and identity formation. These intercourses are a locus of power as networks of a series of relations engaged in an exchange of power.¹⁰⁵

The process of art making explored here resembles Surrealist practices that experimented with free association, stream of consciousness, chance, intuition, and imagination.¹⁰⁶ I take the world of the psyche, personal hauntings, unpleasant imaginings, longings and desires, and translate this through drawings, video, objects and photographic representations. Surrogates, anthropomorphic machines, animal cyborgs, substitute friends, family and enemies make up this body of regressive work. The “mildly grotesque” or uncanny in everyday life is explored through subtle transgressions and political concerns. *Some Nerve* is

¹⁰² “Ray Bradbury Quotes” http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1630.Ray_Bradbury. Accessed August 7, 2013.

¹⁰³ “This I Know.” *Under the Influence with Terry O' Reilly*. CBC Radio: Canada. Saturday, June 15, 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/undertheinfluence/season-2/2013/06/15/this-much-i-know/index.html> Accessed June 30, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Donald Kuspit, “Symbolizing Loss and Conflict: Psychoanalytic Process in Louise Bourgeois' Art.” In *Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed, Volume 1*, ed. Phillip Larratt-Smith (London: Violette Editions, 2012), 130.

¹⁰⁵ Philip Barker, *Foucault: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 28.

¹⁰⁶ For a concise historical articulation on Surrealism from approximately 1924-1940s, see David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. While the movement was specific to its social and historical context, the Surrealist method and process of art making is relevant to my art practice. This includes an interest in Freudian psychoanalysis, the irrational, dreams, imagination, loss of control (of reason), automatic writing, free association, unconscious desires, repressed thoughts, art and life, undermining the aesthetic in art along with subverting the aesthetic value of art. Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism*, 16, 17.

about saying what cannot be said. It addresses social anxiety and explores the ‘wounded mind.’¹⁰⁷ To theorize autobiography, I look at postmemory, transgenerational trauma and collective narrative. The work and biographical narratives of Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse provide the connection to process, merging art and life.”

Video: *Every Body Was Afraid*, (2013), 2:01 minutes

Building on the project, *Ortho Ensemble* (2013), the video work, *Every Body Was Afraid* (2013), is based on selected text from an audio recording of an interview where my grandmother describes life in her small Mennonite village in the Ukraine just prior to Nazi occupation and eventual eviction. In the video, two performers put on the modified headgear in slow motion, voluntarily subjecting themselves to the corrective apparatus. The slowed movement eroticizes the opening and closing of their mouths which must accommodate the uncomfortable and intrusive prop. The body is sensually and ritualistically dressed. In the next sequence the handheld camera hovers toward an intimate close-up of the back of their heads. The bandage and elastic that secure the headgear to the face alludes to injury, bondage or recovery. The audio and video are separate and the viewer never sees the performers' lips move nor the front of their faces as they recite the audio. Pronunciation is distorted like a childhood rhyme recited with fingers in the mouth: the narrative expresses the terror of Communism and the threat of Siberia:

Everybody was afraid. Everybody was afraid if somebody said something and you didn't do that, they were so afraid you would send them to Siberia. Sometimes it was just a few words and (fft_) off they go to Siberia. Not that right away but next day, the other day they came, the militia or how do you call them, they came from the city and with the black...the... you call them, the black cars [...] Ya, like vans. And they took 'em away. So everybody was afraid to say something. Everybody was quiet [...] ¹⁰⁸

By using an apparatus to impede speech, the objects of *Every Body Was Afraid* act as metaphor for restriction and silencing enforced by governmental structures where speaking out was severely disciplined.

I chose dental headgear as a metaphorical prosthetic because its purpose is mainly aesthetic.

¹⁰⁷ Freud describes the term *trauma* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a wound not inflicted on the body but on the mind. See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996) 3.

¹⁰⁸ My grandmother, Maria (Buhler) Thiessen (1923 - 2012) recorded by Michael Thys in 2010. An excerpt from the audio recording was transcribed and given to participants to read aloud.

The class and social implications of straight or crooked teeth are a problem of the privileged: while crooked teeth may not have dire physical consequences, the social implications could determine a range of responses based on status and class and could indirectly affect economic conditions.

While the text in the video speaks to historical disciplinary measures imposed by political authorities, the objects reference a social and internalized form of control that can be political *and* social. Voluntarily submitting the body to aesthetic “improvements” is what Kathryn Pauly Morgan refers to as “Paradoxes of Choice.”¹⁰⁹ Women’s “choice” to undergo plastic surgery for example, is linked to the costs and benefits of that choice. While choice implies autonomy and agency, coercive persuasion under oppressive conditions is disguised as free will. Examining Foucault’s analysis of the body as an “object and target of power” involves disciplinary power over the body to create “docile bodies.” Once a body is docile, it may be “subjected, used, transformed and improved.”¹¹⁰ The features of disciplinary power to create docile bodies include:

1. The scale of control: treating the body individually and exercising subtle coercion.
2. The object of control: organizing and controlling the body’s movements and gestures.
3. The modality of control: uninterrupted, constant and supervised coercion that privileges the process rather than the result of an activity.¹¹¹

The constant uninterrupted coercion of aesthetic ideals (in the example of elective cosmetic surgery) can be compared to political coercion. In other words, both involve consequences that directly effect individual bodies.

Among the many historical instruments of discipline and punishment is one that was particular to women’s speech: the brank or “gossip’s bridle.” The brank was a large metal headpiece that fit over a woman’s face. A plate of iron placed in the mouth covered the tongue. The mouthpiece was either sharpened or covered with spikes. If the offender attempted to move her tongue in any way it was likely to be injured.¹¹² In the Middle Ages, women labelled “scolds”¹¹³ were treated as offenders of the public peace as “the free use of the tongue gave rise to riots and feuds...” Along with the Ducking Stool, where women

¹⁰⁹ Kathryn Pauly Morgan, “Women and The Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women’s Bodies” In *The Politics of Women’s Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance and Behaviour*, ed. Rose Weitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 120.

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline*, 136.

¹¹¹ Foucault, *Discipline*, 136 - 137.

¹¹² William Andrews, *Old Time Punishments* (London: Tabard Press Ltd, 1970), 38.

¹¹³ A “scold” or “scolding woman” was one who spoke freely, loudly, quarreled, gossiped or was “out of line.” See William Andrews, *Old Time Punishments*, (London: Tabard Press Ltd, 1970), 1.

were strapped to chairs and lowered into cold rivers as punishment, the Mayor and Justice used the brank on women who were charged with street brawling or for insulting constables.¹¹⁴

The brank worked to silence women: the guilty woman might also have been led through the village with a chain; or in some cases, if she didn't comply, she would be wheeled through the streets in a wheelbarrow. Sometimes the *threat* of the brank would be enough to keep women quiet. In *Ortho Ensemble* and *Every Body Was Afraid*, I mimicked corrective devices to create a work that would symbolically look at power structures that attempt to silence citizens.¹¹⁵

To theorize *Every Body Was Afraid* (2013), I look at transgenerational trauma and postmemory. Transgenerational trauma has been developed in reference to the children (and grandchildren) of Holocaust survivors.¹¹⁶ This can include a “narrative process of memory” which families translate to one another through familiar interactions and narratives from generation to generation. Because familial memories are a part of personal and collective identity, memory is socially conditioned and can be constructed, like “collective fiction.”¹¹⁷ In *Every Body Was Afraid* I respond to social constraint and specific social historical extremes of silencing, tying in the autobiographical by including my grandmother's story. The family unit is central in relating personal identity as several generations provide the historical background to shape and construct collective identity.¹¹⁸

Postmemory is similar to transgenerational trauma in that the event experienced by the previous generation(s) is removed, distanced and secondary to the present generation, but permeates or influences their lives. For example, while children born after the war lack a first-hand understanding of the event, they

¹¹⁴ Andrews, *Old Time*, 42.

¹¹⁵ A contemporary example of silencing can be found close to home. While Canada has maintained a reputation as democratic world leader when it comes to freedom of assembly, speech, and information, recent shifts in government policy have compromised these values. Describing Canada as, “the true north suppressed and disparate,” Adam Kingsmith looks at recently implemented legislative strategies: “unregistered civic demonstrations are inhibited and repressed, rebellious internet activities are scrutinized and supervised, government scientists are hushed and muzzled, and public information is stalled and mired by bureaucratic firewalls.” Kingsmith, Adam. “The Slow and Painful Death of Freedom in Canada.” *The Huffington Post*, April 29, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/adam-kingsmith/canada-freedom-of-press_b_2946418.html Accessed August 1, 2013.

¹¹⁶ Silke Horstkotte looks at two different concepts of transgenerational traumatization. While the psychoanalytic approach sees an unconscious transference or transmission from one generation to another, she favours the narrative process discussed above.

¹¹⁷ Silke Horstkotte is quoting Jonathan Crewe in “Transgenerational Mediations of Identity in Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Marcel Beyer's *Spies*,” in *The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities*, edited by Silke Horstkotte and Esther Peeren, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007): 150.

¹¹⁸ Horstkotte, “Transgenerational Mediations,” 149.

experience the war indirectly through secondary information, namely through narrative and photographs from parents and grandparents.

Photographs: *Surrogates*

Surrogates consists of six digital colour Polaroid's that have been scanned, enlarged and displayed in 30" x 36" light boxes.¹¹⁹ The images depict various figures: family members in domestic settings, alone or with one another at banal or special occasions. I purchased the images at an antique store with no personal or historical background information concerning the people represented.

In one image, a dark-haired woman in a bathing suit smiles at the camera. She stands alone in the bathroom. The reflection of the flash illuminates the male photographer caught in the mirror. Other images depict recurring characters: an elderly man alone at the table – or in the living room with the arm of a shirtless young man around him, a father and son perhaps. The same shirtless young man sits in the kitchen at the feet of his “mother” who is braless; her yellow shirt is stained. One hand rests on his shoulders, the other holds a thermometer.

Another image shows two women standing protectively behind a massive, cooked turkey that looks like a sunburned reclining nude. The round hollow at the neck, like a gaping mouth, shows evidence of the beheading. The wounded hole is like a symbolic female body. The women shield themselves behind the bird-beast while “flaunting” crude, surrogate private parts.

These objects are important for several reasons. They depict the everyday and allow me to elevate the “discarded” to a privileged level. Writer and cultural theorist, Susan Sontag, values “offbeat or trivial subject matter” as a way of ‘photographic seeing,’¹²⁰ “subjects are chosen because they are boring or banal.”¹²¹ It is because of this initial strangeness and indifference to the figures that gives them potential for new and personal meaning. Like the *flâneur*, attracted to the “dark seamy corners” of the city, its neglected populations and the “reality behind the façade of bourgeois life,”¹²² I find the gritty normalness of these images interesting and allow for personal identification. “What makes something interesting is that it can

¹¹⁹ These six photographs are a selection of thirty found Polaroids in my collection.

¹²⁰ “Photographic seeing” is a term Susan Sontag uses to describe an inclusive position to that allows photography to be free of technical perfection and beauty with unlimited potential subject matter that can include “anonymous, crudely lit, asymmetrically composed photographs formerly dismissed for their lack of composition.” See Sontag, *On Photography*, 136.

¹²¹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 137.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 55.

be seen to be like, or analogous to, something else.”¹²³ The unknowns about the images leave them open to interpretation: did they consent to the public display and circulation of their image as a commodity outside of the secure kinship circles where family photographs normally reside? Or were they vulnerable, ignorant of the displacement of their possessions? In this case, these images are similar to my family and I identify with them. The images are pleasurable and humorous; there is something odd or quirky in each one.

Paradoxically, there is also a distancing that takes place where the figures become caricature *others*, due to photography’s neutralizing effect. While photographs create sympathy, they simultaneously distance an emotional sympathetic response.¹²⁴ Despite the illusion of implied understanding, what seeing through photographs really invites is an acquisitive relation to the world that nourishes aesthetic awareness and promotes emotional detachment.”¹²⁵ The term *Surrogates* in this context, implies a substitution not only of replacing the photograph, but substituting family members with strangers. Unlike a photograph I take of a person I know, I acquire (through monetary exchange) a photograph that is not my own of a person I do not know. Having never seen the original, the people are representations - the *Surrogate* is doubly removed and distanced.

As Sontag states, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself, which shows its connectedness. As the nuclear family began to take shape after industrialization, family photographs memorialized and restated the vanishing extended family.¹²⁶ Photographs promote nostalgia and pathos: to take a photograph is to participate in another person’s “mortality, vulnerability, mutability.”¹²⁷ The family photograph perpetuates the “familial gaze” what Marianne Hirsch describes as the “conventions and ideologies through which the family sees themselves.”¹²⁸ Since looking is reciprocal, as a viewer also participates in reproducing or affirming whatever ideologies are being conveyed, what does it mean to have the absence of the original content or no kinship affiliations?

Since I am neither behind the camera, nor are these people my family, I replace or supplement biographical narrative with fiction without ever explicitly stating what the new narrative is, except to elude a vague emotional attachment by “adopting” them as surrogates. The photograph “...attempts to contact or

¹²³ Ibid.,175.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 110.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 111.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁸ Hirsch, *Familial Looking*, xi.

lay claim to another reality.”¹²⁹ In this case, the reality doesn’t concern capturing past experience, but a new experience. Sontag describes the sense of the unattainable evoked by photographs – the photograph is a “pseudo-presence and a token of absence.”¹³⁰ By replacing my own past with a pretend present, I create a new narrative and identity.

While Diane Arbus photographed people who “looked strange”¹³¹ including carnival characters, and people with bodily “anomalies,” the subtle oddities in daily life may be equally as strange. The characters in *Surrogates* are not “freaks,” but may belong to a working class or lower class demographic based on the shabby furniture, out-dated wallpaper, dirty clothing or no clothing, and crowded living spaces depicted in shamelessly intimate detail. The scenes are *uncanny* – they are domestic, safe and familiar but something strange is happening. The images are light hearted and humorous rather than terrifying; they are uncanny in a melancholic, average sense. The viewer may identify with the imperfect bodies, the messes and spills of every day life, loneliness and isolation, the bonds of kinship, and fragmented connections.

While Arbus knew her subjects personally, I took liberty with *Surrogates* based on my own sense of identification with these images. However, I acknowledge the possibility that I may position them as *other* in this exhibition. As Sontag points out, “photography ensures a degree of control over a subject.”¹³² *Surrogates* peers voyeuristically into people’s lives, indulging the viewer in a variety of responses that may or may not include compassion, identification, empathy, distance, or apathy. One can assume the figures of *Surrogates* posed for family members and didn’t intend to have their private moments made public. While Arbus saw photographing people as unarguably “cruel” and “mean” because it seduces people to disclose their secrets, Sontag argues that a compassionate response is not the point. “The camera is a passport that annihilates moral boundaries and sound inhibitions toward the people being photographed. The whole point of photographing people is that you are not intervening in their lives, only visiting them. The photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist...”¹³³

To counter this, one can imagine the potential benefits that may result from being “immortalized” as art or celebrity in a public gallery. The scale of the images shows a validation of the banal, the ordinary

¹²⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹³¹ Ibid., 34.

¹³² Ibid., 155.

¹³³ Ibid., 42.

turned extraordinary. In this way I hope to privilege them, rather than situate them in a position of alterity. And yet the enlarged images amplify their flaws. Sontag writes that Arbus' subjects did not appear pained or distressed, but detached and autonomous. Her focus on victims doesn't arouse compassion or sentiment but creates a distance from the subject, allowing the viewer to be aware of their privileged position, by looking at the *other*.¹³⁴ "The camera has the power to catch so-called normal people in such a way as to make them look abnormal. The photographer chooses oddity, chases it, frames it, develops it, and titles it." (In this case, if *Surrogates* are viewed as *others*, the viewer may, as I do, positively identify with the characters or see themselves in a privileged position.

Despite the distancing and neutralizing effect of photography, I intend to allow new narratives and/or the privileging of *others* in the work *Surrogates* based on personal emotion and affect. The work does not direct the viewer to think compassionately or apathetically about the people represented but intends to allow for unanswered questions and layers of meaning, especially personal, positive identification and the imaginative potential of a new or supplementary family of origin. While ethical considerations are imperative, possessing "them" as objects, and claiming ownership over the figures depicted, I determine new personal experiences based on the idea that they may replace, supplement or enhance my autobiographical narrative.

In photography, any purpose can be served; photography repurposes and recycles the real, things and events are assigned new meanings.¹³⁵ By deciding to appropriate images and create my own narratives, as Richard Avadon (quoted by Sontag) states, "The pictures have a reality for me that the people don't... It is through the photographs that I know them"¹³⁶ If "every photograph is a self-portrait of the photographer"¹³⁷ then this work reflects back on the artist in a biographical sense and says more about the identity, or identification or personal response toward the image.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 174.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 121.

¹³⁷ Susan Sontag quotes Dorothea Lange in *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: Noonday Press, 1977): 122.

¹³⁸ As I write this, I have no intention to pursue the real people in the photographs *Surrogates*, though it is possible they may discover their image in the gallery, or online. The result of that discovery could prove wonderful or disastrous – a risk I choose to take. I find it interesting that living, breathing people may be affected by this work even though I have viewed them as stationary and static objects, images and representations.

Photography is acquisition in several forms...a photograph [is a] surrogate possession of a cherished person or thing, a possession, which gives photographs some of the character of unique objects. Through photographs we also have a consumer's relation to events (...), which are part of our experience, and to those that are not...¹³⁹

This kind of acquisition and possession that is an inherent aspect of "surrogacy" related to the photograph is personalized in *Surrogates*.

Cardboard Cut-Outs: *Friends, Family, Foes*

Twenty cardboard figures dominate the centre of the exhibition space, up to six feet in height. While the viewer may walk around them, the intrusive presence of their two-dimensional bodies interrupts the space. These works are replicated larger versions of small pencil drawings on cardstock, cut out like paper dolls. They are inspired by conflicted, contentious or poignant personal relationships in my adult life and my family of origin. By disguising the physical features of the "real" people, distorted features describe the essence or spirit of the person. These "interpretive drawings"¹⁴⁰ are the result of meditative imagining of the person's internal self, sometimes morphed with prosthetic components and animal parts. Some are bound in restraints; two horses "pull" one character to be 'drawn and quartered.'¹⁴¹

Friends, Family, Foes speaks to the breakdown in interpersonal communication and silencing in intimate kinship networks. It represents an attempt to reclaim or establish power after experiencing consequences imposed by the powerful in a group dynamic. The work is similar to *Sadie* (page 36), and a kind of "explosive restraint" that results from keeping silent or keeping the peace face to face.

Foucault's analysis, expanded on by Phillip Barker, is that power is not always negotiated as a one way correspondence asserted from the top down, from the powerful to the powerless; rather, power circulates locally. Individuals occupy various positions of power: mother, father, sister, teacher, employee, and so on, therefore power circulates between bodies. "We are all subjects of power in the sense that we both simultaneously exercise it even as we experience its effects, and in so doing constitute even such

¹³⁹ Ibid., 155 - 156.

¹⁴⁰ I compare this method of working to a dancer who absorbs music through the ears, interprets it in the mind, and outputs a series of improvised movements in an expression of the body.

¹⁴¹ Drawn and quartered is a medieval punishment that consisted of binding the arms and feet of the accused to ropes pulled by horses.

fundamental relations with ourselves as our sense of individuality. Indeed the individual is one of the effects of power, an articulation of power.”¹⁴²

Looking at power relations at the micro level involves those closest to us.¹⁴³ To paraphrase Mark Cladis in *Durkheim and Foucault: Perspectives on Education and Punishment*, ‘There are prisons of brick and mortar, and prisons of the mind, both critiqued by Foucault, where we measure ourselves by societal internalization and self-regulation. We become our judge.’¹⁴⁴ The prisons of the mind, as Cladis explains, are “conveyed in relentless images and voices, sometimes loud, sometimes faint.” The idea of the *voice* – either speaking out or remaining silent – resurfaces in my work repeatedly and is a prominent theme in the exhibition *Some Nerve*. What is important in this work is the internalization we subject ourselves to and when what cannot be said surfaces in an abject, distorted, festering wound (through an interpretive method of drawing) conveyed in *Friends, Family, Foes*.

Religious Prescriptions: Hysteria, Vibrators, Antidepressants and Behaviour Modification: *The Be(Happy) Attitudes*

The “pill-book” sits alone on a white plinth. It is a medium-sized book, gold and red. Its title, *The Be(Happy) Attitudes*¹⁴⁵, appears only on the spine. The cheap vinyl cover, embossed in golden *art nouveau* motifs, gives the impression of antique authority, a façade of wisdom. The initial pages tout the author's praises and his dedication of thanks to the *such-and-such congregation* and *television ministry* secure his authority in popular Evangelical ministry.¹⁴⁶ Turn past the title page to *Contents*, and you’ll find a surprise. Twenty small tunnels penetrate the pages like bullet holes machined through layers of paper skin. In the circular cavities lay coloured capsules, encased in plastic, an individual “nest” for every “egg”. The SSRI’s – Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors – or antidepressants pockmark the book’s body. The sentences throughout are violently interrupted and rendered illegible. Like a knife hidden in a cake to be smuggled in secret, the book is the disguise or the front for the classified operation. The pills are not intended to be ingested by the viewer, but imply an imaginary user.

¹⁴² Philip Barker, *Foucault: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 28.

¹⁴³ Barker, *Foucault*, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Mark S. Cladis Ed. *Durkheim and Foucault: Perspectives on Education and Punishment*. Oxford: Durkheim Press, 1999), 14.

¹⁴⁵ See Robert Schuller, *The Be-Happy Attitudes*, Texas: Word Books, 1985.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Schuller is a major figure in 1970s and 80s “mass psychological movement and a leader of a megachurch/para church organization. See John Weaver, “Unpardonable Sins: The Mentally Ill and Evangelicalism in America.” *Journal of Religion & Popular Culture* 23:1 (April 2011), 74.

Both the book and the pill in this work, function as emotional prosthetics with a salvation story. Both imply an authoritative power that perpetuates systems of normalization with physical, social and economic implications.

The Be(Happy) Attitudes: Eight Positive Attitudes That Can Transform Your Life, is a positive thinking book based on the *Sermon on the Mount* in the New Testament. *The Be(Happy) Attitudes* claims to be “successful therapy for depressed minds”¹⁴⁷ with “eight positive attitudes that will transform any life.”¹⁴⁸ The author takes the beatitudes¹⁴⁹ and changes the language to include his own interpretation, including,

Blessed Are the Emotionally Stable - Who are the emotionally stable? They are those who through discipline have developed a divine poise. They hold their negative impulses in check. They avoid and resist distractions and temptations which would excite and stimulate, but which drain their financial, moral and physical resources.¹⁵⁰

Honesty, hard work and strong mental determination yield the promise of joyful living.

As John Weaver, author of *Unpardonable Sins: The Mentally Ill and Evangelicalism in America* points out, Evangelicalism dismisses the mentally ill as “sinful”, and morally responsible for their unhappiness due to the belief that sins and demonic curses are passed down from generation to generation.¹⁵¹ While perspectives vary between charismatic, Pentecostal and fundamentalist Evangelicals, certain movements, such as deliverance ministries like the Biblical Counseling Movement (BCM) believe a person cannot truly be mentally ill but is morally responsible for their behaviour, even if it is caused by illness. The BCM interprets the Bible as a manual to treat any mental health problem, including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and OCD.¹⁵² “The supporters of the biblical counseling movement have built their movement on normalization. They have set up their own classificatory systems, from which they deem what behaviours are considered spiritually normal and which are not.”¹⁵³

In the same way, *The Be(Happy) Attitudes* reflects a standard of normalization dependent on happiness as its gauge. “In contemporary American society, that normalizing standard is happiness. Any

¹⁴⁷ Schuller, *The Be(Happy) Attitudes*, 16.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ The beatitudes of Christ include “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, and so on. See Matthew 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-22.

¹⁵⁰ Schuller, *The Be(Happy) Attitudes*, 79.

¹⁵¹ John Weaver, “Unpardonable Sins: The Mentally Ill and Evangelicalism in America.” *Journal of Religion & Popular Culture* 23:1 (April 2011), 66

¹⁵² Weaver, “Unpardonable Sins,” 76.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 68.

deviation from this standard marks the suffering individual as ‘dysfunctional,’ or ‘ill,’ or ‘psychologically incompetent.’”¹⁵⁴ The pathologization of “normal” mental health through religious and medical systems is connected in the “pill book” through ideologies about what constitutes normal or deviant behaviour, related to ideas of happiness.

The Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) in this work consist of the most commonly prescribed antidepressants available today:¹⁵⁵

Amitriptyline HCl	(Elavin)	10 mg
Bupropion Hydrochloride, USP	(Wellbutrin XL)	300 mg
Bupropion Hydrochloride, USP	(Wellbutrin XL)	150 mg
Citalopram Hydrobromide	(Celexa)	20 mg
Citalopram Hydrobromide	(CTP 30)	30 mg
Duloxetine Hydrochloride	(Cymbalta)	60 mg
Desvenlafaxine Succinate	(Pristiq)	50 mg
Escitalopram Oxalate	(Cipralext)	10 mg
Escitalopram orodispersible	(Cipralext MELTZ)	10 mg
Fluoxetine HCl	(Prozac)	20 mg
Lithium Carbonate	(Pms-Lithium Carbonate)	300 mg
Mirtazapine	(Remeron)	30 mg
Paroxetine Hydrochloride	(Paxil)	20 mg
Quetiapine	(Seroquel XR)	150 mg
Quetiapine Fumarate	(Seroquel XR)	50 mg
Sertraline HCl	(Zoloft)	50 mg
Sertraline Hydrochloride	(Pms-Sertraline)	50 mg
Trazodone HCl	(Desyrel)	150 mg
Trimipramine Maleate	(Surmontil)	25 mg
Venlafaxine	(Teva-Venlafaxine XR)	150 mg

While this project juxtaposes positive thinking and pharmaceuticals, I address the gendered aspect of social norms around depression looking again at hysteria as a contemporary construct. The antidepressant or SSRI, one could argue, is the contemporary version of the 19th century vibrator with “depression” being the modern hysteria. Vibrators and antidepressants, which both point to the pathologization of “normal” women’s bodies and behaviour, are used to construct gender norms and show an androcentric devaluation of women’s lived experiences.¹⁵⁶ (While the growing medicalization of

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵⁵ A number of SSRI’s prescribed in the past are considered dangerous and are difficult to access or are no longer available. Antidepressants are often prescribed in combination with other drugs to combat potential side effects. Doses prescribed in higher or lower concentrations are related to the specifics of the diagnosis. For example, a lower or higher dose of the same medication may be prescribed for depression *or* to treat anti-psychotic behaviour.

¹⁵⁶ Without undermining the severity of clinical depression and the potential benefit of medication as treatment, it must be noted that the increase in prescriptions, the lack of evidence of effectiveness and the serious and harmful effects of this medication is well documented in *The Marketization of Depression: The Prescribing of SSRI Antidepressants to Women* by Janice Currie. According to Arthur Kleinman, a

“normal” human emotions affects people across a gender spectrum, the idea that “women are more ‘mad’ than men” continues to the present day. When it comes to lifetime rates of depression, women outnumber men 2:1).¹⁵⁷

To provide some context for the invention of the vibrator, it is important to understand that as far back as the time of Plato, women were thought to have specific womb diseases and internal problems (such as cold and wet humors mentioned earlier), that could be cured through the stimulation of the genitals.¹⁵⁸ The term *hysteria* described a host of illnesses, including what we now understand to be sexual frustration, as androcentric models of sexuality suggested that women’s satisfaction was achieved through male penetration. Bringing the “hysterical” woman release through “paroxysm” (orgasm) was performed by a midwife or doctor and was not thought of as sexual. As the electromechanical vibrator emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, it relieved the doctor of this onerous task, and allowed him to see more patients and to reap the attendant economic benefits.¹⁵⁹ While the vibration machines of the past can be examined as objects used on the body to control, correct, or cure “disease”, they were essentially a behaviour modification tool to correct “abnormal” or “deviant” women who didn’t approximate accepted social, sexual or behavioural norms.

According to Janet Currie’s analysis of women and depression, twice as many women are taking prescription SSRIs than men, and women suffer greater harmful effects from SSRI medication (including anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and sexual dysfunction). Since 1994, doctors prescribe antidepressants in 81% of office visits, and 66% of these patients are women.¹⁶⁰ Drug intervention is becoming the norm. A disturbing fact about SSRIs is that no long-term studies have been done to assess

psychiatry professor at Harvard and the co-author of *Culture and Depression*, “There is no question in my mind that severe clinical depression is a real disease...but mild depression is a totally different kettle of fish. It allows us to re-label as depression an enormous number of things.” See Currie, Janice. “The Marketization of Depression: The Prescribing of SSRI Antidepressants to Women”, *Women and Health Protection*, May 2005): 11.

<http://people.stfx.ca/accamero/Gender%20and%20Health/Mental%20Health/SSRIs%20perscribed%20for%20women.pdf> Accessed July 8, 2013.

¹⁵⁷ Jane M. Ussher, “Are We Medicalizing Women’s Misery? A Critical Review of Women’s Higher Rates of Reported Depression,” *Feminism & Psychology* 20, (2010): 9. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/darius.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=48424056&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, Accessed August 14, 2013.

¹⁵⁸ Rachel P. Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: “Hysteria”, the Vibrator and Women's Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3.

¹⁵⁹ Maines, *Technology of Orgasm*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Currie, “The Marketization of Depression,” 3.

their extended use.¹⁶¹ Serotonin affects mood and can cause many individuals to be over-stimulated resulting in agitation, nervousness, mania, depression, and restlessness.¹⁶² Currie cites cases where addictive tranquilizers were administered to patients who were agitated, anxious and manic from Prozac use.¹⁶³

According to Currie's research, it is the pharmaceutical companies who have constructed the dominant ideology about SSRIs through language, exaggerations, secrecy (by omitting information), market expansion techniques and specific funding strategies. Currie suggests that by describing depression as a "biochemical disorder" or a "deficiency" disease, pharmaceutical companies continue to create new disorders and pathologize women while reaping lucrative profits at the expense of women's mental health.

Possible factors that contribute to the depression women experience in their lifetimes includes:

- Women experience more discrete physiological events than men (e.g. menstruation, pregnancy, lactation and menopause).
- Women suffer more frequently from poverty or impoverished situations
- Women often work in jobs with high stress (e.g., as nurses, teachers and social workers).
- Women are often victims of intimate/family violence, including childhood sexual abuse, which may result in anxiety or depression in adulthood.

By labeling dysphoria, sadness, premenstrual "neurosis," and "frigidity" as depression, and by redefining depression as a "chemical deficiency," drug companies have successfully expanded their markets and influenced public opinion.¹⁶⁴ They have articulated a language of disease by "selling the theory of depression."¹⁶⁵

In his controversial research, American psychiatrist and author Peter D. Kramer asked the question, "What if Prozac could help people who aren't depressed?" such as for "personality repair" or "mood brightening."¹⁶⁶ He argued that we have cosmetic surgery like breast enlargement, why not psychological enhancement? His idea was to use Prozac as an *enhancement* that would take someone from a normal state to a more desired state.

¹⁶¹ Clinical trials for certain medications lasted only six weeks. See Currie, "Marketization of Depression," 3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 - 11.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ "Rethinking Depression: Part 1." *Ideas with Paul Kennedy*. CBC Radio. Thursday, March 7, 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/episodes/2013/03/07/rethinking-depression-part-1/> Accessed June 30, 2013.

On the one hand, I critique religious institutional structures that promote a “joycentric”¹⁶⁷ normativity and stigmatize mentally ill and “abnormal” people as guilty of sin and failure. On the other hand, practitioners and private companies have reaped economic benefits due to pathologizing women’s appearance and behaviour and relegating women to the (diseased) body. Vibration machines and SSRIs contribute to the construction of femininity where certain behaviours are idealized or considered normal, while others are pathologized or deemed abnormal, failing to address social issues and alternative support methods or treatments.

Objects, audio: *Captivity*

Two canister vacuums covered entirely in real and faux fur rest on the floor with the larger vacuum “mounting” the smaller one. They are machine and animal hybrids transformed from a useful object into useless one.¹⁶⁸ While not animated by movement, they are brought to “life” through their “voices”: the audible sounds of a running vacuum play through speakers hidden inside the body of the “male” vacuum. A crescendo grows faster and louder, builds to climax and release, a diminuendo, denouement.

Captivity was inspired by psychiatrist Victor Frankl’s concept of the “existential vacuum” – the loss of “man’s” primal animal instincts and role secured in tradition, resulting in a crisis due to available choices. *Logotherapy* or meaning-focused therapy is Frankl’s alternative to psychoanalysis and will help people overcome their neurosis by finding their *will to meaning*.¹⁶⁹ Frankl considers “Sunday Neurosis,” where the usual busyness of the week is experienced as a void during time off and can lead to depression, aggression and addiction.¹⁷⁰ Sometimes this crisis of lack of meaning is compensated by the will to power, the will to money or the will to pleasure, where existential frustration eventuates in sexual compensation. “We can observe in some cases that the sexual libido becomes rampant in the existential vacuum”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Weaver, “Unpardonable Sins,” 69.

¹⁶⁸ The useful object is rendered useless, typical of Dada and Surrealist works. See Meret Oppenheim’s Object - a cup, saucer and spoon covered entirely in fur.

http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80997 Accessed August 15, 2013.

¹⁶⁹ Victor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press. 1984), 120, 121.

¹⁷⁰ Frankl, *Man’s Search*, 129.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

The “voodoo” doll: *Sadie (My Sadie)*

Combining readymade doll parts and hand-sewn fabric, the *Sadie (My Sadie)* doll is a surrogate or stand in for an actual person. The polyester-fill stuffed body allows pins to puncture and penetrate the wool and cotton skin. In this exhibition, the doll appears to be standing upright on a plinth, but she is actually attached to fishing line, suspended from the ceiling. Her feet hover slightly above the plinth but do not touch the base.

The title in this work references an important figure in French-American artist Louise Bourgeois’ personal life. When she was a young woman, Bourgeois had an English tutor named Sadie. Bourgeois describes an unconscious and repressed jealousy and hatred of Sadie, her father’s mistress of ten years. (Bourgeois’ mother was ill at the time).

Sadie symbolizes an enemy - she can represent multiple people. Revenge is enacted on the doll in the imagined transfer of pain from inanimate object to the person she symbolizes. Sadie is about the loss of control and taking back power from “perpetrator” to “victim.”

The process of art making allows the artist to channel emotions such as aggression into symbolic form and through symbolic actions – for the sculptor (specifically Louise Bourgeois) this includes cutting, drilling carving and pouring.¹⁷² In *Sadie (My Sadie)* it is the action of threading the needle, stitching and binding the fabric, stuffing, sealing, and finally stabbing - violent, aggressive gestures. Bourgeois believed the artist had special access to the unconscious and the exceptional ability to express aspects of the psyche in symbolic form.¹⁷³ By digging deep into the unconscious, art making offers a momentary reprieve from past trauma. Philip Larrat-Smith writes that the tension in Bourgeois work is in the “contradictory binary oppositions that cannot be resolved: male and female, conscious and unconscious, past and present, active and passive, inside and outside, pleasure and unpleasure.”¹⁷⁴

Similarly, reading the work of German-American artist Eva Hesse involves a psychological perspective. “In psychoanalysis most of her adult life, obsessed with the bizarre events of her childhood, she was aware of the implications of all her actions as part of her internal history [...] In fact, her art and her

¹⁷² Philip Larrat-Smith, Louise Bourgeois, 8.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.

life were so close that she did not concentrate on any specific content while she was making a piece.”¹⁷⁵ It is the biographical narratives of Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois that influence their process, materials and subject matter. Hesse struggled with materials (at first) as well as with identity; Bourgeois channelled her debilitations, hauntings and struggles into symbolic form.

Kinetic sculpture: *A Horse in Motion*

Four tree branches, fashioned into marionette-like hinges (similar to the “legs” in *Metamorphosis*) are attached to copper pipe that rotates with the help of small electric motor. The thick base of the leg is shaped into a “hoof” and hits the ground at intervals. The u-shaped pipe allows the limbs to collapse and bend as they touch the ground, (and then extend again) mimicking a horse’s trot.

Photographer Eadweard Muybridge asked the question, “do all four legs of a horse leave the ground at the same time?”¹⁷⁶ *A Horse in Motion* shares similarities with previous projects such as *Miranda*, *Metamorphosis* and *Drool Machine*. *A Horse in Motion* is a kinetic object, reminiscent of a toy. The legs gallop endlessly, in a futile circle, with no beginning and no end. The similar rotation in *Miranda* and incessant struggle in *Metamorphosis* suggests repetitive, futile, and Sisyphean¹⁷⁷ labour. Similar to the work, *Captivity*, concerning the existential vacuum, I touch on meaning and existential crisis where futility creates neurosis and is absolved through meaning and purpose.

Text, Illustrations: *Ideas Laboratory/Archive*

Ideas Laboratory/Archive includes a text-based, illustrated collection of realized and unrealized ideas that have accumulated over the course of my Master of Fine Arts degree and are documented in a scientific format. The text is lengthy and contains an abstract and a brief introduction as to the purpose of the archive:

¹⁷⁵ Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 5.

¹⁷⁶ Eadweard Muybridge lined up twelve cameras on a raceway. Each camera was connected to a cotton thread. When the horse ran, it tripped the threads that released the camera shutters, allowing him to photograph the running motion of a horse. See Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History, 2nd Edition*, (New Jersey: Laurence Kind Publishing, 2006): 209.

¹⁷⁷ “Sisyphus, in Greek mythology, is the son of Aeolus and founder and king of Corinth. Renowned for his cunning, he was said to have outwitted even Death. For his disrespect to Zeus, he was condemned to eternal punishment in Tartarus. There he eternally pushed a heavy rock to the top of a steep hill, where it would always roll down again. See *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. Academic Search Complete, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.darius.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=39032504&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, Accessed August 9, 2013.

...Reasons for the archive include: to capture and make sense of fast thoughts that pop up in the mind periodically and to diagnose whether an idea is good or bad, allowing for the categorization of pursuable ideas and eventual art works. Bad ideas are included in the report, along with ideas already realized...

Another useful purpose of the report is to clarify the idea for the MFA Supervisory Committee (or other worthy benefactors), to dissect further research strategies, to create a feedback loop* concerning potential problems, and to evaluate whether an idea is total *shit* or is worth pursuing, which may in turn prevent failure and eliminate a portion of residual hesitation that accompanies the manufacturing/materialization of an idea, especially in the circumstance where the artist/scholar must fulfill the requirements of the academic institution.

* a feedback loop represents a continuum of sources of input/output (language, material) informed by the “critique” that will modify and especially *improve* the artwork...

Each idea is formatted according to a (modified) formal scientific document and includes: **an immediate identification description, reference number, title, description, list of materials, references, inspiration, theoretical background, further research requirements, technical requirements, a timeline for completion, potential problems** or issues that may arise, **date completed, conclusion, summary, and evaluation.** The *Ideas Lab* is arranged in a grid with the text on the left and the accompanying drawing on the right (or alternatively, the text is exhibited in a grid and the images are organized in a separate grid to the right of the text). Many of the objects in the Thesis Exhibition *Some Nerve* were made based on the Ideas Archive.

CONCLUSION

The work I have created over two years is varied and diverse, reflecting my material exploration and evolving social and political interests. One aspect of my research includes the cultural, social and political inequalities and power discrepancies that seem obvious when observing history, but may be tolerated or go unnoticed in the present. While each of us engages in power dynamics through various forms of social and familial interactions and exchanges, order and rules are necessary for social cohesion. The critique I engage in involves an examination of taken-for-granted human behaviour that is deemed normal and acceptable, versus abnormal and unacceptable. Subversive methods of identity employed in my work by blurring the boundaries between the closed and contained subject and the monstrous, leaking body. Referencing the body through performance art, the figure and autobiography - this open, and interactive body undermines dichotomous ideals privileged in western, individual ideologies.

My mediums are multiple: drawings are interpretive and distorted, allowing chance, a loss of control and a psychoanalytical “working-through” in *Friends, Family, Foes*. Photography in the work, *Surrogates*, is adopted in a Duchampian manner by naming a found object “art,” as well as calling the surrogate family my own and identifying with the *other*. The video work, *Every Body Was Afraid*, speaks to political, civic silencing, transgenerational trauma, postmemory, and collective identity. Autobiographical narrative merges with historical and contemporary objects used to correct, control, or enhance deviant bodies and behaviour.

The *Ideas Laboratory* shows a chronology of art making and a progression of realized and unrealized potential projects that evolve through knowledge and experience over the course of the masters degree. My chronology of art-making can be described as starting with collecting, altering and repurposing found objects, to an exploration of the grotesque, hybridity, and body art, to incorporating historical psychological or aesthetic treatment methods and finally, turning to personal narrative as a means of working through theoretical investigations. In terms of my practice, found objects occupy a position that is similar to literature, popular culture, science fiction, and self-help books in that they reflect cultural values, normative behaviour and influence and inspire my work.

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APPENDICES

IDEAS LABORATORY/ARCHIVE

C.T.H./ 2011-2013

MASTER OF FINE ARTS
University of Lethbridge
THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

Initial Report

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of the IDEAS LABORATORY/ARCHIVE (in the form of a LAB REPORT) is to take inventory and to analyze potential IDEAS related to art-making accrued during THE MASTER OF FINE ARTS [ART] DEGREE with the inclusion and/or modification of IDEAS that began prior to graduate studies, and especially those which may be useful to pursue in the 2012/2013 semesters to meet degree requirements.

Reasons for the archive include: to capture and make sense of fast thoughts that pop up in the mind periodically and to diagnose whether an IDEA is *good* or *bad*, allowing for the categorization of pursuable IDEAS and eventual art WORKS. *Bad* IDEAS are included in the report, along with a selection of IDEAS already realized. There may be unintended therapeutic benefits as a result of the transfer of IDEAS from the brain to the lab report wherein the artist is able to practice 'space clearing', the technique developed by *Feng Shui* masters/professionals related to objects, and the effect of physical and material clutter on production - in this case, clutter in the mind. This inventory of IDEAS is documented in a modified and generalized scientific format to dissect, analyze and process the transfer of IDEAS from thought to material form.

FAILURE PREVENTION/HESITATION ELIMINATION:

Another useful purpose of the report is to clarify the IDEA for the M.F.A. Supervisory Committee, (or other worthy benefactors) to dissect further research strategies, to create a feedback loop* concerning potential problems, and to evaluate whether an idea is total *shit* or is worth pursuing, which in turn may prevent failure and eliminate a portion of residual hesitation that accompanies the manufacturing/materialization of an idea, especially in the circumstance where the artist/scholar must fulfill the requirements of the academic institution.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS:

The artist does not have to realize these ideas alone. In fact, he/she may choose to generate a plethora of ideas without resolving material issues. A by-product of the process may be advantageous economically wherein the artist may generate ideas to engage in a monetary exchange with other artists, bourgeois aristocrats or common folk, that is, IDEAS may be sold to curators, collectors, or others who may outsource materials and labour.

LEGAL BENEFITS:

In the event that an unrealized idea should leak into forums of public knowledge, this data provides assurance of intellectual property based on detailed documentation. For more information, visit <http://www.theideasafe.com/index.php>, where professionals, "keep your work safe and provide independent verification of your rights."

*a feedback loop represents a continuum of sources of input/output (language, material) informed by the "critique" that will modify and especially *improve* the artwork.

GOOD AND BAD IDEAS:

Objective and non-objective evaluation of a good and/or bad IDEA is included in the REPORT.

GOOD IDEAS:

A good IDEA is (essentially translated into a WORK of ART), one that is theoretically and intellectually SOUND; it may be interesting, simple and easy to "get" or may cause the viewer to THINK. The viewer may react to the work on an EMOTIONAL level which may trigger an AFFECTIVE response resulting in FEELINGS which may initially appear counter to a rational, academic response or may cause distress and/or SHOCK which, in turn may also further a rational (or irrational) response. A GOOD idea or work of art is executed with some level of SKILL and/or has MULTIPLES, and/or includes an obsessive amount of LABOUR, which inevitably differentiates the idea from the materialized object. Good ideas are generally, *not* boring, though the resultant works may (or may not) be so.

A good IDEA is, arguably, related to the MASTERS THESIS, or can be MODIFIED as such through the manipulation of LANGUAGE or by interfering with or altering the work. It is always rooted in TRADITION and references or comments on or rebels against ART HISTORICAL/CANONICAL real art. A good IDEA is important to win the approval of the Supervisory Committee, and if the artist is lucky, may "wow" a curator, dealer, and/or the broader art world, which may result in the fulfillment of his or her *Broad Objectives* (see below).

BAD IDEAS:

Bad IDEAS become bad works of ART, and by distinguishing between good and bad in a detailed, formal model of analysis, the artist may prevent bad IDEAS from being realized in material form and from jeopardizing their *Broad Objectives* (as stated below). Bad IDEAS may lose their appeal during an incubation period wherein the TIME-BASED CONTINUUM (chart not provided) that allows for a retroactive-perspective, may prove invaluable. Bad IDEAS can be incredibly deceptive as they may have the appearance of being a good IDEA (initially), but deteriorate over time resulting in the conclusion that they are in fact bad. The artist may even ask himself or herself the question, "What was I thinking?"

The level of confidence with which IDEAS are pursued is no indication of their goodness or badness. Bad IDEAS have often been pursued with the greatest of confidence. Bad works of art may or may not be boring, the result of a bad or good IDEA. IN SOME CASES VERY GOOD WORKS OF ART HAVE BEEN CONCLUDED TO BE BORING.

IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES:

Complete degree requirements*

BROAD OBJECTIVES:

Exhibit in ARC**, ART GALLERY, MUSEUM or other EXHIBITION VENUE

*while maintaining sense of humour/sanity.

**ARTIST RUN CENTRE

IMMEDIATE IDENTIFICATION DESCRIPTION: LENI RIEFENSTAHL VIDEO
IDEA: 043-28-0946

TITLE: "TUT MIR LEID" (German)

DESCRIPTION: VIDEO

Recreation (excerpt) from film *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* (DATE), this video interview depict current political climate in Canada. Mimics original interview with L.R., pre-WWII ideologies, propaganda, shows the actor denying political involvement. "It could never happen again", "dictatorships and democracy", etc neo-liberalism, freedom of speech and art connect to contemporary. Ref. oil sands, Canada's history as peacekeeping nation and democratic leader, environmental leadership, reputation, social values. German with English subtitles.

MATERIAL REQUIREMENTS: video camera, editing software

REFERENCES: video - *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, World War II, Canada under the 'solid, stable, majority, conservative Harper government,' language to describe environmentalists terrorists...

INSPIRATION: Berlin, in front of the *Topography of Terror* on Niederkirchenstrasse, L.R. idea for interview: (denial, propaganda pre-WWII), strategic, systematic Fascism. Canada's democracy, freedom of speech, protest, etc. and language of the right - terrorist/environmentalist...

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: L.R. denies association with the Nazi party and claims to be a-political, neutral. She was hired as an artist. She represents contentious figure, was blamed. Is interesting b/c she was prominent filmmaker and b/c *Triumph of the Will* furthered Hitler and the Nazi party's success (prior to atrocities). She is accused of not doing enough or for being a part of the movement. She denies knowing what had been going on at the time.

FURTHER RESEARCH: Canada currently, the rise of the conservative Right, Facts - erosion of democracy, (Frankie James and play *Prime Minister*, artist funding cut Europe b/c environmental, Bill (C390? Look up again) re. wearing mask protest in public.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS: video camera, editing software, camera operator/tripod, lighting, room, interviewer?

TIME REQUIRED COMPLETE: approx. 1 -2 months

TIMELINE: research, write script, translate, record, edit

POTENTIAL ISSUES: too literal, didactic? Script must be good.

DATE COMPLETED:

CONCLUSION:

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION:

IMMEDIATE IDENTIFICATION DESCRIPTION: STALACTITE, FOUR-LEGGED
IDEA: 043-28-0955

TITLE: *UNTITLED*

DESCRIPTION: SCULPTURE

Object with four legs from sticks, leans forward with multiple stalactite-like "breasts" hang, point to floor. Has prominent ribs...

MATERIALS: chenille body, plywood frame, furniture leg attachments, sticks, latex sheeting, polyester fill or fill with silicone, furniture mounting screws, dense foam, contact cement

REFERENCES: grotesque hybrid, is like museum display of extinct creature, imaginative

INSPIRATION: (...) popped into my head, can't get it out of my mind

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

FURTHER RESEARCH: Louise Bourgeois, David Altmejd, that Canadian art duo who makes taxidermy stuff and sings backwards in their videos- what are their names again?

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

TIME REQUIRED COMPLETE:

TIMELINE:

POTENTIAL ISSUES: drawing looks better than actual object. Needs to stand solid without falling, easy assemble and disassemble would be nice. Just another feminist derivative work?

DATE COMPLETED:

CONCLUSION:

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION:

IMMEDIATE IDENTIFICATION DESCRIPTION: PUBLIC SHITTING
IDEA: 043-28-0957

TITLE: ?

DESCRIPTION: COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCE, VIDEO
Artists defecate on boulevards and in parks throughout city (binge eating fibre, laxatives). News video - Interview with artists describing theory to support defecation esp dogs - the group doesn't think anyone will mind as average person won't know the difference between human and dog feces. Interview describes the relationship of the urban animal to their environment and the urban environment's relationship to the domesticated beast. Is human "regressing", identifying as animal?

MATERIALS: volunteers, video..

REFERENCES:

INSPIRATION: after snow melted in spring noticed a lot of shit on boulevards a lot of material to work with, and it's free, I should do something with this. Collect it? Human animal, socially deviant behaviour. Ok for dogs but not humans. Maybe just grumpy that people don't clean up after their dogs.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: abject, animal human connection, transgression

FURTHER RESEARCH: Cindy Sherman, Kristeva -Abject, Yve Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss Informe/Formless, Georges Bataille

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

TIME REQUIRED COMPLETE:

TIMELINE:

POTENTIAL ISSUES: a lot of potential problems. Video might be stupid and not funny. Shocking but not thought-provoking. Just shock and no substance.

DATE COMPLETED:

CONCLUSION:

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION:

IMMEDIATE IDENTIFICATION DESCRIPTION: PLAYBOY MAGAZINES (AFTER GEOFFREY FARMER)
IDEA: 043-28-0962

TITLE: (what was his title for the life magazine work at Documenta 13? play on that)

DESCRIPTION: OBJECTS

Collection of hundreds of images of playboy models (I inherited from my uncle, from 1971 to 2002), cut out of magazine and displayed propped with thin bamboo sticks in base (see Geoffrey Farmer's work)

MATERIALS: magazine images, bamboo or wooden sticks, base/platform

REFERENCES: pornography, playboy magazine, popular culture, GF but with porno, (Canadian artists)

INSPIRATION: what to do with hundreds of magazines I was given.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: feminism, women's bodies, pornography, female body as object, magazine, masturbation, etc.

FURTHER RESEARCH: playboy history, GF and Documenta in 2012

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS: scissors, assistants? cut out all models from my collection

TIME REQUIRED COMPLETE: approx. 2 mos.

TIMELINE:

POTENTIAL ISSUES: looks like crap, too derivative, another fem cliché, cheap trick. Do I really want to complete the collection and acquire the missing months/years?

DATE COMPLETED:

CONCLUSION:

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION:

IMMEDIATE IDENTIFICATION DESCRIPTION: PITCHED TENTS
IDEA: 043-28-0965

TITLE: SALUTE! MAJOR GENERAL CORPORAL COLONEL MASTER LIEUTENANT

DESCRIPTION: OBJECTS

Hundreds of square fabric pieces, erect in center, propped by unidentifiable object underneath. Multiple "pitched tents" at attention.

MATERIALS: fabric (neutral colour), pine cones, 2x4 square wood base

REFERENCES: military procedure for pitching tents has specific requirements; *pitched tent* is slang for erection.

INSPIRATION: book *WAR TIME*. Phallus (erect) is supposed to be symbol of virility, strength, authority, but under clothing looks odd, hilarious, and silly

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Castration, phallus, (Freud, Lacan?) feminist theory

FURTHER RESEARCH: military procedures for all activities, Freud - castration anxiety, virility and masculinity, military and masculinity, gun and phallus

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

TIME REQUIRED COMPLETE:

TIMELINE: collect objects, test pine cone and water-glue mix, 2x4 platform,

POTENTIAL ISSUES: too silly, not serious, "mature" professional art, etc
Objects have to be smooth and perfect to be taken seriously

DATE COMPLETED:

CONCLUSION:

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION:

IMMEDIATE IDENTIFICATION DESCRIPTION: DIVORCED/SEPARATED INTERVIEWS
IDEA: 043-28-0970

TITLE: *IN THE BEGINNING*

DESCRIPTION: VIDEO (OR AUDIO ONLY)

Divorced or separated individuals are recorded sharing the story of their first meeting, how they fell in love with their ex-partner. Can be animated with real audio/ recite transcribed audio/ juxtaposition of different videos/ (close up on lips) to hide identity. *This was the ad I posted:*

WANTED: *Individuals who are divorced or separated to participate in an interview where they describe their first encounter and the beginning of their relationship with their ex-partner: how they met and how they fell in love.*

The interview, (audio or video, depending on your comfort level) is anonymous and privacy is respected. Names will be changed and voices will be edited to retain participant's privacy.

Interview time is approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

MATERIALS: video, audio equip.

REFERENCES: individual relationships, broader social implications, institution of marriage, history of monogamy in Judeo-Christian, white, middle class privilege or whatever demographic of the selection of volunteers...

INSPIRATION: seeing people I know who used to love one another now in custody battles and toxic domestic feuds. What was once passionate infatuation is now intense, passionate hatred. Is interviewer/artist playing role as healer? Can intervention of this kind bring person to recall positive memories and shift perspective? I'm most interested in the internal, physical or chemical transformation or effect on the person who is exceptionally bitter. •Gillian Wearing video two boys and mother, voices reversed exceptionally inspiring. MAKE STRANGE, *ostranenie*

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

FURTHER RESEARCH: psychology, interpersonal relationships, separation and divorce, the chemical effect of falling in love, the reasons for energetic and enthusiastic hate, Wearing's video

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS: video, audio equip.

TIME REQUIRED COMPLETE: 1-2 years

POTENTIAL ISSUES: not necess. related to thesis, except power structures and relationship of power between ex-couple (or between interviewer and one who discloses information). Extremes and the grotesque in everyday life? The banal grotesque...

DATE COMPLETED:

CONCLUSION: after one interview, I have stalled the project for different reasons - need more participants, clearer vision.

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION:

IMAGES: MFA (Art) Studio Production, 2011 – 2013

| 1. *Untitled*, Experiments in Performance, Lethbridge Arts Days, 2011



2. *Fault Lines*, performance, sculptural object, Lethbridge, Alberta, 2011



3. *Miranda*, kinetic sculpture, University of Lethbridge Faculty of Fine Arts Exhibition, 2012



4. *Blow*, video stills, 2011



5. *Moult*, video stills, CASA Inaugural Exhibition: *Transitions and Transformations*, Lethbridge, Alberta, 2013



6. *Hot Tail*, performance, kinetic sculpture, Parlour Window, Lethbridge, Alberta, 2012



7. *Metamorphosis*, performance, sculpture, 2012



8. *Drool Machine/Leak Body*, kinetic sculpture, 2012



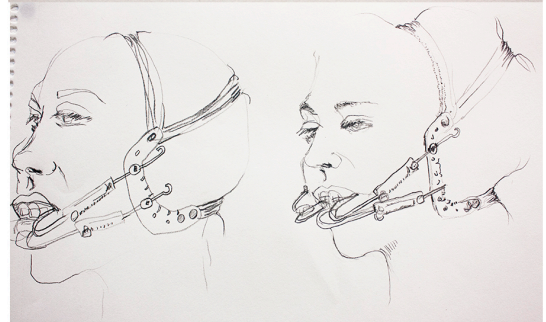
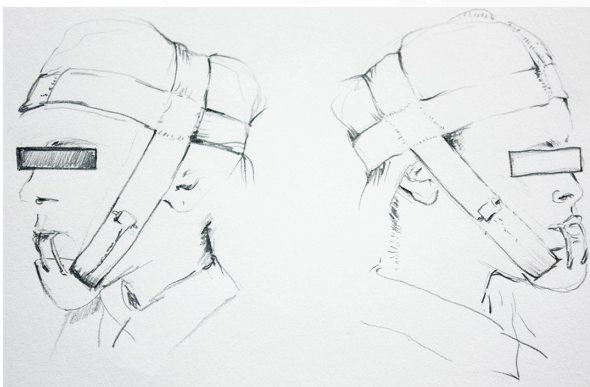
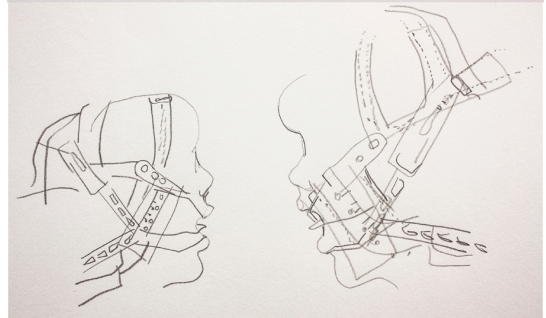
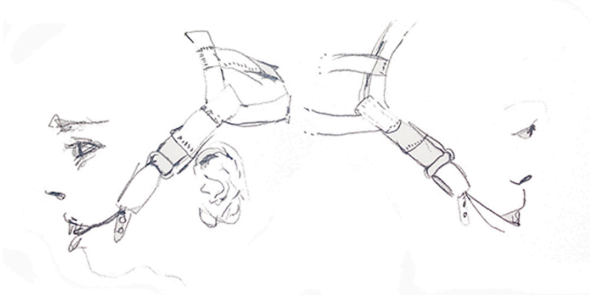
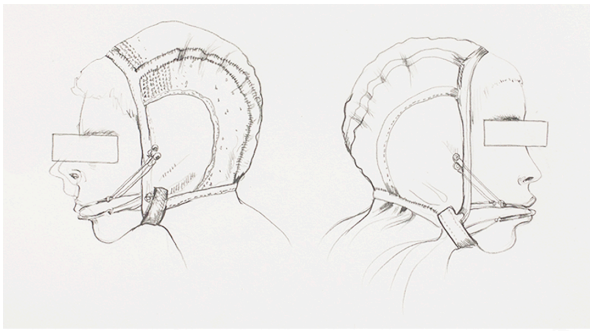
9. a). *Untitled*, studio objects, 2011 – 2012



b.) *Untitled*, studio objects, 2011-2012



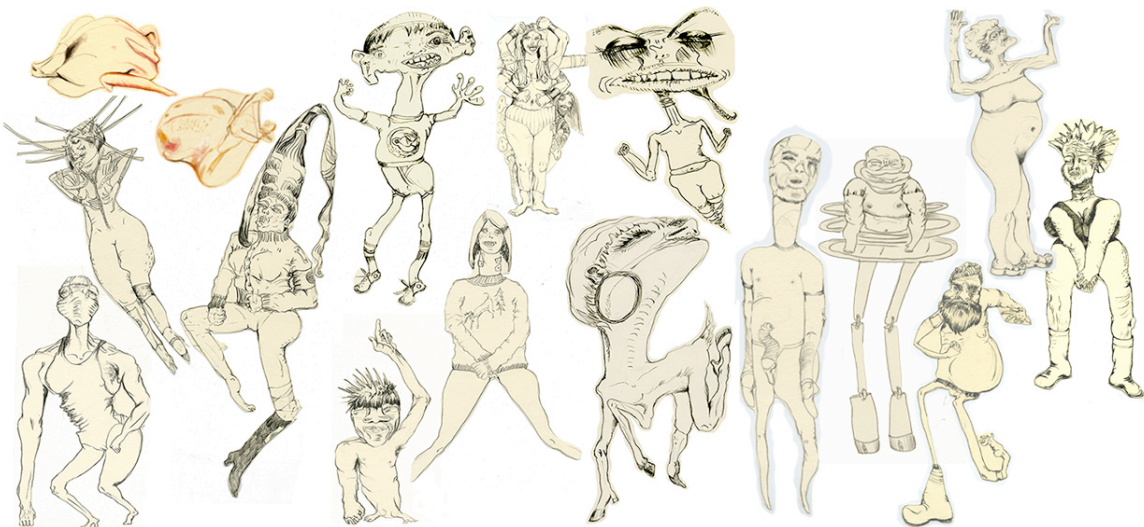
10. Head Gear Studies, 2013



11. *Ortho Ensemble*, video stills, 2013



12. *Friends, Family Foes*, paper cut-outs, 2013



13. *Friends, Family Foes*, paper cut-outs (on motorized platform), work in progress, 2013

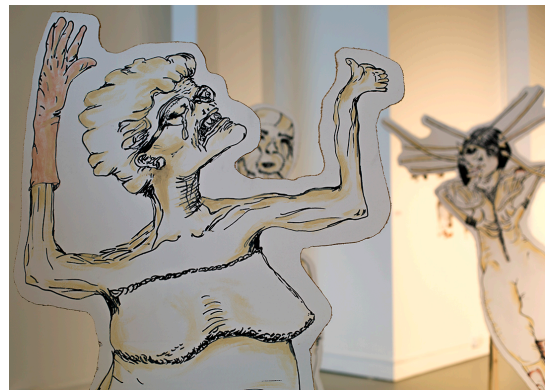


IMAGES: MFA (Art) Thesis Exhibition, September 14 - 28, 2013

14. *Surrogates, Friends, Family, Foes*, Installation view



15. a.) *Friends, Family, Foes*, Installation view



b.) *Friends, Family, Foes*, detail



c.) *Friends, Family, Foes*, detail.



16. a.) *Surrogates*, Installation view.



b.) *Surrogates*, Installation view



c.) (*Surrogates*) Six Selected Polaroids, from collection



17. a.) *Every Body Was Afraid*, installation view



b.) *Every Body Was Afraid*, video stills



18. a.) *Head Gear*, Installation view



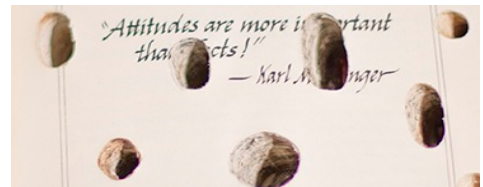
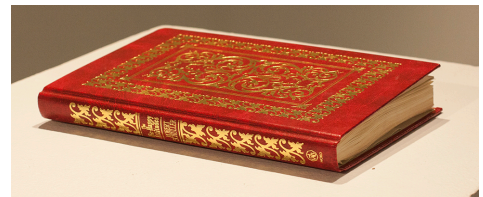
b.) *Head Gear*, detail



19. *The Be(Happy) Attitudes, Captivity, Sadie (My Sadie) and A Horse In Motion*, Installation view



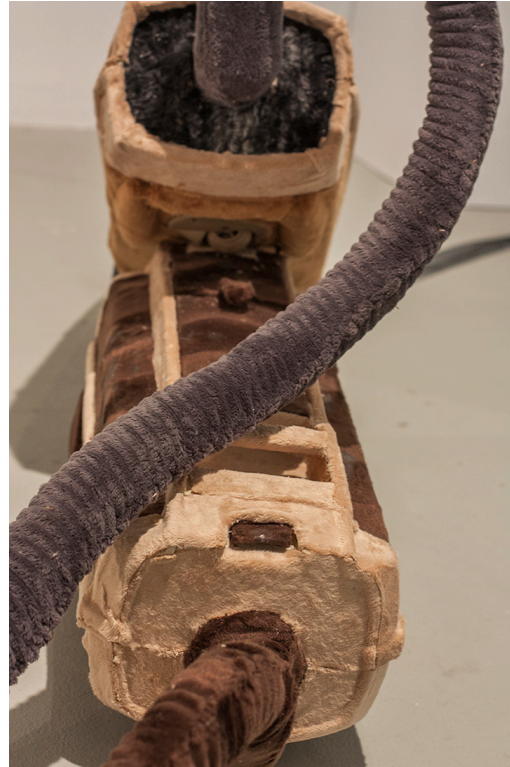
20. *The Be(Happy) Attitudes*, sculptural object



21. a.) *Captivity*, sculptural object, audio



b.) *Captivity*, detail



22. a.) *Sadie (My Sadie)*, sculptural object



b.) *Sadie (My Sadie)*, detail



23. a.) *A Horse In Motion*, Motorized object



b.) *A Horse In Motion*, detail

