
no more potlucks

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Editorial

Welcome to the **Witness** issue.

Witness as in:

To observe.
To attest.
To testify.

One who has personal knowledge of something.
One who can give a firsthand account.
One who gives evidence.
One who is called on to testify before a court.

A character witness, blind witness, Witness Lee, paranormal witness, auricular witness, adverse witness, hostile witness, compellable witness, Jehovah's witness, prosecuting witness, zealous witness...

In this issue...

Momoko Allard speaks with cover photographer, Yuki Kokubo, about her documentary work on sites of environmental loss. Kokubo also discusses her current project; a film about her parents who live in a region of Japan affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

Mandy Hiscocks blogs (sends letters to friends who type her words and upload them to her blog) from Vanier Prison in Milton, Ontario. She expects to spend most of 2012 in jail on charges of conspiracy, for her participation against the G20 in Toronto, summer of 2010.

Karen Herland interviews human rights activist Laura Agustín and discuss how migrant women's lives are impacted by international concerns about human trafficking.

Tara-Michelle Ziniuk interviews long-time community radio programmer, activist and unofficial lesbian historian Laura Yaros about the importance of archiving queer and women's histories.

Toshio Meronek speaks with Jason Fritz-Michael and Matt Momchilov. They describe art from their show Hayride, inspired by the first-wave AIDS crisis and self-help guru Louise Hay.

Featured in this issue is the second in a series of interviews by Owen Chapman with Montreal-based audio artists conducted during the summer of 2011 as part of a "writing audio art" residency at the Oboro new media centre. For Witness, Chapman speaks with Nimalan Yoganathan.

As part of a series of interviews with artists on the MTF spectrum, Tobaron Waxman introduces Raafat Hattab a genderqueer Palestinian performance artist from Jaffa.

Jay Donahue gets the inside scoop from Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith about their new book: *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*.

On sabbatical from York's Department of Sociology, Lesley Wood turn to war stories to question the transformative potential of "witnessing something horrific."

A series of accidental photos documenting the first-person perspective of a long-term care home are captured by 86-year old Joyce Dix on her cellphone camera. These become fodder for Cait Harben and Sarah Mangle to address issues of autonomy, privacy, and the culture of elderly care facilities.

Dandy Horse Magazine asked Marlena Zuber to map her favourite cycling route in 2009, but it evidences much more than this: love, landmarks, and alternatives.

If You Can, Dance was originally commissioned by *SubTerrain Magazine*; a piece by Vancouver-based filmmaker and performance artist Amber Dawn that brings testimonies to stage.

We are ready to announce the themes for 2013. They are:

25 Jan/Fev 2013 – ARCHIVE
26 Mar/Apr 2013 – HAUNTED
27 Mai/June 2013 – CRUSH
28 Jul/Aug 2013 – REVENGE
29 Sep/Oct 2013 – Guest Editor (tba)
30 Nov/Dec 2013 – USED

If you would like to contribute, check out the submit page or email us.

Thank you to the whole NMP team, especially to Jenn, Ren and Tamara for their stellar copy editing and to Dayna for her video compression magic. Sending love to regular contributor, Yasmin Nair.

Extra special thank-you to Jacqueline Wallace for the extra special support. THANK YOU. Virtual nod to the Fembots, too.

Mél would like to personally thank Mars for the planetary boost in self-confidence. M-C has nothing to say right now (but is also secretly rooting for Mars.)

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward a existential and experiential journal bimonthly.

Your NMP Editors,
Mél Hogan & M-C MacPhee


OCCUPY
Vanier
2012!

Bored But Not Broken: Occupying Vanier Prison

Mandy Hiscocks

What follows is an introductory letter and a few reprints from Mandy Hiscock's blog: Bored but Not Broken where she is sharing experiences and thoughts during her time at Vanier Centre for Women in Milton, Ontario.

in 2009 and 2010 i was involved in organizing against the 2010 winter olympics and the G8/G20 summits. i was working with a lot of amazing people and – unfortunately – at least two undercover cops.

based on some incredible paranoid and twisted interpretations of the under-cover's surveillance notes, arrest warrants were issued for 21 people on charges of conspiracy. i was arrested in the early morning of the first day of the G20 summit along with two friends, at gunpoint, in a Guns and Gangs unit raid on their home. over the next few weeks more alleged conspirators would be arrested, some would have their charges dropped, some would be released on bail. i spent a month in jail at Vanier Centre for women before being released on house arrest to six sureties who pledged a total of $140,000.

all of this happened in the context of a massive security operation in the lead-up to the summit and serious police violence during the protests. over 1000 people were detained, most never charged. inside the G20 meetings the "leaders" committed to the austerity measures currently wreaking havoc around the world.

our arrests also happened in the context of years of increasing collaboration and solidarity between indigenous people, migrant justice organizers, and anarchists. i believe this to be the real reason we were arrested – solidarity scares the state.

in the fall of 2011 we were offered a global resolution by the crown: everyone takes a deal, or everyone risks going to trial. while i would have loved to take the state to court, we decided that the best decision for the group was to take

a deal. we negotiated the crown down to only six guilty pleas (to counselling not conspiracy) out of the 17 of us still facing charges. six of us would do time and 11 would go free. this was a difficult decision but we stuck together in a stressful and complicated situation. for more information on our deal and how we reached it go to conspiretoresist.wordpress.com.
so now i am back at Vanier until december 3rd. i'm trying to stay connected to organizing and my community, and to learn about the prison industrial complex while it has me in it's clutches. this blog is an attempt to share what i learn and experience with people on the outside – i hope it's useful.

My Statement to the Court
Published by mandy
Fri, 2012-01-13
08:29

[*Today, Mandy was sentenced to 16 months in prison. During the sentencing hearing, she made this statement to the court, which was interrupted 8 times, by both the judge and the prosecutor. In the end, they spoke more during the time alloted to Mandy than Mandy spoke herself. A version which includes all of those comments will be posted separately.*]

It's not every day you get the opportunity to speak directly to a judge, and I have a lot to say. This is my first opportunity to speak since this entire process started last June so I hope you'll hear me out until the end.

I plan to take about ten to fiteen minutes at most.

I don't know you as a person or as a judge, so my comments are directed at the legal system in general.

I want to address some of the things you said on this matter in earlier sentencing hearings, particularly your references to the KKK.

When you sentenced Peter, Adam, Erik and Leah to jail, you stated that this is not political, it is about our tactics. You mentioned the KKK, and compared their actions to those of the non-violent civil disobedience protesters of the 60s. I agree with you that the tactics used by the KKK are reprehensible. I disagree with you that that kind of violence against people is anything remotely like the property damage that occurred on the streets of Toronto during the G20 summit.

Regardless, by focusing on the KKK's tactics and not their politics you've missed the point entirely. The problem with the KKK isn't only their tactics. It's the fact that they're a white supremacist group.

White supremacy is defined as "an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples and nations; for the purpose of establishing, maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege."

I don't think you disagree with me that there is a system of wealth, power and privilege in this country. I benefit from this system every day, and so do you. We benefit on the backs of others, most of whom are people of colour.

Systemic oppression is widespread in the legal system. Racial profiling affects who gets arrested in the first place, who gets charged and who gets sent home, whose charges the Crown decides to proceed with and whose they drop, who gets bail and who doesn't. It's not a secret that if you're in custody during your trial, your chances of conviction are higher. And even if you do get out on bail, who gets compliance checks and who doesn't means some people end up back in jail on a breach while others don't. Who in this is more likely to plead guilty right away because they don't have the time, tools or money to defend themselves?

The fact is that lawyers are expensive and your chance of conviction depends on how much time your lawyer is willing to put into your case. Most judges are white, and the jury selection process means that if you're poor you'll almost certainly not end up with a jury of your peers. And finally, sentencing relies on privilege (your education level, your chance of employment, your income, prior run-ins with the law, and so on.)

I don't have proper statistics for all of the above, and anyway I know you know this stuff. I just want you to be aware that I know it too, and so do most of the people in this room today and in the video room.

However, here are some statistics that I do have: According to the federal correctional investigator, over the past decade there has been a 52 per cent leap in the proportion of black offenders in federal incarceration. Black people make up roughly 2.5 per cent of Canada's population but 9.12 per cent of federal prisoners. In Ontario, 20 per cent of the federal prison population is black. Keeping in mind that people of colour have been hardest hit by the economic downturn and the conservative policies of our current government, and keeping in mind all the ways in which the legal system disadvantages people of colour, is it really any wonder?

My point is that a few broken windows and burned police cars at a protest will not lead us down the path of the KKK. The KKK targeted black people with overt violence and terror, and this system targets them with institutionalized racism, which is just a more subtle form of violence. In fact this legal system is doing the work of the KKK more than any anti-G20 protester ever could. It's very telling that the KKK was comprised in large part of wealthy businessmen and lawmakers – the kinds of people our society and our legal system hold up as the best of the best. Perhaps this is why in 1987 Weatherman Linda Evans was sentenced to 40 years for using false ID to get a firearm and harbouring a fugitive, despite the average sentence for that being 2 years. In the same year, a KKK leader named Don Black, who was planning an invasion of Dominica with a boatload of explosives and automatic weapons, was sentenced to 8 years, 5 of which were suspended, so that he ended up serving 3.

White supremacy is wrong, it's violent and dangerous, whether it's at the hands of a fringe group like the KKK or an accepted institution like the criminal justice system.

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It's not always what the "justice" system does that causes the problems, sometimes it's what it doesn't do. The courts simply do not consider systemic oppression and inequality.

In a book called The Red Lily, Anatole France stated that "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread." The book was written in 1894 in France, but that statement still applies here, today.

A crime is a crime, you say, regardless of who committed it, and what leads people to crime doesn't matter.

In 1999 the Supreme Court of Canada tried to address systemic injustice in their ruling on Regina vs Gladue. They stated that we need to acknowledge the circumstances of Indigenous people, the reasons they may wind up in the justice system, and the racist treatment and attitudes they encounter there. They recommended alternatives to prison sentences that mesh more with Indigenous cultures.

According to people who work in the field, many Indigenous accused still don't know about Gladue reports or how to get them, and they aren't always informed by their lawyers. Judges continue to resist the sentencing principles outlined at the conclusion of the Gladue case.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2008/2009, 10 years after the ruling, Aboriginal women represented 28% of all women remanded and 37% of women admitted to sentenced custody. Today Aboriginal women, though less than two per cent of the Canadian population, make up 34 per cent of female federal inmates.

My point being, I don't have the power to change what happens in this legal system. I'm trying to indicate why I don't respect this legal system.

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The crown wants this sentence to be a deterrent. It won't be. Please take a second to have a good look around the room. When i get taken out of here do you think you'll have increased anyone's faith in the system?

I am certainly not deterred, I'm just angry.

No matter what my sentence is today, it won't be about justice. Your system is not about justice. If it was, don't you think we would have come to you when the G20 decided to set foot here to pursue their obviously unjust austerity agenda? Don't you think we would have asked for your help when the police started to put up their fences and cages, and randomly arrest whoever they felt like so they could systematically abuse them in the detention centre?

If this system was about righting wrongs, don't you think we would come to you to hold the rich to account for their abuses against the poor, immigration officials to account for their abuses against people without status, and settlers to account for our abuses against Indigenous people?

We didn't and don't come to you. We won't ever come to you.

A court of real justice would defend people against aggressors. In this society, the privileged are the aggressors, but time after time you choose to protect their privilege and their property against people who are struggling to survive. You're doing it wrong. Let's not debate. The obvious answer to the violence and the chaos is the cops brought that. I'm going to try and finish.

This legal system that we have here is not equal, it's not fair and its not just. And a lot of people out there believe that it is. What I would like to impart to you is that I don't buy it and the statistics dont support it.

You speak of dignity, that everyone should be treated with dignity. I agree with you. But you can't treat someone with dignity, or expect to be treated with dignity in return, while one person is up high and the other person is down low, while your boot is on their neck.

This is why we, myself and the people in the other room, don't have decorum in this system.

Throughout this farcical legal process that's coming to an end today the accused have been told that our actions were an attack on the rule of law, which is at the heart of our society. Well good.

Our society is racist and colonial, its rooted in wealth and power, and so is the rule of law that upholds it.

And I'm going to leave this court room today, to quote Chilean anarchist Diego Rios:

"I am carrying all my hatred and contempt for power, its laws, its authority, its society, and I have no room for guilt or fear of punishment."

Liberation
Published by mandy
Wed, 2012-02-01
21:14

the other day i opened a book appropriately entitled "liberation". on the very first page, written in pencil, was this:

Why I am here?

How long am I going to be here?

How do I get out of Prison?

Who put me here?

Who do I speak to, what do I say?

Who will help me?

What do I need?

What type of help do I need?

Where do I go? for help.

When do I get out?

When does someone tell me what I am supposed to do?

i can't imagine how it must feel to be that isolated and disoriented in a place like this. when i got here, i'd been preparing myself for two months – lots of time to get comfortable

with the idea of incarceration, to put plans in place, to find out much of what i needed to know. i'm fortunate, and privileged, to have tons of community support and friends who are skilled organizers with a lot of resources and access. all of that has made it pretty easy for me to get my bearings and transition into life on the inside.

but it's not like that for everyone here. there's a lot of uncertainty. i can hear it constantly in snippets of conversation as people walk around the range, talk to their lawyers on the phone, and ask anxious questions to guards, nurses, social workers – anyone who might know anything that could help them. i've met people who don't know what exactly their next court date is for, or if their their surety should be there, or why their lawyer didn't show up to represent them, or why they're being deported.

the legal system is not user-friendly, and there's no reason for that. i think there should be an orientation to the process for people just getting to jail. a regularly offered class, like the workshops on anger management, substance abuse, healthy relationships and so on that they run here. or just a handbook. hmm. . .i sense a project coming on, anyone interested in working with me on this?

as i think i mentioned in my last post, my "Earliest Discharge Date" is december 3, 2012. that's 2/3 of my 16 month sentence which will be all i'll serve as long as i "earn full remission and protect it by proper behaviour". . .how's that for condescending? most people end up serving no more than 2/3 of their sentence, it seems that improper behaviour has to be pretty bad (but don't quote me on that, i don't know for sure). because the crown has not asked for a period of probation following sentence, on december 3 i will be completely out of the clutches of the criminal "justice" system.

if i fail to act appropriately, i could be held past december 3 but no later than may 12, 2013, which is my Warrant Expiring Date and marks the end of the 16 month sentence. let's not think about that.

that brings me to the last important date: june 22, 2012, which is my Parole Eligibility Date and marks 1/3 of my sentence. despite rumours to the contrary, which i'm sorry to say i helped spread before arriving here, parole IS available for people doing up to two years less a day in provincial jails and isn't only for people serving longer sentences in federal penitentiaries. in fact, if your sentence is six months (181 days) or more, your right to a parole hearing is automatic. if it's less than that you have to apply in writing but it's still possible.

the person to talk to about parole is the institution liaison officer (ILO). one is available at every institution. the ILO i spoke to was very nice, and explained that her role is to give me all the information i need and then to help me prepare for a hearing. she gave me some pamphlets to look over which were very informative and slightly condescending, and a Parole Planning Guide which was slightly informative and very condescending.

if you're interested in how parole works in provincial jails, check out www.opb.gov.on.ca.

for now, in case you're thinking that me getting out on parole this summer sounds like a good idea and/or remotely possible, here are some of the highlights:

-the parole board "wants to discuss your offences with you and how you plan to keep yourself from committing a crime in the future." they want to see remorse, of which i have none.

-"the board will focus on whether or not your release will pose an undue risk to society"

- yes, that's important because i was such a threat before – and "whether or not your release will help you to become a law abiding citizen." pardon me while i laugh uncontrollably for a moment.

-one of the "things you can do to increase the likelihood of parole" is "think about the decision you made that got you into trouble with the law and what you need to do to increase your chances of staying out of trouble if you are released." <sigh> so many things to say about this, and they all lead to PAROLE ELIGIBILITY FAIL.

but here's the real kicker: there are six mandatory standard conditions that come with parole. if i breach any of them or am "convicted or charged" with another criminal offence before the end of my full sentence in may 2013, my parole could be suspended. i could be forced back to Vanier to serve the rest of my time, which could even be extended past the 16 months if they decide not to count my time out on parole as time served. the conditions are:

-report to your parole supervisor and local police as required;

-remain in Ontario;

-get permission from your parole supervisor before changing address or employment;

-carry your parole certificate at all times

okay, so far so good. i suppose i could accept those. but the last two are:

-obey and the law and keep the peace;

-not associate with any person who is engaged in criminal activity or who has a criminal record unless approved by your parole supervisor.

now there's absolutely no way, after what happened to alex, that i trust the cops or the crown attorney's office to not have me arrested on some bogus charge or breach and have me thrown back in here just because they can. as for non-association conditions, i don't expect i'll ever sign those again. it's hard to believe they're constitutional (i suspect they're actually not) but easy to believe they're designed to rip targeted communities apart, one conditional release at a time. of all the mistakes i made since my arrest in the summer of 2010, agreeing to non-communication with my co-accused is the one i regret the most.

so thanks but no thanks. i've decided to waive my right to a parole hearing so that when i walk out of here i will not be on any conditions and won't be bound to the criminal "justice" system in any way.

this post is titled "liberation" so i'll end with a shout-out to Erik, who's spending his first week out of jail as i write this. of course, being freed from incarceration is not real freedom... none of us will have real freedom until we get our shit together and decide what we're willing to give up for it. but you all know that already.

in solidarity, with much love and thanks for all your letters,

mandy

Home, Home on the Range
Published by mandy
Fri, 2012-02-10
13:03

well, i've been here almost four weeks now, i'm all settled in and i've got the routine down. so now it's time for me to answer the question i get asked the most by folks on the outside: "so what do you do all day?"

come, spend a day on Unit 2F, in the maximum security wing of Vanier with me!

the lights come up in the cells around 7:45am. this gives us about 15 minutes to get up, get dressed, and strip our bed (folding the sheets and blankets neatly in a pile at the end of the bed, as per the photo posted out on the range). by the time the lights go on i've been up for at least an hour or two doing a full warm-up and stretch – conveniently remembered from my days of competitive gymnastics – while my cellie sleeps. being up that early means i get to see who's being taken out for court – they get taken at 6am so they can wait in holding cells for hours. it's inefficient and kind of mean. anyway, around 8am the loud buzzing sound means the cells are now unlocked, and we head out to breakfast. the cell door locks behind us.

here on maximum security we're supposed to either all be in or all be out of our cells at any given time – we can't go in and out throughout the day as we please. one exception to this is right after breakfast, when the doors and the cleaning supply cupboards are opened and we're allowed to take some time to clean our cells.

one cell out of the 16 on Unit 2F is a single – every other one is for two people. they have:

-two beds (metal slabs with plastic covered replaceable mattresses on top)

-a shelf at the end of each bed for our stuff

-a desk and stool

-a sink and toilet

-two mirrors, one of which is functional

-a window in the door that looks out onto the range (my cell has the best view. we can see everything – the guards, the TV, the clock)

-a window in the wall that we can't see through but it does let in some light

-one property box (big tupperware) each for us to store things in – usually things that need to be taken out to the range like paper and pencils, book, sweater and so on

okay, so where were we? oh, right, cleaning the cell. we sweep and mop the floor, and clean the desk, sink and toilet. unlike last time i was here in the summer of 2010, there's cleaning solution now. but still no rags or mop heads, so we use sanitary napkins and dirty towels. we clean a lot. i mean, who washes the toilet and mops the floor every single day? we do. it's not like we have any big plans for the day or anything.

at some point during chores one of the guards yells "supplies!" and we line up so they can pass soap, shampoo, tampons, etc. through a hatch. if you want a new toothbrush you have to bring the old one so they can see you toss it in the garbage. same goes for the deodorant and toothpaste containers, and the toilet paper rolls – i'm not joking. shortly before or shortly after supplies the nurse arrives and anyone taking meds lines up. they're passed through the hatch, too, and when you've swallowed you have to open your mouth to show the nurse you're not stashing them in there.

sometime after chores the cell doors are locked and the rest of the morning is spent on the range. the range is the common area that the cells open onto. it's very institutional with walls made of those big bricks and painted off-white like a high school gym, and a linoleum floor. eight tables with four seats each are bolted to the floor near the front of the range, closest to where the guards sit watching us from behind the glass. high up on the wall is a TV that gets turned on in the afternoons and evenings during the week and all day on weekends. three very well-used phones are lined up against one wall. there are two bathrooms and at the back end of the range are two showers that get unlocked whenever we're locked out of our cells. the bathrooms and showers don't lock so there's a little sliding window you can use to see if anyone's inside. there's also a laundry room but only guards and range workers go in there.

out on the range people chat, play cards, do crossword puzzles and sudukos and word finds, draw and colour, write letters and poems and journal entries, and talk on the phone. there are usually a few people walking around the range in circles, and sometimes people do step or sit-ups or stretch.

between 11 and 11:30 lunch arrives, and after lunch we get locked in our cells until around 2pm. "quiet time" – yes, like at daycare! some guards even dim the lights. this is a good time to get things done – i usually work on the blog or write letters and read. people have been sending me some really interesting things for which i'm really grateful. this is also a good time for a game with my cellie – lately we have been playing a lot of scrabble. if i'm feeling ambitious i do pushups or burpees, but that doesn't really happen very often.

when the cells unlock around 2pm we're back on the range until dinner (which comes ridiculously early – between 4 and 4:30pm). this is the time of Really Bad TV: Jerry Springer, Maury Povich, Silent Library, Scare Tactics. it's painful, and hard to get away from, but i'm getting better at tuning it out.

after dinner we're locked up again until 6pm, and then we're back out on the range until 7:30. in and out, in and out. nothing much

happens in the evening. request forms are handed out (these are to be filled out by inmates who want to speak to someone, like a doctor or social worker or the Elizabeth Fry Society) and the nurse comes to dispense evening meds. at 7:30 we go back to our cells for the night and hope the lights don't get dimmed too soon. . .because some guards will dim them as early as 8:30. i guess sometimes they forget we're adults. anyway the lights don't really go out – all night they're only dim – and i can still read in the only-slightly-darkness, so it's not too bad for me. at some point before my cellie falls asleep i make my bed, do a bit of yoga and am usually in bed by 10pm. it's easy to sleep eight hours a night here. . .i know some of you are jealous!

but really, don't be jealous, it's actually not very fun. every day is basically the same, with a few exceptions:

-wednesdays and sundays: clothing exchange. we get clean clothes, towels and bedsheets

-saturdays: the canteen order arrives

-sundays: we submit next week's canteen order form. we get our free issue: four pieces of lined paper and two envelopes that the jail mails out for free

there are the occasional very welcome interruptions of yard time, mail distribution and visits. and the less fun but still distracting chats with the institution's professionals and community workers. now that i'm settled i don't really see any of those people anymore. i also don't go to programs (Anger Management, Better Choices, Healthy Relationships etc.) or go to the Chapel or Bible study, although a lot of inmates do. mostly i try to write a couple of letters and make a phone call every day, work regularly on the weekly blog post, and do three 40 minute walks around the range daily.

something good happens at least once a day. i get a visit, or mail, or i chat on the phone with someone i miss. still, i often go to bed at night feeling that the day can't possibly be over because nothing has happened yet, i haven't really done anything. it's not like i never felt this way on the outside – i just feel it way more often here. i remind myself that it's probably how a lot of people feel who work shitty, meaningless jobs then go home and watch shitty, meaningless TV – but that doesn't make it better, just more sad.

because there's so little to do, i find it helps to keep everything separate and focus on one thing at a time. walking is walking and it happens inside. breathing fresh air happens

outside. so don't walk around outside, just breathe. don't walk and read, or read while you eat! walk, then read, then eat – it takes longer. don't take the cell's garbage bag out on the way to breakfast – wait and do it during chores – it'll be an extra trip! i'm not sure if this is what people mean when they talk about mindfulness and focusing on the present, but it definitely feels different than my usual hurry-up-save-time multi-tasking lifestyle. i hope to be able to keep it up to some extent when i get out.

and speaking of getting out. . . Adam has been released from Penetang! i hope you're enjoying your first week back on the outside, Adam. slowly but surely the state is relaxing its grip on us.

Thanks to **Ali Sauer** for all of her amazing work on Mandy's blog and on this submission to NMP.
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To read more about Mandy's experiences in Vanier, please visit her blog:
http://boredbutnotbroken.tao.ca/
Donate money to help Mandy cover costs associated with jail here:
http://boredbutnotbroken.tao.ca/fundraising

"FRIENDS" MEETING EMIGRANT GIRL AT THE DOCK

"The girl was met at New York by two 'friends' who took her in charge. These 'friends' were two of the most brutal of all the white slave traders who are in the traffic."

—U. S. Dist. Attorney Edwin W. Sims (page 55).

Foreign girls are more helplessly at the mercy of white slave hunters than girls at home. Every year thousands of girls arriving in America from Italy, Sweden, Germany etc. are never heard of again.

Laura Agustín on Crossing Borders

Karen Herland

A century ago, newspapers regularly reported stories of young women who were tricked by fraudulent employment agents, seduced by men promising marriage or drugged with hypodermic needles on the tramway, and awoke behind a brothel's locked doors. In every 'chop suey palace' or ice cream parlour lurked madams, pimps, and their agents, responsible for stealing tens of thousands of young women each year to feed the growing sex trade. Conservative clergymen, women's associations, philanthropic organizations and progressive social reformers were equally passionate about the need for legislation to protect girls and women. Plays, movies, magazines and books were all platforms for cautionary tales.

The panic was so entrenched that when the well-funded coffers of John D. Rockefeller's private foundation turned up no trace of coordinated international networks of criminals kidnapping women, this lack of evidence was seen as further proof of their power.

I came across those early front-page newspaper accounts of drugged and stolen women regularly when researching vice in Montreal in the early 20th century. Further back in the paper, less sensational follow-up stories described young women who had decided to elope, or who fabricated stories to avoid punishment for staying out too late. One young woman faked her own kidnapping to try to win back an ex-boyfriend. Women were using the presumption of their powerlessness to get what they wanted.

And yet, the story still persists. Current campaigns against human trafficking closely parallel concerns about the white slave trade. Although the theme encompasses child labourers and migrant farm workers, the focus remains on stories of young women sold or stolen into exploitative conditions dependent on cruel pimps and indifferent clients. The need to protect these young women and girls is regularly deployed to galvanize people across any number of

disparate political positions. And, following in Rockefeller's well-heeled footsteps, Google recently announced an $11.5 million donation to fight human trafficking around the world. An entire network of NGOs, programs, charities and projects exist to fight trafficking. Despite the vast amount of resources devoted to the cause, there are still only a handful of arrests every year.

Laura Agustín is one of the few theorists willing to challenge this particular legend. Since the early 1990s she has been speaking with, and writing about, migrant workers. What emerges is a complex set of stories presented from the point of view of the forgotten subjects in these narratives. Her research suggests that some women do choose sex work over other forms of labour available to them as migrants.

Although this contradicts the accepted mythology of trafficking, Agustín says: "I always say I take as a basic value that if someone tells me something, I believe it." Her writing is also critical of what she calls "the Rescue Industry"– the growing, and well-funded network of NGOs and programs whose existence depends on the helplessness of women and the conviction that they need to be saved.

I had the pleasure of meeting Laura while she was traveling through Montreal in November 2011. We had many fabulous conversations over drinks. Unfortunately, my attempts to properly record our subsequent conversations were only marginally successful. We found ourselves trying to recreate conversations over and over "for the record", losing a little bit with each successive copy.

What follows is fragments of our conversation, examining the ideas inherent in the mythologies of these campaigns and the very real impact those stereotypes have on the lives of the women involved.

Karen Herland: I want to start with this narrative. It's always the same story: an innocent woman, wherever she may be, somehow seduced by power or promise, or coerced and trapped….

Laura Agustín: It involves the idea that there are innocent girls, and there are men (or bad women) who tell them a story, and they go along with it. It relies on the idea of isolated women in jungles and mountaintops who don't know anything… but, of course, there are grass-roots agencies, and NGOs and journalists in those places, too.

It isn't because the story is more credible, it's more appealing. It presents a scenario with clear good and evil. Not many people like ambiguity and complications. They'll hear a story that's entertaining or thrilling and that's it.

KH: It is interesting that you say it's a kind of entertainment — it is. As a melodrama, it becomes simply entertainment. Nobody wants to know what happened to these women after the raid.

LA: I think the women have become irrelevant. I started to see that years ago. I doubt many really care about the women.

KH: The story ends when the brothels are shut down, and the women no longer have

to be there. But where the women end up, or what their options might be, is never considered.

LA: A lot of money is spent on (rescue) shelters, but there isn't any mechanism for overseeing them, some of them are more like asylums or concentration camps. And there's no solution for the fact that women who have migrated to another country don't have any citizen rights.

I've met people who feel 'rehabilitated', in the sense that they have a roof and food, and a chance to calm down and think about what they want to do.

They are grateful for that, but they are not going to be able to stay in the country they happen to be in. And they don't want to go home.

Of course, a woman in this situation can't just walk away, because she's not legal and doesn't know anyone. She's calculating the whole time as well, "what should I say to these people to make them bend the rules for me."

KH: It is a constant calculation. Women who decide to leave home in the first place, make those calculations — 'should I work as a domestic in a home and care for kids, or work in a bar?'. Then after they have been "rescued", they have a whole new set of calculations to make.

LA: But if you have crossed a border, you are constrained. What if the shelter people are abusing you? Some people might try going back to the brothel, if they know the way. And even if someone offers to help them, they are vulnerable, as recognizable foreigners who don't speak the language.

KH: In the developed world, we put all these values on these choices and the people making them. The fact that you would leave your family, and go into debt, to sell sex is completely incomprehensible to a lot of western people. Why would you leave your family unless you were forced to or lied to or desperate? And why would you sell sex unless you were forced, or desperate or lied to....

LA: Of course, we know that some people do want to leave home, and run away. But adult women in "other" places are considered children. That's colonialism.

KH: And their choices are not valid. How many North American women willingly leave their homes and go to school and go into debt. Those women are leaving home to better their lives. And in the context of that, they're incurring debt. Somehow we accept the need for the debt of higher education. Finally the occupy movement is addressing this in a really clear way. You see sign after sign: I went to school..., I got that degree...

LA: I did what you told me to do...

KH: ...and now I have a 20, 30, 100 thousand dollar debt. And with the earning power of my English degree or humanities degree, I have no way to pay that back in any reasonable amount of time.

LA: At least two kinds of big debt are invisible: student debt and mortgages on houses that people can't pay and they are thrown out on the street.

People get into boats and go to Vancouver and owe $20,000 and that's considered uniquely horrible. If you talk to them, they say "well, it's a lot of money, but my plan is to I'll be able to pay that back in a few years…." People may be duping themselves, but it is rational to think that way. Women migrating and incurring debt to sell sex is just considered so much worse. Anthropologically, it's very strange to see one kind of debt as demonic and especially terrible.

KH: The assumption is that everyone in the West, or with an education or whatever that marker is, never has to compromise. I don't understand how anyone can live a life and assume no one has to compromise. We all compromise.

LA: When I'm giving a talk, there's always a conversation about choices. I look at everyone in the room and say: "I would like everyone in this room to think about whether they have always had a full and interesting gamut of choices at every point in their life — when they never felt obligated or coerced by a parent, or an institution, or the need to get money, or to get the hell out of a stupid marriage …" Everyone always seems on board with that.

KH: But difficult choices and compromises are somehow worse for women in developing countries. This is precisely where the rescue industry exists. It is intended to protect women from abusive conditions, however, to do so, it has to presume that there are only abusive conditions, and women who have been tricked and betrayed.

LA: If you talk to people in NGOs they all know how messy and confusing it is. They talk with migrants and try to figure out what each person can do. But the funding comes from governments with policies. And right now, taking an anti-trafficking position is a condition for funding. So you have to couch your requests for funding in a particular way.

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KH: So, what is the utopia? Do you see what exists now and take a pragmatic approach of harm reduction? Do you try to improve the situation, such as it is? Or do you say no I want to build a better world where this doesn't exist at all.

LA: My kind of view is considered amoral by utopians. They say I'm willing to let everyone have a mediocre life. But I'm not interested in utopia.

KH: Because you don't think it's realistic.
LA: I don't believe we'll ever reach there. I am personally more interested in the slow plodding amelioration of bad situations, the small things that you can do. But there is a lot of pressure to only present one version, the simplistic, idealistic one. I've been called irresponsible for not doing that.

KH: So how would you address some of the problems as they are framed now?

LA: Well, I would never say, *this* is the solution. There are too many different situations. It's all been totalized by the melodramatic story into one simple idea, but there have to be a variety of solutions.

KH: The problem is sex work is so often illegal, wherever people end up. It's a bit of a chicken/egg situation. If I come from somewhere and don't have the papers that allow me to work legally, the fact that sex work is more often than not undocumented makes it an option.

LA: Even in the countries that have legalized or regulated sex work – Holland and New Zealand, say – they've excluded sex work as a way to prevent trafficking.

It can be an advantage that sex work is not regulated. If you get into a country and you have the right contacts to get into sex work and then find it tolerable or you manage to adapt to it, well then in fact you have the ability to move from different levels of the industry and try different jobs.

And for domestic workers, the family that employs you is often named on your papers. So women doing domestic work can't even move sideways. It can be better to do it in an undocumented way, and then move around.

KH: I want to go back to what you said before, about believing what people say about their own experience. Because, sometimes, when I hear certain stories, I'm wondering if I'm being told those stories because of those calculations we discussed before.

LA: I don't work in an NGO. If you're on the front line, then you are faced with those very confusing situations. Sometimes I think "that sounds fishy." The people who process asylum claims are in exactly the same situation. They always have to evaluate: is this something to make a claim on...Social workers have to ask the same kinds of questions, do these people deserve or need my help or not?

KH: Even how you pose that question: do people deserve or need my help? In the rescue industry, no one is asking that question. The default is to assume victimization and a lack of agency — not to figure out what's needed, or wanted, by the women themselves.

LA: Well, we're back to colonialism, then.

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While it's easy to see how both the idea of the white slave trade and trafficking discourses stem from western anxieties about immigration and gender, it's less clear why the stories depend on such archaic depictions of helpless women in need of rescue.

The spectre of victimized women in need of protection creates a satisfying narrative that allows westerners the opportunity to sweep in and 'save' misguided, abused and neglected women (and girls).

As Agustín has pointed out, the language of trafficking is circling back to the turn of the last century, and being replaced by the language of 'slavery'. This shift reinforces the helplessness of those involved, and

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I look at everyone in the room and say: "I would like everyone in this room to think about whether they have always had a full and interesting gamut of choices at every point in their life – when they never felt obligated or coerced by a parent, or an institution, or the need to get money, or to get the hell out of a stupid marriage ...“

the urgency of some form of intervention. International legislation is increasingly based on the imperative to stop trafficking, although arrests of traffickers are not increasing in proportion to the attention or resources devoted to them.

Although human rights NGOs uniformly take an anti-trafficking position, the rights of sex workers (including the right to be a sex worker) are rarely considered. Usually, the "rescued" women are forced to return to the same economic, social or cultural conditions that drove them to choose to leave in the first place.

More to the point, legislation and policy that has, as its basis, the intention to protect a supposedly less capable segment of society has rarely actually served that community.

Many of the Canadian laws, recently deemed by Justice Susan Himel in her 2010 ruling to put women in harm's way, were intended to protect women. In practice, their enforcement has had quite the opposite effect.

Image Credit: War on the White Slave Trade, Ernest A. Bell
First published 1909.

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Laura Agustín *blogs as* *The Naked Anthropologist* *and is the author of Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour, Markets and the Rescue Industry (Zed Books, 2007). She writes as a lifelong migrant and sometime worker in both nongovernmental and academic projects about sex, travel and work.*

Karen Herland *has only rarely left Montreal.*

Qimmiruluapik By Nimalan Yoganathan

"Not All Audio Art is Good, Obviously...": A Conversation with Nimalan Yoganathan

Owen Chapman

Nimalan Yoganathan's work demonstrates that "audio art" and "music" need not be mutually exclusive categories, showing how soundscape field recordings can replace Hip Hop MCs. Our interview also touched on sampling practices, the significance of attribution with source material, and the ethics/aesthetics of sound mapping. I was particularly keen to learn about Yoganathan's field recording in Inukjuak, Nunavik, as well as his collaborations with the Stein brothers and their "Montreal Sound Map" project. Shortly after our interview, Yoganathan left for the Brazilian Amazon to gather field recordings as part of a group residency led by sound artist Francisco Lopez. His 2011 album Sangam can be heard at http://nimalanyoganathan.bandcamp.com – check out "Qimmiruluapik" for some spine-tingling North meets South (as in Jamaica) juxtapositions.

This is the second in a series of interviews with Montreal-based audio artists conducted during the summer of 2011 as part of a "writing audio art" residency at the Oboro new media centre (http://oboro.net). I met Yoganathan for lunch on September 9th at the Croissanterie Linda on rue St. Catherine.

Nimalan Yoganathan: I started off just using pure field recordings and composing with that. I did more traditional soundscape compositions. But then I got the idea of trying to integrate that with Hip Hop and Dub music. Rather than sampling soul records, I'm going to sample some floating village in Vietnam or something. And try to integrate it that way, but not in the kind of traditional Hip Hop way where you just take a short, two-second excerpt of someone's voice, but rather spread it out and make dense textures within it. Very interesting, but very challenging at the same time. I've tried approaching MCs and they're like, "I can't rap over this, it's too much." Which is unfortunate, but at the same time I can understand because I guess the music is more... maybe it's more instrumental based?

Owen Chapman: Hip Hop used to be all about pushing the envelope and trying new styles and the more "next level" you were, the better. I don't want to say that everybody's like this, but it feels like it's become codified or much more rigid... more pop-y in terms of structure.

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We had these strange objects hanging off the ceiling and then these little arms hitting them. Sometimes they would work, sometimes they would break or fall to the floor, which made it interesting and very impromptu.

NY: But then you look at J Dilla for instance and – do you know Raymond Scott? I was part of that benefit, that concert that they did at Concordia. His son was giving a talk, and I was speaking with him and I asked, "How do you feel about J Dilla"? He blatantly used a few of Raymond Scott's pieces without getting any permission, and they were really mad about that. He was like, "he didn't get any kind of clearance, he didn't even bother asking us."

OC: It's just the Hip Hop way, I guess.

NY: It's good and bad because I can understand. Raymond Scott never really got any recognition, so he could at least quote him and say, check out his stuff. But at the same time, if you do research, you could find out [who J Dilla sampled] and it brings it into a new light. But that's just him. You won't see many people taking samples like that. It seems like there's a bank of samples that people are using.

OC: One thing I'm trying to outline is what "audio art" means as a term. Most audio artists are going to have a very idiosyncratic interpretation of what it means, and some of them might reject it entirely. And yet, there is a literature that I've encountered, maybe the term "sound art" is more what's being used, but people are trying to define what it is and relate it to the history of installation art, differentiating it from experimental music. I get it, because you want words to have significance when you're talking, but it's too constraining, I think.

NY: I guess the thing with audio art and sound art – the problem with a lot of academics – is they should be teaching more outside the circle. For instance, you learn about Stockhausen and John Cage. But what about Dub music, like King Tubby. These guys are often forgotten because it's described as just music or pop music or it's too common. But in fact King Tubby is experimenting as much as people like Stockhausen, with new technology, reverb, and following up on what these guys [Stockhausen and Cage] started in the 1950s.

OC: If you exclude performance as one element of what "sound art" or "audio art" can be, then it's too constraining. For instance, going to see a scratch DJ, or a live electronic music performer – can that constitute audio art? You're dealing with samples and fragments and other bits, you're pulling them together, you're manipulating them in a musical way, but it's all live in real time.

NY: As soon as something has melody or it's catchy or it has elements of music in it, then it gets stuck into the music category. But when you're talking about performance, that's something I always think about because I'll do some shows where it's just purely Hip Hop, Dub stuff, right? And I'll set it up that way as like performance. But at the same time it's not really a performance. I get self conscious as a performer because it's like a laptop synthesizer, there's nothing exciting going on necessarily, it's more just for listening. I often play with a lot of noise artists – do you consider that a performance? Is it entertaining? I mean, if you find listening entertaining then that's a performance, right?

OC: Can you tell me about your involvement with Oboro – what you presented and how the process went?

NY: I did two projects, one project was with Max and Julien [Stein] who did the Montreal Sound Map [http://montrealsoundmap.com]. We got invited. They have a Caisse Populaire residency for young artists. So we got access to all the studio facilities and the equipment and everything. Our project was taking the idea of the Montreal Sound Map – mapping – and we basically went around town, recorded all these sounds and then we created an installation using solenoid [actuators], like automatons. Like an automaton orchestra. We used a SuperCollider patch fed by all the field recordings that then triggered rhythmic patterns with the solenoids. What the solenoids played were found objects, like trash and random objects we found in the street. It was basically to explore the hidden rhythms of the city. Because often we think that you can only find interesting sounds out in the country, or you have to go to the jungle somewhere to find interesting soundscapes, but even though we have a lot of noise here and pollution, construction – you can still find interesting things in a city.

OC: Were there no field recordings that ended up in the final presentation of the work?

NY: They were played back simultaneously. They were played back in real time, but at the same time the software was being fed by the live playback.

OC: Did you compose a piece? Was it highly improvised? Was it structured improvisations?

NY: It was kind of loose compositions. We only used the pure field recordings, there wasn't any processing or anything, just editing. We just rearranged it by themes. We had some ideas, like water, taking footsteps from different metros or outside, exploring different textures and things like that. So it was kind of loose, like maybe five- to six-minute segments, spread out with short sounds in between. But in terms of composition, I think more of the focus went into finding interesting rhythms in terms of how would it react live. It wasn't us performing – it was these robots performing, these automatons performing. And that's what we wanted, like kind of in a Dadaist way, to make it a bit humorous. We had these strange objects hanging off the ceiling and then these little arms hitting them. Sometimes they would work, sometimes they would break or fall to the floor, which made it interesting and very impromptu.

I did another performance on my own, related to my Nunavut project – a multi-channel sound performance with video. I think it was probably the first time I actually performed in a strictly gallery setting. So you know, you walk in, everyone's quiet and sitting down and expecting the start of the performance, but I was doing soundscape at the same time as live rhythms and beats and stuff. It was interesting, not hearing people talking like in a bar setting. So that was fun, but it makes you think about the line between audio art or just live music.

OC: How do you understand the practice of sound mapping?

NY: Well, [with the Stein brothers] it is kind of scientific research. The way that they coded the database is amazing because you can say "okay I want a breathing sound", you search for that, you'll find a dog breathing, a human breathing... you can search for mechanical hand-operated machines, automated machines, very detailed.

That's what I found great, because it's one thing to just archive the sounds, but you want to be able to search and kind of study how some sounds are more prevalent than others. And that's what people in Vancouver were doing in the 1970s [with the World Soundscape Project]. But they were more concerned with noise pollution. What the Steins were doing and what I wanted to do with my project was to find compositions within the environment itself. And that was more so in my case. I think with the Montreal Sound Map it is different because it is open to the public – anyone can upload sounds – so it was more of an archive. Whereas mine... I collected the recordings, but also I was giving workshops there for kids up North. Sound art and field recording workshops. They were 11- to 14- or 15-year-old kids. They learnt how to use small Zoom H2 recorders and mini disks and we'd walk around the community and record. They caught on really fast, they were able to operate the machines, and so they uploaded some sounds to the sound map as well [http://www.inukjuaksoundmap.com]. My focus with this sound map was trying to give the idea of how there is music in the environment, but also conceptual ideas like how they're integrating both Western ideals and technology with traditional Inuit technology. For instance, on my sound map there's a recording of an elder Inuit man who's carving a kayak, but in the background there's a radio blaring The Rolling Stones. So just that sound, you listen to it and that speaks so many words – a depiction of everyday life. It's very clear. That's what I found interesting, and as I recorded sounds I started noticing subtleties like that, from a communications point of view, what it tells about the culture and where they're moving – it's no longer like the kind of naïve perception of Nanook of the North.

OC: And how did they respond? Because mapping is a loaded term in places like that...

NY: The kids were really insightful. I would be recording a sound and they'd be like, "Okay well if you're gonna go to that fishing dock tomorrow, I would suggest going in the morning because that's when they load up and start getting ready.

So there's much more interesting sounds, you can get the sound of them preparing...." And so they knew already what's going on and what you're trying to capture. But then talking to elders, for instance I remember talking to the mayor of the town and he started right away... he started going off on these tangents about how the night before he opened up his window and he was listening to the music of the wind, you know, and the melodies, so he appreciated this guy coming from down South and trying to find the music of the North. He didn't view it as hokey, "who is this guy?" But he understood, "okay, yeah that makes sense, I understand what you're trying to capture and what you're trying to do with it." I was surprised. I was really intimidated at first – I'm going to look like this strange guy with a microphone, recording everything. But people seemed to... they already know, they already appreciate these sounds...

OC: It sounds like they wanted to contribute and make sure that the map was not just representative of your kind of outside perspective, but that it integrated their sounds.

NY: And more realistic, you know, not just capturing the pretty sounds, but what life is. Whether it's in the supermarket or it's throat singers, or fishermen. So a more realistic approach.

OC: Do you think audio art is inherently conceptual?

NY: Very conceptual. That's the thing. As opposed to music, which isn't always conceptual, I mean obviously if you have lyrics it's conceptual, but it's more concerned with... I would say you can have conceptual art without having voice or lyrics or any kind of narration. The sound can be the narration itself, just by the way you layer sounds, it gives a narration on its own.

OC: Audio artists are often deliberately trying to explore... something.

Maybe what they're exploring only emerges in the process of doing some kind of random experimentation, but it quickly becomes refined. Things that you choose to limit yourself with become the concepts or the path through which you then generate your work. And I think that is a more deliberate type of method in audio art than in music.

NY: But I guess the interesting thing in terms of concept is that it could be problematic, in the sense that not all audio art is good, obviously...

OC: That's the one thing I'm going to quote from you!

NY: Yeah [laughter]. Artists are often deemed successful based on how they present their concept to the public or to funding committees. However, I've often come upon artists with very interesting and significant concepts. But do they actually successfully realize their project, like from an aesthetic point of view? I've been to a lot of shows or gallery exhibitions where you read about it, it sounds intriguing but what's going on? It's not bringing me in, I don't find it interesting. I find it's important not to only depend on the concept, but to have performance, it's good to think about the audience and the aesthetics of it. I'm not saying your piece needs to sound pretty. I just mean you need to give your audience something tangible to engage with, while still leaving room for interpretation.

Nimalan Yoganathan *is a Montreal sound artist and musician. He holds a B.Eng in Electrical Engineering (McGill) and BFA in Electroacoustic Studies (Concordia University). He focuses on the sculpting of field recordings within his works from his travels through bustling cities, desolate landscapes, and spiritual sites. Nimalan often attempts to mimic the timbral and rhythmic characteristics of such natural sounds using synthetic gestures. In a time when global communities are being plagued by noise pollution, he believes it is crucial to preserve and accentuate the subtle but musical sounds hidden all around us. He is the first artist to be funded by Conseil des Arts et des Lettres du Quebec's recently established Nunavik Fund for the Arts and Literature program (in collaboration with Avataq Cultural Institute). His works have been disseminated internationally at festivals and venues including Chicago Calling, Tonic (NYC), Hartware Medien Kunst Verein (Berlin), MUTEK (Montreal), Suoni per il Popolo, Art's Birthday, Darling Foundry, OBORO, and Société Des Arts Technologiques (SAT).*

Owen Chapman *is an audio artist whose work involves sampling, video projection, contact microphones and old electronic instruments. He is co-director of the Montreal Mobile Media Lab, located in the Communication Studies department at Concordia University, where he is also an Assistant Professor in Sound Production and Scholarship.*


PEOPLE
HAVE
AIDS.

Thinking About a Cure with Jason Fritz-Michael and Matt Momchilov

Toshio Meronek

In 1988 Oprah invited self-help guru Louise Hay onto her show to describe Hay's work with people with AIDS. At events she dubbed "Hayrides," Hay raked in thousands of dollars from AIDS-afflicted audiences who paid her to help them heal using her meditation and positive-thinking techniques. Days, weeks, and months later many of these followers were dead.

"Without the AIDS epidemic," said the *New York Times*' religion columnist in 2008, Hay's empire "wouldn't exist." (Today there are over 35 million copies of Hays' book *You Can Heal Your Life* in print. Her website also offers astrology calendars, iPhone apps, and audio CDs about feng shui.) But it's clear that Hay and many followers truly believed that her methods were something of an alternative to political change and medical innovation. Through paintings depicting the Hayrides, sculpture (including body casts of queer people who lived through the first-wave AIDS crisis), and clothing (one particularly striking piece: T-shirts proclaiming "PEOPLE HAVE AIDS."), Jason Fritz Michael and Matt Momchilov look at "the limitations and failures of self-help, fashion, art, and other media," which in the 1980s tended to conflate queerness with illness and stood in for "real advocacy, activism and transformation."

Toshio Meronek: How were you introduced to Louise Hay?

Jason Fritz-Michael: I became infatuated with her through my close friend, Sarah Lakey, who is trained in the arts of touch hypnosis, emotional freedom technique, chakra alignment, PSYCH-K, and gem elixirs. Sarah thought I would find [Hay] particularly fascinating as a guru figure.

Matt Momchilov: I was introduced to her through Jason, actually. He had a solo show in Oakland at *AS IS* Exhibitions earlier in the year, and that whole show was dealing with ideas of queer death, disease, and healing

and empowerment through self-help. One of the pieces was a sculpture he made that was supposed to be my tombstone. Ain't that sweet? And it was also starting to deal specifically with Louise Hay—so I really just jumped on as a collaborator for the New York show after his amazing show in Oakland sparked my interest in this whole world.

TM: Do you think Hay was just profiteering from fear about HIV and AIDS with her Hay Rides, books, movies, calendars, and appearances on Oprah?

JFM: No, I believe there was a real sense of passion and care behind her work, that she truly believed in the mind-body connection. However, it seemed to take on a life of its own, morphing into something that felt more constructed around books, tapes, videos, postcards, cruise ships, calendars—kind of less sincere feeling.

But this liminal grey area in her and other self-help gurus' work is always really interesting. The letting-go of negativity is always the goal, but what happens when our actions toward a positive, healthy life *become* the negative? Like her cruise ship retreats, where someone is paying to experience a healing ritual, while simultaneously this vessel that "heals" dumps massive amounts of garbage and waste into our oceans, pays the crew unfair wages, and consumes large amounts of fuel, food, cleaning supplies and enough toxins to overpower any affirmation. Where is the transformation of this waste? How can we heal on bigger scale?

MM: I agree. I think that's always the irony with any person who gains a lot of visibility with some special knowledge or power they're trying to teach you. Something might originate from a good place, but then you find out the priest is molesting little boys, the televangelist is embezzling money, Miss Cleo is being investigated for fraud, and the self-help guru is hosting healing retreats on a slave ship.

I think sometimes the people we look up to for answers end up with more responsibility than they know what to do with and lose touch with their core—but ultimately, I don't think Hay has any malicious intent or is deliberately doing anything that's deceptive.

TM: Tell me about the creation of her life-sized sculpture

JFM: The sculpture came from a life cast of the amazing, "'$65,000 Silicone Wonder' herself, Miss Gina LaDivina!" to quote from her introduction at the legendary drag bar in San Francisco, Aunt Charlie's Lounge, where she performed for many years. The construction was pretty similar to the process in that behind-the-scenes look at the making of *Thriller*: lots of liquid goo, breathing through straws, and holding positions for long amounts of time while listening to Lou Reed. I wanted to use Gina because she was a physical example of what it means to heal and transform. She captured a higher power beyond words, in my mind. And anyone who has seen her perform is sure to agree! As a representation of empowerment, she questions what it really means to "heal" one's life––not through blame and shame

but through self-creation and the power to be yourself and love who you are. She really made the piece—bringing into the discussion performance, drag, questions of identity, and history. Gina not only had been to the Hay Ride meetings during that time but also had met and cooked lunch for Louise. That really made the whole experience almost unreal and extremely personal. We had our own little higher power transformation that day.

MM: Absolutely. Gina totally made the piece. As far as the actual construction goes, the life mold we made of Gina was cast in concrete and then painted. We did work with a lot of photos—mostly headshots of Louise Hay from the eighties and early nineties—so the effect was this really strange double-portrait: Gina LaDivina in Louise Hay drag.

TM: Did you approach creating the pieces of clothing included in the show differently from other pieces that are more likely to be seen hanging in a gallery?

JFM: The [PEOPLE HAVE AIDS.] T-shirts are similar to Hays's work in the fact that they question a mode of transferring information, and call for action both internal and external.

They were inspired by the 1980s political message T-shirts of Katharine Hamnett, and the shirts leave the viewer feeling a little vague. The shirt isn't asking anyone to do anything. It's not meant to stand in for any real activism. But it forces those who wear the piece to have a deeper and more complete connection to the text "PEOPLE HAVE AIDS."

TM: The artists' collective in Brooklyn where you held the NYC show, *Monster Island*, is being torn down to make way for a *Whole Foods*. How did it feel knowing yours would be the last show there?

JFM: During the show I photographed the entire space—hallways, bathrooms … I knew it would be the last time I would ever see the building, and the whole space was so epic, so lived-in and special.

Raul De Nieves, one of the artists involved with the space, called it their "clubhouse," and it was truly amazing to hang out there before its scheduled implosion. Another treasure gone to make way for developers.

MM: Really strange. Even though we don't live in Brooklyn, it's a space that so many amazing artists, musicians, and friends have been connected to for such a long time. The idea that all these people are being displaced to make way for a fucking *Whole Foods* is pretty unbelievable. Haven't people learned how this Joni Mitchell song ends?

Jason Fritz Michael *is an interdisciplinary artist whose work shuttles between performance, installation, and disaster. Originally from Detroit, now living and working in San Francisco, Fritz's work is heavily in conversation with the histories of the queer future and representation through documentation. He holds a degree in Film and Women's Studies from San Francisco State University, and his work has been exhibited in galleries, performance spaces, and universities throughout the U.S. and Europe. His film Portrait of Bonnie has been screened at film festivals and has toured at universities in 2010. Fritz has participated in performance collaborations in New York, San Francisco and Berlin—and brings nothing less than Pure Joy.*
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Matt Momchilov *was born in Centerville, OH, in 1986. He is a multi-media visual artist and troublemaker whose portraits investigate the spirit of American subcultural spaces. He received his BFA in Painting, with High Distinction, from The California College of the Arts in 2008. His work has been exhibited, collected, and written about nationally and internationally, and he is a two-time winner of the Robert Ralls Memorial Scholarship, a Scholastic Art and Writing Awards National Silver Key winner, and a recipient of the 2004 Presidential Scholarship in Visual Arts. He currently lives and works in San Francisco.*
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A M 540 600 700 800 1000
F M 88 91 94 97 100
VHF hi 144 148 152 156 161+
VHF lo 30 32 35 38 42
UHF 450 460 470 480 490
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AM BROADCAST BAND
FM BROADCAST BAND
PUBLIC SERVICE BAND 1
PUBLIC SERVICE BAND 2
PUBLIC SERVICE BAND 3
AIRCRAFT CONTROL BAND
PATROLMAN—6
AC / BATTERY · SQUELCH CIRCUIT
SQUELCH
OUT
VOLUME
OFF
TUNING
FINE TUNING
REALISTIC

They Don't Call It Ephemera for Nothing: A Conversation with Laura Yaros about Lesbian Archives, Activism and Her Drawer of Cassette Tape Interviews

Tara-Michelle Ziniuk

It's June of 2009 and the National Campus-Community Radio Conference is being held in Montreal. It's Women in Radio day, a then-annual day of programming and workshops. It's queer caucus time and a bunch of us are sitting around with chart paper and name tags. We're exhausted. A couple of us are friends or work together and we're all there with the best intentions but fairly different interests. There's a go-around. It's fairly expected. Enter Laura Yaros, a local lesbian in her 50s, producer and host of *Matrix* at Radio Centreville. *Matrix* has been running for over 30 years, likely the longest running feminist radio show in Canada, produced entirely for and by women. Laura points out that this includes the technical production of the show, which certainly wasn't often the case when she got started.

We exchange stories of how we both got involved in radio. We're struck by the similarities between our respective experience, hers beginning in the early 1980s and mine the late 1990s. We both stayed on because radio became an outlet for our activism, a way to reach out and network; it became something we were good at and able to train others in. We laugh about reading from awkward scripts about subjects we knew little of, quoting statistics.

Matrix has had a lot of turnover, sometimes it worked as a collective and othertimes not. The team working on it has mostly been between five and ten women at a time. These days, Laura is doing most of the work herself, sometimes collaborating and sharing material with Rose Mary Whalley, who works on CKUT's *Older Women Live*.

Laura and I meet again electronically in December of 2009. At this time, I'm working on an edition of *GroundWire*, a news program produced collaboratively by stations across the country. It's the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Massacre, and Laura has original footage from 1989, produced with her longtime partner Beth Blackmore.

In Spring 2011, I have the opportunity to invite Laura to speak at another NCRC, this time in Halifax. Laura delivers a workshop called *The Role of Archiving Feminist Movements and Women's Struggles* and shares audio clips with us, including more of the December 6th footage along with stories of women affected by the Oka Crisis. Struck by the need to continue this conversation until our archives are digitized and accessible (i.e. pretty much forever), I interviewed Laura for *No More Potlucks*. Laura starts off by telling me about a recent edition of *Matrix*.

Montreal Massacre – Original Coverage by Laura Yaros, Matrix, Radio Centre-ville

Laura Yaros: On November 12th, I did an obituary and tribute to Barbara Grier, who died the Thursday before. Barbara Grier was a major player in lesbian publishing and an activist from way back. I had an interview that I'd done with her in 1987 when she'd come to speak at McGill. She spoke about her history being involved in one of the first lesbian groups in the 50s in the U.S., *The Daughters of Billitis*. She worked on the magazine *The Ladder*, this very secretive lesbian publication, sent out to women in brown paper packaging. She was co-founder of *Naiad Press*, which was sold ten years ago when she and her partner retired. She grew it into a really large publishing venture. She was great to interview because she is very colourful and has all these stories. You know when you get a great guest and you can wind 'em up and let 'em go?

Tara-Michelle Ziniuk: I do…

LY: That was Barbara. She was an innovator in her way. She really put lesbian publishing on the map and gave a lot of lesbian authors their first break. She was also quite the pirate, the little American capitalist, but very generous. In her interview she talks about coming out at 12 and looking it up at the library. She later wrote book reviews of lesbian books in her *Ladder* column, and reprinted lesbian authors from the 1920s who had gone into obscurity. She and her partner were librarians by trade, and near their retirement they wanted to downsize so they shipped two big vans of archival material to a special library in San Francisco.

Excerpt from Barbara Grier Interview by Laura Yaros, Matrix, Radio Centre-ville

T-MZ: This works right into the question of what we're all supposed to do with our piles of paper. I've been working on a project about the *Toronto Women's Bookstore*. Even with all the contacts I had through the store, the best contact I've made so far was the mother of a friend of mine's girlfriend – who happened to manage the store in the 1970s. She sent me original posters and flyers by mail. It makes me think about where the other copies are – do people have them? Do they still exist?

LY: Well they don't call it ephemera for nothing. Think about it. So much of that stuff gets lost or destroyed. I have stuff that's not on the Internet and eventually I'm going to have to think about where to send it all. We conserve things better with new technology, but CDs and USB keys aren't foolproof either.

T-MZ: The radio station I was at for many years shut down recently and if you didn't have time in the 2 allotted weeks to go pick up your stuff from decades past it was gone. So I have this handful of tapes now and know that somewhere on them are these bits of audio I want to keep.

LY: I've got a drawer full of cassettes. It's not all worth keeping but who do I talk to about transferring all of this stuff and making it sound good? They're old cassettes and they sound fine off the actual cassettes but not digitally. This is off a Sony Pro, cost me $450 back in 1987. It's the model journalists were using at the time. I hadn't worked in forever, then got a job and with my first paycheck went to the stereo store that my stepbrother worked at and bought this top-of-the-line machine. Just being able to get quality audio is an actual problem for getting our archives out there. And there's urgency to it; magnetic tape is an actual physical tape that deteriorates.

This stuff is important. This interview with Barbara Grier – she tells good stories, she's opinionated and outrageous and you can just see she's a bossy little capitalist. At the same time, it's fun and it's a really important part of lesbian history. Like her or hate her, or have whatever opinion of her, but it's really thanks to her that we have all these publishing houses and authors and not just three books. She and her partner would wake up in the morning and go pack books. This was a lifeline to women living in Shitsville, Texas where they'd get lynched if anyone knew they were lesbians. Women in Crapville, Alabama were getting these books in brown paper. That's what they did for so many years. It was volunteer work until they could pay themselves salaries and give themselves and other lesbians jobs. It's important to know this history. These publishing houses didn't come from nowhere. There's a reason you can download all this music now or have Ellen or Rosie O'Donnell's show on TV.

T-MZ: Do you think women's roles in the mainstream media are changing women's roles in community and alternative media? We're certainly seeing more of them, not to suggest they're all doing anything politically enlightened—

LY: Or meaningful.

T-MZ: Or meaningful. Do you think that creates more reason to be responsive or reactive, or less?

LY: It's possible that a certain segment of women see people like Ellen and Oprah hosting their own shows, and see women on the news and hear them on commercial and CBC radio and think, "Why would I work on a rinky-dink little station that won't pay?" It's true that there are more possibilities, even for technical positions. There's probably also a certain segment that thinks there's no reason to be politically active anymore – though I think that's changing too, with the Occupy

movement and even before that. I think for a while that wasn't true though, there was a sentiment that we're living in a post-feminist era: "We've made it! We got our slice of the corporate pie!"

T-MZ: One of the things you and I have talked about throughout our conversations is not losing our history, being able to use our social and political histories as a basis to move forward from. What are your ideas on what needs to happen to archive our history, whether that's physical pamphlets and flyers, or radio interviews, or just getting stories down and really passing them on.

LY: I'm as guilty as anyone else, I need to get my shit together to get at least the more outstanding shows I've done into as many kinds of media as possible. In whatever ways we can, we should be working hard to preserve things for future generations. When we see what's around from the '20s, '40s and '50s, it's very meaningful to us. But that's not all we should be doing – not everyone is going to know that material exists and to look for it. Maybe we need to have workshops or conferences or informal gatherings where some of this material is shared. Even just our stories, we all have our stories. In addition to written and electronic preservation, we need to preserve an oral tradition as well. It doesn't have to be formal or academic.

Beverly Nelson – Kahnesetake Radio – Sept. 15 1990 by Laura Yaros, Matrix, Radio Centre-ville

I'm lucky I came out during the rise of the feminist movement. I didn't know other lesbians I could talk to. I found a couple of books, and not just those novels where one woman kills herself and the other one goes back to men. Actual validating books like*Lesbian Woman* by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon.

T-MZ: There's all this money that goes into archiving the history of sports teams or the military or whatever, but there's still this idea that gay people are this tiny bit of the fringe and no one really sees us and we don't really matter. Yet we have so much history and can't get funding to actually make that accessible to people.

LY: It's up to us. We have to do it without the financial resources, we have to preserve our own materials or we have to try to raise the money somehow. This is the history and herstory that needs to be heard and needs to be put out there. The professional sports teams and corporate shit have the money. But even there, how many women's sports teams have their histories preserved? I'm a big women's sports fan – hockey, basketball – and even there, how much do you see? In terms of activism and marginalized communities, and we clearly are still marginalized, even if not as bad as before. But bullying is still happening and young people are still living in fear, afraid to disclose anything. I know that even in the older generations there are gay and lesbian elders living in residences where they don't want to come out because they don't want to be mistreated or ostracized. We have to prioritize getting our stories out because no one's going to do it for us. There are a lot of

people getting older and dying who have this wealth of knowledge and experience, and you never know what's going to inspire somebody. One thing sparks another and that creates a movement.

Maybe we need to have a conference just about how to preserve our materials. Instead of arguing about procedural matters, I've already done my share of that, let's get this started. Instead of quarreling about who's more anti-oppressive than who – that's history repeating itself, we did the same thing back in the day in lesbian and feminist groups, we're so busy chewing each other up and spitting each other out. It doesn't mean we have to stop thinking about or working on these other things, but maybe what we need to do is concentrate more on concrete tasks for a while.

T-MZ: We get caught up in theory but I also think we're still struggling to live our lives, get our work done and be part of changing things. It's sometimes about literal time but it's also about giving our material a life again. I'm more inspired when someone reacts to one of my old interviews and it means something to them and they want to discuss it. I feel the same way about hearing your old clips. They become interesting again, they become a discussion point and the community owns them again, instead of just you or I knowing they're in a milk crate somewhere.

LY: I agree about sharing the material. Sometimes I listen to these things and am like, "wow, these issues are still happening now." Or I'll remember getting things done with no resources.

It must have been ten or more years ago now, the group I was working with, *The Lesbian Network*, wanted to organize a national lesbian conference. I gave a little talk on the first lesbian conference that happened here, I think in 1974 or '75. We were 200 women, mostly from Eastern Canada, but from across the country and from Ithaca, New York – it wasn't completely nationwide, but there was some representation. We put this together in a few months, a small group of us organizing with no budget, no computers, no email, no fax machines, no Internet, no long-distance plans. Before making a long-distance call in 1974, you didn't only think twice, you thought three, four, five, six times. So we had snail mail, basically. None of us were professionals at that time, we didn't have salaries. We had this women's centre at the time – it was this shitty place, eight rooms on two floors that we rented, because some women that had salaries had contributed, or maybe we had a small grant at the time or a few women paid five bucks now and again. The food consisted of a huge pot of soup, a thick hearty soup, and bread that someone provided, or a few women kicked in some money and someone cooked it at home. I remember seeing them hauling it up the stairs. People were billeted in homes – this is what we had. It was a wonderful weekend, we had workshops and a little dance with recorded music on cassettes – I mean, who could afford a DJ? Back in 1974, so few resources, with no Ellen show and very few books, we had the desire and the willingness to work to bring ourselves together to support each other and validate

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Where do we go from here? I wish the fuck I knew. I'm a lot older and a little more tired and I don't have the physical wherewithal to camp out at an Occupy site. So I think of other ways to support movements. I've been working all these years for social change. I'm 57 years old, I'm not dead yet.

each other and share our ideas. Even to get photocopies done was a major thing. We published a lesbian newspaper and these two women had a Gestetner and we had to turn it manually, printing out 300 copies of each page and collating them by hand and stapling them by hand. I just thought: We were fucking amazing, that we did that.

T-MZ: Oh wow, so where do we go from here? [I'm mostly talking about the interview.]

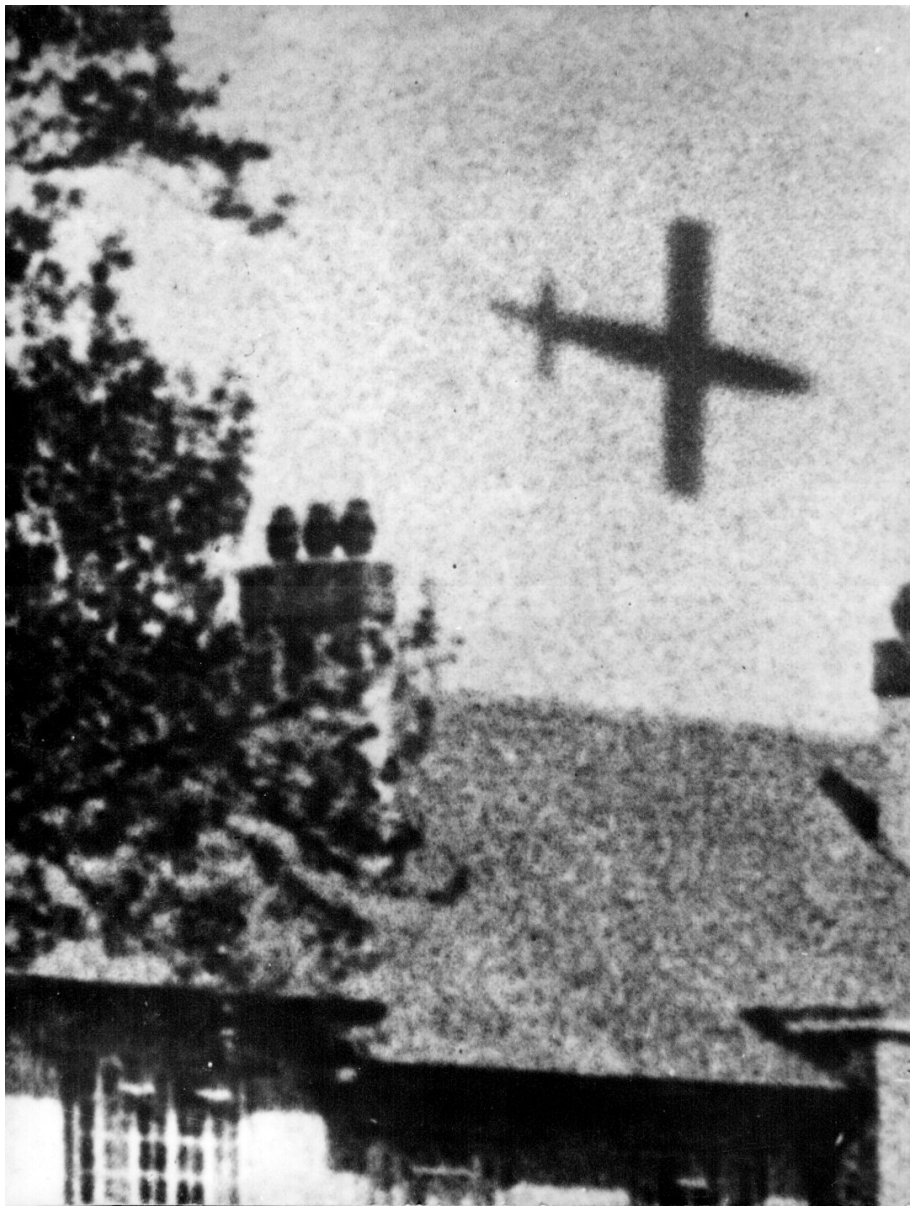
LY: Where do we go from here? I wish the fuck I knew. I'm a lot older and a little more tired and I don't have the physical wherewithal to camp out at an Occupy site. So I think of other ways to support movements. I've been working all these years for social change. I'm 57 years old, I'm not dead yet.

Image Credit: Alan Levine

Audio Credits: Laura Yaros, *Matrix*, Radio Centre-ville

Tara-Michelle Ziniuk *is a writer, activist, media-maker and parent currently unsettled in Toronto. She has been involved in community radio since 1997 and is author of the poetry books Emergency Contact (McGilligan Books, 2006) and Somewhere To Run From (Tightrope Books, 2009.) Amongst other things Tara-Michelle is currently working on a young adult novel about a girl and a gender complicated person's on-again/off-again relationship with each other and their activism. Tara-Michelle co-facilitated an intergenerational for-radio discussion series between Guelph lesbians from ages 20-something to 60-something. She's a new volunteer at the Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives and would totally go to school for Library & Archive Studies if she had an undergraduate degree. If all else fails she may settle for producing a Lesbian Hoarders reality TV show.*

Laura Yaros *has been active in feminist, lesbian and community groups for 38 years. She produces and hosts "Matrix", a 60-minute weekly magazine by, for and about women from a feminist and progressive perspective on Radio Centre-ville (www.radiocentreville.com*



Telling War Stories: Witnessing Expectations...

Lesley Wood

Does witnessing something change us? Most of us assume that it does.

Indeed the basic premise of a lot of contemporary social theory is that the things we experience make us who we are, what we want, our dreams, our animosities... Following this logic, witnessing something like a war would be a profound influence on our sense of self, of the world, on our politics.

Mass media coverage reinforces this sense. Interviews with witnesses follow certain genres: "What happened when the boat went down... when your dog was stolen... when he started shooting?" This question is usually followed by, "How do you feel?" We know the answer almost before we hear it. We've been trained. The storytellers have been trained. We can often predict the stories that witnesses tell.

There is a tension here. On the one hand, stories by ordinary people who witness something are seen as authentic and valuable in themselves. On the other, we also recognize that there are genres of storytelling – genres that reflect the larger culture and social structure. We have expectations about how to tell a witness story, even a 'witnessing war' story.

Authentic voices and storytelling genres came into conflict when I interviewed my father. He is 84 years old, and witnessed the beginning of World War II as a twelve-year-old, working class, Jewish kid in Brighton, a coastal town. At 15, he moved to London with his family to work in the factories and garment industries.

Following the theme of 'witness,' I wanted to understand how he thought witnessing a war had affected him and the people around him – their sense of themselves, and of the world. I wanted to record the stories he would tell. Some of them I'd heard before. But I wanted them as a cluster, as a map of how he became who he is.

But things didn't turn out like I thought they would… My dad rejected the standard 'witness' genre, despite my efforts. Instead, he gave me a war story of youthful adventure. His insistence on this one genre rather than the other itself told me a story about him and his experience, as much as it told me anything about witnessing the war. He describes his relationship to the war, to others, and to himself through his stories.

What does this suggest about war stories? As historian Charles Tilly says, the trouble with stories is they help us to give meaning and identity and create relations to the world. At the same time, however, stories are manifestations of larger social and cultural struggles and interactions. But figuring out how the war story and the warring world are connected, that's where things get tricky.

Lesley Wood: Tell me what you saw during World War II?

Matthew Wood: I'll start when the war began, September 3, 1939, and I was still in school. I remember the Prime Minister, who was Neville Chamberlain, making the speech on that we were at war with Germany and we all looked at each other. And well, the three of us, my mother, my father and myself, and the newspapers had been talking about the possibility of war for weeks and possibly months. Then an hour after we heard the speech, the air raid sirens went and we weren't sure whether we were going to be attacked, bombed. …

I was still going to school, and one day when we were out on the playing field alongside the school playing soccer, we heard aircraft noises and there was a Royal Air Force plane – probably a Spitfire – shooting at a German fighter plane while we were still playing on the field. The sirens hadn't gone. Our teacher got us all together and he marched us into the air raid shelters under the school. They were dug underground, and we sat in the shelters until we got the all-clear, which was a continuous note on the siren.

A few weeks later, we were told that we'd only be going to school one week mornings and the following week afternoons because we had London children, brought down from London to escape the bombing. When we weren't in the classroom, we were digging. They called it Digging for Victory – they had vegetable allotments alongside the school. We were issued spades and hoes and rakes, and we were planting vegetables. When we weren't doing that, we went out with our teacher to places of interest, of historic interest, and as a child, I thought it was pretty exciting. I wasn't affected psychologically by anything at that particular time.

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I remember one particular day, I had begun working for an electronic distributor in the town of Brighton, and it was just he and I. I was a 'joe boy' there. I was working in the store, and supplying local electrical dealers with bits and pieces that they needed. Anyway, we were both of us just standing, looking out the window of the store and we saw three Focke-Wulf 190 aircraft coming in, just above the trees, machine gunning everything in sight. They were so close, you could almost

see the pilots in the aircrafts. They came in under cloud cover, before the warnings went, and they bombed and machine gunned – they hit the telephone exchange very close to where I was working. This was what they called hit-and-run raids, to frighten and scare the people. Our windows were blown out from the blast on the telegraph exchange building, which was a high-rise building that was probably about 10 or 12 stories high. Anyway, I remember he said, "We'd better get this cleaned up." And so I took a big broom and started sweeping all the glass together from the blown out shop-front windows. We tidied up the place, and they put plywood on the windows until they could get glass to put in. And this was happening all over these coastal towns.

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In hindsight, I was probably one of the lucky ones – I had the excitement of the war, but the other aspect of it didn't register until I was older. And we didn't get news, we didn't know anything about concentration camps being operated by the Germans. The newspapers were censored, the Ministry of Information controlled all the media, both radio and newspapers and magazines. And everything had to be submitted to censorship, so they couldn't print anything that would affect the morale of the people. They would print Allied victories, but anything that suggested Britain had suffered defeats, or situations where the British army or allied armies were being affected, was controlled by the Ministry of Information.

When I first went to London, the Blitzes were tailing off, the heavy bombing was tailing off. I stayed in the East End of London in Stepney in a tenement. The people who lived there went to the air raid shelters every night, but I didn't go, I thought I'd take my chances and stay. I couldn't see sleeping on the floor in a warehouse or the basement of a warehouse or a reinforced building. I thought, I'll take my chances here, maybe I was being a bit reckless, but I thought... I stayed there for a few months and then I moved.

...I was determined to stay on in London. But you know, as I say, morale wasn't, in my case, it was the overall, you knew that there were all kinds of incredible things happening. It was an aura of excitement, but I never thought of being killed, it didn't even occur to me that I could be killed.

I remember seeing when the American troops came in, starting after Pearl Harbor, the United States started sending troop ships over. Seeing all these American troops and Air Force people, with their amazing uniforms and they seemed to have so much money, they all looked in a sense like movie stars. Even NCOs or corporals, but the Air Force people, they were very glamorous and the English women responded to this in a big way. It was an exciting time...

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What does this suggest about
war stories?

As historian Charles Tilly says, the
trouble with stories is they help
us to give meaning and identity
and create relations to the world.

LW: So the story you're telling me is that you feel like the experience of the war itself didn't fundamentally change you. The knowledge later and the insight later did, but the actual experience of being there, the war itself, didn't fundamentally change you.

MW: Yes, it didn't fundamentally change me.

LW: That's interesting. Do you think it changed Britain?

MW: Yes, I would think it changed Britain, to a degree. The morale was amazing and I want to put it down primarily to Churchill and his leadership. Once he got himself established, and it didn't take him long, Churchill was the man for the job. If he hadn't been there, who knows, it's conceivable that Britain would have gone down.

LW: So, do you think that it's hard to remember what you felt then, given the amount you've read and seen films since? And it was a whole lifetime away, right?

MW: Yes, correct.

Lesley Wood *is on sabbatical from York's Department of Sociology. She is interested in how ideas travel, storytelling dynamics, the timing of social interactions, and the way repression affects struggles for justice. She is the author of the forthcoming book, Direct Action, Deliberation, and Diffusion: Collective Action after the WTO Protests in Seattle (Cambridge University Press), and an editor of the online journal Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements.*

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Image credit: Marion Doss

CAPTIVE GENDERS

TRANS EMBODIMENT AND THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

ERIC A. STANLEY & NAT SMITH, EDITORS

On "Captive Genders": An Interview with Nat Smith & Eric Stanley

Jay Donahue

Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex, published by AK Press in the fall of 2011 is an important and unique contribution to both trans, queer and anti Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) organizing. Currently mainstream queer organizing in the United States is squarely focused on procuring so-called "marriage equality," allowing lesbian and gay identified individuals to enter the military and pushing hate crimes legislation–all actions that not only preserve a status quo that has never benefited trans and gender queer individuals, but that also strengthen the PIC. *Captive Genders* challenges us to both remember our roots and the struggle that has brought our communities to where we are today, but also to take a realistic look at both present and future organizing for trans liberation. I wanted to interview the editors, Eric Stanley and Nat Smith, because I think they offer different and complimentary perspectives on the importance of *Captive Genders* and also bring to the table knowledge and experience that can help to inform others who are part of the struggle for trans and queer liberation.

Jay Donahue: What was the impetus for *Captive Genders* and what do you see as the importance of having this body of work in the world?

Nat Smith: At the time that Eric and I started this project it was a really crucial moment in the queer liberation struggle. Liberal gays and lesbians were embroiled in the Trojan horse of "the right to marry." Hate crime legislation was on the rise, and poverty and unemployment for queer and trans folks were hitting an all time high. I was actively organizing in the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) abolitionist movement and was feeling a lack of recognition of the unique struggles that trans people face within and against the PIC, in that movement and I was simply disgusted with mainstream LGBT movements and their focus on identity politics rather than the ways in which trans identity was informed

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Non-academics should analyze and critique the academic pieces and professors should use the book in their classes.

by capitalism and the state. I think all those things hold true today. Seven years later, not that much has changed.

Eric Stanley: When Nat and I first started working on this project together it was, at least for me, driven by the reality that so many queer and trans people, especially trans women of color, are held within the grasp of the PIC. We also wanted to push LGBT politics to think about, and hopefully organize against, mass incarceration. While it is true that trans and queer folks are subject to relentless forms of personal and state violence, currently the PIC is the only "solution" offered. *Captive Genders* helps show how these same systems that are offered as "solutions" actually produce more violence and offer very little. To this end, Nat and I wanted abolition as the primary point of contact for the book, meaning that we wanted all the essays to offer some form of an abolitionist politic.

JD: Can you talk about why it was essential to have contributions from people inside and maybe illustrate both the challenges and movement/ relationship building aspects of that process?

ES: Yes, when we first began collecting submissions we knew that it was vital to have pieces from people writing from the inside as well as from formerly incarcerated folks. Also, we wanted to push on the definition of the PIC and understand how it works in often unexpected ways. To this end, we also wanted to include experiences and analyses of people who were living the slow death of the carceral state, even if they were not currently incarcerated. For example, Ralowe T. Ampu's piece, "Hotel Hell" talks about her daily life living in a residents' hotel, which functions, like prisons and jails, through multiple forms of surveillance. We want our abolitionist analysis to also account for spaces like residents' hotels that are often not included in anti-PIC work.

NS: Any liberatory struggle needs to be led by the people who are living that reality daily. Communications through the walls of the PIC are the crux of that struggle and one of the ways in which the PIC exists is by breaking up communities, creating isolation, and discouraging self-determination. So the day-to-day communication with the contributors was very difficult and dependent on the guard who sorted the mail, the guard who distributed the mail, whether they were having a bad day, whether they had a grudge, whether they were racist as well as the strict regulations of the prison regarding mail. Additionally, I was not just soliciting contributions, but also building relationships and that's hard to do when you don't know each other at all. Writing about your life and your very personal experiences for a stranger's book was a big leap of faith and I appreciate that.

JD: Can you talk about the importance of having components of both theory and practice in the book and how they inform each other?

NS: While academia has traditionally been the right only of the privileged, that needs to be separated from down and dirty education. We've got libraries and we've got each other and we have our elders, some of whom have a

big vocabulary and some of whom do not. For me discussing theory needs to be reclaimed (and already is in a variety of communities and struggles) by the people who are also doing the day-to-day grueling liberatory work, and vice versa. So for me it was important that the book include, and display the relationship between analysis, theory, and action while keeping in mind that analysis alone is not action and that action devoid of analysis is short sighted.

ES: For me, I did not want to decide in advance what would be "accessible" to someone. In this project I wanted to keep the question of theory and practice open. For sure we wanted to have examples of people doing the work of abolition right now, but we also wanted to share the analysis that is produced by this kind of organizing. There is sometimes a tendency in anti-PIC work and writing to assume analysis has to be "straightforward", but in *Captive Genders* I think some of the stories, especially the pieces written by folks inside, offer an example of lived theory. I think we need to work on proliferating our tactics and analyses and use the creative abundance of our queer imaginations to help us all to be free.

JD: How do you hope this book will be used?

ES: I would love to see the book used by folks both inside and outside prisons, which I think it is. It holds a lot of the amazing organizing and thinking that people have been doing. For sure, queer prison abolition organizing (even when done under different names) has been around for a long time. But *Captive Genders* existing in book form is important because it works as a point of convergence that can help conversation and organizing around trans/queer prison abolition flourish.

NS: People need to read this book and not just buy and put it on their shelf with other dope books they haven't read yet. I purposely put in three exercises for folks to do with family, friends, etc. Do the exercises! One of the exercises in particular engages the reader by looking at the long-term successes of their own work to help them to make sure they aren't strengthening the PIC. Non- academics should analyze and critique the academic pieces and professors should use the book in their classes. I see this book as playing a crucial role in raising voices, in lending analysis, in challenging both the anti-PIC and LGBT "rights" movements and in educating people who are interested––trans identified or not––in widening the scope of their understanding of trans liberation struggle. It will probably protect you from the rain too.
—

Support independent publishers and get your copy of *Capitve Genders* from AK Press (www.akpress.org). AK Press also offers a 20% discount on books ordered by or for prisoners.

Jay Donahue *organizes with Critical Resistance, fighting to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC) and end our reliance on prisons, policing and surveillance as solutions to social problems while simultaneously building strong, self-determined communities. Jay is a competitive long distance runner and when not out logging miles on the road he might be found fly-fishing a Sierra stream or brewing beer in his kitchen. Jay currently lives in Oakland, California.*

Eric A. Stanley *works at the intersections of radical trans/queer politics, theories of state violence, and visual culture. Eric is currently finishing a PhD in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz and continues to organize with Gay Shame. Along with Chris Vargas, Eric is a co-director of the films Homotopia (2006) and Criminal Queers (2011).*

Nat Smith *is a light-skinned Black queer gender variant nerd who loves camping, comics, animals, sci-fi, mathematical equations and is proof that none of these things is antithetical to being from the 'hood. Known to associate with such dangerous organizations as Critical Resistance, Trans/Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project, you can find Nat casually dropping the "PIC abolition" bomb all while in line for wings. Nat would appreciate the sharing of poutine from his Canadian comrades, as we cannot get it in this neck of the woods.*


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If You Can, Dance: The Winter 2010 Ceremonies That The World Wasn't Watching

Amber Dawn

If You Can, Dance was originally commissioned by *SubTerrain Magazine* for "The Regret Issue (a post-Olympic Reflection)" or issue # 57. I hadn't written a stageplay since my undergrad—a BFA in Creative Writing—and I wasn't keen on meekly revisiting this multifarious genre. However, the more attempts I made to respond to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, the more I felt like an inadequate narrator. Who was I to speak solo on such a mondo pile of bullsh*t? I could not begin to tackle winter 2010 a piece of non-fiction. It was the best I could do to recall some of the many "sound bites" and images I had witnessed. Those sound bites became a stageplay—one that I hope captures a glimpse resistance movement with the guts and dignity it so deserves.

Characters

Amber Dawn
Sybil Liberty
Bill Blitz
Wayward Bro
Jael Time
Steve of Destruction
Sara
miko
Elder
Sally
Lynn

Prologue

Amber Dawn: "If there won't be dancing at the revolution, I'm not coming." Emma Goldman. June 27, 1869 to May 14, 1940. Writer, feminist and self-proclaimed anarchist. I am also a writer. A feminist, most certainly. And, while I have never felt that the particular appellation of anarchist befits me, I have stood naked in front of the art gallery steps. I have torn a sleeve from my blouse and used it to dress an open wound. I was there when one hundred lesbians seized the food court at Pacific Centre Mall in an anti-homophobia kiss-in demonstration. I have kissed pavement while a police officer handcuffed me and another felt down my pants for an alleged weapon. (No one read me my rights. No weapons were found.) I ate pepper spray, along with a thousand or so other protesters, at the APEC summit. I saw riot tanks rush London on Financial Fools Day. Once, I sat in a cake at a party where the mayor was in attendance. Many times, I've held the hands of strangers, chanting, "The people united will never be defeated." My humble acts of

revolution are growing more humble with age. I speak softly and I carry a small stick: my pen. During the winter of 2010, I tried to do Emma Goldman proud by dancing. I danced at the parties and ceremonies that the so-called world wasn't watching. It is unlikely that the world will ever watch *this* party. So for the majority of you who have missed it, I offer this dramatization of a small sampling of the conversations, thoughts, song, dances and ceremonies of my community of Olympic resisters. Details have been altered and, apart from the character of myself, Amber Dawn, names have been changed. Identities deserve protecting; yes, there are very real consequences attached to organized resistance. And ultimately, I believe people should be in charge of telling their own stories. This is mine.

Act One
(*Sybil and Bill are seated on a dark stage. The glow of two illuminated travel mirrors light their faces. Sybil is applying make-up, while Bill fixes a false moustache above her lip.*)

Sybil: (*to audience*) There are two ways to find out about this party, word-of-mouth or Facebook. And according to Facebook, there will be one hundred and fifteen people attending, and another sixty-eight who might attend.

Bill: Plus, another forty or fifty will show up after the bars close, because their friends mass texted the tip that we sell bootlegged beer for two bucks. Let's remember to give What-to-Do-if-the-Cops-Come-Knocking instruction sheets to the door volunteers. And tell them not to let anyone stand outside smoking. And no one leaves with drinks in their hands. There's what, four thousand extra cops in the city? I walked past two Navy patrol vessels in the harbour on my way here. Now would be the worst possible time for a raid. (*to audience*) Olympic security has put out several warnings to anyone planning a quote-unquote "disruption." According to VANOC, I shouldn't even be wearing this t-shirt. (*BILLstands to show her shirt with an image of frowning faces in the centre of each of the five Olympic rings.)*

Sybil: So you're saying that two hundred some-odd queers gathered in an unlicensed warehouse-turned-theatre venue plastered with anti-Olympic posters would be considered a disruption? But our foremamas and papas didn't have the luxury of safe assembly. Think Stonewall. Same police raid shit happened here. Nov 23, 1974, the year I was born, Vancouver queers held their very first protest on the steps of VPD headquarters to demand a stop to police harassment at gay bars and bathhouses.

Bill: 1974? How old does that make you?

Sybil: Quiet, you whippersnapper. You were born in the eighties, therefore I must school you. (*to audience*) I'm trying to school all of you. This is how it's always been for us. We pool our humble resources together to create these tiny spaces, knowing that any minute they might be taken away. I've been involved with the rise and fall of three underground radical queer spaces and squat housing co-ops. It's worth it to find yourself, no matter how briefly, in a world that is all right. Or at least our kind of "right." Our kind of "right" is reflected in our mandate. We are a...

Sybil *and* Bill: ...community-driven, collectively-managed, volunteer-run, not-for-profit, anti-capitalist, queer, gender radical, sex-positive art and activist space that strives for inclusively, accessibility, continually raising our voices and shamelessly shaking our hot asses.

Sybil: Like all of our parties, tonight is a fundraiser. Our Facebook invite reads like this:

(*The lights come up to reveal a modest cabaret theatre furnished with mismatched tables, chairs and equipment. Sybil and Bill are in costume: Sybil in a cowgirl outfit and Bill dressed as a circus ringmaster. Volunteers arrive and begin lighting candles, setting up the bar, etc. The other drag kings arrive in masculine caricatured costumes, i.e. a construction worker circa 1980s.)*

Friday, December eighteenth. Five King Circus! A night of Drag Kings and Direct Action. Step right up and oppose the homophobic, sexist, elitist, impoverishing and gentrifying Games. Performances by Bill Blitz (*points at Bill*), Wayward Bro, Jael Time, Steve of Destruction and Sybil Liberty. That's me. Five to fifty dollars, sliding scale. No one turned away for lack of funds. All money raised goes to the Olympic Resistance Network. Location… the venue. Welcome to "the venue." One thousand square feet of damp concrete nestled under the Clark Street Bridge.

Bill: Our goal is to raise five thousand bucks between admission and bar sales.

Steve: That could pay for someone's bail, if one of us gets arrested while protesting.

Wayward: One person's bail verses shelter for twenty-eight. For five grand we could sponsor twenty-eight red tents. They're setting up a tent village in Oppenheimer Park. Oppenheimer Park or across from the Woodward Building. We are the only developed nation without a national housing strategy, you know? Nearly three thousand homeless in Vancouver.

Jael: And we need to photocopy and distribute these Surviving the Circus resource guides by the Community Olympic Watch. (*flipping through COW's booklet*) It's filled with tips for interacting with the cops, how to handle tear gas, activist aftercare…

Bill: So much work to be done. So much to do, indeed, and so much to see. (*Bill walks into a spotlight. Her voice switches to a circus-barker dialect*) Come one, come all to the Five King Circus. A delirious, delightful, delicious display of drag and direct action. There is so much to see, it might be more than your minds can comprehend. Then again, you're a thoughtful crowd, aren't you my friends? You were keen and kind enough to donate to the Olympic Resistance Network at the door. For more eye-opening information about tonight's fundraiser recipient, visit resist dot c-a. That's r-e-s-i-s-t dot c-a. But I know the real reason why you are here. Put your hand up if you came here to see naked ladies. I'm thrilled to introduce the hardest working naked lady in town. And believe me, it's hard work being an activist by day, a showgirl by night and putting up with us drag kings in the dressing room. She is the Ginger to our Freds. The Ella to our Fellas. Put your hands together for the one and only Sybil Liberty.

(*The spotlight widens. A Spaghetti Western theme song titled* Gold *by Francesco De Masi plays. The opening lyrics: "There is gold, hidden gold. All men desire, but few men ever find." sybil saunters across the stage carrying a canteen and a steel gold pan. Through a series of provocative bends and swats she mimics panning for gold in an imaginary riverbed. She fans herself in the implied heat with her cowboy hat. She pours water from her canteen down her body. She strips to a pair of shimmy shorts and sequined nipple pasties. At last, she discovers a gold nugget the size of a baseball. As she holds the nugget in her hands, she realizes that the gold is dripping like paint. Frantically, she rubs the dissolving nugget over her bare skin, streaking herself with gold. The nugget's core is red, and in her frenzy, Sybil coats herself in theatrical blood. Horrified, she falls to the floor in anguish. Behind her a slide is projected on the white wall. It reads, "The Fraser Canyon Gold Rush of the 1850s led to the colonization of British Columbia and the displacement, rape and*

murder of thousands of Nlaka'pamux first people. What atrocities will the 2010 rush for gold bring? No Olympics on Stolen Native Land.")

Act Two
(*The scene is the intersection of Main and Hastings during the Women's Memorial March. Drumming, singing and the VOICE OF THE SPEAKER can be heard throughout Act Two. Characters move in and out of the action. Conversations overlap. Sara weaves through the audience handing out red carnations.)*

Sara: Nineteen years ago a woman was murdered. Just a few blocks from where we are right now.

(Amber Dawn stands in a long line of women holing a long decorative fabric banner. She lifts one hand from the banner to wave.)

Amber Dawn: Hi, Miko. You found me.

Miko: The crowd goes back a couple blocks at least.

Amber Dawn: I've never seen so many people at the march. I was expecting the opposite. That the Olympics would keep people away.

Voice of the Speaker: Every year on Valentines Day, I come to the Missing and Murdered Women's Memorial March to mourn and remember our sisters by listening to their family members, by walking the street of the Downtown Eastside. Dozens of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and thousands of Aboriginal women across Canada are missing…

Elder: (*to Miko*) Take the end of that banner. Don't let it drag on the ground. Hold it up.

Sara: (*motions to the banner*) Elise Jones. Jean Mary. Laura Mau. These are our names. The names of the missing and murdered women. See how each panel has been decorated by family and friends. Here is a medicine wheel made out of felt. Here is a row of embroidered hearts. A baby's handprint in pink paint.

Miko: How long is it?

Amber Dawn: I'm not sure. Long. The banner starts way over there. (*points into audience*) And this is only one of five memorial banners.

Sara: The names stretch from Calgary to Edmonton to Toronto to Montreal, clear across to Bear River, Nova Scotia. Today this banner is carried in six different cities. It takes a many people to carry it.

Voice of the Speaker: We'd like to welcome everybody here this afternoon. We are standing in front of the Vancouver Police Station. It is very symbolic that we stand here. This is where the injustice towards the murdered and missing women began…
(*Sally and Lynn approach wearing Legal Observer T-shirts.)*

Amber Dawn: Sally. I didn't know you were a legal observer.

Sally: This is Lynn, my observer buddy.

Amber Dawn: How have you been holding up? You know, acting as a neutral observer in the midst of all the demonstrations?

Lynn: Normally, I'm not what you'd call a neutral person. I totally have a hot head. I'd cruise around the Olympic Pavilion kicking anyone with red mittens in the nuts all day long if I could get away with it.

Sally: Oh me too.

Lynn: Right. But when the Assistance to Shelter Act passed last Fall I thought, it's really happening. The province has officially given the police the green light to remove people from the street...

Sally: Detain them. Cart them off to shelters. What shelters? During a shelter shortage? They didn't say what kind of shelter or where these shelters would be.

Lynn: Yes. Which made me worry that the homeless would essentially be jailed for being homeless.

Miko: The Olympics have history of using force to move the poor and dissenting people out of site. In China, even potential protesters were detained by police. In Atlanta, nine thousand homeless people were arrested in the months leading up to the Games.

Lynn: True. Hi. Uhm. Hi, I'm Lynn.

Miko: Miko.

Lynn: Pleasure. So I decided to volunteer as a Legal Observer. You know, act as eyes and ears on the streets. Document and report anything I can.

Sally: It's more useful than kicking ball sacs in frustration. Plus, our volunteer training, full of dykes. Some cute ones too.

Miko: What else is new? We always top up the volunteer pool.

Lynn: Miko, we know each other, don't we? We met at the venue.

Sally: (*to Amber Dawn*) Leave it to Lynn to pick up at the march.
(*sara enters the stage, hands out red carnations. Amber Dawn searches her pocket for change.)*

Sara: Keep it. Keep it, lady. For Valentines Day.

Amber Dawn: Thank you.

Sara: Do you remember me?

Amber Dawn: I do. It's good to see you, Sara.

Sara: Whoa. My name ain't even on this banner and you remember it.

Voice of the Speaker: ...a nation is not conquered until the hearts of women are on the ground. Then it is lost. This is how I feel everyday when I see elders using the shelters.

Or seeing the young women being turned away from the shelters because there is not

enough room for them...

Elder: Follow the drummers. We're moving to Powell Street. (*Elder sings the Women's Warrior song. The crowd sings together. Their footsteps move to the drum's beat.)*

Sara: It's the Women's Warrior Song. You sing it pretty good.

Amber Dawn: (*embarrassed*) I don't even know what the words mean.

Sara: They're not something you can find out on your own. You can't go opening a newspaper, eh. Go on the computer. There's the words. Written right here. In English. Nope. The song has to be given to you. By an elder.

“

Look up. The eagles are here.
Dancing in the sky. I knew the
eagles would come.

But, hey, I can tell you what it's about. It's about ladies being so strong. So strong they can take anything. (*Sara sings loudly, and dances. The crowd seems to intently sing and dance with her.*)

Amber Dawn: (*to audience*) I know this woman. She sleeps at the overnight emergency shelter for women on Cordova Street. I used to work the graveyard shift there. I lasted no longer than six months before I caught a relentless chest infection that my doctor could not diagnose.

Sara: (*to audience*) You get sick here. The Downtown Eastside's got the highest HIV rate in the developed world. Ninety percent of us have Hepatitis C. The national rate is less than one percent, did you know? It's like just about everyone in Canada with Hep C is living here.

Amber Dawn: Each night my shift began in the cockroach-infested kitchen, serving soup from eleven until one. The other worker on shift helped the homeless women set up their cots and blankets. And when we ran out of cots, the women slept on foam gym mats in the hallway. And when those ran out, women slept on the polished concrete floor, wherever there was floor space. We did laundry while the women slept. As many soiled clothes, right from the women's backs, as my co-worker and I could manage, so that they'd have clean, dry clothes to wake up to.

Sara: The folks who came in 2003 and decided that Vancouver would get the Olympics, they didn't see the Downtown Eastside, eh. Their tour bus took a wide detour.

Amber Dawn: Breakfast was always oatmeal and coffee. Everyone back on the street by eight. After the floor was mopped and the garbage taken out, I would phone the shelter hotline to see if I could find a real bed for any of the homeless women. I would say to the hotline operator, "I have a senior in a wheelchair who needs a bed." Or, "I'm calling on behalf of an HIV positive woman who's been homeless for almost a year." Or, "She is a young woman, seven months pregnant, she really needs…". This is how I know this woman. I failed to find her shelter while she was pregnant. Now she is here, marching. No baby. You don't see many babies in the Downtown Eastside. Pregnant Native woman, yes. But not babies. The Ministry of Child and Family Development took her baby, I just know.

Sara: I was a foster kid too. And my mother was taken from her family. You can trace it right back to the residential schools. Today there are more Native kids in the child welfare system than there were in the residential school system.

Amber Dawn: I know recent funding cuts to Native health programs and inner-city daycares have already caused these statistics to rise.

Elder: I know that in a few months time, the city will renege on their promise to turn two hundred and fifty two units in the Olympic village into social housing.

Lynn: I know that a few months later, studies will show that only twelve percent of SROs – single room occupancies – are affordable

to people on welfare. Just as we predicted, homelessness increases after the Games.

Amber Dawn: I know. I know. I know. What I don't know is what to do. Write more letters to the government? Repost rabble dot c-a articles on Facebook? Organize more fundraisers. Boycott Coca-Cola? Listen to CBC the Early Edition and cry?

Sara: Look. Hey, lady. Look up. The eagles.

Miko: Two of them.

Elder: Three. There's another one.

Sara: Look up. The eagles are here. Dancing in the sky. I knew the eagles would come.

Epilogue

Amber Dawn: During the 2010 Winter Games we, Olympic resisters, were called Party Poopers. Our art was torn from gallery walls. Our heroes put behind bars. We were told to "get a life" when we stopped the torch from traveling down Commercial Drive. Even though that demonstration had a carnival band, furry mascots and some of the most lively protest signs I've ever seen, we were accused of embarrassing Vancouver when we gathered during the opening ceremonies. We believe the six billion dollar price tag that came with the games in the face of drastic cuts to education, health care and social services is an embarrassment. And still there we stood while anti-anti-Olympic protesters clustered around us with their red and white painted faces and drunken frat-boy tactics, shouting, "You say protest, we say party." But the thing is, we did party. We brought our horns and our costumes, our songs and signs and our spirits. Not the "spirit" that's been branded for Olympic marketing. Our human spirit. The spirit that allows us to see the suffering that surrounds us, and urges us to do something about it. This party has been going on long before the five rings were erected at YVR. It is a party that will last a lifetime, if you allow it to. When you come to this party, you will hear the elders drum. You'll be told terrible and triumphant stories that you may not hear anywhere else but at these gatherings, these ceremonies. You will learn the words to chants and songs that will bond you closely to the people around you. You might find yourself dancing. And if you can dance in the streets, at clandestine venues or in front of courthouses or cop shops… If you can dance knowing that the so-called world will never dance with you… If you can dance with the sharp comprehension that the revolution you dream of, bless you Emma Goldman, will likely never come, but you dance anyways because sometimes dancing is all that you can do… If you can, dance.

Amber Dawn *is a writer, filmmaker and performance artist based in Vancouver. She is the author of the Lambda-winning novel Sub Rosa (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010), editor of the Lambda Award-nominated Fist of the Spider Woman (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2008) and co-editor of With a Rough Tongue: Femmes Write Porn (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005). She frequently discloses and politicizes sex work, survivorhood and transgressive sexualities in her work. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. Currently, she is the director of programming for the Vancouver Queer Film Festival.*

Interview with Raafat Hattab

Tobaron Waxman

This interview is an excerpt from Tobaron Waxman's forthcoming book, "Trans women Artists: interviews with artists on the MTF – spectrum" with forward by Susan Stryker (forthcoming 2013). Portions of this chapter were previously published in Pretty Queer. Raafat Hattab رأفت حباطه is a genderqueer Palestinian performance artist from Jaffa يافا. He uses his own body, family history, and language in his work. There is also a strong element of costume. We met in 2006, when I lived in South Tel Aviv, and he showed me warm hospitality in his family home in Jaffa. In 2008, with Stefan St Laurent at SAW Gallery in Ottawa, I co-curated his video and live art in "Radical Drag: Transformative Performance," a highly successful group show about artists complicating drag in political ways. In much of his work, Raafat performs in a non-traditional drag as 'Arouse Falastin' (The Bride of Palestine) عروس فلسطين. The Bride of Palestine is a traditional Palestinian reference to the ancient port city of Jaffa. Raafat's performance as Arouse Falastin is the embodiment of something that was always there, while simultaneously looking back at something that used to be there... she's sort of like a ghost, and yet she's also tangible in her physicality. This timeless figure of the Bride of Palestine by her graceful presence, her generous and even warm expression, and by the fact that she bears multiple signs of injury on the body, becomes the ultimate witness.

Tobaron Waxman: Is there an Arabic concept for "genderqueer"?

RH: In all my sexual and gender activism, I'm trying not to copy-paste it from the West. Because all the Queer theory and feminism started in the West, but here it's different. I can learn from it but I can't copy-paste it. — If I say I'm a genderqueer, a Western audience will understand it, but here in Israel and Palestine it doesn't have a meaning. In Arabic when I want to talk about Queers, there is no word for it. There are words that come from the Koran, or there are words

that mean Queer, like 'different' but in a bad way. So people try to create new words that don't have negative meaning. (The term we use is) "ahhrar el jins" احرار الجنس from "horiya" حرية which means "freedom". Literally its like sexually free, or sexually liberated. Because it becomes a way of life, more than just practicing something sexually.

I don't believe in the binary of male/female; I believe in what's in the middle, the diversity in the middle — so if you're born male or you're born female, you're free to choose to move on this line between them. People always ask me if I want to be a woman: [they assume] I'm afraid, like I can't be a transgender so I'm doing drag. No that's not my point, I don't want to choose a side. I want to move freely on this line, between male and female.

TW: So do you use the persona of Arouse Falastin to embody what you have seen as a witness? Who actually is the witness? You're a witness to your own life of course.

RH: I can't disconnect Arouse Falastin from me, it's not two personas, in the end it's one. Me as Raafat, I have things to say sometimes, and I can't just go and say it in the streets, so I have found my way to say these things. I have these messages in my art, this is why I make art, this is my means to talk to people that I can't talk with, as Raafat, face to face. It's me as an artist, and I say these things through Arouse Falastin.

The Bride of Palestine, she's a witness, in the end: me, as The Bride of Palestine, I witness. I'm a witness to what is happening today, and what happened in the past. Before 1948, people called Jaffa the Bride of the Sea افاي عروس البحر, or the Bride of Palestine, until 1948. Jaffa was always a female. But me, as a male, representing Jaffa, I'm using MTF.

TW: In your work, you sort of shimmer between a female persona and a genderqueer female persona, as Arouse Falastin عروس فلسطيني**.**

RH: Between the male and the female, the male is the figure, the default figure of me. Its always when we talk about liberating Palestine, we talk about the men who do it. The resistance, the revolution, it's led by the men, it's not taking the women into consideration. So for me, Palestine is a woman.

TW: In the performances that I've seen you do as The Bride of Palestine, the makeup isn't like traditional complete drag makeup, but more like a suggestion, like signage of a female gender, somewhat goth, as well as fake blood coming from the mouth, nose and eyes. When I first saw you perform 'Iran, Beirut, Palestine and me' in 2006, I thought: this figure has been run over by a Caterpillar — and yet you don't look injured, you are proud, graceful, feminine and strong. You are creating an iconography with Arouse Falastin – what does the makeup mean?

RH: She is crying blood. She was violently wounded, inside, and it comes out in her tears as blood.

When I analyze the political situation, the Palestinians in the West Bank, they suffer from physical occupation, they have borders,

they have checkpoints, they have soldiers, there are walls. But here, the Palestinians inside Israel, we don't have these borders. The occupation is more mental, it's feelings. I feel it in the language; when I go to school, I see how the Ministry of Education works to erase anything about history, about language, and we are mentally occupied. I don't suffer as a Palestinian physically. I suffer mentally.

TW: Internally injured, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually crushed.

RH: Exactly.

TW: Please talk about what it takes to feel 'safe' in art making and in live performance. What is at risk for you and in what contexts are you at risk or safe? Live artists often talk about the issue of risk and safety, in terms of using one's own body in space, or doing body-based work, in a public space and determining the various personal boundaries, or degrees of boundary. But in your case, in addition to those practical issues as an artist, you are a Palestinian body in an Israeli space. Because of art, i.e. culturally controlled space, both culture of art-world, culture of Israeli, urban, controlled space — you are existing in occupied space.

RH: When I perform in an art space or gallery, I feel physically safe because I know the audience that comes to see me, they know the context of the exhibition. But when I perform in the streets, I can never know who will be around me. I usually prefer to show in a gallery, even showing photos or installation. To show in open space makes me feel very exposed. I feel unsafe in general, in public space in Israel.

TW: You mentioned the Arabic idea of "ahhrar el jins" from "horiya," and this is also the title of your newest tape?

RH: About the name 'Houria' [حـ(و)ـرية [1 (Mermaid/freedom), it's another thing that's not understandable, the word '*horia*' حرية in Arabic, it's freedom. And then houria حورية, it's mermaid. So one letter makes the difference between 'freedom' and 'mermaid'. So of course the story of The Little Mermaid, that she doesn't talk, she can't talk, and she has to make her choices; she has to give up things for her to be a human being, the witch takes her voice to give her legs. But the price is that she can't go back in the sea. She had to give up her family, she had to give up the ocean, to cross to the other side. But without a voice. As a mermaid, she is in the middle, and I as a mermaid, I am in the middle -- not fish enough to be in the sea, not human enough to be on the shore. So here, I am talking about the in-between of things. I'm talking about the gender issue, because its obvious that I'm male, the upper part, but the lower part is a fish, it's sexless.

TW: Please explain the beautiful Arabic word-form that is being tattooed on your chest in the video. To whom is it legible on a semantic level? I mean, you are layered in many ways; first of all it's under your clothes, and then, it's in Arabic, and even then, it's a very classical form that only certain people could read. In the past you've chosen to not have any translation during performances for Israeli audiences.

Is this a similar choice, to decide when and to whom you disclose what kind of information, and to whom you allow access?

RH: The tattoo is for me like making this contract, like something written to prove that I'm from here, I'm from Jaffa, I'm from this land. On the one hand, I'm using my body as a performer, while also using the concept that Jaffa belongs to Palestine, historically.

Tattooing is not acceptable in traditional Palestinian society. So to make a tattoo, I go to Tel Aviv. So it becomes like, to make the tattoo, as The Bride of Palestine, I need to meet the Other, the Israeli.

When I do the tattoo in Tel Aviv, that empowers my being as Palestinian. Maybe if there was no Israeli side, and I was living in a Palestinian environment, I wouldn't need it, to prove that I am The Bride of Palestine. The distance, from the Other, the existence of the Israeli side, existence of the occupation, gives more meaning for the Palestinian existence nearby. As it is explained in the curator's text: "Our identities are constructed through a friction with each other."

In daily life, the people that get access to this tattoo are the people who get intimately engaged with me... [he smiles] when I take off my shirt. And when they ask me what it is, because they can't read it, I tell them that it says "Jaffa the Bride of Palestine"يافا عروس فلسطين. Sometimes I don't. I don't tell them what it is. When I tell them what it means, it's like exposing myself to them. And here I choose to be exposed or not to be exposed — as a Palestinian, as The Bride of Palestine. As you can see, the video is one level, as I'm taking this tattoo to my daily life, as a performing artist that uses his body.

TW: In "Houria" حـــ(و)ـــريّة, you are not costumed in the way I've seen you in other works as The Bride. And there is no lip-synching or lyric, or any of the other strategies you have employed in previous works.

RH: In "Houria," I don't wear make up because the Bride of Palestine is present through the tattoo. And as a mermaid, I'm already a transgender being, sexless but still half-male, half-fish, with no sexual organs of a male. Mermaids are usually represented as female, especially in stories. The little mermaid is a female.

In "Houria" حـــ(و)ـــريّة, I was trying to get to the roots of my past to understand the history of my family — to understand what my roots are, as a Palestinian living in Jaffa, and combining this with me, right now, and the way I'm living. It's like checking and exploring my belonging to this society or this nation called Palestine.

I went to meet my aunt, my father's sister, and she was telling me the story of my grandparents, the stories about where my grandparents used to live, and how my family got to live where they live now.

TW: The work that you did with your aunt is a testimony, describing specific narratives about people, places, and events. She is speaking, and you are not speaking, neither is there a lip-synched

performance – and you correlate this with the mermaid who has no voice.

RH: It's important for me that she's a woman, a Palestinian woman, telling the narrative of the family, and during this video I'm silent. She's telling the story of the Bride of Palestine, instead of me telling it. In this video, I'm there, just listening to the story of my aunt, about what happened in '48. As a witness, I am part of the Palestinian society and not feeling belonging, and at the same time I'm part of the Israeli society, but I don't feel belonging. So being in this place gives me the ability to look, to see, to criticize, and to analyze the reality around me, about the history, the past, the present... this place that is in the middle, between the Palestinian and the Israeli society. Like not being fully a part of the Palestinian society, although I'm from there.

TW: Is it possible to be fully a part of the Palestinian society without a state?

RH: Yes, of course.

TW: So what would it take for you to be fully a part of Palestinian society? Do you wish to be fully a part of it? What would make that possible?

RH: I think it's impossible. [laughs]

To live within the Palestinian society is to live the lifestyle of a traditional society, to get married, to have a family, to be in the mainstream like everyone else. Following the traditions, and the holidays... and yet as a Palestinian, I can't be fully part of the Israeli society. If I want to live, the way I live in the Palestinian society — to live alone, live with my boyfriend, to have my dog, and everybody knows that I'm not married, and that I live with a boy – you know, you live, you have neighbours, you are a part of the society, you take part. It's not the case.

TW: Not taking part in the traditional expectations.

RH: Yes, I'm not following.

I need to create my own place, my own environment. Not a real place, it's invented out of my dreams and fantasies, combined with reality and it's limitations.

TW: You and Arouse Falastin are witnesses to each other, it seems. Does Arouse Falastin "see" the audience?

RH: Yes, The Bride sees the audience and makes eye contact with the audience during the performances. In my performance from May 2011, "Marsa" [2] (Anchor) مرسى, I stamped the people in order to let them in. I had a performance in Jerusalem and I used all the dresses created since 2006-2010 and built an installation. So when all the dresses were in use I was dressed as male. The performances were during 4 years and each dress is one color of the Palestinian flag: red, white, black and green.

I had a stamp: the same calligraphy as the tattoo on my chest. I stamped people on their hand or arm to let them in the room to see the installation. Of course there was another entry, and those who refused to be stamped went from around. This is the only

performance in which I had in physical contact with people, but I didn't talk, smile or do anything but stamping.

TW: What does it mean that all these people, mostly Israelis, are now stamped and branded as you are, albeit temporarily, as 'Arouse Falastin'?

RH: At the beginning, people didn't understand and didn't know what to do, they tried to pass by me but I kept standing, not moving. I raised my hand to show them the stamp. If the person standing accepted to be stamped, I let him in. During the performance, it began to be clear to people, because there was a lot of people and others saw what was going on. There were people who refused to be stamped. People tried to talk to me although I didn't reply. Some people were disturbed, it reminded them of Auschwitz, the numbers on the Jews' arms. I felt in a position of power. I stood there and decided who could pass by me and who couldn't. It was the opposite experience I have when I pass through a checkpoint where I'm in a very weak position.

I used to think that the Palestinians are the people who understand me the best way. I discovered that they are not. And I used to think that the Israelis wouldn't understand me, and I discovered I'm wrong. There is a gap between the two societies, and I'm trying to understand both sides and to live peacefully with both sides, although I can't find my place in either side.

It should be one state. One state for both nations. With no borders, no checkpoints, no walls.

TW: Do you want to mention your activism, what are the names and URLs of the groups you're working with, and what is your role?

RH: I think it's important to talk about alQaws [3. People need to know about the existence of the organization. I'm a board member of the organization alQaws for sexual and gender diversity in Palestinian society. The organization consists of four main groups around the country (Jerusalem, West Bank, Jaffa, Haifa). I'm organizing the Jaffa group. Also, alQaws is going to open a drag workshop for Palestinian performers that will be led by me, together with the Palestinian Drag Queen 'Queen of Shebah' (we call her Eman) from Jerusalem.

Every six weeks, we have a party and I'm one of the organizers, responsible for the cultural part of the event, organizing the drag shows. The party is the biggest activity alQaws does that brings around 400 participants from around the country; it's a safe space for Palestinian LGBTQI to socialize. And within these events, using the drag shows, we work on messages we want to give to the audience to raise awareness, for example, of IDAHO, International day against AIDS, the Nakbeh, Woman's Day, etc...

TW: Last but not least, you have a poem you wanted to share.

RH: Because it's a Queer poem, I'm talking about myself, trying to explain who I am. I don't know how to explain it, I just need to translate it and you'll understand more. Instead of talking about me personally, I talk about myself but in a more poetic way...

Untitled Poem by Raafat Hataab, Part 1:
Untitled Poem by Raafat Hataab, Part 2:
Untitled Poem by Raafat Hataab, Part 3:

Untitled Poem by Raafat Hataab:

عربي، حتى ولو لم تكن تريد ذلك بملامح وجهي

عربي، رغم خضر عيني وطول شعري

أنا عربي ونعومتي تشبه نعومة نساء المجتمعات المُخملية

ثم أنّ نظراتي حادة لا تتأسّف، لا تخجل لا تبالي

أرتدي الفساتين وأضع المكياج وأحلم برجل يكون لي زوجاً

أرتدي البُدل والقمصان وأبحث عن امرأة لتكون أمّ أطفالي

أحلامي تتراوح بين الشرق والغرب

ولا أجد مكاناً أُلقيها فيه لتنمو، فهي تظلّ بلا جذر

لا أرض خصبة تملكها ولا ميناء يحتوي سفنها

أبحث عن معانٍ وأتحدى ما تبقى من الزمن

أتجاهل الأيام وأرى الثورة آتية مع نسمات الرياح

أستنشقها لتعيش في داخلي وتجري في دمي لعلني أنهض يوماً ما

وأُحطم جدار الصمت
البنطال والقميص وحتى ملابسي الداخلية سوداء،

فاللون الأسود له عدد لا نهائي من الأشكال، العشرات أو المئات،

لا أدري

ولكنني أنا واحد،

عربي...

تعرفني من لهجتي اليافية فهي مميزة عن الباقين

مكسّرة، محطمة غير كاملة

تعرفني من عاداتي وتقاليدي التي حطمتُها بعد أن درستها من الألف حتى الياء

أنا من هنا، ابن هذه الأرض

تعرفني من طول شعري ولون ثيابي والغمامة السوداء التي تحيطني من كل حدب

أعترف، غريب الأطوار أنا وأفتخر

أنا عربي ولست امرأة ولا رجل

أنا عربي وكياني غير معرّف في أيٍ من الكتب المطبوعة بعد

لا أمارس الجنس... بل أحمله

لا أمارس الحب... بل أبكيه

أنا الجنس الآخر وأنا الحبّ المستحيل

أنا عربي واسم بلادي موشوم على صدري

أعيش في الهامش ولا أخشاه

أفكك قواعد الحياة وأمحو كلّ العناوين والألقاب

أنا سجيني وسجاني وه أنت

أنا الثورة والحرية هي أنت

هي أنا بنا لنلبس الفساتين والقمصان

لنضع المكياج ونُسقط ما تبقى من أقنعة

حان الوقت للانقلاب

أنا عربي عنيد أكون مرآتك

أنا ثائر عنيد أكون قدوتك

أنا محارب عنيد أكون سلاحك

أنا هو أنت- عنيد أعيش حراً

English Version

Translated by: Maryam Hussain and Rehab Nazzal

Part 1
I'm Arab even if you can't see it in my facial features
I'm Arab despite my green eyes and my long hair
I'm Arab and gentle like the aristocratic women
And my gazes are sharp, unapologetic, not embarrassed, unconcerned

I wear dresses and put on make up and dream of a man to be my husband
I wear suits and shirts and look for a woman to be the mother of my children

My dreams fluctuate between the east and the west
and I can't find a place to throw it to let it grow, though it's kept unrooted
no fertile soil to keep it, no harbor to contain its silence

I look for meanings and I challenge what remains of time
I ignore the days and I see the revolution coming with the gusts of winds

I inhale it, let it live inside me and run through my veins
I wake up one day and destroy the wall of silence

Part 2
My pants, my shirt and even my underwear are black
the blackness has endless forms, hundreds or thousands, I don't know...
but I am one
An Arab...

You recognize me from my Jaffan dialect, it's different from others
broken, shattered, incomplete
you know me from my customs and traditions
that I destroyed after I learned them from A to Z
I am from here, a son of this land

You recognize me from my long hair, the color of my clothes and the black cloud that surrounds me on all sides
I admit my strange ways and I am proud

Part 3
I'm an Arab, not a man nor a woman
I'm an Arab and my existence is not yet identified in print
I don't practice sex... but I hold it
I don't practice love... but I cry it
I'm the other sex and I'm the impossible love

I'm an Arab and the name of my home-city is tattooed on my chest
I live on the margins and I don't fear it
I dismantle the laws of life and erase all the titles and labels

I'm a prisoner and my jailer is you
I'm revolution and freedom it's you

Let's wear the dresses and the shirts
Let's put on makeup and tear off what remains of the masks
It's time for revolution, change
I'm an Arab, let me be your mirror
I'm a revolutionary, let me be your guide
I'm a warrior, let me be your weapon
I am you, let me live free

References:

[1] Houria: http://www.youtube.com/

[2] Marsa (Anchor), مرسى: three hour performance at the Artists' house in Jerusalem, May 2011.

[3] http://www.alqaws.org/q/

Tobaron Waxman *is an artist interrogating how borders and notions of citizenship make moral and ethical claims on our bodies. Their strategies have included: performance, photography, tissue engineering, porn, biofeedback processing, sound, choreography, and voice; Tobaron is also a trained vocalist in Jewish liturgical music. Tobaron has taught their voice and collaborative techniques at School of the Art Institute of Chicago and at Hollins MFA DanceExtended Study Program in France and Austria; lectured at Parsons, SOAS London, SMFA Boston, Videotage Hong Kong, UC Irvine, OCAD, Concordia and others. Tobaron's work has shown internationally, and in Canada at Neutral Ground, Buddies in Bad Times, and as invited artist at TAAFI. Tobaron was honoured with fellowships including Van Leir Fellowship at Harvestworks NY, Franklin Furnace Performance Art Award, and grants from Canada Council for the Arts, Toronto Arts Council, Henry Moore Foundation for Sculpture, Experimental Television Center, NY, and Kulturlabor ICI Berlin Institute of Cultural Inquiry Research Fellowship for "Mechitza 7.1" — acclaimed one of the five best art experiences of 2010 (Globe and Mail, Canada). For the endurance performance "Opshernish", Tobaron is the recipient of the first ever Audience Award of the Jewish Museum of New York. Based between Toronto and New York, Tobaron is currently creating a hand-made film and teaching voice while a studio resident at Smack Mellon in Brooklyn.* ***http://www.tobaron.com.***

Raafat Hattab *was born to a Muslim Family in Jaffa in 1981. As a child, he attended the French school, Collège-des-Frères, Jaffa, until the age of 13, when he moved to a Jewish high school. In 2001, he began his studies at Hamidrasha School of Art at Beit Berl College, where he first got involved with social and political activism. In 2006, he joined the organization alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society. Hattab was one of the first artists to initiate the co-operative art gallery Alfred Gallery in 2005 in Tel-Aviv, and he remains a member of this group. He has exhibited performance, video, photography and installations in both group and solo exhibitions in Israel and abroad. Hattab's art is his means for dealing with multiple identity formations within the context of his everyday life as a queer Palestinian living in Israel/Palestine. He is constantly working to connect the struggle for minorities' rights and freedoms in both societies. Today, Hattab lives and works in Tel-Aviv.*

Recovery Through Process: An Interview with Yuki Kokubo

Momoko Allard

Yuki Kokubo's serene images have recorded changing environments in locations spanning from Iceland to the northern and southern U.S., to Mexico and Japan. Momoko Allard connected with her via email in late January to learn more about her ongoing photo work and her newest project, a personal documentary film.

Momoko Allard: Tell me a bit about what originally brought you to photography, and how your work has evolved over the years you've been shooting.

Yuki Kokubo: I began photographing when I was sixteen. It was 1994 and my parents had just moved back to Japan. I was living with an NYU student on East 9th Street and I began dating an older boy who I met in the neighborhood. He was a street photographer and he introduced me to photography. He let me use his Leica camera and taught me how to process and print. He had converted his one-bedroom apartment into a studio with a darkroom, where I spent many hours falling in love with photography. New York City was gritty back in the 1990s and it was really interesting to photograph.

A couple years later, I moved to Chicago to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I began to take a more conceptual approach to photography. It was really interesting to enter this new world of theory, interpretations, and dialog. After graduation, I continued to make conceptual work and participated in some group shows in Chicago. It was really fun, but I began to feel that I was missing something. Around that time I decided to volunteer at an after-school program for high school kids who lived in the notorious Cabrini Green projects. I taught some art classes and really enjoyed it. It meant a lot to me that I could use art in a way that extended beyond the art world in a way that felt useful. That experience got the ball rolling. I moved back to New York in 2005 and began to take photographs with social

and environmental themes. In 2008, I went to India to volunteer my time as a photographer and website builder for an organization called Swabhimaan. The following year I traveled to Iceland alone to immerse myself in the natural landscape and to photograph the glaciers. And I began photographing obsessively around the Gowanus Canal, which is a Superfund site in my neighborhood.

In 2010, I was working admin at the Environmental Defense Fund where my interest in photography was well-known and supported by my wonderful boss, Marcia Aronoff. In March of 2010, she gave me permission to go to Louisiana to document EDF's coastal restoration project on the organization's dime. A month after my trip was, of course, the BP oil spill. EDF sent me back down to Louisiana three times that spring and summer, where I extensively documented the environmental impacts in photographs and video. That's when I knew for sure that I wanted to use my image-making skills to bring awareness to social and environmental issues.

MA: Was video a more recent expansion of your visual practice?

YK: I've always been interested in filmmaking, but there were reasons that kept me away from it. I took a film course in college but 16mm was too expensive, and back then, video was still visually rough in a way that I didn't like. With the advances in digital imaging technology, both film and photography have become more accessible, but the downside of that is, as an emerging photographer, I found it nearly impossible to "emerge" shooting only still images. I felt it was necessary to expand my skills to film, but since it was something I've always wanted to do, it was a no-brainer. Beginning in 2010, I attended the MFA program for Social Documentary Film at the School of Visual Arts. I've completed one year and am currently on leave from the program.

I've worked on several short films, and am in the early stages of my first feature-length documentary. At this point, I'd say that I'm totally in love with filmmaking. For me, a photograph can be iconic, but a film has the ability to transport its viewers into a different world and carry them through various emotional landscapes that shift throughout the duration of the piece. The past few years have been a particularly transformative period in my life, and filmmaking has helped me approach the world through a different lens, which has helped me to learn more about myself.

MA: As your work has shifted to more directly serve social objectives, has your approach to the formal considerations of image-making changed?

YK: When I began taking photographs almost twenty years ago, I was mostly interested in studying environments. Back then, I used the camera to help me figure out the world around me. To an extent, I still do that, but have come to realize that life as a whole is a continual process of learning how to relate to the world. Nowadays, my work is more about service – to bring awareness to important issues, and to give a voice to the voiceless.

MA: How was shooting in Louisiana? Were you able to spend time getting to know the locals and hearing their stories?

YK: Louisiana was a great experience because I really got to know the area over the course of multiple trips, which gave me a real advantage in terms of understanding the issues and getting access.

During my trips to coastal Louisiana, I often stayed in Morgan City. After one long shoot, I stopped in at a local restaurant called Susie's Seafood. I probably stuck out being the only Asian person in the restaurant, with a big camera sitting by my side. So as soon as Susie came by to take my order, she asked me where I was from. Afterwards, we had a long conversation about how the oil spill had affected the seafood community, and how the restaurant was suffering from the skyrocketing prices. I knew immediately that I wanted to tell their story. It took a few visits to the restaurant before I convinced Susie and her husband Murray to be photographed, but I'm glad I did. I think most people understand the impacts of environmental disasters better when they see how other people are affected.

I love documentary for the human connections that it creates. When I look at any of my photos, I often think of how many people helped me to get to that place, or to meet that person. I keep in touch with many of the people I've photographed or filmed, as well as those who have never appeared in front of my lens.

MA: Like you mentioned, the BP disaster happened just a month after your first trip there. Environmental loss often only garners media attention when there's a sudden disaster, and coverage again subsides as news cycles shift to the next incident. Did you experience that kind of wave during your time working in Louisiana? Through the EDF, did you find alternate routes of dissemination for your images that could contribute to a more measured awareness of the region's issues?

YK: EDF has been working on coastal restoration in Louisiana for over three decades and their work continues. The BP disasters took a terrible toll on the coastal environments they work to restore, but it also brought international attention (and funds) to an area that had been suffering for decades from oil exploitation and development. EDF continues to use my images for their work there. A good example of that is a website,**Erreur ! Référence de lien hypertexte non valide.** that just launched, representing a coalition of environmental organizations that work together to restore the coastal areas.

MA: Your most recent project also deals with an event of massive environmental and human loss, but on a much more personal level. After the earthquake in Japan last year, you put things on hold in New York to start working on a film with your parents in Japan. Can you tell me more about it? How was your family affected by the tsunami and nuclear disaster?

YK: As I sat down for breakfast on the morning of March 11, I opened the New York Times website as I usually do. On the homepage was a photo of an enormous whirlpool over Oarai, a seaside town where my parents and

I used to go to buy seafood and enjoy the beach. Of course I was frantic and called my parents right away, but I couldn't get through. It took me over three days to locate them. Those were really terrible days for me, without much eating or sleep. I called and emailed everyone imaginable, and even sought out strangers on the Internet who had posted about my hometown. Finally, one of their neighbors whom I had met on a previous trip and connected with via Twitter was able to contact their friends who live near my parents, and that couple reported seeing my parents walking their dogs.

My parents live in Ibaraki, and most of the area was without power and phone lines for about four days. As soon as I finally received a call from my parents, I booked a flight to Japan, but I had to cancel. Train lines were down and my parents could not get gasoline due to the fuel shortage, so I would have been stranded at the airport. The fuel shortage persisted for quite some time, as well as scheduled blackouts and a food shortage – a period of time when my parents lived on their rice stocks and whatever they exchanged with friends and neighbors. Because of their proximity to Fukushima, they were also advised not to go outside for the first several weeks.

It was during that time that it really sunk in how far away I was from my family and the country where I was born. Since my parents had moved back to Japan, I had maybe visited them once a year, sometimes less frequently. I realized then that my life had really drifted into a space where I had little connection to where I was from – it lacked a sense of belonging.

After the disasters, my father's part-time job of doing excavation work disappeared. I learned that my parents didn't have any financial cushion to fall back on. They make a living as potters, but business has been very slow for a long time so my father had been forced to take another job. There was no way I could help because I was in school full-time with no source of income, so I decided to sell prints of my photographs. I sent out a plea to my friends using email and Facebook. It was a really humbling experience to admit to everyone I knew that I was in need of help, but it still makes me emotional to think about the overwhelming response I received from my friends and their friends, and their friends, etc. My message was circulated widely and picked up by numerous blogs. People sent orders from Europe, and others sent donations without requesting prints. So many good people helped my parents and me in a time of need.

I finally made it to Japan in June after completing the spring semester. It was really good to see my parents and a few other family members. My father and I drove up the coast to see the destruction caused by the tsunami – I guess we both felt the need to see it with our own eyes. But after just one day, we felt overwhelmed and went home. I filmed quite a bit during the trip but couldn't bring myself to look at the footage for a few months. Even though many of my friends and colleagues had suggested that I work on a film in Japan, it just felt too raw for some time. I decided in the meantime not to return to school. My parents have recently sold some pottery and my father has gotten his job back, but being the only child, it feels too uncertain to

put myself further into debt – although I still hope to complete my degree at some point. The film is an exploration of my roots and a biographical piece about my parents. Their stories are a window through which I hope to learn about Japanese society and how it's coping in the aftermath of the disasters. In the U.S. (and other parts of the world), many of us have read articles about the "quiet strength" and "resilience" of the Japanese people. I think most of us feel a primal need to understand where we're from, and although I haven't lived in Japan for a very long time, I want to reconnect with that part of my heritage and share my lessons with the viewer. Filming my parents has also been a very introspective and healing process for me.

I've filmed on two separate trips so far and plan to spend much of the spring back in Japan. There is a big craft festival called Toensai, which my parents rely on for a good chunk of their annual income. I plan to help them out with the festival and through filming them, tell the story of their success and/or failures in the outcome of the festival.

Kasama-Yaki Film Sample Reel from Yuki Kokubo

MA: In a rough cut you shared with me, your mother remarks that people who create survive by creating. I imagine that as artists themselves, your parents have been receptive to the filmmaking process. How is it working with them?

YK: Working with my parents has been wonderful. I thought that they would be somehow resistant to being filmed, but I've been surprised to see how comfortable they are in front of the camera. I'm grateful that they have given me complete access into their lives, and I love that the camera gives me an opportunity to just sit there for hours and observe while they work. It's not something I've ever done, or probably would have ever done if it not for this film.

Overall, I'm starting to find that people's willingness to be filmed has a lot to do with the filmmaker's intentions, and how clearly they communicate their goals to their subjects. I've never been filmed, but I don't imagine it's an easy thing. You're putting yourself at the mercy of the filmmaker's vision and it also takes up a lot of your time, so it had better be for a good cause!

MA: As someone who also lives somewhere stretched between North America and Japan, I'm really interested in hearing about how your parents relate to you through the two very distinct cultural spaces that the three of you have lived within. Do they understand your need to retrieve your roots? Do they think about it in relation to their own decision when you were a child to move with you to the U.S.?

YK: When I was growing up, Japan was a place where if you opened a magazine, all of the models were white. There were white people in commercials and white people on billboards. I grew up in a time where white people and Western culture were idealized in Japan. I'm sure there was more depth to the issue, but as a child of eight years (and younger), I took in the idea that it was better to be white and Western. My father also happens to be a very dedicated abstract

painter, and I remember him teaching me about Western art and music with a kind of zeal. For those reasons, after we arrived in the U.S., it felt perfectly natural for me to unplug from Japanese culture.

On my most recent trip to Japan, my parents and I had a conversation about this topic. I was always under the impression that my father was against Japanese culture, but he explained that having grown up in the post-war era in a defeated Japan, he was part of a generation that looked at the country with a critical eye. Which, I guess is not that different from myself, and many others with regard to the U.S. My mother lamented that she let me drop out of Japanese Saturday school, which I attended until I was in high school. So, in a way, I found out that while they were ambivalent about my connection to Japanese culture when I was growing up, they never discouraged me from being a part of it. In fact, they're very happy to know that I've become very interested now.

MA: This film seems like a once-in-a-lifetime project. When you're finished, what kind of work would you like to move on to? Is there a place or thing that you dream of shooting in the future?

YK: There are so many places I want to go film, and so many topics that I'm interested in developing into films. I keep a list of ideas and articles that are interesting to me. A couple of years ago, I started developing a film about the environmental issues in Louisiana. The film encountered some roadblocks, but I'd love to complete that project some day. I also learned how to dive and started photographing and filming underwater last year, which had been a lifelong dream, so I'd like to make a film that has an underwater component. Under the surface, the ocean is a different world with a mysterious quality that I love.

What is most important to me is making films that bring awareness to environmental issues, and the role humans play – whether we are perpetrators or victims, or both. I feel that we're at a critical point in so many ways, but there seems to be a lack of understanding that perhaps some films can alleviate.

*** Please help Yuki complete this film by supporting her Kickstarter campaign:

I'm trying to raise $15,000 by March 31st so that I can finish filming and hire a musician to compose an original soundtrack for the film. The contributions will also be used for other post-production costs, such as graphics and sound mix. There are special gifts for different levels of contributions, so please check it out!
http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/yukikokubo/kasama-yaki-made-in-kasama

Raised in an artists' community in rural Japan, ***Yuki Kokubo*** *and her parents moved to New York City in 1986. She began photographing as a teenager and attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she obtained a BFA in 2000 with a concentration in photography. Beginning in fall of 2010, Yuki attended the School of Visual Arts to pursue an MFA in Social Documentary Film. She is currently on leave from the program. Focusing on social and environmental issues, Yuki has worked on projects for the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the Climate Reality Project, and El Eden Ecological Reserve in Mexico. While continuing to freelance as a producer, videographer and photographer, Yuki is currently working on a personal film in Japan.*
http://kasamayakifilm.blogspot.com/
www.yukikokubo.com

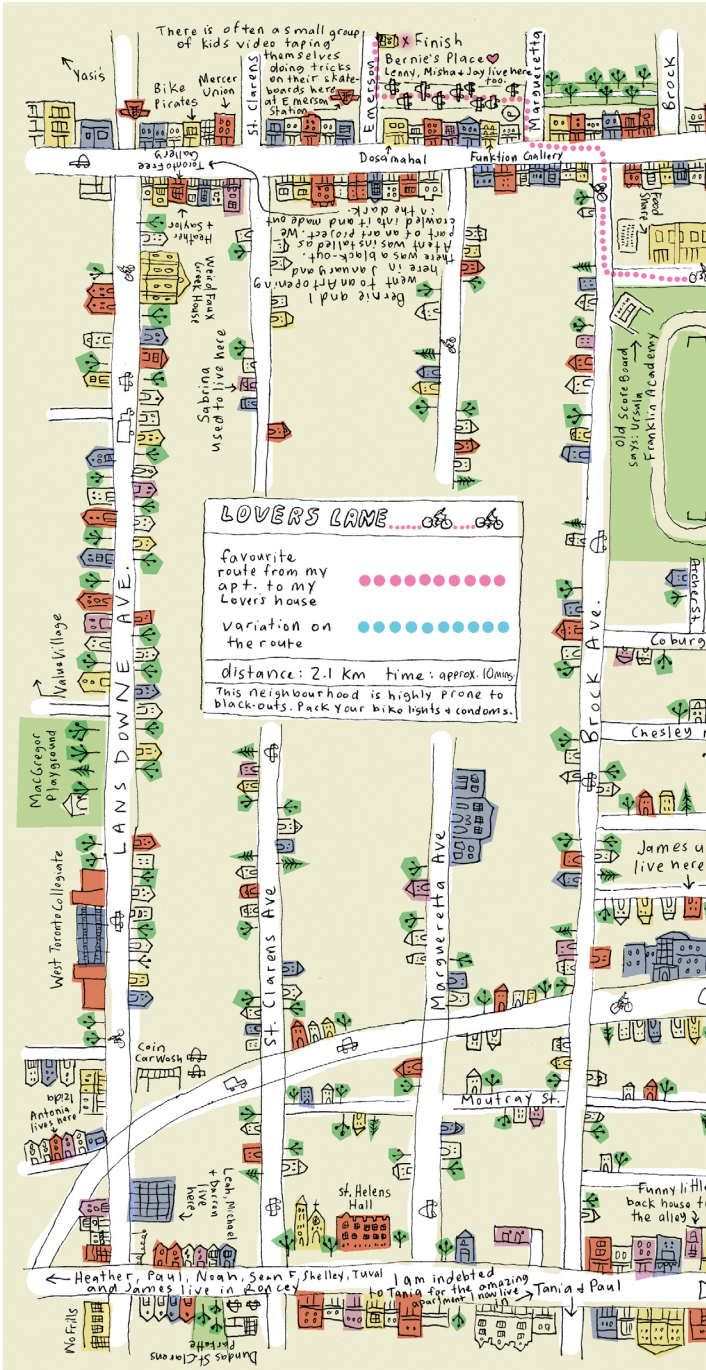
Momoko Allard *is an artist working in drawing, photography, and other pictorial mediums. Her projects often involve questions of representation, sexuality, and visual pleasure. She is also at work on a dialogue-based video piece about her relationship with her grandmother, and the cultural, language and other cognitive barriers that shape their understanding of each other. Her work has been funded by le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and the National Association of Japanese Canadians Endowment Fund. She lives in Montreal and sometimes crashes in Nakano.* ***www.momokoallard.com***

Lovers Lane

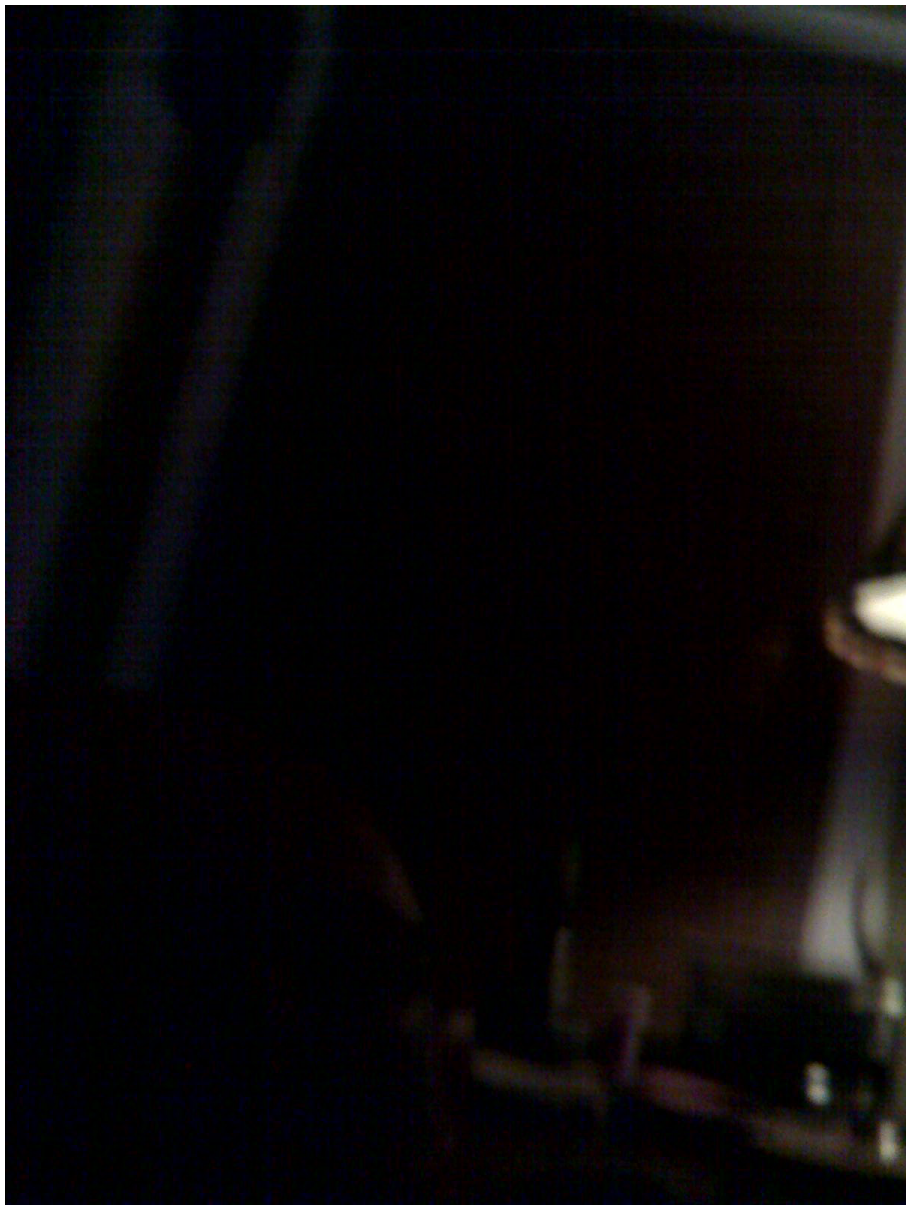
Marlena Zuber

Dandy Horse Magazine asked me to map my favourite cycling route for their summer 2009 issue. At that interval of my life I was very much in love and dating someone new. The route would have to be my ten minute zig zag north to his house. Lovers Lane is a journal of time and place and is evidence of more than just one relationship. It guides you through first dates, meaningful landmarks, introduces you to my friends, my community, my thoughts and feelings, break-ups and alternate routes.

Marlena Zuber *lives and works in Toronto. She makes maps, illustrates books and magazines, produces drawings and paintings and is a member of the glam-pop indie band, Tomboyfriend. She also assists in running the non-profit art program, Creative Works Studio. In 2008, Marlena partnered with writer Stacey May Fowles to produce the illustrated novel Fear of Fighting, published by Invisible Publishing. She recently completed a large series of maps and drawings for Stroll, a monograph of Toronto from a flaneur's perspective, by Shawn Micallef, published by Coach House Books.*



Pauline
Russett
Islamic Information Centre
Gladstone
Bartlett
Stella →
Bartlett is the only place where the tracks meet the street. In April, Bernie and I, went
Salem
for an awesome walk along the tracks. We made out against a small metal building.
Westmoreland
Dovercourt House
BLOOR ST.
Bloor Collegiate
Gladstone Library
Gladstone Ave.
The Potluck House
Paradise Cinema
beautiful Art Deco
Laurel, Chloe + Matt live →
Croatia St.
Croatian Church
Hepbourne St.
This road is not lined up properly
Market goes inside for winter
Rink House
Hockey Rink
The Farmers Market (spring, summer + Fall)
garden
Bake Ovens
Clay + Paper Theatre
Dufferin Park Ave.
I spent many Fridays in the summer of 2003 here, learning how to stiltwalk. We would also play frisbee + then go + enjoy an amazing community dinner by the bake oven.
I am so looking forward to having summer dates with Bernie in this park.
There are some big ass homes on this street.
Harbord St.
I have been to many fire parties here
Both Bernie + I get turned on by the smell of fire smoke in our clothes.
DUFFERIN GROVE PARK
Home of Night of Dread + many other wonderful events
Heather + Elsa + I would often meet at the Common, grab a coffee + come to the park + sit + talk + smoke cigarettes.
cob seat
I broke up with a lover at this picnic table
There was gum all over the seats.
cobstructure
I broke up with a former lover in this food court. It's perfect: bright lights, public, no space for weakness or messy temptations. I highly recommend it.
I used to also ironically, sometimes eat dinner at the food court when I was single and depressed. I liked feeling like I wasn't eating alone.
Dufferin Mall
DUFFERIN ST.
Havelock St.
Rusholme Rd.
DOVERCOURT RD.
Dewson St.
Ave
Ave.
Sylvan Ave.
Muir Ave
Lindsey Ave
Lindsey Ave
At one point I boycotted walking or riding my bike through parks like this. I was depressed and angry and the happy couples walking around. And now I understand it. I wanted to punch someone wants to punch me. It's an honest phase of despair. I am thankful to be 100 miles away from that feeling right now.
neat silhouette graffiti on boarded up windows. This should be redeveloped into affordable housing!
Sean F. used to live here
This house has a very dreamy addition on the back + on top that is all made out of old windows. Just like in that movie with Helena Bonem Carter, I think it was called: "Margaret's Museum".
I know I am riding the wrong way on this street but it's only for a little bit.
N
W
E
S
marlenazuber © 2009
I have never belonged to a gym but if I did, it would be this one.
So many of my friends go to this Y. I do not.
The Y
sed to
Falafel nights.
St. Helen Catholic School
COLLEGE ST.
Cánh Buồm
Bernie brought me here for our 2nd date. The interior design is an impressive Giligan's Island-Asian Fusion. This is now my favourite spot for veggie Pho.
Sheridan Ave.
The Common
The Gladstone Cadbury Chocolate Factory
Marquee Video Store
St. Anne's Anglican Church
Gladstone Ave.
You can often smell the chocolate when you get here. It really is a sweet route to my sweetheart.
Laura lives somewhere on Rusholme Dr.
Rusholme Dr.
Rusholme Rd.
Craig Stephen used to live here
Heyden Park Rd.
The Smiling Buddha
Shannon St.
I used to take African Dance classes here with Heather + Elsa
Churchill Ave
Harrison St.
good slurpees
This woman is always watching the street from her window.
Coolmine
ucked in
The Hen House
Mary Jo used to live above the rotating tourist agency globe
DUNDAS ST.
Bee Bop
I bump into Lauren on Dundas quite a bit.
Little Portugal (home of some serious soccer fans)
Sholem, Sheila, Margaux + Misha
START
Communist Daughter
laundry + LCBO
carrie
Mez
Cheap + yummy churrasqueira
My friend Swati lives next door
I live here on the top floor with my cat, Ziggy.
Lisgar
Beaconsfield
New Gallery
Bernie and I saw 2 guys in bloody fisticuffs, hero, as Bernie would say.
Portuguese Banquet Hall
Cheerful mural
Lauren
West Side Stories Video Store



"Everything Has Already Happened": Secret Photographs by my Grandma Joyce

Cait Harben & Sarah Mangle

In 2009, my grandmother Joyce Dix passed away after living in a long-term care home for only six months. At the time, I didn't know she had left behind an archive of cellphone photographs, all taken in the last two months of her life. I found the accidental photos hidden in the phone when I inherited it, and they felt like a secret gift. As an unintentional document created by my grandmother, the photos are a first-person perspective of her transition into long-term care, a space that is not often documented by personal or family photos. I feel connected to the photos through my own interest in embodied art practices and using photography as a tool to trace the movements of the social body. To consider this series of accidental photographs with aesthetic concerns in mind is a strange task: the perspective is too close to both the body and the objects that surround it. The composition and colour are not choices, they are only evidence of the how the body acts as a frame for experience, and how the boundaries between my grandmother's body and the spaces that surround her collapsed as she aged. The images are defined by the realities that we face at the end of our lives.

Below is an interview with Sarah Mangle where we discuss our grandmothers, the photos, autonomy, privacy, and the culture of care facilities.

Sarah Mangle: Before we look at the photographs, do you want to talk a bit about our grandmothers?

Cait Harben: Are your grandmothers still alive?

SM: I have one grandmother who is still alive, and really one relationship. Her name is Betty. As I became an adult, she became more a part of my life. She always identified as an old person... she's identified as an old lady as long as I've known her.

CH: How would she identify that to you?

SM: She would often say, "I am an old lady," "I will die tomorrow" and "I don't do that anymore,' about many things, all through my 26 years of knowing her I've heard her say, "maybe I'll die tomorrow I'm an old lady".

CH: It's interesting that your grandma would self-identify that way. My grandma Joyce used to say to me "Don't get old, don't get older." She passed away a few years ago. My other grandmother Marjorie, who is still alive, is similar to yours in that she's resigned herself to say, "I am an old lady, everything has already happened." When I was little I used to refer to them based on where they lived, so there was 'grandma Toronto' and 'grandma Kingston' [laughs]. I was close with both but I have very different relationships with each of them.

SM: What were they like?

CH: I was really close to my grandma Toronto, Joyce, because I grew up near her, and I would get to see her during the week or on weekends. I had sleepovers at her house a lot, just her and I. I have really strong memories of her house; I would crawl in bed with her some mornings, all the quilts and blankets she had made herself, and the smell of her body odor was comforting [laughs]. She did a lot of cross-stitching—one of the things she made was a portrait of me when I was in grade four. She lived in the same house for 40 years, since World War II, and I don't think much, if anything, in that house changed since. We were very close, she called me the daughter she never had. She was happy to have me around. My grandma Kingston I saw during holidays or on family vacations in the summer.

SM: So the photo series we're looking at are of your grandma Joyce?

CH: These photos were shot inside my grandma's room after she moved into a long-term care nursing home. She shared a room with three other women, so in the photos, you see the things that were part of this group environment: the woman across from her, the multiple wheelchairs… a part of her head, you can see the edge of her glasses… her bedside table. There is one of the ceiling above her bed; the beds were divided by curtains and the only thing visible in the photo is the roller track the curtain hangs from. Another photo is shot looking down at her knees—at first I thought they were my knees. In this photo is her handwritten phone list, with numbers of her friends and family.

SM: What's that one?

CH: That one's her bedside lamp at night. Each photo was labeled as the date and time stamp so they are identified with a specific moment. I found them on the cellphone that she had. My dad had got her a cellphone after she moved into the nursing home instead of setting up a landline. With this particular phone, the button that you use to take the photo is on the side. It was easy to set off, so my assumption is that they were taken as she was trying to call someone or when someone was calling her. Unfortunately I never got to ask her so I don't know for sure whether she took them on purpose or not. The photos became an accidental witness to that time and space. It is an unusual subject—not many people document that time in their lives, or even wish people to remember them in that

way. My grandma didn't like having photos taken of her after a certain point in her life, so it is strange to have such an intimate window into that time.

SM: Oh, your grandmother took the photos? That's interesting, because I thought you took them...

CH: After she died, I was given the phone and found these photographs. At first I thought that I had taken
them of myself, then I realized that there were things from her room and her body.

SM: They're all such weird angles.

CH: Yeah, the way you hold a phone and where the camera is situated, they're all taken from a hand held angle, or first-person angle, looking out at things around her. They are a bit disorienting to look at, some are blurry and it's hard to figure out what is going on in them. The subject matter, angles, and framing are unintentional, or like they were shot 'secretly'.

SM: They're awkward in a really beautiful way.

CH: Moving into that home was really difficult for her. Letting go and leaving her house of 40 years was a huge change and adjustment to deal with. Unintentionally, the blurry and disorienting feeling I have from them is revealing of that transition and experience. She took a few outfits and photos, and one or two little statues and ceramic things for her bedside table, but nothing else besides that. There is no space, all you have, as an elderly person who moves into care, is a bed.

SM: It shows to us the limit of care we're willing to provide our family and the limit of care we're willing to provide to our community. You deal with it in your family, even though people around you and close to you have resources, they can't help. One thing that pisses me off about old age retirement situations is a total lack of privacy. People actively archive things and hold onto things their entire lives as a practice of identity, and the idea that you just lose those things at the end of your life makes me really angry.

CH: And it's a lack of respect in a lot of ways...

SM: As a daycare teacher, I feel daycares and retirement homes are in a similar place. We hear horror stories about retirement homes and I feel very sensitive about it. If it's at all similar to a daycare, then I understand that the stress Personal Support Workers are under is because they're under-supported and that public retirement homes are absolutely underfunded.

CH: In witnessing the nurses at my grandmother's home, I noticed the amount of responsibility and work they have with family members breathing down their neck about their loved ones' care. The home that the hospital placed my grandmother in was two hours away from my dad's home, so he was stressed that he couldn't get to see her as easily as before. She no longer had the support of neighbours or friends from her home. He felt guilty leaving her in this place that wasn't set up to respect her or see her as an individual at all, but he didn't really have any other options. I know that there are a lot of amazing support workers who vastly

improve the quality of life that people can have in those homes, but the facility and the institution itself aren't structured to provide that at all.

SM: No, and so often I hear the sentiment of resignation about ending up at a retirement home, "oh, that's just how it goes".

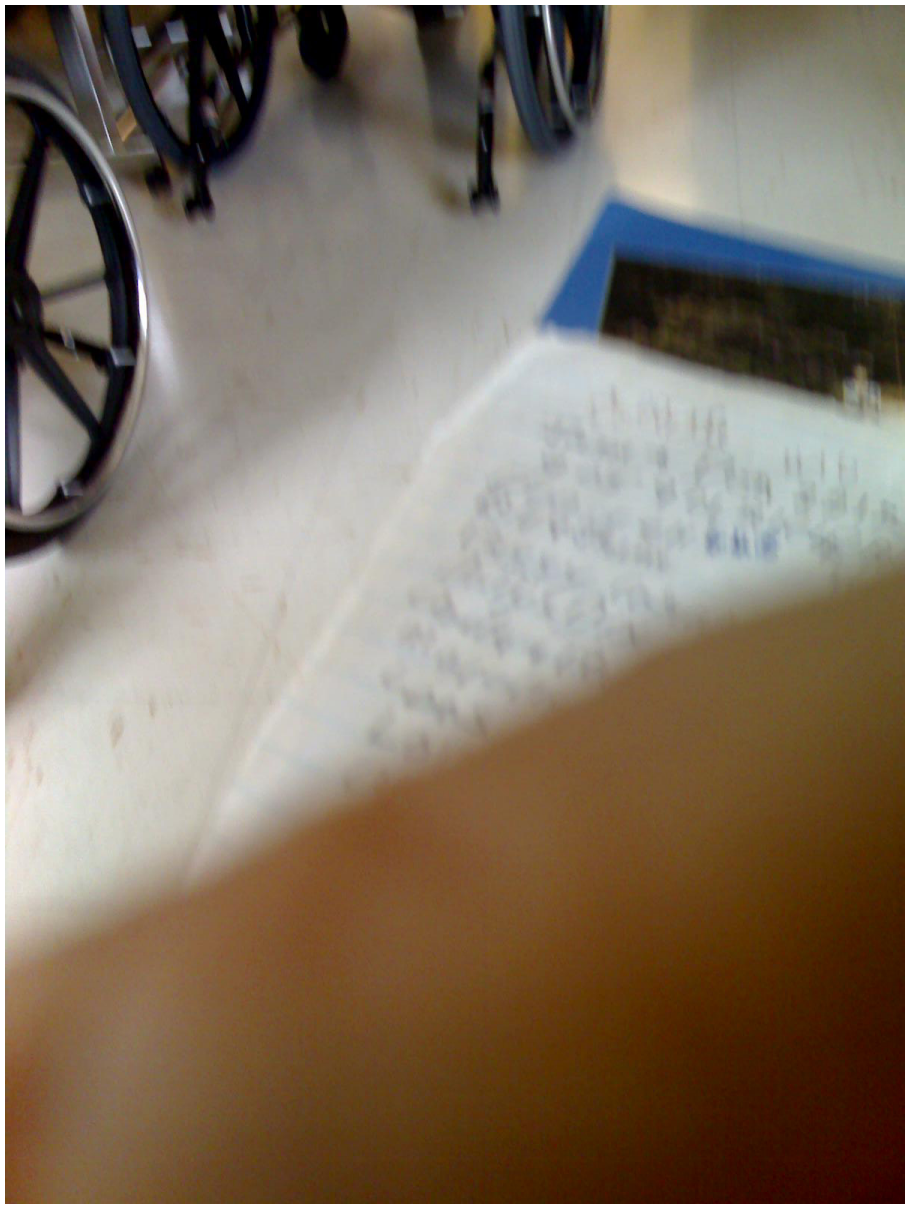
CH: Many long-term care facilities, including my grandma's, are open door, so everyone is coming and going all the time. You really have no security about your space; everything is open all of a sudden. You give up autonomy completely when you move into a long-term care facility; everything is suddenly decided for you. The photos have a 'secretive' quality about them, as if she tried to take them without anyone noticing, in spite of being in a public environment where she was constantly being watched. At the time, I was surprised at how much memory she started to lose, almost immediately.

SM: After moving?

CH: Yeah, It was like she had overnight dementia...

SM: Caused by stress!

CH: ...by stress, and I wondered if it was from losing that routine and autonomy of moving through her house of 40 years. I saw a connection between her daily routine and the things around her that oriented and triggered her memory. After she moved and that familiar environment changed, all of her memories, her sense of time and space, started to deteriorate. Watching her go through that life change was profound, and I'm still trying to understand it.



Cait Harben *is an artist and educator living in Toronto and received her BFA from NSCAD. She has co-designed programs in an afterschool art program for 6-12 year olds where they made billboards for GO Train commuters, designed an 'adventure kits' library, and built miniature cities in nearby sinkholes. She co-edited Do You Read Me?, a book of youth zines and artwork, with artist Sarah Febbrarro in collaboration with Oakville Galleries Youth Council. In 2013 she will join the Arctic Circle Residency expedition to sail around the high arctic with a team of artists, scientists, and educators.*

Sarah Mangle's *work archives social histories, especially queer histories through journalism, film, radio, song writing and zine writing. Sarah grew up in Wolfville, Nova Scotia and currently lives in Toronto. Sarah is currently working on a movie about her relationship to her lesbian homesteading aunts.*