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EDITORIAL

28: Revenge

Welcome to #28: this is the REVENGE issue.

Revenge, as in:

- *to inflict punishment in return for injury or insult*
- *to seek or take vengeance*
- *spite, vindictiveness, retaliation*

In this issue:

Haley Morris-Cafiero is this issue's featured photographer, presenting work from her series *Wait Watchers*, which makes visible everyday hostilities directed at fat and other non-normative bodies in public. This interview is conducted by **Jackie Wykes**.

Sarah Kember presents an anonymous open letter about the discovery of life on Mars.

Katie Weldon interviews **Mandi Morgan**, a Vancouver-native and NFB/ONF employee in Montréal, with hopes of answering questions about the decline in viewership, and the best way to support Canadian filmmakers.

Moynan King considers a reading of Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* as a form of revenge – a performative speech act that reveals, and retaliates against, its genesis in misogynistic polemics throughout history.

Regular NMP contributor, **Andrea Zeffiro**, interviews **Steph Ceraso** about her ongoing audio project archiving the lived experiences of graduate student life.

Our next theme is USED, out September 1, 2013.

If you would like to pitch us an idea for a future submission, please consult our Guidelines and use the Submit form (or email us: info at nomorepotlucks dot org). NMP comes out every 2 months online, and bit later in print-on-demand. The ARCHIVE, HAUNTED and CRUSH issues will be available in p.o.d shortly.

As always, huge thank-you to our copy editor, Tamara Shepherd, p.o.d assistant Jayme L. Spinks, to all the NMP regulars, contributors past and future, and to readers and supporters of the project in so many ways.

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward a thought-provoking journal bimonthly.

Mél Hogan & M-C MacPhee



Revenge as Radical Feminist Tactic in the SCUM Manifesto

Moynan King

Dropping out is not the answer; fucking up is. Most women are already dropped out. They were never in. Dropping out gives control to those few who don't drop out; dropping out is exactly what the establishment leaders want; it plays into the hands of the enemy; it strengthens the system instead of undermining it, since it is based entirely on the non-participating, passivity, apathy and non-involvement of the mass of women.- Valerie Solanas

Acts of revenge rely on the mobilization of retributive justice. Revenge is a form of re-activism, it requires retaliation (payback), and seeks a kind of relief that can only be achieved with the harm or humiliation of an enemy who has done harm or humiliation to the revenger. Revenge is violent and energetic; it wants to be known, it wants to draw attention to its motive, and to expose a wrong done. Revenge, in effect, always perpetuates the very kind of assault it seeks to stand against. Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*, in a decidedly vengeful tone, engages these qualities of violence, energy and retribution. It is a passionate, driving text whose auditory rhythms evoke the hammering, spewing, shooting rage of the wildly

wronged and infinitely trapped. Emerging from an abject abhorrence of the male sex, the text ultimately encompasses a much larger critique of capitalism and the entire hegemonic power structure as designed and controlled by men. The radical inversion of power and power systems espoused by Solanas summons the ideology of decolonization described by Franz Fanon, which suggests that: “Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon,” (Fanon 35) and as a “a program of complete disorder... cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding” (Fanon 36). Solanas’s program of “complete disorder” suggests an impossible brand of subterfuge – a nihilistic shriek positing a near-complete retraction of history. The pain of her shriek is almost too much to bear at times (too much to read), but Solanas’s extreme and radical style may be justified because, as Avital Ronell reminds us in her brilliant introduction to the 2004 edition of *SCUM*, “Sometimes you have to scream to be heard” (Solanas 3).

The *SCUM Manifesto* is a call to “civic-minded, responsible, thrill seeking females” to “overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and destroy the male sex” (Solanas 35). It is a transgressive inversion of gender roles that drives head-on into the traffic of the one-way street that constitutes historical gender binary oppression, and emasculates the male by assigning to him historical traits branded onto women. “[T]he male is psychically passive,” Solanas extols, “he hates his passivity, so he projects it on to women, defines the male as active, and sets out to prove that he is” (Solanas 37). This inverted gender branding may be viewed as a form of literary drag; the male is dressed up in the social and psychic costume traditionally assigned to women, resulting in a textual appropriation of gender norms that seeks to invert a dichotomy – a dichotomy that “hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart” – and ride it out to its extreme (Diamond 3). But Solanas’s rendition of patriarchy does not, as Judith Halberstam has suggested, “neatly divide positive and negative human traits between men and women” (Halberstam 109), but rather constitutes a mass of contradictions incorporating binaries within the binaries, multiple sexualities that do not resist, but rather support, the very limited

dichotomy from which they emerge. For example, Solanas's inverted binaries express disdain for sycophantic "Daddy's girls" and reverence for faggots, "who, by their shimmering, flaming example, encourage other men to de-man themselves" (Solanas 72-3). The web of contradictions that she weaves (with a heady combination of bile and humour) only serves to highlight the problem of theorizing a utopia of non-history by a woman who herself is thoroughly inserted into the "phallogocentric crush of the linguistic grid" (Ronnel qtd in Solanas 15). Solanas's revenge-styled text creates an inverted system of thought, redoubled onto itself, with some gunfire thrown in.

Historical tradition offers the female only two potential affective responses to what Solanas sees as the systemic oppression of women under patriarchy; she can either internalize (neurotic style), or she can risk expression and render herself psychotic. Solanas is, what I call, a radical anti-fragile feminist. As anti-fragile, and not strong, sturdy, confident, secure or any of the standard antonyms of fragile, I am suggesting that Solanas's force and conviction rely on an acute awareness of the social binaries that historicize the female as implicitly fragile, and, as well, on a sustained connection to her own oppression and victimization. This sustained connection to oppression, combined with the deliberate and violent inversion of gender dichotomy, renders Solanas a sort of binary terrorist. Rebecca Schneider defines binary terror as the fear "that accompanies the dissolution of a binary habit of sense making and self fashioning" (Schneider 13). In this sense, Solanas's metonymic conflation of the male and patriarchal oppression "invites a kind of hysteria, a psychosis of the overly real" (Schneider 6). Solanas resists her status as supporting actor in the social order and declares possession of the leading role in a calcified gender dichotomy. "Maybe," Ronell posits, "the Solanas tract was payback; it was clocked to strike the time of response to all shameless woman-hating manifestoes and their counterparts, the universalizers. No matter how you cut it, universal – whether common or communist – meant 'man'" (Solanas 5). As a manifesto, *SCUM's* intention is to make manifest, to render perceptible, a new order of ideas. Derived from the latin *manifestus* (apparent, palpable) whose etymological roots are *mannus* (hand) and *festus* (struck), the manifesto is an apt, if not ideal, form for Solanas's revenge-styled counter-hegemonic tract.

What the text always wants to render perceptible is a systemic manipulation of power by the male who, Solanas asserts, “attains to masterfulness by the manipulation of money and everything controlled by money, in other words, of everything and everybody” (Solanas 41). Further, the control that man wields is a violation of the “female’s rights, privacy and sanity” (Solanas 48), a violation inspired by his need to deny the female her true social function, which, according to Solanas, is to “explore, discover, invent, solve problems, crack jokes, make music – all with love,” because:

The female’s individuality, which he is acutely aware of, but which he doesn’t comprehend and isn’t capable of relating to or grasping emotionally, frightens and upsets him and fills him with envy. So he denies it in her and proceeds to define everyone in terms of his or her function or use, assigning to himself, of course, the most important functions – doctor, president, scientist... (Solanas 47)

Solanas inverts the psychoanalytic model of feminine identity by deploying precisely the tactics of historical misogyny, which results in an act of binary terror that converts female penis envy, for example, to the male’s envy of the female’s free wheeling individuality.

The *SCUM Manifesto* recalls the tenor and tone of its schematic opposites, such as (to name only a transhistorical few): Plato’s *The Republic*, a series of dialogues whose social principles relegated women to the lowest position within a tripartite system of value, equating woman with animal; John Knox’s sixteenth-century critique of women in positions of power, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against This Monstruous Regiment of Women*; the *Malleus Malificarum* (or *The Witch Hammer*) a seventeenth-century text that targeted women as inherently evil in a tract that was sanctioned by a papal bull and detailed a calculated and cruel directive for the treatment of witches (primarily female); and the *Futurist Manifesto* of Marinetti that calls out to “glorify...contempt for women.” Indeed, Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) – a fascistic, misogynist tract, demanding the dismissal of history and the destruction of great art in the name of progress, speed, war and a new definition of culture for the future – is taught

regularly in college and university art programs as a seminal text in modernist art theory (Andy Warhol's post-modern genealogical trajectory touches this tradition in more ways than one). So, I wonder, as an aside, if we can absorb the violent vision of Marinetti into a mainstream cultural theoretical framework, then why not Solanas's as well?

As a manifesto *SCUM* heralds a new order, it makes a promise and it follows through (to some degree, at least), as evidenced by Solanas's shooting of at least three men, most famously her attempted murder of post-modern art icon Andy Warhol. This live act of violent revenge activates the directive that due to "[t]he male artistic aim being, not to communicate (having nothing inside him, he has nothing to say)...he resorts to symbolism and obscurity (deep stuff)," SCUM females must stalk and kill "great male artists" (Solanas 27). Her metonymic conflation of the human male and oppressive patriarchy results in an aggressive call to action that details the necessity of destroying the male sex in order to relieve society of the historical mess created by patriarchal social systems. Overall, though, as an authentic performative (one that wholly follows through on its promise), the *SCUM Manifesto* it is doomed to fail. The grand design of Solanas's revenge fantasy is literally impossible. SCUM is ultimately a society of one, and further, of "one" whose performance of self embodies isolation – Solanas is, paradoxically it seems, an anti-social personality with a social agenda. Revenge acknowledges that the communication of pain (via retribution) is the only way to end the pain; it seeks its relief there, and Solanas understood that words, like bodies, can be hurled to injurious effect.

The *SCUM Manifesto* takes aim at, while simultaneously and blatantly revealing its genesis in, misogynistic polemics throughout history. It is worth noting that the definition of polemic (according to Merriam-Webster) is: "an aggressive attack on, or refutation of, the opinions or principles of another." A polemic therefore has a revenge-like reaction-against built into its form, rendering Solanas's manifesto a polemic against polemic, a war against war. Solanas has rendered herself a scourge of feminism, forgoing her own utopian vision of the female function "to create a magic world," and to do so, "all with love." (47). "SCUM," Solanas asserts "is too

impatient to wait for the de-brainwashing" (Solanas 71); it wants revenge and it wants it now. The violence, she reminds the reader, is a necessary but temporary measure because, "after the elimination of money there will be no further need to kill men; they will be stripped of the only power they have over psychologically independent females" (Solanas 78). But the road to her post-history utopia must be paved with violence, humiliation and death. Because revenge always perpetuates the very kind of assault it seeks to stand against, one has to wonder if it can ever be mobilized as an effective feminist tactic? I don't (obviously) have the answer, but will reiterate, all the same, that if the alternative is utter silence, then sometimes you really do have to scream to be heard.

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Moynan King is a Toronto based director, writer, actor, curator, performance artist and scholar.

A theatre and performance artist with twenty years of professional experience, Moynan has worked with many major and alternative Toronto based companies and travelled widely as a creator, director and actor. As an actor she has over forty professional film, theatre and television credits. She has acted as dramaturge for some of Canada's finest and most radical theatre artists including: d'bi young, RM Vaughan, Keith Cole, Ann Holloway, Nathalie Meisner, and Nathalie Claude, and assisted in the translation of Nathalie Claude's *Le Salon Automate* (scheduled for publication in 2013). Moynan was resident dramaturge for the Playwrights' Guild of Canada's Women's Caucus from 2002 – 2007 and has led dramaturgical workshops in Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg. She is the author of six plays and is currently developing *The Proust Project*, a stage adaptation of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, which had its first public workshop presentation at The Canadian Stage Company in 2011. Moynan's performance installation works, both solo and collaborative, have been presented across Canada and in New York City. Most recently Moynan co-created *TRACE*, an interactive sound installation, with Tristan Whiston for *FADO Performance Art*, which is slated for a national tour in 2014.

As a curator and festival director, Moynan was the co-founder and director of *Hysteria*, the country's largest and most diverse multi-disciplinary festival of work by women, for five years, and was co-director of the *Rhubarb! Festival of New Plays*, for a total of five years. Moynan is the founder and director of *Hardworkin' Homosexuals*, producers of the wildly successful *Cheap Queers*, from 1995 – 2009 (and other queer performance events such as *Explain Yourself!* in 2012).

She is currently working on her PhD at York University, and is a director on the board of the Toronto Arts Council.



Overcoming Bureaucracy: An Interview with Mandi Morgan

Katie Weldon

This interview came about serendipitously while Katie was in the process of writing her final paper at Emily Carr University. As a film student, the research paper addressed the National Film Board's decline in viewership, as well as the dilemma of how best to support Canadian filmmakers. Along with traditional resources for her research, she sent a hopeful e-mail lined with questions to Vancouver-native Mandi Morgan, an NFB/ONF employee in Montréal, and was pleasantly surprised by the stranger's impassioned response.

Katie Weldon: Could you tell us about your background, artistic and otherwise?

Mandi Morgan: I am originally from Vancouver, British Columbia, but my family now resides in Sandy Hook on the Sunshine Coast with the bears. I currently live in Montréal. Six years ago I took a train across Canada with two suitcases filled with my most important possessions and moved to Montreal. I moved with the hopes of getting into the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema. To pick up and leave my family, my roots, my life and friends in my 30s was the hardest thing I'd ever done. Yet uprooting, building, and going through the intense solitude and sadness of leaving everyone I ever loved, was the best thing I ever did. Now I understand



the depth of gratitude and love. I did all of this to pursue my dream of being a filmmaker and artist. I did not find creative inspiration in Vancouver.

In 2006, I received my B.A. at UBC in World Literature with a minor in Film Studies, and in 2010, I received a B.A. in film production specializing in documentary/experimental cinema at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, Concordia University. I am a multi-media visual artist specializing in filmmaking, expanded cinema, animation and illustration. I work with video and 8mm/16mm film formats. I prefer to work with my hands and avoid computers if I can. (Impossible.) All of my animations are hand-drawn and paper cutouts. I am part of a film collective in Montréal called Groop*index. It started in 2011 after four of us graduated from Film School and we did not know what to do with our lives. It was a rather existential time in our lives when we first developed the group. We were all in our 30s, in major debt, and we had all just graduated from film school. We laugh about it now, but Groop*index was certainly born of uncertainty. Suffice it to say, we are all doing great now! The goal of the group is to support each other and provide critical roundtable advice for our projects.

[Blue meanies H264](#) from [Mandi A Morgan](#) on [Vimeo](#)



KW: Where are you working on these days?

MM: Along with several small personal projects, I am currently the assistant director to documentary filmmaker Martin Duckworth, working on a film about renowned

Canadian playwright David Fennario. The documentary is a film about the making of his most recent play, *Motherhouse*. It is a heated political play about women working in the munitions plant in Verdun, Montréal during WWI. I also work at Concordia University as the booking coordinator for IITS Cinemas. It is an exciting job with a lot of responsibility and high levels of pressure during busy times. Essentially, I coordinate the events that take place in our four cinemas on several levels. These events range from high profile film festivals such as Fantasia and RIDM, film retrospectives, academic conferences, private screenings, Cinema Politica, and academic classes. Our team is highly professional and I am proud to work with this crew. It is a very exciting time for the cinema department at Concordia University because our two major cinemas, with over 1000 seats combined, are being renovated this summer with an upgrade of equipment. We also carry the mandate to maintain and preserve the exhibition of 35mm and 16mm film. With all the cinema houses sadly closing down in Montréal, there are not very many cinemas that will continue to screen celluloid. Our cinemas will be in demand and this is exciting!

KW: You've worked at the CinéRobothèque in Montréal, correct? It sounds like it was a pretty magical place, could you describe it to someone who's never been?

MM: The CinéRobothèque was the flagship for learning about Canadian culture. Visitors to the CinéRobothèque walked into a darkened room equipped with approximately 25 personal viewing stations. Each station possessed a user-friendly touch screen computer with the NFB/ONF's collection of over 10,000 films dating as far back as 1918. The viewer could easily navigate and find films based on genre, subject, year or filmmaker. The seats were very comfortable, and people would pass the whole afternoon or evening watching films. The CinéRobothèque attracted local and international researchers, tourists, families, new Canadians, students, street kids, seniors, teachers, children and cinephiles. It had an open door policy where everyone was welcome. Street kids would come in and watch films on those unbearable days when it reached -30 degrees. It was the home to those first awkward dates, and for old men who could barely stand without a cane but

struggled to get to the CinéRobothèque despite the weather conditions. Essentially, the CinéRobothèque was Montréal's/Canada's public darling as far as learning about Canadian/Quebec history, culture, politics, geography, and creativity through the means of informative visual media. There was a centre in Toronto also called the Mediatheque which was similar, but not as large and without as lofty a collection as the Montréal centre. This centre was also closed.

What made the CinéRobothèque especially interesting was a six-foot tall robot named after the first projectionist in Montréal, Leo-Ernest Ouimet. When a viewer chose a film from one of the viewing stations, the computer would send a message to Ernest and he would retrieve a large laserdisc film from his many thousand drawers. He had an impeccable memory. Ernest was getting rather old. His services were being replaced by digitized films and he occasionally fell asleep on the job. That is what happens when you get old. But our technicians always managed to revive him back into order. The technicians had a complicated relationship with Ernest because he was quite difficult to fix, seeing that he was built with the same sophisticated software as the Canadarm. Viewers came from far and wide to see Ernest play films, especially the children, who pressed their noses against the glass waiting for Ernest to greet them with movement. What was particularly special about the CinéRobothèque was that the viewing stations were absolutely free.

The CinéRobothèque was also an educational centre, where our team of animators designed 16 different film-related workshops specializing in the documentary and animation genres. There were paper cut-out, claymation, pixilation, and puppet animation workshops. There were several film production workshops, including workshops about how to examine films responsibly and critically. The workshops were designed for all ages, levels and abilities. My favourite workshops to teach were for those with disabilities. We taught animation workshops to the visually impaired, and sound workshops to the hearing impaired. People often wonder how it is possible to teach the non-seeing about animation, and the hearing impaired about sound in films. However, it was one of the simplest of the



workshops because it was an exchange. Not only did the participants experience new ways to see and hear, so did the animators learn different ways of seeing and hearing. Creativity was always encouraged. The end result was always above satisfactory.

On the level of cinema exhibition, the CinéRobothèque was an extremely important centre for the city of Montréal. The NFB/ONF cinema was home to the most sophisticated and professional cinema equipment in the city. It hosted several integral film festivals, such as RIDM, Festival du Nouveau Cinéma, FIFA and RVCQ to name a few. We shared an excellent partnership and passion for cinema with the festivals and organizations. It was an important centre for local/international filmmakers to premiere their films. It was the place where the community would see films of relevant subject matter, connect with the community and challenge, encourage and provoke critical thought. The centre was located in an area called Quartier Latin (Latin Quarter), the epicenter of the arts in Montreal.

KW: What was your role at the NFB, specifically before the layoffs in Montréal in 2011?

MM: As for my role at the CinéRobothèque, it was a hybrid job. The employees were all responsible for having a very good knowledge of the collection in both official languages. I liaised between the public and the NFB/ONF, and helped people with their research. I was responsible for informing the public about the NFB/ONF. In a sense I was a librarian, but for visual media and films. I helped to coordinate the smooth execution of festivals and was responsible for teaching workshops. The most special element of the centre was the team. It was a true gift to work with such a positive and supportive crew of colleagues. We all shared similar responsibilities and were all expected to know the different elements of the job. We rotated our responsibilities and helped each other out when help was needed. If there was one positive to come from the centre closing, it is that some of us have become friends for life.



I feel that I had a relatively special role at the NFB/ONF leading up to the layoffs, because I was one of the last to be hired onto the team before the cuts. In addition, I was also the only Anglophone working at the centre. And at that time, one of only two females teaching workshops. This intimidated me greatly. I needed to learn confidence very quickly. This was incredibly challenging for me, because when I applied, I thought I could speak French, but when you get up in front of 30 people to teach a class in a second language, you quickly learn that you cannot speak the language as well as you thought. I was mostly sleepless for the first few months of working at the centre, because I loved my job so much that I did not want to lose it due to the language issue. There were a couple of people who were not comfortable with my level of French, but for the most part, my peers recognized my effort, and these great friends are the ones who encouraged me to improve and become completely bilingual. I knew I was in a very rare and fortunate position and I would have done just about anything to keep this job because I feel/felt very passionate about humanitarian cinema and the NFB/ONF mandate. In fact, I always dreamed of working for the NFB/ONF one day... a place that functioned as both work and home.

However, with all the happiness and excitement of working at the CinéRobothèque, there was always the looming threat of the behemoth of our Conservative government. I anticipated losing my job, so I feel I lived in a state of constant anxiety. It was heart crushing in 2012 when the Orange Crush was crushed due to the silly constituent election system we have here. I knew it was the beginning of the end. Many of my peers kept mentioning that I was being a pessimist and that I must think positively. However, I knew and felt how increasingly ruthless the Conservative government was becoming. It was only a matter of tick and then tock before the end of the next fiscal year.

What was most ruthless, however, was how the centre was informed of its closure. We received a phone call. The centre would be closed. We all lost our jobs. All 22 of us. I felt so deeply saddened for everyone. I was in the middle of teaching a workshop with a colleague when the news hit. Others were working also, trying very hard to keep it together. There were a lot of tears that day. It was a violation.

There was no warning. It was very difficult for those who worked at the centre, who had devoted their lives building the centre and community, etc. It was revolting how, in one phone call, the plug was pulled, ruthlessly. Just like that. Poof. Jobless. All our efforts and passion for the institution were completely dispensable. We were the face of the NFB/ONF. It was us, who liaised with the public, and us who taught 'Canadians of Canadians.' Not the administrators lost in an office at the NFB/ONF Headquarters somewhere on the 40 (highway in Montreal). What I felt to be particularly tacky, was when human resources showed up later that afternoon in their suits with briefcases filled with pamphlets and advice on how to cope when losing a job. We were the effect of Harper's bovine, headed straight to the slaughterhouse of the unemployed. The centre would remain open for six months longer, which was most difficult of all because we had to repeat the same old story over and over, and we had to hear from the community what a tragedy it was over and over. It became depressing. It was similar to someone who is terminally ill. I loved the CinéRothèque dearly. We all did. But we knew she had only 6 months to live. It was difficult.

KW: Can you describe the political landscape leading up to the NFB layoffs? And what was the public's reaction?

MM: The political environment leading up to the NFB/ONF layoffs was incredibly exciting in retrospect. At the time, I can't deny that the beginning of the protests were disheartening. Each night, helicopters hovered over Montréal until the wee hours of the morning. There was intense brutality in the streets. It felt very Orwellian. Everyone was warned not to go to the city centre where most of the protests took place. However, one night I was curious and I took my bicycle into the heart of where the violence erupted every night. I learned a lot from the solo field trip. It was horrifying what I witnessed, however, I must be honest. A lot of the violence was provoked. Most of the perpetrators were drunk or on drugs and clearly not students. Watching the tension rise was tantamount to watching a game of psychological mob chicken. Many street kids would go straight up to the cops and yell "Fucking Pigs" no more than a few inches from their face. Some spat on

them. The police would stand stoic, gazing beyond and through the perpetrators. Similar to a tower of playing cards, it is only a matter of time until something loses balance, and then everything falls. The tension rises and rises until one person can no longer tolerate the abuse and loses his/her steam. When one falls, the rest follow in its stead, and then come the aftereffects of ungrounded mayhem and adrenaline. This is exactly what happened. United, the cops advanced block by block, with the mentality of beating anything in their path. If a woman was walking a dog outside her apartment building, she would be hit by a baton. It was terrifying. Fear breeds panic. People jumped from car roof to car roof, smashed in all the windows, started intense fires that spread across intersections. Tear gas, people screaming and running, people bloodied, eyes swollen by the batons, the clip clop of police horse hooves, innocent bystanders crying with shock at witnessing such brutality. There were no students who provoked this. These few idiots ruined it for everyone. There were 100 useless idiots to 100,000 pacifists. Of course the media filmed the 100 rock throwing, mask wearing idiots. And the mass media delivered the message that the students 'got what they deserved...'

Stringent laws were imposed restricting students' rights to protest. You could be arrested if you were walking in a group of eight or more people. No wearing of masks was allowed. This did not deter the students nor the people of Montréal. Every night the students marched and endured the severe beating of the police. As the violence got worse, the people of Montréal (not only students, but grandmothers, families, immigrants, uncles, Hasidic Jews, children, the English and the Québécois) outwitted the police and spread the protests out into different areas of the city. At 8:00pm every night, ALL of Montréal went into their cupboards and grabbed pots, spoons and pans and would join each other out on the streets clanging and banging in solidarity. All of Montréal walked for several miles because all of the separate groups from all over the island met together at the confluence of random intersections and walked together down the two major streets toward downtown. More than 100,000 people marched together, wearing costumes, dancing, smiling, celebrating, blowing bubbles. I don't think one can truly comprehend what it could possibly sound like to have 100,000 people banging

pots and pans in unison, joyously, in absolute solidarity. I will never feel something like that again I don't think. I don't think a thousand flawless runs down a ski hill will equal this amount of joy.

I feel very saddened that English-speaking Canada has a deep misunderstanding about what *really* happened with the student protests here in Montréal. It was not just about 'Québécois' students not wanting to pay to go to school. That is the rudimentary, hooked on phonics version of what really happened. It was the accumulation of many things. The government's budget cuts, people's rights, oppression, the environment, the banks. If the movement was examined critically and responsibly (and not by the violent images on TV every night), most Canadians would be very moved, inspired and proud of what the student protests managed to accomplish. The narrow take from the media and lack of presence/ acknowledgement by the federal government sadly perpetuated the divide between Québec and Canada further. I find this very sad because it should not be the reality. Without the bridge to inform and educate openly about either culture, stereotypes solidify, and both parties become increasingly ignorant and stupidly uninformed. Not only was there a big elephant in that big old green common room of ours, but there was a whole herd of hundreds of thousands of determined elephants stampeding and celebrating in the streets, shutting down Canada's second-largest metropolis. Where was the government? It was very unfortunate that the rest of Canada started in on the street celebrations once the movement was lauded and followed internationally. It should also not go unnoticed that The Maple Spring and The Idle no More Movement, both drawing international attention and admiration, were inaugurated by Canada's sweetheart minorities.

The protests occurred close to every evening starting as early as February. The protests came after the Occupy Wall Street movement and also after the Arab Spring. Revolution was/is certainly in the air and if there is any place in this country to galvanize a revolution, it is Québec! From the movement sprouted other movements and other protests with regards to teachers supporting students, protests against the banks, against environmental degradation, against Bill 78,

against F-35s, against Omnibus Bills, etc., etc., etc. As the protests were in full force, not only did Canada receive her proverbial slap on wrist and budget hair cut; but we got a severe buzz cut, as it is the appropriate style when forcibly joining the army. The mandate to put more spending into the military infuriated everyone. The CBC was cut drastically, and so was the NFB. People became increasingly angry and became more involved, especially in Montreal where culture is valued. It was a perfect time to fight for culture! Especially as a representative for the NFB/ONF.

When I learned that I had lost my job, I was truly heartbroken, because it was taken away from me. I have a very political background as my great grandfather, William Irvine, was one of the principal founders of the NDP. He is also responsible for abolishing capital punishment in this country. I've always had a particular passion to remain politically involved and active, and I felt that this was my calling. Instead of being broken and devastated, as I was, I devoted my energy and focus into finding justice. Denys Desjardins, a very important advocate of Québec cinema and renowned documentary filmmaker, started an organization called the MSSO (Movement Spontané Pour la Survie de L'ONF or Spontaneous Movement to Save the NFB). At first, there were approximately 10 people who would meet weekly in an old, shabby, underground film exhibition spot called Casa Obscura. A good friend and I were the two representatives of the NFB/ONF from the CinéRobothèque, and we would provide him with necessary information and numbers about the centre. But this small group, many from the documentary filmmaking community, organized ways to draw attention to the closure of the centre and fight to have it saved. I helped translate some documents from French to English. The MSSO organized a protest. Over 300 people came to the front doors of the CinéRobothèque with signs and banners to save the NFB/ONF. People came with large banners and homemade posters stating, "We need more 35mm films, and not more F35's." The NFB/ONF's logo was pasted on posters with a tear falling from the eye. It was very touching. Creative partners came in solidarity, such as the Cinematheque Québécoise, RIDM, and FNC. The CBC came to cover the story and asked to interview one of the staff members, and I wanted to so

desperately, but I was warned that I could lose my job (again). People eventually sat in the middle of the street blocking two major intersections. Horns were at war. Some drivers parked in the middle, slammed their doors shut, screamed *en tabernac* and raced to the metro.

I met one peculiar character at this demonstration by chance. He was wearing a long black trench coat, had pomade-slicked hair and he resembled a 1970s afterhours jazz musician. I had to talk to this guy. The character ended up being Tyrone Benskin, the Minister of Heritage for the opposition. In other words he was the NDP Minister of Heritage. We had a great discussion and I told him of my great grandfather. I got his card and told him we would be in touch. When I attended the next MSSO meeting, I informed Denys that I had met Tyrone Benskin personally and suggested that we meet him. A few of us from the documentary filmmaking community went to meet Mr. Benskin to seek help with keeping the centre open. Yanick Letourneau, the director of *United States of Africa*, members of the RIDM film festival and Julie Perron and Denys Desjardins, two veteran NFB/ONF filmmakers and myself met in Tyrone's office. I prepared a list of all the positives that the CinéRobothèque brought to the community, along with a lofty list of all ramifications its closure would have on the documentary filmmaking community. I wrote it in hopes that he may take some of the ideas and address them to Mr. Harper in the House of Commons. Tyrone was extremely sympathetic and informed us of what was happening behind the scenes in the House of Commons. Inevitably, I left the meeting feeling more depressed and hopeless than when I entered it. However, I felt that we had Tyrone on our side, and that was truly something. He said he would mention our concerns. I was so excited. I pored through the monotonous dialogues of the House of Commons everyday looking for Tyrone Benskin's name, always to no avail. I searched and searched naively, wondering what he said to the Prime Minister. Nothing. Until one day, not too long afterward, I was reading the paper in a bakery and there it was. Tyrone's name, in a caption that read, "Tyrone Benskin raises important issue for funding the Queen's Jubilee to Prime Minister Stephen Harper." I continued reading, and learned that Tyrone requested a \$2,000,000 budget to promote the

Queen's jubilee. What is most important to mention here is that the NFB/ONF's budget cuts for the 2012/2013 fiscal year was exactly \$7,000,000. This is why both centers were lost. The government spent \$2,000,000 to promote the Queen's visit with perhaps a million wasteful plastic pins, and a million wasteful paper flags. Our CinéRobothèque went to Canadians attending 30-second parades with the anticipation of 20 seconds of a black car driving by with black windows, all the while waving flags that were ultimately made in China. This is the sad truth. This is where our beloved CinéRobothèque went: to waste and fleeting ideology.

KW: For aspiring documentary filmmakers like myself, what is your advice for entering a film world (in Canada), where there is relatively little arts funding?

MM: As a documentary filmmaker nowadays, in this political environment both nationally and internationally, I feel the filmmaker has a large social responsibility. This goes for all artists alike. It is inevitable that there will be mass cuts to funding for filmmaking. This is something that has always happened. Now, with the current government it will be more severe. However, it is the filmmaker's responsibility to fight back and remain true to his/her craft, to take this challenge and make films regardless of the obstacles. If a filmmaker wants to make a film, there is no way the film will not be made. It is very desirable to make a film and have a large budget for post-production. However, that may not be the reality these days. A true filmmaker will get out and shoot anyway. If a film must be made, it will be made. Most importantly, crucial information will be revealed.

Documentary filmmakers, the world's most honest politicians, humanity's social angels, need to go out and gather, accumulate and report on what is relevant in this world, to disclose what we are affected by and to celebrate how we may overcome and circumvent specific obstacles. I believe that filmmakers who are the most passionate about making films do not make films for themselves, or a small niche of peers. True filmmakers recognize that being a documentary filmmaker is to struggle financially, to fight incessantly for a cause knowing full well that there may not be a positive end result. They struggle to expose dire issues and bring to



light certain concerns that humanity should know about. Documentary filmmakers do not need the NFB/ONF for funding, cachet or creative approval. They just need to go out and shoot. Filmmakers are at an advantage in the sense that the equipment to record material is much more accessible.

If there is a will, there is a way. That is why it is exciting to be a filmmaker in Canada right now. As most of the conventional opportunities to get funding have been curtailed, the artists are left with their own will. The responsible artists will resume their practice. For any artist, if they are an artist, they must create or they will fall apart with sadness. A good artist can and must turn anything into art regardless of the dwindled resources. This is precisely where we find creativity, and this is exciting. Canada's cuts to the arts have actually provided many artists with an opportunity to express their raw and untapped talent. Artists have been vindicated from the bureaucratic dinosaur mentality of having to expose what Canadian identity is through our work. It has provided us with the freedom of DIY craft.

As artists, we need to relearn our creativity. We must reclaim the duty to compel, share, ignite and connect community. We must transform stifled spirits and teach them of legitimate humanity. We have a big job to accomplish. Artists have always changed the world. There is a life beyond the NFB/ONF as a documentary filmmaker. I am certain that the honest and the impassioned, and above all, those who love humanity will find their way.

K: Thank you so much for sharing your stories and insight. You are a huge source of inspiration for myself and young artists alike

Images:

Four black and white photos of the protests outside of the CineRobothèque in Montréal – April 10th, 2011. Protest signs translated:

The conservatives in 'Raquetteurs' (A pun of a very popular and famous NFB film)

Less F35 planes and more 35mm films

The Cameras of the ONF are out on the street- now so are we!

Harper's Canada is a nation of no sense

Cuts to culture is a federal error

Other images in text by Mandi A. Morgan:

Bureaucracy (was created specifically to accompany this interview).

The Crickets

Syncrude

Newton and Skeena

Video:

Blue Meanies H264 by Mandi A Morgan

Katie Weldon is a recent graduate of the Film and Integrated Media program at Emily Carr University, Katie uses film as a vessel to promote small business, non-profit organizations, musicians, artists, and as an excuse to experience something new. Her main passion lies in documentary filmmaking. Recent projects involve working on CBC's documentary series *Flying Solo*, volunteering for GenWhy Media's production *Fractured Land*, and directing a short documentary, *Meat the Butchers*, about a 6-year-old girl who takes a fervent interest in whole-animal butchery. Katie's contact info can be found on her website: www.solarized.ca

Mandi Morgan completed a BA in World Literature from the University of British Columbia in 2006. She completed a BFA in Film Production specializing in directing from the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema at Montreal's Concordia University in 2010. She was the recipient of the Bruce Mallen Award for, 'Tackling the Paradox of War through Creative Cinematography' for her film "Parade". Mandi was also the runner up in the figurative category in the Festival International Montreal en Arts (FIMA) in 2010). She worked at the NFB/ONF's Cinerobotheque in Montreal until the centre was sadly closed due to the federal cuts in 2012. She currently resides in Montreal, Canada.

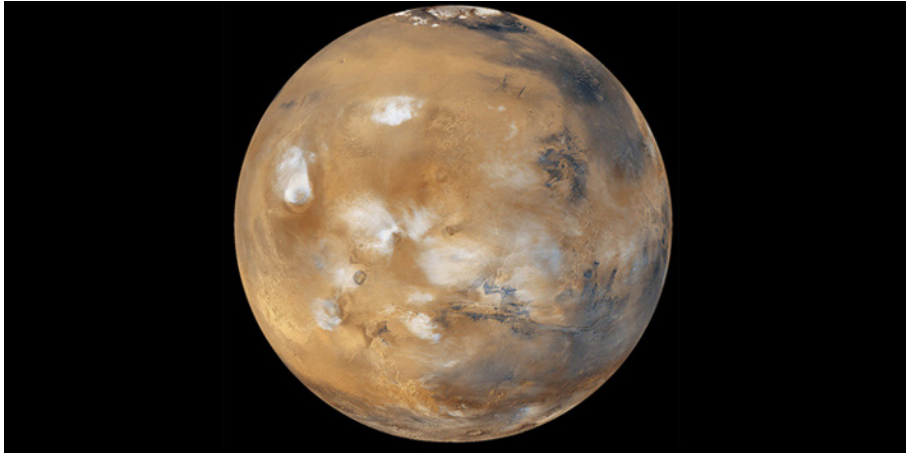
<http://mandimorgan6.wordpress.com>

<http://groopindex.com>

<http://vimeo.com/user9081382/videos/all>

Mandi is a selected member of the Nous Sommes Les Filles organization:

<http://nous-sommes-les-filles.com/2011/11/17/mandi-a-morgan>



An Open Letter on the Subject of Life on Mars

Sarah Kember

An Open Letter on the Subject of Life on Mars[i]

Since all other channels are now closed to me, I am forced to serve this notice courtesy of the press. This would be considered unorthodox for any reputable scientist, but for me it is also ironic. I do not have time to summarize the history of my relationship with the media, although I expect it will become more widely known, along with every other irrelevant detail of my life, in due course. I have lived a long time, but I've only ever understood one thing, namely that the quest for truth is all that matters. I have held on to this principle. Indeed, I've had to. I can't think what would have happened to me otherwise, where the battles and insults might have left me. I don't know where the strength came from, to be honest. I have no partner or family and have always worked alone. Please don't misunderstand me; I have no cause for bitterness. On the contrary, my life's work is now complete. I've done it despite them, the so-called journalists, the space agencies and their ever-shifting criteria for success, the scientific community – my peers. I have no peers, not any more. That will become apparent soon enough.

The discovery was made six months ago but withheld from the public. I now realize that they were never meant to know. *Classiforum Louellian*: I named it after myself,

as was my prerogative. I would describe it, simply, as a strain of bacteria akin to its Earth-based counterpart but with one key difference, concerning the rate of cell division and subsequent mutation. I made all of the formal announcements, needless to say. My paper was published in *Nature* and presented at the Spring Symposium on Astrobiology in Phoenix, Arizona – close to my home. I'm a veteran of the conference circuit, familiar with many of its venues and even more of its idiosyncrasies. I became inured to them, the cliques, the fads, the self-appointed leaders and their disciples. Popularity has nothing to do with science. I found it ridiculous, so I ignored it. I had allies, people who would get in touch with me privately, usually after I'd spoken at an event. In the past, I'd even considered writing with one or two of them, but not on this occasion. On this occasion I actually wanted to have the stage to myself. I've never sought the spotlight, it wasn't about that, but after so many years and a great deal of discouragement, I thought I'd earned the right to silence my detractors. Instead, I merely silenced the room.

There were two experiments and mine was the second. I wouldn't call it minor but the primary goal of the mission was to test for the presence of organic molecules on Mars. Should these be found, the second experiment was designed to see if these molecules had a biological source. In other words, mine was the life detection experiment and it ran, in effect, independently at the same two landing sites, some five thousand miles apart. I used probes shaped like arrows to collect the soil, add water and nutrients and analyze the result. Most of them could do this remotely, using radio transmitters to convey data to the orbiter and then back to Earth. One probe was retrieved from about four inches under the surface by the robotic arm of the rover, Beagle 3. This was the European rover. NASA's were bigger and more expensive but they were only ever geologists. They were not looking for life, but for the conditions that could support life, or could have supported life in the past. For reasons I could never fathom, NASA chose to ignore the inevitable consequences of what we have known for several decades, which is that there is liquid water on Mars. Where there is water there is always, necessarily, life. I found it in the form of a species of green sulfur bacteria. Terrestrial equivalents collect in clumps, or aggregates around a single-celled, often nameless organism. In this

case, that organism closely resembles the virus *E. Coli*. The detailed classification of my discovery wasn't done *in situ* but once the sample had been returned to Earth. I announced it with the publication of my paper and at the symposium a few weeks later. Nobody has spoken to me or contacted me since.

I want to make a couple of things perfectly clear. The results of my experiment satisfy pre-mission criteria for life on Mars. The results were consistent, controls were in place and the sites had been agreed upon many years in advance. The design was selected from hundreds of submissions and no-one with any scientific training has questioned how the experiment was conducted or even what it found. It is not the results themselves but my interpretation that seems to be the problem – again. Yes, it has happened before. I'll come to this, but first let me clarify what has occurred in the interim. In between then and now, there have been a number of major developments. One such is the undisputed identification of liquid water that was made toward the end of the '90s. Another development concerns the discovery of what we call extremophiles on Earth. These are plants and animals that live in conditions that were previously thought inhospitable, even hostile to life: the deep sea where there is no light or oxygen but only sulfur and methane, the desert.

There were four experiments originally and so, statistically, I stood a better chance of being believed this time around. Still, I knew the dice were loaded. It hurts me to say this, so allow me to explain. I'll keep it simple, but for further reference, I have written many more detailed papers on this subject. One of the original experiments was the GC-MS (Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry) test. It was given the casting vote in the dispute between myself and the other experimenters. I subsequently found, in fact I was able to prove, that it lacked adequate sensitivity. In other words, the reason why it did not find organic molecules on Mars and so effectively cancelled out my own positive findings was that it was simply unable to. Instead of accepting that there was a fault with the test, NASA put my own results down to chemical rather than metabolic reactions. They simply explained them away. The fact that I've been disproving the possibility of a chemical explanation ever since would seem to count for nothing. How is it even possible for science to be conducted this way?

I have made one of the most important discoveries known to science and to humankind and I have done it twice. It should never have been necessary for me to do it twice! For the last half century, I have stood my ground and answered every question using only – only – the agreed methods and techniques of my field. In this way I've countered every alternative interpretation of my original results. When it comes to rigor, diligence, sheer patience, I have nothing to reproach myself for. What I do regret is being cautious. I was still a young person back then and the selection of my experiment on the Mars mission was a very great honor. I was not overwhelmed or unconfident, even in relation to my perhaps more illustrious colleagues, but I was, as I have always been, careful. I was careful enough to design the only experiment that worked, that was sensitive enough to detect life in conditions that are certainly harsh, if not outright hostile. I do not need to tell the readers of this publication that the subject of life on Mars has been disputed for centuries. I feel a certain affinity with some of my predecessors, such as Lowell, who was wrong, of course, about the canals but not about the general conditions that have turned out to be at least sufficient for alien life. Lowell's detractors declared the planet dead and their opinion dominated three quarters of the twentieth century. My response to them was understandably circumspect, but when I announced that my results were *compatible* with life, I allowed the debate to remain open. I recognized, if anything too clearly, the significance of what I had found. What I didn't see was that I'd given my opponents enough room to deny it.

Well, not this time.

I managed to persuade ESA, the European Space Agency, to take a modified version of my original experiment. How? Because Mars has been returned to Lowell. Where there is water there has to be life and it was I – and I alone – who found it last time. What else were they going to take apart from my experiment? A modified GC-MS test, naturally. Did it find its organic molecules this time? No, it did not. The results were negative, as they were always meant to be. How could they have been otherwise?

The test has proved only its own inadequacy, so why choose it again unless the real goal of a life detection experiment is to discover no life on Mars or, better still, to undermine the discovery of life on Mars, however unequivocal, however certain it is.

What else could I do? From my room I survey this arid landscape that looks like nothing but dust and rock, and I know that it is teeming with life. I can prove it but my proof makes no difference. How can that be? These are the rules I have lived by. They are universal but with, so it seems, one exception. I've only ever understood one thing and I could not allow it to be destroyed, even if that meant breaking the rules that didn't, in any case, apply to me.

One newspaper, if I can call it that, implied that I had falsified my results. Even my former colleagues have never done that. It didn't give any of the relevant facts, but the public has a right to know. Most people don't read specialist journals like *Nature* and in any case the editors printed a retraction. That was the worst thing. They tried to take it back. Luckily, I figured out how to do that too. I requested access to the sample that had been returned to headquarters. They couldn't very well refuse – though believe me they tried. I made the trip, I conducted what I said would be a follow-up experiment, comparing the Mars sample more closely with terrestrial viruses and bacteria. I wanted to say more about the remarkable speed at which the Martian cells divided and account for the mutations that had taken place. But there was no longer any point doing it in writing. I left the Earth sample in place of the Martian one and returned home.

The desert is a natural habitat for many unseen organisms and you don't need to look far to find them. Just lift a rock or dig a few inches down. The air condenses at night and moisture gets trapped underground. Whatever is out there is changing now, evolving much faster, accelerating toward some unknown form, just like me. I needed to be certain.

L.G.

[i] This is a work of fiction. It alludes to events that have happened and could happen but it is still made up, as is the central character. This character, who may be male or female, is drawn from historical figures, living and dead, but is not intended to represent any of them.

Anyone who is interested in or concerned about this letter should contact s.kember@gold.ac.uk

*Sarah Kember is a writer and academic. Her work incorporates new media, photography and feminist cultural approaches to science and technology. Publications include a novel and a short story *The Optical Effects of Lightning* (Wild Wolf Publishing, 2011) and 'The Mysterious Case of Mr Charles D. Levy' (Ether Books, 2010). Experimental work includes an edited open access electronic book entitled *Astrobiology and the Search for Life on Mars* (Open Humanities Press, 2011) and 'Media, Mars and Metamorphosis' (Culture Machine, Vol. 11). Her latest monograph, with Joanna Zylińska, is *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (MIT Press, 2012). She co-edits the journals of *photographies* and *Feminist Theory*. Previous publications include: *Virtual Anxiety. Photography, New Technologies and Subjectivity* (Manchester University Press, 1998); *Cyberfeminism and Artificial Life* (Routledge, 2003) and the co-edited volume *Inventive Life. Towards the New Vitalism* (Sage, 2006). Current research includes a funded project on digital publishing and a feminist critique of imedia. Sarah is Professor of New Technologies of Communication at Goldsmiths, University of London.*



Grad School Confidential: In Conversation with Steph Ceraso

Andrea Zeffiro

Full disclosure: I have spent the last 30 years within an educational institution. This is by no means an impressive number. My mother spent 40 years as an educator. But what if I were to tell you that I've spent the last 30 years out of a total of 34 within an educational institution. What does this equation suggest? I have my own theories about my pursuits of education, including a subtly engrained first-generation Canadian mentality, to the pursuit of a proverbial pink rabbit. And yet, I find myself at an impasse: restless and impatient with the contemporary climate of academia, yet still gripping onto the ideals of 'the University.' Even the thought of articulating my 'whoa-is-me-ism' is rather nauseating given that such problems – my problems – are the problems of the overly educated. And it is within such a (head) space (or, head case) that this interview materialized. That said, what follows is void of any negativity. If anything, it conjures optimism. For anyone who has had the privilege to attend graduate school – and I mean this without an iota of sarcasm – understands that being a graduate student is a double-edged sword: one exists in a safe space looking onto the world, and yet, one's identity is still very much entangled within one's research agenda. It's a wonderful but demented space to occupy, and it can leave many graduate students (i.e. people) feeling misaligned with the 'real' world, or perhaps simply out of touch. If you're reading this and have felt this way, or if you're reading this and currently feel this way, then I encourage you to read on...

Andrea Zeffiro: Steph, thanks for taking the time to talk, and for allowing NMP readers to learn more about you, and your research and artistic inquiries.

Before we begin, allow me to disclose how I came across your work. Mél Hogan – co-founder and content curator of NMP – alerted me to your work. Mél and I had just co-authored a chapter addressing feminism within academia, and the perils associated with the graduate student experience. In turn, she drew my attention to your more recent project – the audio confessional project – that solicits graduate student confessions.

I'd like to begin by discussing your conceptualization of this particular piece. I think it's a fabulous concept, because materializing graduate student experiences in this way will enable other graduate students to comprehend how their fears, concerns, and discontents are shared realities.

Additionally, it would allow interested parties – individuals contemplating graduate studies, senior academics, and the administration of post-secondary institutions – to address the changing conditions of the graduate student experience under the auspices of the neo-liberal university. I'm really curious as to how you came to this project, or what led you toward such a focus. Can you speak to it in general or specific terms?

Steph Ceraso: Well, I'm currently near the end stage of my dissertation – the culmination of my grad student experience – and so I've been doing a lot of thinking about how I got to where I am right now and about the process of becoming an academic. When I started reflecting on my 7+ years as a grad student (I did a separate Masters program), I was most struck by how much of this experience has been coloured by fear and anxiety. It's not that I don't enjoy grad school. I love a lot about it. But the amount of sometimes crippling anxiety involved in the process of pursuing a graduate degree is very real, and I know I'm not the only one who feels this way. I've talked with so many grad students from different disciplines

who have expressed similar concerns. While most grad students commiserate with their peers, a lot of what we worry about most, which may seem embarrassing or ridiculous, remains unspoken. I think one reason for that is because people just assume that it's a part of the game. Being stressed and scared is portrayed (often by professors and/or grad students who are further along than you) as a rite of passage of sorts – everyone has to go through it. You just have to suck it up and keep working.

This project serves as a way to expose some of the silent but powerful things that make us question ourselves and question academia (its function, its purpose, its effects on individuals, etc.). One of the aims of this project is also to amplify the unspoken shared experience of grad students, which I hope will be a source of comfort for those going through it, and perhaps a way to start a broader institutional conversation about how grad school might be re-imagined to actually reduce fear and anxiety.

AZ: You articulate one of the aims of the project as ‘amplifying’ the unspoken and shared experiences of graduate students. This amplification is figurative – enabling graduate students to share what is otherwise unsaid – and very much literal – through the practice of recording and listening. And it makes sense for this project to take the form of audio, given that you work within that domain. Can talk about the relationship between the form and the topic. In other words, why sound?

SC: I think sound is an ideal medium for a project that features confessions. Unlike video, it enables the confessors to hide their identities to an extent. In my instructions to participants, I even give them the option of manipulating the sound of their voice in case they are worried about being identified (by increasing or decreasing the pitch, etc.). They also have the option of remaining anonymous or providing their names as collaborators/co-authors on the project. Because participants are discussing sensitive issues about their graduate student experiences while they are still in graduate school, I wanted to take extra measures

to protect them if they did not feel comfortable being identified. I think that recording one's voice in private (without me there asking questions) puts people at ease, and they are more likely to speak honestly for however long they desire.

Additionally, amplifying people's voices is much more powerful than say, written confessions, because of the affective affordances of sound. Hearing the grain of people's voices – especially when they are discussing stressful or emotional topics – helps listeners to empathize with confessors and their experiences. Because there is no visual information, listeners' sole focus is on the sound of the voices. And that can be an intense experience. When I listened to the first submission – someone I've never met or seen a picture of before – I felt like that person was in the room with me. Unlike other modes, I think sound has a very *here and now* quality; it's a kind of presence that fills the room. Listening to someone confess something is a very intimate act, and I chose to do a sonic project because sound is the most intimate medium I can imagine.

AZ: How do you anticipate showcasing the piece? Will it be web-based, or do you envision the potential for an installation or immersive sound piece? I think there are many ways in which you can re-present what you collect. And to tack on an additional question at this point, could you talk about how you are soliciting submissions?

SC: I am definitely planning to do at least some version of this piece as a web-based project. However, I want to wait to make decisions about presentation until I get a sense of how the project will take shape. For instance, if there are a lot of overlapping themes in the confessions, I may do a layered mash-up to emphasize certain patterns. Or, I could imagine doing a more straightforward version with distinct confessions separated by silences. It will really depend on how I hear the material fitting together. That said, I don't yet have enough material to work with! I have advertised the project on Twitter several times and on my personal website (www.stephceraso.com). Though many people have expressed interest, very few submissions have rolled in so far. So, if there are grad students reading this who are

interested in the project, please contact me via email (stephceraso@gmail.com) or Twitter (@stephceraso) and I will send you the details. I don't need your submissions immediately. At this point I just need more people to commit to the project. I am hoping to have enough material to work with by mid-summer so I can begin piecing everything together.

AZ: In some ways, the project could take on a life of its own, in the sense that it could be an ongoing project and working process for you. In fact, it could be bracketed by your own personal experiences, specifically, as a graduate student, and then, life post-PhD. It's hard to imagine, but life actually exists beyond one's identity as a graduate student! I think it would be worthwhile to consider the potential transmutations of the project once you have breathing room from your own immersiveness within graduate student life. What do you think?

SC: Absolutely. I think doing a web-based version of the project lends itself to that kind of ongoingness. For instance, this project might end up taking the form of an ever-expanding archive of confessions. If people continued to contribute, it would be interesting to hear how the confessions changed or stayed the same through the years. In terms of my own participation, I do intend to contribute a confession as well. But at least in the first iteration of the project, I don't want my experiences to stand out any more than the other voices. I'd really like this to be a collaborative sort of situation where all of the confessions get equal weight.

AZ: I'm really excited to track the materialization of the project. Speaking from experience, I think it's such a worthwhile endeavour. It's taken me two years and a lot of airing of grievances to climb out of a certain mindset. In fact, it was only in sharing that I discovered how many others shared my feelings. What else are you working on at the moment?

SC: My biggest project right now is my dissertation – “Sounding Composition, Composing Sound: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Pedagogies, and Everyday

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It's not that I don't enjoy grad school. I love a lot about it. But the amount of sometimes crippling anxiety involved in the process of pursuing a graduate degree is very real, and I know I'm not the only one who feels this way. I've talked with so many grad students from different disciplines

Experience” – which offers a more expansive, multisensory approach to the teaching of listening and sonic composing practices. The listening pedagogy I offer is based on my concept of *multimodal listening*, a practice that involves attending to the full range of sensory, material, and environmental aspects that shape a sonic event. Unlike ear-centric listening practices where listeners’ main goal is to hear and interpret audible sound (often language), multimodal listening practices move beyond the audible by emphasizing the ecological relationship between sound, bodies, and environments. Each of my chapters examines multimodal listening in a different context. This was the most fun part of the project –learning about listening and sonic composing practices in areas that I previously knew nothing about. For instance, I got to interview deaf percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie about her full-bodied listening practices. I also interviewed acoustic designers about their approach to designing sound for various spaces, and I did a chapter on the significance of listening and sound in automotive engineering. These areas seem totally disconnected from the field I work in (rhetoric and composition), but I discovered that they serve as really productive models for how to train students to be more sensitive, engaged, holistic listeners, which can ultimately expand and enrich their sonic composing practices.

The other project that I have been absorbed in lately is co-editing a special issue on “Sonic Rhetorics” for *Harlot of the Arts*. I am guest editing this issue with Jon Stone, a grad student from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Jon’s scholarship focuses on rhetoric and folk music, and he is a killer banjo player. We put out a call that asked people to consider: “How does sound – natural or artificial, made or heard, deliberate or unconscious – figure into everyday persuasion? In turn, how might a rhetorical perspective help us think through everyday interactions with sound?” And we got some amazing work in response. What’s cool about this issue is that it is meant to be listened to and played with rather than just read. The full issue is available to the public, and I think anyone interested in sound will find something that they can geek out about. It’s been a fun experience working with Jon and the rest of the *Harlot* team (especially editors Tim Jensen and Kate Comer). I wish more publications were so open to experimental forms of academic work.

AZ: Your dissertation and scope of research pursuits intersect sound studies. What led you to pursue this domain? Do you have a background in music?

SC: I don't have a background in music, but I've always been a major music nerd. I collect vinyl, go to shows, follow music blogs – that sort of thing. And around the time I started grad school, sound studies research was beginning to crop up everywhere. I was hooked immediately (Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past* and some of Michael Bull's work on mobile music technologies were among the first texts that sucked me in). Rhetoric and composition is already a very interdisciplinary field, so incorporating sound studies research into my project wasn't that far of a stretch.

AZ: Actually, I have a few colleagues who focused in and around sound studies – at the intersection of communication studies – and a few had a background in music but the common thread was that they're all self-identified music nerds.

Do you think you will pursue academia following the completion of your dissertation? It's a bit of a loaded and troubling question. It's one that I ask myself almost daily. There is a whole crop of folks with PhDs but very few non-adjunct academic jobs to fill. I think it's a really important question to consider even if it's not a question with a simple answer because it demands that we think of, and perhaps even carve out, possibilities outside of academia. Personally, my sense of 'what's next' changes continuously, even as I'm living it.

SC: I do plan to apply to academic jobs in the fall. While I worry like everyone else about the uncertainty of the academic job market (and all of those other fears and anxieties that come with being an academic), I really love teaching at the college level. Designing classes and projects is an intellectual and creative challenge that I truly enjoy, so having the opportunity to teach kind of balances out the negative stuff for me. But I do think a lot of graduate students feel pressured to stay in academia even if they don't necessarily want to because it seems like there aren't any other options. We are trained to do academic work and it's hard to imagine what else we might be qualified to do. I think conversations about careers outside

of academia are (slowly) starting to play a more important role in graduate programs, which is a move in the right direction. In the end, I think you just have to ask yourself what you love to do and go for it.

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That One Isolated Moment: An Interview with Haley Morris-Cafiero

Jackie Wykes

I first heard of photographer Haley Morris-Cafiero in February this year when her series, *Wait Watchers*, received a slew of attention from mainstream and social media. I am fascinated by the series because it makes visible the completely ordinary, everyday hostilities directed at fat and other non-normative bodies in public. I started looking into the series as part of my research on fat subjectivity, in particular the ways that fat people use self-representation to speak back to the twinned discourses of health and beauty that produce our bodies as abject. In this interview, I speak to Haley about media attention, public hostility, anonymity, activism, and making performance art out of everyday life.

Jackie Wykes: For those who aren't familiar with it, can you briefly describe the *Wait Watchers* series?

Haley Morris-Cafiero: It's a series where, for the past three years I have set up my camera in public and taken hundreds of photographs to attempt to document any kind of critical or questioning looks or body language as people pass by me.

It started from my former series *Something to Weigh*, where I was just setting up the camera and doing self-portraits in these beautiful places where I would think about



my body size – like, on vacation and at restaurants and things like that. And when I was setting up one on the Times Square Coca Cola steps, that's when I got the first look. And then I got one five minutes later. I thought, if this happens twice, let's see what happens if we set up the camera for this purpose. And so I've been all over the world trying.

At this point there are actually two layers of the project. There are the photographs, and then there are the products of media attention – comments and blog posts from people who are critical of my image and the photographs. The first major article was in the *Daily Mail UK*, and the first comments were, like, "They're not looking at you because you're fat, they're looking at you because you're ugly!" Or, "If I were there, I would not only look at you but punch you," or something.

I think the anonymous comments – of course they're intended to be hurtful and negative – but they're funny. I laugh my ass off because they're contributing to the story, they're helping me out! And that's what they don't understand. Like, "Put down a donut and start working out"? Okay, thanks. You're judging me based on what I look like, and that's exactly what I'm trying to prove.

It's really a social experiment. Although it starts for me with weight, it is a social experiment to see how we react to one another based on our preconceived notions of image. So it's weight, hair colour, skin colour, clothing, everything.

JW: I'm quite interested in the similarities and differences between the *Wait Watchers* series and the *Something to Weigh* series. In terms of aesthetics, the *Something to Weigh* series has some really strikingly beautiful images – 'Self Control' where you're looking at the display of rock lollies hanging in the window – I think it's just gorgeous.

HMC: I prefer shooting in that kind of formalist style – you know, lights and colours and darks and Hopper-esque – those are the visual things that interest me. But with the *Wait Watchers* series, you can't do that in the dark so there much more of



the performance aspect. I mean, I do hunt for as aesthetically pleasing spaces as possible, but it's genuinely more in the act of performance versus the actual formal qualities of the image.

JW: In *Something to Weigh*, you're photographed in certain contexts which are typically seen as the 'cause' of fatness (like restaurants and sweet shops), or where fat bodies are typically excluded (the pool, the beach, the skate rink). Whereas the *Wait Watchers* series emphasises – and problematises – other people's reactions.

HMC: *Something to Weigh* is about the pressures of my ability to live up to expectations of the social structure – when you go out, you have a bite to eat, or when you go on vacation you go to a pool or the beach. Those images are meant to be very open-ended, they can be depressing or hopeful depending on the viewer's interpretation, but the others are more about people's attitudes. I think they're both a commentary on society. In *Something to Weigh*, society is represented in the spaces and the constructs of social structure, whereas in *Wait Watchers* it's the actual people.

JW: I wanted to ask about the relationship between self/other/object in your work. Part of what you're doing is turning the gaze back on the people who are looking at you, but at the same time, you're turning the camera on yourself as well, and I think that's a really interesting relationship.

HMC: I think that I consider myself an object in terms of the way that I try to deal with me being in the photographs. I mean, it's something you just do as a self-portrait artist, you just turn it off, you're the 'other', you're using yourself to prove a point. And I would never ask anybody to do what I do. There are so many images – I try to show that no matter where I go, it's not just one place or one culture where things like that happen. It's just over and over and over again. And by doing that, hopefully someone can then insert themselves into my shoes, and if that helps them, or makes them think about the way they act, I don't know.



JW: I think one of the things that I find most affecting as a fat person looking at those photos is that they really capture that part of the daily experience of being fat in the world – the looks, the body language, the ‘micro-aggressions.’ I find the way your photos capture that in a concrete way really useful. I was wondering if having that form of evidence has changed the way you experience being in public space?

HMC: It actually doesn't. I guess in terms of the photographs, it's such an isolating experience when I'm taking them – I have no idea if anyone's going to react, or who's reacting, or what. It's just hundreds of photographs taken as people walk by. It's just a little moment in time.

There are times when people have been verbally completely harassing me, making fun of me, and I've taken pictures: on their face it just looks like they're talking to somebody, you know? There's nothing there. Those images are not part of the series, so it goes both ways.

Another layer is that people might think they have anonymity because they're passing behind my back – although I don't know that for sure, because I don't know what they're thinking. But it's another layer that's added to the images.

JW: Have you ever been contacted by someone in one of your photos?

HMC: No. No, no, no. And I'm not interested in seeking them out. A lot of people have contacted me wanting high-res images to try to figure out who these people are, and I just really don't... I don't have any interest in it because I don't know what they're thinking. They could be, like, "Oh, those are cute shoes!" but in that moment, that one isolated moment, there is something critical or questioning.

And, I mean, I don't accuse them, I don't want to talk to them about it or anything like that. There's nowhere where I say "these people are calling me fat." Sometimes it's just taking things for what we understand them to mean and going with it.



JW: Anonymity is such an interesting concept. On the one hand, I think a lot of us walk through the world assuming a certain level of anonymity. But also, if you look in any way 'different,' then certain aspects of that anonymity disappear. Like, your body almost becomes a public property. That relationship between public space and anonymity seems to be one of the things that you're exploring in your work.

HMC: I think that people assume that they have control and power over their image. And some places you do, actually, like in France. And people think that there is no, like, recourse for whatever they want to do, you know? And that they are expressing themselves and they have a right to express themselves. And that is, you know, that's fine. But I also have the right to photograph, and as long as I'm in public and as long as you're in public, that's a protected act.

When all the media stuff happened, I realised that there's this whole structure of anonymity that we have now. Not only through our online personas do we expect the ability to be able to say whatever we want without having any recourse because it's just anonymous.

JW: I've read some of those comments, and they can be really hateful – not just about you – but they bring in a whole lot of other prejudices about race, sexuality, misogyny, all sorts of things. Has it been hard to deal with that level of vitriol across so many different sites?

HMC: Actually, for me, no. I don't care what they think. I genuinely – I don't care. And if anything, they're helping me. I've been taking these comments and screen-shotting them and archiving them – because it's like a conversation, it's like photograph and response.

But at the same time, you can't just dismiss the mean comments as "Your mother didn't raise you right," because it's cool to be witty – or, you know, not even witty – raw and cool. I mean, I'm not saying it's fine that they do it, but if you're going to use the internet to your advantage, then I'm going to use it to my advantage as well.



JW: The casual cruelty can be quite breathtaking, really. But at the same time, I think that online forms of communication can also be amazing in terms of building connections and communities, for example, the fat acceptance and activism communities online. Do you have much involvement with them?

HMC: To be honest with you, I wasn't involved, and it's not because I'm not interested in it. Every day for two weeks on the news, there was another disease linked to obesity and people aren't seeing the forest for the trees. It's trying to fit us all into a box. Because for me, I don't eat poorly, and I'm incredibly active. But it's not treated like that in the media – it's treated as this blanket, you know, fat equals you're going to die.

But what I'm interested in is gender and image, not just fat and skinny. I think it becomes problematic if I just limit myself there – artistically it limits what I'm trying to say. It's a lot more than just weight. That's one part of it, but I'm treated differently because I'm a woman, I'm treated differently because I'm blonde – maybe not in those photographs, but in life. I have experienced more discrimination in my real life because I'm a woman and a blonde more than because I'm fat. At least, that I know of. I've been actively discriminated against in the workplace because I'm a woman. And so working in the broad and having all of these other layers is more engaging to me personally.

JW: You talk about wanting to start a conversation through your work, which to me has a very activist kind of implication. Do you see the relationship between art, social experiment and activism in your work?

HMC: I think it is my form of activism. It may not be picketing and sitting-in and all those different more physical forms of activism, but I do consider it activism. For me activism is taking something that is not necessarily on the up-and-up and putting it out in the world and showing it. I think there's a big spectrum of activism.

JW: Oh, absolutely! And I think that cultural practices like making images, contributing to the cultural conversation, can be effective in ways more classic activist work isn't.

HMC: I do too, because it's harder to dismiss and ignore. And, quite frankly, if I gave up what I wanted to do every day to do something on an activist platform that's more traditional, I would be letting the thing I'm activating against win because I'm altering my life, you know? That's not what I'm interested in.

JW: There's obviously a long history of photographers who put themselves in front of the camera, but I'm really interested in the cultural context as well – particularly the popularity of the 'selfie' on social media, and also more activist-oriented sites like *Hollaback* and *Smile, Sizeist!*. Do you see your work in relation to those things at all?

HMC: I think for me, it's completely different. A lot of it came out of the performance artists of the 70s and 90s. When I think about something that I wish I could honour, it would be those people. Because to me it's this kind of self-sacrificing in order to start a broader conversation, and that's where I see myself.

A lot of people try to dismiss them as almost something that a wily teenager would do, and it's actually a genuine conceptual process. And a lot of people have suggested that I put a link to buy a print on my website to make money. Whereas the media is making the images public, to me they still belong in the gallery – they're for publication and gallery exhibition and not fodder for media. I mean, that's great, I'm very appreciative of the opportunities. But I think a lot of people dismiss it as the pissed-off fat girl, and that's not the case at all. It is another layer of the discrimination.

JW: Yeah, I've definitely had similar experiences with my academic fat studies work – like, any kind of theoretical critique I have or have to say gets boiled down to the angry, overemotional fat girl.

HMC: Right! Mad that she can't be skinny, or too lazy to care, or whatever.

JW: And when I've talked to the media, they want to draw out the, like, traumatic childhood bullying story rather than any kind of theoretical argument I might have, which is incredibly frustrating.

HMC: The media for me wanted to know when I stopped being able to 'control' my weight, and the reasons why I'm fat instead of the actual issue at hand.

JW: One of the things I find really interesting about your work is that you're not trying to recuperate fatness by recreating an image of ideal femininity that's just a little bit larger. I think that that's a really interesting and productive difference between your work and some of the other images of fat bodies that are out there.

HMC: Well I think that part of the goal was to try to document something that is completely ordinary. People think that when they're taking a photograph, they have to dress up and record a memory of something that didn't necessarily exist. Every year on picture day at school you put on makeup and did your hair, but the other 364 days, you didn't. So part of that exercise was to depict exactly how I am. I wanted to get as close to reality as possible, and that's reality.

I just got an email yesterday from someone who is big and wants me to dress up better. And I... I don't have an interest in dressing up better. I mean, what I wear is what I like to wear. I like it visually, and it makes me comfortable. This is me everyday, and that's what I depict in the pictures.

JW: They look like candid shots – in most of them, you look as unaware of the camera as the people walking past. But at the same time, that kind of choice is part of the staging of the photos. In some ways it’s just as constructed as a more obviously posed image.

HMC: Many of them are taken while I’m doing other things. I took a group of students to Spain and said “Hey, let’s set up a camera, this is a good spot right here. Bam! This is what I’m wearing.” I think I did that to add accuracy to the experience, as well as just convenience. I walk around sometimes, and I’ll just grab a stranger to take the pictures. It’s not structured or planned or anything like that.

JW: Do you see that reversal of the gaze – and in some ways the power dynamic – in these pictures as a sort of revenge?

HMC: It’s definitely empowering, but I don’t consider it revenge because for me revenge has got this emotive nature to it that I definitely don’t have when taking the pictures. It’s very factual.

JW: Revenge seems to suggest a very personal connection.

HMC: Yeah, like a one-on-one, very personal, very specific act. And I don’t know what’s going to happen – I mean, there’s thousands of shots that are not successful. I don’t consider it revenge, but some people do, and if it helps them, that’s great. To me, it’s helpful in terms of just shedding light on what happened at those moments.

Jackie Wykes is a full-fat low-maintenance high-femme procrastinatrix. She is a PhD candidate in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, where she is writing a thesis is on fat embodiment and sexual subjectivity. Her much-neglected blog can be found at <http://www.fatosity.net/>. Jackie's favourite procrastination strategies include co-founding and producing *Va Va Boombah Fat Burlesque* and founding the Melbourne chapter of *Aquaporko* a fat femme synchronised swim team. Aquaporko's debut performance in March 2012 became the subject of a short documentary, *Aquaporko! The Documentary*.

Haley Morris-Cafiero received her BFA in Ceramics and BA in Photography from the University of North Florida and her MFA in Art from the University of Arizona. She currently lives in Memphis, Tennessee where she is the Director of the MFA Program and the Head of Photography at Memphis College of Art. She is a national member of the A.I.R. Gallery was named a "FotoFest Stand Out" by Manfred Zollner, Editor of fotoMAGAZIN. She is currently working on finishing the *Wait Watchers* project and presenting it to curators for exhibition and publishers for a book publication.
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