

# **Performing Things**

By

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## ABSTRACT

I make performances using space, time, the body — and sometimes things — as materials. These performances attempt, through a personal and embodied investigation of these materials, to explore an intimacy with the viewer that engages with questions of individual and collective identity.

My current work includes performative *acts* or *gestures* that evolve through a phenomenological process of inquiry. The work aims to challenge the ways we relate to each other physically, emotionally and conceptually inside the spaces we occupy in order to create moments of tangible engagement with each other. Through my art work, I am interested in finding a means to open up family histories, everyday experience and cultural and socio-political perspectives between the viewer and the artwork, in order to explore how this exchange can shift our interaction with the world, offering new ways of seeing and identification.

As a form of research, the artwork investigates how the act of interpretation can draw the viewer into a *performed reception*, attempting to make essential the complex social relationships that exist in a shared space through activating what the viewer's '*part*' or '*role*' is in relation to a work. To this end, my working processes include promoting an intimacy through reversing spatial relationships, using performance and the body to encourage an embodied response and drawing upon narrative conventions, such as metaphor, to further an interpretation that supports an intersubjective engagement in order to deepen the opportunity for the viewer to perform their own meaning in their reception of a work.

Influenced by Merleau-Ponty's theories of bodily perception, Claire Bishop's writing on the physical relationship between art and viewer and Amelia Jones' ideas on representation of the performed body and its role in meaning production, my research attempts to understand how we can create definite connections with the viewer through our shared attention to a work. As such, artists Tino Sehgal and Sophie Calle have been influences inside my practice.

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## **DEDICATION**

For Kevin, Hokuto and Felix MacDuff

## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will discuss the research and artworks I developed over the course of my Masters of Applied Arts degree program. Together, this work describes an investigation into how performance can manipulate what I call the ‘materials’ of space, time and the body, in order to explore new physical and mental spaces of engagement between the artwork and the viewer. Through the construction of how these materials interact and collide, I hope to invite the viewer into a considered negotiation of interpretation, and specifically one that reveals this negotiation as part of a process in which the viewer of an artwork can *perform* reception.

In *Performing the Body Performing the Text* (1999), Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson write that they are interested in “exploring practices that enact the body or subject in a performative fashion in order to point to the act of interpretation itself as a kind of performance.” (1) I view this shared performance as a bridge; a space where my own identity, history and perspectives can co-mingle or exchange with the viewer’s to create deeper and broader understandings of our individual and collective identities.

As such, one of the main considerations of my research is the notion of intersubjectivity and how it may be possible, through a viewer’s response to an artwork to encourage a self-reflexivity that reinforces interpretation, essentially inviting the viewer to perform meaning. Through the manipulation of space and spatial expectation, the body — both live and suggested — and using metaphor, it is possible to produce a physical and emotional engagement with an artwork through revealing how the viewer identifies in relationship to it. It is this investment and the relationship it raises between the viewer and the artwork that has the potential to open up possibilities for shared experience and the means with which to better understand our own histories and perspectives.

My thesis also acknowledges that, much like the act of interpretation, my method is in flux. As such, it puts forth some current questions and challenges within my practice and looks to my research in an attempt to answer and address these questions. How do the relational elements I am working with blur and accumulate to create the intended space for interpretation? And within the unpredictability of performing meaning, how do I encourage the viewer to receive *my* intention within the work? In other words how can I best direct the viewer's experience to result in the desired performed response? I will be looking specifically at the role of space and site within my practice, through exploring how performed reception can be activated through working with aspects of space and time. I also explore the vital role the body plays in intersubjectivity and its double role as both subject and object. In acknowledgement of the ephemeral nature of performance and the transformative qualities of form, I will consider how the recontextualization of a work continues to build further interpretations that go on to encourage a performed reception.

## **PERFORMING MEANING**

*"Interpretation, like the production of works of art, is a mode of communication.*

*Meaning is a process of engagement and never dwells in any one place."* (Jones and Stephenson, 8)

Within my research I am interested in how *performing meaning* can suggest an active interpretative relationship between the viewer and the artwork. Ideally this is a physical, emotional and mental reception that shapes how a viewer identifies with a work, which also indicates how much they invest in it. I have found that formal elements have the ability to reinforce a performed reception; elements such as placing the viewer in a performative space through the use of lighting, sound or objects; drawing out narratives through using analogous tools such as metaphorical objects or actions; as well as using the body to suggest a physical or empathetic response. Whether this

investment incites a kind of pathos, or a response that generates other imagined meanings, my methodology addresses the ways in which we can maximize the viewer's conscious and unconscious relationships to an artwork in order to draw out a range of performed meanings.

There are three main frameworks I have been working with as part of the overall methodology of performing meaning. The first is a process I call *proxemical flipping*, which looks at how we can reverse spatial expectations to enliven the relationship between the viewer and an artwork. The second deals with the role performance can play in suggesting a physical and emotional co-presence. And the third framework is what I call *metaphorical embodiment*, which uses metaphor as an action that seeks to deepen opportunities for interpretation. My interest has focused on how these processes can be complicated in order to examine how the intersubjective act of performing meaning prompts the viewer to be engaged in the artwork as an active producer. The development of these frameworks and how they work in relation to each other has required experimentation, and as such, much of my practical research has revolved around multiple iterations of works that serve to continue this inquiry. My thesis considers these methodological processes that I am developing through discussion of several specific works I have produced as part of my studio practice during the MAA.

### Proxemical Flipping

Space can be a powerful communicator in the process of performing meaning. We can consider different types of space: traditional performance spaces (such as theatres and galleries), site-oriented public spaces, or simply the outdoors. Space plays a large part

in determining our reception of a work<sup>1</sup>. As viewers, our experience can also be affected by our proximity to a work. Imagine sitting in the back row of an opera house or watching a site-oriented performance that happens in an underground parking lot. Both of these spaces will impose upon a work. In challenging how they regularly operate, I aim to change the ways the spaces are perceived, shifting the narratives that regularly exist within them.

I find there is a friction between the public nature of performance and the often very private or personal content I am interested in working with. In my work I have played with how this opposition generates multiple levels of engagement between the artwork and the viewer. In the best-case scenario, it can allow for a work to be received on both a physical and intellectual level, and can lead to a rich accumulation in the viewer's experience. This conscious and unconscious engagement with a work has the potential to create further levels of meaning. I believe this kind of affect is assisted by the re-expectation of our relationships to public and private space and allows for an intimacy to be present within the performance experience that encourages the viewer to be open to a performed reception. This further foregrounds the viewer and their experience inside the collaborative act of interpretation and evokes a kind of pathos, attributing to the viewer's investment and ultimately, to a work's resonance.

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<sup>1</sup>With regards to more traditional performance space, we can consider the writing of performance theorist Marvin Carlson, particularly his work on theatre semiotics, as well as sources such as *The Empty Space* by director Peter Brook, or Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory*, as well as Claire Bishop's book, *Installation Art*. For less traditional spaces and ideas on site and place, I have found Bishop's *Artificial Hells* and Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another* to be two illuminating sources.



Fig. 1: Ant Hampton and Tim Etchells, *The Quiet Volume*, 2010. Used by permission of Ant Hampton.

I found this to be evident in the work *The Quiet Volume*, in which artists Ant Hampton and Tim Etchells construct a ‘self-directed’ performance that draws upon several sonic, visual and experiential elements to create both an incredibly private and undeniably public experience. The work illustrates Ant Hampton’s practice of ‘autoteatro’ or ‘automatic theatre,’ where “audience members perform the piece themselves, usually for each other.” (Hampton, *Autoteatro*) *The Quiet Volume* investigates the interplay and tensions between whispered and read text in a public space with a particular relationship to silence and volume.

For me, the natural tension between the private and intimate nature and content of the performance, placed within the everyday environment of a public library resulted in a deeper investment in the work. This was reinforced materially through the use of books and headphones — both objects that are common in a library, but which offer a private means to convey information. This problematized the socially expected behavior of a library through the performance and maximized a heightened sensation of spatial awareness, creating an intimate bubble where a shared, crafted narrative occurred between me and a perfect stranger. We were co-creating the performance, which

involved engaging simultaneously in the intimate act of reading and being read to. Our own individual interpretations of the work reinforced the roles we were invited to perform, and this collided with the public nature of the performance, which resulted in a performance experience that used this essential reversal of spatial reception — a *proxemical flip* — as an initial layer on which to perform meaning.

An important reference for me in suggesting the notion of the proxemical flip is cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall's *The Hidden Dimension*. In this book Hall identified 4 primary categories of space<sup>2</sup>: Intimate (up to 1.5 feet in proximity), Personal (between 1.5 to 4 feet), Social (between 4 feet to 12 feet) and Public (between 12 feet to 25 feet) (116-129). Hall defined proxemics as “the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture” (1). This idea of the communicative function of space was integral to Hall’s concept of *space as language*, by which he meant that space has the capacity to deliver information directly to a viewer. I am interested in this basic idea that spatial relationships are highly developed and can be understood as forming a *collective* language. We all exist in space, and as such we have some sort of concept of human territoriality inside private and public, personal and social spaces. I look to engage what Hall calls “delicately controlled, culturally conditioned servomechanisms” (5), in order to complicate and make apparent our collective understanding of how we both inhabit and are alienated by the different spaces we encounter.

As my research has progressed, my practice continues to draw upon this framework of proxemical flipping as a valuable process in making work. By utilizing this intentionally simple exercise — taking something that occurs in intimate space, such as love-making, whispering or wrestling, and placing it in public space — a gallery, or a public

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<sup>2</sup>There are many theoretical and conceptual references regarding how different kinds of space interact with each other, and many of these include more multi-dimensional ideas of space, Henri Lefebvre’s theories on how space is socially produced, for example. However, I have found Hall’s compartmentalized approach to spatial designation an integral part of employing space as a material within my practical process of making work.

square, my process engages in how this destabilizes the expectations between the artwork and the viewer and reorders or reinvents our understanding of space, thereby affecting the ways we identify with them. And while proxemical flipping has been useful in generating work, I also acknowledge that spatial relations are complex and exist around us and shift within different kinds of artworks all the time. In this way, the characterization of spaces that Hall defines offers a valuable perspective in understanding the complex social relationships enacted between public and private space within my research.

On top of the spatial flip, it is possible to add other layers that build further opportunities for performing meaning. Personal identifications, the socio-political context of the environment the work is situated in, and formal aspects, such as materiality, performance and duration. My practice considers what happens when these elements come together to tell a shared story with the viewer. This is an unpredictable encounter, where histories, experiences and perspectives can interact with the specific narratives that the piece calls forth.

When thinking about space, my research is not only invested in our physical relationship and understanding of it, but also in the consciousness that these spaces evoke. The way one *feels* or *thinks* inside intimate space and the activities that evoke these feelings are an integral part of performing meaning. What is the consciousness we hold around certain intimate acts, for example? Undeniably, we are affected by how close we are to another person. We are also affected by our tactile relationships to objects. How do these elements determine our immediate emotional, physical and intellectual responses? How does space — both our relationship to it and the way it is used — communicate with us?

### Performance

Within my practice, I employ perspectives, approaches and process drawn from my

training as an experimental theatre maker. This has led to an emphasis on a search for narrative inside my work — the dramaturgy of the performance experience, as well as a heightened consideration for the viewer/performer relationship. In my work<sup>3</sup>, performance is a key aspect to engaging the viewer; theatre is most demonstrably about talking *to* an audience.

Performing also places me within my work, as a subject. I draw from my experiences and personal history, and as the subject of the work I am able to speak directly to issues of my own identity. But within my work, I am often also the object, and I utilize my performative body to further suggest narratives. By taking on this role of both subject and object, my goal is to allow for fuller associations from the viewer. To this end — how I appear, where I am, what I am doing — these are all things that can contribute to how effectively meaning can be performed. An important reference for me in this aspect of my work has been historian and critic Amelia Jones, who states that “whether our body or that of another, it is never fixed or simple in its significance, but always fully lived, in process, and contingent. Our body both makes us subjects and makes us objects for others” (*Critical Terms*, 260). This narrative potential that being both subject and object presents feels generative within my research, as it connects the diverse processes within my practice.

I am also interested in exploring how shifting the conventional expectations of space can operate as a kind of framing mechanism for building performance. Certainly in theatre, this manifests itself in more overt ways, through stretching ideas or expectations of traditional performance spaces, for example. *BIOBOXES* is a work I

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<sup>3</sup>My definition of performance draws from my experience and history in experimental theatre and aligns with the concept of performance as discussed by art historian RoseLee Goldberg in her book *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. Goldberg defines performance as an “open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established forms,” (9) and she includes the work of Russian Constructivists to Allan Kaprow and John Cage, to the work of influential theatre directors Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman to dance artists Pina Bausch and Jerome Bel.

conceived and co-created with the performance company Theatre Replacement, which contains six short-form pieces featuring one performer, performed for one audience member at a time. The performance takes something that would normally happen in public space (a work of theatre) and contains it in what Hall would categorize as intimate space: a box theatre<sup>4</sup>, worn on the performer's shoulders, with the audience and performer one to two feet away from each other. In a further play on language, each box is bilingual, with the performers switching between English and another respective language seamlessly at the audience's command. In this way, *BIOBOXES* attempts to highlight that performance should be, above all, an immediate experience. Within this work, the vitality of the relationship between performer and audience offers an immediacy that encourages a performed reception.

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<sup>4</sup> The box theatres were 16 inches high, 24 inches wide, 16 inches deep and stood on legs, with a hole cut in the bottom of the box for the performers' heads. Both the performer and the audience member were seated for the performance, and the audience area was enclosed by a red curtain. The audience member and performer's faces were about 1.5 feet away from each other, well within the realm of what Hall would constitute as personal space.



Fig. 2: Theatre Replacement, *BIOBOXES: Artifacts of Human Experience*, 2007. Used by permission of Theatre Replacement.

Of interest in this regard is the notion of bodily co-presence, as developed by German performance theorist Max Herrmann<sup>5</sup>. Herrmann was one of the first theorists who placed significance not only on the body, but on how the performers' bodies promoted a responsiveness in the viewer, which he believed maximized the opportunity for a collective understanding in the audience assembled:

“For Herrmann the process of embodiment, not text, was central to the theatrical experience and this embodiment moreover had to be experienced and empathized with by other bodies, those of the audience, in each unique manifestation of the art” (Fischer-Lichte, 3).

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<sup>5</sup> Max Herrmann's theories signaled a shift or a “performative turn,” which is significant to my own particular lineage of training, acknowledging theatre as being less about a “dramatic text” and more about a “physical event.” (Fischer-Lichte, 3).

Again, this idea includes the viewer's physical and mental engagement as essential to the realization of an artwork; the presence of the performer leads to the presence of the viewer. As I will make clear later in this thesis, the notion of presence can extend beyond the performance itself — it can also exist within the recontextualization of a work; a moment of connection between the viewer and an artwork can go on to produce meaning beyond the initial performance through the metaphorical actions and objects that continue its resonance.

### Metaphorical Embodiment

My research explores the use of physical actions as metaphors that can offer yet another way to activate a viewer's subjectivity in relationship to a work. I am interested in how this connection can encourage a kind of empathy, which results in the viewer receiving the work through an embodied response. This response can be less conscious and even allow for imagined or invented associations. In this way, *metaphorical embodiment* has the potential to be a profound way to perform meaning with the viewer because it accesses identifications that are perhaps more instinctual. Through exploring the process of metaphorical embodiment, I am searching for a deeper, more internal way in which the work can connect to the viewer.

In *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, author Zoltàn Kövecses references George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's description of the characteristics of metaphor, which removes the concept from the realm of words and redefines it in the realm of action. These characteristics challenge the more traditional and dominant understandings of metaphor, and perhaps most fundamentally to my own research; Kövecses defines it as "an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning" (x). This 'inevitable process' feels like a key way in which metaphor can encourage interpretation. As a process, it is dependent upon a physical act or gesture that is recognized, understood and embodied by the viewer, which allows for further opportunity for a performed

response. *Public Art Carry Me*, 2013, one of the provisional works I made in the MAA program, began as an examination of intimate space, and utilized the physical act of carrying in order to draw out different metaphorical responses from the viewer. Carrying requires an intimacy between the particular bodies and/or objects involved, as well as imposing a degree of empathy for the thing being carried. In *Public Art Carry Me*, I ask the public art in and around some potentially contentious public spaces in Vancouver — the Olympic Village and Yaletown neighbourhoods, for example — to *carry me*, in order to reinvent the narratives of these particular spaces and reveal a diverse range of experiences and relationships within our city's public sites.



Fig. 3: Maiko Yamamoto, *Public Art Carry Me*, 2012.

With this work I wanted to create a tangible relationship between myself and these public artworks, while exploring the relationships and responsibilities they have to the public. Both the Olympic Village and Yaletown are neighbourhoods that have suffered from over-aestheticization due to large events (the 2010 Winter Olympics and Expo 86). As an individual, but also as a member of a larger community, I have a relationship to these events that is somewhat hypocritical. In theory, I oppose how these events alter our public systems and redirect resources, but I also experienced a sense of community and support around both these events. What's more, today these spaces — as they are — offer enjoyment to the individuals and communities who use them, myself included. And yet there is always an underlying tension I feel within these spaces due to the larger concerns they simultaneously represent.

As a gesture then, *Public Art Carry Me* intervenes a proxemical flip within an attempt to get intimate with public art in a paradoxical space. Metaphorically speaking, this draws our attention to the ownership of these spaces and the problem with memorializing events in history that are part of a discourse around these complicated and globally draining events.

### **The Act of Interpretation**

As I have discussed, I regard the act of interpretation as having the potential to affect a viewer in physical, mental and emotional ways. This response can take many forms, as it is dependent on the intersubjective engagement between a viewer and an artwork. In considering the body in space and time, another way to think about how this intersubjectivity affects the viewer is to look at how a performed response can cause a momentary 'thickening'<sup>6</sup> of space, as proposed by French surrealist writer and

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Leiris' notion of spatial thickening is related to Marcel Duchamp's ideas of "*inframince*," described as the moment when 2 dimensional becomes 3 dimensional. (Lotringer, *Becoming Duchamp*)

ethnographer Michel Leiris. Leiris uses the analogy of the bullfight to illustrate how space can shift and take on a density, as in the instant when the matador and the bull square off. He believes this condition creates a moment “where one feels tangency to the world and to oneself” (Leiris and Smock, 21). This notion feels relevant within my practice, as the frameworks I am engaged with concern these moments of tangible connection.

In order to set up contexts for performed meaning within my research, I have seized opportunities to speak to themes and issues of personal and cultural identity. This means that each element of a work, including site, object, body and duration, can contribute another specific and related layer. If space is the playground on which we meet, by *site* I mean the actual physical location; by *objects* I mean the things or materials involved in the work; by *body* I am referring to my own body as the performer or activator of a work; and by *duration* I mean the time that the performance takes to unfold. Each of these elements has a highly personal context and speaks to my own socio-political issues, such as family histories and the nature of performance itself, which I will elaborate upon further in this document. By inviting an audience to engage with ideas of cultural identity and embodied understanding, I am hoping to build new ground on which to create alternative meanings and change the way we associate and identify, within our relationships, to space and the things around us.

Part of the impetus for this level of engagement comes from the desire to make resonant connections with the audience through my work. I make work to feel less alone — to address feelings of alienation I experience in my everyday life due to my gender, my cultural background, my experiences and even my occupation. Through attempting to generate a kind of pathos through my work, my research allows me to better understand how these feelings are associated and thus, offer meaning through a shared experience with the viewer.

Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson speak about this idea of interpretation as a collaborative act. They suggest we are “entangled in the intersubjective spaces of desire, projection and identification. As classed, raced, sexed and gendered (fully socialized and embodied) subjects, both artist and interpreter are imbricated within any potential determinations of meaning.” They go on to say that “the notion of the performative highlights the open endedness of interpretation” (*Performing the Body*, 1). This open-endedness feels integral to the kind of relationship I endeavor to have with my viewer, but also to my artwork; there may be clear connections, or the engagement may be operating on less conscious levels.

However I can invite the viewer in — whether through a spatial reception, the hook of performance, or an embodied understanding — it contributes to the narrative production of a work, and each contribution relies on its own histories, experiences and ideas. The meaning is not dependent on the work alone. This is important to me; that the languages that I am drawing upon within my practice allow for a shared contract with the viewer, where they have the possibility to draw upon their own cultural identities, their own personal perspectives and political beliefs. This careful process of interpretation is not a concrete formula, nor would we ever want it to be. We want it to be as complex as it is — or, as Jones and Stephenson so aptly put it — we want to ensure that it “never dwells in any one place” (*Performing the Body*, 8), in order to promote our further engagement and understanding of our own identities as well as the collective nature of our existence.

### **CASE STUDY: *And if I tied myself to you***

I believe all space speaks to us, whether we become nostalgic when we drive by the first apartment we ever lived in, or we get a feeling of anticipation sitting in a darkened theatre waiting for the curtain to rise. Space communicates, both on conscious and unconscious levels. When thinking about performative spaces, there are many practical, physical, imaginative, emotional, cultural and political ways in which we process spatial information. How is the physical space constructed? Where is the delineation, if any, between performers and audience? What is the process of managing our individual parts within the performance? How does our perception of space write the narrative of what occurs there? In a site-oriented performance, what does the site communicate as a backdrop for a work? This ongoing dialogue inevitably affects our behaviour, both towards the space itself as well as any other people who might be occupying it at the time. I am interested in how we can utilize these ways in which we process space to build specific meaning with the viewer through an artwork. In this first case study, I will look at two different iterations of the work *And if I tied myself to you, 2012*, to reflect upon the negotiation between the processes of proxemical flipping, the role of performance and metaphorical embodiment and how these come together to shape the work and the viewer's reception.



Fig. 4: Maiko Yamamoto, *And If I tied myself to you*, 2012.

*And If I tied myself to you* is a durational performance in which I tied myself with ropes of varying length to an ‘anchor’ — a physical, conceptual and psychological mooring — for different durations of time. In the first iteration, the anchor was my home. I tied one end of the rope to my house and the other to my body and walked away until the rope prevented me from going any further. And then I stopped and waited, sometimes for 5 minutes, sometimes for an hour. I would allow instinct within the process to determine the length of time. For instance, as I moved away from the house and

crossed the street, if a car came by and needed me to retreat in order to continue driving, I would stop, go back to the house, re-tie to the anchor and head off again. The work became an exercise in attempting — both physically and emotionally — to extend private space through and into public space, by using the rope as a device for this extension.

Whether I got as far as the curb, or the field across the street, because of the rope, I was able to carry the intimate space of my home — and all that it entails — with me; a complex snail's shell of comfort and burden. I held onto the consciousness of this intimate space as I moved increasingly away. The intention of the flip here was to allow the viewer to keep their own ideas and associations of home alive, as part of the narrative of the work. In this way, the proxemical flip worked with a slower rhythm that utilized the rope to maximize affect and meaning.

Further, this first iteration also addressed the incidental audience that encountered the work in the original moment of the gesture. This interaction exists in its own context and inevitably affects the work with regards to how it may be recontextualized. There is some trace of these encounters in the overall narrative of the work; the moment an unsuspecting viewer sees the performative act and slows to take in a woman tied to a house by a rope, offers an entanglement that becomes part of the narrative of the performance, and is therefore always present in the performance of the work.

### Spatial Resonance And The Power Of The Flip

With regards to the process of proxemical flipping, the home offers up easy access for both a personal and shared understanding of space. And this can be used to invite associations — potentially powerful ones — into the process of interpretation. I am interested in both the power and conflict of the home as a domestic and socially complex space.

The home is arguably one of the most resonant spaces imaginable. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard deconstructs the worlds — both real and imagined — contained within the private space of the home. He describes one’s house as “our corner of the world...it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”

(4) My research considers how the poetic imagination and phenomenological pursuit that Bachelard speaks of functions in our individual and collective understanding of domestic space. In *And if I tied myself to you*, I attempt to grab onto both conscious and unconscious ideas of home in order to encourage interpretation from the viewer.

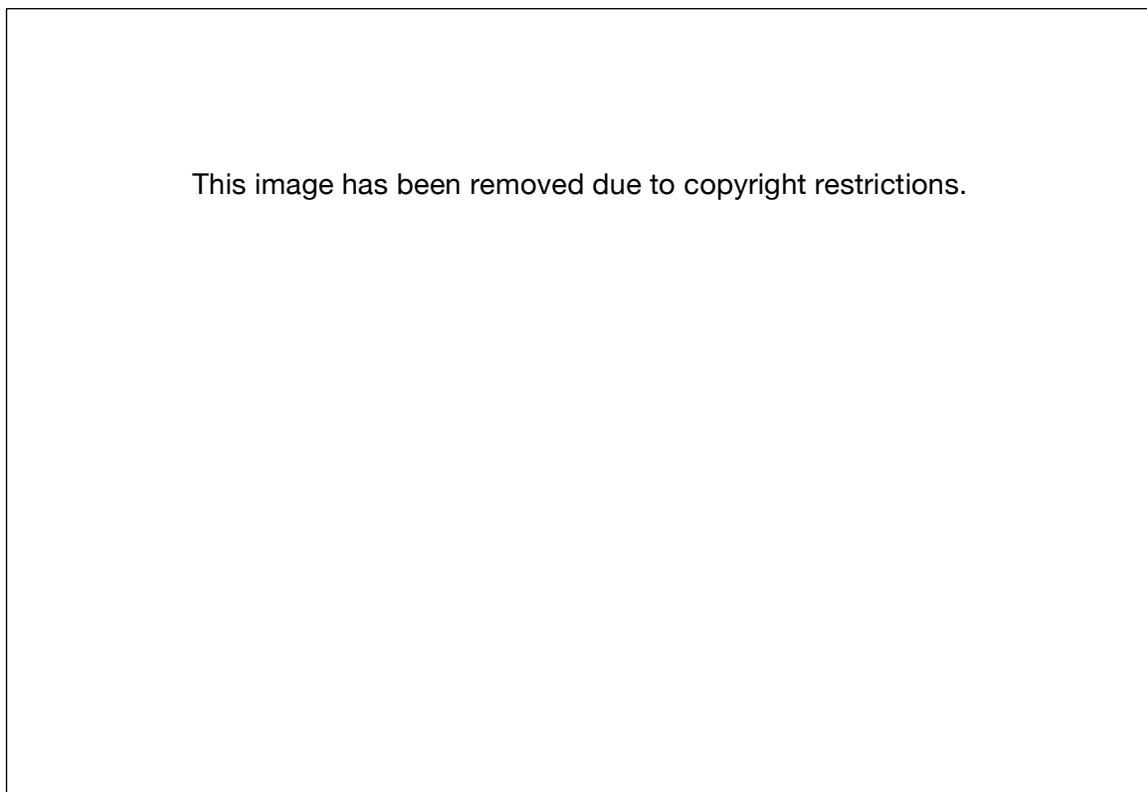


Fig. 5: Lucy Gunning, *Climbing Around My Room*, 1993. Video Still.

This kind of viewer engagement and receptiveness is evident in artist Lucy Gunning’s work, *Climbing Around My Room*. In this work from 1993, we encounter a single channel video, played on a small monitor, of a woman in a red dress moving about a mostly unfurnished room without ever touching the floor. She precariously balances on the edge of a dresser and a fireplace, using the ceiling for counter pressure; she edges

along a window ledge, appearing to eye how she will traverse the gap between the sill and a set of built in shelves. Firstly, in considering my own performed reception of the work, the title of the piece speaks volumes. By naming the space *her* room, suddenly the narrative potential is amplified, and I am invited in to add my own ideas of how that space is defined. My imagination becomes activated; I add memories of my own rooms, performing my own meaning on top of what Gunning offers. I empathize with the climber in the red dress through my own interpretation of this particular space. In the same way, *And if I tied myself to you* attempts to use our connection to this idea of home as a hook to intentionally engage the viewer. Considering how a space can be invested in the process of interpretation is both an exhilarating and puzzling prospect at the heart of my methodology.

#### The Body Is A Metaphor For Home

The home also has huge metaphorical presence. Just as Bachelard reveals, it functions “as the portal to metaphors of imagination” (xiii). The act of tying myself to my home offers the viewer many entry points for metaphorical embodiment. We can all identify with a sense of being tied to something. The viewer senses the rope around their waists; senses the slight lean of the body outward as the rope becomes taut. They have a physical understanding and sensation of this metaphor, and this allows them to relate this tethering to their own situations. Through this physical empathy, they suddenly play a part within the construction of a narrative that intermingles the imagined story of the tied woman and the experiences of being ‘tied down’ within their own lives.

In my methodology, I am looking for more tangible ways to build metaphorical embodiment. The rope offers a way to physically connect with the viewer. After a while, the feeling of being tied begins to affect me; I get increasingly frustrated by this desire to leave, but not being able to, and this is part of a narrative in the performance that I am attempting to transmit to the audience, whether it be the incidental audience that

encounters the work in the moment, or an intentional, secondary audience that experiences the work as it is recontextualized. I am curious about how even more physically rigorous and immediate metaphorical gestures can increase a viewer's sense of investment. Here we can again consider Gunning's work. A large part of my identification with this work comes from observing and imagining the physical difficulty in the woman's act of climbing. This registers itself in my own body, and I interpret the plight of the climber. I feel her action and I understand what it means. The performance is amplified by the red dress, the lack of furniture or objects in the room, and the way the lighting is shining upward, almost giving a vaudevillian character to the piece. This activates a performed reception and heightens how these elements come together to relate a drama that places me inside of its narrative.

#### The Gallery Can Be A Lonely Place To Perform

The second iteration of *And if I tied myself to you, 2013*, recontextualized the work for the gallery space, and was presented as part of the MAA Low Residency Interim Exhibition, *Alteractions/Alterations/Altercations*.<sup>7</sup> There were new considerations within this process; the alternate environment and context posed several challenges. The main concern was in determining what the *style* of the performance would be. How much amplification (or theatricality) did the work call for? How did time function in this case? How did materiality — which was more integral inside the gallery — work inside the piece? In removing myself from the anchor of the home, I needed a new anchor, so what would that be? After this conceptualizing was in place, even more was discovered through the performance of the work itself.

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<sup>7</sup>This show took place in the Concourse Gallery at the ECUAD campus, from July 18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013, and featured the work of Jill Banting, Leigh Gillam, Sarah Nordean, Lisa Simpson, Leah Weinstein, Jay White and myself. A common thread that seemed to tie all the works in the exhibit together was each of the artist's desires to actively engage the viewer in the construction of meanings either through formal or spatial considerations.



Fig. 6: Maiko Yamamoto, *And If I tied myself to you*, 2013.

The gallery version still operated with the same basic function; I tied myself on one end of a rope, and attached the other end to a physical anchor. However, with this iteration the ropes accumulated on the anchors and my body according to the different degrees of time that I remained tied to each one. This acted as a way to trace or record my

performance of the work in the space. I wanted to make visible the materials of my research; to reveal spatial relationship through the way the ropes tangled and marked my pathways along the floor — through a reminder of the body in the space. What the physical anchor was going to be however, was in many ways, the most influential and determining factor of the work. Initially I considered tying myself to the actual architecture available in the space, but eventually, in bridging together the initial model of the work and the new context of the space, it became clear that a more personal and conceptual anchor was needed, and one that could still generate intimacy — something that I recognized was going to be much more challenging inside the gallery. I decided to ask my father, who is a wood craftsman, to build three circular rings out of wood, to be mounted to the gallery wall. These were made of yellow cedar and were stained with a high-gloss varnish (to look a bit unnatural). The connection between the concept of home in the first iteration, and collaborating with my father added the right degree of relevance to the anchors for me, as it furthered a narrative of familial obligation, which felt like an integral through-line of the work.

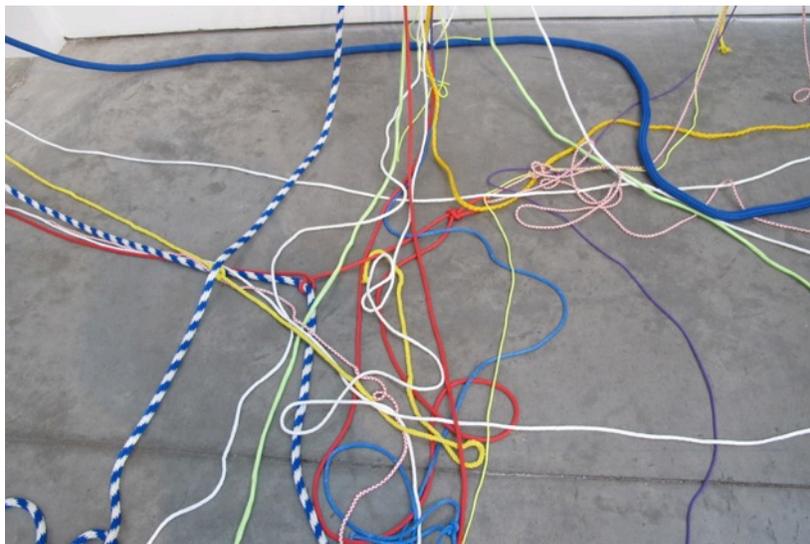


Fig. 7: Maiko Yamamoto, *And If I tied myself to you*, 2013.

I chose all synthetic ropes of varying lengths, colours and diameters. Again, something unnatural in their materiality appealed to me, especially in contrast to the wood of the

anchors. In addition, these were all ropes (boat ropes, various work ropes) that were specifically made *to be seen*, which was also important, as it referenced one of the original sources of the work, which was an article I read about Japan's Suicide Forest.<sup>8</sup> I also liked the juxtaposition between the bright colours of the rope, the synthetic materials and the wood anchors. The ropes were of different lengths, and allowed me to travel varying distances within the gallery, and to also step beyond the confines of the space. These ropes would also, at times, determine my proximity to the viewer. I would spend an indeterminate amount of time on each rope (again, led by instinct) and then I would cut it off my body, leaving it tied to the anchor and freeing myself to then start a new rope. The ropes accumulated on the anchors as well as on my body.

About halfway through the exhibition period, I considered that the work was potentially more interesting when I was not in the space, leaving the viewer to experience a trace of the performance, and therefore continuing it, in a sense, through the metaphorical objects and in the bodies of the viewers as they encountered them. The outline of a performance was present, and the narrative of the work was potentially stronger in the viewer's performed response.

The gallery version of *And if I tied myself to you* allowed me to test out my research material over the course of several days, and added valuable information to my process. This iteration was less about imposing an intimate space, and became more about confusing how we visualize proximity. This was an unexpected result, but for me, it became an integral significance inside of the work. My absence in the gallery, represented by a tangle of ropes, conjured a dialogue with the viewer about proximity and presence, and extended an opportunity for performed reception.

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<sup>8</sup> The Aokigahara Forest lies on the side of Mt. Fuji, and is "the most common place to commit suicide in Japan." (Estrin, *Wandering in Japan's 'Suicide Forest'*). Many people contemplating suicide will tie a rope to themselves in order to help guide them out of the forest, should they change their minds. Park rangers stumble upon these ropes leading eerily off into the forest, and are unsure of what they will find when they reach the other end.

The recontextualization of *And if I tied myself to you* offered many opportunities to push this work further and to consider aspects of spatial relationship, performance and metaphorical embodiment. In addition, this process exemplifies how a work can be recontextualized beyond the initial performance. The work now exists as a trace of a performance; the residue or remembrance that reveals space, the body and time within the narrative told by the ropes.

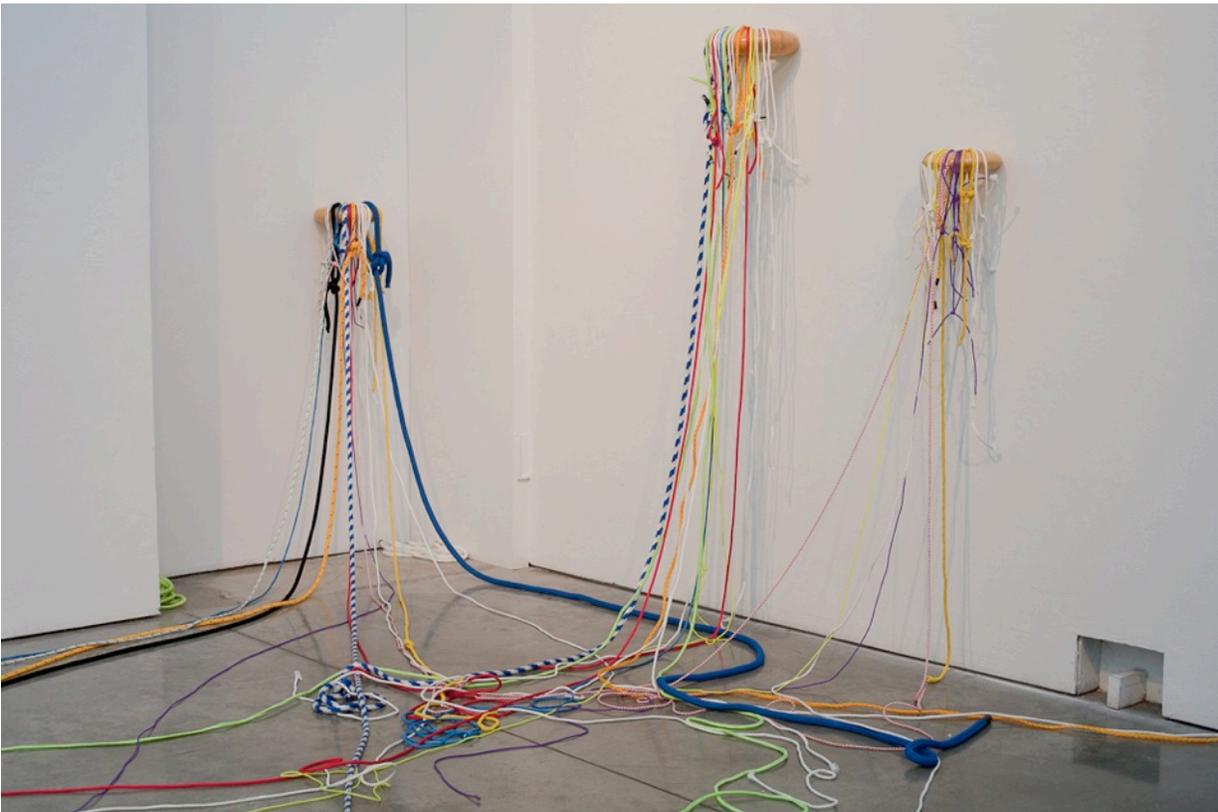


Fig. 8: Maiko Yamamoto, *And If I tied myself to you*, 2013.

## **CASE STUDY: *Public Sleep* and *Bridge Affection***

*“Space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction; likewise energy and time. Although in one sense this ‘substance’ is hard to conceive of, most of all at the cosmic level, it is also true to say that evidence of its existence stares us in the face: our senses and our thoughts apprehend nothing else.”* (Lefebvre, 12)

There is an apparent contrast between Bachelard's more quiet definition of space and more prevalent understandings of space as a product of human intention and activity, put forward by the writings of Henri Lefebvre. Just as the house has been carved out and carefully built and resonates on an intimate scale, other sites can hold public resonance and speak to potentially larger-scale ideas. This is a space that, as opposed to a place where we enter to retreat from the rest of the world, we go to connect ourselves to this idea of the city, alive with the echoes of human movement and activity. It is, as Lefebvre envisions, all around us, and perhaps not considered as concerted as the home, but ever-present. And just as the space of the home can pull you into reflection, so the city can be an instigator for performing meaning.

This is true for both of the works included in this next case study: *Public Sleep* and *Bridge Affection*. Both works take a different act, which commonly occurs in intimate space and places them in iconic public spaces. Searching for the spatial tensions within these sites forces us to look differently at them; to search deeper in order to better understand how they function within our lives. These experiments were occupied with real space and as such, the location became an integral part of the narrative of the work. My research revealed these public spaces to carry their own identities and politics. Miwon Kwon's writings on site-oriented practices are significant to consider in this regard, especially her elaborations on site-specific work as a “problem idea” (2), complicated by the many layers of discourse that are invested in attempting to organize these spaces. This co-organization opens up much dialogue

around the potential power of the site to “strengthen art’s capacity to penetrate the sociopolitical organization of contemporary life with greater impact and meaning” (30). Both *Public Sleep* and *Bridge Affection* utilize the public identity of a site to generate a particular interpretation of the work.

### Spatial Identification And The Sleeping City

Spaces are spaces before we encounter or inhabit them. They have a history and character, and this shapes our understanding, perception and experience of it. With the work *Public Sleep, 2013*, I wanted to explore the intimate act of sleeping, and the consciousness of this intimacy, in order to search for how the collision of private and public could function with the specific choice of site. For two weeks I recorded my body’s positions during sleep, in order to determine my dominant sleeping positions, which I narrowed down to three. I then re-enacted these positions while attempting to sleep in public, in and around the grounds of Vancouver's City Hall. This is a site characteristic of production, where policy is made and decisions affecting the lives of everyday citizens are taking place. Sleeping here presented me with the opportunity to make a statement on the idea of our collective disillusionment within the public process. Further, in carefully selecting to bar a populated walkway on the grounds, I was able to mediate my own identity within this collective narrative, and speak to my own personal disagreement within my place in the city.



Fig. 9: Maiko Yamamoto, *Public Sleep*, 2013.

In this way, *Public Sleep* attempts to provide further relevance through its encounter with the individual and complex shared identity of the public space in question. The site's meaning is derived from this common understanding as well as the individual relationships brought to it by the viewer, which ostensibly could be full of civic purpose, but could also be about wanting a quiet place to sit and admire what the space has to offer: an iconic representation of our city. Our associations with the public identity of City Hall blurs with our own experiences and understanding of this site, creating a multilayered interpretation.

I chose sleeping as an act of intimacy, because it felt like a way to access the consciousness of private space. For me, sleeping evokes a kind of intimacy of the body and mind. My awareness moves inward, residing close to or on my skin. My consciousness becomes internalized. My eyes are closed; I swim in the darkness surrounding my bones and organs. I wanted to see if it was possible, through the performance of this work, to recreate this state of mind in order to pull the viewer into this consciousness with me, essentially to perform meaning with them through evoking the intimate act of sleeping.

### The Body As Transmitter

With *Public Sleep*, the concept of performative presence is important to consider. I am interested in the body's role in suggesting a performed reception. As a performer, I understand how I can physically interpret the gesture or the act, while at the same time transmitting an intention to the viewer through the performance. The performative body has presence, which is a mode of transmission. How we read a sleeping body is affected not only by the site and context, but also by the countenance of the figure, the tension in the body, the emotive qualities we can read. The sleeping figure is suddenly 'extra-present', which transmits further information. Again, the atypical relationship between gesture and space offers interpretive opportunities. On top of this are all the possible associations that sleeping in public might suggest: homelessness, substance abuse, danger, etc. The body also communicates particular socio-political and cultural identifications, which further provoke the interpretation. These elements combine to create a friction that extends a theatricality, and a narrative is intimated.



Fig. 10: Maiko Yamamoto, *Public Sleep*, 2013.

In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Erica Fischer-Lichte states that presence “refers to the phenomenal body of the performer. Presence marks not an expressive but a purely performative quality. Through specific processes of embodiment, the actor can bring forth his phenomenal body in a way that enables him to command both space and the audience’s attention.” (96)

This notion of presence being a key part of one’s ability to “command space and attention” feels significant within my research. With a work like *Public Sleep*, the proxemical flip is only apparent in the body’s performance of sleeping in an unexpected space.

In addition to thinking about the performative body's capacity to transmit information through performance, bodily presence is yet another way we can understand or receive space. I appreciate Amelia Jones' articulation of the phenomenological viewpoint with regards to embodied knowledge. She states that: "for Merleau-Ponty, the body is never simply an object, but 'a grouping of lived-through meanings'" (*Critical Terms*, 260). The body has the potential to unlock unanticipated significance within the viewer, and continue to turn this meaning over and over like a kaleidoscope. In this way, it is a generous instrument within my own research.

This idea of the inclusivity of the bodily experience is something I am attempting to draw out in my process. The performative gesture speaks to not only my own *lived-through meanings*, but the *lived-through meanings* of others. This dual interpretation that the body provides feels integral to performance as a form, as it allows the performers' subjectivity to be present, while at the same time engaging the subjective experiences of the viewer, offering a connective tissue between them. This promotes a collective understanding between humans, and for me, illuminates the idea that our experience is a shared one. Even though we may be separated by beliefs, history and perspectives, we have a common corporeal ground on which to build collective meanings.

### A Metaphorical Jump

The original intention of *Bridge Affection*, 2013, was to have a moment of intimacy with two very public spaces, The Burrard Street Bridge and the Lions Gate Bridge respectively, to show my appreciation for these bridges and all that they do for our city. It did not take long to reveal that bridges are spaces that make people uncomfortable. They are loud, cars speed by, walkers just want to get to the other side, and people are unsettled by those who linger too long in one place. It is impossible to be intimate in this space. With *Bridge Affection* I wanted to acknowledge the iconography of these two spaces, while at the same time push up against them; to show my affection for

bridges in order to invent new relationships to these public spaces and to create broader realities. Metaphorically, I wanted to be a bridge for new perspectives. In this way, *Bridge Affection* attempted to counter the ways that we are alienated by space.

I spent three different days on site at the Burrard Street Bridge, walking the length of the structure and spending time at the midway point. Each time, I wore particular clothing — a costume. This was intentionally meant to make me seem friendly, unthreatening and visible, and it also added to a level of performance. I adopted a kind of character, which indicated to the viewer different possible narratives inside the work. At any point during my time on the bridge, I would try to show it my affection. This would manifest in different ways; sometimes it appeared as if I was hugging the bridge, other times it seemed I was lifting it up, or attempting to help it support the many cars, buses and people that were crossing it at the time. By placing my body in these specific spatial relationships with the bridge and performing an act of affection, I was attempting to incite an embodied activation in the viewer. This promoted a physical reception of the metaphor at work: my affection for the bridge reveals a lack of connection I feel within the city and between the people who live within it.

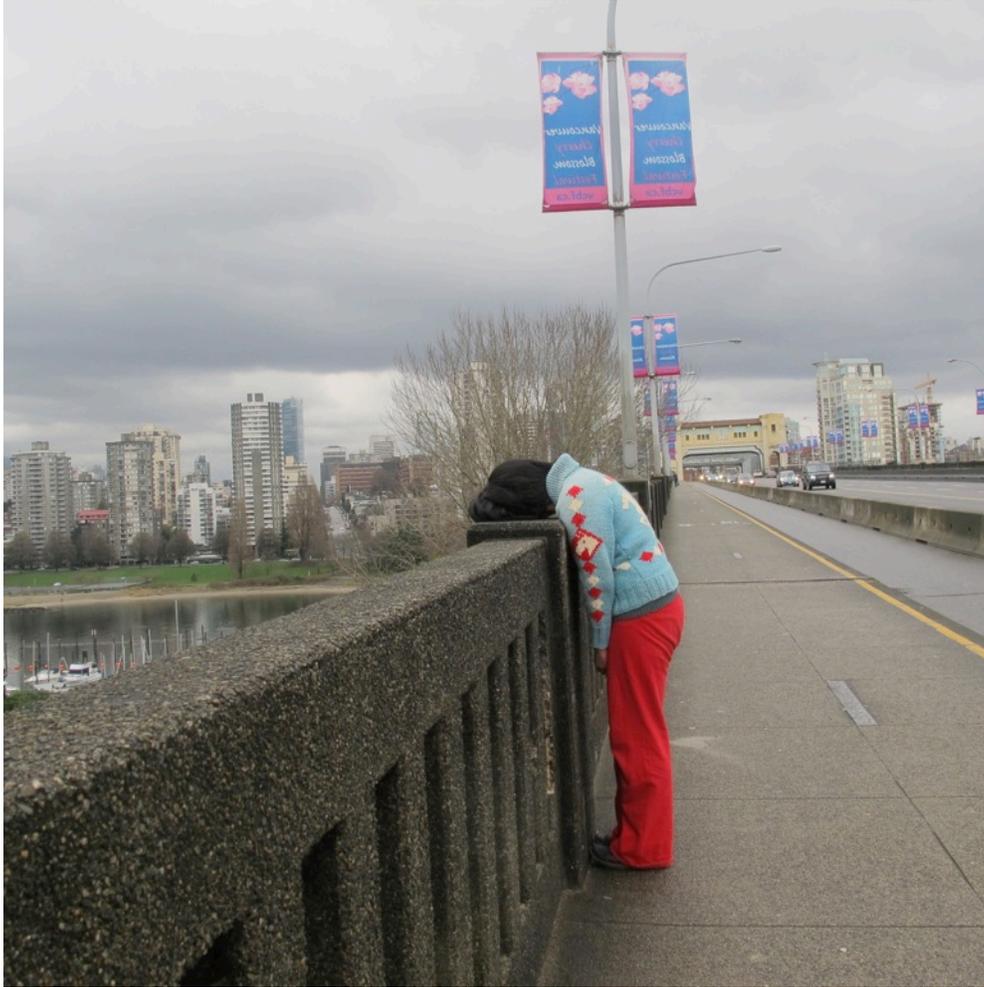


Fig. 11: Maiko Yamamoto, *Bridge Affection*, 2013.

Artist Tino Sehgal's work, *The Kiss*, is an example of a more overt way that a work can promote a metaphorical embodiment. In it, we see two dancers in the gallery space, performing famous and infamous kisses of art history. In viewing this performance, we feel the kiss in our own bodies, and through this embodiment, we receive a deeper understanding of the work and how it translates to our own lives.



Fig. 12: Tino Sehgal, *The Kiss*, 2010. Used by permission of Loren Madsen.

In an interview in the *Guardian* newspaper around the premiere of his work for the Turbine Hall commission, *These Associations*, Sehgal said: "Attention is the material I work with" (Sehgal, 2012). Thinking about his work, I understand his definition of attention to be primarily physical, but inherently linked to an intellectual and conceptual awareness. There is something that greatly attracts me about Sehgal's statement. It contains, inherently, a challenge. The challenge of attention; giving and taking it, agitated by the desensitized and over-technologized world we live in. For me it implies a necessary and active physical relationship between the artwork and the viewer and reinforces the idea of co-performing meaning. Through highly choreographed movements and text, the group of performers traveling in and around the massive space of the Turbine Hall, offer the viewer a mirror on which to perform individual and collective meaning. This is suggested through a physical reception — whether a kinesthetic kind of reaction, a natural sense of empathy, or a resonance evoked by one of the personal stories shared by the performers. With all these connections,

significance is placed on the body — performers and spectators, both individually and as a collective presence. With this in mind, I would propose that metaphorical embodiment can generate this kind of multifaceted attention: physical, spatial and emotional. I am most compelled to speak through these kinds of attention within my own artwork, as the essential challenges of demanding them from the viewer are not only about this process of promoting performed reception, but about my own ability to give and generate attention with a work.

To varying degrees, both *Public Sleep* and *Bridge Affection* reveal how working with a particular site can be problematic within my process. Dealing with the site's identity can prove to add layers of complication that may possibly rob the work of its intended simplicity. The site is a hard space to control; it is unpredictable and the intention of the space is less specific in relation to a performance. This is arguably what makes the site exciting, but more recently it has also drawn me to consider works for the more determined space of the gallery. *Bridge Affection* remains unresolved, with larger questions around how the work is recontextualized and presented to a viewer beyond the initial performance.

## CASE STUDY: *Rose, 41*



Fig. 13: Maiko Yamamoto, *Rose, 41*, 2014.

*Rose, 41, 2014*, is the work I produced for the final graduate exhibition in the Charles H. Scott Gallery. Forty-one bags of rice were stacked in a tier formation, perpendicular to the long entrance wall of the gallery, encouraging a physical and emotional encounter. In this work I was investigating proximity and relationships; these relationships were between the bags of rice themselves and also between the viewer and myself. I wanted to reveal a narrative of cultural identity and to explore ideas of alienation through a personal history with rice — Kokuho Rose rice, in particular.

Spatially, *Rose, 41* explored two environments. The long view, front approach of the work presented an area before the sculptural “wall” of rice bags, suggestive of a more public, heightened/dramatic and anticipatory space. This was supported through the use of coloured lighting, which illuminated the 20 feet of wall space leading up to the

rice, moving from a spectrum of blue to red. Directly on the other side of the sculptural form was revealed a more private space, suggestive of an intimate, domestic environment. Here, there sat a plinth with a small rice cooker on it. At times, viewers were confronted by the subtle smell of cooking rice.

Through the process of making this work for the group show in the Charles H. Scott Gallery, the performative nature of *Rose, 41* evolved into a more quiet, restrained performance than I had originally intended; an almost invisible performance that evoked a fairly clear essential narrative: the slow processing of the rice, as the cooker steamed and worked away in relation to the substantial barrier: a literal wall of rice bags. The rice was either eaten in the gallery (by myself while sitting on the bags) or taken home to be eaten later. This transformation (washing, cooking and eating) generated a kind of performative distance in relation to the installation, as I found it increasingly awkward — as the performer — to be present in the gallery. Instead of waiting to be seen executing these tasks by gallery goers, I found myself quickly tending to the work in order for the installation to maintain its state of independence. My intention was to allow the viewer room to navigate his or her own relationships to the work, opening up more opportunity for their associations and perspectives.

Rather, *Rose, 41* relied more on the encounter with the sculptural form of the bags and the subsequent reveal of the cooker as well as the imagined progression of the narrative of the cooked rice, than on the performer. This marks a significant shift in my ideas around how performance can function within the gallery. The performative body was still suggested, but I became less present as a performer. In many ways, the work pointed to an absence of the performer, although there is still a suggestion that the installation is somehow performed, through the theatrical lighting as the viewer approaches; through the discovery of the rice cooker; through the open bag of rice which appears to be continually depleting its supply. Further, the installation seemed to propose, through these elements, that the viewer was cast as a performer in the work, supporting the process of a performed reception.

## When Proxemics Get Personal

Growing up, there was always a bag of Kokuho Rose rice in our house. Like many Japanese Canadians, it was the true staple of my family's diet, and in addition to countless memories of having to prepare and make rice, as well as the chore of lugging the giant bags in from the car upon my mother's request, I also remember many little rituals around rice: *never stab the rice with your chopsticks, never dirty the rice, never, ever leave any uneaten grains in your bowl*. I remember my mother repeatedly saying "At one time, rice was more valuable than gold." So, rice has built up many levels of meaning for itself within my life.

Kokuho Rose was the rice that most Japanese Canadian families used after the 1960s when it became readily available. It was the first rice that truly resembled Japanese rice and so everyone cooked with it, especially the generation of immigrants that came to Canada during the late 60s/early 70s, such as my parents. After some time, other brands came up, but these were either less or more expensive, and so Kokuho Rose came to represent a kind of middleclass-ness. Back then, rice was integral; we ate it at least twice a day, and more commonly three times a day. Regardless of what brand you ate, you learned quickly that it was something to be valued. Of course, this was a philosophy that was reinforced within my immediate family, but as a concept, the way the Japanese identify with rice is reiterated on broader, historical levels. In her book, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time*, author Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney investigates the notion of rice as the "dominant metaphor of self" (4) for the Japanese, as fortified not necessarily through being a primary food, but also through a relationship of land and labour. She states that "throughout history, the symbolic importance of rice has been deeply embedded in the Japanese cosmology...rice as soul, rice as deity, and ultimately, rice as self." (8) She also discusses this idea that the Japanese have in part, defined their relationships with the other through fiercely attaching their identity to rice. All this confirmed the potential of rice as a fitting material to test out my methodology.

With *Rose, 41* I was interested in these bags of Kokuho Rose as a kind of *readymade*, an object with wide-ranging references, arranged to probe relationships between myself and the viewer. I wanted to investigate how I could persuade the viewer to perform their own meaning alongside my own within the work?



Fig. 14: Maiko Yamamoto, *Rose, 41*, 2014.

Indeed, the work furthered my research into performing reception. Interpretation was encouraged through the experience of the encounter with the bags and was further supported by the way in which the space set up the viewer's approach. A proximity with the installation was suggested, whether reading the public space of the gallery, or

the private space of the installation. Spatially, the space before and after the rice bags followed Hall's descriptions of public and personal space. Because of where the work was situated in the gallery, the opportunity arose to utilize the length of the wall, encouraging the viewer to first consider the work from afar before drawing closer. This distant approach then revealed the more private, domestic space of the cooker, which fortified the overall narrative of the work. In this way, the physical distances within the work became a key narrative aspect to *Rose, 41*. I came to regard the proxemical flip occurring through the relationship between these two spaces, as opposed to the usual flip of content and space.

### A Bodily Association

I chose Kokuho Rose rice as a material, because of its ability to access a personal history as well as a socio-politically specific context in the hopes of amplifying my own presence and agency within the work. *Rose, 41* offered me the opportunity to rigorously explore the primary themes I am addressing inside my research; the theme of identity through referencing a particular family relationship and context and through using a culturally specific product; as well as the theme of alienation through a culturally and socially specific examination of rice. In addition, the bags presented a way of observing proxemics on a broader level, through the opportunity to examine, through the encounter, how these materials suggest a physical and emotional interaction with the performer, the viewer and the space.

The structure of the work investigates the two overarching perspectives within my research: a physical, or external perspective, and an intellectual, or internal perspective. Externally, this very tangible object was used as a way of exploring the body's relationship to the physical structure of the work; how the viewer's body interacted with the installation, which altered depending on what side of the work they were on. Through the washing, cooking and eating of the rice, an internal perspective was drawn out, which triggered more personal and conceptual associations. Through

this specific process in the work, there was less contingency within the viewer relationship; the piece operated more autonomously in defining the form of a performed installation. My goal was to leave more room for the viewer's interpretation, but this also made their experience more difficult to steer.



Fig. 15: Maiko Yamamoto, *Rose, 41*, 2014.

On another level, the work opened up space for specific associations around the role of the body — and the female body in particular — in this act of processing and consumption. The washing, cooking and eating is connected to ideas of domesticity, and this, fortified by the aesthetic quality of the bags and the 'rose-coloured' lighting, was suggestive of the female body in particular. This was quite a new identification for me, as in my previous research my works are not overtly suggestive of gender. This has opened up new areas of research, further reinforcing the relationship between physical and intellectual areas of engagement. In the future, I would like to continue to

explore the form of the performed installation with works that investigate all aspects of my own identity in order to access further potential for intersubjective engagement.

### The Burden of Rice

As a material, rice offers several access points upon which to build associations. Beyond its significance as a food found in many cultures, with a long history of processing and use, most people can identify with rice in one way or another. Whether it evokes a particular culture, or it suggests a kind of modesty or simplicity, there are many connotations it calls forward. As such, its metaphorical potential is far reaching, which is both beneficial and challenging in relation to my own research. There is the danger of generalization, which can undoubtedly remove personal meaning from the work and alter its intention. With *Rose, 41*, I found that I had less control over how the metaphor transmitted to the viewer through my absence, however, the bags as objects themselves allowed stronger opportunities for additional associations to occur.

In the article *The Language of Things*, Hito Steyerl dissects Walter Benjamin's *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, and examines the idea that *things* might have their own distinct language. In other words, objects speak to us and have a communicative power. Steyerl states that "a thing is never just something, but a fossil in which a constellation of forces is petrified" (3). She goes further to say that things "consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, which keep being exchanged" (3). In choosing bags of Kokuho Rose rice as a material, I was able to utilize the power of this particular *thing*, to draw out its language in order to add deeper levels of meaning to the work.

The potential for metaphorical embodiment in *Rose, 41* was suggested through the immediate identifications that the viewer has with rice. It allowed for the construction of meaning to occur through many layers: the visual, initial association with the bags; the

scale of the work and the tiered display; their tactile quality as well as the action of washing, cooking and eating the rice all suggested the body.

In addition, the stacking of the bags carried further metaphorical resonance, and this was received on both physical and mental levels. The shape of the work and the spaces around the installation were intended to be registered physically, while the stacking of the bags was suggestive of other images: bodies, sandbags, architectural forms such as buildings or stairways, landscapes, etc. All of these associations heightened the possibility for a careful meaning to be performed between the viewer, the performer and the thing.

## CONCLUSION

In this text, I have outlined my methodology as it has evolved through my research and studio practice in the development of this thesis project, and although there are still many considerations inside of the work, several overarching notions within my research have taken shape and can now be applied within my practice in different ways. Specifically, my research has drawn me to better understand and further confront ideas around spatial relationships, and how reversing our spatial expectations can reveal the complex social relations that operate within space at any given moment. Further, I have explored how these relations might be applied to actively engage the viewer in an encounter with an artwork. This process has also deepened my interest in the significance of performance and the body in generating powerful conscious and unconscious connections; it has taught me how metaphor and other analogous narrative tools can be used in promoting a performed response. Perhaps most importantly, it has enlivened a new form for exploration within my practice — the performed installation.

In the trajectory of my research in the MAA, the provisional works I began with focused on performative gestures that did not necessarily construct the viewer experience in the moment of the gesture. Thoughts on how the viewer would receive the work came much later, through the recontextualization of a work, whether through the presentation of the documentation, or subsequent iterations. Although these initial explorations were generative and helped to develop my process, it was making work for the gallery space that truly tested and activated my methodology. Through the formal considerations of how these performative gestures function within the relationship between the viewer, the performance, and the objects or materials within a shared space, I have gained a better understanding of how my work offers opportunities for intersubjective engagement between an artwork and an audience.

With regards to the notion of performing meaning, I have experienced how these intersubjective engagements are directly related to moments where one feels a sense

of “tangency”, as Leiris describes. It is an active connection where an exchange occurs and we are drawn into playing out our own narratives alongside a work. I am interested in how these moments of tangency are created and furthered.

During the final graduate exhibit, a viewer mentioned that her family ate rice every night, and her experience of *Rose, 41* made her remember the countless awkward and tense moments around the dinner table. She told me that dinners were not a happy time, and as she said this, her arms crossed over her body. Suddenly I felt her family history layer on top of my own, and this changed the work, if only briefly. I am interested in exploring how this kind of engagement is encouraged, through the use of the space, the lighting elements and the objects, the way the body is suggested physically and symbolically. I believe the subtle function of the performed installation has the potential to leave room for viewers to place themselves inside the work, without over-determining a relationship. In this way, both the conscious and unconscious reception of a work can be used to build an act of co-performing its meaning.

Through my work I am looking for ways to be *in the same space* with my viewer, however long this can last — to conceptually share a moment of space, whether it be physical, philosophical or emotional. In this moment we demand attention from each other. We care for each other and share our ideas, experiences and perspectives. We feel what Amelia Jones calls *interpretive desire* — a moment of active, intersubjective connection. I now see this desire as a necessary component in making a work. It is full of complex, subjective narrative potential that can go on to resonate on many different levels. Through my research, I have found ways to amplify my own terms of engagement — and hopefully the viewer’s. I hope to continue this work: to draw out associations that disturb contexts and blur histories, in order to build new narratives that hold the potential to shift the dominant narratives of our shared experience.

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