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QUEER SPACE

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THESIS SUPPORT PAPER

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For the kids who know they're queer &
don't know yet if or where they'll ever belong.
And for George, I love you with all my heart.
Keep getting back up, it's worth it.

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"All my life I have searched for a place of belonging, a place that would become home. I knew in early childhood what home was, what it felt like. Home was the safe place, the place where one could count on not being hurt. It was the place where wounds were attended to. Home was the place where the me of me mattered. Home was the place I longed for; it was not where I lived."

bell hooks, *belonging: A CULTURE OF PLACE*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Until relatively recently, the historical power of 'Queer' was as a slur, calling out difference with an allegation of deviance. The word queer implied abnormality, outsiderness and difference, while bringing attention to the fear of the non-normal. In the 1980's the word queer was reclaimed by the people it was used against, becoming a source of power to call out and target the camouflaged workings of power and normativity. Sites of resistance, resilience, dissent and immoderation appear everywhere as possibilities for rebellion, for connection and solidarity. Agitprop, street performance & guerilla art have developed as counter-tactics to invisibility and silence. (Getsy,15) Where community and belonging is hardwired into us as a survival instinct, and celebrated as a goal or measure of success, identifying queer space, be it physical or temporal, marks a point of existence as the traditional "(any name) was here" carved into trees, park benches, school desks and walls, through memorializing and identifying existence, inviting belonging and building community. I find the words Derek Jarman, filmmaker, artist and gay rights activist wrote in his memoir At Your Own Risk in 1992 relateable, "when I was young the absence of the past was a terror". I grew up to queer history primarily identifying oppression, persecution, and stories of violence and suffering. Using site specific art as a means to identify space where queers have forged belonging through an idea, a story, or temporary physical

marker promotes queer visibility while engaging and building community and history with the hopes of growing that history to include the positive gains and fight erasure and silence.

I connected with feminist and social activist bell hooks' quotation that serves as an epigraph to this section from her book *Belonging: A CULTURE OF PLACE*. I believe hooks' quote sets the tone for this chapter, and I will continue this format with the chapters that follow. Home and belonging are two key concepts I focus on in my thesis work, and while her quote resonated with me and was relatable, I must acknowledge the context within which hooks discusses belonging and home is based on her lived experience with racism as a Black woman in the southern United States, and there is no equating or suggestion of parallels to the adversity and oppression racism imposes.

Positionality— We're here, we're queer, we fuck shit up

I am a queer, able-bodied, cisgender white woman, living in Vancouver on the stolen land of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil Waututh Nations. On my paternal side I am a fifth generation settler, and a first generation settler on my maternal side. My mother immigrated to Canada from the tenements in Glasgow, Scotland to escape post-war poverty. My father left home at 16 to join the Navy in Halifax, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people, to escape abuse and poverty at home and pursue his dream to fly. After seven years of life on an aircraft carrier, he returned to the west coast, living and working as a bush pilot in Haida Gwaii, before returning to Vancouver to begin his career as a commercial pilot, and eventually meet my mother.

I have a close relationship with my family in Birmingham, England, and Glasgow, Scotland. These are the places I grew up understanding to be home. My father, estranged from his family, embraced my mother's family and was welcomed warmly. The travel benefits of my father's career enabled us to fly home every year to spend our holidays with family on a council estate in Birmingham, and the Ayrshire coast in Scotland. My parents worked hard to ensure my sister and I received the educational foundation that had been inaccessible to them, by sending us to a private school for girls. There were a few other girls at the school like us, but most were from families with substantial wealth.

As I entered my teen years, I knew I was queer. After witnessing another girl suspected of being queer bullied severely, I kept my queerness to myself. I discovered sports and the art room. I had friends, but kept a certain distance even though I wanted to belong. Several amazing teachers found ways to support my ADD long before diagnoses were made or recognized. My school was a second home, my second family.

Getting things wrong, getting things right

After 12 years at this school, I was asked to leave (politely expelled) in the second month of my final year for procuring pot for my sister's friend. This abrupt rejection evaporated everything I thought to be solid: my sense of belonging, identity and value. The weight of my parent's devastation was terrible. The fallout significantly shaped the difficult years that followed. I struggled with severe depression, lived recklessly, travelled alone, worked and looked for purpose. I tried to come out and failed miserably, struggling again with belonging, or rather not belonging.

My attention eventually shifted to design school and exploring tools to shape space and place while building connections between home and belonging. Design saved me, and I thrived. After finishing design school, I moved home to the UK, only to realize it wasn't home for me. I lived and worked there for a year, returning to Vancouver to have my son. For the first time I began to call Vancouver home, and within 10 years I finally believed it. My thirties and early forties were focused on raising my son as a single parent while building a career in Interior Design and Interior Architecture. By my late thirties I could no longer suppress my queerness. I came out at work and to my family.

During this time my art practice quietly emerged in the form of research. Through my design practice I explored the artfulness of living, and the efficient occupation of space and built environments, while attempting to improve quality of life for my clients and end users. My work in residential design allowed me to explore the intimacy of people within their private spaces: how they interact with others, how they assert their dreams, goals and fears through the character of the spaces they develop and claim as their personal territory whether at home, work, or when occupying public space.

I have always been interested in the grey area where design becomes art, art becomes design, and the creative process both disciplines share. Liminal space, the space between belonging, and the illusion and illusivity of belonging have been recurring life patterns and patterns of interest. Invisibility, identity, history and erasure have shaped my past, forming the foundation of my art practice, as querying place and queering space is my present.

"Perhaps the best way to understand the stance that self-nominates as queer is to see that it is, fundamentally adjectival— it attaches itself to nouns, willfully perverting that to which it is appended. It is a tactical modification— this name 'queer'— that invokes relations of power and propriety in its inversion of them, that is, its utterance brings with it two operations. First it appropriates and affects the thing that it now describes (a queer *what*?). Second, this attachment of 'queer' to a noun necessarily cites the standards and assumptions against which it is posed (the presumed 'normal' that it abandons)."

David Getsy, *Queer. Documents of Contemporary Art*

CHAPTER 2

Site specificity, exploring place

My art work is focused on queer space and tends to be site specific. The site informs the material expression, which as a designer, is a natural progression. Architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa describes in his book *The Eyes of the Skin*, the built environment, and or "architecture is our primary instrument in relating us to space and time, giving these dimensions a human measure." (17) The site provides answers and understanding of how, why and what already exists: the quality of light, orientation, shade or shadow, transformation from day to night, the seasons, exposure to the elements, how people interact with the space, how they engage with each other and use the space. How are our senses affected by a space— auditory, olfactory, touch. Are there characteristics that impact or affect patterns of behaviour, the neighbours, trees, birds and other creatures? Does traffic move past quickly or slowly; how does the site fit into the surrounding landscape? What is the history (hidden or overt) associated with the place, the name, the relationship to the people who use or experience the space? These studies and observations inform and inspire the material, direction and expression of a site-specific work for me.

Formerly trained as an architect, curator and art historian Miwon Kwon considers the importance and impact site-specificity has upon art and architecture by discussing the role context plays on

art and identity politics in her paper "One Place After Another". Kwon examines not only the physical and spatial influences of site, but also cultural and historical influences.

> "A dominant drive of site-oriented practices today is the pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life-- a critique of culture that is inclusive of non-art spaces, non-art institutions, and non-art issues (blurring the division between art and non-art, in fact). Concerned to integrate art more directly into the realm of the social, either in order to redress (in an activist sense) urgent social problems such as the ecological crisis, homelessness, AIDS, homophobia, racism, and sexism, or more generally in order to relativize art as one among many forms of cultural work, current manifestations of site specificity tend to treat aesthetic and art-historical concerns as secondary issues. Deeming the focus on the social nature of *art's* production and reception to be too exclusive, even elitist, this expanded engagement with culture favours "public" sites outside the traditional confines of art in physical and intellectual terms." (Kwon, 29)

Kwon notes site-specific art dwells within the following three paradigms: phenomenological, social/institutional, and discursive. She compares institutional (museum and gallery) space to public space in the built and natural environments, and the impact context has on both while considering our understanding of impermanence.

Kwon identifies how site-specific work leads to the unearthing of repressed histories and provides support for greater visibility of marginalized groups and issues. She also suggests siting art in "real" places can be a means to extract the social and historical dimensions out of place. She explores how art can infuse a site with new significance or value through authentic experience while acknowledging the choice to belong to anywhere, everywhere and nowhere does not belong to everyone equally. Identity and difference as cultural constructs also speak to a variety of different relationships to power. There is an absence of control in art created for or installed outside of an institution (gallery or museum) as the work is exposed to the public, and the elements. The idea of ownership and preciousness typically associated with art is modified, in part due to weather, time and possibly vandalism.

I see you, I hear you, going somewhere

With regard to my work, I am interested in the connections people make between art, a specific site, how they interact with the piece, and how the work becomes a part of their own story of place and identity. Art created and installed in both the natural and built landscape alters the site and the social behaviour or interaction people have with the site. The impermanence and unexpected discovery of art in a space outside of the gallery not only speaks to ownership, but also to power and influence, or rather lack of. The impermanence interests me— how a work becomes a landmark or memory and the story of the piece may be mythologized after it is destroyed or removed, and additionally, the second life it takes on through documentation of its existence and shared stories.

My background in design supports and informs a research-based creative process. A significant part of my journey during this program has involved understanding where and how my creative process incorporates design strategies/thinking, considering how that process differs when exploring artistic research and expression, and how different creative disciplines diverge or connect when it comes to knowing. Design development is often preceded by a thorough examination and interrogation of site, client objectives, needs and wants, stakeholders, users and life cycle considerations, producing a programming document that either informs or shapes the creative concept or expression. I was challenged to understand how this process translates in shaping an artistic response. Composer Julian Klein suggests in his paper "What is artistic research?", artistic research is dependent on examining and determining the method and motivation for a project-- regardless of the discipline, research is the aim for knowledge. Process becomes a part of the product in the design response, whereas for an artistic response it creates an experience. Klein proposes research methods can become a part of the artistic experience, describing artistic experience as a form of reflection, and most importantly, the knowledge for which artistic research strives is a *felt* knowledge. (Klein, 2017)

In both my art and design practice I typically begin work with reading, questioning, and exploring, followed by searching for, selecting or understanding a site, studying the site and recording observations. During this time I begin to unload my ideas, thoughts, and preconceived responses (relating to shape, form, and expression). I include details, notes, and new perspectives gleaned from my research, considering connections and adjacencies. The ideation process is intertwined at this stage, looping in and out, backwards and forwards until a concept and/or form takes shape before progressing to test and evolve the idea or concept in relation to material exploration, orientation (site), and expression.

The idea for the *Queer Heritage* project developed while walking around my neighbourhood. I stopped to read some of the many Vancouver Heritage building signs on old houses, buildings and parks. I thought of the blue plaques installed by English Heritage (a government sponsored charity organization) that I'd happen upon in the UK fixed to buildings, pubs, shops etc. identifying a place a famous person may have frequented, the home or work place of an influential historical character etc.. I began searching for plaques noting queer places or figures of importance, and was unable to find any official city funded plaques of the sort in Vancouver. Embarking on a wider search, I came across the Masha P Johnson memorial plaque (Fig. 01), created by a group of writers, artists and scholars identified as REPOhistory, noting the site in New York, USA where her dead (most likely murdered) body was found. In London, England, I found a rogue blue plaque created and installed in 2016 by the Sexual Avengers, a queer activist network, outside the Admiral Duncan pub (Fig.02), a well known gay pub, memorializing the homophobic hate crime in 1999 which left 3 people dead, and 79 seriously injured.

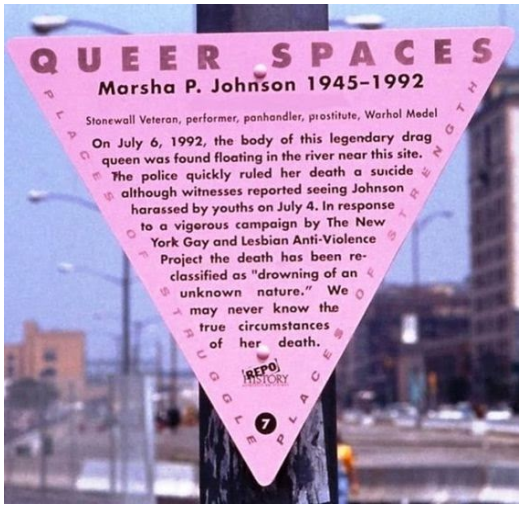

Fig. 01 *Queer Spaces Marsha P. Johnson Plaque*, REPOHistory, 1994, New York, USA

Fig. 02 *The Admiral Duncan Pub Plaque*, Sexual Avengers, 2016, London, England

In my attempts to locate records of queer space, I was reminded of the overwhelming weight of queer history, so deeply entrenched in violence, and oppression. As critical as it is to memorialize 'never again' moments in history, by solely creating awareness around events rooted in hate, violence and loss, the hard won queer spaces that promote visibility and wins seem to be missed, and by missed, these wins are too easily erased. Instead of focusing on loss, I wanted to uncover and celebrate queer history and queer space with the hope of influencing a paradigm shift that might better facilitate connection and belonging.

Identifying space is challenging when hate crimes and safety are still a present threat. However, I believe the absence of recognizing them contributes to a culture of erasure, leaving young queers, or closeted queers significantly more isolated. At this point I began to imagine a series of *Queer Heritage* markers that would share some of the queer spaces, events, and places in

Fig. 03 *Little Sister's Queer Heritage Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2019, Davie Street, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 04 *The Drive Queer Heritage Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2019, Commercial Drive, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 05 *Lotus Hotel Queer Heritage Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2019, Abbott Street, Vancouver, Canada

Vancouver. I felt it would be important to create a sign that looked enough like an official City of Vancouver sign, that people would be unlikely to damage or remove them, while lending a sense of importance and reverence to the site.

I modified the design of the City of Vancouver Heritage Building signs to create *Queer Heritage* plaques for three locations: Little Sister's Book & Art Emporium on Davie Street (Fig. 03), The Drive (neighbourhood) on Commercial Drive (Fig. 04), and The Lotus Hotel on Pender Street and Abbott (Fig. 05). After trying to recreate the three dimensionality of the official Heritage Building signs with a CNC on MDF and painting them, I found the process to be too labour intensive and the end result looked neither professional or polished enough to pass as an official sign. I took a step back and focused on the information I want to communicate with the signs and streamlined the idea of a plaque into an all weather vinyl mounted on a painted MDF backing. I installed the signs with double sided Gorilla adhesive to locations I'd already located at the various sites. I installed the signs on Pride weekend, 2019 wearing a high visibility vest and hard hat, attempting to pass as a city worker to discourage passers by from questioning the installation. It worked. Installing the sign in Gastown at the Lotus Hotel, two different police cruisers passed me on the step ladder sign in hand without a second look. A year and a half later, two of the signs remain in place, and look much the same as the day they were installed.

"We don't see public space as neutral or abstract. We take queerness out of the 'abstract' and enact a queer conversation out in public. Historically, public space has held a contradiction for queer people; on the one hand we have been invisible and on the other hand we are frequently the target of violence in public. Part of the impulse in making this work has been to let other queer people know that we are here, that queer people are everywhere-- simply put, we make ourselves visible."

Fierce Pussy, *Queer. Documents of Contemporary Art*

CHAPTER 3

Monuments and non-uments

The artists I find myself inspired by and drawn to produce work that speaks in it's own way to belonging through site specificity. From Rachel Whiteread's early work capturing the negative space of domestic objects and furniture, to her larger scale works like *Ghost, House, Holocaust Memorial,* and *Monument/Plinth*, her materials, use of multiples, scale, exploration of site and monumentalization, uncovers new perspectives along with a reconsideration of representation, space, presence, loss and absence. Whiteread presents spaces that feel familiar yet are disorientating, encouraging us to rethink how space works or worked.

Fig. 06 *House*, Rachel Whiteread, 1993, East London, England

House was a cast of the negative space inside a Victorian house in East London, responding in part to the gentrification of the area. You see the indentations of the trim and windows, the doors and panelling. Whiteread filled with concrete the interior of the house. Space previously filled with life, patterns of movement, connection and home evolved into a monument to all that transpired within the walls. *House* claimed space on the site as a temporary marker, a remembrance or ghost of space once occupied with life and movement. Four months after *House* was completed, it was demolished to clear the lot for development. All that remains now of this work is the photo/film documentation and stories that remember and mythologise it, transmuting the physical space into temporal space. In this way, *House* became untethered from the very specific site it occupied, and immediately became relatable to every neighbourhood or home experiencing the various stages of redevelopment, gentrification, or densification.

I wonder, does it matter if there is a sign or homage to recognize the exact place where the work once stood, or does it add more value for it to be recognized or discovered by chance. The entire lifecycle of *House* as an artwork was on display for the general public at no fee. The proposal, creation, installation and demolishment of the work occurred in the open rather than behind the closed walls of a studio. The neighbours and community were able to watch it

transform, grow, then disappear. A simple iron fence stood between the street and the work, separating the development site from the sidewalk, more as a measure of the developer's land ownership rather than a means to identify the work as precious. Whiteread's *House* attracted thousands of people and initiated conversations challenging and questioning urban planning and development— not necessarily critiquing it, but most certainly challenging it.

House captures and makes solid the liminal space, the intangible and elusive space that holds meaning and belonging. I look to this work and the idea of the space it occupies post demolishment, and this leads me to Gordon Matta-Clark's process of re-imagining architecture and spaces within buildings. Where Whiteread gives form to the formlessness, Matta-Clark explores formlessness by undoing and unbuilding. He described his work as an-architecture, sometimes hyphenating to identify it as a type of architecture, but also to describe it as an anarchic approach to architecture.

Fig. 07 "*Office Baroque, 5th Floor Looking Down*", Gordon Matta-Clark, 1977, Anvers, Belgium

Fig. 08 *Conical Intersect*, Gordon Matta-Clark, 1975, Paris, France

Matta-Clark's work cuts into the body of a place, through the structure, splitting it so one can see through/out with a new perspective. Matta-Clark used existing spaces / places for his work, purchasing or acquiring access to buildings either condemned or slated for demolition. As with Whiteread's *House*, Matta-Clark's work was also temporary. Only his photo documentation and films remain of the physical spaces. His spaces immediately convert from the physical to temporal— by cracking a house or building open, he lets the light in to grow thoughts, ideas, insights and stories.

Matta-Clark saw his cuts as unifying space, by disengaging points of support. He described his spatial subversions as splitting and unbuilding, destructur-ing, de-functionalizing, and undoing. He created transgressive non-uments stating that "architecture is never an action or something that can be made. It is an elusive, subversive condition that is always already there in the cracks." (Wigley, 20) By converting place into a state of mind by liberating space with his cuts, his work was subtractive rather than additive, and he recognized that rethinking architecture is inevitably political. His work was less about intervention and more focused on uncovering something that was already there, "unfolding" other ways of seeing and experiencing. I am drawn to Matta-Clark's re-imagining and disassembling of the built environment & how that affects the idea of place. His anarchic approach to manipulating perspective, and re-imagining space and experience by removing elements rather than adding offers a valuable line of inquiry when attempting to disrupt or destabilize ideas of normative behaviour, thought and experience.

Architect Mark Wigley presents Matta-Clark's photographic documentation of his work, interviews, statements, and correspondence along with conversations with conflicting memories of Matta-Clark's fellow artists that comprised of the Anarchitecture Group in the early 1970's to present a clear understanding of Matta-Clark's exploration into the conceptual development of his building cuts, the subsequent documentation and presentation of this work. "Anarchitecture can only be pointed to with a certain canniness. It might be possible to document it by shifting our understanding of documentation— but it can never be designed as such. The very idea of design is one of its first victims." (Wigley, 21)

I question how Matta-Clark's re-imagining and disassembling of the built environment affects the idea of place. His anarchic approach to manipulating perspective, the imagining of space through a subtractive practice offers a new line of inquiry within my work. As I explore monumentalization, I am excited to consider Matta-Clark's non-uments as an opportunity to deconstruct place to create queer space.

Fig. 09 Melly Shum Hates Her Job, Ken Lum, 1989, Rotterdam, Netherlands

In contrast, Ken Lum's work explores issues around identity and spatial politics. His work *Melly Shum Hates Her Job*, employs the medium of an advertising tool, a billboard, to sell nothing. Melly is smiling and appears happy; however the text suggests otherwise. There are no answers, simply an announcement. The billboard was installed on the side of the former Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam in 1990 (the centre renamed itself the Kunstinstituut Melly in October 2020 in recognition of the negative impacts of colonialism as Witte de With was a Dutch naval agent in the 1600's). The work was intended to remain in place for the 6 month duration of Lum's show as a means of promotion, although Lum requested that no accompanying information (his name, dates/hours) be included. After the show wrapped, the work was removed. However the local community overwhelmed the centre with calls, letters and petitions demanding the museum reinstate *Melly Shum Hates Her Job,* proclaiming every city deserves a monument for people who hate their jobs. Melly was re-installed and remains in place to this day. Within six months the advertisement for the show had transformed into a monument. Melly and her story grew into the community's day, passing by her in the morning, returning home in the evening from work that may or may not be rewarding or loved. People connected with Melly, and this work brought them together.

I am curious about the community's attachment to Melly. Lum's piece doesn't share details about why she hates her job. She doesn't appear to be doing anything about it, and she certainly doesn't seem stressed. I wonder if the piece leaves enough room for people to be curious about her why, enabling them to project their own experience or story onto hers, and in this way Melly is publicly speaking a truth they may be unwilling to face or address. Melly occupies not only a physical space, but also a temporal space. She is a cue for people to connect with each other and their own truth. I believe this piece is more accessible and open to public ownership because it was installed without explanation, authorship, or identification

noting "this is art". The quirky randomness is personal and human, connecting us to our commonalities and as a result, each other.

Claiming Space

Sitting in Grandview Park during the festival following the Dyke March, Pride weekend 2017, my friend Cynthia Brooke (former Vancouver Lesbian Avenger & member of Act Up) and I chatted about queer visibility and queer space. We laughed sarcastically at how 'dudes' could land a city sanctioned park sign by identifying it as 'art'— As humorous as the Dude Chilling Park name and idea is, the sign became a permanent installation thanks to neighbourhood support of a racist and classist petition. We talked about the loss of Lesbian clubs and spaces— including The Lotus Lounge, a place we both used to frequent, now known as The Pint, boasting a 'bro' atmosphere and culture that couldn't be less welcoming to lesbians or queers. We joked if dudes who have always enjoyed the run of the city could claim a park, what's stopping dykes from doing the same thing? Grandview Park, a park with a most certainly grand view, could very accurately be described as Dyke Chilling Park. More days than not the park is filled with dykes. We laughed, then were quiet before turning to look at each other saying at the same time, 'we could do this, we could make this happen'.

The following year, early in the morning, before heading to the rally point at McSpadden Park for the 2018 Dyke March, Cynthia and I installed a temporary replica of a Vancouver City Park sign, on top of the Grandview Park sign on Commercial Drive in East Vancouver re-naming the park Dyke Chilling Park. We set up an IG account @queerspacing, determining Queer Spacing could/would be an ad hoc Collective, the account could potentially a platform to support a petition for the install of a permanent Dyke Chilling Park sign, and Cynthia's Dyke Manifesto:

> Dyke Chilling Park is an ironic self reference. Being a dyke is not ever chill, it is to be always aware of being singled out, called out and shut out. Dykes have been marching to and from Grandview Park for over 30 years. The history woven in between the benches, and lawns hold the memories of countless meetings to work out place and eke out a space in this city on stolen land. The word dyke is a rough word, less noun than adjective, rarely objective, mostly derogative. The word dyke asks us who is left behind. Dykes marching will always be a protest, never polite. Being a dyke will sooner get you bashed in the street than invited to a parade. Dykes are most often beyond definition. We can be, though are not limited to femme, 2spirit, butch, kiki, trans, young, brown, non binary, black, kinky, political, indigenous, old, asexual, nelly, ugly, nasty, and trouble.

> Dykes are raging, unforgiving, and rarely forgiven. The word dyke is only beautiful in the mouth of a lover. Dyke Chilling Park is a protest, a recognition of queer space, a declaration of pride, and ultimately, a place for lovers.

The sign was met with support and joy from people within the park and on the street— whether they were dykes, with dykes, attending the festival, hanging out in the park, walking by or enjoying brunch across the street. The sign brought recognition and visibility to a community that struggles so frequently with the absence of safe space, lack of privilege, and no invitation to belong without the proviso of assimilation. The Grandview Woodland neighbourhood and Commercial Drive community have long relied on Grandview park as a safe queer space for its ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population, and the park has provided an accessible location for community events, concerts, picnics, sports, and for over 30 years, hosted the Stonewall Festival, East Side Pride and the annual Dyke March & Festival.

FIG. 10 *Dyke Chilling Park*, Cynthia Brooke & Andrea Finlay, 2018, Vancouver, Canada

By not identifying the *Dyke Chilling Park* and the *Queer Heritage* signs as art, and omiting authorship, the community was able to connect and claim ownership of the signs. The sign inspired more art, including the Instagram post by Trish Holowczenko @take_the_jet (Fig.13) captioned "on reclamation". When the *Dyke Chilling Park* sign was eventually destroyed, an exchange on the empty space of the sign commenced— someone writing in Sharpie "Dyke Chilling Park", subsequently crossed out, followed by the application of stickers and more Dyke Chilling Park tags. The petition to have a *Dyke Chilling Park* sign permanently installed as an art piece was unsuccessful, however the following year The Queer Spacing ad hoc Collective (this time consisting of Cynthia Brooke, Ifetayo Alabi, and Anonymous 89 & 79) installed a "*Trans**

Chilling Park" sign on the morning of the Dyke March, 2019 as a rebellious response to the protests and propaganda circulated by TERFS (Trans exclusionary radical feminists). The demonstration of solidarity with Trans folk was particularly poignant and timely, and evidence of a positive legacy established by our first disruptive sign. Meanwhile, *Dyke Chilling Park* lives on in the stickers we handed out, the selfies and social media posts the queer community posted with the sign, and you can still "check in" to Dyke Chilling Park on Google Maps.

FIG. 11
Dyke Chilling Park sign deconstructed

FIG. 12
Trans Chilling Park*, Queer Spacing Collective, 2019, Vancouver, Canada

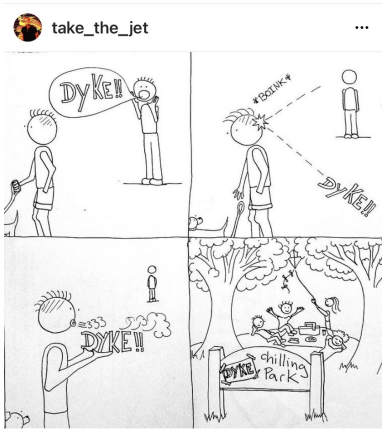

FIG. 13
on reclamation, Trish Holowczenko @take_the_jet, 2018, Instagram post

When considering the importance of place, visibility is crucial. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan notes the impact of the past on the present does not exist unless the past is memorialized in history-- books, monuments or other methods that have the potential to become an ongoing tradition. (174) When the queer community is presented with an incomplete history highlighted with acts of violence, shame and oppression, countered with the extreme of celebratory events like Pride, a massive gap forms between the two where both an individual and collective sense of self is left with very little ground to grow a sense of belonging or connection. This proves problematic when the creation of place is reliant on people getting to know one another. (Love, 28) Looking into Vancouver's queer history there is no comprehensive record of the past that can be located in one place: No single book, website, organization or collection exists, only fragments, most of which remain scattered on the internet or in the hazy memories of community members. With respect to public memorials in the built environment, we can look to the Vancouver AIDS memorial at Sunset Beach in Vancouver's West End memorializing the lives lost to AIDS, and a Plaza named after Jim Deva, the longtime community gay rights activist, founder of Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium, and advocate for Vancouver's LGBTQ2+ community. The plaza has an information plaque and commemorative art piece in the form of a Megaphone sculpture at

Davie and Bute at the rainbow crosswalks, however there is little else of permanence in the city that shares or connects the queer community with the past in the city.

Naming or claiming a place is bound to power, power dynamics and ownership. Vancouver's colonial past and present is reflected in the shape and names of the built landscape developed by either intentionally or passively destroying, erasing, and disregarding Indigenous place names along with the Indigenous Nations that lived and cared for this land for millenia prior to European discovery. Claiming, naming and renaming place has been a display of the settler's power and assertion of ownership. This is a pattern I wish to disrupt by identifying queer space rather than claiming it, and decolonizing homophobia by subverting the existing colonial power dynamics.

"Queer objects support proximity between those who are supposed to live on parallel lines, *as points that should not meet*. A queer object hence makes contact possible. Or, to be more precise, a queer object would have a surface that supports such contact. The contact is bodily, and it unsettles that line that divides spaces as worlds, thereby creating other kinds of connections where unexpected things can happen."

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*

CHAPTER 4

Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you

The Lesbian Avengers, a direct action group focused on, as described in their handbook " issues vital to lesbian survival and visibility", was founded in New York City in 1992 by Sarah Schulman, Ana Maria Simo, Maxine Wolfe, Anne-Christine D'Adesky, Marie Honan and Anne Maguire— six longtime lesbian activists and friends. The group organized events, ran culture jamming campaigns, public addresses, public art projects and agitprop actions. Rather than focusing on traditional methods of protest, the group was creative in drawing attention to critical issues by staging dramatic actions often involving humour and creativity. In 1993 The Avengers organized the first Dyke March, an event that continues to this day in cities around the world.

The Lesbian Avengers contributed to increasing queer visibility, while addressing identity politics and asserting queer space by claiming space without invitation. Their work is inspiring, and legendary. The means with which they rallied communities into action was detailed by Sarah Schulman in their handbook, and serves as a key resource and blueprint for organizing actions to this day.

The celebration and embrace of difference in attempts to exist and build outside the capitalistic structure by disrupting histories of oppression, violence and erasure inspires the expression and motivation of my art practice. The rawness, humour, imperfection and temporary nature of the Avengers' actions proved an effective approach at connecting and building the queer community while promoting visibility and change. The Lesbian Avengers inspired Cynthia Brooke and I directly in creating the *Dyke Chilling Park* sign, and the Avengers handbook and manifesto is a formula I considered when conceptualizing the Queer Heritage markers.

The following is a quote from *The Lesbian Avenger Handbook: A Handy Guide to Homemade Revolution*

> **Concepts:** What is the goal of this action? Who are we trying to reach? What is our message?
>
> **Logistics:** What are the time, date, place and length of the action? Do these choices make sense given the goals and message of the action? How much space do we have? Will the action take place inside or outside? Are there any obstructions? Where are the entrances and exits? Will we have to contend with security? Will the action take place on public or private property? How wide is the street for banners and props? The location needs to be scouted as early as possible. How many people will be participating? Will they be Avengers only? Lesbians only? Anyone? What kinds of props and supplies are needed? Who will transport them to and from the action?
>
> **Tactics:** What type of action are we planning: symbolic, disruption/interference, education? Avoid old, stale tactics at all costs. Chanting, picketing and the like, alone no longer make an impression; standing passively and listening to speakers is boring and disempowering. Look for daring, new participatory tactics depending on the nature of your action.

Queerness exists here

In contrast to my design practice where projects are client driven, my art projects use a phenomenological approach to understand and explore the defining elements of queer space, querying the contrast between behaviour and experience when working and existing as a queer within public versus private space. As theorist Sarah Ahmed describes in her book *Queer Phenomenology* "what is queer is never, after all, exterior to its object". (106) As a designer I have built a career studying human behaviour through observation and autobiographical experience. I've worked at understanding how the built environment can shape or satisfy needs, wants, territoriality, how it can influence work, play, socialization and either build or limit

opportunities to build community and belonging. With my research into queer space, and within my attempts at queering space, I'm exploring disrupting the expected, creating moments of disorientation that place an unexpected object, idea or experience in place of one that is known or familiar-- literally queering the experience by disrupting expectations and outcomes. Thus phenomenology and queering are central in my artistic methodology, used as a strategy to subvert and use art as a form of intervention.

I've witnessed directly through my design practice and work with developers how the city is shaped to reinforce and reward the existing power structure(s), define and shape exclusive neighbourhoods, including using art to prime areas for gentrification / development. Financial return is a generative force in many cases to exclude and erase marginalized communities and individuals, including their histories in favour of more convenient stories that support and lend legitimacy to the branding and promotion of the new development. They support and shape the existing power structures culturally and politically, with little if any conversation or critical analysis surrounding benefit or value in investing in, recording, celebrating and promoting more honest and inclusive histories unless it affects their bottom line. From what I've discovered and observed, unless queerness directly touches one's life, the awareness of queer history outside of the dominant culture's rendition of the past rarely exists.

The queer community, within which there are varying levels of oppression, prejudice, violence, trauma and exclusion, often ongoing, has frequently been edged out and erased throughout the growth of Vancouver. With this reality in mind I question what does it take to shift this paradigm, to disorient and queer it? How can a more inclusive and accurate history and demarcation of presence and visibility be realized by a community that is already exhausted by the effort required to survive, let alone thrive in toxic and/or hostile environments? Can we use similar methods of priming: introducing queer art into the city's fabric quietly using a vernacular that already exists? How better to propose an alternative way of being, by including histories, events, locations that are too easily erased than by queering those spaces. Who notices, who is affected, impacted or benefits from this disorientation? Ahmed proposes "the point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do-- whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope." (158) Queering as a methodology presents an alternative to the status quo, encouraging critical engagement and discussion, providing a public connection that hopefully will initiate enough momentum to normalize and encourage community investment by drawing attention to what is missing, "to form new patterns and new ways of making sense." (Ahmed, 171) This strategy or tactical approach invites collaboration and solidarity through increased visibility and awareness.

"The 'elements' of architecture are not visual units or gestalt; they are encounters, confrontations that interact with memory. In such memory, the past is embodied in actions."

Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin, Architecture and the Senses*

CHAPTER 6

Queering the city

Not long after installing the first three Queer Heritage signs in 2019, I noticed the sign I'd installed on the building at Commercial Drive and Charles street had been removed. I asked one of the small business owners on the block if they had noticed when or who might have removed it, and I was directed to the building's resident manager Harry Grunsky. He was willing to talk with me, and explain why he'd removed the sign. We had a good conversation, at the end of which he returned the sign and gave me his phone number so I could connect with him at a later date. Harry had founded and run a cafe in the building in the 90s that had been one of the key business in the Commercial Drive area that encouraged a shift in the neighbourhood to accept and embrace the growing queer community. I had read about his cafe when compiling the information for 'The Drive' sign, and I realized this was an opportunity to connect and foster inclusivity by further growing this project. After engaging in more conversation with Harry earlier this year, and watching a series of interviews he'd done for an oral archivist, I planned a new sign for his building identifying his cafe as a Queer Heritage site, and decided to reinstall the original sign noting the the more general queer history of 'The Drive' further down the street.

During the first install in 2019 I printed some stickers leaving the bottom area of the sign blank and handed them out with sharpies to people at the Dyke March and at the Pride parade with the hope / intention people would write their own history / story and mount them around the city. Only a few went up— most people kept the stickers. However the conversations I had while handing out the stickers reaffirmed the value in promoting a visible queer history. Everyone I spoke to had ideas where they'd like to see a sign, and two years after the 2019 install, two of the three signs were still up and in good condition. I chose to interpret this as acceptance, and I felt it would be worthwhile to expand the project.

Through researching Harry's building, I learned more about the history of the BC Gay & Lesbian Archives. This led me to Ron Dutton, the archivist that founded, collected and safeguarded the Gay & Lesbian Archives in his home in Vancouver's West End for 40 years before donating them to the Vancouver City Archives in 2018. Ron was excited about my project and generous with his time, sharing details and notes about the history of the archives (which he continues to collect). I reached out to others directly or through queer facebook groups piecing together information about different spots around the city. Glenn Tkatch, storyteller and historian who created and leads The Really Gay History Tour for Vancouver's Forbidden Walking Tours was another fantastic connection who also was generous with his time, stories and information.

As I collected information and created a list of potential sites for a second install, I explored locations, groups, events and sites that might form further opportunities to bridge the diversity of Vancouver's multi-generational queer community. I looked into organizations promoting visibility and connection, queer artists and art: Out On Screen (Vancouver Queer Film Festival & Out In Schools), SUM Gallery (& Pride In Art Society), and the Vancouver Queer Arts Festival. I also focused on sites where political events or actions engaged and shaped Vancouver's queer present, for example The Vancouver Art Gallery Steps, a site of protest for the decriminilization of homosexuality in 1958, and the first protest for gay rights in 1971.

A significant challenge I encountered was sourcing information as there is no single source of written queer history in Vancouver. I searched and found fragments within the archives, printed articles, websites, oral history archives, and social media groups. I compiled what I could, then messaged, emailed and called anyone with contact info posted online. Many people didn't get back to me, some connected me with other sources, and several were thrilled to help. Then began the process of piecing together notes, and confirming details. Further complicating matters, many of the fuzzy memories shared in anecdotal stories and online posts often conflicted with information noted in articles which sometimes confused sites, events, timelines and groups. I sought consent from any individuals or groups I mentioned by name, then reviewed the sites to ensure I could mount the sign in a prominent enough spot that would also appear discreet enough that would suggest a committee might have agreed upon the placement.

Conscious of history unfolding as each day passes, I felt it important to not only focus on sites and events in the past, but also sites or groups actively shaping our queer future. I thought of a queer kid from a small town visiting Vancouver with their family, and what impact would visible signs celebrating queer community and history beyond Pride, and history cataloging queer wins versus violent attacks and prejudice might have. What connections or information would best help that kid? What information would have helped me feel less alone when I was growing up? Granted, the internet has opened up a new world of connection for youth and closeted queers that never existed before, there really is no substitution for live connections. I remember the profound feeling of belonging I experienced when submersed in my first queer space, surrounded by other queers. The memory of that feeling, and knowing where I can connect with it again supports me every day while I live and work bombarded with heteronormative messaging that excludes me from ever completely belonging.

I planned the install for a Sunday morning in early April, coinciding with the install of the MFA Thesis Exhibition in the Michael O'Brian Exhibition Commons (MOEC). I started in the West with the Vancouver City Archives (BC Gay & Lesbian Archives) (Fig. 15), followed by the Vancouver Art Gallery (site of gay rights protests) (Fig. 14), the City Centre Station at Granville and Georgia (The Really Gay History Tour start point accross from where the legendary Castle Hotel and bar had one stood) (Fig. 16), the Dominion building (Out On Screen) (Fig. 18), and the Sun Wah Building in Chinatown (SUM Gallery) (Fig. 17). I was aware several sites had cameras and or security patrols therefore I needed to be swift and discreet. After installing each sign, I photo documented the installation, and posted two locations a day on @queerheritagevan with the text on the sign as the description for the post. I tagged the location and anyone mentioned or featured on the sign.

Installing the signs in the midst of the COVID pandemic was a substantially different experience than a sunny Pride weekend at the peak of summer. I felt more conspicuous and actively observed. That said, only once was I asked what I was doing, to which I responded "installing a sign celebrating the queer history of Vancouver". I left room for them to form their own assumptions about legitimacy, and they returned with an offer to help. I was also closely observed putting up the sign for the Odyssey Nightclub on Howe (Fig. 19) by residents in the high rise that now stands in place of the low rise building the Odyssey used to occupy. The new building is owned and operated by the McLaren Housing Society, a non-profit organisation providing safe, secure and affordable housing and support services for individuals and families living with HIV & AIDS. Not long after the sign was up and I was off to the next site, the McLaren Society posted the Queer Heritage sign on their Facebook page. By the following day, their post had over one hundred shares across multiple groups, with comments sharing memories and experiences.

Fig. 14 *Vancouver Art Gallery Steps Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, Robson Square, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 15 *BC Gay & Lesbian Archives Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, 1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 16 *The Really Gay History Tour Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, Granville & Georgia, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 17 *SUM Gallery & Pride In Art Society Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, 268 Keefer Street, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 18 *Out On Screen Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021,207 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 19 *The Odyssey Nightclub Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, 1251 Howe Street, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 20 *Queer Arts Festival Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, Roundhouse Community Centre, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 21 *The Shaggy Horse Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, 818 Richards Street, Vancouver, Canada

I continued with the Roundhouse Community Centre (Queer Arts Ferstival) (Fig. 20), then on to Richards Street (Fig. 21) where the former Shaggy Horse was demolished to make way for a parking lot (the site is now under construction and I plan to return when construction is complete to install the sign). Heading east, I stopped in Gastown at the Lotus Hotel to clean up the sign I installed in 2019. I had noticed a sticker covering part of the sign last time I'd been in the area. As I removed the sticker, I quickly realized the sticker was covering up a swastika someone had painted on the sign. Fortunately I had a pocket knife and was able to remove the swastika, then moved on to reinstall the Commercial Drive sign from 2019 at Parker and Commercial Drive (Fig. 22). The final sign installed was Harry's Off Commercial sign at 1716 Charles Street (Fig. 23). I met Harry outside his building, and we chatted as I put the sign up. By the end of the day, his Facebook post about the sign had received over 100 comments and 'likes' congratulating and celebrating him and his legacy in the neighbourhood.

Fig. 22 *'The Drive' Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021,Commercial & Parker, Vancouver, Canada

Fig. 23 *Harry's Off Commercial Site Install*, Andrea Finlay, 2021, 1716 Charles Street, Vancouver, Canada

Thesis exhibition

Determining what to present in the MOEC gallery space was a challenge. With the physical work installed at various sites in the city, this left me with a space in the gallery to fill... or not. I considered mounting a Queer Heritage sign in the gallery space, however a sign removed from

the context of site, I felt it wasn't the right option. Ideally I wanted people to get out of the gallery and into the city to discover the Queer Heritage markers in situ. Timing the city install with the gallery install ensured a higher chance of catching the signs before any might be removed or damaged, however it didn't leave time for me to print and install the photo documentation in the gallery.

I reflected on the context maps commonly found in presentation centres selling condo developments, demonstrating the desirability and walkability of the neighbourhood with examples of "get your coffee/yoga/dog groomed/shopping/nails done here". The connection to Vancouver's development and growth felt like a good fit. I also enjoyed the idea of queering a tool that had been used to erase queer histories from developing neighbourhoods. In place of a developer's logo to mark the spots of interest, I used the reclaimed symbol for gays/lesbians and queers, an inverted triangle spray painted on in a Gay Pink, to mark the locations of the signs on the map. I noted the IG account on the wall, hand written in a paint pen, and installed a plinth with take-away maps of the sign locations printed on light cardstock, with the phrase "THE QUEERS ARE HERE" on the back.

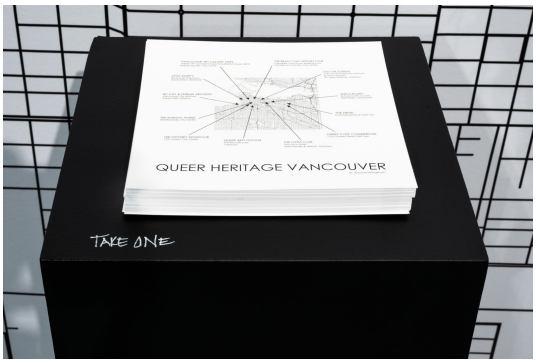

Fig. 24 & 25 Queer Space-- A. Finlay Thesis Exhibition, Michael Love, 2021, MOEC, Emily Carr University of Art & Design

The context map is strong and arresting, however it doesn't explicitly describe what the project is about. I feel the space it takes up and the attention it demands is successful, that said, however much I appreciate the suggestive quality conceptually, I believe there are some connections that are missed as a result. In addition, aesthetically the exhibition install is very different from the city install, and I feel a more visible or direct connection would have helped to connect the two. Perhaps if I'd installed some paste-ups of the signs in a black and white xerox format as one

might find plastered on construction hoarding, filled the wall with the text from the signs, or simply written @queerheritageinvan in the centre of the wall, I might have connected the exhibition space with the signs/project more successfully. More than anything, the install in and outside of the gallery has opened up more questions, ideas and opportunities. Initially I had viewed the city as the (alternative) gallery space, however I soon came to realize the Instagram account was the gallery. Reading through the comments on the Instagram account, and Facebook postings I recognize this forum opened up another world I wasn't quite prepared for, and will need to explore the opportunities on these platforms in more depth. As much as I personally use and enjoy Instagram, social anxiety and introversion leave me feeling uncomfortable engaging with people on this medium beyond posting, sharing and 'likes'.

Several people and organizations featured on some of the signs, were eager to share the signs online themselves. They checked in for permission to credit me with authorship as they were aware I'd installed the signs anonymously. I thought it through and although I wasn't working too hard at keeping a secret, I felt it was best to remain anonymous. Especially after reading through some of the comments on their initial postings, I saw people congratulating them for their work being recognised and celebrated publicly (clearly assuming the city was behind the signs). At this time I also became very conscious of the potential for this project to transform from an art project into a "what if" or proposal for a city supported initiative.

The Monday after my install, I had a conversation with one of the city archivists about the sign I'd mounted on their building. She was supportive of the project, and initially said she would have sanctioned the install if I'd asked for permission first. However within moments noted she would have had to request permission from management where the request likely would have been turned down or been delayed by months with no guarantee they would be able to approve it. She continued to say now that it was up, it had become a talking point in the office. They recognised although some people would be unhappy the sign was there, most (and they had already received overwhelmingly positive feedback on the presence of the sign) would celebrate its presence, and now that it was up, it would be difficult to remove it without creating upset.

I've been quite surprised the sign installed at the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) has remained up even two weeks on. As the sign was not specifically about the VAG, rather more specifically about the public forum associated with the steps facing Robson Square, I tagged the VAG in the social media post, but did not approach them before the install for permission to name them on the plaque. Prior to the VAG occupying the building in 1983, it was home to the Provincial Courthouse, and thus a site often used as a rallying point or site for protests, and the steps have continued the tradition as a site for public gatherings, candle light vigils after tragedies, protests and performances.

Following the install, several people have reached out to me with connections to city officials interested in evolving the Queer Heritage signs into a permanent install, and another with an invitation to speak at a heritage group event. A few of the people I spoke with while gathering information for the signs also expressed interest and support in collaborating on a book to document Vancouver's queer history. These opportunities are exciting, and directions I look forward to exploring further. I am confident this project will continue to grow and transform in the months and years to come. In the meantime I have a couple of updates to make to a few of the signs. During my defence, artist Paul Wong, my external reviewer noted the SUM gallery sign in Chinatown would communicate a more authentic commitment to decolonizing history if the text on the sign was also included in chinese— I wholeheartedly agree, and plan to update the sign soon.

AWESTRUCK [VERB]

1. to quit
building bomb shelters
to keep the universe
from blowing your mind.
Andrea Gibson, *Lord of the Butterflies*

CHAPTER 6

Not a conclusion

How can we identify what belonging is without first describing what it isn't along with who doesn't belong. One of the first and most influential places that shapes and either damages or comforts us is 'home', or rather the idea of home. My design practice has been focused on creating and shaping home through an understanding of how tightly home is connected to identity, behaviour, conditioning and belonging. My art practice explores inviting a sense of belonging to place in the absence and erasure of queer history and presence.

I see common threads running between my queerness and my artistic influences: refusal, dissent, anti-assimilation. Where normal is a silent authority, queer represents the other, the not normal. In identifying or defining queer space, queering space, or querying a place, I believe an invitation is created to reframe, re-visit place, space, and lives lived in a new and powerful way promoting belonging and visibility. Humour, outrage, aggression and discomfort feed the disruption of connecting what is known, expected, to what is out of place, who is rejected, uninvited or under-represented and how they occupy space. I will continue to investigate mending connections with place through building relationships between the emotional response and reactivity between people and space by challenging expectations.

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