

COUNTERV(E)IL: TRUTH, APOSTASY AND THE ANXIOUS OBJECT

by

Susan M. Brandoli

BA, University of Regina, 1982

BFA, University of Regina, 1983

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

The College of Graduate Studies

Interdisciplinary Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Okanagan)

March 2009

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Abstract

The original form of the word countervail is defined as to act or avail against with equal power, force, or effect, to counteract or offset, or to be of equal force in opposition. Similarly, Counterv(e)il plays with the origins of the original word, countervail, and its meaning, and also conjures associations of veiling and masking, merging these concepts under the banner of a type of surveillance, concealment and revealing. To counterv(e)il is to effect an intervention, and also a counter-action, an act of agency and equality.

The significance of an image may well disturb when it is displaced from its habitual surroundings, where it becomes an “anxious object”. The written thesis and two accompanying exhibitions in installation, video, and performance – Counterv(e)il: Desire and Counterv(e)il: Conceal – explore ideas of binary oppositions: interior/exterior, private/public, nature/culture, truth/fiction, presence/absence and both the reclamation and rejection of beliefs; but they also investigate the connections that intertwine, unite, and bind these seeming oppositions by both confronting and blurring dualisms. The written thesis, Counterv(e)il, as a whole also can be seen as an exploration of connections to relevant theoretical writings and contemporary artists, establishing links of observation between issues of surveillance, desire and the gaze, abjection, subjectivity and performativity, liminalities and rhizomatic connections within the conceptual framework of the anxious object.

When encountering the “anxious object,” we are confronted with a constructed and often ambiguous situation outside of our accustomed level of comfort, forcing us to devise new strategies for making sense of the world, forge new interpretations and links between object and subject. The power of objects to generate feelings of anxiety, to question our preconceptions and construct new associations, allows the exploration of new territories of desire and remembrance. These objects of desire meld into each other, lose and reform their identity, take on new meanings and relationships, to be imagined, experienced, remembered and forgotten.

Through the private transformation of public spaces, sites of installation such as Counterv(e)il present us with chains of meanings, bringing into question our perceptions of what is real and what is fiction: a kind of heterotopia, a misplacement or displacement, a counter-site that represents, contests and inverts reality.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge the many friends and colleagues who assisted and supported me in my journey to obtain my Interdisciplinary Master of Fine Arts degree.

Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Supervisor: Gary Pearson

Committee Members: Dr. Jennifer Gustar, Neil Cadger, Denise Kenney, James Kalnin

Adjunct Committee Members: Byron Johnston, Mary Daniel

University Examiner: Dr. Hussein Kushani

Chairperson: Stephen Foster

Instructors Dr. Jodey Castricano, Dr. Ilya Parkins

Live performers: MaryAnn Lawrenchuk and Christina Smyth (Illust. 1 & 2).

Video Performer: My daughter, Emilia Brandoli (Illust. 3).

Additional Documentary Photographers/Videographers: Richard Vignola, Alan Brandoli

The UBC Okanagan FINA technical and secretarial staff, particularly Michael Berger, Maureen Lisle, Don Lyon, Mona Butt, and Linda Falkingham.

The FINA faculty, FCCS, IGS, and the College of Graduate Studies at UBC Okanagan.

The faculty of Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, who provided me with opportunities to teach (and earn income) while completing my degree at UBCO.

My family and friends, who always offered their unconditional support.

1. Introduction

I am well aware that I have not written anything but fictions ...which is not to say that they have nothing to do with the truth. – Michel Foucault (P/K 193)

The thesis exhibitions of *Counterv(e)il* are divided into two separate works, *Counterv(e)il: Desire* exhibited in the Project Gallery of the Alternator Gallery for Contemporary Art, Kelowna, British Columbia, from August 22 - October 3, 2008, and *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* exhibited at the FINA Gallery at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, Kelowna, from September 3 - 26, 2008. *Counterv(e)il: Desire* can be seen as a transitional work, a working out of ideas, and as a bridge between past work into the main thesis installation, *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, and is presented as such within the context of this paper.

An image will most often disturb when it is displaced from its habitual surroundings, when it becomes the anxious object. This supposition forms the basis of the exhibitions in both spaces. The written thesis and two accompanying installations, *Counterv(e)il: Desire* and *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, explore ideas of binary oppositions: interior/exterior, private/public, nature/culture, truth/fiction, presence/absence and both the reclamation and rejection of beliefs, but also investigates the connections that intertwine, unite, and bind these seeming oppositions by both confronting and blurring dualisms. The written thesis *Counterv(e)il*, as a whole, also can be seen as an exploration of connections to relevant theoretical writings and contemporary artists, establishing links of observation between issues of surveillance, desire and the gaze, subjectivity and performativity, liminalities and rhizomatic connections within the conceptual framework of the anxious object. The theory backgrounds the artwork. However, rather than providing a strict theoretical framework for the exhibitions, it informs, but does not dictate. My interest in theoretical engagement provides a map for exploration of the art works, tracking a sampling of certain theoretical

perspectives and ideas that appear throughout both exhibitions, as a critical reflection on the work.

When encountering the “anxious object,” a term first coined by art critic Harold Rosenberg, we are confronted with a constructed and often ambiguous situation outside of our accustomed level of comfort. The anxious object confounds, angers, perhaps bores – but ultimately forces one to question what is thought to be perceived, to devise new strategies for making sense of the world, new interpretations and links between object and subject (Illust. 4).

The act of observing can take on many forms. In *Social Acupuncture*, Darren O’Donnell describes surveillance as being observation from above, as from the French ‘sur,’ and he compares this to ‘sousveillance,’ a term he credits to self-proclaimed cyborg Steve Mann¹, who describes sousveillance as the process of turning the cameras around and pointing them up at authority. O’Donnell’s concept of social acupuncture is another incarnation of such conceptual play, what he terms ‘entreveillance’: observation from between or within, the scrutiny of one another within a dynamic of relatively evenly distributed power, where the observer can walk away from the camera at any point and the interest is in observing the mundane rather than anything spectacular (O’Donnell 61).

Counterv(e)illance, therefore, could be described as a response to O’Donnell’s entreveillance.

The original form of the word “countervail” is defined as follows:

1. to act or avail against with equal power, force, or effect; counteract.
2. to furnish an equivalent of or a compensation for; offset.
3. Archaic. to equal.

¹Steve Mann, ‘ “Sousveillance”: Inverse Surveillance in Multimedia Imaging,’ http://www.eyetap.org/papers/docs/acmmm2004sousveillance_p620-mann/

–verb (used without object)

4. to be of equal force in opposition; avail.²

The title, *Counterv(e)il*, plays with the origins of the original word, countervail, and its meaning, bringing these ideas under the “observation” of a type of surveillance.

Counterv(e)illance, in this respect, is also an entreveillance, an intervention of sorts, and also a counter-action, an act of agency and equality.

Director Anne Bogart writes that to observe is to disturb, reminding us that quantum physics teaches us that the act of observation alters the thing observed. “To observe,” she writes, “is not a passive verb” (Bogart 72). She further states that we all live in-between – in the space between ourselves and the object of our interest. In bridging this gap, she explains,

we travel outward to make contact with the other. The word interest is derived from the Latin *interesse* which is the combination of *inter* (between) and *esse* (to be): to be between. The state of interest is a liminal experience – the sensation of a threshold. Interest is personal and temporal. It changes, it vacillates and should be attended to in every moment because it is a guide (Bogart 77).

One can also not discount the other association with the word *counterv(e)illance*, that of the homonym *valence*, defined as:

- (1) *Chemistry* The number of binding sites of a molecule, such as an antibody or antigen.
- (2) The ability of a substance to interact with another or to produce an effect.
- (3) *Psychology* The degree of attraction or aversion that an individual feels toward a specific object or event.
- (4) *Linguistics* The number of arguments that a lexical item, especially a verb, can combine with to make a syntactically well-formed sentence, often along with a description of the categories of those constituents. Intransitive verbs (appear, arrive) have a valence of one—the subject; some transitive verbs (paint, touch), two—the subject and direct object; other transitive verbs (ask, give), three—the subject, direct object, and indirect object.

²Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. 16 Jun. 2008. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/countervail>>

(5) The capacity of something to unite, react, or interact with something else.³

Counterv(e)illance, then, suggests an alternate interpretation or meaning. In the liminal spaces that exist between objects, meaning (or truth) is often open to interpretation and a multiplicity of meanings (polyvalence). Meaning can also be misinterpreted, reinterpreted, or even deferred, deliberately or inadvertently. In this respect, objects, forms and ideas combine with the presence of surveillance as a formative act that shapes our experience, and possibly our actions.

³ Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. 16 Feb. 2009.
valence

2. The Alternator Project Gallery: *Counterv(e)il: Desire*

2.1 Transition, Time and Memory

Feminist art critic Peggy Phelan once wrote: “performance is the art form which most fully understands the generative possibilities of disappearance.” The two installations comprising *Counterv(e)il* as a whole, attempt to mirror but also to challenge the (in)stability of space, time and memory, offering a kind of escape from a perceived reality which no longer offers stable boundaries. Many of our most memorable experiences are those perhaps filled with disorientation and uncertainty, Freud’s familiar made strange via the uncanny juxtaposition of objects, time and space. We search for connections between objects, a kind of reconciliation between knowing and perceiving. Although similarities offer a more comforting place of acknowledgement, they may also conversely highlight difference.

Static notions of space and time are disrupted and replaced by multiple spaces and environments, as well as partial, simultaneous events – related but separated (Illust. 5). We make public space private via transformation. Through this transformation, we are presented with a chain of meanings, questioning our perceptions of what is real and what is fiction, what Foucault would term a kind of heterotopia, a misplacement or displacement, or counter-sites that represent, contest and invert reality.

Memory is a shifting experience, and can be questioned, changed, manipulated and embellished over time. Even photography, or video and film, media which seemingly would appear to be capable of capturing that moment of pure truth, can be misrepresented or reformulated to express a new truth through errors of omission such as cropping and framing, or taking out of context. How is it possible to trust what we are seeing and hearing? Does repetition allude to truth? The recent phenomenon of false memory calls into question the historiography of memory, which I will return to later.

Our identity, that person we are in the process of forever becoming, is assembled over time through experience, assimilation, reasoning, forgetting, selective rejection and acceptance. Often it is the gestures and repetitive motions of life, as well as the sights, sounds and smells,

that form memory and sculpt our identity. Colours, too, are a method of connecting memory and events. Specific places can act as borderland or boundary where those who populate this liminal space act and react in between the existing texts, performing and re-performing certain gestural peculiarities. These themes also surface in both exhibitions of *Counterv(e)il*.

2.2 Memory, Trauma, and Representation

Ultimately, installation is a transient act of art, and in the end, for both spaces, we are only left with memory and fragmented documentation (video, photographs) as a means of future access. Even the possibilities of its reconstruction will never result in exactly the same thing, as it would necessarily be constructed for a new space, for new audiences, with new temporalities and histories. And where is the truth in these memories?

In returning to the historiography of memory, Judith Butler cites the works of trauma theorists Caruth, Felman and Laub, and the phenomenon of trauma in relation to the construction of false memories, saying, “trauma is, by definition, not capturable through representation or, indeed, recollection; it is precisely that which renders all memory false, we might say, and which is known through the gap that disrupts all efforts at narrative reconstruction” (Butler 2004 153). In her discussion of the relationships forged between memory, event, and desire, Butler asks these questions: is it an event that precedes a memory? Is it a memory that retroactively posits an event? Is it a wish that takes the form of a memory? One is forced then, to also ask, where is the juncture of “reality” with the historiography of the event? The position of the trauma theorists cited above would argue that it is “the sign of trauma and its proof [that] is precisely its resistance to the narrative structure of the event” (Butler 2004 153). Psychic events may or may not link to actual historical events.

In reading the objects particularly within the installation *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, one can sense the psychic register of pain and the psychic consequences of trauma, but the narrative is incomplete. Could a complete narrative ever be achieved? Butler writes,

If trauma theory is right to assert that trauma often leads to the impossibility of representation, then there is no way to decide questions of the psychic and social status of [trauma] through direct recourse to its representation. One will have to become a reader of the gap, the absence, and this means that psychoanalysis will have to relearn the skill of reading broken narratives (Butler 2004 155).

Reading the gap between objects constructs a kind of narrative, but cannot prove the historical veracity of any event – real, imagined, or ‘wished.’ Particularly in *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, in the environment of the Alternator Project Gallery space, we are presented with signs

of trauma, but have lost access to any terms that would establish historical veracity, which is, Butler asserts, “where what is historical and what is true become unknowable or unthinkable” (Butler 2004 156). In our inability to connect to an event in any meaningful manner, we are unable to discover its truth, and are therefore placed into an anxious state (Illust. 6, 7, 8).

2.3 The Anxious Object

Memory is a sign of life. There is a kind of mourning that takes place in remembrance. To mourn is not to forget, but to keep in mind and also release. It is the act of loss – the possibility of non-existence – that brings forth the promise of memory. David Krell, in his discussion of Jacques Derrida’s ideas of mourning asks, “Does the most powerful *presence* of a beautiful thing ... wield its power in and as *withdrawal* and *absence*?” (Krell 8). Can any object induce a sense of mourning? Once proximity diminishes and distances grow, desire is sparked, brought about by the inevitable, eventual absence of the object in question. From our deconstruction of the objects and of their relationships to each other, we inevitably return to an affirmation of them, and hopefully move towards a deeper understanding of their nature.

Counterv(e)il: Desire, in the Alternator Project Gallery space, houses particular objects of anxiety — objects that contain a duality of meaning. An image of flying bees projected through a semi-transparent latex scrim serves to separate us from the adjoining space (Illust. 9, 19, 20). The quality of the latex sheet upon which the image of the bees is projected is reminiscent of both human skin and beeswax in texture and presentation. The translucent quality of the latex allows the viewer to access the projection of the image of the bees from both sides. The sound of bees permeates the room as an ever-present background noise. The video projection of the bees onto the latex scrim represents a kind of private space that only exists in the digital depiction of the image. The technology of the medium serves to highlight the artificiality of the image of bees flying in the room. Theorist Gilles Deleuze has discussed the need to reconcile the real and the copy. If the virtual is the precondition of the real, the real, argues Deleuze, is an image first, before fulfilling its promise of becoming. Claire Colebrook clarifies this idea, quoting Deleuze, in that “the idea of ‘copy’ presupposes some original model and Western thought has been dominated by the idea of the copy” (Colebrook, quoted in De Oliveira 43). As theorist Jean Baudrillard has observed, “it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the sign of the real for the real itself” (Baudrillard 454). Larger than life-sized, in a world without real bees, the

image supplements the original.

To access the additional objects contained within the room, the viewer must enter into a semi-enclosed space (Illust. 9, 10). Inside the room, across from the bee projection and also on a latex scrim, an additional video projection, smaller in scale and more intimate in presentation, plays on a loop. In *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, this small projection is the image of a woman's jumping feet and swirling hem of the white dress she wears – feet which continually press downward in an ambiguous space, but which are also pushed back up in a never ending sequence of resistance and resilience. Situated directly beside the small projection stands a steel medical I.V. unit, from which hangs a set of headphones (Illust. 11, 12). Similar to the more intimate scale of the smaller video, the viewer is given the opportunity to don the headphones, blocking out the background buzzing of the bees as well as any additional ambient sounds, and to listen through the headphones to a stretched out, metallic sound, synchronized with the slowed-down image of the woman's bouncing feet. Interspersed with this sound is an animalistic, growling noise, surprisingly constructed by merely slowing down human speech, but no longer recognizable as such. In stark contrast to the man-made, metallic sound, the series of growls and roars drag us into unknown territory. In the combination of the slowed, languid bouncing of the disembodied feet and the stretched out audio accompaniment, the viewer is confronted with a limitation. Unable to achieve a discernable wholeness of form and meaning, they are instead presented with a form of disengagement, what Christine Ross describes in her discussion of contemporary art and depression as the ability of video's distancing of filmic attraction to “both stage and amplify the vicissitudes of perception” (Ross 150). The slowing down of time reflects a depressed subjectivity and energy, in effect stagnating access to the future. Memory, representation and desire are in turn more difficult to access.

Also suspended from the I.V. stand, a medical urine collection bag drips viscous, liquid honey in a painfully slow, measured pace through a latex hose (Illust. 11, 12, 13), onto a pile of human hair in web-like strands, eventually turning it into a sticky mass over the six week period of the exhibition; a surreal lifeline measuring the slow creep of time (Illust. 14). At one point

near the completion of the installation, a small pool of the golden liquid gathered on the floor beside the mound of hair, punctuated by one slightly discernible grey, sticky, footprint leading away from the mass of hair (Illust. 15, 16). As a student of history, I am both drawn to and repelled by piles of hair, disturbing because it is remindful of past breaches of civilized conduct, analogous to the shaving of heads in Nazi death camps. It is an object both anonymous and personal at the same time. The hair, although human, does not necessarily read only as human, and is ambiguous in its form. It does not ultimately matter, in the end, whether it is read as human or animal (is there a difference?). It is evidence of trauma. As an object of anxiety, it is severed from its origins, and exists in its alterity.

Opposite the honey and hair, two severed and preserved wild Rocky Mountain goat's legs hang suspended in space, dismembered from their origins, and able to move slightly by actual touching by the viewer, invisible air currents, or close movement (Illust. 4).

Freud once commented that we do not like anything that reminds us of our animal origins (Freud, quoted in Warner 97). Principles of substitution, synecdoche, and fetishism can be found throughout the work. The goat's legs, associated with nature and wilderness, are removed from the realm of the human yet serve to link the slaughter of these wild creatures to ethical questions of the treatment of animals, and blur the lines between the human-animal divide (Medoro and Calder 42). Here, nature is modified by human culture. We are isolated from the means of production and ignore larger issues of responsibility for the process and end result.

Marx compares the division of labour to the separation of commercial from agricultural, the rift of town from country and the conflicts between them (Marx 654). By deliberately placing the goat legs within the framework of the 'white box', they are lifted from the context of individual subsistence animal hunting to also address the larger issues of animal-based industry in the context of commodity culture, tourism and wilderness adventure. Both trophy and fetishistic object, the legs act as a signifier of thwarted potential, a severing of possibilities, a separation and disruption of the natural world.

Marx denied the existence of the spirit, believing that life consists of merely physical or material processes of which consciousness is a result. Our current society views the hunting of these creatures as a sporting activity. We are conscious of the inherent rift between animal and human because we are removed as a society from daily contact with both domestic and wild creatures as hide, food, or glue. Now, from a distance of both time and place, we revisit the ethical questions raised in the sacrifice of these creatures for the sake of human sport. These material forces form our consciousness, and thus our perceptions.

Similarly, the presence of the honey and the image and sounds of the flying bees also serve to connect us to natural forces (Illust. 17). In a symbiotic relationship with humans for many thousands of years, somewhat domesticated, although never quite completely, the bees operate as both a source of anxiety in their potential to sting, even kill, and also a comforting human companion that fertilizes our crops and produces a delicious edible product. The bees also represent ecological catastrophe. Their projected image underscores their increasing absence from the natural world as our main pollinators, as they fade in and out of sight on the screen, into and out of our collective memory. The dripping honey measures time in deliberate segments.

The archival suspension of the severed goat's legs and their proximity to the video of the disembodied, bouncing legs and feet of the woman in the video projection sets up another kind of dialogue (Illust. 18). Although real in every sense of the word, the goat legs are dead, lifeless, and in stark contrast to the seemingly life-like movement of the projected image of the bouncing feet.

In a similar fashion, the two video projections of the bounding feet and the flying bees (Illus. 19, 20) also suggest a new dialogue. The question arises, outside of live performance, of the relationship between the image and reality. Susan Sontag notes in *On Photography* (1974), that "subjectivity, which can never be fully erased from a work of art, makes reality illusion in any video" (quoted in Rush 238). With regard to the use of moving video imagery within *Counterv(e)il*, the lines between reality and illusion shift and mirror each other in disturbing

ways.

One could relate the use of these objects, and the choice of objects themselves, in terms of the abject, a term first suggested by theoretician Julia Kristeva. Used in the context of art, specifically referring to art in which designated images of the body were fragmented and decayed, or which represented a socially unacceptable bodily function (scatological images, bodily fluids, etc.), the term has become synonymous particularly with feminist influenced art. Critic Holland Cotter writes that “in depicting what most people would rather not see, the theory goes, art breaks through societal taboos, especially those surrounding sexuality” (Cotter 1993). This is certainly an aspect of both installations, particularly in *Counterv(e)il: Desire*; however, these objects have been cleaned up, preserved and somewhat sanitized. One could begin to question if, in their presentation as objects of beauty, they retain their ability to fully act as objects that still have the potential to disturb. Perhaps we, as a collective society, are too numbed (disengaged) to the violence inherent in these disassociated objects.

Kristeva states, in *The Powers of Horror* (1982 2), “To each ego its object to each super ego its abject.” Kelly Oliver’s discussion of Kristeva’s statement explains,

For [Kristeva], the abject is not yet an object but rather that which calls into question boundaries. The abject is the in-between that challenges all categorization. [Kristeva] maintains that on a social level the abject and abjection are ways of negotiating our relationship to, or separation from, other animals and animality; on the personal level abjection is a way of negotiating separation from the maternal body (Oliver 53).

Oliver states that we are born into a world where meaning already exists, and that we do not choose the meaning of our language and cultural symbols. However, history has shown us that these meanings do vary over time and in different contexts, and Oliver cautions us against underestimating the importance of not giving up on finding meaning, that to do so would lead inevitably to silence and depression. She writes,

The distance or gap between imagination and reality is crucial for sublimation. Sublimation requires idealization, which gives birth to imagination ... it is only by imagining the world otherwise that we are inspired to resist oppression and work for the decolonization of both our own and other’s social and psychic space (Oliver 141).

Used in psychological terms, sublimation refers to the diversion of the energy of a primarily sexual or other biological impulse from its immediate goal to one of a more acceptable

social, moral, or aesthetic nature or use. Sublimation is a means of controlling the abject, displacing it. In the cleaning up of the objects, the (re)presentation of them in an alternate context, the sublimation of the displaced objects in *Counterv(e)il: Desire* alludes to the passage of time, memory and remembrance. Kristeva has said that the abject is neither subject nor object. It can be viewed as an ambiguity that disturbs identities, systems, and order (Kristeva 4). She differentiates between the *meaning* or *knowledge* of death, and the reality of being confronted by death. In drawing associations between objects, investigating the in-between of abjection, we begin to question preconceived associations and meanings for each of the recognizable objects presented within the installation – objects that serve to act as a kind of *memento mori*, reminding us of our mortality and vulnerability through the breakdown of the distinctions between subject/object, or self/other, and the transience of time and memory. Abjection represents the absence of the other, evidenced in the breakdown of objects of desire. In this way, through the experience of mourning an object already lost, the abject becomes a vehicle for the exploration of imagining other realities, and perhaps a means of achieving individual agency, and ultimately, our desires.

2.4 Territories of Desire

Desire is an ambiguous term. In 1958 the psychologist Jacques Lacan made the distinction between need, demand and desire, specifically defining desire as a longing that persists once needs have been satisfied. Defined in terms of a 'lack', rather than a wish to literally possess an object, desire operates continually as a signifier of something else, something other than the object (such as money representing freedom). In drawing an analogy between two objects, Lacan states that it is the *word-to-word* "connexion" [sic] where metonymy can be found. He illustrates this further:

It should be said that modern poetry and especially the Surrealist school have taken us a long way in this direction by showing that the conjunction of two signifiers would be equally sufficient to constitute a metaphor, except for the additional requirement of the greatest possible disparity of the images signified, needed for the production of the poetic spark, or in other words for metaphoric creation to take place ... The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the presentation of two images, that is, of two signifiers equally actualized, it flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present throughout its (metonymic) connexion within the chain (Lacan 453).

Again, it is the liminal space of the 'between' rather than the actual objects which hold power. This metonymy between objects as it operates in concepts of desire is taken a step further and inverted by theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari, and further propounded by psychologist Jean-François Lyotard. Rather than a relationship manifested via lack, "desire is not the product of an encounter with an object, however ephemeral, but a universal force or flow that exists prior to the establishment of the subject-object distinction and prior to representation. Always resistant to representation and socialization, desire is a marginal and marginalizing force associated with outsiders (Guattari 1975a quoted in Macey 95)."

Similar to the flashes that take place in the metonymy between the two signifiers of Lacan's desire, Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome model – what they refer to as the thousand plateaus, the middle, not the beginning or the end – similarly connects and reconnects signified and signifier in a myriad of ways, but in a positive rather than negative fashion, where desire is no longer lack but endless possibilities (Illust. 21, 22). The rhizome, they describe, is antigenealogy. They describe this further in the principle of asignifying rupture, as

against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure. A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines ... Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad (Deleuze and Guattari 382).

In the same way in which the book is not an image of the world, *mimesis* does not reproduce reality. Deleuze articulates this apparent contradiction: “the Pink Panther imitates nothing, it reproduces nothing, it paints the world its colour, pink on pink; this is its becoming-world, carried out in such a way that it becomes imperceptible itself, asignifying, makes its rupture, its own line of flight, follows its ‘aparallel evolution’ through to the end” (Deleuze and Guattari 383). In *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, the flashes between objects connect, separate, and take flight. The layers of cloth, in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, tunneled through and rearranged, are imagined, experienced, remembered, and forgotten. The concealed architecture of the FINA gallery space continually seems to rearrange itself at the whim of the performer (Illust. 23), audience/performers, and chance. These, too, are becoming-worlds.

In addressing the disparate, seemingly unrelated objects within *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, in the space of the Alternator Project Gallery, which I refer to as objects of desire (objects whose presence simultaneously create a lack but also open up limitless realms of meaning and possibilities) the images and objects meld into each other, lose and reform their identity, take on new meanings and relationships. Deleuze and Guattari write:

We are no more familiar with scientificity than we are with ideology; all we know are assemblages. And the only assemblages are machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation ... An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flow simultaneously ... There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a fields of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author) ... The outside has no image, no signification, no subjectivity (Deleuze and Guattari 385).

In speaking of those arts which manifest a rhizomatic direction of logic, Deleuze and Guattari explain,

they know how to move between things, establish a logic of the *and*, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings ... The middle is

by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other way, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle (Deleuze and Guattari 386).

It is in the logic of the *and* (my own emphasis) where the objects coalesce, expand, and reassert their own individual importance to the assemblage: bees *and* medical equipment *and* human hair *and* honey *and* latex *and* dismembered animal legs *and* disassociated feet, et cetera. It is also the logic of supplementarity, where meaning is continually deferred and new associations are formed.

Lacanian theories of desire and the imaginary delineate one function of the image in visual arts as a means to regain visual access to the lost object. Griselda Pollock contrasts this with earlier notions of psychoanalytic theories of fetishism in images, which, she states, “need to disavow and keep distance from a potentially threatening sight and the knowledge of difference that sight precipitates (Pollock 147).” In art, beautification of the image or object functioned as a means of managing threat and loss (absence), and, specifically with regard to women as a sign of difference, the threat and loss upon which sexual difference is constructed. She writes,

The play of desire within and generated by looking at images is fundamentally contradictory, a) fearful of the knowledge of difference (woman as threat) and b) fantasizing its object (the image of woman as fantasy of male desire, its sign) (Pollock 147).

Here, Pollock is clear to note that it is the image of woman that she is referring to. Laura Mulvey has extensively investigated the concept of woman, particularly in patriarchal culture, as “a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing on them the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning” (Mulvey 169). Pollock incorporates Mulvey’s observations in that the pleasure of visual domination and voyeuristic consumption of images of the female form “evoke the anxiety that female form is made to signify within a patriarchal culture” (Pollock 148). This anxiety perhaps demonstrates why women, in particular, have been drawn in large numbers to the possibilities of performance,

video, and installation art for their practice, distancing themselves from the static image of woman commonly found in painting or sculpture, for example, and choosing instead to pursue the live aspects of performance, or the semblance of the live found in video and film. Through doing so, women have been able to regain at least a modicum of agency through interaction with, and control over, the image or object, although, as Mulvey observes,

it gets us nearer to the roots of our oppression, it brings closer an articulation of the problem, it faces us with the ultimate challenge: how to fight the unconscious structured like a language (formed critically at the moment of arrival of language) while still caught within the language of patriarchy? There is no way in which we can produce an alternative out of the blue, but we can begin to make the break by examining patriarchy with the tools that it provides, of which psychoanalysis is not the only but an important one (Mulvey 169).

The instability of the meaning of images and objects, and the 'potential slippage' between two seemingly opposing and contradictory orders, act in the production of subjectivity. If, as Mulvey posits, psychoanalysis can be a destabilizing tool, artists (women and men) can then use this tool as a means of reinventing the language of art, helping to shift artistic practice as a whole out of the strictly modernist and into a post-modernist paradigm. In effect, this is what women artists, in particular, who, early on, invaded the realm of performance, video and installation art have attempted to do. In the (re)discovering of our internal realities, women can perhaps then make use of these discoveries to perform a counterv(e)illing gesture, reclaiming subjective control.

3. The FINA Gallery, UBC Okanagan: *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*

3.1 The Female Body as Anxious Object

On the maps drawn by men there is an immense white area, terra incognita, where most women live. That country is all yours to explore, to inhabit, to describe.

– Ursula le Guin⁴

In the FINA Gallery, a layer of white, parachute-like fabric covers the architecture of the gallery walls, floor and ceiling in an all encompassing, voluminous sheet. Rest stations, such as a mattress and upright wooden chair are placed in the central areas of the gallery, draped with the layer of fabric (Illust. 24). There is a short staircase, comprised of four steps, attached to and ending abruptly at the wall – a staircase that, nevertheless, invites participation by the performer and audience/performers. We observe the shape of these objects but not their reality. These objects are mimicked in shape by the covering fabric that also acts as a barrier or skin, a kind of membrane that transforms the space and the objects contained within. This transformation disrupts and displaces expected conventions and, by challenging the position of the viewer, begins to create an uneasy and anxious state. These objects are secretive – covering and copying, repeating, or doubling what is beneath, yet, ultimately, the original is supplemented by the copy, limiting our access to it (Illus. 25).

For a select portion of the day, a single, nude performer moves between the gallery walls and beneath the translucent layer of fabric in a semi-choreographed motion, sometimes stopping to rest by either sitting in the chair or lying down on the mattress (Illust. 24, 25), sometimes disappearing altogether between the walls and fabric. At the same time a larger than life-sized video projection plays against the back wall depicting the obscured image of a woman who falls through space repetitively, and is dressed in a similar white material as that of the Gallery lining, (Illust. 25). The fabric spills out of the fourth, open wall of the formal gallery space and into the space of the foyer, forming a bridge into the installation. We enter the space like penetrating a womb. At the same time, this material “bridge” also “flows” through the entrance and into the

⁴Le Guin, Ursula (1989) *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, New York: Norton

foyer, conjuring images of the abject quality of seepage or leakage, associated specifically with women, in particular, and with the water and fluids associated with the process of birth. The viewer must remove their shoes and/or cover their footwear in order to proceed into the space. There are two access points into the work, and available for entry into the installation by the audience. The audience can walk over the top of the layer of fabric at any time through the main entrance, or, when the performer is not active beneath the layer of cloth, they can enter into the right hand side opening, which puts them between the layer of fabric and the gallery structure itself and into the position of a substitute for the paid performer. The audience is not given access to this space beneath the fabric during the time allotted to the performer. In this way the performer is ensured some degree of separation from the audience/performers at all times. While the performer is active in the space, however, and at all other times, the audience/performers can interact on the top layer, which forms a soft, white and ethereal cocoon-like space within the rigid structure of the actual gallery architecture.

The live performer only moves beneath the cloth, through the space between the gallery walls, floor, objects and the fabric, apparently oblivious to the video projection, yet occasionally highlighted by the projected light. A stretched out, metallic sound incessantly repeats itself within the space. The performer is only active in the space for a set period of time, and often the video projections will be the only movement and sound, holding the installation as a place marker for the performer, as such, when the performer is absent, but still exerting an influence over the audience/performers who may wander the space over and between the layers when the paid performer is absent. The space, activated by the body of the performer(s), in turn becomes a changing, sculptural form that shifts constantly when actively engaged, and is never left in the same tableau in which it was found (Illust. 26, 27). One enters, as such, into a metaphorical world of play.

There is a malleability of reality at work. The space of the traditional gallery constructs a certain kind of experience, and related expectations. The work transforms the masculine geometric frame of the “white cube” gallery space into a feminized space, womb-like in its all

encompassing draping, charged further by the female performer at designated times. The presence of the partially revealed nude figure of the performer also transgresses our accepted notions of gallery spaces, particularly in a conservatively biased and relatively isolated geographical area such as the Okanagan valley, where historically even pictorial representations of the nude have been questioned and challenged, and even censored.

The female body has operated in art as one source of cultural anxiety. Control over the sexuality of women has been an ongoing project of civilization for thousands of years. Women have served in the economic bartering and sociological strengthening of cultural ties throughout history, often merely as property to be exchanged and unable to possess any particular agency of their own in these various transactions. Currently, most notably with the arrival of the technologies of the webcam and the internet, vast, lucrative cross-cultural industries are based upon the trafficking of women and their bodies, events in which the participant may or may not be a willing performer. The performer in the FINA installation *Counterveil: Conceal* acts as a source of specific anxiety. She is placed within the public sphere, her body presented out of context, and she remains inaccessible. We are not viewing her movements from the privacy of our own homes in front of a computer screen. The fabric, a skin-like peeling sliding over her body serves a performative purpose. Suspended between wall and cloth, she moves leaving a trace or trait of her presence behind her. Insect- or snake-like, shedding her skin to emerge into – what? An infinite realm of possibilities? An escape, perhaps? The trail left by the passage of her body remains as a sign or marker of a broken history, a rupture in the continuum.

There is energy in the uncontrolled shape. The mattress, chair and staircase act as iconic and recognizable objects, comforting in their familiarity, alluding to acts of everyday existence, but made strange in their covering and concealment, their form also changes through manipulation by the audience/performers as their bodies move through the fabric and engage with the objects themselves (Illust. 28, 29, 30).

3.2 Borderlands: Subjectiles and the Parergon

On the threshold of a transformed space, we are poised at a place of transition, a space different from the one we are leaving behind (Illust. 31). Jacques Derrida's demarcation of boundaries, and his subsequent erasure of borders and limits are in full play here. Derrida writes of the subjectile in art, the material support on which a work of art is made. Described further by Julian Wolfreys, the subjectile is "a becoming between, at once a support and a surface. The term marks and remarks a certain crossing and recrossing of borders, instituting the very borders it crosses, while having no consistency apart from that of the between" (Wolfreys 85). The architecture of the room acts as the subjectile in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. It both contains (frames) and informs, while in itself it is untranslatable, an alterity that supports meaning but is never really part of what is represented. Wolfreys writes: "Any representation is only ever possible through such support, and through the violence of appearance and penetration, the weaving motion that is figured through the motif of writing" (Wolfreys 86). The performer in the FINA gallery is the 'writer' who makes her mark upon the space and erases it with her movement. The audience/performers operate in a similar fashion. Trails in the fabric mark the passage of the body, but leave little of their histories to elucidate their stories (Illust. 32). Representation is not refused in the appearance and penetration of the performer(s) as they move about the space, rather, it is mediated via the subjectile of the gallery space and the cloth covering, through the crossing and recrossing of those very borders the subjectile purports to delineate.

Is this a sanctuary? The word "sanctuary" itself denotes an inside/outside dichotomy. We leave the outside world behind, yet traces of it remain in the muffled ambient noises, distantly heard. Without the outside, this interior space would not exist: interior is defined in relation to exterior. We remove our shoes to enter one space. Is this a holy place? Certainly, it is an uncanny one. We acknowledge that there is a narrative unfolding before us, but it is unclear precisely what form it will take. Perhaps this is an "arche-writing," a term Derrida uses to refer to an original, non-phonetic form of writing not derived from speech. In arche-writing, original

meaning can never really be present, always deferred through repetition and supplementation. This infinite referral masks the originary breach, placing into question notions of presence and absence, creating an ambiguity in the installation of *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, where definitive declarations of ultimate meaning are placed forever in motion. Where is the centre located within these myriad signs? Is there one? Derrida states that “history and knowledge. . . have always been determined . . . as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence” (Derrida 1998 307). The performer is both writer and text. In the text of the performer – the anxious object that contains meaning, yet constantly defers meaning – we sense a shift in our perception, a questioning of history and boundaries. Deconstruction decentres the transcendental subject, the logos, inverting or erasing meaning. As both audience and performers we will create our own histories.

Meaning is always in motion or in transit, and is made possible by differentially linking signifying elements (Macey 93). Derrida also uses the word *trait* when referring specifically to art, synonymous with the term *trace*, and writing. The *trait* is a mark, transmissible and available to reading, subservient to representation and ontology. “The appearance of *trait*, is therefore always a *retrait*. Never appearing for a first time simply, any trait always implies repetition” (Wolfreys 87). The trait marks a passage *between*, a process of doubling. The deconstruction of all the significations presented in the text of the gallery spaces particularly targets the signification of truth. In the layering of material, specifically in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, concealing and revealing traces of the objects, performers, and audience/performers as they move through space, punctuated by the disjointed mechanical sounds filling the room, a palimpsest is created, that writes and rewrites over the surface of the fabric (Illust. 33).

Is this censorship or repression? The movements and forms created by the performers/audience eventually all disappear, and we are never able to engage with either in a meaningful manner, in the sense of discovering truth or ultimate meaning. Although meaning is inferred, it is also continually deferred, creating ambiguity. In *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, the idea

of the traditional proscenium in theatre breaks down – as one enters the room one is in fact crossing a kind of stage, however the viewer breaks traditional boundaries between stage and audience by actively entering the space of the performer and artwork. By doing so one becomes both audience and performer. The binary oppositions, such as that of inside/outside, absence/presence, human/animal, for example, are concealed or repressed within *différance* or supplements. It is the logic of the *and* of Deleuze and Guattari. By deconstructing the installation, through acknowledging and displacing these oppositions, we can attempt to uncover the contradictory and sometimes confusing logistics hidden within. For example, between sanctuary/interiority and exteriority lies the boundary that forever doubles itself. One cannot exist without the other. Derrida calls this border *parergon*. He describes it as a *passé-partout*, both a master-key and also a frame composed of two sheets of transparent material mounted back to back: “a double border [...] and transparent. It is therefore a condition of possibility for both the visible and the invisible” (Wolfreys 89). In *Countev(e)il: Conceal* the boundaries are in continual motion, contesting dualisms and blurring distinctions (Illust. 33, 34).

In the displacement of hierarchies, meaning is continually deferred. The borders of the *parergon* represent an eternal doubling: a liminal boundary where overlapping signs reflect both inside and outside, presence and absence, and the passage between (Illust. 35). Through ritual and repetition, we are placed forever on the boundaries of understanding, yet paradoxically, it will be demonstrated that it is through repetition that eventual agency may be achieved. If every repetition returns a difference, as Derrida would say, then the *parergon* is the master key that unlocks the “condition of possibility for both the visible and the invisible,” and, in this respect, provides us with the conditions necessary for achieving agency.

3.3 Surveillance and the Gaze

In *Counter(e)il: Conceal*, we are presented with images which evoke Foucauldian ideas of the Panopticon – where women, in particular, participate in forms of self-surveillance to patriarchal structures, even as they are viewed themselves and also view each other through varying cultural, social and sexual lenses. Within this framework of panoptic surveillance, how is it possible to know the individual body, and how are notions of power bound up with this knowledge? Michel Foucault's vision of the panopticon holds its power not because there is an omnipresent eye always watching, but because there could be. Through the apparatus of surveillance the viewing audience is also placed in the simultaneous position of both voyeur and viewed. Surveillance becomes performance and vice versa. The performative aspect of the installation invites the audience in to participate, but also requires the participation of the viewer for the piece to function fully as art (Illus. 36). The audience is requested to creatively engage with the installation by entering into the space, either above or below the fabric. Public space is transformed into a space of the intimate, womb-like and protective, but a reversal also occurs: thin and transparent, the hidden becomes public, privacy is eroded and an opening is left for normally taboo subjects to arise. The body emerges from and disappears into a liminal space literally created between the fabric lining and the gallery walls. A collapse occurs between the distinctions of public and private space. It is from this fragmentation that we construct broken narratives and incomplete histories.

The performer in *Counter(e)il: Conceal* is at once vulnerable and powerful. She has the ability to generate anxiety, to act and react of her own free will, yet she remains vulnerable in stature, gender and display, and restricted to her distinctly limited performance venue. She does what she can within her own circle of influence. Her gestures are an act of violence, in a fashion. Some of her movements are minimally choreographed, but there is room for creative interpretation and for the unexpected to occur. She is instructed to perform within the specific parameters of the space she occupies; to avoid engaging in spoken conversation; and to perform repetitive tasks such as resting on the bed platform, ascending and descending the stairs, or

sitting in the chair (Illust. 37, 38). The more condensed repetition of the projected image of the falling woman makes the movements of the performer appear random. The decisions she makes within the confines of these boundaries influence our reading of the work. Spontaneous, but repetitious, her movements are confined to a theatre that has been delineated for her performance. She must find within these boundaries a space in which she can make her own choices for transgression or acts of agency. Bogart observes, “Paradoxically, it is the restrictions, the precision, the exactitude, that allows for the possibility of freedom. The form becomes a container in which the actor can find endless variations and interpretive freedom” (Bogart 46). Throughout the histories of almost every culture on earth, the actions of women have been curtailed and truncated at some point in time, particularly with regard to the control of their own sexuality. Yet women continue to push against boundaries, to test their limits, and threaten to spill over these liminal borderlands, occasionally successful in expanding their borders of influence. Bogart notes that, paradoxically, “the compression into a restricted space and the patience demanded for this containment actually intensifies the life which is revealed in a minimum of activity” (Bogart 146). Thus, Bogart reminds us that to be silent, to make no movement or gesture, is to avoid the necessary violence of articulation which, although it would alleviate the risk of failure, would also cancel the possibility for advancement, and therefore any agency on the part of the performer (Bogart 49). There exists a seeming contradiction in the broader picture of today’s varied cultures and societies, in that many women are able to live largely, to find meaning, in small or restrictive (physical or psychic) spaces, a condition which also exists in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. Many women continue to carve out territories and meaningful lives for themselves despite often having to occupy constrained spaces and strict conditions within existing patriarchal structures, and they do so with grace and dignity. I see this continual testing of power relationships as a condition of *counterv(e)illance* addressed within the installation (Illust. 37, 38).

On a larger scale, in the current power struggles that become more and more pronounced as nations and ideologies vie for dominance, it is easy for the less powerful, such as

women, children, and the economically disadvantaged, to lose agency and become lost in the never ending re-shuffling of so-called civilization. The human psyche can be viewed like a palimpsest, a social surface of inscription, written and re-written with the changing mores and whims of a globalized society. In the constructed micro-environment of the installation *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, agency lies, perhaps, in the interactivity inherent in the performance – both the performer(s) and the audience are active in creating their own narratives and gestures. Both the woman and the audience/performer(s), both gendered, seek a means of exploring and seeking empowerment through this interaction and ultimately as a means of retrieving lost agency.

The experience of being immersed in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* is a sensual one, and the audience and performers are invited to simply feel at a visceral level (Illust. 39, 40). I find my own works often converge with the work produced by American artist Ann Hamilton, particularly in the exploration of liminal spaces. Michael Gowan, the Director for the Dia Centre for the Arts, New York, wrote in the forward to Ann Hamilton's *tropos* installation:

Civilization, of course, is not optional, nor can its process be reversed; its language defines our existence in the world. Yet somewhere in our body and experience are the remnants of prelinguistic perception, of developing human sense anxiously in search of meaning (Gowan 55).

Art is, of course, a language in itself – a visual system of signs and text. In redefining or reinventing language, for even a limited time, alternate possibilities emerge. At times, the act of being immersed beneath the fabric covering, the sheer enjoyment of silky cloth sliding over skin, the totality of being surrounded by white, invites a spiritual dimension lacking in logic and common sense, the space beyond the civilized (Illust. 41, 42).

3.4 The Gaze, Subjectivity and Power

It is that nether world beyond civilization, the one lacking language to delineate it, where the liminal space of desiring and not having lies.

The quest for identity and happiness are two of the most enduring obsessions of the modern Western subject. If rationalization is about decentring spheres of meaning, such as economy, technology, science, law, government, et cetera, then subjectivization is about meaning, what one of Documenta XI curators, Cornelia Klinger, refers to as the life-world of individuals, communities, belief systems, religion, personal aesthetic/expression, art, and the private sphere of intimate relationships. She points out that subjectification involves the same process of decentring as rationalization, but “performs a contrary movement of closure, centring the subject” in a way which is ultimately complementary and harmonizing (Klinger 287). In the centring of the subject into the position of transcendence, the categories of culture and nature arise, what Klinger terms “concepts of nostalgia” which attempt to recapture what is about to vanish or is already lost. She states: “In the effort to keep something alive that is gone, such concepts do not exactly recover but rather discover or even ‘invent’ what they are supposed to conserve” (Klinger 288). If, as cited earlier in Oliver, identity is placed beyond the arena of choice and agency, where can one begin to transcend the larger community into which one is born, the socialized system of beliefs, norms, values, and even language?

Griselda Pollock discusses the possibilities for women and the gaze through consideration of the female spectator (Illust. 43). There is a sexual politics of looking, at the heart of modernism, which functions around a system of binary positions, activity/passivity, looking/being seen, voyeur/exhibitionist, subject/object. She suggests that there are key questions that must be asked when viewing work produced by women artists. Are they complicit with the dominant regime? Do they naturalize femininity in its major premises? Is femininity confirmed as passive and masochistic or is there a critical look resulting from a different position from which femininity is appraised, experienced and represented? In a movement away from modernist notions, the traditional private sphere of woman is invested

with meanings other than those ideologically produced to secure it as the site of femininity, achieved through the articulation of space, repositioning the viewer, selection of location, facture and brushwork, for example. It is primarily through the re-articulation of traditional space that it “ceases to function primarily as the space of sight for a mastering gaze, but becomes the locus of relationships” (Pollock 87). It is the transformation of the space and the importance of relationships that are constructed within the work of both sites of *Counterv(e)il* – a series of relationships we must navigate and interpret in order to reach understanding, and to shift our emphasis into a non- or even post-modernist discourse.

Who is included in the political process, and who is systemically excluded (Illust. 44)? Foucault, who has been accused of relativism and nihilism, rejected norms, arguing that truth and knowledge are always produced within a network of power relations. However, it is the material experience of most women that power is distributed unevenly through various constructions of gender. Feminism requires a conception of power that can account for the asymmetry of gendered power relations (McLaren 2).

Foucault’s greatest political virtue is this: “that he never outlines programs of reform, but constantly forces his reader to challenge everyday assumptions about the very nature of punishment, sexuality and mental health” (Macey 35). Foucault’s concept of genealogies in his later works, particularly Volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* differs from traditional historical practices because they focus on discontinuities and ruptures rather than continuities, echoing the concepts of rupture found in Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Lacan. It is these possibilities for discontinuities and ruptures that I find myself exploring in my own work. “For Foucault, power is not unilateral; it is not negative; and it is not possessed by an individual or group of individuals. Power can be productive and positive; it is a relationship, not a thing” (McLaren 4). Power operates on individuals through social norms, practices and institutions. In his later work, Foucault distinguishes between power and domination, which will become a major point of reconciliation with feminists. The relation between discontinuities and ruptures, specific objects, and between

the audience/performers in the works of *Counterv(e)il* as a whole and how they play out in structures of power form the basis for exploration in the works.

The power relationships evident in *Counterv(e)il* are reflected in many ways in different societies and situations. Women's own complicity in restricting the lives of other women also plays out in patriarchal practices of subordination (Illust. 45). The artist in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* is in a position of power, in hiring the performer and choreographing, to an extent, the performance. The audience is in the position of privilege as viewer. The performer is subordinated, yet the performer also maintains power through her interaction, or refusal to interact with the viewer. She also can survey the viewer through the veil of the translucent material (Illust. 46), and perhaps retains more freedom in her act of surveillance due to the privacy afforded by the veiling. She has freedom to look, without fear of being caught in the act of looking. This enacts a relationship between the performer and the audience that illuminates Foucault's claim that power is never won once and for all; there are always possibilities for resistance. If resistance is never "outside" of the effects of power, then how can it ever be achieved? Foucault's ideas surrounding the concept of governmentality are applicable here. He argues that since governmentality depends upon consent, authority remains contingent upon our assent, and therefore open to challenge. This becomes problematic however, as it also implies that identity politics involve participation in dominating practices of 'subjection' (Sawicki 294). The performer may choose not to follow instructions, or she may be placed in a position via interactions with the audience/performers where she is unable to follow instructions (Illust. 47).

One may also use these frameworks as a means to uncover sites of resistance and agency within *counterv(e)illance*, further expanded through a feminist lens, through such concepts of subjectivity and performativity described by Judith Butler. Butler's concept of performativity – the unconscious, repetitive acts that delineate gender within our various cultures – likewise surfaces within the works. Butler states that all gender can be understood as an imitation of an ideal or norm. If all gender identity is performed or enacted, it therefore becomes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the original and the imitation (Rivkin and

Ryan 900). The veil-like qualities of the fabric can also act as a means of subverting this gendered performance. The ability to use the veiling as a mask surprisingly highlights the humanity of the subject – the clinging fabric highlights her vulnerability and delicate structure – even while concealing individuality.

Judith Butler argues that feminist politics without a feminist subject is both possible and ultimately desirable – identities are not fixed and stable (Sawicki 304), and she makes use of Foucault’s frameworks of power constructions to investigate subjectivity and agency. She writes in *Gender Trouble*:

There is a new venue for theory, necessarily impure, where it emerges in and is the very event of cultural translation. This is not the displacement of theory by historicism, nor a simple historicization of theory that exposes the contingent limits of its more generalizable claims. It is rather, the emergence of theory at the site where cultural horizons meet, where the demand for translation is acute and its promise of success, uncertain (Butler 1999 ix).

The veil in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* is not a politically neutral object. Similarly, events of environmental degradation and climatic catastrophe on a global scale may influence the readings and associations of objects, as evidenced in *Counterv(e)il: Desire*.

One consequence of globalization is that as an artist, I find myself aligning with work by “other” women, of different ethnic and geographical origin, religious and cultural backgrounds. As a woman of predominantly Euro/North American and Catholic background, navigating this post 9/11 world, I find threads of convergence emerge between my own artistic practice in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* and that of the work of artists such as Shirin Neshat, an expatriate Iranian who lives in New York. How are representations and constructions of identity presented? Images are often deemed provocative because they seem to lack a distinct ‘moral’ stance. In his discussion of Neshat’s work, curator Igor Zabel states that “it is the emptiness of meaning that makes room for stereotypes” (Zabel 22). When looking at the work, one must ask, is there a ‘truth’ of sexuality? How do we take account of material bodies? Presented with the binaries of male/female, east/west, veiled/unveiled, and public/private spheres, we are forced to ask ourselves, can art be separated from history, anthropology, or ethnicity? Zabel observes about Neshat’s works,

... an essential part of this first reaction was a feeling of a gap, an inconsistency. Because of this gap, I was able to distance myself from my first impressions and recognize in them a mixture of old and more recent stereotypes and preconstructed ideas about the “Orient,” the Middle East, and the Muslim world. The phantasmic mixture of spirituality, poetry, fanaticism, and violence did not, however, disappear after this insight. Rather, it changed its role. The divided world in which we live is not a fiction; representational stereotypes that function as divisive mechanisms cannot simply be dismissed. An important effect of Neshat’s photographs is that they prompt us to rethink our own position in this divided world and our relationship to Others (Zabel 25).

Is this ambiguity inherent in the images of the Other? In *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, the performer is the representative ‘woman,’ not the artist herself. Obscured and concealed, she is the (silent) voice behind the veil. To whom does she speak? Whom does she speak for? Is she representative of contemporary or historical woman? First, Second, or Third World woman? She provides us with a Western construct of ‘woman’, a stereotype, a single voice for all women, but this category overlooks the possibilities of difference among women as a group, and alternately, any kind of reference to cultural or national specificity. How media functions in the construction of our own ideas of identity of certain cultures and individuals plays an important part in our perceptions of the work. Curator Jacqueline Larson speaks specifically about the work of Neshat’s *Women of Allah* series, quoting Gayatri Spivak in reference to labels such as ‘Third World Woman’ that these labels “reflect the site of a desire for people in the First World [...] to have a manageable other” (quoted in Larson 10). In Western society, we too, always seek out the manageable other, whether through culture, race or gender. Is it only to Western cultures, they ask, where we have all but lost the image of the veiled woman as pious, modest, and no longer contemporary, the exception appearing in our fantasies or as fetish objects, that the image of the veiled woman appears as strange or exotic?

With relation to identity and role-playing, perhaps there is a hidden identification with a certain role of media stereotypes. The tensions abound between knowledge and belief: we know that this is a young woman beneath the fabric, however we can never be quite certain of her youth, ethnicity or history, without transgressing the boundary of the cloth (see Illust. 1, 2). Woman, as a construct and belief, is necessarily suspended in an uncanny game of role-playing. There is repetition and a reiteration or perhaps even a commitment to tradition and roles in these

Counterv(e)il works, similar in fashion to some of the works of Neshat. Judith Butler, in her reading of Gayle Rubins' *The Traffic in Women* – that normative sexuality fortifies normative gender – puts forth the idea that sexual practice has the power to destabilize gender (Butler 1999 xi). She states that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (Butler 1999 xv). Butler's beliefs concur with Foucault in that political agency cannot be isolated from the dynamics of power from which it is wrought and that sexuality is perceived as an effect of social discourses and institutions. In answer to critics that her theories promote passivity and “quietism” she states “the iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility” (Butler 1999 xxiv). If we take this generically veiled woman as the normative image of woman, the symbol of a suitably conforming ‘woman’ – female, heterosexual, mother, daughter, sister, niece, etc. – and instead situate her within a public space, for all intents and purposes unclothed, we invert and subvert the symbol. A further subversion occurs when participation beneath the covering is opened up to the audience, whose members may be of a specific, different, gender, race or sex.

However, if we look at the repetition and reiteration presented in the images of the veiled woman, specifically, as subversive, we are left with questions still remaining. Is the woman challenging the status quo or embracing the status quo? Is her silence complicit? Butler writes: “just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where “subversion” carries market value” (Butler 1999 xxi).

In the *Counterv(e)il: Desire* site, there is a reference to commodity culture present in the latex veils. These are found in the video loop of the flying bees and the commodity inference of

both the dripping honey and the spoils of sport hunting, and also in the pile of human hair, as raw material to be used for – what? Its initial cutting also represents an exchange. The video loop of the jumping woman can also be seen to hold particular value, even if this value is simply located in the work and energy put into the repetitious act, an act reminiscent of the disengaged experience, for example, of an assembly line where disparate parts are assembled in repetitive actions to be further constructed into an unseen final product (Illust. 48, 49, 50).

The veil can be viewed as a delineation of multiple boundaries. The use of this symbolically ambiguous imagery sets up certain expectations. In a Western Christian system, the draped veil of white cloth can be seen as a continuation of the bridal-like dress of the woman who continually falls or jumps in the projected videos in each space, representing purity, modesty and transformation, whether in reference to a bride, a first communion or confirmation (bride of Christ), or a nun (taking up the veil). There is the overtly sexualized veil of the exotic dancer that intrigues not in its ability to conceal, but rather in the anticipation of its removal (one could argue this is also present in the other examples).

In yet another context, for example, the embracing of full body veiling, specifically the chador, by fundamentalist Islamic women in a revolutionary gesture, is often seen through Western feminist eyes to be a contradictory and even counter-revolutionary in stance to the secular values embodied outside of the Islamic world. Over the centuries, full body veiling, like the chador or burka, has represented privacy, distinction, or safety to many Muslim women. The chador, however, like other forms of veiling, is not merely a sign of modesty and religious convention, but also a political statement wrapped up in ideas of nationalism, colonialism and imperialism. During the Iranian Revolution specifically, a charismatic young intellectual, Ali Shariati, Iranian-born and Sorbonne educated,

married his knowledge of Marxism to his own Iranian Shiite Islam, with roots in rebellion against the status quo after Muhammad's death – and came up with a revolutionary creed designed to uplift the masses and challenge despots. Western dress, he decreed, was a form of imperialism, turning women's beauty into a product of capitalism to be bought and sold, at the same time as it made third-world women dependent upon consumers of fast-obsolete fashions. Muslim women, he urged,

should assert their freedom by adopting Islamic dress . . . the chador symbolized liberation (Brooks 25).

A similar dress code was never requested for the men of Islam, who apparently did not need to demonstrate their commitment to the revolution in such a public and exclamatory way. In *Nine Parts of Desire*, Geraldine Brooks writes:

In Muslim societies men's bodies just weren't seen as posing the same kind of threat to social stability as women's. Getting to the truth about hajib was a bit like wearing it: a matter of layers to be stripped away, a piece at a time. In the end, under all the concealing devices—the chador, jalabiya or abaya, the magneh, roosarie or shayla—was the body. And under all the talk about hijab freeing women from commercial or sexual exploitation, all the discussion of hajib's potency as a political and revolutionary symbol of selfhood, was the body: the dangerous female body that somehow, in Muslim society, had been made to carry the heavy burden of male honour (Brooks 32).

Feminist art theorist Griselda Pollock suggests that the feminist influence in contemporary art can be seen in the manufacture and repetition of sexual positions, specifically in the way that they manage desire and pleasure, fuel fantasies and situate the viewer (Pollock 161-62). The work *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* invites us to question the trajectory of the gaze between audience and performer(s). Natural tensions and specific movements temper the interaction between those who encounter each other as well as the performer(s) while participating within the work. Display and appearance form a kind of identity, and contained within these displays are also panoptic-like systems of surveillance. The performers are never sure whether they are being observed, and continue their movements despite having an audience present or not (Illust. 51).

Foucault's theories of surveillance through a feminist lens are perhaps best expressed in the writings of Susan Bordo, who further explores the notion of disciplining gender. In *Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body*, Bordo delineates 'old' feminism from 'new' feminism, in that old feminism fails to address racial, economic, and class differences among men and women. The insensitivity of older forms of feminism ignored the multiplicity of meanings that inhabit every cultural act and practice. Bordo explains that in newer forms of

feminist thought,

one may find arguments for the 'creative' or 'subversive' nature and practices and cultural forms, such as makeup, high heels, or cosmetic surgery, which the 'old' feminist discourse would view as simply oppressive to women. In general, the 'old' discourse is seen as having constructed an insufficiently textured, undiscerningly dualistic, overly pessimistic (if not paranoid) view of the politics of the body (Bordo 1994 232).

Degrees of creative or subversive behaviour within established, or sovereign, power systems also harken back to the restricted spaces, referred to earlier, in which some women are required to perform their daily existence. Bordo explains that Foucault divided modern power systems from those he deemed to be sovereign. Foucault saw modern power as non-authoritarian, non-conspiratorial, and non-orchestrated; yet it still produces and normalizes bodies to submit to dominance and subordination. Foucault imagined several diversions from sovereign power structures. First, 'power' is not the possession of individuals or groups (something people 'have') but rather it is a dynamic or network of non-centralized forces. This was evidenced in the dynamic that played out between audience and performers in the *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* installation. Power can be taken or given. The performer could choose to dissolve into the liminal space between the fabric and the wall (Illust. 52, 53), where she could not be easily seen or even become invisible to the eye, or she could 'surprise' the audience member who was not expecting a live, nude performer to be present, causing discomfort and even withdrawal. The audience, however, often also chose to watch either passively from the doorway (Illust. 54), or from within the installation itself, quietly observing the performance (Illust. 55), or, in the case of one young man who noted that the performer was naked beneath the fabric, called loudly to his nearby group of friends to come and see for themselves. The performer chose to fade into the liminal space between the wall and fabric in response to this overt act of observation.

Second, Foucault believed that these non-centralized forces are not random or haphazard, but appear from an historical basis, from certain groups and ideologies that do have dominance. He cautions that the fact that power is not held by any one does not entail that it is equally held by all. People and groups are positioned differently, but the members are not

necessarily equal. An example of the kind of power which is often taken absolutely for granted by those who already feel that they own it occurred during one performance where three large, young male students literally charged beneath the fabric, not stopping to remove their backpacks and shoes, and tore through the feminized space of the gallery in less than ten seconds, looking for the exit (or the absent performer?) and leaving through the third doorway that had been carefully closed off with fabric, and not one of the designated entrances or exits at all.

Interestingly, the violence of their passage left no additional visible inscription on the surface of the cloth, no physical tears or rips in the fabric, no disruptions in the separation of fabric from the structure of the gallery walls, in much the same way that an act of violence either physical (rape) or mental (abuse) also may occasionally leave no visible marks on the surface of the body of women. We do not always recognize the signs of violence when we are presented with them after the fact.

Third, Foucault argues that selfhood and subjectivity which sustain dominance and inequality are constructed and enforced not by law and ‘punishment’ from above (as sovereign power is exercised) but through many and diverse ‘processes,’ which in turn regulate the most intimate and minute elements of the construction of space, time, desire, and embodiment. Regulation is achieved not through physical restraint and coercion (although social relations may contain these elements), but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms. Thus, as Foucault writes, “there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself” (Foucault, quoted in Bordo 1994 233).”

Bordo acknowledges that women are frequently physically, emotionally and financially terrorized; however, she embraces Foucault’s concepts of panoptic surveillance, noting that they “[arise] out of and reproduce normative feminine practices which train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being experienced in terms of power and control” (Bordo 1994 233). She notes that within a Foucauldian framework, power

and pleasure do not cancel out each other. She cautions that the feeling of being in charge, or 'in control' of, one's life, is often not necessarily an accurate reflection of one's actual status, a perception that "is always suspect as itself the product of power-relations whose shape may be very different" (Bordo 1994 234) Foucault's concept of 'technologies of self' come into play within this framework. Bordo states that because of this, women are not always passive 'victims' of sexism, and may themselves contribute to the perpetuation of female subordination – for example, "by participating in industries and cultural practices which represent women as sexual enticements and rewards for men without this entailing that we are equally positioned with men in sexist culture" (Bordo 1994 234). One must ask in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, who does the performer perform for (Illust. 44, 56)?

In *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, we must question the extent of the performer's freedom. In answer, we are often met by a maddening silence, answers deliberately withheld. Because the works are constructed for a specific audience, that of the gallery-going public, there is an expectation that the audience will recognize the dynamics at play, but this of course has no guarantees, as evidenced earlier. At best, perhaps a negotiation on the part of the observer can be assumed. One also cannot presume to anticipate the response of differently gendered viewers, or whether the work appeals to or resonates more with a particular gender, or on what level this may occur.

In creating a dynamic between masculine/feminine or feminine/feminine, opposition should not be viewed as an end, rather the interactions should be seen as a means of bridging difference. How does society function to oppose and converge? Can we read society in a non-gendered manner when female and male positions remain polarized, and women are treated differently from men (Illust. 57)?

Foucault wrote: "One doesn't have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over others. It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised" (Foucault 1980 156). The contradiction in many cultures, including those of the West, is that men are also

continually denied resistance or agency, and to a great extent are also self-policed, caught in their own systems of beliefs and structures of power. Monica Gatens (1983) argues that masculinity and femininity mean different things according to whether they are lived in male or female bodies. In her discussion of Gatens, Elizabeth Grosz comments, “what is mapped onto the body is not unaffected by the body on which it is projected” (Grosz, quoted in Ramazanoglu 1993 251). A literal mapping of the body of the performer(s) occurs within *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, with writing and erasure of the texts, and through the inclusion of iconic symbols both brimming with meaning and paradoxically rendered meaningless (Illust. 58).

Women must continually search for their own identity, and to accomplish this might entail the stripping away of all cultural and other identifications. In a sense, the fabric veil in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* does this. Women must enact a form of bravery in everything they do, testing boundaries and challenging the norms. The performer performs an act of bravery by appearing naked beneath her veil, and the audience performers also are given the opportunity to enact their own performances of bravery within the parameters of the installation (Illust. 59).

It was not so long ago that men and women were often also segregated in Western society, with different doors for entering public institutions such as schools, bars, and so forth. During the time set aside for the actual paid performer, we are perhaps transported back into time, with the paid female performer still relegated to their own entrance, their own sphere of influence, but this shifts when the space of performance beneath the ‘veil’ within *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* is opened up to all genders, and new categories and possibilities open up. In setting up non-traditional juxtapositions, an inversion of traditional spaces occurs, subverting traditional relationships and norms. We are invited, in the words of David Horrigan, to see through a glass, doubly, regardless of gender, culture, class or race (Horrigan 17).

3.5 Taboo and the Veiling of the Subject

I see myself seeing myself ... I see outside, that perception is not in me ... it is on the object that it apprehends. Jacques Lacan, from *Anamorphosis* (223-4).

The act of viewing is also an act of mirroring. Implicit in the act of viewing is the understanding that one may be caught in the act of doing so. In the installations of Counterveil there are competing viewpoints, of being immersed in a space, yet being forced to also maintain a critical distance, which conversely, can be eroded by the spectacle presented (Illust. 60).

Installation artist Vanessa Beecroft, for example, presents the viewer with a *mimesis* of a human being, yet one removed from every day reality, in that the large groups of women in her works are presented either completely naked or only partially covered, and often made up or transformed to look almost exactly alike. There is the promise of engagement in the basic humanity of the women, but it is never fulfilled. The models are instructed not to interact with the audience. The viewers are not allowed to engage the models on any level. The performers' lack of modesty and lack of engagement with the viewer can be unsettling and disorienting, suggesting that there is a psychological, intensely subjective nature inherent in even the most detached images.

Veiling has existed within various cultures primarily as a means of ostensibly providing modesty and protection. It is a cloaking of female sexuality, and ultimately identity – a separation of the body of the subject from the outside world. Referring to veiling in her own specific cultural context of fundamentalist religious Muslim cultures, artist Shirin Neshat addresses the subject of the gaze as taboo in relation to sexuality and desire. She writes:

Taboos are forms of culturally internalized inhibitions that by their very nature justify and allow for socio-political structure to operate on a deep emotional level, which affirms them through conformity . . . a simple gaze is considered a 'sin' in such a way that violations of this code create anxiety and would not be tolerated (Horrihan 2000 20).

The images of Egyptian born artist Ghada Amer, like Neshat, now, also, living in New York, similarly investigate the taboo, specifically in her use of female erotic poses, delicately stitched, yet presented within the context of an abstract expressionist sensibility. The remaining

threads left hanging and which cascade over these provocative images, serve to 'veil' her subject. Even in the relatively more liberal atmosphere of North American/Euro culture, to be placed in proximity to a nude female performer, outside of a strip club where nudity is expected, for example, is to be situated within an anxious moment. An anonymous performer, veiled in her own way, both hidden and revealed at the same time, transgresses our established cultural boundaries and sets up disturbing situational proximities that contain within them the ability to generate psychological distress and discomfort within the audience/performer. She embodies the abject, as suggested by Julia Kristeva (Illust. 61). The audience/performer becomes an unwitting player in the performance and may react with embarrassment, anxiety or acceptance, depending upon their own diverse cultural baggage. In a comparable, though much more aggressive manner, performance artist Marina Abramovic and her creative partner for a time, Victor Ulay, performed a similar orchestration, interjecting their naked presence as two performers at the entrance of a gallery in the piece *Imponderabilia*, performed in 1977. In order to access the gallery down a narrow hallway, the viewer was forced to squeeze themselves between the two naked performers positioned face-to-face, choosing which sex they would face to do so and dragging themselves against the performers bodies to squeeze through to the next room. Similarly, in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, proximity and presentation attempts to transgress our preconceived notions of the human female body, the abject, anxious object of uncontrolled sexuality, and disrupts our comfortable expectations, placing them out of reach, and outside of the status quo. Merely the force of another's presence offers something to push against. The audience is forced to choose between the desire to flee and the desire to find out more.

3.6 Veiling the Political Subject

Globalization has opened us to the reality of transcultural associations. Darren O'Donnell raises the potentially contentious issue of using other people – their culture, their ideas – as material for Western artistic endeavours and the potentially problematic representation of others not afforded the ability to intervene or comment. The culture of the Other has been continually mined for just these purposes throughout the history of Western art, raising many questions of the ethics of such practices. Meaning and truth are irretrievably bound up in ideas of who is speaking for whom. The “neutral” theorizer always operates within a social space and a discursive context. Citing Foucault’s “rituals of speaking”, Linda Alcoff investigates the problem of speaking for others, and also the idea that meaning is understood as being plural and shifting within diverse contexts which effect truth-value and epistemic status (81). The privileged or unprivileged position of speakers and listeners, when postulating truth in particular, distinguishes between something taken as truth, and actual truth. If truth is free of human interpretation and exists independent of human action, then, in the Kantian sense, it is also inaccessible. Alcoff describes truth as “an emergent property of converging discursive and non-discursive elements, when there exists a specific form of integration among these elements in a specific event (82)”, and notes that the social location of the speaker bears profoundly on matters of truth and its perception.

Does silence represent complicity? In *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* the performer remains mute in a literal sense, but speaks, instead, through gesture and movement (Illust. 62). In the investigation of rituals of speaking, politically constituted by “power relations of domination, exploitation, and subordination” (Alcoff 83), these rituals are impossible to contain in a “neutral” voice, and the structures of power revealed through the process of claiming the right to speak may also claw back some of the control over the meaning and truth of that which is spoken. This is exacerbated by the unknown context of the reception of what is spoken, where meaning fragments and interpretations transform the speech. Alcoff suggests that by tracing the trajectories of speech, anticipating the possible locations in which the speech is received, the

speaker can maintain responsibility for meanings that are subsequently produced, and thus still be held accountable for the effects of these practices. Ultimately, though, can reception be controlled or maintained? In *Countervail: Conceal*, the response of all those who will receive the performers' presence, gestures and movements is unknown, and however it may be anticipated, the final result remains uncertain and not, finally, under the control of the artist or performer. This provides a parallel to the larger uncertainty of interpretation in the context of speech. We are always open to multiple, conflicting meanings, hence, as Foucault would say, creating possibilities for counterhegemony.

If the production of meaning is necessarily a collective enterprise, then all members of a community must be encouraged to speak, each providing their own, partial accounting to make up the whole, if a "whole" is ever possible. That some speakers inflict a violence on those whom they might not have intended is also an issue; however, Alcoff notes that "even a complete retreat from speech is of course not neutral since it allows the continued dominance of current discourses and acts by omission to reinforce their dominance" (85). In this context, one cannot speak for oneself, even, without inviting criticism and, perhaps, committing errors; however this should not bind us into silence but rather admonish us to learn from our mistakes and push forward. Like Spivak, she rejects the idea of total retreat, postulated by intellectuals such as Deleuze and Foucault, "on the grounds that their position assumes the oppressed can transparently represent their own true interests" (Alcoff 86), opting for a "speaking to" of the oppressed, leaving open the possibility for them to produce a "countersentence" of their own if they are able.

In *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* the performer posits both a sentence and a countersentence. Her presence makes a statement. The audience is invited to take on the role of the performer themselves, to put themselves in her place, they are handed the tools for producing their own narrative, their own stories (Illust. 63). They do so not to displace her, necessarily, although there is certainly the danger of this, but rather add to the community of discourse. If we can view discourse as an event, as Foucault suggests, involving "speakers, words, hearers, locations,

language, et cetera (quoted in Alcoff 88),” then we can move towards conducting a discourse in a respectful manner in which all parties speak and are heard from equitable positions. We push against with equal force; we *counterv(e)il*.

3.7 Taboo and the Body as Surface of Inscription

The works of *Counterv(e)il* are laced with issues surrounding cultural and sexual taboos. Within Foucault's essay on genealogy, he describes the body as a figured surface and the scene of cultural inscription, an inscribed surface of events. The body is a blank page, a medium that must be destroyed and transfigured for "culture" to emerge, and this is achieved via history, seen as the figure of a relentless writing instrument. Only by disrupting the regulatory practices of "cultural coherence imposed on a body by a power regime," in effect by re(dis)covering the body prior to its cultural inscription, can one hope to overcome these "regulatory grid(s) of intelligibility (Butler 1999 166)." In *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*, it is the figure of the performer who essentially functions as a disruption to accepted reality, presented as a-historical (Illust. 64). However, the video reference of the falling woman, and the viewer, for example, carry their own histories. Both the encompassing cloth and symbolic icons and gestures serve as boundaries or liminal spaces of translation where the historicity of viewer, objects, and projections intersect.

The body of the performer is utilized to exaggerate the differences between herself and audience (Illust. 65). Butler looks at Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, the suggestion that the very contours of "the body" are established through markings that seek to institute specific codes of cultural coherence. Any discourse that establishes the boundaries of the body serves the purpose of instantiating and naturalizing certain taboos regarding the appropriate limits, postures, and modes of exchange that define what it is that constitutes bodies:

Ideas about separating, purifying, demarking and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherent untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created . . . her analysis . . . provides a possible point of departure for understanding the relationship by which social taboos institute and maintain the boundaries of the body as such. Her analysis suggests that what constitutes the limit of the body is never merely material, but on the surface, the skin, is systematically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions; indeed the boundaries of the body become, with her analysis, the limits of the social per se (Butler 1999 167).

A poststructuralist appropriation of her view might well understand the boundaries of

the body as the limits of the socially hegemonic. In a variety of cultures, Douglas maintains, there are

pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He [sic] has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone (Butler 1999 167).

Douglas, whose view that all social systems are considered dangerous at their margins, asks the question “Why should bodily margins be thought to be specifically invested with power and danger? [...] If the body is synecdochal for the social system per se or a site within which open systems converge, then any kinds of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment” (Butler 1999 168).

As in Douglas’ analogy, the abject body of the performer signifies potential danger and transgression, a disruption in the connective membrane of normalcy. We live in a changing world, and each of us exists within a complicated social, political, religious and cultural construct. Within concepts of veiling, arranged marriages, lack of education and basic health care for a significant portion of human society, denial of employment, negation of familial rights to custody of children and the lack of ability to hold property, there is an implicit seduction in the taboo, an invitation for transgression and subversion. Works by artists such as Shirin Neshat demonstrate these concepts, particularly in her film installations *Fervor* and *Rapture* in 2000, when she observes that it is often repressed women in any culture who question authority and men as a whole who stay within the existing societal norms (set up by men initially and administrated to their specifications already) (Horrigan 2000). An interesting example of this was demonstrated within the context of *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* near the end of the exhibition, when the performers, looking for variation (and perhaps relief from boredom) from their repetitive tasks extended themselves outside of the delineated borders of their performance, and out into the space of the foyer, testing the border of their confinement and challenging the parameters of the original choreographed instructions (Illust. 66, 67, 68). In the previous,

simple repeated movements of the woman's body occupying the structural space between the gallery walls (the "white box") and the silk "skin" covering the space, we may have seen repetition as oddly reassuring, but when the performer moves out into the space beyond the containment of the usual parameters of the gallery, we may then begin to question the ability of the fragile material and parameters of the room to continue to contain the body, what Jo Anna Isaak defines as "to exceed the domains of control, to live in excess of language" (Isaak 210

Few societies today do not try to enforce and regulate gender in some manner. The *performative* acts, gestures and desires of the subject can mask the principles of society that regulate gender. What exists as desire within may have no relation to what may or may not be inscribed on the surface of the body. In the end, we do not need to know if the performer is specifically female. At times, the more androgynous qualities of one performer were masked or concealed, and the bodily structure suggested beneath the fabric could have been that of a young male.

As Butler states, gender is not a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *stylized repetition of acts*," and the effect of gender is produced "through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler 1999 179). Gender is conceived as a shift in identity, a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. If gender is not continually enacted or produced by the subject, then, she continues, the "appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler 1999 179).

In an inversion that, conversely, locates agency and resistance, Butler explains that rules that enable and restrict the assertion of an "I", of intelligible identity, operate through repetition. It is the variation within repetition that allows for agency.

... In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency," then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If

the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e. new possibilities for gender that contest rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible (Butler 1999 185).

The question is not what meaning does that inscription carry within it, but what cultural apparatus arranges this meeting between the instrument and the body, and what interventions into this ritualistic repetition are possible? (Butler 1999 186). It is here that she engages the theories of Foucault in earnest in order to expand them into a meaningful resource for locating women's agency and the resistance necessary for a full feminist engagement and application toward material, lived experience stating that

construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible. The critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities; that conceit is the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject, a position that deploys precisely the imperialist strategies that feminism ought to criticize. The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them (Butler 1999 187).

Artists must imagine what repetitions and variations of repetitions will become possible in the work they produce. In his early work, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Foucault writes that the "very invention of the arts" owed much to the "deranged imagination of poets, painters, and musicians" (quoted in Afary 2005). It is through the "subversive repetitions" that artists create ruptures and dislocations, moments of resistance that provide access to agency and eventually to change. If we are able to do this by seemingly using existing normative constructions and structures of power, to invent new variations of repetitions, herein lies the appeal and relevance to contemporary art. It is the ambiguity of the message that is subversive, opening the possibility of multiple meanings and readings (Illust. 69).

3.8 Audience as Performer

A large part of our excessive, unnecessary manifestations come from a terror that if we are not somehow signaling all the time that we exist, we will in fact no longer be there.
– Peter Brook (quoted in Bogart 79)

In signaling our existence to the world, we also construct our subjectivities, or internal realities. The opportunity to perform in this way in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* allows us to operate beneath a mask or veil, perhaps in a subversive manner. Is one more self-conscious when one acts above the cloth or from beneath it, where we perhaps imagine a freedom free from prying eyes (Illust. 70)?

Darren O’Donnell writes that “in the arena of artifice, the unscripted and accidental is often much more beautiful, astonishing and revealing than the rehearsed (O’Donnell 60).” In both installations of *Counterv(e)il*, there is space waiting to be filled. In *Social Acupuncture*, O’Donnell discusses the work of installation and performance artist Santiago Sierra, whose work with illegal workers casts light on the social exclusion of transient workers and their situation. In the piece *For Workers Who Cannot be Paid, Renumerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes*, Sierra hired Chechnyan asylum seekers to spend the day at a gallery hidden in small cardboard boxes. The viewer’s experience was not of the actual workers themselves, but of their presence within the boxes, in effect restaging their roles as that unseen social category of migrant workers which often operates as the backbone of capitalistic enterprise. Both an awkward and uncomfortable relationship, and although never in direct contact with each other, the antagonism of the interaction or lack of interaction between the viewer/performer in this instance points to the unequal relationship that exists between them in Sierra’s work, and indeed in the larger social context of the invisible migrant worker (O’Donnell 10).

Both Sierra and O’Donnell seek to initiate encounters between disparate segments of society by challenging the space of artistic and non-artistic activities, “activities in which power differentials are at least tacitly acknowledged and the artistic manoeuvre is to either reverse or erase them temporarily in a gesture of antagonism that contributes to rising social intelligence” (O’Donnell 33). It is not then sufficient for the artist to create art for art’s sake, for both these

artists, the work must engage socially as well.

In a similar fashion, in Gustavo Artigas's work *The Rules of the Game*, two soccer teams play against each other, intersecting on the soccer field, while four teams play at the same time. In this example, the teams function as a metaphor for Mexican/American cultures, their intersecting play drawing attention to the specific situation of the interaction between two cultures across a contentious border. In an apparent counter-movement, a kind of symbiosis evolves from the initially confused play, and the play of both congruent games begins to flow naturally, proving that two populations or events can coexist simultaneously. A reviewer from NOW magazine observes this particular staged event by noting that "At first they collide in confusion, but after a few minutes the two games evolve to work with each other, and soon it's a well choreographed spectacle where goals [...] are scored in unison" (quoted in O'Donnell 34). Explains O'Donnell,

the piece, even detached from its political context, can still provide politically charged content by proving that differences don't need to be ironed out; two sets of rules, norms and behaviours can exist in the same space at the same time and the difference can serve to unify ... Multitude is created, paradoxically, by drawing attention to otherness (O'Donnell 34).

Counterv(e)il attempts to construct interventions similar in relation and idea to both Artigas and Sierra, although admittedly on a smaller and much more intimate scale, and also through the private transformation of public space. The interactions between the performer and the audience/performers in *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* specifically also come to a form of symbiosis in their movements and explorations. We are confronted with the reality of a nude performer who is covered by a thin, translucent material, and whose bodily outlines and contours are perceptible, placing them outside of our accustomed comfort zone, but as we move beside her or around her, or she among us, she becomes more familiar, perhaps even acceptable and at least less strange or threatening. Although her actions are choreographed to the extent that she is schooled in how to avoid direct contact if possible, instructed not to

verbally engage with the audience – she cannot control the movement of the audience, nor their reactions/responses to her own movements. In this unrehearsed interaction new relationships are forged, new interactions and interventions, previously unimagined, are presented as possibilities. The element of chance has its own simplicity for which one cannot account or plan. The performer (and audience/performers) can choose to rest when they wish on the mattress, staircase or chair provided. The performer repetitively sleeps, walks, climbs, sits, crawls, and occasionally disappears into the space she inhabits between the gallery walls and the layer of fabric (Illust. 71).

Freud speaks of a recurrence of the same situation, things and events, which when combined with certain conditions awakens a feeling of the uncanny, recalling the sense of helplessness felt in dreams (Freud 427). These endless gestural repetitions raise questions as to their ultimate purpose or intent. The reality of the uncanny is not something new and foreign, but something old and familiar – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression. Freud reverts to Scheller’s definition of “the uncanny as something which ought to have been concealed but which nevertheless has come to light” (Freud 429).

In the forward to *Installation Art: Empire of the Senses*, Jonathon Crary discusses the double-sidedness of visual perception and how strategies of de-familiarization serve to fragment and compartmentalize the world. Visual perceptions are formed from both within and without, but it is the erosion of this reciprocity – the transfer of human capabilities to machines for example – that challenges and disrupts our accustomed ways of seeing. He states:

For those working in the visual arts and new media, there is a particular awareness that the current spread of communication networks is not generating a trans-national community with a shared set of aesthetic and perceptual foundations. Instead, there has been the spread of relatively self-sufficient micro-worlds of affect, meaning and experience, between which intelligible exchange is less and less possible (quoted in De Oliveira 7).

In what may at first be construed as an effect counter to the notions of interconnectedness put forth by Deleuze and Guattari, Crary describes this as an

epistemological crisis, where the sheer amount of knowledge available serves to undermine concepts of shared knowledge; “Instead, electronically accessible data can be used in the service of any point of view, regardless of how extreme or absurd” (De Oliveira 7). This is particularly disturbing when applied to the concept of Globalization, where, via media such as the internet, the workings of capitalism are increasingly independent of the actual physical location of our bodies. Crary cites this as one of the factors for the prevalence of installation as an artform, where artists are placed in the position of “inventing flexible models of imagination and narrative outside of the enforced routines of cultural consumption” (De Oliveira 9). In this respect, it can be seen not as counter to the rhizomatic logic of the *and*, but as a product of artists striving to rediscover connections and even forging/forcing relationships where none had previously existed. The art critic Nicolas Bourriaud reiterates this notion whereby “the changing role of the artist as less than a generator of original or primary materials, to that of an editor of existing cultural objects to be inserted into new contexts” (De Oliveira 22).

The encompassing environmental, sensory-surrounding aspect of installation engages simultaneously both the centre and margins, revealing multiple routes of entry and exit. It is the role of the audience in installation art that acts to bring both artist, performer and viewer together in a discursive environment. In this theatrical and performative space, the audience as author generates their own meanings and interpretations from their everyday experiences and sense of familiarity to (or alienation from) specific objects. Robert Storr in “*No Stage, No Actors, But it’s Theatre (and Art)*” (1999) describes these complete immersive environments such as those presented by American artist Ann Hamilton, as “much like wandering onstage and picking up loose pages from a script, overhearing bits of recorded dialogue and trying to figure out what the setting is ... and what actions might still be taken” (De Oliveira 17). Artists such as Ann Hamilton and Canadian artist Stan Douglas similarly use ‘real’ objects in their work, investigating how public space is made private by creating internal spaces that “allows the artist to sidestep the demands for universality inherent in the use of public, or external space” (De Oliveira 29), but it is a provisional location, one fully negotiated by the artist. As Derrida’s

subjectile, the space acts as liminal one, a launching pad, as it were, for the work.

The objects represented in *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, specifically, reference several contemporary artists, such as Louise Bourgeois, Damien Hirst, and Kiki Smith, to name only a few, for example, in their use of the “real” object – hair, honey, goat legs, et cetera – but also in the constructed object, one that “represents” in an uncanny manner – latex for skin, moving image for reality. Structurally, and on a more formal level, *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* holds similarities with that of French artist Annette Messager, particularly with regard to her recent Venice Biennale installation, where a billowing black cloth animated from beneath by fans blowing air revealed and concealed lit sculptural objects (such as decapitated dolls) placed on the floor. Similarly, her use of the veil is a loaded one, alluding to issues surrounding the veiling of women in both Muslim and Catholic cultures.

It is the scale of installation that holds its power. In another seeming counter-movement, and despite earlier discussion of the importance of intimate proximities, the sheer monumentality of dimensional scale ultimately can limit attempts at intimacy (Illust. 72). Scale further restricts the traditional single-point perspective, forcing the viewer out of their position of stasis and accepted notions of space and time, replacing these with multiple spaces and simultaneous events, shattering our experience of space and time.

4. In Conclusion: Some Observations on Truth, Apostasy and the Real

To doubt everything and to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both dispense with the necessity of reflection. – Jules Henri Poincare (1854-1912)

In *Counterv(e)il* as an entirety, there is an uncertainty of purpose which highlights a transience of reality. *Counterv(e)il: Desire* in the Alternator Gallery space presents a more definitive evidence of trauma, and personalizes the encounter. *Counterv(e)il: Conceal* in the FINA gallery is more interactive, universal, and may actually represent an erasure of trauma, a kind of cleansing, particularly in the way in which the performer(s) write on the surface of the cloth, and also erase their passage through, leaving behind only the trait of their journey. The first openly reiterates a traumatic experience, while the second emphasizes concepts of presence in a constant state of flux.

One inevitably must question the intentionality of the work. It is often when a creative work is completed, and presented to a public for reaction/commentary that intentionality in fact emerges.

Deborah Root writes in *Cannibal Culture* of the display of objects in art galleries and museums, and the accompanying set of assumptions and suppositions that attend them, especially in their relation to actual culture. She states,

Notions of originality and authenticity, and of the relation of detailed information to ‘truth,’ underlie museum’s presentations of the objects they administer. One of the most cherished convictions of high culture concerns the primacy of the authentic object, which is believed to provide an experience that a reproduction can not . . . Once an object is named as art either by the relevant specialists or by the market, it tends to be exhibited alone, displayed as an aesthetic form rather than a source of cultural information . . . art universalizes the object and places it beyond culture (Root 110-111).

Our assumptions about the truth of objects are mediated by who names it as art (in this case the artist and the presentation of the work within the gallery spaces), and what the viewer brings to the act of looking and interpretation (Illust. 73, 74, 75).

The display of the real object as art has roots in Dadaist nihilism, the anti-art aesthetic, prevalent after the First World War. Thomas McEvelley’s discussion of the prefix anti-, which he describes first as opposition and later clarifies as shifting more toward that of an exchange,

can be looked at in regard to Derrida's *parergon*, the boundary that forever doubles itself. In setting up the binary oppositions of thesis/anti-thesis, art/anti-art, painter/anti-painter, et cetera, McEvilley presents us with a *passé-partout*, both a master-key and also a frame composed of two sheets of transparent material mounted back to back: a double border and transparent, a condition of possibility for both the visible and the invisible. McEvilley states that these binarisms are not merely set up in opposition to, but rather "proposes (itself) as a replacement for (it.)" (McEvilley 2005 15). One cannot exist without the other: the border reflects and exchanges in an ambiguously positive value. It is the occulted object of desire (loss), suggested by Lacan.

Anti-art is not non-art. It is the opposing dialogue with itself, turning the dominant art of its time upside-down and reflecting two separate sides of the same thing. McEvilley states, "nothing really exists, but human life is governed by convention ... Nothing is in itself more than this or that" (McEvilley 2005 21). He discusses Pyrrhonic philosophy which negates the classical ontology of existence as an unchanging essence, existence as a slave to conventions and opinions, with no claim to essential truths. McEvilley states that language is irrelevant to claims of truth: if nothing is true, then nothing is false, either (McEvilley 2005 21). The influence of Pyrrhon on Duchampian ideas can be seen in Duchamp's embracing of the term "indifference", a position of no-position, stepping outside of binary oppositions. Duchamp's "visual indifference," seen as "the total absence of good or bad taste" (McEvilley 2005 23) in his choice of Readymades (urinal, bottle-rack), has also, through the passage of time, slipped across the ever shifting boundaries of the *parergon* into the aesthetic discourse to be accepted as objects of beauty in their own right. This invariably led to the introduction of the notion of intervention into the normal conventions of reality, creating a rupture that leads to eventual transformation.

The Kantian roots of formalism that relegate artistic judgments only to the aesthetic (taste or judgment) in response to forms or colours, negate the ethical or the cognitive. Duchamp directly attacked the formalist doctrine, refusing to conform to universal judgments of

taste. Taste was the enemy of art (McEvelley 26). This concept, plus Duchamps' inclusion of linguistic elements heralded the foundational principles of Conceptual art, and this was later carried over into video, performance and installation art. Creation by designation, the contextualization of an object as an art object through social or cultural juxtapositions, basically designating non-art objects as art, was a central defining strategy for Duchamp. Duchamp, the agnostic, revelled in the idea of chance, removing the traditional aesthetic decision making from the process.

The most important connection between Dada and post-modernism was the relation between the Readymade and the "found-object" precipitating "the breakdown of modernism and the instigation of the radical other" (McEvelley 31). The syllogism of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis reflected a means of proceeding out of the Kantian Modernist, accomplished through the synthesis (post-modernism) of thesis (modernism) and anti-thesis (anti-modernism), a kind of reconciliation between art and life.

Dada, however, is merely an historical precedent, and *Counterv(e)il* could not be described as Dada, however, it is based upon earlier Dadaist strategies, particularly the use of the found object, and followed by the anxious object (one could argue the abject), when injected with social, political and psychological inferences. Later transformations of the dada sensibility have lead us to a post-modern hybridity, which embraces new fields of reference, such as feminism, post-colonialism, the logics of late capitalism, and psychoanalysis, to name a few, essentially expanding the metonymy of this dynamic.

Duchamp was responding to the aftermath of two World Wars, an industrial revolution, various other political revolutions, and the instigation of the Cold War. As a late baby-boomer and one brought up also immersed in this era, I believed in the values championed by the narrator of the 1960s television serial *Superman*, whose alter-ego Clark Kent vowed to fight for "*Truth, Justice, and the American Way*", as if these were somehow all bound up together and inseparable from each other. I believed that democracy would triumph over all other forms of politics, that women would be treated decently and equitably and have control over their own

destinies, that science and reason would take precedence over religious fundamentalism. Like Fox Mulder of *X-Files* fame, I still want to believe.

Our encounters with installation are at best temporary. Presented with a chain of meanings within constructed environments, linked, but often tenuously, it is here – in the spaces reflected in Derrida’s *parergon*, in the shifting boundaries of the liminal, in the interconnecting rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari – that we also encounter the “heterotopias” of Michel Foucault, mentioned earlier. Heterotopias are formally described as:

1. misplacement or displacement, as of an organ.
2. the formation of tissue in a part where its presence is abnormal.⁵

These counter-sites of installation exist simultaneously both within and outside of acknowledged cultural boundaries. They are sites of contestation and inversion. “Places of these kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (De Oliveira 38).

Director Anne Bogart discusses truth as an *experience*, not something that is easily defined, and which exists in the space between opposites. “It exists in the disagreement of ideas or imagery ... It is expressed in the tension between opposites, the opposition of physical attraction and desire for escape. Opposition, or dialectic, sets up alternative systems of perceiving. It creates shock spaces where insight might occur” (Bogart 56). Experience is mediated through the body, and the interpretation of the participant of the materials presented. In any form of observation or participation, it is important that a critical stance be maintained. British writer Richard Sennett suggests that “interaction is then not simply an opportunity to ensure the audience’s participation, but instead suggests a creative engagement with the content of the artwork which directly impacts the evaluation of the museum itself” (quoted in De Oliveira 46). In the end, it is not the actual creation of the object/artifact in the traditional sense that is important in installation and performance, but the cultural activity surrounding it.

⁵ Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. 10 Aug. 2008. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/heterotopia>>.

Exhibitions such as “*Sensation*” at the Brooklyn Museum in 2006, have touched off many debates over the ethics surrounding the use of the real in art. Often works such as this, and such as *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, reference natural history museums or medical museums. Arthur Danto’s discussion of British artist Damien Hirst, notorious for his use of a formaldehyde encased shark in the work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, and sectioned animals used in other works, reaches past the ethical debate of the use these creatures as art, to investigate the *why* of Hirst’s use of the real. He states:

... Hirst uses death as a way of expressing thoughts about death. “His most celebrated work,” according to a press release, “has never shied away from the terrible beauty that lies in death and the inevitable decay contained in beauty”; Hirst himself, on a Web page, is quoted as saying, “I am aware of mental contradictions in everything, like: I am going to die and I want to live forever. I can’t escape the fact and I can’t let go of the desire (Danto 54).

We live our lives in a society in denial of aging, sickness and death, separated from the messy practice of going out to hunt down our food, caring for our own sick or aged, or preparing the dead for burial. However, real or simulated, it is the apparent unrelated juxtaposition of objects that intrigues the most in Hirst’s work, and also in my own. Of one work, *Love Lost*, Danto writes:

The works are inevitably mysterious, as there is no clear narrative that connects [objects], nor is there any available allegory one can easily seize. Any interpretation that occurs to me seems instantly superficial, so I think it best to let the mystery stand. There is, however, one truth worth considering, which is that both works are extremely beautiful ... it seems to me that one possibility is that beauty heals ... that the beauty heals the pain of loss, or that it can ... Beauty cannot be preserved. And the fragility of beauty is like the fragility of life. (Danto 58).

The darker truth is that beauty cannot be preserved, and eventually all will become ashes and dust. As artists we create works of reality and works of memory that we hope will live on beyond ourselves. We pick apart the scattered objects and detritus of everyday life to search for meaning and systems of beliefs to hold onto. Apostasy can be looked at as the abandonment of what one may have once voluntarily professed, and an apostle as one who is perhaps sent out, to preach reformation, questioning the status quo and injecting doubt into preconceptions. In an artist statement in 1996, Hirst gives a reading of a piece by Bruce Naumann, which he describes as follows: “It’s a neon sign that’s a spiral that goes into nothing in the centre and you have to

tilt your head when you read it and it says ‘The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths,’ and you go ‘Oh, yeah, great’ and then you go ‘Oh god’ and there’s nothing there.” Even Danto’s own interpretation of the Naumann work did not originally consider this option. “I had not considered the spiraled words just ending in empty space to mean: There are no mythic truths, there is only nothing. As an artist’s statement, ‘Oh god, there’s nothing there’ is pretty deep” (Danto 59).

In art, we search for authenticity through artifice and simulated experience. If any truth is to be found, it is in the experiences generated between objects, or between objects and the viewer, and carrying their own logic (Illust. 76). In providing questions without answers, in the setting up of possibilities without fixed boundaries, the artist can open new pathways of interpretation and meaning, but not necessarily define or limit them. As an artist, in my own search for something to believe, I find myself discovering it in the wide smile of joy glimpsed on the face of the woman falling endlessly in space, in the sheer sensual experience of silky fabric sliding over skin, in the sounds of buzzing bees filling my senses and the resilience of pushing against a trampoline to gather the momentum to fly back up into the air.

Therein lies the apostatic gesture.

Art is the lie that tells the truth – Pablo Picasso

5. Illustrations



**Illustration 1. Performers: MaryAnn Lawrenchuck, Christina Smyth (standing),
Counterveil: Conceal, UBCO FINA Gallery (Susan Brandoli, photographer)**



**Illustration 2. Performers: Mary Ann Lawrenchuck (left), Christina Smyth (right),
Performers for Counterv(e)il: Conceal, UBCO FINA Gallery (Richard Vignola,
photographer)**



Illustration 3. Video still, Counterv(e)il: Conceal, Emilia Brandoli performer (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 4. An anxious object – dismembered Rocky Mountain Goat's leg and cast shadow, from Counterv(e)il: Desire, Alternator Gallery for Contemporary Art, Project Gallery, Kelowna (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 5. Constructing Memory: fabrication of the cloth covering used in Counterv(e)il: Conceal. (Alan Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 6. Signs of Trauma – Performing taxidermy on the goat's legs used in Counterv(e)il: Desire. (A. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 7. Signs of Trauma – Skinning the legs. (A. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 8. Signs of Trauma – Stitch/conceal. (A. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 9. Entrance into Counterv(e)il: Desire, Alternator Project Gallery. Translucent cast latex sheet for bee projection. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 10. Objects of anxiety: Medical unit, dripping honey, human hair, headphones, goat's legs, video projection of jumping feet, detail from *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, Alternator Project Gallery. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 11. Medical I.V. Unit , dripping honey, human hair, headphones (sound). Detail from *Counterv(e)il: Desire*. (S. Brandoli, photographer)

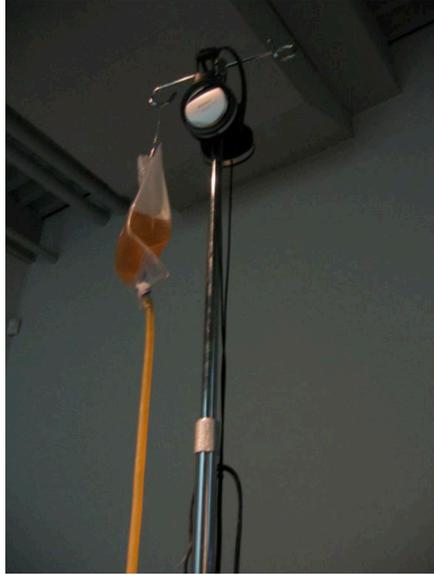


Illustration 12. Headphones, connected to I.V. unit of dripping honey, detail from Counterv(e)il: Desire. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 13. Dripping honey. Detail from Counterv(e)il: Desire. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 14. Web of honey strands on human hair. Detail from *Counterv(e)il: Desire*. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 15. Pool of sticky honey, seeped through the hair after several weeks into the exhibition. Detail from *Counterv(e)il: Desire*. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 16. Honey pool. Detail from Counterv(e)il: Desire. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 17. Translucent latex sheeting (manufactured by the artist) allowed for the projections in Counterv(e)il: Desire to be viewed from both sides of the scrim. The sound of buzzing bees permeated the room. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 18. Associations and contrasting relationships between objects were formed via their juxtaposition within the room. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 19. Entrance to Alternator Project Gallery, Counterv(e)il: Desire. Latex scrim. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 20. Detail from Counterv(e)il: Desire, view from second projection in corner (woman jumping) back to entrance to Project Gallery, projection of bees flying. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 21. Rhizomatic connections. Installation view of UBCO FINA gallery, Counterv(e)il: Conceal, showing video projection of falling woman against back wall, and the fabric-covered space: walls, ceiling, floor, chair (left corner), bed (front left corner), and performer (back right corner, in front of stairs). (S. Brandoli, photographer.)



Illustration 22. Detail. Falling woman projection onto fabric, detail from Counterv(e)il: Conceal, UBCO FINA Gallery. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 23. Performer and stairs. Installation view, UBCO FINA gallery, Counterv(e)il: Conceal. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 24. Installation view, bed, performer, chair, Counterv(e)il: Conceal. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 25. The original is supplemented by the copy. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 26. Performer, *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 27. Installation view, *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 28. Performer at the top of the stairs, *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 29. Detail from *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 30. Detail from *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 31. Installation view, *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 32. Installation view, Counterv(e)il: Conceal. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 33. Detail, Counterv(e)il: Conceal. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 34. Blurring the boundaries: overlapping images occur in the projection of the video against the movements of the performer, as well as the shadow of the performer or objects, which take on a life of their own. Detail from *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 35. Detail, *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 36. Detail, Counterv(e)il: Conceal. Trajectory of "the gaze." (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 37. The performer adopted various attitudes in her interaction with the objects placed in the gallery, and with the audience/performers. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 38. Traditionally, the placing of objects higher or lower, suggests a kind of hierarchy. The performer would often stand on the stairs above the level of the audience. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 39. The performer could choose, at times, to emerge from and disappear into the liminal space between the architecture of the gallery and the fabric lining. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 40. Energy in the changing forms. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 41. The performer reclines on the bed. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 42. Feeling at a visceral level. Detail, Country(e)il: Conceal. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 43. The female spectator. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 44. For whom does the performer perform? (A. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 45. Observation, surveillance, documentation. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 46. Beneath the fabric. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 47. Audience or performer? (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 48. Video detail from *Counterv(e)il: Desire*, Alternator Gallery.



Illustration 49. Video detail from *Counterv(e)il: Desire*.



Illustration 50. Video detail from *Counterv(e)il: Desire*.



Illustration 51. Points of observation. *Counterv(e)il: Conceal*. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 52. The performer could choose to fade into the liminal space between the gallery wall and the fabric lining, at times disappearing completely. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 53. The performer also was able to melt into the background to be less noticeable, concealed by the movement of the video as well as the fabric lining. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 54. Audience as reluctant performers. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 55. The audience could "perform" both above and below the fabric lining. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 56. Performers, Counterv(e)il: Conceal. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 57. Chains of observation. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 58. Acts of bravery. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 59. Mapping the body of the performer. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 60. Sentinel (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 61. Abjective stance (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 62. Protection/abjection. Who speaks for whom? (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 63. The trait or trace, as left behind by the performer. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 64. When the audience felt they were being observed themselves, they were often reluctant to participate. The nude performer can be glimpsed under the fabric along the back wall, unnoticed by all but one of the observers. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 65. Pushing against boundaries. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 66. Exceeding the boundaries. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 67. Moving beyond borders. (S. Brandoli, photographer)

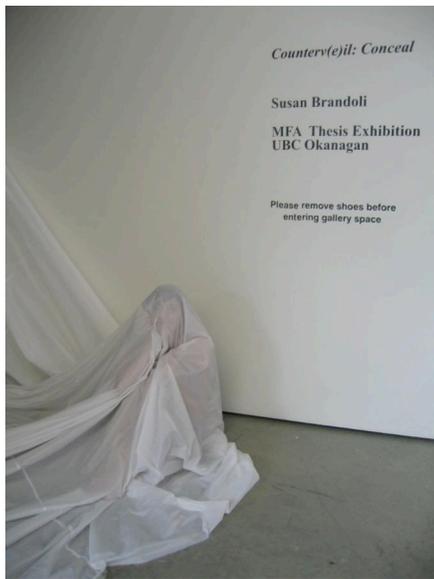


Illustration 68. Testing boundaries. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 69. Icon. (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 70. Variation through repetition. (S. Brandoli, photographer).



Illustration 71. Every repetition returns a difference. ((S. Brandoli, photographer).



Illustration 72. The monumentality of installation art may limit the possibility for intimacy. (R. Vignola, photographer)



Illustration 73. Uncovering the real. Detail, Counterv(e)il: Conceal, between the fabric and the gallery walls. (S. Brandoli, photographer).



Illustration 74. Objects beneath the fabric (wrapped chair). Detail, Counterveil: Conceal (S. Brandoli, photographer)



Illustration 75. Stairs beneath the fabric. Detail, Counterv(e)il: Conceal. (S. Brandoli, photographer).



Illustration 76. The anxious object. (R. Vignola, photographer).

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