

# PROTOTYPES

Beginnings of Oral History  
Performance Projects

Undergraduate Journal  
of Performance Creation

Concordia University  
Department of Theatre  
Fall 2020

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OF PERFORMANCE CREATION

Concordia University  
Department of Theatre  
Fall 2020

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unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory  
Montréal, Québec

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The *Undergraduate*  
*Journal of Performance*  
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Olive (URW Type Foundry),  
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We acknowledge that  
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is located on unceded  
Indigenous lands.  
Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) is  
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gathering place for many  
First Nations. Today,  
it is home to a diverse  
population of Indigenous  
and other peoples. We  
respect the continued  
connections with the past,  
present and future in our  
ongoing relationships  
with Indigenous and  
other peoples within the  
Montreal community.  
We recognize the  
Kanien'kehá:ka as the  
custodians of the lands  
and waters upon which we  
work, create, and learn.

# PROTOTYPES

*Beginnings of Oral History  
Performance Projects*



# CAITE CLARK

*guest editor*

Acts of Listening Lab, Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling  
Concordia BFA Specialization Theatre & Development, 2019

Oral History Performance, if the name does not already give it away, is interdisciplinary by nature. The practice and study of Oral History is inherently political; placing value in the voices that have participated (or in some cases, have been victimized) in history, rather than the dusty written narratives Eurocentric culture chooses to place value or hold truth in. By shifting focus towards testimony and spoken tradition, Oral History chooses to believe in lived experience.

The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS), a hub for Concordia University-based research, prides itself not only in the direct connection to communities in Montreal and beyond, but also the long-standing relationship with the Department of Theatre. Sparked by the collaborations of professors Steven High (Oral History), Ted Little (Theatre), Kathleen Vaughan (Art Education), and Cynthia Hammond (Art History), *The Right to the City Project* was a four-year long endeavour that sought to connect Concordia students of varying disciplines in community-engaged pedagogy. As a graduate of both this project, and Concordia's Theatre and Development program (now known as Performance Creation), I believe strongly in the value of shared authority. As defined by COHDS, shared authority "is about much more than speaking to new audiences; it requires the cultivation of trust, the development of collaborative relationships, and shared decision-making. It cannot be rushed." Oral History, especially when the word Performance is included in the practice, is a

collaborative effort. It is a shared agreement between the artist researcher and participant that commits to learning from one another. The artist researcher may have authority or knowledge regarding their practice, but the participant is the one who owns their lived experience.

In my assistance producing the final outcomes in professor Luis Carlos Sotelo's Oral History Performance class and subsequently editing this edition of UJPERC, I have paid witness to the immense growth in these Performance Creation students. This edition of the journal is a compilation of reflections following the presentation of Oral History Performance project prototypes. And that's just what they are: prototypes. These students were tasked with devising a project that would translate testimony into performance; requiring a connection with a collaborator, an interview, and a creation process. As the definition of sharing authority suggests, this takes time. Building a trusting relationship asks for dedication and vulnerability from everyone involved. Thus, in only a semester's time, these projects are a beginning: the start of an idea, that with intention and care can lead to an engaging performance, and hopefully with it a long lasting creative relationship. It was an honour to witness the relationships and testimonies being forged by these young artists, and this handful of seeds, this collection of ideas, is ripe with potential.

Many thanks to Luis Sotelo, the students and their project participants for their thoughtful contributions, the team at COHDS and the Acts of Listening Lab for supporting the student performances, Vincent Potvin for graphic design, and UJPERC Founder and Editor-in-Chief Shauna Janssen for your leadership. ✱

# LUIS CARLOS SOTELO CASTRO

*guest editor*

Associate Professor, Department of Theatre, Concordia University  
Canada Research Chair in Oral History Performance  
Co-Director, Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling

This issue offers a sample of seven works by students in the Oral History Performance (hereafter, OHP) course that I offered at Concordia in the Winter 2019 term. I selected these essays because, all together, they map out some key stages of a typical creation process and show challenges that any creator may face when devising an original piece of oral history-informed performance. Read these essays, and I trust they will give you useful clues about how to tackle safely difficult topics that matter to you, your families, your friends, and your communities.

Students in this class engaged with various questions that are both deeply personal and social at once. They include: how to exist tactically as a neurodivergent person in an urban environment, how does climate change impact different bodies, what would a sex offender have to say about his sexual crime, what new path would a high competitive athlete take once she or he cannot continue practicing her sport for whatever reason, what is it like to migrate to Canada from Syria, what might life have been like for a woman in Winnipeg after she recovered from alcoholism in the 1970s, how to get teenagers to stay away from porno or to avoid using porno to abuse their partners sexually, and what is life like for a family where one of the children has severe autism? These essays share some of the struggles that students faced as they came up with these topics and, importantly, some of the strategies they used to network with and recruit participants as interviewees for their project.

Some of the skills that an OHP-creator needs to develop include: to build relationships with potential interviewees and stakeholders, to manage their expectations, to negotiate with them the terms of their engagement with the process, to interview and listen to them, to do recordings of good quality, to store, transcribe, classify, and edit them, to identify and address ethical concerns related with their handling of the solicited, recorded, and performed memories, and to be resourceful and creative when it comes to curate and perform the collected narratives. Besides, creators need to choose the format of their creation. This collection sample illustrates formats as varied as solo verbatim performance, video installations combined with live actions, video installations combined with teleconferencing technology, a sharing circle, or participatory performance. One of the students chose to act herself, another engaged an actress and thus developed skills as a director, a third created an environment and thus produced what might be best described as a happening or event. Another used her own story to address issues of sexual violence. Students also looked into different forms of pre-existing archives to contextualize the narratives that they chose to present. Some of these archives included family photographs and videos, newspapers, and sounds and videos publicly available on the internet.

Due to the complexities involved in defining a meaningful topic for an OHP project, describing inclusion and exclusion criteria for their participants, and approaching and engaging interviewees within the limited time available to students within a thirteen weeks-long term, I asked students in this class to collect, transcribe and analyze maximum two interviews and to develop a performance prototype out of them rather than a full performance. I believe that the research and

development process for an OHP project needs to be of such length that it allows the creators to consult with their interviewees as the ideas evolve. Creators also need time to test solutions with peers, gather and implement feedback from the instructor, make changes and monitor that the work's ethical concerns are taken seriously all along. Students took this course along with four more courses. Thus, it was impossible to expect a commitment bigger than some eight to ten hours per week, which is the standard expectation for a three credits course at Concordia.

At the beginning of the course, an overview of some practitioners and scholars in the field offered students a sense of the variety of artistic formats they could use to “translate” oral history into an artistic performance. I structured their assignments in a way that each assignment could scaffold their creative process. By that, I mean that the assignments were, simultaneously, steps in their creative process: first, they had to choose a case of an OHP from a list to make a close study of that case to make a presentation to their peers. This initial assignment got them to think about what they would want their project to be about and what format they would want to explore artistically. Three assignments followed each one representing a different stage in the development of the project idea. In their first assignment, they had to do an initial outline of their project idea, identify potential interviewees, explain why they had chosen that topic, and draft an ethical application to get approval from the Theatre Department's Ethics committee. Their second assignment asked them to give a more detailed description of the interviewing process: who, where, when, using what questions, and recording technology? This second assignment allowed students to revise their ethics application and their initial idea in the light of



feedback from their peers, the instructor and the ethics committee. Lastly, their fourth assignment was a more detailed description of their prototype idea. They had to state what their artistic intention was, who the target audience was, what space they were going to use, etc. Drawing on templates from institutions that offer grants for artistic projects, I developed a form that students had to complete to describe their prototype idea. They could choose two venues for their performance: either the studio where the class took place (MB.7.425) or the Acts of Listening Lab (ALLab). The ALLab is a research-creation hub that I started in 2018 within the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling to investigate the transformative power of oral history performance. It offers an acoustically enhanced black-box space for creators to test different strategies for engaging performance audiences as listeners of personal, potentially transformative narratives.

The results were promising and rewarding. I thus offered students to produce a mini-festival at the Acts of Listening Lab in the spring following the course. Most of the students included in this collection took that chance and re-enacted their work. One of them, Zoe Bailly Stetson developed her relationship with her interviewee further and organized in the fall 2019 at the ALLab a workshop with her, Marie Cornellier, to discuss the issues raised by the performance. Marie Cornellier describes herself in her blog as a marginalized person, more specifically, as a queer woman who has suffered from many health problems since childhood, some of them related to abuse and other to environmental factors. According to her blog, it seems, both participating in Zoe's creative process as interviewee and in the workshop at the ALLab offered her the opportunity to be "truly heard". She describes the experience of being

heard as “a healing process”<sup>1</sup>. I think this alone shows that oral history performance has a huge potential to enable creators to transcend the barriers of the art world and develop their craft into a tool to make interventions that matter through artistic performance. ✱

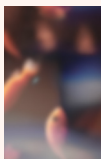
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<sup>1</sup> See <https://mariecornellier.com/2019/10/15/the-art-of-listening-to-the-most-marginalized/>

ALYSE  
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## EXISTING TACTICALLY

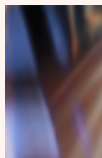
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ZOÉ  
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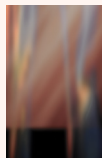
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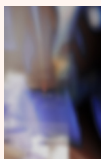
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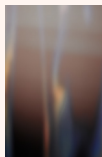
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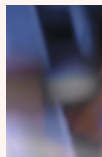
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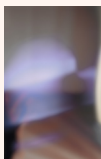
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ALYSE TUNNELL

# EXISTING TACTICALLY

BUILDING FORTS OF SOLIDARITY

*“Our task is not merely to  
extract information, but to open  
up narrative spaces.”*

—

Alessandro Portelli  
(on being an Oral Historian)<sup>1</sup>



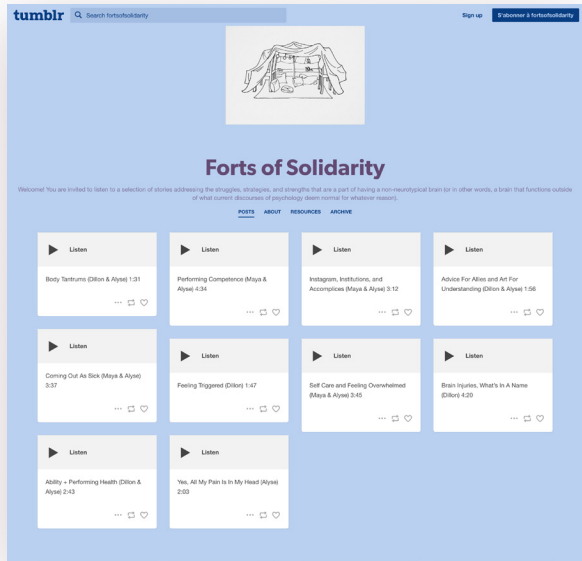
[fortsofsolidarity.tumblr.com](http://fortsofsolidarity.tumblr.com)

Sharing stories is one of the most intuitive ways we get to know each other. Stories invite us to step into the realm of another, leading us on a journey through an alternative perspective. In creating vantage points that foster compassion and understanding, they allow us to explore the similarities and differences between human experiences. Stories can change our minds, give us hope, help us see the beauty and horror that co-exist in the world; they bring new life to knowledge. Stories allow writers, readers, performers, and audiences alike to move outside themselves into a new collective space. And with this, there are few things quite so transformative as a great story.

Oral History Performance is one of the theatrical mediums which invites us to explore real stories of human experience. In this way, Oral History Performance is a social art practice that builds on the ethos of storytelling as a revelatory, political and engaging act with the potential to form bonds of solidarity between those involved (audiences, performers, and characters alike). The power of this type of performance lies in its intention to create narrative space for stories that attempt to recreate personal narratives with precision, honesty, and authenticity. This makes it an ideal medium to reveal larger cultural issues through the exploration of personal embodiment and lived experience. By giving people the space to explore vulnerable, personal and real experiences, Oral History Performance gives us a lens to explore the complex nature of living in a world filled with both beauty and violence. As a medium it invites us to contemplate our own lives in relations to the lives of others.

My piece, *Existing Tactically*, focuses on the realities of attempting to function in contemporary society while having non-neurotypical experiences of the world. The interviews for my project, *Existing Tactically*, explore the truth, beauty, and chaos of having a brain that functions outside of what society has decided is “normal.” With this piece, I hoped to create space for deep, authentic conversation about the embodied experiences of neurodivergence and the reverberations that those experiences have on our lives. To fully carve out this space, I created a multifaceted work that exists in a variety of spaces, including the physical installation of the project, a website, and the emotional space of each interview.

*Existing tactically* is composed of three distinct spatial experiences. First, an intense sensory experience that is meant to mirror my own experience of sensory overload: As the participants enter the black box, there is a barrage of sensory information including bright spotlights aimed at the door and speakers loudly playing sounds from the metro at rush hour (one of my biggest pain triggers). These purposely overwhelming sensory experiences last for one minute before calming to reveal a whimsical fort fit with cozy blankets, soft lighting and pillows. After the onslaught of light and sound, the second space is meant to evoke a sense of comfort, softness and decompression. The fort has purple and cream coloured curtains for the walls, which are interlaced with fairy lights that add a glow to the space and replace the spotlights when they are turned off. The goal for this space was to create a sense of safety for people to interact with the third aspect of the installation, a tablet with my Tumblr archive *Fortsof Solidarity* (<https://fortsofsolidarity.tumblr.com/>). In this iteration of the project there was one tablet that



people were invited to congregate around and choose clips to listen to. However, there would ideally be multiple tablets and headsets so people could explore at their own pace. The archive itself contains short clips from interviews between myself and other neurodivergent folks, as well as resources about neurodiversity and notes on the project. If I were to present this at a gallery with a longer exhibition, I would have added more sound clips.

An essential aspect of the project is evoking an embodied reaction by contrasting the different types of spaces, the overstimulating of the first minute, with the comfortable lounging space, and the accessible online space. Through the project I hope viewers consider both how other bodies might be affected by spaces and how different situations might affect their own ability to deeply listen.

In the early stages of development, I knew I wanted to focus on the space where the stories were being told just as much as the stories themselves. Working with concepts of safe(r) space<sup>2</sup> has been an integral part of my art practice (as well as an almost constant consideration in my personal life) for many years now. I believe that the spaces people receive stories can deeply shape their relationship to them, whether that is because some venues are imbued with a sense of authority, or because others allow listeners to feel safe enough to fully experience their own reactions—we cannot discount the importance that space has to the way we listen and internalize narratives. Physical spaces are indelibly affected by the emotional currents that flow through them, which are informed by the architecture, decoration, people, ideas, history and myriad other facets of a space and its inhabitants. The emotional tone of the spaces that I created for this project are just as important as the physical ones.

With *Existing Tactically*, my goal is to create a safe(r) space that is conducive to compassionate responses from the listeners; one wherein listeners could feel comfortable experiencing stories that explore difference. To openly engage with difference it is essential to approach listening without defensiveness so I decided to combat these feelings through spatial tactics and ambiance. Thus, it was important for the fort to feel cozy and inviting, comfortable enough that someone would be willing to have an extended engagement with the material, a place to let their defences down and deeply listen. I recognize that I have no control over how anyone will perceive the space as everyone has different things that manifest a sense of safety in them, however I did my best to create something that would make me feel safe(r) than galleries and institutional spaces generally allow me to feel.



Because my health in many ways has been the focal point of my life, I knew that I wanted to invite people into experiencing stories of neurodivergence. For the last few years especially, my life has been oriented around figuring out how to exist in a society which rarely considers the needs of neurodiverse folks. With this project I wanted to demonstrate how environments affect people with neurodivergence and other (dis)abilities<sup>3</sup> through both the narrative space of storytelling and the physical environment of the installation. The idea of creating a safe(r) space for listening to/telling stories felt like a natural extension of discussing neurodivergent experience, as many people that are non-neurotypical are highly affected by their physical and social environments. The movement towards neurodiversity is described by *Psychology Today*'s John Elder Robinson as:

neurodiversity is the idea that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal, natural variation in the human genome. This represents a new and fundamentally different way of looking at conditions that were traditionally pathologized; it's a viewpoint that is not universally accepted though it is increasingly supported by science.<sup>4</sup>

This notion that these different experiences of being "non-neurotypical" or "neurodivergent" are in fact normal and have both advantages and disadvantages is a key part of what I hope viewers take away from *Existing Tactically*. I hope this project helps to elucidate what science is starting to prove; social and environmental factors have an immense impact on people's lives. If someone is in an environment that is compassionate, flexible, and non-judgemental they are less likely to fall into a vicious cycle wherein the distress they feel from a

negative environment increases their feelings of shame, anxiety, and even physical pain. So with this in mind, I look to create spaces and conversations that are accepting, flexible, and safe.

Dr. Alessandro Portelli's article, *Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience*, put into concise words many of my own thoughts about the relationality of interviewing and the importance of sharing space, both social and geographical, within the context of oral history. Portelli teases out how oral history necessitates a different type of encounter than testimony; it depends on the relationship that is formed between the interviewer and the interviewee and the trust (or lack thereof) that is built.<sup>5</sup> Further, he states: "An interview, then, is a moment in a relationship between times: the time of the events, the time of the telling, and, when we factor in the archive, the time of listening."<sup>6</sup> As Portelli suggests, an interview's relationality extends past the two original parties of interviewer/ee into those that experience it after the fact, whether it be through an archive, a gallery, or some other space.<sup>7</sup> It is the third relationship, between the listeners and the interview, that *Existing Tactically* looks to explore and create an ideal environment for just as much as the relationship between interview and interviewee.

The interviews I performed were with people I know relatively well and was aware of their identification as non-neurotypical. On account of losing my first interview, I had three participants; Cherie, my massage therapist (the interview I lost when I did not save the audio file properly); Maya, a past professor of mine; and Dillon, my roommate. All of the participants were excited to be part of the project and keen to participate, though Maya stated during the interview that she had felt quite

nervous leading up to it. However, once we set into the conversation she seemed to relax into it. After the interview I made sure to ask that she was okay with the things that she had shared. The comfort of my interviewees is at the core of my ethics approaching this work. I specifically chose people that I knew would be able to talk about these issues both without being triggered, as well as in a clear and comprehensive way in order for there to be clarity for the listener. I also prioritized precision and clarity in my clips from the interviews. I tried to use a balance of segments people might find relatable versus those that are specific to a particular experience. Mostly, I tried to share moments of conversation I found to be impactful, memorable—moments that you feel the openness of the interaction.

My intention was to be as considerate as possible in every step of the project, for which Dr. Della Pollock has also been a key resource. Her thoughtfulness throughout the process of enacting an oral history performance, which is depicted in *Telling the Told: Performing "Like a Family"*, was inspiring.<sup>8</sup> Her wisdom to allow room for questions, differing opinions and learning is a great model for working collaboratively and with real stories that impact communities and inform contemporary issues. This consideration of how the audience will receive the work and making space for the audience informed my thinking. I tried to bring this consideration as well to my interviewees by allowing them to determine much of the process. In order to prepare myself and participants for the interview, I wrote eight questions which I sent to my participants ahead of time and then we had a conversation based on those questions. Generally, the interactions were quite conversational as I wanted to create a sense of dialogue more so than a single narrative. I did ask certain questions if I

felt that our conversations had not addressed them, or that participants were unsure of how to address certain topics, but for the most part, things were *ad lib*.



I took a more active role as an interviewer/conversationalist in this project than is perhaps standard in the practice Oral History Performance. In general, I find the notion of objectivity and aesthetic distance problematic. I do not believe that there is a way to recuse myself from affecting the outcome of the interview. I find the idea that an interviewer or performer could be objective entirely impossible, especially when the interviewer has an emotional/financial/professional stake in the topic at hand. There is no escaping the relational dynamic of interviewer and interviewee and so I decided to embrace the relationships I have with my interviewees. I was not looking to have distance, so much as I was looking to collaboratively create a space of kinship and understanding. So, I chose people who I knew that this would be possible with. My voice is often present in the audio clips as I feel I am as much a part of the story as my interviewees.

The notion of meeting people where they are at is crucial to my interviewing practice and thus Henry Greenspan's work helped to expand my thoughts about how to create an approach wherein there is room for the interviewee to determine how/where/when they want to share their stories. Greenspan's humanistic approach to interviewing and oral history informed my decision to be highly present in my own process and to focus on the relationships. I wanted to offer my own vulnerability as a show of faith as well as means to commiserate and find kinship with my interviewees. Talking about subjects that society sees as aberrant, weak, or inconsequential is often difficult but important work. However, it is made easier by having a sense of community and comradery. Though it was not possible in the context of this course, I can imagine doing this project over time and doing more interviews with the same people adding new people and building relationships, as Greenspan discusses in *Collaborative Interpretation of Survivors' Accounts: A Radical Challenge to Conventional Practice*.<sup>9</sup> I think this could be particularly interesting for this type of project because unlike recounting memories, as we live our lives we learn how to manage our struggles and stress, which generally leads to growing insight and wisdom that the broader community can benefit from.

The form and approach to *Existing Tactically* are inspired by artists Carlos Motta, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Nadia Myre whose work is focused on, viewer-experience, and collaboration. Motta's *We Who Feel Differently* (2011) is an online archive of interviews with queer people from Colombia, Norway, South Korea and the USA that exist as a website as well as a touring exhibition, a journal and documentation of the exhibitions.<sup>10</sup> I respect Motta's work immensely as it bridges the worlds of academia, activism, and art



in a way that allows for a wide audience and extended engagement with conversations about identity, politics, and the consequences of othering certain populations. Gonzalez-Torres is an excellent example of an artist whose installations, such as *Untitled (Ross in L.A.)* (1991), subvert the wants of the institution to create something that truly exists for the sake of the viewer. His work is endlessly generous for the viewer which is something I aspire to. Myre's *Scar* (2005-Present) is an ongoing project in which the artists created a space for people to share stories and re-create their pain through art in an attempt to heal collectively, which she then turned into a book. This work demonstrates the benefits that we can get from collective healing practices (which something I truly believe the world needs more of). Each of these artists has fed my imagination and sensibility of how to create work that is viewer-centric, accessible, and unapologetically political—all tenants I hope to bring to my own practice.

I was pleased with the feedback that my classmates offered as it seemed that people understood the impact of my decisions, specifically, the importance of delineating the spaces of the piece. One aspect that would be interesting to experiment with is the sense of traversing an overwhelming sensory space. I could imagine building a tunnel or more contained space that the viewer would move through to get to the respite of the fort. As well, I would like to have more context for the work available, whether it is written or I record an introduction that I put on the Tumblr page. I think I would like to write more about my thoughts surrounding discomfort, empathy, embodiment, and feminism, in order to include a more political element.

It is my strong belief that having a supportive and informed community is the most essential determinant of success for those deemed different by society. And for those of us that have invisible issues, it is so crucial to hear other people talking about our issues as it is not necessarily easy to identify one and other in the world—especially when there is a lack of acceptance and being “out” can hurt your social or economic standing. Thus, I think the thing that *Existing Tactically* has to offer is a building block to a sense of community. By sharing stories we learn that there are others out there like us and that they can offer information, support, and solidarity. And with systemic issues of ableism, misogyny and capitalism at the core of my work, the only way to break down these barriers of oppression and othering are with community action and by fostering empathy in those that would try to other us. \*



4 John Elder Robison, "What Is Neurodiversity?", *Psychology Today*, 2013, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/my-life-aspergers/201310/what-is-neurodiversity>.

5 Portelli, "Living Voices," *The Oral History Review*, 244.

6 Ibid. 246

7 Ibid.

8 Della Pollock, "Telling The Told: Performing Like A Family", *The Oral History Review* 18, no. 2 (1990): 1-36, doi:10.1093/ohr/18.2.1.

9 Henry Greenspan, "Collaborative Interpretation Of Survivors' Accounts: A Radical Challenge To Conventional Practice", *Holocaust Studies* 17, no. 1 (2011): 85-100, doi:10.1080/17504902.2011.11087273.

10 Carlos Motta, *We Who Feel Differently*, Installation & Website, <https://wewhofeeldifferently.info/about.php>, 2011.

## NOTES

1 Alessandro Portelli, "Living Voices: The Oral History Interview As Dialogue And Experience", *The Oral History Review* 45, no. 2 (2018): 243, doi:10.1093/ohr/ohy030.

2 safe(r) space attempts to create a space that is inclusive and safe for everyone while also recognizing that it is not possible to do so perfectly. Humans have diverse, fluctuating and often conflicting needs. It is impossible to ensure that a space is safe and will remain safe for everyone throughout the time it exists. Thus, safe(r) space suggests a commitment to trying to keep a space as safe as possible for as long as possible.

3 I use the term (dis)ability to signify a more complicated understanding of what it is to live with disabling limitations. Words like cripple, handicap, crazy, hysterical and disability carry with them a history of bias and systemic oppression that tend to reiterate the ableism they were born out of... By stylizing the word in this way, the negative qualifier, dis, is removed from the word, which represents a notable shift in the meaning and perspective on ideas of disability. By modifying the term disability instead of erasing it, (dis)ability represents an awareness that structures of ableism exist and are actively oppressing us. There is a poetics in how (dis)ability captures both a harmful lineage and a hopeful future. (excerpt from Alyse Tunnell, "(DIS)ABILITY: what's in a name? a CRIP's guide to language," *Godber.com*, 2020, <https://godberd.com/m/events/view/-DIS-ABILITY-what-s-in-a-name-2020-09-30>

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ZOÉ BAILLY-STETSON

# MARIE AND YOUR AQUARIUM

*Marie and Your Aquarium* is an oral history testimony performance presented at the Acts of Listening Lab on March 28th and on May 17th 2019. I directed an actor, Bridget Mountford, to share the story of Marie Cornellier's bodily reaction to climate change. This performance was a chance to draw parallels between Marie's chronic pain living with multiple toxin sensitivity and a young generation's environmental grief living with climate change. It was an opportunity to open intergenerational communication in the face of the climate crisis.

Prior to this project, my grandmother moved into her retiring home room. *It's small*, she said as she showed me around, *but look at the tree in front of my window*. Moments later, she asked me to admire the tree again. My grandmother has Alzheimer's, yet even through the haze she comes back to her tree. When brainstorming my performance, I knew I wanted to explore the effects of the climate crisis in a personal way. I decided to start with my grandmother and her tree.

My performance project would be a chance to explore intergenerational memory in relation to the land. Initially, my intention was to interview my grandmother on the environmental changes she has seen in her lifetime. Can remembering past iterations make us care about the Earth intimately, just like when we flip through a family photo album? How does a generation collectively forget to extend respect toward the land? The first challenge I encountered was an ethical one. I did some research on Alzheimer's, and soon realized that my grandmother was not in a position to give her full consent to my project. Reading oral historian, Alessandro Portelli

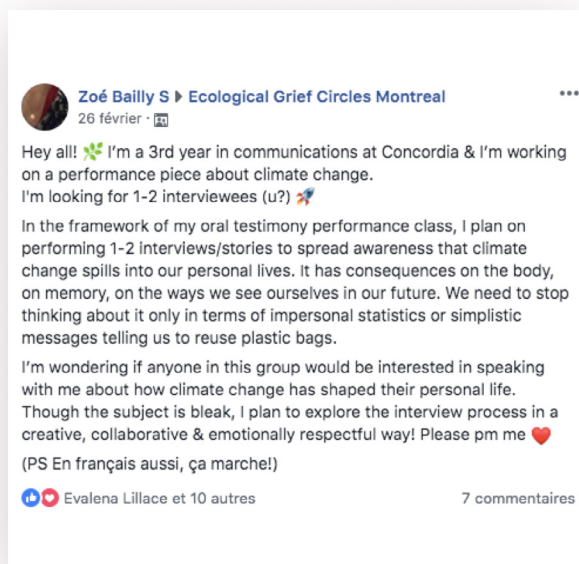
(2018) helped me understand that the main reason why it did not feel right to use my grandmother as an interview subject, is because my agenda would be so different from hers. Her's would be to connect with her grand-daughter, whereas mine would be to turn her dementia into a metaphor. So instead, I chose to ask my mother if I could interview her on her mother's Alzheimer's. We planned to fit the talk at the end of our usual Skype session, the week after. The next day, however, a PERC 364 class conversation changed my plan.

That Thursday we spoke about the importance of carving out a "moment" when conducting an interview. Logistically, this means drawing attention to the recording technology, establishing an interview protocol and/or preparing specific questions. Emotionally, this means setting aside a time where both interviewer and interviewee can be fully present. For Portelli, an interview is "a mutual, personal encounter based on some form of reciprocity" (Portelli 240). This two-way encounter works when both people are open to what Portelli calls an "exchange of gazes". I realized that I would not be able to arrive at this moment if I interviewed my mother over Skype. First, because a Skype call is not a reliable nor intimate technology. Second, because the conversations I have with my mother are inscribed in a habit removed from possibilities of a true encounter. Though I considered it, I was uninterested in asking a classmate to interview my mother for me. I thought it would distract from Portelli's two-way moment, one which I wanted to experience all for myself.

I would have to find a stranger, who would become less strange to me through an interview. In my research on spaces that facilitate conversations around climate change anxiety in Montréal, I came across

the “Ecological Grief Circles” at The Yellow Door Hive. I contacted the founder of the circles, Anya Solovey, who agreed to speak with me about her experience helping children connect to the land through community gardening. I thought I would use a lapel mic to conduct a walking interview and then present the interview as a sound walk. Neither of these projects happened. Anya reached out to share that she was too drained from community organizing and did not have the energy to be interviewed. It made me realize how an interview is not a casual affair. It is strenuous, and that can be dangerous. Vulnerable people and overstretched activists are easily excluded from the pool of storytellers. Somewhat discouraged, I posted on the Ecological Grief Circle Facebook page (see image 1). I chose Marie Cornellier out of the seven people who contacted me because in her message to me, she included a link to her personal blog ([mariecornellier.com](http://mariecornellier.com)). There, I was taken aback by how openly she spoke about living with chronic pain, practicing acts of decolonization as a white person and teaching her granddaughters how to connect with the land. We scheduled to meet two days later. Some examples of the questions I prepared were: How does your body react to places differently? Do you remember one of the first times you heard about climate change? How do you feel the climate crisis in your body? Though the interview did not follow the trajectory I had planned, I do not feel as if this hurt my project as Marie was extremely generous in her answers. Together we branched into places that surprised both of us.

The interview was four hours long. I have never conducted such a long interview nor have I experienced such meaningful time with a stranger. At the start, Marie spoke about climate justice and colonization with complicated words. I became worried that she was not sharing enough tangible examples about her lived experience



audience members could latch onto. Since I wanted to gather details of Marie's lived experience, I redirected the conversation toward her sensorial memory. In *Stories of Courtship, Desire and Immigrant Women*, oral history performer Nisa Remigio (2019) shared tiramisu cake with her audience, explaining that her interviewees recalled their stories through the taste of this cake. Remigio explained that by asking an interviewee what they remember tasting in a moment, vivid sensorial knowledge comes into play. The storytelling is richer.

In the fourth hour of our interview, I raised the question of how Marie wanted her story to be represented. It was here that Marie and I became true collaborators. For her, it was important that I use symbolic objects. She showed me masks that she had used and that her friends had decorated. She played me a forest soundscape created by her friend and which

calmed her when she was in pain. She showed me pictures I could project of her grand-children in the Laurentides. Suddenly, the project was both of ours. As I left, Marie beamed with excitement and told me my project was giving her a platform to reach a younger generation with insights about fighting for change, that she has been gathering for a long time. I walked down the stairs of her apartment grateful, yet feeling the pressure to shape all of these elements into something worthwhile.

In the second chapter of "On Listening to Holocaust Survivors", psychologist Henry Greenspan (1998) writes that voicing an experience of trauma is often a "primary impulse" for survivors (Greenspan 53). Greenspan's interviewees told him that it was cathartic to share their story with an active listener. I am in no position to compare Marie's experience of solitude and chronic pain with the lives of Holocaust survivors. However, Marie also shared that the way I listened to her before and during the interview inspired a feeling of release. Marie's friends have often told her: "your transformation needs to be brought to a larger audience". Marie said she saw it as a small miracle that I knocked on her door and gave her a platform to do that, regardless of the size. Hearing "thank you" and "I trust you" from someone I had met that afternoon was strange and precious. That night, as the adrenaline faded away, I felt overwhelmed by the four hours of testimony to sift through. Over the following days, I recalled visiting artist-researcher Sara Maurer's lecture on how she sorts through hours of interviews. Following her method, I transcribed the interview and used colour coding to highlight the main themes (see image 2). The difficult part was weaving the themes together. Since I wanted Marie's story to tie into my fears around climate catastrophe and generational divide, I took the liberty of juxtaposing her words with my



own. As I pasted her verbatim next to my paraphrasing, I wondered if using Marie's experience as a crutch for my storytelling was lazy or worse, exploitative.

Once I had condensed seventeen pages into four, I sent the first draft to Marie. She sent it back to me with many corrections. Marie's edits reminded me of Communications professor Della Pollock (1990) when she writes about the fine line between history and aesthetics, between lived experience and interpretation. With Marie's edits, I saw how I had subconsciously manufactured a story arc, embellished details, and exaggerated lows and highs of Marie's life. To use Pollock's term, I had instinctively "aestheticized" (Pollock 8) Marie's testimony. In her text "Telling the Told", Pollock defines an aestheticized performance as one that runs the risk of being so contained and polished that it does not incorporate the real. For Pollock, it is a political imperative to root a performance in reality. Rather than reaching a perfect form, the piece needs to serve Marie's content. In the same vein, it has to engage an audience and not simply entertain them.

**orange** = who is Marie? Introduction

**red** = collective grief, "if I could get better you can take action", flesh of whale, opening yourself to love, waking up w/ Lilou, breastfeeding + rock, personal grief (loosing son)

**blue** = rebuilding, context, collectivity

**purple** = you cannot care for something you don't love, "You probably don't want children!", grand-children as contribution, crystal, respect, nature

**green** = indigenous women dreaming for the future, this is a good fire

**yellow** = soundscape

With these lessons in mind, I started to work with my actor, Bridget Mountford. In her performance as Marie, she invites members of the audience to reach into jars, bottles and bowls of water. When they bring out an object (a clementine, a toy whale, a mask), Bridget tells Marie's story associated with it. One thing we committed to during our rehearsals is that we wanted the audience to feel the weight of the invitation to reach for an object. The intention was to make the audience feel like a child whose grandmother is showing them the contents of an old jewellery box. In this interaction, the child and the grandmother are actively involved in building the story. The child picks up a treasure and prompts a story by asking "What's this one?" As she formulates her answer, the grandmother revisits the memories behind each object. The storytelling is co-created and both parties are essential. I started working on this piece because I was frustrated at how numb I feel as a young person in the face of a polluted and sick planet. What I like about the exchange I created in *Marie and Your Aquarium*, is that the audience is engaged through their wonder. They reach into water for stories of connection.

The feedback I received from classmates is important as I reflect on how I can improve the piece. Alicia shared: "There's a line Bridget spoke that encapsulates your project: we can do a lot with what's left." Sara said the minimal artificial lighting and use of silence helped her concentrate on the story being told. In a future iteration of this piece, I would ask my actor to sit at the same level as my audience, most likely on the floor. I think this would make the audience less afraid to reach in the water and lean into the stories. I would like more time working with Marie as co-director to play with Bridget's physicality and delivery. I also need to work on positioning myself more clearly as a subjective filter of

Marie's story. As *Elsewhere* co-creator Joy Ross-Jones explained during her guest workshop, in oral history testimony it is important to draw attention to yourself as mediator of the story. In my case, this might mean clarifying what in the script was written by me, and what Marie shared.



*Marie and Your Aquarium* has a vast potential for expansion largely because of Marie's layered testimony. In each of her answers, Marie taps into questions of social justice, personal anecdotes and teachings from marginalized communities. Listening to her, I hear hurt. I also can't help but hear sheer joy. The layers of knowledge and hope Marie weaves together make up a strong definition of resilience. Bringing the performance to a larger pool of young people would be useful to guide us away from distress and apathy vis à vis ecological collapse. In light of events such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic, *Marie and Your Aquarium* has the potential to be a link between two generations who want to do better, who want to build better.

When Marie saw Bridget performing *Marie and Your Aquarium* to a live audience, she reached for my hand. I saw her eyes were wet. I looked to the stage and saw audience members' hands dip into story-water. Sometimes the hands were eager, sometimes they were tentative. I end this reflection with the words of essayist Svetlana Alexievich (2018), who urges a departure from the storytelling "canon" made of "plaster and reinforced concrete, like all monuments" (Alexievich 16). Perhaps *Marie and Your Aquarium* can introduce malleability and vulnerability into the widely shared plaster-story of climate change. \*

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CALLUM PFOHL

# HOW ?



CONTENT WARNING

This project explores themes of sexual violence.

*How?* has been a difficult but rewarding creation journey, from its inception and formulation as an idea all the way through to the writing of this paper. *How?* was a soundscape installation showcased in MB 7.425 on March 28, 2019 as part of the outcomes of the PERC 364: Oral History Performance students. *How?* featured many clips describing/playing through misogyny and news reports of sexual harassment/assault, crescendo-ing in volume and multitude of voices before abruptly dying down to a selection from an interview I held with a convicted sexual offender about what they would say to someone before they commit a sexual crime. In this report, I hope to track my own process and review my choices for this prototype, and what I would change for the future.

Among the myriad of complications that I encountered in creating this piece, the first one I encountered when enrolling in this class was: what did I want my project to be about? What was the content, what did I want to say? And in the reading of Della Pollock's *Like a Family*, I realized that a lot of what I wanted to say/create as an artist who typically works in the written/fictional realm, I was really out of my depth. What community could I celebrate? How can I encounter the history of a person/subject and reinvigorate a sense of re-performance, and for what purpose? (Pollock 3). For the sake of a class project? I was at a loss with these questions and had to look deeper into myself to figure out what stories I could shed light on, or what I could possibly say. Using my positionality, what could I possibly contribute? Around the initial due dates of the ideas for projects and concepts, I had heard that professor Luis Sotelo-Castro has worked with sexual offenders for an Oral History project that occurred a year before my taking his class,

and that ultimately fascinated, clicking into perspective what my project could be. This doesn't have to be my experience I as an artist needs to tell (as Della Pollock and nearly anyone working in oral history/performance will tell you), anyone is capable of recreating and re-staging someone else's story. An artist's responsibility is ensuring that there is something worthy of being said, and during the #MeToo movement, the sexual misconduct in Concordia's English Department<sup>1</sup> and numerous stories I've heard from my friends about these kinds of crimes that happen to them, it clicked for me and I knew that I needed my project to focus on sexual assault. As a man, I know that I can use my position (and as someone that hasn't experienced sexual assault) to engage in a conversation with a sexual offender in their experiences of committing such a crime and trying to place that back to the larger framework of how misogyny and the power of hush culture pervades our daily lives, institutions and paradigms of human behaviour. I could portray/show a marginalized voice, which is after all a greater aim of Oral History and storytelling in general (Frisch 320). So, keeping in contact with Professor Sotelo-Castro over the first half of the semester, he was able to use his connections with the Centre de Services de Justice Reparatrice (CSJR) in securing a sexual offender for me to interview.

Once I knew what subject matter I was going to be tackling, I consulted with Zohar Kafir's *Testimony* project<sup>2</sup> in which survivors of sexual assault are recorded telling their experiences and put into a 360 degree virtual reality website for users to interact with. I paid especially close attention to the submission guidelines for what questions Zohar wanted her subjects to answer, and gave me a notion of structuring my questions in the categories of: the bulk of the interview was focused on PRE-ASSAULT (the perpetrator's life/influences before



committing the crimes, how they tracked their victims, what their relations with women were like), DURING (what happened in their words, what they remember thinking during the crime) and POST-ASSAULT (their journey in restorative justice, the time that has passed and how they identify themselves as someone who has committed a crime, how they've changed or not since). I also was interested in the idea of using oral history performance not as a live piece, but as a digital installation to keep in tandem with our evolving artistic landscape, to push my own knowledge as an artist. I chose to work in the medium of a soundscape using only human voices to reinforce the man-made nature of this type of crime. With this framework, I then was able to meet with the subject under the pseudonym of Jeremy. Now because I was not able to be in contact with Jeremy myself due to legal circumstances, I was left out of the recruitment phase and wasn't able to "select" my subject, which forced my questions to not be vague but open-ended so as anyone I think that has had this experience could be able to reflect on their own stories in a purposeful way. But because of this separation of communication and legal circumstances with my subject before the interview, I wasn't also able to choose the location of interview, any public activities we could engage while conducting the interview such as a walk, all of which were suggestions I had been exposed to in various articles/readings in the course. I especially wanted to meet with Jeremy repeated times over the semester and let them choose the location of our interview as even those choices are crucial to the kinds of stories/memories to be explored (Greenspan 86). But working within the legal constraints of meeting, we met once on March 8, 2019 and interviewed for about an hour and a half, which was truthfully terrifying and enlightening. He gave very detailed answers to all the questions I had, but not exactly in the way I wanted. I realized that I was looking at this

through a gendered perspective, and Jeremy wasn't looking at his life experiences through that lens. I had to "guide" him in some manner so I knew I could have recordings that would fit into my soundscape. In this way I was creating a new construction of his lived experience, changing the narrative to fit the narrative I wanted to present, and this is where I think I flawed as an oral historian/interviewer. It is not until the writing of this paper that I realized that I was too focused on supplying an answer, some sort of solution to this epidemic that plagues our society. As an oral historian, it is far more important to show/allow the contradictions, the differences and the struggle of gaining perspective rather than trying to find a linear cause-and-effect timeline (Pollock 34). This would occur again in my next phase of designing the soundscape I had in mind.



Initially while sitting at my computer looking at a blank Audacity work page, I was having trouble selecting which fragments of my interview to use. There was plenty of important concepts and memories discussed that shed light on this dark issue I wanted to explore and didn't know which ones I could fit into a 5-10-minute

prototype soundscape for our class's outcomes. I decided instead to prioritize the sound bytes taken from various media sources. These included film clips, news-casts and television interviews to show how pervasive/widespread these notions of objectifying and harassing women are. Once I had selected clips and adjusted the volume settings as I wished, I realized that once again, I had inverted the structure of creating a oral history performance piece. I now had to find and edit a sample of my interview that could fit in with this pre-determined agenda I had set to accomplish. I thought in this moment about why I was making the choices I was making, what else was available to do; perhaps verbatim theatre? Why not just release the whole interview on its own, as that is compelling in of itself? What even was my agenda, were my externally-sourced clips too sprawling to contain the notions and judgements I held as an artist creating this piece? As you may have noticed, this report contains more questions than answers, and at this stage in my development as an artist with the limited engagement I have had with oral history, that is to be expected. This is the crossroads of oral history that is interesting to traverse, and instead of charging thorough (as Anne Bogart would put it, irimi, 'to enter', pg 49) I escaped around those choices, stuck to my own original concept. But now I know going forward with this project, that I can challenge my own artistic practice, and now having a critical understanding of what makes oral history performance engaging, I know now my methodology behind gathering interviewees, selecting fragments and the presentation of such would change drastically.

When presenting my soundscape in class, I arranged MB 7.425 to be enclosed in total darkness, seated in chairs in a circle formation. I thought that would bring a sense of togetherness and my original intention

was that there would be space/time after the initial hearing of the soundscape to reflect and have dialogue about the piece. As important as I thought it was to present my piece/agenda, as Professor Sotelo-Castro has pointed out in the class before “your art is the catalyst for dialogue about these issues” and I think that is where the power in my soundscape would have come from. Unfortunately, due to the formatting of presenting the outcomes in a class setting we had to move swiftly along to the next piece, but if there were to be a remounting of said soundscape, I would design the space such that there would be allotted time after hearing the soundscape in darkness to then turn on the lights so we could focus on each other and discuss what we heard. A constructive note I received in peer feedback was the choice of handing out a “map” of the sources of scattered voices in the first half of the soundscape, so as to provide context into what I would be presenting. I wanted my invited audience to be literally unable to see in the darkness to sharpen their focus on the words, but not also figuratively as to become totally lost in who is saying what and when. It also was confusing to have multiple voices layered on top of one another and the meaning behind these words lost their significance because of such design choices. In the future, I would also focus less on proving how much gender influences these kind of sexual crimes and focus more on what my subjects had to say. For Jeremy, he was very in depth about the abuse he suffered as a child, so I would press more on that as that is what he wanted to share. I also would be compiling multiple interviews with many different subjects over a longer period of time to have a more comprehensive understanding that fits on the macrocosm level I was hoping to achieve by interviewing just one subject. The soundscape (if I were to create a soundscape again, which as I am writing I am hesitant about) would be far

longer and the clips I choose would be entirely different to reflect that of what my interviewee said, rather than vice versa. Finally, for the future, I also would consider collecting these interviews and showcasing them in their entirety on an online database similar to *Testimony* so if audience's curiosity reaches that level, they are able to have access to such critical information. \*

## NOTES

1 A Concordia University Creative Writing professor(s)' accusal of sexual misconduct was exonerated after internal investigation in 2018. The students who filed the complaints were never notified, igniting protest amongst the student body in Winter 2019.

2 Kafir's project can be experienced online [testimony.site/room](https://testimony.site/room), and tours internationally as a virtual reality installation. As described on the website, "Testimony Project is an interactive documentary for virtual reality that shares the stories of survivors of sexual assault and their journey to healing. Beyond just a film, Testimony is an advocacy platform to allow the public to bear witness to those who have been silenced."

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ALICIA MAGLIOCCO

# A NEW PATH

This prototype project entitled *A New Path* was one where I performed the story of Jonny, a man who used to play hockey competitively but who is now pursuing acting, dance and music. The project follows the transition of someone of a sports background “transitioning” into a new way of life. The aim was to see the ups and downs and, in the end, to show that there is always a new path that you can take; that, no matter what, you can always find new pursuits or dreams that make you happy.

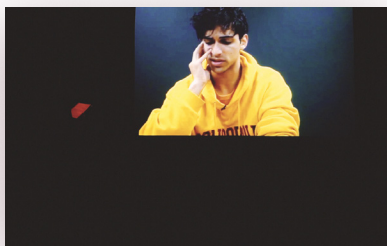
My original impulse to do this project is actually quite simple. I have been struggling with the concept of a new path ever since I left my own sport of water polo. I was playing at a professional level, playing with Team Canada, the team that, if we qualified, would go to the Olympics. I had to stop playing because of the many injuries, more specifically the concussions, that I suffered throughout my many years of playing. Playing water polo had been my entire life for so long that having to transition into a life without it was very difficult for me. Seeing that this was such a struggle for me, I was sure that others had gone through similar situations when leaving their sport and I wanted to know their stories as well. I wanted to make connections between what I had gone through and what they had gone through in a creative way. I also hoped that in hearing their stories I would be able to help build a sense of trust and understanding. Alternatively, this is also not something that most people have to go through, the transition for a life of high-level sports to one without is quite particular. Another reason that I felt the need to pursue this project was to show an outside audience the struggles that athletes go through. I also thought that though this is a particular experience, the internal feelings that are involved are ones felt not only



by athletes but, in fact, by anyone who is going through a major life change. This is why I thought it would be interesting to show the athletes perspective of a feeling that many people have experienced at some point in their lives.

The research process of this project consisted of going back to readings that I had done and figuring out what I had learned and could realistically implement into my project, as well as a lot of self-reflection and research on other people's experiences in similar situations. The first reading that I kept going back to was the Henry (Hank) Greenspan reading about his style of interviewing. One of the main aspects from that reading that I kept getting drawn to was the idea of interviewing one person many times on the same subject. (Greenspan, 2011) Originally this is something that I was strongly considering for this project because when people are interviewed only once on a subject, they may not have the chance to say everything that they would like to and as Greenspan mentions, people will always have more to say. Another text that I went back to frequently was the Della Pollock reading about remembering. In this Pollock discusses how no one owns a story. (Pollock, 2005) This was a very interesting thing to be thinking about going into this project as I was struggling with how I could go about telling this story. I found myself asking who I was to be telling the story, which really brought me to some interesting self-reflection about my process and why I wanted to do this project so badly. The last text that I found myself going back to frequently in my research was the Derek Paget reading about verbatim theatre. In this, Paget explains that verbatim theatre is like a collage, which was very helpful to think about when I eventually came to putting the final video for the prototype together. Paget mentions that just because someone

is interesting it does not mean that what they say will be interesting or valuable to what you are trying to portray (Paget, 1987) therefore there is a sort of editing that needs to happen, like in a collage. The reason that I had to come back to this is because I kept finding it very hard to cut anything that Jonny was saying. But this helped remind me that not every bit is important and that we need to see the greater picture more than each individual piece.



The developmental phase of this prototype was one that was ever fluctuating. I knew from the very early stages that I wanted to do a verbatim piece of theatre. I thought that this would be a very appropriate way to portray another person's story. However, this was the only aspect that was concrete in my mind from the start. The main issues that I came across was trying to select the interviewees. There are so many people that I know that have gone through the situation that I wanted to interview about. However, it was actually very difficult to narrow down which stories I wanted to hear, or rather that I could realistically use in my prototype. After a great deal of consideration, I decided that the people that I would be interviewing would not be from my own sport of water

polo, because I could potentially bring in my views on that in the presentation. This really narrowed down the pool of people that I could interview for this, as most of the high level athletes I know played water polo as that is who I had surrounded myself with in the past. This was a blessing in disguise because I later remembered that we should only interview one or two people for this project, where as I had plans to interview quite a bit more people then that. I eventually narrowed it down to two people I know; one who played football and one who played hockey. After discussing with both of them, I decided that it would be best if I only interviewed one person at this stage of the process, and so I chose to interview Jonny, the hockey player. I chose him in the end because he is closer in age to me and so our life experiences were more likely to be similar and therefore our stories would work together better.

The next step in my process was to plan and conduct the interview. The planning aspect of this was the part that I struggled with the most, more specifically with planning the interview questions. The main reason that I struggled with this is because I wanted the interview to flow more like a conversation then just a series of questions being answered. The latter would have too formal of an interview to be having with someone I consider to be my friend. Therefore, my struggle was in finding questions that would be more conversational but would also get the information and stories that I wanted from the interview. After a lot of thought, I decided to go into the interview with a series of questions to steer the conversation towards the aspects that I wanted to focus on. When the interview happened however, I found that I hardly needed to use any of them, it was much more interesting to listen to what Jonny wanted to say than what I wanted to ask him to talk about. There were a few

times where there was a slight lull in the conversation and it was then that I incorporated the questions that I had planned beforehand. That being said, the conversation flowed naturally the entire time, despite the interview not taking place where I originally intended. I wanted the interview to be filmed in a location chosen by the interviewee that would bring back memories of their time playing the sport. However, because of the time constraint and the conflict of schedules we ended up filming the interview in the Acts of Listening Lab, which worked just as well.

The next part of the process was choosing an art form to present the interview in, and then to select the specific fragments that I wanted to use. The first part of this was actually quite intuitive. I knew from the very early stages that I wanted to do a verbatim piece but just needed to narrow down how to present that idea. By coincidence I went to see *Boom X* (2019) at the Segal Centre and this gave me an idea. In that show, writer and director Rick Miller performs interviews by showing the video of the interviewee being asked the questions, but there is no sound coming from the video. The performer decided to voice both himself, the interviewer, and the interviewee. I was so fascinated by how seamlessly that was done, I decided that was something I wanted to try to incorporate into my presentation. Then, I needed to go back to the interview and decide which fragments I wanted to use for my presentation. This was a little bit more challenging. I had about two hours' worth of material that I had to try and condense into a five minute presentation. After watching the video many times and transcribing it, I started to see which parts I wanted to use. I decided to start the video with the aspects of transitioning out of sport that I could relate to my experience as well. This part of the video was the part

that I decided I would perform like *Boom X*, where I spoke over a silent clip of video. The next fragment that I chose was one that I found very interesting, and that Jonny was very passionate about, but that I could not really relate to as much. During this segment the audience see and hear both the video and the original audio. In the final segment that I chose, I wanted both Jonny and I to speak together, therefore I chose a segment of text that really reflected both of our perspectives in tandem.

I cannot help but want to continue this project even further now that I have started it. Based on the feedback from my peers there is a lot that I can still do with this project. I was asked if I would be willing to interview more people, which has informed what I would like to do next.. There are so many stories to be told and I don't want my project to be limited to only two voices. If I was to continue with this, I would definitely interview at least two more people and interview Jonny again. I would also like to do these interviews over a longer period of time so that I can get as many stories as I can. A lot of the other feedback that I received was based on the form that the presentation took place. I think that if I continue with this is an art form, I would explore more and really hone my technique. I think that it is such a powerful device to use and I think that if I really took the time, or rather had more time, to memorize and rehearse the words, it could turn out to be a really beautiful piece.

Now that my prototype presentation is done, I can't help but look back at the project and wonder if it made a difference. The more I think about it, at this stage it has not made a difference. Perhaps in the future it could. I think that if I continued to work on it and went more in depth, it could really make a difference in people's lives. One of the main ways I think this project

could one day make a difference is by showing people that, no matter what, you can always find a new dream or a new path. You may think that you are on the path that you will be on for the rest of your life and then something suddenly happens and you realize that you can no longer go down that path. But there is always another path, another door that you haven't tried yet. There is always something else that can make you equally as happy, or even happier or more fulfilled. If this message reaches even just one person who is feeling down about the changes in their lives, then I will consider this project to have made a difference. \*

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GEORGIA HOLLAND

# THANK YOU JOE



I believe that in order to write a play about an issue or to do a project on one, you must be really passionate about this subject. When devising a piece of art, I always try to base it around something that lights a spark in me. Something that makes me either so angry I could burst, or so happy I could cry. In a way this project turned out to be both.

My idea and who I was interviewing had changed numerous times. At first I was supposed to accompany Elisabeth Coutour, one of my professors, and her theatre group Promito Playback to one of their performances. In these performances they take a group of immigrants that are taking French classes and they listen to any stories these people would like to share. From these stories they then act out their interpretation of the story and create a performance right there in live time. I had originally wanted to go to one of these performances in order to find a subject to interview, but due to scheduling I could not make it to one. I knew I wanted to stick with my idea of exploring topics that have to do with immigration, however, I knew nobody in the city. Therefore, I had to reach out to my home town of Miramichi, New Brunswick where I knew there were two Syrian families residing.

Before making contact with them I wanted to have my artistic intent figured out. Who was I creating this for? What was the main topic I wanted to share? How should I share it? I thought about what my personal connection to the topic might be. I asked myself the questions, 'how come I can share this story? What gives me that right?'. When the refugees from Syria first started coming to Canada my city and province was not

ok with it. This is a community where kids graduate from high school and the boys go off to work with their hands to become men and the women either teach, nurse, or sit in an office. All while complaining about how terrible their lives are. Now not everyone is like that, there are some people in New Brunswick who are happy. But it is the bitter unhappy few that felt the need to express their disgust at the idea of having immigrants come into our country. I heard and saw many things that made me so angry. "They are just coming to get a free ride." "Why can't they stay and fight for their own country?" "There are Canadians who are homeless and Trudeau is giving all out tax payer dollars to outsiders." And the one I heard the most, "*They are going to take all our jobs!*". These things made me very angry. As I saw more and more hate one thought entered my mind. Its one thing to have an opinion. Everyone is entitled to their opinion. But at least know all the facts before you state your opinion. I once wrote a paper that stated that uneducated people are the most dangerous thing in the world. This, I found, was going to be the notion in the back of my head throughout my process: education.

I thought to myself if people were to be educated on not only what is going on in Syria, but also why these people had to flee their homes and come to Canada, perhaps this would create a more peaceful environment for these families to enter into. Once I found that idea that created a drive in me, I decided to reach out to a Syrian family in my home town: the Alsaidy's. The Alsaidy's came to Canada on October 2nd, 2017. They were forced to come here due to the brutality of the issues they faced in their homeland. When I first reached out to them I did not know their whole story, just that they were from Syria and that they fled here for refuge. I kind of had an idea in my head of what I wanted the

performance to look like before I even did my interview, which I now realize was not the right thing to do. Not that there is a right or wrong way to create a performance. For me however, once I talked with the Alsaids my whole idea changed for the better. Before the interview I knew I wanted to work with film as it was something that I enjoyed doing and film is also a part of my background. Along with this film I wanted to bring some element of performance into my final outcome, so I hired an actor to play a distressed Aly; the mother of the Alsaids family. I was to have the video playing in the background and have the actor be approached by the audience members and interact with them. But of course that all changed after I did the interview.



The interview was done over the phone. I had my friends Sara and Collin Williston, who are great friends of the Alsaids there as well to help facilitate the conversation. Mohammad the father and Aly the mother spoke good English but just in case there was any confusion I wanted Sara and Collin to be there. Mohammad told me their story and then Colin told me the story of how they worked to get the Alsaids into Canada. It was then that

Colin told me about how they like to say thank you to this mystery man they had decided to call Joe. This name was bestowed upon the man who targeted Mohammed and the bread shop he owned, provoking the Alsaïdy family to flee Syria. Their neighbourhood was bombed nearly two weeks after the sudden departure, ultimately saving the lives of the Alsaïdy's.

After hearing about the story of the bread shop and "Joe", I knew I wanted to bring the idea of bread as well as Joe into the presentation in some way. I had first thought about sculpting the entire family of the Alsaïdy's out of bread but obviously that was a bit extreme for a presentation of this size. So I thought I would mould one man out of bread and say it was Joe. However, a full size model would have taken too long. Therefore, I came to the conclusion to do a sculpture from the shoulders up and place it on a stick so it was about hip height. I used chicken wire to get the shape of the man first, then placed a plastic mask on the front of it as a face. This was the easy part. The moulding of the bread however, was not. I decided that rolling the bread out flat was the best tactic to get it to shape the way I had wanted it to. In order to make it stick onto the chicken wire mould I first tried using thread and a needle to sort of sew it together and attached it to the wire. This method proved to be quite tedious and take quite a bit of time that I didn't have. In order to use bread to sculpt the man I had to do it the night before the presentation or else it would have gone bad. Once I decided that sewing the bread on wasn't going to work I switched to a glue gun. This worked much better and I was able to speed up the process. When it got late and I got tired I decided to stop and finish it in the morning. This was not the best idea. Because when I woke up the next morning the bread on

the sculpture was hard as a rock. What happened was, because I had rolled it out so thin it got stale a lot faster than if I left it in its regular form. Nonetheless, I was still able to finish the sculpture on time.

A week before I tackled the sculpture I created the video that was shown during the class presentation (March 28th, 2019). It started out as a video that was just going to show news clips on repeat, but then I found that clip of Justin Trudeau explaining to a concerned citizen of Canada why bringing these people here was ok. I knew I wanted to include this in the video so I paired that audio up with footage of different families coming to Canada from Syria. In a way this created two different videos and because I was treating this as a prototype I decided to keep it that way and see how the audience responded.

The response I got from everyone was so great. I really enjoyed the feedback. I think most of my classmates were drawn to the sculpture as opposed to the video. Some didn't like the harsh content that was shown and I understand some people can't handle seeing things like that. It was great to hear what worked for them and what didn't. I'm a little bit disappointed in myself that I couldn't figure out a way to incorporate the story of the Alsaids into the performance. Then perhaps the sculpture would have had even more significance. I think in the future if I were to explore this project further I would like to attempt a full size sculpture and accompany it with possible audio recordings from Mohammad. Kind of like an interactive walk through experience with different sculptures in different rooms. There are many ideas floating around in my head and if I get the time this summer I would like to explore those ideas.

Overall this project and the process leading up to it really awakened something in me. I realized this passion for storytelling that I have and how much different people's stories can fascinate me. I feel that I have learned so much over the course of this semester thanks to this class. It has opened up a whole new medium of expression for me that I would not have found elsewhere. I hope to develop this project into something that reaches the members of my home community and to work with the Alsaidy's to help them share their story. \*



BETHANY COOKE

# GRANDMA JUNE



My project is called, *Grandma June* and is a performance based on an interview with her. There were verbatim and non-verbatim techniques used in the writing of the piece. My original inspiration was to use my Grandma June because she has a lot of stories and is humorous and theatrical. I felt like she would have a lot to say.

I planned to interview her on her experience with Alcoholics Anonymous. However, after a lively conversation with her, I realized that limiting her stories to that in Alcoholics Anonymous might be doing her a disservice. She has lived 89 years in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has seen many changes within the city. She grew up in an orphanage, for several years in the convent, worked with people on the street, been involved with gay-rights movements in the 1980s, gave birth to eight children, and now has eighteen grand-children and fifteen great-grandchildren. She has also been a recovered alcoholic for 45 years. She is also a talented vocalist, pianist and has a passion for theatre and performance. She surprises people daily with her witty lines and jokes; they do not expect that from a "sweet old lady."

I also shied away from "Alcoholics Anonymous" because Grandma June would share information from her meetings. Members share their stories and experiences in these meetings and they are meant to stay private or anonymous. If I were to interview my grandma, she may accidentally share stories with me that I am not supposed to hear. The performance was a monologue of Grandma June speaking. I acted as Grandma June. I based the monologue on verbatim and non-verbatim text from our interview. I also incorporated her reactions to me, the interviewer.

Hank Greenspan's play *REMNANTS* inspired my type of performance. Greenspan interviewed Holocaust survivors over the span of several years. He would condense his interviews to one story in monologue form. He acted as his interviewees on stage, performing a monologues based on their interviews. His collection of monologues was performed as theatre and titled, "REMNANTS."

He did not use verbatim techniques but got to the heart of the story. While he was Skyping with the class, he told us that one of his interviewees said that he did not say exactly what she said but that he said exactly what she meant. This was my goal with the *Grandma June* performance project. My performance as "Grandma June" also incorporated her reactions to me, the interviewer. She started by saying, "Do you want me to say something? Well, don't ask anything too personal because you are not going to get the answer." Sometimes she would joke around and say, "Isn't that awful, Bethany?" I chose to keep these moments to highlight the act of interviewing and how it can affect memories and what is said. Nothing happens in a vacuum.

In Della Pollock's, "Introduction: Remembering," she talks about the dynamics of an oral history interview. She states, "The oral history interview is a bounded event that asserts the 'competency' of the primary teller to tell a particular history;" (Pollock, 3). This means that the act of giving an interview shows that the interviewee has the power to tell a particular story. In this case, my *Grandma June* had the authority to tell her story. I wanted to incorporate her reactions to emphasize the authority that she had.

Sara Maurer, research assistant to Professor Sotelo, shared her interview with farmers' wives in Austria and their experience during World War 2. She interviewed the women that most people did not think to interview. She pointed her research in one direction and the interview led her in another direction: women's sexuality in 1940's Austria. This inspired my idea of doing an open-ended interview with Grandma June. I hoped this interview would lead me in an interesting direction. The process of "recruiting" my interviewee was simple because she is my grandmother. I asked her if she wanted to be interviewed for the project and she said yes. Her memory is not the best though, so I had to keep asking her several times. The plan for the interview would be to call my grandma and ask if she was free for 30-60 minutes. If yes, I would conduct the interview.

For the interview, I came up with open-ended questions such as, "What is the most important thing in your life," and "Name an experience that changed you as a person." I also asked, "What advice would you give to my future kids one day?" One challenge of the interview was getting a hold of my grandmother. Sometimes she was sleeping or away from the phone. Once she forgot to hang up the phone. While conducting the interview, she would often stray off topic and tell a story or several that were seemingly unrelated. I would just let her talk. She would often go off on a tangent for a very long time. I would let her speak to see if I could use any of the information.

Another challenge was transcribing the interview because she talked a lot. It was also a challenge to transcribe because she does not finish her sentences. She talks about one topic and then veers to another one without finishing her thought or taking a breath. If I were

to transcribe exactly, there could be sentences that were twenty sentences in one. I only transcribed a little bit from the beginning because it would take days. Another challenge was lack of time to transcribe the interview.

Transcribing was a lengthy process, so I decided to transcribe the beginning and use what I could from there. I would take parts that seemed as though they were of the same subject and put them together in the monologue. For example, she talked about her dream with Jesus wearing a suit. In the dream, she and Jesus were at the top of the hill with the bicycle built for two. I recognized that song, so I used creative license and incorporated the song into the beginning of the performance.



This project could make a difference in the lives of people without parents or family support. My grandma June grew up in an orphanage because her mother gave her up and her father was not fit to raise her. One thing that brought her through these challenging time was her love of God and Jesus. This project could help people in challenging situation find hope through

faith like she did. She is also entertaining and humourous, so this project could brighten someone's day and make them smile.

The feedback from my classmates was to make it longer and incorporate more reactions from the interviewer. They found the performance engaging and the props to be realistic. The props included moisturizer, a book, and hand lotion, a photo framed of the family and a book mark with Mother Mary on it. If I were to do this project again, I would choose a specific direction to go into (example: living in a convent as a teenager) and ask specific questions within that area. I would also do two to three interviews instead of just one. I would also like to meet in person and get a video. I would also give myself more time so I could transcribe everything, at least ten to twelve hours. I would then colour code the information into different topics. For the performance, I would want to add more sound and video elements. I would also like to take more time to rehearse and copy my Grandma's mannerisms and way of speech. \*

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TEAGHAN O'DRISCOLL-STEEVES

# LISTENING

*"Rape is the perfected act of male sexuality  
in a patriarchal culture," the "ultimate  
metaphor for domination, violence,  
subjugation, and possession"*

—

Robin Morgan (Ward 226)



## CONTENT WARNING

This project explores themes of sexual violence.

About a year ago I felt the devastating reality of my two rapes crush me beyond comprehension. I was triggered into a spiral of trauma that I had never before felt, and still struggle to understand. One thing is for certain, however. Since the day I recognized my rapes for what they were, I have set out to shed as much light on the darkened shadows sexual assault so fervently blinds us by, so that if possible, others may, too, eventually become liberated from the chains of sexual abuse. Thus was born the *Kissing Me Sinister (KMS) Campaign*.

The *KMS Campaign* is a developing anti-rape initiative that uses art and education to spread awareness in the lives of teenagers about sexual assault and how they can serve as active leaders in its prevention. The aim of the *KMS Campaign* is to offer life-changing exposure for teens to real testimony of rape through the use of oral history performance. It uses hands-on art education workshops to offer skills in learning how to prevent sexual assault. Coupled with non-judgemental discussion and feedback sessions, the *KMS Campaign* is created to assist the next generation in discovering solace and shelter from a world designed to perpetuate perpetration.

My *KMS Campaign Prototype Video* was performed on March 28th in the safe space of Concordia University's Oral History Performance Class under the wing of Professor Luis Carlos Sotelo Castro. Approximately a dozen students witnessed this "self-interviewed testimony" both filmed, written, performed by myself. The idea for a "self-interview" came by accident in a meeting with Mr. Luis Castro. Typically, oral history performances require meeting and interviewing another person, and originally I intended to interview an ex-convict nicknamed



Jeremy. However, when it became clear to my professor and I that interviewing a perpetrator would be harmful to my health at the time, my oral history interview idea was dropped. After searching through the dark for quite some time, Professor Castro and I landed ourselves in a meeting where I began to describe incidents of my sexual trauma, which Castro audio recorded (with my permission, of course.) Thus gave way to the “self-interview”, making the oral history component complete. With my professor as the listener, I was free to audio record my own oral history testimony, which I determined to layer with a visceral depiction of both my sexual traumas that I had caught on camera during their re-enactment in a photography session with a friend of mine a few months prior.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response my peers offered me after viewing my “uncomfortable”, “honest” and “vulnerable” prototype video, a number of lurching questions still tugged at my spine. The greatest of which was: how does one address the issue of voyeurism, especially in the context of those who are sexually gratified by the suffering and humiliation of others?

Even if my intention for the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video* was to use depictions of sexual representations to mirror pornography, to mock gender socialization and to reveal the secrets of perpetrators in action so as to shed light on the trauma that perpetuates cycles of sexual abuse, how does one prevent perpetrators who are aroused by such sufferings to empathize with victims? How does one prevent a young person with a pornography addiction from becoming a perpetrator, when pornography has legitimized, normalized and created a desire to sexually abuse?

Through the critical explorations of the play *Blasted* by Sarah Kane, an in depth exploration of Robbie McCauley's "survival art" found in her play *Sally's Rape*, and a comparative study of voyeurism through an examination of *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Aby Ghraib* and *Guantánamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom*, this critical analysis of the *Kissing Me Sinister (KMS) Campaign Prototype Video* will explore the pros and cons of performing trauma, thus concluding an ideal approach for how to address teenagers in the future growth of the *KMS Campaign*.

Sarah Kane is known for her violent playwriting that depicts explicit rape scenes on stage. Her intention to snap her audiences into awakening of what constitutes "real rape" is challenged by consciously toying with rape myths right before her audience's eyes. Her plays are described as "in-yer-face" dramas that are designed to "unsettle" her audiences by writing to the "extremes" (Ward 290, 230).

Considering the explicit and difficult-to-watch nature of the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video*, Kane's work parallels the need to re-live and share my rapes that fed the creation of the prototype video. My intension for filming this trauma and sharing it was twofold: first, I hoped to use it as a teaching tool for teens. Ideally, the sharing of this explicit material would stimulate their desire to follow a healthier path. Second I needed to do it as part of my own art therapeutic healing.

Ward says on page 239, "When asked why she wrote, Kane replied that she did so in order to stimulate conversation and to "change" people and in order to stimulate, she shocked." The intention of shocking her audience dwells at in the desire to cause her audience

members to experience the rape in a personal and life changing way. The potency of her writing, as Aston confirms, “lies precisely here in her “ability to touch hearts, minds and nervous systems,” in offering her audience the “experience of suffering.”” (Ward 240). Carrying this truth at heart, the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video* did accomplish a similar purpose. As stated by a classmate in the post-video feedback session:

“Even if it’s uncomfortable subject matter, that shouldn’t matter – showing people things and showing people things that maybe upset them or maybe make them uncomfortable is what should be done [...] If we don’t see it in the way that you showed us [...] then we’re disconnected from it and we don’t fully feel impact of it, and we ignore it. You have you show people these things that are happening or else they won’t resonate with it. It’s important” (O’Driscoll 5:00-5:56).

Another individual in-class stated their personal opinion about the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video* relating also to the exposure of my personal trauma on film as a performative teaching tool. They said, “I think the thing that struck me the most, was that your vulnerability was your strength. And that is a lesson that everybody can learn. [...] Thank you for sharing it because we’re all richer for it.” (O’Driscoll 8:22 – 9:19).

But is this the best approach? Robbie McCauley’s uses “survival art” in her play called *Sally’s Rape* to shed light on years of sexual trauma, and in her case, racial oppression against the black female body. Ann Nymann states, “McCauley’s performance experiments demonstrate a black female subject bearing witness to the confluent

demons of racism and sexism in representation as well as in everyday life" (Nymann 577). Homi Bhabha explains,

"the aesthetic function of a survival art is a tricky thing, for it must recognize the dual apparatus of cessation and continuance. Trauma creates a cessation of identity, culture, and tradition; continuance is living through and responding to that trauma. Survival art aestheticizes this constant "re-traumatizing," not to offer transcendence or simple resolution, but to stimulate an immediacy of emotional and intellectual response" (Nymann 579).

This concept of cessation and continuance, of living *through* trauma adds an increasingly intimate layer to Kane's work, and ties closely to the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video*. For example, at the pinnacle of *Sally's Rape*, McCauley places her naked body on a podium while her white female counterpart encourages the audience to chant "bit 'em in" (Nymann 582). Momentarily thereafter, this trauma of being resold as a slave is compounded when McCauley re-lives Sally's rape on the block as well. Nymann states,

"Curling down on the block, McCauley experiences Sally's rape on her own body as she does in a recurring nightmare. [...] Once again, past and present converge, as the rape of a slave woman becomes a contemporary reality, a painful wound in the American psyche which needs to be addressed in the name of healing" (Nymann 584).

When McCauley appears to be at her weakest and most vulnerable moment, however, her reality

is that she remains in perfect control. For example, immediately after her naked body is sold on stage, and just before she is victimized fully in the re-enacting of Sally's rape, McCauley steps off the block and halts the chanting to put her clothes on and address to the audience. This breaking of the fourth wall, symbolizes the author's perfect control over the abuse placed on display for the viewer (Nymann 584).

To highlight this, the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video* also breaks the fourth wall in its performative expression which serves to empower the author. In many scenes depicted in the video you see the layers of deconstruction occurring behind the scenes. For example, in one of the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video's* rape scenes, the artist lies 'unconscious' on a bed in her bra and underwear with eyes closed and mouth hanging open. While remaining 'unconscious', she ask her photographer to pass her a switchblade, which becomes a personified stalking perpetrator hungry to dominate its next rape victim. Upon opening of the switchblade, the artist slowly drags the blade down her bare belly. Still remaining 'unconscious', the artist lurches up as if to plunge the knife into her own vagina, thus completing the assault perpetrated by the personified knife.

In this scene, the audience sees the artist wielding the knife with her own hand like a puppet master would manipulate its lifeless pet. The fourth wall is broken. The artist may be lying 'unconscious' on a bed in her underwear about to relive her rape. Just as McCauley broke the fourth wall by putting on her clothes and addressing the audience, the *KMS Campaign* author equally remains in perfect control of her aesthetic (Nymann 583). My classmates commented

on this shattering of fourth wall in our feedback session.  
One individual said,

“Something that struck me about watching the video was capturing the meta-layer of making it. We saw the video of you talking with your photographer as they’re photographing you, we saw them taking pictures of you from a camera looking at a camera looking at a camera looking at you. I think that added a complex layer of how much editorializing and how skewed an image can be. I think that was a really powerful and unique choice.” (O’Driscoll 4:07-4:50).

Another individual commented, “I also think the camera element – this deconstruction of porn – is really important because you’ve not just testified here, you’ve seen where the source of this problem is. And you’ve realized all the other implications of this, and it’s not you... It’s you *understanding* and trying to share this understanding with everyone else. I think it’s incredibly important what you’re doing.” (O’Driscoll 7:35-8:16).

While using “survival art” as depicted in McCauley’s *Sally’s Rape*, or exploiting the “shock factor” so frequently applied by Kane in her violent sexual dramas may be effective in *showing* individuals what sexual assault and trauma can be like, it still poses the question of how to reach individuals who are already aroused by the sexual suffering of others? How do we bring individuals who are sexually gratified by the humiliation of others to empathize with sexual trauma? At the end of the day, are not the assailants the individuals we must aim to reach most fervently in order to cease the perpetration of sexual abuse?

With this in mind, I have researched voyeurism and its exploration in two art pieces. In Wendy S. Hesford's *Staging Terror*, we will explore how the photographed art exhibit called *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Aby Ghraib* and the documentary theatre and testimonial drama called *Guantánamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* will compare and contrast the dosage of voyeurism in a piece's effectiveness in creating lasting social change. *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Aby Ghraib* is an art exhibit displayed at the International Center for Photography (ICP) in New York during fall of 2004. It depicted 16 torture photos that highlighted the suffering of Middle Eastern citizens (Hesford 31). These 16 photographs included 4 framed photos at the end of the exhibit which contrasted the torture photos. As suggested by Hesford, these final four photographs were aimed to provide "a counter-discourse to the dominance and voyeurism of both the American Media and the soldiers" who had taken and circulated the photos (Hesford 31). But was it effective?

By staging the torture of these middle eastern individuals without voices through photographic spectacle, a "gray zone" was established that presented greater reality for voyeuristic intent rather than empathy and critical witnessing (Hesford 32). Ultimately, in the case of *Inconvenient Evidence*, it can be argued that trying to fight fire with fire can end up... well, backfiring. As Hesford quotes Dominick LaCapra, "You take the 'illness' [the excess] and you counteract it through proper dosage of the illness [the excess] itself." LaCapra suggests that in times such as these, such tactics may be helpful or required, but that it is important "not to overdose on the antidote" (Hesford 34).

Applying this knowledge to critical thinking about the *KMS Campaign Prototype Video*, it is therefore surmised that one must be very careful with how they choose to represent their sexually, especially in an educational setting with underage individuals and audience members who may enjoy the suffering of others. In respect to the work I am doing, for example, by re-enacting rape scenes overtly or through metaphor, while wearing underwear on camera and displaying pornographic-like photographs of myself – even though the intension is to shine light on the perverted sexual reality of our daily existence – this may just be giving greater power to the enemy.

The contrasting artwork, however, *Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom"* documentary play written by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, may serve as a better model in learning how to address voyeurism in the theatre while dealing with potentially destructive subject matter. *Guantánamo* uses verbatim testimony of prisoners trapped in Guantánamo Bay naval base in Cuba during the post 9/11 policy established by President Bush. Using a simple set design with thin cots, mesh prison cages and a cast wearing orange jumpsuits, *Guantánamo* staged the readings of verbatim letters and stories of four British citizens held captive in Pakistan. Despite there being very little character development, the play was able to open a great space for audience members to encounter and empathize with broader collective truths respecting the realities faced by the prisoners in Guantánamo Bay (Hesford 35). "If *Inconvenient Evidence* reproduces U.S. dominance through spectacle – an overdose of the antidote – *Guantánamo* seeks to counter the spectacle and to humanize the detainees by providing a documentary stage for their stories" (Hesford 35).



An early vision I had for creating the *Kissing Me Sinister Campaign* respected the desire to incorporate diverse voices of many unique individuals who had suffered numerous forms of sexual trauma. For example, I long to hear and learn from the man who has suffered life as a perpetrator. What does he have to say to a young person, so that they may be saved from falling into similar dangerous patterns of abuse? What does an ex-porn star have to say to a young person about their experience in the porn industry? What does an ex-porn addict have to say about having been able to confront and overcome their porn addiction? Sexual assault takes form in many different ways, by many different people and under many different circumstances.

Bearing this in mind, the previous outline for using the “punch” value described by Kane in her violent staging of sexual assault, and even working through the trauma of reliving rape on stage in McCauley’s “survival art” similar to my previous approaches may not create the space that is required in order to hear and help heal all the voices that have suffered different forms of sexual trauma, let alone dispel sexual desire for the suffering of others.

Hesford states, *Guantánamo* “is about the audiences realizing how the detainees worked through the trauma and empathizing with them, and not about documenting injustices” (Hesford 37). This very clear distinction that draws us away from focusing on the dark and painful re-enactment of trauma focuses our attention as audience members and artists on a new and true light that creates a safe path to grapple with the realities of sexual assault without having to physically re-live them or witness them viscerally. This path can set the viewer free from voyeuristic tendencies, for it

pinpoints their attention on the emotional reality of the story rather than on its image.

In conclusion, despite all the wonderful feedback I received from my classmates respecting the choices I had made to visually conceptualize and relive my traumas on screen; despite all the wonderful work Sarah Kane is doing to challenge rape myths; despite Robbie McCauley work to relive trauma to encourage understanding, I will resolve to shy away from using my own body as a tool for trauma's retreat. Instead I will focus my attention building performance art that emphasizes empathy through storytelling. \*

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SAM WHITEHOUSE

# JOSHUA

An audio visual archive  
exploring memory and  
familial relationships

*Joshua* indirectly began in October 2018 whilst studying performance styles at the University of Manchester. Exploring verbatim theatre, we were asked to devise a short three-minute piece based on an interview. For the performance I decided to interview my mother on her experience of parenting my younger brother, who is autistic, and the challenges and successes she encountered with him in mainstream education. Intended to only be a short interview, the discussion lasted nearly an hour forty-five minutes. Having only three minutes of content to create I used the interview to make a short movement piece. Whilst I discarded the performance for my outcome, I shelved my mother's interview, often discussing with her over the phone how I would potentially use it in a future project. In January 2019 I moved to Montreal, Canada on an exchange programme at Concordia University. Having previously taken a class exploring applied theatre, the practice of theatre in educational, community or therapeutic contexts, I was keen to further my understanding of theatre as a device for social change and thus decided to take the Oral History Performance class.

Similar to the work of applied theatre in the UK, oral history performance focuses on "aspects of social changes, personal development and community-building" (Helen Nicholson 90). However, oral history and oral history-based performance serves to challenge and expand upon traditional ways of transmitting historical knowledge. It is more so a method of devising rather than a style of performance and tends to be based on an interview, serving to understand past events, reclaim them and retell them with the purpose of highlighting a social issue or facilitating an individual's journey to

healing after a traumatic event. The retelling of the told, since no one was listening

I began my project by mind mapping possible foci and themes. Having a keen interest in queer performance my immediate response was to use the project as an opportunity to explore Montreal's queer scene. Though I had numerous potential interviewees suggested to me the project seemed to have come to a standstill before it had even begun. It was not until a few weeks later did I remember the interview I had recorded in October with my mother. I suggested the idea to a small group of peers and though greeted with nods of support, it was suggested that the project could be a platform for my younger brother instead. Over the next week I debated over who the project's focus should be on. I looked to Anna Deavere Smith's work who we had been reading about at the time. Regarding *Fires in the Mirror*, Smith's verbatim play exploring the tensions between a black and Hasidic Jewish community, Smith collected in total 46 voices to be represented on stage through her vocal and physical performance. Rather than pinning down particular individuals for interviews Smith looked for those who had a story they needed and wanted to tell. In a similar vein my mother had told me the story willingly and I had responsibility over her story, it was Smith's ability to listen that made her work so powerful. I had listened to an impressive story however I could not ignore the opportunity I had to give Joshua a platform to discuss his own experience.

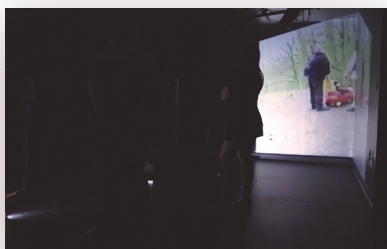
A concern of mine was how to facilitate an interview with my younger brother. I knew a conventional sit-down interview would be ineffective, rather a form of conversation would be more effective. This would allow a focus and themes to emerge naturally. I was unsure

how to facilitate an organic, stimulating conversation for Joshua. Being in Canada also meant that the interview would have to be conducted via a phone or video call. Video calling my brother to discuss the project quelled these worries, and he agreed to take part and appeared comfortable in front of the camera. The concern lay in finding a way to facilitate a stimulating conversation.

I explored an idea giving him full autonomy of the project, asking him to document his daily activities via his phone. Trialling the idea, I asked him to film himself exploring a collection of photographs at our Aunts the following day. Unfortunately, he forgot, and I realised in order for Joshua to take part in the project I needed to conduct some form of face to face interview in order to provide stimulus. It was suggested by my professor that I may have somebody else interview my younger brother. However, due to the nature of my brother's autism having a stranger interview him I felt would alienate him and would be contradictory to the project. However, it is something I would be open to exploring in the project's future.

The answer of how to facilitate a came during a class when discussing the English performance artist Bobby Baker. Baker uses food within her performances to represent different points in her life, for example in *'Drawing on a Mother's Experience'* she paints a white canvas in the food she craves when expecting her first child. In ending the performance by lying within the mess, she presents to her audience her struggle with postnatal depression. Baker's method of using food as a metaphor was particularly inspiring and led me to explore common objects me and my brother shared. In conversation with my mother she suggested old photographs as Joshua had always had an acute memory

and fascination with the idea of the past. Instantly I was reminded of a VCR we had had found a few years previous after my Nan's death whilst clearing out her house. The VCR held a collection of footage documenting me and my younger brother growing up together. It contained one particularly poignant scene where Joshua was brought back from the hospital. The video documents me, aged two, rushing into the lounge to greet my younger brother for the first time. Having no recollection of the event, or even knowledge of the existence of the footage, me and my younger brother shared a special experience watching it.



The VCR was the focus I needed and a way to facilitate a conversation between me and my brother. Through the Blue Jeans video calling app, I could watch the video with my younger brother. With the help of my father, we set up cameras focusing on me and my little brother watching the footage. I recorded my point of view and had sent a digital version of the VCR. I found the interview challenging, I found myself asking questions to which I had no response. I began to simply watch the video, allowing Joshua to come forth with his own commentary.



When all the footage had been rendered and collected, I now had the challenge of how to re-perform this event. I was concerned with aestheticizing and cherry picking from Joshua's story. However, I understood Robert Landy's definition "aesthetic distance" (20) as important. By recontextualising an event through performance, we can experience the story in a new light. I had used multimedia in previous work, and I had intended to create a platform for Joshua to present himself. Thus, presenting the footage and audio in a documentary style seemed most logical. I recalled the words of the journalist Aphrodite Salas, who had visited the class to discuss visual journalism. Salas had stated when creating a story she abided by three things; to listen, to respect and to tell their interviewees story through film, audio and script captured on the day. She combined these with little editing to narrate and facilitate the words of the interviewee as respectfully as possible. Through the presentation of the documentation I had collected, I could allow Joshua to present himself whilst also creating an artistic performance. I wished to portray the experience me and my brother shared in my performance, thus the idea of memory and the alternate experience of memory became my focus.

Pollock states that oral history "is itself a transformational process" (2). Understanding transformation and transportation regarding Richard Schechner, I understood that in order to transform my audience's perspective I must effectively transport them into the world of mine and my brother's memories. Inspired by the work of Bill Viola's *The Greeting* (1995) and immersive CAVE installation, studied in another course, I began to think how I could use projection to transform a space. I imagined creating a smaller, intimate space, which audiences could enter to watch a video projected onto

the ceiling. However, when given the chance to explore the Acts of Listening Lab with a projector I realised projecting onto the blank walls in the dark was just as immersive. I decided to use two projectors in order to fill the space and make audiences feel surrounded by the multifaceted memories. The final edited videos were a combination of audio from the interview with my brother and my mother layered over footage of my nan's VCR. By reanimating the space with projection, I was able to create an intimate setting that allowed audiences to engage with my brother's, mother's and nan's stories.

In a post-performance discussion, a peer commented on the porous line I had created between the past future and present. They failed to recall where exactly images had come sequentially and thus felt totally immersed. Our professor Sotelo Castro suggested the interweaving of my project and a fellow peer whose performance explored a family escaping persecution in their native country. Home footage of the family contrasted with news clippings and videos of destruction within an immersive CAVE environment would be an interesting and powerful performance. Similar work is being created by artists such as Chris Milk who uses VR (virtual reality) to bring stories of individuals living in conflict to western audiences. In a Ted Talk (2016) on his work Milk states how VR allows one to "feel an emotional closeness to the character because of what you feel to be a physical closeness". He transforms our experience of video footage by transporting us to their world using VR.

Continuing this project further, I would be intrigued to see how I can expand the project to feature other voices. I believe oral history should be

co-constructed and whilst I struggled to do this due to distance between me and my family, I plan to continue the project in collaboration with my family. Performing it possibly to a local audience would be particularly interesting particularly those personally close to my family. ✱

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