

HER

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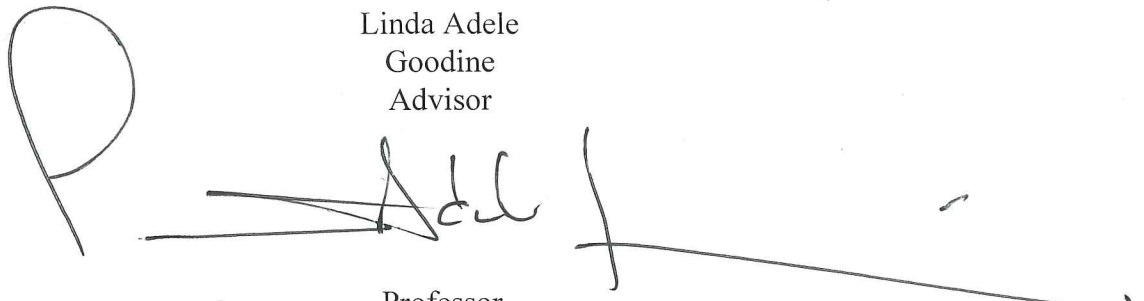
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By Hillary
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Master of Fine Arts

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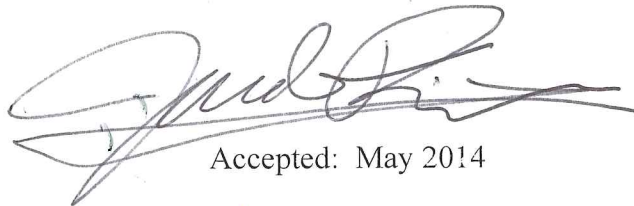
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Life and death seem to be opposite in definition but I believe it is death that makes life. The two need each other and death is what defines life for me. How do we know what happiness is without sadness? How can we understand life without death? Part of what defines being alive for people and animals alive is the fact that they die. Immortal things are inherently 'dead' because they do not know death. Mortality gives us life because death is the place in which living begins and ends.

The work I create combines pieces of my past or myself that, when placed upon one another, create my own creature like that of Dr. Frankenstein. When Dr. Frankenstein created his monster he failed to make it live because the creature was doomed to immortality and therefore only existed as dead flesh forced together. My creature is alive because it depends on things or elements to live, nourishment, and have the potential to die without those things. I have reanimated pieces of myself that are rooted in a past trauma or a present conflict. The work is no longer connected to my own mortality and has a life separate from me. "To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. (Mary Shelley pg 70)"

My connection to mortality is why I choose analog mediums; they age, degrade and can die and have a physical presence while a digital file does not age and lives outside the physical. I can hold a tape in my hand and use its life. I can destroy it, while a digital recording remains. Digital is the *virtual*, one is always a step away from the interaction between the 'thing' and the viewer. Analog is the *actual*, the interaction is physical and in that moment. The *actual* can live and breath in next to a viewer, the viewer and the 'thing' exist and live in separate spaces in the *virtual*. For instance a face-to-face conversations live in the *actual* while Skype or Facetime interactions are in the

virtual because of they are step away from the physical. The two physical interactions and contexts are translated into digits in the virtual.

My work exists in a duality, living and dead. I take two things (be it video and sculptural elements or sound and visual elements) that are immortal and neither living nor dead and combine them to make them actual and dead; and therefor vital. Video and sound technologies have an aspect in which they have the ability to loop forever and ever, doomed to repeat itself and denied a chance to live and change. When these sound pieces or videos are placed on or through something else they animate themselves and the thing they live through, even a simple old projector screen enters the *actual* rather than the *virtual* with the image moving and dancing on it, they absorb my identity. A blanket is alive, forms an identity of its own along with my own. The blanket talks back to you through my voice being embedded in the blanket while the viewer lays down and receives the sound.

I am interested in sound and video because of how we are active participates in its life. Sound is lonely; it reaches out for a participant so it can live. Without a receiver of the sound it will only continue to bounce from wall to wall, filling the room with its emptiness. It can fill a space with its presence but it needs another presence to be truly activated, to enter the *actual*. Some sound work uses this and uses the audience in this aggressive entrance into a body, the body of the viewer. It needs a carrier, the body of the viewer, to live outside that space. There is an intimacy between the sound/voice and the viewer because of this entrance into their physical body. The work I create is concerned with breaking that immortality of sound and the work needs a viewer to engage rather than the sound engaging them, a longing for that intimacy rather than

forcing this intimacy. The sound makes a room or a thing alive through giving the room or the thing a voice. "Sound does not adhere to the line of sight; it moves around walls and bounces through openings and between spaces, invading, adjoining rooms. It does not follow safe and contained visuality...(Sound Caleb Kelly 17)" There is a double life to the work because the way an inanimate object is brought to life. When the viewer engages with the work the sound lives through them. In the case of my work it is my own voice that reanimates these objects. These audio recordings fill in and represent my person-ness, they make me present in the room without my physical body only my words.

The sound and the object that is animated cannot be separated. The object changes the sound, muffles it, and when the viewer interacts with the objects, the sound is changed again, becoming amplified and absorbed.

The majority of the sound work is recorded through analog technology, using an old cassette tape recorder given to me in my youth. This device was a companion, it gave me my own voice but it also became voice separate from me that could talk back. Analog has a different presence; you can physically hold the sound in your hand. It also has the ability to be degraded through use alone. Degradation does not easily occur in digital sound recording and it is more a result of deliberate action on the digits to degrade them rather than the environment and use acting on itself. In contrast an analog recording will pick up the sound of the tape head over time and through my transferring process. Digital audio cannot be held in your hand and it only exists in the computer trapped in its relative perfection. When it is erased it is as if it never existed,

there is no evidence of its life. When cassette tapes are erased there is evidence that a death has occurred; there is an actual body.

I use my voice to fill in for myself. I fear miscommunication and fear that I will be just like the sound, drifting in a room waiting for someone to listen, someone who can listen and hear these events or anxieties that I battle with. This is one of my fears, which is why I approach these traumatic events with a sense of failure. I fear that I will always fail to translate the true weight of my past. I use the idea of the failure of language and personal barriers people put up because of that fear. There is a tension though because I need to communicate these events or moments, but I fear the failure. I create gestures to communicate the trauma that will always fail. I create the failure instead of waiting for it. This failure is what makes the work succeed; it needs to fail because the intimate relationship the work expects from the viewer needs to be fair. It allows an entrance, space for the viewer. If the trauma were to be fully communicated that potency would make the work like the sun, too bright to see, and forcing the viewer to look away. That distance and space between viewer and the work is intentional distance and choice. "Successes are delayed failures; failures are aborted successes. What decides the value of a form is what becomes of it. All living forms are, to use Louis Roule's expression in *Les poisons*, 'normalized monsters.' (Beatriz Preciado pg 241 {George Canguilhem})"

I developed my own way of thinking because I experienced the world outside of a definable language. Instead of verbal language, I learned to understand the world through my senses and empirical investigations. Today I continue to interpret the world for myself to understand the world that is somewhat separate from me. The way I interpret moments is through recreating a physical moment or relating to experience;

which are reconstructed and relayed through phrases. These phrases are my way to make the world something that I can understand and relate to; I redefine the world and create what I call “Hillary Logic” so I can grasp communication with others. These phrases are usually trapped inside of my consciousness because I am always afraid of others misunderstanding and pushing me further outside the norm.

Swimming Lessen

Swimming Lessen deals with a personal past trauma that is difficult for me to talk about. The only way to speak about it is through a performative gesture, created to reenact the trauma. Through the gesture I try to talk about the trauma under water but the viewer/listener cannot understand me. It is also hard to speak under water just as it is hard to speak about personal trauma.

The piece consists of two gestures that are captured and displayed through video. One vantage point is an underwater shot in which the camera is under the water with me as I try to speak. The imagery underwater consists of bubbles from my spoken words expelled from my mouth and my hair moving and floating in the water. I have to come up for air and it is impossible to completely finish the story.

There exists a second part to the gesture in which in the video the viewer sees me come up for air and breathe for a moment, calming and preparing myself because I go under again, trying to complete the story. This gesture is the parallel and yet the opposite of the underwater video. Because these gestures need each other I stacked the videos together creating a defining line and split. Placing the videos together also gives the gesture a kind of life for the viewer because they can see the moments in-between and those in which I am most alive as I breathe before I submerge myself again. Water

and air are located in a place of life and death, too much or not enough can kill us and they it can also surround us and also evaporate and evade us. It also shows the viewer that it is a chosen gesture that I will repeat until the story has been told in full; cleansing by reliving a past event. The water absorbs the event and me, my physical body breaking the surface of the water over and over again.

Another important aspect of the piece is the sound component, it is the way in which the audience can enter into the story, although simultaneously that story is muffled and destroyed by the water. Even though I tell the story and try to release it, the world can never hear it.

“Some people can talk, hide nothing, not lie: they are secret by transparency, as impenetrable as water, in truth incomprehensible. Whereas the others have a secret that is always breached, even though they surround it with a thick wall or elevate it to an infinite form.” (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* pg 290)

The action gave me a way to release the tension of containing the story. The act of speaking into the water releases the story into the water and the water absorbs that trauma. The water kills my voice but it also gives me life through protecting me by the destruction of the sound and story.

Reconscioused

Reconscioused lives in a place of my past but when I constructed the piece I realized how present this issue still was for me, and thus the meaning changed. It talks about my relationship to pornography, and the strange place of guilt and pleasure. The



piece is also about a longing for a companion and who that person would be; the possibility of a relationship to any of these women. “The pornographic image is characterized by its capacity to stimulate-independently of the spectator’s-will the biochemical and muscular mechanisms that regulate the production of pleasure. (Preciado pg 265)”

Reconscioused is constructed of a dinner plate onto which I transferred an image of a naked woman onto a dinner plate and provided an accompanying audio dialogue.

The images are ones I found through a Google search, soft porn images of women. I found some that I was attracted to and others that I felt a kind of sadness and longing in the image so I wanted to save them in a way. Save them from the others, save them from their origin and give them a new life. The images are black and white and somewhat degraded due to the LaserJet transfer process; pieces of the women rubbed off making a kind of wound in the image. During the process one is supposed to flip the image so that it is the correct orientation after the transferring process, but I chose not to mirror the image because there was something about the image existing behind the woman. There are 5 of these plates but I chose to show only one in the thesis exhibition because it relates more to an obsession and singularity of this one particular woman. The plate I chose is one of the sad ones I want to save her from others' gaze and I want to know her story. She seems weighted and magnetized to the floor because of the gaze, her gaze and my own. Her eyes are also closed so she can't see me looking at her.

I imagine what the life and personality of some of women who are depicted in these soft-core pornographic images of women could be like. I recorded these stories and the viewer absorbs them as they absorb the plate.

The stories came naturally to me as I sat in my home rubbing away the paper to make the women present on the ceramic plate, I thought about them. I talk to them as if they were real, I wanted them to be real; for myself and for them. I make the once virtual image of the vulnerable and *actual*. I thought about what things and places that

we would enjoy together. These things I thought about were not based in the sexual but in a place of the personal. Most of the stories came from my own desires and longings for place and things.

I recorded these stories onto my old friend, the tape recorder that I got when I was a child, my old companion. The dialogue of the sound element is these stories told earnestly and softly into that analog device. I did not write down what I was going to say and for some I was telling the story for the first time. I touched the plate and caressed the image and thought about them and myself and tried to save them as well as myself, save each other from a place of loneliness and miscommunication.

When the viewer puts on the headphones and listens they become part of the dialogue. I am talking to the viewer and the woman on the plate at the same time. I wanted to know who they were and I wanted them to know who I was/am. I did not want these plates to remain silent, they need this story and they need to live outside their image. The sound gives them a kind of life that silence lacks.

Silence is about listening, listening to small sounds, tiny sounds, quiet and loud sounds out of any context, musical, visual or otherwise. Silent sounds can be loud, as much as noisy sounds can be quiet, but they do not deafen my body to anything but themselves, and instead include me in their production. (Salome Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence* pg 81-82)



Discomforter

Discomforter is a sound piece that can only be heard when the viewer lays down on the blanket and absorbs it. The audio was recorded while I was wrapped up in my blanket and talking about general anxiety that revolves around my sexuality. The audio is muffled by it being wrapped up in the blanket, just as the barrier of the blanket muffled the original recording.

During rebirthing ceremonies, one is wrapped up in a blanket and then pushed/forced out. This gesture is supposed to mimic birth and is performed when they believe that the person was 'damaged' from the trauma of birth and this ceremony will lessen the trauma and absolve them. I am wrapped up in my blanket but instead of expelling myself from the blanket, I expel my voice and the discomforts I have with myself. A blanket is supposed to be comforting but I use it to talk about how I feel uncomfortable in the world.

My original intention was that the dialogue would be directed toward my two brothers, who were unaware of my homosexuality. My speech filters into an openness

that is directed at the listener and the listener fills in for those whom the original intention of the audio was directed towards.. The blanket also is a way to muffle my voice to mimic the inability to talk about this particular issue with people that I care about. My failure is rooted in anxiety about acceptance. This failure circles back in on itself; these fears cause the failures and lack of communication, a self-destruct and collapse caused only by internal struggles. The external (being intimate familial relationship) is unaware so how is it supposed to succeed.

There is a potential for failure because the viewer needs to lay on the blanket to hear the audio. Without that interaction my voice will forever be reaching for someone to absorb the sound. The sound does not have life until it is heard. Until then it is only waiting and longing for a receiver so that it can be sound and live. If the viewer does not participate there still exists the visual and the “thing-power” of the blanket itself and all the life and death, pain and joy that is absorbed into what a blanket is and what it does for us.

When the sound is placed into the blanket it gives that blanket a kind of life. The site of a blanket reminds us of bodies, bodies wrapped up in them or laying on them, bodies using them as protection from the cold. This blanket contains my voice, a type of body and entity that exists outside of a physical body. This placement of the audio inside of the blanket gives the blanket another type of life in which it breaths and waits for someone to receive its comfort, and once they do they receive my voice as well which lives in a place of anxiety and discomfort.



Discomforter and *Reconscioused* are placed close together in the layout of the thesis exhibition. Both pieces talk about my sexuality; either being rooted in a kind of anxiety created from not being part of the hetero-normative culture or the anxiety from being a member of the group that 'look' at, and the guilt of the gaze; being both a participant in the gaze and the objectification.

A comforter exists in the same plane of sight as the bed, a site of intimacies and longing, a place of life and death, dreaming and fixation, it is the site of the moments in-between in which we live our lives. A comforter lives in this duality of love and tenderness but also distress. Some will scream into a pillow and let it absorb that distress some wrap themselves up in their blanket and wish for the next day to come, a better day.

Discomforter lives in that space, it was born from that space and to allow people to see this I have removed it from the bed and elevated it from the domestic space into an art space. Where we know we are to take notice of a thing and look at it.

Reconscioused has a similar relationship to the object part. A dinner plate is the site of consumption and intimates, of nourishment but also gluttony and addiction, a site of relationships and exchanges. When I look at the plates and see the women I think about how eating dinner off them could be seen as objectifying the lady once more making her a surface of my consumption, desires and needs. "...consumption is a two-way street, an encounter between bodies human and nonhuman.(Jane Bennett 47)" This idea of having dinner on these particular plates remind me of those moments when you awkwardly look down at your plate wondering what to say. The combination of the plate and the audio also reinforces a change of intimacy between the voice behind the audio and the woman on the plate. My voice enters into a relationship with the woman on the plate. This exchange and story could have happened over dinner, a meal, but the story is imaginary and the woman also is virtual.

Each of the works removes a thing from the world it traditionally lives in and places it in the sterile and 'lifeless' gallery space; a space with the intent to objectify things, raising them to the place of art object. The gallery puts a kind of pressure on the everyday objects, the space services these objects and there is a role that they place inside the art space of a gallery white high ceilings and white walls. The things are embedded with connotative gestures that root the objects in the *actual* world and they have a life and a story outside of my own, the viewer thinks of their own blanket and the plates they have in their cupboard, they may try to remember what they had for

dinner last night, imagine that a meal could be placed upon the naked lady plate. These pieces contain my voice, one that is nervous and lost while the other is soft and sweet; the voice that gives life to each of the objects.

The pieces I have chosen to have in my thesis exhibition show a range of my work and processes. *Discomforter* and *Swimming Lessen* represents my way in which I am interested my personal struggle with communication and the tension that arises from an inability to communicate personal anxiety or past trauma. *Discomforter* uses physically muffled dialogue to explore miscommunication. Sound is a medium that I turn to often and sound was the best way to explain the gesture of a muffled voice. *Swimming Lessen* also uses this idea of a muffled or altered voice but it needed the visual to fully explain the performative gesture of speaking under water. I did try to use just sound but that sound didn't have a place for the viewer to enter the piece. It was hard to listen to if you knew where it came from, it was the bright afternoon sun again, too much to actually see. The video has that entrance point for the audience and they can see what I am doing and that I am making a choice to do this. I use video when that is the best way to absorb the gesture that I have somewhat created, like speaking underwater to talk about the intensities of childhood trauma, eating a candy gun to reenact a friends suicide in both memory and remorse or scrubbing my chest with a bar of soap until the bar of soap is gone to talk about abuse and how the build up of small abuses can affect our physical and mental bodies.

Reconscioused is the newest piece that is in the thesis exhibition. In contrast to the other two pieces, *Reconscioused* exists in the present for me. It deals with a constant rather than a past. It is important for me to have these two conversations because the

way in which the past and the present exists for me. The present stands on the shoulders of the past, they live on the same plane. When we remember or think about the past it is in this present moment, the two planes are never truly separate from one another. The past I think about now depends on the present state as well. *Reconscioused* is an important avenue for me to explore, this idea of the present. I believe that work like this will put more pressure on the other work that deals with past trauma or anxiety. The blanket exists in an in-between of past-ness and present-ness because some of the anxieties I speak into the blanket are still present for me while others have been resolved. The three pieces together show a linear progression of the work and the different ways in which I capture these anxieties or traumatic events.

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