An Imperfect Shelter

Interpreting Female Friendship Through Video Art and Critical Theory

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Abstract

An Imperfect Shelter: Interpreting Female Friendship Through Video Art and Critical Theory

Representations of female friendships in film are often overly romantic, wrought with conflict, or overshadowed by heterosexual romance. In order to investigate and trouble these tropes, I undertook a research-creation project in which I made a prototype for an experimental video about female friendship entitled *So You Know I Think About You Every Day*. In this video, my friend Tilda* and I read our email correspondences as voice-overs. These voice-over readings are accompanied by images of an abandoned construction site. Within this site, two young women interpret our emails through dance. The dancers watch and perform for each other, but rarely manage to touch. In their dance, they strive towards an ideal friendship of reciprocity and closeness, but never quite reach it. The current document is a complement to this creative endeavor. I discuss the process of making video art and conduct a textual analysis of the finished piece. I approach the making of the video through the lens of interpretive autobiography. The autobiographical genre defies stable notions of subjects, memory and truth. Using my personal archive of emails as source material, I took inspiration from music videos and dance films to create an impressionistic, visual narrative. This narrative conveyed my interpretation of my email exchange and friendship with Tilda. I also borrowed from conventions of narrative storytelling and documentary editing in order to distil the broad reality of a relationship into a single concept and a single story. I analyze my video as a text in a theoretical chapter. First, I use Chantal Akerman's film *News from Home* (1991) as a counterpoint to consider email correspondence and the construction of female intimacies through communication technologies. I then discuss the formal elements of *So You Know I Think About you Every Day*, in particular the use of movement, framing and space. I conclude with a discussion on embracing loss as an integral, though not a final, element of friendship as well as the possibility of play in both friendship and creation.
*Fictional name.

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This thesis was mostly written and created on Kanien'kehá:ka (Mowhak) traditional territory. I am grateful to these lands and waters for sustaining me, and for the centuries of indigenous resistance to Canadian colonialism. Thank you for helping me learn about the violent settler histories I have been born into and for calling us all to action and deeper reflection.

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Introduction: Finding My Way Through Research-Creation

> *I wonder where you are, how you are, what you are seeing, who you met, where you are staying, how many cigarettes you smoke in a day, how's the coffee, have the edges of your hair grown back, do you have pain in your hands when you hold someone too-close?*
>
> –Tilda, personal communication, May 2009

Friendship has always fueled creativity and passion in my life. In particular, my decade long friendship with Tilda (fictional name) is a relationship where creative collaboration and intimacy intertwine. Together, starting in 2006, we made our first forays into feminist theory, deconstructed patriarchy, collaborated on various art projects and organized spaces for young women to discuss everyday manifestations of sexism. Throughout this time, we also developed a practice of emailing whenever one of us left the city. Our writing carried all the elements of our friendship: not only did it permit vulnerability; it was also an avenue to think through feminism in our day-to-day lives, and to discover our selves through writing. As we grew into our twenties and pursued distinct career paths and life choices, this spacious time for collaborative projects and intimacy dwindled. Aside for emailing, the demands of our adult lives seemed to take us away from one another. This sense of distance led me to look back on our invigorating, inspiring and arts-based friendship, and to wonder what place friendship might take up in my adult life. My analytical turn towards our friendship also led me to notice a lack of nuanced portrayals of friendship in film and experimental cinema. In particular, I found cinematic representations of friendship to be portrayed as overly romanticized, competitive and spiteful, or to act in service of the protagonist's attainment of heterosexual romantic

partnership. Since I began my project, representations of female friendships that trouble these conventions have emerged across media forms: the art-house film *Frances Ha*, Ferrante's epic *Neapolitana* literary series, Sheila Heti's witty novel *How Should a Person Be*, and the web and television show *Broad City* by comedians Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson. Clearly, I am not alone in wanting to investigate, deconstruct and represent the complexities and nuances of female friendships.

During this time, I also developed, bracketed and then reignited my independent practice as a video artist. When I was growing up and into my early twenties, camcorders had acted as an extension of my desires—to observe, deconstruct, reconstruct, imagine, make, show and be seen. After earning a film school diploma in 2008, I decided to put film aside for some time in order to delve into critical feminist scholarship, communication studies and local organizing. In 2014, I was reintroduced to media making through a feminist filmmaking workshop I co-organized in Guadalajara, Mexico, with an autonomous feminist media center. Through leading this workshop, I realized I wanted to reintegrate my various practices: feminism, education and filmmaking. I decided to take up an artistic craft once again. This decision coincided with the questions I was asking myself about friendship. It was an intuitive next step to develop a video project on the topic of feminism and friendship.

Four years later, I have created a video called *So You Know I Think About You Every Day*[1]. This 30-minute video on loop is intended for presentations in galleries or experimental film festivals. It is a meditation on friendship as both reciprocity and distance, and on emailing as a creative practice. In the video, Tilda and I read our 2009 email correspondence as voice-overs. These voice-over readings are accompanied by images of an abandoned construction site.

Within this site, two young women interpret our emails through dance. One moves furiously and elegantly through the space, the other watches in stillness before attempting to dance as well. What unfolds is an interchange between performer and witness. The two dancers watch and perform for each other, but rarely manage to touch. In their dance, they strive towards and ideal friendship of reciprocity and closeness, but never quite reach it. These dance sequences weave in and out of the readings of our emails, which reveal a fraught exchange and attempt at communication over the course of one summer.

This project was carried out as part of an MA in research-creation. As such, it not only involves creation, but also research and writing. This document is a written companion to the video installation. In the rest of this introduction, I discuss carrying out this video within the paradigms of a research-creation project. I write about how I see creation and research intersecting. In the next chapter I discuss my methods and reflect on the process of making this piece. My last chapter is a theoretical interpretation of the video and some of the meanings it conveys on friendship and emailing. I end with some concluding remarks on playfulness and the unknowable ends of both friendship and research-creation processes.

How is this project research-creation?

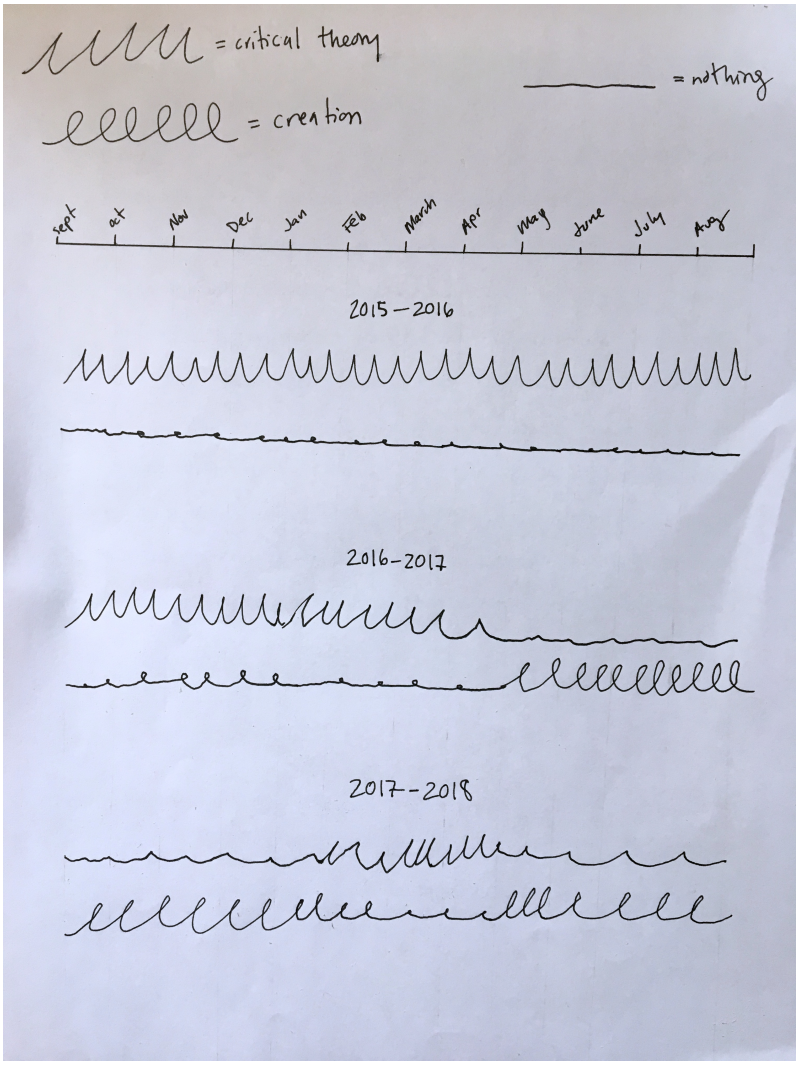
As part of my MA, I am asked to discuss in what way I consider my video project to be research. In "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'," Chapman and Sawchuck deconstruct and describe different methodologies of research-creation. They argue that these methodologies offer epistemological challenges to institutions of knowledge and ways of knowing. Similar to qualitative research, research-creation projects offer opportunities for researchers to self-reflexively bring 'un-scientific' ways of knowing, such as

intuition, into their investigations. Chapman and Sawchuk explain: “This understanding of the role of intuition and ‘feeling’ presents itself as one of the strongest reasons why those who pursue research-creation are committed to the methods they promote, as it is only through working theoretically and artistically, or creatively, with their research topics that they become invested and engaged in a process that is right for them” (12). In line with this statement, I must ask myself: How did un-scientific modes of knowing, such as intuition and video making, contribute to my research on friendship? How did this process open avenues to understanding where more traditional research would have led me elsewhere? In keeping with an intuitive approach, my instinct is to think of my project as a form of textual analysis. I could have studied existing representations of female friendship in film or in popular media, but instead, I made my own text. By making media, I investigated existing tropes, social patterns and sense making attached to friendship. I troubled some of these representational patterns through my own work.

I also want to think through the intersections of research and creation in my work by describing how these two modes of knowing and making came together for me. For the purposes of this discussion I will define and bracket “research” from “creation” in my project. I am going to associate research with more traditional forms of academic inquiry, and creation with making media, even though these categories are not so neat, which I will come back to later. Research, in my case, mostly constitutes critical theory. I ask questions of the world that surrounds me, develop curiosities around language and concepts, read books, take notes, try to make sense of things, write, edit, write and edit. Creation, in the context of this project, relates to video art, installation, and film. Here, I also ask questions of the world that surrounds me, I

am intuitively drawn towards affects, objects, images, scenes and other works of art, I draw sketches and write, research archival material, work with collaborators, shoot, make, edit, record and edit. *So You Know I Think About You Every Day* began with critical theory and then went back and forth between intensive periods of creative work and theoretical research and writing. Here is a rough, visual timeline of my process. To show that these two modes, research and creation, were somewhat ongoing throughout, I have represented research as waves and creation as loops. Each can have varying degrees of intensity, and a line signifies no activity.

When I began my project, I thought that critical theory could be the driving force for my creation. I invested a lot of energy into theory. My supervisor, Elizabeth Miller, would remind me to stop waiting for the perfect concept and start trying things out. Her advice resonates with Chapman and Sawchuck's assertion that for those working in research-creation, textual research is not enough, and creation reveals unique forms of discovery: "Generating situated forms of knowledge, combined with new ways of developing and disseminating that



1. Timeline Sketch

knowledge, research-creation helps reveal different contexts and methods for cultural analysis" (11). I finally realized that engaging with practices of creation and video making would reveal paths to knowledge I had been searching for through theory. I starting experimenting with images and making stories. As can be seen in my timeline, when I began engaging intensively in making, I put critical theory aside for some time. In this period, I was drawn to books by and for artists, about their processes and approaches (Kleon, 2012; Lynch, 2007; Oldham, 1992; Rabiger, 2004). Taking a rest from critical thinking was often necessary for video-making, as critical thinking often dipped into self-critical thinking. When I say self-critical, I do not (only) mean self-doubt. I am referring to the application of critical theory to my own process of making, while it was still in progress. Attempts to analyze and derive conceptual lessons from my art while I was in the process of creating it, was counter-productive. Here, two modes of knowing were in conflict. While I was in the midst of making, it was necessary to lose myself to play, experimentation and iteration. Engaging fully with these modes involved engaging with the unknown: I could not know what the result of these explorations would be. And so, I curbed attempts to analyze an object that was not in a state to be analyzed. I describe my creative process in detail in my chapter on methods.

My active re-engagement in making also led me to change my approach to theoretical research. Initially, I saw critical theory as driving the process forward, giving it both direction and form. Concepts, I thought, could translate directly into visual concepts. I identify with Sara Ahmed when she writes about academic tendencies to treat ideas as coming from above, as being generated "through distance, a way of abstracting something from something" (12) or as "what scholars somehow come up with, often through contemplation and withdrawal" (13).

When I learned how to write theoretically, I fell into these academic tendencies. Too often, I imposed concepts on a text or a situation, rather than letting concepts emerge from situations themselves. These days, I begin by seeing critical theory as a resting place or an avenue. It is where I go to take stock, derive lessons, and gather myself. This approach was partly inspired by a bout of insomnia, which prompted me to read theory before bed. Novels are too stimulating; they require my investment in imagining another world. Theory, on the other hand, appeals to my meandering mind. I can begin a book of philosophy at almost any point, and feel no obligation to read until the end or comprehend it fully. It keeps me occupied and wandering, until I wander out of being awake. Books surround my bed, where I have dropped them from fatigue. Describing theory in this way may seem to align me with the withdrawn academic Ahmed describes. However, by situating theory in my bed, I mean to bring it home, into ordinary life, as Ahmed proposes we do. In my bed, I am disarmed, I can let ideas come to me and simmer in my mind, until something sticks. As Ahmed writes, “Staying close to the everyday still involves attending to words, and thus concepts…I am still listening for resonance” (12). I want theory to be something I listen for, something that comes towards me, and something that emerges out of my day-to-day encounters.

Furthermore, by beginning my theoretical work at night, in a state of rest, I am not suggesting that it is always restful, and that it is not work. Getting up the next day to work through the concepts that have been marinating certainly takes a great deal of effort! However, by doing theory work at night, I am placing it at the end of a cycle. This “cycle” could be daytime, a long stretch of creative work, or at the near-completion of a project. It is a place to come back to after hands-on engagement, where I can process and be lead to new avenues for

discovery. Approaching theory as rest is to view it as crystalizing and developing language that will contribute to unpacking experiences and observations, as well as forming new questions, rather than as an imposition of concepts from above that will direct and shape a course of action and creation. I come to a theoretical resting place in my second chapter, where I research and analyze the representation of emails and friendship in my video.

Extended family and chosen family

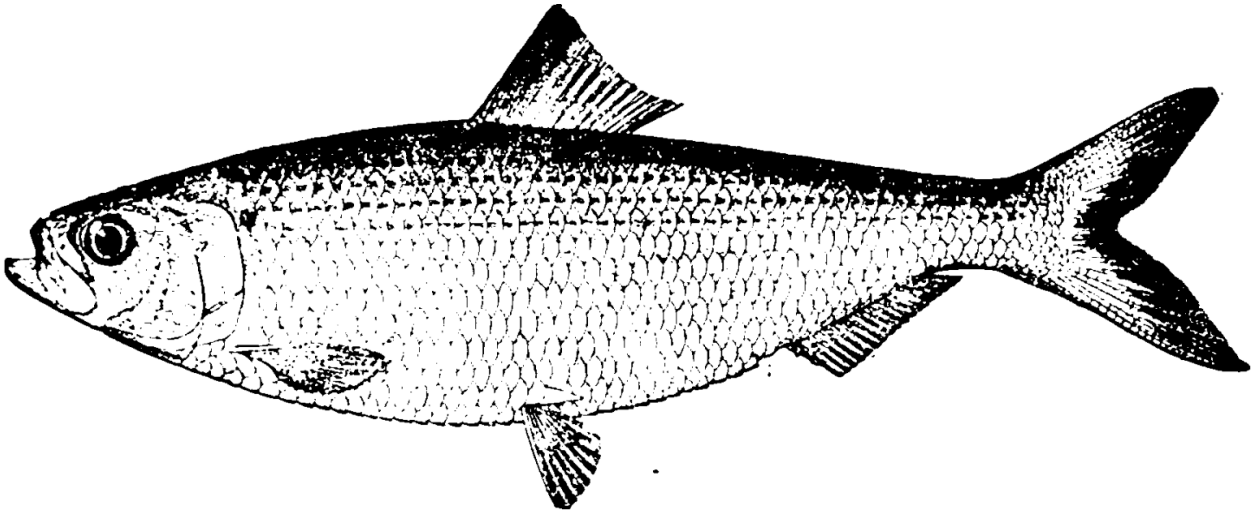
I want to further flesh out these slippery categories of 'research' and 'creation' and 'research-creation'. To do so, I decided to conduct a word experiment using Chapman and Sawchuk's categories of family resemblances. They argue, "Research-creation is not a fixed methodological approach. It refers to an important variety of different possibilities" (14). Within each research-creation project, research and creation are mutually constitutive, but play different roles. To map out some of these possibilities, they draw out four categories within the family of research-creation: research-for-creation, research-from-creation, creative presentations of research, and creation-as-research. Like family members, each category bears shared resemblances, roots and similarities to the other, but they are distinct. Following on the work of Chapman and Sawchuk, I want to further deconstruct and make tangible what research and creation could mean within these familial categories. I also want to bring in the cousins, aunties and grandparents, as well as the friends, lovers and neighbors. To broaden the research-creation family, I experimented with either the word 'research' or 'creation' in their designated categories:

Research-for-creation. Asking-a-question-for-creation. Location-Scouting-for-Creation. Reading-for-creation. Logistical-planning-for-creation. Calling-my-mom-for-creation.

Remembering-for-creation. Drawing-for-creation. Taking-pictures-for-creation. Looking-at-archives-for-creation. Going-to-a-political-lecture-for-creation. Seeing-a-film-for-creation. Going-to-a-gallery-for-creation. Teaching-for-creation. Visiting-a-public-library-for-creation. **Research-from-creation**. Research-from-making. Research-from-taking. Research-from-listening. Research-from-spying. Research-from-forgetting. Research-from-family-secrets. Writing-a-book-from-creation. Counting-from-creation. Articulating-from-creation. Theorizing-from-creation. Running-away-from-creation. Getting-feedback-from-creation. **Creative presentations of research.** Creative presentations of my thoughts. Creative presentations of interviews. Creative presentations of collaborations. Creative presentations of consent. Loud presentations of research. Boring presentations of research. Dirty presentations of research. Performative presentations of research. Obnoxious presentations of research. Salty presentations of research. **Creation-as-research.** Making-a-collage-as-research. Wandering-the-neighborhood-as-research. Crying-on-the-floor-as-research. Asking-Google-dating-advice-as-research. Articulating-needs-as-research. Daydreaming-as-research. Listing-as-research. Tasting-as-research. Trying-to-get-out-of-bed-but-can't-as-research. Collecting-rocks-as-research. Watching-as-research. Making-repertoire-of-movements-as-research. Leaving-as-research. Travelling-as-research. Returning-home-as-research. MDMA-as-research. Loneliness-as-research. Sketching-as-research. Jealousy-as-research. Astrology-as-research. Therapy-as-research. Emailing-a-friend-as-research. Recording-an-audio-narration-as-research. Creating-sounds-as-research. Entertaining-fantasies-as-research. Trying-to-be-more-realistic-as-research. Editing-as-research. Caring-as-research. Getting-lost-as-research. **Research-beside-creation.** Thinking-beside-doodling. Bewilderment-beside-a-tape-recorder. Observing-beside-doing.

Watching-beside-enacting. Waiting-beside-filming. Conversing-beside-constructing. Imagining-beside-a-voice-memo. Pausing-beside-crafting-a-poem. Writing-beside-sadness. **Research-with-creation.** Tracking-with-walking. Calculating-with-dancing. Outlining-with-being-inspired. Narrowing-with-excitement. Seeing-with-exploring. Creation-messing-up-research. Creation-undoing-research. Research-opening-up-creation. Research-tumbling-into-creation. Research-turns-into-creation. Creating-opportunities-for-research. Researching-ways-to-finance-creation. Research-shaking-up-creation. Research-refining-creation. Research-redefining-creation. Creation-turning-research-up-side-down. Creating-under-research. Creating-over-research. Research-the-sides-of-creation. Research-where-to-do-creation. Create-spaces-for-research. Create-time-for-research. Research-your-creative-trajectory. Creation-unraveling-from research. Creation-overtaking-research. Research-saves-creation. Researching-my-self-creation.

Immersed-in-research-creation…



2. A herring. From Jordan , D. S. & Evermann, B. W. "American food and game fishes. A popular account of all the species found in America north of the equator, with keys for ready identification, life histories and methods of capture", 1908. Retrieved from the from the Flickr Commons Online Catalogue.

I conducted this expanded research-creation family word experiment in order to bring more materiality to the four categories Chapman and Sawchuck established. These categories can be useful in lending more specificity to the methodologies that research-creation scholars employ. However, attempting to apply these four categories to my own work produced a sense of anxiety and confusion. The four categories all applied to my process at different stages, and depending on how I might understand *research* and *creation*. I found these categories did not go far enough as concepts that would clarify and define a process. In particular, the terms *research* and *creation* themselves are broad and far reaching. A traditional written thesis, though thought of as research, also incorporates many creative moments. Therefore, I found it necessary to describe research and creation in material and specific ways. In my word experiment above, I explore many different states and actions that constitute research or creation over the course of my project. In my thesis, I do not rely on any of the four categories of research-creation to define my methodology, but rather describe the specific forms of research and creation involved in video making and writing that went into this project.

Feminist thoughts are the waters I swim in

Feminism is homework. - Sara Ahmed, 2017

My word experiment also led me to reflect on the ways my approach to the connected practices of research and creation are tied up with my approach to feminism. Creation and research are part of my every day life. This project, *So You Know I Think about You Every Day*, is a very material and tangible expression of those intersecting tendencies. It is about everyday

experiences of friendship—a relationship we may take for granted and not question. As a feminist researcher and artist, part of my work is to deconstruct these norms and social categories that are held up as given and made invisible in the intimate spaces of our lives. Research-creation is not only about what happens out in the world, but also what takes place at home. As Ahmed proposes, "I am suggesting feminism is homework because we have much to work out from not being at home in a world. In other words, homework is work on as well as at our homes. We do housework. Feminist housework does not simply clean and maintain a house. Feminist housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master's residence" (7). The investigating, questioning and making I do are out of commitment to both critique and reach beyond our existing ways of being in the world and in relationships. I do critical theory as part of a commitment to situate my work and practice within the context of power and injustice. I articulate what my work can speak to and what it does. On the other hand, creative work is also about the transformation and rebuilding that Ahmed speaks of. It is about experimenting and transforming existing structures and relational modes. My video intends to stimulate imaginaries and discussions on how we currently find ourselves in friendship, and how we might make it differently. By making a representation of friendship and by analyzing this representation, I am taking it out of its regular context. I am observing, describing and working on friendship with a goal of transformation.

A catalogue of disappointments

In the following chapter, I draw on feminist filmmaker Michelle Citron to describe how I used autobiographical and storytelling techniques in the creation of my video. In my theory chapter, I draw on Esther Milne to analyze how the email functions to mediate friendship in my

video, and on Heather Love to propose friendship as a negotiation between reciprocity and solitude.

Finally, it is important to note that as a work of research-creation, I did not undertake the double workload of a full thesis paper alongside my creative piece. While I am committed to feminist theory, I was not able to cover the same ground in my academic research, as I would have done had I not had a commitment to creation. Therefore, this text also presents a catalogue of disappointments[2]: I included references and footnotes pointing towards other resources I would have liked to read and include in this project, or lines of questioning I would have liked to pursue further.

Making Video Art: Interpretive and Relational Autobiography as Self-Creation

In a lecture and personal interview (2017), curator and educator Rebecca Duclos shared her desire to demystify artistic processes. She pointed to the methodological differences between the sciences and social sciences on the one hand, and fine arts on the other. Scholars widely acknowledge methodological descriptions of scientific research: it is the language of hypotheses, thesis statements, data, and findings. In contrast, artistic methods are often shrouded in mystery. We may think of famous artists as possessing a "gift" or "artistic genius", and assume they are guided by intuition or a higher power. Yet Duclos argues that artists and their methods need not remain so obscure. She decided to observe an artist over the course of a long-term project to develop a language with which to describe the stages of his creative process. While artists may not follow similar protocols as scientists, Duclos observed that they nonetheless follow identifiable stages in the development of their work.

When I began my MA thesis video installation project, *So You Know I Think About You Every Day*, I too was under the impression that all I had to do was connect to a deep sense of intuition. Over the course of this Master's, I learned about artistic methods, and that intuition is not enough to bring a creative piece to life. As I had not practiced my artistic craft in a number of years, I found myself deconstructing and reflecting on these methods. In an effort to encourage reflection and analysis, and to follow in Duclos' footsteps of demystifying artistic practices, this chapter includes a self-reflexive description of my process of making video art about female friendship. I begin by situating my work in a genre of interpretive autobiography. I then describe my use of storytelling techniques in the development of the video. I have

included anecdotes about detours, mistakes, and personal reflections to show that I am not offering a template, but rather a particular example of an experience of creating media.

Fact or fiction: questions on the autobiographical genre

The topic of my project is a feminist interpretation of female friendship. I adopted a situated and autobiographical approach by deciding to focus on one of my lived experiences of friendship with a person I name Tilda in this project. I was drawn to this friendship because Tilda and I had discovered feminism together in our late teens, and had cultivated a rich practice of email correspondence that could serve as archival material. Furthermore, at the point of making the video, I was preoccupied with questions on the place of our intimate friendship in adulthood. The obligations of our adult lives, such as school, career, and romantic partners, seemed to pull us away from each other. As I grappled with a sense of loss, I turned towards our archives of emails to revisit what our friendship meant to me. I asked: how can I represent my lived experience of friendship, and what are the possible limitations of this endeavour?

I found theoretical grounding for my question on self-representation in feminist historian Joan Scott's discussion (1992) of the use of experience in historical research. She critiques historians who aim to correct normative accounts of history by relying uncritically on first-hand testimonies to reveal alternative truths. This uncritical approach follows traditional methodologies in which new evidence serves to discredit previously held beliefs, without questioning the way new evidence itself is shaped discursively, both in the archives and through the interpretations of historians. For instance, historians may rely on primary sources from women or queers to counter male and heterosexual narratives. However, in using experience in

this way, historians risk reifying difference rather than investigate the processes through which difference is created. Scott writes, “the evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world” (25). She proposes that historians struggle with the tension between honouring subjects’ agency and investigating the historical and linguistic processes that constitute subjects. She explains, “Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the concepts they deploy. And subjects have agency. They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them” (34). This poststructuralist approach to experience considers subjects and their actions to be inseparable from discursive fields that shape and confer meaning.

Based on this understanding of experience, autobiography is not read as a direct and transparent reflection of a subject’s reality. Autobiography is an investigation of a subject that is always incomplete, and always formed in relation with discursive systems and structures of power. In a discussion on cultural theorist Stuart Hall, Daniel McNeil (2018) argued that Hall used autobiography as a way to resist claims of authenticity. Hall was wary of his experience being taken up as representative of all black lives. Therefore, he wanted to ground autobiography in the particular: in his situated position as a British and Jamaican subject. Autobiography can offer situated particularity to counter claims of essentialist truths about an identity or category of experience. Moreover, Scott argues that autobiographical writing produces knowledge about the self. In her analysis of Samuel Delaney’s memoir *The Motion of*

Light in Water, she writes that he seems to present two separate narratives: one about his personal story and the other about its social context. Yet both narratives are "inescapably historical; they are discursive productions of knowledge of the self, not reflections either of external or internal truth" (35). Autobiographical writing has a productive quality. Through language, we understand the worlds we inhabit, and we come to understand our selves within them. And just as subjects are shaped by language, they can recreate themselves through language. Laurel Richardson writes: "Postructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organization, and power. The centerpiece is language. Language does not 'reflect' social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality" (961). Writing autobiography is a means of producing meaning about the self: it is writing one's self into being. Autobiography is not discovery of the self; it is creation of the self.

Autobiography further complicates the representation of subjects by engaging with question on the slipperiness of memory. Samuel Delaney points to the complexity of representing memory and truth in autobiography. He begins *The Motion of Light in Water* with two stories of his father's death, one based on his memory, the other based on factual information. He summarizes these two stories in two sentences: 1) "My father died of lung cancer in 1958 when I was seventeen"; 2) "My father died of lung cancer in 1960 when I was eighteen" (xxii). The first story, based on memory, presents some significant differences from the one reconstructed by his biographers using evidence such as obituaries. After teasing out the differences in these two narratives, Delany explains: "Now a biography or a memoir that contained only the first sentence would *be* incorrect. But one that omitted it, or did not at least suggest its relation to the second on several informal levels, would be incomplete" (xxii). Here,

Delany points to the ways that invention and alterations can sometimes be just as, or more truthful, than facts.

The autobiographical genre opens many more questions on the intersections of memory, truth, ethics, identity and self-representation. The literature on autobiography is extensive. It investigates how autobiography has evolved with changing notions of the subject (Anderson, 2001), its intersections with feminist thought and literature (Cosslett et al, 2001; Gwynne, 2013; Stanley, 1992), and the representation of autobiography on film (DeRoo, 2018; Lebow, 2016). Can fiction sometimes be more truthful than evidence? Is memory ever really truthful? How can we represent our selves when the self is always something in the process of being made and undone? Is there a separate genre of feminist autobiography? How do filmmakers translate complex ideas on autobiography into the cinematic medium? How do autobiographers ethically represent other individuals who are part of their lives?

So You Know I Think About You Every Day, and the process of its creation, touches on these questions and theories of autobiography. Though I relied on archival material to create this piece, I also employed storytelling techniques. In so doing, I did not document my friendship; I interpreted it and re-created it through my unique perspective and artistic craft. I relied on the dissonance between my memories and the relationship I saw reflected in my archive to create a story. In creating this story, I altered some elements of the past in order to better represent my truth. Therefore, I consider this project to be a creative or interpretive autobiography. Furthermore, it is also a relational autobiography. While I directed this piece and it is my personal take on a friendship, I also negotiated this representation with my friend Tilda. Our process of negotiation revealed tensions around artistic ownership over an

interpretive autobiography when this autobiography is about a relationship. I will now describe the process of making this video.

To begin, I researched scholarship on friendship so as to situate my autobiography within discursive systems and to adopt a critical feminist lens. I wanted to understand how friendship could be conceptualized and produced as a cultural, linguistic, discursive and symbolic phenomenon. I read about the representation of women's friendship in film (Hollinger, 1998), watched a number of films and novels portraying friendship, and looked at research on friendship emerging from sociology, journalism, media studies and queer studies (Foucault, 1998; Gouldner & Symonds; 1997; Love, 2007; Oliker, 1989 & 1998; Roach, 2012; Traister, 2016; Winch, 2013). However, this research was too broad and failed to locate friendship in a particular context. In turning to my own narrative of friendship, and specifically to my own artefacts of friendship—my archive of e-mails—I was able to undertake a more situated investigation.

A digital archive of friendship

Tilda and I have been exchanging emails since 2006. We have managed to conserve almost the entirety of these exchanges, as they have been stored on email servers. These emails provided me with a situated example of friendship, mediated through language and writing. I began by reading back on these exchanges.

In the next chapter, I go into detail on how this epistolary technology mediated particular forms of intimate expressions. For now, I will describe our emailing practice. Tilda and I wrote to each other when one of us was out of town. Physical separation led us to rely on emailing as a way of maintaining intimacy and connection across distance. We wrote on topics

that we would also have discussed in person. However, connecting through a communication technology and not face-to-face allowed us to explore different parts of our relationship and ourselves. Email, for Tilda and I, was somewhere in between a personal diary and a conversation. We wrote effortlessly and abundantly. We went on long tangents to describe the various aspects of our daily experiences. We ruminated on life decisions and life events, shared art projects, and gave feedback. This style of writing conveyed a sense of immediacy, spontaneity and authenticity. In the summer of 2009, Tilda and I exchanged 46 emails in 4 months (35 within the first two months), between Canada and Europe. These emails ranged from a few paragraphs to around 4 pages. I focused on the emails from this time period as they reveal a style of writing akin to the interpretive autobiographical approach I have been discussing. Emailing was a way of interpreting our lives, again and again, from different standpoints in space and time.

The interpretive aspects of our emailing are apparent in our performative approaches. While we write very freely, informally, and in a confessional tone, there is a clear desire to impress each other and to discover ourselves through writing. We experiment with different forms of storytelling, investing our emailing with intentionality and effort. Our awareness of this intentionality is apparent when we complement each other on our writing. On the 24th of June 2009, I write, “I love having your life mirrored back at me...I was thinking that we could print out all these e-mails when I get back home”. On the 29th of June, Tilda responds, “I filled my lungs with beauty as I read your letter”. In these instances, we are aware of our emails as forms of creative expression. I also express an appreciation of our writing as something to preserve and memorialize through the act of printing. This awareness of our emails as creative

objects of value led me to turn back to them years later to mine for meaning. In the context of this project, I consider these emails as a personal archive of female friendship.

When memories and archives meet

Reading our older emails, I relate to Michelle Citron's process of re-visiting her home movies, the source material for her film *Daughter Rite*. The silent images confronted her with a recorded trace of her past. However, there was a dissonance between her embodied memories of childhood and the happy children she saw portrayed on screen. As Citron articulates, making *Daughter Rite* was "to reread the image of my family's home movies. To unpack the pictures, exposing the meaning I knew lay just beneath the surface appearance" (16). She carried out this unpacking by manipulating the images with slow motion and repetition to reveal subtle gestures and relationships, and by adding interviews with other women.

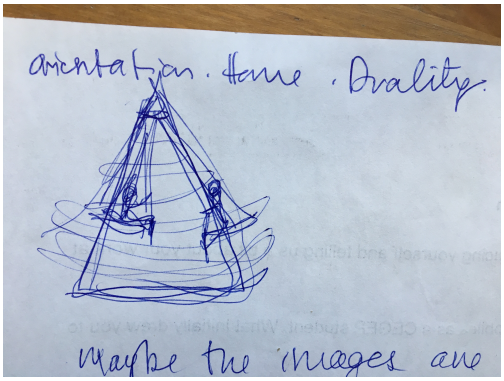
When I read my email archive, I too felt a dissonance between my image of the past and what I saw actually reflected in our correspondence. When I thought of our practice of emailing, what I remembered was an idyllic sense of mutuality and reciprocity. I remembered our friendship as a space where we could each experiment with our personal expression, while also offering feedback and finding comfort in knowing we would be seen by each other. Thinking back on these emails many years later, my memory had constructed a romantic portrait of our relationship and our communication. When I actually read through our archive, I was struck by an apparent imbalance. Tilda's emails were drawn out, poetic, filled with details of her life, events that she wrote out as stories for me. My emails, on the other hand, were more often brief and fragmentary. Rather than narrate events, I more often shared my thoughts or feelings around the events. I did not let Tilda in on my day-to-day life experiences. In response to the

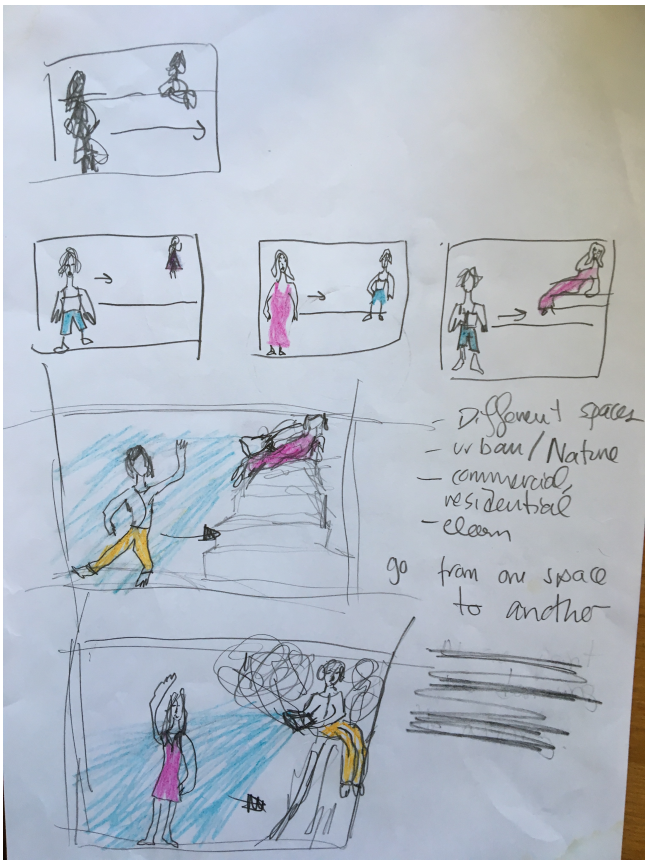
brevity of my emails, Tilda often encouraged me in my writing. She pressed me to share more on my days and myself. Reading back on my archive of emails, I observed my writing evolve in response to her style, and her insistence that I keep writing. I was struck by the dynamics I saw in our correspondence, which were especially present in the summer of 2009, a period of intense growth and coming of age.

Reading and re-reading our old e-mails left me with impressions from the past, feelings and images. Similar to Citron as she watched her home movies, I felt compelled to show what I sensed below the surface of our writing. These dynamics had been invisible to me up until that point, clouded by a more romantic image of our friendship. They might also have been invisible to a neutral reader. The contents of our emails were quite compelling in and of themselves. As I confirmed when sharing them with others, it was easy to be drawn in by the life events we were each describing, as they unfolded over the period of one summer. But what I was interested in was not only the events of our lives in that time, but in our relationship. I wanted to depict the ways we were writing, reading and relating to each other through email. While Citron's source material consisted of silent images with no text, mine consisted of text without images. Working with a text-based archive is a dilemma for a visual artist. As video and installation are my principle artistic mediums, I asked myself how I could represent the content of lengthy emails on screen? I decided to investigate how I could translate these emails to a visual medium.

Initially, I took an intuitive approach. I let images come to me, and sketched them out. I was also drawn to dance through a fascination with music videos, and watching bodies moving through space. I was excited by the capacity of music videos to portray relationships, dynamics,

and moods without the use of dialogue. Just as music videos are accompanied by lyrics, I imagined my emails providing the same function as lyrics to choreography. I was also inspired by the work of experimental filmmaker and choreographer Maya Deren (1944). I was taken by her ability to convey stories without a literal sequence of actions or events. She relies on choreography and impressionistic, surreal scenes. Even though I could not say what her films are 'about', they made an impression. I think of her technique, as well as those of music videos, as 'non-linear storytelling.' I was inspired by non-linear stories and decided to mimic this genre by allowing images and scenes to come to me in an intuitive fashion. The following are some of my first sketches:





3. Sketches of ideas

Initially, I thought I could simply let these associative images guide me. But I soon found that intuition alone was not enough to illustrate the emails or translate them to moving images, even with a non-linear style. I decided to turn to some of the conventions of narrative storytelling that date back to Greek theatre, and are now adapted to many fiction and documentary films. These conventions involve the development of a plot containing three acts, through which a central protagonist makes a choice, confronts a conflict or antagonist, and reaches a climax and resolution. Citron's insights are again useful here: "With the creation of a narrative, a fragmented present tense becomes a coherent past tense. With distance comes detachment. A life is authored and re-authored. Narration is active. To narrate one's life is to

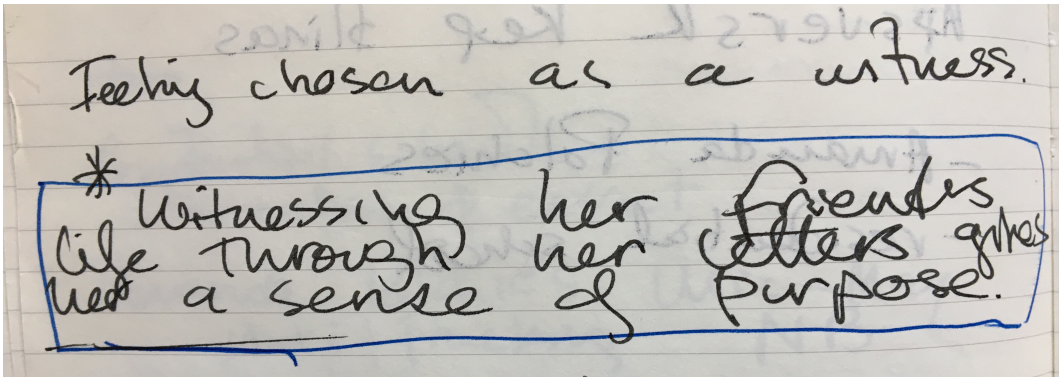
have agency" (42). Turning to the tools of fiction and storytelling gave me both distance and agency over my own narrative. While I continued to adopt a non-linear, associative visual style, these narrative techniques gave structure and an arch to the intuitive, experimental approach I had started off with. I used storytelling methodologies to create a visual narrative, which I would weave in with voice-over readings of the emails.

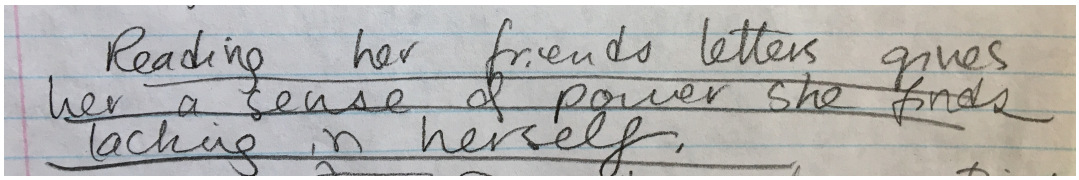
Storytelling in action

The video production process took place through an unofficial artist residency in Lithuania. A friend and mentor, Saulė Norkutė[3], had agreed to support me on the project and act as the producer. As soon as I arrived in Vilnius she sat me down and asked: What do you want to do with this film? What is it about? At that point, I did not have a good answer. *What is it?* became the central question for the next month. "What is it?" is also the name of the first chapter of a mainstream screenwriting book called *Save the Cat!*, by Blake Snyder (2005). Snyder writes, "I want you to forget all about your screenplay for now, the cool scenes that are bursting forth in your imagination, the soundtrack, and the stars you KNOW would be interested in being in it. Forget all that. And concentrate on writing one sentence. One line" (4). A screenplay's one-line description, also called the logline in film lingo, should direct the creation of characters, images and flow of the story. A great logline provides a compelling mental image of what the film looks like, the crux of the story, and a sense of the time-span it takes place in. I started writing my logline. Answering the question "What is it?" pushed me to distill the complex web of memories, images and affects I associated with the emails into a single concept and a single story.

To create this story, I chose to focus on the imbalances in my correspondence that I had described earlier. I thought more deeply about our old emails. I noted how much I admired Tilda's ability to write about her life so eloquently and imaginatively. Her attention to detail in her emails suggested a keen sense of observation, as well as a belief that her day-to-day experiences were worth writing about and sharing. In my writing, I perceived a struggle in valuing the details of my everyday life, and in sharing them with another person. On the other hand, this reluctance to describe my experiences through a textual medium might suggest that I was too caught up in the present moment and involved in my daily life to spend time writing about it on a computer. However, as our correspondence evolved throughout time, I gained more trust and a desire to write about my life through emailing. When I revisited our email archive in the summer of 2017, I became aware of the dynamics in our correspondence and of the evolution of my writing. At that time, the distance I sensed in our friendship made me keenly aware that I currently missed this relational space in which we practiced this form of self-expression and exchange. Based on these personal reflections and deep readings of our emails, I started constructing a story and writing a logline.

Here are some of my earlier attempts at writing a logline:

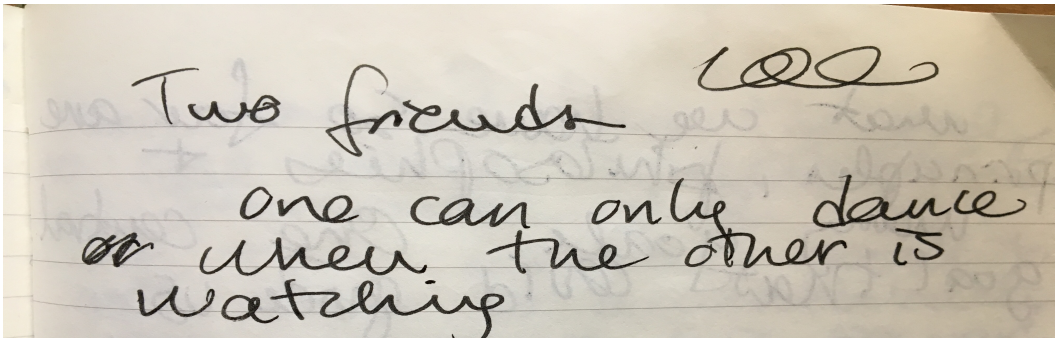




4. Logline Notes 1

When I began writing, I was relying on words like purpose or power. For example, in one of my attempted loglines above, I wrote, "Witnessing her friend's life through her emails gives her a sense of purpose." One character has purpose, the other does not. One person is looking for her sense of power through the other person. Power and purpose are abstract and lack specificity. They do not translate into choreography, images, space and sound.

Here is how my logline evolved:



5. Logline note 2

My final logline is more concrete: *Two friends dance for one another in an abandoned construction site. One can only move while the other is watching.* Through this exercise I was able to move from an abstract logline to one that contains a story, and is concrete and action-driven. This logline draws out the relationship between eyesight and movement. Two women bear witness to each other's movements. One of them can only move when she is being watched. If her friend stops watching, she stops moving. When her friend watches, she starts

moving again. It is a game that anyone can play. The story became about the desire and fear to be seen by a friend. The emails are dramatized as dance performances for an attentive onlooker. One dancer is fearless in taking up space—she moves swiftly, elegantly. Showing her body completely. The other creates movements through productive limitations—she only shows fragments of her body at a time. She must be coaxed to reveal her movements. She shows herself, yet depends on the eyes of her friend in order to move at all.

A month of video production

In a traditional filmmaking workflow, especially in the fiction film context that Snyder describes, one would move from logline, to screenplay, to production, to editing. My process was not so linear. The creation of a logline, the writing and the production all took place within my one-month stay in Lithuania. When I arrived, Saulė had already recruited two movement artists to work with me. While I was working on the logline, I was also in rehearsal with the dancers, scouting for locations, working with the cameraperson Mikas Zabulionis, finding costumes, and planning and executing two days of shooting. Therefore, there were certain aspects of the production process that fed directly into the conceptualization of my story.

For example, when I began location scouting in Vilnius, I had a sense that I needed a place that offered opportunities for the dancers to both hide and show off. I saw a photograph online of an abandoned construction site—an apartment building that had never been finished. The vastness and greyness of the space gave it a stage-like quality. At the same time, rectangular holes in the ceilings offered the perfect spots to watch while simultaneously remaining concealed. Visiting the building with Saulė, I found that one could get lost in it. It isolated sound. A moment of fear: circling through the staircases to find my lost friend. The site

resonated strongly with the mood and narrative I wanted to convey but had not yet clarified in my writing: a dance between total visibility and exposure, like a game of hide-and-go-seek. After visiting the building, we came across a ravine a few feet away. We found a small wooded area down below, with a river running through it. This place was an imperfect oasis. Covered with garbage, swarming with bugs and slugs, it presented a messy beauty and a relief from the linear walls of the skeletal construction site. Saulė urged me to incorporate this place into my story, to let the location influence my creative process. I realized: yes, this ravine is the sensual sweet spot of friendship. It is a place where we can momentarily find a reciprocal connection of understanding, sensuality and complicity. Using place as inspiration, I wrote a scene into my story based on this river.

My work with the dancers, Ula Liagaitė and Beatričė Bukantytė, also influenced my writing. We had three days of rehearsal before beginning the shoot. They had both agreed to create improvisational motifs rather than a fixed choreography. This process entailed starting with a direction or idea that would be developed through rehearsals to generate a repertoire of movements. As soon as we started the rehearsals, I realized I was missing the language of a choreographer. Also, without a strong logline, my language as a director remained too abstract. I had imagined that I could give them the emails and use their contents—such as sentences or images that Tilda and I had wrote—as prompts for improvisation. It soon became very apparent that this method was not working. The dancers were confused. They were not *moved* by the rehearsal, and I had to quickly get back to my writing table and simplify my story. This episode helped me to pare down my logline to more concrete, action-driven words and to simplify the language. I came to the rehearsal the next day with new directions. I instructed Ula, who

represented Tilda's emails, to take up as much space as possible, stretching her body into all directions, moving through as much space as she possibly could, without letting herself find stillness. It was more challenging to direct Beatričė who represented my emails as it was very uncomfortable to conceive of myself as a character. She was encouraged to explore the space around her using only one body part at a time. To keep most of her body concealed while trying out all possible extensions with only one limb.

Editor Carol Littleton describes film as a combination of all the arts. She says, "Film is terribly musical and it is also narrative. It has characters, dramatic progression, structure. All of those are also in music and literature" (66, in Oldham, 1992). Aside from rhythm and story, film also includes moving images, and in my case an important attention to dance, location, costume and sound. My role as the director was to translate my vision into these different art forms, and to communicate and support my various collaborators. The closer I got to a central concept and story—the logline—the more I was able to do this work of translation. And so, my production process can be described as moving through the following stages: 1) Reflecting and researching on friendship; 2) Choosing source material—my email archive—and reflecting on this archive and communication medium; 3) Gathering artistic inspiration from music videos and dance films; 4) Writing a logline and storyline; 5) Developing repertoires of movement, scouting for locations, choosing a cinematographic style and finding costumes; 6) Finalizing the script; 7) filming. My creative process fluctuated between intuitive image-making, writing and conceptualizing, experimentation and production.

Creating this video did not consist of portraying a direct representation or documentation of my experience of friendship. In fact, I distilled my subjective and situated

experience of friendship into a logline that could be translated into various art forms: *Two friends dance for one another in an abandoned construction site. One can only move while the other is watching*. This process of refining my logline, creating a story, and generating action-driven directions for my team, involved treating my friendship and emails as something outside of myself. Storytelling techniques were, on the one hand, a distancing mechanism. I gave Tilda and I other names and thought of us as characters. I talked about us in the third person. These techniques of storytelling helped me depart from abstract thinking. Sometimes, thinking theoretically creates distance. My first approach to this project had been to create through ideas, intuitive images and impressions. But when it came to communicating with my collaborators, I realized these impressions were very abstract and complex. They did not translate into a story with intentions, actions, characters, conflict and change. Finding simplicity through storytelling and action was a way of being closer and more direct about my particular and situated truth.

Editing: stretching time and re-writing

After completing the production in Lithuania, I edited and created the sound design for the film. This post-production was another form of re-writing. I had created the dance segments using the emails. These segments related to the subtext of the emails. I watched a number of different films and visual art pieces based on epistolary relationships. I found that the visuals often depicted the content of letters, showed their geographic destination, the writer, or even written text itself. My filmic interpretation relied neither on direct interpretation of the content of the emails, nor on the actual spaces of their origins or destinations. Rather, I had drawn my attention to the modes of writing and reading, to the

relationship between writers—a relationship I had attempted to illustrate through impressionistic dance segments. I had taken inspiration from the 46 emails we had exchanged in the summer of 2009. However, I did not yet know how I would match these emails to the footage I had created. Reading one of these 46 emails aloud could take between 5 and 10 minutes to narrate. Had I used all the emails in a voice-over, my piece could have been over 2 hours long. I was confronted with the full content of our correspondence, in contrast with the interpretive and specific visual story I had created, which I had intended for a 10 to 15 minute short video. Grappling with the length and breadth of my source material parallels the process of editing documentary film. Documentary film editor Tom Haneke captures some of the challenges of working with raw documentary footage:

> *There are millions of different ways to make material work…It's really in your hands. You have to decide what you think happens in this footage; then you have to take, say, an hour and a half of film of a particular event and make it into a three-minute scene that communicates what you think happened in that hour-and-a-half event…That's essentially what you're doing in the whole process, distilling the truth, as you perceive it.* (In Oldham, 45).

Editing was a process of distilling the 46 emails so that they would portray the truth I had chosen to convey, and to weave these together with the dance interludes in the building. I embraced a storytelling approach and accepted that I could not portray the full reality of our friendship as it was represented in these emails. Again, I relied on the central concept of my story to select particular emails. My logline: "Two friends dance for one another in an abandoned construction site. One can only move while the other is watching"—guided my selection. I chose emails that conveyed a sense of performance and exposure, contrasted with others that suggested self-concealment.

The editing process has taken almost a year of work. Eventually, I found the challenges of distilling the emails to be too challenging to undertake on my own. As Haneke further asserts, "Editing is always a collaborative process with directors. But they can't make the film play, *you* have to make it" (in Oldham, 51). I found that, as the director of an autobiographical piece, I could not make the film play. I was too close to my vision and to my source material. I needed a collaborator. I decided to work with experimental documentary editor Pirouz Nemati. I began by giving him the 46 emails to read. Together, we went by a process of elimination to chip away at the content of the emails until they revealed the story I wanted to show, without compromising the essence and flow of the emails themselves. Pirouz was also able to see my footage in ways I had not imagined. Having written and directed the footage, I had a fixed idea of the order in which it would appear. Pirouz was able to see the footage in a new light, and to rearrange it and create a rhythm that resonated with the content of the emails. The video is now about 35 minutes long. At the time of writing, I am approaching a final cut, but the editing, as well as sound design and color correction, are still in progress.

Story and subject collide: relational autobiography

In the final stage of the project, my interpretive, autobiographical approach collided with my accountability towards the person I was representing. While I took the liberty of fictionalizing my own story. I had a certain level of accountability towards these emails, and towards the person who'd written the emails. Throughout this process, my friend, who I continue to name Tilda, remained external to the process. She had given me permission to use the emails as I saw fit, as long as I changed all the names. As my process progressed, I gave her a sense of the video and story I was creating. Furthermore, the question of who would read her

emails as a voice over in the video was up for discussion. I finally shared some of the emails I had used in the project for her to review and to reflect on this question. She shared her reaction with me in an informal email. With her permission, I am sharing some of her words with you:

> *My first reaction was one of some sort of aversion. Like: wow, how dramatic and self-absorbed were we? (Especially me, haha!) I found myself to be pretty much sexually obsessed and totally over the top…I guess I had a reaction of self-judgement. And judgement of both of us, as sometimes it felt we were really ill-attuned to each other, and reacting or re-enacting with each other rather than responding…Now I just re-read them, and had a very different experience. I found them absolutely endearing. I only realized the second time that I had read through them way too fast the first time. The urgency took away any possibility for tone. I realized, if I record these, I can set the intonation and the speed. I can deliver them how I want them to be delivered. I think I would feel most comfortable if I read them. It might be alienating to hear someone else's voice & someone else's interpretation of this deeply personal content.* (January 2017).

It was Tilda's turn to re-read our archive, and to be confronted with the personal histories they held. Her response demonstrates the personal way we each read our emails, from our place in the present moment and our individual subjectivities. Had she taken the same material as a starting point, she would have created an entirely different story. I can also observe that she felt a sense of ownership over those artifacts and over her own representation. While the entire filmmaking process had been out of her hands, by introducing her own voice, she too could have some creative and directorial ownership over how she would be portrayed.

I was very touched and excited that she wanted to do the voice-over for her letters. She currently lives in another city, and I made arrangements to take a week off from work to visit her and record the narration. When I arrived, I set up a recording space in a closet in her home, and did multiple sound tests. I went over my intentions for her "character" in the video and gave her my directorial thoughts on how she could read her e-mails. I sensed a hint of anxiety

as I described these intentions to her, but brushed it off. When came time do the narration, she told me she would rather do the recording alone, without having me in the room. She explained that she would feel less inhibited if I were not there. I acquiesced, wanting to give her the space she needed. I reasoned this recording could be a good first attempt, and we could always record them again with me present, to make sure to cover our bases. It was late in the afternoon when we finally sat down to listen to the emails she recorded. As we played the audio, I realized that I had failed to prepare her for some technical aspects of voice recording. I thought she would be able to hear plosives—breathy sounds that create distortion when recording voice. But being unaccustomed to voice recording, she could not pick up on these subtle distortions. When I listened to her recording, it seemed very noisy. In a sense, it was as if her breath—her very being—was pushing up too close against the story and visual narrative I had created. Her actual presence created noise that was not ready to be folded into the video I had made. I told her that the recordings were too noisy and that we would have to do it again. At that point, she was tired, became quite discouraged, and eventually very upset. What followed was some true friendship conflict, we both found ourselves sitting on her bed in tears, trying to sort through a sense of disappointment and mismatched expectations.

Through a deep and meaningful discussion we came to a resolution around this conflict. What had occurred was not only about technical difficulties, but also about a clashing understanding of ownership over the creative process. I had been working on this project for over a year and she was new to the scene. I had entered with a sense of directorial control and vision. While she supported this vision, she also hoped for a sense of ownership and control over the delivery of what were, after all, her emails— vulnerable and messy archives of her past.

She expected me to simply attend to the technical aspects of the recording, and enable her to record herself alone, at least to begin with. She imagined a set-up in which she could record herself and listen back immediately in order to self-direct her performance, and let me in afterwards for feedback and revisions. Instead, I had thought of the process in quite the opposite manner. I had given her artistic directions, I would monitor the sound while she did the voice recording, and I would be the one listening to the recordings afterwards to assess whether they were adequate or not. This process is common in filmmaking, yet in this case I had to negotiate the vision of my video with the subject I was portraying. After a few hours of talking things through, we came to a resolution and laughed about how this episode would be instructive for my research. Indeed, this conflict revealed an interesting collision between autobiography as self-creation and the autobiographer's accountability to the people she is representing. Tilda and I are still finding a balance between her need for autonomy in her self-representation, and my ability to direct her in a way that is true to my vision. I am currently using someone else's voice as a way to test out different styles of reading while Tilda and I negotiate and find time for this process.

Coming to the end of this video-making process, I am left with some questions on doing an autobiography of friendship. Who has the artistic license over the portrayal of a relationship: the artist or the one who is represented? How can we share a sense of creative ownership? What happens when a friend becomes an artistic collaborator, and what are the differences between these two roles? These questions relate back to the dynamics I perceived in our old emails. In our correspondence, I had struggled with a sense of agency over my creative expression and ability to write. In making a video, I claimed a creative process and vision as my

own. I made something independently of my friendship with Tilda, to be viewed by a wider public outside our friendship, and acted as the writer and director in telling our story. At the same time, her presence was always part of this project, especially through her emails. When she became part of the process in a more active and collaborative way, I was confronted with generative questions about her role in this piece. I continue to ask: in what ways is this my story, and in what ways is it ours?

For now, I am concluding this reflection on my creative process, and I turn to a theoretical deconstruction of the piece itself. In this chapter, I looked at my methods through the eyes of an artist and maker. In the next chapter, I look at my video as a text through the eyes of a feminist critical theorist.

Moving Figures and Dancing Letters:
An Analysis of Friendship and Emailing in *So You Know I Think About You Every Day*

In this chapter, I interpret my video installation *So You Know I Think About You Every Day*. Here, I not only consider my intentions in creating this work, but also examine it as a text, independent from the process of its creation, with multiple avenues and entry points for sense making. I discuss how this video uses the epistolary genre and formal elements to depict and contend with a non-romantic portrayal of friendship. First, I use Chantal Akerman's film *News from Home* (1991) as a counterpoint to consider email correspondence and the construction of female intimacies through communication technologies. I then discuss the formal elements of *So You Know I Think About you Every Day*, in particular the use of movement, framing and space, to examine both the troubles within and possibilities of friendship. As I wrote in my introduction, this theoretical endeavor is part of my feminist homework. It is work I carried out at home, at the end of a cycle of making. This critical reflection on my own piece is a form of taking stock on what I created, nourishing this creation with new research and ideas, and positioning it within a field of scholarship and theory.

On Reciprocity

I consider *So You Know I Think About You Every Day* to be in conversation with Chantal Akerman's seminal essay film, *News from Home*, which troubles the depiction of mother-daughter relationships. In *News from Home*, Akerman reads letters her mother wrote to her while Akerman was living in New York City. This reading is performed as a voice-over superimposed on mostly still frame, observational scenes of New York City. Scholarship on *News From Home* is far-reaching and extensive. For instance, Moss (2016) situates *News From*

Home within a broader discussion on essay filmmaking, and Lebow (2016) considers the autobiographical registers in Akerman's work. I focus on Morra's essay (2007) that attends to Akerman's engagement with letter writing. Morra views *News from Home* as an act of translation by a daughter in exile. Akerman, living in New York, translates her mother's letters into her own tongue by reading them as a voice-over and by translating them from French into English. Her mother is a Holocaust survivor from Poland who speaks Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish and French. Letters become a vehicle through which to bridge the distance of exile and find closeness. The act of reading her mother's letters collapses distance created from generational loss, linguistic differences, histories and distinct home countries.

As Moss demonstrates, Akerman's formal choices in the animation of letters portray her relationship with her mother as a negotiation between autonomy and closeness. I will briefly discuss these formal and conceptual elements so as to contrast them with my own choices in the depiction of friendship as a negotiation between solitude and reciprocity. In *News from Home*, we only hear the mother's letters, not the daughter's, read in the daughter's voice. We only learn about the daughter through the letters of the mother and through the mother's desires for closeness and intimacy with her daughter. However, as Moira points out, the daughter's desires are not absent from the film, as the film itself represents her desires and her autonomy. For instance, the eye-level shots of the city streets and subway cars show the daughter's point of view of a place that has taken her away from home and from her mother. Moreover, Morra writes, "the intimacy of translation also ensures that the fusion between daughter and mother is *incomplete*, and that the daughter represents her own independent and autonomous subjectivity" (98). At the end of *News from Home*, we leave the

claustrophobic high-rises and subways of New York's interior and see an expansive view of the city landscape and the sky from a boat drifting away from shore. It feels as though a weight has been lifted: we have left the burden of the mother's longing that permeated the city streets. *News from Home* uses the epistolary genre and situated observations of space to foreground tensions between a desire for closeness and intimacy with a desire for independence. These tensions are particular to the troubled mother-daughter relationship that Akerman portrays.

In contrast to *News from Home*, *So You Know I Think About You Every Day* features Tilda's letters and mine, read in our own voices. There is no translation: we were both raised in Montreal, with English as our mother tongue, and French as a close second language. We are part of the third generation of European exiles. Our mothers belong to Akerman's generation—the children of exiled Eastern-European Jews. Yet, these exiled languages do not play a visible role in our friendship, as we were both forged through the same language, in cities that were also of those tongues. We 'belong' in a way that Akerman did not, in either Belgium or New York City. Perhaps, most importantly, our friendship is not mediated by family lineage despite our similar heritage. We became friends, and remain friends, out of choice.

The inclusion of both sides of the correspondence, in our own voices, is important: it speaks to the possibility for equality and reciprocity, or rather a fantasy of reciprocity, at the heart of friendship. The mother-daughter relationship, as represented in Akerman's film, for example, implies a sort of hierarchy. The daughter was presumably dependent on the mother as an infant. However, in distancing herself to a foreign city, she detaches herself from this early relationship and establishes her autonomy. The relationship of need now seems to be switched. As the daughter removes herself from the intimate sphere of the mother, it appears

that it is now the mother that is in need of care: she longs for closeness, intimacy, and the physical presence of her daughter. The daughter negotiates her mother's need with her own desire for distance and autonomy. In contrast, this hierarchy is not established from the outset within friendship. There is no primal need binding Tilda and I to each other. Rather, we have chosen to be bound up with one another. In this choice, there is a fantasy of idealized mutuality: the possibility of reciprocal and complementary needs and desires. In my video, this reciprocity is represented by the presence of both of our voices and both of our emails.

A note on epistolary theories and mediums

My representation and analysis of an epistolary exchange is part of a tradition of studying and making art based on letters. There is a wealth of research on the epistolary genre in philosophy and cultural studies (Barthes, 1997; Benjamin, 2006; Derrida, 1980; Derrida & Malabou, 2004; Roach, 2104), in literature (Kafka, 1952; Kauffman, 1986 & 1992) and film studies (Rowland, 2013). Some of these texts broach the topic of friendship. For instance, *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida* (2004), is a collaborative work between Malabou and Derrida published after the latter's death. The book meditates on the notions of place and travel in Derrida's work and includes a selection of his postcards, written to Malabou from different parts of the world. In *Friendship as a Way of Life* (2014), Roach analyzes a letter that Foucault wrote to his friend Hervé Guibert to gain insight on Foucault's philosophies of friendship. Furthermore, in relation to digital practices, there is a body of literature examining the rhetoric, styles and histories of emailing within the tradition of epistolary writing (Rooksby, 2002; Danet, 2001; Milne, 2010; Yates, 1999). Research on digital writing, digital texts and writing with computers may complement these investigations as a way to further examine the

particularities of corresponding through a digital medium (Hayles, 2002; Jain, 2006; Kirscenbaum, 2016). Literature on emailing and letter writing contributes to knowledge on the ways communication technologies and language mediate relationships, sexuality and gender across distance.

My ability to represent both sides of a correspondence comes, in part, from the email medium. The structural qualities of emailing provide a different sort of archive than do letters. With letters, we are usually only left with one half of the correspondence—the ones we have received. The preservation of this archive depends on our own decision and ability to conserve the letters, as well as chance events that might lead to their destruction or loss. In the case of email, we can be left with an abundance of archives, or nothing at all. Many email providers conserve both the "sent" messages as well as the ones that were received. Also, as long as one "replies" to an email rather than begin a new message, one conserves the trail of old messages. The full archive of emails can therefore remain quite accessible. On the other hand, the preservation of this archive can be quite outside of our control. The loss of old passwords, the disappearance of an old account or service provider, can destroy an entire archive from one day to the next, unannounced. In my case, I had written my 2009 emails using an old email service to which I subsequently cancelled my subscription. That account, and all the emails it held, is inaccessible. I entered Tilda's old Hotmail account to access the totality of our emails from 2009. Since I began working on this video, multiple individuals have shared stories of lost email accounts, and lost archives of correspondences. A final point to observe about emailing is that it always provides access to an archive. It is easy to go back and review not only the past emails

the correspondent has sent, but also your own emails. Email offers the possibility of reading one's self, not only through the emails of the other, but also through one's own writing.

Whereas Akerman included only one side of the correspondence, I included both ends of the exchange[4]. As I have argued, this choice stems from the email medium, and it is representative of a fantasy of reciprocity in friendship. Including both sides of the exchange exposes viewers to both sides of the correspondence. While doing so offers a hope of reciprocity, the content and styles of the emails reveal imbalances. In the following section, I draw on Milne (2010) to analyze the distinct modes of writing in our emails to explain the imbalances they reveal, and the ways I translated these distinct modes into a video.

Writing friendship into being

Milne (2010) employs the concept of presence to study correspondence. She argues that the binary of presence/absence is a key modality through which the epistolary genre has been understood historically. Physical distance is a prerequisite for letter and e-mail correspondence. Communication then becomes dependent on technologies: letters, postcards, postal systems, computers, keyboards, the Internet and e-mail service providers. They enable the exchange of words and language without the co-presence of the writers' bodies. However, Milne argues that despite the absence of bodies, epistolary writers convey a sense of presence through their writing. She explains: "in email and epistolary correspondence, presence often depends paradoxically on a type of disembodiment. In some instances this involves the eclipse of the material medium that supports and the temporal or physical obstacles that would otherwise thwart communication" (9). Epistolary writers often seek to transcend the physical limitations of communication technology and convey a sense of bodily presence with their

correspondent. Milne draws attention to the ways epistolary writers involve their bodies in the acts of writing and typing, and analyzes how bodies are present in their texts. She asks: "What is the relation between the materiality of the (present) letter and the corporeality of the (absent) body?" (54). She investigates this question by analyzing the rhetorical strategies of email and letter writers.

I draw on Milne's theoretical framework and questions to show how Tilda and I use opposing rhetorical strategies to convey presence in *So You Know I Think About You Every Day*. Tilda's emails convey bodily presence by eclipsing and transcending the materiality of the email medium. In Tilda's first email she writes: "Today I got my period…We are released from each other, the flooding of my body, stretching to the nearest ocean to come into contact with the waters that may arrive at your shores. It hurts." Here, she describes our bodies and bodily fluids stretching across space so that we might come into physical contact. Her blood travels towards me—the recipient of the email. In her following email, she writes: "Wonderful scene. You in Paris, dangling your feet off a windowsill with smoke travelling upwards, meeting my blood half way, mermaid cross-links." Emailing is an effort at proximity and contact. Through words, we could imagine that our blood and smoky breath could intermingle, defying the distance that separates us. In Tilda's style of emailing, she strives for an embodied presence. She uses metaphors and text to transcend space and create a sense of shared intimacy and embodied contact.

Tilda also achieves a sense of presence through thick descriptions. She fills her emails with details—telephone operator who could not "get her name right," her new lover's habit of staying home on Saturday nights, the intricacies of her relationship conflicts, details about sex,

and poetic ruminations on these life events. These thick descriptions serve to create a sense of immediacy and proximity. We are drawn into her universe. She portrays her life and makes it palpable for her correspondent, who is not there. In fact, it seems she cannot stop writing. Her outpouring of details and descriptions suggest an unquenchable desire for connection and attention. She provides these details so that someone else might inhabit these same scenes, relationships and affective states along with her. In Tilda's writing, the medium of the email momentarily becomes invisible. Viewers are transported into her world and can easily lose sight that this world is technologically and materially mediated.

My emails, on the other hand, focus on the materiality of the email medium and the spaces surrounding me, and do not create a strong sense of presence through emailing. In my first email, I state that I will not write much about my own experiences, but that "I love having your life mirrored back at me in your emails." I define my role as a witness rather than a storyteller. In my second email, I draw attention to the physicality of the medium via the French keyboard and the typos that will result from it. Unlike Tilda, I do not provide thick descriptions. I gesture towards affects, talk about cities and architecture, but am sparse when talking about my lived experiences with others. My day-to-day interactions and observations remain mostly unknown. In a later email, I claim, "I hate describing people in words". My universe remains off-access to my correspondent, due to my lack of descriptions that could paint it out for her. Furthermore, it seems there is often something in my immediate, physical environment that draws me away from emailing. I have "three hours to walk through this city," an accordion player draws me away from the computer, or a Laurie Anderson song marks the end of my writing time: "The song is over, and I'm going to bed." Elements of my material world are

always pulling me away from our shared epistolary practice. Finally, I do not appear to be taken by the literary and erotic pulses of Tilda's emails. Rather, I am dubious of the world she has constructed. I ask her questions, probing her to reflect on her material reality. I express concern and care, but do not participate in her creation of a world in writing.

After these initial email exchanges, about halfway into the video, Tilda expresses frustration about with my lack of presence in epistolary world-making. She writes: "Except Laurie Anderson, what do you do with your days? I guess when you are living through so much, you forget that I'm not there with you. I can't see you. I mean, how are you feeling?" Tilda directly points towards my unwillingness to share details. As she points out, I do not engage in the act of portraying my world for someone who is not there with me and is missing out. As though she is giving me writing prompts, she probes me for thick descriptions, for details about my schedule, my feelings, my travels and love affairs.

The tension in our epistolary exchange points to the paradox Milne describes. Tilda's ability to transcend the materiality of the communication medium contributes to a sense of embodied presence across physical distance. In contrast, my attention to materiality acts as a barrier to an embodied presence in our correspondence. As Milne argues, "Materiality of a letter seems actually to *get in the way* of its ability to communicate. Arguably, this is a feature of representation in general; the desire to experience unmediated 'reality' appears satisfied when the material conditions of representation (the pen, the screen, the keyboard) are eclipsed" (62). The ability to eclipse materiality and the refusal to do so represents an imbalance in our writing and different approaches to constructing presence in our friendship. Tilda paints a compelling and dramatic portrait of her life events. In so doing she transcends the materiality of

a communication medium and the physical distance that separates us. In contrast, the materiality of emailing and computers gets in the way of my writing, and I do not achieve a sense of epistolary presence or contact. Ironically, this refusal to communicate at a distance can suggest that I am more grounded in the materiality of my present moment and day-to-day experiences of my travels. This very grounding in materiality separates me from an epistolary exchange with Tilda. To convey these different and contradictory modes of writing and presence, I translated our letters into movement and dance through space. I will now discuss the formal elements of my video.

Figures: concealing and showing

"Cacher/ to hide. A deliberative figure: the amourous subject wonders, not whether he should declare his love to the loved being (this is not a figure of avowal) but to what degree he should conceal the turbulences of his passion: his desires, his distresses; in short his excesses (in Racinian languge: his *fureur)."* –Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 1977.

I conceive of epistolary writing as a performance. While one correspondent's absence from the other's physical surroundings may be perceived as a barrier to communication, it can also be generative. As Milne states, "For many correspondents, 'absence' is creative; it opens a discursive space in which desires and subjectivities that might not otherwise be articulated can be explored" (52). The absence of one's correspondent can be a vehicle for imagining one's self as well as the friend we write to. As we can see in the case of Tilda's emails, conveying an embodied sense of presence for someone who is absent requires translating one's lived reality for an outsider. In the reconstruction of this reality for a reader, the writer engages in a type of performance. The epistolary writer "performs a version of self and the recipient reads that performance" (9). As Cynthia Lowenthal further elaborates, "The letter writer first establishes his or her sometimes idealized but always constructed particularity in the transaction; as the

relationship grows, such repeatable particularity authenticates the performance. Simultaneously the letter writer adds new facets to the role as an emergent self is constantly shaped" (Quoted in Milne, 63). The epistolary exchange is unique in that it offers a direct and ongoing relationship between the writer and reader. The writer can construct an image of herself and her life through writing, and receive direct feedback from her reader. This construction and re-construction the self, in relation to a reader, functions as a performance of the self through writing for an intimate public.

To dramatize epistolary writing as performance, I represent our emails as dancers. An elegant and graceful dancer wearing a bright pink shirt with overalls and running shoes performs Tilda's emails. She seems young and irreverent. A watchful and strange dancer, wearing a jacket with flowing pants and dress shoes, represents my emails. She seems pensive and ageless. I use dance to show the different styles of performativity in our letter writing, and the relationship between performer and audience. Tilda's dancer leaps across space. She extends into it with every part of her body. She performs handstands, balances on the tips of her toes, nearly falls, but catches herself. We see her moving across distances; she runs, twirls and reaches forward. She cannot stop moving, and always needs to be seen. She uses the space of an empty building as a stage. Just as the materiality of the email fades to the background of Tilda's emailing, the physical environment acts in service of her dance, framing her movements in its architecture. In contrast, the dancer representing my emails interrupts her movements through the physical environment. She uses the architecture of the building to keep her body concealed, drawing attention to the materiality of the space itself. Using a hole in a ceiling, she conceals her entire body except for a single arm. Her movements emerge from this

concealment; the dance is constructed through interactions with the physical space. Moreover, the dancers act differently in their roles as audience members. The dancer representing my emails is still as she watches. She observes intently and patiently, often watching from above, fading into the background once the performance is over. The dancer representing Tilda's emails, in turn, bolts towards her friend. She is not content with watching a half-hidden performance from a distance, she strives towards physical contact and immediacy. As the video evolves, the dancers shift in their enactments of performer and audience.

Whereas emails are all text and no corporeality, dance is all body without spoken or written language. Dance and choreography compel us to communicate without the use of words. Using *body language*, we communicate through movement and bodily expressions. How do dance and the written language relate to each other? Roland Barthes, in his classic text on the love letter, describes letters as being composed in "fragments of discourse," which he calls *figures* (3). He explains the term figures: "is to be understood not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptation". He compares the lover who writes to a gymnast or an orator engaging in a "lunatic sport", exerting himself. The lover is "caught" in a gesture or a pose. A *figure* is a body in the midst of action. It is recognized as such by its reader. Figures can be "read, heard, felt"—they are perceived and recognized through the feelings and impressions they convey. Similarly, I portrayed Tilda and I exerting ourselves through our writing and our dancing bodies so as to be recognized and read by each other. I did not translate our letters into dance literally: the dancers do not mime the contents of their letters. Rather, these figures embody forms of expression, performance and communication.

These figures are also engaged in a "dance," in the sense of a game. They seem to gesture and move towards each other, while always missing one another, or being unable to form meaningful contact. They watch, perform, and run towards each other, but only touch once during the video. Just as in all letter writing, the dancers are separated by distance.

The email is an imperfect shelter

This last sense of dance as play brings me to a discussion on the use of place in *So You Know I Think About You Every Day.* Here, it is again useful to compare my work to Akerman's. Akerman depicts a street-level perspective of New York City, the destination of her mother's letters. As White (2010) argues, "Akerman's cinema is composed *with* New York's streets and buildings. The film…is rigorously bound by Akerman's sensitive, partial experience of New York" (366). *News from Home* is based on dedicated and situated observations of city life. New York City is held in contrast with the home—Belgium—from which her mother writes and that we do not see. Both cities are spaces of estrangement, as Belgium is a home in exile from Jewish Poland, and New York City is yet another space of estrangement (Morra, 2007). In contrast, the space I depict in *So You Know I Think About You Every Day* is an imagined and metaphorical space. The dancers move through an abandoned construction site, a concrete building with a skeletal structure. It is not based on my situated experience of a city or place, but rather on my situated, but imagined, experience of the Internet and emailing. Tilda and I both write about feeling stranded. Even though I happen to be travelling, Tilda also describes herself as traveling as she does not have a stable home. The binaries I explore are not between home/exile, familiarity/estrangement as they are for Akerman, but rather between a shelter/the world and interior/exterior. The external world is unstable and shifting. The home we turn to, in the

meantime, is the email medium and our friendship. The building represents the space of the email and the Internet. Emails travel across great distances, just as the dancers, as well as our voices reading the letters, move across this vast, empty space. This large cement structure looks symmetrical from the outside. From the inside, it bears the traces of abandonment. Around it is a mixture of urban nature and life, with apartment buildings. There is a sense of life and people dwelling on the outside. Within the building is a sense of vast emptiness. It contains large spaces that let in sunlight and rain, unprotected from the outdoors. Removed from the exterior social world, it represents a temporary and imperfect shelter of distanced intimacy.

The trouble with friendship

The binary between shelter and world resonates with Heather Love's troubling of the representation of friendship in literature and philosophy. In line with Love, the friendship I represent is not ideal: it is troubled and replete with a sense of loss. She argues that friendship has been idealized across queer and feminist cultures and scholarship. She writes that this idealization is inherited from the reverence towards friendship in Western history, through which it has been placed:

> *At the very top of the hierarchy of intimate relations; during that same period, same-sex desire and love have been among the most denigrated forms of intimacy…The long philosophical tradition of friendship that sees this relation as a model of equality, reciprocity, and longevity proves almost irresistible to the bearers of a form of love understood to be nasty, brutish, and short.* (77)

Queer communities and scholars have taken up this image of friendship. They have considered how it embodies a relational form that exists outside of "state-sponsored intimacy" (80). It is not dependent on nuclear family or the institution of marriage, both of which have alienated and rejected queer people and oppressed women. Friendship can inspire models of kinship and

community-making that are based on reciprocity, equality, and chosen family rather than on hierarchical structures integral to capitalism, hetero-normativity and patriarchy. However, Love criticizes these histories for focusing on the idyllic aspects of friendship and suggests that we look at the trouble that brews in histories of friendship.

In her search for trouble, Love examines the portrayal of friendship by turn of the century author, Willa Cather. Scholars and readers in the field of queer studies have sought to identify Cather as a queer writer based on her writing and her history of living with women. On the other hand, there are elements of Cather's biography that complicate this reclaiming, such as her outward disapproval of public expressions of homosexuality. Heather Love proposes that those wanting to "rescue" queer figures from history embrace the range of troubled affects that these figures carry with them. She argues against a one-sided celebration of Cather's queerness and rather suggests we explore her backwardness: her turn towards the past and her interest in "loneliness, historical isolation, and death" (74). One of Cather's turns towards the past is her interest in romantic friendship, as is explored in her short story "148 Charles Street," featuring the friendship between her two friends, Jewett and Fields, who live in the same house. The story features the house as an area where friendship can flourish with 'splendid contacts', sheltered from the 'wounding contacts' from the external world.

The story also explores an anxiety about the end of friendship. At the turn of the twentieth century, romantic women's friendships were at the risk of being overshadowed by homophobia that sexualized same-sex intimacy and limited the ways in which women could express and experience their friendships. Though scholars have now discredited the idealization of romantic friendship and the extent to which this historical turn represented a radical break in

forms of female intimacies (Castle, 1993; Stanley, 1992), Cather nevertheless expressed an anxiety over the disappearance of female friendship in her writing. She wrote about spaces such as the interior of a house and the back garden, which represented sheltered areas of female friendship, and held them in opposition to the external world that did not hold space for this type of relationality. As one of the friends she writes about becomes ill, she wonders whether these relationships are disappearing. As Love writes, "For Cather, romantic friendship is a 'shrinking kingdom,' a back garden that she surveys with a mixture of desire, longing, and regret. She demonstrates a mode of looking backward that is not exactly nostalgic, as the world that she longs for is not one of presence, but of absence, loss, and proleptic mourning." (93). Cather had never fully experienced the friendship she imagined and longed for. Her image of friendship is just out of reach, characterized by perpetual longing, loss and death.

This ambivalence and longing for a friendship beyond reach is reflected in my work. There is a sense in which we are never quite there, at this idealized form of intimacy. The dancers move towards and then away from each other; they strive towards friendship, but do not arrive. Perhaps the moment they come closest to these "splendid contacts" is when the dancers actually do make contact, and descend towards a ravine, a forested area by a river. Viewers are given a relief from the rigid and austere environment of the abandoned building. The emails in this section begin as a loving and caring exchange, and it seems that the external world outside of friendship fades to the background for a moment. The individuals and events that inhabit the other emails do not make an appearance here. It is just us.

In the friendships Love explores, as represented by Willa Cather, and in my own representation of friendship, solitude and friendship are co-constitutive. Love points to the fact

that Cather had never experienced the "structure of feeling" of the romantic friendship she longed for. Love also discusses philosophers and literary theorists who similarly seem to describe friendship as a field of affective possibilities always beyond our grasp. For Derrida (1997), friendship is impossible: it is the outline of a community that cannot be realized in the present. Love writes, "Hope for alternative forms of relation and community is an important affect in the present, particularly as queers try to articulate alternatives to marriage as the dominant form of social life" (98). Love suggests that in imagining these alternatives, we must resist the idealization of friendship and community, as if they could rescue us from the institutions we seek to distance ourselves from. Rather, we should familiarize ourselves with the ambivalent and negative affects that characterize the histories of friendship and community. While friendship might offer us alternative models for the future, we must contend with the distance, loneliness, loss and anger that can be constitutive of histories of friendship. While we might reach towards redemptive futures, we can simultaneously mourn the non-existence of that future in our present moment. Friendship is a field of unknown possibility. [5]

At the end of the video, the dancer of my emails finds herself on a ledge on the highest floor, lying in stillness. Her friend, after watching her, leaps off to continue her dance somewhere else, outside of our view. In the emails voice-overs, I suggest a phone call following a conflict: "I want to hear your voice. How would you feel if I called you? I think I might try now." We do not know whether or not the friends will make contact through the phone, or whether they will remain separated and silent. There is a sense of loss in their separation, and in the interruption of their epistolary dance between performer and audience. I like to think of them

as momentarily separated, continuing to move on their own, in separate parts of the building. In Nietsche's *Gay Science*, he describes embracing the estrangement of two friends:

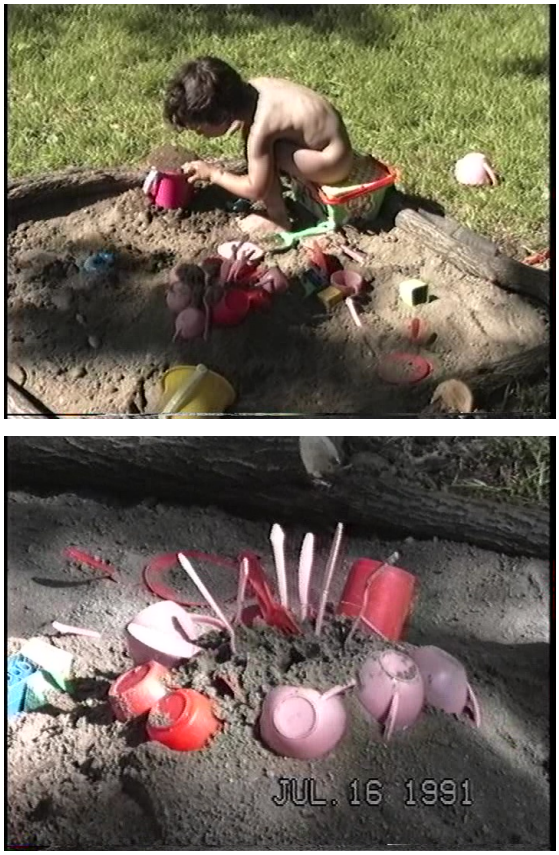
> *We are two ships, each of which has its own goal and course; we may cross and have a feast together, as we did—and then the good ships lay so quietly in one harbor and in one sun that it may have seemed as if they had already completed their course and had the same goal. But then the almighty force of our projects drove us apart once again, into different seas and sunny zones, and maybe we will never meet again—or maybe we will, but will not recognize each other: the different seas and suns have changed us!"* (98, quoted in Love)

Nietzche's two ships sailing through the same seas, having travelled together but then coexisting at a distance, resonate with the image of the two dancers moving to their own rhythm on separate floors of the same building. They are transported through space by their moving bodies, yet no longer share the same stage. I would like to see this moment not as an end to friendship, but rather as an interval. Bodies that move at their own timing and pace nevertheless coexist in the same building. Even though they do not touch or watch each other, they continue to be moved by each other's presence. Furthermore, if we think of this video not as a film, but rather as a video installation on loop, this moment is not truly the end. It a recurring phase in a cycle. The dancers have returned to their original positions and will begin their interchange again. Friendship is a continual cycle of searching, encounter and loss.

Conclusion: Can We Play Now?

I began this paper with a reflection on research-creation methods. I will now add some concluding remarks on play as a methodological approach. I will then discuss how to bring elements of play into friendship.

Through the creation of *So You Know I Think About You Every Day*, I learned as much about process as I learned about friendship. An important lesson was on the nature of goals and play in arts-based research. Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) critique academia's emphasis on 'deliverables' and 'findings'. They propose shifting the emphasis on research outcomes to asking, "On what level(s) can this project be identified as an intervention?" (22). This question brings our attention to the ways research-creation projects act in dynamic ways to stimulate conversations and make things happen within particular contexts and communities. I also propose that we shift the emphasis on deliverables by asking how we can bring a sense of play into research-creation projects. Play is an important mode of production and discovery in my artistic approach. While goals are necessary, engaging in experimentation and iteration often means momentarily losing sight of goals. Sometimes we must forget we want to make a product in order to make this product. The type of play I am referring to is akin to that of a child in a



6. Stills from the author's home videos, 1991

sandbox. The child has the materials and technologies she needs at her disposal: sand, buckets and tools. It is not a game she can win, and there is no goal to be reached. Rather, she is left to experiment, iterate and evaluate. Out of this process will emerge her creations: sculptures, designs, towers and concoctions.

Though we may consider play as childish and unproductive, play often brings us to where we need to go. I ask: how can we bring a sense of play into our research-creation projects? Where can play take place, within the structures of the academy and its protocols for evaluation? How can we take ourselves less seriously, and get our hands dirty?

I also wonder how we can bring a sense of play into friendship. In particular, can we let go of the notion that friendship will also produce deliverables, or that it will deliver us from something? As I wrote in my previous chapter, queer and feminist theorists have often looked towards friendship as a relational form that could subvert hetero-patriarchal norms. When I began this project, part of me wanted to prove that friendship could subvert structures of power. I thought friendship could be altering, feminist, and radical. I believed friendship could save us, or perhaps I just wanted to save my friendship. Just as I had to let go of my creative goals, I also let go of these friendship goals. I embraced loss, and the unknown, as an integral part of friendship. During my most intensive video production period, I lost contact with Tilda. I immersed myself in the memories of our friendship, in what our friendship had been and the story I wanted to tell. I did not know what our actual friendship would look like after this moment. Making the video was a way of mourning what I had believed our friendship to be, and embracing the possibility that it would not re-emerge. Just as in play, I momentarily lost sight of an outcome or a future. This loss made room for my friendship with Tilda to take shape

again, with new words, emails, collaborations, conflicts and intimacies. The presence of her voice in this project is a testament to our ongoing relationship.

Many literary and cinematic portrayals of friendship culminate in the loss of friendship. Aside from Tilda's desire to be in the video, I am insistent on the presence of her voice in the voice-overs as a refusal for friendships to always end. This statement is in contradiction with what I wrote above: that loss or the unknown is sometimes a necessary element of friendship. I want to hold onto this contradiction. We do not know where friendship will take us. Cindy Milstein, speaking about her anthology, *The Collective Work of Grief*, in a public workshop (2018), proposed that loss be mourned collectively. If we bear our grief to one another rather than wear it privately, perhaps we can connect in transformative ways. She asserts that loss is not solely individual, but rather relates to broader structures of power. Why is friendship thought about as something that should last forever, yet is often represented and experienced as unsustainable? I continue to ask how we can explore the loss and the unknown that seem bound up in stories of friendship, while also investing friendship with power, integrity and hope in our day-to-day lives.

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Endnotes

[1] In this paper, I discuss the video project as though it is a finished product. However, for my MA, I created and presented a short prototype of the final version. The video is still in the post-production phase. The work that remains pertains to editing, sound production, voice-overs and distribution.

[2] Thank you to Professor Peter Van Wyck for coming up with this term.

[3] A brief note on my friendship with Saulė, in order to avoid confusion. Saulė is not Tilda—she is not the person who this project is about. Her role in this project is very different and would reveal different aspects of friendship, if I were to study it. She acted as an older, more experienced artist and mentor, who enabled my own artistic development through material, practical, creative and emotional support.

[4] What are the other differences between the letter writing in Akerman's work and the email composition in mine? Part of my forays into epistolary theories involved considering the differences between emailing and letter writing. I am certain there are tangible differences that could be drawn out between these two mediums. For one, emailing allows for effortless editing and a speed of transmission that conveys greater sense immediacy and authenticity between correspondents. However, I hesitate to make definitive claims about the differences between emailing and letter writing. For example, the speed offered by emailing must be historically contextualized. In a case study described by Milne, I was surprised to find that two friends, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Mary Russell Mitford, exchanged at least 700 letters in the span of eighteen years, between 1836 and 1854 (Milne, 2010, 55). We can average this amount to about forty letters per year. This amount is still far less than what Tilda and I were able to exchange. For instance, we wrote over one hundred emails over the course of one year when I was living abroad. Nevertheless, I was quite impressed by the volume of letters exchanged by Browning and Mitford, and how they expressed a sense of immediacy and authenticity in their correspondence. The speed of the postal system may also have been greater in the 1800s. Moreover, Milne's research suggests that the study of the email should be situated in the structures and histories of specific server systems. Therefore, a study of the email medium in my correspondence with Tilda for this project would have ideally looked at the servers we were using (AEI and Hotmail) as they were operating in 2009. Given these multiple considerations, I do not believe I could do justice to a discussion on the email medium, its particularities as a mode of communication and its differences to letter writing in the present study.

[5] I want to note a contradiction here. I am drawing on queer investigations of friendship while also being aware that the emails in the video are entrenched in a heterosexual stance. Most of our emails are about men and sex(uality) with men. I was not able to engage with this contradiction in this paper. To do so, I would have broached? Sara Ahmed's discussion of straight orientations in *Queer Phenomenology* and *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). She explores how orientations and paths towards heterosexuality can conceal or direct us away from other paths, such as paths leading towards queerness. I am interested in how friendship figures within these directions and paths—how do orientations towards heterosexuality (or marriage) position us in relation to friendship? I also would enquire further into the representation of female friendships in the media. For example, Hollinger (1998) analyzes the representation of female friendship on film. Many of the films she studies culminate with the loss of friendship. This trope echoes Love's and my discussion on loss in friendship. There are generative links to be made between queer and feminist scholarship on friendship.