

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Joni Man-Yi Cheung (Snack Witch)

Entitled: Adult Sweetness

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts, Studio Arts: Sculpture and Ceramics

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

Kelly Jazvac Chair

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Approved by Kelly Jazvac  
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Annie Gérin

Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts

♥ Adult Sweetness ♥

🔮 Snack Witch Joni Cheung 🍡

(Another) MFA Thesis Exhibition

(But this is my first one though please come <3)

*!Vernissage!* 🎉 Wed, April 5th, 2023: 6 - 9 pm 🎉

Thurs, April 6th: 3 - 8 pm

Sat, Apr 8th: 1 - 7 pm

Sun, Apr 9th: 1- 7 pm

MFA Gallery

### List of Works:

*2033 Essex Rd, Williston, Vermont, USA, 05495* (2023 - ongoing)

*Lucky Charms* (2023 - ongoing)

*Saved Pins* (2022 - ongoing)

*Before We Go* (2021 - ongoing)

  *Soba's Corner: A Chinese-Canadian Cooking Show*   (2020 - ongoing)

*bring back as souvenirs* (2019 - ongoing)

*Adult Sweetness* (2023)

*88 (Spam) Keys to my Heart* (2023)

*!FAST AND EASY! A Short and Sweet Guide to Making a French-Canadian Favourite ~Pâté Chinois~* (2021)

### Selected Publications:

#### Authored Contributions

Asís Ybarra, *Food& #7: Spectacle*, Vol. 7. Berlin: Food&, 2002.

Dean Baldwin Lew, ed. *Mixed Drinks*, MOCA Toronto, 2022.

Sanaa Humayun, ed. *At Arm's Length*, Edmonton: John and Maggie Mitchell Art Gallery, 2021.

*Tender Pearl Zone* 150th ed. Vol. 1, Yolkless Press, 2021.

Zartasha Zainab, Em Dial, Sophie Lau, and Jane Law, eds. *Mélange Creative Arts Journal: Seeding Justice & Deepening Our Roots*, Toronto: Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, 2021.

#### Writing about my Work

Amelia Wong-Mersereau, "Light Hours," *esse*, no. 104 (2022): 98.

Godfre Leung, "Vancouver Photohistory and the Politics of Disappearance," *C Magazine*, 2022.

Morgan Mullin, "Nocturne 2022: Meet me at the Dinner Table is an invisible feast," *The Coast*, 2022.

## Thank Yous

It has been and continues to be a privilege to rest my tired head and body in Tiohtiá:ke|Mooniyang|Montréal, unceded lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka and Haudenosaunee peoples. I am grateful for the friends I have made here, non-human and human. From the toasty (borderline sweltering), summer afternoons spent drinking crisp ciders in parks brimming with green trees and chicken-wing and pizza hungry squirrels, to the mulled wine that has been keeping me warm during these harsh and snowy winters. It has been difficult living here, as I grew up on unceded Coast Salish territories of the x̣ẉməθkwəỵəm, Skwxwú7mesh, Stó:lō, and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh nations, where feelings of uncertainty and out-of-placeness, symptoms of being displaced and trying to process trauma that is continually being enacted by colonial and capitalist powers on the lands, waters, and valleys, mountains, animals, and non-white human bodies, could be soothed by bathing in the Pacific ocean, freshwater rivers and walking on beaches and through forests of trees who have seen and lived through more than I could ever imagine.

Being away from the place and people I have and will always consider my home has been hard. But I am thankful for what I have learned about myself while being away. I am thankful for the growth I have gone through and how I've learned how much I miss and dearly love and cherish the waters and lands I was lucky enough to be born and grow up on. I am grateful for Turtle Island and its stewards, who have and continue to fight and protect what many guests take for granted and even abuse. The communities here have taught me the importance of learning about my (hi)story. Learning about my Hong Kong-Chinese heritage by beginning my journey through my parent's ancestry (my mom is 台山/廣東人, and my dad is 寶安/廣東人) has grounded me when I feel lost. I hope that what I have become, and what I continue to grow into, will allow me to find the small and large ways

(at whatever capacity I spiritually, mentally, and physically can at the moment cause the world can be a real shitter sometimes)

in which I live in this world,  
in the way I orient myself,  
in the way I practice, live, play and work,

can be used to support those in need, near and afar, through different scales of time and space.

\*\*\* MVP SUPERSTARS \*\*\*

甄艷秀 \ 姬絲汀 \ Christina \ 媽媽  
張興華 \ 蕃薯 \ Francis \ 爸爸  
張文蔚 \ 小妹 \ Janis  
Soba the Calico Cat  
Cassie Paine + Brandon A. Dalmer<sup>1</sup> + Megan Stein + Faber Mo Neifer  
My Therapist  
maya rae oppenheimer  
Maureen Kennedy  
Monique Deschamps  
Philippe Garneau + Global Néon  
Geneviève Moisan + Morris Fox, Textiles + Materiality Research Cluster  
Brian Cooper + Mauricio Aristizabal—Metal Shop  
Chris Latchem + Liz Xu + Gary Cherkas—EV and VA Wood Shop  
Chris Ready + Cameron Skene  
Jules Beauchamp Desbiens and Sevan Belleau—Digifab Shop  
Chloe Cheuk and Eric—CDA Depot  
Oswaldo Toledano and Peter Hošťák—Academic and Research Facilities  
Michèle Thériault + Yasmine Tremblay + Robin Simpson—Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery  
Pedro Barbáchano + Post Image Cluster  
Mojeanne Sarah Behzadi  
Kelly Jazvac  
Deanna Bowen  
Cheryl Simon + Nicole Gringas  
Juan Ortiz Apuy  
Surabhi Ghosh  
Aaron Mcintosh  
Selina Latour and Pascale Tétrault  
516/512 Studio Crew  
Geneviève Wallen, Nicole Burisch, María Escalona—FOFA Gallery  
eunice bélidor

and my forever-growing list of restaurants and snack spots in my Google Maps “Want to go” folder,

as well as those that are no longer with us.

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<sup>1</sup> “You have a research-based practice, you can have as many [website] tabs as you want.” - Brandon A. Dalmer

This text and body of work is dedicated to the fam jam I was gifted at birth and the one I've chosen to build a life with. Thank you for keeping me from kicking the bucket. 🙏🗑️

But in all seriousness, I probably wouldn't be as funny without the 張 \ Cheung + 甄 \ Yan family humour. 💕

李彩鳳 \ 婆婆 \ po po + 甄玉振 \ 公公 \ gung gung  
張旭權 \ 爺爺 \ je je + 鄭玉潔 \ 嫲嫲 \ maa maa  
舅公's \ kau gung + 姨婆's \ ji po + 姨公 \ ji gung  
甄艷秀 \ 姬絲汀 \ Christina \ 媽媽  
張興華 \ 蕃薯 \ Francis \ 爸爸  
張文懿 \ 大妹 \ Joni  
張文蔚 \ 小妹 \ Janis  
弟弟's \ Jaden and Jackie

婆婆 Po Po

Sometimes,

I think about,  
If my parents never left (forcibly displaced from) what was home,  
For another that was supposed to become  
Home for them or me (a false promise),  
Would they have been better off?

Imagine the smell of gasoline and Dominos deluxe pizza

To be lost and found all at once.

I am where the freshwater (blood) rivers and saltwater (tears) oceans meet,

an estuary of past and future time,

Swirling over,

Flowing under,

Around

and through.

fragments of

m y s e l f c u l t u r e l a n g u a g e

memories i pick up as i walk past

and sit

in places we use

to frequent together

...

REplete WITH MEMORY-TRACES, I am all feeling and response. Each time my therapist returns me to my childhood, she asks me to imagine my own daughter in my place. To imagine my own daughter trying to reach me by tear-ing out her hair in screaming fistfuls. Each time I under-take this exercise, I discover myself to be a deep and en-during fracture. Each time, I am undone.<sup>2</sup>

Don't look down on her tears. She earned the right to those.<sup>3</sup>

...

Last summer, my grandmother passed away.

It was sudden.

I found out from a text message from my sister.

Tuesday, August 9th, 2022 11:31 pm EST.

As I re-readread read readre-readread read  
readre-readread read readre-readread read readre-readread read readre-readread read  
readre-readread read readre-readread re  
ad readre-readrea

d read readre-readread read readre-readread read readre-readread read readre-readread read  
readre-readr  
ead  
read readre-readread read readre-readread r  
ead readre-readread read readre-readread read readre-readread read readre-readread read  
readre-readread  
read readre-readread read readre-readrea  
d read readre-readread  
read readre-r  
eadread read readre-readread read read

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<sup>2</sup> Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You* (California: Punctum Books, 2018), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Pachinko, "Chapter 3," *Apple TV* video, 56:00, March 25, 2022, <https://tv.apple.com/ca/episode/chapter-three/umc.cmc.1kx29jr4i9p063aoetl0js62g>.

the messages now—short, rapid, back-and-forths,  
attempts to grasp at anything to ground me while  
everything was falling apart—the feelings that I  
thought had evaporated in the heat of the summer flood  
in again. Tears well up and flush out what had settled  
on the floor, covered in dust.

Seen 1 hr ago

winded

by

the rolling

waves

A few weeks later, our 姨媽 aunt, sent my mom photos from 婆婆's funeral. They shared it with us on our family Facebook chat: Fam Jam 🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟. It's weird to see photos of a funeral through a messaging chat room. To be reminded that she is no longer here, when I had just gotten a moment of respite while visiting the Coast Salish<sup>4</sup> lands and waters I call home. I am bracing myself for if/when I will return to Hong Kong.<sup>5</sup> Because I haven't gone back since 2019, 婆婆 is still alive. I am trying to delay the moment where reality will crystalize upon landing. At the moment, I prefer living in the clouds.

I have been trying to embody the fact that our ancestors are with us even after they've passed on from this realm. But this is the first time I feel I've truly been put to the test<sup>6</sup>. I still find it extremely difficult to live this truth.

I often think back to this time. How I found out about her passing via sms only two days before I was flying home to visit my family during a low point of my cyclical depression.

At the time, we couldn't afford to fly to Hong Kong to help with the planning of and preparations for the funeral: COVID meant travel restrictions and costs of COVID-tests, flight tickets, and hotel accommodations during mandatory quarantine procedures. I was upset that I couldn't go back during this time, but I was devastated that my mother couldn't return either.

As I reflect on it now, the timing between her passing and my return to Vancouver seems *too* coincidental. I like to believe 婆婆 planned this. There really is no *good* or *better* time to die. But maybe she wanted to wait for a time where she knew I wouldn't be alone. I wonder if this was a gift from 婆婆.

I want to believe. I need to.

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<sup>4</sup> Unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, Stó:lō, and Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwiltulh peoples.

<sup>5</sup> April 1, 2023: I will be flying to Hong Kong the day after my deinstallation as I've learned 爺爺 \ je je's cancer has relapsed (also found out through a short and court Whatsapp message from my dad). I am simmering in the emotions and thinking about the types of grief I am experiencing in the span of 9 months. To grieve someone you did not get to speak or see one last time, who passed suddenly. Thinking about how I can only imagine her voice as I don't know of any videos or audio recordings I have of her... To grieve someone who I will possibly see before they die. Wondering about all the things I need to ask, should ask, but will most likely not ask as the gravity of language and emotions bear down on me once I land.

<sup>6</sup> I don't know who would want to test me on this but here we are. 🙏

## COVID, Food, and Digital Lives

I learned from her that sharing stories engenders creative rigorous radical theory. Wait. I learned from her that sharing stories *is* creative rigorous radical theory. The act of sharing stories is the theory and the methodology.<sup>7</sup>

I guess what I am trying to write but cannot pinpoint is that the collaborative aspects of the work allowed us to share ideas in ways that I did not anticipate. The project is, then, not solely text; it is the unpublishable work of conversing over several years and continuing that conversation.<sup>8</sup>

Friendship is hard freedom. Maybe friendships effectuate consciousness and liberation and possibility.<sup>9</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic locked Montréal down on Friday, March 13th, 2020. What we thought would only last a weekend continues to affect the way we live together today (though Capitalism tries to make us think otherwise).

At this point, the friendships I had made here had only started to root. I spent my first birthday in Montréal celebrating with my roommate and friends over Zoom.<sup>10</sup> I was grateful for my roommate's physical and friends' digital presences, but I would be lying if I said that was all I needed. That it could replace the sensation of a hug IRL.

As months passed and the hope of returning to on-campus studios/facilities/equipment<sup>11</sup> became replaced by feelings of frustration towards the business and bureaucracy that is academia, the COVID bubble I had built tried to find other ways to continue creating. We found an external studio in the Mile End to jump start the communal spaces we had lost. I moved to an apartment that was closer, as I was too afraid to take public transit at the time because of COVID-19 and the Anti-Asian sentiment and violence being prolifically documented *to not have agency around when i am hyper*(<sup>12</sup>. Spending less time in public felt safer.

This apartment was the first time I have ever lived on my own. Soba the calico cat, arrived soon after we met on Pet Tinder.<sup>13</sup> We would spend our 2020 中秋節 Mid-Autumn Festival together,

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<sup>7</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Dear science and other stories* (Durham : Duke University Press, 2021), 73.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> An online meeting platform students, faculty, friends all became very familiar with during the pandemic.

<sup>11</sup> These are things for which I was still paying full tuition but could not access.

<sup>12</sup> Kamila Hinkson, "Montreal's Korean consulate issues safety warning after man stabbed," CBC, March 19, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/koreans-montreal-safety-warning-1.5501963> I lived a 10 minute walk away from here at the time.

<sup>13</sup> Pet Tinder is what I call <https://www.petfinder.com/>.

plus one other COVID bubble friend. I'm grateful I wasn't alone then, but homesickness still crept in.

...

Much of my time during early COVID was spent watching cooking videos on YouTube. People cooking ancestral dishes and guilty pleasures in the confines of their home kept me company when I was eating snacks rather than meals. These videos were a lifeline. I could imagine I was elsewhere, eating something else, over there, anywhere but here. [I just didn't want to be here.](#) They were portals to homes. They were forums where I could find diasporic kindred spirits, who understood my struggles with trying to acquire knowledge about my culture and to find/fit into my communities. Who also couldn't read or write eloquently in their mother tongue<sup>14</sup> but can order their favourite childhood dish at Hong Kong-style cafes. Siri and Google became my substitute Chinese teachers.

tongue mother  
tongue me  
mothertongue me  
mother me  
touch me  
with the tongue of your lan lan lang  
language  
I/anguish  
  anguish  
english  
is a foreign anguish<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Marlene NourbeSe Philip, "Discourse on the Logic of Language," in *She Tries Her Tongue – Her Silence Softly Breaks*, (Middletown, Connecticut : Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 30-33. Philip positions mother tongues and father tongues as opposites: not foreign languages ~ foreign languages. What does it mean to live without a mother tongue?

<sup>15</sup> Philip, "Discourse on the Logic of Language," 32.

Two YouTube cooking personalities I had obsessively started watching #forfunsies were “Binging with Babish”<sup>16</sup> and “Jun’s Kitchen”.<sup>17</sup> “Binging with Babish” became known for recreating dishes from iconic pop cultural media (films, TV shows, video games etc.). “Jun’s Kitchen” captures the hearts of viewers with 2 popular searches on the internet: food and cats. With their three cats—Kohaku, Poki and Nagi—Jun takes us through the steps of making a meal, while letting their furry companions watch and sniff ingredients. (Sometimes they get to partake in tasting the final results.) An important note: both hosts are self-taught. I’ve noticed that I tend to gravitate towards non-professional cooks/chefs in the digital culinary world when looking for recipes to try myself. It feels approachable, like I could do it as well.

...

I can’t remember how the conversation started but Brandon,<sup>18</sup> a dear friend and peer, was complaining to me about how he can’t scratch his itch for Ginger Beef. During the 10 years he had lived in Toronto before moving to Montréal, he couldn’t find a restaurant that made this dish the way it’s *supposed to be made* back in Alberta.<sup>19</sup> While he was reminiscing about the dish to me—the importance of balancing the sweet and spicy, crunchy exterior with borderline jerky interior chew, coated in \*just enough\* sauce—I was perplexed as I offered descriptions of dishes labeled Ginger Beef that I had eaten in Vancouver, but none of them fit his bill.

This conversation sparked a curiosity in me: Did each province of Canada have a Chinese-Canadian speciality?

This took me down a rabbit hole of studying the provenance of Chinese-Canadian food. At the same time, I became curious about the possibilities of approaching digital materials and performance through a sculptural framework. This research developed into 🍷👩🍳 *Soba’s Corner: A Chinese-Canadian Cooking Show* 🍷👩🍳 (2020 - Ongoing), which is a video series that unpacks distinct Chinese-Canadian dishes from specific provinces.

What started out as just a conversation between two friends became a space for me to explore cuisines as windows through which to study perceptions of tradition and authenticity. These dishes have become mirrors, reflecting the political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts which

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Rea, “Binging with Babish,” Babish Culinary Universe, <https://www.youtube.com/@babishculinaryuniverse/featured> (It is now Babish Culinary Universe, as the content creation team has grown.)

<sup>17</sup> Jun Yoshizuki, “Jun’s Kitchen” Jun’s Kitchen, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRxAgfYexGLlu1WHGIMUDqw>.

<sup>18</sup> Brandon A. Dalmer: <https://www.badalmer.com/>.

<sup>19</sup> Most people, including myself, think Toronto is the food capital of Canada, but I now argue it might be Vancouver, at least for East Asian food. 😊

shaped their creation. The stories shared between my co-hosts and I explore how food and recipes function as living archives—documents that are revisited and activated through making. Unlike objects held in institutions, substitutions and personal interpretations can occur and are encouraged. They record connections between individuals, communities, cultures, time and movement through geographies.

This work reflects on how diasporic communities have used YouTube to meet needs—bridging physical, emotional, spiritual, and ancestral gaps. It analyzes how food-recipes are used for cross-cultural dialogue, building relationships and are malleable archival apparatuses — reflecting, translating, and disseminating stories of the people-places they've encountered.

But at the end of the day, the most meaningful part of this project—at least for me—is the place it provides for dialogue, food, and stories (pleasurable and painful)

to be shared,

to take up space,

to breathe.

yum yuck  
sticky icky  
can you have too much of  
a  
sickly sweet  
repulsive attraction  
attractive repulsion  
over-whelming  
surge of  
addictive rush  
suppress resist  
crashing

appetite  
can't stop, won't stop  
have to stop  
slow digestion  
absorption  
pump through  
flush out  
upset spike  
at risk of  
rot-ting  
penetrating layers

an acidic cavity  
sensitivity to  
spice  
stain the corners of your  
mouth  
guilt trip  
burn a hole in my tongue  
sweet dreams are made of  
this  
pangs of  
hunger  
fill full feel full  
longing to be whole  
by swallowing fragments

## Language, Culture, Knowledge ~ Transcription/Translation

*As though the frost that bearded those words could be melted by repeating them in a humorous, ironic way.*<sup>20</sup>

You did not yet have language through which to articulate your distress.<sup>21</sup>

The story-text itself, read aloud or quietly, is an imprint of black life and livingness that tells of the wreckage and the lists and the dance floors and the loss and the love and the rumors and the lessons and the heartbreak. It prompts. The story does not simply describe, it demands representation outside itself. Indeed, the story cannot tell itself without our willingness to imagine what it cannot tell. The story asks that we live with what cannot be explained and live with unexplained cues and diasporic literacies, rather than reams of positivist evidence. The story opens the door to curiosity; the reams of evidence dissipate as we tell the world differently, with a creative precision. The story asks that we live with the difficult and frustrating ways of knowing differentially. (And some things we can keep to ourselves. They cannot have everything. Stop her autopsy.) They cannot have everything.<sup>22</sup>

I have been thinking about my agency. As an artist who works in conversation with others—family, friends, strangers, and the more-than-human—I thank you for your generosity. I am grateful for your trust in me, to nourish and take care of the stories you gift me. I am cautious of who I share our histories with. I have been letting this passage by Eve Tuck and C. Ree’s in *A Glossary of Haunting* marinate:

I care about you understanding, but I care more about concealing parts of myself from you. I don’t trust you very much. You are not always aware of how you can be dangerous to me, and this makes me dangerous to you. I am using my arm to determine the length of the gaze.<sup>23</sup>

Inspired by Tuck and Ree’s text, Sanaa Humayan invited Jasmine Piper and I to participate in the project, *at arm’s length*<sup>24</sup> (2020). Before this moment, we had never met. Over a 6 month letter writing exchange, we built our friendship through handwritten notes and reflections, candies and stickers. I felt very safe sharing my highs-and-lows with Jasmine during this period. There was

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<sup>20</sup> Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You* (California: Punctum Books, 2018), 96.; Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (2014), 8, <http://www.lesliefeinberg.net/download/479/>. First published in 1993 by Firebrand Books.

<sup>21</sup> Singh, *No Archive*, 96. Julietta Singh quoting their therapist.

<sup>22</sup> McKittrick, *Dear science and other stories*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Eve Tuck and C. Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Linn Holman Jones, Tony E Adams, and Carolyn Ellis. (California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2013), 640.

<sup>24</sup> Joni Cheung, Sanaa Humayun, and Jasmine Piper, “at arm’s length,” Mitchell Art Gallery, 2020-2021, <https://mitchellartgallery.macewan.ca/atarmslength>.

space for reflection—to write a response over a month—without the pressures and urgency of instant messaging. We were able to think about the ways we could hold each other, make space for one another, through gossip<sup>25</sup> and keeping one another’s secrets. The things we needed to manifest or expel from our bodies, but then redact from public gaze.

...

I still can’t believe it’s been 4.5 years since I moved to Montréal. I’ve started to learn French using Duolingo because I’m actually considering staying here for another year, as I figure out what I’ll do and where I’ll go after graduation.

I didn’t try very hard to learn French before this. People would encourage me to learn it while I was here or to find a French-speaking lover. I would practice the little French I know in grocery stores and shops, but I would often encounter people who wanted to be accommodating or did not want to hear me butcher their father tongue.<sup>26</sup> They would stop me in my tracks by responding to me in English. I’ve even gotten discouraged from speaking French by a florist at Jean Talon market after trying to decipher the questions they were asking me: “Don’t do that [lie about understanding French?].”

I have no mother  
tongue  
no mother to tongue  
no tongue to mother  
to mother  
tongue  
me

I must therefore be

---

<sup>25</sup> Hannah Black, “Witch-hunt,” TANK Magazine, 2017, 106-111, <https://tankmagazine.com/issue-70/features/hannah-black>. Hannah Black frames gossip as having “always been a secret language of friendship and resistance between women.” They explain the distaste (by most of) society has for gossip is linked to underlying misogynist thinking we have been conditioned to learn by cis-, het-, patriarchal systems of power. Gossiping allows BIPOC LGBTQ2S+ and femme presenting folks who are pushed to the margins, to share essential information that allows us to survive when we are constantly told and made to feel like we are not worthy, not valuable, don’t or shouldn’t have space.

<sup>26</sup> Philip, “Discourse on the Logic of Language,” 30-33. In relation to the reflections in footnote 14, Philippe’s text also ferments in the question: What does it mean then if one’s mother *and* father tongue is English?

tongue  
dumb  
dumb-tongued  
dub-tongued  
damn dumb  
tongue

but I have  
a dumb tongue  
tongue dumb  
father tongue  
and english is  
my mother tongue  
is  
my father tongue  
is a foreign lan lan lang  
language  
I/anguish  
anguish  
a foreign anguish  
is english—  
another tongue  
my mother[...]<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Philip, "Discourse on the Logic of Language," 30, 32.

It is

m y f

i n g

e r s .

slip

ugh

thro

Ping

It's like I'm in a desert, trying to hold a small pool of water in the cup of my hands, carrying it as far as I can before it eventually disappears between parched lips and fingertips. I don't have many people I can practice with here. It irks me—to be forced to learn yet another White colonizer language when I'm trying to retain the little Cantonese I can still call my own.

...

Choosing when, what, and how I transcribe or translate the stories of others and my own is how I take back my agency. I am a cultural practitioner, but not an open book. As a means of protection and survival, I have to hold back.<sup>28</sup> Learning from Black redaction and annotation: To practice non-White, non-cis, non-het redaction and annotation, allows marginalized communities to share their stories with past and future ancestors. It protects us from the glutinous gaze of White colonizers.

I need to be careful with the fragments of our oral histories when sharing with individuals and communities outside of my own.

These stories are not meant to be easily consumed. You have to work for it. Not all of them are sweet. Some are **spicy, bitter, tart, sour, umami, rotten, gone off**. Some are **adult sweet**.

There is a price for admission.

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<sup>28</sup> Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 113. Black diasporic communities and cultural practitioners have always used redaction and annotation to take back their agency from White colonizers who continue to enact violence towards Black bodies and extract from Black lives.

“The death of a language is like the burning of a library.”

- Okoth Okombo, Professor of Linguistics, University of Nairobi<sup>29</sup>

Am I a burning library?

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<sup>29</sup> Anna Corradi, “The Linguistic Colonialism of English,” Brown Political Review, last modified April 25, 2017, <https://brownpoliticalreview.org/2017/04/linguistic-colonialism-english/#:~:text=Okoth%20Okombo%2C%20a%20professor%20of,originated%20in%20Sub%2DSaharan%20Africa.>

*pages in this chapter are intentionally legible only for those accessing a digital version*

*highlight me*

## Stuck in the Archive

I've wondered why I've been so attached to archives. I brushed it off as something I had learned to love as my practice became research-based (\*pst pst\* studying under the watchful eye of Vancouver (Photo)Conceptualists 🤖). Though the media I use varies project-to-project, the practice of creating research—whether that be old-school reading of books or binging reality tv—has been the one constant.

I think it also has to do with the absence of communication between my family and I. My parents and extended family weren't ones to speak about their pasts often. In elementary school, when friends and classmates returned to school on Monday to share what they did on the weekend—hanging out at their grandparents place, eating freshly baked cookies made just for them, learning about their grandparents and parents childhood—I sat quietly, jealous that my grandparents lived on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

The gaps I felt within my family history, I tried to fill with the archive. In my phase shifts, the archive was a physical place containing all the objects I could stuff myself with—what I thought could make me feel whole.

But lately, I have been feeling stuck in the archives. Julietta Singh speaks clearly to these emotions in *No Archive Will Restore You*:

The stories that comprise us have left us both wanting more, wishing we had access to a fuller narrative frame. I call this wishing-wanting desire “the ghost archive.” Everything we need to know but cannot know as we keep circling and sniffing around the edges. Everything that keeps affecting us and affecting others through us. Everything that remains right there, but just out of reach.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the objects I become obsessed with are not ones that have a cult-following within academia. The Good Morning Towels in *bring back as souvenirs* (2019 - ongoing) and the nostalgic dish that all Québécois know in *!FAST AND EASY! A Short and Sweet Guide to Making a French-Canadian Favourite ~Pâté Chinois~* (2021) are prolific in the lives of many—yet have not been documented or studied by North American institutions.<sup>31</sup>

These experiences forced me to rethink what I considered “worthy” or “valuable”

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<sup>30</sup> Julietta Singh, *No Archive*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> I think about whether I could find more information in archives written in other languages that I am not proficient in, but this obstacle I frequently encounter is a central theme and motivation in my work.



I think it's time to break-up with the archive. 💔

These experiences forced me to rethink what I considered “worthy” or “valuable” research material. Instead of idolizing peer-reviewed journals and dismissing websites that don’t end with .org, I repositioned my relationship with materials such as YouTube videos, Facebook groups

<sup>30</sup> Julietta Singh, *No Archive*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> I think about whether I could find more information in archives written in other languages that I am not proficient in, but this obstacle I frequently encounter is a central theme and motivation in my work.

and posts, online forums, personal blogs etc. This was the breath of fresh air I didn’t realize I needed. To rip me out of the thing that had slowly started to consume me.

I thought this was a dead-end: Not being able to find the objects that I love and care for in the archives I was dependent on to validate the importance of these objects, as well as the stories of my communities that they hold. But it became a space for me to believe in their significance without needing 🌟🌟🌟 of approval from institutional spaces where we aren’t welcomed in and that weren’t meant for us in the first place.

In the spaces in-between is a place to imagine different futures for not only these objects, but myself and my communities. I am asked to rethink my relationship to the archive. Whether it was a healthy one. And now I realize I can no longer use it to fill the voids and disconnect I feel with my family, ancestry, and community.

**I think it’s time to break-up with the archive. ❤️**



Within glitch feminism, glitch is celebrated as a vehicle of refusal, a strategy of nonperformance.<sup>a</sup>

The footnote as an armor and a shield, as a place to curl up and rest so we don't curl up, exhaust ourselves and die.<sup>b</sup>

[...] a footnote is our breathing together.<sup>c</sup>

[...] allows us to think spatially and also kind of temporally as well.<sup>d</sup>

Playing with where my stories inhabit, whether in footnotes, hyperlinks, different coloured text, scrambled formations, I “[...] can be as loud or as quiet or as visible or as encrypted and redacted as [I] might choose.”<sup>e</sup>

(footnotes, margins, lines between, closed captions, subtitles, subtexts, description boxes...)

Legacy Russell's writing on queer, BIPOC folks who use glitches and footnotes in their digital domains has made me reflect on the ways I have grown up in these spaces. These online gathering forums have allowed me to learn about my culture, through language and food, historical imagery, as well as teleport and time-travel to places I haven't physically returned to in years.

...

Restaurants and grocery stores are my second home. Most of the memories I have of spending time with my family are of us going to the grocery store to pick-up ingredients (and to beg for that new snack treat to try during dinner prep) for dinner or to share a meal at a Chinese restaurant with extended family. I've spent many hours waiting under outdoor awnings by neon open signs to grab a table for family gatherings of 6 or more. Bamboo plants/arrangements, money trees, miniature electric rolling ball fountains (SOME EVEN CREATE FOG!! 🌫️🌫️🌫️),

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maneki-neko [^.\_^]/[^.\_^]/[^.\_^]/, and other lucky restaurant paraphernalia have become comforting sights for me while living away from home.<sup>f</sup>

I grew up surrounded by objects used in rituals of wishing or to bring good/ward-off bad luck. They are used to listen, hold and send hopes and dreams into the universe. I've always wondered why we bother making wishes or sending prayers to our ancestors or deities when we don't even know if they'll come true. There is something about manifesting one's dreams, releasing them into the unknown, especially during uncertain times.<sup>g</sup>

...

During a recent trip back to Vancouver, I noticed many small business awnings layering the present business name over the old, rather than removing the old cover before installation. I see these as interventionist: a queering, an act of behaving badly.<sup>h</sup> Perhaps it is just a simple act resulting from convenience, but a suspension of time has been enacted. Simultaneous universes, places, histories are made space for.<sup>i</sup>

These signs perform in parallel with Stephanie Springgay's reflections on posters and artistic projects involving "public/ations"<sup>j</sup> in *Feltness*. Springgay quotes Rebecca Solnit when speaking to the conceptual and formal framework of posters as printed matter in one of "a series of publications produced within a semester-long course at OCAD University, Toronto, titled *Pressing Issues* and taught by the artist Shannon Gerard":

These posters are intended to rupture dominant narratives within the curriculum and to provoke alternative ways of understanding and researching the past. Their selections emerged out of the different course public/ations and the students' ongoing conversations regarding 1960s and 1970s activism and its relevance for their lives and communities. According to Rebecca Solnit, these posters further revolutions by keeping them alive: pasted to walls, posters take back the public sphere from corporations and "give it to the radical imagination" (2020, 17). The vitality of street posters, Solnit claims, is "when the walls wake up, they remind us of who we are, where we are . . . that we are not alone, that others have gone before, and hope remains ahead" (18). In an era of eroded public space, protest posters become "small gestures," she contends, that keep alive the power of revolution and hope in the public sphere.<sup>k</sup>

Springgay goes on to underline the importance of printed matter and DIY aesthetics as a tactic of subversion by quoting Dylan Miner:

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Metis artist and activist Dylan Miner (2009, 130) writes, “The tactility and expediency of the print is paramount to its capacity to circulate within wide audiences, without being contained by capitalist social relations.” Handmade prints in an age of mass digital reproduction, he contends, become an embodied form of resistance.<sup>1</sup>

Restaurant awnings and lucky objects, I argue, are also similar to the way artist Josh MacPhee speaks about printed matter in *Paper Politics: Socially Engaged Printmaking Today* (2009). “Public/ations insist on an encounter. They want to be used. But they also gesture beyond the text on a page to a more-than, to publics to come. Banner making is a similar form of public/ation that is both community driven and a form of communication.”<sup>m</sup>

What might initially be read as carelessness (not taking the time to create a new slate) or laziness, is actually the complete opposite. It is an example of how one can care for those that came before, a reminder that there will always be someone/thing after. How do we care for those who have yet to arrive, while thanking the ones who paved desire lines for us to flourish in the various gestures we make everyday?

I think about these objects as layered spaces. Vellum palimpsests that have been carefully erased and written over, but where

pastpresentfuture

become interwoven.

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They are carefully collected

traces,

stories laid over,

under,

tied together.

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Perhaps in this act I can give myself,

my ancestors

and those after me,

a place to nurse.

before floating back up,

the surface once

piercing through

the eye of the storm

To submerge into dark waters,

has  
passed,

---

to find what is next.

...

It was then that I started to wonder over my own body as an impossible, deteriorating archive – a body that had across my life felt both excessive and in-sufficient, oftentimes even monstrous. Abandoning the pursuit of a legitimate archive – one external to me and one that might ensure my professional success and up-ward mobility – I began instead to dwell on the messy, embodied, illegitimate archive that I am.<sup>n</sup>

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map//ping//border//making//crossing//cursing

I see the objects I've grown fond of as bodies. Like the container I find myself in, they hold stories of multiple timelines/spheres of time. The body is fickle: sometimes I feel trapped in it; other times I feel excited by all the things it allows me to feel. I am writing onto/into my cells, hoping those after me can find ways to survive when navigating disparate spaces themselves.

...

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During Lucas LaRochelle's presentation in Hanss Lujan Torres's *Freezer Cheese: Queerer Times* series at Oxygen Art Centre (2022),<sup>o</sup> I jotted down the following notes:

Queer/queering - is a relationality - in conversation with surroundings. Queering as any sort of disruption/vandalism/breaking/taking apart/pulling down/ongoing, active/rest, refusal, negation, slowing down, messing up, gunking up, accessibility disability politics, FISTING AS PRACTICE

When I look back on these words, I think of Tuck and Ree's reflections on the glossary:

In the entries of this glossary I will tell the story of my thinking on haunting. Yet this glossary is a fractal; it includes the particular and the general, violating the terms of settler colonial knowledge which require the separation of the particular from the general, the hosted from the host, personal from the public, the foot(note) from the head(line), the place from the larger narrative of nation, the people from specific places. This glossary is a story, not an exhaustive encyclopedia (which is itself a container), and this story includes my own works of theory and art as well notations on film and fiction. It is a story that seethes in its subtlety—the mile markers flash-faded instantly from exposure. Pay close attention, and then move very far away. I am only saying this once.<sup>p</sup>

My practice is a suturing of fragments, ragged pieces of stories and objects—of past and present, so that I can envision futures, while holding and making room for those before. It is a method of queering through the deliberate act of disruption in text, time, memory, and space.<sup>q</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism* (London; New York: Verso, 2020), 8.

<sup>b</sup> Legacy Russell, AICA-USA Distinguished Critic Lectures at The New School, and Vera List Center, "AICA-USA Distinguished Critic Lecture: Legacy Russell: On Footnotes," (New York: Vera List Center, 2021).

<sup>c</sup> Russell, "On Footnotes," 2021.

<sup>d</sup> Russell, "On Footnotes," 2021.

<sup>e</sup> Russell, "On Footnotes," 2021.

## SEEKING: Community through Collaborations

... what [does] it mean[] to acknowledge and to pay homage to people who can be in the room and people maybe who are not there, but we will hold space for.<sup>33</sup>

Against the idea of the individual genius artist who makes a single valuable art object, printmaking and banner making require techniques available to the many, while also being collective and distributed. When prints, public/ations, and banners circulate, they occupy public space and give voice to political and social issues. Josh MacPhee (2020) maintains that the action of wheat-pasting the Celebrate People's History posters on walls in a city space creates small publics as people gather and engage with the work.<sup>34</sup>

[...] Wynter highlights how he simultaneously knows and feels racism; her reading insists that *knowing is feeling is knowing* [...]<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps the function of communication, referencing, citation, is not to master knowing and centralize our knowingness, but to share how we know, and share how we came to know imperfect and sometimes unintelligible but always hopeful and practical ways to live this world as black.<sup>13</sup> *The text passes from a dreamed- of transparency to the opacity produced in words.*<sup>14</sup> The parentheses enfold and convey, the notes buttress, and they leave shadows.<sup>15</sup> Citing is not easy. Referencing is hard.<sup>16</sup> <sup>36</sup>

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<sup>f</sup> *Lucky Charms* (2023 - ongoing); *Adult Sweetness* (2023). Luck is something that needs to be collected (or ward off, if it's the yucky stuff) by individuals to allow their relationships and partnerships (of various kinds: family, friendship, partnership, work collaborators, etc.). *Lucky Charms* and *Adult Sweetness* pay homage to these common objects found in restaurants (a type of restaurant aesthetic).

<sup>g</sup> *Before We Go* (2021 - ongoing). This installation was inspired by mall wishing fountains and the architecture of circular dim sum tables with lazy susans. It is a space to reflect on rituals of wish-making, to host conversations and dispatch hope into the universe during times of uncertainty.

<sup>h</sup> Leah DeVun, and Michael Jay McClure, "Archives Behaving Badly," *Radical History Review* 2014, no.120 (Fall 2014): 121-130, doi:10.1215/01636545-2703760.

<sup>i</sup> Kwan, Daniel, and Daniel Scheinert, dir. *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. 2022; A24, 2022. Film.

<sup>j</sup> Stephanie Springgay, *Feltness* (Durham : Duke University Press, 2022), 154.

<sup>k</sup> Springgay, *Feltness*, 159.

<sup>l</sup> Springgay, *Feltness*, 159.

<sup>m</sup> Springgay, *Feltness*, 159.

<sup>n</sup> Singh, *No Archive*, 27.

<sup>o</sup> Lucas LaRochelle, Hanss Lujan Torres, and Oxygen Art Centre, "*Freezer Cheese: Queerer Times*," (Freezer Cheese: Queerer Times, Nelson, BC: Oxygen Art Centre, 2022).

<sup>p</sup> Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Linn Holman Jones, Tony E Adams, and Carolyn Ellis. (California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2013), 640.

<sup>q</sup> The footnote then should be a space to make creative trouble, to play and provoke, to ask questions, and to stir the pot, to talk back.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Russell, "On Footnotes," 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Springgay, *Feltness*, 159-160.

<sup>35</sup> McKittrick, *Dear science and other stories*, 60.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

These references are not so much about who is or who is not relevant to the work we do as about how we radically reimagine liberation collectively. *Playing in the Dark*. Naming demands that we ask about the unnamed and honor the unnameable.<sup>37</sup>

...

Camille Turner's *Miss Canadiana* (2001-2019)<sup>38</sup> contextualizes their experience of having immigrated to Hamilton, Ontario at a very young age. As a Black child growing up in a primarily White town, she found it very difficult.<sup>39</sup>

My parents emigrated from Hong Kong just before the 1997 Handover. I was born in Richmond, British Columbia, but lived in Vancouver, BC. Unlike Turner, I grew up in neighbourhoods where I was a visible majority: By the time I was entering elementary school, many of my classmates looked like me and came from similar cultural backgrounds. For most of my childhood and adolescence, I didn't feel out of place. It was when I attended a field school in Berlin during my undergraduate degree that this perception changed.

While living in Germany, and visiting other nearby countries, I became very aware of my differences. I was constantly shouted at by White folks across the street in any East Asian language they knew and assumed I spoke.<sup>40</sup> When introducing myself to potential new friends and strangers, people were confused when I answered, "Canadian" to their question, "Where are you from?" The follow-up question is always along the lines of "Where are you *really* from?" I could read the lines on their face, that I didn't fit their idea of what Canadians look like.

Every time I hear Cantonese here, it's like finding home.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>38</sup> Camille Turner, *Miss Canadiana*, Photography and performance, 2001-2019, <https://www.camilleturner.com/miss-canadiana>.

<sup>39</sup> *Camille Turner, Hometown Queen* | *TVO Arts*, (TVO Today Docs, 2022), <https://youtu.be/9EUc7-QgHXc>.

<sup>40</sup> One time I was followed and repeatedly harassed while visiting the 2017 Venice Biennale.

As an artist (and any cultural practitioner, really), you are often asked who your audience is.

I've always had a difficult time answering this question. Not because I didn't know who this collective was, but because I was afraid to say it out loud. Because I've seen the way eyes glaze over (especially White folks) when I say my work is about Chinese-Canadian identity and experiences. I am often told that by stating this, that my work will not be accessible. It won't be engaging. It's too boxed in.

But who and what are the systems that are labeling me,  
containing me,  
tying me up,  
in the first place?

Who has decided that there are too many Chinese(-Canadian) stories  
or that only select histories are allowed to be told  
that check all the boxes  
of what you believe I am  
allowed to be

that there isn't enough space

for all of us?

To have decided to pursue art production and education on Turtle Island, in so-called Canada, I've been trained to make my/our stories accessible. It is through meeting co-inspirators/co-conspirators who care for me/our well-being that I finally feel supported and safe enough to ask back: Accessible to whom? I am no longer interested in making art that can be easily consumed by audiences who are not willing or interested in contending with the difficult histories and ongoing violence they and their ancestors have inflicted on other peoples, places, and the more-than-human.

My research continues to be invested in the additions, disappearances and fuzziness that occurs in the translation of materials; text; (moving) images; sound between physical and digital spaces. I see my experiments with this continuous feedback process as a way to understand my in-betweenness: of nationalities, cultures, homes, gender, sexuality, and languages. As a person who identifies as queer, but has only just begun reflecting on my artistic practice through a queer lens, I am working through my own preconceived, Eurocentric notions of what queerness *feels* like. As of late, my studies involve spending time and giving attention to the details within the margins.

Ruminating in

the cut-off,

the leftover,

the negative,

the out-of-focus,

In the dark,

the shadows

the shadows

the shadows.

Infusing storytelling and analytic writing, in analog and digital public forums

for

gathering,

workshoping,

and imagining,

is where I find space to play **together.**

Since the beginning, my practice has been about SEEKING.

SEEKING objects that hold glimpses into our histories.

SEEKING those who are trying to find a place to build community.

SEEKING those who will celebrate my highs AND hold me accountable/call me out on my bullshit/harmful coping mechanisms.

SEEKING other awkward bodies who struggle with remembering what that vegetable is called in their mother tongue of their diaspora.

SEEKING others who want to let our minds dance,  
as we imagine what our futures can look like together.

♥ SEEKING you. ♥

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