

Outta This World

An Exhibition of Installation/Drawing/Performance/Video/Mystic Objects

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Outta This World is a multidisciplinary show comprised of drawing, video, music, performance and installation. It was initiated by my interest in the concept of the nation-state, more particularly Canada, and the way it imposes certain identities on its citizens through violence and repression. Using strategies of humour, abject beauty, social engagement and ritual, my work proposes alternate possibilities for Canadian identity through a difficult, yet ultimately beneficial process of de-repression.

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Section 1: Manifesto

I demand nothing less than the creation of a Canada that is more fantastic, more fabulous, more wondrous, more glamorous, more mystical, more spiritual, more positively sexual, more sensual, more romantic, a place that makes people feel more empowered and attractive, combatting repression; a Canada that is inclusive, a Canada that transcends all borders and repels evil as it ventures out into the cosmic!



(fig. 1) Robert Dayton. *Blossom*, 2014, app. 65 cm. by 98 cm, ink, watercolour, glitter, collage on paper.

Section 2: Introduction

Outta This World is an outcome of my thinking about the concept of the nation-state, in this case Canada, and the way it imposes specific identities on its citizens. Through performance, drawing, video, and installation, my interdisciplinary work proposes alternate possibilities for Canadian identity via the difficult yet ultimately beneficial process of de-repression.¹ In his work *Eros and Civilization* critical theorist Herbert Marcuse explores the roots of repression (and ultimately proposes forms of de-repression) in the Western concept of civilization. He asks, “[d]oes the interrelation between freedom and repression, productivity and destruction, domination and progress, really constitute the principle of civilization?”² For Marcuse repression is an all-present condition impacting all spheres of life. He sees it as embedded in the tenets of Enlightenment philosophy and the project of modern state building in any nation-state.³ The work of moving away from repression to incorporate creative, artistic acts as forms of de-repression is at the core of Marcuse’s book and is the crux of my work.

The goal of my work is to achieve a sense of wonder in all who engage with it and to have this sense of wonder dissolve repression. I see this sense of wonder as embedded in experience of art, pleasure, and freedom—all qualities that can undo repression as Marcuse defines and critiques it.⁴ I often accomplish this through heightened, lively, interdisciplinary visual concepts and elements. In *Outta This World* I both propose and create a possible world—a world imbued with wonder, a version of de-repressed Canada

¹ When I use the word ‘de-repression’ I mean the elimination of repression. De-repression is not a term used by Marcuse but is in keeping with his theories.

² Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) 4-5.

³ Ibid, 87-88.

⁴ Ibid, 172.

that moves away from the constraints of the nation-state, becoming something entirely different.

The aim of *Outta This World* is to bring about a non-repressed society and, at the very least, help those who visit my show to become less repressed. Furthermore, my work provides a critique of Canada as a nation-state. I accomplish this by using strategies of humour, social engagement, and abject beauty. Among these more specific themes arise, such as romance, post-nationalism, borders and violence. While utopian in nature my criticism and propositions are serious.⁵

⁵ It should be noted that Marcuse does not view a non-repressive civilization as utopian.⁵ By his definition, in its relationship to non-repressive civilizations, a utopia is an idealistic fantasy and therefore impossible to achieve (though Marcuse very much believes that non-repressive civilizations are possible). However, when I use the term utopia I refer to Richard Noble's definition, found in his introduction to *Utopias* that describes a better place, one that is always becoming and progressing, not necessarily a perfect place, yet one that is real and possible.⁵ See Richard Noble, "Introduction//The Utopian Impulse In Contemporary Art," *Utopias*, Ed. Richard Noble (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009) 12. Therefore while I employ Marcuse's language and terminology, I am not adopting his definition of the word 'utopian.'

Section 3: Analysis of the Work In Visual Terms

Outta This World is an exhibition comprised of drawing, video, music, performance and installation. All of these elements are designed to connect to each other but can also be viewed and interpreted individually. In comparison to my previous work, text is minimized in an effort to achieve the ineffable.

The visitor must enter –and ultimately exit– the show through a pair of stanchions that I have titled *Orgone Stanchions*. These stanchions are wrapped in layers of steel wool and cotton. A metal bucket with the words “WON’T YOU SIGN THE GUEST BOOK” sits nearby. Inside the bucket are seven Canadian pennies submerged in a small amount of human urine.

Hanging on one wall are several large-scale pen-and-ink drawings of varying shapes. These shapes are often created through ripping and including elements of collage. Projected on to some of these drawings is a stop-motion animated video of seven pink maple leaves fluttering and undulating in various configurations. Accompanying the video is a soft NEW HORIZZZONS (Craig Daniels, Michael Comeau, Robert Dayton) soundtrack of guitar, drums and wordless vocals playing softly throughout the space. Overlapping the music is the sound from a video hanging on the back wall. The video, entitled *FLAG*, features The Canadian Romantic, one of my performance characters, grunting as he labouriously struggles to eat a Canadian flag.

Several objects that I term “mystic objects” are placed mostly on the floor between the video and the drawings. These “mystic objects” are echoed throughout the exhibition and represent a personal mythology that structures and unifies the different material diversity of the show. For example, the red and white candles (part of the

“mystic objects”) are artifacts from the videos of *The Canadian Romantic*, who lights candles at the beginning of the video to establish a mood. Some of the “mystic objects” – such as the circle of Lowney’s Cherry Blossom candies, the maraschino cherries and the red and white candles– are all referenced in the drawings. The Cherry Blossom candies are also used in the small-scale photos placed into a paper folder labeled *Story Of the Cherry Blossom*. In my mythology all of these visual elements refer to the Canadian national identity, Canadian flag, and other accouterments of the state, mostly through the colour scheme of red and white.

The drawings are rendered in black ink along with bursts of red, white, yellow and brown. In keeping with the open-ended, tactile and organic nature of my aesthetic, I have chosen to avoid rigid grid structures in both the format and installation of the drawings. Consequently, the paper is often ripped with additions of collaged scraps of paper, fabric, and fake hair. In fact, much of the work in this exhibition is tactile and hints to my corporeal interaction with the various elements of the exhibition. This is echoed in the “mystic object” entitled *Cherry Cold Cream* which is a bowl of cold cream containing trails of finger marks and a cherry with a knot in its stem, alluding to the fact that it may have been tied into a knot by someone’s tongue. This is also evident with the eating of the Canadian flag in *FLAG*, in the half eaten Lowney’s Cherry Blossom candies, and also in the urine at the entrance to the exhibition. There is an over-arching sense that the body –perhaps my body, has touched, manipulated, or interacted with every element in the show.

Across from the drawings, on the opposite wall, is a glossy photograph of SUPPORT, another character that I perform. This character will perform at various times

during the exhibition. When performing, SUPPORT will sit on one of two beanbag chairs in front of the photographs and will invite the visitor to sit and interact with him.

SUPPORT will quite literally be there to listen and support the visitor. He also shows support by softly asking the visitor questions and responding affirmatively to what the visitor has to say.



(fig.2) Robert Dayton and Brian Limoyo (photographer), "Support #2", photo, 2014, size tbd (life size)

Section 4: The Process of How the Work is Constructed and Why

My inter-disciplinary studio practice often incorporates one or two different mediums that bleed into each other. They play off of their respective commonalities and differences as they help bring about the creation of a possible world, a version of Canada that is one of wonder containing the qualities of art, pleasure, and freedom that Marcuse believes can undo repression. The exhibition is designed to guide the visitor through different mediums that comprise the installation. The sounds from the different projections inter-mingle with each other throughout to create a more complex environment over all for the visitor.

Upon entering *Outta This World* the visitor passes through the gateway of *The Orgone Stanchions* consisting of two stanchions with an undone red velvet rope. Many nightclubs –most infamously Studio 54– have used the red velvet rope as a mechanism that limits entry allowing only the exclusive or those deemed ‘appropriate’ or desirable access to the venue; furthermore this barrier is commonly used in institutional settings such as museums, galleries, banks, and government buildings to designate spaces which are not open to the public, but accessible to a select few. Deliberately and continuously left undone, the red velvet rope in *Outta This World* signals that this space is open to everyone. More than just a physical or symbolic entry point, the stanchions, which are wrapped in alternating layers of non-metal and metal material, function as Orgone accumulators.⁶ Orgone accumulators were devised by radical psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, and were designed to harness a powerful type of life-affirming cosmic energy that Reich termed ‘orgone.’ Reich believed that orgone had the power to de-repress as well as

⁶ “What Is Orgone Energy & What is an Orgone Accumulator?,” *Organics.com*, Organics, 1999-2015, Web, 14 Feb. 2015.

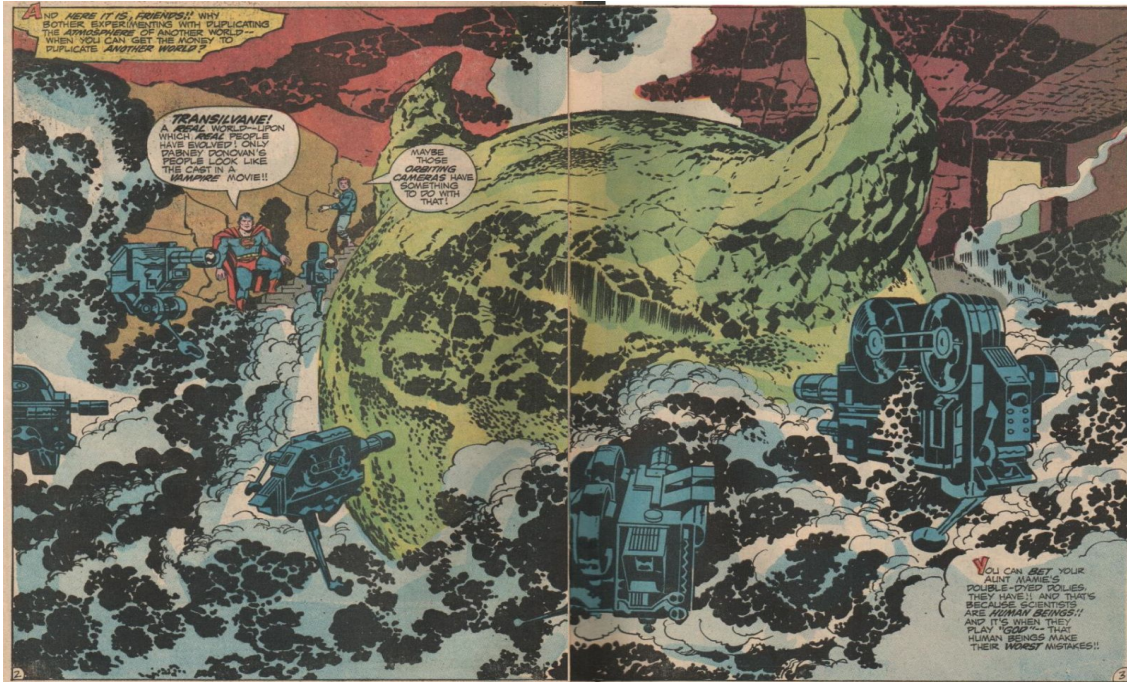
heal the user from disease.⁷ His ideas were embedded in a belief in radical, utopian transformation of the social sphere through a process of de-repression (a mixture of psychoanalytic theories, Marxist ideas, and creative expression). In keeping with Reich's radical theories, I imagine the space of this exhibition as a place for de-repression. The visitor will begin the process of de-repression once they walk through the *Orgone Stanchions* and continue on into a different realm.⁸

Dusan Makavejev's film *W.R. Mysteries Of the Organism* explores Marcuse's theories of repression as well as the work of the radical psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich. This is most evident in the film's pivotal scene where one of the main characters, a soviet figure skater and a national symbol, cuts off the head of the leading female character as an act of sexual repression. After her violent murder the protagonist's disembodied and still breathing head says, "Cosmic rays streamed through our coupled bodies. We pulsated to the vibrations of the universe..."⁹ These cosmic rays –also known as orgone in Reich's theories—are what I evoke in my drawings through explosive lines and shapes that are influenced as well by the unique visual aesthetic of comic book artist Jack Kirby. Kirby created many possible worlds and new archetypes in his art that heavily invoked both the cosmic and the spiritual. Kirby would induce these cosmic and spiritual concepts

⁷ *W.R. Mysteries Of the Organism*, Dir. Dušan Makavejev. 1971, Criterion, 2007, DVD.

⁸ As my show operates on a metaphysical level suggesting possible alternative worlds, the Orgone Stanchions therefore reference as well the twin waist-high metal poles that operate as a gateway into a mysterious dimension in the *Phantasm* series of horror/fantasy movies. See *Phantasm*, Dir. Don Coscarelli, 1979, MGM, 1999, DVD.

⁹ *W.R. Mysteries Of the Organism*.



(fig. 5) Jack Kirby, two pages from “Genocide Spray!” *Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #143, print, 1972.

visually through drawings of cosmic rays and bursts.¹⁰ With *Outta This World*, I want to inspire change and transformation, as illustrated by these depictions of cosmic rays and bursts, to cause de-repression.

A central theme of *Outta This World* is the elimination of repression through the process of transformation. This notion of transformation utilizes the concepts of alchemy and individuation that are both connected through urine. Near the entrance of the exhibition is a metal bucket containing seven Canadian pennies and a small amount of human urine with the words “WON’T YOU SIGN THE GUEST BOOK” written on the

¹⁰ In a box of old comics given to my brother and I by our Grandma, one coverless comic in particular grabbed ahold of me, partially due to a love of horror movies and monsters. In this comic book or ‘mystic object’, the artificial humans became monsters flying around in coffin spaceships after horror movies were projected on to their newly created, miniaturised world. See Jack Kirby, “Genocide Spray!” *Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #143 (Nov., 1972) Print. The movies affected the inhabitants of this possible world. As a work of art, that comic book by Jack Kirby affected me.

front of the bucket. The ancient and mysterious practice of alchemy is a means to create transformation and urine is often used for this process through numerous experiments and methods such as distillation, boiling, and extraction. Whether such means were successful in the application of transformation, such as turning common metals into gold, is

uncertain.¹¹ According to *The Encyclopedia Of Magic and Alchemy*, urine “...represents the unconscious and creativity and is also a name for Prima Materia, the basic material of the cosmos. In depth psychology, Prima Materia is the state of conscious chaos at the beginning of the process of individuation.”¹² Both Prima Materia and orgone are cosmic energies and could very well be one and the same.

The large drawings in *Outta This World* extend out towards the cosmos, away from the existing Canada, both figuratively and metaphorically, to gain the process of individuation -which is defined as a process of moving beyond identity.¹³ These depictions of individuation are illustrated through mutating and shifting representations and symbols of both male and female genitals as well as hybrids of both. Smearred lines of ink as well as the shapes of furry ribbons, distorted dish bottles and seductive red lips repeatedly bend and morph. The drawings often extend beyond the edges of the paper

¹¹ The human urine in *WON'T YOU SIGN THE GUEST BOOK* is also a reference to Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*, one of the very first installations in the history of the 20th-century Modernist art. In *Beyond The White Cube*, one of the key texts on installation, Brian O'Doherty writes that “Kate Steinitz, the Merzbau's most perceptive visitor, noticed a cave ‘in which a bottle of urine was solemnly displayed so that the rays of light that fell on it turned the liquid to gold.’ The sacramental nature of transformation is deeply connected to Romantic idealism...” Brian O'Doherty, *Inside The White Cube: The Ideology Of The Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1999 edition), 45. Schwitters often referenced alchemy in his art and *Merzbau* was an evolving installation continually in a state of transformation.

¹² Rosemary Guiley, *Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy* (New York: InfoBase Publishing, 2006) 323.

¹³ Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) xv.

that normally work as a border, or a confinement, and in my mind function much like the restrictive border of the nation-state. These movements beyond the confined rectangular shape of the sheet allows the drawing to extend the space through collage and create empty space by means of ripping into sections of the paper –be it in the middle or on the outside edges. By subverting and moving beyond these borders they are symbolically showing resistance to the nation-state. Repeated depictions of flying saucers show the journey beyond borders into the vast unknown of space. Similar in colour and appearance to the flying saucers, variations of halos signify the spiritual ascension that I see as working in conjunction with the cosmic elements to dissolve repression.

Canada’s representation of itself as a place of authentic nature is false. In Joris-Karl Huysmans’s *Against Nature*, a novel heavily influenced by the ‘glam’ movement and its use of artifice, the main character recreates and even betters nature.¹⁴ The stop-motion animation loop of pink maple leaves projected on to the drawings reference this idea and symbolise an un-repressed reinvention of the flag of the nation-state of Canada. These leaves are seven anthropomorphic objects that push for individuation as they freely copulate with each other in numerous configurations. Blurring the line between subject and object, the leaves becomes alive through movement; they contort to become more psychedelic as they push the confines of identity.

Several sculptural pieces that I term “mystic objects” occupy the left corner of the gallery space. My “mystic objects” evoke and humourously update those used in enactments of magic rituals in numerous European erotic horror films and in the 1940’s

¹⁴ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, Trans. Robert Baldick (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971).

American horror films such as *I Walked With A Zombie*.¹⁵ The rituals in European erotic horror films, mostly done to effect change or as a way to gain power, often use such objects as ancient-looking knives , as well as candles. My “mystic objects” are often more modern, playful, and Canadian, such as the Lowney’s Cherry Blossoms candies. *I Walked With A Zombie* dealt with voodoo in a realistic manner. In one scene the protagonist slowly drifts with the zombie through the woods to encounter a few “mystic objects”; these objects appeared to glow in the dark. It is that illuminative power that I hope to bring across through my own mystic objects, though it may take an actual light bulb to help make this happen.¹⁶ The “mystic objects” in *I Walked With a Zombie* are never fully explained, they appear to be connected to a ritual of reanimation that happens at the end of the pathway through the woods. As mysterious as they are, they still appear deeply powerful.

Another method of dissolving the borders of the Canadian nation-state is the placement of a circle of seven half-eaten Lowney’s Cherry Blossoms candies that ooze a trail of syrup leading to a red and a white candle in the centre. Surrounding the Cherry Blossom candies is a circle of salt inside of a broken circle of soil. In voodoo (or hoodoo) and other forms of magic salt is used for protection and purification from evil forces.¹⁷ Being of the earth, the border of soil symbolizes the actual land of Canada and its artificial nation-state border. The salt is inside the symbolic national border because I am

¹⁵ *I Walked With A Zombie*, Dir. Val Lewton (1943, RKO) Warner Bros., 2005, DVD.

¹⁶ Although not in the show, as a sigil that has actually made people feel more attractive, ‘The Canadian Romantic Winking Pic’ is an art object/ mystic object from the lenticular tradition of winking Jesus portraits and winking pretty lady postcards –The Canadian Romantic certainly has overlap between the two. The mystic objects in this show aim to make people feel more attractive.

¹⁷ Catherine Yronwode, “SALT,” *Luckymojo.com* (Web. 9 April 2015).

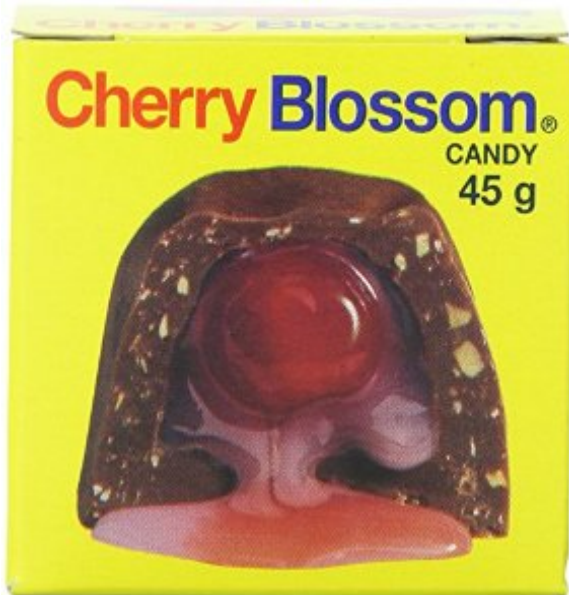
trying to purify Canada of the evil it has contained since Canada's inception as a nation-state. The soil border is broken as a way to break through and away from the National borders of this land.

Hanging from the ceiling above is a bouquet of a dozen long, dead roses. These roses ooze maple syrup, a chief Canadian symbol and export, into a pool on the floor with the words "I LOVE YOU" scrawled into it. The words "I REALLY DO" are written beside it in blood. This "mystic object" is Canadian, melodramatic, camp, and full of abject beauty (see: Section 6).

Being what I perceive to be the ultimate Canadian symbol of abject beauty, Lowney's Cherry Blossom candies frequently recur throughout *Outta This World*. This was a very popular confectionary in Canada and is still sold in stores. The 'beauty' element of Lowney's Cherry Blossom candies can be found in its intense sweetness and decadent silver foil wrapping inside of a canary yellow box. The 'abject' is in the image on the box of the slimy candy bisected; this confection oozes creamy pink syrup once the round maraschino cherry chocolate is messily bitten into. This ooze can appear grotesque. I have encountered many Canadians –including myself– who as children would hold two boxes of Lowney's Cherry Blossom candies over their eye sockets as a ghastly replacement for real eyes. Because of this visual and its symbolic denotation of abject beauty (i.e. taking erotica into transgressive and disturbing areas of the destruction and erotic play of the body, particularly the eye) Lowney's Cherry Blossom is, for me, a Canadian stand-in for Georges Bataille's *Story Of the Eye*, a key text of abject beauty.¹⁸

¹⁸Georges Batailles, *Story Of The Eye*, Trans. Joachim Neugroschel, 1977 (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987).

My use of Cherry Blossom candies as a symbol of abject beauty is another method to undo repression.



(fig. 6) Lowney's Cherry Blossom candy

Resting on top of large swaths of glittery red velvet, another “mystic object” of abject beauty, *Cold Cream Cherry* consists of a maraschino cherry—its stem tied into a knot—on top of a bowl full of cold cream smeared by a trail of finger marks. There are a number of factors that make *Cold Cream Cherry* a “mystic object” of abject beauty. For one, it could be mistaken for a delicious whipped dessert except that on closer inspection the cold cream has a yellowish pallor and one can faintly smell the cold cream. The red syrup from the maraschino cherry seeps into the white cold cream to cause a soft pink haze. As a Canadian symbol, cold cream was often sensually applied to the face as a nightly ritual to counteract the dryness of the Canadian winter by moisturising the skin. The stem of the maraschino cherry, tied into a knot, is influenced by a scene from *Twin Peaks*—a television show that incorporated mysterious spirits, symbols and rituals— in which the character of Audrey Horne puts a cherry stem in her mouth, ties it into a knot,

then removes it.¹⁹ This gesture is simultaneously absurdly humorous and erotic. Besides its mysticism and humour, I also reference *Twin Peaks* because of its heavy deployment of abject beauty.



(fig. 7) Robert Dayton, *Cherry Cold Cream* (photo documentation by Jane Tingley), sculpture (bowl, cold cream, plinth, maraschino cherry), 2014

My performance character The Canadian Romantic was created from a genuine need to make people in Canada (and beyond) feel more attractive.²⁰ In Canadian

¹⁹ *Twin Peaks*, “Episode Six,” Writer Harley Peyton, Perf. Sherilyn Fenn, ABC, 17 May 1990, Television.

²⁰ Seemingly specific at first in name, the nebulousness of being both ‘Canadian’ and ‘Romantic’ can create a real wide range of movement allowing for a large amount of stream-of-consciousness and the subconscious. Part of the inspiration for The Canadian Romantic stems from a history of romantic spoken word and actor-as-singer albums; these records have a flair for the melodramatic (I have wondered if Vito Acconci is referencing them in his video “Theme Song” which is one long imploring come-on to the camera). A lot of inspiration for my work comes out of collecting. I often resuscitate long-dormant genres to give them new life as these old materials often still have much that we can learn from today. As I discover more and more of these records (beginning with finding “Sounds of Love” through performer Gregg Turkington) I realize that these romantic spoken word albums are more of a genre than I thought, though long forgotten,

Romantic's videos and performances notions of repression are both directly and indirectly explored. He is somewhat mysterious, even cagey; he will create stories that may not even be true.²¹ A firm belief in not having all the answers is part of my practice and allows me to maintain a greater sense of play with the audience. In the video *FLAG* the sounds that The Canadian Romantic makes while eating the Canadian flag can be interpreted as sexual while simultaneously also sounding like a struggle, a gasping for air. Knowing that the nation-state can restrict and repress the senses, The Canadian Romantic transgresses the flag, the symbol of the nation-state by tasting and touching it as a means of moving towards a state of de-repression.

The second performance character featured in the show is SUPPORT. He is far less theatrical and verbose than The Canadian Romantic. SUPPORT comes to life when I take his black satin jacket from the nearby hook, put it on, and transform into him. Surrounded by a wardrobe screen, two beanbag chairs are set up to make an unthreatening atmosphere, or what I would deem a safe space, for the visitor to sit with SUPPORT. Knees gently touch as SUPPORT softly asks the visitor if there is anything that they want to get off their chest. Although SUPPORT will prefer to choose to react rather than act, he guides the conversation to some of the works in *Outta This World* as well and, with minimal prodding, the topic of repression in the visitor's life. Through performance, SUPPORT functions as a guide that employs collaboration to transform the

mostly undocumented and unrecognized as a genre. These records by poets, late night DJs, and actors (Telly Savalas, Peter Wyngarde) are intimate items that one can take home and play, they are romantic and deal in attraction, they serve a form of social need in a way, these voices in a room that set a tone. They often speak directly to the listener like they are trying to seduce them.

²¹ One piece "Notes On Camp" is about him as a little blind girl being sent to camp where she learns about colour from a boy in a disturbing yet sensual manner.

visitor into a participant. On a more intimate level, SUPPORT hopes to de-repress.

Through this transformation, and as a character that is not overtly representative of the nation-state of Canada (unlike The Canadian Romantic), SUPPORT closes the circle on the goals of de-repression in *Outta This World*.

Section 5: Theory

Canada is a country founded on stolen land and genocide. As with other nation-states, Canada promotes its national identity as natural and authentic, arising from the common understanding of the national “being.” This notion of identity, framed through authenticity and normalcy, is an artificial construction, based on a variety of political, social, cultural and other ideologies built up over time and through violence. Herbert Marcuse sees the structure of the nation-state as becoming all-encompassing and repressive, which will ultimately lead to becoming fascistic.²² In the Canadian context this trajectory is in the form of the long-standing simulacra of Canadian identity which boasts of limitless natural resources, vast landscapes and wilderness, that are increasingly becoming more fake –especially in the neo-Conservative political climate that highlights nature while simultaneously destroying it.²³

All borders of the nation-state are essentially artificially created for the means and aims of those who are in power. This artificiality of borders is particularly apparent when one thinks of Canada as a country founded on stolen land. The idea of being Canadian can often seem nebulous. Canada is a vast landmass with a diversity of cultures that cannot be reduced to a single national identity. What exciting imagery does Canada have on offer? Can one de-repress through spiritual and cosmic process? Can we create a different more glamorous and romantic Canada –even for those who are not Canadian– to exist in? I explore and strongly desire to answer these questions affirmatively through the installation of *Outta This World*.

²² Marcuse, 104.

²³ Desmond Cole, “Taking Action Against Bill C-51”, *The Walrus* (16 Mar 2015, Web) 9 April 2015.

In my work I choose to oppose the claims of authenticity made by the nation-state through the use of artifice for the creation of an alternative Canada. In *Sweet Dreams*, a book that calls for more openness and positivity in the world of contemporary art, cultural theorist Johanna Drucker writes that, "...artifice, the very essence of artistic activity, is the potent instrument of insight into the machinations of the real and to the constructedness of the 'real' within the shared imaginary of any culture."²⁴ I therefore use artifice to reveal how Canada's national identity is itself a construct.

My possible world, however, is also very much rooted in reality as a way to transcend the nation-state of Canada. I combine artifice and reality as a strategy to critique repression within the context of Canadian nationalism. With Makavejev's film *W.R. Mysteries Of the Organism*, a hybrid fiction/documentary, we can see him employing a similar strategy. The film's pivotal scene—in which the protagonist is decapitated—illustrates the violence that can result from pent-up repressed energies, in this case unleashed in gruesome decapitation.²⁵ Marcuse believed that non-repressive freedom would explode civilization.²⁶ Like Marcuse I am seeking to explode Canadian identity through a sense of play, exaggeration, and the use of fantastical elements as a means of coaxing out these repressed energies.

²⁴ Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) 9.

²⁵ *W.R. Mysteries Of the Organism*, Dir. Dušan Makavejev 1971, Criterion, 2007, DVD.

²⁶ Marcuse, 175.



(fig. 3) Dusan Makavejev, *W.R. Mysteries Of the Organism*, film, 1971 (DVD, Criterion, 2007)

In *Utopias*, Richard Noble writes,

Utopian art...is politically effective because it focuses the mind on the necessity of a radical (revolutionary) break with what is...Perhaps what defines art as utopian is not so much a common aesthetic form as an attempt to model in some way the tension between an immanent critique of the present and a future, radically other condition implied by that critique.”²⁷

Although much of *Outta This World* needs Canada to react with, this tension of a new possible world breaks away from time and space; more specifically, the here and now of the nation-state of Canada, as well as what may come and what has been. Being a nation-state, Canada has always been repressive, however, if we assess it in accordance with Marcuse’s theories, it is also becoming more fascistic.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid, 14.

²⁸ Shannon Gormley, “Oversight can’t sanitize inherently abusive powers,” *Ottawa Citizen* (Ottawa Citizen, 6 April 2015, Web), 15 Apr 2015.

Expansion of the repressive nation-state can stifle spiritual growth.

Documentation of the spiritual practices²⁹ of the founders of the Canadian nation-state is notably absent.³⁰ In fact, most spiritual practices in 19th century Canada were quashed and repressed³¹ with exception of Richard M. Bucke's research. Bucke was an Ontario

²⁹ As they are spiritual practices they would not be of the Catholic and Protestant organized religions.

³⁰ The Source Family, a California spiritual sex commune and organization, created rituals using numerous sources, including the Masonic and Rosicrucian practices of America's so-called Founding Fathers. See Isis Aquarian, *The Source: The Untold Story of Father Yod, Ya Ho Wa 13 And The Source Family* (Los Angeles: PROCESS, 2007). It was these origins of their rituals that caused me to research the nation-state of Canada's spiritual origins (of the invaders and not the original inhabitants) or lack thereof. I asked curator-programmer-publisher Jodi Wille, co-director of the documentary on The Source Family and an expert on spiritual groups, what she knew about their magic rituals. She told me to just make my own rituals. See Jodi Wille, conversation with author, 2014. I was now freed from a fear of not being faithful enough to ritual, of being restricted by it. I could explore my own possibilities. No longer hindered by a false sense of rules, new rituals of my making can help to manifest my possible world to make a new more spiritual and cosmic Canada that is separate from the Canada that we are in now. As a part of my methodology, ritual is a way to get at something or achieve an aim. Even when ritual doesn't always work, the process can teach me things. I also use ritual as a means for social engagement.

³¹ Ged Martin, *John A. Macdonald: Canada's First Prime Minister* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2013) 128-129. Although I could find no evidence of spiritual beliefs or practices in the founders of the nation-state of Canada, there is a long practice of spiritualism in Canada dating back to at least the mid-19th century according to Stanley Edward McMullin's book *Anatomy of a Séance*, which states, "Few have written about the occult in Canada." See Stanley Edward McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance: a history of spirit communication in central Canada* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University, 2004), xii. Spiritualists in Canada in the 1800's were not very public, choosing to gather mostly in small groups of friends and families due to fears of being arrested for witchcraft under The Vagrancy Act. See *Ibid*, pp. 63,19. In this regard, Canada was less open, more conservative, and less egalitarian than America. This ties into my lack of findings on any spiritual practices of The Founding Fathers of Canada. Much of Canada's spiritual movement stemmed from America, particularly New York state which was also the time and place of The Women's Rights Movement connecting with the more feminist and less hierarchical leanings of spiritualism. See *Ibid*, 10. McMullin writes, "Underlying the concerns of these early spiritualists was an inherent acceptance of individual rights and freedoms, especially in the area of religious belief." See *Ibid*, 40. This acceptance goes against the more repressive, fascist leanings of the nation-state that Marcuse describes.

psychiatrist working during Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald's time. Bucke coins the term "cosmic consciousness" in the book of the same name, and details his explorations of the subconscious.³² He defines "cosmic consciousness" as a new awareness for the next stage of human development.³³ This book heavily influenced the spiritualist movement nationally and internationally.³⁴ To me, his "cosmic consciousness" can help individuals move beyond national discourse and ultimately, beyond repression. Similarly, Marcuse writes about the restrictive effects of the nation-state on the individual's consciousness, which I believe prevents people from moving towards a state of cosmic consciousness.³⁵

Related to "cosmic consciousness" is the term "psychedelic" that roughly translates to mean "mind-altering." This word was coined in Saskatchewan through Dr. Humphry Osmond's letters to Aldous Huxley during Osmond's experiments with the mind-altering drug LSD in the mid-twentieth century.³⁶ Some of these experiments included giving LSD to alcoholics, which gave some of them a spiritual experience to cure them of their alcoholism (Jung believed that it would take a spiritual experience to cure alcoholics).³⁷ As a nursing student in Weyburn, my mother was asked to volunteer for one of the LSD experiments.³⁸ I believe, however, that one can reach a psychedelic

³²S.E.D Shortt, *Victorian lunacy: Richard M. Bucke and the practice of late nineteenth-century psychiatry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 162.

³³ Ibid, 112.

³⁴ Stanley Edward McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance: a history of spirit communication in central Canada* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University, 2004), 121.

³⁵ Marcuse, 100-103.

³⁶ David Collier, *Humphry Osmond: Psychedelic Pioneer and The Doors Of Perception* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 1998).

³⁷ Carl Jung, "Letter to Bill Wilson," 30 January 1961, *Barefoot's World*, 9 July 2001, Web, 16 Feb. 2015.

³⁸ Margaret Dayton, conversation with author, 2000's.

state without the use of drugs. In contradiction to the origins of the Canadian nation-state, through enactment of cosmic consciousness and the psychedelic, I strive for my creation of a new Canada. Marcuse writes, “A new basic experience of being would change the human existence in its entirety.”³⁹ Both cosmic consciousness and the psychedelic are transformative concepts that aim to provide this experience of being.

These transcendent concepts are more difficult to envision with Canada’s current massive shift towards right wing⁴⁰ and towards a neo-liberal, post-national landscape. In the recent book *Negotiations In A Vacant Lot* Cultural Studies expert Imre Szeman writes,

“Even if the nation is a social and political fiction that has to be repeatedly and forcefully imagined into being, it is a fiction, it is a fiction that has taken material form, most prominently in that entity called the nation-state. Borders, police, controls over movement and access to resources, social institutions, funding agencies, all manner of material histories and social lineages- these are but some of the structures that have come into existence via a national imaginary.”⁴¹

This nation-state is a fiction yet it still has great power that can cause very real consequences.⁴² Although promoted otherwise, Canada –as with all nation-states– has always been artifice. Thus it becomes important for me to create a possible world of a transcendent Canada that dissolves borders.

³⁹ Marcuse, 158.

⁴⁰ Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson, “Introduction,” *Negotiations In a Vacant Lot*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal & Kingston:McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014) 12.

⁴¹ Imre Szeman, “Out With the New,” *Negotiations In a Vacant Lot*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal & Kingston:McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014) 109.

⁴² Richard William Hill, “The Vacant Lot: Who’s Buying It?” *Negotiations In a Vacant Lot*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal & Kingston:McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014) 173.

Outta This World reacts against the nation-state by moving beyond identity, in its perpetual state of becoming.⁴³ It is this becoming, the act of creation, that goes against the destructive progress of civilization to hopefully de-repress and eliminate suffering.⁴⁴

According to Marcuse, cultural repression in the confines of the nation-state is all encompassing, permeating all aspects of life.⁴⁵ He writes, “We have suggested that the individual’s awareness of the prevailing repression is blunted by the manipulated restriction of his consciousness.”⁴⁶ This means that the individual cannot move to a state of cosmic consciousness and therefore remains repressed. According to Marcuse a nation-state becomes more fascistic with “...the control of information, with the absorption of individual into mass communication, knowledge is administered and confined.”⁴⁷

To undo cultural repression Marcuse suggests “...the demonstration of the inner connection between pleasure, sensuousness, beauty, truth, art, and freedom...”⁴⁸ through the aesthetic play that results from the liberating qualities of art. As well, the taboo on perversions must be eliminated to free oneself of sexual repression.⁴⁹ This de-repressed sexuality would be transformative,⁵⁰ even on a spiritual level, to transcend⁵¹ to a higher

⁴³ Manning, xv.

⁴⁴ Marcuse, 87-88.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 99-100.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 103.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 104.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 172.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 199.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 201.

⁵¹ Ibid, 211.

level of unity. The aesthetic play that occurs in *Outta This World*, along with works of abject beauty, aims to achieve this goal.⁵²

⁵² Myth building was a large part of the heavy promotion of Canadian art in the 1970's. Although her work was complex and questioning of Nationalism, Joyce Wieland -as well as Greg Curnoe and others- were folded into Canadian art history under the banner of Canadian nationalist art shaped during the heavily funded 1960's and 70's. See Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Development of Feminist Strategies in the Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland," *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, Ed. Kathryn Elder (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1999) 115. Indigenous and non-white artists were ignored, only now to have their work be included, subsumed as part of the voice of the nation-state. See Erin Morton, "Preposterous Histories of the Present," *Negotiations In a Vacant Lot*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal & Kingston:McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) 26-27. By being subsumed into this National narrative, even subcategorized, this work may be rendered toothless. With my own inclusive possible world that takes a holistic approach to a new myth via performance and other means, a place created outside of colonization, a possible world aiming to exist outside of neo-liberal and capitalist constructs and controls, I now glibly ask an uncertain question: What of those who don't want to be included?

Section 6: Concepts

The sense of wonder in *Outta This World* is created through a larger than life artifice connected to concepts taken from the glam rock tradition, humour and abject beauty. I inherently use the language of these concepts throughout my work as a way of exploring de-repression, identity, politics and culture.

Although glam rock was active primarily in the early 1970's, it still has relevance today through the continuation of glam culture and its forward-thinking explorations of time, space and identity. I am interested in the nebulous characteristics of glam, particularly in how it smears borders and often deals with cosmic lyrical themes. Glam is artifice showing us possibilities; amidst the still lingering tendency to disregard what isn't perceived as 'authentic', glam's aestheticism is anything but neutral. Glam often combines both past and future to create a hybrid that is in itself a contradiction, a blatant disregard for linear time. It provocatively explores notions of identity through affect⁵³, heightened appearances, and gender ambiguity. In its original form, glam rock used the idea of the alien to symbolise notions of 'the other' and therefore opened the door to gender play, which is also tied to the notions of camp and participatory spectacle.⁵⁴ I am

⁵³ Affect as I use it is a term that has been in use in critical theory in the past decade or more and refers to the way in which people experience a state of varying degrees of intensity that is non-conscious and beyond meaning, in terms of popular culture affect is powerful to many people who are invested in it. See: Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There A Fan In The House," (from *The Adoring Audience*, 1992); Lawrence Grossberg, Interview: "The Organization of Affect: Popular Music, Youth and Intellectual and Political Life," *Taboo 2* (1995), 109-131; Lawrence Grossberg, "Affect and the popular" (from *We gotta get out of this place*). *Maska* (Slovenia), vol. 24 (nos. 125-6), Autumn, 2009, 6-13).

⁵⁴ Glam rock strongly used camp, a primarily gay sensibility, though one need not be gay to use camp. See Jack Babuscio, "Camp and the Gay Sensibility," *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, David Bergman, ed. , (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993) 20. Unlike kitsch, camp is much more knowing and inside with its' humour. In

particularly interested in how these ideas as they relate to my character The Canadian Romantic, who breaks down gender barriers and social constraints through the use of costuming and glittery make-up. These ideas also manifest in my drawings that, for example, use playful genital allegory as well as colourful images of the contortion of genitals.



(fig.4) Robert Dayton, The Canadian Romantic promotional photo (photo documentation by Craig Irving), 2011

defining camp Jack Babuscio writes in *Camp and The Gay Sensibility*, “Four features are basic to camp: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor.” See Ibid.

Humour is found in all aspects of my work: I use it in an attempt to be more intimate with my audience (as well as myself) and less constrained as an artist. In *The Artist's Joke*, curator Sheena Wagstaff writes, "By using comic iconography, artists do the same thing as making a joke: perturbing, provoking laughter, attacking presuppositions and conventions." Therefore we can argue that the opposite of seriousness and convention is often defined as humour. Humour involves a sense of play. Humour is an effective tool that I use to eliminate repression. Marcuse believes that freedom can happen once reality is no longer serious.⁵⁵ This loss of seriousness is tied to a sense of play, the opposite of toil, which Marcuse says leads to beauty.⁵⁶⁵⁷

Another key concept I deal with is abject beauty; like humour it acts as a tool of de-repression standing against convention and repression. In the essay *Approaching Abjection* cultural theorist Julia Kristeva believes that the abject can alleviate repression. It does so by forcing the subject to face horror and repulsion, reactions that often emanate from within the self. Working through repression one may be able to move beyond the self, empathizing with nonhuman values. For me, both abject and beauty strive to overcome repression and move beyond the self. While introducing the concept of the

⁵⁵ Marcuse, 187.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Freud writes, "Heysmans (1896) explains how the effect of a joke comes about through bewilderment being succeeded by illumination." See Sigmund Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious//1905," *The Artist's Joke*, Ed. Jennifer Higgie (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2007) 27. Bewilderment and illumination are often elements of the sense of wonder. This sense of wonder is created in my work through a larger than life artifice connecting to the modes of humour, most notably the camp aesthetic used in the glam rock tradition. With a fear of causing a negative impact with the best of intention, through humour the mistakes can be built in. For example, one source of humour is my personas giving terrible advice and having the attendee become illuminated, achieve awareness, that the advice is terrible. Humour can be a methodology aimed at getting to truths.

abject as one of ambiguity, filth, and immorality, Kristeva argues that, “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.”⁵⁸ The abject, therefore, disturbs the relationship between the subject and the object, invading the porous borders of subject’s identity. I see this as a way that one could overcome repression, and in my work it serves the same purpose as humour.

I find that striking examples of abject beauty are found in a particular genre of European erotic horror cinema. These films are often baroque in nature and are simultaneously stylish and absurd. Using these films as inspiration, my work borrows visual elements such as red and brown velvet, candles and blood in order to create a cinematic atmosphere that is equally melodramatic as it is sensual and erotic. These films employ an element of abject beauty called *jouissance*, which I also use in my own work. Kristeva defines *jouissance* as willing, transgressive pleasure. *Jouissance* is a cathartic confrontation of taboo.⁵⁹ With these films, a sense of unease is created through lush visuals and the use of such elements as mist, which function as cinematic tools for creating suspense. A key tome of this cinema, *Immoral Tales* by Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, states that “...the cinematic roots of this strange phenomenon can be traced back to what the French call the ‘*fantastique*.’ If it’s ‘*fantastique*’ it has to be erotic, way out and fabulous. Linear narrative and logic are always ignored in a ‘*fantastique*’ film.”⁶⁰ The *fantastique* is abject by virtue of its aesthetic structure; it is beautiful with disturbing

⁵⁸ Julia Kristeva. “Approaching Abjection,” *Powers Of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

⁶⁰ Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, *Immoral Tales: European Sex And Horror Movies 1956-1984* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1995) 5.

elements of horror. The *fantastique* has a dream-like quality that takes place outside of reality. Similarly in *Approaching Abject* Kristeva writes, “On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safe-guards. The primers of my culture.”⁶¹ With reality seen as destructive by Kristeva, the elements of the *fantastique* that I employ in *Outta This World* are other-worldly and set apart from reality. With the *fantastique* being both erotic and horror, abject and beauty, I hope to heighten the senses of the viewer as a way to lessen constraint (disturb borders) and to allow for further intimacy.

⁶¹ Kristeva, 2.

Section 7: Contemporary Art Practice/Culture:

My work draws on numerous, diverse influences from such visual culture as comic books, as well as music, performance, filmmaking and more interdisciplinary work that combines many of these elements. Three contemporary interdisciplinary collaborative groups that also use many of these components are Forcefield/Fort Thunder in Rhode Island, The Royal Art Lodge in Winnipeg, and the Canadian Psychedoolia group that existed primarily on the West Coast of Canada then spread further. Beginning almost simultaneously in the 1990's, they all focus extensively on a playful, humorous drawing practice. Forcefield performed and recorded very dissonant music and designed elaborate costuming for themselves. The Royal Art Lodge was strongly inter-disciplinary, making drawings, dolls, videos and more experimental folk music with recurring characters that they would create to exist in many of those formats. Many of the artists in these three groups were influenced by the interdisciplinary works of Destroy All Monsters, Gary Panter, The Hairy Who,⁶² and comic books such as those written and drawn by Jack Kirby.⁶³ However, not all of these influences impacted each member of these groups. The *Canadian Psychedoolia* group was so loose-knit that pinpointing exactly who did what or who was part of the group was impossible, although artists working primarily in drawing such as Jason Mclean, Marc Bell, and Amy Lockhart are most often named. This group had also collaborated with The Royal Art Lodge on late night drawing jams when The Royal Art Lodge would visit Vancouver. As a member of

⁶² Dan Nadel. "Introduction," *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present*, ed. Dan Nadel, (Rhode Island: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 2014) 10.

⁶³ Dan Nadel. "Jack Kirby," *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present*, ed. Dan Nadel (Rhode Island: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 2014) 187.

this loose-knit group that was later deemed *Canadian Psychedoolia*, I can say that we influenced and collaborated with each other making the small art booklets that are documented in the collected book *Nog A Dod*.⁶⁴ The only real musical and performative aspects of the *Canadian Psychedoolia* scene are my conceptual musical acts Canned Hamm and July Fourth Toilet which also brought together illustration, posters, costumes (some built by artist Jason Mclean) and collaboration. Every July Fourth Toilet performance and recording had a different theme, with a mandate that no two shows could be the same.

The 1990's was a decade that had a plethora of collaborative musical acts who used performance and conceptual ideas integrated with sound, such as New York's neo-psychedelic Bongwater that featured Ann Magnuson's explorations into the subconscious through her numerous personae (sometimes all at once) and Arizona's inexplicable Sun City Girls who incorporated elements of mask work, confrontation and world jazz into their practice. Many of these acts were based in San Francisco, such as the black light-infused and ergot vision-induced Caroliner (whose songs were written by a singing bull from the 1800's), the deep nerd personae of Three Day Stubble, the transgressive operas of Lisa Suckdog, and intense comedic duo Zip Code Rapists. One could say that this San Francisco tradition stems back to gender bending Glam pioneers The Cockettes. Of the duo Zip Code Rapists, Gregg Turkington is a creator of many nuanced performance personae (such as tragic comedian Neil Hamburger) who, like myself, uses record-collecting to inspire his own work. Turkington has made many records that are to be engaged with as their own immersive environments, including *Final Relaxation*, a

⁶⁴ Marc Bell, ed. *Nog A Dod: Prehistoric Canadian Psychedoolia* (Wolfville: Conundrum, 2006).

meditation album where he performs as a grim narrator gently guiding the listener to death. This dedication to persona, as well as to seeing a joke through to its fully realized conclusion, has profusely inspired me. By being named by Zip Code Rapists and by being inspired by many of these aforementioned acts, my Canadian group July Fourth Toilet were linked to the San Francisco performative music scene of the 1990's.



(fig. 8) Neil Hamburger with Canned Hamm, (photo by Simone Turkington), 2014

If any artist of the last thirty years could embody “abject beauty” it is Mike Kelley. On the surface, my work and interdisciplinary approach connects to that of Kelley in his interest in the abject through the use of stuffed animals and other thrift objects, masks and horror paraphernalia. However, the subject matter is very different. Although his work can be deeply academic, much of his art shows a unique way of dealing with trauma and childhood fears.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Eva Meyer-Hermann and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, editors, *Mike Kelley* (Amsterdam: Prestel Publishing, 2013).

Like Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw is an accomplished chameleon of visual styles. This is something that I have never quite been able to master in my own visual art. In terms of musical connection, both Kelley and Shaw were members of Destroy All Monsters, the Detroit-based group that pushed and expanded many elements of art through the format of a rock group.⁶⁶ Shaw created a matriarchal religion called Oism, a banner under which much of his wide-ranging body of work cryptically falls under –old superhero comic books, religious tracts and his interest in thrift store paintings are all incorporated into this religion that he has created. This invented religion is a valid one for Shaw as are all other religions including the UFO based beliefs of The Unarians. Shaw believes that there are no differences between a “real” religion and an invented one.⁶⁷ Although he calls himself an “agnostic-animist”⁶⁸ my work relates to Shaw’s interest in altered states as a way to dissolve ego. Like Shaw, I have a deep interest in esoteric objects that becomes an integral part of the work. As well, these objects can become fully integrated into the creation of possible worlds.

Along with General Idea, with whom he often collaborated, artist Eric Metcalfe used the creation of “alternate myths.”⁶⁹ These “alternate myths” were actualized through the creation of his own possible world called Brutopia. This is a practice that I, too, engage in through *Outta This World*. As a key figure of “Canadian Glam”, Metcalfe is a mentor and influence on me. In reference to glam, Metcalfe once described himself as

⁶⁶Cary Loren. “God’s Oasis & Other Tales from the Psychedelic Sand Pit,” *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present*, ed. Dan Nadel (Rhode Island: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 2014) 212.

⁶⁷ Darcey Steinke, “Burned-Over: Jim Shaw’s Oism,” *Jim Shaw: The Rinse Cycle*, ed. Laurence Sillars, (Gateshead: Baltic, 2012) 110.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 115.

⁶⁹ Philip Monk, *Glamour Is Theft: A User’s Guide To General Idea* (Toronto: Art Gallery Of York University, 2012) 30.

“...too camp.”⁷⁰ In the catalogue to Metcalfe’s 1992 career retrospective, Peggy Gale shows how the leopard spots that he paints on everything ties in perfectly with glam by describing them to be “...ideal as surface, skin, façade.”⁷¹ I connect with Metcalfe’s use of a personal aesthetic language as well as his creation of persona that goes far more deeply below the surface. Gale writes about Metcalfe’s persona Dr. Brute noting that “Metcalfe, General Idea and others have used the term ‘Image Bondage’ to indicate the inextricability of role and image with an individual’s original character. For a long time Eric Metcalfe WAS Dr. Brute; the assumed character replaced the natural one.”⁷² I am inspired by how his darkly subconscious persona does not break character with a sly wink to let the audience feel safe in knowing that it is all just an act.

Ontario-based contemporary installation artists Fastwurms use Canadian symbols and mystical elements, as do I, but they are practicing magicians who use magic in their work to demystify through such gestures as free haircuts.⁷³ Although their adoption of pirate and witch motifs does seem dated, I am interested in the way Fastwurms employ interesting and unique installation strategies that are often playful and colourful. Fastwurms appropriates and then positions itself firmly in D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) culture even if they do not follow its tenets. They embrace putting themselves under the umbrella of subculture –this may be an exclusionary tactic as a subculture often tries to set itself aside from mainstream culture with its own set of codes. As shown by my *Orgone*

⁷⁰ Eric Metcalfe, conversation with author, 2014.

⁷¹ Peggy Gale, “Eric Metcalfe: Performing The Self,” *Return To Brutopia: Eric Metcalfe Works and Collaborations*, ed. Scott Watson (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1992) 52-53.

⁷² Ibid, 52.

⁷³ Philip Monk, curator, *Fastwurms: Donky@Ninja@Witch* (Toronto: Art Gallery Of York University, 2010).

Stanchions, I want to reach people without being exclusionary; and am D.I.Y. only when it is out of necessity as a way of connecting with an audience. In some of the writings on Fastwurm's work the word "kitsch" often comes up⁷⁴, a word that evokes a patronizing view point. To use the word "kitsch" in reference to an object indicates that one looks down upon it and does not really get inside of it (through being deemed "kitsch" editor and art historian Monica Kjellman-Chapin, in her introduction to the book *Kitsch*, states that the object is positioned "...as low to art's high"⁷⁵). People often confuse kitsch with camp, but camp –which I use in my work– is not patronizing, camp can be more subversively inclined to get inside of the object⁷⁶, sometimes even embracing it or speaking as the object itself.

⁷⁴ Jenifer Papararo, *Donky Ninja Witch: Fastwurms* (Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2008) 13.

⁷⁵ Monica Kjellman-Chapin, "Introduction", *Kitsch*, ed. Monica Kjellman-Chapin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013) xiv.

⁷⁶ Monica Kjellman-Chapin, "From Kitsch to Critical: Mobilizing Kincade", *Kitsch*, ed. Monica Kjellman-Chapin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013) 173-175.



(fig. 9) Robert Dayton, *Leave*, 2015, ink, mixed media, collage on paper, app. 130 cm. by 200 cm, 2015

Section 8: Conclusion

The inclusive Canada of *Outta This World* is one that is de-repressed by my employment of abject beauty, ritual, and ‘mystic objects’ and moving further towards individuation and beyond restrictive boundaries. I attempt to shatter these boundaries through the use of influences such as Glam and the *fantastique* to move towards a psychedelic sense of cosmic consciousness. *Outta This World* is explicitly about making a better Canada through the elimination of repression while also using reworked nationalist symbols as works of abject beauty. Glam, humour and abject beauty can all transcend and even transgress borders. I use humour not only as a tool to create a possible world, a new Canada, but I believe that my use of humour is badly needed in today’s national and international context, for a world without humour is not a world that I want to live in. Humour evokes a sense of play that combats repression. I have a love/hate relationship with Canada. Lately it has been veering towards the latter as the things that I love are eliminated by the current [national climate](#). Hopefully my exhibition and its various elements (installation, drawing, performance, music, video) will at least engage and instill a sense of wonder in the attendee to open up possibilities of transformation, or simply a dialog about the importance of play, humour, and most importantly de-repression in the everyday.

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