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Working Title: Documentation Study

December 2020

Staff lounge, Visual Arts Building at the University of Ottawa

Text on the context of the work

Documentation has a precedent within performance art. Recorded images are prioritized as the proof of the event, but a concession for the lived experience. As a result, the two are often conflated and seen as dependent on each other. Further, performance documentation often has commercial cache and attachments to the value of ownership rather than authorship. The goal of this installation is to present the objects and the conditions pre- and post-performance, and by doing so create an affective space. This offers an experience of the performance *Make Your Bed*, that is beyond visual, working towards the material, corporeal and cerebral.

Central to this discussion is the email sent within the cohort about attending my performance. So much is learned about the event before it happens. Dated October 20, 2020, the email documents a collaborative effort to present work; I negotiated with Professor Cara Tierney to create a schedule, research current public health policies and address how the work will be accessible for distant students. My contextualization is integrated within the scheduling email. Returning to the email in Late November, on the question of how to present documentation to the external panel, I felt it was the perfect paradox of coming to performance art.

If presented the opportunity, I would publish the email in a catalogue as documentation. Catalogues are the space for manuscripts and writing. Craig Owens wrote "...writing is conceived as supplementary to speech. It is of course within the same philosophic tradition which subordinates writing to speech that allegory is subordinated to the symbol. It might be demonstrated, from another perspective, that the suppression of allegory is identical with the suppression of writing."¹ The supremacy of images straddles a similar realm in performance, which can undermine other capacities of the work. The text of the email acts as a memorandum for the performance.

The challenge of presenting documentation became less preoccupied with images and more concerned with the material and administrative conditions of the work. The staff lounge is a satellite space where preparations happened outside the gallery and operates as a palimpsest for presenting the levels of documentation, minimizing the impact of the images.

The italicized portion of the email is printed in the same vinyl that was used in the performance, in order to make a material connection between both spaces and events. Instead of THE FLOOR IS LAVA, the wall text lists ways to engage with the space I perform in. Rather than exacerbate the terms I restate them. The text can operate as a guide to the room; less so a map but the navigation of the space. The materials needed to create the performance occupy the

¹ Craig Owens "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Post-Modernism" *October* Spring, 1980, Vol. 12 (Spring, 1980) 86. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/77857>

large table. The table creates both a barrier and a distancing signpost for the viewer. “This is probably what you would be doing anyway.”²

The sixth kettle is where it naturally lives in the staff lounge. Sylvie, the Visual Art Department’s Secretary, let me use it for the performance, in addition to allowing access to the spaces. I put three photos on the wall behind it because it features the same kettle, taken as I enter gallery 115’s back room. The sink acts as a manifold of the performance timelines. Situated with the photos, it acts as a marker for the middle part, traversing from the gallery to the storage room, while also manifesting the pre- and post-performance activities: filling the kettles and emptying the water bottles.

The back of the lounge reveals what was hidden during the performance. The disco ball is exposed and the song *Walking on the Moon* by The Police plays continuously. On the wall is a photo taken at the end of the original performance. Though the temperature change isn’t as dramatic, the exposed air conditioner and slightly open window reference the physicality of the gallery storage room; much smaller, darker and colder. Instead of looking at me while I perform, there is a small photo on the wall. This photo depicts me standing in front of the dividing walls and THE FLOOR IS LAVA above my head. The photograph marks the apex of the performance when the mirror ball behind the walls is illuminated.

For the duration of the Fall Semester 2020³, the lounge wasn’t totally accessible and occupation was limited. It wasn’t a space where you could gather anymore, and current interactions are brief and transactional in nature: use the microwave, make a coffee, etc. By re-organizing the space affectively, my goal is for the work to provide a cognitive shift, even momentarily. This is not a ‘paradigm shift’ where I anticipate someone seeing the world differently forever. I rather enjoy that moment of potential, that banal activity briefly interrupted and a space reframed. This reframing centralizes on the materialization of fluid states: the performance, planning the performance, and thinking about alternatives to the performance through documentation practices.

² Cara Tierney quoting Laura Paolini in an email, October 20, 2020

³ During Fall 2020, Ontario moved to a colour coded COVID-19 prevention framework. Oscillating between Stage 2 and 3, Ottawa’s final status was Orange (Restrict) as of December 11th 2020 before the Province-Wide lockdown issued December 26 2020. My final critique was on December 18 2020.