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Mobilizing the “Multimangle”: Why New Materialist Research Methods in Public Participatory Art Matter

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ABSTRACT

This research study is focused on new materialist modes of social inquiry and in particular the material-discursive practices that situate all bodies, human and nonhuman, in relations of matter and mattering. The present study investigates the work of the Mobile Art Studio (MAS), a transitory creative research lab that brings participatory art into public space to develop greater community engagement with issues of social justice. We explore MAS's recent performance, *Reconstruction* (2016), as a case study for new materialist arts-based methodologies that decenter the human as an exclusive maker of meaning, shifting instead to focus on the relationships between humans, lived spaces, and creative media. We situate this discourse within Leisure Studies as it is a vital site for developing a broadly interdisciplinary scholarly conversation on arts-based practices oriented toward the public good. The paper first outlines how *Reconstruction* (a sculptural, mixed media, sitespecific, participatory, screen-based project) can elucidate posthuman understandings of the subject/object divide as a multimangle. That is, *Reconstruction's* research design and collected data reveals a research space constructed through the contingent relations between public architecture, the performance installation, the art materials, and participants. These relations offer an understanding of space as agential, containing multiple temporalities, materialities, and affective resonances. We then argue that creative intra-actions with such spaces produce knowledges that are scarcely, if at all, represented in the academy.

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Introduction

“Space ... is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made ... Perhaps we could imagine space as simultaneity of stories-so-far.” (Massey, 2005, p. 9)

On a mild November night that threatens to turn cold, a crowd gathers in a popular urban public square. There is energy in the air, perhaps fueled by curiosity and a bit of uncertainty. Audiences mill about large blank white squares of cardboard hanging six feet high. Old overhead projectors reminiscent of primary school fill the space with images of a city that is both real and imagined. The projectors are flanked by boxes of

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markers that are beckoning to be used by audience members. These audiences move above the space, using the markers to draw the buildings the overhead projectors illuminate on the blank cardboard screens. Afterward, they add their own graffiti images as a response to the more “official” images that have been projected and traced. This is *Reconstruction* (2016), a site-specific public art installation that unfolded over a four-hour period to create a mixed-media sculpture evoking the experience of walking within an urban construction zone. The installation referenced city residents’ recent lived experiences of negotiating road construction in the area. It invited audiences to “re-make” the city landscape into a playful choreography of live animation, projection, and sound. Part sculpture, part projection art, and part performance, *Reconstruction* was mounted by the transitory creative lab space *Mobile Art Studio* (MAS) and exhibited during *Night/Shift*, a public art festival in Kitchener, Canada. MAS situates public art as a vital creative practice that can foster community engagement within urban environments and is committed to bringing art out of the gallery and into public space. In the spirit of MAS, the formal structure of *Reconstruction* encouraged an embodied sense of agency among participants within the exhibition.

Reconstruction’s intention, from its initial stages, was to create a place for city residents to share their ambivalences around the profound changes occurring in their lived spaces within a creative public forum. Collectively, the city is experiencing growing pains that open residents to daily discomforts and uncertainties that are felt and heard in public conversations. The region of Kitchener-Waterloo, with more than half a million residents, is undergoing rapid development as it transforms from a failing factory economy to a central technological and startup hub within Canada. This distinction was cemented with the opening of Google Canada headquarters in downtown Kitchener in 2016. Tied to this is the city’s restructuring of its transit systems, including a light-rapid rail line that cuts across the city radius. These infrastructural developments are unsettling the landscape with the gentrification of formerly working class neighborhoods, turning the city core into a massive construction zone. MAS artist-researchers focused on this sense of general unease around development in the planning of *Reconstruction*. As designers and collaborators on *Reconstruction*, the authors (Brianna and Shana) employed creative research practices to bring to the forefront, for both resident-participants and researchers, the affective resonances of the city’s literal reconstruction at the level of our bodies, memories, and emotions (Figure 1).

Reconstruction’s design plan aimed to imaginatively re-create city blocks on twenty-four 4x4 foot cardboard screens, held up by wooden frames. Each screen represented an actual city-block within the Kitchener-Waterloo corridor. The re-created city blocks were made of collaged photographic images of popular city street sections, which were enlarged onto the screens by the overhead transparency projectors. Viewers were invited to pick up black markers and trace the projected images onto the blank screens. Once the city block was traced onto the screen, it was moved away from the overhead projector into a space where participants could use colored markers to intervene on the recently traced city images on each screen. Participants in this “graffiti” section populated the traced city blocks with various characters and slogans, renamed street signs, and repurposed landmark buildings, collectively and collaboratively reimagining their everyday spaces in creative and personally meaningful ways. Once screens were adorned



Figure 1. Reconstruction (2016) Photo: Sidra Hasan.

with graffiti, they were moved into a geographically accurate ordering of the corridor that spans from downtown Kitchener to Uptown Waterloo. The movement of the city image from photograph and projector to graffiti to reconstructed corridor unfolded in a tightly choreographed performance led by MAS artist-facilitators who wore generic construction attire (hard hats and reflector vests) and adopted the roles of architect, builder, graffiti artist, construction crew, and supervisor. A soundscape of city construction sounds added a backdrop to the choreography, giving the entire event a sense of fluidity and motion that propelled audience participation.

This article explores *Reconstruction* as a case study for the value of new materialist arts-based methodologies. We work from this emerging mode of creative research because it emphasizes modes of interaction and embodiment in seeking tacit forms of knowledge that “reflect new social and other realities either marginalized or not yet recognized in established social practice and discourses” (Barrett & Bolt, 2012, p. 4). In what follows we outline our experience of creating *Reconstruction*, foregrounding our onto-epistemological belief that the material elements of the project matter. Our research is oriented around matter—in particular, the materialities of art-based practices, which include spaces, bodies, and creative materials in relation to one another.

Using a posthuman framework, our analysis of the project traces data “glows” (Maclure, 2013) to decenter the human within creative research practices. In taking up Maggie Maclure’s concept of the wondrous quality of data, we recognize that when data glow they instill in us a curiosity, a fascination that impels us as researchers to follow where the data may take us. We may be moved to thematize, code, and analyze them,

or we may even just pause to reflect on them. In the spirit of looking at “data that provoke and glow,” we frame our key methodological inquiries around “understanding how affect works in the social” (Maclure, 2013, p. 661). In doing so, our reflections on *Reconstruction* shift focus to the “intra-active” (Barad, 2003) relationships between these things. Intra-action in our use here acknowledges how relationships among people, places, and things shape as a process each other in their on-going, shifting formations. Building on these connected new materialist frames, we illustrate our practice-based scholarship below through what we term *research scenes* to describe the layered sites of events, actions, and contestations that play out at various moments in the real-time process of creative research events.

Our reflections here on *Reconstruction* show how the use of new materialist and posthuman methods within creative analytic practice (CAP) offer researchers and participants access to affective resonances within the site of research. Our understanding of affect is grounded in Sara Ahmed’s (2004) writing on affective economies, wherein feelings circulate as a means of creating the surfaces and boundaries that both define and connect us to other people and things (pp. 8–10). These affects orient us toward other people, temporalities, spaces, and places. As Ahmed (2006) notes, “bodies are shaped by contact with objects and others, with ‘what’ is near enough to be reached . . . what gets near is both shaped by what bodies do and in turn what bodies can do . . . Orientations [affects] are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach” (p. 552). This understanding of affect as orientation is crucial to this research—it leads us toward data that inspire and instill in us a sense of curiosity and investment. Further, it underscores affect’s capacity to transfer among bodies, spaces, and things revealing how affect is a determining factor in the relationship between researchers, the artistic environment, experiences, and, ultimately, the project’s creative outcomes. The data that remain after a research event like *Reconstruction* provide an archive of affective glows, enabling an important layer of analysis around the lived experiences tied to our research spaces.

We are interested in how urban public art events, which include the creative materials, audiences, and artists operating within them, are an embodied, dialogic, and experiential “mangle” (Youngblood-Jackson, 2013). Following Youngblood-Jackson, material is not purely produced by human intention, nor does human agency pre-exist or transcend the material; instead, they mutually constitute one another. In this sense the material aspects of participatory CAP can map the affect contained within lived experiences of urban gentrification and development. Building on this notion of the mangle, we focus on the multiple mangles apparent in the screens we were left with when *Reconstruction* was complete. These screens contain mangles from our intentions, desires, and anxieties in the preproduction stage, alongside the inscriptions on the screens by participants during the event itself, as well as our affective responses as researchers to the sculptural objects after the event. We identify these interlocking mangles as *multimangles* because, when taken together, they help us better understand the complex, interconnected affective resonances of lived experiences within urban space during moments of ongoing upheaval and their aftermath.

In what follows, we describe the multimangles present within our creative analytic research scenes through a new materialist, posthuman research framework. In the

spirit of the mangle and its call to explore the relationships around and among events and actions, we first delve into existing scholarship on new materialism, creative practices, and methods as “encounters” rather than a traditional literature review. We explore methodology, ontology, and axiology as they bump up against one another in anticipation of our reflections on the research scene, commenting on how they move us as researchers and how they move the research. As researchers on this research scene, our values and bodies become mangled with the theories and literature we read; this is what draws us into these exciting conversations and explorations with the material and the affective. Echoing the processes used in the development of *Reconstruction*, we situate the manuscript itself as a playful experiment with reconstructing our evolving commitments to overlapping frames, orientations, and practices.

Encounters: posthuman and new materialist mangles

Ontology: immersion in mangled, constitutive relationships with our worlds

As a response to the linguistic turn’s preoccupation with the human subject, a posthuman understanding of the world decenters the human (Hayles, 2015) to acknowledge the more-than-human forces that are always at play. The posthuman subject is constituted in relationship with a world in flux; this subject is relational, observing, and building intra-actions with nonhumans, and environments, while crucially, also being situated along intersections of race, gender, social and economic class, ability, and ethnicity (Braidotti, 2013). A posthuman approach names the forces, events, and actions that shape our experience of the Eurocentric, androcentric, capitalist world we move within. Similarly, a new materialist perspective rejects ideologies of matter as inert, positing instead that matter is dynamic, agentic, chaotic, and self-generative (Bennett, 2010; Frost, 2011). Tying a posthuman frame to new materialist methodology suggests animate (e.g., human and nonhuman animals) and nonanimate materials move each other within relational networks. In *Reconstruction*, we read the cardboard hangings, projectors, participants, and the streets themselves are agentic in their own right, capable of affecting and being affected in the unfolding choreography of the piece. Their constellation at each stage of development in the project determined the work’s continuously unfolding process and archival remains. Employing posthuman methods of social inquiry enables us to focus on the material relationships among researchers, events, the tools of inquiry, and audiences, demonstrating the transformative potential of affective economies at play within such assemblages that help us both understand the material world and change it.

We read our research scenes as constructed spaces in continuous flux and prone to spontaneous change. This ontological position situates the social world as contingent on affects that are (un)consciously created, performed, and dismantled by both humans and nonhumans (Agamben, 2009). Situating research within such affective worlds shifts our focus to the ordinary objects and daily practices—the habits, dispositions, feelings, and power within which these ordinary practices take place and move (Thrift, 2008, p. 139). In analyzing these spaces as complex, “we can no longer see the cultural as sat atop of biology, no longer see the body as a container, no

longer see a Manichean inside-outside division” (Crang & Thrift, 2000, p. 8). The bodies of researchers and participants must be understood as *in* context, wherein “the body acts within an environment that appears to require it to respond in certain ways, but this environment is actually created and organized precisely by means of how people move around it” (Bell, 1997, p. 139). We take up Fox and Alldred’s (2015) (2016 notion of a “research-assemblage” to address this body in context. In a research-assemblage, researcher, data, methods, and contexts are linked together “to do something, to produce something,” namely a view of the affects that make them work (pp. 403–404). The research-assemblage thinks through how discourse and matter are mutually implicated in the world, in place of the hierarchy implicit in valuing language as a solely visual or textual representation (e.g., DeLanda, 2002; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

The research-assemblage of *Reconstruction*’s live performance and its various stages of reproduction are a *multimangle* of practices that became equally informed by the additional layer of mangling of our data analysis at a much later date. The complex entanglements of human and nonhuman materials at each stage (cardboard screens, markers, projectors, researchers, participants, spaces) reciprocally engaged in pushes and pulls of resistance and accommodation that constitute the mangle, whose agency is found in both the material and the actions shaping the material (Youngblood-Jackson, 2013, pp. 272–274). Within our creative practices, the multimangle offers one means for thinking about assemblages as an affective economy that orients us toward data in posthuman ways.

Axiology: world-making through creative practices

As humanities scholars with interdisciplinary ties to fine arts, feminist theory, communication studies, and cultural studies, we investigate the relationships between representation and bodies, noting how creative materials and processes can disrupt spatial and social power relations. We are drawn to existing conversations on new materialism, creative analytic practice, and postqualitative inquiry in the social sciences. As Parry and Johnson (2007) suggest “leisure and the products produced in the humanities are not necessarily distinct discourses” (p. 126). We view the intersection between the two not-so-disparate arenas as a vital site of interdisciplinary scholarly conversation for arts-based practices oriented toward the public good. Our commitment to social justice, creative practice, and community engagement draws us to alternative modes of data analysis advanced by alignments with posthumanism and poststructuralism in leisure sciences. We see here the important overlaps and insights between leisure sciences and our own disciplinary practices. The work of poststructuralist informed leisure studies is to critique the humanist parameters “around what can be thought, lived, and experienced,” asking us instead to consider “what else could *become* in our field, our research, our teaching, and our lives” (Berbary, 2017, p. 729).

Since the early 1990s, we have seen the field of leisure studies expand the borders of traditional inquiry to experiment with CAP to research grounded theory, case studies, narrative inquiry, and ethnography (Berbary, 2015; Berbary & Boles, 2014; Parry, Johnson, & Stewart, 2013). Work done around CAP emphasizes research processes and

the complex, contingent knowledges that arise from the experiences of participants and researchers (Berbary, 2011; Parry & Johnson, 2007). Similarly, the humanities have seen the rise of an interdisciplinary conversation on creative research practices from the fields of theater and performance studies, where practice-as-research (PaR) and practice-based research (PBR) have extensive critical histories (Barrett & Bolt, 2012; Borgdorff, 2012; Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011; Nelson, 2013; Riley & Hunter, 2008). Further, within the Canadian context, recent scholarship from communication studies, media, and fine arts employs the term “research-creation” most frequently in its discussion of arts-based approaches to research (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, Chapman & Sawchuk, 2015; Horowitz, 2014; Loveless, 2012, 2015).

Lisbeth Berbary (2017) notes that our “deconstruction of the linguistic/discursive creates material effects as we open up the possibilities of *wording of our worlds* differently” (p. 731). In part, our methodological framings discussed below respond to Berbary’s call to “do leisure research differently” by focusing, as she suggests, on process, production, and materiality (among others) (p. 733). MAS emerged under the rubric of research-creation within Canada, taking up practices of “creation-as-research,” whereby “creation is required in order for research to emerge” (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 19). The project involves a “gathering and revealing through creation” through which researchers seek “to extract knowledge from the process” (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 19). For us it is in the doing—the “gathering and revealing”—of the multimangled assemblage that the hidden and tacit affective knowledge of the research project is able to emerge (Haseman, 2006). Arai, Berbary, and Dupuis, (2015) argue that moving toward post-structuralist frames allows us to move “away from understanding the individuality of participant minds making meaning” and “towards the ways that we are all constituted through discursive practices as they performatively engage with the material world” (p. 313). This conceptual consideration of the performativity of our actions as world-making “opens [us] up to new re-deployments, multiplicity, contingency, and possibility” (p. 313). In this we heed the call by Parry and Johnson (2007) that CAP scholars foreground our “experience and interpretation of the project as part of the representation of the findings” (p. 124). This enables the production of artistic research that “demand[s] new relationships with research participants, oneself and one’s work” (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 124; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

We believe discussions on research-creation practices can be more productive by placing them in dialog with leisure studies frames. What leisure studies offers in particular is a well-articulated link between creative research practices, social justice, and the affective spaces of lived experience (Berbary, 2015, 2017; Parry & Johnson, 2007; Richardson, 2000). Our research reflections offer one point in this cross-disciplinary dialog on how creative-research methods usefully map the existence of relational materialities in space and time and their links to broader cultural patterns.

Methodology: assemblages animating processes of world-making

Bringing forth a new materialist lens to creative practices can help scholars clarify the inter-relations of public events oriented toward community engagement, including their physical, structural, interpersonal, and embodied configurations. We move from Parry

and Johnson's (2007) view that CAP can usefully elucidate meaning within "the social spaces and cultural contexts of those people being researched" (p. 120). In response, our analysis takes into account the interconnected nature of the research process and data that emerge from and remain after the creative event.

The above-mentioned concept of the research-assemblage impacted our ontological understanding of the research scene, and thus greatly informed our creative-research method for *Reconstruction*. We methodologically employ our assemblages as "complex social configurations through which energy flows and is directed" to "underscore the relationality of affect" flowing "through bodies and things" (Ringrose & Renold, 2014, p. 773). The "ongoing affective intensity" of the "data and research assemblage" (Ringrose & Renold, p. 775) propelling *Reconstruction* mapped the frustrations and fantasies tied to resident's negotiations of the road work and new transit system's implementation. Personal feelings of exasperation from countless residents coalesced around the lived experience of road construction. When residents came together on the night of *Reconstruction*, collective feelings of unease around these invasive projects very much came through, shaping our data. It is impossible that they would not.

In this study, a participant was anything, place, pull, push, nonhuman, and human that emerged on the scene. Our reflections below think through, within, and alongside the multimangle we descriptively reconstruct in order to clarify the affective links across our data. Situating *Reconstruction* as a research-assemblage highlights the links among the multiple material, environmental, and conceptual contexts within the project and how this is refracted in the frames we bring ourselves as researchers. In this way our approach approximates what Phillip Vannini (2015) terms nonrepresentational ethnography, which seeks to "animate rather than simply mimic, to rupture rather than merely account, to evoke rather than just report" (p. 318). We see strong affinities with Vannini's practice, particularly when accounting for "events, practices, assemblages, affective atmospheres, and the backgrounds of everyday life against which relations unfold in their myriad potential" (p. 318). Nonrepresentational ethnography speaks to our emphasis on the multimangle research processes wherein our data archives (the inscribed screens that remain) produce and orient us as researchers toward more the animated affective economies contained within them as artifacts of *Reconstruction*. Our research scenes below reveal the myriad potentials that arise from the convergence of practices, events, and everyday life as they are inscribed on *Reconstruction's* screens and what they evoke for us in the reading of the data after the fact. This leads us to question the effect we had as facilitators on the construction of the artwork/data and, equally, how our experience of the event reorients our research focus (Figure 2).

In the following analysis we outline the affective intensities present within *Reconstruction* at these two different stages of the research creation process: inscription during the event and analysis of them as data after the event. These research scenes seek to draw attention to the everyday affects that circulate around, between, and within the everyday lives of Kitchener-Waterloo residents made available through these inscriptions, and how they spiked by our curiosities and attachments during our postevent analysis. As we re-encountered the cardboard screens, we recorded our discussions of the content found on the screen, mimicking unstructured interview techniques wherein

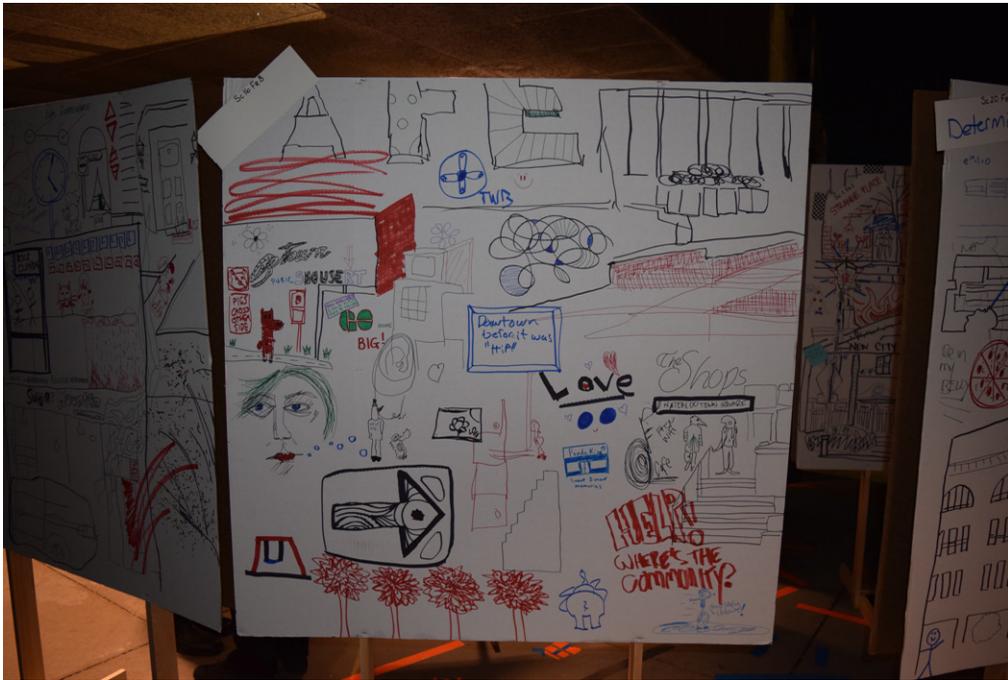


Figure 2. Reconstruction (2016) Photo: Sidra Hasan.

we were open to being led by each other and the screens, following the glowing data and the accompanying discussion in any direction it sought to go. We then transcribed our recordings of the glowing data and the discussions it led to; our analysis stems from these conversations, taking the form of research scenes. In particular, we were both drawn to a series of connecting threads that emerged across the screens. While we do not in the slightest claim or assume a universal or generalizable experience from all participants in regard to the themes we feel emerging across the screens, we do sense these data glowing and as such recognize the importance of emphasizing these glows. Last, in calling these large squares of cardboard “screens,” we seek to draw attention to the temporal, spatial nature of the research process here: locations, milieus, and images were drawn onto these screens at one moment in time, leading to new and different episodes of meaning and description, which directed us to the creation of research scenes.

Analysis: staging the research scenes

We foreground this analysis by acknowledging that memories, thoughts, and actions are produced through the spaces in which we find ourselves, and in this way we cannot ignore the spaces where our analysis takes place or the spatial, temporal, or affective histories associated with the screens and the bodies of knowledge we have come to interact with. Our discussions on the screens takes place within the Modern Languages building at the University of Waterloo—a brown brick, tile floored structure built in the late 1960s, housing the university’s Theater of the Arts. As we reflect on *Reconstruction*, we as artist-researchers who have studied, learned, and taught within

the halls of Modern Languages recognize these experiences alter the ways in which we produce *and* ourselves are produced by theory, art, and practice. Our research scenes seek to elucidate the complexity of the affective, mental, and physical components of the research mangle: the spaces where we conduct analysis, the meetings between the two of us spanning the last two years, our meetings with student volunteers dating back to October 2016 in various locations, the construction of the screens, the rehearsals of the event night, (re)listening to the soundtrack of construction noises, participating in the event as director and choreographer, taking down screens after the event, the inter-related nature of the aforementioned events, the unmistakable yet often unnamable threads of feeling from all entities involved, and the tendrils of affect that continue to push and pull to this day.

As part of the multimangle, each screen has histories of its own from its creation even prior to the evening of *Night/Shift* to the present where, even after *Reconstruction*, the screens continue to affect. The subsequent analysis is written in such a way to highlight that we the researchers are not the only actants on scene; rather, through senses of curiosity and attachment we observe and watch, we feel, we play, we perform, and we envision possibilities for the affects that push up against us, pulling us in different directions and toward new ideas our screens and their histories can offer. Reading through these scenes may feel hectic; it may seem confusing or complicated—this speaks to the complex interweaving of affect that the multimangle explicitly attempts to address. Indeed, the multi-mangle has opened us to the many becomings present and circulating throughout this project's journey.

Research scene #1: wanderings and ramblings

Colors, words, structures, and flames are everywhere as we walk down the main hall of Modern Languages, gazing at the 24 screens propped along the walls of the corridor. Despite our common humanities training, our approach to the data inscribed on *Reconstruction's* cardboard screens are somewhat varied. We are both interested in how the material inscriptions on these screens construct and disrupt the dominant ideologies circulating within a mid-sized city like Kitchener. However, Bri tends to look specifically toward imagery that “self-labels” itself as mediator between positions of power and how these play out along intersectional hierarchies. Shana instead examines the screen's broader discursive patterns and how they weave an impressionistic, dialogic narrative across participant inscriptions. Our shared emphasis on the interrelationship between the act of data analysis and the affective materiality of the data itself focuses our approach overall. There are so many things to see: drawings to take in, words to read, scribbles to decipher. Together, we slowly turn around, taking in all of the screens, feeling as they are pulled into different directions, toward different screens. We gravitate toward different screens, gesturing toward but not yet speaking of the images and words that individually captivate us.

Walking through the screens is quite different now than on the evening of *Night/Shift*. In this later timeframe, the researchers once again reconstruct the city yet now in ways that are not as legible; it's difficult to put streets and buildings in order when they no longer appear how they do in real life. Perhaps they don't need to be in order.

Drawn on several screens are overlaid images of genitalia and “Hail Hydra” (a nod to Marvel Comics’ take on Nazis). These are fresher than the original layers of drawn architectural structures. The layers indicate that over time what was initially inscribed on the screens became buried when people added to the screens as the night wore on. Layers of thought, feeling, and action, like the graffiti in everyday spaces, are enactments, layers of graffiti over the buildings and city-made structures.

Standing next to each other are two screens that have been renamed by participants as “Compassion Street” and “Rage Street.” One author notes the interesting coincidence (or perhaps not a coincidence) that these two screens mimic two streets that are geographically located beside each other in real life. Looking at Rage Street, the other author reads out an inscription scrawled onto the screen, “twist and turn and let it burn,” while the first author joins in and together they read, “twist and turn and let it burn, the past was always ashes. To the windows to the wall. Laugh out loud.” Flames are drawn in and around this quote, trickling down to a drawing of a self-labelled hipster, who is according to the speech bubble above his head, “feeling boxed in in midtown Kitchener.” The figure is imprisoned by “do not enter” signs, a frowning face, a “help can’t walk anywhere” sign, and a frowning cloud singing the lyrics “take on me,” and so on. In response, the air around the cloud sings, “take me on.” This interplay is surrounded again by burning flames, next to a cross and a green swirling tornado. It’s chaos. It’s clear that once the performers, or the “construction workers,” left the scene on the evening of *Night/Shift*, and participants were no longer surveilled, the swirls of rage intervened into the drawn architecture, leaving a clear mark on the screens/scenes. On a building next to the chaotic swirl of “hipsters,” clouds, and tornadoes is a building adorned with grapes and apples, leading to a window that offers a glimpse of a rave with multicolored lights. The colors of the lights in the window seem to suggest invitation. We both throw out a laugh—we’d like to join whatever party is happening here. Then a grocery store comes into view, drawn over top of a cycling shop that is part of the first layer of the architecture. It’s a gesture toward constructing a new part of the city, one that has more access to fresh food, or perhaps toward reconsidering the use of space. This section contains a critique of the “ethical white hipster” who, occupying a certain class bracket and racial category, can afford the luxuries of all natural, organic food. It’s again a gesture, but toward what we cannot be entirely sure.

As the authors look around once more at the screens lined up on either side of the hallway, we remark to each other that the interactions taking place on the screen between the destruction of the flames overtaking buildings and cars and images and words of love and peace feel quite overwhelming. The screens reveal a relationship to be explored between nature and culture that, in turn, expresses the intricacies of certain KW residents’ lived experiences. The relational character of events and the physical, cultural, and biological composition of the layers present on the screens help explain how the world is produced around us. Over time, one of us comes to notice that on each screen where love exists, there also exists the imminent flames. It is noticed quite suddenly and profoundly, and the tension becomes palpable. On screen 13, hearts are drawn around windows and “love every moment” is written in green in the center of the screen. Just above these inscriptions, flames ravage the windows of a KPMG office building. Just across the hall from where we placed screen 13, “everyone has a voice,

just listen,” is written on the middle screen 21 in different writing, surrounding a heart that says, “love in every heart, home, and business, unlimited love, joy, peace.” Beside this, in the same green ink that penned “love every moment,” “surrender to truth, joy, love, and peace” is written. Layered on top in a different marker are flames, surrounding, and seeking to overtake these sentiments. Yet this green ink does not give up, and written on another screen are the words, “patience in all for all areas of construction—esp. in this construction in our homes and families” in the same handwriting. Above this, written in black ink and a different hand, are the words, “give everyone a chance,” with a red heart drawn beside.

Flames adorn almost every screen except for one entitled “Civitas,” which instead sports strands of what look like festive, twinkling lights. “No idling,” it reads, “walk instead,” “no run!” A figure walks down an unmarked route with a speech bubble screaming, “AHH!” There is a sense of urgency. Overgrown vines cover the wheels and exhaust pipe of a truck where three small drawn cats sit in the front seat, blocking the human stick figure from view. It’s a push to protect Earth, as flowers are drawn into every window on the screen, covering store names and logos well known to long-time Kitchener-Waterloo residents. A figure with long hair and a joyful body hangs off a street lamp in front of the vine-covered truck. There is a willful abandon espoused in the image. This figure is celebrating. Although it is uncertain what the cause of celebration is, the authors, too, feel the surge of happiness, and we discuss how the apprehensions felt earlier, arising from the tension between love and flames, are subsiding.

Above the swinging figure a speech bubble, written in a different hand, reads, “I [heart symbol] alcohol.” Directly above, in the same scrawl, is a game of tic-tac-toe. There is a sense of disarray to each screen, even screens that promote anti-car sentiments, underscoring the issues of walking precarity and the de-regulation of walking spaces that are quite prevalent in Kitchener-Waterloo during construction. What is emerging through the different layers inscribed on the screens are a series of dystopic and utopic tensions; interactions are beginning to take place on each screen and between screens as participants seek to answer something hopeful, and then others asserting flames and prisons. There are tensions already taking place between the beautiful and the abject, the sacred and the profane.

Research scene #2: adventure avenue

Turning to the next screen, the authors note just how visually full it feels. It is chaotic, vibrant, and adventurous. Love fills the screen. Although this screen originally depicted a stretch of Uptown Waterloo, it is no longer clear exactly where this projection was taken from. It is Uptown, but it is not. It has been layered over so many times by participants that it is its own territory—with its own claims: “Health, happy families, cheers, to listen to something with love” is written in green, flowy letters; “5 o’clock somewhere”; “perfect love drives out fear”; drawings of suns and flowers; and a depiction of a chakra. What jumps off the screen is an esthetic coherence that is indescribable and different from the screens encountered thus far; colors balance each other out, words and images flow together. Just to the left, small pigs linger. “Bacon” is written underneath one pig’s body. These pigs produce questions for the authors that call out

the assumptions made about differences in animal bodies and human bodies, and how they are used to structure different bodies along different hierarchies of power. What becomes of solidarity when bodies are trapped behind bars or forced to cross at different places than the majority? What kinds of segregation are implied? Layered atop the friendly pig on this screen are, of course, flames. And layered atop these flames, a demand for “#foodjustice” is written loudly, largely, and boldly.

Behind this pig sits an architectural, historic building with the words “you’ve changed” written atop its peaks. “Safe and affordable housing in abundance” is advocated directly underneath the building, a gesture, perhaps to a utopic future vision of KW, aligning it with earlier patterns of images of utopia and dystopia on other screens. This particular image feels pressing, as it outlines a relationality between built environment and residents, personified via particular relationship cues that contain a simultaneous ambivalence, nostalgia, and wistfulness. While the authors are unsure of what this coherence gives us, it is still worth noting that somehow, over the course of the night, this screen emerged as space to express loving sentiments toward KW and, notably, loving sentiments that were not burned out by flames.

Other screens bear witness to red and orange flames, decorating the sides of buildings and blocking out previous drawn layers. This screen is home to different kind of red imagery; rather than flames, red flowers grow on walls, red messages hidden in windows, and red cats meow. Red stick figures smile in the windows of buildings and red hearts float out of doorways and chimneys. Love fills this screen, daring the flames to find a spot to spark. When during the evening this love was layered onto the screen, the authors cannot know, but what the authors do feel is a balancing act happening on this screen, and between the screens. Nature grows, seemingly to grow over buildings; buildings are layered over, yet the bricks are intent on standing; flames threaten to overtake it all but love appears as a consistent and stubborn remainder. All of these exist, intertwined and mangled with each other, producing different effects. The screens are demonstrative of thought, space, and time. This is key. The screens function as cultural papyrus, a temporally noted archive that brings forth the lineage or progression of a dialog. The latter inscriptions are informed by the former, presenting a dialog spread across the time frame of *Reconstruction’s* performance at *Night/Shift*. The dialog is brought forth on the screen, provoked and produced by the former inscriptions to give yield to the next sets of layers.

Battles exist on the pages between different tensions, different ideologies, and this screen reveals affects that are different from the other screens. Figures of humans and animals live behind every window on this screen. A person drives a pickup truck down the road; a delivery van and a bike roll down the street. Names are written onto this screen, naming figures, and there are many cats in the windows and on rooftops, gesturing toward and exemplifying life, whereas other screens seem to focus on destruction, a clearing of the board. This battle between life and destruction, utopia and dystopia, seems to exist across the screens, and it sparks questions about what images and words came first, and how they are enacted sequentially. Is there a way to understand the battle from these inscriptions, the battle between all the love images and words and the fire, the utopia and dystopia? On the very edge of the screen the trunk of a tree daringly sits. Green flames sizzle around the trunk, but they do not seem to be

burning the trunk. In fact, the multicolored, sparkling leaves seem to protect the rest of the tree from this fire. Or perhaps this fire isn't here to burn.

Research scene #3: strange place

We enter a final research scene that glows vibrantly for us, offering a glimpse of the research site as a whole. Named "Strange Place," the screen depicts New City Supermarket, an Asian grocery store in downtown Kitchener. Draped in garlands and twinkling lights, the lamppost draws us in. This small scene is almost enough to distract from the flames pouring out of the building. Above the flaming building a cloud cries rain down. Similar to other screens, juxtapositions push and pull the authors in different directions as they move between utopian and dystopian imagery. As the supermarket burns, the cloud sobs down giant tears to extinguish the raging flames. A tree grows out of the side of the building, and giant vines growing out of the roof toward the sky. Vine growth and trees take over the buildings and machinery, crumbling the bricks and crushing the truck on the screen. Newly created environments become central on this screen: the tires of a car have been turned into a sun and a flower. "Get a bike" is written on the windows the car. A pig walks across the street, while another pig is imprisoned behind bars. Fairies with wands fly high in the sky.

This screen, unlike the rest, includes post-it note prompts placed by facilitators on the evening of *Night/Shift*, asking residents about their relationship to KW. "Write KW a love letter," one post-it note asks. "Dear KW, I love your skating rinks, love Chantelle" the screen responds. A stick figure is drawn directly beneath, skating in figure eights on a rink. "What is your favorite place to take a walk?" another post-it note asks. "Laurel Trail" is the screen's reply. Although there may be something productive about purposely structuring a conversation between researcher and participant through these post-it note prompts, there may be something equally or more productive about fostering a public dialog wherein residents engage with their environment, creative materials and their spontaneous dialog across themes that reveal themselves across the screens. We see this practice enabled by the conditions of *Reconstruction* to offer a performative, or iterative, mode of civic engagement based on public forms of assembly. Although the focus of *Reconstruction* offers some constraints on what is being brought forth (that is, conversations take place around the reconstruction of KW), participants were free to engage with the space in any way that moves them; creative outputs on the screens were just one way of capturing these moments, one means through which the authors could bring together audiences, participants and researchers into dialog.

Anonymity produces an interesting node within our multiple-mangles of this research-assemblage: although these interactions between participants, researchers, time, and environment are perhaps more possible due to anonymity (indeed, it is easier--and safer--to be an advocate for Earth, for animals, and for gentrification when one's name and title do not need to be associated), it also makes circulating these produced effects more difficult. Participants saw these screens and felt these specific urges for only a brief moment in time. These inscriptions are one form of the many becomings circulating within KW. They hold utopian, dystopian, rebellious, and optimistic motifs that make themselves visible and present, the discourses, affects, networks, and thought



Figure 3. Reconstruction (2016) Photo: Sidra Hasan.

processes present on the screens provide an important opportunity for discussing how the social tensions of democratic citizenship can be either encouraged or repressed. These screens are forms of “discourse” that offer a means of turning toward communities and inclusion as opposed to focusing on the issues present on the screens as a problem of being present-focused and not future-oriented. It is, indeed, a strange place (Figure 3).

A conclusion never finished

Our reflections on the affective economies of *Reconstruction* as a public art event *and* a research-creation practice reveal the different ways “things” orient toward each other within the research scene. At the site of the public art event, fluid boundaries are created and undone by the constantly evolving performance. The performance pulls and pushes the (non)human subjects and materials interpolated within the scene. Our introductory discussions of methodology, ontology, and axiology show how new materialist and posthumanist theories influenced our creative research design to be attuned to such materially and affectively situated orientations. Our reflection reveal a research process of “borrow[ed] concepts, invent[ed] approaches, and creat[ed] new assemblages that demonstrate[d] a range of analytic practices,” which in some sense constitute a “non-method that is always in a process of becoming as theories interlink...” (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 717). The processes of meaning-making in *Reconstruction* unfolded at multiple stages since, for us, meanings are produced and do not exist a-priori to experience. The *Reconstruction* research process includes the consensus building and reframing of the project that occurred at various points of collaborative discussions, material

gathering, and script planning, and during the live event/data collection, as well as the postevent analysis of archive documents of event (MacDonald 2018). This article demonstrates a further layer of the process surrounding the collaborative discussions on how to represent, frame and make meaning of all these aspects for the mode of manuscript dissemination. These experiences together demonstrate that, indeed, meanings are processual.

In analyzing the specific post-event layer of our research assemblage, we propose that the unconventional archives of ephemeral events generated through audience participation in public art events can count as a valuable form of data—as integral to making up the multimangle in so far as they contain affective resonances from another moment in time. Through this we challenge existing assumptions on what and *when* something counts as data. In the case of our research method for *Reconstruction*, collecting was a mode of exploration without certainty of what data will be collected. We set out the conditions of how the public art (as a site of research) unfolded, but we could not determine what data or outputs would be left at the end of the event, as this was entirely contingent upon how artists and audiences interacted with the available materials and how such interactions prompted creative, spontaneous forms of expression. These contingent relations occurred at various stages of the event and afterward, offering a layered notion of the research process. This is why the concept of the “multimangle” is useful: beyond preliminary layers of inscription, the performance/installation space changed because of what audiences wrote on the screens. At that point a new space took shape in the construction of the screens as a replica corridor of the real life space between downtown Kitchener and Uptown Waterloo. This newly constructed space then opened up the context for more writing/graffiti and further mangles/interventions. At the site of the installation several mangles existed, all interacting and responding to each other. As artist-researchers who are simply one node of the mangle existing alongside other nodes, we recognize that we are not autonomous agents who can choose some data while disposing of others. In this way, the multimangle data of *Reconstruction* glowed through an “emergence of sense” (Maclure, 2013, p. 661). All of these layers were part of the data we then read as artist-researchers who were active in the space during the live performance event, and were later confronted with the data archive of the event after the fact. These layers of our multimangle research-assemblage necessarily include our own affective memories, embodied reflections, and spatial and temporal reckonings.

In reflecting on pasts, presents, and future possibilities of leisure studies, Jayne Caudwell (Silk, Caudwell, & Gibson, 2017) contends that leisure and for, that matter, leisure studies must interrogate “dominant societal structures, cultural practices, and political histories. Leisure is linked to ... inequalities, social in/justice, failing capitalism, emerging right-wing geopolitics, poverty, migration, environmentalism, rights, and freedoms” (p. 154). The ways in which we can engage in such interrogations and their multifaceted relationships are multiple and not always certain, yet it is imperative for us as artists and researchers to explore both the affective, political, and structural resonances of KW’s literal reconstruction at the level of residents’ bodies, memories, emotions, and everyday lived experiences as these are so deeply interrelated in our lives as urban residents. Through the possibilities and limitations of new materialist and posthuman

qualitative research methods for CAP, our public performance assemblages in city spaces, along with the creative materials, audiences, and artists operating within them, demonstrate the extent to which embodied, dialogic, and experiential multimangles can spread as research-assemblages. We understand the production of affect in creative public art events like *Reconstruction* as pre-personal forces that correspond to passing from one bodily state to another; it is a means of understanding realms of experience--affects are outside of representation and are not dependent on the human subject.

Caudwell is apt to emphasize that the links between leisure and performance are obscure (p. 155). As a piece of public art tied to a municipal, cultural festival, *Reconstruction* is one such activity that bridges the leisure and performance worlds. Informed by our feminist, communication, and cultural studies backgrounds, theory always underlies our practices in the name of change. Part of resisting dominant structures is resisting the prevailing anthropocentric notions of power. Power is always part of multimangles, enabling and constraining becomings and capacities in certain spaces at certain times. *Reconstruction* is a moment--even just one moment in time--to reflect forward on the relationality of matter for art practices. In closing, we ponder the following: What *becomes* of art when performed communally for the advancement of social justice? What possibilities arise when artists, activists, and researchers turn to the physical (and psychic) matter of issues? And what becomes attainable when we recognize the material workings of power, affects, and creative practices to emphasize social production, rather than social construction?

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