

A Shape for Queerness:  
Glimpses, Loops, Holes, Language

A Support Paper for the Exhibition titled  
A Wreath of Snakes, A Lexicon Devil, A Hole in Time, A Single Thought

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James Nicholas Wilson, candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts Visual Arts, has presented an Exhibition titled, ***A Wreath of Snakes, A Lexicon Devil, A Hole in Time, A Single Thought*** and a Support Paper titled *A Shape for Queerness: Glimpses Loops, Holes, Language*, in an oral examination held on February 13, 2019. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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## Abstract

*A Wreath of Snakes, A Lexicon Devil, A Hole in Time, A Single Thought* is a sculptural installation of 24 large-scale drawings and an artist's book. The work is concerned with the formation of consciousness and the ways that the shared experience of queerness affects notions of time, lineage and orientation. It examines the way queerness creates a non-reproductive lineage which stops, starts and skips across time. This installation is an articulation of the contradictory bumps and associations, both obvious and esoteric, which accompany my prolonged contemplation on the subject of queerness and the making of this work. This support paper is an investigation into the ways drawing exists as a solitary erotic practice which connects bodies across time. The research which supports this work is derived primarily from Queer theorists such as Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, Sarah Ahmed, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. It also includes the ideas of post-colonial theorist Édouard Glissant and his investigation of 'peripheral' identities. This MFA support paper elucidates a thought process about queerness, time, shapes, holes, orientation, and language.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction or Queerness Spills Out

Is not the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes*? In perversion [ . . . ] there are no “erogenous zones” (a foolish expression, besides); it is the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is the flashing itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as- disappearance.

From *The Pleasure of the Text* by Roland Barthes, 1973.

In 2003, I was sitting in a high-school history class attempting to deflect attention from myself so that I could continue to view the exposed strip of underwear between the beltless jeans and American Eagle polo of a varsity rugby captain. He was highlighter blond with hockey hair wings — bent forward, chin on fist. The gym class locker room was too risky: you can’t let your eyes linger too long on any one pair of boxer briefs. This was the only time I could really concentrate on the colour and texture of the jewel-tone, pomegranate fabric stretched so tightly across and against the skin. For a moment, the world was that strip of red, until it was swallowed up by movement and fidgeting, pulling at the cloths that hold the body in awkward bunched folds.

What is it to be queer? Is it to be outlier? Outsider? Peripheral? Marginal?

Oppositional? Contrary? Wrong? Surely it is more than being gay, more than any single sexual act or even a pattern of sexual activity. Historically, there has been a tendency for the gay-cis-male experience to stand in for the queer experience as a whole, which encapsulates a much larger collection of experiences and intersections. Most of the time I am not sure what it is. It comes in glimpses and then disappears. It becomes an ‘it’

rather than a named substance. Though I largely experience queerness through the lens of a cis-gay-male experience, I am also drawn to the way queerness presents a structuring principle that defies structure by disrupting the categories that gave rise to it. There are many practical definitions for what constitutes queerness, but they mostly fall short of satisfaction; they lack flow. One can bask in the technicality and precision of language but in a single instance of experience or the flash of a new or different knot of clarity, the meaning of words can smear, slip and spill into something that is not quite fitting. 'It' is holes, parts, gaps, cracks, spilling, shower, spiral, and spark. This is what I hope but also a thing that I know.

It is not surprising that the recognition and experience of my sexual desire determined many of my actions and decisions as both a teenager and an adult. What is surprising, viewing these formative years in retrospect, is how much that deviant sexuality (not mine specifically, but the spectre of 'gayness') seemed to order and dictate many of the other burgeoning sexualities that surrounded me. The idea of gayness regulated social interactions and peaked out in words misspoken, mis-chosen or lisped, or actions that seemed a bit too limp-wristed, effeminate, or weak. The constant (self) regulation of male gender expression was at the mercy of queerness or at least its ghost.

In this context, the terms of queerness (its expression, appearance, and meaning) were completely beyond my control, as they are out of all queer people's control. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, "it is the interlocutor who has or pretends to have the *less* broadly knowledgeable understanding of interpretive practices who will define the terms of the exchange."<sup>1</sup> This places the power to detect and assign the meaning and codes of queerness in the hands of those with no personal experience of it, or people

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<sup>1</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), 4.

who will actively disavow any personal experience. The atrophy of being a closeted teenager in 2003, meant that my primary understanding of queerness as a social force was defined by the bullies (teachers included) that policed the actions of the population at my middle and high school. This ignorance was only punctured when I stopped playing the role I was assigned in the near-daily exchange of accusation and denial. Once I stated my gayness, the tenor of the conversation changed dramatically. 'It' was here. It was no longer a ghost to be hunted and shooed away. I remember the horror on the face of another boy when he interrogated my sexuality and I replied with "what if I was?" I offered a glimpse of the thing that has been an abstraction for many boys for so long. The pleasure of this hunt had been disturbed by the appearance of the prey.

Stranger still is the depth of this hunt, or search, as it seemed to have so much of its own desire. It started long before I realized that I was a member of the hunted party. As early as grade three, I remember being called a "faggot" when I acted inappropriately. The sting of that designation as a pariah was attached to a vague set of behaviours that extend far beyond the actions that actually constitute homosexuality (people of the same gender having sex). The actions that were the subject of this hunt were a transgression of gender-specific expressions including gesticulations and speech patterns that were identified as 'feminine.' This was before the eruption of sexual desire, even before the development of secondary sex characteristics. This policing of gender and the concomitant policing of sexuality, and the pressure to conform to rigid gender norms, is described by Judith Butler as a "*compulsory* performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very

prohibitions.”<sup>2</sup>

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick describes this leaking of queerness into the flow of life and the way that it structures this flow:

What *was* new from the turn of the century was the world-mapping by which every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or a female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable to a homo- or a hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of *implications*, however *confusing* [emphasis added], for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence. It was this new development that left no space in the culture exempt from the potent incoherences of homo/heterosexual definition.<sup>3</sup>

Michel Foucault described this type of structuring more broadly in his conception of the “polymorphous techniques of power”<sup>4</sup> that surround the implementation of “sex into discourse.”<sup>5</sup> He outlines the multiplication of those discourses<sup>6</sup> and the refinement of sexuality toward productive means (mainly reproduction). In my thesis exhibition, *A Wreath of Snakes, A Lexicon Devil, A Hole in Time, A Single Thought*, this ‘it’ — this queerness — leaks past the body and permeates more abstract images which are themselves loaded with these “confusing implications.”<sup>7</sup>

As a viewer enters the gallery, they are confronted by the back of a false wall which bisects the space at a 30-degree angle; it is neither parallel nor perpendicular to any

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, (Hoboken, Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 725.

<sup>3</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1990), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 2.

other wall in the gallery. In the timber latitude of this wall, several copies of an artist book are presented. In this book are diagrams of the drawings that hang on the other side of the wall and a small, corresponding fragment of text. As the viewer walks around the space, they discover that the other surface of the wall is covered with a grid of 24 drawings hung three high and eight wide. The wall behind these drawings is painted a bright, luminous red that is visible only in the small gaps between the pieces of paper and where they curl away from the wall.

My intention with this installation is to offer a viewer some of the same glimpses that I have seen and to open my perspective on language, queerness, shape, and time. This work is a collection of the “confusing implications” that have shaped my world view. It is not intended to be a complete offering of a fully digested idea but rather the evidence of ideas that has been well-chewed. The drawings presented are one part of a work that is never complete but still fully whole. They are in perpetual motion and belong to a series I intend on returning to over and over again.

The work embodies and practices several ideas I have encountered through my research. It performs a type of queer kinship described by Elizabeth Freeman<sup>8</sup>, which expands the heteronormative idea of biological inheritance into a non-reproductive lineage that skips and skitters across bodies and time. The work also shifts the formal relationship between the art objects, the gallery space, and the viewers by embodying Sarah Ahmed’s conception of “queer phenomenology,”<sup>9</sup> which explores the spatial and directional dimensions of queerness. The elements of this exhibition come together to

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Freeman; “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography”. *Social Text* 1 December 2005; 23 (3-4 (84-85)): Duke University Press, Durham, NC. 57–68.

<sup>9</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006), 1-24.

produce an exploration which offers a semblance of becoming, with all of its pleasurable, painful, confounding, surprising, and banal confusions.

Note: Throughout the remainder of this paper, I refer to the figures listed in the Appendix.

## Chapter 2: Drawing Lines

Lines are important: they guide eyes and bodies, create boundaries, and form cracks.

Lines, particularly contour lines, are fissures that separate what is being represented from what is not. This forms the basis of the figure ground relationship which often relies on a dichotomy between focal-point and field — an object in a space. Lines give both direction and the possibility for deviation. One can have a sight line and also inhabit another's line of sight. Lines orient people and objects; they establish the direction in which people move or delineate a course of navigation.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sarah Ahmed states that "the 'straight line' is what shapes the very tendency to go astray. What is astray does not lead us back to the straight line, but shows us what is lost by following that line."<sup>10</sup> Ahmed's exploration of the language of lines reveals the different functions that lines can offer. When a line is open it can be followed to a different location, a new starting point, a middle way or a port in a storm. Before it was discovered that vision was the product of light traveling into the eye, seeing was conceived by the Roman scholar Ptolemy as a kind of radiation that extended out from a viewer<sup>11</sup>. He posited that a physical substance called "flux"<sup>12</sup> was projected from an eye toward an object in the same way that a lighthouse casts a beam into the ocean. Maybe this is why we look 'at' things rather than receive visions. This Ptolemaic conception of looking forms a line between a viewer and what they are regarding: a line of sight.

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 79.

<sup>11</sup> A. Mark Smith, *Ptolemy's Theory of Visual Perception: An English Translation of the "Optics" with Introduction and Commentary*, (Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1996), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Ptolemy's Theory of Visual Perception*, 23.

A line can also create a boundary. Some boundaries are necessary for creating relationships between objects, spaces and people but these divisions are never observed without political affiliation. As I write this paper, a caravan of refugees from Latin America is headed towards the southern border of the United States and their progress toward asylum has been demonized by the Trump administration as a pretense to drum up political support in the mid-term elections. This conservative preoccupation with tightening the U.S.-Mexico border is totally void of any recognition that this border was the result of the murder and genocide of Indigenous peoples and theft of their land. Lines can be geographical and political impositions that grant or restrict the movement of bodies, and also ideological boundaries that dictate behaviour, taboo, and who is cast as 'other.' Remember: there are some lines that you simply do not cross. In practice, these lines of taboo or political division, are porous and inconsistent, which is evidenced by their continual need for maintenance and discipline by governments, institutions, and other social forces.

Many of the drawings in this series take up the question of boundaries. In a pictorial sense, figures 12 and 9 conflate the boundary of the meander (a decorative frame used in ancient Greek tile work) with the boundary of the paper they are drawn on. This relationship is explored through text in fig. 23, where the block of snakes appears to be sliding out of the frame. This transgression of boundaries is also extended to the relationship between image and ground. The mark making which constitutes these shapes is porous, with small slivers of ground poking through. From a distance, these drawings may seem to present solid blocks of colour; on closer inspection they are a field of marks rather than the dense, impenetrable surface they were originally assumed to be. This relationship is explored further by activating the gaps between the drawings

and the cut paper drawing in fig. 16. The bright red wall which is exposed in the gaps between the drawings disrupts the membrane that is created by hanging such a large number of sheets of paper in close proximity.

By making a line in a drawing, one is inevitably directing a viewer and demanding some kind of response, or at least an acknowledgement. By using a line to create a representation, one is similarly guiding the viewer elsewhere, toward absent subjects and ideas; in this relationship, the drawer is dictating a line of thought which is to be negotiated by a viewer. The drawings in this body of work make use of all of these lines and to play their various definitions off one another.

One of the biggest fears I have for this body of work is that a viewer would take the place of a passive audience member rather than an interlocutor who animates the work. Their presence and their line of thought is largely responsible for the activation of this set of images. This piece, though, made of physical lines, relies on the lines of association that link one drawing to another. Lines are there; these images are not randomly collected. They are the result of my own thought process and a year of research. These drawings helped to discipline a thought process and provided different points of definition. While navigating the world, this series acted as a kind of safe harbour, or at least a repository. I would often ask myself if an ‘idea’ or ‘thought’ was a drawing. In retrospect, I realize that I was testing the abstract boundaries of thought from a deeply subjective position. Like the overactive and conniving Brain, from *Pinky and the Brain*,<sup>13</sup> this work asks a viewer, "Are you pondering what I am pondering?"

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<sup>13</sup> “Pinky and the Brain” is a children’s cartoon in which two lab mice continually endeavour to take over the world. The character Brain is always the leader of this scheming and, in his continual search for intellectual kinship, always asks his dim-witted companion Pinky “are you pondering what I am pondering?” when he comes up with a new plot to take over the world. Though Pinky’s thinking is never in line with Brain, it never stops Brain from asking this eternal question.

and “Are you pondering the *way* I am pondering? Does the movement of your mind follow a similar line to mine?”

I used shape to ricochet ideas off of one another. The ouroboros becomes the wreath of snakes in fig. 8, and then a word that eats itself in fig. 4. The word “snakes,” looped in on itself, becomes a chain of the word “snakes” in fig. 22, illustrating the way the word begins and ends with the same ‘s’ sound and, when repeated, begins to eat itself. These loops of language lead to the word “Nirvana” in fig. 20, and its layered associations with both the Buddhist exit from Samsara (the cycle of death and rebirth) and the symbolic death of hair-metal<sup>14</sup> that was precipitated by the band that took on this word as its name. In fig. 20, the logo of Nirvana (a smiley face with X-ed out eyes) is hollowed out, leaving only the outer ring, a loop. This ring leads to fig. 6, which is the logo for the LA Hardcore band, *Germ*s. Darby Crash, the leader of the *Germ*s, was a closeted queer who committed suicide at age 23. *Germ*s guitarist, Pat Smear, would go on to play guitar with Nirvana until Kurt Cobain killed himself in the spring of 1994.

Elizabeth Freeman writes, “Some events count as historically significant, some don’t; some are choreographed as such from the first instance and thereby overtake others. Most intimately, some human experiences officially count as a life or one of its parts, and some don’t.”<sup>15</sup> Freeman identifies time as a construction that tracks often heteronormative markers that make up a successful life. These are the parts that matter,

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<sup>14</sup> Though this symbolic death might be a pop-culture fable, I think it is important to note the emergence of a figure like Kurt Cobain. Cobain did not identify as a member of the LGBTQ2S community but made space and gave support to women like Kathleen Hannah and queer people of colour like RuPaul. He also projected a type of male vulnerability which was a shock to popular music at the time.

<sup>15</sup> Freeman, *Erotohistoriography*, 57–68.

the markers that get to count as a life. Some of these markers include education, marriage, procreation, employment, and wealth accumulation. These are the peaks of a life, those commemorated and celebrated publicly, that are often rewarded with recognition. Freeman refers to this way of constructing time as Chrononormativity.<sup>16</sup> This construction of history leaves gaps, little holes that things fall through and evaporate, to rot in the valleys that are overshadowed by the peaks. Or so it would seem.

The lines of association in this piece stop and start, skip, repeat, loop back, and leap across different epistemologies. They embody a non-reproductive lineage of queerness, what Elizabeth Freeman describes as a “‘bottom’ historiography,”<sup>17</sup> where what is passed on through the social reproduction of queerness is the idea of “receptivity itself.” Freeman is describing the possibility of kinship outside of the hetero-capitalist-patriarchal institution of reproductive inheritance that queerness creates. This body of work echoes the way that the experience of other queer lives, of queer experience, and history has nothing to do with the idea of iron-clad genetic, reproductive inheritance that supposedly flows neatly down the family tree from parent to child, and so on. This idea of inheritance skips unexpectedly, emerges with the pleasure of surprise, and transgresses the hetero-normative structures of the ‘family.’ It imagines different possibilities for the holes that Crononormativity creates.

I calculated an entry into the series with an evolving set of criteria that were based on what I was reading and experiencing. Many components found their way in because of a shape, like fig. 14, which extends the circular motifs I was working with

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. (Durham, Duke University Press, 2010), 1-19.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2005), 64.

into a continuous three-dimensional surface. With these drawings the idea of shape was also tested and stretched. It would flow between the image of the circle and the cyclicity and repetition of repeated mark making, the rising and setting of the sun or the repetition of letters in text. The circle or the enclosed space offer an opportunity to think about the slippage between the idea of a formal shape (a circle, a square, etc.) and the shape of experiences. A circle or ellipse is the movement of planets — orbit and rotation. It is a spatial relationship based on scale which is experienced through the bigness of astral bodies and the smallness of human bodies. We know the horizon is continuous and circular, but can only see it as a straight line because of our smallness in relation to its bigness. The sun rises and sets because of a cycle and shape; we call that cycle time. This cycle of time is also related to language and text, specifically text-based languages that rely on an extremely limited alphabet. Text is a play of cycle and variation, of flow, of shape and endless return to the same limited set of characters and sub-characters that are all made of lines.

Though lines function in manifold capacities in this body of work, it is impossible not to talk about the physical lines that result from pressing pencil to paper and depositing graphite. The lines in this work make time a conspicuous component of their making. They hold time through repetitive mark making and point to the endless repetitions of time and the interplay between the marks and the gaps that make up a whole.

### Chapter 3: Back-First

An undeniable tradition of art making is the dimensionalities ascribed to certain mediums. Even though there have been incredibly bombastic and dramatic explorations of the gradation between two-dimensional and three-dimensional art, in many institutional and gallery contexts these experiments remain an exception to normal modes of display and not part of an ongoing problematic. In Janine Antoni's *Loving Care*, the artist used her hair to paint the gallery floor.

This example is of particular interest to me because it places the artist's body and its performance/movement in relation to the tradition of action painting; but it also confronts the male-dominated history of abstraction and activates the gallery itself as a painted surface. Another example is Anthony McCall's experimental film, *Line Describing a Cone*, in which the projection space is activated by a smoke machine and the circle being projected by the film becomes a cone in space.

The division of these two states summons up the question of approach. How does one approach an artwork and what 'face' is accessible to a viewer? How do these different zones of approach affect the artwork and the sight-lines that a viewer is privileged to? Which 'face' or 'faces' are hidden or unaddressed? Sarah Ahmed addresses these questions by investigating the 'orientation' in sexual orientation<sup>18</sup>. Ahmed suggests that who or what we are oriented toward might determine who we align ourselves with politically, emotionally, and sexually.<sup>19</sup> Ahmed also states that "we do not have to consciously exclude those things that are not 'on line.' The direction we

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 15.

take excludes things for us, before we get there”<sup>20</sup> and that “to turn away from ‘the other sex’ is also to leave the straight line.”<sup>21</sup>

I am interested in Ahmed’s notion of ‘turning’ in relation to the normative gallery experience of things hung on the wall and things placed on the floor. As a viewer enters the gallery they are met with the back of an enormous false wall. It is as if the wall has swung itself away from the architecture of the gallery and turned away from a viewer before they encounter the work. This is not meant to be a defiant or dismissive stance, but an allusion to an unacknowledged zone of the gallery, the part behind the drywall skin. It also disrupts a normative interaction with two-dimensional work. Paintings, drawings, and photographs are not often thought of as having any dorsal or posterior space. They are assumed to be addressed as a ‘front facing’ object that is addressed by a creature with a ventral plane. In other words, we turn toward an object to interact with it, and assume that it will be turned toward us as well. The idea of *turning toward* something assumes that direction, and therefore attention, is always *pointed to* with a ventral plane.

This can also be understood through the idea of *facing* something. Whatever direction our face is pointing is our frontal plane and therefore the object of our attention is always directed by our front. This is not always the case. There are some times in life when you are *facing away* from the object of your attention. Often when I am looking at someone and trying to evade detection, I will look at a person’s reflection in a window. This happens most on the bus, but I also remember looking at an attractive man in the reflection of an inactive T.V. in a hospital waiting room. After years of harassment from

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<sup>20</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 71.

the men that I would find myself attracted to, this averted looking has been naturalized as a defence mechanism. In the past, when men have noticed my attention, they have scoffed and turned away or even threatened me. It often feels like they are afraid that the attention of other men will implicate them in queerness, that they will be touched and infected by this queer Ptolomaic gaze. I can only speculate because I never stick around to hash it out. All that I am left with is the understanding that when looking feels dangerous, when the subject of your desire so closely resembles past pain, the best way to look is by finding a way to be turned away. This type of averted attention is also part of being anally penetrated. Facing *away* from your partner(s) while getting fucked is not the sole experience of anal but it is one that many people opt for.

In a (supposedly) post-sexual revolution society, and under the guidance of a second- wave feminist mother, I was led to believe that sex should be the result of a romantic bond between two (this number is important) loving people. Though the imperative for reproduction and the implications of sexual property had (mostly) been removed from this sexual dynamic, what was implied was a new logos for sex which was supposedly humanizing. But what if I don't want to fuck like a human? What if I want to fuck like an animal? What if I want to get fucked like an animal or a non-human animal? The encroachment of homonormativity<sup>22</sup> pathologizes sex which is anonymous, spontaneous or fleeting, rather than assigning it an alternative meaning. Is it not possible to see sex as also serving some mood-driven utilitarian function? The itch to be scratched? Or even a mood stabilizer?

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<sup>22</sup> Homonormativity describes a political climate in which queers are expected to align themselves as closely as possible to white-hetero-patriarchy and abandon the associations of queerness with more radical political and sexual movements and practices. This means adopting and expressing marriage, military service, monogamy, whiteness, and racial segregation, as well as traditional gender roles and expressions.

I see this turning of the installation as a way of creating a queer relationship between the work and the people who encounter it, back-first. It is also significant that the artist's book containing diagrams of the drawings with a corresponding text is placed on the 'back side' of the wall. This is a way of creating movement from back to front and back for the viewer. When text is presented with art, the dichotomy often plays out as art and instruction manual. The presence of text as didactic paneling, catalogue essay, or artist statement, is expected to function as a contextual *petit fours*, but often takes up the space of meaning when work is perceived as impenetrable, difficult, or just nonsensical. I often hear people in galleries regurgitating lines from didactic texts and attempting to shoe-horn them into the series of objects they encounter as if they are attempting to assemble IKEA furniture. The texts presented in the books are not an artist's statement in any way, but look to reveal a poetic glimpse of the image's significance. The aim of these texts is to be a series of holes that might guide a viewer from one image to the next without proposing a definite trajectory.

Though a book's sequential ordering of pages proposes a definite trajectory, this order is disrupted by the multiplicity of the books in the installation, and the fact that the sequence of images and texts presented in each book has no singular order. Each book has a different sequence of images. A viewer's interaction with the books (or book) will either echo the proposed uniformity of books if they only interact with one copy, or it will confuse this uniformity if they take in multiple copies and multiple image sequences. This disruption is a reminder of difference that is found primarily in the places where continuity is expected and also rewards close inspection.

## Chapter 4: Inversion and Holes in Time

Havelock Ellis's idea of sexual inversion made an early and important point of definition about desire for members of the same sex. In *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis makes a definition towards what is now a 'gay identity' and what is often referred to as sexual 'orientation.' Orientation differs from homosexual activity which may be highly contingent on circumstance. Ellis observed that not all acts of homosexuality are driven by a desire for the same sex; many of these acts are the result of a desire for sex in general. They are re-oriented within homosocial spaces. Examples of these spaces include boarding schools, prisons, convents, and monasteries. Ellis sees homosexual activity in these spaces as having a different meaning than when it is observed as desire outside of homosocial circumstance.<sup>23</sup> Ellis describes this as the "sexual instinct turned by inborn constitution abnormality towards persons of the same sex."<sup>24</sup> He claims that this condition results from an abnormality; it is an "inversion" of "natural objects of sexual attraction."<sup>25</sup> This shift in thinking is important because it illustrates the growing atomization of sexuality into discrete categories of meaning that require disciplinary boundaries and behavioural markers to be assessed, identified, and disciplined.

In my exhibition, this inversion is expressed in a literal sense in the inversion of subject and non-subject, figure and ground, in fig. 10. Along with highlighting negative space, in the context of the larger matrix of drawings, fig. 10 adds to the cumulative

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<sup>23</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex Vol. II: Sexual Inversion*, (Philadelphia, F.A. Davis Company, Publishers, 1915), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 2.

questions about normative relations between objects, people and ideas. Is night the inverse of day because of its lack of light? Night is infected by the opaque blackness and absence of light. It is also marked by sleep (the absence of consciousness?) and a traditional lack of activity. The lights of nightclubs amplify darkness; they don't illuminate it. They draw attention to a lack of light. There are several drawings in this series that are made of dark matter. They use negative space. They invert normative colour relationships, with specific reference to the silhouette. A silhouette is a displacement of light that traces the exact volume of an object or a person.

During my BFA drawing classes, we were assigned negative space assignments. We were given a subject, often a houseplant or a skeleton, and were asked to draw the negative space — the space that is created by the contour of the object and all of the gaps that are created as various dimensions and appendages overlap. These were drawings of the things that make up dapples on the sidewalk, the gaps that let light through. In this exercise, I felt as though I was drawing everything in the world except the subject, a breadth that I still find seductive as these drawings offered a glimpse of the whole world. This also meant that the vantage point from which you drew this subject determined how these gaps were perceived and recorded.

The inversion of attention has several tangential qualities that need to be understood as simultaneously formal, linguistic, and visual. Placing emphasis on the periphery of an object shifts focus from the supposed subject of a drawing towards the boundary that is created and defined by the vantage point of the drawer. It also carries with it the word 'negative,' which denotes absence, negation, refusal, and moral defamation or impurity. It also has repercussions for formalist ideas about pictorial

space. It highlights the frame of the composition and makes a subject of an image everything that is not the subject. In fig. 10, the drawing is everything that is not the subject and the visible support (as well as the framing edge of the support) becomes the subject. This relationship is reinforced by the drawing's self-reflexivity as it is a drawing of a piece of paper on another piece of paper.

To be inverted might also mean that one is inside out. In an abstract way, some of these drawings take up the subject of interiority and passage. Fig. 11 depicts a winding twisted piece of string that I found in an elevator. The squiggle reminded me of the diagrams that are used to illustrate intestines in articles about gut health and proper anal douching technique. This relates to fig. 7, which depicts anilingus as both a masturbatory gesture and the completion of a loop in the figure's digestive tract. Gay sex in discourse often summons the spirit of shit, guts, and viscera. One of the shameful truths about living in a queerphobic society, is knowing that my guts are the subject of idle speculation when sexuality is thought of.

Part of being an invert, and especially a gay male, is anal preoccupation, whether it has any basis in desire or not. The majority of gay men will deal with the anus (literal or figurative) at some point, as well as the shame of penetration inherited from misogyny and other histories of lowered status, including slavery and colonization. Elizabeth Freeman posits that the status of the penetrated, or 'bottom,' might be a model for a kind of non-reproductive transmission of queerness across time. In a truly queer inversion of circumstance, Freeman imagines bottoming as "a transmission of receptivity itself, of a certain pleurably porous relation to new configurations of the past and unpredictable futures."<sup>26</sup> This is the point at which the

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<sup>26</sup> Freeman, *Erotohistoriography*, 64.

circle or cycle becomes a hole which, in a queer context, blurs the distinction of entrance and exit, of in and out. In this space I think about my own status of ‘in’ the closet or ‘out’ of the closet as something that is not bound to a single event or a continuity of circumstance. One goes in and comes out when it is safe or opportune. The hole might be a place to find refuge, to escape or to be welcomed. These “porous relations”<sup>27</sup> which are referred to in the shape of many of the drawings speak to the fluidity of queerness, its continual liminality where the meaning of activities can flip in an instant towards pleasurable, nutritious, painful, and poisonous ends.

Another one of these inversions happens in fig. 1, which depicts a male chastity device. On one hand, this is a painful reminder of the enforced chastity of many queer people through legal, medical, or social restrictions; on the other it, contains the perverse pleasure of eroticizing this control (a queer response if there ever was one). This device also places a material emphasis on anal penetration as the sole source of sexual pleasure (without the ability to access one’s penis, the only hope of orgasm is through prostate stimulation). It also eroticizes a lack of sexual activity. This device connects bodies across time in the experience of sexual control and offers an outlet for pain as a site of erotic perversion. In this drawing, the shape of the chastity device is also an evasion of representing the penis. Like a glove, it gives shape without substance. It is a hollow skin that is made to hold skin and a glimpse of sex given form.

A hole might also be a place where things get lost.

Freeman posits that time itself is a construction which leaves gaps in experience that bodies slip into and out of. The major markers that make up histories (births, deaths, weddings, wealth accumulation) and that create these gaps in experience are explored

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<sup>27</sup> Freeman, *Erotohistoriography*, 64.

throughout this body of work. In fig. 24, I assembled a list of the (sometimes imaginary) ways that one's life is marked by the circumstances of one's birth as a way of satirizing the linguistic preoccupation with categorizing, which begins at the earliest moment of one's life. This propensity for linguistic definition is also explored in fig. 21, which is a collection of the ways that I have been addressed through correspondence. This drawing illustrates the way that one's identity is partially defined by a singular name which itself is, paradoxically, in constant flux between intimate, professional, institutional, and casual identities.

Annie Dillard writes that “a name, like a face, is something you have when you are not alone,”<sup>28</sup> pointing to the deeply social function of naming and the way that these linguistic markers place a person into a social structure. As Freeman suggests, these structures are intrinsically connected to time and the language used to construct it. In fig. 18, I use a quotation from the Laurie Anderson song “From the Air,”<sup>29</sup> in which she performs the final announcement from the captain of a crashing airplane.<sup>30</sup> The song ends with the repeated phrase: “This is the time and this is a record of the time,” presumably alluding to the black box which will shed light on the demise of the doomed aircraft. These last words of this dispatch, tie together the ethos of time with the imperative to record it. In this phrase, Anderson is naming time as the language that is used to record it. This parable about time brings with it the loss of all of the names and the faces of all the passengers (humans who have lives) who are eternally destined to die

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<sup>28</sup> Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm*, (New York, Harper Colophon Books, 1977), 71.

<sup>29</sup> Laurie Anderson, “From the Air”, *Big Science*, (Burbank, Warner Bros. Records, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Please take a moment to listen to the song.

(and disappear from history) and the elect few who will remain visible in the crash as recorded by the black box. This is often the way history functions. Certain lives and experiences count, while others do not, and the structures that dictate election into history are tied tightly to race, gender, class and sexuality.

This erotic connection to bodies across time is also explored in fig. 2, which depicts a rapid HIV testing kit. The spectre of the AIDS crisis still looms large in the queer consciousness, not only because of the pain of loss, but also the memory of public and institutional indifference in the face of a global epidemic. The cycle of testing has been promoted and naturalized as a healthy part of sexual life by well-meaning health organizations, but the pain, anxiety, uncertainty, and shame of one's sexual health status is disproportionately perceived as a problem for queers (gay men in particular). The way the test functions has a connection to circumnavigation, as it does not detect the virus itself, but instead looks for the anti-bodies that become present when the virus is proliferating in the body.

## Chapter 5: On Drawing as Masturbation and the Pursuit of Solitary Pleasure

Drawing has a long relationship to preparation and to delay. One can make thousands of sketches, plan endlessly, and keep busy for an entire life without ever getting around to ‘it’ whatever ‘it’ may be. The imperative to sketch, to dream, and to glimpse offers some safety to those who are pre-disposed to failure. The endless iteration of prep work is like saving for a rainy day. No matter how impressive, large, intensive, crafty, or detailed, drawing, as a history and a collection of material and conceptual circumstances, will always retain its relationship to hesitance.

Drawing also has a long-standing relationship with representation and reproduction. Old master drawings have up until very recently been a large part of traditional art education, and one’s progress as a student could be gauged by one’s ability to reproduce the work of the masters. A failure to reproduce equals a failure to progress. This attitude towards representation persists: when a drawing fails to represent something with an adequate or expected degree or realism it is ‘bad.’ It holds a mixture of disappointment and shame. The ‘bad’ drawing is pathetic. But the contingency of this badness might rest in its ability to get the job done, depending on what the drawing is meant to do. Sometimes, such as the case with fig. 14, what is required to illustrate an idea is just a few faint lines.

In my work, drawing represents a special relationship with masturbation. Wayne Koestenbaum alludes to the relationship in his essay, “On Doodles, Drawings, Pathetic Erotic Errands, and Writing.” He makes a list of several satisfactions that unite the making and viewing of erotic drawings. Selections from this list include: “the need to use the hand,” “the need to verify (or disguise) an internal fantasy by giving it visual

form,” and “the need to produce and *not* produce, simultaneously.”<sup>31</sup> Koestenbaum’s nimble interplay, between drawing and jerking off, highlights the intertwined activities’ associations to heteronormative assumptions about both practices. In his polemic, *No Future*, Lee Edelman lays out the anti-queer political agenda that underpins what he calls “reproductive futurism.”<sup>32</sup> Edelman observes the conservative political tactics that privilege heterosexuality and heteronormativity by placing paramount importance on the figure of ‘the child’ and preserving a particular type of future for these imagined children of tomorrow. This type of future usually involves stripping people with uteruses and ovaries of their right to choose and trivializing and, paradoxically, infantilizing people who choose not to have children or who are incapable of or not wealthy enough to reproduce.

This imperative towards reproduction, towards a more productive and perfect future, makes the ‘bad’ drawing into the ‘spilled seed’ of masturbation, the rough draft, the wasted paper. The failure of naturalist or realistic representation can hold unknown and divergent pleasures. Jack Halberstam imagines failure as an alternative to the “dogged Protestant work ethic”<sup>33</sup> that pervades hetero-patriarchy, and the “social and symbolic systems that tether queerness to loss and failure”<sup>34</sup> The failure of these drawings — their choppy lines, conspicuous mark making, inconsistent line weight, and flatness — are, to borrow Halberstam’s words, a “failure [that] recognizes that

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<sup>31</sup> Wayne Koestenbaum, *On Doodles, Drawings, Pathetic Erotic Erands, and Writing*, (New York, Faber, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 188.

<sup>32</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011), 96.

<sup>34</sup> Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 97-98.

alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent.”<sup>35</sup> The failure to reproduce text or images seamlessly in this work is a queer failure. It imagines other reasons for being and other modes of exchange. The awkward choppy lines and the inconsistent surface mirror the skips and leaps of queer, non-reproductive lineage.

The viewpoint “reproductive futurism” also places sexuality squarely at the mercy of reproduction, transforming all sex into a parable of procreation. When I draw, I am reanimating past pleasures and ideas and performing the same repeated motion until one drawing is finished and another can be started. I am reigniting a glimpse of pleasure from other experiences, other people, and other times. This solitary practice of recollection and making is an erotic connection similar to the erotic fantasy and pleasure of masturbating. In fig. 7, a solitary figure performs the (almost) impossible masturbatory act of licking their own asshole. This image is a provocation about the politicizing of pleasure. It confronts the idea that sex, and pleasure in general, which does not have a productive end (Edelman’s “reproductive futurism”) is a perversion of the ‘intended function’ of sex.

More broadly, these drawings are a meditation on the loop, or repetition of solitary pleasures that come up over and over again beyond those that can be identified as strictly erotic. It is the pleasure of the sun on one’s face or a cold, crisp wind on a body of water at midday. It is the meditative stroke of pencil on paper and the soothing release of that pencil from an aching hand when a drawing is completed. They are a reminder that pleasure is never complete; it stirs and goes dormant, then stirs and goes

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<sup>35</sup> Halberstem, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 88.

dormant, and on and, on and on.

As an adolescent, I would often make erotic drawings in secret. In part, they were meant to stand in for or recreate the few pornographic images I had seen, but most of the charge came from this taboo expression of creativity itself. Making sexual drawings expanded the erotic pleasure of solitary sexual activity. Making the image was itself an erotic activity. Add to that the arousal of seeing sexual images and add to both of those things the charge of shame and transgression of not only having dirty pictures but also having made them. Drawing has been and continues to be a way in which I connect the solitary pleasures of the body, the failure of reproduction, and the continual re-emergence of the gaps where these pleasures can be found.

## Chapter 6: The Infrathin and the Archipelago

Sometimes, the only way to view a subject is obliquely: looking sideways, looking around from multiple vantage points. A plural viewership requires spatial movement, especially when the viewer is capable of such elevated mobility. The ability to move around is a privilege of the global middle class, and it creates a different kind of stillness because, while the body can remain stationary, the mind can move farther afield than ever before. A viewpoint is no longer a static position with a sightline pointing in a single direction; it has multiple points of refraction through the network of dense technological nodes provided by the internet. My research process is intrinsically linked to the unending glimpses, jumps, links, and skips that is both enabled and mandated by browsing the internet. This multiplicity of entry-points, viewpoints and counterpoints was forecasted by post-colonial theorist Édouard Glissant in his conception of relation and “the archipelago.”<sup>36</sup> His conception of interchange or exchange was acutely spatial and used the Caribbean islands as a model for movement and relation between different language groups. This is a movement that is wholly peripheral and de-centralized. In this movement, a center is erased or debunked in favour of a continual and expansive periphery. This denial of a center is a kind of circumnavigation that is explored in an under-represented work by Marcel Duchamp.

Duchamp’s “Infra-Thin” (also written as Infrathin and Infra Thin)<sup>37</sup> is hard to figure as an artwork, but that is probably why it is so endearing to me and why it works so well, given its near in-existence. The only public appearance of the infra thin was on

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<sup>36</sup> Édouard Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation*, (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 84.

<sup>37</sup> Gavin Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book*, (London, Tate Publishing, 2008), 77.

the back cover of *View* magazine in 1945. The text piece on the back of the magazine (translated from French) reads: “When the tobacco smoke smells also of/the mouth which exhales it, the two doors/marry by infra thin.”<sup>38</sup> After his death in 1968, Duchamp’s notes on the infrathin were made public. Its project was an attempt to define a term through example rather than a definitive definition. The list of examples that define the infrathin include “Velvet trousers —/ their whistling sound (in walking) by/ brushing of the 2 legs is an/infra thin separation signaled/by sound,”<sup>39</sup> and “The warmth of a seat (which has just/been left) is infra-thin.”<sup>40</sup> The structural inability (or unwillingness) to propose a definite definition for the term is both a conceptual imperative and a playful evasion of directness. For the term to retain some form of malleability and novelty, the central definition must be avoided at all costs and the connection I draw with Glissant’s “archipelago” is meant to illuminate the infrathin as something more than a linguist play with meaning and contingency. It is a parable about movement, and multiplicity through evasion. The infra-thin is not concerned with what it is but what it could be, of finding *a* way to know, rather than *the* way to know.

This piece also points out the absurdity of any claim of singular, definitive definition for words. The conceit that Duchamp is creating with the infra thin is that, for some reason, definition often implies a singularity: one word, one meaning. As any person who has ever looked at a dictionary can tell you, there are an almost absurd number of ways that words can be defined. For example, the word ‘A’ has thirty-one entries in my MacBook dictionary. This has to do with history, context, colloquial

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<sup>38</sup> Perkins, *The Duchamp Book*, 76.

<sup>39</sup> Perkins, *The Duchamp Book*, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Perkins, *The Duchamp Book*, 55.

affectation, pronunciation, spelling, historical drift, misreading, mistranslation, misspelling, etc. With the infra-thin, Duchamp calls out language for the black mirror it is: a surface that is much more useful for divination than accurate re- presentation. Language will always stand in for itself before it makes concessions for any of your ideas.

The Infra Thin is a way of imagining continuity without imposing sameness and this is the way I imagine *A Wreath of Snakes*, *A Lexicon Devil*, *A Hole in Time*, *A Single Thought*, which is both a series of drawings and a whole piece. It has components and spans a wide range of topics while always returning to the same central question, which cannot be directly articulated.

This simultaneous multiplicity and evasion of definition, as well as the instability of the idea of categories of gender and sexuality, have been investigated and challenged by Judith Butler, who characterizes naturalized categories of male, female, masculine, feminine, lesbian, gay, straight, etc. as products of a habitual cycle of repeated performance.<sup>41</sup> Unlike a ritualized religious performance (like praying the rosary), the performance of these categories is not a set performance; it comes in many different ways at different times and with different degrees of severity. That is to say, the stakes and style of the performance of gender and sexuality shift in ways that can be unexpected and surprising. On the repetition of these performances, Butler states “that there is a need for a repetition at all is a sign that identity is not self-identical. It requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of becoming de-instituted at every interval.”<sup>42</sup> Butler sees the gaps between performances as generative

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<sup>41</sup> Judith Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, (Hoboken, Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 725.

<sup>42</sup> Butler, *Gender Insubordination*, 725.

space for disruption and flux.

This conception of identity as liminal, habitual, vulnerable, continually contingent on context, susceptible to drift, and decentralized definition is echoed by Duchamp's Infrathin and Glissant's archipelago. They exist by virtue of this state of flux and perpetual motion. Glissant's conception of the "poetics of relation," which is expressed by the archipelago, sees that "this constant repetition is sufficient evidence that such a poetics never culminates in some qualitative absolute."<sup>43</sup> This unending pursuit, the open-ended, multiplied cycle of definition can be witnessed throughout the shifting history of definition in sexology, gender, and race. This movement should not take an absolute, imagined end-point as a guiding light; instead this movement should be viewed as a way of achieving completeness.

The infrathin and the archipelago achieve their usefulness through proliferation association, and expansion. The more they evade, the more they tell you. They give shape through excess and polyphony. Their open-ended approach offers a new entry point at every node and this series of drawings is constructed in a similar way. At every point there is an entrance, an exit and an alternative. It is up to the viewer to navigate *A Wreath of Snakes*, *A Lexicon Devil*, *A Hole in Time*, *A Single Thought*, but this work attempts to leave itself open at every point.

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<sup>43</sup> Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation*, 35.

## Chapter 7: Other Voices, Other Rooms; Different people, Different Times

The experience of queerness as a non-reproductive lineage, creates holes in time and portals to different bodies which are not connected through genetic inheritance, but through a shared sensibility. This recognition and mirroring is part of what Elizabeth Freeman describes as the “social activity” of “making other queers.”<sup>44</sup> This process of socialization, as I experienced it, was not guided by any parental inheritance but was an act of looking around, looking back, looking to the side and seeing something that I might be drawn to, something that I could orient myself toward. In this series of drawings, there are a polyphony of voices from different times that have affected my life in ways small and large, and connect me to different lives and an alternative history that is radiated out across time. These encounters are a way of touching lives from the past which artist Ryan Danny Owen describes as “an act of cruising through a queer time.”<sup>45</sup>

One of these encounters is with the singer Darby Crash, and is represented by the circular logo of his hardcore band *Germes* in fig. 6. Part of the name of this project, *A Wreath of Snakes, A Lexicon Devil, A Hole in Time, A Single Thought*, is taken from the name of song “Lexicon Devil.” In the song, Crash spits: “I am a lexicon devil with a battered brain,”<sup>46</sup> pointing to the structures of language that are so essential to the band’s preoccupation with fascist tactics and aesthetics. Crash’s early schooling in

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<sup>44</sup> Freeman, *Erot historiography*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> Ryan Danny Owen. About. <https://www.ryandannyowen.com/about/>, Accessed October 19, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Darby Crash, (1979), “Lexicon Devil”, (*GI*) (Los Angeles, Slash Records, 1979).

Scientology<sup>47</sup> acted as a strong influence on his understanding of the ways that language can be manipulated to control and structure people's reality. I believe that Crash was not attempting to point to one single structure as a cult or cult-like environment, but to illustrate the way that different cults bump up against each other, how every person is a "lexicon devil with a battered brain."<sup>48</sup> Crash's status as a closeted queer in a punk scene that was violently homophobic, gives context to his subsequent adoption of fascist aesthetics as an inversion of the power dynamics that lead to the murder of at least 15,000 homosexual and bisexual men and transgender women during the Holocaust. It also points back, as a kind of warning, to the complicity of homosexuals, like Ernst Röhm who served as the head of Hitler's early Nazi paramilitary and was murdered in the initial purge of homosexuals from the party.

Another encounter is with the gay Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace, who rose to fame in the late 1980s with his hyper-flamboyant designs and baroque patterns. The circular logo of Versace (fig. 15) displays the head of Medusa, the Greek villain who could turn people to stone with her gaze. This logo invokes both the revenge of the feminine and the power of looking. It also alludes to the Greek meander that encircles the waist band of Versace underwear and the erotic border it creates where the torso meets the genital zone. With its connection to undergarments, excess, queerness, and ancient myth, the Versace logo holds a cacophony of pleasurable glimpses but also painful ones. With these pleasures comes the commodification and appropriation of queer aesthetics by the dominant hero-capitalist elite, an unattainable standard of wealth

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<sup>47</sup> Brendan Mullen, Don Bolles, and Adam Parfrey, *Lexicon Devil: The Fast times and Short Life of Darby Crash and the Germs* (Los Angeles, Feral House, 2002), 279.

<sup>48</sup> Brendan Mullen, Don Bolles, and Adam Parfrey, *Lexicon Devil: The Fast times and Short Life of Darby Crash and the Germs* (Los Angeles, Feral House, 2002), 279.

and beauty, the supremacy of the able white body as the pinnacle of wealth and desire, as well as the violence of Versace's murder.

Fig. 16 is a replication of the pattern from Brion Gysin's "dream machine," which was developed as a meditative tool meant to induce a trance state through the flickering of light. The pattern is to be cut into paper which is rolled into a tube and placed upright on a turntable rotating at 45rpm. A light bulb is suspended in the centre of the paper column and as it rotates, the light is interrupted and flickers in rhythm. Gysin was a prolific queer poet, painter, and novelist who was instrumental in the formation of the Beat sensibility, collaborating with William Burrows on the formation of the "cut-up" poem. His interest in religions like Tibetan Buddhism and Sufism had a huge influence on artists like The Rolling Stone's Brian Jones (for whom Gysin wrote the liner notes for *Brian Jones presents the Pipes of Pan at Joujouka*). Gysin was an artist in constant flux: I run into traces of him constantly; he is often cited in interviews by musicians and artists like Genesis P. Ordich (member of "Throbbing Gristle" and "Psychic TV") and Iggy Pop. While researching Gysin, I found a review of his last posthumously published novel, *The Last Museum*, in which the reviewer stated that "maybe Gysin's failure to achieve greater public recognition is due to a commitment to, and talent for, work in so many different media."<sup>49</sup> It is this constant movement, fluctuation and flicker that made Brion a magnetic figure in queer history and a subject of my temporal cruising.

In her auto-theoretical memoir, *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson describes an encounter with a sonogram technician who insists on giving gendered traits to her still developing child and notes that "we develop, even in utero, in response to a flow of

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<sup>49</sup> Oliver Harris, *The Beat Goes On*, (London, New Statesman, 1986).

projections and reflections ricocheting off us. Eventually, we call that snowball a self.”<sup>50</sup>

For many people, this flow of projections aligns with the life they will go on to lead.

Many other people assume their assigned sex and heterosexual orientation and it more or less matches their experience of desire and gender identity. For queers, the response to this flow of projections is quite different. Many queer people have to look beyond what is offered by the flow of assumptions that surrounds them, towards other people in other places at other times. Though Nelson imagines a process that is driven by ricocheting, I tend to think of it more in terms of sticking. As a developing person (a process I see as continual rather than bound to some crucible of adolescence), I try things on: some stick and many fall away. In the video game *Katamari Damacy*, you play as an alien who is pushing around a giant ball. As you roll over some things, they stick to you. Fig. 19 is an image of the two Japanese characters that spell “Katamari Damacy,” which roughly translates to “clump soul.” This image is included as a way of acknowledging the patchwork nature of the self; the way that things accumulate over time and are influenced by one another. It is through these meandering, glimpsing encounters with figures from queer history that I have, in part, formed a self.

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<sup>50</sup> Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*, (Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2015), 68.

## Conclusion

We no longer reveal totality within ourselves by lightning flashes. We approach it through the accumulation of sediments.

From *The Poetics of Relation*, By Édouard Glissant, 1990.

Though I see the works in my MFA exhibition as an ongoing series, there are several conclusions I feel confident about. *A Wreath of Snakes, A Lexicon Devil, A Hole in Time, A Single Thought* is a collection of sedimentary glimpses that reveal the formation of my thoughts and emotional experience across different bodies and different times. It enacts a Ptolemaic way of looking, of using flux to reach out and touch the sediment of queerness through looking, searching, and hunting. In this work, I use sexual identity to open up gaps and explore the inverted places where the light of heteronormative hegemony may not shine.

As an installation, this work offers my glimpses throughout time as an open letter to queerness and to the people who I find myself *in line* with. This work also offers the viewer a chance to assess their own orientation toward the work and to consider the ways that they may or may not find themselves *in line* with it. It uses a conception of orientation and sexuality to ask questions about spacial relations between people and objects.

This installation is a way of exploring the connections between the pleasures of the mind and those of the body and how they are connected through the act of drawing. It looks at the ways that the formal properties of drawing are connected to the gaps in

the “polymorphous techniques of power”<sup>51</sup> embodied by hetero-patriarchy, which present a false totality in the face of existences that challenge some of its basest assumptions. This work animates a line of thought, a sensibility which is accumulated over time. It is expressed as a visual bibliography and a personal lexicon through which I align myself with other queer makers and thinkers. This alignment is continued in my support paper, in which I lean on queer theorists who have been essential in the formation and ethos of this work.

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<sup>51</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 11.

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## APENDIX A: Figures

A note on the figures:

These are diagrams of the drawings presented in the exhibition. They are all representations of images that are 44 x 30 inches. All of the drawings, with the exception of the one represented by figure 16, are pencil on paper. Figure 16 is cut paper, so the red in this representation is to be understood as the red of the wall poking through the holes which make up the drawing.

All of the drawing are to scale with the exception of figures 1 and 2, which have been enlarged to show detail. Please see figure 25 and 26 for an idea of their actual scale.

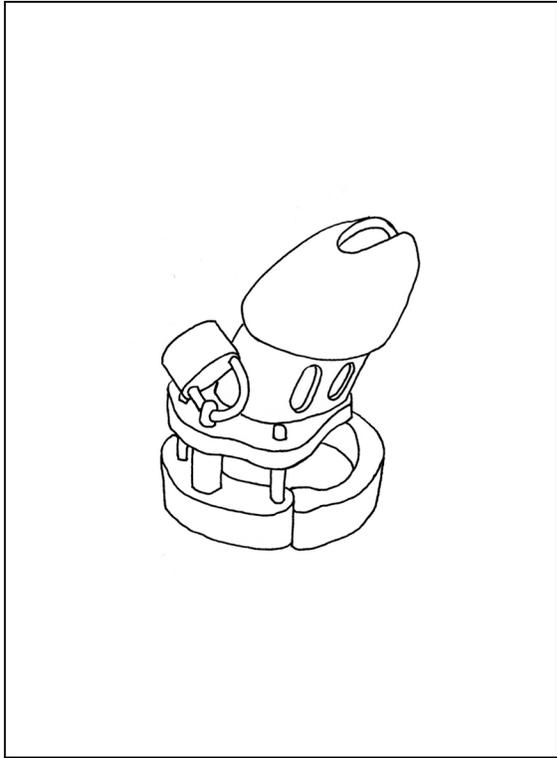


Figure 1

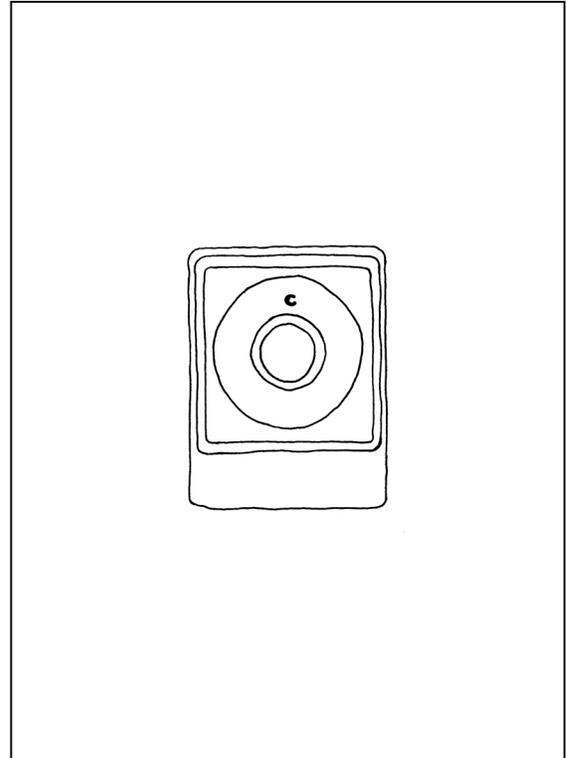


Figure 2

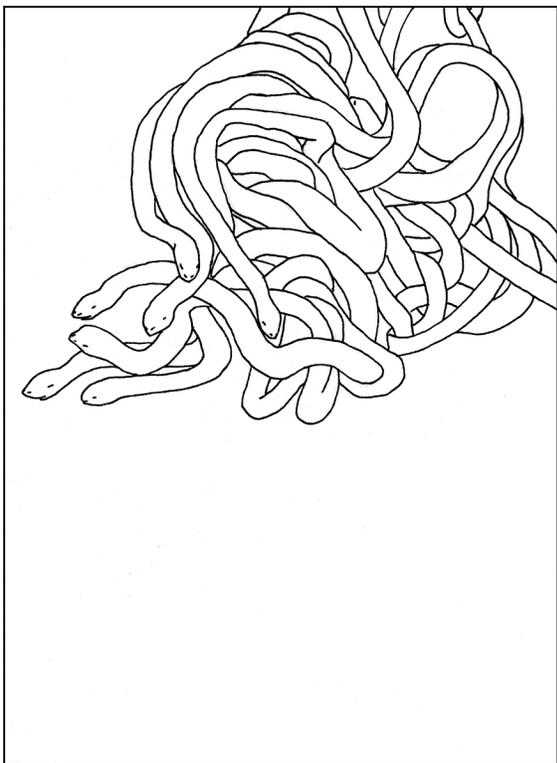


Figure 3



Figure 4

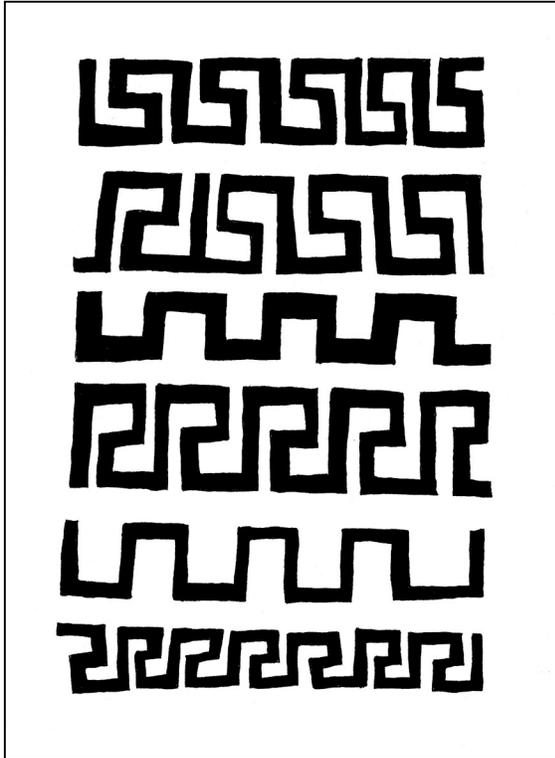


Figure 5

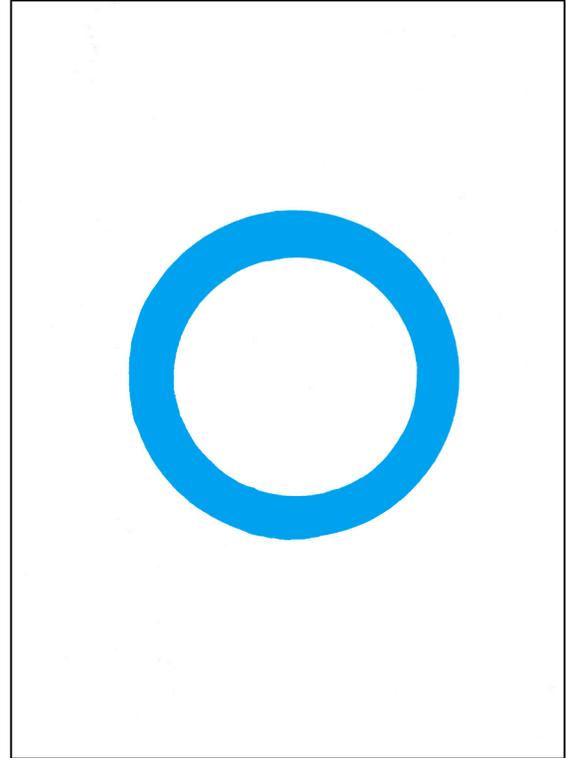


Figure 6

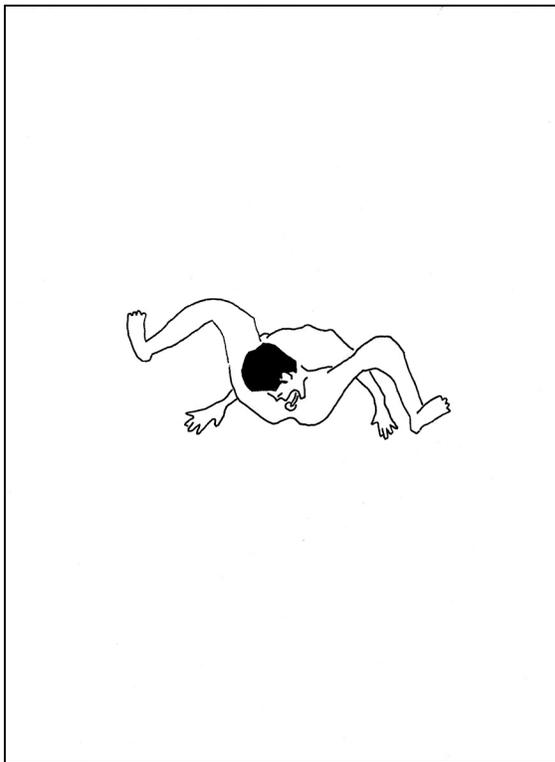


Figure 7

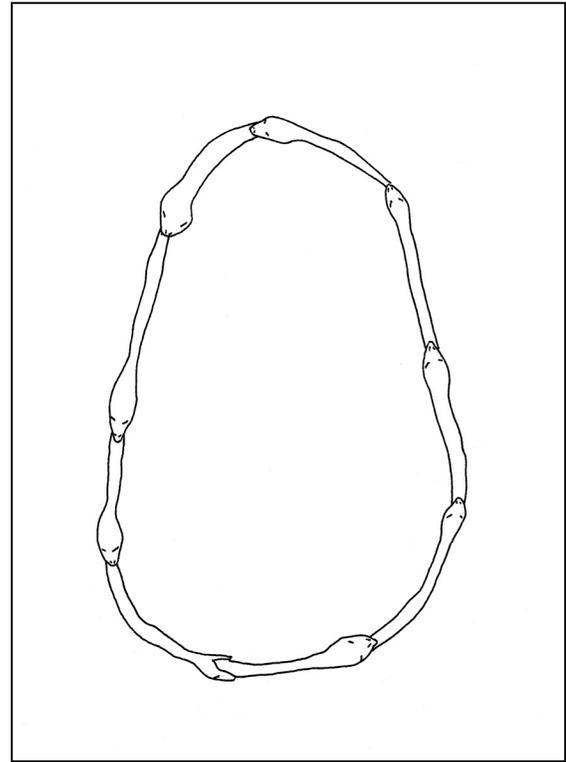


Figure 8

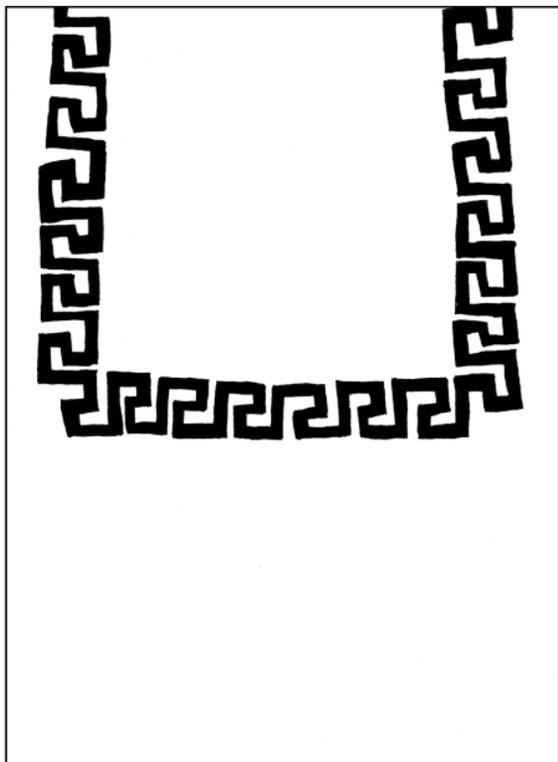


Figure 9

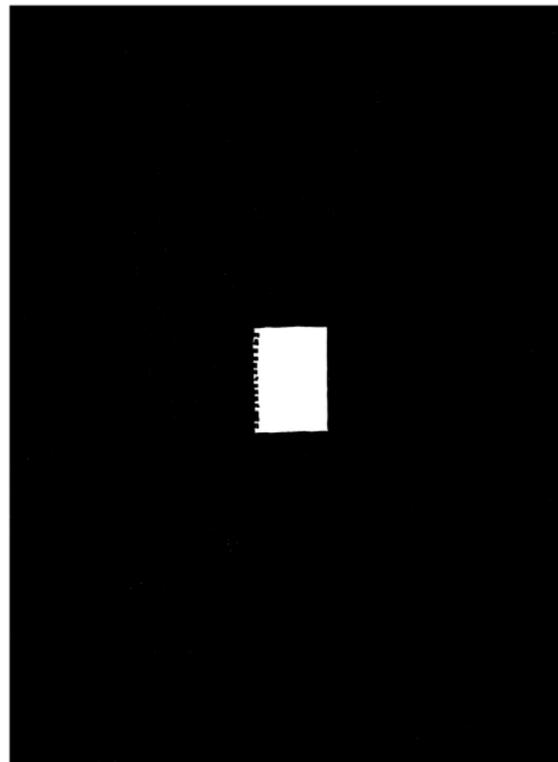


Figure 10



Figure 11

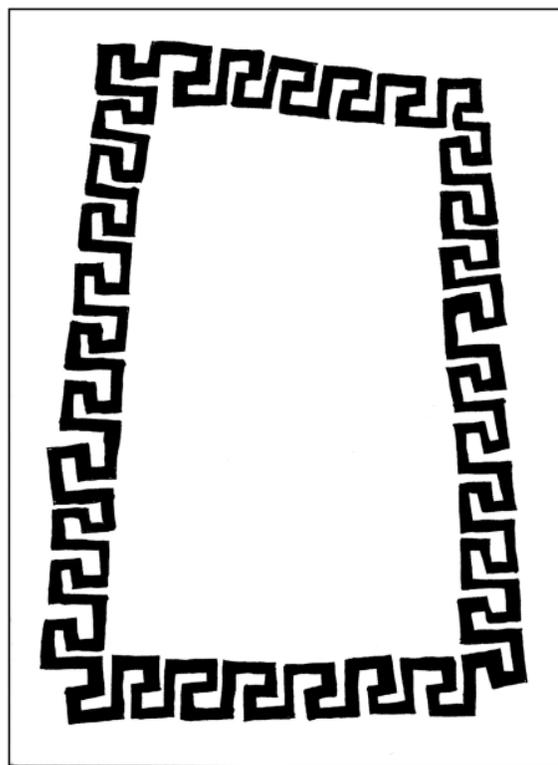


Figure 12

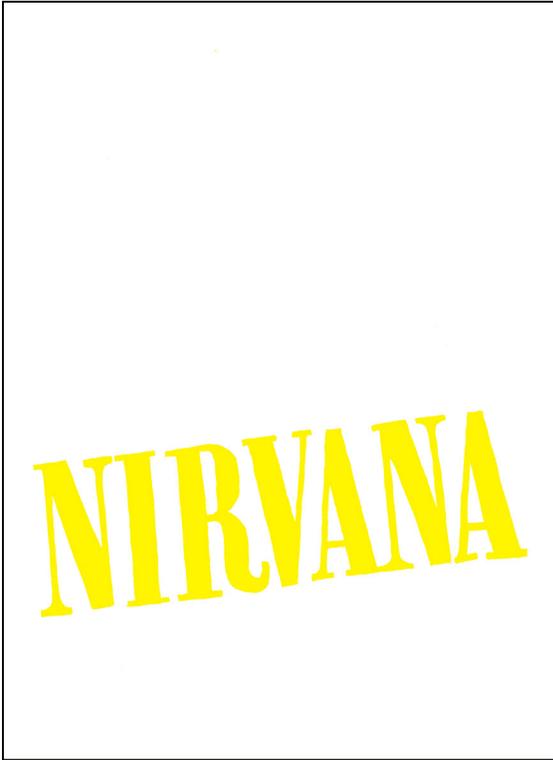


Figure 13

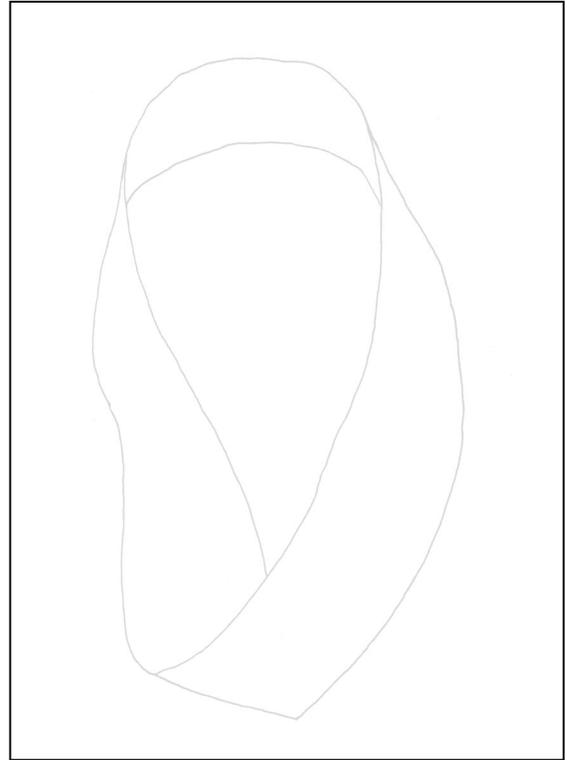


Figure 14



Figure 15

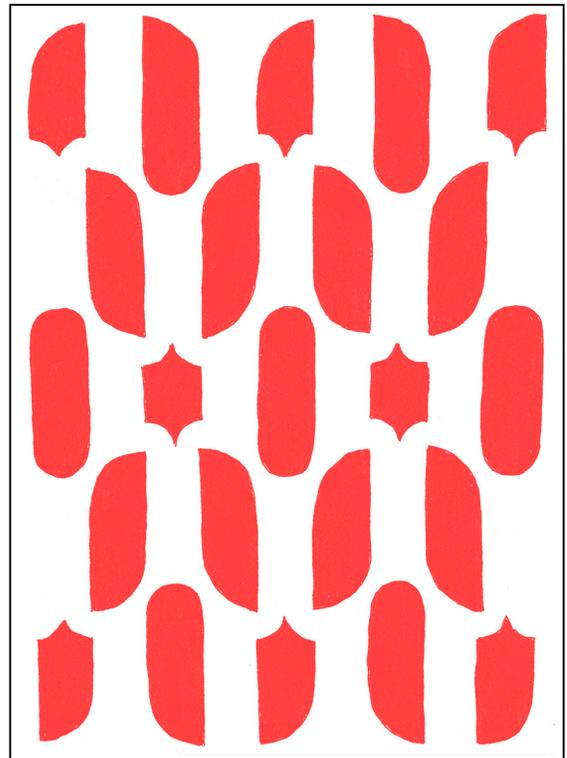


Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

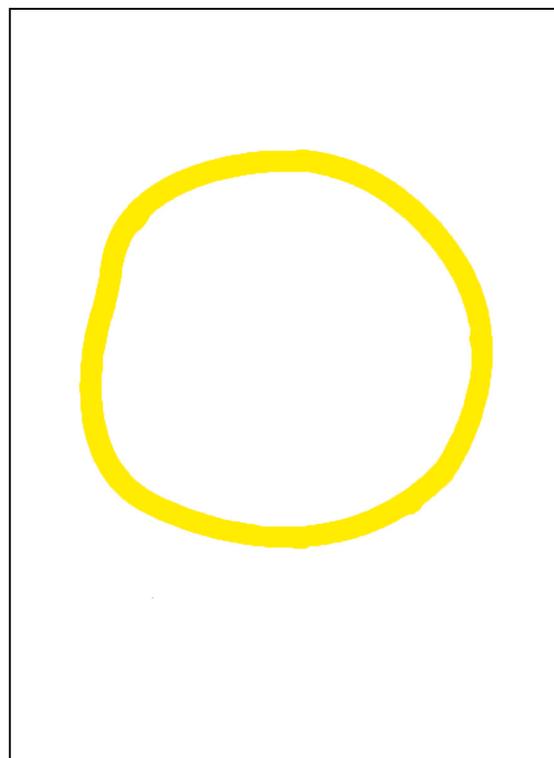


Figure 20

NNic  
 NNic Wilson  
 JJames  
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 JJames Nicholas Wilson  
 Mr. James Nicholas Wilson  
 Mr. Nick Wilson  
 N. Wilson  
 James Wilson  
 James N. Wilson  
 Nick Wilson  
 Nicholas James Wilson  
 Nikolas Wilson  
 Prof. Wilson

Figure 21

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Figure 22

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Figure 23

Live Birth, Water Birth, Home  
 Birth, Helicopter Birth, Moon  
 Birth, Jacuzzi Birth, Natural Birth,  
 Assisted Birth, Swamp Birth,  
 Subway Birth, Taxi Birth, Silent  
 Birth, Unnatural Birth, Satellite  
 Birth, Negative Birth, Temporary  
 Birth, Good Birth, Gayby, Breach  
 Birth, Pre-Marital Birth, Smashing  
 Pumpkins Birth, Scheduled Birth,  
 Reverse Birth, Forced Birth, Still  
 Birth, Silver Chair Birth, Full  
 Birth, Partial Birth, Perfect Birth,  
 Surprise Birth, Metallica Birth,  
 Rooftop Birth, Destination Birth,  
 Taxi Birth, Group Birth, Hospital  
 Birth, Work Birth, Wrong Birth,  
 Decoy Birth, Accidental Birth,  
 Replacement Birth, A Birth of  
 Convenience, River Birth,  
 Continental Birth, First Birth,  
 Long-Distance Birth, Circle Birth,  
 Full Metal Birth.

Figure 24

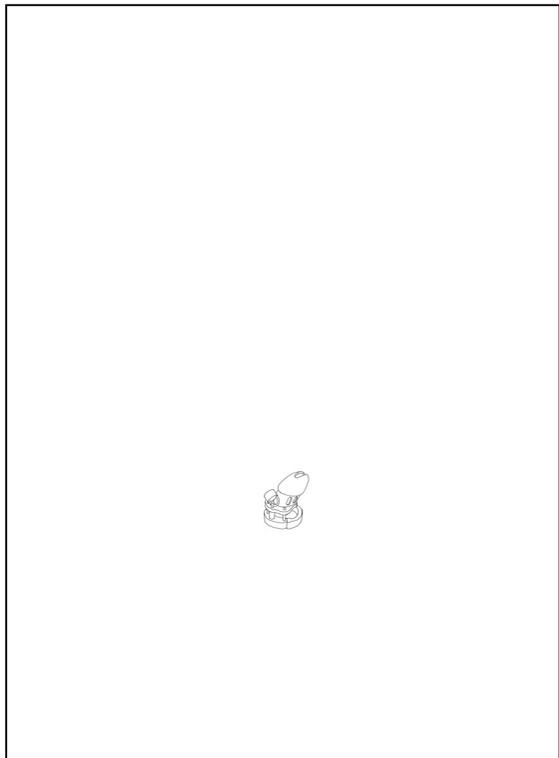


Figure 25

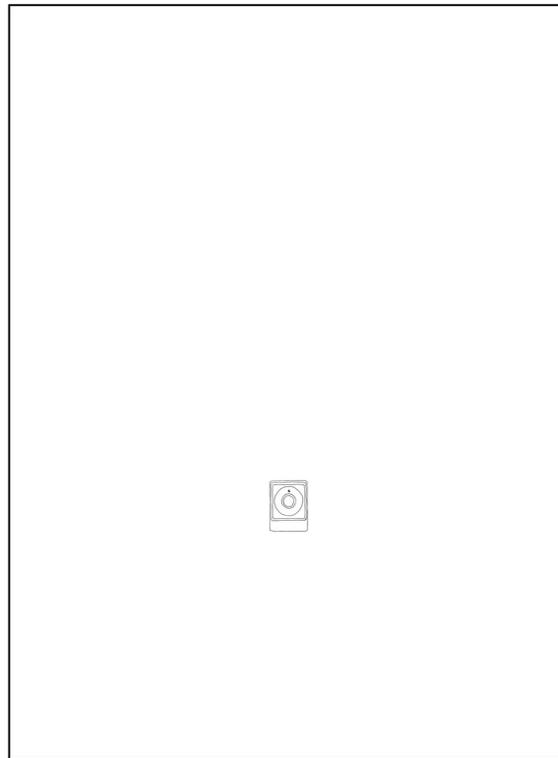


Figure 26