

Deconstructing *Panty Pennants* and Revealing Absent Presence

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Abstract

More multifaceted than the mere titles we maintain—as daughters, sisters, wives, and teachers, for example—sexuality is a part of our identity worth exploring and honoring. Women's stories, gathered in a questionnaire, highlight sexual identity in *Panty Pennants*—an exhibition held in late 2012 at the Leedy-Voukos Art Center in Kansas City, Missouri. The author uses a process of thinking *with* deconstruction to explore various texts from the exhibition. In doing this, she learns to hear silence, and to see women as multi-dimensional.

Keywords: poststructural, deconstruction, gender, reflexivity, subjectivity, identity

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*"My first time was memorable. I was so naive and he was so tender."
Relationship Status: Divorced
Age: 51-60*

On March 19, 2012, I disseminated a five-item questionnaire (see Appendix for questions asked) via email and Facebook to around 100 women family members, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances to gather evocative narratives regarding their sexual identities. Thirty-one anonymous survey responses ultimately inspired the dyed and patterned forms installed in a December 2012 exhibition, *Panty Pennants* (see Figure 1). These forms resembled both thong panties and pennant flags and acted as signifiers for celebrating women and self-expression. The prayer flags of Wencheng Temple in China informed both the color choices (e.g., gray, navy, orange, pink, turquoise, yellow) and formal arrangement of the dyed forms; my intent was to create a vibrant and sacred space for both visitors and myself.



Figure 1: Image of art installation at Leedy-Voulkos Arts Center in Kansas City, Missouri.
Photo credit: D. Shaughnessy, 2012.

Visitors to the exhibition moved under and around the large-scale panties, measuring around 3' x 3' each, upon entering the Back Gallery at the Leedy-Voulkos Art Center in Kansas City, Missouri. I machine-embroidered expressive text snippets from the women's narratives on the back of each panty, inviting viewers to pause and read (see Figure 2). I also invited viewers to listen; a piped audio recording (see Audio file 1 for a sample) of women's voices shared the gallery space. Fifteen friends volunteered to

select and recite one or more of the 31 narratives using GarageBand. I synthesized and looped the recordings. Though unsolicited, many of my friends confessed to having completed the Sexuality Questionnaire.



Figure 2: Detail image of embroidery on panty.
Photo credit: D. Shaughnessy, 2012.

<https://ualberta.aviaryplatform.com/r/zg6g15v934>

Audio file 1: Audio file sample of piped recording.

Nearly two years have passed since the exhibition, and I have decided to revisit *Panty Pennants* through a theoretical lens. My familiarity with the concept and imagery informed this new direction, as did the content garnered from two research methodology and theory courses (Narrative Inquiry and Poststructural Theory and Research Methods) offered at a large research institution in the Midwest. The following question guided the study: *How does the deconstruction of an art exhibition about women's sexual identities document the absent presence?*

I deconstructed *Panty Pennants* through a “continuous opening and exploration of . . . spaces, passion, and silences” (Mazzei, 2007, p. 15) to present participants’ stories in new, transformative ways. A multimodal call-and-response exchange (see Table 1) demonstrated thinking *with* Derrida’s (1972/1982) deconstruction (Caputo, 1997; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2007) as a methodology. For example, I responded to written text with a visual representation in the first research strand (i.e.,

The Trace of Faith), and then my colleague² responded to the visual representation with a musical score that she composed. I documented this process through an interview excerpt with complementary visuals in the second strand (i.e., *Illuminati*). Finally, I listened to the composition, and continued to think *with* theory as a methodology when writing a response to what I heard in the third strand (i.e., *Artist/Researcher/Teacher-Becoming*). Ultimately, panties as pennants and thinking *with* theory functioned as conceptual and procedural springboards for exploring multimodal ways of coming to know, and honoring women and our sexual identities.

Table 1		
Field Texts Helpful in Exploring Research Questions		
Field Texts	Sub-Questions with Call and Response	
1. Panty Pennants	Call:	How does the deconstruction of written text document women's sexual identities?
	Response:	Visual text (i.e., <i>The Trace of Faith</i> —a series of artistic representations that I designed)
2. The Trace of Faith	Call:	How does the deconstruction of visual text document women's sexual identities?
	Response:	Audial text (i.e., <i>Illuminati</i> —musical score written and composed by Cynthia Williams Phelps, doctoral candidate in Music Education at State University)
3. Illuminati	Call:	How does the deconstruction of audial text document women's sexual identities?
	Response:	Written text (i.e., becoming by thinking with theory)
4. Artist/Researcher/Teacher-Becoming		

Table 1: Field texts helpful in exploring research questions.

I began by exposing aspects of my reflexivity and identity in the form of a five-scene scripted piece titled *Gingham Fabric*. Sharing part of my own story was important, as it informed the ways that I thought *with* theory as an artist/researcher/teacher-becoming. The piece was also in conversation with *Panty Pennants*—both materially and discursively, as I integrated (a) gingham fabric into the exhibition as a unifying element, connecting several panties; and (b) part of my mom's survey response via embroidery onto one of the panties.

Gingham Fabric: Reflexivity and Subjectivity

Scene 1: GINGHAM FABRIC

NARRATOR: My mother and father grew up in Small Town, Missouri
Children of parents who lived through the Great Depression
Cotton fields and a general store.

GAGGY [my father's mother]: There's not much to say.

² The author would like to acknowledge Cynthia Williams Phelps, doctoral candidate in music education, for her creative contributions that informed portions of the present article.

NANNY [my mother's mother]: Too much gingham fabric, not enough food,
Hoovervilles and drought.

WOMEN: cleaned, cooked, canned, mothered, doctored . . .

NARRATOR: patched
darned socks
mended sleeve cuffs and collars for Sunday clothes

sewed . . .

dressess, quilts, and aprons
often out of flour and cotton sacks and gingham fabric
So much gingham fabric

WOMEN: followed, listened . . .

Scene 2: THE CHURCH

NARRATOR: My mother and father grew up in the Missouri Bootheel.
She was raised in the Southern Baptist church; he was raised Methodist.

MOTHER: Noah Hampton Wade was your great, great, great, great grandfather
and a Southern Baptist minister who traveled Tennessee spreading the word of
God.

WOMEN: don't dance, don't drink . . . followed, listened

NARRATOR: July 26, 2011: email from my mother with "Baptism dates" as the
subject

Father: First Baptist Church, Missouri
March 10, 1985

Mother: Second Baptist Church, Missouri
October 14, 1956

Son: Tulsa Baptist Church, Oklahoma
May 8, 1994

Daughter: First Baptist Church, Missouri
November 3, 1985

Scene 3: (S)MOTHERING

WOMEN: don't dance, don't drink . . . followed, listened

NARRATOR: Childhood: followed, listened

Head, shoulders, knees-and-toes
Knees-and-toes

First day of kindergarten
Shiny, patent leather shoes
Roses-match-socks-match-dress-match-bag-match-bows

MOTHER: Good girls make their bed every morning.
Good girls help their mothers clean the house.
Good girls help their mothers make dinner.
Good girls chew their food slowly.

Scene 4: ABSENT FATHER, PRESENT MOTHER

NARRATOR: American dream

Yellow lab
One daughter
One son
Two-story house in a cul-de-sac

Absent father, Present mother

WOMEN: follow, listen

Scene 5: GINGHAM FABRIC

NARRATOR: Years passed
Resentment gave way to forgiveness
Then gratitude

WOMEN: but, intimacy . . . inadequacies, insecurities

MOTHER: My mom had a special apron that she would put on to signal to my dad that she was feeling “frisky.” She is 88 years old now, and still has that apron neatly tucked into a drawer, even though dad has been gone for years.

WOMEN: follow, listen

I engaged in reflexivity, or “heightened awareness of the self, acting in the social world” (Elliott, 2005, p. 153), by writing this piece, where I chose to remember and (re)present stories from my recent and not-so-recent past.

Postmodernism: Flattening Cultural Binaries and Hierarchies

Designing both the exhibition and the scripted piece helped to flatten the enduring binaries and hierarchies established in my culture's history. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the sexes in the United States harken back to 16th-century colonial America, when court records document punishment for women who did not follow social mores (Andrews, 2010). This subjugation continued through the 17th century, as evidenced by Puritan minister Richard Baxter, when he claimed that women "were to be 'prudent, lowly, loving, meek, self-denying, patient, harmless, holy, and heavenly'" (as cited in Andrews, 2010, p. 5). Beginning in the early 19th century, women received what was believed to be a "useful education that would teach the virtues of self-discipline, reason, prudence, and the calm pleasures of domestic life" (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 4). Shortly thereafter, women gained confidence and recognition as they used handicrafts as a vehicle for speaking out against slavery and in favor of women's rights. Chicago (1975) claims:

Though the nineteenth century left us with new freedoms, it also left us with personalities shaped by male-dominated society. Women still suffered from feelings of inferiority and helplessness, and the culture reinforced those feelings by eliminating the history of the great feminist revolution. (p. 171)

Feminist theory deconstructs this patriarchal hierarchy in favor of redefining what it means to be a woman (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2002; Chicago, 1975). Chicago (1975) states that this redefining "is the first step in the act of changing the society, its values, and its priorities, and it is no mere coincidence that the present women's movement is based upon the examination and alteration of female role through consciousness-raising" (p. 173). The alteration permeated views of both identity development and of the artmaking process, which become multifaceted and complex. The new perspective is part of postmodernism, and is a direct response to the linear view purported by male-dominated modernism. I contributed to postmodern conversations via *Panty Pennants* and *Gingham Fabric* to honor women and our sexual identities.

Deconstruction and the Absent Present

Being mindful of my own reflexivity, subjectivity, and history gave me the tools to examine critically my philosophical and theoretical positions that informed this study. St. Pierre (2011) recommends that qualitative educational researchers align themselves and their work within the "philosophical . . . conversations that have created and continue to create science" (p. 5). In brief, I am inspired by continental philosophy, as its topics, themes, and practices encompass a variety of ways of "*doing* philosophy, and perhaps even . . . '*making*' philosophy—in the sense of creating new philosophical disciplines and inter-disciplines" (Lord, 2009, p. 8, emphasis in original). According to St. Pierre (2011), researchers should use philosophy to (a) "get to the intellectual problem of explaining why things are as they are and how they might be different" (p. 3) and (b) induce cohesion between epistemology/ontology and methodology.

In response to St. Pierre's (2011) plea for theoretically rigorous research, I use poststructural theory and analysis by referencing Derrida's (1972/1982) conception of

deconstruction (Caputo, 1997; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2007) in this study. During an interview with Caputo (1997), Derrida states that deconstruction is made up of

the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break. The condition of this performative success, which is never guaranteed, is the alliance of these to newness. (p. 5)

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) state that deconstruction disrupts convention by “dismantl[ing] our preconceived notions and expos[ing] the absent present. The absent presence is that which has been ignored in an attempt to preserve the illusion of truth” (p. 18). In this project, I explore written, visual, and audial field texts surrounding one art installation through a “continuous opening and exploration of the spaces, passion, and silences not yet deconstructed” (Mazzei, 2007, p. 15) to document the absent presence of women’s sexual identities.

Thinking *with* theory. In this study, I do not attempt to interpret or *make meaning* out of participants’ stories, but rather present the field text in a new, transformative way. One way to discover what text and philosophy *do* (Colebrook, 2002; Lord, 2009) is by thinking *with* theory. I put theory to work as a methodology when analyzing survey responses, field notes, and an interview transcript. Table 1 is a list of field texts and strands I found helpful in exploring specific research questions. I used a call-and-response exchange to demonstrate how the direction of each strand is guided by thinking *with* theory in the preceding strand. In this call-and-response, I read theory through methodology and visual art through music and writing. Deleuze and Parnet (1977/1987) discuss the latter integration further:

There is no substantial difference between [art], music, and writing. These activities are differentiated from one another by their respective substances, codes and territorialities, but not by the abstract line they trace, which shoots between them and carries them towards a common fate. (pp. 73-74)

And so I followed that line as it zigzags (Deleuze, 1987) through art, music, and writing all while attempting to expose the silences that exist between and within them.

The Trace of Faith

I proceeded with the study by revisiting the abbreviated excerpts from the survey responses—the same excerpts that I embroidered onto the backs of the panties for the art installation, entitled *Panty Pennants*, two years prior. I also explored the silence between the excerpts, deconstructing the *written text* to document the absent presence. I outline the six phases of thinking *with* theory below.

1. In a Word document, I originally highlighted the abbreviated excerpts from the survey responses in yellow to add emphasis. The emphasis served as a visual reminder during the embroidery process two years prior. To begin this new

analysis process, after copying and pasting the field text data into a different Word document, I changed the color of text: black to gray and **yellow highlight** to black. The purpose of altering the color of the font and highlighting was to explore the subtlety in the text while maintaining some visual contrast. See Figure 3 for an excerpt from the process.

9. I've learned that intimacy is more than just sex; you have to be equally inclined in **faith** also.
 10. My mom had a **special apron** that she would put on to signal to my dad that she was feeling "frisky." She is 88-years-old now, and still has that apron neatly tucked into a drawer, even though dad has been gone for years.
 11. Grannie, must not have known much about romantic intimacy because she referred to it as **granddad "bothering"** her.
- Complete the following statement: I feel sexy or sexual when _____ because
12. I feel sexual when he reaches over to get my hand, when we share a long hug, and when I reach out and **squeeze his buns**.
 13. I feel sexual when both of us are in the shower, when we're **cooking together**, and during slow walks and long talks about our life.
 14. I feel sexy when I know **I look good**. A drink or two doesn't hurt anything either.

Figure 3: Survey response excerpt denoting changes to font color.

2. I then changed the gray text to white to emphasize the unmarkedness of the remaining text—the *with* words (Mazzei, 2007). In doing this, I built on Brekhus's (1998) notion of the marked and unmarked "as basic features of social perception" (p. 36). According to Brekhus (1998), extraordinary phenomena are marked and represent the "uncommon features of social life" (p. 34), while ordinary phenomena are unmarked and embody the "taken-for-granted elements of social reality" (p. 34). He argued for a balanced representation of social life and social reality by highlighting both unmarked and marked phenomena. In this study, unmarked and marked phenomena (Brekhus, 1998) support considerations of silences (Mazzei, 2007). Mazzei (2007) engages in a problematic of silence when encouraging researchers to listen to it as "an essential part of the whole language" (p. 48). Put differently, Mazzei is particularly interested in markedness, but realizes that unmarkedness helps to frame the former—the silence cannot exist without the words; the marked cannot

exist without the unmarked. See Figure 4 for an excerpt of unmarked survey responses and complementary marked silence.

faith

special apron

granddad "bothering" her

squeeze his buns

cooking together

I look good

Figure 4: Survey response excerpt denoting unmarked words and marked silence.

3. To view all of the survey responses on one page, I adjusted the line spacing from 2.0 to 1.5. This was an important step, as each response helped to reinforce the intent of this research: honoring women's sexual identities. The spacing adjustment also allowed me to better identify the pauses and interruptions of the document. Figure 5 represents this process.



Figure 5: Survey responses with adjusted line spacing.

4. The influence of unmarked text—and text in general—is conditional. I consequently experimented with Derrida's *sous rature* by putting it under erasure—a contradictory process of acknowledging and challenging language (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). As an artist, I was curious to see the visual impact of the marked, silent positive negative space and the unmarked space (see Figure 6). In both visual art and design and in architecture, positive negative space refers to "the void between structures . . . articulated as a positive shape with as much form as the structures themselves" (Brekhus, 1998, p. 43).

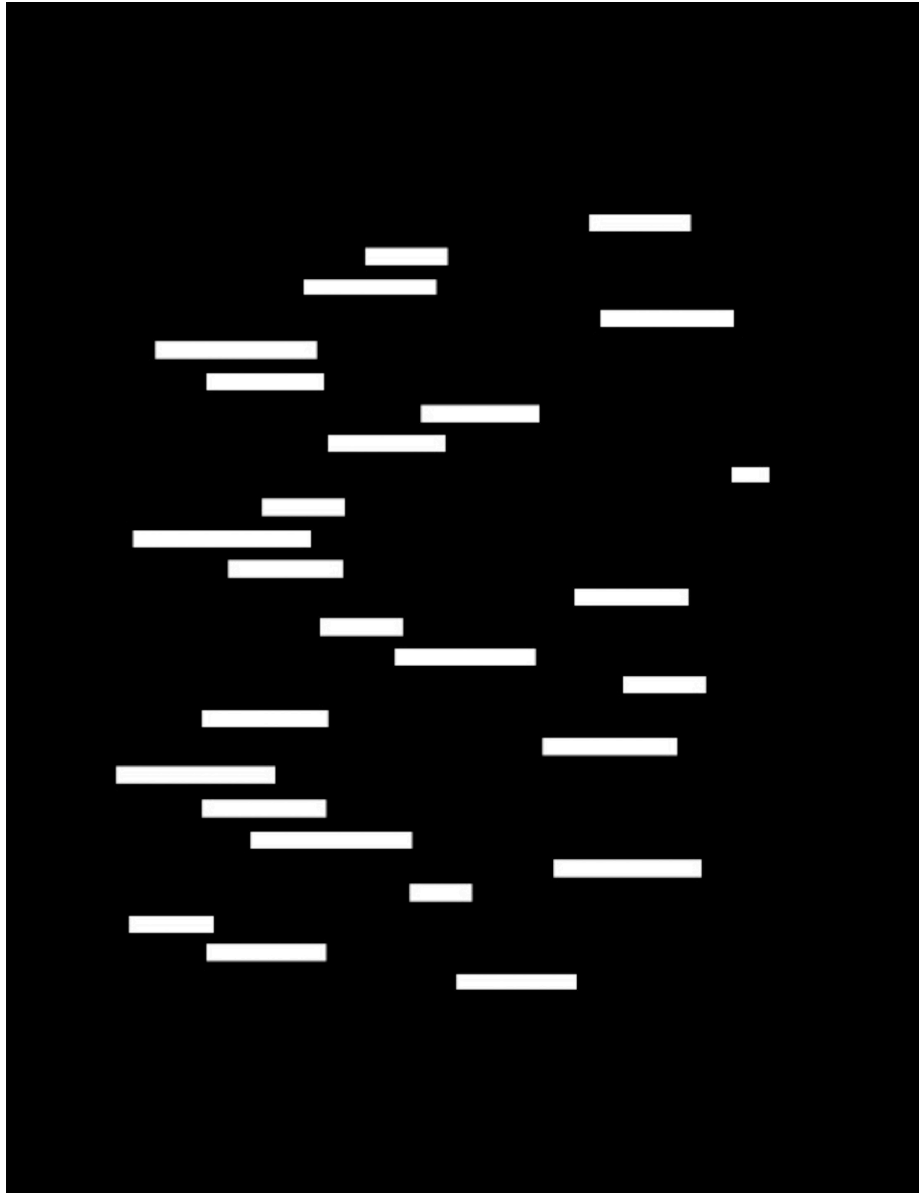


Figure 6: Visual representation of data under erasure.

5. Particularly intrigued by Figure 6, due to the suggestion of what once was and what could be, I minimized the image, and played with various fills, shapes, transparencies, colors, and patterns in Word while considering the compositional elements from the *Panty Pennants* installation (see Figure 1). I placed circles over what appeared to be an outlier mark: the trace of the word “faith” from a survey response (see Figure 7). I title this strand of the study *The Trace of Faith* because I allowed myself to trust the survey responses, and the process of thinking *with* theory.

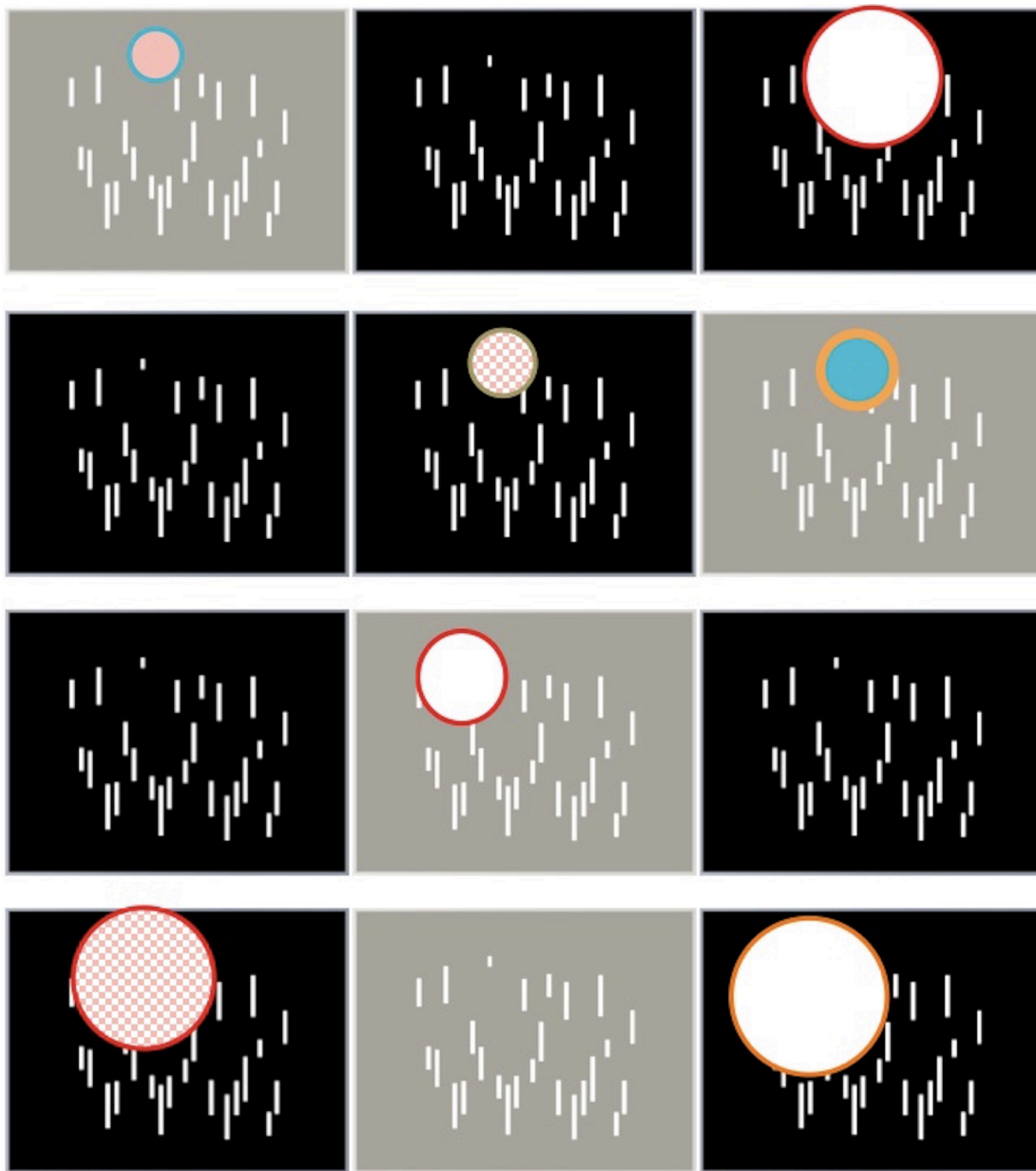


Figure 7: Visual representation of compositional play resulting in “the trace of faith.”

6. I then experimented with the rotation function in Word. Figure 8 portrays an image utilizing reverse mirroring. As the visual representation began to read like a musical composition, I was ready to record my discoveries.

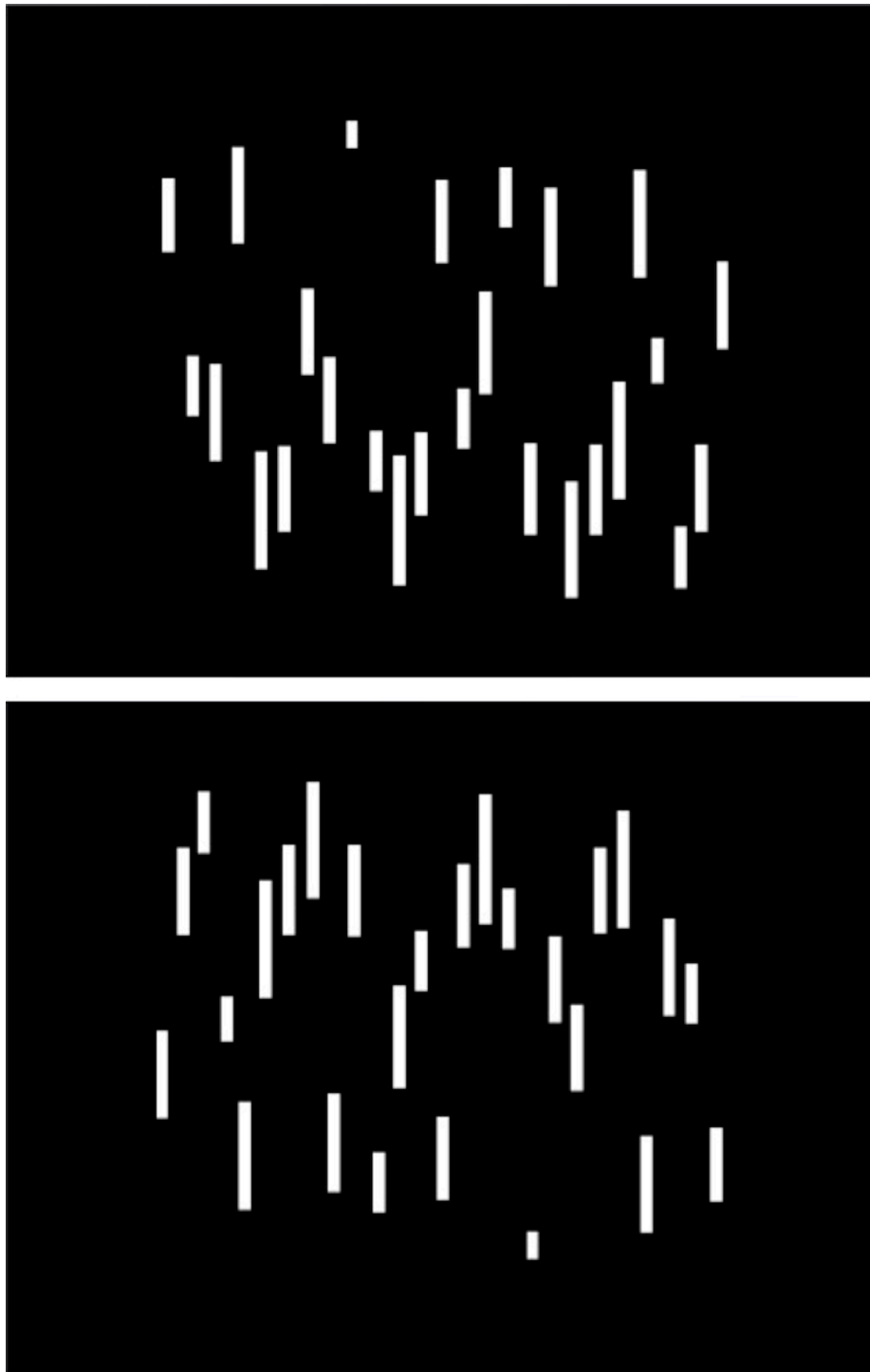


Figure 8: Visual representation of reverse mirroring.

In the following section, I present what I learned from the above analysis using Brekhus's (1996, 1998) phenomena of the marked and unmarked coupled with Derrida's (1972/1982) deconstruction (Caputo, 1997; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2007). Brekhus (1998) addresses hazards associated with emphasizing marked (extraordinary) over unmarked (mundane) social phenomena, which include reinforcing stereotypes and presenting a biased portrait of a binary.

Extraordinary silence and ordinary text. When I applied Derrida's deconstruction to the marked and unmarked phenomena, I engaged in *reverse marking* (Brekhus, 1998). What was once marked (e.g., the excerpts mined from the participants' survey responses/the text embroidered onto the cotton panties) became unmarked when I specifically listened to/for the silence. Brekhus offers more clarification: "We can reverse any markedness relationship by explicitly foregrounding that which is typically unmarked [i.e. silence]. I refer to reverse marking as an explicit strategy for foregrounding the unmarked as though it were unusual and ignoring the marked as though it were mundane" (p. 43). In this case, reverse marking also uncovered the absent presence, or "that which has been ignored" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 18). In sum, employing deconstruction and reverse marking yielded similar results, which exposed a relationship between extraordinary silence and ordinary text. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) introduce an important point on reverse marking with a word of caution: "Deconstruction is not simply a reversal of the binary . . . but a destabilization that creates a gap that allows the trace, something other, to insert itself in the crack" (p. 28). Meanings attempted to insert themselves in the crack of this strand. The relationship between extraordinary silence and ordinary text, for example, was a contextual and slippery one—for my understanding of something extraordinary might be ordinary for another.

Written text → Visual text. Destabilizing the written text from *Panty Pennants* resulted in both a pleasant and turbulent marriage. The artmaking portion of this process was intuitive but documenting my thinking/analysis through writing was challenging because the process of deconstruction and thinking *with* theory were both so new to me as a researcher-becoming. When the visual representation (see Figure 9) began reading like a musical composition, I realized that the time was ripe to deconstruct the *visual text* in search of its absent presence.

Illuminati

I solicited assistance from my colleague Cynthia Williams Phelps for the second strand of the study. In what follows, I present a fictionalized (i.e., synthesized and compressed) account of an actual conversation between us reflecting on her role as co-narrator. Creative fiction exists under the umbrella of narrative analysis and is arts-based research. I chose to present this second strand by blending theory and fiction as a way to encourage readers to think differently, and to "directly challenge . . . the fact/fiction" binary (Leavy, 2013, p. 21). Mixing my discourse and identity with Williams Phelps's resulted in "an overlapping dialogue based on *becoming*" (Tedlock, 2011, p. 333, emphasis in original).

Williams Phelps was a doctoral candidate in music education at the same state university where I attended. As she and I finished our lunch and casual conversation in early April 2014, we spent about 30 minutes discussing this strand of the study, including the musical score she had composed. We first examined the initial field text of participants' survey responses (see Figure 9) that inspired both the original art installation and the series of visual representations I designed and presented in the previous strand (Figures 3-7), most of which she had not seen previously.

1. Relationship status	2. Age	3. What have you learned about romantic intimacy (e.g. stories, anecdotes, behaviors, rumors, etc.) from your relatives or friends? Please explain.
Married	61-70	My mom had a special apron that she would put on to signal my dad that she was feeling "frisky" that night. She is 88 years old now and she still has that apron neatly tucked into a drawer even though dad has been gone for years. Grannie, on the other hand, must not have known much about romantic intimacy because she referred to it as granddad "bothering" her.
Dating	20-30	From watching behaviors from romantic couples I have found that all of the couples show their intimacy differently. My parents for example have been together for 25 years and I have yet to see them kiss in front of me. On the other hand, my roommate and her boyfriend can't keep their hands off each other. Many times I walk into the house and find her straddling him and they don't think any thing of it. My sister has been married for about 4 years and in my mind they share a very healthy relationship. Their romantic intimacy is shown in front of others as caring, loving, and equal. And I know from stories from my sister that they are intimate sexually alone.

Figure 9: Survey response excerpt.

Vibration, harmony. She smiles and reads a portion of a survey response aloud: "Vibrating cock rings. . . . You know, the strings have a more obvious vibration." Williams Phelps had designed a musical score for a string quartet (i.e., two violins, a viola, and a cello) based upon the visual representation of reverse mirroring image only without having any prior context. She says, "Having more context would have likely influenced the musical outcome, and I didn't want that."

She continues, "We have certain rules in theory and music. When I added the harmonic elements, I was so tempted to manipulate the notes to make them more melodic, but I didn't. I wanted to make the notes what they *are* and not what I felt they *should be*." We change the direction of the conversation to discuss the one visual representation that I had given to Williams Phelps as inspiration.

She laughs and says, "I see now that you created a reverse mirror image, but I didn't write the score that way because I was unaware of the symmetry at that time. When I first saw the vertical white rectangles, I saw the light shining through a dark space. The Illuminati were a sect of religious people who were enlightened—they saw the 'light.' That's how I came up with the title of the score: *Illuminati*."

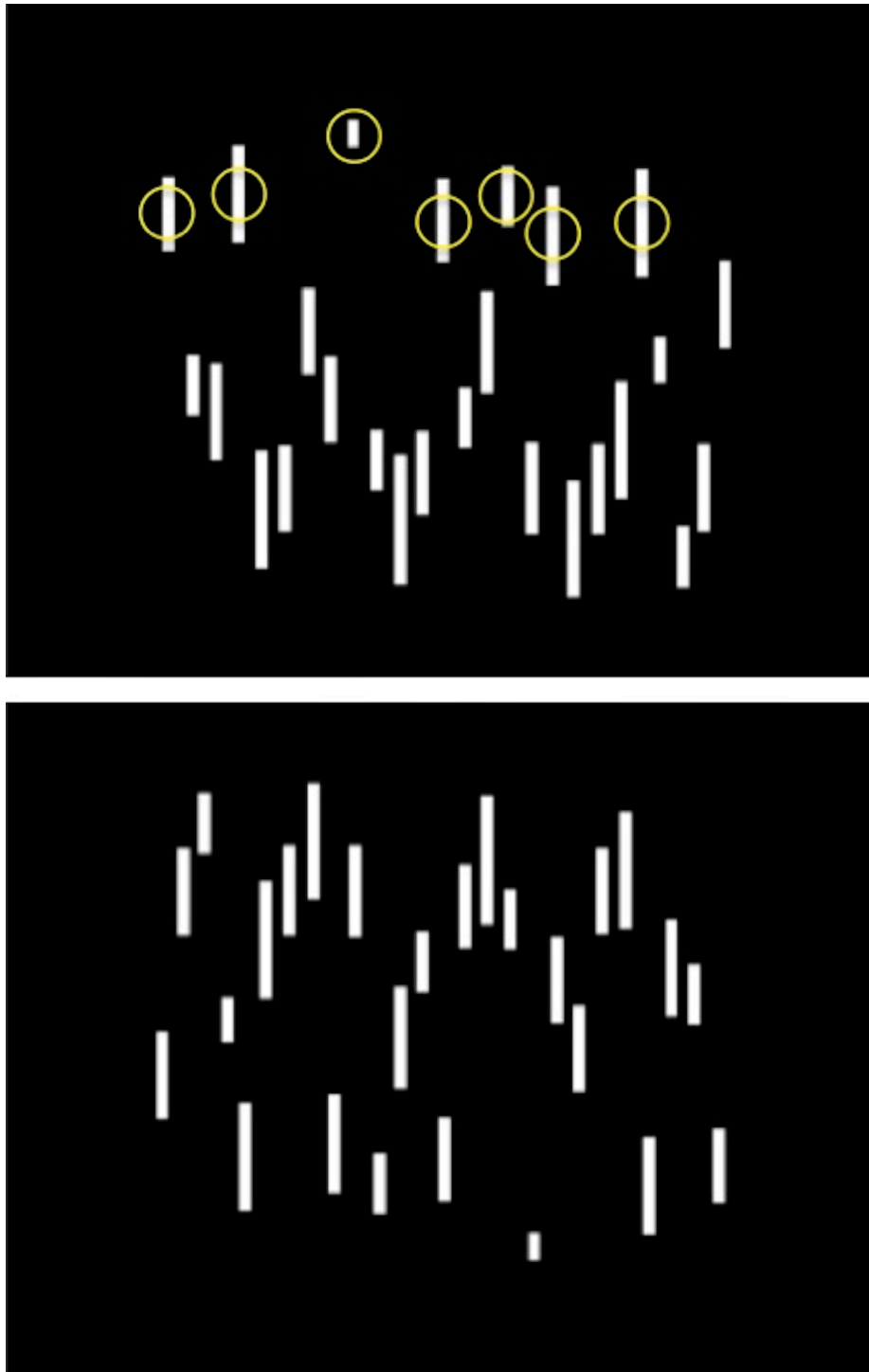


Figure 10: Yellow circles emphasizing “light shining through a dark space.”

Visual text → Audial text. Williams Phelps and I then discuss the melody. She says, “I see the top half of the visual as the melody in the composition.”

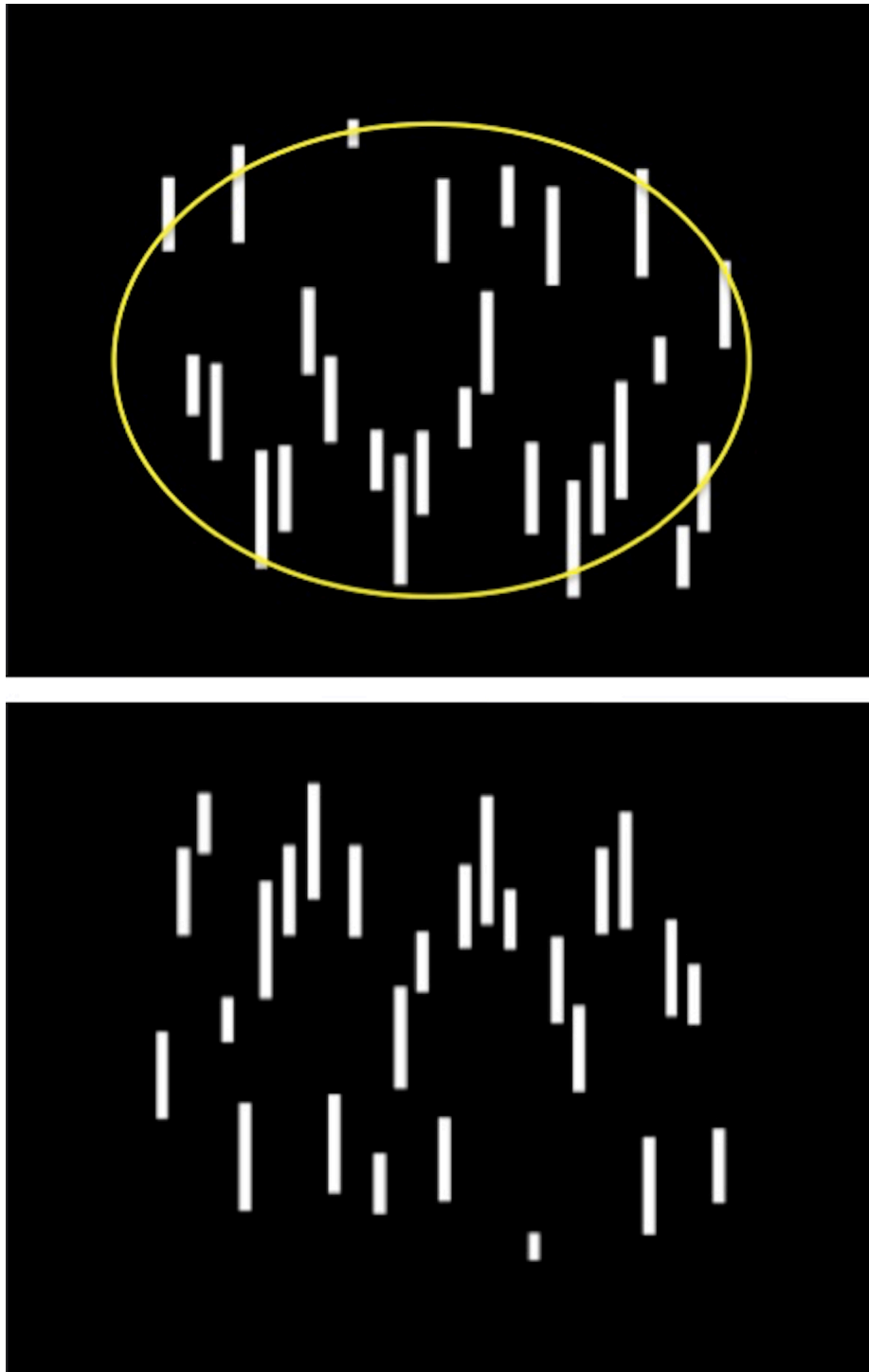


Figure 11: Yellow oval indicating musical melody.

I say, “How did you arrive at the score as a whole?”

She replies, “I just traced the notes. It’s called a melody contour. I was specifically looking at the direction of the pitch and the melody by connecting the rectangles with an invisible line from left to right. That’s what I saw when I looked at this.”

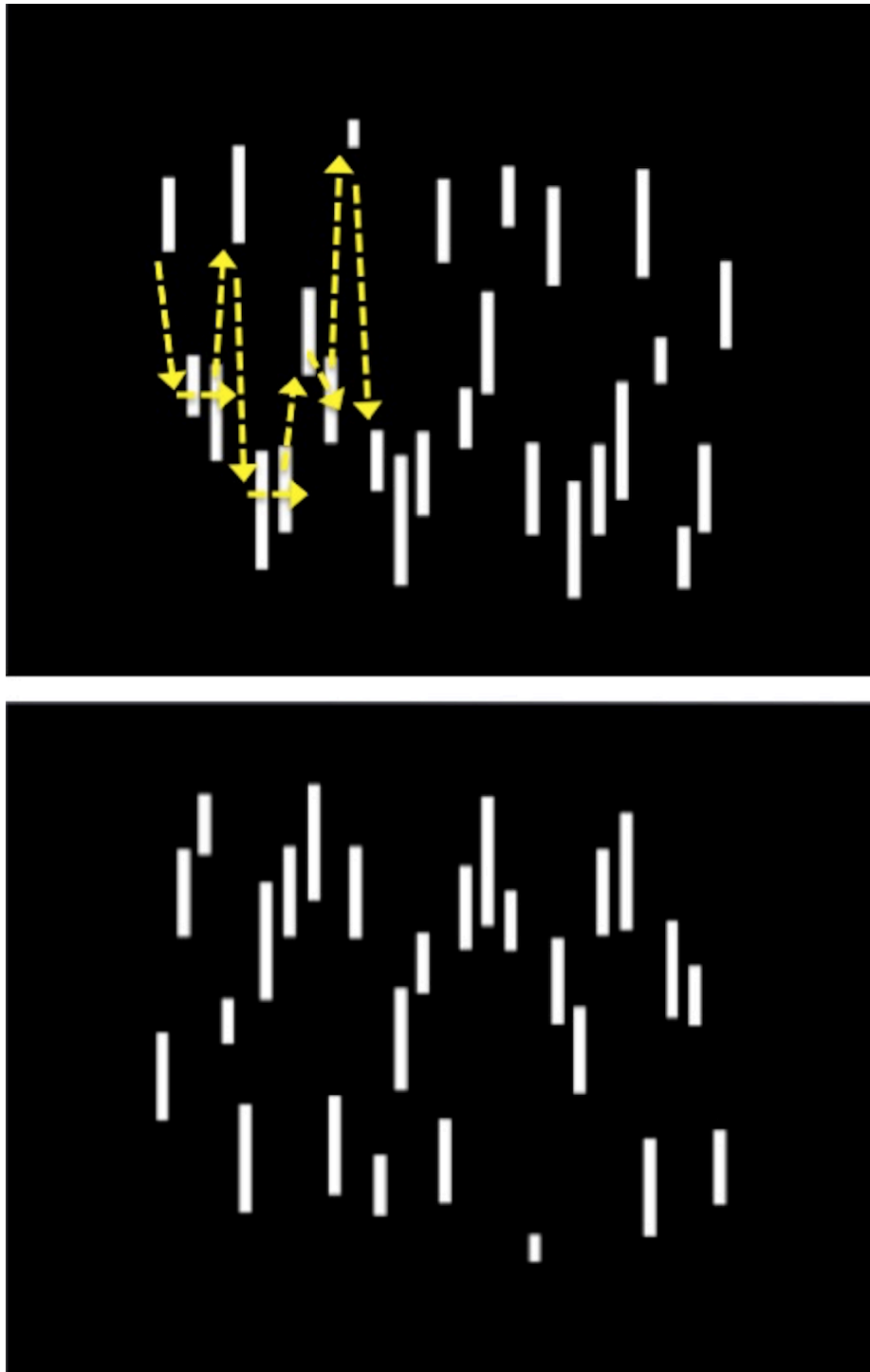


Figure 12: Dashed-yellow arrows showing “direction of the [musical] pitch and the melody.”

Unable to read music and without much formal education in that area, I naively ask, “I know what a melody sounds like, but what exactly is a melody?”

Williams Phelps says, “A melody is a group of notes used to create a tune—a musical thought that runs through the piece.” With this explanation, the thought, along with the trace of the melody contour, begin to make more sense to me.

On musical chords, Williams Phelps states: “I ended up putting the score in C minor, which is good for strings. I sat together with the image you e-mailed me, and the music program, dragging and dropping pitches in. I saw each of these as a pitch placement. The tops of the white shapes match up horizontally to create consistent pitches in a melody.”

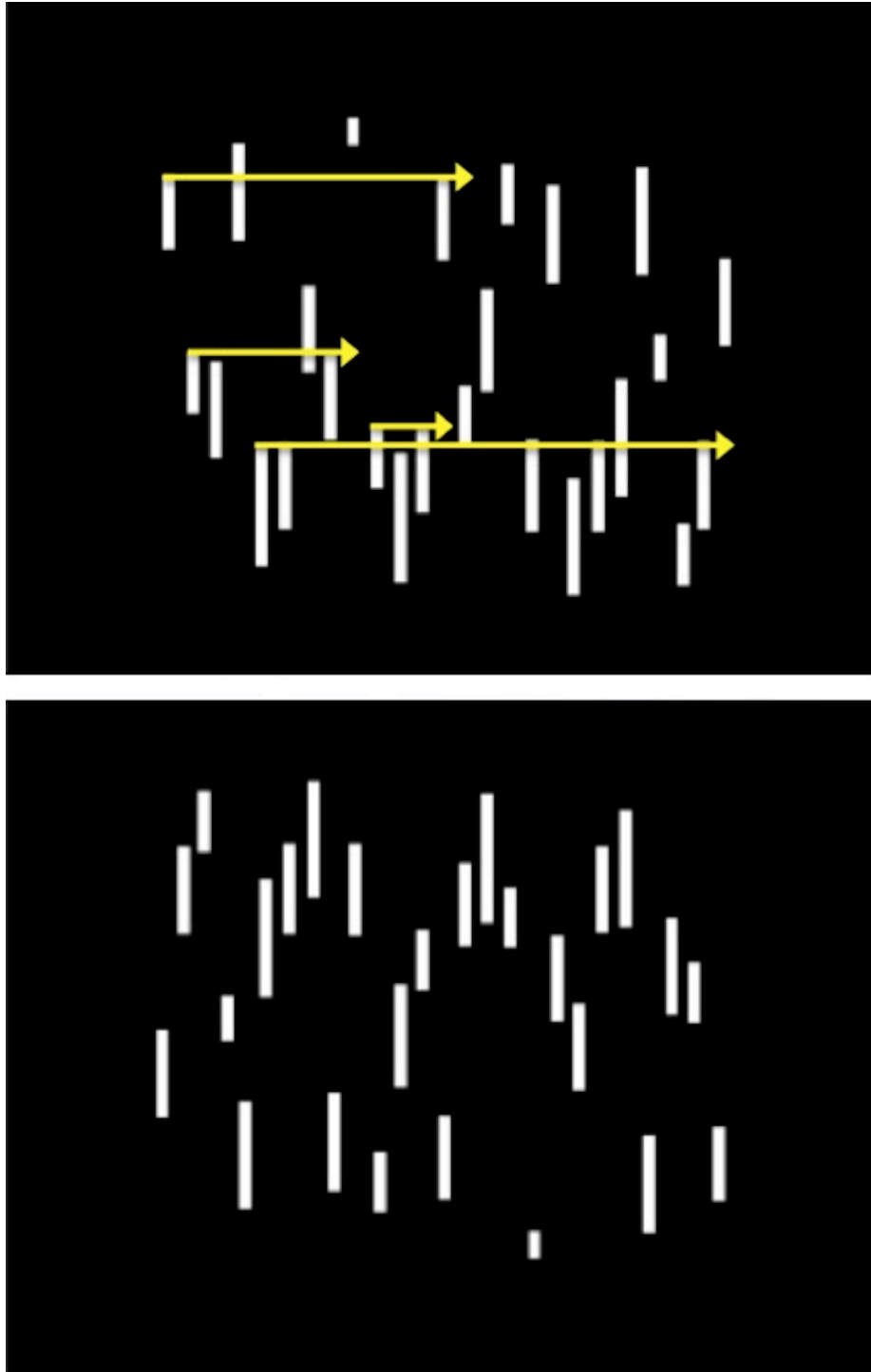


Figure 13: Yellow arrows demonstrating musical pitch placement.

“When I first created the score it was in a slower time. I sped it up, and it worked better. I also don’t have a complete ‘measure of silence.’ The piece needed to keep driving forward; all of the instruments get to rest at different times, though. I added some dynamics, but I didn’t slow anything down because I didn’t want the piece to sound like a funeral dirge, which is also in a minor key. I was after a more *introspective* minor melody.”

In between dissonance *and* harmony. Williams Phelps then begins deconstructing the musical score (see Figure 14), which she composed, using a series of musical terms and concepts that are relatively new to me. Toward the end of the conversation, she says, “This piece really took on a life of its own. I was in a state of ‘flow.’ I lost track of time. That just doesn’t happen often enough for me.” Then, she begins to cry. While these seem like tears of gratitude, I try to be appreciative of this shared moment in time without feeling too compelled to assign meaning to it. We end our lunch date by agreeing that deconstructing the visual journey disclosed “points of dissonance and points of harmony” (e.g., “light shining through a dark space”; resting while continuing to drive forward) that were akin to our journeys as doctoral students.

Score

Illuminati

Cynthia Williams Phelps

♩ = 135

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

©2014

Figure 14: Excerpt of Williams Phelps’s musical score.

After we return to my car, the conversation shifts from that of being doctoral students to exploring the topic of sexual identity. Williams Phelps was recently married, and discloses that she and her new husband have a robust sex life. Shortly thereafter she confesses, “Talking about this is a sensitive topic because I am also the daughter of a retired minister. I feel like I’m not supposed to talk about these things with anyone other than Chuck [her husband].” We agree that sexuality *is* a healthy and operational part of our identities. William Phelps and I are both educators, and this role adds to the sensation of feeling silenced; although, we cannot decide whether it is imposed and/or assumed silence that we feel. Poststructural analysis ultimately gives us permission to deconstruct the visual representations to arrive at the space in between the “points of dissonance and points of harmony” to find our identities as artists *and* doctoral students *and* women *and* wives *and* sexual creatures *and* daughters *and* educators. Deleuze (1990/1995) describes his understanding of *and* as,

neither one thing nor the other, it’s always in between, between two things; it’s the borderline, there’s always a border, a line of flight or flow, only we don’t see it, because it’s the least perceptible of things. And yet it’s along this line of flight that things come to pass, becomings evolve, revolutions take shape. (p. 45)

Artist/Researcher/Teacher-Becoming

I received Williams Phelps’s e-mail containing the audio file attachment of *Illuminati* (Audio file 2), and immediately looped the sound on my computer while writing. I began with a modified automatic writing exercise where I was unconcerned with lower order issues such as spelling and grammar. I say, “modified” because I engaged in conscious thinking. I listened *and* thought *and* wrote, and later edited with the reader in mind. In this last strand of the study, I investigated the *audial text* to document the absent presence.

<https://ualberta.aviaryplatform.com/r/1z41r6np7t>

Audio file 2: Audio file of Williams Phelps’s *Illuminati*.

Audial text → Written text. I listened to the musical rests and crescendos, and I became increasingly aware of the structured binaries that existed in my life and the research strands above. As an educator, for example, I have a history of allowing myself to be fettered to a one-dimensional identity—that steady pillar of society. I have seen this identity as black and white. However, a master educator acknowledges and disrupts the binaries surrounding her; she isn’t bound by her own perceived limitations. St. Pierre (2013) states:

Refusing that binary logic which pervades our language and thus our living is a priority, because if we see ourselves as always already entangled with, not separate from or superior to matter, our responsibility to being becomes urgent and constant. (p. 655)

A master educator rejects the trace of what was, and begins to think and teach in a new space—in this threshold she is becoming (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). An educator-

becoming is in a better position to model for students how to reconsider ways of thinking about making meaning. Deleuze and Guattari (as cited in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) called this process deterritorialization and reterritorialization. “To deterritorialize and reterritorialize is to leave the trace, to flatten the hierarchies, and to reterritorialize ways of thinking about data, method, and meaning-making” (pp. 12-13).

By discussing my analyses and findings in this paper, I examined how the deconstruction of an art installation about women’s sexual identities documents absent presence. In turn, by bringing to light *that which has been ignored*, the absent presence serves to honor women’s sexual identities. I first deconstructed written text, and learned that employing Derrida’s deconstruction and Brekhus’s reverse marking yield similar results, exposing a subjective relationship between extraordinary silence and ordinary text. “The trace of faith” became a visual representation and celebration of women’s sexual identities. In the second strand, I discovered that deconstructing the visual representations unveiled the space in between the “points of dissonance and points of harmony” to reveal identity-*and* (e.g., artist-student-woman-wife-daughter-educator). I learned in the last strand to put theory into action by disrupting the binaries that have limited my potential as an educator. I listened to the audio more carefully as if hearing it for the first time; the symphony of sounds washed over me. While typing, I realized that I am becoming someone different from who I was just one moment ago; I am discovering the potential of the absent presence.

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Appendix

Sexuality Questionnaire

I've generated this questionnaire as a way of gathering anonymous and secure stories from family, friends, and acquaintances. Once collected, many of the narratives will be incorporated into a body of artwork about women and our sexuality or sexual identity. The artwork and installation will be revealed this fall during a scheduled exhibition (details to come). Your involvement in this project is completely optional. Should you choose to participate, please answer the following five (5) questions thoroughly and honestly. This questionnaire will take around 10-15 minutes to complete, and will close in three (3) weeks on April 9.

* Required

1. Relationship status (Please click on all that apply)

Single
Dating
In a relationship
Engaged
Married
Divorced
Widowed
Other

2. Age

20-30
31-40
41-50
51-60
61-70
71-80
81-90

3. What have you learned about romantic intimacy (e.g. stories, anecdotes, behaviors, rumors, etc.) from your relatives or friends? Please explain.*

4. Complete the following statement: I feel sexy or sexual when _____ because .
..*

5. Tell me about a memorable sexual encounter. What makes it memorable?*