

Divine Interventions and the Geography of Loss

Research, Experimental Documentary, and Slow-motion Video in Action

At ***Study In Action*** this year, Kerri Flannigan and I each presented performative slideshow lectures; Using a digital projector, ambient soundtrack, and live narration, Kerri presented on the use of images of god in art as sites for appropriation or resistance, and I presented on concepts of death and loss, looking at gentrification, lost cemeteries, memorial and migration. These visual essays proposed a different way of presenting academic, activist, and arts-based knowledge, asking: What is the role of art in community movements, learning, research, and archive? How does art generate and reflect knowledge within an academic and community context? In what ways do art and art-making contribute to our understanding and knowledge bases of popular history, political theory, and social movements?

I have tried to rework this slideshow lecture for the printed page, attempting to translate a performative work (with the glowing light of the projector, the tone of my voice, the somber slowed-down hymn soundtrack, and the slowly animated images) towards the thin paper pages of a printed journal (pages you'll hold in your hands, flip through, and fold and bend, start reading and stop.) This proves a difficult transposition, so rather than attempt this by presenting you the whole text with inserted images in an effort to recreate the performance, I am presenting just a few of the hundred images that make up the slideshow, along with selected notes from the text in a scrapbook format. With dates and place names and notes, like my oma would have done.

[The reworked excerpts on the following pages are from the performative slideshow lecture titled ***Death: The Architecture of Dying and the Geography of Loss***, (2011, 18'00, digital projection, sound, narration). It was presented as part of ***Study In Action*** on March 12, 2011, alongside Kerri Flannigan's ***Divine Interventions: Depicting, Resisting, Queering, and Appropriating 'God' in Art.***]

Kandis Friesen

Death: The Architecture of Dying and the Geography of Loss
(excerpts and notes)

This is a question; about what death and dying mean. This is a family album; an archive, an accumulation of documents, research on researching. This is a stockpile, a mass of detritus, a rumination on eradication and what they call 'the eternal rest'.



Marquette, Manitoba; the farmhouse where my mother grew up. I think I love this photograph because I never got to go there before it was torn down. I wish for things I can't have.



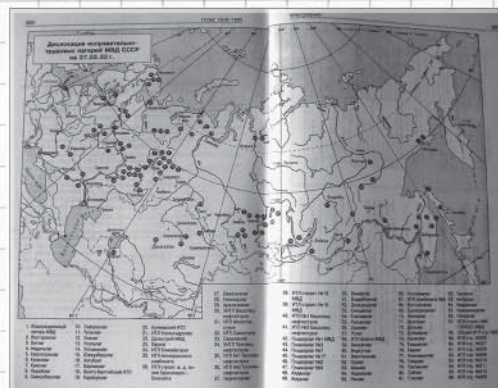
The Mennonite Settlements in South and Central America: Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, Belize, Mexico. They crossed the world to escape compromises that seemed uncompromisable. I've been told that when they arrived, they were given a map to their plot in the jungle. Less than half of them survived.



I read One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich in Grade 10.



My great aunts internally deported to the mining camps in Kazakhstan.



How do you map the size of death? How much can you mark down? Memorials on paper or memorials in stone?



I found this photo in an archive online, a cemetery at the gulag in Butugychag. The gravestones marked with sticks, the most they could do.



It reminded me of the family cemeteries in front of the big old white estate houses in the Eastern Townships. The small unmarked rocks at the feet of the graves were not, as I naively guessed, for family pets, but markers for the graves of black slaves. A deathly colonial architecture.

Refugee camps. Death can be something other than an end; an impending condition, a constant forecast, a loss of everything you know and love.



1948



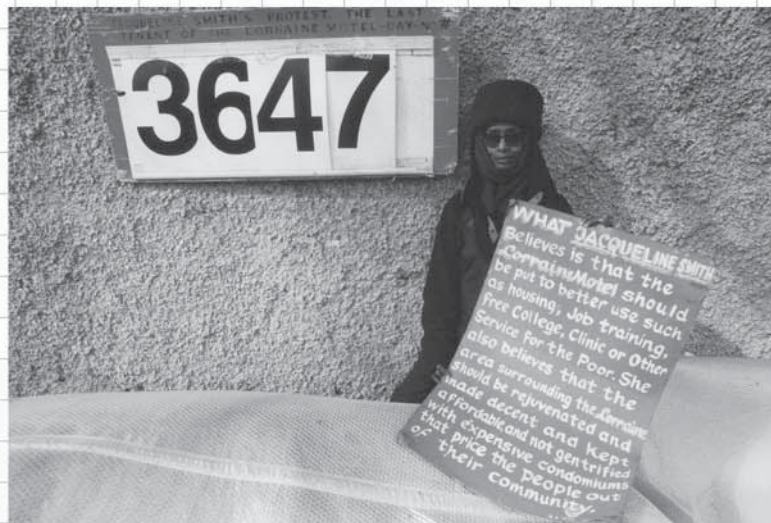
Stalin was an orchestrator, his compositions looked like this. Sifting gravel for grains of wheat, I remember my grandmother's stories.



1967



Africville, Nova Scotia. The city of Halifax vacated this small black community in 1967, razing it to the ground after moving the residents out in garbage trucks.



1998

Memphis, Tennessee. Before the Civil Rights Museum was built at the Lorraine Motel, it was a rooming house, where Jacqueline Smith, and many others, lived and built a community. After the forced eviction, she took up residence on the sidewalk across the street, and has lived there for the last 23 years, counting the days and protesting gentrification in the name of civil rights.



This was the memorial at the place where Fredy died at Parc Henri Bourassa. It remains today, the ground covered with wax-coated rocks, like blood.



The protests and vigils don't end because the deaths don't end. Quilem Registre, Anas Bennis, JJ Harper, I erected memorials of my own. Under the cover of night, with working girls on guard, we plastered the city. Police partout, justice nulle part.



We remember.