

Mediated Communication:
The Space Between Us

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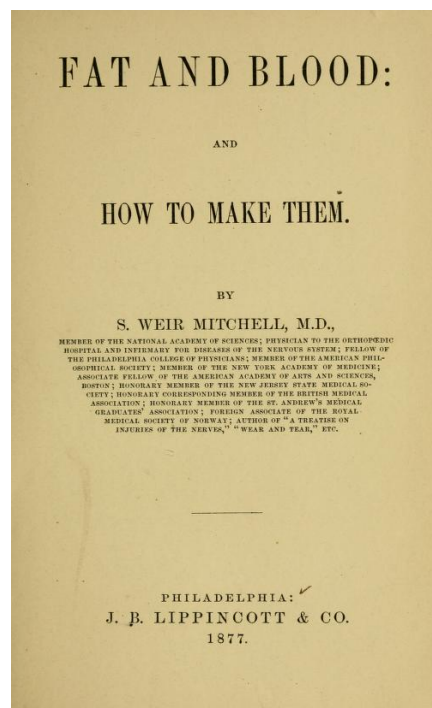
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Introduction

Human beings are motivated by more than sex and the drive towards death (Freud 32). In addition, they need to be seen and heard, to connect and communicate with others. It is often called love, and whether it be familial, romantic, or platonic in nature, we seek it throughout our lives. It drives our actions and affects our interactions. In fact, we desire incessantly, and more often than not, we cannot achieve satiation. What interferes with our desire for oneness, intimacy, physical and emotional connection is the effectiveness of our communication with one another. We can't or seem not to have the language to communicate fully. This communication occurs as an effect of our bodies, which we use to speak, touch, see, and hear one another. These same senses inform our entire human experience, and yet somehow, they fail us when we attempt to say what we mean. Always, there is a space between us, one that is unseen but nonetheless ever present.



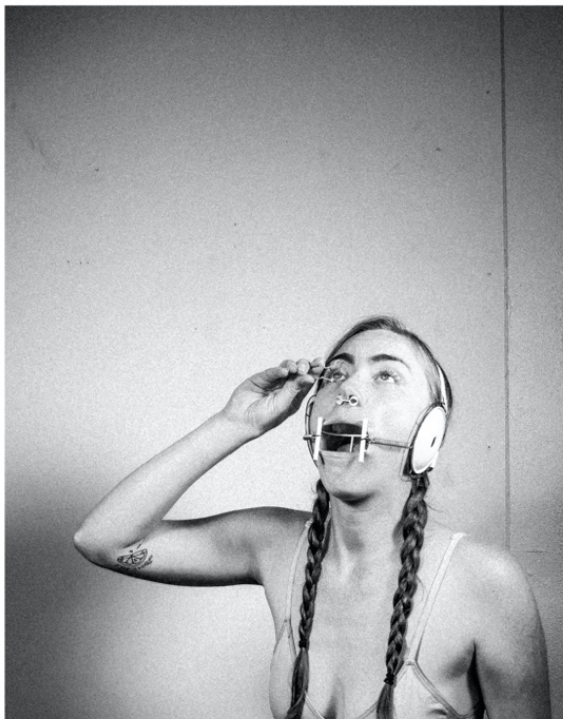
Antique Electroconvulsive Therapy Device



Fat and Blood by Silas Mitchell Weir
1884 (developed the rest cure
treatment)

When I first began to research these issues, I was interested in historical and current medical practices, body adornment, and how we communicate with one another. At that time, my

work was directly linked to specific medical practices such as hydrotherapy, the rest cure, cauterization and bloodletting to name a few. These cures were formerly performed on the physically and mentally ill and were, for the lack of a better word, quackery. The objects I make that go on the body, which I call apparatus's, reference these historical devices with their funnels, tubing, straps and clean sterile surfaces. While the surfaces and materials I used evoked medical usage, they were not intended to be functional; they could not cure their users, but instead inspired reflection on a particular kind of interaction. In my first series of apparatuses, *To Affect* 2018, the objects were placed on only one person's body and an outside person would interact with them through the apparatus. For example, in the piece *To Keep Yourself Open*, the apparatus keeps the facial orifices open so that medicine can be applied, but also therefore changes how one is able to interact sensorially. The eyes are always open, so you cannot look away, the ears, nose and mouth are open and the wearer is no longer free to speak.



To Keep Yourself Open
Digital image, steel, copper, powder coat and fabric
2018

Works such as this can be understood as a kind of “doing to,” as in one person is doing something to me and I have no hand in the matter. I likened this to the interactions that many patients in hospitals have had with their doctors, as they are acted on and not interacting with their caretakers. This is both submission and domination in which one individual controls the other’s physical and mental state. This type of communication between two people can be destructive and harmful, even when the intended outcome is meant to be for the patient’s benefit. While this destructive type of relationship between two people does happen, the majority of relationships are not unequal to this extreme. As my own relationships were changing so did my perspective on the victimization I felt in my interactions with others. As I came to see it: things weren’t happening to me but, instead, I was participating in my own self-deceit and belittlement. This change in my thinking led me to wonder about the interchange of information between two individuals, how they interpret it and how we begin to come to terms with the fact that there will always be misinterpretation.



HEARING TRUMPETS.

Various ear trumpet designs. Were made to amplify sound to the ear

For my thesis body of work, I began to focus on how two people communicate, including the other persons' body as it interacted with the apparatus. They are placed in a location on the body used to communicate; eyes, hands, mouth, ears, chest etc., and thus they inevitably become a barrier between these two bodies, both connecting them and keeping them apart. They become a mediator, both granting and inhibiting access to the others body. Put otherwise: the objects for my thesis can be understood as braces that suspend bodies in relation to one another, often in close proximity: a hand held inches from the face, or two chests attached to each other, often suspended at an insurmountable distance. As typically understood, moments such as these are only stages on the way to other, more iconographic moments: the embrace, the kiss, the caress. But, in my work, these overlooked moments come to visibility in their own right, and through them I bring attention to our desire to connect with one another and our inability to do so in a way that could satiate us.

These ideas are activated when the viewer sees these wearable apparatus's both unoccupied and occupied, either through the objects themselves and images of the objects on the body. In either case, the spectator is encouraged to contemplate his or her own embodied experience. My work forces people to communicate through the body, often mimicking the comportment of another. In making visible the space between people, I create a contradiction between what we say we desire and what we achieve. We claim to want complete connection and communion with someone yet if it were possible to attain it, would it satisfy our desires? The great cost of our fulfillment would be a collapsing of two entities into one and an erasure of the individual – an idea that is at once romantic and terrifying. These objects make visible the conflict we have with desiring someone and the inability to have them. It is through the object that I mediate, and make physical, the experience of desire that is unseen and always necessarily unfulfilled. Never reaching it and forever seeking it are the only absolutes in want and desire.

Communication and Relationships

I am most interested in the two-person relationship, the interaction between oneself and another. I'm curious about how and why we react and communicate in the ways that we do and how have certain types of communication more valuable than others. Humans are social creatures; we prefer a social life far more than a solitary one. It makes sense, biologically, that we would want others around that we could trust to keep us physically protected, help feed us,

produce and look after young with us. We still want and need these qualities from other people, but things have shifted, obviously very dramatically, from living in a tribe to current, urban living. Since the main goal of our day is not to find food, create shelter and protect our young from outside elements, people's day-to-day focus has shifted from survival to more existential concerns. Our interpersonal relationships have largely changed from "I *need* you around" to "I *want* you around." One could also think about this difference of need and want between parent and child. We need our parents around when we are young but later in life, we have a choice to keep them in our lives or not. As times evolve, we seem to have more choice, at least in the western world, who we want to surround ourselves with. These relationships include friendships, romantic relationships, and even to some extent professional relationships. It is not as likely that your parents will choose your spouse, that your geography will limit your friendships or that you will have to bend to the social niceties of someone you despise at work. With more choices and modernized ways of life we would think that we would be able to navigate the world more freely. However with this choice and modernization comes a good deal of anxiety.

The term coined in 1869 by S. Weir Mitchell and George Beard called this newfound anxiety about the modernized world "neurasthenia." Its definition according to Merriam Webster is: *a condition that is characterized especially by physical and mental exhaustion usually with accompanying symptoms (such as headache and irritability), is of unknown cause but is often associated with depression or emotional stress, and is sometimes considered similar to or identical with chronic fatigue syndrome.* Neurasthenia was thought to be linked to the new stresses people faced due to the modernization of society. Historically this term took on a similar aura to the medicalization of hysteria in previous times; it was an all-encompassing medical term for the ailments of the mind with limited medical understanding. I find this idea resonates still to this day. Neurasthenia could be applied to how we think about forming and maintaining new relationships today. Tinder, Bumble, OkCupid, E-Harmony and their friend finding counterparts are all ways of trying to reach out digitally, to communicate with one another. Yet, if you have ever used these services you know how often these connections fail, and how often you fail to meet the person in real life. This is anxiety inducing but these websites flourish. It's as though we have forgotten how to relate to each other face to face. To activate the objects I make, each person must be in bodily proximity to one another. Yes, the objects mediate that space somewhat like technology, but the difference is that you are present with another. It is in this space, the

short distance between yourself and the other, that we can begin to form new relationships, realize that any form of communication is flawed and attempt to communicate with one another.

How we communicate with one another is based on our experiences; how we were raised, where we grew up, events in our lives and the people that surround us. With such a variety of experiences, it can be hard to communicate with and learn another's personal language. Empathy is the ability to understand and feel the emotions of another. Unlike sympathy, which entails feeling bad for someone going through a rough time, empathy places oneself in another's shoes. We are empathic creatures, to varying levels of course, but we, through our bodies, automatically empathize. It's prevalent in newborn babies, they mimic the faces closest to them; pouting their lips, raising their eyebrows, mirroring their caregivers. Why do we do this? It has been found that in the brain mirror neurons activate so that when we see someone performing a task the same neurons activate as if we were performing the tasks ourselves (Van Der Kalk 58). This empathetic response can be seen in people who spend much of their time around one another. They use the same colloquial terms, gesture in a similar ways, and sometimes interact with others comparably. It is how we bond and form groups; when we mirror each other, we grow deep ties that make us feel safe and comfortable in this world. We begin to feel seen and heard.

Mirroring is involved in all my pieces. It is required by the apparatuses and built into their designs. This can entail a joint caress of the face, mutually standing face forward towards each other, or actual mirrored surfaces to see one another through an apparatus. This mirroring attempts to get the participants into an empathetic state with the other, to get as close as one gets to being in the other's shoes. However, this attempt is barred by the apparatus. Even when we try to understand someone else's experience we can't fully, because to do so we couldn't be ourselves. These objects are a visual approximation of how close we can get, a literal distance as a metaphor for the emotional distance. An interesting question is who is mirroring whom? However, in this body of work it is deliberately hard to say. The frozen moment, where two bodies are stuck in the same motion or limited to one act, there isn't one person doing something to the other or for the other to follow, but instead joint participation. When the same act is done at the same time there is no domination or submission of one over the other.

Image and Object Making

For me, having my own hand in making art objects is essential. It is how I have investigated materials and learned how to communicate. I've chosen to work in a craft-based field because it gives me a language where functionality, utility, tradition and skill are imbedded. A well-made object invites veneration; we respect and appreciate its craftsmanship. Although my objects are not utilitarian, like a cup or fork might be, they do have a function—to engage with the idea of how we relate to one another. This is where my work deviates from traditional craft, yet I would still call what I do craft based. I use very old methods of handling metal like annealing, cutting, soldering, and riveting that have been used for centuries to fabricate these objects. I also use alternative materials such as acrylic, powder coating and leather. I handle them in a similar craft-based way where I experiment and research what the materials are able to do. When I hand saw through metal, fabricate with acrylic, or leather, there is a great amount of intention behind each step. Instead of me telling you directly what I'm thinking about, there is an object to engage with. This is a meditation on communication, it slows down the exchange of information from one person to the next. However, my intention can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, just as with any other type of communication. Yet we have more time to spend with objects and more time to think about their purpose. Because of this, there is a better chance of clear communication between myself and my audience.

Photographic images and objects function very differently. Objects rely on our interaction with them, and only when we are physically present with an object can they be seen, handled and qualified as objects. This interaction is also reliant on time, being bodily present with that object. A picture of an object takes the objects ability to function in the same way. A photograph takes it from the 3D to the 2D, freezes it in time and takes away the ability to sensorially investigate the object in the present. Our relationship to objects is essential to the way we experience the world; we need them to bring us back into our embodied present, especially when much of our time is thinking about the past and future. Our relationship to objects, culturally, has changed significantly, especially as an effect of recent technologies such as cell phones and computers. However, what these technologies give us access to is not in the present but instead timelessness. Where time stands still, and the image dominates. This makes technology, to me, not an object, but a portal for the mind. Yet, we need objects just like we need people, or we need food, or

anything else that helps us operate; they provide a specific function by grounding us in our bodies and also doing things for us.

The body can be qualified as an object because of its ability to perform a function. The function of our bodies is to sense through touch, smell, sight etc. Bill Brown in his writing on Thing Theory talks about our relation to objects and things and “What they disclose about history, society, nature or culture- above all, what they disclose about us.” He qualifies things as objects that no longer work for us “When the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy..” (Brown 4) Therefore, a thing is different from an object because a thing no longer works. He also cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty, asserting “the body is a thing among things.” The objects I make do have a function which then effects the body’s ability to perform an action fully (Brown 4): stopping touch, hearing or sight so that we can more fully observe the action that is almost taking place. By stopping the action, we become aware of the object’s use on the body and the thingness of our own bodies and their inability to fully perform. My apparatuses make the body into a thing because they impede the ability of the users to communicate directly. For example, my piece “Immeasurable Distances” connects its wearers, but also keeps two bodies from embracing chest to chest. One of our most primal needs is physical touch from another human being, it comforts us as babies and young children and that remains throughout adulthood. If one of the body’s primary functions is to touch and be touched, then the impediment of it would render one of our functions broken. Our bodies become things when we do not effectively communicate with own another. This is because we don’t express ourselves well and we also don’t interpret the other correctly. Our inability to do so is caused by the experiences we have had in our lives that often have wide reaching effects. Our upbringing, the culture we were are a part of, our own personal psychology and individual experience all weighs on how we understand each other. If we learn how to empathize, we might be able to come closer to understanding one another's individual language. My hope is that when my objects connect one body to another, we can begin to more effectively empathize through joint experience, through the mirroring of one another, which also reveals that our interpretation are otherwise flawed.

The image exists only for the eye and can be viewed in more than one location; unlike the object, it escapes time. Within a photographic image is immortal foreverness, it never changes, and the thing captured in that moment is unattainable in the present “nothing can be kept and

nothing can be stopped” (Metz 83). I use the photograph in my own work to indicate how two people’s bodies interact with the objects and each other. These images are paired with the work but sometimes operate individually as well. My images solidify the moment of interaction and make the body stay in an eternal separation from what it desires: to successfully communicate with another. When the image and object are together in space there is a push and pull of a moment. The object speaking to the fleeting now and the possibility of one’s own interaction through the objects. By contrast, the image speaks to the frozen moment both unattainable because the moment has passed and because the objects are inaccessible from touch through the image itself. The image for me is a way to speak about our inability to communicate and even solidifies our fate to never be satiated. In a way it fetishizes these moments of what would be private interaction otherwise. Creating an image that can be lingered over, allowing the viewer to control how long their gaze is to remain. Yes, it’s a view of an intimate moment. It’s almost voyeuristic.

Photographs and death have an inseparable link. It takes the moment out of time and freezes, makes it still and forever just as death does. It’s no longer linked to the people or objects it captures because as they change it does not; it is a finality (Metz 85). My image-making is an attempt to halt and freeze the inescapable end of our time together as human beings, to remember that our communication will always be faulty, but we tried anyways.

The Meaning of Touch:

Touch is a very direct way that we communicate and interact with our world and other people. It only happens when we are in proximity of another body, sometimes making touch unavoidable, unlike some other senses. For example, we can close our eyes if we do not want to see or can plug our ears if we do not want to hear. With touch we must physically move away if we do not wish to engage. When we are babies, we experience much of the world through touch, exploring through grabbing, and feeling with our hands and our mouths. There is power in touch, it can be consensual or inflicted on someone. It can sooth, empower and excite but it can also dominate, control and inflict pain. Different types of touch hold specific connotations and their conventions are strongly held to signify different relationships. The kiss, the handshake, the hug the pat on the back etc. They all mean something, signifying different emotional, social and cultural connotations.



Immeasurable Distances

Digital image, brass, nickel, silver, leather, steel and acrylic
2019

A hug is affectionate, friendly, and marks a sign of familiarity to another body, a caress of the face is the same. We hug when we are happy, sad, as a greeting or to show comfortability with another person. It's a connection chest to chest, placing one person's open vulnerable body in contact with another. A caress of the face is similar. It is an action that communicates a desire without the use of words, the mind communicating with and through the body because they are not separate from one another. This desire is not always romantic but can be expressed in friendships and familial relationships as well. These haptic communications sometimes have found themselves on a value scale of effectiveness and intellectual hierarchy. At a certain point in time, we began to value expression more closely associated with the mind over that of the body. Making verbal and written communication higher on the hierarchical scale.

Descartes believed that the mind and the body were separate entities and one could exist without the other (Jennings 372). This belief stemmed from religion, arguing that the soul was immortal and since this immortality was not beholden to the body, the mind/soul held much more importance. However, I believe that the mind and the body are in fact in unison, and it is because our mind is integrated with our body that we seek intimacy with others physically. We

understand ourselves; we have autonomy over our thoughts, desires and actions. It is, however, impossible to know what another person is thinking and feeling. This individuality and difference isolate us from one another. If Descartes' theory is true, and the former statement is true, we are both separate from our bodies and other people's knowledge of us. I object to the thought that we are separate from our bodies, but I do believe we are born lonely and seeking ways to end that loneliness and isolation from one another. It is true that no form of language alone seems worthy of communicating to someone else who we are, our deepest emotions and our desires. Interacting with the body is one way that that we attempt to become unified with someone. Albeit the barrier of our physical bodies doesn't allow the complete access to each other's minds that we desire.

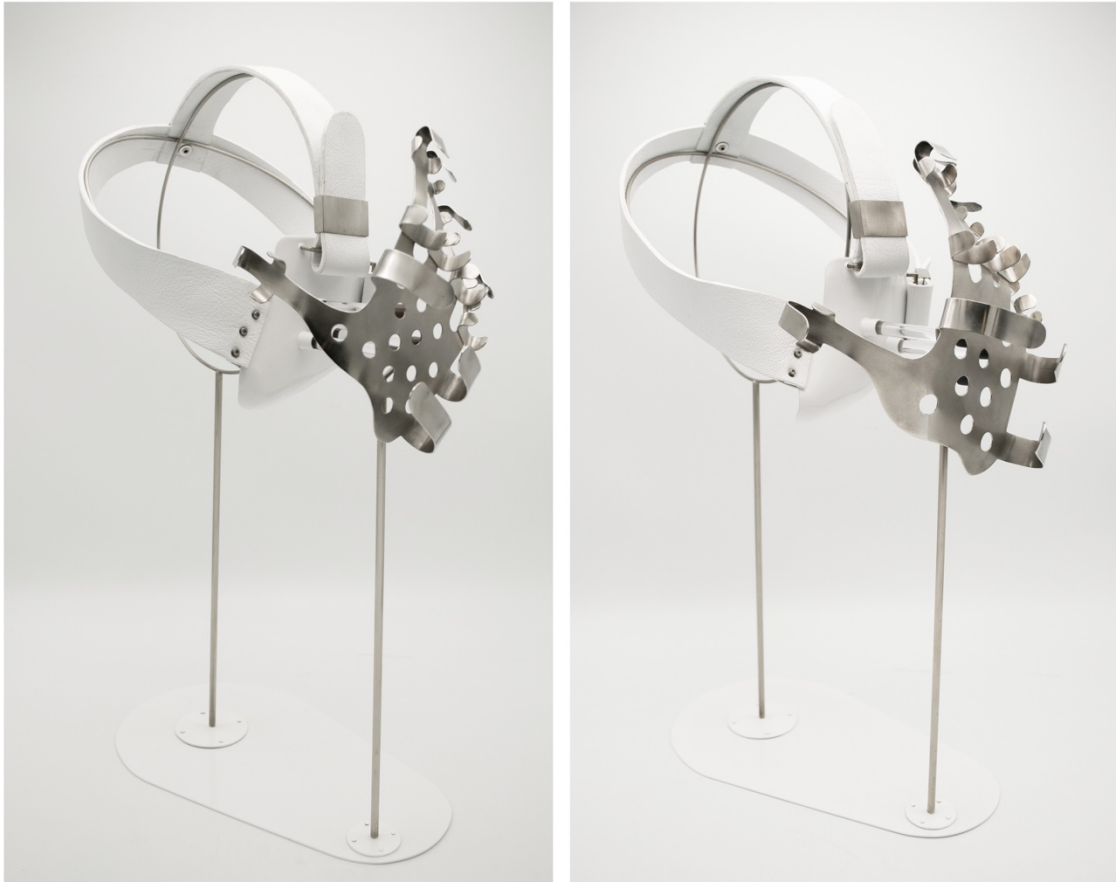
We react to other bodies empathetically. The facial scrunching when someone is about to cry, the tension of muscles when they are angry, the blushing of cheeks when someone is embarrassed all evoke, to some degree, an empathic rather than sympathetic response in our bodies. We mimic their emotions in our own bodies and in effect feel their emotions, but why? I believe it is another way to attempt reaching a closeness to someone else that we struggle to achieve. Placing ourselves in someone else's shoes we can more closely start to integrate two people into one and achieve a better 'knowing' of another person. If our desire is to return to a place where there is sameness between people, it is a total regression of what we have evolved to be; separate autonomous individuals. Jean Baudrillard talks about our desire to return to a state before difference in his book *The Vital Illusion* (Baudrillard 3-30). Baudrillard refers to sameness as a desire to replicate oneself via cloning rather than reproducing through sex to form a new individual. This return to sameness or a state before difference is similar to when organisms simply split one into two creating a genetically identical clone of itself. He speaks to the elimination of difference in relation to the idea of immortality, but I believe we want an elimination of difference so that we can be known by another human being. Perhaps we believe that if we feel, smell, think, taste, understand, and experience things in the same way then someone will truly know us. More than anything we want to be entangled with another we want someone to connect with and to fully understand us. That fully embodied communion with another has been slipping farther and farther from our grasp since we evolved from single cell organisms. Single cell organisms self-replicate, creating a clone of itself as its offspring, what was one is now two. Identical in their DNA, could it not be said that the clone and its original are

the perfect dyad? We humans however are driven, in some part, by sex, where two different entities create an entirely new and separate entity. We do not divide ourselves but give parts of ourselves creating difference in our offspring. This difference is a divide that cannot be crossed. The closest thing we have to full communion with another person is when we are in our mother's womb and we are bodily one. We seek cohesion in other people because we believe we are incomplete halves always looking for another to make ourselves whole

Immeasurable Distances and *An Almost Collapsing of Bodies* speaks to this contradiction, our desire, the inability to achieve that desire and how it's not what we wanted in the first place. For us to reach the point where we are in complete connection with someone, we would collapse and form a single entity. It would be as if the single cell organism did the opposite process and instead of splitting it would meld together, a regression. So, to fully satiate our desire it would destroy us. I use the hug and caress as physical metaphor for our desire to connect with another and the apparatus's I make as a metaphor for the impossibility of the satiation.



An Almost Collapsing of Bodies
Digital image, copper, nickel, powder coat, acrylic and leather
2020



An Almost Collapsing of Bodies
Digital image, copper, nickel, powder coat, acrylic and leather
2020

Romantic Love

Ah, love. We love to talk about love, we love to think about love, and we most desperately want to be in love. We have written about it for centuries, waged wars for it, driven ourselves mad and even have a hard time defining it. Love: the feeling of what we hope is an unbreakable connection to another person. We think of it as an all-consuming flow of passions, something we are willing to give our lives for, kill for, and give up everything for. Love stories that are recorded throughout history are usually ones with regretful endings. Love occurs in what we think of as our soul, mind or spirit and then are acted upon through and with our body. In all relationships we show our passions with our body; we speak, we touch, we do things for the other person, we love through and with our body.

Love connections come in a multitude of variants. From maternal, paternal, romantic, friendships or even love of a place or thing. We place our ardor in something outside of ourselves

onto what Freud called a “love object” (Freud 245). Freud believed that man is driven by sexuality and the need to replace the mother’s breast once weaned, with something else, another love object. The mother’s breast is our first loss in life; we feel our empty mouths and cry for it to come back to us. We are in a constant search for love and without a replacement the seeking is perpetual. The result of failing to replace the lost love object and go through the mourning process (dealing and coming to terms with the loss) can result in feelings of melancholy, an overwhelming sadness and depression. Failing to replace the lost love object is not usually from lack of trying. We either become obsessive over the individual lost from our lives or we become obsessive about seeking another person to love. Both reactions fail to deal with the trauma left behind from the initial loss and result in what is often called lovesickness. We as humans are enamored with the idea of love.

Love in the beginning is magical. We think our partners are perfect beings that can do no wrong because they love us and we assign them the status of saint because of it. In Alain de Botton’s novel *The Course of Love* (Botton 8) he beautifully writes:

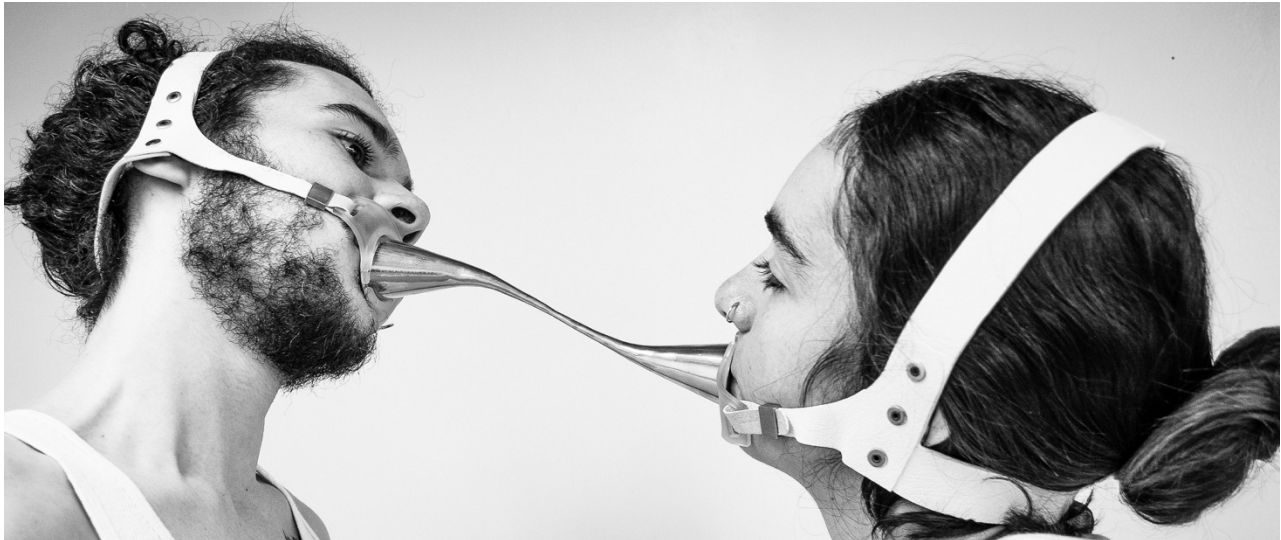
The start (of love) receives such disproportionate attention because it isn’t deemed to be just one phase among many; for the Romantic, it contains a concentrated form of everything significant about love as a whole. Which is why, in so many love stories, there is simply nothing else for the narrator to do with a couple after they have triumphed over a range of initial obstacles other than to consign them to an ill-defined contented future--- or kill them off. What we typically call love is only the start of love.

The love story doesn’t end after the “honeymoon” phase, but if we were to look to stories portrayed in the media, one would think that’s what constitutes love as a whole. We see love stories played out thousands of times on the big screen always ending after they have found their soul mates. Our ideas on love need to evolve with how we now consider our partner. Many of us do not marry anymore simply for stability of our household, maintaining status and producing offspring. We also want comfort, comradery, affection, and play. These wants are what we ask for in a romantic relationship, which is well, a lot to ask for. We also want a best friend, an intimate lover, a good provider, an involved parent and a load of other things that we’ve never asked for from one individual before. As Ester Perel puts it, “You’re asking one person to give you what an entire village used to provide.” (Perel) We ask for perfection from imperfect beings.

Often when a partner fails us, we become unfathomably upset. That rage comes from, in the beginning, our crush idealized version of them and our inability to see them as imperfect beings. Later in love it comes from a belief that they have dishonored the bond you had formed, and since they’ve seen most of your faults already, the anger often becomes uglier. In love, we

are all looking for completeness (Botton 17), imagining that our partners can make up for what we lack. We can also mutually realize our insufficiencies and how lost we both are, take comfort in knowing we are lost together.

In my piece *Silence of a Kiss*, two mouths are connected through an elongated funnel that tapers in the middle and straps to each participants face. Their heads are tilted in such a way that would give a suggestion of a kiss, yet, the mouths are impeded by the device. The apparatus also looks as though the participant would be able to speak through the grate punctured through the funnels opening but when worn it muffles their words and ability to verbally communicate. Unlike several other of my pieces, such as *Immeasurable Distances* and *To Be Seen*, two forms of communication are impeded by this apparatus, both speaking and touch.



The Silence of a Kiss
Digital image, copper, nickel, powder coat, acrylic and leather
2020

The kiss is an iconic image, a symbol of romantic love and connection between two people. One mouth connecting with another to communicate something that words can lack in describing, namely, what it feels like to be in romantic love with someone. It is interesting that the kiss is also carried out with what we most commonly communicate from, the mouth. The kiss both stops verbal communication and communicates through touch. In a relationship we would hope that verbal communication and physical touch are both part of the equation. The fight between one form of communication dominating over the other, physical versus verbal, seems to have a prevailing effect on people love lives. What this apparatus does is draw attention to the

back and forth of how couples communicate. One is unsure which is the giving and receiving end as well as what form of communication the couple is attempting to perform. Both of which get in the way of the other. I don't think anyone would argue that communication is a large component in how/why couples stay together. With this apparatus I wanted to observe and have the two participants feel that impediment and connection, to maybe for a moment consider it in their own partnerships. This is true for all the pieces I make, whether the people I choose to wear them are in romantic relationships or not.

Hearing and Listening



The Difference Between Hearing and Listening
Digital image, copper, powder coat, acrylic and leather
2020

Verbal communication is extremely complicated. There is intonation, slang, enunciation, vocabulary, pronunciation, and a slew of other small variables that can change meaning and understanding between two people. When we speak to one another we decipher what the other person is saying based off the context and the nature of the relationship. When two people are close, they believe they are well equipped to understand what the other's words mean. However, they are just as likely to infer things that are incorrect or not what the other person means.

The difference between hearing and listening is attention. Hearing is accidental, involuntary and effortless much like when we are walking down the street and overhear a conversation but don't really know what was being said. In a way, hearing is passive and listening is active. In hearing, we absorb the sound but not the content. Listening is intentional, comprehending, and focused. We want to be heard but sometimes that impedes our own ability to hear the other. In relationships this balance between being heard and hearing someone else is so precarious, so fine, that it is often unbalanced. If someone speaks and there is no ear to listen, it can't be qualified as communication. This difference between active listening and passive hearing is where the breakdown of communication occurs. When we feel like the other person is listening to us, we feel that they know us better, and the relationship becomes closer.

Funnels and tubing are used in medicine to transport one thing to another. They can transfer blood, plasma, medicine, another tool or sound from one point to the other eventually making its way into a body. Ear trumpets were one of the first apparatus's made to aid the ear. One end was to be inserted into the ear and the larger trumpet end was made to capture and amplify sound so one could hear better. This apparatus allows one-way communication; it is a receiver and not meant to be talked through. Of course, the user is free to speak while using the trumpet but the devices intended purpose is one-way input through the ear. In my piece "The Difference Between Hearing and Listening," the form and shape of a traditional ear trumpet are used to signify that two people are communicating through hearing and listening. It creates a loop where two people talk to each other though the apparatus. Visually this is made clear but if you look closely at the trumpets no sound can be transmitted through them, the acrylic inhibits the sound. In effect the two people are talking to themselves and each waiting to be heard. The two faces are looking over each other's shoulders, not making eye contact. This is a metaphor for the seeking of connection with another person through verbal communication and the disconnection we have between listening and hearing the other.



The Difference Between Hearing and Listening
Digital image, copper, powder coat, acrylic and leather
2020

Seeing

We wish to be seen by another human being. The differences between seeing and looking are similar to the differences between hearing and listening. Seeing is engaged and active whereas looking is more passive. To see someone has multiple meanings in the English language. It can mean to literally see something or someone standing before us or it can mean to know someone deeply. Why do we equate sight with an access to our inner thoughts and true selves? We rely on sight more than any other of our senses to interpret the world; we see things before we can touch, taste or smell them. With sight, we can close our eyes and avoid the things we do not wish to see; it is something we choose to engage with. And maybe that's why we say, "I wish they would see me for who I really am" because it's a choice to see them, and completely dependent on the other person's prerogative. When we don't think we are being seen, it denotes a lack of care from the other person especially when we care deeply about that person.



To Be Seen

Digital image, copper, steel, nickel, powder coat and acrylic
2020

To look or to gaze has been thought of as an act of power. However, to mutually gaze upon each other is a different act all together. It requires that neither party dominates nor submits to the other and creates an equal power structure. It can be extremely compelling to look someone in the eyes for an extended period; in effect we feel closer and more in tune with that person. When relationships are new, looking can be exciting, peculiar, and arousing. We use sight to seek out things we desire, we admire them because they are foreign to us. When we claim what we covet and begin to get to know that thing or person, the mystery diminishes and often so does our interest. Keeping enough distance allows us to maintain our autonomy, mystery and renews our desire.

Several of my pieces require the people wearing them to interact face to face, allowing the opportunity to mutually gaze at one another while also affixing to them by the apparatus. In my piece *To Be Seen*, the gaze is more isolated so that only the eye of the other is seen through a distorted lens. This object is a periscope that allows you to see without being in direct presence of the other person. This is a metaphor for how people do not see us for exactly what we are but through their own lens of experience, which makes it so hard for them to empathetically know

us. This apparatus also keeps distance between the two people. This distance allows the individual to remain autonomous and unattached to the other creating a sense of mystery. It is this mystery that evokes desire, a desire to see and be seen.



To Be Seen
Digital image, copper, steel, nickel, powder coat and acrylic
2020

Conclusion

As I go forward with this work, I will continue to investigate different ways we communicate and how the space between us changes our ability to sensorially understand one another. This work is not done; our bodies communicate on so many different levels and to different degrees that this work may never be able to fully encompass how we interact. However, this is why I find this question of communication so interesting. Our understanding of communication changes with the culture, the person and the intermediary for the exchange. My thesis comes to an end in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. A time where our communication has changed so dramatically that we are literally forced to attune ourselves to interacting only through a computer screen, where the others person's body is at very least six feet away from ours. Much of my work is about the metaphorical distance, the un-collapsible

space between two people because they occupy different bodies. This distance between people is now literally larger and because of it the desire to bridge that gap is greater. We yearn for one another; we miss the others presence. In effect we are no longer literally reaching for each other but instead using language to bridge that gap. Language is one of the most flawed ways we connect with one another, as there aren't enough words or ways to string them together to entirely represent what we feel. My work is about how the body gets us closer to communicate those feelings in conjunction with language. Now that the body has become dangerous, words and images are all we have to connect us. What will we be like when we escape from the caves of our own homes to and are finally able to reach out and touch someone? To see them with our own eyes? My work will inevitably change because of this because so will the nature of our intimate relationships. What that change will look like is somewhat unknown both in my work and in society at large. We might rejoice in one another's arms, actively engage in others company or we might slide back into our comfortable caves adhering to a more technocratic lifestyle. My hope is that we all listen, see, embrace one another.

Because I want you and you want me.

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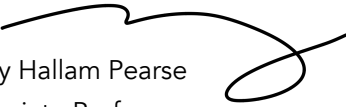
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April 21, 2020

To Whom it May Concern,

As Laurel Fulton's Major Professor and Area Chair of Jewelry and Metalwork, I am pleased to acknowledge Laurel passed her Final Oral Defense with distinction. Laurel has consistently been highly engaged in all aspects of graduate school since the beginning. I have never had a student more focused and directed. Everything she does, all decisions she makes, are in service of her artistic pursuits. She is a determined artist whose thoughtful regard for the history and traditions of the field show me she will contribute to the future of the field. Her thesis, *Mediated Communication*, explored new ways of tackling the subject of relationships that will enhance and advance the field of jewelry and metals.



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