

NURTURING THE UNFERTILISED EGG: TOWARDS THE ABSURD HEROINE

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of a PhD in Art
May 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gratitude in its entirety to Dr Esther Windsor, Dr Gemma Commene and Dr Linda Stupart.

For Joe, Stella, Rudy, and Edward; For all of the human and non-human beings who have cared for me, and in doing so cared for my egg. Thank you.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

1.0 THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER, may also be identified as I

The Author.

This character is constructed of two parts: (1.1) The Researcher and (1.2) The Egg.

1.1 THE RESEARCHER has a human body that contains a uterus.

1.2 THE EGG also known as **MY EGG** is an unfertilised chicken's egg.

1.3 The Egg Carrying Researcher may also be identified as I.

- In transformation from “I” to “The Egg Carrying Researcher”, I am able to reposition my writing from confessional to reflexive, bearing witness and critically engaging with events of trauma to establish contextual understanding.¹ This position allows the Egg Carrying Researcher to become the subject of trauma, and attempts to present knowledge by simultaneously showing and telling.² Performative writing troubles the autoethnographic potential of trauma repetition, while creating multiple selves that are responsive to each other.³
- Judith Butler writes that resistance to admit to self-narration (for example, “even if it was me, this is not for you to know”) questions the legitimacy of authorities who may try to identify the self-narrator (“was it you?”) and maintains a domain of autonomy which cannot be intruded upon.⁴
- LaCapra recognises that the experience of trauma can shatter and distort memory, which creates vulnerabilities in reports of the event, suggesting a process of working through trauma.⁵ However, the Egg Carrying Researcher does not wish to work through trauma, because this denotes a form of recovery;

¹ Kwon, H. (2016) Writing Witnessing, Witnessing Writing: Working Through Trauma Using Performative Autoethnography. *Visual Culture & Gender*, 11. pp.8-17. Available at: <http://vcg.emitto.net/index.php/vcg/article/view/100> [Accessed 21 January 2023]. P8-9

² Tamas, S (2009) Writing and Righting Trauma: Troubling the Autoethnographic Voice. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-10.1.1211>

³ Kwon, H. (2016) Writing Witnessing, Witnessing Writing: Working Through Trauma Using Performative Autoethnography. *Visual Culture & Gender*, 11. pp.8-17. Available at: <http://vcg.emitto.net/index.php/vcg/article/view/100> [Accessed 21 January 2023]. P16

⁴ Butler, J. (2005) *Giving an Account of Oneself*. USA: Fordham University Press. P11-12

⁵ Masterson, J., Watson, W. and Williams, M. (2013) Mending Wounds?: Healing, Working through, or Staying in Trauma: An Introduction. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 29(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2013.777140> P1

A way of rectifying an unproductive being to enable a productive mechanism once more.⁶

- Ahmed reflects on anecdotes of abuse which illustrate how literal “closed doors” are used to stop something or someone getting out,⁷ concluding that doors eliminate potential witnesses of violence and provide private space to maintain hierarchies and allow ill-treatment to occur.⁸ By writing of the Egg Carrying Researcher, I attempt to circumnavigate intimidating power structures, opening doors to allow interactions with dominant cultures to be witnessed.

2.0 THE WORM MAKERS, may also be described as MEN WHO LIVE IN WORM-MAKING BODIES

2.1 The worm makers are cis heterosexual men.

2.2 Worm makers are each a worm themselves. However, due to their prominent multiplicative tendencies, in naming these beings it is important to indicate the worm makers’ ability to produce worms as well as be worms individually.

2.3 A worm is a malware which duplicates itself and infects others, while remaining active on infected systems. A worm self-replicates so that it can spread complete working versions of itself to uninfected systems. It often does this by exploiting parts of an operating system which work automatically; therefore, this exploitation can occur without consent. Typically, a worm is only noticed when its uncontrollable thirst for reproduction consumes system resources, slowing or halting other tasks.⁹

2.4 There are people of all genders who live in bodies which have, or previously had, the facilities to make worms, however, an individual’s refusal to be a man will forfeit their worm making ability. In any gender, a non-male person in a worm making body may still be able to produce sperm, which is entirely different.

⁶ Stupart, L. (2016) *Becoming Object: Positioning A Feminist Art Practice*. Ph.D. Thesis. Goldsmiths, University of London. P25, 181-182, 195, 212-14, 251, 258.

⁷ Ahmed (2021) *Complaint!* Durham and London: Duke University Press. P179

⁸ Ahmed (2021) *Complaint!* Durham and London: Duke University Press. P189

⁹ **Point 2.3 repurposes and manipulates language from:** National Institution of Standards and Technology (2023) *Worm*. Available at: <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/worm> [Accessed 21st May 2023].

TechTarget (2022) *Computer Worm*. Available at: <https://www.techtarget.com/searchsecurity/definition/worm> [Accessed 21 January 2023].

3.0 EGG LAYERS, may also be described as EGG LAYING BODIES

3.1 The egg laying body is a body which contains, or is presumed to contain, a uterus.

3.2 The laying of an egg occurs in all genders.

3.3 Not every egg laying body regularly lays eggs. There are frequent occurrences of irregularities within individual egg laying systems, both naturally occurring and voluntarily suppressed, however, the term 'egg laying' is based upon the societally expected role that a body will take in reproduction, based upon the gametes that they produce.

3.4 The egg laying body is a provider of vessels through which worms can burrow.

4.0 People who are described as NON-CIS-MALE

4.1 I use this term to refer to people who are not cis men.

4.2 Although this may be translatable as a generalisation which groups a wide variety of identities, this terminology is used in discussion which refers to those that fall beneath patriarchal authority.



PRELUDE: MOTHER

Body straining, Sisyphus screwed his face, bracing for a fresh start, with legs outstretched. Gods in too-clean hospital scrubs stood around with clipboards and beaming faces, nodding with encouragement when they caught their patient's eye.

From time to time, Sisyphus's mind flicked back to the many times sat in polished white offices where a God had broken the news to him that this expulsion would happen. He had pleaded, for all his sins, he did not want this to happen to his body, and the God had courteously assured Sisyphus that the new presence, despite resulting from his frivolous prior behaviours, was actually a gift (congratulations!), and that the authorities had ensured that alternative arrangements were not sanctioned to be made. In blunter terms: it was coming, whether Sisyphus liked it or not.

“Anyway, it will give you something to do! A real sense of purpose!”

Sisyphus juddered violently until suddenly the gruelling pushing stopped, and something clunked into existence, tipping off the edge of the bed and thudding onto the marble floor. Exhausted by the long effort, Sisyphus waved weakly at one of the Gods for help to retrieve the new thing that had escaped his body and fallen on to the floor. A muscular midwife with chiselled cheekbones concealed their mild confusion with a polite smile.

“Oh no sir! That belongs to you. You must recover it yourself; it is not my job.”

Sisyphus groaned and dragged himself into an upright seating position, twisting to the left and slipping his feet down to the floor. He looked to the side at the Gods, who graciously gestured for him to continue. Feebly bending down with a slight shudder at the twinges in his bruised pelvis, Sisyphus placed his hands around the cold object. A boulder. Struggling back up, Sisyphus first met the stony ankles, then the clasping hands and the keen eyes of a God who had stepped forward. “Remember, this is precious,” he said to his quizzical patient, turning to the window and pointing towards a dusty slope.

INTRODUCTION

Within this thesis, I present anecdotal, fictional, and theoretical forms of writing to revitalise the absurd in a way which contributes new terminologies to challenge patriarchal structures. In particular, I offer The Absurd Heroine as a queer figure of resistance to systemic and heteronormative reproduction. Through doing this, I provide new ways to imagine, speak about, and preserve the expansiveness of gender beyond the limitations of a biologically prescribed binary.

My writing develops through my becoming an Egg Carrying Researcher, done so via a performative art practice of active nurture towards an unfertilised egg throughout the course of the study. The relationship built with my egg is offered as a reimagining of the time spent between Sisyphus (Camus's "Absurd Hero"¹⁰) and his boulder, regulated by a shifting of domesticised and feminised caring duties towards the unfertile, unproductive task. The inhabitation of this methodology produces experiential and corporeal knowledge which displaces the canon of traditional academic production through reflexive positionality.

The research is responsive to the environment in which it has evolved, with the presence of Covid-19 having established distinct perimeters for the Egg Carrying Researcher throughout the period of study. The boundaries negotiated through the research have been determined by lockdown regulations and associated caring responsibilities, a transfer to nomadic attendance and a backdrop of working in private spaces, and subsequent physical and emotional trauma responses resulting from the pandemic.

Is the Absurd Hero a Man?

I construct this practice-led research upon an interest in how a queer feminist art practice might be useful to interrogate Albert Camus's definitions of absurd lives through the examples of cis men and worm replicating activity, and question how appropriate these choices are in comparison with the concept of absurd existence.

¹⁰ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin. O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P116

In selecting examples of ‘The Absurd Man’, Camus states: “I am choosing solely men who aim only to expend themselves or whom I see to be expending themselves”,¹¹ implying that these exemplary figures are in some way consumable. Meanwhile, Andrea Long Chu defines female as “any psychic operation in which the self is sacrificed to make room for the desires of another”,¹² acknowledging that this identity is constructed upon a lack based on the expansive, gaining cis male other. When comparing these statements, it is plausible to question whether the absurd man is male at all.

Fundamentally, when outlining the motivations of this study, I am challenging Camus’s naming of cis men undertaking worming activity as illustrative of absurd lives. Whilst Camus acknowledges that his chosen examples could be considered morally dubious, an occupation of absurdity allows these figures to behave as if they were royalty.¹³ Horowitz notes that Camus’s absurd formulation is rooted in “a very particular, [misogynistic and racial] experience”, providing “curious indifference to various brutalities” that are charged by both racial and gender-based othering. Most importantly, the eradication of the other in Camus’s writing cannot be denied or excused as he “has placed in his work men who reflect a collective attitude or mentality of sexual and racial fear and ill-concealed desire for degradation”, encouraging the participating reader to dismiss these issues.¹⁴

I outline the figures and behaviour which Camus identifies as characterising of an absurd existence in the following table. While it is apparent that some form of departure from conventionality occurs in each of these examples, I also recognise that each figure actively contributes to the way patriarchal and colonial values are upheld, thus assisting in the reproduction of ‘meaning’ that measures the other, rather than contributing to its deconstruction.

¹¹ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P67

¹² Long Chu, A. (2019) *Females*. 1 edn. London/Brooklyn: Verso. P11

¹³ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P88

¹⁴ Horowitz, L. K. (1987) Of Women and Arabs: Sexual and Racial Polarization in Camus. *Modern Language Studies*, 17(3). Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3194734> [Accessed 26 May 2021]. P55-56

Figure	Justification
Sisyphus	Cheating death, initially motivated by a need to punish his wife for leaving his body in the middle of the town square (this was done at his request). ¹⁵
Don Juan	Misogynistic, womanising, and non-committal pursuit of desire. ¹⁶
The Actor ¹⁷	Experiences the absurd through a fleeting yet dependent relationship with fame ¹⁸ and an ability to stray from the physical self. Although this is a role which encompasses more than cis men (Adrienne Lecouvreur is mentioned in Camus's writing), ¹⁹ Camus positions the actor through he/him pronouns, description of Hamlet ²⁰ and repetitive occupancy of the hero's life cycle. ²¹
The Conquerer ²²	Men who live and act with grandeur, who see themselves as Gods rather than men. ²³

Most significantly, Camus championed Sisyphus of Greek mythology as the Absurd Hero,²⁴ this title resulting from his punishment to spend eternity in an unproductive ritual of pushing a boulder to the top of a slope before watching it roll back down and beginning again. In response to the discrepancies between Camus's definitions of absurd lives and Long Chu's definition of 'female' alongside further contemporary definitions of womanhood, within this project I

¹⁵ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P115-116

¹⁶ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P67-74

¹⁷ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P75-82

¹⁸ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P76-77

¹⁹ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P80-81

²⁰ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P75, 77, 80.

²¹ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P79.

²² Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P82-89.

²³ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P85-86.

²⁴ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P115-116.

propose that the ‘Absurd Hero’ is a role better suited to a non-cis-male identity: The Absurd Heroine.

Through inhabitation of a performative art practice, this PhD aims to begin to demonstrate the actions of The Absurd Heroine. I explore the original Sisyphean task through a durational performance of care towards a single unfertilised (chicken’s) egg, suggesting that the experience of unproductive or futile labour which is measured by an expectation of generative achievement is more fitting to those outside of cis male definition. This is a performance which began with the period of study and extending throughout its span, having met my egg within the first month of beginning this PhD. I compare a looping cycle of unfertilised egg production and loss or failure to Sisyphus’s boulder, challenged by a slope of reproductive expectation that is pronounced by capitalism. It is vital here to acknowledge that the alignment of Sisyphus to the boulder is not a personal choice, but one assigned by a hierarchy. So it is with the alignment of the egg to people who are not cis men. I do not utilise the egg as representative of cis and biologically able womanhood, but rather as symbolic of an expanse of people who are measured against it; Beings who are ruptured by a patriarchal expectation that they are vessels to bear the reproduction of heteronormative order.

I would like to take time to extrapolate Long Chu’s definition to be clear in my own terminologies; ‘Female’ here does not equate to womanhood or femininity, but rather refers to beings who exist outside of cis male-dom and, by this reasoning, cannot command patriarchal society in the same way, still experiencing ‘lack’ as opposed to an inherent ability to gain. I do not use this definition to recategorize non-binary people, neither to call ‘female’ the man who was assigned female at birth, nor to reframe trans women as anything but women.

I am particularly interested in how a disruption of meaning and deviation from capitalist expectation occurs through gender non-conformity, or existence outside of binary gender. Silvia Federici describes “the female body as the material and social fabric holding the community together”.²⁵ When associating this concept to absurdist narratives, the misbehaving woman, the woman who refuses or fails to cooperate within the social fabric, becomes a key element in the masculine experience of the absurd. In behaviour which rebels against a

²⁵ Federici, S. (2018) *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women*. 2nd edn. Oakland, CA: PM Press. P24

patriarchal framework that applies capital purpose to women, the gateway to the absurd is opened and meaninglessness is exhibited. The following table indicates such occurrences in the work of revered absurdist texts:

Character	Actions contributing to Absurd realisation of (cis male) protagonist	Literature
Marie (Mersault's Lover)	Wanting too much romantic attention from her partner.	<i>The Stranger</i> ²⁶ Camus
Mersault's Mother	Dying.	<i>The Stranger</i> ²⁷ Camus
Grete (Gregor's sister)	Leading the family to revolt and kill her brother.	<i>The Metamorphosis</i> ²⁸ Kafka
Rambert's Lover	Being geographically absent (due to quarantining procedures).	<i>The Plague</i> ²⁹ Camus
Anny (Antoine's Ex-lover)	Is over him and has moved on.	<i>Nausea</i> ³⁰ Sartre
Sisyphus's Wife	Leaves her husband's dead body in the town square – this is his request.	<i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> ³¹ Camus, Originating from Greek Mythology

If failure and refusal are challenging to a fixed social order based upon purposeful roles and encoded gender practices, then the antagonism of our assignment to those binary practices is increasingly troubling to the immovability of heteronormative structure. While the women misbehaving in traditional absurdist fictions do not cooperate with the expectations of their male protagonists, they remain within cis-ness. I would like to think about how the absurd

²⁶ Camus, A. (2013) *The Outsider*. Translated by Sandra Smith. London: Penguin Classics. P38-39

²⁷ Camus, A. (2013) *The Outsider*. Translated by Sandra Smith. London: Penguin Classics. P3

²⁸ Kafka, F. (1983) *The Metamorphosis*. In: *The Penguin Complete Stories of Franz Kafka*. Translated by Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd. Great Britain: Penguin Books. P134

²⁹ Camus, A. (2013) *The Plague*. Translated by Robin Buss. London: Penguin Classics. P114-115

³⁰ Sartre, J. P. (1965) *Nausea*. Translated by Robert Baldick. Middlesex: Penguin Books. P17, 20

³¹ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin. O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P115-116

could be further exposed by a movement away from cis gender. The misbehaving woman could be the person that was assigned male at birth and now is not, or indeed an (assigned at birth) “woman” who transformed into a man, or a different gender entirely.

To further consider this point, we should recognise Federici’s use of the phrase ‘female body’; It is important to note here that eggs occur in bodies of all genders, and similarly, not all women produce eggs, and so I do not seek definition based upon the reproductive capabilities of a body. Whilst establishing the concept of Absurd Heroine, I look towards Johanna Hedva’s convictions behind using the word ‘woman’ in *Sick Woman Theory* as a term further encompassing than she/her pronouns. Hedva describes this choice as representative of “the uncared for, the secondary, the oppressed, the non-, the un-, the less-than”.³² Within this phrase, Hedva reveals an unprivileged identity of Long Chu’s ‘lack’, living in a body that is denied autonomies by a patriarchal state. They go on to describe the radical importance of the word ‘woman’ to those who were not assigned female at birth:

“I use it to honor a dear friend of mine who came out as genderfluid last year. For her, what mattered the most was to be able to call herself a “woman,” to use the pronouns “she/her.” She didn’t want surgery or hormones; she loved her body and her big dick and didn’t want to change it – she only wanted the word.”³³

It feels radical to use the word ‘woman’ in response to a denied access, and yet it can also feel dysphoric to those who were assigned female at birth and do not find correlation with the term. I do not wish to attempt to reconcile people who establish that they are not women with an assertion that they are. And so, while I begin this thesis by using the word “woman” with a tenderness and a vastness, I also use it as a placeholder while I pursue better terminology of opposition and resistance. A word which indicates a type of being which is not the dominative norm. Most prominently, I translate the equation of womanhood to expansive resistance in my use of ‘Heroine’; A champion who is defined by their antagonism and defiance of the overshadowing, authoritative ‘Hero’.

³² Hedva, J. (2016) *Sick Woman Theory*. Available at: https://johannahedva.com/SickWomanTheory_Hedva_2020.pdf [Accessed 30 January 2023]. P9

³³ Hedva, J. (2016) *Sick Woman Theory*. Available at: https://johannahedva.com/SickWomanTheory_Hedva_2020.pdf [Accessed 30 January 2023]. P9-10

Contribution

I care for my egg at a critical point of re-evaluation of knowledges surrounding inhabitation of the biological body, where evolving definitions of gender and the able body are violently opposed by contemporary state control and exclusionary practices based upon reproductive value. Written throughout a climate of (increasingly suppressed) protests and uprising amidst a Camusian pandemic, an intention of my thesis is to highlight the absurd as a landscape in which bodies are prompted to question the effects of capitalist expectation upon their state of being. I assert that we can observe tensions and give consideration to our counteractions through a sterilising of the labour which reproduces dominant heteronormative values.

In proposing the Absurd Heroine as a revision of the significant absurdist theory established by Albert Camus, I contribute to conversations which challenge notions of transcendence that are used to defend biologically determined gender. Reviving the disruption of meaning as a form of body-based activism claims utopian space for post-gender identities to be established through language and enactment rather than the presence of biological characteristics and their roles in (re)production. My formulation of the Absurd Heroine will offer a new terminology with which to approach philosophical discourse around nonbinary identities.

Meanwhile, my methodology contributes to radical forms of reflexive art practice-led research, queering traditional data collection narratives and asserting new ways of disseminating liberating pedagogies in the everyday.

Ways of Writing

The binary of written and practical work in a practice-led PhD study is troubled by, and is troubling to, this research project. I approached this construction with some wariness, reluctant to force something which looked like a miniature version of a traditional academic thesis while dissecting a boundary around the things that might constitute as practice. I look here to Elizabeth Price's ideas around an emancipatory expansion of research form, especially recognising that participation in a reproductive cycle of regulated and fixed-form theses is not conducive, particularly in a subject such as art, where research is undertaken to question the

form that things may take.³⁴ With this in mind, throughout this study, I allow writing to be an unsolidified and shapeshifting process, which expands beyond a formulaic submission of academic text.

Initially, I adopt Gallop's methodological ideas around thinking, presenting theory, and processing knowledge through anecdote³⁵ to record my experiences of egg care, but also to bear witness to the blurring of boundaries between my research and my everyday life that occurs within feminist scholarship, as described by Pearce.³⁶ Of this, Gallop recognises that exposure of gendered experience infiltrates the professional expectations of institutions, legitimising a different type of knowledge, known by different types of people, and acquired within personal spaces.³⁷ Furthermore, Precarious Workers Brigade explain reflexivity as a useful and political way of disputing the notion that identities such as 'women' have fixed or unanimous boundaries, instead exposing contradictory and fluid individual experiences of power, relationships and involvement.³⁸ Taking these ideas into account, when engaging writing as a practice to grapple with the experiential material of egg care, I am able to articulate corporeal and positional knowledge in a way which is interfering to expectations imposed by heteronormative academic trajectories.

Meanwhile, as performativity can be found in both egg care and writing, so can the act of sculpting. Katrina Palmer's thesis demonstrates writing as a sculptural object which resists confinement of studio spaces,³⁹ giving new dimensions to an exploration of making that is reflexive to my egg care experience, particularly when the everyday becomes a physically enclosing space. During my research journey, writing became a vital component of my practice when space and materials became restricted due to my living arrangements during the Covid-

³⁴ Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities (2014) *The Form of the Academic Thesis – an artist's perspective* | Prof Elizabeth Price. [video] Available at: <https://youtu.be/Sz9sy8woVcg> [Accessed 14 May 2023].

³⁵ Gallop, J. (2002) *Anecdotal Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press. P2

³⁶ Pearce, R. (2020) A Methodology for the Marginalised: Surviving Oppression and Traumatic Fieldwork in the Neoliberal Academy. *Sociology*, 54(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038520904918> P8

³⁷ Gallop, J. (2002) *Anecdotal Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press. P55

³⁸ Precarious Workers Brigade (2017) *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability & Reclaiming Education*. London: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press. P26

³⁹ Palmer, K. (2011). *Reality Flickers: Writing With Found Objects and Imagined Sculpture*. Ph.D. Thesis. Royal College of Art. Available at: <https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/1627/1/Final%20Version%20Katrina%20Palmer%20Thesis.pdf> [Accessed 30 June 2020]. P15-16

19 lockdowns. In a reading and discussion lead by artist-writer Adwoa Owusu-Barnieh for Black Hole Club,⁴⁰ we shared the value of poetry as a practice. In this instance, poetry is defined by Audre Lorde as the “revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word to mean”,⁴¹ again nodding towards vast and vibrant practices which escape colonial and patriarchal rigidity. This form of writing, Adwoa reasoned, is an accessible material which does not rely on wealth, or studio keys, or specialist guidance. For this reason, writing as practice disfigures capitalist expectations of productivity in art making by enabling the capacity for expansiveness in even the most confined spaces. To undertake writing as an art practice is a defiant and gestural act which displaces the concept of quantifiable material value in defining an art object.

While writing is a practice which can occur within the most rudimentary of spaces, it also contains possibilities to carve new and unrestricted sites where limitless things can happen. Through non-prosaic text, Lola Olufemi declares the significance of feminist imagination, defining an ability to facilitate resistance by “dismantling hegemonic notions of what is permissible under current conditions” and creating plural, spontaneous and multidirectional futures.⁴² In this way, application of the imagination through experimental or fictional writing becomes a form of practice which offers uninhibited ways of interpreting theoretical and anecdotal research, well beyond the spatial, historical, environmental, social, and scientific factors which might otherwise limit what could be documented or physically made.

This also correlates with how experience of the absurd is handled during a documentation process. Palmer highlights the importance of the imaginary in further investigation:

“We don’t see the ordinary things we live with. In fact, we should avoid looking at familiar objects because we can’t make a spectacle of the everyday without losing it. If we look directly, and try to scrutinize its ordinariness, the very quality we want to inspect will recede.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Owusu-Barnieh, A. (2022) Kelechi Ochafor and Audre Lorde: Reading and Discussion. *Welcome To The New Earth*. Black Hole Club, 17 February [notes taken by Emily Scarrott].

⁴¹ Lorde, A (2017) Poetry is not A Luxury. In: *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*. UK: Silver Press. P8

⁴² Olufemi, L. (2021) *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*. UK: Hajar Press. P35

⁴³ Palmer, K. (2011). *Reality Flickers: Writing With Found Objects and Imagined Sculpture*. Ph.D. Thesis. Royal College of Art. Available at: <https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/1627/1/Final%20Version%20Katrina%20Palmer%20Thesis.pdf> [Accessed 30 June 2020]. P96

Whilst anecdotal material is a groundwork of my findings, the potential to damage commonplace absurdity in over-analysis means that alternative ways of articulation through making is important. Making via writing has allowed me to readdress personal anecdotes in world building exercises which express the findings of my research in speculative fictions. Pursuit of speculative and science fictions within my practice enables the potential to further interrogate properties of, and reactions to, eggs beyond the walls of the everyday. By returning experience from the realm of reality back into the process of sculptural text, I am able to re-evaluate the tensions within these occurrences. Ursula Le Guin's *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* defines science fiction as a reflexive method of describing actions, feelings, and happenings, concluding that when properly conceived it acts as:

“...a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story. In it, as in all fiction, there is room enough to keep even Man where he belongs, in his place in the scheme of things.”⁴⁴

The womb-ness of speculative fiction creates a container to carry my experiences of egg care, an egg carrying space for embodied knowledge to become sculptural text. Haraway describes Le Guin's writing as taking “the shape of a carrier bag that is disdained by heroes”,⁴⁵ an environment which is crafted to support the gathering of feminised practices. The egg, a final beast to be slain by the triumphant hero through impregnation of a fair and swooning maiden, finds solace when it is placed in Le Guin's carrier bag; Concealed, removed from the heroic site of “bashing, thrusting, raping, killing”.⁴⁶ Now, I pick up the egg and place it within a container of my own sculpting, removing it from the hostility of texts which reproduce the worming, conquering protagonist. This thesis is a space for unfertilised eggs to survive.

⁴⁴ Le Guin, U K. (2019) *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Ignota. P37

⁴⁵ Haraway, D. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. North Carolina: Duke University Press. P120

⁴⁶ Le Guin, U K. (2019) *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Ignota. P33

Thesis Overview

- Preluding the introductory body of the thesis, MOTHER is a short fictional exploration of the beginning of Sisyphus' relationship with his boulder which probes how hierarchical powers (in this case the Greek Gods) eradicate bodily autonomy. This work is responsive to the restricted circumstances in which abortion can legally occur, and the overturning of Roe v. Wade which happened during this period of research, removing the constitutional protection of the right to abortion in the USA.
- The LIST OF CHARACTERS provides new terminologies to refer to biological reproductive mechanisms and their influence on gender definition, while avoiding the coded terminologies of at-birth-assigned gender.
- THE SETTLEMENT is a speculative absurdist fiction which materially explores the damage that is caused by patriarchal power through a removal of recognisable societal understandings of reproduction. By positioning a community of eggs responding to the threat of worm invasion, this text provides an exploration of the terminologies outlined in the List of Characters.
- In CHAPTER ONE, I present my methodology, declaring the rules with which I care for my egg and providing a theoretical context for this approach to absurd praxis. I reference the holistic nature of finding out in the absurd environment of *Twin Peaks*, including an exploration of the Log Lady as illustrative of a knowledge generating relationship with a silent non-human object.
 - This chapter contains METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT ONE: VALENTINE'S DAY 2020 or MY PARTNER SMASHED MY EGG IN THE CAR ON VALENTINE'S DAY, a documentation of the moment that my egg was first broken, and how it was fixed.
- In CHAPTER TWO I undertake a contextual review. This chapter exists as a series of four vignettes, presenting a recognition of absurd scenarios, both lived and fictitious.

- In PART ONE, I utilise the replication of conditions within Camus’s absurdist fiction *The Plague* during the Covid-19 pandemic to position myself as the Egg Carrying Researcher. I argue that reproductive purpose is a patriarchal framework inflicted over the landscape of the absurd, while notions of the withdrawal of labour began to be more widely deconstructed during the pandemic in response to an enforcement of capitalist values.
- In PART TWO, I interrogate the motivation of the worm-making practices of the cis male artist, specifying Piero Manzoni and Gavin Turk’s amplification of monetary and artisanal value to the egg as an art material through interventions made through deliberate personal interference. While I describe the self-referential practices of such cis-male artists as an enclosed ‘circle jerk’, I then look outwardly to the reclaiming of eggs in art as tools of protest and complaint, holding properties that can disturb order. Outside of the circle jerk, I reflect on practices by Carolee Schneemann, Faith Ringgold and Nigella Lawson.
- In PART THREE, I follow an acknowledgement of the violence committed by Charles Saatchi (an institutional figurehead within contemporary art) upon Nigella Lawson, with further thought upon the disturbance of meaning through absence of the non-male being. Here, I draw upon parallels to the rupturing of Ana Mendieta’s body by her artist-husband-murderer(?), while reflecting upon the way that knowledge is shared horizontally when it is otherwise bypassed by the institution.
- METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT TWO: DOWN THE SLOPE is a short anecdote which documents a public incident in which the egg falls and cracks.
- In PART FOUR, I return to *Twin Peaks* to explore how absurdity provides a setting for transforming gender and transforming bodies, while recognising the resistance of the institution in accepting transformation.
- LAURA PALMER TAKES LYSISTRATA’S OATH is a *Twin Peaks* fan fiction written as a script, envisaging the scene in which Laura Palmer decides to die so that her body cannot be utilised in the reproduction of Bob (“the evil that men do”). As Bob tries to enter Laura through sexual intercourse, Lysistrata appears, taking

the form of one of the Greek statues which appear in the Red Room, and invites Laura to participate in a sex strike through the act of death.

- THE TRANSFORMATION OF ALBERT’S PRONOUNS: A GHOST STORY, A DISSECTION is a fiction which responds to the death of Albert Camus, speculating on post-humous experiences. I use this scenario to explore a radical reading of the Absurd Man as not even human, informed by Braidotti’s proclamation that “we are not all human” where the definition of ‘human’ is cisgender-heterosexual white males, authoritative and able-bodied.⁴⁷ As a dead body, Albert is no longer able to commit heteronormative, imposing, or physical acts and so the transformation from alive to dead means that Camus is no longer a cis man. He witnesses alterations in how he is perceived or dealt with by the people around him.
- In CHAPTER THREE, I explore methodologies of protest through two interventions enacted in response to the reproduction of heteronormativity in personal and professional spheres. This chapter closes with a reflection upon the contribution made by my methodology.
- METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT THREE: AN EXCERPT OF THOUGHT PROCESS is an experimental text which documents lucid thoughts and actions in response to my position as carer for my egg. The action of writing this text occurred directly following the event described. The text is purposefully interrupted by an image of the eggshell.
- CHAPTER FOUR explores the capitalist expectation of fertile behaviours through a personal anecdote of enforced cis gender affirming healthcare for polycystic ovary syndrome, prompting an evaluation of the contemporary taxonomies of “womanhood” by Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs). Here, I identify an exclusionary mentality which acts as a form of quality control to a reproductive workforce and argue that these ideologies are indicative of a gaining rather than self-sacrificial existence.

⁴⁷ Braidotti, R. (2015) *Metamorphic Others and Nomadic Subjects*. In: Byrne-Smith, D., ed. *Science Fiction Documents of Contemporary Art*. London: White Chapel Gallery. P166

- GUARDIAN OF THE EGGS: A POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN STORY is an anecdote which illustrates the valuing of binary gender and reproductivity in health care.

- This chapter is externally accompanied by THE VESSEL: “A WOMB OF THINGS TO BE AND A TOMB OF THINGS THAT WERE”.⁴⁸ This is a script of an audio play which depicts the horrors of a capitalist and colonialist attitude towards eggs; A vessel valued for its ability to gain further financial or labour assets. This text depicts the increasingly poor conditions that workers must tolerate to fulfil the wishes of their authority. This audio play is constructed in a way which permits co-authoring and horizontal methods of working between actors; There are no character descriptions, encouraging a cast to assign roles based on individual interest, while conversation prompts support collaborative construction of each performance.

⁴⁸ Le Guin, U K. (2019) *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Ignota. P37

THE SETTLEMENT

HD stirred in the morning light on the day of her ripening and rolled out of her nest. When an Egg becomes ripe, it is customary for them to be physically assessed on the grand steps in the centre of the settlement, following which they are presented to their community. This is a logistical and quiet, yet triumphant ceremony.

She polished her shell and consumed her breakfast nutrients, with a little extra that she had been saving as a treat to prepare her newly ripening body for a vigorous day. HD ate her breakfast alone, as always, sat at the entrance of her individual nesting cabin, taking in the atmosphere, and watching others do the same.

There was no generational assembly within the settlement. All Eggs lived alone, but The Egg People were and had always been together and their time of togetherness was extensive. Egg People do not reproduce and so there was never a newcomer to the settlement, or a need for parental relationships. Eggs formed individual bonds with each other, maturing at their own rates and feeling non-authoritarian love and friendship together. Occasionally, death would occur, but this was a natural process. The Egg People never really thought about the end, or their own end, or being one of the last few left over at the settlement's end. There was a lot of them around for now.

Despite underlying paranoias regarding worm invasions, the settlement had been undisrupted for as long as its members could remember. In fact, now it seemed that even worm invasions had become a horror of scrambled old Eggs' tales, rather than a historical or political circumstance of their reality.

The story would always be the same: The worms would come, seemingly from a place that must exist somewhere else (the Egg People have no knowledge of what dwells beyond their skies) and strike the settlement. Worms split open and feast upon the shells of Eggs, allowing themselves to be absorbed by the internal Egg and mutating with their victim into a new entity. The new entities, a product of Egg combining with worm, were of a soft, cushiony texture. There was a gross succulence to a mutated worm/Egg body which discomforted the Egg People. A mutation would call to the Eggs, demanding and begging them to bring forth and nourish it with the sweet slime-nutrients that would otherwise be the Egg's meals. Mutations

were frightening beings, yet pathetic and dependent, slurping sacrificed resources from the settlement as they expanded. Rebuilding the settlement after a worm invasion and mutation period was a lingering task, the majority of which all Eggs would spend indoors and hidden whilst the mutations outgrew their settlement. Eventually, after an aching long period of expansion and consumption, a mutation would, in a sudden discharge of gaudy raspberry-sticky-pink light, burst and be gone.

HD moved through the tightly gathering Eggs to take her position for assessment at the top of the grand steps of the settlement, newly emerging yet comfortable amongst the community that she had always known.

The grand steps of the settlement were built from an ornate marbled stone. Once pristine, now crevices and coarsened surfaces were inhabited by a thin layer of miniature emerald moss, the only other inhabitant of the settlement. The moss, some said, appeared shortly after the first mutation had erupted and slowly feasted upon the remnants of fluids which had settled in tiny spaces that Egg People could not clean.

At the very top of the steps, marked out with moss-inhabited grooves carved into the platform, rectangle in which assessments took place. Overlooking this, was a large silver spoon. The handle of the spoon slotted into a hole in a small stone cube, allowing it to stand vertically with its head to the sky. At double the height of the tallest Egg, this gigantic object was known as The Throne of The Settlement, so named because it was said that any Egg could lie inside the spoons curvature and find safety. The Throne remained in its position, apart from during a ripening assessment in which it was tradition to remove the spoon from its stand and lie it horizontally, allowing the ripening Egg to take a moment to rest in the Throne's curvature: A symbol of wellbeing and prosperity in their future role within the settlement.

The physical assessment of an Egg is a gentle and tactile procedure, relying on shape, weight, colouration, and texture to calculate the nourishing qualities of the individual. A ritual of the Egg people, The Assessor (as they are formally known) initially examines the ripening Egg, taking and recording their measurements. The ripening one would then take their moment to lie in the curvature of The Throne of The Settlement. Following this, The Assessor touches their shell against the Egg, going on to invite the rest of the community to join in touching the newly ripe one and feeling, acknowledging, understanding their state for themselves. Finally,

the ripened Egg would be told their newly discovered fortune. The Assessor herself was identified through this process; It was a ritual that allowed the Egg People to find the potential within their community members and take their appropriate place within the settlement's day-to-day life.

At the short sharp sound of the ceremony beginning, The Assessor approached HD. The Assessor wasn't intimidating, she thought. A little shorter and stouter than HD, with a peachy-blue tinge whilst HD had a sunny toffee glow. They already knew each other, as all Eggs in the settlement did, perhaps a little more than acquaintances but not enough to feel a certainty in their emotional bonds. However, this was a formal ceremony and so The Assessor greeted HD with a warm, yet appropriate nod before turning to give a welcoming address to the crowd.

The first steps, as always, were to take some measurements of HD's blossoming body; Height, width and circumference both vertically and at two horizontal points (once at her widest curve and once at the mid-point of her conical top). Whilst this was happening, it was custom for the gathered community to hum in unison, a low and rumbling age-old harmony which soothed the ripening one and reiterated the togetherness of Egg People.

Next, The Assessor lifted The Throne of The Settlement from its base. There was an uncomfortable screeching-crumbling sound as the silver spoon handle scraped against the gravelled stone block, but the move was easy and quickly The Throne of The Settlement lay horizontally at the top of the steps. The Assessor gestured for HD to take her place in the curvature. Although nervous, HD was obedient and lay down in the ovoid metal, her shell aligning almost perfectly. She counted, trying to pace this moment, and then stepped back out onto the grand steps. Proudly, HD lifted The Throne of The Settlement by its silver handle and slotted it back into its stone base, with a dull thud. She returned to The Assessor.

It was finally time for the assessment touch, which would determine her future role amongst the community.

HD's plump structure was lightly mottled; A texture which could not be experienced by the rigidity of her community but completely occupied by the fleshy body of a mutation. HD's swollen, freckled stomach was sturdy and cool, meeting the touch of The Assessor with a gentle clacking sound.

A clacking sound, but then a sudden, ever so slight jump back by The Assessor. Perhaps too slight, almost too professional for anyone further away than HD to notice. The Assessor carefully reached forward and clacked softly again. Whilst HD examined her face for a glimpse of what she thought might've been a frown, The Assessor stepped to the left and beckoned for the Egg People to begin the community procession, in which they would each walk up the steps, individually touched shell with HD and made their way back down with a newfound knowledge of HD's place within the settlement. During the assembly of the procession, the Egg People began to sing the first few notes of the second ripening tune; This time a lullaby, a song which is composed for the contents of an Egg.

When the first in the long line of beaming Eggs was only a couple of steps away (with the second only a step behind), The Assessor calmly, but very, very deliberately reached sideways and pushed HD forward to the crowd.

As the singing procession of Eggs touched HD in turn, each member was struck with the same profound realisation that inside HD was a great and terrible potential. Deep within the stomach of her shell, HD was carrying a MAN.

This was not a man who would grow inhabiting a feminine body, with a rich and painful understanding of the gender he would be mistaken for. Neither was this a masculine body, piloted by an imprisoned woman. This was not a body dwelt in by a being who existed outside of directive physicality. Within HD lay a MAN within a male body. A MAN who would not survive in plurality. A MAN born inside and connected with a MAN'S body, that would not feel an ache of belonging, instead knowing only ownership and possession.

Dread rippled through the gathered community.

HD, waiting to be told her fortune and unable to know what the Eggs had seen, suddenly became aware that a new and exclusive hive mind was surrounding her.

Fearful stories writhed and wriggled, frothing to the surface of the collective intelligence. Upon worm invasion, HD's body would mutate to release this MAN. Whilst all mutations were a sickness which ruled the settlement, HD's mutation would be apocalyptic. A mutation which would not grow to fear the outside, but to consume the outside. This MAN would grow to

smash his way through the Egg people, producing continuous worm invasions which in turn would continue to mutate Eggs and this would be the downfall of the settlement.

HD's body *will* mutate to release this MAN. This MAN *will* grow to smash his way through the Egg people.

Action was urgent, before HD knows and before HD runs. Do not allow HD to protect the MAN in a MAN'S body. Traitor.

HD watched as the (now silent) line of Egg people travelled down to the base of the grand steps of the settlement, as was custom for the stating of the fortune and the naming of the ripened Egg's place in society. But rather than settling back into a crowd, the snaking procession made its way across the base of the final step, turning and climbing back up towards the assessment rectangle. The first in the line led the procession to meet the last, so that the community of Egg People became a gigantic moving circle around HD and The Assessor, walking up and down the steps in a loop, pacing around and enclosing the ripening one.

Their speed quickened, each member of the new circle watching HD, staring and then, without discussion but instantly, immediately coming to a halt. HD turned desperately to The Assessor but realised that she was no longer next to her and had merged back into the circle as part of the community, an allegiance silently pledged. As she inhaled, the Eggs leapt forward and rough pinkish, greenish, ochre shells knocked HD towards the ground and held her down.

It should be done, and it should be done now.

Somewhere from behind HD, held down on the grand steps, came a familiar and distressing noise. Horrified, but unable to turn, HD recognised a scratching sound of metal scraping against gravelled stone. She tried to struggle, to cry out, but the Eggs pressed down, ensuring that she was trapped.

It should be done, and it should be done now.

The community began to chant in union – the final song of the ceremony – the anthem of the settlement, a choral statement of society, order and commitment. HD, pinned down on the

grand steps of the settlement, tried feverishly to sing along, although the words were becoming hazy and lost. She tried to concentrate on the feeling of tepid moss and cold marble against her shell, but that felt distant now too.

One Egg or another, no longer recognisable in the pack, swung the spoon high above the crowd, bringing the thin edge of the cupped end down on the base of HD's conical head with a hacking crunch. Another Egg took their turn, repeating the movement and chopping down into the now open shell. Then another crack. And another. Together, the Egg People hacked and hacked, until HD's shell split into two separate pieces. More Eggs turned the spoon, using the under curve to further splinter HD's shell, causing shards of her freckled exoskeleton to pierce the shuddering bulb of newly exposed yellow jelly within. They sang the final lines of the anthem of the settlement as they replaced the silver spoon, standing tall above the assessment rectangle.

As HD's yolk dripped and dribbled down the grand steps of the settlement, the Egg people dispersed. The settlement was safe.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY

A Declaration of the Relationship between the Researcher and the Egg

The Egg Carrying Researcher did not want to choose an egg to be theirs. The researcher did not want to judge the coloured speckles of the shells or compare how each potential candidate curved against the palm of their hand before making a commitment. Instead, the egg-making researcher decided to wait.

At the time of meeting their egg, the Egg Carrying Researcher was temporarily living in their grandmother's house. On the kitchen shelf, between spare crockery and some teabags, there was a disposable clear plastic box of a dozen eggs, cheap from a local supermarket, gradually being used by the Egg Carrying Researcher's grandmother in meals and recipes, here and there. Expiry date: October 2019. Eventually, one day, there was only one left.

"Nan, can I have this last egg?"

"Yes", she called back from the cream-coloured chair in the living room. No questions asked, a simple act of care from a matriarch.

The researcher picked the egg up, closing their fingers around the cool object and putting the enclosed fist into a pocket. Together, researcher and egg joined their grandmother in the living room. Sitting on the settee, the researcher placed the egg in a pre-prepared egg cup on the side table.



RULE 1.

**The egg cannot be left alone; The egg must be carried everywhere.
The egg is a vulnerable being. The egg is dependent on the researcher for survival.**

**In extreme or high-egg-risk circumstances, the egg may be left with an appropriate
babysitter who will also follow these rules.**

Care for an egg is most commonly recognisable as a form of training undertaken in schools that prepares students, primarily ‘girls’, for parenthood.⁴⁹ Through the prolonged handling of a chicken’s egg, young egg-laying bodies are instructed that they are biologically aligned to the main duties of raising of a child, while their wormy counterparts, although equally responsible for the ‘project’, will intermittently be available to provide a nervous helping hand but ultimately have time away to spend on other things.⁵⁰ As an introductory exercise to successful and productive heteronormativity, this activity defines lifelong behavioural objectives through its inhabitation of time, personal space and gender identity; Learning labour as a fulltime activity.

Speaking of training for womanhood more broadly, Federici acknowledges that a process of instructing for wife and motherhood is implemented on a day-to-day basis over at least two decades by an unwaged mother towards an unwaged daughter, guiding her to find satisfaction in a husband and children and presumably distribute the same knowledge to the following generation.⁵¹ Whilst, to a certain degree, subsequent feminist movements have opened out the possibilities of career and lifestyle diversity for women, we now face a revival of womanhood by these terms in opposition to the liberation of trans people, denoting a return to the reproduction of the woman as reproducer.

⁴⁹ **Discussion on the histories of this lesson can be found at:** Norwood, C. (2015) A classic prep for parenthood, but is the egg all it’s cracked up to be? *npr*, 9 April. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/04/09/398074310/the-egg-baby-project-a-lesson-in-sex-education> [Accessed: 26 April 2023].

⁵⁰ **Testimonials of he/him babysitters:** Weiss, P. (2013) The Adult Egg Baby Project: Adventures In Sitcom Parenting. *Refinery29*, 21 November. Available at: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2013/11/57658/egg-baby-experiment> [Accessed 27 April 2023].

⁵¹ Federici, S. (2012) *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland, California: PM Press. P17

Centring this research project is a commandeering of the egg baby teaching strategy through performance; A way of finding out through care, made absurd by a distortion of time length and antagonism of failure. This is an appropriation of the egg baby as a Sisyphean boulder, to which we are anchored by biological attributes. As a person containing a womb, it is likely that my younger self would have been socially positioned as lead partner for an egg baby project. I now choose to carry my egg as a method of redirecting the intuitive training of womanhood that will have been delivered to me in my lifetime. Rather than acting as a reproductive vessel which regurgitates the idealisation of womanhood, as an Egg Carrying Researcher I enact these lessons to the unfertilised egg, thus halting the replicative behaviour of a heteronormative gender binary.

This altered praxis of egg care can be contextualised amidst an intersection of domesticised feminine emotional labour and a behavioural translation of body hacking. By this, I refer to established anti-institutional practices in which partakers adapt their physical body materially, biologically, surgically, or technologically, resulting in a sort of DIY implementation of cyborgism. Although generally understood through literal anatomical manipulations, I choose to reference this term following Olivares's writing that draws parallels between body modification and Eva Hayward's concept of 'transbecoming', suggesting that more expansive forms of hacking are available through embodied experience.⁵² Hayward describes 'transbecoming' as "an emergence of a material, psychical, sensual and social self through corporeal, spatial, and temporal processes that transform the lived body".⁵³ Egg care is a practice which disfigures the heteronormative body by affecting the way that it is used, and the way that it inhabits space and time, depicting the cyborg of Donna Haraway's manifesto; A being which combines fictionalised and lived experience to rewrite what women's experience might be, in opposition to notions of a single, universal trajectory.⁵⁴

⁵² Olivares, L. (2014) Hacking the Body and Posthumanist Transbecoming: 10,000 Generations Later as the mestizaje of Speculative Cyborg Feminism and Significant Otherness. *Nanoethics*, 8(3). pp.287-297. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11569-014-0203-0> P292

⁵³ Hayward, E. (2010) Spider City Sex. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 20(3). pp.223-251. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2010.529244> P226

⁵⁴ Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P149

In the reporting paper following Micha Cárdenas's performance *Becoming Dragon*, she highlights that "creating new ways of living can be seen as an act of biopolitical resistance".⁵⁵ In this performance, the artist challenged the year-length process of 'real life experience' that is expected in gender reassignment surgery by living for 365 hours as a dragon in second life. To politically contextualise this work, Cárdenas goes on to describe Agamben's argument that the way to "escape state control... is to find new ways of using the body".⁵⁶ To a similar end, in 2016, Thomas Thwaites lived as a goat for three days, titling the event as a "holiday from being human",⁵⁷ temporarily denouncing his assignment of being and using a combination of embodied design and performance art to explore an alternative way of living. Within *GoatMan*, we find refusal to participate societally, articulated by a reimagining of how life is experienced. In attempting to take a break from his human life, it could be debated that to some extent Thwaites also took time away from his position in maleness and cisness by displacing his role in those structures. Such subversion of societally-expected human gesture – that is a 'misuse' of the body - pronounces a halt in the reproduction of capitalist-governed systems. Within this project, I purposely oppose the state-applied 'use' of my egg laying body by applying nurture to an unfertilised egg, rather than a fertilised one. This is the "antagonistic dualism"⁵⁸ of Haraway's cyborg, acting upon cyborgian suspicions of "the reproductive matrix"⁵⁹ and decisively behaving incompatibly.

On performative inquiry, Gergen and Gergen write that subjectivity is important in research as there is no one use of language that can be representative. Encouraging the potential of performance as a methodology, they state that this effectively means "that we may expand our concerns from documenting 'what is the case' to 'what futures do we create?'"⁶⁰ When

⁵⁵ Cárdenas, M. (2009) *Becoming Dragon: a mixed reality, durational performance in second life*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.thing.net/~rdom/ucsd/cave/Becoming%20Dragon.pdf> [Accessed 14th June 2020]. P11

⁵⁶ Cárdenas, M. (2009) *Becoming Dragon: a mixed reality, durational performance in second life*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.thing.net/~rdom/ucsd/cave/Becoming%20Dragon.pdf> [Accessed 14th June 2020]. P11

⁵⁷ Thwaites, T. (2016) *GoatMan: How I Took A Holiday From Being Human*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

⁵⁸ Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P180

⁵⁹ Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P181

⁶⁰ Gergen, K and Gergen, M. (2014) Mischief, Mystery, and Moments That Matter: Vistas of Performative Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2(2). Available at: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/10.1177/1077800413519074> [Accessed 16th June 2020] P215

applying this idea alongside my methodology, caring for my egg becomes one of many blossoming alternative uses of the body. Working in opposition to the socially contracted single condition in which an egg carrier is supposed to live,⁶¹ this methodology is navigated by the owner of the physical self rather than governed by an imposed ‘meaning’ which directs the body – and the egg – to a single, fertilised future.

RULE 2.

The egg will be repaired when necessary.

A broken egg must be rebuilt, and as much egg as possible must be salvaged and preserved.

Under no circumstances should the egg be replaced or disposed of, regardless of severity of breakage.

This is a strategy which largely involves an evolving risk mitigation; The nature of egg care as a methodology encourages intuitive and rapid response to the unpredictable ways my egg (a fragile object) might respond to the everyday. As the egg experiences harm, it is my task to repair, protect and navigate the egg’s future. Here, I take the role of guardian, carrier, nurturer. Camus writes that “For an absurd work of art to be possible, thought in its most lucid form must be involved in it”,⁶² further describing that the relationship between an artist and experience is vital in establishment of an absurd artwork; A bad relationship occurs when work simply theorises about experience, while a good relationship can be realised when the work is contained within actual, unbounded experience.⁶³ Therefore maintenance of the reflexivity of my activity is vital in creating data from absurd experience. Additionally, Haraway describes Anna Tsing’s arguments of modern precarity as found in “eruptions of unexpected liveliness... nondeterministic, unfinished, ongoing practices of living in the ruins”.⁶⁴ In this description, Haraway and Tsing recognise the birth of contemporary knowledges from lucidity within entangled happenings, illuminating the importance of embodied practice as a form of research.

⁶¹ Federici, S. (2012) *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. 1st edn. Oakland, California: PM Press. P16

⁶² Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P95

⁶³ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P95

⁶⁴ Haraway, D. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. North Carolina: Duke University Press. P37

Locating lucid practice within performance, Poli and Andrieu write of “the activity of the living body” as a site for imagination in its capacity to listen to the surrounding situation.⁶⁵ They go on to specify “bodily intention” as differing to “bodily awareness” because intention centres unconscious, raw and anticipatory perceptions that enable opportunity to learn through embodiment.⁶⁶ By embedding intention into this methodology, I entangle myself with my egg, encouraging an instinctual and emotional practice rather than a staged act.

While regarding the ‘stage’ which egg care might inhabit, it is perhaps obvious to note that a methodological process that is framed as performance has been impacted by lockdowns, and a resulting dispersion of social interaction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Pearce acknowledges that transfeminist learning processes are often undertaken “largely outside of the formal confines of the academy”.⁶⁷ While this recognition is applicable to the encompassing activity of my project, the Covid-19 lockdowns gave a non-negotiable shove into situating my research totally outside of the physical academy, erecting new walls to somewhat obstruct the Egg Carrying Researcher’s interactions with the rest of the world and its inhabitants. Although there has been no need for logistical changes, adaptation in my research has come in an internalisation of the process, rather than an integration with the public as spectators. This situation queers the concept of autoethnography; the findings of my research are currently produced in private spaces and the absence of public, far more so than by interaction with other people.

⁶⁵ Poli, A. and Andrieu, B. (2022) Performing Transdisciplinary Creativity by Emersiology with the Living Body. In: P. Burnard, E. Mackinlay, D. Rousell and T. Dragovic, eds. *Doing Rebellious Research: In and Beyond the Academy*. Leiden: Brill. P114

⁶⁶ Poli, A. and Andrieu, B. (2022) Performing Transdisciplinary Creativity by Emersiology with the Living Body. In: P. Burnard, E. Mackinlay, D. Rousell and T. Dragovic, eds. *Doing Rebellious Research: In and Beyond the Academy*. Leiden: Brill. P114-115

⁶⁷ Pearce, R. (2020) A Methodology for the Marginalised: Surviving Oppression and Traumatic Fieldwork in the Neoliberal Academy. *Sociology*, 54(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038520904918> P817

RULE 3.

The egg should not be ignored; The egg's presence must be acknowledged.

Introduce the egg to everyone that you meet:

“Hello everyone, here is my egg. We are delighted to meet you.”

Remember to include your egg in conversation. All eggs contain the potential to give opinions.⁶⁸

While Sophie Lewis asks: “How can surrogacy be turned against reproductive stratification?”⁶⁹, Johanna Hedva writes that anti-capitalism can be protested through actions of care for both ourselves and others. They describe this as a radical form of kinship, a practice which supports, honours, empowers and protects each other’s vulnerabilities through “historically feminised and therefore invisible” acts of care and nurture.⁷⁰ When envisioning notions of radical surrogacy occurring in realms of absurdity and knowledge formation, I look towards the importance of The Log Lady’s human/nonhuman relationship in *Twin Peaks* where the presence of the Log and an understanding of its experiences becomes crucial in a process of locating knowledge to solve a case.

In *Twin Peaks*, Margaret Lanterman and her Log do not exist as a binary partnership, but rather as a collective presence in the community which is identified as “The Log Lady”. Muhlhauser and Kachur recognise that awkward or confusing encounters can “lead viewers closer to solving *Twin Peaks*’ supernatural mysteries”,⁷¹ further presenting the co-operation of Margaret and the Log as a significant way of ‘finding out’, a method of locating new knowledge which cannot be obtained by humans singularly.

⁶⁸ An earlier version of the following deliberation was published as part of an article for Contactzone. The published article can be found in Appendix A and is cited as followed: Scarrott, E. (2022) The Narrator Is(n’t) Human: The Presence of the Human Body in the Nonhuman Narration of *Twin Peaks* and “The Metamorphosis”. *ContactZone*, 1(May), pp. 70-86. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26379/1736>

⁶⁹ Lewis, S. (2019) *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*. London: Verso. P307

⁷⁰ Hedva, J. (2016) Sick Woman Theory. *Mask Magazine*, 19 January. Available at: <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory> [Accessed 30 April 2020]

⁷¹ Muhlhauser, P. and Kachur, R. (2017) “Listening to the Log: Gothic Awkwardness and *Twin Peaks*”. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 50(5), pp. 929-949. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12608> P931

Muhlhauser and Kachur go on to establish how Margaret's position as a lady "carrying a 'talking' log"⁷² makes every encounter awkward. They elaborate on the awkwardness of the Log's presence by recognising the ambiguity that is raised by the log's presence, posing the question: "How do you act in the presence of a talking log that may or may not bear witness to supernatural realities?"⁷³ The Log is awkward or misfitting because, although it has supernatural qualities, it is also excused of any defined meaning. The Log, and by proxy the Log Lady, are unapologetically absurd in their lack of obligatory explanation.

To the listener, it may initially appear that the flow of knowledge between Log/Log Lady is linear, with the Log as a dominant purveyor of knowledge and Margaret as an obedient actor who accurately distributes the Log's words:

(Knowledge) → Log → Margaret → Listener.

This is resonant with Margaret's understanding of her role as the Log Lady, stating: "The human being finds himself, or herself, in the middle".⁷⁴

In contrast to this, Fox deliberates whether the Log is a communicative tool for Margaret, reasoning that this behaviour, originating from a trauma response, gives her strength to speak.⁷⁵ This implies that knowledge is acquired by Margaret, but transferred to the listener via a social mechanism involving the Log, thus creating the persona of the Log Lady:

(Knowledge) → Margaret → Log → Log Lady → Listener.

⁷² Muhlhauser, P. and Kachur, R. (2017) "Listening to the Log: Gothic Awkwardness and Twin Peaks". *Journal of Popular Culture*, 50(5), pp. 929-949. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12608> P931

⁷³ Muhlhauser, P. and Kachur, R. (2017) "Listening to the Log: Gothic Awkwardness and Twin Peaks". *Journal of Popular Culture*, 50(5), pp. 929-949. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12608> P931

⁷⁴ 'Episode 9', *Twin Peaks*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 13 August 1993, Bravo, 47 minutes.

⁷⁵ Fox, L. (2019) The Triple Goddess. In: Ryan, S. and Bushman, D., eds. *The Women of David Lynch*. USA: Fayetteville Mafia Press. P82

This could be evidenced by the Log Lady's statement "Sometimes we want to hide from ourselves. We do not want to be us. It is too difficult to be us",⁷⁶ implying that 'The Log Lady' became so to avoid being 'Margaret'. This theory nods to the fragmented knowledge of Margaret's previously heteronormative life, and the tragic end to her intimate human/human relationship with her husband. We first learn of this event over afternoon tea with Cooper, Harry, Hawk and Dr Hayward, where the Log lady describes that her husband (Sam Lanterman, "a logging man") "met the devil" who "took the form of fire".⁷⁷ In response, Hayward acknowledges that this occurred the day after their wedding. Paired with the firefighting paraphernalia and boarded up fireplace that surround the group, this conversation could clearly indicate the source of Margaret's trauma and a specific attachment to the flammable material of her husband's trade.

Ultimately, there is also a constricting implication in this particular concept that no new knowledge can be produced through a Log that is simply an Earth-originated object with no otherworldly variant involved. If the Log Lady is simplified to a performative way for Margaret to share her thoughts, then there is no value given to the presence of the non-human object in the creation and distribution of new knowledge, whether sentient or not. This provides dangerous hierarchical and colonial inferences that only humans have authority in knowledge, or that knowledge can only be held in human consciousness, or that nothing is to be gained from nonhuman experience. If any of these attitudes are the case, then opportunity for knowledge positioned outside of dominant culture is minimised, whilst recognition of corporeal experience is extinguished.

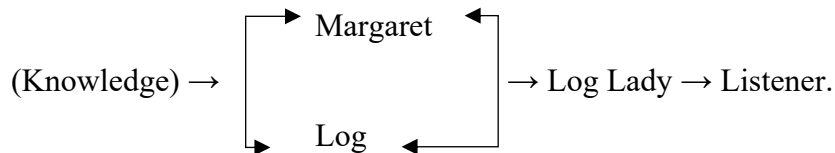
It is far preferable to observe, and far more likely, that communication, and indeed presence itself, is a collaborative contribution from both Log and Lady. The democracy of this entanglement is so much so that, much like the binary of human/nonhuman, the origin of words spoken by Margaret can often be unclear. This can be illustrated in some of Margaret's phrasing, for example: "Wait for the tea. The fish aren't running",⁷⁸ where simple

⁷⁶ 'Episode 13', *Twin Peaks*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 10 September 1993, Bravo, 47 minutes.

⁷⁷ 'Episode 5', *Twin Peaks*. [television programme] Directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 10 May 1990, ABC, 46 minutes.

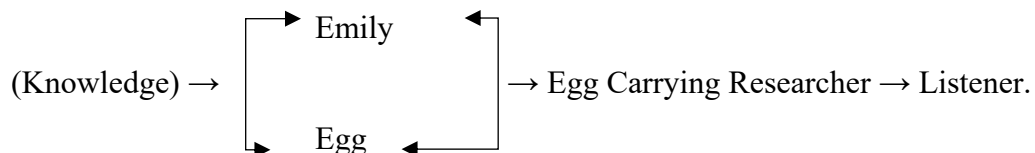
⁷⁸ 'Episode 5', *Twin Peaks*. [television programme] Directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 10 May 1990, ABC, 46 minutes.

communication between humans is combined with riddle-like turns of phrase that are stylistically traceable to the Log's lexis. Combinations of Lady and Log's vocabulary suggest that their knowledge production is a cooperative process, where an internal conversation may occur between the pairing before it is voiced to a third party. This also suggests that the Log and the Log Lady mutually contribute to the formation of the Log Lady:



To finalise this understanding, we should note that while the Log cannot easily express its comprehensions to other humans, it is able to listen. This is evident as Margaret is seen speaking to the Log herself (“Shh, let me do the talking”⁷⁹), and often redirects her peers to address the Log directly. Some, like Cooper and Truman, are hesitant, much to Margaret’s expressed disapproval,⁸⁰ but others, like Major Briggs,⁸¹ comply without question, perhaps due to a deeper personal awareness of the nonhuman existences within the town. These interactions indicate that the Log is alert and attentive to its environment, quietly participating, maybe even offended by the rudeness of being ignored. This illustrates the Log as a reflexive being, reactionary to the occurrences around it, able to construct knowledges based on its interactions with humans.

I write of the Log Lady to situate how knowledge is constructed by the Egg Carrying Researcher within this methodology, acknowledging that the contribution of this PhD is a collaborative process, informed by more than ‘Emily Scarrott’ as a singular researcher.



⁷⁹ ‘Episode 5’, *Twin Peaks*. [television programme] Directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 10 May 1990, ABC, 46 minutes.

⁸⁰ ‘Episode 1’, *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by Duwayne Dunham. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 12 April 1990, ABC, 46 minutes.

⁸¹ ‘Episode 9’, *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 6 October 1990, ABC, 47 minutes.

With the Egg taking a role similar to the Log, the contributions of this PhD are informed through an ongoing conversation between the two elements of the Egg Carrying Researcher. On the relationship between human and nonhuman beings, Morton writes that we are as much as objects around us can be ‘styled’ by us, we can also be ‘styled’ by them; A mode of relating which is facilitated once we remove discriminations based on life/death, sentience and consciousness.⁸² Throughout our time together, the Egg will gain knowledge of what it is like to be cared for by a human being as much I will gain knowledge about what it is like to care for an unfertilised chicken’s Egg. Despite sharing the same experiences in terms of cohabitation, the Egg and I have differing positionality, and as different species we inevitably experience and react to trauma, privilege, and communication differently. However, it is within the muddling of these experiences that a specific knowledge held by the Egg Carrying Researcher can be established.

RULE 4.

Care for an egg is an instinctual, rapid response practice.

A practice of occurrence and navigation.

Egg care materialises in precarious situations.

⁸² Morton, T. (2019) *Humankind*. 2nd edn. London: Verso. P138

But what if I'm not going anywhere?

The most triumphant eggs are those that have broken inside their box

imply broken eggs as a verb

EGG CARE MANIFESTO ONE (EXTENDED PERFORMANCE EDITION) EDITED FOR CARE DURING VIRUS TIMES

ONE The egg cannot be left alone; The egg should be carried everywhere. The egg is a vulnerable being. The egg is dependent on you for survival.

In extreme or high-egg-risk circumstances, the egg may be left with an appropriate babysitter who will also follow these rules. Lockdown rules mean that all situations are now my sole responsibility I can not ask for any help from an appropriate babysitter

TWO The egg should not be ignored; The egg's presence must be acknowledged. Introduce the egg to everyone that you meet.

Hello everyone, here is my egg. We are delighted to meet you.

Remember to include your egg in conversation. All eggs contain the potential to give opinions.

THREE The egg will be repaired when necessary.

A broken egg must be rebuilt, and as much egg as possible must be salvaged and preserved. Under no circumstances should the egg be replaced or disposed of, regardless of severity of breakage.

scrambling for the embarrassment felt important

In the morning I get out of bed and I put the egg in between my breasts and we go about the day as a surviving body comprising of two parts

shell contact

Shell-skin contact means that I am always ambiently aware of my egg, I am unable to completely forget that it is with me I can feel the spikes of repaired shell digging softly into my flesh

This bit is very important because we don't really 'meet' anyone new nowadays but we do tell people how we are getting on and the egg should be included in that

Shame

scrambling for the embarrassment felt important

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

consider spoon as a body-verb

Reassure your egg

My egg sleeps next to my bed in an egg cup - when my egg was younger I would sleep with him in the bed but now the egg is more fragile and it feels safer

[Redacted]

The egg should be given enriching experiences to encourage growth.

working out a way to contribute to radical protests when you can't join a crowd

Egg shortages in shops/bulk buying activities gave eggs a new kind of value and therefore a new kind of annoyance when they would not cooperate

Care for an egg is an instinctual, rapid response practice. A practice of occurrence and navigation. Egg care materialises in precarious situations.

picking up bits of egg shell

while they laugh

Enriching experience in virus times can sometimes mean just lying in bed and browsing the internet, but also it could mean

There is definitely a feeling of unpreparedness like how I know that I've run out of superglue but I haven't gone to get more even though it is a vital material

Sometimes I worry about if I got sick - if my egg would be called dirty or contaminated and get confiscated

METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT 1: Valentine's Day 2020, or My Partner Smashed My Egg in the Car on Valentine's Day⁸³

NARRATOR: It is late at night. We – my partner, my egg, and I – have been to see a band. It is 14 February, but we didn't go to celebrate Valentine's Day. It just so happened that a band that I like was playing in Birmingham on Valentine's Day.

The gig was over capacity and claustrophobic. Navigating a gig with a raw egg, specifically an object susceptible to confiscation due to expectations of aggressive use, is a high-intensity situation.

To get my egg past door staff, he was concealed in a rolled-up pair of mustard-coloured gloves in my (mostly empty) tote bag. Although the staff didn't check my bag anyway. I kept my fingers on him all evening, disturbed by the number of eggless bodies with no awareness that were getting a bit too close.

Afterwards, the three of us went swiftly to the car and headed home. Home is about 30 minutes away at night when there is no other traffic. It is now 11:45 pm.

She is rummaging in a red tote bag.

E: Where is my egg?

HE: I don't know ... What did you do with it?

E: I gave him to you when we started driving ...

HE: Are ... Are you sure?

⁸³ This piece of writing was previously published in Roehampton's Roundtable journal. The published article can be found in Appendix B and is cited as followed: Scarrott, E. (2021) Valentine's Day 2020, (AKA My Partner Smashed My Egg in the Car on Valentine's Day). *Roundtable*, 3(1). Available at: <https://roundtable.ac.uk/articles/10.5334/rt.70> [Accessed 29 May 2023].

The couple get out of the car and start to look inside, using torches on their phones to search. They open the front doors. They fold back the seats to check the back seat. They open the boot to check inside. They close the boot. They go back to the front seats.

E: I know I put him directly into your hand before I started driving.

She turns and continues rummaging frantically.

HE: ... Oh God ... I'm so sorry.

She looks up, pointing her torch.

He holds up a sodden pair of rolled up mustard-coloured gloves. There is a slight crunch to them, and they glisten in the torch light.

E: ... Oh ... God.

She slams the car door.

E: I've left my keys in the boot.

NARRATOR: The boot, when closed, does not reopen without the button on the key.

He climbs over the front seats into the back of the car, where he folds down the back seats, bending over them to search through the boot. He does all of this while tangled in the dark, and eventually retrieves the keys.

She stands holding the crunchy roll of mustard gloves. She attempts to look inside, but her fingers feel there is no apparent solid structure within the roll of mustard gloves.

E: Well, there's a lot of eggs getting smashed on Valentine's night, isn't there?

He wordlessly unlocks the front door.

E: Isn't there!?

NARRATOR: We – my partner, the egg, and I – enter the house. We go straight through to the kitchen. My partner has his palms down on the kitchen surface, supporting his weight as he leans forward in despair. He is breathing heavily. E: Are you okay? There is no answer. He is breathing heavily. It feels like he stands this way for ages. He can't turn around. The moment is silent, except he is breathing heavily.

E: Are you okay? What's up? Are you cross?

He does not turn around.

HE: I'm just really sorry. I'm so sorry.

E: It's okay.

HE: It isn't, it's *your* egg.

E: I know, but it still is my egg, so let's help him out, shall we?

HE: But it's not been long.

E: It's okay, it was going to happen sooner or later. He's been whole for a hell of a lot longer than most eggs. Most eggs are in the bin pretty fast. Let's have a look at the damage.

He finally moves. He gives her a pale plastic tray and then begins to pace the room. He can't quite make eye contact with the egg as it is unravelled.

She cautiously begins to remove the egg from the gloves. The process is slow, carefully navigating a cocoon of mustard wool.

The shell of the egg comes out of the gloves as one piece, a jigsaw held together by the inner membrane. A deconstructed net of the egg's original shape. It looks like, with tender hands, it can be more or less moulded back into the ovoid structural form.

E: Okay. Have you got any superglue? And do you have an egg cup?

He obediently gets a small metal egg cup out of a cupboard full of condiments and puts it on the tray. He opens and closes drawers full of objects used for daily tasks and sorts through them determinedly but does not find any superglue. There are a couple of simple candles in small glass pots, but there is not much left to burn.

E: Can I use a candle and a lighter? I might be able to do something with the wax?

HE: I know that I have some modroc upstairs from when I was making puppets. I could get that?

E: Yes, that sounds good! I'll have a go with that! Do you have a small bowl?

He gives her a small bowl. It is delicate, a bit like a teacup. He leaves the room. She lights a candle. While it burns and the wax begins to melt, she squeezes the mustard-coloured gloves over the small bowl. This process wrings out the raw egg fluids – aged yolk and white combined into a thin liquid – from the gloves. Her fingers are covered in remnants of the fluid, but she puts all of her strength into squeezing and the base of the bowl soon holds the liquid egg.

The wax has started to melt, and she positions the eggshell into an egg shape and tips a bit of liquid wax inside. Because the shell is still wet from yolk – an important aspect of the salvage operation – the wax solidifies without attaching to the shell, each drop creating a separate object which is easily removed from the egg.

He returns with some materials: two bundles of modroc and a tub of green Warhammer modelling clay. She takes a teacup and half fills it with water from the tap. She takes scissors and cuts small squares of mod rock. The operation begins.

She dips the modroc squares into the water and then uses the mouldable plaster to rebuild the inner structure of the egg. She soaks modroc in the yolk and combines this with the inner shell, returning the yolk to its position. She pours the salvaged yolk into the shell and it soaks into the hardening modroc, and the elements of the egg are reunited.

To complete the operation, she cuts a long strip of modroc, dampens it and wraps it around the centre of the rebuilt egg. The egg has been healed and it is time to rest.

NARRATOR: We – my partner, my egg, and I – go upstairs to bed. I carry the tray, covered with objects: rolled-up mustard yellow gloves, a candle, a delicate teacup-like bowl, modroc, and packaging. The most important thing on the tray is my egg, a survivor, sat in a simple metal egg cup.

I put the tray on top of a closed portable record player, and tidy it up so that, while the objects are still collected, my egg has enough room to sleep comfortably. Although he is still within my arms' reaching distance, this is the first night that the egg has slept away from my body.

The couple undress and get into bed. He turns the light off quite quickly.

E: Are you okay?

HE: I don't want to talk about it.



CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

PART ONE: The Egg Carrying Researcher

My original intentions within this contextual review were to use fictioning as a way of situating theories of different origins within the same location, creating absurd conditions which allow spatial relationships to illustrate tensions between existing literature. However, the immediate experience of the Covid-19 pandemic altered the way that spatial relationships occur, and I found myself positioned, both existing and researching, amidst a distinctly absurd situation, parallel to Camus's *The Plague*. Whilst there are still elements of fictioning which bring together literatures in tableau vivant, the environment for Part One of this review is less scattered, instead generally cohabiting amongst the events of 2020. Here, methodology and positionality are embodied, and criticality can be undertaken through a reflexivity of the spaces that the Egg Carrying Researcher can and cannot occupy.

THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER IS LIVING WITH AN ELDERLY GRANDPARENT. BEING ELDERLY MEANS BEING VULNERABLE TO THE VIRUS, WHICH MEANS THAT THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER HAS 'CARING RESPONSIBILITIES'. 'CARING RESPONSIBILITIES' MEANS UNWAGED EMOTIONAL AND FEMINISED LABOUR, TAKEN ON IN ADDITION TO THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER'S OWN SURVIVAL.

Like many others, somewhere in the darkest depths of the Covid-19 lockdowns I decided that it was an appropriate time to re-read *The Plague*. The exercise felt melancholic yet compelling, with mounting similarities between our own living arrangements and Camus's narrative acting as a sort of relevant bridge between needing to work on my PhD and not wanting to do anything remotely strenuous.

Within the narrative, I became particularly interested in the despair of Rambert, a journalist visiting Oran, whose girlfriend⁸⁴ is waiting outside of the quarantined city. Rambert struggles

⁸⁴ The relationship between Rambert and his partner is described as follows: "Strictly speaking she was not his wife, but it was the same thing." Camus, A. (2013) *The Plague*. Translated by Robin Buss. London: Penguin Classics. P65

to come to terms with their separation, deliberating between his newfound responsibilities supporting healthcare efforts in Oran, and a desperation to find a way to return home.

Of this, the character describes:

“I don’t think I’m a coward, most of the time at least. I have had the opportunity to test it. Only, there are some ideas that I cannot bear.’

The doctor looked directly at him.

‘You’ll see her again,’ he said.

‘Perhaps, but I cannot bear the idea of this going on and of her getting older all that time. At thirty, you are starting to get old, and you have to take advantage of everything. I don’t know if you can understand that.’”⁸⁵

In the pandemic, my own (egg carrying) body’s position became equivalent to that of Rambert’s partner; I turned 28 years old a couple of months before the virus spread, equating to a timeline in which the final years of my twenties became immobile. Alongside this, due to the prioritisation of personal caring commitments, combined with lockdown restrictions, I had also become physically separated from my partner for an extended period of time by family preoccupations. Described by Halberstam, there is an odd contradictory understanding that we can use our time as we like, but there are also assigned values and meanings to specific times (for example ‘family time’) from which it is seemingly inappropriate to deviate.⁸⁶ Perhaps I was not Rambert’s partner, but Rambert himself? Committed to providing care to someone who needed it, while filled with frustration at the timely cost of his own autonomies and intimacies.

While reading, I underlined “and you have to take advantage of everything” in my copy of the book.⁸⁷ I understood what Rambert’s phrase referred to, a fertile window of reproductive opportunity identified by a decreasing number of eggs, and I was simultaneously wilfully resistant towards making constructive use of them, while longing to have time, space, and movement to do with them as I wished. Halberstam acknowledges that the way that time is spent is primarily organised by capitalist accumulation, recognising that the absurdity of

⁸⁵ Camus, A. (2013) *The Plague*. Translated by Robin Buss. London: Penguin Classics. P114-115

⁸⁶ Halberstam, J. (2005) *In A Queer Time and Place*. New York: New York University Press. P7

⁸⁷ Camus, A. (2013) *The Plague*. Translated by Robin Buss. London: Penguin Classics. P115

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is established through the teasing of time wasted because nothing happens; A period spent unproductively, immobile, in stasis.⁸⁸ Additionally, Halberstam writes of reproductivity in terms of respectable scheduling informed by a biological clock and a widespread belief that the productive use of fertile time is desirable,⁸⁹ while Camus states "the revolt of the flesh is the absurd",⁹⁰ considering aging and how we wake one day to realise we are no longer young. Between Halberstam and Camus, the absurd, a juxtaposition between meaning and meaninglessness, is exposed through a failure to make use of (re)productive opportunity. Although I was distinctly aware that time was passing through my stationary body, Rambert, a worm maker, did not seem to acknowledge the revolt of his own physicality, instead redirecting his concerns towards the aging body of his egg laying partner. In this temporality, the plague in Oran exposes cracks in a shell of meaning; Rambert's inability to 'take advantage of' the egg laying mechanism results in despair and self-uncertainty. While this circumstance attributes meaning to reproductivity, there is further implication that absurdity is cultivated within sterile bodies. This project suggests that absurd, rebelling flesh, the site where reproduction does not occur, could become a site for liberatory practices, rather than a condemnation.

It is not just Rambert's partner that is absent, to the reader *The Plague* is noticeably devoid of women. Elizabeth Bartlett compares two readings of this absence, acknowledging that Allen recognises it as example of Camus's misogyny, whilst Rizutto "interprets this absence as representing sterility, at a time when Camus regards rebellion as fertility".⁹¹ My argument combines these ideas, suggesting that it is misogynistic of Camus to regard rebellion as fertility, instead proposing that exposure to the absurd through sterility can be used as a form of protest. Sterility, in this case, refers to a refusal of heteronormative reproduction; A withdrawal, removal, or opposing action. Amidst the spectacle of excessive and rather unimaginative normative sexual reproduction and homemaking in the pandemic, a resistance to participate in the replication of patriarchal values felt significant.

⁸⁸ Halberstam, J. (2005) *In A Queer Time and Place*. New York: New York University Press. P7

⁸⁹ Halberstam, J. (2005) *In A Queer Time and Place*. New York: New York University Press. P5

⁹⁰ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P12

⁹¹ Bartlett, E. A. (2004) *Rebellious Feminism: Camus's Ethic of Rebellion and Feminist Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P15

Notably, sterility does not equate to abstinence from sex, but a resistance to reproductive outputs. Sophie Lewis writes: “The denial of pleasure to populations is a grave historic harm, and the denial by some leftists of the centrality of pleasure to liberation struggles is a correspondingly serious error”.⁹² Lockdown procedures had seen governmental efforts to refuse jouissance via a reinforced image of the nuclear family. Sophie Lewis describes how loving one’s family members and wanting to abolish the family can be concurrently understood through the observation of the oppressive loneliness which comes with feminised domestic labours and the recognition of the social frameworks which endorse them. Such structures had become further intensified throughout the pandemic, with introductions of bubble systems that further dictated sacrificial and separational activities based on what was most productive.⁹³ Cleanliness could be sought only through the successful combination of a furnished home, furloughed pay and a legally binding sexual contract.

However, this image had also been disrupted by conflicts of class, sexuality and kinship. Tensions in the nuclear family framework came as people were told to opt in or out of a household with no negotiation⁹⁴ causing those with multiple forms of feminine labour, or non-heteronormative forms of relationship to abandon personal intimacy in order to fulfil solitary duties elsewhere. This was seen in nurses spending lockdown in mobile homes outside of their family bubbles, a no-mans-land between personal and professional care practices.⁹⁵ Amidst the no-mans-land, in exchange for personal affections, nurses and care workers instead committed to deeper forms of closeness with strangers, as sensitive physical interaction and end of life companionship became dutiful replacements for disallowed visits from loved ones.

⁹² Lewis, S. (2020) Collective Turn-off. *Mal*, 5. Available at: <https://maljournal.com/5/sex-negative/sophie-lewis/collective-turn-off/> [Accessed 15 February 2021].

⁹³ Hill, A. (2020) Support bubbles: what is new policy in England and how does it work? *The Guardian*, 11 June. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/11/support-bubbles-what-is-new-policy-in-england-and-how-does-it-work> [Accessed 21 May 2023].

⁹⁴ Konotey-Ahulu, O. (2020) UK Tells Dating Couples to ‘Make Your Choice’: Stay Away or Move In. *Bloomberg*, 24 March. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-24/u-k-tells-dating-couples-facing-lockdown-to-make-your-choice> [Accessed 30 June 2020].

⁹⁵ Madden, S. and Rimmer, M. (2020) Coronavirus: The NHS staff living away from homes and families. *BBC News*, 22 April. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52280264> [Accessed 30 June 2020].

Meanwhile, amendments in lockdown regulations made sexual activity with somebody from another household an illegal action;⁹⁶ This act temporarily eradicated alternative, promiscuous and less privileged arrangements of intimacy whilst quietly attempting to reiterate heteronormative values of life in monogamous family units. Halberstam describes queer temporality in relation to the AIDS epidemic by drawing upon Gunn's recognition of the mixture of death and the sexual.⁹⁷ This idea, calibrating life-threatening risk with seeking non-contractually bound relationships (through marriage, property, accommodation or financial means) was fortified to the mainstream through the prohibition of physical encounters with someone from a different household. Whilst AIDS primarily affected gay communities, in 2020, Covid-19 revives this queer infection experience for heteronormative and even actively anti-queer people. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, dominant heteronormative lifestyles in capitalism had been reformulated to resist a replicative system reliant on host bodies. Perhaps an easier way to say this could be that it used to be queer to oppose an invasive, worming reproductive system, but now the straights were doing it too. And it was their way, or no way.

“The virus’ life is continual reproduction, and so she festers, feeds, multiplies [...] Every time a white man born a man cites a man born a man cites a man again every time a translucent male artist or academic or scientist references another pallid male academic, artist or scientist – in this most sterile shallow procreative model, she proliferates. In every screen, in every projector, every lecture theatre hub, Virus was growing new tentacles, legs, cunts, arms with balls on the end like the viruses that used to be in science class when there were still classes and when they still insisted on believing in science, and objectivity – that is men’s ability to make objects of the world.”⁹⁸

– Linda Stupart, *Virus*

THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER IS IN A BUBBLE BATH. THERE IS A LAPTOP NEXT TO THE BATH. THE SCREEN SHOWS AN ACTIVE ACADEMIC

⁹⁶ Menendez, E. (2020) Sex with someone you don't live with is illegal from today. *Metro*, 1 June. Available at: <https://metro.co.uk/2020/06/01/sex-someone-dont-live-illegal-today-12785637/> [Accessed 30 July 2020].

⁹⁷ Halberstam, J. (2005) *In A Queer Time and Place*. New York: New York University Press. P2

⁹⁸ Stupart, L. (2016) *Virus*. London: Arcadia Missa. P23

SEMINAR VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS. THERE IS A PIECE OF BLUE TAC OVER THE LAPTOP WEBCAM.

Samek and Donofrio's interrogation of performing academic professionalism recognises the demands of a framework of keeping up appearances as so restrictive that it will "short-circuit our ability to engage the queer project".⁹⁹ When the pandemic removed a communal physical space for staging 'academic drag' and made moot attire presenting the professional self, replacing them with pyjamas and a childhood bedroom shared through the lens of a laptop, the framework of academic behavioural expectation became disrupted. The renegotiation of research projects to halt a reproducing viral threat deconstructed and decolonised the canon of knowledge, removing institutional regulation of 9am-5pm working hours and ID scanning to register that you are in place and ready to work, sandwiched between commutes. Knowledge could now be produced in alternative timelines and alternative spaces. Knowledge could be produced in the bath.

The construction of this literature review has been particularly difficult due to the pressures of contemporary plague existence. When the traditionally Camusian absurd became lived experience, and repositioning research in the quarantined home became the institution's answer to this tension, it felt necessary to halt my own attempts at conventional productivity to listen to the proximate context. The institution, necessarily bound to capitalism, intensified drives towards productivity, as if reactionary procession of grief, loss, change and fear was a laziness. Halberstam introduces *A Queer Time and Space* by asserting that queer inhabitation of time and space develop to oppose "the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" while also responding to "other logics of location, movement, and identification."¹⁰⁰ When the status quo was ruptured by coronavirus, causing the logics of location to become static, movement to become housebound and identification to become digital, new possibilities arose to reimagine how one engaged with their research. This new climate had positive and negative effects; Physical comfort, sufficient rest and nomadic access contended with feelings of shame at the exposure of one's home setting, marooned people in (personally or professionally) hostile

⁹⁹ Samek, A. A. and Donofrio, T. A. (2013) "Academic Drag" and the Performance of the Critical Personae: An Exchange on Sexuality, Politics, and Identity in the Academy. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 36(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2012.754388>

¹⁰⁰ Halberstam, J. (2005) *In A Queer Time and Place*. New York: New York University Press. P1

environments, and intensified responsibilities that were quarantined within the same space, 24/7.

For a large portion of lockdown, I did nothing towards my PhD except continue to care for my egg. Halberstam explains that respectability is dependent on normativity and is “upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality”.¹⁰¹ When situating this statement amongst the coronavirus pandemic, the withdrawal of tangible research output (production of a written thesis) becomes queer based on its resistance to the ‘keep calm and carry on’ mentality of the institution. This institutional temperament has been indifferent to the pandemic conditions of lower classes, participation in caring structures and emotional effects of both adverse events and diminished physical proximity to a research community. Through an ignorance towards those who fell outside of a fertile research environment during the pandemic, the institution reasserted a shame and silence upon non-heteronormative research, subsequently valorising what might be considered premium research via its successful relationship with governmentally approved sanitation. In light of the effects of Covid-19 upon the economy, Grace Blakeley argues: “We must learn to understand capitalism as a holistic system – one in which states, capitalists and other powerful ruling class actors cooperate in order to ensure their own survival, and the survival of the system that created them”.¹⁰² This description can be applied not only to the economic structure of neoliberal states, but the encouragement of reproductive behaviours in research which uphold increasingly archaic and chauvinistic academic values. The assumption that research can continue uninterrupted during the pandemic is indicative of a binary-oriented belief that research is produced in the mind rather than the physical, situated or communal body. In opposition to these values, it is critical to document the positions of the Egg Carrying Researcher when constructing this project so that it may be asserted to the academy that knowledge can (and should) be composed, despite little to no time being spent at a desk.

THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER SPENDS A LOT OF TIME ON THEIR LAPTOP IN BED. THEIR DESK IS DISASSEMBLED IN THE BACK OF THE SHED. THERE IS NO ROOM FOR IT IN THIS HOUSE.

¹⁰¹ Halberstam, J. (2005) *In A Queer Time and Place*. New York: New York University Press. P4

¹⁰² Blakeley, G. (2020) *The Corona Crash*. London: Verso. P57

In Sarah Franklin's proud self-proclamation as "a failed reproductive mechanism [...] a wench in the works",¹⁰³ we see an example of a cog that refuses to turn in the direction that the patriarchal machine of academia expects. Within this research, through practices of egg care but also through a construction of this thesis which queers academic expectation, I seek to embody the failed reproductive mechanism which Franklin describes. Simone De Beauvoir, in *Manifesto of the 343*, states "As any kind of producer, I can, while waiting for improvement, put pressure on society through my production (child strike)".¹⁰⁴ Here, De Beauvoir recognises the dictated 'meaning' of her egg laying body and purposely withholds it. Spending a period of time not writing was not necessarily justified in language as strike action, but involved an avoidance of the institutional expectations of what I should be doing in my position as researcher; Time spent declining the fertilisation of my research and its subsequent blossoming into a fully formed 'product'. Leading to the wench in the works, Franklin shares her worming tutor's exasperated comment: "REWRITE OR let us not cope",¹⁰⁵ emulating the requirement for perseverance in moulding the 'expected' product. Instead, my absence from writing was an extended queer moment, acknowledging time for my own survival and in turn provoking the heteronormative institution to 'not cope'.

TO EARN MONEY, THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER PROVIDES ACADEMIC SUPPORT TO STUDENTS IN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES. THE NATURE OF THE INSTITUTION MEANS THAT THOSE STUDENTS ARE TOLD NOT TO USE THE WORD "I" WITHIN THEIR WRITING, BECAUSE WRITING IN FIRST PERSON IS NOT ACADEMIC. THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER FINDS THIS PART OF THE WORK PARTICULARLY ANNOYING, BECAUSE THE ACADEMY'S RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC HAS HIGHLIGHTED THE SINGULARITY OF THE QUARANTINED RESEARCHER.

¹⁰³ Franklin, S. (2015) Sexism As A Means of Reproduction: Some Reflections of the Politics of Academic Practice. *New Formations*, 86(1). pp.14-33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3898/NewF.86.01.2015> P22

¹⁰⁴ De Beauvoir, S. (1971) *Manifesto of the 343*. In: Fahs, B, ed. *Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos For The Revolution*. 1st edn. London: Verso. P347

¹⁰⁵ Franklin, S. (2015) Sexism As A Means of Reproduction: Some Reflections of the Politics of Academic Practice. *New Formations*, 86(1). pp.14-33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3898/NewF.86.01.2015> P20

Federici reflects on the historical context of stately control of the body, describing a ruling class fear of the physical proletariat. She describes that the strength of those presiding over state administration was “continuously undermined – but also determined – by the threat of riots and social disorders”.¹⁰⁶ The authoritative fear of collective action has been prominent throughout the timeline inhabited by my egg, culminating in 2022 when the UK government passed The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which provided the state the power to restrict protest.¹⁰⁷ Simply summarised, the details in the bill allow the police force to suppress any challenge to state power. This reassertion of state control shadows a period in which political demonstrations clashed with the physical separation necessary to collectively survive the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst lockdown procedures have been important to protect lives, they also became an excuse for brutality. The virus has been used as an excuse for the violent restraint of marginalised, ‘othered’ and un-stately bodies when they have displayed collective grievance or mourning in response to state injustice, and the violation of their bodies by state representatives. Exemplary of such violence is the (allegedly coronavirus-motivated) police repression of attendees at a vigil for Sarah Everard,¹⁰⁸ a young woman who was abducted, raped and murdered by a police officer under the guise of an arrest for breaching coronavirus restrictions.¹⁰⁹

In 2021, during the ominous period precursing the passing of the bill, Sir Charles Walker, a conservative MP, spoke in parliament to proclaim a personal protest against ongoing coronavirus restrictions by carrying a pint of milk on his person for a few days. I was particularly bemused by the language which Walker used to announce this action:

¹⁰⁶ Federici, S. (2014) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Second, revised edition. New York: Autonomedia. P137

¹⁰⁷ **See both:** Casciani, D. (2021) What is the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill and how will it change protests? *BBC News*. 22 March. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56400751> [Accessed 9th May 2021].

Home Office. (2022) Protest powers: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet. *GOV.UK*, 20 August. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-protest-powers-factsheet> [Accessed 21 May 2023].

¹⁰⁸ Dearden, L. (2021) Police breached fundamental rights at Sarah Everard vigil and Bristol protests, inquiry finds. *The Independent*, 01 July. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/police-protest-laws-sarah-everard-bristol-b1875735.html> [Accessed 21 May 2023].

¹⁰⁹ Dodd, V. and Siddique, H. (2021) Wayne Couzens ‘used police ID and handcuffs to kidnap Sarah Everard’. *The Guardian*, 29 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/29/wayne-couzens-used-police-id-to-kidnap-sarah-everard-court-told> [Accessed 21 May 2023].

“As sure as eggs are eggs, we will be back here in six months at the end of September being asked to renew this legislation again. [...] But this afternoon, I’m not here to talk about eggs, I want to talk about milk because in the remaining days of this lockdown, I am going to allow myself an act of defiance, my own protest that others may join me in. I am going to protest about the price of milk. Now I’m not sure whether I think the price is too high or the price is too low, I shall come to that decision later. But for the next few days I am going to walk around London with a pint of milk on my person because that pint will represent my protest. And there may be others who will choose too to walk around London with a pint of milk on their person as well and perhaps as we walk past each other on the street our eyes might meet [...] what will their pint of milk represent, what will their protest be?”¹¹⁰

Specifically, I was intrigued by the similarity of Walker’s methodology to mine as a concoction of complaint and responsiveness to the suppression of public demonstration, combined with his inability to articulate why such a practice could establish a form of protest, or even confidently explain what he was protesting at all. Walker’s indecisiveness on his stance within his protest – whether the price of milk is too high or too low – is illustrative of an ignorance towards his material. While I shape the Absurd Heroine as a body that protests a prescribed reproductive purpose by a capitalist state, Charles Walker is intrinsically representative of how systemic frameworks are upheld. Despite attempting to rethink a way of protesting, he is also undeniably worm making in his position as a white, cis, heterosexual man with a substantial financial income from his role as a conservative MP and title appointed by Order of the British Empire. Although Walker is likely a consumer of milk products, within this protest, he takes ownership of the substance in a way which he cannot relate to, with no understanding of its value or how it came to be in his hand. When reflecting on his protest, I wonder how Walker might have responded to the discovery of a leak, a rupturing breach of the plastic bottle? What happened to the milk as it began to turn? How long would Walker have persisted to carry his milk as the smell worsened? Was the milk stored in the fridge at night, or did it accompany him to bed? Did he dare to drink it? At what stage did the milk inevitably end up in the bin?

¹¹⁰ Ng, K. (2021) Tory MP Sir Charles Walker carries pint of milk in bizarre protest at Covid restrictions. *The Independent*, 26 March. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-restrictions-protest-charles-walker-milk-b1822678.html> [Accessed 21 May 2023].

Hélène Cixous writes of the consistent equation of womanhood to motherhood, describing: “There is always within her at least a little of that mother's milk. She writes in white ink”.¹¹¹ Cixous’s description recognises an alignment of identity and designation as producer; A dictation of meaning based upon reproductive labours, resulting from the role of a biologically ‘female’ (egg laying, milk making) system in procreation, that is placed upon people of all genders containing wombs, those who use she/her pronouns, or perhaps just those who reject he/him, aesthetically femme bodies and so on... all alongside cis women. Even when we are physically unable or consciously unwilling to become mothers (or even women at all), the presence of femininity within one’s identity or maternal mechanisms within one’s body at birth are societally translated to reproductive purpose.

Reba Maybury dedicates *Dining With Humpty Dumpty* to “all those who have truly experienced the gravity of eggs”.¹¹² In correlation with this, at the climax of the novel, she states: “None of us want to be defined by our eggs”,¹¹³ an assertion which recognises the fundamental criteria of gender binary and subsequent oppression which Cixous alludes to. Within their texts, both Cixous and Maybury position the nourishing fluids of the biologically ‘maternal’ body as unashamed tools of protest; Milk becomes an ink for a woman to write, whilst an egg can be thrown in rebellion.

THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER HAS SPENT THREE DAYS AVOIDING A FORM THAT THEY NEED TO FILL OUT FOR UNIVERSITY.

A typical phrase used in mainstream media to situate transness and gender deviation is ‘born in the wrong body’. Shon Faye describes this phrase as “clumsy”, and a poor way of explaining dysphoria.¹¹⁴ The idea of being born in the wrong body contributes to the continuous reiteration of binary identification upon gender queer and trans beings; A heteronormative method of understanding the gender binary as a fixed law or fact, and trans people as anomalies which

¹¹¹ Cixous, H. (1976) The Laugh of The Medusa. *Signs*, 1(4). Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239> [Accessed 27 November 2020]. P881

¹¹² Maybury, R. (2017) *Dining With Humpty Dumpty*. 2nd edn. UK: Arcadia Missa. Prefacing pages.

¹¹³ Maybury, R. (2017) *Dining With Humpty Dumpty*. 2nd edn. UK: Arcadia Missa. P95

¹¹⁴ Faye, S. (2022) *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*. UK: Penguin Books. P66

need to be reconfigured. This crude explanation of transition implies that someone assigned male at birth simply want to swap their worm making mechanism for an egg laying one, and vice versa. Though identity is constructed in realms beyond sexual organs, we continuously watch this intricate boulder repeatedly roll down a slope of birth physicality.

To live audiences, Travis Alabanza asks:

“Why when I say I’m trans does someone ask, ‘What will you have done?’ ‘What is next?’ As if trans can never be a destination. As if Trans is synonym for broken body. As if I cannot say I’m trans and someone say, ‘You do not need to change. I will protect you the way you are.’”¹¹⁵

The implications of hetero-reproductive instruction of gender are apparent in the assumed need to medically alter the body to literally become ‘the opposite sex’, reducing complexity of feeling in identity dysphoria to a simple desire to exchange biological template from one side of a binary to the other. Patriarchal descriptors of gender (like ‘the opposite sex’) composite two polar forms, of which an individual can be only one, removing the potential to imagine finding stability within the transitional space. However, language is as much a tool of categorical restrictions as it is a space for metamorphosis. Casper Heinemann describes “In the mystical contemporary trans moment I HATE MEN SO I STOPPED BEING ONE is a transfiguration spell, I say I am not this so I’m not, and I mean that totally literally”.¹¹⁶ The transfiguration spell helps us to envisage the idea of ‘transitioning’ in terms of moving away from the category that was assigned at birth, rather than moving towards a static destination at the other side of a binary. A transition is not dependent on medical mediation or physical presentation, but a deliberate refusal to remain categorised.

Legacy Russell describes the neoliberalism of 2014 Facebook’s fifty-eight gender/three pronoun list of options as a reinforcement of the need to be categorised under the guise of inclusivity; That a body which remains undefined is an error which needs to be fixed via a box ticking exercise before access is granted.¹¹⁷ In *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, the polymorphous creature Laboria Cuboniks’ explains:

¹¹⁵ Alabanza, T. (2018) *Burgerz*. London: Oberon Books Ltd. P35

¹¹⁶ Heinemann, C. (2014) Magic Work: Queerness as Remystification. In: *Re-Materialising Feminism*. London: Arcadia Missa. P64

¹¹⁷ Russell, L. (2020) *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. London: Verso. P121

“When the possibility of transition became real and known, the tomb under Nature’s shrine cracked, and new histories – bristling with futures – escaped the old order of ‘sex’. The disciplinary grid of gender is in no small part an attempt to mend that shattered foundation and tame the lives that escaped it.”¹¹⁸

This aligns with Butler’s explanations of a heterosexual matrix, where “persistence and proliferation” of uncategorisable gender identities “provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility”.¹¹⁹ Even when communicated as an inclusive structure, the capitalist matrix of gender identities requires an individual to commit to classification with assigned meaning.

Within this project, I have adopted Laboria Cuboniks’ use of the word “grid”¹²⁰ to think of the ruling patriarchal-capitalist framework. The grid is a formal structure, with strict pathways and stairways, parallel sides and a top and a middle and a bottom. When neoliberal forces attempt to be inclusive, they expect a simple movement from one divisive classification to another – a dice roll and the repositioning of the individual counter within a new square in accordance with cis-tematically developed categorical rules. However, rebellious bodies do not obey the grid, their fluidity splatters across it. They survive in multiple segments and cross contaminate each one. The grid is a scaffolding of gender-based meaning which masks the absurd desert.

By tearing down this framework, we seek a removal of decreed ‘purpose’ and instead situate the body as a material for creation of identity, rather than a tool of the state.

IT IS MID-MORNING. THE EGG CARRYING RESEARCHER IS CONTINUING TO AVOID FILLING OUT THE FORM. THEY ARE MAKING A CUP OF COFFEE FOR THEIR GRANDMOTHER WHILE A WATCHING A FILM ON A LAPTOP THAT SITS ON THE KITCHEN COUNTER.

¹¹⁸ Laboria Cuboniks (2018) *The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics For Alienation*. 2nd edn. Brooklyn: Verso. P45

¹¹⁹ Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd edn. New York and London: Routledge. P23-24

¹²⁰ Laboria Cuboniks (2018) *The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics For Alienation*. 2nd edn. Brooklyn: Verso. P45

Eggs are a regular motif in John Waters' *Pink Flamingos*,¹²¹ as Edie, Divine's mother, constantly, impatiently, hungers for a visit from her beloved Egg Man so that she can eat more eggs. The preparation of eggs for their mother is an act of care, a routine domestic task for the family, while Edie, as mother and grandmother, seems at odds with the traditional figure of a matriarch. Her relentless demand for, and consumption of, eggs is grotesquely and absurdly selfish, capsizing the expectations of an egg laying family member. Biologist Greg Hampikian describes how our individual existence begins, as an egg, inside the developing ovaries of our mother's fetal body as it matured in the womb of our grandmother.¹²² While biological reproduction might see the generational passing down of eggs to create babies and continue a family line, *Pink Flamingos* presents an inversion; eggs are distributed generationally upwards, halting in an childish yet mature woman, smeared in jellyish yolk and living inside a baby's playpen.

The film's plot depicts a battle for the title of filthiest person/people alive. The Marbles, the antagonist straight couple attempting to dethrone Divine of this title, consider themselves filthy, in part, because they run a black-market baby ring – kidnapping women, keeping them in a cellar and raping them so that they can sell the subsequent newborns to lesbian couples. Divine's filthiness differs here – she is not portrayed as motivated by monetary gain, and the sexual activities that Divine (and her companions) are plainly antagonistic of the social norm. Divine ultimately maintains the title of filthiest person alive because The Marbles operate, however immorally, within realms of reproducing normativity, while Divine does not. Raymond Marble revels in the abduction of a fertile young woman, yet flees when an attractive woman that he exposes himself to in the park is revealed to be trans. While The Marbles fear the police's discovery of their business, conceal their criminal activity and phone the police to report Divine, Divine and her friends cannibalise the police who try to shut down her birthday party. Later, Divine proudly invites the press to witness as she commits murder, gleefully understanding that she will circumnavigate any consequences later. Anna Breckon begins to discuss *Pink Flamingos* by referencing John Waters' proud declaration that his work has no social value, stating that this should be read as an effort to critically disengage from a gay

¹²¹ *Pink Flamingos* [feature film] Directed by John Waters. Dreamland, USA, 1972. 104 minutes.

¹²² Hampikian, G. (2012) Men, Who Needs Them? *The New York Times*, 24 August. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/25/opinion/men-who-needs-them.html> [Accessed 11th January 2023].

liberation movement which seeks equality within the current social order.¹²³ Perhaps Waters' mechanism here is to establish an extreme and distinct disconnection between heteronormative society and queer life; A need to exclaim that queerness should not seek equal footing within the systems that it opposes. Divine's queerness is glaringly superior to the heterosexuality of the Marbles, not because she does the same things better, but because she lives in a completely different way. Waters doesn't simply wish to stake claim of a square on the grid of identity, he exposes the swamp of queerness which bubbles underneath, urging it to rise amongst the cracks, cascading over any existing societal framework in a deluge which drowns normativity.

¹²³ Breckon, A. (2013) The erotic politics of disgust: Pink Flamingos as queer political cinema. *Screen*, 54(4). pp.514-533.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjt041> P514



“Carry the egg with you all day, feeling the weight of it in your pocket, noticing it gently rolling around as you walk. Sit through meetings, lectures, coffee dates with your thoughts fixed on the heavy egg just within grabbing distance of your greedy fingertips”.¹²⁴

– Ruby Tandoh, *Eat Up*

Images documenting a live performance informed by Ruby Tandoh’s writing on Cadbury’s Crème Eggs.¹²⁵ Performing in April 2020, the Egg Carrying Researcher tormented societal tensions arising from cleanliness and state-sanctioned guidelines on public presence by ritualistically eating a Crème Egg in a public park during a daily walk. Documentation of this performance is of poor quality as lockdown procedures equated to the distancing of social support and a singularity of the Egg Carrying Researcher’s process. Depiction of the work, created using a phone camera propped up on a park bench, became illustrative of the reduction of practice during the pandemic.

¹²⁴ Tandoh, R. (2018) *Eat Up!* London: Serpent’s Tail. P13

¹²⁵ Tandoh, R. (2018) *Eat Up!* London: Serpent’s Tail. P13

PART TWO: INSTITUTIONAL EGGS

A Room, A Circle Jerk

“Because of the eggs delicacy it can be tempting to want to handle it with aggression, a knowledge that the human is more powerful than it. A human has the power to control the egg, to decide its future.”¹²⁶

– Reba Maybury, *Dining With Humpty Dumpty*

Circle Jerk: A masturbatory, self-gratifying act between a group of worm-makers which reinforces the production of worms.

There is a room in this literature review where artists who are men that live in worm-making bodies are trying to claim eggs as their own. The room is probably white from ceiling to floor, plastered precisely with a high-end budget, and lit garishly with those spotlights that institutions love. The worms seep into each other, burrowing between man and institution. It is hard to tell where man starts, and institution ends.

One of the worm-makers is boiling some eggs. He then baptises each boiled egg with his own thumb print. Afterwards, he eats them. Everything is neat and everything is clean. Nothing is allowed to leak.

Piero Manzoni’s explorations of ready-made objecthood and artist notoriety utilise recognition of his practice to provoke perceptions of authorship. Throughout this description, I will call him Piero, removing the prominent signatory article from his character.

In 1960, during a participatory artwork called *Consumption of Dynamic Art by the Art-Devouring Public*,¹²⁷ Piero ate some of his thumb-printed eggs, whilst also serving them to gallery visitors.

¹²⁶ Maybury, R. (2017) *Dining With Humpty Dumpty*. 2nd edn. UK: Arcadia Missa. P95

¹²⁷ Manzoni, P. (1960) *Consumption of Art by the Art-Devouring Public*. [Participatory artwork] Galleria Azimut. Available at: <https://www.mlfineart.com/artists/49-piero-manzoni/> [Accessed date 26 January 2021].

Piero's thumb print appears to transform each egg into a worm; As a member of the public consumes the egg as man-made art, Piero invades their body with something that is notably 'his'. The titular language of 'art-devouring public' labels participants as desperate creatures of lack, whilst their act of consumption becomes Piero's conquest.

Following this, in 1961, Piero famously sold tins of his own faeces as *Artist's Shit*.¹²⁸ An indirect implication here is that he profited from the authorship of eggs before defecating them out for further profit: Piero's cis-male body took the nutritional value from the eggs and then further manipulated them for capital value. Objects originally authored by a non-cis-man have now been claimed by a cis man as his own work in a three-stage sequence: 1. the presentation of a thumb-printed egg, 2. the action of eating a thumb-printed egg and 3. the sale of shit, produced after the consumption of thumb-printed eggs.¹²⁹

The capitalist production of Piero's bodily waste depicts the 'gaining' cis-worm-making figure. *Artist's Shit* occupies space in the world, packaged in a tin can so that it is non-perishable, a permanent and polluting fixture.

In a doctoral study of the artist, McGrath notes that this digestive transformation is regularly recognised in discussion surrounding Piero, 'elevating' the worth of each egg. He also likens Piero's process of controlling authorship to "the operations of branding – both of livestock and slaves - as biological units recognizable as property of a particular owner, and of commodities as objects recognizable as for sale by a particular corporation"¹³⁰ but does not appear openly critical of this similarity to obviously immoral and archaic practices.

Later in the same year, Piero will directly sign his name on nude egg laying bodies, declaring each one a *Living Sculpture* and positioning himself as the producer.

¹²⁸ Manzoni, P. (1961) *Artist's Shit*. [Tin can, printed paper and excrement] 48 x 65 x 65 mm, 0.1kg. Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/manzoni-artists-shit-t07667> [Accessed 29 May 2023].

¹²⁹ McGrath, J. T. (2014) *Body, Subject, Self: The Art of Piero Manzoni*. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University. Available at: <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:12274487> [Accessed 26 January 2021]. P81-3

¹³⁰ McGrath, J. T. (2014) *Body, Subject, Self: The Art of Piero Manzoni*. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University. Available at: <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:12274487> [Accessed 26 January 2021]. P82

In another corner of the room, another man living in a worm-making-body has been admiring Piero's work. His name is Gavin Turk. A wealthy man living in a worm-making body named Charles Saatchi helped Gavin Turk to find his way into the room. (Charles Saatchi is, amongst other things, a gatekeeper of such rooms).

In 2019, Gavin invited the public to submit "original photographs inspired by an egg",¹³¹ and now sits, surrounded by egg sacrifices. Whilst Piero serves eggs to his audience, Gavin requests that they are given to him.

Gavin openly admits that he is "following in the footsteps" of Piero on his website.¹³² Perhaps this is an attempt to validate his work through mention of another man. The phrase that he uses here could imply that the combination of Gavin and eggs is reproductive of Piero's ideas. He also mentions the egg-based footsteps of "Magritte and Dali", who were also cis-men. Gavin's website describes his interest in eggs in the following ways: "symbols of life, of creation, of originality, fragility and mortality".

On Easter Sunday 2021, Gavin sold an autographed ostrich egg for £700 + VAT via his website.¹³³ In comparison, high end supermarket distributor Clarence Court provides fresh ostrich eggs for £19.99,¹³⁴ leading to the supposition that this particular egg's value is raised by 3500% because it boasts Gavin's signature. Perhaps the artist recognises his use of ink as symbolic of creative and original value, rather than the womb work of the ostrich.

¹³¹ Turk, G. (2019) *Gavin Turk – Portrait of an Egg: About The Project*. Available at: <https://www.gavinturkegg.art/> [Accessed 26 January 2021].

¹³² Turk, G. (2021) *Modern Egg*. Available at: <http://gavinturk.com/artworks/image/91/> [Accessed 26 January 2021].

¹³³ Turk, G. (2011) *Ostrich Egg*. [Ostrich egg and wood plinth] 24 x 20 x 20 cm. The Art Car Boot Sale/Online. Available at: <https://shop.gavinturk.com/products/ostrich-egg> [Accessed 4th April 2021].

¹³⁴ Clarence Court (2018) *Ostrich Eggs Now in Season*. Available at: <https://www.clarencecourt.co.uk/ostrich-eggs-now-in-season/> [Accessed 6th April 2021].

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VIEW



Ostrich Egg
2011

Ostrich egg on wood plinth first presented at The Art Car Boot Fair 2011.

Ostrich Egg and wood plinth

24 x 20 x 20 cm



£700.00 + vat
(approx €823 \$968)

ADD TO BASKET

“Phallogocentrism was the egg ovulated by the master subject, the brooding hen to the permanent chickens of history. But into the nest with that literal-minded egg has been placed the germ of a phoenix that will speak in all the tongues of a world turned upside down”.¹³⁵

– Donna Haraway

Outside of the room, Haraway’s phoenix takes flight, circling above a raucous protest. Audrey Wollen scrawls a huge X across the walls which contain the worm makers, beginning in the sky and reaching down into the ground. “BEWARE MALE ARTISTS MAKING ARTWORK ABOUT EMPTINESS”, she informs the crowd. She turns to the door which lies beneath a line of the gigantic cross. “NOTHING DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU. GIRLS OWN THE VOID. BACK OFF FUCKERS!!!!”¹³⁶

Rafael Luis Estrada Requena, the subject of Johanna Hedva’s novella *On Hell*, challenges a journalist: “If we gonna tear this shit down we gotta start with they symbols where they store their power”.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, Bitch and Animal lead the picketers in singing *Pussy Manifesto* to subvert the language of eggs as political objects, shouting the lines: “Honey, that took Eggs for you to tell your customer off for not tipping you 20%!”¹³⁸ At their command, eggs instead become a proclaimed “symbol of all courage”,¹³⁹ a language placing eggs into the hands that throw them in rebellion, rather than in the possession of the cis-tematic gatekeepers of reproductivity.

From amongst her eggs, Carolee Schneeman pulls a scroll. Carolee reads from the scroll, a conversation with a worm-making structuralist filmmaker: “He protested you are unable to

¹³⁵ Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P148

¹³⁶ Wollen, A. (2015) *Girls Own The Void*. [digital collage] Available at: <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/audrey-wollen-girls-own-the-void/3827> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

¹³⁷ Hedva, J. (2018) *On Hell*. 2nd edn. Santa Fe: Sator Press. P46

¹³⁸ Bitch and Animal (1999) *Pussy Manifesto*. In: Fahs, B, ed. *Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos For The Revolution*. London: Verso. P446

¹³⁹ Bitch and Animal (1999) *Pussy Manifesto*. In: Fahs, B, ed. *Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos For The Revolution*. London: Verso. P446

appreciate the system the grid”.¹⁴⁰ The man is delighted in his proclamation that the only meaning of his work is the “logic of its systems”; A maker and keeper of structure for the sake of structure, representative of cis-tem for the sake of cis-tem, and proudly devoid of “emotion, intuition, inspiration, spontaneity”.¹⁴¹ Observing, Horne notes down that Schneeman’s mode of production is “a mode of *hysterical* production, of excessive expressive words issuing uncontrollably from the womb”.¹⁴² Hysterical production creates splattering words, leaking from the body and remonstrating the grid. It is deliberately messy. However, most people do not pay attention to the words on the scroll. For most people, it is enough that Carolee Schneeman has pulled a scroll from amongst her eggs.

Faith Ringgold reflects upon egg-based protest against The Whitney Museum’s predominately male Annual in 1970:

“We went there often to deposit eggs. Unsuspecting male curatorial staff would pick up the eggs and experience the shock of having raw egg slide down the pants of their fine tailor-made suits. Sanitary napkins followed... Generally, everywhere the staff went they found loud and clear messages that women artists were on the Whitney’s case.”¹⁴³

The drips of burst yolk and white upon the tailored exterior of the cis-worm-making curator spoils the conquering performance of the ‘gaining’ body which exists externally. The suit is reproductive of the institution; Each well-dressed curator is a building block in the grid and the egg splatters across it. Ringgold notes the sanitary napkins used to salvage the visual institution, but anyone familiar with the stubbornness of raw egg knows that the spoiled suit will continue to be visible to all who interact with this square of the grid.

¹⁴⁰ Schneeman, C. (1975) *Interior Scroll*. [Documentation of performance/Beet juice, urine and coffee on screenprint on paper] 905 x 1830 mm. Tate collection. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282> [Accessed 28 April 2021].

¹⁴¹ Schneeman, C. (1975) *Interior Scroll*. [Documentation of performance/Beet juice, urine and coffee on screenprint on paper] 905 x 1830 mm. Tate collection. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282> [Accessed 28 April 2021].

¹⁴² Horne, V (2020) ‘the personal clutter... the painterly mess...’ Tracing a History of Carolee Schneemann’s Interior Scroll. *Art History*, 43(5). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12529>

¹⁴³ Meller, S. (2010) The Biennial and Women Artists: A Look Back At Feminist Protests at The Whitney. *Whitney Museum of American Art*. [blog] 3 May. Available at: <https://whitney.org/education/education-blog/biennial-and-women-artists> [Accessed 15 Mar 2021].

In 2018, as part of a project with Birmingham City University, I proposed an artwork consisting of twelve (uncooked) chickens' eggs for exhibition in Tate Liverpool. Despite the project space being invigilated by the group of artists throughout it's time there, I was not given permission to actually publicly show my artwork in the space. Instead, I had to provide photographs of each egg on a pinboard, whilst my eggs were kept in a locked room behind the security desk. Forty -eight years since the Whitney Annual protests, it seems that institutional galleries still have deeply ingrained egg fear.

All of the men living in worm making bodies in this room think that their physical interference with the eggs blesses each one with a heightened value. They believe that they enhance the egg's identity, rather than allowing the egg's presence to enrich theirs.



Elsewhere, A Saatchi-less Place¹⁴⁴

In a different room, an egg laying (and frequently egg carrying) body named Nigella Lawson is eating a poached chicken's egg on top of a leftover pizza slice. Nigella is alone. She used to share a room with the man living in a worm making body named Charles Saatchi, but his presence became a physical threat to the existence of her egg laying body and so Nigella walked away from his room to find one of her own. As with all ingredients, she performs a feminised, semi-sexual intimacy towards her food, speaking with admiration for the leftovers and 'waste' products that have become her breakfast. Nigella's choice to publicly share her combination of egg and leftover pizza horrifies her audience¹⁴⁵ because it seems anarchic.

Julia Kristeva writes: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite".¹⁴⁶ Egg-pizza ignores the rules that a culinary professional should visibly adhere to. The presence of an egg contaminates, and is equally contaminated by, boundaries of cuisine, levels of freshness and clashes of texture. Nigella is unapologetic in this indulgence.

I would like to take time to note that Nigella Lawson is an upper-class, white, cis-gendered (and for all of these reasons privileged) figure. Koivunen, Kyrölä and Ryberg introduce *Vulnerability as a Political Language* by expressly stating that the amplification of white cis-women's experiences of abuse dominates any acknowledgement of the severity of abuse received by women of colour and trans people:

"These debates over whose injury and vulnerability matter more, or the most, raise important issues about structural inequalities between women and what can count as

¹⁴⁴ White, A. (2020) Nigella Lawson's Cook, Eat, Repeat shows us the pleasure of being alone. *The Independent*, 14 December. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/nigella-lawson-cook-eat-repeat-b1770018.html> [Accessed date 28 January 2021].

¹⁴⁵ Younan, C. (2020) Nigella Lawson baffles fans with 'disgraceful' egg on leftover pizza breakfast. *Daily Star*, 24 November. Available at: <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/real-life/nigella-lawson-baffles-fans-disgraceful-23059262> [Accessed 26 January 2021].

¹⁴⁶ Kristeva, J. (1982) *Powers of Horror*. New York: Columbia University Press. P4

‘shared experience’, but also about how to measure levels of vulnerability, or if such measurement or ‘competition’ is desirable or possible at all.”¹⁴⁷

Whilst there is publicly documented trauma involved in the breakdown of her marriage, it is important to recognise that Nigella has a successful platform, alongside both personal and inherited fortune which make independency and relocation much less of a logistical challenge.¹⁴⁸ However, I choose to include the image of Nigella and her isolated egg breakfasts in this project because her divorce is a direct reaction and resistance to the violence of the art institution. Her physical position is elsewhere: when the tabloid-informed audience look into her kitchen they recognise a Saatchi-less place, a site of active dissociation from the institution, thus obstructing the reproduction of his behaviour.

¹⁴⁷ Koivunen, A., Kyrölä, K. and Ryberg, I. (2018) Vulnerability as a Political Language. In: *The Power of Vulnerability: mobilising affect in feminist, queer and anti-racist media cultures*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526133113.00005> P2-3

¹⁴⁸ **RE: recognising this privilege and the ability to escape abusive working environments, Nigella said: “It’s important to remember that this affects women in every line of work, and in very unglamorous lines of work too, where they don’t have voices to complain [...] it’s important that those women’s lives are being paid attention to and being safeguarded.”**

Spring, A. (2018) Nigella Lawson: We were always told that we mustn’t make a man feel bad about anything. *The Guardian*, 22 January. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jan/22/nigella-lawson-we-were-always-told-we-mustnt-make-a-man-feel-bad-about-anything> [Accessed 29 January 2021].

PART THREE: THE FALL

Elizabeth Bartlett recognises the components of Camus's idea of rebellion as appropriate to feminism, however, she admits that to her knowledge there is no evidence that Camus was a feminist or gave specific attention to gender injustices. She also goes on to describe that "Camus's personal reputation was one of being a womanizer and his wife's family attributed her years of suicidal depression to his infidelities".¹⁴⁹ In direct comparison with this, Allen argues that Camus's depictions of women means that they "cannot participate in the existential endeavour".¹⁵⁰ However, one of Camus's significant philosophical points is the correlation between suicide and absurd realisation; From this we can assume that absurd realisation haunted the egg laying body in Camus's household, but her husband was just too busy to notice.

Reba Maybury, of a romantic encounter with a cis het white male, writes: "He, too, considered his misery as something alien to my female consciousness."¹⁵¹ The lack of comprehension of egg-based suffering, or indeed the blame placed upon those beneath the patriarchy for such suffering, indicates a worm-held belief that their imposition of structures are meaningful and thus satisfactory; A washing of worming hands to forsake any responsibility for their crumbling structures.

300 Mercer Street

It is difficult to reflect upon patriarchal violence in the art world without referring to the occurrences that transpired between Ana Mendieta and Carl Andre. I am particularly interested in the way that knowledge of Ana Mendieta, both as an artist and a victim, is passed beneath the structures of academic learning, a tale told in undertones rather than loudly, to an assembly.

Like many people in the UK, I first came across Carl Andre on a school trip to Tate Modern somewhere in my GCSE years; A stack of bricks which I found as obnoxious as I did

¹⁴⁹ Bartlett, E. A. (2004) *Rebellious Feminism: Camus's Ethic of Rebellion and Feminist Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P13

¹⁵⁰ Bartlett, E. A. (2004) *Rebellious Feminism: Camus's Ethic of Rebellion and Feminist Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P13

¹⁵¹ Maybury, R. (2017) *Dining With Humpty Dumpty*. 2nd edn. UK: Arcadia Missa. P51

uninteresting, although was corrected by my teachers that it was actually very important and very clever (which probably just meant very expensive, or that it was cool to say you ‘got’ it). Meanwhile, also like many of us around the world, Helen Molesworth admits that it was far into grad school with art specialisms when she first heard about Ana Mendieta, notably from another student rather than someone in a teaching position. She also confesses that she did not find Ana’s work “cool” at the time, predominantly because her education was “philosophically inclined”, and “privileged theory over feeling”.¹⁵² An extension of the debate into the suppression of Ana Mendieta’s story feels important to include here, in a thesis which poses challenge to patriarchal philosophical thought.

Molesworth, host of *Death of an Artist*, a podcast which explores the circumstances of Ana’s death for a true crime audience, recognises that there is a certain script which art world professionals stick to, and so it is unlikely to find an acknowledgement of what transpired between Ana Mendieta and Carl Andre on an exhibition wall label or in art history textbooks.¹⁵³ The podcast has received criticism for its cliched sensationalism, and an amplification of the silence surrounding the case for dramatic narrative. McLaughlin, for Art Review, declares that the silence is not so deafening, in part because Ana is discussed in multitudes of theses, articles and books,¹⁵⁴ however there does not really seem to be a contrast of information here; Molesworth openly recognises the citation and recreation of Ana Mendieta’s performances, pilgrimages to sites which were significant to her life and practice, and protestors still publicly furious about her death. The real disparity between the podcast and its Art Review critic is that the format and genre of *Death of an Artist* is lowbrow, allowing a far wider audience to engage with Ana’s artwork and biography through a form of “hearsay” (termed by McLaughlin)¹⁵⁵ than any formal programmes of education, or indeed any institutions aiming to disseminate cultural knowledge through the permanent acquisition and exhibition of artwork.

¹⁵² Molesworth, H. (2022) *Death of an Artist. Episode 1: The Haunting*. [podcast] Available at: <https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/death-of-an-artist/episode-1-the-haunting> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

¹⁵³ Molesworth, H. (2022) *Death of an Artist. Episode 1: The Haunting*. [podcast] Available at: <https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/death-of-an-artist/episode-1-the-haunting> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

¹⁵⁴ McLaughlin, R. (2022) *Ana Mendieta Deserves Better Than a True-Crime Podcast*. Available at: <https://artreview.com/ana-mendieta-deserves-better-than-a-true-crime-podcast/> [Accessed 1 February 2023].

¹⁵⁵ McLaughlin, R. (2022) *Ana Mendieta Deserves Better Than a True-Crime Podcast*. Available at: <https://artreview.com/ana-mendieta-deserves-better-than-a-true-crime-podcast/> [Accessed 1 February 2023].

Such absence of information is replicated in a *TateShots* YouTube video about Carl Andre and his career.¹⁵⁶ Despite being filmed in the apartment where her life ended, there is, typically, no mention of Ana Mendieta within the film or accompanying description, and yet, beneath the stark frame of the video, we find her name roared in the comments section, condemning the institution, and screaming to fill the gap of contextual knowledge which has been conveniently excluded. When checking the Birmingham City University referencing guide, a section about videos from online platforms comes with the rather scathing phrase: “assuming that the material you have found has academic credibility”,¹⁵⁷ and yet here, the distribution of crucial knowledge intertwined with Carl Andre’s position as a ‘famous’ artist is found outside the confines of acceptable academic sourcing because the authors of institutional material do not want to provide the full picture.

Federici writes of how the term ‘gossip’ was tactfully redefined by the patriarchy from a term of egg making companionship and a generational sharing of knowledge to one of derogatory meaning, implying wasteful, irrational, and inflammatory conversation. She acknowledges that this is a deliberate part of the degradation of women, stating that the proliferation of the word contributes to the construction of the stereotypical woman as “envious of other people’s wealth and power”;¹⁵⁸ The precise quality which Carl Andre suggested of Ana Mendieta’s attitude to his art world achievements. Here, I construct my deliberation of Ana Mendieta as indicative of the Absurd Heroine in an imagined dialogue, or ‘gossip’, because this is how knowledge of Ana is spread. Challenging the linearity of institutional rhetoric, this knowledge is built collectively and shared horizontally, capsizing the capitalised exchange of knowledge rather than adhering to the hierarchical structure of academic distribution.

¹⁵⁶ Tate (2014) *Carl Andre – ‘Works of Art Don’t Mean Anything’* | *TateShots*. [video] Available at: <https://youtu.be/JLgwSgWpkpk> [Accessed 1 February 2023].

¹⁵⁷ Birmingham City University (2022) *Harvard – audio, visual, multimedia*. Available at: <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/library/services-and-support/referencing/harvard/audio-visual-multimedia> [Accessed 1 February 2023].

¹⁵⁸ Federici, S. (2019) *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women*. Oakland, CA: PM Press. P41

Did you hear about Ana Mendieta?

No? An artist?

Ana Mendieta lived in an egg laying body and was receiving more acclaim (artist-desired capital)¹⁵⁹ than her worm making husband. Ana's work received praise based upon the ways she positioned her body with the earth, and her expressions of the meaningless violence and otherness that her non-white, egg laying body experienced.

Lived? Is she not alive anymore?

No. She died when her body impacted the earth after a 34 storey...
fall?

She jumped?

¹⁵⁹ WHEREISANAMENDIETA, eds. (2016) *Where Is Ana Mendieta?* Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B543es7FPf0SYTRIZU80V1NXcUJVRjN1ckNYTzI2UFY2eXpF/view> [Accessed 26 January 2021]. P20

I don't think so. It sounds like her husband was involved. She was married to Carl Andre – that guy with the bricks in Tate Modern?

Oh yeah, that male professor mentioned him in the criticality lecture a few weeks back.

Yeah, they didn't mention her though.

All the pictures in the lecture were of floor-based sculpture - Carl Andre seems to love throwing shit on the floor.

I heard on a podcast that he was a bit jealous because people were talking about her artwork more and more.

Did you know that Sisyphus was sentenced to his boulder-slope ritual by the Gods, after he deceived death twice?¹⁶⁰ The second time Sisyphus cheated death occurred in response to his wife doing as her husband asked. Upon Sisyphus's death and at his request, his wife

¹⁶⁰ Raffalovich, D. C. (1988) "The Deaths of Sisyphus: Structural Analysis of a Classical Myth." *Anthropologica* 30(1). Available at: <http://doi.org/10.2307/25605249> P88

cast Sisyphus's body in the town square¹⁶¹ without making any funeral arrangements or "customary offerings to the dead".¹⁶² Camus describes this request as a "test [of] his wife's love", going on to describe how Sisyphus obtained permission from the Gods to return to reprimand his compliant wife after being "annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love".¹⁶³ Following this, avoiding return to the underworld, Sisyphus enjoyed life on Earth for many more years until captured and punished to his boulder.

Sisyphus's antagonism of his wife here could be understood in different ways; It could be that he was simply setting an obtuse test for her love, or perhaps this was an elaborate premeditation to avoid permanent death through active dominance and manipulation of his wife's loyalty, prompting her to do 'wrong' so that he could take a disciplinary role amongst the living.

Ana Mendieta's body lying in the street is Sisyphus dumped in the square except there is a difference: Ana Mendieta's body did not ask to be dumped there.

¹⁶¹ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin. O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P115-116

¹⁶² Raffalovich, D. C. (1988) "The Deaths of Sisyphus: Structural Analysis of a Classical Myth." *Anthropologica* 30(1). Available at: <http://doi.org/10.2307/25605249> [Accessed 11th February 2021]. P88

¹⁶³ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin. O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P115-116

The collective WHEREISANAMENDIETA? recognise the artist as a missing figure within the archive which recognises her cis-husband-murderer's achievements; Ana Mendieta is an embodiment of lack. Nine Yamamoto describes how vanishing women exist through "their palpable absence"¹⁶⁴, whilst Linda Stupart illustrates Ana Mendieta as a shadow.¹⁶⁵ Ana is representative of many bodies that have been forced to lack so that another can occupy a larger space.

...Meanwhile Carl Andre enjoyed life on Earth for many more years, avoiding permanent art-career death through active dominance and manipulation of his wife's body.

I've seen a few articles that say that Carl Andre is one of the Tate's most controversial acquisitions, but Ana Mendieta is never

¹⁶⁴ Yamamoto, N. (2016) A Woman Vanishes. In: WHEREISANAMENDIETA, eds. *Where Is Ana Mendieta?* Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B543es7FPf0SYTRIZU80VINXcUJVRjN1ckNYTzl2UFY2eXpF/view> [Accessed 26 January 2021]. P8

¹⁶⁵ Stupart, L. (2016) An Extract From 'Virus'. In: WHEREISANAMENDIETA, eds. *Where Is Ana Mendieta?* Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B543es7FPf0SYTRIZU80VINXcUJVRjN1ckNYTzl2UFY2eXpF/view> [Accessed 26 January 2021]. P3

mentioned.¹⁶⁶ It seems like putting bricks on a floor and calling it art is somehow much more controversial than being suspected of your wife's murder.

Also, there's this whole thing isn't there, where Ana Mendieta repeatedly arranged her body on the ground while Carl Andre repeatedly arranged bricks in grids? And bricks are rocks are hard are the sentence of Sisyphus and bodies are squashy are messy are the sentence of The Absurd Heroine?

The bodies in this story both experience the self-sacrifice of the Camusian absurd, but whilst Ana Mendieta explored the ways that she had been required to make space for (sexually, racially, physically) gaining others through her artwork, the worm maker responded to their own space-making obligations by violently removing the opposing force. He refused to lack, he had to gain!

¹⁶⁶ See both:

Clavien, A. (2020) The Most Controversial Tate Purchases... That Paid Off! *London Trade Art*, 22 July. Available at: <https://www.londontradeart.co.uk/en/magazine/the-most-controversial-tate-purchases-that-paid-off> [Accessed 1 February 2023].

Jones, J. (2016) Carl Andre's Equivalent VIII: the most boring controversial artwork ever. *The Guardian*, 20 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2016/sep/20/carl-andre-equivalent-viii-bricks> [Accessed 1 February 2023].

And so, this egg laying body fell into New York which means surrounded by a grid of bricks and concrete which means surrounded by rocks which means ruptured by the tools of Sisyphus.

Cabañas wrote about how Ana’s body occupied an in between space, a site where meaning is produced. Although Ana references goddesses of fertility within her work, Cabañas tells us that a use of gender essentialist language to describe Ana’s practice would “duplicate the fixity of patriarchal categories” and enforce a societal imposition of singular meaning upon a situation where multiplicity can be found.¹⁶⁷ It would be colonial and whitening to attempt to position Ana Mendieta within a patriarchal ideology of a binary. Her work is not based on biological determinism, it emphasises the circumstances of the body.¹⁶⁸

So, the problem was that Ana Mendieta used her body to make work which disrupted the neat grid of meaning that the white male brick layer built...

¹⁶⁷ Cabañas, K. M. (1999) Ana Mendieta: “Pain of Cuba, Body I Am”. *Woman’s Art Journal*, 20(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358840> P16

¹⁶⁸ Cabañas, K. M. (1999) Ana Mendieta: “Pain of Cuba, Body I Am”. *Woman’s Art Journal*, 20(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358840> P16

Peterson's examination of the straight white male performance recognises a climate of "straight white male paranoia",¹⁶⁹ which can be contextualised by Sedgwick's fictitious comment that "a paranoid friend, who believes I am reading her mind, knows this from reading mine".¹⁷⁰ In other words, the straight white male fears domination of the 'other' based upon his domination of them. Peterson further contemplates Helene Cixous's statement that a play can only begin when a woman dies, stating that "male solo performance, both 'high' and 'low', unites its spectators around the female body the protagonist holds before them".¹⁷¹ A solo performance can only commence when the 'other' is eliminated, whilst the spectators' communal understanding survives in the negative space and how it came to be.

Mourners gather to perform their care for Ana Mendieta by organising crying protests at Carl Andre shows. Leaking, bursting, dripping bodies become so disruptive that they are escorted from

¹⁶⁹ Peterson, M. (1997) *Straight White Male: Performance Art Monologues*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. P11

¹⁷⁰ Kosofsky Sedgwick, E. (2003) *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. P127

¹⁷¹ Peterson, M. (1997) *Straight White Male: Performance Art Monologues*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. P139-140

gallery premises.¹⁷² WHEREISANAMENDIETA? discuss the use of

Ana's artwork in the court case as evidence that she was suicidal:

“Women who dare to find voices and be creative are dismissed as unstable, hysterical, damaged and flawed in some way. This is an obvious example as to how an honest, emotional female voice is a threat to patriarchal institutions”.¹⁷³

Ana Mendieta is Laura Palmer, or perhaps Laura Palmer is Ana Mendieta. Both transformed into angels when they refused to replicate the behaviour of the men in their lives, their old bodies lying dead at the centre of a community mystery. The angels are no longer cis bodies, they are splattered beings, wrapped in plastic, ruptured and leaking from their forced metamorphosis. At news of Laura's death, Donna Hayward wails in class¹⁷⁴ like the crying protestors, wailing in galleries. Endless, gulping screams ringing out in

¹⁷² Crawford, M. (2015) Crying for Ana Mendieta at the Carl Andre Retrospective. *Hyperallergic*. 10 March. Available at: <https://hyperallergic.com/189315/crying-for-ana-mendieta-at-the-carl-andre-retrospective/> [Accessed 11 April 2021].

¹⁷³ WHEREISANAMENDIETA, eds. (2016) *Where Is Ana Mendieta?* Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B543es7FPf0SYTRIZU80V1NXcUJVRjN1ckNYTzl2UFY2eXpF/view> [Accessed 26 January 2021]. P20

¹⁷⁴ ‘Pilot’, *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 8 April 1990, ABC, 94 minutes.

institutional settings, halting the repetitive transfer of information from teacher to student, from curator to viewer, stake claim for newly found knowledge which erupts like the salty tears of the person next to you, rather than packaged and handed over by someone with designated authority.

Sarah Wood considers the “violence and sensuality of a young woman’s corpse is the antithesis” of the archive’s “capability to preserve and enable reproduction, resuscitation, remembering, performs a denial of the possibility of death”.¹⁷⁵ The historicising, categorising nature of the art institution chooses to quietly clean up the presence of the corpse rather than acknowledge the damage that exists within their collection. The removal of weeping bodies from public exhibitions three decades after Ana Mendieta’s death depicts an institution that is only welcoming to those who will participate in reproducing a mentality which is as precise in the execution of stagnant, emotionless calculation as the *Equivalent series* proudly presented upon its floors.

¹⁷⁵ Wood, S. (2018) The Body In The Archive. In: Jagoe, R. and Kivland, S., eds. *On Violence*. London: Ma Bibliothèque. P122

Ana Mendieta's ruptured body leaks between categorical states of being, inhabiting the institution through a communal refusal to allow the archive to forget her. She is not present to tick archival boxes, instead she haunts them.

Because messy bodies not doing what is expected of them (keeping quiet to support the grid and making the grid famous) become unproductive bodies and leak and ooze in between the gaps between rocks, or bricks, and change the way that the bricks touch each other and make the grid slippy.

Rebecca Tamás writes of the prominence of Ana Mendieta's physical body, both within her work and within her premature absence. Her essay likens Ana Mendieta to the green knight, a supernatural being made from plants who retrieves and reattaches their head when it is sliced off by Sir Gawain.¹⁷⁶ Although slain, Ana Mendieta survives as a supernatural power within the artworld, surpassing physical limitations and haunting the orderly attempts at success made by her executioner. Tamás writes that Ana is revealing of "the huge realm of

¹⁷⁶ Tamás, R. (2020) *Strangers: Essays on the Human and Nonhuman*. UK: Makina Books. P58-59.

possibility that lies outside of the container of allegedly ‘normal’ existence in late capitalism [...] a space in which all can change, where the boundary between a wolf, a bird, a lizard, a woman is not as strict as one might imagine, but open and liable to shift”.¹⁷⁷

Perhaps by avoiding the expectations of our body, we rupture our allocated square on the grid and its yolk slips and drips through the in-betweens and makes the grid messier and erodes the guidelines between the extremes.

¹⁷⁷ Tamás, R. (2020) *Strangers: Essays on the Human and Nonhuman*. UK: Makina Books. P60.

METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT 2: Down the Slope

It is lockdown, and
eggs are not available.

I – my Egg and I -
go to the big Tesco's
once a week, on a Friday.

We queue around the building
to get inside, sometimes
for an hour, spaced
two metres away from the people
in front and behind me.

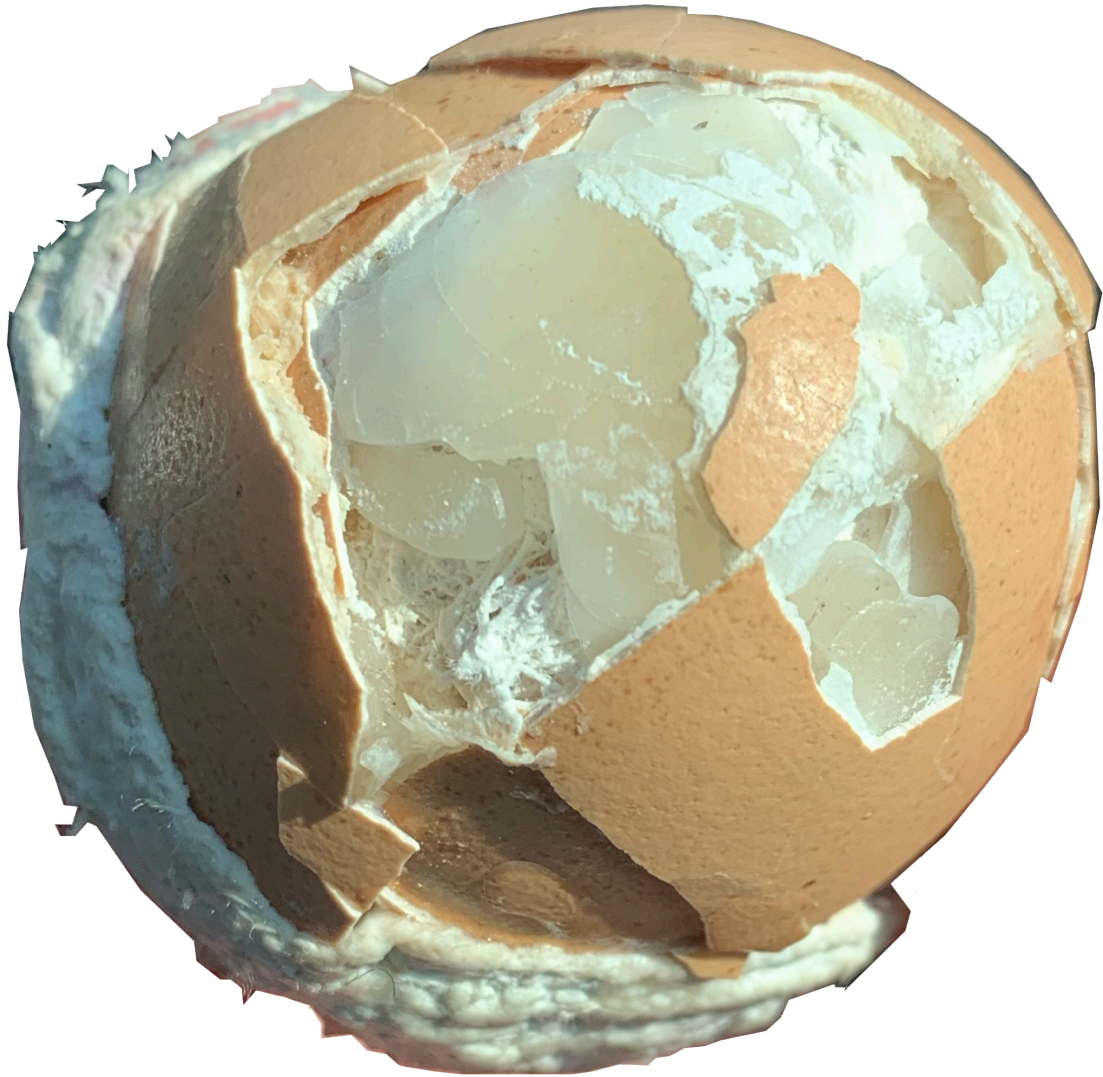
Today, after a 51-minute wait,
we enter the shop.

As I approach two
members of staff
pushing a metal
crate full of items,

I suddenly feel it,
the slip downwards.

The egg – the only egg
in the vicinity of
the building – cracks
as it hits the cold floor,
a huge chunk of shell
shattering and skidding
across the shiny tiles.

As I drop to the cold hard floor, frantically
tucking my egg back
into my chest and
snatching the fragments into my palm,
I make awkward eye contact with the confused
employees as they laugh.



PART FOUR: AFTER LIFE

The Transformation of Albert's Pronouns: A Ghost Story, A Dissection

Sometime shortly after 1:55pm, Albert Camus opened his eyes, except he didn't.

The car had contained four others, members of the Gallimard family: Michel (a worm making friend who worked in publishing), his wife Janine, their daughter Anne, and their dog Floc. Earlier in the journey, Michel and Albert had been talking about death in detail, both hatching a plan to be embalmed so that they could take up space in Janine's living room. "Quelle Horreur!" she had shouted, exclaiming that she would move out,¹⁷⁸ the corpses of these two men could take the apartment and she would retreat elsewhere.

Around him, Albert could hear his travel companions slowly attempting to move. He thought to turn to face them, to make contact, but something was restricting his efforts somehow. Nobody else seemed to be having such a problem.

Soon, new people arrived on the scene. Albert tried to call out, to interrupt the low hum of dialogue to draw attention to himself, but it didn't seem to work. He was used to being able to infiltrate and dictate conversation with ease, but today Albert was noiseless, waiting for the group to locate him. "I recognise him!" They shouted, alarmed and pointing, peering into Albert's immobile face, unaware that he was looking back. "Wasn't he that writer?!". Some were taking photos;¹⁷⁹ Albert tried to blink his eyes to block the bright flashes, but the movement wouldn't happen, the light invading his wide, unreactive pupils.

He tried to move his legs, to dislodge whatever it was that was stopping his movement, and it wasn't possible. He tried to push his elbows against the metal of the car to sit up, and it wasn't possible. The objects around him, a tall tree and a newly distorted Facel Vega had become invasive to Albert, both in turn permeating his body and rupturing the membrane of life in control of it, allowing this strange new Albert to become simultaneously unattached but stuck

¹⁷⁸ Lottman, H. R. (1981) *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd. P662

¹⁷⁹ Lottman, H. R. (1981) *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd. P666

inside. Albert had not been ruptured before. Things that were inside now felt the breeze of outside. The boundaries of his body no longer seemed to be as neat as the shape of his skin; Now, Albert also existed in wetness, blood, and exposed soft tissue, all warping the outline of a previously dominant, heteronormative, adult male human. Since the rupturing, he had been unable to have an effect on the things around him and instead his presence seemed to be reducing, spreading thinly to make way for everything else. This was an unexpected state, an altered existence newly based on lack rather than gain. Rather than entering space, space seemed to enter Albert's body. It was not something that he had experienced before, and he felt embarrassed by it.

Someone nearby asked everyone to move, that a local had arrived. Doctor Marcel Camus,¹⁸⁰ fittingly named, leaned forward, touching the skin on his namesake's head and neck, before declaring that Albert's life had ended.

Sometime after 4pm, and a long period of uncomfortable rearrangement, dislodging and unpicking, Albert was removed from the car, placed on a stretcher, and covered. Arriving to clear the scene, two emergency paramedics bent to lift the packaged body together. "Come on, let's put them in the truck then". To the speaker, it was an insignificant mutter, condensed by the heave of straightening from a bend, and yet the lack of Albert in that sentence was surprising to him. Under the layer of plastic, Albert heard the voice of Doctor Marcel Camus, who had confirmed Albert's death, observing "He didn't suffer".¹⁸¹ Somewhere between the repetition of his surname and the momentary glance towards his experience, Albert found solace.

Sometime after, Albert found that he had been relocated to a town hall council chamber, surrounded by conversations which referred to him as "the body". One government representative told another that Albert's opposition to religious ceremonies meant that they should oppose any suggestions to bless "the body".¹⁸² *Good*, Albert thought, *I am glad they are remembering my requests*. But later, one of the institutional officials formally chose to

¹⁸⁰ Lottman, H. R. (1981) *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd. P664

¹⁸¹ Lottman, H. R. (1981) *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd. P664

¹⁸² Lottman, H. R. (1981) *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd. P666

“bow before the body” during a public speech on behalf of the government,¹⁸³ circumnavigating Albert’s requests to fulfil his own principles, and probably to keep up some sort of appearances to those attending. Perhaps respect towards someone’s requests is less important than Albert had expected. When friends visited, they feared a great secret lay underneath the sheet, and so they did not lift a corner to look at Albert in order to preserve this confidentiality.¹⁸⁴ Later, somewhere in a cold white room, some more people prodded and poked, before deciding to “put it back in storage”, the job was done.

The last time that other people seemed to interact with Albert at all occurred as four strong humans carried him to a hole in the ground. A great stone, simply inscribed with Albert’s name and dates, was placed to weigh down on the ground above him. And so, time passed, and Albert felt the increasing compression of materials, the mud and grit pushing down onto his shoulders from this neat rectangular boulder.

As Albert lay in the ground, earthworms came, burrowing through his pores and feasting on his flesh, creating gaping new holes throughout Albert’s body where their offspring fed. As Albert physically became less and less, the worms became more and more, their invading bodies multiplying in celebration of their conquest.

Beneath the cold ground which blocked the French sun, Albert occasionally heard exclamations of “Here it is!”, as people arrived at the graveside. As years passed by, so did many visitors, seemingly to see the piece of stone with Albert’s name on it rather than to be near to the objects which were once Albert Camus.

¹⁸³ Lottman, H. R. (1981) *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd. P666

¹⁸⁴ Lottman, H. R. (1981) *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd. P668

A Way of Explaining: “In the pandemic I didn’t want to do my work, so I just watched lots of *Twin Peaks*”

Throughout the final part of this contextual review, I spend a substantial amount of time in the fictional town of *Twin Peaks*. During the restrictions of 2020, when any form of PhD work felt too hard to do, my egg and I watched, re-watched, and watched again, the original two seasons of *Twin Peaks*, finding within it a utopian form of absurdism which became convivial to the theoretical work that I was trying to undertake.

I write about *Twin Peaks*, rather than in pursuit of an academic study of Lynch/Frost as media creators, to describe the absurd as a mechanism for both alternative knowledge construction and disruption of worming patriarchal structures. Corresponding with my motivations, deliberation of the series is undertaken through fan essays and fan fiction. I view this as a method of working intimately with character and circumstantial materials to provide a vignette of the absurd during contextual review through the provision of a speculative fictional scenario. By writing as a fan, and with citation of fan-based writing, I can further expand my implementation of anecdotal study through a reflexive articulation of personal and intimate spaces, an application of “what is actually happening”¹⁸⁵ (ie. The Egg Carrying Researcher consuming, and finding liberation within, *Twin Peaks*).

In the following writing, I pursue the narrative of *Twin Peaks* to further articulate how a transformation away from cis-ness enables an ability to trouble patriarchal reproductions of violence but can equally be blocked by hurdles of ignorance which attempt to reposition the transformed being within binary existence. This is reinforced through recognition of *Twin Peaks* as a fictional site of exchange between the absurd and a knowledge-seeking institution. In *Twin Peaks*, the process of ‘knowledge production’ (finding out, investigation, research, problem solving) is done holistically. Through ancient Tibetan methodologies, interactions with spirits, and conversations in dreams, Agent Cooper adopts a methodology of being with and being within the native community of *Twin Peaks*, cohabiting, rather than directing or invading. Loacker and Peters quote Breskin in testifying: “That which occupies ‘the wrong place’ and that which deviates from the ‘regular picture’ is then what Lynch conceives of as

¹⁸⁵ Le Guin, U.K. (2019) *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Ignota. P37

the absurd”.¹⁸⁶ In this description, I find parallels between Cooper’s practices and my own methodology: the ‘wrong place’-ness of the nomadic research of egg care is an absurd practice, an ongoing and intuitive occurrence outside of the confines of the research institution.

To further describe this, I look to Lola Olufemi’s recognition that “imagination calls on us to understand and embrace, as a project of resistance without determinable end”, which goes on to describe the possibilities of taking imaginative potential seriously to expel misery and propel a political “schema that refuses persuasion, compromise, sacrifice, the trap of practicality”.¹⁸⁷ Such imagination propels the narrative of *Twin Peaks*; The acceptance of the supernatural is not difficult for the characters, or the audience, and this openness allows investigations to take place without the hinderance of attempting to apply logic.

The Metamorphosis of Laura Palmer

Rumfitt makes a radical declaration that Agent Denise Bryson is not the only trans person in *Twin Peaks*,¹⁸⁸ describing Laura Palmer as identifiably within a state of transness. Laura is portrayed as the desirable epitome of a cis white teenage girl; She is a sociable, charitable, and conventionally attractive homecoming queen, depicted within a nuclear family unit and beloved by classmates, boyfriends and the community around her. However, as an audience, we only meet this image of Laura Palmer retrospectively, while our own exchanges are held with a being that is no longer human or earthbound, instead occupying paranormal and dreamlike realms.

I have briefly written before, in Part Three’s *300 Mercer Street*, about the loss of Laura’s cis body in her death. Throughout the investigation, through hindsight we learn a lot about the way Laura inhabited her body, recreationally taking drugs and consensually engaging in multiple relationships and promiscuous sex, but we also learn about how Laura’s body is forcefully

¹⁸⁶ Loacker, B. and Peters, L. (2015) ‘Come on, get happy!’: Exploring absurdity and sites of alternate ordering in *Twin Peaks*. *Ephemera*, 15(3), pp. 621-649. Available at: https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/75422/1/15_3loackerpeters.pdf [Accessed 14 May 2021]. P622

¹⁸⁷ Olufemi, L. (2021) *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*. UK: Hajar Press. P34

¹⁸⁸ Rumfitt, A. (2020) A Confused and Wild Thing. *The Final Girls*, 11 November. Available at: <https://www.thefinalgirls.co.uk/bloody-women/twinpeaks> [Accessed 6 January 2023].

inhabited by others: her rape by Jacques Renault and Leo Johnson, and the regular incestuous rape, assault and murder by her father as he plays host to Bob.

Laura's transformation occurs through her refusal to become a reproductive vessel for Leland/Bob's behaviour. From pages taken from Laura's diary ("I know I have to because it's the only way to keep Bob away from me. The only way to tear him out from inside"¹⁸⁹) and Leland's final confession ("She fought them, she wouldn't let them in", and "she said she'd die before she let them"¹⁹⁰), we know that death is a decision that Laura makes as a form of resistance which draws force from a position of utmost vulnerability.¹⁹¹ In conjunction with Albert Rosenfield's reasoning that Bob is "the evil that men do"¹⁹², Laura's willingness to die, to step out of fertile cis-ness, woman-ness, white-ness, humanness, is a sacrificial break in a worming chain of the reproduction of evil. Mbembé and Meintjes summarise Bataille's descriptions of death as a point so destructive and sacrificial in its irreversibility that it is a radical expenditure to a state which is withdrawn from meaning.¹⁹³ They further demonstrate martyrdom through the figure of the suicide bomber, describing the transformation of the body into a weapon which ensures that the death of the owner is interlinked with the death of the other.¹⁹⁴ Here we could describe Laura Palmer's role as suicide bomber, motivated by a reasoning that her ability to die is hypothetically capable of concurrently eradicating Bob by shattering the pipeline of his proliferation. The death of Laura Palmer's body is a moment of ultimate resistance against the replication of the evil that men do.

¹⁸⁹ 'Episode 16', *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by Tim Hunter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 1 December 1990, ABC, 47 minutes.

¹⁹⁰ 'Episode 16', *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by Tim Hunter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 1 December 1990, ABC, 47 minutes.

¹⁹¹ Koivunen, A., Kyrölä, K. and Ryberg, I. (2018) Vulnerability as a Political Language. In: *The Power of Vulnerability: mobilising affect in feminist, queer and anti-racist media cultures*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526133113.00005> P8-9

¹⁹² 'Episode 16', *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by Tim Hunter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 1 December 1990, ABC, 47 minutes.

¹⁹³ Mbembé, J. A. and Meintjes, L. (2003) Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1). Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/39984> [Accessed 29 May 2023]. P15

¹⁹⁴ Mbembé, J. A. and Meintjes, L. (2003) Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1). Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/39984> [Accessed 29 May 2023]. P36

Mbembé and Meintjes also describe how the power of self-sacrifice “may be derived from the belief that the destruction of one’s own body does not affect the continuity of the being”,¹⁹⁵ or rather that the death of the body is not the end, and this seems to quietly be the case for Laura Palmer. In the conclusion of *Fire Walk With Me*, we see Laura Palmer’s elated, celestial tears at an angel, an ascension away from the Black Lodge. Angels, and their absence, are a motif throughout the film,¹⁹⁶ they disappear from paintings, and Laura assures Donna that they would not be able to help if one were to fall through space. While the non-existence of angels seems to haunt Laura, she undertakes her task and is seemingly rewarded. The peaceful, joyful completion of a transformation, a being which is self-assured by their form after a tiresome battle to avoid their original state. The boulder has reached the mountain peak, and it seems to sit in place!

¹⁹⁵ Mbembé, J. A. and Meintjes, L. (2003) Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1). Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/39984> [Accessed 29 May 2023]. P38

¹⁹⁶ *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. [feature film] Directed by David Lynch. CIBY Pictures, France/USA, 1992. 135 minutes.



A Drawing Together of Scripts: Laura Palmer Takes Lysistrata's Oath¹⁹⁷

The scene opens to reveal a pastel pink bedroom. It is relatively tidy, with a few simple items of furniture, and a standing lamp in one corner. In the centre of the room is a double bed with a floral duvet cover.

*LAURA PALMER, a living human girl of teenage age, is lying across the double bed, writing in her diary. On the bed around her there is an ash tray, a telephone with the speaker dangling off the hook, and an open copy of *Flesh World* magazine. Tears sparkle on Laura's cheeks; she has clearly been extremely distressed. She speaks the words as she writes:*

LAURA PALMER

February 23rd. Tonight is the night that I die. I know I have to because it's the only way to keep Bob away from me. The only way to tear him out from inside. I know he wants me; I can feel his fire. But if I die, he can't hurt me anymore...

*Suddenly, there is a beam of supernatural light and a white marble Greek statue, a replica of the *Venus de Medici*, in turn a likeness of the goddess *Aphrodite*, and strikingly familiar to the audience of *Twin Peaks*, appears at the foot of Laura's bed. Laura's eyes are wide, but she does not scream. She rubs a tear from her eyes with her sleeve, and stares at this new presence. A voice comes from the statue.*

STATUE

Laura Palmer, I am *Lysistrata*.

*Laura kneels up on her bed, facing *LYSISTRATA*, clutching her diary to her chest.*

LYSISTRATA

Will you tie yourself to the high purpose in your writing? Will you take this oath, and pledge yourself to these stern conditions?

¹⁹⁷ **The translated text of *Lysistrata* varies widely, this particular interpretation is an amalgamation, informed by:** Aristophanes (2013) *Lysistrata*. In: *Lysistrata and Other Plays*. Translated by Alan H Sommerstein. Revised edition. UK: Penguin Classics. P148-149 **and** Aristophanes (2012) *Lysistrata*. Translator unknown. New edition. Seattle, WA: Loki's Publishing. P23-24

Laura nods, despite her sadness, we see that she is invigorated by this decision. She nods again, determinedly.

LYSISTRATA

Repeat after me...

To demon, father or lover, I'll not open arms

As Laura speaks, a chorus of voices are echoed behind her. The many beings who have fulfilled an act of refusal with their bodies.

LAURA PALMER

To demon, father or lover, I'll not open arms

LYSISTRATA

Though love and denial may enlarge his charms

LAURA PALMER

Though love and denial may enlarge his charms

[She laughs]

Oh, my knees are failing me Lysistrata!

LYSISTRATA

[Soothing]

And I will live in the Red Room in unsullied chastity, beautiful, clad in saffron silks

LAURA PALMER

And I will live in the Red Room in unsullied chastity, beautiful, clad in saffron silks

LYSISTRATA

I will never willingly yield myself to him

LAURA PALMER

I will never willingly yield myself to him

LYSISTRATA

If then he seizes me by dint of force

LAURA PALMER

If then he seizes me by dint of force

LYSISTRATA

I'll give him reason for a long remorse

LAURA PALMER

I'll give him reason for a long remorse

LYSISTRATA

I'll never lie and stare up at the ceiling

LAURA PALMER

I'll never lie and stare up at the ceiling

LYSISTRATA

Nor like a lion on all fours go kneeling

LAURA PALMER

Nor like a lion on all fours go kneeling

LYSISTRATA

If I abide by this oath, may I drink from this cup.

LAURA PALMER

If I abide by this oath, may I drink from this cup.

Laura raises the glass of water from her bedside table, toasting the statue and taking a sip. It was time.

LATER

LELAND PALMER/BOB

O hit them hard and hit again and hit until they run away,
and perhaps they'll learn not to have much to say

The De-Metamorphosis of Laura Palmer

Throughout the original series of *Twin Peaks*, Agent Cooper's detective research is created holistically, outside of institutional practices; Cooper constructs new knowledge absurdly and reflexively – pursuing meditative methodologies, responding to his own dreams, and listening to the Log. However, throughout *Twin Peaks: The Return* we witness a corrupted Cooper following his infiltration by BOB, amongst his villainous behaviour replicating the abuse committed upon Laura by Leland. Diane describes how an 'evil' Cooper (portrayed as a doppelganger) raped her¹⁹⁸ and there is implication that Audrey was raped and impregnated by Cooper¹⁹⁹ while hospitalised following the finale of the original series.²⁰⁰ Despite a depicted recovery of the original, 'good' Cooper, in the Black Lodge, Agent Cooper, representative of institutional law enforcement, is instructed by Leland Palmer, Laura's abuser, to locate her and return her to the family home. Laura's transformation is initially reversed as Cooper 'saves' Laura, disrupting her journey to the place where she is murdered, taking her hand and leading her away in the woods with the intention of returning her home. Although Laura disappears, this achievement is depicted as beautiful and fulfilling, subsequently creating a peaceful morning where no dead body is recovered, and Pete Martell goes fishing quietly. However, we must also ask what the implications of this reversal are for Laura in this new extension of her present state. The interference with Laura's pathway to her death does not necessarily interrupt, or undo, the years of sexual abuse that have culminated at the hands of her father. While Sisyphus is allowed to return from death to punish his wife for leaving her body in the town square, Laura Palmer is not retrieved from death to punish her father for leaving her body, wrapped in plastic, amongst their community. While, on the surface, this appears to be a positive achievement because Laura is no longer a victim of murder, the intentions of this act seem to simply return her body to the perpetrator of violence against her; A second chance for Laura to become a vessel for man's evil through continued acts of sexual abuse, which are

¹⁹⁸ 'Part 16', *Twin Peaks: The Return*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 27 August 2017, Showtime, 55 minutes.

¹⁹⁹ Robinson, J. (2017) *Twin Peaks: The Hidden Implications of Diane's Emotional Confrontation*. *Vanity Fair*, 18 June. Available at: <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/06/twin-peaks-episode-7-diane-meets-cooper-sexual-assault-rape-audrey-horne> [Accessed 25 January 2023].

²⁰⁰ 'Part 7', *Twin Peaks: The Return*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 18 June 2017, Showtime, 55 minutes.

likely to eventually lead to her death once again. At the climax of *The Return*²⁰¹, Cooper pursues the task assigned to him by Leland to completion, even attempting to prompt Laura's missing memory by reminding her of her (rapist, murderer) father's name. The corrupted cop is no longer holistic, now driven by an institutional requisite to restore the productive, fertile body rather than value its safety. The series closes as Laura screams with distress and fear as she recognises the site of her abuse, realising that she has been returned. The boulder has rolled downwards.


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²⁰¹ 'Part 18', *Twin Peaks: The Return*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 3 September 2017, Showtime, 55 minutes.



CHAPTER THREE: INTERVENTIONS

METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT 3: Thought Process

I FOUND A PIECE OF EGGSHELL ON THE LIVING ROOM CARPET THIS EVENING. WHILE I WAS SITTING ON THE SETTEE, I NOTICED IT, ABOUT 1.5 METRES AWAY FROM ME. THE ROOM WAS LIT ONLY BY A TABLE LAMP BUT THERE IT WAS. UNMISTAKEABLE. A TINY, FRECKLED SQUARE OF EGGSHELL. ABOUT 2 OR 3MM SQUARE? I DON'T KNOW, I'M NO GOOD AT GUESSING MEASUREMENTS. ANYWAY. ALARMED AT MY FIND, I WENT OVER AND I PICKED IT UP. MY EGG WAS IN MY CROPTOP BRA AT THE TIME, TOUCHING MY SKIN, A ROUGHNESS TO HIS NOW ANGULAR FORM, BUT THIS IS A WAY I HAVE BEEN CARRYING HIM QUITE OFTEN RECENTLY AND SO I'M USED TO THE ROUGHNESS IT DOES NOT BOTHER ME IT FEELS GOOD TO HAVE HIM THERE. ANYWAY. I LICKED MY FINGER SLIGHTLY AND USED THE STICKINESS OF MY SPIT TO PICK UP THE EGGSHELL OFF THE CARPET. I KNOW WE'RE MEANT TO BE REALLY HYGIENIC AT THE MOMENT AND I DO WASH MY HANDS BUT I'VE BITTEN ALL MY NAILS RIGHT DOWN (ONE OF MY MOST LOVED HOBBIES) AND SO THERE'S NO WAY I COULD HAVE PICKED THIS LITTLE SQUARE OF EGG SHELL UP WITHOUT A BIT OF SPIT. SO, I PICKED UP THIS LITTLE BIT OF EGG THAT I FOUND AND TOOK IT UPSTAIRS. I NEEDED TO WEE SO FIGURED THAT WAS A PRIVATE PLACE WHERE I CAN UNDERTAKE AN UNDISTURBED EXAMINATION. I PUT THE TINY EGGSHELL SQUARE BETWEEN MY  LIPS WHILE I UNZIPPED MY TROUSERS AND SAT DOWN. AGAIN, I KNOW WE'RE MEANT TO BE CLEAN BUT SOMETIMES I JUST FORGET AND I DO SOMETHING BEFORE REMEMBERING THAT I SHOULD BE CONCENTRATING ON AVOIDING GERMS. I GOT MY EGG OUT FROM BETWEEN MY BREASTS WITH ONE HAND AND THEN GOT THE TINY SQUARE OF DRY EGGSHELL FROM BETWEEN MY DRY LIPS WITH THE OTHER HAND AND COMPARED THE TWO. ODD. THERE ISN'T ANY GAPS WHERE SHELL IS MISSING ON MY EGG. WELL. THERE IS, BUT THAT BIT IS ACCOUNTED FOR. YOU SEE, I HAD AN INCIDENT A WEEK OR TWO AGO, PROBABLY MORE LIKE THREE, WHERE THERE WAS A LITTLE CHIP OF SHELL THAT NEEDED TO BE SUPER GLUED BACK ONTO MY EGG AND SO I POSITIONED HIM IN A METAL EGG CUP (WHICH WE'VE BOTH BECOME QUITE FOND OF SINCE

THE 'BIG BREAK' INCIDENT) AND SUPERGLUED THIS LITTLE TINY SHARD BACK ON AND LEFT HIM TO DRY OVERNIGHT IN THE EGG CUP WHICH WAS A POOR OVERSIGHT ON MY BEHALF BECAUSE SOME GLUE DRIBBLED DOWN THE SIDE OF MY EGG IN THE NIGHT AND STUCK PART OF HIS SHELL TO THE METAL EGG CUP AND IN THE MORNING I HAD TO SEPARATE HIM FROM THE METAL EGG CUP AND I HAD TO DO A STRANGE PANICKY OPERATION WITH SOME SCISSORS TO UNSTICK MY EGG BUT A TINY PATCH OF SHELL STAYED STUCK TO THE METAL EGG CUP. IT'S OKAY THOUGH, THERE'S NO HOLES IN HIM, THE GAP IS FILLED WITH WHAT I PRESUME IS A COMBINATION OF MEMBRANE AND BANDAGE FROM THE 'BIG BREAK' INCIDENT. AT THE MOMENT WHILE I FIGURE OUT TO DO ABOUT THAT GLUED EGG CUP PIECE, HE SPENDS EVERY NIGHT IN THAT CUP SO HE IS AS UNITED WITH THAT PIECE AS CAN BE, GIVEN THE IGNORANCE OF HIS GUARDIAN. WE'LL FIGURE OUT HOW TO DO IT, I'M SURE. ANYWAY. SO THAT'S THE ONLY GAP ON THE EGG SHELL AND I HAVE BEEN MONITORING IT CAREFULLY AND I KNOW THAT THAT'S NOT WHERE THE TINY SQUARE, SITTING IN A BIT OF SPIT ON MY FINGER, HAS COME FROM. THE SQUARE IS DEFINITELY FROM A CHICKEN'S EGG, NOT FROM ONE OF THE EGGS THAT I OCCASIONALLY FIND WHILE I'M OUT WALKING THE DOG. IT IS PEACHY-BROWN AND FRECKLED. UNMISTAKEABLE. I CAREFULLY TRY TO POSITION IT IN THE GAP THAT I CAUSED WITH SUPERGLUE, JUST IN CASE. IT'S DEFINITELY NOT FROM THERE, BUT ONE OF THIS TINY EGGSHELL SQUARE'S SIDES CAN MATCH UP QUITE WELL WITH ONE OF THE SIDES OF THE NEGATIVE SPACE, SO THAT IT COULD SIT IN THIS GAP IF IT WANTED TO. IRREGULAR, BUT POSSIBLE. I'M FASCINATED BY THIS LITTLE SQUARE OF EGGSHELL FROM MY LIVING ROOM FLOOR. HOW DID IT GET THERE? IF NOT FROM MY EGG, THEN WHO DID IT COME FROM? IF IT WAS A SUPERHERO, I WOULD BE AN EAGER FAN DEMANDING AN ORIGIN MOVIE. I MUST KNOW. IF IT WAS ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR IT WOULD MAKE SENSE BECAUSE A KITCHEN IS A PLACE WHERE KITCHEN EGGS ARE RITUALLY BROKEN AND IT COULD'VE ESCAPED A BIN-RELATED JOURNEY OR EVEN JUMPED A LONG WAY FROM A PARTICULAR VIOLENT CRACK. TO BE IN THE LIVING ROOM REQUIRES THIS TINY SQUARE TO HAVE TRAVELLED ACROSS THE KITCHEN TO THE DOOR AND FROM THE DOOR DOWN THE HALLWAY AND THEN TURNED LEFT INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND GONE AROUND THE SETTEE AND DIAGONALLY ACROSS THE CENTRE OF THE

ROOM TO THE SPOT WHERE I FOUND IT. AN IMPRESSIVE VOYAGE FOR SOMETHING SO TINY, ON A GLOBE WHERE ALL FRIVOLOUS EXPEDITIONS ARE BANNED. I PLACED THIS TINY SQUARE OF EGGSHELL CAREFULLY ON THE SIDE OF THE BATHTUB WITH ONE HAND, AND WITH THE OTHER I REACHED DOWN THE FRONT OF MY JUMPER AND T-SHIRT AND TUCKED MY EGG BACK WHERE WE FEEL MOST SAFE. I WIPED, PULLED UP MY TROUSERS, FLUSHED AND LICKED THE TIP OF A FINGER AND PICKED THE TINY SQUARE OF EGGSHELL BACK UP. I FORGOT TO WASH MY HANDS FIRST. I'LL DO IT SOON, I THOUGHT, GNAWING ON A FINGERNAIL OF THE NON-EGGSHELL-HOLDING HAND. THE THREE OF US HEADED TO MY BEDROOM WHERE I PLACED THE TINY EGGSHELL SQUARE INTO THE METAL EGG CUP. THE METAL EGG CUP WHICH HAS RECENTLY BECOME A SAFE HAVEN FOR DETACHED SHARDS. I WILL FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH THE TINY SQUARE OF EGGSHELL SOON. INSTINCTIVELY, I WANT TO ATTACH IT TO MY EGG, AN ACT WHICH WILL MAKE BOTH OF THEM STRONGER AND REDUCE THEIR LONELINESS. I WANT TO TAKE A BIT OF TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF DOING THAT FIRST THOUGH. WILL I BE CREATING SOME SORT OF FRANKENSTEIN EGG? I'VE BEEN THINKING A BIT ABOUT HOW SOMEDAY MY EGG MIGHT NEED A SHELL TRANSPLANT IF HE GETS ANY SEVERE INJURIES, BUT THIS FEELS A BIT DIFFERENT. A BIT MORE EMOTIONAL. A BIT LIKE I WOULD BE DOING IT FOR BOTH MY EGG AND THE TINY SQUARE OF EGGSHELL, AND SORT OF PLEDGING ALLEGIANCE TO TWO ENTITIES FROM TWO DIFFERENT BODIES AND COMPROMISING MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY EGG. BUT TOGETHER THEY WILL BECOME ONE ENTITY AND THAT ENTITY WILL CONTINUE TO BE MY EGG. I WILL KEEP THINKING ABOUT IT ALL ANYWAY AND WORK OUT WHAT TO DO. I WILL KEEP THINKING.

Sites of Solitary Protest

In late May 2020, in an effort to open out my ideas around egg care, and this methodology's engagement with the potential to use our bodies to assert a halt in capitalist systems, I wrote the following questions:

- How do we publicly protest when it is not safe for our bodies to form a mass?
- How do our bodies become solitary sites of ongoing activism?

In particular, these questions drew upon an exploration of protest during a time when even the most able of bodies faced risk via state-dictated exposure of an immediate health threat. Initially, this coincided with (although was not necessarily directly relating to) the UK announcement of changes in lockdown that continued to focus on massaging the economy through labour, rather than maintaining the wellbeing of the population.²⁰² Lockdown had become an environment in which transphobic and racist law enforcement, designed to limit 'otherness', was being debated and enacted, largely unnoticed. Ultimately, I had been spending time thinking about the modes of privilege which were shielded by coronavirus-based laws and wanted to communicate that, despite shared objectives to provide protection, the negotiation of coronavirus survival through an enforcement of rules by state power should not be a topic exempt from critical discussion. However, within a couple of days of writing these questions, the murder of George Floyd went viral, encouraging a global emergence of contemporary conversation around racism and oppressive structures, leading to rebellion against guidance on public gatherings, incredible scales of demonstrative protest and a new urgency to answer my questions.

As an inhabitant of, and acting as carer for, a 'vulnerable' household, I felt increasingly frustrated that I could not physically support Black Lives Matter protests and was instead existing, unsatisfied, within the overly excitable and often insincere landscape of social media. I was angry about the pageantry of art organisations who made feeble attempts to display care via the quick reposting of infographics, becoming very aware that a situation which was suffocating to so many people could be so easily swiped away by those who weren't interested.

²⁰² Johnson, B. (2020) *Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 10 May 2020*. Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, 10 May. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-10-may-2020> [Accessed 29 May 2023].

On 1st June 2020, as protests broke out in the UK, I hung my questions at Sedgley Beacon: a site historically constructed to spread messages, located in a white Conservative-dominant, yet still largely working class, semirural area. As a central point of the town and surrounded by a grassy quarry, the tower was passed frequently, and particularly so during the era of government sanctioned 'daily exercise'. Initially, I hoped that they could become some kind of prompt. Perhaps people could read my questions and think about how they would answer? Perhaps they could instigate difficult conversations between families as they walk their dog past the site? Perhaps other allies of the cause would join my statement, and together we could reappropriate the site to reach out to our immediate community?



Less than twenty-four hours after pitching my questions at Sedgley Beacon, they had been removed. Instead, climbing the steps to the site the following day, I passed a community support police officer who was newly monitoring the area. The empty fence greeted me, and I trudged back down the hill.

And that was it, the single public act of solidarity (or indeed response at all) towards the Black Lives Matter movement in Sedgley was hushed. The banner had been quietly cleared away, and, despite several days of lurking in the corners of social media where conversations about the town might be held, I found no answers. A lack of response was arguably more irritating than a direct statement of disapproval, implying simply that the questions were an object that was spoiling the beacon, and so the conversation was closed, silencing the political climate.

The condemning removal of my questions is indicative of a community which has become too interested in preserving a historical site, so much so that they cannot bear to allow it to grow with, participate in and experience the radical present. Bartlett identifies the “valuing of immanence”²⁰³ as a key component of Camusian rebellion, defining the significance of the present as a quality of joyful and progressive action. Celebration of transcendence in these historical bodies repudiates the immanency of contemporary action, instead casually justifying an unjust condition. In doing this, the potential for a narrative evolution throughout future histories is erased and instead we simply maintain monuments of colonial, patriarchal and fascist knowledge. Kern describes how access to cities can provide certain opportunities (to avoid heterosexual milestones and expectations of gender, to pursue work and non-traditional careers, to participate culturally, to locate kinship, and to live outside of normative identities) for marginalised genders which may otherwise be restricted by small communities.²⁰⁴ How then, when responsibilities or requirements of care, restrictions of class, or limited financial means create obstacles too large to surpass, do we gain entrance to the opportunities of the city? Is it possible to rewrite the atmosphere of smaller communities for those who cannot leave?

²⁰³ Bartlett, E. A. (2004) *Rebellious Feminism: Camus's Ethic of Rebellion and Feminist Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P8-10, 131-158.

²⁰⁴ Kern, L. (2021) *Feminist City*. London, UK: Verso. P48-49.

Although the culture of one's surrounding neighbourhood is likely to be oppressive, the bedroom can become a site for radical transformation and dismantling action to begin. While Hedva acknowledges: "If being present in public is what is required to be political, then whole swathes of the population can be deemed a-political – simply because they are not physically able to get their bodies into the street",²⁰⁵ Ahsan asserts that reclusiveness, a withdrawal of the self, can be radical, highlighting the bedroom as a site of resistance where one can remove themselves from the heteronormativity of the street.²⁰⁶ The bedroom is a site of shelter where care for the self can be undertaken, and queerness can be established. The bedroom is a site where protest signs can be secretly painted, and unfertilised eggs can be saved from the kitchen.

Hayward explains the presence of the transitioning body within the city as a spider, a creature that rewrites architecture by means of its physical attendance, nesting in material spun through its body. In the binding of the spider's body to its environment, it also transforms the landscape which it inhabits, blurring the boundary between the internal and external and reimagining the site where one's address transpires.²⁰⁷ When the spider builds its bedroom, it reshapes its neighbourhood. Meanwhile, Russell describes "anti-body", a methodology of physical glitch that is confrontational to a use of the body as a "coercive social and cultural architecture".²⁰⁸ Through anti-body, the meaning of the body can be challenged, and elements in need of re-definition or heightened celebration can be identified.²⁰⁹ Between Ahsan, Hayward and Russell, I envisage Gregor Samsa, an insectile (but no longer worming) body resting on top of a mattress, occupying a revolutionary bedroom. Rhodes and Westwood recognise that Gregor's transformation voids his participation within economic exchange, a redaction of a worker in a capitalist market.²¹⁰ It is difficult to imagine how one person, unable to get out of bed, could encourage a change in the reproduction of the capitalised body. While Gregor's fate is secured by the neoliberal intentions of his family, the impact his new state of being has upon their

²⁰⁵ Hedva, J. (2016) Sick Woman Theory. *Mask Magazine*, 19 January. Available at: <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory> [Accessed 30 April 2020].

²⁰⁶ Ahsan, H. (2020) *Shy Radicals*. UK: Bookworks. P37

²⁰⁷ Hayward, E. (2010) Spider City Sex. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 20(3). pp.223-251. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2010.529244> P229

²⁰⁸ Russell, L. (2020) *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. London: Verso. P91

²⁰⁹ Russell, L. (2020) *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. London: Verso. P98

²¹⁰ Rhodes, C, and Westwood, R. (2016) The Limits of Generosity: Lessons of Ethics, Economy, and Reciprocity in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 133(2). pp.235-248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2350-1> P241

product, and consequentially their income,²¹¹ such radical removal of one's configuration with productivity conjures images of the consequences of a hundred, two thousand, or three million Gregor Samsas. At what stage would the tide turn? When a virus spreads an infectious transformation from human to insect, how, and when, might the town of Sedgley be rethought for creepy-crawly beings? When the fleshy social and cultural architecture has been demolished, and rebuilt with the burnished exoskeletons of bed-bound insects, what then?

During lockdown, I repeatedly returned to Johanna Hedva's Sick Woman Theory, written in response to the Black Lives Matter protests of 2014, as a soothing resource. The central question of this text is: "How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can't get out of bed?"²¹² and initially this felt like another question that I was trying to answer, with the concept of 'bed' applying to my nan's house, and the stubborn neighbourhood that enclosed it. Instead, I feel that this experience described in this essay has prompted an evolution of this question: How do you become the dismantling piece amidst a structure which protects a capitalist system? How do you become a brick when you are surrounded by the window of a bank? How do you become a brick when you are made to be part of the bank window?

²¹¹ Rhodes, C, and Westwood, R. (2016) The Limits of Generosity: Lessons of Ethics, Economy, and Reciprocity in Kafka's The Metamorphosis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 133(2). pp.235-248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2350-1> P241

²¹² Hedva, J. (2016) Sick Woman Theory. *Mask Magazine*, 19 January. Available at: <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory> [Accessed 30 April 2020].



online
 I MET A HAPPY MAN ^{one of} several men championed ^W during an institutional ^{circle-jerk} event
 --BUT DON'T CALL ME THAT
 IT'S JUST SOMETHING ELSE I DO--
 HE SAID WE ARE FOND OF YOU
 YOU ARE ^{quiet} and listen to me talk about myself
 BUT DON'T ASK US TO LOOK
 AT ^{everyone else's} work
 WE CANNOT
^{because we have not}
^{met you in the}
^{pub with}
^{the}
^{lads}
 (I DON'T TAKE THE ADVICE
 OF MEN WHO ONLY TALK TO
 THEMSELVES)
 PAY ATTENTION TO ^{how the institution has used the national +}
^{accessible platform of}
 IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY
 ONE GENDER and seemingly for one race too
 HE SAID YOU CAN DO AS I DO
 TAKE ONE CLEAR PROCESS
 FOLLOW ITS STRICTEST
 IMPLICATIONS INTELLECTUALLY
 ESTABLISH A SYSTEM OF
 PERMUTATIONS ^{be just like us. go to the pub with the lads.}
^{go to the pub and maybe} will look
^{work}
 I SAID MY ^{IS} CONCERNED
 WITH ^{ignoring and abolishing} systems
^{he would not be able to}
^{identify anything within my work because he has only ever}
^{talked to me about his own}
 THEN YOU ARE BACK TO METAPHORS
 AND MEANINGS ^{likes the nihilistic}
^{jokes in our work, we are accessible, we}
^{make work about the streets}
^{and the nostalgic nature of Britain}
 -- AGGRAND-
 IZED HABITS WHICH SET ARTISTS
 APART FROM ORDINARY PEOPLE --
^{there is nothing wrong with the system}
^{it has done the boys club very well}
 IT'S TRUE ^{i did not dislike his work because it}
^{reminded me of my hometown although}
^{i was cross with myself for admitting}
^{this in another discussion when}
^{i should have said it would be ok}
^{for me to dislike the work. i wanted to}
^{say that my comment was really more}
^{of an institutional critique and not a}
^{personal attack on the} or the
^{art lads from the pub. it was irresponsible for the}
^{institution to programme this event at this time.}
 HE PROTESTED YOU ARE UNABLE TO
 APPRECIATE THE SYSTEM THE GRID
 THE NUMERICAL RATIONAL
 PROCEDURES -- ^{he said why can't you just be FUCKING happy for people}
 I SAW MY FAILINGS WERE WORTHY OF DISMISSAL I'D BE BURIED
 ALIVE MY WORKS LOST.....
^{cannot}
 HE SAID WE ^{BE FRIENDS} equally because you publicly recognised that
^{WE ARE NOT ARTISTS}
 EQUALLY which is interesting because i was happy to be friends even
^{though i knew the inequalities} of our practices in the eyes of others
^{i should have said we cannot be friends}
 EQUALLY ^{because you will not recognise my friends as}
 ARTISTS EQUALLY
^{but instead i said that is your decision}
^{and my door is}
^{always open}
^{he told me to close it}
^{and blocked me on all platforms}

On Carolee's Boulder, and Challenging Dominant Positioning

This essay is born from the consequences of a frustrated tweet, critical of an institutional event which championed an all-white, majority cis-male group of friends as representative of Birmingham's artists. Whilst my response was geared towards the irresponsibility of the gallery, their celebrity host and their chosen representatives during this event, the projection of my opinion aggravated the championed wormy artists, so much so that I received personal backlash from the named individuals.

Zarina Muhammad describes:

“I went to art school with white male artists who fell deeply and madly in love with the images they made; the power that they could just reproduce within the container of an image, how they could fashion and mould it into a shape, how it was a perfect encapsulation, or a stunning likeness”.²¹⁴

She defines this cycle of reproduction as being without the ability to critique, subvert, evade, recondition, or even dilute power, instead replicating an uninteresting demonstration of dominance.²¹⁵ Such worming repercussions of white male artists to my criticism were a deliberate attempt to defend their place in dominant culture, actions of aggression to ensure that a hierarchy was maintained, and that those with lower footing were kept in place. Most interestingly, my thoughts were framed as a betrayal, as if opposition to dominant culture is done purely to sabotage the success of the perfect image that such white male artists can allegedly create. Employing Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (made in 1975) as a base for this text allowed me to define my exchange, occurring in 2021, as an interaction with a cycle that has been reproducing for at least 46 years. In the case described in *Carolee's Boulder*, the cycle of reproduction was so starkly predictable that the only woman artist highlighted in the public-facing discussion was done so because, amongst her work, she had previously painted a portrait of the celebrity host who was invited to make selections. This is exemplary of a lack of criticality which did nothing to demonstrate the value of the city's practitioners, but rather invite further sensationalism of a singular demographic.

²¹⁴ Muhammad, Z. (2021) Can white people ever be radical? *The White Pube*. [blog] 4 April. Available at: <https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/canwhitepeopleberadical> [Accessed 21st September 2021].

²¹⁵ Muhammad, Z. (2021) Can white people ever be radical? *The White Pube*. [blog] 4 April. Available at: <https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/canwhitepeopleberadical> [Accessed 21st September 2021].

Muhammad's text rationalises that instability that is "required for radicality to be possible",²¹⁶ an instability which the white male artists in my story either refuse to admit, or claim as their own when criticised, unaware that their dominant positioning actually causes instability for others. Olufemi describes an exchange within the art world as indicative of the market, in turn provoking an increase in practitioners to gravitate towards further production of the thing that is perceived to be successfully circulating.²¹⁷ With this in mind, the occurrences of this event added a further instability to the diverse artist community of Birmingham, publicly communicating that, despite wider discourse prompting promises to do better in institutional practices of cultural representation, success and recognition in the art world is still most likely to be achieved upon private membership of the boys' club. While the integration of practitioners and spaces within the city provides substantial opportunity to engage in artwork, the opinions of those who (qualified or not) can elevate art careers can only be gained over a round of pints with the lads in the pub. This may not necessarily have been a direct attack upon protected characteristics, but it was an occasion of aggressive ignorance towards community and an insincerity towards the professional livelihood of those who fall outside of dominant culture.

Sara Ahmed describes complaint as a queer method and purposely non-reproductive labour:

"A complaint is a refusal of [an] instruction, a refusal to pass on the same thing. If you complain because a culture is being reproduced, you complain in order to stop that culture from being reproduced. A complaint can come out of a sense that the culture will be reproduced *unless* you do what you can to try and stop it."²¹⁸

She further specifies that 'culture' equates to 'practices' of behaviour, doing and saying, but most prominently what types of doing and saying are allowed. This particular part of Ahmed's writings on complaint runs parallel to Muhammad's description of radicality and the reproducing culture where it becomes absent. By Ahmed's explanation, a complaint is radical

²¹⁶ Muhammad, Z. (2021) Can white people ever be radical? *The White Pube*. [blog] 4 April. Available at: <https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/canwhitepeopleberadical> [Accessed 21st September 2021].

²¹⁷ Olufemi, L. (2021) *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*. UK: Hajar Press. P114

²¹⁸ Ahmed, S. (2019) Why complain? *Feministkilljoys*. [blog] 22 July. Available at: <https://feministkilljoys.com/2019/07/22/why-complain/> [Accessed 28 January 2021].

(by Muhammad's terms) in its ability to block the reproduction of dominant culture by refusing to participate in its breeding programme.

It is important to take time here to reflect that I am complimentary to dominant cultures, as a white, English-speaking person who works in varying capacities alongside the academy. For this reason, my position, while determinedly opposing, is somewhat distracted by the positions that I inhabit on an extensive grid of privileges. Therefore, rather than radicality, perhaps it is best to speak of my actions in terms of solidarity and allyship. By expressing solidarity through complaint, an active body within dominant culture can align themselves against the further reproduction of the hierarchy, forming resistance by fostering instability within the system that they inhabit, consequently protecting and caring for marginal, radical beings.

Lamble admits that for effective forms of care and safety, alternative means for tackling and preventing harm need to be built. She further acknowledges that abolition is a collective way of life, requiring "an ongoing process and practice" rather than a "singular or revolutionary 'event'".²¹⁹ This is something which should begin in education; Precarious Workers Brigade describe the seeking of networking opportunities as "neoliberal logic", while offering solidarity as an alternative to employability which encourages opportunity to address and deconstruct the narrative of vocational competition.²²⁰ Alongside this proposal, I feel that I should recognise solidarity as an expression which extends beyond an immediate line of vision. It is not enough to express one's circle jerk as a performance of solidarity, to believe that solidarity and mutual masturbation is the same thing. For solidarity to be enacted, it is vital that the circuit of the circle jerk be disconnected and reshaped to become a support mechanism for those outside of it.

When Cheap Cheap, an artist-led space in Birmingham, invited me to share *Carolee's Boulder* as an A0 poster outside the building entrance, I dithered between wanting to publicly distribute documentation of the hostile exchange which followed my tweet, and a concern that this distribution might create further conflict and harassment. Pearce writes of a juxtaposition of compulsions, feeling both obliged to speak out and obliged to carefully self-moderate, with

²¹⁹ Lamble, S. (2021) Practicing Everyday Abolition. In: Duff, K, ed. *Abolishing the Police*. London: Dog Section Press. P148.

²²⁰ Precarious Workers Brigade (2017) *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability & Reclaiming Education*. London: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press. P16-17

cautious preparation regarding when to speak or remain silent.²²¹ These actions could be interpreted as negotiation and navigation of power dynamics, but also as a recognition that there are moments in which choosing not to intervene becomes a political act of care for the self. However, absolute silence was also ill-fitting. Audre Lorde writes of attempts to live with anger that had arisen from actions and presumptions of racism and bigotry in silence, discovering that nothing was to be learnt from a fear of its expression.²²² While Ahmed describes shutting a door as a way of obstructing the institution,²²³ from my position there was a recognition that to be quiet was to do as the boys' club wanted; To uphold their values by retaining any critique away from the public eye. 'Closing a door' in return to the metaphorical door that was shut²²⁴ when the representative of dominant culture chose to block my engagement meant that my expression of solidarity would also be closed. This would instead imply my own indifference at the end of a static event, rather than the ongoing practice of tackling harm which Lamble described. In the occurrences of Carolee's Boulder, I expressed that my door was always open to my aggressor, suggesting that I would be continually willing to talk about the stance that I had taken and why. However, when operating from a position within, it is even more significant and confrontational to dominant culture to extend an open door policy in allied resistance; To directly pronounce a challenge to hierarchical normativity, while providing visible space to welcome and protect those who struggle in its undercurrent. When operating from a position of privilege within a culture of closed doors, an open door is a purposeful withdrawal of the labour used to maintain that culture. An open door removes vertical separation in favour of horizontal and accessible forms of relationship.

This culminated in a conversation with my supervision team where we discussed the simultaneous need to speak about aggressive responses to calls for diversity, and an uncertainty of how care for the self might be engaged whilst stepping into hostile situations. Choosing to bury Carolee's Boulder solely within the confines of this thesis would simply perpetuate the reproductive cycle of the boys' club by restricting the anecdote to those who directly seek it, easily invisible to a circle jerk which will not turn to look outside of their ring of company.

²²¹ Pearce, R. (2020) A Methodology for the Marginalised: Surviving Oppression and Traumatic Fieldwork in the Neoliberal Academy. *Sociology*, 54(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038520904918> P10-11

²²² Lorde, A (2017) Poetry is not A Luxury. In: *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*. UK: Silver Press. P107

²²³ Ahmed (2021) *Complaint!* Durham and London: Duke University Press. P302

²²⁴ Ahmed (2021) *Complaint!* Durham and London: Duke University Press. P302

Meanwhile, expressing the exchange publicly would, however quietly, articulate that personal hostility was not acceptable.

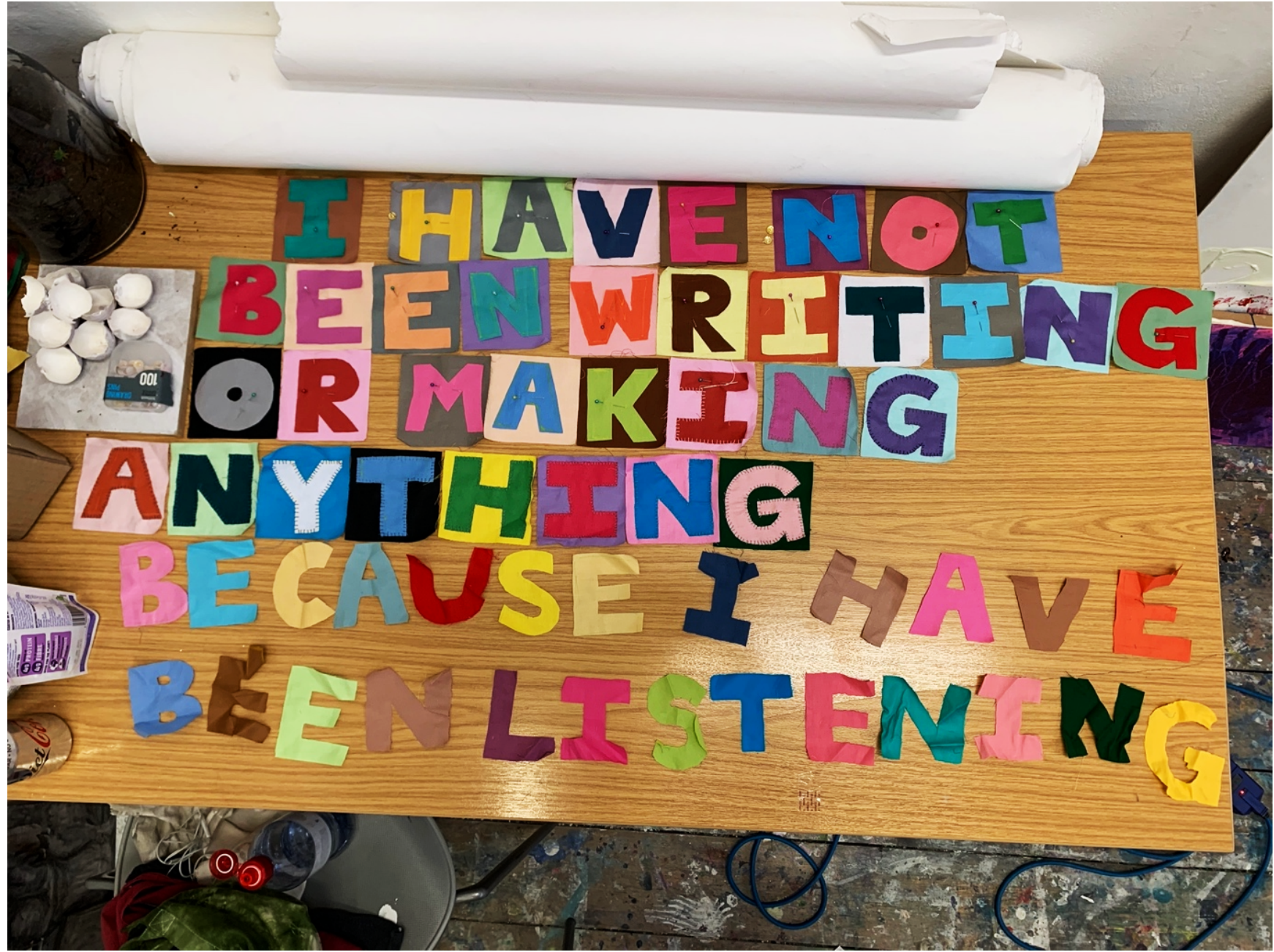
While absolute silence would be ill-fitting, Katz recognises that careful placement of silence – a silence that is chosen rather than enforced - can be an effective mechanism for protest.²²⁵ Eventually, in the final form of Carolee's Boulder, I decided to omit certain words which made the male artist directly identifiable. Distributing this personal exchange in a public forum would provide a situation where the male artist in question would have to admit to a tantrum in order to argue the response. The redaction of details on Carolee's Boulder is an empowering exercise, exploring the opportunity to decide for oneself how much is spoken, while simultaneously reverting the question of how quiet one should be to the male artist in his decision to confess his involvement. Katz describes this deflection as an instigation of a form of queering by displacing the otherness of the self and relocating it within the system which would otherwise structure identity.²²⁶

Presumably in response to the frustrations of not knowing when to speak, not long after Carolee's Boulder was publicly displayed, it went missing, torn down from the board outside of the gallery door. Reminiscent of my lost questions at Sedgley Beacon, the removal of Carolee's Boulder indicated a second attempt to assert silence upon a situation.

²²⁵ Katz, J. (1999) Performative Silence and the Politics of Passivity. In: Rogers, H. and Burrows, D., eds. *Making a Scene: Performing Culture into Politics*. Birmingham: ARTicle Press. P102

²²⁶ Katz, J. (1999) Performative Silence and the Politics of Passivity. In: Rogers, H. and Burrows, D., eds. *Making a Scene: Performing Culture into Politics*. Birmingham: ARTicle Press. P103





I HAVE NOT
BEEN WRITING
OR MAKING
ANYTHING
BECAUSE I HAVE
BEEN LISTENING

CHAPTER FOUR: FERTILE WORKERS

Working Accordingly (Confessions)

At the end of Summer 2022, the Egg Carrying Researcher spent a month in the Atacama Desert, a pursuit of the vast infertile space in which Camus locates the absurd. In the desert, they write in a hammock whenever possible. Others work at tables dotted around the oasis's medicinal garden, while the Egg Carrying Researcher dangles in a hammock with a pen and paper, a laptop, a nub of Milliput, a copy of Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* extensively renewed from the university library, an episode of *Twin Peaks* on an iPhone. Being in the desert has helped them to recognise where the virus has damaged their body. The altitude shrinks and squeezes their lungs until the Egg Carrying Researcher can only rasp and cry with panic. Does Sisyphus get altitude sickness at the top of his slope? Did the people of Camus's Oran feel exhausted, and struggle with brain fog, months after their city reopened?

It seemed, as I waded through the deepening swamps of writing and pooling final processes needed to finish this PhD, that the expectations of production were more difficult than ever. These conditions felt like a problem that I was unable to solve: The fertility required to 'grow' a thesis traditionally was not one which the Egg Carrying Researcher was able to provide, an earth mottled with the salts of long covid brain fog, neurodiversity and bleeding ovaries that would continuously reject the roots of thesis production, as idealised by heteronormative depictions of genius. When Hedva writes "The only thing the patriarchy is selling that I've wanted to buy is genius",²²⁷ they acknowledge that beings existing outside of a hetero-academic pipeline still feel the need to break into it. Writing of the requirement of embodiment for storytelling, Le Guin describes that essays are made through "headwork", and "don't have bodies" in the same way that stories do²²⁸ and perhaps this was where my alleged problem arose; that the body of the Egg Making Researcher is where knowledge is held, and not the head at all. I position this methodology in opposition to trampling forms of knowledge 'production' which attempt to acquire knowledge in a traditional format, rather than admitting

²²⁷ Hedva, J. (2020) *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain*. USA: SMing SMing Books and Wolfman Books. P3

²²⁸ Le Guin, U. K. (2023) *Old Body Not Writing*. In: Mayer, S. and Shin, S., eds. *Space Crone*. London: Silver Press. P164.

how, where and with whom knowledge sits. Egg care is a way of sitting alongside and learning from, rather than colonising and possessing.

When experiencing boredom (defined as a “radically isolating encounter with nothingness”²²⁹), Goodstein writes that one is prompted to question meaning via significance of action. The significance of egg care has been amplified by the ‘boredom’ of the restrictive circumstances of Covid-19. A paramount, and perhaps the most enjoyable, part of lockdown was engaging with art practice and research in ways that could be considered performative and/or private and/or comfortable and/or unseen and/or all of the above. Attendance became nomadic and research was created in ways that would have previously been seen as disruptive. Is it really research without an expensive 5am train to London to feel too-tired-to-concentrate at an event? Is it *really* research without a lukewarm £8 pasty outside Euston station to awkwardly kill time? Academia holds a mysticism to expensive and tiring forms of research which traditionally value stressful ideas like weary travel to distant conferences and networking above the immanence of contextualising research amidst the researcher’s own experiences, capabilities, and limitations. The body is treated as a limitless vessel for the brain, rather than a site where knowledge sits. It has taken time and a battle of imposter syndrome to recognise that traditional doctoral research experiences are not *my* research experiences. Having entered the period of study in late 2019 as an outwardly abled bodied being in a pre-pandemic world, I will leave it with significant and unexpected caring experience for an elderly person, negotiating new physical restrictions, and learning to articulate sensory and processing needs; A freshly laid whole egg, cracked, and transformed into a rebuilt one. When speaking to the university support services about these renegotiations, it was recommended that I ‘work accordingly’, doing what was possible when it felt possible, rather than causing further damage by forcing a traditional routine of work. Working accordingly in many ways describes how this project was constructed. In the desert, the hammock provided a place for the body to work through rest and care, suspending physical restraints which come from ‘the right way of working’ and allowing engagement to become accessible. Throughout the pandemic, the bath became a similar site of knowledge production: a site where polycystic ovaries could bleed without interruption or public shame.

²²⁹ Goodstein, E. (2005) Experience Without Qualities. In: McDonough, T, ed. *Boredom*. London: White Chapel Gallery. P26.

And yet, the methodology of egg care is, and was deliberately chosen to be, a full-time activity in the most definitive sense. An antagonism of domesticised and feminised caring responsibilities, I have been an Egg Carrying Researcher 24/7. This activity has accompanied me throughout evenings, weekends, sickness, and holidays. To describe this terminal, laborious obedience to my egg, I return to Federici's description of training for self-sacrificial subservience.²³⁰ Much like putting boulder to slope, egg care is a practice which took time to form in technique but, once initial experiential knowledge and due diligence has been built, it is a practice that plateaus into part of daily routine. With this acknowledgement comes an awareness that whilst challenges (in the form of egg breakages and bids for escape) are sporadic, the tactility of the relationship between egg and carrier is perpetual in its employment of socially refined physical and emotional services.²³¹ This means that, material logistics aside, the care for my Egg inhabits a structure of behaviour which has been socially embedded into the way I live via patriarchal expectations of an egg making being. Perhaps this could be better worded: I have been in training to be an Egg Carrying Researcher since I was assigned female at birth, and that is why it does not feel abnormal to embrace an around-the-clock form of practice. Although the construction of a submission for PhD can be worked accordingly, this methodology has been purposely all-encompassing. One may work accordingly, but equally such work is inescapable; Even when seemingly quiet, the labour of this PhD has been conducted through a constant need to be attentive, to carry and to care.

Although I write that I have been training to carry my egg throughout my life, it is critical to the contributions of this study that I am not using this training to fulfil the intention of the society that has acted as instructor. Unfertilised egg care applies nurture (that was 'meant to be' given to a newly growing being) in a way that is purposefully fruitless. By inhabiting this action as a form of research, I theorise that to use one's body to behave in a way which deviates from involvement in heteronormative reproductivity is to reject a recognition of purpose and live absurdly. Our perceived purpose is measured by the patriarchal language of capitalism, and, in this, the tension of the unfertilised egg gains the heaviness of a Cis-yphean boulder.

²³⁰ Federici, S. (2012) *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland, California: PM Press. P17

²³¹ Federici, S. (2012) *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland, California: PM Press. P17



Guardian of the Eggs: A Polycystic Ovarian Story

In January 2022, the Egg Carrying Researcher had an ultrasound examination which determined that they contained polycystic ovaries. During the scan, the Egg Carrying Researcher asked the nurse if they could access a copy of the images which were being recorded.

“No”, she said, bluntly.

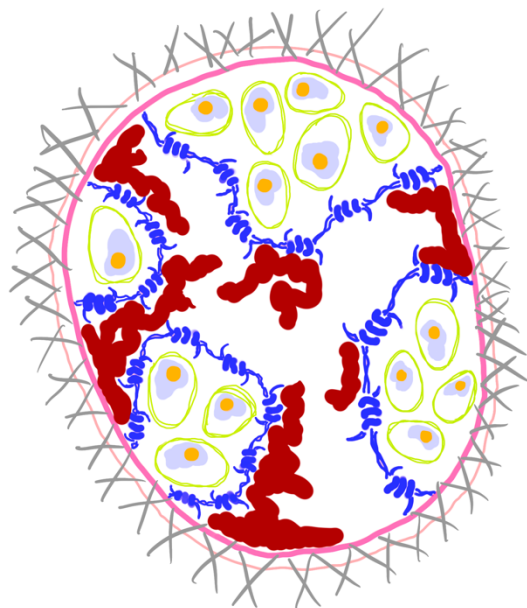
“Oh, okay”, the Egg Carrying Researcher answered. “It’s just that I am doing a PhD in art, and I thought that they would be quite interesting to make artwork with -”.

“Oh no!” The nurse interrupted, aghast. “No no no, that wouldn’t be okay. Oh no. There’d be lots of issues about confidentiality if you did something like that.”

“Oh... okay, that’s interesting”, the Egg Carrying Researcher said, embarrassed. “No bother!”

But inside, they were bothered. Whose confidentiality was being protected? The Egg Carrying Researcher had been quite intrigued with the idea of seeing their own collection of eggs inside their own body (a place that had not been seen by anyone before) and felt disturbed that area was considered too confidential for subsequent viewers to share, even with its owner. This was a procedure in which regularly, in the case of pregnancy, images were printed and given to the patient in a celebratory little card to display at home and share on social media, but this access was immediately restricted when there was no evidence of reproduction.

At home, the Egg Carrying Researcher read about the polycystic ovary’s reluctance to release eggs,²³² imagining their body as one which is biologically positioned to carry eggs rather than to lay them. They imagined barbed wire and spiked



²³² NHS. (2022) *Polycystic Ovary Syndrome*. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/polycystic-ovary-syndrome-pcos/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

fences; Reinforcements that their body had built around the eggs to save them from worm invasion.

In January 2023, the Egg Carrying Researcher attended a hospital appointment to discuss their polycystic ovaries. This interaction was dysphoric, humiliating, and traumatic, illustrative of a healthcare system which is centred around reproductive accomplishment rather than care for the autonomous individual. In this particular experience, the Egg Carrying Researcher was not informed about the details of their diagnosis, or the options for alleviation of the risks associated with PCOS, but instead repeatedly told that they “needed” ‘feminising’ reproductive hormones, despite the Egg Carrying Researcher’s reports of severe effects upon their physical and mental quality of life during previous usage. The doctor was a worm-maker, tunnelling and trespassing, seemingly equipped with a knowledge of biological mechanics, but ignorant to individual preservation. His actions were dismissive of the Egg Carrying Researcher’s firm explanation that they did not want to reproduce, and their tearful request that hormonal treatment could be avoided, not bothering to hide the roll of his eyes, and using the urgency with which the Egg Carrying Researcher required fertility as a threatening reason to restrict access to any other treatment.

Of diagnosis, Sherronda J Brown describes: “I would soon come to understand that PCOS treatments were often simply gender-affirming care for cis women”, acknowledging a distinct failure within PCOS resources to accommodate expansive gender identities.²³³ Within Sherronda’s article, Grace B Freedom acknowledges how the attributes of PCOS can be individually euphoric and disruptive to supposed biological imperatives, stating “my beard and infertility are expressions of my joy in not conforming, and thus being liberated from the gendered expectations of legibility”.

Behind a curtain, out of sight of the doctor, nurse quietly reminded the egg carrying researcher that they were able to make their own decisions about their healthcare, and that the egg carrying researcher did not need to do what they were told. Solidarity, and the encouragement to stand up for themselves, felt particularly significant amidst a period of nursing strikes. Like ‘witches’ of the past were demonised for their knowledge of women’s healthcare so that the capitalist

²³³ Brown, S. J. (2022) How PCOS can create gender euphoria for trans and nonbinary people. *Prism*, 26 October. Available at: <https://prismreports.org/2022/10/26/pcos-gender-euphoria-trans-people/> [Accessed 13 January 2023].

state might gain control,²³⁴ the hierarchy in the doctor's office exemplified the colonisation of egg carrying experiences by worm makers who wished to imprint their own authority.

The historically vilifying meaning of gossip as an “idle, backbiting talk”,²³⁵ destructive in its ability to sow discord, was a deliberate action to extinguish networks of female conversation and maintain a dependency upon the patriarchal hierarchy. This moment, behind a curtain as the Egg Carrying Researcher reluctantly undressed for an internal examination, exemplified the greatest qualities of Federici's history of gossip, as it is defined and as it was intended; An utterance that slips beneath the watchful eyes of the power structure, but with the ability to unsettle an order and dismantle dominant authority.

²³⁴ Federici, S. (2014) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Second, revised edition. New York: Autonomedia. P170

²³⁵ Federici, S. (2019) *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women*. Oakland, CA: PM Press. P35

Working Parts: Is the Absurd Heroine a Woman?

While I initially established a discrepancy between Camus's definitions of absurd lives and critical definitions of cis men as gaining, colonising, possessing existences, in this chapter I locate a second discrepancy, or perhaps a divisional mechanism between the definitions of non-male realities.

I start by saying that womanhood is, and should be, a state that is achievable by all people, no matter their biological features or at birth assignment. Despite this, we face a critical point of debate around the definitions of women – who qualifies to be a woman and who is outcast from this identity.

Haraway reiterates Long Chu's concept of the retracting female self, describing:

“... a non-subject, a non-being. Another's desire, not the self's labour, is the origin of “woman”. She therefore develops a theory of consciousness that enforces what can count as women's experience – anything that names sexual relation, indeed sex itself as far as ‘women’ can be concerned. Feminist practice is the construction of this form of consciousness; that is, the self who is not”.²³⁶

Although the states of womanhood and transness both require a displacement of the self to make space for the invasive other, we could argue that non-binary and trans existences are at odds with the origin of womanhood which Haraway designates in this extract. Whilst Haraway distinctly notes that ‘woman’ is created through desire and not self-labour, transness inverts this formula. It is not positionality drawn by desire which yields the lives lived at odds with cis binary gender, but rather the distinct work of the individual to visibly make space for their own identity. This is a tiresome self-labour in response to a dysphoric heart ache (as confessed by Faye and Long Chu²³⁷) that subsequently navigates a perpetual dismissal from others at the hands of heteronormative reproduction values. We know that this is a frustrating and often failing labour simply through the frequency of aggressive misgendering in response to polite requests, violent attempts at conversion and prejudicial depictions of morality, and the

²³⁶ Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P59

²³⁷ Faye, S. (2022) *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*. UK: Penguin Books. P66

overwhelming suicidality which haunts the trans community.²³⁸ Here, I will visit the beginning of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, specifically Camus's declaration that "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide".²³⁹ Suicide is a key focus of the way that Camus communicates a reaction to the disconnect between the structures of life, meaning, and the absurd within the *Myth of Sisyphus*, and perhaps this is where we can find distinct quantitative data of the lives which most directly experience it. dickey, Budge and Kazak situate suicidal ideation of trans people between Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of "thwarted belongingness", or a feeling of social disconnection,²⁴⁰ and Meyer's Minority Stress Theory, which builds upon the psychological distress of experiencing marginalisation.²⁴¹ When translated to the language of the absurd, we could describe 'thwarted belongingness' as a displacement of how a being might sit within perceived meaning, while 'minority stress' occurs in reaction to the systemic buttressing of that meaning upon the being who is not convinced by it. The combination of these theories helps to explain that, while femaleness is dependent on becoming what someone else wants,²⁴² the transitioning being does not define themselves by the desire of another, but rather their inability to situate themselves within the expectation of heteronormative society that is dealt by categorisation of their biological body.

Haraway describes herself as a "political chicken",²⁴³ entrenched in the systemic construction of binary gender. The chicken is caged by a rigid structure of functional and biologically-essentialist femininity; A creature frequently incarcerated to perform the production of eggs in any form, whether unfertilised, as a source of food for their masters, or fertilised to create more egg labourers. As soon as the chicken is no longer of productive value, her feathers are plucked, and she is eaten: a final stripping of her materials for the financial and physical gain of her superiors. The chicken's perspective of gender is based on her socio-economic position and the

²³⁸ Austin, A., Craig, S. L., D'Souza, S., & McInroy, L. B. (2022). Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(5-6), pp2696–2718. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520915554>

²³⁹ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P1

²⁴⁰ dickey, I. M., Budge, S. L. and Kazak, A. E. (2020) Suicide and the Transgender Experience: A Public Health Crisis. *The American Psychologist*, 75(3), pp.380-390. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000619> P381

²⁴¹ dickey, I. M., Budge, S. L. and Kazak, A. E. (2020) Suicide and the Transgender Experience: A Public Health Crisis. *The American Psychologist*, 75(3), pp.380-390. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000619> P381-382

²⁴² Long Chu, A. (2019) *Females*. London/Brooklyn: Verso. P74

²⁴³ Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P128

requirements of her being which stem from it. A free-range chicken will have less experiential awareness of gendered labour than a caged hen, and a feral bird even less so, if at all. When deliberating the definition of gender, Haraway recognises a social breeding programme of ‘chickens’ in which women are produced as ideological reproductive materials; Beings who supply desire, domestic labours, and procreation, beings who are “structured for mothering in patriarchy”.²⁴⁴

However, while social training for motherhood is allocated based on biological features, our physical characteristics may not be accommodating to the requirements of reproduction. Johanna Hedva describes “it’s not that I was a man giving birth, it’s that I wasn’t a woman, maybe this is why I failed at birth”;²⁴⁵ An assertion based on ownership of a “diseased” uterus which bleeds “black dust”,²⁴⁶ ultimately causing miscarriage. Specifically, this statement is made based on the existence of the disease, creating a malfunction which eradicates Hedva’s womanhood. This recognition of malfunctioning materials of womanhood, or faulty parts, acknowledges that a ‘woman’ is a working version of this socially built construction. My copy of Hedva’s *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain* is stained, accidentally, unavoidably, with my blood, anarchic old eggs which were overflowing during the few days after the book arrived in the post. It seems fitting that *Minerva*, a collective work exploring patriarchal genius and lost motherhood, is not a clean text; An unruly fluid spreads, biologically rebellious towards the assignment to produce new generations, inhabiting the material of the book, but unable to be confined to singular rectangles in the grid-like structure of pages.

Shon Faye writes that transgender healthcare has historically been disinterested in emancipation and instead continues to focus on “tying up the loose ends of binary gender in a society where some people’s lives seemed to threaten such a notion”,²⁴⁷ equating this with women’s reproductive healthcare as a system which maintains successful procreation and feminising cultures. Footnoting this, Faye also acknowledges that reproductive health is not solely a women’s issue because people of all genders can become pregnant, however

²⁴⁴ Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P141-142

²⁴⁵ Hedva, J. (2020) *Minerva the Miscarriage of The Brain*. USA: Sming Sming Books and Wolfman Books. P85

²⁴⁶ Hedva, J. (2020) *Minerva the Miscarriage of The Brain*. USA: Sming Sming Books and Wolfman Books. P23

²⁴⁷ Faye, S. (2022) *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*. UK: Penguin Books. P71

recognises that the language and practices of reproductive healthcare have been traditionally and regressively understood through a patriarchal image of women's role in society. This translates to an antagonistic acknowledgement that, while people of all genders will partake in reproductive healthcare, there is a distinct alignment of the features of cis women and the patriarchal delegations of reproduction, who can do it and how it is done. Here, again, there is opportunity to recognise the word 'women' in referral specifically to agents who are societally designated to carry out reproduction, with 'women's healthcare' acting as a service check to ensure continuity of heteronormative replication.

Hedva also takes time to deliberately address their audience: "the womb (note that I do not call it mine)".²⁴⁸ This is a direct emphasis of the dysphoria which their physicality causes. This womb is a presence in the writer's body which causes grief, it is not an identifiable feature for the vessel in which it exists. The title of Hedva's poem is "You've Got To Carry Your Own Body Son, Because A Person Can Only Carry One Body At A Time".²⁴⁹ This is a title which is very directly about 'personhood' in opposition to 'womanhood' (and 'womanhood' as opposed to 'motherhood', which is a state achievable by all genders). Here, Hedva's implication is that, were they a functioning 'woman', their son would have been carried to term; The 'woman' Sisyphus would successfully carry the boulder uphill and position it at the very top, while the 'person' that is measured by 'womanhood' would slip and watch it roll.

²⁴⁸ Hedva, J. (2020) *Minerva the Miscarriage of The Brain*. USA: Sming Sming Books and Wolfman Books. P23

²⁴⁹ Hedva, J. (2020) *Minerva the Miscarriage of The Brain*. USA: Sming Sming Books and Wolfman Books. P81



When further attempting to define womanhood, Haraway states that there is no binding state of being female,²⁵⁰ signifying that identity is not based on a biological stock take. However, despite the diverse, fraying tapestry of experiences which equate to womanhood, there is a determination within transphobic and homophobic culture to define a distinct and impermeable boundary, so much so that they seem to regulate personship (as made available through rights) via exclusionary membership of the gender binary. Trans Exclusionary ‘Radical’ Feminists (TERFs)²⁵¹ gatekeep the term ‘woman’ as an archaic category rather than a conscious identity, significantly defining it as a reproductive machine of biological essentialism. Such measurement of working parts is a harmful form of patriarchal quality control which extends beyond the discourse of trans liberation; Not only ‘dysfunctional’ biology but also queer or non-cis sexual activity and parenthood, and cultural and racial differences could conceivably be termed ‘faulty’ by bigoted fascist culture and population control systems. We now face a distinct problem where TERFs are so doggedly protective of a biologically sacred womanhood that Women, operating under an increasingly trademarked regime, are becoming systemic meaning keepers and bestowers themselves.

In response to the violence now undertaken to ‘protect’ womanhood, my question is now this: has “woman” become an identity so exclusionary in its over-definition and worrying membership policies that we must seek new definitions for those of us who fail to meet its criteria?

I would like to return to Andrea Long Chu’s definition of ‘female’²⁵² as referential to those who experience lack, the victims of subjugating patriarchal control. If trans exclusionary cis women are now able to instil transphobic ideologies to “police deviation from official women’s experience”,²⁵³ then we could feasibly ask if cis women are becoming male through their actions. Radicalesbians identify that control measures are achieved via a “male grid of role

²⁵⁰ Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P155

²⁵¹ **While this phrase is a recognisable way of distinguishing transphobic feminists, I put the word ‘radical’ in quotation marks because I do not believe that this is a radical form of feminism based on its reproduction of patriarchal culture through a distribution of marginalising and oppressive views.**

²⁵² “any psychic operation in which the self is sacrificed to make room for the desires of another”, Long Chu, A. (2019) *Females*. London/Brooklyn: Verso Books. P11

²⁵³ Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books Ltd. P156

definitions” which adheres to heterosexual conditioning to assess the non-male as a sex object and ensuring that the essence of womanhood is “to get fucked by men”.²⁵⁴ In response to categorising, othering practices of gender essentialism, Butler writes that “recourse to an original or genuine femininity is a nostalgic and parochial ideal” which is culturally conservative and segregating.²⁵⁵ Meanwhile Straus states that the conclusion of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, in which Grete becomes “a little patriarch” in her leadership against her brother’s new form, warns that no progress is made “when women become as men are”,²⁵⁶ a phrase indicating an upholding of heteronormativity through acts of violence and marginalisation. These texts all equate to recognition that womanhood is a term of obedience to patriarchal structure. If this is the case, a halt in reproductivity can only occur where a being ceases to reproduce the heteronormative systems of cis gender from either side of the binary, a deviation from the grid. Camus defines his subject: “What, in fact, is the absurd man? He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal, [...] his revolt devoid of future”.²⁵⁷ This absence of contribution towards the future could be described as a withdrawal of reproductivity, not necessarily through the creation of biological children, but rather as a distinguished halt in the reproduction of the structure of cis gender binary that is entered into at birth and subsequently obeyed.

Ahmed writes that the architecture of the gender binary is founded upon the assumption that the duality of biological sex is a fixed principle,²⁵⁸ however, whilst binary biological sex is a dominant concept, it is not accurate. Sean Saifa Wall defines ‘intersex’ as “a set of sex characteristics, like hormonal, chromosomal, gonadal, genital, that are atypical for male and female”²⁵⁹ and states how, much like discussions staking claim for a wider understanding of gender identity beyond that which is assigned at birth, the conversation around biological sex

²⁵⁴ Radicalesbians. (2020) *The Woman Identified Woman*. In: Fahs, B., ed. *Burn it Down! Feminist Manifestos For The Revolution*. London: Verso. P43

²⁵⁵ Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd edn. New York and London: Routledge. P46-47

²⁵⁶ Straus, N. P. (1989) Transforming Franz Kafka’s ‘Metamorphosis’. *Signs*, 14(3). pp. 651-667. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174406> [Accessed 29 May 2023]. P666.

²⁵⁷ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P64

²⁵⁸ Ahmed, S. (2019) *What's the Use?* US: Duke University Press. P202-203

²⁵⁹ /Queer. (2021) *The Intersex Rights Movement*. [podcast] Available at: https://open.spotify.com/episode/5v90ExBY5qIYDDmFPzXsEk?si=ubUcYyUETB2wHDyj9C_1RA Transcript available at: <https://slashqueer.com/the-intersex-rights-movement-transcript> [Accessed 13 January 2023].

should be expanded beyond a binary of male and female. In 1993, Fausto-Sterling proposed that the binary system of sex should be replaced with a five-sex system, where three new sexes are created from factions of intersexuality (the language of which is built upon the word ‘hermaphrodite’ – “herms”, who contain both egg and sperm producing mechanisms, “merms”, who outwardly have a vulva but contain testes, and “ferms”, who outwardly have a penis but contain ovaries).²⁶⁰ By Fausto-Sterling’s admission, the aggression of responses, incredulous at the absurdity of a proposal that there was more than the biological binary which could intertwine to reproduce, combined with the delighted reactions of others, indicated that there was brewing potential for a revolt towards biological sex.²⁶¹ Following the proposal of the five-sex system, in 2000, Fausto-Sterling reflected: “I imagine a future in which our knowledge of the body has led to resistance against medical surveillance, in which medical science has been placed at the service of gender variability, and genders have multiplied beyond currently fathomable limits”,²⁶² where major intersex medical concerns are responsive to life threatening conditions rather than physical synchronisation to the binary.²⁶³ And indeed, while there is still some progress to make, twenty two years later, voices like Amanda Saenz contribute to a future which embraces solidarity, stating that intersex is an “open ended and expansive” term which “hopes to define” wider experiences including differences in hormonal production and reception.²⁶⁴ Building on this, Wall goes on to propose that physical attributes like PCOS or ovarian failure could also be described as intersex variations.²⁶⁵ Most importantly, Saenz expresses that someone with such variations could use intersex as a term to identify themselves, but equally they do not have to.²⁶⁶ This declaration illustrates a community which is signified by biological sexual attributes who, unafraid of the alteration of their protected characteristics, are radically adaptable in their terminology and ability to recognise and welcome their

²⁶⁰ Fausto-Sterling, A. (1993) The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough. *The Sciences*, 33(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2326-1951.1993.tb03081.x>

²⁶¹ Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000) *Sexing the Body*. USA: Basic Books. P78-79

²⁶² Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000) *Sexing the Body*. USA: Basic Books. P101

²⁶³ Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000) *Sexing the Body*. USA: Basic Books. P101

²⁶⁴ Brown, S. J. (2022) How PCOS can create gender euphoria for trans and nonbinary people. *Prism*, 26 October. Available at: <https://prismreports.org/2022/10/26/pcos-gender-euphoria-trans-people/> [Accessed 13 January 2023].

²⁶⁵ /Queer. (2021) *The Intersex Rights Movement*. [podcast] Available at: https://open.spotify.com/episode/5v90ExBY5qLYDDmFPzXsEk?si=ubUcYyUETB2wHDyJ9C_1RA Transcript available at: <https://slashqueer.com/the-intersex-rights-movement-transcript> [Accessed 13 January 2023].

²⁶⁶ Brown, S. J. (2022) How PCOS can create gender euphoria for trans and nonbinary people. *Prism*, 26 October. Available at: <https://prismreports.org/2022/10/26/pcos-gender-euphoria-trans-people/> [Accessed 13 January 2023].

heteronormatively malfunctioning kin. Such invitation is actively dismantling to a commanding patriarchal hierarchy, a call to individuals to become 'other' to the biological binary which incites violence activates a removal of the structures of domination in both sex and gender. This is a call to stay the same, to avoid heteronormative maintenance, and to continue to be more of whatever this being is.

Preferring Not to Say

While the term 'intersex', and Fausto-Sterling's writing, are resistant to the binary, they continue to offer a form of classification to identify oneself, enabling a way to discuss their occupation of the grid. This encourages a commitment to a specific identity, a contractual pinpoint of communicated data.

When finalising this project for submission, I regularly noticed uncomfortable plotted points where identifying language such as pronouns stuck in documents, immovable and disconcerting. Hope describes this as an anxious feeling of dishonesty which defaults to an answer based in binary gender because that is how we are typically perceived.²⁶⁷ However, to challenge this, I would like to highlight the possibility of withdrawing one's answer entirely, to remove one's participation in the grid, to 'prefer not to say'.

The retraction of a statement of identity is inviting to speculation rather than assumption; It does not provide a direct answer, instead indicating that the binary is not a comfortable position in which to be situated. This is a bewildering and absurd blow to the worms patrolling the grid because 'prefer not to say' avoids confessing what mechanisms are contained in a body and how they might work. It is a refusal to reproduce the language of meaning through personal affirmation. It is a step off a square, and a tiptoe, somewhere along the gridlines between categories.

²⁶⁷ Hope, A. (2021) What's your gender? I prefer not to say. CNN Health, 2 February. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/02/health/gender-question-not-always-necessary-wellness/index.html> [Accessed 30 May 2023].

Beneath the Grid

In 2020, My Egg and I joined the audience for Tai Shani's presentation on *Feminism's Occult Imagination*, hosted by the Courtauld. Tai spoke of becoming frustrated when realising that there isn't a mystical realm of womanhood which somehow justifies historical, constitutional, and social violence towards women.²⁶⁸ This was the familiar feeling of the absurd; A hopeful search for a suitable meaning behind the oppressive structure. But I also recognised that the absurd itself is the realm where patriarchal meaning is disturbed, and thus a territory which is condemned by worm makers, because its discovery could reveal that there is no necessity to hierarchy. It just isn't an idea that we necessarily associate with mystical language. This was a moment in which the absurd became apparent as a space that people who do not make worms might find refuge from their invasion. A place buried beneath patriarchal structures that one might seek out in avoidance of becoming a vessel for further worms.

Camus prefaces *The Myth of Sisyphus* by extending a "lucid invitation to live and to create in the very midst of the desert",²⁶⁹ going on to conclude that, despite the inevitable downward tumbles, "one must imagine Sisyphus happy".²⁷⁰ By drawing together these statements, I find an encouragement that when a recognition of the absurd illuminates a lack of meaning, this space opens opportunity to explore the conditions of being devoid of allocated purpose. In the same way, we should imagine the Absurd Heroine satisfied with the failure of their unfertilised egg, and consequent disappointment of reproductive systems.

Le Guin writes of the struggle to write when one does not "have" the person whose story it is,²⁷¹ an idea which can help us to understand how the Heroine came to the absurd landscape while running, disillusioned, from a story that had been assigned to them. It began with a form, a question about gender which contained tick boxes. They had started to run, with armfuls of eggs, as they realised that they did not recognise the version of themselves within the expected

²⁶⁸ Shani, T. (2020) *Feminism's Occult Imagination*. *Gender and Sexuality Research Seminars*. The Research Forum, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 19 October [lecture notes taken by Emily Scarrott].

²⁶⁹ Camus, A. (2013) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. [Kindle edition] New Ed edn. Translated by Justin. O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. Pix

²⁷⁰ Camus, A. (2005) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 18th edn. Translated by Justin. O'Brien. London: Penguin Books. P119

²⁷¹ Le Guin, U. K. (2023) *Old Body Not Writing*. In: Mayer, S. and Shin, S., eds. *Space Crone*. London: Silver Press. P162

stories, held within the options. First leaping from one neat square on the grid to another, they realised that each four walls aligned a new expectation that they did not find comfort in. As they grew weary, an egg fell from their arms, splitting across the floor between squares. Looking at first in horror, then in confusion, the Heroine realised that the canary-coloured ooze was trickling away to somewhere unseen, somewhere between the line where one categorical square met another. At the sound of cis-temic keepers in pursuit of their escape, the Heroine decided to follow the yolk. They slipped in between the squares, first a toe, then a limb, then their whole body, dropping down into a void where no categories exist, which had been concealed by the heavy, structuring architecture that the worms had built. Above, the authorities attempted to eradicate the leaky egg, and fortify the crumbling squares to reinstate the cleanliness of the grid. Meanwhile, the Heroine did not attempt to find their way back from the absurd. Here, they found a vast expanse where classification could no longer be plotted. The desert was wide and empty; A place to survive against the grain of gender essentialism, and to 'have' a story of their own writing.

No longer running, the Heroine bent down and collected the pieces of broken eggshell which had fallen with them, into the absurd. Holding them in one hand, they smiled, reaching into a pocket to find a tube of super glue.

Somewhere above roared the cries of the cis-yphus, for the Heroine had made them despair.



CONCLUSION

The contribution to knowledge made by this project is entangled between egg and researcher, embodied by the collaborative being described using the term ‘the Egg Carrying Researcher’. For this reason, the research can be primarily demonstrated within a requested audience with the Egg Carrying Researcher, wherein the egg can be encountered through its presence, tactility, and vulnerability, alongside the relationship between human and nonhuman.

In this conclusion, I begin by reflecting upon the relationship between my egg, my encompassing art practice, and their contribution to the theoretical context of a proposed Absurd Heroine, before further recognising my methodology as a site which is unproductive to the heteronormative academic canon through the making of corporeal knowledge. While the egg is the epistemic object of the study, this corporeal knowledge is exposed through the making of sculpted terminological, anecdotal and fictional text which formulate both this thesis and the research’s accompanying artworks. I close with a description of the practical and lived knowledges of egg care, presented for future carriers of eggs.

The Absurd Heroine

I began this PhD by questioning:

How can a performative art practice be used to challenge Camus’s Absurdist narrative of the Myth of Sisyphus?

How can a refocussing of the act of care from the fertilised to the unfertilised egg demonstrate actions of an Absurd Heroine?

Throughout the project, the Absurd Heroine is primarily expressed through my performance of egg care. My becoming the Egg Carrying Researcher is exploratory of the Absurd Heroine through a material and bodily inhabitation of the relationship between Sisyphus and his boulder instilled in the Sisyphian task, undertaken here through a relationship with a biologically gendered object. In my introduction, I present this methodology as a queer acquisition of the Sisyphian task, going on to disclose the ‘rules’ of egg care and their contextualisation within chapter one. These procedures are informed by heteronormative schooling in which students care for an egg in preparation for parenthood, however I distort the purpose of such training to absurdity through longevity, intentional failure, and uptake at mothering age. I position the egg

as central to this praxis by theorising that the fertile ovum is the unit of measurement by which beings who are not cis men are classified; We are assigned at birth based upon biological attributes attaining to reproduction, and such physical characteristics are used to reinforce adherence to the gender binary. Trans women are disputed by Trans Exclusionary ‘Radical’ Feminists (TERFs) because they were not born with the facilities to carry eggs, trans men emasculated because they have experience of egg carrying, and non-binary people recategorized within binary based upon their egg or worm making capacities.

Contributing to liberatory queer and transfeminist discourse through practical and theoretical speculation, this project defines the character of the Absurd Heroine as a figure that is measured against, yet provides opposition to, heteronormative expectations of the reproduction of patriarchal values. I outline this position as absurd through disruption of prescribed meaning, drawing upon Camus’s description of absurd realisation as a recognition that existence has no purpose. Presentation of the Absurd Heroine contributes a new terminology with which to begin articulating the absurd as a site of emancipation from binary gender through a displacement of structural and systemic meaning.

Within my thesis, I explore the Absurd Heroine through existing examples of people, both real and fictional, who navigate violent systemic patriarchal enforcement. Through these examples, I define the Absurd Heroine as a being who is wilfully obstructing of their own patriarchally dictated meaning. These examples are summarised as follows:

Divine (as characterised in <i>Pink Flamingos</i>)	Title of “filthiest person alive” achieved through a lifestyle that is antagonistic of the cishet social norm.
Nigella Lawson	A “Saatchi-less place” a being actively and publicly dissociated from a major art institution.
Ana Mendieta	A victim of patriarchal domestic and institutional violence. Now a frequent subject of knowledge that is distributed outside of the confines of academic canon.
Laura Palmer (<i>Twin Peaks</i>)	Chooses death as a method of transformation away from cis womanhood which obstructs opportunity for her body to become a reproductive vessel to her father’s behaviour

Carolee Schneemann	Interior Scroll documenting a disagreement with a male artist, where she antagonises the artist's refusal to see them as equals
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There are also smaller gestural and theoretical examples made through mention and citation of: Micha Cárdenas's *Becoming Dragon*, Margaret Lanterman's presence as The Log Lady, Sarah Ahmed, Silvia Federici, Sarah Franklin's 'Wench in the Works', Travis Alabanza, Audrey Wollen, Johanna Hedva, Faith Ringgold, Zarina Muhammad and Gregor Samza. Each of these citations are illustrative of obstructions in the reproduction of dominant cultures, resisting heteronormative and binary gender, patriarchal academic and art world structures, and labour expectations.

Further Vocabulary

Within my thesis, I contribute new expressions and reorientate known language to interrogate heteronormative and structural gender:

- I toy with the idea of the 'worm' as a way of explaining behaviour which equates to cis male perpetuation of patriarchal and heteronormative values. Although drawing on the image of sperm as the heteronormative conqueror of the egg, the term does not refer to sex cells and is more so informed by the invasive and replicative nature of computer worms.
- I create distinctions between the idea of egg laying (uterus containing bodies) and egg carrying (those whose identity are equated to the burdened expectation of fertile eggs).
- 'Non-cis-male' as an umbrella term used as a way of speaking about people who, in varying degrees, do not qualify for the privileges of patriarchal dominance.
- The 'Egg Carrying Researcher' as a title which refers to the combination of myself and my egg: the absurd body which practices the Absurd Heroine into being.

The research evolved considerably with regards to how the project handled the terminology of gender and womanhood. The political battle to locate the perimeters of the word 'woman', to increase or decrease them, has been central to my positioning of the Absurd Heroine. This is due to the instigative role of cis womanhood within a contemporary dictation of meaning; One which increasingly exacerbates patriarchal division between beings who, whether by birth or

transitioning identity, are not cis men. The research began with an intention of diversifying womanhood, working towards evolving boundaries of the term ‘woman’, however, an increasing exclusivity of womanhood contributed to a proposition of radically leaving behind womanhood.

Responsive to the aggressive pronunciation of ‘woman’ based on cis reproductive biology (the idea that a woman has a womb) with no permissible deviations, I proposed that this definition is no longer desirable or appropriate, and that while it is radical to use ‘woman’ to antagonise the term’s boundaries, it is also radical to seek new terminologies to become something beyond womanhood which is immeasurable against patriarchal vocabulary. I argued that ‘woman’, when defined from a gender critical standpoint, is a term becoming a tool for fascist activity, utilised to gatekeep, oppress, and dehumanise through denied access under the guise of protection. It is with this argument I was able to determine that the Absurd Heroine, as a being inhabiting the space where meaning is disrupted, cannot align with the reinforcement of structural binary.

Art Practice

While the egg, and its relationship with the researcher, is the epistemic object of this research, and the central enactment of art practice within this project, the research is realised through interdisciplinary and action-led artworks that are responsive to personal, political, and egg-related events, enabling the documentation and processing of experiences lived by the Egg Carrying Researcher. These works have been positioned to take up space publicly at sites including Sedgley Beacon (*Crème Egg performance, Sedgley Beacon Questions*), Digbeth, Birmingham (*Carolee’s Boulder*) and Highbury Park (*Extracts from The Settlement*), in part prompted by the pandemic to reconsider how art might be unconventionally and unexpectedly encountered outside of the confines of gallery walls.

Using the phrase ‘circle jerk’ within part two of my contextual review (chapter two) and extended within *Carolee’s Boulder* (chapter three), I recognise that the artworld is site to masturbatory and capitalist forms of reproducing behaviour. I equate art practice as a significant and lucid intervention method with which to investigate the (re)production of value and meaning in relation to an object, while recognising that a disturbance of institutional and

academic systems is formed through a practice-led original contribution to knowledge that is resistant to capitalist value.

The (re)production of value, meaning, or artisanal worth, has been considered within my practice through:

- Economic value produced through excessive time or labour investment by the Egg Carrying Researcher as artist-worker. This excess displaces an absence of physical materials, or a minimal usage of materials of low quality or negligible monetary worth. This is done primarily through sculptural acts of writing, both of which can be achieved without spatial, material, or financial privileges, and egg care, which, while materially minimal, takes permanent residence in the researcher's daily life.
- Work that has been made to express solidarity or allyship, with redaction or exclusion of attachment to the artist, which has subsequently fallen casualty to public vandalism or theft (*Sedgley Beacon Questions, Carolee's Boulder*). These artworks have invited reflection on the value of solidarity and the unwanted disruption that is caused by its expression.
- Performative art involving cheap, disposable, and perishable items including eggs, novelty toy worms, and seasonal food (*Good Mom/Bad Mom, Crème Egg Performance, Egg Care*). Meaning and material value is antagonised through the transplantation of such items from their short-lived expected territories to become more permanent objects of care, tools of disruptive behaviour and utensils with which to articulate theoretical thought.
- Performances made to exist in the everyday, without formal audiences, or in isolated pandemic spaces (*Ongoing Egg Care Practices, Crème Egg Performance*).

Egg Care

Further questions posed by this research project are:

How can care be reimagined outside of biological and reproductive femininity?

How does it feel to care for an unfertilised egg for four years? How does it feel to become an Egg Carrying Researcher?

The methodology embodied in this PhD contributes to strategies of practicing desired worlds into being. When contextualising *Rule 1* of egg care in my first chapter *Methodology: A Declaration of the Relationship between the Researcher and the Egg*, I recognise artworks by Cárdenas and Thwaites which explore new ways of being through distorted enactment of expected behaviours, namely gathering lived experience for gender reassignment surgery, and taking a holiday. I describe such works as a method of ‘hacking’ one’s body to become resistant to the reproduction of normative expectation, achieved through an enactment of deviating behaviour that reimagines an alternative to prescribed ways of being. Through my becoming the Egg Carrying Researcher, I embarked upon a way of reimagining how socially learnt feminised and reproductive labour could be radically redirected toward the unproductive task.

In chapter four, I reflect on the knowledge produced by this research project as residing within the Egg Carrying Researcher’s physical body, rather than within the traditionally revered academic mind. I further recognise this body as a site of ongoing trauma manifesting from Covid-19, neurodiversity, and polycystic ovary syndrome, thus emphasising a need for non-normative and accessible forms of research. The resulting practice-based and corporeal contributions to knowledge found in this study are decentring of heteronormative academia, inserting peripheral margins as a focal point through queer and transfeminist scholarship. By writing the anecdotal in place of formal academic canon describing an othered object of study, researcher positionality becomes a reflexive, queer and fluid process rather than a static observation.

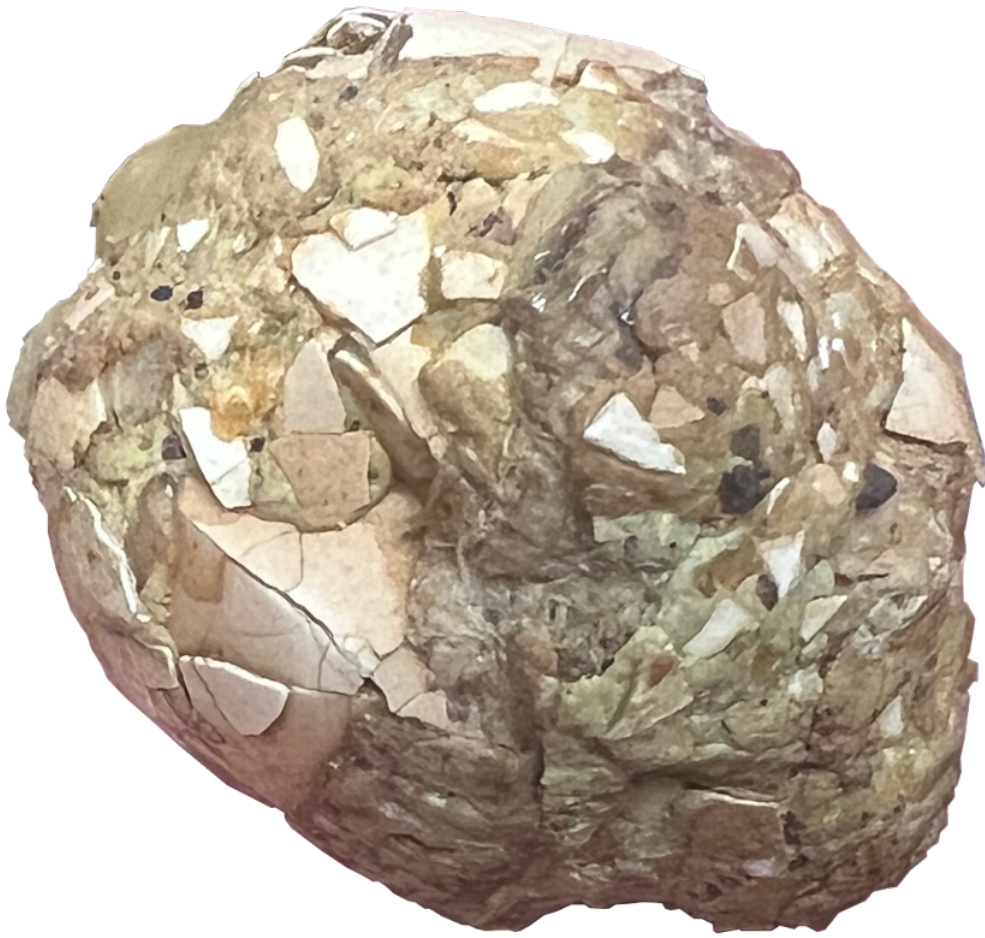
The process of egg care is documented anecdotally in both first person (‘I’) and third person (describing situations inhabited by ‘The Egg Carrying Researcher’). When introducing this title in the List of Characters, I express that switching between these ways of self-presentation provide opportunity to trouble autoethnography by simultaneously inhabiting and witnessing trauma, and preserving knowledges gained at the site of trauma, rather than ‘working through’ and reinstating functional productivity. I allow sites of trauma to become sticking points within my research, permitting these disturbances to halt the reproduction of dominant culture. This practice is antagonistic to capitalist and institutional expectations of successful end points by resisting adherence to efficient and able-bodied research.

Through the Egg Carrying Researcher, the research bears witness to a changing landscape of care through an intimate entanglement with a significant public health crisis. During the Covid-

19 pandemic, The Egg Carrying Researcher's position as carer to an elderly person provided an unforeseen, yet immediate, environment for feminised caring responsibilities to become directive of the spaces in which they are simultaneously being reimagined. Within part one of my contextual review (chapter two), I explore these conditions through an applied reading of Halberstam's *In A Queer Time And Place*, which re-examines the circumstances of egg care as an expansion of queer modes of care previously determined by the AIDs epidemic, now infiltrating of heteronormative time and regulation. In reflections made in my essay *Working Accordingly*, I acknowledge that whilst egg care has been a full-time activity occurring 24/7, the pandemic caused the traditional feminised caring duties that I was undertaking to also become all-consuming through a non-negotiable occupation of my time, space, and identity, overruling any opportunity to choose to preferentially fill time with social, professional, or intimate relationships. This created a distinct and personal experience of the tensions of productive meaning which culminate in an awareness of the absurd.

The latter question, of how an Egg Carrying Researcher might feel, is important in recognising a methodology which generates holistic, corporeal, reflexive and positional knowledge. I can confess that there is no single conclusive feeling deriving from egg care. Unfertilised egg care can be euphoric in its alignment away from a gender binary. Unfertilised egg care can equally be anxiety inducing when all of the best egg carrying bras are in the wash, or when the egg is introduced to someone who you know is a mother. Unfertilised egg care can be stomach-turning at the loss of grip and the sound of a crack. Unfertilised egg care can be triumphant in its ability to occupy, disrupt and make absurd spaces that would usually be defined by heteronormative binary expectation. The experiences of these feelings, the repetitive climb and descent of the Sisyphean slope, are detailed through experimental anecdote throughout the text, but in particular through direct account in *Valentine's Day 2020, A Tiny Piece of Egg Shell, Rule 1*, and experimental fiction evolving from lived experience in *The Vessel*.

By the end of this PhD, I will have been an Egg Carrying Researcher for almost four years. I go forth retaining this identity, continuing to nurture the unfertilised egg beyond the end of this research project.



For Future Egg Carriers

Laid out here are practical knowledges which I have gained about egg carrying, outlined as recommendations for navigation of this practice. Due to my intention to continue caring for my egg, and the ongoing evolution of knowledge which will accompany this practice, these details are not exhaustive or fixed.

When carrying:

- The best place to carry the egg daily is at the carrier's chest, tucked in between breasts. For this to be secure, the carrier will need a tight sports style bra or binder. I first began this practice in 2020 as a way of ensuring that the egg was given constant attention and a physical connection when movement was restricted down to days spent on the settee.
- To smuggle an egg into a gig or performance venue where bag checks and pat downs are in progress, it is best to move egg from chest to bag before reaching security. The egg should be wrapped in something (previously I have used rolled up gloves, a bandage and a hat) so that it can go unnoticed when the bag is checked. When a safe distance past security, the egg should be returned to the chest.
- As the egg ages, it is common for tiny pieces to chip. Sometimes, the egg carrier will have to remove those chips from their skin.
- Egg Carriers may adopt certain items to wrap the egg and help protect it that become part of daily activity for a while. My examples have included a medical face mask and a strip of bandage. These items are part of rapid response to needs.

When reconstructing:

- Modroc can soak up leaking egg yolk and return it to the egg form. Modroc is also helpful for larger reconstructions where the form needs to be reinforced.
- Wax does not stick to egg.
- Superglue is good for medium sized reconstructions.
- Milliput (an epoxy putty) is useful to reattach tiny chips. As a solid material, it is also a suitable choice to keep on hand for emergency egg first aid when travelling.

When interacting:

- Humans don't seem to be able to smell the egg, but dogs definitely can. (The question "Does it smell?" frequently arises).
- When introducing the egg socially, it is common to hear "you'd be a bad mum". This can be frustrating to hear, especially when explaining egg carrying as an exercise against reproduction, however the best response to this is: "If I was a bad mum, the egg would be in the bin". If the egg carrier is feeling antagonistic, they might also want to add, "Anyway, I am not/don't want to be a mum, that is why I have an egg".
- Many people do not want to hold the egg, even when directly offered. Maybe this is out of fear of harming him, or disgust at his exterior. However, occasionally people will hold the egg easily, as if unaware of its gravity.

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Television and Film

Twin Peaks [television series] Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 1990-1993, 2017.

'Pilot', *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 8 April 1990, ABC, 94 minutes.

'Episode 1', *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by Duwayne Dunham. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 12 April 1990, ABC, 46 minutes.

'Episode 5', *Twin Peaks*. [television programme] Directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 10 May 1990, ABC, 46 minutes.

'Episode 9', *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 6 October 1990, ABC, 47 minutes.

'Episode 9', *Twin Peaks*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 13 August 1993, Bravo, 47 minutes.

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'Episode 16', *Twin Peaks* [television programme] Directed by Tim Hunter. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 1 December 1990, ABC, 47 minutes.

'Part 7', *Twin Peaks: The Return*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 18 June 2017, Showtime, 55 minutes.

'Part 16', *Twin Peaks: The Return*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 27 August 2017, Showtime, 55 minutes.

'Part 18', *Twin Peaks: The Return*. [television programme] Directed by David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, USA, 3 September 2017, Showtime, 55 minutes.

Pink Flamingos [feature film] Directed by John Waters. Dreamland, USA, 1972. 104 minutes.

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me. [feature film] Directed by David Lynch. CIBY Pictures, France/USA, 1992. 135 minutes.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Scarrott, E. (2022) The Narrator Is(n't) Human: The Presence of the Human Body in the Nonhuman Narration of Twin Peaks and "The Metamorphosis". *ContactZone*, 1(May), pp. 70-86. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26379/1736>

ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

Non-human Narrators in Science Fiction

Editors: Oriana Palusci and Valentina Romanzi



(2022) Vol. N° 1 (May) – ISSN 2723-8881

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Paolo Loffredo Editore srl

via Ugo Palermo 6

80128 Napoli - Italy

P.IVA 05014040876

R.E.A. NA 931959

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GRAPHIC LAYOUT

Nexus Advanced Technologies, Milano

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ContactZone

n. 1 (May) 2022

ContactZone is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association for the Study of Science Fiction and the Fantastic. The areas of research range from literature to cinema, from media to comics and video games touching a wide spectrum of critical approaches, which includes literary criticism, ecocriticism, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, linguistics, translation studies, critical race studies, queer studies. The journal welcomes papers from scholars, authors, teachers, and librarians supporting an innovative insight into texts written in English, but also in other languages, in order to promote a lively dialogue among critics and other specialists on an international level. *ContactZone* will focus on themes and topics dealing with the representation of imaginative and/or alternative worlds in the realms of science fiction and the fantastic.

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Authorisation n. 60 issued by the Court of Naples on 16/04/2019

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The Narrator Is(n't) Human: The Presence of the Human Body in the Nonhuman Narration of *Twin Peaks* and “The Metamorphosis”

Emily Scarrott

DOI: 10.26379/1736

1. Introduction

This paper interrogates the collaborative human/nonhuman relationship of Margaret Lanterman (*The Log Lady*) and the Log in *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 1993, 2017) alongside Gregor's transition from human to nonhuman in Kafka's “The Metamorphosis” (1915). These texts explore absurdity as a method of positioning non-normative bodies amongst capitalist hierarchies. The cross-contamination of human and nonhuman voices in these narratives explores a breakdown of meaning initiated by an abject presence of the absurd body. Haraway (2008: 292) acknowledges that “To be out of place is often to be in danger and sometimes also to be free, in the open, not yet nailed by value and purpose.” The division of the two possibilities in this admission can also describe the situations of the subjects of this essay. When Gregor Samsa becomes noticeably ‘out of place’ in a system of white, heteronormative, capitalist productivity, he experiences increasing threat, ultimately leading to his demise, whilst the Log and Log Lady live freely, with acceptance of their peers. Recognising Gregor Samsa's fate in his family home, and the Log Lady's reverence within her community, an exploration of these narrators' human/nonhuman memberships intends to highlight possibilities for modes of non-repro-normative modes of existence.

Albert Camus noted: “the revolt of the flesh is the absurd” (2005: 12), specifically referring to the aging body, and indicating a resulting breakdown in meaning that can be experienced by the self or one's peers in response to a body which passes its productive prime. However, corporeal absurdity can be further explored within speculative and science fictions, where both the status quo and the conceivable body can be reimagined beyond the known achievable. Ackhurst (2019: 118) describes everyday utopian practices which create needed political and social change based on observations of what is missing from dominant structures. She goes on to acknowledge Octavia Butler's assertion that change is essential, and reorganisation is science fiction (Ackhurst 2019: 117). Speculative fictions provide space where lore can be developed which, through new encounter and experience, can challenge a normalised understanding of existence. For this purpose, a study of the human/nonhuman should recognise that these entities are not necessarily separate, and do not exist as a binary. Kristeva (1982: 4) writes: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” Within these narratives, conversation between absurd bodies and their human peers disrupts a hierarchy of being, where the boundaries between the human

and nonhuman become blurred, leading to a disturbance of societal expectation and uniformity.

The Log Lady recognises: “There is as much space outside the human, proportionately, as inside” (Episode 9, 1993). This is one of many statements that are quietly informed by the Log and indicates that, educated by her nonhuman counterpart, the Log Lady is peacefully wiser to the mysteries of her external world than any of her peers. Tamás (2020: 45) contemplates how “the natural world is part of an intimate web of life that we share, [...] part of our mental web of existence, one that we ignore again and again.” The Log Lady’s attentiveness to her nonhuman surroundings, and blunt recognition of the ignorance of other humans (“I thought so” [Episode 2, 1990]), detaches her from her human community and aligns her towards the nonhuman community of her companion. This tuning to the nonhuman is quietly affirmed when the Giant appears to Agent Cooper in the busy Roadhouse to warn him that another murder is about to occur, and, whilst other humans do not react, we see the Log Lady look towards the Giant (Episode 14, 1990). Following this vision, the Waiter (another entity in human form) comforts Cooper, who has still not yet understood the Giant’s message, whilst the Log Lady looks to him with sympathy; Her awareness is so that she wordlessly understands the knowledge of the spirits that also occupy the spaces of Twin Peaks, whilst other humans struggle to translate. Morton writes “one doesn’t act awareness, it happens to one,” going on to acknowledge that being ecologically aware is to understand that there is a “bewildering variety of scales, temporal and spatial” beyond humankind (2019: 186).

Meanwhile, Pezzini (2018) notes that the opening chapter of “The Metamorphosis” is “built on a double alternation between ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’” recognising not only the conflict between aspects of the internally ‘human’/externally insectile Gregor, but the pressures of Gregor’s personal bedroom, social spaces within the family home, and wider public exposure. These spaces reveal Gregor, the physically nonhuman, to humans in human bodies who are dependent on his role as a worker and provider, and so a transformation which could be described as a revolutionary, anti-capitalist action becomes “caught in patriarchal, hierarchal, heteronormative possibility space” (Morton 2019: 188-189).

2. A note on citation

This paper is written with Ahmed’s feminist citation practices (2017: 148-149) in mind, choosing to disrupt the reproduction of canonically patriarchal academic structures. While this is a rich practice which encourages the inclusion of diverse knowledges when crafting research, the conscious choice to read and cite marginalised academic practitioners also activates the disturbance of patriarchal order that is created by the out of place ‘other’, as recognised in these texts.

Audre Lorde acknowledges that members of marginalised communities are frequently asked to “stretch across” gaps of ignorance in academic spaces (2017: 93), highlighting the absence of knowledge that is created through an unawareness of the experience of the other. The utilisation of inclusive citation practices in this paper incites reflection on the perspectives of non-heteronormative researchers, so that the non-heteronormative narrative voices of the texts may be better understood.

3. The nature of narratorship and conversation

The Log, and, by proxy, the Log Lady, can be defined as narrator(s) of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017) based on both their internal position as knowledge providers within the town's events, and externally, introducing the next stages of narrative to viewers in the episode introductions for Bravo reruns (1993). Mulhauser and Kachur (2017) note that "aporically awkward encounters" could "ultimately lead viewers closer to solving *Twin Peaks's* supernatural mysteries" and that "she – as a Lady carrying a "talking" log – makes every encounter both gothic and awkward." Specifically, the awkwardness of Lady and Log combined provides narration in such a way that it provokes their audience to actively participate in the resolution of mystery. Margaret seems to have her reasons, but they are not shared with us, expressing "I am known as the Log Lady, there is a story behind that" (Pilot, 1993) and "reasons can even explain the absurd" (Episode 1, 1993). She ultimately summarises her own understanding of her role as the Log Lady in two statements: "The human being finds himself, or herself, in the middle" (Episode 9, 1993) and "Languages help us communicate. Even with complicated languages used by intelligent people, misunderstanding is a common occurrence" (Episode 10, 1993).

As a human being, the Log Lady has taken a mediating role between the nonhuman Log and her human peers, specifically acting as a translator to convey information. There are also allusions to the Log's abilities to view events that Margaret cannot – for example, the Log "saw something," and is able to describe the events of Laura's murder (Episode 5, 1990). As the Log witnesses the murder, but not the Log Lady, this could even show that the Log can spiritually or physically leave Margaret's side for certain periods of time, whilst the Log's decision to report this knowledge indicates the Log's morality.

To the listener, the flow of knowledge could initially seem linear, where the Log is dominant, and Lady is obedient in her execution of the Log's words:

(Knowledge) → Log → Margaret → Listener.

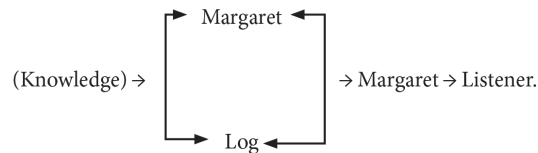
Meanwhile, Fox (2019: 82) contemplates whether the Log "is where she finds her strength to speak," a communicative tool for Margaret, and that she translates knowledge through the character of 'her Log' rather than vice versa:

(Knowledge) → Margaret → Log → Margaret → Listener.

The implication here is that The Log Lady's behaviour perhaps originates from a response to trauma and that the Log is simply an Earth-originated object with no otherworldly variant involved. This could be evidenced by The Log Lady's statement "Sometimes we want to hide from ourselves. We do not want to be us. It is too difficult to be us" (Episode 13, 1993), implying that 'The Log Lady' became so to avoid being 'Margaret'. This theory nods to the fragmented knowledge of Margaret's previous, more traditional life, and the tragic end to her intimate human/human relationship with her husband. We first learn of this event over tea and cookies with Cooper, Harry, Hawk and Dr Hayward, where the Log lady describes that her husband (Sam Lanterman, "a logging man") "met the devil" who "took the form of fire" (Episode 5, 1990). In response, Hayward acknowledges that this occurred the day after their wedding. Paired with the firefighting paraphernalia and boarded up

fireplace that surround the group, this conversation could clearly indicate the source of Margaret's trauma and a specific attachment to the flammable material of her husband's trade. However, from what we know of the occurrences in *Twin Peaks*, this could equally indicate an origin story for the supernatural Log; Shimabukuro (2016: 124) recognises an implication that Margaret "lost her husband as a result of gaining its knowledge." We could ask whether the being that we know as the Log was somehow involved in the fire. We could even speculate that the Log is Sam Lanterman himself, existing in a new form, but, as the Log has not directly explained this to us, we can only conclude that it is not necessary for us to know.

Narration is a collaborative contribution from both Log and Lady, so much so that, much like the binary of human/nonhuman, the origin of words spoken by Margaret can often be unclear. This can be illustrated in some of Margaret's phrasing, for example: "Wait for the tea. The fish aren't running" (Episode 5, 1990), where simple communication between humans is combined with riddle-like turns of phrase that are stylistically traceable to the Log's lexis. Combinations of Lady and Log's vocabulary suggest that their knowledge production is a co-operative process, where an internal conversation may occur between the pairing before it is voiced to a third party.



To finalise this understanding, we should note that while the Log cannot easily express its comprehensions to other humans, it is able to listen. This is evident as Margaret is seen speaking to the Log herself ("Shh, let me do the talking" [Episode 5, 1990]), and often redirects her peers to address the Log directly. Mulhauser and Kachur (2017) go on to note: "The epistemological uncertainty inherent in these encounters – does one laugh at and/or take seriously the log's knowledge? – inevitably yields awkwardness. How do you act in the presence of a talking log that may or may not bear witness to supernatural realities?" Some, like Cooper and Truman, are hesitant, much to Margaret's expressed disapproval (Episode 2, 1990), but others, like Major Briggs (Episode 9, 1990) comply without question, perhaps due to a deeper personal awareness of the nonhuman existences within the town. These interactions indicate that the Log is alert and attentive to its environment, quietly participating, maybe even offended by the rudeness of being ignored.

Margaret
Response → =
Log

Whilst the movement of knowledge/thought to communication may be uncertain between Lady, Log and third party, conversation between Gregor and his peers is less disputable in "The Metamorphosis."

(Knowledge) → Gregor → Listener.

When Gregor first speaks aloud, he is surprised to hear “unmistakably his own voice,” although with a “persistent horrible twittering squeak” (97).¹ This implies that voice is maintained as part of Gregor’s remaining human consciousness, but now distorted, presumably by his physique.

(Knowledge) → Gregor (human consciousness) → Gregor (nonhuman mouth) → Listener.

However, later, comments from his family and colleague, including “Did you understand a word of it?” “Did you hear how he was speaking?” and “That was no human voice” (98) indicate that there is less recognition to Gregor’s voice than first anticipated.

(Knowledge) → Gregor (human consciousness) → Gregor (nonhuman voice) → Listener.

The distortion created by Gregor’s new body means that he has lost ability to express himself as the ‘same’ person that he was prior to his transformation. In other words, his voice – a potentially recognisable component of the individual – now differs from the son and brother that dwells within this new vessel.

4. The vessel and productivity

Pezzini (2018) recognises that Gregor’s exploration, both internally and externally, is generally done through sight. The narration of “The Metamorphosis” via Gregor’s sight distances his new state from his surroundings. Small details, texture and textile, are designed for humans, not over-sized insects: “His domelike brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely” (89). Such details contribute to “a regular human bedroom” (89), a statement which recognises the dualism of Gregor’s new identity. He envisages the room as “human” and therefore alien to his new form, whilst the word “regular” indicates that he perhaps still identifies as a “human,” just one who has stumbled upon on a rather abnormal existence. Rhodes and Westwood (2016) acknowledge that Gregor’s recognition of himself as human, paired with inhabitation of a nonhuman body, confuses the “categories of human/nonhuman,” and that this raises further ethical questions about how generous the family should be towards their insect son.

Le Guin describes the contained hero: “It’s clear that the Hero does not look well in this bag. He needs a stage or a pedestal or a pinnacle. You put him in a bag, and he looks like a rabbit, like a potato” (1988: 35). Gregor, freshly ‘bagged’ in his nonhuman container, loses hero status to his family. This change in status develops from Gregor’s ability to provide for the family, something that the family had “simply got used to” (111), as they are suddenly required to explain his absence to the chief clerk (“We don’t know what to say to him” [95]). Meanwhile, much like Le Guin’s rabbit, he is ensnared by the new vessel in which he finds himself, unable to

¹ All citations from: Kafka, Franz 1983 [1915]. “The Metamorphosis”. In Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.). *The Penguin Complete Stories of Franz Kafka*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 89-139.

regain control. This lack of control is exhibited to the reader immediately, as Gregor struggles with his newly nonhuman body, stuck “lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back” while “numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes” (89).

The productivity of Gregor’s nonhuman state is addressed immediately, primarily by Gregor himself. He mulls over the effects of his new hindrance:

...supposing he was sick? But that would be most unpleasant and would look suspicious, since during his five years’ employment he had not been ill once. The chief himself would be sure to come with the sick-insurance doctor [...] who of course regarded all mankind as perfectly healthy malingerers. And would he be so far wrong on this occasion? Gregor really felt quite well, apart from a drowsiness that was utterly superfluous after such a long sleep... (91)

This thought process itself is absurd: how can one consider themselves physically able to work when they are an insect who cannot even get out of bed? Gregor’s instant questioning of his own physical ability during an unexpected and frightening transformation is indicative of a capitalist society. However, the stern arrival of a work superior, the chief clerk, proves that Gregor’s anxieties are not entirely unfounded:

Here you are, barricading yourself in your room, giving only ‘yes’ or ‘no’ for answers, causing your parents a lot of unnecessary trouble and neglecting – I mention this only in passing – neglecting your business duties in an incredible fashion [...] I thought you were a quiet, dependable person, and now [...] you seem bent on making a disgraceful exhibition of yourself. (97)

Lack of control is indicated to Gregor’s family and work colleague soon after, as they overhear a “dull thud” as Gregor falls out of bed (95). Camus (2005: 85) writes: “The path of struggle leads me to the flesh. Even humiliated, the flesh is my only certainty.” Gregor’s physical degradation creates a jarring disconnection between the family’s understanding of their son/brother, and the literal creature that they eventually see before them. Camus (2005: 123-124) notes that in Kafka’s work, the “hero’s misfortune” is a result of a logical response in “the framework of everyday life,” summarising: “Kafka expresses tragedy by the everyday and the absurd by the logical.” The tragedy of Gregor’s physical state highlights an irrationality to the supposed logic of a responsible worker.

As predicted by Gregor, the chief clerk does not take a supportive or concerned role and scolds Gregor for letting his family and colleagues down, assuming that his judgement of Gregor’s personality thus far has been false rather than recognising someone in need. Rhodes and Westwood (2016) detail that the conclusions drawn by the chief clerk illustrate the lack of ethics in the “harsh logic of the employment relationship” and that “social relations are terminated as soon as it is clear that the other is no longer one of us and that reciprocation is not possible.”

In contrast to the contained hero, Le Guin proposes the hero as bottle “in its older sense of container in general” (1988: 28). If containership is viewed as a heroic quality, then Margaret, the human bearer or perhaps ‘container’ of the nonhuman Log, could be viewed as a hero. Le Guin’s definitions are fiercely feminist, elaborating upon the heroic bottle as maternally nurturing; simultaneously containing a stomach of food, containing a handful of food, containing future supplies of food for externally contained children which she, presumably, once internally contained.

Here, we can bridge into an exploration of the Log Lady as presumably physically capable of bearing and mothering a human child, however displacing biological reproductivity in favour of a dedication to the nonhuman. Fox (2019: 82) examines “The Triple Goddess,” three faces of the archetypal female based on life stages. Fox identifies these three stages as Maiden, Mother and Crone, recognising The Log Lady as exemplary of the third stage: “She cradles her log as if it were her child, the child she never created when she was a creator (Mother Goddess).” We do not know if children were ever an intention in Margaret’s life, but Margaret’s time as the Mother creator was clearly a short one and, if we consider marriage as the transitional moment from Maiden to Mother, then it may have only lasted twenty-four hours, ending at her husband’s death and union with the Log. Federici (2018: 27) describes: “because of their unique relation to the process of reproduction, women in many precapitalist societies have been credited with a special understanding of the secrets of nature, presumably enabling them to procure life and death and discover the hidden properties of things.” As Log Lady, we see an established embodiment of Federici’s “secret-keeping woman,” so entangled with the “hidden properties of things” (2018: 27) that she sacrifices her whole self to nurture them. Additionally, as a cisgender woman, through care of her Log instead of a biological child, the Log Lady distorts her relationship to reproductivity, and the subsequent patriarchal expectations of motherhood. Haraway (2008: 292) notes that surrogacy “is nothing if not the mutter/matter of gestation out of place, a [...] cut into the female-defining function called reproduction.” The surrogate is a disruptor of reproductive systems, nurturing beyond patriarchal or colonialist expectation.

The Log Lady’s awareness of her relationship with the nonhuman is evidenced in her episode introductions, stating: “I play my part on life’s stage, I tell what I can to form the perfect answer” (Episode 5, 1993) and “Nature is the great teacher” (Episode 18, 1993). These statements indicate recognition that Margaret considers ‘the Log Lady’ as a specific responsibility, however, this work may not be fully altruistic. Morton (2017: 173) writes that the “blending of human with nonhuman” in an act of solidarity “is very significant,” while acknowledging that this is not a search for love or sympathy. The Care Collective (2020: 43) proposes “promiscuous care” as an action of kinship. They describe promiscuous care as recognising that “not all women want to be mothers, whether they can be or not; and that caring [...] for the community and caring for the environment are equally valuable tasks that must be adequately resourced and appreciated.” Log and Lady provide mutual aid to each other; whilst the Log Lady helps the Log to not only survive, but become visible in the community, the Log supplies companionship to a widow in a town full of maidens. Wright (2019: 45) notes that cooperation within community and solidarity should not be motivated by selfishness, but by “a combination of moral obligation to and concern for others.” This concern is evident within the relationship between Log and Lady; it is easy, in the form of a commonplace object such as a log, to remain silent, and it is equally easy to leave one’s log at home when caring duties are inconvenient. The inseparability of Lady and Log indicates the authenticity of their togetherness. Similarly, when there is no focus on the pair, the Log Lady’s sincere attentiveness and soothing physical affection towards her Log can be seen in the background of *Twin Peaks*, for example patting the log in time to music (Episode 14, 1990), or stroking the Log whilst sat amongst an audience (Episode 29, 1991), indicating that care for the Log is not a performative action for the eyes of others.

Garoin and Gaudelius (2008: 47) describe the performance of a “physically

impossible task” as a pedagogical communication of “inter-connections between nature and culture, the earth and the human body, and their mutual poisoning, degradation, and death.” The Log Lady provides protection to a being which visually replicates an object created by a human intervention on the natural world. Without knowledge of any supernatural lifeform which may internally dwell, the nurture of a chopped log could be considered an impossible task as no amount of nourishment will cause it to develop. We could ask what form the Log would have without disruption from human industry. Would the Log be a rooted, living tree?

Whilst Margaret heroically bears the Log, the Log is a container too. Le Guin further notes: “I would go as far as to say that the natural, proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings.” The presence of the Log as narrator, container of knowledge, provokes analysis and resolution (Mulhauser and Kachur 2017), thus effectively guiding both audiences and key characters to gain further understanding of the situation. As a novel contains a narrative, so the Log contains knowledge of the happenings of *Twin Peaks*, with a deeper awareness of the meaning of these events than any human peer, distributing information in a way in which research can be undertaken and discoveries can be made. Mulhauser and Kachur (2017) go on to describe the thought process of the viewer: “Oh, a log holds information in this text? That’s strange. How can this be explained within the logic of the text? What do the log’s words of wisdom really mean?”

5. Gender and presence

If the Log is indeed a transfiguration of Sam Lanterman as speculated, then he has experienced a similar metamorphosis to Gregor, perhaps becoming even more incapacitated and vulnerable due to his immobility. However, evident similarities between the two metamorphoses end on this superficial level, their paths distinctly differing in the responses of their family unit. Whilst the Log Lady nurtures her Log, the Samsa family grow increasingly cold towards their son/brother due to his inability to provide care for them.

Previously taking the form of a cis-heterosexual man, Gregor is newly experiencing existence away from the dominant, heteronormative state, and the fear of being a marginalised body for the first time. In this state, Gregor is no longer able to freely navigate space, and now must negotiate ongoing threat based on his form. Whilst Gregor still personally identifies with he/him pronouns, the humans begin to deviate, changing Gregor’s pronouns to “it” when expressing anger with his present state (“I won’t utter my brother’s name in the presence of this creature, and so all I say is: we must try to get rid of it” [133]). He/him pronouns seem to be used more retrospectively (“I think it would be best to keep his room exactly as it has always been, so that when he comes back to us, he will find everything unchanged and be able all the more easily to forget what has happened in between” [116]), showing that the Samsa family consider Gregor to be completely absent, rather than simply visually different. Rogers (2021: 2198-2199) clarifies how a refusal to use the chosen name or pronouns of someone who lives beyond the cisgender binary invalidates their agency as an individual and draws on “normative gender as a means of social recognition,” whilst emphasis of the misgendered pronouns is an abusive microaggression. This form of cisgenderism, employed by

the Samsa family, upholds the expectation that existence should remain in the confines of dominant binaries, and any external “practices or presentation” are “considered to be invalid or unnatural” (Rogers 2021: 2190).

Similarly, we could question the Log’s experience of human society through the positioning of a female-identifying carrier. Perhaps the presence of the Log in the arms of a “crone” (Fox 2019) means that leeway for peculiar behaviour is automatically created by her social position as widow and her lack of dependents, but equally, this position makes it much more difficult to be actually listened to, rather than merely humoured. Comfort (2009: 63) notes the “unelaborated” permanence of the Log’s public presence, “as common and unquestioned as the Douglas fir” in the town of Twin Peaks. Although quiet, this presence is reliant on a specifically “eccentric habit” performed by the Log Lady (Comfort 2009: 63) to present an otherworldly being to the community, whilst Gregor’s transformation, although unusual and unfortunate, situates him in the living body of a cockroach, a being which is likely humbly commonplace and already unwelcome in the family’s environment.

Pezzini (2018) writes that Gregor initially attempts to “connect his new body with the old corporal scheme, under the imperative of doing and being social,” going on to recognise that, rather than this new form, social relationships are the suffocating obstacle to his development. Rhodes and Westwood (2016) specify that Gregor now “no longer has a face” and so the family can no longer identify with him: a lack of recognisable expression alienates Gregor from them. Perhaps this is where the conflict between Gregor and the Log’s reception ultimately occurs. Although The Log Lady may direct speakers to talk the Log directly, she provides a logical face for the Log, comprehensible to humans.

In correlation with this, Pezzini (2018) notes that the second chapter of “The Metamorphosis” is “the moment in which his being a cockroach is accomplished,” coinciding with Gregor’s conflict with his family. The family’s lack of direct physical or emotional interaction with Gregor – even when punishing him – indicates that he “already belongs to the realm of the impure” (Pezzini 2018). Hedva (2016) writes: “If being present in public is what is required to be political, then whole swathes of the population can be deemed a-political – simply because they are not physically able to get their bodies into the street.” Whilst the Log is visible, with a human accomplice who can provide physical access to participation in the local community, Gregor is concealed by his human family members, removing his visibility from society. Ahsan (2020: 36-37) outlines #occupybedroom, a rebellious withdrawal of the self, inspired by the hikikomori population:

For our families, we are parasites, or at best a cause for concern [...] We don’t need a cure: we are the vanguard revolt at the heart of advanced post-industrial capitalist society, and we are at the heart of the bourgeois home itself. We are not workers [...] we are an inter-intervention, a passive insurrection from within the aspirational class [...] We turned the world of aspiration on its head, and we turned the regulatory working day inside out [...] There were too many ‘successful’ people in the world, and they ruined it.

Whilst this statement is written victoriously in its resistance to replication of a damaging hierarchy, Rhodes and Westwood (2016) recognise that “as well as an insect, Gregor is divested of anything worth exchanging; he can no longer participate in economic or reciprocal relations,” caused by the radical extremity of his transformation. In other words, to those preoccupied by the pressures of gain

in a capitalist market, Gregor's incapability to contribute to work means that he is no longer appreciated or respected enough to be visible in other areas of family life. This perspective is publicly extended, creating abhorrence among lodgers in the family home when Gregor is eventually revealed, one of whom expresses: "naturally I won't pay you a penny for the days I have lived here" (132). The "product" that the family offers is spoiled by Gregor's presence and therefore the business cannot compete in the market, losing their custom and income. Kern (2019: 48-49) describes how access to cities can provide certain opportunities for marginalised genders which may be restricted by small communities: "Opportunities for work. Breaking free of parochial gender norms. Avoiding heterosexual marriage [...] Pursuing non-traditional careers [...] Expressing unique identities. Taking up social and political causes. Developing new kinship networks and foregrounding friendship. Participating in arts, culture, and media." If Gregor were visible and able to find empathetic peers, his transformation would not be so condemned. Although previously a beloved member of the family, the family's shame reduces Gregor's value to that of a simple cockroach, lurking beneath their furniture.

6. Death of the body

Ahmed (2021: 179) discusses how literal "closed doors" can be purposefully used to hide forms of complaint from the public, going on to reflect on anecdotes of abuse which illustrate how doors can sometimes be closed to stop something or someone getting out (Ahmed 2021: 181). Ahmed (2021: 189) concludes that doors can be used to stop us from entering into discourse by eliminating potential witnesses of violence and providing a private space which maintains hierarchies and allows ill-treatment to occur (Ahmed 2021: 183). These intimidating behavioural strategies of coercive power structures are reflected as Grete leads the Samsa family in chasing Gregor back to his room and locking the door whilst they decide how to dispose of him (134-135). Reflected in the increasing presence of physical boundaries between Gregor and his family, Pezzini (2018: 437) indicates that Gregor considers the people he had known as inaccessible. This description recognises Gregor's internal acknowledgement that he has become the 'other', uncomfortably out of place in his surroundings and with no supportive kin to encourage survival. As we are systemically taught to remain in line with the status quo, it is difficult to take steps to protect oneself even when vulnerable (Ahmed 2021: 183). For this reason, Gregor is compliant, so much so that he makes the decision that he should disappear "even more strongly than his sister" (135). Gregor's vulnerability, along with varying physical results of negligence (including a serious injury from being struck with an apple (122), and increasingly limited meals [125-127]), conclude in his quiet death that evening, presumably to spare the Samsa family the task, and himself from further violence. Stupart (2017: 159) notes that the "escape of the melancholic subject into itself descends ultimately into complete silence when they/she/it ceases to relate to the outside, starves herself and eventually dies. The refusal of nourishment is a symptom of serious melancholia." Gregor's withdrawal from food indicates a "refusal to take in anything from the outside world" (Stupart 2017: 159), thus resigning himself to a distinct separation from his environment and considering the chance of any possible resolution hopeless.

As Gregor's lifeless body is recovered, the family appear to go through the motions of mourning ("They all looked a little as if they'd been crying" [137]). Stupart (2017: 156) also acknowledges a contrast between mourning, occurring as a "reaction to the loss of a loved person," and melancholia, occurring "at the point where the lost object is irretrievable." These definitions encourage a questioning of the Samsa family's reaction to Gregor's death; Rather than processing the loss of Gregor (the 'lost object'), their response is more focussed on the new irreversibility of Gregor's human-to-nonhuman metamorphosis. This perspective is illustrated in their reaction to the charwoman's gleeful statement: "You don't need to bother about how to get rid of the thing next door. It's been seen to already" (138). Whilst this statement or its sentiment would typically be abhorrent when speaking to the family of a recently deceased person, the family do not react as severely as if Gregor's body was still human, and do not seem upset at the prospect of his body being unceremoniously disposed of. Instead, Gregor's father simply hushes the charwoman and, following her departure, acknowledges that she would be dismissed later (138-139), implying a vague recognition that her behaviour is inappropriate, but still not taking the offence that one would expect from a grieving father.

7. Inherited practices

Twin Peaks: The Return (2017) was filmed towards the end of actress Catherine Coulson's life after a period of illness. Presumably aware of Coulson's prognosis, a deliberate choice was made by Lynch to portray Margaret Lanterman's final days in parallel with the actress who portrayed her. During The Log Lady's final appearance (Part 15, 2017), she telephones Hawk:

Hawk... I'm dying... You know about death, that it's just a change, not an end. Hawk... it's time. There's some fear, some fear in letting go. Remember what I told you. I can't say more over the phone. But you know what I mean, from our talks, when we were able to speak face to face. Watch for that one, the one I told you about, the one under the moon on Blue Pine Mountain. Hawk... my log is turning gold... The wind is moaning... I'm dying... Good night, Hawk.

The Log Lady's admission that death is not the end indicates Margaret's recognition that she is about to transform to a different state or become unhuman. However, as we, as onlookers, approach Margaret's death, we cannot help but wonder what will happen to the Log when the inevitable happens. The loss of Margaret's human form will divide Log from Lady, severing a key communication line where knowledge, advice and observations are transferred by the supernatural to the human population of Twin Peaks.

Frost (2017: 95) shares that Hawk becomes the Log's new owner, keeping it on his mantel, a positioning which replicates the placement of Sam Lanterman's ashes in The Log Lady's home (Pilot, 1993). Although the Log has not yet spoken to Hawk, he ensures that he is available and willing to listen. The allocation of Hawk as The Log Lady's successor perhaps insinuates that both Log and Lady consider him most in tune with the nonhuman world. An implication here is that Hawk's indigenous heritage makes him more acclimatised to attending to the nonhuman beings around him, in comparison with the dominantly white inhabitants of Twin

Peaks, representative of an invasive, colonialist history. These surrogate behaviours, employed by Margaret and Hawk, are non-normative rather than anti-normative (Lewis 2019: 310) because they are not performed as a direct opposition to reproductivity, but operate in spheres of tradition which originate away from the governing cis-heterosexual white majority. Lewis (2019: 310) states: “reproductivity is a blunt, geographically imprecise instrument: created in one specific (settler-colonial, post-plantation) setting [...] Many of the practices that sustain and refine alternative modes of kinship predate anti-capitalism and weren’t originally projects to ‘abolish’ or ‘queer’ anything at all.” Lewis (2019: 310) goes on to describe “inventive kinning” which “supersedes the genealogical grid” as an ongoing response to forcible imposition of patriarchal institutions upon colonized and working-class communities.

Margaret’s ashes are scattered in Ghostwood Forest (Frost 2017: 95). Whilst this could simply be a choice to reunite with her husband at the site that he was lost, it could also be a final acknowledgement that she is better suited amongst nonhumans, a resting point surrounded by spirits and logs, rather than the human bodies of the graveyard. Frost (2017: 93) also acknowledges that Margaret wrote a speech for Hawk to read at her funeral. This act illustrates that, now that Margaret is no longer human, she pre-emptively allocates a human to communicate through. Rather than allow her human peers to reflect on their perceptions of Margaret’s life, she chooses to pass on her knowledge in a manner akin to her most intimate companion. Margaret’s posthumous speech goes on to recognise: “A traveller learns more than a passenger” (Frost 2017: 93). This statement acknowledges that whilst her passenger, the Log, has both produced and contributed to knowledge whilst in her care, the amount that Margaret herself has learnt whilst playing the role of the Log Lady exceeds that. Meanwhile, the speech is not solely written by Margaret, and, of course, contains contributions from the Log, encouraging their peers to seek answers within “the wind and the trees, the rocks and the water” (Frost 2017: 93). This instruction indicates that the human/nonhuman relationship, where strengths and new knowledges can ripen, could and should be collectively extended. If the singular Log has provided vital information to the people of Twin Peaks, what could multiple nonhuman-to-human conversations achieve?

8. Conclusion

Camus defines his subject: “What, in fact, is the absurd man? He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal, [...] his revolt devoid of future” (2005: 64). This absence of contribution towards the future could be described as a withdrawal of reproductivity. Straus reads “The Metamorphosis” as “a fantasy about a man who dies so that a woman may empower herself. Her self-empowering, the transference of a woman into a position where a man used to be, does not transform the social system, however, but merely perpetuates it” by learning, as wife or worker, to “be exploited by the system that has exploited her brother” (1989: 666). Federici (2012: 20) states “we will never achieve any real change unless we attack our female role at its roots,” going on to describe how women in employment typically experience further exploitation by being required to complete tasks as an extension of their domestic expectations as housewife, and that “other people’s lives depend on” this cooperation. The pairing of Straus and Federici’s writing

highlight Grete's misdirected loyalty towards a societal labour structure which will not reciprocate with value or commitment. In contrast, whilst Grete replaces her brother in the now empty role of the family breadwinner, Margaret's becoming as the Log Lady does not step into the wage-earning role left empty by the death of her husband. The lack of exchange here is disruptive to the capitalist structure; rather than replacing a worker in a comprehensible, profit-driven field, the Log Lady directs her labours towards the supernatural nonhuman community.

Straus goes on to say that Kafka communicates that no progress is made "when women become as men are" (1989: 666). Perhaps, then, a halt in reproductivity occurs where the nonmale ceases to reproduce the heteronormative systems of cisgendered men. The Absurd Man is, in fact, not male at all, and may not even be human. Braidotti (2020: 161) proclaims that "we are not all human," where the definition of "human" is cisgender-heterosexual white males, authoritative and able-bodied. In their pathways of labour participation, Grete Samsa, career-oriented, chooses to align herself with the dominant 'human' and becomes "a little patriarch" (Straus 1989: 666), while Margaret Lanterman affiliates with the 'other', becoming the Log Lady. Tamás (2020: 60) writes of a "huge realm of possibility that lies outside of allegedly 'normal' existence in late capitalism [...] a space in which all can change, where the boundary between a wolf, a bird, a lizard, a woman is not as strict as one might imagine, but open and liable to shift."

Le Guin (2019: 37) describes science fiction as a "womb of things to be and tomb of things that were," a gateway between an old system and new. The nonhuman memberships of the Log Lady and Gregor become terminations of reproduction of the patriarchal capitalist system, instead nurturing possibilities of a different, freeing, type of existence.

Haraway (2011) writes: "The point for me [...] is parenting, not reproducing. Parenting is about caring for generations, one's own or not; reproducing is about making more of oneself to populate the future, quite a different matter." Margaret, as the Log Lady, does not reproduce the capitalist system, but she does *parent*. Meanwhile, the Samsa family's behaviour, plans, and expressed expectations, reproduces the capitalist system, but they do not respond to Gregor's predicament as parents. Perhaps we could conclude that, in the Log/Log Lady relationship, the nonhuman is parented, whereas the Samsa family, even when their son/brother experiences a debilitating and traumatic change, stubbornly attempt to reproduce humanity, and create a human; They will not accept nor support the 'other' in their home, no matter his origin. The Samsas did not want to become 'Log Bearers' of the nonhuman Gregor in fear that he may debilitate them in their attempts to climb the hierarchy, rather than opposing a hierarchy which would disallow them from caring for a family member who may be incapacitated or deviates from the norm.

Regarding children who are raised through collaborative communal practices rather than within restrictive boundaries of biological family units, The Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers proclaim "They will not belong to the patriarchy. They will not belong to us either. They will belong only to themselves" (Lewis 2019: 322-323). This statement illustrates how webs of kinship can disjoint heteronormativity and provide generational longevity to horizontal practices which oppose oppressive hierarchies. Lewis (2019: 308) notes that "Despite capitalism's worldwide hegemony, many people on earth are putting something like "full surrogacy" into practice every day, cultivating non-oedipal kinship and sharing reciprocal mothering labors between many individuals and generations." However, from the

Log/Log Lady's humble triumph, we can learn the potential to extend these survival techniques to collaborate with the nonhuman in challenging a system which only benefits its gatekeepers. The Log Lady's affiliation with the Log not only allows the nonhuman to survive, but also contributes to the survival of the humans in Twin Peaks. Meanwhile, the Samsa family chooses to sacrifice their son in order to return to their place in an oppressive system, rather than fight for the wellbeing of their family member. They refuse to learn from the communicative nonhuman. "The Metamorphosis" concludes as the Samsa parents acknowledge that Grete has physically matured and "it would soon be time to find a good husband for her" (139). This is an assumptive decision which perpetuates a system of gender-based labours and is ignorant to Grete's own aspirations to study the violin, a sentiment which is supported by Gregor, who had been secretly saving for his sister to study at the Conservatorium, despite their parents discouraging "even innocent references" to it (111). Whilst Gregor is favoured by his family for the professional positioning and wage-earning ability of his human body, and then discarded based on a new physical state which terminates his ability to undertake his job, Grete also faces an expected future as a wife and mother based on the potential (re)productivity of her body. The fates of both Gregor and Grete warn us of a reliance on a system which is not protective or negotiable in a crisis. bell hooks (2015: 149) identifies marginality as "much more than a site of deprivation [...] it is also a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance," encouraging participation in alternative systems, whilst Russell (2020: 91) describes "anti-body," a methodology of physical glitch which resists "the body as a coercive social and cultural architecture," allowing us to reimagine the body and locate elements which need redefinition, and others which should be celebrated (Russell 2020: 98). The nurture of the absurd nonhuman could be considered a withdrawal of labour which would otherwise uphold such societal constructions, and so aligning ourselves with the non-human will disrupt the heteronormative, patriarchal framework. We should live alongside the absurd, rather than attempt to stifle it.

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Abstract


This paper explores the cross contamination of human and non-human voices in absurdist science fiction. Primarily, I will interrogate the collaborative human-to-non-human relationship of Margaret Lanterman and her Log in *Twin Peaks* (1990-1, 2017), in comparison with Gregor's experience as newly "other" in Kafka's "Metamorphosis" (1915).

The Log Lady is representative of the collision between the human and non-human. In her ongoing role as carer for her log, the Log Lady literally carries the capability of communicating with supernatural realms. Whilst the Log is, arguably, more informed about the occurrences in *Twin Peaks* than any key character, it is reliant on its human collaborator to become part of the conversation. Comfort (2009: 63) recognises how "unelaborated" their collective identity is: the community do not feel the need to provide any justification or explanation to the Log Lady's behaviours. Without sound or gesture, the Log's input leads the narrative, providing knowledge to human investigators which opens the pathway towards conclusion.

In contrast, although Gregor internally retains his human sense of self and understanding of the world, his newly physical otherness provokes a need to rethink the nature of the narrator. While the non-human Log relies on an intimate

relationship with a human vessel to communicate, Gregor is able to express himself as an individual to close family members, he loses validity based on the non-human vessel which he inhabits.

Critically drawing on patriarchal understandings of the able human body as capital, this discussion explores the value assigned to narrators by their peers, based upon the humanness of the body through which they communicate.



Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

ContactZone n. 1 (May) 2022

Non-human Narrators in Science Fiction

Editors: Oriana Palusci and Valentina Romanzi

Contributi di: Oriana Palusci; Valentina Romanzi; Simone Pettine; Amalia Călinescu;
Lena Crucitti; Wendy Wright; Emily Scarrott; Kara McCormack; Claudio V. Coccoli



(2022) Vol. N° 1 (May) – ISSN 2723-8881

Appendix B

Scarrott, E. (2021) Valentine's Day 2020, (AKA My Partner Smashed My Egg in the Car on Valentine's Day). *Roundtable*, 3(1). Available at:
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Valentine's Day 2020

AKA My Partner Smashed My Egg in the Car on Valentine's Day

EMILY SCARROTT



Emily Scarrott is an artist and PhD student at Birmingham School of Art. Her performative research praxis explores the absurd as a non-cis-male protagonist. These experiences are led by nourishing and tactile encounters with unfertilised eggs. She is currently performing durational care to one specific egg; he is doing quite well, and they go everywhere together. Exploration of Emily's relationship with her egg culminates in repetitive manifestos, experimental speculative fictions, performance and rapid response making.

NARRATOR: It is late at night. We – my partner, my egg, and I – have been to see a band. It is 14 February, but we didn't go to celebrate Valentine's Day. It just so happened that a band that I like was playing in Birmingham on Valentine's Day.

The gig was over capacity and claustrophobic. Navigating a gig with a raw egg, specifically an object susceptible to confiscation due to expectations of aggressive use, is a high-intensity situation.

To get my egg past door staff, he was concealed in a rolled-up pair of mustard-coloured gloves in my (mostly empty) tote bag. Although the staff didn't check my bag anyway. I kept my fingers on him all evening, disturbed by the number of eggless bodies with no awareness that were getting a bit too close.

Afterwards, the three of us went swiftly to the car and headed home. Home is about 30 minutes away at night when there is no other traffic. It is now 11:45 pm.

She is rummaging in a red tote bag.

E: Where is my egg?

HE: I don't know ... What did you do with it?

E: I gave him to you when we started driving ...

HE: Are ... Are you sure?

The couple get out of the car and start to look inside, using torches on their phones to search. They open the front doors. They fold back the seats to check the back seat. They open the boot to check inside. They close the boot. They go back to the front seats.

E: I know I put him directly into your hand before I started driving.

She turns and continues rummaging frantically.

HE: ... Oh God ... I'm so sorry.

She looks up, pointing her torch.

He holds up a sodden pair of rolled up mustard coloured gloves. There is a slight crunch to them, and they glisten in the torch light.

E: ... Oh ... God.

She slams the car door.

E: I've left my keys in the boot.

NARRATOR: The boot, when closed, does not reopen without the button on the key.

He climbs over the front seats into the back of the car, where he folds down the back seats, bending over them to search through the boot. He does all of this while tangled in the dark, and eventually retrieves the keys.

She stands holding the crunchy roll of mustard gloves. She attempts to look inside, but her fingers feel there is no apparent solid structure within the roll of mustard gloves.

E: *Well*, there's a lot of eggs getting smashed on Valentine's night, *isn't there?*

He wordlessly unlocks the front door.

E: Isn't there!?

NARRATOR: We – my partner, the egg, and I – enter the house. We go straight through to the kitchen. My partner has his palms down on the kitchen surface, supporting his weight as he leans forward in despair. He is breathing heavily.

E: Are you okay?

There is no answer. He is breathing heavily. It feels like he stands this way for ages. He can't turn around. The moment is silent, except he is breathing heavily.

E: Are you okay? What's up? Are you cross?

He does not turn around.

HE: I'm just really sorry. I'm so sorry.

E: It's okay.

HE: It isn't, it's *your* egg.

E: I know, but it still is my egg, so let's help him out, shall we?

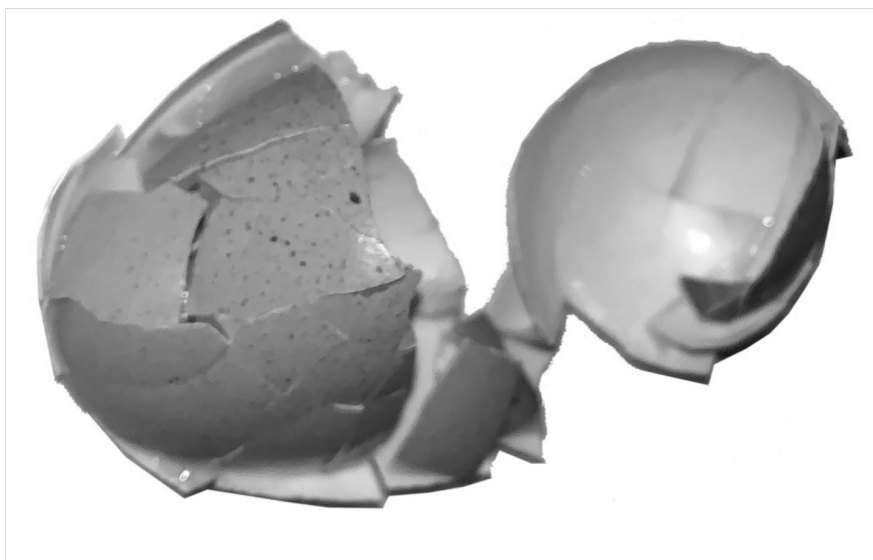
HE: But it's not been long.

E: It's okay, it was going to happen sooner or later. He's been whole for a hell of a lot longer than most eggs. Most eggs are in the bin pretty fast. Let's have a look at the damage.

He finally moves. He gives her a pale plastic tray and then begins to pace the room. He can't quite make eye contact with the egg as it is unravelled.

She cautiously begins to remove the egg from the gloves. The process is slow, carefully navigating a cocoon of mustard wool.

The shell of the egg comes out of the gloves as one piece, a jigsaw held together by the inner membrane. A deconstructed net of the egg's original shape. It looks like, with tender hands, it can be more or less moulded back into the ovoid structural form.



E: Okay. Have you got any superglue? And do you have an egg cup?

He obediently gets a small metal egg cup out of a cupboard full of condiments and puts it on the tray. He opens and closes drawers full of objects used for daily tasks and sorts through them determinedly, but does not find any superglue. There are a couple of simple candles in small glass pots, but there is not much left to burn.

E: Can I use a candle and a lighter? I might be able to do something with the wax?

HE: I know that I have some modroc upstairs from when I was making puppets. I could get that?

E: Yes, that sounds good! I'll have a go with that! Do you have a small bowl?

He gives her a small bowl. It is delicate, a bit like a teacup. He leaves the room.

She lights a candle. While it burns and the wax begins to melt, she squeezes the mustard coloured gloves over the small bowl. This process wrings out the raw egg fluids – aged yolk and white combined into a thin liquid – from the gloves. Her fingers are covered in remnants of the fluid, but she puts all of her strength into squeezing and the base of the bowl soon holds the liquid egg.



The wax has started to melt, and she positions the eggshell into an egg shape and tips a bit of liquid wax inside. Because the shell is still wet from yolk – an important aspect of the salvage operation – the wax solidifies without attaching to the shell, each drop creating a separate object which is easily removed from the egg.

He returns with some materials: two bundles of modroc and a tub of green Warhammer modelling clay. She takes a teacup and half fills it with water from the tap. She takes scissors and cuts small squares of mod rock. The operation begins.

She dips the modroc squares into the water and then uses the mouldable plaster to rebuild the inner structure of the egg. She soaks modroc in the yolk and combines this with the inner shell, returning the yolk to its position. She pours the salvaged yolk into the shell and it soaks into the hardening modroc, and the elements of the egg are reunited.

To complete the operation, she cuts a long strip of modroc, dampens it and wraps it around the centre of the rebuilt egg. The egg has been healed and it is time to rest.

NARRATOR: We – my partner, my egg, and I – go upstairs to bed. I carry the tray, covered with objects: rolled-up mustard yellow gloves, a candle, a delicate teacup-like bowl, modroc, and packaging. The most important thing on the tray is my egg, a survivor, sat in a simple metal egg cup.

I put the tray on top of a closed portable record player, and tidy it up so that, while the objects are still collected, my egg has enough room to sleep comfortably. Although he is still within my arms' reaching distance, this is the first night that the egg has slept away from my body.

The couple undress and get into bed. He turns the light off quite quickly.

E: Are you okay?

HE: I don't want to talk about it.



CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

My overarching PhD proposes the absurd as a liberatory landscape for non-cis-male existence, away from the misogynistic examples given in Camusian absurdist literature and opposing expectations of meaning hatched from a patriarchal-capitalist valuing of reproductivity in relation to the body. I navigate this research through a continuing relationship with an unfertilised chicken's egg, utilising my egg-making body to provide nurturing in an unproductive or meaningless way, rather than achieving conventional expectations of bearing a biological child.

Throughout my research, I have adopted the phrases 'egg-making body' and 'worm-making body' to describe the societal expectation of a body's role in reproduction. Using the words 'egg' and 'worm' as opposed to 'ovum' and 'sperm' is a playful simplification of the sex cells, reducing them to a binary of two shapes while actively avoiding the coded terminologies of assigned-at-birth gender. It is important to express here that eggs occur in bodies of all genders, and that not all women produce eggs. The absurd body protests a prescribed reproductive

purpose by a capitalist state. People of all genders born with wombs, people of all anatomies whose pronouns are she/her, aesthetically feminine people, and so on, all receive a patriarchal-capitalist dictation of meaning founded in reproductive labours and measured against the role of biologically ‘female’ (egg-making) reproductive organs in breeding.

In selecting (all cis-male) examples of ‘the absurd man’, Camus stated that he was “choosing solely men who aim only to expend themselves or whom I see to be expending themselves” (67). Sisyphus – Camus’s champion and a cis worm-making body – is destined to perform a ritualistically failing physical labour towards a boulder. This task is external to his body, employing physical machismo to achieve his chore.¹ Sisyphus’s failed imposition of his worm-making body upon its environment indicates a self-expenditure that could more comfortably align with Andrea Long Chu’s description of ‘female’ as “any psychic operation in which the self is sacrificed to make room for the desires of another” (11). While Long Chu’s text controversially offers definition of femaleness based upon subjugation, the implication that non-male identities are responsive to cis-male self-gain/expansion is an important contrast with Camus’s statement, which suggests that ‘the absurd man’ is not actually ‘male’ at all.

To further establish my own definitions of femaleness, I look towards Johanna Hedva’s convictions behind using the word ‘woman’ as further encompassing than she/her pronouns. Hedva describes radical use of ‘woman’ to honour a genderfluid friend, treasuring the use of the word in relation to her identity and content with her worm-making body. In Hedva’s sick woman theory, measurement against binary definition is ignored; each sick woman is instead an under-privileged identity corresponding to the lack discussed by Long Chu, living in a body that is denied autonomy by the state.

Elizabeth Bartlett questions whether there is a space for women among Camusian rebellion, or whether it is a fraternity which relies upon women “being in the private spaces of the home” (13). My egg care is an exploration of Sisyphus’s boulder in response to traditionally feminised domestic labour. It is a durational task, performing the societally decreed labour of my biological form, doomed to continuously fail. Sophie Lewis asks: “How can surrogacy be turned against reproductive stratification?” (307). Unfertilised egg care applies nurture (traditionally given to a growing new being) in a way that is purposely fruitless.

1 Camus describes the physical exertion of the external body: “the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it ... the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands”.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus describes the maintenance of meaning and realisation of the absurd:

So long as the mind keeps silent in the motionless world of its hopes, everything is reflected and arranged in the unity of its nostalgia. But with its first move this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding. We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar, calm surface which would give us peace of heart (17).

The sequence described in this text is a crucial moment in the unravelling of capitalistic meaning and depiction of the absurd. An unfertilised egg, when whole, remains capable of capitalist productivity in provision of sustenance to the worker. When the egg is cracked and rebuilt, in the act of maintenance, it becomes freshly void. 'Valentine's Day 2020' is the despairing moment in which Sisyphus, despite his best efforts, watches the boulder fall to the bottom of the slope, sighs, and begins to push upwards again.

I was particularly interested in the coincidental date and my partner's role in the breaking of my egg. Heteronormative tradition dictates that the rupture of an egg-making body's egg by a worm-making body is a triumphant act, here falling on a date which capitalises on romanticising this pairing. Therefore, the invasion of my egg by a worm-making partner could be described as an aggressive and literal reproduction of the state-anticipated heterosexual cis-male act – the expansion of one body and the contraction of another.

Monique Wittig describes the concept of biological difference as how:

the masters interpret a historical situation of domination. The function of difference is to mask at every level the conflicts of interest, including ideological ones. In other words, for us, this means that there cannot any longer be women and men, and that as classes and categories of thought or language they have to disappear, politically, economically, ideologically (29–30).

Total elimination of a patriarchal language of reproductive meaning provides an environment for the blossoming of identities away from the constellation of sexual meaning. Where dictation of individual purpose is constructed on the theoretical role our bodies play in biologically making a child, here absurdity is found in the rebellious U-turn to concentrated deviation from heteronormative reproduction and collaborative rebuilding of the unfertilised egg.

Maintenance of ‘the everyday’ as an unstaged platform is vital to the integrity of absurd experience. Camus describes the relationship between artist and experience as good when the work itself is a portion of unlimited lived experience, rather than a theorised experience (95). Jane Gallop’s *Anecdotal Theory* is key to my collecting of lucid thought and articulating it as data of absurd praxis. Utilising anecdotes allows exposure of politically private and vulnerable acts, removing the authority of traditional pedagogies in explaining a concept (Gallop 24). The reflexive act of documenting preserves ‘the everyday’ as an arena for undisturbed, reactive behaviour.

However, documentation of the events of ‘Valentine’s Day 2020’ in an entirely confessional format does not feel comfortable. Memories of the experience exist in my mind as statements, objects, actions shared between multiple beings. There is a significance in the expansion and contraction of tensions between the three bodies – my partner, my egg, and I – and these details would be lost if presented from a single descriptive voice that attempts to purposely analyse.

I have been exploring experimental writing as practice as an expansion of anecdotal theory documentation. Anecdotal material is the basis for my findings, but there is also potential to retrospectively damage commonplace absurdity in over-analysis, and so alternative ways of articulating experience are important.

Katrina Palmer highlights the importance of giving space to moments of unembellished experience:

We don’t see the ordinary things we live with. In fact, we should avoid looking at familiar objects because we can’t make a spectacle of the everyday without losing it. If we look directly, and try to scrutinize its ordinariness, the very quality we want to inspect will recede (96).

The absurd everyday survives by collecting and reconstructing its shell, rather than attempting to clone every aspect of its original form.

In a scripted format, reactionary emotions are not explicitly described but instead retrievable in the possibility of observing the sequence as audience, or joining the experience as one of the players. Rather than a simplified diarylike focus on my distress, I hoped to expose the complex vulnerabilities of each of the three participants – my partner, my egg, and I – in the untold spaces of this template.

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