UTTER MONSTER
HOW MY PERFORMING VOICE CREATES QUEER SPACE AND GENERATES
ALTERNATIVE GENDER NARRATIVES

by

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Declaration

I, Eloise Fornieles, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Content Warning

Some of the following written material contains references to violence and sexual violence. Some of the artworks contain roadkill, nudity, bodily fluids and references to violence. Each artwork has an independent content note for readers to make informed decisions on their engagement.
For John, Lynne and Tata
Acknowledgments

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With special thanks to my father for his endless curiosity and dedication, to my mother for her unwavering belief and kindness, and to Tata for her strict approach to education.

Many thanks also to The Lionel Bart Foundation for their financial support in my first year of research.
Abstract

This practice-led research investigates how the performing voice can create queer space and generate alternative gender narratives. Through works of art that apply methods including vocal masks, alter egos, collage, storytelling and monstering, it aims to show how vocal performance can unsettle fixed and binary formulations of gender and facilitate fluid and polyvalent ones. To that end, this report presents three key bodies of practice: (i) performed alter egos, (ii) vocal sound works and (iii) video.

Brian Kane’s model of vocal analysis – which cross-sections Topos (site), Logos (meaning), Echos (sound) and Techne (technology) – is used to consider how vocal performance can upset the norms embedded in vocalising and establish new sets of relations. My research challenges Lacan’s definition of the voice as the unobtainable objet petit a, a theory endorsed by Mladen Dolar in A Voice and Nothing More, and instead builds upon the voice as a relational bridge between active parties incorporating Miriama Young’s understanding of the voice as a technology. Autopoiesis figures as a performative feedback loop in which listening figures as a vital component, following theories of Quantum Listening and Deep Listening as theorised by Pauline Oliveros. Adriana Caverero, Michael Chion, Mladen Dolar, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Brian Kane, Jacques Lacan and Miriama Young provide theories on the voice to which the works of art created in the course of my research respond.

I extrapolate Floya Anthias’ concept of Translocational Positionality as a means of analysing the fluid nature of intersectional gender identities. The artworks apply feminist queer theories – Xenofeminism (Helen Hester), Shadow Feminism (Jack Halberstam) and Glitch Feminism (Legacy Russell) – to the task of undermining binary gender narratives and constructing
space for the production of alternatives. The ideas of Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Audre Lorde are among those used to analyse and evaluate the works of art, while performances by Laurie Anderson, Leigh Bowery, Samuel Beckett, Lydia Lunch, Paul McCarthy, Adrian Piper and Marianna Simnett provide context for the relation between voice and gender.
**Impact Statement**

This research project *UTTER MONSTER, How the Performing Voice Creates Queer Space and Alternative Gender Narratives* aims to be beneficial in its contribution to public and cultural discourse on the voice, queer space and gender politics in academic and non-academic forums. I have spoken at various symposiums in person and online during my research and I will be applying to present my work at future academic forums and symposiums.

As well as being hosted by cultural institutions, the works of art through which I researched were performed in pop-up project spaces, theatres, nightclubs, and festivals. This means that my research had a diverse audience, with correspondingly wide-ranging responses. Invitations to perform new works in London, Milan and Athens in 2023 will provide further opportunities to present my findings. As an artist my public engagement outside of academia is well established and diverse in its audiences.

My performances involve diverse forms of storytelling which provide an intimate way of researching the effect of voice on the construction of shared space and the production of narrative. These effects have a life beyond the encounter: in the retelling of the experience by participants, for example.

In 2020 I was the first Slade School of Fine Art Scholar to carry out a semester of research at Yale University under the supervision of Professor Brian Kane in the musicology department. During this time, I contributed to the sound art class that nurtured a multidisciplinary approach to the generation and recording of sound. Collaborative and interdisciplinary
learning has been extremely important to my practice as an artist, teacher and researcher. This is reflected in the multiple points of access to my work.

The cross-disciplinary nature of my collaborations with academics, artists, designers, writers and musicians means that the findings of this research can be applied to diverse fields. I also plan to reformat my research as a fiction narrated by the character Monster, protagonist of the video *UTTER MONSTER*. I hope that the publication of this fiction will make my research accessible to a non-academic audience.

I have been offered a post-doctorate position at The British School at Rome to research *Speaking to Power in Rome*, which builds upon the ideas developed here. This cross-disciplinary research project will explore the intersection of three historical expressions of political protest in the Italian capital: the queer satire of Catullus, the tradition of the ‘talking statues’ on which citizens post anonymous messages of dissent, and the work of pioneering feminist collective Rivolta Femminile. Through dialogue with the school’s faculty and the city’s residents, this is an opportunity to formulate an original, queer feminist perspective on the vocalisation of dissent through the case study of ancient and contemporary Rome.

I now live in Athens, where I am in the process of establishing a not-for-profit educational and studio space in the district of Exarchia committed to advancing a number of the principles outlined in the course of this research. I have reached out to LGBTQIA+ charities including Safe Space International in order to work with queer young people interested in the arts. I will volunteer as part of their arts program, applying the findings from the research undertaken here.
This practice-led PhD has provided the foundations on which to build more theories about the relations between voice, gender and performance, and to make them available to diverse academic and artistic communities.
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0. Introduction

0.1 Research Overview

We enter the world bawling. Our tiny mouths gasp for the first breath so we might cry out into the atmosphere and have our vulnerable life force noted. From the start our voices make our needs known and we are caught by a relational net of people who coo, sing and repeat small phrases until our utterances transform into a vocabulary of words.

The voice reveals something of our personhood through specific vocal traits and codes which become intrinsic to our identity. When listening to a voice we aren’t merely comprehending words, but interpreting accent, volume, intonation, tone, pitch and lilt. We use all of these cues to understand gender, place of origin, cultural background, class, age, mood, intention and status. Our voices may take on some of the characteristics of those around us, but each remains unique.

In her book *Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, Adriana Cavarero writes that ‘uniqueness resounds in the human voice; or, in the human voice, uniqueness makes itself sound.’¹ It is this personal quality that makes the voice so powerful as a performer and is why I have chosen to focus my research on the voice. Prior to this, I had spent fifteen years creating one-to-one performances in which I asked questions of my interlocutors and listened to their stories. The practice undertaken as research for my PhD marked an important shift in my work, during which I started to find and use my voice to tell my own stories. In doing so, I was able to construct narratives of gender that expressed my own experience.

The title of this report acknowledges the performative impact of ‘utterance’ and declares me – the artist, the author of this report – to be ‘utterly’ monstrous. The word ‘utterance’ has been used by speech scholars to denote the smallest unit of speech, bound by silence: a vocal sound which needn’t be a word. J. L. Austin changed the perception of the utterance in 1955 when he started to develop the idea of the performative utterance in his lectures and subsequent book *How to Do Things with Words*\(^2\). Recognising that speech was a form of action, he argued that to speak was to shape the world around us.

Austin proposed that language does this in two significant ways, one of which he referred to as a *constative utterance*: within the right social and/or institutional context, language can announce something as so. Take, for example, the registrar’s declaration ‘I now pronounce you wife and wife.’ The second method is referred to as a *performative utterance* which instigates a sequence of events that unfold as a consequence of speech: ‘I promise to put the stone down.’ The *promise* is an action, in that the word itself is *doing*. If the promise is fulfilled, the physical world is changed by the stone being dropped to the floor (if the action fails to take place, writes Austin, these performative utterances are *unhappy*). And so, the voice is an agent that shapes the world and the gender narratives in our culture. These narratives are manifested and perpetuated through fairy tales, films, social media, religious sermons and oral family narratives, shaping the ways in which gender is embodied and performed in our everyday lives.

In her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed relates how her sister uses the phrase ‘Look, there’s a little John and a little Mark’ to identify two boys as

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miniature versions of their fathers. Ahmed observes how the utterance is used to keep a normative, sequential narrative ‘in line’ across generations by verbally comparing the son to the father. According to Ahmed, this practice doesn’t just affirm a correlation, but also sets a model for the replication of behaviours that will result in the son becoming father to an imagined future generation. Ahmed writes,

One can think of such an utterance as performing the work of alignment: the utterance positions the child as the not-yet adult by aligning sex (the male body) and gender (the masculine character) with sexual orientation (the heterosexual future). Through the utterance, these not-yet-but-to-be subjects are “brought into line”, by being “given” a future that is “in line” with the family line. What intrigues me here is not so much how sex, gender and sexual orientation can “get out of line”, which they certainly can and do “do”, but how they are kept in line, often through force, such that any nonalignment produces a queer effect. 3

Thus, the family unit uses performative utterances directly and indirectly to manifest social gender norms. This utterance establishes a family narrative such that if any of its members slip ‘out of line’ they are considered non-normative, often to their detriment. For this reason, it feels vital to use my voice to make alternative ‘utterances’, to both demonstrate and model diverse ways of being and alternative narratives. This is carried out in the knowledge that sharing these stories might contribute to the normalisation of what is considered ‘queer’ – that as societies and their institutions shift to create equality and acceptance, being queer won’t be so queer. This is a shift I have mixed feelings about.

For the purpose of this research I have focused on the figure of the ‘monster’ as a vehicle for queer expression, theory and storytelling. Monsters manifest the fear of the unknown – the word ‘Monster’ comes from *monstrare*, meaning to show or reveal – which is to say, to speak the unspoken. Monsters are a means of showing and saying what cannot otherwise be said.

This research is an attempt to go out into my own internal terrain and reveal the monsters I find there. In identifying my internal monsters, and speaking through them, I wanted to discover whether my queer monsters would change the shape of the world they inhabited. Could the performing voice reach beyond the world of performance to queer physical space? In the action of utterance can I reclaim the monster narrative and establish my own alternative understandings of gender? Speaking gives agency to the parts of my psyche that might be deemed monstrous, and my artworks embody and accept them: I use the term *monster* to acknowledge, honour and express the parts of me that are not accepted within social norms, that are ‘out of line’. The monster becomes a vehicle to be more publicly honest about myself while simultaneously feeling protected by the mask that monstering provides.

It has taken me more than twenty years to find my voice in performance. In this written report, I unpick what it signifies. I investigate how my own voice sounds coming back to me, as it reflects on surfaces, or passes through sound equipment. In describing the effect my voice has within my artworks I am using my perspective as a performer to express how I experience the queer spaces the voice creates. In listening to it, I try to understand myself. The research explores how, in live performances, my voice operates in communal space, how it contributes to the formation of collective experiences, how it changes the atmosphere.
Gender narratives are the stories that culturally ascribe constructs, ideas and ideals of how gender roles should be played out in our lives. I have used the term ‘alternative gender narrative’ to describe the stories I create because they provide marginalised stories that don’t fit binary distinctions of gender. The stories are often formed using the disruption of culturally understood gender cues and in this disruption a new possibility opens up and the normative narrative is changed. Gender narratives are always relational as they indicate how protagonists relate to one another, how they relate to themselves and how they relate with an audience.

My thesis follows J.L Austin’s theory on performative utterance,\(^4\) according to which the voice physically affects the world, and Judith Butler’s proposals in ‘Gender Trouble’\(^5\) that establish gender as a performative and therefore relational construct. Narratives are also performative and relational and the stories we tell culturally, the stories we tell ourselves and the stories we tell about ourselves, all culminate in our understanding of gender and self-identity.

My practice-led research follows the long histories of marginalised voices using oral storytelling as a means of sharing information, experiences and stories that have traditionally been excluded from the canon. My oral stories apply dramatized narrative, improvisation, poetry and song in which I have developed and presented new ideas of what gender can look like outside of a binary system. This process made me aware that in using my voice I changed the atmosphere of the space I was in, which made me ask what that quality was. In each instance the overarching commonality was the endeavour of communicating my


queerness and that my voice was bringing that quality into the space. Vocally created queer space therefore is a relational construct in which a queer quality is broadcast and received within a feedback loop.

The research sets out to create and understand queer space and in the process questions whether it constitutes a ‘safe space’. The term first came into circulation among feminist activists in the late twentieth century and has been since been widely adopted by academics and community groups. For the purposes of this research, the term ‘safe space’ is taken to define a physical or online space in which participating actors feel confident that they will be protected from emotional or physical harm. The Roestone Collective⁶ write that ‘from the literature on unsafe space, we can … understand how the categories of safe and unsafe are socially produced and context dependent. As such, safe spaces respond to the often patriarchal, heteronormative, racialized, and classed “imaginary construction[s]” of safety (Stengel 2010:524).’ Safety as a culturally dependent and imagined construct is one area that my research investigates. I consider how my vocal performances and recordings respond to the nature of that ‘safety’ provided by the spaces within which they take place. And how, in turn, they change my experience of safety as a performer in the given space.

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⁶ The Roestone Collective comprises geographers Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman.

⁷ The Roestone Collective, “Safe Space, Towards Reconceptualization”, Antipode, (October 2014), 1350
0.2 Structure of Report

This research is practice-led and frames the artworks (live performances, sound works and videos) as the thesis. This paper is a report on that thesis. The context of the research is within theoretical writings on performance, the voice, queer space, gender narratives and artworks by other artists, all outlined within this introduction and methodology.

Each artwork is outlined in a corresponding descriptive case study, which cites the specifics of how each artwork employs particular methods to answer the research questions. The case studies include links to the artworks online and links within the paper to indicate where each case study can be found in the following thematic analysis. The thematic analysis cross references my artworks in order to highlight how the thesis endeavours to answer the research questions. My artworks are framed within the fields of visual arts and performance with comparative artworks by other practitioners in order to contextualise the works within contemporary fields of practice. The conclusive chapter of research will endeavour to interrogate how my practice creates queer space and communicates unique alternative gender narratives within a wider constellation of vocal performance and summarise what I have learned from making the work.
0.3 Research Questions

Primary Questions

How does my performed voice create queer space? How does this facilitate the creation of alternative gender narratives?

Secondary Questions

Can my voice create a bridge between my mind and body, and myself and a community?

Is the queer space my voice creates a safe space?

Does my voice function as a tool?

The questions I ask of my practice will also be asked of other relevant artworks by artists such as Laurie Anderson, Leigh Bowery and Adrian Piper to situate the findings in my work and articulate how my practice-led research is original.

0.4 Hypothesis

The hypothesis presented here asserts that performing genderqueer alter egos in costumed performances, manipulated vocal sound work and videos featuring my voice will lead to the disruption of gender normative cues and in doing so create a queer space. By manipulating my natural vocal range with vocal effects and helium to create vocal masks that are in opposition to visual representations of the body and normative gender narratives, the performances will open up a space for reinterpreting my identity. I believe focusing on the employment of altered voices and intimacy within performances has the potential to create original and empathetic dialogues that broaden the current discourse on queer space and challenge cultural stereotypes on gender.
0.5 Aims and Objectives

In order to advance the thesis, I have made performance work, sound works and videos that focus on the following aims:

- Devise artworks that use my voice to create queer space.
- Use my voice in artworks to generate alternative gender narratives that demonstrate diverse ways of modelling gender.
- Produce artworks using monsters that embody original voices, ideas and gender narratives.
- Investigate how visual and vocal masks create a queer space for alternative gender narratives.
- Evaluate the response to feminist concerns delivered by a deep voice.
- Assess the ways in which my alter egos relate to their bodies and articulate their gender.
- Develop artworks and theories that exemplify my voice as a bridge between my mind and body, between myself and individuals, between myself and a wider community.
- Evaluate the relationship between queer space created by my voice and safe space.
- Investigate whether my voice operates as a tool.
- Report on my subjective experience of the queer space created by my voice.
0.6 Methodology

The methodology framing this body of research sets the research within fine art practice drawing on bodies of knowledge from performance studies (performativity, speech acts, quantum listening and autopoiesis), queer theory (Shadow Feminism, Gaga Feminism and non-alignment), spatial theory (Translocational Positionality and Horizons), intersectional feminism (Glitch Feminism, Xenofeminism) and theories on the voice (acousmatic voices, bridges and the voice as technology).

Each artwork outlined as a descriptive case study focusing on my subjective perspective as a performer. The rationale for this approach is to provide a rich and nuanced account of the process and practice of making and performing, which requires the body – and in this case the voice – of the artist to be active. The descriptive case studies act as a form of storytelling which is in keeping with the practice-led research. Descriptive writing as a concurrent activity to the practice of making artwork is highlighted in Clive Cazeaux’s book, Art, Research, Philosophy, which asserts that the act of describing the artwork further sculpts and refines the artwork, identifying and bringing to the fore elements of the process. Performance scholar Peggy Phelan suggests that performance cannot be reproduced, whereas writing relies on the repetition of words and their indicative definitions. To write about performance studies in the absence of the event, therefore, is to create a new form for the performance in the understanding of the reader. Phelan states ‘To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself.’ The descriptive case studies therefore stand in to shape the experience of the

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performance works. The methodologies used in writing about my performance work encompass the fold between performing/writing and vocalising/listening as active and reflective processes that are intrinsically linked. The process of descriptive writing also became a way of making the work more accessible to an audience who may not have auditory hearing, may not be able to see the artworks, or may not like or be able to access live performance.

Fig. 1. Model of Vocal Analysis, 2022.
In this research the voice is framed by musicologist Brian Kane’s model of cross-sectioned vocal elements consisting of Echos (sound), Logos (meaning), and Techne (technology) which can be used to queer the fourth element Topos (site) (Kane 2015, 91-112). To develop this model, I have used Miriama Young’s theory of the voice, according to which the biological apparatus within the body (lungs, larynx, throat, mouth and tongue) should be considered as an organic technology (Young 2020, 6). This forms a model in which Techne is ever-present, with additional technologies – such as microphones, speakers, vocal effects, pedal – as extensions of the existing biological technology.

This analytical model figures the voice as a tool. I have also looked to Audre Lorde’s The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House, which asserts that the technologies and systems created by a colonial patriarchy will ultimately serve those who made them. Conversely, Legacy Russell’s Glitch Feminism promotes the use of these tools to glitch, disrupt and reconfigure the power structure, by hacking, refusing and instigating viral breaks in the patriarchal system. Xenofeminism stands firm in the belief that patriarchal tools can be turned against the patriarchy through their use in technological interventions that progress equality and abolish gender distinctions (Hester 2018, 7). Within this framework I assess alternative gender narratives and queer space using a progression of artworks that start with performing alter egos moving onto sound works and finally video, all of which centre the voice as the focal point. Throughout this process my performances and

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13 Helen Hester, Xenofeminism (London:Polity, 2018). Xenofeminism was developed by an art collective known as Laboria Cuboniks, including artists, writers and computer programmers Diann Bauer, Katerina Burch, Lucca Fraser, Helen Hester, Amy Ireland and Patricia Reed.
artworks questions whether the voice can be considered a tool and, if so, whether it can escape belonging to the master.

The research challenges Mladen Dolar’s work on the voice, which develops Lacan’s theory on the voice as an objet petit a, in which the voice figures as a separate entity from the speaker as an unobtainable object of desire (Dolar 2006, 10-11). Instead, I analyse the voice as a point of connection and bridge between speaker and receiver, as touched on by Erika Fischer-Lichte’s theories on feedback loops of connectivity between performer and audience (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 130). In this configuration the performer listens to the audience in order to understand the relational effect that their performance is producing and responds accordingly. By extension, an important element of this feedback loop has been the practice of listening. Pauline Oliveros’ theories and practices in Deep Listening— in which the listener listens to everything possible within themselves and their environment – were observed and applied in my performed artworks (Oliveros 2022, 29). This extends into Quantum Listening, in which the listener is listening to more than one reality simultaneously, and, importantly, to listening to listening, which is a fundamental part of performing. As Oliveros remarks ‘Listening is the key to performance’14 which is true to both audience and performer.

When performing, a combination of vocalising and listening created a bridge between my body and mind (in hearing the sound of my voice coming back to me); between myself and audience members; and between myself and the wider world. These connections made possible new combinations, and, in this way, vocalising became an abstract way of creating communal experiences that are, in effect, intersubjective collages in something like the manner described by Jack Halberstam (Halberstam 2011, 135).

14 Pauline Oliveros, Quantum Listening (London: Ignota, 2022), 37.
Halberstam describes collage as a form of radical passivity and shadow feminism, a form of refusing normative materials, ideas and gender narratives and instead cutting and reconfiguring them to take a stance against oppressive constructs (Halberstam 2011, 123-145). The voice is at the intersection between subjects and temporarily brings together those projecting vocally and those receiving the sound of that voice. As the substance that temporarily connects separate entities, the voice is well positioned to effect, change or influence the connections between people that collectively produce shared and communal experiences.

I have figured the voice as a bridge in this research, but I have also taken advantage of the gaps that the bridge spans. The bridge is configured between the performer/ artwork and audience, which means the voice also bridges the visual representation of the body, or the lack thereof, and the audience. I have followed Michael Chion’s writing on acousmatic voices, developed from Pierre Schiaffer’s writing in the 1950s, in which the sound (Echos) of the voice is separated from the visual representation of the speaking body (Topos). Chion writes ‘When the acousmatic presence is a voice, and especially when the voice has not yet been visualised- that is, when we cannot yet connect it to a face- we get a special kind of being, a kind of talking and acting shadow to which we attach the name acousmêtre.’

Acousmêtre create a gap in the audiences knowledge and therefore there is an opportunity for the audience to imagine the face, body and therefore gender of the speaker. Acousmêtre feature in most of my artworks as my face and body are obscured by masks and costumes, and sound works and videos in which my voice is dislocated from the representation of my

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body. Acousmatic voices introduce forms of ventriloquism that utilize the gap between the voice and the speaking body in order to reimagine how that body might be gendered.

The monsters in this practice-led thesis are of my own invention, each vocalizing a different part of my psyche. This intentional identification and embodiment of the monster and narrating from the monster’s perspective is a method I refer to as Monstering, which is a term I have developed specifically to describe a method of performance. My monsters and monstering create a gap between what is said and what is seen, often disturbing normative gender narratives by combining a deep voice with a femme or alternative body. However, there are many ways of monstering, and other practitioners employ various techniques to present monsters and gender in a new light. Leigh Bowery for example, created visually arresting costumes which configured a new way of understanding what it meant to be camp, flamboyant and otherworldly in public spaces, such as clubs. For my analysis, I positioned my monsters within a constellation of other forms of artistic and literary monstering, such as Paul B. Preciado’s lecture and consequent book *Can the Monster Speak?*[^16], Leigh Bowery’s monstrous birthing performance[^17], Narcissister’s shapeshifting[^18] and Paul McCarthy’s riff on the family unit and the monstrous behaviours that pass between father and son.[^19] Identifying as a monster frees the performer from the expectation that they should perform normative gender cues. As such, monsters’ function as both individuated characters and broad cultural signifiers. For example, in my performances The Troll Baby is a sweet and loving character, but they also represent the fear of having/not having a child and simultaneously the hopeful gender narrative imbued within child free life. Alex Sharpe’s queer theories on monsters[^16][^17][^18][^19]

posits them as hopeful creatures that shed light on future challenges and changes. Like Sharpe, I focus my analysis on monsters that are always, at least in part, human: Sharpe explains ‘While some scholars might want to define monsters more broadly, I think a key thing about monsters is that they are at least part human, though never completely so. That is, hybridity is a condition of their constitution, but not any kind of hybridity’. For this reason monsters remain particularly poignant, since there is always a human element that is relatable, despite being othered, and therefore seem all the more terrifying: they are not so far removed from everybody else.

Spatial and relational theories were used to understand how one’s personhood and voice affect physical space and vice versa. These theories and observations were then used to consider how queer space is produced by the voice. Key theories included sociologist Floya Anthias’ writing on translocational positionality (Anthias 2002, 491), in which perceptions of identity change through space and context and Heidegger’s theories on the horizon line and the illusive nature of boundaries (Sharr 2007, 55-58). These theories enabled an evaluation into the emotional impact and limitations of what it means to create queer space with my voice.

0.7 Methods

The thesis is my art practice and so the methodologies rely on methods of practical application, namely alter egos, monstering, masks and costumes, collage, making do, listening, ventriloquism and storytelling.

0.71 Alter Egos

The term *Alter Ego* comes from the Latin *Alter* which means *other* and *Ego* which means *I*. The term was coined by first-century Roman politician and lawyer Marcus Tullious Cicero, who used the term to describe “a second self or trusted friend”. In contemporary culture, the term has been adapted both in the wider media and among academics of diverse disciplines to describe instances of a second self ranging from virtual avatars to fictional characters and performance acts.

The research-led practice uses three alter egos to explore the possibilities of generating queer space through performance. These characters are Eric Self, Troll Baby and Monster. Eric Self is a rabbit with a deep voice, a large vagina and a bolshie attitude. He is a social and political animal who gives birth to Troll Baby. Troll Baby is desperate to be loved and to love but is a lonely creature. Troll Baby uses their smart phone obsessively in an attempt to connect with the world. The last alter ego manifests as a voice that provides the monologue voiceover for the video *UTTER MONSTER*. Her voice is electronically manipulated to be slightly deeper than my own but is the closest in pitch to my everyday voice.
0.72 Masks and Costumes

The characters of Eric Self, Troll Baby and Monster are constructed through visual and vocal masks. Eric Self is realised, in part, through an adapted, shop-bought rabbit mascot costume. In a reoccurring performance Eric reveals his vagina, which is a handsewn adjustment to the costume, and gives birth to Troll Baby, who has the latex face of an old man, wears a plastic bag as a nappy and has bare breasts. The effect is to confuse age cues by presenting a body crossed between infancy and old age. Eric's ability to reproduce, his large vagina and deep voice, as well as the Troll’s bare breasts and gruff voice, are all designed to disrupt binary gender cues.

Each artwork uses vocal masks created through technologies and techniques including a Boss vocal effects pedal, the editing software Logic X, inhaled helium and my larynx, mouth and tongue. Together these manipulate the pitch, accent and texture of my voice. I do not commit to physically changing my body using hormones or surgery: It is important to note that I do not feel that my body needs to change; rather, I endeavour to change society’s perception of my body.

Eric’s voice is made especially deep through use of the Boss vocal effects pedal. Troll Baby’s voice is deeper than my everyday voice and is created by dropping my voice and pushing the air against the back of my throat to produce a gruff, gravelly sound. The only external technology used by the Troll is helium, which they use to playfully heighten their voice.

The spoken word works collage vocal effects using a vocal effects pedal. Modulations in pitch are used to misalign, in Sarah Ahmed’s sense, expected vocal and visual gender cues.
(Ahmed 2006, 83). I used Logic X to manipulate my voice in the voiceovers for the videos *The Calculation* and *UTTER MONSTER*.

The descriptive language, names and pronouns used to describe and understand the characters are also masks. Neither Eric Self nor Troll Baby are male but adopt the male and gender-neutral pronouns, respectively, to dispute the female characteristics of the body beneath the mask. In the video *UTTER MONSTER*, the narrator’s body is never shown. The screen through which they speak is itself a mask. Like a mask, what it shows express a part of the character that would otherwise go unseen.

**0.73 Monstering**

Monstering in this research is a series of performative behaviours that sit outside of normative cultural/social cues, which I manifest in performances and vocals. It involves the performer embodying a behaviour or impulse that is conventionally hidden, feared or despised: that society has deemed ‘monstrous’. The creation of a monster thus relies on the perception of others: without a norm to contravene, nothing can be monstrous. By breaking free from those behavioural norms of binary gender constructs, monstering is a way of exploring alternative narratives.

**0.74 Ventriloquism**

The act of animating and vocalizing a fictional character – as I do in my performances – is related to the way a traditional ventriloquist vocalizes a puppet without seeming to move

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21 The discrepancy in adjectives used to describe female and male subjects often goes unnoticed but has a surreptitious effect. For example, females with leadership skills are often described as ‘bossy’, where her male counter parts would be positively affirmed with positive adjectives.
their mouth. The illusion creates the impression that an inanimate object has a voice and is by extension animate. I take a wider view of ventriloquism, understanding my voice to animate costumes (in live performances) and laptops, projectors and speakers (in video and sound works). Creating disjuncture between my body and my voice is also a form of ventriloquism, because separates the acousmatic voice from the body.

0.75 Making Do

Making do is a method based on making the most of the materials and equipment that are to hand and are available to the financially challenged. This self-sufficient means of making belongs to a rich culture of DIY art practices, queer subcultures, and music from punk to bedroom pop. My approach to work – and life – is DIY, scrappy and to a large extent making do. To make do is an operative phrase: it transforms the act of making into the act of doing.

0.76 Collage

Collage is a method I apply to all parts of my practice, in various different media. I cut and paste materials to create hybrid costumes; I collage sound and image in videos using the editing programmes Logic X\(^22\) and Premier Pro\(^23\); I use the cutup technique to sculpt the texts that I deliver as spoken word works; I think of my performances as creating communal experiences that are constituted through the collage of individual experiences in the space. I use Jack Halberstam’s writing on radical passivity and shadow feminism to analyse collage as a feminist and queer method.\(^24\)

\(^{22}\) Logic X is a program used for editing sound.
\(^{23}\) Premiere Pro is an Adobe program used for editing video.
0.77 Storytelling

My practice-led and written research examines the role of the voice in storytelling and its influence on the formation of gender identity both individually and culturally. The artworks refer to the stories being told through news media, fairy tales, pop music and social media, reflecting on whose voices they represent and the ways in which they shape expressions of gender. The artworks use vocal monologues and poetry as forms of oral storytelling and the report uses descriptive case studies as an additional form of storytelling which highlights specific elements and shapes the artworks in their absence.

0.78 Listening

Listening is an essential part of the works of art that constitute my research. I use the term *listening* to encompass different means of receiving information from people: I listen attentively to people’s body language when I perform; I listen to the feedback delivered by friends in the form of an email or text message. When performing live, listening to the audience helps me to improvise, and influences my delivery of scripted word pieces. During the making of the work I received feedback from the audience, my supervisors and peers which was taken into account when developing further work. The reception of the works influenced successive performances, so that there is a feedback loop between performer and audience. The feedback loop created by speaking and listening is an integral part of my research methods.
I applied the method of Deep Listening, as defined by Pauline Oliveros, through the production of the album *Trespass* (case study 5) which transformed ambient sounds recorded in my environment into melodies and rhythmic sounds.

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0.8. Research Context

0.81 The Voice

The voice is a bridge emerging from the body rather than an object that exists independently of it. I do not follow Mladen Dolar’s theory, based on his interpretation of Jacques Lacan, that the voice is an objet petit a: an unobtainable object of desire. Dolar argues that we can never quite locate or see where the voice comes from, highlighting the gap between the body and the voice. He quotes Slavoj Žižek:

An unbridgeable gap separates forever a human body from “its” voice. The voice displays a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, so that even when we see a living person talking, there is always a minimum of ventriloquism at work: it is as if the speaker’s own voice hollows him out and in a sense speaks “by itself” through him.\(^{26}\)

Rather than ‘an unbridgeable gap’ between body and voice, I build on Erica Fischer-Lichte’s insight in *The Transformative Power of Performance* that ‘The voice builds a bridge and establishes a relationship between two subjects. It fills the space between them. By making their voices audible, people reach out to touch those who hear it.’\(^{27}\) I take this further, proposing the voice as bridge capable of making new connections between mind and body, between self and other, between individual and community.

By creating an artificial gap between body and voice, it is possible to disrupt expectations of how they relate to the other. My practice-led research used costumes, vocal masks and


recorded sound to create a gap or screen that creates a disjuncture between the two. In doing so it produces acousmatic sound.

‘Acousmatic sound’ is a concept coined by Pierre Schaeffer and popularized by Michael Chion in his book *The Voice in Cinema*. Chion uses an anecdote in which Pythagoras would make his followers listen to their ‘Master speak *behind a curtain*, as the story goes, so that the sight of the speaker wouldn’t distract them from the message.’28 My alter egos and visual masks function as veils or ‘curtains’ that allow me to be physically present without my body conditioning the reception of my voice. Unlike Pythagoras, these performances do not focus the audience’s attention on the linguistic content of the message, but instead focus their attention on the sound of my voice and its manipulated pitch, freed from association with my body.

Brian Kane’s model of the voice integrates Logos (meaning), Echos (sound), and Topos (site). In considering the ‘vocal turn’ in the humanities, Kane observes that the voice is commonly segregated into these sections of analysis. He argues instead for a holistic evaluation of the voice which integrates all three elements, and goes on to include an additional term, ‘Techne’ (technologies and techniques) (Kane 2015, 91-112). In her book *Singing the Body Electric, The Human Voice and Sound Technology*, Miriama Young proposes that the human voice should not be pitted against technology and instead regards the voice as a sophisticated technology in itself (Young 2020, 6). Young suggests that external technologies – such as microphones and speakers – merely extend the voice produced by this internal technology, thus complicating the binary between technological and biological.

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I have adopted this philosophy and adapted Kane’s model so that Techne is as central to it as the other three elements. Kane encourages an analysis which cross-sections or pairs the different fields, so as to consider where sound (Echos) becomes meaning (Logos). This provides a model for my investigation into how meaning (Logos), sound (Echos), and technology (Techne) can queer space (Topos).

Fischer-Lichte reflects on the voice in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, observing that it creates three types of materiality – corporeality, spatiality and tonality – with tonality always generating spatiality (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 125). This relationship between tonality (Echos, in my model) and spatiality (Topos) indicates that the speaking voice will always affect the space in which it speaks. Sound is kinetic and travels through material, however diffuse or dense that materiality might be.

As Kane points out, the term Topos allows that the site of the voice moves beyond the body (*soma*). Instead, the voice creates a space that extends beyond its point of origin. Thus, changing any one of the elements of the voice changes the Topos, the space in which it exists. At the beginning of each chapter I have indicated which cross section of Echos, Logos, Topos or Techne are most relevant to the analysis.

### 0.82 Performance

too often marginalised practitioners, academics and activists working outside the predominantly white, male European and North American canon. That ‘there is no quintessence of queer performance—its significance and value as such is relational, determined through time and in particular spaces’\textsuperscript{29} suggests that any understanding of queer performance cannot be separated from the contexts in which it is practiced and received. My research focuses on how I use my voice to create a relational space, which extends to include both the speaker and listeners. The space in which this happens can then be queered in the process and new models of gender can be proposed and endorsed.

With its focus on the relation between gender and performed voice, my practice-led research sits at the intersection of two forms of performativity: the performative utterance as defined by J. L. Austin, in which speech acts shape the world, and Judith Butler’s more recent use of the term to describe the repetitive bodily actions through which cultural constructs of gender are performed. Jacques Derrida and John Searle had moved performative utterances forward after Austin’s death in 1960 (\textit{Doing Things with Words} was published posthumously in 1962). Searle asserted that utterance was rooted by intention whereas Derrida believed that the performative utterance was activated by iterance and therefore relied upon repetition, which divorced the speech act from conscious intention\textsuperscript{30}. Butler developed Derrida’s approach to the cultural significance of performative repetition in \textit{Gender Trouble}. Butler writes,

\begin{quote}
As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of
\end{quote}


meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this “action” is a public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame—an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject. 31

That gender is an action performed through repeated performance frees gender from biological determinism. Gender is instead figured as a process in which the subject is founded, providing agency for queer subjects whose experience is at odds with binary gender distinctions. Performative constructs rely upon on the action being seen and heard, so that their cultural significations are validated. Since queerness also manifests in performativity, it is also fundamentally relational. This process of identification can be with oneself, as an autopoietic loop reflecting on one’s own transmission and reception.

My artworks use performative utterances to make real those aspects of my psyche that exist outside of normative expectations. In the word piece Monster, I play the phrases ‘I’m a Monster’, ‘I’m boisterous’ and ‘I’m homo, home sweet homo’ as constative utterances which announce something to be so, pronounced under my own authority. In speaking myself into being, the sovereignty of my identity remains my own, and the world I inhabit is shaped accordingly. This often occurs in spoken word poetry in which poets use language to reclaim hate speech in order to self-identify on their own terms. An example of this is seen in Travis Alabanza’s poem, Pride, in which Alabanza ends with the line ‘I am a freak, you cannot fuck

with me.’ These constatives and performative utterances are acts of speaking that shape the world around the speaker, rendering the voice as vital in implementing social change.

I follow Fischer-Lichte’s use of the term autopoiesis to describe the self-sustaining system created by the ‘feedback loop’ that connects audience and performer. Fischer-Lichte identifies the ‘performative turn’ in the 1960s with a new focus on audience engagement. Fischer-Lichte writes ‘The feedback loop as a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process emerged as the defining principle of theatrical work. A shift in focus occurred from potentially controlling the system to inducing the specific modes of autopoiesis.’ For example, the Fluxus group of artists, performers, composers and writers active through the 1960s and 70s focused on the process rather than the product, with a particular emphasis on the interactive relationship between the performer and audience. Perhaps most famous among these works is Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece (1964), during which she invited the audience to take up a pair of scissors and cut the clothes she was wearing. Through the work she remained still and silent.

When a performance isn’t held by the architecture and etiquettes of theatre, the specific modes of autopoiesis can be diverse. In my live performances I respond to the audience as much as its members respond to me, reinforcing the relational nature of queer performance, as identified by Amelia Jones (Jones 2021, 4). This relational process shapes the performance and the atmosphere of the space. My research investigates the possibilities of this autopoiesis by taking it a step further, creating vocal acts that do not have an external audience (or at least not an obvious one) by making sound recordings on my own in secluded public places, such as car parks at night.

In those instances, the only receivers for my voice were myself, my recording equipment and any animals and plants that happened to be present (although I also had a future audience for the recordings in mind). In these examples, the process of listening to my voice within a space and then listening to the subsequent recordings created a solitary feedback loop between my body and my voice. This was important in understanding how to proceed with the performances and reinforced that the feedback loops on which my performances depend always involve active listening. Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tapes* (1958) illustrates this process by allowing the audience to witness the protagonist listening to a prior recording of his voice at a significantly later stage in his life. Krapp responds to his own voice, creating an autopoietic system that collapses the thirty years between the character speaking and listening to himself.

At other times, my alter egos physically give birth to other alter egos: when Eric Self gives birth to Troll Baby, for example, I embody both characters and birth myself (case study 2: *The Birth of Troll Baby*). In this more literal act of autopoiesis, the alter ego creates a new body, voice and gender narrative for themselves. This is demonstrated by a piece called *Changes* (2013) by the performance artist Narcissister. She works her way through costumes representing death, an old woman, and a pregnant maid, births a doll, turns into an acrobat, a stripper, opens her suitcase to step into a large clam shell within it, on which she stands naked as Botticelli’s Venus, pulls a white sheath from her vagina which she stretches over her head, and finally slips her body through a hole in the hinge of the clam so that her head is presented like a pearl in the shell.
Narcissister’s characters do not speak, but their multiple embodiments in an autopoietic system create a similarly queer performative process of self-creation: each iteration of a new character is publicly self-made. By stripping a costume to reveal another, the artist does not change behind the scenes or have assistance with dressing, and the characters do not playout normative birth, but nonetheless reproduce. The process of change is the subject of the performance and the artist uses transformation as a form of queer identity. She is not one but all of these iterations. The speed at which identities are stripped and cast off rips through archetypes of womanhood in order to pervert and embody them on her own terms.

For the purposes of my research, I characterise drag as the performance of exaggerated binary gender archetypes, a definition which encompasses Narcissister’s Changes. Drag Kings perform an exaggerated version of masculinity as understood by the binary gender system and Drag Queens perform an exaggerated version of femininity as understood by the binary system. Importantly, the gender of the performers is not relevant to the performance.

While drag has too long a history to address comprehensively here, its popularity in today’s mainstream culture (notably in television series such as Ru Paul’s Drag Race) can be traced back to the voguing competitions that took place in the ballrooms of Harlem in the 1980s, with queer, Latinx and Black communities taking centre stage (as famously portrayed in the documentary film Paris is Burning, 1990). The significance of drag to the history of performance art at the intersection of gender, race, class and age cannot be overstated, which is why I will outline here where my practice-led research overlaps and where it diverges.

Drag relies upon the performance of recognisable gender archetypes. Artists such as Vaginal Davis adopt drag persona to combine their black, tall, male body and voice with behaviour that is coded by western society as feminine. In The Trouble with Men, or, Sex, Boredom and
Jennifer Doyle provides a critique of the value systems within which performance is framed at an intersection of ‘high art’ and marginalised queer art. In this essay Doyle looks to performance by Vaginal Davis in order to critique this value system and its implication on gender, race and class, using boredom, failure and sexualised archetypes as methods of subverting gender norms. Doyle recounts witnessing a performance that took place at a night organised by Davis and Ron Athey under the name GIMP at a Los Angeles gay club that exemplifies this point. This particular evening, in 2000, was named Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Care and headlined Davis’ work of the same name.

The title Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Care, plays on the US military’s notorious Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy. From 1994 to 2011 the official US policy towards non-heterosexual service people was they should be allowed to serve on condition that they did not disclose their sexual orientation or speak of LGBTQIA+ life. In this performance Vaginal Davis impersonated Vanessa Beecroft, a female Italian artist known for slick installations in which conventionally beautiful fashion models and uniformed men pose blankly in museum spaces.

Jennifer Doyle, who was at the performance, describes that in counterpose, Vaginal Davis as Beecroft paraded a selection of physically diverse, ‘bohemian-looking’, model men wearing US Navy Marine uniforms above the waist and socks and underpants below, while Davis read from a US Navy Marine handbook. Davis was then joined onstage by a real US Marine, in full uniform. After the Marine exposed his penis and played with himself, he received a somewhat unsuccessful but nonetheless enthusiastic blow job from one of the models.

Doyle comments, ‘When guilt and shame register in contemporary art it is frequently around spectacles of femininity, homosexuality, and blackness. Art, as understood by Davis in her

citation of Beecroft, is a form of class warfare.’ Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Care upended the conventions of beauty and behaviour upon which Beecroft’s work depends. Beecroft’s installations also critique gender by applying the same cultural codes and aesthetic presented in slick magazines in slick galleries, creating an uncomfortable dynamic in which an audience is in relation to real-life, speechless humans displayed as desirable commodities. Vaginal Davis on the other hand disrupts the codes and undermines both the magazine culture and the US Navy policy. Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Care was also a critique of gender representation in the contemporary art world, a world to which Vaginal Davis did not, at that time, unlike Vanessa Beecroft, have access. In drag, Davis used a marginalised construct of femininity to attack the dominant form.

In the essay Going Ape, Simian Feminism and Trans Species Drag35, Joshua Williams proposes that people performing as animals are creating a form of transspecies drag. Williams looks to trans theorists Eva Haywards and Jami Weinstein to broaden the term trans- in order to look specifically at the process by which performance encapsulates transformation. Williams includes instances in which humans dress as animals, and humans dress animals as humans, to examine the ambiguous threshold between animal and human and analyse what may be signified in performing across this divide. Williams draws on three performances in which female performers challenge racist and sexist stereotypes – Coco Fusco’s performance-lecture Observation of Predation in Humans: A Lecture by Dr. Zira, Animal Psychologist (2013-16), in which Fusco delivered a lecture on the aggressive behaviour of one set of humans against another, embodied as Dr Zira from the film series Planet of the Apes (1968-1973); a scene from television show Empire (2015) in which

fictional character Cookie Lyon, played by Taraji P. Henson, is lowered to a stage dressed as a gorilla beating their chest in a cage; and Kathryn Hunter’s theatrical performance in Kafka’s Monkey (2009) that depicts a version of Red Peter from Kafka’s story A Report to an Academy, in which an ape reports to a conference of academics on his learning to speak. In this article Williams examines these performances to develop a theory of transspecies drag, focusing on how these performed animal identities critique the gendered and racist implication that they signify.

While my performances as Eric Self do share aspects of trans species drag, such as an animal costume, my practice-led research does not attempt to exaggerate already established tropes within animal representation nor does it straightforwardly exaggerate forms of masculinity or femininity as seen in classic drag. Instead my alter ego performances generate new identities that do not align with existing gender categories or species distinctions.

However, my performances do make use of vocal effects pedals to exaggerate gendered understanding of deep pitch. Artists such as Laurie Anderson and Mariana Simnett both manipulate their voices using electronic vocal effects to distort perceptions. Both use a pitch shift that is within a typical male range. Eric, on the other hand, uses a very low voice. In this exaggeration of a gendered characteristic, his vocal performance is in line with drag. Eric’s costume also includes a large vagina, and although this is an exaggeration of anatomy, it is not an exaggeration of femininity, which in western cultures requires the labia to be small, neat and tucked away. The low voice and large vagina are exaggerations of gender which counter and confuse so that the performances remain in reference to drag, but outside of it.

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Where drag exaggerates or foregrounds binary distinctions in order to show the extent to which gender is constructed, my work aims to operate outside or dissolve those constructs. It does not aim to emulate or heighten characteristics held to belong to a gender or species.

Adrian Piper performed *Mythic Being* in public spaces around New York City between 1973-1975. For the performances, Piper dressed as a man, with an afro, sunglasses and moustache. On this performance John Bowles writes “‘[d]rag’ cannot be assumed to simply express some unmediated ‘interior truth.’ What is performed must always also be understood in terms of what cannot be represented—as the manifestation of certain prohibitions as well as an articulation of identification and desire.” Drag thus enables a space in which to express parts of one’s psyche which may struggle to be apparent within the constructs of binary gender, but it also enables the performer to express desires, such as using public space, that is either prohibited or difficult within the confines of normative behaviour.

While my alter ego performances do indeed express an “interior truth” (they make apparent my desires using props that stand in for a phallus and umbilical cord, or in speaking with a deep voice, which communicates my desire to be heard), I resist identifying my performances as ‘drag’ precisely because they work outside of any binary system of male/female, human/animal. My performances articulate a fluid identity that traverses existing categorical distinctions between human, animal and mythical. My body and speech represent something human; my body and Eric’s costume represent something animal; Eric and the Troll are derived from mythical creatures, respectively the White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Hoggle in Jim Henson’s *Labyrinth* (1986).

My performance practice is often live, but unlike some other forms of live art, it doesn’t formally reject the illusionary constructs of theatrical performance (such as the fourth wall, the suspension of disbelief, scripted action) in favour of experienced actions in real time. Instead it works within a spectrum of live art activities. Live art includes a multitude of interweaving disciplines including theatre, film, dance, music, ritual practices and fine art, with my own practice situated at the fine art of the spectrum.

I do not – as I did in my earlier work, prior to this research-led PhD – use the body as a material on which to carry out acts of endurance, but instead used masks to conceal and activate the body as a site for the audience to question and reimagine gender. However, these earlier performances taught me what I can physically and mentally endure and my approach to making performance has been deeply influenced by it.

The body’s materiality is often emphasized in live performance art, highlighting the ethical dilemma of an audience witnessing a sequence of potentially harmful actions played out on the body of the artist. Marina Abramović famously took the charged relationship between performer and spectator to an extreme with her work *Rhythm 0* (1974). At Galleria Studio Morra in Naples, Abramović invited the audience to take their choice from 72 items laid out on a table, and with them interact with her body. She provided a statement declaring that ‘I am the object. During this period I take full responsibility.’ The items on the table included a gun and one bullet. The performance started out calmly – members of the audience gave her a rose, kissed her on the cheek – but soon became increasingly violent. Audience members cut her clothes, cut her neck, drank her blood, lay her down on the table and put a knife between her legs. At one point somebody put the loaded gun in her hand, at which point a person from
the gallery intervened. Not only did members of the public action these violations, but others failed to intervene to prevent them, thus sanctioning the behaviour.

By contrast, my practice-led research requires the audience to suspend their disbelief and engage in a collaborative process of fictioning, so that my characters might be accepted on their own terms: not objects, as in *Rhythm 0*, but subjects. Audiences interacting with my alter egos are required to suspend their disbelief and enter conversations premised on the construct that these characters live in the world, relating to their gender without the normative expectations and cultural cues of normative society. The audience becomes an active part of the performance and a feedback loop is established which crosses between the realms of perceived reality and the conditions set up in order to speak with a fictional character. For example, when I was performing improvised conversations with members of the public on the streets of LA as Eric Self (case study 1: *Eric Goes La, La, La*), nobody asked who I was or why I was dressed as a rabbit. They addressed the rabbit to ask him his name.

In *Art Practice as Fictioning (or, myth-Science)*, Simon O’Sullivan asserts that art can create its own lexicon of adapted codes, so as to create a world of its own which is both ‘otherworldly’ and ‘of the world’ (O’Sullivan 2015). He goes on to theorise that digital technology makes it possible to layer (or collage) spatial and temporal materials to create alternative worlds.

This collapsing of hitherto separate worlds – and the concomitant production of a “new” landscape, a new platform for dreaming – is another definition of fictioning, especially when it is no longer clear where the fiction itself ends and so-called reality

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38 Marina Abramović interview for The Marina Abramović Institute
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTBkbsEXOQ
begins (or where reality ends and the fiction begins). Fictioning inserts itself into the real in this sense – into the world as-it-is (indeed, it collapses the so-called real and the fictional), but in so doing, it necessarily changes our reality. This is fictioning as mythopoeisis: the imaginative transformation of the world through fiction.39

In this way, performance can affect and change the world in which we live and since performance is so closely aligned with performativity it models new behaviours that expand from the moment in which they are performed. Fictioning therefore enables a means of imaginatively challenging gender norms and encouraging new forms of relational interaction between the performing voice and an audience.

I follow the observations of theatrologist Max Herrmann’s who framed the audiences as a performing counterpart: the audience may clap, laugh, boo, tut, snigger, cheer, sigh, gasp, give a standing ovation, walk out, throw flowers (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 35). By this measure, the audience is a body of actors who perform through their collective voices and actions (much like a chorus), and in doing so change the space of the performance. Unlike Abromovic’s Rhythm 0, the audiences are not formally invited to physically interact within the performance I make, but instead enter a conversation with alter egos, or respond to hearing spoken word work, and in doing so create a reaction to which I can respond.

When I have performed in established queer venues, to queer audiences, it is not my vocal performances alone that queer the space but, in collaboration with the audience, they produce new qualities and relations which create the atmosphere within the space. For example, when a performance evoked laughter, I would speak again when the laughter ended, so as to hear

39 O'Sullivan, S. Art Practice as Fictioning (or, myth-science) (2015), 6-7.
the reaction of the audience fully and then be heard, often to evoke more laughter. In doing so
a temporary relation is formed between the performer and the audience, which includes a
sense of expectation on both parts, oscillating between tension and release.

I mention endurance and drag in this section on performance specifically because they have
deeply influenced my artwork and frame it. As I have outlined, the artworks in my research
share qualities from each, but they do not straightforwardly belong to either discipline. Drag
represents an exaggerated act of artifice and spectacle; endurance art is predicated on the
direct encounter of the body with processes established by the artist that unfold over time. I
believe my alter egos are monstrous hybrids of these two disciplines: exaggerating,
countering and confusing cultural gender cues as Drag offers, whilst actioning over extended
or allocated periods of time, much like endurance, creating the opportunity to observe how
the actions of the performing body and voice effected particular spaces over time.

0.83 Queer Space
Queer space is determined by the relational activity of queer doings within a particular space.
Queer space can be physical, psychological, metaphorical, public or private. Queer space can
also be formed within a singular or collective imagination. Queerness challenges normative
ways of being within a patriarchal, colonial power structure but has varying meanings and
qualities, so for the purpose of this thesis I will define what I mean by ‘queer’ and ‘queer
space’.

From the end of the nineteenth century the word ‘queer’ was used as a derogatory term for
people of non-heterosexual orientation and people of non-binary gender. The word was
reclaimed in the early 1980s, and over time has come to generously hold a wide range of people and practices that stand outside or against the normative ideas, archetypes, and behaviours instituted and maintained by patriarchal and colonial power structures. The roots of the term are associated with gender and sexuality, and although these are the primary fields of my engagement, the term ‘queer’ has come through queer theory to be applied to frameworks that disrupt normative social and cultural constructs. The term has an established place in the academic realms of philosophy, politics, social sciences and the arts. Jack Halberstam writes,

If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity and come closer to understanding Foucault’s comment in “Friendship as a Way of Life” that “homosexuality threatens people as a ‘way of life’ rather than as a way of having sex”.

So, the term queerness denotes a multitude of non-normative doings that threaten a colonial patriarchy that it will not serve. Queerness needn’t be overt or assertive and, as outlined in Halberstam’s theories on shadow feminism, acts of absence, refusal, silence and self-sabotage can effectively disrupt the power system. ‘Queer’ is not an absolute value, but is defined by diverse doings between people or between people and things: it is relational.

Established queer spaces such as bars, clubs and community centres have played an important role for queer communities, especially at times and in places where their sexual practices were/are illegal and/or suffer prejudice from society. A recent report from University College, London, revealed that 58 percent of LGBTQIA+ spaces in the UK had closed between 2006 and 2017\textsuperscript{43}, with a further decline after the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020. According to the report, the threat to queer space is largely down to gentrification and the rise in property prices.

Community initiatives such as Friends of the Joiners Arms (a community owned LGBTQIA+ pub in East London) have raised money in response to the threat of losing queer spaces, but without government funding or protected property rights the decline in queer space will continue in the UK. Yet queer communities have always found transgressive and imaginative ways of creating space in the face of adversity. One strategy has been to create temporary spaces. Bars, clubs, cafes, theatres, squats, galleries, parks, and streets often become temporary sites of queer activity either licitly, for example by hosting queer nights, or illicitly, for example when queer spaces are officially prohibited. The nature of performance is that it occupies time as well as space: my voice queers not only the spaces in which it is heard, but the time in which it is heard.

The most prominent example of a temporary queer space is Pride, an annual international festival that celebrates queer culture in cities across the world. Pride was founded in 1970 around the anniversary of the Stonewall riots\textsuperscript{44}. Taking this festival onto the streets not only


\textsuperscript{44} The Stonewall Riots took place in New York in 1969 after the LGBTQIA+ venue The Stonewall Inn was raided by Police, which led to 6 days of rioting and acted as a catalyst for Queer rights in America.
manifests a queer space but has a social impact that extends beyond its duration. The queer space created by the festival is physical and public, but also private and psychological for queer citizens. It establishes a place of self-acceptance, resilience and community. New York poet Terence Winch writes in his poem *Three Addresses*,

The first Gay Pride Day
made the building tremble so violently the roaches
scurried from the cracks and crevices looking
for safer quarters.45

It is the sound of Pride – the music, the singing, the chanting – that rattles the built architecture of the city. It unearths, challenges and scares those who harbour prejudice towards, and wish harm upon, the queer community. The sound of Pride travels beyond the festival’s allocated space and duration.

Several of my live performances took place within established queer spaces, but the majority of my research is into how to create new queer spaces. Without the overarching support of a queer institution dedicated to queer communities, performances and activity, can queer space be created by the voice in transgressive, subtle and ephemeral ways? Can my voice shift the atmosphere of a space and queer the experience of those within it?

My research investigates how the voice creates a temporary queer space demarcated by the range within which it is audible. Additionally, my performing voice disrupts cultural cues on reading gender and in doing so makes space for alternative and queer understandings of the

speaker. The sites for this research are as varied as the street, the stage and the screen. Because queer space is relational, the precise nature of these temporary zones varies according to numerous factors: the personal histories of the people listening, the cultural context of the platform, the dominant language of the community, the legal framework and political governance of the city and country.

The impacts of social, political and locational variables are taken into account within the analysis. In doing so I make use of the concept of Translocational Positionality as advanced by Floya Anthias, who works in migration and human geography. Anthias writes,

[Translocational Positionality] involves looking at both where people are placed within relations of social hierarchy within a time and space framework, and how they position themselves […] in relational terms. […] This approach aims to pay attention to spatial and contextual dimensions. It emphasises processes (rather than fixing people and “groupings” of people). Difference and inequality are conceptualised as a set of processes, and not as possessive characteristics of individuals, although individuals experience the outcomes of these processes.46

In adopting a translocational perspective I am aware of my fluid position as a performer engaging with the processes I embody, rather than representing a fixed state or identity. In doing so I am able to thoroughly and sensitively approach the relational context, geographic placement and social intersections affecting the ways in which I relate to and communicate through my body, gender and voice.

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The case studies investigate the qualities of the queer spaces created by my voice, and which range from public spaces to private spaces, somatic spaces, imagined spaces and virtual spaces. The live performances and recordings use the voice to tentatively test and ‘sound out’ the physical spaces that I occupy.

Queer space is not necessarily safe space: indeed, I would argue that spaces hosting performance are never ‘safe spaces’\textsuperscript{47}. To perform is make oneself vulnerable. The queer spaces I create using my voice are temporal and often tentative, and when performing live the spaces they create are contingent, and vulnerable.

\textbf{0.84 Gender Narratives}

I have focused in my practice-led research on how the voice, the body and family structures influence the formation of gender narratives, with particular attention to the role of monsters and mothers. The figure of ‘the monster’ gave me a form with which to identify and ‘the mother’ a form in which I do not fit. I am not a mother to children. Instead I birthed monsters: prosthetic genitalia, voices, speakers, and fully formed alter egos, all configured and emerging from my belly bearing their own narrative of gender. These works of art question, break down and reconfigure bodies and familial roles within which my voice can reside. I have followed Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of gender in \textit{The Second Sex} (1949), in which she poses the question ‘What is a woman?’\textsuperscript{48} in order to establish gender as a cultural construct: ‘One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.’\textsuperscript{49} De Beauvoir’s theories were substantially developed by Judith Butler in \textit{Gender Trouble} (1990), which uses the term 


\textsuperscript{48} De Beauvoir, \textit{The Second Sex}, 3.

\textsuperscript{49} De Beauvoir, \textit{The Second Sex}, 293.
‘performative’ to describe those repeated behavioural gestures and attributes that culturally signify gender.\textsuperscript{50} That gender is a cultural and performative construct informs my research and analysis, and provides a starting point from which to deconstruct and reconstruct gender narratives.

Dislocating gender from the biological sex, as assigned at birth, of an individual emphasises its performative nature. However, the body has been used to reinforce ideas regarding gender that serve patriarchal domination. Legacy Russell writes in \textit{Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto}, that

\begin{quote}
Gender has been used as a weapon against its own populace. The idea of “body” carries this weapon: gender circumscribes the body, “protects” it from becoming limitless, from claiming the infinite vast, from realizing its own potential. We use “body” to give material form to an idea that has no form, an assemblage that is abstract. The concept of a body houses within it social, political and cultural discourse, which change. Based on where the body is situated and how it is read. \textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Russell’s observation follows the translocational positionality theory in assigning to the body a state of flux. It is in need of consistent recalibration, determined by context. Without this consideration our bodies are written into stories that don’t serve their actuality. Russell’s manifesto looks to digital platforms, language, interventions and metaphors in order to reimagine the body and the spaces it occupies. In riposte to de Beauvoir’s “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” Russell writes that “[t]he glitch posits: One is not born, but rather becomes, a body”. Glitch feminism looks hopefully to the possibility of “errors” to catalyse evolutionary change and progression for multitudinous identities within physical and

\textsuperscript{50} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 34.
virtual spheres. Turning to the internet and digital forums in order to expand ideas of how the body and gender might be played out, it provides a fluid approach to identifying within physical, virtual and digital spaces creating the bodies, identities and narratives in which to identify.

My practice-led research applies some of these same principles when AFK (Away From Keyboard) in live performances. My digital sound and video works, meanwhile, attest to how the digital manipulation of my voice can reshape ideas projected onto my body, which remains (as online) partially obscured or unseen. In several of the live performances detailed in the case studies, my body goes through various transformations or reiterations that absent the body from the performance. In some of the video and sound works, it is absent entirely. I use ventriloquism and acousmatic sound so that my unseen body remains free of visual cultural cues on gender: again, much like the liberating online experiences that Russell details. My voice in these instances becomes the bridge in space and time between my body and the audience. When the body is unseen, it can be imagined in new and radical forms.

Unlike trans writers and theorists such as Paul B. Preciado, who in *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, recounts their experience of self-administrating testosterone (Preciado 2012), or Andrea Long Chu, who in *Females* uses Valerie Solonas’ *SCUM Manifesto*52 as a springboard from which to theorize that ‘everyone is female and everyone hates it’53, I do not use external surgical or chemical interventions to permanently change my body or voice. Instead I use DIY materials, methods, and

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52 Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (London, New York: Verso, 2004). Solanas self-published *SCUM Manifesto* in 1967: in it she proposes that all men are in fact female and vice versa. Solanas’ manifesto is an exercise in radical and at times what could be perceived as darkly comic hate speech. In her opinion, ‘the eradication of any male is…a righteous act, an act highly beneficial to women as well as an act of mercy,’ (Solanas 2004, 68).

technologies to temporarily mask my body or manipulate my voice to help me in communicating how I relate to my body and gender.

As Sara Ahmed so eloquently described in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*,

54 gendered ideas and behaviours are passed down through the generations and maintained within communities through the perpetuation of gender narratives. The voice plays a major role in the transmission of this information, not only in the content of speech but in the characteristics of speech. My practice disrupts the gender cues found in the voice, thereby clearing space in which to write new narratives. As I have stated, my practice-led research is predicated on the principle that works of art can change the narratives that constrain bodies, rather than changing the performer’s body to fit existing narratives.

Gender narratives are ascribed from birth. My case studies model alternative births, outside of the biological norm, on the principle that these make possible new gender narratives. De Beauvoir writes that ’maternal sadomasochism creates guilt feelings for the daughter that will express themselves in sadomasochistic behaviour towards her own children, without end’

55. De Beauvoir suggests that mothers internalise patriarchal behaviours, however repressive to women, to the point that they cannot help but pass them onto the next generation. Jack Halberstam outlines a counternarrative to this pattern of replication in their theories on shadow feminism, observing the break in normative modes of motherhood when they are refused, or completely avoided.

This shadow feminism speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an antisocial femininity and a refusal of the essential bond of mother and daughter

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that ensures that the daughter inhabits the legacy of the mother and in doing so reproduces her relationship with patriarchal forms of power.\textsuperscript{56}

This is not to say that mothering or motherhood is inherently patriarchal. The family unit is one of the most important places in which to experience and practice feminism, and millions of mothers of multiple gender identities do this. But I am not a mother to children, and so shadow feminism provides me with an analytical framework which is related to, but outside of, the motherhood chain.

Fertility, birth and (the absence of) motherhood are among my key research topics. Much of this research has sought out theories that suggest ways of reconfiguring familial relations in ways that liberate women and children within the family. Drawing from Shulamith Firestone’s \textit{The Dialectic of Sex}\textsuperscript{57}, \textit{Xenofeminism} proposes technological intervention, antinaturalism, and the abolition of gender as a means of achieving equality (Hester 2018). In \textit{Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the end of Normal}\textsuperscript{58}, Jack Halberstam outlines a model of social bonds of care assembled outside of marriage and familial relation, while in her call to ‘make kin, not babies’ Donna Haraway observes alternative models of family in the behaviour of nonhuman animals and in the speculations of science-fiction\textsuperscript{59}. This method of creating familiar units looks outside of genetic and biological bonds and the constractive realms of patriarchy, instead extrapolating theory from units of community which support each other in an exchange of mutual benefit. My practice-led research looks to these texts for models of alternative gender narrative, and they have strongly informed the work outlined in the case studies.

\textsuperscript{57} Shulamith Firestone, \textit{The Dialects of Sex} (London and New York: Verso, 2015).
\textsuperscript{58} Jack Halberstam, \textit{Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the end of Normal} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012).
The gender narratives I create work on an understanding of gender as a relative construct that shifts with time, space, context and relational subjects. It is a condition not limited to a specific set of values but which can move across a continuum. Sub-categories such as ‘cis-male’ and ‘trans-female’ are used to identify and locate movement, but the nature of the subjects within these categories are multiple and fluid.

This is in opposition to the binary system of gender supported by the performative behaviours of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. Throughout my research I argue that these constructs are formed by a patriarchal system which oppresses everyone within it (cis-males included). Without a diverse representation of experiences, individuals that fall outside of normative narratives can feel isolated, misunderstood, unseen and unheard within their wider cultural context. My artworks do not create a universal code in understanding what it is to be female or genderqueer, but instead contribute to a multitude of necessary narratives in which to understand the diverse experiences of gender. In this way narratives in art can be powerful tools in shaping social acceptance for oppressed or previously unheard individuals.

61 Genderqueer is a term used to describe those who do not identify as being solely male or female.
1. Case Studies

Introduction

This chapter consists of nine descriptive case studies. Each case study is an artwork that I created with the purpose of advancing my practice-led research into how it is possible to use my voice, within my art practice, to queer the space of performance and to generate alternative gender narratives. These case studies explore those possibilities through the use of vocal manipulation and masking in live performance, video and sound work. These case studies are arranged in chronological order, reflecting a progression in the course of my investigations from live performances to sound works and videos. Each case outlines the title, date and format of the work, followed by an account describing my aims and objectives. I describe how the methods of collaging, monstering and ventriloquism are put to the ends of creating queer space through my voice and creating alternative gender narratives, and then cross refer to these case studies in later chapters that offer further thematic analysis.

These accounts are written from the perspective of the artist and focus on the process of making the work rather than the experience of someone receiving it. The reception of the audience nonetheless contributes to that process, in the form of the feedback loop that is generated between artist and audience. In those case studies that report on works that use alter egos, I sometimes shift between first and third person: I might analyse the alter ego in terms of their characteristics in the third person, for example, and then describe my experience of performing as them in the first person. These shifts are designed to reflect the fluid nature of an experience, and the possibility of picking up and casting off identities. Each case study has a conclusion in which I consider how the work addressed the aims, objectives and questions guiding my research-led practice, with a brief summary of my findings.
Performed Alter Egos

1.1 Case Study 1: *Eric Goes La, La, La*


Fig. 02. Hollywood Boulevard.

Fig. 03. Los Angeles Centre of Art.

Fig. 04. Venice Beach.

Fig. 05. Hollywood Boulevard.

Fig. 06. View point on Tour of Hollywood Hills.
Title: *Eric Goes La, La, La*

Format: Live Performance

Place: Los Angeles

Date: April 2017

Position in research schematic: Topos x Echos x Techne

**Account**

This performance marked the beginning of my practice led research and I wanted to use my alter ego Eric Self, a genderqueer rabbit with a bolshie attitude, to create an alternative gender narrative. For this performance I played on Lewis Carroll’s children’s story *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), recruiting my then girlfriend to document the performance, so like Alice she was following a white rabbit around otherworldly places. I also wanted to experience how an audience in public places, such as the street, would respond to my voice when it had a significantly lower pitch, manipulated by sound equipment hidden in my costume.

Los Angeles is the home of Disneyland, cartoon culture and people costumed as anthropomorphised animals, making it an apt location to perform as Eric Self. The city’s wide streets are made for cars, meaning that the majority of people only walk when visiting shops, tourist attractions, or hills and beaches. I sought out these places in order to perform improvised interactions with a public enjoying its leisure time: stops on a guided tour of Hollywood, the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Venice Beach, the Venice canals, and the concourse outside the Griffith Observatory.
This performance with Eric was not scripted. Eric was a tourist in a foreign city, but because of his unusual appearance people would often strike up conversation without my instigating it, at least verbally. This meant that Eric performed his own form of sociability. From within the costume, I would gauge my interlocutors’ response to my manipulated voice, which was manipulated into a low pitch by concealed sound equipment. Eric’s voice played through a speaker strapped to my stomach, at the volume of normal speech.

The space within the costume acted as a membrane separating me from the world. Within it, the sound of my voice came back to me doubled: at my regular pitch, contained within the space created by Eric’s padded head, and in the bass version from my cybernetic belly. This relocation of the voice to the stomach reconfigures the experience of sound so that a form of ventriloquism is in action, diverting the perception of vocal sound away from the mouth and queering the space between speaker and listener.

I performed as Eric for two to four hours a day on five days across a two-week period. Most of these outings were recorded by my then-girlfriend on a camera phone. Much like Alice from Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland she followed Eric, but unlike Alice she remains unseen, unrushed and with quiet agency behind the camera. Her presence was unobtrusive and at a slight distance, so that Eric’s interactions remained relatively uninterrupted by the process of filming. This also meant that the audio of the conversations was not recorded, so that the relationship between the audience and performer was not comprised by obtrusive sound equipment or consent forms.

The dialogues were diverse: many were playful, with passers-by amused by my appearance and intrigued by my voice. Others were hostile. On the Hollywood Walk of Fame there were
many street performers dressed as characters from films and cartoons. Eric attempted to speak with them, but Minnie Mouse turned him away, Spiderman hit on my girlfriend and an evangelising preacher exclaimed, ‘ALL QUEERS WILL BURN IN HELL’.

When I came across the preacher, I listened to his exhortation. His language was extreme and hateful. I felt angry, but it also made me quiet. I didn’t confront him or contradict his hate speech publicly, partly because I didn’t expect it to lead to a change in his opinion, but also because his words were threatening. I didn’t know how this person would react to being challenged so I decided not to. As a queer person with a fem body it is important to judge which public spaces are safe.

A common strategy in response to feeling threatening is to make yourself physically small through changes in body language, which can be effective even in a rabbit costume. At first, I wasn’t sure if my reaction was in line with Eric’s character: I had preconceptions that Eric would be confrontational and start his own queer sermon, but my instincts overruled these presumptions, and I stayed very quiet.

Since my heritage is Catholic, this hate speech resonated within a personal context. The queer space that my voice had projected around Eric, a space in which it was possible to speak and act in ways that disrupted patriarchal gender norms, shrank. The only sound I could hear myself make was my breath within the confines of my costume. Performing with a full body costume and lowered voice provides a sense of being hidden, but the costume and sound equipment didn’t provide physical protection and impeded my ability to see and run. I felt safer and more liberated in sharing hidden parts of my personality, but I felt more physically vulnerable. If Eric were to speak loudly, the preacher or any other individual opposed to
queer identity could enter the queer space and cause harm. I learned from this performance not only that I shrink the vocal queer space in order to stay safe, but that queer space is penetrable and vulnerable. Queer space created by the voice is relational, and it is predicated on feedback loops between performer and audience. The preacher’s feedback was negative. It was verbally violent and, potentially, physically violent. Queer space does not equate to safe space. And so, because I was afraid, I withdrew the queer space I had cast out. I was quiet.

People’s interactions with Eric were in part conditioned by his role as a monster possessed of an artificially low voice and large pantomime vagina. Monsters stir curiosity and/or confusion, destabilising the audience’s perception of reality. Eric is an alter ego, a semi-fictional character embodying a hidden part of my own personality, and so members of the public who talked with him participated in a relational form of fictioning, creating a world in which Eric and his attributes were accepted, however contingently, as real.

When I was approached by members of the public on the street, I would introduce myself as Eric. I was occasionally a bit surly, I would take selfies with them, I would behave and converse with a confidence that I, as Eloise Fornieles, would never have otherwise. The people with whom I conversed never questioned the construct of the performance and always went along the imaginative logic required to converse with a fictional rabbit. Nobody asked who was underneath the costume, why they were dressed as a rabbit, or how they were manipulating their voice. Instead they would ask Eric what his name was, and where he was from. They would ask, ‘How is your day?’ ‘Could I take a photograph with you?’

This form of performance is a form of make-believe in which both parties enter an unspoken agreement to maintain a fiction through the suspension of disbelief. This requires what
Oliveros refers to as ‘Quantum Listening’, which she defines as ‘listening to more than one reality simultaneously’\(^\text{62}\). As the performer, I had to listen to the pitch of my own voice in the costume, be mindful of carrying a speaker on my belly, and simultaneously listen to the sound of my manipulated voice as I embodied Eric as a character who moved through the world, speaking and behaving according to his own character.

After live performance concludes, other people generate their own versions of the work through word-of-mouth retellings of the event. These mythologies leave space for the narrative to evolve: aspects are changed or forgotten, and so the queer space created by the voice stretches out beyond the live event into the relational space of further conversations. This shows how the construction of queer space can be extended in time beyond the duration of the live performance. The work generates queer space and alternative gender narratives by confronting the audience with a character who confuses established gender codes, creating unscripted encounters that make possible new forms of relation.

A real rabbit’s gender is not easily identified, and neither is Eric’s. A real rabbit doesn’t speak, but Eric does. Eric upsets conventional distinctions between not only male and female but human and nonhuman. The rules of interaction between this in-between character and his audience are unclear, and this creates a space between performer and audience in which to invent new ones.

**Conclusion**

Performing on the street in Los Angeles as Eric Self provided two primary experiences of vocally created queer space: in the conversations between Eric and individuals, and within

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the confines of Eric’s costume. I would also suggest that the performance makes possible the creation of more queer spaces through the dissemination of different oral accounts of what happened.

These queer spaces were created in 3 ways.

1) The space extends as far as the voice can be heard. The space between myself and the participants was, in most cases, intimate and socially comfortable. The quality of Eric’s artificially manipulated voice queered the conversations.

2) The manipulated voice of a rabbit was non-normative and disrupted binary gender codes: the low pitch of the voice, suggesting a male character, was set against a costume that included a large vagina, implying a female character. The performance used technology to alter the audience’s presumption of the character’s gender by lowering the pitch of Eric’s voice with a battery-powered vocal effects pedal and speaker hidden in the costume. Xenofeminism calls for the abolition of binary gender through technology\textsuperscript{63}: this performance used DIY methods to alter the reading of my body and voice, if only temporarily.

3) The queer space within the cocoon of the costume was an intimate queer space only ever inhabited by me. The shallow space between my mouth and the microphone, between my skin and Eric’s fur, became a transformational space between my ego and my alter ego, in which I am both simultaneously myself and Eric. The material and technological interventions facilitated the enactment of an otherwise unseen queer part of myself to emerge. The physical experience of my voice extended beyond my larynx, mouth and head, to the low frequencies of the speaker vibrating against my

\textsuperscript{63} Hester, \textit{Xenofeminism}, 12.
belly, redistributing and queering the somatic physicality of my voice. My belly and large costume vagina became the place and orifice that delivered speech.

Eric embodied forms of monstering, in his adapted rabbit body with large vagina and low-pitched voice, which enabled me to generate alternative gender narratives. These narratives were co-created through Eric’s interactions in Los Angeles. The physical and vocal masks freed me from the social readings transmitted from, and projected onto, my uncostumed body and voice. Performing as Eric also gave me the opportunity to rethink what it means to stop speaking in order to be safe, to withdraw the vocally created queer space.

An unexpected result of the performance was experiencing hate speech, which assisted in understanding the relationship between queer space and safe space. In instances in which one is confronted with hate speech, I discovered it is not always the best course of action to counter what it being said. Queer space created by the voice can coexist in conversation with hate speech, but it does not protect the queer speaker from verbal or physical abuse. On the occasions in which I felt threatened I have chosen to diminish the space I occupy with my voice. I felt particularly vulnerable when I was dressed in a costume which physically impedes my movement, so I did not engage with, or use hate speech. The alternative gender narrative didn’t stop because it was silenced; instead, it fell in line with countless suppressed stories of queer oppression.
1.2) Case Study 2: The Birth of Troll Baby


Title: *The Birth of Troll Baby*

Form: Live Performance


Date: 2016-2017

Position in research schematic: Topos x Echos x Techne

**Account**

In this performance I aimed to create an alternative gender narrative that figured birth and self-creation, without the act of mothering. This was in part, to see if I could articulate more than one sense of self within one performance. I was also interested to observe whether the queer space I created with my voice varied depending on the venue in which the performance was set.

The first time I performed *The Birth of Troll Baby* was at Metaphonica, an experimental music event hosted by the University of the Arts, London in 2016. The stage was set in the university’s large event space in King’s Cross with a screen projection at the back of the stage. This performance was with The Perverts, a band of fellow furries, in which Eric Self was singer and front ‘man’. Halfway through a song I unzipped Eric’s vagina and worked my way out of the rabbit to become a bare-chested troll baby who triumphantly cut their own umbilical cord, fashioned out of a pair of tights. The shock and delight of the audience was palpable, and the performance enabled a narrative shift from one queer monster identity to another. The succession of Russian-doll identities created a queer space onstage and the voices of these creatures expanded the queer space to fill the large venue. The audience
response celebrated the slip between the monsters, embracing, by extension, their fluid non-binary gender narrative.

I adapted the performance to each venue and the space affected my voice, as much as my voice affected the space. When the given space was large, I amplified my voice; for smaller venues, such as The Backroom Gallery in Peckham, I used my body to control the volume of my voice. Eric didn’t speak with the audience and instead danced to *Girl You’ll be a Woman Soon* by Neil Diamond. The song demonstrated a common patriarchal gender narrative in which, to fulfil womanhood, a girl needs a man.

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Girl, you'll be a woman soon
Please, come take my hand
Girl, you'll be a woman soon
Soon, you'll need a man
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Eric’s dance mocked this coming-of-age narrative. The transition from girl to woman was further undercut by a different kind of metamorphosis, in which a non-binary rabbit became a non-binary troll: no man needed. Troll Baby burst out of Eric shouting ‘Neil, shut up!’ , turning the music off with a snap. By doing so, Troll Baby cut short the mainstream gender narrative, creating a space in which to orchestrate their own gender.

During the performance, Troll Baby trusted an audience member to hold their beloved Chicken, a furry rabbit hand puppet, Troll Baby’s best friend. Troll Baby gives the audience instructions on how to use their camera phones to capture an exploding confetti canon. Troll Baby asks the audience to share footage of this moment on social media, as if the act of being present in the moment can be experienced online. In bringing the audiences’ attention to their
phones, Troll Baby diverts the focus away from what’s happening in front of them and onto a screen. Troll Baby doesn’t clock the irony in their request to ‘capture the moment’ but in doing so creates a humorous and queer triangulation between themselves, the live audience and the future audience online.

The Troll Baby’s conception started at a baby shower for my good friend. David Bowie had recently died and so in his honour we made Bowie the theme of the baby shower. My heavily pregnant friend dressed as The Goblin King, played by Bowie in the film *The Labyrinth* (1986), and I dressed as his side kick Hoggle the goblin. The latex mask I bought for the occasion was of an old gnarly looking goblin, with a bulbous nose and bushy eyebrows. The mask and the baby shower inspired me to develop Troll Baby. Troll Baby uses a voice based on Hoggle’s voice, which is gruff and deep but not electronically manipulated.

This set of vocally queer characteristics is part of the queer persona that the audience record and present on their social media platforms, and which I broadcast through my Vimeo account. Troll Baby’s instruction that the audience record the performance means that their voice ripples from the moment it is delivered live into a future in which it is replayed online. The location and time of this secondary audience cannot be known, but Troll Baby’s voice will continue to queer the spaces in which it is heard.

Troll Baby’s final performance was at The Strange Love Festival in Folkestone, as part of the Queer Puppet Cabaret at The Quarter House Theatre. On this occasion Eric performed a spoken word piece called *Now is the Time* that I had written in 2014. The text is a collage of references found in lyrics, common phrases and lines from poems and films, twisted to create an alternative take on the material. After the spoken word piece was delivered, I pulled my
arm out of the costume through Eric’s vagina, with Chicken, the white rabbit hand puppet, on my left hand. Chicken and Eric looked at each other and then Chicken led the way for Troll Baby to emerge from Eric’s birth canal.

The venue had a large audience in an intimate cabaret format, with performers free to roam amongst people sat at tables. The event was publicised as a queer festival, creating expectations among the audience of something theatrical and non-normative, so the response was one of good humour and delight rather than shock. This is an example of how the prior establishment of a space as queer, and the commensurate change in audience expectations, changes the performance. My voice changed the quality of the queer space, but did not create it.

**Conclusion**

Birthing a new monster demonstrated metamorphic and fluid ways of communicating alternative gender narratives. The work exemplifies a process of self-birthing in which binary male and female participants are unnecessary and a non-binary individual gives birth to another version of themselves.

The costumes dislocated the reading of my voice from my biological body. My breasts were naked during the performance, but the Troll’s gruff voice, gnarly face and plastic bag nappy countered and confused sexualised or gendered readings. Troll Baby enabled me to embody a different way of being seen partially naked, which freed me from sexualised gender narratives.
The size of the space and audience affected the shape and atmosphere of each location and consequently the ways in which my voice queered the space. At UAL my amplified voice reached beyond the venue into the courtyard, which expanded the queer space I could see from the stage. In The Backroom Gallery my voice wasn’t amplified or manipulated with equipment and the atmosphere was intimate. Yet the queer space extended beyond the venue through the footage posted on social media and viewed by bodies occupying different times and places. The Strange Love Festival was a queer space, and so while my voice contributed to that as part of a collective, it did not change it in the same way.

In each case, my voice united audiences in the act of co-creating gender narratives. The collective activity changed the atmosphere and quality of each queer space, which means that although my voice can create queer space through the act of speaking, and remains the dominant sound in the room, it isn’t the only component shaping the atmosphere and quality of that space. Every person present is an active factor in how a space is experienced.

This performance confirmed that creating queer space with the voice relies on the combination of one or more of the following:

i) the queer identity of the speaker (Topos and Logos)
ii) the queer intention of the speaker (Logos)
iii) the non-normative sound of the speaker’s voice (Echos and Techne)
iv) or the queer content of their speech (Logos)

The speaker’s body and/or external technological apparatus are the sites at which the voice is queered. The broadcast of this voice queers the space around the speaker.
Content note: The next page contains images of nudity, menstrual blood and a prosthetic penis/umbilical cord.
1.3) Case Study 3: Troll Baby in Paradise

Fig. 14.

Fig. 15.

Fig. 16.

Fig. 17.

Fig. 18.


Title: *Troll Baby in Paradise*

Form: Videoed performance

Place: Baker Street Studio, London

Date: 2017

Content note for video link: This artwork contains footage of nudity, menstrual blood and prosthetic genitalia

Link: https://vimeo.com/567501297?from=outro-local

Password: Paradise

Position in research schematic: Echos x Logos x Topos

**Account**

A visit to Disneyland in 2017 had proved informative in terms of desire, utopia, and fantasy, and I wanted to create a work that would allow me to research these factors in the production of queer space and the generation of alternative gender narratives. After performing live as Eric Self and Troll Baby in the previous case studies I wanted to see if I could create an autopoietic feedback loop performing by myself. To further the theme of birth and gender depicted in the previous work *The Birth of Troll Baby* (case study 2) I wanted to develop a work that playfully explored the relationship between the voice, the body and prosthetics.

I created a set for this video through an assemblage of silver streamers, a large Perspex sun, and a suspended branch blossoming pink marshmallows, like a cherry tree in spring. Troll Baby relates to props such as candy dentures, a nest of twigs, a hollow ostrich egg and a marshmallow flump64, in a playful way that evokes their wonder at the world.

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64 A flump is a long cylindrical piece of marshmallow.
Troll Baby wanders through the space talking and singing to themselves, so that their voice fills the space and creates a sound to dance and play along to. This makeshift Disney World is Troll Baby’s idea of paradise. Yet Troll Baby’s solitude and babbling renders it melancholy: they crave company and communication. The video presents two perspectives, one overlaid on the other: a third-person perspective from a fixed camera and a first-person perspective from a camera phone turned on themselves by Troll Baby.

Troll Baby dips their hand into their nappy and withdraws their fingers to wipe menstrual blood onto their belly. The character’s appearance – suggesting both advanced age and early childhood – seems to contradict the sexual maturity implied by menstruation, and so any attempt by the audience to assign a conventional gender narrative is fractured and confused. Troll Baby sits by their nest which contains a large ostrich egg and candy and starts to chew on one end of the aforementioned flump whilst pushing the other end into their menstruating vagina. This is not auto-eroticism but is more akin with a baby putting things in their mouth to understand what they are. In consuming representations of their own body, the character is trying to comprehend their physical identity on their own terms. Rosi Braidotti writes in *Metamorphoses* that,

> Disciplining the body means socialising it into acceptable “normal” behaviour in terms of choices of love-objects and modes of externalization of the drives. I would render this psychoanalytic process as follows; identity is coded on the body by a process of psychic mapping which functions by indexing certain organs onto specific functions.⁶⁵

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The flump stands in for organs that I don’t possess: a phallus and an umbilical cord. These body parts are indexed to represent motherhood and manhood, which I desire in part and find difficult (but not impossible) to map on my body. Embodying a character in Troll Baby who has not yet been socially disciplined and does not care for ‘normal behaviour’ frees me from the cultural expectation of my body and opens the opportunity to reconfigure new ways of being. I am free to bare my breasts, hunch my back, waddle, extend my body with prosthetics, wear a nappy, shit myself.

The Troll’s phantasmagorical body part fills their mouth so the character ceases to speak: their voice is muffled in the act of trying to create a new physicality. Their body fails to enact the potential of either body part (they cannot fully activate their phallus or umbilical cord), but the internal desires are made visible to the audience, and thus become part of the gender narrative that is constructed in that relation between performer and audience.

The bodily matter required to fulfil Braidotti’s material understanding of psychic mapping is challenged by the immaterial nature of the voice according to Denis Vasse. In his theory of the relationship between the umbilical cord and the voice, Vasse draws attention to the cutting of the umbilical cord at the time of a baby’s first cry. This constitutes a symbolic replacement of umbilical cord with voice, meaning that the baby’s physical relationship to their primary carer is thereafter mediated through the voice. The voice thus maintains the connection with the mother even as it must always be associated with the primal rupture from the mother’s body66.

Troll Baby’s recreation of an umbilical cord, in the form of the marshmallow flump, connects

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them to their own body: mouth to vagina. The implication is that they are their own parent. Troll Baby also speaks and sings to themselves, forming an intimate feedback loop, as an echo of their umbilical endeavour and their representation of themselves through the handheld camera on selfie mode. The handheld camera shows how Troll Baby perceives themselves and how they wish to be perceived. Troll Baby emulates the ‘curation’ of identities through self-portrayal on social media, addressing an imaginary audience of ‘chickens’ as if they were live streaming. In fact, there was no live audience, or even camera crew. Troll Baby is alone but wants to connect. The edited video only exists on Vimeo and wasn’t broadcast live on any social media sites.

In Troll Baby in Paradise, Troll Baby sings A Whole New World from the problematic Disney film Aladdin, (1992). Based on a tale told by Scheherazade in A Thousand and One Nights the film depicts Aladdin’s pursuit of Princess Jasmine. Together they sing A Whole New World, about how he can (with the aid of a magic lamp) show her the world and the wonder it contains. Troll Baby’s solitary rendition of this romantic song may appear sad, but it also suggests that they don’t need Aladdin or his lamp to access a wonderful world of their own creation.

As Firestone repetitively observes in The Dialectic of Sex, women have historically been at the mercy of men to access the world and adventure. The retelling of fairy tales often reinforces archaic forms of gendered behaviours and repression, with updated versions

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67 Disney has issued a content advisory warning which states ‘This programme includes negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures. These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now. Rather than remove this content, we want to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together’.

68 ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ is a compellation of folk spun by a character called Scheherazade who tells stories to her violent King husband in order to save her from being executed.

cultivating contemporary prejudices. Troll Baby remains oblivious to the gendered messaging and appropriates a romanticised gender narrative – in which a man shows a woman the world – into their own narrative of self-discovery. Troll Baby creates their own world and their own unique gender narrative.

Later, Troll Baby hums the Disney tune *Wish Upon a Star* (1939) while breathing in helium from a red heart balloon which shifts the melody to a higher pitch. *Wish Upon a Star* is featured in the Disney film *Pinocchio* (1940) and reoccurs in my work as a symbol for queer modes of parenthood. Geppetto becomes a parent without sexual intercourse, fertilisation or birth. The enchantment of a wooden puppet is a far-from-normative creation myth. Using helium to shift the pitch of Troll Baby’s voice enables the voice to embody childhood joy, while the constantly changing pitch as is a reminder that Troll Baby’s is themselves of fluid age and gender.

Because these songs were recorded on two cameras, their combination in the edit gives the impression of two singers. Each camera records the sound of the voice moving through the space slightly differently, and so the video presents two positions of visual and auditory perception and might be taken to demonstrate Anthias’ theories on translocational positionality, according to which identity changes depending on the time, place and cultural position of the perceiver. The dual sound channels disrupt the reading of Troll Baby’s voice whilst suggesting an identity that is as multitudinous and queer as the number of receivers.

By the end of the video Troll Baby has grown very quiet. They carefully rearrange the candy props back into the nest with the egg and softly walk out of shot. The lonely atmosphere of Troll Baby in their paradise is magnified by their speaking and singing to themselves. The
speech isn’t coherent enough to be considered a soliloquy; instead the chattering, singing and humming Troll vocalises an intimate queer space which oscillates from private self-discovery to performance for an imaginary audience.

Conclusion

_Troll Baby in Paradise_ manifested the desire for a phallus and an umbilical cord. These bodily organs connect us with others, and the umbilical cord has a particular relevance as a bridge between bodies that has been twinned with the voice. In this video, non-normative gender narratives play out in the medley of actions, costumes, props and vocals. Troll Baby’s floppy phallus/umbilical marshmallow flump – stretched between their menstruating vagina and mouth – playfully reconfigures and reframes menstruation, fertility, and parenthood in a story about gender that disrupts normative constructs. Troll Baby authors their own narrative, peculiar to normative expectation, and creates their own queer space.

The video witnesses a scene that would otherwise be private. Troll Baby’s babble connects the character to an audience which is both imagined and, in the sense that this video can be watched online, real. Without a live audience I became more aware that the recording equipment, stood in for their absence. My voice filled the space which would otherwise feel empty and the autopoietic feedback was established in listening to myself within the space.

The queer space created by Troll Baby’s voice manifests in their self-made world, but also extends to the spaces in which the video is watched. These spaces of reception are likely to be private and domestic. In the response of these audiences to the songs and speech of Troll Baby another queer space is created, in which it is possible to imagine alternative narratives of gender.
Sound Work

1.4) Case Study 4: How Does That Make You Feel?


Fig. 20. Eloise Fornieles, *How Does That Make You Feel*, 2019. Live performance as part of CamperVan at Köenig Gallery, London. Photo by Victoria Fornieles.

Fig. 21. Eloise Fornieles, *How Does That Make You Feel*, 2018. Live performance. Photo by Christopher Taylor.

Fig. 22. Eloise Fornieles, *How Does That Make You Feel*, 2018. Live performance at Lay Low, London. Photo by Mimi Xu.


Title: *How Does That Make You Feel?*

Form: Five spoken word tracks performed live and later recorded as an EP

Date: 2017 -2018

Link: https://soundcloud.com/user-767201877/sets/how-does-that-make-you-feel

Position in research schematic: Echos x Techne x Topos


**Account**

This LP is made up of five tracks (*Are You Alright, Chance, The Wind, Ocean Eyes* and *Monster*), each of which uses spoken word and singing in a poetic reflection on love. The tracks were performed live at various locations in London (listed above) and then recorded in a studio. This constituted a new field for my research into the means by which my voice can create queer space, and the nature of the gender narratives generated within that space.

Previously I had developed improvised and loosely scripted performances using alter egos, but with this new body of work I wanted to investigate the effects of poetry, spoken word and non-linguistic vocal sounds, to see what they communicated and how they affected the space. I was interested to learn how poetry could employ reclaimed language, metaphors and personal story telling to communicate the alternative gender narratives with which I identify.
My previous works had used singular voices and with this new work I set out to layer polyvalent configuration of my voice, to communicate multiple versions of how I identify simultaneously.

For these works I employed my vocal effect pedal to manipulate the pitch of my voice across the vocal spectrum and occasionally breathed in helium to further affect the pitch of my voice, which would slide from a squeaky high to electronic lows as the helium wore off. During live performances I would at times press contact mics against my throat to amplify my voice. The small, circular, metal mics in this instance were closer to the vocal folds, meaning that the words were muffled by the flesh separating the vibrating fold from the electronic disks. I also stroked my skin with the contact mics, using the vocal effects pedal to create a vast, echoing, sci-fi sound through flange and reverb. These corporeal cyber-sounds looped into layered soundscapes of electronically manipulated breathing, sighing, grunting and panting over which I performed word pieces.

Performing these tracks live was the first time I had used a vocal mask without a costume. The discrepancy between my body and the deep pitch of my manipulated voice produced comic effects in the live performances, effects that I was able to make unnerving through facial expressions and body language that would have been invisible in costume: by fixing an audience member in the eye, for example, and holding their gaze until they looked away.

The quality of the space in which these connections took place was influenced by the gender identity of each audience member, which in turn shaped the gender narratives that were

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70 Sci Fi films have been a fertile ground from the very beginning of electronic music with groundbreaking composers, many of whom were women, including Bebe Baron, Wendy Carlos, Delia Derbyshire and Suzanne Cianni. These composers and others established a vocabulary of sound we associate with outer space.
created within it. Since my appearance was culturally understood as fem and my voice understood to be masculine, the relational dynamic between myself as a performer and each audience member was, irrespective of how they identified, non-normative. This encouraged un-scriptable dynamics and the playing out of new and relational forms of gender. These performances belonged somewhere between a poetry reading and an awkward stand-up comedy set. The performances would make people laugh, but the laughter would be disrupted by vocal sounds such as panting, that consciously extended beyond the point at which it could be considered funny. The poetic content of the speech also countered the comic nature of their delivery producing further disjuncture between what was being said (Logos) and the body saying it (Topos).

Where literal language is insufficient to express an emotion or experience, we must use metaphors and the other strategies of poetry. In *Poetry is Not a Luxury*, Audre Lorde advocates for poetry to be taken seriously. She writes that,

> For women […] poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams towards survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.\(^\text{71}\)

In order to create action in society, one must first find the words with which to articulate the need, share the idea, and action the action. Words become performative utterances and language, poetry and the spoken word are the catalysts for these utterances to be heard.

These spoken word works were an attempt to turn emotional knowledge into language, ideas and actions in which to communicate an alternative to socially determined, prescriptive gender norms. Using poetry enabled my internal voice to reach out as a bridge to the wider external world. In this way my voice acted as a conduit for understanding; a voice whose personal experience spoke to many in the acknowledgement of collective experience. Lucy Lippard writes,

A developed feminist consciousness brings with it an altered concept of reality and morality that is crucial to the art being made and to the lives lived with that art. We take for granted that making art is not simply “expressing oneself” but is a far broader and more important task – expressing oneself as a member of a larger unity, or comm/unity, so that in speaking for oneself one is also speaking for those who cannot speak. 72

Art then enables a singular voice to be articulated and when others identify, the voice no longer stands for just one individual, but for a particular collective. This process requires an active audience: one that does not merely receive information but in listening and identifying with the articulation they charge the artwork or voice with a significance that it wouldn’t otherwise have. Lippard goes on to assert that people of different identities cannot speak for others, which indicates the need for a wide range of voices.

The recordings for the EP were done in single takes in a recording studio and were not altered in postproduction. Without the improvised introductions that occurred in the live performances, the recorded pieces are darker, creepier and far less funny. This indicates that

much of the effect of the live performances was achieved through body language and facial expressions that they were at odds with audience expectations.

The difference between the live and the recorded performances also highlights the extent to which queer space is defined through collaboration with the audience. Performing the work was not merely an act of transmission, but also of listening and responding. In these live performances I was listening to the audience’s vocal reactions and to the sound of my voice in order to gauge how to further shape the atmosphere in the space we were co-creating. The queer space created by the recorded work is also shaped by the audience, since they select the physical space in which to listen to it, the volume at which they play it and the company in which they listen to it. My voice then enters the space and changes or modulates the atmosphere in which the listener locates themselves.

The most revealing tracks according to the terms of this practice-led research are *I’m a Monster* and *Are You Alright?*, both of which employ monstering and coded metaphors. *I’m a Monster* starts by looping the lines ‘I’m a Monster’, ‘I’m boisterous’ and ‘I’m homo, home sweet homo’. These lines play with degrading or discriminatory words and archetypes that are reclaimed and embodied by the speaker.

Using a low voice, I recite a spoken word piece which uses metaphors to represent the sadness at the end of a relationship. It ends with the line ‘If you said, “Do it again, I didn’t see it the first time”, I would’, which is a phrase my grandfather would say to me and my siblings if we fell over to make us laugh. This line has seeped into my personality: I repeat harmful scenarios and knowingly laugh at myself doing it. These personal phrases exemplify how we absorb the words spoken by those around us, shaping our character and personal
narrative. The spoken word pieces opened an opportunity to reshape and queer the narratives I had been told and retell myself. The phrase is reclaimed, and my personal experience is opened into a public forum, which transforms it from being a personal anecdote to a potential point of connection between myself and the collective.

In the recordings of my voice there are inconsistencies and imperfections: points at which my singing is flat, or I falter on a word, or the intake of my breath accidentally repeats on a loop. It was a conscious decision to leave in these small utterances, with which we communicate without thinking. As the title of this report UTTER MONSTER suggests, these small units of vocal sound are the auditory fabric of monstering. The imperfections are signifiers of queerness: they stray from the script and create a quality which renders the voice more vulnerable. The vulnerability of the protagonist is more apparent when these circumstantial moments are left to play out. Despite the technological intervention and manipulation of the voice, the human mistakes are amplified and gently monstrous.

The track Are You Alright? starts with a sequence of looping vocal sounds made using breath: a deep breath; a sharp intake of breath as if shocked; rapid breath as if panicked; and a slow, low, sexual grunt. These sounds exemplify how effective the voice is at communicating without words, and each communicates a different emotional state. Vocal sounds often have their own particular place within gendered narratives: for example, rapid panting, screaming and crying are often associated with higher, seemingly fem voices. The cultural expectation of vocal sounds associated with gender provided a framework in which to play and to push against, enabling new ways of perceiving gender.
Looped over these vocal sounds are three lines that my therapist would say: a low-pitched “How does that make you feel”, followed by a middle-pitched “Tell me” and a high-pitched “Are you alright?” In the artwork these simple sentences of concern and care become increasingly meaningless in their repetition, rendering the auditory sequences as a backing track for my spoken word piece.

The lines of poetry were then recorded without changing the pitch of my voice. This makes the recording more direct, but the content of the poem is a list of metaphors that communicate the anxiety I felt at the prospect of falling in love. In this instance the metaphors become the mask, behind which I indirectly communicated how I felt. The unmanipulated sound of my vocal delivery, the absence of post-production and the personal meaning still contributed to the queer quality of the performance because my queer identity is imbued in the words.

Performed live and recorded, these tracks are layered and collaged. The effect is to give numerous voices to one being, so that the work has the capacity to hold multiple versions of one performer: each line represents a different version of myself. The queer space created by these effects is comparably manifold and layered. Whether the work is experienced live or as the recorded version, the space in which the tracks are heard is queered by multiple technological manipulations of my voice and the queer content of the poetry.

As Miriama Young observes in *Singing the Body Electric: The Human Voice and Sound Technology*, despite technological intervention and manipulation it is hard to completely remove aural recognition of a vocal sound and by extension an imagined body.\(^73\) The human

ear is tuned to recognise a human voice even when it is masked, and we are trained to correlate that information with the imagined and gendered body that culture associates with the production of that sound. Which means that in distorting the sound of the voice’s cultural cues, I am able to tinker with the imagination of an audience, so that the imagined body can take new shapes.

In live performances of the work, it is the technologically manipulated disjunction between voice and body that enables a space to rethink (rather than reimagine) the body in front of the audience. The physical body is evident, and the uncanny voice requires the audience to listen attentively in order to reevaluate their assumptions of the performer.

**Conclusion**

The findings of these performances drastically shifted my practice-led research into queer space and the production of gender narratives. The vocal mask was effective in disrupting perceptions of gender without a visible costume and that the sound of my voice didn’t need words to be effective in communicating narratives or queering space. While utterances such as panting, sighing and grunting all carry gendered cultural cues, these same utterances can communicate many different conditions. A pant can suggest sexual ecstasy or the onset of a panic attack: playing with these crossovers created the possibility for new and transgressive narratives.

The live performances demonstrated how the discrepancy between my body and the way I experience, and express gender became more explicit when my audience could read the cues provided by my body (long hair, fem features, wide hips, breasts). The recorded tracks enabled the creation of acousmatic voices and, by extension, imagined bodies. The
manipulated voice enabled the imagined body to be free from cultural expectations of normative gender.

In these spoken word pieces, the multiple voices on each track weave multiple and evolving states of being all at once. In this way the collaged form communicates the complex and polyvalent nature of gender. Poetry provided a means of capturing feelings within metaphors and assisted in reframing personal narratives. When phrases were looped in a repetitive cycle the intimate meaning of the words changed from being charged with personal resonance to becoming a sequence of semi-melodic and rhythmic sounds. In speaking poetry, the words reflect on feelings and take on an active role in communicating alternative gender narratives.
1.5) Case Study 5: Trespass

Fig. 25. Eloise Fornieles, Photograph of recording session for *Trespass*, 2019 © Eloise Fornieles.

Fig. 26. Eloise Fornieles, *Trespass*, 2019, Screen Shot of Logic X mixing desk © Eloise Fornieles.

Fig. 27. Eloise Fornieles, *Trespass*, 2019, Screen Shot of Logic X mixing desk © Eloise Fornieles.
Title: *Trespass*

Form: LP album of sound works

Date: 2021

Link: https://soundcloud.com/user-767201877/sets/trespass-1

Position in research schematic: Echos x Topos x Techne

**Account**

For the spoken word works collected in my 2018 EP *How Does that Make You Feel?* (case study 4) I dropped the rabbit costume but kept the voice and persona of my alter ego Eric. For my long-playing album *Trespass*, I retained the vocal masks but dropped the alter egos. In terms of my practice-led research, this was part of the process through which I slowly found my own voice. In the process of making this album I wanted to research how my voice might be employed to test how safe I felt in a space whilst queering it. I also wanted to pay particular attention to how environments shaped the sound of my voice and how the traces of environmental sound affected the recordings of my voice.

The method I used to manipulate sounds changed. Instead of using a vocal effects pedal to adjust my voice in real time, I made recordings on my Zoom Handy Recorder and then manipulated it through the editing programme Logic X. I made the recordings in environments that changed the quality of my recorded voice: the acoustics of a chapel in a monastery amplified my voice; the wind whipping up a mountainside swallowed it; and the fear I felt in a carpark at night turned my voice into a small whisper. This case study gave me the opportunity to research how the environment affects and distorts my voice as well as how it affects and distorts the space into which it is broadcast.
This body of work used field recordings, synths, musical instruments and vocal recording to make a series of sound pieces through a process of assemblage. The album set out to reconfigure the psychogeography of the queer spaces. Psychogeography is a concept coined by Marxist theorist Guy Debord in 1955 to describe the effect of the built landscape on emotions and behaviours. The idea was taken up by poets, artist and writers who would practice the dérive, ‘drifting’ through cities without a destination or fixed agenda. Often critiqued as typically white, male and bourgeois, this practice has been adapted by a number of artists, writers and psychologists to suit queer and feminist purposes. Feminist psychologist Dr Alexander John Bridger writes, ‘Psychogeography as a practice involves walking through various places, and the gendered body is therefore like a “vehicle” through which the person experiences and makes sense of their relation both to others and to place.’

Our understanding of the environment is therefore affected by cultural understandings of gender and the particular ways in which the individual experiences and communicates their gender. The subjective experience of both the space and its relation to one’s body changes as the body moves through the changing environment (these changes are experienced in the change of architecture, time of day, people present, local events, etc.). Recording my voice in different public places became a testament of my body relating to the place I occupied, communicating something of my emotional state, often influenced by an imagined other (there was rarely a physical audience).

I inhabit and to create something musical out of the quotidian sounds I create in my environment. The process begins with what Pauline Oliveros refers to as Deep Listening, so

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that I can hear the sounds that are normally unnoticed by me, and which I then record, reconfigure and manipulate to express something of my experience within that environment. Oliveros writes,

> We listen in order to interpret our world and experience of meaning. Our world is a complex matrix of vibrating energy, matter and air, just as we are made of vibrations. Vibration connects us to all things interdependently.\(^75\)

Therefore, our singular selves are woven into the spaces we inhabit through the universal vibrations of sound.

For the majority of the field recordings I was solitary and moving through urban and occasionally rural spaces. Many of the field recordings are made in places in which I feel uncomfortable or unsafe. These were often the places in which I recorded song lines. Vocalising in unsafe spaces may seem counterintuitive, because of the risk of attracting unwanted attention, but making and recording sound became a means of claiming the right to inhabit the space.

It was also a means of testing the boundaries of my solitude. The reach of my voice allowed me to listen for a response. If I heard something I would remain quiet until I understood who was listening (often it was an animal) and if I was safe (animals are, in my experience, safer than humans). My personal relationship between vocalising and feeling safe is tied to a memory from my early childhood. Because I was afraid of certain parts of my grandparent’s house, my mother would tell me to sing so she would know where I was. This would keep me safe (for Denis Vasse’s theory of how the voice both replaces the umbilical connection

\(^75\) Oliveros, *Quantum Listening*, 38.
between mother and child and is associated with its rupture, go to page 67). Singing became a way of conjuring the nerve to explore spaces that felt threatening. Singing was a means by which to obtain my highly sought-after independence.

The track *Landscape* is made up of two field recordings. One records me singing quietly into my phone at the top of a mountain in Greece at night; the other was taken as I was jogging in the hills of Los Angeles while a storm rolled in. The first includes the noise of wind whipping up the mountainside, which I manipulated in the production to crackle and pop. Over this texture you can hear my voice, close to the microphone but caught by the wind, creating a sound that feels close and simultaneously distant. On the Los Angeles recording there are high cries of squabbling coyotes in the valley below, while the end of the track gives way to gentle bird song. You can hear the metallic crunch of keys in my hand, the weapon of women who feel unsafe.

The overlaying of these two distant places creates an eerie space and portrays my unanchored way of life at that time, caught up in the folds between the two locations. There is a strange juxtaposition between the harsh wind and the gentle bird song. It doesn’t make sonic sense and a queer atmosphere opens up between a human voice, wild animals and the wind. In postproduction I found the frequencies of my voice and manipulated the EQ so that it was foregrounded over the ambient sounds, which are also distorted. In this way I affect and queer the auditory experience of real physical spaces to become something slightly different in the imagination of the listener.

The track *Trespass* (for which the album is also named) builds on recordings made in a small room at the top of Fotodoti Monastery on the island of Naxos, in Greece. Behind my voice is
the consistent sound of cicadas in the surrounding trees. The cicadas’ song has evolved over 250 million years, and so the inclusion of their sound stretches concepts of time as well as space, reaching back beyond human existence. In Donna Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble*, she outlines what it means to embody multispecies storytelling in a space she refers to as Terrapolis. Terrapolis is an imagined SF matrix, influenced by critters and companion species, in which to reimagine the world and think through philosophical and social quandaries.

In this imaginative space for thinking, Haraway looks to human and nonhuman companions to rethink her environment and her ideas. Looking at the gap between humans and nonhuman animals and their modes of being enables queer modes of thinking, and so I looked to the cicadas to structure the sound work. The way they gather in trees became a way of imagining myself as part of their chorus, and inspired me to create my own chorus, using manipulated layers of my voice.

When I recorded my song lines in the small room of the monastery, I sang alone, but in replicating, layering and shifting the pitch of my voice over several lines in Logic X I multiplied myself. Some harmonies are made up of layering lines I sang on site, and others are made by using the ‘Pitch Shift’ plugin on Logic X. These pitch shift lines give the impression of a more diverse range of singers who the listener is culturally conditioned to identify as male and/or pre-adolescent. The intergenerational sound enables me to imagine my younger self and my unborn, using my adult voice to vocalise versions of myself that could not make themselves heard. The multi-layered structure facilitates a multi-layered

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76 Donna Haraway describes SF as Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, Speculative Feminism, Science Fact, So Far.
imagining of the singular body to which all of these bodies belong. I use this model of thinking to reimagine my singular body as a complex chorus.

In ancient Greek drama the chorus played an important role in the telling of stories. The collective was originally made up of a group of dancers (the ancient Greek χορός can be translated as dance), who would use body language to articulate parts of the tale. Over time the role was extended to include song, and so the chorus became a means for multiple bodies to have one voice, or to speak for the many.

At times the chorus may split and communicate differing opinions or nominate one member of the group to speak. Although the group articulates as a whole, it is composed of multiple bodies in fluid formations, and as such lends itself to a more complex configuration of gender identity. In a passage that chimes with the theories of translocational positionality, Renaud Gagne and Marianne Govers Hopman state in *Choral meditations in Greek Tragedy* that,

> Although every chorus ultimately shapes a specific voice for itself, no two spectators will hear or see the exact same ode, and no audience member will be able to seize all the possible layers of thought and imagery, the nuances of connotation, the implications, the indices and citations, and the contradictions of the temporary world opened by the songs.\(^77\)

The chorus layers voices in ways that are harmonic and unified and yet hold out the possibility of multiple different interpretations. This structure became a useful model for configuring the composition of my voice in order to manifest multiple gender narratives. A

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disparate online audience, separated from the original performance by wide tracts of time and space, will create differently nuanced and fluid interpretations.

There are no words sung on this track, and so the meaning (Logos) of what is communicated is created by a combination of sound (Echos) and the site of the sound (Topos). The resonance suggests a high ceiling like that associated with places of worship, and the particular acoustic and melodic lines follow suit, sounding similar to a chant or hymn. The sound of the vocals has a haunting and mournful quality and there is a call-and-response structure, as if the voice is calling out to its multiple selves.

The album Trespass used field recordings of diverse spaces, activities and encounters. From the background cacophonies, by practicing the principles of Deep Listening outlined by Pauline Oliveros, I isolated single sounds: a salad spinner, the chain on a studio door, an electric toothbrush, the sound of skipping, being smacked on the arse, passing motorbikes, passing storms, puddles and dripping taps are a few of the sounds that found their way into the fabric of the tracks.

Embracing sound (Echos) over language (Logos) provided an opportunity to restructure some thoughts and ideas. These sound pieces treat noise as a material which recodes isolated sounds as sonic articulations of the queer spaces I inhabit. Although the sound works codify these environmental sounds, the code exists as a personal lexicon. There is no obvious way for the audience to decode the auditory signifiers.

Several of the tracks on the LP Trespass use musical instruments, in none of which I have any formal training. Instead I relied on improvisation and unconventional means of playing.
Instruments come with their own gendered narratives and cultural connotations, and to escape these cultural cues I also often distorted the sound beyond recognition in postproduction. For example, I play a line of saxophone in Motorsports which has layers of effects to make the sound harsh, grating, mangled and crunchy: nothing like the smooth, sonorous tones of the tenor sax as played by someone with a formal training in the instrument.

At other times I foreground the symbiosis between my body and the instrument as conjoining technologies. My Body Lies consists of lines played on the Halldorophone, which is a synth that looks like a cello and can be played using the strings, tuning keys or bow. For one section of this track I took a single sung note and stretched the timeframe on Logic X so that the quality of my voice resembles a note produced by the Halldorophone. In layering the sound of my manipulated voice with that of the Halldorophone, the two sounds merge.

On this track I speak and sing a phrase I heard sung by a busker in Greece, who had changed the lyric from the Scottish folk song ‘My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean’ to ‘My Body Lies Over the Ocean’. The line becomes a mondegreen, which is when a lyric is misunderstood and repeated incorrectly, creating a gap between what the busker had heard (Echos) and what was understood (Logos). This productive misinterpretation can change our understanding of the song in a way that is useful in the context of this chapter. A disconnected voice is calling out for its body, which remains on the other side of an ocean.

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79 The Halldorophone is a purpose-built electro-acoustic string instrument designed by Halldór Úlfarsson.
Conclusion

Through this case study I was able to research how my voice responds to the environments in which it is broadcast, and the implications for the production of queer space. The act of vocalising queered the spaces in which, for the purposes of this album, I recorded my voice – ranging from a monastery to an abandoned car park – but the recordings are also testament to how the environment shaped the sound (Echos) of my voice.

I used my voice to sound out public space. I understand this as a relational form of echolocation, enabling me to perceive what was present by listening for physical and/or vocal responses to my voice. When I felt unsafe, the sound of my voice is quieter. In postproduction, my quiet singing has been manipulated and layered in order to be heard but retains the quality of a voice which is close to whispering.

The sound (Echos) of the voice maintains a quality of fear, so that the atmosphere of the queer space captured during the recording, keeps its emotive integrity despite the amplification of the recording in its broadcast. In the amplification of the work the piece fills more space and increases the queer space created by the voice. Without the physical threat to my body singing live, my voice can create larger areas of queer space.

This case study shows how even the most hostile spaces can be claimed as queer spaces, and how those spaces can be expanded.
Content note: The next page contains images of prosthetic genitalia
Video

1.6) Case Study 6: Spectrum


Title: *Spectrum*

Form: Video, 4:12 mins

Date: 2018

Content note for video link: This artwork contains footage of a prosthetic genitalia

Link: [https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/261725359](https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/261725359)

Password: Spectrum

Position in research schematic: Echos x Topos x Logos

**Account**

*Spectrum* attempts to articulate my own experience of gender, and the struggle I have with social constructs ascribed to gender within a binary system, through video. As such, it marked an extension of the field of my research into the production of queer space and the articulation of gender narratives outside binary systems. I wanted to extend the idea of listening, beyond a human realm and into the reception of animals, plants and environment, in order to further distort the binaries between human/animal, male/female, interior/exterior.

The video montages representations of thought, dreams, psyche and imagination using footage of gardens, domestic interiors and landscapes, blurring the boundaries separating internal from external spaces. Footage of animals and plants with characteristics similar to human body parts unsettle the artificial distinction between human and nonhuman, nature and culture. Footage is digitally manipulated to distort the colour of the footage, and the speed and direction in which it is played (some of the footage plays in reverse).

The making of the video was spurred by the question, asked by a friend, of how I might articulate my own gender. As my previous case studies have illustrated, there is no
conventional language for this. At the time of being asked the question I happened to be surrounded by flowers. They seemed more successful in representing nonbinary gender than I was, and so I filmed them (it is typical of my practice to take examples and ideas from my environment). This footage is combined in *Spectrum* with footage I had collected over many years, without a predetermined end, and footage shot for the video. The video became a poetic, nonverbal means of expressing loss, love and desire and the effect these emotions have on the way gender is experienced and expressed.

The footage shot specifically for the video was always made up of the world around me as I encountered it: a rose dying in the kitchen, flowers at the shop down the road, the strangeness of a palm tree in a snowstorm. We internalised the character of the environments we inhabit: they affect our mood, health, and behaviours. Videoing and editing footage of my environment became a means of collaging a portrait of myself out of it, thus re-externalizing what had become internalized.

This self-portrait is in part an expression of gender that does not abide by binary codes. The video uses objects and sounds from my environment to communicate how that feels, rather than how it might be prescribed in language: my experience of gender might be a plastic bag in a swimming pool, or a waterfall, or a dead rose. My environment was queered by my activities and my perspective: the process of selecting footage provides a personal insight into what I choose to identify with, what catches my attention, tiny moments within my every day that become memorialised and manipulated. The footage doesn’t provide a record evidencing what happened in a certain time and place, but the small part of my life that I chose to record and manipulate. Creating the video from my personal archive of footage turns the visual record of a private queer space into a public queering of space.
Water recurs through the video to signify the fluid nature of gender and its everchanging formations. In sections the voice is manipulated by the strobe effect on the vocal pedal, which makes it sound like the notes are gurgled at the surface of bathwater. There is footage shot underwater, looking up at the sky, creating an image which merges parallel worlds: one submerged, one celestial. The visuals and vocals strive to merge internal and external worlds creating a personal gender narrative through the process of combining those factors in its formation: my body and the space through which it moves.

The vocal soundtrack was created in my studio. This wasn’t a sound studio, and so the walls and materials within the space absorbed and reflected the recorded sound in unpredictable ways. At the time of recording, my voice was being amplified by a speaker – the internal technology of my voice being extended by external technology – so that the sound reached beyond the walls of my studio and could be heard in corridors and lift shafts.

The architecture of the space at the time of recording and at the time of listening affects the sound of the voice and the queer spaces it creates. The same applies to the technology used to create, record and replay the sound of the voice: amplified sounds create larger queer spaces; headphones create queer spaces retained within the cavities of the listener’s body. In the broadcast of the work, the voice bridges a gap between unknown architectures, technologies and people, all of which become instrumental in the creation and reception of queer space.

The soundtrack is made using layers of my voice looping on a vocal effects pedal. This creates a sound that expresses the experience of feeling multiple emotions at a single time, without using words. I used my voice and vocal effects pedal to experiment with sounds and
to ‘feel out’ what was interesting. Some of the sound is made by pointing the microphone at
the speaker, already amplifying my voice in loops, which further distorts the sound of my
voice with feedback. The vocal sounds are melodic, building a soundscape so that the vocal
sound becomes part of the constructed world and queer space of the video. The video starts
with a shot of a dog who seems to be listening to the echoing claps on the soundtrack. When
a voice comes in, the dog’s ears prick, and a world in which the sound and images are
connected is established. The idea that the dog can also hear the acousmatic voice pulls the
viewer further into the queer space of the video. The screen acts as a membrane between
worlds, presenting a queer perspective on gender.

**Conclusion**

Ironically, *Spectrum* allowed me to develop a model for the production of gender narratives
that is more complex and multi-dimensional than a spectrum allows for. Instead I began to
think of gender as an open ended and capacious construct, shaped by time, space, context and
relational subjects. The complex structure of the collaged artwork assisted me in considering
how the combination of my voice with moving images – manipulated through techniques
analogous to those applied in previous case studies – can be used to create queer space.

*Spectrum* communicates my experience of gender and its relationship with desire,
environment and emotional wellbeing. The pitch and textural quality of the voice is distorted
and layered to communicate the multiplicity of gender experiences through a singular voice
belonging to a singular body. The nonverbalised sound (Echos) of my voice guides the
audience though the visual experience of the video, as the visuals are edited to the pace,
texture and emotional tone of the sound. The video transgresses distinctions between internal
spaces which include the body, mind and domestic spaces and the external including plants, animals and environment, which help to communicate a non-binary understanding of gender. My voice queers three distinct spaces in this video work: the physical space in which the voice was recorded, the physical space established by the voice where the video is played, and the virtual space of the video onscreen. The architecture of the physical space in which the voice is recorded and replayed, and the technology used at every step of the process, affects the nature of the sound and the quality of the queer space created by the voice. The queer space doesn’t manifest between the original transmission and human reception of the voice, but in distinct spaces: firstly between the performer and recording equipment and then in the multiple spaces in which the recording is replayed and received by an audience (i.e. where it is heard).  

80 Philip Auslander writes that the recording and playback of performance is a reactivation of the original and in itself a performance between the document and the audience. For more on the relationship between audience and mediated performance refer to Philip Auslander, “Reactivation: Performance, Mediatization and the Present Moment” in Interfaces of Performance ed. Maria Chatzichristodoulou (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 80-93.
1.7 Case Study 7: The Calculation


Fig. 38. Eloise Fornieles, The Calculation, 2020. Still from single-channel video, colour, sound, 07:46 minutes. © Eloise Fornieles.
Title: *The Calculation*

Form: Single-channel digital video, 7:46 minutes

Date: 2018-21

Content note for video link: This artwork contains a story regarding a death threat

Link: https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/567523099/privacy

Password: stone

Position in research schematic: Echos x Techne x Logos

**Account**

The monologue in this video tells a first-person narrative. In it, the narrator goes on a walk with a man who threatens to kill them. The visuals over which this narrative is delivered are initially pixelated to the point of abstraction. At the very end the camera moves back to reveal that the image is an onscreen reproduction of Caspar David Friedrich’s *A Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818). The soundtrack underneath the voice uses a Crabtree remix (2016) of *Heart of Glass* (1979) by Debbie Harry and *Violin Concerto 2* (2009) by Philip Glass. I wrote this monologue shortly after having a similar experience to the story told in the voiceover. I set out to understand the political impact of a voice telling an intimate story, but rather than formulating that story as a straightforwardly delivered narrative I aimed to distort the perceptions of gender within the story in order for the audience to rethink the normalised reception of gendered violence. I specifically aimed to experiment with perceptions of time and scale both visually and vocally to see if the manipulation could assist in queering space and simultaneously disrupt normalised narratives of gendered violence.

The monologue is narrated using my voice, with the pitch dropped. When I speak lines belonging to the male antagonist, the pitch is deeper still. The listener might think that the
story concerns two men until the narrator’s menstrual blood is mentioned. The biological function of the narrator’s womb changes the way the viewer understands the story in terms of its gender narratives. Rather than, as in previous case studies, the voice seeming at odds with the visible body, here it is the verbal mention of the body’s biological functions that force the listener to recalibrate or reconsider their presumptions in understanding the narrator and the wider assumption in which gender is determined by the individual’s reproductive organs at birth.\footnote{The Gender Recognition Act came into effect in the UK in 2004, enables individuals to legally change their gender if they do not identify with the gender ascribed to them at birth, predominantly determined by the biological sex of the baby.}

The soundtrack beneath the narrator’s voice is a Crabtree remix of Blondie’s *Heart of Glass* in which Debbie Harry’s voice has been slowed down and stretched out almost – but not quite – beyond recognition. The slowing down of Harry’s voice mimics the slowing down of time experienced in the story when the narrator experiences a threat to their life. Here, as elsewhere in my case studies, a combination of different temporalities contributes to the queering of the space created by the work. Slowing down sound has a direct correlation with the pitch at which it is played, since the longer the soundwave, the lower the pitch. This correlation is somewhat modulated by Logic X, but it is worth noting that speed and space have a direct effect on the sound waves.

The video begins by showing a laptop screen in extreme close-up, its grid of large strobing pixels shifting through an undulating pattern of colour. As the shot slowly pans out, the camera recalibrates its focus from the digital pixels, to the dirty surface of the screen, revealing greasy smears and specks of dust. This discreet transferral moves the focus from
the virtual space of the image, to the material space of the screen, which in turn draws the audience’s attention to the physicality of their own screens.

These interfaces also separate the shared online space from the private space in which the viewer experiences the work. The voice serves as the bridge between these two spaces, connecting them. It also connects the experience of the artist to the experience of the viewer, in the manner of poetry as described by Audre Lorde. The artificially low voice of the narrator summons several dimensions of space and time: the space in which the story happened, the space in which I made the audio recording, the space in which the audience receives the video, the online space of a digital platform and the imaginative space in which the audience recreates them. This multidimensional intersection of space is queer, because the constituent parts do not align in conventional ways.

Eventually the camera zooms out to the point that it becomes possible for the viewer to realise that the image on screen is a painting. At the conclusion of the video the camera withdraws to the point that the viewer glimpses the famous, solitary man represented in Caspar David Friedrich’s *A Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. At this moment the physical, virtual and narrative worlds momentarily align to frame the Romantic figure of the solitary male wanderer as the perpetrator of gendered violence.

Friedrich was working in the Romantic tradition of the sublime, which presented nature as a transcendent force into which the awe-struck individual could dissolve. According to eighteenth century philosopher Edmund Burke, the sublime had the capacity to compel and destroy, which included states of terror,

‘For, fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that
resembles actual pain. Whatever, therefore is terrible, with regard to fight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endued with greatness, of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling or contemptible, that may be dangerous.'

In recognising the awe inspired by states of fear Burke turned a Romantic lens on violence which we have seen amplify over time, from landscape paintings of the sublime to video games. The Calculation sets out to break the Romantic vision of the sublime, by being so close to the image that it is distorted beyond recognition, dislocating the image from its charged resonance and instead presenting a micro-vision of pixels and dirt, until the figure is revealed at the very end of the video within the context of a story which has reframed the lead male protagonist. Friedrich’s painting of a young, fair, man looking out from a peak over the mountains portrays his protagonist as at one with nature. Yet his attitude – posed on a peak raised over the landscape and looking down upon it – suggests ownership over the land rather than submission to it. The video reframes the male figure to suggest an analogy between patriarchal violence towards the landscape (owned, exploited) and that towards female bodies. This violence is culturally absorbed, normalised and often romanticised.

Friedrich reveals more of masculine identity within a patriarchal system than he intended, and the painting can be read against his apparent intentions. As his work reveals the blind spots in his thinking, so my own blind spots are contained within the video, and will be revealed through the scrutiny of other translocational perspectives: as the reception of the painting is changed by the time and place in which the viewer encounters it, and the ideas and

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82 Edmund Burke, The Sublime and Beautiful (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1796), 56, Gale Primary Sources.
experiences they carry with them, so the gender narratives constructed by viewers of my work will be conditioned by the space in which they receive it.

**Conclusion**

I found that storytelling is a means of creating a queer space in which to reclaim agency and exercise personal healing. I used my voice to externalize a traumatic experience. Using an altered voice meant that it was possible for me to separate myself to some degree from it: to remove myself from a story of gendered violence, and to reframe the role of gender within that story. Listeners might be able to identify with the story, and in so doing reimagine and reclaim their own experiences. This video creates a queer space of sharing and identification.

Making the video public creates a queer space in which I feel vulnerable, particularly as the individual described in the video is on the peripheries of my community. Using one’s voice to call out acts of gendered violence comes with a risk of further violence: not being believed, being ostracised, stigmatized, called hysterical, verbally bullied, physically beaten, murdered. In sharing the story, I put myself at risk and so the ways in which I share it are highly considered: as the title suggests, the risk at all times is calculated.

As I have stated previously, vocally created queer space is not safe space. It cannot guarantee protection from violence. *The Calculation* describes the issue of a threat, so the abuse is verbal rather than physical. Verbal, physical and virtual male violence against people with fem bodies has been normalised and so by queering the voices in the story, the violent gender narrative is disrupted. The manipulated pitch of the acousmatic voice indicates an imagined body that doesn’t align with the body referred to in the story in a normative way.

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The confusing gender narrative requires the audience to re-evaluate normalised power dynamics between gendered bodies.

Within the narrative, the narrator uses their voice as a tool for survival. Like Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, their conversation defers violence. Had this not worked, the narrator would have used their voice to call for help. The voice cannot protect the queer body from physical violence, but it can advocate for it, deflect threats, and alert others to it, creating queer space in the process.

In this video the voice bridges physical, virtual and imagined spaces for the audience watching the video online. The capacity of the voice to layer multiple different forms of time and space creates a complex and manifold queer space that also enfolds the physical space and the historical experience of the audience.
1.8) Case Study 8: *Tools to Hand*

Fig. 39.

Fig. 40.

Fig. 41.

Fig. 42.


Fig. 42. Eloise Fornieles, *Tools to Hand*, 2020. Still from single-channel video, colour, sound, 03:03 minutes. © Eloise Fornieles.
Account

I started this case study with the very simple aim of making sound with my body and voice in non-normative ways using the makeshift materials I had to hand at the time. But as I improvised, I came to realise that this was a pivotal moment in understanding the role of my voice and body as an apparatus and external technologies as an extension of my own biological being. It was during the process of making that I realised that the gestures I was making were challenging notions of masculinity and so I set out to understand whether I could reclaim agency in turning narratives of gender violence on myself.

In the video work *Tools to Hand* I am shown lying supine by a river with a row of large flat stones laid out across my naked belly, chest and throat. The shot is tightly cropped so that my chest appears to be part of the landscape, collaging my fleshy pink torso with the slightly iridescent, silver stones.

The handheld video is shot with a camera phone on selfie mode while my other hand took a stone lying on the riverbank and gently tapped the large flat stones on my torso. The sound of
the stones changed in pitch depending on the cavities of my body below, making my body part of a makeshift musical instrument. The stones on my belly jigged whilst the camera shook in my hand: both tools were affected by my body’s material qualities and awkward handling. The external tools represent a stretch in technology from natural, ancient stone to human-made, contemporary smart phone, combining with my own internal technological voice.

I made several video recordings, experimenting with the sounds I could make. With each recording the tapping became increasingly forceful. My camera failed to record the most violent sequence, in which I beat my chest with great force. The stones functioned as both weapons and armour. I beat and beat and beat and the blows were absorbed by the stones. Instead of pain there was a strong, affirming thud and it wasn’t until that evening that a dull ache spread across the inside of my chest.

The gesture of beating one’s chest has been firmly established as a gesture through which male primates demonstrate their physical strength, so my performance of this gesture disrupted an established gender narrative. The work also reclaims an act of gendered violence. In case study 7: The Calculation, I described the experience of being threatened by a man armed with a stone. This work puts the stone in my hand and gives me control over its effects on my body. The performance addressed and to some extent resolved a traumatic experience.

My vocalizing was minimal, at least in the conventional sense. Instead the technology of my

body (Techne) through which I would ordinarily vocalise (larynx, lungs, throat and mouth) was used to make sound in a different way. Rather than moving breath through these body parts I used their hollow spaces to amplify or modulate the vibrations created by the impact of stones on the surface of my body.

I came to understand this technique as offering an alternative means of constructing voice. In this example, the voice is constructed through the shape of the body. In this performance I instrumentalize my body to express an experience through a different type of voice. The body is the instrument, and in this case study I find new ways to play it. This configuration queers the body from its normative means of vocalizing sound and creates a new form of communication which is void of language but imbued with thought, feeling and meaning (Logos).

**Conclusion**

The technology of the body can produce voice by different means than conventional *vocalising*. As I have previously demonstrated, the body is a technology for the production of voice. This case study extended my research into the production of different voices.

‘Playing’ my vocal apparatus with stones created a somatic sound. The hollow spaces that contributed to the production of this voice were not limited to those parts of the body that are normally used to produce voice. The effect was to queer those parts of the body, transforming them from their biological functions within the body into modes of creative expression.

The voice queered the site at which I performed by creating a set of sounds produced by a queer activity. The voice is queered through the non-normative way in which it is produced.
Miriama Young asserts that the vocal apparatus within the body is in itself a tool: this performance queers that tool.

The performance verified that meaning (Logos) can be embedded within the sound (Echos) of the voice, however it is produced. It reaffirmed that meaning is not dependent on language. Rather than submitting to the constructs of language, this somatic sound was created from my own lexicon referring to musicality, gender roles and experiences of gendered violence.

The use of stones and the recording of the performance on camera phone reclaimed ancient and modern tools for the perpetration of violence against women (namely stoning\textsuperscript{87} and the recording and broadcast of revenge porn\textsuperscript{88}). My action reclaims these technologies. The filming of my naked body in the process of creating a voice established an autopoietic system of creation and documentation.

Content note: The next page has an image of a museum display of human remains.
1.9) Case Study 9: *UTTER MONSTER*

Figs. 43-46. Eloise Fornieles, *UTTER MONSTER* (detail), 2021. Still from single-channel video, colour, sound, 14:08 minutes. © Eloise Fornieles.

Title: UTTER MONSTER

Form: Digital video, 14:08 mins

Date: 2019–2021

Content note for video link: This artwork contains footage of museum display of human remains and animal roadkill.

Link: https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/567558718

Password: UTTER

Position in research schematic: Logos x Topos

Account

In the voiceover for this artwork I wanted to focus on language (Logos) to see if it was possible to charge the voice with more agency than the body. To do this I set out to use forms of shadow feminism to create an alternative to oppressive gender narratives bound in the expectations of normative female fertility. I also wanted to develop the ideas I had formed in case study 8, Tools to Hand, by creating a soundtrack that used instruments as technological extensions of the voice to investigate what kind of queer space this might create.

UTTER MONSTER tells the story of an alter ego called Monster who lives under the bed. Having lost her voice inside herself, Monster’s monologue traces her thoughts in an internal soliloquy. The footage is collaged from video clips in the personal archive I had been gathering for several years, stitched together and displayed as a channel that plays within a smaller frame superimposed on a second channel of footage. Behind this nested screen is a long, continuous shot of the sky at dusk, filmed as I walked around my neighbourhood in Athens. This backdrop was shot with my camera phone, held in the palm of my hand, and so the footage gently staggers with each step.
The vast expanse of negative space between buildings is punctuated, as it fades from day into night, by trees, contrails and lamp lights. This footage records the changing relationship between my body and urban public space as night falls. Public spaces at night are stages in which the violent consequences of socially constructed gender narratives play out: their nature is determined by streetlights, urban architecture, surveillance cameras, and whether there are people within earshot. The video looks to the space above my head to understand the potential reach of my voice if I need to shout out.

Monster asks, ‘Am I looking at negative space, or am I filling it?’ Or, indeed, is she carrying it? Female narratives and philosophical concepts have often described women as vessels or defined them by an absence or lack (Halberstam 2011, 125). While the montage of images in the central, nested screen pull the viewer through tunnels, caves, interiors and orifices, Monster questions what it means to both occupy and contain space. Monster cannot feel a sense of belonging, identification or safety in the spaces she inhabits. She longs to eradicate herself from space completely. In the *The Queer Art of Failure* Jack Halberstam refers to this form of eradication as characteristic of ‘shadow feminism’:

This feminism, a feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence, offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing and forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project, a shadow feminism which has nestled into more positivist accounts and unravelled their logics from within. This shadow feminism speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an antisocial femininity and a refusal of essential bond of mother and daughter that ensures that the daughter inhabits the legacy of the mother and in doing so reproduces her relationship with patriarchal forms of power.89

89 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 124.
Monster’s infertility breaks the bond between mother and daughter, freeing her from the gender narratives that are passed down through generations under patriarchy, but she struggles to find an alternative narrative. Instead, she desires eradication. She seeks to remove herself from the story completely. Failing to fulfil the normative gender narrative of ‘mother’ plagues the character in her looping thoughts, so that birthing or aborting language from herself comes to her as a solution.

I must whelp the voice that feeds on our insides. Or else find the courage to cut it out with one of the Man’s tools.
I have googled it, found DIY methods of sucking at myself until it gives.
I will stutter the staggering utterance out of me.
Birth a holophrase. Eradicate the internal palimpsest. Sick as Sycorax you press our hand against my larynx and squeeze.

The monologue’s language and references become progressively more esoteric. Their specificity obstructs their communicative function and imbues them with a form of violence. The language is increasingly obscure, so that the speaking voice becomes hard to understand.

The monologue doesn’t name individuals but instead features the archetypes ‘Mother’, ‘Father’, and ‘The Man’. Each of these represents a social construct; ‘Mother’ is the figure of ‘mother nature’, ‘Father’ is the Church and ‘The Man’ is the patriarchy. Monster verbally wraps these characters into her version of events. She claims victimhood even as she confesses her own role within toxic dynamics. Monster reframes her acts of kindness – characteristics which are framed as quintessentially feminine within normative gender constructs – as acts of control, revealing her monstrosity but reclaiming a twisted form of agency.
Monster skips between referring to herself as ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘you’ in an attempt to separate her body from her mind: this monologue is addressed to her own body. When she uses the word ‘you’ she is referring to something her body did that she regards as separate from herself as a mind. When it is ‘we’, they were in it together.

The word ‘O’ is repeated throughout the monologue like a verbal hole, an open mouth. This evokes the spot lit and disembodied speaking mouth of Samuel Beckett’s *Not I* (1972) (for more on this, see page 162) and the video riffs on images of the Barbara Hepworth sculpture *Single Form* (1964)90 famous for its smooth round cavities. This reference is also to the last utterances (rather than words) of Hamlet, as recorded in the first Folio: ‘The rest is silence. O, o, o, o.’91 The Monster thus takes on a male narrative of madness to reshape her own.

Monster’s last words are ‘No, no, no, no’, playing on Molly Bloom’s famous monologue at the end of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and its conclusion in a single, affirmative, ecstatic ‘Yes’. The monologue attempts to absorb, reference and repurpose these pillars of the western literary canon to create a different gender narrative for a fem monster who refuses the normative script.

Monster’s voice is my own, manipulated to be a little lower. By comparison with previous case studies it is much closer to my natural pitch. It plays over a soundtrack which adapts tracks from the album *Trespass* (case study 5) and an additional cinematic string composition. To make this extra track, I sang multiple harmonic lines to a violinist, who played them back by ear. I recorded each line and then layered the recordings on Logic X to

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90 *Single Form* (1964), is situated outside the United Nations Secretariat Building, New York.
create an orchestral sound. The violin and the computer program became technological extensions of my voice. In post-production each line of the violin was treated with a digital effect called ‘Concert Hall’ designed to mimic concert hall acoustics. Layering my voice to create a polyphonic sound extended my research into chorus structures in *Trespass* (case study 5) and created a queer space *using* my voice, without the sound of my voice being heard.

By this process I queered my voice into a sweeping, romantic music that coincides with the opening footage of sea and sky. At other times the soundtrack is mechanical and menacing, or rhythmic and sexual. In part the tracks are made using manipulated loops of found sounds: my breath while skipping, breathing, brushing my teeth. These quotidian sounds reference my body moving through the world, but are masked through a process of distortion and layering to make them difficult to place or identify. All of these sounds play into the emotional content of a story in which the protagonist grapples with how prescribed gender narratives shape her every day and domestic experience.

**Conclusion**

*UTTER MONSTER* foregrounds the vocal monologue as a means of breaking the gender narratives. Rather than retelling a gender normative story, Monster applies story telling in shadow feminist forms. She does this by:

1. Talking to herself internally instead of out loud
2. Verbally looping thoughts instead of facts
3. Refusing the gender normative narrative of Mother.
4. Referencing and distorting language and literary examples
5. Stepping towards eradication instead of participation.

Monster refuses to take part in replicating patriarchal gender narratives. However, she fails to create a positive or active alternative and instead longs to eradicate herself. The alternative gender narrative in this instance applies a tactic of shadow feminism by stepping outside of the story in order to break the loop between mother and daughter.

Within the soundtrack’s composition, the transmutation of voice into strings makes the voice unrecognisable, and thus detaches the sound from the body. This break occurs at a point of relief in the narrative, in which the description of a queer relationship between two women offers momentary escape from patriarchal relations.

In authoring a conversation between the body and mind, the voice acts as a bridge between the two. But the bridge is treacherous, and the Monster’s mind uses her vocal bridge in an attempt to annihilate her(body)self. The content of Monster’s speech and the manipulated sound renders the voice queer and the bridge a queer but dangerous entity. Annihilation is the alternative gender narrative in this instance and offers the protagonist a means of escaping normative gender narratives.
2. Thematic Analysis

2. 1 Mother of all Monsters

Please refer to case study 1: Eric goes La, La, La, case study 2: The Birth of Troll Baby and case study 3: Troll Baby in Paradise. This theme is situated at the intersection of Logos and Topos.

I will assert in this chapter that the mother of all monsters is fear: fear of the unknown, fear of difference, fear of the other, fear of one’s body and one’s desires. Yet the monsters born of fear are, I will argue, to be cherished rather than banished. In my research-led practice, these beloved monsters emerge as figures of hope. This chapter will cover the ways in which I have evoked these hopeful monsters and how they and their voices create queer space in which it is possible to imagine non-normative gender narratives.

In traditional narrative forms, from fairy tales to Hollywood movies, monsters are the vilified manifestations of that which is misunderstood, feared, or exists outside of social convention. They show that which should not be seen or spoken of, and yet are brought into being through a performative speech act: ‘the monster comes into being the moment it is called a monster’, writes Jeffery Andrew Weinstock.92 As the other to all that is normal, the monster is a queer figure, a deviant whose particular narrative indicates a culture unease, and as such functions as a cultural signifier. Unlike other demonized figures (like witches, sirens, or evil stepmothers), the monster is not explicitly gendered. Rather, like the unnamed and unnaturally birthed monster in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, the monster must redefine itself in order to establish its own narrative:

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92 Jeffery Andrew Weinstock. The Monster Theory Reader (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 3.
I was dependent on none and related to none. The path of my departure was free, and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them.\(^{93}\)

The story of *Frankenstein* is of the monster searching for a narrative through which to solve that problem: how to understand a body and a way of being that is rejected by society?

As the above quote demonstrates, the position of the monster is liberating (‘the path of my departure was free’) as well as being painful. Thus, the monster can be employed as a character representing the possibility of alternative narratives, including those of gender. The monster’s voice is, in my work, the expression of alternative possibilities, surprising and hopeful (Sharpe 2016, 232-234).

Before undertaking this research, I spent many years performing one-to-one pieces in which I would ask participants for their hopes and fears. Through that process I came to understand that our hopes and fears are very closely related means of preparing us for the future, and that sometimes it is only a small difference in attitude that differentiates the two. I follow Alex Sharpe’s association of the monster with hope for the future: the future is unknown and must therefore be monstrous. Sharpe reminds us that the word *monster* has an etymology which means *to show* in Latin, and so monsters are guides that show us the way.

The monster is often formless, or shapeshifting, always different from social norms of the ideal body (even Shelley’s monster seems hard to pin down in size, capable of feats of

\(^{93}\) Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics), 99.
strength far beyond any human). As such, I use the monster as a character to express
alternatives to the socialized norms, and an alter ego to manifest that which is other within
me. I make the monster manifest; I allow it to mask my body. This process enables the
emergence of monster as alter ego. The alternative persona acts as a mediator between the
psyche and the public and enables me to express parts of myself that I would otherwise be too
shy to share.

Eric’s low vocal mask provided a level of disguise I hadn’t previously experienced. Unless
people know otherwise, my body is perceived as cisgender female, but in the costume, people
presumed I was a cisgender man in a rabbit costume. This simple blur of identity opened a
queer experience in which the cultural prescription of gendered behaviour could be
abandoned, and Eric’s genderqueer identity articulated something of my own experience of
gender. The vocal monster mask provided a temporary escape from gendered cultural
expectation, but there was something significant and sad in the realisation that there was a
difference in how people listened to what I was saying. They were more attentive and grew
quiet to listen when I spoke. The feminist concerns I expressed were received differently,
when they were delivered by a male character, even if it is a giant rabbit. They took on a new
gravity, which is hard to reconcile with their message. Am I really taken more seriously when
perceived as a male human dressed as a rabbit, than I am with a female human body? Are
people scared of what fem individuals have to say?

Choosing not to listen is an active decision, and often serves to protect the prejudices of the
listener. Mladen Dolar observes that in many languages the word for ‘listen’ is closely
related, etymologically, to the word ‘obey’. In his analyses of the famous image by Francis Barraud, *His Master’s Voice* (1898), in which a dog listens to its master's voice on a gramophone, he surmises that this image is indicative of the power relationship between speaker (the master) and listener (the subordinate). The act of listening is, within this system, subservient. My research contests this.

Instead it suggests that people must be empowered to listen. Those who refuse to listen are those who fear that they will hear something that will take power away from them, that might upset their prejudices. People listen more openly when they do not feel threatened, and listening is a form of learning that makes possible a productive dialogue or exchange. Without active listening, there can be no positive feedback loop between speaker and listener, no possibility of learning, change, or the generation of new narratives.

In *Gender, Power and the Voice*, Alexandra Suppes observes that both Hilary Clinton and Margaret Thatcher came under routine criticism and for their ‘shrill’ voices, with Thatcher taking vocal training in order to lower her speaking voice. Suppes questions whether women in power need to sound like men in order to communicate the same power that we are culturally conditioned to identify in the low sound (Echos) of the masculine voice. A low tone wields authority because it is produced by a dominant physique. This physical strength is written into the sound, which plays into biases around gender.

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Passing as male while performing can be both empowering and depressing. When trans men have their voices recognized as male it is often cited as an important milestone in their journey, and documents of this experience provide an insight into how male and female voices are received within a society that upholds binary gender distinctions. In a video made by MTV interviewing trans men on the topic of male privilege, the interviewees describe the different gender biases experienced when perceived as women versus when they were perceived as men. Take Samuel Leon’s experience:

An unexpected aspect of male privilege for me was being taken way more seriously than I was before, and it’s funny because I have all the same ideas, still thinking about the same things and yet sometimes I would literally just be talked over or laughed at. Now people will often quiet down. 96

The video ends with an observation from Tiq Milan: ‘You know what else is male privilege, we actually have a bunch of men having to talk about what male privilege is, even though women have been talking about what this is for years.’

Paul B. Preciado recounts a similar experience in his transition. To pass as a cis, white heterosexual man is to experience what is presumed to be the ‘universal’ position. As such, it affords a degree of privileged anonymity. In his paper-turned-book Can the Monster Speak, Preciado identifies as a monster, addressing the ‘ladies and gentlemen’ who have gathered for a conference on Women in Psychoanalysis at The École de la Cause Freudienne in Paris (Preciado 2021). Preciado compares himself to Red Peter, the ape protagonist in Franz Kafka’s short fiction A Report to the Academy (1917). In the story, Red Peter addresses a congregation of scientists on his experience of learning

96 Since quoting this video the original has been deleted from YouTube. An abridged version is found here 2nd Jan 2023 https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10153973397801701
human language in order to escape the cage in which humans had confined him. Taking this as an analogy for his own experience of patriarchy, Preciado states,

I quickly understood that there were two paths open to me: the pharmacological and psychiatric route to domesticated transsexuality and, with it, the anonymity of normal masculinity or, on the other hand, and in opposition to this, the spectacle of political writing. I did not hesitate. Normal, naturalized masculinity was nothing other than a new cage. Those who enter will never leave. And I chose. I said to myself: speak publicly. Don’t silence yourself. And so, of my body, my mind and my monstrosity, of my desire and my transition, I made a public spectacle: yet again, I had found a way out.97

Speaking as a monster and making one’s ‘monstrosity’ public is a political and hopeful action. It defies social normalcy and refuses the terms of definition that deny one’s own self-knowledge. Preciado applied his voice as a tool with which to free himself from categorization and retain sovereignty of his self-authorship.

Like Red Peter, Eric is part of a long history of anthropomorphised animals taking on human voices. Because animals don’t vocally speak in a language we understand, their seeming muteness makes them a blank canvas on which to project human ideas (this is used to great effect in children’s stories). It creates a space for characters that aren’t encumbered by human stereotypes and voices that can play into or against cultural stereotypes. I take advantage of this when performing as a rabbit.

My practice includes elements of ventriloquism between myself and the costumes that embody my alter egos. The audience cannot see the body from which the voice is coming,

dislocating one from the other. This creates a space between the presumed but hidden origin of the voice and the static mask or ‘dummy’ from which it emerges. Ventriloquism has its origins in a spiritual or religious practice in which the speaker played a role similar to that of medium or oracle, interpreting rumbles in the belly as the voices of spirits trapped in the belly. Ventriloquism combines the Latin words for stomach (venter) and to speak (loqui). In the eighteenth century the practice moved from the spiritual into the world of entertainment and ventriloquists were to be found in travelling shows, music halls and theatres with the puppet or dummy establishing its place in the act.

The ventriloquist and their dummy are always monstrous, because they embody a form of uncanny othering. The dummy doesn’t speak with their own voice and therefore can’t be trusted. Neither can the speaker, who doesn’t fully embody their own voice. Monstrous forms of ventriloquizing are played out in Paul McCarthy’s video artwork Pinocchio Pipenose Household Dilemma (1994) which investigates masculine identity within the failure of the American Dream and the nuclear family. Like Shelley’s monster, McCarthy’s offer a cautionary tale of what might happen if bodies not accommodated by society are not provided with a narrative through which to understand themselves. These are the consequences that my more hopeful and supported monsters seek to avert.

Much like Troll Baby in Paradise (case study 3), McCarthy’s work riffs on fairy tales and Disney characters. However, instead of creating a provisional utopia, he creates an unsettling combination of childhood environments and domestic dystopia. Dressed in bright red-and-yellow lederhosen, long clown shoes and a plastic mask of a boy with an explicitly phallic

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stretch of red pipe for a nose, this is McCarthy’s Pinocchio: not quite boy, not quite man, not quite puppet, but all of them at the same time. Throughout the film he sits in a little wooden house, with holes in the walls that act as orifices into which he sticks various protrusions. The wooden house is installed with microphones that pick up the sounds of McCarthy moving around and amplify them. McCarthy brings out a duplicate dummy version of himself: the same replica plastic mask and a slightly smaller, soft, doll-like body in identical clothes. This dummy is the double, the twin, the father, the son: all the domestic male role models sandwiched between these two monstrous figures and their doubled body.

Because McCarthy’s head is covered by the same mask as the dummy, it is impossible to know to which of them the voice belongs. The muffled voice, without words, is sometimes that of an adult addressing a small child or baby. Drawn-out syllables and regular groaning and grunting create a sexualised and sinister undertone to the action, which sees Pinocchio carrying out sequences – such as force-feeding and wrestling the dummy – that suggest a complex gender narrative hinting at incestual abuse. The father here represents the institutions of power and patriarchy.99

At one point, Pinocchio tries to teach the dummy language: ‘D is for Dad; B is for Boy.’ (We might recall Sarah Ahmed’s description of boys being ‘brought into line’ with their fathers through linguistic association.100) Jacques Lacan proposed that the father stood in as the signifier and giver of language; the father synonymous with the phallus, and the phallus, according to Lacan, being the primary signifier101. McCarthy’s performance undermines this gendered concept by mimicking the abusive nature of the patriarchy as represented by Father

100 Sara Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, 83.
and phallus. The monster shows the audience his learned behaviours and demonstrates how he can transmit them to the next generation through performative utterances and actions. These behaviours – the patriarchal norms – are abusive.

McCarthy’s *Pinocchio Pipenose Household Dilemma* offers a useful example against which to counterpoint the findings of my research. In my work, monsters do not unconsciously repeat but instead present alternatives to normative gender narratives. They are expressions of the break – painful, but also liberating – from the intergenerational trauma and repression that sustains binary gender.

Image removed because of potential copyright restrictions.

Fig. 50. Paul McCarthy, *Pinocchio Pipenose Household Dilemma*, 1994, Still from single-channel video, 46:00 minutes.
One way to imagine that break from the cycle is through alternative forms of giving birth: through self-creation, self-splitting and autopoiesis. in The Birth of Troll Baby (case study 2) Eric births a monstrous alter ego in the form of Troll Baby. Eric births a new being but disappears in the process. He never enters the role of motherhood, which is the established life narrative for anyone born with a womb (but normally denied to those born without one). Motherhood plays a dominant, complex and fraught position in feminist and queer theory, and the association of motherhood, pregnancy and babies with monstrosity is a recurring theme. Shulamith Firestone states that ‘Pregnancy is barbaric… Pregnancy is the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species. Moreover, childbirth hurts. And it isn’t good for you.’\(^{102}\) In the recently influential queer text This Young Monster Charlie Fox’s teenaged Alice\(^{103}\) points out that ‘every mother has fears of bringing a monster into the world.’ For this Alice, ’Motherhood is for suckers: who wants to be at the beck and call of a shrieking pig? So tough just to look after myself.’\(^{104}\)

The sentiment echoes De Beauvoir’s observation that mothers ‘fear giving birth to a cripple, a monster, because they know the awful contingency of the flesh, and the embryo that inhabits them is merely flesh.’\(^{105}\) This fear can only be understood in the context of a constructed and collective understanding of what it is beautiful, well-formed, normal. De Beauvoir’s ableism is the product of a society that upholds the bodily ideals of an ableist, transphobic, white supremacy. Monsters defy those ideals. A community reveals much about itself by what it chooses to call ‘monster’.

\(^{102}\) Firestone, The Dialects of Sex, 180.
\(^{103}\) Based on the character Alice from Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865) by Lewis Carroll.
\(^{104}\) Charlie Fox, This Young Monster (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017), 147.
\(^{105}\) De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 553.
Leigh Bowery and Nicola Bateman famously performed *The Birth* (1994): a queer birth onstage at the New York Drag Festival, Wigstock Festival. Concealed under Bowery’s clothes, Bateman was strapped upside-down with a harness to his waist. After a rendition of the Beatle song *All You Need is Love*, Bowery lay on a table, birthed Bateman’s naked body, tore an umbilical cord of sausages with his teeth and presented his baby to the audience.

Bowery was dressed as a fem figure with large bosoms and pregnant belly. During the birth he continued to sing and speak directly to the audience, announcing ‘Oh my god, Wigstock’s first baby!’ The constative declaration is delivered, but the baby’s gender isn’t specified. Instead the baby’s identity is framed and formed by the queer event and community into which they’ve been born. Bateman doesn’t scream herself into the world but is compliantly led round, kissed and held by Bowery, who presents her to the audience without her uttering a sound. Bateman’s body is that of a naked adult woman, covered in red body paint and wearing a skull cap so as to appear bloodied and bald. The baby can walk but doesn’t talk and her silent, placid nature is unnerving.

While Bowery’s birth performance has clear parallels with *The Birth of Troll Baby*, there are also instructive differences. I birthed an alternative version of myself, rather than someone else, and in doing so effected a birth story that doesn’t imply a binary, genetic or romantic coupling. Instead, one non-binary being births another in a performance of auto-destructive autopoiesis (as referred to on page 27). The autopoiesis creates a solitary troll, from a solitary rabbit. For Troll Baby to exist, Eric must die.
Fig. 51. Leigh Bowery, *The Birth* (1984), Wigstock Festival, New York. Photos by Iris de Ath.

It’s worth noting that many of the feminist and queer authors and artists mentioned in this chapter (De Beauvoir, Bowery, Firestone, Fox and myself included) are/were not mothers. We comment from a position of the unknown, which might be why monsters feature so
highly in the cultural analysis of motherhood. Writers and artists have often remained childless: because society offers insufficient support for working mothers, or parenthood couldn’t be reconciled with the financial precarity of writing and making art, or because it was not physically possible with or without technological intervention.

Not fulfilling the gendered narrative of biological motherhood is often framed as a misfortune or a selfish indulgence. My research-led practice has investigated and developed models that present alternatives to this narrative that are hopeful and queer. These represent opportunities to break the patterns of generational repression that are essential to the maintenance of the patriarchy. In the chapter *Queer Negativity and Radical Passivity*, Jack Halberstam throws out the injunction to ‘Lose your Mother’ (Halberstam 2011, 124.). This break is necessary to interrupt the mother-daughter chain through which ideas and behaviours regarding binary femaleness created by patriarchal models of thinking are transmitted. Instead, Halberstam identifies silence, cutting, refusal, and masochism as modes of expression which break participants free of repression (and occasionally their mothers).

My practice-led research experimented with these techniques using costumes and vocal masks. Creating monsters assisted me in processing the parts of my psyche which are rejected by conventional society. This was a hopeful endeavour, transforming those desires and impulses which are feared by society (and, by the process of internalisation, by myself) into positive narratives. Rather than a stigma, childlessness was reimagined as opening up a space that could be filled by numerous alternative narratives: of self-creation, autopoiesis, and non-binary gender relations.

The voice is key in the establishment of these spaces. This is a key point of distinction between my research and the examples given. McCarthy’s Pinocchio and dummy do not have
language outside the strict patriarchal alignment of ‘D is for Daddy; B is for Boy.’ Leigh Bowery narrates the birth of Nicola Bateman’s disturbingly mute baby. Shelley’s monster and Kafka’s ape are amazingly articulate, but cannot escape the cage built for them by language (they must choose between exile, persecution or freak status). Troll Baby and Eric use their voices to bridge the space between themselves and their audiences. They make temporary queer spaces of these communal environments, contingent societies which make possible, as Shelley’s monster puts it, the ‘interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being’.

*The Monster Theory Reader*, features a chapter by Elizabeth Grosz who outlines 6 of the ways that sex might be determined in an individual: sexual chromosomes, hormonal constitution, gonadal structure, morphology of internal reproductive organs, morphology of external reproductive organs, and sex of rearing, stating that the psychologist and sexologist John Money had perceived sex of rearing to the most difficult to change. In my research I have strived to make the change within social perceptions of gender and the world in which we live, rather than the body itself. Monstering has assisted me in this quest and has provided alternative gender narratives that disregard all categorisations and instead employed vocal masks and costumes to create original forms of relational interaction.

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106 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 111.
2.2 The Intimate Sound of a Political Voice

Please refer to case study 1: Eric Goes La, La, La, case study 4: How Does That Make You Feel? and case study 8: The Calculation.

Fig. 52. Eloise Fornieles, How Does That make You Feel, 2017. Live performance at the Baker Street Studios, London. Photo by Victoria Fornieles.

The period of my research coincided with a huge cultural shift in speaking out against the gendered abuse of power, sparked and expressed in the #metoo movement. The phrase was coined by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 and adopted as a hashtag for the 2017 social media campaign launched by Alyssa Milano that sought to make public the scale of sexual abuse, harassment and violence (predominantly, but not exclusively, against those who identify as female).
The movement demonstrated how the sharing of stories can help create a community, generate solidarity, and legitimise narratives which are frequently denied, suppressed or silenced. Telling of the abuse of power is a step towards social justice with measurable impacts on the distribution of power. Storytelling and sharing here steps in to compensate for the failures of legal and civil institutions of justice which too often fail victims of gendered violence.

Encouraged by the movement, I decided to extend my research into the possibility of creating new gender narratives by telling my own stories within my practice. In the video work *The Calculation* (case study 2), I use a voiceover to tell a story based on my own experience of gendered violence. I did not tell the story as a form of direct justice and did not reveal the identity of the person in question. Instead, the story gives form to the complicated way that power dynamics play out between the two protagonists. The pitch of my voice is manipulated so that the presumptive genders of the participants are to some degree confused, complicating traditional narratives of gender violence and asking the audience to actively consider how these power dynamics come into existence and how they manifest.

This chapter will analyse the ways in which the voice can transform personal stories into politically charged artworks to which audience members can relate and which might help them to formulate their own narratives. The performing voice here is a means for the speaker to assert their own version of events, to claim agency, and to speak out against a social structure that normalises gendered violence. By disrupting these constructs, the voice queers the space in which it is heard.
To contextualise this research, I will compare and contrast it with two works that have been influential on my practice: Lydia Lunch’s spoken-word work *Shotgun* (1984) and Adrian Piper’s performance *Mythic Being* (1973-75). These help to frame my own research in this field by giving examples of how the application of queer methodologies to the process of vocal storytelling can generate radically different narratives of gender to those that prevail in patriarchal society.

On her album *The Uncensored/Oral Fixation* (1989), Lydia Lunch recounts a traumatic experience from a very different position. In her spoken-word piece *Shotgun*, first performed in 1984, Lunch relates her experience as a young hitchhiker. A man drives her down an isolated lane and offers her money in return for ‘a couple of stories’, threatening that there is a shotgun in his trunk if she refuses. As she tells him stories of abuse and murder, he gives her pliers and instructs her to pinch herself with them and to lick his car. Lunch’s voice starts out self-assured, nonchalant and even-paced, quickening into anger and then pleading. The abuser gives her fifty dollars and Lunch gives him her phone number. She admits, as the piece trails off, that she saw him again.

Storytelling is a survival mechanism. In the context of the story, Lunch’s ability to tell stories that are to the satisfaction of the man threatening to kill her keeps her alive. Like Scheherazade from *One Thousand and One Nights*, she needs her voice and her ability to formulate narratives to survive the night. As a work of art, *Shotgun* is testimony to that survival and in the process combines personal, social and political history. By telling the story she reclaims agency: she sets the narrative, without adapting it to suit the expectations

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108 Lydia lunch, first released on cassette tape in London, October 1984, later included on the album of spoken word *Uncensored/Oral Fixation*
of a judge and jury. Storytelling here is an assertion of power on the part of the speaker and an expression of their truth.

By revealing the ongoing relationship between herself and the perpetrator, and sexualizing her delivery, Lunch’s work functions as a sex-radical feminist\(^{109}\) response to trauma that doesn’t deny the complex entanglement of desire and disgust with abuse (Lunch traces this back, in the track *Daddy Dearest*, to being sexually abused by her father). In *Queer Responses to Sexual Trauma: The Voices of Tori Amos's "Me and a Gun" and Lydia Lunch's “Daddy Dearest”*, Mary Lee Greitzer reads Lunch’s art as a ‘defence of sexual “perversions” born of her first-hand experiences with overcoming her father’s systematic tortures. In embracing her adult self as a brazen and sexually perverse exhibitionist, she copes with deep psychological trauma through deeper self-knowledge.\(^{110}\) In other words Lunch refuses to deny her complex need for sexual attention and within the process of creating work goes out to disgust her audience as much as she goes out to turn them on.

Greitzer goes onto define Lunch’s sex-radical response to trauma as queer because it doesn’t deny or divorce danger from pleasure or seek to make people comfortable in her telling of it. In an interview with Jason Gross, Lunch states that ‘All I can do is try to find various formats to express the things, the ills [that] obsess me, hoping that others will either find release in my voice or acknowledge that there is some truth in this.’\(^{111}\) Lunch doesn’t hold her stories as definitive accounts of what happened but insists that they be acknowledged as containing ‘some truth’, which is to say the truth of her experience. She does not shy away from the

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\(^{109}\) Sex-Radical Feminism is a sex positive approach to feminism which promotes sexual pleasure and the reclamation of terms such as ‘slut’ and ‘whore’.

\(^{110}\) Mary Lee Greitzer, ‘Queer Responses to Sexual Trauma: The Voices of Tori Amos's "Me and a Gun" and Lydia Lunch's “Daddy Dearest”’, *Women and Music* Volume 17 (2013): 4, Gale Academic Onefile.

messiness of these accounts or complex narratives which must reconcile apparently opposite tendencies (such as desire and disgust). The voice of another person telling an intimate story to which the listener can relate and ‘release’: the story is not just personal expression but a bridge establishing a relationship and a means of catharsis. My spoken word works on the album How Does That Make You Feel? (case study 4) uses lines of poetry to reveal personal intimacies and political standpoints. The spoken-word performances without costumes provided a way of being seen and heard and simultaneously processed difficult feelings of desire, anxiety and grief. Performing this live was at times uncomfortable but finding affinity with anyone who could relate to the narrative was a relief. When this happened, the relation established a queer space characterised by mutual recognition and support.

Audre Lorde writes that,

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas.¹¹²

Poetry provided a way of communicating the complexities of sexuality and emotional wellbeing that are not possible in conventional language, which by its nature reproduces societal norms. Lorde figures poetry as a way of translating the particulars of our daily lives into larger abstractions that others can inhabit. Thus ‘rock experiences’ become ‘spawning grounds’, imaginative spaces in which new narratives can be formed. These ‘sanctuaries’ are sheltered spaces in which the writer can plant ideas which grow when they are shared. When they leave those spaces – when the ideas are disseminated, move into different contexts – they

¹¹² Lorde, Your Silence Will Not Protect You, 9-10.
cease to be safe. The sharing of poetry can take form in performative utterances and constatives that give new meanings and directive action.

I used poetry to make lists of how it felt to be with lovers, the benign domestic details of a breakup and the ways in which I relate to my body. The voice marries the body to language and the public vocal sharing of intimacies renders personal details as political data. The voice functions in a way that enables an intimate reading of identity to be known in the wider world: for this reason, it is relational, performative, personal and political. The political placement and qualities of the voice require a framework in which to accommodate the relational terms which translocational positionality posits. The identity of the speaker and their voice is always perceived in relation to the listener and the cultural significance of a voice shifts depending on the time, place and context in which it is heard.

Fig. 53. Eloise Fornieles How Does That Make You Feel? 2018, Live Performance, The Campervan, Art Licks Festival. Photo by Zoe Marden

In his analysis of humans/creatures and their relation to space, Jeff Malpas identifies that for any subject in space to have agency they must be able to move and act, referring subjects in
space as ‘acting subjects’. For the purposes of this thesis I will highlight speaking as an act. This becomes poignant when there is a distinct inequity in the distribution of agency in many public spaces. Judith Butler writes in *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly* that ‘Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space, how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics.’ The public acceptance of what gender looks like, what gender sounds like, what it is permitted to do and where it is permitted to go becomes a social agreement, with ideals implemented by those with the most power. Because the threat of gendered violence against a fem body – rape, grievous bodily harm, domestic violence, and murder – is very real, performances that bring the act of vocally speaking into public spaces are politically charged.

Between 1973 and 1975 Adrian Piper performed as her alter ego *Mythic Being*, a male, African American character she created by wearing an afro wig, moustache, sunglasses, masculine clothing, adopting masculine body language, and often sucking a cigarette. Her own identity as a light skinned, multiracial, Philosophy student was subsumed beneath the characteristics of a working-class African American man. Although Piper did not change the pitch of her voice, she changed the way she spoke and her mannerisms. In the course of these performances Piper would vocalise sections from her journals, repeating them like mantras. In one video document of a performance for which she walked through the streets of New York as *Mythic Being*, Piper repeats the following sentence: ‘No matter how much I ask my mother to stop buying crackers, cookies and things, she does anyway and says it’s for her, even if I always eat it, so I’ve decided to fast.’ By using extracts from her journals, Piper

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113 Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience, A Philosophical Topography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 49.
115 According to a report in 2020 by Femicide Census, in the UK a woman is killed by a man every three days.
embeds her own identity and voice into her masculine alter ego, confusing the gender narrative. As in much of my work, the voice seems to be separated from the body delivering it, opening up a space for speculation and imagination.

In *Notes on Mythic Being I*, Piper writes that,

> During that month, the mantra and the autobiographical situation that provoked it become an object of meditation for me. I repeat it, reexperience it, examine and analyze it, infuse myself with it until I have wrung it of personal meaning and significance. It becomes an object for me to contemplate and simultaneously loses its status as an element in my own personality or subjecthood. As my subjecthood weakens, the meaning of the object thus weakens, and vice versa. The end result is that I am freer for having exhausted it as an important determinant in my life, while it simultaneously gains public status in the eyes of the many who apprehend it. The experience of the Mythic Being thus becomes part of the public history and is no longer a part of my own.¹¹⁷

The repetition of the line shifted the meaning of the sentence so that it becomes purely material sound. The speaking out-loud of the sentence transforms intimate personal details into public history. As with the example from Lydia Lunch’s work, it also separates the speaker from the experience described, freeing her of it. Thus, the inscription of private experiences onto the public record through the voice is to witness history and to be liberated from it.

Cherise Smith contextualises Piper’s performances within the civil rights movements that had risen up in India and the United States in the preceding decades, highlighting the importance

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of culture in the fight against white supremacy. Smith quotes the organizer Maulana Ron Karenga as stating that ‘We stress culture because it gives identity, purpose, and direction. It tells you who you are, what you must do, and how you can do it.’ Culture in this formulation is the means by which narratives of race, gender, sexuality, class and disability are constructed. So, it matters who produces them, and how they are expressed.

In *Mythic Being*, Piper asks her audience to re-evaluate who is allowed to occupy public space and the freedoms they have to speak within it. The work plays on the white audience’s fear of Black masculinity and the racist, often sexualised prejudices, fetishes, and forms of violence to which it gives rise. The cultural cues provided by Piper’s acting the part of an exaggeratedly masculine Black man are confused by her fem body and voice. Piper subverts the patriarchal vocal hierarchy – in which the male voice is dominant, is heard and listened to – by vocalising female experience through a masculine character.

It is not incidental to the piece that New York in the mid-1970s had the reputation of a dangerous city. The institutional racism and homophobia of state infrastructures including the New York Police Department made it doubly dangerous for Black, Latinx or queer individuals expressing any public form of dissent. That the power dynamics in *Mythic Being* are complex and not easily resolved is part of what makes it such a compelling work to study. As a middle-class academic who in other work has played on the fact that she is often misread as white, Piper has access to privileges that are denied her character, much as *Mythic Being* gives her access to privileges that she is otherwise denied. *Mythic Being* thus

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establishes a queer space in which to reimagine and redraw narratives around class, race, and gender.

![Image removed because of potential copyright restrictions.]

Fig. 54. Adrian Piper, *Mythic Being* (1973-1975), Still from videoed performance, New York.

My practice participates in a history of artist and activists speaking in public space in an act of reclamation (case study 1). For Eleanor Antin’s 1974 performance *The King of Solano Beach*, the artist dressed as one of her many alter egos: a romantic king with long hair, beard, brimmed hat, ruffled white shirt, cape and boots. This king ventures out onto the streets of his realm, initiating conversations that challenge notions of class, gender and race. In 1980 Lorraine O’Grady created her persona Mlle Bourgeoise Noire: she wears a gown stitched together from 180 white gloves, a crown and a sash reading *Mlle Bourgeoise Noir 1955*, the year O’Grady graduated from Wellesley College. Having ‘invaded’ galleries, O’Grady
shouted out poems critiquing the racist art world, whipping herself with a white cat o' nine tails.¹¹⁹

Pope.L performed *Schlong Journey (My Penis is Fine, How are you?)* (1996), by walking through the streets of New York wearing a white suit and four-foot-long white phallus, at the end of which was a fluffy toy rabbit supported by the wheeled base and stem of an office chair. Much like Adrian Piper’s *Mythic being*, Pope L. and his awkward armature insisted that his audience re-evaluate the fears, prejudices and fetishes towards the culturally sexualised Black male body.

Eric Self (case study 1) is an alter ego I have used when performing in public spaces. The invention of Eric Self dates back to 2014, just after my grandfather passed away. Eric’s accent resembles my grandfather’s Cockney accent, which is identified with those born within earshot of the bells of Saint Mary-le-Bow in the Cheapside district of the City of London. The Bow Bells are an example of sound being used to demark an area and a community: ‘Bow-Bell Cockneys’. Although my maternal grandfather was proud of his place of origin, he was also aware that his accent made him subject to prejudice and classism. When my siblings and I were children he would correct our speech, which he connected to education and social and career opportunity.

He left school at the age of 13 to help his father lay bricks. After the Second World War he took the opportunity offered to servicemen and trained as an architect at a night school. He and my grandmother, who was originally from Lancashire, changed their accents to socially navigate a prejudiced system so that their voices masked part of their identities. My

Grandfather’s social circumstance – his translocational position – changed from a working-class bricklayer in East London to a middle-class architect in Portsmouth.

Content Note: The next page has an image of a dead rabbit.
Accents are in the United Kingdom powerful and extremely nuanced signifiers of class, wealth, education and privilege. Anyone who grows up in the country is conditioned to be acutely attuned to tiny variations in intonation and diction. Colloquialism and vernacular language identify communities, and accents imprint place and social background in every voice. This aural index of place reaches out beyond borders when people travel, taking with
them a locational part of their identity. This can be influenced by secondary/multiple region/s over time and in turn influence the vernacular of the new community.

The translocational positionality of the speaker and the listener are always affecting what is said and what is heard, and it is through this collaborative feedback loop that the voice can be translated into a set of cultural signifiers that may or may not be understood by the listener. In the case of artworks, these cultural codes and their receivership can and should be framed politically in order to understand the wider context in which the work exists, what it is trying to do within that context, and what it might do in future contexts (artworks possess their own translocational positionality).

My work can be outspoken in public or quietly whispered to one individual, and the spaces that my voice creates are politically charged and queer. My artworks set out to be heard and seek for connection and inclusion. This is not the only available option: artworks by trans artist Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley set out clear boundaries. In the case of Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley’s videogame *Resurrection Lands* (2020)120, the immersive online artwork asks viewers to identify themselves with a team: either ‘Pro Black Pro Trans Team: a team composed of all Black trans people who want to meet their ancestors. Their intentions are to listen to those from the past and share knowledge between each other.’ or ‘Consumer Team: a team composed of those who are not trans. They can only appreciate transness from the outside. Their intentions are unclear, they keep them close to their chest.’. Picking a team determines which journey the audience will experience. The artwork uses multiple electronically manipulated voices that tell various stories both narrating the world within the artwork, but also presenting intimate stories manifest by digital avatars. The artwork acts as

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an archive for Black trans ancestors, but it also aims to protect the archive against the
tendency of audiences to fetishize, objectify, appropriate or other difference. This rejection of
colonial body/gender/identity tourism creates a space in which experiences can be expressed
in the knowledge that they will be received by subjects who can identify with them.

All of the artworks in this chapter use speaking voices to manifest personal stories of gender
identity that don’t conform to binary gender constructs. In communicating these stories in
public forums, the artworks act as politically charged access points for people to listen to
stories that they either identify with or hear gender narratives different from their own,
enabling an experience that challenges preconceived ideas and/or forms an opportunity for
deeper understanding. These artworks address forms of violence against marginalised people,
by using voices to share intimate stories and in doing so create politically charged queer
spaces.
2.3. Do it Yourself

Please refer to case study 1: *Eric in La, La, Land*, case study 3: *Troll Baby in Paradise* and case study 8: *Tools to Hand*. This theme is situated at the intersection of Techne, Logos and Topos.

The power structures that shore up the patriarchy and the tools that were used to build them are created to benefit their creators. The legacy of power in the West is colonial, capitalist, racist, sexist, ableist, transphobic, homophobic and xenophobic which manifests within the institutional operating systems. But how are we to make change to the societal structures and constructs we operate within, without the application of the patriarchal tools and operating systems? If one of those societal constructs is the binary gender system, can the voice be a tool to deconstruct it?

This chapter proposes that voice can be a tool to break down binary systems of gender and to create space in which to construct alternatives. The voice does this by making performative utterances, establishing bridges between disparate bodies and subjectivities, and by creating queer spaces that encourage the formation of new sets of relations.

The voice as tool is framed as ‘internal techne’ within my developed model of Kane’s vocal analysis (page 10), which can be extended or modulated using external technologies (external techne, according to the model). These external technologies will be considered as extensions of the voice, ranging in sophistication from stones that amplify the hollows of body or helium which, when ingested, changes its pitch, to the smart phone through which I record my voice.

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in order to later broadcast it. The range and sophistication of external technologies is limited by what I can afford and what is immediately to hand.

In Audre Lorde’s essay *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House*, originally delivered as a talk at *The Second Sex Conference* at New York University in 1978, she states,

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures of order to define and seek a world in which we can flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never be able to bring us genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support.122

Lorde used her voice to critique the conference at which she delivered this lecture, calling for an intersectional feminism which acknowledged, utilized and honoured women of diverse race, class, sexual orientation, age and economic status. Lorde recognised that the institution of the university served the interests of those who created it rather than the ‘black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet’ she self-identified as and stood for.

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Paul B. Preciado’s *Can the Monster Speak?* also used an invitation to an institution (in this case the École de la cause Freudienne) as a platform from which to critique it. Preciado states that, ‘I have learned the language of Freud and Lacan, the language of the colonial patriarchy, your language, and I am here to address you.’ (Preciado 2021, 19.) Like Lorde, Preciado learned the language of the oppressor in order to be granted the opportunity to speak against it.

Both Lorde and Preciado used their voices as tools within the master’s house to disrupt, critique and call out (if not dismantle) the institutions to which they were invited. Both had learned the language of academic institutions, but their voices remained their possession, inflecting and individuating their position, infusing their language with their own experiences.

In *Glitch Feminism*, Legacy Russell writes,

> If we assume that Audre Lorde’s 1984 declaration that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” still holds true, then perhaps what these institutions – both online and off – require is not dismantling but perhaps mutiny in the form of strategic occupation. The glitch challenges us to consider how we can “penetrate…break…pressure…tear” the material of the institution and by extension, the institution of the body.¹²³

Russell’s description of the body as an institution suggests that it is not consistent with the subject and might indeed alienate them. This leads to the strategy of institutional occupation, a protest that attempts to reclaim it.

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To fully embody our bodies requires that we negotiate with or reject cultural constructions that are not consistent with our subjectivities. In my research-led practice, I experimented with using my voice to create queer space that might temporarily ‘occupy’ institutions ranging from art spaces, to nightclubs, to my own body. I recorded tracks for the album *Trespass* ([case study 6](#)) in a church, using my voice to fill a building constructed through millennia of female and queer repression and transforming it temporarily into queer space.

In *Xenofeminism*, Helen Hester quotes Lucca Fraser, a fellow member of the Xenofeminist collective Laboria Cuboniks, responding to a question about whether the master’s tools can in fact dismantle the master’s house. Fraser states,

Yes. Both literally and figuratively yes. That’s what tools are – they’ve got uses that go beyond their master’s intentions. And they’ve got weaknesses that can be exploited to make them do things they weren’t intended to do. Which is basically what hacking means. This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t invent new tools. The more the better. But yes, absolutely, the master’s tools can dismantle the master’s house.124

Should we take this as evidence that Xenofeminism is too entrenched within the infrastructures of the master’s house to work against it? Or is appropriating, subverting and repurposing the available tools sufficient to bring down the master? *Xenofeminism* goes on to outline the detailed violent and racist history of gynaecological tools and the ways in which they were reclaimed by women to advance the cause of their own authorisation and agency over their own sexual health, specifically looking at Del-Em125 (Hester 2018, 70).

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124 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 98.
125 Del-Em was the name given to equipment adapted by Lorraine Rothman and Carol Downer in the 1971 for DIY menstrual extraction and early abortion.
Reclamation, adaptation and hacking are all methods that Russell would regard as glitching the institution and creating a space for hope and change to emerge.

In Marianna Simnett’s film *The Needle and the Larynx*, the artist undergoes a medical procedure in which a doctor injects Botox into her cricothyroid muscle in the larynx. The Botox paralyses the muscle which usually contracts to heighten the pitch of a voice, thus lowering it substantially. The footage, which depicts Simnett looking up at the doctor, is slowed down. A voiceover by the artist tells a fairy tale narrative about a girl who wants her voice changed to match the ‘rumble outside her door’, and eventually coerces a surgeon (against his protests that ‘Boys must be low and girls must be high’) into carrying out the procedure. This fairy tale cuts to a scientific history and purpose of Botox. Throughout, Simnett uses vocal effects to alter the pitch of her voice to articulate characters within the story. Towards the end of the film there is a recording of the artist speaking after the procedure which dropped her voice to a raspy lower tone explaining that she hadn’t expected the procedure to leave her feeling so physically weak.

Fig. 56. Marianna Simnett, *The Needle and the Larynx* (video still), 2016. Image reproduced with permission of the rights holder, the artist, Société, Berlin, and Serpentine Galleries, London.
The audience understands that the voiceover belongs to the protagonist depicted onscreen, but at no point do we see the mouth speak. In the doctor’s surgery, Simnett presents herself in an archetypal configuration of an objectified virginal female: her white clothes, big eyes, blonde hair and open mouth play on a classic form of sexual desire which she disrupts using the manipulated pitch of her voice. In this way the artist demands to be seen on her own terms, to be made equal to those objectifying her, to deflect the gaze and for the voice to be in her control (as is the male doctor Simnett has employed to carry out the procedure).

There is a gap between the cultural cues of the deeper voice and the visual representation of femininity, creating layers of gendered narrative that don’t align with the norm and instead situate Simnett’s monster psyche in the context of fairy tales. Her voice subverts socially constructed ideas of femininity within the binary system and creates an alternative. In this way Simnett employs Botox, vocal effects technology and her voice as tools in the creation of an alternative gender narrative.

In my video works *The Calculation* (case study 7) and *UTTER MONSTER* (case study 9) I tell stories through monologues delivered by digitally altered voice. These works postproduction tools, applied over time and constructing layers that effectively multiply the voice. The tools I employ in *Tools to Hand* (case study 8) are quite different. I use stones to create sounds across the hollows of my throat and chest, thus reconfiguring the way that the body makes sound and expanding convention definitions of voice. The body is presented as an instrument which can be played a number of different ways, or a technology that can be applied in unexpected manners. These possibilities are extended through external technologies ranging from the stones with which I play my body and the mobile phone on which I record the sounds in order to later communicate them to an audience.
The intervention of technologies and scientific advancements to reconfiguration of gender is endorsed by Xenofeminism (XF), which calls for technological materiality and an abolition of the gender binary. Technology is presented a means of defying what has been set by ‘nature’. Hester writes,

Biology is not destiny, because biology itself can be technologically transformed and should be transformed in the pursuit of reproductive justice and the progressive transformation of gender. XF emphasizes what it sees as the fundamental mutability of bodies, identities and the various processes that help shape them; it recognizes the often violently denied plurality of spontaneously occurring gender diversity (as in the myriad forms of intersexuality); and is invested in a proactive and emancipatory reworking of gendered and sexual order.\textsuperscript{126}

These technologies should be applied in collaboration with the body (rather than imposed upon it), creating an interlocking apparatus in which hormonal intervention, surgical appendages or virtual avatars can be used to reconceptualize gender in plural configurations.

Trans writers, artists and activists including Paul B. Preciado, Harry Dodge, McKenzie Wark and Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley embody the reshaping of gender somatically as well as reforming cultural gender narratives in their work. My practice is different in that I create temporary spaces in which to reimagine gender narratives without changing my physical self – at least not permanently – to embody them. I am not trans and my exploration into gender is not identified as such.

The tools I use are instead means of materially externalizing an internal understanding of my gender as multiple and changing and, as such, articulable only through the creation of new

\textsuperscript{126} Hester, Xenofeminism, 22.
narratives. They assist me in disrupting the cues for gender stereotyping and in doing so create a queer space in which to generate these alternative gender narratives.

Laurie Anderson combines low-fi and cutting-edge technologies in her vocal performances and artworks. A classically trained musician who aligns herself with the avant-garde, Anderson began, early in her career, to deconstruct old musical equipment, reassembling it to make something new. Often this involved reconfiguring the equipment so that it might interacting with her body in ways other than the ways for which they were intended. For her interactive installation-sculpture *The Handphone Table* (1978), Anderson turned the bodies of audience members into listening devices. The work consists of a wooden table, the structure of which conceals a sound system. People are invited to sit at chairs placed at opposite ends of the table and to place their elbows in small depressions on its surface, before cupping their hands around their ears. Rather than through the air, the sound travels via bone conduction through the listener’s body. The effect was of Anderson’s vocal tones or instrumental music (depending on which end of the table the listener sat) travelling directly into the listener’s head.¹²⁷

In *Poetry at Stake: Lyric Aesthetics and the Challenge of Technology* Carrie Noland observes that Anderson has two ways of negotiating the relationship between self and technology. One is a process in which the external permeates the internal; the other in which the internal projects itself onto the external. Referring to the ‘intrinsic’ (internal to the self) and ‘extrinsic’ (technology, institutions, politics, the media)¹²⁸ Noland argues that ‘because Anderson conceives of the body as an apparatus, she can interface this body with other types

of apparatuses in a search for the perfect machine.'

This understanding of the body as itself a technology, which can engage productively with other technologies to produce new forms of expression and subjectivity, aligns both with the Xenofeminist endorsement of new technologies and my own understanding of voice as a technology which through combination with others can produce new configurations of the gendered self.

Donna Haraway writes that ‘Any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no “natural” architectures constrain system design’. To use the tools against the master, we must first disassemble and reassemble them to suit our own purposes.

Mariama Young describes the human voice as a ‘highly sophisticated piece of machinery’,

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and that the voice is ‘*always* technology’. External technologies can be used to extend or distort the voice, but this doesn’t not mean that the voice loses its identity. These two forms of technology – internal and external – can be collaborative: their combination creates hybrids, or cyborgs. By adapting technologies to work *with* our voices rather than against them, we can repurpose them to our needs.

The vocal masks I use help me to articulate a part of myself which is otherwise hidden or difficult to access, and which is not consistent with patriarchal structures and binary systems of gender. Technology is, in these examples, a tool through which I can upset or break down those institutions. The electronic tools I utilize are collaged, or ‘glued’, into a process of being and vocalizing.

Anderson explains ‘I use technology as a way of amplifying or changing things’, which suggests that the ‘things’ already exist. In the context of her work, her voice is chief among those things. Carrie Noland paraphrases Haraway when she writes that, ‘If “we,” as feminists, can seize “the tools to mark the world that marked [us] as other,” if “we” can transform these tools into more strategically self-expressive devices, it is because “we” already exist in some form that is not entirely overdetermined by these tools.’ In other words, our bodies and our voices exist prior to the cultural constructs that serve to dictate or constrain our behaviour. If our bodies and voices are also technologies, or tools, as I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter, then it follows that these are tools, with others, to begin dismantling the master’s house.

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2.4. Holes, Edges and Gaps

Please refer to case study 4: How Does that Make you Feel?, case study 6: Spectrum and case study 9: UTTER MONSTER. This theme is situated at the intersection of Topos, Logos and Echos.

In this chapter I will build on my research-led practice to argue that holes, edges and gaps are not merely negative spaces between what is structural and ‘significant’, but should be understood as entities with their own value systems and frameworks. I will consider loops – in configurations including Möbius strips, three-dimensional doughnuts, and positive and negative feedback loops – as models for understanding how the voice is creates, is carried across, and reconfigures the space between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ and between the speaking body and receiving body.

Loops create shapes with holes in the middle. They establish form whilst insinuating movement, as if perpetually chasing their tails. The form has an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’, drawing a line between one space and another while simultaneously inhabiting both. 3D doughnuts (known as ‘tori’) and Möbius strips model the seamless slip between interior and exterior. These models assist in thinking through and around the corporeal and cerebral sites in which the voice journeys. Elizabeth Grosz uses the Möbius strip to challenge Cartesian dualism, in which the body and mind are understood as separate substances. In Volatile Bodies Towards a Corporeal Feminism, Grosz argues that the separation has its costs and posits the Möbius Strip as an alternative model.

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The Mobius strip model has the advantage of showing that there can be a relation between two “things”- mind and body – which presumes neither their identity nor the radical disjunction, a model which shows that while there are disparate “things” being related, they have the capacity to twist one into the other. This enables the mind/body relation to avoid the impasses of reductionism, of a narrow causal relation or the retention of the binary divide.134

In this twist away from a simple binary, the voice might be situated in the complex bind between body and mind. It exists between and joins internal and external entities (the body and mind, one’s thoughts and one’s performative utterances). The mouth opens to be the orifice that ‘lets out’ a voice, the genesis of which is internal both somatically and cerebrally. The voice traverses internal and external space, acting as a marker that identifies the speaker’s relational position within social systems.

In his paper *The Voice Diagnosis* Brian Kane outlines Jacques Derrida’s critique of Edmund Husserl’s proposition that speech is founded on an internal soliloquy of thought135 creating an uninterrupted loop of understanding (the speaker is also the receiver). Derrida challenged Husserl by casting a light on the gap between the voice and the ear, creating just enough space for error. I would suggest even when verbal thought is not vocalised externally, the thinker may not fully understand their subconscious drives and become caught in loops between what they are saying and what they think they are saying. There is always a gap.

In the video work *UTTER MONSTER* (case study 9), the audience is made privy to the voice

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135 Professor Russel T Herbert researches a phenomenon he refers to as *Pristine Inner Experience* in which some people do not have an inner monologue and instead visualize their thoughts, memories, tasks. Some, including myself, do both.
inside the eponymous monster’s head. This internalised voice expresses an internal reality that, the listener realises, does not always correspond to external reality. More accurately, there is no external reality that the voice precisely relates. It articulates one position in relation to a reality that is constructed – according to translocational positionality – through multiple different perspectives.

In her monologue, Monster identifies the ‘Body and mind conjoined like shadowy heteronyms’. Heteronyms are words that sound the same but have different meanings. In this instance the word ‘Monster’ names a body with a culturally defined gender and a mind, also named ‘Monster’ that understands her body to have a different meaning. The sentence identifies the individual as a single sound with multiple meanings, and liable to be misunderstood. The word 'heteronym’ is itself a technical word that might punch a hole in the listener’s understanding of the sentiments being expressed. Towards the end of the monologue I introduce more specific and coded vocabulary to create more holes in the audience’s understanding. This expresses the desire to lock people out of comprehension: Monster can be heard, but she cannot perfectly be understood. Her experience must remain in some sense her own, untranslatable.

Sections of the monologue have loops of speech created through the editing software Logic X. These digital loops are precise, so that seemingly incidental details of speech – the intake of breath or the click of saliva under the tongue – become repeated, rhythmic sounds. When a phrase of speech is looped, the pattern of fluctuating tone sounds increasingly melodic. There is a similar effect in the spoken word works in which I use the vocal effects pedal to loop sections of (case study 4: How Does That Make You Feel?).
The term ‘speech to song illusion’ was coined by Diana Deutsch, Professor of Psychology at University of California, San Diego in 1995. Whilst editing an audio recording, Deutsch found that the repeating phrase “sometimes behaves so strangely,” beginning eventually to sound as if were sung. The effect of this illusion is strongest when the repeating section of sound is extremely precise (achieved by using a looped recording), as is achieved through the editing process of UTTER MONSTER. The repetition pulls the focus from content of the speech (Logos) to the sound (Echos), opening an alternative and musical experience of the words.

A closed circle of repeated sound becomes a positive feedback loop in the listening. It takes on new characteristics and new meanings. Much like Piper’s previously mentioned mantras in Mythic Being, the loop of words detaches from their original context and meaning and instead becomes a sound which the audience is free to interpret. The effect is queer in its transformation from one perspective to another. Loops played in a space create melodic merry-o-rounds of sound that transfix the listener.

The only word in the script for UTTER MONSTER to appear in speech marks is ‘O’. This indicates that it is the only word that Monster is able to say ‘out loud’, as opposed to in the interior monologue to which the listener has access. This simple phoneme is utilised to ask questions, communicate revelations and express desire. The verbalised ‘o’ becomes the round opening of a mouth, an entrance to the body, a hole. In her poem Bon pour Brûler Anne Boyer retells a story by Jean-Jacques Rosseau in which a small girl learning the alphabet gets stuck on the letter ‘O’, which she sews into a fabric compulsively. Rousseau used the example, notoriously, to argue that girls were less inclined to literacy and that equal educational opportunities would be wasted on them.
Boyer argues that these O’s expressed a literary imagination beyond Rousseau’s capacity to imagine. She writes,

Rousseau believed the O’s to be O’s, but every O could have been also, every letter and every word for the little girl: each O also an opening, a planet, a ring, a word, a query, a grammar. One O could be an eye, another a mouth, another a bruise, another a calculation.  

In this way ‘O’ has the capacity to be the world and the void. The shape represents a unit of sound (Echos) that communicates multitudes. It is queer in this multitudinous nature, and I like to think of the small space (Topos) within the letter O and the sound (Echos) that it makes as queer entities that translate or tie the voice to the page, in the mind of the reader, in the absence of the voice in sound (Echos).

The monologue in UTTER MONSTER ends with the line ‘No, no, no, no’, which I wrote as a play on Hamlet’s last utterances in the First Folio: “O, o, o, o.” The ‘No’ become a means of defiance. Despite the monster feeling she cannot escape her circumstances, her “No” is a word imbued with agency. “No” is a small word that refuses consent, refuses to go unheard, refuses to be defined as hysterical, refuses to die (unlike Hamlet). “No” is to claim, “I will not”. It is a syllable hollowing out a refuge from everything outside itself.

This negative alignment is often cited as problematic in ‘feminist’ and ‘queer’ distinctions in which the terminologies rely on the patriarchy in order to be defined by what they are not. Definitions of the female subject which depend on lack or absence is also a reoccurring issue in psychoanalysis. Lacan developed Freud’s theory on the castration complex, in which the

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child’s unconscious feelings are determined as to whether they fear losing their penis (if they have been identified as a boy) or resent having already lost their penis (if they have been identified as girl) (Grosz 1990, 117). Within the binary gender system Lacan proposed the phallus as a *symbolic* primary signifier, which nonetheless went to represent those with a penis, which left those without as lacking. In this way, for Lacan the phallus was the signifier of a binary defined by its presence or absence. Grosz critiques Lacan for creating a system which denies that female subjects are entities in their own right:

I will claim that the phallic signifier is not a neutral “third” term against which both sexes are analogously or symmetrically positioned... The two sexes come to occupy the positive and negative positions not from arbitrary reasons, or with arbitrary effects. It is motivated by the already existing structure of patriarchal power... They are distinguished not on the basis of (Saussurian ‘pure’) difference, but in terms of dichotomous opposition or distinction; not, that is, as contraries (‘A’ and ‘B’), but as contradictions (‘A’ and ‘not -A’).\(^{137}\)

Lacan’s configuration – in which all subjects must be A or -A – is premised on a misogynist and gender-normative thinking which doesn’t cater for anyone without a signifier.

One of the longest shots in the video work *Spectrum* (case study 6) looks down at my hand mashing a pork sausage between my legs. The action is played in reverse, so that the fleshy pulp between my fingers seems to unfold into a phallus. This reversal of a destructive act emulates the ethos of collage, in which signifiers are destroyed in order to create alternatives. The destruction of the phallus and the simultaneous refusal of one’s own anatomy aligns with Halberstam’s’ theories of shadow feminism, in which the subject declines to recreate what is normative. The voice in this section becomes rough, distorted and growling, suggesting something animal, monstrous or pained.

But the space created through the absence of the phallus can hold a value of its own. In Pope L.’s *Hole Theory part Four and Five*, the American artist identifies as the hole. He writes of Hole Theory that,

9.31 Conversely, this theory
Could only come from someone
Who lacks something
As a political condition.

9.4 Hole Theory engages lack
Across economic and cultural
And political boundaries.
LACK IS WHERE IT’S AT. [highlighted]138

Pope L. puts an emphasis of the hole and its value in the imagination. Those that can see it, don’t have it. This approach towards the imagination and identifying with what is absent is a queer method of understanding space and value.

In Samuel Beckett’s *Not I*, a character manifests as a bodily hole and negative space that speaks a monologue. Onstage is what appears to be a disembodied mouth (in fact, the actor is hidden behind a screen with a hole through which to speak). The character MOUTH is at the centre of a blacked-out theatre (all other lights, including the exit signs above doors, are turned off). Most famously performed by Beckett’s long-time collaborator Billie Whitelaw, MOUTH tells its life story at speed to the audience, stopping at intervals to address a voice we presume to be in the character’s head. The filmed version of *Not I* is cropped so that the mouth takes up most of the screen, so that MOUTH resembles a *vagina dentata* birthing a

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narrative. In isolating the mouth, the audience is drawn into the space of the body, in which the external becomes internal.

Fig. 58. Samuel Beckett, *Not I*, 1973, Performed by Billie Whitelaw for BBC 2

*Not I* is an extraordinary piece of writing that expresses many key parts of my research – in the isolation of voice from body, in the voice as bridge between body and mind – but the dynamics of its original production are troubling. The monologue requires the actor to be literally strapped to the back of the screen that obscures their body and to perform a prodigious feat of memory. When Beckett directed Whitelaw, he demanded an exactness that pushed Whitelaw to the edge of a nervous breakdown.\(^{139}\)

Male control over female orifices and speech is a familiar and violent trope. As a counterpoint I would cite the performance *Disco Derek* by Rosana Cade which also isolated an orifice and gave it speech. Cade performed this work at a Fierce Festival club night in 2015 in the character of Disco Derek. Disco Derek made their entrance naked except for high heels, silver body paint and straggly tufts of silver tinsel taped to random bits of their body. They straddled a laptop camera connected to a projector and filmed their fingers moving their labia to ‘lip sync’ Donna Summer’s *I Feel Love* (1977).

Behind them a large projection of the labia lips mouthed ‘Ooooh you and me, you and me, you and me’. Cade has performed this form of lip syncing in various other productions such as *Drag Mother* (2019) and *The Origin of the World* (2016), but I mention the performance as Disco Derek performance because I was there and can personally attest to the joyful, electric, anarchic and powerful atmosphere – the queer space – that this performance created.

In live performance, the relationship between audience and artist can create a positive feedback loop. Positive feedback loops are distinct from negative feedback loops. The latter create homeostatic systems within which the possibility of change is suppressed, because the feedback works to serve the status quo. Positive feedback loops, by contrast, amplify change. In these loops, small interferences in a static system have impacts that can ramify swiftly and dramatically, moving far beyond their originally limited scope. This provides a model for the means by which works of art can aspire to effect change.

*UTTER MONSTER* is full of visual as well as linguistic holes: its footage focuses on the holes in a Barbara Hepworth sculpture, on tunnels, caves and bodily orifices. I used an otoscope camera to shoot inside my ears, mouth and vagina, searching for the seemingly
empty spaces in which my voice might reside (the ancient Greeks believed that voices took up residence in the belly, so one can’t be sure). Whilst examining a diagram of the larynx, I discovered that the hole between the vocal folds is named the glottis (which lends its name to the glottal stop that my grandfather discouraged in me and my siblings). It struck me as poignant that an empty space should be given a name and thus identified as a functioning part of the body. The video similarly aims to give a positive identity to a character otherwise defined by absence or lack: she is not young, she is not fertile, she is not a mother, she is on the verge of not being.

Fig 59. Eloise Fornieles, UTTER MONSTER. Video, 2021.

The gap between what is heard and what is seen in UTTER MONSTER divorces the voice from a culturally prescribed understanding of the gendered body. Although there are a few brief shots of internal and external body parts (dead and alive), the androgynous voice is never allocated to a body and so escapes the corporeal confines of visually depicted gender.

140 An otoscope camera is used to see and record visual footage from inside the ear.
The video is made up of two frames, one a backdrop of footage with another smaller rectangle of the same ratio in the centre. The dominant backdrop is of the sky, filmed on a camera phone in my palm, facing directly upwards. Vocalising requires the body to draw in air/atmosphere (that which transitions into sky) from our external environment into our internal systems with a breath. Air is required in the creation of speech and therefore key in developing the phonematic orthography of languages.

The intersection between the body, language and environment are ever present in the verbalizing human voice. In the monologue the character grapples with the internal and external edges of this intersection and looks to the horizon and its insolvably distant relationship to the body. As children, my father would say to us ‘Towards the horizon run!’ which is quoted in the monologue. My relationship with the voice and its reach are similar. I want to discover the limits of the queer space it creates, but the edges remain unreachable. Martin Heidegger looked to the horizon to comprehend the illusive nature of some boundaries; Adam Sharr writes:

A horizon is where earth meets sky, but it can’t be located precisely in space. It’s impossible to get to the horizon. If you walk towards it recedes into the distance. […] While some boundaries of place identifications accord with physical things and can be recognized precisely, others are horizons in this sense. They’re chimeras which can’t be pinned down readily. For Heidegger, individuals know such boundaries by experience but can’t locate them exactly. They can’t be recorded with a line on a drawing but remain vital in people’s identification of place.  

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The unobtainable nature of the horizon demonstrates that the edge of something might only be understood in the experience of it. Some boundaries can never be pinned down. Although the reach of the human voice and hearing are measurable in decibels, what can’t be accounted for are the ‘boundaries by experience’ which determine the impact a voice may have.

Whispered words may redirect a life narrative or ignite the rallying cries of global protest. Art and writer Harry Dodge writes ‘We exceed our skins’ and in his book My Meteorite observes the permeable, diffusing nature of our beings. We affect (and infect) each other in ways that aren’t always apparent.

The voice is part of a complex system that binds our bodies to our minds and our environments. In vocalising we must draw in breath in order to externalise our feelings. The voice weaves together the worlds that each of us occupy as much as it distinguishes them. It is a wave that moves through materials in order to communicate the contents of our minds. The edges of our speech, like the edges of our bodies and the edges of our narratives, are impossible to draw precisely. They dissolve the closer you get to them.

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142 For example, in May 2020 black American George Floyd was murdered by white American police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on Floyds neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Before he died George Floyd was recorded saying the words ‘I can’t breathe’ multiple times. This phrase is reported to be said by multiple black Americans under arrest in America and in the case of Floyd it ignited international protests as part of the Black Lives Matter campaign.

Conclusion

My original contribution to knowledge in the fields of fine art and performance studies has been to identify and demonstrate how the voice is a tool that, in conjuncture and disjuncture with visual representations of the body, can create temporary queer space within which it is possible to configure new and alternative imaginings of gender. As the title *UTTER MONSTER* suggests, my practice-led research centred around monsters and performative utterance. I adopted vocal strategies that disrupted binary gender narratives using masks, costumes, alter egos and collage. I developed improvised live performances, written and performed spoken word poetry, spoken monologues, sound works and videos to generate original, complex and multi-layered gender narratives.

I began this project with the premise that gender is a construct that is transmitted and performed through storytelling. Moreover, that vocal performance offers a way to generate new forms of these narratives by opening up a space in which conventional constructs are confused or undermined. I discovered a number of artworks and performances that used voice to this end (some of which are profiled in this report), but there were none which told my story. Although I had been making performances and artworks for fifteen years, I hadn’t utilized my voice to narrate my own gender narrative and this practice-led PhD marked a significant transition in doing so.

In discovering how to mask my voice, I found a way to listen to it, and develop how best to communicate what I needed to say. As I did so, I recognised that my voice was changing the atmosphere of the spaces in which I could be heard, to queer effect, and I wanted to understand *how*. In vocal and performance theory I found exciting ideas and models for thinking about the voice but none of them linked the voice to the queering of space and so,
through the creation of artworks and performances, I began to develop strategies in which to
test the theories I had found and develop new models of thinking which answered my
questions.

Brian Kane’s analysis of the voice provided me with a model based on site (Topos), meaning
(Logos) and sound (Echos). I adapted this model by integrating technology so that there was
a new perspective on the role of Techne as an equal and constant element, considering the
voice and its biological apparatus (lungs, throat, larynx, tongue and mouth) as a tool. Techne
enabled a means of exploring cultural gender cues using the body without medical
intervention. This model enabled me to conceptualise the various ways that the speaking
voice can create queer space (or queer Topos). Sound (Echos) can be the dominant factor: the
voice could be queered, for example, by manipulating its pitch to confuse typical gender
cues. Alternatively, meaning (Logos) can be the key element: queer things are said, queer
people speak, and language is queered in the process. Logos and Echos are concurrent and
synonymous within the speaking voice: the sound always carries a meaning; the meaning is
carried in sound. In the process of my research I came to recognise how these two factors
oscillate in the production of queer space: one typically being more dominant than the other,
but both contributing to the effect.

My research identified the ways in which my performing voice creates queer space. The
extent of the space is consistent with the limits of its audibility and is always limited to the
time in which the voice can be heard. My research gave me the opportunity to discover how
these spaces are created and their extent: they might be as large as a concert hall within which
the voice is amplified, or as a small as the space created by a whisper. In the later stages of
my research I considered how the space is created wherever the voice is heard (whether or
not the speaker is physically present), so that an audio recording might also create queer space in the place of its broadcast. What the research made clear to me is that the space created by the voice is demarcated by its receiver. This is the case even when the only listener is also the speaker. If you can hear the voice you are within the space it establishes. As I learned from an early encounter with someone hostile to that space, it grows and shrinks according to the volume at which the performer projects their voice, in response to the site and the behaviour of others.

The research led me to question the Lacanian theory of the voice as _objet petit a_, an unobtainable object of desire. Contrary to this, I found that the voice acted as a bridge between the speaker and the listener within the space that it established. In performing publicly and sharing work online, my voice created a connection between myself and an audience and wider community. This process included the hearing of my own voice, which I found to create a connection between my psyche and my body. Which is to say that it gave me a way of expressing my own personal experience in forms intelligible to myself and others.

The relations between myself, the receiver and the context in which the work was received had dramatic impacts on the nature of the space established and the new narratives constructed within it. The narratives constructed around a deep voice, to take a simple example, can be frightening or seductive depending on the experience of the listener and the context in which they hear it. Thus, my research expanded beyond considering how the voice might be manipulated to create queer space to considering how the nature of the space is conditioned by these factors.
Seeking to understand the kind of queer space that is created through collaboration with an audience led me to consider this research through the lens of translocational positionality. By taking into account the many variants and perspectives contributing to the production of queer space, it gave me a model through which to understand how the history of the venue and the feedback of the audience contributed to the nature of the space created. My research here consisted in performing art works such as *The Birth of Troll Baby* (case study 2) in different locations and recording how the performance and its effects were changed by the site and the audience.

Translocational positionality required the acknowledgment of embodied *processes*, rather than the idea that the body and voice represent a fixed state or identity. This assisted in articulating a key finding of my research: that the space created by the voice is relational and constructed – like the new forms of narrative it makes possible – between speaker and receiver. It became clear that my research into this subject required consideration—specifically how my voice, and the space it created, responded to feedback. I adopted a methodology derived from ‘Deep Listening’ as defined by Pauline Oliveros, which provided an active process, reflected in the new ways that I started to listen to the responses of people as I performed. As a performer, listening is somewhat instinctive, and I would adapt performances according to the response I heard. I furthered this process by recording my environment and the sounds I made within it. Using listening as a form of understanding myself and the space. The sounds of my environment and the effect it had on my voice became material for constructing tracks in *Trespass* (case study 5).

Following Brian Kane’s model, I have contended that space is queered by some combination of the identity of the speaker (somatic Topos), the content of the speech (Logos), and the
nature of the sound (Echos). My research into that third element led me to distort and manipulate my voice so as to disrupt the cultural cues that denote gender within a binary system (such as the association of a deep voice with masculinity). The voice is an incredibly rich form of communication: even outside of language, its sound and modulation communicate cultural codes and social indicators regarding the speaker’s identity, class, place of upbringing and, of course, gender. These codes – transmitted through the voice’s accent, pitch, volume, pace, tone and lilt – mean that something of the speaker’s identity is carried through even the smallest of utterances, which needn’t involve verbal speech (a scream, for example, suggests the screamer’s age). These codes are configured within the materiality of sound (Echos) rather than the meaning (Logos) of speech.

Disrupting cultural cues for gender proved to be a key strategy in creating queer space and alternative gender narratives. The methods included vocal masks but also physical masks, costumes and collage in performance to assemble characters and narratives that subvert normative readings of gender. During this process I created acousmatic voices in order to test the nature of the space created when my voice is present, but my body is absent. I experimented with visually absenting my body through the use of costumes in performances, and physically absenting myself from sound works and videos that could be experienced independently of my physical presence. In live costumed performances such as *Eric Goes La, La* (*case study 1*) this was done by concealing my body in a costume, which in effect created a form of ventriloquism. The ventriloquism occurs between my physical body and the skin of the costumed character, in which I am both animating and vocalizing myself and the alter ego simultaneously.

My research considered how the narratives formulated within physical space can be carried
beyond it, having effects that persist even once the voice is no longer audible and the space has dissolved. My research allowed me to consider how the voice can be transmitted (for example through social media and online platforms) to create new spaces, and how audience members might also carry the memory of the voice and the space it created and, by retelling it, recreate that space. The queer spaces could be psychological, metaphorical and imaginative.

Having established that my voice created queer space, I wanted to consider the question of whether my voice was always transformative to space in which it was heard, and in what way. I asked what happens when a performer uses their voice to create a queer space in a venue that is already queer in character and committed to protecting alternative or marginalised narratives of gender? I discovered that in venues that already had an established queer identity, such as queer clubs, my voice responded to and modulated the space. The voice didn’t transform the space into queer space, but instead worked with the space, and with the audience occupying it. I learned from this that the production of queer space through the voice can be a co-production between performer and sympathetic audience and space.

During the research I performed and recorded my voice in locations including private spaces (such as my home) and public spaces (such as the street). Unlike institutional spaces such as museums or galleries, open public spaces do not establish a contract (however unspoken) between performer and audience, and etiquettes about their respective behaviours.

Performing in public led me to question whether the queer spaces I created were safe spaces. While creating queer space establishes conditions in which to imagine new narratives of gender, what happens when that space impinges on that occupied by people who are hostile
to that principle, in conditions that are not bound by the same rules around performance that prevail in a theatre or art institution?

In order to answer this query, I used my voice in a performative praxis similar to echo location. For this, animals such as bats and dolphins create sound in order to judge the distances between their bodies and bodies off which the sound bounces: they locate themselves in the world by vocalising and listening. In my case, I vocalised a sound and then listened for evidence of listeners. I made judgements according to their movements and responses as to whether it was safe to continue vocalising. Through this process I discovered that the queer space created by the voice is not safe space. The voice might advocate for the safety of the queer speaker, but the space created by the voice does not protect the speaker from harm. Instead, it might invite it. By incorporating much of what I had learned through performance, and through consideration of models of vocalising and listening in the context of performance studies, I was able to consider how the same principles apply in spaces outside the (relatively) protected spaces of theatres and institutions.

This stage of my practice-led research also allowed me to observe and reflect upon how I adjusted my voice, and the queer space it creates, to preserve myself from harm. I became quiet so as to draw less attention to myself and my difference (in the process diminishing queer space). I would adjust my conversation to calm a volatile situation (modulating the nature of the space). I would tell stories which verified the stories of others who experienced similar abuses of power (validating their own and my experience and reinforcing narratives that are suppressed in a patriarchal space). In this way the voice creates queer space through relational connection.
I found the voice is a powerful tool in addressing the structural power dynamics of a prejudiced social system. Here I considered Audre Lorde’s oft-quoted assertion that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’. The voice, as I have earlier stated, is considered in this thesis as a technology or tool. However, while it may speak the languages of the patriarchy, the voice remains an entity unique to the body of the individual. It is a tool that does not belong entirely to the master, and through processes of disrupting and glitching can effectively be applied to dismantling the master’s house. Lorde’s writing gave me a foundation for this part of my research, and the application of the ideas of Hester, Russell, Haraway, Preciado and Halberstam to the creation of my vocal artworks convinced me that the voice can be applied as a tool, using methods such as poetry (as suggested by Lorde), lectures, songs, stories and conversations to subvert, undermine and perhaps one day dismantle the patriarchy.

One of my aims was to consider how voice could be used as a tool that advocates for social change and shapes the cultural environment in which I performed and in which my gender was narrated. To do this I researched the meaning and effect of constatives and performative utterances, as defined by J.L. Austin, and tested them within my artworks in multiple forms. For example, in the artworks *How Does That Make You Feel?* (case study 4) I used constatives to declare that I am queer, and that I am a monster. In the artwork *Eric Goes La, La* (case study 1) I used performative utterances in conversational improvisation. I used speech to create new models of gendered relationality and to have a cultural impact on societal understandings of gender.

The artworks function at the intersection between performative utterances and performativity, both working to perform gender as a relational construct that communicates alternative
gender narratives. The performative nature of gender constructs and ‘the becoming of a body’[^144], as outlined in theories by Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Legacy Russell, have been applied in the artworks, to counter, disrupt and reconfigure embodiments of
gender. I used various techniques to do this: in various forms I veiled my body from my
voice, requiring the listener to imagine the body and speculate on its gender. I created
performances that use autopoiesis and acts of self-birthing to suggest an alternative to birth
through normative heterosexual coupling and the narratives associated with it. I employed the
ideas of shadow feminism, as outlined by Jack Halberstam, to deny the replicating patterns of
behaviour that normative familial units reinforce. All of these works sought to provide
alternative, new and self-produced models of gender that are outside the conventions of
patriarchal society.

I performed as a monster in lieu of being a mother (you can, of course, be both). The
monster’s position as Other provided a space in which to model alternative ways of being and
to seek understanding from a public (which is not the same as soliciting their acceptance).
Monstering allowed me to escape from the constructs imposed on fem bodies and to build
new ones more appropriate to my own experience. Each alter ego represented a way of
reassessing my relationship with my body, constructing a new narrative, and understanding a
different articulation of selfhood in a relational understanding of gender.

My research developed in ways that I could not have anticipated at the start of this process,
and in using my voice I came to understand the richness of queer space and the many means
and variety of alternative narratives around gender it makes possible. This report asserts that
the voice can create queer space in which it is possible to generate new narratives appropriate

to the experience of those individuals who do not conform to binary constructions of gender.
I also came to understand gender as a construct more complex than the analogy of a spectrum allows. Instead I adopted the model of gender as a relational *process*, conditional upon the circumstances and the subjects that combine to construct it. Queer space creates a field within which these new networks of relation can be trialled, in which we can tell new stories about ourselves and the means by which we are connected to others. In creating a space to imagine gender roles outside of the dominant system, vocal performance can be a vital tool in shifting cultural perceptions on gender, transgressing and dismantling patriarchal power, and addressing the injustices, prejudices and inequalities that are maintained through the silencing of those who do not conform.
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