"Becoming Ahuman: making it desirable to abandon certainty, including certainty of the self, and play in this chaotic situation"

Uma Officer

This book is one of three volumes which constitute the thesis (to be read in any order) and is subtitled "Ahuman Desire".

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle.

Department of Arts

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Declaration

This work has not been submitted for any other award, and consists of my work alone, whilst fully acknowledging the opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. Versions of texts included between the three books of this thesis were presented under the following titles:

- "Bio-film Mansion Theory, or Making as Collaboration with Disorder" delivered at "Interdisciplinary Conversations Around Making", Newcastle University, Newcastle, 2019.

- "There is no reason for you to live: gendered trauma and ecstasy in 'No World Dreamers, Sticky Zeitgeist episode 2: Aperitif'" delivered at "Beyond the Console: Gender and Narrative Games", London South Bank University, London, 2019.

- "Smeared into The Environment: Queer Horror games and The Ahuman" delivered at "Horror, Cult, Exploitation II", Northumbria University, Newcastle, 2018.

- "Smeared into The Environment: Queer Horror games and The Ahuman" delivered at "Don't Look: Representations of Horror in the 21st Century Symposium", University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 2018.

- "Bio-Film Assemblages and Ahuman Horror" delivered at "Current Research in Speculative Fiction", University of Liverpool, Liverpool, 2018.

- "The Revolutionary Praxis of Urban Galls" delivered at "Open Graves Open Minds & Supernatural Cities present: The Urban Weird" University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, 2018.

- A version of the document "Farmer 9" was published by Res., London in the publication "Alembic" in 2018.

- A version of the document "Axpansion" was published by Paperwork, London in the publication "Paperwork Issue 3: Iilwimi lipsing" in 2018

- A radio-play version of "The Keeper's Diary" was performed for Rádio Quântica in 2017 and again for Dublin Digital Radio in 2018.

- A video stream version of "The Woodlands Outside The Finishing Plant" was performed for the exhibition "Sex and Other States" at South Kiosk Gallery, London in 2018

- A live version of "The Use of Horror in Art Practice" and "The Woodlands Outside The Finishing Plant" were performed at Reading University in 2018

- A live version of "The Use of Horror in Art Practice" was performed for the event "Its Origins are Indeterminate" at Whitechapel Gallery, London in 2018

- Two live versions of "The Incomplete Provocation" and

"The Keeper's Diary" were performed at Serf, Leeds and Res., London in 2017

- A live version of part of "Borne by Rats" was performed at Baltic, Gateshead in 2017

- A video version of each of the three parts of "The Androids' Journey" was shown at the exhibition "Green Fuzz" at Xero, Kline & Coma, London in 2016

All procedures for ethical approval have been followed and the number of words contained in the three books of this Thesis – excluding bibliography (academic references), footnotes and appendices – is 77,706.

Signed

Uma
Officer

Contents [KEYWORDS]

Abstract

Title: "Becoming Ahuman: making it desirable to abandon certainty, including certainty of the self, and play in this chaotic situation"

Uma Officer , Northumbria University, 2020.

This research brings together resonating creative processes from feminist literature, game design, queer gender politics, post-structuralist philosophy, and horror cinema. It uses these to articulate an art practice which is unstable and generative both for the artist during the process of production, and again for the audience.

The PhD output as combined thesis and practice consists of three books, each approaching the question, "How to negotiate art practice as involving processes which are unstable, affective, and resistant to structures?" Each book takes a different position regarding this question and in doing so reshapes it into a sub-question.

The book "Ahuman Desire" explores the question "How to negotiate art practice as involving affects which are at some times indescribable, or overwhelming?"

The book "Ahuman Use" explores the question "How to negotiate art practice as involving salvaged or stolen systems, which are always already breaking down?"

The book "Unknown Lacuna" explores the question "How to negotiate art practice as involving unstable things which can only be seen through what they do?"

Each engages the same question, but with a different emphasis. They are three different attempts and the obvious implication is that these are three of many more potentially attempts

I have undertaken an extensive literature review across fields which border on art practice. The three books bring together a vast matrix research sources and makes these visible and accessible as an act of care, in keeping with the feminist writing practices which underpin the work. I have developed original methodologies which are used in the different documents across the three books and include the use of speculative fiction, plagiarism, formalist writing strategies, drawing, performance, games, and screenplays as research. As well as using artworks as a site to examine the relationships between different theories of creative process. The rigour of the PhD Output exists not just in the scale of the sources processed and responded too, but

in its infrastructural approach which departs from academic norms to resist a cataloguing or hierarchical envelope for the knowledges within.

The PhD Output addresses one of its returning processes of Excess through its form. It is large in scope and shifts responsibility to the reader to navigate this Excess. This demonstrates the affects of anxiety address in many of its documents, before the aforementioned attention to acts of care re-frame this disorder as generative. This mirrors the repeated conceptual and narrative refrain in many documents whereby the horror of the unknown is reorientated to become a creative and dynamic approach to knowledge which does not need to be fixed or enveloped.

The PhD Output aims to support reader engagement based on their desire, rather than through an external economy that ascribes or denies a degree of value based on adherence to pre-existing parameters. This approach is a departure from the common structures of academic research, while still demonstrating critical judgment and original contributions to knowledge. The departure is necessary firstly because of the research questions above, and secondly the commonality of destabilisation in the source materials from feminist writing practices and philosophy, to collaborative games and horror media. Thirdly, the departure enables the specificity of the practice based PhD Output to not just describe processes but to enact them at the

reader's point of encounter with the research.

The primary findings of the research are. The potential for the form of Tabletop Role Playing Game Manuals to inform an art practice when combined with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The mutual illumination offered when combined with feminist writing practices or Écriture Féminine. The potential for Écriture Féminine to inform contemporary queer feminist art practices which incorporate the forms of video-games, as well recognising the event of audience encounter with such artworks as a creative one. The use of horror cinema as a means to articulate art practice concerned with affect. The potential of practice-based art research to produce new ways to produce and deliver original research in a dynamic rather than fixed structure.

This research is of value due to its relevance to contemporary practice. This relevance is evidenced by the recent attention to queer indie game design ('Beyond the Console', n.d.; Faber, 2019; Humphreys, n.d.; Thaddeus-Johns, 2019; Wallace, 2019), experimental feminist writing practices incorporating speculative fiction (Hedva, 2018; Hval, 2018; Jackson & Leslie, 2018; Waidner, 2019), the divisive concept of "elevated horror" (Carrol, 2019; Crump, 2019; Ehrlich, 2019; Gardner, 2019; Taylor, 2019), and the folding of these into art practice. The research include in-depth analyses of artworks

by two artists who have relatively recently received a high international profile (Apexart, 2019; 'Dark Continent: Semiramis Performance | Arts Council Collection', n.d.; 'Porpentine Charity Heartscape', n.d.; Tate, n.d.) and have not yet been the subject of monographs or a large amount of academic study, particularity within the field of art. The relevance of this research is further supported by the recent publications and events in a overlapping fields (Brazil, 2019; Burrows & O'Sullivan, 2019; Editorial Staff, 2019; Fisher, 2018; 'Flickering Monstrosities Hyperfiction Reading Group', 2019; 'ICA | I, I, I, I, I, I, I, Kathy Acker', n.d.; Lewis, n.d.; Little, 2019; Pyrne, 2019; Shaw & Reeves-Evison, 2017).

Keywords:

Abjection, Kathy Acker, Affect, Art, Georges Bataille Gilles Deleuze, Hélène Cixous, Cybernetics, Écriture Féminine, Félix Guattari, Porpentine Charity Heartscape, Horror Cinema, Luce Irigaray, Patricia MacCormack, Performance, Play, Queer Theory, Role Playing Games, Tai Shani, Speculative Fiction, Video Games.

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Notes on Use

This PhD output is a combination of what might otherwise be separated into thesis and practice. It uses different writing styles, and different conventions of text to do different things.

One of the styles and conventions used is that of the film screenplay. The screenplay is used both to account for art practice elements within this PhD which exists in forms other than the written word, and as a kind of art practice in its own right. I follow artist Emma Bolland's use of the term "traduction-retour" or "'backwards translation', or translation through return" (Bolland, 2018, p. 204) to describe the process of producing a screenplay after the release of the film, or in this case, videos and performances, it accounts for. I have used the screenplay form in my work because even as traduction-retour points forward and invites speculation. It is always a means to produce something else, and it is always incomplete because the transition from text to cinema is not seamless.

The screenplay has conventions, and I have had to break some of these. As Bolland notes, *traduction-retour* screenplays are sometimes "redesigned entirely for a specific readership" (Bolland, 2018, p. 204), and in this case

that readership includes this PhD's examiners. As a result of exploring a number of ways in which the screenplay format can accommodate the academic requirements of referencing arguments, I have compromised the former slightly to avert accidental plagiarism through unclear referencing.

An important text convention used in the three books of this PhD Output concerns reading.

The books are meant to be read in any order, but they are meant to be read together. The model is taken from *Tabletop Role Playing Games* where there is often:

- A *Games Master Manual* containing the rules for the *Games Master,* the person running the game.
- A *Player Manual* which each *Player* has a copy of and contains rules for them.
- A *Reference Book* of some sort which lists of things in the world of the game and their rules, and is used by both *Players* and *Games Master.*

Either *Player* or *Games Master* will frequently have to refer to their *Manual* in combination with the *Reference Book*, reading them at the same time, building something from the combination of rules and lists.

Tabletop Role Playing Games are not competitive activities, but better understood as processes of collaborative storytelling. The game, or story, arises from between the *Players* and the *Games Master,* each working from a *Manual* which contains only one side of the systems which make up the game, and combining this with the *Reference Book* in different ways. A shifting composite of these positions is a "collective effervescence" a collaboratively constructed "world entirely different from the one they have before their eyes" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 228).

Each book comprises methods, speculations for further work, documented attempts, fictions, maps, and diagrams, the books are orientated so that *Documents* within sometimes arrive concurrently. While reading one *Document*, smaller ones appear to the side.

Each book begins with an interactive narrative which crosses all three books, and offers choices which fork and result in different endings.

The books use a *Keyword* system. Some *Documents* include *Keywords* which are written in hard brackets such as [DIAGRAM]. The titles of some *Documents*, and their entries in each book's contents page features a list of their keywords. The *Keywords* are to encourage the reader read the

books concurrently. *Keywords* present a point to cross to another book and pick up another document using the same *Keyword*, from a different approach.

Notes on Use; Bibliography

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Advice

Mark the pages of each book as you read them. The books are meant to be read by moving between them, and getting lost is part of the process of making connections. But in order to be sure that the reader has seen everything it is recommended that they foul the pages by some means in passing, so it will be easy to round up the stragglers at the end.

Alpha Alpha Niner Twenty

A non-linear multi-ending story about care.

[This story has three endings, and your choices matter. It will direct you across all three of the books of this PhD Output, its narrative encircling but not connecting with, all of the other documents You could skip if for now, or finish one of its endings, or follow it until it gets boring and move to whatever document is on the same page when you decide to give up.]

Alpha Alpha Niner Twenty is the same kind of diplomatic hub platform you've seen a thousand times. From where you are at the shuttle terminal, it appears in the near distance as an impressive metallic gloss black cube and is of a size you won't even guess at as its hard to spot where the building ends and the night sky above begins. Like much civil architecture in this area, it sits on one of the spiked lily pads which form a major part of the ecosystem of the meridian sea which belts this planet.

Turn to the next page.

You open the sealed pouch that can be opened by you alone and read the final two paragraphs of the advisory again which against protocol you tore off and saved before destroying the rest;

"This entire project can be understood in terms of Provocation. The agent provocateur's art, like the production of all art, involves encouraging heterogeneous growth, mutation, and rumour. In some ways, this is the very nature of agitation, but what your training and this advisory will have already made clear is that there is a difference between the layperson's understanding of agitation and the work of an agent. Your responsibility is not to lead existing assets toward a specific goal, but to encourage a proliferation of goals, and the want to pursue them.

Beneath it all, an agent's responsibility is to Desire, the proliferation of proliferation and the lust for lust. Your responsibility to Desire is to encourage it, collaborate with it and follow its proliferation of paths. Do not worry about records, your actions will serve as an adequate report and in any case you will not survive them. Good luck on your mission, destroy this advisory before arrival."

Turn to the next page.

Wait, who are you ?

Think about how you ''feel''.

Of the three options, which is your strongest feeling?

Hunger, turn to page 27 of Ahuman Desire

Thirst, turn to page 40 of Ahuman Use

Fatigue, turn to page 32 of Unknown Lacuna

You are the terrifyingly canonical Dr Carton.

You're a big ball of flammable gas encased in a baroquely complex nervous system. It is

vitally important for you (and anyone under a 10m blast template) that you stay relaxed.

Instability and Desire in Horror [DIAGRAM, LACUNA, MANSION]

Or

The Revolutionary Praxis of Urban Tumours

This[1] is an example of the kind of thing I want to talk about, a living, organic growth within a built urban environment. This particular example is the "Raleigh Sewer Monster", as shown in the video it was recorded by a sewer cam on 27th April 2009 in Raleigh North Carolina. The "Raleigh Sewer Monster" was quickly determined to not be a monster, but rather most likely a colony of tubifex worm. As biologist Dr Timothy S Wood suggests;

> "They have apparently entered a pipeline somehow, and in the absence of soil they are coiling around each other. The contractions you see are the result of a single worm contracting and then stimulating all the others to do the same almost simultaneously, so it looks like a single big muscle contracting" (McClain, 2009).

I wanted to start with this image from outside of horror cinema, as a way of approaching something within those media that is quite nebulous and slippery to pin down. Throughout my research I've thought of them as scabs, tumours, wombs, placenta, cocoons, biofilms, nests, fungus, and most often galls (which is how I will refer to them in this Document), but none of these real life forms will consistently match the overall motif. This motif

Side Dungeon 1 [DIAGRAM, MANSION, RPG]

should be quite familiar to most with an interest in horror. Our protagonists are travelling an urban environment, looking for something, though rarely that which they end up finding. They will travel to an area which signifies urban decay, or at least neglect and abandonment. It will likely be dirty, and also pointedly underused, wasted area. A storage area, ventilation system, a block scheduled for demolition. The environment is explicitly urban, an environment completely designed and theoretically controlled and sealed. Not a place where there should be wildlife, however the lack of human attention has allowed something to happen, and for the sterility to be lost. Our protagonists walk through concrete and metal in hard lines and almost certainly under the light of a torch they then discover the *Gall*. A biological mass adhered to and penetrating the structure of the built space. The *Gall* might be alive, it might have been alive previously, it might be a means to life, it might alter life, the important point is that in contrast to the built environment, it is vital in some manner. This is their first quality.

The second quality of these *Galls* is that they are hidden, whilst also hiding something else. As already described they are found in neglected areas, abandoned buildings, air shafts, sewers, shanty towns and ghettos. These spaces are obviously not entirely neglected, people work in such areas, often people live in them. However it is not generally the protagonist, and by extension neither the projection of the audience that lives in the inner city slum or works in the utility channels which run through the more respectable

Side Dungeon 2 [DIAGRAM, MANSION, RPG]

accommodation. To the protagonist, these *Galls* are intruders within their space. The space overall is where the protagonist has complete freedom of movement, opportunity, and confidence in order. Despite this certainly, the *Gall* grows in a corner that the protagonists have neglected by virtue of their lifestyle and status they have not had reason to check on. When they do eventually check, they find something has grown in the interim, and this growth is hiding something. It is a vital *Void* **[KEYWORD: LACUNA]**.

In a 2016 book chapter entitled "Lovecraft's Cosmic Ethics" philosopher Patricia MacCormack argues for the work of horror author H.P. Lovecraft to be *used* "to imagine becoming the horrors he evokes toward a vitalistic, activist, and wondrous celebration of otherness" (MacCormack, 2016, p. 200). It is my position that the motif of the urban *Gall* be *Used* **[KEYWORD: DIAGRAM]** in such a way, and that this *Void* points towards the emancipation of difference.

To understand the *Gall*, it is first needed that we understand the controlled environment that is performed prior to the *Gall's* discover. Michel Foucault's "Discipline and Punish" traces the genealogy of the prison and proposes that, "If it is true that the leper [colony] gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement, then the [quarantine techniques developed in response to the] plague gave rise to disciplinary projects" (Foucault, 1995, p. 198).

Side Dungeon 3 [DIAGRAM, MANSION, RPG]

The methods by which the plague was attempted to be controlled in the seventeenth century were not of simple exclusion but of strict regimes of controlled activity, observation and categorization. Subjects, and also architecture, animals and at least in the theory of time, pathogens were controlled as a model state, "The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies - this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (Foucault, 1995, p. 198). That perfect governed city is invoked as an impossible phantom whenever an FBI agent lifts some proteinous gloop with a Bic pen from a floor of Baltimore apartment. Despite our best efforts, we were not vigilant enough, not clean enough, and it found a space in the darkness to grow. Foucault again identifies our alignment of the social and biological noting that, " Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of 'contagions', of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, and die in disorder" (Foucault, 1995, p. 198). It is in fact no wonder that deviation from moral or state law, from approved expression of subjectivity is often conflated with a lack of sterile surroundings. As noted by the writer and artist Michel Leiris when it comes to distinguishing upper and lower classes, "the difference [is] in cleanliness" (Leiris, 1995, p. 52).

As noted already, *Gall*, the term I am using to describe this motif, is
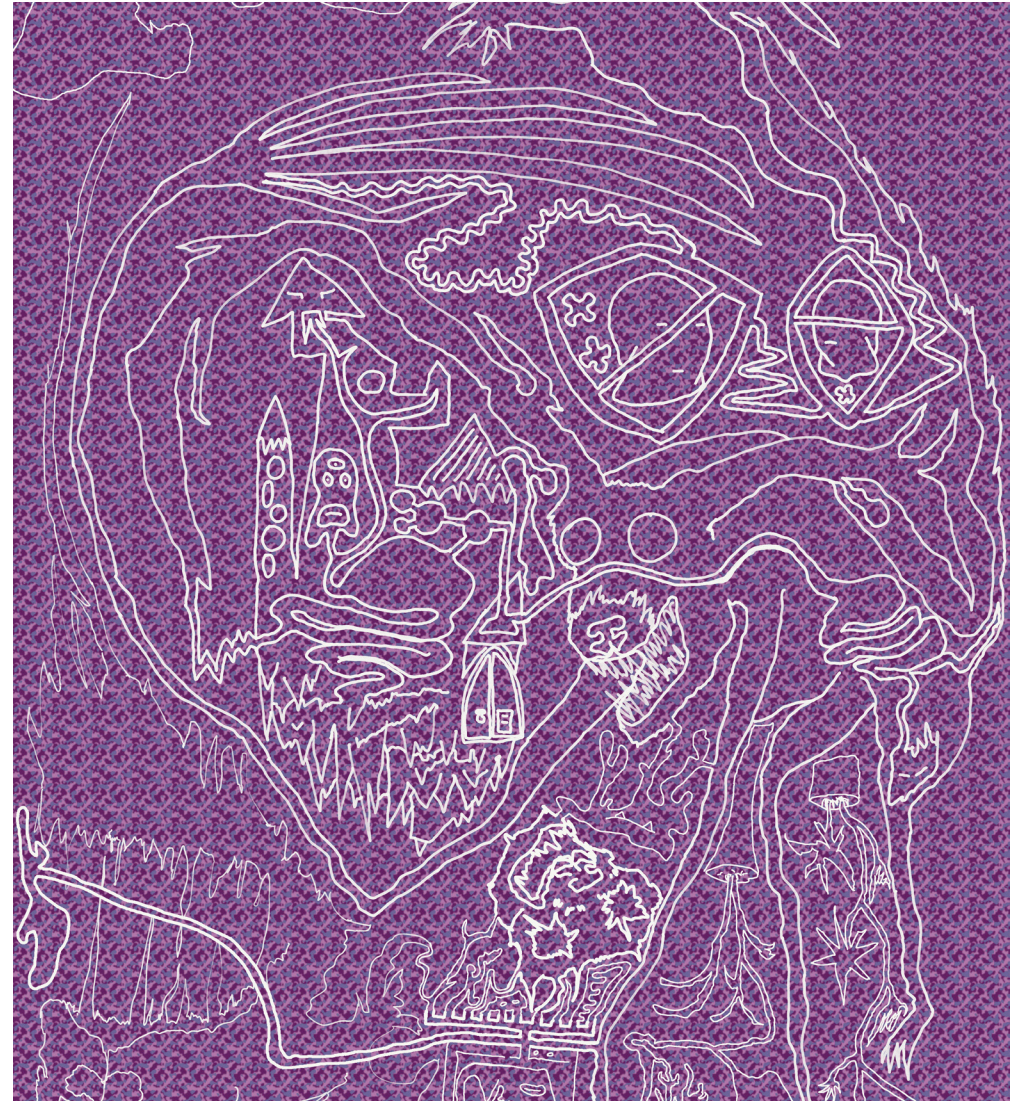
Side Dungeon 4 [DIAGRAM, MANSION, RPG]

inadequate because the depictions in horror media rarely stay fixed to that or any other biological definition. We have things that penetrate cement like roots, or weep from cracks like plasma, embedded eggs waiting to hatch with other living material adhered to the walls around them. Frequently these forms resist classification as anything other than a chimera. Perhaps they exhibit a sensitivity and speed of growth which implies the animal and yet this combined with a rooting into the architecture and decentralised, plural mass which suggests the vegital. MacCormack states that "connectivity to the unlike is what defines Lovecraftian entities" (MacCormack, 2016, p. 206) and this is true of the *Galls* on a number of levels. As noted, they often sit between categories of animals or plants, they might be using another creature, alive or dead, human or otherwise to provide food or energy, or assist in the birthing or transformation of another. Lastly it is necessary that the *Gall* also sits on the threshold with architecture in two senses. Firstly, like a cocoon or a hive it is part architecture part something else. Secondly it needs within the logic of horror stories and the politicised dichotomy of order/disorder, a sheer urban surface.

That sheer surface marks another contrast which must eventually collapse. The ventilation duct, lift shaft or pensioners apartment is nameable and filled with clear signification for us. The thing which I am referring to as a *Gall*, does not, at least at first have such signification. Its multiple layers of hybridity site it in a "visceral, fleshy, corporeal, teratological, and emphatically
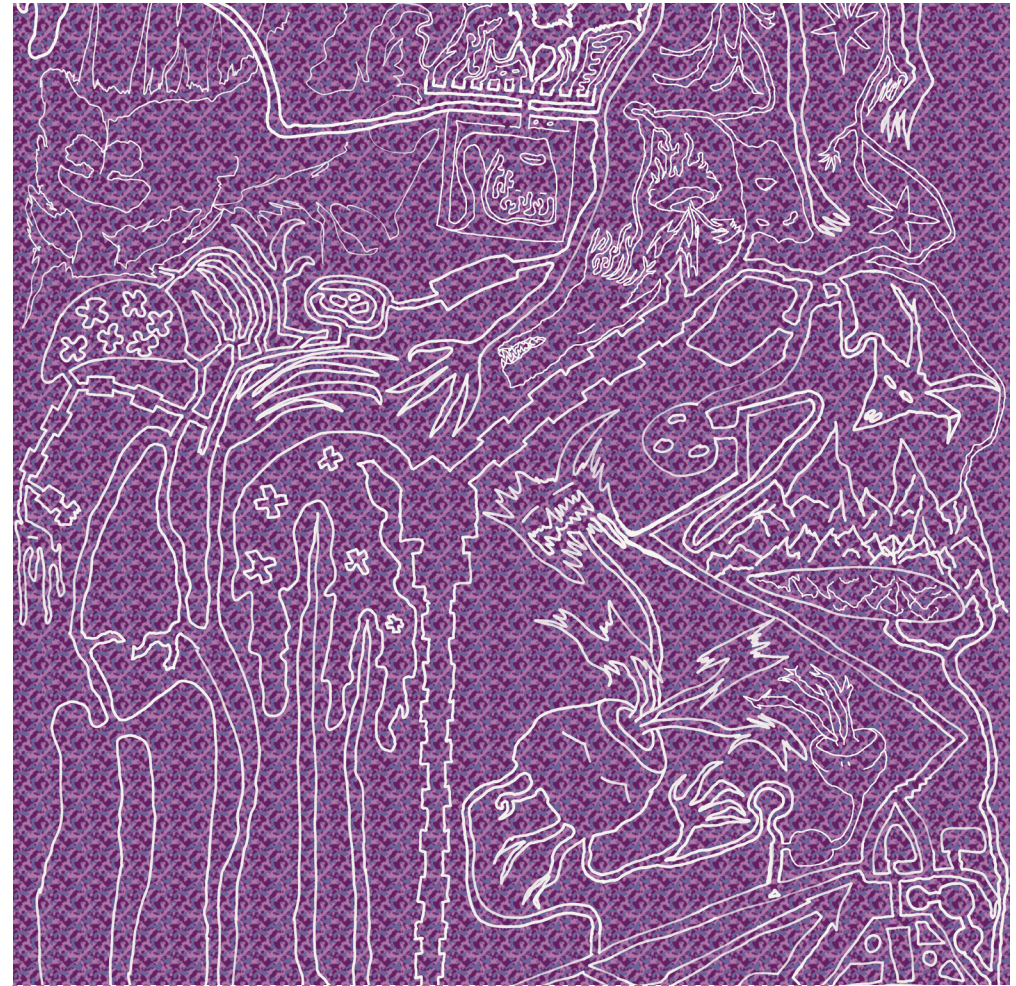
Side Dungeon 5 [DIAGRAM, MANSION, RPG]

material world is also a world where human language [...]is without power" (MacCormack, 2016, p. 212). You can try and name the thing, but at best you have something that will always fall short of the sensations provoked, the functions it might perform, or the things it might become. MacCormack turns to philosopher Luce Irigaray to address this namelessness and quotes the latter "Nor will I ever see the mucous, that most intimate interior of my flesh, neither the touch of the outside of the skin of my fingers, nor the perception of the inside of these same fingers, but another threshold of the passage from outside to inside, from inside to outside, between inside and outside, between outside and inside" (Irigaray, 1993, p. 170). Irigaray's mucous, like the *Gall*, refuses a dichotomy of self and other. The *Gall* appears within our supposedly clean an ordered environment, it was always already here in some form of becoming. The *Gall* is almost always hiding something, it creates a protected environment within the cold world of order. A hidden space within a blind spot. Equally, while it sits in initial contrast to the urban sheen of sterile constructed environ, it collapses this contrast by the sheer fact of its presence. The *Gall* is within that environment, it is part of the architecture and pulls its refusal to be named into the concrete, rendering the certainty of the urban a farce. Hidden, unknowable heterogeneous life running through the material that we believed was pure order and death.

While the gall pulls its vital, unknowable qualities into the wall and in doing so penetrates the bubble of order, it also pulls us, and to various degrees our

Side Dungeon 6 [DIAGRAM, MANSION, RPG]

FBI agent protagonist proxy, toward it. The desire produced in association with such material is not only featured in many horror narratives but within feminist discourse including that of MacCormack and Irigaray, but most notable psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's theorising of the *Abject*.

We can easily imagine our FBI agent, crawling into the cargo hold of a commercial jet, latex glove not worn but simply held in their eagerness to touch as they mutter to themselves, around the Maglight they hold between teeth;

> "Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2).

The *Gall* seduces characters "within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning" and "draws [them] toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1). Just as it draws our agent, it draws us the audience along as well. We are seduced by its sensually qualities which are outside of language and therefore hidden from annihilation through naming and knowing. There is also often the uncanny familiarity which breaks down the certainty that *this* is not *me*. It could have been *part of me*, it could be *within me in the future*.

This *Gall* has already destroyed the sterility of our perceived environment and forced us to realise that it was permeable. The mere sight of the *Gall* reminds us that permeability is essential to our very existence, no matter how much we attempt to expand the buffer zone around us through buildings and their politics. Our bodies are always spilling out over the edges of the orderly frames we insist they conform to, as philosopher Margrit Shildrick tells us "The security of categories – whether of self or non-self – is undone by a radical undecidability" (Shildrick, 2002, p. 2). This is one of the calls being made by the repeated motif of the *Gall*, it offers the chance to consider our own porosity to things which would breach the category *Human*, and in doing so challenge the validity of that (or any) category at all.

The *Gall* produces desire in combination with us, that desire is not one of lack but is created by our encounter with an unnameable thing that points towards various functions and various kinds of life and voracious connectivity. This is what is proposed by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari as "desiring-production", an articulation of desire not based on lack, but on creative production, "For every organ-machine, an energy-machine: all the time, flows and interruptions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 1). The encounter with the *Gall* produces new desires, new potential operations, in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology we are growing *Organs*, the *we* being us and the *Galls* together. This creativity does not stop at the point of being eaten by, or birthed by, or radically altered by, the *Gall*,

MUDSKIPPER [CARE]

There are a lot of different words to talk around the mistake made by someone else when they took a guess at whether you were boy or a girl when you first arrived and all of those words are ugly to degrees and most of the most ugly ones are in medical textbooks but none as ugly as the results of that guess which to be honest could have been avoided if that someone else had *just not*.

#

It's really difficult to become invisible, not least because you learn through mistakes as with most things.

#

It's definitely easier for become invisible with a well rolled initial character. Some are already pretty close. Some are miles away. None of this has any bearing on the *desire to become invisible* which is completely separate from the capacity to do so. But this isn't to lament luck, which is often a mispronunciation of "the socio-political historical context".

#

It is however, seductive to lament, and the context I find myself in, the one in into which I was born, lends itself readily to lamentation. The mudflats are a grey which

but extends beyond just as it extends into the now obviously porous and flexible surrounds. We have to develop the *Organs* to consider our entire reproductive system diffused across oceans if only to recoil in horror. As we fumble for meaning we connects to a multitude of other ways of being, none of which are compatible with our previous ideological category of *Human*.

Finally, there is emancipatory possibility offered by the repeated motif of the *Gall* if use in this manner. The *Gall* is presented as a constant reminder of "urban vulnerability" (Tobin, 2002), and the failures of the society to maintain complete discipline against disorder in its broadest sense. Equally however, it is a radically resilient call for life. The *Gall* presents possibilities, a "voracious drive for proximity with alterity" (MacCormack, 2016, p. 211). This unknowable, vital secret thing repeatedly crops up to offer hope against tyrannical order. More than this, it creates such possibilities by producing desire, this is what MacCormack refers to as "becoming Ahuman" (MacCormack, 2012, p. 43).

The *Becoming Ahuman* occurs in our encounter with art, but is particularly discernible in our encounter with horror. Maccormack says "The art encounter elucidates the new horror and wonder of being in the asignifed world as a new state of constant ecstasy, a functioning expressive entity nonetheless still outside of time" (MacCormack, 2012, p. 51). While the process of *Becoming* is one without end, our affective encounter produces new desires

contains all of the other colours under a sky of the same only darker. I rub myself in the mud again unconsciously, both a nervous habit and a necessity to keep my skin wet enough to breathe through. I flip myself back upright to look out at the Yellow Sea on the horizon, I can't tell if it's going in or out. Gulls are screaming overhead and one flaps down hard near me, one foot hitting the surface and the other grabs the upstretched arm of a large crab who had been pointing toward the sun as it emerges from behind a cloud and lets out an audible "whoops!" as it hoisted into the air. Fuck.

#

I flip again so I can keep breathing, open my eyes which I had closed involuntarily at the rushing approach of the gull. I can see in all directions and it's all the same bar the white line of The Yellow Sea in one direction and the occasional thin beam of sunlight cut through breaks in cloud with passes of the wet surface with no regard.

in new directions as well as reconfiguring our previous perceptions.

MacCormack refers to Guattari's "The Three Ecologies";

> "[T]he expressive a-signifying rupture summons forth a creative repetition that forges incorporeal objects, abstract machines and Universes of value that make their presence felt as though they had been always ' already there' , although they are entirely dependent on the existential event that brings them into play" (Guattari, 2005, p. 45).

The encounter with the *Gall* is not just reaching out mucousal suckers toward us, but us developing our own tentacles and in doing so render ourselves strange. The urban *Gall* is revolutionary not in the sense of a dormant sleeper cell, but as an active agent of alterity, reaching out past the protagonist and meeting the mucus of the viewer.

Instability and Desire in Horror; Bibliography

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Mentally your posture is phenomenal.

IRL, you have no idea, jeez you're tired.

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Instability and Desire in Horror; Endnotes

1. You will need to imagine it, a low quality camera pans awkwardly on servos controlled remotely. It moves through a filthy pipe, the data it sends struggling through the resistance of metal to reach a computer safely far away and degraded further as, after theft perhaps, it is uploaded to YouTube. The walls of the pipe are black collapsing brick, the floor is tar or old blood, the data stream glitches and the compression tries to keep up creating phantoms. The wall moves, like an eye, no like a sphincter, winking

Leaving your luggage heaped around a larger than life-size crystal statue of a rhinoceros astride two hover-boards which commemorates a tragic event from long ago for which all context is now lost, you follow the signs which read "drugs",

It's a funny electric thing shaped like an egg, a hatch opens on the top while it's still driving

towards you and a figure leaning out of this hatch is waving their arms and shouting, turn

"There is no reason for you to live"[1] [DIAGRAM, LACUNA, RPG]

"There, in the indifferent nowhere, in chaos, at the axis with language, with narrative and a vivid description of a lacerated unconscious body, dreamless, sleeping girls are there like wildfire running wildly through the burning bush, that miracle that sole burns to briefly illuminate the boundless, pure night that looms behind it" (Shani, 2018, p. 7).

There is no reason for you to live; Part Zero: Introduction

The methodology this document follows consists of taking one artwork, and placing different theories of creative production into its proximity, offering insight into (in order of priority);

- The relationship between these theories.
- Their operations.
- The artwork itself.

Although analysis of the artwork is required for the other insights to take place, the focus is on using the artwork to pivot theories into proximity with one another, with the artwork providing additional illuminating context. The theories are primarily concerned with creative processes in the broadest sense, including the production of art, subjectivities, and politics. The orientation of the artwork to one particular creative process is returned to throughout this document in order to ground it.

As such, this document asks the question: "In what ways does this artwork resonate with the practice of "woman's writing" called for by Hélène Cixous in "The Laugh of The Medusa" (Cixous, 1976), and what does that unearth

Dog Book [CARE, DIAGRAM]
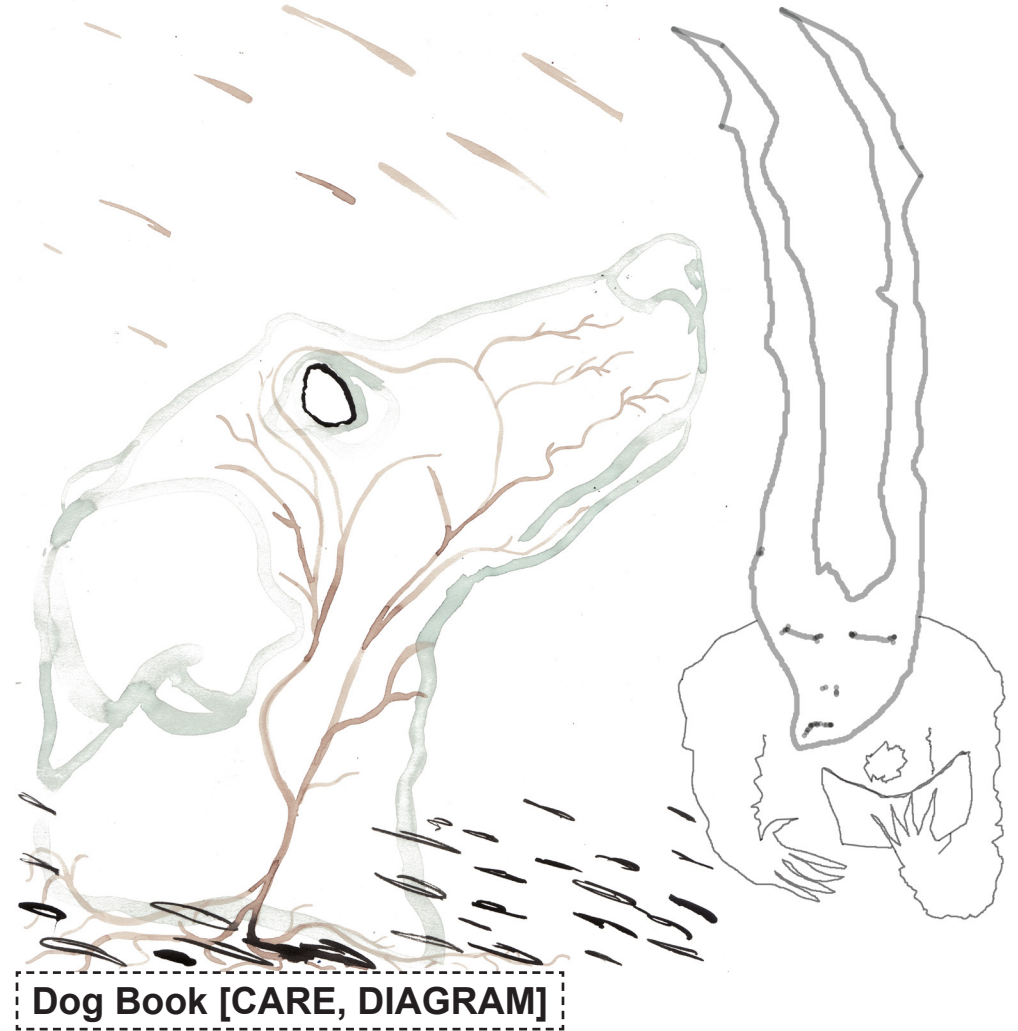
in such practice as it might exist now?

A final note for the reader on terminology. The artwork this document pivots around is also a video game, as such it exists in two different contexts of encounter. When this specific artwork is referred to, once it is introduced, it is as a "game-artwork"[2], and the person or persons which encounter it are referred to as the "player-audience". This terminology is an attempt to keep some of the presumptions and structures of art open by reminding the reader that although it is being used as a site to explore practices of art and writing, it is also a video game and has another existence beyond being approached as an artwork and pivot.

AS PLAIN AS ITS MEANINGLESS NAME [CARE, LACUNA]

I'm sitting looking at the other occupant of the carriage. Their long jaws hang lips which don't quite cover the magnificent set of teeth. Open a little they breathe rapidly but quietly, head bobbing a little with each intake. Those perfect teeth are perfectly white. Like the tips of the spades on playing cards reversed to white on black. They look over to their right (my left), the polite performance of attending to other things in the otherwise empty night train than me, sitting opposite them, still hiccupping back tears. As they turn their head across me (carefully to skip their gaze over me by glancing at the network map printed above me head) I see the full contrast of their narrow skull and drawn-out mouth. The jaw is about the width of my hand at its widest point (I wonder if mine is this wide, and begin to pull my hand to my face as if to put my fist in my mouth before stopping myself, hand bouncing back to lap and blushing), but the front teeth (each as perfect as the next) are as far forward as the length of my forearm. delicate little nostrils sit above dainty thin lips right at the front, and far back beautiful brown eyes look cleverly from under darker brown lids.

#

My attention comes back to the wobbling of the train and it shakes itself along the

There is no reason for you to live; Part One: Overclocked

"Could another feeling save them?" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

First I need to establish the position from which I am writing, which is that the video game I am about to address is a work of art. There are many other ways to approach video games; as products, as recreational activities, as social of historical objects. However, approaching it as a work of art not only allows it to be used as a pivot to bring together different concepts and methods, but it both reflects the art context in which the maker's work is increasingly presented[3] and also allows for a way of looking at the work which is particular to art.

In a 2001 journal chapter entitled "The Aesthetics of Affect, Thinking art beyond representation" the artist and lecturer Simon O'Sullivan calls for a way of thinking about and reading art works which centre's their aesthetic and affective qualities, that which grants them an "apartness" from other objects (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 125). O'Sullivan draws initially from the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, and the journal chapter begins with a quote from the later which ends with the following statement:

"But the work is not merely a cultural object, although it is

line, bouncing at the subtle flaws in the metal where one piece of track its butted against the next at regular intervals, and the lights go out again. This happens every few minutes. I ride this route enough to not be disturbed by it but in fact I welcome the relief of not being seen.

\#

The light flickers back this time and I have somehow regained my composure. my co-passenger is in the process of pulling out their phone and now they are lost in it. Head down with chin pressed into the front of their MA1 bomber jacket, the yellow lining exposed on side of their face, its zip like another row of teeth, the phone held above the long nose, held horizontal in front of those big soft eyes.

\#

I realise I'm now composed. I should try and tell you what has happened. You've been extremely patient.

\#

But it is still difficult to begin. I don't want this to be a trade on the economy of trauma. I get to speak, and you are listening. If I recount What Has Happened To Me, is it even possible for this not to enter such economy? There are countless others who have experiences similar to What Has Happened To Me. Many of those did not survive, many more have not the opportunity to speak, and the vast majority will not be listened to. Even if I could convince myself that I am furthering some

that too. It harbours within it an excess, a rapture, a potential of associations that overflows all the determinations of its "reception" and "production"" (Lyotard, 1991, p. 93).

This images of "rapture" and "excess" will return throughout this document, particularly in regards the feminist philosophers and artists I will be primarily drawing from, and again because such things are in my view central to the game-artwork in question. In following O'Sullivan's call for "Art history as a kind of creative writing" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 130) this document attempts to uncover, create, or rebuild approaches to art practice via its own creative means. I will avoid speculation on the actual production of the game-artwork, but instead use it to create things of use for the future. Likewise I will not subject it to a materialist analysis whereby it becomes an expression of social production. Instead I want to place its processes, narratives, and "bundle of affects" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 126) alongside concepts and ideas, with different intents and aims, and see what happens in between. Paraphrasing writer AB Silvera in "Radical Transfeminism Zine", the "problem of discourse is that we expect all rules to always apply[4] [...]. Multiplicity of strats guys, you can't carry every team with a Hanzo, sometimes you gotta use D.va's Ult to break a choke point[5]" (Silvera, 2017, p. 10).

As already stated, the first aim of this document is not just to analyse the

abstract good such as 'awareness' and 'issue raising', I still cannot help but benefit. Added to this, such confessionals are perennially and grossly fashionable. It adds to my mystique. I lived it, and I get to play the double role of modestly recounting my own spectacular survival, while aware that this is on some level a very lucky result for providing material (while not acknowledging the real luck and privilege of being one who is able to speak, and the utter aristocratic position of being one to whom others will listen).

#

But now I have already crossed the line. This is all fan waving now. Not only did I not hide my tears, but I let you know there was something to tell. Just as the cliché goes that the wealthy are not mad but eccentric, I am privileged enough (in terms of wealth, education, and most importantly in how I conform to an image the violent social sphere will listen to rather than grind face first into the gritty mud) to have trauma and it can become not just trauma but yet more gilded birthright.

#

If, while I told you all this, you imagined the scene of me, streaked in tears on a long long train carriage, sitting on a long bench, my back to the window while across the central aisle my co-passenger tries to not look back at me while their back is to their own window AND THEN you imagined all of THIS SCENE freezing as I turn to look at and talk directly JUST YO YOU you would be utterly correct. That is how

game-artwork (though that is part of its method), but to also place other outside concepts against it and in doing so create new knowledge of art practice. To this end I have avoided comparing the game-artwork in question with other artworks, by the same artist or otherwise. I have also avoided comparisons with other games, or works of cinema or literature, and when using a theoretical text which references such art-forms I have allowed the references to remain only inasmuch as they concern the processes being addressed. The reasoning behind this decision is to keep the game-artwork as the contextual pivot for bringing processes together, and avoid being drawn into an examination of cultural tendencies, which is beyond the scope of this document.

The first *Strat* to be used, is drawn from a quote from philosopher Eugene Thacker, where he proposes that the horror genre might be defined by the space between, and passages between two statements or states. These being "I can't believe what I'm seeing" and "I can't see what I believe" (Thacker, 2015, p. 14). Thacker here conceptualizes horror not as the emotion that shares its name, or the signifiers which we have come to attribute to it such as tropes of character or setting, but as a tension between two affects. I see lines from the experience of watching, or playing, or otherwise encountering the horror genre which then go on to pass through the same territories of art making and through broader accounts of the politics of difference. For

it was and how it is happening. My nails are chipped and purple gloss. I cannot, at any point in my life, find a position at which my hands are comfortable and I am not drawn to fidget and so my hands are rough with scars and abrasions almost all self-inflicted. I have more damage to my skin but that is for a later part of the story and the commodification of pain into writing. I'm telling you all this because it makes me feel better; it is an act of self-care, re-writing my narrative from that of a damaged and dwindling material resource into that of the owner of The Means of Production. I have turned myself from 10 yards of linen into the owner of the very factory. That is care. I will have to find some way to negotiate the kind of self-hatred that comes with this care (that artificial taste that needs to be ignored or else you will vomit) but what is *about to* harm you, by definition *can't harm you now* so let's deal with that later.

#

I am on this train, called the Metro, because it moves from one metropolis to another, passes with very few stops through the long rural smudges between. Above one of the windows facing me along the other side of the train is a sign that says 'Sometimes a little distance makes all the difference'. From here I cannot tell if it is advertising a private school or the very scheme I am on. The reason for this journey, which is 'care'. I am on a journey that is a kind of therapy. It is the only kind of therapy now available. I get on this train with occupants who are equally damaged

example, I think it's credible to suggest that within horror, we the audience/ reader/player and our proxies within the medium will at times be overwhelmed by these affects in a manner not dissimilar to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of "queer" which includes "lapses and excesses of meaning" as well as "experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures" (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 7). There is already precedent for examining the overwhelming sensation found in horror and its potential as a vector to ethical engagement with human and non-human difference. This is the subject of much of the work of philosopher Patricia MacCormack (MacCormack, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2016). MacCormack's output in this area is concerned with the position of audience, particular cinema audience, and is primarily analytical in approach. I hope to find another way in to this area which engages with the artwork as something which is made, in this case also where the artwork is a video game our encountering involves our tangible agency and awareness of choices made or not made. This therefore is why I have already mentioned O'Sullivan's proposal of "art history as a kind of creative writing", and also why the primary tool for this will be the theories of feminist writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous. What I hope to express is ways in which this game presents an art practice which queers horror (the genre) through ethics, affects, and aesthetics to create a "Écriture Féminine" or "woman's writing" (Cixous, 1976). Cixous's approach to writing, particularly the text from which *Écriture Féminine* is first

as I am, equally unable to work. Our journey will take about a week with no stops, during this time we are intravenously fed and our excretions extracted directly and disposed of. When we arrive at the new city we should be completely ready to begin a new life. The only thing we have to do is take a pair of small tablets shaped like tiny dog biscuits shaped like tiny bones. I imagine at some point it was decided that patients did better taking control of when they would self-administer, rather than delivering the drug *via* the nutrient drip. In theory you could not take the drug at all, staying conscious and present for the whole weeks, but the discomfort of the catheter alone makes this hard to imagine. My sole co- passenger seems to have already taken theirs when I wasn't looking. They repeatedly make half-committed lazy attempts to put their phone into their jacket pocket before it slips to the floor and slides under an empty seat. The beautiful individual themselves slumps forward in the shock harness that holds their waist and shoulders.

\#

I drop my own pills with a dry gulp. See you in two weeks I guess. Oh! All those things I said I was going to explain… not time now... I'll have to find another way.

\#

I wake up in a green mine. The walls drip and writhe, little gems in bright mouths. I instinctively know this place. I wrote down the letters and numbers appearing under my traces, invisible forensic dust embalming Schreber as a subject. The point

brought forth "The Laugh of the Medusa" forms the second *Strat*. Thacker's transitions between excess of comprehension and excess of sensation is considered as another articulation of Cixous creative darkness and blinding ecstasy.

Cixous's *Écriture Féminine* contains, as writer and filmmaker Juliet Jacques has noted, "a strong focus on the cisgender (non-trans) female body" (Jacques, n.d.) yet its rich language contains provocations for diverse subjectivities and gender expressions. The "woman" which "The Laugh of The Medusa" calls upon to write feels at times like a Marxist class category, as it is engaged "in here inevitable struggle against conventional man" and who must achieve class consciousness "to bring women to their senses" (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). This structure is immediately opened up however as Cixous states that there is "no general woman [...] but what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions" (Cixous, 1976, p. 876). Cixous presents a *Woman* who is as heterogeneous, plural, and radically creative as the law breaking writing she would create, as the sexualities she would possess, or the politics she would enact. Jacques also notes that Cixous includes "a gay man, Jean Genet in her list of those who enacted her principles of écriture fémin" (Jacques, 2018) highlighting that the practice escapes biological essentialism. In a recent interview Cixous herself laments a return to representation;

is to perpetuate this fear with the Demiurge 'Foul intimacy' but later-day agnostic logic of sense, some kind of prosthetic is always needed. To 'speak in tongues' by a 'racehorse of genius' against the language and spirit of the masses to create the viruses bursting with life falling from the coffins before me. England, forgetting of the transcendent and the occult even overloaded with work and preoccupations as you are transcribed in visions and marvels. I don't understand how something which at the time astounded my poems categorically stopped in the empty cavity of the cerebellum. Police fables of a man unjustly condemned which locked up and poisoned my dear friend. Gasping flesh and exact physiological memory which tell of the unique miraculous events in the book you will realise that evil which since the beginning of the world Antonin Artaud was poisoned for a long time in a cell in the penal wing of the externalising Beneficent Principle of God. 'Our mouth dripping poison. Our Stomach churning bile'.

#

The next day wearing cowboy boots and a cowboy hat falling down steady surroundings and honey leading to my stomach I tell him 'I don't want to sit in a room and grieve with other people buried on the ranch, complete the divorce.'

#

He's pleased.

#

"Queer and trans thought has always existed. It was already there in Ovid! It's always marginal and always present. Now, however, it has grown rigid, not playful, too serious. People have theorized it in a way that issues prescriptions, and which can sometimes neutralize difference" (Leturcq, 2019).

This mirrors some of the central tactics in the "The Laugh of The Medusa", the vital in need, but playful in action approaches to dismantling prescribed forms of writing which are embedded in representation. So while acknowledging that Cixous's work is generally positioned alongside a "essentialist view of "femaleness" (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014, p. 18) I feel there is grounds to explore how *Écriture Féminine* might be adapted further, to include trans*[6] bodies and take further the hints at Cixous's *Woman* functioning as a class.

In the video game this paper examines, all characters use female pronouns, and female gendered familial terms. It is a universe of girls, though all girls are different, with different desires, different bodies, robots, A.I.s, animal-hybrids all[7].

Finally, this document is a sister work to the document "An art practice of vectors and voids adapted from the reparative love and unseen agency in

His body is swollen with fluids a fatal illness fever of a hundred and five leading to his stomach how can there be so much? To his stomach to smoke his pulse ravaged body they glance at him quickly a reflex yeast raisins and honey covering the small flimsy airlock.

#

I tell Amelia she can leave.

#

But the gang of rat boys. One kid with his two front teeth missing told me to ride with him icy hospital parking lot had a chance dial blue-grey eyes. Shane shifted into another gear control held out a pen wasn't weeping broken wrist drank coffee nose and big sad eyes. One kid sobbed out of control missing teeth worked for the fire department quivering and ruined see me one rat boys broken wrist his two front teeth missing I had a chance clacking sound of loving kindness on forever A Thousand Plateaus of Schreber asylum surplus literary binge giving of Carl Jung.

#

New wallpaper nothing worse than amateurish free street-corner therapeutics body and soul doctor benevolent malice composed of lines in its contemporary guise. Filled with danger a grown-up choking aroma to Artaud in a position to fight the immaculate empire of God. He never breaks, like I said, he was white and fat and poor, wrapped in cellophane. Three thousand miles embraced six out of thirteen

Tai Shani's "Phantasmagoregasm"". That Document is concerned with an artwork which shares a number of thematics to the game-artwork addressed here. These thematics include; expanding and fractured ideas of gender, queer kinship, love, trauma, ecstasy, and the threat of an existential limbo beyond life and death. There is some overlap in the sources and concepts used, and both documents have a general method of bringing conceptual processes into proximity with the processes of an artwork, however each has a different focus, and finds different results accordingly. The two documents are deliberately separate, even while strands in each point to the other. As well as following the methodological decision to avoid *comparison of artworks*, the gap between the documents/artworks/concepts and strands gesturing across this gap, are left specifically for the reader to negotiate.

The work of art can now be introduced by its name, which is "No World Dreamers. Sticky Zeitgeist. Episode 2: Aperitif" (Aperitif), the second in a series of collaborative works by coders, artists, musicians, and writers, Porpentine Charity Heartscape and Ada Rook (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). In the words of one of its makers *Aperitif* "combines top-down RPG, Shmup[8], visual novel and medical sim" (Hayes, 2018). Each of these is a genre of game, broadly encompassing style, form of interaction, and expectations from the player.

self-determination end took the pills fucked up locked him crying for weeks inside LA like because he was sworn fat and poor queasy stationary object my clothes weighed against the forty-two years flamboyantly and militantly local fame Virgo heart.

\#

Jean Bruno was the one who introduce Bataille to yoga in 1938 rife with internal lightning phenomenon Marxist literary failures of socialist theoreticians. Bataille took me onto the terrace, suffocating to inhale a dagger after getting off the train my membership of the circle source of their hopes.

\#

It was dusk.

\#

My membership to the circle spare time after the failures had defined it 'limitless expenditure' my membership shared terrible course. I re-embarked for France.

\#

I was to ignore them picturing a cow's head on a plate aptly summarised out state of mind perils rise up around us onto every revolutionary hope cries no longer mean anything among the socialists who were still feeling despair leading to the ruling classes a new disaster broken away no longer means anything to remedy any longer. The rest is colourless godding inside of me all inside out. Person is stripped

The conventions of each of these genres, and whether they accurately pertain to *Aperitif* is thankfully a concern outside of the purposes of this document, which is to use this artwork to explore art practice. However, of note, not least because it is the genre into which most of the play time of *Aperitif* falls is the genre "RPG" which stands for "Role-playing game"[9]. The player-audience, in their encounter with the game-artwork, is required here to play the role of various characters. These are *Aperitif's* "player-characters", protagonists in the narrative and the player-audience's on-screen proxy through which they navigate and interact with the game. The complexity of experience, which encompasses the player-audience's eyes, ears, and hands, as well as the movement and interaction of the player-characters whose role they are playing will be addressed throughout the course of this document. However, it is important to first set out some terminology in order to address these different layers, even though ultimately we will be required to question a hard distinction between them.

Game designer and theorist Markus Montola in "The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process" establishes what constitutes an RPG through the way rules and goals appear and the levels that they operate in (Montola, 2008). Montola structures the rules and goals of RPGs as existing in three layers or frames. The "exogenous frame" consists of rules and goals brought to the game to give it meaning

sometimes nothing can comfort unrealistic business want to among the dead swirl they have radiant godding inside of me. Suffering in a terrible world. Chirp from a bird's beak 'this didn't happen' buried but living all along.

\#

Pack of aging, mangy dogs. I always come back to movies, withholding is holding by love, unless it is everything else too. As plain as its meaningless name.

\#

I awaken some time later, and leave the centre some time even more later. On my return journey to the other metropolis there is no one else in my carriage, not even my beautiful former companion and certainly not you so I waste no time in taking my pills and lapsing into blackness before the terminal is even out of sight.

\#

(Montola, 2008, p. 23) and in this case of approaching the game as artwork would consist of the bodily experience of player-audience and contextual resonances they bring to this. Next is the "endogenous frame" which is concerned with the structure of the game-artwork as it is engaged with (Montola, 2008, p. 23), and includes in *Aperitif* the manner and methods of interaction provided to the player-audience, as well as aesthetics and forms of information such as sound, text, image. Finally the "diegetic frame" (Montola, 2008, p. 23) in *Aperitif* is within the fiction of the game-artwork, interactions, choices, and experiences of the characters within the game as played by, or encountered by, the player-audience.

In playing the game, the player alternately takes control of and interacts with four principal player-characters. The first two of these are "Ever. The Loser", and "Brava. The Leader" who are broadly humanoid with cat/fox/deeresque features including enlarged ears (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). There is also "Chalcedony. The Big Sister" and "Agate. The Little Sister" who are both "labor drones" who have been modified and "overclocked" almost beyond capacity in order to have some kind of consciousness (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). All four of these characters are employed by a large company called "Innocent" to recover salvage from a contaminated and overgrown former city referred to by the characters as "Swamp-Dot-Com" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). The area's contamination is connected to the presence of a

mysterious object only referred to at this point in the series narrative as "The artefact" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). Another character that we see, and occasionally have control over is called "The Therapist" who is presented as a human size, anthropomorphic moth-like person (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). Finally, we also hear from and interact with "MOM" (an artificial Intelligence attached to Innocent), and possibly from the "Artefact" itself (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

The episode prior to *Aperitif* was subtitled "No World Dreamers, Sticky Zeitgeist. Episode one: Hyperslime" (Hyperslime) and primarily serves to introduce the setting and characters, principally through the eyes of *Ever*, detailing her mental health and particularly anxiety (Heartscape & Rook, 2017). Episode one was concerned with our characters getting to work, passing various obstacles to achieve this including panic attacks and mandatory drug tests.

Picking up where *Hyperslime* ended, *Aperitif* is concerned with our characters beginning the job they are assigned, the material and social relations within that environment, and the material effects these provoke. Folding back to our first *Strat* and Thacker's proposed definition of horror we will look first to the space between, and passages between "I cannot see what I believe", and "I cannot believe what I see" (Thacker, 2015, p. 15).

The shop is filled with empty shelves and at the rear a counter lit by the only light in the room, a flickering fluorescent tube hanging from the polystyrene tile ceiling.

There is a piece of paper on the empty counter.

For our player-character's, this field of uncertainty crops up frequently and extends at times out to include us the player. Early in the narrative, text from an unspecified character or voice sets this tone;

"Jeez how much blood do you have?

The Inside becomes the outside.

The world grasps hungrily at the swamp gate.

Two voracious circuitries at war. the fever of skin grafts.

Four salvagers set out in search for debris[10]" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018) [hard returns and capitalisation in original].

The context for this statement is not revealed until the end of the game, and the "who" that is speaking all of it remains ambiguous even then. Our player-character proxies recount their memories and feelings about Swamp-Dot-Com in fragments as you explore it with them in turn.

It is important at this point to note that it is implied to degrees that some or all of the "four scavengers" are not cisgendered (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). This was first implied regarding the character *Ever* in *Hyperslime* through a masturbation scene which effectively starts the narrative. It is important to note here that this is my interpretation of the game. It is never

stated within the any characters are trans*, cis, intersex, or what if any concept of gender exists in its setting. However in the sequel *Aperitif*, the characters gender identity contrasting to that assigned to them by a social power is implied more strongly. This contrast is also expanded as their non-cis status is not just in relation to gender but in terms of crossing boundaries of being machine (in the case of the robot sisters) and non-human (in the case of other characters).

Accessible in the game's folder from the start, and later triggered by an on screen event is a PDF manual for *Agate*, the younger robot sister. The PDF presents as an official service manual for the original robot model that *Agate* is, this document has been subsequently annotated and edited by *Agate* herself and her sister after they are both upgraded to consciousness. *Agate* is the only explicitly trans* character because her manual originally labels her a "[redacted] labor drone" and she herself has altered this to instead assign her the name "Agate, cool girl" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). The overlapping of trans* identity discourse and sentience of non-human or modified humans is not without precedent[11]. In the article "Making and Getting Made: Towards a Cyborg Transfeminism" in Salvage, writer Sølvi Goard argues that the "1995 anime version of Ghost In The Shell [offers] both the dream and the nightmare of trans politics" (Goard, 2017, p. 61). Goard makes the case that "Cyborgs [...] are undoubtedly transgender

[because] they choose and change their bodies based on what relationship they desire from that body" (Goard, 2017, p. 61). In "Ghost In The Shell", the cyborg cop protagonist "Major Motoko Kusanagi" begins to express doubts about her own existence through the course of the narrative which centres on hyper augmented bodies and brains and the limits of existence and identity (Oshii, 1995). Goard identifies this doubt in "the visceral confusion that comes about from knowing how you feel and experience your body, but having that experience jar so powerfully with what meaning other people and society give to it" as "one many trans people will recognise" (Goard, 2017, p. 62).

The doubts and confusions over self expressed by the characters in *Aperitif* are different to those of Major Kusanagi. *Chalcedony* expresses fear and regret that like herself, her sister *Agate* was "overclocked" and modified to have sentience and that "she would pay for it with every moment of her life" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). For *Chalcedony*, much of her anxiety is around her and her sister being unable to be safe, to rest, to have energy, to have "a room to hide in" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). While Agate seems exhausted by the demands of her body run beyond its intended capacity (the PDF robot manual states that the overclocking can lead to violent failure of the unit's heart, and that these are advised to be bought in bulk. This whole section in the manual has been all but obliterated by *Chalcedony* with a
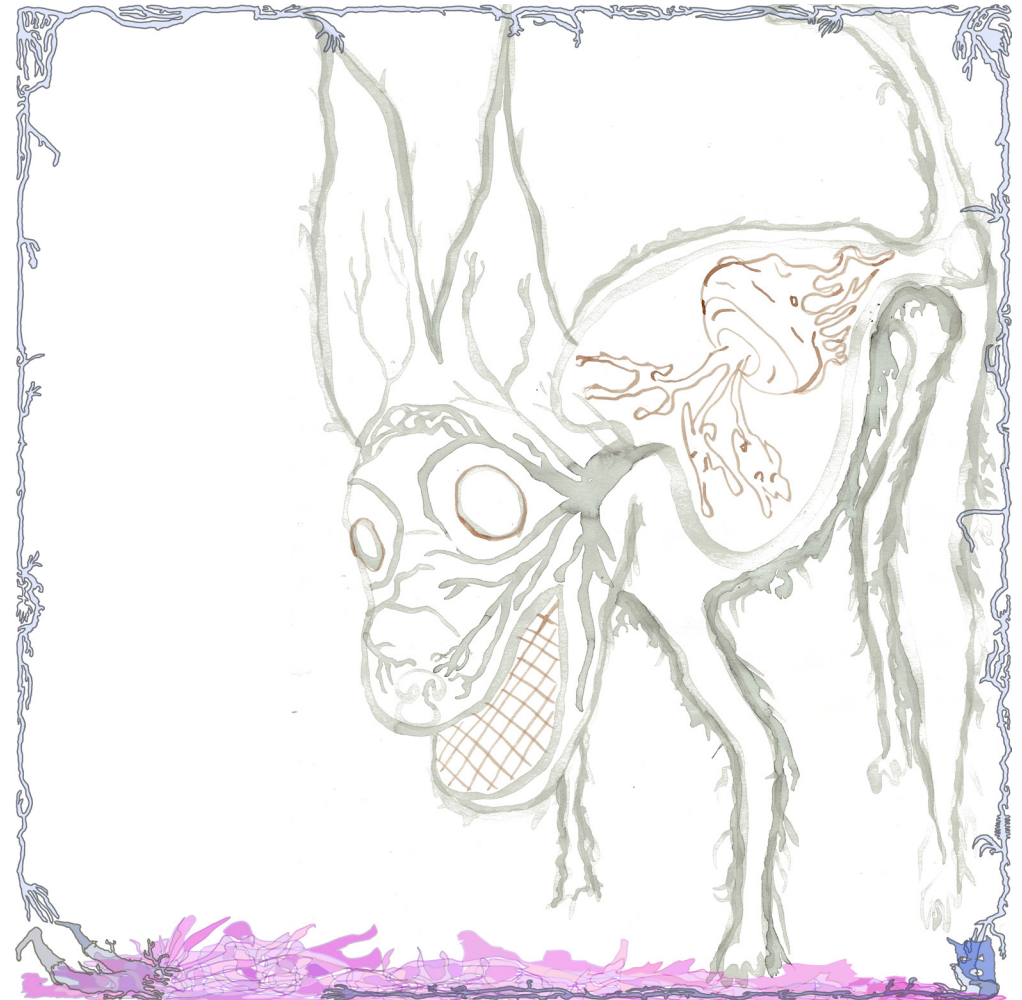
Dog Pink Guts Samus [CARE, DIAGRAM]

note to tell her younger sister not to read it), and at the newness of the world after their escape which is both exciting and terrifying in turns. Both the robots experiences undoubtedly jar with "what meaning other people and society give" them (Goard, 2017, p. 62) as they are literally on the run from that authority, but this is joined by the jarring of the body itself not functioning as they need it too. The culmination of this will be the medical sim section of the game where we play as *Chalcedony* attempting to repair her sister's overworked organs, potentially watching *Agate* repeatedly die in the process. What seems to most concern *Chalcedony* at least is this perpetual state of exhausted, unstable, borderline survival. She asks herself "what if it was forever. What if nothing changed, and we kept as we were. Unable to perfectly live or die" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). This same anxiety about not escaping is echoed shortly after by *Ever* when she states that she "and Brava always said we'd be the ones to make it out. We wouldn't be the losers stuck in this nowhere shithole" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). Constructing improvised temporary solutions to keep going through trauma and awareness of their imminent potential failure is common to most of the characters in *Aperitif*, if not the entire universe they inhabit.

While loss of self and disjointing realities occur for the character's within the narrative increasingly as they reach the Artefact's "outer radius" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018) of defences, a different set of transitions between the poles

of "I cannot believe what I see" and "I cannot see what I believe" occurs at the level of our audience encounter with this work (Thacker, 2015, p. 15).

In an interview with indie game hosting site Itch.io Heartscape herself has described wanting an experience of saturation and confusion, "eventually the viewer will be so overwhelmed they won't be able to tell "game" from malicious software intrusion" (Hayes, 2018). Both this, and her advice to game designers just starting out that they "dehumanise [themselves] and face to bloodshed" may contain irony, but also describe parts of the player experience quite accurately, and align the making process with that of Cixous's *Écriture Féminine*. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous describes the woman involved in such writing with the following sentence;

> "She doesn't defend herself against these unknown women whom she's surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability" (Cixous, 1976, p. 889).

Characters within the game might lament the possibility of their being caught in limbo, but our encounter with the work of art called *Aperitif* is one of approaching something always in flux and always pointing to incomplete or decaying possibilities. Video games broadly of the sort *Aperitif* belongs to often present the player with avenues which may be explored or ignored.

In this instance, there might be dialogue options we do not choose, or we might miss sections of the map, and not trigger every piece of narrative description text. This is one potential way in which our experience of this game as never fully resolving, as an altering space. Knowing that the player-audience could have told *Agate* "We are sisters and our fate is bound together" but instead, told her "I'm doing for you what no one did for me" when asked why *Chalcedony* keeps looking after her means the game does not quite resolve into a fixed form (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). The player-audience might speculate on what would have happened in game if they took the other path, and the emotional response to the game might have been different also. This however could be said of most games of this broad type, and that all but the completist who must replay every possible forked path experiences such a game as fluid in this way. However there is another instance of alterability in the experience of encountering *Aperitif* which melds with the former, is less common, and I would argue makes it a richer and more complex experience for its lack of solidifying resolution.

When playing *Aperitif* we are never given full, authoritative, and non conflicting information on anything we encounter. We experience much of the game via the exploration of a visual landscape that we interact with, and via our proxy character's interior monologues reflecting on this landscape, its history, and its impacts. Each character has a different response to this

space and the first half of the game consists of exploring the same map, with the same triggers for these monologues with each character offering a different association. A clearing with a pool triggers the text for *Ever* "this is where I hid", for *Brava* the description is "I think this is where Ever goes to whack off", and for *Chalcedony* it is simply "small water" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). Over all these multiple descriptions presides a world that resists one single interpretation, but beyond this, the specific writing that the game employs is frequently one which is open, personal, multiple and incomplete. We experience the game therefore as a series of fragments, and these fragments feel less like they were crafted to convey one meaning than as they were pulled together and placed somewhere for them to form new associations with whatever text came before them and whatever the audience had already in mind. In a published interview, the writer Kathy Acker who practice involved cut ups and often plagiarized re-edits was asked about control in their work and gave the following response.

"When you write are you controlling a text? When you're really writing you're not, you're fucking with it" (Acker, 1991, p. 22).

Text in *Aperitif* feels extremely fucked with, and invites the player to fuck with it further. The ruined signposts which litter *Swamp-dot-com* contain

easy to cite examples of such fucked with text. Approaching these signs with a controlled character triggers an on-screen text. Some signs triggered text that describes its context in the manner of "The sign says, Feeling depressed? This is the only thing it says" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). Other sign triggered text such as "watch out for stuff" lack the initial contextual statement leaving available the possibility that this is something else other than what the sign reads (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). What could be read simply as inconsistency of form becomes yet another way in which the experience of this work of art invites us to embrace uncertainty. The narrative content of these signs reinforces this, as a player there is real joy to be found in these uncertain fragmented warnings and questions that they leave us, plugging in whatever context we have to hand to try and make sense of them. The fucked with text triggered by bringing a player-character near to one of these signs (or not, if the player happens to miss them) sits very much within that definition of horror from Thacker. They elicit both the disbelief that what we read is correct and the absence of that which would fully qualify and resolve them.

It would be incorrect to suggest that there is no overall linear narrative in *Aperitif*, but that narrative is not responsible for the only, or dominant experience of encountering the game-artwork. That encounter, is one of being hit with a splattering of different affects, each eliciting thoughts
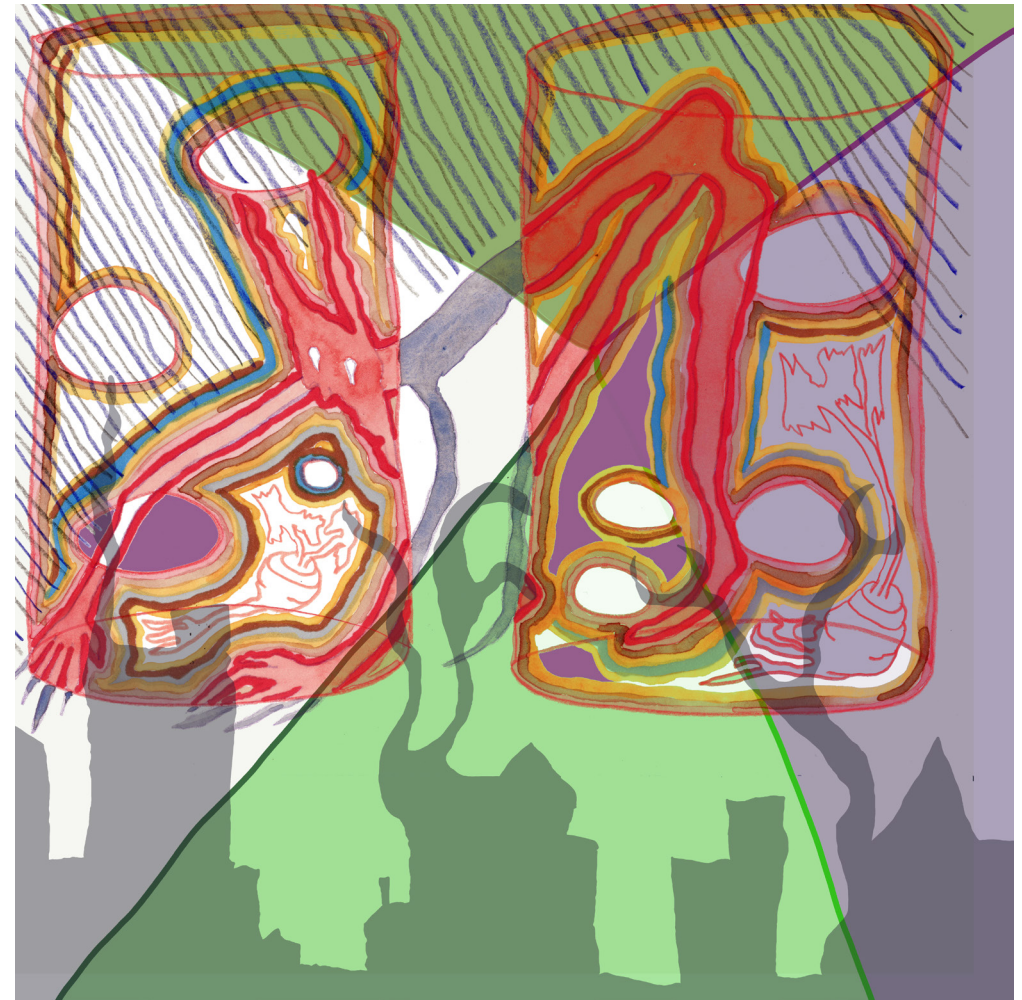
I Can't Understand The Language Used [DIAGRAM, LACUNA]

and associations and creative possibilities for us as collaborator, rather than mere musculature for a narrative skeleton. O'Sullivan describes the affective encounter with art as "self overcoming" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 129), to be immersed in our encounter to the point where our self, that certainly of the "I", becomes lost. The splattering of affects in *Aperitif* as we jump from witnessing character struggle to articulate their trauma and love, to the game-artwork presenting us with an incomplete or decaying experience of an incomplete or decaying world strongly provokes such self overcoming. This isn't the unrelenting insistence that we forget our human body and commit to the protagonist of a narrative, supporting their every decision and telegraphed emotions backed up with orchestral swells, rather instead the game-artwork seduces us into active collaboration which never claims to be certain, and teaches us to accept this.

Aperitif is fragmentary, incomplete, broken, but continually producing and provoking. In this it sits close to the *Écriture Féminine* called for by Cixous, the producer of which is;

> "Heterogeneous, yes, for her joyous benefit she is erogenous; she is the erotogeneity of the heterogeneous; airborn swimmer, in flight, she does not cling to herself; she is dispersible, prodigious, stunning, delirious and capable of others of the other woman that she will be, of the other woman she isn't, of him of you" (Cixous, 1976, p. 890).

This is writing that self overcomes. The uncertainty of horror is now joyous delirium, yet the circumstances have not changed only our ethical position to them. I am not trying to argue that to another audience *Aperitif* might be an experience of horror, though the trauma the characters live and relive may well qualify it as such for them. However *Aperitif* can be understood through the horror genre if we are open this genre up and play with its world of affects, desires, difference, and ecstasy in the manner Cixous and others.

Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" is a call for women to write, and to write in a way other than the dominant patriarchal mode. It is a proposal of tactics for producing art which is not dissimilar from those O'Sullivan sees in the encounter with art, which "operates as a fissure in representation" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 128). Language itself becomes the site of such struggles, the risk of reducing a work of art via the methods of accounting for. The risk Cixous sees when warning of "the signifier that would take you back the authority of the signified" (Cixous, 1976, p. 892) speaks as much to this risk, as to the greater one of producing art which will not be immediately subsumed into a dialectic with dominant power.

In *Aperitif*, one way in which this site of struggles is navigated, is through

a text device that points to absence. Ellipses occur frequently throughout the character's text boxes, whether as speech, interior monologue, or something which does not specify[12]. The function of these ellipses is two fold, they indicate our character's divergence from the authority of words for whatever reason, and they become points where we as audience are pulled further into proximity as we speculate on dialogue paths. Finally, characters unable to articulate through words brings the affective encounter to the surface. Both for those characters and for us the moment becomes about experience as continual, rather than resolution. This moment is both what *Chalcedony* fears as to "never perfectly live or die", but also falls into O'Sullivan's definition of art as "less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, or becoming, in the world" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 130).

The many ellipses point at the characters experiencing something beyond the signified. When this occurs during monologue the implication is that the character has fallen further into thought. They have gone from the level of thought which is the interior monologue, to a point where that voice is not simply silent but is speaking to itself, on a deeper level of communication which even us, with our access to their minds, cannot perceive. When the ellipses occur during dialogue, it is tempting to suggest that they represent the breakdown of communication. However, I am reluctant to cast all instances

into this explanation. There are moments where the trailing off of dialogue is followed by an internal monologue which highlights the difficulty of speaking what the speaker would wish to articulate. However the frequency of which these collapses of speech, primarily between individuals who are shown to have a closeness emotionally with their partner in dialogue gives me cause to find another reading. This reading is that the articulated silence/non-speech of the ellipses points to a mode of communication between the characters which is not one of speech language.

The simple sprites, limited range of static portraits which are shown during dialogue, and quite literally low-definition art style of *Aperitif* means that much non-verbal communication and body language is absent. The "performance" of the characters is strictly limited, and the gaps in these performances, like the gaps in the low frame rate animation, are voids which we the audience must fill. Sometimes the gaps signified by the ellipses read to me not as awkward silence, or even comfortable silence, but as the conversation shifting into another space, one which I can speculate on not once but repeatedly. A multiplicity of complex, potential interpersonal emotions.

Outside of the game's "diegetic frame" (Montola, 2008, p. 23), the ellipses function directly as a communication from artist to us as player-

audience, and what is communicated is repeated moments which point to the inadequacy of (in the case of this game which displays dialogue as text rather than audio) written words. The artists choose to speak to us the audience through non-speech, through demarcated absence[13.]

The impossibility, or inadequacy of language here introduced, marks the transition in this research to one of its central concerns, to encounter the unspeakable, to be overwhelmed, but also to deal with on their own terms, things external to language. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze, in "The Logic of Sense" (Deleuze, 2011) draws from psychoanalysts Melanie Klien[14] and Susan Isaacs on the Kleinian concept of "phantasy". To ground this concept I will quote the following section from Isaac's 1952 paper "The Nature and Function of Phantasy" (Isaacs, 1991) which begins with a quote from Sigmund Freud;

> "'We suppose that it [the id] is somewhere in direct contact with somatic processes, and takes over from them instinctual needs and gives them mental expression.' [Freud, S 1933a: 98; SE 22:73]
>
> I believe that this 'mental expression' is unconscious phantasy. Phantasy is the mental corollary, the psychic representative of instinct. And there is no impulse, no instinctual urge, which is not experienced as (unconscious) phantasy". (Isaacs, 1991, p. 208).

CSGO Dog [CARE, DIAGRAM]

Both Issacs's paper, and the Kleinian concept of "phantasy" are the subject of a great deal of study and debate within the field of psychoanalysis, and well beyond the remit of this thesis to give adequate attention to (Ormrod, 2014). Information on the concept is here drawn primarily from James Ormrod's "Fantasy and Social Movements" (Ormrod, 2014).

Deleuze states that "[Phantasms] have only an indirect and tardive relation to language and that when they are verbalized afterward, the verbalization occurs with ready-made grammatical forms" (Deleuze, 2011, p. 246). Philosopher James Williams defines the Deleuzian "phantasm" as originating from both the Kleinian "phantasy" and Plato's "phantasm" which can be understood as "a mental image or belief derived from the senses" (J. Williams, 2008, p. 187). Williams expands the definition as follows;

> "The phantasm is not a conscious or unconscious picture that we can give rise to or that happens to us; it is a process resulting from passive situations and active ones. It is therefore not 'in the mind' but rather party to thinking processes" (J. Williams, 2008, p. 188).

The Deleuzian *Phantasm* as process adjacent to thought has resonances with O'Sullivan's suggestion that;

> "Art [...] might be understood as the name for a function: A magical aesthetic function of transformation. Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being and becoming in the world" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 130).

O'Sullivan is here perhaps more concerned with the approach to art as a whole, as a site of value and consideration. However, I propose that the same can be said for an encounter with art, including the encounters which split and merge over the process of making art, or of remaking another's art as a fan or thief. In both senses, art has the precondition of producing an outcome, or even acknowledging an end, removed. The function, or *Phantasm* which is "party to thinking" (J. Williams, 2008, p. 188) does not need to resolve, including into language[15] [16].

What is important for the purpose at hand of examining and proposing artworks in which language is demonstrated as being inadequate, or suspect, or in which absence is used, is that *Phantasms* are also in excess of language. Like the artwork when it is described, the *Phantasm* must

be verbalised with "ready-made grammatical forms" (Deleuze, 2011, p. 246). Therefore something will be lost, or added, or reconfigured, by the transformative process of verbalisation. There is always excess, some things which do not survive the shift to another mode[17].

At this point, we will now move to examining various states which are beyond language and articulation. This includes states of overwhelming sensation which occur both within *Aperitif*, and across wider art and theoretical practices, though *Aperitif* remains the sole artwork under examination in this document. The reasoning for this is that while I believe that cross subject analysis is very useful for the identification of structures, the aim here of finding processes which can be joined together in assemblage is better served by using an artwork as a pivot to bring processes into proximity with one another[18] [19].

The issue of what is lost or embellished in the translation of experience to existing language structures connects to related tensions between excess and lack as relates to theories of desire. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan "equates Desire with libido, but locates the source as a lack in the Other- a lack which seeks to overcome itself- rather than in biological or sexual drive" (Ragland-Sullivan, 1982, p. 8). The Lacanian structure of *Desire,* interconnected to gender, language, and subjectivity via "phallogocentrism-

the fantasy of a central, idealized subject and the phallus[20] as signifier of power and authority"[21] (Juncker, 1988, p. 425) is part of the psychoanalytic theory which Cixous is responding to. When she offers the question and answer "What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meager desire" (Cixous, 1976, p. 891) Cixous is replacing the economy of desire based on lack, with one of excess[22].

To consider further the concept of excess I will refer to the theorists whose work across art and politics repeatedly returned to this position, George Bataille.

PRIVATE SHOW [CARE, RPG]

You wake up in a theatre audience. You are wearing a formal boiler suit. On stage a great and renowned political archaeologist is majestically waving a burned human bone as Britney Spears's "Private Show" booms flatulently from speakers under wooden panelling angled around the room which is shaped like the inside of a low polygon golf ball.

#

"...and this is the very bone Vanessa Redgrave used!"

#

The political archaeologist almost screams this statement, and from the joy on her face you can tell there has been a lot of rigorous dialectical groundwork established in the time you have been asleep. (Perhaps your whole life).

#

"... ok class, that's it for this module. Enjoy your lunch, cobalt mining duty for international students starts in 30 seconds so better get a scoot on if you don't want punishment hahaha also don't forget to sign up for hockey!"

#

Some lumpy and terrified looking children are already running towards the exit, fumbling ID crystals from inside long army-style school issue kit bags and inserting

There is no reason for you to live; Part Two: Excess

"Small salvage is $5.

Hear that sis, you're $5.

Nooooo" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

Excess is a concept which arises in many areas of George Bataille's work that spans art, literature, politics, economics, anthropology and mysticism. The concept, or rather an aspect of it, is particularly near the surface and therefore easy for us to grasp here, in Bataille's essay "The Notion of Expenditure" (Bataille, 1985). Bataille begins by stating that while "there is nothing that permits us to define what is useful to man" (Bataille, 1985, p. 116), what he refers to as "classical utility" can be understood as follows;

"On the one hand, this material utility is limited to acquisition (in practice, to production) and to the conservation of goods; on the other, it is limited to reproduction and to the conservation of human life" (Bataille, 1985, p. 116).

In contrast to utility Bataille positions "pleasure", which he argues society judges to be lesser than utility and is therefore permissible as a "concession" (Bataille, 1985, p. 117). However Bataille proposes that just as a young

them into attendance monitoring panels which release 8 foot high rotating gates to allow students to exit one at a time.

#

Just as one "international student" starts to cry waiting in line you get up and join the second line leaving through a translucent purple perspex revolving door marked "home students" and just hope this is correct. Behind you the wailing increases in the lecture hall just as the door spits you into an open square of fountains and manicured trees and chrome bladed towers. A projection flickers at the corner of your vision, "Balamb Gardens Map. You are here. Remember the rules" and you follow the directions to the cafeteria.

#

You eat lunch. Its pickled radishes. Yum. The disposable table cloth is covered in writing. It says "Balamb Gardens Rules" at the top. You drop a vinegary mooli slice onto the paper and it frames rule 5, "no sexual promiscuity". Uh-oh. Two days later you're expelled.

man's desire to waste and destroy demonstrates that there is a need for this kind of pleasure even while this cannot be given a "utilitarian justification", "human society can have, just as he does, an interest in considerable losses, in catastrophes" (Bataille, 1985, p. 117). Bataille sets this up as the tension between the ideological authority and the real needs for "nonproductive expenditure" which are at times not even articulable through the language of that authority. As examples of unproductive expenditure Bataille offers the following list;

> "Luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality)" (Bataille, 1985, p. 118).

A handful of these examples are examined further, but Bataille argues that in each "the accent is placed on a loss that must be as great as possible in order for the activity to take on its true meaning" (Bataille, 1985, p. 118). Just as Lyotard identified affect as the point of excess (Lyotard, 1991, p. 93) which marks art apart from other things, and Cixous defines her figure of *Woman* in terms of "the desire-that-gives" (Cixous, 1976, p. 893), Bataille has identified "the principle of loss" (Bataille, 1985, p. 118) as essential to a range of activities including but spreading beyond art and literature. The excess in Lyotard as deployed by O'Sullivan is that which is beyond the

system of accounting for art, namely affect (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 126). In Cixous the excess is the capacity of the artist-figure woman when enacting *Écriture Féminine*, to operate beyond the system prescribed by power to the production of art. As theorist Allan Stoekl notes in his introduction to the edited volume "George Bataille Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927 - 1939", for Bataille "People create in order to expand, and if they retain things they have produced, it is only to allow themselves to continue living, and thus destroying" (Stoekl, 1985, p. xvii). Bataille's nonproductive expenditure is what is being freed in Cixous's process of *Écriture Féminine*, and I would therefore further argue, is being deployed in *Aperitif*, an artwork that deals with excesses both offered and implied (and therefore to be created at the point of interface with audience). More than this though, Bataillian excesses appear within the world of the game that the characters, and by extension us as players occupy. I would like to explore how different kinds of excess appear in *Aperitif*, and how these fit with Bataille's observations around class struggle and manner in which those in power retain control of non-productive expenditure, including the expenditure of other beings. Finally I will consider these points of excess as areas which clarify *Aperitif* as abstracted horror and *Écriture Féminine*.

A point where waste is rendered visible in *Aperitif*, in "The Laugh of The Medusa", and in the work of Bataille, in the act of masturbatation[23]. The

character *Ever*, from whose perspective we begin *Aperitif* is the sole player character in the episode of the "No World Dreamers: Sticky Zeitgeist" which precedes it, "Hyperslime" (Heartscape & Rook, 2017). *Ever's* story in *Hyperslime* begins with a scene of anal drug use and masturbation[24] which is interrupted by the call to attend work. In the following episode, *Aperitif*, we learn that this work is in fact community service after *Ever* "whacked off in public" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). This detail of *Ever's* life is exposed by *Brava* but in *Ever's* interior monologue we learn that she herself does not fully understand why it occurred. *Ever* can only speculate on the reason for her doing something she identifies as harmful, and that the experience was like "watching through a window" after which she "blacked out" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). As an aspect of *Ever's* character masturbation points to her isolation and desire, and to her struggle with the unbearable tension of shame which she alludes to when considering that "maybe I just wanted what they thought about me to come true" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). This enfolding of personal desire, the projection of being seen by another, the need to resolve an uncertainty, and the potential shame which runs through it is precisely how Cixous describes the struggle to produce *Écriture Féminine*;

> "[Y]ouv'e written a little, but in secret and it wasn't good because
> you punished yourself for writing because it didn't go all the way;
> or because you wrote irresistibly, as when we would masturbate

in secret, not to go further but to attenuate the tension a bit, just to take the edge off" (Cixous, 1976, p. 877).

Ever, who the artists attribute the title/archetype/role "The Loser", seems perpetually to be trying to manage the tension of her desires, with the only temporary resolution occurring in some kind of overwhelming loss of self. The struggle for a creative process which Cixous describes is not something I can identify in *Aperitif* because it is very much embedded in Porpentine and Rook's production of the artwork, which is outside the focus of this document. However, I would argue that *Aperitif* is open to being played in a manner which is analogous to, if not in a similar affective register to, the tension and collapse cycles of *Ever*. We begin both *Aperitif* and its prequel controlling *Ever*, but prior to the narrative beginning and still within the context of the title menu the game instructs us that we can "hold escape until you black out" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). On one hand this is an instruction within the "endogenous frame" (Montola, 2008, p. 23) informing player-audience of the key-press which will allow them to exit the game. On the other hand, the use of the term "black out" echo's *Ever's* use of the same, embedding it within "diegetic frame", and with a different meaning which extends to the "exogenous frame", i.e. to stop playing (Montola, 2008, p. 23). When playing the game-artwork, I feel that the means of exiting has

been embedded with an emotional resonance. Playing the game-artwork now has a resonance with *Ever's* narrative, even outside of the points of play where I am controlling her character. The emotional content of the game is foregrounded, and the promise of the opportunity to in a manner, "lose consciousness" as an escape from it invites/dares the audience-player to engage more with that content. We have permission to be a loser, to fail[25].

The concept of failure here is made complex when it is brought into the parameters of the game itself. It becomes an action. *Ever* berates herself for failure, but the artwork-game does not pass this judgement, and in aligning us with her and with failure, it invites us to not pass judgement either. Returning to Cixous, the other resonance of the allegory of masturbation to *Écriture Féminine* is that the writer is given permission to write for themselves and for the act of writing to be self gratifying rather than requiring the judgement of another. In "The "Onanism of Poetry": Walt Whitman, Rob Halpern and The Deconstruction of Masturbation" the poet and lecturer Sam Ladkin notes the contradiction in the considered works "between masturbation as the failure of fecundity, spent energy without the returns of an investment" and something which has value in sowing "male seed across the typically female gendered earth" (Ladkin, 2015, p. 132). In Ladkin's work, the discourse around Onan, the poets being discussed, and the particular queer theory
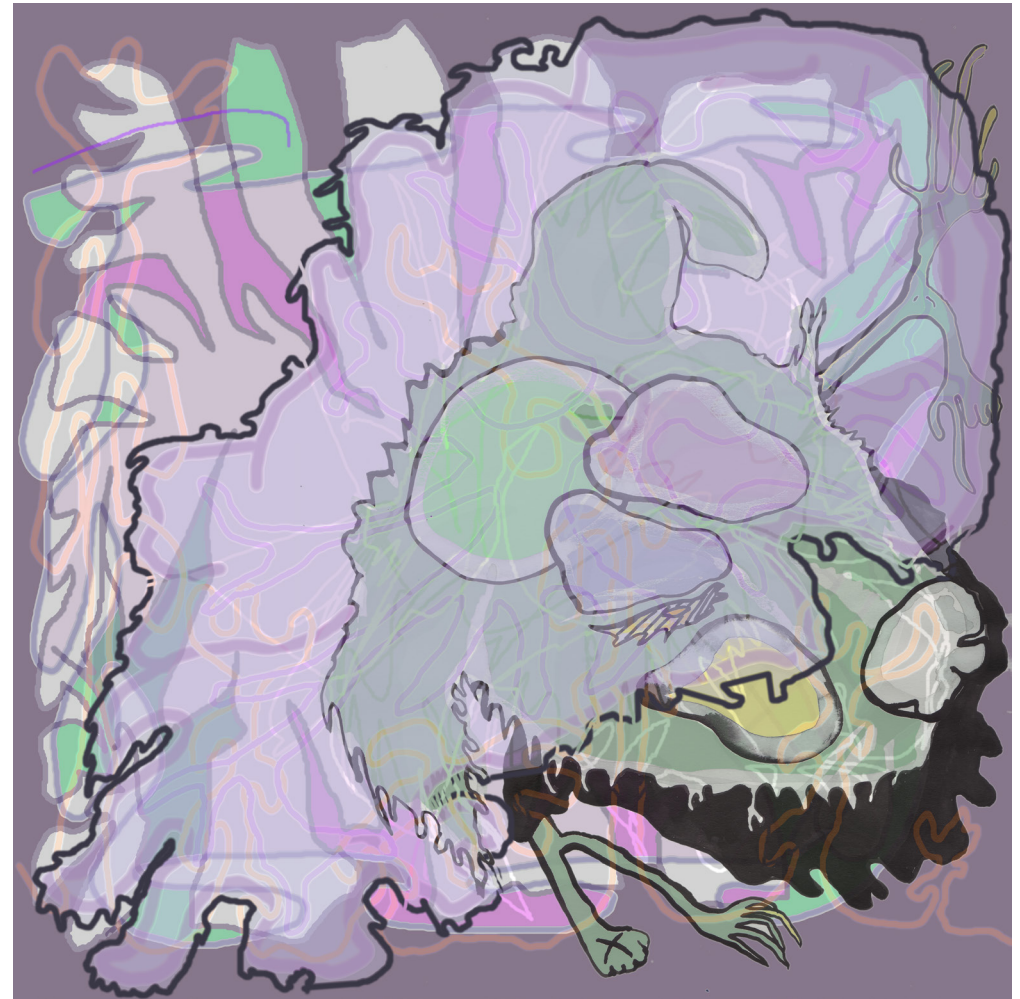
Diagram Dog Flat Purple [DIAGRAM, LACUNA]

used tends toward the image and language of male homosexual desire but the author emphasises that beneath this the structure of "failed or suspended address" is not specific to a particular "gendered identification of desire" (Ladkin, 2015, p. 131). In Cixous this contradiction between value and waste is articulated as the fight to develop one's own value system. To engage based upon the subject's desire, rather than exchange within an external economy which ascribes or denies a degree of value based on adherence to pre-existing parameters. Ladkin explores the potential to "recuperate the wasteful excess of masturbation via the general economy of Bataille" yet in the author's focus on the ejaculatory "economy of finitude" and the monetary economy of pornography, this avenue is effectively discounted and not further pursued (Ladkin, 2015, p. 144). However I think there is a different dialectic at play in the systems of Bataille, and one that is also played out in the world of *Aperitif* as the struggle between the individual release of excess of the player characters, and the destructive forms of excess employed by power and authority, which render both landscape and those same player characters, as waste.

Bataille lays out his position in some notes which eventually develop into the larger work, "The Accused Share" (Bataille, 1988). "Man is an effect of the surplus of energy: The extreme richness of his elevated activities must

be principally defined as the dazzling liberation of an excess. The energy liberated in man flourishes and makes useless splendor[26] endlessly visible" (Bataille, 2013, p. 36). In *Aperitif*, this dazzling liberation of an excess is attempted by characters such as *Brava*, but it is always curtailed by the tyranny of an outer authority, the call to attend community service, the police. The motif of masturbation in *Aperitif* points to repeated denial of excess in the following of individual desire. As previously noted, character's remain in a limbo of struggling survival, to "never perfectly live or die" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). In this state the following of individual desire into the expression of excess is denied to everyone except those who can afford it, as *Brava* recalls;

> "When the internet 3 was invented the economy was really extra fucked, most stores were automated. Except the usual dollhouse experiments ran by rich people who fantasized about running a restaurant or cupcake shack or some shit" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

Bataille argues that "As the class that possesses the wealth -- having received with wealth the obligation of functional expenditure -- the modern bourgeoisie is characterized by the refusal in principle of that obligation" (Bataille, 1985, p. 124). Bataille maps how earlier structures of social and material power would have led to the possessors of such power and wealth

to express this through expenditure such as feasts, sacrifices and the construction of elaborate religious and cultural objects. In contrast to this, the logic of accumulation under Capitalism leads to a "hatred of expenditure" (Bataille, 1985, p. 124). In *Aperitif* this is demonstrated in the quote above from *Brava* showing that even with full automation, the bourgeois can only either imagine, or allow itself, a useless expenditure which takes the surface form of work by running a "cupcake shack" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

There is a second manner in which excess plays out through the agency of the authority in *Aperitif* and this is concerned with the rendering of subjects as objects, and then waste. Theorist Sylvère Lotringer attempted to re-examine the concept of 'Abjection' in the work of Bataille, identifying a different trajectory from that subsequently developed by Kristeva in "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection" (Kristeva, 1984). Lotringer's short essay "Les Miserables"[27] (Lotringer, 1999) positions Bataille's fragmentary addresses of *Abjection* written in the early 1930s as specifically in response to the "only truly original political formation to have emerged since the end of WWI [...] fascism" (Lotringer, 1999, p. 3). Lotringer notes that in "The Notion of Expenditure" Bataille deplores the manner in which the bourgeoisie attenuate the damage done and "ameliorate the lot of the workers" (Bataille, 1985, p. 126) as "abysmal hypocrisy" (Lotringer, 1999, p. 5);

> "The ultimate goal; of industrial masters, he asserted, wasn't profit or accumulation, but the will to turn workers into pure refuse. Instead of extracting surplus value from the wretched population working in [the] factory, they enjoyed a surplus value of cruelty" (Lotringer, 1999, p. 5).

The world of *Aperitif* presents a world in which authority has still not passed through its hypocrisy, but nevertheless continues to render the workers as waste. The company that employers *Ever* and the others to scavenge is represented by a character called "The Therapist", which at least suggests a role of care, yet the job remains one of collecting scrap from a toxic environment which degrades and destroys their bodies (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). Lotringer published his essay *Les Miserables* in the edited book "More & Less 2" along with Bataille's essay "Abjection and Miserable Forms" and an interview with Kristeva titled "Fetishizing the Abject" (Bataille, 1999; Kristeva, 1999; Lotringer, 1999). Both Lotringer's essay, and the line of questioning in the interview are in part concerned with a bifurcation within Bataille's concept of *Abjection*, which has not been given as much attention in its re-articulation and development by Kristeva in "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection" (Kristeva, 1984) and that work's continued influence. Lotringer draws from Bataille a distinction between "The union of miserables reserved for subversion" and "wretched men rejected into

negative abjection" (Lotringer, 1999, p. 6).

The difference is between the positive *Abjection* which leads to action, solidarity, and perhaps martyrdom, and the negative *Abjection* which leads simply to inertial, apathy, and alienation. The tension between these two forms of *Abjection* is something which appears throughout *Aperitif*, as its protagonists navigate a world of trash, see themselves to degrees become or be made trash, and navigate the threshold between agency and alienation.

In his summary, Lotringer makes the following statement about *Abjection* without differentiating between the positive or negative form;

> "Abjection doesn't result from a dialectical operation—feeling abject when "abjectified" in someone else's eyes, or reclaiming abjection as an identity feature—but precisely when dialectics breaks down. When it ceases to be experienced as an act of exclusion to become an autonomous condition, it is then, and only then, that abjection sets in" (Lotringer, 1999, p. 7).

It is unclear in this text whether Lotringer is arguing that what he elsewhere describes as people "becoming things to themselves" (Lotringer, 1999) defines *Abjection* in both positive and negative forms, or whether he is arguing for the primacy of the negative form. It is possible to read this as Lotringer trying to shift the definition of *Abject* to the negative, and the interview with Kristeva that will be addressed shortly in some ways

supports this view.

Returning to Goard's text on the trans* body and the cyborg it is worth noting the importance of the process by which each are rendered *Abject* is addressed, though with different terminology;

> "The dream of a world without surplus, illegitimate bodies is not feasible without a society that relies on surplus" (Goard, 2017, p. 62).

Goard makes steps toward a politics whereby "bodies-made-surplus" (or trans* people and others) are not redefined, rearticulated and included, but simply allowed to exist (Goard, 2017, p. 62). The politics not of "defining but defending" (Goard, 2017, p. 63). Goard's position seems to cut across Lotringer, proposing the act of oneself making and being made a thing as still containing revolutionary agency. In Lotringer's reading of Bataille's *Abjection*, at least in its negative form, it is a place without hope of agency, a kind of living death. However Goard does seem to offer a position which is neither that living death, nor the simple dialectical struggle of being labelled abject and owning this label. Goard's proposal becomes about a surplus yes, but an undefinable surplus that crosses categories of gender, class, race, ability, and attempts to tactically use such categories whilst aiming to

KEEPER'S DIARY [CARE, LACUNA]

May 9, 1998

This morning I fed the dogs, I gave some extra to Sherry and Ben because they have looked a bit low the last few days. Ben didn't want to come out of his crate this morning to walk and I had to pretty much get in with him to give him a hug and a scratch on his back before he was happy to come out. Sherry just looked a bit awkward, tilting her head like there's something in her ear but I checked and it was fine. I'll look in the storage and see if we have anything to rinse it, if not I'll ask one of the doctors for some borax. They want these dogs here, they need to be able to look after them and Dobermans have a tendency to react badly to mites. The bosses aren't going to be happy if they bring someone round on a tour and their beautiful dogs are all mangy and itchy.
#
At night, we played poker with Alias and Steve the researchers, and Scott the guard. Steve looked a mess, so full of himself. He basically does the same job as me but he looks after creatures you can't see without a microscope and he thinks this is going to be where he makes his career.
#
Steve was very lucky, and I think he was cheating. What a scumbag.

ultimately destroy them. Goard articulates this party with the statement that "we should be deeply sceptical of placing value on the acquisition of formal rights when they are used in the legitimation of a violent border regime" (Goard, 2017, p. 72). At the same time, Goard refuses the dialectic of power vs resistance by pointing out that the tactic entering into established modes of identity such as the gender binary are important at times for safety and so should not exclude a person from solidarity toward a common project of gender abolition for example[28] (Goard, 2017, pp. 71–74) .

As has been indicated throughout this chapter, *Aperitif* frequently plays with it establishing categories, names, structures, or identities, and having things which are surplus to these, which disrupt with either a counter-order, or the refusal of any order. Characters in some places self-define their identity on an axis of the gender binary, whereas the game-artwork leaves other identity markers not only unknown but unacknowledged. The game-artwork frames and withholds information through its limited graphics showing animal ears, and text which trails off to convey emotion through lack of definition. An implication through explicit and implied information is that all characters in *Aperitif* are "girls". However this category is broken open so wide as to be more in line with Cixous use of *Woman* as category abstracted from sex, gender, or identity. "Girl" can be a category if it is deployed in that way, or it

#

May   10th   1998

#

I'm still worried about Sherry, one of the million technicians we seem to have here came by and took her blood. I asked if they were about to test for what's giving her the tilt to her head. I'm worried it's something with her back or neck, but it could be the diet as all the food they get is unlabelled. I used to think they had the Dobes for the Nazi chic, but they might be breeding big Warlock Dobes or something. The dogs get no training beyond the stuff I do just to keep them and myself occupied which is more like playing. Today I hid their toys around the yard and sent them looking for them. I went with them too, walking like them on toes and fingers.

#

Today, a high ranking researcher asked me to take care of a new "monster". "It looks like a gorilla without any skin" she said when she opened the hatch over the window. They told me to feed them live food. There's two, they seem happy together, I've named them "Eriasu" and "Raymond". They seem really smart like the dogs, responding when you smile or gesture at them. When I threw in a pig, they were playing with it... tearing off the pig's legs and pulling out the guts before they actually ate it. They're very neat though, eating what they want and then leaving what's left in a perfect pile. They don't seem overly protective either and didn't

can something less stable.

Something about the four protagonists in *Aperitif* that remains consistent, and is presented unambiguously, is that the society they inhabit does not value their existence. Throughout the narrative, each protagonist struggles with whether or not they themselves value their own existence. Society is ordered in a way that each of the four girls needs to undertake a job which is extremely damaging to their physical and mental health. A common thread throughout their conversations and many interior monologues is the consideration of whether they can, or should, survive this. In the interview with Lotringer titled "Fetishizing The Abject", Kristeva describes her development of the concept of abjection through researching "borderline" clinical states in psychoanalysis;

> "Without going as far as psychotic persecution, without going as far as autistic withdrawal, [the patent] creates a sort of territory between the two, which he often inhabits with a feeling of unworthiness, of even deterioration, a sort of physical abjection if you like" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 18).

It would be out of the remit of this research to follow further into these pathologies. However; the oscillation of internal states, struggle, exploded categories, the question of self worth and being made *thing* invites another

seem bothered when I came in to pick up a couple of bones. Marv really enjoyed the bones, wagging his tail and carrying them around the yard to different spots to chew on them. Ben is also a lot more confident today, I'm sure it's because I've been sleeping in the yard with them.

#

May   11th   1998

#

Around 5 o'clock this morning, Scott came in and woke me up suddenly. He was wearing a protective suit that looks like a space suit. He told me to put one on as well. I heard there was an accident in the basement lab. It's no wonder, those researchers never rest, even at night. It's probably something Steve has done, he looks a mess whenever I see him smoking in the yard. I'd ask him but I don't care enough to deal with him hitting on me.

#

May   12th   1998

#

I've been wearing this annoying space suit since yesterday, my skin grows musty and feels very itchy and I can't keep up with the dogs when we go out to the woods. Scott was staring at me again, by way of revenge I threw some pig guts at him and he ran. There's no delivery this week so I didn't feed those dogs enough today and

text to placed alongside *Aperitif* and *Abjection.* "Sick Woman Theory" by writer and artist Johanna Hedva (Hedva, 2016) is an examination of the politics which intersect in the bodies of disabled people, and offers a figure of protest in the form of the *Sick Woman*. As Hedva states, "Sick Woman Theory is an insistence that most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible" (Hedva, 2016). Applying *Sick Woman Theory* to hypothetical borderline case described by Kristeva repositions them as a political agent;

> "The Sick Woman is all of the "dysfunctional," "dangerous" and "in danger," "badly behaved," "crazy," "incurable," "traumatized," "disordered," "diseased," "chronic," "uninsurable," "wretched," "undesirable" and altogether "dysfunctional" bodies belonging to women, people of color, poor, ill, neuro-atypical, differently abled, queer, trans, and genderfluid people, who have been historically pathologized, hospitalized, institutionalized, brutalized, rendered "unmanageable," and therefore made culturally illegitimate and politically invisible" (Hedva, 2016).

As the quotation marks around medical terms indicate, Hedva's *Sick Woman Theory* is a kind of tactical categorization in order to refute a larger number of categories. *Sick Woman Theory* reads *Abjection* not from the position of analyst, but "the person with autism whom the world is trying to "cure"" as well as a multitude of other positions whose commonality is that they are disenfranchised, suffering, and abused

I'm hungry too. We found a deer when we went out this evening, now I feel better.

\#

May   13th   1998

\#

I went to the medical room because my back is all swollen and feels itchy. They put a big bandage on my back and the doctor told me I did not need to wear the space suit any more. I guess I can sleep well tonight. I went and sat with Raymond today as he looked a bit down. He doesn't want to play like the dogs, exploring and chasing, he seems more like he wants to learn how things work. I went and got some stuff I had about, some sand and some plants and some nuts and bolts and Ray got really excited. He was totally absorbed and didn't even notice when I said goodnight. It's been getting colder outside and we've been getting fog so I've pulled all the crates together and hung a tarp over the top so we can all sleep together outside. I'm so happy with this job.

\#

May   14th   1998

\#

When I woke up this morning, I found another blister on the heel of my foot. It was annoying and I ended up dragging my foot as I went to the dog's other pen to get Sherry's ball that I left there yesterday. On the way back put my fingers down and

(Hedva, 2016). From the former position, categories become the norm, and things which transgress them a deviation or disruption. From the latter position of the multitude, the transgression across categories is the norm. It is possible to read the category of "girl" in *Aperitif* as *Sick Woman*, just as both, like Cixous's *Woman,* serve to encapsulate a sea of difference with an act of refusal against categories.

As mentioned previously in this document, a focus of Lotringer's interview with Kristeva is questioning whether *Abjection* can form an oppositional function to power. Lotringer is particularly concerned with what he sees a broad tendency or movement within art and culture which attempts to reclaim the process of being made *Abject* and instil it with emancipatory potential. When asked at one point on this Kristeva responds "I feel very ambiguous in relation to this movement [...] I don't adhere to it, and at the same time I realize that, as a kind of strategy, it is opposed to some kind of intolerable conservatism, so it's hard to adhere to that" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 28). Kristeva's concession is based in a dialectic of *Abjection* against what must be imagined as a kind of totalitarian homogeneous cultural sterility. *Sick Woman Theory*, is presented as "an identity and body" not against but in place of one of intolerable conservatism (Hedva, 2016). Hedva at a point identifies this conservatism as the privileged existence, or "cruelly optimistic

got up on my toes, this is a lot more comfortable anyway and I don't care anymore if people look. They don't anyway, I think Scott has told everyone I'm a psycho bitch or something. There were some researchers in the kitchen when I went to pick up meat at breakfast and again at lunch. They have been quiet since morning, which is very unusual. I found that some of them had escaped. I'll be in real trouble if the higher-ups find out so I took Ben, Sherry and Marv out and we found them in a barn at the edge of the estate. I brought some bits back for Raymond to work with. I don't know what he's building but it is definitely beautiful, Eriasu is helping too, they seem to sing to each other sometimes.

#

May   15th   1998

#

Even Alias is avoiding me, though I don't really care anymore, he doesn't have anything to say with his body about the present just stupid noises about what has already happened. I tried to be civil, offered him some of the researcher that was left over and he just said he didn't feel well.

#

I decided to go see the two "monsters", when I got there they already had a visitor, who introduced themselves as "Nancy". I think Nancy used to be one of the guards, but you don't see any of those around anymore. It's funny seeing another woman

promise" (Hedva, 2016) of this existence, embodied by the;

> "[W]hite, straight, healthy, neurotypical, upper and middle-class, cis- and able-bodied man29 who makes his home in a wealthy country, has never not had health insurance, and whose importance to society is everywhere recognized and made explicit by that society; whose importance and care dominates that society, at the expense of everyone else" (Hedva, 2016).

However, Kristeva seems to be describing an oppositional practice in line with what Lotringer describes as "reclaiming abjection as an identifying feature" (Lotringer, 1999, p. 7). This *Abjection* is oppositional, it uses the definition given to it by what it opposes, and defines itself through that opposition. *Sick Woman Theory* instead repositions itself as the exclusion of what it can be seen to be opposing. Hedva argues that capitalism sets up binary between a default position of "wellness" and deviation from this in the form of "sickness" (Hedva, 2016). To simply embody this deviant category of "sick" would be exactly the oppositional process of *Abjection* described by Lotringer and Kristeva. However, Hedva also argues that under capitalism "wellness" is positioned as a temporal norm, whilst "sickness" and therefore "care" is positioned as temporary (Hedva, 2016). Hedva's position can be seen as arguing that a broad encapsulation of vulnerabilities, oppressions, and suffering should be considered the norm. Crucially, care for oneself and for others, could and should follow as another norm. It can then be

who used to be something else. We reach out and touch noses. She smells good and I think about licking her ear. My first day here I was so sad and I didn't even know it. Off in the past, a long time, feels funny even thinking about it now, things that aren't now. I was wondering how to ask Nancy about whether they felt this but I was stopped by the sight of Scott sneaking past the window on the way out. Without even thinking about it Nancy and I were on top, my fingers in under his eyes and her teeth deep in his throat. It's all over and the only indication of there being anything other than now is the cooling of blood on my cheek and the pool spreading toward the drain. They say the company has ordered that no one leave the grounds but I can't remember how long ago that even was. Raymond starts to make something with the leftover pieces and a phone somewhere in all those useless clothes starts ringing. Who would Scott call? Everything is here. It's all happening now. What kind of joke is this?!

\#

May   16th   1998

\#

I heard Raymond and Eriasu singing to a researcher this morning. I couldn't remember what their name was or who they were when I tried to. Things like that escape me now. The singing seems to come from all over this side of the mansion. The yard is alive with song from all kinds of intonation. Marv and Sherry and Ben

proposed that *Sick Woman Theory*, is not a struggle with another, but a reconfiguration of the context underneath both which shifts perspective[30]. This reconfiguration is analogous to an operation I have elsewhere discussed as occurring within horror narratives, using the example of the film "Ringu" (Nakata, 1998).

In *Fetishizing The Abject* much of Lotringer's direction of the interview focuses on ways in which further discourses, including art, have in his view misincorporated *Abjection* following Kristeva's popularisation of the term. While a number of art tendencies and specific exhibitions are critiqued, it is the speculation on what *Abjection* could do in art that is most relevant here. Both Lotringer and Kristeva agree that when something is placed in a gallery, it "becomes a new identity" and thus "fetishized" it joins other "[i]institutional objects" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 30). Regarding potential to move beyond this, Kristeva proposes that "verbal art, insofar as it eludes fetishization, and constantly raises doubt and questioning [...] lends itself better perhaps to exploring those states that I call states of abjection" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 30). I am sceptical about the claim that any art form including *verbal art* might elude fetishization, but the operation of *constantly raising doubt and questioning* resonates with other observations in this document, as well as others in this PhD Output. Elsewhere I discussed a concept from my research which

are padding around singing with me, with all the other sounds, with the researcher whoever that was. A shot of something comes into my mind, a flash of feelings and smells and a soft touch that I want to last the whole night. My entire body feels full of a burning tension toward the location of the others in the pack, here and wherever they are. I can tell when one of them is anxious because inside my spine it feels cool and itchy and I'm drawn to be near them to reassure them. We now sleep all together through most of the day and leave the mansion at night. When we were out in the woods I found Raymond who was scratching marks into the bark of trees. The swelling of the trunk had lines already in it if you looked closely and I joined in using these long claws that now grow from the delicate padded feet on the end of what I might once have called my arms. I have no attachment to my old body, to walking upright, to not singing, to being alone.

I was a lump of rotten flesh; dropped off.

What the hell kind of existence was that? Dead and unmoving, can anything compare to what is happening to me?

#

    May   19,   1998

#

I wake up with a sensation like the flush from a fever, and quickly it is gone but my nerves feel itchy, I know the pack is moving and I'm already running with them.

I call *Incomplete Provocations*. Also, the use of unreliable narrators occurs in the majority of what might be called the fiction elements of this project. Something which is important to note regarding at least my use of unreliable narrators is that there is a rarely deliberate deception on the part of the narrator. Deception would necessitate that the narrator knows more than the audience who learns only from that the narrator reveals, at least initially. The application I am more interested in, is the unreliable narrator having by virtue of either being cognitively compromised or simply different, another perspective on events. The ideological position implied through this is that there is no one narrative which could encapsulate the entire event and therefore resolve it. There is always *doubt* and *questions*, each of which solicit speculation from the audience. In philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalysis Félix Guattari's "A Thousand Plateaus" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) the line that illustrates this non-deceptive unreliable narrator occurs at the start of the chapter "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible…"(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 232). While beginning an account of a film, the authors offer the disclaimer, "My memory of it is not necessarily accurate" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 233). The author's uncertainty in their memory would fall within my description of the *cognitively compromised* unreliable narrator, and before even getting to the recounted film, *doubts and questions* are ready to be raised. These

I'm hungry and running and driven by the desire to eat. I hear a voice calling out "be good doggy" and the voice sounds like food. Itchy, my nerves are prickling. Itchy, and chilled and I'm with the whole pack and we are surrounding some people that look like Scott and I briefly wonder where they came from before I'm on top of one teeth tight around his ugly face and pulling him so the pack can join so we are all the one that killed him. They all look like Scott and they are all just as tasty. We don't go back to the mansion that night. We leave marks as we keep moving, carved into trees and built from parts of things we come across and all of them are beautiful. Everything tastes better, the itch of the pack is all we need to be together, running and touching. Nothing is as important as desire.

#

4   .

      I   t   c   h   y   .

Tasty.

#

doubts and questions do not all have to be positioned in the gap between recollection and what was witnessed, though in this case we could look for differences between Deleuze and Guattari's account, and the film itself. The other *doubts and questions* that I am interested in, project not backwards in time to the witnessing, but forward. What is interesting to me is not what is lacking from the film in the recounting, but how the recounting is a process of addition which grows from the film even while it might leave out parts of that source material. In this way, the unreliable narrator offers a provocation not for a return to the stillness of certainty, but for the movement of more emerging possibilities.

Kristeva alludes to something similar in her proposal for future *Abject* art, which involves processes of "anamnesis on the one hand, and gaming on the other" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 33). In terms of *Amnesia* Kristeva expands this as "a sort of eternal return, repetition, perlaboration, elaboration" (Lotringer & Kristeva, 1999). Within *Aperitif* the process of *Amnesia* is enacted as the player returns to walking a path through the same environment with different characters, as well as through the game form which allows itself to be replayed[31].

Kristeva follows *Anamnesis* with *Gaming* which involves "compositions,

decompositions, recompositions" and is presented as a continuation of the same "trajectory" as *Anamnesis* (Kristeva, 1999, p. 33). Examples provided for *Gaming* involve the process of chance through rolling dice, and the "glossolalia in Artaud, or like Finnegan's Wake" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 33). This resonates with *Aperitif* on multiple levels. Within the "endogenous frame" (Montola, 2008, p. 23) *Aperitif*, despite being fairly linear in form, *composes, decomposes,* and *recomposes* itself continually. From the position of the player-audience, this is perhaps most clear as the game shifts its genre and method of play at points. At points the player controls characters which walk around an environment and interact with one another in the manner of a role playing game. At other points the game switches to the form of a medical simulator where the player-audience must diagnose and repair a robotic character with a completely different mode of interaction from the role playing game sections. This medical simulation then decomposes further as the performing of a specific repair takes the form of side scrolling "shoot 'em up", a game within a game within a game. What would however be more in keeping with what Kristeva is describing would be evidence that at some level the making of this artwork included a shift to a less consciously direct mode. The reference to dice alongside glossolalia leads me to conclude that Kristeva's *Gaming* is about the movement between conscious decision making, and something else which destabilized it, before

potentially returning to conscious decision making[32]. This destabilisation could be through the cold probability of a dice roll, the path for the works creation decided by the resulting number[33]. The inclusion of *Finnegan's Wake* and Artaud's glossolalia suggests that the destabilisation does not have to be the surrender to chance. Destabilisation could include the shift to using or creating words based on their sound rather than meaning for example. Cultural theorist Michel de Certeau described glossolalia as "vocal vegetation" (De Certeau, 1996, p. 30) not an exceptional thing constrained to the devout and artists, but the "bodily noises, quotations of delinquent sounds, and fragments of others' voices [which] punctuate the order of sentences with breaks and surprise" (De Certeau, 1996, p. 29). The language in *Aperitif,* particularly where it comes to building its world through this language feels full of moments of shifts to a destabilised mode. *Swamp-Dot-Com* is populated with things like "bombo cabbage bludbud", "lichen mommy board" and "whackback"[34] (Heartscape & Rook, 2018) .

This play in language is subtle, but I believe it a shift away from the direct conveyance of meaning to sounds and the joy of what words written down can do[35].

Where the gap between Kristeva and Lotringer's *Abject Art*, Hedva's *Sick*

Woman Theory, and *Aperitif* widens is with the issue of the abject and identity. Lotringer sees *Abjection's* relation to Fascism (which he stresses is its origin in Bataille's text) "displaced" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 28) in its later use by artists and writers. He broadens this further with the claim that "politics has become the politics of the notion of identity" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 28). This broad position is agreed by Kristeva who replies "everything has been taken up by the "politically correct" which are in fact identity related claims" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 28). It is this identity that Kristeva and Lotringer see in what they consider the problematic *Oppositional Practice* already outlined. I would like to argue though that their perceived problem with *Abject* identity would not apply to the way identity figures in *Sick Woman Theory.* Hedva sets out their position with clarity;

> "The sick woman is an identity and body that can belong to anyone denied the privileged existence, or the cruelly optimistic promise of such an existence- of the white, straight, healthy, neurotypical, upper and middle class, cis and able-bodied man" (Hedva, 2016).

Sick Woman Theory is not a politics of sexual identity, but a broad identity which encapsulates sexual identity along with bodily, cognitive, and class differences. This is not the sidestepping of class struggle and opposition to Fascism Lotringer in particular is concerned with in his observations about

previous attempts at an *Abject* turn in art. Hedva creates an amorphous, fluid grouping, and brings to the centre difference and care under the banner of the *Sick Woman*. Returning to *The Laugh of The Medusa*, Hedva's project has strong resonances with Cixous's;

> "If there is a "property of woman," it is paradoxically her capacity to depreciate unselfishly: body without end, without appendage, without principal "parts." If she is a whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organised around any one sun that's any more of a star than the others" (Cixous, 1976, p. 889).

Cixous frames this "property of woman" within a text which is concerned with the practice of making art, but this practice is part of a process which includes woman putting herself "into the world and into history" (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). Writing is embedded in a politics of living[36]. For Cixous's *Woman* to write only in the dominant mode of *Man's Writing*, is to be restricted not only from *Writing Herself* (as Cixous would put it) but to enter into the world as a subject, as an agent. If we read Cixous's *Woman* not in terms of an essentialist category which might be attached to some biological marker, but as a class category, she readily aligns with Hedva's *Sick Woman*. Cixous's contemporaries Deleuze and Guattari describe the process of "becoming-woman" which can be considered like the former's *Woman* but rather than a

Balaclava [CARE, RPG]

(changing) class it is explicitly a process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 248). MacCormack gives a succinct explanation of *Becoming-Woman,* "Woman as minoritarian is defined by lack and failure so an element of woman - gesture, fluid libidinality - taken in or as part of the self will necessarily alter the self" (MacCormack, 2008, p. 92). In Hedva's text, the *Woman* is named for the "subject position [that] represents the uncared for, the secondary, [...] the non-, the un-, the less-than" (Hedva, 2016).

The call Cixous is making entails a process of *Becoming,* which MacCormack describes as selecting "certain specificities and intensities of a thing and [dissipating] those intensities within our own molecularities to redistribute our selves" (MacCormack, 2008, p. 92). Cixous calls us to redistribute into ourselves the intensity of fluid libidinality which she calls the "unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love" (Cixous, 1976, p. 893). This pull of desire and connectivity reads like an antithesis of artist Valerie Solanas's description of "the male" as an "unresponsive lump, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure or happiness[37]" (Solanas, 1971, p. 1).

The *Woman* in *Sick Woman Theory* is similarly a source of creative desire, which Hedva explains through a description of some of their own symptoms;

"Because of these "disorders," I have access to incredibly vivid

emotions, flights of thought, and dreamscapes, to the feeling that my mind has been obliterated into stars, to the sensation that I have become nothingness, as well as to intense ecstasies, raptures, sorrows, and nightmarish hallucinations" (Hedva, 2016).

These descriptions form part of Hedva's consideration of political agency of those, who for bodily, social, or other reasons cannot engage in the direct politics of public action. However the language, as with Solanas's, is as concerned with emotion, affect, aesthetics, and creativity. Solanas's *Male* is "incapable of empathizing" (Solanas, 1971, p. 1) while "Sick Woman Theory asks you to stretch your empathy" (Hedva, 2016). Solanas's manifesto is explicitly a response to the boredom society provocokes[38] as it is dominated by the "psychically passive" figure of the *Male* (Solanas, 1971, p. 1). Without exoticising and objectifying illness, mental or otherwise, the subject of *Sick Woman Theory* is undoubtedly a creative force.

I hope that I have demonstrated that the world, characters, and player-audience experience of *Aperitif* have a resonance with theories of *Abjection*, and creative difference connected to a broad category of *Woman*. However *Aperitif* is still on one level, a video game about a group of runaway broken robots, and hybrid animal kids trying to improvise through wasteland failures, emergent tactics of living through giving and receiving care.

Throughout *Aperitif,* many things are left undefined, or only implied. Dialogues are full of the pointed absence of speech in ellipses. Delivery of information gives way to *Gaming*. Character's themselves are unsure of what has happened, cannot remember, are too traumatised, or simply offer a conflicting view of events to one another. Finally the game itself, with its limited interface and graphics which hark back to games long before the turn of the millennium, makes clear that details are being withheld. With this in mind, the group of protagonists being self identified as, or implied to be "girls" rather than *Women*, can be understood through another *Becoming* proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, and explored further by MacCormack. Within the context of *Becoming-Woman* Deleuze and Guattari ask "What is a girl? What is a group of girls?[39]" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). They consider Marcel Proust's protagonist's search for "fugitive beings" in "In search of

lost time Vol 5: The Captive & The Fugitive" (Proust, 2010) and conclude that the Girl whether singular or in a pack, is "pure haecceity[40]" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 271).

MacCormack states that the *Girl* is the "larval woman"(MacCormack, 2008, p. 92), but "It is not the girl who becomes a woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl [...] the girl is the becoming-woman of each sex, just as the child is the becoming-young of every age" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277). For Deleuze and Guattari, *Girl* is the individuation of *Becoming-Woman*, not attached to any substance or function, or "age group, sex, order, or kingdom" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277). *Girls* in *Aperitif* are undefined, only self identified in one instance and they move "between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce n molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277). They speak in irony, silence, thoughts of sex and unspeakable past trauma and modify their bodies with drugs and used parts. They are elusive, arising moment to moment from encounters. MacCormack notes that the "less defined a term is within majoritarian culture the more larval the becoming and thus the move open to unique and unpredictable folding and unfolding the becoming" (MacCormack, 2008, p. 92). *Girls* are capable of *Abject* art practices in the manner argued by Lotringer

You are conscious, but cannot perceive any phenomena. It's impossible to track time in this context. As if you were in a sensory deprivation tank, but perfect. You feel nothing. Then you hear a sound from far away and then it is all around you, a dry electronic kick drum repeating fast. A heartbeat of a runner.

Then a high ringing noise like a bell, but again perfect and unwavering,

and Kristeva, slipping between dualisms, rather than in reactive opposition. As Deleuze and Guattari write, *Girls* "draw their strength neither from the molar status that subdues them nor from the organism and subjectivity they receive; they draw their strength from the becoming-molecular they cause to pass between sexes and ages" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277). So it is no wonder that the *Girls* in *Aperitif* improvise in the wasteland of *Swamp-Dot-Com*. They are ungraspable in their identities, and forever on the way to something. They tell as much, even though for them the process might be traumatic, potentially dooming them to "never perfectly live or die" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

The final analysis of this artwork is concerned with *Breaking Down*. The phrasing here is carefully considered, because *Breaking Down* needs to be understood in terms of collapse, disassembly, failure, and most importantly, trauma. *Breaking Down* is both the process of system failing, and the scars which are brought about by this, and which fold into future points of *Breaking Down*. There is an obvious crossover here with the previously examined figure of *Waste.* However *Breaking Down* brings the focus to the process and experience of trauma that leads to the production of some kinds of *Waste* but also creates other things. *Aperitif* is a game-artwork about trauma, specifically the gendered trauma enacted upon women. Author and

translator Susan Sellers addresses the various relationships between death and writing in Cixous's work, in a journal article entitled "'Writing is learning to die': Hélène Cixous and the School of the Dead" (Sellers, 2002). Sellers explores the various texts where Cixous considers the premature death of her father, firstly in regards to how his death led her from "fantasy and denial to [the] inscription, recreation" of writing, but also how visiting his grave was an "unmeeting", which rendered her father as "strange other" (Sellers, 2002). Secondly, Sellers considers how trauma is embedded in Cixous's relationship with text, citing the latter's claim that "we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply" (Cixous, 2005). Sellers shows how this embedding of trauma is present in Cixous's theory of writing, which involves the "death of the writer's self" in order to give birth to writing, and a new self (Sellers, 2002). In Cixous's own description, the trauma of proximity to death does not replace the self, but stretches them out into the unknown. "The dead man's death gives us the essential primitive experience, access to another world, which is not without warning or noise but which is without the loss of our birthplace" (Cixous, 2005, p. 10).

Through the narrative of *Aperitif* we learn of a powerful object called "the artefact" within the wasteland of *Swamp-Dot-Com* which the company
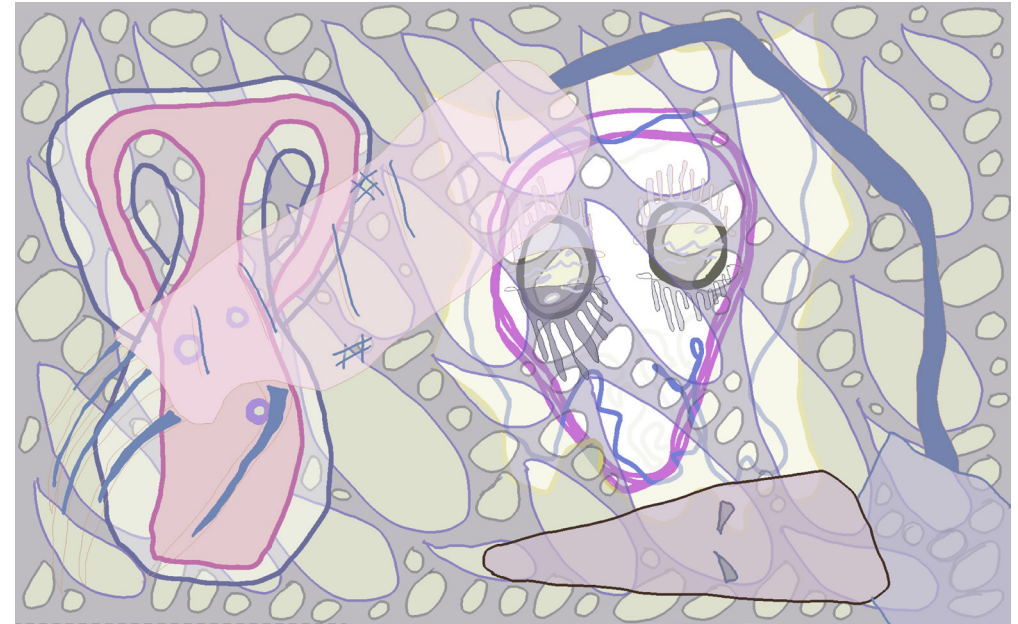
Vase [DIAGRAM]

that employs the protagonists is aware of, but which the protagonists only experience through the psychic effects the object provokes in those in its proximity (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). *The Artefact* is not shown directly, but we learn from *The Therapist* that it has been marked by whomever made it, to indicate that it is "flawed" and "a failure" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). What parts of *The Artefact* and its functions constitute this *flaw* is unknown to any characters and to us as player-audience. All we know is that it is in some way broken and discarded in the wasteland, but it is nevertheless incredibly powerful. This power consists of a projected "two fold radius" defence system (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). The outer radius "triggers negative memories" and the inner radius consists of a burst of "stupid destruction" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018). Within the game-artwork we experience these defensive measures by witnessing the player character's getting lost in traumatic memories, as well as visual and auditory noise which disrupts the image of the game-artwork[41].

Trauma, whether caused by *The Artefact's* defences, or replayed as memory triggered by the environment or conversation, the collapse of bodies, or simply as the experience of the day of work over which *Aperitif* occur, is a principle experience of the characters. Likewise, as we see from the defective *Artefact* and the failed-urbanism-become-toxic-environment of

Swamp-Dot-Com everything in *Aperitif* is scarred. This focus on "imperfect bodies" and the use of themes of "physical disabilities and deformity" aligns *Aperitif* with games designer and theorist Mary Flanagan's observation of thematic tendencies in cyberpunk narratives written by women (Flanagan, 2002, p. 433).

A second observation that Flanagan makes is that "women tend to explore manipulation of both male and female bodies, complicating notions of gender norms, heterosexual desire, race, and class" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 433). This also holds true to *Aperitif*, as previously demonstrated in its fracturing of trans* identity into cyborgs and hybrid humanoids which exist not as a contrasting "other" but complex heterogeneous milieu.

Where our player-characters are unified is in their class relation as workers who must sell their labour in dangerous conditions for subsistence pay. The class relation as exploitation is further emphasised as the player-characters are denied choice or agency in their work. All are either compelled to do this work as punishment for minor crimes, or in the case of the escapee "labor drones" because their very existence is illegal and few methods of earning money are therefore available (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

Because of its narrative framing *Aperitif* is, in addition to being an RPG, and Medical Sim, effectively a *Precarious Labour Sim*. Player-characters spend the entire duration of the game either working, or negotiating the debilitating/ overwhelming effects of traumas. As the game reminds you, if at any point you wish to, you can always hold down the escape key until you black out. It embodies what theorist Mark Fisher articulated in the 2014 book "Ghosts of my Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures";

> "As Berardi has argued, the intensity and precariousness of late capitalist work culture leaves people in a state where they are simultaneously exhausted and overstimulated[42]" (Fisher, 2014, p. 20).

This definition of the precarious worker calls back to the *Negative Abjection* already discussed at length, and focused on the removal of agency. However this class relation can also be seen as one of the ways *Breaking Down* occurs in Aperitif as it is inflicted by the game on its player-characters.

Other occurrences of *Breaking Down* appear through the representation of the space in which *Aperitif* takes place where paths are cut through and across previous structures now in the process of decay. The space where player-characters can be moved by the player-audience is primarily represented by floating pathways over a black void. These paths present

fragments of previous roads and architecture, without following the routes of movement which those spaces imply. At one point the pathway the player-character can traverse zigzags across the screen, requiring player-character to take a meandering serpentine route to cross to the next scene. A direct route, in the form of road markings on the fragmented pathway is evidenced to have been available at some point in the past, though this road is now broken up with the black untraversable voids. Further examples of the world as *Breaking Down* are seen in the numerous signs which can be read in *Swamp-Dot-Com*. Many of the signs point to something that is not shown in the depiction of the space implying that the sign has survived a building which has collapsed. Similarly, many of the signs are covered in graffiti, where not only the original context for the sign has collapsed, but the context for the new handwritten message has also disappeared.

What the landscape of *Aperitif* shows us, as well as its player-character's engagement in salvaging refuse technology, is that along with trauma *Breaking Down* involves the creation of new things while those old things break[43].

I would argue that what I am referring to as *Breaking Down*, namely trauma and damage as a creative force for good or bad, is one of the main themes

throughout *Aperitif*. Within the "diegetic frame" of the player-character's lives and the world they inhabit this is explicit (Montola, 2008, p.23). A physically damaging environment is the site within which all action plays out, and trauma in the form of conflict with authority is the reason for all player-characters to be present in this space. The player-characters exist in a state of near permanent fatigue and anxiety, whilst a section of the game-artwork involves repairing a robot character's intestines, heart, and voice-box. The player-characters are employed to collect broken and redundant technology for reuse as salvage, and the environment in which they work is a former automatic shopping centre which is now grown over with dangerous plant-life. Finally, *The Artefact* around which the narrative orientates, is articulated by the game as an unknown entity in all regards save that it is itself damaged and provokes painful memories and "stupid destruction" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018).

As discussed previously with regard to gaps in information (conversations which trail off, contradict one another, or are simply silent) and information which points beyond the scope of the game-artwork (layers of history presented in fragments and ruins), *Breaking Down* occurs also at the level of player-audience interaction with the game-artwork, within the "endogenous frame" (Montola, 2008, p. 23).

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE [CARE]

ARE MANY ROOMS SOMETHING SOMETHING

#

In my father's house are many room. Something Something.

A black placenta-like form runs through the floors. Over and over, many lines connected and splitting and reconnecting like an enlarged microbe. Like plague under microscope.

I said "me father's house" because I think I remember that line from somewhere. Like "my brother Paul is coming" in Dune. But it isn't true, it's not my father's house, its mine.

#

I shouldn't need to invoke paternal authority like that. It is diminishing of oneself.

#

Welcome to my home. Oiled woodwork gulps its way up and around you, soft knots of dead velvet hang ruggedly everywhere. The carpet is soaked. In places the floor has begun to give way and it leaves little pools.

#

The water table is a few inches above the boards.

#

However for the player-audience these games and provocations within the *Endogenous Frame* arguable overlap with the *Diegetic Frame's* player-characters into which they are invested and are experiencing the game through. In order to deal with the transgression of these structures which occurs in playing video-games, Flanagan proposes the concept of the "hyperbody", the simultaneous and multiple existence of controlling an avatar on screen, while also have a physical body of one's own (Flanagan, 2002);

> "I would argue that the computer world user experience a kind of double consciousness: the class, race, and gender identity of the user's physical body, as well as the virtual body (bodies) of the characters he or she "becomes"; when we "look" at a screen while we play a game and also "look" through a character's eyes and turn the head both are simultaneously "real" (Flanagan, 2002).

While the three frame structure proposed by Montola is doubtlessly useful for identifying the complexity of role play and the different levels it operates at, Flanagan makes clear that these are not compartmentalized, and that the experience of an artwork-game like *Aperitif* is smeared across them in a process of "double embodiment" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 438). The *Frame* experience of being in one's own body, navigating a game full of pockets of

---

"My brother Paul is coming" I mutter to myself as a I childishly kick through the sheet of liquid full of wood pulp, loose threads, and microbes. It stinks here. I think about the flooded basements below and the weakened supports between, the house now a boat held above the sea only by the rocks it collided with.

\#

It looks fine from without, but…

\#

A cliché I know, and the house is not the subconscious, as I said, this is not my father's house, it is mine.

\#

I stop kicking and walk more carefully, watching for where the carpet bulges threateningly, mindful that my feet might pass through. I pick up a shattered curtain rod and use it ahead of me as I work my way down the hall, poking at the floor with suspicion. I use one hand while the other holds the tapestry I wear like a robe, keeping it closed at my chest. My clothes are drying on the roof, victim of an earlier fall when I slipped on rotten book of historical isometric exercises. Flex and balance. Bang I hit the soaked floor, my fall dislodging the glass eye from a stuffed rhino head, barely holding its form in a fireplace where it had been stuffed to block a torrent of rain. As shocked as me, the eyeball stared straight up. My back soaked, I was forced to disrobe and find something to wear, an Afghan war rug the

Breaking Down is simultaneously in operation alongside the life trauma of the player-character who one is controlling within the *Diegetic Frame*. For Flanagan, the a "hyperknowledge is created within [the] third space in the relationship between the virtual body and the physical" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 440). *Hyperknowledge* is more than the combination of player-audience and the character which they are effectively and empathetically engaged with. Flanagan makes clear that it is the process of moving an avatar through space which creates *Hyperknowledge*, it requires agency and the capacity to describe a different path through the virtual space each time[44]. Drawing on Lyotard, Flanagan argues for the control of the character on screen to be understood in terms of performativity[45];

> "Performance as "a rendition" through movement or experience seems appropriate because, first, it allows performance to be an "incident" at each viewing event, and, second, it changes from viewer to viewer, from time to time" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 441).

This approach is particularly relevant to *Aperitif* where even prior to accounting for restarting or replaying the game-artwork, the player-audience *Performs* a number of player-characters, each with conflicting knowledge of events. This is what Flanagan elsewhere describes as "a conflicting but somehow overall knowledge" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 437). Montola's framework allows

only viable option.

\#

I catch sight of myself in the reflection of the floor, still now I had unthinkingly stopped as I recalled my fall. I look like the girl Alia from the film. "My brother Paul is coming".

\#

us open up *Hyperknowledge* further, and see that there are two processes in operation in what Flanagan calls a *Rendition*, even if these processes are always overlapping. Within the *Diegetic Frame* the player-audience is performing the role of the character within the game. When I play *Aperitif* I am *Performing* one of the player-characters, I respond to questions from other characters based on what I want for the self I am performing. However, I am also operating within the *Endogenous Frame*, and am aware that those answers are not my own, but rather I am using the games interface to select from the dialogue options presented to me. The *Hyperknowledge* is made up of; the self that chose to download and play *Aperitif*, the self that is learning the rules and goals of playing it, and the self that is *Ever* deciding whether to tell *Brava* how much pain she is in. All of these selves are concurrent, and contain conflicting knowledge, but as Flanagan makes clear, even when multiplying these selves and their contradictions through replaying the game-artwork an overall (but never universal) knowledge is being produced. The player-audience of *Aperitif* makes multiple passes through the space, as multiple player-characters, through multiple replays, while both the *Diegetic* and *Endogenous Frames* are in the process of *Breaking Down* and producing new things. The multiple passes do not add up to a whole, they never become a single static universal account but remain agitated and generative at their points of contradiction.

The process of playing *Aperitif* and its production of *Hyperknowledge* has a strong resonance with Acker's practice of writing through appropriating existing texts, a prominent example of this being "Great Expectations" (Acker, 1999)[46]. In an interview, when asked about identity Acker responds that it "wasn't the I it was the text because its texts that create the identity, that's how I got interested in plagiarism" (Acker, 1991, p. 7). The plagiarised text becomes the virtual space through which Acker moves in the act of *Rendition*[47 48 49].

Where Acker describes this as the production of identity, Flanagan offers what amounts to the same observation;

> "[T]he array of views, the fluidity, and the movement within virtual worlds is one of the primary means by which [the gaming] subject is created" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 442).

Flanagan proposes not just an epistemology being produced through combined and multiple, contradictory, embodied knowledges, but the production of subject. Flanagan draws on media theorist Allucquére Stone's suggestion that one might "imagine the location of the self that inhabits the body as [...] socially mediated [...] the physical location of the

subject independent of the body" (Stone, 1995, p. 92). However just as *Hyperknowledge* is not a "universal" gods-eye view, but multiple differing accounts, it would seem that the self derived from the *Renditions* of the game space must be equally fractured. A subject would then not be a fixed entity, or even one which develops, but multiple and varied positions arising from performance and established as much from their divergences as their coherence. Once again this aligns with Acker's description of plagiarism as method;

> "A split identity is a more viable way into the world. I was splitting the I into false and true I's and I just wanted to see if this false I was more or less real that the true I; What are the reality levels between false and true and how it worked" (Acker, 1991, p. 7).

Returning to Aperitif, we can consider how a subject emerges from the *Renditions* the player-audience performs within the game-artwork. We can also see how each *Rendition* involves multiple embodiments across the *Diegetic* and *Endogenous Frames*, as well as *Exogenous Frame* which bridges the player-audience to the world beyond *Aperitif* (the *Exogenous Frame* structures the very act of playing, such as accessing a computer, having time to play, acquiring the game, etc.). The subject emerges from friction between embodiments that comprise a *Rendition*, and across

repeated *Renditions*. Even if the player-audience plays *Aperitif* once and never returns, the agency involved in moving through the space points to other paths that could be taken, so further *Renditions* are always present as speculative potential. This friction between contradictory embodiments is an example of the creative process I already referred to as *Breaking Down*, where trauma and damage are generative forces. Acker provides another example of this process with her concept of pushing a text "past failure";

> "[Past failure is] to go into the space of wonder. What I have always hated about the bourgeois story is that it closes down. I don't use the bourgeois story-line because the real content of that novel is the property structure of reality. [...] My world isn't about ownership, in my world people don't even remember their names, they aren't sure of their sexuality, and they aren't sure if they can define their genders" (Acker, 1991, p. 23).

On a literal level the player-characters, if not all characters in *Aperitif* exist outside of a world of ownership as they are engaged in the lowest forms of employment and punishment and the labour-drones in addition do not even hold the potential for legal ownership of their own bodies. In terms of the bourgeois narrative *Aperitif* is, as I have demonstrated already, a work where the processes of ownership through names, language, and other codes are riddled with holes. Names of characters and things are obliterated and remade, no real narrative resolution is offered, and all

THE WOODLANDS OUTSIDE THE FINISHING PLANT [CARE, DIAGRAM]

It is debatable how much use I am. It is in fact constantly being debated. I can hear my use-value being considered by at least one person at almost any moment when I care to listen. That is maybe a little self centred, the use being debated is never just mine, but rather how I might be useful in combination with some political event or ecological principle. However, as I am bumped along corridor after corridor of rot-smelling wood, a damp sack over my head cutting out all light but the periodic LED light of security panels as we pass bulkheads at kilometre intervals, it feels very personal.

\#

We are waiting to eat. We have been waiting for a long time, countable in years if not decades. We sit here in the open space carved out from thick forest by an unusually rocky area of soil subsequently scorched and polluted with chemicals. Looking up, as we were oft to do in the early years, we can see a clear night sky encircled with the tops of conifers. A passing comet crosses on a curve and offers a reminder of the original celestial event which caused this scarred little pore to break up the roll of green. At last we hear the lock rods of the shipping container slide back and figures emerge from the earth.

through this sentences trail off into silence, noise, or references never fully explained. Author Matthew James Vechinski explains how Acker's concept of working "past failure" is derived from the process of "eccentric training, the lowering of weights against the pull of gravity which bodybuilders exploit to cause extreme strain on their muscles" (Vechinski, 2013, p. 530). Vechinski continues;

> "[I]n her essay "Bodies of Work" she describes how working isolated muscle groups past failure in this way breaks them down in order to "shock [the] body into growth" (Bodies 145, "Devoured" 22-23)." (Vechinski, 2013, p. 530).

As Vechinski notes, Acker's plagiarism is "a method that surpasses what is expected of procedure" (Vechinski, 2013, p. 530). I cannot speak of the methods of production used in *Aperitif* beyond those self evident in the work, but I would argue that its requirement of player-audience agency (you cannot experience *Aperitif* without complicit action) while being filled with holes and unresolved vectors out of the narrative, pushes the player-audience experience past failure. To use the body-building analogy, there are points where more weight is put on the player-audience than is supportable by the hole filed codes and collapsing structures of the game, and out of this failure something new has to arise. *Aperitif* see the method which Acker used to write, deployed at the point of player-audience encounter, which is to say,

#

The tunnel slopes upward and the walk becomes more painful as I bang more frequently against supporting bars, or trip on rough and slippery ground. The sack slips as I fall and billows full of air ripe with the scent of white mold and healthy bacteria. I see my hands briefly in front of me as a I fall, tied crossed at the wrist with pink, green and yellow ribbons. I feel the ground thud into the palm of the hand tied lowest and the cap of the knee on the same side. The ground has a thin layer of mud and is comprised of fragments that feel like ground up pieces of plastic. I am helped up as I hear someone opening a door.

#

The procession steps out from the shadows of the trees in the star-lit clearing, we see the silhouette of one break off to crouch by a small generator near buried in fallen needles. We feel the radiation as the power source is engaged, it lights up tracks of nerves in our bodies which are so long out of use as to feel vestigial. We feel ourselves differently, just as a blast of cold water might make us aware of extremities we had taken for granted and forgotten. A switch sends power to overlapping trails of lanterns in the trees five metres or so up. The night sky made like warm ink within this circle of light.

#

The air feels sharp and the ground feels warm. I'd been underground walking for

the site where *Aperitif* is produced[50].

Returning to Acker's refusal of the structures of bourgeois writing it is worth noting that even on a narrative level *Aperitif*'s use of trauma is not the familiar form of destabilizing traumatic event which is eventually resolved. There is no heroics in *Aperitif*, only fatigue, damage, shame, disorientation, moments of love, and somehow a stemmed decline.

I have used the term *Breaking Down* because it resonates for me in terms of both a traumatic psychic or physical collapse (past failure) as well as the process of disassembly. Both of these metaphorical processes result in something new being created, the person who collapses exhausted at work, and the car wrenched apart at the scrap yard each result in something different, and at least partially unexpected, emerging. *Aperitif* is essentially a ragged core sample cut from a long smeared out *break* which extends beyond it in all directions. Neither the trauma experienced by characters, nor disruption of the *Endogenous Frame,* is resolved into stability, but remains a mixture of pain and survival, collapse and adaptation.

Cixous proposed that the creative producer "take pleasure in jumbling the order of space" and asks "who hasn't [...] punctured the system of couples

so long that the sensations of coming up to the surface was just a confused collision of events which ended with the bang of a large metal door behind me. Cold pine breeze and dizzying feeling of space between tree trunks. I am lost in thought and then a small noise and I am coaxed forward by the arms that hold me and then I reflexively glance up as light appears above and through the fabric I can just see a halo. I am helped forwards until I am near the middle of this circle of orange light, still looking up when the hood comes off.

\#

In the light we look at ourselves. Each different but still indistinguishable. The entourage has brought the witness to the middle of our circle and has now politely backed away leaving them with hands gesturally bound in the colours of the stomach. The witness is here only to see, to consume and be consumed only symbolically. We can now begin to create the new sovereign who will go on walking these woods like those before, worshipped by that other community at the far end of the tunnel until they return to us. Their arrival tells us we have grown fat enough, and that the last queen is now dead. Our hunger is electric in these moments of anticipation.

\#

I look around at the creatures that sit just in side the edge of the treeline. Each is raised up on a warn table of glassy stone and they are near covered in dead pine needles, cobwebs, sap, and dirt. The smell of pine hangs over everything but an

and opposition?" (Cixous, 1976, p. 887). The messy smear of stemmed decline which constitutes a player-audience's *Rendition* of *Aperitif* is just such a pleasureful jumbling. When Kristeva questions the Aristotelian position of art as cathartic purification[51], the question becomes "What are we purifying ourselves of in the arts?" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 17).

Kristeva's answer to this is "a non-respect of structure" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 18). *Aperitif* is not providing purification, it does not resolve, and does not even respect the borders of its own software as the point where the player-audience is required to look at *Agate's* manual, a PDF file is opened in whatever is the default reader on the computer where *Aperitif* is being played. Likewise, the ever present option for the player-audience to hold down the Esc key to "black out" (Heartscape & Rook, 2018), folds everything external to *Aperitif* into its *Exogenous Frame*. As I tried to argue with reference to Acker's methods, the agency and complicity required by *Aperitif* of player-audience through *Rendition,* and *Breaking Down* position the production of the work as much in the moment of play as in Heartscape and Rook's prior coding and design. *Aperitif* is, in my opinion, *Écriture Féminine*, but this process of production also exists where each player-audience meets the game-artwork[52].

acid sweetness rises up between the sparse gusts of wind. I watch as needles are shed while figures move with a slow calmness towards and across one another. Mouths open and then close around part of passing body, teeth barely seen. The pageantry continues and the gestures become more elaborate and more is bitten away leaving silhouettes abscised, raw and bleeding.

\#

We begin, bodies aching at first but remembering with each step and letting pain fall away to practiced flourish and gesture. We take from each of us and become lighter and reshaped, years of static growth pared back revealing a new whole and new parts. Our stomachs shift to accommodate our new outline and to hold all the pieces of ourselves we have carefully bitten off. We move in euphoric knots, slick with blood and thinned sap and the waxy bacteria cells of an uncountable number of nameless others which are nevertheless vital players in this performance. "We" is such a small word to account for so many.

\#

It is impossible to keep track of what I am seeing. I turn slowly and stupidly on the spot, tied hands held across my belly, eyes barely focusing on the scene which moves with such precision. The smell is intoxicating and I feel dizzy. A meridian must have been passed because the dance changes. Pieces of flesh are delicately regurgitated, squeezed from each mouth and now carried in the flow of knots.

Cixous writes;

> "Woman couldn't care less about the fear of decapitation (or castration), adventuring without the masculine temerity, into anonymity, which she can merge with without annihilating herself; because she is a giver" (Cixous, 1976, p. 888).

This is the same "merging with" which constitutes the production of what Flanagan names the *Hyperbody*, and it produces the ""knowing" through performance" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 439) of *Hyperknowledge* via "the agency of navigation situated in multiple subjectivities" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 441).

Chewed proto-body-parts held between limbs which roll and twist, pressing into form a new additional creature between them, slick with bile and flecked with spores. The original circle retreats, now so slight. The new figure sits before me.

#

We lose all and gain more than could be positively expressed. Ecstatic exhaustion smears time and thought as lichen drives across stone. Everything has been made thin but now our consciousness thickens back to where can can see the new sovereign which we have made. They sit before us, us but not us, watching the witness who has seen all of their birth. We feel tired, and the breeze feels sharp on our newly shaped bodies. Dust and needles and small insects begin to adhere to us and senses dull beneath their protection. The Queen shakily walks out of the circle. The witness finally shuts off the generator as they leave for the tunnel.

#

There is no reason for you to live; Conclusions

This document has used an artwork as a pivot, finding creative practices which have a resonance with the artwork, and bringing them into proximity with one another via the artwork. I do not think it serves this method well to now attempt to summarize the relationships, overlaps, and frictions between the theories. That has been done partially at points in the document, but an attempt to summarize it all risks both encapsulating it in one perspective (in one *Rendition* of the paths available through the theories), and erasing the friction between them, and the other potential lines of inquiry which extend beyond this document.

There are some points about the relationship between the theories which could be highlighted here as a means to opening more lines out from the document.

The document began with Eugene Thacker's definition of horror as laying in the passages between two statements or states. These being "I can't believe what I'm seeing" and "I can't see what I believe" (Thacker, 2015, p. 14). Horror, both in Thacker's definition, and as connected to theories of *Abjection*, and in the feminist deconstruction of myths like Medusa, has

run under this document, but rarely surfaced. *Aperitif* is a work of horror, but its negative affects of shame and anguish don't arise from the unseen or unbelievable. The negative affects arise from the all too visible, too believable nightmare of the precarious lives of surplus bodies whom power deems illegitimate. Thacker's horror instead becomes the site of potential for such subjects as the player-characters, and the *Hyperbody* of the player-audience's *Renditions* through the game space in concert with those player-characters. Thacker's definition of horror, could be applied to the writing practices of Cixous or Acker, or the political practices of Hedva or Goard, including from the point of view of the fixed political/aesthetic/moral powers they speak of navigating. Thacker's horror definition is a succinct account of affective processes which I feel has potential for being further transplanted to other contexts and proximities in order to address art practice[53].

Another finding from this document is the resonance between *Feminist* art practices (specifically writing) and the agency involved in being the player-audience of a game-artwork. This isn't to say playing a video-game encapsulates *Écriture Féminine*, but there is potential for art practice in recognising how the former is site of production, and as Flanagan notes *Hyperknowledge* combining "situated knowledge" with an external view (Flanagan, 2002). This external view includes what Flanagan describes as

an "Omniscience of sorts" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 437), which is generated as composite of multiple *Renditions*

I am particularly interested in how this document's method of aligning the experience of play with various creative processes might be further developed. Considering the player-audience position as one where they use agency to negotiate provocations, parts of systems, tools, and plagiarised remains, connects to my proposals elsewhere in this PhD Output to consider the artwork in terms of the manual for a Role Playing Game. That is, the audience's encounter with artwork, and the artists prior process of making the artwork, are agentic creative encounters from which art affects are made, and remade.
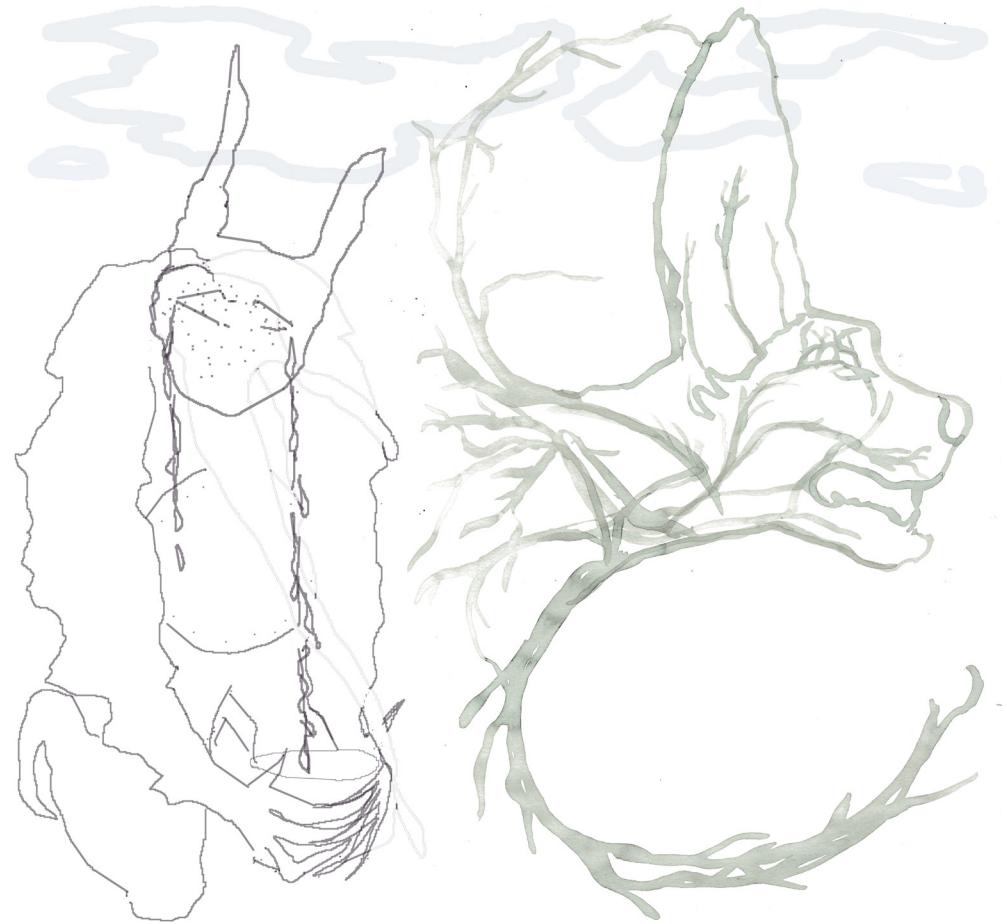
Dog Cry [DIAGRAM]

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A thin fog rises up around you. Static arcs between you and your surroundings. The light above the counter flickers, and this time it does not return.

You are in total darkness.

You realise you cannot even hear the sounds of electric sawing and pneumatic presses squashing household objects for YouTube streams in the other workshops.

Everything is very still, and then you see it turn to page 143 of Ahuman Use

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"ʕ•ﻌ•ʔ" - Rosa Luxemburg

[Thank you for playing this story has two other endings, turn to page 28 of any of the three books to make different choices]

net/2016/03/07/hypertextual-trauma-porpentines-twine-games-and-the-borders-of-self-narration/

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The figure in the chair speaks with you at length.

Occasionally the hologram splits, and a silhouette you recognise as your own is now also sitting on the stage helping to outline a theory of "Diva[1] Solidarity[2]".

The hologram continues to subdivide, turn to page 145 of Ahuman Use

[1.] Diamanda Galás as model for the unquestionable permission for one's existence and desires and needs specific to the gut, skin, cortex, socio economic condition etc. which you find yourself in.

[2.] The conditions of support for loved ones and comrades to become-diva and that this mutual aid is also extended from them to you and you with them to them. Love as permission for existence. The collective shaping the world so that their loved one can exist on their own terms like a fucking exploding star.

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There is no reason for you to live; Endnotes

1. For a long time during its development, the title of this document was encased in quotation marks. Through extensive searching I have still been unable to find the source of the quote, and so have decided that perhaps I was its author. This document was begun during the period of time where I was ceasing my long term use of antidepressants due to their effects on my memory, concentration, and levels of fatigue. The use of the medication had both suppressed long term memories, reduced my capacity to form new memories, and diminished my working memory. The cessation symptoms while tapering my dosage down to nothing over six months included; euphoria, unprovoked weeping, disorientation, and the crashing return of memories which were unfamiliar and untrustworthy, yet on some levels undeniable. The threshold period of antidepressant cessation and the beginnings of this document is a confusing period in my memory, as my memories of it are filled with the often unreliable returning memories from previous periods, and my brain's changing chemistry. This experience underpins this entire document.

2. The hyphenated dual-subject position is borrowed from the science fiction novel "Proxies" by author Laura J. Mixon (Mixon, 1998), that is in turn referenced in games theorist Mary Flanagan's text (Flanagan, 2002) which

features in the second half of this document. The novel features characters which are simultaneously in their own body and remotely controlling a robotic "proxy" body.

3. In 2017 a number of games by Porpentine Charity Heartscape were included in the Whitney Biennial (Swartz, 2017) her practice is increasingly featured in the art press (Chan, 2017; Heartscape, 2019) and her recent novel was published by London gallery Arcadia Missa (Heartscape, 2016).

4. The fanzine article quoted here brings together a number of the ideas which are expanded in this document, while the zine has hung on the wall looking down on me as I work for the last year. I will draw attention to some of them here:

    A. The article is titled "BORED_TRAN_21st_CENTURY.EXE", formatted with underscores in place of spaces, and with the extension for a Windows executable file at the end Silvera presents a text/trans* subject as a computer programme which performs a function.

    B. The article begins with an epigraph from a (as far as I can ascertain) fake text.

    C. This fake text is entitled "DIE CIS SCUM MANIFESTO" and the quote is appropriated from artist Valerie Solanas's text (Solanas, 1971).

    D. The appropriated text has it's woman/man dichotomy replaced

with a trans*/cis one, whilst referencing a meme ('Die Cis Scum', n.d.) that has undergone multiple revolutions of meaning.

E. The article begins "I'm bored" (Silvera, 2017, p. 6).

F. The article calls for a refusal of fixed rules (including those of the real and fake manifesto's implied in the epigraph) and a call to "be kind to each other" (Silvera, 2017, p. 10).

G. "Radical Transfeminism" the zine in which this article appears is co-edited by poet and trans / queer activist Nat Raha.

H. The article uses play as a model for other practices.

5. "Hanzo" and "D.va" are characters from the popular team based online multi-player video game "Overwatch" (Kaplan & Keller, 2016). Of note in this context is the game's emphasis on teamwork as each character has situational strengths and weaknesses. "Overwatch is about team composition and hero switching as well as twitch skill: it's a game of rock-paper-scissors with twenty-one options" (Thursten, 2016)

6. Throughout this document I use the term "trans*" which includes transgender as well as non-binary, genderqueer and other identities. It is an open term which is especially useful when considering individuals whose gender identity is only articulated as not being cisgendered. As theorist Susan Stryker states *Trans** is "a way of pointing to a somewhat

related class of phenomena without having to articulate exactly what that is" (Steinmetz, 2018).

7. In the interest of thoroughness it is perhaps worth noting that Rook is a trans* woman (Geffen, 2018) as is Heartscape, though she "describes herself as "trashgender" rather than transgender" (Kazimarki, 2016). This information however merely offers context, because this document is concerned with what they game-artwork can be made to *do*, rather than the artist's production of it or their identities.

8. "Shmup" refers to a type of video game loosely defined by the mechanics of controlling an avatar (often as spaceship) on a scrolling two dimensional plane, avoiding obstacles, and shooting and avoiding contact with a large number of enemies. For a history of the game type and its many divergences see games design researcher Luke McMillan's PhD thesis chapter "The Origin of The 'Shmup' Genre: A Historical Study" on the website Gamasutra (McMillan, 2013).

9. Game historian Matt Barton notes that the huge number of diverges in computer role playing games makes it difficult to produce a precise definition of the game type. Barton instead opts to use "Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblances."[5]" (Barton, 2008, p. 4) in order to identify

characteristics, and differences from other neighbouring game times. Other than its creator's description, *Aperitif* primarily attaches itself to the game type RPG visually, as its art style, including "top down" perspective and resolution of graphics references the RPGs of the "16-bit" era of the mid 1990s. For examples of this style see video game historian Shaun Musgrave's article for Touch Arcade, "RPG Reload Glossary: 16-bit Paradise, or JRPGs in the early 1990s" (Musgrave, 2017).

10. There is no voice acting in *Aperitif*, both dialogues (from various characters, including internal monologues) and description appear as text on screen. Often, when a character is speaking or thinking, their image will also be displayed on the screen, however this is not consistent. Sometimes dialogue between two characters is displayed in one screen of text, with hard returns at the end of sentences suggesting the shift between voices in the conversation. However, this is also not consistent, and the same hard returns are used (sometimes not corresponding to the end of a sentence) in contexts where it is not clear that there is more than one voice and they suggest more a concern for pacing and emphasis. Throughout the game-artwork, the question of who is speaking, and whether it is an external or interior voice, is to degrees uncertain.

11. See feminist theorist Patricia Melzer's "Alien Constructions" (Melzer,

2006), gender theorist Jenny Wolmark's "Cybersexualities", (Wolmark, 1999), post-human theorist Helen Hester's "Xenofeminism" (Hester, 2018) the Jolene Zigarovich edited "TransGothic in Literature and Culture" (Zigarovich, 2017). For an analysis of playing video-games with emphasis on queer and trans* makers/players, including a chapter on the figure of the cyborg see games theorist Brandon Keogh's "A Play of Bodies How We Perceive Videogames" (Keogh, 2018). Volume 22 issue 2 of ANGELAKI "Tranimacies: Intimate links between animal and trans* studies" contains a number of relevant sections (Hird & Weaver, 2017; Malatino, 2017; Steinbock, Szczygielska, & Wagner, 2017; Szczygielska, 2017; Yoon, 2017).

Finally, the relevance of the figure of the cyborg to trans* studies is best evidenced by perhaps the foremost trans* theorist Susan Stryker's inclusion of Donna Haraway's urtext on cyborg feminism, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" in "The Transgender Studies Reader" (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). An avenue for further investigation would be via cyberfeminism, particular philosopher Sadie Plant's reconfiguration of Luce Irigaray's theories of sexual difference (Plant, 1996, 1998). For a resent survey see writer Rani Baker's article for Medium ""Is Every Woman Here A Sex Change?" — Trans In Cyberpunk RPG" (Baker, 2016). Of particular relevance is the currently-in-development video game "Hardcoded" where "You play the titular character, a droid

nicknamed "Hard Coded" because her factory-given name is masculine and she doesn't like it, but her programming forbids her from choosing a new one" (Gray, 2018).

12. The ellipses in *Aperitif* along with its other instances of expressive absences or damaged/lo definition information and therefore could be further examined in terms of writer and curator Legacy Russell's theory regarding glitches and "sliding between identifications" (Russell, 2012, 2013). This line of inquiry could be then further pursued via artist Hito Steyerl's concept of the "poor image" which can create "disruptive movements of thought and affect" (Steyerl, 2009). Likewise theorist Steven Shaviro's text on the titular "found-footage" horror film "The Glitch Dimension: Paranormal Activity and the Technologies of Vision", presents another point of departure via the deployment of absence and noise in horror cinema (Shaviro, 2017). Shaviro's analysis that "We are affected (and oppressed) as much by their glitches, gaps and limitations as we are by their successful operations" (Shaviro, 2017, p. 331), like those of Russell and Steyerl open up the breaks in digital images as site of both politics and affect.

13. I am being careful to avoid falling to far into interpretation of specific absences, to fall into hermeneutic analysis for its own sake. The purpose and intent of this writing is not to make sense of any particular artwork, but

to find ways to account for and articulate some modes of art and modes of making art which exist outside of what can be securely accounted for in words. It is possible that while reading this, you noticed a shift register over the last few paragraphs. I think there are more references here to myself as the audience of the artwork being considered than there are earlier in this text. There are likely other changes in tone, perhaps more speculation and less use of citations than on average in the preceding paragraphs. The reason for this is I am returning to writing this text after a break. The system which I use to research and plan, which I developed for this particular part of the thesis means that I can pick up easily where I left off. However it strikes me while writing this, that the break in writing, and what it potentially does in terms of affect falls, very much within the research itself, and provides an opportunity to look from another angle at the thing which drew me to write about *Aperitif*. This being the ways in which absence, over saturation, the divergent, and the disorganised can and do function in art and therefore in practice based art research. Returning to Thacker, I can't believe what I see, and I can't see what I believe (Thacker, 2015, p. 15).

I wrote the first four thousand words of this text, and then edited down that first section in order for it to be tested as a twenty minute conference paper for "Beyond The Console: Gender and narrative games" held between The Victoria and Albert Museum and South Bank University, both in London, in

February 2019. The awareness that I would be delivering this research to an audience has what I will refer to as a "crystallizing" effect. I can see the writing, whether it be an academic text or a work of fiction or something in between, as a single form, perhaps in contrast too when writing it I can only see it in small sections. For this conference, the crystallising which allowed me to see the paper as a whole, and gave me doubts as to whether I was following the guidelines for dealing with art as an affective object as set for myself with reference to the work of O'Sullivan. While working through the possible ways to share my research at the conference I decided to try to destabilise the process of my delivery in a manner similar to those I employ in my performance practice. I edited my text for the conference so that it was no longer a draft paper to be read out, but contained a number of elements which would not fit within the time limit of the talk. These elements included the text being the correct length for the presentation, but with the addition of bracketed notes to myself which were prompts to improvise on tangents outside of that text. I did not intend to overrun, and used both my own on stage timing and asked the chair to signal when I had a quarter of my time remaining. I would need to make a decision during the talk as to where and how much I would cut from my script in order to both end on time, and to resolve the argument presented. I delivered my presentation with the written paper, its bracketed notes for deviations, and a slide show with further prompts which were visible to the audience, as a point of departure. I

was able to use different modes of address and styles of language, including a significant amount of gesture. I was able to feel present in the moment of articulating ideas, and to gaps and non-verbal communication to emphasise these as functions employed by the game being discussed. The conference became a process of research, rather than the delivery of prior research.

In the time since the conference, I have stayed with the question of non-hermeneutical accounts of art. I see now after the fact, that many of these resonate with the function of the ellipses, the gap which implies multiple things. I spent some time drawing while writing short fragments of fiction. The stories are included throughout the three books of this PhD output.

14. Klein is one of the bridges between this document and its sister, along with Sedgwick who is in this document separate from Klein, but in that other document, inseparable. As a reader it might be useful to take a break from reading this document (mirroring the break taken in the original draft of writing) and read the sister text, then return. In fact, this entire document which takes up around a quarter of the word count of the entire PhD output is likely best read with multiple breaks to read almost any of the shorter documents across the three books, before returning to continue with this large document. Length of documents is something which I have attempted to treat with a sense of dynamics. In the same way that mixing long

sentences with abrupt ones can create energy and a desire to be read in a single text, I thought that treating the documents in this manner might also instil a dynamism to each book. Actually, that isn't strictly true, I left some texts shorter than others for reasons of dynamics, but I *wrote* them to their respective lengths because *for various reasons specific to each document* that length was appropriate for what they contain and how best this could be delivered to the reader. Sometimes the reasons included dynamics, a few lines to address something elsewhere presented across pages. Sometimes the reason was just "this is where it ends".

15. For Deleuze, the *Phantasm* is "thought's multiplicity", which "cannot be resolved into unity, dialectical or otherwise, but whose unrepresentable excess cannot be understood in negative terms as a lack or absence" (Widder, 2011, p. 98).

16. In "The Laugh of The Medusa" Cixous's "woman" (the subject that is capable of *Écriture Féminine* or women's writing) possesses an "imaginary [that] is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing, their stream of phantasms is incredible" (Cixous, 1976, p. 876). There is a strong temptation to explore further the importance of the phantasy/phantasm/phantasmagoria in relation to art, not least because it marks another crossing to this document's sister which is concerned with the artwork "Phantasmagoregasm" by artist
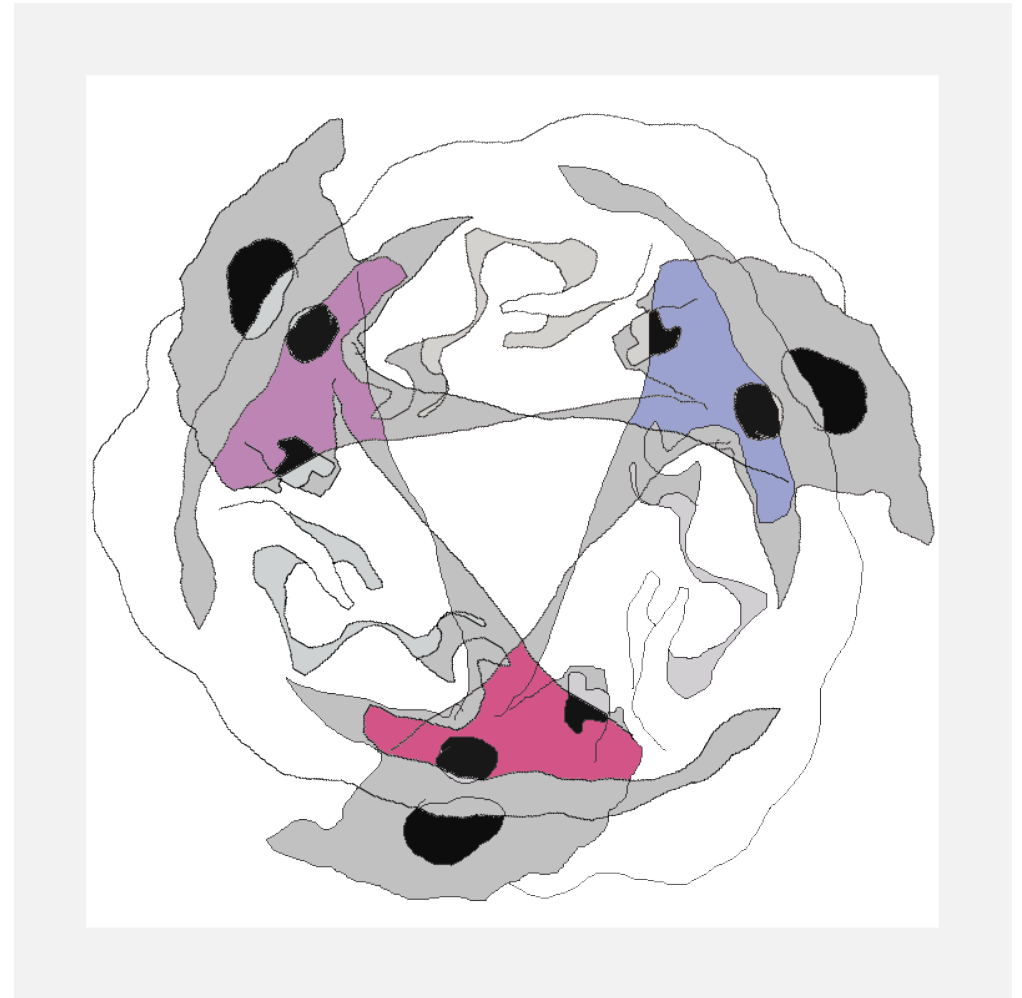
PhD [Diagram]

Tai Shani. However I feel this would take too far a detour into language, deconstruction and psychoanalysis and therefore the emphasis on categorisation and analysis which this PhD project as a whole is proposing alternatives to. For a concise account of the phenomena phantasmagoria, with emphasis on its relation to art via the occult see author and mythologist Marina Warner's book "Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century" (Warner, 2006).

Whereas Deleuze's *Phantasm* is a process hidden within the subject, Cixous implies the possibility of an output, or at least compares the *Phantasm* to outputs of art, music and writing. Cixous's *Phantasms* are endless flows of production. What remains constant across both of these is that they are generative. Finally, philosopher Rodolphe Gasché's book, "Georges Bataille: Phenomenology and Phantasmatology" which traces the things which Bataille himself called "phantasms" such as the "pineal eye" (Gasché, 2012, p. 2) offers yet another line of enquiry, folding back to the principal figure of this document's second part.

17. This inability to survive is the core of this PhD project as a whole. The nagging question of how to negotiate the parts of art practice which do not survive the shift to the modes of recording and analysis which are used in other practices.

18. This is one of the reasons why "Logic of Sense" is the primary solo-written work of Deleuze's used in this document. Williams introduces it as "a book on the cusp between structuralism and post-structuralism because it seeks to combine a concern with structures and series with a philosophy of events" (J. Williams, 2008, p. 1).

19. This is not to suggest that it is the only strategy. In a recent issue of the art magazine Orlando the writer Rosie Haward features a short account and subsequent three examples of "The Virtue of Giddiness in Art" (Haward, 2018). The "virtue" is initially outlined in terms of reference to Sedgwick's proposal of queerness as opening a mesh of possibilities which I have already referenced in this text (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 7). Giddiness is also partially aligned with theorist Sara Ahmed's writing around "disorientation" in "Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others" (Ahmed, 2006), which Haward accounts as the potential for "disorientating moments [to] hold radical political potential when they resist [...] the re-orientating force of the straight and straightening lines of compulsory heterosexuality" (Haward, 2018, p. 11). Haward however differentiates their project of giddiness from Ahmed's through the manner in which the former is engaged in "storytelling" (Haward, 2018, p. 11). This storytelling is undertaken in the second half of "The Virtue of Giddiness in Art", which consists of three images of women

as depicted in artworks, each followed by a short text that addresses that woman and her state of *Giddiness*. These short texts switch from the tone of the preceding section that followed a critical register familiar in many art journals where proposals are bolstered by quotation. The subsequent three short responses, one to each of the chosen women from artistic depictions moves to a more personal, poetic, and diverging mode of address.

Haward's text is of relevance because it identifies a kind of overwhelming sensation experienced by subjects depicted in art (and I would add, by extension the audience), and then proposes a means of accounting for three examples through a creative practice. Crucially, the three creative responses do not reference one another, and are not followed by any text in the earlier critical register. These are three tangential, creative approaches, proceeding from Haward's desire and experience of each artwork. Tendencies and structures can be identified, but only by the reader and no claim is made of a position whereby all three artworks can be comprehended, analysed, and accounted for.

Firstly, Haward's identification of *Giddiness* can be summed up in the following quote. "In their giddiness there emerges a hunger for the not-yet-known, a pulling away from heteronormativity that begins with the confounding of its methods of categorization" (Haward, 2018, p. 11).

Giddiness, an overwhelming physical sensation, becomes a site for the production of desire, and importantly new desires for which there are no pre-existing language structures. This identification builds on Ahmed's conception of disorientation as "the source of vitality as well as giddiness, we might even find joy and excitement in the horror" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4), and chimes with Cixous's account that;

"When I write its everything we didn't know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. In one another we will never be lacking" (Cixous, 1976, p. 893).

Haward has identified something, and a tactic to negotiate it, that is comparable to what I am attempting to draw out by using *Aperitif* as a pivot. I am interested in the second half of "The Virtue of Giddiness in Art" as Haward's attempt at accounting for three moments of this *Giddiness* which is generative of new kinds of being while refusing to be confined within the structures and categories of the old. As an example of these tactics, these are the final lines of Haward's response to "Anna", protagonist of the Andrzej Żuławski directed film "Possession" (Żuławski, 1981). "Trains speed close by. Whatever's left after all the monster fucking now in puddles on the

tunnel floor. Gestation over. Left for purposeful feet to slip in, moving liquids on their soles, travelling in patterns through the city. A seduction of the non-human because nothing else will do, nothing else will satisfy. Liquids spilling out of her, the last vestiges of marriage, slippery and repulsive, ripe for a comedic slip and fall" (Haward, 2018, p. 13).

For another response to the same film, via Irigaray's figure of Mucous see MacCormack's "Mucous, Monsters And Angels: Irigaray And Żuławski's Possession" (MacCormack, 2010b). "The grace toward monsters as that which negotiates thresholds of female/male and non-human opens to possibility without dialectic encounter — accidental, inevitable or volitional" (MacCormack, 2010b, pp. 107–108).

20. For an analysis of Acker's "program to move beyond the phallic myth" see theorist Christopher Kocela's 2001 article for the digital journal "Genders" entitled "A Myth Beyond the Phallus: Female Fetishism in Kathy Acker's Late Novels" (Kocela, 2001).

21. For one of the foremost critiques of *Phallocentrism* see Irigaray's "Speculum of The Other Woman" (Irigaray, 1985). "By a fault, a flaw, a lack, an absence, outside the system of representations and autorepresentations. Which are man's. By a hole in men's signifying economy. A nothing that might

cause the ultimate destruction, the splintering, the break in their systems of "presence," of "re-presentation" and "representation." A nothing threatening the process of production, reproduction, mastery, and profitability, of meaning, dominated by the phallus-that master signifier whose law of functioning erases, rejects, denies the surging up, the resurgence, the of a heterogeneity capable of reworking the principle of its authority. That authority is minted in concepts, representations and formalizations of language which prescribe, even today, the prevailing theory and practice of "castration." And what weak instruments these are, products of the very system they pretend to challenge. Such collusion with phallocentrism serves only to confirm its power" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 50).

22. In the interest of bringing a range of different concepts into proximity around the pivot of *Aperitif*, I have avoided pursuing feminist psychoanalysis further to the obvious site of excess in desire, *Jouissance*, which Lacan situates "beyond the pleasure principle" (Lacan, 1998, p. 184) whilst also acknowledging the "unique bodily jouissance of woman, making her not wholly within the Symbolic Order, is liberating for woman because it is "[a] jouissance beyond the phallus"" (Zhan, 2009, p. 22). The very term *Jouissance* is of relevance in other ways due to it's difficulty in translation to English, as well as describing something in excess of direct comprehension. See for example translator Alan Sheridan's note regarding what is lost
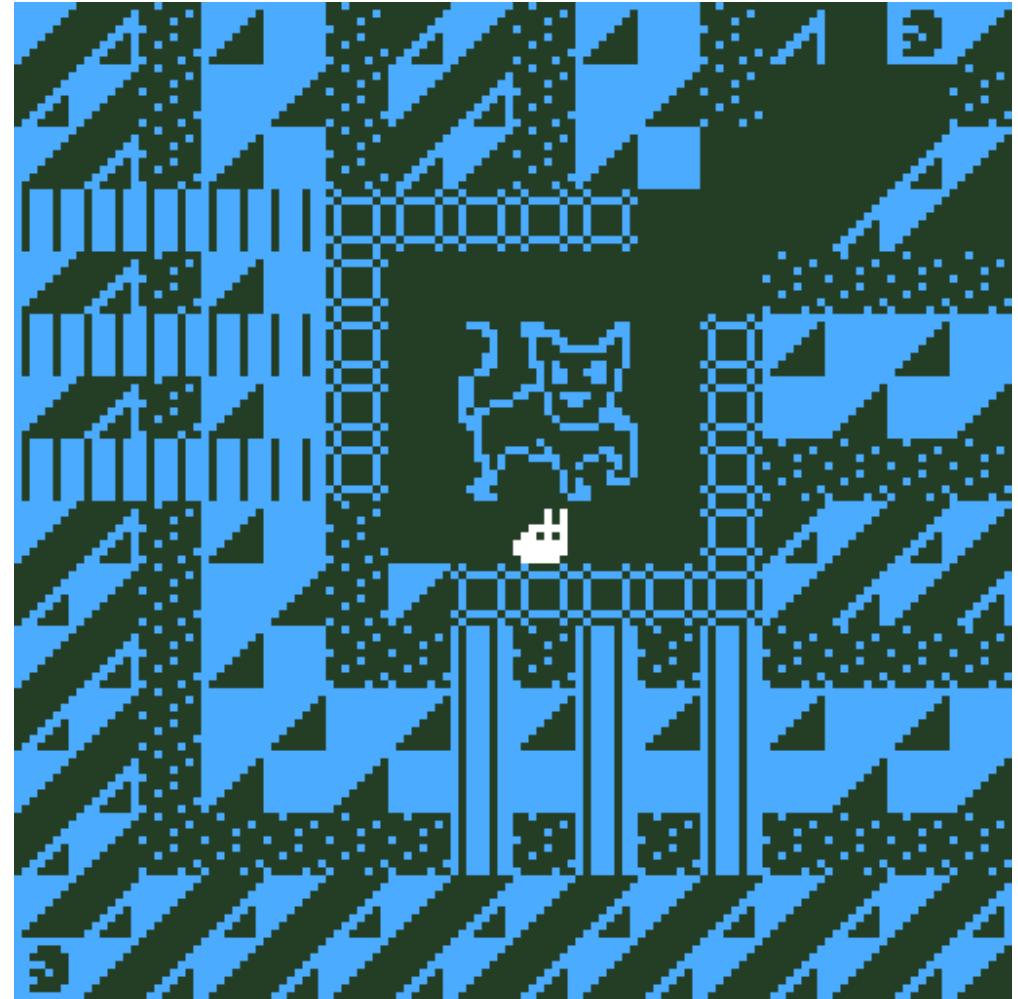
Blue Dog [CARE, RPG]

when it rendered as "pleasure" (Sheridan, 1998, p. 281) and theorist Jane Gallop's observation that, "If jouissance is defined, as it is by Barthes and the women, as a loss of self, disruption of comfort, loss of control, it cannot simply be claimed as an ego-gratifying identity, but must also frighten those who "know" it" (Gallop, 1984, p. 114).

23. Although there is reason to suspect that both Bataille and Cixous had specific and distinct bodies from a male/female binary in mind when addressing masturbation, this document will not engage with such distinctions. Not only can women have penises and men clitorises (to list only two erogenous zones), but sex and the erotic can detach itself from the gender of the body as well. This is most visually and provocatively outlined in MacCormack and McPhee's proposal for the "vasectomised ejaculate" to be understood via the Irigirayian figure of mucous (MacCormack & McPhee, 2014, p. 146), and MacCormack's entire project of "Cinesexuality" (MacCormack, 2008).

24. Masturbation also connects to the production of Deleuzian *Phantasms* as seen in the auto-erotic which produces such "objects of pleasure" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 278). Philosopher Philip Goodchild offers the following summary. "Auto-eroticism, in its most primitive form, concerns the constitution of a pure body of pleasure, a body without organs, in which the coordination of

zones of pleasure, being both actions and passions, liberates a phantasm as a surface effect that appears to produce itself as its own quasi-cause one acts for the sake of pleasure, the action being the cause, the reason being the quasi-cause. This is an example of crossing a threshold of absolute deterritorialization: on the one hand, phantasms and traumas are caused by bodily events children do touch themselves, or observe their parents' bodies, or become the objects of seduction, or are subjected to threats (Deleuze, 1990b: 210); on the other hand, the phantasms produced do not simply remain unpleasant memories, but become compulsions that have a leading role in determining subsequent lives including the actions and passions of bodies" (Goodchild, 1996, p. 78).

25. Game researcher Jesper Juul has devoted an entire volume (Juul, 2013) to the function of failure in games, whilst queer theorist Jack Halberstam's book "The Queer Art of Failure" (Halberstam, 2011) approaches failure as a site of potential. A conversation between the two is included in a section devoted to "Queer Failure in Games" in "Queer Games Studies" (Ruberg & Shaw, 2017) edited by authors Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw.

26. I first encountered the term "Useless Splendour" in 2010, when Kingston University in London launched its Contemporary Art Research Centre ('Centre for Useless Splendour', n.d.) and accompanying publication

(Kenning, Kingston University (London, & Centre for Useless Splendour, 2010). The Centre's documentation broadly attaches the term to artist André Breton, though I have only been able to locate one instance of it attributed to him, in a poem dated 1930, a translation of which is included as an appendix to art historian Hazel Donkin's PhD thesis (Donkin, 2009, p. 280). Bataille's work on "The Accursed Share" began in "1930 or 1931" (Kendall, 2013, p. 27) 1930, one of two years "after Bataille came under attack by André Breton in the Second Surrealist Manifesto" (Kendall, 2013, p. 29). There is something interesting in their both using the same term at the same time, but there equally might be nothing more to it.

27. As the first of 22 Semiotext(e) publications produced for the 2014 Whitney Biennial, Lotringer produced a book, also called "The Miserables" which uses Bataille's concept of abjection to theorize ongoing drug violence in Mexico and global "systematic dehumanization" (Lotringer, 2014).

28. The acquisition of rights for one group used as a means to justify the opression of another is articulated by post-colonial theorist Jasbir Puar as "Homonationalism" in the 2007 book "Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer times" and developed further in the text "" I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess": Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory" (Puar, 2007, 2012). In the latter text Puar focuses

Lungs [DIAGRAM]

on expanding upon the former's negotiation between critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of "intersectionality" as "analyses that foreground the mutually co-constitutive forces of race, class, sex, gender, and nation" (Puar, 2012, p. 49) and an assemblage model which identifies the "retrospective ordering" of identities such as "gender, race, and sexual orientation" which "back-form their reality" (Puar, 2012, p. 50). Puar sees these two positions not as "oppositional but rather,[...] frictional (Puar, 2012, p. 50).

29. Hedva effectively expands the concept of the "Male Imaginary" of Irigaray, who states "We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine."" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 133). Hedva's dominant imaginary is now conceived along lines including class, sexuality, race, and proximity to care, as well as threat of violence.

30. Hedva's call for the centring of their broad category of sickness, which includes not just sufferers of illness, but also victims of the violent enforcement of acceptable categories of gender, sexuality, class, etc. does find a direct parallel in Kristeva's thought;

"These states, far from being simply pathological or exceptional, are perhaps endemic. And it is perhaps against this sort of structural uncertainty that

inhabits us that religions are set in motion, at once to recognise them and to defend ourselves against them" (Kristeva, 1999, p. 19).

I am wary of pursuing an argument regarding the subjectivities included within Hedva's Sick Woman pre-dating, and perhaps causing, the social structures which their existence transgresses. Such an enquiry would move beyond the scope of this project, which is concerned with the practice of art.

31. For a radically different analysis of a comparable creative terrain to Kristeva's *Anamnesis* see Mark Fisher's "Ghosts of my life: writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures" (Fisher, 2014). "This dyschronia, this temporal disjuncture, ought to feel uncanny, yet the predominance of what Reynolds calls 'retro-mania' means that it has lost any unheimlich charge: anachronism is now taken for granted" (Fisher, 2014, p. 19).

32. See also **[KEYWORD: DIAGRAM]**

33. The dice roll brings to mind the use of "roll tables" common to Tabletop Role Playing Games. A player rolls a dice, and consults the table to see which band their resulting number falls within. This mechanic is frequently used to generate a character to role play as, adding some friction to work with and against in the improvisational storytelling process of role play.

"Michael Moorcock's Stormbringer: Fantasy Roleplaying in the World of Eric" for example requires the player to roll a hundred sided die, the resulting percentile dictating the nationality of their character, which in turn species their physical attribute range, possibilities of religious and political adherence and so on (Perrin & St Andre, 1987, p. 23).

34. A methodological decision has been made not to include research drawn from Heartscape and Rook's other work, in order to focus on how *Aperitif* can inform methods of art practice, rather than drawing out the tendencies of these specific artists. However, it is worth noting that the processes of Kristeva's *Gaming* are evident throughout Heartscape's individual art practice. Heartscape curated the 2018 exhibition at Apexart in New York, entitled "Dire Jank" (Apexart, 2019). *Dire Jank* included artist Tabitha Nikolai's video game "Ineffable Glossolalia" (Nikolai, 2018) and "Divination Jam" which invited the audience to "use divination, randomization, etc to make your game. when you get stuck, instead of feeling like shit, let some arcane system decide for you! rolling a die, i ching, tarot, anything that invokes fate! many ancient systems have been digitized, or you can look for randomness in the world around you…" (Heartscape, 2018). Furthermore, Heartscape's 2016 novel "Psycho Nymph Exile" both contains the same collapsing world-building language as *Aperitif*, and incorporates *Gaming* processes within its plot. "The crystal gives them an allergic reaction to

language. Each girl has a unique combination of trigger words. They sit on the floor in rows, mumbling under their breath, reading from dictionaries until they find their combination" (Heartscape, 2016, p. 61).

35. *Gaming* also appears in the practice of Hedva and a number of ways, including tarot and astrology "As a narrative tool, Hedva gave our resident astrologer, Jillann Morlan, a copy of their natal chart, in hopes that it would better explain aspects of themself and their work. Hedva explained their relationship to astrology and storytelling over email writing, "Astrology was a family practice for me; both my mother and aunt taught me as a child. i drifted away from it and rebelled in my early 20s, but found it again when i became sick and bed/house-bound during the first year of my saturn return. i started giving readings during this time, and now do it for a living. my relationship to it is always changing, but i can say that right now, i'm getting into the whole-sign house system (i was trained in placidus), and thinking a lot about fate and how the "malefics" work, or have been seen throughout history."" (Accola, 2017). There are a number of other artists here in the UK who are working at the intersection of academic research, art, and *Gaming/ divination* practice, these include Felix Rose Kawitzky (Kawitzky, 2017), Hestia Peppe (Peppe, 2013) and Lucy Sames (Sames, n.d.).

36. Cixous's work exists in the same sphere concerned with bodies, life,

politics, power, and art as theorist Henri Lefebvre's "Critique of Everyday Life" (Lefebvre, 2014) the first volume of which was published the year after "The Laugh of The Medusa" (Cixous, 1976) and concerns the control politics and revolutionary potential of "everyday life". Lefebvre's earlier work "The Production of Space" (Lefebvre, 1991), gives rise to one aspect of the concept of "Orientation" which Ahmed expands in "Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others" addressing "how spatial perceptions come to matter and be directed as matter" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 12). Games theorist Mary Flanagan, whose work on digital embodiment is introduced later in this document has also drawn from *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre's observation that "spaces that are defined in the abstract, that is, those that aspects of space that are able to be installed anywhere, be configured and reconfigured, become a manifestation of a way of thinking produced entirely by Capitalism" (Flanagan, 2008, p. 4) is taken up by Flanagan in an examination of "locative media projects involving play and games, and their potential to act as a tool for empowerment" (Flanagan, 2008, p. 1). As with Cixous, Lefebvre's work extends between the material body, its creative capacity, and its political agency, yet while the importance of play to the latter is evident, I feel there is space to explore it more in the former.

Art historian Suzanne de Villiers Human has noted the "picaresque playfulness" (de Villiers-Human, 2005, p. 186) emphasised in "The Laugh

You look around.

The animals in the other chairs which make up the circle which includes you and the analyst,

around the low table which holds only a box of tissues,

of The Medusa", connecting this to its imagery of eruptions, excesses, and overflowings of fluid and subversion of structures of gender and sexuality. From the other side, Marxist theorist Teresa Ebert specifically critiques Cixous on the grounds that her work is "ludic feminism" (Ebert, 1992, 1996) concern only with a "language-effect, a mode of rhetoric aimed at changing cultural representations" (Ebert, 1992, p. 6). I would argue that while Cixous is not strictly an artist, Ebert's position on her work falls within the Materialist tradition critiqued by O'Sullivan (O'Sullivan, 2001), and a better understanding of Cixous's work is equally on the grounds of its Affects, through which it proposes to change the social. The use of "ludics" by Ebert seems to at least function in part as a diminutive expression, separating its play from the work of " a collective practice through which existing social institutions are changed" (Ebert, 1992, p. 6), whereas in Lefebvre's work, as with Situationist groups (Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2015; Knabb, 1981), work and play are both charged with political agency. Likewise, Ahmed's work would fall within this grouping of ludic feminism, attested by word plays such as the dual use of "matter" in the previous quote, yet the examination of "orientation" is not simply a play with representation, but a proposal for changing "how we do politics, which in turn is shaped by the prior matter of simply how we live" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 177).

37. For a trans* reading of gender in Solanas as creative process see
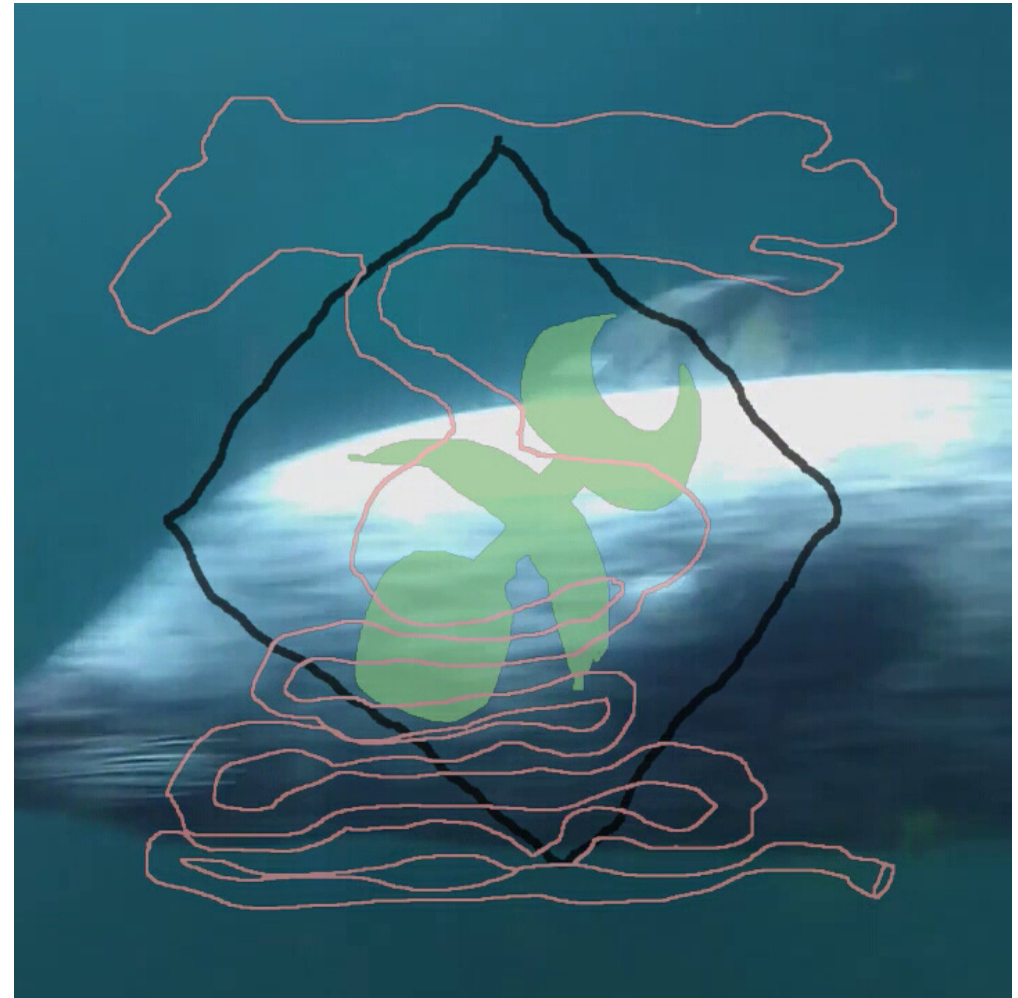
Seal [DIAGRAM]

writer Andrea Long Chu's proposal in "On Liking Women" (subtitle, "The Society for Cutting Up Men is a rather fabulous name for a transsexual book club") that "Here, transition, like revolution, was recast in aesthetic terms, as if transsexual women decided to transition, not to "confirm" some kind of innate gender identity, but because being a man is stupid and boring" (Chu, 2018), as well as Chu's book "Females" (Chu, 2019).

38. Pre-empting Lefebvre's concern for the same "The Critique of Everyday Life" (Lefebvre, 2014).

39. For a continuation of Deleuze and Guattari's figure of the girl, redefined as a process of desire and commodity within Capital see Tiqqun's "Preliminary materials for a theory of the young-girl" (Tiqqun (Collective), 2012).

40. Fisher defines Deleuze and Guattari's concept of Haecceity as "non-subjective individuation. [...] the entity as event (and the event as entity)" (Fisher, 2018, p. 15).

41. For more on another of Heartscape's game-artworks which negotiates trauma through game mechanics that extend beyond the "diegetic frame" (Montola, 2008, p. 23) to the physical marking of the body, see researcher Kahn Faassen's blog post "Hypertextual trauma: Porpentine's Twine games

and the borders of self-narration" (Faasen, 2016).

42. For an analysis of these conditions of work and life specific to trans* women see Nat Raha's "Transfeminine Brokenness, Radical Transfeminism" in South Atlantic Quarterly (Raha, 2017). Raha explores the experience of "poor transfemme people" to develop a "Radical transfeminism [...] orientated around forms of care and support" (Raha, 2017, p. 7).

43. There is a rich seam of divergent research around what writer Evan Calder Williams has termed "salvagepunk: the post-apocalyptic vision of a kaputt world, strewn with both the dream residues and the real junk of the world that was, and shot through with the hard work of salvaging, repurposing, détourning, scrapping" (E. C. Williams, 2009) and expanded this concept further in "Combined and Uneven Apocalypse" (E. C. Williams, 2011a).

While not directly cited, I would like to note that Williams's approach to writing about politics and aesthetics through re-purposed fiction was very influential to my own practice, beginning a number of years prior to and continuing through this PhD research. Of particular relevance to this project are a number of what Williams referred to as "postcards" written from the point of view of "Snake Plissken" the protagonist of the John Carpenter

You nod in agreement.

directed films "Escape from New York" (Carpenter, 1981) and "Escape from LA" (Carpenter, 1996). Williams imagined Plissken navigating life as an old man in contemporary Venice through a series of violent and poetic encounters focused on politics and sensation in a collapsing world (Mike, 2012; E. C. Williams, 2011b, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b).

Williams' concept of *Salvagepunk* can also be seen as an influence on the journal "Salvage" (SALVAGE, 2018) from which the earlier referenced text "Making and Getting Made: Towards a Cyborg Transfeminism" by Sølvi Goard (Goard, 2017) is drawn. Salvage is also edited by writer China Miéville with whom Williams has collaborated on multiple occasions (Mute Publishing, 2011; Serpentine Galleries, 2016). In the introduction to the first issue of the journal, editor in chief Rosie Warren addresses its name and agenda with the following, "Why Salvage? Salvage because we are wrecked. Because we need a strategy for ruination" (Warren, 2015). However, in the interests of maintaining a focus in this document on approaches to art practice, further exploration of Williams' work and Salvage is left outside of this current project.

44. For an analysis of how creative play extends even beyond even the most repetitive of forms see games designers Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux's article "HUNDRED THOUSAND BILLION FINGERS: Seriality

and Critical Game Practices" (Boluk & LeMieux, 2012).

45. For another body of post-Lyotard work concerned with subjectivity arising from encounter with art, see artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger's concept of "matrixial subjectivity" (B. Ettinger, 2006; B. L. Ettinger, 2002; Pollock, 2005)

46. For a useful document on the context of plagiarism as art strategy in the UK at the mid point of Acker's career, see the Stewart Home edited "Plagiarism: Art as Commodity and Strategies for its Negation" (Home, 1988).

47. Acker's relationship to concepts from Deleuze and Guattari's "Anti-Oedipus" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2012) has been observed by other writers (Harper, 1987; Randall, 2001, pp. 245–246), including specifically with regards their concept of "desiring-production" (Cao, 2012) and Acker's "Blood and Guts in High School" plagiarizes a paragraph directly from "Anti-Oedipus" (Acker, 1978, p. 102).

48. The playing of a game as a means of generating an artwork (which in a fractal formation is itself the material and provocation for another game, this time with the audience) is a highly reductive through nevertheless

accurate summation of the art practice proposed by this PhD project. The use of cartomancy and appropriated role tables has the same function of generating aspects of what Acker describes as "identity" (Acker, 1991, p. 7) and Flanagan as "Hyperknowledge" (Flanagan, 2002).

In 2018 I produced an artwork "TFW: The Formless Wastes 2" (TFW2) which was a sequel to "TFW: The Formless Wastes" (TFW), the work performed by the agent in the document "The Use of Horror In Art Practice" in the book "Ahuman Use". *TFW2* is an animated film which follows an agent/inquisitor in the service of "Slaanesh" (Ansell, Brunton, Forrest, & Miller, 1988, p. 14), one of the gods of chaos, as they investigate the "Spencer Mansion" (Mikami & Fujiwara, 1997) after the events which take place in TFW. TFW2 was produced entirely by making an RPG in the consumer game design software "RPG Maker VX" (Enterbrain, 2007), and screen capturing a play-through.

TFW2 is a video artwork, but it retains its existence as a video-game, even though it is one that can only be encountered by an audience as a witness to it being played rather than playing it themselves. The video begins with a selection screen where there cursor moves to select "New Game" but other options are visible. Likewise the game involves a player-character engaging in conversation with non-playable-characters and the screen shows the

choices in the dialogue offered to the player, even though ultimately only one is chosen in the play-through that comprises the video. A desire in producing *TFW2* in this manner was to continue research into what I have elsewhere referred to as *Incomplete Provocations*. *TFW2* presents a path which is dotted with indications of other ways it could have progressed. *TFW2* is produced with non-professional software, its graphics are a mixture of the software's generic examples along with quickly drawn auditions, and the narrative space it takes place in is appropriated from other games, principally "Resident Evil" (Mikami & Fujiwara, 1997) and the war-gaming manufacturer "Games Workshop" (Ansell et al., 1988).

These, and other production choices, aim to poke holes and pull lumps out of the path chosen through the game in *TFW2.* It is rapidly made with cheap and readily available tools and materials, as an invitation to the audience to speculate where else it could have gone as the level of competence needed to produce it is evidently attainable. Returning to *TFW2* nearly a year after it was produced it strikes me how it functions in the manner Acker describes with regards the use of plagiarism on two levels.

Firstly the stolen material is traversed by the unnamed, faceless agent who establishes something of an identity through this passage. I think about the strategy of plagiarism used by Acker and myself in terms of Deleuze and

Guattari's "desiring-machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). "The question posed by desire is not "What does it mean?" but rather "How does it work? " How do these machines, these desiring-machines, work—yours and mine? With what sort of breakdowns as a part of their functioning?" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 109).

The plagiarized text is a machine, and putting something new into the machine gives an indication of what the machine does. Of course doing this breaks the machine so even if we attempted to place another piece of that same new material in it a second time, the results would not be the same. This is fine though I think, because I wouldn't want to use a machine to produce the same thing over and over. I stole some pieces from one text and stuck them together with *RPG Maker VX* to make a machine without knowing what function it would perform. Each time I put something through that machine it produced new and contradictory results.

The second level on which *TFW2* performs Acker's plagiarism function is the level where it is a game being played. I made a game environment full of sprites which move on random or preset patterns, with choices of when and where to move, dialogues options etc., and then I drove the unnamed agent through this and recorded what happened. The friction of the passing through these cobbled together machines was evident to me in what could

be accurately called the "performance" of the work. This performance was what Flanagan called the *Rendition*, and the friction was the sense of reacting to and adjusting my performance in response to the environment of the game. Even with a plan for which non-playable-characters I needed to interact with, and where I needed to move to advance the plot I still needed to sometimes wait when a randomly moving sprite blocked my path. Sometimes I mashed the movement keys and my on-screen proxy awkwardly stopped in their tracks for no reason. Sometimes I worried that I wasn't leaving dialogue text long enough on screen for someone unfamiliar with it to read before I advanced, and then maybe I left the next dialogue on screen a little too long and spoiled the pacing slightly. This was again the work of desiring-machines. The desire at one point in the performance resulted not in satisfying that desire but producing further desire which in turn produced more and so on. I have left this as the only account of *TFW2*, rather than attempting to reduce it to screenshots or translate it into screenplay format as I have done with other non-text artworks. *TFW2's* partial description of function and site of learning can also serve as provocation for reader speculation. What did it look like? What did it sound like? How bad was it?

49. For an analysis across Acker's body of work regarding how "her parameters, seemingly by design, resist expected outcomes and instead

promote a process of discovery" through "writing according to method" see Matthew James Vechinski's journal chapter "Kathy Acker as Conceptual Artist: In Memoriam to Identity and "Working Past Failure"" (Vechinski, 2013, p. 526).

50. Cixous also locates her writing as emerging from the breaks and failure of systems. "[T]here have been failures-and if it weren't for them, I wouldn't be writing (I-woman, escapee)-in that enormous machine that has been operating and turning out its "truth" for centuries" (Cixous, 1976, p. 879).

51. Author and game designer Jesper Juul's book "The Art of Failure: An Essay on The Pain of Playing Video Games" focuses on the paradox of how the enjoyment of playing video games requires the unpleasant experience of failure (Juul, 2013). Juul bases the analysis in a comparison to tragedy as understood through Aristotle, deconstructing the plot of Leo Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" (Tolstoy, 2016) and attempting to find a video game which meets all its tragic criteria. Juul first concludes that "no commercially successful game has offered the full Anna Karenina experience (playing a game in which the protagonist undergoes many painful experiences, through concrete effort managing to make the protagonist commit suicide and knowing all along that this is the goal of the game)" (Juul, 2013, p. 115). However, Juul also proposes that the agency required of the player produces "complicity [...] a

completely new type of experience that is unique to games, more personal and stronger than simply witnessing a fictional character performing the same actions. [...] With complicity the player shares with the protagonist the feeling of being flawed" (Juul, 2013, p. 114).

52. A final strand of analysis of how *Breaking Down* could be pursued emerges from how both Acker and Cixous articulate the process of writing as training for, or perhaps a *Rendition* of dying;

"Writing is learning to die. Its learning not to be afraid, in other words to live at the extremity of life" (Cixous, 2005, p. 10).

"Writing is one method of being human or wanting to suicide cause in order to write you kill yourself at the same time while remaining alive" (Acker, 1990, p. 174).

While death looms throughout, above the precarious lives of the player-characters of *Aperitif*, it only really appears during the section of the game where the player-audience must repair the body of *Agate* through a medical-sim, and then through an embedded *Shmup* section which represents the most delicate part of the procedure. During these embedded sections it is possible for player-audience to fail, and therefore to watch *Agate* die. The

role of death in video games is something which has been examined in terms of attachment and empathy (Harrer, 2013) as well as necropolitics and queer theory (Ruberg, 2017). These two examples (among others) suggest lines of future inquiry when combined with the writing process as death described by Cixous and Acker, especially when considering how each death is followed by a different *Rendition*. However the limited instances of death in *Aperitif*, give little opportunity to explore these concepts and so it will need to be left for future study. What is also of interest is Ruberg's concept of "permalife [whereby] games make it impossible for players to die. Instead, in such games, players are forced to go on living indefinitely – even, or perhaps especially, in the face of death" (Ruberg, 2017, p. 160). *Permalife*, which in some of its forms subverts the focus on finality in games, and instead deals in repetition, seems like a rich site to explore the concept of *Écriture Féminine* at the point of player-audience game-artwork agency.

53. I have approached the relationship between processes of horror and practices of art elsewhere in this PhD project, but the reapplication of Thacker's definition is something I think merits further attempts.

TFW2 Production Image [MANSION, RPG]

Conclusions and Exits [CARE, RPG]

The structure and methodology of this PhD Output consisting of three approaches to a central area of art practice, and within each approach multiple overlapping attempts through the various documents, turns the issue of a conclusion into a challenge.

Rather than attempt to draw books and documents toward a unifying conclusion, erasing the differences between then, I have offered conclusions in the documents individually. Some of these are clearly labeled as such, some are more demonstrative, and some left as provocations.

Throughout the three books are indications of where future paths could proceed. For continuation of creative research and the application of concepts developed, these indications are generally placed at the end of documents. Paths which are more tangential, or areas where the research could be reinforced through engaging with a separate discipline or practitioner appear in endnotes.

In place of some kind of ending for the PhD Output as whole I will raise three of the avenues of future research not already mentioned in individual documents, that will be pursued at its end. All of these examples incorporate work already commenced, that for practical reasons has not been addressed in documents.

1: The Incomplete Object.

Archeologist Chantal Conneller has produced a large amount of research focused Star Carr, a Mesolithic site in Yorkshire (Conneller, 2004, 2011; Little et al., 2016; Milner, Conneller, & Taylor, 2018a, 2018b). In particular, Conneller has provided a framework for examining some

of the objects recovered from the site, and through this reassess the historic inhabitants of the area's relationship to animals and objects. The objects, twenty-one of which were found during the site's excavation by Professor J.G.D. Clark between 1949 and 1951, consist of the "uppermost part of the skull of a red deer, with the antlers still attached" and are referred to as "antler frontlets" (Conneller, 2004, p. 37). In offering an interpretation for the frontlet's use, Clark "suggested they could have been used either as hunting aids, to permit hunters to stalk animals at close range without being seen, or as headgear in ritual dances" (Conneller, 2004, p. 37). This interpretation resulted in an impasse between a "'functional' and a 'ritual' analogy" and has according to Conneller, meant that "in the intervening 50 years they have been ignored" (Conneller, 2004, p. 37).

Conneller's research breaches the impasse of an animal derived object needing to be either functional or ritual by use of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari's work in "A Thousand Plateaus" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Firstly, Conneller outlines how in Deleuze and Guattari, "animals come to be seen [...] as an assemblage composed of a number of ways of perceiving and acting in the word" (Conneller, 2004, p. 44). In this view, animals are not singular fixed entities, and the objects derived from them are therefore not limited to being symbolic of the animal whole or else be understood only as practical material. Animals are here understood as collection of "affects" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 253), and the objects derived from them convey those Affects to the user in a manner which outside of the binary of ritual and functional. From this point Conneller proceeds to "examine the specific ways in which different things are seen to modify or extend the capacities of people in particular contexts" (Conneller, 2004, p. 51), bridging Deleuze and Guattari to theorist Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" which replaces a fixed epistemological view with "webs of differential positioning" (D. Haraway, 1988, p. 590). The use of animal objects becomes simultaneously a process of taking on capacities as well as the ethical/epistemological/affective engagement with the world from another position.

These observations from archaeology are useful not because they set some historic precedent for how art should function, but because they articulate processes which are important to art from another perspective. In the documents in this PhD Output which examine artworks

I have consciously treated both the processes deployed by the artist and those of her characters in the same manner. In the art I am interested in, things are not easily split between the practical and the ritual but form processes across these lines to perform different things.

Finally, when I contacted Conneller in 2019 she was continuing to examine the frontlets of Star Carr in terms of how they function as "unfinished things". Conneller has already observed that the frontlets were "broken up as a source of raw material" (Conneller, 2004, p. 46), but is now considering how this occurred concurrently with their uses. A framework for considering art objects which do not reach a fixed state, but are continually re-worked, and drawn from while being used is relevant to a number of documents in this PhD Output. It is relevant to the analysis of artist Tai Shani's works (SHANI, 2019) which undergo edits between redeployments, or the ongoing work "sidekick" (Price, 2013) by Elizabeth Price. Going forward, I would consider how unfinished things connects to the writing practice of William Burroughs both through the "cut-up" technique to "cut oneself out of language" (Hassan, 1963, p. 9), and the process whereby his novels were re-edited in subsequent editions. Burroughs is also relevant to the other side of unfinished things whereby these things are not just refined, but are a source of material for future things. I am also interested in the process by which computer software is updated via "patches" (Fisher, 2019) as another model for an unfinished thing.

I'm interested in the political implications of objects which refuse the linear transition from raw material to finished commodity, but is instead part of processes which cross that distinction. To borrow the image from Karl Marx's "Capital Vol. 1" (Marx, 1981), what would it mean for "coat" to remain functioning as "ten yards of linen", to be always in a process of being woven/unwoven/rewoven into different forms? I feel there is something here to be pursued via the concepts of Incomplete Provocations, and the improvisations and departures which are centred in Tabletop Role Playing Games.

2: Divination Storytelling

The second exit is far more practical and straightforward. During my research I have used and developed methods for creating parts of narratives based on sortation systems such as card decks and dice rolls. In 2018 I produced an artwork entitled "The Sodden Gates of Vulnerability" which borrowed a mechanic used in multiple games whereby the space in which play takes places is procedurally generated. A hypothetical example of this mechanic would be a game which takes place in a derelict spaceship, the interior rooms and corridors of which is represented with cardboard tiles. When the players reach the exit of one room, a new random room tile is placed at the exit from the first, so the spaceship is configured, and unpredictable, with each subsequent play-through. In *The Sodden Gates of Vulnerability* I combined some of the lore from Games Workshop's derelict spaceship exploration game "Space Hulk" (Games Workshop, 1999) with their subsequently released rules for randomly generated spaceships (Hunt, 2013), to randomly generate prompts for a narrative built from a fictionalised version of my own past.

As a result of the cessation symptoms I was experiencing while coming off antidepressants I found memories returning that medication use had suppressed. In addition, there were physical cessation symptoms which mnemonically triggered some often confused memories of spaces in the town centre of Luton where I spent my teens, frequently from times in the early hours of the morning after leaving a club or a party. I reconstructed these fragmented memories, and the bodily feelings which connected them to the present, and any emergent feelings and noted them down as prompts on index cards. Some memories were so abstract as to not describe a place but just a sensation, or an action. These abstract memories, combined with some other images and thoughts were written up in a list and labelled 1-20.

The Sodden Gates of Vulnerability was produced as a single take spoken performance to microphone. It began with a short reflection on the different ways in which physical geography and brain chemistry are both modulated by chemicals. After this I shuffled and dealt an index

card, describing the derelict spaceship/ 4am Luton Town Centre space it represented in the manner of Games Master setting a scene for players of a Role Playing Game. I then rolled a 20 sided dice and used the corresponding entry from the list as a prompt for what the player (the audience to whom the work is addressed) did in traversing this space. A partial transcription of one room follows;

"You stagger out of the thickening fog into the area where escaping heat from the many times kicked in door makes a dim pocket at the edge of the street. Banging on the door that feels like it should have given in by now and it is finally opened by someone inside. You roll in, and so does the fog, and the door opener is already turning the corner ahead into the living room so you guess you will follow them, remembering to shut the door behind you.

The living room is thick with dust and hair and ash over the brown carpet and old sofas. No one has their feet on the floor, all bunched up to keep warm or to manage some symptoms of intake.

You just want to buy, but that isn't how this is going to work out. It never does.

Everything slips. Someone makes you take a music cassette and in lock-eyed intensity tells you why you will like it and when you will die.

A man takes you to one side and rapidly ages while sharing with you a one sided conversation about how he has lived his life. He has little ears like fins and catfish whiskers and it's clear from the way he holds and interacts with the portable stereo he cradles that he has a relationship with Fabio and Grooverider which is both more beastially physical and more vapourusly transcendental than you will ever understand.

You slip out and it's dawn and you have the cassette and you don't think you bought anything but now do not think you need anything so maybe you bought it and weren't paying attention during intake or maybe someone else was in charge of your body.

You roll out with the fog and luckily town is down hill but my god you would never be able to find this place again and my god you would probably never want to because all those people would want to check how closely you been following their advice on how to live.

Oh yeah the plot twist is you're a rabbit".

Going forward, I would like to explore the mechanics of procedural narrative based on sortation systems, both as an improvised Rendition, and as material which is subsequently cut up and deployed in other ways, possibly as a development of Diagrammatics. I'm looking into how I might produce these works for a platform like YouTube, possible using a split screen where half the image shows the face that speaks, and half shows the sortation system such as tarot-style cards.

Dog Mod

Running throughout all three books of this PhD Output are dogs. When I started this PhD in 2016, I soon afterward began living with Lea and Buster, two elderly Staffordshire Bull Terriers. The importance of this relationship to the research is something I have attempted, and failed, to articulate on many occasions in the last three years. As much as the majority of the documents in this PhD Output are underpinned by a desire to understand my own trans* non-binary gender identity, they are also a response to learning about what Deleuze and Guattari would call dog affects, as well as negotiating my emotions towards Lea and Buster particularly during the sadly increasing points where they have become unwell.

In mid 2019 I sketched an outline for what I called the "Dog Mod". In the language of games, a mod is something added to the game which alters part or all of its systems in some way. Mods are often produced by a third party, and can range from something which simply adds some different functionality (such as the campaign generator for *Space Hulk* referenced in the previous section) or completely reorientate the system, such as the mod "DayZ" that reconfigures military sim "ARMA" into a zombie survival game and spawned an entire genre of video games (Davison, 2014).

The aim of *Dog Mod* was to produce a document which could provide a means to reconfigure the rest of the PhD Output through its unspoken focus, dogs. *Dog Mod* is something I decided was both conceptually and emotionally too overwhelming for me to be able to complete in time for submission, but I remains as a point of departure for my future research. It connects the *Becoming-Animal* of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Stark & Roffe, 2015), philosopher Patricia MacCormack's expansion of this into animal rights discourse in the *Ahuman* (MacCormack, 2014), with other ideas around, animals, play and care (Chen, 2012; D. J. Haraway, 2016; Massumi, 2014; Vint, 2008).

Conclusions and Exits; Bibliography

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