

**School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry**

**Collage as Queer Methodology: The Pleasures and  
Politics of Trans and Queer Photographic  
Representations**

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Doctor of Philosophy  
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## ***DECLARATION***

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number # SODA251114.

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Jack Ball uses they/them pronouns

## **ABSTRACT**

In this practice-led research I critically engage with the politics and aesthetics of mess and collage as a framework for exploring trans and queer photographic representation. I suggest how visual methods that prioritise iteration, un-doing, and re-making, can deliberately and performatively contest the visual conventions that seek to standardise bodies and desires. I draw from theorists Jack Halberstam (2005, 2011, 2018a, 2018b), Sara Ahmed (2017), and Lucas Crawford (2010), and artworks by Cassils, A.L Steiner, Pipilotti Rist, and Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore to critically engage with the pleasures and politics of collage. I develop a messy, queer, collage practice-led research methodology that prioritises the relationships between theory, practice, and embodied knowledge. My methodology is supported by a lineage of feminist scholars who have argued for the inclusion of personal experience in academic research as a means of creating social change (Harding 1987) and challenging what knowledge is deemed credible (Campbell and Farrier 2015; Collins 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2013). The visual component consists of seven photographic series, exhibited in various iterations at fourteen gallery spaces over a seven-year period. In this exegesis I focus on two series: *Fluctuate* (2013) and *PDA* (2019) created six years apart, from different positionalities. The imagery is intimate, saturated in colour, large-scale, made up of multiple images, and engages an anti-heroic approach to image-making. I locate my practice within a lineage of artists who argue for queer and trans visibility in public galleries and I develop methods to take up space without replicating the same structures of heroism and monumentality I am critiquing.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
Chapter overviews	14
The archetype of the serious photographer	18
Undoing expectations of being public	24
Art institutions	30
Conclusion	36
<b>CHAPTER 1: MESSY, QUEER, COLLAGE, PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>37</b>
Introduction	37
Practice-led research	37
Practice-led research as collage	41
Queer and dyslexic mess	47
Exegetical structure	49
Embodied methodologies	50
The necessity of first-person perspective in trans research	59
Conclusion	62
<b>CHAPTER 2: PHOTOGRAPHIC MYTHOLOGIES</b>	<b>64</b>
Introduction	64
The obsession with the ‘real’	65
Fear of unprofessionalism	70
Conclusion: Masquerade	75
<b>CHAPTER 3: MESSY BOUNDARIES AND AMATEUR METHODS</b>	<b>76</b>
Introduction	76
Making a mess is making a point	79
Building flexible architecture	83
Heroic fake caves	87
Taking up space	89
Pixel damage	91
Pipilotti Rist’s imagery and public critique	94
Liquid colour	100
Bodies, inside and out	105
Conclusion: Molecular collage	111

<b>CHAPTER 4: COLLAGING QUEER ARCHIVES</b>	<b>114</b>
Introduction	114
Old drives: Personal digital archive as collage	118
A.L. Steiner and queer excess	122
Trans and queer experiences with affective imagery	127
Conclusion: Collectively queer	130
<b>CHAPTER 5: PERFORMATIVE ARCHIVES</b>	<b>132</b>
Introduction	132
Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore’s everyday performances	135
Camp performances of visibility and invisibility	141
Close crop, gender ambiguity, and gender deception	154
Performative stopovers	159
Conclusion: Everyday building materials	170
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>172</b>
Introduction	172
Collage in situ	172
Politics of mess	173
Materiality of gender	173
Pleasures of unprofessionalism	174
Developing a messy rigour	175
Flexible narratives	176
Anti-heroic imagery	176
Photography mythologies and trans mythologies	177
Self-representation	178
Queer Connection	179
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>FIGURE LIST</b>	<b>200</b>

## ***INTRODUCTION***

In this practice-led research (hereafter PLR), I argue for both the pleasure and political potential of mess and collage in trans and queer photography. I show how trans and queer representations that are in the process of un-doing and re-making, and which do not seek resolution or adhere to popular ideas of authenticity, can deliberately and playfully contest the expected narratives that shape trans and queer lives. I explore a material approach to trans and queer embodiment and image-making, and I prioritise visual methods that encourage intimacy and connection with imagery. I suggest how embodying a messy approach to gender as a trans person is political and pleasurable.

Through the process of PLR, I have developed a messy, queer, collage methodology, that prioritises embodied and material knowledge as a driver of creative practice. My methodology engages with a queer and feminist politics of juxtaposition, amateurism, un-doing, excess, and a deliberate anti-monumentalism. My approach is supported by a lineage of feminist scholars who have argued for the inclusion of personal experience in academic research as a means of creating social change (Harding 1987) and challenging what knowledge is deemed credible (Campbell and Farrier 2015; Collins 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2013). It is also bolstered by feminist, queer, and trans artists, photographers, and authors who have highlighted the importance of making productive use of one's positionality and the integration of practice, theory, and lived experience in order to disrupt the visual conventions that seek to standardise bodies and desires.

The central organising concept that binds this PLR is collage. To investigate the messy, destructive, and generative potential of collage, I draw from Jack Halberstam's conceptualisation of trans bodies as made through a process of "continuous building and unbuilding" (2018b), as well as his work on the pleasures and possibilities of queer failure (2011). I explore his ideas through practice by embracing amateur photographic methods to point to the flimsiness of professionalism. I also draw on Sara Ahmed's "lesbian feminism as wilful carpentry", which suggests that "when we build, we ruin" (2017, 232). Her concepts emphasise the need to

enact a politics of ruining in order to build spaces with more room for inclusivity, which Ahmed understands as “lesbian feminist world making” (321). My collage PLR methodology is informed by Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier’s exploration of the potential of messy, queer bodies to erode disciplinary boundaries and queer “normative hierarchies of knowledge” (2015, 83). They argue that “[m]essiness...does not equate to methodlessness” (ibid) and I show how mess and collage, with unruly fragmentation, can be utilised as a purposeful and political methodology in the production of photographic visual imagery.

Collage offers a visual and material language that resists resolution. Collage can be messy and multiple; it makes reference to loss, erasure, clutter, repetition, and contradiction (Halberstam 2011; Suhr and Willerslev 2013). Collage can also be playful and amateur; it invites embellishment and performative fictions (Rosler 2007) and allows for non-hierarchical, non-linear modes of narrative development. Halberstam (2011) connects theories of queer failure to material collage practice and argues for the feminist and queer potential of collage, an idea that has been formative to my investigation. He writes, “[c]ollage precisely references the spaces in between and refuses to respect the boundaries that usually delineate self from other, art object from museum, and the copy from the original” (136). Collage’s attributes of authenticity, excess, and disruption reflect key themes in trans and queer representation and everyday experiences. For these reasons, the images I make as part of this PLR exist as collections of multiple images, rather than singular, heroic outcomes. These iterative and non-hierarchical qualities are central considerations in my messy, queer, collage PLR methodology, which I explore further in the following chapter.

In this PLR, both the practice and exegesis are equally weighted (a 50-50 split). The visual and written components together form a thesis, with both parts contributing to knowledge production. The visual component consists of seven photographic series, which were exhibited in various iterations at fourteen gallery spaces over a seven-year period. These images are presented in a separate documentation pdf, which allows the reader to see the works in the exhibition context and to zoom in on image details and textures. Relevant page numbers are provided in an in-text citation. In this exegesis, I focus on two series: *Fluctuate* (2013) and

*PDA* (2019). I have selected these series because they critically engage with the photographic methods and theoretical dilemmas explored in this research. These series were made 6 years apart and from differing positionalities. I utilise a genderqueer lens to reflect on and complicate *Fluctuate*, which I made when I was identifying as female and in a heterosexual marriage. I draw on my feminist understandings, developed during the process of exhibiting *Fluctuate*, in addition to what I learned from my practice between 2013–2019, to inform how I navigate trans and queer representational dilemmas as they emerged in the making of *PDA*. I connect the pressures I have experienced to perform public expectations of being female and expressing femininity correctly, to a critical exploration of destabilising binary gender. The shift from experiencing male-dominated art spaces as a white, female, and feminine-identified artist to a visibly trans, queer artist, offers a unique lens for unpacking how gender and sexuality inform what is expected in these spaces. This research also challenges the mythology of stability that surrounds cisgender and heterosexual bodies (Crawford 2010).

Masculinist traditions in photography have long-prioritised certain methods that symbolise professionalism and authenticity. Like most artists who use photography, my practice is shaped by both disciplines; therefore, I draw from the historical trajectories and cultural norms of both art and photography throughout this exegesis. I engage with feminist artists such as Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist and North American artist A.L. Steiner to show the political potential of visual camera-based methods that are often associated with amateurism and superficiality, such as saturated colour, excess of imagery, as well as large-scale images of queer and female bodies, and camp performance. I embrace these amateur methods to critique the misogyny that shapes who is taken seriously in art spaces. I also utilise these amateur methods to question trans and queer narratives of legitimacy and ‘realness’. Trans lives are often represented through the lens of distress and pathology (Schulz 2018; Stryker 2008). Cisnormative narratives often strive to make ‘sense’ of trans bodies using easily digestible narratives of neat binary transitions, which split lives into ‘before and after’ and focus on arriving at a stable end point. Whilst these narratives of arrival resonate for many trans people, including myself, my own experiences have also taught me to recognise the value and pleasure that comes from experiencing my gender as continually in process. I utilise Lucas Crawford’s conceptualisation of trans bodies

as a lived experiential archive, rather than a trans “body-as-home” (2010, 519), to visually and performatively respond to the pressures of stability and authenticity. Through methods of photographic collage and camp aesthetics, I re-work, undo, and playfully perform the ideals of arrival, ‘before and after’, and nostalgia. Crawford’s framework offers a lens to engage with the destructive and productive processes that are central to Los Angeles-based Canadian artist Cassils’s performative works. Cassils critiques the viewing of trans bodies as spectacle and directly confronts trans histories of violence. They explore methods of representing trans bodies as iterative and in process. I also turn to French artists Claude Cahun (1894–1954) and partner Marcel Moore (1892–1972) who integrated photographic performance and everyday life. Their exploration of the pleasures of iterative and intimate self-making prompts my own engagement with performative archives. Engaging with historical and contemporary artists who explore gender and queerness through image-making practices has supported and encouraged my own experimentations with trans and queer representation.

This PLR PhD focuses on the connection between theoretical frameworks and material processes. It is intentionally iterative to reflect the cyclical, reflexive nature of PLR (Smith and Dean 2009). My exegesis offers a practical and embodied conceptualisation of how queer and feminist theories have contributed to my photographic methods, rather than only making a contribution to these theoretical disciplines. Whilst this is an inter-disciplinary scholarly engagement, my research is located in art, rather than in queer theory, trans theory, and feminist theory. I argue towards the deliberate and provocative production of images as a way to visually engage with trans, queer, and feminist theoretical paradigms. My analysis of my photographic practice is informed by dilemmas arising from my experiences of making photographs and exhibiting work for an audience. I utilise these dilemmas as a catalyst, interrogating them reflexively and in dialogue with my positionality, using theory to inform practice and politics. I engage with a question posed by Estelle Barrett: “What new knowledge/ understandings did the studio enquiry and methodology generate that may not have been revealed through other research approaches?” (2010, 1). I demonstrate how the process of making and publicly exhibiting imagery generates insights into feminist and queer photography and representation that might differ from those generated through theoretical and interpretive



engagement alone.

While trans artists are experiencing an increase in art institutional recognition, their lineage in these spaces is fleeting (Gregory and Vaccaro 2017). This exegesis acts as a collaged archive (one of infinite assemblages) of trans, gender diverse, queer, and feminist perspectives. The trans and queer artists discussed in this exegesis all demonstrate the pleasure and political potential of taking up space in a public art gallery with personal, iterative, feminist, queer and trans imagery. Through this engagement, I am contributing to broader critiques of these institutions, which have traditionally limited inclusion and representation. Trans and gender diverse people need greater visibility in these spaces so that we can imagine ourselves, with more nuance and complexities, beyond normative narratives made about us. Throughout this PLR my critique of limiting trans narratives is aimed towards those frequently represented in photography and art culture, with a peripheral reference to popular culture and reinforced through medico-legal institutions. It is not a critique of trans and gender diverse individuals' experiences of their bodies, identities, or how people represent themselves visually. I argue for the necessity of trans people visually representing trans experiences, thus expanding and layering the visual landscape of queer and trans imagery exhibited in Australian gallery spaces.

Throughout this PLR I use numerous terms to describe my own gender; however, the term I return to most frequently is trans. I use trans to encompass gender diversity and non-binary identities, unless otherwise stated. I recognise, however, there are many people whose gender differs from what was presumed for them at birth and do not identify with the term trans. Halberstam writes that when it comes to language that categorises, we cannot “stabilize fluctuations in meaning” (2018a, 9). He uses the term Trans\* where “the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity” (4). Whilst I embrace the multiplicity and expansiveness this term embodies, I am not familiar with this term being utilised in the trans community in Perth or in Australia more broadly. For this reason, I have not adopted it for this PLR. I use the term trans with these instabilities, iterations, and complications in mind.

## Chapter overviews

The structure of this exegesis is informed by my methodology, which compels an interwoven approach. I critically engage with theory, practice, and embodied knowledge in all chapters of this exegesis. In Chapter 1 I establish my methodological approach by situating it in relation to PLR methodologies, feminist methodologies, and bricolage methodologies. I outline how Campbell and Farrier's (2015) concept of messy, queer erosion shows the political potential for queer PLR. I use first-person perspective, and my unruly, trans, queer body in my research as a way of "queering normative hierarchies of knowledge" (83) and damaging boundary lines. Supported by feminist theory, in particular the notion of situated knowledges, I argue that creative practice driven by first-person perspective and lived experience is critical for trans research. I connect this methodological approach to a broader argument against the institutional regulation of trans bodies. Through this research, and through practice, I develop a methodology that is focused on a queer and feminist politics of assemblage, juxtaposition, amateurism, damage, excess, and a deliberate anti-monumentalism.

Chapter 2 establishes the concepts of authenticity, fixity, and hierarchy in photography theory and culture. Throughout this exegesis, I reference numerous contemporary art examples where there is still an expectation that the camera creates a 'neutral' documentation of reality (Sontag [1977] 2008, 2003), and I locate these ideas in photography theory. I interrogate the proposition that digital photography is empty (Batchen 2001a) and dematerialised (Fackler 2019), and outline how these criticisms of the digital medium can in fact be beneficial for feminist and queer image-making. I show how loosening the relationship between the photograph and the referent can be a necessary and political method for imagining the visual worlds we do not see ourselves reflected in. This may be particularly useful for those who have not traditionally been visible in photographic art histories and/or not been able to represent themselves in these histories. I also explore the hierarchy between film and digital photography; though this hierarchy may appear to be an argument that is perhaps best relegated to decades past, I show the lingering impact of the belief in film as a more inherently authentic material. I show how

these lingering ideas in photography theory are informed by a patriarchal social order, which continues to shape concepts of authenticity and reality in representation. I set the scene for why a performative and playful take on the amateur photographer is a useful method to challenge masculine heterosexual traditions. Throughout the exegesis I connect these common mythologies about the photographic medium to narratives that shape trans and queer representation.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how saturated colour, large-scale casting processes, and visible pixels can be utilised as visual methods to celebrate and subvert themes of amateurism, inauthenticity, and excess. I unpack how I use these methods as provocations for feminist and queer image-making that contest the normative, masculinist, heterosexual photographic traditions within photography culture. The embodied experience of making and exhibiting *Fluctuate* forms the impetus for this critique. All of the photographic methods I explore in this chapter are connected, in various ways, to flexible and shapeshifting bodies. I detail the haphazard casting processes that form an analogy for thinking through common narratives that female bodies are messy and leaky (Grosz 1994), as well as navigating the boundaries between the inside and outside of bodies. I engage with Racheal Whiteread's large-scale installations of casted boxes to explore how to make anti-monumental, large-scale works that do not seek to distance the viewer, but rather invite us to move through the works. I move back and forth between large-scale and close-up explorations of materiality. I also consider processes for damaging pixels (the building blocks of an image), or making them visible, as ways to counter the high-resolution aspirations that are often celebrated as professional within photography.

Mid-way through Chapter 3 I focus on exploring the possibilities of saturated colour in image-making. I demonstrate how colour shares many attributes with my central PLR objectives for iteration and collage. Photographers who work with colour in ways that exceed what is considered natural or neutral (Bajorek 2015; Kane 2011; Wiese 2016) are often met with charges of inauthenticity, superficiality, and amateurism (Malcolm [1980] 1997; Sontag [1977] 2008; Young 2006). I focus on how Pipilotti Rist unapologetically uses colour to counter masculine photographic culture, which privileges high resolution, technical clarity, and 'realistic'

colour management. Her work demonstrates how supposedly 'unprofessional' methods can make room for bodies and desires that do not adhere to representational norms. I show how colour is a key way in which I can visually explore bodies and desires that are messy and in the *process* of un-doing and re-making. The motifs of closeness and distance, inside and outside, are repeated throughout the chapter and I use these motifs as scaffolds to explore how gender is often ascribed based on exterior markers only. I return to the ideas of messy female bodies and complicate this gendered association. In this chapter I explore the connections between messy material photographic processes and messy material bodies.

In many ways, Chapter 2 builds a platform for the ideas unpacked in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 serves a similar purpose for Chapter 5. These latter two chapters concentrate on iterative methods to explore trans and queer bodies in process. Chapter 4 introduces the concept of non-institutional photo archives (the type of archive created through practice and through everyday life) as a method to think through what multiple images can do. I explore the messy materiality of my own digital archives and the collage-like capacity to reimagine narratives and identity. I look at how multiple images can be framed and deployed as excessive, amateur, and feminist clutter (Cross 2014). In Chapter 4, I show how A.L. Steiner demonstrates this point through her large-scale installations comprising hundreds of photographs, often of queer and gender non-conforming people. Steiner uses clutter and multiplicity to expand and make room for queerness in art institutions. Her work rejects the celebration of the singular hero image, and instead argues for a multiplicity. She uses multiplicity in a way that does not overwhelm the viewer (Black 2012). Building large-scale queer everyday archives in institutions is a world building exercise (*ibid*) as it is not often we see queer bodies represented in these spaces. In response to the daily saturation and celebration of cisgender and heterosexual bodies, I am interested in the affective and intimate relationships queer and trans people have with images that we see ourselves reflected in. By exploring how images shape us, I make my argument about the need for a diverse range of trans and queer imagery within art spaces, made by diverse makers. Understanding the intimacy and connectivity between bodies and imagery is key to shaping the methodologies I explore throughout this PLR.

Chapter 5 realises my overarching objective to develop visual methods that explore trans and queer bodies in process. To illustrate this, I focus on the everyday pressures that narratives of arrival exert upon trans bodies and experiences. Throughout the process of reshaping and reimagining my body by using collage processes in my images, as well as physically through surgery and hormones, I have sensed a pressure to provide a linear 'transition' narrative and to arrive at a place of clear resolution. Bodies that change gender, or are gender ambiguous, are frequently framed as a threat and configured into narratives that seek to eliminate confusion. In this final chapter I revel in this ambiguity in a bid to create representations of trans and non-binary bodies that loosen the possibilities for how desire and intimacy are visually depicted. I show how photography and collage lend themselves to the exploration of authenticity in self-representation and queer identity. I refer to my series *PDA*, which speaks to my experiences of negotiating public space as a trans and queer person. *PDA* explores pleasurable material processes, self-assemblage, camp aesthetics, everyday gender performances, and intimate connections. I explore Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's archive, and demonstrate how their integration of performance into everyday life, and the importance they place on contradiction, have shaped my own practice.

I explore the material processes of transforming and embellishing the surfaces of bodies and surfaces of images through camp aesthetics and performance. Camp challenges the audience's expectations of gender and sexuality, and I show how it connects to my central method of collage through the notions of the amateur, cutting and pasting, and contradiction. I explore how cropping my face out of the frame, which is often a key indicator of gender, is a way to be boldly present, but also remain anonymous. I detail the complex relationship cropping has in relation to gender ambiguity, through erasure, objectification, and deception. I also show how I can utilise cropping as a camp method to direct the viewer's gaze. In the last section of Chapter 5, I explore how the visual method of time-lapse (using before and after photos) can disrupt how we respond to nostalgia for the past. This method also unsettles the ideas of linear arrival in trans representation. I look at ways to playfully perform concepts of arrival and homeliness and engage with old images from my archive. I consider Cassils's photographs and performance in connection to Crawford's (2010) concept of trans bodies as archives. In

Cassils's work *Time Lapse* (2011), they document the changes to their body as they undergo an intense bodybuilding regime. Their work challenges the expectation for trans bodies to arrive at a place of stability. I also explore the visual methods Cassils uses in their work *Becoming an Image* (2011–2019), which confronts trans representations of violence. They use photographic methods to emphasise the audience's gaze and the dilemmas of witnessing. In this chapter, I performatively explore ideas about trans archives as a series of stopovers through the use of photography, and how this process offers an avenue for expansive and iterative trans representation.

### **The archetype of the serious photographer**

In the remaining three sections of this introduction, I explore a number of important background concepts that have informed this PLR. The first section is a summary of key considerations about feminism and gender politics in photography and art. I outline how patriarchal culture has shaped my experiences in art galleries. In the following section titled *Undoing expectations of being public*, I outline my early experiences with photographic conventions and how they inform my later exploration of self-representation. I situate the feminist theoretical and conceptual foundations for this PLR through the work of Sara Ahmed, Chris Kraus, and Jack Halberstam. I conclude this introduction with a discussion of queer and trans representation in art institutions and art galleries, the context in which my images are exhibited.

I had internalised the unequal power dynamics between subject and photographer long before I picked up my first SLR camera. I grew up with the image of the celebrated, white, cisgender male photographer as the heroic professional, holding his camera with bravado or as “a predatory weapon” (Sontag [1977] 2008, 10). Photography's role in replicating unequal gender disparities has been central to theoretical and popular discussion for decades (Parsons 2017; Raymond 2017; Solomon-Godeau [1995] 2017). Gender bias is deeply ingrained, influencing who has access to work, who benefits economically, who progresses in their career, who is

taken seriously, and who is offered a safe workplace free from discrimination. It also shapes the aesthetics and image content that are celebrated and rewarded. When only one part of society is responsible for the majority of the images we consume daily, gender roles, heterosexuality, and white hegemony (Moreton-Robinson 2004, 87) are maintained through repeated representation. In this exegesis, I argue that these debates are far from over. Reflecting on my own practice, I recognise the pull towards certain tropes of traditional masculinist photography. The artists and photographers I turn to in this exegesis have taught me how to disrupt, discard, and re-imagine the conventions that support patriarchal traditions in both photography and art culture.

My experience of gender has offered me a critical purview into how gender shapes experiences of art spaces. When working as a young female and feminine identified artist, both men and women in positions of power treated me noticeably differently to male colleagues at a similar stage in their careers. I am well aware that reporting on these experiences risks accusations of being dramatic or petty, or of complaining too much; however, the covert threat of such accusations is also a mechanism to prevent complaint (Ahmed 2017). Interpersonal interactions would reveal this bias in both obvious and subtle ways — for example, being referred to as a ‘female artist’, while my male contemporaries are simply ‘artists’. These linguistic differences reveal the persistent view that female makers are on some level an anomaly within male-dominated artistic spaces. These narratives have persisted since openly identifying as trans. Having my non-binary gender recognised is the most pressing of challenges, as even when showing trans images I still get referred to as a ‘female artist’ and introduced as a ‘great gal’. My experience as a female, and then, as a trans person exhibiting in art galleries has offered numerous insights into the gendered differences experienced by artists. In these spaces, my creative intentions and the rationale behind my work is repeatedly questioned or moderated, while the cis male artists I am exhibiting alongside are given free rein to own the space without the same scrutiny and demand for accountability. In the past, whilst identifying as female and feminine, I was approached by men who assume that the exploration of sexuality in my artwork is an invitation to ask inappropriate questions about my sex life. I have experienced unsolicited flirtation at my own exhibition openings, which I have often sensed arises due to assumptions

that the subject matter in my work means I am 'easy'. It is well documented that these experiences are commonplace in art (Kraus [1998] 2006; Nochlin [1971] 2003). In Chapter 1, I refer to Maggie Nelson's (2015) example of Rosalind Krauss shaming Jane Gallop for showing personal photos that include nudity, which demonstrates how women can perpetuate misogyny. Increased attention was directed at everyday misogyny in Australian art spaces in 2018 through the National Association for the Visual Arts's (NAVA) (2018) open letter titled "Dear Person I've been Reluctant to Keep Engaging with but have had to for Professional Reasons". Although increased diversity of representation in image culture and art institutions may be happening, nonetheless complications, delays, and refusals continue to proliferate in many interpersonal and professional relations. These experiences impact how we make. They influence our access, support, and how we progress in our careers.

In commercial photography and photojournalism contexts, the gender disparity is clear. Men are far more likely to be photojournalists (Hadland, Campbell, and Lambert 2015; Macharia 2015) and they make up 71% of the news media workforce in the Asia Pacific region (Macharia 2015, 45). Camera brand ambassador programs globally often appoint a significantly lower number of female photographers. For example, in 2017, a Nikon Asia and Africa campaign presented 32 male ambassadors and not a single female (Victor 2017). In an article in *The Guardian* newspaper, Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore (2019) explains how gender inequality plays out in the day-to-day experiences of Australian female photographers. She refers to photographer Cybele Malinowski's experiences on set, noting that

the client would assume that her male assistant was the photographer, or that she was the makeup artist or stylist. More recently, when she became pregnant, Malinowski suddenly found herself losing jobs: clients told her they feared she just wasn't "up to it".

Gomerioi/Gamilaraay Murri yinah woman Barbara McGrady, a leading photojournalist who creates powerful representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples to highlight their contributions, political struggles and communities, speaks about how she can be "twice overlooked as a woman and a black woman" (quoted in Tatham and McAllister 2018). A 2018



global photojournalist report found 68% of women experienced discrimination. This “included stereotyping (56%), sexism within the industry (54%), a lack of opportunities for women (49%), and social and family expectations (42%)” (Hadland and Barnett 2018, 21). These disparities are part of a larger project of ongoing exclusivity and elitism. Discrimination was also found to be deeply impacted by “age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and nationality” (ibid). In 2020, there is clearly still more work to be done in eroding these stereotypical expectations and limitations within the photography profession.

These stereotypes extend to the subject matters assumed to be best focused on by women. Angela Liang explains how in a commercial photography context “[s]tereotypes often dictate that ‘women should stick to what they know: weddings, beauty, children, families’” (quoted in Sebag-Montefiore 2019). The assumptions that female photographers have lower technical capability, or that they should remain bounded to capturing ‘feminine subjects’, are fatiguing stereotypes that can be traced to early advertising campaigns when gelatine emulsion was first invented leading to mass accessibility of the medium. In 1893 the Kodak Girl advertising campaign was introduced which included “phrases like ‘even mum could use it’” (Jackson 2019). Women were delegated the responsibility of saving the memories of family life (Skyrme 2013) and were discouraged from tackling political or serious subject matter. Even when women purposely chose to focus on subjects considered more feminine for political purposes, including not only the obvious topics of family and domesticity, but also emotions, bodies, and intimacy, they were not taken seriously.

Chris Kraus writes about the criticism artist Hannah Wilke faced in the 1970s: “From the very start, art critics saw Hannah’s willingness to use her body in her work as an act of ‘narcissism’” ([1998] 2006, 214). Kraus articulates a central question that Wilke was asking: “If women have failed to make ‘universal’ art because we’re trapped within the ‘personal,’ why not universalize the ‘personal’ and make it the subject of our art?” (ibid, 211). The assumptions that women are navel-gazing and too close to the content they produce is echoed in the methods that are celebrated in the work of male photographers; a framework that suggests an omniscient and neutral viewpoint is more desirable.

Whilst much time has passed since Wilke was contending with this criticism, Maggie Nelson writes in 2013 of “the age-old trope of disavowing anything associated with the (sentimental, mundane, soft-minded) feminine as a ticket to (critical, artistic, human) seriousness—which is why you will find so many women in the mainstream doing it”. Halberstam writes of how femininity is associated with fraudulence and explains that “indeed many versions of feminisms have viewed femininity with suspicion, characterising it as pure artifice, as theatre and as performance” (Halberstam 2018b, 120). As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, when the maker is female or queer, the criticism Wilke faced in past decades still continues to appear in public discourse. I refer to a 2018 review article by Christopher Allen as an example. In his review of artist Pipilotti Rist’s *Sip my Ocean* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, he mocks her work as decorative, superficial, and narcissistic, and makes reference to the age-old trope of the hysterical woman. Pipilotti Rist’s work is intimate; it brings bodies and images close together. In her video works, the camera slips over skin, and between bodies, and we are entangled within plants, textures, and kaleidoscopic colour. Through these methods, she creates new ways of imaging bodies and desires. In this exegesis, I also draw from personal experiences that demonstrate affinity with these long-standing critiques of femininity. As a young female and feminine photographer who was representing my own body and exploring intimacy in my images, critiques of my earlier work centred on superficiality, inauthenticity, and excess. By contrast, a central objective in my practice now is to contest these negative associations by using *too* much colour and exploring subjects that are deemed *too* personal or *too* feminine. Whilst deeply respecting the connection between femininity and womanhood, I am most interested in artists who expand visual depictions of femininity to allow various bodies and identities to experiment and celebrate what femininity might encapsulate, in turn challenging the normative gender limitations that impact all of us, myself included.

The type of photographic images I am actively responding to is the tableau photography genre, made famous by Jeff Wall, Thomas Ruff, and Jean-Marc Bustamante in the 1970s. These artists create large-scale, staged imagery presented as heroic monuments, which viewers are asked to admire from afar. Michael Fried writes that the images of German artist Thomas Demand,

whose practice stems from the tableau tradition, are “wanting nothing from the viewer, of giving him or her no opportunity for empathic projection of any kind” (2008, 266). Also working from this lineage is Andreas Gursky, one of the highest selling photographers of our time and whose large-scale images often depict mass production, feats of engineering, and destruction of human-made landscapes. Gursky’s work is often referred to in relation to the sublime (Nanay 2012; Ohlin 2002) and is celebrated for its high resolution and large-scale image clarity. Gursky’s compositions are often composites, created using multiple photographs. However, rather than the seam lines being visible, the collage process is meticulously erased. Alix Ohlin describes how “an air of unreality pervades the spaces he depicts, a sense of sparseness and order that abstracts the picture, even down to areas that one would assume to be messy, like a high-tech workroom” (2002, 28). Gursky’s pixel-free, high resolution, lush, cleaned-up images provide the distance we need in order to feel safe from the untenable scenes of consumerism that he depicts. His process makes a spectacle of the destruction and proposes distance, order, and containment. Process is hidden from view.

My practice seeks to do the opposite. To show messiness, I work with messiness. I work to bring bodies and images close together by using grainy and textured colour, close cropping, visible seamlines, and details such as scratches and stains. I explore the potentiality of surface texture for bodily, intimate, personal image content through Laura Marks’s “haptic visuality” where “the eyes themselves function like organs of touch” (2000, 162). Marks explains that “optic visuality”, on the other hand, “sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space: in other words, how we usually conceive of vision” (ibid). The latter occularcentric framework more readily aligns with the male traditions of the tableau. All of the artists and theorists I engage with use an approach that is not about heroism and distance, but rather about inviting the audience or reader in as part of a politics of accessibility and connection.

## Undoing expectations of being public

Throughout this PLR I draw on my experiences of initially striving for idealised femininity and becoming aware of the conventions and methods of socialisation that work to preserve and support the heteronormative gaze. As a young adult, taking photographs of myself was a way to actively explore my desire and identity. How I arranged myself for the camera and the aesthetic conventions I borrowed from were, understandably, heavily entrenched in heterosexiness (Dobson 2015). Being sexy is an expectation of normative femininity, yet simultaneously showing sexiness publicly, as a young woman, is readily framed as slutty and “equated with victimhood, low self-esteem, and/or deviancy” (Dobson 2015, 40). These images were repeating the expectations of femininity for a masculinised, heterosexualised gaze (Mulvey 1975). The aesthetic conventions of normative white femininity and womanhood are not only visible in my young adult social media snapshots. They are also present in numerous series of artworks created when I first started photographing my body for this PLR. The long-standing tensions between empowerment and subjugation in terms of girlhood media cultures and the sexualisation of young women’s subjectivities are explored by numerous feminist scholars (Dobson 2015; Gill 2003, 2008, 2009; Lamb and Peterson 2012; McRobbie 2009). Framing these experiences of normative sexuality *only* as oppressive erases the pleasure and performative elements of self-making through photography. These concepts of sexualisation culture, post-feminist critique of agency, and subjugation are not the focus of this thesis. However, developing visual methods that contest the heterosexual, masculinised gaze is part of my objective of exploring trans and queer bodies through collage.

One of the reasons I have connected with Ahmed’s theory of feminism, particularly her book *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), is because she uses everyday, embodied experiences of misogyny as a starting place for critique. These everyday experiences are connected to broader social and cultural structures that seek to preserve hierarchies of knowledge and power. Ahmed writes that “feminism often begins with intensity” (2017, 22). She continues:

Over time, with experience, you sense that something is wrong or you have a feeling of being wronged. You sense an injustice. You might not have used

that word for it; you might not have the words for it; you might not be able to put your finger on it. Feminism can begin with a body, a body in touch with a world, a body that is not at ease in a world; a body that fidgets and moves around. Things don't seem right. (Ibid)

There is often the assumption that gut feelings do not matter. I have been socialised to discount and cover over these feeling of niggling unease, as it is assumed that it is preferable to retain a smooth, cheerful exterior (Ahmed 2017). This is not to say gut feelings embody an authenticity and truth that cannot be questioned. Rather, this approach is about noticing and attending to bodies as a valid site for knowledge. Throughout this PLR, I prioritise embodied, sensory, and material experience.

Ahmed explores how feminism can emerge in moments of a bodily snap, which means “to break suddenly; to give way abruptly under pressure or tension” (2017, 188). She explains that “a snap might even seem like a violent moment; the unbecoming of something” (ibid), or even “self-harm” (195). The concept of damage as a productive force is a central theme throughout this research. Ahmed writes about “lesbian feminism as wilful carpentry” (232), which expresses the process of ruining and destroying in order to make space for expansive re-making. She writes:

We might then think of fragility not so much as the potential to lose something, fragility as loss, but as a quality of relations we acquire, or a quality of what we build. A fragile shelter has looser walls... A movement is what is built to survive what has been built. When we loosen the requirements to be in a world, we create room for others to be. (Ibid)

This framework allows for iteration and flexibility. It refuses to settle down. It also speaks to rupturing a smooth exterior, or a fast and sudden break with lineage, which are, as I will discuss throughout this exegesis, feminist and queer methods to destabilise meaning and representation. I can recall many of my own experiences of a feminist snap—most notably, leaving outwardly performed heterosexuality and re-imagining my femininity as a trans person on testosterone and post-chest surgery. I was ‘damaging’ and defying all my socialisation

as a white female—including the middle-class expectations of femininity which, as Susan Brownmiller explains, “combines a deferential attitude with ornaments of the upper class and an etiquette composed in equal parts of modesty and exhibition” (1984, 19). Ahmed shows ruining such socialisation and convention is both constructive and necessary if we are to ‘live a feminist life’. I contend that the same process of deconstruction, of undoing, of making a mess, are necessary to facilitate trans possibilities beyond stultifying narratives and representations.

Key to the demands of publicly performing ‘correct’ femininity is a demonstration of the stability of selfhood. Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick* ([1998] 2006) is a critique of this expectation. The book is a carefully crafted performance that responds to concepts of excess and failure. Through a series of theatrical exchanges between her and her partner, *I Love Dick* details Kraus’s obsessional love for Dick, later revealed to be cultural critic Dick Hebdige. She explores the “desire to fictionalize life” ([1998] 2006, 26), which is demonstrated through how she collages fiction with memoir, art writing, her experiences as a filmmaker, and theory. Like Ahmed, Kraus’s book utilises the integration of everyday politics with academic discourse as a vital methodology for critiquing the academic institutions that seek to preserve the hierarchies that allow white cisgender men to remain in power. Kraus’s character is unashamedly public and messy. She is making a mess, but she is also making a point. She is performatively responding to male fears of unruly female bodies. Kraus writes:

I think the sheer fact of women talking, being, paradoxical, inexplicable, flip, self-destructive but above all else *public* is the most revolutionary thing in the world. I could be 20 years too late but epiphanies don’t always synchronize with style. (Ibid, 210; italics in original)

In the ever-changing cultural space of public and private boundaries, this statement remains pertinent 22 years later, perhaps even more so in the current context of social media performativity where women’s public self-revelation is both constantly demanded and critiqued (Dobson 2015). Whilst much has changed, the same criticisms about ‘oversharing’, being *too* public, remain (ibid). Kraus is not only being public, but public in a way that destabilises the acceptable image of a woman. Part of this is because her subjectivity is not presented as fixed

and stable.

The allure of the true authentic self is celebrated in reality television and on social media platforms, such as Instagram. The neatness and stability that this narrative offers is certainly seductive. In relation to online self-representation, Amy Dobson writes,

Girls and young women are expected to be 'on display,' not only to make their bodies visible, but also to speak, to be heard, to express their 'inner' selves confidently, 'authentically,' and 'transparently,' and thus, to make themselves *known*. (2015, 162; italics in original)

There are often similar pressures on trans people to speak of their authentic self and arrival at a solid, unchanging understanding of selfhood (Crawford 2010). The concept of being your 'authentic self' is also a privilege, which is not available to all LGBTQIA+ people. Kraus describes these pressures on women as "the kind of story everybody likes, about a tough girl who becomes a truer version of herself by uncovering her vulnerability" ([1998] 2006, 238), as if by dispensing with the façade we are led to a core authentic self. As Kraus continues, "it was the kind of story (dare I say it?) that women are supposed to write because all its truths are grounded in a single lie: denying chaos" (ibid). Kraus articulates the "impossible position female artists find themselves in when they try to be 'authentic' and the limited ways they are expected to act in public, as per the demands of heterosexual patriarchal norms. In this exegesis and through my imagery, I explore the question of what it might mean to actively and performatively unravel in public, and to show this unravelling as intimately personal and political. Kraus's practice and writing involves a process of undoing, of allowing herself to be messy and I understand this as a process of collage. In this PLR, I explore how I can explore a similar undoing through material collage photographic processes.

Kraus demonstrates how unravelling can be a powerful feminist assertion. However, what does it mean to borrow from Kraus's model of undoing and unravelling in public, when my body is not easily intelligible, through a normative lens, to begin with? Now that my body does not fit normative expectations of male or female, adhering is not an option. 'Failure' is

now the starting point, rather than a desired end point. I have learned this from Halberstam, specifically his book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), where queer failure is a site of possibility. The book offers a queer radical alternative to neoliberal and capitalist culture's performance of success. It begins with the proposition that to access the possibilities opened by queer failure, we must "resist mastery" (11), "privilege the naïve or nonsensical (stupidity)" (12), and "suspect memorialization" (15). Halberstam explains "[t]he desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production" (6). For Halberstam, queerness questions ideas of family succession and normative concepts of authenticity (ibid). He explains that "[c]apitalist logic casts the homosexual as inauthentic and unreal, as incapable of proper love and unable to make the appropriate connections between sociality, relationality, family, sex, desire, and consumption" (95). Halberstam (2018a) also applies this to trans bodies. He explains that "over the past century trans\* bodies have been cast as unreal, inauthentic, and aberrant" (34) and that the lived consequences of this charge differ depending on multiple factors, such as race, socio-economic situation, and disability status. Halberstam demonstrates how untethering from dominant lineage and questioning normative models of authenticity can instigate new formations.

Of relevance to Kraus's character in *I Love Dick*, is Halberstam's concept of shadow feminism, which explores a feminist politics of self-destruction and proposes "shady, murky modes of undoing, un-becoming, and violating" (2011, 4). The concept also shares similarities with Ahmed's (2017) conceptualisation of a feminist snap, and ruining to remake; however, Halberstam's shadow feminism has a more prominent emphasis on a refusal to reform with optimism. Halberstam links shadow feminism to processes of collage and writes of how female artists have used collage to explore "the promise of transformation, not through a positive production of the image but through a negative destruction of it that nonetheless refuses to relinquish pleasure" (2011, 136). Through discussion of violence and cutting in Yoko Ono's 1964 work *Cut Piece*, Halberstam demonstrates she "refuses conventional modes of femininity by refusing to remake, rebuild, or reproduce and that dedicates itself completely and ferociously to the destruction of self and other" (138). Halberstam's shadow feminism serves as a model of feminist intensity that engages with risky methods. As Anna Watkins Fisher suggested, Kraus's



approach too is somewhat risky as it tests the limits of self-destruction (2012). Fisher frames Kraus's relationship with Dick as a feminist parasitical relationship, where the intention is "to suffocate or drown" (231) the hetero-patriarchy by using the same methods of domination, a tactic which has commonalities with shadow feminism. Whilst I am compelled by the visceral and destructive intensity of shadow feminism, an engagement with negativity, self-destruction, and violence as feminist method are not part of my PLR objectives. Violence, disappearance, and erasure, do however, briefly appear as part of my discussion in the chapter that follow. These ideas carry different meanings when applied to trans histories, trans representation, and trans bodies and I engage with them carefully, yet also clarify that they are beyond the scope of this research. Shadow feminism has, however, deeply shaped my politics of refusing to reproduce a neat, typically positive representation of trans bodies as per normative cisgender ideals.

As a visual maker, I have a different set of concerns to Halberstam, Ahmed, and Kraus. My methodology hinges on image-making, materiality and personal photo archives. In this PLR my exploration of undoing and damage is conceptualised through messiness. As I have already mentioned, messiness is about showing the seam lines, grainy details, and stains. It comes from my material process of working with an unwieldy stash of printed and digital images from my archive. Messiness relates to my material processes of working with slippery plaster as I detail in Chapter 3. As I have learned from Kraus, understanding the pleasures of this messiness is about embracing mess when the culture I am surrounded by tells me not to. Using the term messy is also a political response to the institutional regulation and authentication of trans bodies, which I explore at the end of Chapter 1. Embracing messy gender is not possible for all trans people. Nor is it always desirable, and for some trans people it is a source of distress. My genderqueer messiness is a frequent problem in my everyday life, and, at times, I am fearful for my safety because of it. Embracing mess is a gesture towards the long lineage of queer interventions to re-imagine derogatory or negative terms. In this PLR I explore how mess and collage is a way to counter cisgenderism, homophobia, and misogyny in trans representation by exploring the possibilities and pleasures of fragmentation, iteration, and rejecting a neat resolution. I further unpack messiness as a methodology in Chapter 1.

## Art institutions

The creative practice outcomes for this research have all been made for exhibition and shown in a variety of art spaces. This includes state institutions, arts organisations, commercial galleries, and artist run spaces. The white walls of galleries are far from neutral, and in the following section I explore some key considerations about institutional and gallery contexts for trans and queer representation.

A central way in which exclusive lineages are reproduced and preserved is through art institutions. These exclusions prescribe whose perspectives are validated by institutions, and who is able to represent their own community on institutional walls, and many people and communities are impacted as a result (Sullivan and Middleton 2020). Stamatina Gregory and Jeanne Vaccaro explain how trans artists do not have a formalised lineage of artists to draw from, and trans artists “historically lack institutional investment, market interest, and representation in established museums and galleries” (2017, 356). Institutions can play a vital role in changing community attitudes by disrupting settler-colonial and heteronormative narratives within their collections. Queer theorist Nikki Sullivan and curator Craig Middleton write that “for decades feminists, artists of colour, and others have identified, criticised, and attempted to counter the massive over-representation of white, upper-class, able-bodied, cisgender men in positions of power in cultural institutions” (2020, 19). Artist and curator Paola Balla, a Wemba Wemba and Gunditjmara woman, drawing from a long lineage of Aboriginal matriarchal resistance, speaks of the ongoing project to decolonise white Australian art institutions. She writes that “Instead of Indigenising and decolonising, institutions continue with dominant white voices that separate Aboriginal people from art, art without community, art without Country and collections without community engagement” (25). She continues that “this maintains the status quo of us standing on the outside looking in, or ‘visiting’ the inside looking out” (25). Whilst there has been much more public conversation about the need for diversity in institutions, institutional mission statements can sometimes be used to symbolically recognise there is a problem, but gloss over the depths of racism, eurocentrism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism upon which the institution is founded and supported (Sullivan and

Middleton 2020).

It is not only about allowing access to those traditionally excluded. There are both subtle and overt ways in which institutional expectations shape what *types* of representations, by diverse makers, are permissible and supported. Curator Ivan Muñiz Reed describes decolonial curating to “advocate for an epistemic disobedience, replacing or complementing eurocentric discourses and categories with alternative perspectives” (2017, 101). He explains that “systematically including oppressed histories into the museum has proven to be insufficient, and in fact, when not carefully enacted, has led to an institutional tokenism, which has only served to reinforce imperial power hierarchies” (ibid). Sullivan and Middleton (2020), who explore how LGBTQIA+ lives and experiences have historically been ignored in institutional space, explain that the methods that have been implemented to promote LGBTQIA+ diversity are often tokenistic, and that heteronormativity is still dominant. For example, trans people may feel pressure to present easily digestible narratives of gender that do not cause trouble, that replicate ‘safe’ cisgender framing of trans lives. Fear of benefactors and funding being lost, causing embarrassment to the institution (Messih and Barry 2019), making audiences uncomfortable, low visitor numbers, or generating unwanted media attention, are often cited as excuses for maintaining heteronormative perspectives (Sullivan and Middleton 2020). Trans people of colour, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Brotherboys, Sistergirls, and trans and gender diverse people may contend with numerous complexities not captured here and may draw from long histories of diversity and resistance to respond to challenges art institutions can present.

Jeannine Tang explains that whilst trans lives and trans artists have in recent years experienced more recognition in North America, “running parallel to this rise in visibility is the heightened vulnerability of transgender people to forms of state-sanctioned violence and murder and to slow deaths from chronic isolation, poverty, and mass incarceration” (2017, 365). Gregory and Vaccaro explain that we need to “recognize and confront the vulnerability of trans life” in order to write about transgender art history (2017, 360). These hard realities should be visible in trans representation; however, when they are represented only through stereotypes and by cisgender creators, it does not offer us room to imagine ourselves outside of these

plot trajectories. In the Australian context, Lucy Nicholas (2019) notes that with the increased visibility of non-binary and genderqueer identities, there has been an intensification of public criticism towards these genders. When trans artists exhibit publicly, there is an increased risk of transphobic responses from the public, as suddenly trans experiences can be framed as something to debate. I have found it particularly challenging to witness audience members who are noticeably uncomfortable with my imagery and my gender. In *Clear Expectations: Guidelines for Institutions, Galleries and Curators working with Trans, Non-Binary and Gender Diverse Artists*, Spence Messih and Archie Barry write that “visibility and representation is not always an inherently positive and beneficial experience... Being ‘represented’ often comes at a large personal cost” (2019, 2). They explain that “visibility often means having to respond on someone else’s terms, speak only about one’s gender identity and provide evidence of, and defend, one’s own existence” (ibid). In my own experience, repeatedly having to educate the gallery staff is exhausting (particularly when compounded with other exhibition-related stresses) and knowing that my gender is likely to be questioned publicly (on the opening night of the exhibition and at artist’s talks) brings additional anxiety. There is an expectation that if you chose to be public about being trans, then you should have it ‘figured out’, thus making it particularly difficult for artists who are questioning and exploring their identity. Not all artists who are trans wish to make work about gender or can speak publicly about being trans. Whilst there have certainly been developments in recent years, insisting on queer and trans legitimacy in public galleries demands an ongoing project of taking up space.

Queering the Museum, a project led by Sullivan and Middleton, demonstrates how a collaborative, creative, and community approach can unravel traditional lineage and dislodge authoritative knowledge. Sullivan and Middleton write that Queering the Museum is “an intervention aimed at problematising the dominant, heteronormative, museological paradigms and the policies, practices and subject positions to which they give rise” (2020, 1). In a project also titled Queering the Museum, undertaken at the South Australian Migration Museum, and led by Sullivan, the public was invited to participate in the re-interpretation of the museum’s collection from queer perspectives through a website. The central idea is that objects have multiple stories to tell and which stories dominate depends on whose relationship with objects

(and histories) is privileged. Through this collaborative community project, the project not only points out the erasure or omission of queer histories: they point to a much deeper issue around how we think of history as static and singular. They highlight the changeability and fluidity of our relationships with the past and the multiple points of view that the past is constructed from<sup>1</sup>. I understand and conceptualise this as *a collage approach to making meaning collaboratively*. They explain how the past is continuously made through the concerns of the present, therefore making it a site of radical transformation of social relations in the present. Chapters 4 and 5 similarly play with time and context by collaging images from various periods to highlight the malleability of narratives I have constructed through my personal archives. I show how I engage with these methods to queer the limiting narratives told about trans and queer lives.

Statistics offer a stark insight into the influence of gender on the inclusion of artists within Australian art institutions. Increased accountability of gender inequality within art institutions has been fuelled by the #MeToo movement, which generated public momentum to challenge gender inequality and misogyny. In Australia, the 2016 and 2019 Countess Reports have offered vital information about gender disparities in Australian arts institutions, arts organisations, and artist-run spaces. The 2016 report, which draws on 2014 data, demonstrated that gender inequality was a pressing concern in the state galleries and in media representation. In 2014, 34% of exhibitions in state galleries were by female artists and 59% by male artists (Richardson 2016). The report found that in art media, “34% female artists, 61% male artists were the subject of feature articles and reviews” and that cover articles “included only 20% female artists and 80% male artists” (6). The second version of the report, released in 2019, showed significant improvement in many aspects of the arts sector. However, the report also notes that “in State galleries and museums the representation of women decreased from 36.9% to 33.9% from 2016 to today” and that these institutions “continue to significantly under-represent

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1 An example is Jo Darbyshire’s work *Downunder* in the exhibition *HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer* at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery in 2020. Darbyshire selected 13 historical artworks by prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian artists. She includes a quote below each image, which is sourced from an art historian’s or art critic’s notes, that suggests the artist was queer. *Downunder* demonstrates how queerness destabilises the familiar interpretations of works by these famous artists.

women in their collections and exhibitions” (ibid).

As the Countess Reports indicate, not all publicly funded Australian state arts institutions are working hard enough to challenge assumptions about what professional artists look like. Institutional values are, in many ways, representative of broader cultural values. In keeping with economic inequality in the wider community, the gender pay gap is clearly evident within the arts. A recent report found that between 2016–2017, “the total incomes of female artists were 25 percent less on average than for males, and women earned 30 percent less from their creative work” (Throsby, Petetskaya, and Shin 2020, 2). The report contextualises these statistics by noting that at the time there was a “workforce gender pay gap of 16 percent” (ibid.), highlighting the severity of the art world’s role in perpetuating the dominance of male artists. In an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* titled “Australian Women Call Time on Abuse of Power in Art World”, Lisa Havilah, the then director of Carriageworks, reminds us “the ‘grand narrative’ of the hero male Australian artist still reigns supreme” (Kembrey 2018). Similarly, Australian artist Janet Laurence explains in an interview by the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (2019) that “[t]he public’s perception of artists being these ‘big heroic male figures’ is reinforced by our conservative press and political institutions, so a discussion around women’s [art] work that reaches a broader audience is very important”. Working within art galleries and institutions requires ongoing reflexivity and action to critique the ways in which eurocentric concepts of containing and disciplining gender and sexuality are tied to other inequalities (Sullivan and Middleton 2020). Halberstam (2018a) writes that in mainstream visual culture, trans people are typically represented as white. Challenging this representational assumption is pivotal in arguing for institutional recognition.

The 2019 Countess Report included a category for non-binary artists, the first time such information had been collected in Australia. The report found non-binary artists made up only 1–2% of artists exhibited in arts organisations and artist-run spaces. The collection of this data represents a crucial step forward; however, what remains a tangible issue is that there were “no non-binary artists recorded in curated state gallery exhibitions in 2018” (Prceovich, Richardson, and Samuels 2019, 6). An important caveat is proposed by Archie Barry (2019) in a piece

commissioned by Countess, namely, we must keep in mind that

... there will always be experiences that evade numerical assimilation ... If counting is good for making sense, we also need to find ways to respect and acknowledge the kinds of sense beyond our own paradigms. People are not just women and men, if you want to map a shifting terrain you need a flexible cartography.

The Countless statistics alone demonstrate the necessity of exhibitions that centre on women artists in Australia. However, the cisgenderism of these institutional spaces also needs to be addressed, not only through symbolic gestures of inclusion, but by cisgender curators and staff taking the time to reflect on their own gender as something that is not 'neutral' or normal, challenging their everyday use of gender stereotypes and gendered language, and respecting and enacting the necessity of making trans people feel welcome.

Queer and trans artists face additional hurdles when negotiating art institutions. In addition to facing barriers to inclusion, we also struggle against historical legacies of homophobia and transphobia when it comes to presenting imagery that depicts same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity. Until 2002 in Western Australia, the "promotion or encouragement of homosexual behaviour" was illegal under the *Law reform (decriminalisation of sodomy) act 1989*. This included the public presentation of queer artwork. In the catalogue for a recent exhibition titled *HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer* at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at the University of Western Australia, curated by Brent Harrison (2020), a brief history of queer exhibitions in WA is detailed. Four queer group exhibitions between 1993 and 1999 were held at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, whilst this law was still in place. Jo Darbyshire's *The Gay Museum* was exhibited at the Western Australian Museum in 2003. However, as Harrison notes, "despite the seeming reluctance by institutions to engage with the practice of Queer artists, a plethora of exhibitions have taken place at local Artist Run Initiatives" (12). Gregory and Vaccaro (2017) make a similar point about trans artists in America, namely, that a lot of trans art and performance was self-determined, presented as publications, in clubs, and on the streets, and also had a key role in building a sense of community. Many trans and queer artists

use online platforms to present art directly to their peer group, garnering large audiences, and thus reject the need for an institutional intermediary. Without dependence on institutional recognition or invitations, using social media to challenge representational stereotypes is a powerful contribution to public education, offers connection with other trans and gender diverse people, and has the capacity to generate social change. However, as I explain throughout this PLR, bringing representational disruptions into the space of the gallery and using the authority these spaces muster against itself to disrupt can also be a powerful way to contribute to change, ask questions of credibility, hierarchies, and challenge public perceptions of trans, gender diverse, and/or queer bodies.

## **Conclusion**

The discussions explored so far are important for 'setting the scene' for the chapters that follow. In this introduction I have established key ideas about the patriarchal constraints of photography culture and art practice. From the moment I pick up a camera until the experience of exhibiting in public galleries, gender is informing my experiences. In Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 I explore the way gender, from my shifting positionality, informs photographic methods. In the next chapter I unpack the methodologies developed to undertake this research, including how my positionality has informed this research.



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **MESSY, QUEER, COLLAGE, PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

As I mentioned in the introduction, collage is an organising concept that features in several ways in this PhD: it is a central photographic method; it guides my selection and engagement with artistic works; it is a way to explore trans and queer bodies; it informs my exegetical structure; and it is a common metaphor in the theoretical paradigms I engage. In this chapter I unpack how collage is an integral part of my research methodology and how I use it as a generative and political tool. I begin this chapter by outlining my approach to PLR. I explore literature on bricolage and montage methodologies and demonstrate the queer and feminist potential to build on these methodologies through greater emphasis on the specificity of bodies, positionality, and messiness. I then introduce the pleasures and possibilities of queer messiness, showing how it can be disruptive and unsettle clear discipline boundaries and expectations (Campbell and Farrier 2015). By using a messy, queer, collage, PLR approach, I show how first-person knowledge can be used with purpose in my methodologies to drive my own political critique. To understand personal, subjective, messy bodies in academia, I outline key literature on feminist situated knowledge (Haraway 1991; Harding 1987, 2004) and demonstrate how invalidating knowledge gained through lived experience has been used as method of exclusion (Collins 2000). Throughout this chapter I show how questions of credibility have shaped my methodology. I use queer, messy, collage methodology to engage with questions of artistic and scholarly credibility and outline the significance of embodied knowledge in trans and queer PLR.

### **Practice-led research**

In Australian universities, there is large variation in PLR models and much debate about how practice and research should interrelate to form a singular research project (Ravelli et al.

2013; Robson 2013). The model of PLR I utilise is one where “the written text refers *constantly and explicitly* to the creative work” (Ravelli et al. 2013, 405; italics in original). Foregrounding practice throughout the written exegesis, as I do in this document, is one of four different PLR models Ravelli et al. outline for creative practice theses in Australian postgraduate research. Ravelli et al. explain that in this model “the connections are not simply co-referential, but enable the creative and written components to be linked in multiple ways” (2013, 405). A similar interwoven approach is utilised by artists and academics Leora Farber and Maarit Mäkelä, who frame PLR as “a cyclic relationship *of praxis*, that is, practice-following-theory-following practice” (2010, 14). Farber and Mäkelä (2010) mention that this process is potentially messy, and I unpack this attribute later in the chapter. In addition, my approach is informed by poet, artist and academic Hazel Smith, and musician, academic and scientist Roger T. Dean. They outline PLR as an “iterative cyclic web” (2009, 8). Smith and Dean explain that this model evokes “spider like” (19) movement, with “numerous points of entry, exit, cross-referencing and cross-transit within the practice-research cycle” (8). Emphasising iteration as a mode of development closely connects with the collage process of repetition and re-making in my material photographic method.

I draw from a lineage of PLR scholars who value the affective, sensory, and embodied knowledge generated through making. This connection to bodily and material awareness is most prominently informed by Barbara Bolt (2010), who centres on the knowledge gained through materiality, tools and processes. With reference to Paul Carter’s (2004) term ‘material thinking’, Bolt explains that “the concept of material thinking offers us a way of considering the relations that take place within the very process or tissue of making” (2010, 29). Both Bolt and Carter argue for embodied knowledge, developed intuitively through the process of working with materials, as a valid mode of knowledge production. Bolt further explains that the exegesis offers space for artists to illuminate, and critically engage with, the role of tacit knowledge in creative production, which may otherwise be discarded as insignificant. Similarly, Enza Gandolfo, an Australian creative writer and researcher, speaks of how “material thinking... is often invisible in the actual finished artefact” (2012, 64). This model of PLR shows that what happens behind the scenes—in my case during the process of working with photographic

materials and tools—requires analysis equal to that of the front of stage final image. Australian researcher Estelle Barrett writes of “the potential of studio-based research to demonstrate how knowledge is revealed and how we come to acquire knowledge” (2010, 2) and that this is a crucial contribution of PLR.

PLR is relatively new in academic discourse. This short history has meant that it creates a paradoxical experience for practitioners: it offers both a freedom to experiment, whilst stirring up anxieties about its legitimacy (Barrett 2010; Ravelli et al. 2013; Smith and Dean 2009). Many researchers have been pivotal in arguing for the significance of PLR in universities (Barrett 2010; Gandolfo 2012; Nelson, “Practice-as-Research”, 2006, *Practice as Research*, 2013; Smith and Dean 2009; G. Sullivan 2010) and Australian universities have been central in leading the way for creative production PhD theses since the late 1980s (Nelson, *Practice as Research*, 2013; Ravelli et al. 2013; G. Sullivan 2010). Creative arts as research was introduced at Curtin University in 1998 (Milech and Schilo 2004). One of the reasons for the hesitation in legitimising creative practice as research in universities is the common understanding that art is interpretive, subjective, and involves sensory and affective ways of understanding and making knowledge. Such approaches counter the traditional idea that knowledge has to be accounted for as quantifiable data (Smith and Dean 2009, 3) that is gathered by objective and neutral researchers (Nelson, *Practice as Research*, 2013; Harding 1987). These tensions speak to the divisions between qualitative and quantitative research, as well as to larger epistemological divides—between affective, sensory, and embodied knowledge, and linguistic and semiotic models of knowledge (Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Howes 2005). However, as Barrett argues, “the generative capacity of creative arts research is derived from the alternative approaches it employs—those *subjective, emergent* and *interdisciplinary* approaches” (2010, 3; italics in original). In this PLR I embrace these tensions and anxieties as opportunities. The ability of PLR to “breach accepted practices and challenge assumed canons” (49) echoes some of the driving principles and political disruptions of queer and feminist scholars like Halberstam (2011) and Ahmed (2017). Questioning scholarly hierarchies of credibility has shaped my methodology. In this chapter I demonstrate how I utilise these anxieties about credibility in PLR to enact a queer political methodology.

PLR involves ongoing handling of two components with different and overlapping histories and methods. In my own experience, the ongoing tensions and connectivity between both image-making and writing is continuously tangible and shapes every aspect of PLR. For example, there is a common misconception that creative practice is antithetical to theoretical and textual research. This misconception is frequently expressed by artists (Barrett 2010) and I have noticed two reoccurring concerns that inform this myth. Firstly, a common discourse about theory in art communities is that critical deconstruction of an art work destroys its romance and magic (Carter 2004; Gandolfo 2012; Smith and Dean 2009). From this perspective, it seems as though self-analysis, deconstruction, or verbal explanation will dissolve the apparently thin veil that preserves the artwork's allure and mystique. This narrative implies a smoke and mirrors conception of art, where a seemingly robust artwork can succumb to words. Robin Nelson writes, "Some [artists] are reluctant to reveal their process either because they feel... that to do so would 'extinguish the spark' or because they are precious about what they do" (2013 37). These narratives stem from the mythology of the artist as genius who has a god-like position (Nochlin [1971] 2003) that cannot be questioned. The artist studio, the place where making has traditionally occurred, has long been a place of privacy, mystery, exclusivity, and intimacy (Smith 2017). There are parallels here to the heroic male photographer, as described in the introduction, who keeps the audience at a distance and presents a slick exterior where the process of making is concealed. It is not my intention to eradicate uncertainty and mystery from art making processes. Nor is my intention to suggest that the specialist skills of the artist, which have been developed with labour and time, need to be disclosed to the public in order for them to critically engage with the process. Uncertainty is a key contributing strength of PLR methodologies (Johnson 2013; G. Sullivan 2009) and central to art practice. Nevertheless, I argue that there is a distinction between mystery and uncertainty as pleasurable and experiential contributions of art practice, as opposed to mystery and uncertainty being used to withhold, gatekeep, enact an authority, and prevent criticality.

The second presupposition which perpetuates the opposition between practice and theory, or, more generally, using language to explain artwork, is the idea that an artwork can offer a

specific experience that words cannot. It is commonly understood (and something I know from my own experience) that creating artwork involves processes that cannot be easily explained (Gandolfo 2012); making artwork can be a bodily and affective process that can be beyond, or before, language. It is important to acknowledge the specificity of photography and writing as different mediums that communicate and make meaning in unique ways. In this exegesis I focus on how theory communicated in the written form can enrich and complicate practice and vice versa, rather than positing them in a binary opposition, and I turn to collage as a central methodology for exploring these nuances.

### **Practice-led research as collage**

Through collage, as an organising concept, I have been able to use PLR methodologies as generative and political tools. It has, however, taken me some time to find my own way of activating PLR and collage as an artist and researcher. Whilst collage is an important metaphor for combining multiple disciplines and mediums, it is important that I make collage useful. When I use the term useful, I am referring to what collage can *do* and *un-do*. My methodology could not be decided upon, or articulated, at the outset of this research; rather, it has been developed through the process of research and through my photographic methods. When I began this PhD, my practice was focused on sculptural forms. I casted maquettes with plaster and created sets to be photographed. However, after noticing the massive stash of images I had collected over years of shooting regularly, I began using collage processes to handle and re-configure this mass. Instead of building from plaster, I began building from bits of images. In my photographs, collage processes create seam lines, layers, cut marks, holes, and glue stains. I print photographs and then re-photograph them, over and over. I use mirrors to double a printed image and photograph the results, and I combine two printed images together through long exposures. I pull images apart, I cut pics up, crop bodies, damage print surfaces, stain them with oil or dye. Sometimes I layer my body on top of the print surface, pushing it into the frame. The scale of images is expanding or contracting with each re-print. As I stack the printed images in my studio, I am thickening the layers. By turning these collages into digital files, I once

again flatten these layers. They then reappear in the gallery as fabric-like prints on velvet rag surfaces. I use these material processes of doubling, thickening, flattening, expanding, cutting, and sifting through fragments, to undo and redo concepts, theories, images, bodies, and to inform the combination of theory and practice, text and image. It is through this process that I have developed a methodology for doing research.

My development of collage as a research methodology has also been informed by the literature on montage and bricolage methodologies. In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2005) refer to bricolage, montage, and quilt making as metaphors to describe mixed analytical methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches in social science qualitative research. They explain:

The qualitative researcher who uses montage is like a quilt maker or jazz improviser. The quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity—a pattern—to an interpretive experience. (5)

Denzin and Lincoln focus on bringing together multiple disciplines and theories. They explain how in montage the viewer is required to bridge the spaces between images and play an active role in interpreting the sequence. They further explain that paradigms may not always be “mingled or synthesized” (6) and highlight the impossibility of creating an objective whole; nevertheless, they emphasise the usefulness of montage as a method of collation.

Denzin and Lincoln do not view the gaps and disconnections as sites of possibility. My queerness simultaneously brings disunity, undoing, disruption, and failure (Halberstam 2011) and in this way Halberstam has informed my methodological approach. This framing can be used to think through many different dilemmas in this exegesis and will be developed further in the coming pages. Similarly, to bricolage, PLR can also be understood as a method of both collation and disunity. Farber and Mäkelä argue that between PLR and theory, a “junction, or ‘in-between’ space ... a slightly ‘artificial’ divide, and yet a necessary and inevitable one, can emerge” (2010, 14). However, it is not often that misalignment in PLR is discussed as

a productive attribute to undo and redo concepts and theories. The divide that Farber and Mäkelä refer to is different from the binary opposition explained previously, where creative practice is sometimes seen as antithetical to theory, and where they are imagined as two clear-cut categories with neat edges. Collage and queerness can emphasise the seam lines, divides, and messy complications between multiple components. What is key, for me, is how collage can then be used to ask questions about what can be generated from disunity, contradiction, and misalignment or disconnection.

Bricolage is a concept and methodology that has many similarities to collage. Bricolage has been used in feminist and queer methodology, which I will outline shortly. However, it is also frequently used as an interpretive, critical, and intellectual construct, rather than a lived, embodied methodology. For example, a key text about bricolage methodologies is Joe Lyons Kincheloe and Peter McLaren's (2005) chapter in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. They write about how the interdisciplinary aspect of bricolage "demands a new level of research self-consciousness" and that "bricolage highlights the relationship between a researcher's ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history" (316). These are key aspects of my own feminist and queer objectives; however, Kincheloe and McLaren do not reference how the above ideas were founded in feminism. They mention that bricolage can be used in critical theory as a means to disrupt; however, bodies are not an overt part of this disruption. My intention is to demonstrate how collage can disrupt *through* a material practice, in bodily terms, and via lived PLR methodologies, rather than through theoretical analysis alone.

Most frequently credited with defining the concept of the bricoleur is Claude Lévi-Strauss. In 1966 he wrote in *The Savage Mind* that "'the Bricoleur' is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman" (11). The bricoleur has an agenda and is "opportunistic" (Baker 2011, 41), whereas the craftsperson whose skills are founded in tradition, are more closely associated with sincere intent. For Lévi-Strauss, the role of the bricoleur involves "recycling or use of second hand ideas and concepts" (Greet 2017, 191). The definition emphasises handmade processes, however the positionality of the maker's body, which informs the role of the bricoleur, is ignored. The translation notes refer to the

bricoleur as the “jack-of-all-trades” (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 11), which is colloquially followed by the phrase ‘master of none’. The bricoleur is also a “kind of professional do-it-yourself man” (ibid), a professional amateur. The bricoleur has freedom to be creative and is less fixed to the rules (Greet 2017). Yvonna S. Lincoln (2001) draws an analogy to the film character of Mad Max to describe the bricoleur as an anti-hero and a rebel. Trickery, amateurism, and breaking rules all offer something important to my collage methodology. However, its usefulness is a long way from Lévi-Strauss’s context for bricolage as a “structuralist project, requiring structuralist analyses” (Lincoln 2001, 695). In keeping with the ethos that Lévi-Strauss’s bricolage compels, I loosely appropriate his definition for my own queer agenda and use it to ask what bricolage can offer my collage methodology.

Being trans and queer means I am starting from a position that is often ascribed with deception and trickery, and I unpack this further towards the end of this chapter. Through this lens, the role of the “craftsman” can feel unattainable. Is the bricoleur someone who does not have access to the “craftsman” tradition in the first place because of their difference? Are these devious and deceitful qualities of the bricoleur being ascribed from the position of the “craftsman”, who has had access to the traditionally supported pathway and training? The social and cultural positioning that informs the role of the bricoleur is often ignored. Without the authority that is associated with specialist skills, the bricoleur is somewhat less professional and less respected within a tradition. From Halberstam (2011), I understand that unprofessional pathways can be seen as generative and political. I can engage with bricolage by exaggerating the devious qualities of the bricoleur to comment on the rules and regulations upheld by the craftsperson. The medium at hand, photography, is already entangled with questions of deception, truth, and amateurism. I can performatively overemphasise my experiences of being positioned as devious (or deviant), through photography practice, to heighten questions of credibility. The concept of the bricoleur who pulls things from everywhere and builds something anti-monumental with a political agenda, is full of queer and feminist potential.

Bricolage has been explored by numerous queer and feminist scholars because of its connection with fragmentation, re-making, mess, and anti-establishment politics. Rachel Handforth and



Carol A. Taylor (2016), who are both academics working in feminist research, explore feminist bricolage as a writing methodology. They explain a way to do “academic writing differently” and explain that

[t]his more complicated telling foregrounds the practices of shaping, crafting, and producing that academics usually hide (and often hide behind) in the production of beautiful and polished surfaces, unpunctured by doubts, hesitations and incompleteness. (629)

Including the messy details in this way resonates with my approach to PLR. A crucial contribution of PLR to knowledge production is its ability to make process visible (Barrett 2010). Feminist bricolage writing methodologies are also explored by writer and creative arts PhD student, Pamela Greet (2017), who develops a bricoleur and bowerbird writing methodology. This approach is based on the Australian bird which creates elaborate nests from found objects, often with the colour blue, to attract a mate. The nest may appear messy, but its intentions are purposeful (ibid). The process is ongoing; it is about constant re-making and expressive embellishment with intention, all of which are fitting for understanding my own collage approach.

Robyn Stewart (2001), a visual arts academic, offers a commonly cited example of how bricolage can be used in practitioner-based research in art. Stewart writes of how bricolage is a “strategic, self-reflexive practice” and that “the bricoleur appropriates available methods, strategies and empirical materials or invents or pieces together new tools as necessary”. Whilst Stewart’s use of bricolage is informative, the connection between PLR and bricolage is not specifically grounded in a feminism theoretical lineage, nor is it focused on materiality, or personal or embodied knowledge. Dallas Baker (2011), who is a creative writer and academic, explores queer PLR grounded in queer theory. Baker combines Foucault’s (1986) ethics of the self, which he explores as a form of self-bricolage, with Butler’s ([1990] 2008, [1993] 2011) ideas about performativity. Baker (2011) develops a performative self-bricolage. He writes that “bricolage as an approach or method can be seen as a kind of performance, an enactment of a multidisciplinary and diverse or plural positionality” (40). Despite his focus on self-bricolage,

embodied knowledge feels distant in Baker's methodology. His body, positionality, and practice are not propelling the methodology. His methodology prioritises the theoretical, rather than the materiality and the bodily.

In this PLR, I have specifically chosen to use the term collage, and not bricolage or montage. Collage comes from the everyday stash of images, from glue and scissor, from digital collage aesthetics in Instagram stories. It signals low-fi processes, amateur-level skills, and popular culture. As a teenager, collage is what I created on my bedroom wall, and the covers of textbooks using magazine cut-outs. I understand collage as closely tied to identity formation and expression. Collage directly describes art making practices and is not so heavily invested with scholarly theoretical use. Throughout this exegesis I reference and borrow from many sources not traditionally considered academic. Halberstam's (2011) low theory, as a way of challenging the expected citation canon and including everyday images and cultural references in academic research, has been instructive. For Halberstam, low theory is a way to "push through the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing, and into a more chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing" (2). Halberstam's low theory can be described as collage-like in its approach. Collage pulls from anywhere easily and accessibly. It recycles with purpose. This approach is bolstered by the histories of queer artists, authors, and researchers who have highlighted the necessity of collaging practice, theory, and lived experience. Artist A.L. Steiner explains:

Everything is part of a practice, which is always in conversation, expanding: nothing is categorical. That's what's interesting about being queer, you're constantly in a state of questioning to begin with, and that's not separate from what you might be producing and making. (Black 2012)

Steiner, like Ahmed, does not separate practice and research from the everyday politics of living. All these above approaches to bricolage inform how I use collage as an organising concept and methodology. However, I suggest there is room to layer and reroute these approaches of bricolage, and place more emphasis on the specificity of bodies, positionality, practice, disruption, and messiness.

## Queer and dyslexic mess

Throughout the preceding discussion, and in the introduction, there has been a repeated mention of messiness. As I have explained, I am interested in collage as a way of highlighting process. I intentionally show the cut marks and emphasise disruption and gaps. I am not collaging to form smooth surfaces and glossy façades. The collage I am interested in is deliberately messy. Mess is part of PLR (Farber and Mäkelä 2010) and, as Barrett argues, PLR is “necessarily unpredictable” (2010, 3). Mess also informs my approach to feminism. Throughout this PLR I explore the politics of fragmentation, excess, and ambiguity in image making. My experience with gender and sexuality is pleurably messy and I purposely use this term as a political response to refute cisnormative institutional management and the regulation of trans bodies, which I explore later in this chapter. In the introduction, I mentioned Chris Kraus’s ([1998] 2006) book *I Love Dick* where Kraus’s character is unashamedly public and messy, and full of contradictions and intensity. Kraus’s messiness is purposely and artfully crafted to critique patriarchal academic and art institutions and to show how undoing can be a powerful feminist assertion that challenges the expectations of being female. This idea that “[m]essiness...does not equate to methodlessness” is explored in article titled “Queer Practice as Research: A Fabulously Messy Business” by Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier (2015, 86). This article celebrates the political potential of messy, queer Practice as Research (PaR) through performance and it has been central to the development of my methodology. Campbell and Farrier write, “In queer PaR methodology it is the unruly and leaky body that presents the possibility of knowledge as somewhere beyond the apparent stability of theory’s abstractions, and often beyond the notionally clean lines of academic disciplines” (83-84). This very visceral inclusion of queer bodies in the written text takes a significantly different approach compared to Baker’s queer PLR methodology. Not only do Campbell and Farrier celebrate queer mess, they show how the messy, queer arts researcher can “add to the field while raising questions about the functioning and ideological biases of the academy” (86). Queer bodies are often positioned as excessive (Munt 2000; Sender 2003) and, as Heather Love explains, “Queer desire is often figured as ‘loving too much’” (2007, 40). However, in contrast, Campbell and Farrier propose the ‘cleanliness’ of the academy has gone too far. Campbell and Farrier write

about how “cleanliness in knowledge production is associated with knowledge forms that have routinely occluded the queer and the non-normative in an effort to tidy up hypotheses and conform to hegemonic forms of ‘rigour’” (2015, 84). They argue that “messiness requires its own (queer) rigour” (ibid). Messiness is integral to my methodologies, as it allows inclusion and spaciousness. Such attributes are vital as I work towards developing images of trans and queer bodies that are iterative and expansive. Throughout this PLR I explore how and why a trans and queer politics of destruction, of failure, and of ruining to remake is a method to counter cisgenderism, homophobia, and misogyny in queer and trans photographic representation.

Whilst Handforth and Taylor reject “polished surfaces” (2016, 629), Campbell and Farrier take this mess further by being excessively and performatively messy, not through theory alone, but through both their research and performance practice. Damage is part of their methodology for disruption. They explore the “potential for change to established knowledges via corrosive or eroding contact—in other words for queer PaR to mess up/with these powerful and normalising discourses” (2015, 84). There is pleasure in a methodology that can be corrosive, and potentially damage “established conceptual frameworks” (ibid). Campbell and Farrier’s article supports the connection I am making between Kraus’s feminist undoing, Halberstam’s (2011) queer failure, and Ahmed’s “lesbian feminism as wilful carpentry” (2017, 232). I utilise these ideas to develop a messy, collage PLR methodology that disrupts *through* a material, photographic, and bodily practice. One of my challenges is to make this mess visible in my imagery and write without slipping into heavy abstraction or indecipherability, as this would only distance the viewer and/or reader. Such tension, between going too far, and retaining a messy rigour is compelling and is something I contend with at various moments throughout this exegesis.

Mess appears as a key concept in this PLR not only because of my interest in queer and trans mess, but also because mess is embedded in my experience of writing. Being dyslexic means that my relationship with text has always been about flexibility, failure, and disorder, and this has shaped my relationship with education and academic institutions. Letters and words are spacious and malleable. A word I use frequently can suddenly appear strange, as if it is the first

time I have seen it in written form. It is a kind of unruliness that is attached to both shame and humour. Words generate a tumble of visual connections, meaning that working with thousands of words and reading hundreds of thousands of words is a constant battle of reigning in, trying to stabilise, assemble, and prioritise endless associations. Accessing written knowledge was particularly challenging whilst growing up and it has continued to have its challenges. Embodied, lived, sensory, and oral knowledge was, and still is, integral and intuitive to how I learn. For example, audio books and text-to-speech software have played a large part in my research and writing. Audio books have enabled me to listen to many of my key theory and literature texts whilst driving, walking, catching the bus, and shopping. Leaving my home with the voices of these authors, and listening whilst undertaking everyday activities, has enriched and complicated my understanding of how I connect theory and practice. New connections emerge through this overlay. Yet benefits such as this are seldom included in discussion about dyslexia. Just like being queer and trans, dyslexia was most often constructed as the result of my own failure to engage correctly with the expected norms of literacy and text-based education (Collinson and Penketh 2010). I mention at numerous points throughout this chapter the divisions that I have felt between sensory and affective ways of understanding and making knowledge versus knowledge that is theoretical and/or that does not include the researcher's positionality. Having dyslexia adds another layer to my argument for the necessity of continued expansion of what are 'acceptable' methodological approaches in universities. In this exegesis, I suggest that messy, dyslexic approaches to research can contribute to academic knowledge. Like queerness, dyslexia offers me a way of understanding the benefits and pleasures of failure. As Halberstam writes: "Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2011, 2-3). Dyslexia, like queerness, has taken me to unexpected places, as it keeps words and ideas moving, shapeshifting, and up for questioning, and this extends to how I respond to the dilemmas explored in this exegesis.

### **Exegetical structure**

The messy, cyclical, queer, and collage approach to PLR, for me, needs to be echoed in the

exegetical structure and writing. The literature review and creative practice are not contained in singular chapters or under clear subheadings within chapters. In each chapter, central concepts, literature, key artists, and my own practice, methods, and outcomes are intertwined. I use italicised text to delineate personal content that is located in a particular moment in time, akin to a field note or diary entry. Such text both connects and interrupts the flow of the exegetical writing and allows for different styles of writing to be collaged together. Each chapter is broken up into multiple short sections for a similar reason. This exegesis is not a straightforward illustration of process. It is a critical engagement *with* process, and with queer and feminist theories that inform process. By using this writing method, I can show the processes of centring and analysis, as well as iteration and fragmentation, and I can generate creative and critical content which contributes to broader cultural, social, and theoretical dialogue (Barrett 2010).

This messy, cyclical, queer, collage approach to PLR also shapes how I negotiate the central research questions of this exegesis. In this research, I do not engage with the formula that one begins research from a place of not knowing and concludes with a clear answer. In an article published in *Un Magazine*, Melbourne artist Helen Johnson (2013) explains the complexities of PLR in universities: “for any artist, I would argue, not knowing is an important part of the process. One doesn’t always need a hypothesis to make a discovery, nor to produce meaningful art”. As Robin Nelson writes, rather than mirror “‘the scientific method’ in which data lead to the resolution of a hypothesis...PaR typically affords substantial insights rather than coming to such definite conclusions as to constitute ‘answers’” (2013, 30). Gandolfo expresses a similar sentiment: “in the end we raise more questions than we answer” (2012, 72); while Farber and Mäkelä emphasise how “finding multiple solutions might be regarded as an asset, not a weakness” (2010, 10). Refusing to arrive at a location of certainty is supported by the feminist argument for partiality and situatedness (Haraway 1991; Harding 1987, 2004) and I outline this in the next section.

### **Embodied methodologies**

Personal experience is central to my methodology. For several decades, feminist scholars have

argued for the inclusion of personal, subjective, and embodied experience in academic research as a means to create social change (Harding 1987; Wallace and Wolf 2005). Valuing first-person, embodied knowledge and experience has been crucial in breaking with white, eurocentric, patriarchal knowledge production (Collins 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2013). First-person perspective is a central feminist and queer research methodology across a range of humanities disciplines. Creative art research lends itself to critical reflexivity as its research questions are driven by autobiographical and experiential concerns (Barrett 2010). In this PLR I engage with reflexivity as a collage process and examine how to bring together the multiple threads of the researcher's lived experience, positionality, practice, and theoretical engagement. Next, I will outline the feminist lineage I am drawing on to support my use of first-person perspective and lived experience in this PLR.

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist critique of the positivist paradigm that assumed the universality of a cis, white, middle to upper class, heterosexual male researcher, started to gain momentum. Sandra Harding, a North American feminist, writes that during that time, to speak from a socially situated location was “out of the question for standard research norms” (2004, 4). In the social sciences, for instance, the relationship between the researcher's positionality and their findings was often left unremarked and unquestioned. The absence of critical reflection meant that the subject of research was often constructed as ‘other’ and the researcher's account of them was accepted as an objective truth, uncompromised by the power relations imbued in the research encounter. Harding writes that these “[a]ndrocentric, economically advantaged, racist, eurocentric, and heterosexist conceptual frameworks ensured systematic ignorance and error about not only the lives of the oppressed, but also about the lives of their oppressors” (5). Obscuring and erasing positionality from research benefits those in power (Collins 2000; Harding 2004) and Harding argues that “we need to avoid the ‘objectivist’ stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible” (1987, 9). Standpoint theory was developed to understand the systems of power that perpetuate these oppressions, in order to disrupt them (Collins 2000; Harding 2004).

North American feminist Donna Haraway's theory of situated knowledge argues for “politics

and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating” (1991, 195). She articulates the differences between situated knowledge and universalism such as: “the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity” (ibid), which conceals the specificity of the researcher and designates subjective knowledge as insignificant. Haraway explains this view as the “god-trick”, which is a “promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully” (191). Haraway’s theory of situated knowledge is “not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (190), rather her feminist objectivity “initiates, rather than closes off” (190). Haraway emphasises that complexity and contradiction is a necessary component of socially locating oneself. Similarly, Harding’s feminist objectivity argues that bodies can add to the integrity or “objectivity” of the research rather than reducing it (1987, 9). However, this integrity comes from treating positionality as “empirical evidence” (ibid), which differs from Haraway’s approach. As Harding writes, “this evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence” (ibid). Harding argues that making the subjective body of the researcher visible is a means to increase objectivity. Photography is already engaged its own disciplinary questions related to objectivity and subjectivity, and the practical demonstration of this in both written research and photography poses productive challenges. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013), a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka people (Moreton Bay) and Indigenous feminist scholar, points out, the divide between objective and subjective knowledge underpins white feminist standpoint theory.

When thinking about *how* a messy subjective body could become visible as ‘evidence’ in both theory, writing, and photography practice, numerous questions arise. One method feminist photographers have utilised to counter the myths of the objectivity in both the discipline of photography and in feminist thought, is to include indicators of the artist’s positionality within the photographic frame through, for example, self-shooting, or using photographic methods to draw attention to the photographer’s gaze. These feminist methods have a lot in common with feminist research methodologies, as they both counter a positivist paradigm that assumes a universality of the researcher (Brooks and Hesse-Biber 2007) and/or artist, thus challenging the female subject position as ‘other’ (Irigaray 1993). An example can be seen in



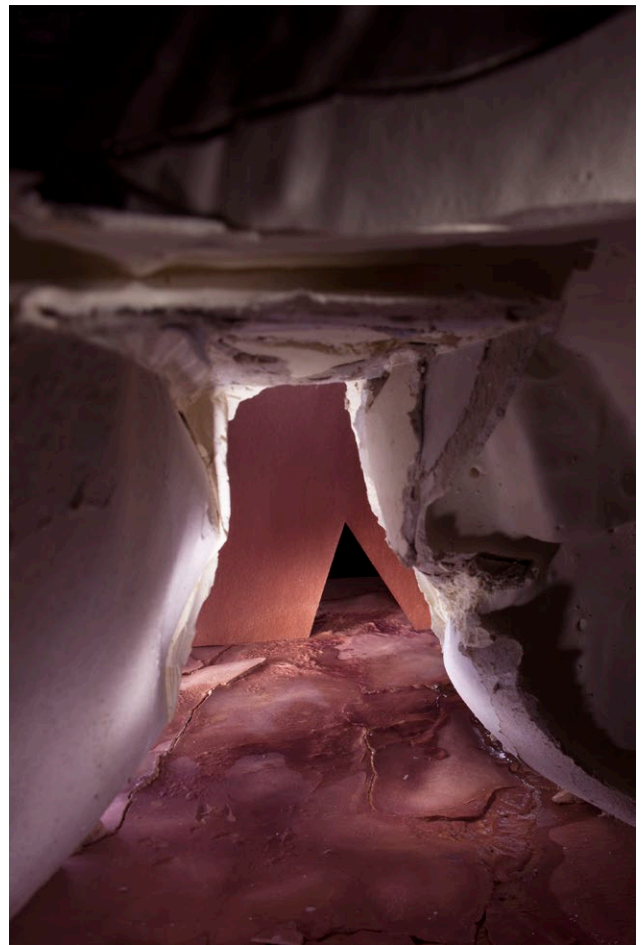
American photographer Lee Miller's (1907–1977) work. She was a photojournalist during the Second World War and her work is known for communicating a self-reflexive positionality (Liu 2015; Raymond 2017). I am drawn to her image *Portrait of Space* (figure 1, page 54), which was taken in 1937 while she was living in Egypt. I use a similar compositional device in many of my photographs, including *Fluctuate #4* (figure 2, page 54) and *Slow Summer* (figure 3, page 54). As Claire Raymond writes, "*Portrait of Space* works through several self-conscious framing devices" (2017, 51), as the framing reveals the position of the photographer and the partiality of the viewpoint. This method involves a "redrawing of the boundaries of watcher and watched" (ibid). *Portrait of Space* can also be understood as a "reversal of the conventional tourist photograph point of view [and] can be understood as Miller's feminist rebuttal to Western patriarchal claims of domination over the non-Western 'Other'" (ibid). What I find most interesting about Miller's approach to positionality in photo making is that the relationship between the subject and photographer informs the very structure of the image. The positionality *builds* the content. Positionality is not just a feminist ethical duty; it is productive of practice. Chris Kraus ([1998] 2006) demonstrates this point in *I Love Dick*, as previously discussed, as do most of the artists I engage with in this PLR.

Critical theory, from a range of perspectives and contexts, offers a theoretical basis for inviting the deliberate development of methodologies which assist me in understanding the complexities of representing queer and trans bodies. Studying how knowledge hierarchies seek to legitimise and delegitimise in order to contain and oppress ideas that do not support white, patriarchal cause, emphasises why standpoint theory is particularly necessary for groups of people who have traditionally been the subject of research and excluded from academic thought (Collins, 2000). Arguing for lived experience to be considered credible in academia involves critiquing what types of knowledge are validated by institutions (Collins 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2013). Patricia Collins (2000) writes of how the erasure of Black women from dominant modes of knowledge production has been orchestrated to suppress and delegitimise Black feminist thought. She explains how academia controls and maintains the bounds of what is legitimate knowledge. Collins explains that this has not only shaped who gets to make knowledge, and what types of epistemologies and methodologies are valued, it has also

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**figure 1.** (left) Lee Miller, *Portrait of Space*, 1937, gelatin silver print. Reproduced from: The Art Stack

**figure 2.** (below) Jack Ball, *Fluctuate #4*, from the series *Fluctuate*, 2013, inkjet print on archival rag, 140 x 210cm.



**figure 3.** (left) Jack Ball, *Slow summer*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag and gloss (2 panels), 70 x 105cm.

meant that research themes and interpretation alone cannot significantly challenge popular stereotypes about, for example, race, class, disability, and sexuality. Collins explains how Black women's standpoints validate and prioritise the knowledge gained through lived experience, dialogue, relationships, community, and caring, as well as valuing the diversity of Black women's experiences. Collins writes, "The existence of a self-defined Black women's standpoint using Black feminist epistemology calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth" (2000, 271). Although I am engaging with different issues and lived experiences, Collins has deeply informed how I respond to issues pertaining to the representation of marginalised experience and the challenging of institutional credibility.

As my gender and sexuality have changed over the course of the PLR, so too has my positionality. My positionality is changing not only as I age, move geographically, and move in social contexts (Haraway 1991), but also as my voice lowers and my moustache darkens with testosterone. My non-binary gender may put me into question, but in Australia my whiteness does not (Ahmed 2017). How my gender is categorised and positioned socially is unpredictable, meaning my positionality can also be unpredictable. My shifting positionality has allowed me to recognise further details about my experiences of a pressure to uphold the normative expectations of womanhood and femininity. Although I have moved (and keep moving) to a differently complicated position, it is nonetheless still, in many ways, connected to a constraining discourse of binary gender. I have embodied experiences, albeit fleeting, of being gendered as a male. However, being positioned as such almost always ends with a sharp and abrupt relegation to being 'other'. The man-to-man nod or the 'hey, man' greeting can swiftly turn to expressions of repulsion or micro aggression. I have experienced this most often at the gym, a particularly anxious space for masculinity, and mostly from men who I assume are cisgender. My experience of being socially positioned by others is often centred on my body's capacity for gender disruption. I utilise these insight to generate the visual methods for representing gender and my positionality through photography.

As feminist geographer Gillian Rose (1997) states, with reference to Haraway, making

positionality visible in feminist research often assumes we have clear understanding of our inner selves, of our privileges, and possess an omniscient view of the field in which we are researching. Haraway makes it clear that “we are not immediately present to ourselves” (1991, 192). She explains that “the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly” (193). This framework for self-assemblage is present in Chris Kraus’s and Cahun’s continued re-making and reflecting on their positionalities, where they embrace fragmentation as a form of resistance to a singular position or truth. This approach is also seen in Cassils’s (2013) understanding of being trans as a “continual process of becoming”. Haraway writes that it is through this process of patchwork that we are “able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another” (1991, 193). Importantly, acknowledging a partial perspective does not make my perspective an innocent one. As Judith Butler ([1990] 2008) explains, there is no real and authentic identity waiting to emerge—one that I will be able to uncover and then communicate to the reader. Having a clear understanding of positionality would look uncomfortably similar to seeing from above: “we may be performing nothing more than a goddess-trick uncomfortably similar to the god-trick” (Rose 1997, 311). Rose explores the importance of messiness, gaps, and uncertainty in positionality. Gaps support the feminist objective for non-generalised knowledges, and value space for other knowledges (Rose 1997).

Throughout this PLR, I grapple with how to communicate my positionality through my imagery, whilst simultaneously communicating the impossibility of omniscient awareness. Rose’s approach has shaped how I use visual gaps, punctures, and creases in collage material practice to highlight the process of how knowledge is made, validated, and how it can be disrupted. Rose explores feminist positionality through geographical spatial analogies of closeness and distance, and these tactics for visualising positionality are well suited to photographic PLR. Rose’s and Haraway’s conceptualisations of positionality connect with Laura Mark’s concepts of “haptic visibility” and “optic visibility” (1998, 2000) and the masculinist tradition in photography, which is about distance between bodies and images, which I outlined in the introduction. Gritty textual surfaces, queer camp disruptions, flexible large-scale collages, and close-up cropping are just some of the methods I use to explore the close relationships between

bodies and these theoretical concepts of positionality in my imagery.

When I began this PhD, the concept that first-person subjective research was oppositional to serious objective research was deeply embedded in my thinking. Even now, I need to continually work to recognise how the subtleties of this hierarchy of methodologies shape my thoughts. My experience in formal education has strongly supported this premise, as does my socialisation as a white female. I have been taught to view my feminist subjectivity as too wilful (Ahmed 2017) and that my desire is something that I cannot trust (Lorde [1984] 2007). Carolyn Ellis critiques the assumption that “the fallible, messy, and uncontrollable body was just too uncertain ... to include in published researched texts” (2013, 29). I, too, felt that rigorously engaging with how my own queer desires, emotions, and sensory and affective experiences could connect to broader social and cultural concepts, was not a valid way of making knowledge. Laurel Richardson writes of how research “requires writers to silence their own voices, to view themselves as contaminants” (2001, 35). Maggie Nelson writes of her experience of witnessing Rosalind Krauss publicly and aggressively shame Jane Gallop at an academic seminar for presenting an analysis of a series of photograph taken by her husband, which included images of Gallop naked, bathing her son. Nelson writes of how “Krauss excoriated Gallop for taking her own personal situation as subject matter” (2015, 50) and she writes of how Krauss accuses Gallop of “contaminating serious academic space with her pudgy body and unresolved, self-involved thinking” (51). In a different context, Nelson writes of “the age-old trope” of women perpetuating misogyny by denouncing the personal and emotional as “sentimental, mundane, soft-minded” (M. Nelson 2013). This concept of contaminating (staining or damaging) my written and image-based research with the personal is associated with shame; I am sharing too much, and therefore being too much and further reducing my chances of appearing professional. I draw from the notion that pride and shame are inextricably linked (Munt 2000; Sedgwick 2003). Ahmed illustrates this, explaining that the “moment of queer pride is a refusal to be shamed by witnessing the other as being ashamed of you” (Ahmed 2010, 116, as quoted in Nelson 2015, 22). I utilise these queer responses to shame to develop a methodology that embraces the messy, queer body in research as a political method of disruption and erosion (Campbell and Farrier 2015).



Reading Moreton-Robinson's (2013) Indigenous women's standpoint theory changed how I understood the above ideas on positionality. She emphasises how the dualist approach of embodied knowledge in opposition to legitimate knowledge is grounded in a Western concept of self in a post-colonisation, capitalist context, and stems from a lineage of feminist knowledge developed out of universities built on Indigenous land (ibid). Indigenous women's standpoint does not have the binarism between objectivity and subjectivity at its foundation (ibid). She explains, "Unlike feminist standpoint theory Indigenous women's standpoint theory is not predicated on the separation of ourselves from our countries, human ancestors, creator beings and all living things" (343). The overarching Western philosophical framework I am embedded in is dependent on asymmetrical, interchangeable hierarchies (Grosz 1994), and multiple separations: between objective and subjective, body and mind, reason and passion, male and female, truth and invalidity, and authentic and inauthentic. Western colonial epistemologies, which are contingent on such separations, have long been used to erase and invalidate Indigenous epistemologies (Moreton-Robinson 2013).

Critiquing the taken-for-granted knowledge that informs your experiences is key to feminist standpoint methodologies. Throughout this PLR I continually work at recognising and critiquing how Western epistemologies structure my ways of knowing and being. Most significant to the objectives of my research has been to recognise and critically engage with the false separation of objective and subjective truth; in particular, the assignation of the personal or subjective as messy, leaky, and too much. Realising the deeply heteropatriarchal foundations of this binary and the implications it has had on artistic practice, both within photography and more broadly, has been of critical importance to my developing methodology. Liberating the messy to push back against the presumption that distance, objectivity, and cleanliness equates with scholarly credibility, seriousness, and professionalism is central to my queer feminist approach to making.

## The necessity of first-person perspective in trans research

As a trans person, it does not take much to be considered *too* personal in research, and this is informed by how trans people and trans bodies are understood within institutional settings. In this section I explain why trans first-personal perspectives matter. American trans philosopher Talia Mae Bettcher (2009) argues for the necessity of “First Person Authority”. One of the reasons she argues for its importance is due to a “Basic Denial of Authenticity” where “transpeople are identified in ways that are contrary to or even hostile to our own self-identifications” (99). She writes that trans people are often seen as “misaligned” and therefore “deceivers or pretenders” whereas cisgender people are “‘correctly’ aligned” and therefore “tell the truth” (Bettcher 2009, 105). Trans bodies and subjectivities have not been trusted in health research (Vincent 2018), medicine (Stryker 2008), law (Spade 2003) and more broadly in society and culture (Halberstam 2018a). In trans and gender diverse research, first-person perspectives have contributed significantly to countering pathologising and delegitimising discourses. To understand the importance of reflexive, first-person trans research in the humanities, I need to briefly look further afield to contextualise trans research and trans experiences in other institutional settings. In trans and gender diverse health research there has been a recent turn to include trans people as researchers, to undertake community consultation, and to engage with people’s lived experiences, which differs greatly to the approach that dominated trans health research in the 1990s, where trans people were studied as ‘other’ by cisgender academics and medical professionals. However, problematic research dynamics, including the lack of transparency, intersectionality, and respectful practice remain present in trans research (Vincent 2018).

Gender dysphoria can broadly be described as an experience of distress or discomfort due to a difference between how a person’s gender is understood socially and culturally, the physical attributes of their body and their internal sense of gender. Dysphoria may be related to specific parts of the body, social interactions or expectations, pronouns and other gendered language and/or names. Not all trans people have dysphoria or experience it the same way. Nor do all trans people seek out or have access to medical affirmation. However,

a diagnosis of gender dysphoria is often needed to gain access to gender affirming therapy<sup>2</sup>. When used in conjunction with a gatekeeping mentality, this diagnostic process, which devalues self-identification, is one of many ways trans bodies can be regulated by institutions. Gender dysphoria is categorised as a mental illness in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* (American Psychiatric Association 2013)<sup>3</sup>. In the World Health Organization's (1992) current *International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD-10)*, the diagnosis is categorised as Gender Identity Disorder and located in the chapter on Disorders of Adult Behavior and Personality.<sup>4</sup> When trans and gender diverse experience is categorised as a disorder and a mental illness, it perpetuates the idea "that a narrative of distress is a core component of transgender experience" (Schulz 2018, 78) and makes it difficult for trans people to "determine the terms of their embodied lives outside of the lens of medical and psychiatric pathologization" (77). Susan Stryker writes that "access to medical services for transgender people has depended on constructing transgender phenomena as symptoms of a mental illness...because 'sickness' is the condition that typically legitimizes medical intervention" (2008, 37). Stryker is pointing to how trans people often have little option but to self-perpetuate these damaging narratives in order access care. These narratives are often internalised by trans people. For me, these narratives of distress and pathologisation were formative in my perception of self. They have limited what I imagined was possible and shaped my relationship with my body. These diagnostic frameworks also connect trans bodies to damage and shame. Valuing first-person knowledges, including the ability to identify one's own gender (Nicholas

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2 In the medical context, the *WPATH Standards of Care* (Coleman et al. 2012) are the principal guidelines for global trans health and they recommend that trans and gender diverse people need a diagnosis of gender dysphoria to gain access to gender affirming care (Schulz 2018).

3 In previous versions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the DSM-IV, it was categorised as a sexual disorder (1994).

4 Within this sub-category is the diagnosis of transsexualism, which is still used in Australian clinical care. Dual-role transvestism appears directly below this listing. The next category that follows on from gender identity disorders is 'Disorders of Sexual Preference', which include diagnoses of fetishistic transvestism, paedophilia, and sadomasochism.



2019, Bettcher 2009) without needing authentication and approval from state institutions<sup>5</sup> and medical institutions, plays a vital role in dislodging and reimagining the regulating narratives outlined above.

For many trans people who are women/girls or men/boys, there are often expectations to uphold normative gender and social conventions in order to be recognised as legitimate (Vincent 2019). Since gender-affirming medical care has emerged as an option in Western medical contexts, the idea of being a ‘real’ man or ‘real’ woman within the bounds of a cisgender paradigm have permeated trans narratives (Halberstam 2018a; Stryker 2008; Vincent 2019). Ben Vincent, a non-binary researcher, writes that whilst trans clinical care may no longer adhere to the expectation of strict gender roles, “‘excess’ masculinity in a trans woman (or femininity in a trans man) [continues] to be [framed as] a subject of ‘concern’” (2019, 132). For example, butch trans women and femme trans men may encounter additional questions of legitimacy. For non-binary people, there is an array of difficulties to contend with both within and outside of medical and legal settings. These may include: performing a binary gender identity in order to access health care (Schulz 2018; Vincent 2019); everyday experiences of being questioned due to gender unintelligibility (Butler [1993] 2011); and contending with not feeling ‘trans enough’ within the trans community (Vincent 2019). Lucy Nicholas, an Australian non-binary researcher, explains that whilst gender diverse representations are more prevalent in pop culture, “[g]enderqueerness that challenges prevailing categories or attributions still receives extreme negative social responses” (2019, 170). They explain that this “cannot be understood as stemming only from overt prejudice in the form of transphobia but, rather, from more insidious biases that either invisibilise them as impossible or conceptualize them as not natural or ‘normal’” (ibid). So often, non-binary people are framed as the problem, rather than the responsibility being located in the social world in which they live (Nicholas 2019). This

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5 For example, to change your gender marker on your birth certificate in WA you have to submit an application to the Gender Reassignment Board. Whilst genital surgery is no longer required, this application still requires medical proof from a specialist of a reassignment procedure, such as gender affirming hormones. To change your gender marker on your birth certificate in NSW you need to have sex affirmation surgery which specifically needs to involve reproductive organs and/or genitals. These examples show how the state seeks to authenticate, create obstacles, and regulate trans bodies and trans lives, all of which refutes the capacity for self-identification.

resonates deeply with my own experiences. I have had numerous experiences (in both medical and non-medical settings) where my non-binary body has been seen by others as disgusting, confusing, unattractive, and/or uncomfortable. This is why being *too much* and embracing messiness are compelling and subversive political propositions. When making images, I do not have to include much personal content to evoke a response. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, even a photograph of my belly button can be perceived as *too much*. For these reasons, employing the first-person perspective in trans and gender diverse humanities research is crucial.

## Conclusion

As Collins and Moreton-Robinson have stressed, arguing for embodied knowledge to be considered credible in academia also involves asking what institutional validation means, where it comes from, who is excluded, how is it maintained, and how am I participating or benefitting from it (Collins 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2000a, 2000b, 2013). I have asked myself: why not reject institutional recognition entirely? I am, after all, seeking validation from the academic and art institutions that are founded on and continue to reproduce the culture I am critiquing. Contending with this contradiction emerges in several ways; through the photographic methods I use, the artists I study, and the theory I engage, in the chapters that follow. I am also dependent on institutions as I undertake a PhD and having a doctorate will bestow institutional credibility. My series *Fluctuate* was supported by two major Australian art institutions. Exhibiting in institutions is part of a 'successful' art career. However, I am also, always, questioning what success means. My motivation to continue working in these spaces is to utilise their assumed authority as a platform to critique legitimacy and credibility. Exhibiting political trans and queer imagery in public art galleries and institutions with large audiences can be a way to contribute to social change.

In this chapter outlining my messy, queer, collage PLR methodology, I have shown how I engage with the personal in order to develop ways to disrupt using a material practice, as well

as via bodily and lived PLR methodologies, rather than through theoretical analysis alone. My approach is iterative and adaptive. It refuses to arrive at a stable, settled end-point as this would counter the feminist argument for partiality. It also acknowledges the endless gaps in positionality as a way to make room for other knowledges (Rose 1997). This same approach best suits my objectives to explore trans and queer bodies in process. In the chapters that follow and through my photographic practice, I use this methodology to develop an argument against the regulation and control of trans bodies, and to highlight the fragility of the notion of artistic and scholarly credibility. I focus on how I can engage with messy, queer, collage to explore the pleasures of unintelligibility, failure, and confusion in my research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PHOTOGRAPHIC MYTHOLOGIES**

#### **Introduction**

Over the following chapters I demonstrate how dilemmas of authenticity, possession, and fixity in the photographic medium are linked to similar dilemmas in problematic trans and queer representation. To establish my basis for this argument, this chapter outlines familiar concepts in photography culture that inform photography's relationship with authenticity and credibility. Many of these concepts are about noticing the tendency (both explicit or inferred) in critical writing on photography to conceptualise photographs through binary categories, such as surface and depth (Solomon-Godeau [1995] 2017), real and fake, natural and unnatural. I connect these ideas to gender and explain that a patriarchal worldview is often informing the need to preserve these frameworks. In the first part of this chapter, I summarise how questions of authenticity, power, and credibility appear repeatedly in photography theory due to its romanticised proximity with reality. In the second part, I argue that a flexible relationship between the photograph and the referent can be a necessary and political method. I demonstrate how, in my practice, film and digital photography tumble and collage into one another, without adhering to the belief in the uniqueness of film that apparently still garners attention in some art gallery contexts and among some photography theorists. I outline the key ideas that demonstrate why a performative and playful take on the amateur photographer is a useful method to foreground the flimsiness of 'professionalism'. Part of my PLR objectives is to develop a political and visual response to patriarchal constraints within photography culture. This chapter contributes to this objective by establishing the groundwork for how 'unprofessional' methods, such as saturated colour, collage processes, and visible pixels, can be utilised as feminist and queer visual methods to celebrate amateurism, inauthenticity, and excess.

## The obsession with the 'real'

Photography has been framed as a “passive art form” (Raymond 2017) that replicates without ritual, tradition, and cult value (Benjamin [1936] 2008). It can be assumed that photography is merely a mechanical and detached tool of documentation, a neutral witness. As Susan Sontag points out, photography has “credentials of objectivity”, yet it always has “a point of view” (2003, 26). Whilst there is a widespread understanding that photographs can be misleading, we frequently assume that the content of an image once existed in some form or other (Sontag [1977] 2008). Roland Barthes explains how the photograph and the referent are “glued together, limb by limb” (1981, 6). As a result of photography’s tether to ‘reality’, a number of problematic frameworks arise. For example, the concept of possessing the photographed subject frequently appears in photography. This can be seen in Henri Cartier-Bresson’s description of how he takes photographs:

I prowled the streets all day, feeling very strung-up and ready to pounce, determined to ‘trap’ life—to preserve life in the act of living. Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes.  
(Quoted in Sontag [1977] 2008, 185)

Cartier-Bresson is seeking to contain and dominate the subject, which resonates with concepts of the sublime (Freeman 1995). He positions himself as a predator, with powers to take something from those who are photographed, demonstrating photography’s propensity for aggression. Cartier-Bresson also frames himself as an omniscient observer of reality, a view “from nowhere” (Haraway 1991, 195), echoing positivist approaches to research, where the positionality of the researcher is invisible (Harding 1987). Cartier-Bresson’s emphasis on essence is also a reiteration of the so-called mystical qualities (Sontag [1977] 2008) of the professional photographer, which mirrors the notion of the artist as genius (Nochlin [1971] 2003) outlined in the introduction. Having an inherent ‘eye’ for capturing ‘reality’ is a quality ascribed to a limited few.

Photography's entanglement with 'reality' also informs the discourse about a candid photo being more objective, more authentic, or more real than a staged photo, and this concept can be seen on numerous photographic tips and tricks websites (Caputo n.d.; Singh 2020). Sontag explains this approach suggests that "reality is hidden", therefore "whatever the camera records is a disclosure" ([1977] 2008, 120-121). She demonstrates her point through Robert Frank's objectives "to catch reality off-guard" (121). This approach invests considerable power in the camera, overlooking the positionality of the photographer. Questions about who has the ability to reveal hidden truths, whose reality is considered valid, and who can command an authoritative perspective, are of course limited to those who can access the status of 'professional'. Whilst ideas about authenticity are somewhat dated in photography theory, I argue that they still inform contemporary photography culture. When I was tutoring photography at university, these concepts appeared frequently in conversations with students of all ages. These lingering ideas about authenticity and credibility also inform the language we use to discuss photography practice. Even the words 'shoot' and 'capture' preserve the idea of possession and ownership which can also be understood in relation to early anthropological uses of photography to categorise, exoticise, and objectify. Photography's historical legacy is part of a broader system of imperialism (Marks 2000; also see Solomon-Godeau [1995] 2017; Sontag [1977] 2008) and working with this medium in a contemporary setting requires ongoing reflexivity in order to interrogate ideas of power, legitimacy, and credibility. These historical discourses about photography also inform how photographs are interpreted within an art gallery setting.

The digital versus film debate may seem like something relegated to decades past; however, it still informs discussions of credibility in contemporary photography culture and art culture. Photo historian Geoffrey Batchen wrote of the importance of "contiguity" (2001a, 21) which he explains "is what can give any sign in the present a direct association with another sign in the past, and it is precisely this temporal and historical connection that provides photography with its uniquely 'carnal' knowledge of the world" (ibid). Batchen argues these connections are embedded in the analogue processes of chemical alchemy and the loss of these connections in the current digital milieu is something to lament. He writes that digital "images may still

be indices of a sort, but their referents are not the objects they picture but rather electronic flows, differential circuits, and abstracted data banks of information” (22). Batchen states that digital images “are content to be nothing but surface” (ibid). He approaches film as a more authentic medium and explains that film and analogue processes are the “embodiment of the idea of photography” (Batchen 2001b, 140). As Claire Raymond notes, there is a difference between light touching the skin of the film as a “physical trace” and light being translated by a digital processor as a “mathematical code” (2017, 167). However, Batchen attaches a hierarchy of authenticity to this difference, where an intermediary (the digital sensor) devalues the credibility of the image. Whilst time has passed since Batchen’s claims, in the next chapter I argue that the conceptualisation of the digital as empty still informs contemporary photography culture. When the subject of a digital photograph is considered a typically ‘female’ subject and is therefore readily associated with emptiness and superficiality (as per the discussion in the introduction), does this increase the chance of a similar critique extending to the materiality of the medium? I will explore this question in the following chapter.

Also arguing that digital photography includes a loss of tactile, bodily connection is photographic theorist Fred Ritchin who writes, “[d]igital involves coded signifiers, data that can be easily played with, abstracted from their source; analog emanates from wind and wood and trees, the world of the palpable” (2009, 17). Katharina Fackler (2019) offers an alternative viewpoint. She explains how “the digital appears to have ‘dematerialized’ photography and thus made it less trustworthy as a trace of the material reality before the camera lens” (519). She states that these common fears of the dematerialised digital image are “grounded in a nostalgia for a bygone era of clear and simple relations between photography, human observers, and ‘the real world’ that never existed” (520). As Fackler suggests, positionality shapes the framework we bring to understanding photography by explaining how “this nostalgia has been entangled with an ocularcentric world *view*...that has tended to solidify the position of the privileged” (ibid; italics in original). Making connections between film and its god-like capacity to represent reality, as well as the idea that that film chemistry is more embodied and more materially connected to the world than the digital image, are essentialist views that work to maintain a patriarchal social world order. Such approaches reduce the ambiguities and complexities of how

bodies relate to the materiality of imagery. Building on my previous discussion of the feminist and queer potential of loss and ruin, I am interested in how the apparent emptiness of digital photography and its capacity to disintegrate this interlocking binary between the referent and the image can be politically productive.

What happens when you do not see yourself mirrored, or do not feel supported, in the historical record or in 'real' world referents that Batchen is prioritising and celebrating? Loosening and subverting this traditional dependence on the photographic trace can be a necessity for those who are not as visible and have not typically had access to the production of photographic culture. For example, Australian photographer Tracey Moffatt uses various digital and analogue photographic methods to converse with histories that were not photographed or that have been photographed only through a settler-colonial, misogynistic, and/or heteronormative lens. In an interview with curator Natalie King about her 2017 Venice Biennale work *My Horizon*, Moffatt explains:

I have never been very interested in capturing reality with a camera, but rather creating my own version of reality. I can use fiction to comment on my own personal history or serious issues of social history or reflect on what is going on in the current political landscape. (Moffatt and King 2017, 11)

Borrowing and collaging aesthetics conventions from film, pop culture, and painting, and rejecting the need to claim a singular photographic style, are some of the methods she uses to challenge eurocentric photographic histories of legitimacy and authorship. For example, Moffatt explains that the series *Passage* (figure 4 and figure 5, page 69), which is part of her Venice Biennale work, is a "photo-drama series [that] is a definite homage to old movies, 40s film noir, though in hot colours, not in black and white" (16). She references and adapts this popular aesthetic to explore themes of migration and settler-colonialism. Moffatt's work shows that bodily connections with imagery has no allegiance to 'real referents' or to silver halide crystals in gelatine.



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**figure 4.** Tracey Moffatt, the series *Passage* [installation view of exhibition titled *My Horizon*, Australian Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia 2017], 2017, photographic installation. Reproduced from: The Venice Insider.

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**figure 5.** Tracey Moffatt, *Hell*, from the series *Passage*, 2017, type C photograph on gloss paper, 105.5 x 156cm. Reproduced from: SBS NITV website

## Fear of unprofessionalism

With each technological advancement since photography's invention, professional photographers have found ways to maintain a separation from the amateur through arguments about technical skill, quality, uniqueness, duration of skill development, and equipment. This divide has been a way to maintain livelihood and acknowledge specialty skills (Alper 2013); however, it has also been a method to prevent people of diverse identities and backgrounds from being producers of imagery. The prevalence of digital phone photography is making it increasingly more complicated to separate the professional and the amateur (Gómez Cruz and Meyer 2012; Palmer 2010; Rubinstein and Sluis 2008; Villi 2015). Camera phones have increased the access to photography and offered expansive possibilities. However, this does not mean photography has become completely democratised. Time, internet access (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008), and access to audiences, all play a role in who can move from amateur to professional status (Looft 2017). The separation between producer and consumer becomes more complex in digital cultures, as re-making, re-editing, and re-posting image content shuffles traditional hierarchies of authorship (Dobson 2015; Rubinstein and Sluis 2008).

When photography first began to gain recognition within art institutions in the 1980s, some photography professionals feared “the most ambitious images were discussed in direct continuity with *all* sorts of images” as there was the belief “that this reduces photography to something trivial, vulgar, a mere craft” (Sontag [1977] 2008, 132; italics in original). Interestingly, this tension is still visible in a contemporary art context—for example, as evidenced in Joanna Zylińska's discussion of the work *Floh* (figure 6, page 71) by British artist and photographer Tacita Dean, who assembles found imagery in book form:

Motivated by the fear of the amateur photographer, with her hobbyist excesses, Dean takes on herself the heroic role of attempting to stop this madness of imagi(ni)ng-without-end, by introducing some kind of ban, barrier, or dam, in labour to prevent the endlessness of photography, to contain and order it. (2010, 147)

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**figure 6.** Tacita Dean, *Floh*. 2001, book format, 30 x 24 cm. Reproduced from: Artist's Books and Multiples.

Interestingly, Zylinska transposes the familiar heroic, male photographer narrative onto Dean, who becomes the heroic woman capable of containing and holding at bay the changing landscape of the discipline. There is some overlap with the tableau genre male photographers I mentioned in the introduction, who seek to distance their bodies, assume the role of interpreter, and contain and order the world through image-making. It would seem that to Zylinska, the amateur threatens disciplinary boundaries, and that these boundaries are necessary to maintain film's place in a value hierarchy.

Photography's capacity for excessive replication can be at odds with the art world's celebration of individual uniqueness. Zylinska and Dean suggest that film photography is a way to demonstrate a separation from the amateur in contemporary art and prioritise this idea of uniqueness, whereas the digital is now associated with the uncontrollable spillage and repetition of vernacular imagery. We are familiar with stock photos detached from authorship (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008), and the endless duplication of motifs, poses, and subject matter in Google Images, and advertising. As Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis write, these bland, everyday backdrop images are "camouflaged as...non-political, non-significant and non-ideological" and that "through being unnoticed, vernacular images appear normative...and inherently benign" (2008, 23) and therefore can be dangerous. Similarly, Laura Marks articulates

the cliché image as “a commonsense, hegemonic image that extends unproblematically into action” where there is “habitual recognition without reflection” (2000, 36). A photograph taken using film can be equally as clichéd as one taken using a digital camera. However, digital materiality is readily assumed to degrade and devalue image content. In keeping with my methodologies, where ruining offers room for remaking, I draw on the digital medium’s connection to low value, generic, everyday content to speak to themes of credibility, clichés, and invisibility in queer and trans photography.

Furthermore, there are aesthetic qualities that connote authenticity (Borges-Rey 2015) and professional status. Black and white, for instance, is often associated with ‘timelessness’ and nostalgia. They can also be granted evidential weight as communicators of ‘authentic’ history. Faux vintage sepia, and black and white filters offered on image-sharing social media platforms, such as Instagram, with all the “iconic...light leaks, lens artifacts” and “mistakes” of film (Chopra-Gant 2016, 125), serve to replicate this sense of authenticity. Similarly, visible pixilation and unplanned framing can authenticate the presence of the witness in news media. For example, this means that amateur photographs of traumatic events can be considered more authentic and that professional photographic skills can, in fact, work to delegitimise photographs depicting trauma (Borges-Rey 2015; Sontag 2003). There is a common assumption that aesthetically pleasing photographs (for example, images that have dramatic painterly light) can distract from and damage ideas of truth (Bajorek 2015; Sontag 2003). As this argument suggests, ‘neutral’ aesthetics communicate a more accurate and credible representation of reality. In the chapters that follow, I explore how supposedly light-hearted amateur methods, such as camp and saturated colour, can be political. I develop methods that utilise both everyday snapshot aesthetics and lush cinematic aesthetics for performative purposes.

The amateur has also been romanticised, most famously by Barthes. In his autobiographical text, Barthes writes, “the amateur renews his pleasure (amator: one who loves and loves again); he is anything but a hero (of creation, of performance)” and that “he will be perhaps—the counter-bourgeois artist” ([1977] 2010, 52; italics in original). Barthes’s amateur (which is gendered male) represents an alternative to the model of mastery and success. In *Camera*

*Lucida*, he writes that the amateur “stands closer to the *noeme* of Photography” (1981, 98-99; italics in original); and by *noeme*, Barthes is referring to the illusive essence of photography, which stems from the photograph’s indexicality and separates it from other types of images, such as painting. He is suggesting that a lack of skill in photography is, broadly speaking, a desirable and authentic attribute. His romanticisation of the amateur does not, however, attend to social structural positionality. Sontag explains how the idea of the “middle-class *flâneur*” ([1977] 2008, 55) had a significant role in developing the category of the amateur photographer. Even now, photography as a hobby is often associated with comfortable middle-class status due to the expense of photography equipment and the time luxury required to learn to use it without the need to benefit financially. Whilst amateur photography can offer pleasure, there are differences between those for whom this status is a choice versus those who may find it more challenging to advance from their consignment to this category. My positionality makes attaining the status of the professional photographer difficult from the outset. Accessing professionalism may present different and/or overlapping challenges for many people who are not cis, white, socio-economically privileged and able-bodied men.

I notice how I am seduced by the mistakes born from the alchemy that is conjured from film. I understand darkroom magic through an embodied experience of watching images emerge on blank paper. I started working in photolabs as a high school student and expanded these darkrooms skills at university (including analogue colour printing). For four years I taught students to print in the darkroom, many of whom had never touched film negatives. I learned digital photography in the early 2000s when it was growing in commercial popularity. The large format inkjet printer offers its own magic and chemical aromas. In this PLR, I collage film and digital material mediums in multiple ways. For example, I scan medium-format film negatives taken on a 1980s camera, thus transforming them into data. I print these images (that originate from film chemistry) on a laser printer (which warps the colours and has a fine dot matrix on close view), and then re-photograph them again. To do this I might use my 17-year-old 3-megapixel digital camera, which offers a different image quality than re-photographing the print with a high definition digital camera. I utilise digital flaws; for example, colour banding in gradients, or chromatic aberration where a glowing purple and green halo forms on

high contrast edges in digital photos. I also incorporate film flaws or technical ‘mistakes’; for example, dust and scratches on the film negatives, or shooting daylight-balanced film indoors with halogen lights, which generates a nauseating yellowy-green saturation. Whilst I understand the material seduction of film, I am also seduced by the specificity and materiality of all my cameras (old, new, film, semi-professional, cheap) and all of the printing techniques (laser, home inkjet, large format, black and white, architectural plan printing, fabric printing) and Photoshop processes.

Photography is frequently spoken about using binary categorisation, such as surface and depth, real and fake, known and unknown, which differs greatly from my flexible collage approach to the medium. For example, Tacita Dean explains in an interview on the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art’s (ACCA) YouTube channel that the “digital is so known, and film is all about the unknown...I need the unknown” (acca\_melbourne 2013, 00:01:20). Later, she explains, “I still think that film has the means to make poetry, it has innate beauty” (00:08:08). Dean continues, “Film mistakes are beautiful, whereas digital mistakes never are... I rely on mistakes often... Something so essential about something that is flawed” (00:03:24). Abigail Solomon-Godeau addresses this common incongruity in relation to how photographs are conceptualised; “we frequently assume authenticity and truth to be located on the inside...at the same time, we routinely—culturally—locate and define objectivity (as in reportorial, journalistic, or juridical objectivity) in conditions of exteriority, detachment, of nonimplication” ([1995] 2017, 12). Solomon-Godeau explains how “one of the recurring tropes of photography criticism is an acknowledgment of the medium’s brute exteriority, its depthless-ness” (ibid). Batchen and Ritchin demonstrate dependence on these binary themes in their critique as outlined earlier. Barthes, who was writing in a time prior to the digital advent, explores the seduction and promise of a photograph containing inner layers of substance, waiting to be uncovered by the viewer. He writes:

I live in the illusion that it suffices *to* clean the surface of the image in order to accede to *what is behind*: to scrutinize means to turn the photograph over, to enter into the paper’s depth, to reach its other side (what is hidden is for us Westerners more ‘true’ than what is visible)”. (1981, 100; italics in original)

He then comes to a particular realisation: “Alas, however hard I look, I discover nothing: if I enlarge, I see nothing but the grain of the paper” (ibid). There is a playful, knowing awareness, or a hint of performance even, woven into Barthes’s analysis. In this PLR, I am interested in real versus fake, emptiness versus substance, surface versus depth, as performative concepts, and these themes are repeated throughout this exegesis in relation to gender, large-scale imagery, excess of imagery, and photographic colour.

### **Conclusion: Masquerade**

When Joanna Zylińska is grappling with the endless mass of digital imagery in relation to Dean’s work, she poses two questions that I am seeking to critically highlight. She asks: “how do we continue photographing ‘seriously’ in the digital era? How do we deal with the amateur photographer who ‘masquerades’ as an artist?” (2010, 147). To respond, I turn to Halberstam’s work on female masculinity, in particular drag kings. He critiques the notion that “that masculinity ‘just is’, whereas femininity reeks of the artificial” and asserts that when “male masculinity reveals itself to be staged or performative...the masculine masquerade appears quite fragile” (1998, 234). My intention is to foreground the flimsiness of the category of the photographic professional and develop visual methods that critique these definitions. I use photographic methods to performatively, playfully, and purposefully explore this idea of the “amateur photographer who ‘masquerades’ as an artist”, to perform the amateur back to itself, and enjoy the pleasurable possibilities and politics in doing so. Using the amateur as a framework allows me to performatively respond to normative ideas of success (Halberstam 2011). Part of this includes linking the binary ideas of surface and depth, and real and fake in photography, to the narratives that permeate queer and trans representation. Professionalism is about policing and maintaining disciplinary boundaries, and messy, queer, collage offers possibility for eroding these hard edges (Campbell and Farrier 2015).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MESSY BOUNDARIES AND AMATEUR METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

Building on my discussion of the politics of messiness in the introduction and Chapter 1, the focus of this chapter is on how messy material processes and collaged concepts of gender can contribute to ambiguous and iterative imagery. This chapter begins with my haphazard methods of casting in the studio, where the inside of the mould becomes the outside and I build sets from fragments and rubble. The chapter concludes with the messy processes of building (or sculpting) my trans body with testosterone, where I connect the materiality of plaster and collage to the “*materiality of gender*” (Preciado 2013, 142; italics in original). I am collaging gender from both the inside and outside. In this chapter I continue to connect previously established themes of authenticity, power, and credibility in photography theory, to gender. Here it is demonstrated through making and exhibiting images, experiencing other artist’s images, and my lived experiences of gender.

Throughout the chapter I build links between sculpture and photographic materiality. One of the ways I do this is through an exploration of Rachel Whiteread’s work *Embankment* (2005). From large-scale installations, I move to the minute and examine visible pixels and pixel damage, and consider the latter as a way to reject the pressures for smooth exteriors and seamless high definition prints. I unpack how gritty pixel texture can offer an intimate and haptic experience with imagery (Marks 1998, 2000). The visual methods I explore throughout this chapter all prioritise closeness, invitation, and intimacy, rather than domination or distance. These qualities are found in Swiss video and installation artist Pipilotti Rist’s (2018) exhibition *Sip my Ocean* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. She uses saturated colour and adapts popular aesthetic conventions to create large-scale installations that connect with her audience. I examine a review of Rist’s work to demonstrate how the gendered associations with visual methods can be amplified by the artist’s positionality. I show how saturated colour can be understood as political when engaged by feminist queer artists, and artists seeking to



disrupt traditions of professionalism in photography culture. I turn to North American artist Lola Flash's work to demonstrate how distorted colour can make a mess of the expected white and heterosexual representational norms. Towards the end of the chapter, I draw on Halberstam's (2018b) writing on how abstraction can complicate the boundaries between the inside and outside of bodies and therefore offer a method for representing messy ambiguous gender. I explore the relationship between interiority and surface through Paul Preciado's (2013) understanding of gender as molecular materiality and Marks's (1998; 2000) discussion of the interrelationship between the haptic and optic.

Throughout this chapter I focus on theoretical and practiced based provocations that arose through making and exhibiting my series *Fluctuate* (figure 7, page 78; supporting documentation pdf pages 6-41). The series was the first work I made as part of this PLR PhD. It is a series made up of eight large-scale photographs that gesture towards bodily, architectural, and landscape forms. The work focuses on messy boundaries; between fragment and whole, excess and details, façade and depth, intimacy and distance. I used materials (such as cardboard, metal, clay, plaster, and various casting processes) to create sculptural sets that were then photographed. The imagery is suggestive of bodies, landscape and architecture. The work was produced for an exhibition titled *Primavera 2013: Young Australian Artists* at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. The eight images, printed on thick rag paper, were designed to form an overall composition and they were hung, unframed, in two rows. The total height of the work was 4.3 m and the width 5.9 m, and it is the largest work I have made. *Fluctuate #6* was also exhibited in *New Matter: Recent Forms of Photography* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in 2016 (figure 8, page 78; supporting documentation pdf pages 42-45). The exhibition instigated dialogue with other Australian artists using similar photographic material processes.



**figure 7.** (above) Jack Ball, *Fluctuate*, [installation view, Primavera 2013: Young Australian Artists, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, exhibition curated by Robert Cook], 2013.

**figure 8.** (right) Jack Ball, *Fluctuate #6*, [installation view, New Matter: Recent forms of photography, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, exhibition curated by Isobel Parker Philip], 2016.



## **Making a mess is making a point**

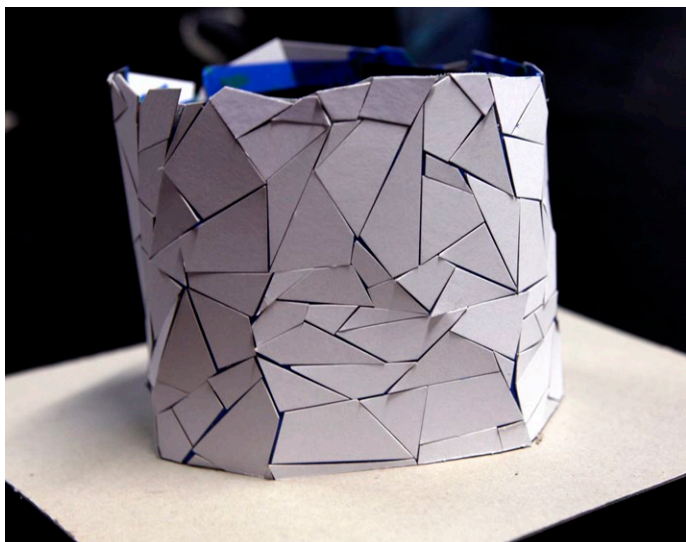
*The day before Primavera opened, I had a moment alone in the gallery. I stood below the 4.3-metre stack that was Fluctuate and I was overwhelmed with a feeling that a part of me had leaked out through my images; something sexual, slippery, and desiring and I couldn't do anything to hold it back or cover it up. It was on the wall on a massive scale. Up until this point I had only made photographs that were architectural, abstract, distant, and formal; I did not think of myself as being in the work. I had last seen Fluctuate as they were being printed in Perth, flat on a table, in pieces, one image at a time. But this bodily mountain of giant images was personal. The artist's statement I had written did not account for any of these feelings. My plans for how to speak about the work publicly were suddenly in question.*

The casting processes I used to create the sets for *Fluctuate* were cheap, low stakes, and easily accessible. It was a messy, spontaneous, pleasurable, and unpredictable experimentation via tactile engagement with materials. There was little ambition to master and control my materials, a skill often celebrated in works by male sculptors. I was, however, very hesitant to share how haphazard my casting processes were. I made moulds from hundreds of pieces of cut cardboard taped together (figure 9, page 80). They were comparable to scrappy-looking architectural maquettes. The maquettes were then tightly wrapped in gaffer tape, heavily bound and padded, making them (for the most part) watertight. The plaster was often stained with oxides to introduce colour that marbled and clumped together when not stirred through. Whilst mixing the powder and cleaning up, I wore personal protective equipment (PPE). Even though plaster is a relatively safe product in comparison to other typical sculptural materials, I did not want it inside me. However, flakes of dried plaster were later found pressed into my clothes and buried in my hair. As I poured in the wet plaster, the forms would usually slouch and expand. Occasionally they would split, creating rapidly spreading puddles of plaster on my studio floor. Kitted out in latex gloves, I would try to plug up the holes with clay. This led to lumpy



**figure 9.** (below) Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.

**figure 10.**(right) Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.



**figure 11.**(above) Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.

**figure 12.**(right) Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.



and puckered formations, where the cardboard was entangled in the plaster. The inside of the mould became the outside, the negative space became the positive, concave become convex.

Once the plaster was partially hardened, I would unwrap the damp-smelling gaffer and peel off the cardboard (figure 10, figure 11, and figure 12, page 80). I would shape it with my hands or carve into it with a blade. I scrubbed the remaining cardboard off with a scourer. It was like scrubbing apricot-coloured skin. I softly coated them with colour and added highlights and accentuated curves. As I worked on my surfaces, the boundary between interior and exterior continued as a question. Sabina Andron's description of a surface suggests a collage process: "The surface is a space: not a boundary but an extension, a thickness, an object...[it] is cumulative and layered: it results from the gradual addition of individual inscriptions, materials, coatings, paint, markings and erasures" (2018, 7). Collaging paper prints, collaging plaster, and collaging skin all share this capacity for both accumulation and disintegration. As Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey write: "skin is temporal in the sense that it is affected by the passing of time or, to put it differently, it materializes that passing in the accumulation of marks, of wrinkles, lines and creases, as well as in the literal disintegration of skin" (2001, 2). I was faking marks of time. I patched over cracks with clay and plaster, sanded back lumps, added scratches to the surfaces. I dropped some sections so that they would smash into pieces. Later I could repair and re-make, a process of building from the rubble. The more I embellished the surfaces, the more time I spent with these odd, low-fi objects, the more attached to them I became.

Throughout this process, I also experimented with a number of other casting techniques. I tried wet clay moulds, plasticine moulds, and wood moulds. I watched YouTube tutorials on slip casting, with mediocre results. I took short cuts and I did not have the right equipment. I also poured plaster into things such as plastic filing sleeves, and tubes made of thick watercolour paper, or one meter-long tubes of thick plastic (which I then flattened out and shaped with my hands). I crunched up thin sheets of aluminium and covered them in plaster and made all sorts of moulds from the malleable metal. I poured plaster into a range of everyday boxes and containers. The mould just needed to be flexible and soft enough that I could peel or break it off.



These objects were ordinary to look at. It was only through the process of layering them with light and using depth of field that they transformed into something more alluring and dramatic. With the lights out in my studio, and over a long exposure, I used small LED lights, of various colours, and dragged them over the surface of my sets. All eight images were developed simultaneously. At the end of each day of shooting, I would collage the latest version of each image directly onto my Photoshop canvas install layout. I studied the details of these transformations from thickness to flatness. I recorded the changing layout using the screenshot function on my computer to prevent me from forgetting. I documented every slight change to the sets for fear of loss and irreversible damage to the cast objects. The desire to capture each step created an excess of images, an archive of sorts that was a massive stash of outtakes.

All these processes were messy, bodily, and intimate. These material processes were refusing to uphold boundaries between inside and outside. In the months that followed my experiences at *Primavera*, where I was more conscious of the sensual and sexual associations of the work, I interpreted the metaphors present in these casting processes as being about female bodies. Elizabeth Grosz explains the historical and lingering idea that female bodies are understood “as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking...self-containment—not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order” (1994, 203). When the images were hanging on the wall, I became conscious that they were loose metaphors for my own challenges in terms of being a woman correctly (Ahmed 2017). This includes the expectation to be desirable, but only when it benefits patriarchal desire, whilst simultaneously being taught to be afraid and ashamed of my sexual desire (Lorde [1984] 2007).

In retrospect, I could understand my casting processes as experiments in containment and spillage. Similar to how I had assumed I needed to conceal my desire, I worked hard to conceal my messy processes and prevent the behind-the-scenes leaking out into the gallery. I was encouraged not to give away the secret of how small and ordinary my sets were, as it would destroy the magic (Nelson, “Practice-as-Research”, 2006). It was as if I was performing an air

of mystery and withholding to increase the prospect of attraction, akin to heterosexual dating rituals. As Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier (2015) have shown concealing the messiness of queer bodies and desire is a way to maintain clean disciplinary boundaries. Nevertheless, female bodies can also make a mess of these disciplinary expectations. Campbell and Farrier write, “liquid is hard to contain — it finds cracks and holes to permeate and flow through, thus coming into potentially eroding or corrosive contact with ‘established conceptual frameworks’” (84). Sculptural traditions suggest that it is men who work with difficult, expensive, heavy, and serious materials, such as stone and metals. Such materials form hard boundaries that support concepts of solid unwavering masculinity. The approach of the male sculptor resembles the approach of the professional male photographer or the craftsman as outlined in Chapter 1. However, stone and metal can still speak to messiness, ruin, and fragility, and cis male bodies also leak (Lindemann 2009). What I have learned throughout this PLR is that allowing the fluidity and messiness of my desire and gender to spill out into the gallery is a valuable method for damaging expectations. Chris Kraus ([1998] 2006) and Campbell and Farrier (2015) show how making a mess *is* making a point.

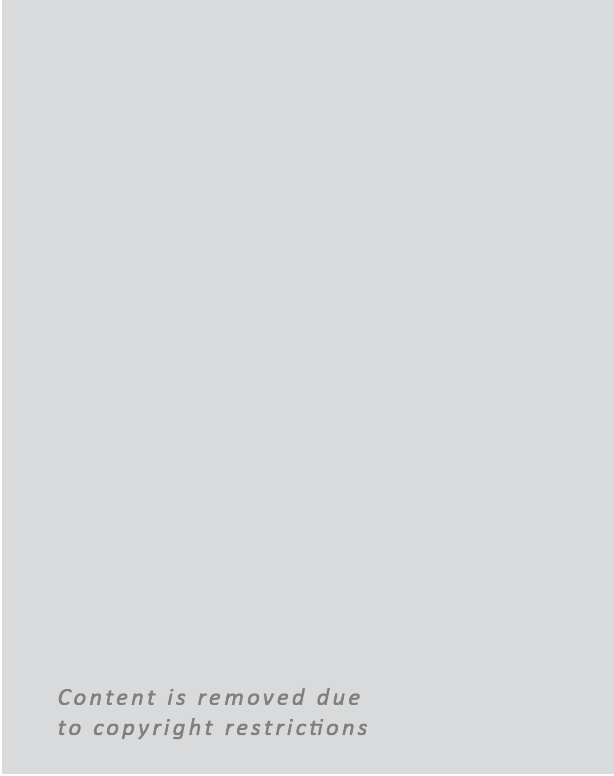
### **Building flexible architecture**

The process of casting and the process of photographing both have histories intertwined with ideas of authenticity. The process of casting I used to create *Fluctuate* reflects the process that Rachel Whiteread had used to create *Embankment* (figure 13, figure 14, and figure 15, page 84), which was exhibited in the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in 2005. *Embankment* is made up of approximately 14,000 semi-transparent polyethylene casts of variously sized cardboard boxes. Whiteread is known for her plaster casts of rooms, stairwells, and furniture, which “literally carried the authentic traces of the objects or spaces from which they were cast” including “dusty fragments of the original room” (Wood 2005, 29). Representing a space that reminds us of its absences is a productive and imaginative way, as Catherine Wood explains, of “making in-between spaces visible...in the form of plaster ‘ghosts’” (27). Whiteread uses the phrase “mummifying the air” (Bickers 1991, 17), which resonates with Cartier-Bresson’s



**figure 13.** (left) Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment* [installation view TATE Modern]. 2005, translucent polyethylene. Reproduced from: Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment*, Tate Publishing.


**figure 14.** (below) Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment* [installation view TATE Modern]. 2005, translucent polyethylene. Reproduced from: Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment*, Tate Publishing.



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**figure 15.** (right) Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment* [installation view TATE Modern]. 2005, translucent polyethylene. Reproduced from: Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment*, Tate Publishing.



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objectives of trapping life, containing something living. However, Whiteread's self-positioning is never about domination. Her location is grounded in the everydayness of the items she chooses to cast. Boxes are utility items and can be associated with movement, transport, and commercial storage. However, Whiteread's initial idea for the work came from a personal experience of discovering a box, whilst going through her mother's possessions after her death, that she remembered vividly from her childhood (Tate 2005).

The boxes in *Embankment* are "ghosts" (Wood 2005, 27) in that they show dents, seam lines, handles, impressions from beer bottles and other objects once carried in the boxes. Whiteread made the initial mould for *Embankment* from actual boxes; however, to produce the large quality needed, the boxes were manufactured commercially. This point complicates the idea of preciousness and authenticity (Tate 2005). Each box suggests it is "anchored to a real referent" (Wood 2005, 26); yet, to repeat the language of photographic authenticity, it is a fake referent. Whiteread's boxes *perform* the look and feel of a 'real world' referent. One cast box cannot be more authentic than another and their excessive commercial replication is at odds with these "authentic traces" (29). *Embankment* offers a sculptural example that counters Batchen's claim that "carnal knowledge" (2001a) can only come from authentic indexicality and shows how intimate and embodied experiences can come from performances of indexicality. In the chapters that follow, I develop playful visual methods to perform authentic referents, and I connect this to a long lineage of queer camp performance which points to the flimsiness of categories such as 'real' and 'fake'.

*Embankment* turns the Turbine Hall into a temporary warehouse, one of many stopovers, a thematic which connects back to the gallery's industrial history (Wood 2005). Whiteread's mass collection of boxes can be seen as "a kind of maze with many branches and dead ends and no 'center' or goal" (31). Some sections are arranged in neat pillars; other stacks form mountains that appear as though they could easily crumble and collapse—after all, boxes are collapsible. The boxes form a flexible architecture, one that is in process, that can be endlessly re-arranged, dismantled, and re-built. Rather than forming a monument that is stable and finite, *Embankment* is like a monument to excess and replication. Wood says that the work is "[I]ike

a dream or a nightmare of overproduction” (29). Its excessiveness differs from the immovable sculptures by male artists (Wood 2005). For example, Donald Judd’s steel, copper, and Plexiglas boxes often involve multiples, but the replication is never excessive. Instead, the repetition always remains managed and contained. It is through these links to multiplicity, flexibility, reappropriation, and seam lines that I started imagining *Embankment* as a kind of large-scale architectural collage.

*Fluctuate* was similarly a process of collage. It was not a singular heroic phallus, a celebration of verticality, rather the overall work was made of eight fragments that offered some flexibility. My cast objects also carried the “authentic trace” (Wood 2005, 29)—for example, actual fragments of cardboard remain in the plaster—which were then flattened through digital photography. I needed some of “authentic trace” to be erased in order to dramatise these objects, to convey an air of mystery, however it is an objective I now feel conflicted about. I was collapsing the 3D objects into digital images and putting an end to replication by assigning them as editions of 5, meaning only 5 images can be printed. I was following the rules on how to ascribe value to, and manage, the endlessly reproducible digital file. Interestingly, at the exhibition opening, I was asked if my work was made completely via 3D digital rendering software. I desperately pointed to the evidence of my body being present through marks of the handmade; the fingerprints (the most ‘unique’ of authentic traces), dust, scratches. At that moment, I *needed* the referent. I needed the markers of authenticity. In that intuitional context, to have made work completely dislocated from the ‘real’ (as in digitally rendered) felt vacant and unskilled. Even before reading Batchen, I had already intuited his arguments about the digital’s lack of contiguity as a sign of emptiness. However, to amplify the handmade would also mean showing more of the messy process. In this scenario, mess was both a marker of legitimacy and a marker of amateurism. The futility of these rules was becoming apparent and I began to ask, whose measures do I use to ascribe value to my work anyway, and who was I making the work for?

## Heroic fake caves

In the days after *Primavera* opened, Andrew Frost wrote a review of the exhibition that was published in *The Guardian* newspaper. According to Frost (2013), “not so much can be said... [about] Jacqueline Ball’s suite of impressively large photos of fake caves made from plaster and photographed in macro, blown up to heroic scale”. After listing which works in the show do not engage him, including my own, he writes, “in fact, they are all good-looking things but their substance doesn’t seem to match their surface, which is to say there isn’t much, at least not to these eyes”. Frost’s review has some similarities to Batchen’s argument outlined earlier; my images were just empty digital surfaces. Similarly, the common trope of images being discussed through their “brute exteriority, its depthless-ness” (Solomon-Godeau [1995] 2017, 12) and through the binary of façade and inner truth appears in his discussion. His comment suggests my series was just pretty to look at, but there was nothing hidden awaiting discovery, no authentic core. Frost positions himself as ‘the decipherer’, which amplifies, rather than socially situates, the importance of his gaze and the power invested in his view. The art reviewer can be the interlocutor between the gallery and the public, and it is often the case that embodied positionality is missing from art reviews in mainstream newspapers. Both his gender and my gender are not discussed in the text; however, both our genders are shaping the conversation. My socialisation has taught me that spilling my desires, messy body, and personal experiences into the clean, professional white cube (particularly with its traditionally heterosexual, white, cis male history) is shameful and superficial. My socialisation has also taught me that I need to continually demonstrate my substance, in a way my male colleagues do not, in order to prove my credibility and deflect charges of superficiality. If I exhibited with the name ‘Jack Ball’ and I had been perceived to be a male artist, would I still have been critiqued for superficiality and lack of substance, or would something else be targeted? Or what if I had made this work as an openly queer, trans, masc artist?

Consumerist hooks such as ‘the bigger the better’ versus ‘quality over quantity’ had looped in my mind whilst making decisions about *Fluctuate’s* scale. Large-scale digital photos are connected to advertising billboards and Frost chooses words that frequently orbit consumer

image culture. He refers to *Fluctuate* as “fake caves” twice in the review. He did not use the terms ‘handmade’ or ‘constructed’—terms that converse with the male tableau traditions and the history of constructed photography. His emphasis on “fake”, at the time, felt like a point of embarrassment, as if he was revealing my attempt at public deception. Frost also uses the word “heroic”. When combined with his descriptor “fake caves”, I understood it as an reference to a fake performance of heroism, a feigned masculinity that exposes weakness (Halberstam 1998). The work is either framed as *too* feminine and consequently facile, or as a failed attempt at masculinity. Would images with a more direct indexical relationship to ‘reality’ have prompted the same criticism of superficiality? Presenting ‘real’ bodies would have evoked a very different set of problems compared to if I had presented ‘real’ caves. Caves are one of the subject matters explored in the European traditions of the sublime, where the wildness of nature is idealised and desired, and is safely moderated and controlled by the male artist (Battersby 1994, 2007).

In the previous chapter I posed this question: when the subject of a digital photograph is considered a typically ‘female’ subject and is therefore readily associated with emptiness and superficiality, does this increase the chance of a similar critique extending to the materiality of the medium? Frost’s review offers a way to explore these concerns. Piecing together how gender impacts the nuances of public critique is challenging as it involves examining subtleties that are easily dismissed as meaningless. As I mentioned in the introduction, attending to the details of misogyny risks an accusation of exaggeration or pettiness, or of complaining too much; however, these accusations are also a mechanism to prevent complaint (Ahmed 2017). Frost’s review was productive for this PLR, as it illuminated the details of gendered ideas within dominant understandings of photography and how this framing can be linked to the gender of the artist. This review also piqued my interest in closely examining the newspaper art reviews of successful queer, Indigenous, and/or female artists to notice language decisions, and decipher which aspects of the work are the focus of the critique and how this links to the

artist's positionality<sup>6</sup>. Newspaper art reviews have an extensive readership. As such, reviewers are vested with power to challenge the image of the heroic white male as the personification of the professional artist and to disrupt settler-colonial narratives and heteronormativity in both art institutions and art criticism.

### **Taking up space**

I clearly wanted to “take up space” (Ahmed 2017, 25) with large-scale bodily imagery in *Fluctuate*, in the lush, new white cube in Sydney Harbour. Making massive images did not align with my socialisation as female. Ahmed explains: “Gendering operates in how bodies take up space...To become accommodating, we take up less space. The more accommodating we are the less space we have to take up. Gender: a loop, tightening” (ibid). The images were made with bodies in mind. I did not want to smother the viewer with scale and content, nor did I want to distance the viewer. I looked for methods that would give the viewer some breathing space, whilst also offering intimacy. The attempt to understand how my body relates to large images came to a fore during the process of deciding on the scale for *Fluctuate*. I used a projector to project images onto the high walls of a studio at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), where I was undertaking an artist residency. Mary Ann Doane mentions in relation to cinema that “scale as a concept in general can only be understood through its reference to the human body” (2003, 108). I made each image the height of a doorway, as I understood how my body related to doorways. All the doorways in my life became spaces to imagine my images. When projecting imagery on the wall, I found a range of forms and compositions that were more amenable to distortion when standing below them. I then

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6 For example, see the following reviews of Tracey Moffatt's exhibitions: Adrian Searle's (2017) review in *The Guardian* newspaper titled “Tracey Moffatt: Review—Horrible Histories from Australia's Venice Envoy”; senior art critic at the *Sydney Morning Herald* John McDonald's (2017) review titled “Venice Biennale Review: Mediocrity Suspended Between Poles of Earnestness and Silliness; Robert Nelson's (2004) review titled *Tracey Moffatt* in *The Age* newspaper, which critiqued her exhibition of the same name at the Museum of Contemporary Art. All three reviews, to varying degrees, claim the work is excessive, frivolous, and deceptive, and the reviews collectively demonstrate an expectation to replicate white, settler-colonial, patriarchal perspectives of reality.

made maquettes of these often-angular forms and repeated the process of projection. The final sets were designed with perspective lines that were warped to begin with. I further amplified these distortions with the use of a tilt-shift lens, which created a selective focal plane that ran perpendicular to the lens. This lens creates a diagonal plane of focus, or a diagonal depth of field, which is not possible for our eyes to replicate. With this lens, the distortion can be manipulated on two planes (vertically and horizontally), similar to a large format view camera with adaptable bellows. The diagonal plane of focus works to lead the viewer into the image. Historically, this lens was used in architectural photography to correct lens distortion. Here I was using it to amplify distortion. The visual effects of a tilt-shift lens were once commonly replicated on Instagram with the use of a filter. It was often used to make buildings appear as though they were miniature sets. This effect is subtly present in many of the *Fluctuate* images. I was both exaggerating scale and truncating scale.

Due to *Fluctuate's* similarity of scale and ratio to the cinematic screen, I found Doane's exploration of cinematic scale to be important for theorising this work. She writes that the close-up shot in cinema "invokes two different binary oppositions—proximity vs. distance and the large vs. the small" (2003, 92). She asks the following question:

Is the close-up the bearer, the image of the small, the minute; or the producer of the monumental, the gigantic, the spectacular? This confusion, and the apparent collapse of the oppositions between detail and totality, part and whole, microcosm and macrocosm, the miniature and the gigantic, is crucial to the ideological operation of the close-up, that which makes it one of our most potent memories of the cinema. (108)

I am writing about the "antimonumental, the micro, the irrelevant" (Halberstam 2011, 21), and of the amateur as "anything but a hero" (Barthes [1977] 2010, 52) and resisting the masculinist model of mastery. *Fluctuate* could be understood as a series of monuments to messy bodies. After realising that the large white cube of the Museum of Contemporary Art is located where the First Fleet landed in 1788, on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, I was left with the question; was *Fluctuate* anti-monumental enough? In the future,

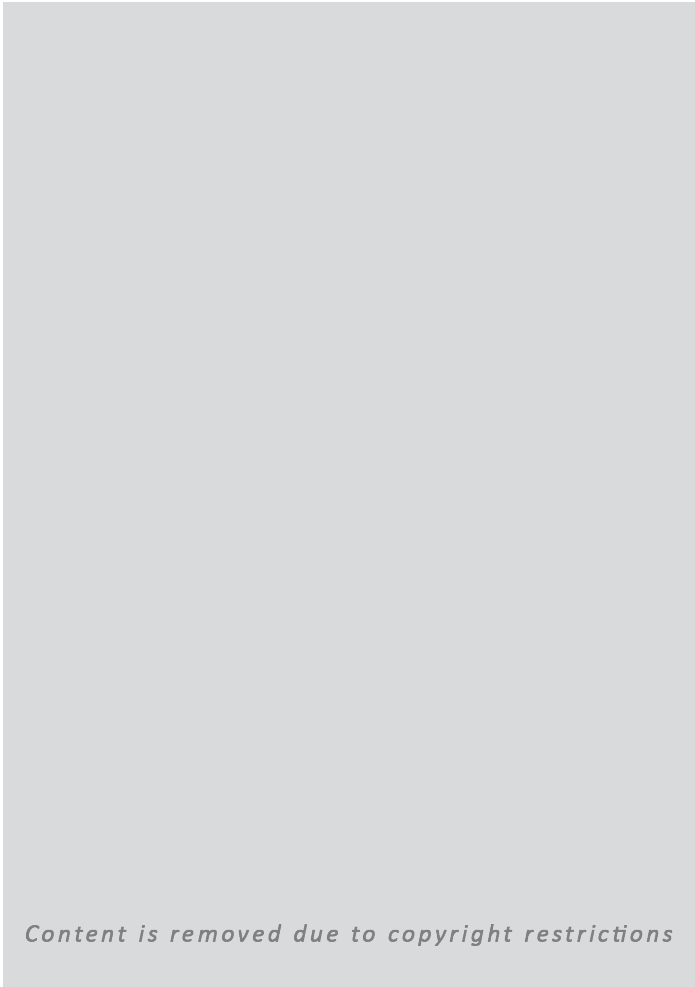
it is important that I build large-scale imagery, using collage and fragmentation, mess and multiplicity, as a white, trans artist with a decisive and unapologetic anti-monumental politics.

### **Pixel damage**

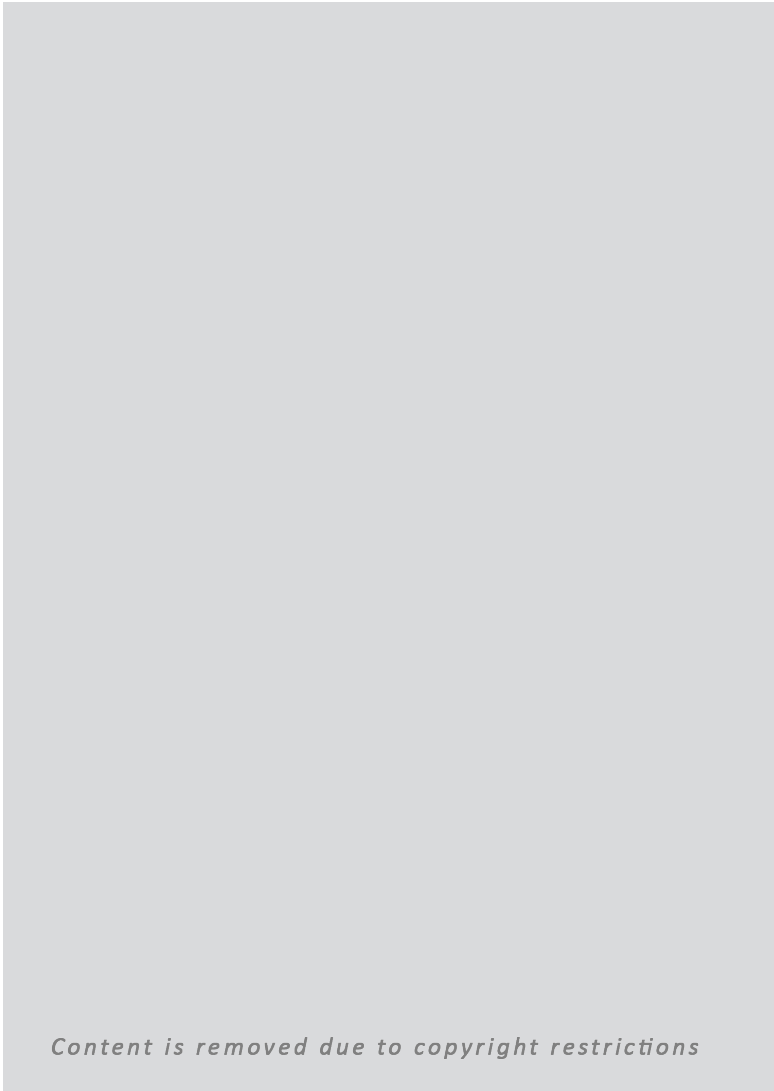
Working on such a large scale provoked worries about pixels leaking out and becoming visible to the viewer. In digital photography culture, there is a relentless desire for pixel-free imagery. I was taught that we should not see the pixel *too* soon. Online photography forums endlessly compare quality using this measure. Cameras are sold with the promise of pixel-free prints. Australian artist Bill Henson's first exhibition using digital photography rather than film was praised by Christopher Allen (2010) in *The Australian* newspaper, who wrote that the images were of "operatic sublimity" and "nothing could be further from the hyper-real photographs that pervade the commercial media". Whilst it is becoming increasingly difficult to tell digital and analogue apart, the film grain is often celebrated, whereas the pixel is commonly regarded as cheap and commercial. The pixel's presence should never be revealed: the micro should remain invisible. In certain photographic and art spaces, the disclosure of the building blocks of the digital photographic medium is still viewed as amateur.

The *Fluctuate* series was very expensive to print. One reason I have not been able to make work at this scale since is that the exhibition was funded by the Museum of Contemporary Art. Whilst my plaster-splattered aging canon DSLR is useful, it was not of high enough quality to print pixel-free at such a large scale. To solve this, I had to stitch (manually edit on Photoshop) three images files together to make each large image. The tilt-shift lens provides a large image circle, meaning I could move the lens up and down to create multiple images that vertically overlap. Each final *Fluctuate* image was a secret collage. I carefully smoothed over the seams, blended each file together with meticulous care, to prevent any trace of my manipulation.

There is difference between lazy pixels and visible pixels as a decisive gesture. Australian artist Pat Brassington explores a subtle, but deliberate, engagement with digital materiality



**figure 16.**Pat Brassington, *Like a Bird Now*, 2010, pigment print, 85 x 60cm. Reproduced from: Stills Gallery website.



**figure 17.**Pat Brassington, *Coming*, 2010, pigment print, 100 x 72cm, Reproduced from: Stills Gallery website.



(figure 16 and figure 17, page 92). Brassington uses digital collage to explore distorted and shapeshifting bodies, disorientating interiors, dislocated landscapes, and other dream-like scenarios. It is my sense, when I look at Brassington's work, that these images have been *through* something; a process of being stretched, cropped close, expanded, resized, and the colour was been distorted. The grittiness of the surfaces converse with the grittiness of the subject matter. Brassington is using crunchy or granular pixel surfaces to reduce the clarity of information. Grainy pixels give us a sense of things rather than offer sharp evidence-like detail. Could revealing pixel texture, as a type of 'pixel ruin' or 'digital mistake', be a small form of feminist photographic rebellion in opposition to the more 'professional' camera tech obsession with high resolution? As mentioned earlier, when the subject of the work is typically associated with femininity, it shapes how the digital materiality of the medium is interpreted. The desire to contain the materiality of the digital, to present a neat exterior, can be connected to the desire to contain female and queer bodies. In *PDA*, which I explore in Chapter 5, I use gritty digital pixels to visually explore a connection between containment and spillage. Fear of pixels is also about the professional photographer's fears of the democratisation of the medium, where anyone with a smartphone can participate. Celebrating smooth, 'realistic' representations and seamless surfaces, and dismissing leaky and messy pixel grit, is a way to preserve disciplinary boundaries which are necessary to maintain the professional's place in the hierarchy.

Pixilation, image texture, and image disintegration also offer haptic potential to reject mastery and the totality of representation (Marks 2000). Visible pixels can be used as an amateur method to evoke sensory engagement, in contrast to the heroic, large-scale tableau traditions which seek to distance the viewer. Laura Marks explains that in relation to cinema, both haptic and optic visibility are part of "a dialectical movement from far to near, from solely visual to multisensory" (1998, 332). *Fluctuate* may be a collection of large-scale images designed to be viewed as a whole, but the textures also invite the viewer to move in close. As Marks writes, "we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies" (ibid). In a lecture, Halberstam (2016) explains that "the haptic is a way of narrating that doesn't have an orientation or a goal... The haptic allows you to feel your way through something without needing to master it". This approach connects with my central PLR objectives. Interestingly,

Marks writes that “electronic texture can protect the viewer from the image, or the image from the viewer. It can force the look to be self-reflexive by stressing the opacity of the video ‘window’” (1998, 333). Rather than digital texture creating flatness associated with emptiness, this flatness can offer a self-conscious viewing or an awareness of positionality in relation to the image. This exchange between surface and depth, and a sense of intimacy, engages the viewer in a process, where, as Marks explains, the erotic possibilities of haptic visuality can be found (ibid). Marks is not writing about eroticism as voyeurism or spectatorship. As she clarifies, “The erotic relationship I am identifying in haptic cinema depends upon limited visibility and the viewer’s lack of mastery over the image” (342). Many of my photographic methods are designed to make room for this type of intimacy and hapticity. I continue to prioritise intimate visual methods in my series *PDA*. It is through Marks’s theories that, I suggest, an engagement with visible pixels and digital materiality can be understood as a feminist and queer method.

### **Pipilotti Rist’s imagery and public critique**

In January 2018 I experienced Pipilotti Rist’s exhibition *Sip my Ocean* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. Visible glitches and pixel materiality ooze from Rist’s imagery (figure 18, figure 19, and figure 20, page 95). Carolyn L. Kane writes that Rist’s “colour palette is pushed to the very limits of its machinic and technical artifice, to taint, rupture, and mechanize conventions or ‘natural’ colour assumptions” (2011, 490). She uses visceral, gritty, high-pitched, inverted colour as a decisive method to disrupt and destabilise how bodies and images relate. Rist is not a photographer. The medium of video has a different history and different set of aesthetic conventions to contend with. However, her work has been critical in situating my practice. Rist’s imagery has been central in understanding how image methods typically associated with amateurism, such as saturated colour, excess of imagery, and large-scale images of female bodies, can be connected to superficiality. I show how Rist’s amateur methods can be understood as a critique of the misogyny that shapes who is taken seriously in art spaces.

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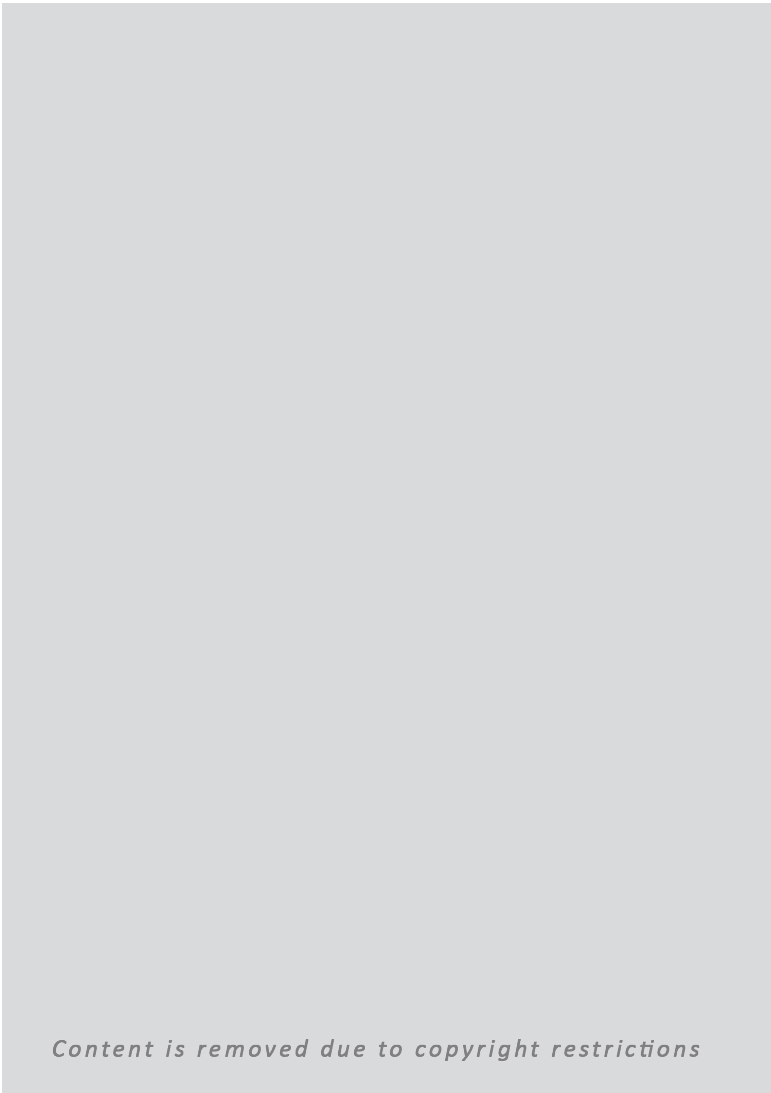
**figure 18.**(above) Pipilotti Rist and Muda Mathis. *Japsen* [still]. 1988, single-channel video with sound. Colour and sound by Muda Mathis, Pipilotti Rist and Les Reines Prochaines. Reproduced from: Museum of Contemporary Art website.

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**figure 19.** (above) Pipilotti Rist, *The Tender Room* [still]. 1997. Reproduced from: Vogue Magazine website.

**figure 20.**(left) Pipilotti Rist, *Pickelporno* [still]. 1992. Single-channel video with sound. Reproduced from: Muse Magazine website.

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**figure 21.** (left) Pipilotti Rist, *Administrating Eternity* [Installation view, Pipilotti Rist: Komm Schatz, wir stellen die Medien um & fangen nochmals von vorne an, Kunsthalle Krems, Austria 2015], 2011, four-channel video installation with sound. Photo by Lisa Rastl. Reproduced from: Museum of Contemporary Art website.

**figure 22.**(below) Pipilotti Rist, *Gnade Donau Gnade2 from the Mercy Garden Family* [Installation view, Komm Schatz, wir stellen die Medien um & fangen nochmals von vorne an, Kunsthalle Krems, Krems, Austria 2015]. 2013-2015. Reproduced from: Museum of Contemporary Art website.



The installation spaces Rist creates are designed for bodies, in that she “encourage[s] visitors to rest, take off their shoes, stretch, and ‘pour their body’ onto the couch, carpet, and colourful space” (Kane 2011, 489). The lights are low, which eases my self-awareness of being watched in the gallery. Rist’s imagery layers over my body as I move in and out of projection beams, casting shadows on the surrounding screens (figure 21 and figure 22, page 96). Imagery and sound are slowed down and sped up, which work to distort and disorientate. Rist’s imagery often includes naked female bodies pressed up closely to the camera, filling the corners of the frame, and unapologetically taking up space. This intimate relationship between cameras, bodies, and projection surfaces generates messy and ambiguous boundaries between the inside and outside of bodies (Hawkins 2015). Harriet Hawkins writes of the “body camera”, where “the lens seems almost glued to the woman’s skin, moving among pores, hairs, and goosebumps in an engagement that challenges scale, distance and exteriority” (2015, 164). Marks’s (1998, 2000) discussion of how surface texture can be erotic, connective, and a sensory site for invitation is pertinent to my experience of Rist’s work; Hawkins (2015) also makes this connection. Rist’s handling of video surfaces, textures, and colour counter masculine photographic culture that privileges high resolution, technical clarity, and ‘realistic’ colour management. Rist discusses her work in relation to the political lineage of proletariat art (Louisiana Channel [2012] 2016) and speaks of how she is influenced by music videos. Rather than referencing visual language and aesthetics derived from male traditions of painting, which cinema and photography tend to heavily depend upon, she uses popular visual language that is familiar to the audience to encourage them to connect with her imagery.

Rist’s exhibition brought my own anxieties about using too much colour in my photographs sharply to the fore. A few weeks after viewing the exhibition, the origin of these anxieties became more apparent as I came across a review of Rist’s *Sip my Ocean*. Written by Christopher Allen (2018)<sup>7</sup>, the review was published in the Murdoch-owned national paper *The Australian*. Reviews like these have shaped my assumption that the extreme use of colour is often considered ‘too much’, or superficial, because it is linked to the feminine and not to be taken

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7 All subsequent quotations from Allen in this section are from this 2018 source.

seriously. In Allen's review of Rist's work, he casually mentions colour, but does not specifically engage with it. David Batchelor writes that "in much of art criticism, the authors of which seem able to maintain an unbroken vow of silence on the subject of colour even when it's quite literally staring them in the face" (2000, 31). The title of Allen's review sets the scene: "Pipilotti Rist's *Sip my Ocean* is Simply Narcissistic Biennale Filler". The heading selected by the newspaper to advertise the article on Twitter states: "A sip from Pip? No thanks" (*The Australian* 2017). Sexualised language is used throughout the article. Allen explains that "[Rist's] work is ultimately the superficial and trashy production of a rich girl who has managed to convince the international art world to take her seriously". The comment dispels her agency and skill, and instead assumes an ease of progression (Ahmed 2017). Not only does he erase the challenges female artists face, he overlooks that all institutional contemporary art is entangled with wealth and capitalism. However, most interestingly, he introduces the idea of deception. This comes in addition to his adamant charges of narcissism. The term narcissism appears four times in the article, in addition to the title. It is a tired trope, and one which Rist critiques within her image content. Allen claims that her work is navel-gazing, which I accredit to the frequent close-ups of female bodies and the work's link with social media aesthetics. Allen explains how Rist's work is "mainly appealing as a background to social media portraits" which emerges as part of his discussion about how young women narcissistically use social media. Allen is suggesting that Rist's imagery is as empty as the gaze of the young women who flock to see the exhibition.

Throughout the article, Allen emphasises that Rist has gone *too* far with her aesthetic choices. He describes the work as being "like falling down Alice's rabbit hole and landing in the frothy, pink and futile world of social media mirages. The show itself is swimming in pinks and pastels, with flashing lights, hanging gauzy curtains". He complains that her work does not make "sense" and explains "the aesthetic content of the room is far from clear". At certain points, he appears to be assuming she has made errors and is not aware of how her medium's aesthetics communicate. At other times, he acknowledges her intentionality but only by claiming she is using aesthetics dishonestly and that her images are deceptively plush in their shallow visual seduction.

These themes are most evident in his critique of Rist's work titled *Ever Is Over* (figure 23, page 99) from 1997. The video portrays a white woman dressed in a bright blue dress holding a baton shaped like a red-hot polka flower. She passionately and brazenly smashes car windows as she walks down a street. A female police officer nods her head in support. Part of the frame is overlaid with red tropical flowers. The soundtrack is entrancing, the video is in slow motion, and is displayed on two screens. The horizon line is unstable, and slowly tilts as the video loops. Allen describes the work as "the epitome of the alienation of the narcissist". He then details what he characterises as the selfishness of this act:

The protagonist may be having a great time destroying the property of strangers but you really don't have to think very hard to imagine what it would be like to be an office worker hurrying to their job or a mother taking her children to school, and coming downstairs from their apartment to find that their car had been collateral damage in someone else's joyful and uninhibited self-expression. Is it pedantic to make this objection? But how else can we possibly interpret a work that explicitly evokes and, more worryingly, celebrates a state of narcissistic, even hysterical dissociation that in the real world we would associate with mental illness?

Allen's review is a forceful assertion of a patriarchal social order. This example shows that even

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**figure 23.** Pipilotti Rist, *Ever Is Over All* [still]. 1997, two-channel video installation with sound. Colour and sound by Anders Guggisberg and Pipilotti Rist. Reproduced from: The New Yorker.

in the contemporary arts context, imagery created with a camera still carries the expectation that it should create a supposedly 'neutral' documentation of reality (as if this were possible). The reality Allen wishes to see is his established, patriarchal "real world" reflected back at him. Rist's subversive and performative destruction is in many ways similar to Chris Kraus's public undoing in *I Love Dick*, which was published the year before. The protagonist in *Ever Is Over* is demonstrating a performative and playful rejecting of the expectation to avoid chaos (Kraus [1998] 2006, 238), and using damage and violence as a wilful feminist method of undoing (Ahmed 2017; Halberstam 2011). Endorsement from the female police officer, a symbolic nod to the establishment, emphasises this point. Allen assumes the messy destruction is purposeless, whereas a feminist perspective can understand that the protagonist is making a mess because things need to be messed up. The pleasure the protagonist takes in this destruction is perhaps at the heart of what Allen finds threatening.

### **Liquid colour**

Photographers who work with colour in ways that exceed what is considered natural or neutral can often meet with charges of inauthenticity and amateurism (Bajorek 2015; Kane 2011; Wiese 2016). I argue that this extends to other camera-based mediums, such as video, as Allen's review of Rist's exhibition exemplifies. Saturated colour is associated with the teenage Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat filters of visual communication and the amateur's heavy-handed enthusiasm for Photoshop. Photography students are taught not to move the colour slider *too* far whilst editing. Similar to pixel preciousness that celebrates high definition, the preservation of colour data, for example smooth gradients, is valued over 'banding', 'clipping' or 'combing' effects in the histogram (a graph representing pixel tonal values of each image). These latter processes 'ruin' pixel data. In *Fluctuate*, colour slips and blends into each other without friction, loosely embracing analogous colour palettes; that is, using colours that are close together on a colour wheel. However, it was not until I made the *PDA* series, which I discuss towards the end of this exegesis, that I was able to mobilise 'going too far' with the colour saturation in my photographs as a productive method. It was only then that I developed



ways to explore colour as a process of collage, as a liquid and material substance, where I was moving it from one place to another, creating colour contradictions and tensions, embellishing and transforming it. This shift towards colour saturation as a political tool was prompted by Rist's *Sip my Ocean* exhibition. I was especially struck by Rist's words in an interview: "they call [colour] superficial, but actually it's dangerous" (Louisiana Channel [2012] 2016, 00:08:22).

The fear of amateur colour can be traced through photography's history. Kodachrome colour film was first introduced on the market in 1935. In 1977, Janet Malcolm was one of many critics deeply critical of colour photography's introduction into the art establishment. She wrote of the Museum of Modern Art's famed William Eggleston show in 1976 that colour photographs are associated with "retrograde applications—advertising, fashion, *National Geographic*-type travel pictures, nature pictures, old-fashioned arty abstractions of peeling walls and European traffic signs" ([1980] 1997, 79). Black and white, it seemed, required far more skill (Malcolm [1980] 1997). Sontag wrote in 1977 that black and white was "felt to be more tactful, more decorous than colour—or less voyeuristic and less sentimental or crudely lifelike. But the real basis for this preference is, once again, an implicit comparison with painting" ([1977] 2008, 128). Colour photography has not completely shed its associations with the "frivolous snaphooter" (Malcolm [1980] 1997, 81).

Believability, authenticity, and deception frequently form part of the critique for photographers who work with intense palettes. These critiques are compounded when the artist's positionality is not that of a white, cis, able bodied male. Just like my messy plaster casting, colour is "slippery and precarious" (Kane 2011, 478), leaky, and it can shapeshift. It "spreads flows bleeds stains floods soaks seeps merges" (Bachelor 2000, 86). Kane argues that colour has an "inability to remain static or keep a stable identity (colour will change hues based on its context and surrounding colours)" (2011, 478). Colours can have an afterlife as first colour viewed shapes the perception of the next one and we have no way of knowing how colour perception varies between us (Albers [1963] 2013). Colour can be felt as affect, as heat and intensity that can be "too much" (M. Nelson 2009, 30). It can be seductive, erotic, and queer (Jarman 1995). As I have demonstrated throughout this PLR so far, messiness and desire threaten disciplinary

boundaries which are necessary to maintain the professional's place in the hierarchy. Colour in photography can be utilised to achieve similar ends. Colour as a threat echoes the fear of the unruly female body that menstruates and makes "mess that does not dry invisibly" (Grosz 1994, 205). North American artist Yves Klein speaks about his performative painting work *Anthropométries* from 1960 where he used naked women to be his "living brushes" and the vehicles to administer the messiness of the paint onto the canvas. Klein explains, "I was able to remain constantly at the exact distance 'x' from my canvas and thus I could dominate my creation continuously throughout the entire execution. In this way I stayed clean, I no longer dirtied myself with colour, not even the tips of my fingers" (2007, 187). The alignment of femininity with mess and subservience to the male creator could not be more clearly stated.

When asking, as Rist does, what colour is natural, what colour is normal, and what colour is 'real' in camera-based imagery (Louisiana Channel [2012] 2016), I actively reflect on the cultural constructs that have shaped my understanding of these terms. Colour in photography is an integral site for challenging the unquestioned and often-reinforcing tendencies of whiteness. When bright colour is perceived as a threat, it not only associated with gender. It can also be a racialised response. In Australia, the rhetoric around colour has long been foregrounded in white nation-building policies of assimilation, protection, and segregation, which sought to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands and culture. These historical contexts that construct colour and race as the basis for difference persist within contemporary discourses of national identity and belonging (Australian Human Rights Commission 1997). The negation of Indigenous legitimacy is systemic and relies upon the perpetuation of representations of white dominance within a narrow Western epistemological framework. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson asserts, "the power relations inherent in the relationship between representation, whiteness and knowledge production are embedded in our identities" (2004, 87). She argues for more attention to be focused on studying how white hegemony is maintained through representation. This can be seen in how the colour balance of film was initially designed only for white skin (Roth 2009), as were standard lighting set ups in photography, film, and TV (Dyer 1997). Richard Dyer (*ibid*) writes of how white make-up has a long history in photography and how it served to carefully erase any colour from white bodies to perpetuate white desirability. Photographers

are encouraged to remove 'colour cast' or a 'tint' to neutralise white skin, all terms that have racialised connotations. In relation to Ahmed's experiences of being repeatedly questioned about where she is from because of her brown skin, she succinctly states, "whiteness: when colour is something that is acquired" (2017, 118). She explains her difference from the tanned Australian woman: "her colour is not a stain on her being; her colour is not foreign; her colour is even an expression of national character, of what we do in our leisure time... To be a white woman with colour is to be bronzed rather than brown" (ibid). White Australia's paradoxical fear and obsession with colour is a narrative that has surfaced in many different forms. As a white Australian photographer, it is imperative that I engage in ongoing processes of reflexivity and criticality in relation to how photography aesthetics can perpetuate colonial ideas (McCauley 2018). The normalising of standardised perceptions of colour is just one more extension of the same deeply embedded norms of image-making that marginalise certain bodies, knowledges, and desires.

The contexts explored above shape the assumption that saturated colour in photography cannot coincide with imagery that is political, because it cannot be trusted and it is not a serious visual method. These messy, collaged, shapeshifting qualities of colour in photography are purported to be damaging to the ideas of truth (Bajorek 2015). Jennifer Bajorek offers an interesting proposition:

The questions we should be asking are not whether colour is too sweet or too seductive, or whether it distracts us from passively receiving a political message, or from engaging as political actors with "hard realities", but whether and when it allows us to visualise these realities differently or to ask new questions about them? (2015, 234)

The idea that colour cannot be political in photography is based on the same idea that continues to emerge—that imagery created with a camera is a 'neutral' documentation of reality. Certain methods of visualising the "hard realities" are more valued than others. Bajorek's critique of the use of colour in photography is not focused on gender, however it is interesting that she chooses language typically associated with femininity (for example, sweet,

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**figure 24.** (above) Lola Flash, *Stay afloat – use rubber*, 1993, cross-colour photograph. Reproduced from: Lola Flash website.

seductive, and passive) to describe it. Female and/or feminine-presenting artists who use bright colour to make political work are both disrupting the gendered use of colour and disrupting colour's association with superficiality.

Artist and activist Lola Flash interrogates race and queerness through her reversal of colour. Her work from the 1980s and 1990s responded to the racism and homophobia that she experienced as a Black queer woman in the United States using a photographic process she calls “cross-colour”, where the colour is inverted. Flash explains in an interview how cross-colour “is a comment on the notion of ‘perfect Kodak days,’ in reverse”, which typically represented the idealised white nuclear family, and that through this process the “viewer's expectations of colour are challenged” (Lynne 2018). In the image *Stay afloat – use rubber* (figure 24, page 104), which she made during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the swimming pool is volcanic red or like blood cells, the two men are cobalt blue. These colours are perceived to be ‘unnatural’, like the

broader public perception of queer desire at that time (Wiese 2016). The work also references the concept of inversion, which was a term once used to categorise same-sex desire. Flash's use of inverted colour messes up the indexical representations of 'reality'. She uses colour and popular aesthetic conventions as a method for world building, but also as invitational and as a connective method to engage with her audience. Flash's method rearranges and destabilises colour to challenge long-held biases around the representations of Black and queer people in photography. Her imagery demonstrates the political potential of how colour can be a simple but powerful visual method to critique enduring norms in image culture. Both Flash and Rist demonstrate that lush and distorted saturated colour can be used to push boundaries, erode edges, and make a mess of the expected representational norms. They have also shown me how colour can be intimate and connective. Inviting people to absorb themselves in the messy and sometimes intimate details of the image content can be an important method of responding to masculine photography practices that seek to distance the viewer. As I have suggested, the methods I utilised to create *Fluctuate* encourage this type of audience response. In my later series *PDA*, not only do I use saturated colour for intimacy and connection; I also engage with something else I learned from Rist and Flash: the importance of building the visual worlds you wish to see more frequently.

### **Bodies, inside and out**

So far in this chapter I have considered how messy plaster, messy surface texture, and messy saturated colour are all feminist methods to ruin and remake, and challenge photographic disciplinary norms. The methods explored in this chapter can be utilised to visually explore bodies and desires that are in the *process* of un-doing and re-making. In the concluding section of this chapter, I return to ideas from the opening section about leaky materiality being associated with female bodies. Female bodies are often read via their skin (Ahmed and Stacey 2001) and gender is frequently assigned to the surface of bodies (Getsy 2015). In this section I explore how the liquidities between exterior and interior surfaces and spaces can offer possibilities for understanding and representing bodies that are gender-ambiguous.

In a PhD peer group critique, *Fluctuate*, in draft form, was interpreted as a series of “large-scale vaginas” by two male students. The critique insinuated the work reeked of embarrassing feminist clichés, and that I had made messy, leaky, and excessive vulvas, a part of the body that is culturally expected to be neat and hidden from view. I had been crafting methods to invite the viewer into the sensory surfaces, however my images were gazed at, by these male students, as amateur and lacking in substance. It was a complex moment for me. The location of inner female truth, authenticity, and, as Julie Ewington articulates, “affirmation of women’s sexual power” (2017, 22), has been assigned to the vulva by radical feminists over the decades. Essentialist radical feminist rhetoric is still cited as an excuse for transphobia. I was never interested in creating ‘core imagery’ associated with this lineage. Back in 2013, I was not prepared to tackle these politics. I removed the most vulva-like images from the series to try to appropriately contain any leaking sexuality. However, fortunately, as I later found out in the gallery, the sensual suggestions still remained.

In hindsight, I realised it did not matter so much whether I made images from ‘real’ bodies or ‘fake’ bodies. As my body was assumed female, I was inevitably engaged with the feminist representational politics of making female-looking bodies public. However, not everyone read the images as clearly ‘female’. Ivan Muñiz Reed writes of entering into *Fluctuate #1* in the *Primavera* catalogue essay: “we peer into a tunnel or larynx-like gorge...like we’re performing a laparoscopy” (2013, 24), which offers a less gendered approach to internal space. The probing laparoscopic image illuminates parts of our bodies that are private even to ourselves, in that they are difficult to self-shoot and a doctor is more likely to be privy to them before we are. In this way, *Fluctuate* relates to artist Mona Hatoum’s work *Corps étranger (Foreign body)*, 1994, where she filmed all the openings of her body (figure 25 and figure 26, page 107). The work reveals “a glistening surface of an eyeball; a magnified ear cavity yawning; a corrugated inside of a stomach; a vein-streaked tunnel of the intestines; a mucous fold of the vagina; and a knotted recess of the anus” (Lajer-Burcharth 1997, 195). The installation design in Hatoum’s work offers semi-privacy as the imagery is projected on the floor in the centre of a small circular room; however, I imagine, as a viewer, that feelings of voyeurism would be difficult to ignore.




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**figure 25.**(above) Mona Hatoum, *Corps Étranger*. 1994, video still from multimedia installation. Photograph by Hans Christian Andersen. Reproduced from: Kunst Online.

**figure 26.**(right) Mona Hatoum, *Corps Étranger*. 1994, multimedia installation. Photograph by Philippe Migeat. Reproduced from: Centre Pompidou.



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**figure 27.**(right) Eva Hesse, *Expanded Expansion*. 1969, Fiberglass, polyester resin, latex, and cheesecloth, 309.9 x 762 cm overall. Reproduced from: Guggenheim Museum website.

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Hatoum is visually representing the boundaries between inside and outside of her body for the public gaze, however the images of her body are not immediately gendered. In Hatoum's work, a close-up of a vulva becomes somewhat abstract. One of the beautiful things about being trans is the loosening and re-imagining of the categories in which parts of my body is named and order via gender. The close-up image is a photographic method that has many similarities, as it can offer room for ambiguity and slow down the speed at which normative gendered associations are made. In Chapter 5 I further explore cropping and close-ups as visual methods to represent gender ambiguity.

Eve Hesse's feminist works from the late 1960s explore similar ideas about interior and exterior bodily boundaries, but rather than working with the specificity of her own body, Hesse explores interior bodies through abstract soft sculpture (figure 27, page 107). In a lecture, Halberstam (2016) explains how Hesse's work asks, "What would it mean if we represented the body inside out?". He continues, "We're so obsessed with the surface of the body, the skin, the morphology of the body. [Hesse] started pulling all of these shapes together to represent what happens if the body comes undone" (ibid). He explains how this question is useful for re-thinking both female and trans representation. Blurring the boundaries between the inside and outside of bodies can be a political method of undoing how gender is typically represented. In a different context, Halberstam (2018b) explores how this approach is part of a larger movement, where trans and gender diverse artists and performers "have turned away from figuration or indexical or mimetic representation and towards the abstract, the symptomatic, even the architectural". He articulates how "[a]bstraction...opens onto other ways of thinking about gendered embodiment" (ibid). By undoing bodies, for example through collage, and moving to a space of abstraction, I can speak to this common overemphasis on exteriority that is projected on female bodies and trans bodies. Ahmed and Stacey write that "the skin is fetishised as a boundary-object by a variety of different and overlapping discourses which measure the truth, health or nature of bodies through the skin" (2001, 4). Trans bodies, for example, are endlessly subjected to a narrative obsessed with genitals, surgeries, and 'passing' as markers of authenticity. Halberstam's abstraction opens up the possibility of performatively collaging the relationship between the inside and outside of bodies. As I explore these ideas through practice and theory,



I have found new ways to make sense of *Fluctuate* that release it from the clear ascription of binary gender markers.

The process of making and exhibiting *Fluctuate* showed me how the surface of photographs (both as data and as printed images), the surface of bodies, and the surface of objects are all entangled in similar ideas about authenticity. Over the chapters that follow, I build on these connections to develop visual methods for trans and queer representations. Two key ideas about how bodies are understood in relation to authenticity are found in Claudia Benthien's writing on skin. These ideas assist with linking the specific dilemmas of authenticity in photography as a medium, to concepts of authenticity in relation to bodies and gender identity. In her first example, Benthien explains how "skin is imagined as a protective and sheltering cover but in some expressions can also be a concealing and deceptive one. What is authentic lies beneath the skin, is hidden inside the body" (2002, 17). This framework echoes Barthes's illusive pursuit of the essence of photography, where he is scrubbing the surface of an image in pursuit of truth, yet simultaneously recognising its fallibility. Benthien continues that inner authenticity "escapes our gaze, and its decipherment requires skills of reading and interpretation" (ibid). When something is hidden, there are often regulations surrounding who is able to excavate and whose interpretation is more valued, as I have discussed previously. Benthien then outlines the second approach which "equates the skin with the subject, the person: here the essence does not lie beneath the skin, hidden inside. Rather it is the skin itself, which stands metonymically for the whole human being" (ibid). This approach aligns with the ocularcentric view which privileges sight (Howes 2005; Marks 2000) and distance (Haraway 1991), fast signification, and exterior markers of credibility. My objective is to use visual methods to complicate these two concepts: of authenticity lying beneath the surface and authenticity as based on the surface.

Being queer and trans means I am constantly engaged in conversation with regulatory hard edges and boundaries; for example, questioning scholarly disciplinary boundaries (Campbell and Farrier 2015), or bodily boundaries around public and private desire. To explore the pleasures of messy gender through both abstraction and more concrete signification, I focus

on contradictions, boundaries, and the ongoing process of re-building. Building is key to how Halberstam explores the relationship between architecture and trans bodies (2018b). Building is also key to collage. Halberstam writes of how architecture is used to regulate and order gender; for example, through binary restrictions on bathrooms. He writes about how trans can be seen as a process of “continuous building and unbuilding of the body” (ibid). For example, medical affirmation is “a project of dismantling and remaking, a sculpting of flesh and molecular form” (ibid). He mentions the importance of “deploying the concept of transgender as a kind of wrecking ball that can knock and batter at the fortress of binary gender” (ibid). *Fluctuate*, on a foundational level, is also about building transformational architectures; mundane looking table tops sets are transformed, through photography, into doorway-size images with a range of bodily associations. *Fluctuate* could equally be understood as a series of portals and transitional spaces. I have used a number of architectural devices in *Fluctuate* which engage with these ideas of boundaries between inside and outside, and in terms of motifs of re-building. In the final images, for example, facades lead to secondary facades (figure 7, page 78; supporting documentation pdf pages 6-41). Facades are the *face* of a building. We can take something at ‘face value’, implying a superficial veneer. The transitional references are not only about forward progress, as the images also show ruin. Rubble, dirt, cracks, and crumbling surfaces all serve as markers of duration. Linda Nochlin writes about ruins and fragmented images in relation to modernity, where they represent nostalgia for wholeness, for the lost utopic dream and an abrupt and violent rupture from the past (1994). However, the images in *Fluctuate* are not monuments to an idealised past, nor to a utopian future. They are almost disorientated or distorted in time. They are not aligned with the large-scale male photographic traditions that celebrate a heroic outcome, an arrival, a stoic and fixed artifact. Rather, they are experiments in ruining in order to build something with more space (Ahmed 2017), and to enjoy the pleasures in doing so. Through *Fluctuate*, I was building bodily forms that are iterative, ambiguous and in process.

### Conclusion: Molecular collage

I began this chapter by discussing the messy processes of casting bodily forms and I am concluding it with the messy process of crafting my own body. I understand Halberstam's ideas of trans architecture through my own body. The surface of my chest was reshaped (and will be reshaped again) via small cuts, where tissue and fat were broken up and edited out. Shifting the perimeters of my chest illuminated how the subtlest of body contours are so willingly assigned a binary gender. This process has offered a unique misalignment between the visual and haptic, in that the nerves that brought sensation to my nipples no longer align with the exterior nipple form. Instead, all the sensory feedback now exists a few centimetres towards the centre of my chest, and my exterior nipples offer very little by way of sensation. This small detail, of a pleasurable and quirky misalignment, is perhaps telling of how trans bodies, in a material sense, can offer ways to re-imagine the connections between inside and outside, visual and haptic, and the pleasures of collaging bodies.

On a molecular level, I am building my body with hormones. Halberstam explores the interior process of shaping gender through Paul Preciado's book *Testo Junkie* which explore his concept of the pharmacopornographic. Preciado and I use the same brand of testosterone gel. He writes of "Testogel and lubricant turning into architecture: a brilliant, viscous edifice, lavished on us. This is the mind in its moist, adhesive state" (2013, 402). Preciado describes the application of Testogel as an erotic, experimental, performative ritual. He enables me to understand the capacity of this liquid to build a flexible, collaged, and desiring embodied architecture from the inside out. Preciado explains that whilst the molecular possibilities of hormones are no longer limited by gender presumed at birth, that "[t]estosterone isn't masculinity" (141), and that "masculinity is only one possible political (and nonbiological) by product of the administration of testosterone" (ibid). Building a flexible, trans, architectural body with testosterone does not mean I am building manhood. Rather, Preciado explores how "[w]e are confronted directly by the *materiality* of gender" (142; italics in original). It is this materiality of gender that I connect to the materiality of making, where I am collaging gender from both the inside and the outside. He explains his experience as a "molecular revolution" (ibid) and that even without physical

changes that others can see, “testosterone turns me into something radically different than a cis female” (140), pointing to an internal and felt materiality of gender that is not necessarily orientated for the public gaze. In this way, Preciado allows me to understand gender through scale—the subtle nuances found in the small details, as well as the overall ways in which my gender is understood from a distance when quickly glanced at by others. There is a similarity here with how the intimacy of gritty pixel materiality jars with a more voyeuristic approach to images that objectify.

Whilst binaries such as real or fake, authentic or inauthentic have regulated my experiences of gender, collage has been a way to scramble these associations. Preciado’s argument is based on the understanding that we are already changing our molecular bodies with all types of medications, in particular the Pill and Viagra. Of testosterone, he writes, “the changes are not purely artificial. Testosterone existing externally is inserted into a molecular field of possibilities that already exist inside my body. Rather than rejection of it, there is assimilation, incorporation” (141). Testogel is my liquid, erotic, and messy trans masculinity. It supports a leaky masculinity, in that the gel can spread to another person. It is also a flexible and shapeshifting masculinity that increases and decreases with different doses. I am collaging it onto my body, in that I am taking it from elsewhere, pasting it, absorbing it, shedding it, and using it differently.

The experience of building a body that does not fit either gender calls into question the very categories of male and female. For 3 months, I tried injecting oily, golden testosterone. I had a 28-day injection cycle, which overlapped with my approximately 28-day period cycle. I am socialised to understand periods as distinctly female, and the changes associated with testosterone, such as an increasingly lower voice, as distinctly male. My day-to-day life involved contending with this collage of gender signifiers. This collage disrupted and complicated my understanding of gender through both internal self-reflection and external signifiers, through messy molecular materiality, and through daily repetitive acts that make and remake gender differently (Butler [1990] 2008). My experience of betweenness resonated with how Preciado writes that “T is only a threshold, a molecular door, a becoming between multiplicities”

(2013 143), and as I have demonstrated in various ways throughout this chapter, fluidity and messiness are valuable methods for permeating boundaries (Campbell and Farrier 2015).

All the questions I have raised in this chapter about believability and deception, as well as notions of the amateur, and of authentic indexes of reality, can all be traced back to a hierarchy of gender. So much of the criticism I received as a female artist were based on photographic subject matters and methods *associated* with femininity, and therefore superficiality. My experience with testosterone has highlighted, through a lived experience (rather than through theory alone), the flimsiness of gendered associations, and how they remain in place to preserve patriarchy. Through the process of developing this chapter, I can also understand how *Fluctuate* embodies the objectives of my thesis. *Fluctuate* visually explores trans and queer bodies through methods of collage and abstraction. The work shows bodily forms in the process of un-doing and re-making, as iterative, and in a way that does not seek resolution. In this way, I am developing a material approach to trans and queer image-making. I am understanding my body as made up of materials to be reconfigured, both through embodiment and through my collage approach to photographic representation. When I first wrote of the leaking processes of casting with plaster, I was quick to assign this spillage to femininity and to female bodies. Now, I can understand the politics of leaky material processes through a pleasurable and performative trans, masc, femme, genderqueer mess.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **COLLAGING QUEER ARCHIVES**

#### **Introduction**

The central objective for this chapter and the one that follows is to unpack, with increased specificity, the visual methods to explore trans and queer bodies as iterative and in process, and that celebrate this ambiguity as a strength, rather than a weakness. To do this, I build on my understanding of representational challenges I experience as a maker with a body assumed female, to explore the complications and pleasures of queer and trans representation. This chapter is about my relationships with imagery and I demonstrate how intimacy with other people's imagery shapes my queer, trans, and feminist photographic methods. I begin this chapter with an exploration of my everyday archive, where I demonstrate how the messy materiality of my own digital archives offers a collage-like capacity to un-do and re-make identity. Archives involve contending with multiple images from multiple points in time, and with this multiplicity in mind I explore themes of excessiveness, amateurism, and clutter, through a queer lens. I do this by engaging with A.L. Steiner's large installations which are made up of hundreds of collaged images that cover gallery walls. Steiner uses multiplicity and collage to contend with representational challenges such as erasure and disappearance, whilst also exploring the pleasures of being queer. As I did in Chapter 3, I move back and forth between large scale and excess, to small moments of intimacy. I explore the queer and trans imagery I have collated (both in my memory and on my phone) to build my own queer and trans archive. In response to the daily saturation and support of cisgender and heterosexual bodies and desire, I am interested in the affective and intimate relationships queer and trans people have with images where we recognise ourselves. By reflecting on the potential of these images to shape the lives of trans and queer people, and the significance of Steiner's queer collages in bolding taking up space in art institutional settings, I argue for the need for a diverse range of trans and queer imagery, made by diverse makers.

By focusing on those archives that we carry close to us, like the archives on phones in our

pockets, and the old hard drives we have stashed away, I am building knowledge about collage. I do not create singular imagery; all my series are about how multiple images work together, which is one reason why exploring concepts of archives has been useful. The other central reason is to do with how trans bodies are often photographically represented through narratives of before and after. Archives are, as Joanna Zylińska explains, about the “recognition of transience, of the passage of time” (2010, 144) and, similarly, Steiner speaks about “the archive as a living thing, as a past, a present and a future” (2015, 00:09:14). I am interested in what collections of pictorial representations from various moments in time might mean for trans lives; where transition may complicate and/or bring uniquely nuanced relationships with images from the past. Allan Sekula explains, “[i]n an archive, the possibility of meaning is ‘liberated’ from the actual contingencies of use. But this liberation is also a loss, an *abstraction* from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context” ([1983] 2003, 444; italics in original). This detachment from context can, on the one hand, be used for reimagining, yet on the other it could be used for erasure, social governance, and preservation of homogenised narratives (Cross and Peck 2010). Halberstam (2005) emphasises that cultural producers play a key role in creating queer archives, which is particularly evident on social media sites such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Tumblr was once a vibrant queer and trans archive before sexual content was banned in 2018 (Engelberg and Needham 2019). Canadian genderqueer, disabled poet and academic Lucas Crawford’s conceptualisation of the trans “body-as-archive” (2010, 519) is a central idea in the following chapter, however the foundations for its importance are laid in this chapter as I explore my own archive. Crawford critiques the concept of the “body-as-home” (ibid) and proposes trans bodies as a “series of stopovers” (533). Crawford responds to Jacques Derrida’s well-known text *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, where Derrida explains that archive fever “is to burn with a passion... It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it” (1996, 91). Derrida continues, “[i]t is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (ibid). Returning to the origin, or to home, as Crawford explains, has different meanings for trans people. Throughout this chapter I explore ideas of arrival and return, as I feel the pull towards my own archives for evidence of a stable selfhood and clear-cut answers.

## Bringing the camera home

After I exhibited *Fluctuate*, I became less interested in working in my studio. I took my camera home with me and my bedroom and lounge room become my sets. I began thinking about skin, muscle, fat, and body hair in the same way I approached paint, plaster, cardboard, and clay—as materials with histories and in a process of continual reconfiguration. I experimented with how the personal and the performative can actively inform my imagery, instead of assuming personal content should be concealed from public view. When exploring intimacy and desire photographically, my body is the most convenient subject matter I have available. Whilst certainly not exempt from ethical dilemmas (Pink 2001; Tullis 2013), I do not have to ask permission to photograph it and therefore do not have to navigate the messy complexities of negotiating subject–photographer power dynamics between two people (Koskela 2004). Crafting and editing myself through photographs contribute to how I understand myself visually and how I understand my desires. However, I also understand, through my own trial and error, that the moment I put my body, as a female body, a queer body, or a trans body, into a two-dimensional photograph and exhibit it in a gallery for a public audience, I am contending with the complex politics and history of representation. Through this PLR I have come to understand *how* I am shaped by masculinised conventions (Mulvey 1975), heterosexy conventions (Dobson 2015), as well as concepts of self-surveillance (Foucault 1980) and body regulation (Bordo 1993), even whilst shooting my body privately in my studio or my bedroom. It has taken some time to develop visual methods that communicate and emphasise an ongoing process of grappling with, and reflecting upon, the unresolvable tensions and difficulties of making feminist representations of intimacy and bodies. Rather than detail the processes of arriving at my current understanding, I remain driven by the central objectives for this thesis: exploring collage methods to show bodies in process. My experience of exploring representation with a body that is assumed female has informed the ways in which I am challenging the common visual expectations that trans and queer bodies ought to arrive at a stable location.

When bringing the camera home, the bodies of my partners became entangled in my photographs. Many questions arose, such as where does my personal life begin and end?



When was I “off duty” (Pink 2001, 28) with my camera? The bodies of my partners appear in numerous images. They are, however, always anonymous and fragmented. Working through the parameters of this anonymity was something we thoroughly discussed at all stages in the process. These are not the images I focus on in this exegesis, however it is still important to note their presence. The process of navigating these power dynamics and complexities, and how they differ depending on the gender and sexuality of the person I am with is too expansive for me to cover in detail in this exegetical PLR. There is a passage in Maggie Nelson’s (2015) *The Argonauts* where she details a conversation with her partner, Harry, as they negotiate the limits of ownership over personal information whilst she is writing the book. The conversation brings up questions about what part of my life is mine to share and what part belongs to my partner. Nelson contemplated the idea of writing a book in collaboration with Harry, but then explains her anxiety of losing herself to another. What Nelson articulates is how, through her writing practice, she felt it was possible to find a sense of self. My photography practice has similarly been a space for individuation. Rather than focus on my relationships, in this chapter I explore the connection between individuation and intimacy with other queer and trans imagery.

When I self-shoot, I am the photographer and the subject simultaneously, the object and the person gazing. Self-shooting is often considered an amateur method where the boundaries between these roles can be messed up (Coleman 2008; Palm 2015; Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015). This method has long been used by feminist photographers as a way to embed some details about the positionality of the photographer within the frame. When I am self-shooting, the space between the camera and my body is often close. I shoot without seeing the outcome or knowing where the boundaries of the frame are. I arrange my body in awkward angles, arm stretched out with practice, visualising the cut lines, where my body will be cropped. Sometimes I connect my camera to my laptop and set it to take, for example, 100 photos with 3-second intervals. The photos would appear instantly on my laptop screen, in reverse. I would re-adjust my body and the lights, whilst the shutter would start firing before I was ready. It was like stop motion animation of my body’s performance for the camera, a performance of my own 3-second interval of self-gazing. This method of capture was, on the one hand, aggressive, fast, and mechanical in its rhythmic “machine gun approach” (Sontag [1977] 2008, 177), which was

shunned by the male photographic masters as unprofessional (Sontag [1977] 2008). Each frame was not a reflexive or meaningful decision bursting with authentic value. I was creating a mass of mediocre images on the premise that within the mass there might be something useful. The bulk of the images were mistakes and in-between moments of transition. My mistakes were private, although there is always the background worry of a leaky archive, which could spill out into the public without consent. I could shoot unlimited photos directly to my hard drive and I had complete control to delete. The stakes were low; it felt liberating.

### **Old drives: Personal digital archive as collage**

I approached my hard drives as black boxes; data waiting to be decoded. I turned to these drives with high expectations. I was 28, I had recently left a heterosexual marriage, and I was looking for a clear photographic trajectory of selfhood to find the logic which would lead me to my current location. I have been taking photographs of my everyday life since my late teens and at 28, this was my first experience of looking back on a decade of adult life. I had about 20 hard drives. Some of my hard drives were slow to awaken, as the parts started to move again for the first time in 5 to 10 years. Two drives did not start. There were no labels telling me what year of my life they were from. I was certain, too, that I was missing hard drives, left under sofas or at the back of cupboards of rentals long vacated. I clicked on folders with irrelevant titles. Lacking in hashtags or captions, and resulting from a teenage-like disinterest in organisation, my archive was untethered and difficult to search. I found folders buried within folders. I had also purposely stacked folders behind one another, a method that was once designed to prevent parents finding sexy selfies. It reminded me of slipping a photo behind another in the sleeve of a physical album, as a way to reduce repetition, which may stagnate the album's narrative, but also indicated some kind of value, as these images were kept for a reason. Hidden images behind images, be it in an analogue or digital archive, offer a veil of privacy, a subterranean layer that appears on a second glance. There were also whole folders of images with impossible time stamps. I had not set the date on my camera and, just like film, they could not always be accurately tied to specific moments in time. There were lots of empty folders, titled sensibly,

but with the content moved. “[B]lank spaces” and “glue and torn paper” (Edwards 2005, 423) all point to lost photographs in a physical album; however, these were digital blanks. And these gaps also included corrupted files, which are comparable to when printed images stick together, when album pages fuse, the protective plastic adheres, and fragments of print emulsion separate. One cautiously peels them apart and tries to patch over the missing surface. I slowly stepped through my limited options for mending broken code.

One particular stash of black, underexposed thumbnails looked like nothing but boring mistakes. But something made me scroll back. I increased the exposure and watched my body emerge, like darkroom magic. I was draped in fluorescent pixels; hot purple and pink noise. I had taken these photographs when I was 21, in 2007, with an ex-partner, who passed away a year after our relationship ended. We used to go out walking at night with our cameras, the moon as our only source of light, with no tripod for support. We directed our cameras into the dark, and at each other, and watched our back-lit screens reveal nothing. But the sensor was still creating data. Back at home, we would drag the exposure up on Photoshop to see what had ‘imprinted’. The place where he died was one of the places we went walking at night, aiming cameras into darkness. However, whilst going through my archive, I did not find a single photograph from this location. I am not sure if I have confused photographs with lived memory or vice versa. I was not only looking through these archives to ‘find myself’, I was also looking for pictures of other people who have shaped me, including ex-partners, lovers, and friends, many of which are mired with messy, contradictory emotions. My body blends and contrasts with the tumble of other bodies, complicated by moments of feeling aligned with the masculine bodies (of all genders) but being conscious of how photos of my body often jars with these desires.

This experience of handling these digital files was a process of messy, material, collage. My experience emphasises the point that Sarah Pink makes in numerous texts about the haptic (Pink 2014, 2015; Pink et al. 2015) and “messy” (Pink, Lanzeni, and Horst 2018, 2) capacity of digital technology. Pink et al. write, “digital materiality is not static, and is a processual ‘thing’ rather than an object” (2017, 373). Pink, Ardèvol, and Lanzeni argue that “the digital and material should not be thought of as two separate things that already independently exist in

the world and have now become entangled” (2016, 6). Tom Boellstorff argues a similar point. He writes, “some scholars of the online seem unable to stop referring to the physical as the ‘real’, even though such inaccurate phrasing implies that the online is unreal” (2012, 42). The images on my hard drives were not empty digital surfaces (Batchen 2001a) that were less authentic than their silver halide counterparts. My data is not fixed, safe, trustworthy; it, too, like the physical photo album, is in a process of fading and decay. The more effort I put into preserving it, the more anxious I become about losing it. My archive had clear boundaries, similar to what Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis describe in terms of how “the traditional album provides a discrete framework for displaying a limited selection of images”, whereas “photo-sharing websites exist as spheres of image abundance” (2008, 21) and are often entangled in endless hashtag links. The photographic album as a personal archive has frequently been associated with collage, identity formation, preciousness, and loss. When viewing an analogue album, we jump ahead, go backwards, view it upside down, or over the shoulder of another; we guide the duration (where we linger and where we speed up). Traditional printed albums are collections of frames that are temporally malleable, that repeat, may not be ordered in perfect linearity, and, as Elizabeth Edwards writes, they evoke the “imaginative and ambiguous spaces that the past inhabits” (2005, 423). Part of this is because, as Edwards explains, the photo album “constructs a narrative of history not merely in the juxtaposition of separate images but in the way that the viewer activates the temporality and narrative through the physical action of holding the object and turning the pages” (ibid). Each time I explore the messy folders of a hard drive, the juxtaposition, and my own movements and motivations, prompt different narratives. The narratives I was my past were just as fluid, and fictional, and distorted, as my own memories. I had not considered the photographs on my hard drives to have any connection to my arts practice. Most of the images were not made with a public audience in mind. However, I began to experiment with how I could work with my archive of messy, collaged, shapeshifting, digital material imagery as a way to speak to themes of transition, undoing, and instability.

After weeks spent going through these drives, I began to notice that I could not see my images. The length of the montage was too big to be remembered, the specificity had collapsed.

The individual stories, images, and bodies had begun to blur into one another. The intimacy, emotions, and haptics that were once present could not retain enough affect or force to remain visible through the sheer quantity of images I was engaging. I stopped searching and instead began working with a smaller pool of images I had set aside from the mass. I started assembling, laying, cutting, deleting, expanding, flipping, and printing what I had found, both on Photoshop and in the printed images. This process led directly to the development of the series *No Anniversary* (figure 28, page 121; supporting documentation pdf pages 176-201) which used photo methods that greatly differed from *Fluctuate*. The photographs were cheap and printed on a plan printer, which is used for printing black and white architectural planning drawings, at a low-end commercial shop. The prints could be touched, cut, and had multiple versions of each print. However, what I noticed was that whilst the selected images were rich with stories, experiences, and emotions, they were references only available and visible to me. This contradiction is expressed by Catherine Zuromskis, who writes that “the amateur snapshot photograph is the site of both banal conformity and deep affective response. The



**figure 28.** Jack Ball, *No Anniversary #12*, 2014, plan print on bond paper, 61 x 85cm.

genre encompasses both one's most treasured possessions and the tedious ephemera of other people's private lives" (2013, 8). I was reminded of why I am not in the genre of documentary photography and why I need fiction, collage, embellishment, and performance, with juicy tactile surfaces and vibrant excessive colour. My documentary images from 'real' life were not reflecting my experiences and desires. This experience of noticing my archive lose any affective potential and the mass of images drowning each other out, led me to question how I can use multiple images on a gallery wall. The play between enjoying unintelligibility, and being erased by unintelligibility, are key concerns as I develop visual methods that use multiple imagery to explore queer and trans representation.

### **A.L. Steiner and queer excess**

In photography education, there is a tendency toward 'giving space' to images. Karen Cross describes traditions where "students are taught to compose so as to remove unsightly 'clutter'" (2014, 76). This includes unpleasant shadows, background objects (Cross 2014), as well as clutter positioned too close to the edge of the frame. Cross makes a brief mention of the feminist potential of "clutter as a rupturing force" (77) but the article is not concentrated on imagining what this could look like. Photographer Stephen Shore, known for his photographs of urban America in the 1970s and 1980s and early use of colour photography, argues that "photographers have to impose order, bring structure to what they photograph. It is inevitable. A photograph without structure is like a sentence without grammar—it is incomprehensible, even inconceivable" (2011, 48). Knowing when to give space to something and pause, and when to heighten visual complexity, is celebrated as an art of discernment and high photographic skill. As the mythology goes, the professional photographer holds an intuitive knowledge about what is *too* much. The singular heroic image in the tableau tradition always has white space around it. White walls are considered "safe" (Taussig 2009, 18) and neutral, where "the art is free... 'to take on its own life'...unshadowed, white, clean, artificial...[the] ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time" (O'Doherty 1986, 15). I plan my exhibition layouts down to the centimetre. The gaps between my images are agonised over. I have been criticised for not



giving my images enough room to breathe, and subsequently, in the past, I became somewhat self-conscious about demonstrating my discernment to withhold, refine, and delete. I have also assumed putting too many images on a gallery wall would dissipate affective potential or that the subtle narrative cues would be lost, repeating my experience with my archive as previously explained—that is, until I saw A.L. Steiner’s work. I then became interested in what happens when a queer artist uses large quantities of photographs, that are packed together tightly on the wall with edges overlapping, a liberating dyslexic mess, with purposeful and political intentions.

American artist Steiner is a self-identified “skeptical (sic) queer ecofeminist androgyne” (2018) who works with installation, performance, and video photography. She is also a writer and curator, makes zines, and often works collaboratively. I focus on her room-sized installations, which are collaged from floor to ceiling with photographs, for example in the works *1 Million Photos* (2004- 2008) (figure 29, page 124) and *Accidenthell* (2014) (figure 30, page 124), which I view on my computer screen. In many of her works, the images are stacked tightly together, printed via a range of commercial and everyday printing processes (both cheap and archival), and as Steiner (2015) explains, the prints are often “loose” on the wall. She explains; “it looks all smooth in the picture, but it’s falling down” (ibid). Cramming the walls with images critiques the traditions of image refinement and reduction as indicators of sophistication. However, from listening to her talk, there are many other important political motives driving her visual method. Steiner works with her embodied stance that “everything is part of a practice which is always in conversation, expanding: nothing is categorical” and that “being queer, you’re constantly in a state of questioning to begin with” (Black 2012). This is part of her interest in living and enacting academic theory and politics (Steiner 2015). Steiner works with images from her archive which she has been building since the 1990s. Her photographic installations use images taken from a range of contexts and in a range of styles. For example, the work *Puppies & Babies* (2012) (figure 31, figure 32, and figure 33, page 125) is made up of pictures of pregnant people, families, dogs, and babies sourced from her personal archive. Whilst the idea for the work started off as a joke (M. Nelson 2013), the work is a powerful example of how typically amateur subject matter can be political. Most of the people in the images are queer

*Content is removed due to copyright restrictions*

**figure 29.** A.L. Steiner. *1 Million Photos*, €1 each, 2004-2008 [installation view], photographic installation. Reproduced from: Deborah Schamoni Gallery website.

*Content is removed due to copyright restrictions*

**figure 30.** A.L. Steiner. *Accidenthell*, [installation view, from the exhibition *Made in L.A.* Hammer Biennial]. 2014, photographic installation. Reproduced from: Deborah Schamoni Gallery website.





*Content is removed due to copyright restrictions*

**figure 31.**(left) A.L. Steiner. *Puppies & Babies* [installation view 3001 Gallery, Los Angeles]. 2012, photographic installation. Reproduced from: Hello my name is A.L. Steiner website.

**figure 32.** (below) A.L. Steiner. *Puppies & Babies* [installation view 3001 Gallery, Los Angeles]. 2012, photographic installation. Reproduced from: Hello my name is A.L. Steiner website.



*Content is removed due to copyright restrictions*

**figure 33.** (above) A.L. Steiner. *Puppies & Babies* [installation view 3001 Gallery, Los Angeles]. 2012, photographic installation. Reproduced from: BOMB Magazine.



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and gender non-conforming. And whilst there are large collections of queer images online, I have very few memories of seeing queer bodies in art galleries. Art Institutions and museums have historically disregarded and marginalised LGBTQIA+ lives and experiences (Sullivan and Middleton 2020). Rather than there being a singular token queer body, Steiner's work flips the narrative and the room is saturated in everyday queerness.

Steiner offers a very different way of understanding large quantities of photographed bodies. As I discussed in Chapter 2, vernacular imagery can often seem invisible, in that they appear "normative, all-encompassing, and inherently benign" (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008). Steiner's images have an everyday casualness; however, they do not blur into the fatigue of mass repetition akin to vernacular photographs online. In *Puppies & Babies*, Steiner destabilises this expectation of hegemonic sameness in mass imagery, despite the ubiquitous association generated from the title. Anthea Black (2012) asks Steiner, "what happens when the body becomes really small in relation to a vista of collaged, overlapping photographs of other (queer) bodies on the wall?" Steiner responds:

The viewer's physicality is important in relation to viewing: I don't want a sensation of [being] overwhelmed, I want there to be a sensation of infinity. That this isn't finished, it's never ending. This is just ending because the wall ends. That wall has nothing to do with the story ending.

As I have argued in relation to *Fluctuate*, large-scale works do not have to equate with domination. Steiner does not present a parasitical relationship, where the intention is "to suffocate or drown" (Fisher 2012, 231) the hetero-patriarchy by turning the tables and using the same methods of domination. Such an approach means both sides risk destruction (Fisher 2012). Rather, as Black (2012) articulates, Steiner's works are "a gesture of feminist world building". Making visible, on a large-scale, that which is typically not seen, generates parallels with Ahmed's description of the release one might feel upon entering queer and lesbian spaces which "are looser, freer...because you are reminded there are many ways to be" (2017, 219). Steiner uses clutter and multiplicity to make more room in representational norms, rather than to erase the specificity of the individual which is often the case in mass imagery.

Steiner's mass of collaged imagery is not about an individual or singular body. There is no singular female muse presented as the icon of the artist's ego, on a pedestal for display and admiration surrounded by adequate white wall space. There are so many different types of positionalities gazing back at us that it is impossible to pinpoint a clear narrative about who is gazing at who. As Steiner writes, "the juxtaposition of pleasure and discomfort, or resistance, or being in a state of anxiety are really interesting to me, because you can't look at my installations and think that they're only one thing" (Black 2012). Steiner's work shows how collage is used to create contradiction, which maintains a queer ethos of movement and process rather than fixity. Maggie Nelson (2013) writes in relation to *Puppies & Babies* that

it is a reminder that any bodily experience can be made new and strange, that nothing we do in this life need be shoveled into a box with a lid crammed on it, that no one set of bodily practices or relations has the monopoly on the so-called radical, or the so-called normative. (n.p.)

Steiner's work is not simply trying to make queerness normal by replicating it multiple times and presenting queerness with content usually associated with heteronormativity and clichés. The queerness is chaotic, messy, and political. Steiner's use of multiplicity and collage for the purpose of contradiction, as a way to undo and destabilise visual norms, has been a vital influence on how I approach queer and trans visual representation through photographic collage.

### **Trans and queer experiences with affective imagery**

*I was a teenager, lounging around with family and friends, when two female singers on the TV started kissing in a music video. I had never seen women kiss! A deep aching pain began between my thumb and index finger and moved up my arm. My face became hot with shame and I wanted to dissolve into the couch. All these years later, I still get this achy pain in my hand when I see visual*

*representation of queer desire, particularly in stories of unrequited queer love, small moments of everyday queer intimacy and queer longing. It took 15 years to acknowledge the connection between queer images and this weird pain in my hand.*

*I was in my late twenties, on a plane from Sydney to Perth, wedged between two men in suits. On the inflight entertainment I came across a documentary with a non-binary person in it. I had never heard anyone speak about their gender in this way. I watched it on repeat with tears quietly running down my face. The contrast between feeling claustrophobic and jammed in and the expansiveness this imagery offered, felt so telling of what I was up against.*

*When my chest dysphoria was at its worst, I would stay up for hours searching, and saving images of trans men and non-binary people who had top surgery and were on testosterone. These selfies offered something propulsive, fiery, a dizzy feeling that could no longer be shoved away. I connected with these images of other people's bodies more than I connected with images of my own body. Whilst I photographed myself to understand myself, I could not create photographic double. Other people's images helped me sketch in a draft collage of what was possible.*

So far, I have discussed digital archives, photo album archives, and A.L. Steiner's room-sized archives. In addition to these examples, I am also compelled by images we hold in our bodies, all the queer and trans images that have stuck with me—those images that have offered possibility and those that intrude like the “sting, speck, cut, little hole” of Barthes's (1981) punctum. I make a point of remembering the images that leave a residue on my skin, that cover me in goosebumps, that make me blush and become “burningly aware” (Sedgwick 2003, 37), when an image speaks to something shameful. I have not forgotten the images that are arousing, erotic, and sexy, that offer a respite from the daily saturation of heterosexual desire. Then there are also the images that are exploitative, humiliating, and violent towards

trans and queer people, which I wish had not embedded so deeply. Ahmed uses the word “sticky” to explore how objects and emotions can relate. She writes that “objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension” (2004, 11). Additionally, she evokes the notion of “sweaty concepts” which are bodily and leaky, and where “the task is to stay with the difficulty” (2017, 13). I have found both these ideas useful for thinking through the complexity and pleasures of queer and affective connection between images and emotions. These analogies also work well with my collage methods, where adhesion, liquidity, and glue serve an important purpose.

Australian artist Tracey Moffatt explains at the beginning of her book *Fever Pitch*: “I’m always hungry for an image... I can stand in a bookshop and easily scan an art magazine or book in five seconds flat — computer-like, taking in, discarding, or storing for later use, for later (so people tell me) ‘appropriation’” (1995, 6). Moffatt is collecting, arranging, saving images for her own private archive, and these fragments are collaged as part of her practice. I visualise my own queer and trans stash of remembered images through a similar material collage metaphor as my digital archives; images are replaced, merged, damaged, forgotten and repeated. My experiences of intense affect with queer images (and my weird, achy hand pain) can come from anywhere: reality TV, famous queer artists, historical dramas, music videos, social media, or documentaries. It is my sense that many queer and trans people have distinct memories of the first moments they witnessed and identified with queer and trans representation. Such intensity occurs because of how queer and trans experience is associated with deviance, stigma—a shameful secret that should remain private. Whilst considerable progress has been achieved for some, queer and trans rights are not yet ‘won’ and, as Maggie Nelson reminds us, “justice has no coordinates, no teleology” (2015, 28). Therefore, public image representations of queer and trans bodies and desires remain a vital, powerful, and political method of visibility that has the potential to shape lives.

The intimate, intense, and emotional experiences queer and/or trans people have with imagery can offer a valuable and unique insight into affect. To explore the abrupt collapse of the boundaries between bodies and images, I layer my adaptation of Ahmed’s “sticky” and “sweaty”

connections with Kathleen Stewart's writing on affect. Stewart uses the subheading "an image gets stuck in the middle of your brain" (2003, 440) in her essay "Arresting Images". She speaks to this through lines such as "the flow of circulating signs stopped dead in its tracks" (441). Stewart explains that affect is "[f]elt as a sudden eruption or interruption, this shimmering transformation of matter and image into common sensate affect can come as a shock" (431). Affect is intensity and a "sensate excess" (433). It is unformed, messy, and does not fit into the neat categories of "named 'feelings' or 'emotions' invented in discourses of morals, ideals, and known subjectivities" (Stewart 2005, 1029). Similarly, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write that "affect emerges out of muddy, unmediated relatedness and not in some dialectical reconciliation of cleanly oppositional elements or primary units, it makes easy compartmentalisms give way to thresholds and tensions, blends and blurs" (2010, 4). Affect is something before language or outside of language, or difficult to language; it is "not about one person's feelings becoming another's but about bodies literally affecting one another and generating intensities" (Stewart 2007, 130). Stewart writes, "Whether such affects are feared or shamelessly romanticized, subdued or unleashed, they point to the generative immanence lodged in things" (2005, 1029). I first understood affective images as fleeting. Upon returning to such images, the intensity was gone. I became restless for that first surge. Since then, I have become more perceptive in relation to how images can occasionally remain sticky for weeks, months, or years, where affect can repeat with full force, and still hold "the promise or threat that something is happening — something new, emergent and capable of impact" (Stewart 2003, 431). Non-categorical, open-ended relationship with images, that is not about clarity and stability, but movement, force, and uncertainty, is important throughout this research. My own intimate and affective experiences with other peoples' imagery continues to shape my visual methods.

### **Conclusion: Collectively queer**

Every time I am part of a queer and trans protest or community event, I am struck by the sudden feeling of comfort that comes from being surrounded by other queer and trans people.

The shock of this comfort is telling. Ahmed explains how for queer people, the daily repeated failures to align with compulsory heterosexuality “can be experienced as a bodily injury” (2004, 147). I have, in many ways, normalised the daily disruption my body causes, simply as a means to get by. Ahmed describes comfort as a “seamless space” (148) and I explore this further in the next chapter. Steiner’s tightly packed collages show a connectivity and intimacy between bodies, but also a sense of rupture, difference, and contradiction, and I understand this tension as integral to visually exploring a type of collective queerness. Steiner’s personal queer archive is taking up space on institutional walls that typically privilege white, cis, heterosexual lifeworlds. She queers the institutional spaces with her content and through her refusal to ‘correctly’ manage and order her photographs within the architecture. Steiner works within these, whilst simultaneously critiquing them, and expanding what could be expected within them. Her work is full of affective potential, it is necessarily messy, unfinished and in process. The affective, sticky, queer archives that I hold in my body, and on my phone and hard drives are not only about personal affect, but also about feeling part of a collective visual queerness. Steiner’s work offers this sense of community. My engagement with Steiner’s work has been pivotal in developing my own anti-heroic approach to image-making, where imagery can take up space on a large scale yet be deeply intimate and connective.

## CHAPTER 5

# PERFORMATIVE ARCHIVES

### Introduction

In this chapter I performatively explore ideas of trans archives as a series of stopovers (Crawford 2010) through photography, and how this process offers an avenue for expansive and iterative trans representation. I explore how medium-specific ideas about photography can support critique of cisnormative expectations of trans bodies and how they should change. I focus on my most recent exhibition *PDA*, a colloquial abbreviation of public displays of affection, (figure 34, page 133; supporting documentation pdf pages 46-157), including a series titled *Shower Scenes* (figure 35, page 133; supporting documentation pdf pages 78-99), which speaks to my experiences of negotiating public space. *PDA* explores pleasurable material processes, self-assemblage, camp gender experimentations, and intimate connections. *PDA* was exhibited as a solo exhibition at Turner Galleries in Perth in October 2019 and a few months prior, I showed a small collection of these images, in their early development, as part of a group show titled *The Essayist* at The Cross Arts Projects in Sydney.

I begin this chapter with Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's archive. In many images, Cahun's body is doubling and mirroring; her identity is shapeshifting and always in process. I demonstrate how her integration of performance into everyday life, and the importance of contradiction, have shaped my own practice. I explore the material processes of transforming and embellishing the surfaces of bodies and the surfaces of images through camp. Camp challenges the audience's expectations of gender and sexuality, and I show how camp connects to my central method of collage. I explore how cropping my face (which is often a key indicator of gender) out of the frame is a way to be boldly present, but also remain anonymous. I detail the complex relationship cropping has to gender ambiguity, through erasure, objectification, and deception. I also show how I can utilise cropping as a playful and camp method to direct a viewer's gaze. In the last section of this chapter I explore how the visual methods of time-lapse (before and after photos) can disrupt how we respond to nostalgia for the past, as well as ideas





figure 34. Jack Ball, *PDA*, [installation view, Turner Galleries, Perth. solo exhibition], 2019, photographic installation.

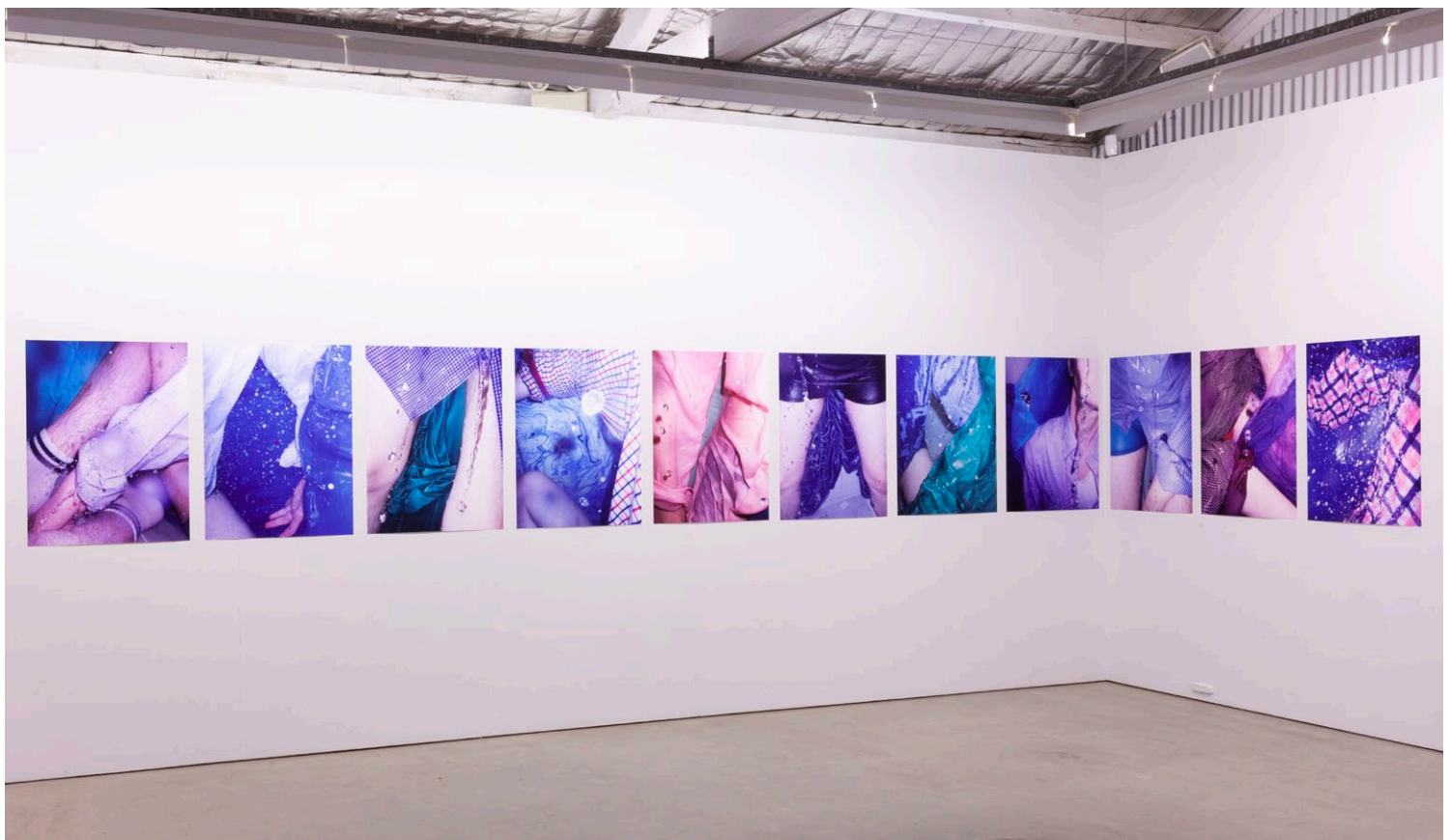


figure 35. Jack Ball, *Shower Scenes 1-11*, from the series *PDA*, [installation view, Turner Galleries, Perth. solo exhibition], 2019, photographic installation

of linear arrival in trans representation. I look at ways to playfully perform concepts of arrival and homeliness and engage with old images from my archive. I consider Cassils's photographs and performance, in connection with Crawford's (2010) concept of trans bodies as archives. In Cassils's work *Time Lapse* (2011), they document the changes to their body as they undergo an intense bodybuilding regime. Their documentation is not about arriving to a place of stability and home (Crawford 2010); instead, it is about reaching a threshold—the moment bodybuilding becomes unsustainable. I also explore the visual methods Cassils uses in their work *Becoming an Image*, which confronts trans representations of violence. They use photographic methods to emphasise the audience's gaze and the dilemmas of witnessing. In this chapter I performatively explore ideas of trans archives as a series of stopovers through photography, and how this process offers an avenue for expansive and iterative trans representation.

In the previous chapter, I explored affective relationships with queer and trans imagery and how these intense connections shape what is possible. In this chapter I explore, through PLR some of the narratives that are repeatedly seen in how trans bodies are represented in camera-based mediums. In his book titled *In A Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam explores the complexity of trans representation in cinema:

The transgender film confronts powerfully the way that transgenderism is constituted as a paradox made up in equal parts of visibility and temporality: whenever the transgender character is seen to be transgendered, then he/she is both failing to pass and threatening to expose a rupture between the distinct temporal registers of past, present, and future. (2005, 128)

Halberstam emphasises that there is danger and violence involved in visibility and “it often becomes necessary for the transgender character to disappear in order to remain viable” (129). There are also stereotypical narratives of ‘exposure’ in cinema, where a character’s dark, shameful secret is revealed to the audience (Halberstam 2005). Growing up, my most prominent memories of trans people on TV were via Jerry Springer, which as, Emily Bobrow explains in an interview with artist Zackery Drucker “tended to sensationalize with big reveals like ‘My Boyfriend Is a Girl!’ and ‘Guess What ... I’m a Man!’” (2016). Drucker points to the

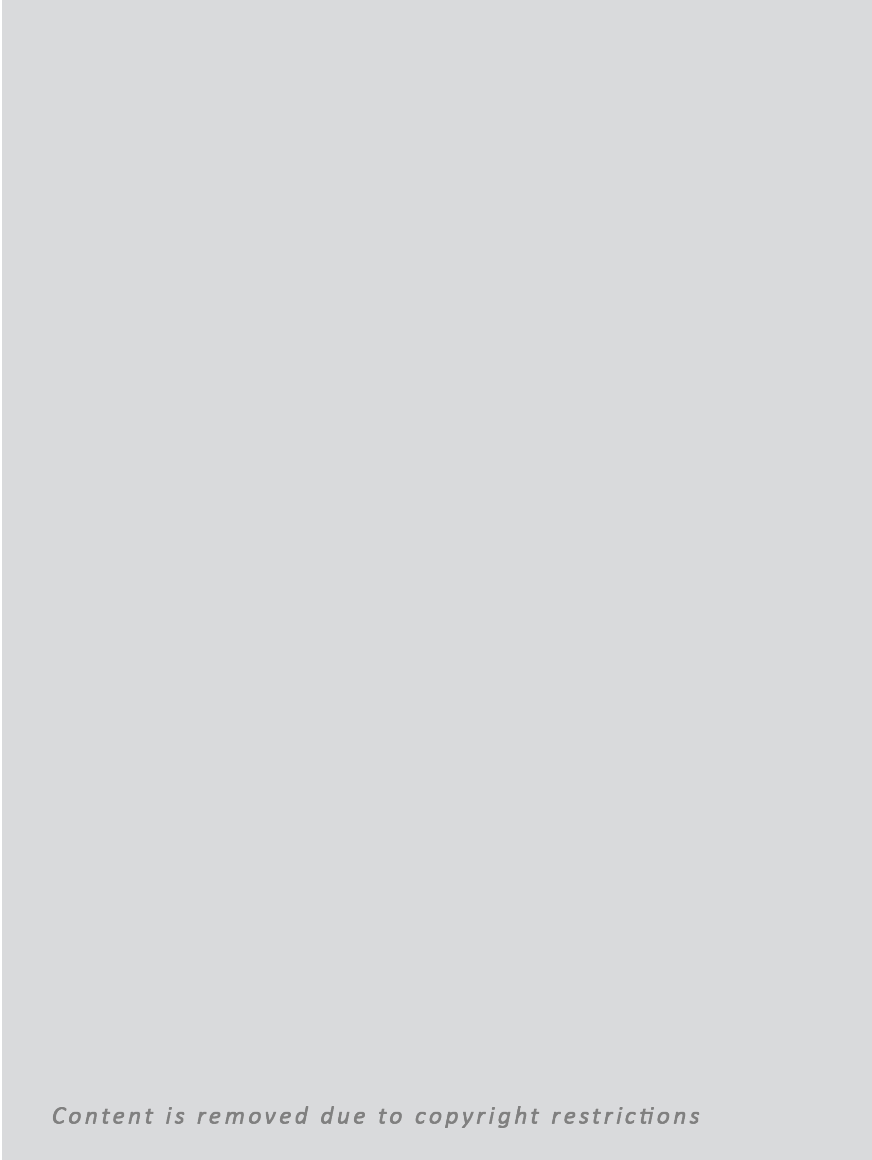
complexity of this representation when she explains, “you knew you didn’t want to be that, but at least there was something to point to” (ibid). When exhibiting *PDA*, I overheard a man assume I was trying to deceptively conceal my gender assigned at birth and he appeared determined to uncover the truth. Halberstam writes that exposure narrative can occur through the “rewind” method, where “the transgender character is presented at first as ‘properly’ gendered”, and the character’s eventual exposure acts as the “narrative climax”, which often “spells out both her own decline and the unravelling of cinematic time” (2005, 129). Building on my exploration of collaging archives in the previous chapter, I unpack a number of photographic methods to disrupt the expectations built into the before and after narratives commonly found in trans representation. Due to the propensities for objectification by a cisgender and heterosexual gaze, I demonstrate that taking up space in a public gallery with personal and intimate queer and trans imagery remains political.

### **Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore’s everyday performances**

Around 80–100 years ago, French artists Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, who were partners, created a collection of imagery together, which is now held by the Jersey Heritage Trust, located in the Channel Islands. Many of their images have been sticky and affective, and they have stayed with me in my own body archive of queer and gender expansive imagery. Cahun’s theatrical and DIY prototyping show an iterative re-imagining of her body through photography. Cahun explores “the false belief that one might truly know the self by looking at the self” (Shaw 2006, 44), which challenges my own romanticism that I take photographs of myself to understand myself, or that searching through my archive will offer evidence of selfhood. Her ongoing project of self-assemblage through image-making has informed how I approached my archives and my practice. Cahun and Moore’s imagery is embedded with symbolism, iconography, and references applicable to her visual milieu, which I will never be able to understand with the same nuance as those who absorbed the visual aesthetics of that era on a daily basis. Rather than focus on a semiotic approach to interpretation, I am more interested in exploring the images that prompt affect. In particular, the outtakes—the images that were

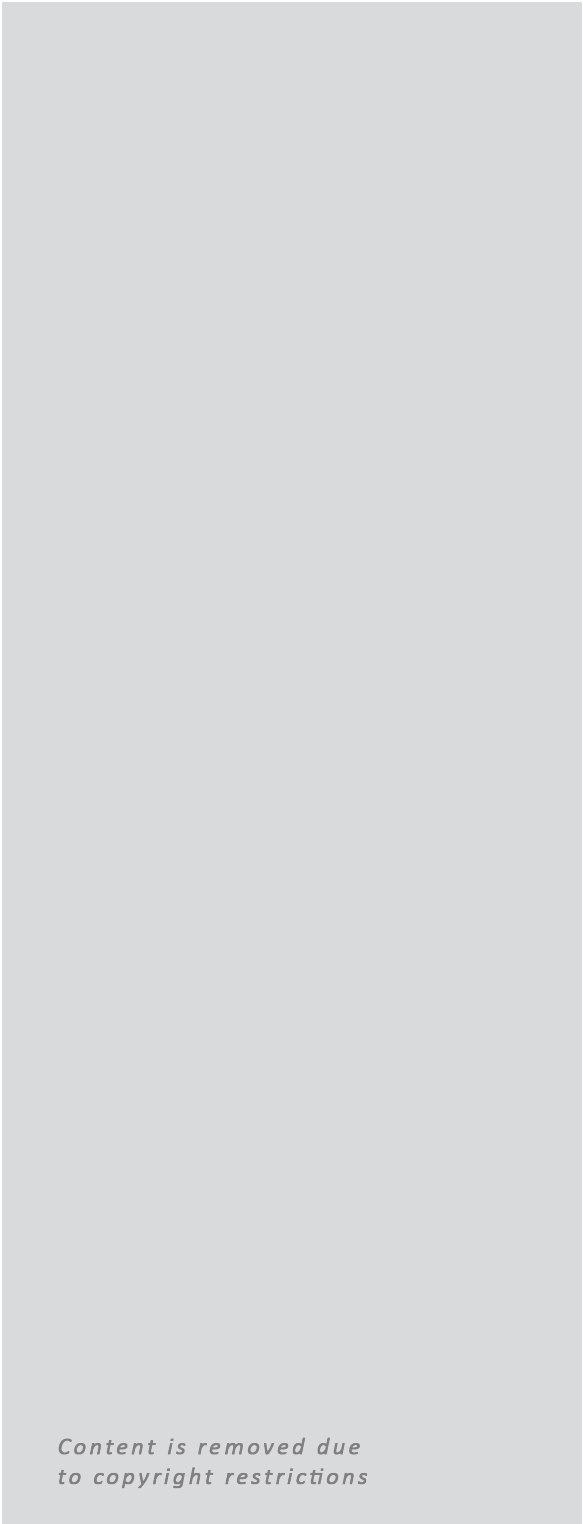
taken before and after the famous images we have come to know. It is here that I have found intimacy and familiar, and I have studied the visual methods Cahun used to explore her body, politics, desire, and gender. I make sense of Cahun's and Moore's glances, gestures, and expressions through my own experiences of queerness and gender non-conformity. However, I am careful not to define Cahun's and Moore's gender and sexuality through current language for articulating identities. Ambiguous categorisation is also pivotal to Cahun's shapeshifting explorations of identity through photographs. Knowing that they were in love makes their photographs part of a visual lineage that is not often represented.

There are 504 photographs in the archive, and I have viewed these images via the internet and in book form (Downie 2006). The archive includes everyday imagery, performance, holidays, friends, landscapes, and cat photos. Attempts to divide Cahun's art and her life do not feel constructive. Since we cannot know which images were taken with an audience in mind, looking has, at times, felt voyeuristic. James Stevenson (2006) writes of how value and understanding of artistic intent are deduced from which images remain as negatives, which are contact prints, and which have been selected as printed images. He details how individually cut negatives have been pieced together by matching up the cut marks made with scissors. These collaged negative strips re-form as a sequence, and since it is suspected Cahun mostly used one camera (a Kodak folding camera which did not have a detachable back, meaning she could not swap film), we can imagine that the sequence is in linear order. There is an intimacy in being privy to these short montages of their lives. There are many sequences that show exposure at different intervals, often called bracketing (Stevenson 2006). Underexposed and faded images are flattened with a grey fog, and bodies disappear into the background (figure 36, page 137). The overexposed images show her body disappearing into the sky. There are also various cropping options and posing options presented for the same image concept (figure 37, page 137). Sequences show us the transitions between a series of poses, which offer a glimpse into their working processes. Numerous images have crop marks drawn directly onto the negative (figure 38, page 137). To permanently draw a cut line is a committed editing decision, and such marks demonstrate clear intent. There is evidence to suggest that many negatives were discarded by Cahun (Stevenson 2006). Cahun and Moore's archive does not include many artworks that can

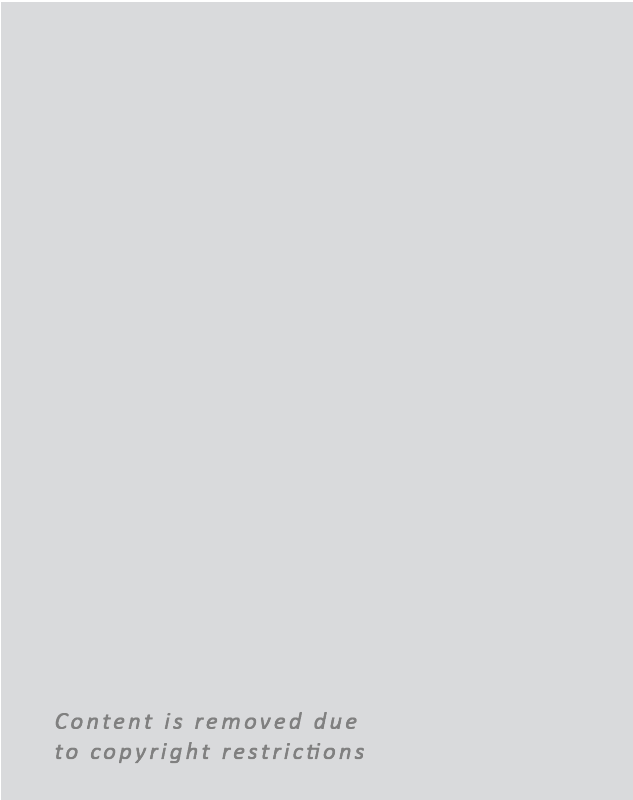


**figure 36.** (left) Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *[images from archive]*, 1916-1917, gelatin silver print (see image for sizes). Reproduced from: Don't kiss me: The art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore.

**figure 37.** (below) Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *[images from archive]*, 1928, gelatin silver print (see image for sizes). Reproduced from: Don't kiss me: the art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore.



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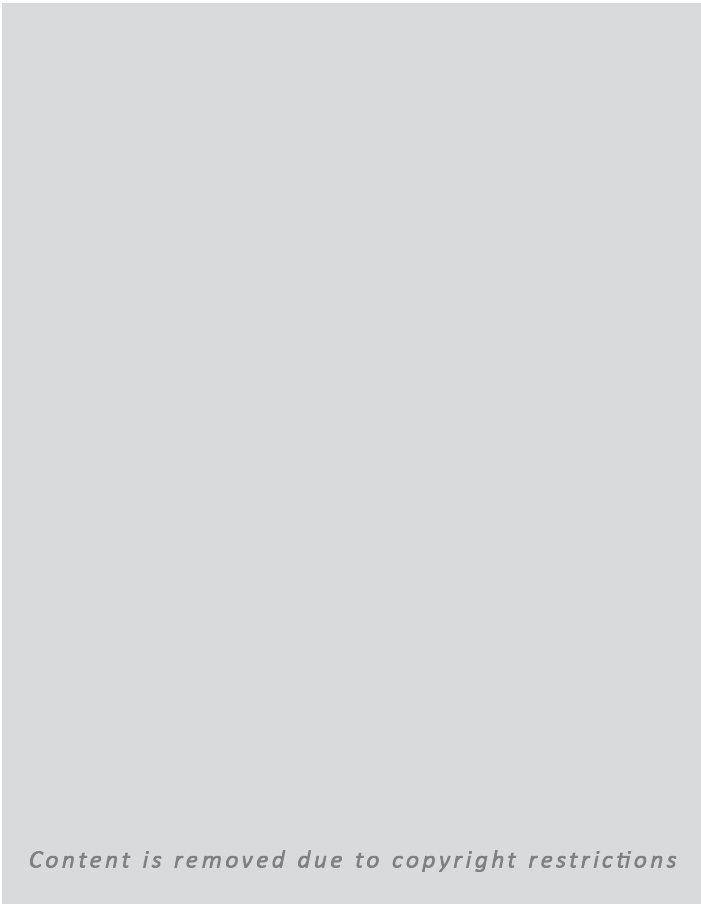
**figure 38.**(above) Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *André and Jacqueline Breton*, 1935, gelatin silver print, 10.7 x 8.2cm. Reproduced from: Don't kiss me: The art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore.

*Content is removed due to copyright restrictions*



be assumed to be finished in the traditional sense. Stevenson postulates that this was either because Cahun did not get around to printing them or that they were destroyed by German soldiers when Moore and Cahun were imprisoned on Jersey island in 1944. She did not have many exhibitions during her life time and I imagine this would have shaped why the work did not appear 'finalised'. From 1940 onwards, Marcel and Cahun contributed to the resistance against Nazi Germany (Follain 2006) and they continued their resistance actions from prison. They were both sentenced to death; they remained in isolation and were subjected to horrific conditions, under the knowledge that execution could come at any time. They were granted a reprieve in February 1945 and released in May 1945 after liberation. They went to great lengths to hide their relationship whilst in prison and used their relationship as stepsisters to maintain a culturally legitimised connection. They both attempted suicide (together and separately) on multiple occasions whilst in prison. Most of the photographs in their archive were taken before their imprisonment. How I understand and relate to Cahun and Moore's images is with this knowledge in mind. How I have learned about their lives is out of sync with linear order, and whilst this is a somewhat obvious detail, my own experiences of moving through my archive have shown how collage and juxtaposition in handling and viewing also contributes to meaning (Edwards 2005). Cahun and Moore's performance of remaking has, in many ways, continued after their deaths. Those fascinated with their lives, their work, and their relationship rearrange and remake their images: by creating historical connections, exhibiting their imagery in contemporary art spaces, and by reassembling their fragmented film strips.

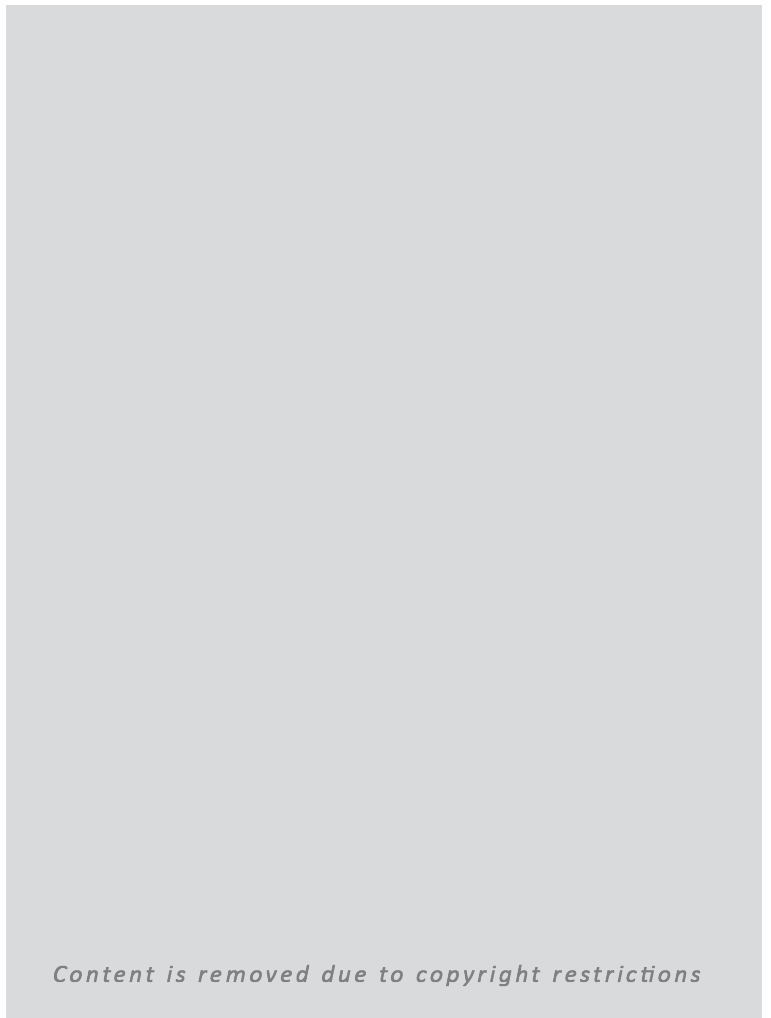
Motifs of mirroring, doubling, and disappearing, all of which are collage methods, are found in many of Cahun and Moore's images. A mirror features in her famous untitled self portrait from 1928 (figure 39, page 139); however, the flipping of the camera (to achieve a double exposure composition) also emulates a mirror metaphor. For example, in another untitled photograph from 1928 (figure 40, page 139), Cahun's body appears twice, each layered alongside itself. She is naked, her feet are bound, her head awkwardly propped up on a wall just above the water. Despite there being two performances within the same frame, doubling her presence, I feel as though she is about to disappear into the darkness of the water. There are a number of images where she is seen lying in water, often on the shoreline, a boundary space, with loose



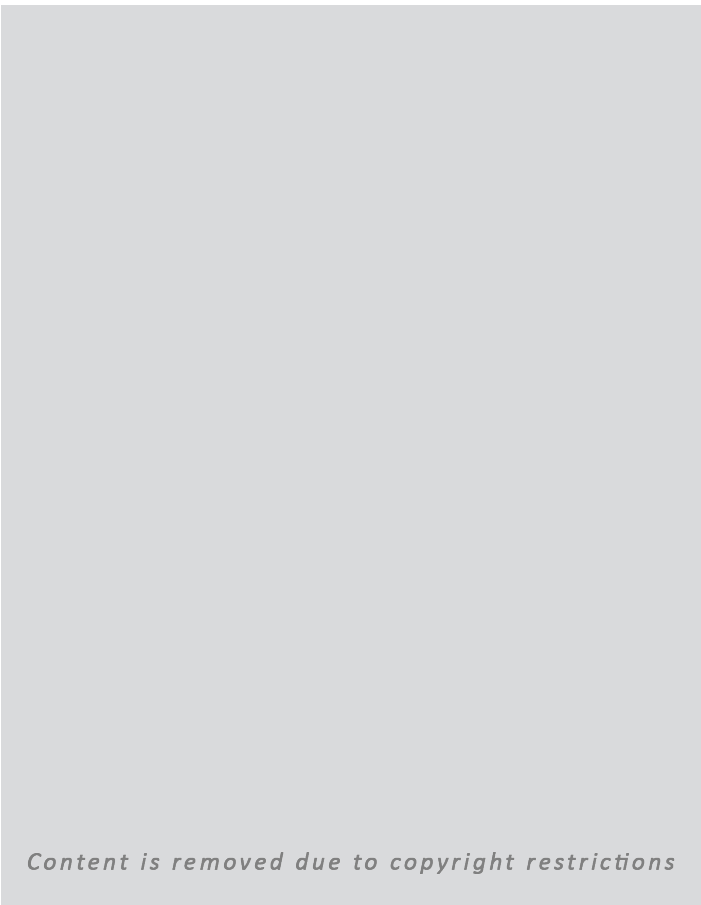
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**figure 39.(left)** Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [images from archive], 1928, gelatin silver print, 10.7 x 8.3cm. Reproduced from: Don't kiss me: The art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore.

**figure 40.(below)** Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [images from archive]. 1928, gelatin silver print, 13 x 18.1cm. Reproduced from: Don't kiss me: The art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore.



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**figure 41.** (above) Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [image from archive]. 1928, gelatin silver print, 11.8 x 8.8cm. Reproduced from: Don't kiss me: The art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore.

rope or another symbol of restraint present within the frame. This method of layering two isolated moments through double exposure highlights a translucency and ephemerality of her body on the emulsion. There is an intimacy between both of her bodies through this repeated act, despite them not touching, pictorially or physically. Sometimes Cahun is dressed in ways that make her unrecognisable. Double exposure does not offer a clear narrative order and there is no distinction between before and after. Disrupting linear time is a useful visual method for trans representation, which I explore towards the end of this chapter.

In many of Cahun and Moore's images, they turn everyday spaces (including gardens, and home interiors and exteriors) into theatre sets and stages. Rather than the professional studio approach popular at that time (which she may or may not have had access to), these decisions show Cahun's performances for the camera as integrated into her life and identity. Many images present a makeshift, DIY set-up. For example, in the three untitled images in figure 37 (page 137), the artist has used a fabric backdrop. Similarly, in figure 41 (page 139) an ornate duvet is used as a framing device for her performance. Whether the edges of these fabric backdrops were to remain evident in the final image is unknown. Keeping the edges of the fabric within the frame, rather than cleaning up the frame through cropping, and communicating a makeshift approach is seen in number PDA images, including *Shower Scenes 3 and 9* (figure 42, figure 43, page 141) as it speaks to amateur methods and an awareness of the everyday qualities to the performance. Whilst she had some peripheral involvement in the male-dominated Surrealist movement, Cahun did not have access to large audiences during her lifetime. How Cahun conceived of an audience, and who she was performing for, will perhaps always be somewhat ambiguous. The emphasis on iteration and contradiction throughout Cahun and Moore's archive requires the viewer to have an active role. Cahun writes under one of her images in her book *Disavowal*: "under this mask, another mask; I will never finish removing all these faces" ([1930] 2007, 183). There is no arrival or resting place. As mentioned, this ethos continues to be enacted through their archive, which suitably aligns with Cahun and Moore's objectives. Cahun's femininity and masculinity are collaged, playful, and in process, and recognisable gender stereotypes are always made strange. Similar to Steiner, Cahun and Moore show how multiplicity is key in making room for contradiction and resisting categorisation and resolve.



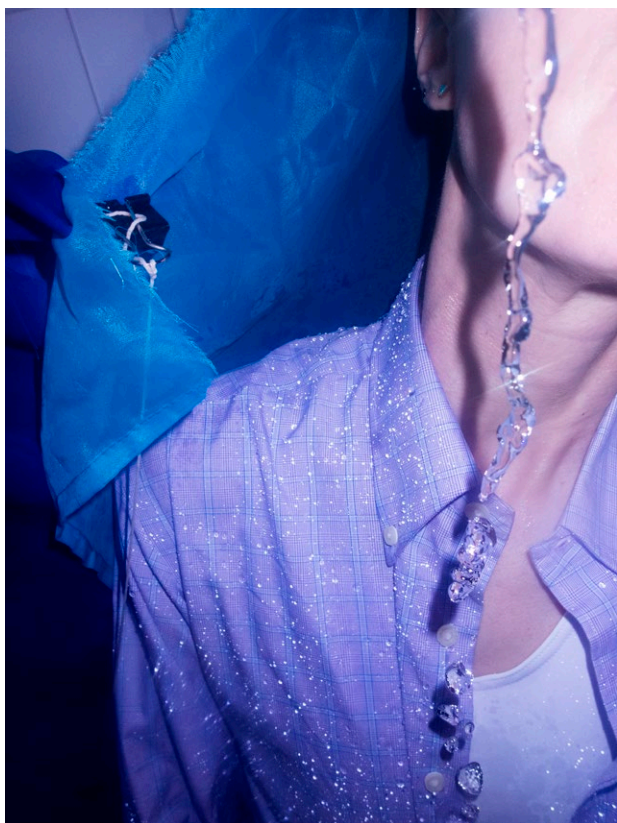


figure 42.(above left) Jack Ball, *Shower scene 3*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.



figure 43.(above right) Jack Ball, *Shower scene 4*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.

### Camp performances of visibility and invisibility

*PDA* explores the pleasures and possibilities of trans self-assemblage and intimacy. The photographs depict staged performances for the camera, as well as casual everyday performances of intimacy and routine. Thematically, the images reference trans self-representation online as well as non-figurative trans bodies. Materially, the images communicate the various processes that went into their making. The prints are large; packed with hairy bodies, sexual close-ups, and crisp edges. Several images are constructed by overlaying multiple print layers, pinned on top of one another. Whilst the majority of the work is printed on thick velvet rag, several images are printed on high gloss paper, and others on cotton drill fabric. In the latter, the edges are deliberately left frayed, and in *Rule of thumb* (figure 44, page 143) the fabric is both slumped and bulging away the wall surface.

During the exhibition, the images were pinned to the wall with aluminium pins. I coated these in various colours that coordinated with the image content. Every detail of the hang was meticulously planned to communicate the pleasure of being in process. Collage was not only present in the images that were hung on top of one another, I also created collages within the image content itself. I used material and clothing, DIY additions to architecture (figure 46, page 143), and low-fi Photoshop editing tools in post-production. The images were thick with texture, crunchy pixels, and romantic grain (figure 45, page 143). Fabric prints and cheap laser prints were re-photographed, embellishing the images with extra layers of detail from other moments in time. In *PDA* I incorporated old images from my archive and more recent images of my body.

In January 2019, my partner and I moved out of our rental, sold many of our household items, put the rest of our belongings in storage, and went traveling overseas for 3.5 months. Many of the images in *PDA* are from this experience. I started on T a month before I left Perth and so I had to pack numerous boxes of Testogel to take away with me. My body started changing as I was travelling. I was documenting these changes with my camera, whilst being out of place, in changing environments, and with multiple stopovers and moments in transit. We spent 3 weeks in the Canary Islands, on a tiny volcanic island named El Hierro, in the unfamiliar Atlantic Ocean off the north-west coast of Africa. El Hierro, unlike the rest of the Canaries, is not a popular tourist destination and so very few people speak English. Our lack of Spanish meant the simplest everyday tasks became eventful challenges.

The geomorphic transitions were hyper visible on the landscape. Our accommodation was built on a very old lava field, precariously placed beneath a mountain. The multiple calderas which surrounded us, although inactive, were a constant presence, particularly when we heard there had recently been underwater eruptions off the coast. Across the road from our temporary home, we could walk through the lava fields; the formations of once-oozing molten liquid had solidified into a knotted mass. The old lava was sprouting succulents that I had only seen as house plants. In parts of the island, boulders frequently spilled onto roads. Hefty metal nets installed to break their fall were not always strong enough to hold back the mountain.

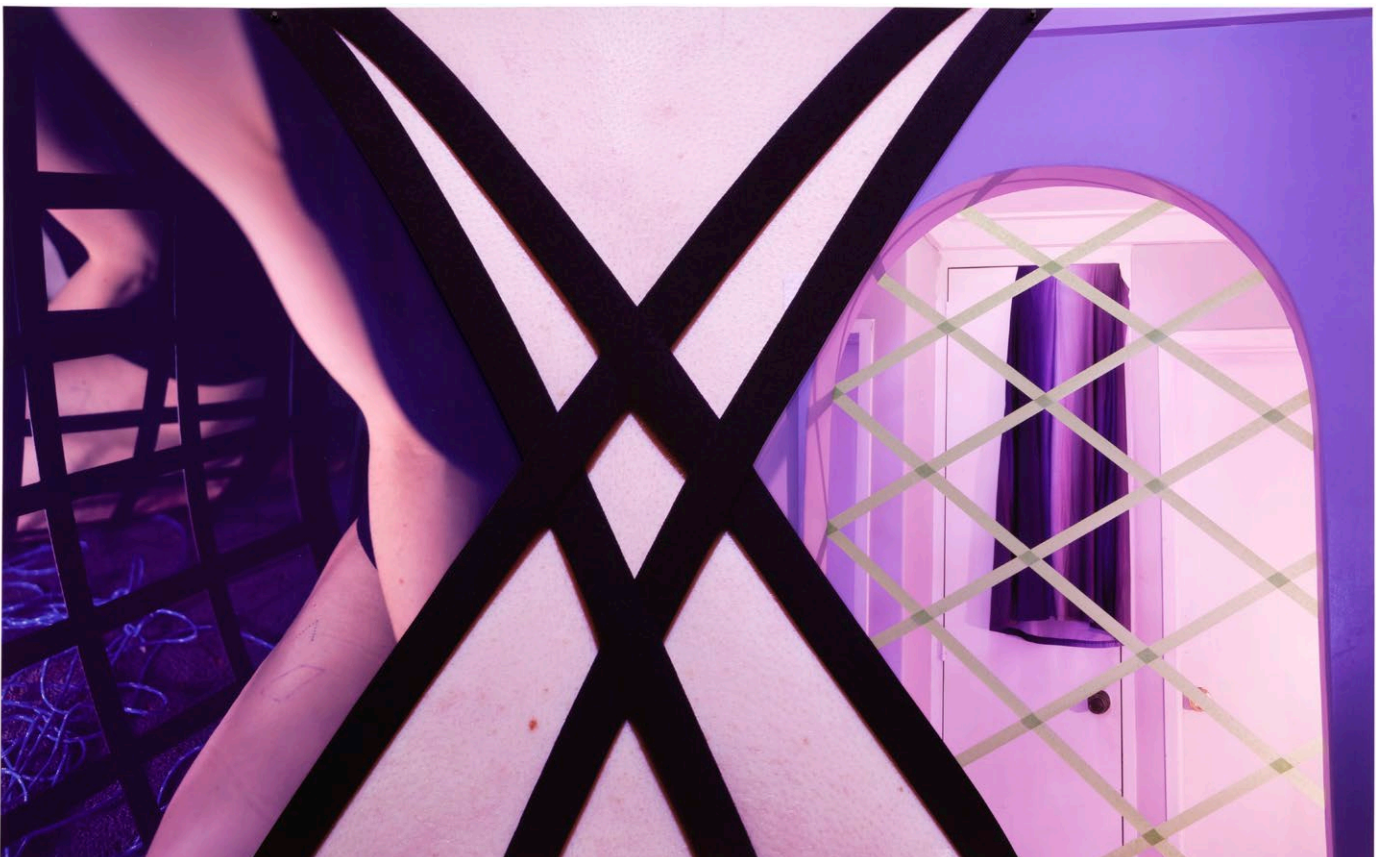




**figure 44.**(above) Jack Ball, *Rule of thumb*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, digital print on cotton drill, 94 x 142cm.

**figure 45.**(right) Jack Ball, *Home sweet homo*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 105 x 155cm.

**figure 46.** (below) Jack Ball, *Sketching*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag (2 panels), 110 x 174cm,



Despite my appreciation, in the last few days of being there, I felt too deeply caught up in the shapeshifting island energy and felt an urgent need to leave. The instability was too close, and my body was changing too fast.

The title *PDA* emerged from these experiences of travelling overseas as a queer couple, but equally references my everyday experiences in Perth. As a queer couple, affection and intimacy in public remain a cautious decision. I understand the ease and smoothness that comes with public comfort through my past experiences of being outwardly heterosexual. As Ahmed writes of her own similar experiences of leaving heterosexuality, “comfort is very hard to notice when one experiences it” (2004, 147). Ahmed continues: “[t]o be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends, and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view” (148). These ideas inform the images I explain below. Being invisibly queer, however, also brings a different overlapping set of challenges. Despite my molecular changes whilst travelling, my gender was not seen by others, and this feeling of translucency was, at times, lonely. My body was read as an unruly, hairy female, which was an empowering but complex position for me to experience, as it was a position I had been taught to fear. In Sri Lanka, I sensed my whiteness was my central identifying feature, rather than my queerness. My partner and I were assumed to be sisters on numerous occasions, our short hair perhaps a sign of ‘European strangeness’. I did not have knowledge of the nuances of gender diversity and queerness in Sri Lanka, and I was trying to remain reflexive about how my entire embodied and intellectual understanding of queerness is filtered through a Western lens. This includes my Western ideas of public and private life. The current Penal Code in Sri Lanka (with its origins in colonial rule) prohibits consenting same-sex intercourse, and the Human Rights Watch (2016) has reported on the severity of human rights abuses and discrimination towards LGBTI and other gender non-conforming individuals. Visibility can be dangerous for LGBTQIA+ Sri Lankans, but less so for white tourists. Months later, arriving in Berlin, prolonged eye contact with other queers on the street felt explicit, unapologetic, and erotic. As my gender queerness was reflected back to me, so too were more familiar anxieties. For example, whilst walking in a central part of Berlin, but on a quiet street, we were threatened, though briefly, by a group of men, with aggressive bodies and aggressive clothing,



who were certainly alert to our queerness. In *PDA* I use collage and camp performance as ways to speak about queer experiences of negotiating public space.

*PDA* is also about change; but by change, I do not only mean the exterior changes of gender. I am also interested in physical movement, materials in transition (fading, oozing, disintegrating), photographic methods which show change (long exposures, double exposures), and collage to show change by borrowing from different moments in time. There is a sense of movement in the imagery; for example, a small gesture of queer touch on a motorbike seen in *Daylight savings*. There is surface change, such as sunburnt skin in *Paint box mid-blue* (figure 47, page 146). The image *Island cuts on the old prime meridian* (figure 48, page 146) shows the aftermath of a DIY queer haircut. The focus of *PDA* is always on the small engagements, not the heroic outcome, and this remains important when I consider the before and after in the following section. Many images were shot indoors, inside the bedrooms and bathrooms of our accommodation, where I could play with queer performances in private. During these months of travelling, my partner and I often constructed hotel and motel rooms as safe spaces (although there were moments when this, too, felt uneasy) where my indoor performances were private stages for queerness and for understanding my changing body through representation.

In numerous images in *PDA*, bodies blend with architecture or objects. For example, in *Shower Scenes 11* (figure 49, page 147) my hairy legs fold into fabric. In *Aquarius* (figure 50, page 147), a torso covered in black nylon fabric mirrors the surrounding rocks. In *Sketching* (figure 46, page 143) which is made up of two layers pinned on top of each other, I use painter's tape and cardboard to get the architecture to replicate my exercise bra straps. These visual methods speak to Ahmed's discussion of comfort as previously outlined; however, in my images, comfort is also a type of camouflage. A melding of background and subject also occurs through the material processes. Many images are re-photographed prints, a method similar to Cahun's double exposures where two moments are combined. In *Dolphin camp* (figure 51, page 148) the surfaces are embellished with sugar syrup poured onto glass, with the image layered underneath, creating a bubble filter. The image *Hot pixel mess* (figure 52, page 148) is made



**figure 47.** (above) Jack Ball, *Paint box mid-blue*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 160 x 109cm.

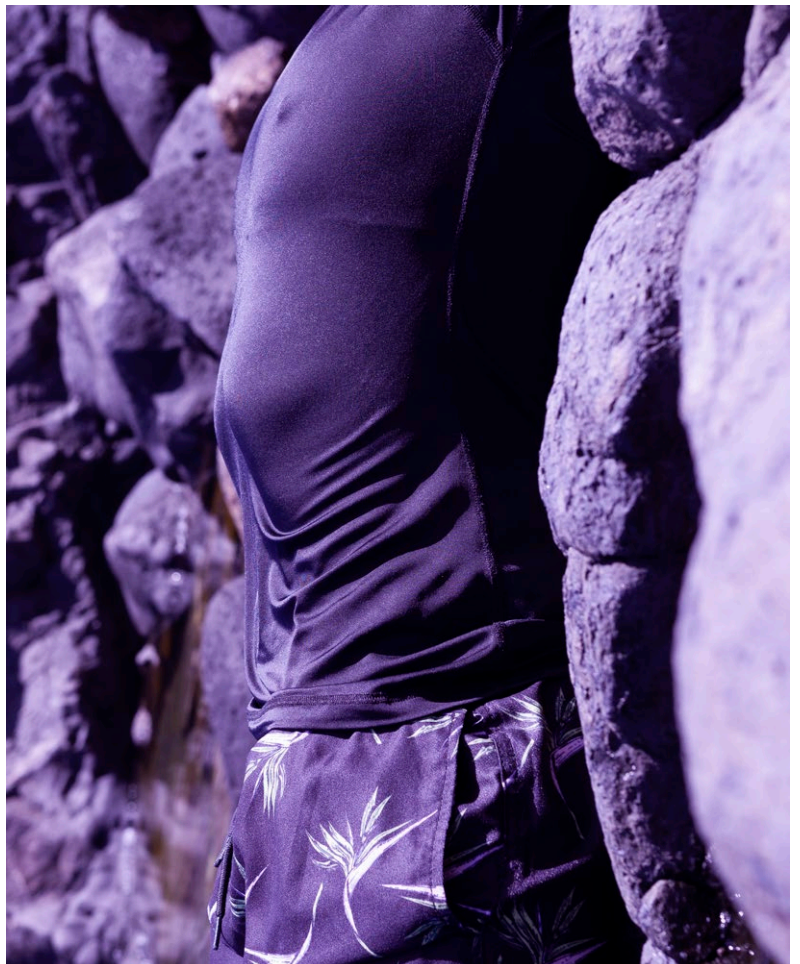
**figure 48.**(left) Jack Ball, *Island cuts on the old prime meridian*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 65.5 x109cm.



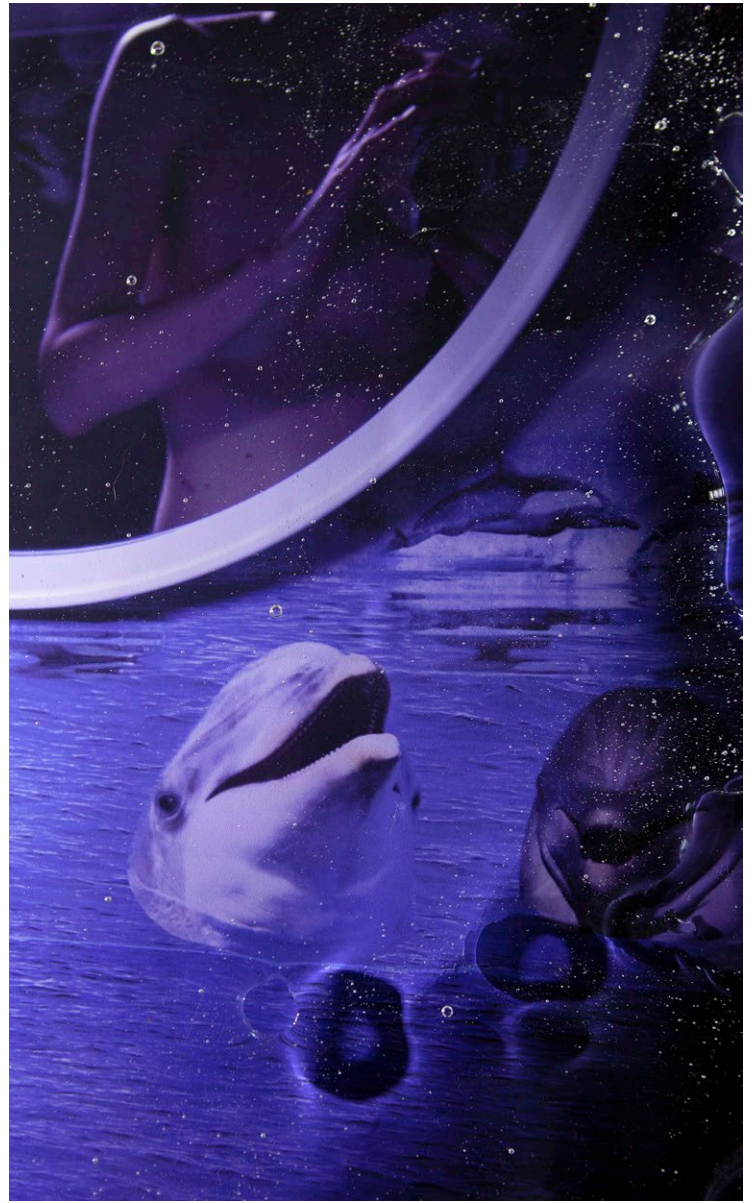


**figure 49.**(above) Jack Ball, *Shower scene 11*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.

**figure 50.** (right) Jack Ball, *Aquarius*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 65.5 x 80







**figure 51.** (above) Jack Ball, *Dolphin camp*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 28 x 49cm,

**figure 52.** (left) Jack Ball, *Hot pixel mess*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 101 x 175cm.



by printing a photograph taken on a DSLR and then taking a photograph of it on my phone (see the shadow in the left-hand corner in figure x). I subsequently brought this image up on my computer screen and photographed it again with a DSLR. Pixels are crunched and expanded. A moiré pattern is formed from the LCD screen, and on close-up viewing of the print, the surface is covered in fluorescent rainbow colour pixels, shimmering across the surface. Embellishing their surfaces is a way to take time with images, to make them more intimate, to add excessive layers, and undo and remake their meaning. Transforming the surfaces of bodies and the surfaces of images are key themes in *PDA*.

In the series *Shower Scenes* (figure 35, page 133; supporting documentation pdf pages 78-99), which is part of *PDA*, the shower becomes a stage, and the private act of showering becomes a performative moment for the gallery. I conducted these performances a few times a week over a two-month period and edited the photos down to eleven images. There is a casualness that is reminiscent of outtakes; a strategy I deployed to maintain process, and trial and error, as key parts of the conversation. I transformed an everyday space into a stage, making Cahun and Moore's influence visible. I clipped repurposed silk and satin fabric outfits that I had in storage from backdrops constructed decades before, hanging it loosely inside the shower recess, using string and clips. The DIY aesthetic was intentional, hinting at the playfulness of dressing up for oneself. I dressed in business shirts found in op shops; their fabric and pattern deliberately chosen to reflect the mundanity of day-to-day office life—daggy and from a time past. There was a functionality involved in each performance. I did, after all, need to shower; however, my performances were limited by time: I had to work fast so as not to waste water. I used an entry level underwater camera with a flash. The frozen droplets are a reference to the clichés of slow-motion nature photography and the elementary fascination with slowing down time and seeing details that our eyes cannot. Through this process, water becomes more abstract; a thick form frozen in mid-transit. The liquid takes on other material associations; it appears sticky, like lube, glitter or glycerine.

*Shower Scenes* is a camp collage. I created a wet and sticky collage of masculinity and femininity through fabrics, poses, and skin. Camp utilises imitation, performance, and subversion to point

to the flimsiness of gender archetypes. One of my main interests in camp is that it does not rely on the expected markers of professionalism. In *Shower Scenes* I use my amateur methods detailed in previous chapters (in particular, saturated colour) to work in conjunction with a DIY theatrical prototyping. Camp is often theorised as connected only to gay male culture (Robertson 1996); however, there is much literature that details the diversity of camp culture: for example, Pamela Robertson's (1996) feminist camp, Katrina Horn's (2017) exploration of women and camp in popular culture, Elly-Jean Nielsen's (2016) writing on lesbian camp, Esther Newton's (1979) work on camp and male impersonators and drag butches, and Kate Davy's ([1994] 2005) writing on camp in lesbian theatre. Camp has at times been assumed to be apolitical (Sontag [1966] 2009) and nothing more than frivolous; however, it is also "used by gay people as a means of communication and survival" (Bronski 1984, 42). In her book *Gender Outlaws*, Kate Bornstein suggests a collage approach to camp, where she writes, "camp performers were taking pieces of the culture and twisting them around to a point of humour" (1994, 137). She also explains how "[c]amp can be a leading edge in the deconstruction of gender, because camp wrests social control from the hands of the fanatics. Camp in fact reclaims gender and re-shapes it as a consensual game" (138). Camp is about cutting and pasting, borrowing and mimicking, fictionalising and amalgamating odd combinations, which are all key attributes of collage. Newton (1979) writes that "camp depends on the perception or creation of incongruous juxtapositions... the homosexual 'creates' camp, by pointing out the incongruity or by devising it" (106) and asserts that "masculine-feminine juxtapositions are, of course, the most characteristic kind of camp" (107). Contradiction is central to many of the queer methods I have already explored.

Nielsen argues that lesbian camp's invisibility is a consequence of patriarchy, yet it does not mean it has not existed: "like most queer praxis, [it] has evidenced a long and rich history buried under heteronormative readings" (2016, 131). Women have not had the same access to being cultural creators as gay men (Robertson 1996). There is also the assumption "that gay men appropriate feminine aesthetic...[and] women, lesbian or heterosexual, do not similarly appropriate aspects of gay male culture... women, by this logic, are objects of camp and subjects to it, but are not camp subjects (5). In *PDA*, I reference gay male aesthetics and culture

as a non-binary person. For example, I mirror poses from *Butt* magazine (Bennekom and Jonkers 2014), a famous magazine that explores sex between men, in *Date night* (figure 53, page 152), and in a number of *Shower Scenes* images. Maggie Nelson makes an important point about performance. Nelson writes that she does not use performance “in opposition to ‘the real’; I’ve never been interested in any sort of con” (2015, 75), which is a reference to Judith Butler ([1990] 2008). Borrowing from these magazines does not mean I am faking gay masculinity or being fraudulent, rather it is part of my queer sexuality. Many trans and gender diverse people explore self-representation through camp culture and camp aesthetics (including gay male aesthetics), which can be seen on Instagram and YouTube. In *PDA*, I am engaging with this online conversation. It is not often that I see trans people use humour and playfulness to speak about their experiences and these online examples are the only references I have for what a type of trans camp can look like. Halberstam makes a similar point, explaining there are many literary examples where the transgender butch character is represented through narratives of “loss, loneliness and disconnection” and rarely as “playful gender hedonists” (1998, 168). Nielsen explains how “lesbian women’s propensity to poke fun, to turn norms on their heads, to camp, is a legitimate practice that has been over-looked” (Nielsen 2016, 121), and whilst I am not conflating lesbian experiences with trans experiences in a broader sense, for me, personally, they do overlap. What is difficult is that these narratives of distress and sadness are reflected in lived experiences and mental health research; for example, the heartbreaking statistics about mental health, suicide attempts, and self-harm in young Australian trans and gender diverse people (see for example, Strauss et al. 2017). Just because camp appears light hearted and frivolous, its political potential should never be overlooked. This argument mirrors those made in previous chapters, for example, in relation to Chris Kraus’s book *I Love Dick*, A.L. Steiner’s work *Puppies & Babies*, and Pipilotti Rist’s exhibition *Sip my Ocean*. When trans people are producing their own content, they have control to shape the diversity and nuance of narratives, which can contribute to change more broadly.

Camp can, however, replicate damaging the gender tropes, racism, and misogyny of dominant culture (Nielsen 2016). Nielsen’s earlier point about lesbian women being rarely represented as humorous and satirical reminds me of Hannah Gadsby’s show *Nanette* (2018), where she



**figure 53.** Jack Ball, *Date night*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 62 x 93cm.

shares her experience of using self-deprecating humour. She asks: “Do you understand what self-deprecation means when it come from somebody who already exists in the margins? It’s not humility, it’s humiliation.” There is a connection between Gadsby’s articulation of her gendered experiences and the visual representations I grew up with, where trans women (I have no memories of seeing trans men on screen) were the butt of the joke. Self-mockery was the only means to be visible in representation. It has been difficult for women, particularly those who identify with femininity, to participate in camp, because camp has sometimes involved the ridiculing of femininity (Nielsen 2016). To echo Butler ([1990] 2008), I understand, through my practice, how the line between subversion and repetition of norms can become hazy when you are trying to argue against the damaging representational norms that have deeply shaped your life and sense of self. It is only in hindsight I been able to notice that in a number of the series that are part of this PLR, my visual critique could have been more overt and assertive. There is an overlap with how Gadsby speaks of her experiences of internalised homophobia. When I had a typical female presentation, I was so familiar with being the subject of misogyny, and I was socialised to accept it without question. That misogyny was also deeply internalised, even when I adamantly thought it was not. My approach to camp as a queer trans person is a constant work in process, where I need to persistently reflect, refine, and edit the ways in which I recognise and respond to damaging stereotypes and narratives. In *PDA*, camp offers a way to understand performative masculinity. It also offers a way to understand the pressures I have experienced to perform public expectations of being female and expressing femininity correctly (Robertson 1996). Camp offers trans people a visual method for expansive femininity and masculinity, for excess and humour. It offers a queer political lineage to draw from whilst making accessible commentary (Horn 2017) and a critical contribution to destabilising binary gender. Queer and lesbian camp is a theoretical avenue that has opened up through the process of making and exhibiting PDA and shaped the future direction of my practice.

### **Close crop, gender ambiguity, and gender deception**

In *Shower Scenes*, the camera is close, and my body is cropped. Removing clear markers of identity, such as the face, can engage with Halberstam's concept of abstraction as a method for trans representation. In the following section I consider the complexities of cropping and fragmenting trans bodies through photography as a way to experiment with unintelligibility, ambiguous gender, and abstraction. A cropped image is often associated with editing decisions made in post-production, whereas a close-up involves the camera close to the body. Rather than focus on the technical differences, I am interested in photographic representations of bodies in parts and in isolation, and bodies with key identifying features missing. As I have explored in Chapter 3, Halberstam writes of abstraction as a way to counter the common overemphasis on the exteriority of trans bodies. He explains that complicating the boundaries between the inside and outside of bodies can be a political method of undoing how gender is represented. However, through my own practical experiences with abstraction, questions of trans anonymity and invisibility as well as charges of deception have arisen. Additionally, cropping bodies, by placing a frame line *through* bodies or isolating one part of the body, can suggest aggression, erasure, and objectification, making it a particularly complex visual method to explore the pleasures of non-binary gender.

My experiments with cropping began through my experiences of photographing my body that I, and others, presumed was female. Over the last 14 years of exhibiting, none of my images have been selfies, despite sharing many visual aesthetics with selfie culture. My images are not portraits either, at least not in the traditional sense. In all of my series for the PLR, there are no visible eyes, which meant the subject of the photo cannot return gaze with their (representational) eye contact. Photography has cropped bodies since its invention. Seeing floating heads or bodies cropped at the torso or waist in a photographic portrait is not strange, yet the moment the face is the only part of the body missing, questions arise. Advertising, for example, is rife with midriffs, abs, and breasts represented in isolation from the whole bodies, as Rosalind Gill (2009) details. There is, however, also a liberating and escapist pleasure to be found in anonymity that comes from cropping out a face. Tiidenberg and Gomez Cruz write

about sexy selfies on social media, where “real names are not used, identifying elements are blurred out, and images are usually headless or at least hide the face” (2015, 80). They explain that this allows for the exploration of desire and sexuality without the consequences that being identifiable might pose to some individuals. In my early 20s, I enjoyed taking headless selfies for similar reasons. It was a space for trial and error. It was also a thrill to break with the conventions of keeping my body private, and to relinquish control to the specificity of the medium, which I knew would present me in a certain way. As I was making my desire visible, there was a strong sense of disappearance, as my body slipped into the mass of other white bodies mirroring and repeating the same poses, aesthetics, and the same idealised femininity and heterosexy conventions (Dobson 2015). The images are both lost in the tumble, but preserved forever online, and this contradiction is knowingly part of the performance.

There are many common visual methods that are used to obscure the identity of a person, whilst simultaneously being present. On the news, for example, various visual methods are used either to protect victims or to indicate criminality: a face layered with a soft-focus blur, chunky pixilation, or an aggressive black rectangle over the eyes; bodies in silhouette; a close-up of hands. We draw meaning from the details that remain in view. In research, similar visual methods of obscuring identity are used for ethical protection; however, the erasure of a face can also indicate the erasure of individual agency or the community the individual represents (Allen 2015). Since I am mostly self-shooting, I am not bound to a ‘photographer and subject’ dynamic, where I would need to respectfully navigate the ethics of representing people other than myself. My focus is on making my body public in an art gallery without the gender specificity that comes so readily with facial signification. At the same time, there are, of course, multiple parts of bodies that are quickly attributed with binary gender. Halberstam speaks about Nancy Grossman’s leather masks from the 1980s in this regard. In a lecture, he explains how “the face is so important to the way that we think about gender. What happens when the face is covered? How do we know the meaning of gender then?” (Halberstam 2016). As David Getsy writes in his book *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender*, “one of the central lessons of transgender history is that gender is not always readable as or on the surface...Grossman’s works demand that one asks about gender beyond (or, more



accurately beneath) what one sees on the exterior” (2015, 203). Getsy explains how Grossman’s work was a key shift away from essentialism and the idea that feminist art needed to focus on female bodies. Since essentialism dominated the feminist art of that era, Grossman faced much criticism. You cannot determine a person’s gender simply by looking at them, a concept which clashes with my experience of being frequently misgendered. Halberstam turns to abstraction to respond to the weighty history of problematic representation, including the obsession with gender as being located on the surface, as tangible indexical signs. Benthien’s (2002) outline of the common association with authenticity lying beneath the skin and authenticity as based on the skin, which I summarised in the last chapter, is applicable here too. Cropping out the face not only destabilises gender, but also destabilises the location of authenticity. In *PDA*, when I cropped out my face, it was assumed that I was deceptively concealing my gender assigned at birth.

In *Shower Scenes*, I used cropping to explore the pleasure of gender non-conformity. *Shower Scenes* responds to heightened anxiety and fear of trans people’s bodies in public, including some cisgender people’s common fixation on trans people’s genitals (what lies underneath their clothing) and controlling which public bathrooms trans people are permitted access. I may have cropped my face from view, but my trans body has not disappeared. I am deliberately deciding what parts to make visible. As I am both the subject of the photograph and the photographer, I have control over the parameters of the performance, up until the moment the image is on public display. My artist statement for *PDA* communicated that the exhibition explores trans self-representation, therefore my cropped body was not anonymous. In *Shower Scenes 9* (figure 54, page 157), the focus is clearly on my thighs and crotch. Whilst the pose is familiar, this is not the type of body that is typically objectified in advertising. The tight and suggestive cropping asks the viewer to look directly at that part of my body in a public gallery, which, in turn, brings awareness to the viewer’s own gaze. Over the nine images, there is no progression to a naked reveal. Rather, I use cropping as a playful, camp collage tool to create “incongruous juxtapositions” (Newton 1979, 106).

On opening night, *Shower Scenes 9* was purchased by a cisgender gay man. I heard from



figure 54. Jack Ball, *Shower scene 9*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.

others that he was hot for this image and that he unquestioningly viewed it a sexual cis gay male representation. It was a complicated moment. I wanted to explain that it was a trans image, which I thought was obvious due to my body's composition, let alone the themes in the other images and my artist statement. It is, of course, possible that he was aware, and he was engaging playfully with me. I was also enticed by the idea of a secret trans image being in cis gay man's art collection. Since I frequently get misgendered as female, I had assumed that my birth-assigned gender was clear in these images. I had not expected the trope of exposure and the trans reveal (Halberstam 2005) to be part of my exhibition. Later in the evening, I overheard a conversation unfolding, with a small crowd, around my image *Date night* (figure 53, page 152). A man was pointing to my body in the photo and tracing the contour of my waist with his finger. He repeatedly stated, "This is not a man, a man doesn't have curves". He then traced his finger down the (supposedly) solid unwavering line of his torso to validate his statement. There was an undercurrent of anger rising, exemplifying how this image did not align with his reality. Over and over he exclaimed, "I look at my body every night and my body doesn't look like this"; and, with hostility, he asked, "Is it a man or a woman?" He also stated, more than once, that "it needs to shave". It was his persistent repetition of the same statements, without any progression in his thoughts, which I found particularly disconcerting and upsetting.

*Date night* shows my cropped torso with deep shadows. I am wearing a binder (however, this detail is not clear to someone who has never seen one) and there is a grey tie draped around my neck (a *Butt* magazine reference). Hair from a recent haircut was glued to my stomach with roll-on glue. To me, this cut and paste job was obvious, and it was a clear nod to drag king traditions. I had even wondered in the days before the show if it was *too* obvious. *Date night* was a large photograph (93 cm x 62 cm), meaning all of these details were legible from a standard viewing distance. Despite all the ways I had chosen to communicate my positionality, this man was blinded by the shock of this incongruity. He was adamant that I was being intentionally deceptive, and that my body was fraudulently trying to blend in. He identified his own body as upholding the idealised contours of manhood. His response speaks to the pressure women (cis and trans) experience to regulate body hair, and to uphold appropriate femininity, and shows how trans representational dilemmas overlap with female representational



dilemmas. Similarly, men (cis and trans) can of course have curvature in their waists. When I had a body that was typically seen as female, cropping out my face was readily associated with objectification and with Laura Mulvey's use of the Freudian term "scopophilic instinct", where the "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (1975, 11). Mulvey's theory depends on a heterosexual desiring relationship (Halberstam 2005). With trans bodies, cropping out the face in this instance pointed to questions of trickery, which likewise remains connected to the male gaze. I was still objectified, particularly through this man's use of "it". However, my body had disrupted the viewing pattern, as he did not experience viewing pleasure. Trans bodies can confuse the limiting and normative conventions of subject/object relationships in representation, including compulsory heterosexuality (Halberstam 2005). Similar to how camp is closely tied to theatrical and audience expectations, when I stage my photographs in the gallery, as a type of opening night performance, I can learn more about the relationship between the images and the audience. From both these experiences, I learned there is something useful about the safety of a gallery, where I can be accused of tricking someone, without reprisal. In other public spaces this can be a dangerous experience.

As I outlined in Chapter 2, there is a common assumption that photography is capturing reality, that it is a neutral witness and has the ability to reveal hidden truths. In *PDA* I use these medium-specific ideas to converse with cisnormative concepts of gender and transphobic rhetoric that frames trans bodies as deceptive and fraudulent, that helps sustain the implication that these bodies are hiding 'truths' and are not 'real'. The content of my images amplifies these medium-specific tropes of interpretation. Similar to Christopher Allen's response to Pipilotti Rist's work discussed in Chapter 3, my experience is indicative of the relentless expectation for camera-based imagery to firmly support a patriarchal social world order. I have found it liberating to recognise the impossibility of succeeding within this framework.

### **Performative stopovers**

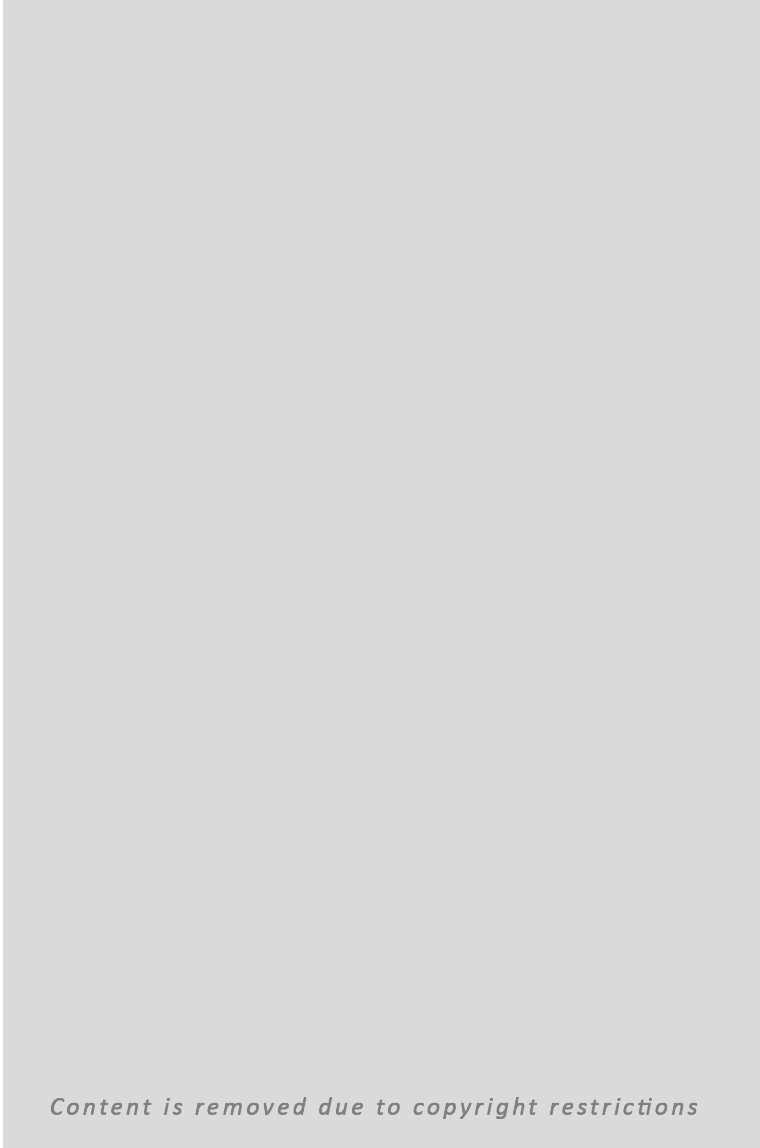
Photography, broadly speaking, is said to highlight a "shock of discontinuity" (Berger 1982, 86)

between the present and the past, and is closely associated with death, loss, and nostalgia (Barthes 1981; Sontag 2003). To visually explore my leaky and messy masculinity and femininity and non-goal-orientated representations, I contended with the photographic medium's pull to the past. Time-lapse is a visual method that has frequently been used to narrativise transition in photography, social media, and film (Halberstam 2005). Before and after photographs is time-lapse in its simplest form. Many of the trans people who use this method on social media do so with captions to indicate the complexities that are often absent from two photos alone; however, news media, film, and TV representations often present easily digestible stories of neat binary transitions, without the 'uncomfortable' in-between (McBee 2018). Successful transition is often measured through normative conventions of binary gender. Thomas Page McBee explains, in relation to before and after images, that "[t]here's something lurid to it, a kind of visual undressing" and that "[o]ur cultural fascination with finding 'proof' of that journey still hasn't abated" (2018; italics in original). Halberstam (2005) explains that when trans characters become visible in cinema, they are framed through failure (failure to pass) and suggests that trans characters often disrupt linear temporality. With my embodied experience of collaging my gender (as detailed in the conclusion to Chapter 3) closely in mind, in *PDA* I experiment with methods to visually communicate the messy processes of building and sculpting my trans body with testosterone. In this final section I connect the materiality of imagery, the "*materiality of gender*" (Preciado 2013, 142; italics in original), and the materiality of archives.

At the beginning of Chapter 4, I mentioned how Crawford connects Derrida's concept of the archive directly to the longing and difficulties of arriving home to "a final resting place of selfhood" as a transgender person (2010, 534). Crawford questions the common narrative of transition as a process of arriving home and being "at home in one's skin" (516). For me, this homeliness is comparable to Ahmed's articulation of heterosexual comfort as "a seamless space" (2004, 148) that is designed to fit heterosexual bodies and that has taken shape through repetition. Likewise, Crawford writes that the concept of "home is grounded in the hetero-normative structure of the family" (2010, 527) and connects to capitalist concepts of ownership as well as the "hetero-normative mythology that every human body is naturally stable and

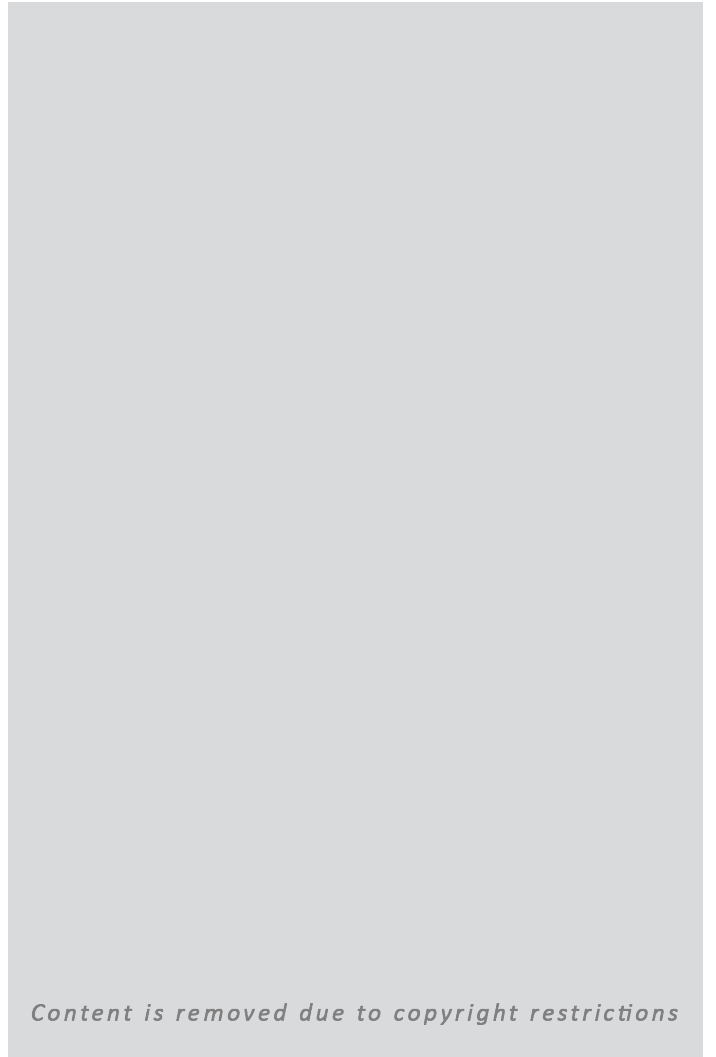
fixed” (ibid). He explains that the high occurrence of violence within the home is one of the many reasons the presumption that homes are safe and neutral must be questioned. Crawford proposes that not only should we re-imagine the heteronormative design of the home, but also argues that instead of a “body-as-home”, we should consider a “body-as-archive” (519). Crawford expands on this: “we might think of our practices of the body as a series of stopovers that are, nonetheless, serious and equally oriented toward finding a self through the body. In other words, our bodies could be lived as archives rather than as homes” (533). My objective in this PLR is to develop visual methods to explore trans and queer bodies in process, and this objective has originated from the everyday pressures of the narrative of trans ‘arrival’. I do, however, understand that comfort, safety, stability, and the narrative of finding your ‘authentic self’ are deeply appealing and meaningful concepts for many people, including myself. Crawford points out that there are very few narratives for trans people to connect with and questioning pervasive trans narratives of being ‘at home in your body’ is not a criticism directed at trans people. As he explains, home is not an idea to be dismissed completely, rather we need to re-imagine what home looks and feels like. Re-imagining what home looks like is not only an architectural project, it is a performative project. Building on my engagement with Cahun and Moore’s visual methods of everyday gender performance, I consider how Cassils contests the ideals of arrival, of home, of comfort (Ahmed 2005), through various methods of collage.

As part of the series titled *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011) (figure 55, figure 56, page 162; and figure 57, page 163), Cassils’s *Time Lapse* documents their changing body over 23 weeks, as they gain 23 pounds through intense diet, steroids, and bodybuilding. The work is a reference to Elanor Antin’s 1972 work *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, where the artist diets to lose weight over 45 days. However, instead of dieting to lose fat, Cassils’s muscles tear when bulking up and the contours of their body reform in ways more typically associated with masculinity. Like Antin, Cassils documents these changes through a series of time-lapse photographs at regular intervals. Their body composition, lighting, and backdrop are kept the same and the outcome is a stark, detached, clinical-style documentation. The visual aesthetic serves to emphasise the subtle body contour changes and the format urges us to compare the first and last images. Eliza Steinbock explains how Cassils uses “bodybuilding as a model



**figure 55.** (above) Cassils, *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, Timelapse (Front)*, 2011, photograph. Reproduced from: Cassils website.

**figure 56.** (left) Cassils, *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, Timelapse (Left)*, 2011, photograph. Reproduced from: Cassils website.







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**figure 57.** Cassils, *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, Timelapse Before/After (Detail)*, 2011, photograph. Reproduced from: Cassils website.

for understanding the dual nature of violence’s generative-destructive powers” (2014, 254). Cassils critiques the division of before and after in trans lives, and the idea that surgery and hormones are often the focus of trans arrival (Crawford 2010). They also reject the need for surgical cuts, and instead refer to the cut marks as a bodily composition of taut, muscular line work. This process of muscular tearing and rebuilding is a form of bodily collage. Cassils’s time-lapse method is also a collage of multiple images from multiple time points. Their work *Time Lapse* ruptures a linear narrative of gender in terms of past, present, and future (Halberstam 2005). This work echoes their lived experience of gender, as Cassils (2013) writes: “I perform trans not as something about a crossing from one sex to another but as a continual becoming, a process-oriented way of being that works in a space of indeterminacy, spasm and slipperiness”. Both Antin and Cassils reach thresholds, where forward progression becomes unsustainable (Steinbock 2014). E. Hella Tsaconas writes that in this artwork, “the building of a body is not a

triumphant act, but rather a process that is both temporary and risky. A body coheres to come apart, capacities are cultivated only to disintegrate” (2016, 204). Whilst Cassils did not set out with a specific number of pounds they wanted to gain, they were nonetheless “in the pursuit of maximum capacity” (201). Cassils’s use of steroids to change the molecular composition of their body was also unsustainable due to the health risks. Additionally, their body became unable to undertake everyday practical tasks, such as removing their t-shirt, without help (Tsaconas 2016). Whilst Cassils is clear that they are not interested in accessing gender affirming testosterone, there is a similarity to Preciado’s “molecular revolution” (2013, 142), which frames testosterone as one of an endless number of pharmaceutical molecular changes we can use to shape our bodies. Cassils’s work speaks to the flexible, collaged architecture of masculinity, which is being shaped by both molecular materiality, and an intensely physical exercise regime.

What does nostalgia look like in trans narratives? What does ‘arrival’ look like if you are non-binary? The common trans narrative represented in popular culture is to split a life into two, which I suggest, would bury the pre-surgery and pre-testosterone images I made under the name Jacqueline, and therefore most of my archive. For many trans people the period ‘before’ transition is associated with deep distress and such experiences often dominates visual representations in film and TV. Whilst I have complex feelings towards the old imagery of my body, distress was not the main experience of my adolescence and young adulthood. North American lawyer and activist Dean Spade writes about challenging the medical and legal process of accessing surgery, which often requires evidence of breaking the typical gender norms expected of your presumed gender at birth during childhood. Drawing on his personal experience, he explains;

[N]ot engaging a trans childhood narrative is terrifying. What if it means I’m not “real”? Even though I don’t believe in real, it matters if other people see me as real. If not, I’m a mutilator, an imitator, and worst of all, I can’t access surgery. (2003, 20)

What Spade emphasises is that not experiencing the expected narrative of dysphoria and knowledge of being trans in childhood is fraught with questions of legitimacy and can prevent

access to care. Visually exploring trans lives through narratives that do not fit the expected story can also prompt similar anxieties. Exploring visual narratives of the past, without distress, does not need to diminish the significance of such experiences, but rather it adds to the continuing nuanced collage of trans visual representation. In *PDA* I use collage to subtly weave old images into the assemblage as a way to destabilise the idea that my past self was fake, a masquerade, and separated. This process, for me personally, is a gesture of integration.

To visually explore these ideas, I have re-created nostalgia through the medium format film camera's aesthetics to perform ideas of authentic time. In *PDA*, I use an excess of magenta to reference the unstable dyes in old colour photos. I use my medium format film camera to make large-scale images to show off the film's romantic grain (which was often placed alongside a crunchy pixel image for contrast). On the film images, I did not edit out the dust from film scans. An example can be seen in the left-hand image in *Sketching* (figure 46, page 143). Many of the images in *PDA* reference a fake authenticity seen in Instagram vintage filters (Chopra-Gant 2016). I use images taken from different time points, and collage processes (including layering prints over the top of each other physically on the wall), as ways to build a flexible architecture of home, and a flexible archive. Rather than turning to my archive to find evidence of my past self, as explored in Chapter 4, I am building my own DIY archive and performing 'evidence' that is purposely flexible and messy. This objective is not only motivated by my political perspective, but also driven by a practical problem—linear methods of documenting change do not visually represent my genderqueer experience.

Cassils's work *Becoming an Image* (figure 58, figure 59, page 167; and figure 60, page 168) strongly critiques the trans body as spectacle and directly confronts trans histories of violence. The work demonstrates a connection between the materiality of imagery, the "*materiality of gender*" (Preciado 2013, 142; italics in original), and the materiality of archives. It brings together clay sculptures and casting, trans representation, photography, and performance, all central themes in this PLR. *Becoming an Image* was originally commissioned in 2011 by the *ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives* in Los Angeles for an exhibition titled *Cruising the Archive* to respond to the archive's limited records of trans lives. I was in the audience when they

performed *Becoming an Image* at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts in February 2019. Over the course of the performance, Cassils uses their strength to pummel an approximately 900 kg clay monolith, an anti-monumental symbolic act. The performance occurs in the dark. Ushers individually position us to form a circle around the site and we hear Cassils before we see them. Their body is only visible through an aggressive strobe flash from a photographer, a white male who, along with the audience, is blinded by the light. Cassils's body is burnt temporarily into our retinas. The sounds of Cassils's body hitting the clay with full force (sounding disturbingly similar to flesh on flesh) and the aggressive strobe was felt in its full, affective, nauseous intensity, reverberating through my body. Layered with the lengthy periods of darkness, the performance was disorientating, so much so that I had to concentrate on not falling over or panicking. The performance ended with soft light revealing a twisted, sensuous bodily clay form, which was now an artifact and an index of what had happened. Clay footprints were visible across the floor and Cassils had left the room.

Seeing their body felt urgent and necessary. The impulse was not voyeuristic or objectifying. Rather it was because, at that point, I had seen so few trans bodies in person. However, throughout the performance I could never see them clearly enough. Sometimes other people's heads were in the way and I could not foresee which way to move to gain a better view. When I did see Cassils's body, they were distorted. The sudden flash meant their image drifted as wavy lines that would trail off and dissolve. One way of understanding the performance component of *Becoming an Image* is as a series of disappearing time-lapse images that I could not hold or save for future viewing. They were "sticky" (Ahmed 2004) images I held onto in my memory. Cassils's methods worked precisely to critique a cisgender and male gaze of trans bodies. The following day, however, a selection of these images was printed as part of their exhibition at PICA. The performance now existed as a series of intervals, an archive of the performance, each image marking each flash of light. Not only could I now see Cassils in high definition, but I could also see myself in the audience, gazing at Cassils. The shock and disorientation of the flash was visible across all the faces in the crowd. Cassils (2019) explains that through this process, the witness becomes a participant. We were collectively caught in the act of gazing (Steinbock 2014), and in this moment, I felt self-conscious and voyeuristic.

*Content is removed due to copyright restrictions*

**figure 58.**(left) Cassils, *Becoming An Image, Performance Still No. 4*, [Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth International Performance Festival], 2019, digital photograph, 101 x 75 cm. Photograph credit: Cassils and Manuel Vason. Reproduced from: PICA website

**figure 59.**(below) Cassils, *Becoming An Image, Performance Still No. 3*, [Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth International Performance Festival], 2019, digital photograph, 101 x 75 cm. Photograph credit: Cassils and Manuel Vason. Reproduced from: PICA website

*Content is removed due to copyright restrictions*



**figure 60.** Cassils, *Becoming An Image*, [Installation view of exhibition titled *Alchemic*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth International Performance Festival], 2019, digital photographs, clay. Reproduced from: PICA Facebook page

In the days following their performance, Cassils (2019) was asked at an artist's talk about their responsibility towards the viewer in regard to the violence their work portrays. Cassils responded by saying that if this work makes people uncomfortable, it is not their responsibility, as the work is referencing the experiences of violence on trans bodies. In an interview, they clarify: "I would argue that work isn't simply about representations of violence; it sort of misperforms violence. It unpacks violence so that we can really look at its construction" (Cram and Cassils 2019, 126). Through my experience of being a participant, I understand how it accomplishes this objective. Steinbock writes that "[t]hrough making explicit the power structuring the various roles of the witness, the aggressor, and the documenter, *BAI* [Becoming an Image] stresses the debilitating ongoingness of structural inequality and suffering" (2014, 263). Cassils is directly confronting these attributes of the photographic medium, its history and contemporary usage, and links it to key concerns in how trans bodies have been represented.

Whilst *Shower Scenes* is very different in both style and content, Cassil's approach informed my decision to incorporate the imagined gaze of the audience into the image construction.

The methods Cassil's uses to shift the responsibility of trans violence and trans representation to the audience offers important knowledge for guiding my future image methods. There are of course some major differences between my work and Cassil's; however, studying Cassil's methods has prompted me to examine my stance on how and when I want responsibility to shift to cis, queer, and/or trans audience members. I remain somewhat ambivalent about trans and queer people being caught up in Cassil's performance and becoming the voyeuristic witnesses to violence, particularly for those who have witnessed or been victims of violence. The performance content is clearly explained to the audience before they enter, and I acknowledge this question warrants a more thorough discussion than what is possible here. However, what I can point to is that my experience of *Becoming an Image* taught me to never assume the normativity of the viewer, cis or trans alike.

Cassil's work excels at translating their experiences to the bodies of the viewers through the flesh-on-flesh soundscape, the viewer's unexpected experience of becoming an image, and their participation in witnessing violence. When I use methods of collage, cropping, and undoing in *PDA*, I am not only exploring fragmentation through my own body. It is also the cisnormative narrative of gender that is being cut, deleted, and remade through cropping and collage. The man who found *Date night* so confronting demonstrates my point. In his comments about *Date night*, he referred to his own body numerous times. He physically mapped gender through a performance of contours, refusing to accept that my contours and his could co-exist in masculinity. It was his own gender identity that was showing fractures, not mine. It was *his* responsibility to manage that. My experiences on the opening night of *PDA*, and Cassil's performance, showed how the relative safety of the gallery and/or institution can be a powerful and productive platform to confront transphobia. Working out my responsibilities toward different audience members presents many complex questions, and these questions are productive for future work.



A key contribution of *Becoming an Image* is that the focus on this work is not about how trans bodies change. The work is about what trans bodies can *do* and *un-do*. In *PDA*, I am showing action, process, destruction, and preservation *through* my material photographic processes. However, showing trans bodies physically in action—shaping, changing, undoing, destroying, and reconfiguring—is a powerful way to represent the potential of trans bodies. As such, I would like to incorporate more active visualisations of trans bodies into the images I create in the future. Throughout Cassils's practice, their unapologetic approach to countering hegemonic trans narratives, as well as their precise use of the mediums which deliver these narratives, contribute significantly to a more expansive visual world.

### **Conclusion: Everyday building materials**

Throughout this chapter, I have built the material connections between bodies, genders, photographs, and archives by weaving together key ideas from trans and gender diverse authors, academics, theorists, and artists: Crawford's (2010) conceptualisation of trans bodies as a series of stopovers that contests the idea of arriving home; Preciado's emphasis "on becoming" and Testogel's erotic, architectural potential (2013, 143); Halberstam's (2018b) architectural building and remaking of trans bodies; Cahun and Moore's everyday performances; Cassils's artwork and lived experiences of gender as iterative. They have all informed how I visually demonstrate my central objectives, namely, to show how trans and queer bodies that are in the process of un-doing and re-making, that do not seek resolution or adhere to popular ideas of authenticity, can actively and playfully contest the expected narratives.

Creating a photo archive that explores assembling, undoing, and performing gender expansiveness is not only about recording change, it is a way to make room for change. Through *PDA*, I am creating what I cannot see in my visual spaces around me. I am also understanding myself visually through this process of public self-assemblage. By staging a performance through photographic images in the art gallery, which is historically a heterosexual space, I have developed visual methods that demonstrate how gender-expansive representation can shape

the conversations in these spaces. Challenging normative gender in art galleries and institutions should always connect to a broader agenda for improving access, support, and respect for all groups of people who have not traditionally been visible in these spaces and/or not been able to represent themselves in these spaces.

Crawford's conceptualisation of stopovers connects to Cahun and Moore's emphasis on bodies and gender as multiple and iterative. Although from a different time and place, Cahun and Moore's archive has shown me the performative possibilities of integrating everyday life and practice. Their photographs cannot be read as evidence and Cahun's knowing performances require the audience to engage in an active and ongoing collage approach. It is a similar engagement I want viewers to have with my own work. Understanding Cahun and Moore's archive as performance led to the realisation that *PDA* is a performative archive. Or, to adapt Crawford's (2010) concepts, *PDA* is a series of performative stopovers. Through Crawford's conceptualisation of trans bodies as a lived experiential archive, I have come to understand my own idealisations of arrival. I have developed visual methods to make a mess of ideas of trans linearity; of past, present, and future. I explore ideas of home, comfort, and nostalgia through performative visual methods that embrace a trans camp aesthetic and culture.

# CONCLUSION

## Introduction

The chapters of this exegesis have traced my development of visual collage methods and a research methodology, which have enabled a visual exploration of the pleasures and political potential of trans and queer photographic representation. In this PLR I have investigated multiple ways in which collage visual methods can offer expansion and nuance to the often limited trans narratives found in photography. I have shown how collage can be used to *queer* these stifling narratives, to make a mess of things and find pleasure in contradiction and ambiguity. I have developed photographs that show bodies in process, that are not resolved, and by doing so challenge cisnormative concepts of 'successful' and completed gender transition, legitimised only in relation to normative conventions of binary gender. The creative output of this PhD includes seven photographic series, exhibited in various iterations at fourteen gallery spaces. Supported by feminist theory, I have developed a methodology that prioritises personal and lived experience as a driver of creative practice. The two overarching contributions of this PLR are, firstly, to trans and queer representations in visual photography practice, and secondly, through the development of a messy, queer, collage PLR methodology. In this concluding chapter I unpack each of these contributions.

## Collage in situ

In the years between exhibiting *Fluctuate* and *PDA*, I made five series of works (supporting documentation pages pdf pages 158-151) that explored various forms of collage to embellish image surfaces, layer, and fragment bodies and combine images from different moments in time. However, in the process of creating *PDA* the possibility collage offers queer and trans representations became far more active and tangible. I made *PDA* with the intention to engage confidently and publicly with representations of my gender and sexuality within my imagery. Whilst I had shared my gender with people close to me in the years prior, this exhibition was

my first experience of being trans in such a public way. As the gallery became a stage of sorts, for performance via my imagery, a whole new set of dilemmas emerged. This step enabled me to understand, apply, and experiment with the theoretical and political concerns of my PLR in situ, with an audience. Since this exhibition, I have further refined and developed these theoretical and political concerns through the process of PLR. This research has enabled me to develop a strong platform for engaging in a politics of trans and queer image-making that I will continue to build on in the future.

### **Politics of mess**

It is not only my relationship with collage that has changed over this research, but also my relationship with mess. When I exhibited *Fluctuate* in *Primavera*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in 2013, I had carefully crafted numerous ways to contain and conceal the messiness of the process, of my desire, and of my body, all of which I felt was too unprofessional and too unruly for the seriousness of institutional walls. Throughout this PLR, I have critically engaged with theory (Halberstam 2011, 2018b; Ahmed 2017; Crawford 2010) and with other artists' work (Cassils, Steiner, and Rist) to develop a strong politics and aesthetics of mess. Whilst messiness is not always a choice, and embracing messy gender is not possible or desirable for many trans people, in this PLR I have shown how embodying a messy approach to gender as a trans person can be political. For me, messiness is about my embodiment of gender as always in process and refusing resolution. Not only can messiness be political, but I suggest it offers a key narrative and material qualities that can complicate, challenge, bring playfulness, and pleasure to trans photographic representations in art spaces.

### **Materiality of gender**

I have approached trans image-making and trans identity through materiality. For instance, Chapter 3 begins by detailing the process of making the images for *Fluctuate*, where I

conceptualise collage and mess through the sculptural processes of casting. As this PLR developed, I began to understand collage and mess through the process of building and sculpting my body. In Chapter 3 I have explored how I do this through testosterone and surgery, but also how I have sculpted (undone and remade) my body through photographic methods such as close-ups, scale, collage, saturated colour, cropping, and camp performances. Building on what I have learned through Preciado's (2013) book *Testo Junkie* and Cassil's art practice, I understand my body as materials to be reconfigured (for example skin, fat, muscle, molecules, hair, clothing) taking it from elsewhere, pasting it, absorbing it, growing it, reducing it, removing it, shedding it, and using it differently. I have collaged a flexible masculinity and femininity that shifts and changes through relationality, desire, performance, intimacy, and self-reflection. Throughout this research I have made frequent connections between the materiality of imagery, the "*materiality of gender*" (Preciado 2013, 142; italics in original), and the materiality of archives. Doing so is a way of enacting my queer, collage practice-led methodological approach, which hinges on collaging my lived embodied experience, theoretical engagement, and my visual arts practice.

### **Pleasures of unprofessionalism**

A queer politics and aesthetics of collage and mess has been developed and expanded through my engagement with and forging of connections between numerous feminist, trans, and queer authors, artists, and theorists. I understand this as a process of collage in its own right: In this exegesis I have collaged one of multiple potential queer lineages. Through Halberstam (2011), I understand how my queerness brings disruption and how the queer politics of failure can be pleasurable. I have borrowed Halberstam's theories and applied some key ideas to photographic practice, where, for example, I have shown how embracing amateurism through my photographic methods is a way to reject seriousness and patriarchal and Euro-centric notions of professionalism. I explain that professionalism can involve policing and maintaining disciplinary boundaries, and mess, queer, collage offers the possibility of eroding these hard edges (Campbell and Farrier 2015). I connect typically amateur photographic methods that are often

seen as superficial and apolitical, such as saturated colour and the DIY qualities of collage, to camp aesthetics and politics. As discussed in Chapter 5, in my series *Shower Scenes*, I embraced the connections between camp and collage: a process of appropriating, imitating, fictionalising, amalgamating, creating “incongruous juxtapositions” (Newton 1979, 106) and finding pleasure in excess. Embodying a position of queer failure, following Halberstam (2011), has not only been compelling and generative, but has also come as a relief. Visually exploring the flimsiness and flexibility of rules and regulations for gender, sexuality, and for professionalism as an artist has been liberating.

### **Developing a messy rigour**

In my discussion of bricolage methodologies in creative practice research (Chapter 1), I identified that there is room for more emphasis in these theories on embodiment, positionality, practice, and disruption. I develop a methodology that is focused on a queer and feminist politics of bringing together pieces from elsewhere, on juxtaposition, amateurism, damage, excess, and a deliberate anti-monumentalism. In this way, my methodology has a camp twist. Like photographs saturated in colour, camp and mess are concepts easily presumed frivolous or haphazard. Instead, as Campbell and Farrier argue in their messy creative practice research methodology, “messiness requires its own (queer) rigour” (ibid). I understand this rigour through an active and material engagement that is reflected in my artistic work. This hands-on rigour is also present in Ahmed’s (2017) description of a politics centred on re-making. Ahmed emphasises the need for enacting and living a politics of working with your hands to break things that need to be broken, but importantly, to reflexively design and build, with intention, a more inclusive and expansive space. Throughout this PLR I have not only worked at integrating embodied knowledge into my research but have worked at continually figuring out how to live the theory, methodologies, and politics in my everyday life. The process of continually *undoing* and *remaking* the interrelationships between theory, practice, and lived experience is a practical and material everyday challenge.

## Flexible narratives

This PLR has involved recognising the malleability of narratives I have constructed about both my gender and my practice. In Chapter 4 I discussed my exploration of my digital archive on old hard drives with an intention to build a clearer 'picture' of my past, and how through this process the performative potential of archives became apparent. In Chapter 3 I looked back at *Fluctuate* from a different position, to critique and reframe my experiences and early interpretations of this 2013 series. I do not, however, dismiss these previous interpretations. Throughout this PLR I show how my experiences as a female-identified person have assisted significantly with understanding numerous dilemmas encountered as a trans person. I suggest that it can be important not to erase old narratives to present a neat story. I invite a reflection upon my experience of changing positionalities, which offers a unique insight into gender in art and photography practice. I have demonstrated these ideas through practice, learning from Cassils and Crawford (2010), who both challenge linear ideas of trans arrival. In *PDA* I have collaged images from my archives from various moments and performatively and playfully made a mess of 'before and after' trans narratives. I have not only argued for flexibility in trans and gender diverse photographic representation, but also for the value of flexibility in a methodology. My messy methodology has been developed and changed through the *process* of this PLR. Trans and gender diverse research requires flexible thinking, and, as such, methodologies need to be open to changing throughout the process of research.

## Anti-heroic imagery

Through the theory and art practices outlined above that I have also developed an *anti-heroic* approach to image-making. My approach is significantly different to the large-scale photographs of Andreas Gursky and Thomas Demand, mentioned in the introduction, whose objectives are to inspire awe and to distance the viewer through high-definition clarity. Throughout this PLR I have shown how collage visual methods can communicate intimacy by inviting the viewer to move in close. For example, I have worked with scale, cropping, familiar aesthetic references,



gritty textures, and saturated colour that are full of haptic potential to encourage this type of audience engagement. All of my series are made up of multiple images that come together as small archives on the gallery wall. They are not operating as singular, heroic outcomes. I work with large-scale prints, but through close-ups and fragmentations to embrace ambiguity. Through this PLR I have learnt how to take up space without replicating the same structures of heroism and monumentality I am critiquing. I suggest that inviting people to absorb themselves in the messy and sometimes intimate details of the image content is an important method of countering normative cisgender framing of trans bodies as spectacle, medicalized, and as distant.

### **Photography mythologies and trans mythologies**

Throughout this PLR I connect normative practices within the photographic medium to normative trans and queer narratives. For example, in Chapter 2 I outlined the common belief that photography can capture reality and to possess or reveal truth. I refer to Solomon-Godeau who writes in relation to photographs that “we frequently assume authenticity and truth to be located on the inside...at the same time, we routinely—culturally—locate and define objectivity...in conditions of exteriority, detachment, of nonimplication” ([1995] 2017, 12). I connect this to Benthien’s (2002) concept where authenticity represents the inner self or is located only on the surface of the skin. I layer these ideas with how gender is frequently read as a collection of indexical signs located only on the surface of the body, ignoring the fact that someone’s gender identity cannot be guessed from their presentation (Getsy 2015). I visually explore Halberstam’s (2016; 2018b) proposal that complicating the boundaries between the inside and outside of bodies, and exploring abstraction, can be a political method of undoing how gender is represented and reducing the emphasis on exteriority. However, through my own practical experiences with these ideas, through cropping out my face, close-ups, and collage, I noticed a familiar response. It was assumed that I was deceptively concealing my gender assigned at birth, as I outlined in Chapter 5. I explored a similar theme in Chapter 3: in Allen’s review of Rist’s work he articulates a clear expectation that she uphold his patriarchal version

of 'reality'. In both instances, my concern is not about the reviewer/audience member not liking the work, rather it is their resolute belief in their authority to act as the authenticator and the regulator of gender and objective reality. What I have learned through conducting this PLR, and through *PDA* in particular, is that I can use medium-specific ideas about photography to converse with cisnormative concepts of gender and transphobic rhetoric that frames trans bodies as deceptive and fraudulent. The concurrent critique of photographic tropes and cisnormative tropes through my queer, collage methodology generates nuanced understandings of both areas of research.

### **Self-representation**

In this PLR I have suggested that the project of valuing first-person perspectives in research and ensuring trans people are representing themselves on institutional walls is an urgent one, connected to the necessity of trans and gender diverse people being able to self-identify gender in other institutional settings. This PLR is part of a broader conversation gaining traction within visual arts spaces, where imagery made by trans people, with a diversity of experiences, is prioritising plurality and valuing self-representation. Contesting normativity as it relates to gender not only positively impacts trans peoples' experiences in art galleries, institutions, and academia, but can be instigative of improvements to inclusivity for all social groups. Throughout this research I have also learned the necessity of being responsive to the exhibition and/or institutional context in that these spaces are far from neutral in terms of gender as well as race, ability, and other socially structuring factors. I have recognised the importance of utilising these exhibition platforms to engage with the public politics of trans representation more boldly. I have developed a strong political and theoretical foundation to have these conversations publicly in art galleries.

## Queer Connection

Something that I have learned from many artists, yet intuited in particular from Cahun and Moore's photographs, is that a photographic practice need not only be orientated towards countering, refuting, and working in opposition to norms. A practice can also be driven by the pleasure and enjoyment that emerges from the everyday processes of making photographs and making oneself. In many ways, *PDA* visually explores this objective. I have suggested that the exploration of pleasure is not at expense of politics. A key part of my future exploration of what messy, collaged trans bodies can *do* and *undo*, will be to continue my exploration of how trans and queer bodies *connect*. I am interested in further exploring queer and trans intimacy and friendship through photography and working collaboratively, alongside other trans and queer people, to create these possibilities. I am interested in exploring, assembling, and writing about queer, collaged archives, of affective, and haptic queer imagery made by others. I am also interested in enacting my messy, queer, collage politics through community-based projects and further understanding the local histories of trans artists in Perth. I continue to come back to the same motivation that I sense so many queer and trans artists are driven by — the necessity of building, rebuilding, and accentuating what you do not see frequently enough.

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## FIGURE LIST

- Figure 1. Lee Miller, *Portrait of Space*. 1937, Gelatin silver print. The Art Stack, <https://theartstack.com/artist/lee-miller/portrait-space-egypt>.
- figure 2. Jack Ball, *Fluctuate #4*, from the series *Fluctuate*, 2013, inkjet print on archival rag, 140 x 210cm.
- figure 3. Jack Ball, *Slow summer*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag and gloss (2 panels), 70 x 105cm.
- figure 4. Tracey Moffatt, *Passage*, [installation view of exhibition titled *My Horizon*, Australian Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia 2017], 2017, photographic installation. The Venice In-sider, <https://www.theveniceinsider.com/art-biennale-2017-australia/>
- figure 5. Tracey Moffatt, *Hell*, from the series *Passage*, 2017, type C photograph on gloss paper, 105.5 x 156cm. SBS NITV website. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/culture/nitv-news/article/2017/03/24/tracey-moffatts-hell-57th-venice-biennale>
- figure 6. Tacita Dean, *Floh*. 2001, book format, 30 x 24 cm. Artist's Books and Multiples. <http://artistsbooksandmultiples.blogspot.com/2013/04/tacita-dean-floh.html>
- figure 7. Jack Ball, *Fluctuate*, [installation view, *Primavera 2013: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, exhibition curated by Robert Cook], 2013. Photograph by Jack Ball.
- figure 8. Jack Ball, *Fluctuate #6*, [installation view, *New Matter: Recent forms of photography*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, exhibition curated by Isobel Parker Philip], 2016. Photograph by Jack Ball.
- figure 9. Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.
- figure 10. Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.
- figure 11. Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.
- figure 12. Jack Ball, studio image, developing the series *Fluctuate*, 2013.
- figure 13. Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment* [installation view TATE Modern]. 2005, translucent polyethylene. Rachel Whiteread, Catherine Wood, Gordon Burn and Tate Modern, eds. 2005. *Rachel Whiteread: Em-bankment*. London: Tate Publishing.

- figure 14. Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment* [installation view TATE Modern]. 2005, translucent polyethylene. Rachel Whiteread, Catherine Wood, Gordon Burn and Tate Modern, eds. 2005. Rachel Whiteread: Em-bankment. London: Tate Publishing.
- figure 15. Rachel Whiteread, *Embankment* [installation view TATE Modern]. 2005, translucent polyethylene. Rachel Whiteread, Catherine Wood, Gordon Burn and Tate Modern, eds. 2005. Rachel Whiteread: Em-bankment. London: Tate Publishing.
- figure 16. Pat Brassington, *Like a Bird Now*, 2010, pigment print, 85 x 60cm. Stills Gallery website. [http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/brassington/index.php?obj\\_id=folio&image=14&nav=17](http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/brassington/index.php?obj_id=folio&image=14&nav=17).
- figure 17. Pat Brassington, *Coming*, 2010, pigment print, 100 x 72cm, Stills Gallery website. [http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/brassington/index.php?obj\\_id=folio&image=2&nav=17](http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/brassington/index.php?obj_id=folio&image=2&nav=17).
- figure 18. Pipilotti Rist and Muda Mathis. *Japsen* [still]. 1988, single-channel video, sound, colour, sound by Muda Mathis, Pipilotti Rist and Les Reines Prochaines. Museum of Contemporary Art website. <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/pipilotti-rist-sip-my-ocean-curatorial-essay/>.
- figure 19. Pipilotti Rist, *The Tender Room* [still]. 1997. Vogue Magazine website. <https://www.vogue.com/article/moving-image-pioneering-video-artist-pipilotti-rist-transforms-the-galleries-at-the-wexner-center-for-the-arts>.
- figure 20. Pipilotti Rist, *Pickelporno* [still]. 1992. Single-channel video and sound. Muse Magazine website. <http://www.musemagazine.it/pipilotti-rist/>.
- figure 21. Pipilotti Rist, *Administrating Eternity* [Installation view, Pipilotti Rist: Komm Schatz, wir stellen die Medien um & fangen nochmals von vorne an, Kunsthalle Krems, Austria 2015]. 2011, Four-channel video installation with sound. Photo by Lisa Rastl. Museum of Contemporary Art web-site. <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/pipilotti-rist-sip-my-ocean-curatorial-essay/>.
- figure 22. Pipilotti Rist, *Gnade Donau Gnade2* from the Mercy Garden Family [Installation view, Komm Schatz, wir stellen die Medien um & fangen nochmals von vorne an, Kunsthalle Krems, Krems, Austria 2015]. 2013-2015. Museum of Contemporary Art website. <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/pipilotti-rist-sip-my-ocean-curatorial-essay/>.

- figure 23. Pipilotti Rist, *Ever Is Over All* [still]. 1997, two-channel video installation with sound, colour. Sound by Anders Guggisberg and Pipilotti Rist. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/09/14/pipilotti-rists-hedonistic-expansion-of-video-art>
- figure 24. Lola Flash, *Stay afloat – use rubber*, 1993, cross-colour photograph. Lola Flash website. <http://www.lolaflash.com/aidsflashback/j215ktt5ttrfisirssug2d25byw4mnds>
- figure 25. Mona Hatoum, *Corps Étranger*. 1994, video still from multimedia installation. Photograph by Hans Christian Andersen. Kunst Online. [http://www.kunstonline.dk/profil/mona\\_hatoum.php](http://www.kunstonline.dk/profil/mona_hatoum.php)
- figure 26. Mona Hatoum, *Corps Étranger*. 1994, [installation view, Centre Pompidou], multimedia installation. Photograph by Philippe Migeat. Centre Pompidou. <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cdj4RE/reaB5y>
- figure 27. Eva Hesse, *Expanded Expansion*. 1969, Fiberglass, polyester resin, latex, and cheesecloth, 309.9 x 762 cm overall. Guggenheim Museum website. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/1648>
- figure 28. Jack Ball, *No Anniversary #12*, 2014, plan print on bond paper, 61 x 85cm.
- figure 29. A.L. Steiner. *1 Million Photos, €1 each*, 2004-2008, [installation view] photographic installation. Deborah Schamoni Gallery website. <http://deborahschamoni.com/artists/al-steiner/>
- figure 30. A.L. Steiner. *Accidenthell* [installation view Made in L.A. Hammer Biennial]. 2014, photographic in-stallation. Deborah Schamoni Gallery website. <http://deborahschamoni.com/artists/al-steiner/>
- figure 33. A.L. Steiner. *Puppies & Babies* [installation view 3001 Gallery, Los Angeles]. 2012, photographic in-stallation. BOMB Magazine. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/maggie-nelson/>
- figure 31. A.L. Steiner. *Puppies & Babies* [installation view 3001 Gallery, Los Angeles]. 2012, photographic installation. Hello my name is A.L. Steiner website. <https://www.hellomynameissteiner.com/Puppies-Babies-1>
- figure 32. A.L. Steiner. *Puppies & Babies* [installation view 3001 Gallery, Los Angeles]. 2012, photographic installation. Hello my name is A.L. Steiner website. <https://www.hellomynameissteiner.com/Puppies-Babies-1>

- figure 34. Jack Ball, *PDA*, [installation view, Turner Galleries, Perth. solo exhibition], 2019, photographic installation. Photograph by Jack Ball.
- figure 35. Jack Ball, *Shower Scenes 1-11*, from the series *PDA*, [installation view, Turner Galleries, Perth. solo exhibition], 2019, photographic installation. Photograph by Jack Ball.
- figure 36. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [images from archive], 1916-1917, gelatin silver print (see image for sizes). Louise Downie, Claude Cahun, and Marcel Moore. 2006. *Don't kiss me: the art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*. London: Tate publishing & Jersey Heritage Trust.
- figure 37. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [images from archive], 1928, gelatin silver print (see image for sizes). Louise Downie, Claude Cahun, and Marcel Moore. 2006. *Don't kiss me: the art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*. London: Tate publishing & Jersey Heritage Trust.
- figure 38. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *André and Jacqueline Breton*, 1935, gelatin silver print, 10.7 x 8.2cm. Louise Downie, Claude Cahun, and Marcel Moore. 2006. *Don't kiss me: the art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*. London: Tate publishing & Jersey Heritage Trust.
- figure 39. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [images from archive], 1928, gelatin silver print, 10.7 x 8.3cm. Louise Downie, Claude Cahun, and Marcel Moore. 2006. *Don't kiss me: the art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*. London: Tate publishing & Jersey Heritage Trust.
- figure 40. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [images from archive]. 1928, gelatin silver print, 13 x 18.1cm. Louise Downie, Claude Cahun, and Marcel Moore. 2006. *Don't kiss me: the art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*. London: Tate publishing & Jersey Heritage Trust.
- figure 41. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, [image from archive]. 1928, gelatin silver print, 11.8 x 8.8cm. Louise Downie, Claude Cahun, and Marcel Moore. 2006. *Don't kiss me: the art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*. London: Tate publishing & Jersey Heritage Trust.
- figure 42. Jack Ball, *Shower scene 3*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.

- figure 43. Jack Ball, *Shower scene 4*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.
- figure 44. Jack Ball, *Rule of thumb*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, digital print on cotton drill, 94 x 142cm.
- figure 45. Jack Ball, *Home sweet homo*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 105 x 155cm.
- figure 46. Jack Ball, *Sketching*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag (2 panels), 110 x 174cm.
- figure 47. Jack Ball, *Paint box mid-blue*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 160 x 109cm.
- figure 48. Jack Ball, *Island cuts on the old prime meridian*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 65.5 x 109cm.
- figure 49. Jack Ball, *Shower scene 11*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.
- figure 50. Jack Ball, *Aquarius*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 65.5 x 80.
- figure 51. Jack Ball, *Dolphin camp*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 28 x 49cm.
- figure 52. Jack Ball, *Hot pixel mess*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 101 x 175cm.
- figure 53. Jack Ball, *Date night*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 62 x 93cm.
- figure 54. Jack Ball, *Shower scene 9*, from the series *PDA*, 2019, inkjet print on archival rag, 70 x 93cm.
- figure 55. Cassils, *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, Timelapse (Front)*, 2011, photograph. Cassils website. <https://www.cassils.net/cassils-artwork-cuts>.
- figure 56. Cassils, *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, Timelapse (Left)*, 2011, photograph. Cassils website. <https://www.cassils.net/cassils-artwork-cuts>.



- figure 57. Cassils, *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, Timelapse Before/After (Detail)*, 2011, photograph. Cassils website. <https://www.cassils.net/cassils-artwork-cuts>.
- figure 58. Cassils, *Becoming An Image, Performance, Still No. 4*, [Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth International Performance Festival], 2019, digital photograph, 101 x 75 cm. Cassils and Manuel Vason. PICA website. <https://pica.org.au/show/pica-30-gala/>.
- figure 59. Cassils, *Becoming An Image, Performance, Still No. 3*, [Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth International Performance Festival], 2019, digital photograph, 101 x 75 cm. Photograph credit: Cassils and Manuel Vason. PICA website. <https://pica.org.au/show/pica-30-gala/>.
- figure 60. Cassils, *Becoming An Image*, [Installation view of exhibition titled Alchemic, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth International Performance Festival], 2019, digital photographs, clay. PICA Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/PICAARTS/photos/10156144378131526>.