

**SUPERTHERE:  
A cartography of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures  
from a hauntology of  
long-distance romances of collaboration**



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## Abstract

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This exegesis serves as an extended explanatory notation for the SUPERTHERE video collage. The collage is the final creative outcome of the SUPERTHERE practice-based research. The materials of the video collage were generated across a 6-month period of remote collaboration via digital communications technologies between a group of 5 freelance artists all of whom work principally with choreography, video art, and performance. These collaborations were always undertaken remotely - across varying geographic distances - and were understood and framed as long-distance romances of collaboration. The structure of these long-distance romances involved attempts at monthly exchanges between the artists of task based provocations for the creation and exchange of 3-minute Skype video messages. The thematic of the tasks and video messages was always the long-distance romances of collaboration themselves.

The romances of SUPERTHERE were initiated as a response to Claire Bishop's 2012 polemic for artistic work and research to deal explicitly with the experience of 'thinking, seeing, and filtering affect through the digital'. They were also a continuation of works within my own practice which have dealt with questions of long-distance relationships and remote artistic collaboration using everyday digital technologies of communication as their point of convergence. The SUPERTHERE research took up on Bishop's provocation by applying Mark Fisher's hauntological readings of cultural events - specifically music and films - to an analysis of the SUPERTHERE long-distance romances of collaboration. By undertaking a hauntology of SUPERTHERE via the production of the final video collage performance of the materials generated within the project, the research revealed a cartography of queer(ing) failure (after Halberstam: 2011) and ghostly textures. Through the charting of this cartography, the research determined that to *become* in and through the digital in acts of remote collaboration is a hauntological process. This occurs via a post-digital understanding of presence as in-motion and processual.

This finding, along with the expansion of Mark Fisher's notion of hauntology into analyses in the practice-based Performance Studies context, is the principle contribution to knowledge of the SUPERTHERE research. The research employed its video collage method of analysis following the argumentation of Paul Garoian (2008) that collage can operate as a hauntological, queering strategy. The choice of a video work as the final analytical

outcome of the research advances the current turn towards the medium as a valid, generative, and appropriate form of expression of scholarship (Bates: 2015). Emphasising the embodied, the performed, the sensuous, the multimodal, and the affective. SUPERTHERE deals specifically with remote digital making practices. It offers a long form practical example of this type of work by practicing contemporary artists. This unique outcome contributes to the discourse around digitally based artistic collaborative practices and their relationship to the contemporary conditions of precarity in the arts.

## **Declaration of Authenticity**

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I, Melanie Jame Walsh, declare that the PhD exegesis entitled *SUPERTHERE: A cartography of ghostly textures and queer(ing) failure from a hauntology of long-distance romances of artistic collaboration* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work.

Melanie Jame Walsh

Monday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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*“An idea, like a ghost,  
(according to the common notion of ghosts)  
must be spoken to a little before it will explain itself.”*

(attributed to Charles Dickens, Allibone: 1876: 335)

*"I'll write about becoming other:  
vibration, selection, recombination, recombination.  
Possibility is content, potency is energy, and power is form.  
I call possibility a content inscribed in the present constitution of the world  
(that is, the immanence of possibilities).  
Possibility is not one, it is always plural: the possibilities inscribed in the present  
composition of the world are not infinite, but many.  
The field of possibility is not infinite because  
the possible is limited by the inscribed impossibilities of the present.  
Nevertheless, it is plural, a field of bifurcations.  
When facing an alternative between different possibilities,  
the organism enters into vibration,  
then proceeds making a choice that corresponds to its potency.  
I call potency the subjective energy that deploys the possibilities and actualizes them.  
Potency is the energy that transforms the possibilities into actualities.  
I call power the selections (and the exclusions)  
that are implied in the structure of the present as a prescription:  
power is the selection and enforcement of one possibility among many,  
and simultaneously it is the exclusion (and invisibilization)  
of many other possibilities.  
This selection can be described as gestalt (structuring form),  
and it acts as a paradigm.  
It may also be seen as a format,  
a model that we can implement only by complying with the code."*

(Berardi: 2017: 12-13)

*"In theatre, as in love, the subject is disappearance."*

(Blau: 1982: 94)

**London**

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**Warsaw**

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**Berlin**

**Glasgow**

# I // Points of Departure

## 1.

### Introduction to SUPERTHERE

/// questions, definitions, outcomes, ethics, style

SUPERTHERE is the title of an artistic research project. It is also a name for a particular imagined utopian state of relating. An ideal which, perhaps, like many envisioned utopias, is a deeply romantic one. The romantic is both futuristic and sentimental. It hopes forwards and it grasps backwards. It is a particular mode of slippery presence - radial, spectral, always dissolving at the edges.

#### As a title...

SUPERTHERE refers to the artistic research project that this exegesis seeks to support, supplement, and notate. The SUPERTHERE artistic project operated in experimentation with particular modes and contentions of slippery presence and incomplete absences. It worked with these as they related to a digital collaborative artistic practice which took place over various geographic distances. It consisted of two parts: *Romance Phase // Tasks* and *Reflection Phase // Video Collage*.

#### Romance Phase // Tasks

The online Oxford Dictionary offers several definitions of romance. One, as a feeling: the mysterious feeling of love, “especially when sentimental or idealised.” Two, as an arrangement: “a love affair, especially one that is not very serious or long lasting.” And three, as a genre “of fiction (or film) dealing with love in a sentimental or idealised way.” Romance always references and refers to what it recognises and misses as absent, it is based in yearning and idealisation - for the lover, for the future. Simultaneously, it is understood as a precarious event, doomed to 'fail'. In *A Lover's Discourse* Roland Barthes responds to this understanding by stating, “Someone tells me: this kind of love is not viable. But how can you evaluate viability? Why is the viable a Good Thing? Why is it better to last than to burn?” (Barthes: 1977 (trans Roland Howard: 2002: 23) Romance is desired because it enlivens and exists in a place of pleasure as priority. Yet it is derided because of its supposed inability to 'last', to transmute into a (re)productive socio-economically bound commitment. Romance then, because of its priority of desire over

security, and in spite of its grounding in certain dangerously gendered and heteronormative paradigms, can under certain conditions be understood as a queer event. This thinking around a working definition of 'queerness' in the SUPERTHERE project will be returned to shortly in this Introduction.

In SUPERTHERE's *Romance Phase // Tasks* a group of artists attempted to collaborate remotely over a 6 month period. Across varying geographical distances, via purely digital means. This phase can be understood as the data collection period. The aim of this period was to experiment with possibilities for remote collaborative methods. In this case, a method for performance making experimentation outside of shared, common physical space or time. This experimentation occurred also as a research of possibilities for working together as artistic collaborators outside of typical institutional support frames or models for cultural production. It occurred alongside our main gigs: making and touring our own works, rehearsing and touring as performers in the works of others. Maria Lind defines collaboration as a process of

...working with others to do a task and to achieve shared goals. It is a recursive process where two or more people or organisations work together to realize shared goals, (this is more than the intersection of common goals seen in co-operative ventures, but a deep, collective determination to reach an identical objective) - for example, an endeavour that is creative in nature - by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus. (Lind: 2009: 5)

In this sense collaboration is a strategy for, or a strategic method of, two or more parties working together via exchange and encounter with the aim of generating something new. In SUPERTHERE collaboration was understood as a romance process. It was the engine and location of artistic dialogue as a labour of love: work undertaken out of curiosity and out of pleasure – for the encounter of artistic romance – rather than for any external, material benefit such as money or social capital (despite a desire that such financial conditions were different).

As the participating artists of the SUPERTHERE project, we undertook this experimentation via a series of exchanges of emailed tasks and 3 minute video messages using the Skype video call platform. The subject or thematic of our collaborations was our long-distance romance of collaboration itself. There were 5 artists working on the project in

total. Myself, and four collaborators. Each of these four collaborated with me, but not with one another. All were aware that I was seeing other people. For ethical reasons around privacy and anonymity in participating in potentially intimate and vulnerable experiments that would be recorded and publicly exhibited, these four collaborators were known as the Romances: A, B, C, and D. This shifting of the event and meaning of romance - as a feeling, as an arrangement, and as a genre - into the categorisation of individuals participating in the research attended to two things. Firstly, in terms of the ethics of the research it gave a name for my collaborators which was anonymous.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, through the act of capitalisation and becoming nouns, the impact of the Romances as active agents within the research was honoured. Romance was the shape of our collaborations - with all of the tentative texture that that implies. Within this naming, a certain knowing smirk was gestured towards the equally ridiculous and wonderful nature of romance itself in all its expanded forms, particularly within a frame of queer(ing) ideas of failure. Later, as ideas around recognition of co-authorship shifted in the research, and the participants gave their enthusiastic consent to have their names identified with their work, it was decided that they should all be named within the exegesis.

My collaborators were:

Romance A: Jayson Paterson - Australian dancer, choreographer and community artist

Romance B: Louise Trueheart - American dancer, writer, curator and choreographer

Romance C: Martin Hansen – Australian dancer and choreographer

Romance D: Allie Hankins – American dancer and choreographer

Within the body of this exegesis they remain identified by their Romance letter.

### *Reflection Phase // Video Collage*

In *Reflection Phase // Video Collage* the production of a final art event was undertaken. This art event is the video titled SUPERTHERE that this exegesis supplements and expositis. The editing of this video - the trimming of the various clips and stills, the categorising, classifying, and naming of these clips in accordance with the theoretical, conceptual, and formal lines of inquiry of the project - was a method of analysis of the raw data of the research. This raw data consisted of the 3 minute Skype video messages, the

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<sup>1</sup> A section on ethics in SUPERTHERE can be found on page 58 of this exegesis.

exchanged tasks, and the surrounding communication via email and various chat platforms that occurred between myself and Romances A, B, C, & D. This method of analysis yielded a collection of clips which served as the materials for the production of the final SUPERTHERE video; the final practical outcome of the research. This analysis was principally concerned with articulating a cartography of ghostly textures and queer(ing) failures as they emerged from the creation, collation, and synthesis of the initial materials.

The final SUPERTHERE video takes the form of a screen capture recording of a live collaging performance composed from a selection of the edited, categorised clip materials. This collaging performance took place on the desktop of my ailing-yet-tenacious workhorse mid-2012 MacBook Pro, the same hyper-mobile site and source of freelance artistic labour at which the entire SUPERTHERE project converged.<sup>2</sup> This live collaging as performance technique was employed as an optimal strategy to produce an assemblage that would both effectively and affectively narrate the experience of participating in the SUPERTHERE romances of collaboration. It is also the technique which served as the best means of expression for performing the lines of inquiry of the research and its findings. The video performance collage is a document which traces the exploratory intentions of the SUPERTHERE research; exploratory more than argumentative, opening a case rather than attempting to close one.

As a narrative mode, collage is understood here as *hauntological* - it traces spectral contours of overlapping elements and time fragments, it creates and opens out spaces of speculation and potentiality in what it elides, occludes, and repeats. Collage channels different time frames at once, whilst refusing to centre any one image, gesture, or argument. It refuses the 'successful' closing of narrative. In this sense, it is a potential queering strategy - it operates radially - emanating rather than charging through; rather than with a linear or horizontal concept of logic, refusing traditional hierarchical dramaturgies. Drawing on Deleuze's notion of the potentiality of spaces of becoming in 'creative stuttering', for Paul Garioan, "...the stuttering of collage enables a radical cultural critique, a narrative process that has long been misunderstood..." (2008: 94-95) wherein, the "indeterminacy and immanent possibilities...suggest the 'haunting' of its interstitial spaces by specters, ghosts, and apparitions of personal memory and cultural history and the imaginings of cognition." (108)

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<sup>2</sup> Bojana Kunst somewhat cynically caricatures the basic tools of contemporary choreographic practice in Europe as moving between multiple collaborative projects and airports working with a "Mac computer and a couple of toothbrushes". (Kunst: 2010: 29)

This exegesis moves toward a hauntology of the undertaking of the SUPERTHERE project. It is in a sense, a ghost story, a particular kind of narrative which sketches emergent ghostly qualities of long-distance romances of digital artistic collaboration; the ghostly textures of the doing of the thing, and of the failing to do the thing. As a survey of romances, it is a ghost story of short lived creative love affairs. It is a hauntology of the failure and failings of series of artistic romances.

### As a utopian state...

SUPERTHERE refers to the ideal of an ultimate, sustained event of intense presence between two or more people. Ideas of presence saturate SUPERTHERE, which can be understood as a hyper-saturated *being there*, and more crucially: a hyper-saturated, resolute *availability* to being there. Being...where? Being there for one another, no matter when and where. *Perhaps*. By design, utopias are ideals, they are imaginings of other ways of being. Always operating in futurity, usually romantic, sometimes touched upon lightly in the shared present tense, in temporary spaces of suspension of the status quo. Because they rarely succeed completely, if at all, attempts to move towards such utopia are usually framed as a failure. Pronounced ambitions of a utopia are often violently derided before they can even begin to become. This is how stasis, normativity, and status quo are maintained - through a failure of recognition of other modes of being and doing. That is not the position of this research. SUPERTHERE is an ambition - it is an ideal image - a romance of something to work towards, something to believe in. More precisely, SUPERTHERE refers to an ideal way of being together; of being in relation to one another. It is a commitment to the potentials of otherness.

Ideas of presence and absence haunt SUPERTHERE as the markers of the 'success' of that ambition - but they, and the concept SUPERTHERE, also point to the unquantifiable consistency of these notions - their evasive, slippery qualities, the impermanence, the becoming-ness, the necessarily processual form of presence. Particularly in a post-digital context, presence/absence is/are hauntological in their texture, in the way that they are experienced.

## // Research questions

Through all of its various forms and iterations - the first proposals for argumentation, the *Romance Phase // Tasks*, the *Reflection Phase // Video Collage*, this current exegesis - SUPERTHERE has sought to respond to Claire Bishop's 2012 oft-cited polemic 'Digital Divide' in which she claimed:

While many artists use digital technology, how many really confront the question of what it means to think, see and filter affect through the digital? How many thematise this, or reflect deeply on how we experience and are altered by the digitisation of our existence? (Bishop: 2012)

Contributing to this understanding of post-digital life and subjectivity through the SUPERTHERE research is significant because it investigates the possibilities and applications of readily accessible digital technologies such as Skype and smart phones in performance making practices and more importantly in remote performance making collaborations. While there has been some research into this area within the dance community, the SUPERTHERE research project investigates the impact of these technologies for the broader contemporary performance community. By investigating these possibilities through the lens of hauntology, failure and the ghostly this research seeks to provide new reference points for the still nascent research around collaborative practices over distance. This focus on collaborative practice is both highly topical (Kunst: 2010) and useful to the artistic community. Writing for the New York Times in 2008 Kevin Kelly speaks of the new 'ubiquity of the screen space' that has emerged with the quotidian presence of smart phones, touch screens and video call technologies. These screen spaces provide a new dimension of inhabitation for their users. Simultaneously, the everyday experience of the temporal is shifting in this post-digital contest by allowing users of screen based communications technologies to 'cut across time'. (Massumi: 2015) These aspects of becoming through the digital are both fascinating and deeply impacting on the social contracts that we make with one another via our contemporary ability to materialise and dematerialise across screen spaces and time frames. This new realm of spatial and temporal possibility offers its own set of limitations and possibilities for performance, not only in the artistic field, but in how everyday people perform their subjectivities in relation to one another.

The question of post-digital subjectivity – living and becoming not only through but as the digital has been theorised generatively by Mark Cote who has set out to provoke an affective “re-articulation of the relationship between the human and technology.” (Cote: 2010: 1) Cycling through the writings of The Futurists, Donna Haraway, David Ihde, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, and Mark Hansen, Cote drafts a genealogy of theory which convincingly supports an argument wherein technology is not a prosthetic addendum to the human experience, but rather it is what defines the human, or being human... 'At stake..our understanding of our contemporary mediated existence and its political implication (also) the provocative claim that 'we have never been human'." (1) This consideration of post-digital subjectivities offers a frame for example for thinking through Roger Odin's comments on the slow integration of the camera with the body which is occurring through the ubiquity of the screen. (Odin: 2009) Cote insists that this demands a redefinition of *techne*. He quotes Mark Hansen who, “considers this technological embodiment in aesthetic terms, specifically how the digital image “has itself become a process and, as such, has become irreducibly bound up with the activity of the body.” (Hansen: 2004: 10 in Cote: 2010: 3) Continuing on to question that “in short, what are the political stakes in the attempt to square the differential affect of a Cartesian geometry of the body with the quantum non-locality of the virtual, especially if the corporeal and virtual are never separate but instead transductively related?” (3). Cote's writing offers an instrumental grounding for my research; combining an insistence on the affective nature of the digital with a solid argument for the position that technology is a transductive property and aspect of being human, if not, post-human.

This exegesis takes the position that this transductive affect, in terms at least of the experience of working with the digital as a site of collaboration for performance based practice research is understood as a hauntological experience. The findings of this research-as-hauntology materialise in this exegesis as a cartography of two entangled elements. One of failure(s) as a queer(ing) event and one of ghostly textures in acts of remote digital artistic collaboration. In traditional terms, cartography is the science, art and process of mapping geographical areas. It is the production of a visual representation of a region, territory or terrain. The term cartography has been borrowed by critical theorists as a useful and meaningful way of talking about the process of charting the 'shape' of affective, political and social phenomena. Theorists have written critical cartographies of the contours, patterns and variations of the terrain of their subject of interest. Rosi Braidotti's “A Critical Cartography of Feminist Post-postmodernism” (2005) is an example

of such work. A cartography in this sense is a form of concept mapping, but more than that, it is a map of interrelated affects produced through political positioning. The great functional use of mapping cartographies in theoretical writing is that they can produce a supple model of the dynamics of a given phenomena.

This is how cartography is understood in SUPERTHERE. It is a mapping of tones, textures, affects, and modes. A cartography of queer(ing) failure is a map of speculative optimism, of futurity rather than ennui. A cartography of ghostly textures in the frame of SUPERTHERE charts the fleeting embodiments and instances of the hauntological as it is experienced through the digital; phenomena of glitch, loop, repetition, signal loss, and so on which produce a particular set of affects – of *felt* experience. A cartography of ghostly textures is an act of mapping affective aesthetic elements as vapours rather than solids. The ghostly textures of SUPERTHERE, and the conditions of the making of the work - subject to and resultant from a specific set of precarious personal, institutional and socio-political conditions - serve as markers of a queer aesthetics of failure on the cartography that is mapped as a principal finding of this research.

As a research project, SUPERTHERE sits within a body of research into the use of video conferencing technologies such as Skype in performance and in rehearsals. Pauline Brooks' 2010 article 'Creating new spaces: Dancing in a telematic world' describes her experience of collaborating between Philadelphia and Liverpool with Prof. Luke Kahlich to choreograph a series of new dance works using 'simple video conferencing software' (Brooks: 58). As in my first long distance digital collaboration project, *A Remote Year*, which is discussed in the next chapter, Brooks and Kahlich were motivated by their strong desire to work together despite considerable geographic distance between them. Brook's paper about their experience codifies the various spatial dimensions that they discovered through working across three projects, with an emphasis on the audience experience of viewing partially telematic choreographies. Meanwhile, Peter Petralia's 2011 'Here, There and In-Between' offers a useful description of a series of obstacles that occurred through attempting to rehearse with Skype, and strategies for overcoming them.

The interests of SUPERTHERE differ from these fruitful studies however because the project was not about assessing the utility or limitation of the platform in creating an ersatz physical presence in the production of a show, or in the making of a piece with an imminent premiere date. It was about involving the technology in an experimental discovery of

process for its own sake - for pleasure and out of admiration between people interested in working together artistically - with its own interests in working around, through, and against conditions of precarity.

SUPERTHERE refers to the *ambition* of the relationships that occurred between myself and the participating artists of the project across our 6 month long artistic dialogues regarding our romances of collaboration. It refers to our ambition to be there, to be present, to be able to show up, for something to be possible despite the many, many conditions pitted against our *success* – whatever that success might have looked like. These romances were to varying degrees, and for varying reasons, both difficult and wonderful – and these experiences and textures serve as the engine of this exegesis. It is in the *difficulties* of these relationships that the most complex and generative of possibility for reflection and engagement findings of the research were revealed. What was uncovered by SUPERTHERE is conveyed in both the SUPERTHERE video and this exegesis via the hauntological narration of these difficulties and wonders. The cartography of ghostly textures and queer(ing) failures revealed by this narrative strategy - in both written mapping and video collage - attends to the two central questions of this research:

What areas, contours, textures, and entanglements of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures can be identified and mapped through the tracing of a hauntology of long distance romances of digital collaboration?

And,

How can video editing be deployed as a meaningful method of research analysis for hauntological and digitally based subject matter?

**/// Key Concepts**

**// Theoretical Contexts**

**/ Hauntology**

*“Hauntology is the proper temporal mode  
for a history made up of gaps, erased names and abductions”  
(Fisher: 2014: 130)*

*“Why is there something here when there should be nothing?  
Why is there nothing here when there should be something?”  
(Fisher: 2016: 12)*

*“Derrida's aim is to formulate a general hauntology,  
in contrast to the traditional 'ontology'  
that thinks being in terms of self-identical presence.  
What is important about the figure of the specter, then,  
is that it cannot be fully present:  
it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is no longer or not yet.”  
(Mark Hägglund in Fisher: 2013: 18)*

Spectral theories have existed in many forms. Hauntology, as a concept, began as a pun. A joke of Derrida's played on the concept of ontology; a joke on how, when pronounced in French, these two words sound so similar.<sup>3</sup> Crystallizing ideas he had been working with since the 1970's, in Derrida's 1994 *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and The New International* the hauntological is a metaphor for the spectral. The specters of the title allude to the opening phrase of Karl Marx & Friederich Engel's *The Communist Manifesto*: “A specter is haunting Europe – the specter of communism.” (Marx: 2010: 14) By drawing on the evocative deployment of the spectral concept in Marx, Derrida's text responds to Francis Fukuyama's (in)famous claim that “the end of history” was signified by the apparent conclusive and terminal dominance over all other political-economic systems by capitalism, implying that the ideal liberal state had been unequivocally reached. For Fukuyama this event was demarcated by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent apparent 'death' of communism. (Fukuyama: 1992) Derrida's questions to the claim are: If communism is indeed dead, is the communist task now one of generative mourning for a future lost? And what of the ghosts of this ideology, where do they manifest? How do they trouble and disrupt? How do they affect radical agency in the virtual?

Derrida's hauntology arrives via Nietzsche's thinking around a critical history and is concerned with the interdependence of being and not being; slippery presences and incomplete absences. Hauntology is a figurative instrumentalising of the popular ghost concept; it is a conceptual metaphor. Hauntology was useful for Derrida in critiquing the development of capitalism into neo-liberalism and the 'disappearing' of communism. It

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<sup>3</sup> A 'puncture'. (Fisher: 2013: 17)

serves as a tool in his contribution to the deconstructionist project of which he was the founder. The importance of hauntology is in how a modern conception of linear time and ergo, of historicity, can be destabilized through the use of the concept of specters and ghosts and their refusal of fixed temporality and materiality. And through their refusal of absolute states of the positive and negative; there or not there. On the question of whether these ghosts are of the supernatural variety, Fredric Jameson attends to Derrida's thinking by noting that it "does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present;" but ghosts do "make the present waver". (Jameson: 1999: 39) By showing up metaphorically and sensually - conceptually, culturally, *texturally*, within art objects, for example - ghosts and specters dissolve the edges of claims by the here and now as fixed and immutable.

Derrida's ghost is a conceptual metaphor. Conceptual metaphors can possess agency in systems of knowledge production that an everyday or literary metaphor does not. (Bal: 2010: 10) A conceptual metaphor operates, it works or labours, to dynamically and generatively produce new or other theoretical possibilities. The conceptual metaphor of the spectral heralds "the ghost's emerging status as an analytical tool that *does theory*" (del Pilar Blanco: 2013: 1). The ghost's appeal as an instrument of analysis underpins the Spectral Turn, a moment still in progress in the academy which began in the late 1980's. Pervading a broad range of interdisciplinary discourse from Trauma Studies to Architecture to Gender Theory:

(T)he ghost, as a figure of multiplicity that has turned (from being alive to living-dead) and, as a haunting force, keeps turning up, turning into, and returning in unpredictable and not always easily demarcated ways, could inaugurate an alternative logic of the turn as something not necessarily definitive or revolutionary in the sense of radically new. Instead of demanding a distancing, the twists and turns of haunting manifest as a layering, a palimpsestic thinking together, simultaneously, rather than a thinking against or after (as in the plethora of counters and posts each scholarly turn tends to precipitate). The spectral turn, then, may be read not only as a turn to the spectral, but also as the spectralization of the turn - its unmooring from defined points of departure, notions of linear progress, and fixed destinations. (del Pilar Blanco: 32)

The spectral turn encompasses and engages ghostly concepts other than the hauntological.<sup>4</sup> The hauntological - as a spectral metaphor - refuses a fixed shape. Here though, in this exegesis, the anchor will be dropped at a location concerned with the effects of Derrida's hauntology as they have emanated into models for dealing with cultural texts and artifacts - with art and its practice.

In 2013, Mark Fisher published *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* which brought together much of the author's thinking on the spectral that had appeared on his essential *k-punk* blog and in various articles published across a roughly 10-year period. Fisher's hauntology is deeply committed to a blistering critique of late-capitalism, and of the obliteration of innovation in (pop) cultural production as a symptom of the perceived neoliberal sickness. It is not without its problems. Through treatments of music, literature and cinema *Ghosts of My Life* presents evidence and expressions - ghosts - of 'the slow cancellation of the future', a phrase he borrows from Franco Berardi. Fisher pursues specters of futures, particularly futures of promise of social mobility and access for members of working class Britain growing up in the 70's and 80's, which bleakly failed to materialise. In this pursuit, he enacts a kind of mourning for the possibility of the 'new', for the radical innovations which appeared, in particular in popular and electronic music in the UK at that time - Rave, Jungle, Garage - which have so starkly tapered off and been replaced by indiscernible, sanitised yet vaguely melancholic simulacra of the past - Adele, Eurotrash. What Fisher's hauntology offers abundantly is a model for dealing specifically with cultural texts, with art works and processes, as hauntological. This model offers a departure point for talking about the production and form of SUPERTHERE, and as an impetus for assembling the final video collage of the project. Here, hauntology is defined as an affect, a set of uncanny textures, which effect senses of temporal and spatial dislocation within art objects or events.<sup>5</sup>

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4 "Although *Specters of Marx* is often seen to stand at the origin of the so-called "spectral turn"...it would go against the spirit of the specter—and Derrida's elaboration of it—to assign a unitary genesis to what was in fact a diffuse, extended cultural moment." (10)

5 The notion of the uncanny is important to this exegesis and so I will clarify its use here. The uncanny is an affect. It is the affect operating at the center of the hauntological and ghostly textures. It pertains to the feeling of something being strangely familiar, eerie, or somehow unsettling. It is the feeling of *deja vu* and also of there being a 'presence' in the house, in the space, in the room. The uncanny can be creepy, but deliciously so. The word has taken on this contemporary meaning through Freud, or rather with a translation from Freud of his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche*. 'Unheimlich' in literal translation to English from German means 'unhomely'. Mark Fisher takes up the leap made from unhomely to uncanny in the introduction to his book 'The Weird and the Eerie'. Closely reading Freud's essay Fisher, rejects what he perceives as Freud's disappointing reduction of the unheimlich to castration anxiety and instead picks up on cluster of ideas that Freud cycles through in his description of the uncanny - including phenomena of repetition and doubling - which flesh out the uncanny, not only as an affect, but also a mode. Almost a genre, like romance. A genre

In assessing his reluctance to begin engaging with hauntology, Mark Fisher explains his reluctance to align with Derrida:

I'd generally found Jacques Derrida, the inventor of the term, a frustrating thinker. As soon as it was established in some areas of the academy, deconstruction, the philosophical project which Derrida founded, installed itself as a pious cult of indeterminacy which at worst made a lawyerly virtue of a voiding any definitive claim. Deconstruction was a kind of pathology of scepticism, which included hedging, infirmity of purpose and compulsory doubt in its followers. It elevated particular modes of academic practice – Heidegger's priestly opacity, literary theory's emphasis on the ultimate instability of any interpretation – into quasi-theological imperatives. Derrida's circumlocutions seemed like a deintensifying influence. (2014: 17)

Fisher's commitment and fidelity to the Marxist materialist critique as the cornerstone of Leftist academic analysis initially finds the evasive and oblique strategies of Derrida irritating and un-useful.<sup>6</sup> Through this careful and patient critical distance, he locates a materialist(ish) definition of hauntology which renders the concept so much more legible and accessible to the purposes of SUPERTHERE: thinking of “hauntology as *the agency of the virtual*, with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing.” (18)

The agency of the hauntological operates in two directions: 1) that which invokes the past: the revenant; and 2) that which gestures and foretells of what is to come - the arrivant. The arrivant is what saves hauntology from an abject melancholia, it deals in futurity, in the possibilities of spectral speculation. Haunting then is not only “failed mourning” (Fisher: 2014: 22), but is “unlike trauma...distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done.” (Gordon: 2008: xvi) While Mark Fisher is careful in his introduction to present intermittent disclaimers of his awareness of how his position *might sound*, his hauntology persistently

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that is not only 'unhomely' but also distinctively weird and eerie through an identifiable set of textures and tropes (Fisher: 2016 : 3-4) In SUPERTHERE, uncanny is used as an affect and mode that is rendered increasingly clear in definition as the ghostly textures of the long distance digital romances of collaboration are articulated – as affective modes.

<sup>6</sup> See Hite. Christian ed. 2017, *Derrida and Queer Theory*. Earth: Punctum Books. as an anthology of arguments of varying intensity for Derrida's legacy, and late admission, to the queer canon which is instructive in thinking about hauntology as a potentially queer mode.

borders on, and merges into, the melancholic, the nostalgic, and the pessimistic. It is mired in the revenant. If it is concerned at all with the arrivant, it is with the imminent absence of a future worth inhabiting, the imminent arrival of proof that the lost futures of modernity will never, ever arrive.<sup>7</sup>

Despite his melancholia, or perhaps because of its deep resonance, Mark Fisher popularised the concept of hauntology - ultimately stating that the work of this idea for him was in locating the spectral traces in melancholic, ghostly works of art and music which, through their fleeting emergence to the spectator inspired after all “the desire to not give up” (2014: 21). Mark Fisher created a lucid map of how hauntology offers a critique of capitalism while inscribing it with generative meaning in relation to particular spheres of music criticism and production. This work in relation to cultural objects is concerned with how the hauntological – as an uncanny affect which effects senses of temporal and spatial dislocation – emerges as textures of the revenant and the arrivant through the use of different techniques in their modes of production. A simple, ubiquitous example for this being the crackle of vinyl so often present in music of the 00's considered to be hauntological. As Fisher, borrowing from Derrida via Hamlet argues, “crackle makes us aware that time is out of joint; it won't allow us to fall into the illusion of presence”. (2014: 21) His examples, like his writing on the subject are eloquent and proliferate.

The go-to musical style for exemplifying what the hauntological is, is Dub – dub, meaning copy, but also understood as coming from Jamaican slang for 'ghost': 'duppy'. Mark Fisher returns to this ghostly relative of popular reggae hits again and again, as does Eric Davis whose writes about it so:

Dub arose from doubling—the common Jamaican practice of reconfiguring a pre-recorded track into any number of new songs. Dub calls the apparent 'authenticity' of roots reggae into question because it destroys the holistic integrity of singer and song. It proclaims a primary postmodern law: there is no original, no homeland...despite the crisp attack of its drums and the heaviness of its bass...swoops through empty space, spectral and disembodied. (1997)

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<sup>7</sup> It is not lightly mentioned here that Mark Fisher took his own life on 13 January 2017.

Dub, like hip-hop, has important spectro-political implications, it speaks to and for the literal unheimlich (non-home) events and consequences of the African slave trade. These revealing and incredibly important correlations are dealt with in earnest and with great care in other dedicated scholarship. What is of interest here is the way in which the hauntology of an art object is described and inevitably related to the of technologies used to produce it - and the ways in which these specific technologies were chosen. Technologies of recording and transmission have always been understood as, and associated with, the spectral.

In introducing their *Spectralities Reader*, Maria del Pilar Blanco and Dorothy Preen offer a critique of a 2010 exhibition at the Guggenheim as a caution against the pitfalls of the 'critical mass' of the Spectral Turn. The problem with the *Haunted: Contemporary Video / Photography / Performance* exhibition for these authors was the 'stretching too thin' of the concept of haunting, applying it to any instance of repetition, any reference to the past, any blurred image produced by an apparatus capable of materialising memory, inhabiting space or "crystallising time." (Lazzarato: 2007)

Del Pilar Blanco and Preen fault the curator's reading of Barthes *Camera Lucida* in which it is argued that photography as a medium is essentially haunted. The critics argue in turn that Barthes had also specifically made the distinction between photography as haunted and the cinematic as not, and it was in misreading Barthes in this way that the Guggenheim show had cast its hauntological net too wide, or 'too thin'. There is in fact much to be said in defence of cinema as hauntological. Or, more importantly for this research - there is much to be said in defence of the videographic digital moving image as producing uncanny affects of time and place as being out of joint. Derrida's appearance in Ken McMullen's 1983 film *Ghost Dance* claiming, "Cinema is the art of ghosts. The battle of phantoms." is one such supporting claim. Maurizio Lazzarato's writing on video is another. Either way, it is the language of Barthes' distinction between the mediums that prescribes what is necessary from an art object, or from an apparatus of art production, to make it a haunted one. He writes, "in the cinema, no doubt, there is always a photographic referent, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favour of its reality, it does not protest its former existence; it does not cling to me: it is not a specter." (Barthes: 2000: 89) The art object or mode of production *must cling* in its uncanniness, in the unheimlich qualities of its revenant or arrivant claims, to be haunted; to be hauntological, to be composited of ghostly textures.

A key finding through the SUPERTHERE research was not only that the video collage needed to be a hauntological narrative composited of ghostly textures, but also how the modes of production of the project - the doing of it, the collaborations themselves - were hauntological. This hauntology of the modes of production of SUPERTHERE - the hauntology of digital communications technologies, of collaboration, of our economic precarity as cultural workers, and of failure as a queering strategy - is informed implicitly by an understanding of presence/absence as processual and temporal, both within the work of participating in the romances of collaboration, and within the ghostly textures of the digital technologies that these romances existed through. They are hauntological in that it is impossible to name for sure where the present tense of their events is located. In working with this definition, SUPERTHERE moves closer to offering an understanding of the hauntological experience post-digital remote artistic collaborations.

## // Presence/Absence

*"Information is a verb"*  
(Leeson and Shanks: 2012: 234)

In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean Paul Sartre relays the story of waiting for his friend Pierre to meet him in a cafe. Pierre never shows. "Pierre absent haunts this cafe" writes Sartre. (1953: 10) For Mark Fisher, hauntology is the consequent materiality of that which isn't quite, that which is not presently within its being. Pierre absent is a hauntological figure. This hauntology appears via the destabilisation of any simple binary between presence (positive) and absence (negative). It is the presence of Pierre's absence that creates the uncanny affect, the ghostly texture of Sartre's experience - hauntological Pierre clings to him. In this model, presence/absence are processual and hauntological. Pierre inhabits the spatial as much as he inhabits the temporal.

Remote collaborative artistic practices - from the 1960's tradition of Mail Art, through to the simultaneous online performances of Berlin based British artist Elly Clarke's #Sergina project, with her doppelgangers that perform with her online in and between multiple European cities - are all necessarily events of absence. This lineage of artistic practices for SUPERTHERE is traced in the following chapter. For now, their relevance is that they are events - although *perhaps* encounters is a better word<sup>8</sup> - in which the principal absence of

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<sup>8</sup> O'Rourke speaks of 'perhaps' via Caputo, as a word which operates as an opening of possibility, of queer futurity,

the work is of 'live' bodies, live performing bodies, *being* in a shared singular physical space and time. Geographical distance makes this so. The bodies are simply not *there*. They fail to be in the same place at the same time. In the context of performance based practices, this specifically physical absence poses a very fundamental curiosity. Although not the position of this exegesis - as will be made clear across the next few pages - the opposite of absence is conventionally understood as presence, and, in performance, there is no greater value than that descriptor: 'presence'. On one level, in the realm of the lineage of work cited briefly above, this is purely a semantic disruption. The remote collaborators are not present with one another in a shared physical location. They are in fact absent to one another in a purely physical sense. However, what is really meant by 'presence' in a performance context is what is *felt*, more specifically what is felt affectively, energetically, of and between performers, and in turn by and between performers and audience. Presence is an affective transmission. Presence in performance refers to an affective capacity - an ability for a person or phenomena in a 'live' situation to be experienced in an amplified, intensified way. Presence, in this sense, can be understood as “a dimension in which cultural phenomena and cultural events become tangible and have an impact on our senses and our bodies.” (Gumbrecht: 2004: 83) As an affect, as a phenomenon, the notion of presence is contested. It is unstable. Unfixed. It is hauntological - its agency is in the virtual - yet it is not *hauntology* in and of itself.

In Performance Studies and other practices of critical discourse around cultural production, ideas of presence often take their point of departure from Phillip Auslander's concept of “liveness”. Liveness as a concept was first and foremost formulated by Auslander as a means of dissolving the orthodox binary that discerns between the affects or senses of performance in theatrical contexts and performance for cinema or television. First published in 1999, the full title of the work is *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. It is a thesis which attempted to grapple with the increasing use of film and live feed video on stage, to take into account an increasingly mediatized society and increasingly mediatized practices of cultural production including theatre and performance. One of the most important aspects of Auslander's powerful text is its critique of Peggy Phelan's famous contention that performance is defined by its ephemerality, its irreproducibility - for Phelan these are the qualities which endow performance with its uniqueness: “Performance...becomes itself through disappearance.” (Phelan: 1993: 147)

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noting that Derrida always italicised the word. (2014: 9)

The liveness of theatre is understood as its engine, the affective kick of the phenomenon of the event, presence in this context is rendered visible and immediate through the adrenalised energetic interpenetration of live bodies in a shared space, audience and ensemble - all the things that constitute 'The Theatre' - in which some of the people in that space - the performers - are essentially risking the possibility of human failure in order to deliver representations of human frailty to another set of people in that space - the audience. A value in this context is the exceptionality of a performer's 'stage' presence. When Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment states that "Death haunts all performance" (Etchells: 1999: 117) - he is alluding to the potential for a performer to present enough immediacy, or authenticity - enough presence in their dare game of failure with an audience.

Presence offers a way of speaking about performers and performance; it attaches a word to the most chimerical quality of the phenomenon. We also speak of 'presence' when we speak of ghosts. And ghosts are spoken of as the uncanny traces and specters which render absence anything but absolute. Ghosts haunt, they haunt the in-between spaces, the liminal zones between absence and presence - never being one or the other completely. Ghosts, in their fleeting, glitching way, or rather because of it, require belief, a leap of faith, a risk of failure - just like performance, just like a long-distance romance.

Liveness is one way of talking about presence - immediate and anything but dead. Liveness can also be virtual. This is Auslander's contention and in the post-digital context he is not alone. So, while performance presence can be mediatised, questions of what this presence means and implies - across spatialities and temporalities, and how it relates to absence - remain open. In insisting that the ontology of performance is that of disappearance - that in the instant a live action occurs; comes into being: it 'presents', it is also evasively falling away to trace; slides out of being: it 'absents' - Phelan does gesture toward presence as processual; that it occurs in movement. Phelan's argument is in defence and praise of the theatre - it is in defence and praise of *being there* in a unique and specific physical sense - in a privileged sense - and therefore demotes documentation of performance to an inevitably disappointing incomplete archival relic, absent from the 'real' event, absent of the fleeting affect of each moment *as it happened*.

This claim is complicated and diffused by performances for lens based media, such as the

work of Cindy Sherman, and by post-digital works in which performances are performed for audiences across distances and through screens - or, for example in networked video gaming - or, in long-distance romances of collaboration concerned with performance making. The contention of this exegesis is that presence/absence are in fact predicated on one-another, they are in truth, non-binary.

While this sense of ephemerality of performance - and by default, of presence - may be 'like a ghost' – there, and then gone - it is not hauntological; nothing clings spectrally in the sense that Barthes prescribes. A hauntological conception of presence and absence is better located in the idea instead that presence persists; operating in the virtual, understood through absences which are filled with anticipation, suspense, and affect. These concepts become more readily digestible in thinking about cultural artefacts operating digitally than in terms of theatre.<sup>9</sup>

In their introduction to *Archeologies of Presence: Art, performance and the persistence of being*, Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks offer a re-definiton of the ontology of presence in the post-digital condition:

Presence, here, then, is not a function of unity and synthesis; not the untroubled occupation of place, or a definitive *being here* or *being there*, but is performed in the persistence of 'being' across division and differentiation” the emphasis is on “the processual and the temporal” ... “...presence (is) an ephemeral, emergent phenomenon provoked and shaped in dynamic networks of action, response, perception and witnessing. (2012: 11)

This potentiality of bodies-in-motion can be applied to presence/absence-in-motion, and so, to the spectral. By accepting presence/absence as *in movement* - as processual and emergent across time and space; as virtual - it is understood as spectral. It becomes a vehicle of revenant and arrivant hauntologies. It becomes “a queer kind of evidence”, unreliant on visibility or hard proof. (Schneider: 2012: 70)

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<sup>9</sup> For Rebecca Schneider, Phelan's insistence that performance is undocumentable, incapable of transmission outside of the live event is informed by the hegemony of the archive...

“Do not such practices buttress the phallogocentric insistence of the occularcentric assumption that if it is not visible, or given to documentation or sonic recording or otherwise 'houseable' within an archive, it is lost, disappeared?” (2012: 70)

This exegesis uses the phrase presence/absence throughout, sometimes as a shorthand for 'slippery presence and incomplete absence', more often as an expression of the definition of the concepts as processual and in-motion. The phrasing *presence/absence* performs the spectral spectrum of the ideas. With this understanding of presence/absence, SUPERTHERE - which is itself an ideal of saturated effective and affective presence and availability *on the move* within events of physical absence - becomes, like hauntology, a knowing conceptual metaphor.

## // Queer(ing) Failure

*"If you are not queer, you are not paying attention."*

(Colin Self: 2013)

*"A manifesto of uncertainty."*

Planning to Rock, 'The One', (2011)

## Queer

"Once the term 'queer' was, at best, slang for homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse. In recent years 'queer' has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. What is clear, even from this brief and partial account of its contemporary deployment, is that queer is very much a category in the process of formation. It is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics."

(Jagose: 1996: 1)

The word queer is a hard won reclamation by LGBTQIA+ people and communities of a violent slur used historically as means of demarcating, othering, and punishing people for non-heteronormative, or 'deviant', sexual and gender identities and practices. The foothold that queer theory took in academia began with Teresa de Lauretis' 1991 article *Queer Theory: Gay and Lesbian Studies*. This foothold in the discursive sphere ran in tandem with and fed off of the work of queer women of colour - such as Martha P Johnson and Silvia Rivera in the US - self-organising and mobilising movements since the 1960s, and

gay activist groups such as ACT-UP in the midst of the 1980's AIDS crisis - where visibility of queer people and their vicious othering arose through their dying in massive numbers unsupported by the conservative state. The history of the political activism, cultural production, and theoretical work undertaken to achieve the reclamation of the word queer inscribes it with great significance. It also inscribes it with a great fluidity; queer is a queer term. It has to be, lest it lose its meaning and political potency completely. As theorist Davis Halperin points out, "the more it verges on becoming a normative academic discipline, the less queer "queer theory" can claim to be." (Halperin: 1995: 113)

Queer theory is sexual *and* social theory. It is in this complication and indeterminacy that it locates its efficacy and its controversy. Dealing not only with gay, lesbian, and bisexual histories and identities - which are simultaneous histories of joy, sovereignty, and brutally violent oppression - queerness also pertains to almost every kind of social contract, from gender identity and presentation, to spatial and temporal economies of architecture, sound, theatre, interaction. The singular unifying marker of 'queerness' is the lived experience of queer people as 'other' and also the desire to deconstruct, oppose, resist and offer models of difference to the hegemony of heteronormativity around which contemporary mainstream social, economic, and political conditions are based. Heteronormativity is understood here as the dominant socially governing principle that gender exists on a simple binary of men and women as assigned indelibly at birth, and that these two clearly delineated genders operate in a way that is 'natural' and 'complementary' for the purposes of human survival through various codes of dominance and submission, physical reproduction, and economic arrangement. It is understood also as an organising principle which violently defends itself through various appeals to religion, morality and 'nature'. Queerness as a counterpoint to this hegemony, is a radicality and a position of anti-essentialism.

'Queer' then, has two meanings. One, as an identity grounded in non-normative sexualities and/or gender identifications, commonly defined as 'deviant' to the heteronormative order. And two, as a strategy for reading and deconstructing of that heteronormative order as it pertains to and deeply permeates a broader range of social contracts and contexts of cultural production including arenas such as sport, museum curation, cinema, publishing and art. On the entangled importance of these two usages Sara Ahmed writes:

I think it is important to retain both meanings of the word queer, which after

all, are historically related even when we do not reduce them. This means revealing what makes specific sexualities describable as queer in the first place, that they are seen as odd, bent, twisted. In a way, if we return to the root of the word “queer” (from the Greek cross, oblique, adverse) we can see that the word itself “twists,” with a twist that allows us to move between sexual and social registers without flattening them or reducing them to a single line. Although this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to a life of sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of “deviation” in what makes queer lives queer. (Ahmed: 2006: 161)

Importantly, and flowing from this entanglement of meaning, a 'homosexual' person is not necessarily 'queer', and a 'heterosexual' person is not necessarily 'straight'. Legendary queer theorist, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who was married to a cis man up until her death in 2009 wrote on this distinction, “there are some lesbians and gays who could never count as queer, and other people who vibrate to the chord of queer without having much same-sex eroticism, or without routing their same-sex eroticism through the identity labels lesbian or gay.” (Sedgwick: 1993: 13) The embroiled politics and ongoing debate around this positioning, particularly by theorists such as Lee Edelman. Edelman’s ‘No Future’ polemic critiques the utopianism of certain cohorts of queer theory by arguing that queerness - defined by its impossibility of ‘natural’ participation in reproduction and deviant desire - is determined by the death drive and further, that a queer politics should be an *apolitics*. Adequate critique of Edelman’s thinking is beyond the scope of this paper and is dealt with exhaustively in numerous careful accounts elsewhere. Edelman’s position is not the position of this paper, which draws on Munoz and Halberstam as productive critics of his polemic in their arguments for queer futurity. What is of importance here is the opening out of the term queer as a strategy and as a verb, while not detaching from the material reality of the lived experience of queer lives and their social othering. To queer then, as a verb, is to enact 'queerness' or 'queering' as a critical reading strategy in order to imagine and/or enact other non-normative possibilities. A first example of this strategy, relevant to SUPERTHERE and still anchored with the materiality of lived queerness, is the notion of the queer body.

### Queer Bodies

To paraphrase and draw on Judith Butler (1986), the body is a cultural situation – it is a

site in and upon which meaning and identity - particularly in relation to gender and sexuality - are inscribed or fortified through acts of performed acts of repetition in the social sphere. Gill Valentine argues that, "Repetitive performances of hegemonic asymmetrical gender identities and heterosexual desires congeal over time to produce the appearance that the street is a heterosexual space." (1996: 150, in Ahmed: 92) Within this space, queer bodies, "become from this viewing point a 'failed orientation': the queer body does not extend into such space, as that space extends from the heterosexual couple. The queer couple in straight space then look as if they are "slanting" or oblique. The queer bodies, which gather around the table are out of line. This is not to say queer bodies are inactive...spaces and bodies become straight out of repetition." (Ahmed: 92)

The queer body is a body that disrupts the heteronormative codes of legible and permissible performance. This disruption can occur in myriad ways based in sexuality: through performances and acts of desire, affection, and togetherness in a symmetrical gender relation; through non-binary forms of gender presentation, but also in other ways that disrupt the heteronormative expectation of non-disruptive efficient social function, for example, disabled bodies can queer spaces and are normatively read as other. A queer body reads as deviant in heteronormative space.

In SUPERTHERE, the bodies of everyone participating are queer. They are queer because of the sexual identification of everyone participating, but also through the performances of desire and romance between various symmetries and asymmetries of gender relations that take place in the research; the romances spill outside of the heteronormative model of gender asymmetrical monogamy. Further, the queerness of the bodies in SUPERTHERE is inscribed through these romances being acts of queer friendship and collaboration which spill outside of normative models of these relations and fall into sphere of enacting what Donna Haraway refers to as 'kinship' - the structuring of systems of care, support, co-habitation and between people who are not blood related, married, or necessarily in normative romantic partnership. (Haraway: 2017) For many queer people, this reorganising and expanding of the shape of friendship, romance and family has been necessitated through breaks and ruptures in their relation to their family of origin.

The queer bodies of SUPERTHERE are disruptive of the heteronormative codes in these ways. And these relations and bodies are further queered through their relationship to

failure and the ghostly digital textures of their encounters and exchanges with one another throughout their long distance romances of collaboration. The 'romances' of SUPERTHERE are queer in that they spill outside of the boundaries of conventional categories of relating. None of us are 'really' lovers, but the exchanges are acts of love, and in the doing of SUPERTHERE we are more than friends. There is an erotic charge to the exchanges, within the intercourse that occurs through collaborative artistic exchange – we are in a state of play and vulnerability and also of taking pleasure in performing for one another. The long-distance romances of SUPERTHERE are instances of queer “anarchic intimacies”. (Dumortier: 2016) Our consciousness of this, and our awareness as queer artists of what we are performing and its politics, means that the intimacies glimpsed in SUPERTHERE are not 'too much' or 'too precious' to be shared. In fact, all of us are more than happy for the video to be viewed widely. This is a part of our lived experience as queer bodies, the pleasure in the radicality of ways of relating; the pleasure in not insisting on certain intimacies and affections being exclusive to certain silos of 'relationship'. The ethics of participation in SUPERTHERE is dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

These queer-bodies-in-relation unbind the idea of their being 'less than' through their perceived failure to a) reproduce, or b) love inside the lines. For Jack Halberstam, these radical relations of queer failure can be found in “teen comedies and children's animated features,” which, “are replete with fantasies of otherness and difference, alternative embodiment, group affiliations, and eccentric desires. In many of these “queer fairy tales” romance, as it is commonly understood, gives way to friendship, individuation gives way to collectivity, and “successful” heterosexual coupling is upended, displaced and challenged by queer contact. (119)

### Queer aesthetics

*“...to present oneself as being committed to the marginal  
with a commitment greater than the marginal merits”  
(Mark Booth in Greer: 2016: 17)*

Queer is a critical, political, flexible strategy for working in and with the visual, performance and discursive fields - and in life. Queer aesthetics operate via a regularly renewed intention of locating means for disrupting and destabilizing hegemonic, heteronormative modes and monopolies of thinking and production. Queerness is a strategy for generatively rendering all assumptions unstable. This strategy is employed in order to uncover potentialities and

agreements for ways of being in relation to one another; ways of being that centre inclusion and legitimate equity. Queer operates in the realm of the arrivant, it is hauntological in its concern with futurities, potentialities, and ruptures in convention. To be queer is no easy thing, but it can mean to dream with horizon.

Queer aesthetics can be identified via a number of markers. These can be understood as consisting of representations and embodiments of non-normative actions and states of being, not only sexual, but also in terms of social relations, and - as will be dealt with in the next section - relationship to non-reproductive phenomena like failure. Queer aesthetics trouble possibilities for biological reproduction through enacting non-normative formations of bodies in intimacy and pleasure. They produce non-linear and non-Oedipal narratives as a mode of refusing the dominant white, cis, heteronormative male gaze and through this strategy produce non-normative affects (Berlant: 1994). They disturb assumptions about gender performance and disrupt categorical assumptions about ways of relating. Queer aesthetics *queer* through producing radical acts of non-essentialism. For Juan Estaban Muñoz, “queer aesthetics map future social relations.” (Muñoz: 2009: 1) As will be discussed shortly, queer aesthetics can be found as much in the images of 1980's New York nightlife and queer lives captured by Nan Goldin, as they can in Dreamworks animations like Chicken Run.

## Failure

*“This is a story of art without markets,  
drama without a script, narrative without progress.  
The queer art of failure turns on the impossible,  
the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable.  
It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life,  
for love, for art, and for being.”*  
(Halberstam: 2011: 88)

*“It is failure that guides evolution;  
perfection offers no incentive for improvement.”*  
Colson Whitehead (1999)

Failure is an event or series of related events which deviate in outcome to that which was expected or (initially) hoped for. This occurrence can be highly generative of re-inscriptions of the indices of “success”. It can do this by instilling or insisting upon a refusal or rejection of market based desires such as gloss, virtuosity, commodification, closed narratives, and

the codification specific production values as a norm which prohibit access to their means of production. Failure is in no way necessarily a perjorative. It is not necessarily a disappointment. Rather, it can be considered a strategy – for both making artistic work, and surviving late capitalism in the realm of cultural production as artists, but also, perhaps more importantly, as human subjects. This strategy, by virtue of its usefulness and intention in rendering normative assumptions unstable – in uncovering new possibilities and agreements for ways of being and relating to one another politically and socially – can be understood as a queering strategy. This thinking renders visible the neo-liberal delusion of “the end of history” a pervasive, exclusionary lie – and insists that spectres of potentiality, of possibility, emerge in acts of queer failure. Failure is a strategy in the haunt for queer utopia(s).

It is important to note here that failure within this frame is understood as a *queering* strategy, rather than a *queered* one. The notion of queer as a political strategy - as distinct, though of course implicitly entangled with, the notion of queer as an identity – is one of speculative futures, it is one of imagined utopias, it is a futurism, it is an activism of carving out small spaces in which *other ways of being* can be possible. It is not here yet. For queer scholar, the late José Esteban Muñoz, “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.” (2009: 1) Namely, this potentiality is one for ways of being, ways of organising ourselves as a social body outside of, other than, a hetero-capitalist model in which innumerable structures of oppression and subjugation to a narrow normative frame work exist. For Muñoz, this carving out of possibilities (and they should always be plural) can be experienced on the dance floor, in nightlife spaces. For Jack Halberstam, this carving out can be experienced in the leaking out, the eeking out of moments of failure in various artefacts of cultural production - some as widely distributed as Pixar movies. Halberstam argues that within these cultural texts, an aesthetics - a queer art of failure - evidences itself.

Failure in artistic practice in terms of making is widely understood as a generative event. At least at the process level. The advance on this occurs when representations of failure, narratives of failure, performance of the risk of failure, find their way in to the presentation level of art or cultural artefacts. Such presentations create ruptures in mainstream or dominant models of what representation is. They create ruptures in what expectations of entertainment are, they draw into critical focus what the engines of our expectations are as viewers/spectators. They draw into focus what the market is dictating and why. Such ruptures re-open questions of what art is, of what performance is, of what the point of

creative and other types of labour are. A preoccupation with an experimentation with failure in theatre and performance serves as the main artery of the 30+ year body of work of England's Forced Entertainment. Failure was big conceptually in the 90s. We also know it from earlier, from John Cage and elsewhere.

The online 'Institute of Failure' initiated by Forced Entertainment and Goat Island is an instructive, pioneering event. Its typology of failures serves as a source - and in some ways a model - for the SUPERTHERE research.

The Institute of Failure describes itself as follows:

*Situated on the ungraspable border between deadpan irony and high seriousness, The Institute of Failure dedicates itself to the documentation, study, and theorisation of failure as it occurs in all aspects of human endeavour.*

*Existing as a website and through occasional live presentations, the Institute of Failure is a think-tank whose concerns may be summed up in the following questions:*

*What is failure?*

*How do things fail?*

*Why do things fail?*

*What is the part of failure in the psychic, cultural and social landscape of human-kind?*

*Headed by Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment) and Matthew Goulish (Goat Island) and backed by a team of Honorary Scholars the Institute aims to map the face of contemporary failure in avowedly cross-disciplinary style, exploring areas such as architectural failures, relationships that fail, obsolete, dead or 'failed' media, sporting failures, the nature of 'the catastrophe' etc.*

*The Institute of Failure website will present the archives of the Institute, provide information about forthcoming activities and gather resources and links to other materials concerning the object of its study.*

*The project represents the first collaboration between leading members of Forced Entertainment and Goat Island, two highly respected international performance companies whose work shares many interests, failures and concerns.*

The Institute provides the following two taxonomies of types and areas of failure:

1. Accident
2. Mistake
3. Weakness
4. Inability
5. Incorrect method
6. Uselessness
7. Incompatibility
8. Embarrassment
9. Confusion
10. Redundancy
11. Obsolescence
12. Incoherence
13. Unrecognizability
14. Absurdity
15. Invisibility
16. Impermanence
17. Decay
18. Instability
17. Forgetability
17. Tardiness
18. Disappearance
19. Catastrophe
23. Uncertainty
24. Doubt
25. Fear
26. Distractibility

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Areas of Failure

1. of religious systems
2. of economic systems
3. of intellectual systems
4. of love
5. of marriage
6. of families
7. of bodily systems
8. of mechanical systems
9. of ecosystems
11. of cosmological systems

What is also synonymous with the practices of artists like Forced Entertainment and John Cage is the conditions in which their work with failure and risk has been produced and canonized. Their fresh proposals of rupture through repetition and boredom and impossible tasks were ground breaking in their non-normative thinking in terms of the frame of theatre and musical composition respectively. Their work has been rightfully massively influential on the processes of so many artists in so many fields. In the case of Forced Entertainment also for example, the institutionalization of their work, the canonization of their work has rendered its treatment of failure, somewhat ironically, as a marketable product to big arts festival audiences. It has become what they 'do'. Through this branding, it has become commodified, and through this the ubiquity of them - or of their white, male Artistic Director Tim Etchells - their being programmed has become an integral part of a market predicated on elitism and prestige. Meaning that their work sometimes eclipses opportunities for other artists, while ensuring that Forced Entertainment themselves get to continue to be afforded the resources actually required to produce 'works of genius' - space, time, support staff, funding, trust. The work of Forced Entertainment around failure, around boredom, around risk on stage should not be underestimated. It is seminal and instructive and they rightfully continue to work at the place where they are not quite sure what they are have gotten themselves into.

Work around, with, and through failure performed by artists, is political. It is a strategy for countering the conditions of precarity experienced by artists that will be fleshed out in the next section of this chapter. Sara Jane Bailles articulates these ideas in the following way:

Adopting failure as a political and formal strategy (using intentionally low-fi techniques to achieve outcomes, for example, or refusing to make an event 'eventful') suggests ways to maintain art practice beyond the purview and controlling mechanisms that regulate commercial artistic production. Collaborations amongst art practitioners during the last decade or so have given rise to a number of live and virtual projects concerned with failure not only in performance but in a wider range of contexts. (Bailes: 2005: 57)

Small, unfunded projects – necessary labours of love, and a love of curiosity are produced more often than not in club environments and in borrowed or temporary spaces. These particular conditions of artistic labour more often than not mean that production values are necessarily low, and expectations of gloss and virtuosity are recalibrated. This doesn't mean that the work is not 'good'. Or not conceptually rigorous. But it does force an analysis of why conditions are how they are and what conditions the market demands as a door price. It does mean that the work often appears relatively provisional or makeshift. It also doesn't

necessarily mean that the failure of these works are queer. Jack Halberstam offers the delineation of when failure is queer and when it isn't in cultural texts and narratives. They cite the example of Irvine Welsh's classic 1990's novel *Trainspotting*, which also appeared as a film in 1996. The novel is structured as a series of rants and stream of consciousness tirades and musings by its protagonist Renton which screenshots punk Scottish working class life in the midst of rave culture, heroin addiction, fights for nationalism, and the decline of the welfare state. In Renton's famous 'choose life' speech, the contradictory and futile demands on the contemporary masculine subject are railed against. The speech, and the book, veer between a progressive politics of refusal of conditions and bleak racism and misogyny, importantly, they offer no model of possibility for change: no future. Halberstam understands this book as 'decidedly unqueer' in its depiction of failure, "In this example of unqueer failure, failure is the rage of the excluded white male, a rage that promises and delivers punishments for women and people of colour." (92) For failure to be queer then, it must offer proposals that are "productively linked to racial awareness, anticolonial struggle, gender variance and different formulations of the temporality of success." (92)

In 2017, Aaron Wright became the Artistic Director of Birmingham's Fierce Festival. Amongst a number of key observations that he made in the lead up to the opening of his first program he noted that "'unprofessionalism' is a political tactic". This thinking speaks to an understanding that that 'failure' and the provisional are markers of a queer aesthetic in contrast to high resolution, slickly produced works that become at times non-porous through their production values.<sup>10</sup> But it is not the only queer aesthetic. Such a singularity would disqualify itself. Rather the provisional is a queer aesthetic. Further, the incredibly high production values of artists like Ursula Mayer, who won the Derek Jarman award for radical film-making in 2014 and makes incredibly powerful and critically lauded queer-feminist work based in the politics of pleasure, desire, beauty, and science, prove that queer aesthetics can never be singular in their categorisation. Rich Images can be queer images. To embrace the 'unprofessional' as a strategy offers a politic of queer cultural production which seeks to rupture expectations around form if it wants to, rather than waiting in line for inclusion in the big budget program. It seeks, as Gavin Rayna Russom, "...not to slightly change the status quo so that it is more inclusive – but to actually dismantle the status quo entirely". (Russom: 2018) This thinking is reflected in Muñoz's

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<sup>10</sup> At the time of writing this exegesis, the highest possible resolution to shoot and produce video work on, for example, was 4K, with talk of new 6K cameras starting to spill onto the high end market.

argument that:

...queer performances of amateurism...signal a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming. Again such performances do not disappear but remain...and do things in the future... The performance, in its incompleteness, lingers and persists, drawing together the community and interlocutors. Utopian performance is often fueled by the past. The past, or at least narratives of the past, enable utopian imaginings of another time and place that is not yet here but nonetheless functions as a doing for futurity... (106)

Because queer is not fully here yet, it operates hauntologically, it operates by spectrally reaching into and imagining a future materialisation of itself. It is waiting for the Kairos – the ancient Greek notion of the rare perfect, magic moment of transformation. Making small attempts at bringing another way into being in the present; trying and failing, but then not. Or, at least, trying earnestly to model glimmers, glimpses, traces, outlines of different possibilities not yet quite here but hoped for, with quiet determination, with gentle tenacity; summoning imminence. As O'Rourke writes “Muñoz was always already a ghost and queerness for him is insistently hauntological, has a revenantal structure.” (O'Rourke: 2014: 4) Revenantal: always returning from elsewhere, the past passing through. But also, arrivant:

Queer does not exist in the here and now; future queerness as we might call it always occupies the ghostly temporality and spatiality of the then and there. Ghosts come from the past and from the future. (Muñoz: 6)

Queer aesthetics of failure, of the provisional, of glitch, operate hauntologically to effect and affect small, radical cuts in the fabric of what Elizabeth Freeman has dubbed: chrononormativity. Which she defines as:

The use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity...a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate...forms of temporal experience that seem

natural to those whom they privilege. Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time. The advent of wage work, for example, entailed a violent re-temporalization of bodies once tuned to the seasonal rhythms of agricultural labor. (Freeman: 2010: 3)

Chrononormativity also refers to the expectation of people moving through and achieving certain age appropriate 'milestones'. Milestones such as puberty, relationships, having children, choosing a career, and, for women, becoming sexually invisible after the age of 40. Fisher's suspicion of Derrida's indeterminacy comes from an investment in, and the affliction of performing particular anxieties about facts and knowledge and proofs, and class before intersection. This fidelity to a materialist critique is a stumbling block of Fisher's work. It inhibits the absorption of generative queer strategies which - through their reframing/reclaiming/re-distribution of failure, and the rejection of chrononormativity - could offer other potentials for not only imagining, but actualising new organisational structures. Queering is indeterminate, that is its hauntological politic - opening spaces in which the yet unnamed can experiment with its form before the constraints of logocentrism fix it in (a singular) place.

Queer(ing) failure is the failure to succumb to categorisation. Operating defiantly in double negatives, it is a willful failure to be normalised. Writing on her recent *Being Dead (Don Quixote)* performance, Australian artist Kerith Manderson-Galvin writes:

Don Quixote feels close to a queer identity because he's being, living, doing a new identity and daring to imagine a different world where he can be the hero and deserving of love. "For hope is always born at the same time of love."...Don Quixote isn't saying, in the future there will be change. He demands that world now, even as he fails. And it's impossible. I watched another lecture on YouTube with Judith Butler, and in my notes I've written, 'full recognition is a fantasy'. (Manderson-Galvin: 2018)

Queer(ing) failure then is an act of defiance; an inversion of the conventional understanding of the term. 'To fail' in this frame of queering is to refuse the values that inscribe the rejection of your body, your sexuality, your subjectivity, your precarious condition in the place of being rejected - it is a die-trying mode of operation. This re-inscription of failure offers itself to

many as infinitely more accessible than the re-distribution of wealth.

## / Creative Precariat

*“Space, as time, is a fundamental value,  
the social use of which is constitutive of the social order itself.”*  
(Villi & Stocchetti: 2011: 102)

The large body of un-contracted, freelance artists and cultural workers who move from city to city and project to project is understood in contemporary labour discourse as the creative precariat. Usually earning close to minimum wage – or working on irregular short term, project based contracts, traveling frequently to where the work is – increasingly so in the age of proliferate festivals and the biennial and art fair model of presenting work, subject to the gig economy and the persistent speculative, competitive process of prospecting for new work. These conditions of the creative precariat mirror the increasingly precarious labour markets of workers around the world with the introduction of 0 hours contracts and dis-organisation.

The image of the creative precariat has been appropriated and touted by some conservative political bodies as the shining model of neo-liberal flexibility. In his comprehensive survey of the conditions of the contemporary creative precariat in which a number of strategies for the organisation and protection of nonstandard workers, Grieg de Peuter maps the conditions that lead to this false narrative:

The thrust of the role model proposition is that priorities of post-Fordist, neoliberal capitalism are exemplified by the conditions and propensities of those in nonstandard employment navigating the liquid labour markets of the vaunted 'creative economy': habituated to self-reliance; accepting high-levels of risk; allergic to bureaucracy; juggling multiple short term 'projects'; blurring the boundaries of work and non-work time; preternaturally adaptable; striving to be innovative and unique; producing monetary value from knowledge, symbols, or otherwise intangible resources; carefully branding the self; personally funding perpetual education upgrades; vigourously managing social networks within highly informal labour markets; performing work without a guarantee of compensation; assuming responsibility for maintaining

a steady flow of paid work and hence, on job search without end; and willingness to put the passion for the work ahead of the size of the pay.” (de Peuter: 2014: 264)

This co-option by neoliberalism of the socially, culturally, and emotionally unjust conditions in which contemporary cultural workers re-inscribed as an ideal model of the labour subject has been possible in part through the mythology of the glamour of working in the 'creative industries'. It is fortified via the idea that artists and other cultural workers are remunerated through the immaterial capital of 'doing what they love'. The problem with this thinking is not only that it perpetuates the deep undervaluing of the social and cultural value of the arts as a space of critical inquiry and enrichment of lives and communities. It also obscures the fact that the co-option of this 'model' of working is now applied to all types of labour in all types of industries. It is an engine of the atomisation into precarity of all workers.

Hito Steyerl, picks up on this in relation to the privatisation of warfare and governmental security creating a condition of 'subcontracted sovereignty' which 'undermines accountability and the rule of law'. (Steyerl: 2013: 4) Drawing on the etymology of the word 'freelance' – which derives from the medieval word for a soldier for hire, a subject with a 'free lance', Steyerl likens the condition of participating in labour precarity to being that of a mercenary, albeit for the most part unwilling/unwitting. (2)

To participate in such market of mercenaries in this way can be exhausting and demoralising. As artist Elly Clarke states in her interview with me that forms Chapter 4:

And I feel I am getting less good at dealing with it. Like more anxious the more it goes on. Because also as you get older and get more experience, you don't want to take the shitty gigs as much. You know, you become more picky about what you do. You don't have the energy to do so many different things at once.

This sentiment of being worn down is reflected in the recent Tweets of British performance installation artist Tai Shani which are used to frame a 2019 article in Frieze by Chris Sharratt titled, 'Why Artists Are Struggling To Make A Living From Their Art (And The Activists Fighting Back)'. In Shani's reported Tweets she details

how, despite having recently enjoyed a suite of large scale international commissions and presentations she 'makes almost no money' from her practice', she then adds, "I so wish I could dedicate myself full-time to my work but it's more and more impossible. I want to be in the studio more. Trying to stay afloat financially and practice-wise has made me physically sick on many occasions." One of the engines of this precarity, argues Sharratt, is the historical culture of a lack of transparency in the art world about contracts and payments. This opacity has created a culture of mythos in which part of the attraction of art works is their detachment from money. When in fact they are produced in conditions of hyper-capitalism largely by people with extremely specialised and undervalued skill sets.

Like this culture of opacity, the tandem notion of, '*but haven't artists always been precarious?*', evades the implications of the growing labour precariat in the broader workforce, whilst also avoiding the question of the class barriers that are in place that often prevent marginalised and working class people from participating in cultural production. Existing in conditions of precarity doesn't necessarily equate with accepting them, nor does it indicate a consensus with the ways in which critical cultural production is undermined by profit-driven narratives of social organisation.

The idea of the creative precariat is essential to SUPERTHERE because: 1) Precarity is the genuine condition of everyone participating in the projects – poverty line incomes from artistic practice, gig-economy, constant mobility in order to go where the work is – all leading to a condition of the unheimlich, the uncanny, the unhomely; ghostly lives. All of the artists participating in SUPERTHERE are members of the creative precariat; 2) Precarity is the threat of erasure, of disappearing, of being ghosted by the world – it is a hauntological state.

### **// Formal Contexts: ghostly textures**

The Spectral Turn has favoured 'the spectral' over 'the ghostly', and 'spectrality' over 'ghostliness'. Del Pilar Blanco and Preen argue that this can be traced to anxieties by Freud to distance himself and his 'science' from the easily ridiculed supernatural fascinations of the lower classes. (6) The ghostly is presented in this exegesis as a means of giving shape to and conveying the formal texture of an experimental and critical application of Fisher's hauntology. Fisher dealt primarily with the relationship between

music and politics, specifically music and the socio-cultural power of its temporal affects in articulating an assemblage of signs of cultural malaise in post-rave Britain. Here, in this exegesis, what is dealt with are collaborative performance making practices which occur over distances. These practices employ digital technologies in order to persist with presence - in and through, absence - in an age of precarity. Here, the ghostly textures circlude - they envelope rather than penetrate - a sensibility, an affect, a quality, of what it is to take part in, and what is generated by, the intersection of the above concepts within the frame of the SUPERTHERE project. The contours of which are mapped through language in this paper. This assemblage of these contours effects SUPERTHERE as a ghost story; a hauntology: a mapping of processual fluctuations of presences and absences in glitching repetitions of the not yet, of the unresolved.

While the distinction of their nuance is appreciated and attended to in this exegesis, the terms ghostly and spectral are for the most part used interchangeably. However there is a preference here for using the ghostly. It evokes more of the pop cultural than the somewhat antiquated spectral. The spectral evokes, in English at least, a somehow drier, dustier, dead white men's philosophy. In turn evoking that particular philosophy's devices of deliberate exclusivity through an obscurity of language. Most simply, in a collaborative framework, and from an artistic position - mention of the ghostly here proves more direct and evocative than mention of the spectral. The ghostly is the sheet over the head and saying "boo" to the spectral's sleek, well-funded hologram. As will be revealed a little further on, the sense of provisionality that that sheet over the head implies is a queer and ghostly texture in and of itself. From this position, working with the word ghostly feels more satisfactorily expressive of the hauntological at play in the SUPERTHERE context.

The ghostly is articulated here as an affective assemblage of absences which are powerfully revealing of presence/absences, and of speculations of possible futurities and equally possible pasts. It refers not only to the "evanescent ontology" of the events and artefacts produced by the limitations of the remote performance making collaborations investigated in SUPERTHERE. It also refers to the evanescent ontology of *all* aspects of this research including the modes of production and the phenomena which they produce: everyday, digital technology-based, remote artistic collaborations undertaken outside of a conventional institutional frame of cultural production, working with and towards a process rather than a product per se.<sup>11</sup>

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11 The phrase 'evanescent ontology' is borrowed here from Steven Choe's 2014 book on Weimar Cinema, *Afterlives*.

The ghostly then is the neologistic proposition of this research. It is an activation of the word as what Jack Halberstam champions as the utility of 'low theory': "dart(ing) back and forth between high and low culture, high and low theory, popular culture and esoteric knowledge, in order 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) Within this exegesis, three principal areas of ghostly texture are identified: The Poor Image (after Hito Steyerl), Glitch, and The Provisional. Also charted is the mode of digital long distance collaboration of SUPERTHERE itself as both a site and a *kind* of ghostly texture.

## / The Digital

*"In conditions of digital recall, loss itself is lost"*  
(Fisher: 2014: 2)

*"Mr. Watson, come here, I want you."*  
Alexander Graham Bell,  
according to his assistant Thomas Watson  
in the world's first ever telephone call  
(Alfred: 2011)

The events of SUPERTHERE were staged - via the frame, the screen, the lens - with a knowledge that one's actions in an 'actual' space are being digitally captured for virtual transmission and repetition in potentially *any* space. They were produced with a knowledge that digital loss was occurring in the microseconds following the moments of a live performance that was hoped would emanate enough presence to the Romance for whom it was made. Wherever they may be, whenever they may watch. As a digital phenomenon, the ghostly has two experiential parts: a) attempting the transmission of presence - making the video, sending the emails, preparing the tasks; b) attempting the reception of presence - watching and being with the sent messages, understanding the tasks and planning replies responsively. The video messages and sporadic emails were created by people whom, within the exercise, never shared a singular space and time for the project. The videos and text fragments are less items of documentation than they are consciously produced artifacts of attempts at contact, at tracing and intersecting with one another. They are attempts at bridging absences through presence-in-motion.

The shift in understandings of presence/absence that have emerged in the post-digital

terrain are a continuation of the persistent re-calibrations of notions of the processual-within-the-virtual that have been occurring since the beginning of the mechanical reproduction of images and tele-technologies. Mark Fisher notes Derrida's pre-occupation with 'tele-technologies' which are capable of compressing, stretching, stopping and collapsing space and time. A capacity which has only intensified with the internet and the post-digital space that most now occupy. Fisher notes, in relation to the elastic dimensions that define the internet:

Here we have a first reason why the concept of hauntology should have become attached to popular culture in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For it was at this moment when cyberspace enjoyed unprecedented dominion over the reception, distribution and consumption of culture... (2014: 20)

The digital is virtual and the virtual has a new recognised agency within the post-digital domain. This is the space of the ghostly textures of long distance romances of collaboration.

### **/ The Poor Image**

In 2009 Hito Steyerl published their highly influential essay, 'In Defense of the Poor Image'. The paper talked to and about the disruption to the traditional, highly regulated markets of video, film and image production. It responded to flows of economy built around piracy and image sharing that emerged with shifts in digital technology and the proliferation of the internet and its "unprecedented dominion". (Fisher: 2013: 20) It spoke of how the Poor Image operates as a resistant, failed image which corrupts and disrupts the hegemony of the original, the expensive, the rare, and the high definition. The Poor Image is a low quality digital image, readily available to mutations, re-edits, copying, and unchecked distribution, usually experiencing infinite data-loss in the process. Originality and authenticity is of little importance to the Poor Image. For these reasons, it is distinctly hauntological. In this way, the Poor Image defines some of the attributes of ghostly textures. It has the capacity to cut across time and to operate and appear in infinite constellations of looping repetition with other poor images. Poor Images move toward an anti-monumental, low resolution spectacular of a queered aesthetics of failure in their contribution to the critical dialogue around resistance to flows of (late) capital and the heteronormative tyrannies of image and cultural production that Steyerl points to. Steyerl draws a relationship between the Poor Image and the Imperfect Cinema of Cuban writer

and filmmaker Juan Garcia Espinosa's 1960's manifesto *The Third Cinema*:

Like the economy of poor images, imperfect cinema diminishes the distinctions between author and audience and merges life and art. Most of all, its visuality is resolutely compromised: blurred, amateurish, and full of artefacts. (Steyerl: 2009)

For Espinosa, the imperfect cinema offers a strategy for the dissolution of class and labour division in cultural production. It offers an accessible, radical alternative to a 'perfect cinema', the increasingly slick demands of commercial cinema and their perpetuation of normative fictions and mythologies. SUPERTHERE follows this lineage, this resolve to remain imperfect, to make do, to generate from a place of perceived limitation and to queer these failures through the ghostly textures of glitched narrative structure and, importantly, the provisional that will be touched upon shortly in this chapter.

The aesthetics of the Poor Image and the Imperfect Cinema are both saturated in and produce ghostly textures. For Steyerl:

The poor image is a copy in-motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution sub-standard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.

The Poor Image is a problematic, but resistant image. It offers a potential site of queer(ing) failure through its resistance to neat resolution in both the pixel and narrative senses:

The poor image is no longer about the real thing – the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation...In short: it is about reality.

The poor image is hauntological in its precarity, in its absences, and in its processual motion. It is hauntological because it holds a secret. It is a queer image in its refusal of the

hegemonic economy of images in which it is devalued. It is an image of romance because it is (re)produced as an act of love or devotion. It clings – like the spectres of Barthes hauntological prescriptions – it perpetuates the afterlife of images in unexpected economies of flow, capital and exchange.

## / Glitch

*“It is when the language system overstrains itself  
that it begins to stutter,  
to murmur, or to mumble;  
then the entire language reaches the limit  
that sketches the outside and confronts silence.”*  
(Gilles Deleuze: 1994: 28)

In the on-line Oxford dictionary, a glitch is understood firstly as, “A sudden, usually temporary malfunction or fault of equipment.” and secondly as, “an unexpected setback”; a temporal disjunction or delay. The term triggers an anticipation of frustration. A frustration with the contemporary demand that the phrase 'it was a glitch in the system' should serve as an adequate explanation for an administrative error of any magnitude. A glitch is a pure instance of failure; a definite moment of failing. It can be understood as a stutter aesthetic. (Garioan: 95) Glitching carries queering potential through its relationship to a form of repetition that Ahmed describes as a kind of bringing into being while failing to be reproductive. (2006)

Glitch is also the name of a sub-genre of electronic music which emerged pre-dominantly in Germany and Japan in the 1990's. Sourcing sounds from damaged audio equipment, skipping CD's, software bugs and crashes, scratched vinyl. Glitch as a genre offered a demarcation of a 'post-digital' era. It is also understood as a genre which embodies an 'aesthetics of failure' (Cascone: 2002) - one which utilises the revelation of failures in technology as both its material and its subject. The engine of interest in Glitch in its historical moment spoke to the emergence in that moment of the tension that persists to this day between a utopian faith in technology and an acceptance of the fallibility of anything designed by human hands; the hidden failings of the future perfect.

The musical genre of Glitch emerged alongside a general interest in failure as both a method and subject in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The manifestation of this zeitgeist of failure in contemporary performance was highlighted via the work of Forced Entertainment

earlier in this chapter. Turning here to the technologically driven post-digital interests of contemporary art production in the same period, one is led inevitably back to Hito Steyerl's, 'In Defense of the Poor Image'.

## **/ The Provisional**

The provisional is a sensibility that I have considered frequently in making and engaging with art and artistic practices. It operates keenly as a ghostly texture in SUPERTHERE. In thinking this through, I am using this opportunity to further articulate the provisional as new concept offered as one of the contributions to knowledge made by this research.

To be provisional is to be temporary, to be and make use of what is at hand, to be unofficial, impermanent, and explicitly subject to change, replacement or revision. Poor images are provisional images. Romances of collaboration are provisional relationships. Provisional aesthetics are borne of provisional limitations; limitations of productivity, limitations which reveal provisional specters, or ghosts, of what is absent, what is lacking and how conditions may have failed before they began in the frame of the Rich Image.

The provisional is a stand in. A stand in for what is yet to come, what should have, could, would have been, what is not available at the time - for what will do. Both Glitch and the Provisional operate as key threads in the fabric of the ghostly video textures of SUPERTHERE; speaking directly to the lineage of Imperfect Cinema. They operate with temporal affects. As these temporal affects, they exist in the landscape of an hauntological aesthetics. Although the two are not synonyms, precarious labour is provisional labour; the precarious is in constant risk of collapse, the provisional is understood as temporary or makeshift. For this reason, the ghostly texture of the provisional is an appropriate aesthetic and sensibility for framing and exploring precarious subjects.

## **/ Collaboration**

*“Their flight outside the prison house of language  
– if it can be judged to have succeeded -  
was possible precisely because of both teams' escape as individual “artists” from their  
personal bodies into the uncanny but mobile realm of phantoms.”  
(Green: 2011: 188)*

In contemporary performance and choreographic discourse, collaboration is a hot topic. In

a market-driven society, it only makes sense that the science and machinations of how people work together to produce creative and innovative outcomes receives significant research attention. In her 2010 article 'Prognosis on Collaboration', Bojana Kunst argues that, "We can say that collaboration, communication and connection belong to the most fetishized fields of the present day." (23) The contemporary discourse around collaboration is largely and essentially a discourse of production. It is a critical discourse of the political implications of those variant modes of production. This is informed largely by how collaborative practices in the (visual) art market have to varying degrees disrupted the existent flows of that market; blurring identities of authorship, failing to produce discreet marketable 'textual' objects, and challenging qualitative conceptions of aesthetic and critical value (Bishop: 2006), in turn forcing reflection and re-articulation of the desires of that (visual art) market via critique and curation. Collaboration studies are also a strategy for critically addressing the shift toward a multi-skilled or non-specialized labour force which now produces largely through modes of 'co-operation', 'team work' and 'working together'; hallmarks of the precarity of the contemporary political economy.

As Maria Lind makes distinctly clear, "Groups of artists, circles, associations, networks, constellations, partnerships, alliances, coalitions, contexts and teamwork – are all notions buzzing in the air of the art world. However, co-operation in the art context is by no means new." (Lind: 2009: 16) Within the contemporary fields of dance and performance, collaborative making, that is, working together, is more commonplace - by pure dint of the ensemble nature of much of the work. This is not to say that the same questions or problematics of authorship and sale-ability/fund-ability do not densely permeate and shape the performing arts market. It is to say however, that critiques dealing explicitly with *the doing* of collaborative performance practice are more informative to the current research than critiques of *the meaning* of collaborative practices within a market of what are understood as predominantly visual art practices.

Collaboration has become consumptive of time via the emergence of an expectation that we are in constant communication with one another - that the work never has to stop - we are haunted by it. In what Bojana Kunst describes as "...the intriguing relations between the contemporary experience of time and collaboration" (2010: 22), time operates with a sense of scarcity and urgency. For Kunst, the inevitability of 'working together' in the contemporary political economy 'cannot be conceived of separately from time management'. Even in the frame of artistic work, collaborations are generally begun as mutually beneficial exercise in

which the end goal is a product or publicly shared outcome. These outcomes manifest in concrete deadlines and the time must be found to work together enough to meet them.<sup>12</sup> In spite of this time pressure, the pressure of 'productivity' operates divergently. "Collaboration's productivity is essentially a series of unforeseeable events that cannot be planned ahead. Mutually contaminating singularisations just happen – or they do not." (Laermans: 2012: 8). In this frame, collaboration can in some permutations be understood as a process in which individuals work together to eliminate the sense of being haunted by the possibility of failure.

Like Florian Schneider and Martina Ruhsam, Bojana Kunst positions her critique of the contemporary phenomenon of collaboration as "a symptom of the diagnosis of the present time". (27) A time in which artists, like other subjects engaged in the precarious conditions of producing immaterial labour, are caught in what Schneider calls the 'excess' of collaboration (2007: 252) which Kunst summarises as a condition which, "makes the artist "contemporary" in the sense that he or she belongs to the present time, but at the same time, does not radically alter his/her position as such: in that arrest, there is no potentiality, only actuality." (28)

Rudi Laermans draws a line between the "once influential and highly romantic rhetoric of moving together freely (which) has (now) been exchanged for the more impartial work ethic of 'doing a project with others'." (2) Laermans is writing specifically about the contemporary Brussels dance scene, and what he refers to is a shift away from collaborations being based around a common political goal or agenda and a distinct attempt at a horizontality of organisation, to a more research based series of practices in which complimentary interdisciplinary skill sets are brought together with varying degrees of ease and cohesion, and in contingent alliance with one another. These collaborations still rely upon a temporal intersection of 'now, here' to emerge, however Laermans also points out that the more pressing temporal aspect of a collaboration is that it is hauntological, it is:

...always a collaboration yet to come. Artistic collaboration nowadays bets on the potentialities of cooperation itself. They are realized 'now, here', through the actual working together in a studio space, yet simultaneously every momentary realization of a team's potential hints at prospective possibilities.

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12 In the same text, Kunst argues that time management is related to a contemporary denial of mortality.

In this sense, artistic collaboration is always a collaboration 'yet to come'. The shared promise of a genuine social productivity that clearly supersedes both the traditional forms of labour division and a mainly calculative individual investment logic, constitutes collaboration's original impetus and continual driving force. It is also the normative yardstick used by the participants. They hope that a particular surplus value will recurrently emerge within the context of a particular project or a specific situation of joint action. Neither the temporal arrival nor the actual form of an instance of successful collaboration can be predicted or premeditated. (1-2)

In the *Post Scriptum* to her 'Prognosis on Collaboration', Kunst reveals her initial idea for a collaborative examination of the topic with friend and colleague Ivana Müller. She writes that,

However strongly we wanted to do that, we failed because of the lack of time. When I was preparing for the conference I realised our failure was not only the result of the lack of time, but we failed because we wanted to invent and make visible yet another protocol of collaboration, to add something more to its excess. We didn't take into account that we were already collaborating, encountering and challenging each other through many situations, conditioning our future together, with no visibility required. (29)

Kunst then publishes a letter which she received from her collaborator, Müller, the day before Kunst was due to present a paper on, in part, the 'failure' of their collaboration. In this letter, Müller articulates some of the contours of the temporality of their (non)collaboration:

In the here and now I am again in this situation that the two of us like to put ourselves into: the situation of no time, of dead line long time crossed of the future that is not future any more, but somehow increasingly becoming present. Once again, the limitations are so extreme that only this strange mix of intuition and believe can be the right way to think, act and create. It almost becomes our methodology. And once again, just like always when work together, we are reanimating that "dead" line, making it not die, making it active and performative, making it be our friend.

And now Bojana, here we are. We are in the future. This is the moment in which the crowd is coming in and there is no more space to imagine it, as we look at them right in front of us. now. We look at them. Me standing next to you, on your right... also wearing black. We are now together in the future. me imagining it, you performing it! (29)

It is a sense of working together in the now; *nowness*, conditioning future possibilities - which characterise the imperative of conventional contemporary modes of collaboration. A sense of the necessity of being together at a shared temporal intersection, the same moment in time, *finding* those moments in which collaborators can drive relentlessly forward to a future when the given project has arrived; when it is finally 'there'. This sense of 'nowness' however, opens up with the introduction of digital communication platforms - and from their "new communicative possibilities, collaborations become multiple and simultaneous". (Kunst: 23) These possibilities are on the one hand a driving force behind the 'excess' of contemporary collaborations; a marker of the late capitalist condition. These technologies are also a driving force behind the sense of a scarcity of time, however the same communicative possibilities simultaneously open out preconceptions of how it may be possible to situate oneself within time in relation to others.

Speaking at a lecture at Melbourne's RMIT in November 2014, Brian Massumi spoke on the now ubiquity of smart phones and the resultant emergent practices of the last 15 years in terms of how these personal devices produce 'new' or alternate conceptions of the intersections of space and time, and the possibilities in the everyday for cutting up or cutting across of those dimensions. Collaboration itself is ghostly in that one is constantly haunted by the project – one's responsibility to one's collaborator, visitations of ideas in the early hours of the morning, traces of images and sensibilities which evade capture, the constant presence of the seemingly chimerical project. One is haunted by the prospect of 'failing' to work together 'well'. The affects produced in these conditions are ghostly in their very nature – their very materiality so elusive to prove, their transmission and sensation so fleeting and tricky to articulate.

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The notion of the ghostly, or of ghostly textures, is deeply informed by a body of queer

theoretical practice which explores - and for political reasons embraces - failure as a critically generative strategy. The ghostly can be queer in that it is an affective aesthetics based in the chimerical, the mutable, the shapeshifting, the glitching, the provisional. It is a space and a medium of interdependent intensities of presence and absence. These speculative characteristics, and their relationship to failing and to failures - of permanent presence, of stable ontology, of fixed meaning - are produced by the everyday digital technologies used in the project. They are produced by the experiences of temporal and spatial dislocation of the attempts at collaborative practice within the romances of SUPERTHERE. They are produced by the hauntological affect - or ghostly-ness - of what occurs when one participates in these artistic processes, and also when one reflects upon them.

Canadian curator Chantal Pontbriand offers that, "Art is a mode of thinking as much as it is a mode of doing; investigating the real with imagination and perspectivity. It delves into the world in order to find its material. And re-organises this fragmented reality into other visions that can contribute to more creativities." (Pontbriand: 2014) This emphasis on the generative, as distinct from the productive, will be returned to throughout this writing. This conviction in artistic practice as a mode of thinking underscores the impetus behind offering the SUPERTHERE video collage as the ultimate outcome of this research - it performs not only an account of the activities of the *Romance Phase*, which were of course artistic - but also allows the *Reflection Phase* to be a performance based act of sensing through and analysis. Through its visibly enacted assemblage, the video generates - it emanates - the affects of the hauntological, the ghostly, the queer(ing) of failure – it does so in a way that a written document on its own could not.

## // On Ethics

As an artistic research project involving 5 people taking creative and personal risks in trusting relation to one another a recorded format for eventual public presentation, SUPERTHERE required a careful consideration of ethics. As a project being undertaken in the frame of a Doctoral research project in a university, an ethics clearance application had to be approved. The Application for Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants is attached to this document as Appendix B. It was approved by the Victoria University Low Risk Human Research Ethics Committee on September 2, 2015. While the focus of the research shifted after this application was approved - from the ontology of remote digital collaboration, to a hauntology of queer(ing) failures and ghostly textures in

long distance romances of digital collaboration – the research method and therefore the ethical considerations remained the same. A brief summary of these ethical considerations for the research, as they appear in the ethics clearance application and as they emerged during the study, follows.

The structure of the SUPERTHERE research has been outlined at the start of this introductory chapter and it is explained in fine detail in Chapter 4.

In brief: This project involved collaborative dialogues between myself and 4 artists. These artists were based, and traveling perpetually, all around the world. Our elaborate mobility was understood as a necessary condition of our privileged yet precarious survival in the world as people making their living as artists. Going where the work was, which was rarely the same place as one another, or the gig before, the collaborative dialogues we shared consisted of two parts:

- i) The monthly exchange of 5 tasks for the creation of a 3-minute Skype video message
- ii) The monthly exchange of a 3-minute Skype video guided by the 5 tasks last received

The subject, or thematic, of what we produced was our relationship as collaborators in the project. These relationships were understood as romances of collaboration. Each artist collaborated only with me. I collaborated with all four artists. The slippages between, around, and through these basic tenets – the failures of doing, or being SUPERTHERE - were of principal interest. SUPERTHERE was understood as an exercise in possibility, undertaken by optimistic members of the contemporary creative precariat.

The collected material – the Skype messages, the emails, the messages that deviated to other messaging platforms, the deviations of recording media, the Skype conversations - were ultimately collated and collaged together as a video, an affective assemblage which performs a hauntology of the SUPERTHERE event; a tracing of the spectral contours of the various encounters and questions raised in the doing of this project. This exegesis serves as an extended guide to the thinking and process of the production of that final performative video assemblage.

The main ethical considerations that flowed out of this structure were: 1) informed participant consent around engaging in the exchanges and the public availability of the

final video collage, 2) security of the collected data, and 3) post-participatory after-care and debriefing.

### 1) Informed participant consent

Participants were required to sign consent forms before beginning the long distance romances of collaboration. These forms included explicit yes/no responses to a) creating a flexible working schedule for the collaboration, b) producing digitally based responses to tasks, c) the public exhibition of those task responses. It was made clear within this document that the participants could withdraw from the research at any time without penalty or repercussions. I repeated this opt-out possibility throughout our communications as the collaborations progressed.

An important point of note within the discussion of the ethics around participation and consent within the research is the question of anonymity. The research was designed in such a way that the participants would be anonymous. This was important as the videos would potentially depict very intimate exchanges. The limitation of this anonymity came in the fact that they might be identifiable in the video collage. As the question of co-authorship and strategies for honouring our collaborations became more apparent, the 4 participants were given the opportunity to watch the final video collage and nominate if they would like to be anonymous, or credited as participating artists. All four agreed that they would like to have their name attached to the authorship of the video. As such, they are named at the beginning of this introductory chapter. Throughout the exegesis, they are still referred to as Romances A, B, C, D. As mentioned in the 'Queer Bodies' section of this introduction, the queering potential of our on screen interactions in terms of expanded definitions of intimacy and categories of relationship was another reason why we were all happy to have our names attached to these acts of closeness, vulnerability, and exchange.

### 2. Security of collected data

I alone had, and continue to have, access to the entire body of collected data from the research. This collection of videos, emails, and messages is stored in duplicate on two external hard drives which are stored in a locked storage box at my place of residence. Nothing exists on a cloud or another hackable location. The messages recorded to Skype have all been deleted.

### 3. Post-participatory after-care and debriefing

Throughout the research, and in the time following the collaborations, the contact of a psychologist from Victoria University was available to participants on request. In addition to this formal provision, I undertook Last Dances and Break Up Talks with the 3 participants who finished the task exchange series. All 4 participants watched the final video collage before the submission of the research and I have offered open invitations for further feedback and debriefing conversations. None of the participants to date have had an issue with the sensitivity of the work, or with how they have been represented. It has been made clear to all participants that should they wish to be removed from the video collage at any time, arrangements will be to cater to this rightful demand.

A further important ethical point for me that sat outside of the university ethics clearance was the question of asking for unpaid labour from members of the creative precariat and that the technology required to participate in the study was readily and easefully accessible to them. I attended to these concerns in the way that I approached the participants. This is detailed in Chapter 4. In short, I was extremely upfront about acknowledging precarity and I ensured that the task exchanges could be flexible in terms of time and frequency. I also addressed these concerns through the use of free Skype software and common domestic digital hardware (laptops, smart phones). A further issue of the complication of power relations in the collaborations is dealt with in the Findings chapter.

My capacity to undertake the research was underwritten by my, at the time, 5 years professional practice as an artist with triage live art collective and later as a solo artist in making numerous works that heavily involved audience participation to investigate play, intimacy, affect and social norms. Ethics and integrity have been core to the way in which these works were designed and performed. In most cases these ethics have been moral rather than legal. Each has involved careful consultation and work with peers and collaborators on the degree to which the experience for a participant ensures their dignity, autonomy and confidentiality. These three principal markers: dignity, autonomy and confidentiality have been considered each time a work is made in terms of how it will be documented, how that documentation will be shared, and how the design of the work has inbuilt contingencies for different levels of participant comfort, willingness and confidence. These questions have been present not just in the design of those works, but also each and

every time they have been performed.

## // On Style

The style of writing and address in this exegesis ranges. In drafting it, I was conscious of its purpose as a counterpoint to the SUPERTHERE video. Just as much as it is a notational companion to that theoretically informed yet purely artistic articulation, this exegesis is a site where a deal needs to be struck in balance between practice as research and conventional academic rigour. The video performs the concepts and the experience via a deliberately experimental collage narrative. The exegesis offers a background, a guide, and a thinking through of what of is generated by the video and the years of research in various modes that have gone into it. The exegesis performs in a different way to the video. Obviously, this occurs because of their different formal modes - written text and video collage - but also because of their differing interests.

I consider the writing of this exegesis performative - it seeks to embody and affectively transmit my thinking and experiences of undertaking the research. This is important to me because it is in the writing, in the revisions, in the re-writing, in the choices to gently break with convention here and there – lilt in and out of more poetic and less poetic prose, shifting tonality between the conversational and the less intimate/invitational, moving between fonts and playing with the layout of the text on the page - that the thinking has happened. The solutions, the new relationships between concepts, the analysis...they have all happened here in some way on the page. To intimate that, rather than to perform as though that process had not happened, to obscure it and pretend, runs against the subject matter anyway: ways of being together and ways of relating, queer(ing) failure, and ghostly textures.

By way of an explanation for the engagement with performative writing in this exegesis, I have chosen a passage from UK scholar and performance maker, Adrian Heathfield in his excellent essay, 'Dramaturgy without a Dramaturge' that I would like to quote at length:

Performative writing does not see cultural events or artworks as objects, but rather as situations, manifestations, and articulations of ideas. As such they are rarely static and final, but highly dynamic and provisional. They are seen not just as representations but also as sayings. What

they say is said in relation to, and partly determined by, their context: historical and present, material and spatial (in terms of the institutions or social settings in which they are presented), and embodied (in terms of the physical and sensual relation between the spectator and the object, and the spectator and the work's other recipients). To address such sayings in writing is then to say back, to respond, to engage again in a process relation that is corporeal, animate and transformative. In other words, it is to stage a crossing: a conversation...

Conversation manifests a form of discourse that is within and partly about the present context of an encounter; an intensely social and provisional affair that is not subject to closure. Here language is gripped by differentiation: as Blanchot says, "To converse is to turn language away from itself, maintaining it outside of all unity, outside even the unity of that which is. To converse is to divert language from itself by letting it differ and defer, answering with an always already to a never yet." The intangible gift that is given in this exchange evades name and number, it is not a quantifiable phenomenon, nor is it an object of knowledge. It cannot be assured. It is the gift of time spent entwined with the ideas of others, heart in hand, ear in mouth, eyes at the horizons of thought, words slipping over lips and dissolving into air. Given time the gift returns... (Heathfield: 2016)

Heathfield's text is important because of its contribution to a decentering, to a queering, and to a sensualising, of the inevitably collaborative practice of knowledge production. In order to have presence, in order to be communicative, transmissive of its questions, more than its resolutions and verdicts – the work of this exegesis must be moving rather than still, tempered by intervals and gaps rather than a perfected, impermeable gloss...it is processual, its presence persists in its absences.

### **/ A note on the online presentation of the video collage**

*"However strongly we wanted to do that, we failed because of the lack of time.  
 When I was preparing for the conference  
 I realised our failure was not only the result of the lack of time,  
 but we failed because we wanted to invent and make visible  
 yet another protocol of collaboration, to add something more to its excess.  
 We didn't take into account that we were already collaborating, encountering and*

*challenging each other through many situations,  
conditioning our future together, with no visibility required.”  
(Kunst: 29)*

The video collage of SUPERTHERE is presented on Vimeo.

It can be found here:

<http://vimeo.com/259699010>

And accessed with the password:

**romance**

This choice of final presentational mode for SUPERTHERE was made to encourage viewers of this practical outcome of the project to experience it through the same conditions that it was produced in. Screen based remote collaboration occurs in a space between a live performance space and cinema. It actually occurs in the entirely separate space of living and engaging that is the screen of a digital device. This is a space with its own hauntology, not disconnected from a lineage of the things with which it is similar or reminiscent, but still its own contemporary context. This work is best viewed and understood on the screen of a laptop computer or desktop monitor. It is best viewed alone, just as the exchanged task videos were viewed alone on laptop screens in hotels and airports and at kitchen tables. Any loading problems or glitches that occur in streaming the video collage – any failings of any kind - only continue the precarious hauntology of the work. To view the work in this way maintains the integrity of the piece as “anti-monumental” (Halberstam: 21). By typing in the password and sitting down to view the collage in domestic or banal conditions, the viewer is being immersed in the provisionality of the work and connected through the body to the intentions of the research. They are also then participating in something rare.

SUPERTHERE is about the surprising spectacle of small things.

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This document is structured in three parts. Chapters 1 & 2, including this Introduction, form the first half: *Points of Departure* They illustrate relevant contexts for reading SUPERTHERE as a project. Chapter 2 considers the genealogy of the work in a

broader art historical context, as well as in the frame of my own artistic practice, whilst further installing the theoretical framing of SUPERTHERE. Chapter 3 serves as a mid-way point or axis on which the two halves of this exegesis can be divided, on which they can revolve. It consists of a performed transcript of a dialogue with performance artist Elly Clarke. It forms the second section of the document: *Points of Convergence*. Following this moment of consolidation, Chapters 4 and 5 focus in detail on detailing and analysing the SUPERTHERE research project as *Points of Possibility*. Chapter 4 extrapolates further how I arrived at the design of SUPERTHERE and offers some expanded definitions of the key working concepts. Chapter 5 analyses SUPERTHERE in extensive detail in relation to this framing. It examines and explicates in turn the outcomes of the practical project and the thinking behind the editing and form of the final SUPERTHERE video. Finally, the Findings section which closes the exegesis serves as a counterpoint to the Foreword, it is an autopsy, a summing up of the contribution to knowledge offered by the project as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

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13 This connective model draws on the findings of Hamilton and Jaaniste (2009) who argue that:

This model appears to combine earlier approaches to the exegesis, which oscillated between academic objectivity in providing a context for the practice and personal reflection or commentary upon the creative practice. We argue that this hybrid or connective model assumes both orientations and so allows the researcher to effectively frame the practice as a research contribution to a wider field while doing justice to its invested poetics. (1)

## 2.

### **Practical Contexts**

/// artistic precedents to SUPERTHERE in the work of others and in my own practice

This chapter seeks to contextualise the SUPERTHERE project inside a lineage artistic work in my own practice and in the work of others. SUPERTHERE diverges from these previous studies into the use of video call technologies for remote collaborative performance practices in one very important way. The project was not about assessing the utility or limitation of the technological platform in creating an ersatz physical presence in the production of a show, or in the making of a piece with an imminent premiere date. It was about involving the technology in an experimental discovery of process for its own sake - for pleasure and out of admiration between people interested in working together artistically - with its own interests in working around, through and against conditions of precarity. SUPERTHERE is best situated in the lineage of task based experiments with collaboration outlined a little later in this chapter and in the work of Bojana Kunst sketched in the Introduction. It takes these leads and applies them to the domestic digital space as a site or filter that charts how this technological filter produces hauntological effects and specific forms of queer(ed) failure which can be mapped into a dynamic cartography which speaks to the experience of existing and acting *through* the digital.

#### **// My own practice**

The following two projects directly led me to initiating the SUPERTHERE research project. They serve as the main departure points of both its design and its lines of inquiry. They were undertaken as experimentations with the digital as a means of *crossing over* distances with strangely materialised and dematerialised subjectivities, but they were not invested in, let alone aware of, hauntology as either a concept or a method.

#### **/ Far Away...So Close**

The first project that I would like to outline is titled *Far Away...So Close*. This work was presented in a number of contexts both in Australia and internationally between 2012 - 2015, most recently at NLHspace Gallery in Copenhagen. *Far Away...So Close* was a

one to one performance work. What this means is that it was a performance event or frame that was made specifically to occur as an encounter between one performer and one audience member, or participant, at a time. *Far Away...So Close* developed out of a series one to one performance events that I had co-created as a member of Triage Live Art Collective with Artistic Director, Katerina Kokkinos-Kennedy. The most significant of these being *An Appointment With J Dark* (Arts House, Melbourne, 2012). This piece, and others, consisted of a series of one to one events in which myself and the audience member shared a singular physical performance space. These works increasingly dealt with intimacy as an affective material of the performance event. They sought to deliberately experiment with the generation and transmission of intimacy between artist and audience member as an integral part of the work.

I made *Far Away...So Close* as a response to my increased mobility across those years, spending more and more time in Europe for both my Masters research and my artistic practice, I found myself on Skype all the time, both for work and - more importantly - for maintaining connection and love with my friends and family across the very wide geographical distance that exists between Australia and Europe. It is a long, long way. *Far Away...So Close* was developed as a one to one work which could investigate the question, 'If intimacy happens in one to one performance through the charged spaces between audience and artist, can this intimacy be experienced just as strongly or effectively across digital distance?' i.e. across the Skype platform.<sup>14</sup>

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14 This work was informed by and spoke to the extensive and timely critical work of Rachel Zerihan and Maria Chatzichristodoulou's on questions of intimacy and one to one performance in both the unmediated and digital fields. In her 2006 article "Intimate Interactions: Returning to the Body in One-to-One Performance", Zerihan argues that the "trend to make it" one to one so prevalent in live art practices across the early 2000's was a response to the alienating condition of contemporary nomadism. This formal interest in addressing one of the principal drivers of precarity for arts workers and the broader workforce continues to today.

In her 2009 *Live Art Development Agency Study Guide on One To One Performance*, Rachel Zerihan notes that strategies for dealing with this relational distance are as varied as the works themselves – some wishing to emphasise the alienating potential, others seeking to erase it. Zerihan makes two propositions: firstly, that rather than 'audience member' or 'participant', a more appropriate nomenclature for this role is 'the other'. By naming them the other, their agency in the performance event is able to be more fully recognized – at least in theorising such works. Secondly, Zerihan emphasizes the importance of naming these performance events one-to-one as opposed to one-on-one – again a subtle shift in prepositional language reframes the relation between artist and the other to acknowledge the co-creative, or co-authorship potential of one to one performance events. It is in keeping with this line of thinking around one to one work that I intend to consider 'the other/s' in the one to one performance events of the SUPERTHERE research projects as collaborators - as co-authors of remote performance making practices across distances. And to critically consider distances as not only geographical, but also relational. And thirdly, to consider distances as temporal.

Zerihan and Chatzichristodoulou's 2010 anthology *Intimacy Across Visceral & Digital Performance* offers many key examples of works exploring the thematisation and aestheticisation of distance, intimacy and the digital space. In their introductory text, they note a "simmering strategy" across the one to one works they survey wherein "the

*Far Away...So Close* was essentially a work about the modern condition of love and distance as it happens over Skype. Audience members would come to the gallery or the performance space or hotel room (depending on the festival programming context). They were then invited to enter the installation alone. Here, they climbed into a large bed, dressed with white linen, where they find a laptop, a map and a few other items. On the laptop was an open Skype account belonging to 'You. Here, Now'. There was one listed Contact for this account, 'A Distant Friend'. The audience member would then place a video call which was answered by me. I was in another bed in a separate location. Potentially, I could be anywhere in the world. What happened next was really contingent on the play and interaction between us as a unique constellation of two people. I have found the best way to succinctly describe what happened in *Far Away...So Close* is to state that we have a 20-minute micro-love affair on Skype, and that of course - love affairs can be a lot of things - they can happen between friends, lovers, and new acquaintances in many different ways.

The work was structured with a sequence of contingencies for actions that the audience member and I could undertake together. These ranged from locating various geographical places of longing, memory, and distance on a map, to answering questions about long- distance relationships, to constructing 'romance identities' for us to reveal to one another from a suitcase of provisional costumes concealed somewhere within the installation space. The main aim of the work was to explore the question of how intimacy between two people can be created and maintained using the screen as, to borrow from Mischa Kavka, their zone or point of affective conjunction. It was also a formal exercise artistically in terms of experimenting with the dimensions of the digital screen space as a space of affective performance transmission. (Kavka: 2008)

### **/ A Remote Year**

The second project from my artistic practice which serves as an impetus for the SUPERTHERE research project is *A Remote Year*.

*A Remote Year* began in Berlin in the Summer of 2012 when we - myself and French

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political engagement of the artists under discussion is emblematic of a current trend in performance works that are responding explicitly to the displacement and insecurity that has spread, especially since the turn of the Millennium." They observe "a proliferation of contemporary artworks that are appearing to demonstrate a desire to connect with the other, a range of practices...that play with formal, temporal and technological interfaces of intimacy" (2010: 5)

theatre artist Colyne Morange - met at a performance making workshop run by She She Pop at Universität der Künste. We instantly felt an affinity for one another's work but were not sure how to proceed with making a collaboration. We were based in two, well actually three, different cities, myself between Berlin & Melbourne, and Colyne in Nantes. Heavily influenced by the task and rule based methods of contemporary artist Sophie Calle in making work, we agreed to attempt a year of independently produced remote collaboration.

We called this year, *A Remote Year*. At the beginning of each month, starting in January 2013, we sent each other 5 rules to follow for the month – strategies for documenting and making short actions and reflections in public and private spaces. These rules pertained to language & text, dramaturgy, poetics, thematics, space, time and image collection. At the end of each month we would reflect together on how these rules went for us via a Skype conversation.

As the year went on we struggled immensely with the discipline required in making this remote creative relationship happen in tandem with the demands of our precarious professional practices. Long-distance relationships are labourious. But somehow, we continued, folding these difficulties reflexively into the thematics of our work – love, distance, labour and the digital technologies that make them possible. Midway through *A Remote Year*, we turned our attention to working together through performances on Skype. Still working with the monthly 5 rules that we sent one another in advance on the first day of each month.

These 20 minute shared Skype performances shifted the work and made us very conscious of the frame and the screen of video calls as a particularly interesting performance space. They also brought to our attention the particular aesthetics of the video call – grain, glitch and dissonant sound - as it related to the maintenance of a long-distance relationship. This interest in the frame became a huge preoccupation for us.

In the final 3 months of *A Remote Year* the form shifted to us leaving monthly, and then fortnightly, 3 minute highly aestheticised Skype video messages for one another. These messages were very satisfying to make and each one responded to the video message sent before it. This way of working demonstrates how *A Remote Year* underwent this first phase

of research and development with a very careful accumulative methodology in which one session of work directly and consciously informed the questions of the next in a playful and dialogical way. *A Remote Year* generated an immense amount of material and questions for us. Questions that I now pursue in SUPERTHERE, but also hope to return to with Colyne at a later date.

*A Remote Year* is the instrumental departure point for SUPERTHERE. The technology it used and the task based methodologies it worked with both appear relatively intact in SUPERTHERE. The most important aspect of *A Remote Year* that influenced the new long-distance romances of collaboration of SUPERTHERE was the enthusiastic pursuit of locating ways of working with artists with whom you feel a strong affinity. No matter how much the contemporary conditions of precarity might serve to obstruct you.

### **/ The generativity of limitation**

While *Far Away...So Close* allowed me to clearly understand how to filter affect across digital distance as a performer, it was *A Remote Year* which allowed me to think explicitly through - and to work reflexively with - the notion of the generativity of limitation. This knowledge is instructive to the SUPERTHERE research and underpins the notion of the provisional which is articulated through the research as a ghostly texture of queer(ed) failure.

Generativity can be understood here as the surprising, unexpected and innovative solutions and outcomes that emerge in research work as a response to defined limitations. The notion of the generativity of limitation - in essence that 'less is more', or that restrictions, constraints or structures 'breed creativity' - is by no means a new one. A vast lineage of artistic work exists that consciously informs itself via experimentation with formal, material and conceptual restraints. The pushing of non-porous structural choices, and the experimentation with processual adventures into testing the elasticity of apparently concrete boundaries is, or should be, central to the ambitions and definition of art itself. This mode is of inherent risk, of potential failure.

More often than not, a given artistic process is one of discovering what lateral possibilities exist in play with objects and concepts that *feel* or appear pre-determined in terms of their dimension or purpose. The process is one of a resolute exhausting of the potential and limits of a material or an idea. In his seminal text *Orthodoxy* from 1908, British philosopher G.K. Chesterton famously wrote that, "Art is limitation; the essence of every picture is the

frame.” He continues:

This is certainly the case with all artistic creation, which in some ways is the most decisive example of pure will. The artist loves his limitations: they constitute the thing he is doing. The painter is glad that the canvas is flat. The sculptor is glad that the clay is colourless. (26)

Limitation is a form of discipline in the face of an expansive world of seemingly limitless possibility. The structure of limitation curbs a tendency toward excess or the infinite spiraling out of ideas. An 'economy of means' may be instituted as a formal, investigative or disciplinary choice on the part of an artist. Or it may be picked up out of necessity. A third well-worn phrase comes to mind, 'necessity is the mother of invention', particularly in conditions of precarity.

The radical Italian Arte Povera movement of the late 1960's - early 1970's is a critical example of groundbreaking art production via an economy of means. Arte Povera means literally 'poor art' but the word poor here refers to the movement's signature exploration of a wide range of materials beyond the quasi-precious traditional ones of canvas, bronze, or carved marble. Materials used by the artists included soil, rags and twigs. In using such throwaway materials they aimed to challenge and disrupt the values of the commercial contemporary gallery system. It is this use of everyday materials as a response to a circumstantial, conditional economy of means which makes the Arte Povera movement particularly relevant to as a precedent to the SUPERTHERE research.

Arte Povera is not the only example. The 1980's Availablism of American performance artist Kembra Pfahler is a more fitting precedent, with her investment in the provisional and body of queer work. Availablism was essentially about whatever was on hand at the time to make the performance / the video / the image, happen. For Pfahler this has meant anything from bowling balls to cracked eggs and, almost always, her own body. It is through Pfahler's use of the body and disruption of beauty ideals that the queer-feminist basis of her work resides. In the 90's she famously sewed her vagina shut in a Richard Kern film as a refusal of bio-essentialism. Today she is a part of the queer-feminist collective The Future is Female, and continues to tour with her performance art band The

Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black performing in full grotesque baby doll drag alongside a troupe of doppelgangers. Pfahler uses the availability of her own body as an immediate medium with which to refuse, re-inscribe, and disrupt normative notions of gendered desire and behaviour. The generativity of limitation as the engine of the artistic process remains the same as in Arte Povera as it does in Pfahler's practice. The drive is to invest in the provisional as a disruptive and generative strategy.

### **/ Task based practice**

The lineage of task or provocation based performance making strategies stems back to the Fluxus movement's proliferate use of scores as a means of sharing action based performance works in the 1960's. (Higgins: 2002) This lineage has been continued by a suite of influential, often feminist luminaries including Yoko Ono, Sophie Calle and Miranda July. A very recent example bringing task based methodologies into the digital collaborative realm is Elly Clarke with her project, *#Sergina's Stimulatingly Sexy Simultaneous Simulation of Herself*. An interview with Elly Clarke about her practice forms the third chapter of this exegesis.

In the 1980's, drawing to some extent on Fluxus, but also on postmodernist movements within contemporary dance, Artistic Director of New York's acclaimed SITI Company, Anne Bogart articulated the Viewpoints and Composition methods of devising work. Bogart's concept of 'exquisite pressure', wherein one creates scores, tasks and conditions that are literally impossible to complete in full in order to break open bad habits in approaches to making performance work is of particularly strong influence in SUPERTHERE and my practice in general. It is this concept of the 'impossible task' which underpins why task and provocation based compositional performance strategies are considered a limitation within the SUPERTHERE research. As a mode of production, they may *produce* abundance, superfluity and excess within a composition, however the tasks and provocations themselves are written as careful parameters, ingredients and instructions which appear either limiting or impossible to fulfill without a creative and lateral approach. In this sense task and provocation based compositional strategies embody the notion of the generativity of limitation.

In the 1990's, New School academic, Australian McKenzie Wark's own practice based investigations around distance and expatriation provided a contemporary model of task and

provocation based compositional strategy for collaborative making. In 2000, working from his new location of the USA, and in collaboration with the Australian poet John Kinsella, Australian novelist Bernard Cohen, and Australian memoirist Terri-Ann White, Wark co-wrote the experimental work, 'Speed Factory'. For this collaboration, the co-authors developed the 'speed factory' writing technique, in which an author writes 300 words, emails it to the next author, who then has 24 hours to write the next 300 words.

The greatest benefit of task-based practices, besides their capacity as a strategy for working with distance, is the way in which they delimit the violence of the empty studio space and endless time that can blow out obstructively at the beginning of a project. They offer a type of practical armour against the specters of failure that haunt and saturate the empty space and the new collaborative constellation – the terrors of the first meeting, the paralysis of the blind date. Task based making practices are an insurance against the stultifying threat of endless blue-sky possibility. That distant longed-for dream that sounds like magic, but without productive limitation and clear tasks, shows itself as a nightmare of cursed stuck-ness. In SUPERTHERE these methodologies cushion the violence of working together alone - thinking, seeing, and filtering affect through the digital as a collaborative act. As a long-distance romance of collaboration.

///

This chapter outlines the practical precedents to the SUPERTHERE long distance romances of collaboration to be found in my own practice and in the practices of other artists. The ways in which these precedents inform the methodology of the SUPERTHERE practical project are made clear in Chapter 4: By Design. The following chapter picks up on the preliminary definitions of key terms outlined in the Introduction, fleshing out in detail the theoretical basis of SUPERTHERE, whilst initiating a weaving through of the practical findings specific to the project. These discoveries are detailed at length across Chapter 5 and Findings sections of the document.

**II**

**// Points of Convergence**

### 3. “The Thumbs Up Is Unreliable.”

/// a conversation with Elly Clarke

*Elly Clarke is an inter-disciplinary artist working with performance and the digital for over 15 years. Her project, #Sergina's Stimulatingly Sexy Simultaneous Simulation of Herself involves a series of events of up to five performers dressed the same - as Clarke's drag persona, pop star #Sergina - lip-syncing to the same songs at the same time, performing to live audiences but also those online, linked up by Google Hangout, and live broadcast via YouTube. These performances test the limits of digital collaboration and explore the interplay of digitality and subjectivity.*

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In presenting this transcript I have given different weight to different phrases and sections of text through the use of gradients of greyscale and underscoring.

This is an exercise in performing to a certain degree the process of selection and editing that occurred in the production of the SUPERTHERE video collage with the exchanged clips and communications between myself and my romances of collaboration.

The aspects of the text given the most weight are those which gesture toward queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures.

I have chosen to include the transcript in its entirety as a snap shot of the context of two queer freelance artists in conversation with one another about both remote collaborative digital practices and economic precarity.

In performing and attending to discourse and practice in this way, this conversation transcript marks the point of convergence of this exegesis. The following section III Points of Possibility deals with a description and an analysis of the doing of SUPERTHERE itself.

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2017,  
Paris/Berlin

MJ: Hey there.

E: How are you?

MJ: Good. Good, good. How's our connection?

E: I think it's alright. I think I just need to close some programs though.  
Just gonna close some programs.

MJ: Ok

E: Are you in Berlin or are you somewhere else?

MJ: No I'm in Paris. I'm in Paris.

E: Paris babe, Paris.

MJ: Gay Paris, indeed...I'm just trying to figure it out, I'm on...new Skype is very confusing.

E: I know, Skype also the picture is really quite shit on Skype I find

MJ: Yeah right? Like extra shit?

E: I think it's going shit on purpose cos it used to be good.

MJ: Yep, what do you think the purpose is?

E: I don't know, I think they want you to have, they've been taken over by Google, so they want you to use Google Hangout instead...

MJ: Right, yeah, well I think it's been taken over by Microsoft as I understand it

E: Microsoft...

MJ: So then it has to be shit just to keep with their brand

LAUGHTER

E: Yeah exactly!

MORE LAUGHING

E: Totes, totes.

E: So, what are you doing in Paris?

MJ: I'm having a little romance holiday.

E: Nice

MJ: Yeah, I was just in Brussels for IETM which is like this theatre, this European theatre making market place weirdness.

E: Oh yeah cool

MJ: Yeah kind of cool I spent a lot of time kind of not being there. Yeah. But ah, now I'm in Paris. And I've got lots of questions for you so maybe we'll...

E: Yeah we can crack on...

MJ: So, thank you so much for agreeing to have a chat.

E: Yeah that's fine.

MJ: I really appreciate it.

What am I gonna tell you? I'm gonna tell you what I'm doing with my PhD and that can kind of help frame what we talk about.

So I'm doing, I'm in the process of finishing, a PhD, like a practice based Ph.D. And the research is a project called SUPERTHERE. And it's a series of long-distance romances of collaboration.

E: Right.

MJ: So it's **myself and 4 other EU & US based artists**, all of whom work with performance first and foremost. And we're doing a kind of task based, kind of mail art or instructional art project. We have these romances that we hope last for 6-months and the intention has been to send each other a set of tasks

at the beginning of each month that relate to, um, light and colour and composition and dramaturgy. And then we make a 3-minute Skype video message for each other. So essentially a short film that we make based on the tasks that we send. And the subject of all the videos that we make is our relationship. Our romance...

E: Yeah

MJ: And how much it's succeeding or failing. And um, yeah, that has gone not so smoothly. I mean, which has been great. It has been what it has been. But um, yeah, there's been sort of particular things which lead to it being sort of...one person, we've done one exchange to date. With other people we've done

5. You know, and this kind of stuff. So um...that kind of lets you know what perspective I'm coming from, in terms of working with the digital, in terms of working with collaboration and all these sort of things. Now, I've got questions written down for you so I'm going to start with reading them...so I don't forget anything.

E: Fine

MJ: So, as I explained, SUPERTHERE is intended as a series of long-distance romances of collaboration and it blends ideas of collaborative artistic digital practice and ideas around how modern love and contemporary art making is shaped by technologies that make these long-distance practices possible. And that's why I wanted to speak to you. Because of the work that you're doing with Google Hangouts and blending them with ideas around romance and collaboration, and multiple subjectivities that we can inhabit. And as I read in one of your...I've been snooping around your website...this idea of living in at least two dimensions like on line and offline and in between. So I would like start by talking about #Sergina

E: Mmmm

MJ: Mmhmm

And ah, did she begin as a singular persona or was the idea of performing her with multiples, like her doppelgängers in different places like Bristol, Belgrade, Berlin, was that an idea from the outset and was that multiplicity kind of a part of the genesis of #Sergina or the concept of her?

E: Um, no, it started off just as me. Basically, what happened was I already had this of drag character who was already just going out to parties in Berlin, who kind of evolved into this #Sergina character. So it was Sergei/Sirgay first and then Sergei went out one night in drag and that was way more fun and out of Sergei came #Sergina. It was never intended as an art project at all. It was just, mainly a way of creating characters to fill my friend's now ex-girlfriend's night, that was the shittiest night of the month, which is the last Wednesday of the month in Schwuz. And it was a club night in the old Schwuz called Dansgedons which was a bad taste club. So me and my friend Liz, like religiously, every last Wednesday of the month would like...drag up in whatever the fuck and

got to this club.

At the same time, I was in a band with like 6 other women who were all from the Goldrausch course and I wrote, and all of us wrote songs, that kind of related to our own practice that we brought into this band. It was called Tier (?), this band. And we were together for about 2 years and played about 3 gigs only ever. But for that I wrote a load of songs all about, I wrote Instantaneous Culture, I wrote Phone Me Don't Write, I guess about 5 of the songs that are still my core songs for that, at that point they were kind of weird punky versions. The band then disbanded and then 2013 I was living in the UK but over the summer I realised that the lyrics to the songs were kind of like manifestos and were becoming more important because everybody by that point had a smart phone. Everyone was much more online. It used to be in Berlin people weren't really on the phone. They didn't look at their mails and things like that, and then suddenly, it changed and I thought well this is now more urgent and I need to find a different medium. And I realised that I wanted those songs to be Pop Songs and in order for them to be Pop Songs they needed a Pop Star. And me as Elly I'm not a Pop Star. But I was like, oh, I've already got someone who might be able to fulfil that role...

MJ: So funny...

E: Yeah, so I was like, yeah! And I brought the two together and it was initially really just for fun. Then two friends came up and said, 'we want to make this video with you for Instantaneous Culture'. It was made with two guys, two friends of mine. And I did that and I showed it to a curator who was like, no this is not just a joke, this is really interesting, blah-blah-blah! And so that video happened. Initially I was performing just for the camera. And over a year I made that video and another one. And then I got into a residency in Banff to make my third video. And that's when I did my very first live performance. Which was when we supposed to present our work and it was at 10am in the morning in a conference room. And I said to this really nice trans guy Ollie, who I'd made friends with, you know you always make friends with the queers first in the thing, I said, "I think I wanna do it in drag, I wanna be in drag for the presentation let's just do this version of Instantaneous Culture." So he picked me up from my hotel room in Banff, I don't know if you've been to the Banff Centre, you're all in hotel rooms...

MJ: I know about it, yeah.

E: And it was like half 9 and I was going you know what the fuck. And it was really bad drag. It's always been pretty bad drag but this was particularly bad. And I did this performance and no one knew who the fuck I was. Who is this drag performer suddenly in our midst I didn't see her around? Is it a they or a him or whatever? And I realised that it was really interesting to perform her and also what happened to the reading of my own gender. And the kind of power that gave me when people couldn't read my gender because that meant that they couldn't read my work according to my gender. So they then therefore had to just listen to the words instead. So it was this really interesting deflecting tool and a way, weirdly, through a diversion, to get people to really pay attention to the words.

MJ: Yeah, wow, I think that that ambiguity with drag, that destabilising thing is so great. It suspends gender reading...

E: Exactly! You become free of it. And so that was when I also shot the video, 'I Want To See You From A Different Perspective' and also recorded it on this amazing piano. And I got 4 of the boys, one of which was Ollie, these 4 very unprofessional voices to form a choir and then got it recorded professionally. I got it arranged and I decided from the outset with that song that I wanted it to be different people playing #Sergina. So then I had 3 people playing #Sergina in that one video. Even then I wasn't really thinking beyond the video. But we had a party, which happened to be my birthday, the last night of the residency I think. We all got wasted, I'd done another little mini-performance. Lauren Berlant was there and Wendy Chun cos they had been advisors on this residency. You probably know their work right if you're looking into this...

MJ: Yeah, absolutely

E: So they were all there. Everyone was drunk. And suddenly someone said, "I wanna be #Sergina." So we went into the loo and we swapped clothes. And then this happened about four or five times throughout the night. And every time a different person came out as #Sergina they walked like her they had the same mannerisms and they had the same textural gestures. And I was like, this is really interesting, there's something that is happening where people are really happy to occupy someone else's drag. To perform it in a certain way. So that's when I thought well I'd love to do a performance called "#Sergina's Stimulatingly Sexy Simulation of Herself" and I told a curator and 4 months later she called me up and said, 'Yeah you can do your simultaneous performance at The Lowery at the opening of this exhibition'.

MJ: Amazing

E: And I was kind of like, what the fuck? But now it is an integral part of who

#Sergina is and I am looking into ways in which she can become even more collaborative and even more open source and that sort of thing. And so...LONG ANSWER...to your question.

MJ: No but it's a great answer because it's also this kind of thing of the collaboration as a kind of a singular, kind of malleable, dissolvable subjectivity. And that's why the way that you deal with persona is so interesting, that #Sergina herself is an open source technology.

E: Exactly. And I see the contrary as neo-liberalism and capitalism which is all about the cult of the individual, so you become through this strategy of, well my identity can be anyone's, my identity can be worn by anybody, literally anybody...it's a trying to side-step or become more slippery in terms of that deterministic, individualistic, solipsism kind of content.

MJ: Yeah, and the discreet singular body, eliminating the hermetic single persona.

E: Yeah.

MJ: What is success in relation to "#Sergina's Stimulatingly Sexy Simulations of Herself?"

E: Success? Um...in terms of what? In terms of #Sergina herself, or the audience, or...?

MJ: In any terms. When you think about success in relation to that particular mode of presentation or for her performance, like the shared subjectivity or the simultaneousness, the simultaneity, what is success in relation to simultaneity and also in terms of your ambition for her? Artistic or otherwise.

E: I think a lot of the success is actually revealing the flaws of the technology that we are using without questioning it. So, just drawing attention to the mediums that we are using and that everybody is using. So its showing actually simultaneity doesn't exist, really. Or, it does exist but you actually can't show it completely through the technologies that we currently have. You know, it's always for example with live television you see it obviously with live interviews and people are sitting there for a long time waiting for the answer to come. So a lot of it is about reminding us that it's all actually not quite where the advertisers are telling us we are. On another level of course is getting us as close to looking like it is possible.

So for us, you know, our main challenge was starting the music at the same time in every location. Which the only way we could work out was by using the 24 hour clock. And then a human person clicking go, which of course would have been easier if that bit could have been automated.

MJ: So you couldn't cue each other visually, because it's unreliable?

E: The line has got quite bad...

Yeah you can't just go off a thumbs up. Because in that situation someone will always be later. So the person in Belgrade's thumbs up would always be later because of bandwidth. So when you are working with other people in this way, particularly with Vladimir in Belgrade, because other people I have been working with in Western Europe and the US the bandwidth and the speed of the network has been pretty much all the same as one another. But in Belgrade it's always much slower.

So then it talks about investment and it talks about money. It talks about access and it talks about all these other things. So, Vladimir will always be behind, will end up behind the others which is something I never anticipated.

MJ: That's so fascinating

E: Which again shows that there is no neutrality of the net, that the same things that affect us in the real world affect us online as well.

So success is kind of, um, on the one hand the illusion, the kind of

successful creation of an illusion that this is happening but at the same time showing actually, it's an attempt and it's not ultimately possible, I guess.

MJ: Yeah, and the kind of way that we kind of tip-toe around or make allowances for the absences and the gaps. I guess. I really love the idea of this meta, or this metaphor, that 'the thumbs up is unreliable'.

E: Yeah! Yeah, yeah!

LAUGHTER

MJ: In relation to the likes (Puts thumb up) and the dislikes (Puts thumb down) and the thumbs up and the thumbs down...

E: I mean I've got this hilarious image of all of us in different countries and trying to figure out how the fuck we do this starting the music thing. And then looking at each other going (Makes slowing down face...“Stop! I'm not there yet!” or whatever. And it was just, you know, we, trial and error. And also using this technology. You know, it sounds quite simple, you just have Google Hangout, you have this many people, you're all trying to do the same thing. And then you realise that you are the only person who has ever tried to do that.

Because why the fuck would anyone want to and need to all do the same thing at the same time working with this technology? And then you also realise...that aligned, for me, there was also a kind of crisis last Summer before a performance I did in Brighton where Google Hangouts said, we are gonna stop broadcasting to YouTube, or something was going to happen, and Skype at that point you couldn't have more than 3 people. Yeah, so you also realise how you are subject to the elements of you know, tech. Yeah and if they decide to pull it then...yeah...

MJ: Yeah, like, I was saying at the beginning, Skype has just been bought out and there is new Skype now. And the function that is at the core of my project, which is sending, ah, 3-minute video messages to each other is no longer accessible. Like they have stopped that function as a straight forward feature. So we are finding ways to adapt around it.

But the thing I really love in this idea of the 3-hour rehearsal to get the music happening at the same time is the desire to make it work. You can't make it work. But there is this shared desire with the collaborators. And it's kind of, it's a very particular optimism.

E: Yeah totally...and that is of course success, that everybody is totally behind the project. And then the moment someone isn't... The difference is that when you have people physically in the same room, once it's over you can have a chat or go for a beer and people read each other, you know and will say, “Are you alright, what's going on, you seem a bit down today?”. But it's interesting because in some ways you do...

Nick! That's my slipper! NO!

LAUGHTER

My dog's chewing my slipper. He's looking guilty. Um...yeah...no, I think

also at the same time it was interesting because like afterwards Vladimir would go and those of us left would say, "Oh Vladimir seemed a bit down today" or you know... So it's the stuff that you do still pick up or that you learn to pick up on. Through the use, through the frequent use of the platform.

MJ: The literacy kind of advances through exposure, I guess...

E: Yeah

MJ: And so then, what is failure in relation to the Stimulatingly Sexy Simulations?

E: Ah! I mean failure was actually due to...the second time I did that performance I did it at The Lowry and then went down to Brighton to do it the very next day, which was a nightmare and I would never do it again. To move cities and then set up, that failed that time because it was, you know, tech guys told me how I should be doing my tech and music and stuff. You know those bloody guys...

MJ: Yep...

E: They are fucking annoying and they said "This is how you have to do it." And I was like, "Believe me, we have had hours of rehearsals figuring out how best to do it and I sent you the tech rider." Anyway, they didn't listen, they overrode me, and as a result Vladimir was left out of the performance. He was not linked in and I didn't know that till the end...

MJ: No!

E: And it was not started anywhere near at all to the agreed time of the performance. And so then it was so out of time from the beginning, so that you know, that thing of looking like you are trying, the attempt and the failure...the attempt had already failed. So that was, you know...so annoying because it was just to do with basically sexism. This annoying thing of when you are working with tech and you are a woman.

MJ: The gendering of tech support...

E: Yeah. So that's failure. So then the failure is also kind of engendered in the misuse, or the just not following the rules precisely enough for the actual tech. If someone gets a bit of a movement wrong, I don't consider that failure. That's just what happens.

MJ: That's live performance.

E: Exactly and also not having everything exactly perfect is a part of #Sergina anyway, that's a part of her fabric. Luckily. I mean, if we had more money and time to you know, hire a director or to have people actually physically present in the room to cue things, then of course we could get it way slicker. But, I've not had that, but it's also not about that, because the reality is, everyone is practicing in their bedrooms. So it's kind of, you know, what you can do with the limited resources, it becomes hard, that's all.

MJ: I think this quality of slickness and whether or not that is an ambition is really important. You know, um, Jack Halberstam talks famously about the queer art of failure and I wonder if you have a response to that particular idea in relation to your practice.

E: Yeah, failure is very much a part of #Sergina. You know, I have people sending me emails asking if I can help with their drag make up and I'm like, no, because #Sergina is really bad at make-up. I mean I could do bad drag make up on you, but it won't even necessarily look like drag, it might just look like very bad make up. I just don't believe that perfection is possible. And of course perfection is the lie that we are fed by capitalism anyway – perfection is just, kind of, what fairy tales are made of in order to sell stuff that isn't true.

But I think the desire for perfection of course is also what very much effects

#Sergina herself and her character and what she talks about is how her image on Instagram is way better than her physical body. So it's about being outshone by your digital version, and your digital version that you can edit, that you can adapt and put filters on, and revise what you say in your comments or whatever, as opposed to the kind of clunky physical body that, you know, has bad make up on where one eyelash falls off. You know, where you need to go to the loo and you have your period and whatever else you know, all that stuff.

MJ: In our break-up talk, because I am now in the process of having break-up talks with my SUPERTHERE romance partners...

E: Right! God! (Laughs)

MJ: Yeah! And in one of our break up talks they said how much they hated the webcam aesthetic, and the Skype aesthetic and the look of things mainly because it has “no resolution” and “no definition” and, um, that kind of feeds in to being true of both the tech used and what the romance relationships were attempting. So in light of, ah, #Sergina's interest in the post physical, and this idea of why bother with an in person meeting when online you can look so much better, but then kind of decay a little bit, what are your thoughts about that or what are some further thoughts about that? Particularly in terms of the image quality...

E: Sorry?

MJ: Also the image quality...like the, do we look better or do we not? You know what I mean, like what is this particular aesthetic of being in the webcam?

E: I mean I think the first time I saw the, um, after The Lowry performance and I watched the YouTube feed, I mean, I don't know if you've seen it, but it's just appalling.

MJ: (laughs and nods)

E: I mean it's just really hard to watch. You can't see anything. You can't really hear anything. It sounds like, it looks like, the internet back in the 90's when I was working at Franklin Furnace in New York as an

intern, helping with these very early, you know digital cybercam thingamajigs, whatever they're called...they were doing performances over webcams in the dial up era...and they were like that, and I actually found it really exciting to see them. And going, nobody does this because they are always striving to look good and this looks like absolute shit you know. Also what I liked about how shit it is that there is this fantasy that online you can see everything and access everything, and you know like, students when I was teaching at Coventry, the lectures were recorded. And I'd meet them on the way back and they would say, "I'll just watch it later". So you kind of go, no actually you can't see everything. For example if you're in Belgrade you can only see Vladimir on the screen, you don't get to see the rest of us, but at least you can hear the words and see the performance and actually understand what it's about. Online you see everything but you see nothing.

So, you know, at the same time I am now in touch with these guys in Nottingham and they have this Virtual Reality Lab which could mean a lot for what the performance could be in terms of tech, you know, go on to a different level.

Talking about whether I would want to work with VR and AR and things like that, which would bring the idea of slickness into a different place. Um, but, I think exposing the limits of whatever medium I am working with is always a part of what I do. It might be the limits for example of VR, where I had this amazing VR experience during a course I was doing here in Berlin last week...and you can see your hands. You can actually see where your hands are, but they're not your hands they're like, chubby little tiny avatar hands, like, cartoony hands. Then you put them out and you touch cartoony hands with another person, and it's like you have actually touched hands. And it's like, complete shock. You're in this digital world, but you can actually touch hands, warm, fleshy human hands with someone else. But it's like an avatar, so, I am looking to moving into working with that stuff but, I think the shines of it is part of the point in a way.

MJ: Definitely, Hito Steyerl writes about defending the poor image, you know, and understanding the super-compressed, data-reduced, reproduced, meme-d out image, the ghost like image as a political image, as a site of resistance against these market values of 0 loss, and FULL HD slickness, and what those values represent and what they exclude. So then I wonder, if you move...

iPhone RINGS

MJ:

#Sergina

E: Sorry

MJ: into a full gloss experience, exactly what does she lose in terms of a queer politic or just a politic in general? Or an aesthetic...

SKYPE SOUND

MJ: Oops, I got another call...

E: Oh you just froze then...

Um, I got, what does it mean if she becomes fully glossy?

MJ: Yeah...

E: What do I lose what? What was the end of that?

MJ: In terms of a queer politic or just in terms of an um, aesthetic, line of inquiry...

E: I think then it will just start to look more like advertising. It just won't show as being anything different actually. Because, I think, um, it will just look like a Pop Video or everything else that we see. And it will be comfortable viewing and um, I mean, yeah, I mean it will probably be more saleable, let's face it cos people quite like to buy something they understand better, and don't find uncomfortable to watch. You know it will be more likely to be in one of these fancy galleries or something, you know? And in making people watch those live streams, that's the product, that's where it is and it's certainly not saleable and it's certainly not slick and it's certainly not fun to watch in any way. So I think if she were really slick, it would definitely lose a lot and definitely say less. Like that slickness would slick out some of, or a lot of what makes it interesting, I think.

MJ: I think it's interesting kind of thinking about how it's hard, you know, with things that are made on these technologies where it's hard to watch and that kind of relates to what you were saying at the beginning about #Sergina at Banff: the destabilization of being ambiguous. You know?

E: Yeah exactly.

MJ: Like it's a kind of digital drag in a way. But then that said, does #Sergina want to go to MOMA does she want be at Basel, you know?

E: I don't know actually. Do I even want to be in those places? I don't know, um, I kind of hate the art world. And I hate all of the elitism that exists around art. It's not really an ambition of mine. If I ended up there I would find it all kind of amusing and then would do something...I'm not sure, I think it's a very difficult question to answer. I think, I mean, of course if I was invited there I would do it. I'd just be very surprised if it got in there.

LAUGHTER

MJ: None of us expect the invitation

E: But at the same time, people often compare #Sergina's work to Ryan Trecartin

- who has really been shown all over the place and works with video. So

you know, #Sergina's work, the messiness of it and the bad sound and stuff is often compared to that kind of thing. And I see it as the opposite, like, you know how there is this whole wave of films being made, by particularly really young artists, where there is a kind of really badly staged, but very slickly filmed scenes which look like rehearsals - and something about that, I just saw a bunch of works like this in Prague on the weekend - something about that really annoys me. I don't know what it is, it's almost like...I have to work out why that way of filming annoys me that much. It's almost doing the opposite of what I am doing. It's kinda like, pretending to be really DIY, but it's so clearly not, and it's not giving you one thing or the other...maybe that's the point, but it annoys me because it is so self-conscious of being an art work.

And that's why I have a problem with the art world in general. Things becoming and art work and they cease to be a vessel for ideas. And that's what I am most interested in doing and that's why I'm interested in music and trying to make, I want to basically make an album and get my music played because I feel it can often be a more...

MJ: Effective vehicle...

E: You can reach more people I think through it, than art. And bypass some of the pretentiousness of the art world.

MJ: And I think that what you are thinking about in process when making music or something is very different to what you are thinking about in process when you are making a really super slick video. And making music is for anyone to hear, whereas if you are making a super slick video that has been commissioned by a particular gallery then you are making it for a narrow market and I don't think you can escape consciousness of that.

E: Yeah exactly.

MJ: One thing that I would like to talk about a little bit more is these particular technologies: video communications technologies, digital communications technologies - and thinking about them in terms of modern love and also this idea of ghosting. Are you familiar with this idea of ghosting, like, people just absenting themselves from one another without notice? Like, you're dating and suddenly you're not talking anymore. What do you think about that? This ghosting phenomenon...

E: I think it comes out of the fact that we are really in touch with so many more people than we actually have the ability to be in touch with. And also how differently you behave online to offline. It's much harder to walk past somebody and blank them dead, in real life, although people do it, than it is to just ignore a message, you know? I think sometimes it comes out of absolute meanness and sometimes it comes out of some kind of self-protection for whatever reason. I also think that, it's like the ethics, or the manners, no, manners is too prissy, but..

MJ: an etiquette...

E: What else did you say?

MJ: An etiquette.

E: An etiquette exactly around this stuff. And it's all still actually so new, and we forget how new it is actually, this tech. It's within, really, very few years. So all that stuff hasn't really caught up and I remember even when mobile phones first came out you know, and when people would answer their phones and when they wouldn't. And it would really annoy people. And everybody had their really loud ring tone, and it was ringing all the time and that's changing now...and it's considered now in some places really rude to not have your phone on silent all the time. But with relationships, it's horrible, if ghosting happens to you, it's horrible. Like when you see that someone is typing a reply to a message and then stops, and it's like "what were they typing!?!” “What didn't they say?”.

MJ: You know they've seen the message and they have begun a response. Yeah it's strange to witness and engage with...

E: Yeah waiting for the reply

MJ: Totally.

And then thinking then a little more about ghosts, I find digital artistic collaborations so interesting because, and you have touched on this a bit in talking about Vladimir and for various reasons there being a temporal dissonance, you know? And, um, it's so interesting because...

E: You keep freezing actually...

I'm gonna do a screen grab, ha!

MJ: Blerrr

E: You're completely frozen...

MJ: But can you hear me?

LONG PAUSE

E: Um, now I can, I couldn't before...I couldn't hear you for a while...i heard Vladimir and then nothing more...

MJ: So thinking about Vladimir

ELLY'S IMAGE STARTS TO FREEZE

FEEDBACK

MJ: Well not thinking about Vladimir, but it came up in the way you were talking about them and this temporal dissonance. Of never actually being able

to be simultaneous.

E: Yeah

MJ: For various reasons. And I think this thing that is so interesting with digital artistic collaboration is this always negotiating the absence of shared time and space. Or the impossibility of it. And you are always risking the missed connection, the frozen moment. And Mark Fisher, talks about hauntology as the 'agency of the virtual', of something that is always just about to come into being or into presence or something that has just finished moments ago...and I am wondering if you have any thoughts on this idea of digital collaboration as a hauntological or as a ghostly process?

E: Digital collaboration as a what?

LAUGHTER

MJ: As a hauntological or a kind of a ghostly, a ghostly process. Where um, things are either just coming into being or they have just happened. The actual moment itself is lost, or never quite there. You're never IN the moment.

E: I mean I certainly notice it at the end of a performance when you can't just have a drink with people. It's this incredible loneliness. And the end of a very big successful or even a very difficult rehearsal, and it really reflects on exactly what I am writing about lyrically, "Ganz Allein mit Dir" (Completely Alone With You), especially when I'm like, in drag, in my bedroom. And then it says on Google Hangout 'It looks like you are the last one left', 'You're the only person left on this Google Hangout'

LAUGHTER

E: And then like, you see, this like, kind of abject face, not even posing but with the bad make up and the wig and I'm just like, there I am and the computer is going 'You're on your own mate.' And then it's so, well really the digital cannot replace the physical, well not yet anyway. There is a lot of loneliness accompanied there and loneliness of course is a big theme of #Sergina's lyrics - that one of the needs of the physical body is actual, is physical co-presence with other people, in some format. I also did a performance a couple of weeks ago from London, cos I was teaching in London, and I don't know if you saw it, it was to a gallery in New York. So I was asked to come in, so I was wheeled in on a computer, on a trolley, and did this performance to a load of people in Brooklyn in this gallery, and then was wheeled out again as I was still going. And so it was like 'bye' and then I was on my own. And luckily a friend came down from Birmingham to be there with me. It was quarter to one in the morning,

I had been teaching all day, then there I was in my mate's apartment, up on Turnpike Lane, don't know anyone around there, all dragged up - and it's all so weird, the thing has happened and there is also the time zone change, which means I didn't hear from the gallerist until the next day. So yes, definitely ghosts and aspects of yourself that you can perform to camera, that you need to bring out more. Like, you have to perform in a different way online.

I've also done lectures over Skype and that's also a weird thing. So I'm talking to my projection, but I am seeing them from the side, and they are

asking me a question - and I am saying, "I'm in the computer can you look at me". So you are really caught in this idea of being disembodied, you're not where you are, you're not where people think you are. You are not necessarily where you are showing. You are not where you are seen to be. You are seen to be somewhere and you are actually somewhere else. Even in a room. With the apparatus set up to show your projection, even that doesn't correspond to any kind of sense of physicality or physical presence.

MJ: I think that's interesting also, this idea that, like, even now while we are speaking, we're conscious of performing a certain presence, you know...

E: Yeah

MJ: To ensure that you really get me and making sure that I really get you. It's a different, ah, performative way of being than the one you make in front of a live audience.

E: Exactly. Or to even having a coffee in a cafe, you, know

MJ: Totally. It's more being an apparition.

LAUGHTER

E: Really.

MJ: I have one more question. So SUPERTHERE is um, also about the kind of precarious conditions of existing in the world as a freelance artist. Do you have anything to say about this kind of contemporary precarity? And what do you think #Sergina thinks about it?

E: Ha, that's a good question. So what do I think about it first...um, it's a bloody nightmare. And it gets harder as you get older I think.

MJ: Yep.

E: And I feel I am getting less good at dealing with it. Like more anxious the more it goes on. Because also as you get older and get more experience, you don't want to take the shitty gigs as much. You know, you become more picky about what you do. You don't have the energy to do so many different things at once, and that you need to streamline. So yeah, it's really difficult. And this is why I am going to start doing a PhD also, next year. Just to have more structure around me for a bit and access to experts and to other people who are actually interested in my work, or who are paid to be interested in my work.

LAUGHTER

E: And what #Sergina thinks of it...I mean, I think it's probably all she's known. So I think it's just how it is. And her precarity is that she may disappear at any moment. And this project that I just did with some others here in my house, with Foto Klub Kollektiv, was highly problematic...and I've declined to go on with it to another

presentation...because it was very weird for #Sergina to be in a room with other people for a long amount of time. To be trapped in a room and also as a service provider, it was also wrong. Like she begrudgingly...I mean, she is in the real world so she probably does need money. It just works better for her in situations like the one in New York, where she is sitting on a sofa and once people are looking at her she is on, she is activated by her viewers online or offline. And by her Handsome Boys. And in this other context, where she was just kind of lying around on a blow-up bed, being observed while not necessarily having a performance to do, because nobody had bought her services. That was really wrong, and she would have just disappeared in her optimal circumstances.

So I think I learnt quite a lot about who #Sergina was at that point. But in terms of precarity, I think it suits her, cos she can kind of just disappear, and turn up somewhere else. And now I am actually thinking about, especially with Vladimir - who is really my key collaborator - if I were to do another performance in New York, equally that could have been done by Vladimir as much as it could have been done by me. And I like the idea where, if there are more gigs coming, or like you said, there is the opportunity for a slick video - I have thought before that if someone like Apple wanted to advertise - I mean, it would never happen, but the scenario is interesting to imagine - she would sell out, she would wear a diamante Apple.

MJ: Well she's a hustler, she's allowed. It's totally permissible within her persona. It's great.

Um, thank you so much. It's really wonderful to hear your answers and to hear more about your practice. I keep thinking about...whenever I think of you, like I see you on Instagram or wherever, I get this flash image of the Yo Sissy (Festival) gig.

E: Oh Yeah!

MJ: And your amazing friend who was your back-up singer.

E: Oh Simon, I know!

MJ: Yeah! And where I was standing I could see him more than I could see you. And this absolute conviction in singing these words, 'He only wants me for my network'. It was like, I think it was one of my favourite things that I have seen in a really long time.

LAUGHTER

It was so impassioned and like just simply fucking great.

E: Yeah, Simon, I used to live with him at university. I've known him for over 20 years now. He writes some amazing music. He wrote a whole album for his MA at Goldsmiths called 'Sad, Sad Songs of Wretchedness and Death'. And I was looking the other day for the CD and I couldn't find it, and they're not online anywhere, so I've lost the CD and I'm terribly sad.

MJ: He was really labouring for the love, it was really great.

E: He was nervous beforehand.

MJ: He was brilliant, you were brilliant also, but he has become this kind of mental avatar for me of the #Sergina experience

E: He also arranged the music for that track so it made sense for him to be up there.

But yeah, your project sounds super interesting. So are you in your last year now?

MJ: I'm in my last months...

I've just gotta plug in my laptop or it's gonna die...

Yeah, I'm in my last months, I'm writing it up and finishing up the romances. It's been great, but also this balance of, because of course my professional practice as an artist has developed and expanded across these 3 years and I have had to follow that. And I really think that that is a symptom, or a hallmark of this precarity that we are talking about. You have to take the work and the chances while they are there, there is an acceleration happening.

E: And it's always either everything is happening or nothing at all.

MJ: And think that's what's really effected the romances of collaboration we've had is that. We all really want to do it. It's like your relationships with Vladimir and with Simon, it's this labour of love you know? But, people have gigs, and they have applications, and they have to do the gigs and the applications rather than make the Skype video as a matter of priority...

E: I know, exactly, exactly...yeah

MJ: So that's where we are at. Thank you so much!

E: No, you're welcome, it's been fun and it sounds super interesting. Let me know if you need anything more.

MJ: I will, and I will be back in Berlin next week so we should catch up for a regular chat and a coffee

E: That'd be great

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### III

## // Points of Possibility

#### 4.

#### **By Design**

/// SUPERTHERE:

expanded concepts, research design & choices of form

The design of the practical research of SUPERTHERE is mapped out in this chapter. This mapping occurs in two parts, each describing the design of one of the two distinct phases of the process: a) *Romance Phase // Tasks* and, b) *Reflection Phase // Video Collage*. For each of these two phases, the rationale of the specific design choices are detailed. These rationales provide explanation for the structure of the task exchanges between the romances of collaboration, and for the formal choice of collage as a hauntological strategy. These two phases are presented in turn to offer a linear narrative understanding of how the project was designed and executed. They can also be understood in a loose sense as the data collection and data analysis phases of the research.

Ultimately, this exegesis is intended to serve as a supplement, or as an extended set of companion notes, to the SUPERTHERE video. This video is considered to be the ultimate practical outcome of the research, beyond the long-distance romances of collaboration themselves. This chapter examines the choices behind the planning of the production of that video - the structures for initiating and participating in the romances of collaboration. The subsequent chapter digs in to the process and experience of that video production. It offers a mapping of the key markers of the cartography of ghostly textures and queer(ing) failure that appeared through the hauntology of SUPERTHERE presented in the video collage.

#### **// Romance Phase // Tasks I: design and rationale**

In essential terms, the active collaboration phase of the SUPERTHERE project consisted of a 6-month long series of task based exchanges between the artists/Romances across everyday digital platforms. These artists - myself included - arrived at the project from different backgrounds in contemporary performance and choreographic practices.

The very basic model for our exchanges was that on a nominated day each month (or every

6 weeks, or whatever nominated interval of time), each artist would exchange with me a set of 5 rules or tasks.

I would write 5 for them.

They would write 5 for me.

This exchange would occur via email.

The 5 rules or tasks would serve as directives or provocations for the creation of a 3 minute Skype video message.

This parameter of 3 minutes was shaped by the maximum possible length of video message available to be left on the Skype platform at that time.

I would produce a video message for them using their rules/tasks for me.

They would produce their video message for me using my rules/tasks for them.

The video message would be produced and sent within a nominated time frame following the exchange of the rules/tasks (24 hours later, 1 week later, etc.).

The video message form meant that the receiving Romance did not have to be present or even logged in to Skype at the time a task based video was generated for them.

This system of exchange would be repeated across up to 9 months on a time cycle agreed upon by each individual pairing (e.g. once a month, once every six weeks).

The cycle of exchange of rules/tasks and video messages would form a dialogue between myself and each artist.

The subject of our exchanges in every case was our 'long-distance romance of collaboration' itself.

The methodological framework of SUPERTHERE took its immediate cue from Chantal Pontbriand's 2014 argument for a case for art as a method. A great body of literature on practice based research from the last decade or so advocates for

carving out a space for such methodologies (Minchinton: 1996, Ellis: 2018). The debates around practice-based research continue to reveal the tensions between the academy and artistic practice, and also speak to Schneider's (and many others such as Diana Taylor's) critique of the tyranny of the insistence on document and the hegemonic, colonial grip of the archive.

In the case of SUPERTHERE, the materials collaged in the final video are a kind of slippery, consciously performed documentation themselves. They are both documentation and they are not. They are invested in omissions and complications and queerings of what they present in terms of bodies and subjectivities and actions and intention. Everything that appears in the final video collage consists of fragments of artistic processes made explicitly for digital media. Each individual task exchange video was performed explicitly as an attempt at filtering affective presence/absence through lenses and screens out/through/across/to the senses and reception of the Romances on the other side of the digital transfer. The technologies being experimented with in SUPERTHERE were technologies being used in the everyday realities and lives of myself and the Romances.

The two central domestic digital technologies employed in SUPERTHERE were Skype and smart phones. Both of these technologies were reasonably accessible to all of the artists approached, and were, in fact, used by each of them all the time. These technologies were made for, and were readily found in, the domestic settings of the artists. This criteria of the ready domestic availability of the technology used in the project was absolutely necessary for the following reasons:

- i) The required technologies for participating in a long-distance romance of collaboration did not tax in any way the economic precarity of the artists.
- ii) The required technologies were as mobile as the artists themselves.
- lii) The required technologies necessitated no training to use, no extra investment of time and resources.

iv) The required technologies already served as tools in the creative labour of the romances, they felt to a degree 'native' and therefore lent themselves to formal experimentation, they felt to a degree 'everyday' to the romances and therefore lent themselves to an experimentation with provisionality.

v) The required technologies allowed an easily and reasonably immediate transmittable visual capture of the enactment of the tasks and task exchanges.

The absorption or subversion of these 'everyday' technologies into collaborative performance making practices provided a space for the research to directly and practically chart the experience of working creatively with and in the digital.

Despite being anchored somewhere in the sea bed of the scientific method - with its delineated data collection and data analysis phases - the carefully thought out *plan* of the SUPERTHERE artistic research project was not a clinical one. The proposition was to initiate and sustain multiple long-distance relationships of artistic collaboration - to think through *the doing* of an art practice together; to explore the hauntological experience of long-distance digital collaborations. The proposition was to exist in open, playful relation - in romantic encounter - to other artists. These artists were - and continue to be - my peers. Some are friends. Some I had been in a long-term state of admiring from a distance. One in particular, I knew only through a deepening mutual appreciation over time of the aesthetics of our Instagram accounts and what those accounts told of our approaches to making art.

The principal interest of SUPERTHERE was to map a hauntological cartography of the contours of what *it is* to participate, to *be in(volved) in* digitally based performance collaborations themselves. The attention was on how artists working principally with performance might forge a process together in this digital context of uncanny temporal and spatial possibility. Importantly, the research was interested in what the failings of these endeavours of long-distance romances of collaboration produced whilst operating outside of an institutional frame of cultural production. As mentioned in the Introduction, SUPERTHERE diverges from previous research into the use of Skype in performance in that the project was not about assessing the utility or limitation of the platform in creating an ersatz

physical presence in the production of a show or a piece. It was about involving the technology in an experimental discovery of process for its own sake. It was for pleasure, and out of a mutual admiration flowing between people interested in working together artistically who would never find a way to get into a room together to work without military style planning and a concentrated schedule of funding applications. The project had its own interests in working around, through and against these conditions of precarity and impossibility. It took these leads and applied them to the domestic digital space as a site or filter.

To begin SUPERTHERE was to enact the first risk: to gambit on proposing participation in the artistic research project to 7 fellow artists who also work principally with performance. I wanted to ask them if they would consider a long-distance romance of collaboration with me. I was asking them to take a chance on going steady with me in an artistic relationship - a very particular kind of intimacy. The intimacy of collaborative artistic relationships emerges through the invitation to engage together in the field of not knowing whilst being utterly exposed and seen by one another - the field of artistic process. What if my idea was boring or stupid or naive to them, my peers? New risk: exposure of my failure to be a 'good' artist. Or perhaps, another risk: my failure to attractively engage them; a failure to begin.

At this very early juncture, my concern was how to frame the invitation to join me in such a way that the proposition was attractive. SUPERTHERE was very much a response to the precarity of being a freelance artist in the age of late capitalism. It was a project which sought to carve out potential modalities of working together simply because we wanted to. It occurred because we took pleasure in one another's, and our own, artistic work as a method of practice and dialogue. It was done for the love, so to speak - without waiting for the space, the grants, the supported creative developments, the presentation opportunities booked years in advance to signal a green light; without waiting to be taken seriously. The desire of the research followed from Jack Halberstam's interest in less 'tried and true', more hauntological modes of producing knowledge where, "being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production..." (6)

And further...

I believe in low theory in popular places, in the small, the inconsequential, the anti-monumental, the micro, the irrelevant; I believe in making a difference by thinking little thoughts and sharing them widely. I seek to provoke, annoy, bother, irritate, and amuse; I am chasing small projects, micro politics, hunches, whims, fancies.  
(21)

SUPERTHERE was a hunch. The ambition with the research was not only to find a way of working together because we wanted to, but also to encourage one another to locate methodologies which could manifest independently of the success / failure, you're visible / you're invisible brutal binary machine of making artwork via institutional support. After Halberstam, SUPERTHERE was proposed as an opportunity to 'map a few detours'. (6) As such, I was keenly aware that I would be risking doing the one thing that I am most loathe to do: request immaterial artistic labour for no financial compensation from professional artists who receive such requests all the time, and who are urged for ethical/political reasons to say no to such opportunities for 'great exposure'.

In the planning of the project, I had thought carefully about what the parameters of our engagement should be. This of course, was to create an attractive proposition, but also to create a method that was not overly demanding of the participating artists. The intention was to create something flexible that could not only easily fit into, but also reflect, the conditions of the lives of artists in all of their precarity: the constant traveling; the irregular time schedules; the working within various conditions of limitation of resources; the juggling multiple projects as a not only as a matter of interest, but also as a necessary strategy of survival; the perpetual grant and application writing in the relentless task of prospecting for something resembling a sustainable practice and future.

And so, I approached them, my potential Romances...

Hello.

I am writing to you, because I would like to invite you to be a part of the artistic research project of my PhD studies.

First, a little caveat/disclaimer, up front, I am super aware of the constant demands put upon us - and by us, I mean artists - to produce and provide immaterial labour for immaterial reward. For this project, that's essentially what I am suggesting we engage in together and for that reason alone, I COMPLETELY understand if you would rather not participate and would also perhaps prefer to not read any further. That is fine with me. Absolutely. 0 drama, full respect.

To the project...

The title of my research is (for now):

SUPERTHERE: a ghostly ontology of long-distance romances of collaboration

The project will last 9 months. Starting this Oct/Nov.

I am inviting 3 - 5 different artists who work principally with performance to engage in what I am taking the liberty to call long-distance romances of collaboration with me across that time.

We will agree on realistically do-able intervals of time in which we will make exchanges.

These exchanges will consist of two parts...

#### 1) Tasks

So, let's say we agree to a monthly exchange.

Each month, on say, the 5th, we will email each other a set of 5 tasks.

These tasks will serve as provocations and/or scores for our performances.

They might be about light, or movement, or dramaturgy, or mis en scene, or text.

#### 2) Performance

Working with that month's tasks, at an agreed time, we record a Skype video message for one another - me for you, you for me.

Essentially a short performance for video/short film.

The format is limited by the platform to 3-minutes

Our long-distance romance of collaboration itself will form the subject of our work: our feelings, our failures, our desires - to continue, to end it, to go deeper, to ghost away.

Our dialogue will emerge and occur through the tasks and performances, successively forming the mode of our romance of collaboration.

At the end of the 9 months, I will edit together the video messages and exhibit them as a video installation.

This, along with a written exegesis of around 40, 000 words, will form

my PhD dissertation.

There is, of course, a whole lot more to this in terms of what I am interested in and what I will be writing about. But for now, I just want to reach out and gauge your interest.

I am approaching artists who travel a lot or who live in different places to me.

The people that I am approaching all have really strong and really diverse aesthetics which I feel will lead to a rich final piece.

You are all people who intrigue me and who I would love to get to know more about through a playful process in this way.

Several of the artists that I am inviting I have never personally met, but I have become totally enamoured with them and what they do via their Instagram posts.

This all feeds into the research in various ways.

The terms of our engagement, as in the intervals at which we make our regular exchange, are super flexible. And of course, it is your absolute prerogative to drop out at any time.

What I am hoping for is that it will be an easeful and pleasurable way for us to have an opportunity to work together on something.

If you are curious, then we could Skype?

Let me know your thoughts.

Best wishes,

Four of the seven approached artists agreed to participate.

Two expressed reluctant interest, but did not begin.

One declined to reply.

For the four that agreed, we went about the first mutual task of scheduling a preliminary Skype date. The subject of these dates was to discuss the project and to set the terms of our fledging romance of collaboration in relation to the limitations operating within the project. In every case, this meant agreeing on time intervals for the frequency of our task exchanges - each of the four chose an interval of one month. We also agreed on how long the turnaround time would be between exchanging the tasks and enacting the video responses – 24 - 72 hours was the preferred choice, with most wanting to move fast and loose in the spirit of the proposition. In every case, we committed to not looking at the other's tasks until we had both sent that month's email, so as to not let one's tasks influence the others. In every case, we failed from the beginning to stick to the schedule. SUPERTHERE is a survey of limitations, absences, and failures.

### **/ Tasks & Limitations**

In Chapter 2, task based methodologies in the work of others and in my own practice were sketched as a lineage of precedents for the task based exchanges between myself and the Romances in SUPERTHERE.

The tasks I sent to the Romances throughout SUPERTHERE drew directly on the tasks exchanged between myself and my collaborator Colyne Morange during our 2012-2013 *A Remote Year* project. In this sense SUPERTHERE was a direct continuation of this earlier work in my practice, a building upon prior knowledge and failings. From *A Remote Year*, I knew a number of things.

- i) That initial tasks needed to suggest a wide breadth of possibilities to open the parameters of the potential dialogue as widely as possible
- ii) That task sets that accumulatively felt 'too much' for 3 minutes produced the requisite 'exquisite pressure' to generate lateral responses
- iii) That formal tasks around lighting, sound and explorations of the frame were always welcomed and reciprocated
- iv) That task exchanges took several rounds before a unique sense of dialogue was

produced

I also knew that producing as much of a sense of open flexibility in terms of time was key. This was furthered in importance because of the voluntary labour that the project was contingent on. It was important that the commitment to the project be kept alive through allowing slippages and last minute changes with dates and times for task exchanges and video call production. Even though 'making it on time' felt satisfying, time pressure would serve as a dissuasive element to participation.

The intention of the tasks was to open out individual spaces of dialogue with each Romance that could unfold via different simultaneous investigations of form and performative possibility. The formal experimentation was geared toward the possibilities of the technology being used, e.g. the parameters of the screen, the off-screen space, colour, light, mise en scene, foreground, background, shot size. The performance possibilities leant into provocations for speech, sound, text, movement, repetition, duration, and relationship to the camera. The idea of the task design was to offer enough limitation to operate as a springboard for experimentation by the Romances. It was also to serve as a model for what tasks they might send me in return. Their deviation from this set-up, their failure to draw within the lines, was what was desired. The thematic subject of every set of task exchanges was always our romance of collaboration itself.

Typically, my tasks were written in the following style:

Throughout the video, place objects within the frame so that they mask or block different portions of the image you are producing. It may be a piece of paper across a corner, or it may be layers that fill the frame and allow me to only hear your actions.

Include a 90 second dance break with music.

Let one minute of your 3-minute message be silent of speech. But there may be a sound that represents the passing of time.

Announce at some point your reasons for continuing our long-distance relationship (for this project) and your reasons for not wanting to do it anymore, if any.

Find a way to have digital multiples of yourself in the frame at the same time...pictures, videos, recordings.

or, later:

Anyway, you like

Colour and light

5 sentences from our email exchanges

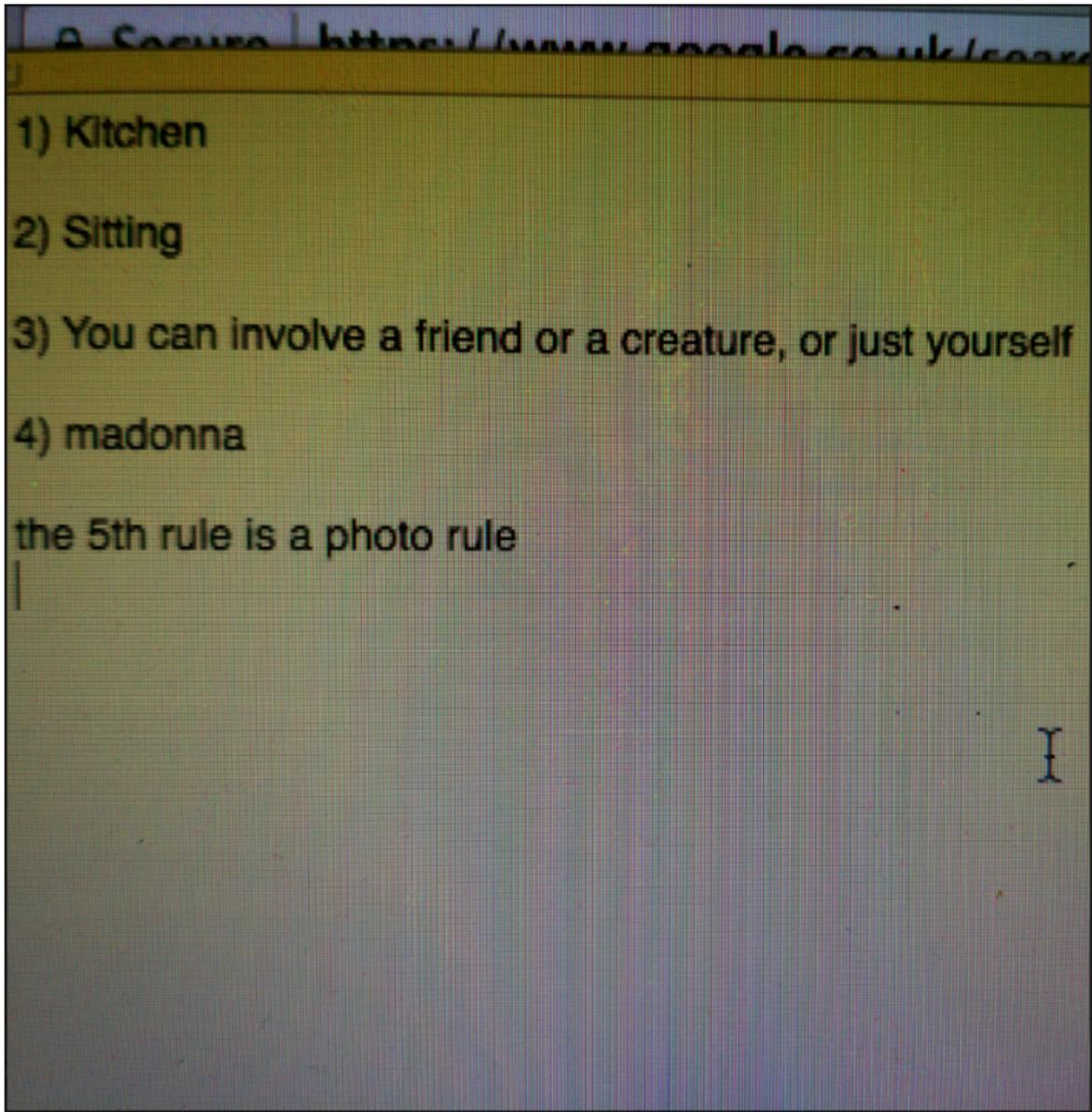
Absurd, anything

For the next 3 exchanges include captured footage of our performances/actions on a video phone wherein your image appears on surveillance monitors, i.e. On the train platform, at the 7-11, wherever this is possible.

I sent tasks in different forms – as screen captures, with different fonts - as a gambit in initiating further spaces for generating deviation in conversation and exchange through form with each individual Romance. The style of the tasks that I received in return varied as much as the Romances did. It was in these differences that the dialogues between us emerged and individuated; finding their own qualities, rhythms and specializations.

Here is an example from each of the Romances:

Romance A:



## Romance B:

1. Be salty
2. Be springtime
3. Be nice baby
4. Use a towel
5. Aerosmith

## Romance C:

- only make 'eye contact' with me once during the course of your video. Choose this moment carefully, consider how it might relate to what you've been saying or not, to where you are in the frame
- include a quote. This quote should relate to long-distance romance between people.
- apologize for something that failed between us. Accuse me of being responsible for something that failed between us. You can do this as many times as you like, but there should be an even number of apologies and accusations.
- if you can, shoot the video in a location that might confuse me as to what and where it is. This effect does not have to last the whole video.
- play with the viewers perspective.

## Romance D:

1. Report what you are doing as you are doing it.  
You don't have to tell the truth.

2. "Go out with a bang!"

3. Come up with five actions, and perform each one for fifteen breaths.

Use a different place in the frame for each action.

4. Exaggerate shadows

5. Read a passage from a book or article or poem aloud for one minute, then recite everything you remember reading for the next two minutes.

The most common concern the Romances raised during our initial Skype date was that there would be no time to 'rehearse'. This concern sprung forth immediately and in general we agreed that it stemmed from the fact that our anxiety to be 'good' makes us hasty to judge our own output. In response to this concern 3 new parameters were introduced:

i) The allowance of a maximum 1 hour 'rehearsal' before making a video message.

ii) The allowance of a maximum of 3 re-records before sending a video message and that ideally no re-records would occur – the fragility of the 'first try' being the thing of interest within the material produced.

iii) Ideally, the time commitment per month to being SUPERTHERE would be no more than 1 hour.

These limitations were essential to the design of the research. The way in which they formed via conversation with the Romances - and responded flexibly to the limits of their time capacities and generosity - helped to establish the dialogical style and collaborative tone of our long-distance relationships. The shaping and doing of SUPERTHERE was always dialogical, always relational - as befits a project preoccupied with collaborative process.

///

Expanding on the investment in the generativity of limitation as a strategy for making work outlined in Chapter 2, the ideal of a SUPERTHERE availability was beholden to a dynamic set of limitations. In listing these here I am mindful of Bojana Kunst's reflection that the real 'failure' of her collaboration with Ivana Müller was "because we wanted to invent and make visible yet another protocol of collaboration, to add something more to its excess." (29) A certain excess of structure was required on my part in designing SUPERTHERE in order to win the confidence of my Romances. It was discipline as seduction. More importantly, this structural rigour was instrumental in ensuring that the valuable time of the precarious Romances was not abused. It was hospitality as care. Finally, SUPERTHERE was designed in order to ensure that the dialogues between myself and the Romances occurred within the container of our artistic practice together, with very little conversation to occur outside of the frame of the writing and the doing of the tasks themselves. For this reason, the limitations had to be clear. Kunst's thinking on excess and failure informs what follows in the next chapter, where a cartography of queer(ing) failure is sketched as a mode of analysis of the SUPERTHERE project. It is important to note here however, that while the protocols of the *Romance Phase* // of SUPERTHERE may have been excessive, the means of production were lean. My task in this current chapter is to relay the thinking of the design of the practice, and so its excesses of protocol are now laid bare:

## The Tasks Themselves

As outlined above, the tasks themselves had parameters. There could only be five. They also functioned as sets of limitations that we were invited to impose upon one another as provocations for actions within our video messages. The limitations of the tasks were the engine of the long-distance romances of collaboration. The routine exchange of the tasks was their momentum.

As will be fleshed out in the next chapter, the tasks operated to different degrees of intensity as provocations (points of departure) or prescriptions (points of constraint). This depended on whether or not they were considered tasks or rules by the individual Romances, and whether or not there was a sense of adequate time and connection between myself and the particular Romance in the given moment.

## Technology

As has been detailed above, SUPERTHERE sought to engage with a small and select set of everyday digital technologies. These technologies were chosen because of their actual use within the running of the artistic practices of the Romances, and because of their capacity to allow a fast, free, and relatively easeful exchange of digital material – most importantly video – between collaborators.

The tasks were exchanged via email.

Discussions about scheduling and delays and orientation within the project also occurred either in email, or in Skype chat.

The Skype video message facility was used for the exchange of task videos. At the time of beginning the long-distance romances of collaboration, Skype offered the possibility for any user to record and send a video message of maximum 3-minutes duration directly to another Skype account from the desktop app. As will be discussed in the next chapter, changes to the Skype platform in late 2017 meant that this video function was removed from the desktop app. This left us to locate new solutions for the final few task exchanges. Usually this meant uploading and sending a compressed file of a 3-minute video shot on a smart phone in

Skype chat.

This shift in the technologies spoke loudly to the relationships of precarity and failure found at the heart of the SUPERTHERE research. They will be touched on in the analysis that occurs in the next chapter. What is of interest here now in this outlining of the dynamic of limitations at play in the design of the task exchanges is that the 3-minute format stuck, it worked. The arbitrary limit of 3-minutes for the task exchange videos was informed by what was offered by the Skype technology used at the beginning of the project. It was an act of working within those limitations.

Three minutes in the course of a recorded act of process based work – a performance for one's Romance, affectively reaching through the lens and into the digital ether – can feel like an eternity or a direly inadequate blink of an eye.

Three minutes is a particular stretch of time to hold the attention of both the maker of the video and the Romance receiving it on the other side. It is the length of a pop song.

Three minutes of presented process can be prepared for in 1 hour.

Three minutes of recording an act of processual performance research can remind people engaged in long-distance romances that it's not so difficult or laborious after all – that there is joy within the work.

When three minutes of video material is analysed through a process of iterative viewing and editing, three minutes proves an incredibly rich and dynamic container of data.

Three minutes is enough.

### Time

The 3 minute video message rule is one of the many time-based parameters of the design of the task exchanges.

The long-distance romances all began with a first Skype date in which the time interval

determining the routine exchange of tasks would occur. As described above, these time intervals were marked by agreements not only on the frequency of the exchanges, but also what length of time we agreed to allow between exchanging the tasks and preparing, recording and sending the videos which they provoked. Like Bojana and Ivana, the failure of adherence to these time intervals became an influential force within the doing of the project. The failure of adherence to limitations was always of far greater interest than any act strict adherence to their parameters, because of what these failures spoke to and generated. An analysis of this occurs in the next chapter.

The end of the romances was designed to be enacted through a final Skype date. These dates were proposed in the following way:

Here is a new a task, perhaps a final one:

Arrange a 20-minute Skype conversation with me in which we don't speak - but we can sing, dance, play video, play instruments, send links, change clothes, explore the space of the Skype frame.

Don't choreograph this call, just bring enough to it to play with and I will do the same.

It is a conversation.

I will time the 20 minutes.

I will make it clear that the 20 minutes are over.

When the 20 minutes are over, let's find our way into a spoken conversation about our relationship.

Let's be honest with each other.

This second part of our call can take as long as it needs to take.

Or as long as we have time for.

We can decide together from this conversation what to do next.

If our call freezes, or one of us freezes.

Screen shot the frozen moments and send them to me. I will do the same.

We can use the chat function to negotiate how to continue the call.

I will be in ..... all next week. Where will you be?  
What time would work for you?

This final task inviting the Romances to the Last Dance and Break Up Talks is exemplary of the excess of protocols of limitation at play throughout the *Romance Phase //*. In writing this email, my attempt was to account for as many contingencies as possible, folding them into the limitations, so that our dialogue could remain concerned with the artistic practice rather than the logistics of the procedure.

Besides the potential failure of the technology, the principal logistic contingency to be dealt with in the limitation protocols of SUPERTHERE was time.

The passage of time within the project also created a particular form of distance.

### Distance

Distance was the crucial limitation in SUPERTHERE. The project was an exploration of remote collaborations, of working across distances, and of the technologies which offered a means of bridging, or better still, *crossing* those distances.

There were 2 types of distance operating as limitations in SUPERTHERE. The first -

geographical distance - was an intentional limitation from the outset. The second - time - was discovered within the doing of the work as a type of distance at play as a limitation in SUPERTHERE. Even though time as distance was not strictly considered in the design phase, this is the best place thematically and contextually to introduce it as such.

The long-distance romances of collaboration were predicated on geographical distance. These distances were always in flux. They extended from myself and a given Romance being only a suburb away from one another at one time of exchanging tasks, to us being in different hemispheres in another. These distances had to be maintained in order to preserve the integrity of the exploration of remote digital collaboration. To this end, a limitation was put in place that the project could only be discussed or actively undertaken within the container of the emails and Skype messages. Meaning that any other interactions that we may have had, as friends or as peers, was kept separate to the undertaking of the *Romance Phase* //.

It was rare that any of us were ever in the same geographical place at the same time during the 6-months of the project. Even when we were, the overlap often occurred during a window in which one person was arriving in town whilst the other was leaving. The constant of geographic distance led to an ongoing negotiation of time zones. The phrases 'your time' and 'my time' were constant reminders of how the spatial disruption of geographic distance involved an inevitable simultaneous temporal disjunction. For example, a precursor to a first Skype date with Romance B looked like this in the platform's chat:

Let's talk in 10?

Hey! We said 13h, no?

Oh the time difference

duh

I'm in Israel

it's about to be 1 here

ah! ok

So you want to talk in an hour?

are you able to do that?

1:20 is better for me your time

Or now

As will be explored in the next chapter, the perception of time was the greatest limitation of all in the romances of collaboration. It was also the strongest engine of perceived failure. Time came to exist as a form of distance in SUPERTHERE. This not only occurred in terms of differing time zones as operating as markers of geographic distance, it also occurred in terms of how long past an agreed date for an exchange of tasks we had gone, or how late one Romance was in responding to one another. The passage and passing of time became a pressurized form of distance between us all at different points of the *Romance Phase //*. This unspoken pressure operated keenly in the virtual, it drove the hauntological shape of collaboration that will be drawn in the next chapter – it is a ghostly texture. Here it is given attention as a particular kind of limitation within the project.

### Work

The driver of the two types of distance at play in SUPERTHERE was work. Everyone participating in the long-distance romances of collaboration works professionally as a freelance artist. The demands of this precarious labour are high. The limitations built in to the design of the *Romance Phase //* were both responsive to, and limited in turn, by the limitations and restrictions of the conditions of our work within the gig economy.

### The Thematic

The final important limitation of note operating within the design of the *Romance Phase //*, was the thematic of the task exchanges and videos - the subject that they would be concerned with. From the beginning, it was a parameter of the

design that the subject of the tasks and the exchanged video content would be the long-distance romances of collaboration themselves. The intention of this parameter was to assist in the expediency of the 1 hour preparation/rehearsal rule. In implementing this limitation of thematic the labour of producing a fresh subject for each task and video exchange was avoided. It also served to gently nudge the dialogues between myself and the Romances in the direction of self-reflexivity on the subjects of collaboration, tasks, time, desire, labour, and distance. It was a means of both thickening and focusing the potential of the material.

### **/ Last Dances & Break Up Talks**

The Last Dances and Break Up Talks were designed to achieve a number of points in terms of the collection of video data and participant feedback on the process. They also served as a definite and final gesture and moment for the Romances and me of the work together. They allowed for a moment of celebration and honouring together of our long distance romances of collaboration within the performance for screen based language of SUPERTHERE.

The Last Dances of 20 minutes were intended as an extended exercise in deep play together. It was an test of form after 6 months of relating via tasks and videos, expanding the performance based conversation to a live setting. My interest in the Last Dances was to see what particular tropes emerged as important to the individual romance relationships. They also allowed for an experimental assessment of how and what ghostly textures emerged in a 'live' exchange.

The Break Up Talks followed immediately after in the same Skype call. This model of working 'on the floor' and then shifting directly to a feedback session is taken from commonly used rehearsal methods in shared physical space when making dance of contemporary performance. The bond and openness created through playing together first and being in the body usually leads to a more open, trusting, and valuable space of reflection in the feedback conversation. They were intended as a means of immediate debrief, in addition to being an opportunity to collect long form verbal feedback on the process in a way that having

communicated only through tasks, videos and brief email and online chat/SMS exchanges had consciously not allowed for. The design of the *Romance Phase //* had been to let the work exchanged do the talking. The Break Up Talks were a chance to break that frame and connect and reflect with one another differently.

Transcripts of The Break Up Talks are attached to this document as Appendix A. Quotes from these talks are used as evidence throughout these final chapters.

///

All the parameters and limitations mentioned above, both planned and incidental, sought to both respond to precarity and encourage provisionality as twinning influences on the emergent processual dialogues that took place in the different Romances. The response to precarity occurred through the specificity of the protocols and the limitation of the technologies. These same responses were expected to encourage provisionality – making do with what was there, generating process and dialogue out of limitation and failure.

### **// Reflection Phase // Collage I: choosing a narrative form**

The gathered materials from the active *Romance Phase //* of SUPERTHERE – the exchanged videos and the various communications around their production: the sent tasks, the conversations around dates and times and who's turn it is, the captured footage from the break up talks, the Skype chat messages that punctuated the process along the way – form what can be understood as the raw data of the research project, they are materials. The analysis of this data, the weighing up and weaving of these materials, resolves into the final art event of the project; *the* practical outcome. This event takes the form of a singular one channel video collage. This singular video seeks to perform the ghostly textures of the queer aesthetics of failure underpinning the long-distance romances of collaboration that were SUPERTHERE.

The production of this video had three principal directives:

i) To invest in and investigate the possibilities of video editing as a form of research analysis

ii) To contribute to the growing interest in video as form for research reporting and publication

iii) To make use of the hauntological possibilities of collage as a method of narrative practice

### **/ Video editing as research analysis**

The primary material of SUPERTHERE was the video files produced and exchanged by myself and the Romances as dialogues and responses to the tasks we sent to one another. Video served as this primary material because it engaged the everyday domestic digital technology of video messaging to experiment with *crossings over and in between* the distances of time and geographic space in long-distance relationships of collaboration. The videos of the SUPERTHERE romances are where presence persists in absences - absences created by distances of time and space. The primacy of this material in the research led me to the conclusion that the primary method of analysis in SUPERTHERE should centre this video material. Further, it led me to the conclusion that this video material needed to be centered in the final artistic outcome of the project in a way that was more than a simple act of say an attached Appendix to a thesis wherein each video was simply logged in sequence, or as unattended to 'straight' documentation lingering on a rapidly outmoded storage format. Such approaches would result in an unfortunate evading and avoiding of the rich space in which the hauntology of SUPERTHERE could really be experienced by others, it would be the worst kind of failing of a project about failure. The videos of SUPERTHERE were sites of dynamic and complex artistic process and conversation.

Through the above thinking, the editing of the video materials was chosen as the primary method of analysis in the SUPERTHERE research project. Later, this editing work led to the choice of video collage as the final presentational mode of the research, and Vimeo as the most appropriate presentational space. This approach took its cue from the arguments for video methods as research strategies presented in *Video Methods: Social Science Research in-motion* (Bates: 2015). This volume is where notions of “sensuous multimodality” and “more-than-representation” find traction as opening out the potentials of video

methods as vehicles for academic research. *Video Methods* is particularly instructive to the SUPERTHERE research because it articulates a shift in the social sciences context toward an experimental imperative within research practices which open out space for modes of data collection, analysis and reporting which can avoid a “fail(ure) to catch the texture of the world”. (2 - 4) Commenting on what they had observed as two parallel movements in sociology and cultural geography towards different video practices in those fields of research in the last decade or so, in her introduction to *Video Methods* Bates cites Sarah Whatmore, who notes that there exists an:

Urgent need to supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject (5)

Here, a 'live sociology' is championed in which research and analysis are able “to attend to the fleeting, distributed, multiple and sensory aspects of sociality through research techniques which are mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points which are open to the 'doing' of social life.” (4). For Phillip Vannini, in his Afterword to the book,

...video methods are absolutely essential weapons in the research arsenal of sensuous scholars. As performative, narrative, reflexive, impressionist, embodied, and descriptive qualitative research traditions across the social sciences continue to evolve, the sensuous scholarship arising out of video methods has the potential to develop our understanding of and appreciation of knowledge *about the senses, through the senses, and for the senses.* (238)

Such an approach fits sympathetically with the ambition of SUPERTHERE to assemble an immersive and sensory montage of the ghostly textures and queer(ing) failures of digitally based remote artistic collaborations. This ambition takes precedence over and above presenting a reporting narrative or chronology of the work undertaken. The work of that style of reporting is happening here, in this exegesis, giving space to the video collage to speak of the experience of

SUPERTHERE in differently self-reflexive ways. Ways that perform the experiential material and the data of the research through an affective mode. This is how Bates' conceptual ambition for video to potentially offer "more-than-representation" in research is understood in SUPERTHERE. Working from a definition of representation as speaking for or *on* behalf of a phenomenon or subject, a method that pursues a reporting mode that is 'more-than-representation' serves the attempt made in SUPERTHERE to convey the experiential and to filter the affective in relation to its subject matter, questions and thematics as not only reported data and events, but as inter-penetrative, inter-personal hauntological exchanges between complex creative political subjects across digital interfaces. Just as mapping a textural cartography allows a supple, dynamic mode of describing the phenomena and findings of the research, a video method of analysis and reporting opens out the potential for a sensuous and poetic mode of conveying the experience and the ghostly-ness of being *in* the project from multiple subject perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

The point of difference for SUPERTHERE from the type of research focused on at the core of *Video Methods* is that SUPERTHERE operates as artistic research in a context already open to practice-based artistic experimentation. *Video Methods* is very much targeted at what it sees as the unfortunate limitations of the traditional observational protocols for working with film and video in the field in disciplines such as ethnography - where a static, simple camera set-up is understood as preserving scientific integrity. It highlights a variety of really exciting, often interdisciplinary approaches to geography, ethnography, sociology, and visual anthropology. But emergent here once again, are those tensions between what constitutes research in artistic practice and what constitutes research in the academy. The proposition of employing video editing as the primary mode of analysis in SUPERTHERE made sense in relationship to the primacy of video material in the work, and in the context of artistic practice as research. It also made sense to me personally from the standpoint

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<sup>15</sup> The need for such potential is reflected in the following statement by McKenzie Wark - who's own task-based collaborative experiment *Speed Factory* was touched upon in Chapter 2. Wark is quoted by Geert Lovnik in his 2011 book, *Networks Without a Cause*, on academic approaches to new media studies:

Having to always declare something over is connected to refusing to historicize. There are two ways of situating (media studies) historically. One way is to see new media as add-ons or extensions of old media. Start with cinema for example, and position the new as same-but-different within this space of thought and disciplinary organization. The other way starts with the phenomena before us - games, mobiles, internet - how do they call into being entirely new (long range) genealogies? How do they call us to reject or revise existing histories? It needs to be allied with three methodologies: the conceptual, the ethnographic and the experimental. The mere reading of "texts" does not serve us well at the moment. (23)

that, as a video artist, video editing is a fluent, fast, and intuitive process.

Again *Video Methods* was instructive, in their introduction to the book, Bates emphasizes that:

No two of the video methods presented here are the same, and rather than offer the reader a set of instructions or a recipe to follow, the chapters in the volume are served as tasters that issue an invitation to experiment and improvise with your own ingredients - devices, contexts, and theoretical positions – and find new ways of working with video as a research method. (2 - 3)

Video editing functioned as research analysis in SUPERTHERE by offering a method for the systematic description, categorisation, comparison and evaluation of the primary data – the 3 minute videos. This analysis had two phases: 1) content collection and tagging; in which description and classification occurred and, 2) content editing and collage – which took Laurier's method of 'iterative viewing' as a departure point to analyse the clips in relation to their positioning in a cartography of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures. What follows is a description of the design of these two phases including a discussion of the choices of video collage and Vimeo as the presentational modes for SUPERTHERE. The findings of these methods are found in the next chapter, and more multi-modally and sensuously in the video collage itself.

### **/ Content collection, tagging, and clip editing**

The content collection and tagging phase of the SUPERTHERE research took the work of Eric Laurier, Ignaz Strebel & Barry Brown in their 2008 'Video Analysis: Lessons from professional video editing practice' as its departure point. As content was produced in the exchanged video tasks across the 6-month *Romance Phase* // of data collection, it was logged, using a locally stored database program, across a matrix of markers for cross-referencing.

Each clip was logged by date, time, participant (Romance A, B, C, D), and number of exchange, and location. Additionally, it was logged according to various

aspects of its content both formal and thematic. When I proposed the research initially, these markers were:

For form:

- / temporality
- / spatiality
- / dramaturgy
- / text
- / sound
- / colour
- / depth of field
- / number of screens within shot

For content:

- / cultural/cinematic referent
- / aspect of collaboration
- central question
- / key thematic
- / aspect of the ghostly

This logging was intended to assist in categorising the data for the iterative editing process which would follow at the end of the 6 month collection phase.

About two months into the collection phase - as it emerged that the most generative way to talk about SUPERTHERE as a digital experience was to understand it as a hauntological event - I revised the markers to reflect more instructively the cartography of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures that were appearing in the data, and so the logging tags became:

For form:

- / light
- / sound

- / text
- / speech
- / movement
- / action
- / moving backwards
- / moving forwards
- / moving cam
- / close up
- / mid shot
- / masking
- / enter frame
- / exit frame
- / provisionality
- / image in image
- / screen in screen

For content:

- / collaboration
- / tasks
- / failure
- / romance
- / desire
- / provisionality

The communications surrounding the romances – the texts, the Skype messenger chats, the emails, the lists of tasks - were also collected as screen captures. The communications with each Romance were stored in a folder. Each screen capture of these separate communications were tagged by:

- / Romance name
- / The number of the task round the communication fell into
- / Their location

Plus, what the communication pertained to:

/ Time  
 / Tasks  
 / Collaboration  
 / Desire  
 / Failure

Following the 6 month *Romance Phase* // of data collection, the process of editing as analysis was begun by utilising a method of 'iterative viewing'. The aim was to create a collection of clips of varying length and texture to serve as the materials of the final video collage. Within this method, footage was watched and re-watched with an increasingly critical eye closing in on a balance of selecting footage which attended most efficiently, affectively, and aesthetically to expressing a cartography of queer(ing) failure and the ghostly. The imperative of this intensive analytical process was, after Laurier, to illustrate the epistemic and hauntological 'orders' of the research and its findings into a 'filmic' one which aims to achieve a final, collaged performance of the clips of digital materials in which 'all the...discussions, successes, compromises and failures, between (the) myriad of agents (within SUPERTHERE)' are locked up tight.' (Laurier: 2008: 5)

As materials going into this process of iterative viewing and editing into smaller clips, the exchanged video messages were not finished performances, they were processual gambits, improvisations, and experimentations with formal and thematic parameters. They are love letters, not finished performances for broad public consumption. Their fragmentation respects their fragility, their fleetingness – like the fast cuts of a music video. The ambition to 'lock up tight' the vast multitude of threads of the SUPERTHERE video editing process diminished significantly the further I entered into the work. It faded further still as I became serious about understanding the SUPERTHERE remote collaborations as hauntological events. Laurier's model was derived from a survey of the methods of professional video editors and how these practices might be of use in the social sciences. It was an excellent and instructive starting point. Laurier's body of work with video methods more broadly expands possibilities of research practice. The directive for eventually systematically 'locking up tight' the myriad fragments uncovered through editing raised questions however. These questions burned brighter in light of the multimodal and sensuous possibilities of video methods that I was becoming exposed to as time passed in my research. They also burned brighter the further into the process of iterative viewing I

went. The more time I spent repeatedly watching the videos, trimming them as different clips for different aspects of interest, the more intimate, the more sensuous, haptic, embodied my relationship with them became. I understood this particular pleasure of engagement with the material from my artistic practice working with video editing - processually, formally, it becomes a painterly, choreographic, very alive way of working. And so the questions about 'locking up tight' in the context of an artistic research project burned brighter still: Why expand out beyond the limitations of strict and linear representation through editing as a method if only to insist on reducing the outcomes back down again? To lock up all the elements in the edit tight in a commercial film context makes perfectly contextual narrative sense. To do so in the charting and underscoring of a hauntology of an artistic research project, less so. Knowing these clips as I did...

**last dance\_ghost\_romance a\_paris\_glasgow.mp4**

**speech 1\_collaboration\_romance b\_4\_berlin.mp4**

(and so on...there are 263 clips in total)

...my question became, is there a way to *perform* with them the experience of doing SUPERTHERE, of being SUPERTHERE? Can a method of final analysis, but a not-definitive narrative of the ghostly textures and queer(ing) failure, be located? One that incorporates and *transmits* my intimacy with these edited video materials? One that performs a hauntology of our work?

Again, here is evidence of the uneasy rubbing up of the integrity of the *scientific* in social science methods with the interests of practice-based *artistic* research - the notion of rigour operates differently in each, not qualitatively, but quantitatively - either way it is exhaustive. It came down to the mode of production of SUPERTHERE. I am not a social science researcher arriving at video editing as a curious, and important, experimental mode of analysis. I am a professional artist who works with video editing as an integral part of my practice - editing is already a sensuous and intuitive mode of working for me and it is this possibility - and the possibility to talk a little about this kind of knowledge production - which further encouraged me to engage with video collage as the ultimate mode of analysis and

presentation of my research. Collage narrative revealed itself as the best practice for presenting the final practical outcome of this hauntological study of queer(ing) practice.

### **/ Collage narrative as a queer(ing), hauntological practice**

Sartre offers a hauntology of his friendship with Pierre, or a hauntology of relationships in general. The Romance absent haunts the collaboration, haunts the project, haunts the video collage. The actual hauntology of SUPERTHERE – a narrative of uncanny dislocation of events of presence/absence in-motion within the romances of the project - occurs in the final SUPERTHERE art event which is presented as a screen captured performance. It is an hauntological assemblage of a series simultaneous art/love stories. The SUPERTHERE video collage gestures at a history of collaborative romances, or romances of collaboration – past, present and future. This history is constructed as a h(a)unting of and by the ghosts perceived to exist within a trail of digital material - Skype messages, screen grabs, emails. The joining, drifting away from, possible returning to and even refusal of the project by the SUPERTHERE collaborators is chartered within the narrative frame of the collage. This narrative frame contains a writing of histories of creative romances; budding, blooming, flowing, faltering, failing, fading away. It is an (abridged) anatomy of collaborative romance(s). A history of the haunting nature of collaboration. A history of the demand – temporal, spatial, digital, contemporary – to be SUPERTHERE. It speaks in fragments, which, while hinting and gesturing at what they leave absent amplify what is present.

The video collage 'gestures at' rather than 'documents' for several reasons. The aesthetics of the video performance collage take their cue from the lineage of post internet (post digital) art, and also from recent performances by UK based, Australian artist Sam Smith. In his performances, Smith, layers found and constructed video clips. He makes use of the file names of these clips as a further textual element.

**movement 1\_me 4 romance a\_5\_berlin.mp4**

**masking 2\_text 2\_tasks\_collaboration\_failure\_romance b\_3\_moscow.mp4**

In Smith's performances, the cursor is deployed as a visual marker of the process of selection, of editing, of thinking, of omitting, of amplifying. It is a fluttering trace of presence/absence in-motion, as processual. In this frame, the cursor blinks on the screen

and inhabits different temporalities of activities such as busy-ness or contemplation. For these reasons, the cursor is present in the SUPERTHERE video. This choice of including the cursor operates as an acknowledgement of two findings of the research: 1) the power dynamic and truth of authorship/authority between myself and the Romances; as revealed in the break up talks; and, 2) the active act of collaging, of mixing, of obscuring, of summoning elements and the incidental results of glitching and provisionality. This second aspect calls on the hauntological methods of music artists such as Burial as examined by Mark Fisher throughout his *k-punk* writings.

As materials, the exchanged video messages of SUPERTHERE are not documentations of finished performances - they are processual gambits, improvisations, and experimentations with formal and thematic parameters. They are love letters – quite literally, they are notes - not finished performances. Their fragmentation into edited, categorised clips respects their fragility, their fleetingness. In these ways, they are primed like the fast cuts of a music video - and in their presentation in the collage they lean in to this pop cultural language; low theory. These clips form the main material of the video collage. The performance with them involved a 40-minute continuous screen capture recording of their being selected from the Mac Finder, being opened, closed, played, paused, looped, minimised, full-screened, maximised, made larger, made smaller in size, having their volume turned up and down, in a layered improvised conversation with other clips.

In the preparation for the recording of the video collage in this final act of this *Reflection Phase* // of the project, I set myself a series of limitations that were adapted directly from the rules, tasks and parameters of the *Romance Phase* //:

- i) No more than 2 hours rehearsal/preparation
- ii) No more than 3 re-records

The reasoning for these limitations was to maintain the methodological integrity from the task exchanges in the video collaging. The intention of the video collage was to perform a hauntological sense of the doing and the experience of the long-distance romances of collaboration. This meant that it must necessarily contain elements of precarity, provisionality, and glitch. The small window of 2 hours meant that I was able to build a score for the performance, a loose choreography. Into this, I built in the possibility to follow

associative paths as they came up - relying on and testing my intimacy with the clips that had been developed through the iterative viewing/editing stage. This method of a loose choreographic score also followed on from how I had approached making my videos for the Romances during our task exchanges. It opened out the potentially delicious space between the purposeful and the incidental. It left space for happy accidents and collisions of material. It supported the hauntology of unintentional referentiality between the materials that made collage such a powerful choice for the final art event of SUPERTHERE.

Collage in SUPERTHERE traces spectral contours of overlapping elements and time fragments, it creates and opens out spaces of speculation and potentiality in what it elides, occludes, and repeats. Collage channels different time frames at once, whilst refusing to centre any one image, gesture, or argument. It refuses the 'successful' closing of narrative. In this sense, it is a potentially queering strategy - it operates radially with time - emanating rather than charging through; rather than with a linear or horizontal concept of narrative logic. Drawing on Deleuze's notion of the potentiality of spaces of becoming in 'creative stuttering', for Paul Garioan, "...the stuttering of collage enables a radical cultural critique, a narrative process that has long been misunderstood..." (2008: 95-94) wherein, the "indeterminacy and immanent possibilities...suggest the 'haunting' of its interstitial spaces by specters, ghosts, and apparitions of personal memory and cultural history and the imaginings of cognition." (108)

The final SUPERTHERE video collage is just one possible assemblage in an infinitude. The potential interplays between the mix of video clips and the scrolling TextEdit .rtf compilation of all of the communications that occurred between myself and the Romances during the 6-month Romance Phase are endless. It operates as an electronic music track does, opened out to remixing, it is infinite in possibilities and associations, but somehow always remains itself in sensibility – it always haunts itself.

The video collage is presented on Vimeo. This choice was touched upon in the introduction, and it feels appropriate to repeat its reasons again here. The choice of final online presentation mode for the SUPERTHERE video collage was made to encourage viewers of this practical outcome of the project to experience it through the same conditions of production that the work was produced in. This work is best viewed and understood on the screen of a lap top or desktop monitor. It is best viewed alone, just as the exchanged task videos were viewed alone on laptop screens in hotels and airports and at kitchen tables.

Any loading problems or glitches that occur in streaming the video collage - any failings of any kind - only continue the precarious hauntology of the work. To view the work in this way maintains the integrity of the piece as “anti-monumental” (Halberstam, p. 21). By typing in the password and sitting down to view the collage in domestic conditions, the viewer makes contact with the provisionality of the work and is connected through the body to the intentions of the research; in a spectacle of small things.

When watching the video, viewers are invited to look around their immediate space – their office, the kitchen, the bedroom - and imagine how that space might lend itself as a site for a task exchange in a long-distance romance of collaboration. The video collage performs the experience of doing the project – thinking, seeing, and filtering affect through the digital - in a sensuous, multi-modal way that a pure text description of the project alone never could. As Charlotte Bates writes:

It is not my intention to promote video as a visual method – this would be to limit its qualities. With its sound and its movement, video exceeds the visual realm. It might better be thought of as a sensory method, not simply because it blends what we see with what we hear, but because it evokes a sense of feeling – a feeling there and a feeling for the spaces and people, the animals, things, relationships, and practices that we seek to understand through our research...attentive to the rhythms, textures, and atmospheres of happenings, video methods...revel in the visible and the invisible sensorium of social life. (2)

///

The next, final chapter will analyse the doing of SUPERTHERE - the participating in the long-distance romances of collaboration, the making of the collage video - through the enmeshed theoretical and formal lenses outlined in the Introduction. This final chapter is then followed by a Findings section that concludes this exegesis with a summary of the contributions to knowledge made by the research.

## 5. Practical Outcomes

/// conditional failures, presenting ghosts

This chapter discusses the SUPERTHERE practical artistic research project. It analyses the *doing* of the long-distance romances of collaboration and the production of the final video collage. As such, it reflects on the two stages of the practical project - *Romance Phase // Tasks II* and, *Reflection Phase // Video Collage II* - in turn. The first section: *Romance Phase // Tasks II*, maps the processes, conditions, and experiences of the 6 month Skype video message exchange phase of the project. This was the data collection phase of the research. In this section, contours of queer(ing) failure in SUPERTHERE are traced. This aspect of the cartography is sketched with the following markers:

- / Absences**
- / Time**
- / Communication**
- / Technology**
- / Desire**

The second section: *Reflection Phase // Video Collage II*, charts further through the process of selecting, categorising, and trimming the video clips. This survey of working with the clips includes our final Skype dates - our last dances and our break up talks. The tracing of these processes gives language to the ghostly textures of the SUPERTHERE hauntology and they are mapped with the following markers:

- / The Poor Image**
- / Glitch**
- / The Provisional**
- / Collaboration**

This cartography takes its formal cue from the typologies of failure published by Tim Etchells' Institute of Failure that were shown in the Introduction. While those typologies of failure offer a seemingly comprehensive list of the kinds and causes of failure available to us as human subjects - allowing readers to make their own, often humorous if not vaguely

depressing inferences - the cartography mapped here seeks to sketch contours, connections, affects, and inter-dependencies between their different markers.

The record of how failure and failing were experienced and queered in the long-distance collaborative relationships of SUPERTHERE becomes in turn a charting of its ghostly textures. The cartography traced below draws on my own experience and notes from the doing of SUPERTHERE and the making of the video collage - including its iterative viewing and editing processes. The break up talks that I conducted with 3 of the 4 Romances at the end of the project are referenced here as well. Transcripts of these talks are located in the Appendix of this exegesis.

///

## **// Romance Phase // Tasks II**

### **/ Markers of queer(ing) failure**

To be SUPERTHERE is to be utterly, impossibly present. It is to show up to a task with full, unwavering commitment. It is a condition which only fails when the expectation is that such a condition - in conditions such as these - can be more than fleeting. A sustained condition of being SUPERTHERE is an impossible task. The institutional conditions that allow us to be SUPERTHERE are rare. The requisite attention to a singular task, for its own sake, is hard. And so, SUPERTHERE refers not so much to a readily attainable state, but rather it refers to the absence at the centre of an ideal. An absence of the possibility of sustained, vigilant presence. SUPERTHERE is a haunting concept, it is a nostalgic concept. It is an embodiment of the ghostly textures of long-distance romances of artistic collaboration and their queer(ing) failures. SUPERTHERE operates as a glitch concept. It is something that reveals itself as more than a promise, more than chimerical, but no more than an occasional flash, a vision, a spectral encounter.

What are the degrees of being SUPERTHERE? This question is answered via a consideration of the relentless problem of presence, the persistent pressure to show up, to (re)produce, to be available, to know something, to have a response, to be articulate enough to offer something to the engine of the project's progress.

This research invites you to commit to understanding the creative collaborations of SUPERTHERE as they occurred across distances as *romances* of collaboration. By regarding the unique and individual dynamics of these various collaborations in this way, the particular challenges of relating to one another in order to keep 'alive' what two people share or have together can be both actively and reflexively understood via the popularly accessible narrative of the long-distance relationship. In the instance of SUPERTHERE, what was shared was a committed desire to work together on an exploration of collaborative process - across time and in spite of geographic distances, through the digital. In some very fortunate cases, what was shared was a strong, sustained synergistic, borderline ecstatic, rapport around a shared project. Via this artistic and rhetorical strategy of the long-distance romance, the question of desire became, 'can we make it *work?*', and if by *work* we mean success, what then indeed are the indexes of this success? Furthermore, what is to be considered a failure, and what is to be made of these failings?

These collaborations occurred out of artistic curiosity, they were acts of love - long-distance romances of collaboration occurring in free fall, outside of any institutional frame which could really serve their career or their income in concrete, material terms. And as with all long-distance romances, life gets in the way, life can make such hopes impossible. Love can fade, particularly under the pressures of time, distance and whatever is immediately in front of you. Relationships can fail, particularly when the urgency of working for money takes precedence over the urgency of attending to the romance. It is from these unfortunate truths that the intertwined formal and political lines of interest of SUPERTHERE come to be underscored. It sought to enact a small gesture of, if not defiance, then hope, in trying to locate a method or a moment in time which allowed a set of artists to play together for no other reason than their interest in experimenting with a method. This act is optimistic because the precarious conditions in which the Romances work as professional artists in the field of contemporary performance sets them up to fail dismally in these hopeful acts of collaboration. That it happened it all is a small miracle. Long-distance relationships are hard work. SUPERTHERE operated in a constant state of anticipation of the end, of the failure of romance to 'make it'. Failure to show up. Failure to find time. Failure to 'get it right'. Failure to produce a 'dialogue'. Failure to include all tasks. Failure to feel like it is not failing enough to be about failure. Failure to remain undistracted. These were all common experiences and events of failure within SUPERTHERE. Failure is understood as a queer art in this project; it is considered a

queer(ing) strategy.

## **/ Absences**

This research project was designed both earnestly and ambitiously. Outside of it being a PhD project occurring within the institutional frame of a university, the project had no institutional support in any way, neither financial, nor in terms of space, time, or feedback; no funding, no remuneration for the participating artists involved, no commissioning gallerist or presenter, no producer on-selling the work or feeding it into the consciousness of the market. It was intended as a small, optimistic DIY endeavor between myself and 4 participating EU/US based freelance artists. Artists with performance at the core of their practice. The work was taken on out of both artistic and professional curiosity; mutual artistic interest, and the desire to investigate possible forms in close to impossible conditions. In this frame of being ultimately, a favour, a curiosity - the long-distance romances of SUPERTHERE were taken on with the knowledge that it was work that would deal primarily with attempting moments of availability to presence in conditions of multiple absence. The absences outlined below are the spaces in which presence was able to persist.

The two most significant conditional absences were:

- i) The absence of a fee for the participating artists
- ii) The absence of having to be in a specific place at a specific time, specifically the same specific place and time.

The significance of these two absences lies in the fact that they operated in the project as the engine of its 'failure', or, at least of its failings. In many ways, the work was destined to 'fail'. In many ways, the project invited *failure* - because failure is interesting as a making strategy, because it is revealing of precarity, because failure in the context of experiments with the experience of working with and through the digital underlines the hauntology of the digital space in terms of how relationships are carried out across it.

The absence of the other, or of *another*, during the *Romance Phase* // of SUPERTHERE was felt mostly keenly as presence/absence in making the task exchange videos. The absent Romance was no more keenly present in the space with you than in the moment that

the record button had been hit. The moment in which you are attempting to affectively cross over through the lens somehow and be with them, or be intensely felt by them as focused on you. In their absence from you, in your absence from them, one another's presence is acutely *there*. This is the SUPERTHERE moment. Its curiosity comes in the fact that the attempt to cross over is not 'live' transmission. It is for capture - to a video message service to be viewed and experienced at a time out of your control. In this way the task exchange videos are produced and performed without a referent. And although they still serve as a slippery form of documentation, the way that they perform supports Schneider's theory of the processual, in-motion nature of presence. They operate as active, responsive comprehensible phrases from within the dialogue of the long-distance romance to which they belong. Through this phenomenon also, is evidence of the hauntological nature of how thinking and the filtering of affect occurs through the digital.

This presence through absence phenomenon showed up in other ways in these same moments of the recording of the task exchange videos. There was a distinctively different sensibility and quality to the rehearsals than when the recording was happening. Yes, this is true of any act of performance, but there is a specific intensity to the act of bringing oneself, of transmitting oneself, into a kind of affective materialisation in the digital capture. It is to do with the persistence of the presence of the other as talked about above. It is also to do with estimations of how to mobilize your own presence/absence across the intangible, hauntological digital space - wherein time can be cut across - suspended, rewound, superimposed - in myriad ways. The Romance *feels* like an active audience in this moment, like Pierre, their absence haunts the space – they are almost willed into being here, via imprints of memories of previous encounters of togetherness. This failure to be there at the time afforded a very particular pleasure when receiving a task exchange video. The videos were/are for you, they were/are an act of incredible attention to your absence, they were/are an act of summoning presence through motion. They persist. They cling. Even now.

The final absence that I would like to discuss in this cartography of queer(ing) failures is the instance of interesting pre-cursors to the collage that occurred in the visual compositions of the videos. Because of the frame, because of formal devices like masking, and because of the geometry of objects in the often domestic or hotel room spaces in which the video messages were recorded - they already resemble collage. The hauntological resonance of collage occurs through the things it leaves absent, through its failure to allow any singular

element to be fully realised or seen, and therefore fully known and delimited by this knowledge of its totality of edges. In the collage-like compositions of the video messages, what is obscured can become anything, there is no resolute certainty. Collages are a potentially queering strategy in breaking up of dominant narrative and temporal modes. This notion returns to the idea of the absence of referent in the videos operating as hauntological presence/absence.

## **/ Time**

The next marker of orientation in this cartography of queer(ing) failure in SUPERTHERE is time. Here, I will continue to pursue the idea that the absence of referents in the video messages operated as a principal driver of the complication of senses of presence/absence. I return to the notion from the Introduction that the hauntological quality of SUPERTHERE as a digital project is largely shaped by the impossibility of naming for sure where the present tense of the event(s) are located. In the project, the Romances and I engaged in our dialogues principally through our slippery kinds of demi-documentation: our 3 minute Skype messages. Cutting across time and space as these videos do - with their failure to fix a tense, and their failure of fixity of the moments in which they would be received, watched, responded to - render them and the Romances outside of linear time.

A different kind of failure of time also haunted the project, or, perhaps it is more correct to say that the project haunted the romances through failures of time. As discussed in the last chapter, time came to exist as a form of distance in SUPERTHERE. This not only occurred in terms of differing time zones operating as markers of geographic distance, it also occurred in terms of how long past an agreed date for an exchange of tasks we had gone, or how late one Romance was in responding to one another. The passage and passing of time became a pressurized form of distance between us all at different points of the *Romance Phase* //. It became so from the beginning, when not a single first task exchange happened according to schedule.

This unspoken pressure operated keenly in the virtual, it drove the hauntological shape of the collaborative romances. It intensified the affect of imminence surrounding the work. It made the three minutes of the video concertina in and out in form. First as an impossibly un-fillable expanse of time, and then often as over before the completion of singular specific performance action could be realised; so big and then, simultaneously, so small.

The collection of presence in absence discussed above in the moment of hitting record drove this moment. The imminence of inhabiting the moment just before - even though re-record was possible. In their Break Up talk, Romance C phrased this imminence so beautifully as “waiting in the wings”. Meanwhile, during their Break Up talk, Romance B talked about the failures in time bringing about a sense of competition: “I think I felt competitive about BROKEN UP SOUND being more on time, so when I was more on time than you I felt good.”

Time, its passing and its failing operated as both an expansive and compressed pressure in SUPERTHERE. It took on a particular density in the physical realm, whilst becoming available to multiple layerings and manipulations in the digital. By remaining flexible with the terms of time, in spite of feeling its pressures, the work engaged with refused chrononormativity in order queer its temporal 'failings'.

## **/ Communication**

In her critical analysis of her 'failed' collaboration with Ivana Müller, Bojana Kunst raises the issue of the link between the precarious capitalist subject and new fascinations in the labour market with collaboration and communication as a fetish. (23) SUPERTHERE too was preoccupied with these things. Within the research, collaboration was understood to operate in a convergence of the ghostly textures of its modes of production via its haunting and disruption of spatiality and temporality. It did so whilst meanwhile seeking to know if other, less fatiguing modes of working together were/are possible. Connection in SUPERTHERE is understood as hauntological, as operating virtually through the digital, and as underpinning the very notion of being SUPERTHERE. Communication in the project - and in its potential for breakdown and disruption - is understood as a functional marker in the cartography of queer(ing) failure that is being sketched here.

The basis of SUPERTHERE was dialogical. It was structured around exchanges; around conversations. Slippages, misfires, and mutations in communication yielded interesting observations. The most notable of these came in the third exchange with Romance A, when their entire video was structured as a kind of allergic protest against the 'rules'. What occurred to me in this moment was that whether a Romance called, and therefore named, the routine exchanged provocations 'tasks' or 'rules' influenced their relationship to them.

Throughout *A Remote Year*, Colyne and I had used the terms interchangeably as synonyms. We tended towards the term 'rules' as a kind of tribute to, or delight in the way Sophie Calle had used them – as disarming points of constraint, with playful reference to bourgeois restraint and value of discipline. This shared understanding was not a part of my collaborative relationship with the Romances. I consider this a failing of my design and most definitely an important element to consider in any further iterations of this research work. What this slippage of communication revealed was that 'tasks' are received as points of departure, while 'rules' are considered points of restraint. I will return to this distinction and its implications for my research in the Findings section of this paper, but for now, tasks, not rules, were what were intended to be exchanged as the engine of SUPERTHERE.

The dialogues took time to develop – and each found their own grammar and logic of difference and collision. In every case, there was an anxiety about what the other wanted. Further, there were anxieties for the Romances about what I wanted. Despite the ambition of collaboration, it was always my PhD project. As Romance A reminded me in our Break-Up Talk - I was the one throwing the party. I was the host. Perhaps this power imbalance was another form of distance. I will return to this point in the next and final chapter. For now, the interest is in how the dialogues of task exchange operated in the doing of SUPERTHERE.

The dialogues progressed, not so much through the written tasks, but more between and among and through the choices made in the videos - presence in-motion. Dancing and movement took on a very special affective significance when appearing in the frame of the videos - for the camera, in the domestic spaces. Acts of movement - like acts of repeated spoken phrases and long stream of consciousness moments of speech - encouraged further experimentation. In persistent experimentation with movement, Romance A achieved another instance of pre-cursory collage - through constant disengaging with the camera - turning their back, obscuring their face, showing only sections of the body; failing to fully reveal themselves. These experimentations directly influenced my own videos for them - and in this way a ghostly texture was uncovered through dialogue that in turn encouraged the whole pursuit of final video collage event as a hauntological narrative.

The greater the risks taken, the more the individual romances found their own style through acts of mirroring and mutation. They were a circuit of mutual influence. We inflected one

another's videos in this way. Because the ambition was to only 'talk about' the project by doing the project, in making my videos I was interested in how modeling and feedback might occur purely within the container of the exchanged videos. In my videos produced for Romances A & B in London in May 2017, my ambition was to demonstrate the possible simplicity of enacting the tasks in a video.

The tasks that had I received were as follows...

From Romance A in the form of this .jpg:

1. Remain in the background, you can come to the foreground 3 short times
2. Turn around and make a comment on the unfolding situation
3. Attempt to recall saying something that you explained to someone last week
4. Cut yourself some slack via making it cosy  

5. Visual Language from the reduced bin|

And from Romance C in the body of an email:

take my breath away  
don't face the camera until the end  
throughout the 3 minutes, glorify one part of your body, be it  
anatomical or internal or energetic  
don't dominate me  
include choreography from one of your past works

I shot both videos in front of closed venetian blinds making use of the light streaming through and throwing my form into a kind of silhouette (examples at 15:52, 22:21). I enacted simple repetitive gestures and used sound as a constant. I used the same set up for both videos. It was an attempt to gesture towards the mutability of the tasks/rules – an encouragement to fail at following them to the letter and to instead use them as points of departure. This experimentation with simplicity occurred in dialogue with Romance A's expression through their previous video of their allergy to 'rules'.

Even though we then didn't exchange tasks for several months, the next videos felt more attuned, more open, more experimental. The stuttering dialogues were in-motion. I would like to skip forward here to the iterative viewing and editing phase stage for a moment - the place where this motion of dialogues became so evident. When watched several times over in sequence - and broken down for traces of synchronicity and contrast - there was a tremendous pleasure for me in tracing the development of language and relationship of individual style that occurred in each of the Romances. What had felt at the time like precarious, barely there, failing conversation - revealed itself as an incredibly rich site of dialogue in retrospect. In this sense, enacting the hauntology of SUPERTHERE through the video editing and collage was the necessary method for analysing the work of SUPERTHERE. The iterative viewing and editing process revealed and identified meaningful and contingent categories and classifications for the video material. The act of collaging – in its 3 rehearsals – further underscored how these edited materials spoke to one another and produced and performed a cartography of ghostly textures and queer(ing) failures. In the collaging, multiple clips were able to be shown together in layers and

juxtapositions which revealed a suite of synchronicities of actions, textures and phenomena - the key instances of which are being mapped in this chapter.

## **/ Technology**

The principal technology used in SUPERTHERE was Skype, more specifically, the Skype video messaging platform. This platform was chosen first and foremost because it was the one used in *A Remote Year*. Skype had been used in both in *A Remote Year*, and earlier in *Far Away...So Close*, because it was a) free, and b) used constantly at the time in our everyday lives as freelance artists. Both of these works had sought to speak of and through the experience of living and working with this digital platform - in which bodies and subjectivities materialise and de-materialise by crossing over distances and elasticising time.

When the SUPERTHERE practical project began in the first half of 2017, Skype offered a video message function in which a video of up to 3 minutes could be recorded and sent to any of your Skype contacts. This video function also allowed the re-recording of the video message, but no capacity to save them before sending. Once sent, the video messages were saved and appeared in the shared chat history of the sender and the recipient. This technology, though not without its failings, was ideal for the long-distance basis of SUPERTHERE romances. Video messages would often fail to upload, or take an incredibly long time to upload. They would fail to play. Or fail to download when I attempted to store them. For the most part, they worked. When they didn't, myself or the Romances improvised with PhotoBooth or our smartphone cameras and took advantage of Skype's capacity at that time to send files of unlimited size via the chat function. These features of the platform shaped the project and also offered a detailed online archive of the exchange history of each Romance.

In late 2017, Skype was sold to Microsoft and its design renewed. Suddenly, a very familiar interface had become buggy and bewildering. Further, chat histories were wiped overnight. Some video messages had disappeared completely, while those remaining were stored in the new 'Gallery' folder - which took a prolonged effort to locate. The video messaging functionality had not been built into the new design. It was available, but not in an immediate, straight-forward, user-friendly way on the usual desktop app interface. Searches for information on how to continue using the video messaging in this mode revealed the

necessity of some kind of online Quest Journey. Video messages could still be made using the smartphone app, but had a maximum limit of one minute and required that a finger remain pressed on the record button the entire time. Further, an upload limit had been set on file transfers in Chat, meaning uploaded 3-minute videos from smart phones and PhotoBooth now had to be compressed before sending. This failure of the free but commercial technology to remain constant, or user friendly, re-affirmed the precarity of the project - erasure was and is always imminent. Our co-option of the platform for SUPERTHERE was always an act of borrowing, and always operating on borrowed time.

The easeful and generous video message function was most probably removed because of the issues it raised for Skype around storage and data. It was probably also not used so much by anyone except in instances of experimental long-distance romances of collaboration art projects. Skype's principal function is a live video call service in real time. Other platforms, such as WhatsApp and even Snapchat, are better suited to, and more interested in the grammar of video messaging. As SUPERTHERE came to a close, so did the technology it worked with - at least in the form it was accustomed to. This process reveals another aspect of living through the digital - constant adaptation, and persistent re-inscription and evolution of the grammar of existing in the frame. Living through the digital requires vigilant attention to data loss, or alternatively, a stoic attitude to change, and the shifting capacities of storage and retrieval.

This haunting by the spectre of being rendered obsolete via technological change - the haunting by the spectre of erasure - is an important and interesting area of this cartography of queer(ing) failure in the SUPERTHERE project. It speaks again to the hegemony and privileging of the physical archive, the written archive. Forgotten and erased histories - queer histories, Black histories, trans histories, feminist histories - are of crucial importance to be written and woven in to what we dare to understand not only about history, but the also the future, and our agency in both. At the same time, archive fever is fueled by the death drive, by the futile quest for an omnipotent and eternally permanent resolute, *textual* record. Drawing on Diana Taylor, Rebecca Schneider's argument in relation to presence and liveness as they operate in conversation with the archive, is that there are other forms of knowledge production and memory than the textual. And these forms are of equal value.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Drawing heavily on Derrida's 1995 classic Freudian treatise on the archive, *Mal d'Archive: Une Impression Freudienne*, translated to English that same year as *Archive Fever*, Helen Freshwater uses her firsthand experience with

The body is one such place of knowledge production. The processes of remote collaboration developed between myself and the Romances will continue to materialise and inflect our future work - together and apart - whether the 'complete' SUPERTHERE project and its materials enter the archive or not. This will occur with or without citation. But it will occur in

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the prominent institutional record of Lord Chamberlain's office - which are housed at the British Library in order to "preserve the textual detritus produced by the quotidian activity of the British theatrical censorship system." (731) - to expose the "dangerously seductive" allure of the archive and to call for its necessary re-imagining by contemporary scholarship. Her argument is underpinned via her charting of "the archive's continual oscillation between the poles of thing and theory." (752). When Freshwater speaks of the 'thing', she refers to the realities of the objects of the archive; a reality whose grasp is perpetually obscured by what Walter Benjamin has called the 'aura' of the object. This aura is problematized by the fact that in the archives to which Freshwater refers, those objects are textual. Barbara Biesecker recalls LaCapra's caution of "archivism's tendency toward the mis-recognition of words as things" (Biesecker: 125).

By the 'theory' Freshwater refers to what she models as the often fetishised, mythology that the archive holds the key to every grand narrative of the Western logocentric tradition – if one can only dig deep enough; collage the fragments and traces convincingly enough – if one succumbs to archive fever. "Any interpretation of the archive necessitates a complex negotiation of the space between thing and theory." (Freshwater: 731). She continues, "Academia thrives on the lure of new material and undiscovered textual territory" (732). The allure of the archive is perhaps most compelling when the researcher is confronted with the particularity of a unique archival collection." (731) It is the allure of communing with the dead, as Derrida argues, "The structure of the archive is spectral. It is spectral a priori: neither present nor absent 'in the flesh', neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met." (Derrida: 1995: 84).

The influence of Derrida's *Archive Fever* upon the contemporary discourse of the archive is ubiquitous and pervasive; it underpins Freshwater's thinking. *Archive Fever* addresses the archive from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, considering the impetus for 'archivisation' as beholden to two opposing catalysts: the conservation or archive drive and the destruction or death drive. Conversely, in Derrida's own words, "...the death drive is above all anarchivic, one could say, or archiviolithic. It will always be archive destroying by silent vocation...The archive always works, and a priori, against itself...There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression. Above all, and this is the most serious, beyond or within this simple limit called finiteness or finitude, there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive." (11, 14, 19)

Using the example of the Lord Chamberlain's records, Freshwater makes explicit two of the ways in which the archive operates with the destruction or death drive: a) that the Lord Chamberlain's is a record of suppression, censorship and repression. And, b) that any reconstruction of the past is an act of violence. Via these conflicting drives of conservation and destruction, the institutional archive has operated as an incredible bedrock of political power. On this I quote Diana Taylor, influential critic of the archive, at length from her 2010 lecture 'SAVE AS...Memory & the Archive in the Age of Digital Technologies':

An archive is simultaneously an authorised place (the physical or digital site housing collections), a thing/object (or collection of things – the historical records and uniques or representative objects marked for inclusion), and a practice (the logic of selection, organisation, access, and preservation over time that deems certain objects 'archivable'): Place/thing/practice function in a mutually sustaining way. The 'thing' is nameable, storable, and preservable, imbued with the power and authority - perhaps even aura - of both place and of selection. We know the thing is important because it has been selected to be preserved in the archive. It does not matter whether the thing was made to be preserved in the archive. It does not matter whether the thing was made to be saved – carbon copies of letters and even daily newspapers or handouts at a protest march take on a special status in the archive. In turn, notions of historical accuracy, of authenticity, authorship, property (including copyright), specialised knowledge, expertise, cultural relevance, even 'truth' are underwritten by faith in the object found in the archive. This circular legitimating epistemic system again affirms the centrality of the place. The archive comes to function, Foucault noted, not simply as the space of enunciation, the place from which one speaks, but also (and primarily) "the law of what can be said." Place/thing/practice exist in a tightly bound connection in which each relies on the other for its authority. Each has a different logic and politics of making visible." (Taylor: 2010: 4-5)

good faith, and it will be of use in very practical, generous ways. The digital opens out other knowledge production possibilities - such as the visual field, video in particular. Video degrades, storage formats change, not everything can be saved. Not everything has to be. The Poor Image refuses the totalising impulse of the high-resolution authority. At the same time, video as a format implies that things are always missing - every frame functions as an act of selection, as an act of inclusion and exclusion, and an act of data loss.

Acknowledging gaps, omissions and missing pieces is a potential act of queering the failure of the archive, and of queering the failure of technologies. In acknowledging that there are gaps, that there are things we do not know - possibilities can open out. This attention to omissions does not necessitate a queer(ing) event or process. It becomes a queering strategy when it destabilises normative narrative structures and affects. When it centers subjects and social contracts of relating which deviate from heteronormative lines of being, and instead they appear, 'out of line' (Ahmed: 161), or rather, as Renate Lorenz insists, they are not deviant, but are "always other". (Lorenz: 2012: 22) The SUPERTHERE project yielded more video material than can reasonably be shown, or that *needs* to be shown. By presenting these failures – of time, of technology, of attention, of the ability to tell everything at once; to be SUPERTHERE – the deliberate and chance intersections of video collage attend to and reveal their cartographies of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures. A hauntology of the project - enacted by this video collaging - is the most reasonable and generative act of care and transmission of what we did together whilst apart. Because, as Paul Garoian denotes, "the in-between spaces of collage are always volatile" (105), it insists that we "consider those who are absent" (110), marking the form as a viable and vital form of critical narrative. Drawing on Maurice Lazzarato, Garoian argues that in a time of mass communications wherein there is a fixation on the processing of information, collage narrative insists on a return to story-telling. In SUPERTHERE the embodied knowledge of the doing of the project through the digital is brought to bear in the "in-between spaces" of collage narrative.

## **/ Desire**

The technology used in SUPERTHERE itself was provisional. It was a proxy for 'being there' in the long-distance romances. As we saw above, it was also liable to shape shift without warning. The filtering through of the affect of *being there*, the effective transmission of presence/absence, was achieved mainly through the task videos operating as recordings

of intensities of attention. In the task videos, commitment and intention - to enactment of process, and of intense attention to the effort of filtering *across* the digital - amplified presence/absence. Any moment, however fleeting, of distraction - eyes darting to somewhere on the screen, or worse, out of the frame to another object of interest outside the container of the work - magnified disconnection, signaled failure; the flood of impossible distance came flooding in. These moments of distraction - though of course inevitable as Sara Jane Bailes makes clear in her short essay *Distracted* for the Institute of Failure (2002), and although exceedingly rare – always served as a reminder that the ambition to be SUPERTHERE was always “cruelly optimistic”. (Berlant: 2011) Tim Etchells is skeptical of the realities of *being there*:

The fantasy of pure or unmediated presence can be quite disturbing...I can only think of it as a horrible gushing forth! - because we can only ever construct ourselves through all kinds of filters, frames, barriers and social frameworks. (Etchells: 2006: 186)

Failure is relative to expectation. It is the falling short of expectations. It is inextricably linked to desire and the attainment of desires. In the doing of the *Romance Phase* // of SUPERTHERE, two desires persisted tellingly. The first, was the desire for the technology to be different. In their Break Up Talk, Romance A was asked what they would desire in a final 'swan-song' task exchange:

R: I would like to not use these shitty cameras

LAUGHTER

M: Yeah

R: I hate them

M: It's about limitation babe.

R: Yeah.

M: It's about absence and limitation.

R: Absence of resolution.

M: Exactly

R: Absence of definition.

And for me it was about limitation. Again, it was my party, I was the host, and my guests had desires and interests other than my own. That was the basis of the dialogues, and the rupture of the third type of distance operating in the project - the power imbalance around direction of the work and around authorship. Romance A was asking the same question queer performance artist Erin Markey very recently put forward:

Yeah, but there's no way to know that without just fucking fail, fail, fail, fail, failing at it. I mean, failure is such a boring old trend now. Everybody knows that failure is the key to everything. But then what's next? If we know that failure is the way to get anything done that feels good, then it's about getting the space to imagine the actual utopia that follows it. So yes, fail, but also allow yourself to imagine what could come next - not the perfect world inside of this world, but the perfect world that seems impossible. *That* is the thing that I hope comes out of a million failures. (Markey: 2017)

Markey's statement refers in some ways to the institutionalising of failure as almost a genre or a trope in cultural production, as with Forced Entertainment. The relationship between production values and queer aesthetics is not as simple as queerness equals losing as an 'inevitable' part of a non-reproductive loop. Meaning it is therefore an aesthetics of failure that operates always with a sense of 'amateurism' in an outlier or marginal position. The desire of many queer artists is to take pleasure in craft and make a living from their work while inhabiting queer bodies, romances, desires and narratives. In terms of production values and commercial and critical success, this is realised in the Pixar films referenced by Jack Halberstam as much as it is in the work of Ursula Mayer. It is worth quoting Greer again in an understanding of queer performance making as an ambition, 'to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits' (1999: 69)" Queer work doesn't have to be provisional and it doesn't have to 'fail' or represent failure. But failure and the provisional are available queering strategies, and their use in SUPERTHERE stems from my formal interest in them as a queer artist. What is at play here is queer desire in terms of formal choices.

I had a formal interest in the limitations of the conditions of the project, and an ethical and political interest in not impinging on the precarity of the Romances in designing the parameters of the project. At the same time, the parameters weren't rules - points of constraint, they were tasks - points of departure. They could be blown open, and fail to be

attended to in any way the Romances wanted. Romance A had stopped using their Skype web cam by the second round of task exchanges. In my romance with them, I quickly followed - using the camera of my iPhone. This was our dialogue; a gentle, incremental elevation of the refusal of the failures of the limitations that were initially set and a re-inscription of what was possible.

This testing of the elasticity of the membrane of the process was borne out the same desire that haunted everyone in the project - the desire to be good: a good collaborator, a good artist; to be good enough. The desire that everyone expressed at one point or another in the process was to enact a good Romance – to charm, to flirt through creative risk taking and dialogue, wanting it to work, wanting to be seen and embraced, to be met artistically. These romances are queer because of these desires, because of this spilling out and blurring of the lines between romance and creative collaboration. Or perhaps, more to the point because they acknowledge the romance like shape of collaborating – where the intercourse consists primarily of vulnerable negotiation of artistic desire. In SUPERTHERE the romances are also queer because of their refusal to engage with normatively gendered relations in the frame of 'long distance relationship' – the videos normalising sexual sameness in enacting romance and desire, and place no demands on fidelity to normative gender presentation or the limitations of actions or expressions of desire.

One of my biggest regrets of the project was that Romance D and I only shared one exchange. We had the greatest geographic distance between us, knew each other the least, and had the most in common between our practices. Following that first exchange, Romance D wrote to me via email:

I know it's super not the point to be worrying about these being "good" but of course I have to say that I think my future vids will be "better" since I'll have more time and won't be jet lagged.

Their video was GREAT. It filled me with promise about where we would go in our dialogue. It filled me with desire to go further. It also filled me with the anxious desire to be 'good enough'. These anxieties work spectrally, they haunt us in order to push us further, but they also make us fail before we try. They are a double-edged sword and an engine of the ghostly texture of collaboration that will be discussed below. These desires of 'being good'

produced a persistence of presence in absence. They also served as the engine of disruption in the flow of the work - the failure to engage for fear of failing, and worse being witnessed by peers in that act. The risk that is constantly taken in order to make art.

## // Reflection Phase // Video Collage II

This section of the exegesis is an explanation of the thinking that took place through the production of the final video collage of SUPERTHERE. It is textual map of the understandings, experiences, and examples of the failures and failings that occurred within the romances of collaboration of the project. This map reveals how the contours and textures of these events - as they played out in the digital screen spaces of the project, and in the affective and concretely physical spaces of distance between collaborators - appeared in the form of ghostly textures. If failure can be a richly generative force in creative work, then what failure both generates and is generated by in SUPERTHERE, is an understanding of ghostly textures in remote digital collaboration. This charting of the ghostly textures in SUPERTHERE underscores the broader contemporary experience of the uncanny and the precarious as the quotidian within which we must all increasingly work. A prolonged condition of all things being no more than provisional, temporary, casual, hauntological - particularly as we increasingly become through the digital. This mapping of ghostly textures in the project is in essence a second underscoring of absences - of the Poor Image, of Glitch, of the Provisional, of Collaboration. This second layer of absences intersects and informs those plotted in the surveying of queer(ing) failure above.

## / Markers of ghostly textures

The key *texture* - the feel, the affect, the visuality, the *experience* - of the ghostly is unfixedness. It is a fluidity, an impermanence, a failing of any given element, any technology, any economy necessary to the continuation of an event or relation to live up to a promise of permanence. Or an ability to materialize fully. This unfixed, semi-materialization is most legible or obvious in the lo-resolution quality of the screen appearances of the collaborators. It is also evident in more subtle elements. For example, the micro gestures of beginning and ending the video messages wherein hands visibly hover in minute hesitation over trackpads as eyes dart to check that the technology indeed is working - that they, as Romances, are indeed present(ing) for digital capture. It is also to

be located in the way in which a seemingly small commitment of time - a fixed date to exchange tasks - somehow psychologically blows out or amplifies for some as an impossible time challenge to meet; the commitment itself haunts us into a paralysis of simple, promised action...it is too much. It is also in the brief flurries of messages around these failures-to-show-up, wherein incredible texts around the tyranny of time were exchanged.

The ghostly is a refusal to remain constant. The ghostly is a queer kind of productive unreliability. The ghostly is an ongoing experience of suspense, which is perhaps a glossier, more romantic, more cinematically reminiscent term for anxiety. The ghostly is (perversely perhaps, as we arrive back at Derrida) an enactment of Marx's phrase, that 'All that is solid melts into air'. Marx was referring to the acceleration of the binarising of labour conditions brought about by the expanding bourgeoisie as it marching toward and beyond the Industrial Revolution obliterating the long understood feudal system of social stratification. In SUPERTHERE the solid melting to air is the reliability of conditions that make long-distance romances of collaboration possible - digital screen space, time, internet connection, artistic connection...failures, absences.

This chimerical cartography, this constant tension of attempting to hold on tight to the trace vapors of a point in time or a relation in space can effect a particular kind of nostalgia. A longing for the spectre of an imagined moment - a moment of ideal, the moment in which we 'get it right'; a future perfect condition. This chimerical event of longing and temporal disjunction that underpins the hauntological - and so the ghostly - is an exercise in faith and trust and adaptation; the hardest things of all in relationships of any kind, including romances of collaboration. Through its visibly enacted assemblage, the SUPERTHERE video collage generates - it emanates - a hauntology of the project.

### **/ On collaging**

I would like to take the time here to reflect a little further on the process of making the video collage. This work had two stages: a) the iterative viewing categorising, and trimming of the clips and materials; and b) the act of performing the live collaging performance action for screen capture. The markers of ghostly textures that follow in this section draw on both of these stages, just as the collaging work of SUPERTHERE found inflection in the markers of queer(ing) failures above. Everything in SUPERTHERE worked and works

dialogically and works hauntologically – producing uncanny affects in a mode in which time is out of joint.

In the trimming of the clips, I was balancing multiple urgencies and desires. I was thinking of them, my Romances, and how to sufficiently tell *our* story. I was thinking of how to serve them. I was also thinking of how to serve my narrative - of what was visually interesting, of how to evidence failure while allowing a certain legibility, a certain 'pleasing' aesthetic. Throughout this process I reflected often on Tim Etchell's definition of presence as being produced by people being witnessed not quite achieving their task; of presence being produced through absence, through failure. (Etchells: 2006: 184-185) I was thinking of how I needed to risk trusting the collage process to be that old chestnut, 'good enough', not as an art event necessarily, but as a hauntological narrative strategy.

In editing down the video clips it became apparent very quickly that the level of fidelity any given Romance demonstrated to their tasks in their video messages was the least interesting thing. In this sense, the collaging process was eased of the burdensome limitation of having to prove some empirical relationship in the chronology of the SUPERTHERE exchanges. As discussed above, the absence of referents of time and place was already an engine of uncanny presences in the exchange of the Romance videos. This refusal of temporal referents meant that the present tense of the videos was unfixed, it was unreliable. In the collaging process, I became conscious that viewed from the outside, by a spectator from beyond the container of the project - a third referent became absent: the referent of for whom the videos were made - the clear referent of the knowledge of the dynamic of the relationships. Through this third element of indeterminacy - amplified through the fragmentation of collage - the hauntological effect, and affect, thickens. In considering potential viewers at this collage making stage - they too became present in their absence, and the relationships between the fragments in the collage became loaded with further possibilities, inferences, and implications.

In moving towards drafting the loose choreographic score for the video collage performance, I considered a number of further necessary elements that should be included. I was interested in offering a sense of the different tracks that we took as each individuated Romance pair via our particular alchemy of interests and levels of consistency of engagement. During the *Romance Phase* // of SUPERTHERE I was always concerned with the dialogue in terms of analysing the material - that was my task as a participant in 3 concurrent long-distance

romances of collaboration. In the *Reflection Phase //*, where the video collage was produced, I became pre-occupied with the gaps and absences, the odd synchronicities. With the Break Up Talks, I worked with them immediately in the editing software. I did this for expedience, but also to work with the medium directly. In this way, I could evade unnecessary extraneous textual referencing to the doing of the thing. And instead engage with the hauntological process of cutting across time more directly.

In the continued process of iterative viewing the categorising and clipping of the fragments brought to light different revelations of form and content, different connections, different modes of thinking - visually, bodily, textually, sonically - at play amongst the videos. Moving towards the loose choreographic score, I considered these multiple modes as a palette. I had certain introductory clips in mind that could act as narrative sign posts and serve as an introduction to the machinations of the form. I had certain strategies that I wanted to employ: looping, repetition, multiple sound sources, non-diegetic sound - that would summon the ghostly textures that are detailed in the next section.

I knew that I wanted the collage to return to its own beginning somehow. My intention with this was to create a temporal referent for the viewer within the constantly shifting terrain of the layering of clips. It would produce a sense of looped narrative arc, stretching time and demonstrating the elasticity and potential infinitude of repetition. The clip that I used for this purpose was Romance C delivering the following text which underscores the thematic and intention beautifully whilst introducing the method of the project and its capacity for dissolution:

*You asked me to stick to a schedule, once a month, send instructions and a video. In the beginning, I did it, I was good at it. But as time went on, a slippage, maybe a bit of fear, messiness, sometimes...*(Romance C becomes distracted by something out of frame and abruptly stops speaking. The clip is cut here and loops back on itself)

I knew that I didn't want the video to be more than 45 minutes in length. This was in some aspects a question of taste. I have a personal preference for compact screen works. It was also a consideration of audience. On the one hand, 45 minutes is a brief enough length to hold attention – 10 minutes under the conventional 55 minute documentary feature length. On the other hand, it leaves a clear sense of making the audience privy to only flashes and

eruptions of some of the events of the 4 long distance romances. This brevity and conscious use of omission connects to a tenet of the hauntological narrative form – producing uncanny events of absence/presence through ghostly textures of glitch and provisionality. The structure of the video collage does loosely follow the linear sequence of events of the 6 month romances; culminating in all 3 Break Up Talks and Last Dances playing together at 20:09 – 29:06, and again further at 34:44 – 36:02. It condenses a durational experience in a way that experiments with hauntological narrative. It tells through omission and temporal and spatial displacement whilst keeping something of the individual events of romances purely and solely in the knowledge of those participating.

Using these directives, I drafted the loose choreographic score that I felt would perform a hauntology of SUPRTHREE. The score was written as follows: <sup>17</sup>

speech 1\_collaboration\_tasks\_romance c\_3\_berlin (half sound/loop)  
 masking 2\_text 2\_tasks\_collaboration\_failure\_romance b\_3\_moscow (mask)  
 RTF (make it thru the whole RTF by the end of the capture)  
 sound 1\_tasks\_romance a\_4\_glasgow  
 build up  
 individual Romance layers (take cues from RTF + 3-4 of me 4 romances)  
 >> 5. 4. 4. 5. 2. 3. 6. 2. 3. 4. 2. 7.  
 last dance  
 movement  
 light  
 speech  
 screen in screen  
 ghost layers  
 screen in screen in screen 2\_romance b\_4\_berlin  
 find the beginning

<sup>17</sup> Should there be a further iteration of the project, I would use this loose choreographic score and the file names of the clips as the departure point for the writing of the tasks.

In working with the material in this way to make the video collage, it became a very intuitive, compositional process. It operated outside of language and within a flow of working with form. It is in a sense a painterly, dance-like process. Although these can be understood as analogue forms or approaches, the experience of immersed, embodied, fully absorbed pleasure and focus of *making* is the same in digital context. It is akin producing electronic music, or live mixing - which are accelerated versions of the same processual sensibility - working with loops, duration, glitches and samples. And here the invested spectre of Mark Fisher returns. There was a requisite intimacy with the materials - I needed to really *know* them in order to work them. The video collaging entailed a dual thinking process of the theoretical/analytical exploration: sweeping and searching for what had been learned, what had been discovered, looking for new connections; whilst simultaneously leaning in to the aesthetic/artistic discoveries and pre-occupations of the SUPERTHERE work – looking for the 'things that cling' rather than merely 'ghostly' aesthetics.

What is traced below is a gesturing towards the many elements that produced the ghostly textures of SUPERTHERE and how they interplayed. It is not an exhaustive survey, but it does offer an introduction to the ghostly textures at play in the video collage so that they, and others, might appear more readily to the viewer.

### **/ The Poor Image**

The images of SUPERTHERE that appear in the video collage are not evidences of the Poor Image in the strict sense of what Hito Steyerl talks about. But they are low quality images. They are available to the same mutations, re-edits, copying and data-loss that define the Poor Image. Their originality and authenticity is of little importance in their distribution. They are distinctly hauntological for these reasons. Their capacity to cut across time and to both operate and appear in infinite constellations of looping repetition with one another are important attributes of their ghostly textures. Further, they were made within an ambition toward the anti-monumental, the non-spectacular of a queer aesthetics of failure. They were made as a contribution to the critical dialogue around resistance to the flows of (late) capital as they interact in the kind of normative tyranny on image/cultural production that Steyerl points to. These images exist under the umbrella ambition of the Imperfect Cinema proposed by Juan Garcia Espinosa and drawn on by Steyerl.

The Poor Image and Imperfect Cinema operated as ghostly textures in the SUPERTHERE

video collage firstly in the experience of the clip categorisation and iterative viewing and editing process that prepared for the collage. As image-materials they were available to be quickly edited, changed, copied, trimmed and silenced in order to unfix them further in reference to both time and discernible purpose of action. In the video collage the images appear unfixed to solid referents. The appearance of file names and the QuickTime control panel, along with the work of the blinking cursor reveal the images as potential copies, as potentially unfinished. They are copies-in-motion. The image in SUPERTHERE is no poorer, and no ghostlier than when it is presented at (examples at 23:50 and 32:15) as a screen within a screen within a screen. This effect is thickened considerably when one detects that the figure in this 3 x impoverished image is the figure of the person now showing you the image of themselves - captured in a CCTV monitor on their iPhone, with that iPhone now being held up to the web cam in all its trailing iridescence, and that image in turn undergoing compression and clipping before appearing in a short loop in the video collage.

The Poor Image operates as a ghostly texture through other acts of unofficial citation and reproduction. For example, when sound, speech, or text clips offer non-diegetic moments in which it is unclear if a phrase like "It won't load, it's just not going to load." is a quotation or an act of original speech (09:19). When these moments *appear* as potential quotations, their source is uncertain - they evoke an unmoored pop cultural nostalgia, because they *seem* like they may be a cinematic moment we may have encountered before, perhaps in a Rich Image. This is classic hauntology from the Fisher school, the experience of the sense of citation where in fact there is none. The referential loops in these instances close to the point where the present tense of the event is un-locatable: where everything is quite literally out of time.

Early in the video collage, in the third clip to appear (01:46), Romance A performs a movement sequence to the sound of a digital dictation quotation of my original letter of invitation to SUPERTHERE. In the collage, it serves as a kind of narrative sign post. Its ghostly texture is that of the Poor Image - a copy of a copy of a copy of digital information - unfixed, destabilising, democratic, queer. Romance A's work with text areas throughout the task exchanges persisted with this pre-occupation with quotations from our collaboration. In them, slippages of tone produced an uncertainty of both who was being addressed and who was being cited.

**/ Glitch**

While citation, quotation, and copying operated as ghostly textures in SUPERTHERE, drawing on the notion of the Poor Image, instances of repetition and looping can also be understood as ghostly through the concept of glitch. In looking at these examples, I attempt to heed the caution of del Pilar Blanco and Preen, to not confuse every event of vague focus and loop as hauntological. I seek the things that 'cling' after Barthes' own proscription for what constitutes the spectral.

In the context of the collage, this criterion shifts, because curiously juxtaposed fragments cling to one another in unexpected ways, and in turn, produce the uncanny affect of haunting the viewer with the uncertainty of what, where, and when they are looking at and being drawn into. When Garioan makes his very convincing case for collage as hauntological narrative, he draws on Deleuze to explain the form as a type of stuttering aesthetic - an aesthetic of queer(ing) failure and presence persisting through the absences made by the disruption of the glitching of stutter. With this framing, glitch is not only about disruption. It is also about the unpredictable arrival of the return of the point from which an event or sequence was broken with. For example, in the collage, certain actions begin in one clip, and are then returned to in-motion in another. This occurred in instances where the content of the clips belonged to different, multiple categories such as 'action' and 'moving forwards'. In the collage video for example, we see Romance C go to close the door and later continuing on from that action in a different clip layered over the first (18:37, 18:46). In this way, through the collage and via the ghostly texture of glitching, things and actions get broken up across time. They fail to have narrative closure in and of themselves and in this failing, they succeed in perpetuating a hauntological narrative of the project. In all of these micro narratives of provisional actions split up and collaged together - it is the unexpected return of another glitching moment of progress/regress of an action that is saturated in ghostly texture. In making the SUPERTHERE collage, this understanding of glitch, and its operation as ghostly, was something that I both consciously experimented with and 'helped along', but it was also something that occurred incidentally - of and by itself - with the agency of the virtual.

A simple example of glitching as a ghostly texture in the collage is in clips where the white balance of the digital cameras being used can't make a fast enough choice in the rapidly changing light conditions of a moving camera. And so the frame is momentarily bleached out completely (examples at 09:16, 10:12). This is the intersection of the Poor Image and glitch operating together as a ghostly texture. This same glitching of the effect of presence-in-

motion being denoted through an absence of clarity of subject and conditions is also evident in the 'body section' clips. These clips were edited as a collection of instances wherein only a section of the Romances' bodies were visible - the clips all began when the eyes of the subject have just left the frame, and ended in the moment directly before the eyes come back into shot (example at 07:47). This use of the trope of masking the composition of the shot with a section of the body was an interesting and useful strategy used by some of the Romances in their task exchange videos. Looped in the video collage, these same compositions become glitching rhythms of presence in-motion.

## **/ The Provisional**

The provisional is a sensibility that I have considered frequently in making and engaging with art and artistic practices. It operates keenly as a ghostly texture in SUPERTHERE and in thinking this through, I am using this opportunity to further articulate the provisional as a conceptual contribution to knowledge by this research.

Poor Images are provisional images. Romances of collaboration are provisional relationships. Provisional aesthetics are borne of provisional limitations; limitations of productivity, limitations which reveal provisional specters, or ghosts, of what is absent, what is lacking, and how conditions may have failed before they began in the frame of the Rich Image. The provisional resists the idea of vulnerability as imperfection by drawing on the queer value of radical softness.

Everything about SUPERTHERE is provisional: the Skype technology, the digital storage of the material, the tasks, the choreographies, the props, and the Romances themselves. The provisional is hauntological because of the way in which it operates not only with precarity, but also in the way it points to other futures. Like the Poor Image, the provisional operates with a loaded referentiality, it calls in the 'other' versions of itself that are absent. The provisional is the Poor Image of performance, it draws on the lineage of Arte Povera – it cites and copies and makes do.

In the SUPERTHERE video collage, instances of domestic lights - lamps, bare bulbs, switches - serve as an excellent example of provisionality (examples at 04:26, 04:57, 06:16, 1:05, 14:28, 28:42, 29:15, 30:00). They operate so simply that they are almost amusing in how effective they are. Their simplicity is deceptive because what they gesture at is complex.

The domestic lights and lamps in SUPERTHERE stand in as references to theatre spotlights and film sets, to music videos and the idea of having a tech crew. They gesture at what one might be capable of with a State Opera budget - while condensing the intensity of that desire and those capacities into an act of task based experimentation with process - performed for and captured by a now obsolete 3 minute video messaging service.

### **/ Collaboration**

The final ghostly texture of SUPERTHERE is collaboration itself. This final section of the markers of ghostly textures seeks to bring together the threads that have run throughout this exegesis that all point to the idea that becoming through the digital in relationship to one another is a necessarily hauntological event. Collaboration - across the elastic distances of geography and time and precarity - via purely provisional, domestic digital means – is *the* spectre. It is the thing that clings. Its presence persists always in absence, like a romance. It clings through myriad anxieties about being 'good' or 'there', through an ambition to try, through curiosity, through friendship, and through the ghostly textures of the tasks, tropes and technologies that shape its relationships.

## 6. Findings

In essence and working backwards: this exegesis exists primarily as an extended notation or appendix of the SUPERTHERE video collage. This video collage employs its specific form because that form is itself hauntological. It operates through an unfixed, fluid process of assemblage and montage. This process performs the experience of noticing, producing and experiencing a cartography of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures that emerged from the doing of participating in the 6 month long series of task exchanges, video message production, and surrounding communication of the *Romance Phase* of the SUPERTHERE project. The project was initiated out of an interest in the possibilities for locating a method of remote collaboration between constantly mobile freelance artists across various geographical distances via everyday digital technologies. This work was undertaken and intended as an experiment in very sincere artistic labours of love in precarious times.

This final chapter lays out the principal findings of this research. It discusses the shift of my interest in to hauntology as a narrative strategy or mode. It then summarises discoveries made in relation to three of the markers of queering failure and ghostly textures identified through the mapping of the project: Absence, The Provisional, and Collaboration. Following on from the conversation around collaboration, the findings of the practical work in relation to the methodological ideas of tasks and limitations and how this related to discoveries around issues of authorship are noted. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on the use of video editing as a method of analysis for SUPERTHERE and how that might assist further research.

### Ghostly ontology to hauntology

In the first contact email to the participants launching Romance Phase // Task (see page 89) I name the title of my research as: *SUPERTHERE: a ghostly ontology of long-distance romances of collaboration*. This title is offered with the disclaimer of 'for now'. This evidences the framing of the research before I had swapped out the idea of a ghostly ontology, to ghostly textures that could be revealed within a hauntology, bringing me the current title of the project:

SUPERTHERE: a cartography of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures in a hauntology of long distance romances of collaboration.

Mark Cote's writing offered an instrumental grounding for my research; combining an insistence on the affective nature of the digital with a solid argument for the position that technology is a transductive property and aspect of being human, if not, post-human. Adopting the position that this transductive affect - in terms at least of the experience of working with the digital as a site of collaboration for performance based practice research - could be understood as a hauntological experience opened up my thinking about the project as a contribution, or response to, Claire Bishop's call for research that sought to identify and explain becoming through the digital in a number of key ways. Firstly, in Mark Fisher, I found a model for talking about hauntologies of cultural objects, and pop cultural objects specifically. SUPERTHERE as a project, and as a video collage art object, is a cultural object. It is a pop cultural object because of the contemporary (for its moment) domestic technologies that it engages with in order to produce rough and ready images and experiences of very pop subjects: the romance of distance, the romance of play. As a narrative strategy that identifies affects and textures operating in the virtual, or the not quite here, and as a mode of analysis of these affects and textures in their relation to cultural events and social phenomena - hauntology perfectly suited a set of long-distance romances of collaboration that were taking place purely in a digital zone; producing slippery artifacts of low resolution materialisations and dematerialisations of queer bodies. By identifying ghostly textures as affective and aesthetic markers of hauntological processes, rather than stretching to articulate a 'ghostly ontology' of remote digital practice was liberating to my thinking. Through this, an understanding of queerness itself as hauntological (Muñoz) flowed readily into a way to think productively and politically about the 'failures' of the project. Choosing to speak of these affects and modes as *ghostly* rather than spectral textures further underscored the pop cultural positioning of the work as well as speaking to the notion of The Provisional as an aesthetic.

SUPERTHERE then, became a research project seeking to trace a cartography of ghostly textures and queer(ing) failure in long-distance relationships of artistic collaboration. And in this way the notion of the ghostly is a neologistic proposal, or offering, of the research. A research which was positioned as a haunt for remote ways of working together through various states and conditions of absence. It sought digital modes for romances of collaboration which were understood as inherently hauntological. It was a haunt for speculative futures of presence across of tyrannies of long-distance. This process addressed

the following two research questions:

- 1) What areas, contours, textures, and entanglements of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures can be identified and mapped through the tracing of a hauntology of long distance romances of digital collaboration?
- 2) How can video editing be deployed as a meaningful method of research analysis for hauntological and digitally based subject matter?

The areas, contours, textures and entanglements of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures from the SUPERTHERE research are detailed in the previous chapter. In short, what I found is that they can be mapped in the hauntology of the project with the following markers: Queer(ing) failures are identified as being embedded in the Absences, Time, Communication, Technology, and Desire aspects of the work, and ghostly textures can be mapped in by tracing instances of The Poor Image, Glitch, The Provisional, and Collaboration. These textures, affects and instances don't operate independently from each other, they are rather entangled in a kind of superimposition.

### Absence

Several of these markers were particularly generative. Firstly, the idea of Absence, or absence presence. SUPERTHERE reveals notions of slippery presence and incomplete absences in the post-digital frame. The question of presence/absence as a non-binary, or queered temporal-spatial phenomena is apparent in the long distance romances of collaboration in SUPERTHERE in 3 ways:

- 1) It exists as a post-digital practice – it is purely virtual.
- 2) It is defined by its assemblage of absences and how those absences house the persistence of presence as hauntological processes.
- 3) It operates as a kind of destabilised documentation/archive which contributes to the work of Taylor and Schneider on alternate modes of knowledge production and storage as 'queer kinds of evidence'.

Departing from Rebecca Schneider's theorising of expanded archive practices and notions

of presence as processual and on-motion, the materials of SUPERTHERE can be understood as a performed archive - there are different moments of reception, different concepts of audience. The acts of SUPERTHERE are attempts at 'achieving' presence over distance via a mediation. Operating in the interstitial space of presence/absence in SUPERTHERE, documentation is a hauntological material. It is also the principal material and is comprised of performances intended for camera, through the lens to the viewer, circumventing the problem of anyone else needing to be there to document or assess. At least, it is a kind of documentation. The video materials in SUPERTHERE were the method of exchange on which the collaborations were built. In form, they feel into a video art practice. In intention, they are love letters. Notes from the field of romances of collaboration. In understanding them as a kind of slippery documentation, which was ultimately poured into the flexible, multi-modal container of the video collage, I was able to avoid the pitfall of 'documentation' that often impacts on artistic practice as research projects. Wherein the documentation serves as what Annabelle Melzer terms as a "best betrayal" of the real thing, the 'real' live performance research. (1995) The video materials of SUPERTHERE are the real thing - the long-distance romances of collaboration are predicated on absence, distance and mediation, and for these reasons they work with presence/absence as a basis of their hauntology. This queered relationship to absence/presence effects a hauntological narrative by creating an event in which there is an impossibility of naming for sure where the present tense of the events are located.

To queer failure is in some ways to recalibrate senses of shame around the concept of failing. It is also a reclaiming of a word. Queer(ing) failure is densely political. It is not just about understandings of 'success. It is about a response to queer people's bodies, lives, subjectivities and actions being shamed - often violently - for a failure to be normative, for a failure to reproduce, be masculine, be feminine, be the same, to value what the market values. SUPERTHERE is not a failed project. It is a project insistent on its difference, on its anti-monumentality, on its small gestures and on its recognition of the attempts by queer bodies to attempt crossings over to one another in digital space, defiant in the failure of their precarity to stop them trying.

In this sense, the most important absence in the project is the absence of shame about failing. Particularly in the act of attempting to bring into being a utopian state of being. In this absence of shame, the power of failure as a queer hauntology reveals itself - the power of the unfixed, the indeterminate, the non-binary, the fluid. The absence of clear referents in the

videos of SUPERTHERE - to time, to audience, to task, to subjectivity in hauntological digital space - draws on this power of un-fixedness. In its unfixed intervals of time, its strange yet clear communications of tasks, the doing of SUPERTHERE operated in and of itself as a kind of lived montage. Dropping in and out of one another's focus and lives, in and out of primacy, haunting one another through the anxiety of the promises of long-distance romances of collaboration; the uncanny synchronicities of actions in the break up talks and last dance Skype performances - the entire event behaved as a hauntological collage. In this way the research builds on the work of Petralia and Brooks in their investigations of Skype as a telematic rehearsal space. It does so by further theorising the experience and affects of working with the medium whilst differing from their research by framing the artistic work undertaken as processual rather than production oriented. The interest of SUPERTHERE was not to try and 'successfully' rehearse a work, or a piece of research to public presentation. It was instead about inhabiting the hauntological digital space as a means of exploring its specific affects and formal possibilities.

### The Provisional

A second marker that I would like to give attention to in this Findings chapter is the notion of The Provisional. Articulating this notion within this research is an important finding of the research because it interrogates more deeply an aesthetic or mode of making that I have used in my practice frequently over the last 10 years. Providing it with this articulation allows me to further remove this idea of the provisional from being misunderstood as 'accidentally amateur'. Instead, it is denoted as 'deliberately limited'. It is a queer aesthetic via its refusal of apologising for a lack of resources, also via its anti-monumentality which Halberstam denotes as a hallmark of the queer art of failure. Elly Clarke's comments on the relationship between precarity, failure underscore how the Provisional becomes a political strategy:

Yeah, failure is very much a part of #Sergina. You know, I have people sending me emails asking if I can help with their drag make up and I'm like, no, because #Sergina is really bad at make-up. I mean I could do bad drag make up on you, but it won't even necessarily look like drag, it might just look like very bad make up. I just don't believe that perfection is possible. And of course perfection is the lie that we are fed by capitalism anyway - perfection is just, kind of, what fairy tales are made of in order to sell stuff that isn't true.

And further, her description of the end of an online rehearsal session speaks to the

peculiar pathos of the aesthetic as a making mode whilst also giving a unique insight into the experience of remote digital collaboration:

I mean I certainly notice it at the end of a performance when you can't just have a drink with people. It's this incredible loneliness. And the end of a very big successful or even a very difficult rehearsal, and it really reflects on exactly what I am writing about lyrically, "Ganz Allein mit Dir" (Completely Alone With You), especially when I'm like, in drag, in my bedroom. And then it says on Google Hangout 'It looks like you are the last one left', 'You're the only person left on this Google Hangout'

The Provisional is a ghostly texture within the SUPERTHERE project that is best exemplified in the use of regular household lamps to attempt emulation of professional studio. The Provisional is a kind of tongue in cheek, but also an insistence that what is there is enough. The provisional queers failure by refusing to apologise for what is not there as a result of conditions that are in fact structural, economic and exclusive, that said, it does not necessarily have to be an aesthetic purely for the precarious. Further, it reinscribes the agency of the viewer in a way by asking them to labour their imaginations and recognise the potential small spectacle that is available at any given moment in what is at hand.

### Collaboration

A key finding through the SUPERTHERE research was not only that the video collage needed to be a hauntological narrative composited of ghostly textures, but also how the modes of production of the project - the doing of the project, the collaborations themselves - were hauntological. This recognition of the modes of production of SUPERTHERE as hauntological - the hauntology of digital communications technologies, of collaboration, of our economic precarity as cultural workers, and of failure as a queering strategy - is informed implicitly by an understanding of presence/absence as processual and temporal. This applies both within the work of participating in the romances of collaboration, and within the ghostly textures of the digital technologies that these romances existed through. They are hauntological in that it is impossible to name for sure where the present tense of their events is located. This finding speaks to the collaboration of Kunst and Mueller where collaboration is understood as operating 'out of time', which Kunst read as an interesting failure of their attempt to work together. Through insisting on an understanding of collaboration across distance and the digital as a hauntological mode of production, SUPERTHERE refutes the

'out of timeness' as a failure as such, whilst acknowledging and articulating that to collaborate remotely is to always be haunted by one another and your work. This finding speaks both as an indicator of one of the hallmarks of the conditions of precarity in which contemporary creative labour takes place and also to collaboration as a ghostly mode of production.

A second observation to be made about collaboration in SUPERTHERE relates to the methodological issue of how the romances were structured. Questions of authorship and power imbalance pervade the romances in ways that are complicated and deserving of reflection here. These reflections are then potentially useful to further research. One of the reasons why I chose to call the collaborations Romances was to attempt a strategy to frame the artistic dialogues as an equal space in which 'the lead' could be taken by anyone. This strategy was informed by my experience with making one to one performance works and very consciously, after Rachel Zerihan, naming them as one-to-ones rather than one *on* ones. But ultimately, as Romance A made clear in our break up talk I "was the one throwing the party". All of the Romances arrived at the project at my invitation. They all knew it was for my PhD research. These factors created an immediate imbalance which produced anxieties about time and 'getting it right' or 'being good enough' that further underscore the hauntological nature of remote collaboration as a mode of production, but also announce that the Romances were never really fair. Ultimately, I was the one controlling the authoritative cursor in the collage. In fact, the choice of including the cursor in the collage operates as an acknowledgement of two findings of the research: 1) the power dynamic and truth of authorship/authority between myself and the Romances; as revealed in the break up talks; and, 2) the active act of collaging, of mixing, of obscuring, of summoning elements and the incidental results of glitching and provisionality.

Beyond acknowledging my collaborative partners by name, which I do in the Introduction to this exegesis, this imbalance is embedded into the work of this iteration of SUPERTHERE. The existence of this power dynamic is food for thought for further collaborative projects. On reflection, this imbalance did not exist in *A Remote Year* with Colyne Morange, and that is because we proposed the work together. But also, we worked over a longer time frame and were able to incorporate negotiations of dominance into our exchanges as a method of play.

### Tasks and limitations

Carrying on directly from the discussion of the limitations of the research in terms of power

dynamics around authorship with the participants, the question of tasks arises. A further difference between the original *A Remote Year* project with Colyne and SUPERTHERE, was my ability to be completely flexible with the tasks that I sent my Romances. A frustration with the process in SUPERTHERE was that the content of my tasks was limited to a list that I had submitted for my Ethics clearance application in proposing my research. This limitation in the context of an artistic project, in the context of a clearance that had approved the research as low risk was enervating. The possibility for dialogue through the tasks was delimited in this way and I couldn't be as responsive or playful as I would have liked. I was responsive and playful in the research, but I would design this differently if doing the project again in such a context. Never the less, the generativity of limitation is one of the underpinning principles of SUPERTHERE and so, I worked around it. I also considered these awkward, failing-to-fit tasks as ghosts from early manifestations of the research such as *A Remote Year* with Colyne Morange. In retrospect and as stated above I think this also stems from the fact that Colyne and I worked over a longer period and had established mutual thematic and formal interests before we began. We were working with a shared language born out of a love for Sophie Calle in which the words tasks and rules were interchangeable. In SUPERTHERE this language was enforced and did not translate as playful but rather overbearing at times. The Romances invited into SUPERTHERE were not starting from this same place – *with me and from scratch* – and so, held less of a tacit understanding of the project's interests. Simultaneously, these interests (my research interests) were only minimally explained to the Romances as a strategy of opening out collaborative possibility. But I maintain that these limitations could only be discovered in the doing of this iteration of SUPERTHERE.

What does it mean to be SUPERTHERE? Or rather, what does SUPERTHERE actually mean? This title, this phrase, conjures a sense of a kind of hyper-presence, or perhaps a kind of intensive locality. What does it mean, to 'be there'? Where is there? Is it a strictly physical, geographical location? If one is not physically there, is one absent? Can you be there - same time, same place - and fail to be present? Or is it a more complex, affectively negotiated agreement - something more spectral, more possible in a post-digital world? And if it is the latter, what are the parameters of these agreements? What are the rules of engagement effecting one's ability 'to be there'? What aesthetic textures and ontological or otherwise conditions are produced via degrees or intensities of 'there-ness'?

One thing we can know for sure, geographical, affective, or temporal...

'THERE' is relational.

To be *there*, is to be in relationship to another, to others.

To be *present*, is to be in-motion, between states of absence.

To truly be SUPERTHERE can only ever be fleeting at best. Not physically present, but completely *available* in an intensity of presence/absence to a moment of relating - in the case of this artistic project: it was to be available to the tasks and to one another. Intense presence/absence can only ever be momentary in any given state. It is ultimately an affect, existing in the virtual, and like all affects it necessarily ebbs and flows through an aperture that must open and close. Like an eyelid or the shutter of a camera, it needs to blink to capture and to remind itself of its existence – to remember that it is seeing, sensing. It cannot remain open without risk of becoming destabilised or diminished in its potency. Any ambition to remain fully present can only fail. Presence persists most enduringly in its absences.

These apertures of availability were the most crucial limitation operating within SUPERTHERE. They were crucial in a way that reached far beyond the concrete, technical parameters of the exercise itself: the agreed intervals of time at which the exchanges of tasks and video messages would take place, the 5 tasks per exchange, the self-reflexive use of our collaborative relationships as a thematic and subject matter, the clear timeline of the engagement lasting for no longer than 9 months. Availability in the context of SUPERTHERE refers to multiple things, all operating in relation to the enmeshed concerns of time, anxieties and presence/absence which render the project hauntological.

Any ambition to maintain full availability in the project, to always be fully present, to always have time, to not feel pressured – was necessarily destined to fail. The conditions in which the project was undertaken functioned as a source of exhaustion of possibility. It was a voluntary labour of love/fascination by freelance cultural workers. People who travel constantly in pursuit of a demanding and precarious labour market. It was always only going to operate precariously. The mutual interest between us all in *trying* against these conditions, against these obstacles - to *just see*, to *test*, how much might actually be possible - is what made it SUPERTHERE. The first seduction of the project and its multiple long-distance romances of collaboration was its proposition of an over-arching task, a narrative, that pitted

itself against all odds. Its premise was in itself a dare. A dare to carve out enough time to enact a staging of queer bodies in artistic relation. A dare to enter into a long-distance romance of collaboration supported by only tiny spectres of possibility.

### Video editing as analysis

SUPERTHERE engaged with video editing and video collage as methods of analysing and performing the findings of the research for three reasons.

i) To invest in and investigate the possibilities of video editing as a form of research analysis

ii) To contribute to the growing interest in video as form for research reporting and publication (Bates: 2015, Laurier: 2008)

iii) To make use of the hauntological possibilities of collage as a method of narrative practice

Both video editing and video collage allowed me to work in an embodied way with the digital data materials of the project. The process of classifying the clips and also of further trimming the video materials through the process of iterative viewing allowed me to analyse the material – to identify its properties and the relationships of those properties - in a way that was both systematic and sensuous or 'multi-modal'. The video editing was essential in working with the materials as containers of affect. It was the first point of analysis towards what would become the cartography of queer(ing) failures and ghostly textures. It created this possibility by providing a strategy for engaging with the materials in a way that could reveal the dynamic interplay between textures, time and space. Video editing as an analytical tool in the research responded to the flexible qualities of the data. Further, it was both instructive and a pleasure, as a video artist, to think through video editing as a research tool in this way.

This experience with the editing as analysis aspect of the research was amplified in the production of the video collage as a hauntological narrative of the research process. This method developed from the argumentation of Paul Garoian that collage can be a hauntological, queering strategy. The use of video editing and assemblage as an analytical

methodology in SUPERTHERE contributes to an articulation for such practice based strategies to be considered viable forms and tools of a sensuous style of scholarship. The choice of a video work as the final analytical and performative outcome of the research advances the current turn towards the medium as a valid, generative and appropriate form of expression of scholarship (Bates) which emphasizes the embodied, the performed, the sensuous, the multimodal, and the affective.

### In conclusion

SUPERTHERE deals specifically with remote collaborative digital making practices. It offers a uniquely extensive long form practical example of this type of work by practicing contemporary artists. This unique outcome offers the extension of this discourse around artistic collaborative practices and their relationship to the contemporary conditions of precarity in the art.

SUPERTHERE was a project borne out of and sustained upon failure: failure to locate institutional support, failure to find time, failure to share physical space – to be in the same place at the same time, failure to fix a subjectivity, failure to fix a point in space to be shared, failure to agree on terms, failure to understand the one another's meaning. And a refusal to accept these conditions as a defeat.

As a ghostly texture, the provisional aesthetics of the project reveal themselves as a direct embodiment of these 'unfixed' conditions: a liminal, not-quite-crossed-over, provisional simulacra of other ambitious potentials, traces of possibility, the perpetual haunting of precarity in the freelance market of cultural production; the perpetual haunting of ambition; the perpetual spectre of absences.

The cartography of queer(ing) failure and ghostly textures that performing the video collage hauntology reveals in the SUPERTHERE project are further productive outcomes of the work. The charting of these cartographies simultaneously results in an advance of both an argument for a post-digital understanding of presence (after Hito Steyerl and Rebecca Schneider) and a post-institutional understanding of the conditions of the creative precariat (after Silvia Frederici and Bojana Kunst). This mapping advances and problematises notions of failure as a generative phenomenon (Etchells) and, after Jack Halberstam, a site of queer possibility and resistance in practices of cultural production.

Failing so steadfastly, so reliably, we recalibrate our indices of success in order to afford our failures. This is a strategy of survival: lemons into lemonade. In doing so, we create space to queer our understanding of success, meaning 'simply' that we allow new propositions of relating from whatever it is we manage, or don't manage, to create together. Meaning also that we refuse a failure to (re)produce as a marker of weakness or deformity. Failure then becomes generative, responses to the conditions brought about by failure open out new possibilities - possibilities that are non-linear, non-outcome oriented, immaterial, ghostly.

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## Appendix A

### /// Break Up Talks

i.

#### /// Romance A: break up talk transcript

Me: Hi Baby

Romance A: Hi

Me: How are you?

Romance A: Hi! Welcome to dinner

Me: Ha! Thanks.

Romance A: Welcome to dinner in Glasgow. We made you potatoes, ah, roast vegetables and chicken noodle.

Me: Haha! Chicken noodle what?

Romance A: Chicken Noodle microwave meal

Me: Ha! That's fantastic. Thanks.

Romance A: Hehe. So glad you could join

Me: I'm delighted to be there

Romance A: Great

Me: I need to send a reply to a message, can I just have 1 second.

Romance A: Yeah, I'm gonna have another bite of the chicken noodle.

Me: Great. Cos I'm in Paris and I'm waiting for my, my boyfriend, my lover,

Romance A: He's coming?

Me: My Romance.

Romance A: The real romance.

Me: Well. What does that mean?

BACKGROUND NOISE WAITING

Me: Hi

R: Hi

Me: So um. Yeah, This is the end...

R: This is the end

M: How do you feel about that?

R: Good Riddance!

LAUGHTER

M: Good riddance?

R: No. Um. It's strangely selfish relationship. M: Yeah?

R: Cos, I always feel like I'm indulging. I feel I have permission to indulge. And then, it leaves me like, what's in it for you?

M: Mmm. But what's in it for you?

R: It's such a like, a process of one. Like, the...generating communication, in my own world, and pushing that to you

M: Mmmhmm...

R: Pushing on you what I generate. My content.

M: Do you feel that your content is in relation to my content or do you think the only relation is that we have said there is a relation?

R: Hmm. We've said there is a relation. There has been a relation...Ah! I know...I haven't, you haven't witnessed my pleasure, and you haven't witnessed my pleasure. So I make things for you...

M: Oh, you mean the pleasure of receiving?

R: Yeah, I don't get to witness your pleasure in receiving. I don't get to watch you giggle, or laugh, or go doh!

M: LAUGHS

R: And so this is something that's like, er, I don't get to flirt...that rapid flirt...

M: That quick feedback flirt. That response...

R: I see you, you see me...yeah... It's a slow dance! M: Yeah, it's a slow dance...

Is it a slow dance that is leading somewhere?

R: Is it a slow dance that is leading somewhere? Yes. Always, always. It's always building, something. It's always bonding something. Building, bonding, binding. Um...I had to re-silicone my bathtub, and, it's a great process, you have to start by deciding that the silicone has to go. And there could be a number of clues that give this. There could be leaking somewhere around your bath. It could be mouldy. It could be tearing apart like literally saying take me away. And it's, you have to get the silicone in one of those guns. So once you've scratched it out,

around the bathroom, around the tub, you put some masking tape down - because you have to set boundaries with the masking tape...

M: GIGGLING

R: And if you don't set those boundaries then the silicone goes everywhere. It still does it's job but er...it loses it's value.

M: It's not tidy.

R: Yeah.

M: So if it still does it's job has it failed?

R: Hmm. Because things have hidden jobs, don't they? I mean, if I wanted to live in a house that was just functional, it wouldn't have any form would it?

M: Right...

R: You wouldn't really need a couch that was a particular colour, you would just need a sack.

M: Yeah

R: Yep

And...I know we have couches for each other. I'm positive of that.

M: Definitely.

R: And we've enjoyed..amazing couches.

MICROWAVE DINGS

M: Yeah

Spectacular couches.

R: Fruity couches

M: Do you think that our long-distance romance has been a success?

R: Mmmm.

No.

M: Has it failed?

R: No.

M: What are the, what is the index of it, if it were a success, what would that mean? What would have happened for it to be successful?

R: Mmmhmm, mmhmm... Mmmm.

Something like, it wouldn't have been able, to only exist inside of itself. Yep...

M: It wouldn't have been able? It would have spilled out somehow into other things?

R: Something would have broken. Not broken, yeah, something would have spilled out.

M: And effected something else..?

R: Yes. Yes.

M: Do you think that this, um, has been an artistic practice?

R. Mmm. Of course.

M: Why of course?

R: LAUGHS

Because I have this feeling when I'm with you, that everything is always an artistic practice.

LAUGHTER

M: Yeah but now you are flirting.

LAUGHTER

R: Cos you're a weirdo

M: Yeah

Why did you say..why did you say

R: Um. Mmm. Because...part of me

M: In our personal relationship?

yes to doing this?

wanted to submit control to you...

R: Part of me liked the idea of you giving me instructions. I liked the idea of

being subject to your parameters.

M: But was I not subject to your parameters also?

R: Mmm. Yes. Yes. Yep. Ah...but you were like, you were the one throwing the party.

M: Sure, I was a host.

R: Uh-huh.

M: Does that mean that there was always a power imbalance? And does that matter?

R: Yep. Yep. But that's partly what I was interested in. M: Did it give you anxieties?

R: Yes. Yep. Um, what if I don't get this done today? What if I don't get this done now? Get this done. This has to be done. Does this have to be done? What if this isn't good enough? What if this is too good?

M: LAUGHS

What does that mean?

Cos sometimes I make things, like, the last video I made for you it was interesting cos, like, like, like you said, I'm the host, this is my thing, ultimately, and you know I'm seeing other people...

LAUGHTER

Like, er, um, like the last video that I made you, I was so satisfied with the composition. And I thought maybe this is too good for this project. But then I was like, but what does that say about this relationship...

R: Oh my god

M: But that's not really what I thought, you know, it's more that, um, it was, that I had stumbled across good source material. Or I was on to something in terms of a formal experimentation that I would want to take somewhere else, you know? Which for me is a good collaboration, because it's only through our ah, through your tasks that I create that particular moment.

R: But, how accountable am I to your tasks? How strict are they? They are always in combination with your own tasks that you have written yourself for the other at that moment.

M: But I think this, 'Is this good enough?' question is really huge...um, i think it's the thing that for me somehow always, it's like, it's a tiny 3-minute video, but it feels somehow epic to produce sometimes...and this thing of it's not good enough and caring, caring whether or not you like it and, like you

said, not getting sense you receive then in the tasks disjointed and...

the feedback as an audience, not seeing you, not getting to it...there's an absence of that feedback, the feedback happens that you send and because time stretches out and gets

R: And then the tasks, yeah...and then I know that you...I know that there are...and then I wonder, 'What are the other people making?', 'What are the other romances making?', and 'How do I size up...to them?'

M: Yeah, yeah...

R: Who even are they? WHO ARE THEY?

M: LAUGHS

There's some others.

If I talk about ghosts. If I say the word 'ghosts' in relation to this project, what does that bring up for you?

R: Hmm. Ah, yep.

It's a caring ghost. SHE is a loving ghost. She's a particular...ghost. She's sometimes scary. But not scary because she's a ghost. She's scary because, um, you don't know what she'll do... You don't know what she'll do, you don't know where she will place her energy, but you know what that energy is capable of and it'd a bit like, 'OH'. So it's the equation. It's that meme of the woman with the equation...

M: Yeah!

R: Like...hardcore algebra M: Hmm

R: But it's also a caring ghost. So you are making, you have the ghost in your head, telling you...you wanna impress the ghost, you wanna flirt with the ghost...

M: Is the ghost us, or is the ghost IT, or is the ghost me, or what is it?

R: The ghost is you! The ghost is you! Don't be silly. The ghost is you. The ghost is always you.

M: The ghost is YOU!

R: The ghost is always you...

M: And what about presence? What if I ask you about presence? Presence and absence...

R: Ummm... Yeah I wish, I could hear your direction on what I was doing...because I know you would be like...yeah, but I just have to throw it, I have to throw it out there for your ghost, the presence of your ghost. Because I know...something about knowing what you like and wanting to respond to that, and always towards that, never resisting, no...and what I like, what you like, and where they overlap.

Presence...

And wish, and...wanting you to be there in that moment, when I press record

M: Like to see it immediately, or to be in the room with you?

R: To be in the room. Wanting you to be in the room. Wanting you to be in the room...and er...

M: But wanting me to be in the room like, when I get a crush on someone, and I always imagine that they can see me, you know what I mean. Like, even though I'm by myself, I imagine they can see me. Like, not that they are physically in the room but more like

that they can just see me. You mean like that or more like physically in the room with you?

R: A bit of both, like, always the first one...

M: A bit CCTV

R: Like imagine you you can see me and I want to know what you think. You know,

you're

guide,

lover.

my audience so of course I wanna know what you think. Ah...and as a like wanting to be guided by this lover. Learning. Learning from this

M: Did

R: Plenty.

M: Like what?

you learn anything?

R: About myself and what I like. What I can do, what I can get away with. What choices I tend to make. But I'm not sure why I tend to make them but I'm more aware of what they might be, not the why.

But for you I know, you're learning from everyone. Not only this particular romance. I have this feeling...

M: No but I am.

R: But I have the feeling that that I am one of many. And so what I learn is with me and is with you. And what you learn is with me and you and them.

M: Mmhmm.

R: Cos there's a them in this relationship. An imaginary force: Them. M: Them.

R: Them. Those others.

M: They are a ghost.

R. Indeed. There's a clue!

LAUGHTER

M: Um...do you have any questions for me?

R: Yep, can you describe when you felt it was working. Can you describe when you felt this affair this romance was working?

M: I felt like it was working when we sent the messages quickly together. R: And within that? What does that set up or create?

M: When that happens?

R: Yep.

M: For me. It's exactly what you were talking about. Because it's a real relation and when there is this feedback loop and a response that isn't tempor...that isn't displaced in time.

R: Synchronicity?

M: Yeah.

I'm also interested in the things that, me, it's not just that it, ah, interested in when not just being scared of the tasks but also when we find time, and why we couldn't find time. You know, what was taking up

But then

I'm also

couldn't

so much of our time?

R: Yeah, because it's the time that's like energy. It's the right energy that I wanted to give you and give this romance. And...I could always find time but, there has to be...

M: A particular desire, right?

R: A desire. I mean many things have to go together for two people to get in synch with each other...

M: Absolutely.

R: And because of the container of this relationship, like, what's outside of this container is bigger and larger and so, not that this one would sink, but...this is the dress rehearsal, but the real thing is happening...

M: Yeah, in real time...

R: You shouldn't turn up to the dress rehearsal late or drunk or hungover. You should turn up to the dress rehearsal ready to go but that's not what happens. You gotta save it for the opening night.

M: Yeah, keep something in reserve R: Mmmm.

M: How do you feel about it ending? Do you wanna do one more or do you wanna leave it?

R: Um. Yeah, I'd love to do one more.

M: How would we arrange that? How would we arrange that so that it was.. R: But why? Why?

M: Why do one more?

That's the question I am asking you, do you want to do one more, and within that

desire is the answer why.

R: Err, do you...what would one more offer us?

I wanna do one more but it's indulgent, it's like...

M: Because you enjoy it?

R: Because I enjoy it for my sake. I have a blast. You see? M: I know. I enjoy it too.

R: You've been privy to that.

M: I would suggest, then, that for the last one...we write the tasks together. We could write them even now. To see how different it is, so the why could be, all the things that we've just talked about in our relationship, if we give it one more try...

R: NODS

M: So like for example, I would suggest that we include in our videos for each other that we see one watching one of the videos that we sent each other from before...

FREEZING

SCREEN SHOT SOUNDS FEED BACK

M: Did you hear me? LAUGHTER

TYPING SOUNDS

FEEDBACK

SKYPE MESSAGE SEND SOUND

M: You know what I mean because then we see each other in each others worlds R: Maybe...cos we see each other...like remake the first video

M: You mean like remake each other's videos?

R: No like remake our own first video, but this time that...something has to shift, something about the...like going back the tasks, using your first instructions...but I would try and...something about the...something about the pleasure

M: I would say then that we do the first tasks again, and I would like to see and image of me in your video. I would like to see one of my videos in your video

R: And I would like to see an image of me in your video. And I would like to see an image of me...

SCREEN SHOT SOUND FEED BACK

TYPING

FEEDBACK

R: What is that sound? Bipbip...an image. A single image M: Well I would like to see one of my videos in your video

R: I would like to not use these shitty cameras LAUGHTER

M: Yeah

R: I hate them

M: It's about limitation babe

R: Yeah.

M: It's about absence and limitation.

R: Absence of resolution.

M: Exactly

R: Absence of definition.

M: When should we do our next videos?

Should we exchange them by Friday next week R: I'll be on Australia time. So that's fine. No, what day is it today? Friday this week.

M: Friday this

R: Yep.

The very first Yeah I need to I need to feel

My videos. You.

My videos. Your videos. Our videos.

M: I'm glad we R: Let's do it M: I'm gonna go WAVING

week. Ok. Perfect.

instructions you sent me. feel you in my videos. you in them.

are gonna give it one more try.

ROBOT VOICE: you are disconnected

R: Bye.

ii

**/// Romance B: break up talk transcript**

M: Hey Babe

R: Hey. Time war abgelaufen.

M: Time war abgelauft. Hey, I'm gonna go into my warm space. R: Are you in one of those apartments that uses a fire?

M: Aii. Sorry?

R: You don't have a furnace, do you?

M: No, no. The bathroom is always cold because living next door so the there is no heating on heated.

R: Oh

M: And like there is no radiator in that room. toasty warm.

Ah!

Hi there.

R: Nice to see you too. Your hair looks great. M: Thanks, I passed through a transformational R: You did.

M: Yeah I did.

the neighbours, there is no-one in there and the wall doesn't get Not like in here where it's membrane.

R: You came out. M: You were there. R: What?

M: You were there. R: I was there.

M: So, this is the R: My friend.

M: How do you feel

R: I think I feel. all. But then when emotions about it.

end.

about our, ah, our romance?

I was just talking about it. I haven't been feeling much at I was talking about it just now, I realized I did have some

M: Do you wanna share what they are?

R: Like emotions of care, like wanting to kind of, be a good romantic partner and fulfill and your expectations. Or like, dis...like, disappear the possibility that I could be anything

short of an amazing romantic partner. Like stuff that happens in all of my romantic partnerships.

M: Yeah. What do you think the romantic expectations were?

R: Um. To produce cool images.

LAUGHTER

M: Do you think we produced cool images? R: Me? Or we?

M: We.

R: Um, yeah...I think so, but also a lot pieces, sometimes. Like as entireties. I compositional...at least on my end. Yeah.

of them...I think we produced cool think they were better than as

M: Did you think of them more as performances or as videos?

R: I thought of them more as like, journal entries and tasks. Um. Or like, impossible tasks that turned into journal entries.

M: Do you think that our long-distance romance of collaboration succeeded in some way?

R: In some way. But if you took out the 'in some way' part of that sentence then my first instinct is to say no.

M: Yeah. And what...ok then, if it didn't succeed, then how did it fail? R: I think that the beginning was superficial.

M: Yep.

R: And I think there was a turning point. And I think that was a success actually now that I think about it. That at some point there was a level of, like I started feeling a desire, prompted by you, or, I don't know exactly when it happened, it could have been prompted otherwise, or by one of your questions...to be a bit more honest. Where there was a level of honesty that came in at some point, I think when I asked, when I said it in the video, like, that it was hard. And then I think there was a real turning point.

M: Yeah I think so too. Because then it became something, I mean it was conversational. It was relational. Um, do you mean superficial in terms of how the whole thing was proposed or superficial in terms of how we engaged with the first video?

R: How we engaged, well, I think how we engaged in the first video. I think, the proposal was superficial enough that you could do anything with it. Or like, so superficial wouldn't really be the right word, I would say, like broad enough. You could keep it superficial, you could do lots of stuff. But I think...yeah, yeah.

M: What would it take, what would it need, what would the conditions need to be for our romance to succeed?

SCREEN SHOT SOUNDS

R: I think um, I think I would need it to feel like it was more mine. M: There was a power imbalance you mean?

R: I guess. I'm just thinking that now. But I think like, I, um, have similar practices with computers, self-recording, webcam, Skype, lo-fi, selfie performance art kind of thing. And I never felt it come in to these exchanges. And I wonder if that's because I didn't identify with them. So I don't think it's about, like I think that your prompts were hard or the way I took them was either like I couldn't accomplish them so i'm just gonna ignore them and do something else. Um, and so I didn't have that much incentive to make it my own. M: Did you feel anything about pressures around time and producing? Like what... FEEDBACK

Like what did they have to do with the desire to participate?

R: Like what?

M: Did time, or a lack of time, um...what did it require for you to want to participate?

BROKEN UP SOUND BEEPING

M: I'm gonna write some questions...

TYPING SOUNDS BEEPING

M: You

R: Hey

didn't

BROKEN

good.

M: Yep

R: But

it's worst, I wanted to be more on time than you.

LAUGHTER

M: Why?

R: Cos that's how I am in relationships.

M: Yeah I always felt, like, you know I am seeing relationships and I have to admit that I felt the punctuality with you

BEEPING

M: Did you hear me?

BEEPING

R: You felt the most guilt and shame about me?

with me

um...I didn't feel a pressure around time. I felt relaxed about time. I feel like you were stressed about time. I think I felt competitive about UP SOUND being more on time, so when I was more on time than you I felt

like, never stressed. At it's best, I wasn't stressed about it and at

M: Yeah around punctuality and having my shit together.

R: LAUGHING Oh my god, that's so funny.

That probably, yeah, that probably came from me.

M: I think it's a bit of a feedback loop, I think it's a kind of similar, ah, what's the word..just a similar trait between two people.

R: Yeah

M: Did you feel, ah, did you ever feel that it was hard to participate because other people...with these most guilt and shame around of your other commitments?

R: Like, no, I mean, it was always that its something that I wanted to accomplish, but yet put off, and procrastinated on, but as soon as I did it I was like, oh, it's so easy, it really is only three minutes. Like why procrastinate, you know? So, it wasn't like stressful, vis a vis the rest of the work I'm doing. Like I wasn't like, oh, this is another project I have to take care of. Or write emails about. It was very much not in that kind of category in my brain. Like it never was really, I think it was always because there was always so much time in between and it didn't take that much effort, like most of the effort that it takes is like effort with yourself.

M. Yeah, yeah. We never hit the momentum. R: No. Did you with other people?

M: With one other person I did. With one person I've only done one exchange, so far.

R: Did you, um, compare us all?

M: No. I didn't compare you all because the conversations were really different. The visual, um, the ways of engaging are different. The way you are composing are different, the relations were different.

R: How many are there?

M: There's four of you all together.

R: Um, and were you ever disappointed in me.

M: Wow. No, I was never disappointed in you, but I was disappointed in the technology. I think oftentimes...I think it's also, to be honest I think it's also cos of the movement of my practice from one of performance to one of video and to a really visual art practice. And so, that coincided with the beginning of this project and then this concern with what I would have liked the aesthetics to be, you know? Um, and so my artistic interest, aesthetically, shifted while all of this was in train. Um but then, no, I was never disappointed in you. I think it was more a disappointment in circumstances or shitty cameras or you know...

R: Yeah.

M: But then also, the whole thing is about having these relationships with people who are trying to piece together these precarious freelance arts careers, and using really, trying to have everything really accessible and easeful and contained. But now the new Skype, you can't even make video messages on it. You have to log in to a whole other thing, it's like, the whole technology has changed at the end of the project LAUGHS

R: Woah!

M: Yeah, I know.

R: You can't leave video messages anymore?

M: Well you can but you need to log on to Skype web and use a whole other thing. They just haven't included that functionality in the new app.

R: OK.

M: Yep.

I wanted to ask you about the idea of ghosts. And if I say the word ghost, or ghosts, or ghosting does that have any relation, does that kind of speak to you

in any way around the exchange or about the project?

R: Um, only in the sense that like, I never really felt like, like I felt that there was always a very separate trajectory between our real life relationship and this one. Like it was rarely, like, it became more personal at the end. But even then it maintained its integrity as a kind of parallel relationship in a way that could be understood as ghosting. But I wouldn't call my image an avatar of me, but the frame somehow permits it to not be me, and that's also, i wouldn't say that's because of the technology...I would say that's because of your proposal. It's not a kind of cyborgian ghost, it's something else. Um...yeah.

M: What about this idea of collaboration and procrastination and these kind of things, i've been considering the idea of procrastination as a kind of haunting, like um, there's a particular temporality that you want to get in to, which is presence with the task at hand but you can't, and there is a

labour about the attempt to get the momentum into the task...and this, you know, it's like you were saying before, you muster it, and then it's just a 3-minute video...but it's sooo somehow so hard to find the momentum to make it and it's heavy and laborious and somehow difficult to make it...

R: Yeah...

M: And thinking about that as a kind of haunting and I just wonder if you have any thoughts or comments on that?

R: I thought about what it is to have, like my understanding of that concept is, people use the words like latent work, or yeah, latent, when work is happening, but no-body knows. And some places really permit that, like I would say PAF is a place where a lot of latent work happens. But here, like I have felt the potential of this frame to be like a fun outlet to use to procrastinate from something else. Um...and something that was a lot easier than I could have made it, or that I could have had more fun with. But I also wonder if this was a place for us to do latent work for our real life relationship.

M: Yeah right, without knowing.

R: Yeah.

M: That's interesting. Why did you agree to this?

R: I was flattered, curious, and jobless, at the time. Which was a long time ago.

M: Do you have any questions for me specifically about this frame or about my feelings within our romance?

R: I have curiosities about what your plans are like are you gonna make a big video with all this stuff, like, what are you gonna do? But, we can talk about that another time, its not the kind of question I wanna ask you right now. And I think I already asked you my question, like were you ever disappointed in me? Did you want me to make more of an effort, did you ever feel angry or disrespected by the amount of work I was putting in to us?

M: That's an amazing question. No I never felt that. The answer to that is no. I mean, the fact of the matter is is that this is a labour of love for everyone participating in it. And so I, um...

R: That's also why I asked.

M: Yeah. I think my only desire across the board, with everyone, not just with you, and again its because of the development of my own eye, or my own interests, is ah, like, a greater concern with the visuality. That's really it for me. And that is also because now I am looking at how to put this together as

a kind of edited document, you know? But then at the same time there comes a question of integrity of research. My desires for a

certain, ah, cinematic level of engagement with the visuality isn't really the point of the exercise.

#### SCREENSHOT NOISE

R: Yeah, totally. Because you were doing that. And I could see that you were doing that and I didn't see how you were doing that with the other conditions of not thinking about it too much ahead of time, er, you know, just letting it go or whatever.

M: I think honestly most of that comes from choosing to clear the space...

R: Before. Yeah.

M: Yeah. Like really simple things, but it's also my aesthetic, like this really simple thing of creating a like a backdrop or a main frame that is like a block colour, you know, because it creates a really strong popping relationality with the introduction of any object. Um. Or an amplification of a gesture. But then, some of the most interesting ones I made, I made one for another one of the Romances, actually the last video I made you and the last video I made for another person were my favourites. Because um, I thought finally there was a getting into something, like getting into an exchange, but also...at the time I was staying in this, basically like this fucking hotel room that was a cupboard in Brussels, and I couldn't have my big blank space, so I had to um, I had to work harder to get that aesthetic that I was looking for. But I think in terms of that visual field stuff, I really like the way that you use masking, the way that you will like, block the sections of the frame or this kind of stuff. Even though it's not this glossy thing, it's a real doing. Which is really cool.

Um, so, I have a question. My question is... R: What is it?

M: My question is, do we wanna have one last R: Uff...

...

I dunno, both are very tempting. Do you have consciousness of what you are trying? Or do we wanna let it go here? a feeling about it?

M: I think for this question and this proposal, I am really interested in what you want and what it is that you would like to do with it...

R: Hmm... ..

Um. No. I don't wanna do it again. M: Great.

R: Yeah.

M: Hey. Then this is it.

R: It's not because it wasn't fun. M: No, I know.

R: I think I'll just, I'll never be the same again after this conversation.

SMILING

HUMMING SPICE GIRLS

M: "It's the beginning it's not the end." R: Exactly.

M: Yeah. Thank you so much.

R: Thank you.

M: I speak to you soon. R: Ciao babe.

M: Bye!

**iii.**

**/// Romance C: break up talk transcript**

M: Hi

R: Hi

M: How are you?

R: I'm good. I'm really tired cos I got up so early.

M: What time?

R: That means 7 am

LAUGHTER

R: But like my body clock is like, you know...basically like....what's going on babes?

M: I'm trying...LAUGHS...I'm trying to...the light's...I'm trying to put the light somewhere so that I can talk to you and actually be visible

R: I never realised how beautiful that lamp is, by the way...

M: How bright?

R: No but like, the whole form illuminates

M: Yeah, I mean it's also cos of the shitty white balance of the technology that we're using

R: Ok. But, it looked amazing.

M: Yeah...

R: It looks like an illuminated mushroom cloud

M: Spectaculaarr

R: So, um, is this part of the video also going to be in the PhD thesis or is this...

M: What we are doing now?

R: Yeah...we've reached the 20 minute thing

M: Yep. And now we are having our break up talk

R: Yep

M: Um...of which there will be a transcript in the exegesis, and um. Maybe some edits from the video, according to certain questions I have in the research.

R: Do you mind if I roll a cigarette

M: Go ahead...

R: So...yeah...

R: So the purpose of this conversation is to break up now? LAUGHS

M: Yeah, it's to reflect on our relationship. So I mean, I would start by saying, so...'This is it?'

R: And then I would respond by saying, 'This is what it's come to.'

M: What is that?

R: This moment

M: What does that mean in relation to us?

In this frame...

R: Um...I don't know

LAUGHTER

R: Like I think, I don't, I don't know...what do you think?

M: Well, I'm interested to know whether or not...we succeeded?

R: Well, I know I think, um, deviations and failure are just as interesting as fulfilling like a pre-determined set of goals. And um, so no, I think, I don't think we failed. Or maybe it's that I don't see our conversation series, or this task, or however you want to call it as a failure at all.

M: Does that mean that it was a success, necessarily?

R: Um...well it's difficult you know? Like um, like we don't occupy equal positions in this thing, because, I mean it's you

writing your PhD and I am just one of many.

LAUGHS

And um...so you know, you know a lot more, you actually, have the power in this situation. And you are also writing the thesis at the same time. So...you tell me...

M: LAUGHS

But I want to know how you feel, how you have felt in our romance. I want to know if it was hard or if it was easy...

R: Well whenever I was making a video, I always enjoyed it a lot. When I was set in action planning and then rehearsing a video, I always really enjoyed the experience. It was also difficult. Because like, I think at least in terms of creativity, it doesn't lend itself so well to kind of negotiating a series of tasks. And so there was always a moment of having to really kind of nut things out. Even if what I came up with was like maybe a failure or just quite simple there was always this moment of kind of like resistance and then of really enjoyable flow.

M: Mhmm. So, if it was a failure then what was it a failure in relation to? What for you were the criteria or the metric...

R: Well, one time you lovingly reminded me that the topic of our conversation is the long-distance romance itself. And in that you let me know that I had gone somewhere else. I'd done something completely random. So maybe that was a failure, because that was after the video I'd made in Italy where I made it in this like dead great grandmother's room with her photos and I made a video based on them because I don't know why.

M: But why not?

R: Well yeah, why not, it was a really weird, powerful moment of my life this year. It's when I was alone in like the Geelong of Tuscany

M: LAUGHS

R: Like it was a weird week. I remember very strongly making that video and I remember being in that room with Antonella who like, was very fond of me, and I really liked her too. We both got

really emotional when we said goodbye. But anyway, I think those conditions are maybe why I strayed from the task and why you lovingly reminded me.

M: But the conditions were what? Like the conditions of traveling and..?

R: No the conditions were the thematic that we should be working with was our long-distance romance itself.

M: Do you think that we developed a romance?

R: To be honest, it's been so long since I've experienced any kind of romance, um, so I don't know. But I would say...

M: Like, you don't know how to identify it?

R: Yeah, I was like, I don't even know what that is. But for sure I think romance is fleeting and there were for me several fleeting moments of a kind of warmth that I only experience with you.

M: Yeah, but that's that's not our romance in this frame but I guess you can't extract those two things from each other...

R: Of course not...

M: Because i think our particular shared humour inflects the way we approach the tasks. But I also think somehow, and I think this has been interesting, you and I have found a way to express...um...express a kind of earnestness and...ah...honesty somehow within the frame of these videos that we don't necessarily, or a language or a way of being that we don't necessarily have in our real life friendship.

R: Really? Like what?

M: I don't know, it's a tonality. There is something about the tonality. I mean as you know, I've been, I've been seeing other people. And its like...

R: AND THAT'S FINE!

LAUGHTER

M: But there's a different tenderness.

R: I'm very curious to see the videos you've made with other people. To see how you shift.

M: Well I mean, yeah, so like with one other person who I really wanted to, I really wanted to make these videos with them, also because they attend to aesthetics in the same way that I do. And

so, I was very excited to work with them. And we've only managed 1 video.

R: Ok. And how do you feel about that?

M: Um...you know it's this thing. I feel disappointed, because I really want to collaborate with this person and I was really excited about the work we would have made. I think, from an artistic point of view, I would have liked to have the strength of our similar aesthetic vision inflect the videos as they are composited together. But then from the research and an academic point of view, the failure, despite the good intentions, is interesting and meaty and thickens what I am interested in talking about in the exegesis. Which is in part about precarity and the things that stop us from being able to make the videos. You know, some times with us, when there were huge gaps of time and also assurances that we would be making the videos and then we didn't...

R: Yeah, it's true.

M: And I am interested in what that experience has been like for you. Like, when you receive a reminder or when you're not doing it...

R: Or when we accidentally leave it for 3 months and remember again...things like that...um...

M: I'm interested in how you feel about that, how that experience felt, but also how it might relate to 2 things: how it might relate to precarity, in terms of the 'creative precariat' and their conditions, in that, you're just too fucking busy. Or you can't give it adequate attention. But also I am interested in this idea of ghosts.

R: Mmmm

M: But maybe just tell me about your experience of this, of the temporality of doing it.

R: Well, for me this collaboration of ours, I mean in a way, the moments of attending to it and doing it on time and the moments of forgetting about it, all of that is actually reflective of a kind of general temporality of my life. Which is quite, sort of,

schizophrenic. In the time period that we have undertaken this collaboration I've worked in many different countries for different...there's like, everything in my life is very precarious in relation to place and time, and this collaboration of ours is situated in place and time, and is then subject to that same

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volatility. I would love for something in my life to be able transcend the limitations of that temporal experience, but I've never found that thing.

M: Yeah. I think it's also interesting though, in designing the...you know, in the proposal, what could be the most easeful thing? So, ok we have these tasks, we decide on the interval, it's a 3-minute video, but somehow for me, often just the idea of having to produce a 3-minute video, it felt epic, you know what I mean? And insurmountable. And I'm interested in how that kind of , how this idea of creating 3-minutes of content can amplify into something that you just cannot enter into as a task.

R: But that's why I think it was so important that you set the instructions. For example I think you said a maximum of 3 shoots?

MJ: Yeah

R: And you also stressed, I can't remember the exact language that you used but it was like, don't over-rehearse it. And I feel like, I also experienced what you described. But those instructions that I held on to were like a mitigating factor. Like if you hadn't said that, who knows how insanely kind of monumental producing a 3-minute video might become.

M: Exactly, exactly, because I really wanted for it to be only an hour of labour a month, max. Because, you know, apart from me no-one is getting paid. Do you know what I mean? And when I sent out the invitations for people to join in to the Romances, like, you know, I said something along the lines of, 'I am aware of the demands on our labour and requests for us to engage in acts of free labour all the time...

R: Yeah, yep...

M: and if reading this email is already enough then please don't

reply. And there are two people who I know enough, and who I engage with on social media, and they didn't reply to that email." And we've never spoken of it either. You know, and for me, because everyone involved in the project is a freelance artist. It's this gesture towards, it's trying to at least create the performance of the respect of boundaries, or an acknowledgement of those boundaries.

R: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't even take the non-response as any, even as any kind of gesture. In a way. Like the temporality that I described, that my life exists within, I actually think is really common and totally. I mean I don't respond to really important emails all the time...

M: Things slip away and then before you know it it's 3 months later

R: Yeah or getting like, reminders from people that you are really trying to make a good impression with or things like that. Yeah, I think it just happens. Because things are just so...schizophrenic. But also because it relates to the unpaid condition of the labour, which of course always assumes a different role than paid work. And I find it interesting how people relate to unpaid labour very differently.

M: Can you talk a little bit about that?

R: Well like, what are you willing to do for free? And why? Like today I did a photo shoot for free, but I got this now, frankly insane look...

LAUGHTER

M: You look amazing

R: Babe, I look really intense... But anyway, I did this for free, but well, I got some things out of it. What else would I do for free? This with you. And then what else? Basically, my own work. And even for that I don't have much space. Yeah...and all of the admin that I do that I don't get paid for.

M: But why would you do this for free? Would you do this for free because it's me?

M: Yes.

M: And because of our existing relationship. Because we are best

friends basically?

R: But that's also entangled with my interest in the concept and my respect for you as an artist.

M: If I ask you to think about ghosts in relation to this experience, in relation to this project, what comes to mind?

R: Um...what comes to mind?

M: So if I say the words 'ghosts' and 'collaboration', or 'ghostliness and collaboration', does that invoke anything for you?

R: Ghostliness and collaboration. Well I mean now I can't stop thinking about having read those Mark Fisher essays, um, so for example, all of the props that I've just used in this video are objects that exist in this house. And they found their way into this house of course through experiences that I've had, some of which I've shared with you. So for example, the Moroccan dress...

M: Outfit...

R: Outfit. So I knew that that would have a certain impact on you when I entered the frame with it on. The viewers won't get that. Like I guess the thing about ghosts is one time visiting another time. Like a kind of clash of temporalities that such a project can induce. So I kind of consciously constructed in our 20 minute session then...a series of kind of happy ghosts from the past. So that's one thing that comes to mind.

M: So I've been thinking a little bit about what Mark Fisher has to say on the subject of hauntology...he talks about hauntology as 'the agency of the virtual' and then he talks about how ideas of hauntology are the temp...the time...the moments of time around an event, so the time going into an event and the time going out of an event, but the event itself is left as an absence. And I have been thinking about that in terms of the imminence of going in to make the video...

R: Waiting in the wings

M: Waiting in the wings. And the anticipation and um...yeah this kind of haunting of spec...this kind of speculation of what's to come. Also this idea of being haunted by the collaborations themselves. Especially this position of driving the project myself

and being like, fuck, you know, how can I be neglecting this? How can I be not punctual and on time, and it's also because in addition to my PhD research I have a professional practice.

R: I mean you also inhabit schizophrenic temporalities...

M: Very much so...

R: Co-existing and like conflictual temporalities.

M: Completely.

R: It's fucking nuts.

M: And how did you, as someone who works in performance, in performance and choreography and dance, what for you was the relationship with the visuality and the technology.

R: The technology I am very familiar with because I use it all the time. Which is also why your research is really relevant.

Aesthetically speaking...

M: Do you use it all the time for work or...

R: Yeah. Especially Skype, I kind of only use Skype for work.

M: Yeah, I have meetings on Skype, really early in the morning meetings with the other side of the world:

R: That's exactly one of my...

M: Like, you know, you have no pants on but a full face of make and you are trying to keep your yoghurt bowl out of the frame..

R: Yeah...but also like, framing myself...

M: Exactly...

R: Like when I speak with my production house I like to sit in front of this window because it has natural light and I look good, my eyes pop...ha, I'll leave it there...

See, I enter an almost a kind of neutrality with this technology that for moments I forget the apparatus. Which is that you're recording this conversation for future potential public presentation. I am very at home on this platform. It's very normal for me.

So there is that side but there is also this composition thing. And I consider myself to be bad at aesthetics.

M: LAUGHS

But also because you know that they are kind of my main bag.

R: Right and so I was always like, shit, this better look really

good! Come on, what are you gonna do? You know her video is gonna be really creative and yeah, so, but be yourself, but look good. It's not that I really care that much. It's something that is a minor...it's something that I know about myself in relation to other makers, like my handle on aesthetics. It's not a problem because I think I have other strengths, but it is something that I am made aware of all the time.

So yeah there's that element of the collaboration where I was trying to make it look good.

M: Do you have any questions for me?

R: When will there be a public presentation?

M: Um, it won't be public it will be on a password protected Vimeo upload. And my examiners will see it.

R: OK. Would you consider making it a public exhibition?

M: Yeah, I would. I want to see how I feel about the edit. I think for a public presentation I would aestheticize it and thematise it differently. At the moment what I am working on is that I found this amazing article on how collage is a hauntological process and I have also been working with the idea that editing, video editing, is a form analysis, because of course this is all tethered to the academy, and the academy deals with scientific method even though this is an artistic project - which feeds into a discourse which is endlessly complicated. Yeah, so I am trying to find the sweet spot or the balance between those kind of demands. For me, I'm interested in creating an assemblage of affects that really, you know, underscores what I am trying to write about which is a ghostly cartography of remote collaboration. A hauntology: I am trying to write a hauntology of this process. And so for me the video would really do that. So the video will be very collaged...

R: So you could say that the video would even enact that.

M: Exactly. Well, would perform it. But I think that I would consider putting the research in publications and then in that instance and edit of the video would be public. But it will never be long tracts of a singular video. It would never be someone's complete 3-minute video message performance. Also, this is

performance research, it's never finished, they are never intended or considered as finished works, you know. It's an improvisational strategy, it's a working method, it's a research towards collaborative practice when you are not in the same time and space. And I think it's important that, I don't trust spectators and audience to understand what they are looking at is not a capitalist spectacle, and therefore can't be judged as such, or can't be viewed with those expectations.

R: I think that's a well founded distrust

M: Me too

So then the other question is, how do you feel about it being over?

R: How do I feel about it being over? Well, whenever a project ends, I experience a kind of melancholy...

M: What for...

R: I don't know. Some kind of fantasy of imminent loss. And how that kind of contributes to some kind of, I don't know...

M: For me it's the loss of potentials. When you are in a project, anything is still possible, and you always have a sense of the other things it could become. Then when the project is over then that is when it is def-in-ite-ly

R: But as project ends you get a sense of what it will become. But even like when I am working for X and I know exactly how it is gonna feel, the project doesn't change but their it's just still this weird thing. Like in the last days of the last performances I did for them there was still this melancholy for the time I had spent there and the anticipation of change.

M: It's being with others as well.

R: Well of course, each project has a context and quite often this means a certain constellation of people and yeah, you stop seeing them, or you stop seeing them as often. So I would say in terms of this being over, like I would say that now in this moment, I am like, oh, that's melancholic.

M: Do you wanna give it one last try?

R: I would.

M: LAUGHS

That's pretty definite.

How should we structure that?

R: Well, it should just happen before I start my next project on January 2<sup>nd</sup>.

M: Yeah I think it should happen before the year is over because I need to edit it into the final thing.

R: That means it has to happen next week.

M: What would you like it to include?

R: Oh I don't know. It needs to be like this final gesture.

M: Like should we take the rules from a previous time? Should we make new rules together now? Should we...what should we do?

R: Maybe it should be like some kind of retrospective of this collaboration. Like, real or imagined retrospective.

M: I have one desire.

R: What is it?

M: It's that we frame, like within the visual field of this next one, or this last one, this last swan song video that we make, I would like to see in your video one of my videos.

R: Yep. Well yeah, that's actually an amazing strategy for the retrospective. And in your video, I would like to see a quote from one of mine.

M: Mhmm

Is that the only rule?

R: Yes.

M: Same. And we maintain this subject, maybe with the thematic swan song.

R: Yeah, like we maintain the theme. But now I am thinking of it as an almost kind of retrospective video, like self-referential. Yeah...

I would briefly like to show you some objects that I didn't show you during our performance...

M: Sure.

R: Blackboard and black chalk. But it makes like silver...

M: Wild

R: This featured in my last video

M: I remember it well

R: Hot water bottle. Cos we went on this theme of heat and then I thought, hot water bottle? It's too much.

M: Ha! It's a bridge too far.

R: It went too far. I also wanted to put in the typewriter

M: Awww

R: But I wasn't planning to use the jar of coins.

M: Yeah a lot of my objects, well actually not many, some of them. I used everything except the red wig and the white gauze. I wasn't expecting to bring in the sage or the...

R: That was perfect!

M: And of course Roland (Barthes)

R: I couldn't find the quote that I wanted to use during the video and that was frustrating, I didn't mark it in the book correctly and now...yeah

M: So we get these videos to each other by the end of the year. And your video includes one of my videos. And my video includes a quote from one of yours. And the thematic is swan song.

Alright then...

Thanks.

R: You're welcome. Thank you.

#### **iv.**

#### **/// Romance D: break up talk transcript**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, dear romance

We failed.

I'm not sure why.

Mostly purely I guess because now I am out of time to keep going. Also maybe cos I wanted to do a really great job with your videos and there was never enough space to make them #great.

I would love to talk about it.

Maybe even talk about the possibility of one last try.

Is there a time in the next week when we could have a Skype about it?

Anytime that works for you.

This conversation would be super useful to my research - which, incidentally is about failure and its reasons.

Let me know your thoughts.

Best wishes and lots of love,

Melanie Jame

Xxox

## **Appendix B**

### **/// Ethics Clearance Form**

## Application for Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants

Application ID : HRE15-231  
Application Title : SUPERTHERE:  
apparative encounters in romances of collaboration across the digital divide  
Date of Submission : 01/09/2015  
Primary Investigator : DR NATASHA DWYER  
Other Investigators : MS Melanie Jame Walsh

## Introduction

## Important Information

*Form Version: V.13-07. Last Updated: 08/09/2014.*

### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL APPLICANTS:**

- Applicants are advised to follow the guidelines provided on the [Human Research Ethics website](#) prior to submitting this application.
- Ensure all questions are appropriately answered in plain language with correct spelling and grammar.
- All applications must be sighted and approved by all members of the research team and any relevant parties. Applications will not be reviewed without appropriate authorisation.
- To avoid unnecessary delays, please ensure application is submitted in full by the submission deadline for the relevant HREC.

**You are reminded that your project may not commence without formal written approval from the appropriate Human Research Ethics Committee.**

### **Contact:**

#### **Ethics Secretary**

For help and further information regarding ethical conduct, refer to the Human Research Ethics website:

<http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php> or contact the Secretary for the Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research.

Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461

Email: [researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:researchethics@vu.edu.au)

#### **Quest Service Desk**

For technical help, refer to the Quest website: <http://research.vu.edu.au/quest.php> or contact a member of the Quest team.

Phone: 9919 4278

Email: [quest.servicedesk@vu.edu.au](mailto:quest.servicedesk@vu.edu.au)

### **External Resources**

- [NHMRC: National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#)
- [NHMRC: Human Research Ethics Handbook](#)
- [NHMRC: Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

## Quest Guide

## Quick Tips for Using Quest

**Need Help?** For help and instructions, we strongly recommend that you download the full [Quest Online Ethics Guide \(.pdf\)](#). Your questions may also be answered in the [FAQ page on the Quest Website](#).

- **Answer All Questions:**

Most questions are mandatory and must be completed before the application can be submitted. These questions are marked with a red asterisk (\*)

- **Access Help and Tips:**

The  help icon, found next to questions and at the top of each page, will provide you with detailed advice on ethical content.

- **Remember to Save:**

Use the  floppy disk icon (and the  green tick in some sections) regularly to avoid losing any answers. Each page will save automatically when you click *Next*  or *Back* .

- **Print or Save a Copy of Your Application:**

You can use the  report icon at any stage to generate a printer friendly version of the form. Select HTML to print to screen.

To save as a .pdf file to your computer select PDF then save a copy from the pop up screen. *(Don't forget to save a copy before you submit!)*

- **Submit Application:**

When you have completed your application, click on the *Action* tab in the left-hand column and click *Submit Application*. The system will then convert the form to read-only and send it to the Ethics Secretary for review.

You will receive an email confirmation at submission. Double check that your application has been submitted by viewing the application status in the *My Applications* page.

## Responding to comments (if your application is returned)

There may be stages throughout the application process in which the Ethics Secretary will instruct you to amend your application form. These amendments will be communicated to you via 'Comments' within the eForm.

### 1. Generate a List of All Comments:

Click the  report icon, select *Comments Report* from the Document drop-down field and click *OK*. This list will show all comments created in your application and which page they are applicable to. Click *Cancel* to return to the application form.

### 2. Revise your Answers:

Open the page which shows a  red flag; these denote an Action Comment which you are required to respond to. Revise the relevant question(s) in your application form as required. Remember to click  save!

### 3. Respond to Action Comments:

AFTER you have revised your answers, you must provide a response to each Action Comment explaining to the Committee how you have addressed their communication. Open the  Page Comments window and click  New Comment to enter your response into the textbox. Click the  green tick to save your text.

### 4. Mark Comments as Responded:

Once you have revised your answers AND finished responding to all comments, reopen  Page Comments window, use the checkbox to select the *Action Comments* and click *Mark Selected Comments as Responded*. The colour of the flag will change to  yellow and the page will become Read Only.

**Important:** DO NOT mark the comments as 'Responded' until you are completely satisfied with your revised answers - you will lose access to edit the page and the comments.

### 5. Submit Revised Application:

Once you have addressed all of the Red Flags, open the *Action* tab and click *Submit Revised Application*. The system will then send the form to the Ethics Secretary for review. Remember to save a copy of your application by clicking the  Report icon and generating a PDF or printer-friendly version.

## [Office Use Only - Administration]

**Application ID - Assign HRE # using "Manage Applications"**

HRE15-231

**Clearance Purpose**

Research

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**For Review:**

**Assigned Ethics Committee**

Low Risk Human Research Ethics Committee

**Risk Level (Enter 'High' or 'Low' or 'Neg')**

Low

**Students involved in conduct of project? (Enter 'Yes' or 'No')**

Yes

**Date Accepted by Ethics Secretary**

02/09/2015

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**For Finalisation:**

**Date Approved**

02/09/2015

**Approved Start Date for Project**

06/11/2015

**Approved End Date for Project**

06/11/2015

**Date Rejected**

*This question is not answered.*

**Date Withdrawn**

*This question is not answered.*

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**Application Process Comments**

*This question is not answered.*

**[Office Use Only - Risk Assessment]**

**NEGLIGIBLE RISK INDICATORS**

**Applicant has responded YES to:**

**HIGH RISK INDICATORS**

**Applicant has responded YES to:**

4.7.a. Will the identification of participants, either directly or indirectly, be made available in the public domain at any time during or after the research? e.g. In the reporting of research or in any display/presentation (audio or visual) of the research?

**POSSIBLE HIGH RISK INDICATORS**

**Applicant has responded YES to:**

3.2.e. Does the research involve participants in other countries?

6.7. Will any dual relationship or conflict of interest exist between any researcher and potential or actual participants? (e.g., a member of the research team is also a colleague or friend of potential participants)

**LOW RISK INDICATOR**

*If no statements appear under the headings above, the applicant has not responded yes to any negligible or high risk indicators.*

**SECTION 1 - PROJECT OVERVIEW**

## General Details

1.1. **Ethics Category\***

Human

1.2. **Project Title\***

SUPERTHERE:  
apparative encounters in romances of collaboration across the digital divide

1.3. **Project Summary** (Include brief details of aims, methods and significance of the project in plain language. Maximum of 2000 characters)\*

The SUPERTHERE project proposes that a new (im)materialist ontology of collaborative performance making practices which utilise digital technologies to bridge distances can be mapped and understood via the concept of the Apparative. As a multi-channel video project, SUPERTHERE charts a series of 'romances of collaboration' across an 12 month period of online collaborative performance making exchanges between the student researcher and a series of artist collaborators. In doing so seeks to produce an assemblage of affects which transmit the experiential phenomenon of the Apparative as an ontology. These artistic exchanges follow a task based methodology. The digital material produced in response to these tasks is then analysed via a method of editing in which the aim is to create a multi-channel video installation.

The principal aim of this research is to articulate an ontology of collaborative performance making practices which employ domestic digital technologies as their central modes of production. A secondary aim of this research is to test the potential of affectively crossing the 'digital divide' in remote performance making and presentation practices as a means of exploring both a theory of 'the productivity of limitation' and an ontology of 'the Apparative' (the relationship between digital technologies and aesthetics, metaphors and experiences of the ghostly or spectral).

The principal significance of this research lies in the way in which it considers the corporeal and digital selves as continuous. From this position, the research offers a new perspective on ideas of liveness both in performance and the broader sphere of the way in which we communicate, spend time together and conceive of our human subjectivity. The research will offer a unique, practice based contribution to markers of this significant moment of convergence between the physical world and the digital.

1.4. **Primary College or Institute for Application\***

COLLEGE OF ARTS

## Timeline and Funding

1.5. **Period for which ethical approval is sought.** *Note: ethical approval is automatically granted for a period of 2 years from the project commencement date.*

Project commencement date:\*

- Immediately upon receiving ethical approval  
 Other date

1.6. **Date the data collection is expected to be completed:\***

31/08/2016

1.7. **How will the research be funded?\***

- External grant  
 VU grant or funding  
 Sponsor  
 Other  
 Unfunded

If the research is unfunded, indicate how the project can proceed.\*

The project consists of artistic research activities that largely do not require studio space. These activities occur principally online using hardware and technologies already in my possession.

1.8. **Is the research a collaborative effort with another organisation?\***

- Yes  
 No

## SECTION 2 - PROJECT INVESTIGATORS

### Investigators

2.1. **Please list all investigators associated with this project.**

The research team is the group of investigators accountable for the conduct of the project. Include details of the Primary Chief Investigator (primary contact for application), as well as all other Chief Investigators and Associate Investigators. *Student details will be requested separately.* Other staff (e.g. technicians) may perform tasks within the project although they are not necessarily investigators. They should be listed as "Other Staff" if appropriate.\*

1	ID Number	E5014881
	Surname	DWYER
	Given Name	NATASHA
	Full Name	DR NATASHA DWYER
	College/Institute	O4102
	Email Address	Natasha.Dwyer@vu.edu.au
	Role in project	Chief Investigator
	<b>Primary contact for application?</b> <i>Note: Although an application may have multiple Chief Investigators, only one CI may be nominated as the Primary Contact.</i> <i>For student projects, the Chief Investigator/Primary Contact <u>must</u> be the supervisor, not the student.</i>	Yes
	Direct contact number	+61 3 9919 4754
	Mobile number (for emergency use only)	0404843106
	<b>Qualifications, experience and/or skills relevant to the project.</b>	Dr Dwyer undertook PhD studies exploring participants reactions to different types of digital media. As an Interactive Designer at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, her work involved studying how users operate interactive stories and how they interact together when sharing a digital project. She has also undertaken consultancy work for British Telecom within which participants were required to keep a diary of their use of digital communications.

*Note: Please click the Question Help icon above for instructions on how to search for personnel and use this table. Once an Investigator record has been added, click on the name in the table above to open the record and edit the information required.*

*If you are unable to find a personnel record in this system which must be added to your application, please use the [Request to Add Personnel to Research Database form](#) found on the Quest website.*

### Student Investigators

2.2. **Will any students be involved in the conduct of this project?\***

- Yes  
 No

2.2.a. **If YES, is the project:\***

- A STUDENT PROJECT for the degree in which the student is enrolled?  
 A STAFF PROJECT that involves a student(s) undertaking some part of the project?  
 Other

2.2.a.i. **If the research is a STUDENT PROJECT, at what level?\***

PhD

\* Has this project been approved by the Postgraduate Research Committee? (ie. during confirmation of candidature process)\*

Yes

No

2.2.b. **Please list all student investigators involved in this project.**

Ensure the primary supervisor (not the student), has been marked as the Chief Investigator and primary contact for the application in Q.2.1.\*

1	Student ID	S3921724
	Surname	Walsh
	Given Name	Melanie
	Full Name	MS Melanie Jame Walsh
	College/Institute	O4102
	Email Address	melaniejame.walsh@live.vu.edu.au
	Role in project	Student
	Direct contact number	94782802
	Mobile number (for emergency use only)	0431848609
	<b>Student's experience/qualifications relevant to the procedures and techniques to be used in the research and/or to working with the specific target population.</b>	For the last 5 years in my professional practice as an artist with triage live art collective and Savage Amusement, I have made numerous works that heavily involve audience participation to investigate play, intimacy, affect and social norms. Ethics and integrity are core to the way in which these works are designed and performed. In most cases these ethics are moral rather than legal. Just as is reasonably expected in the context of academic research, each time I make a participatory work in my professional artistic practice, I carefully consult and work through with peers and collaborators the degree to which the experience for a participant ensures their dignity, autonomy and confidentiality. These three principal markers: dignity, autonomy and confidentiality are be considered each time a work is made in terms of how it will be documented, how that documentation will be shared and how the design of the work has inbuilt contingencies for different levels of participant comfort, willingness and confidence. These questions are present not just in the design of works, but also each and every time they are performed.

Note: Please click the Question Help icon above for instructions on how to search for personnel and use this table.

Once a student's record has been added, click on the name in the table above to open the record and edit the information required.

If you are unable to find a personnel record in this system which must be added to your application, please use the [Request to Add Personnel to Research Database form](#) found on the Quest website.

2.2.c. **What arrangements are in place for the supervision of student(s) when undertaking project activities?\***

Regular supervision meetings on a fortnightly schedule.

### Involvement of Other Individuals/Organisations

2.3. **Will any individuals who are not members of the research team be involved in the conduct of this project? (e.g., medical personnel involved in procedures, research contractors, teachers) \***

Yes

No

## SECTION 3 - NATURE OF THE PROJECT

### Type of Project

- 3.3.b. **Does the research cause discomfort in participants beyond normal levels of inconvenience?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.c. **Does the research collect potentially sensitive data? (e.g., related to a sensitive topic or vulnerable group; personal health/medical information; sensitive organisational strategies)\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.d. **Does the research involve deception of participants?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.e. **Does the research involve limited disclosure of information to participants?**
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.f. **Does the research involve covert observation of participants?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.g. **Does the research produce information that, if inadvertently made public, would be harmful to participants?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.h. **Does the research involve accessing student academic records?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.i. **Does the research involve human genetic or stem cell research?**
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.j. **Does the research involve the use of ionising radiation?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.k. **Does the research involve the collection of human tissue or fluids?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.l. **Does the research involve any uploading, downloading or publishing on the internet?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.m. **Does the research seek disclosure of information relating to illegal activities or is the research likely to lead to disclosure of information relating to illegal activities?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.n. **Does the research involve procedures that may expose participants to civil, criminal or other legal proceedings?\***
- Yes  
 No
- 3.3.o. **Does the research involve gaining access to medical/health related personal information from records of a Commonwealth or State department/agency or private health service provider?\***
- Yes  
 No

3.1.a. **Is the project a pilot study?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.1.b. **Is the project a part of a larger study?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.1.c. **Is the project a quality assurance or evaluation project (e.g., related to teaching, health-care provision)?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.1.d. **Does the research involve a clinical trial (of a substance, device, psychological or physical intervention)?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.1.e. **Does the research involve the use of therapeutic/intervention techniques or procedures (non-clinical trial)?\***

- Yes  
 No

## Target Population

3.2.a. **Does the research focus on Australian Indigenous (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) populations?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.2.b. **Does the research involve participants under the age of 18 years?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.2.c. **Does the research involve participants who are highly dependent on medical care?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.2.d. **Does the research involve participants who have a cognitive impairment, intellectual disability or mental illness? \***

- Yes  
 No

3.2.e. **Does the research involve participants in other countries?\***

- Yes  
 No

*"Supplement F - Research participants in overseas countries" must be completed in Section 11 below.*

3.2.f. **Does the research involve pregnant women (with a research focus on the pregnancy) and/or the foetus (in utero or ex utero) or foetal tissue?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.2.g. **Does the research involve participants who are likely to be highly vulnerable due to any other reasons?\***

- Yes  
 No

## Intrusiveness of Project

3.3.a. **Does the research use physically intrusive techniques?\***

- Yes  
 No

3.3.p. **Does the research involve gaining access to personal information (not medical/health) from the records of a Commonwealth or State department/agency or private organisation?\***

Yes

No

## SECTION 4 - PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### General Information

---

*Note: All fields have a maximum of 4000 characters (unless otherwise specified) in plain text only.*

*If supporting documentation needs to be provided for the following questions (images, graphs etc), please upload as referenced appendices in Section 11 - "Required Attachments" below.*

---

4.1. **Aims of the project.** Provide a concise statement of the aims of the project (maximum 2000 characters in plain language).\*

The principal aim of this research is to articulate an ontology of collaborative performance making practices which employ domestic digital technologies as their central modes of production.

A secondary aim of this research is to test the potential of affectively crossing the 'digital divide' in remote performance making and presentation practices as a means of exploring both a theory of 'the productivity of limitation' and an ontology of 'the Apparative' (the relationship between digital technologies and aesthetics, metaphors and experiences of the ghostly or spectral).

A further tertiary aim of the project is to map the contours and parameters of remote artistic collaboration; seeking to understand the influences of distance and the digital platforms which bridge them on the work being made. This will involve in part an investigation of the influence of spatiality and temporality on liveness as both a phenomenon and a material within digitally based performance making practices.

These aims will be pursued via the following research questions:

What are the contours of an ontology of the Apparative as produced by the limitations of distance, domestic digital technologies (i.e. Skype and smart phones) and task/provocation based compositional performance making strategies in remote collaborative performance making practices?

How is the notion of the Apparative useful in visualising and theorising an ontology of digitally based remote collaborative performance practices and their modes of production ?

Is liveness dependent on both a shared spatiality and temporality?

How do the screen space and other affordances of domestic digital technologies expand possibilities and understandings of shared spatiality and/or temporality?

What are the contours and parameters of collaboration over and across distance?

4.2. **Briefly describe the relevant background and rationale for the project in plain language.\***

This research stems from the student researcher's own professional art practice. From two works, which both engage with the digital platform of Skype to create collaborative performances: *Far Away...So Close* and *A Remote Year/A Closer Year*. *Far Away...So Close* is a one to one performance event about the modern condition of love and distance that occurs over Skype whilst the individual audience member is positioned with a laptop in a bed within an installation context whilst the student researcher performs the work from a separate, distant location. The work asks, "If intimacy happens in one to one performance through the charged spaces between audience and artist, can this intimacy be experienced just as strongly from a distance?" *A Remote Year* is a collaboration between the student researcher and French performance artist, Colyne Morange. Devised as a strategy for them to make a work together despite living in different countries, *A Remote Year* is made via the monthly exchange of a series of task-based rules for form and content and scheduled 20 minute performative Skype sessions. It is directly from these projects that the student researcher's interest in the lines of inquiry of this research and its set of research questions emerge.

A central theoretical impetus for my research is to meaningfully respond to recent polemical statements by three prominent contemporary art critics. The first, put forward by Claire Bishop in an article titled, *Digital Divide* in the September 2012 edition of *Artforum*, asks why it is that,

"...the appearance and content of contemporary art has been curiously unresponsive to the total upheaval in our labour and leisure inaugurated by the digital revolution? While many artists use digital technology, how many really confront the question of what it means to think, see and filter affect through the digital? How many thematize this, or reflect deeply on how we experience and are altered by the digitisation of our existence?" (1)

The second polemic was put forward by former Tate Modern curator Chantal Pontbriand, in her opening address at the 2014 BMW Tate Live: On Liveness talk with Phillip Auslander, Cally Spooner and Fiona Templeton, Pontbriand insisted that; "investigating liveness is somewhat of an urgency" for both contemporary art practice and contemporary life. The third polemic from which this research takes its impetus comes from Bojana Kunst in her article 'Prognosis on Collaboration' in the 2010 'Exhausting Immaterial Labour in Performance' joint issue of *Le Journal des Laboratoires* and *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory*. Kunst argues, "We can say that collaboration, communication and connection belong to the most fetishized fields of the present day." (23)

In addition to responding to the above polemics as impetus for the research, SUPER THERE seeks to build on and expand the work of a number of contemporary theorists and practitioners as they inform the key concepts of the productivity of limitation and the apparatus. These theorists include: McKenzie Wark on *Telesthesia* (2013), Hito Steyerl on the defense of the poor image and the after life of images (2009, 2013), Mischa Kavka on affect (2009), Stephen Choe on evanescent ontologies (2014) and Mark Cote on digital subjectivity (2011).

The SUPER THERE project investigates the possibilities and applications of readily accessible digital technologies such as Skype and smart phones in remote performance making collaborations. While there has been some nascent research into this area within the dance community, the SUPER THERE research project investigates the impact of these technologies for the broader contemporary performance community. By investigating these possibilities through the lens of the key concepts of the productivity of limitation and the Apparatus this research seeks to provide new reference points for the still nascent research around collaborative practices over distance.

#### 4.3. Methodology and procedures

Include specific details relating to any measures, interventions, techniques, and/or equipment used in the research.

Provide step-by-step details of the procedures with particular reference to what participants will be asked to do.

Provide details separately for different phases or conditions of the research or, where appropriate, different participant groups.\*

The research will be carried out across a 12 month period. In this time, a number of participants, all practising artists, will be invited to enter into performance making collaborations with the student researcher. These collaborations will all happen via a suite of digital platforms and technologies. These technologies are all domestic in application and readily accessible. The collaborations will all adhere to a method wherein a regular exchange of written, performed or otherwise recorded tasks and prompts to assist the collaborative pairs in making works together. These sequential tasks and prompts will always be in response and relation to what has been produced as a result of the previous exchange.

Participants will be invited into the project based on their relationship to the student researcher. They will be either current or past collaborators from a variety of projects from within the student researcher's professional artistic practice, or they will be people who are known for using task-based performance making methods.

Participants will be asked to enter into an exchange of tasks and prompts on schedules determined on an individual basis. This schedule of exchange will remain flexible throughout the course of our collaborative relationship. Essentially, participants will be required to produce both tasks and prompts for me to enact, and to enact tasks and prompts that I send to them. The transmission of both tasks and enactments will occur across a range of digital platforms including Skype, Snapchat, Bambuser, Tumblr, etc. Depending on the needs of each individual collaborative relationship, participants may also be requested to enter into feedback and reflective dialogue sessions with me during the course of our collaboration. Feedback will also be requested from all participants when the 12 month period of collaborative exchanges ends. Feedback in both instances will occur via a variety of digital platforms.

Individual participants will enter the project at different times. The length of their participation across the 12 month research period will be determined entirely by them and their interest in continuing to collaborate artistically with me in such a way.

Following the 12 months of collaborations, the collected footage and digital material produced will be edited together with other material on digital artistic collaboration produced by me to form a multi-channel video installation. This installation will appear both in exhibition in a gallery space and on-line on a website about the project.

Varying combinations of the following tasks (see Appendix 1\_TASKS attached) will be the prompts for the participants during the 12 month research period. These tasks and prompts will also serve as a model on which the participants will form the tasks and prompts which they send to the student researcher, thus creating the dialogical exchange at the core of the project. The participant will both receive and send the tasks on an agreed schedule with the student researcher. Each of these exchanges will contain 3 tasks. They will always be preceded by a choice of form: 1) a live Skype call; 2) a Skype video message; 3) a 2 - 15 minute digital video; 4) a series of digital photographs/images; 5) a Tumblr post. The content will always be based around the thematic of 'the romance of collaboration', reflecting on the individual collaborative relationship as it unfolds across the research period.

Use this textbox if additional room is required for Question 4.3.

*This question is not answered.*

## Data Collection

### 4.4. Indicate all types of data to be collected.\*

- Questionnaire / survey responses\*
- Individual interview responses\*
- Other data
- Group interview or focus group responses\*
- Participant observations
- Blood or tissue samples
- Physiological measures
- Biomechanical measures
- Accessed health / medical records or data
- Accessed student academic records or data
- Archival data

Other data, give details:\*

Written, audio, video and screen-captured creative responses by participants to tasks and feedback sessions.

### 4.5. Does the research only include the collection of anonymous and non-sensitive data (e.g. online survey, observational data) that poses no foreseeable risks or discomfort to participants? Any foreseeable risk must be no more than inconvenience.\*

- Yes
- No

4.6. **Does the research only include the use of non-identifiable and non-sensitive data from an existing database? (e.g., data mining).**

*Such data should pose no foreseeable risks or discomfort to individuals whose information is contained in the database, or to individuals/organisations responsible for the database.\**

- Yes  
 No

4.7. **Does the research involve photographing or video recording of participants?\***

- Yes  
 No

4.7.a. Will the identification of participants, either directly or indirectly, be made available in the public domain at any time during or after the research? e.g. In the reporting of research or in any display/presentation (audio or visual) of the research?\*

- Yes  
 No

4.7.b. Provide details of both aspects of collecting this data and it being made available.\*

The reporting of the research will include the exhibition of a selection of participant creative responses which have been edited together. This exhibition will occur both in a gallery context and on a website made specifically for the presentation of the SUPER THERE project. In these contexts, participants will be visually and audibly identifiable as well as by name in some cases.

Throughout the data collection phase of the research, participants will be using a selection of online digital platforms. Whilst the privacy settings of these platforms will be non-public wherever possible, participants may be identifiable visually, audibly and, in some cases, by name.

4.8. **Who will be collecting the data? (give details for all types of data collected and all persons involved)\***

Ultimately, the student researcher will be collecting the data. Participants will be authoring their responses on a variety of digital platforms.

The data types will be as follows:

Video recordings, still photos and audio recordings on smart phones. (.mov; .jpg; & .wav)  
Video recordings on live streaming platforms. (.mov & .jpg)  
Uploads of video, still photo, audio and written text on Snapchat and Tumblr. (.mov & .jpg)  
Screen shots of email exchanges and Instant Messaging conversations. (.jpg)  
Still screen capture of Skype conversations and video messages. (.jpg)  
Video screen capture of Skype conversations. (.jpg)  
Audio recordings of voice messages. (.wav)

4.9. **Where will the data be collected? (give details for all types of data collected and all locations)\***

The data will be collected on a variety of digital media platforms:

Smart phones, Skype, Bambuser, Tumblr, Gmail, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram.

It will remain on these platforms, on private settings, for the duration of the individual collaborations. This will enable the collaborators to remain 'in platform' in terms of their thinking and their work together. It will also allow them access to a readily available referential project archive for the duration of the collaboration. Once the collaborative relationship has ended, the data will be removed from the online platforms and collected and stored solely on an external hard drive in my possession.

4.10. **How will the data be analysed? (give details for all types of data collected)\***

The data is produced across a 12 month timeframe as an exchange of responsive creative dialogues between the student researcher and each individual participant. Once collected together, this data will be analysed via a process of editing together the materials in to a multi-channel video art work which will map the contours of an ontology of artistic collaborations which use digital technologies to bridge distances. This ontology is called 'the apparatusive'.

The data types to be edited together will include:

Video recordings, still photos and audio recordings on smart phones.  
Video recordings on live streaming platforms.  
Uploads of video, still photo, audio and written text on Snapchat and Tumblr.  
Screen shots of email exchanges and Instant Messaging conversations.  
Still screen capture of Skype conversations and video messages.  
Video screen capture of Skype conversations.  
Audio recordings of voice messages.

In the SUPERTHERE research project, the editing of the video is the method of analysis. This approach draws directly on a number of video as research strategies presented in the recent 'Video Methods: Social Science Research in Motion' (Bates: 2015). This volume is particularly instructive to the SUPERTHERE research as it articulates a shift toward an experimental imperative within research practices which allow for a 'more-than-representational' approach to analysis which supports the movement toward 'sensuous scholarship'. Here, a 'live sociology' is championed in which research and analysis is able 'to attend to the fleeting, distributed, multiple and sensory aspects of sociality through research techniques which are mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points which are open to the 'doing' of social life.' (4) Such an approach fits sympathetically with the ambition of SUPERTHERE to assemble an immersive and sensory montage of the ontology of digitally based creative collaborations, over and above presenting a narrative or chronology of the work undertaken.

The editing as analysis of the research will be carried out in the following way:

1) As content is produced across the 12 month collection phase it will be logged, using a locally stored database programme, across a matrix of markers for cross-referencing. Each clip will be logged by date, time, participant, location and digital platform used. Additionally, it will be logged according to various aspects of its content both formal and thematic. For form, these markers will be: temporality, spatiality, dramaturgy, text, sound, colour, depth of field and number of screens within shot. For content, these markers will be: cultural/cinematic referent, aspect of collaboration, central question, key thematic, aspect of the apparatusive. This logging will assist in categorising the data for the editing process which will follow at the end of the 12 month collection phase.

2) Following the 12 month collection phase, the process of editing will begin utilising a method of 'iterative viewing'. Within this method, footage is watched and re-watched with an increasingly critical eye closing in on a balance of selecting footage which attends most efficiently and aesthetically to expressing an ontology of the apparatusive. The imperative of this intensive analytical process will be to illustrate the epistemic and ontological 'orders' of the research and it's findings into a 'filmic' one which aims to achieve a final, multi-channel cut in which 'all the...discussions, successes, compromises and failures, between (the) myriad of agents (within the SUPERTHERE project) are locked up tight.' (Laurier: 2008)

4.11. **Who will have access to the data collected?** (give details of all persons who will have access to the data)\*

The student researcher alone will have access to the entire body of collected data. Individual participants will be in possession of their own responses and the student researcher's individualised responses to them from within the specific dialogical context of their particular creative collaborative exchange.

4.12. **Will individuals or organisations external to the research team have access to any data collected?\***

Yes

No

## SECTION 5 - PARTICIPANTS

### Participant Group Details

5.1. **Provide details of all distinct participant groups below.**

*Please be as precise as possible, if specific details have not been determined you must indicate that they are approximate.*

**Group 1**

Details of specific participant population:\*

Practicing professional artists with experience in collaborative performance making methods.

Number of participants: \*

6 - 8

Age range of participants:\*

25 - 70

Source of participants:\*

Participants will be sourced from the network of the student researcher's professional artistic practice.

Record details for additional group? (Group 2)\*

- Yes  
 No

## Participant Selection

5.2. **Provide a rationale for the sample size.\***

A sample size of 6 - 8 is the maximum realistic number of participants for the multiple creative collaborative relationships within the research to remain manageable and meaningful in terms of what they produce. It is anticipated that some participants will want to either join or leave the research at different times. This possibility is completely acceptable to the research design. With a sample size of 6 - 8 participants, there will always be at least one collaborative relationship in progress.

5.3. **Does the project include any specific participant selection and/or exclusion criteria beyond those described above in Question 5.1?\***

- Yes  
 No

5.4. **Will there be a formal screening process for participants in the project? (e.g. medical/mental/health screening)\***

- Yes  
 No

5.5. **Does the research involve participants who have specific cultural needs or sensitivities? (e.g., in relation to the provision of informed consent, language, procedural details)\***

- Yes  
 No

5.6.a. **Does the research involve a participant population whose principal language is not English?\***

- Yes  
 No

If YES, provide details and comment on the expected level of understanding of written/verbal English by participants.\*

All participants will have a high (C1) level of understanding of written/verbal English. In some cases, because the research is about creative collaborative exchanges over distance, invited participants will be living/working/from a variety of countries and will not have English as their first language.

5.6.b. **Will documentation about the research (e.g., Information to Participants form and Consent form, questionnaires) be translated into a language other than English?\***

- Yes  
 No

## SECTION 6 - RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

### Recruitment and Informed Consent

6.1. **Will individuals other than members of the research team be involved in the recruitment of participants?\***

- Yes  
 No

6.2. **How will potential participants be approached and informed about the research and how will they notify the investigators of their interest in participating?**

*\*Attach copies of the "Information to Participants Involved in Research" form and any flyers or other advertising material to be used in the research in Section 11 - "Required Attachments" below.\**

Potential participants will all be sourced from the student researcher's existing professional artistic network. In the majority of cases, their contact information will already be known to the student researcher. In cases where it is not known, a mutual contact will be approached to make an email introduction.

Potential participants will be approached and informed about the research via an initial email. Within the body of the email, they will be invited to take part in a one to one Skype conversation with the student researcher about any further questions or concerns they might have about the research. They will notify of their formal interest in participating in the research via email.

6.3. **Will potential participants be given time to consider and discuss their involvement in the project with others (e.g. family) before being requested to provide consent?\***

- Yes  
 No

6.4. **How will informed consent be obtained from participants?\***

- Participants be required to sign an informed consent form  
 Consent will be implied e.g. by return of completed questionnaire  
 Verbal consent will be obtained and recorded (audio, visual or electronic)  
 Other

Attach copies of Consent Forms to be used in the research in Section 11 - "Required Attachments" below.

6.5. **Provide procedural details for obtaining informed consent:\***

1. Participant notifies investigator of interest in participation via email
2. Investigator sends participant Informed Consent Form either via email or post
3. Participant returns signed Informed Consent Form to Investigator via email or post

6.6. **Will you be seeking consent in order to contact participants in the future for related research participation and/or use participants' data for related research purposes?\***

- Yes  
 No

## Competing Interests

6.7. **Will any dual relationship or conflict of interest exist between any researcher and potential or actual participants? (e.g., a member of the research team is also a colleague or friend of potential participants)\***

- Yes  
 No

What is the nature of the dual relationship or conflict of interest?\*

Because participants are all sourced from the student researcher's professional artistic network, they are all colleagues, friends, or both. Some are former collaborators of the student researcher, some are future collaborators on other projects. The purpose of the research is to examine how collaborative artistic relationships occur on digital platforms across distances, it is for this reason that the student researcher invites her own colleagues to participate, they are known to her and therefore their ability to communicate is proven. Also, the participants will all be known to possess the requisite artistic and technological skill set for participating in the research.

How will ethical issues arising from the dual relationship or conflict of interest be addressed?\*

One ethical issue arising out the dual relationships is the separation of the artistic collaborative activities of the research and any other creative project that the student researcher and the participant are, have been, or will be engaged in. This issue extends into a question of Intellectual Property.

This issue will be addressed through the use of task based prompts as the principal methodology of the collaborations within the research. The exchange of a short series of tasks to an individually agreed schedule (fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly) between the student researcher and the participants will ensure that all creative work produced within the frame of the research is clearly documented as such. Should dispute arise, there will be a clear and adequate record of all creative work generated within the frame of the project. Recognition of the potential for such an issue to arise will be built into the Informed Consent agreement.

A second issue that may arise is a sense of obligation that the participants may feel to continue their participation in the research because of their friendship or collegial relationship with the student researcher.

This issue will be addressed in the research description that participants will receive and within their informed consent agreement. Participants are free to leave the research at any time. A key interest of the research is why collaborations using digital platforms may fail, and as such, such occurrences will not be considered disruptive to the research or any relationship that the student researcher may have with the participants.

6.8. **Does the research involve participants who are in dependent or unequal relationships with any member(s) of the research team or recruiting organisation/agency (e.g. counsellor/client, teacher/student, employer/employee)?\***

- Yes  
 No

6.9. **Will you be offering reimbursement or any form of incentive to participants (e.g., payment, voucher, free treatment) which are not part of the research procedures?\***

- Yes  
 No

6.10. **Is approval required from an external organisation? (e.g., for recruitment of participants, data collection, use of premises)\***

- Yes  
 No

## SECTION 7 - RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE RESEARCH

### Physical Risks

7.1.a. **Are there any PHYSICAL RISKS beyond the normal experience of everyday life, in either the short or long term, from participation in the research?\***

- Yes  
 No

### Psychological Risks

7.1.b. **Are there any PSYCHOLOGICAL RISKS beyond the normal experience of everyday life, in either the short or long term, from participation in the research?\***

- Yes  
 No

High probability risks:\*

There are no high probability psychological risks from participation in the research.

Low probability risks:\*

There is the low probability risk of short term stress being created from participation in the research. This stress would most likely come from a participant feeling that they have somehow fallen behind in their participation or that they have not managed their time or other workflow in such a way that allows them to produce their creative responses to any given set of tasks.

How will the risk(s) be minimised?\*

This risk of stress for participants will be minimised in the following ways:

- the clear option to opt out of the research at any time.
- ongoing communication of the possibility of flexibility for the schedule producing creative responses (fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly).
- the invitation to make their creative response entirely in relation to the difficulties of getting the tasks done.

How will these risks be managed if an adverse event were to happen?\*

In the instance of a participant experiencing an adverse psychological effect from participating in the research the following management protocol will be implemented:

- an offer to opt out of the research
- an offer to alter the schedule of producing creative responses
- an invitation to make their creative response about the adverse reaction
- a referral to mediation and/or counselling services - Professor Tony Love has offered to provide this service.

The contact point for referral to mediation and/or counselling services for participants will be:

Professor Anthony Love  
Director of Research & Research Training  
College of Arts  
Victoria University

Phone: +61 3 9919 9458  
email: anthony.love@vu.edu.au

## Social Risks

7.1.c. **Are there any SOCIAL RISKS beyond the normal experience of everyday life, in either the short or long term, from participation in the research.** (e.g., possible inadvertent public disclosure of personal details or sensitive information)\*

- Yes  
 No

High probability risks:\*

There are no high probability social risks from participation in the research.

Low probability risks:\*

There is the low probability social risk from participating in the research that participants may produce creative responses for the project which appear publicly in the final edited outcome which could prove potentially damaging to the participant. This would occur in cases where the participant's behaviour in the creative response could potentially subject them to negative scrutiny from family, friends or potential employers.

How will the risk(s) be minimised?\*

The low probability social risk of participating in the project will be minimised in the following ways:

- Participants will sign informed consent agreements before participating in the research
- Participants will retain the right of refusal for their creative responses to tasks to be included in the final edit
- Participants will have, and will be reminded and assured of, the possibility of leaving the project at any time

How will these risks be managed if an adverse event were to happen?\*

In the case of an adverse event happening in relation to social risk for a participant, their creative responses will be removed from the final edit of the project before any further exhibition.

## Other Risks

7.2. **Does the research involve any risks to the researchers?\***

- Yes  
 No

7.3. **Does the research involve any risks to individuals who are not part of the research, such as a participant's family member(s) or social community (e.g., effects of biographical or autobiographical research)?\***

Yes

No

7.4. **Are there any legal issues or legal risks associated with any aspect of the research that require specific consideration (i.e., are significant or out of the ordinary), including those related to:**

- participation in the research,
- the aims and nature of the research,
- research methodology and procedures, and/or
- the outcomes of the research?

\*

Yes

No

7.5. **Risk-Benefit Statement:**

**Please give your assessment of how the potential benefits to the participants or contributions to the general body of knowledge would outweigh the risks. Even if the risk is negligible, the research must bring some benefit to be ethical.\***

Participants will benefit from being collaborative artists in an exhibited project which is sitting at the cutting edge of investigation about creative collaborative and networking practices, and investigating the nature of digital subjectivities. The project will potentially lead to further creative projects and possibilities.

The SUPERTHERE project itself offers a significant contribution to the general body of knowledge in a number of ways. Via a strategy of multiple outcomes - a multi-channel video work and a written thesis - this research will generate and disseminate new knowledge in unique ways across multiple communities including the academic and the artistic. This strategy of multiple forms is informed directly by prominent Australian-American media theorist, McKenzie Wark's contention that any research that wishes to usefully address and productively interrogate new media phenomena, "needs to be allied with three methodologies: the conceptual, the ethnographic and the experimental. The mere reading of "texts" does not serve us well at the moment." (2011:23)

The research of the SUPERTHERE project is significant because it investigates the possibilities and applications of readily accessible digital technologies such as Skype and smart phones in performance making practices and more importantly in remote performance making collaborations. While there has been some nascent research into this area within the dance community, the SUPERTHERE research project investigates the impact of these technologies for the broader contemporary performance community. By investigating these possibilities through the lens of the key concepts of the productivity of limitation and the Apparative this research seeks to provide new reference points for the still nascent research around collaborative practices over distance. This focus on collaborative practice is both highly topical (Kunst:2011) and useful to the artistic community. The project seeks to articulate an ontology, the Apparative, as a unique way of thinking though very new modes of working together creatively via digital platforms and between digital subjectivities.

The principal significance of this research lies in the way in which it considers the corporeal and digital selves as continuous. Taking Mark Cote's 2011 critique of the persistence of the notion a Cartesian divide between our physical selves and our image in digital screen spaces as a departure point, the SUPERTHERE research project regards the corporeal and the digital self as continuous. By operating from this discursive position, the research offers a new perspective on ideas of liveness both in performance and the broader sphere of the way in which we communicate, spend time together and conceive of our human subjectivity. It offers these new perspectives at precisely the time discourse around liveness is receiving renewed attention. The research will offer a unique, practice based contribution to markers of this significant moment of convergence between the physical world and the digital.

Finally, by exploring the ways in which working collaboratively with digital platforms and technologies allows an experimental play with parameters of temporality and spatiality, the SUPERTHERE research project can contribute to the current discourse of the 'multi-directionality' of memory subjectivity and history begun by American academic, Michael Rothberg (2009).

## SECTION 8 - DATA PROTECTION AND ACCESS

### Data Protection

8.1. **Indicate how the data, materials and records will be kept to protect the confidentiality/privacy of the identities of participants and their data, including all hardcopies, electronic files and forms. See help for definitions.\***

- Data and records will be entirely anonymous
- Data and records will be coded and non-identifiable
- Data and records will be coded and re-identifiable
- Some or all of the retained data and records will include personally identifying information
- Other

8.2. **Who will be responsible for the security of and access to confidential data and records, including consent forms, collected in the course of the research?\***

I will be solely responsible for the security of and access to confidential data and records, including consent forms, collected in the course of the research.

8.3. **Where will data, materials and records be stored during and after completion of the project?** Provide full details of the location for all types of data.

*Note: The VU Research Storage provides secure digital storage and long term retention for research project data including graduate research projects.*

During the project:\*

I will use both the VU Research Storage (R: drive) and an external hard drive which will remain at my place of residence during the research. During the course of the research, a variety of popularly available online digital platforms will be used for the creation of content for the project. These include: Skype, gmail, Tumblr, Facebook, Bambuser, Snapchat, Instagram, smart phones. These platforms will be engaged short-term (across the 18 month data collection period). Where possible and practicable, the security settings will be private. The data temporarily stored on these platforms will be erased at the end of the data collection period.

Upon completion:\*

Upon completion of the research the data, material and records of the project will be stored in the VU Research Storage (R: drive), with the exception of the final edit of the multi-channel video project outcome. The video outcome will be stored both on a project web-site and on an external hard-drive and DVDs for exhibition purposes. These digital storage media will be kept in my possession and be stored at my place of residence.

8.4. **Indicate the minimum period for which data will be retained.** See help for definitions.\*

- Indefinitely
- 5 years post publication
- 7 years post publication
- 15 years post publication
- 25 years after date of birth of participants
- Other

8.5. **Who will be responsible for re-evaluating the data/materials after the retention period and considering a further retention period for some or all of the data/materials?\***

I will be responsible for this task.

8.6. **Will you transfer your data or materials to a managed archive or repository during the project, after the project, or after the retention period? Which discipline specific or institutional archives will be considered?**

*Note: Some funding agencies and publishers may require lodgement with an archive or repository. Retain a copy at VU where possible.\**

The data and materials will be retained at VU.

8.7. **When further retention of data and materials is no longer required, responsible disposal methods should be adopted. Disposal software should also be adopted if digital software, computer hardware, disks or storage media are reused or retired. What methods of appropriate disposal or destruction will be employed?**

*Note: Personal, sensitive or confidential information, both digital and hardcopy, will require secure destruction or disposal. For other materials you may need to refer to the Hazardous Materials Policy, Animal Ethics Standard Operating Procedures, or the Ethics and Biosafety site found on the VU Office for Research website. \**

The storage media will be cleared of all project data from the project using the VU recommended disposal software at the time of permanent deletion.

## SECTION 9 - DISSEMINATION/PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

### Publication Details

9.1. **Indicate how the results of this research will be reported or published.\***

- Thesis
- Journal article(s)
- Book
- Research report to collaborating organisations
- Conference presentation(s)
- Recorded performance
- Other

Other, provide details:\*

A multi-channel video project to be exhibited both in a gallery context and online.

9.2. **Will any contractual agreement exist between the researchers and a third party that will restrict publication of the research findings?\***

- Yes
- No

9.3. **Are there any other restrictions on publications or reports resulting from this project?\***

- Yes
- No

## SECTION 10 - OTHER DETAILS

### Comments

10.1. **In your opinion, are there any other ethical issues involved in the research?\***

- Yes
- No

10.2. **Additional information and comments to support this application:**

n/a

## SECTION 11 - DOCUMENTS, ATTACHMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY FORMS

### Supplement F - Research participants in overseas countries

**You have indicated in Question 3.2.e. that the research involves participants in other countries.**  
**Applicants are requested to refer to the NHMRC National Statement Chapter 4.8 when completing this section.**

1. **List all countries in which the research will be conducted:\***

United Kingdom, United States, Greece, Germany, Finland, France, Switzerland, Denmark.

2. **Provide a brief summary of all research activities (e.g., recruitment, data collection) to be undertaken in the overseas country(s).\***

Participants will be recruited via email and Skype in the above overseas countries.  
Participants will produce creative responses to collaborative tasks and feedback discussions on a variety of digital platforms in the above overseas countries.

**Provide details of investigators' knowledge/experience in conducting research in the country(s) listed above.** (In particular, knowledge of culture, values, language, standards for conducting research, ethical and legal aspects)

3.1. **Chief Investigator:\***

.

3.2. Co-investigators:\*

n/a

3.3. Student researchers: (if none, indicate what training will be provided to the student(s) and when)\*

I have either lived, worked, studied in or travelled to all of the countries listed above, often in my capacity as a professional artist.

4. **Will the student researcher(s) be located in the overseas country(s) during the course of the research?\***

- Yes  
 No

If YES, provide details and describe how supervision will be undertaken to ensure that due respect and protection will be accorded to participants?\*

All of the research occurs via artistic collaboration online.

**Describe the role(s) of each investigator in the overseas component of the research project.**

5.1. Chief Investigator:\*

.

5.2. Co-investigators:\*

n/a

5.3. Student researchers:\*

Conducting the research via engaging in on-going collaborative artistic relationships with the participants.

6. **Will any of the investigators (not including student researchers) be located in the overseas country(s) during the course of the research?\***

- Yes  
 No

If NO, provide contact details of a local person in the country who will be available to respond to participant queries related to the research.

Name:\*

.

Location:\*

.

Telephone number:\*

.

Mobile number:\*

.

Email: \*

.

7. **Will individuals in overseas countries who are not members of the research team be involved in any aspect of the conduct of the research (e.g., recruitment of participants, data collection)?\***

- Yes  
 No

8. **Is there an ethical review process (mandatory or voluntary) for research undertaken in the country(s) where the proposed research will take place?\***

- Yes  
 No

9. **Are there any risks to participants, beyond the normal experience of everyday life, in either the short or long term, that relate specifically to participating in the research in the overseas country?\***

- Yes  
 No

High probability risks:\*

There are no high probability risks.

Low probability risks:\*

There is the low probability risk of short term stress being created from participation in the research. This stress would most likely come from a participant feeling that they have somehow fallen behind in their participation or that they have not managed their time or other workflow in such a way that allows them to produce their creative responses to any given set of tasks.

There is the low probability social risk from participating in the research that participants may produce creative responses for the project which appear publicly in the final edited outcome which could prove potentially damaging to the participant. This would occur in cases where the participant's behaviour in the creative response could potentially subject them to negative scrutiny from family, friends or potential employers.

How will the risk(s) be minimised?\*

This risk of stress for participants will be minimised in the following ways:

- the clear option to opt out of the research at any time.
  - ongoing communication of the possibility of flexibility for the schedule producing creative responses (fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly).
- the invitation to make their creative response entirely in relation to the difficulties of getting the tasks done.

The low probability social risk of participating in the project will be minimised in the following ways:

- Participants will sign informed consent agreements before participating in the research
- Participants will retain the right of refusal for their creative responses to tasks to be included in the final edit
- Participants will have, and will be reminded and assured of, the possibility of leaving the project at any time

How will these risks be managed if an adverse event were to happen?\*

In the instance of a participant experiencing an adverse psychological effect from participating in the research the following management protocol will be implemented:

- an offer to opt out of the research
- an offer to alter the schedule of producing creative responses
- an invitation to make their creative response about the adverse reaction
- a referral to mediation and/or counselling services

In the case of an adverse event happening in relation to social risk for a participant, their creative responses will be removed from the final edit of the project before any further exhibition.

10. **How will the well-being of overseas participants be monitored throughout the duration of the research?\***

The Chief Investigator will ensure that the student researcher carry out regular 'check-ins' with participants. Participants will also have the capacity to contact the Chief Investigator directly, should they for any reason not wish to raise an issue with the student researcher.

11. **Other comments relevant to this section of the application:**

n/a

## Required Attachments

The following documentation **must** be attached to your application:

- Scanned copy of the [Declaration Form for External Investigators](#) (if applicable)

- Copy of the 'Information to Participants Involved in Research' form (Please use the templates provided on the [Human Research Ethics website](#))
- Copy of Consent Forms to be used in the research (Please use the templates provided on the [Human Research Ethics website](#))
- Any flyers or other advertising material to be used in the research

11. **Please attach each of the items specifically listed above as well as any other supporting documentation.**

All documentation must be accurately titled and referenced to within the body of your application where appropriate (i.e. "Appendix A - Declaration Form", "Appendix F - Risk Factor Assessment Questionnaire", etc.). Please limit file types to .doc, .docx, .xls, .xlsx, .pdf, or small-medium images (ie, .gif, .jpg).\*

Description	Reference	Soft copy	Hard copy
Consent Form	VU-HREApplication-Consent-Form-for-Participants-Involved-in-Research-2.doc	✓	
Information to Participants Involved in Research	VU-HREApplication-Information-to-Participants-Involved-in-Research-2.doc	✓	
Reference List	SUPERTHERE reference list.pdf	✓	
Appendix 1_TASKS	Appendix 1_TASKS.pdf	✓	

*Note: Please click the Question Help icon above for instructions on how to upload documents and use this table.*

*If you are certain that you do not need to supply a Consent Form or Information to Participants Involved in Research (both of which are mandatory), please tick Hard Copy and type 'N/A' in the Reference field.*

## SECTION 12 - SUBMISSION DETAILS

### Declaration

**I / we, the undersigned, declare the following:**

- I / we accept responsibility for the conduct of the research project detailed above in accordance with:
  - a. the principles outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007);
  - b. the protocols and procedures as approved by the HREC;
  - c. relevant legislation and regulations.
- I / we will ensure that HREC approval is sought using the Changes to the Research Project process outlined on the Human Research Ethics website if:
  - a. proposing to implement change to the research project;
  - b. changes to the research team are required.
- I / we have read the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research prior to completing this form.
- I / we certify that all members of the research team involved the research project hold the appropriate qualifications, experience, skills and training necessary to undertake their roles.
- I / we will provide Annual / Final reports to the approving HREC within 12 months of approval or upon completion of the project if earlier than 12 months.
- I / we understand and agree that research documents and/or records and data may be subject to inspection by the VUHREC, Ethics Secretary, or an independent body for audit and monitoring purposes.
- I / we understand that information relating to this research, and about the investigators, will be held by the VU Office for Research. This information will be used for reporting purposes only and managed according to the principles established in the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and relevant laws in the States and Territories of Australia.

1	<i>Staff/Student ID</i>	S3921724
	<i>Full Name</i>	MS Melanie Jame Walsh
	<i>Role in project</i>	Student
	<i>Personnel Type</i>	Student
	<b>Sign Declaration?</b> <i>By clicking the checkbox below, you are agreeing to conduct the research project in accordance with the above declaration.</i>	Yes
	<b>Date Signed</b>	10/08/2015
2	<i>Staff/Student ID</i>	E5014881
	<i>Full Name</i>	DR NATASHA DWYER
	<i>Role in project</i>	Chief Investigator
	<i>Personnel Type</i>	Internal
	<b>Sign Declaration?</b> <i>By clicking the checkbox below, you are agreeing to conduct the research project in accordance with the above declaration.</i>	Yes
	<b>Date Signed</b>	13/08/2015

Note: Please click on your name in the table above to complete your declaration; or click on the name of an External Investigator to acknowledge that their declaration has been supplied.

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### **Declaration Instructions and Information**

- A digital signature must be supplied by each and every member of the research team using the declaration table above.
- The 'Needs Signature' icon  shows which records you are responsible for signing.
- Physical signatures are not required for VU staff and students in applications using form version v.13-07.
- External Investigators do not have access to Quest. The Chief Investigator must supply a completed physical declaration on their behalf by following the steps below:
  1. Send the person a copy of the full application form (including any attachments), as well as the [Declaration Form for External Investigators](#) document.
  2. Once returned, attach the signed *External Investigator Declaration Form* document in 'Section 11 - Required Attachments'.
  3. Enter into the External Investigator's record in the above declaration table and mark the checkbox to indicate these steps have been completed, include the date you have done so.

The 'sighted by' field will automatically populate with your name. (*Only the Chief Investigator will have permission to complete this step.*)
- The application cannot be submitted until all members of the research team have logged in and completed this declaration.

### **Finalise Application**

#### **Reminders**

- All applications must be sighted and approved by all members of the research team and any relevant parties. Please ensure each member of the research team has completed their declaration in 'Section 12 - Declaration' above, including any declaration forms supplied on behalf of External Investigators. *Applications will not be reviewed without appropriate authorisation.*
- It is strongly recommended that you save a PDF version of your application before submitting as you will lose access to the electronic record while it undergoes formal review.
- **You are reminded that your project may not commence without formal written approval from the appropriate Human Research Ethics Committee.**

#### **Ready to Submit?**

- \* Once the form is complete and all documents are attached, **click on the 'Action' tab** above the left-hand form navigation, then **click 'Submit Application'** to forward the application to the Ethics Secretary to be reviewed and assigned to a Committee meeting.
- You will receive an automatic email notification from Quest when your application has been successfully submitted.
- *Note: Only a Chief Investigator is able to submit an application for ethical approval. The Chief Investigator who is marked as the primary contact for this application is:*

DR NATASHA DWYER