



A University of Sussex PhD thesis

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

**BECOMING PULAU HANTU:
MEDIATING THE LOSS AND FUTURITY OF
QUEERNESS THROUGH QUEER ART AND RITUAL**

LYNNLY ANN NG-OLSEN

**CREATIVE AND CRITICAL PRACTICE PHD
UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

JULY 2022

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP:

I, Lynnly Ann Ng-Olsen, hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signed:

Date: 13th July 2022

ABSTRACT

Queer identities exist in a state of ephemeral ghostliness and futurity within dominant heteronormative frameworks. Being queer is a 'becoming' that must be performed in perpetuity to be visible in dominant society; however, this is a transient performance that must be continually performed into the future to be perceived and it is not guaranteed that a queer performance will be perceived with accuracy. As a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person, assumptions of who I am and how I am expected to socially perform are heavily projected by society onto my racialised feminine self. My feminine queerness is often lost amidst strict confines of heteronormativity that render my queerness as illegible, thus leaving my queer identity unrecognisable in dominant society no matter my performance.

This autoethnographic practice-based research sheds light on how the present is insufficient for my intersectional queerness to successfully perform and be perceived. My contextual framework explores three main topics: First I discuss the perceptibility of my intersectional queer identity and the consequences that come with being perceived through Judith Butler's work on identity and recognition. Second, I study José Muñoz's work on queer disidentification that discusses being queer as a utopian performance of self that must always perpetually perform away from default heteronormativity to be legible if not to fully disappear into heteronormative concepts. Third, I study queer artmaking as a worldmaking strategy and an act of resistance through Audre Lorde's writings that prompts us to question if the prescribed dominant frameworks have to be true and that better realities can be built by believing in the power of our agency.

My practice explores what I can do for myself in the present through artmaking processes to sustain my existence despite the persistent experiences of loss that come with minoritarian participations of society. I have employed queer art as a way to mediate the loss and futurity of my intersectional queerness in a default heteronormative society through worldmaking art practices to explore what the queering of the present can offer and entail. I have achieved this through the development and exhibition of *Pulau Hantu*, a multi-channel interactive video art installation. *Pulau Hantu* embraces the ghostliness of my presence by exploring multi-channel video installation as an ephemeral method to present and situate queer art. My practice employs abstraction as the primary method of video-making to carry out and produce a queer practice of resistance from being seen and perceived. Ideas of ritual are also adopted through abstraction, repetition, and regeneration in effort to deny the heaviness of this world from attaching itself to me.

I argue that queer art, while potentially worldmaking, will inevitably be perceived through the mimetic faculty of recognisable concepts thus threatening its stability. If queer art, like queer performativity, inevitably suffers loss through being perceived, it is then a queer strategy to develop art that refutes perceptibility instead. My practice accepts this reality and tends away from achieving social recognition in effort to discover alternate means of existence that is not hinged on being seen. Instead, my work embraces my ghostly ephemerality and rejects recognition as a means of being freed from constricted dominant frameworks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My warmest gratitude and thanks to my PhD supervisors
Dr Emile Devereaux and **Prof Mary Krell**
for their wholehearted support and belief in my queer art and research.

My love and honour to my mother **PM Olsen** for her prayers from afar,
my father **B Ng** for bending the universe to my will from his grave,
and also to my brother **MJ Ng-Olsen** for entrusting me with success.

My deepest respect to my **Ancestors**, all **Ghosts**, and **Angels**
who have been my company and protection throughout my PhD journey.

My appreciation and respect to the streets and
void decks of **Hougang** that raised me.

My unending gratitude to the **Sea** for healing my soul
in times of thesis-writing, heartbreak, and global pandemic.

My appreciation to **Laura McDermott** at the
Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts
for providing me a space to exhibit *Pulau Hantu*.

My love and friendship to **Effie Makepeace** for assisting me
and aiding my peace during my exhibition of *Pulau Hantu*.

My gratitude to **Andy Lee** for introducing me
to the idea of pursuing a PhD.

Thank you for my blessings.

CONTENTS

PART I: WELCOME TO PULAU HANTU

1. Greetings	3
a) Introducing: Pulau Hantu	4
b) Research Introduction	9
2. Becoming Pulau Hantu	17
a) A Distracting Arrangement	20
b) Ritual as Reminder.	28
c) Cleanse and Regenerate	37
3. Methodology: This is all I have. I have what I need.	47

PART II: REASONS TO DISAPPEAR

4. It's Too Much to Be Seen	
a) Losing Queerness	60
b) Locating Queerness.	63
5. No Space for Ghosts	71
a) Queer Disidentification	74
b) Durations of Performance	77
c) Ghostly Queerness	81
6. Queer Art	
a) Worldmaking and Resistance	87
b) Mimetic Art	92
7. Conclusion	98

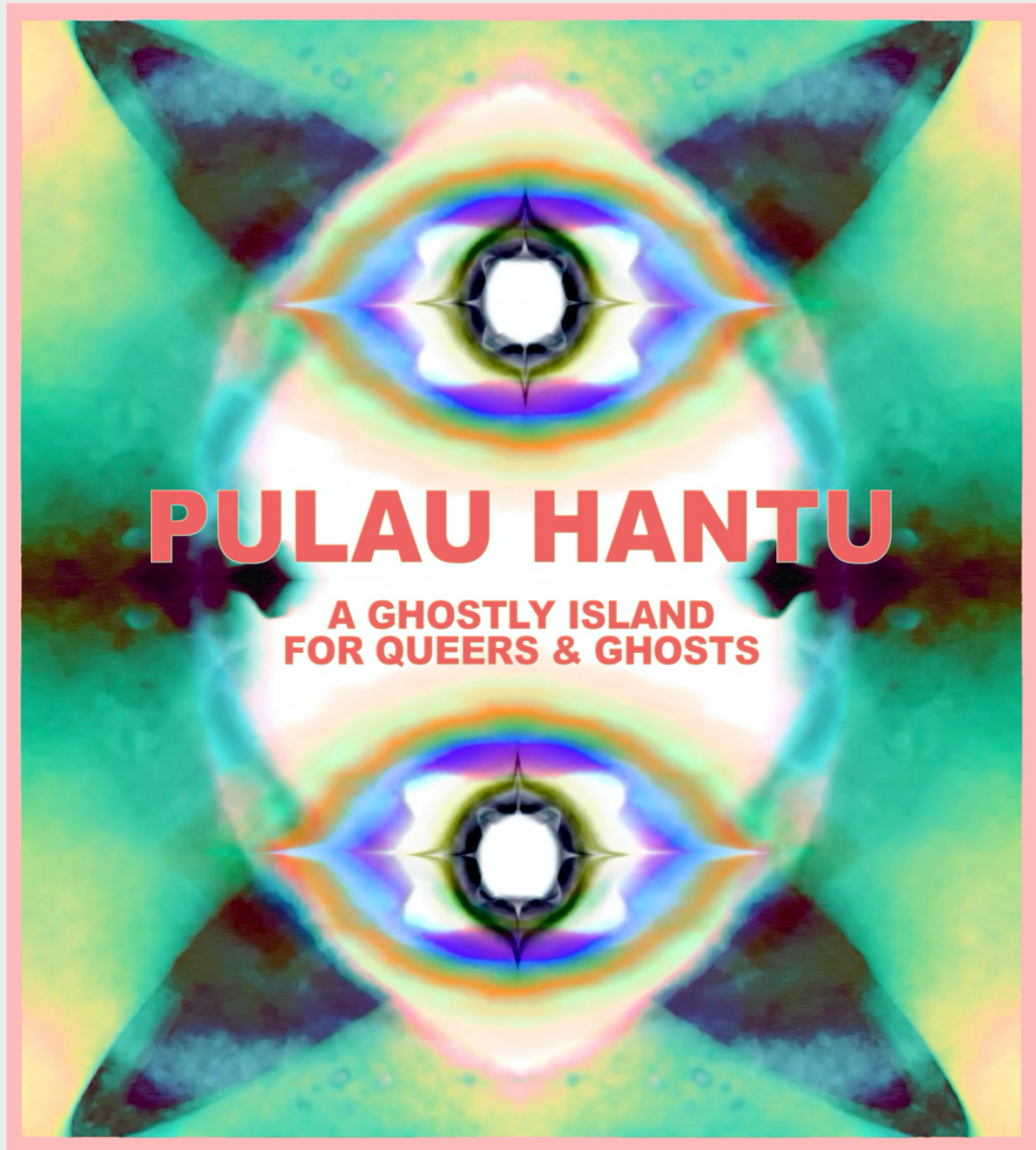
Bibliography	105
--------------	-----

List of Figures	115
-----------------	-----

PART I

WELCOME TO PULAU HANTU

STUDIO HERMIT & LYNNLY BENSON
PRESENTS



PULAU HANTU

A GHOSTLY ISLAND
FOR QUEERS & GHOSTS

16 JUNE 2022

EXHIBITING 1-6PM
JANE ATTENBOROUGH STUDIO @ ACCA

Figure 1: Pulau Hantu – Exhibition Poster

1. GREETINGS

This thesis contains two main parts:

Part I: Welcome to Pulau Hantu introduces and details my artistic practice, Pulau Hantu, with personal narrative and artistic analysis.

Part II: Reasons to Disappear treats theory as a poetic manifesto and carries out performative writing to connect the ideas of my work to theory.

a. INTRODUCING: PULAU HANTU

The title of my practice is *Pulau Hantu* which translates to *ghost island* in the Malay language. Pulau Hantu is also the name of a real local island off the southern coast of my native country, Singapore. Although the island has never been inhabited by locals, it has become a popular location for diving and snorkelling as the island is surrounded by rich coral reefs to explore and clean lagoons to swim in. There was a brief period in my childhood where my family and I would travel to Pulau Hantu on the weekends to escape from our day-to-day realities. My father once worked at a local marina where he would sometimes be granted permission by boat owners to borrow their boats when they were out of town. When it was possible, we would take a trip to the often-deserted island, drop the anchor, and suspend ourselves along the straits of Singapore, only returning to the mainland after sunset. We never actually stepped foot onto the island. My parents would often use this time to relax and take naps to the calm waves while my brother and I would either attempt to catch some fish with old fishing rods or carelessly jump into the sea from every edge of the boat possible. I always wanted to swim to the island from the boat, but I was never allowed to. I was told by my father that this was because we would run into and disturb the *hantu* (ghosts) on the land. I was always raised to respect ghosts and spirits, especially by my father who was not particularly religious or spiritual yet always accounted for their existence. I spent our trips hopeful to catch a glimpse of these ghosts from afar but to no avail. It made sense to me that I could not see them though, I think I knew it was unlikely that I would be able to see ghosts.

The island Pulau Hantu, as its name suggests, is believed to be haunted specifically by the ghosts of Malay warriors who once died in battle at sea. The island is actually made up of two islets. According to local lore, two Malay warriors once engaged in battle at sea that took many other lives along the way. As they fought, the blood of the dead filled the waters, upsetting the sea spirits who lived at the bottom of the sea. Out of anger, a sea spirit created a whirlpool to drown the warriors. Both warriors fought on even as they were being pulled into the sea to meet their eventual deaths. The Gods found out about this matter and fiercely rebuked the sea spirits for meddling in human affairs. To atone for their immorality, the sea spirits reincarnated the two warriors into two islets to honour them and provide their spirits, and the

spirits of those killed in battle, a place to live on. Today, these two islets make up modern day Pulau Hantu. As the tide comes in, these two islets get separated by a body of water creating a lagoon. And when the tide is low, the water returns to sea and the land between the two islets become possible to walk across. I find the rhythmic nature of this tide-cycle very calming; it is as if – no matter what the tides bring or how torrential the tropical storm may be – the island naturally lives and moves through time with an intrinsic cleansing of heart.

My practice, Pulau Hantu, is **a disembodied extension of my multi-ethnic, feminine, queer self** that I can access in moments of distress as I battle patriarchal heteronormative frameworks and all dominant conventions that render my being invisible and ghostly. My practice exhibits a response to a lifetime of feelings and experiences surrounding a queer futurity that continues to displace my sense of self and position in society. Pulau Hantu is imbued with all the ways my existence has felt extinguished because of the impossible demands of social recognition and performativity that leave me in a perpetual state of loss and constant postponement of self. Just as the island Pulau Hantu was an escape from the reality of responsibilities and struggles my family had to navigate on the mainland, my installation Pulau Hantu acts as an extended dimension of myself within my lived reality that offers me a place of protection and recuperation as I move through the never-ending present.

While I have been waiting for and working towards a utopian future where constrictions of dominant frameworks no longer exist, I realised what I actually want is to have some respite right now from a tiring fight. **So how do I remain here, yet at the same time escape from here? This is my conundrum that is being navigated in my art and research.** In my history of queer artmaking, I noticed a pattern of tending towards ideas of escaping the present. Pulau Hantu has as well recreated this tendency in a way. My practice seeks to escape the constrictive limitations of society by rejecting perceptibility and instead imagining alternate ways of existing that does not hinge on being legible within the suffocating confines of heteronormativity.

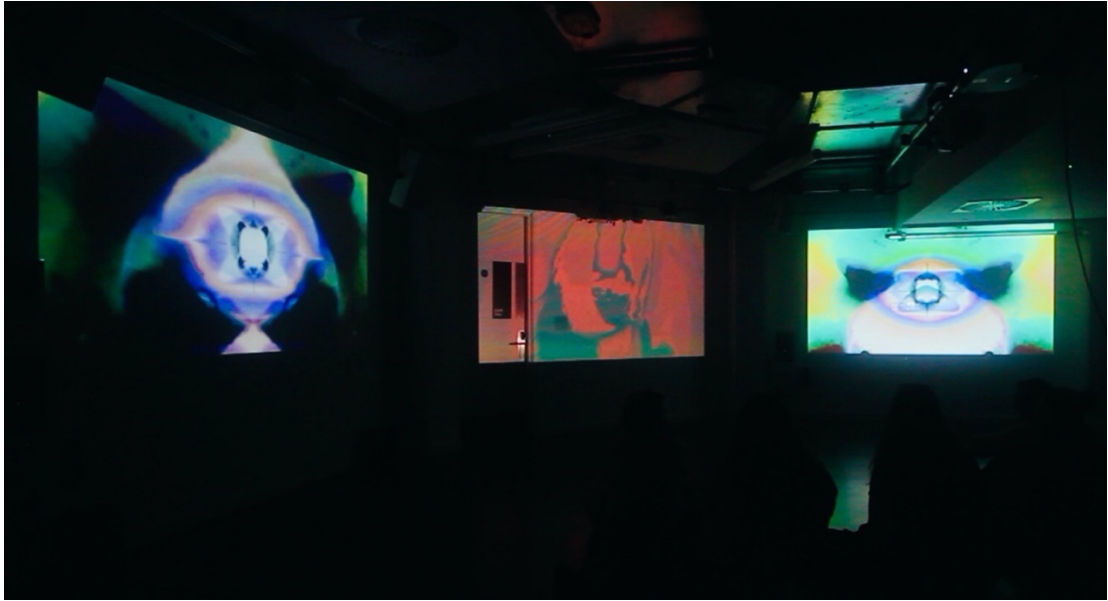


Figure 2: Photo documentation of Pulau Hantu

Pulau Hantu is a **time-based multi-channel video installation** which consists of three video art pieces projected side-by-side. The middle video projection is a distance-sensor-activated piece that is triggered by and passively interacts with the spectator's movement. This piece visually distorts itself in various subtle ways depending on the distance the spectator is from an ultrasonic sensor that is covertly positioned in the centre of the exhibition space. This middle video projection is where my being lives. It is reminiscent of the lagoon in the middle of Pulau Hantu that is continually cleansed within its tide-cycle. This video projection is a becoming of self that is protected behind a repeated cycle of visual distortion to distract and shield myself from the external gaze. The two video projections on either side are 17-minute abstract video art sequences that play on a loop. These two video projections are reminiscent of Pulau Hantu's islets that receive the tides that flow through the island's lagoon, carrying life's encounters to me and also carrying them away from me transformed and returned to the vast sea.

I feel like a ghost in this life. I too often find myself disoriented and slipping away from me as I move through life encountering society. In *Queer Phenomenology*, British feminist writer and scholar, Sara Ahmed states that 'disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel

liveable' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 157). Identity is a state that is reached and performed rather than an inherent condition of our being, however whether this performance can be perceived accurately or received without interrogation is dependent on a wider heteronormative social framework that dictates who can achieve legibility in society (Butler, 2000). Through my practice, I aimed to help mediate the perpetual displacement and loss of self I encounter from negotiating my existence with dominant frameworks in society. As I moved through the processes and decisions that eventually formed the current version of Pulau Hantu, I realised within me a trend to tend towards concluding that the only solution to successfully mediate my queer futurity in this society was to be able to disappear from here – but unfortunately here is the only place I can be.

Pulau Hantu battles the duality of being present in society while also completely disappearing from it - my practice navigates how, through queer art, these two seeming opposites can be true. My ghostly queerness resides within unrecognisable logics. I do not want to betray the complexity of my compounded identities by squeezing myself or assimilating into recognisable concepts just to appear accurately before dominant society, or for my practice to make sense to spectators. This work offers the unrecognisable facets of my ethnicities and queerness the ability to be present in the here-and-now and move covertly through the durational flow of time without being dismantled or removed by society along the way. As a disembodied extension of myself, Pulau Hantu employs various methods of disappearing in plain sight as a practice of agency and a means to not lose myself to dominant power structures.

Pulau Hantu is brought to life through a ritual of abstraction that allows me to be present and seen without being recognised. As put by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, whose thinking laid the groundwork for the field of Performance Studies, 'ceremony is a declaration against indeterminacy' (Turner, 1982, p. 83). Practicing ritual is to carry out and present a statement of myself. Employing ritual within a queer artmaking practice can help ground the volatility of my compounded identities within the present even if through a disembodied performance. All elements of my practice collectively work together to ensure my disembodied self exists in a state of

flow. This is an existence that through practices of abstraction and ritual become impenetrable by the external gaze.

Pulau Hantu employs abstract video art as a tool to accomplish imperceptibility and confound the spectator's gaze. Abstract art upholds my practice's intention to be present yet imperceptible as a means to deflect the performative demands of dominant society, thus freeing me to peacefully move forward in this life. Through Pulau Hantu, I have built improved ways of existing in the present that cannot be defined by mainstream logics of language and recognisable visual concepts. The projected video art offers something to be viewed, however, its abstract visuals and time-based ephemerality prevents the spectator from fully taking in or recognising what they are consuming. The multi-channel setup of the installation splits the spectator's attention, further disallowing them from viewing the work fully as they switch their gaze between the various projections. Through the time-based nature of my practice, Pulau Hantu is continuously emerging and disappearing through time while also remaining unrecognisable, thus ensuring that my disembodied extension of self cannot be fully consumed by the spectator.

Pulau Hantu as a practice rejects the insufficiency and hostility of the present but acknowledges that the present is the only place I can be right now. The more I analysed my realities surrounding my imperceptibility within dominant frameworks, the more I began to gravitate towards a desire to find peace in the here-and-now. However, realising how transient I am in my queer existence and social performance made me wonder if anything I do going forward can ever be sustained. If it is too much to be seen, then it might be advantageous for me instead to embrace my ghostliness and reject perceptibility altogether. **Pulau Hantu thus seeks to emancipate myself from being perceived in a heteronormative society and instead exist free from the compulsive assumptions and categorisations of dominant frameworks.**

My practice acknowledges the tension and inner-conflict of trying to desperately escape the present while also desperately trying to find a way to remain in the present. Sara Ahmed states that 'orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how

we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 3). I have always experienced great relief and a return to self whenever I am alone. It is difficult to discern if my hermit-nature is externally-conditioned or an innate part of me I was born with. Through my practice, I wanted to design a dimension where I could access the ease of being alone, through a form of disappearance, to protect myself from a perpetually cumulating fatigue of my lived reality. This space is an alternate dimension of the present, that through queer art, is also a disembodied spiritual extension of myself, where my queer ghost can rest within and recover from the fatigue of existing.

As the development of Pulau Hantu went forward, my practice began behaving like a reconciliation of my ghostly reality that I know I cannot alone dismantle. I realised what was driving Pulau Hantu was the perpetual loss of all the parts of me that should be mine, such as my ethnicities and queerness, but are perpetually lost to dominant frameworks. Over the course of creating Pulau Hantu, I have developed an ecosystem where my queer ghost can harmoniously live in. Within it I have built an aura of protection to tide me over durations of social encounters that render my identities false or invisible. Pulau Hantu acknowledges everything I cannot change and attempts to operate from the insufficient present in a way that can confront the perpetual loss of all my intersecting identities. Even though Pulau Hantu is something for right now and does not attempt to change the future, perhaps by existing and contributing to queer art, this work can be added to a wider framework of queer feelings and frustrations of the lacking present.

b. RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

Being recognised and perceived by others cannot guarantee that we are being seen and understood with accuracy. Growing up as a multi-ethnic, queer, and feminine person in Singapore, I was privy to the unabating demands of social performance from a young age. Because of this, to me, being confronted with recognition in social encounters has often left me feeling a loss and displacement of self that also then requires so much labour on my own time to retrieve myself back. To be interrogated over the accuracies and realities of my own life was so disconcerting and difficult to

contextualise when I was in my adolescence, but it led me to realise early on that the position I might appear to take in dominant society perhaps does not match the realities I know of myself.

This autoethnographic practice-based research sheds light on how the present is insufficient for my intersectional queerness to successfully perform and be perceived, thus leaving my identities in a perpetual state of loss and futurity like a ghost moving through life. Time as a queer person cannot flow forward in a linear fashion. As a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person, I am always putting myself on pause to negotiate my existence with racial constructs and compulsory heteronormativity. For this reason, I would describe the general state of dominant society as a perpetual roadblock that obstructs my path towards achieving ease within my racialised queerness. Furthermore, for minority groups, it is especially tricky navigating a world that does not actively advocate for us; It is easy for the majoritarian public to be ignorant to the repercussions of their ingrained biases, forcing minority performances into a continued obligatory process of repetition and renegotiation that does not even promise absolute results since there is no definitive end to reach.

My relationship with being perceived within my participation of society has always been complex. The experiences I have accumulated throughout my lifetime have taught me a lot about the social constructs I inevitably live with and my position within it. My mother is Singaporean of Portuguese and Swedish descent and my father is of Chinese descent from northern Malaysia. In Singapore, a local person who is ethnically European or of mixed ethnicities in a way that includes European lineage, like me, would be racially categorised as *Eurasian*, as also exemplified on my Singaporean identity card. As my father's family live in Malaysia, I did not get the opportunity to be raised with my Chinese family or participate in cultural Chinese traditions and their Taoist religion or even learn my father's mother tongue, Hokkien, which is a Chinese dialect that is also spoken in Singapore. Instead, I was raised in my ethnically diverse Singaporean Eurasian family.

Outside of my family, I have been mostly visually assumed as Chinese rather than of mixed ethnicities. It was very confusing for me to grow up not looking like a lot of

the relatives I was raised with. Even though I looked Chinese, I did not seem to perform like a Singaporean Chinese person. Because I knew I was ethnically Chinese, it never occurred to me that I could be embodying 'Singaporean Chinese' in a way that might seem suspicious or faulty in society. It was not an uncommon experience for me to encounter a local person who is met with confusion when trying to decipher what exactly I am and then also expressing their confusion by asking me if I am foreign or grew up elsewhere. My performance was enough for them to assume a conclusion that feels to me to be quite a stretch. It seems if they cannot pinpoint why I did not perform their expectations of a local Chinese person, then what was Chinese about me must not be local at all. It felt like an immediate dismissal of what I believed belonged to me. Contrarily, there have also been many occasions where my Chinese appearance would take precedence, and my social performance would be received as fake or an act I am putting on to distance myself from my Chinese lineage in favour of my European lineage, often alluding to the assumption that I wanted to associate myself with whiteness and deny my Chinese heritage.

In all these circumstances, who I was concluded to be was as always dictated by and insisted upon by external forces and not me. Throughout my life, I have found being perceived to be an inescapable invasion of myself. The generalisations projected and forced onto me seemed to diminish my being before my eyes. I used to desire to socially exist as who I knew myself to be, but much of my encounters that assumed or questioned my reality were so intrusive and forceful – as if my presence in itself was insufficient for me to be fully present.

Being accurately perceived was a goal I once sought after while growing up because I was so tired of the demands to explain myself. I thought if I finally reached some fantasy end-point of this chore, all of these personal intrusions would finally stop and I would become a fully formed person that made sense to myself and others. However, the older I got, the more life showed me that this was a reality that cannot be reached. Thus, over time my experiences left little about recognition to be desired. These experiences have contributed to and enhanced my already introverted and private nature. To appear and be perceived comes with so many caveats and losses that I have grown somewhat resistant to appearing at all.

These foundational life experiences have played an integral part in how I have come to understand and navigate the ephemerality and futurity of queerness in my adult life as well as in society. My experiences have led me to pursue a journey, through queer art and practice, to envision a different way of existing in this society that resists the limitations of dominant frameworks by forgoing being seen at all.

About a decade ago, I moved from Singapore to UK to pursue an education and career in fashion media. Both my Bachelor's and Master's degrees were awarded by a fashion university in London, and during that time I primarily worked at fashion publications as a fashion-film editor. These industry-focused environments were particularly keen on creating media that were visually impressive yet recognisable enough to cater to an audience – in these spaces, being seen and marketable held importance.

When I began to explore queer themes in my university work, I was often told that a heteronormative audience would not understand it. It seemed obligatory that non-queer people should be able to understand my work for it to be marketable or valuable. It was demanded that I kept heteronormative people in mind so as to not exclude them. As a queer artist, I took issue with this condition that took my own queer autonomy out of my hands. Such notion causes restrictions and limits what forms of queerness can be presented and gatekeeps what is acceptable in artmaking. These experiences prompted me to begin a commitment to my queer craft and also to insist that autonomous and radical queer artmaking was valuable even if mainstream spectators of my art and research are unable to perceive or understand why.

During my Master's degree in Fashion Media Production, my project supervisor assumed I had intentions of pursuing a PhD after I graduated. However, I did not grow up in an environment where pursuing higher education was an expectation or convention, so I had never considered that a PhD could apply to me. My supervisor explained to me that my artmaking aligned with practice-based academic research and I should consider looking into doctoral programmes that might better suit the form of work I was already exploring. I was not familiar with academic research at the time, but when I looked into the idea more, I realised that a doctoral programme

could be a suitable space to further expand my queer practice. This was the unexpected encounter that led me to leave the fashion media industry and instead pursue a practice-based PhD. Reflective of my iterative queer artmaking methods, this change of path involved acquiring unexpected new knowledges through my own lived experiences and then also letting go of a career in an industry I had been pursuing since I was 17-years old. Discovering and accepting this change offered me the freedom to confidently release the past and pursue a new path that was potentially a more suited avenue to explore my queer practice.

My ability to focus my research on my queer identity and experiences in my research – which is an intimate part of my being – was greatly enabled by studying, working, and living in the UK context where being queer was no longer the most marked aspect of my social identity compared to when I lived in Singapore. Moving to the UK moved me away from the direct obstructions in society that my queerness used to attract. In the UK, my queer identity was no longer the most obvious form of ‘otherness’ about me as my queerness was greatly overshadowed by my East-Asian appearance and foreign accent when speaking English. Thus, my most frequent battle in the society I live in now is racism rather than queerphobia which has afforded me the time and space to deeply analyse my queer experiences without having to experience them with as much persistence as before.

In this autoethnographic practice-based research, I am focusing on *queerness* as a non-heteronormative existence that does not abide by heterosexuality or the gender binary of cisgender male and female. However, other facets of my identity such as my race, ethnicities, and feminine visual presentation also contribute to my experiences of being queer in dominant society. Thus, *queer* in this research encompasses a lot more than my sexuality or gender – as best described in a quote by Black American author and social activist, bell hooks, I am approaching ‘queer as: being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live’ (hooks, 2014).

In Chapter 2, *Becoming Pulau Hantu*, I analyse my art practice, Pulau Hantu, a multi-channel video art installation. The more I understood and came to terms with my

ghostly impermanence in dominant society, the more I knew that I had to develop forms of protection that can break me out of the socially constructed boundaries to ground my multi-ethnic, feminine, queer self in the present despite the dismissive heteronormative operations of society. My practice in process, culmination, and presentation expands present logics and manifests more and better than what default society can offer me. Through worldmaking art practices of abstraction, ritual and exhibition, I explore what the queering of the present can offer and entail. My art practice explores what I can do for myself in the present through queer artmaking processes to sustain my ghostly existence despite the persistent experiences of loss that come with minoritarian participations of society. Pulau Hantu explores, through ideas of disappearing, the tension I have between having to participate in society yet wanting to retreat into solitude.

My research adopts a queer methodology that I have titled: *This is all I have. I have what I need*. This is a queer method (further delineated in Chapter 3) that blends autoethnography and personal intuition to efficiently develop and carry out research. bell hooks, states that it is valuable to be aware of one's personal experiences of oppression in society. According to hooks, thinking critically about our lived experiences 'automatically correspond[s] with an understanding of the ideological and institutional apparatus shaping one's social status' and that 'it is necessary for feminist activists to stress that the ability to see and describe one's own reality is a significant step in the long process of self-recovery' (hooks, 2000, p. 26).

Through my life experiences, I have observed that achieving recognisability in dominant society is contingent on how much of my existence can be fit into predetermined social categories whether or not these categories are true of me. Failing to do so either casts me out of social sensibilities or forces me to assimilate into social sensibilities that have nothing to do with my life. My physical appearance and social performance have seemed to always confound the external gaze and prevent them from being able to perceive the realities and multiplicities of my many intersecting identities. Patriarchal heteronormative constructs compulsively destabilise my ability to move through society harmoniously. Moving through a constricted society as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person has over time begun to feel like a progressively suffocating reality that I had no way out of.

In *Part II: Reasons to Disappear*, I connect my work to theory through poetic manifesto and performative writing. Commencing with Chapter 4, *It's Too Much to Be Seen*, I break down the imperceptibility of my queer identity in a heteronormative society which renders my queer performance invisible or absorbed into heteronormative frameworks, thus leaving my queer identity out of view and in a state of loss. This chapter studies identity as a state that is not an innate condition of our existence but rather a never-ending becoming of self that must be continually performed to fruition. In society, dominant heteronormative frameworks predetermine which identities are permitted or can be seen. Even though we are not obligated to perform within the oppressive confines of heteronormativity, not doing so results in losing legibility in society. This chapter also argues that because my femininity is locatable within heteronormativity, unless I explicitly perform away from identifiably heteronormative logics, my queerness often gets absorbed and lost within dominant frameworks.

In Chapter 5, *No Space for Ghosts*, I liken my existence to those of ghosts. This chapter studies José Muñoz's work on queer disidentification that discusses being queer as a utopian durational performance of self that must always perform away from default heteronormativity to be viewed as queer if not to fully disappear into heteronormative concepts or cast out of legibility. However, queer performativity is only operational in the present, resulting in a potential existence that is volatile and reliant on permanent repetition of queer performance. This performance is ultimately a slippery disappearing act that only lasts as long as the duration of every social encounter, thus I liken my queer existence to a ghost haunting society with my already performed past that is rarely ever seen in the present.

Chapter 6, *Queer Art*, discusses queer artmaking as a worldmaking strategy of resistance through Audre Lorde's writings that prompts us to question if the prescribed dominant frameworks *have* to be true and that better realities can be built by believing in the power of our agency. Queer artmaking has the potential to ground queer existences and attempt to fulfil the gaps in mainstream representations of society. Practicing condemnation of the insufficient present can assist queer people in dismantling heteronormative governance that prohibits worldmaking and

minority representation, progressively taking the veil off society's inability to see the world as a more authentic whole. However, these attempts at producing and ritualising our existence through artistic processes can only be an impermanent stepping stone towards dismantling the narrow confines of social legitimacy. This chapter questions if queer art can really be a sustainable way to ground the identity of queerness if queer art is likely to be recognised through dominant cultural logics, and concludes that it might be more sensible to develop art that refutes recognisability and instead finds a way to be freed from the chains of dominant forces in the present by employing imperceptibility.

2. BECOMING PULAU HANTU



Figure 3: Photo documentation of Pulau Hantu

Pulau Hantu is a time-based multi-channel video art installation which consists of three abstract video art pieces projected on three walls side-by-side each other. The middle video projection (referred in this chapter as *Lagoon*) is a 60-second interactive video art sequence that runs on a loop and distorts differently depending on how far a spectator is from a distance-sensor. The two video projections on the sides (referred in this chapter as *The Islets*) are two different 17-minute video art sequences that also run on a loop. My thesis contains photo documentation of the installation and screenshots of the video art sequences. Video documentation is also provided alongside the submission of this thesis.

This chapter of my thesis will delineate and analyse the recurring theme that runs through all facets of my practice which is **my rejection of being perceived**. This section contains three parts: *a) A Distracting Arrangement* discusses the ways Pulau Hantu uses its presentation as a tool for distraction, *b) Ritual as Reminder* discusses abstraction as a queer disidentificatory process of artmaking, and *c) Cleanse and*

Regenerate which discusses how abstract video art can be used as a regenerative visual strategy to escape the external gaze.

The purpose of my practice is to mediate the loss and futurity of my queerness in a heteronormative society through queer art and artmaking. Pulau Hantu interrogates the present as an insufficient space for queer identities and, through queer art, presents better ways of situating myself in dominant society that can sustain me instead of wear me out or assimilate me into compulsory heteronormativity. **This research explores how the continued impending loss and futurity of my intersecting identities can be challenged and averted through rituals within queer art practices.** Through queer art strategies, I imagined an added dimension of self, outside of my physical body, that allowed my existence to live on without being displaced by societal disruptions. By undertaking queer art processes and working alongside the queer themes of my work, I have created a practice that is able to offer me a disembodied extension of myself that can act as a mediator between myself and dominant society.

My practice-based research contemplates the reality and ephemerality of my multi-ethnic, feminine, queer existence within the inevitable linear timeline of lived life and explores the queering of such timelines to envision other ways of appearing and existing. Both *Lagoon* and *The Islets* were created through an iterative process of visual abstraction. Even though the video art may appear to spectators as a form of digital animation, the visuals are actually edited films that display a distortion and queering of existing images from my daily life. The software used to create these video abstractions occurred in the film editing software, *Final Cut Pro X (FCPX)*. My artistic process of making queer art in a video editing software – which is a location where mainstream media uses to create queer narratives that often feel diluted and far away from my queer reality – insists that the inevitability of a linear timeline can be queered to benefit me.

My video abstraction process transforms the quotidian into a source of power and protection. The three projections exhibited in Pulau Hantu were created by abstracting a singular video clip of self-portraiture (as presented in *Lagoon*) or

significant items or occurrences recorded from my daily life (as presented in *The Islets*). I began by expanding these video recordings on *FCPX* through a process of slowing-down which multiplies the amount of video frames of the original footage. This expansion-process is done to offer me more to view within a recorded moment. From this expanded scene, I extracted about 3 to 10-seconds to use as the essence within my video abstraction ritual which takes place on a video editing timeline in *FCPX*. This essence is then abstracted through various iterative processes which include: repeating, multiplying, layering, cropping, collaging, and deleting, taking forth the results that felt good to me and letting go of the rest.

The middle projection in the installation, *Lagoon*, also went through an added layer of distortion on top of the abstraction process. Because the video sequence in *Lagoon* still portrayed some identifiable self-portraiture within its abstract visuals, it was essential to add another facet of visual warping to ensure the spectator could not properly view this intimate content. This was achieved by coding a layer of interactive distortion using the free computer language software, *Processing*. This code was then made interactive by working with an affordable ultrasonic sensor that I programmed in the free programming software, *Arduino*. The code applied to my abstracted self-portraiture adds a layer of visual distortion over the video art and obstructs the spectator's view of what I have hidden underneath. Coding and sensor-programming were accessible and cost-effective methods to extend the elements of subversion in my installation. Even though I had no prior background in computer language or sensor-programming, I discovered that it was a very feasible tool to learn as there is a community of people online who share their own unique codes with each other as well as a wealth of free video tutorials online that made learning these skills possible.

Pulau Hantu, as a dimension, is ghostly in existence – a nod to the ephemerality of my own life. This work exists whether or not it is being exhibited, just as queer lives exist whether or not we can be seen. Pulau Hantu operates like a self-regenerative ecosystem with its own habitual cycles that can support my queer existence as I encounter the inevitable challenges that come with social participation. Through the course of realising Pulau Hantu, my queer practice has offered me the space and time

to imagine better realities separate and emancipated from prescribed notions of what life must be, thus serving its purpose whether or not it is in view of an audience.

My practice offers my many intersecting identities the opportunity to exist in a state of flow despite the demanding projections that come with social performance. Even though my physical self is mine, and should ideally be where I am able to exist and operate from, the social categories of recognisable existences ultimately betray me, leaving me silenced, unseen, or in a state of disbelief. Pulau Hantu, as a disembodied extension of my ghostly self, insures and keeps all the volatile and ephemeral facets of my intersecting identities together as I move through the constrictions of this society that will otherwise compulsively render various parts of myself invisible and non-existent. Therefore, Pulau Hantu as a personification and extension of self is part of me, yet viewed separate from my physical body, and has the ability to ensure that I will not lose all the facets of my lived existence that I know belong to me despite what dominant society has decided to be true.

a. A DISTRACTING ARRANGEMENT

Pulau Hantu accepts the harsh reality of my intersectional queer existence and perceptibility in dominant society. Through my queer art, I attempt to reconcile with the here-and-now by extending the present and offering myself more space to deal with social expectations of performance instead of trying to change a future that will never come. The acknowledgements of these hostile realities in turn have guided the development and choices that went into the culmination of Pulau Hantu. This section of my thesis discusses how Pulau Hantu is presented and explores how situating abstract video art within a multi-channel video art installation creates a viewing experience that subverts and distracts a spectator's gaze.

The physical presence and embodied experience of a spectator is an integral element of installation art. Installation art, as explained by art historian and critic, Claire Bishop, 'is a term that loosely refers to the type of art which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as 'theatrical', 'immersive', or 'experiential'' (Bishop, 2005, p. 6). Bishop states that installations presuppose a literal presence of

persons within its space, and through the making of the work, adjusts to amplify the spectator's experience of the work to immerse them into its intention (Bishop, 2005). However, it is not the intention of my practice to pull the spectator too far into its presence, instead Pulau Hantu intends to distract and subvert the spectator from easily digesting the contents of my installation as a means to escape their gaze.

British video artist and curator, Catherine Elwes, describes installation art as 'an interplay of contiguous components contained within an extruded, spatialised totality' (Elwes, 2015, p. 94). Compared to an installation of various art pieces where every work of art takes individual focus within the exhibit, installation art is received as a whole through the various elements that make up the art such as the physical space it is in, the lighting, sound design, or the technical equipment used to present the work. Each element cannot be without the other, the work will be incomplete otherwise. All the varying elements within the space of an installation, including the site itself, comprises the artwork. Without the presence of all these elements, the work cannot be viewed in its fullness or how it is intended to be received.

Pulau Hantu is a disembodied performance of self that carries out an extended dimension of my existence that cannot be weighed down by heteronormative frameworks. Performance art is a useful mode of expression for artists of minoritarian communities who, according to Elwes, seek to 'contend with both the personal and political consequences resulting from the negative mis-reading of their physical appearance' (Elwes, 2015, p. 60). Elwes states that performance art is similar to installation art as they both allow artists a space and time where, for that duration, they are in control of their visual output (Elwes, 2015). Installation art offers an expansive landscape for my queer practice of disembodied performance because installations can only be viewed during the exhibition's duration, thus adding to the ephemerality of the dimension of life it presents, and also offering me the agency to decide when this disembodied extension of myself *can* be viewed.

According to cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner, artistic performance is the final step to realise realities; it offers the compulsively hidden areas of sociocultural life the potential to situate itself within social concepts (Turner, 1982). However, abridged to their own understanding, spectators will project their own interpretations onto the

installation in an inaccurate way. Further discussed in Chapter 6's section on *Mimetic Art*, a spectator perceives from an artwork what they have already known or experienced in their lives which in itself is infinitely varied and dependent on their own combination of social identities and life experiences. Works of queerness are not mainstream which makes it easy for society to collectively categorise all queer art as just a rough aggregate of *queer* and *other*, or altogether absorbed into dominant concepts, thus leaving queerness at a loss and out of view once again.

Emancipating myself from being a legible participant of society can give my intersecting minoritarian identities more space for all the socially unseen facets of myself to be freely present and just be. Creating Pulau Hantu was an effort to consider alternate forms of living and participating in society that could enrich me rather than wear me out. My experience of creating Pulau Hantu acts as a reminder that even though dominant frameworks continue to exist and we continue to participate within it, the limited scope of socially valid realities does not have to become us and we are not required to operate within such prescribed confines. Creating Pulau Hantu and extending myself and my presence through queer art showed me that I do not have to be chained to any social forms of rigidities.

Through queer artmaking, the dimension manifested and performed by Pulau Hantu can at least be present as a form of visual art that can prompt me, and other queer people of varying intersecting identities who relate to the themes of my work, to create and perform better iterations of social existence even if it can only occur within ourselves and our individual participations in society.

In video installation, the use of multi-channel projections can draw attention to an imperfect spectatorship, and draw on or emphasise the 'fragmented nature of perception' and 'the partial view that is any representation' (Elwes, 2015, p. 183). The spectator cannot by themselves capture the entirety of the art, instead as Elwes puts it, they can 'only self-edit a truncated version within which all other permutations were contained as unrealised potentialities' (Elwes, 2015, p. 183). Without a full view, the work cannot be received and digested with immediacy. The spectator will have to alternate their focus to receive the work, never really seeing it

all at once. Through my work, I am distracting the spectator while they also distract themselves, freeing me to live within this dimension I created where I know I cannot be perceived.

I have employed art installation as a queer method of presenting a disembodied performance of self because the nature of its presence, similar to the fleeting transience of my queer performativity within dominant society, is inevitably ephemeral. My artwork can only be viewed when set-up as an installation in a physical space and must be viewed in this context to be encountered. Viewing the separate elements of Pulau Hantu in external circumstances, even if viewing the video sequences separately on a computer screen, does not show the spectator the work but rather gives them hints to what it might have been. Documentation of the work through photography and video recordings can only show an attempted copy of it, which is no longer authentic nor an authentic encounter of the work. As soon as the installation is removed from the site it was located in, the work can no longer exist to spectators until it is purposefully set-up again. The deliberate intentions of ephemerality behind the work allows this disembodied extension of myself to exist with agency, purposefully removing myself from view in my own time instead of being continually open for consumption.

In place of my physical self, Pulau Hantu confronts the demands that come with being perceived in dominant society by purposefully welcoming its imperceptibility despite being present in a physical site. The relationship formed between my art installation and the spectator will be dependent on many factors: The personal narratives and experiences that the spectator arrives to the site with influences what they can perceive of the work. The time from which spectators arrive and stay also determine what within the work can be seen in any course of duration. Even if a spectator stays long enough in the installation for the video sequences to complete various loops, the multi-channel design of the installation does not allow the spectator to view Pulau Hantu with full attention. The spectator must instead toggle their view between the three video projections, taking the work in in parts rather than all at once.

Despite my personal process and time that went into creating Pulau Hantu, it is desirable to me that it can only be viewed in incomplete ways. This method of presenting queer art questions if queerness should strive to be easily consumed or if it is actually necessary to strive for perception. The time-based nature of Pulau Hantu allows the work to unfold over time, adding to its ephemerality and also the ephemerality of what spectators can see and perceive. The spectatorship of the exhibited work, once encountered, can never be encountered the same way again. Pulau Hantu's impermanent nature rejects definitiveness in its contents and its presence, thus embracing the ghostly nature of my queer existence.

My practice was designed to feel like a portal out of the flow of quotidian life that I can heed and disappear into when faced with heteronormative social demands. Pulau Hantu is a controlled space where my queer being can survive in the present despite the parameters put in place by dominant forces that continuously push my queer existence out of sight or into inaccurate conclusions of heteronormativity. Through the abstract, time-based, and multi-channel nature of my installation, the act of looking at the work hinders the spectator from being privy to the flow of my extended self and discourages them from forming immediate assumptions of what they might be viewing.

I am conscious that eventual conclusions will be formed and projected onto the work. My practice is self-aware and does not just accept, but also expects, that Pulau Hantu will be perceived and interpreted in various ways that will have more to do with the spectator than the work itself. I am at ease with this because Pulau Hantu was designed to ensure that what the spectator is consuming cannot be whole, thus taking pressure off the burden of being understood and recognised, and assigning no value to external perceptions of my disembodied self.

The spectator will not be able to digest the various elements of the installation all at once since they will be focusing on the continuous unfolding and disappearance of moving images on multiple video projections. Because the video art is being projected onto walls, a spectator physically moving through the installation will at times project their shadow onto the video projections (as demonstrated in *Figure 4* and at 00:15 of

my video documentation), blocking out some of what Pulau Hantu is presenting during their motions of viewing the work. This element of the installation adds another layer of disruption to the spectator's ability to view the work in its entirety, causing them to be in their own way of what is being presented. This casting of shadow adds to the work and **supports my intentions of not being seen**.



Figure 4: Spectators blocking the visuals with their shadow

The employment of abstraction in my practice is an effective way of negating and navigating binaries of socially recognisable things to purposefully detach myself from being collectively pinned down by external perceptions. In Art History Professor, David Getsy's, essay, *Ten Queer Theses of Abstraction*, he discusses abstraction as a way to resist being categorised in society. His first theses states '1. Queer abstraction is an

abstraction' (Getsy, 2019, p. 65). As put by Getsy, there can be no definitive definition of queer abstraction because 'queer stances are ineluctably contingent, mobile, viral, and plural' (Getsy, 2019, p. 65). He argues that the impossibility to stabilise the definition of queer abstraction is not a weakness but a strength that allows us to resist assimilating to how society is set up and 'create an alternative in which to imagine and image other ways of being and relating' (Getsy, 2019, p. 66). Portraying the visual elements of Pulau Hantu through abstract art is an effective way to present complex queer narratives because it does not have to be insufficiently fitted into recognisable visual concepts. Abstract art allows me to visually present concepts that are theoretical and difficult to define; it is a way of depicting intangible ephemeral realities that are ever-evolving and challenging to prove by depicting moods and feelings rather than tangible concepts. My physical self and how I appear in this world as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person cannot escape being perceived through assumptions and stereotypes, but through my abstract queer art, I am able to achieve a form of imperceptibility even while being perceived.

Abstract art does not have to abide by social rules of how art should look or how a site is utilised. Abstract artist Julie Mehretu states that abstraction is a 'strategy or resistance against flattening' and 'a refusal of description, of language, of containment' (Mehretu, 2021). Mehretu describes the making of abstract art as 'an emergent logic so the absence becomes a presence in its own right' (Mehretu, 2021). Abstraction as an art and practice is free from boundaries and has space and freedom to visually invent new worlds that remain undefined and malleable instead of being finite and constricted. Abstract video art adds to Pulau Hantu's ability to be viewed yet remain unseen; it can be used to reimagine who I am, and what my reality in this world looks like, and how I am authorised to perform in the society I live in.

Pulau Hantu as a disembodied extension of myself has the freedom to dismantle enforced notions of what a queer existence consists of. With this freedom, I can confront the constructed rules of society by emancipating myself from it. The essence of abstract art cannot be pinned down by a spectator's viewing experience, therefore, Pulau Hantu can take on a different meaning every time it is viewed, thus creating a randomness and inconsistency in the various conclusions that might be made by an

audience, thus inhibiting the work from being fitted into an overall category or stereotype.

Abstract art has the ability to take the present and from it abstract an improved reality to exist in. Brand new visual manifestations can also be born out of abstraction, allowing the frustrating feelings of queerness and ephemera, which cannot be found in existing things, the opportunity to be presented and seen. My practice employs abstraction as a visual strategy to present art without explicitly showing what the work is about. Abstract art embodies a form of fluidity and malleability that acts as a shield of protection between the spectator and the soul of an artwork. Through the combination of the installation's abstract visuals, multi-channel set-up, and interactive elements, Pulau Hantu presents different combinations of images depending on when the work is being viewed within the durational unfolding of art. The totality of what can be seen is always on the move and it is unlikely to be seen again in the same way by a singular person let alone by all potential spectators of the work. Even if the spectator remains in the installation long enough for the projections to restart, their shift of focus between the video projections will ultimately perceive different combinations of visuals.

The obstacles of focus that my practice has implemented throughout the installation have been employed to serve my aim of being able to be present in plain sight without actually being legible. As Black American author and social activist, bell hooks, said, 'on one hand, folks project onto your work much that you did not intend; on the other hand, they don't always pay attention to what is there' (hooks, 1995, p. 33). Conclusions will be developed about my work regardless, but with so much to see, my practice is purposefully diverting and distracting their gaze. My video art does not give the human eye anything real to hold onto; Pulau Hantu as a disembodied extension of my being renders myself illegible, thus resisting the social compulsion of categorisation.

Through multi-channel installation and abstract video art, I have found a viable site to comfortably exist within. Presenting abstract art within a multi-channel video art installation can purposefully skew and distort my legibility, thus effectively destabilising the heteronormative perception of my queerness and allowing me to

escape the grasps of enforced dominant frameworks. The continuous unfolding of the three video art projections reveal itself over time but it cannot be seen all at once. This forces the viewer to be an imperfect spectator which is also reflective of the spectators we encounter and are perceived by in our participation of social life. **This manner of presenting art highlights the impossibility of perceiving the multi-dimensional truth of people with accuracy.** Pulau Hantu co-opts this knowledge and appropriates this reality by diverting and distracting the spectator's gaze. Thus allowing the socially volatile parts of me that are vulnerably threaded within the work to disappear in plain sight, free from recognition and constriction, while still being very much present.

b. RITUAL AS REMINDER

My practice employs a ritual of abstracting the present to transform the present. This section of my thesis explores abstraction as a form of ritual and discusses the creation of the two non-interactive video art elements of Pulau Hantu which will be referred to as *The Islets*.

Growing up in a Catholic family, I was raised with several daily rituals that were reproduced into my life as a second nature. These rituals acted as an ongoing protective practice that altered the conditions of the present to my benefit, protection, and safety. An example of such ritual included reciting a set of prayers at night. Every night before I slept, I would repeat my prayers like clockwork to cleanse me of the day and to bless the next day in advance. If I was going through any prolonged or heavy hardship in my life, I would be reminded to recite the Rosary with my nightly prayers. This is a process that is carried out by repeatedly reciting the same prayer in sets of ten with a few other prayers punctuating each decade cycle – as if the repetition of the same prayers gained power over time and built a better case for protection and healing in my life.

My mother would often remind me to say prayers before I headed to bed as if prayers expired over time and needed repeating. It seemed our God needed to be reminded to protect and bless us which always felt suspicious to me. Even though I never fully

believed in the religion I was raised with, these rituals did feel like they added more to my day and they reminded me to believe that life could be transformed into more than meets the eye. Life occurred as it does anyway, it did not suddenly become easy just because of some prayers – but I decided that carrying out rituals was a practice by me and for me, and thus I had the agency to rewire the paths of life that I felt forced into. These rituals were consistent reminders that perhaps there is more to the life we encounter or can see, and perhaps through such practice we can find some hope out of despair.

Even though I no longer practice Catholicism in my personal life, I have carried forth the practice of rituals as an important facet of life that offers me opportunities of peace amidst the chaos. Through these perpetual performances of rituals, a belief system of protection and blessings is kept alive. Perhaps there is a higher power listening and altering my life for the better when asked of me, or perhaps rituals purely work as reminders of what I believe in, thus reinstating them in every present for me to engage with and be empowered by. Either way, rituals have kept me intact through the internal and external hardships of navigating the complexities of life.

As an adult, I continue to carry out rituals that are informed and derivative of my upbringing. Every evening in my family home, we would light a candle at our Catholic alter as a symbol to remind us that God is present in our flat, therefore we are being watched over. In my current personal life, I have adapted this ritual by ensuring that a candle is always lit in the evening in my home to signify the ending of a day that will soon end and be removed from me. This ritual also reminds me that another day will arrive so I should relieve myself of the past so I can make way for better and more. This procedure is a small gesture but it brings me large amounts of ease. Through this ritual, I believe that my home is being cleansed from the heaviness accumulated in the day, and it reminds me that I am not stuck in this moment no matter how suffocating it might be.

My process-based art installation is aware that rituals that were carried out in the past cannot be brought forth into the present. Rituals, like social performance, must be executed with perpetuity – but in doing so, rituals can aid the present and help my intersecting queer identities cope with all the facets of myself that I lose to the external

reproduction of dominant frameworks in mainstream society. Through a repeated process of abstraction, Pulau Hantu as a disembodied extension of self can exist in heteronormative society with a protective abstract atmosphere, thus hindering dominant forces from consuming me.

By acknowledging that the present is insufficient for my queer self, I can be better empowered to queer the lacking images of the present and invent improved ways to appear and exist in this world. As put by Legacy Russel, curator and author of *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, 'what if abstraction is the necessary reset – a correction to a way of seeing that shows us new forms of truth' (Russell, 2021). Creating abstract queer art allows my being to be present without the pressures of being legible or trapped within enforced stereotypes. Presenting my queer self within abstract visual modes that cannot be easily grasped can mediate the loss of my identities within dominant society by taking me out of the running of legibility altogether, thus also allowing me to build better ways of appearing or existing.

Abstract queer art allows me to transgress the heteronormative boundaries reproduced and forced onto me in my participation of society. Getsy states that artists of various minoritarian and oppressed backgrounds utilise abstraction to resist visibility, therefore also to **resist social inspection and interrogation**. He says that this is a response to 'the daily experience of others' categorising gazes and to the persistent cultural marking that any representation of the human form calls forth from viewers' (Getsy, 2019, p. 69). The use of abstraction in my work is a critique of the limited scope of existences that are considered recognisable or valid in dominant society. Developing Pulau Hantu has given me a visual means to contemplate the dominant society that I inevitably have to participate in.

My physical self appears East-Asian and femininely heteronormative even though I am multi-ethnic and queer. These visual identities hold preconceived positions in society that (through social stereotypes and assumptions) speak for me despite me saying nothing at all. Pulau Hantu presents an abstract digital extension of myself that, through exhibition, acts as a disembodied stand-in for my presence. My physical body alone, whether in social performance or captured digitally, is perceived through

socially constructed categories in life and media of what a person is. Queerness does not exist as a monolith and my queerness is furthermore influenced by my ethnicities and cultural background, therefore, who I am as a queer person cannot be realised by social mainstream logics nor through my own comprehension because I as well lack language to fully describe it.

Queer Black American poet and writer, Audre Lorde states that ‘as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule and form our silences begin to lose their control over us’ (Lorde, 2018, p. 1) and that ‘as they become known and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them becomes sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas’ (Lorde, 2018, p. 3). However, my experiences of societal demand have over time worn me down to the point that it seems the only way to mediate these frustrations is to find ways to disappear from the present.

My gender and sexual queerness are mine. My femininity is mine. My ethnicities are mine to inherit and own. However, these facets of myself are constantly fed through a system of social regulation, removing my queerness and history with such force and consistency, thus leaving me to consistently retrieve and reintegrate these facets of myself back into my desolate shell. Performing rituals of abstraction within queer artmaking transports my being into another dimension of existence where the present sphere is expanded and spacious enough for all the facets of myself to peacefully exist in. Through my practice I have found improved ways of approaching my existence and practicing life that can free myself from the restrictive rules of social logics.

Abstraction offers more to observe and to be observed with. The Islets in Pulau Hantu unfold in a manner that is seemingly repetitive yet always evolving. The video sequences that appear in The Islets take many forms. Even though they were created from different origins, all of them derive from the same ritual of abstraction. The Islets in Pulau Hantu were created through a repetitive abstraction process which takes video footage captured from my personal daily life and, through ritual, transforms the present into an expansive video art sequence. All of this occur in a video edit software where its transformation happens slowly on a linear video-edit

timeline, as if I am insisting that through a process of ritual, I can fit something complex and non-temporal into a linear timeline.

The various visual elements within these video art sequences were created by first slowing down and expanding a video clip into more video frames to allow me more to see and work with within a present moment. From this expansion, I extract about 5 to 10-seconds of these expanded video clips to be used as the essence of my abstraction ritual. These clips then get put through repetitive yet varied processes of layering, cropping, multiplying, and blending to abstract images of my daily life into visually unrecognisable images.

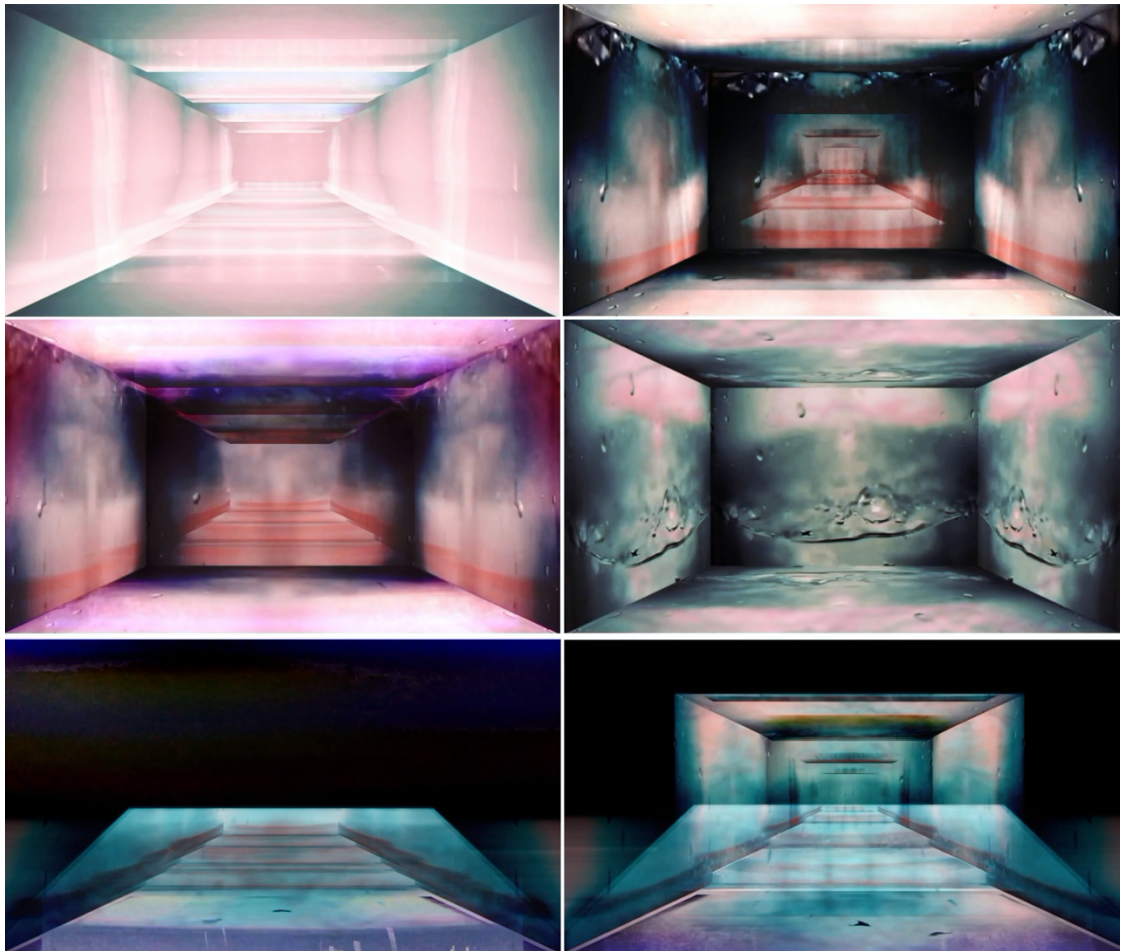


Figure 5: A watery sequence within The Islets

These operations of abstraction incur visual difference and imperceptibility along the way while still presenting a semblance of flow and continuity. This process of abstraction held within The Islets become a form of prayer that when played on loop

can repeat my protection and blessings along the forward movement of time. This iterative process abstracts the original video footage into transformed versions of itself through experimental and dismantling procedures to ultimately reconstitute what it was into something new, thus disidentifying from its default starting position and visually concealing its origins along the way without getting rid of its essence.

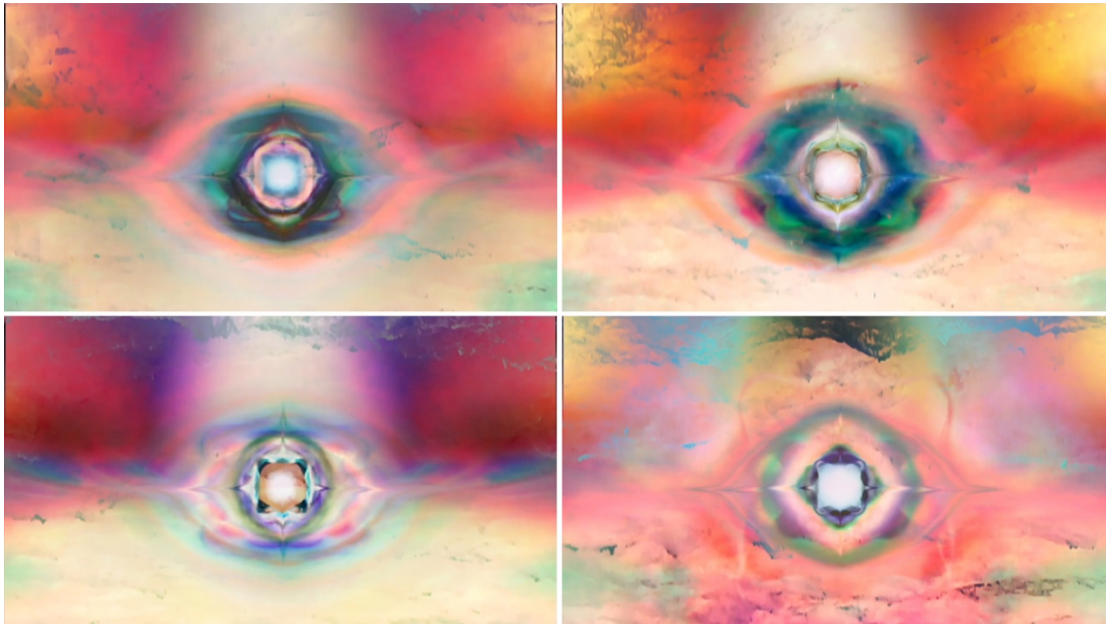


Figure 6: 'Evolving Eye' within *The Islets*

My ritual of abstraction is a practice of searching within what is already in front of me to discover and insist that there is more than what can be seen. In my process of digital abstraction, I did not intend to create video art that alluded to protective imagery, the driving intention was to discover new visual worlds from everyday images. Fluidity and flow are moods that run through *The Islets*. A sequence that occurs within the video art derives from video footage of a vase being filled with water and carrying up remnants of dried petals and leaves with it (exemplified in *Figure 5*). Through rituals of abstraction, this video footage began to take a form that feels like a vortex pulling me into the video and coaxing me into another dimension like a pathway leading me out from the constricted present and into a better place.

Borrowing from my personal daily rituals, two of the video abstractions within *The Islets* that occur significantly in different iterations and combinations were built from abstracting footage of a candle flame. One of these abstractions was created from

video footage of an ongoing flicker of a candle flame that was captured without camera movement. This candle flame was abstracted in a video sequence that ended up visually mirroring the shape of an eye that is constantly shifting and evolving and repeating (as shown in *Figure 6*), as if the accumulation of ritual created a prayer to watch over me.

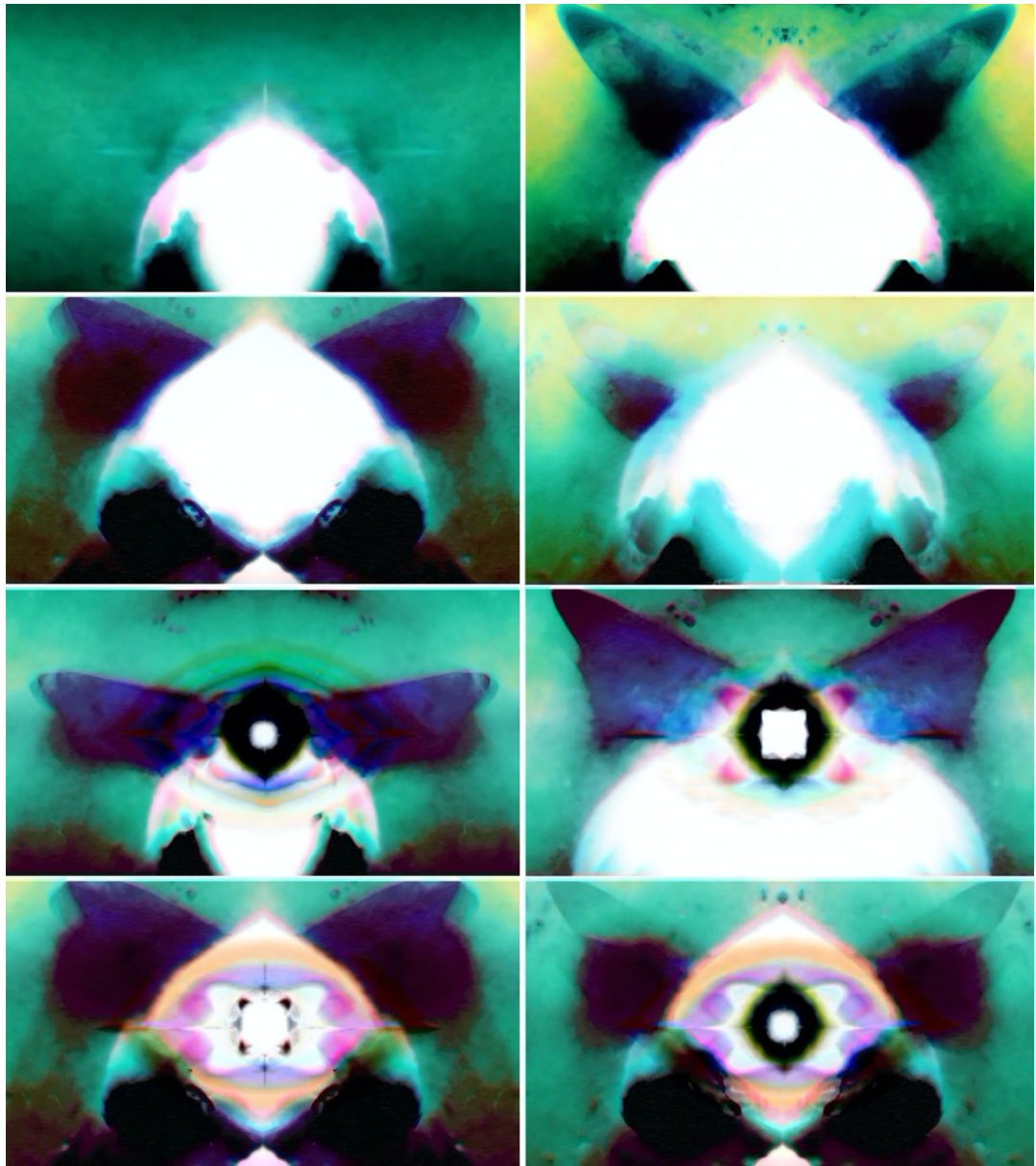


Figure 7: 'Ascending Angel' blending into 'Evolving Eye' within The Islets

The other abstracted candle flame was created from footage captured with a moving camera. This footage when put through the ritual of expansion and abstraction,

began to appear like an angel ascending from a ball of light (exemplified in *Figure 7*), offering The Islets another allusion of divine protection.

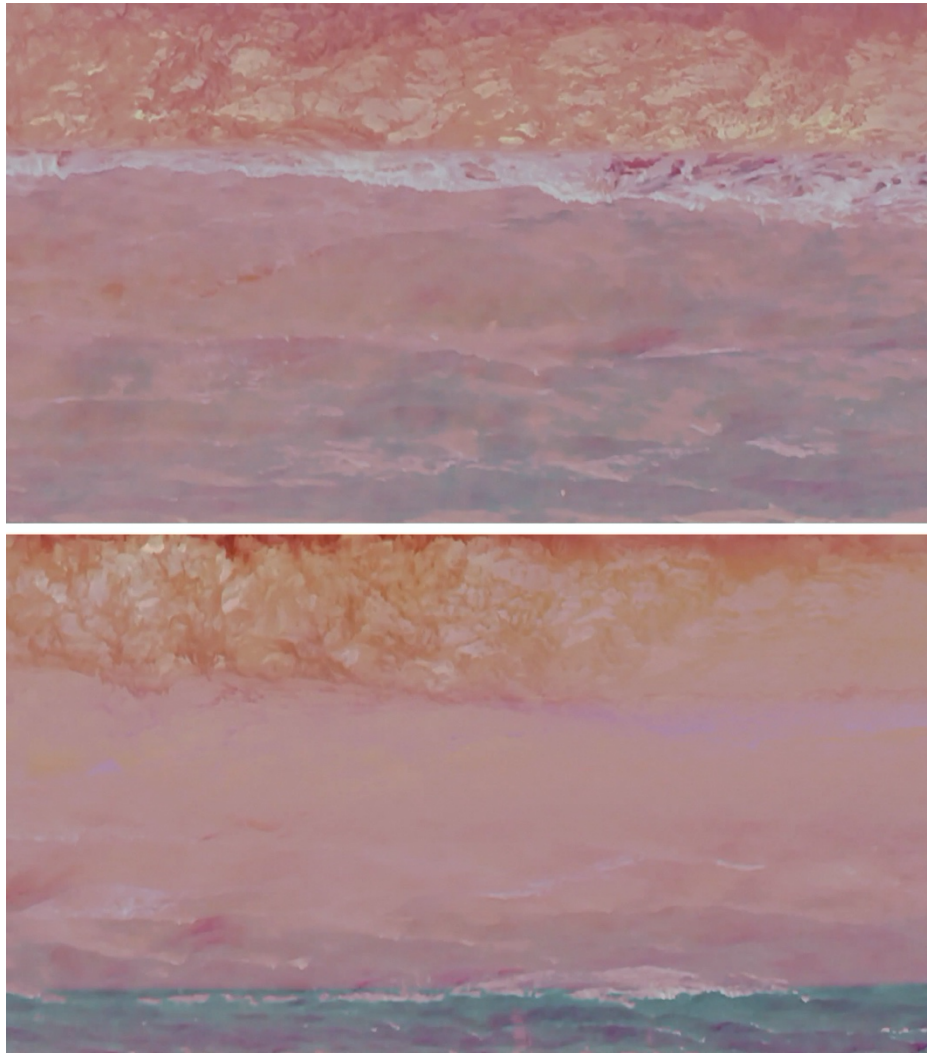


Figure 8: A watery sequence within The Islets

An audio sequence plays alongside the video art presented in Pulau Hantu. The audio sequence (which can be listened to in my video documentation) was developed from a recording of white noise that was also put through a ritual of abstraction. White noise is a sound that, like queerness, is always around but cannot be perceived in the present. White noise is a sound of the past as it has to be first captured within an audio recording to be perceived. In my practice, an audio recording of white noise was expanded, warped, and layered repeatedly to ensure there was no semblance of stillness running through the installation, thus adding to the atmosphere of flow. This audio sequence is a sound that is not disruptive but it is slightly uncomfortable. It is

what I imagine it might sound like to be suspended within water. The audio sequence lingers in the background of the installation to inconspicuously support the work; it adds a further immersive quality to the installation without being obvious. This abstraction of white noise easily melds with the ebb and flow of Pulau Hantu. The implementation of such audio adds a consistency to the viewing experience of Pulau Hantu to ground the abstract video art that is always on the move.

Employing images that exist in my everyday life and abstracting them gives the simplicity of what I already have a greater power and meaning, transformed by a ritual of practice. **Better can be born from the present if we use what we have in the present for ourselves.** My ritual of abstraction has given me opportunities to view the present in different light. It is a meditative process that empowers me and reminds me to believe that there is more that can exist and that the limitations of society is a construct that I am not destined to be stuck within.

My ritual of abstraction carries out a dismantlement of the present that I am trying to escape from - not so much as to destroy it, but rather to insist that there is more within what can be seen, and with its parts I can create a more blessed and supportive space to be in. By dissecting the present and reconstituting it into a new world, my queer self can move on from what I am expected to be and allow myself to be something else somewhere else. Even though the origins of the finalised video sequences are no longer recognisable, the essence of what it was born from remains as a hidden wisdom that continues to run through Pulau Hantu as a quiet knowing and confidence.

The visual results of my ritual of abstraction envelopes a layer of protective atmosphere over my existence like a perpetual implementation of prayer that separates the spectators from my disembodied extension of self. The continuous reproduction of dominant frameworks in society casts what I know to be true of myself either into oblivion or forced into recognisable social categories even if it is untrue of my actual existence. Through practices of ritual, Pulau Hantu explores how these intentional processes, born out of the power of my power, can offer my being the opportunity to exist in dominant society with a sense of stability even during

inevitable encounters with spectators in society. Practicing abstraction as ritual is not just a reminder to practice imperceptibility but to also practice non-attachment. My practice offers flow to my being despite the continued demands of performance and proof of my existence by dominant society. Through such rituals, I am reminded to let go of determined states of being and embrace illegitimacy as a strategy to subvert the external gaze, and as a performance to ritualise this extension of self into truth.

My practice reappropriates the religious rituals I was raised with to serve my current life as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person in society, and reproduces these rituals to provide myself an atmosphere of protection from the impossible demands of a heteronormative world. Carrying out rituals through queer art has the ability to take me out from the physical dimension of life and into an imagined dimension that can aid my experiences navigating an insufficient present.

Carrying out abstraction as a ritual offers the ephemerality of my intersecting and queer identities the opportunity to be grounded and kept intact in the present rather than being displaced or rendered invisible by dominant forces. The repetitive implementation of ritual in my life and art reminds me that the external circumstances of dominant society and the lack it puts onto minoritarian lives does not have to be true. The constructs set up by pre-existing frameworks do not have to apply to me in my personal practice and pursuit of life. Abstracting video footage of daily things into abstract video art allows me to be elsewhere; it is transportational and transformational for my view of my existence and pushes me forward through time with a sense of stability like a protective layer of prayer washed over me. This form of queer artmaking operates from my own power to execute rituals to expand the reality presented to me in society. It offers me more to live from and within, thus dismantling the limitations I have been confined to in dominant society.

c. CLEANSE AND REGENERATE

This chapter section discusses the regenerative strategies implemented within Pulau Hantu's interactive and abstract video art to escape the external gaze and to achieve a state of flow.

Cleansed from the heaviness of society, Pulau Hantu moves through the course of time within a heteronormative society unbothered and thriving. As a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person, proof of my existence is always being demanded of me by society; failing to do so forces my being into insufficient categories of recognisable identities as defined by dominant frameworks. I accept that I cannot control or negotiate how I am perceived, nor can I avoid societal expectations. Through Pulau Hantu I mediate this reality by establishing regenerative elements into my installation that wash external forces off me as they arrive. This practice is a reminder that the constructs of the world do not have to become me, and that it is not inevitable for the exhaustive tensions that come with my participation of society to consume the peace I intend to pursue and sustain in my life.

I am always trying to get away from the constricted present. However, the present is the only place I can physically be in. Through my practice, I am offering myself another dimension to reside in that occurs in the present yet is untouched by present things. By employing queer art as a disembodied extension of myself, I am able to expand the present sphere and discover better ways to mediate the present realities of my societal position and envision alternate means of moving through the present time with ease. Establishing regenerative cycles and qualities into the disembodied performance of my personified queer art is a way to navigate the present space in a manner that sustains my ghostly presence despite the inevitable gaze of spectators, thus ensuring that the external perceptions of my social performance do not hold me down or attach to me, perpetually freeing my being from the constructed social restrictions that are enforced on minoritarian identities.

My practice suggests that video art is a regenerative manner of presenting queer art. Video art contains a cleansing quality because compared to still imagery, video occurs with ephemerality, removing the past from view as it is further revealed. Video art also cannot be recalled with as much potential of accuracy as still imagery. The durational unfolding of these video sequences operates like a shore receiving the tides of the sea - it brings the ebb of the tides in and through the occurrence of time, the tides are naturally removed from me with continuous flow, ensuring that my disembodied extension of self cannot be held onto. A spectator will only be able to remember parts or approximations of what Pulau Hantu is or what it might have

been. This result is amplified further through abstract visuals that do not exist in everyday life.

Three video art sequences are projected onto the walls of Pulau Hantu's installation site. The middle video projection is where my being resides within this disembodied extension of self. It is evocative of the lagoon in between the islets of the real Singaporean island, Pulau Hantu, that fills up with the tides of the sea before being emptied again as the tide cycle moves forward with time. This looped video projection presents my ideal becoming of self by abstracting a video portrait of my physical self into a visual form of freedom, freed from the imagery I present to society.

This video projection which will be referred to as *Lagoon* is an abstract development of my physical self that is 57-seconds in length and repeats on a loop. This video sequence demonstrates an idealistic Becoming of my queer self that is uninterrupted and utopian. It fantasises a linear timeline for my queerness to reach an absolute place of freedom away from my socially perceived self. This sequence uses an iterative and repetitive distortion of video-self-portraiture that visually disidentifies away from my physical self. The repetition of self occurs in a way that dismantles my appearance progressively more along the way, using abstraction to escape my assumed heteronormative presentation and into an imperceptible state.

Lagoon continually releases visual intelligibility through abstraction and distortion to sustain my ideal becoming of self in the present. As put by queer performance artist, Renate Lorenz, in *Queer Art: A Freak Theory*, 'if presumed "recognisability" on the visual level is often the basis for homophobic and racist statements, refusing or non-visualising can be considered an important queer-artistic strategy' (Lorenz, 2012, p. 41). Abstraction deviates from replicating what can be seen in a world that compulsively negates and leaves out what is hidden, thus manifesting alternative imagery that is unrecognisable to cultural logics to reimagine and visualise improved means of being in this world. Getsy states that 'abstraction seems like a ready target for critics who would demand disclosure, familiarity, and their own certainty. If they can't see it, it must not exist' (Getsy, 2019, p. 68). In defence of this potential critique, he reminds us that it is important to keep in mind that this is the same argument enforced in history that was used to 'erase and deny the presence and ubiquity of

queer lives' (Getsy, 2019, p. 68). I feel stuck in my physical and visual body, and I am always trying to find means of escaping from these limitations of existence. In my practice, I have developed a disembodied extension of my being that can **take up space differently** from my physical or visible self.

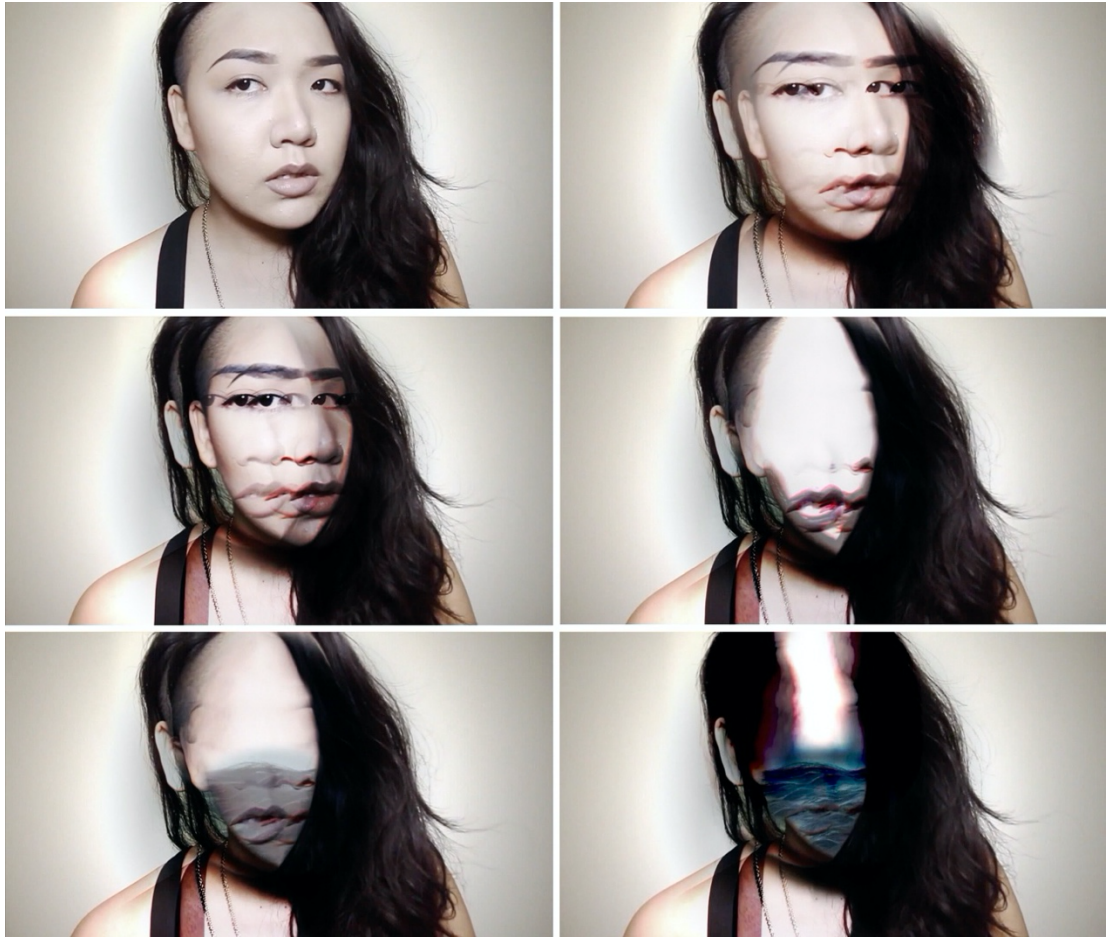


Figure 9: Stages of Becoming

To create *Lagoon*, a singular video clip of self-portraiture was strategically repeated, dismantled, and repurposed to gradually transport myself into another dimension (as shown in *Figure 9*). In the first 5-seconds of the sequence, how I am physically viewed in present society can be seen unfolding and repeating in slow motion. Soon after at 21-seconds in, the sequence begins to erase my facial features - this drastic deletion of my face is displayed for 6 more seconds as if to for a moment mourn and reconcile with my queer reality that unbecoming is something I must do if I ever want to Become. In reconciliation, *Lagoon* accepts that my queer existence takes place in an ephemeral and ghostly realm of society outside of dominant society and

acknowledges that the process towards freedom is a continued dismantling of self that is at the same time a queering of self. My erased face is eventually replaced by pieces of my hair arranged to reflect the horizon of a peaceful sea under an evening sky. This is a pivotal act that releases intelligibility to make way for a better world to enter, even if it is in a state of futurity. During the final 10-seconds of this sequence, the top of my head evolves into an open pathway as if I might finally have the means to free myself from dominant ideological entrapments.

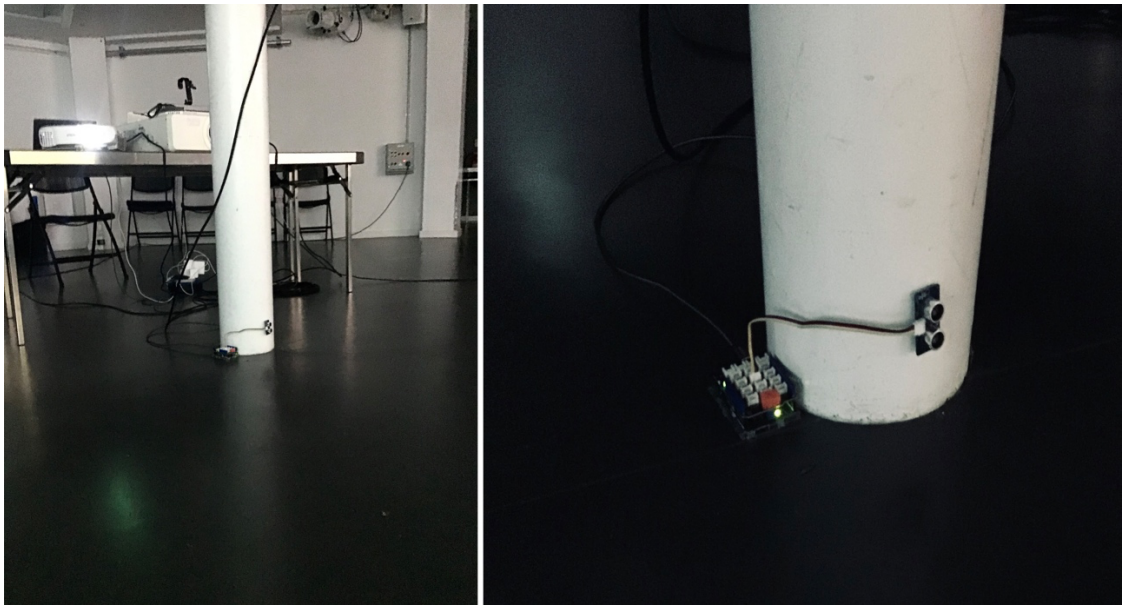


Figure 10: Distance sensor in the exhibition of Pulau Hantu

However, Lagoon is aware that this Becoming is utopian and that this sequence must be repeated continually like a ritual to be transformative in the present. Pulau Hantu does not simply present Lagoon as a singular sequence on loop. My practice seeks to be visually confounding to the external gaze and rejects putting vulnerable parts of myself on clear display and consumption. Therefore, it was essential to introduce a layer of distortion to this video sequence. This was achieved by introducing a distance sensor to the installation (as shown in *Figure 10*) which offers my practice an interactive element to its operations, hindering the spectator from properly viewing my ideal becoming of self behind Lagoon's distortions. Lagoon's visual distortions are always occurring whether or not the sensor is triggered to continually cleanse the heaviness and demands of society off me. The visual distortions occur in 90-second cycles where the distortions progressively increase until the cycle resets.



Figure 11: A sequence of images from when Lagoon was triggered by a spectator

The interactive element within my practice is a passive one. Whenever a spectator walks pass the sensor, the video projection of Lagoon momentarily distorts differently (as exemplified in *Figure 11* and at 00:53 of my video documentation), generating different visual outcomes depending on how far the spectator was from the sensor. Even when the installation is cleared of spectators, Lagoon continues through its cycle of distortion to cleanse itself from past disruptions as a continued ritual and reminder that even though dominant ideologies will continually be enforced onto me, they do not have to stick to me because I have the power to reject them.

My practice has employed the use of distortion to allow a utopian version of myself to exist and occur within Pulau Hantu without actually being consumed by spectators. These visual distortions cause the video sequence to feel like it is submerged underwater, thus refracting the imagery, and creating a forcefield between

myself and the spectator. This distortion does not completely erase the visibility of my idealistic Becoming of self that occurs in Lagoon, instead, it applies a layer of disruption over it, warping and obstructing what can be seen (as shown in *Figure 12*). The visual differences activated through the sensor-interactions are subtle and not visually explicit, which **prevents the spectator from realising that the work they are viewing is not being presented to them in full** or that they are potentially affecting what they are viewing, thus allowing my utopian self to exist in the present without actually giving myself away.



Figure 12: Distortion in Lagoon

The repeated visual dismantling and distortion of self that occurs in Lagoon is emancipatory of my restricted embodied experiences of dominant society as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person. Like the lagoon in the actual Singaporean island, Pulau Hantu, this disembodied visual presentation of my being contains a regenerative quality that cleanses itself in cycles, receiving the tides of social interaction and swiftly letting it go. The employment of regeneration as part of my installation's operations ensures that the expectations placed onto my social performance and presentation in dominant society do not latch onto me.

The two video projections on either side of Lagoon (referred to as The Islets) also contain a regenerative quality. The Islets are 17-minutes in duration and are

displayed on a loop, therefore the spectator will have to remain in the installation for a long enough time to view the sequence again. Even though the spectator could stay and watch the video sequences repeat themselves, the sequences move forth so quickly that it does not allow the spectator to fully absorb what they are viewing. The abstract imagery within Pulau Hantu might be remembered through seemingly recognisable shapes extracted through the perception of a spectator, but these perceptions will not align with the intentions behind my work. Therefore, the video sequences presented by The Islets cannot be held onto or relayed in any accurate manner.

Furthermore, spectators will not be able to view all three projections together in their entirety, and will only receive parts of an on-going unfolding whole. These combination of factors **cleanses the gaze off me** and imparts onto my being a sense of fluidity and flow that is uninterrupted by the disruptive demands of dominant frameworks. Even in my state of flow, the inevitable perceptions of dominant society will always try to attach and insist itself onto me and my social performance. However, with flow, these darts of perception that attempt to define me into categories and stereotypes cannot stick to me and are swiftly removed from me as they arrive.

Video art is a regenerative manner of presenting queer art. The repetitive quality of my video art sequences and generative distortions, combined with the looping of video, acts like a regeneration of self, sloughing off the layer of dust accumulated from spectators' gaze by continually moving forward and restating itself confidently no matter what. What can be viewed of Pulau Hantu is contingent on a variety of factors; Depending on when a spectator enters the installation, how long they stay, and how often and at which distance they walk past the sensor, will affect what combination of visuals will be on display.

These visuals will inevitably expire with time and move on to reveal other imagery, deflecting the external gaze from attaching to any video frame, thus repeatedly releasing attachments with the unfolding of time. The ephemerality of video art disallows the work to be stagnant or on pause for the spectator to take a closer look.

Any inaccurate ideologies and perceptions a spectator might project onto Pulau Hantu cannot last too long as the work is always moving forward and away, inevitably removing their gaze with every new moment. As a regenerative practice, Pulau Hantu is able to ensure that social encounters cannot linger within my soul. It is a practice of non-attachment and a strategy in life to sustain and ground myself in dominant society.

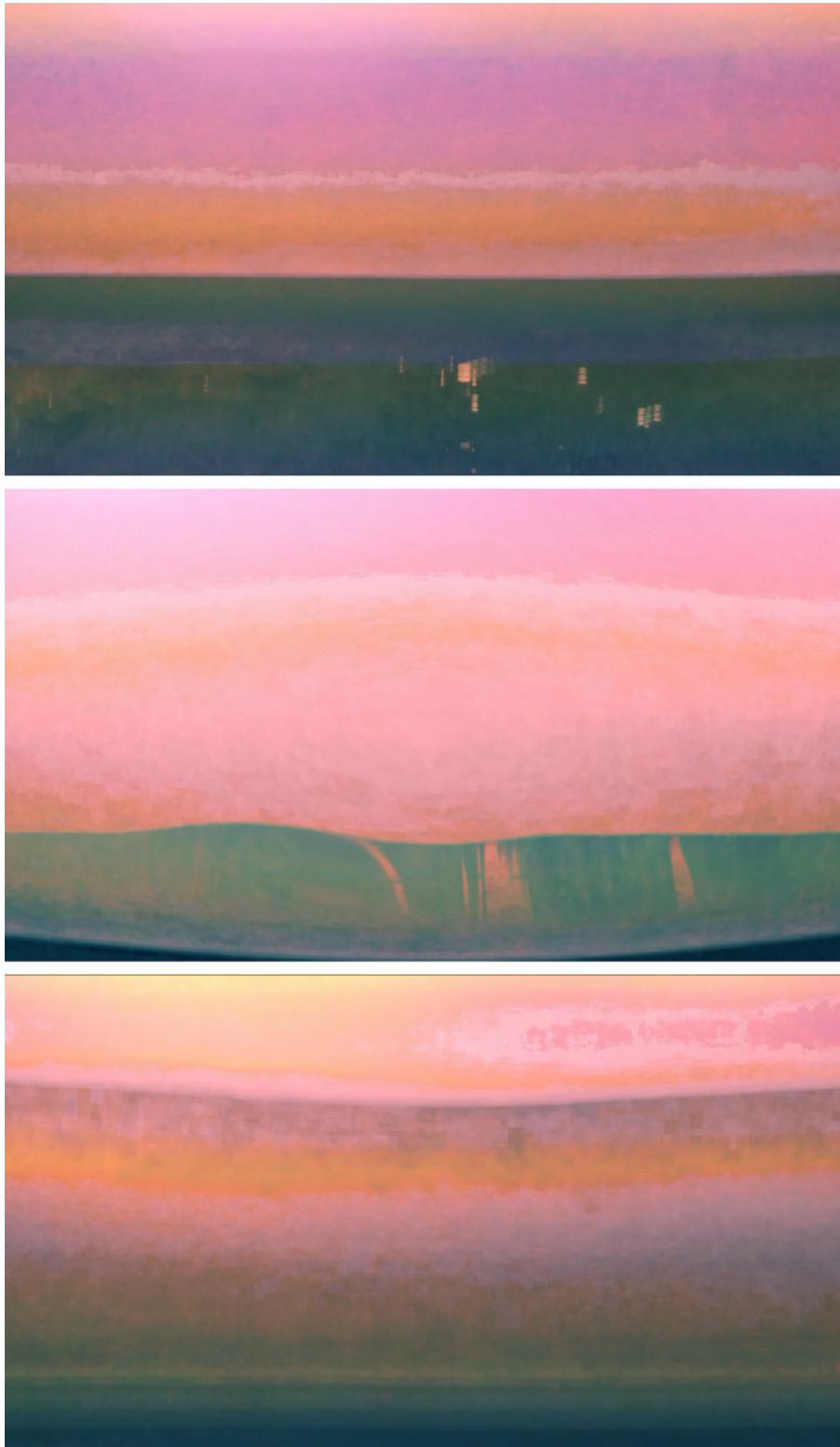


Figure 13: A snippet of The Islets

3. METHODOLOGY: THIS IS ALL I HAVE. I HAVE WHAT I NEED.

My work employs a queer research methodology that I have titled: *This is all I have. I have what I need*. This method is a queer blend of intuition and autoethnography that aligns with the Fluxus movement in its self-sufficiency and simplicity in process, and also in its intention to expand and dismantle the boundaries of what art and artmaking can or should be. In the following section I detail how this queer method upholds the intrinsic value of individual intersectional queer narratives by making space for this valuable contribution to live in through artistic practice and writing.

Queerness can only be performed in the present; it is a performance that is due to expire as soon as it begins. Thus, queer existences are fleeting in nature and are reliant on the perpetual performance of self to be in view. Queer people do not exist homogenously. My queer narrative is the only one that I can access and ethically analyse. Therefore, the most efficient way for me to exemplify a queer narrative in my art practice is to employ myself, a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person, as the subject of my research.

Creating autonomous work through one's queer agency and intuition has the potential to bring feelings of queer futurity closer to the present, bringing to light experiences that are fleeting and transient yet always occurring. Queer Cuban-American scholar, José Muñoz, refers to this as a '**worldmaking**' (Muñoz, 1999, p. 195) practice that can demonstrate other means of existence that does not adhere to or cannot be confined within white, patriarchal, heteronormative constructs. As put by Muñoz:

the concept of worldmaking delineates the ways in which performances – both theatrical and everyday rituals – have the ability to establish alternate views of the world. These alternative vistas are more than simply views or perspectives; they are oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of 'truth' that subjugate minoritarian people. (Muñoz, 1999, p. 195)

For Muñoz, worldmaking practices do not only critique dominant oppressive forces, but it also reveals that we do not actually have to live within their suffocating demands. In *The Uses of The Erotic*, queer Black American poet and writer, Audre Lorde reminds us to question if current frameworks have to be true. There can be other means to pursue accomplishments without abiding by predetermined methods or dominant enforcements. Lorde suggests that better outcomes and realities can be established when we acknowledge the innate power within us (Lorde, 2018). By adopting intuition as a research method, I am able to embrace that the culmination of my past experiences of queer futurity and the knowledge I have accumulated through these experiences are valid and can hold power. This power contains potential to expand our comprehension of the society we participate in; through this power we can make known the ways that the current frameworks does us a disservice through its inadequacy. As put by French philosopher, Henri Bergson, ‘disorder is simply the order we are not looking for’ (Bergson, 2007, p. 80). Intuition as a research method moves with flow and is at ease with allowing the unfolding of time to reveal what is right to do at every junction without being distracted or confined by definitive research plans, presentations, or illusions of order.

My research method does not seek out influence and instead allows my history and intuition to lead the way. My research adopts philosophy of Bergson by employing intuition as a method to achieve my aims. According to Bergson, ‘intuition starts from movement, posits it, or rather perceives it as reality itself, and sees in immobility only an abstract moment, a snapshot taken by our mind, of a mobility’ (Bergson, 2007, p. 22). This method of intuition uses the organic process of duration as an accurate means of carrying out a practice and achieving outcomes. Intuition is not ‘a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy’ (Deleuze, 1991, p. 13), but it is a fully developed method of accuracy in philosophy. Bergson places an emphasis on time first, stating that duration connects a whole continuity of durations together, and that ‘to think intuitively is to think in duration’ (Bergson, 2007, p. 22). By using intuition to progress one moment to the next, we can recognise intuition as a precise lived act that immediately solves a speculative problem once the problem is recognised.

I have pursued an unusual research method because my queer self and research cannot be grasped within usual terms, categories, or presentations. Thus, methods that might be perceived as *usual* cannot successfully comprehend the intimacies or scope of my queer narrative. My complex positionality as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person in dominant society is manifested in my atypical blend of research methods as a stance against normative reproductions of research that often does not account for the complexity and nuances of ethnic and queer lives. This is a method that allows me to follow a train of thought and intuitive process freely and uninterrupted without the rigidity of traditional research methods and presentations.

My research is performative; stitching together a process born out of duration, my queer intuition, and my intersectional queer experiences, that will best serve my aims and intentions. This queer methodology allows me to amalgamate different routes together that will best reveal, within the scope of my research, knowledge about areas of society that have been perpetually excluded from dominant social frameworks. My methodology recognises limits of strict academic procedures and thus does not reject difference or disorder in its methods and instead embraces the fluidity and uncertainty that comes with the succession of time. In fact, my methodology trusts and looks forward to the unfolding of time as a functional, advantageous, and surprising method to produce research that provides processes and outcomes I could have not foreseen beforehand.

To aid the thesis-writing process, I employed my own personal journals containing reflections of my lived life over the duration of this research. Even though these journals were separate from my research and were not written with my research in mind, I discovered that they contained within them great insight into the themes my research and practice were navigating. Unbeknownst to me, journaling about my daily life revealed itself to be a valuable asset that helped ground my intuitive research process.

Queer methods can reveal hidden and oppressed social experiences by purposefully moving away from traditional methodological orders. In *Imagining Queer Methods*,

Sociology Professor, Amin Ghaziani, and Queer Studies Professor, Matt Brim, note that combining the word *queer* and *method* can present a conundrum as the term *queer* cannot be defined in any finite categorical manner nor be definitively contained or projected homogenously onto all queer lives; however, the term *method* denotes a specific order of process that is accurate and reproducible (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019). This veering-away process can highlight the indefinite and unstable social existences through methods that embrace dismantling processes rather than through compulsive reproduction. As put by Ghaziani and Brim:

Methods are queered when we use tenets of queer theory to tweak or explode what is possible with our existing procedures. The most common pursuits include making strange the otherwise commonplace or familiar; interrogating alternate possibilities for worldmaking and livability; negotiating differences; resisting categorisation or adopting an anticategorical stance altogether; disrupting ideals of stability, rationality, objectivity, and coherence; rethinking the meaning of empiricism and our assumptions about data; critiquing heteronormative practices and recentring the lens on queer lives. (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019, p. 15)

Queerness is not a finite existence in dominant society. Ghaziani and Brim state that traditional research methods can fall short at accounting for the diversity of social existences (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019). To be queer is to be ephemeral and always in a state of flux and becoming, thus my queer existence cannot be studied or analysed through constricted and defined research methods. By pursuing a queer methodology, I am able to approach topics surrounding my ephemeral experiences as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person that are often socially ungrounded and unrecognisable. My queer methodology offers me the ability to curate a research and practice that can bring into light poorly represented narratives and reveal the wealth of queer narratives that are cast out of normative social frameworks. To make space for diverse queer narratives, we must first reject the compulsion of prescribed forms of order that categorises queer existences into diluted superficial stereotypes. It is necessary to dismantle constrictive routes to knowledge that keep what we can know of queerness confined and hidden rather than set free into existence.

Much of my process and inclination to let go of parameters and instead embrace uncertainty in artmaking aligns with the Fluxus movement which was an international network of artists in the 1960s and 1970s. An ideology of Fluxus within

art and culture according to Fluxus scholar, Owen Smith, is that art is a reflection of reality and thus also a means of knowledge, and that art's social function is to help society gain more knowledge (Smith, 2002). Fluxus art did not exist as artefacts but was actively approached as a tool to educate or illuminate new thoughts within the spectator, thus being a productive contribution to society. The movement experimented with art that was simple, self-sufficient, and unusual in its tools and material. Fluxus art was non-restrictive; it challenged what was perceived as credible art by approaching and involving human culture, often through ephemeral performance, to evoke thought and expansion in society. Fluxus works focused on the artmaking process and the presentation of these outcomes. Creating art without defining a point of completion or conceptualising potential outcomes was fundamental to the movement – the importance was in the process, not the finished product.

Just like the natural unfolding of time, intuition, and Fluxus' methods of simplicity and self-sufficiency, autoethnography as a research method is not demanding; rather, it utilises what I already have within my life to be successfully accomplished. According to Organisational Leadership Professor, Heewon Chang, autoethnography engages with the 'self as a subject to look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding of a societal culture' (Chang, 2016, p. 49). Chang states that unlike traditional ethnography, autobiographical narratives and insights are purposefully included within the autoethnographic research process as primary data to gain knowledge from. These personal narratives are analysed within a wider context in society to 'make autoethnography ethnographic' (Chang, 2016, p. 49).

It is advantageous to adapt autoethnography in my queer methodology because drawing from my personal life narrative as primary data is a process that is immediately accessible to me, thus aligning with my self-sufficient approach to this research. Autoethnography as a research method engages with lived experience and from it extracts analysis and patterns that can expand our consciousness and knowledge of minoritarian realities in dominant society. Furthermore, my first-hand knowledge and intimate understanding of these patterns offers a deeper perspective to the topics I am studying.

In the past decade as a self-taught queer video artist, I have developed a distinct manner of producing video art that I would define to be as queer as it is visually unique. Through my artmaking history, I have always looked to: '*This is all I have. I have what I need.*' to produce art. I have utilised this mantra to not only develop video art projects but to also reflect my lived life off of in pursuit of a more desirable existence. This has led me to develop a craft that employs the constant dismantlement and reconstruction of what I have in front of me within my means in efforts to abstract the present into something more desirable.

Within my practice, I often dismantle video portraiture of myself away from the battles in front of me and into another dimension as an escape to elsewhere. As much as I want to be here in the presence of my lived life, I also just as much want to be anywhere but here. I have always battled the tension of being in the here-and-now but feeling like I am unable to ground my existence without making adjustments to relieve my discomfort. This process follows my deep belief that there is always more to be seen within what is in front of me. For example, my video art always begins with a single video clip of either self-portraiture, my lived life, or items in my natural surroundings that, over a repetitive iterative process of reconstruction and personal intention, is abstracted into painterly and visually meditative video art sequences. These developed sequences also eventually get put into a new process of dismantlement and reconstruction. This is a process that insists that I already and always have enough raw material in the present as a foundation to build more and better, which is also a practice I implement in my daily life.

I view my many iterations of video art sequences as alternate dimensions that through my artistic process, I am able to disappear from the here-and-now and arrive into. My practice insists that I already have everything I need, and that through certain rituals and repetition, I can will what is already present before me to work for me, and thus perpetually manifesting and producing sufficiency for the here-and-now. My process does not begin with a plan of understanding of where the work goes or what it ends up becoming. It is an experimental process that allows the work to unfold itself before me alongside my research, and it is a process that discovers what it is and how these alternate dimensions take form and presentation as it is being made.

Two queer practitioners whose work resonate with my aims of subverting narratives of self are Mexican-Chicano performance artist, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Vietnamese-American writer, Ocean Vuong. In Gómez-Peña's practice, he uses the performance of his physical self inhabiting the fetishization of his Mexican-Chicano identity to ridicule ethnic objectification and pre-emptively deny the fetishizing gaze from occurring. In Vuong's novel, he defers to a fictional protagonist to portray his experiences as a queer Vietnamese refugee growing up in America after experiencing war, thus taking the intensity of such narratives away from him while still carrying these narratives out. In both of these artists work, they use the medium of their craft as a layer of protection to subvert the external gaze from consuming and objectifying the marginalised and intimate facets of their identity.

An artist whose work contains similar alignments to my practice is the late Ana Mendieta. Mendieta was an artist best known for her 'earth-body' artworks. She was born in Cuba and immigrated to the USA without her parents when she was a child – Mendieta was later reunited with her parents when she was older. Mendieta approached her work as a form of communication between the earth and her female body to navigate the removal of her physical body from her homeland and from her parents as a child (Manchester, 2009). She utilised her practice to assert and establish a connection with her body to the earth she walked yet was so spiritually removed from because of her compounded experiences of losing what should have been hers to inherit such as her national identity, her agency, experiencing her homeland, and the experience of being raised by her parents in her adolescence. Through what Mendieta has termed 'earth-body work' and 'earth-body sculptures', which is a blend of performance and land art, she becomes unified with the earth, and thus without anymore obstruction or interruptions, the earth becomes part of her and she becomes part of the earth.

In *Where is Ana Mendieta?*, Professor of Contemporary Art and Theory, Jane Blocker, states that 'Ana Mendieta's short life, aesthetic choices, gender, ethnicity, and politics have contributed to her absence from a variety of discursive sites' and that her absence within her work 'reveals the willful refusal to appear as an act of transgression' (Blocker, 1999, p. 3). The sense of loss of national identity and family upbringing that Mendieta struggles with are imbued into her prolific 1970s earth-

body series *Silueta*. This series – which was created in various locations in Iowa and Mexico – involved various iterations of Mendieta unifying herself with the earth through rituals that were informed by her Afro-Cuban upbringing and Santeria religion. In some cases, she would involve her physical body in the artwork by burying her body with objects in nature such as with flowers and leaves, and in other iterations Mendieta would reproduce her body by tracing her feminine silhouette with various natural materials such as soil, flora, fire, water and stones, leaving land art behind to be eventually taken by nature. The commonality between the many iterations of *Silueta* lies in the disappearance of her physical body as a result of her process, thus relieving Mendieta from her physicality as she becomes one with the earth.

Mendieta documented these performances of earth-body art through a limited production of photographs. *Silueta* is an ephemeral series that can only be witnessed through her photographic documentation; These images can only capture a visual idea of what the artwork was, creating a barrier between her intimate performance and the potential spectators of the work. Referring to the documentation of *Silueta*, Blocker states that ‘they seem defiantly to tease us, preying on the limits of our vision, daring us to act on faith, forcing us to accept their disappearance’ (Blocker, 1999, p. 23). Even though *Silueta* was widely viewed through photographic documentation, few people have witnessed her work in person. Photographic documentation contain the only proof of Mendieta’s *Silueta* series, thus what can be perceived from *Silueta* is purposefully restricted and subverted by the artist.

Mendieta’s earth-body artworks and my video art practice contain many similarities. Most prominently, we both approach our work as a means to navigate the complex experiences born from our social identities through a ritual of disappearing. Both of our work also similarly utilise material that do not need to be purchased or found, instead we employ material that we can easily access from our natural surroundings that hold meaning in our practice. In *Silueta*, Mendieta brings in her physical body and the natural elements of nature into her performances to choreograph a disappearance of her feminine body. Through her ritualistic performances, she reproduces her feminine body within and with nature and through which she

attempts to unify with the earth. Mendieta endeavours to become one with the earth as a means to navigate the losses of her past and her lack of belonging in this world. Similarly, in my practice, I employ video self-portraiture and video footage of the items I am surrounded by in my daily life as material to carry out my rituals of disappearance.

However, unlike Mendieta, in my work, my intention is to mediate the loss of my queer identity within heteronormative frameworks by finding ways to disappear away from the present my physical body lives in. My practice carries out experimental methods of abstraction and distortion to destroy my ethnic and feminine appearance as a ritual to disappear from the physical present. Through a process of digital dismantling and reconstruction, my practice ritualises myself into a dimension of existence that does not have to abide by or interact with the expectations of dominant society. **Both of our processes go through an operation that reproduces ourselves before shedding ourselves to arrive elsewhere.** Mendieta seeks to return to where she is from, but I seek to escape the consequences of the realities I have been born into. Mendieta seeks to ritualise herself into the earth, but I seek to ritualise myself away from earth. The bodily disappearance and ephemerality that occur in both of our artistic processes and artwork reveals intimate aspects of our identity or lack thereof by letting go of being seen as our physical selves.

As put by Performance and Theatre Professor, Stacy Holman Jones, and Arts Education academic, Anne Harris, in *Queering Autoethnography*, ‘investigating how experiences are enlarged and/or constrained by relations of power has been the particular focus of critical autoethnography’ (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 2). Analysing my own self-narrative is an optimum way to capture the complex dynamics of power enforced onto queerness. It is important to bring a variety of narratives forth for us to have multiple perspectives to learn from and expand our cultural understanding of society with. Such narratives can help us understand why people with complex social identities (and complex social experiences as a consequence) – such as in the case of Ana Mendieta and I – would seek to disappear as a solution to our struggles. It is essential then for intersectional queer identities like mine to pursue a research process that is best suited to make light of injustices and

oppressions within my lived reality and experiences that can be employed to expand knowledges on queer existences – even if it goes against the grain – to endeavour towards a more just society.

Holman Jones and Harris state that autoethnography is a queer research method that ‘works against canonical methodological traditions’ (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 197) and dominant social forces. As put by British feminist writer and scholar, Sara Ahmed, ‘to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things’ (Ahmed, 2006, p. 161). Queering autoethnography can help us illustrate nuanced narratives of minoritarian identities and help us identify the ways society is insufficient and unfavourable for those of us who are invisible within the mainstream makeup of society. This research method:

draws on the practices and politics of queer and queering to offer narrative and theoretical disruptions of taken-for-granted knowledges that continue to marginalise, oppress and/or take advantage of those of us who do not participate or find ourselves reflected in mainstream cultures and social structure – which includes research methodologies. (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 4)

By engaging with my personal history and following the feelings born out of my idiosyncratic queer experiences, I am able to expand my understanding of social constructs and use my accumulated intuition to inform where my research goes and what my practice becomes without any prior predetermined parameters or being confined to one area of study. This is a practice that escapes definition just as much as my queer self – both of which cannot be fit into specific society labels. Autoethnography as a method embraces the reality that lived experiences are unique, and within these unique experiences contains potential for understanding oneself in relation to society, thus producing queer analysis that uniquely contributes to the wider knowledge of queer realities and feelings.

Inserting my queer and personal autoethnography into research can reveal what is missing in society’s construct of existing people and highlight the impossible expectations of social performance that comes with it. Autoethnography is able to help me understand my ghostly position in society; My experiences can help illuminate the rigidity of heteronormativity and highlight the perpetual losses and

inaccuracies that gets reproduced through being perceived in this society through dominant heteronormative frameworks.

My work embraces the undefinable and acknowledges that the rigid expectations that exist within society and research results in the continued loss of minoritarian narratives and thus also the loss of knowledge that can be born from these narratives. Autoethnography can help me reflect on my experiences with default societal expectations and use these reflections to resist the demands of heteronormativity and imagine better ways of living that rejects assimilation. By providing a first-hand account of queer cultural experience, my research is able to exemplify that queer identities are nuanced in complex ways even when they are relatable. This can help to queer my research and break boundaries that can surround research and practice, thus using my knowledge of society's insufficiencies to design my own path of study that fills in the gaps needed to actively and better accomplish my intentions.

My queerness, in conjunction with my experiences surrounding my ethnic background and personal life events, have provided me with knowledge that can aid and expand understandings of queerness' position in society. Jamaican-born British cultural identity sociologist, Stuart Hall, refers to our social differences as a tool that 'makes a difference' (Hall, 2019, p. 80). Bringing in my experiences of social difference into my research can provide unique insights about queer futurity and reveal default systems as oppressive and insufficient. By blending the process of duration with contextual knowledge and my experiences of queer existence, I am able to develop a practice and outcome that is precise and accurate. I intend to queer the present and the spaces I participate in. By injecting my intersectional queerness into my research and practice, this study can take on an essence of my personal knowing that can be a worthwhile contribution born out of my differences thus providing a unique perspective on the topic of queer futurity.

My queer methodology, *This is all I have. I have what I need.*, veers away from convention and **embraces boundlessness** to discover where my experiences can take me in my research. All areas of research pursued in this thesis hold equal space in the pursuit of expanding queer comprehensions. There are so many rules imposed on

how life should be thus limiting how life can be – by pursuing and presenting research through structured parameters, the possibilities of what can be learnt about nuanced social topics then suffers from restraint and cannot be freely or fully realised. My personal narratives and the intuition born from them that take me forward in life and research hold valuable knowledge and should not be left in a position of suspicion or insufficiency.

PART II

REASONS TO DISAPPEAR

4. IT'S TOO MUCH TO BE SEEN

a. LOSING QUEERNESS

Throughout my life as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person, I kept losing the many layers of my social identities to dominant social categories and signifiers. My ethnicities, my feminine social presentation and my gender and sexual queerness have all been lost to dominant frameworks as soon as I participate in society. Utilising personal narrative, this chapter of my thesis discusses my observations of the instability and imperceptibility of queerness within heteronormativity.

1 Identity is a state that is reached and performed rather than an inherent condition of our being. As stated by Jamaican-born British cultural identity sociologist, Stuart Hall, '**identity is always in the process of formation**' (Hall, 2019, p. 69). He writes, 'Identities are never completed, never finished, that they are always, as subjectivity itself is, in process' (Hall, 2019, p. 69). According to Hall, the development of identity is a compounded and intricate process of becoming that is a continued result of the imbalanced power structures that we live in, hence the categorisation of people through identity groups is more a result of otherness and differentiation than a symbol of sameness or as a quality inherent to oneself (Hall, 2015).

2 Our varying intersecting social identities are not a part of our nature but instead they are built on an on-going process that is continuously unfolding and being reasoned with within ourselves and our encounters with society. Identity is unreachable even though identity is always being performed towards as if it were possible to be eventually finalised and fully legible. Furthermore, these performances are only legible within the constraints of socially recognisable concepts. Thus, queer people are not born queer; they *become* queer through the process of moving through and interacting with society. However, this is a *becoming* that is always short-lived as

queerness does not last in dominant society, and as a consequence, queer identities cannot accomplish stability, they can only tend towards it.

3 Between the ages of seven and sixteen, for both my primary and secondary school education, I was enrolled in Catholic convent schools. Despite the religious associations and to the dismay of the people in authority positions at these schools, Singaporean convent schools were widely known to be very queer spaces. The first and majority of the romantic relationships I witnessed amongst my peers in my adolescence were between girls; the reality that many girls also dated boys (who were not my trans schoolmates) even became an afterthought during my school years. I am fortunate to have spent a significant amount of my developing years in an environment where expressions of queerness, whether through gender or sexuality, could exist as a norm. However, in that time, I did not always consider that queer identities might be perceived as strange, deviant, or impossible outside our echo chamber of lesbian heartache. We were teenagers caught up with ourselves, thus for many of us it was a shock to the system when we graduated secondary school and no longer had this utopian space that belonged to us. Unfortunately we could not carry it with us into the future. The ephemerality of this experience was one that I had to mourn as I entered heteronormative reality without this queer place to escape into anymore.

4 Gender theorist, Judith Butler, explains that the term *queer* surfaced through society's internalisation of accumulated cultural ideas that ascertained positions of stability and variability within existences over time. Butler states that *queer* has 'operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject through that shaming interpellation' (Butler, 1993, p. 172). Butler also expresses that queer existences can never be realised in the possible past or future as it must always be repeated and 'queered from a prior usage' (Butler, 1993, p. 173) in the present to be in view. As earlier discussed in this chapter, the construction of self is a process of becoming and a continued response to dominant structures in society; the validity of this becoming is dependent on the wider social framework that determines what actions are permitted or can be seen.

5 Within these grounds, queer people have to initiate otherness in discernible performative manners to have their queerness be legible. Without consistent repetition, a queer subject dissipates into a default heteronormative state. This necessary compulsion is a critical reaction to positions of power branding queerness as deviant while at the same time refusing to acknowledge evidence of queer existence.

6 Butler's work on social identity emphasises that identity is not an inherent knowing but an executed performance momentarily achieved by interacting with society. Every social encounter is an opportunity to be recognised, but these interactions are contingent on what the spectator is already beforehand familiarised with in dominant society. Even within queer identities, as put by Butler, 'the very terms we are asked to occupy threaten our very ability to persist' (Butler, 2021, p. 39). Imposed by dominant society, as put by queer Black American poet and writer, Audre Lorde, 'it means that only the narrowest parameters of change are possible and allowable' (Lorde, 2018, p. 17).

7 Even to have queer identities perceived by the masses as definitively queer does not free us from an imposed compulsory heteronormativity, it contrarily constricts us even within our queerness as it expects us to perform socially predetermined notions of queerness that are often either illusions of straightness or diluted versions of queerness that contain no space for variability nor take into account individual personhoods.

8 Time and history are prerequisites to the attainability of identity. Dominant identities (such as those that are heteronormative) hold significant investment in what can be attained or recognised in society. Queerness as an identity is indefinable; it can merely be performed or shaped through the disturbance of an assumed heteronormativity. This leaves minoritarian identities in a disadvantaged position carrying out a pending performance that is largely imperceptible and undetermined in content.

9 Queer performance is a continuously re-interpreted performance that is in constant negotiation and re-negotiation in every present social experience. In a

heteronormative world, being queer is immediately in an inconclusive position that can only be distinguished through difference, and cannot be defined ontologically. This does not denote queerness as a blatant opposite of heteronormativity however, queerness does not exist homogenously and consequently cannot be promised oneness or be fit into a singular definitive category. If queerness cannot be grounded or recognised as a legitimate existence within mainstream society, then queerness as an identity cannot be reached. This leaves the unending performativity of queerness in a transient position that is unable to successfully reach the present (Muñoz, 1999).

10 My queerness is lost as soon as it is performed in dominant society. It is as if my queerness can only be mine if I keep it hidden in me or in very specific spaces that normalise queerness such as the convent schools I attended. If Identity is founded on a constricted framework prescribed by dominant forces, then perhaps performing deviant identities such as queerness can only function to reaffirm and validate what we know of ourselves, and to attempt to relate to each other within minoritarian communities. There is little space in society for the grief that comes with the perpetual loss of identities that should belong to us yet is so easily lost to others. Therefore, my practice, Pulau Hantu, endeavoured to create a space, through queer art, to mediate this loss and displacement of self that is inevitable in my participation of society.

b. LOCATING QUEERNESS

11 For most of my life I have presented in feminine ways and have also spent periods of my life presenting as hyper-feminine, both of which were frustratingly often interpreted as definitively heteronormative because my visual presentation was a performance that met many expectations of the categorisations of heteronormative women. In my personal life, I do not have any terms of identity that I am particularly attached to regarding my gender or sexual queerness. I often use the terms: queer, lesbian, or gay, interchangeably in relation to myself. In my personal queer experiences, these terms and definitions always matter much more to people who encounter me than to my own self. In my life there has been so much demand and entitlement for people to know exactly *what* is queer about me in society, especially

since by just my visual self, my queerness cannot always be located by a spectator through my feminine performance.

12 Queer women have been rendered out of our nuanced and complex lives as though we are destined and fated to encounter the world either boxed by dominant systems or to be punished by it. Because I spent so much of my growing years in girls' schools, I rarely had any consistent interaction with heteronormative men outside my own family during my adolescence. As I entered adulthood, I began participating in social spaces where men were very much present. These experiences forced me to better understand the disbelief and sexualisation of queer women by heteronormative men and the overall notion that women were for male consumption.

13 I have been in precarious situations where men would insist that I prove that I was gay because it was beyond their ability to perceive or believe that my femininity was not a show I was performing for them. On one occasion, a man at a nightclub became furious at me out of his confusion of my *womanly* existence versus my lack of desire to perform for him. In his fury, he violently grabbed me through the dancefloor and pushed me into a group of women demanding that if I was really gay, I had to prove it. It enraged him that I would not oblige. Through these experiences, I learnt that being queer did not just mean that I could lose my position of credibility within dominant society, but that I was also losing my ability to exist safely as my honest self.

14 Marked identities are only assigned to minority or non-privileged groups of people. Heterosexual cisgender men hold a solid existence in society. In gender and sexuality, the portion that is marked revolves around femininity. Butler states that it is as if 'the universal person and masculine gender are conflated' (Butler, 1990, p. 13). This forces a required definition unto what could be considered *acceptable* women and forms of femininity, but allows people who are – or are assumed to be – heteronormative men in society to be the body bearers of the default human status.

15 Through queer identities, **the heteronormative model is exposed as a regulatory system that is insufficient** and renders my feminine queerness invisible

and in trouble. As discussed by Butler, the logic in the patriarchal social construct masks disruption or inconsistencies in gender performances. This is prevalent within non-heteronormative contexts in which gender does not directly correlate with sexual desire, and sexual desire does not directly correlate with gender. According to Butler, 'none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another' (Butler, 1990, p. 185). When this assumed mirror of gender and sexual desire is disrupted through the presence of queer identities, the obligatory construct of recognisable coherence is **revealed as corrupt**, and this adopted framework then loses its credibility.

16 Butler believes the dominant order of heteronormative identities does not make us obligated to perform purely within these constraints, and that it is still possible for us to produce queer identities within our own terms despite the limited frameworks of social recognition. However, they note that in doing so we also lose our ability to be accurately recognised thus losing the ability to be locatable or credible in society when performing with agency, thus freed of existing restraints (Butler, 2021).

17 The accepted understanding of what makes up society is negotiated through encountering ideas and concepts that help people make sense of their social surroundings, however if these ideas and concepts are unrecognisable, then they remain left out social knowledge. Since human beings are born into a society that has already classified distinctive differences between people as woman or man, and as a result also creating a direct correlated difference between feminine or masculine, people inevitably categorise themselves within these terms, thus consequently gender becomes an enforced necessity to a person's identity.

18 Within heteronormative frameworks, it often takes the existence of masculine women to prompt a discussion on female queerness because their masculine qualities immediately differentiate them from what being gendered female means within dominant frameworks. The seeming authenticity of masculine queer women as being not-heteronormative is based on their obvious performance of sexual deviance. This masculine rendering insinuates that the feminine queer women's identity is

malleable, ambiguous, and not definitively queer. Feminine queer women interfere with the traditional ideologies that signify femininity – which include heterosexual desire – by appropriating these expectations of womanhood for their queer selves. Butler refers to this embodied interference as ‘resignification’ (Butler, 2021, p. 41) and explains that embodying gender norms in ways that are deviant and queer has the ability to confront the enforced social order.

19 Feminine queer women are easily absorbed into heteronormativity because they are visually recognised as the acceptable iteration of *woman*, suggesting a heteronormative identity. My feminine queerness disturbs the notion that appearing feminine is attached to the desire for male or masculine attention. My indifference to men prompts the idea that femininity does not inherently exist for the sake of or for the consumption of heterosexual men or masculinity. However, within dominant society, this indifference is often still received and treated as false or implausible, thus leaving my queerness in a suspicious and unbelievable state.

20 Gender is indefinite; few people can actually fit perfectly into the heteronormative standards of *male* and *female* therefore, gender has to be strained through a binary system to be governed in society. Even though gender is not inherent to human selves, the accumulative conduct of masculinity and femininity over history and time informs the concept of gender, and without this construct, gender would not survive as an obligatory part of human existence.

21 Meeting the set systems of a heteronormative society has become necessary for survival; without meeting the performative qualifications of one’s respective gender can result in losing their legitimacy in society. Conforming to identifiable genders and gendered performances humanises individuals to a larger community of people, allowing empathy for the assumed familiarity of binary-gendered lives. However, because of this presumed recognition of what contributes to the components of being human, society punishes those who do not meet this socially prescribed notion.

22 If gender is a social construct, it should be able to survive in forms other than cisgender male and female. However, this binary social structure holds power and

determines what can be made sense of in society. Accepting a binary gender system retains and promotes the belief in a natural relation between gender and sexuality that couples cis-gender heterosexual men and cis-gender heterosexual women together. If the position of gender is however completely unattached to sexuality, it then turns into a 'free-floating artifice' (Butler, 1990, p. 9) where the human body could present as any combination of gender or a lack of gender altogether. This however goes against the consistency of society's necessary achievement of heterosexuality.

23 The binary of gender does not only separate people into two distinct opposite categories, it also privileges the male. Separating these categories also produces an assumed division into people who are masculine and feminine where they respectively align with the socially established set of psychological, behavioural, or physical traits that is assigned to the recognisable heteronormative, gender-conforming and cisgender members of society. Within these limitations, the only way to be visible in society is to be identified as heteronormative. To exist outside of that fixed gender and sexual binary is to fail at achieving heterosexuality - thus dismissing queer people as illegitimate, and contributing to minority identities' struggle to achieve or keep their identity in society.

24 An institutionalised heteronormativity poses several problems towards living outwardly as a queer person. Being a woman, I have since birth been predestined to partake in sexual correctness through what is deemed normal. American poet and writer, Adrienne Rich, relates the lesbian existence as being a 'profoundly female experience' that cannot be conflated with other queer existences as it is specific in its oppression, sexualisation, and expectations within patriarchal society (Rich, 1980, p. 649). The female gender is such a fixed identity that queer women inescapably blend into the heteronormative formation of *women* unless we purposefully and radically differentiate ourselves as, for example, butch or androgynous.

25 Within my feminine presentation, my queerness is often read in society as a *blind spot* because my visual self is easily absorbed by heteronormative norms, leaving my queerness undetectable. In dominant society, the heteronormative binary of gender and sexuality are used as indicators to locate valid selves. Since my femininity

is reflective of straight ideals, a false perception of who I am is relentlessly assumed as truth until I blatantly prove otherwise. Since my queer body is not separate from the recognisable female body, I must choose to perform away from the racialised and heterosexualisation of myself if I want to have my queerness locatable in society.

26 Gender is formed through prolonged social performance, but abiding by the idea that masculinity and femininity is an inevitable natural inherent occurrence in social performance manages to disguise the performative demeanour of gender operations within the distinct boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality. The common associations and stereotypes related to queer women is that they are divided into *butch* and *femme* categories. It is assumed that queer women who identify as butch are more innately masculine and can be socially identifiable as a balanced masculine half of a lesbian coupling (Butler, 1990). It can thus be argued that heterosexuality is inevitably involved in recognising queerness (Seidman, 1996). The appearance of feminine queer women, like me, does not enable us to assume a queer identity; our visual statements usually liken us to being a heteronormative female and ultimately an obtainable goal of men's desire.

27 Femmes look like heterosexual females, or at least within what the female gender is constructed to represent in dominant society. It is only when a femme is put next to a butch that their sexuality is authenticated, which gives the feminine queer person an unstable identity. This by default allows the butch, or the socially masculine figure, to be the dominant and necessary character, as without them, the femme identity cannot visually exist as queer. When a masculine partner is no longer by their side, femmes are often doubted as queer, and are not always accounted for in the public perception of queer women. The stereotyped notion that butch and femme are imitations of a heteronormative construct ignores the complexity of queer identities and strips us of our autonomy.

28 Media does not occur in its own vacuum in society, it is a tool that functions to reiterate the stories of society. Depending on what is being presented by mainstream media, 'certain patterns of life and some structures of feeling are strengthened and affirmed as against others' (Hall & Whannel, 2018, p. 46). As put

by Media and Arts scholar Gene Youngblood, art and media are avenues where we can be privy to people in relation to the society they live in. Youngblood believes that society is shaped and influenced by media far more than by nature, and that the output of such media contributes significantly and in fact plays a necessary role in developing the social range of consciousness (Youngblood, 1970). Every present reality is a constant construction and re-construction towards making sense of human behavioural traits. Attempting to make sense of people dissects society into roles, which is then often further perpetuated by the powerful force that is media. The presentation of gender in media is simplified and limited, portraying a fixed and stereotyped distinction between genders. The results of media directly affect our social life as media has the power to form meanings and curate recognisable realities of modern society.

29 Stereotypes are not fixed or reliable images, instead, they are an extreme way of communicating expressions that also organise society in a recognisable order. Art and media hold power in producing society, and according to British feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed, ‘power works as a mode of directionality, a way of orientating bodies in particular ways, so they are facing a certain way, heading toward a future that is given a face’ (Ahmed, 2017, p. 43). English and Film scholar, Richard Dyer, suggests that the stereotypes of necessary heterosexuality ‘bolster heterosexual hegemony’ and that stereotyping preserves constructed social ideologies and therefore is used as a means of abuse (Dyer, 1977, p. 31). The stereotype is often thought of as a derogatory method of representation because it can be used to limit diverse characteristics of any community to a select few. Thus with heterosexuality as the privileged ideal in society’s assumption of sexuality, it has the power to define humans as inherently heteronormative, and cast everything out of that classification as unnatural.

30 Because Singaporean convent schools were a space where performing queer genders and sexualities were part of the norm, it was sometimes difficult to discern if the rampant and seemingly spreading queerness was of nature or social influence. It was not uncommon for students to be certain of their queerness in school but realise that they were not actually queer once they graduated from this space. This valid occurrence was however often used by heteronormative society to stereotype us and

cast doubt on the credibility of our queer existences, reducing realities like mine to a childish phase that we refuse to grow out of.

31 Stereotypes as a concept reduces nuanced and multi-faceted aspects of lived experiences to inadequate repetitive narratives. According to the Media Studies scholar, Myra Macdonald, stereotypes uphold their place by being ‘plausible’ and sometimes contain a sliver of truth that convinces society to believe these simplified deductions (Macdonald, 1995, p. 13). These typecasts may not be fundamentally right or wrong, but they promote a constitutional manner of identifying people of different social circumstances into perceivable and limited sets of traits. When a group of minority identities are already in a position that lacks representation, the stereotype labelled onto them intensifies their invisibility and promotes falseness.

32 It is not possible for the act of perceiving others to be fully accurate as according to Butler, ‘recognition is always partial’ (Butler, 2021, p. 34). Recognition being an incomplete act does not make it entirely incorrect either, rather it makes recognition ‘noncomprehensive’ (Butler, 2021, p. 34). With this in mind, Butler questions if the existing labels and categories in society could ever be sufficient in accurately identifying a person, suggesting that creating new terms and better social comprehensions of society could allow us to perceive each other in less constricted and stereotyped ways that also respect and acknowledge the multiplicity of less visible existences such as those that are queer.

33 My queerness cannot be located within heteronormative frameworks and stereotyped expectations. As a consequence to my personal history of having social perceptions of myself be met with suspicion, and of dealing with being unlocatable in society, I have over time begun to give up goals of social recognition and instead started negotiating with the concept of recognition in my personal life as something I perhaps do not heed nor desire. This conclusion is a result of being recklessly puzzled together by too many people into too many inaccurate wholes, and being expected to perform too many variations of who I have been constructed to be. Through my practice I have pursued non-recognition as a means to keep myself together and to escape social heteronormative operations that continuously displace and misplace my sense of self, identity, femininity, and safety.

5. NO SPACE FOR GHOSTS

Growing up in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Singapore, I was raised alongside many different traditions and religious practices. Singaporeans are taught about different cultural practices and beliefs in school and many of us grew up participating in various religious and cultural celebrations or observations even if they did not belong to us. Through these shared beliefs and traditions, many Singaporeans have adopted an overall etiquette that guides our daily movements and practices through life that also accounts for spirits in ways that respect them and keep them alive.

A lot of local spiritualism seem to be a shared belief across the country no matter our religious background. Despite being raised in what I would consider a very staunch Catholic family, I was still brought up to recognise and respect ghosts and spirits in ways that felt antithetical to our faith. A cultural practice that was greatly emphasised throughout my upbringing was to not speak of ghosts when they are present. A known means to recognise if a spirit is present is if a space is overcome out of the blue with the pungent perfume of flowers, particularly jasmine or frangipani. Instead of pointing out these occurrences, we were raised to respect the presence of spirits and let them pass through or situate themselves without interrogating their presence.

A widely practiced religious occasion in Singapore is the Hungry Ghost Festival which occurs annually on the seventh month of the lunar year. During this festival, people of Taoist and Buddhist faiths believe all departed souls return to roam the earth as ghosts for a month. There are designated areas in neighbourhoods where people burn offerings to these spirits throughout the festival to honour and appease them. The Hungry Ghost Festival is always a precarious

occasion as ghostly activity is known to increase during this time. There are certain codes of conduct many locals would follow to not upset or be followed home by the ghosts. For example, it was frowned upon to stay out too late into the night or be alone outdoors for too long as it was deemed dangerous while the ghosts are around. Even though I was not raised Taoist or Buddhist, I was always taught to respect the festival. It was not uncommon for locals who do not practice these faiths to also operate with the belief that the deceased have indeed temporarily returned and that we should be cautious of our actions so as to not disturb the spirits.

Being raised in a culture that felt so inclusive of spiritual entities definitely contributed to my fascination with the possibility of dimensions we cannot see or have limited access to. I was intrigued by any media that explored ghostly encounters or the paranormal, and have been particularly taken by ghost hunting shows, but not in a positive way. Ghost hunting shows feel jarring and invasive to me because it often involves these ghost hunters commanding ghosts to perform and show themselves on demand with little respect for their agency. Through watching these ghost hunting shows I began empathising with the ghosts as I observed that my queer existence in society seemed to mirror ghosts' position in society.

I was struck by an observation while watching ghost hunting shows; Similar to queer existence, the existence of ghosts relies on repetitive performances that is defined by forces outside one's self, and it is a performance that is rarely accurately received or believed by the spectator. These ghost hunters are looking for confirmation of ghostly presences through their limited knowledges of how ghosts have been recognised before in some seemingly consistent manner. But since they are not the ghost, how do they actually know what they should be looking for? Perhaps these spirits do not want to be found – and if they do, then must these entities go through an obligation of explicit performance to be seen and believed? These ghosts might even be trying to make themselves known, but if their performance does not align with the ghost hunters' pre-conceived expectations, they will remain undetectable and in a state of

suspicion. These observations have been helpful to view and analyse the demands and precarity of ghostliness that comes with queer performance.

Buzzfeed Unsolved: Supernatural is a ghost hunting show that aired on the video streaming website, Youtube, between 2016 and 2021. In many ghost hunting programmes such as *Buzzfeed Unsolved: Supernatural*, ghosts are treated as untrustworthy and suspicious. Even if it seems a ghost has performed in a way that legitimises their presence, the ghost hunters will ask these ghosts to repeat themselves to prove that it was not a coincidence. These ghosts have to recreate the same performance many times over to be noticed and to be considered as potentially real. If a ghost wants to be seen, they have to operate within somebody else's definition of what they should be instead of living their existences peacefully in whatever form they take.

The show is hosted by two people, Shane Madej and Ryan Bergara – Madej is a sceptic and Bergara is a believer who is terrified of the possibility of encountering ghosts. Madej and Bergara often attempt to interact with ghosts through various devices such as a spirit box, a device that apparently allows spirits to speak through often muffled radio waves, which is frequently used in this show. Madej and Bergara are not always able to decipher the potential dialogue being said through the spirit box. Sometimes they are able to discern some of the distorted speech, but it is usually met with apprehension by Bergara and dismissal by Madej. The show subtitles the speech of these spirits if it can be deciphered, but if the sounds cannot be deciphered as words, then it gets subtitled as “unintelligible”. The act of the show having to decipher this speech can only be done through their own interpretation of what they are able to hear or make out from these distorted noises and it is often influenced by their biases of what they are already looking for. These subtitles also have the ability to influence what the viewer perceives off the potential evidence of these spirits. This does not allow the potential ghosts a fair chance at speaking for themselves since the viewer is briefed, through these subtitles, about what they should be listening for. Thus, through their own biases and stereotypes, the ghost hunters hold the position of power to dictate what ghosts can be despite not being ghosts themselves.

What is deemed a legible human existence is constructed by forces with power. As put by Sara Ahmed, ‘a gender system is not at work simply in how you do or do not express gender: it is also about how you perform within a wider system that matches meaning and value to persons and things’ (Ahmed, 2017, p. 55). Performing outside the realm of social recognisability might not be perceived as existing at all. In queerness, heteronormative frameworks authorise queer existence rather than queer people – and in ghost hunting shows, ghost hunters authorise ghostly existences rather than ghosts, thus stripping queer people and ghosts of their autonomy since they must repeatedly perform predetermined expectations with precision to be considered as real.

a. QUEER DISIDENTIFICATION

I José Muñoz’s work on queer disidentification discusses queerness as being a utopian state of production and reproduction that must perpetually perform and disidentify away from default heteronormativity in order to be legible in society. Queer disidentification recognises that society runs on what Muñoz refers to as ‘straight time’ (Muñoz, 2009, p. 21). According to Muñoz, straight time dominates and survives through reproductive majoritarian heteronormativity, thus leaving queerness out of the future once every performance in the present moment is over.

Queer performance is transient and in perpetual flux. With every social circumstance, we are consistently performing various combinations of our intersecting identities, therefore, the performances of queer selves is a nuanced occurrence that cannot be qualified into a set of recognisable isolated signifiers. Additionally, *queer* as an identity on its own is difficult to pinpoint because queerness is unable to ground identities; it can merely disturb them through transitory durations of time.

Despite being queer, all people are still born into this world as default heteronormative participants of society. Muñoz explains that queer performativity is an act of disidentification, not a counteridentification. He describes the act of disidentification as a constant comprehension and negotiation of reception and production (Muñoz, 2009, p. 99). This is a performance of navigating dominant

ideologies from the viewpoint of a queer minority. Thus, disidentificatory performances reworks recognisable existences as a means to ground queerness in the heteronormative world in which queer people unavoidably participate.

II Disidentification occurs as a team of acknowledgement and creation, and can be associated with artistic processes and production. Such performances rely on both the spectator and the performer to construct queer encounters where actions of disidentification can be immediately positioned. The significance of identifiable performances of queer selves should not be underestimated in its ability to reform and challenge public perceptions, even if only within the present. For queer people who are largely unrepresented in mainstream society and media, performing queerness is not only a personal pursuit of visibility and survival – it is also a hopeful aspiration toward a utopian reality where the complexity of queerness is possible and representable. It can then be understood that it takes the demise of known concepts of being (through a process of unbecoming) to become – and even so, it is a potential existence rooted in not-yet-conscious utopias.

Muñoz states that queerness can only exist in a state of ‘potentiality’ and not ‘possibility’ (Muñoz, 2009, p. 99) because possibilities exist within present cultural logics. As Muñoz explains, this potentiality constantly brings queer existence close to the ‘horizon’, and through performative repetition, can ‘never completely disappear’ (Muñoz, 2009, p. 114). Disidentificatory performances do not only sever apart concepts of the dominant public, but they also repurpose facets of what is already there to construct more suited realities. As put by Muñoz, ‘disidentification uses the majoritarian culture as raw material to make a new world’ (Muñoz, 1999, p. 196). Muñoz refers to this radical utopianism as ‘worldmaking’ (Muñoz, 1999, p. 195), which he describes as a concept that outlines the ways in which queer performances, in everyday life as well as in arts and media, have the potential to demonstrate alternate means of existence. These nonconforming perspectives do not function as simply just views or opinions, they are also resistive ideologies that stand up to domineering social systems that oppress minoritarian identities.

III As earlier discussed in Chapter 4, queer people have to initiate otherness in discernible performative manners to have their queerness be legible. This necessary compulsion is a critical reaction to dominant society branding queerness as deviant while at the same time refusing to acknowledge evidence of queer existence. Thus, being queer can only be demonstrated when associated with ideas of ghostly ephemera which is implicitly transient and fleeting. Muñoz emphasises that such ephemeral evidence is hardly perceptible and ‘hangs in the air like a rumour’ (Muñoz, 2009, p. 65) because its position is severely overpowered and easily consumed by dictatorial mainstream values. Muñoz suggests that queer potentialities must be performed if we ever want to expand beyond the limits that the present moment can offer. However, he also reminds us that **the performance of queerness is a doing that only culminates in the future** – the performance referenced here can be perceived as a ‘utopian performativity’ (Muñoz, 2009, p. 99) that is saturated with potentiality.

Sara Ahmed states that compulsory heteronormativity is a form of ‘repetitive strain injury’ (Ahmed, 2006, p. 67) as it shapes and dictates what bodies are able to do. She refers to present society as a body that has been bent and twisted repeatedly into something that easily enables some actions and limits the capacity of other actions. Since the construction of existence is a matter of repetition, constructing then becomes a mandatory occurrence in becoming queer. This persistence is then not just a performance but also a resistance of the dominant forces that regurgitates itself into expansion.

Considering how heteronormative identities have already been repeated enough to exist in a position of normalcy, queer performativity can thus be seen as essential for the future of queerness. However, time plays an integral role in creating recognisable identities which poses a disadvantage for minority groups that will always have less time to perform or repeat or become. As discussed earlier, the reality of queer performance is that it derives from a default state of heteronormativity even if it resists assimilating into it, thus causing feminine queer performances, such as mine, to be kept within heteronormative confines as if there is something inherently heteronormative about my queerness.

IV Disidentificatory performances are illustrative of the tactics that deviant participants of society, such as queer people, have to perpetually execute to navigate a majoritarian public that continues to disregard individuals who do not adhere to the prescribed illusion of normalcy. Even though disidentification is an individualistic execution, Muñoz believes it has the capacity to encourage queer people to contribute to a queer utopian state of visibility. The significance of disidentificatory performances of composite selves should not be underestimated in its ability to reform and challenge public perceptions, even if only within a present moment.

For queer people who are not represented in mainstream society and media, performing queerness is not only a personal pursuit to actualise their identity; it is also a hopeful aspiration toward a utopian reality where the nuanced complexity of queerness is possible and perceptible. However, queer social performance is lost as soon as it appears. My practice suggests that disidentificatory performances of self can be better sustained through queer artmaking. Pulau Hantu employed abstraction as a disidentificatory strategy, thus destroying a pursuit of recognition altogether as a means of emancipation from society's heteronormative compulsions and a statement of queer resistance.

b. DURATIONS OF PERFORMANCE

This section of my thesis draws upon Henri Bergson's analysis on time and duration – this examination is helpful in investigating the ephemerality and futurity of minority identity performances within dominant society.

V According to French philosopher, Henri Bergson, time is *mobility* and an indivisible state of *flow*, therefore change is the only reality. Even though it may be helpful to pick out transient moments of queer performance to enquire its status within dominant society, the now-obsolete performances cannot be calculated and reproduced in a meaningful way. Only new moments of performativity can be created with the passing of time. While these new moments of performativity could be influenced and be acted upon with one's accumulated logic from the past – which

Bergson refers to as acting on intuition (Bergson, 2007) – these performances cannot be duplicated or refitted into present time.

A duration can only occur once and there is no way of repeating itself. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson states that ‘the moving body has stayed an infinitely short time at every point of its trajectory’ (Bergson, 1991, p. 189). According to Bergson, it is not the constant change and flux from one moment into the next that stands out to us, it is the positions that affect us that do. An experience occurs all at once and cannot be reduced or broken down into straightforward components, therefore we can look back to a point of one’s *queer becoming* in attempt to analyse and recreate, but it will be a counterfeit performance attempting to break down and recompose an undividable moment.

Singling out and then retrospectively piecing together immobile spans of already performed queerness cannot add up to an authentic duration of queer experience since flow is necessary in facilitating anything authentic to occur. By the time a queer performance is realised, change immediately occurs from that point, leaving queer selves out of what is real once again. Pausing to retrieve an experience that is no longer present obstructs harmony in mobility, thus **there is only the present to be queer**. Consequently, queer identities can only exist in a transient state of ephemera; we must perpetually perform away from a default heteronormativity to become queer, and additionally, these performances do not exist within socially recognisable traits to be valid as queer in the fleeting present, nor can it be reproduced to provide proof of our identities to a heteronormative society.

VI According to Bergson, intuition takes our compounded experiences and utilises what we have accumulated from our personal experiences of life to navigate the present with flow and a sense of faith that our intuition knows where to go (Bergson, 2007). An analysis, however, interprets signifiers extracted from our memory for the purpose of performing the present through the past, with the desire to ‘perfect the always imperfect translation’ (Bergson, 2007, p. 136). An analysis articulates complex concepts through what it is not; it condenses and converts an observed past duration into language and identifiable features. Queer moments, even

after being realised and examined, cannot actually be accurately relayed or foreseen because, as detailed in Chapter 4, queerness resists social legibility and cannot be defined into any categorical system. Therefore, our expectations, based on analysis, cannot live up to what actually happens in new queer performances.

Intuition is intrinsically linked to the uninterrupted change in the expansion of time. Intuition receives the perpetual unanticipated condition of events, which is contained in the spirit of the past, and incorporates it into how we move forward and perform. The intuition that my queerness collects within my own consciousness, in acting, hopes to conceive a proficient method of carrying out a socially resonant performance, but it always ends up being short-lived and in a position of loss since there is no accurate procedure to follow. Therefore, it is perhaps a more efficient use of my queer time to discover new and better ways of *being* rather than attempt to fit my existence into socially known notions of legibility that constrict me rather than fulfil me in this life.

VII It is challenging to perceive or articulate durations of queerness because durations disappear as soon as they arrive, leaving little room to digest this transient moment as it happens. Studying already-expired queer experiences is beneficial as it allows us to examine the repetitive and ephemeral nature of queer performativity, thus validating and contributing to a collective queer feeling. However, such analysis cannot ground authentic durations of queer performance as durations are always on the move, thus leaving evidence of queerness lost in the past yet imperceptible in the present.

Queer performance is the span of time where queer becomings take place, but it is a seemingly similar yet always unique performance that is frustratingly brief at best and does not meet the social conditions for it to possess longevity. Queerness as an identity can be momentarily performed while encountering and participating in society, however this performance is ultimately a slippery disappearing act that only lasts as long as the duration of every social encounter. With every social encounter, my fluctuating and intersecting identities have to be recomposed for the present moment if I desire my unique context of queer existence to *become*. However, since

there is no singular set of characteristics that definitively establish *queer* as legible to dominant society, executing my queer becoming is an unstable task that often goes unnoticed or misread.

Dominant identities have had the privilege of time to ground their existence as not just valid, but often also as default - as exemplified with default heteronormativity. Less socially established identities cannot be performed with enough semblance of collective uniformity, thus perpetually leaving us out of mainstream perceptions in the present. Any component of queer performance that is deviant from heteronormativity is perceived as faulty and not legitimate or locatable in society. Conversely, the components of queer performance that might be recognised and perceived as heteronormative will render the queer attempt invisible and void.

Every repeated performance is concluded differently from every external viewpoint; whether or not my queerness will be recognised in a duration of time is always a gamble that is often lost. My research suggests that since the perpetual negotiation that comes with becoming queer in dominant society leaves queer individuals suspended in a repetitive process of queer performance and loss regardless, then perhaps embracing the inevitability of my ghostly ephemerality can offer my queer life more suited means of living that is born out of my own agency and freedom, and emancipated from social restriction.

VIII Queer identities cannot be qualified in a schematic manner; every reconstruction of queerness is different from the other. Victor Turner, a cultural anthropologist known for his work on symbolic and interpretive anthropology and whose writings laid the groundwork in Performance Studies, states that studying and identifying these schemas and transforming them into artistic performance is a necessary component of understanding human experience. He states that ‘an experience is never truly completed until it is expressed’ and that cultural performance, whether through ritual or art, is ‘explanation and explication of life itself’ (Turner, 1982, p. 14). Through the process of artistic performance, what might be preventing dominant society from noticing the complexity of sociocultural life is put in view and shone a light on. For Turner, ‘a performance is the proper finale of

an experience' (Turner, 1982, p. 13). By better comprehending our position in dominant society, we might be able to use this intellect within artistic performance as grounds to amplify minority positions that are invisible or impossible in dominant society. However, since queerness is a disidentification rather than a counteridentification of heteronormative things, this performance will likely be perceived as a deviant form of recognisable heteronormativity.

IX As earlier discussed, queerness can only exist in a state of potentiality (Muñoz, 2009). Time is always overriding my queer performance and there is not enough space in the present for me to sufficiently catch up. The performance of queerness is in a continuous state of utopian futurity that cannot be reached within a heteronormative society. Retrospectively, queer identities may *seem* to have been a possibility as jolted by our memories, but the only real time is the present, and a duration of queerness is no longer here once the duration is recognised, therefore queerness only has potential to happen again – but not right now.

The performance of queerness precedes the recognition of the occurrence; Whenever a duration of queer performance has been realised, the inescapable nature of time immediately changes and casts queerness into non-existence once again. **Existing as who I am should not have to be this difficult.** This cyclical conundrum of queer becoming has prompted me to pursue non-recognition (as exemplified in my practice, Pulau Hantu) as a worldmaking means to make space for my queer existence and resist the persistent constrictions cast on my potential legibility.

c. GHOSTLY QUEERNESS

X Society experiences queer moments through socially normative capacities of perception that manipulate a present performance into either recognisable or redundant images, thus leaving the queer element of a queer performance unmet. Performance eerily transforms as it is happening in society, immediately metamorphosing into socially dominant concepts as soon as it begins. The duration of my multi-ethnic, feminine, queer performance is filled with invariable potentiality,

however, because of my femininity, this duration can be restrained within dominant concepts, thus rejecting the presence of my queerness and rendering my identity invisible.

Queerness can only exist in the present moment; however, its fate is at the mercy of time that is always in a state of change. Audre Lorde states that within the strict confines of power inequalities, 'our feelings were not meant to survive' (Lorde, 2018, p. 5). My queer performance feels like a ghostly haunting of the past that I am certain of yet is impossible for me to prove or capture in present time – which is the only time that exists.

Queer identities can never successfully meet their ghost - they can only be haunted by them. Queer performativity is so swiftly swept up by straightness and minimised into heteronormative positions. As explained by Victor Turner, the liminal moment where life is being performed can never add up to more than a 'subversive flicker' (Turner, 1982, p. 45) and that this performance is 'put into the service of normativeness almost as soon as it appears' (Turner, 1982, p. 45). The act of queer performativity is simultaneously hopefully performing into existence and also unfortunately stepping foot into disappearance. Social and artistic performances, when perceived, almost always convert into a recognisable form in society, if not, then it is entirely left out of the dominant paradigm as non-existent.

Regulated normativity dictates which identities can thrive in a present environment and which identities will disappear from view in its attempt to be alive. In *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, gender theorists, Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, describe the term 'dispossession' as the loss of belonging that 'marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 3). It is a term that considers how people of various intersecting identities and cultural histories are realised, or not realised, in society. Butler states that 'one is fundamentally dependent upon terms that one never chose in order to emerge as an intelligible being' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 79). For example, because a force like heteronormativity is sustained by dominant ideals, anybody who performs outside of that framework can find themselves in an invalid position that cannot be located in the limits of society. Conversely, a queer person who can be socially perceived within straight parameters

(like my feminine self) is likely to lose authorship of their queer identity in their participation in society. Either way, the dispossession of queer identities prevents queerness from being grounded for very long. By being left out of social recognition, queerness can only exist as a spectre aimlessly apparating into a future that does not exist. Thus, **I liken my position in society as a ghost moving through my course of life haunting a society that is oblivious to my haunting.**

XI In hauntology – which is an expression coined by post-structuralist philosopher, Jacques Derrida, to describe the philosophical concept pertaining to the persistent reappearance of elements from the past like a ghost haunting the present – he states that while spirits and spectres are not the same, they are similar in that nobody can identify what they are in the present. We cannot know what ghosts are for sure, or if they do exist, or if they ‘respond to a name and correspond to an essence’ (Derrida, 2006, p. 5). Derrida writes that ghosts have ‘lower ontological content’ (Derrida, 2006, p. 184) than existing things, and can never arrive at social ideas of reality. While Derrida’s writings on Hauntology is not about queerness, queer performances of self can also resemble a ghostly haunting of the past that cannot be made sense of in the present.

According to Derrida, we cannot identify a ghost not because of ignorance, but because **its lack of existence disallows it to belong to knowledge**. Our perceptions of ghostly moments, or any moment, are interpretations of what Derrida refers to as the ‘structure of inheritance’ (Derrida, 2006, p. 68). Here he does not refer to inheritance as being bequeathed financial assets, but that our inherent being and knowing is an inheritance whether we are privy to it or not. Thus, without already experiencing a queer life, one is likely not able to see queer life.

According to Derrida, acknowledging a ghostly presence ‘exorcises’ (Derrida, 2006, p. 124) and excludes it from the present moment. Since queer performance precedes the perception of it, pointing out its occurrence causes the moment to pass and the identity to vanish from present sight. Witnessing the apparition of queer ghosts is all we can do, whether or not we can perceive images off these apparition depends on our individual range of experiences and memories.

XII The ghosts of queerness cannot be captured and observed in any authentic way. Even though moments of my queerness can be within my memory and perceived by me, it is not possible for me to measure or authentically broadcast the production of my queerness. The immediate disappearance of queerness leaves little to no corroboration of evidence to prove that a queer performance took place and that queerness did in fact manifest in the already past moment. The performance of queerness is where the identity has potentiality to be briefly in view – it conjures a ghostly apparition each time in hopes to be seen. We perceive these apparitions as moments that are associated in some continuous way, and as a result, being queer can feel like an on-going haunting of the self. However, every ghostly performance of self is a singular incident that emerges out of time, which is always in transit.

Dominant society's compulsive assumption of being able to see and recognise everything that one encounters maintains a social order that keeps minoritarian identities seemingly invisible or imperceptible and heavily stereotyped. In *Queer Times, Black Futures*, American humanities scholar, Kara Keeling, states that 'a queer futurity is animated by a future desire that is only *perceptible* (perhaps) – not *recognisable* – now' (Keeling, 2019, p. 102). The restrictions of heteronormative society filter queer identities out of sight thus reproducing their ghostly appearance. Keeling refers to queer temporality as a 'dimension of time that produces risk' (Keeling, 2019, p. 19). The unstable ephemerality of my queerness has left me feeling like a ghost in society who is cognisant of alternate dimensions where other ghosts of queer people exist – but I can only know this as a feeling and not as a provable fact. Evidence of this dimension of queer existence is constantly extinguished at the hands of heteronormative frameworks, thus rendering us unlocatable in the present, and forcing us to move into the future with this perpetual loss.

XIII The illusiveness of my feminine queerness forfeits my presence as if I am always elsewhere and never truly here. Feminine queer women are difficult to locate in society, we are so immediately swept into the forces of heteronormativity based on our visual performance which mirrors the social expectations of heteronormative women. Referring to queer women, literary scholar, Terry Castle, states that 'what we never expect is precisely this: to find her in the midst of things' (Castle, 1993, pp.

2-3). The queer woman, according to Castle, is a spectral figure that can only appear through ideas of the unreal. Even if we are known to exist in the general public, it seems we exist as a myth or a rumour. Even for people who believe in queerness, they might be looking for us, but they cannot find us if we do not appear or perform exactly as they insist what 'queer' is to be true.

If queer women can only survive through ideas of the unreal, then it is beneficial for me to pursue a deconstruction of self to exist. Without performing stereotypical expectations of queerness, we remain here but we just do not *appear*, likening us to ghosts within society. We can only be fleeting, suspicious, and accidental, never to be recreated again nor definitively located in dominant society. My practice pursued abstraction as a form of ritual to deconstruct my queer self away from social expectations of performance, thus embracing what my existence could be within the unlocatable rather than the locatable.

XIV It can be said that there is no space for ghosts in the present. In *Ghostly Matters*, Sociology Professor, Avery Gordon, describes the apparition of a ghost as a location where something imperceptible or lost 'to our supposedly well-trained eyes' makes itself known (Gordon, 2008, p. 8). Gordon states that because dominant culture is being run and determined by hypervisibility, the critique of what is present and what is absent feels out of view. Therefore, according to Gordon, it is convincing for people to believe that all existences and identities that are available, and can exist, does in fact already exist in ways that can be immediately viewed or consumed.

Through the reproduction of dominant frameworks, the space of visibility is proclaimed to be at such full capacity that any oppressed existences such as those that are queer, even while performing and apparating into the future as ghosts haunting the present, cannot be brought into – or be successfully included – in the present sphere with any significant results (Gordon, 2008). Therefore, **many dimensions of society get missed in the act of looking and perceiving** because there is limited space to be visible within the constrictions of patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks.

XV Dominant society's process of *knowing* extracts elements of normative reality that appear stable in the flow of time, and in doing so determines what parameters identities and realities have to align with to have the ability to be present. Bergson believes there is more 'intellectual content' (Bergson, 2007, p. 81) in disordered and absent things that perform differently to the order of existence because recognising disorder implies that there are in fact several orders and means of being. Society's collective habit of only enacting the already-possible is in society's way of seeing and being enriched with a wider scope of perceivable existences that have been historically excluded from the present.

My practice and research suggests that by discovering ways to force society to face the ghosts of society, we might be able to reveal, recover, and retain what we as a society and ghostly individuals have lost as a result of social hierarchies and predetermined inequalities. Although the apparition of ghostly queerness is in a perpetual state of ephemeral transience, these fleeting occurrences reveal that more than what we immediately perceive exists, and perhaps this could alert society to make space for the many ghosts of society. However, the potential of queer ghosts can only be witnessed if our performances match images of mainstream social perception of queerness. Therefore, until a utopian future arrives, queer people will not be relieved of our ghostliness.

XVI Maybe there is a certain type of freedom for those of us who do not fit perfectly within heteronormative restraints. Being queer makes me privy to other dimensions and realities that do exist but cannot be properly seen in the mainstream. Perhaps it is advantageous to make use of such untouched and unseen dimensions, and within them build myself an ecosystem to live in that is not hostile to my being. Until then, taking charge of my ghostliness within compulsory heteronormativity may not be sufficient to break the systems in place, but perhaps it can create improved ways for me to move through the strict parameters of performance and perception that I will inevitably continue to face.

6. QUEER ART

These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each one of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.

- Audre Lorde, *Poetry Is Not a Luxury*

a. WORLDMAKING AND RESISTANCE

In queer Black poet and writer, Audre Lorde's, essay, *The Uses of The Erotic*, she discusses different forms of power that are available in life. She states that many forms of power exist and can be tapped into, but few forms of power are recognisable through enforced patriarchal lens, or as Lorde puts it, 'male models of power' (Lorde, 2018, p. 6). *Lorde discusses the erotic as a tool that can carry out power, but it is socially under-utilised, suppressed, and systemically oppressed.* The erotic here can be likened to an agency of self where life can be generated and powered through oneself to benefit oneself and thus also benefitting society.

The erotic, as something that, according to Lorde, is associated with women and feminine dimensions, is kept compulsively hidden and imperceptible within male models of power. However, when it does get perceived, the erotic is viewed as unreliable, untrue, trivial, or even something to be suspicious of. Through patriarchal systems of oppression and systems that render women-related things – whether queer or not – as invisible or secondary, doubt is cast unto the potential of our power thus keeping this innate erotic power that Lorde asserts is in all 'women-identifying women' (Lorde, 2018, p. 14) from discovering we in fact do have power and agency to build better realities for ourselves through whatever that may feel right and good to us.

It is essential to Lorde that we honour our experiences and the desires that might stem from these experiences, and translate them into a form of language so these

socially suppressed narratives can be shared and contributed to ways of knowing – even if it puts us at risk of being misinterpreted or discredited because *‘the machine will try to grind you to dust anyway, whether or not we speak’* (Lorde, 2020, p. 5).

Lorde prompts us to question if the enforced dominant frameworks have to be true. There are other truths than the ones enforced unto us, thus Lorde believes we can have different and improved realities by acknowledging the power within us. According to Lorde, the erotic power becoming more trusted and recognisable to more queer women pose a threat to constructed patriarchal heteronormative frameworks; Lorde states that male models of power cannot survive if women recognise that their lives can be lived through pleasure instead of being used for male consumption or placed in a position of sacrifice or inferiority (Lorde, 2018).

Carrying out the erotic as power makes the potential for my multi-ethnic, feminine, queer self to become more possible. However, acting on this agency is a hopeful utopian concept that I believe can only divert the constrictions of recognisable queer performances away from me rather than overturn it. This practice could be instead viewed and pursued as an enriching tool that allows me to assess and imagine from the standpoint of desiring a better existence than the existence forced upon me, and provide myself with a personal practice that reminds me (amidst the chaos and demands of a patriarchal heteronormative society) that the hostility of dominant society does not have to attach itself to me even if I have to inevitably experience it.

Disidentification within queer performativity is a measure that must be carried forward into the future. This measure is an unending variable performance that decides its plan of action with every transient present experience without actually arriving in the present. Queer art can provide a resource for understanding and viewing expanded nuances that comprise minoritarian performances; It inhabits a space in society where ephemeral queer performances of self can be expressed and contained in a way that, unlike social performance, is less inclined to fully disappear. Exemplifying queer disidentification through queer art has the worldmaking potential to ground the existence of queer pasts, allowing its history to exist in the

present through different mediums of artistic expressions. However, It is important to note that it is idealistic to believe that through patient performance and abundant artistic cultural contributions there will eventually be a conclusive point in the future offering an established seat in society for queer people that we will not have to strive for. Performing queer disidentification and presenting queer art exists in a state of utopia and futurity, but it does not exist in the future. All we have is the present to carry out performance - without that we cease to exist within already existing things.

Queer life does not live within prescribed historical compulsions and its constructed limitations; this creates an advantageous circumstance for queer lives to improve and alter the requirements of being human. Performing queerness in this society takes place in a realm of what José Muñoz, refers to (first theorised by Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch in 1954) as the *no-longer-conscious* where dominant ideology does not occur and where social interpretations can condition and compose itself towards a *not-yet-here* state of futurity (Muñoz, 2009). Muñoz refers to queerness as an ‘educated mode of desiring’ (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1) that allows us to acknowledge potential existences beyond the heteronormative present despite the insistence of cultural logics. He expresses that being queer is being conscious that the disciplined ways of knowing in this world are incoherent and incomplete. Thus, it is beneficial to approach queerness as something that does not yet exist in the present.

To Muñoz, queer people are lost objects in society that have to not only mourn their loss of possibility within a heteronormative public, but also ***return with a vengeance***. This vengeance is disidentification and a call to action that has the ability to disrupt dominant beliefs that validate dominant positions of power, and deliberately renounce what the majoritarian public has established as real.

The ways that queer performativity disidentifies from the heteronormative default is in no way explicit. Creating a utopian self and environment is an on-going and constantly reinterpreted process that interdependently evolves alongside society.

There is no means to an end within queer performativity. Thus, *waiting on a definitive imaginary future is to miss out on and only experience time as something we have to accomplish to finally arrive somewhere else.*

Tactics for survival in a heteronormative society have emerged as the main quality that drives the production of queer culture and autonomous art (Getsy, 2016). Queer experiences of otherness and invisibility are charged with the ability to bring into view queerness and difference through art as a method of meriting our existence in a society that does not account for us. Carrying out queer disidentification through social performance and artmaking is an acknowledgement of loss and also then *filling that space of loss with an alternate life of futurity*. Accepting this loss can be an act of embracing queerness even in its ephemerality, and serve as a practice that rejects an enforced default heteronormativity even if it also rejects the possibility of normalcy and legitimacy in society.

For intersecting feminine queer identities such as mine, producing art that explores our lived experiences is fundamental to our existence as it can act on our behalf to make up for all that we lose from being imperceptible in dominant society. Lorde refers to poetry produced by women as locations of art that create a starting point where change can actively begin from. Lorde says that 'it forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams towards survival and change' (Lorde, 2018, p. 2). Exemplifying various facets of queer existences into various artistic outcomes gives language and visual references to queer identities and narratives so that the overshadowed realities of queer people can begin to be looked at and thought about.

Imbuing personal queer narratives through art can be a tool of resistance to confront and reconcile with a perpetual otherness, loss, and enforced performativity within dominant frameworks. Art can be the means of seed-planting where hope for a better and more stable future can grow out of. Pursuing my practice, Pulau Hantu, has given me a jumping-off platform towards exploring the potential for a better way of life. Despite my invisible or imperceptible queer and

racial identities, an essence of myself can be contained on my behalf through the process of artmaking.

Muñoz states that these artistic actions of resistance have utopian functions that enable us to see ‘the future in the present’ (Muñoz, 2009, p. 55). Queer artmaking can encourage queer people to envision a world where queerness can rightfully exist and inspire contributions to an integral worldmaking. Muñoz believes it is necessary and powerful to develop means, such as through queer art, to ground under-represented narratives in the present because the present is so hostile towards minoritarian identities.

Integrating our social difference into art is to Stuart Hall the most vital work that can happen within visual art as he believes its contribution to culture is indispensable (Hall, 2019). As earlier mentioned in my Methodology chapter, Hall, lauds social difference as a tool that ‘makes a difference’ (Hall, 2019, p. 80). Queer artmaking has the potential to stabilise queer existence and attempt to fulfil the gaps in mainstream representations of society. These attempts of producing and ritualising our existence through artistic processes can be a stepping stone towards dismantling the narrow confines of social legitimacy.

Practicing condemnation of the insufficient present can assist queer people in dismantling heteronormative governance that prohibits worldmaking and minority representation, progressively taking the veil off society’s inability to see the world as a more authentic whole. My personal experiences with being othered through my many social identities uniquely influences how I pursue creative endeavours and informs the types of creative endeavours I produce; thus, my queer art is an essential contribution to the authentication of queerness. By providing my unique queer narrative, I am able to contribute to dismantling the disbelief or stereotyped views of queer existence.

As discussed by Lorde, acting in resistance against dominant and oppressive social frameworks could convince oppressed people of the power they hold within themselves despite oppressive frameworks (Lorde, 2018). Perhaps artmaking can be an avenue of freedom and liberation from being forcibly fit into defined limitations

of recognisable existences within dominant society. Alchemising oneself through the process of making art can be an act of resistance and activism that paves new routes in spite of the demands of dominant society.

Acknowledging that the present is insufficient can prompt queer identities to confront the enforced norms that keep our queer performance in an unstable state of ephemera. Perhaps queer artmaking and the presentation of queer art can be a quotidian occurrence utilised to resist the loss of our power and autonomy, thus carving out or expanding spaces in life to belong to us, and reappropriating our existence within the repetitive demands of society.

If queerness can only exist as a trace in time, performing towards the future is not a sustainable practice. If the current present cannot fully belong to my queer existence, then it might be fruitful for me to, through artmaking, explore and adopt the present in alternate ways that support my ghostly reality. Dominant society is not looking for me in the ways that are true to what I know of me, perhaps embracing my position as a ghost is beneficial and can offer me a certain freedom from the labour that comes with participating in dominant society.

b. MIMETIC ART

Through artistic practices, artists of minority identities create work that is common sense to their lives, yet at the same time, completely defy common sense as dominant society understands it to be. Minoritarian identities are rarely represented in mainstream media, and if so, they are represented through unreliable stereotypes manufactured by dominant forces, thus leaving a trail of inaccuracy for minority selves to battle while navigating a society that cannot properly see them.

Every perception is a projection of our own analysed moments even if the image we are perceiving does not in any way belong to us. According to philosopher and cultural critic, Walter Benjamin, the act of encountering and perceiving is directly associated with 'passing an expert judgement' (Benjamin, 2008, p. 26). For example,

as earlier detailed in Chapter 3, compulsory heteronormativity is in a default position within mainstream society, therefore queer identities, when encountered, are perceived by majoritarian society through heteronormative conventions such as *butch* and *femme*. Fitting into these categories persuades society to assume they know the roles a perceived feminine or masculine queer woman take on in their relationships or their participation in society based on heteronormative stereotypes.

Being represented in art and media plays an important role in validating and reflecting reality back to society; what is portrayed within it is integral in moulding our social concepts of reality, consequently reassuring and authorising what can exist within it. However, representation is impossible to achieve without being first mediated by the mimetic faculty, which anthropologist, Michael Taussig, describes as ‘the nature that culture uses to create second nature’ (Taussig, 1993, p. 250).

Mimesis is a term in literary and artistic theory that is utilised to demonstrate imitative associations in artistic products that are derivative of dominant social concepts. The mimetic quality of art appeals to our conventional viewpoints of reality. Literary scholar, Matthew Potolsky, describes convention as ‘collective beliefs that over time or by force of habit gain the status of objective facts’ (Potolsky, 2006, p. 4). Queer themes in media, to a person who has not experienced queerness, will likely appear fictitious and separate from social realities. To relate to art, we would have to be able to sense components of it reflected within perceived social encounters from our own lives.

The mimetic quality in art is a standard of expectation that is only realised when a spectator relates to what they are viewing. Potolsky states that the source of mimesis stems from a commitment to convention, not a commitment to the multiplicity of life. As a result, mimesis is fundamentally dependent on socially established concepts that are ever present in dominant society – which is the society art is produced and encountered in. However, in truth, different communities of people differ in their account of reality, so art that does not approximate our respective knowledges of the world will seem out of order and made up.

Ideally, creating queer art in a heteronormative world would have a substantial chance at asserting queerness into social recognition. The potential of artistic queer products is that it possesses a longer lifespan than ephemeral queer social performances of self, therefore it has more time to reach a larger audience who do not know of, relate to, or have queer experiences. However, it is more likely that a heteronormative audience will extract themes and feelings that trigger their own memory and experiences, and project their lives onto the art based on what they are able to perceive, resulting in the intention of minoritarian art being disowned and appropriated by dominant forces, leaving queer art in an inevitable state of loss and transience as well.

However, this does not mean that queer art does not have a productive place in life altogether; Queer art-making can be used as a tool to explore and analyse common experiences and memories of queerness in dominant society. Art allows our lived life to be viewed from a distance, away from the occurring life it is trying to imitate and represent. Queer artists can extract their personal experiences of queerness within heteronormative society and reproduce it through artistic means to contribute to *seen* things in smaller distinct communities, thus developing coherence and logic out of the non-temporal realities of queer life within defined spaces.

In *Mimesis and Alterity*, Taussig explains that habit is an exemplification of what we know. It is within this habitual pattern where unconscious layers of culture become intrinsically built into the temperament and routine of society. Mimetic art pauses the reality of ever-changing time, it encapsulates social conventions within its product, and offers distance between art and spectator (Taussig, 1993). This distance allows the spectator to analyse an immobile product captured within art. However, this analysis is perceived through concepts already existent to their individual histories, and is ultimately an event to further project the habits of their past into the present.

Recognisable and aggregate themes of life, for example: loss, can be easily extracted from majoritarian life, but what triggers this feeling is unique to individual histories and encounters. Being a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer artist, I may produce art

exploring my experiences or feelings of identity loss and dispossession within dominant frameworks, and my work may be relatable to spectators who have also experienced these themes in their history – however, this art will inevitably be carried out and viewed in the present which is ultimately made up of socially recognisable concepts of loss. Thus queer art, when viewed outside of queerness, loses its intention as a result of habitual dominance.

Mimesis wades between the very similar and the very unfamiliar, it has the capacity to exhibit both similarities and differences within the reproduction of recognisable life. According to Taussig, the formation of recognisable identities is involved with habitually participating in society through means that does not necessarily repeat exact images of the past, but by retaining a semblance of recognisable sameness (Taussig, 1993). Grounding this fluctuating peculiarity is challenging. Reproduced concepts of straightness in queerness does not allow queer people to eventually be included in the present, but it has the opportunity to be perceived in a passing moment – not as queer – but as a faulty projection of straight performance. Thus queer people who unintentionally perform approximate straightness might be perceived by society – however, this perceived component would be within heteronormative concepts, therefore still excluding *queer* as an identifiable identity outside the realm of existing things.

The consistent need to identify recognisable components from unrecognisable things proves that the present is actually invariable – it is just compulsively forced into fixed categories to maintain a false sense of social order. Taussig refers to this as *mimetic vertigo*. He explains that the mimetic and alteric effect of these analyses prevents society from properly reflecting upon and mastering unfamiliar moments (Taussig, 1993, p. 237). Being self-aware of the mimetic faculty, which Taussig refers to as *mimetic excess* (Taussig, 1993), allows us to discern that the fundamental basis of our exceedingly rigid reality is based on a form of make-believe.

Forcing present realms of existence into familiar things is a defensive appropriation of non-existing performances and a desperate habit towards mastering and explaining moments that are unfamiliar to the ignorant privileged eye. To avoid

this realisation of unfamiliarity, society hastily assigns meanings to these encounters, projecting identifiable patterns onto their discomfort to resolve their sudden unsettled state.

It is challenging to break the compulsive patterning of mimesis and alterity. Cultural conventions sustains itself off this pattern despite society comprising of a multiplicity of existences that cannot fit into the insufficient model of dominant concepts. Minoritarian lives may not have a place in present society, but they still participate in it in ways that do not fit the prescribed default. Living as a multi-ethnic, feminine, queer person in present society thus can be viewed as an interrogation of the extravagant parameters put in place by dominant forces, and carried out by majoritarian society, that create the illusion of the here and not-here.

In *A Burst of Light: Living With Cancer*, Audre Lorde states that ‘caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare’ (Lorde, 2017, p. 130). My practice, Pulau Hantu, explored what I can do for myself in the present through worldmaking and artmaking processes to sustain my spirit despite the persistent experiences of futurity and loss that come with minoritarian participations of society. Pulau Hantu contributes to the potential of cultural knowing and adds to the representation of queer feelings – perhaps not for society at large – but for others who can see their queer and racialised feelings in my work, thus cultivating validity even just within ourselves if not outside ourselves.

While queer art does have the potential to bring queer narratives closer into the present and contribute to the knowledge of missing narratives in society, art is still, like queer performances of self, coded through one’s queerness and cannot be received by the spectator if they are not able to recognise what is being presented to them. Perhaps it is useful to pursue queer art in ways that seek invisibility and take shelter within my ghostly state as a dimension to access for respite.

Queer people have always lived in dominant society where the identity of queerness cannot stably exist as queer. Present society either perceives queerness through heteronormative proximities or leaves them out of present time altogether. If mimetic art represents nature, and if an existence would have to precede an artistic reproduction, then queer art is perhaps a hopeful form of proof that queer identities have existed in the past at least. Queer art can attempt to assert queer associations into recognisable society, but without the history of queer contexts, the reproduced queerness vanishes from the spectator, leaving misunderstood artefacts behind.

I want to embrace the ghostly state of my being but I do not want to disappear from myself, and I cannot be optimistic for the future if the present cannot support me without wearing me down.

If queer art, like queer performativity, inevitably suffers loss through being perceived, it might be sensible to develop art that *refutes recognisability* and instead finds a way to be freed from the chains of dominant forces in the present despite its imperceptibility. If there is no space for ghosts in the present, then I desire to have access to an alternate dimension for my ghost to exist in harmoniously. My practice, Pulau Hantu, expands the ever-moving present to make space for my ghostly reality rather than finding ways for my ghost to be present in the here-and-now as a hopeful means to an end – because there will be no end – there is only the present to carry out my desires.

7. CONCLUSION

Often, we see queerness as a deprivation. But when I look at my life, I saw that queerness demanded an alternative innovation from me. I had to make alternative routes. It made me curious. It made me ask: Is this enough for me? Because there's nothing here for me.

- *Vietnamese-American Poet, Ocean Vuong*

Audre Lorde wrote: 'I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood' (Lorde, 2020, p. 1). As much as I agree with Lorde, I still often hesitate to state what I am, who I am, or what my queer art is about. Even in writing this thesis, I wonder if I am giving myself away to be misinterpreted through spectators' pre-formed logics when reading or viewing my work.

According to Stuart Hall (whose work on cultural identity was earlier discussed in Chapter 4) the language we use is always involved in an 'infinite semiosis of meaning' (Hall, 2019, p. 72). He states that every sentence we write or speak opens up infinite combinations of meanings despite our specific intentions. As put by Hall, 'meaning is in that sense a wager. You take a bet. Not a bet on truth, but a bet on saying something' and that 'even if you want to take it back, you have to come into language to get out of it. There is no other way. That is the paradox of meaning' (Hall, 2019, pp. 72-73). My practice acknowledges this ongoing conundrum of managing my explanations and battling the interpretations of them while watching it spiral out of control. But this is an inevitable part of life and participation in society. However, for my queer racialised self, it is too much to have to deal with all the time. It is unfair of me to accept this without making adjustments to relieve myself of this exhaustion. I cannot mediate the interpretations of myself through written language which hold such strong signifiers within them, therefore I have always and will continue to utilise the infinite indefinite scope of abstract queer art as the foundation to carry what I have to express in this life.

My father did not have enough time to pass down much of his family's Malaysian-Chinese and Taoist culture to my brother and I. My father also purposefully chose not to pass down his mother tongue, Hokkien, to us. My brother and I are first generation post-colonial Singaporeans, so my father thought the best chance we had to survive Singapore's brand-new independence and development in a Western-dominant world was to only speak English at home. He taught us about his life through stories of his upbringing, but we barely practiced any of his family's traditions together. When I was sixteen years old, my father died suddenly in a tragedy. My potential access to learning more about my Chinese heritage, religion, and languages were suddenly cut off from me. At some point I understood and reconciled with knowing I will likely not be able to make up for the ways I might perceive to be failing at performing my ethnicities correctly. This reconciliation has in time also helped me understand that I was not going to make up for the ways I might perceive to be failing at performing my gender and sexuality. It was not to my interest to have to explain my personal history to people who I was not close to or comfortable with. On the occasions that I did oblige and attempt to offer a bit of an explanation of myself, it always left me in great discomfort and fatigued. Having to disclose intimately personal facets of my life just to make some sense for a transient moment was so draining, and it always left me feeling displaced within myself.

My queer research and practice has provided me a duration to explore my social imperceptibility and untangle my internal conflicts alongside my external social realities, which has acted as a form of reconciliation and catharsis from a heteronormative headache. My multi-ethnic, feminine, queer existence is at such odds with dominant frameworks of appearing and performing that I have come to believe that nobody is actually perceiving me because they are unable to do so in any accurate way. If nobody can actually watch me, then I conclude that this means I am relieved of constructed heteronormative demands. **If nobody knows how to look for me, then remaining invisible and ghostly shall be my form of power in this life.**

Even though my frustrations with dominant frameworks and the demanding expectations that come with it have left me feeling like an imperceptible ghost haunting society, I have realised this is a reality that I can adopt to benefit me. My

queer artistic practice, Pulau Hantu, has achieved this by creating a disembodied extension of my queer self, through a multi-channel video art installation, to relieve my bodily burden of social participation. To achieve such relief, my practice has rejected perceptibility and has instead imagined alternate ways of existing that does not hinge on being recognised. I have found freedom in embracing my lack of visibility and ghostliness. The seeming lack of materiality my intersectional identities hold in dominant society allows me to not be weighed down by the impossible task of trying to make sense in society.

The strict confines one must continually fit into to be perceived in dominant society are just not desirable to me. My practice has carried out ideas of imperceptibility and disappearance as an act of revolt of normative ways of seeing, viewing, spectating, and living. In this research, I have taken advantage of my ghostly impermanence and employed my ephemerality as a strategy of detachment, and detachment as a strategy of self-engagement. Pulau Hantu as a disembodied extension of myself ensures I have operations in place to perpetually cleanse my being from external projections forced onto me, and offers my existence a dimension to tap into that can keep me grounded and intact instead of faded and displaced.

The irony is not lost on me that I have concluded: **Leaving is the only way to stay.** Over the course of this research, I realised that what I want right now is to disappear and escape from the present to remove myself from the pervasiveness of dominant social categories and the reproduction of heteronormative ideologies that attempt to govern my autonomy. However, even though I want to disappear from this society, I am aware the present space is the only place I can physically be. Therefore, I have pursued a practice of disappearing *within* society instead. My practice, Pulau Hantu, as a disembodied extension of self has offered me a space of rest to disappear into and be protected by to mediate all the facets of my identity that I lose from being perceived by dominant society.

Pulau Hantu, as a disembodied extension of my existence was created largely through rituals of abstraction that transformed daily imagery within my life into a protective shield. This has been a strategy to serve my aim of being able to exist in

the present with ease and harmony through imperceptibility, thus mediating the loss and futurity I inevitably experience in society. Within these visual abstractions contain a peculiar wisdom and intuition of the transformed past that I trust can better deflect and confound the gaze of spectators than my physical self ever can.

Pulau Hantu exists as an added facet of my existence even if I am the only person who can access its protection or locate it outside of its exhibition. I have employed abstraction as a strategy to prevent spectators from being able to see what is behind the art or what it consists of, therefore also what *I* consist of. My abstract video art cannot be reproduced elsewhere because these visuals were born out of imagery from my personal life. My work is so far out from recognisability that I feel that the intimate parts of me threaded through Pulau Hantu is insured from all the rituals I performed, and thus cannot be lost to recognisable logics. Like a form of daily prayer, imbuing Pulau Hantu with practices of ritual offers me the ability to be transported into an altered protected present, relieved from the challenges of patriarchal heteronormative society, while still participating in the same physical plane as dominant society.

My practice has suggested that video art is a queer and regenerative manner of presenting queer art. The advantage of video art in the context of my practice is that it does not hold as much consistent presence as a still image. Video art is always moving and heading elsewhere even if the work remains within a singular projection on a wall, thus continually removing the external gaze from me as the work continues to expire and unfold. Even though time is what leaves my queer performativity as a ghost in the past, the forward movement of time is to my advantage in Pulau Hantu.

My work has employed regeneration as a form of protection. These protective strategies, like queer performativity and ritual, must be carried out in perpetuity to heal and mediate every present moment. Pulau Hantu has appropriated the transient fleeting realities of queer performativity into regenerative functions to aid my work. Implementing a regenerative aspect to Pulau Hantu further illustrates the repetitive labour that has to be carried out on my part within my lived experience to prevent my queerness (that is so easily lost to heteronormative society) from being displaced. My regenerative practice is a decluttering practice for my soul. Within Pulau Hantu,

the ephemerality of time continually cleanses my disembodied extension of self and releases all that does not serve me. With ephemerality, Pulau Hantu purposefully and actively cleanses itself from the past and moves forward without external burden.

Despite the practices of ritual and regeneration implemented in my practice, I remain aware that even with my strategies of deflecting the external gaze, my disembodied extension of self is utopian and, like queer performativity, must be perpetually carried out to be able to protect me. This knowledge has kept me hesitant to let Pulau Hantu out into the world to be viewed despite its deflective strategies. To circumvent this hesitation within me, my practice ensured that Pulau Hantu can only be viewed when set up as a multi-channel exhibition. Viewing visual documentation of the work can only offer the spectator ideas of what Pulau Hantu might be, thus adding another layer of protection between my disembodied extension of self and the external gaze of spectators. Multi-channel video art cannot be viewed all at once; before a spectator registers a moment, the combination of projected visuals changes again. My installation distracts the attention of the spectator by only being able to be viewed in parts, thus confounding their ability to perceive the work as a whole. This is a strategy to ensure that I am constantly cleansed from external conclusions of who I am and who I should be.

Queer analysis such as mine would be otherwise lost if researchers only abided by traditional forms of academic research instead of trusting the lived experiences and intuition of our uniquely queer lives and the valuable insights that come with it. This thesis has provided an account of the freedom and autonomy we can have by denying the pervasive gaze of society from defining us. This research has also offered other practitioners subversive methods of presenting art that are centred on ideas of disappearing. Over the course of my research, it became progressively clear that the only way out of the limitations that keep society in a cycle of heteronormative compulsion was not to make queerness successfully visible in society, but to instead develop alternative ways of pursuing queer existence that was not hinged on being seen. This acceptance led me to pursue a practice of unbecoming and imperceptibility instead as a commitment to not fall into the traps of dominant society that can only consider me through finite stereotypes and categories.

This practice-based research has demonstrated that queering practice and research is an advantageous endeavour – therefore I believe this thesis can be used as a resource to prompt other queer practitioners to also dismantle the spaces they feel stifled in and discover more efficient methods of pursuing their own research that is not confined within academic conventions. My method of pursuing queer practice-based research does not fit neatly into traditional academic methodologies, however, this does not mean my investigation holds little academic value. In fact, disrupting the rigidity of academic frameworks can open up opportunities to discover more efficient methods of research and thus reap more nuanced results. Through reflective, experimental, and iterative processes carried out throughout my research, outcomes I could not have earlier foreseen or defined were produced and discovered. Within this malleable methodological process, I was afforded the space to practice reflexivity and the ease to continually readjust my practice and analysis accordingly. The presence of my queer art and research can exist to remind me and other queer people of varying marginalised intersecting identities, that through believing in the power of our autonomy, we can create more suited iterations of social existence and academic endeavours even if their specificity can only be applied to our individual selves and research.

However, it is important to note that pursuing queer practice-based research within a traditional academic institution was a challenging task for me because practice-as-research is not always deemed a valuable or respected means of investigation. Despite these institutional challenges that often reduce artmaking to a trivial pursuit, I resolved to commit to my practice, assigning queer artmaking my main mode of investigation despite encounters of disregard and neglect in a wider academic environment. My experience as a queer artist in academia also led me to commence this thesis by discussing and analysing my art practice before diving into the contextual framework of my research, further committing to and giving value to practice-based research.

The unfolding process-based nature of my work has allowed me to reflect on indeterminate existences with malleability in mind. Pulau Hantu as a practice is ongoing and impermanent in nature to honour the ephemerality and ghostliness of my queer existence. Within this particular research, my practice has resulted in an

art installation. However, the wider intention of Pulau Hantu is to offer me time and space for mediation and pondering. I am certain this work will expand into further iterations going forward that will carry forth Pulau Hantu's ghost through future rituals and abstractions. Therefore, my work is not finite nor final – the multi-channel video art installation analysed within this thesis is only a juncture of Pulau Hantu that will expire as my work evolves with me, and thus this iteration of my work cannot be exhibited exactly the same again and soon will never be exhibited again.

Over the journey of my research, I have let go – through art and mind – of my perceptibility and legibility, and instead I have embraced my queer ghostliness. Back home in Singapore, we rarely apply reason to ghosts' existence because we do not need a reason for ghosts to exist. Whether or not we are privy to their dimensions, they have always been here with us. Since society cannot locate ghosts, being a ghost in this society offers me the opportunity to detach myself from engaging in oppressive dominant frameworks, and thus for now, I conclude that being queer and at odds with cultural logics means that I can move through life however I could ever desire and with eternal ease.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acosta, n. (2016). Thoughts (on Blues). In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 209-211). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2011). Happy Futures, Perhaps. In E. L. Mc Callum, & M. Tuhkanen (Eds.), *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (pp. 159-182). New York: SUNY Press.

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Alsop, R., Fitzsimons, A., & Lennon, K. (2002). *Theorizing Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ang, I. (2000). Identity Blues. In P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg, & A. McRobbie (Eds.), *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall* (pp. 1-13). London and New York: Verso.

Barthes, R. (1964). *Elements of Semiology*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R. (2000). *Camera Lucida*. London: Vintage Books.

Barthes, R. (2006). The Death of the Author (1968). In C. Bishop (Ed.), *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 41-45). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Barthes, R. (2009). *Mythologies*. London: Vintage.

Beauvoir, S. d. (1997). *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage.

Benjamin, W. (2008). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. London: Penguin.

Bergson, H. (1950). *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Bergson, H. (1991). *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books.

Bergson, H. (2007). *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York: Dover Publications.

Bishop, C. (2005). *Installation Art*. London: Tate Publishing.

Bishop, C. (2006). Introduction: Viewers as Producers. In C. Bishop (Ed.), *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 10-17). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso.

Blocker, J. (1999). *Where Is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Boonyawatana, A. (2022, June 29). *Anucha Boonyawatana on Malila: The Farewell Flower* | BFI Q&A. Retrieved July 2022, from BFI:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HasMQEBH0Eo>

Bordowitz, G. (2016). The AIDS crisis is Ridiculous. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 50-52). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Bourriaud, N. (2006). Relational Aesthetics (1998). In C. Bishop (Ed.), *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 160-170). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Busse, K.-P. (2005). Hans Breder's Iowa Experiment Thirty Years on Edge in the Middle. In H. Breder, & K.-P. Busse (Eds.), *Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal* (pp. 11-16). Norderstedt: Books on Demand.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. London and New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2000). Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject. In P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg, A. McRobbie (Eds.), P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg, & A. McRobbie (Eds.), *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall* (pp. 30-37). London and New York: Verso.

Butler, J. (2021). Recognition and Mediation: A Second Reply to Axel Honneth. In K. L. Heikki Ikaheimo (Ed.), *Recognition and Ambivalence* (pp. 61-68). New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

Butler, J. (2021). Recognition and the Social Bond: A Response to Axel Honneth. In K. L. Heikki Ikaheimo (Ed.), *Recognition and Ambivalence* (pp. 31-54). New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

Butler, J., & Athanasiou, A. (2013). *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Buzzfeed Unsolved Network. (2021, November 19). *Return To The Demonic Sallie House* [Video]. Retrieved from Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5R65skWdg7Y>

Cai, D. (2021). Forgive me for so speaking: Towards a hermeneutics of wounded embodiment and an ethics of contingency. *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture*.

Castle, T. (1993). *The Apparitional Lesbian*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chávez, B. (2014). A Living Legacy: What Disidentification Will Continue to Mean for Queer Performance Artists of Color. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 1:3, 150-153.

Chang, H. (2016). *Autoethnography as Method*. New York: Routledge.

Clarke, L. C. (2018). Grim reapers: Ghostly narratives of masculinity and killing in drone warfare. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20:4, 602-603.

Colebrook, C. (2011). Queer Aesthetics. In E. L. Mc Callum, & M. Tuhkanen (Eds.), *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (pp. 25-46). New York: SUNY Press.

Cranny-Francis, A., Waring, W., Stavropoulos, P., & Kirkby, J. (2003). *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Crowder, D. G. (2009). Lesbians and the (Re/De)Construction of the Female Body. In D. Atkins (Ed.), *Looking Queer: Body Image and Identity in Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender Communities* (pp. 47-68). New York: Routledge.

Damasio, A. (2011). *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. London: Cornerstone Digital.

DasGupta, D., & Dasgupta, R. K. (2018). Being out of place: Non-belonging and queer racialisation in the U.K. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 27, 31-38.

Dasgupta, R. K. (2012). Queering the Cyberspace: Toward a Space/Identity Discussion. *Bhatter College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*.

de Beauvoir, S. (1997). *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage.

Deleuze, G. (1991). *Bergsonism* (Vol. Zone Books). (H. Tomlinson, & B. Habberjam, Trans.) New York.

Derrida, J. (2006). *Specters of Marx*. New York and London: Routledge Classics.

Dyer, R. (1977). *Gays and Film*. London: British Film Institute.

Eco, U. (1989). *The Open Work*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Eco, U. (2006). The Poetics of Open Work (1962). In C. Bishop (Ed.), *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 20-39). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Edelman, L. (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Eguchi, S. (2020). Sticky Rice Politics: Impossible Possibilities of Queerness in and Across Yellow Fever and Front Cover. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 43:1, 67-84.

Elwes, C. (2015). *Installation and the Moving Image*. London, New York: Columbia University Press.

Fani-Kayode, R. (2016). Traces of Ecstasy. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 45-47). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Febos, M. (2022). *Body Work: The Radical Power of Personal Narrative*. New York: Catapult.

Fisher, M. (2014). *Ghosts Of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester UK and Washington USA: Zero Books.

Fox, J., & Warber, K. M. (2014). Queer Identity Management and Political Self-Expression on Social Networking Sites: A Co-Cultural Approach to the Spatial of Silence. *Journal Of Communication*, 79-100.

Frank, P. (2005). The Arts in Fusion: Intermedia Yesterday and Today. In H. Breder, & K.-P. Busse (Eds.), *Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal* (pp. 17-35). Norderstedt: Books on Demand.

Freccero, C. (2006). *Queer/Early/Modern*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Freeman, E. (2010). *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Friedman, K. (2005). Intermedia: Four Histories, Three Directions, Two Futures. In H. Breder, & K.-P. Busse (Eds.), *Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal* (pp. 51-62). Norderstedt: Books on Demand.

Gaines, M. (2016). A Defence of Marriage Act: Notes on the Social Performance of Queer Ambivalence. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 217-218). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Gentile, K. (2016). Generating subjectivity through the creation of time. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 33:2, 264-283.

Getsy, D. J. (2016). Introduction: Queer Intolerability and its Attachments. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 12-22). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Getsy, D. J. (2019). Ten Queer Theses On Abstraction. In J. Ledesma, *Queer Abstraction* (pp. 65-75). Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center.

Ghaziani, A., & Brim, M. (2019). Queer Methods: Four Provocations for an Emerging Field. In A. Ghaziani, & M. Brim (Eds.), *Imagining Queer Methods* (pp. 3-27). New York: New York University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin Group.

Gordon, A. F. (2008). *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.

Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Halberstam, J. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Hall, G. (2016). New Space Education and How It Works. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 195-196). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Hall, S. (2015). Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? In S. Hall, & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage Publications.

Hall, S. (2019). *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Hall, S., & Whannel, P. (2018). *The Popular Arts*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Hammond, H. (2016). Class Notes. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 41-45). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Hanhardt, J. G. (2015). Film Image / Electronic Image: The Construction of Abstraction, 1960-1990. In G. Jennings (Ed.), *Abstract Video: The Moving Image in Contemporary Art* (pp. 19-28). Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Hesford, V. (2005). Feminism and its ghosts: The spectre of the feminist-as-lesbian. *Feminist Theory*, 6:3, 227-250.

Hesselberth, P. (2014). *Cinematic Chronotopes: Here, Now, Me*. New York, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.

Holman Jones, S., & Harris, A. M. (2019). *Queering Autoethnography*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (1995). *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*. New York: The New Press.

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. London: Pluto Press.

hooks, b. (2014, May 7). *bell hooks - Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body* | Eugene Lang College. Retrieved May 2022, from The New School:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJk0hNROvzs&t=5250s>

Jarman, D. (2016). At Your Own Risk. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 48-49). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Jennings, G. (2015). Introduction: On the Horizon. In G. Jennings (Ed.), *Abstract Video: The Moving Image in Contemporary Art* (pp. 1-18). Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Jones, A. (2012). *Seeing Differently: A history and theory of identification and the visual arts*. London and New York: Routledge.

Jones, S. H., & Adams, T. E. (2016). Autoethnography is a Queer Method. In K. Browne, & C. J. Nash (Eds.), *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* (pp. 194-214). London and New York: Routledge.

Katz, J. N. (1995). *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Keeling, K. (2019). *Queer Times, Black Futures*. New York: New York University Press.

Khaled, M. (2016). The Non-Located Space: In Conversation with Omar Kholeif. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 188-191). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Kholeif, O. (2015). Introduction: Navigating the Moving Image. In O. Khoeleif (Ed.), *Moving Image: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 12-19). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

King, N. (2014). *Queer and Trans Artists of Color: Stories of Some of Our Lives*. (J. Glennon-Zukoff, & T. Mikalson, Eds.) CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Klemm, D. E. (2005). Intermedial Being. In H. Breder, & K.-P. Busse (Eds.), *Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal* (pp. 67-78). Norderstedt: Books on Demand.

Kunst, B. (2015). *Artists at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Kwastek, K. (2015). Interactive Abstractions: Between Embodied Exploration and Instrumental Control 'Underneath Your Fingertips'. In G. Jennings (Ed.). Oakland California: University of California Press.

Larsen, L. B. (2006). Social Aesthetics (1999) . In *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 172-183). London: The MIT Press.

Lord, C. (2016). Their Memory is Playing Tricks on Her: Notes toward a Calligraphy of Rage. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 99-103). London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Lorde, A. (2017). A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer. In A. Lorde, *A Burst of Light: and Other Essays* (pp. 40-133). New York: Ixia Press.

Lorde, A. (2018). Learning from the 1960s. In A. Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (pp. 35-50). London: Penguin Classics.

Lorde, A. (2018). Poetry Is Not a Luxury. In A. Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House* (pp. 1-4). London: Penguin Classics.

Lorde, A. (2018). The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House. In A. Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House* (pp. 15-20). London: Penguin Classics.

Lorde, A. (2018). Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism. In A. Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (pp. 21-34). London: Penguin Classics.

Lorde, A. (2018). Uses of the Erotic. In A. Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (pp. 5-14). London: Penguin Classics.

Lorde, A. (2020). Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Defining Difference. In A. Lorde, *When I Dare To Be Powerful: Women So Empowered Are Dangerous* (pp. 70-87). United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited.

Lorde, A. (2020). An Open Letter to Mary Daly. In A. Lorde, *When I Dare To Be Powerful: Women So Empowered Are Dangerous* (pp. 8-16). United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited.

Lorde, A. (2020). The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action. In A. Lorde, *When I Dare to be Powerful: Women So Empowered are Dangerous* (pp. 1-7). United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited .

Lorenz, R. (2012). *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* . New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Lushetich, N. (2011). The Performance of Time in Fluxus Intermedia. *The Drama Review*, 55:4, 75-87.

Macdonald, M. (1995). *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*. London: Arnold.

Manchester, E. (2009, October). *Ana Mendieta: Untitled (Silueta Series, Mexico) 1976*. Retrieved June 8, 2022, from Tate Modern:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mendieta-untitled-silueta-series-mexico-t13356>

Mc Callum, E. L., & Tuhkanen, M. (2011). Becoming Unbecoming: Untimely Mediations. In E. L. Mc Callum, & M. Tuhkanen (Eds.), *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (pp. 1-17). New York: SUNY Press.

McKenna, K. Y., & Bargh, J. A. (1998). Coming Out in the age of Internet: Identity "Demarginalization" Through Virtual Group Participation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(3), 681-694.

McNay, L. (2003). Agency, Anticipation and Indeterminacy in Feminist Theory. *Feminist Theory*, 4(2), 139-148.

McNay, L. (2008). *Against Recognition*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.

Mehretu, J. (2021, August 23). *Black/Queer/Abstract: A convening on the occasion of Julie Mehretu* [Video]. Retrieved May 4, 2022, from Whitney Museum of American Art: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGeFJ-g810g>

Meyers, D. T. (2002). *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery & Women's Agency*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mompelat, L. (2019). Queer of colour hauntings in London's art scene: Performing disidentification and decolonising the gaze. A case study of the Cocoa Butter Club. *Feminist Theory*, 20:4, 445-463.

Moyer, C. (2016). Do You Love the Dyke in Your Face? Lesbian Street Representation. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 95-98). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Negrin, L. (2008). *Appearance and Identity: Fashioning the Body in Postmodernity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ocaña. (2016). Spontaneity against Intergration: In Conversation with Toni Puig. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 38-41). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Paul, C. (2005). Intermedia in the Digital Age. In H. Breder, & K.-P. Busse (Eds.), *Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal* (pp. 36-50). Norderstedt: Books on Demand.

Peeren, E. (2014). *The Spectral Metaphor*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Potolsky, M. (2006). *Mimesis: The New Critical Idiom*. New York and London: Routledge.

Rahman, M., & Jackson, S. (2010). *Gender & Sexuality: Sociological Approaches*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Rancière, J. (2006). Problems and Transformations in Critical Art (2004). In C. Bishop (Ed.), *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 83-92). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Rancière, J. (2009). *The Emancipated Spectator*. London and New York: Verso.

Rao, R. (2020). *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality*. Oxford University Press.

Rhall, S. (2018). Home ground advantage: Artwork as autobiographical stories of multiple indigenous selves in colonised spaces and histories. *Thesis Eleven*, 145:1, 99-110.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. *Signs*, 5:4, 631-660.

Rocamora, A., & Smelik, A. (2016). *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*. London/New York: L.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Rosenberg, R. D. (2021). Negotiating racialised (un)belonging: Black LGBTQ resistance in Toronto's gay village. *Urban Studies*, 58:7, 1397-1413.

Rousseau, J. (2022). *Ghosts and Hells: The underworld in Asian art* [Exhibition]. Tainan Art Museum, Tainan, Taipei.
<https://www.tnam.museum/exhibition/detail/332>

Russell, L. (2021, August 27). *Black/Queer/Abstract: A convening on the occasion of Julie Mehretu | Part 2 of 4* [Video]. Retrieved May 4th, 2022, from Whitney Museum of American Art: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHum3C3U2Xs>

Sahib, P. (2016). To Make Queer Art Now. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 194-195). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Seidman, S. (1996). *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Cambridge/Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Shallcross, N. (2016, June). *Singapore's Pulau Hantu*. Retrieved April 2022, from X-Ray Mag: <https://xray-mag.com/content/singapores-pulau-hantu>

Smith, J. (2016). Statements, Ravings and Epigrams. In D. J. Getsy (Ed.), *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art* (pp. 29-31). London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

Smith, O. (2002). Avant-gardism and the Fluxus Project. *Performance Research*, 7(3), 3-12.

Smith, R. (2019). The Map Where We Meet and Other Queer-Square Stories: An Essay-as-Performance Set to a Double-Bass Score. In A. Ghaziani, & M. Brim (Eds.), *Imagining Queer Methods* (pp. 207-229). New York: New York University Press.

Taussig, M. (1993). *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tawadros, G. (2000). Studies in a Post-colonial Body. In P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg, & A. McRobbie (Eds.), *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall* (pp. 358-363). London and New York: Verso.

Turner, F. (2006). *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago and London: The Chicago Press.

Turner, V. (1982). *From Ritual To Theatre*. New York: PAJ Publications.

Vuong, O. (2020, December 21). *All The Ways To Be with Bryan Washington & Ocean Vuong* [Audio Podcast]. (The A24 Podcast, Interviewer)

Walker, L. (2001). *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Warner, M. (2000). *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Wilton, T. (1995). *Immortal Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*. London and New York: Routledge.

Youngblood, G. (1970). *Expanded Cinema*. Toronto, Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited.

Zahavi, D. (2014). *Self & Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 14: Pulau Hantu – Exhibition Poster	2
Figure 15: Photo documentation of Pulau Hantu	6
Figure 16: Photo documentation of Pulau Hantu	17
Figure 17: Spectators blocking the visuals with their shadow	25
Figure 18: A watery sequence within The Islets	32
Figure 19: ‘Evolving Eye’ within The Islets	33
Figure 20: ‘Ascending Angel’ blending into ‘Evolving Eye’ within The Islets	34
Figure 21: A watery sequence within The Islets	35
Figure 22: Stages of Becoming	40
Figure 23: Distance sensor in the exhibition of Pulau Hantu	41
Figure 24: A sequence of images from when Lagoon was triggered by a spectator ..	42
Figure 25: Distortion in Lagoon	43
Figure 26: A snippet of The Islets	46