

Practicing the university differently:

A creative and critical autoethnographic response from within the neoliberal university

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a creative and critical autoethnographic study of the contemporary neoliberal university. It draws on the arts-based methods of writing, poetry and photography to interrogate, reconceptualise and disrupt traditional university practices. With the understanding that the contemporary university exists within a neoliberalised system of marketized and privatised education, and that this system informs how knowledge is known, organised and legitimised, it becomes increasingly important to ask questions surrounding *who* and *what* the university is for, and what its future will, or could, look like. Born out of a frustration towards neoliberal rationality and the institutional perpetuation of hegemonic knowledge, this thesis aims to offer alternative ways of being, thinking and knowing from a convergent space within and against the university. Utilising an arts-based autoethnographic methodology and feminist post-structuralist theory, I was able to explore and collapse the physical, philosophical, political and personal spaces of the university in order to blur the boundaries between these spaces, whilst opening up possibilities for knowing and challenging conventional ways of researching.

The thesis is reconceptualised into an exhibition, its chapters become rooms, photographs interrupt words, and poems emerge from reconceptualising and re-imagining. It is written from an embodied self, a self that is vulnerable, honest and convoluted. It resists box ticking whilst ticking boxes. It's challenge is to practice the university differently whilst being enmeshed in the university's practice. This thesis invites the reader to see and think differently, to place the status quo into question, and to draw on our individual and collective imagination with the hope of opening the world.

## **Acknowledgements**

To acknowledge what has made it possible for me to get here would take up far too much time and ontological waffle (which I have done enough of), so instead I will try to be brief, just know that I am deeply grateful for the privilege of which I am afforded to relentlessly explore, learn and open my brain without fear of persecution or judgement.

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**Dear Reader,**

I write this as I near the end of my thesis, whilst you are just at the beginning. Temporality is important here; we can never exist out of time – we are in and of time, an embodied experience. Wherle (2019) observes that “because we are never merely objects, but simultaneously living subjects – sensing, moving and experiencing – our materiality makes us open and vulnerable to the world” (p. 2).

Vulnerability is something that I will touch on later, but first I feel compelled to acknowledge the moment in time that I am writing through and amongst. It is June of 2020 and this year has held an immense profundity; it has been a boiling point from many angles. Beginning with the catastrophic bushfires that ravaged so-called Australia<sup>1</sup>, which bled into a global pandemic that continues to decimate livelihoods, economies, and futures, which bled into the current global uprising against racial discrimination and police brutality. This rolling boil of crises has thrust our systems, institutions, beliefs, and values to the very core of our attention, they have asked us to rethink and interrogate what we thought we knew and pull on knowledges we have long silenced or ignored. It seems that the futile band-aid of neoliberalist and White supremacist thought has begun to unravel, whilst long-deemed alternative knowledges are finally gaining their overdue legitimacy. During the bushfires, it became *exceedingly* clear that Indigenous knowledge of cultural burning practices must have a place at the table to avoid the destruction that the government’s inadequate and ill-prepared measures provoked. During the global pandemic it became *exceedingly* clear that community and bodily knowledge of care, support, slowness, and sustainability must become our new foundations as it exposed our institution’s neoliberal accelerationist rationale and their annihilation of our welfare system as not fit for the task. During the uprising of the Black lives matter movement it is becoming *exceedingly* clear that the knowledges, stories, histories, voices, and plights of marginalised people across the globe must be platformed, prioritised, and valued as the White supremacist fortress that has been built to house the Whiteness project is not only deadly, but rotting from the inside out. This rolling boil of crises is not new, but we have found ourselves at a juncture where these ‘alternative’ knowledges can no longer be seen as superfluous, but in fact, acutely essential to our collective futures.

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<sup>1</sup> I predominantly use footnotes to reference, but here I would like to clarify that Australia exists as a colonial label for a land mass that was stolen.

The essence of my thesis is to practice and know the university and knowledge differently. In order to discontinue the perpetuation of injustices upon both people and land, we are forced to discontinue the dominant ideologies that allow them to perpetuate. We are forced to think outside of what we know. We are forced to draw upon our imagination. When we begin to look at things creatively, and critically, we are able to begin the freeing process of reconceptualising the institutional structures that surround and enclose us. This is the root of why I began this thesis, and why I am choosing to begin your journey here. You may have gathered that I am interested in knowledge, and you're not wrong. I began this thesis thinking about why some people feel intuitively entitled to and welcomed by the academic experience, whereas others perceive it as a potential battleground. A battle to be heard, seen, mirrored, and engaged on a level that is relevant to and respectful of their personal and epistemic experience. This was a sentiment expressed to me by some of the most intelligent and critically engaged people I know and has been the underlying motivation for this research. I came to this thesis wanting to explore the space that the university occupies within my own philosophical, physical, political, and personal spheres. I wanted to explore the conceptual university – the idea of it, as well as the specific university that I write amongst – the University of Auckland<sup>2</sup>. I endeavoured to begin to understand how the university values knowledge in order to reconceptualise my own knowledge value system. I wanted to undertake this exploration in a way that felt authentic and uncompromised, whilst acknowledging the slipperiness and problematic nature of these intentions. The tension of this undertaking lies present throughout this thesis; the tension of being within and against the institution (Lather, 1991), the tension of trying to practice the university differently whilst being enmeshed in the university's practice. I feel obliged to let you know that I do not reach a finite point with this ontological tension, it doesn't wane, nor does it resolve itself, so please bear with me as I grapple, wrestle, and tussle with it through this writing. Maybe, whilst we're both here thinking about finiteness, I should also let you know, that that is not what I'm working towards in any sense. This idea of a concrete, finite, predictable outcome is one that is bound to neoliberal, colonial and patriarchal constructs (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellsworth, 2005; Gibbons, 2018; Mountz et al., 2015). As Harre et al. (2017) write "these finite games often serve to distract us from all that initially attracted us to the academy as a place of radical possibility" (p. 8). Not only this, if we claim to *know* as a be-all and end-all, this positionality prevents and undermines the process of knowledge being an ongoing and

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<sup>2</sup> Across my writing, I will interchange between using the title of the University of Auckland with the acronym: UoA.

endless venture. So, as I move through this thesis, I embrace the space of not knowing, and I ask that you do this as well. Once we have both given up on the idea that this work will at some point be *complete*, we can “break open the space for imaginative and creative engagement, which also opens the precarious and dangerous possibility of encountering the unknown” (Magrini, 2016, p. 171).

My research asks the question:

How can the concepts of the university and knowledge be reconceptualised through the use of creative thinking and artistic practice?

I begin this active and reflexive process here, at the outset, by reconceptualising the idea of a thesis into an exhibition. Into a body of work made up of different parts, a body of work that is holistic, interrelated, and cyclical. Imagine this letter being the exhibition text, a flimsy piece of paper that you carry as you walk through each room. A piece of paper that ends up folded in your wallet for months until you rediscover it and remember what the exhibition gave you. Imagine that each part of this thesis is a different room of the exhibition, that only because it is being presented as a whole are you walking through each room in the order that you are. If it was a physical space, the parts could be interrupted by a different pathway, a different route. As you visit each room – a brief introduction, a deconstructed methodology, a playful literature review, the bulk of the content, and a closing room towards the exit – there will be traces of other rooms that hint towards its wholeness; themes, photographs, theories, tensions. The parts do not exist as traditional chapters with a beginning and end, they feed into and rest on each other. The reconceptualisation begins here; a different way of knowing, a different way of being in the university, of contributing to the university, of practicing and producing knowledge.

*You are now entering the first room of this exhibition. This room contains the steppingstones of an introduction. A brief overview, a brief summary of my motivation, a brief detailing of the aims of the work, and a proposition for the viewer. This passage contains autoethnographic writing and personal-political views.*

## Room 1: A letter of introduction

### Situation

My research question was born from wanting to explore the way the university systemically produces and values knowledge, it has morphed and grown into an exploration of the spaces the university holds and how these impact what knowledge we deem acceptable and worthwhile, on both a personal and societal level. I have used a creative arts-based research approach to pursue my exploration, as it allows me to draw on alternative modalities and seat myself within a practice-based process. Part of this practice was to amplify the university, to subvert its perceived mundanity towards something strange through the heightening of my awareness, and my engagement. I subscribed to a daily notification that compiled every digital news article that contained the words *University of Auckland* across the internet. My inbox flooded each morning at 10 am on the dot. I walked two of the six UoA campuses for hours on end, watching, listening, photographing, touching, note-taking. Feeling the differences between the intensity of the City Campus<sup>3</sup>; bright lights, glass, steel – all busyness, all business... Compared to the slowness of the Epsom Campus<sup>4</sup>; green, spacious, unkempt, slightly forgotten, but warm. My senses heightened, the residue of stimulation lingering for hours, sometimes days. I collected the university's marketing materials and brought them into my home, inundating my workspace. Waking up and sleeping with the university in my mind and in my room. These acts were immersive, they placed me *in* the research. They were the platforms in which my content was created; they informed the poetry, writings, and photographs that make up the body of this work. They blurred the boundaries between me and the university and formed the critical tension between the subject and object of this research.

I entered the university system under what I saw as the widely accepted and understood notion that it was a place where knowledge is encouraged, challenged, furthered, and varied. Friere (1974) writes that the notion of conscientisation is a probing of the ambience of reality – that the more a person conscientises themselves, the more they unveil their reality. It wasn't until I entered my own process of conscientisation, with regards to the neoliberal and capitalist constructs my world lived within, that I

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<sup>3</sup> The main university campus which is located in Central Auckland; it currently houses the Faculty of Science, Arts, Business, Engineering, Law, and Creative Arts and Industries.

<sup>4</sup> A satellite campus that was originally Auckland Teachers Training College, is now the home to the Faculty of Social Work and Education. This campus has been in a state of closure since 2016, with the faculty to be relocated to the City Campus by 2024.

realised there were very real institutional structures underpinning not only my ways of knowing hitherto but the ways of knowing that were being disseminated as acceptable by the university. As Coleman et al. (2012) acknowledge, “the university tends to acculturate and conscript different kinds of knowledge into their own existing categories for what can be known, how knowledge can be organised, and what forms of knowledge are credible and legitimate” (p. 142). This idea, in conjunction with an understanding that the contemporary university exists within a neoliberal system of marketized and privatised education (Ward, 2012), raises integral questions around how knowledge is constructed, controlled, silenced, and valued. These questions feel necessary, particularly as Hall and Tandon (2017) articulate that without questioning, interrogating, and analysis, we simply reinforce existing colonised (and therefore hegemonic) relations of knowledge power.

For me, this acculturation and neoliberalisation of knowledge catalyses a thought process regarding not only what knowledge is welcomed into the university, but consequentially what bodies are welcomed onto its campus. I agree with Shamash (2018) that the university acts as a gatekeeper to our modern western world, to positions of power, and to social and political mobility. Generational privilege and social class impact heavily on why certain groups feel entitled to access university education. France and Roberts (2017) detail that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds “do not lack the knowledge of how to access higher education but recognise it as an exclusionary ‘social other’, they are cognisant of their exclusion from that place” (p. 54). For as long as our worlds are rooted with the neoliberalist mindset that the responsibility is on the individualised subject, this gate will continue to be *kept*. If certain bodies – bodies as bodies, as well as bodies of knowledge – aren’t able to posit themselves safely and comfortably within the university discourse, then won’t universities continue to perpetuate cyclic power structures that prevent change driven from varied and diverse perspectives?

The aim that underlies this project is to understand how the application of creative practices might expose and uncover dominant modes of knowing in the university whilst aiding the move towards an empathy for new ways of knowing, seeing, and being. In this research, I aim to explore the possibility of connecting three ideas; creativity, the university, and knowledge. I employ creative practices and thinking, critical autoethnography, and arts-based methods to (theoretically) unsettle the way

universities construct, silence, control, and value knowledge. For me, creative practice is about persistently questioning what is accepted, turning ideas on their heads, and approaching them from new perspectives. It is rooted in the imagination and it holds space for the unknown.

I want you to hold on to the tenets of knowing, openness, tension, and being embodied as you read, feel, and experience this process. It is the creative thinking and artistic practice I enact throughout this thesis that I want to alert you to; to provide you with a warning I suppose. A preface that I hope you will remember by the time you reach the end of this writing. There are some unconventional aspects to the way I have presented my research and as you continue to engage you will notice that I have resisted the formalised, chapter by chapter, traditional presentational style of thesis writing. Instead, I have experimented with structure, formatting, and space, as well as using photographs alongside poems and writing. I switch between different writing styles and break into poetry without forewarning. I allow words to breathe, to pause, to fall into one another. I use photography as another form of poetry and as another way to know. A caution that you will be asked to pull on your own visual language as these photographs are neither labelled nor explained. At moments I write from my heart, at others, from my mind, but always, I write with my body. These compositional gestures were not done unconsciously. These gestures were born out of the deep conversations I had with my theoretical collaborators; the feminist post-structuralists, the creative analysts, the critical autoethnographers. These deconstructive textual and visual practices disrupt traditional and hegemonic academic discourse in order to break free from the binaries of emotional/rational, personal/theoretical, social/individual (Gannon, 2006). This experimental playfulness throughout my thesis allowed me to access avenues for different ways of knowing whilst encouraging me to stay open, stay messy, and stay critical. I hope you see the value in these values too.



*You are now entering the next room of this exhibition. This room contains themes of post-structuralism, feminism, and critical autoethnography. Moments of poetic play are present. A room to dwell on methodological dilemmas and ontological mysteries.*

## **Room 2: From here I delve – towards my methodology**

The refrain of my research question sits both statically and tumultuously in my mind;

How can the university and knowledge be conceptualised through creative thinking and artistic practice?

I read it back and forth and I try to understand who the person that wrote that question is, what they believe, how they think it could be answered. I think about the convoluted nature of all four of those ideas. The university, knowledge, creative thinking, artistic practice. What are they and who am I?

I am all of them and none of them simultaneously. Thinking about the notion of a methodology has thrown me against ideological walls. An archaeological dig into my why and how. I have Patricia

Leavy's (2017) research design book in front of me with post-it notes, attempting to be colour coordinated, poking out and staring at me with accusations. Maybe it is a good place to start. But then I read Elizabeth St. Pierre's (2018) writing on post qualitative inquiry and I question whether or not that was really a good idea so early in the game; she emboldens my tendency to problematise, question, and interrogate. She reiterates aspects of a conversation I'd had with my supervisors a week prior almost verbatim; what constitutes research, what generates content, what philosophical values can translate to methodological values, what compromises these, what counts.

I wonder if I really have a choice to apply anything but a critical arts-based paradigm to this body of research. It's in my bones. It's here and now in the way that I have discovered to write. It's in the way I move through the world, regardless of whether or not I'm engaged with the academy. It seems to be ultimately congruent to the way I approach the world, so befitting that when I began to conceptualise what I would do for this thesis, I was already undertaking arts-based work through my politically grounded questioning of dominant knowledges (Finley, 2012). Elliot Eisner (1997) suggests that "alternative forms of data representation can provide what might be called productive ambiguity...the material presented is more evocative than denotive, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity" (p. 8). My pursuit of alternative modalities has been less a path chosen than one that is inherent in my being;

Family and bodily histories

Interwoven with alterity

Alterity as straying from homogeneity – unchosen

Made up of fabrics

That speak to queerness / mental illness / addiction / incarceration / sexual assault

A fabric of empathy, of seeking difference

Of seeking sensitivity

Of nuance

A fabric that wraps me

And tells me that alterity is beautiful

So, I agree with Eisner, my life has been made up of alternative data representation, just as all of ours are, and by virtue of this, we swing and hang in a space of productive ambiguity. This ideation complicates, questions, and encourages a certain way of being, thinking, writing. When things are

turned on their heads and no longer appear as you thought they would, it becomes innate in the way you know that there is a multiplicity of ways to seeing the world. Leavy (2017) asks me to interrogate what I believe – she tells me that this will guide my research practice. What I believe. What is the nature of the social world? What can be known about social life? How should my research proceed? Who can be a knower? What kind of knowledge do I value? How have I come to know? Big questions! I exclaim to myself. I meander through my thoughts and wonder if explaining my ontological and epistemological standpoint is synonymous with the uncovering and demystifying of my very being. I suppose my experience of being proximate to (or enmeshed within) the facets of my life I have put in writing above has led me to question the way in which I see the world; an ongoing, reflexive, continuously in flux, a perpetual state of learning and unlearning. If I allow this juncture to be an apt description of my positionality, then my methodology must adhere to these notions of multiplicity. Bruce (2019) suggests that if reality is multiple, then there should be “multiple ways of representing reality/ies, and that different forms of representation allow for different forms of knowing (or coming-to-know) about research” (p. 4). Instinctually, this sits in my gut quite comfortably. It aligns with my ideas for what follows from here; my theoretical disposition, my proposed process of generating content, my way of moving through this methodology. A methodology that daunts me – it feels like both a commitment and an obligation. I hope you remember what I said about finiteness at the beginning of this writing.

### **The choice of a theory (I chose feminist post-structuralism)**

The questioning of the university and knowledge within this thesis is situated in a feminist post-structural framework. Becky Ropers-Huilman (2001) identifies that these theoretical bodies of thought actively wrestle with concepts related to power, knowledge, and difference; concepts that are the fundamental underlying drivers of this research process. What draws me to feminist post-structuralism is its worrying and wondering of language, rationality, truth, and resistance (St. Pierre, 2000) and the path that these sentiments carve towards a study of what it means to know, what the space is beyond knowing, and the permission to sit in a shifting contradiction (Richardson, 2001). I feel as though I'm already filling in, and existing out of, a contradictory expanse in that whilst trying to conceptualise and mentally re-describe the university and knowledge, I sit as a student, enrolled in a master's degree,

using the tools and guiding structures to approach this task. St. Pierre (1997) articulates this grappling by identifying that although we are employing tools as we simultaneously put them under erasure, we can think about them differently, by employing different devices. I'm also comforted by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1974) sentiment and cautioning that we are obliged to work with the "resources of the old language, the language we already possess, and which possesses us. To make a new word is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believing it solved" (p. xv). Furthered by Sara Ahmed (2012), who writes "to proceed as if the categories do not matter because they should not matter would be to fail to show how the categories continue to ground social existence" (p. 182). I understand that I cannot rewrite the university's practice, but by practicing the university differently, I'm able to see and understand the university with an alternate lens, a lens that opens up a multiplicitous practice.

Part of me wonders whether there is a weakness of pursuing this research with a feminist post-structural lens; I already have a fondness for plurality, a penchant for boundlessness and can digress easily by allowing the state of flux that both myself and my words are situated amongst to take precedent – floating, floating off into an ether. My feminist post-structural friends encourage me to stray, to problematise, to deconstruct – but sometimes I don't know where to stop. But this dismantling feels pertinent, it would feel like a betrayal to my gut if I followed marked posts and delivered it all on a bound-up platter. So, there becomes a stickiness, a stickiness of pursuit. A stickiness that lies in the duplicitous space of attempting to disentangle myself from the binaries of the university's traditions, whilst simultaneously adhering to the ones I can't dismantle; marking schemas, word limits, deadlines, academic expectations. It becomes a process of both empowering and exploiting myself. A pendulous activity. But post-structuralism permits this, pushes for this, actively encourages this – Richardson (2001) writes that by "understanding languages as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and of organising the world, it makes language a site of exploration and struggle" (p. 8). The pendulum continues.

Weaving through what this process has become for me, I understand that my subjective lens is something I can't seem to do away with, leaving me to embrace a notion I would've gawked at months ago, a notion that pushes me under the umbrella of feminist, post-structural critical autoethnography.

As much as these words were unfamiliar to me many months ago, they remain unfamiliar now; I don't think I'll ever know them, but I will persistently try them on, feel them out, and get comfortable in the parts that fit. What implodes this process is the sense that each of these terms seem to come in an array of variable sizes, which leaves the process of finding the outfit in which I am to proceed feeling almost chaotic and impossible. St. Pierre (2000) expresses the echoed sentiment of many writers in that trying to fix terms such as feminist and post-structuralism to their 'meanings' invokes a certain exhaustion due to the proliferation of their referents and their inherently contested nature.

### **Critical / Autoethnography**

The permission of feminist post-structuralism to ponder, wonder, wander, worry, and get lost (Lather, 2007), aligns neatly with autoethnographic values of eschewing from rigid and binary understandings of what research and knowing looks like (Ellis et al., 2011) and compliments my current research predicament. I embarked upon this research process with the expectation that I would carry out a reasonably traditional social-research project surrounding the concepts of the university and knowledge. I anticipated that I would be straying from positivist values by utilising arts-based methods, but I had thought that my methodology would consist of simple to follow methods and consequently, status quo data generation and analysis. Instead, my innate pondering, wondering, wandering, worrying, getting lost and overall eschewal have led me to a sort of twisting in and around myself when it comes to understanding how to conceptualise what both the university and knowledge are, whilst simultaneously being directly entangled amongst them. The double conundrum of studying and researching a phenomenon whilst sitting within it has induced the impulse to research the nature of research, and in specific specifics, my research process, which has led me to right into the palm of autoethnographic rationale. Rather than approaching concepts of the university and knowledge through a macro lens, I have found myself approaching them from my micro standpoint as a student of the university, and a supposed *producer* of knowledge. Ellis et al. (2011) articulate that autoethnography "seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (p. 1). This feels relative to my sense that before having any handle on what it would look like for the university to genuinely embrace diverse knowledge systems, I first have to undergo the process of reflexively embodying that state of mind

myself whilst I conduct this research. Autoethnography provides me with a framework that values both subjectivity and emotionality whilst allowing me to critically acknowledge that these will influence the way in which I research (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011) – a notion that is antithetical to the supposedly objective lens that scientific research is produced from (Finley, 2012; Pink, 2007; Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Shapiro, 1999).

From researching autoethnography, I felt tentative and cautious about falling into a space of self-indulgent navel-gazing (Chang, 2008; Winkler, 2018); I don't innately feel that my experience is (or should be worthy of being) the sole informant of a larger cultural experience. Maybe it's my belief that I don't exist in a vacuum, or the no longer dormant post-structuralist in me that persistently questions my own sense of knowledge (and therefore power), but it feels important to extend the nature of my research out to theory. Writing critical post-structural autoethnography encouraged me to let language, subjectivity, social organisation, and power (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) dispute with and contradict one another, whilst enabling my philosophical tendencies to be drawn in by post-structural ideas of the self and meaning, notions that continuously shift their worth (St. Pierre, 1997). Gannon (2006) reifies this sentiment for me, writing that "knowledge in post-structural autoethnography is sourced from our particular locations in particular bodies with particular feelings, flesh and thoughts that become possible in particular sociocultural-spatial contexts" (p. 476).

Theory and life twist around each other  
Moments of strangulation  
From one to the other  
A horizon line of blurred distinction  
Beginning and ending and beginning again  
What is it that I really believe, or know that I know?  
Theory informing perceptions, digestions, objections  
With life persistently getting in the way

I wrote this poem during and after reading Stacy Holman Jones' (2016) writing on what it means to be engaged as a critical autoethnographer. I am deeply interested in, informed by, and reactive to theory. I agree with Holman Jones that theory and the body are distinctly intertwined, this is bolstered by Zita (1998) – "the body is always in theory and is always deferred to... theory making is the labour of the body" (p. 204). Utilising theory as a destabiliser is key to the disruption of the subjects of this research

– myself, the university, and knowledge. Theory becomes both the armour and the weapon, a dance that is torn down to be rebuilt, again and again. As an art school graduate, a group of friends and I began a critical theory reading group and I have no doubt that the theories we devoured then, contribute hugely to the way in which I currently see the world today. Critical theory has informed my purchases, my politics, my relationships, my sexuality, my future desires, my sense of self, my reason for research; this sense is reiterated by Holman Jones' (2016) –

the “critical” in critical autoethnography reminds us that theory is not a body of knowledge—a given, static and autonomous set of ideas, objects, or practices. Instead, theorizing is an ongoing, movement-driven process that links the concrete and abstract, thinking and acting, aesthetics, and criticism. (p. 2)

When I was experiencing an immense period of grief and trauma after losing three important people in my life within weeks of each other, I read Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*. I'm reminded of Didion's (1979) notion that – “we tell ourselves stories in order to live” (p. 11), I realise Didion's words were not just a story to me in that time, they theorised my experience, they provided a line of thought that placed me within something that felt real – they weren't a reason in order to live, they told me that in fact, I was *alive*. This slippage between theory and life poses a reflexive process in which different knowledges can collaborate with one other, whilst simultaneously challenging preconceived notions and placing ideas of truth in a consistent state of flux. The “diversity, dynamism and complexity” (Holman Jones, 2018, p. 6) that is born out of critical autoethnography directly avoids the limited way that we usually experience ideas of what theory ‘is’ or ‘should be’.

In line with critical autoethnography's supposition that knowledges need to collaborate with one another, this can extend to the use of arts-based methods within a critical autoethnographic methodology. In the same way that theory is a language available to us in order to create stories (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011), arts-based methods are an aesthetic language available to us in order to elaborate on and make sense of these stories in a more full and embodied way. Using the arts-based methods of poetry, photography, and writing as modes of inquiry became a strategy to perform different voices throughout this research. These methods are the vehicles that allowed me to provide knowledges and expressions that would be impossible for me to access through pure autoethnographic writing. They encourage me to deepen my exploration of alternative representations

under the umbrella of autoethnography's challenge to canonical research. I think I could get quite beautifully lost swimming in these philosophical moments of pondering, but my word count, deadline, and marking schema won't quite allow it so here I delve again – to cover different, but necessary terrain.

### **Research as research**

Feminist post-structuralism and arts-based critical autoethnography provide the lenses through which my research will take place. Each holds space for imaginative play, creative questioning, and theoretical writing – for practice-based research – research as research as research as research. Critical autoethnography using arts-based practice. Writing, poetry, and photography as methods of inquiry. These vehicles for research not only value holistic and interdisciplinary ways of knowing, but they allow for a reflexive and textured interpretation and analysis of the process. As I hinted at previously, arts-based research not only feels innate in the way that I understand the world but feels directly congruous and applicable in understanding the driving components of this research project. Months ago, I started to try and wrap my head around what arts-based research meant within the academic arena and found that many of the tenets of this paradigm intrinsically aligned with my own. I found that there is a hesitance and resistance to embrace the White male bias that pervades theory and research (Gallagher, 2008); with this hesitance and resistance coming in the form of embracing an alternative value system. A value system that acknowledges preverbal ways of knowing (Leavy, 2018), includes and appreciates the benefits of interdisciplinarity (Barrett, 2010), and offers the opening up of spaces that see the worth in heuristic, personal, and embodied expressions of knowledge (Barrett, 2010; Gallagher, 2008; Leavy, 2018).

I suppose this value system has inadvertently informed my choice of methods – with writing, poetry, and photography responding to each facet. The convoluted nature of research as research as research as research aptly encapsulates the process in which I attempted to carry out this research project. I remember reading Slavoj Žižek's (2014) book on the event at age twenty-two. I was innocently enamoured by it, and retrospectively, I am slightly impressed. I remember his questioning of how it was possible to determine the exact beginning and end of something. I think about this now

in relation to the beginning and end of my research. How do I definitively pronounce that my research surrounding the university and knowledge will begin in this way, on this date, in this space, and then end in this way, on this date, in this space when I potentially began to undertake this project at age fourteen in the midst of chaos, or eighteen in the midst of upheaval, or twenty-two in the midst of trauma, or twenty-six when I started this masters. This is reinforced by a gentle statement that “this story has no beginning, but has always been, and I slip into it over and over again in different places, and it is as if I too have always been there” (St. Pierre, 1995, p. 115). For the sake of adherence, I’ll do my best to outline the process of my research, but due to the changing nature of –

Teetering on the edge of a sentence  
Wondering if I’m allowed to say what I feel  
What I feel as a stand-alone  
Without big literature and big names behind me  
Without them,  
With myself behind myself  
The extensions of myself  
Who owns words?  
Who owns ideas?  
I return to the feeling that I’m exploiting myself  
I wonder, why am I here?  
I message my partner  
And I say:  
-----  
But really,  
I’m in it,  
Just like I’m in this  
And really,  
I’ll tell you what I’m going to do  
Because I feel like I have to  
For the sake of a beginning and end.

### **A metaphor: methodology as exhibition**

For the sake of a beginning and end to my research, I reconceptualised this thesis making process using the idea of having an exhibition as a metaphor. Barrett (2010) encourages this metaphorical thinking by articulating that “the interplay of ideas from disparate areas of knowledge in creative arts

research creates conditions for the emergence of new analogies, metaphors, and models for understanding objects of enquiry” (p. 7). This *methodology as exhibition* metaphor allowed me to feel a sense of familiarity in order to digest the research journey I was about to embark on, it reoriented my experience by helping me to understand one thing in terms of another (St. Pierre, 1997). From my very short history of exhibiting, I understood that there are steps to the process; you come up with the idea, you explore how that idea is best executed using appropriate materials, and then you pull it all together for the viewer to experience, and generally, there is an accompanying text that elaborates on the concepts of the show. My idea lies in the reconceptualising of the university and knowledge, so my next task was to understand what materials I would use to flesh this reconceptualization out. Having the theoretical framework of feminist post-structuralism under one wing and arts-based research practice and critical autoethnography under the other, it was clear that there would be unconventional tenets as to how this process would develop.

Research as research as research as research. Researching the university, whilst researching my being in the university, whilst researching myself, whilst researching research. A meta-process requiring an interdisciplinary mode of practice, I am reminded of Langer’s (1951) words that interdisciplinarity would bring about more complex and imaginative ways of understanding the human experience. This reminds me of a multimedia art installation, with each material being relevant to a different aspect of the overall exhibition. In order to materialise the different aspects of the research, I had to dissect it into components. I processed and dissected it under the umbrellas of political, physical, personal, and philosophical spheres. The researching of the university fits into the political sphere, one in which I used writing as a method of inquiry to navigate. The researching of my being in the university fits into the physical sphere, one in which I used photography as a method of inquiry to mediate. The researching of myself fits into the personal sphere, one in which I used poetry as a method of inquiry to negotiate. The researching of research fits into the philosophical sphere, one in which this entire thesis is reconciling.

## Writing, always writing

Maybe it's as obvious as me being unable to stray from subjectivity, but writing has become integral to this research process. Not writing as a way to explain but writing as a way to explore. I wrote a poem about writing –

I didn't know I could write.

I was an average student at school

Apart from in the darkroom

I was never encouraged to try it a different way, from a different angle, from a different voice

and certainly not from my heart or head or gut.

I didn't know I could write.

I chased that more-than-average feeling

And went to art school

I didn't have to write so much there.

I wrote a few essays but still,

I didn't know I could write.

I wrote how I thought I was supposed to write.

I'll stick to taking pictures, I thought.

I didn't know I could write.

I didn't know I could write until I wrote a letter to two male friends of mine who had both sexually assaulted me on the same night.

I wrote the letter a year later than said night.

I didn't know I could write until I started writing.

I started writing from

my heart,

my head,

my gut,

my tears,

my anger,

my sadness,

my broken places,

my secret and sacred places.

I write now with tears.

I didn't know I could write until I realised

I hadn't known writing.

This poem speaks to the structural hierarchies of writing, to the canonical ways that we're told to be in the world, and to the notion of using personal narrative to understand cultural contexts. Writing is a way of knowing and a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). My approach to writing thus far has been to only begin writing once you have formed an 'idea', once you've mapped out your strategy of flow, and only ever when you knew what you wanted to say (Richardson, 2000). Writing autoethnographically allowed me the freedom to acknowledge bias, to move through states of critical reflexivity, and to question one's positionality whilst exploring research areas (Richardson, 2000). Writing as a method of inquiry fosters the process of coming to know, allowing space for transformation and transgression throughout whilst embracing the subjective and emotional modes of expression and acknowledge their legitimacy for knowledge (Ellis et al., 2011). Maxine Greene (1995) encapsulates this; "learning to write is a matter of learning to shatter the silences, of making meaning, of learning to learn" (p. 108).

My attraction towards this method of inquiry lies in its fluidity and openness, its inherent dynamism, and its willingness to question and problematise one's research (in my case, the university and knowledge) whilst putting myself under the same lens. These aspects feel pertinent as a White female student of the neoliberal university, they allow for the retention of agency and embodied sensibility, whilst also holding space for the in-between, the contradictory, and the tension of being within and against the academy (Brooks et al., 2018); of being both accepted and rejected by it. Although I am engaged with writing as a reflective and analytic practice across this entire thesis, I engaged with writing as part of a reflective journaling process during the five months in which I specifically aimed to generate content. I used the process of inquiring through writing as a way to both trouble and mediate my myriad of identities (Lather, 2013); as a researcher, a student, a woman, a subject, a maker, a feeler, and a thinker. I have used this method as a way to negotiate my experience of, and weave threads between, relevant literature, theory, current affairs, and public university materials. The structure of reflective journaling not only established a rhythmic process that was sustainable, but it allowed me to have an embodied and conscious real-time response to ideas and thoughts I otherwise wouldn't have known were there (Watt, 2007). The reflective journaling process also demonstrates a certain transparency and authenticity to my readers, the sustained journal process makes my "analytical events open to public introspection" (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). Richardson (2001) calls

this process *writing stories*, I am not bound to one label or another here, but what she adds to the method of reflective journaling with 'writing stories' is the idea that the texts become grounded in the contexts from which they are produced. The writing stories that I have generated acknowledge and situate themselves within my changing personal and sociocultural backdrops – I have pulled content from disparate places and allow these aspects to roll about together amongst the pages, evoking a reflexive and creative analytical practice (Richardson, 2001).

### **Poems and the imagination**

The idea of imagination is echoed throughout writer's works that resist the homogeneity of current educative practices (Hall & Tandon, 2017; hooks, 2009; Pillay et al., 2017; Ruth, 2018). Barnett (2015) suggests, at the very outset of his book, that his writing will allow the reader to look at the familiar aspects of the university in a different way, and that by applying this different angle to something that is generally quite static, it will induce "an infinite array of imaginative possibilities" (p.4). I suppose by that same token, the idea of imagination is not only the result of asking questions in different ways but in turn, it compels the learner towards the persistent question asking that breaks free from the status quo. This positionality feels synchronicous in its relevance to my overall inquiry into the university's hegemonic knowledge value system. By harnessing on to the mobility of the imagination, I'm able to explore the process of research in rich and creative ways as opposed to binding myself to fit into what (at first) seemed to be a rigid unmalleable box. As hooks (2009) describes, "when we are free to let our minds roam it is far more likely that our imaginations will provide the creative energy that will lead us to new thought and more engaging ways of knowing" (p. 62).

Imagination has a role to play throughout each of my methods and my overall research question, as at its very core, this research is about thinking about things in different ways, but the use of poetry felt deeply imaginative to me. It opened up an expanse where I could both feel and not feel, think and not think, know and not know, be in my body and be outside of my body, where I could sit in the space of liminality. I use poetic inquiry to explore the process of gathering, interpreting and reviewing theory and personal experience whilst simultaneously interrogating how poetry can provide a sense of voice

and agency as I move through this research. As Pillay et al. (2017) articulate, through these imaginative practices, there are “moments of freedom that open up spaces for entangled, embodied and creative performances rather than atomistic units of productivity” (p. 264). In a similar way to what Faulkner (2018) describes as a need to talk about (and to) identity, poetic inquiry, and in particular, found poetry, has allowed my research process to be an embodied, reflexive and authentic experience. In line with my hesitancy towards neoliberal mentalities, I do not feel the need to justify my feelings, identity, body, and experience as integral in this research, as Richardson (2001) writes, “no writing is untainted by human hands ... the old idea of a strict bifurcation between “objective” and “subjective” – between “head” and “heart” – does not map onto the actual practices through production of knowledge, or knowledge about how knowledge is produced” (p. 43).

Poetic inquiry as a critical method of analysis throughout my research has provided me with a vehicle to say the unsayable (Fitzpatrick, 2017a), to compile and to connect (Butler-Kisber, 2017), to critique and to play (Patrick, 2016), to rupture the notion of obedience (Gibbons, 2018; Pillay et al., 2017) in favour of meaning-making (Prendergast, 2006). Found poetry has thrust me toward the dynamacy of new insights (Butler-Kisber, 2017) and offers itself as both a disruptor and a synthesizer for intellectual and emotional thinking. I use found poetry in certain moments across this research as it provides the means to *perform* research; it gives voice to theory and allows for the entanglement between me and the literature. It is a playful and exploratory way to reorder, decontextualize, reconceptualise, and re-present research texts so that they become illustrative and investigative (Patrick, 2016). Poetic inquiry within this research allows an intertwinement of inside and outside, body and mind, head and heart, theory and life, academic and social, identity and identity crises – it became a vehicle for analysis, presentation, and representation (Stewart, 2018). I have weaved my responses to this research process through poetic playfulness with literature, theory, happenings, current affairs, and experience – challenging homogenous approaches to research discourse and strengthening both my own perception, and the research’s audience, as to how we legitimate knowledge (Patrick, 2016). Poetic inquiry aided me when I didn’t feel like I had a voice to write but I still wanted to share with my reader, it alleviated the pressure of consistently falling into academic writing and appeased my desire to approach this thesis with an embodied sensibility (Stewart, 2018).

## Pictures

Using photography as a method of inquiry ties into this notion of resisting traditional academic tropes as well as being able to invoke an embodiedness into my research. I have always thought of photography as a sort of visual poetry; particularly in the way that I choose to use film which allows for a slowness, a fracturing of time, a curiosity. I have been enamoured with taking pictures for the last fifteen years, it has become a part of me and a consistent way for me to navigate spaces, feelings, moments, joys, thoughts, and metaphors. As a creative researcher, I am grounded in the empirical world, and photography enables me to capture and posit these visual experiences, objects, and phenomenon's (Szto et al., 2005) amongst my research. In order to posit the photographs poetically and subtly, I have chosen to deliberately omit titles and consciously avoided traditional APA image formatting. This has been done explicitly so that the photographs embed themselves into the whole as a form of collaborative language.

At the outset of my research I committed to photographing each of my visits to the university campus and further along in the process, I committed to taking photographs of my research space whether it be in my bedroom or when I relocated to the Coromandel (more about that later). Space became important. The university campuses were particularly important, as not only did they bring to the fore many of the axiological notions I was grappling with, but the depth of their histories was palpable, tangible, visceral as I moved about their spaces. I would purposefully go to the City campus or the Epsom campus to specifically engage with the physical and sensorial aspects of those spaces and photograph in response to them. This use of photography was not so much employed as a medium in which I sought to objectively document and represent reality, it became a vehicle to share the way in which the visual forms part of my imagination, my reckonings, and my internal conversations (Pink, 2007). In line with the impetus for the use of poetic and written methods, photography is used to demonstrate a visual representation of self, a life that is inextricable to the wider context of my research (Pink, 2007). It opened up a philosophical conversation about space and physicality; it was a reconceptualization of the "visual as integral to other sensory modalities as we use not only our eyes but also our minds, bodies, genders, personalities and histories" (Scarles, 2010, p. 907). The physical spaces of the university have been a source of discomfort for my female body; they felt cold and

unwelcoming, but throughout this research process and particularly, the use of photography, they have acquired definition and meaning, and as Tuan (2001) describes, by the mere presence of my human being, I have imposed a schema on those spaces. By committing to using photography as a method of inquiry, I was able to “facilitate the articulation of ideas and build bridges between the conscious and the unconscious as knowledges were retrieved” (Scarles, 2010, p. 908).

### **Accumulated culminations – cyclical analysis and beyond**

An article I read discussed the idea of *hypomnemata*, which Foucault (1983) described as “a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation” (p. 246). I like the idea of this, and it feels fitting to think about the culmination of my writing stories, poetry, and photography all presented together as material memories. These different material memories provide a holistic, rounded, and interdisciplinary perspective on and of research; they each have “ways of revealing and evoking the character of the person who spoke them... they are not an end in themselves” (Smith, 1994, p. xxiii-xxiv, as cited in Denzin, 2006, p. 423). These composite processes encourage an analysing of tensions, metaphors, and flirtations between arts-based research and the university, and I feel confident that this emergent (and somewhat mysterious) process aligns with the values of interdisciplinarity and creativity; they are creating the conditions in which we are able to expand our understanding of the world in more complex and imaginative ways (Finley, 2012). These layers of simultaneous generation and analysis strengthen an enlivened back and forth dynamic between meaning and understanding; they open space for theory, creativity, and subjectivity to analyse and communicate with one another through recognising that there are multiple ways to approach the world (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). This sort of creative research defies hegemonic traditions in that these cyclic modes of collecting, inquiring, analysing, and generating are difficult to quantify and understand (Barrett, 2010) – a messiness that institutions (within neoliberal frameworks) are commonly averse to due to riskiness and unforeseen outcomes. A segue into –

## Challenges, ethics, slippages

When I initially thought about research ethics, I thought about traversing a landscape full of explosive landmines. It felt global, political, philosophical, infinite – as St. Pierre (1997) writes “ethics explodes anew in every circumstance, demands a resignification and hounds’ praxis unmercifully” (p.176).

When I thought about writing an ethics section for my University of Auckland thesis there was a part of my brain that signalled, a squirm in the pit of my stomach, my eyes started to stress. Signs of discomfort, an unease. If someone invited me to a talk about literally any topic and the panel was all White, and predominantly male, I would choose not to attend. Similarly, if my doctor allowed White supremacist and anti-trans rhetoric to be displayed in the waiting room of their practice, I would choose to not patron their service. If I chose to be proximate to these situations, the way I see it, I would be actively lending my social and financial capital to establishments and events that are complicit in the platforming of these causes, and by proxy, condoning them. I’m sure it is evident as to why I draw up this metaphor – here I am, enrolled in a university that fails continuously at condemning White supremacist behaviour, perpetuates colonial narratives, and thoroughly lacks at upholding an ethical standard to which its minority students are able to feel supported and valued by (The Spinoff, 2019), but – I remain enrolled, and I continue to contribute to its (and my) academic capital<sup>5</sup>.

To maintain my position as critical autoethnographer, then the politics of my positionality must be reflected upon (Andrew, 2017; Madison, 2011). How could I begin to problematise concepts of knowledge and power within the institution without acknowledging the flagrant benefits that I profit from by being actively engaged in its bounds? If I were my solely social self, or my solely philosophical self, or my solely political self, I would unblinkingly boycott the entire thing, but because I am not, and because I remain active within my enrolment, it’s crucial that I speak to the boundaries within which I work. I will gain a masters upon finishing this project, and by proxy of that title I will consequently gain a certain type of mobility that comes with having that on one’s résumé, the benefit of this research, I suppose. The *critical* in my position requires that I examine the individual power created for me within the context of this inquiry (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011). I am able to choose not to boycott the university because these White supremacist, anti-trans assaults do not place my cisgendered White body in any sort of precarious unsafety. It’s important to acknowledge and be

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<sup>5</sup> For further reading on academic capital, see Jessop, B. (2018). On academic capitalism. *Critical Policy Studies*, 12(1), 104-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2017.1403342>

accountable to the privilege that allows me to entertain the mental gymnastics that it takes for me to justify my being here, not so I can pat myself on the back for doing so but so I can continuously engage with a reflexive and critical practice.

To take up the role of an ethical researcher in an already conflicted position will force me to persistently reckon with my positionality, and my who, what, why, where, and how. As a critical autoethnographer I will engage with my consistent state of becoming, of plurality, and of contradictions, as I seek to apply these transitional lenses to the way in which I navigate and negotiate the tensions of researching research as research as research. The nature of autoethnographic research is both emergent and dynamic with sometimes unforeseen outcomes which makes having a strict ethical methodology or protocol tricky to articulate (Andrew, 2017). The bounds of what space ones writing will inhabit seems to continually shift with autoethnography; this has already become evident in the work I have done so far – I begin to write about institutional expectations of academic writing and the next minute, I'm writing about my own experience of sexual assault. This constantly shifting space must be paid close attention to, not just to ensure academic obedience, but to understand and remain aware of the potential impact my writing may have on the characters that have been included in my stories, as well as the reader and my personal mental health.

In terms of my own autoethnographic ethic, or the taking up the mantle of an ethical researcher, I had to ensure that my awareness was heightened surrounding issues of pain, harm, intention, impact, and what feels most important, truth. The stories I weave throughout my thesis will undoubtedly include the characters of my life, whether it be people I intimately know – my family, ex-partner, friends, or the people that make up the more disconnected social fabric of my local context. The implication of others is almost inevitable when writing autoethnographic stories (Andrew, 2017; Ellis, 2007; Tamas, 2016) but to write responsibly, ethically, accountably, it was important that I proceeded with a consciousness of their presence (Andrew, 2017) and with a continuous pursuit of how to negotiate what it means for me to not only tell a 'truthful story' by my account (Ellis, 2007) but to tell a story that is sensitive and aware of the needs of those included in my story (Andrew, 2017; Ellis, 2007).

Stephen Andrew (2017) became my newfound friend; he has not only conducted a review of the literature written on the ethics of autoethnography, but he has suggested a way to work through the ethical dilemmas of this approach to research. Firstly, I must use what he calls *ethical eyes*, a comprehensive run-through of my writing that focuses on understanding multifarious ethical perspectives. He suggests I ask questions such as:

- Does anything in the text leap out as being potentially harmful to others, or myself, if published?
- Was I venting, boasting, scoring points, maliciously undermining, or attacking people or organisations named in the text?
- What is my gut response if I imagine this piece of writing being read by the people mentioned in my writing? (Andrew, 2017, p. 53)

Following this scanning with ethical eyes, I was able to identify the parts of my writing which felt problematic or ethically contentious. I then assessed the writing in accordance with what Andrew (2017) identifies as an *exposure grid* which “looks for individuals and groups who have been identified and criticised or intimately exposed in the text” (p. 53). This allowed me to understand those that have become a part of my writing that may be affected in some way by what I have written – by categorising these people into groups of recognition (Andrew suggests known by name, known by connection and unknowable), I will be able to decipher how to proceed ethically. This is the *ideas and duties grid* that will force me to reckon with ethical actions. Andrew (2017) suggests that I strike a balance; a balance between my values, the values of my research, and the wellbeing of anyone mentioned in my stories (p. 54).

After reviewing and speaking to my supervisors it was decided that I omit, anonymise, modify, or unalter certain passages in question. I have chosen to blur certain stories to ensure that the specificities of who, what, where are unintelligible. There are other stories and poems that I have chosen to omit entirely, as I wasn't confident that they would retain their resonance and credibility after reworking them. I have spoken to the people who are easily recognised within the text and talked through my process with them, reaching a place that felt balanced and ethical. I ensured that the only

figure in the photographs I have selected is myself, as to not breach anyone's privacy concerns. I have anonymised characters in public news articles because the research value lies in the sentiment, not in their names. I have been vulnerable in parts of my writing, and interrogated whether or not the discomfort was necessary; I had to make decisions on a story-by-story basis as to whether this openness and exposure was productively contributing to a larger conversation.

It is long understood that harmonious objectivity surrounding standards of ethical conduct are hard to come by (Ellis, 2007), and finding a catch-all, accident-proof solution for a holistic ethic is nearly impossible, so by no means was I going to breeze through this process without making mistakes, most likely providing my future self with regrets, and potentially writing about others in ways they may not write about themselves. But! I can be guided towards an autoethnographic ethic by those who have been trying and making mistakes for much longer than I have. Andrew provided me with a brilliant framework for me to iteratively analyse my writing in a practical and measured way, but additionally, there are many philosophical and theoretical facets to ethics that I must also harness. Carolyn Ellis' (2007) words of advice in a conversational piece stick out at me: I have to be accountable to what I write whilst also assuming that everyone I write about will read my writing. Andrew (2017) suggests that I carry a critical reflexivity with me everywhere I go, Ellis (2007) reminds me that often personal experience narrows vision, whilst Sojot (2018) adds that neoliberal ideologies can sometimes impede educational imagination with regards to risk-taking and uncertainty. These sentiments encouraged me to be critically reflexive about whether it was my subjective bias or institutional rationalism that determined my ethical decisions.

Everything I've read tells me that I can't uphold my role of critical autoethnographer without scrutinising (and making transparent) the biases, belief systems, and contradictions that inform what I write. Tamas (2016) suggests that none of us would have been born if we based our ethics on an aversion to what hurts – I really love this one, not because I want to hurt people but I take it on board to mean that discomfort is propelling and dynamic. By engaging with this sense of discomfort, I was able to reveal and make more explicit how I come to research; and to practice this reflexivity of discomfort, I had to recognise that “reflexivity is inextricably linked to power and privilege that cannot be erased” (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010, p. 354). Luckily, I had my supervisors to be my real life, real-

time ethical soundboards – to ensure I stop, share, and be sensitive in the necessary places. Andrew (2017) writes that

what we do ethically is an extension of our essential self. Who that self is can only begin to be understood via a process of continual inner exploration... this can be echoed in autoethnographic ethics via a focused attitude of care, founded on a high level of critical self-assessment and self-knowledge. (p. 33)

This notion of a tentative, contingent, transitional self is one I wish to embrace, the sort of sentiment that aligns with my desire to put a question mark on the end of every sentence in this thesis.

I open the book that Esther has suggested, I find the chapter titled Ethics

I see a quote

I re-read it over and over again

It floods my body

It is cliché and it is beautiful, and it travels me back in time

I feel the part of my throat that clenches just before I cry

I feel like I am in the ocean, content

Like a part of me is connected to a previous part of me

Like I am my whole self

A feeling of conviction presents itself

The teetering and the dipping and the foot out

Right now, it doesn't matter

Because I saw this quote five years ago in an exhibition

on the other side of the world

and I wrote it down

and I took it with me

and I remembered it

and it made me feel

And now I'm writing this research not knowing why I'm here or what I'm writing about or why I think I have the right to taking up this sort of space

But then I see my old friends, these words on paper

I feel contentment

And conviction.



*You are now entering the next room of this exhibition. It contains an untraditional literature review with poetic interjections, found poetry, and the occasional photograph. It contains themes of knowledge, neoliberalism, Aotearoa's university system, resistance, and the effect that the outside world has on the body.*

### Room 3: Research beginnings and an attempt at a literature review

I like to think I, amongst a greater we, research daily; I walk every morning and study my surroundings, I attend talks and attempt to digest the overflowing ways of knowing and being that are scattered throughout the room, I go to films, galleries, and plays to learn about ways of expressing oneself and telling stories, and I read books that make my brain fizz with the hope of different possibilities and ways of seeing the world. I speak and write and listen and think. But here, I am asked to review the literature and *prove* my capacity to research in the process, a shifting of gears. From where I sit at the beginning of this task, I'm unsure of how to thread and weave the way I think, through what seems to me, a structured and formulaic way of writing. I know that I have the capacity to review literature (play the game), but how much of myself do I have to shed in that process. Sometimes I resist looking too deeply at examples because I fear that if I do, my body will be stuck on a reference point that may hinder its creativity. I wanted to begin with my own voice because I'm worried it will be (or, I will be) entangled amongst the mesh of academic-speak and bound by its rules if I don't. I want to exercise the right to be me, even if it is here and now in this paragraph, because I think what I'm trying to understand about the university is how can it support and value the uniqueness of individual processes, lenses, and ways of knowing without subsuming the individual into homogenous outcomes.

From trying to retain a commitment to the tenets and possibilities of creative practice combined with a resistance to homogeneity, I have not presented a traditional literature review; I have used autoethnographic practice, narrative stories, found poetry, poetic inquiry, and continued to play with format. I wanted to retain my subjectivity, emotionality and engage with my bias and experience (Ellis et al., 2011) and attempt to "capture a number of different, and valuable, voices and theoretical perspectives through the crystallising and creative process of found poetry" (Prendergast, 2006, p. 372).

*I try to explain what a literature review is to my partner, and I fail.*

*I try to explain why I have to 'do' a literature review to my partner, and I fail.*

*I try to explain how I am going to write my literature review to my partner, and I fail.*

*I begin to wonder what importance a literature review has when really, my partner is packing up all of their things from the house that we share to ready themselves in moving overseas.*

*Instead of wondering, I return to the literature review.*

Maggie Maclure (2005) writes on the systematic review and suggests that there is a 'politic of clarity' in this sort of reviewing process. The politic of clarity regulates the "diversity of practices by less powerful communities by obliging them to render themselves intelligible according to terms set by the status quo" (p. 395). This resonates with what I'm trying to draw attention to – when we, as students, are asked to meet certain measures of credibility, I wonder what is being left behind, what other ways of exploring are being left unearthed, and what textured pathways of knowing are being severed in the process of meeting these measures. If the purpose of my thesis is to explore how the concept of the university and what knowledge is valued could be understood through creative thinking and artistic practice, these qualities and wonderings must be posited at the forefront of my exploration into the literature surrounding my topic.

I began to read copiously, familiarising myself with perspectives on the core constructs of my thesis. Lots of men writing about the university. I tried to dig deeper, lots of writing about the neoliberal university, the shifts began to emerge, lots of writing about resistance, mainly women, lots of writing about ways of knowing, a purposeful eschewal from the immobilised and static idea of 'knowledge'. I started to pick up on words, key words, words that connected my line of thought to that of the writer. Like a path of breadcrumbs that slowly began to make sense as I started to meet ideas that had felt like they had been plucked from my brain in amateur form and articulately and passionately elaborated on by people with *real* experience. My searching is not systematic, it feels serendipitous (Fitzpatrick, 2017) and messy. Luckily (for me), these heuristic characteristics are aligned with aspects of arts-based, post-structuralist, and feminist research, as well as tenets that lie within the resistance to neoliberal systems and their enforced ideals of risk management (Borgdorff, 2010; Chilton & Leavy, 2014; Lim, 2014; Maclure, 2005; Mountz et al., 2015; Ruth, 2018; Swanson et al., 2008).

I searched for any combination of the following words:

– university/higher education/tertiary education – neoliberalism – knowledge  
(democracy/value/systems/production/development) – new zealand – creative practice

I was overwhelmed.

I narrowed it down again – subject refinement;

– education – higher education – knowledge – neoliberalism – research – new zealand  
past five years, extended  
past ten years, something like that

This started to look quite good; I looked for women, I looked for people writing from indigenous perspectives, I looked for the 'big names', I started to read and began to become familiar, familiar, familiar, some names began to feel like old friends, some began to feel like friend crushes – the ones you're a little bit enamoured with and want to know more about.

I snap!

So deeply in the ocean of words

Closer to boxes, borders, boundaries

Forgetting who I am, what I want to do, why I am here

I whip my head back

Stare at myself in the mirror

Remembering the conversations, the shared resentment of the institution

Confusion and guilt

Remind me

Not to shed so much of myself

So, I began again, in another kind of way. I followed my instincts and allowed my mind to be met by an idea in an article, I followed their reference to the next article, and then the next. I found certain words being repeated – heuristic, intuitive, slow, emotional – I found articles across a range of different journals speaking to similar sentiments; expectations and disappointments of the contemporary university, the effects of neoliberalism not just on the university but on the body, democratising knowledge and questioning the ways in which we know, the notion of critical thinking and what this might look like under neoliberalism, and possible modes of action and resistance from within a system so robust. These become my themes and threads for moving through without getting stuck, without becoming untethered.

### **Expectations and disappointments of the contemporary university**

A common thread. Almost every piece of writing that I read engendered a relative reaction to what the university ought to be, has become, should be, originates from, encompasses, perpetrates, once was,

so on and so forth. I use the words 'expectations and disappointments' as they're implicitly imbued with emotionality – even those who write about the university from a less personal standpoint, morsels of vehemence and devotion can be detected. It seems that most people, whether they're situated inside or outside of the institution, and perhaps sometimes as both, as scholar outsiders; those who work on the academic margin (Kidman & Chu, 2017), have some semblance of a relationship with the university. Wherever you sit – inside, or outside, as much as there is an outside (Childers et al., 2019), there is an investment in the university, a social and public intimacy of sorts. As Melinda Reid (2019) articulates, "it's not until the neoliberal grime has accumulated that we begin to see the issues created by an education system set up to drive profits first, and knowledge second" (p. 9). It appears that there is a certain reckoning with the university that is echoing throughout Aotearoa, a coming to terms with the shifts and chasms caused by the neoliberalising of our climate over the last forty years, and of course, the continuous and ongoing, coming to terms with the deeper fissures of the university's colonial beginnings (Tuhiwai, 2012).

The shifts are outlined as phases, which is appropriate when you reconceptualise the neoliberalising of contexts as projects that are inclined to be rolled out, rather than organic practices that just naturally occur. Lerner and Le Heron (2005) articulated that there were three phases that propelled Aotearoa's universities into its current neoliberal identity. Phase one rolled out over the years of 1984 through to 1989, the smoother, potentially less aggressive phase of the three. At this time, universities claimed to be social justice-focussed democratic institutions, and the possibility of the sector being marketised remained largely out of the eye's line due to the supposed idea that they were a public good (Shore, 2015), and an openly accessed service to facilitate opportunities for students. The backdrop of a prolonged economic crisis (Roper, 2018) and a nation-state shifting towards marketisation of industry, combined with the Hawke Report of 1988 and the Education Amendment Act of 1989 legislating the student user-pays system (Rowe-Williams, 2018), Aotearoa universities were handheld by neoliberal advocates towards the beginning of a crucial shift in the conceptual underpinnings of what the sector could be. Or, more likely aligned with the profitably opportunist brain, what it could bring.

A neoliberalising project

Rolling out a new business system, a busyness system

Phase One, 1984 – 1989  
Two, 1989 – 1996  
Three, 1996 – 2008<sup>6</sup>

An evacuation of ideals and opportunities

An influx of managerialism, financialisation, competition, calculations, benchmarking<sup>7</sup>

Subtleties masquerading and

Penetrating practices

Until the practice is a bodily practice<sup>8</sup>

And the subtleties no longer masquerade

They police

Prevent, protect<sup>9</sup>.

From 1989 through to 1996, phase two was staged. The catalytic move towards EFTS-based funding; here lies the fertiliser for a change in climate that brought with it an economic mindset that was flooded with all of the words we don't blink at today. Outputs – efficiency – growth – review – market – competition – funding – cost-consciousness – audits – accountability – skills-based – benchmarking – global ranking – education economy. The EFTS based funding stipulated the competition amongst universities (and within universities, between faculties, academics, students) due to limited funding being distributed per the recruitment of full-time students; Shore (2015) states that the “rationale being that competition for students would necessarily increase efficiency” (p. 37). The residue of this ‘necessary efficiency’ in students reconfigured the student body as “economically rational responsabilised and self-interested subjects” (Shore, 2015, p. 34) who began to view tertiary education as a business that would provide a return on their personal investment. An investment resembling an asset, one that needed efficiency, productivity, and growth in order to succeed.

Increasing the value of students, not as critical, conscious beings, but as consumers, customers, exchange for resources<sup>10</sup>

Increasing the individualisation of faculties, academics, preventing the notion of interdisciplinary thought

Increasing financialised thought, as Lyotard aptly foresaw – not *is this true, but what use is it*

Increasing rigorism, data, financial data, measurement indicators<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Larner & Le Heron, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Shore, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Gibbons, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Kidman & Chu, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Shore, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Larner & Le Heron, 2005.

A climate of increasing – increasing requirements, increasing quantifiable outcomes, increasing skills-based learning<sup>12</sup>

If we increase calculable and comparative terms<sup>13</sup>

What do we decrease?

Phase three, from 1996 through to 2008. Introducing terms such as knowledge society, global knowledge economy, innovation, creativity, excellence, research, development, performativity. I will focus on the subsumption of creativity for a second as it interests me deeply and feels particularly relevant to this research. The commodification of creativity within neoliberalist discourse is well-rehearsed (Gormley, 2018), it has become a buzzword whose meaning is fluid and able to suit any ideological agenda (Clegg, 2008). The purposeful abstractness of the use of creativity allows it to sit within the education vernacular as an employable skill (Gormley, 2018); its sole focus becomes about problem solving within a deregulated market and entirely ignores alternative conceptualisations of creativity being rooted in imagination, resistance, and community (Kapur, 2011). The structural machine of neoliberalism learns its language, befriends its critics, and co-opts its competitors until it has subsumed and re-generated a contemporary equivalent to its predecessor. Raunig (2013) writes that the modulating university conditions itself on its adaptive capacity – it is precise in the way it commandeers characteristics of struggles in order to flexibly immunise and newly position itself. The same beast in a different outfit. As Larner and Le Heron (2005) write, “the calculative techniques of earlier periods are multiply reconstructed and re-deployed for new purposes, including not only the established goals of efficiency and accountability, but also more recent ambitions for collaboration and innovation” (p. 853). This reinvention creates an increasingly refined environment in which the university begins to exist, with the previous ten years providing a perfect cognitive steppingstone for students to innately posit themselves as consumers on the educational conveyor belt that aspires to skills, employability, commercial values, and a world of economic transformation. Social justice and activism have been replaced by entrepreneurship and innovation, blurred and ambiguous, students are told to focus on the choices they make rather than the actions they take (Lackéus, 2017).

Contribute towards a national agenda! Universities will deliver! This phase secured the universities positioning as a market; a market that required students to compete for placement as well as their future financial success (while incurring increasing financial debt), a market that pushed academics

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<sup>12</sup> Shore, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Larner & Le Heron, 2005.

and faculties to secure stability through increasing output – research, funding opportunities, self-improvement – (an irony that stability is acquired through daily chaos and insecurity), a market that placed its values in research and global ranking success, rather than retaining any semblance of its socially just and publicly minded focused beginnings (Shore, 2015).

Leaping forward in time

Across my desk there becomes a resounding desperation

For questions to be answered

Into the space opened by the loss

Beginning with Lerner and Le Heron<sup>14</sup> who aptly ask:

How will we avoid crass instrumentality and ensure that universities retain their role as critic and conscience?

Coleman et al.<sup>15</sup> distil important wonderings into

Can the university, can the humanities – beleaguered as they are in the corporate university of the twenty-first century – be places of and for different knowings?

If we continue to slip and slide into the funnel of the neoliberal agenda full of global and national desire, Hall and Tandon<sup>16</sup> deliberate

How do we support the opening up of spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects, and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic?

Mountz et al.<sup>17</sup> find space in the loss to look at slowness

Thinking

What if we were to follow Halberstam's<sup>18</sup> lead and

Celebrate failure?

And its companion in neoliberal times – slowness – as essential components of good scholarship?

Taveres<sup>19</sup> forces us to reckon with the question

Can education scholars move the public toward a more just society?

And just last year, Ruth<sup>20</sup> almost responds to Lerner and Le Heron's initial question with contemplation and awe

That there remains a slow death of the university as a centre of critique, a vital source of civic education and a crucial public good,

This establishing of the university as market

Leaves many wonderings and many disillusionments

Rowe-Williams<sup>21</sup> encapsulates the hopelessness

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<sup>14</sup> Lerner & Le Heron, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Coleman et al., 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Hall & Tandon, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Mountz et al., 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Halberstam, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Taveres, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Ruth, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Rowe Williams, 2018, p. 60.

Amongst the desperation

Amongst the loss

The bleak irony of a university proclaiming to be a world-class institution currently leading the field in a variety of different areas, espousing itself as producing top-ranking academics and alumni, whilst simultaneously taking steps towards disestablishing the very foundations that facilitate this process and enable this to occur.



### **Knowing knowledge**

It seems widely recognised that simply because universities are public institutions, does not mean that they are equitable, open, and neutral places of learning (Coleman et al., 2012; Gibbons, 2018; Hall & Tandon, 2017; Leach, 2016; Lim, 2014; Ruth, 2018). I stumbled upon a short but poignant piece of writing by Alan France (2018) on the University of Auckland's website; he draws on Kirsty Johnston's journalism of exposing the socio-economic discrepancies within the student bodies of six universities, and then those in the big-earning subjects (law, medicine, engineering) to illustrate how social class inequalities are perpetuated by our supposedly democratic education system (see France & Roberts, 2017). As far as the university has come in terms of curriculum, cultural consciousness, and attempting to expand accessibility, it is still deeply embedded in old colonial roots, and new neoliberal growth, that continues to exacerbate and determine what knowledge is valued, where it comes from, what epistemologies are prioritised, and who is allowed to participate, and on what terms

(Gibbons, 2018; Kidman & Chu, 2017; Leach, 2016; Lim, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2014; Rowe-Williams, 2018; Ruth, 2018; Stewart & Roberts, 2016; Stewart et al., 2017; Tuhiwai, 2012).

Following the phases outlined in the prior section, the government-controlled, market-oriented shifts laid a groundwork within the tertiary education system for encouraging certain types of knowledge that meet economic values, and certain types of students that aspire to these value systems. These reforms, although intended to widen participation through a gradual relaxation of entry requirements and credentialism (Strathdee, 2011), were undermined by the introduction of student and administration fees which were far more accessible and sustainable for students from more privileged backgrounds. Due to the funding incentives from governmental policies, the focus and value was towards getting bums on seats so that universities could expand provisions, rather than ensuring the long-term engagement of those students – in turn, those from less privileged backgrounds were less likely to complete their studies (Strathdee, 2011).

These policies combined with the notion that Stefani (2015) describes in that university-level education in Aotearoa is brazenly located in Pākehā pedagogical models and strategies, and that these are predicated within a colonial (and neoliberal) framework, creates a sturdy foundation for the perpetuation of the elite. This framework centres Whiteness, masculinity, a static narrative of health, and heteronormativity, whilst inherently dislocating those othered by the colonial mindset, and disregarding alternative ways of knowing and being. Brooks et al. (2018) write that the “majoritarian academy determines (in its own image and to its own advantage) what counts as knowledge, what counts as scholarship, and what mechanisms count as acceptable means of demonstrating expertise” (p. 132). Considering that the university is located within contemporary neoliberal frameworks, what counts as knowledge has slipped into what counts economically, McPhail (2016) probes into whether the marketplace itself is the determining factor as to how we include or exclude knowledge into our education systems – (I am beginning to feel nervous). The connection between power systems and knowledge is a relationship widely explored, but forever worth problematizing; as Swidler and Arditi (1994) assert, “it seems reasonable to believe that the authoritativeness of knowledge is grounded in patterns of social authority. To have authoritative knowledge is to have an institution, group, or person

which can settle disputes and establish truth” (p. 311). To understand how certain knowledge is valued as acceptable or useful, we have to understand the practices, power, and policies within our institutions that shape these ideas. Giroux (2014) suggests:

it is important to recognize how education and pedagogy are connected to and implicated in the production not only of specific agents, a particular view of the present and future, but also how knowledge, values, desires, and social relations are always implicated in power. Power and ideology permeate all aspects of education and become a valuable resource when critically engaged around issues that problematize the relationship between authority and freedom, ethics and knowledge, language and experience, reading texts differently, and exploring the dynamics of cultural power. (p. 496)

We have to understand the logic of the ‘rational’, and what that mentality does to the role of imagination within spaces of knowledge. Neoliberalist policies play an integral role in intensifying the logic of the rational and emerges as an “actuarial form of governance that promotes an actuarial rationality” (Peters, 2012, para. 13). If we question ideas of authoritative, institutionalised rationality, Lim (2014) suggests that we can begin to change our understandings of “who has a voice in public, rational debate, whose problems get heard, and who is capable of providing solutions to these problems” (p. 72). Under a post-structuralist lens, once we begin to problematise the idea of rational knowledge which reinforces an idea of normalcy, we can begin to look outside of those constrictions and start a process of knowing that is located in the radical imagination.

### *The Gulf*

There is a gap, a divide, a lacuna, a chasm  
I am face to face with this repetitious gulf  
The divide of the mind and body <sup>22</sup>  
The public and private  
The spirit and the expert  
Falsities, concepts surreptitiously implanted into our brains  
Another divide  
There are the popular, the lay, the plebeian, the peasant <sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Leach, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Hall & Tandon, 2017.

The indigenous

Knowledge

These are the non-knowers

Until!

Until the scorned upon local knowledge <sup>24</sup>

Buzzes and whirrs through the neoliberal machine

And comes out the other end of the institutions mind

As knowledge capital

In bright lights

And shiny 'partnerships'

Now it is all in the running

Towards (fill in answer here)

### **Bodies, bodies**

The hopelessness amongst the desperation amongst the loss. I look at synonyms for the word body and I find configuration, form, structure, build, appearance, design. In the same ways that the neoliberalising of our climate has shifted the university's configuration, form, structure, build, appearance, and design, so has it our bodies. We are reshaped, reformatted, reconfigured to adapt and adjust, to stretch, and to stress. Our lenses are tinted towards risk, responsibility, rationality. Once the practices have permeated the structures, it becomes easy to be subsumed, to shift one's values, and to check boxes rather than wonder why the boxes are there in the first place. Ruth (2018) writes that we are socially constructed and educated through the systems in which we inhabit; so I begin to wonder, if our landscape is steered towards accelerative output, rationality, success, reduced risk, and efficiency, then we become machines; mechanical, uncritical, complacent and potentially indoctrinated by the institutions that in many ways, there are no alternatives to.

There is a distinct dystopian twang when acknowledging that these economic imperatives not only limit the scope for inclusionary practices (Phillips et al., 2014), but concurrently inform our identities and interactions on both a professional and personal level (Mountz et al., 2015). Throughout my reading and reviewing, I hear cries against surveillance<sup>25</sup>, against the consequences of self-interest

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<sup>24</sup> Gibbons, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Gibbons, 2018; Mountz et al., 2015; Stewart & Roberts, 2016.

and individualism<sup>26</sup>, and against performativity and mechanical productivity<sup>27</sup>. I begin to wonder about those that don't cry against these new traditions, these new facets of our worlds. Kidman and Chu (2017), identify this group as the 'institutional elite', the network of actors that regulate, manage, uphold, preserve, and protect the neoliberal agenda within the academy. It is clear that these performances, these actions, these dances look to expel that which is messy. What is messy seems to be either 'challenging' or feminine, in other words, lesser (this is where my dystopia sets in). Lim (2014) articulates that the creation of the neoliberal climate veers towards the idolisation of abstraction, utility, and logic, and I can only think: this value system is dripping in the White patriarchy. He writes that "it privileges utility over empathy, logic over intuition; it deals with abstract, intellectual principles while neglecting or downplaying emotions" (p. 65), whilst Mountz et al. (2015) echo this quiet violence by writing that the institution "militates against (caring) relations and practices" (p. 1239).

Are we not disturbed by this? Do we not begin to wonder?

If we focus on risk<sup>28</sup>, we are focusing on uncertainty

If it is not quantifiable, there is too much risk

If it is alternative, it is not quantifiable<sup>29</sup>

If it isn't specific, it is uncertain

If it is feeling, it is messy

If it is messy, it is uncertain

If you can't perform, you are uncertain<sup>30</sup>

If you are at risk, you are a risk<sup>31</sup>

If we focus on risk,

You cannot come in

In privileging truths that lie in ideas of utility, logic, and rationalism, we deny the knowledge of the body, of the heart, of experience. Institutional neoliberal policies and practices subjugate these knowledges, not explicitly, but by placing other knowledges at a higher value. Knowledges with specific outcomes, solutions, definitiveness; knowledges that can be mastered, controlled, calculated,

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<sup>26</sup> Gibbons, 2018; Larner & Le Heron, 2005; Lim, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2014; Richardson, 2001; Ruth, 2018; Stewart & Roberts, 2016; Shore, 2015; Ward, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Gibbons, 2018; Larner & Le Heron, 2005; Leach, 2016; Lim, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2014; Pillay et al., 2017; Roper, 2018; Shore, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Rowe-Williams, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Gibbons, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Leach, 2016.

quantified (Lather, 2007). The body's knowledge can be none of these things – the body is endless, complicated, messy, and paradoxical. Shapiro (1999) describes the body as that which “mediates and holds in memory the experiences of our lives, and in so doing, create a critical discourse for the body” (p. 31). She goes on to assert that everything we know is attached to this bodily knowing, whether or not we are aware of it, it lies beneath the surface (perhaps, purposefully) of hegemonic consciousness. But to be aware of the body, to *be* embodied, to slip the body onto the page, these are practices that resist dominance; they embrace the unknown, the feminine, and the vulnerable. To be embodied becomes a challenge to patriarchal and institutional knowledge systems, as it creates space for meaning and begins to unravel what we ‘know’ about what research matters and what voices are being heard (Silverman & Rowe, 2020). To be embodied in the university is to subvert dominant paradigmatic ways of thinking; the act itself redefines vulnerability as a strength, messiness as bravery, not knowing as courage, dependency as accountable, radical as possible, and pleasure as important.

*Next*

Making you feel small

Like you can't

Like you have no other option

Like the problem is too big

Like you're not smart enough

Like it might hurt

Like feeling would be foolish

Like it's out of your control

Like enough has been done

Like progression has been done

Like transgression is not yours

### **Critical thinking and resistance**

Through subjugating bodily knowledge through institutional practices, the institution subjugates the criticality that it is embedded with. As Darder (2011) asserts, “it is the body that provides the medium for our existence as subjects of history and politically empowered agents of change” (p. 343). She expands on this by describing the role of the body in forming our critical consciousness, a project that

requires a willingness to engage with the body in a substantial and revolutionary way. Institutional pedagogy and practice that operates within neoliberal and colonial forms of thinking does not engage with this bodily consciousness, purely by purporting the idea that the construction of knowledge remains a cognitive act, a simple analysis of words, facts, truths (Darder, 2011).

Barnett (2015) elaborates on this by wondering whether the way that the theme of critical thinking in universities and higher education is deliberated over is potentially (highly) flawed, as he suggests that a holistic university would not only encourage the notion of critical thinking but instead, motivate critical action and critical being. Lim (2014) questions the underpinnings of what legitimates critical thinking, he delves deeply into an analysis of the ideological and political presuppositions that inform how we understand the subject, and to what and whose benefit. Ruth (2018) proposes that if the educative system is not engendering its students to become critical of their societies, then we are more likely to become passive consumers who lack the initiative to address and interrogate the constructed elements of our worlds and consequently, more inclined to accept the status quo.

Aligned with the notion of an embodied critical stance, I intend to posit my thesis as resistant. Resistant to the calculative and market-driven values of the neoliberal university. Resistant to the individualistic and competitive state of being that is rife across our worlds. Resistant to White-man concepts of truth and knowledge. Part of this resistance is my refusal to state the 'gap' in which I intend to fill. Embracing a feminist, post-structural stance, and questioning the language, power politics, and underlying assumptions surrounding the validity of filling a gap, I feel more favourable towards the sentiment of joining a conversation, or bringing a different perspective or walking on a well-trodden path. This exploration of literature has fuelled me, validated me, challenged me, and provided gumption for the next part of my research process. It is clear that there is a significant conversation happening around the neoliberalisation of the university and what this reflects (White colonial narratives of economy and power), who it encourages (those who are willing to speak its language), and how we can resist (those who aren't). As Coleman et al., (2012) propose,

We have to learn how to talk to each other about the goal of knowledge, not just the acquisition of information and not an encyclopaedic version of knowledge. Rather, how

we can manifest and use knowledges to create a better society and a better world and become a better human. (p. 146)

Using the tools of autoethnography and arts-based methods not only allows for me to traverse these well explored territories of the university and knowledge with a different (and resistant) lens, but they allow for a slower, more generative, and imaginative approach to finding alternative ways of being amongst the institutional bounds. These practices not only confront conventions (Patrick, 2016), but they provide different ways of seeing, knowing, and being which ultimately contribute to the dynamacy of our societies (Faulkner, 2018; hooks, 2009; Lim, 2014; Ruth, 2018).

*You are now entering the next room of this exhibition. This room is signposted through dated journal entries; photographs and writing engage in collaborative dances whilst poetry remain present. This room contains themes of identity, credibility, hope, and knowledge. It is presented in the form of raw data; unedited, a stream of consciousness, it is vulnerable content. Towards the end, there is a found poem collating excerpts of published news articles surrounding public university controversies.*

**Room 4: A window into: wonderings, cravings, dissent, refutations, writings that are both journal entries and poems, cycles of content and analysis, photographs**

*8 January 2020*

I have barely written for the last month. It doesn't help that I'm in Coromandel and it has been hot, my partner is back on the same land as me, my family is back on the same land as me, my head has been whirring – full, but not full of the things it is *supposed* to be full of. I feel like I am in need of a defence. I've been reading but reading things that I really love to read. Thinking about stories and how we learn. Thinking about the arts and how maybe it would just be better to write an article for an arts magazine that just 'gets' it rather than trying to convince the markers of this thesis that the university is twisted and maybe needs to be rebuilt. I am dreading going back to my lonely writing desk. I feel guilty for enjoying myself, enjoying thinking, enjoying relaxing. I think back to a book I read a long time ago, something about the indebted man, I feel like that. A giant debt on my back that I have to repay, the longer I put it off, the bigger it gets. It makes me feel depressed that that feels like life. I want to rebel and be lazy, to enjoy, to listen to all of the birds surrounding my tent while I write this. I'm reading about space, productive space, unproductive space, hostile space, and helpful space. I

wonder whether my brain has become so neoliberalised that I can only understand efficiency in relation to hostility, deadlines, post-it notes, and dedicated working environments. Why can't I harness the efficiency that so obviously comes from relaxing, breaking, laughing, talking, playing? Why can't that be guilt free? I wonder about agency – do I even have it? I think I read something about it when I was deep in theory, that post-structuralists don't believe in it and maybe I don't either? I'm back in the flow of question-marking everything. Afraid of commitment. My supervisor suggests this is to do with vulnerability, the more I think about it the more I agree.

*10 January 2020*

I'm back in Auckland and thinking about institutional ethics. I could write an excerpt on ethics for my thesis. Then write about the ethics of the university I'm writing my ethics chapter for. Then write about the rigidity of compliance when it comes to adhering the ethical guidelines of the university that I'm writing my ethics chapter for. Then write about the absurdity of my own ethics coming to be involved with the university I'm writing my ethics chapter for. Then write about the self-indulgence of writing about my personal ethics whilst writing my ethics chapter for the university. Around and around and around.

On campus I'm drawn to an empty room. I'm drawn because of the way the light is falling, angular, and strict. It's falling onto empty chairs and modular tables, there is a latency, dewy in the air. I go to walk out and see the sign on the door, a belated welcome for me to a newly refitted CALS classroom. Neoliberalism loves acronyms, I suppose they're efficient. I return home to read an article on the Epsom Campus (Locke, 2015) that I stumbled upon yesterday (you can make everything sound as though it's happening *to you*, can't you?). My eyes follow the words for only a brief moment until I find the author's catalyst in writing this article was the refitting of classrooms towards an interactive and collaborative learning space. I think about space and intention. Can control be soft, a nudge, a hand on the lower back gently pushing you towards a trajectory, does it feel like a cocoon until you realise if it wasn't there you might choose a different step, a different path. Everything keeps folding in on itself, and I have the buzz of linkage. Everything feels connected, but I wonder if it isn't just me as the common denominator. How do I hold the hand of my reader through these slightly strange, slightly scattered wonderings, connections, loose ends?

I'm reading about the body and wondering how I see my body, what I reference when I say bodies, bodies as bodies – contextual, experiential, phenomenological, somatic, physical, emotional, ecological bodies (Reeve, 2011). Not one thing. Bodies of thought, bodies of knowledge held in the body. The body being a vessel of stories, feelings, triggers. I don't think about my body often, not philosophically. My partner was here recently and suggested that I have been perpetually distracted since I started this thesis. That I could mentally exit and go elsewhere.

I find a note regarding a web search I'd made for the University of Auckland on Google. This search was conducted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2019. The results:

- 250 University of Auckland staff sign open letter over White supremacist materials on campus
- White supremacists at Auckland Uni: students call out university's refusal to remove signs
- Auckland University refuses to remove White supremacist signs from campus
- University of Auckland rates in top 15 percent of schools around the world, according to new ranking
- Students and staff warned about possible exposure to measles at Auckland Uni
- Climate change strike: Auckland Uni the only NZ university not to back action
- University of Auckland seeks new tech opportunities
- Peter Beck joins University of Auckland faculty
- Auckland University students fined \$400000 in five years

*13 January 2020*

I've been reading furiously, pouring eyes over articles, news articles, statements, press releases, diving into the curious system of university politics. I mention early in this project those that are within the university bounds and those on the outside, a vehement engagement with the effect of institutions. There is a political, personal, philosophical space maintained by both insiders and outsiders. For some, these spaces run deep; I have personal experience with mental health, sexual assault, I am invested in maintaining an anti-racist and queer-positive politic. These stories affect me on a bodily level, they sometimes make me feel hot, or nauseous, or short of breath. Someone said to me recently that real change doesn't happen if you're acting from a place of emotion. I don't believe that. I am trying to look for the cracks that let the light in, the joys, the multiplicity. I have only been

receiving daily updates on the University of Auckland since October last year, yet I am inundated with a distinct rhetoric that seeks growth and profit over sustainability and wellbeing. The discipline of dissent is repetitive and toxic. It makes me sad and hopeless to think of the stories being silenced by the university's public actions, the young students burying their stories because they see, feel, hear the lack of support for them. But on the contrary, there is a fire that is lit by those trying to be louder than the university's silence and suppression, those rejecting hegemony's calls for discipline, those that perform the future, now.

*14 January 2020*

I'm only here because I had the ominous feeling of stagnation thrust upon me from the clouds of neoliberalism raining measures of success on to the top of my head I moved countries because I couldn't afford to remedy the pathway that the raindrops were carving towards the academy I flirted with the idea of resisting the hegemony of continual persistence towards degrees and university gratification I imagined a space where I could learn, teach, share with others regardless of their supposed academic status

Imagination is so beautiful and brief when you have anxiety pumping through your blood

Maybe imagination is either a privilege or a necessity I suppose I started writing to let you know that I'm here for all the reasons I hate Stability, success, academic recognition, fear.

*16 January 2020*

Ellsworth (2005) insists that

...architecture consists not only in the uses and meanings of buildings and spaces. In architectural spaces, bodies have "affective somatic responses" and these responses arise out of the assemblage (mind/brain/body/building) that is the time and space of a building's inhabitation. Our experiences of a building arise not only out of our cognitive interpretations of the building's allusions to historical or aesthetic meanings but also out of the corporeality of the body's time/space as it exists in relation to the building. (p. 4)



Walking through the science building

Full of glass, steel, tubular structures

I catch the lift up and down

Alert to the eyes of others

Waiting to be caught

Old men in ties stare at me

Sensing my feminine playfulness<sup>32</sup> (I suppose)

I go up really high and the view

The view is what you could call spectacular

Otherwise translated to multi-million-dollar

The word *imposter* keeps running through

My mind

Reminiscent of when I'd stay at my friend's  
house / a teenager

And her mother would always make me feel

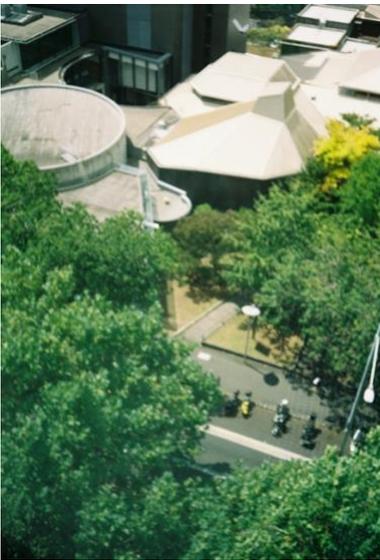
Dirty, naughty

Like I wasn't supposed to be there

and nor was I welcome

I keep walking, quickly my ears are inundated

With the sounds of construction



---

<sup>32</sup> Ellsworth, 2005.



Scaffolding, a word that loves to be used in  
curricula

Scaffolding physically surrounds my person

My eyes catch the sun on a sign

A state-of-the-art facility

Is being built

The sign wants to tell me, (to convince me)

That the project will bring a vibrant,

Active, campus

Where people are healthy and engaged  
(miraculous, I exclaim)

What about active and engaged in

Resistance, protest, uproar?

I bump into an old friend

Known by the university as a

PhD student who teaches

And works across multiple departments

Because she is both Māori and an artist

She tells me

if I want to see discrepancy in resources

Go to Elam

They wouldn't give her money for a lightbulb  
whilst

Engineering drips

Elam and Epsom<sup>33</sup> – bad investments,

We laugh

I should go back, our conversation

Takes place in another

Construction site, I still really

Don't know where I am

When she first saw me, I couldn't stop

Laughing,

Feeling as though I'd been caught

---

<sup>33</sup> Locke, 2015.



I love mismatched buildings

For as long as I can remember

They feel like letters written from different

Times

Statements of different futures

Different hopes

It even

Makes me sad when they disappear

What happens to their memories?

Their futures, their hopes

The word: sanitise,

Keeps recurring in my mind

Maybe this rebuilding and disappearing

Is a sanitising of histories

And a hope for a sanitised future



My PhD friend tells me that the  
University  
Doesn't seem to respect pedagogy  
A laughable example  
(Really, quite funny)  
Sits in the attempt of  
Gearing all learning towards  
Lecture theatres  
First-year fine art students  
Don't get studios anymore  
So, she describes  
All of these kids  
In a lecture theatre  
Trying to draw  
With notebooks on their knees  
Dropping their pencils every  
Two seconds  
Safe to say  
It was an unproductive lesson

I make my way to  
The infamous  
Business building  
Not before stopping  
In my tracks to see  
A, literally, humongous  
UoA billboard  
Stating that  
Success  
Breeds



Success  
Breeds  
Success  
I kind of respect the blatant  
Transparent nature of their advertising  
Almost admitting that privilege  
Breeds privilege  
Breeds privilege  
Let's not go that far though, eh?!



I go and meet Owen G

The temple to

Transcendental capitalism<sup>34</sup>

I feel both underdressed and undercover

Like a poorly prepared spy

The sensor doesn't sense me

It all feels kind of comedic

Until I enter and I see that

ASB is heavily involved with

Whatever is going on here

And that Fletcher Construction built

The building

And that a force of

Gentrification (not that I can talk, I know)

Sits in the faculty café

Money breeds money breeds money?

Doors are less open here

My little student ID

Is essentially defunct

---

<sup>34</sup> Locke, 2015.



As I try to roam about

The irony in the fact that

I can't access any spaces

But am entirely visible

Because every wall

Is made of glass

Can I just add

That it all feels a bit absurd

That there seems to be a ping pong table

Around nearly every corner

Like the runoff from

Silicon Valley



17 January 2020

Here I am  
Both allowed and  
Encouraged  
(I have a newfound sense  
Of warmth for the  
University  
Until I remember, it's going)  
To watch how the  
Light falls  
To notice the green  
And hear laughter  
Locke<sup>35</sup> seems right  
It feels like a place  
To learn  
Maybe not the sort  
Where you can fill your  
Pockets with knowledge  
And then deposit at the bank  
More of a temporal learning  
One that sits in the body  
Slowness runs thick  
Whilst space is endless  
The two aiding  
One another  
Towards breath  
And choice  
Maybe I love this campus  
Because the university  
Wants to rid itself of it  
Maybe because its inception  
Sits outside of it  
Maybe it's okay  
To enjoy something that is  
Part of something you despise  
That feels like growth  
And betrayal

---

<sup>35</sup> Locke, 2015.



The lifts feel like

They're going to plunge

The vending machines,

Half empty

Lockers flung open

With hopeful

Encouragements

Towards filling them

Next semester

Resembling both the

Warmth of the arts

Faculty

And the desolation of Elam

The transparency of value

Really is fascinating

I feel / at ease / here

I can see / three maunga

From where I / stand / grounded

When I lived overseas,

I hungered / for height

For perspective / to locate myself



I need to eject

The distractedness / in me

The feeling of being

Indebted to this thesis

That my time doesn't –

Isn't my time anymore

My partner says it's

Been happening for

The last six months

My brain always elsewhere

Feels unfortunate,

Ironic and annoying that

It's actually not really doing

Either

Somewhere in between

Is there productivity

In the in-between?

Hungering for the hinge

The moment

Where everything clicks



I think about the university in its multiplicitous state, I think of it like the ocean – all of a sudden, I don't feel so trapped. All of these different versions, states, ways of being so varied and nuanced, appealing to people's preferences, it feels quiet, quickly. My post-structuralist feminist friends remind me that it is unlikely to unseat these sorts of structures so I must exist alongside them, entangled amongst them (Davies et al., 2017).



*We go toward the best-known unknown thing,  
where knowing and not knowing touch, where  
we hope we will know what is unknown.  
Where we hope we will not be afraid of  
understanding the incomprehensible, facing  
the invisible, hearing the inaudible, thinking the  
unthinkable, which is of course: thinking.  
Thinking is trying to think the unthinkable:  
thinking the thinkable is not worth the effort.  
Painting is trying to paint what you cannot  
paint, and writing is writing what you cannot  
know before you have written: it is pre-  
knowing and not knowing, blindly, with words.  
It occurs at the point where blindness and light  
meet (Cixous, 1993, p. 38).*

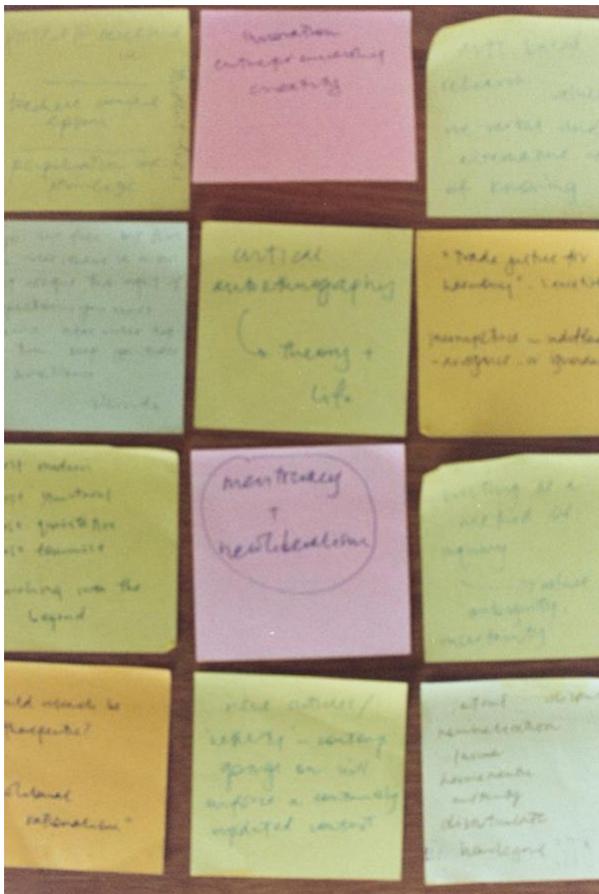


21 January 2020

The home as a site of production, of becoming (Promsaka Na Sakonnakron & Burford, 2019).

An assemblage of identities, as a blurred distinction between personal and professional (political + philosophical). Photography becomes the visual representation of self within research – mediating the personal and private with the physical and public (Pink, 2007) - the photo becomes the window, also a way of knowing that is pre-verbal – unable to be “authenticated” through language or linear logic (Ellsworth, 2005).

The home is a site of learning. The site of the university blurs into my dreams, and holds time in my body, in my mind, in my relationship. It seems only natural to physically, visually blur the distinction between where is what and what is where. If neoliberalism, in effect, asks us to reject femininity in favour of efficiency (Ellsworth, 2005), I choose to go against that. I won't leave myself at the door of the university, I won't leave my university life at the door of my home – I become, my desk becomes, and my studio (my desk in my bedroom) becomes, an instinctual, holistic, experiential place for knowledge with a blurring of triggers, personal and theoretical intertwining again, the public and private.





Drip-feeding ideologies

Piecemeal implementation<sup>36</sup>

Žižek's garbage can<sup>37</sup>

Buildings, campuses steering<sup>38</sup>

Us towards a paved purpose

Securing itself through

Patterned, repetitive, insidious<sup>39</sup>

Actions

*30 January 2020*

WESTERN HEGEMONY INFORMS MONOTONOUS REFERENCE POINTS WITHIN ACADEMIA

The ethical dilemma of indulgence vs resistance

Laziness vs resistance

Tension between political/philosophical/personal

The idea that if I can reconceptualise the university and knowledge draw me towards creating an alternative value system

For myself – becoming freer, less trapped, more imaginary

How is privilege tied into looking at things differently?

Spending your entire thesis on the university

(We only have a certain amount of coins to deposit at this bank)

What about real-world problems?

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<sup>36</sup> Davies et al., 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Reid, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Promsaka Na Sakonnakron, & Burford, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> LeMaster & Johnson, 2019.

*2 February 2020*

Antonia Darder (2011) writes

the pretence that all metanarratives should be disposed seemed to signal a new epoch in democracy theory. This philosophical whim seems a dangerous proposition in a world where capitalism... preserved the majority of wealth and power overwhelmingly in the hands of a few. To speak of power outside of larger revolutionary anti-capitalist struggles serves, inadvertently, as a diversionary intellectual tryst. (p. 4)

This speaks to the illusion of hope... the idea that hope is 'productive' and efficient emotion, whereas despair, disdain, or dissent is antithetical to neoliberal, capitalist notions of productivity. These notions appeal to established ideologies and structures whereas others look to invert, subvert, and erase these reference points. "As well as regulatory, education is understood to be emancipatory, but how and for whom?" (Allen, 2011, p.17).

Going through a presentation I did in 2018,

I wrote to embrace that things are not always as they seem, and with this in mind, the opportunities for learning become endless.

Our experiences inform who we are, what we value, and how we practice. Because we are endlessly experiencing, we are endlessly learning.

This allows us to continuously reform our virtues, abilities, skills, behaviours, and traits though being open to thinking and seeing in various ways.

3 February 2020



Photographing the campus, I struggle against the tension of imposter-ism, the photograph not only mediates the space between me and the campus but it briefly, then more permanently, creates a binding relationship between the two. By inserting the emotional and the slow into the physical and the structural, a philosophical relationship is created – it actively resists the entrenched sense of intrusion.

4 February 2020

Feminist post-structuralism – reflexivity, authority, authorship, subjectivity, power, language, ethics, representation (Richardson, 1997). Language is the centrepiece. Language does not ‘reflect’ social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality (Richardson, 2001). Engaging in self-reflexivity, giving into synchronicity, asking for what one wants, not flinching from where the writing takes one emotionally or spiritually and honouring the embodiedness and spatiality of one’s labour (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

- SLOWNESS
- PROCESS OVER PRODUCT
- FEELING AND BECOMING
- DISRUPTING A NORMATIVE VALUE SYSTEM

*5 February 2020*

Reconceptualising the university and knowledge has asked me to reconceptualise the concept of thesis, of work, of self. When you begin to reconceptualise, you are free, the normative value system is released into the cosmos and everything has the opportunity to become something else.

*8 February 2020*

In an email exchange last year, a friend and I asked each other to resist binding ourselves to our words. It was an unspoken-spoken understanding of temporality, an acknowledgement that we are forever changing, that the feelings of today may be entirely transformed by tomorrow. Am I allowed to ask this of my reader? Can I re-imagine these words to be full of flight, travelling, and then eventually disappearing? This notion of a fixed speaking/writing position is problematised within a post-structural paradigm, where “the subject of the speech-act can never be the same as the one who acted yesterday: the I of the discourse can no longer be the site where a previously stored-up person is innocently restored” (Barthes, 1989, p. 17).

*9 February 2020*

I am pushed to think about my body, about the institution’s impact on me, about neoliberalism’s impact on me. I don’t know if it’s possible to disentangle the where and what. Am I nervous and tired and guilty and embarrassed before or after my engagement with the neoliberal institution, is there a before? The impact is simple – I don’t own my time anymore, I am anxious about past-present-future decisions, my relationships suffer, the perpetual feeling of unworthiness runs deeply through my body but most of all I feel like I am wasting time, wasting my time, my family’s time, my partners time, my supervisors time, even the university’s time. Because what is the rational, practical, realistic point in extending the individual’s brain to a point of philosophical malleability with no ‘hard’ outcomes (Harre et al., 2017) for anyone?



Neoliberalism makes me feel:

Female

Rebellious

Indulgent

Narcissistic

Time-wasting

Unwelcome

Insurgent

Pathetic

Hedonistic

Convolutd

Messy

*Politics and positives of hope*

At a dinner party

Someone admits they find

Youth hopeful

I admit that recently

I've been thinking

About hope as a

Technique of discipline

A mechanism

For productivity

They look at me

As though

I'm a conspiracy

Theorist

It's not so unreasonable

I protest

Considering  
We hold plenty of  
Unquestioned bias  
Towards what is  
Useful and  
What isn't  
Up until recently  
We've been disciplined  
To believe that  
Femininity doesn't  
Have any use  
In academia (or anywhere)  
So, if I can  
Reconceptualise  
And value the  
Productivity  
That feminism  
Holds  
Then I can  
Reconceptualise and  
Also hold space  
For despair, depression,  
Desperation  
It's at this point  
That I expose  
That I've even  
Subverted my  
(long-ago)  
Suicide attempt  
To be productive,  
The aftermath  
Bringing with it  
A new sense of  
Emotionality, empathy /  
It's at this point  
The conversation  
Stops.

13 February 2020

I've had a brief hiatus from writing; a family member died, and another was born. I've been enmeshed in the full-blown circle of life stuff. Antonia Darder stayed with me over the last week, I've been thinking of dissidence and her proposition that it's in you, that it isn't something you can really turn off, the feeling of the will towards dissent (Darder, 2011). I hold Sara Ahmed with me at the dinner table with my family, the strength of her as the foundation for my disruption of the words I do not wish to be said (or thought). Soon, I see my family monitoring their words around me and it makes me feel strange, both good and bad. I'm not sure how to re-enter this practice after this climactic and profound week, it feels strange, again. I read *Selfcare as Warfare* (Ahmed, 2014) to get me in the mood and it does. She not only solidifies and impassions my sense of speaking out and up but reminds me to interrogate and investigate my sense of self-importance and motivation, whilst checking in on my own neoliberal feminist tendencies. The cautious line of individualism, both necessary and violent. Sometimes things seem to swim around like they all met somewhere else and devised a plan to pop up in my reality at different points in time to seem as though synchronicity was happening *to me, upon me*. My friend posted on the internet something about connection being possible in a world that encourages individualism, she then bracketed that even though individualism gets a bad rap, it's both valid and important. That was a week ago. Ahmed (2014) reminds me about the notion of individualism being an evasive technique capitalised on through power. The dance between the institution and the individual. Who takes accountability for what, why is it that accountability is constantly shifting between being encouraged and being allowed (Davies et al., 2017; Promsaka Na Sakonnakron & Burford, 2019)? I wonder where my writing and sensibility sits within this. What is my responsibility as a privileged White woman, is it okay to be vehemently against something which I inexplicably benefit from? Maybe it's not possible to be vehemently against something you benefit from? If I felt strongly enough, I wouldn't be here, right? Can I critique a photograph of all White UoA students in their graduation gowns and call it neoliberal meritocracy whilst I write this thesis with a scholarship on the basis of my good grades? I don't think I can. I seem to fall back to the notion of being within and against. I type a simple search into the university catalogue system: "within and against" to see what shows up:

- Islamophobia
- A culture of achievement

- Large scale education reform
- The grain of policy
- Neoliberal accountability-era policies
- The circle of privilege
- Neoliberalism
- A gendered tenure system
- “Deliverables”
- The archive
- Capitalism
- Feminist research in education

This notion of being within and against seems to fall specifically into bodies of thought that are ponderous, focussed towards social justice, amongst the arts and humanities (and clearly, education). I'm aware that this simple search is limited to the specific use of language that potentially derives from Patti Lather's book (Lather, 1991) and is in no way “robust research”, but I do wonder if this tension lies in other areas, such as business and science? Is this tension specifically indicative of a type of critical thinking? What does this sort of critical thinking engender amongst these ponderous disciplines? I wonder if the 'New Zealand' government is nervous to roll out its colonial history across schools in 2022? Perhaps this will create a nation-wide sense of within and against? I laugh to myself, wishful thinking of mine that there's a dormant insurrection waiting to be unearthed.

*16 February 2020*

I remember writing my letter in application for a suspension of my studies last year. I wrote the letter explaining why it was necessary and who it would benefit. I wrote about the community I needed to be working with, and my own professional growth as a by-product of that work. I sent the letter to a few friends and family for feedback, and the responses, unabashedly the same regardless of their involvement or history with the academy, all advised that I must restructure the entire sentiment to be convincing of the fact that the suspension will in actuality benefit the university. It must be articulated that I am taking the suspension so that I will be in better stead to *contribute to the university's body of research*. Never mind me or the community. My suspension was approved.

17 February 2020

I have been meaning to go back to the city campus to revisit certain sites and research unexplored ones. I've been meaning to go for the past week. The last time I was there I spent hours roaming, climbing stairs, breathing in views, watching, thinking. I left eventually and as I was walking away from the campus, a man on a bike slowed to a stop behind me and whispered down the back of my neck, 'nice' (was I nice or did I look nice?) before riding off faster than my two feet could carry me. I felt his breath linger on my nape whilst I digested what had just happened, then anger, so much anger. Nothing more cowardly than someone who cat-calls on wheels. Anger and fear, the fear only presents itself when I think about going back, and I realise I don't want to. I think about the recent study of university students and sexual harassment ("One in three university students are sexually assaulted", 2019). A *third* of university students report they have experienced sexual assault. This is a *third* of students who sometimes have to return to the place of the assault, or be in the same class as the perpetrator, or be triggered by the university context as to their experience. We're in 2020 and we know the body holds the score (don't we?), we know that there is plenty of talk around safety and inclusion but the university has repeatedly shown its students that this talk is not walked with action aka performative allyship, (see extensive coverage on the White supremacist activity on campus, and regarding the female international student who had her enrolment terminated after allegedly being raped and then attempting suicide). These experiences take their toll, they multiply the difficulty of simple tasks, they are full of grief; the grief of safety, mobility, the body. How do you (I) commence or continue your (my) research when your (my) body is flooded? How do you (I) hold space for these bodily knowledges and somatic responses when you (I) know that deadlines are unforgiving? Not only are deadlines unforgiving but there is a sense (I have a sense) that this isn't applicable or relevant to my research (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), but excruciatingly relevant to my day whilst trying to conduct this research. I think about my anger towards the man who breathed down my neck, and it engenders an anger towards a system that discreetly privileges the unemotional, the mechanical, the efficient, the tidy, the masculine. I want to write myself into this thesis as a way of saying no. As a way of saying that these scores that the body holds deserve to be given space, on campus, in class, in research, in writing, in positions of power, in systems, in institutions, in the university.

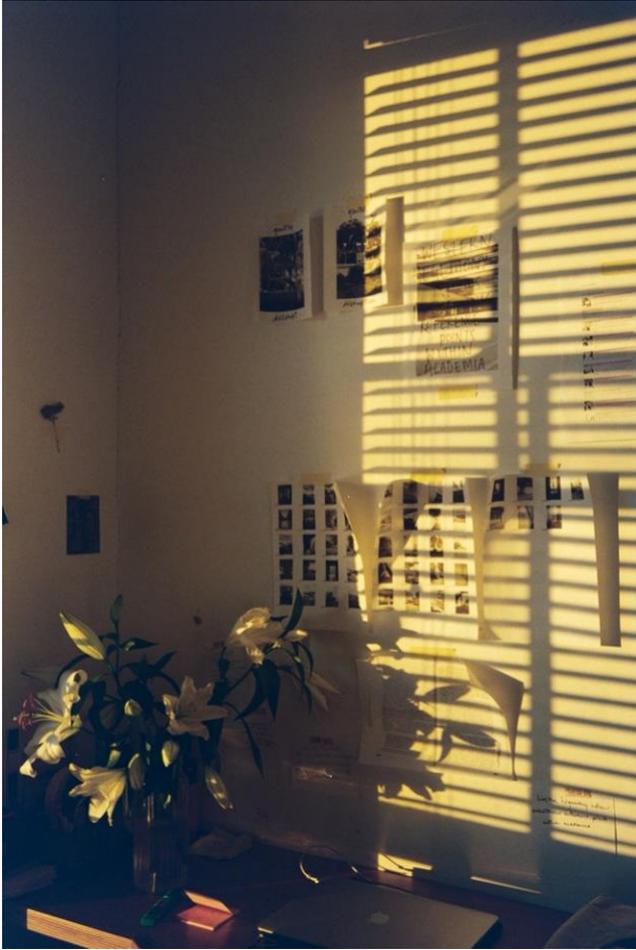
Thinking the university as a metaphor. Thinking of the university metaphorically.

*18 February 2020*

Analysis / It's like I have an aversion to adhering to the *specified* rules of the thesis writing process. Or not so much adhering but obliging to these expected institutional thesis making hurdles. My therapists have always told me that I 'overintellectualize'. That I am often caught in cyclical feedback loops of analysing, overanalysing, intellectualising, overintellectualizing until I am rendered useless in making any decision or articulating clarity of thought. They don't actually say that to me, that's how I *feel*. Maybe I'm perpetuating the same uselessness here. I don't exactly know how to articulate how I will conduct my analysis throughout this project. I think I've already begun (I have), but I suppose it's never-ending. The definition of analysis on my computer states that it is a *detailed examination of the elements or structure of something*. I revisit my copied and pasted excerpts from texts that I read during the first writing of my methodology chapter. The feeling of writing it comes back, viscerally. The expectation to articulate my epistemological and ontological underpinnings! I feel ridden with that same preposterous expectation towards analysis, how do I explain how I rationalise, justify, and make connections? Politics of clarity, respectability politics, diplomacy, complicity flood the system.

*19 February 2020*

I felt motivated this morning like I was going to really *get things done*. I organised my notes, I read them, I annotated writing, I re-read writing, I looked at my photographs, I thought about analysis, preparing myself to write it all up for my supervisors. On my daily morning walk, I thought about analysis and wondered how you can really explain the wild and strange connections your brain conjures between things, I feel excited to write and I get a call which I answer, a call that tells me someone has died.



*2 March 2020*

You'll notice my brief hiatus, it feels like months since I sat down to write, but a week and a bit can be full when it really wants to be. Language feels so slippery and I can't stop thinking about water. My partner of nearly six years broke up with me, bookended by two familial deaths. The last two weeks started with a birth and will end in a wedding, so I feel jumbled, like I'm being thrown around in the ocean, occasionally coming up for air. I think about analysis as I read some of my writing to a close friend – a task that felt brave and new – I think about how constant it is, a reflexive practice; the analysing of affect and effect, of intention and

impact, of position and privilege. Reading as an analytic practice, both my own writing and that of others. Taping my photographs to the wall above where I write, constantly finding new meanings in the visual, and the visceral. Writing as an analytic practice, this is key. Harnessing the notion that my subjectivity isn't stable, fixed, or rigid (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), allowing the twists and turns of subject and object, for varying perspectives and knowledges to become intertwined as I write into being connections, ideas and wonderings. Allowing for the mixture of pulling floating thoughts towards concrete resolutions whilst simultaneously letting them transform and shift towards building blocks for an array of different ideas (Lewis, 2017). Slowly understanding that concepts can become widely applicable with an open mind and an imagination, slowly understanding that my life is related in inexplicable ways to the position in which I write, they become unleashed (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) and undoubtedly inform the connections being made between physical, philosophical, personal subjects. Liminal spaces of action and analysis.

A reflexivity of discomfort “seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous” (Pillow, 2003, p. 188). Within this reflexivity of discomfort, reflexivity is not used as a source of power to know the other in a more complete, bounded fashion, thus rendering the other more understandable. Rather, reflexivity becomes a way to block, challenge, or interrupt the practice of “gathering data as ‘truths’ into existing ‘folds of the known’ to practices which ‘interrogate the truthfulness of the tale and provide multiple answers” (Trinh, 1991, p. 12). Pillow (2003) suggests that a reflexivity of discomfort leads to tellings that are “unfamiliar—and likely uncomfortable” (p. 192).

10 March 2020

I woke up this morning and thoughts of death began to surround me. Grieving brings all grief, someone said to me on the weekend. With so much fear, change, unrest, dystopias travelling through the air, particles so small you can't see them, let alone catch them to put them out, I wonder – at what point do we get to step back and realise that we're actually living through change, or when do we take stock (it's interesting to think about how so much of language is either violent or rooted in capitalism) and think, our world is irreconcilable, or at what point does the world as we once knew it dissipate, a slow-building acclimatisation allowing us to feel okay? I think about what's happened over the last two months globally and it feels undoubtedly scary, and then I think locally about the university and wonder if these persistent dramas have always been happening? Today an article arrived in my inbox regarding the university's policies surrounding freedom of speech, expertise, who you can speak 'as' (Morton, 2020) – made me think of the multiple personalities you're supposed to walk when involved with the university, which makes me think of the multiple personalities you're supposed to have as a woman, which makes me think of the multiple personalities wrapped in respectability politics you're supposed to have as a person of colour. How can you separate one set of knowledge from another? In the policy under review you have four options when speaking out:

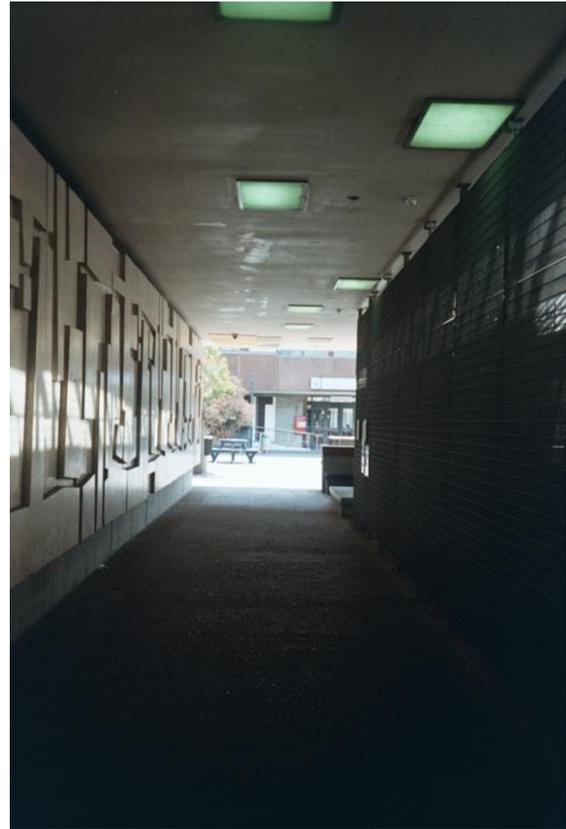
- 1) as an academic or student with relation to their *expertise*,
- 2) as an official of the university (only authorised by the C or VC themselves),
- 3) as an expert (?) with “specific delegated authority” to comment on the matter, or!
- 4) as a private individual commenting unrelated to their expertise or role at the university.



*11 March 2020*

Making my way to the city campus, I listen to a podcast with Silvia Frederici<sup>40</sup>, I take notes in an app on my phone as her words intermittently puncture the ceaseless rhythm of stepping one foot in front of the other.

A new optic  
to see through, or see with  
Can creativity be an optic?  
I remember telling my supervisors that the arts actively allow me to see things I otherwise wouldn't  
a lens upon a lens  
an optic to analyse in order to deconstruct in order  
to change



Frederici speaks to enclosure, the capitalist construct of enclosure, of land, of the body, of knowledge  
as I sit inside the city campus library  
her words resonate  
the land has been enclosed by the university, embedded with a violent history, a history of colonialism, a history of stripped land, stripped bodies, stripped knowledge  
I sit inside the city campus library with hundreds of other bodies, an enclosed wannabe think tank  
I sit next to rows of empty shelves, shelves that I photographed recently, shelves that I now have a relationship to  
I wonder if, if I ever came back to see them full, what I would feel

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<sup>40</sup> Frederici, 2019.



Silvia talks about the enclosure of knowledge, the destruction and undermining of experiential knowledge, of healing knowledge, the knowledge of birth – capitalism had to discipline the woman, her social power had to be undermined

I think of the books lining the walls and floors of this enclosure and wonder what sort of questions people ask themselves in here? She tells me through my headphones that capitalism is a break from looking at nature to look at labour, no wonder it has contempt for the body – everything is industry, mining the body for new powers. I look up and see one of UoA's explicit billboards

**ACTIVE BODY, FOCUSED MIND**

mining the body for new powers, everything is industry  
everything with the purpose of production  
for usefulness  
for practicality  
for credibility



When I sit down, I slip my shoes off  
a small act of defiance  
or maybe just offensive  
I listen to Frederici, read Ellsworth, St. Pierre  
they tell me that the feminine is worthwhile  
the feminine that has been dismissed,  
destroyed, undermined  
that it's worthwhile in knowledge,  
in learning  
the unlearning feels like  
it will take much longer than this thesis  
will my experimentations, explorations,  
mistakes, and contradictions suffice?  
Or play out on paper as girlish, another  
unsophisticated amateur?  
How does the university strip me?  
In my 'real' life, I feel open, confident, playful  
capable of self-love  
In my 'thesis' life, everything is examined with  
scrutiny,  
the self-questioning becomes preventative  
no clear way, no articulate way, no right way

No clarity to the chaos, no outcome  
The mess of a process, with perpetual  
pluses<sup>41</sup>  
back and forth / learning / unlearning /  
compromising / uncompromising  
giving in / giving up / giving out  
the insatiable state of becoming  
an aversion to being fixed



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<sup>41</sup> Cheek, 2017.



13 March 2020

She had recently read about the phenomenon of girls lifting the ends of their sentences, as if unsure whether what they were saying was a statement or a question... It was always so much easier to turn a statement into a question, because in the end you could backpedal and say you were only *asking*, and then you wouldn't have to endure the shame of being wrong. (Wolitzer, 2018, p. 35)

This reminds me of my impulse to question mark every sentence of this thesis; I could imbue each word with a tentativeness, soak it quietly in fear, and have an exit strategy if whoever reads this tells me it's worthless. I could say I know! It was just a pile of questions, that's all. But in the same way that men are more likely to lie in job interviews because of their self-assured arrogance and confidence, I will rework some of that energy and stand by my words. I won't deny their slipperiness (the post-structuralist in me), but I'll at least have their back in the moment they need me. Here. For the minute.

*17 March 2020*

Correlating dates in time, one will realise I write amidst the global panic towards coronavirus  
I have nothing to contribute to the conversation on a medical level  
Obviously (I'm laughing)  
But as I read about neoliberalism  
And knowledge  
And education  
I can't help but relate everything to this crisis  
Reading about individualism  
And notions of freedom  
Of economy over humanity  
And I can't help but think of the bricks that built the foundations that we now stand on  
Are as sturdy as sinking sand



*22 March 2020*

Today I have sat amongst the quiet of the Coromandel to try and turn my attention to this thesis. A quiet that feels almost unnerving in comparison to the chaos of the world. A quiet that is made up of pink cosmos growing wildly outside of my window, no apparent structure to adhere to or uniformity to follow. A quiet that is punctured occasionally by pīwakawaka flying curiously through the room that I am working in, a playfulness that invites what feels like a rare joy. A quiet that hums with bees and smells of warm grass. A quiet that invites stillness. A quiet that allows me to take a step back, to wonder, to draw from. A

quiet that is nostalgic. A quiet that invites memories of curtains billowing in the summer breeze, that reminds me of my nana nursing young wounds with home remedies. A quiet that smells like freshly peeled citrus. A quiet that reminds me of my nana who was brazenly committed to being herself, even when she was literally committed. A quiet that lets me pull on knowledge from my past, present,

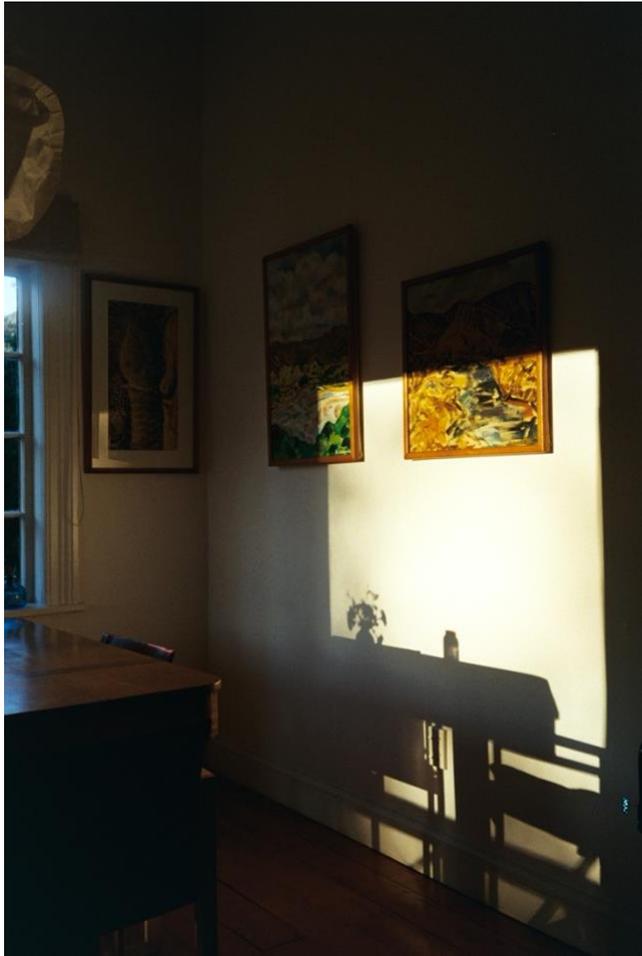
future. I sit amongst this quiet and try to turn my attention to this thesis. This thesis that feels almost redundant whilst in the midst of a global pandemic. A thesis that already felt slightly redundant before the global pandemic. I keep trying to convince myself that in fact, thinking about knowledge and our education systems is always important, and I believe it, but the bug, the ever-present bug, keeps whittling it down so every day, I start afresh. I read an article about the different lenses through which one is able to narrate coronavirus through; racist-populist, socialist, geoeconomist, political, capitalist, globalist, climate activist. Eventually, it begins to feel like a kaleidoscope, requiring a meta-analysis, no right or wrongs, perspectives blurring and shifting, the ground beneath you beginning to fundamentally shift.

*23 March and beyond, days don't seem to count for much at the moment, 2020*

Over the last few days, it feels like I've had a 300% higher interest from friend's video calling, texting, voice messaging, and sharing information. It goes without saying that an uncomfortable amount of time is being spent talking about Covid 19. What continues to arise for me is the feeling of being in some sort of twisted social experiment, where, effective immediately, we are asked to shift our value systems; look inwards, unlearn our capitalist tendencies, stimulate curiosity in unearthed ways, go slowly. The shifting of our value systems requires a similar meta-analysis as I previously mentioned; all of a sudden, we are asked to reckon with the sorts of existential questions that occasionally arise playfully at a dinner party through a myriad of different lenses, perspectives, and logics. Of course, where do I want to be and who do I want to be with, but those aside, deeper questions begin to arise. What is my purpose, how do I introspectively sustain myself, if the future is uncertain, what do I want to work towards and help build and strengthen? We seem to be confronted with a concurrent tension between unlearning and learning, always, but particularly now. Part of me feels thrilled to watch the capitalist world as we know it beginning to be shredded by this virus, but simultaneously I grapple with my unanticipated hankering for rules, information, rigidity. This hankering is met by a slowness, a willingness to remain open and fluid, that luckily, I have persevered in working on cultivating over time (nowhere near in its prime, evidently as I furiously check the news and re-read government orders). But when I begin to think about capitalism being shredded by this global pandemic, I start to think of the ways in which our subjectivities have been moulded, mutated, manipulated to be anything but self-sufficient during a time like this. What if you've never entertained the thought of defying the

pressure to perform, for the same reason that some people don't ever encounter the prospect of arts-based research? What does one do when they're asked to stop, slow? So much of our world is in a persistent state of acceleration, measured by ever further markers of success. In chasing the goal-posts of success we've slowly (quickly) learnt to acquire the armour of individualism, competitiveness, and self-responsibility. This armour was supposedly going to protect us from precarity, from needing welfare, from vulnerability, from unemployment, this armour was supposed to keep us safe. This armour has now become the fire that burns our flesh, it literally threatens our survival, and threatens the societal fabric as a whole. So, in this fire, maybe I, maybe you, maybe society, recognises it is no longer a fantasy, but imperative to reconstruct the bricks that lay beneath us so that we can begin to see the soil. Reconstruct our ways of being, seeing, thinking, reconstruct our institutions.

Reconceptualise different ways of being, thrust alternative value systems out into the world, and think differently about the ways in which we move, idealise, and evaluate self-worth. This time feels exposing – of character, of motives, of ideology, of agendas. Within the university, I feel sceptical (that hasn't changed) that this period of time will be used as ammunition down the line, that the takeaway will be to dig one's heels in deeper, to weaponise 'essentiality', to weaponise online learning, to weaponise isolated working capacities, to weaponise under-the-pump output as the new normal. I read an article on the Times Higher Education (Lau & Ross, 2020), encouraging universities to increase their focus on openness and worldwide welfare rather than sharpening their STEM capacities. I might add to this that it appears increasingly important to build community-based practice and service into our knowledge systems and begin to understand how we can embrace adaptability not for efficiency purposes but to remain open, fluid, and grounded. It seems glaringly obvious that the neoliberal framework that has informed decision making and institutional practice will not be part of the solution to the current crisis, this ideological gamble has weakened the very tenets of our society that we currently need the most. How will this work its way into university practice? What began with UoA freezing staff hiring, and article after article about how many millions of dollars it will lose across this period of time, has slowly become, what appears to be, slightly more human-focused; hardship grants, fees-free extensions, emphasis on mental health and wellbeing.



7 April 2020

What I do know  
Is that Stuart would  
Never sign off an email  
With the poetic license  
And softness  
To remind us all  
That the sun  
Will shine again  
Tomorrow

The self in relation to productivity. Productive self as symptomatic of a larger picture that does not value rest, leisure, play, love, health, wonder, creation. To say and think and *know* that you create for yourself, you create when you want, you create even when it's not perfect, you create imperfection and you like it, you create even after the due date, you create outside of the lines, if you don't want to create you don't create, you create art, music, technology, relationships, playfulness, love in your communication, you create your life, you are in your life, your life belongs to you, you create love for everyone, your time is yours, you are allowed to rest and be excused. You don't need to own the day every day (Mkhonza, 2020, para. 11).

15 April 2020

What is constantly being thrown to the fore is the expanse in which I can write this thesis, that once you diverge from the path of the five chapter piece of writing, options become endless, cyclical

patterns begin to appear, and I am able to learn, relearn, unlearn through tweaked processes I've conjured for myself along the way. At the beginning of this process, I thought I would read certain types of things, and save other things for later, but the same things I read in my first month of research suddenly seem to have new meaning as I wind my way further into this project, almost as if you could provide ten readings at the inception and rewrite, recycle, reconceptualise material in an abundance of different ways. The more engaged one is with their bodies and thoughts, the more material there is to think through, a consistent rethinking of things, tied up in knots, ready to be unravelled and knotted again and again and again. This idea that I thought I was ready to delve into the 1-2-3-4-5 linear step process doesn't seem to fit with this presupposition of mine that there is no beginning and end, no knowledge scavenger hunt that ends with a prize, no year one, two, three of university then expert, no tick-tick-tick exam done sense of accomplishment. A constant cycle of around and around and around. I might never finish this thesis.

*20 April 2020*

Hope is a cog

Part of the play

Smoothed surface

Easy to shine

With a microfibre cloth

Depression / however

Scours and sours

An uncontainable

Uncleanable surface

But most importantly,

It's unproductive

24 April 2020



Every morning I see green  
And hear birdsong  
I get to close the lid on my toothpaste  
I feel in control  
On my own time  
(Not really, time is never really yours is it?)  
(And not really even more, as I'm currently  
living under the same roof as both my parents  
for the first time since they separated when I  
was 3 years old)

27 April 2020

I haven't had much energy recently, I've been distracted by death, grief, mental health, sleep, eating. I know when I'm in tune with my writing because I go to sleep thinking about it. My graduate show in art school was entirely conjured up during those minutes, hours before sleep. When your brain rests, knowing it's going to embark on the beautiful shedding of all that it decides is useless, it blurs and

(Time is always shared)

I think about agency  
Always, ever since I learnt its definition  
It's definition so subjective, never in stasis  
What is a mastermind?  
Can you master the mind?  
Is agency something that you can turn off  
Or is it like time,  
Always relative, always shared  
There are some words you never forget  
learning  
Agency has always been a mystery to me  
Something that perhaps is harnessed during a  
moment of reconceptualising  
Maybe a matter of  
Shirking binary understandings  
Of agency, of options  
All bounded  
Living in bounded boundaries  
Ten times over  
Go out the back gate  
And realise they don't exist  
Binaries don't exist  
Yes and no don't exist

mixes the real and the imaginary in a pot of hazy soup. I often think, I should write this down, but more often, I don't. I feel obliged to let the (my) body rest. I woke up yesterday morning with the zing of curiosity, a readiness. Sometimes when I know I can't write; I go through all of the notes I've taken from things that I've read. It's an analytic process I think, beginning with the reading, then taking the notes, then notetaking of notes, finding threads, links, conflicts, I start to see what I'm drawn to, intuitively. Particularly yesterday though, I read through pages of notes and I realised I'd only been reading about hope. Hope being something that I've written towards before but have never fully grasped as a fundamental driver of my research. Truthfully, I've resisted it. Just like Verwoert (2008) says that by saying I can't, you might in fact mean that you can't, but you can, I have hope that hope can manifest itself outside of positivity and productivity. Hope that can lay dormant, latent. Hope that can lie in being vulnerable, being fed up. Audre Lorde (1997) suggests that "by looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening to the status quo" (p. 74). Can we stretch hope to sit outside of simplistic ideas of positivity, optimism, and happiness? I have hope for subversion and a reassessment of our value system. I think about what's happening now (in the world) and I think about a simplistic kind of hope that existed before, hope that everyone could just tuck itself into the world as it stood, reconfiguring their bodies, mentalities, abilities so that it all just ticked along. What I feel like I'm seeing is a myriad of other ways of being, doing, working, thinking that undermine the so-called rational justifications and logistics of 'before'. No longer can institutions say to less-abled bodies that they can't participate because of physical proximity, no longer can governments and institutions say that it's financially inviable to waive performance indicators and funding based on student achievements, no longer can institutions singularly gear themselves towards purely market-oriented futures, no longer can institutions undermine the importance of mental health, community practice, creativity, collaboration, kindness, generosity, human-centred action and the sustainable and relevant knowledge that arises from these endeavours.

29 April – 7 May 2020

*A large kereru perched on a power line sends me off on my morning walk  
I avoid walking directly under it, something about bad luck*

Articles roll into my inbox

A tide of bad, good, bad, good news on the university

The sponsored content always looks great

*Air whips across my face, so crisp it feels like the winter ocean*

### **‘Diversity at the heart of the University of Auckland’s future’<sup>42</sup>**

Months after students of colour gathered to protest

Hate speech and their lack of safety on campus

**He eventually condemned the White supremacist behaviour**

**After an open letter circulated by staff<sup>43</sup>**

*I’ve watched the mushroom season come and go since  
being here, perfect conditions they keep saying*

With a play by play as to how power works

**It surprises me that someone on a \$700,000 pay packet<sup>44</sup>**

Hasn’t figured out those mechanics yet

*An assured affirmation lets me know that all of the answers are within me,  
pockets of them tucked away  
Safely for when my gut is called on*

**The university is making sure that we have moved to meet students where they are, and to help them grow to the place they dreamed of<sup>45</sup>**

**“We are fully focused on the wellbeing of our students and for that reason we have to think about money... every dollar we give back to a student in a hall of residence is a dollar that we don’t have to support other students or to deliver the teaching and learning experience they are here for in the first place”**

*A future of hope,  
shocked into reality  
by overflowing trashcans  
of fast-food wrappers*

**The university was unable to access government support due to its size and operational structure<sup>46</sup>**

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<sup>42</sup> Diversity at the heart of the University of Auckland’s future. (2019, 22 October). *Stuff*.

<sup>43</sup> No place for racism: an open letter from University of Auckland staff. (2019, 2 October). *The Spinoff*.

<sup>44</sup> Collins, S. (2019, 18 October). University of Auckland Vice-Chancellor Stuart McCutcheon to step down. *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>45</sup> Diversity at the heart of the University of Auckland’s future. (2019, 22 October). *Stuff*.

<sup>46</sup> Tan, L. (2020, 26 April). Covid 19 coronavirus: Auckland university’s lockdown accommodation fees slammed. *New Zealand Herald*.

**Waikato University breaks the chain as they stop accommodation charges for empty rooms... We didn't want to put them or their families under pressure. It wasn't difficult to not charge accommodation fees if they weren't using it.<sup>47</sup>**

- The government assumes power over universities<sup>48</sup>
  - In an emergency
- Central direction, coordination and cohesion (we need)

**WE ARE FOCUSED ON THE WELLBEING OF OUR STUDENTS<sup>49</sup>:**

*Increasing student debt does not achieve that  
Neoliberal rationality strikes again  
It seems obvious where to go from here*

***The Education (Pastoral Care) Amendment Act 2019 stipulates that tertiary education providers are required to take all necessary steps to maintain the wellbeing of domestic tertiary students.***

**Charging accommodation fees while students are legally unable to live or move back to their student accommodation is contrary to the requirements contained in the interim code<sup>50</sup>**

*The university does acknowledge however that* **Many students feel their mental health is better supported at home with their families, rather than isolated in accommodation<sup>51</sup>.**

*Harris<sup>52</sup> writes that ----- SHOCK -----* **tertiary education providers place a higher value on their international image than the wellbeing of their undergraduate students**

*The feeling of rooting deeply into yourself with the gumption of purpose  
Fleeting as it may be  
The roots don't die*

**...it is clear that there has been a change to the state of your mental health... and you did not promptly inform the International Office as you were required to do under your Enrolment Conditions<sup>53</sup>.**

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<sup>47</sup> Blommerde, C. (2020, 01 May). Coronavirus: Waikato University breaks the chain as they stop accommodation charges for empty rooms during Covid-19 lockdown. *Stuff*.

<sup>48</sup> Ross, J. (2020). New Zealand government assumes power over universities.

<sup>49</sup> Tan, L. (2020, 28 April). Covid 19 coronavirus: Halls of residence students asked to contact University of Auckland to work a way forward. *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>50</sup> Harris, E. (2020, 28 April). Making students pay for empty rooms shows a disdain for duty of care. *The Spinoff*.

<sup>51</sup> Kenny, L. (2020, 06 April). Coronavirus: Uni students call for rent freeze or reduction during lockdown. *Stuff*.

<sup>52</sup> Harris, E. (2020, 28 April). Making students pay for empty rooms shows a disdain for duty of care. *The Spinoff*.

<sup>53</sup> Tan, L. (2020, 09 Jan). 'Shameful and disgusting': University of Auckland slammed for kicking out student over mental health issues. *New Zealand Herald*.

*I'm about to start a type of therapy that begins to close off traumatic triggers, perhaps I won't want to scream the next time I read about the University failing to understand how mental health works, even though it literally has a wealth of knowledge at its fingertips*

**“How can these stories be part of our education sector<sup>54</sup>?”**

*Truly*

*This is not rhetorical*

**The export education sector was valued at \$5 billion dollars, \$4.8 paid by international students<sup>55</sup> –**

The number of students are increasing – fees are increasing – pastoral care is not.

**EXPOSED, LAID BARE: Growth and profit sought over sustainability and wellbeing.**

*Sustainability, the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level, the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance*

**SPONSORED CONTENT: University of Auckland ranked number one globally for sustainability<sup>56</sup>**

**The only university across the country that refused to support its staff and students to strike for climate change<sup>57</sup>**

he somehow wrangles the use of diversity as justification ---- some people might not feel this way ---- yet when it comes to displaying its ranking

It may as well be in neon lights and on every badge

*The university, the university, the university*

*The critic and conscience of society – an obligation, a mandate, a freedom, a praxis,*

*Progressive, brave, ethical, resistant*

**...moving away from that reflects a shift to a business model.**

*Performativity as business model. Sustainability as business model. Diversity as business model.*

*Conscience as business model. Awareness as business model. University as business.*

**SPONSORED CONTENT: University of Auckland ranked number one globally for sustainability**

**(We, students) are becoming increasingly concerned about the social impact of the Western world on the rest of the world... the university has strong policies around equity... we expect that for New Zealand. We were the first to give women the vote after all<sup>58</sup>.**

<sup>54</sup> Milking international students. (2020, 10 January). *Scoop*.

<sup>55</sup> Milking international students. (2020, 10 January). *Scoop*.

<sup>56</sup> University of Auckland ranked number one globally for sustainability. (2019, 14 December). *Stuff*.

<sup>57</sup> Franks, J. (2019, 18 September). Climate change strike: Auckland Uni the only NZ university not to back action. *Stuff*.

<sup>58</sup> University of Auckland ranked number one globally for sustainability. (2019, 14 December). *Stuff*.

*I am also concerned about the impact of the West:*

*I see it in our university, I see it in the advertising campaigns, I see it in the curriculum, I see it where funding is placed, I see it where funding is cut, I see it in the way we're encouraged to think, the way we're encouraged to connect. I am concerned, and I think until the university shifts its driving focus of money and profit (which is Western in its colonial capitalist roots) then I find it fraudulent to be riding on the tails of this 'student concern'. Progress isn't linear, let's speak of gaps.*

**A female scientific researcher in a New Zealand university earns up to \$400,000 less than a male.**

**A man's odds of being ranked associate or full professor are more than double those of a woman**

**Women with equivalent research quality scores are under-promoted by a factor of two compared to men – something other than research score is holding women back from being promoted ---**

**Suggesting that a more systemic underlying bias is responsible<sup>59</sup>.**

**In the University of Auckland Equity 2018 profile, the majority of top academic positions of Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, and Senior Research Fellow are held by men<sup>60</sup>.**

*I have a favourite tree  
That from a certain angle at a certain time,  
the light shines through its leaves  
and it reminds me of a stained-glass window,*

*I am holding on*

*Sustainability // health and wellbeing // a sustainable approach to health and wellbeing. Posters with ZERO TOLERANCE splattered across them. Perhaps zero tolerance is subjective?*

**Racist activity on campus dated back to six years ago ... have been allowed to remain on campus at the expense of others.**

**supremacy through their lack of action.  
themselves on campus.**

**The university has an implicit tolerance of White**

**Students felt neither safe nor able to be**

**We ask that he leads by example<sup>61</sup>.**

*Who will look at the Milky Way with me now? Moments in time / pierced and shattered / by other moments / completely unrelated*

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<sup>59</sup> Hancock, F. (2020, 23 January). NZ's \$400,000 gender pay gap. *Newsroom*.

<sup>60</sup> University of Auckland. (2018). *Equity profile 2018*. Auckland, New Zealand.

<sup>61</sup> Franks, J. (2019, 12 April). Auckland Uni White supremacy claims 'utter nonsense', vice chancellor says. *Stuff*.

**The university was subject to negative media scrutiny regarding perceived university response<sup>62</sup> – HOW ABOUT a strong rejection of the claims that are undoubtedly linked to our #1 rating for impact?**

*(He goes on to justify behaviour by listing the factors that earned the university their ranking. Isn't that sort of action the same thing as trying to excuse your racism by claiming that you have a Black friend? Like the 101 on how to exercise your White privilege and blatant misunderstanding of the inequity that is at play within our power structures?)*  
*Starts to all feel a bit repetitive, and belligerent*

Strangely when the university has a new Vice-Chancellor it seems that the laws change too:

*In 2019,*            **The particular posters I have seen... are not themselves hate speech, they are not illegal, they are not inciting people to violence<sup>63</sup>.**

*In 2020,*            **We are aware of materials being posted around the campus and are ensuring they are removed. We are removing the material because it is illegal<sup>64</sup>.**

*I've been trying to be present in my daily life, to take things as they come, to check in on where I'm at, why I'm there, what I feel            Taking my foot that is forward and bringing it back alongside the other            Looking at the present with hope for the future, but not looking to the future with hope for the present            My thesis sits in so many spaces; future, present, past, body, relationships, expectations, debt, pressure, therapy, histories, inadequacies, failures, strengths, questions, perpetual problems, novels, ubiquity*

*On the one hand touting free speech and academic freedom – on the other, introducing a policy that would limit academics speaking out on important issues... an underpinning of the important role of the public academic, and their freedom to provide independent expertise and comment on issues<sup>65</sup>.*

**He has made it clear that the university is a place where a range of opinions can be held and allowed to be debated (with reference to White supremacist behaviour) yet a year later, the same standard is not upheld for academics, this policy catalysing people to second-guess what we can and can't comment on<sup>66</sup> ---- exacerbated by the fact that the idea of expertise is debatable and doubled down again by who is willing to call themselves an expert, and purports to hold the authority to speak on expert matters.**

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<sup>62</sup> Franks, J. (2019, 12 November). Auckland University White supremacy row sparked 'major' crisis incident. *Stuff*.

<sup>63</sup> Franks, J. (2019, 01 October). White supremacists at Auckland Uni: Students call out uni's refusal to remove signs. *Stuff*.

<sup>64</sup> Andelane, L. (2020, 02 March). White supremacist materials distributed around University of Auckland city campus. *Newshub*.

<sup>65</sup> Morton, J. (2020, 9 March). Silencing science? Auckland academics challenge media policy. *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

*Language, language of marketability, language for profit, language for global rankings, does it all boil down to money? It's interesting to live in a time where that question is very real, nuanced, and complex, where we are faced with making decisions that have a palpable friction between the economy and human life.*

**In the 2019 Annual Report<sup>67</sup>, he writes that “there does seem something wrong with a funding system in which our ability to support the success of disadvantaged young people relies so heavily on the generosity of donors”**

*It's interesting that they could cut approximately \$240000 from their pay packet to meet that of the Prime Minister of this country OR they could cut \$548,000 from their pay packet to live on the optimal salary which is still over three times what the average New Zealander earns.*

But sure, times are tight

**Auckland University raises \$380 million in fundraising campaign<sup>68</sup>**

**Auckland University buys \$5 million Parnell mansion for incoming chancellor<sup>69</sup>**

**Auckland University stands to lose \$30 million due to lag of international students<sup>70</sup>**

**University of Auckland announces staff hiring freeze due to coronavirus travel ban<sup>71</sup>**

**Universities warn more staff cuts on the horizon<sup>72</sup>**

**University of Auckland asks contract staff to work for no pay<sup>73</sup>**

**Auckland University lecturer says work-for-free request a kick in the guts<sup>74</sup>**

*I don't doubt that there are issues with the ways that universities are funded, I also don't doubt that there are going to be massive economic impacts of the global crisis we are all facing, but I take issue with who has to make the sacrifices and what that says about the university's values: those that do not read PROFIT.*

**Staff have received emails saying they can either work for nothing for the second half of this year or resign – the New Start programme is a second chance university prep course – aimed at adults from disadvantaged background that affected their schooling – majority are Māori and Pasifika<sup>75</sup>**

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<sup>67</sup> University of Auckland. (2019). The power of philanthropy: Annual report 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Auckland University raises \$380m in fundraising campaign. (2019, 22 November). *Radio New Zealand*.

<sup>69</sup> Leahy, B. (2020, 29 January). University of Auckland splurges \$5m on Parnell pad for new vice-chancellor. *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>70</sup> Gerritsen, J. (2020, 27 February). Coronavirus: University of Auckland freezes staff hires due to travel ban. *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>71</sup> Forbes, S. (2020, 27 February). University of Auckland announces staff hiring freeze due to coronavirus travel ban. *Stuff*.

<sup>72</sup> Robson, S. (2020, 2 March). Coronavirus: Universities warn more staff cuts on the horizon. *Radio New Zealand*.

<sup>73</sup> Collins, S. (2020, 30 April). Covid 19 coronavirus: University of Auckland asks contract staff to work for no pay. *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>74</sup> Keogh, B. (2020, 2 May). Auckland Uni lecturer says work-for-free request 'a kick in the guts'. *Stuff*.

<sup>75</sup> Collins, S. (2020, 30 April). Covid 19 coronavirus: University of Auckland asks contract staff to work for no pay. *New Zealand Herald*.

**NZUSA president notes that it's slightly ironic that when the specialist libraries closed under the justification that the university couldn't afford to keep them open, yet have bought a \$5 million-dollar mansion in one of the most expensive suburbs of Auckland<sup>76</sup>**

**Declining interest in the arts, languages and teacher education – the university tries to reverse these trends by promoting subjects with falling enrolments, improving enrolment procedures and sometimes 'buffering' subjects or faculties in decline<sup>77</sup>**

*I feel like something is missing here in this very statement,  
a disjuncture between micro and macro,  
of course, the university is able to promote a subject,  
financially buffer faculties that need it,  
but if the overall sentiment,  
is shiny  
success-centred  
profit-oriented  
focused on international stature  
and all of the subjects that  
hold that glittery future are  
the ones housed in state-of-the-art buildings  
with glass and steel and money  
then why would a student  
enrol in a course  
that is under-funded  
in a dilapidated campus  
declining interest from the university itself  
and a low-income pay packet?  
The critic and conscience of society  
is perpetuating the very society  
it upholds itself to critique*

*a culling process  
to a barebone few  
similarly, to that research methods course  
that focused solely on dominant practices  
of theory and methodology  
leaving only those that can't deny it in themselves*

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<sup>76</sup> MacLennan, C. (2020, 31 January). Catriona MacLennan: University of Auckland's pricey Parnell pad is a bit rich. *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>77</sup> McCutcheon, S. (2018). From the chair: Staff cuts sometimes an unfortunate necessity.

*to forge their own pathway outside  
of hegemony  
against all odds*

Trying to locate myself  
Justify myself  
Import myself  
Into a framework  
Of meaning  
Where validity  
Is flexible

*15 May 2020*

I keep meaning to write two things. Sometimes writing feels like it makes something real, like you write it into being. To make sure it doesn't sit in your head muddling, muddling, muddling. Firstly, I've been thinking about the notion of reconceptualising the university, going back to the idea of practicing the university differently. Zooming in and out – applying tenets of the university to disconnected fragments of life to learn about it from a different perspective, sometimes an intimate one. I've been thinking about my relationship that just ended, and thinking about how hard we had both been trying to push at boundaries and binaries, trying to unlearn and break down normative concepts, trying to push ideas of what a relationship could be beyond traditional frameworks, but after six years my body just said no. I've been wondering if this thesis isn't a little bit like that, trying to persistently question, problematise, reconsider what the bounds of this process is or could be, sometimes feeling like I should've just taken the road to hegemony – a well-marked, well-trodden path. Where I could've outsourced my how-to, where-to, my why. Maybe that path is easier for a reason. And then I remember that that reason is an institutional, structural, patriarchal, colonial power looking to benefit some and not others, a rigged game. Darder (2011) writes that

a life of dissent requires us to expel the success myths of capital that pollute the ivy-covered halls of academia and to reject the warped and distorted privileges of power, preserved and doled out to the obedient servants of the empire. (p. 5)

And I remember why I'm doing this again. The second thing I wanted to tell you, was about a reifying moment in a conversation I had recently. We were talking about someone who is in their mid-thirties working in a café, the person who I was speaking to began to demonstrate a sort of pitying sadness for the café worker. They admitted that they felt like the person had no hope, no

future, no career, no ambition. I was taken aback, firstly that someone would put their value systems so intently onto someone else, and secondly because their read of the situation didn't account for the potential happiness and fulfilment that the café worker might enjoy outside of their paid job. I asked: What if this person doesn't value their paid work as the be-all and end-all of their character? What if they use their paid work as a vehicle to support their life learning that happens outside of the workplace? What if this person is trying to exist in a different value system that doesn't look to monetary and career-based rewards as a signifier of their success? My conversation mate only responded that they might think that now, but when they get to 65, they will regret it.



*19 May 2020*

I've returned home, and it feels like I've entered a time capsule. Two months gone and my room has gathered dust. My research notes and pictures stuck to the wall above my desk hang limply, their corners folding and obscuring their original messages. I find notes scrawled across bits of paper, ideas, thoughts, quotes. Revisiting them is swinging me back in time. I have the heavy task of taking other notes and pictures down, moments from a relationship that is now over, moments that were left on my walls as a harbinger of hope, now lost. I have transported photographs back to Auckland with

bits of string connecting themes and similarities strung across the map of pictures. I pull them out and they are a mess. This process of disentangling strings feels like a metaphor. I revisit my writing from last year, I have it printed sitting on my unused desk, again I am swinging back in time. I have been



reading Shapiro's (1999) chapter on the body and knowledge, she writes about being; that the notion of being incorporates the issue of time, that we carry the past and the future with us, that in order to fully reconceptualise (to have the possibility of change), our sensing, feeling, perceptive selves are required; they aide in the process of making sense of one's life. The spaces in which I have inhabited thrust my sensing-feeling self upon me, early wonderings not only bring intellectual stimulation but bodily memories. I find a note that suggests that the way that we 'see' things, epistemologically, is not dissimilar to the way that we see things, visually; our visual surroundings are reinterpreted to us through our visual bank of memories, in the same way, that our bodily memories that create our epistemic systems are called on when we speak about belief or opinion. I'm reminded of the idea of research as research as research as research – I find a note that provides a cycle –

Research / 'traditional' research; articles, news,  
media / writing

as

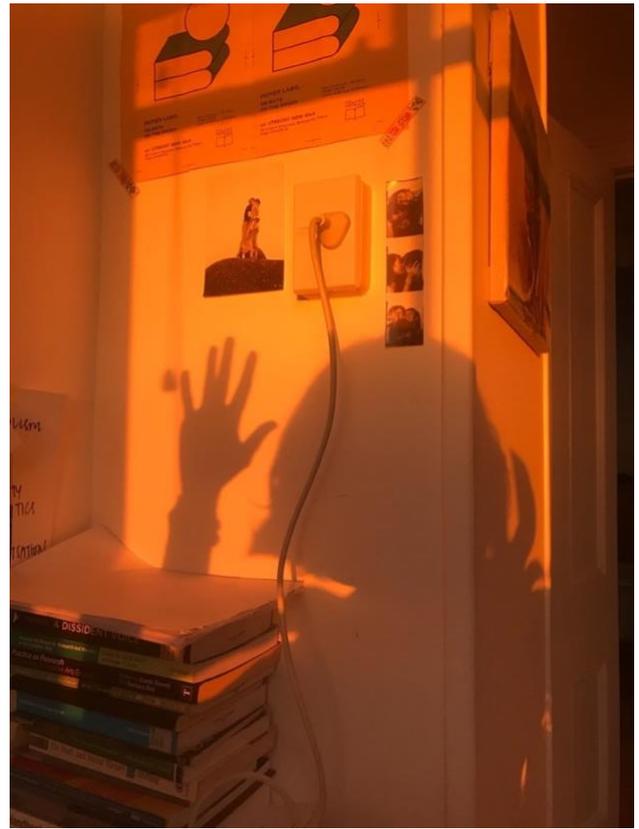
Research / contexts, socio-political spaces in  
which these articles are constructed and  
researched / photography

as

Research / responses to these spaces and  
articles, philosophical, creative, abstracted  
reactions to traditional and contextual research  
products / poetry

as

Research / all three of these combined into /  
thesis



*You are now entering the next and final room of this exhibition. This room contains themes of learnings, unlearning, futurity, hope, and possibility. A platform to leave this space thinking about infinity, materiality, temporality, and being-in-the-world. Some form of closing ensues.*

### **Room 5: A moment to sit, to close and open**

A moment to sit / and wonder  
About where problematising / has led me  
To think about / how lost  
And entangled / and enmeshed  
I have become  
A moment to sit / and wonder  
What I think about the world  
What this research means /  
Circling from me at the bottom  
Towards the sky  
Stopping in between to pause

And think about them too  
A moment to sit / and wonder  
If I have any regrets (always, and never)  
If I could've done more (always, and never)  
If I did what I initially aimed to do (always, and never)  
If I feel authentic (always, and never)  
If I remained uncompromised (always, and never)  
A moment to sit / and wonder

## Rhizomatic frameworks

If I circle all the way back to my initial research question, asking how the university and knowledge can be reconceptualised through creative thinking and artistic practice, I don't know if there is a resolute answer to be given. I think the very notions of creative thinking, artistic practice, and reconceptualisation embed themselves into a rhizomatic framework. By that I mean these concepts are steeped in multiplicities, they open up a myriad of possibilities and are in no way tied to a singular outcome – rhizomatic connections constitute new relations and new ways of being (Kaufmann, 2011). In the process of reconceptualising these systems through arts-based research, I had to begin by problematising them. By digging deeper into both my own and societal perceptions of the university and how it upholds certain knowledges, I was able to uncover elements of these systems in ways previously unknown to me whilst simultaneously uncovering the systems that I was unaware of housing in myself. Problematisation offers “new discourses or politics of truth by making a problem out of something by extracting it from a normalised role or concept to make it visible and open to critique” (Lynch & Kuntz, 2019, p. 159). As I opened up how I understood the university and knowledge to critique, I simultaneously opened them up to my imagination and began to see both concepts, as well as myself, through a disrupted lens. I found that the minute I began to utilise creative practices, I exited and released myself from the binaries of conventionally dominant ways of researching. The boundaries between research and researched became blurred, and I was empowered to slip myself onto the page, into spaces, photographs, and theoretical conversations; spaces that I previously believed I wasn't *allowed* to be in. Utilising creative thinking and artistic practice to conduct this research enabled both me and the research to be personal, embodied, messy, vulnerable, and contradictory. These are qualities that purposefully and persistently resist hegemonic ideas of credibility, legitimacy, and neutrality. Academic resistance can be deployed in many forms, but interdisciplinarity (that is, drawing from a multiplicity of knowledge – in this case, personal experience, creative practice, and critical theory) challenges the status quo by centring alternative presentations of voices and ways of knowing (Kidman & Chu, 2017). I suppose in the same way that White supremacy is able to exist by the complicity of people's silence, the colonial, neoliberal, patriarchal status quo of our education systems will continue to perpetuate if people from within the system refuse to resist and challenge it.



**The part where I tell you what this research means:**

Conclusions are supposed to be difficult right? I sit on the verge of tying this up, but I don't feel as though I can begin to confidently tell you what I've done. I suppose because once you begin the process of reconceptualising systems and constructs, you do away with the presupposed outcomes, metrics, and expectations. I have some questions jotted down, to catalyse me into this part of the process. The first is to ask myself what this research has meant for me. In the simplest terms, it has meant that I was able to spend a year of my life purposefully eschewing a rigid sensibility and attempting to see further than the eye lets on. I think that's what the arts do for me – they evade boundaries and binaries and open up possibilities and hope. They create a metaphorical and philosophical space where things can be different, questioned, convoluted, and complicated. To undertake this research project with creativity by my side (and under my skin) has meant that I haven't had to adhere to normative and institutional practices in the way that I initially envisioned a

thesis to uphold. It meant that I didn't have to perform a severe and impersonal self. It meant that I could blur concepts; by plucking them from their comfort zones, I could dip them in ambiguity and pull them out freshly to create them anew. It meant that I was enabled to restructure what I understand to be my own value system. It meant that I had to unlearn and challenge the neoliberal, patriarchal, and colonial values inherent in my being so that I could start to demystify where they ended, and I began. It meant that I could be embodied and vulnerable during a time that would've felt impossible had I been asked to deny that. This research also cracked me open, it forced me to reconcile with identity, purpose, positionality, traumas, vulnerability, ethics – like a really good therapy session. An interrogation of self to ensure integrity in the now and in the future. It meant that I found hope in a system that on the whole, I was ultimately disillusioned by.



My next question to ask myself is what this research might mean for future students. I hope that it opens up a space to be different within a system that subtly, but effectively, discourages difference. I hope that it enables others to take risks. I hope that it means more students will embrace vulnerability

and feel confident that their voices have an integral place in the future of research. I hope that it encourages an avoidance of the box-ticking, identity-shirking, efficiency-driven mentality that is bred through our neoliberalist model of education. I hope that it encourages students to feel a sense of agency and empowerment *not* from conceptualising themselves as a consumer of, or a customer to, the business of the university, but from having an experiential learning experience that propels them towards feeling connected to themselves and the world in authentic ways. I hope that it broadens the possibilities of what we think we know, that it begins to undo the limits that we enforce upon ourselves as to how we think we have to proceed. I hope that it opens up a space to reckon with the ways that we have been disciplined to value certain ways of being and knowing over others. I hope that it builds empathy for other ways of being, thinking, and doing.

Next question – what this research might mean for the university and its staff. To be honest, I have had the privilege of working through this thesis with two supervisors who haven't once attempted to place the traditional university metric of scientific objectivity onto me, but it is not hard to imagine (drawing on every other institutional experience I've had) what that might look like. I hope that this research drives the university to ask itself what it really means when it talks about 'critical thinking', 'creativity', and 'diversity'. To ask itself to what end are those concepts being marketed, or more importantly, under what definition are they being promoted. To ask itself whether or not it understands that ideas of a supposedly impartial rationality serve and uphold the interests of neoliberal instrumentality and facilitate the social reproduction of the middle class (Lim, 2014). To ask itself whether or not when it asks for creativity and 'outside of the box thinking', does it really want the full throes of what this entails: acts of resistance, deviation from the norm, going slowly, saying no, refusal, a reprioritising of values that imports embodiedness and feelings as worthy or does it want for these concepts to be performed neatly, quietly, 'safely'. What I hope with this research is that it sufficiently advocates for alternative ways of being, doing, knowing, and becoming as not only valuable, but integral for the future of universities and the future of knowledge.

## **A coincidence of timing, unanticipated but welcomed**

I was sitting with my supervisor the other day and saying how strange it feels to be at the juncture where I supposedly tie this whole thing up. I was rambling on existentially, as per usual, and started to talk about the fact I could never have predicted that by the time I was finishing this thesis on the university and knowledge, these systems would be undergoing some of the most immense change I might see in my lifetime. That they would actually *be* in the very process of being forced to reconceptualise themselves. I was talking with particular reference to 'Australian' universities and the recent restructure announcement made a couple of weeks ago in light of the looming recession and job scarcity. The 'Australian' government has introduced a number of schemes to incentivise STEM learners by dramatically reducing the cost of courses (Karp, 2020), whilst deterring arts and humanities learners by substantially increasing the fees making it far less attractive and financially viable. I suppose I shouldn't be shocked by the shamelessness of this decision; it's in line with everything I have read, thought about, experienced, and observed whilst studying the ways in which the modern neoliberal university practices itself. It still feels shocking. It still feels dystopian to so brazenly hamper the potentiality of critical studies and intellectual progress. It still feels scary to redistribute the majority of financial responsibility of tertiary studies to students. It still feels like an attack on any possibility of education becoming a more equitable and inclusive sphere. But these brazen decisions force a conversation, a conversation of who and what the university is for, a conversation that is ripe for the picking.

I feel like one of the biggest challenges of this process has been to wrestle with the quandary of whether this sort of research is worthwhile. My more feminine, anti-institutional, and critical side is inclined to think it is (hence being here, and doing it), but my socialised, neoliberalised, capitalised side consistently throws this confidence into a state of doubt. The continued dance. I think that whilst the rolling boil of crises has taken the global centre stage, it's been difficult to feel as though anything that doesn't directly and immediately improve the dire circumstances of which we're in is worthy or relevant of anyone's time. But the persistency in which I find myself affronted by institutional decision making and the blatant perpetuation of inequities reminds me that now is as good a time as any to be questioning the relationships between education, knowledge, power, and creativity. In fact, what is

that people say about chaos? Something about change being born from it. Similar to the way politicians uphold the slightly sadistic idea that a crisis should never go to waste. I feel the tendency to agree – whilst universities are reckoning with their budgets, staff cuts, lack of international students, and the potential of increased domestic enrolment, it seems like a ripe time for a re-evaluation of what the university means, how it could operate, who it could be for, and what its hopes are. A moment in time to address the inequities of a system of which its foundations are built. A time to undo and rebuild. A time to understand what our universities and knowledge systems could look like if we focused on equity rather than the dollar sign.

The worthiness of this research does not lie in some utopian desire to change the world, but rather in its sanguine hope to open the world. It feels like a betrayal to write about openness to then just obediently close things off. I suppose I am forced to persevere with the practice of reconceptualising. If you and I can both begin to reconceptualise a conclusion to not be a closing but to be an offering or a gift, a plate full of thoughts for digestion over time, at a later date, then there is no closing. We can never really close things off in a finite way because we can never know in a finite way. This sort of research imbues itself into the rhizomatic framework because it creates an endless amount of questions; how can we build alternative ways of thinking, being, and knowing into the university's physical and philosophical infrastructure, how can we safely draw on embodied and intimate experiences, practices and worldviews that lie outside institutional tradition, how can we unsettle the way traditional institutional knowledge value systems perpetuate (and preserve) social reproduction, mobility, and class, what are the politics and ethics surrounding integrity and agency when working to dismantle educational injustice and disrupt knowledge hegemony from the inside. These sorts of questions give me hope, they offer up a potentiality for change, they demand alternative ways of thinking and seeing, they undermine dominance, they place the stagnant status quo into question, and they require the use of our individual and collective imagination, an imagination that forces us outside of our physical and temporal limits.

I'll take this moment  
to sit and wonder  
And think about  
My sanguine hope  
To open the world.



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