Neonate + *The Machine*: Corporeal Epistemologies in the Archive of Social Reproduction

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I resist the introduction's traditional architecture—the scaffolding of argument, the illusion that critical framework precedes corporeal rupture. Instead: I accumulate knowledge in fragments, through methods I deliberately leave unfinished because the material conditions—reproductive labour's extraction, archival violence, the body's inscription as systematic exploitation—have not finished with birthing bodies (Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017).

I begin with my pain rendered methodologically legible, with solitude I have reconceived as epistemological necessity, with my refusal to separate making from thinking (Haraway, 1988; Barad, 2003; Sullivan, 2010). My zoetrope does not spin smoothly; its frames judder; incompleteness insists. To render reproductive labour's frame-by-frame accumulation, I must remain inside fragmentation, refuse the coherence others would impose.

What follows is not argument but testimony I enact through material practice: my rage archived, circulated, reproducible, clarifying (Bolt, 2004; Bolt, 2007).

Corporeal Epistemologies: The Body as Methodological Site

This inquiry originates not in abstracted intellectual terrain but through embodied rupture—a pedagogical intervention (the ten-minute rant exercise) that precipitated access to knowledge territories previously foreclosed through internalised disciplinary constraints. Years of aesthetic and affective compromises enacted within an extractive partnership had cultivated self-censorship; model-making and horror dioramas emerged as methodological apparatuses through which to interrogate gestational body horror as material ontology rather than metaphorical displacement (Kristeva, 1982; Creed, 1993; Brand, 2021).

Chronic pelvic pain—subsequently suspected as endometriosis—rendered my body epistemologically illegible within capitalist regimes demanding predictable, stable productivity. Pain's inconsistency refused assimilation into normative menstrual narratives I had internalised as universal experience (Martin, 1987). This cognitive dissonance catalysed a methodological reorientation: pain became data. Systematic documentation—intensity gradients, temporal duration, anatomical distribution—transformed subjective suffering into material traces of situated knowledge. Following Haraway's (1988) formulation, this constitutes knowledge production from specific embodied locations that refuses the fiction of objective distance, insisting instead upon the epistemological authority of partial perspectives (Haraway, 1988; Smith, 1987).

After years deferring medical consultation—anticipating institutional gaslighting endemic to women's pain treatment—I resumed engagement with biomedical authority. This encounter proved diagnostically productive yet epistemologically troubling: residual uncertainty persisted regarding whether institutional legitimation derived from my testimony or from reproductive futurity's invocation, substantiated through male witness (my partner's presence in the corridor). Medical encounters thus revealed themselves as sites wherein bodily legibility remains contingent upon reproductive value and patriarchal authentication rather than phenomenological testimony (Foucault, 1975; Martin, 1987; Davis, 1981).

Endometriosis's implication for fertility precipitated confrontation with previously unarticulated desire: to experience pregnancy, to inhabit ancestral pain, to perform labour exclusively my body could undertake. This recognition triggered acute anxiety spirals. I began transcribing internal monologue—thought fragments, recursive anxiety patterns—reframing these as autoethnographic data. This methodological gesture repositions affective labour as constitutive research condition rather than disciplinary noise requiring erasure (Smith, 2005).

Anxiety's material manifestations suffused creative production: the rage room installation explored pain's visceral phenomenology; textile works deployed velvet—materially inviting touch whilst concealing—threaded through with representational coils mapping pain's unpredictable neural pathways. Crucially, these artefacts function not as representations but as indexical records: produced during symptomatic flare-ups, abandoned during periods of physical incapacity, resumed upon functional restoration. Model-making enabled construction of gestational body horror at controllable scales—miniaturised scenes of corporeal rupture and accommodation sustaining visceral affective charge (Bolt, 2004; Bolt, 2007).

Navigating biomedical bureaucracy—blood work, gynaecological examinations—my partner's mounting frustration became palpable. Emotional and physical labour I performed transmuted into extraction. I systematically archived this invisible work: browser histories, appointment notifications, message threads wherein I repeatedly translated my embodied condition. These digital fragments constitute an archive of feminised care labour—material evidence of reproductive maintenance work capitalism systematically devalues whilst structurally requiring (Federici, 1975; Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2017).

This process catalysed unavoidable interrogation: not whether I possessed maternal "readiness", but rather what subjectivity I would inhabit as mother. Maternal labour was not futurity but historical continuity—I had already performed it: facilitating my uncle's sobriety at sixteen, preventing my mother's psychiatric sectioning at thirteen, providing paternal counsel to my step-brothers whilst maintaining invisibility. The question became not whether to mother, but whether to choose it deliberately—to raise a subject resistant to normative subjection (Davis, 1981; Fraser, 2016).

This speculation proceeded through speculative writing: what maternal subjectivity might I enact? Having performed feminised care labour under coercion throughout adolescence, what political possibilities emerged through deliberate choice? This thought experiment necessitated distinguishing coerced from consensual reproduction, compulsory maternal duty from abolitionist kinship formations—compelling confrontation with whether gestational desire derived from heteronormative interpellation or constituted something potentially resistant to it (Firestone, 1970; Edelman, 2004; Haraway, 2016).

Archival Insurgency: Methodological Engagements with Arrayah Loynd

Carmen Winant's *My Birth* (2018)—an accumulative installation comprising over two thousand vernacular childbirth images—introduced archival insurgency as methodological possibility (Winant, 2018). Through Audre Lorde's formulation of "using the master's tools", Winant enacts radical visibility: excavating privatised reproductive labour from institutional erasure and projecting it onto museum walls through overwhelming numerical accumulation renders legible what patriarchal archival logic has

systematically refused to preserve (Lorde, 1984; Eichhorn, 2013). I recognised this intervention's political urgency whilst sensing methodological incompleteness.

Archival theory—specifically Derrida's *mal d'archive* (archive fever) and Foucault's theorisation of archives as systems determining which bodies achieve epistemological knowability—provided conceptual apparatus for articulating why Arrayah Loynd's practice resonated beyond aesthetic appreciation (Derrida, 1996; Foucault, 2002). Loynd does not merely recuperate vernacular photographs; she actively manipulates them, inscribing counter-narratives through deliberate defacement, superimposition, and refusal. Where Winant's methodology depends upon pre-existing documentary traces, Loynd's intervention operates through troubling extant imagery's intended signification, disrupting original contexts, refusing documentors' interpretive authority. The archive becomes contested epistemological terrain, wherein hegemonic narratives undergo destabilisation and rewriting (Naik-Neenan, 2025; Hartman, 2008).

Though Loynd engages familial photographic archives, her methodology proves transferable across archival contexts—public domain medical documentation, historical scientific imagery, institutional records. Manipulating medical archives through digital distortion and assemblage generates new indexical traces. Following Margaret Iversen's theorisation, these physical markings constitute traumatic witness through their very incompleteness—each visual rupture, each torn edge, each superimposition becomes evidentiary (Iversen, 2007; Iversen, 2008). Through layering, fragmenting, and recombining institutional documents, distortion itself exposes what institutional authority labours to conceal: the traumatic historical narrative of birthing bodies' pain and labour exploited under capitalist accumulation regimes (Federici, 2004; Davis, 1981). These manipulated traces refuse archives' claims to objective truth, insisting instead that documents themselves constitute sites of ongoing epistemic violence (Derrida, 1996; Hartman, 2008).

This became theoretical scaffolding for my creative praxis: deploying archival materials to expose and destabilise power systems embedded within institutional documentation itself—a methodology elaborated through zine production practices detailed subsequently (Piepmeier, 2009; Duncombe, 1997; Drucker, 1995; Eichhorn, 2013).

Horror, Birth, Dioramas: Explorative Praxis

Femininity's performative demands precipitated creative paralysis—heteropatriarchal expectations accumulating as viscous epistemological constraint. When generative capacity failed entirely, I turned towards consumption rather than production, metabolising cultural texts in lieu of making.

Fixated on motherhood's futural possibilities, I sought narratives capable of articulating what remained linguistically foreclosed. *Nightbitch* gestured towards maternal metamorphosis yet strategically avoided birth itself as body horror—a category viscerally operative within reproductive materiality but systematically aestheticised out of dominant representational economies. The foetus extracting calcium from maternal dentition. Vaginal tissue rupturing. Hip dislocation as obstetric eventuality. Contemporary cinematic production refuses this terrain almost entirely. Only *Alien* sustains engagement with birth as body horror, yet displaces this onto masculine corporeality, onto the monstrous, the extraterrestrial—a displacement constitutive of the genre's ideological function (Creed, 1993; Clover, 1992). What

epistemological possibilities emerge when we refuse that displacement? What if parturition's ordinary experience constitutes the site of horror—not metaphorically transposed but materially instantiated (Kristeva, 1982; Brand, 2021)?

At the Elysium Gallery, encountering a diorama evoking the chestburster scene alongside Warhammer miniatures, institutional validation clarified that temporal investments in my partner's hobbies might be methodologically recuperated towards my own creative inquiry.

I commenced constructing dioramas. Financial constraints necessitated paper prototypes, yet their material fragility proved aesthetically generative for conveying reproductive precarity. The formal vocabulary emerged from dual sources: my misreading of the Kappa logo as a woman positioned in lithotomy—a perceptual error revealing how thoroughly the parturient body has been evacuated from visual culture—and Louis XIV's alleged voyeuristic fixation on observing birth, which catalysed obstetric medicine's architectural shift from upright to supine positioning, thereby subordinating labouring bodies' autonomy to the surveillant medical gaze (Dundes, 1987; Foucault, 1975; Martin, 1987).

This architectural reconfiguration encoded epistemological violence: the birthing body rendered legible exclusively when positioned for external observation, its phenomenological knowledge subordinated to institutional epistemic authority (Foucault, 1975). My dioramas sought to render this violence materially explicit, deliberately introducing sexualised undertones generating affective dissonance. By refusing obstetric medicine's strategic desexualisation of the lithotomy position—by permitting its sexual connotations to remain visible alongside medical violence—I compelled recognition of how reproductive bodies are simultaneously rendered sexually vulnerable whilst systematically stripped of sexual agency (Creed, 1993).

Initially focused on patriarchal positioning and the medical gaze's disciplinary function, the work gradually articulated the economic systems structuring reproductive labour as simultaneously essential to capital accumulation and systematically devalued. A monstrous hand grasping the birthing figure initially appeared reductive, yet proved methodologically generative: how might one represent institutional apparatus without lapsing into visual cliché? Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender Is the Flesh* (2020) returned as methodological intertext—rendering mass production through dystopian horror whilst refusing metaphorical displacement. My practice had been assembling cognate mechanised, impersonal, extractive architectures. This constituted the precise moment my praxis pivoted explicitly towards anticapitalist critique. The lithotomy position functioned not merely as patriarchal but as arranged for maximal extractive efficiency. Birth operated as reproductive labour: the production of future proletarian subjects under conditions systematically devaluing the labourer's corporeal contribution (Federici, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2017).

As I hyperfocused on constructing these paper figures, I found myself awaiting my partner's availability, increasingly cognisant that I possessed no genuine investment in that togetherness. I was becoming what my grandmother had named my mother: a computer widow. Yet the irony folded recursively—I constituted the absorbed subject, claiming solitude I had not yet consciously owned. The work was generating conditions for rupture, fabricating miniature worlds because the cohabited one had become ontologically uninhabitable. My hyperfocus operated as prophecy: the body knew what consciousness could not yet articulate (Haraway, 1988; Barad, 2007).

Subsequently, he recognised in these dioramas something I had not: that I felt entrapped within heteronormative monogamous structures. After one evening experimenting with silhouettes and directional lighting, I dreamed of a shadow zoetrope—animation projected outward onto architectural surfaces rather than contained within a viewing apparatus. This formal inversion registered as urgent: a shift from phenomenological interiority towards exteriorised spectacle, wherein the viewer becomes ambient witness rather than positioned voyeur (Crary, 1990; Gunning, 1990). I discovered Kara Walker's projected shadow installations, which became methodologically foundational: shadows function as indexical marks simultaneously referencing absence whilst asserting presence, rendering visible what has been institutionally obscured whilst refusing taxonomic stability (Walker, 2001; Shaw, 2004).

Consumed by the work's gravitational pull, I failed to register the architecture of relational collapse assembling around me. I self-medicated—substances serving identical epistemological functions: to numb affective disturbance, to defer confrontation, to permit hyperfocus whilst the relational world disintegrated. The conflicts accumulated as psychic scar tissue. Then the conflict that refused the established choreography of apology and reconciliation. For the first time, I did not immediately apologise. In the liminal space between waking and sleeping consciousness, I permitted myself to consider terminating the relationship—the very possibility he had instrumentalised as affective leverage throughout our partnership. I permitted myself agency. A small, terrible permission.

I woke and articulated what I had permitted myself to contemplate. Later that day, he informed me he was departing for Scotland. Six weeks passed—a durational void. Then he transmitted a message.

The Rupture: What the Work Revealed

Between the message and his physical departure, I obsessively generated shadow zoetrope iterations—sketching mechanical configurations, testing illumination angles, calculating rotational velocities. The flat transformed into a laboratory of avoidance: I methodically separated our belongings into discrete piles, dismantling our domestic architecture object by object, grateful for tasks requiring no affective processing.

After he returned to collect his possessions, I fabricated a floor-to-ceiling iteration of the textile piece that had initially opened the motherhood dialogue I had systematically avoided. Scaling it up registered as urgent. If the miniature dioramas had constituted controllable worlds, this vertical expanse asserted presence, refused diminishment. I worked in downstairs rooms whilst he moved through spaces above, fearful of ascending, fearful of what proximity might demand. So I remained below, sewing—enacting the historically feminised labour that Federici (2004) and Parker (2010) theorise as simultaneously essential and systematically devalued under capitalism.

We conducted conversations we should have enacted months—perhaps years—prior. They materialised in fragments, in doorways, as one departed and the other arrived. The articulations arrived too belatedly to preserve anything, but perhaps that constituted the point. They named what had been structurally operative throughout: we had been performing a script neither subject believed in, sustained through inertia rather than desire. My creative practice had been attempting to communicate what I could not yet consciously register (Sullivan, 2010; Bolt, 2004).

During one doorway conversation, he observed it had seemed evident—observing my practice, hearing me articulate themes concerning capitalist extraction of reproductive labour—that I felt entrapped. The statement landed as corporeal blow. I had believed I was concealing it, not from him but from myself. The work had been articulating what I could not consciously acknowledge, and he had interpreted it lucidly whilst I remained strategically blind. This constituted internalised misogyny at its most insidious operation: the conviction that naming my entrapment would signify failure, that admitting the relationship had become another site of extraction would betray the idealised version of subjectivity who could endure infinitely, render herself sufficiently diminished to accommodate (Fraser, 2016; Rao, 2021).

The zoetrope iterations proliferated. I sketched mechanisms never to be materially instantiated, imagined projections exceeding domestic space entirely. The work became simultaneously refuge and demand: it required my attention in ways the relationship no longer could. In that requirement, I located not peace, but precision. The work knew what it necessitated. I was finally learning to attend.

Summer: Alone in the Space

Summer materialised not as temporal reprieve but as recursive return—an enforced repatriation to the maternal dwelling, to those originary architectural coordinates I had laboured to transcend. What had operated theoretically as chosen epistemological solitude transmuted under material conditions into imposed isolation. This constituted not sanctuary but symptomatic retreat: the homecoming registered phenomenologically as failure, as regression into filial dependency's disciplinary infrastructure (Fraser, 2016).

Yet solitude reconceptualised as epistemological methodology—that precise condition through which cognition finally achieved articulation without perpetual translation, without the exhausting affective labour of rendering my situated knowledges legible to a subject who systematically refused comprehension—clarified what the relational architecture had foreclosed (Haraway, 1988; Smith, 1987). Liberated from his reproductive imaginary's coercive pressures, I could finally permit myself neurotypical hyperfixation without the affective penalties he had institutionalised through mundane disciplinary practices. His refusal to engage substantive philosophical dialogue concerning parenthood—articulated through the dismissive formulation "wasn't bothered until they could talk"—had calcified into ideological positioning, making legible the gendered distribution of care labour he had already choreographed. He would romanticise the fantasy of paternal domesticity whilst systematically refusing to reckon with its material conditions; I would metabolise the burden whilst he reserved access to affective pleasures (Fraser, 2017; Daskalaki et al., 2020).

Now, inhabiting solitude, I could think without perpetual translation. I returned compulsively to Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, to social reproduction theory's foundational texts, interrogating: could motherhood materialise outside heteropatriarchal enclosure's disciplinary architectures (Federici, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2017)? The summer transmuted into methodological exercise in archival trespass—testimonies of single mothers by choice, digital forums, video diaries constituting alternative genealogies. What I sought was epistemological permission: could motherhood be enacted without the extractive labour of managing masculine fragility (O'Brien, 2015; Lewis, 2022)?

A suppressed memory resurfaced: the queer single mother I had interviewed during an undergraduate assignment, whose material existence had registered then as ontological impossibility within my theoretical framework. Her daughter navigated quotidian spaces with embodied confidence I had never witnessed reproduced within heteronormative family structures (Ritholtz and Buxton, 2021; Evans, 2023). At that historical moment, I could not metabolise what phenomenological observation presented—constrained by internalised assumptions that motherhood necessitated heteropatriarchal infrastructure. I had archived the interview as an empirical anomaly rather than recognising it as a prefigurative possibility.

Now, occupying newfound singularity, her testimony returned as prophetic utterance. Woman after woman populating these digital forums articulated convergent clarifying insight (r/SingleMothersbyChoice, 2021-2025): the structural absence of a male partner constituted not deficit but liberation from extractive relational economies. Without the affective labour of perpetually managing masculine volatility, of translating embodied needs into household logistics legible to masculine subjectivity, they had discovered surplus capacity—directed toward their children, certainly, but equally toward themselves (Wiesböck et al., 2025; Ritholtz and Buxton, 2021). One documented mornings evacuated of conflict, evenings liberated from the exhausting choreography of masculine fragility's management. Another narrated her daughter's embodied confidence, her refusal of compulsory femininity's performative anxieties (r/SingleMothersbyChoice, 2021-2025).

I had internalised the conviction that motherhood remained fundamentally incompatible with autonomy—an ideological formation constructed through accumulated exposure to feminised care roles, through feminist critiques that collapsed analytically into wholesale refusal of biological reproduction. I had metabolised Firestone's abolitionist call to transcend biological motherhood without adequately grasping that these critiques targeted structural formations rather than corporeal capacities (Firestone, 1970; Edelman, 2004).

The testimonies disclosed abolition of qualitatively different order: the refusal of heteropatriarchal family structure as ontological precondition for enacting care. These women had abandoned the nuclear family's disciplinary architecture entirely, discovering through that abandonment that motherhood need not operate as carceral infrastructure when systematically unmoored from the labour of maintaining masculine comfort (Lewis, 2022; O'Brien, 2015; Weeks, 2023). A radically different relational configuration emerged as materially possible: grounded in reciprocal mutuality, in recognition that care could be enacted outside the extractive economies I had presumed constitutive of parenting itself (Haraway, 2016; Evans, 2023).

This epistemological shift arrived as embodied knowledge—the identical prophetic knowing that had manifested through the dioramas' material articulations before consciousness could adequately theorise them. My younger self's intuitive conviction that motherhood remained incompatible with her continued existence had been phenomenologically accurate, but exclusively within the structural configuration historically available. The partnership retrospectively confirmed what the dioramas had been communicating: his reproductive vision necessitated my systematic self-diminishment as ontological precondition.

The partnership's dissolution revealed itself as structural precondition for futurity's imaginative possibility. What I had mourned was not the relationship's material practices but rather the heteropatriarchal script it had appeared to promise. Without him, I could finally confront the possibility that had been operative throughout: I could elect motherhood outside extractive economies when systematically unmoored from heteropatriarchal enclosure. The testimonies offered epistemological permission to imagine otherwise, to refuse the false binary between autonomous solitude and reproductive captivity (Lewis, 2022; O'Brien, 2015; Weeks, 2023).

During this temporal interval, I volunteered at Hertfordshire Archives digitising historical collections, discovering myself inhabiting Derrida's *Archive Fever* not as theoretical abstraction but as material praxis (Derrida, 1996). Each image I cropped, edited, watermarked materialised as lessons in archival power's operations: determining what information becomes accessible, what remains strategically obscured, illuminating how institutional gatekeeping operates through the mundane labour of selection and framing (Eichhorn, 2013). I was not merely theorising archives; I was actively producing the archive, determining its legibility, inscribing its constitutive limitations. The watermark functioned as a perpetual visual reminder that access remains always already mediated, that no encounter with archival materiality transpires unfiltered (Hartman, 2008; Eichhorn, 2013).

This praxis clarified what theoretical discourse alone could not adequately transmit: archival work constitutes editorial work, preservation operates simultaneously as selective erasure. My hands performed materially what Derrida had theorised abstractly—the archive's *mal d'archive*, its constitutive violence (Derrida, 1996; Hartman, 2008). The volunteer labour became phenomenologically inseparable from social reproduction theory, accompanying me on quotidian commutes returning to my mother's dwelling each evening. On those buses, I knitted—fabricating the jumper that would eventually bear "I have no mouth and I must scream" (Ellison, 1967), invoking Ellison's vision of bodies trapped within machines of torture, denied voice yet forced to endure—a condition I recognised as analogous to existing as feminised reproductive body under capitalism's extractive regimes. The phrase named simultaneously the structural silencing I had endured and the scream my practice was enacting. The knitting was monotonous, precisely the species of labour requiring just sufficient attention to occupy hands whilst leaving cognition free to synthesise. It materialised social reproduction in miniature: unwaged, systematically invisibilised, the production of functional objects through accumulated temporal investments unmonetisable to capital (Federici, 1975; Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2016).

As I knitted, the archival labour and theoretical reading illuminated one another through recursive feedback. The cropping and watermarking operated through identical structural logic articulated in Fraser and Federici—the mechanisms through which reproductive labour remains simultaneously essential to capitalism's continued functioning yet systematically rendered invisible, naturalised ideologically as women's work (Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2017). Both archival preservation and social reproduction demanded parallel interrogations: what accumulates preservation, what suffers strategic obscuration, which labour achieves recognition and which systematically disappears (Rao, 2021; Daskalaki et al., 2020)?

The zine—abandoned during the collaborative module, unable to reconcile its formal requirements with partnership's coercive demands—returned during these commutes as the singular form capacious enough to metabolise what I was beginning to comprehend. It could accommodate the archival sabotage

methodologies acquired from Arrayah Loynd, the radical abolitionist conceptualisations of birth and motherhood encountered through social reproduction theory, and the anti-capitalist critique clarifying through material enactment of digitisation labour. The zine refused the enforced separation between theoretical discourse and material making imposed throughout undergraduate formation; it demonstrated that thinking transpires through cutting, pasting, assembling fragments into provisional configurations that refuse coherent totalising narrative (Piepmeier, 2009; Duncombe, 1997; Drucker, 1995; Eichhorn, 2013).

The knitting and theoretical synthesis proved phenomenologically inseparable. Both necessitated sustained attention that partnership had systematically foreclosed—no subject interrupting, no dismissive framing of intellectual labour as procrastinatory displacement. By the temporal moment I returned to my mother's home each evening, I was metabolising the archive through embodied practice, through the repetitive labour capitalism demands of feminised corporeality, beginning to apprehend how to refuse its extractive terms (Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2016).

Confirmative Praxis: Testing the Zoetrope in Reality

The zoetrope resurfaces temporally in autumn—transmuted from speculative conceptual proposition into material imperative. What originated as theoretical architecture—reproductive labour figured through frame-by-frame temporal accumulation, invisibilised motion rendered abruptly legible—now demands physical instantiation (Crary, 1990; Gunning, 1990). Summer's durational interruption has fundamentally recalibrated the work's epistemological coordinates: theoretical frameworks have crystallised, solitude has transmuted into deliberate epistemological stance rather than imposed condition (Haraway, 1988; Barad, 2003).

I fabricate multiple operative iterations, each constituting material interrogation of the shadow zoetrope's capacity to perform what discursive articulation alone cannot adequately transmit. The inaugural version establishes proof of concept whilst simultaneously exposing conceptual insufficiencies requiring address. Subsequent versions emerge not as progressive linear refinements but as recursive investigations into what the apparatus discloses when subjected to iterative material testing protocols. I engineer a hand-crank mechanism designed to grant viewers agential control over the temporal unfolding of reproductive labour-time's representation (Gunning, 1990; Sullivan, 2010; Bolt, 2004).

Yet administrative infrastructures systematically collapse the intended material realisation. The terminal prototype necessitates precision fabrication: waterjet cutting into brass-toned metal sheeting, subsequently curved to achieve congruence with the cylindrical diameter's specifications. This proves institutionally unattainable within available resource allocations. I am redirected toward 3D-printed thermoplastic material—a substitution that fundamentally transforms the work's sensorial and conceptual registers.

The metal would have transmitted coldness against corporeal contact—constituting haptic echo of medical instrumentality's affective registers, of technologies that simultaneously surveil and pathologise birthing corporeality (Foucault, 1975; Martin, 1987). Metal endures repeated tactile handling, withstands the friction generated through viewer interaction's material demands. The thermoplastic substitute fractures during institutional transport, necessitates emergency repair protocols before exhibition inauguration, fractures again within one week of sustained public display. The material registers

phenomenologically as insubstantial, transmits as cheap beneath my fingertips despite the spray paint application and acrylic wash techniques deployed to mitigate this perception. The material compromise perpetually haunts the work's internal logic.

What partially recuperates the installation's critical capacity is the riso-printed imagery: altered scans sourced from the Wellcome Collection's birthing girdle archives. The animation sequence—depicting a woman suspending herself from a horizontal bar whilst actively labouring in childbirth—operates as devastating visual metaphor for structural violence systematically enacted upon labouring corporeality. Frame-by-frame accumulation renders structurally visible what obstetric architecture ideologically obscures: that birth constitutes work, that bodies labour under conditions not of their autonomous choosing, that apparatus ostensibly facilitating care functions simultaneously as mechanism of corporeal constraint (Federici, 2004; Davis, 1981).

Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* demands theoretical acknowledgement embedded within the work's visual grammar (Federici, 2004). I source mediaeval imagery through public domain archives and Wellcome's digitised holdings, establishing historical continuity between witch-hunts' reproductive control mechanisms and contemporary biopolitical extraction's operations (Federici, 2004; Davis, 1981). I discovered a recently concluded exhibition at the Wellcome Collection; my father attends as proxy, documents it photographically enabling remote analytical engagement.

Through this mediated proxy encounter, I locate scientific studies analysing the birthing girdle's material traces: "Scientists have used emerging proteomic techniques to find traces of ancient vaginal fluid, honey and milk on a rare manuscript from the late 15th century" (University of Cambridge, 2023). The materiality proves irrefutable—bodies inscribe traces, labour writes itself materially into objects, the archive cannot comprehensively erase what it systematically attempts to contain (Hartman, 2008; Derrida, 1996). I incorporate this discovery into the installation's expanding conceptual architecture.

Additional interventions layer further signifying densities: altered archival images depicting illustrated eyes—scattered strategically throughout the zoetrope's exterior surface—invoke panoptical surveillance's disciplinary operations, the tech oligarchs whose vested material interests demand this generation of birthing subjects produce the subsequent generation of exploitable proletarian workers (Baker-White, 2025; Foucault, 1978; Fraser, 2016). I insert altered medical illustrations depicting endometrial cells sourced from eighteenth-century anatomical atlases—acknowledging the corporeal pain catalysing this project's genesis whilst simultaneously achieving compositional equilibrium between external and internal visual fields.

The iterations refuse resolution toward technical mastery. They accumulate as documentary evidence of making-as-thinking, positioning prototypes as epistemological instruments rather than developmental failures en route toward singular completion (Bolt, 2004; Bolt, 2007; Barad, 2003). The zoetrope functions critically—not because it successfully achieves intended material conditions, but because it renders reproductive labour structurally visible, projects it outward into collectively shared spatial registers, refuses the privatised domestic enclosure that naturalises gestation ideologically as unwaged biological inevitability rather than systematically exploited work (Federici, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2017).

This constitutes confirmative praxis: returning recursively to conceptual propositions equipped with acquired technical competencies, testing rigorously whether theoretical frameworks withstand material instantiation's demands, accepting that institutional constraints fundamentally compromise the work whilst refusing to permit those compromises to nullify its critical capacities entirely (Sullivan, 2010; Dimitrakaki, 2025). The zoetrope spins, the frames flicker intermittently, the birthing body labours visibly across the gallery wall—fragmented, strategically incomplete, insisting upon structural visibility despite every material and administrative obstacle encountered throughout its contested fabrication.

The Graduate Exhibition: Installation, Presentation, Gathering

The graduate exhibition materialises as ephemeral congregation wherein praxis enters institutional space and claims legitimacy (Sullivan, 2010; Horne, 2016; Dimitrakaki, 2025). Positioned as a liminal threshold, the work demands phenomenological disorientation, compels introspective engagement within foreclosed affective registers. These assemblages refuse chronological sequencing, reject developmental trajectories. They operate recursively, sustaining epistemological tensions whilst eschewing redemptive synthesis (Halberstam, 2011; Haraway, 2016).

The zoetrope rotates, projecting fragmented sequential frames onto architectural surfaces. Images flicker and judder, refusing seamless animation, rejecting illusory coherent cinematic motion. Yet here the installation encounters substantive limitation: visitor corporeal hesitancy. Despite signage explicitly encouraging haptic interaction, audiences demonstrated pronounced reluctance toward tactile engagement. The motorised mechanism—necessitated by fabrication resource constraints—evacuates agency from the viewing encounter. Had I achieved the intended hand-crank iteration, viewers would be constituted as active participants, their bodily labour directly animating reproductive labour's optical visibility. This material failure crystallises future methodological iteration: post-MA, the zoetrope demands restoration of manual cranking mechanism, demands that viewers labour corporeally to render the work semantically legible (Gunning, 1990; Sullivan, 2010).

Nonetheless the projection disperses outward, rendering reproductive labour as labour-time. Visitors cannot circumvent engagement; flickering frames implicate their bodies. The zine circulates freely—the work's most politically insurgent gesture. Yet visitor hesitancy persists: the threshold separating optical consumption from material appropriation proves difficult to transgress, revealing internalised gallery pedagogy (Piepmeier, 2009; Duncombe, 1997; Eichhorn, 2013).

Unrealised curatorial ambitions haunt the installation's periphery. I had intended to conceive a sonic environment—stratified recordings of industrial atmospheric hum, mechanical ventilation systems, fluorescent lighting infrastructure—constructing the auditory architecture of reproductive medicalisation's technological apparatus (LaBelle, 2015). This remained unexecuted, strategically withheld pending spatial reconfiguration. Yet its absence registers as generative lacuna, as spectral trace gesturing toward more comprehensive sensorial immersion (Derrida, 1996).

An institutional encounter generates prospective directions: collaborative formation with Isy Weaver-Jones and Dan Lewis. How might this praxis translate beyond the gallery? Do Ho Suh's fabric architecture installations—which I encountered at Tate Modern's Walk the House exhibition—offer

precedent (Suh, 2024-2025). Suh's translucent textile structures invite visitors to traverse through domestically scaled architectural passages. What if visitors traversed through fabric, sensation approximating gestational passage? What if installation functioned as camera obscura, inverting phenomenological experience (Crary, 1990; Shaw, 2004)?

The sequencing refuses linearity. Works orbit identical unresolved questions: What does public rage signify when pathologised? What does refusing reproductive futurity signify when capitalism demands labour toward it? What does solitude signify when collaboration has been coercively violent (Fraser, 2016; Edelman, 2004; Lewis, 2022)?

The exhibition does not furnish answers. It sustains openness, presents incompletion, commits to not resolving into institutional formations. This is epistemological positionality, not failure (Halberstam, 2011; Haraway, 2016). The structural conditions persist. The archive continues pathologising. Reproductive labour remains unwaged. The work does not pretend otherwise.

What becomes visible is not resolution but insistence: methodology clarifying, solitude transmuting into rigorous epistemological stance. The exhibition assembles praxis produced without compromise, without institutional translation, without deference to gatekeepers. It speaks through its own register: material, fragmentary, incomplete, refusing closure, refusing capitalism's demand that art resolve structural conditions (Dimitrakaki, 2025; Horne, 2016).

The exhibition is temporally delimited. The works will face dismantling and storage. The zoetrope will cease rotation—until remade, until hand-crank restoration, until visitor labour activates what constraints prevented. Yet the zine continues circulating. The praxis moves beyond institutional confines, demonstrates what it insists: accessibility does not necessitate simplification, refusal constitutes methodology, incompletion constitutes rigour, praxis requires no institutional authorisation to cohere (Piepmeier, 2009; Duncombe, 1997; Drucker, 1995). Future iterations beckon: collaborative formations, architectural interventions, fabric environments collapsing distance between viewer and viewed. The praxis continues. It refuses termination. It insists (Haraway, 2016; Halberstam, 2011).

Accountability Without Resolution: What Cannot Be Said, What Remains Open

This praxis does not conclude because structural conditions persist. The archive pathologises reproductive refusal. Reproductive labour remains unwaged, systematically invisible. To proffer synthesis would betray the epistemological commitment sustaining this practice: refusal of capitalist legibility, incompletion as methodological rigour (Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017; Halberstam, 2011).

Limitations demand explicit nomination. This practice emerges from whiteness, class privilege, institutional access. The former partner materialises as architectural absence, deliberately unvoiced yet ethically acknowledged: rage operates selectively; violence nominated remains partial; solitude generates clarity whilst foreclosing alternative relationalities (Davis, 1981; Hartman, 2008).

Contradictions remain irresolvable. Desire for motherhood coexists with refusal. Critique of the couple-form accompanies grief for partnership's dissolution. Whiteness is nominated as structural formation whilst materially benefiting from its operations. The praxis inhabits contradiction without reconciliation, rendering visible irresolvability without claiming visibility as solution (Edelman, 2004; Lewis, 2022; Weeks, 2023).

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