

Grieving (and) Weaving (and) Spreading (and) Becoming

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ABSTRACT

Our interactions with personal ephemera - a home, a recovered letter, an expired bank card, an arranged breakfast table, a church stained glass window, an enclosed corner, your mother's rosary, a childhood bedroom - give way to the psychological investigations of the self. In this thesis paper, *Grieving (and) Weaving (and) Spreading (and) Becoming*, I will explore my practice of subverting and incorporating found images, video, Slavic motifs, text and text(iles) in a disembodied search for identity, reconnection and softness. My arts-informed research project uses weaving methodologies, our personal archives among the discourse of grief, trauma, the domestic space, ritual, religion and gendered domestic labour. Through works of embroidery, image-making, performance, installation this paper aims to include a "distraction-as-ceremony" based methodology, similar to weaving methodologies, as a form of reconnection to our roots and our identities. In this paper, I will be using my Polish heritage as reference. In what ways can recreating, assembling, manipulating ephemera, space, language and the archive be used as a tool for a softer, slower, more patient future?

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I also acknowledge that I am an uninvited white settler living and working on the ancestral lands of the Haudenosaunee and the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe First Nations. I would like to thank the community on the land that I reside on for offering me a place to feel grounded in my values, my work ethic and my care. Thank you to my peers Ananna Rafa, Alessandra Abelle, Andria Keen and Sade Alexis for sharing in the highs and lows of the program and working alongside me when you did. I do not know what life would be like without your insight, knowledge, encouragement and solidarity throughout the process of my work. I deeply nurture the depth of my friendship with you all entirely.

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*“Can a break be a form of breaking something anew?
Can our breaking shit be a correction too?”*

Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, 2020, 113

“It is useless, then, to trap women in the exact definition of what they mean, to make them repeat (themselves) so that it will be clear; they are already elsewhere in that discursive machinery where you expected to surprise them. They have returned within themselves...Within themselves means within the intimacy of that silent, multiple, diffuse, touch. And if you ask them insistently what they are thinking about, they can only reply:

Nothing. Everything.”

Luce Irigaray, 1985b: *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 29.

INTRODUCTION

As you first step in the dimly lit gallery, it divides itself into channels. On one side, a video performance is projected onto a wall with a wooden bench and poetry chapbook that resembles sitting on a wooden church pew, singing along with a hymnal book. Resting on the floor against the adjacent wall, you visit a triptych of handmade wooden carved frames, in the shape of a familiar stained glass window. Imperfect, yet cared for. The softness of the embroidered words replaces the hardened soldered tinted glass, and is left waiting to be read. As you move to the other side of the gallery, it leads into an arched cobalt blue curtain - like an altar - that moves with the movement of your body when walking through. Finally, you stop and visit a painted blue arched wall, showered with found objects, a small library, photographs, polaroids, holy cards and painted rosaries.

As we are living in a world where late stage capitalism persists and the hyper independent individual must constantly and quickly adapt and consume, my thesis hopes to subvert and rearrange these presumptions through deliberate slowness, exercising patience and holding space for those who may struggle within these unaccommodating systems. Through sporadically weaving these text(iles), I aim to explore this through a “distraction as ceremony” lens which honours and accommodates the neurodivergent mind that may wish to wander.

My work aims to feel soft, playful, humble yet also preserved and cared for. As if you are being mindful when wearing the shoes passed on to you by a grandparent. The see-through fabrics touched by the gallery lights soften these harsh structures, often hierarchized in the Catholic Church. As you move through and look closer, the embroidered words start to come up. That is where the archive extends itself. And subverts itself. The text is either read, written or spoken, revealing its true intentions. It brings some of the church’s motives into question and into critique. Letter by letter, it weaves and brings forward the effect that these contained systems have, to invade and to claim, to govern the home, to dominate the meaning of one’s life into singularity. It stitches the body (our bodies) like feeding the fabric in my sewing machine.

Waiting for time to allow some of it to unstitch. My work extends this lingering dilemma. Do I yearn to let go of these restraints that call my (our) bodies deficient? Or do I yearn to stay for the histories that precede my mother, who have only shown me what love and strength can be? By embroidering memories and thoughts into fabric, and exploring narratives of heritage through archive, and memorabilia, I hope to invite an intimate reflection of the self.

My thesis becomes the seeds to be planted, sprouted and emergent. Planting these archival materials as ghostly seeds that spread across the walls in Special Projects Gallery. Yet to be foraged, yet to be discovered. These seeds are temporal, found in our past, then scattered across to make way for our future. To find them, they would need to be looked at carefully. In all their grief, their yearning, their familiarity, these seeds sprout and break away in a final act of release in the hopes of cultivating a more patient, communal, slower, gentler future.

As humans, we are in constant search for meaning-making. In *Grieving (and) Weaving (and) Spreading (and) Becoming*, this is my meaning-making.

August 13th, 2023

My arrival on a solo trip to my mother's hometown in Poland on August 13th, 2023 happened amidst a hot, muggy summer. Rogoznik, a small town with a mere three thousand people, greeted me like a bowl of warm, hearty soup. It had been fifteen years since I last came, half the amount of time since my mother immigrated to “Canada”.¹ Often when we grow up, our memories about a place can change compared to how we remember it as children. But it was not like that for me. It felt and looked exactly the same as I left it. I often wonder if Rogoznik was kept the same, as if she was waiting here for me. I remember seeing a group of older *Babcias*² circling together in a meadow, next to the church my mother grew up in, singing a folk song called “*Góralu czy ci nie żal*” which translates to “Highlander, do you not regret?”. With the

¹ The reason why I wrote “Canadian” in quotation marks is to hopefully act as a placeholder for a more decolonial language. I’m thinking of writings of Shawn Wilson, Vanessa Watts and Laura Grier, PhD candidate from York University who puts “Canada” in quotation within the beginning of her OCAD MFA thesis dissertation.

² “*Babcia*” is used as the Polish translation of “Grandmother”.

little translation I could understand, I imagined they were desiring to run away in search of a new dream for themselves. Not worried about what they have to cook for dinner for their husbands, children, their children's children, their in-laws, their in-law's children. I saw their spotted, wrinkled, unsung hands. I wondered if any of them remember to sing goralé folk songs or dances. If they did forget, did too much time pass? Did this happen to my mother too? Too much time was given to the *machine*, forcing them to forget their mother tongues and replace them with using their mother muscles. I saw myself in them.

As these *babcias* were laughing together, a vision of my grandmother was captured in their smiles and my mother's spark was in their eyes. If my eulogy is destined to live a life of unacknowledged labour and pressure, like these older women have lived through, it is daunting. Can I let go of holding my tongue? Holding it any longer hurts and is drying me out. Being taught to hold it hurts so much and makes it hard to speak. But if I let go, I feel the guilt trickling down my spine. My tongue is the only proof of knowing I can cling onto. As a reminder of *her* (them). I would rather live from prying eyes, to jump, spin, pan, run right into the fields and scream, live, breathe for *her*.

A younger woman in the group parts her lips open,

About to whisper a folk lullaby.



Artist-as-Weaver

I think about the moments of forming ideas, blurbs, thoughts for new poems and pieces of writing outside of institutions. I think about squeezing in more studio work when time seems limited, embroidering in an institution or for a gallery, or brainstorming on scrap paper during a ten hour work shift for a paper as a way to break in more time. My body becomes heavy having to multitask in fast, dismissive and uncaring systems. Because of the systemic and historical implications, the act of multi-tasking becomes something that is feminine. I think about the histories of creating and making that stemmed from multi-taking methods and how it is present in my own bringing, in my mother's upbringing and her mother's as well. I view multi-tasking as a gendered form of "you're doing the bare minimum as a mother" or the emotional labour of educating the men in your life to be better men while simultaneously healing yourself from your own burdens caused by other men. Writing and creating art about this, transcends and morphs into a Jacquard loom, just like Sadie Plant said.³ From my fingers to my torso, trickling down to my toes and spine, my loom begins to take shape. I become the *artist-as-weaver*. The artist-as-weaver is a concept I have thought about after seeing Anne Low's exhibition at Franz Kaka this fall titled *Bury Me I* (Fig.1), specifically her work titled *Dream Meadow* (2023)⁴. It is the thought and intention of learning how to manually stitch these items by hand, behind closed doors without a machine. Because your body replaces the machine. Some people may acknowledge the artist weaving during those moments in-between, although rarely do they see the artists weave throughout the whole process from start to finish. In our digital world, even weaving and sewing videos are cut down to a sixty second spliced version instead of the whole eight backbending hours.

³ Plant, S. *Zeroes and Ones*. pp. 19. Plant describes how the Jacquard Loom created by Joseph Marie Jacquard, was both effective as one of the earliest forms of the computer machine yet it also was opposed by workers who believed the weaving process was crucial. The workers abhorred having to submit this "migration of control" of their bodies to this new weaving machine.

⁴ Anne Low, *Bury Me*, 2023, Franz Kaka, Toronto, ON. <https://franzkaka.com/Bury-me> In the exhibition review for Franz Kaka, states "reference the body, evoking the absent presence of the weaver". The "artist-as-weaver" methodology that Low describes is taking the long embroidery, weaving, textile actually is when made by hand, rather than the ease of machines being able to mass produce and manufacture them.

When I think about this process, as a weaver, I start missing my grandmother. I wish I could have asked her to teach me how to sew and weave before she passed and teach me how to embroider basic techniques starting with the satin stitches, cross stitch, braid stitch and so on. I wish to learn from her on how to dye fabric, how to sew thinner fabric materials like sheer polyester or organza, how to choose which fabric to embroider and which ones are harder to embroider, preparing a space and equipment to embroider and prepare myself to be in environments that encourage me to embroider. The “unseen weaver” is what I want to highlight here. All of these decisions are a different written labour that is never seen. The invisible labourer, the in-between process and preparation, the thinking and wandering thoughts. Just like a painter prepares a stretched canvas, a colour palette, a brush to be used and what subject will be painted. I sometimes wonder, will anyone even appreciate this? Will they appreciate this body, making then aching, aching then making? Can anyone find solace in my familiar fingers that resemble their own grandmother? I ask these questions in the midst of grief and anger when stabbing my needle through the fabric, my fingers punctured with blood.

The unseen labour of embroidering, altering, quilting, knitting, crocheting, sewing, needlepoint but also multi-tasking in cooking, cleaning, watching a show, caring for your kids, for your loved ones, going to work and classes all make us *artists-as-weavers*. We become Jacquard weaving looms for the in-betweenness of coping within the systems we are forced to thread through. But, we can hope to weave our own narratives (so we can in fact show power through our process).⁵

⁵ Wayland, Elizabeth Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*, January 1, 1996. Pg. 32-33. Wayland explains that textiles and weaving dates back to women in prehistoric periods, helping each other on their weaving projects, weaving by eye and intuition rather than measurements.



Fig. 1, Anne Low, *Dream Meadow*, 2023, Franz Kaka, Toronto, ON. Hand woven and hand dyed wool, hand woven linen, hand woven silk, found textiles, paint, paper, photocopy, horsetail, dog hair, metal, wood, found nut shell, tissue paper, match strike pad.

ON PROCESS: *Distraction-as-ceremony-based methodology.*

Dis·trac·tion⁶

noun

1. To interrupt, divert, cause a disturbance.

Synonyms: intrusion, interference, unattentive, fog, mystification.

2. Extreme agitation of the mind and emotions

Synonyms: hysteria, frenzy, madness, insanity, delirium, mania

E.g. *“That woman over there. Laughing and looking around during a funeral. Is she mad?”*, *“No, she is simply distracted”*.

Cer·e·mo·ny⁷

noun

1. a set of acts, often traditional or religious, performed at a formal occasion to recognize an important event.

E.g. weddings, mass, funerals, birthdays, holy days, days to commemorate the dead.

2. the ritual observances and/or procedure that is performed to commemorate a particular event or action.

Synonyms: observance, formality, performance, ritual, form, worship, solemnity, practice.

E.g. A funeral is a ceremony to mourn the dead. Highlanders singing a traditional Polish folk song during a funeral or wedding commemorates their life lived and relishes Poland’s independence and resilience.



⁶ Definition taken from a combination of the Google, Miriam Webster, and Collins dictionary.

⁷ Ibid.

PREFACE: Distraction as Disruption.

To fall into distraction

 Is resistance,
 A subconscious revolution.
In finding knowledge,
By ourselves and with others,

We happen to

Find ourselves,
Stumbling,
Dilly dallying,
Bumping upon,
Doing “unnecessary” things
everyday.

We are doing so, collectively. Unconsciously. Sacredly.

Because the systems that uphold fastness, greed, loudness, order, discipline, elitism,
homophobia, whiteness, sexism,

don't want us to be distracted in seeking the truth on our own.

DISTRACTION AS METHOD: *The way I drift affects the way I make work.*

Whenever starting a new project, all of the limitless ideas live in the many pocket-size notebooks carried in my tote bag or within the notes app of my iPhone. The ADHD in me can never stick with one notebook. There has to be at least five different ones in a certain size, different shape, colour and texture of the pages. Some are filled to the last page, while others are left barely written in and kept empty, barely touched and tucked away. Gradually compiling dust as each day goes by, saving them for a more special occasion. In a way, keeping these notebooks help separate different literate topics, thoughts, designs to yet be fleshed out. It can be lost or forgotten quotes, words, poems, phrases that resonated in the moment, for a particular project, responses to hated books, or even my grocery shopping list. Many of these writings become sporadic or spur of the moment, because my brain behaves sporadically. This collection of notebooks ranging from pocket size to an A4 size, handmade and machine made, blank and lined, listed by topic and only used for scrap, bears evidence of my ways of organized thought. Are these collections of my notebooks a case study for my ADHD? Is ADHD inherent in these writings, makings, in performing, in looking or talking when making work? Both the physical and digital archives of the words I have scribbled and erased are left with remnants, traces, quotes, questions, spreading and layering of words. To write the space in between, to think of each word, and write, without lifting your pen. (Fig. 2)

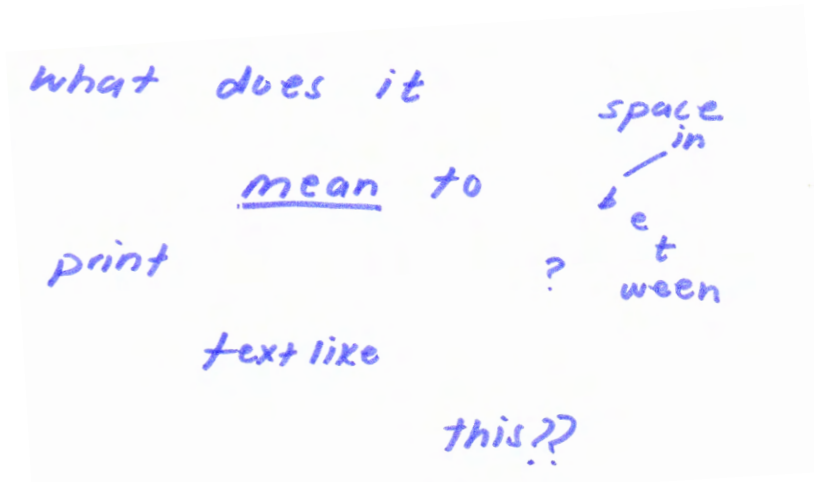


Fig. 2, Scanned writings and blurbs taken from my notebook, 2023.

Distraction becomes a part of opening my pocket notebook, clicking my pen, and writing letter by letter, each stream of thought. I question if this could be intimacy on the pages, and the role of intimacy when thinking about words to describe my practice. Do these fragments of words aid in the making of new work when I write these materials, objects and images? (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4)

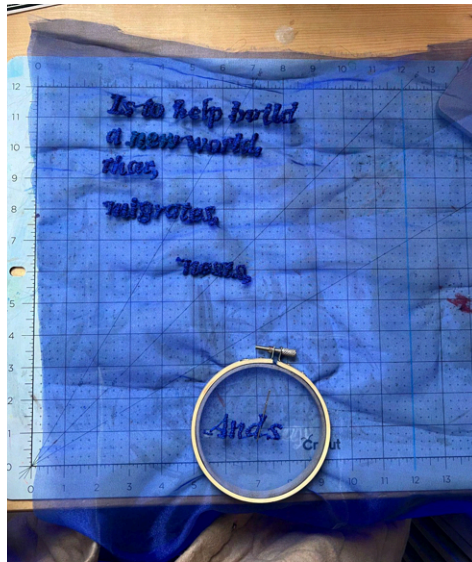
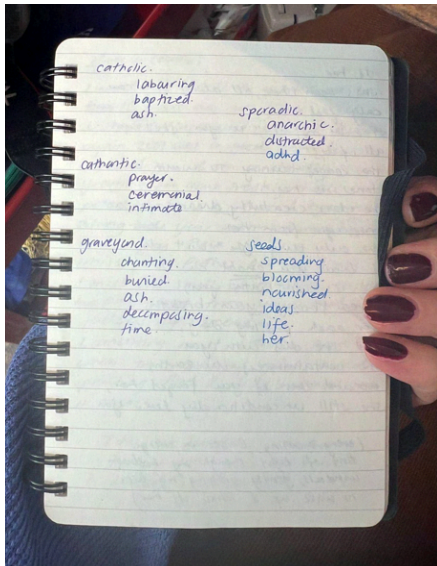


Fig. 3, (Left) Example of how I write in my notebooks, 2023. Fig. 4, (Right) in-progress photo of embroidered organza for *In the Name of the Mother, Daughter and (un)Holy Body*, 2023.

Distraction can be a form of reworking, becoming, spreading, expanding to different futures. One that can be soft, slow, spiral, back-track, erase, skip, and go back to. To be distracted is to wander. In our hyper individualized and imperialist ways of navigating and following the circuit (the system), when our minds wander, we inevitably climb or “jump” out of this script.⁸

⁸ Land, N. Circuitries (1992) *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, MIT Press. Pp. 291. Taken from Land's poem, "...your death window is rushing up. Almost time for you to climb into the script, which when you're inside, is remembering where you came..."

DISTRACTION AS CEREMONY

As an artist with ADHD, sporadically thinking, writing, performing and being becomes my own personal method for making art. Distraction is one of the main components of ADHD. Using distraction as a branch from autotheory helps situate myself as an interdisciplinary artist. There is no restraint for me to stick with one medium, or idea. Can we celebrate the beauty of having disruptive thoughts, feelings, actions individually, while also doing this together?⁹ The thought of being distracted together, in our own separate lives, reminds me of how we can gracefully get lost and imagine, away from systems that dominate and govern us. To include the self and the collective from autotheory, distraction might segue into becoming ceremonial. In a ceremony, we are immersed to distract ourselves together. To be distracted allows us possibilities to the unknown, or at least to a more *knowable* unknown. Like a door left ajar.¹⁰ We use distraction to commemorate a new found place, a newly purchased item of clothing, a new friend, a new vintage bookstore, a new hobby, and new way of cooking, the rediscovery of a photo family album or getting back into writing again. Although this proposal of distraction as ceremony-based methodology does not aim to solve these oppressive systems, at least the act of being selfishly distracted in the moment can serve as a potential placeholder or even starting point when thinking about reframing the hetero-colonial-patriarchial histories that dictate our institutions.

To distract ourselves from these monitoring systems will hopefully allow us to think creatively on how to resist them. As artists, we should allow ourselves to wander, drift, float when forming ideas. To stumble upon noticing something which could be important in the future. A reason for us to look inwards, and unbound ourselves from the conditioning that we are lazy, unproductive, procrastinating, unintelligent and foolish when we seek the desire to be interrupted with temporary pleasure. Distraction can be a powerful to unlearn what exactly “being productive” should look like. To conform to the hustle culture of productivity is to conform to capitalism.

⁹ Brostoff, Alex, and Fournier, Lauren, “Introduction: Autotheory ASAP! Academia, Decoloniality, and ‘I’”. P. 490 I think I associate my distraction or ADHD with Brostoff and Fournier’s idea of the singular “I” and collective “We”. We are in this distraction mindset as a form of coping, by ourselves. We do this unwillingly, but also willingly.

¹⁰ Eloise Sweetman, *Curatorial Feelings*, Edited by Eloise Sweetman and Jo-ey Tang, Shimmer Press, 2021. Pp. 37- 38.

As such, any form of distraction becomes sacred because it allows us to spend more intimate time in weaving our own narratives on earth. Let our minds and bodies float, scatter, rearrange, flow, against all odds, so that for a split moment, no one can reach us.

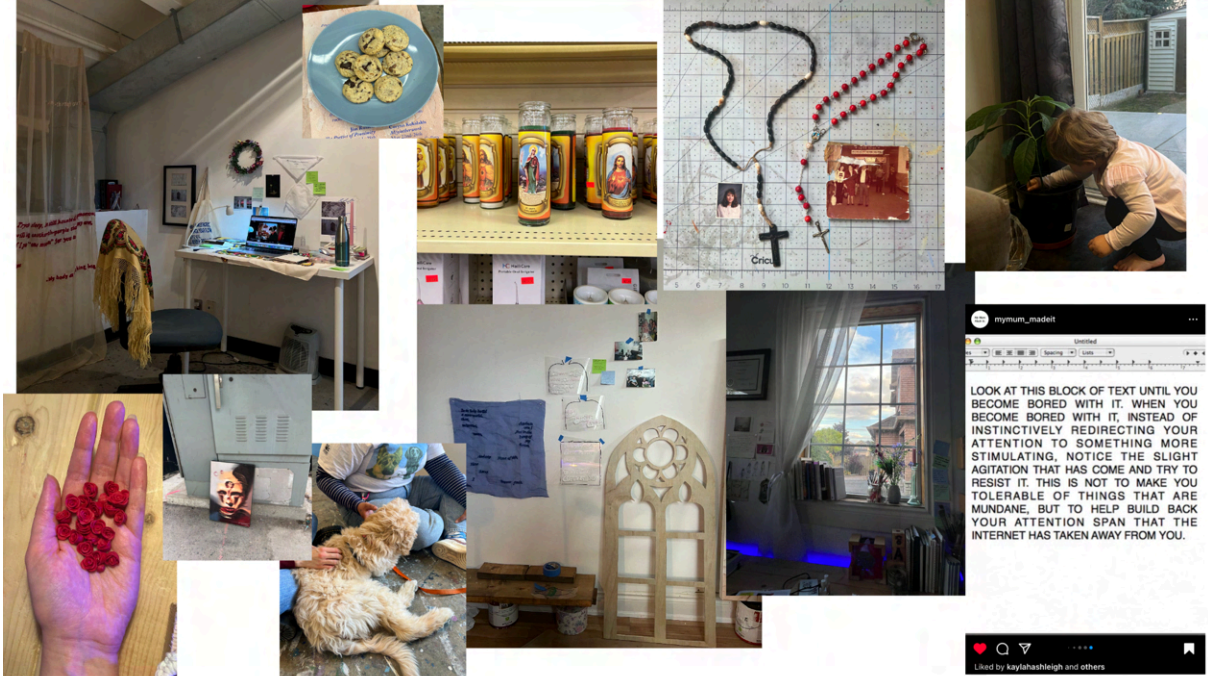


Fig. 5, Collection of archival images found in my camera roll that relates to or has kept me distracted.

GRIEVING

While visiting a friend on a five day trip to New York in the summer of 2022, I stumbled upon a Cathedral, the church of St. John the Divine. My body was drawn to the vast, ascending steps through the doors and the nave of the church. Admission was free, so my friend and I decided to take a look despite my wavering relationship to Catholicism. The distant harmonious voices of a Georgian choir drew me further inside. My eyes outlined the edges of the interior ornamentation and then stopped on the lancet, stained-glass rose and lancet windows that had sunlight seeping through them. I felt the light through the stained glass resting on my cheeks. It was apricity, but inside a cathedral in mid-July. My attention was drawn to the window that depicted the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Fig. 6). I started to think about the invisible labour and effort that went into building these stained glass windows to create a story for worship. Even if one is unable to read, one could read these windows and comprehend the biblical story of Jesus sacrificing himself taking place.

Historically, the architecture and teachings within a church have been written by and for the benefit of men. These religious narratives are markers to hinder and censor the power that women hold. Drawing from Shawn Wilson's Indigenous research methodology, my relationship to these

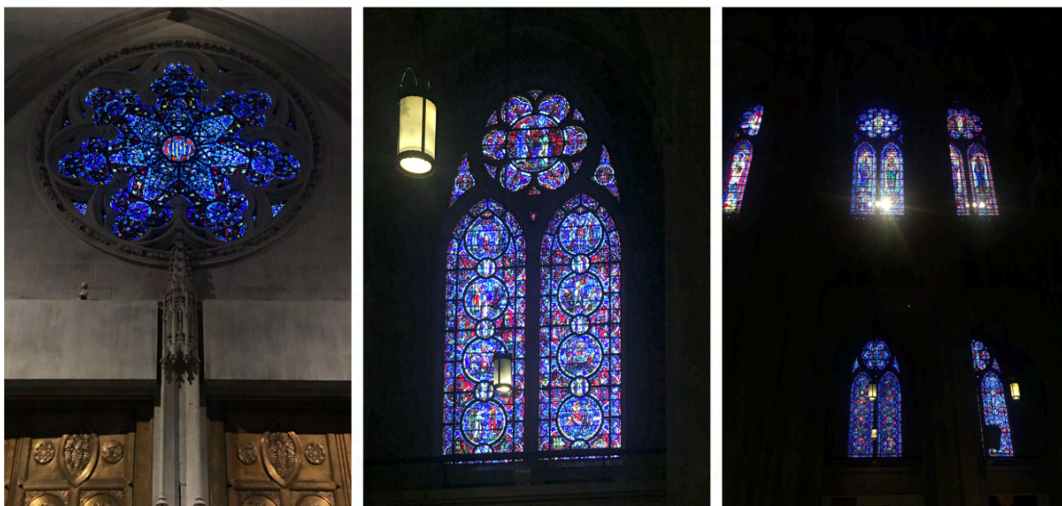


Fig. 6, Stained windows inside a Cathedral, the church of St. John the Divine, New York, 2022.

windows is a place to pray and worship, or something that holds divinity, spirituality and holiness. These iconographic images and the structure of the window are also symbolic markers of ethnic cleansing and border crossings made to colonize through preaching.¹¹ The preachings behind these stained glass windows was also a marker of the duties of what women were expected to do inside the home. In Catholicism, the sacredness of “man” and “man’s teachings” spread these messages through acts of mass murder and rape. The presence of these cathedrals and sites of worship—rife with ornaments to aid in prayer for peaceful ascension into the afterlife—continues these archaic teachings. Through these windows, tea candles are lit to pray and commemorate those who have passed on. For this project, I wanted to recreate my own rendition of these stained glass windows because I have thought about them. Dreamed of how they were meant to be seen, to be read and to be thought about afterwards. In their original context, these windows were tools for worship, in providing guidance for their followers. Yet the "followers" I am familiar with are myself, my foremothers and future women who have been or will be affected by religion during their upbringing. To destroy the initial concept of what divine perfection means. With this in mind, I aim to feminize and soften these windows with the consideration of the history of women’s work and technology.

“Because the bombed cathedral is now a cathedral of trees”.

- Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, p. 7.

¹¹ Wilson, Shawn, “*What is Indigenous Research Methodology?*”. *Canadian Journal of Native Education (CJNE)* Vol. 25, No. 2 (2001), pp. 175. Wilson amplifies the importance of our relationships to an object when it comes to our relationships with creation. For instance, Wilson uses the example of their father’s couch in Cree meaning “someplace where you sit”. It is the importance of naming our relationship to that object. For a stained glass window, my relationship to it is someplace to pray and worship, while also a reminder of the teachings that has systematically oppressed Indigenous peoples through residential schools.

ARCHIVING THE INTERGENERATIONAL

I am interested in the floral colour palette and labour of embroidery that is prominent in Polish folk garments. Such embellishments were found in corsets, skirts, shawls, and worn traditionally by brides on their wedding day (Fig. 7). I thought about carving the floral designs on the wooden frame structure that is commonly seen in Polish and Ukrainian decorated eggs called *Pisanki*. *Pisanki* are often painted by women and historically used to celebrate Easter, fertility, and birth. (Fig. 8) During my trip to Poland in the summer of 2023, I recognized the ornamentation of *Pisanki* that are often seen inside of Poland's local churches; on doors, church pews, altar mouldings, walls, window borders. All carved by hand. These designs were then translated into Polish folk garments and regalia for mountain and highlanders to sing, play music and dance in. Many of the designs used intricate floral patterns, roses, peonies, mountain herbs and various seeds.

There was significance in embroidering and making by hand. There was also significance in women working together, weaving their histories in conversation with each other and their collectivity in making these garments. Using found possessions of Polish folk culture, I wanted to emphasize the value of women's labour, their craft, their grievances, in reclaiming their own anatomical agency.



Fig. 7, (from left to right) Found images of traditional Polish folk floral pattern, corset, shawl, bridal garment from 19th century.



Fig. 8, Found images and illustrations of Polish Pisanki egg designs.

IN THE NAME OF THE MOTHER, DAUGHTER AND (UN)HOLY BODY (Fig. 9)

For this project, I designed three window frames to signify the hand gesture of how Catholics start and end a prayer: in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy spirit. To feminize this, I added fabric in place of the stained glass windows, immensely handcrafted wooden frames that are imperfectly cut and delicately, laboriously embroidered. The title of this work *In the Name of the Mother, Daughter (reversed) and (un)Holy Body* became the feminized counterpart to the masculine Holy Trinity. To make these windows handmade, humbles them in comparison to the perfectionism desired in the craftsmanship seen in Cathedrals. This almost-perfect ornamental design makes Catholic worshippers feel that they are closer to the divine. By crafting these windows on my own, by hand, I am contradicting this perfectionism and instead creating a new sacredness to be intimately read.



Fig. 9, Veronica Spiljak, *In the name of the mother, daughter, (un)Holy body*, carved plywood, embroidery on silk organza, 2024.

IN THE NAME OF THE MOTHER, (Fig. 10).

The first of the three triptych windows is written through the lens of intergenerational mothering inflected with religious trauma, migration status, fleeing from crisis, and labour. Here, the immigrant “Mother” becomes the “Father.” *Her* replaces *Him*. She survived the systems that have wronged her. She migrates and moves, crosses borders to find refuge and safekeeping. The “Mother” clings onto her rosary, a signifier for religious women - seen in most physical depictions of the Virgin Mary- to make a foreign, estranged place become more familiar to her.



Fig. 10, Veronica Spiljak, *In the name of the mother*, carved plywood and embroidery on silk organza 2024.

First window panel read from left to right:

(and her) mother (and her)

*“In the gospel
according to*

Her,

*Your mothers
before you,*

heard your cries,

*The church doesn’t deserve
you.*

And neither does

He.

In seeking for refuge,

*It made you porous
and
stained,*

*And
peeling
hands.*

*You only hoped to hold
onto your rosary to*

(re)create

what’s ‘home’ to you.”

Mother (she/they) - God (often seen as He/Him or They/them)

THE DAUGHTER (REVERSED), (Fig. 11).

"The Daughter" acts as an agent for processing the patronizing systems that are imposed through generations. The Daughter breaks this patriarchal cycle in paving a new way for honouring the women before her. She pushes through for the women who were denied, contained and kept unseen. The women before the daughter were never written intimately, but written within the machine in mind. The Daughter becomes a precedent, a love letter that passes to the next generation. What awaits future generations of daughters?

Daughter (she/her) - Reversal of son (he/him)

Second window panel read from left top-down to right top-down:

daughter (reversed)

*Inhale my
Fleeing,*

*The best I can
do,*

*Exhale your
burdens,*

*In
Honouring
you,*

*Is to help build
a new world,
That,
Migrates,*

*Against
The one i
Feel in the
Lump of
My throat,*

nests,

And say,

None of this,

How

Sorry

*I
Am.*

*Is your
fault.*



Fig. 11, Veronica Spiljak, *Daughter (reversed)*, carved plywood and embroidery on silk organza, 2024.

Drawing from philosopher Sadie Plant, Plant correlates the idea that patriarchal systems are made for women to be built like a machine for breeding, to monitor their ageing bodies as working clocks and overworking their hands in providing for their family. Yet, they have limitless knowledge and insight like a computer. Just like the Polish women singing a classic folk song in search of a new dream for themselves (refer to pg. 9), women have the power to weave together meaningful narratives like a Jacquard loom. Women are nothing in the eyes of the patriarchy, but they are everything to me.¹² Will future women act on a restful, slower, feminized, spiritual collectiveness?

AND THE (UN)HOLY BODY (Fig. 13)

For the third window frame, I started thinking about what it means to have a “holy” body. I considered the contradiction between how the Holy Spirit is perceived of as feminine (Fig. 13) in some scriptures,¹³ yet slut shaming and the sexualization of women’s bodies have always been

¹² Plant, Sadie. *On the matrix: cyberfeminist simulations*, pp. 330-31. Plant uses the analogy of women are like computers or weaving machines which in effect, can serve a purpose of doing everything. She uses irigaray’s “woman” that runs themselves on all operations because of the systems in place that were against her, she cannot think for herself. She lacks representation, yet she is complex. What women desire is “nothing, but precisely, everything”.

¹³ Genesis 1:1-2, Genesis 2:7, Deut. 32:11-12, Proverbs 1:20, Matthew 11:19, Luke 3:22, and John 3:5-6.

preached in the bible. Are these bodies made to obey, serve, receive, be used, verse for verse? Would they be seen as “holy” bodies then? If they were to obey, to *whom* should they submit? Is it to the male priests, pastors and bishops that offer them bread that gently grasp our lips during mass? Should they submit to their managers' sexual harassment to avoid risking the jobs they need to feed their three kids? Would we then obey our alcoholic husbands and partners we return to from work so we don't get physically abused? Should the hysterical manic young women, missing and murdered women, sex workers, trans women, disabled women, runaways, be left to *Him* as well?



Fig. 12, Image of LED sign at the College Street United Church, Toronto, ON.

Third window panel read from left-down to right-up:

(un)holy body

Praying.

Verse.

Then,

For

Kneel.

Verse.

Open.
Receive.

Bathe.
Good.

Pray.

Girl.



Fig. 14, Veronica Spiljak, *(un)Holy Body*, carved plywood and embroidery on silk organza, 2024.



ON WEAVING

INT. (Classroom) - A performer wearing a traditional Polish folk garment enters a room full of graduate art students. She sits down on a chair, and starts peeling potatoes.

A video with captions starts playing behind her.

(ENTER STAGE RIGHT)

The *weaver* binds everything together, but they are hidden. Often working in silence, with thoughts running everywhere, yet the needle and thread can be used as tools of violence for the weaver (puncturing and stabbing) as a source of their internalized suffering.¹⁴ The *weaver* is expected to be hunched over, stitching away for their husbands as a dutiful wife, for love, for piety, for devotion, for the church, for status, anything but for themselves.¹⁵

My installation *The Second I Was Born, I Was A Walking Eulogy*, (Fig. 14) recreates a new rendition of a praying space weaving together narratives in the form of handmade objects and a video performance. Making this body of work was a way to connect to my own experiences and passing thoughts as a second-generation Polish-Canadian woman. A prayer corner in a domestic space, is used to remind one to commit to the Catholic faith. Before the beginning stages of this makeshift prayer space, I was constantly thinking about the body and the hands that are used for invisible labour. For making handmade carvings. For cutting, peeling, and preparing food. To sew, alter, iron, write, create, build. These physical interventions of the hand explicitly connects to Julia Wójcik's hours long performance *Peeling Potatoes* (Fig. 15) in the Zacheta gallery in Warsaw. She was peeling mountains of potatoes to highlight the invisibility of underpaid women weaver workers during the early stages of capitalism.¹⁶ Wójcik actively takes on the "feminine body" as the "invisible and domesticated body." It is the exploited worker who goes unnoticed and unnamed. In my eight minute long performance of *The Second I Was Born*, I used a bright sunset lamp and embellished myself in Polish folk regalia while sewing together a ripped shirt. The halo shape illuminated across my body, is an homage to the women's bodies martyred into becoming weaving machines. Like a Madonna and Child, she is not only prepared to birth and to receive, but to also establish the pious and dutiful body for the man and for the man's system.

¹⁴ Parker, R. *The Subversive Stitch*, pp. 10-11. "She is silent when she sews, silent for hours on end... she is silent, and she -why not write it down the word that frightens me - she is thinking". In relation to how psychoanalytic theory fosters creativity and thought. Here, embroidery became a tool and weapon of resistance for women throughout the centuries since it was the only liberating way for their thoughts and dreams to be kept internally.

¹⁵ Ibid. pp.

¹⁶ Kosmala, K. *Women on Work, Women at Work*, British Journal of Management, 2008. pp. S91

This space of prayer, holding a collection of objects - handmade rosary, embroidered handkerchief, stitched poetry book - provides a segue to the essentials and household items important in Slavic-Catholic homes. The embroidered handkerchief woven with words reading “weaving her, (opaquely) seeing, spreading” evokes speculation and fragments of the subconscious voice from the author speaking throughout the video. All of these items, in the way that they are altered or remade by hand, creates a subversion of how they are originally used.

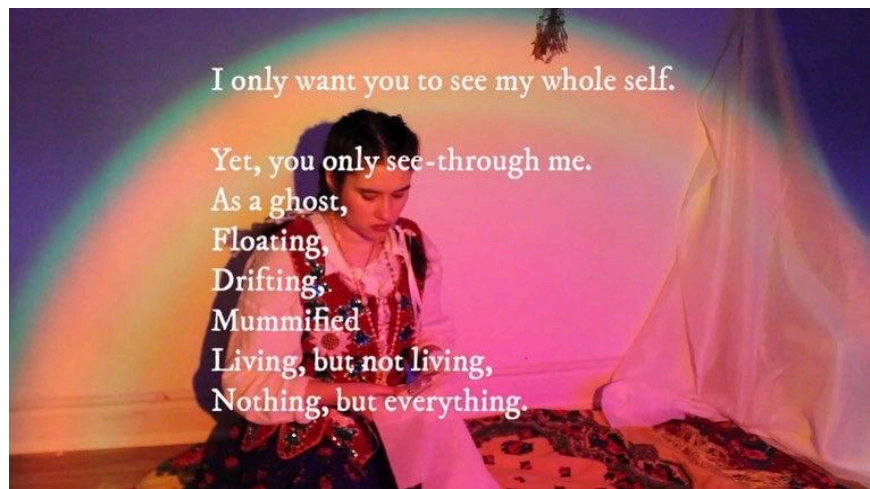


Fig. 14, Veronica Spiljak, *The Second I Was Born, I Was a Walking Eulogy*, video performance, 8 min, 2023.

For instance, within the installation is a handmade rosary made out of floral painted beads and pistachios. A rosary is commonly held onto for prayer. The pistachio nuts and flowers reference the biblical storyline surrounding fertility within the Garden of Eden. Lastly, the complimentary poetry chapbook recites the poem spoken by the author in this eight minute performance video. The poetry book replaces the book of hymns used for mass. The video performance establishes the worker, the mother, the weaver, the domesticated body to be *noticed*. Through use of text and audio recordings of my voice reading passages from my poetry book, it relays the subconscious voice of the “feminized” body.



Fig. 15, Julita Wójcik, *Peeling Potatoes*, Warsaw's Zachęta, National Gallery, 2001.

Wearing the handmade rosary and my mother's regalia in the video - embroidered beaded corset and floral skirt - I am performing as my mother, her mother, her mother's mother and so forth. In weaving these experiences, with the stories of my maternal Slavic ancestors, I recite the following words:

Yet, you only *see-through* me.
As a ghost,
Floating,
Drifting,
Mummified,
Living, but not living,
Nothing, but everything.¹⁷

I aim to reclaim my autonomy in this ghostly, unbodied-body. Sewing slowly becomes counterproductive to the capitalist machine. If the world really dove through the webs of femininity, womanness, mothering and what we have gathered and sewn together, it could see that we are a matrix. Borrowing from Irigay's words "nothing, but everything," women exist to be seen as nothing, to be used, wrapped, covered and used as extended space. Women become seen as *everything* once we are seen as *whole*. They invade common spaces - the internet, workplaces,

¹⁷ Irigay. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1985b: 29. The expectations of me, expected to breed, expected to receive, to be machined, to think other than for themselves. Yet, we also have so many complexities and inner knowledge without being credited. Irigay writes that because of this, we can only respond by thinking about nothing, yet everything.

education, art institutions - that expands, opens and tears it all apart. In the future, our ghostly bodies are not breeding machines, they are only hungry for an alternative dream.

Womanness = everything = gaseous
Transparency = Ghost
Being a woman = transparent
Being a woman = opaque
Being online = anonymous
Anonymous = 0
Burnout = (un)mothering
(un)mothering = (un)love

This passage of my booklet *The Second I Was Born, I Was A Walking Eulogy*, illuminates the experiences of navigating womanhood, meaning it is both opaque and transparent. Everything and nothing. The transparency of *womanness* is what women are reduced to, what is tangible and “known” for their particular gender roles within patriarchal structures. The patriarchy does not believe in concepts of weaving knowledge, thoughts, ideas, experiences of women, but their natural components. “Anonymous = 0”¹⁸ is a reference to Nick Land’s conceptual poem at the beginning of *Circuitries* in his book *Fanged Noumena* (2011), which claims that we are born as products of capitalism turning into machines, to help feed the machine. But, once you exit out of the circuit, climb out of the script, then the machine malfunctions and restarts at “zero.” To restart at zero, Land advises us to use cybernetics - in this case, my accelerating subconscious monologue- to climb out of our own scripts of cybernetic governance.

On the topic of zeroes, Sadie Plant’s *Zeroes and Ones* (1998) values the interconnection between women and technology. She evaluates the numeral binaries of ones (male) and the unvalued zeroes (female) that are significant when it comes to numerical value, the Church, economy, particle theory and even heteronormative gender roles. Ada Lovelace - a nineteenth century mathematician who Plant cites often in this text - a brilliant mathematician was someone the male-dominated world was

¹⁸ Land, N. *Fanged Noumena*, 2011. Pp. 290. “Death-mummy the zero” in Land’s poem refers to when everything collapses after the acceleration from irresponsible capital technological acceleration. The body without organs = 0.

not prepared for. Later on in her life, her madness that was imposed on her aided in her suffering which led to her tragic death.

I think of her.
Her mothering.
My mother once told me,
“Twój uśmiech to wiano na dobre życie”,
Which means
“Your smile is a dowry to live in this life”
I was twelve.
I never knew what she meant by that.
But now I think I hear her.

This passage was in conversation of what my mother taught me at a young age, and what her mother probably told her as well. Is my smile meant to afford comfort and security from another man?

This is my deepest blue.
I think I caught Blue-eye,
Just like Maggie Nelson said.¹⁹

Nelson’s definition of a key term she defines as “blue-eye.” She describes it as “a blueness or dark circle around the eye from weeping or other causes.”²⁰ The concept of weeping and crying that Nelson includes with her visit to her psychologist is seen as dysfunctional, maladaptive and immature. In this passage from my poetry chapbook, I include my own experiences of depression-insomnia-ADHD-executive dysfunction behaviour as something heavily misdiagnosed, especially among case studies with women. Here, I use Nelson’s text in understanding that weeping, mourning, crying are a result of my once undiagnosed mental illnesses and feeling the need to apologize to anyone (patriarchal) who questions it. These emotions of “feeling blue” carry connotations of the body in suffering of the conditions they are forced upon, before being assessed

¹⁹ Nelson, M. *Bluets*, 2009. Pp. 91. Nelson defines “blue-eyed” as a “blueness or dark circle around the eye, from weeping or other cause”. Could this emphasize the existential dread often performed in the body as loops? A feedback loop? A circuit? An exhaustive weaving machine?

²⁰ *Ibid.* Pp. 35.

for the diagnosis of pain.²¹ Women and queerness become a threshold to pain. Julietta Singh says we have a “threshold to pedagogy” that is evident in how marginalized bodies operate within a hetero-colonial, capitalist and ableist infrastructure. We are wired to hold in our pain for the convenience of others, until we are incapable to do so.

Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?
Easy to slice, but at what price?

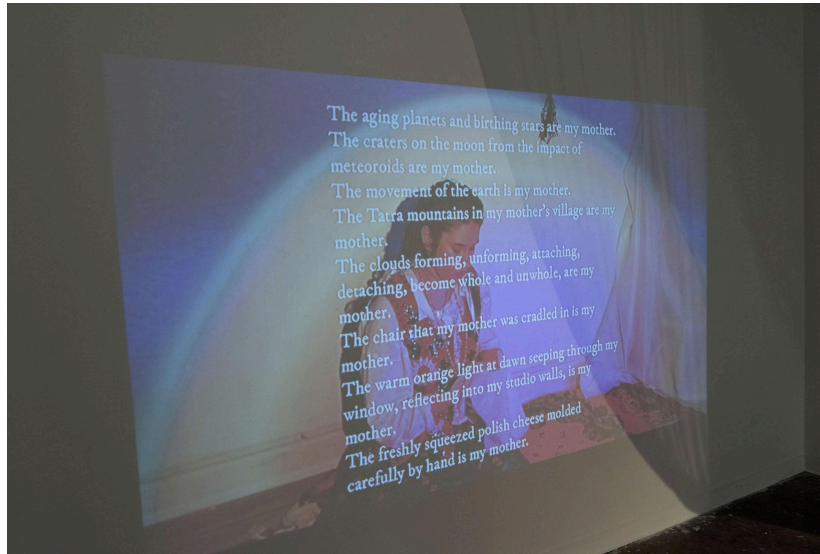
The Second I was born, envelopes a love letter for women under a masculinized capitalistic governance. Referring to Édouard Glissant’s concept of opacity, this section of the poem manages to force us opaque individuals to be easy to manage individuals.²² Could we look to our own communities as a form of healing? In what ways can we liberate ourselves from these indoctrinations of governance? How can we honour the figures in our family who have been conditioned by religious or family values, unpaid labour and the gender roles surrounding their upbringing?

The slogan “Easy to slice, but at what price?” repeated towards the end of the video and poem, is a longing for the same opacity, complexity, autonomy, freedom, slowness, weaving formality that

²¹ Singh, J. *No Archive Will Restore You*. Punctum Books, 2018. Pp. 57-59. Singh writes “before there is an evaluation of pain, there is a suffering body. And this body is always already interpreted before pain is assessed. Pain is secondary to the body that feels it”. This “threshold to pain pedagogy” is intersectional and is activated through political, cultural and historical legacies.

²² Glissant, E. (1990) *Poetics of Relation, For Opacity*, The University of Michigan Press. Pg 190-192. My body is not just flesh and bone. It has autonomy, it is complex. Its opacity comes from the layers of multiplicities that the church, the patriarchy, relatives, the systems that are supposed to “protect us” don't see. Glissant introduces the concept of *opacity* or *opaqueness* that does not reduce individualism. Becoming opaque means to coexist, converge, weave narratives. Opacity is the relation in becoming free from what we are being conditioned to act or think.

is sympathizing with Wójcik's agenda of peeling potatoes for us to critically reflect. Mechanically peeling each slice of potato skin or sewing each thread to close up a torn hole, gains us a step closer into becoming a circuit. A machinic body in flesh, operating as manageable machines for labour-power. "Easy to slice" becomes a metaphor for capitalist training and conditioning our bodies to perform, while "at what price?" is asking how much further can we perform, before we break out and malfunction?



Documentation of *The Second I Was Born, I Was A Walking Eulogy* (2023) in situ.

EXT. - Performer stops peeling potatoes. She gets out of her chair now filled with warmth from her body heat and leaves the room. (EXIT STAGE LEFT)

SPREADING

To *spread*:

seeping, bleeding, scattering, increasing, becoming more, smearing, smothering, expanding, propagating, communicating, accumulating, devouring, replicating...

The weaver's burdens and grief malfunctions into something that starts to spill. We can think about this "malfunctioning" like gears starting to grind or combust and the once-filled tank that fuels us starting to leak. *I am the womb that God forgot*, (Fig. 17) is a curtain installation compiling three panels of fabric: two identical ombre dip-dyed periwinkle lace tablecloth banners and one cobalt blue with an archway cutout that is double in length. The gothic arch-shape mirrors the same shape as *In the Name of the Mother, the Daughter (reversed) and (un)Holy Body* (see pg. 17). The cobalt blue curtain with lace trimmings resembles a lychgate, church banner or a wayside shrine. On my trip to Poland last summer, I would often come across these wayside shrines or mini-chapels called "Kaplicka."²³ (Fig. 16) After Christianization in Poland, many of these shrines would become spaces of thoroughfare. They were often seen under trees, hidden corners, as gates, and surrounded in nature, while also providing an "in-between" space from one's own home to a local church.²⁴ *I am the womb that God forgot* architecturally revises these shrines with the biblical colour blue: marian, cobalt, ultramarine and periwinkle. The choice of using these blues has correlation to the history of these wayside shrines associated with the Virgin Mary, who is associated with the colour blue. In Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* (2009), she remarks the significance of blue within our subconscious and the marking of death.²⁵ This

²³ "Kaplicka" is a Polish word for "Wayside Shrine" to serve as mini chapels on roads, near homes, for people who do not have access to a local church.

²⁴ Aufderheide, C. *The Layered Meanings of Poland's Wayside Shrines*, FolkLife, January 4, 2021. <https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/poland-wayside-shrines>. Wayside shrines were commonly located in "in-between" places such as an edge of a forest, at town boundaries, side of the road etc. These smaller chapels would create a crossroad barrier for one to make their own prayer space.

²⁵ Nelson, M. *Bluets*, 2009. P. 52. Nelson states "134. It calms me to think of blue as the colour of death. I have long imagined death's approach as the swell of a wave-a towering wall of blue. You will drown, the world tells me, has always told me. You will descend into a blue underworld, blue with hungry ghosts, Krishna blue, the blue faces of the ones you loved. They all drowned, too. To take a breath of water: does the thought panic or excite you? If you are in love with red then you slit or shoot. If you are in love with blue you fill your pouch with stones good for sucking and head down to the river. Any river will do."

subconscious blue becomes overwhelming, seeping through the intricacies of the lace fabric, lace trimmings, embroidered text and the silk chiffon fabric.



Fig. 16, (Left) Images both depicting a Kaplicka shrine in Mszalnica, 2014 and (Right) Shrine in the woods near Zawiercie, 2020.

The support pieces, the two dyed periwinkle lace tablecloths are hung, embodying church banners. Dyed in a gradual ombre, provides emphasis on the outcome of this bleeding - deathful but holy - blue that makes its way and is often used in the domestic interior of a home. The main cobalt blue centerpiece, made out of silk chiffon, has a gothic arch cutout providing an entryway for people to pass through, to gather or move in and out. Although the arch shape implies religious familiarity, I would argue that it acts as a placeholder like a “wandering” womb. The white lace trim borders the outline of the arch appearing womb-like when people pass through.

THE WOMB IS A HYSTERICAL SPIDER.

This concept of a “wandering womb” was taken from Sadie Plant when referring to mathematician Ada Lovelace’s diagnosis of *hystera* in 1851.²⁶ Since wombs were often equated with women’s psychological patterns, it became a pre-existing concern for overdiagnosis of hysteria in the nineteenth-century. In hysteria, physicians would link the effects of this diagnosis with a “wandering womb” that travels upwards to various organs of the body (i.e. the liver, kidneys, heart, brain etc).²⁷



²⁶ Plant, S. *Zeroes and Ones*, Sept. 4, 1997. Pp.30. In 1851 a uterine examination revealed “a very deep and extensive ulceration of the womb”.

²⁷ Plant, S. *Zeroes and Ones*, Sept. 4, 1997. Pp.30 Plant mentions how the womb may not change place, yet often changes position, and makes curious and so to speak petulant movements in the woman’s body. “The womb rises to the liver, spleen, diaphragm, stomach, breast, heart, lung, gullet, and head.” Despite these references by medical scholars, hysteria continued to be associated with notions of a wandering womb even post nineteenth-century.



Fig. 17 (top to bottom right), *I am the womb that God forgot*, embroidery on silk chiffon, dyed lace tablecloth and lace trim, 2024.

Despite its negative and patriarchal connotations, the actual definition of “hysteria” was mainly referring to outburst of emotions, excitement, or in other words, emotions that cannot be controlled or governed. What better way to condition these outbursts of autonomy than psychiatric asylums, straightjackets and prescription medication “treating” women back into their zombified state? I believe this hysteria connects to my distraction methodology of *wandering out of the circuit*.²⁸ With this understanding of a womb, to carry life, to hold autonomy, becomes a fluid placeholder for knowledge. There is liberty in a womb that wanders. Like distraction, a wandering womb finds the channels to make its exit out of the patriarchal, colonial, capitalist governance. Interchanging the order of the embroidered words “I am the womb that God forgot” in my work fulfills this dream of exiting out of a governing circuit. Some words are found in

²⁸ Land, N. *Fanged Noumena*. Pp. 292. Towards the end of Land’s poem, he hints for us to climb out of the circuit in which there will be a slight “jolt” when we cross over. As we climb out of this circuit in numbers, we climb out of capitalism, where everything starts to collapse. Furthermore, my inclusion of “hysteria” also acts as this “jolt” when finding our way out.

clusters, some formed closely together on the borders of the lace trim,²⁹ while other words drift across the area of cobalt blue fabric that wanders, drifts, spreads, moves freely and willingly.

Furthermore, this concept of the wandering embroidered “hysterical” text can be related with a *subconscious spidering* effect. Laura Tripaldi calls this process *Hysteresis*, comparing spider silk to neurons in a circuit which recollects and adapts through any disruptive or irreversible change in their structures.³⁰ In my work, the see-through cobalt blue chiffon fabric acts as a placeholder for a spider’s web or a spider’s environment. Among the woven lace trimming, printing of white lace, embroidered text acts as the memory effect for the fabric, as if it is claiming a new channel. As one walks through the arch shape cutout, a minute transformation happens. The curtain can move with us, hold our scent and our accidental footprints. These physical interactions with our bodies retains a new kind of history. Within the curtain’s webs, matrices, and invasion channels, our wandering minds and bodies can freely travel in and out. The following passage inspired this project that the “womb” can nurture our vastness of knowledge and act on our curiosities that are sporadic, yet unknown:

I long for the day
that I can strip,
Bare, wet, naked.
A flesh filled with warm organs.
Cleansing my body covered in layers and
Reaching an inch closer to my soul.
And not fearing being watched.
I long for a present-future
To reclaim my “insanity”.
What you don’t know
Is that you’ll never reach me.³¹

²⁹ The white lace trim could be the circuit but could also be nerve endings for a womb.

³⁰ Tripaldi, Laura. *Parallel minds: discovering the intelligence of materials*. Pp. 22. Tripaldi states that “spider silk is subject to a phenomenon known as hysteresis, a behaviour shared by many complex systems, from materials to electronic circuits, from neurons to economic systems. Hysteresis is, in short, a memory effect: it refers to the ability of a system to undergo irreversible change when an abrupt transformation occurs, and it is one of the ways in which material structures can adapt and retain a trace of their history.”

³¹ Spiljak. V, “*The Second I Was Born, I Was A Walking Eulogy*”, 2023, Pp.13. Excerpt from my poetry chapbook that articulates my body, a “fleshed body with warm organs”, into humanizing it away from the machinic codes of capitalism. In doing this, I also reclaim my own “insanity” that is linked with the historical diagnosis of hysteria that our hetero-colonial-patriarchal governance can never understand, or reach conclusions to its being.

THE WOMB SMOTHERS, SPREADS AND DEVOURS.

As this autonomous womb wanders out of its preconditioned circuit, its curiosity is seeking for an alternative way of life after living in a prolonged exhaustive machinic state. It leads into the following order of:

**Hysteria + distraction → Meltdown (malfunctions) → Leaking →
Spreading → Monstrous Devouring + Smothering → Replicant**

We can see the sporadic lace trimmings and words spread out into a meltdown. The language of these words (codes) being repeated and aligning itself onto the lace (circuit) is already referencing Land's "feminization of AI." Where AI's are seen as a "feminized alien," thus property of the state.³² These words could be accelerating further into total collapse, almost like schizophrenic deterritorialization.³³ But first, we must revise how *I am the womb that God forgot* can subvert this "feminized alien" into this devouring form before transforming into different possible futures. We can look at the Virgin Mary as a prime predecessor of this "feminized alien" within our future's AI. Like the Virgin Mary, my work uses similar colours of white and blues as an implication of excessive smothering using domesticization. For instance, this smothering is present in both Dante Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and Leonardo Da Vinci's *Madonna the Yarnwinder* (1499) respectively (Fig. 18 & Fig. 19). In Rossetti's work, Mary is shown embroidering with her mother Anna, who is teaching her the medieval methods of embroidery which were expected from women during that period. Da Vinci's work further domesticized the Virgin Mary by inserting the niddy-noddy, used to spin yarn, while foreshadowing the crucifixion of her son Jesus Christ.³⁴ Her stance is submissive in both

³² Land, Nick. *Fanged Noumena : Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Pp. 443. AI becoming "a cunt horror slave chained up in Asimov-ROM".

³³ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. R. Hurley, M. Seems, and H.R. Land (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 239-40. Deleuze and Guttari both provide two options to capitalism: should we withdraw from the world market? Or do we accelerate the process more in which the "flows are not yet deterritorialized enough" from a schizoanalysis standpoint?

³⁴ Plant, S. *Zeroes and Ones*, Sept. 4, 1997. p. 197.

paintings, unknowing of the trials and tribulations that have yet to unfold. She is unknowing of her destiny and “duty” as Virgin Mary as Queen but submissive, bowing to her own son.³⁵

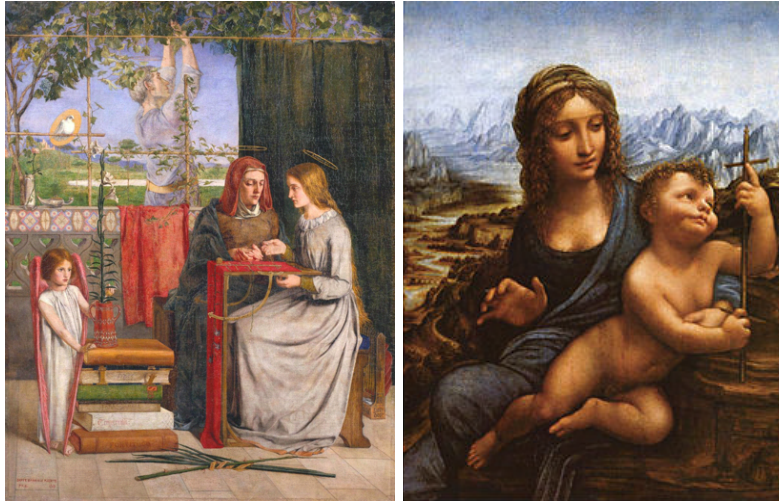


Fig. 18, (Left) *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, oil on canvas, 1849. Fig. 19, (Right) *Madonna and the Yarn-Winder*, Leonardo Da Vinci, oil on canvas, 1499

As this smothered domesticized entity takes hold, it then leads to a devouring-monstrous stage. Julietta Singh describes this devouring when she compares the vaginal space, or in this case, a “womb” acting as a library for tracing our histories.³⁶ Similarly, the vast size of fabrics in *I am the womb that God forgot* - silk chiffon and lace tablecloth - takes up space, making it feel overwhelming, even monstrous. It wanders within the messiness and fluidity of tracing its own archive. In the lace ombre tablecloth church banners, the top starts out in its original white bleached fabric while trickling down slowly into a periwinkle blue dye. Metaphorically, it begins with tracing the histories of a domestic household, then melts down and transitions into bleeding, leaking and spreading internally. In the cobalt blue curtain infrastructure, the lace trim resembles another form of monstrosity through what Singh calls a “vagina dentata,” which possesses a

³⁵ Parker, Rozsika. *The Subversive Stitch*. 1984. Pp. 52. “ratifies feudal hierarchy, denies the sexuality of earthly women, she is enthroned as queen of heaven, yet bows her head to her son who powers over her”. Even Mary, a pure virgin, must submit to her own son. In medieval garments, images of “fertility. Pregnancy, and childbirth repeat and show the contradiction between the place of women in medieval society and the misogyny of the church becomes visible”.

³⁶ Singh, J. *No Archive Will Restore You*, Punctum Books, 2018. Pp. 27. Singh uses the idea of a “vaginal library” from the research of her archivist friend, named C who wrote about Argentinian women, kept as political prisoners, storing subversive literature in their vaginal canals.

hunger to devour organs that enter it.³⁷ But through the physical act of entering and exiting, it can also be a site of trauma. The lace trim's toothy nature is interwoven with the intricacies of the embroidered text that yearns for something. But the embroidered text is frustrated, unable to make sense of itself in coherent words.³⁸ The fragmentation of words not being in chronological order is similar to the ways I write, and how women operate in the digital and physical space. In the age of the computer, chronically logged online, the conquest of the female body and new reproductive technologies reduces women to wombs.³⁹ Similarly, the Virgin Mary is reduced to a womb - despite having her womb blessed by God - and is expected to be obedient and dutiful as a predecessor for Catholic women. This is eminent in the following verse about Mary's position in the bible:

*As Jesus said these things, a woman in the crowd spoke out to him,
"Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you
nursed!" But he replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of
God and obey it!" - Luke 11:27-28*

While Mary is "blessed," the same can be said for many other women if they submit their obedience to God. I am interpreting this to mean that many women in history were discredited from their labour and work from men, or in this case, from Him. The bible does not claim that Mary bearing Jesus in her womb made her blessed, but by keeping and obeying the word of God made her worthy of bearing Jesus and raised her status to be above all earthly women. Mary becomes the biblical epitome of obedience, piety, order, submission become qualities aligned with a pure woman. Mary becomes reduced to the functions of her womb, bearing a son that would lead us from sinning, this becomes her eulogy.

"Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb"
(Parker, R. *The Subversive Stitch*. 1984. Pp. 54.)

³⁷Ibid. pp. 68. "*The folklorish figure of the 'vagina dentata', a toothed vagina that is hungry to devour the organ that enters it*". Singh relates the vagina that holds a mystery and hidden threat. Anything that exits it, in the pediatrician's imagination, becomes an act of radical trauma.

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 26. Singh writes, "we work in words yet struggle to make languages to capture our engagement". This gives me relief that she feels this way. As a writer, I write about what I understand, yearn and long for, and what I do not yet know.

³⁹ Federici, S. *Caliban and the Witch*, 2004. Pp. 17. Federici explains how the "female body" were preconditions of the church and feudalism's accumulation of labour and wealth.

THE WOMB IS A “REPLICUNT” FOR THE FUTURE.

As the organ-womb structure continues to melt down, smother, and leak it transitions into its final point: a radicalized, irresponsible *replicunt*. Nick Land argues that the body without organs signifies “true freedom” within bourgeois capitalist labour-power.⁴⁰ I partially disagree with his statement. While organs can indeed operate like a gear within a machine wired to constantly work, they are the only things that make us human. Silvia Federici has argued that the “female” body becomes an institutionalized breeding machine within our age of technological advancements in which the womb was conditioned to do.⁴¹ But, I believe that the womb can hold our deepest desires and intuitions. It holds power to unlock true freedom and fullness in life. *I am the womb that God forgot* envisions this wandering womb as a self-made “replicunt” from Plant’s Cyberfeminism text.⁴² Plant envisions the next generations of women will be called “replicunts” who are weaving and replicating to reclaim their identity and resist the system they are born into. She links cyberfeminism with weaving where the future is not fixed but *in process*. Womanhood weaves complex narratives that allows us to be seen with a bit more opacity. If the world really dove through the webs of femininity, womanness, its mothering and what we have gathered and sewn together, it would see that we are a matrix. Borrowing from Plant’s words “nothing, but everything,”⁴³ my curtain installation exists to be seen as nothing, to be seen as storage and to be wrapped and covered. We become seen as *everything* once we are seen as *whole*. Technologies like the computer, milling machines, the Jacquard loom, and a calculator are so complex that we are intimidated by analyzing their functions. When we invade and take up space - the internet, workplaces, universities, gender norms - we further expand, open and tear them all apart. In the

⁴⁰ Land, Nick. *Fanged Noumena : Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Fourth ed. Urbanomic ; Sequence Press 2017. Pp. 311. He links organs within the already born mechanized body as a “parasite”. He uses psychoanalysis where schizophrenics are a “body without organs” that operates on a cyberpositive feedback within our capitalist, machinic circuit. It tears everything apart, it’s uncontrolled, it’s explosive and its vastness has yet to be discovered.

⁴¹ Federici, S. (2020) *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, Ch. 1: The Body, Capitalism and the Reproduction of Labor Power*. Pp. 15. This chapter examines the concept of Karl Marx’s labour power in Federici’s argument that the history of exploiting our bodies has turned us into “*work-machines*”. Specifically, the female body as a “breeding machine” becomes institutionalized. Capitalism will still take hold and control over women’s bodies despite technical advancements.

⁴² Plant, S. (1996) *On The Matrix: Cyberfeminist Simulations*. Pp. 335-36. Plant utilizes the word “replicunt” as irresponsible feminists. They write programs, fabricate and weaponize systems, infiltrate the arts and art industry.

⁴³ Plant, S. *Zeroes and Ones*, Sept. 4, 1997. Pp. 31. Quoting Luce Iriguy “what they desire is precisely nothing, at the same time, everything”, when conceptualizing the idea of hysterics in women.

future, our programmed bodies are not breeding machines. Instead, we are tangible, taking up space. Using Plant's "irresponsible" feminism, we can all aim to become replicants. *I am the womb that God forgot* acts as our successor for an "embodied replicant.". We do this not by becoming a human being without any organs, but by embracing the organ that has been discredited. The womb floats and drifts, allowing a soft passage for a new world. Footnoting Deleuze and Guattari's Schizoanalysis, my work forces and inserts itself to add space while being immanent.⁴⁴ When we continue to normalize and ignore the side effects in birth control, postpartum depression, manic irregularities, anxiety from downloading our built-in identities, we continue to feed these smooth machines of biblical order. If we ignore the womb and its functions - which have been disregarded in medical history - can all bodies truly free?

To finalize, *I am the womb that God forgot* functions like a machinic organ. At the same time, it presents avenues of different futures. Devouring as we pass in and out of its archway, allowing us to sync with the movement of our bodies and letting our minds wander. The matrix within the scattered embroidered text forms alterations of the work's title. It connects with its own distracted, uncontrolled, "lazy" fantasies that find their own path in the area of chiffon and lace tablecloth fabric. Finally, the work releases itself from centuries of bottling its emotions confined in the printed text in each Bible verse. It traces our histories from our accidental stepping on the curtain, gently swaying as a point of contact with our bodies, our curiosities of the vibrant blue hue and the texture and its see-through material. Our eyes follow and draw upon every embroidered word in seeking meaning and letting our eyes wander. As I am writing this section, I am peering out of my studio window and my brain is becoming foggy. Going in and out of focus. Just for a moment.

⁴⁴ Land, Nick. *Fanged Noumena : Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Pp. 442-43. Land describes schizoanalysis as a concept that avoids ideas, but sticks to models and diagrams when finding the "liberated" body: bodies without organs. The bodies without organs become additive, immanent and are complex that desires something.

To conclude, below is a text I wrote before this project was fully conceived:

My womb was the one that God forgot.
conceiving my son, was a force so painful.
that eve, the moon was bleeding for me.
the origins of my name,
lies in the colour of Marian Blue.
Sometimes, I believe these *blues* can see-through me and wash
me better than water.
It read me better than any verse, in any gospel or any scripture
written about me.
My breasts, my thighs, my hips, my liver, my heart, my brain is
the version that God forgot.
God missed the part in knowing I have organs that sing.
But it is He who only sees my organs that scream.
Wailing through Da Vinci's *Madonna with Yarn-Winder*.
Both men, women and folks alike have written about me,
Theorized me, analyzed me, specified me, dissected me,
how much more of *me*, do they need to write,
instead of writing what I think?

ON BECOMING

Seeds that are “sewn” are the ideas for a new potential futurity that resists systems of the past. Seeds pave a way for a slower, mindful, hopeful, commemorating one.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; they shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise their heel.

—Genesis 3:15

My final project titled *Amidst a Heritage of Seeds (The ghosts of you, haunts me to walk further)* (Fig. 20) mirrors the same gothic arch shape as in *I am the womb that God forgot*. However, it is painted on the gallery wall in cobalt blue. It presents itself through a collection of photographs collaging polaroids, found images, archival and recent photo negatives from Nowy Targ, Poland. Besides the images, it also holds an arrangement of old passports, Catholic prayer cards, calling cards, handkerchiefs, Polish folk fabrics, embroidered text, rosaries, shelves and polymer clay roses. Similar to *In the Name of the Mother, Daughter (reversed) and (un)Holy Body* (refer to pg. 17), an assemblage of images are shaped within the arch like a stained-glass window that slowly starts migrating outwards. Turning this shape into a personalized stained glass window revisits my past yet also asks what the future can hold: to reflect on my familiar and maternal ghosts that slowly severs its ties to move elsewhere. A state of becoming.

This becoming takes place when some of the photographs are left framed and unframed. Some are painted in the same cobalt blue, like in *I am the womb that God forgot* (refer to pg. 33), while others are left in white. The three shelves scattered on the painted arch are holding jars of dried herbs for safekeeping, photo frames, roses, or other objects. Among this painted arch, there are many miscellaneous objects painted in blue; a rosary, dyed handkerchief, a textile photograph, polymer clay roses in blue and white, blue photoshopped Holy cards and other photographs in blue. The framed and unframed images, embroidered text and found objects slowly spread and

scatter beyond the arch as if it is migrating elsewhere, across the gallery walls resisting against the painted blue arched borders.



Fig. 20, Veronica Spiljak, *Amidst a Heritage of Seeds*, framed and unframed images, polaroids, embroidery on stabilizer, rosary, dyed handkerchief, shawl, herbs in jars, polymer clay, shelves, found objects, installation, 2024. York University, Toronto, ON.

As the images, text and objects continue spreading out, a few framed images become white, blending with the white of the gallery walls. The polymer clay roses - in colours of blue, red and white - and images of chamomile, nettle, rosehips, are sporadically laid among the installation to commemorate the knowledge of the medicinal and healing properties that flowers and herbs can provide in Slavic culture.⁴⁵ For instance, nettles were not only used to treat wounds, but in warding off spells, ghosts, and clouded thoughts. These herbs are modes for creating connections to the self and for gathering cultural networks sewn intergenerationally by Polish women. Meadows, churches, sewing factories, cemeteries, flea markets and the home were spaces of community for Polish women. They were all sources for gathering, gossiping, praying,

⁴⁵ Kujawska, Monika, Piotr Klepacki, and Łukasz Łuczaj. "Fischer's Plants in Folk Beliefs and Customs: A Previously Unknown Contribution to the Ethnobotany of the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian Borderland." *Journal of ethnobiology and ethnomedicine* 13.1 (2017): Pp. 6-10. Shows the table charts of Adam Fischer's field findings of herbs on the borders of Polish-lithuanian-Belarus. He concluded and discovered around 250 different Polish folk herbs during pre-war Poland and categorized them by name, use, and importance of value. Majority of these herbs were used for illness, household, spiritual rituals and food, often with multiple purposes.

embroidering and spreading knowledge. Furthermore, the work introduces embroidered text on fabric stabilizers that reads:

*lingering //
rewritten, rewritten, rewritten //
a cathartic closeness in archiving you//
judged. controlled. monitored.//
she weaves her sprouts. //*

These words yearn for the knowledge and unfamiliar longing embedded in understanding my Polish heritage and reflects the subconscious of what women and queerness is confined to be under a Catholic household. Referencing Roszika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch*, I want to connect these histories for the women who embroider, who gather herbs, who were closeted, who laboured for domestic merit as a means for survival within the church and while immigrating.⁴⁶

In recognizing my Polish heritage in connection to the archive, I can only think of Laura Tripaldi's words when talking about this work:

*"It is never possible to separate the pattern we see in a tapestry
from the interweaving of the threads that make it up." (Tripaldi, L.
Parallel minds, 24)*

When talking about weaving, it is a soft structure. When it is interwoven, it becomes tough leaving complex traces like a software. Just like in *Amidst a Heritage of Seeds*, it emerges and becomes the fabric that it makes up within the images, objects and embroidered text. As in a matrix, the images spread out like a web that always considers its origins before emerging onwards.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Parker, Roszika. *The Subversive Stitch*. 1984. Pp. 86. Due to the rise of the Protestant Reformation in England, it popularized the idea of domestic labour being seen as "God's work" which spread to the masses. It encouraged middle-class women to adopt the needle as a form of "pious management of the household".

⁴⁷ Plant, S. *Zeros and Ones*, pp. 67. Influenced by Plant's quote about the significance of textiles: "*Textile images are never imposed on the surface of the cloth: their patterns are always emergent from an active matrix, implicit in a web which makes them immanent to the processes from which they emerge*".

Finally, these archival images and objects act as ghostly seeds. Borrowing this concept from Julietta Singh's book titled *No Archive Will Restore You* (2018), these seeds are planted in the fabric of my own becoming through the ghost archive. She urges us to see these ghosts that can appear in our own body archives. In this work, it manifests itself from the biblical origins and written stories of the Virgin Mary, the colour blue, polaroids, citizenship cards, a rosary, embroidery floss, repaired handkerchief cloths that are embedded with the images of myself, the tattered images of my mother, grandmother and the people in her family history. These seeds (archives) that I have planted on the painted blue arch resembling a gothic window, "queerly" manifests itself outwards, seeping their way into a new futurity.⁴⁸ In rearranging the physical archive of these ephemera, its memory-tracing articulates the complexities of burden, trauma and convictions that are forming in the creases of my palms. Like Indian-Canadian artist Sarindar Dhaliwal's textile works (Fig. 21), Dhaliwal traces, in embroidered text, the flora and fauna and the story of going to her cousin's first wedding at the age of seven. The embroidered text implies the domestication of Indian women through a dowry, discouraging young girls in taking the liberty of reading books. This ghost archive can also be found in Florence Lan Yee's ghost installation work titled *How to Give Ghosts a Sunburn* (Fig. 22) and *I tried to interview my dad* (Fig. 23). Both use embroidered text and archival images printed on fabric to investigate the perplexities of defamiliarization and longing within their Cantonese heritage through conversations with their families. In these cases, they assembled archival images and conversations to critique labour and capitalist accumulation within the Cantonese diaspora. This can also be seen in Laura Colacci's use of used frames, sound, digital photography and found objects to describe how fear can be documented and passed down our family lineage (Fig. 24).

⁴⁸ Singh, Julietta. *No Archive Will Restore You*. Punctum Books, 2018. Pp. 96. As *permanent memory-traces* that ghostly haunt us and "queerly manifest". As an example of this ghost archive, Singh uses the story of tearing her hair as an offering to her mother in clumps in a fit of anger, Singh's therapist reassures her "you did not yet have the language through which to articulate your distress".

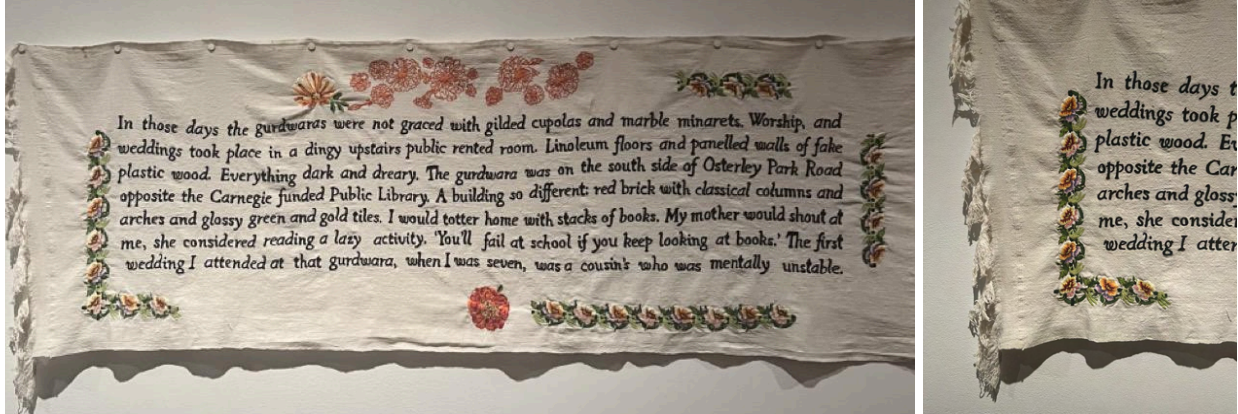


Fig. 21, Textile piece in Sarindar Dhaliwal's, *When I grow up, I want to be a namer of paint colours*, 2023. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON.

These objects and memorabilia, so familiar to us, create a cognitive dissonance of our relationships with religion and domestic conditioning. It makes us “fold in” and conceal ourselves, our identities and our imaginations. For me, subverting and flattening the religious shape of a stained-glass window and allowing the images to move beyond its painted outlines, provides possibilities for me to “unfold”.⁴⁹ Curator Eloise Sweetman asks us “in what way can we intuitively understand how our bodies feel when relating to these objects?” (Sweetman, 102) By attending to them, can it help care for ourselves as well?

By engaging both Catholic iconographies and folk traditions from my Polish heritage, I aim to call on these histories into critique. In doing so, *Amidst a Heritage of Seeds* subverts these lingering histories in the process of breaking free and liberating itself outwards across the gallery walls. All in a hopeful attempt of creating small openings for futures that are shared, communal, cultivating, sprouting, forming on its own.

⁴⁹ Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space: Drawers, chests and wardrobes*, 1957. Pp. 80. I am relating my work *Amidst a Heritage of Seeds* with Bachelard's chapter of finding human intimacy in the spaces of where things inhabit. For instance, like a “wardrobe is filled with linen, there are even moonbeams which I can unfold”.

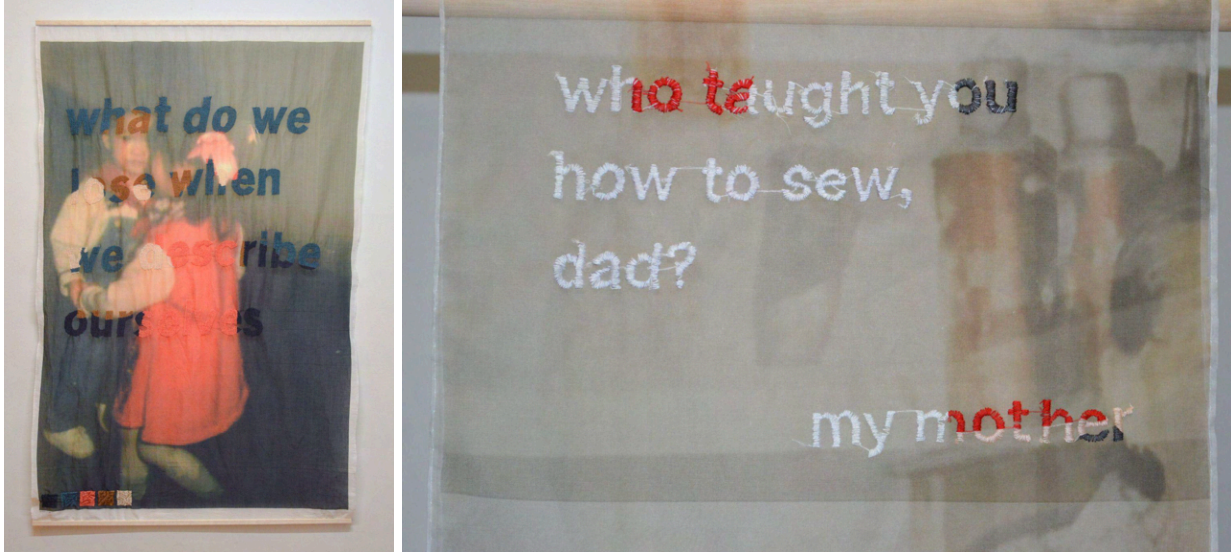


Fig. 22, (Left) *How to Give Ghosts a Sunburn*, Embroidery on cotton voile, 36 x 48, 2021. Fig. 23, (Right) *A Labour of Labour: I tried to interview my dad (detail)*, hand embroidered polyester thread on inkjet printed silk organza, hung on wooden structure, 6' x 6', 2019.



Fig. 24, Laura Colacci. *Open Your Eyes*. 2023. Photography and Sound. Visual Arts Mississauga, Mississauga, ON.

CONCLUSION: *March 25th, 2024*

A thesis is a placeholder for seeds. Not for a garden, but within the soil of meadows, hills and mountains. My work becomes the seeds to be planted, sprouted and emergent. Like the Babcias in Poland sitting in the meadows, my thesis exhibition behaves like the wildflowers and herbs that grow around them. Yet to be foraged, yet to be discovered. Looking through my committee's edits for this paper, maybe "praxis" is not the right word for these seeds to take place. "Praxis" might invite a theoretical or authoritative tone that might not be accessible for someone, like my mother, to read. I think "seeds" or "seedlings" will do for now. To find these seeds in my work, they need to be looked through carefully. And then, they will be found scattered across the crops of soil for this thesis to unfold, in hopes to find a future in:

Weaving.

Hysteria, distraction, wandering, daydreaming.

Spreading outwards.

Becoming and unfolding.

Unstitching our bodies from the sewing machine.⁵⁰

All against the machine.

Women who immigrate provide a different type of futurity from the machine.

I am doing this for a "hopeful" optimistic future = a different temporality.⁵¹

(Going to church on Sunday's was seen as an absolute truth)

In my practice, to embroider was to write. To safekeep images, discarded objects, clothing, ephemera, was to write. To create a visual installation was to immersively write. To be a

⁵⁰ Camilla Grudova, *The Doll's Alphabet*, 2017. Pp. 9. Grudova introduces the first character in her book, Greta, who discovered how to unstitch herself from the sewing machine. I interpreted this as a liberating act from the repression women hold in, in denying this unstitching. This can be visualized through the quote "Her clothes, skins and hair fell from her like a peeled rind of fruit, and her true body stepped out".

⁵¹ Eloise Sweetman, *Curatorial Feelings*, 2021. Pp. 124. Sweetman proclaims and envisions that "hope as improvisation" also becomes something unknown. This *unknowing* lies in a capability of resistance to the governing systems that prioritize the *known*.

Polish-Canadian woman with immigrant parents was to write. To write from these experiences was to openly write for them. My thesis aligns within aspects of the diaspora since it has a connection of homeland between me and Poland. Poland is a country where I only visited twice, but felt at home. I felt her history through the bullets of my mother's home, I felt a sense of my mother's comfort. With these feelings, I also feel the disconnection and embarrassment of losing my Polish tongue and her history. Constantly writing about this dilemma in my embroidery, through video performance, installation, photography, might hopefully weave my dispossession as a form of reconnection. Right now, it is March 25th. As I'm writing about spinning, weaving, embroidering, dyeing, holding, grieving, wandering, I start to feel a sharp pain enveloped in my neck. (Fig. 25)

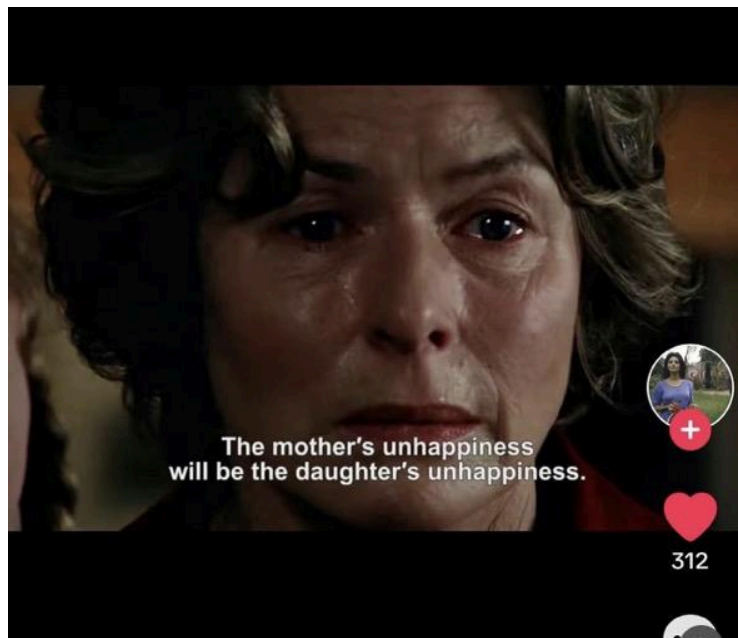


Fig. 25, *Autumn Sonata* (1978), dir. Ingmar Bergman, actors: Ingrid Bergman, Liv Ullman. Img src from Instagram, 2024.

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APPENDIX: Supplementary Images





