Ageing Queer Embodiment, Audiences, and Empathy:

"Intimate Karaoke" and The Material Conditions of Uterine Concert Hall

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Abstract
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My research-creation dissertation asks how performance-based practices impact, affect, and intersect with a gendered, middle-ageing, queer body, how that body provokes, enacts, and personifies, and ultimately how the body is at stake in cisheteropatriarchy. I address representational and material concerns about identity and the status of the queer middle-ageing female body; intersubjective and performative concerns with materiality, practice, and collaboration; audience reception and participation; and my embodied method of performance as research. I do this by examining how I use my body in the sound-based, interactive performance installation *Uterine Concert Hall* (UCH). I track the development of UCH through its multiple iterations, and the knowledge that was generated through hands-on research and performance, knowledge which would not have been possible through non-practice-based methods. I examine how I use my body within this work as a representational concept and as a material object and observe the effects of particular representational strategies on the audience. I also consider age as it factors into modes of representation as well as how age contributes to the work's aesthetic production.

My thesis addresses a lack of critical engagement with what middle-ageing female bodies mean, how they are represented, and how they are valued in performance art studies and mainstream pop culture. I put UCH in conversation with other artists who use performance-based methods and explicit body practices in their artwork. The goal of this research is to study explicit body performance-based practices and artworks against the backdrop of normative mainstream culture, where the value of female bodies to seduce and reproduce is predicated on youthfulness. Research-creation methodologies that were developed in this dissertation include: "intimate karaoke" as a method of achieving empathy between audience members and between audiences and myself as performer; queer sociality as an affective method of engagement and embodiment to circulate intimacies, vulnerabilities, and empathies through consent; and performative strategies to de-centre essentialist renderings of gender and expectations of what people with uteri are to do under cisheteropatriarchy. How I developed a methodology to perform and stage my body in this work relies on my performance-based experience, which I address throughout my dissertation.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Media Documentation

Works cited in this dissertation by Dayna McLeod as part of this thesis
project can be viewed at https://daynarama.com/

Cougar for a Year

Yearlong durational performance

Website: CougarThis.com

Uterine Concert Hall

In-situ durational performance

Website documentation: https://daynarama.com/uterine-concert-hall/

Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall

In-situ durational performance

Website documentation: https://daynarama.com/uterine-concert-hall/
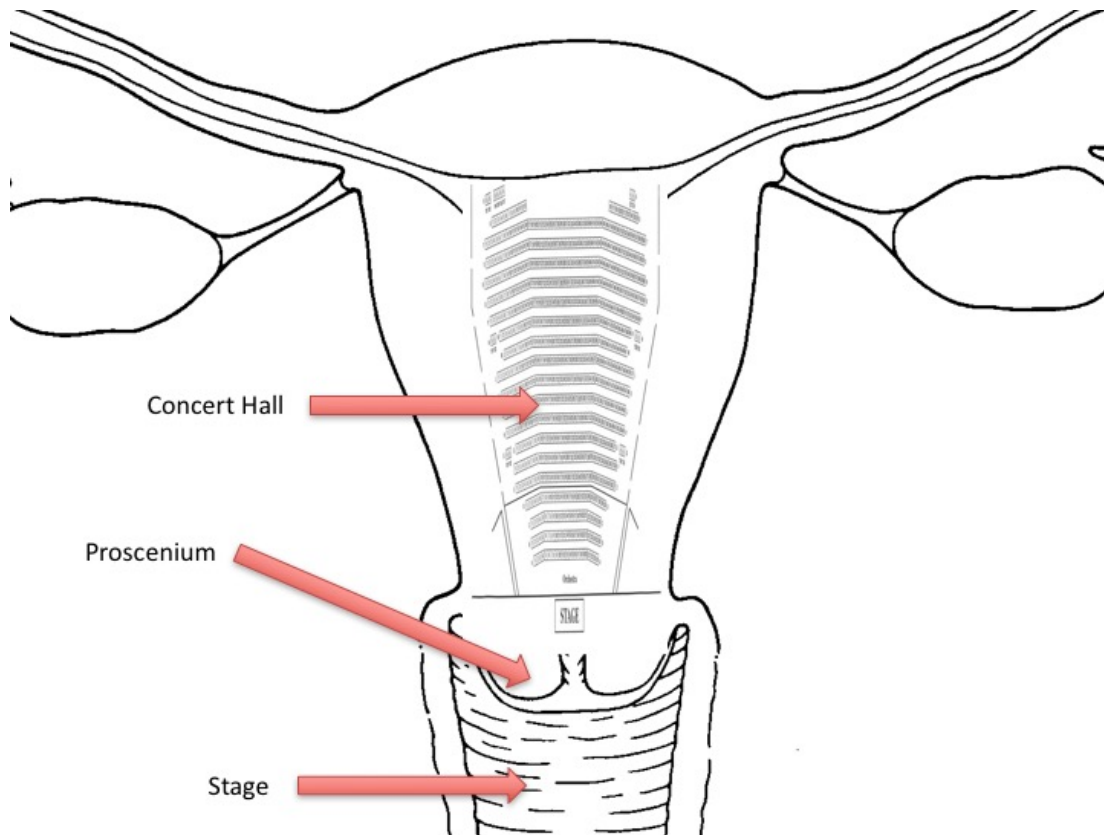
Figure 1: Dayna McLeod, *Uterine Concert Hall diagram*, **2016; images sourced from: the University of Minnesota Image Bank (internal reproductive organs); Center for the Arts, George Mason University, Fairfax Virginia (seating chart).**

INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO UTERINE CONCERT HALL

Introduction

My research-creation dissertation asks how performance-based practices impact, affect, and intersect with a gendered, middle-ageing, queer body, what that body provokes, enacts, and personifies, and ultimately how the body is at stake in cisheteropatriarchy. My dissertation reflects on gendered and aged representations, queer embodiment, intersubjectivity, performance, and performativity. I address representational and material concerns about identity and the status of the queer middle-ageing female body; intersubjective and performative concerns with materiality, practice, and collaboration; audience reception and participation; and my own embodied method of performance as research. I do this by examining how I use my body in the sound-based, interactive performance installation *Uterine Concert Hall* (UCH). I examine the

development of UCH through its multiple iterations, and the knowledge that was generated through hands-on research and performance. My focus on how these processes, discoveries, and outcomes effected changes to the work highlights specifically how research-creation and practice-based methodologies contribute to knowledge production. In other words, it tracks a research process and set of outcomes which would not have been possible using non-practice-based methods. I examine how I use my body within this work as a representational concept and as a material object, as well as its relationship to the audience; I unpack the roles and labour of the audience, my collaborators and assistants, and observe the effects of particular representational strategies on the audience. I also consider age as it factors into modes of representation as well as how age contributes to the work's aesthetic and physical production.

Uterine Concert Hall is a durational performance artwork that features my body as a concert venue. Equipped with a Babypod (a 54 kHz internal speaker), my vaginal canal acts as the stage for sound-based performance in which my uterus (and by extension those invited to listen in) is the audience. External concertgoers hear the recital through the very flesh of my body via stethoscope. This recital has taken the form of several performances that featured experimental, pop, and rock DJ sets by artists Jackie Gallant and Nik Forrest. The latest iteration of *Uterine Concert Hall–Intimate Karaoke, Live at Uterine Concert Hall*—asks audiences to sing their favourite karaoke song into me, so that audiences can literally sing to each other through my body and listen via stethoscope. The shifting arrangements and formations of this performance, which I detail in this dissertation, are significant both in posing and answering questions about the body and performance and in thinking more broadly about feminist and queer interventions in social life.

In creating *Uterine Concert Hall*, I was interested in proposing my uterus as a queer physical site. My intention with this work was to focus the audience's attention on our (often heteronormative, often reproductive) expectations of bodies marked female and why we think we have any right to make demands on these bodies in the first place. I was also interested in how age intersects with and impacts these demands and what happens when we approach the middle-ageing female body as productive and valued instead of marked by degradation, shame, and valuelessness. In this dissertation, I use *Uterine Concert Hall* as a means to navigate and present

research-creation discoveries and outcomes about how I use my middle-ageing queer body in this piece. I also use UCH to put this performance into conversation with other artists who use performance-based methods in their practices. The goal of this research is to study the production practices and artworks of middle-ageing feminist performance artists against the backdrop of normative mainstream culture, where the value of female bodies to seduce and reproduce is predicated on their youthfulness. My dissertation addresses a lack of critical engagement with what middle-ageing female bodies mean, how they are represented, and how they are valued in performance art studies and mainstream pop culture. How I developed a methodology to perform and stage my body in this work relies on my performance-based experience, which I address throughout this dissertation.

The central question my thesis explores is: How do performance-based practices impact, affect, and intersect with what a gendered, middle-ageing, queer body provokes, enacts, and personifies? Secondary questions include, How do I use the physical body within UCH (my own, collaborators, assistants, and the audience)? How does age factor into the production of the work aesthetically, physically, laboriously? How am I represented in the work, i.e., how is the body used as a representational concept and how is the body used within the work as a material object?

My approach to research-creation emerges out of my long-standing creative artistic practice. Embarking on a specifically "research-creation" dissertation extends an ongoing commitment to the critique of cisheteropatriarchy through performative methods of enactment, embodiment, parody, humour, and absurdity. How queer ageing femininities are (under)represented has emerged as a central focus of my practice and intersects with discourses and debates within Performance Studies, Research-Creation Studies, Feminist Theory, and Queer Theory. I thus use UCH as a conceptual and performative framework to raise issues of critical importance in these fields. Rather than read the performance through the lens of these disciplines, I think these disciplines through my practice-based research. Some of the concepts at play in this work are how different arrangements of the middle-ageing queer female body challenge cisheteropatriarchal representations of ageing femininities and bioessentialist expectations of reproduction; performative durationality as a research method of situated knowledge; and empathy as a method of embodied knowledge, audience engagement, and performativity. My

research-creation project opens onto these larger worlds through the critique of and engagement with the following: ageing feminine gender performativity and citationality (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, *Undoing Gender,* and —*Gender Trouble*); the legibility and performance of queerness (Case, *Split Britches,* and —*Feminist and Queer Performance;* Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, *In a Queer Time and Place,* and —*The Queer Art of Failure*); the normative constraints of cisheteropatriarchy and neoliberal heteronormativity (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, and —*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*; Duggan); reproductive futurism (Edelman); and the potentiality of queer utopia (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*). This introduction situates these deliberations and connects them to my reflections on the construction, performance, and reception of UCH and how this work contributes to these fields in original and impactful ways from my position as a middle-ageing queer female feminist artist who uses performance-based practices. This introduction also contextualizes research-creation as a methodology, and describes an embodied knowledge approach to my thesis through practice-as-research, to position myself within this evolving and emerging field. This introduction also details how I engage with audiences through cabaret and durational performance, differences between performing queerness and ageing versus performing while queer and ageing, and how I interpellate cultural readings of ageing female failure as a mode of production, all of which contribute to the development, performance, revision, and staging of *Uterine Concert Hall*.

I believe that my research uniquely contributes to Feminist Performance Art Studies and Research-Creation Studies in the following ways: there is a scarcity of self-reflexive and auto-ethnographic accounts from queer and feminist performance artists-scholars, particularly with respect to ageing; there is little written about the embodied materiality of the middle-ageing body; and there is nothing written about durational performance art as a practice of ageing. It is in response to this gap in Feminist Performance Art Studies and Research-Creation Studies scholarship where I wish to make an original contribution and address a theoretical lack regarding embodied materiality of the middle-ageing queer female body through research-creation knowledge and art production.

Although there exists a body of literature about the enactment of ageing, performing age, and images and representations of ageing in theatre, film, television and dance, this literature

tends to focus on old age or on a youth/old age binary (Basting; Joosen; Lipscomb and Marshall; Goldman and Switzky; Cobrin and Levine). This literature often relies on a heteronormative framework in that queer subjects are simply not acknowledged or examined as case studies. In terms of performance art, Peggy Shaw—the New York butch lesbian of the performance troupe Split Britches[1]—is often cited for her work that explores butch masculinity and ageing, specifically her lounge-act styled piece, *Menopausal Gentleman* (1996).[2] This performance is praised for how it "demonstrates the labor of gender" and how Shaw "performed gender on and off the stage in a multitude of ways" while discussing the hot flashes and sweats a menopausal body encounters during "The Change" (Dolan 470). Other feminist artists who have used performance-based practices like Carolee Schneemann, Holly Hughes, Coco Fusco, Adrian Piper, Linda Montano, Karen Finley, Marina Abramović, Laurie Anderson, and Yoko Ono have each published or participated in self-reflexive accounts of their feminist performance art practice. These chronicles often detail the intent, content, execution, outcomes, and aftermath of a work, practice, or a body of work of these canonized artists. Similarly, this dissertation employs this method of excavation through the examination of my performance *Uterine Concert Hall* while accounting for the materiality of the female body, its representational status as both reproductive and non-reproductive, and the effects and affects of queerness and ageing.

There is little written about the embodied materiality of the ageing body within Canada[3] as it relates to performance art. Jayne Wark briefly discusses Suzy Lake's self-portrait series *Forever Young*, in which Lake portrays a self-deprecating parody of a middle-ageing pop star in "Dressed to Thrill: Costume, Body, and Dress in Canadian Performance Art." The main focus of Wark's analysis, however, is how costuming contributes to the construction of female identity in the work of several Canadian performance artists, and how these artists use dress and costume to mediate their work. There is no extensive research that examines the question of ageing in relation to Canadian performance artists and their practices. Michelle Meagher provides an overview of art production as it intersects with age in "Art, Ageing and the Body" in the *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*. Like Wark, Meagher cites Suzy Lake's *Forever Young* self-portrait series. Notably for my art practice and research, Meagher also cites my year-long durational performance project *Cougar for a Year*, which she describes as addressing "the ways that sexual mores shift with the slide into peri- or post-menopausal middle age" (90-91).

There also exists a body of literature on Canadian feminist performance artists, including Tanya Mars and Johanna Householder's two volumes of *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art by Canadian Women* from 2004 and 2016, and Jayne Wark's *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Canadian artists are generally left out of an international performance art lexicon.

This dissertation accounts for intersectional conditions of identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability) within the context of feminist performance artmaking while asking how age impacts and intersects with these conditions. My thesis does not assume that the queer feminist body is female or cisgender nor does it purposefully exclude cis male bodies. However, an accounting of ageing masculinities is not my focus in this dissertation but has been explored elsewhere (Luke; Nardi; Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell). As a middle-ageing queer artist, I am a publicly scrutinized subject and object. In *Uterine Concert Hall* I amplify this scrutiny and draw the audience's gaze through the ways that I use my body in the work. This dissertation examines the context and lens of this gaze and draws on my knowledge of performance-based artmaking practices.

An Approach to Methods

My research-creation thesis draws on two methods: performance as research and embodied knowledge. My theorization of feminist performance art (my own practice and others') also engages with a range of historical and contemporary performance-based artistic practices, debates within contemporary queer theory, and research-creation as a method and practice. These influences have framed my artmaking and academic research and have shaped the trajectory of my dissertation.

Through my own performance-based practice, I demand visibility as a middle-ageing queer woman, which forces audiences to reckon with how middle-ageing women are less visible because of our desexualization that is outside of an age-appropriate heteronormative matrix. Based on this experience, and using my artwork as active case studies through which to speak, my research responds to the dire need for a more substantiated and nuanced examination of age and ageism in Canadian feminist performance art practice and study. Here too, I am interested in

centring queerness and discussing how it shapes and contributes to performance-based practices by not keeping it at the margins of discussion or contemplation as a subcategory of—or relational to—heteronormativity, but as centralized, formative, generative, and productive axis of performance. My dissertation embraces what Jack Halberstam describes as a queer methodology, which is "a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior" (*Female Masculinity* 13*)*. It also reflects what Dallas J. Baker describes as queered practice-led research (PLR) in which subjectivity is "the core practice leading both research and creative endeavour whilst simultaneously seeing creative practice, research and subjectivity as intertwined and mutually informing each other" (34). Through the examination of my own performance-based production processes and resulting artworks, as well as a comparative analysis with other feminist makers, my dissertation maps the relationships, diversions, intersections, inter-dependencies, influences, and relationality of performance-based practices between the contributors and myself to identify how the middle-ageing queer female body impacts the creation of performance-based works with a focus on *Uterine Concert Hall*.

Research-Creation, Performance as Research, and Embodied Knowledge

Although called by many names (arts-based research, practice-led research, practice as research, creative arts practice as research, studio-based inquiry, etc.), with varying nuances depending on the territorial region it is practiced in, which discipline claims it, and its funding institutions, research-creation as a methodology and practice has become systemically built into Canada's academic and Fine Arts institutions.[4] The definitional malleability of "research-creation" reflects an unfixedness of the term at a systematic level. Various Canadian universities including Concordia employ "research-creation" across departments and faculties. In the Humanities PhD program at Concordia where I study, a research-creation project is defined as one "that combine[s] creative practice in a variety of media with scholarly investigation" (CISSC). Further, students who produce a research-creation thesis are organized into the "Research-Creation stream," an organizational administrative function to be sure, but one that carries the imprint of disciplinarity as it compares to other Humanities and Fine Arts institutional department categories like English, Creative Writing, Painting, Fibers, Intermedia, Studio Arts, etc.

This pseudo-disciplinarity is counter to research-creation's arrangement as an evolving and changing method. However, this organizational formulation has dictated the institutional framework for my studies and my pursuit of a PhD in order to successfully earn my degree. It is for these reasons that I situate this dissertation within these boundaries, while considering how authors of research-creation based dissertations (still) struggle to have their work acknowledged and recognized as rigorous, with some research-creation dissertation submissions going unrewarded and denied acceptance by the academy. I deploy the term research-creation here to acknowledge that utilizing it as a framework helps situate my performance-based practice within a specifically academic context, as well as to provide access to academia from the position of an artist with an active artistic practice. It is here amidst this pressure to perform for the academy and the organized multiplicity of research-creation definition(s), that I situate my performance-based research in order to take advantage of what Louis-Claude Paquin calls its "polymorphic and open" quality (qtd. in Béland and Paquin), what Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk refer to as an "intervention" (14), and what Robin Nelson calls "the heart of the methodology" (8).

In "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'" Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk define research-creation as "a methodological and epistemological challenge to the argumentative form(s) that have typified much academic scholarship" (6). They discuss how "the theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of a research project are pursued in tandem" in research-creation approaches, and that "quite often, scholarly form and decorum are broached and breeched in the name of experimentation" (6). In a "Dialogue on Research-Creation" between Louis-Claude Paquin and Marjolaine Béland, Paquin notes the importance of recognizing the different meanings of research and creation in reference to activity and practice separate from their hyphenated co-dependency:

> While research can be anchored in theories or concepts, it can also belong to the realm of processes or technologies. Creation, most often situated within the artistic sphere, involves expressive and aesthetic expression... it can also signify innovation in artistic, media, or other objects, as well as social innovation informed by critical perspectives.

Emphasizing the fluidity of research-creation approaches, Paquin further notes, "research-creation is always deferred, always an achievement in progress never entirely achieved" (Béland and Paquin). My accounting of *Uterine Concert Hall* and its processes in this dissertation

examine experimentation and failure as method, technique, and achievement. With this study I am also implicated in Robin Nelson's description of doctoral worthy practice as research (PaR) as involving "a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry," where "practice" is "at the heart of the methodology of the project and is presented as substantial evidence of new insights." For Nelson, a PaR submission for doctoral level research would be "comprised of multiple modes of evidence reflecting a multi-mode research inquiry" (8, 9, 26).[5] Performance-based research is crucial to my dissertation research because it enables me to inhabit embodiment in a way that would not be available to me through traditional academic research methods. This method continually asks what it means for me to use my body in practice and research. Situated and embodied knowledge are key elements to this intervention, as is experimentation and failure with processes, technologies, audience engagements, and conceptual reconfigurations.

Queer Research-Creation

One of my advisors[6] challenged me to envision what form a queer research-creation doctoral dissertation submission might take. I have struggled with this challenge over the past few months as I complete my revisions, as although I am employing queer research-creation methods in this study, I am not queering the form that this study takes. Baker proposes that queering PLR means to centre "gender and sexual difference and the ways subjectivities are constructed" and "intertwined notions of difference, positionality, intersection and self-construction within reflexivity" are essential to queer research-creation projects (36, 39). He emphasizes that research and creative practice can overlap and otherwise reflect fluidity between "research" and "creation." However, Baker ties the exegesis of a potentially "non-traditional performative output" to "traditional research output presented in standard academic language" (36). What needs to be queered are these standards, which legitimize the presentation of experimental, non-traditional, and performative practices by using them as support material in an accompanying "traditional" output that is legible and valued by the academy. A queering of research-creation output is certainly possible outside of the academy regardless of whether or not practitioners and scholars have a PhD firmly in hand. But for doctoral submission, we cannot ignore the embedded contradiction in calls to queer research-creation outputs because candidates must secure approval from representatives of the degree granting institution, a definitively not queer act. My experience of the machinations of trying to earn a PhD complete with supportive supervisors,

advisors, program directors, administrators, and staff, is that neither the institution nor the academy permits changes to the format of the dissertation without approval. This approval from the dominant position within a hierarchy is in direct conflict with queer practice: seeking such approval is distinctly not queer. And although scholars like Chapman and Sawchuk (who do not address queer research-creation specifically, but who are also not not addressing it) suggest "research-creation may act as an innovative form of cultural analysis" that troubles traditional academic forms of scholarly, peer-reviewed output formats (7), this is not so easily undertaken by graduate students, junior scholars, and artist-scholars who are (still) expected to establish, build, and develop careers by publishing and producing outputs recognized by the academy. Therefore, queering the output of my dissertation is simply not possible under these conditions.

I am however, practicing queer research-creation methodologies in this dissertation by centering my subjectivity as a queer middle-ageing cisgender woman and emphasizing the significance of sexual and gendered difference in my work. This dissertation also demonstrates that queering research-creation methods does not simply mean to make it gay or charge it with sexuality, but to also bend, twist, challenge, and otherwise mess with these methodologies as means of queer production. Here, queer research-creation methodologies not only feature subjectivity and sexual and gendered difference at their core, but also focus on distinctly queer practices that encounter activisms, temporalities, aesthetics, audience engagements, and non-materiality. A queer research-creation methodology embraces queer experimentation and queer failure as method, taking into account not only subjectivity, but queer means of disruption as production. A queer research-creation methodology explodes the authority and academic standards that encircles research-creation scholarship as legitimate. It divests from a reliance on production and output (or not). It disrupts and otherwise does not conform, just like queers and queerness. To queer research-creation means to centre queer practice. To queer research-creation means to mine and find the cracks, seams, disturbances, perversities, wreckage, discards, and refuse of the methodology itself—to take a sledge hammer to smash it to bits or use a feather to tickle it out.

(My) Queer Performance-Based Practices

Throughout my dissertation, I analyze what I do and how I do it to account for my own methods of performance-based production. My dissertation discusses my performance-based research method of inquiry as it connects to subjectivity and identity construction, as well as how this methodology navigates, responds to, and performs for an audience. By creating, performing, and interpreting *Uterine Concert Hall*, I excavate how I use performance-based strategies centred on intersections of age, queerness, femininity, and the domination of the heteronormative matrix. I consider age as it factors into modes of representation as well as how age contributes to the work's aesthetic and physical production. My intent here is to un-disappear the Middle-Ageing, Peri/Menopausal Woman from the main stage of popular culture and make visible what the mainstream renders invisible, namely older (straight and queer) sexualized female bodies.

In playful ways, I confront societal neuroses and mass-produced anxieties about the middle-ageing queer female body. I do this by staging my body in often uncomfortable proximity to my audience, collapsing the space between us, literally and figuratively, to challenge their fears and desires about middle-ageing queer bodies marked female. This act of performing and engagement with the audience is a queer performative method of knowledge and art production. In other words, when I perform physically and conceptually close, beside, and in the face of my audience, I enact performance to understand how an audience receives and interprets my figuration of middle-ageing queer femininity. This embodied approach to art and knowledge production reflects Guillermo Gómez-Peña's approach to performance as "a form of knowing and understanding the world" (Taylor 36) as well as Performance Studies scholar Nathan Stucky's interest in "performance as a way of knowing" (qtd. in Schechner 360). My embodied approach informs how I evolve, continue, shape, change, and otherwise distinguish my figuration of middle-ageing queer femininity while capitalizing on mainstream misogynistic mores that figure the ageing queer female body as abject or grotesque.

My performance-based artworks stage a middle-ageing, queer, feminist perimenopausal (for now!) body whether the audience wants to see or hear from it or not. My practice has shifted over time and questions of ageing have emerged as I have grown older. I place age in the centre of my current work because I cannot avoid it. Like other middle-ageing women in their forties, I

am reminded daily through mainstream representations and societal attitudes about how "older women's bodies are seen as particularly disgusting and ugly as they age" (Fahs 240). This constant evaluation about how a woman (of any age) looks is exacerbated as she ages, as is her worth and potential contributions to society. I discuss this further in Chapter 1 in regards to *Cougar for a Year*, a year-long durational performance I started when I turned forty about the cougar, a woman who (aggressively!) demonstrates her sexuality by pursuing a younger person. This project similarly demonstrates both performance as a way of knowing and how I interpellate perceptions and representations of age, femininity, and sexuality in my performance research-creation work.

In addition to performance-based research, I examine works by other feminist performance-based artists as a means to further my study. My goal here is to connect the methods that I use in my performance-based art practice to other feminist performance-based artists and to elucidate common practices that we share. *Uterine Concert Hall* is put into conversation with works and practices by other artists who have similarly used vaginal, cervical, and uterine space as physical space as the site of their works' production: how we are oriented to bodies marked female (whether we have a uterus or not), the non-reproductive potentiality of the uterus as site, and soliciting and enacting empathy from strangers are key ideas that are explored here.

Feminist Performance Art and Practices

Intersecting with second wave feminism, the Civil Rights movement, and the LGBT liberation activist movements of the 1960s, feminist performance artists used (and continue to use) the female body as a site for exposing the confines of white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal consumption, desire, and exploitation (Schneider 3). Employing deconstructive strategies that ally feminism and postmodernism (Forte 218), feminist performance artists have also challenged the art canon and the female body's place in this canon as object, subject, absence, and or construction. Internationally and historically recognized feminist artists who utilized performance-based practices—such as Carolee Schnemann, Yoko Ono, Orlan, Adrian Piper, Coco Fusco, Annie Sprinkle, Ana Mendieta, and Hannah Wilke—have used the female body to challenge misogynist, racist, sexist, and capitalist patriarchal desires that have shaped, confined, and restricted what it means to be a woman in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. My thesis

thus builds on this history with a focus on age and its relationship to feminist performance art production from an artist scholar's perspective, as much performance art scholarship figures the body as a static subject, rather than considering the body's shifting significance and status that changes over time. Here, the very meanings of embodied acts change through the effects and affects of age. My dissertation is an intervention that emphasizes the embodied experience of the ageing feminist performance artist, one that acknowledges and accounts for the intersections of gender, queerness, and age. While there are analyses that deal uniquely with issues of the performativity of gender and queerness (Butler; Halberstam; Muñoz; M. Warner), my specific intervention is to shuttle between these modes of being and knowing with particular attention to age informing my analysis as an artist-scholar.

Audiences and Explicit Performance-Based Practices

Because female subjectivity is always-already dependent on the body, the performativity of gender has had an impact on writing about performance and performance art, and how we conceive of embodiment and materiality. It has also influenced the ways representation performs, signifies, and is signified, as well as the performative hierarchy of visibility and perspective, and the self-awareness of the viewer as an embodied subject. In *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Amelia Jones emphasizes that the "site of intersubjectivity" in body art[7] is "a site where reception and production come together," and what "the subject 'means' [is] always in relationship to others and the locus of identity is always elsewhere" (14). Part of the performer's shifting "locus of identity" is with the viewer and is complicated by the representational significance of the body. As Peggy Phelan observes, "the very effort to make the female body appear involves the addition of something other than 'the body.' That 'addition' becomes the object of the spectator's gaze" (150).[8] Being seen by (and interacting with) an audience while performing is a method of inquiry that is crucial to my research as it physically enables me to orient myself to the performer-audience encounter and their embodied presence, response(s), and reactions, which I can only accomplish through performance-based methods. This exchange draws on the significance of representation, which in performance-based practice, can further be amplified through bodily gestures performed for an audience. "Subjects are always and necessarily embodied, incarnate, and corporeal beings": what the audience sees establishes a relationship of seeing and establishes a perspective from which to see the performing body (Grosz 97).

In *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Rebecca Schneider proposes explicit body performance as a means to account for the body and how it is signified. She discusses how the explicit body carries historical meaning and social hierarchies of privilege as "a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality" (2). Schneider observes that "constructed as a natural unnatural, an unreal real, woman has existence relative only to her representation: her representation both precedes and succeeds her, she is always chasing after it" (51). Building on Schneider's thinking, I am interested in how representation works on and across the body in this "chase." If the middle-ageing female body further complicates this production of representation and subject formation, a middle-ageing queer body exacerbates it.

Audience expectations about feminist performance art are categorically limited. Because of our use of explicit body performance practices,[9] feminist performance artists are often lumped together as if we are all doing the same thing when using or staging the body and seen through a reductionist, perspectivist gaze, which has "inscribed women as given to be seen but not as given to see" (Schneider 3).[10] And although I have made work in which I have directed the audience's gaze to my genitals or substitute genitals, the function of my sex organs, or the capacity of my vagina (*Come Shred My Heart*, 2008; *Tales from the Canadian Beaver*, 2001-06; *BronzeCowboy*, 2014; *Careless Fister*, 2017), UCH frames my non-reproductive queer body in a different way to shift the scopic gaze from sight to sound. Examples of feminist performance-based works that pointedly showcase genitalia to confront traditional casting of the female body as passive or flattened subject and reverse the male gaze include Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975), a performance in which a naked Schneemann pulls a scroll out of her vagina and recites a sexist conversation between herself and a "Structuralist Filmmaker"; VALIE EXPORT's *Genital Panic* (1969), a series of images in which EXPORT is photographed dressed in "action pants" that were jeans with a triangle hole cut out of the crotch that revealed her pubic area and she was holding a machine gun with her legs spread open; Annie Sprinkle's *Public Cervix Announcement* (1990-92), a performance in which viewers were able to view Sprinkle's cervix with the help of a speculum; and Jess Dobkin's *It's Not Easy Being Green* (2009), a performance in which a naked Dobkin painted green like Kermit the Frog sits lifeless on the stage until a butch dyke Jim Henson inserts her hand into Dobkin's vagina and puppets her to life to lip-synch Kermit's

signature song. Although united in their exposition of gendered genitalia and its capacities, each of these works employ different techniques to reframe and reconfigure how we see the female body through its explicit staging and the gaze that consumes it. In the 1960s and 1970s, Carolee Schneemann used the female body to challenge the centralized white heterosexual male artist figure of authority and the subsequent subservient role of the female body as object within the male-dominated realm of contemporary art and art history. Schneemann used the corporeal nature of her body in works like *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963), *Meat Joy* (1964), *Fuses* (1967), *Naked Action Lecture* (1968*)*, and *Interior Scroll* (1975). The construction of *Interior Scroll* uses the female-as-art-object-as-critic and addresses social constructions of the female body and the erotic (Banes 197). The use of the scroll activates her body as site, specifically her vagina, which she is actively in control of versus being controlled by a white cis heterosexual male artist, his direction or his gaze.[11] Elizabeth Grosz notes that if feminist politics start with feelings and experiences that are "problematized through a recognition of its ideological production," then the body "provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable" (Grosz 20). Schneemann physically embodies this feminist politic in her art production through the use of her body, symbolically pulling out her feelings from her literal and figurative insides to the

Figure 2: Carolee Schneeman, *Interior Scroll*, 1975; photograph of performance.

outside of her body—expelling these feelings to bridge "the private and the public, the self and the other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the [gendered] mind/body opposition" (Grosz 20-21). *Interior Scroll* and Schneemann's enactment of it was a monumental, foundational, and significant performance artwork in terms of feminist performance art history, and the recognition of female artists *as artists* fully in control of their own agency, representation, and sexuality as they intersect with contemporary art practices and art history. This important work and artist[12] has made it possible for works like it to follow, including *Uterine Concert Hall*.
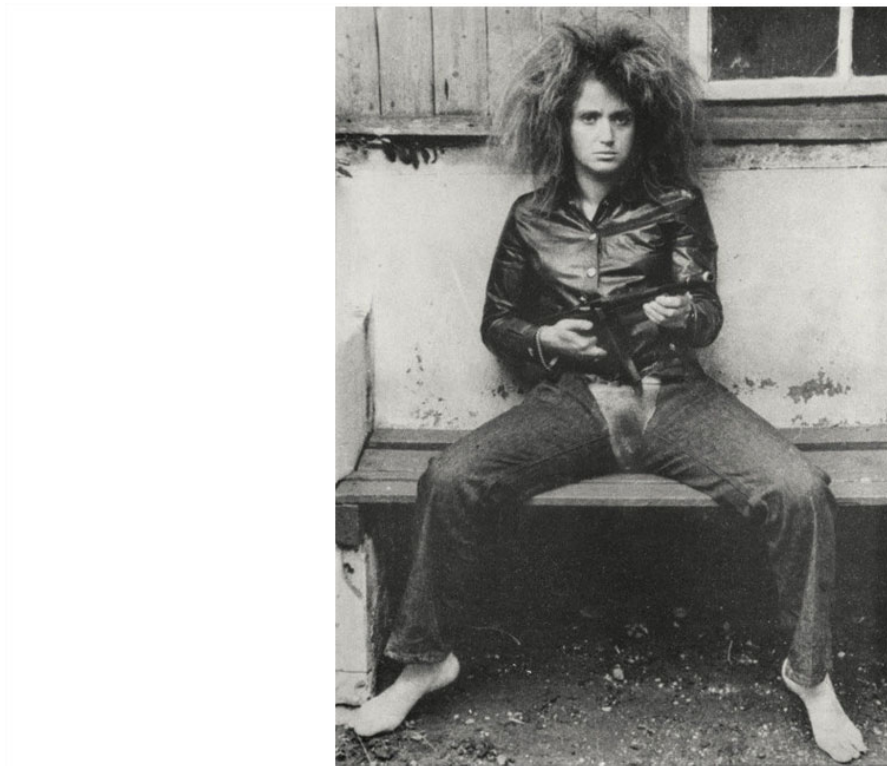
Figure 3: VALIE EXPORT, *Genital Panic*, 1969; photograph of performance action.

EXPORT's *Genital Panic* series of images uses tools, codes, and props of violence and rape to address the terms in which we are able to see genitals often associated with female bodies in a misogynist cisheteropatriarchy. Amelia Jones observes that "through the activation of her sexual body," EXPORT "opens up a continuum between her assertive act and the camera positioning her in the image at the time; between this *act* and our *viewing* later" (Jones, *Seeing Differently* 172; emphasis in original). Here EXPORT has control over the (past, present, and future) gaze of the viewer because she is the author of the image, directing the photographer to frame her crotch as the central point of focus that "opens a hole in fetishism, in its spatializing

16

structure of objectification, making durational identification with the image/body…possible and even highly likely" (172). EXPORT's series of images is an example of how to control the viewer's gaze and direct their attention to the artist's body, specifically their genitals, to re-examine and confront stigma and meaning attached to it.

The accounting of the performative action tied to EXPORT's *Genital Panic* images that has circulated in the forty years since this work was publicly presented is equally informative as to how an art historical gaze fetishizes female artists. Art legend has it that the series was based on an original action in which EXPORT entered a porn theatre in crotchless pants so that her exposed genitalia would be at face and eye level with the audience as she slowly walked down the aisles row by row with a machine gun pointed at each audience members' heads, which made some of them flee. The persistence of this rumour is informative as are the specific distortions of EXPORT's original action.

EXPORT *did* enter a theatre in Munich, West Germany, on April 22, 1969, wearing jeans with a triangle hole cut out of the crotch that revealed her pubic area in two performance actions titled *Genitalpanik 1* and *Genitalpanik 2*. She did not do this action in a porn theatre but in an independent art house cinema. Several audience members left but could not be classified as "fleeing" for fear of violence, but rather for fear of embarrassment that EXPORT would confront them in her crotchless pants (Robinson 85). EXPORT did not enter a public theatre with a gun. To do so would be irresponsible, and put both audience and artist in danger. But this is exactly the point and power of the rumour: to align irresponsibility with EXPORT and her actions and to malign the intent of her actions. She may not have been carrying a loaded gun, but her exposed genitals are seen as equally loaded and dangerous. The "porn theatre" that replaces the "art house cinema" in the rumour also contributes to the discrediting and questioning of EXPORT as a serious artist (read: cishet white male). This distinction is important because the rumour dismisses artwork "where 'sex' happens" and regulates women who expose their genitals in art to the site and stigma of pornography (Doyle). The rumour relies on a distinction between these two sites: the first as associated with low art and graphic representations of sex, and the second as high art despite a possible and probable likelihood that the art house cinema at some point in its

screening history has played graphic depictions of sex, perhaps categorized as "erotic" to lessen the stigma of "pornography." *Genital Panic* indeed.[13]
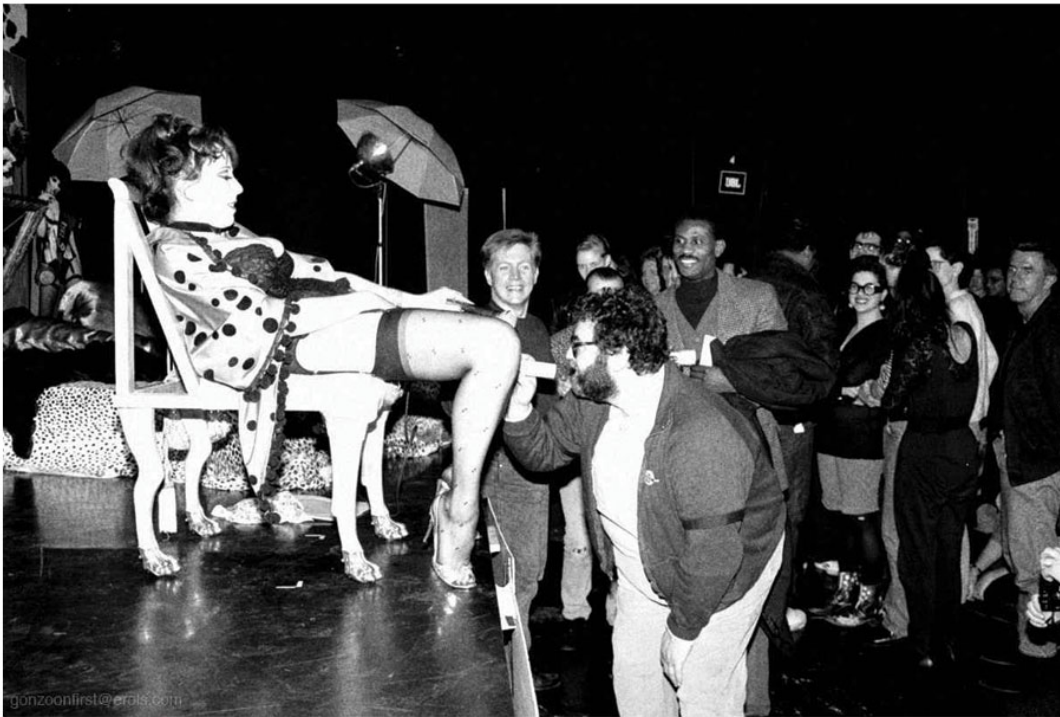
Figure 4: Annie Sprinkle, *Public Cervix Announcement*, 1996; photograph of performance.

A "NYC prostitute and porn star for twenty years," Annie Sprinkle exploded this stigma of pornography in the art world in the 1990s through her performance-based works like *Post Porn Modernist* (1989-1996), *Public Cervix Announcement* (which she performed separately and as part of *Post Porn Modernist*), and *The Legend of the Ancient Sacred Prostitute*, a "masturbation ritual" that she also performed as part of *Post Porn Modernist* and developed as a workshop and performance for multiple participants ("Mini-biography," "Post Porn Modernist"). In *Public Cervix Announcement,* Sprinkle invited audience members to see her cervix with the help of a speculum and flashlight as she reclined in a chair. She used a friendly educational show-and-tell approach to showcase the interiority of the female body and literally expose what we don't know about it. By showcasing her body in this way, Sprinkle represents a "generic" female body[14] subject to an obstetrical gaze but takes control of this gaze by directing onlookers to a cervix and interiority that she possesses, and by occupying this gaze as she watches her audience see her cervix, to see and be seen by what Rebecca Schneider calls Sprinkle's "theoretical third eye." Witnessing Sprinkle's performance and seeing her cervix thusly, Schneider describes the

uneasiness she felt as she became aware of Sprinkle's gaze looking at Schneider as she looked at Sprinkle's eye-cervix. Schneider posits Sprinkle's cervix as a counter-gaze, as a female gaze that sees the spectator as the spectator sees it while the artist watches, reversing and complicating the scopic gaze (55).

Figure 5: Jess Dobkin, *It's Not Easy Being Green*, 2009; photograph of performance.

Jess Dobkin's work builds on the history of explicit feminist performance art that Schneemann, EXPORT, and Sprinkle established through the use of their vaginas and the staging of their bodies. *It's Not Easy Being Green* takes place on stage where Dobkin sits on a stool, slumped over, naked, and painted green like Kermit the Frog. Lex Vaughn, a butch dyke in Jim Henson drag, enters the stage, snapping on a latex glove for the audience and amply applies lube onto her gloved hand. Jim Henson then drops to her knees and carefully inserts her fisted hand into Dobkin, who comes to life and lip-synchs Kermit's signature song and namesake of the performance.[15] Here Dobkin is a reclaimed object, a lesbian object who queers Kermit the Frog and his Muppet master. Her sincere and heartfelt lip-synching is exaggerated by her strategic use of humour and its "ability to disarm" (Reeve 127), which further complicates her demonstration through the very public show-and-tell of how a (lesbian) fist goes into a (lesbian) vagina. She challenges the sacredness of the vagina and its penetration with this insertion and exposes a

sexual practice and sexuality that is non-reproductive. This moment of penetration is exacerbated by the viewer's impressions of lesbian sex and identity, and any preconceived notion that they might have about fisting. However, this otherwise sexualized act is also complicated by the seemingly desexualized and non-eroticized performance that Dobkin embarks on as she takes on the role of a puppet. She does not interact with her puppeteer, and otherwise does not perform the sexualized female object that we have come to know from Western cinema, pornography, and art history. As a body, she does not react to the fist in a sexual way; she reacts as an animated puppet that performs in response to the hand that manipulates its movements. In this case, the hand that controls Dobkin the puppet belongs to a butch dyke who performs the role of puppeteer and Dobkin's "creator," a role without whom the puppet would remain lifeless. She insists on a corporeal, literal embodiment of lesbian sex and a queering of Kermit.[16]

Dobkin's use of vaginal space is reminiscent of Carolee Schneemann's in *Interior Scroll* and Annie Sprinkle's in *Public Cervix Announcement*. Dobkin's use of her vaginal capacities seem to be in dialogue with these older works to stretch and evaluate the capacity for citationality that re-reads explicit bodily performative acts, as well as their reception and interpretation. How Schneemann, EXPORT, and Sprinkle critiqued the era, age, and contemporary contexts from which they participated is significant and Dobkin builds on this historical legacy of feminist performance art that they innovated and revolutionized.

Team Vagina, Team Uterus

At this point in the dissertation, I would like to take a moment to address a potentially problematic conflation of the vagina and the uterus. Both of these organs are distinct and have separate yet potentially related functions. Likewise in UCH, I am positioning my vagina as stage for my uterus as concert hall. Furthering this theatrical analogy, I also figure the cervix between vagina and uterus as proscenium. Were we to label a concert hall like one of the Jubilee Auditoriums in Calgary or Edmonton, the Babs Asper Theatre that is part of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, or the Théâtre Maisonneuve in Place des Arts in Montreal, instead of mapping these architectural configurations onto my body, we could inverse this mapping and fix "vagina" to the stage, "uterus" to the seating areas, and "cervix" to the very front of the stage in front of a curtain, should there be a curtain in any of these theatres.[17] The reason I am drawing our attention

to this mapping is because I imagine we can all envision both of these configurations (internal reproductive organs mapped onto theatres and vice versa). And although we may envision a two-dimensional seating chart floor plan of one of the theatres I've named, we can translate this blueprint into brick, mortar, chairs, and stage boards. Did you see red velvet when I said curtains? That's what I mean.

However, I would imagine that when you are thinking about the architectural elements mapped onto internal organs, these organs are manifested in your mind as a diagram, not as flesh, muscle, and tissue, depending on your relationship to and experience with these organs. The reason this is important is not only because it impacts and affects how we conceptualize *Uterine Concert Hall* (the project and the space) and can thus imagine how sound "works" and travels between these sites, it is important because of their physical proximity and actual size. My uterus is about the length of my index finger. The opening of my cervix dilates depending on my menstrual cycle, but is never bigger than the hole of a Cheerio.[18] Measuring or mapping sound that emits from my vagina through my cervix to my uterus, and then through the flesh of my body between my uterus to the outside of my skin where the bell of the stethoscope is placed is not an accurate procedure. I must confess at this time that the stethoscope may in fact be hearing sound through my flesh emitted from my vagina bypassing my cervix and uterus entirely.

I bring this up in order to situate and contextualize other sound-based artworks that predominately use the vagina as a site of production formally and conceptually, to chart how each project figures the female body, and attend to similarities and differences with UCH. Some of these artists and their critics conflate the reproductive and sexual functions of the vagina and the uterus, which reflects an insistent conflation within cisheteropatriarchy and reproductive futurism. However, because of the non-reproductive use of sound that is being harvested from the vagina-as-site, these works queer the process of gathering and collecting sound from the interiority of the female body and of the sound itself. The collection, transformation, and distribution of this sound and sound-as-data for presentation to an audience is queered: these works shift the functionality of the vagina as a means to access the uterus for procreation and in some cases, aurally amplify non-reproductive sexual pleasure. To make the body and vagina into instruments of sound means to repurpose them outside of the logics of cisheteropatriarchy and

reproductive futurism. José Muñoz suggests that "One possible definition of queer that we might consider is this: queers are people who have failed to turn around to the "Hey, you there!" interpellating call of heteronormativity" (*Disidentifications* 32). In UCH, I also hear the call of reproductive futurism but confront it with a non-reproductive uterus. Not because my uterus doesn't "work" but because I *put it to work* in a non-reproductive way. To make the body, the vagina, the cervix, and the uterus structural materials for a venue as in UCH is to renovate their functions outside of these reproductive logics.

Miya Masaoka works with the concept of a listening vagina in *Vaginated Chairs* (2018), a performance designed for the vagina as a "third ear" (Masaoka). This work uses touch to communicate sound generated by vaginas possessed by performers who mingle with audience members. In this performance-based work, first presented as *Vagina Dialogues* (2016), customized microphones were placed in the vaginas of several performer-participants to "track the internal sounds of the body" (Masaoka). This sound was collected and mixed via computer and redistributed to the audience who sat in brightly coloured chairs that were placed in a curve. The vibrations of sound recorded from the performer's vaginas and interpreted by computer were distributed to these chairs so that the audience could feel the resulting vibrations. The conceptual dynamics of the work figure vaginated bodies as anonymous generators of sound that are converted into vibrations that the audience shares through touch by sitting in the stimulated chairs. This anonymous intimacy creates a network of feeling and vibration through a closed circuit of experience with and for the audience and the performers. Similarly, UCH uses sound to network the audience through the performance. Both works queer sound through its collection and redistribution through the body at the site of the vagina.

Other artworks that have used vaginas as a sound source for other listeners include Anna Troisi's *OB-scene*, (2016) which similar to Masaoka's work collected sound from the artist via vaginal probe. Troisi listened to a recited text that only she could hear, which triggered sexual arousal (Troisi). Unlike Masaoka's work and UCH, *OB-scene* tracked, interpreted, and broadcast Troisi's sexual arousal and redistributed the transformed results to the audience as image and sound. Troisi centres herself in the work as content source, performer, and canvas by receiving stimuli from her headphones, providing data to the vaginal probe, and having the cacophony of

interpreted images projected onto her clothed body as she sits cross-legged at her laptop in front of the audience with the soundtrack filling the presentation space. Like Masaoka, Troisi plays with the circulation of sound and its conversion through a computer interface only here it is not transformed into vibrations transmitted to the bodies of the audience, but is interpreted into sound and image which is affected by her subtle performance of quiet public sexual arousal that may or may not climax in orgasm.

Lauren Lesko's *Thirst* (1995) is a twenty-one-minute recording in which Lesko walked around with a contact microphone in her vagina (Goldsmith). This action and recording brought the interiority of the female body to an external listening audience without a visual referent. The audience must interpret these sounds, their origin, and the interiority of the female body based only on what they hear, which brings the listener into the body, surrounded by flesh, tissue, muscle, and mucus.[19] Similarly, Montreal DJ Ghost Taco uses sound recorded from inside their vagina with an sm57 microphone where "heartbeat and voice make appearances" (Ghost Taco). Ghost Taco queers dance tracks and party vibes by mixing music with their recorded interiority to the delight of the dance party crowds that they plays for. Formally speaking, each of these works used the vagina as a viable sound recording studio to expose audiences to the interiority of the body and confront taboos about the female body as sacred site of reproduction. These projects also informed the viability of vaginal recording and encouraged me to experiment with and seek out further knowledge about microphone construction, which I discuss in Chapter 3

Joe Davis's *Poetica Vaginal* (1986) recorded vaginal contractions from Boston Ballet dancers and other women for broadcast from MIT's Millstone Radar transmitter at Haystack Observatory in Westford, Massachusetts. Capitalizing on his privileged access to this technology as well as the U.S.A.'s preoccupation with space exploration, Davis's intent was to broadcast his project to a potential extraterrestrial audience at Epsilon Eridani, Tau Ceti and two other unnamed stars (Davis; Gibbs; Marshall). Translating these contractions into music, text, speech, and radio signals, *Poetica Vaginal* was a "covert" project that the U.S. Air Force quickly shut down once they became aware of it (Gibbs). Davis's broadcast was a critical response to images that were "placed aboard the Pioneer 10 and 11 spacecraft [that] show impeccably groomed men that lack any facial and body hair…and women with no external genitalia" (Davis qtd. in Gibbs).

According to NASA, the Line Drawing Pioneer Plaque[20] that was drawn by Linda Salzman Sagan and designed by Dr. Carl Sagan and Dr. Frank Drake features an illustration of a man and a woman whose composition "were determined from results of a computerized analysis of the average person in our civilization" (NASA). Of NASA's generic and desexualized images sent into space Davis said, "by making this attempt to communicate with the other…we're really communicating with ourselves" (Davis qtd. in Gibbs). Here Davis uses the translated sounds of vaginal contractions, which he and others have categorized as the site of human conception, in an attempt to critique systemic and sterile representations of the human body. The uterus, cervix, and vagina are not even conflated into a flattened handlebar diagram of female reproductive sexuality, but disappeared entirely into a discreet and hairless "v" in NASA's illustration. Also problematic in NASA's drawings and reflective of the pervasiveness of white supremacy and a perceived default neutrality of whiteness, the cisheteronormative illustrations clearly depict white bodies despite NASA's claim that the figures were based on "a computerized analysis of the average person in our civilization" (NASA).
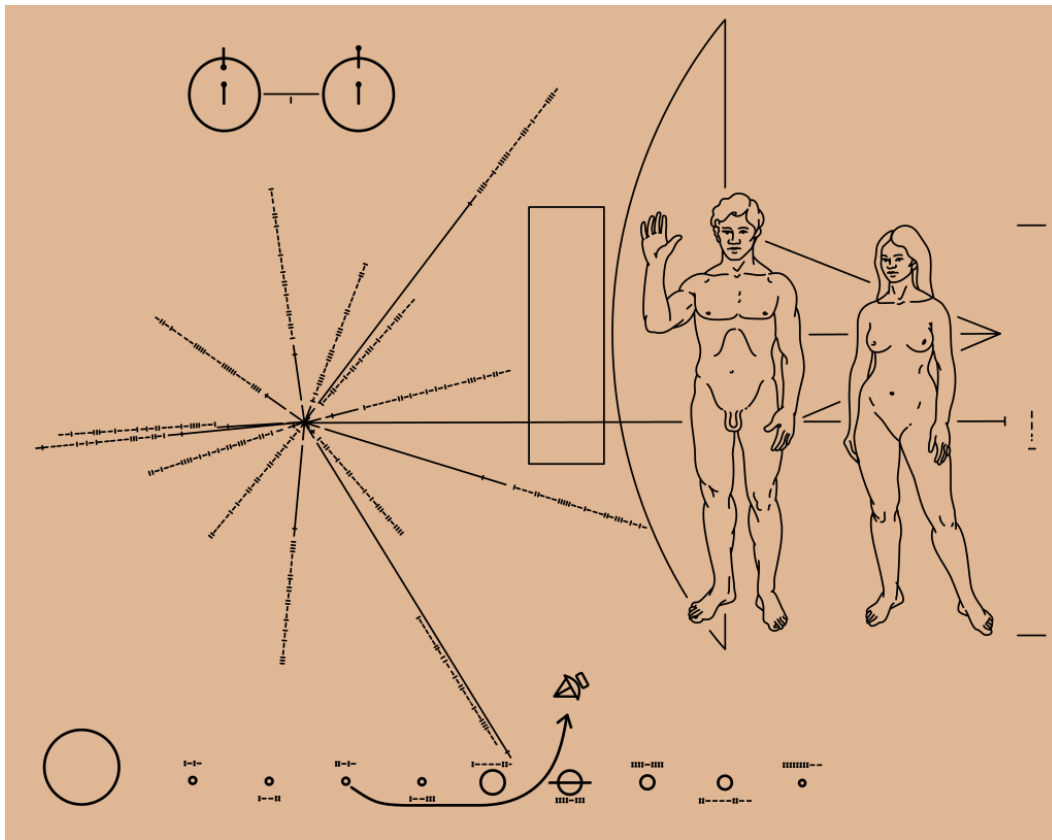
Figure 6: Linda Salzman Sagan, *Pioneer Plaque*, 1972; illustration. Designed by Carl Sagan & Frank Drake; artwork by Linda Salzman Sagan.

These important performance art pieces demonstrate different approaches to staging the body—and staging the vagina specifically—using explicit body practices. They mark the significance of working with, inside of, and across the female body (and vagina) as a material condition and a representational construct. In *Seeing Differently* Amelia Jones argues that "feminist cunt art" opens up a "kind of heightened ethical dimension of relationality—the viewer becomes interrelated with the building of sexual identification and desire, and thus ethically responsible for her participation in this nexus of meaning and subject formation" (172). These works not only map how vaginas were used in artworks, but also emphasize the significant gendered markings of the bodies that house them as material surfaces inscribed with meaning.

Artist Talk: Come to the Cabaret Remix

Over the past twenty-five years, I have used humour to capitalize on exploiting the body's social and material conditions in my art practice to engage with my audience and put them at ease. I use video, remix, installation, live art actions, cabaret, and performance art practices to intervene in the ways and means an audience can read the body. My practice often investigates the ways that bodies marked female are treated by mainstream culture as public property and objects for consumption, and I am dedicated to the study of media representations of sexuality and queer identity. I am interested in how gender performative strategies make the body visible while reinforcing gender as a structure, and describe the subject as constructed by the acts the subject performs.

As part of my dissertation research to engage with and build upon performance-based practices by other feminist artists to connect the methods that I use to help excavate how feminist artists use the body, I curated a forty-five-minute program of experimental video works from Groupe Intervention Vidéo's collection (GIV).[21] My intention with this curatorial project was to examine how feminist artists over the age of forty were using the body from the collection that spanned forty years. I searched the collection for works that used the body, addressed age in some way—either as subject and/or the body performing for the camera—and featured an element of intentional performance. I also searched for works that used humour in some way, whether physically or in content, as my own work uses humour as a strategy for communication and as a performance-based means to represent and sculpt the body.[22] Movement, gesture, task,

action, collection, and intention: How does the body communicate and what does it represent? Where does the body go? How is the body used? Where is the body in relationship to the camera, to the viewer? These were the guiding questions I asked of the works themselves to refine my final selection. I selected fifteen works for the program called *Gestures of Performativity* by artists who all use performance in some way as a means to create their video work. I used "performativity," specifically emphasizing *gestures* of performativity to draw the viewers' attention to how the artists in this selection use performance strategies to sculpt their bodies within these media works that were produced specifically for the camera. Using the search terms "age," "ageing," "the body," "performance," "body image," and "humour," my initial search resulted in fifty-five short film and video works: twenty videos made between 1975 and 2003, eight made between 2004 and 2009, twenty-four made between 2010 and 2014, and three made in 2015. However, I quickly realized that there were not enough works to make up a screening based on all of the search categories that I had considered if all of the works needed to feature all of the terms in some way. "Age" and "ageing" became supplementary, and the central focus for the program became how various artists used the body for the camera in gesture, embodiment, literal performance, or representation regardless of their age or the age of the bodies they used in their work. Other considerations for the program were how each piece related to the rest as a whole, the order they should be placed in for this juxtaposition, the length of each piece, and the selection of only one work from each artist. I was also drawn to works that used subtle to outrageous humour in some way and used it as a thread through the final program. This curatorial bias on my part demonstrated the influence and importance that I placed on my relationship to viewing and selecting the work for presentation.

My practice is an ongoing and playful inquiry into representation framed by a lifetime of consuming and deconstructing pop culture. It has evolved to account for middle-ageing queerness as its subject as I have gotten older (and queerer!). Throughout my practice I use remix techniques to rearrange, deconstruct, and critique familiar mainstream media and reorient the signification and framing of them for my own motives. I am interested in treating pop-culture sources as raw material to queer, exploit, and otherwise reassemble the original intent of these texts. For example, *Don't Ask Don't Tell, Gay, Gay, Gay* (2010) captures the ideological repetition of normative sexual standards within American discourse around Don't Ask, Don't

Tell (DADT) in the 2000s by cutting an episode of *Boston Legal* to a one-minute summary. *Ultimate SUB Ultimate DOM: Maria Von Trapp & Mary Poppins* (2009) imagines Maria von Trapp from *The Sound of Music* as the submissive to Mary Poppins's dominatrix to satirize homophobic theories of homosexual narcissism, which dismiss same-sex attraction as a treatable narcissistic disorder. *That's Right Diana Barry—You Needed Me* (2009) remixes the 1985 made-for-CBC-television *Anne of Green Gables* to plainly showcase the two lead characters' love affair set to Canadian songstress Anne Murray's 1978 classic "You Needed Me" and with an introductory monologue I perform to set up the complex relationship lesbians have with their mothers, girlfriends, childhoods, and sexuality.[23] Here I am interested in what Patricia White terms "retrospectatorship," a way of watching media texts that are formed by the memories, fantasies, and experiences of the viewer and how the production of subjectivity factors for both the character on screen and the spectator who faces it. In my practice, I interpret my experiences of media texts like *Mary Poppins*, *The Sound of Music*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and popular music and television to queer them for my audience. I also rely on the audience's familiarity with these media texts to make connection with the audience, and potentially to queer these texts (if only for a moment) for them and decentre heteronormativity.

As well as utilizing remix strategies in single-channel video and live performance works, my practice also engages cabaret strategies in which I perform short works for an audience in a curated one-to-two-hour show with other acts and performers from other disciplines like dance, circus, theatre, opera, jazz, and comedy in a venue that features a bar and cabaret seating for a relaxed audience. During my doctoral research, I created four performance-based cabaret works with focused attention on representing and presenting middle-ageing queer femininity: *Bronze Cowboy*, a visceral, monologue-based cabaret performance piece that I performed at the Trasnocheo Cabaret at the Encuentro academic conference and performance festival presented by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics and Concordia University in June 2014 in Montreal, and at Montreal's Kiss My Cabaret in September 2014; *I Live for Menopause*, a karaoke-performance with video which I have performed at the Aging and Activism Conference at Trent University in Peterborough and at a fundraising event for GIV's 40th anniversary which is now a single-channel video; *Santa's Wife and the Baby Dyke*, a monologue-based theatre piece which I was commissioned to write and perform for a thematic Christmas show in December

2015 at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal called *Urban Tails*; and *Careless Fister*, an allegorical #MeToo performance about consent that reconfigures George Michael's *Careless Whisper* as a public service announcement and sing-a-long using karaoke, which I performed at Montreal's Kiss My Cabaret in 2017, at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto in 2017, and at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal in 2018. I cite these works throughout my dissertation as a means to situate my practice and its history, and to account for different methods of performance as research.

Figure 7: Dayna McLeod, Careless Fister, 2017; photograph of performance.

Performing (as a) Queer Subject

In *Feminist and Queer Performance: Critical Strategies*, Sue-Ellen Case discusses how she needed to "foreground the difference between lesbian subcultural practices and heteronormative feminist ones" in addressing a predominantly heterosexual crowd at the Women in Theatre Program of the American Theatre Association in 1987 because of "the ways in which heterosexual issues and forms had dominated the activist and artistic scene" at that time (4). Thirty years later, this resonated with me through my dissertation research as I performed *Cougar for a Year* and subsequently took to cabaret stages since the completion of this piece dressed in

my regular non-animal print fabulous sequined onstage attire. Cabaret works like *Santa's Wife and the Baby Dyke* (2015), written specifically for the Centaur Theatre's[24] older, heteronormative crowd, and *Careless Fister* (2017),[25] a piece I have performed for Kiss My Cabaret's predominantly straight crowd and for a queer audience in Toronto, explicitly explain queer codes and sexual practices for the pleasure of queer audiences and as a means for heteronormative audiences to get the jokes. If the audience doesn't know what fisting is before my performance, that "fisting is not just a gay practice, fisting is not just a lesbian practice, fisting is not just a queer practice, fisting is not just a straight practice," they definitely will by the end of my piece. They'll also know how essential lube is, the difference between a Rocky fist (wrong) and a sock-puppet fist (right), and never hear George Michael's "Careless Whisper" the same way again (McLeod, "Careless Fister"). As a queer performer, I am made aware of the audience's predominantly heterosexual makeup and the issues this may raise based on my knowledge of the show or venue and by the way they react to my content, especially if I have performed the same piece for a queer audience.

I introduce queer subjects to straight audiences through my demonstrative subjectivity while challenging what they think they know about queer subjects and our ways of being. Using femininized presentations in cabaret work also plays with what straight audiences think they know about queer female relationships and representations—that is, butch-femme dichotomies which a mainstream audience and certain scholars see as mimicking heteronormative relationships and binary gender presentations (Phelan, *Unmarked*). Heterosexual audiences laugh at my queer jokes in different ways than queer audiences. They laugh in the "wrong" places, give sympathetic "ohs," and offer nervous titters when they are unsure about what they are supposed to do but see from my performative cues that they are expected to do something. I know that using "should" is problematic here and borders on being prescriptive about audiences and their reactions: maybe my work isn't as funny as I think, maybe it was an off night, maybe there were other conditions dictating their responses. And although each of these is a reasonable argument against prescribing how audiences "should" react to my work, experience tells me that when I tell a joke about an ex-girlfriend "whose name I'm not allowed to say out loud for legal reasons—hers not mine" (*That's Right Diana Barry—You Needed Me*, 2009), and queer audiences laugh

heartily and heterosexual audiences coo in a sympathetic way, what has been performed by the audience for me as the performer telling this joke is heteronormativity.[26]

Neoliberal heteronormativity is a state of welcomed unknowing and limited knowing. It is the privilege to be oblivious to not knowing experiences by subjects outside of a heterosexual matrix and the freedom to not care about these experiences if one is exposed to their existence. It is a neoliberal heteronormativity that says, "Yeah but gays can marry *and* adopt now" as though state-sanctioned homonormativity re/solves homophobia and gender-based violence; or "Wow, I never would have guessed that you're gay" as though gender presentations that negate traditional binary, heteronormative ones mark queer subjects as not heterosexual and thus not sexualized subjects for the neoliberal heterosexual; or "Why do you have to make everything so gay?" as any subject outside of heteronormativity that challenges or queers heterosexual hegemony and its texts is simply annoying (Barton). Neoliberal heteronormativity tolerates queerness "so long as [they] embody homonormativity by otherwise appearing 'normal' according to heterosexual mores" (Hartless 1). Queerness and queers that make themselves apparent intrude on the neoliberal heteronormative subject's sense of queerness because they see that the state is recognizing queer relationships and family structures (that mimic heteronormative ones), that homophobia has been fully vanquished (in their peer group and through their visitation of Pride parades and gay bars), and that they personally know queer subjects who pass as straight (regardless of the intention of the queer at hand and whether or not this corresponds with a cisheteronormative rendering of their gender presentation).

Cougar for a Year became a method of exposing neoliberal heteronormativity from its inconsistent fringes (i.e., the cougar is the space where heteronormativity is simultaneously at its most violent *and* accepting to those claims). I used this project to expose the force of neoliberal heteronormativity and its regulative function by queering the cougar. My cabaret work since the cougar project similarly has taken as its focus the critique of neoliberal heteronormativity by transforming the queer from abnormal subject into the status quo, and having the heterosexual cis man take their place as the abnormal subject. By approaching cisheteronormativity in this way, I am able to expose the absurdity of its construction for my audience.

In Hanna Gatsby's radical comedy special *Nanette* (2018), she talks about refusing to use herself as the butt of the joke anymore; to not use self-deprecating humour as a masculine lesbian woman to situate herself for the audience, whether they are straight or queer. She talks about the importance of not doing this anymore because although this tactic might solicit compassion from or establish a rapport with her audience at the time of comedic contact, how audiences then relate to, approach, or otherwise engage with other masculine lesbians, non-binary folks, or queers could be influenced by this self-deprecating performance, a performance that although based on her real life experience, is constructed explicitly for a stand-up comedy audience. Gatsby talks about how she began to internalize a negative view of herself through the use of this self-deprecation and didn't want to feel bad about being who she was anymore. In other words, she no longer wanted to use her identity as a masculine lesbian as the butt of the joke for other people's amusement or frame her identity (and others like her) as negative for cisheteronormative culture. I identified with this re-examination of self-deprecation as a performative tool thoroughly as a queer who uses humour and who has employed self-deprecation as a way to win over an audience and solicit empathy for laughs. I think this is at the heart of what I'm thinking through—that this type of self-deprecation has the potential to unite queers because queers can identify with this sharing. In the example above from my video *That's Right Diana Barry—You Needed Me*, the secrets of a straight ex-girlfriend are kept because she is still in the closet. The joke is made at the expense of those of us who have long left the closet but recognize the ex-girlfriend who still occupies it. Other queers in the audience recognize their own exes in this story and the choices we make to respect (or not) the boundaries of other people's closets and what that costs us. Straight people hearing this same story may offer sympathy and condolences because they see their normative evaluation as essentially correct because homosexual relationships are a failure; "the queer body and queer social worlds become the evidence of that failure, while heteronormative sexuality is rooted in a logic of achievement, fulfillment, and success(ion)" (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 94). Like Hanna Gatsby, I have decidedly not been self-deprecating in terms of my queerness for straight audiences in the last few years.[27] I have worked hard to represent queerness onstage in a way that cannot be misinterpreted or co-opted by the cisheteronormative industrial complex that would use queerness as evidence of failure.

The Queer Art of Failure,[28] Femininity, and Age

A queer performative sensibility is simultaneously nuanced and absolutely not nuanced, depending on the audience. It is coded with meaning. Do you see me? What is legible? What are the similarities and differences here between age and queerness as content, material condition, and technique?

There is an alignment between the performative techniques of queerness (camp, gaiety, butchness) and the performative techniques of age.[29] In performing queerness, the performer is expected to present queer content—to communicate *queerness*—to a heteronormative or queer audience to signal and ready the audience for queerness. Otherwise this queerness, which is central to the subject formation of the performer, may be invisible to heteronormative audiences and read as heterosexual, or be read as a lack for queer audiences who are looking for a mirrored representation of themselves on stage or screen. Similarly, in "performing age" (rather than simply "performing while ageing"), one centres age as content. "Performing age" thus moves beyond the material conditions of the body (the corporeal processes of ageing), which may be perceived as non-normative simply because of the mainstream media backdrop against which we are all already evaluated and that glorifies youth.

Performing queerness and age is different than performing while queer and ageing. If I centre age on stage by telling stories about ageing for example, my queerness disappears. If I centre queerness, my age is sexualized. My age cannot disappear because it is visible and rendered as abject in contrast to youth because of the cultural inscription of failure as an (actively) ageing female body (Fahs 237). It is only if I give voice to my queerness or if I have a legible queer body with me like a butch girlfriend that my queerness is legible. In my work, I always approach the body (my body) with queer intent because this is queer embodiment for me: I am never not queer to or with myself. I am a queer fixed subject; queerness is fixed to me and through me.[30] How this queerness is perceived or not perceived is dependent on the audience's experience with queerness and (other) queer subjects. The more normative my presentation of gender and age, the less apparent my queerness is. The effects of my ageing on heteronormative audiences replace my queerness because an older female body is not read as a sexualized body let

alone a sexualized queer body unless the older woman in question keeps that sexuality active on the reading of her body like with the cougar. I have to constantly keep the inscription surface of my body active with queerness through dress, citationality, and verbose articulation for audiences so that it doesn't disappear into the heteronormative ether.

Cougar for a Year failed at queer legibility for audiences because heteronormativity is so incredibly strong and acts as its own straightening device. However, this project reinforced the perceived value of participating in normative feminine presentation regimens, that is, making an effort in one's appearance that isn't all cougared out. I took advantage of this feminine camouflage in *Uterine Concert Hall* in order to blend in as a welcoming test subject in order to critique our bioessentialist, heteronormative, and procreative view of bodies marked female, their capacities, and their limits. I did this by staging my body for this work in adherence to normative regulatory easy-to-read cues of cishetero-femininity like the removal of body hair (*so smooth!*), the use of makeup (what colour lipstick is *that*?!), and dressing in gender-specific clothing (*fabulous cocktail dresses that flatter the figure!*), to render the middle-ageing female body legible. With respect to queerness, UCH differs from *Cougar for a Year* in that UCH stages the uterus and female body not only as sites of non-reproduction but also proposes these sites for creative artistic input and output. As a woman in my forties, there is no chance of me being mistaken for a twenty-something woman (and as menopause approaches, for a thirty-something woman). I am both performing age (as content) and performing while ageing as I enact and embody ageing femininity. I am also staging my middle-ageing body for audiences to scrutinize for its lack of reproductive potentiality and my unwillingness to participate in reproductive futurism.

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman defines reproductive futurism through the "image of the Child," which he says has been used as a symbolic emblem of heteronormativity to represent an unquestioned future. According to Edelman, the rhetorical concept of the Child is an unequivocal demonstration and constant reaffirmation of a heteronormative system that excludes queerness and renders itself unchallengeable. Edelman posits that the Child preserves "the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance" (2). Edelman posits queerness as the death drive of reproductive futurism (27, 132), which is reliant

on essentialist views of cisheterosexual copulation that ultimately results in reproduction. In Edelman's view, queers and queerness are outsiders to the social order as they "threaten[s] the logic of futurism on which meaning always depends" (11). UCH challenges heteronormative regimens of reproductive futurism by presenting an alternative function for my uterus as a concert hall, which renders it queer and embraces this queerness as generative. *Can you see me now?*

Cougar for a Year was not able to fully address this ageing non-reproductive-ness and how it intersects with queer sexualities because the cougar is read as a defiant snub to ageist perspectives that would paint her as desperate, ugly, spent, and an otherwise useless subject under reproductive futurism. It is the cougar's failure to produce children in her current temporal embodiment that marks her, regardless of whether or not she has borne children in her pre-cougar life. Her claiming of sexual agency and self-empowerment is seen as abnormal and is more fodder for cisheteropatriarchy to mark her as a failed subject. Queerness has no chance for legibility, visibility, or recognition here because it is as deviant as an ageing straight woman aggressively pursuing a younger man. Although my intent was to investigate and challenge the stereotype of the cougar through her embodiment, my performance did not alleviate these markings or judgments on other "real" cougar subjects that the audience might encounter after coming into contact with me. In UCH, I built on this experience to centre queerness as a transformative means for audiences to view my cisgender body and centre their judgments for reflection and evaluation about their expectations about bodies marked female in relationship to reproductive futurism.

My approach to this undertaking in *Uterine Concert Hall* was to conceptually queer the uterus and its hetero-reproductive functionality through my enactment of the work. Using myself as a test subject, I literally and figuratively position my body as a demonstrative enactment for how discourses of ageing, non-reproduction, and queer sexuality are bound to bodies marked female. Failure worked as a catalyst to challenge and question cisheteropatriarchy's expectations of ageing femininities and their relationship to past, present, and future states of (non)reproduction. In *Uterine Concert Hall,* I interpellate and take at face value a reading of myself as a failed subject, failed because—as a middle-ageing woman—I do not have, have not had, nor ever wanted to have children. Here I contend that non-reproductive failure crosses both heteronormative and homonormative[31] cultures, where pursuits like gay marriage,[32] adoption, and

child rearing[33] have meant that I have not escaped the pressures of reproductive futurism as the neoliberal state attempts to swallow whole, erase, and dull queer lives, queer resistance, and queer difference. As a queer subject I am similarly marked for failure because of my abstention in a reproductive past, present, or future. *Lucky me*.

If the empty uterus signifies the failures of reproductive futurism for both straight and queer women, how might I "queer" the ageing uterus? Challenge its reproductive function? My intention here was to take a hopeful approach, where instead of figuring queerness and queers as outside the social order (indeed as "anti-social"), as disposable, mournful, or melancholic (Edelman; Bersani; Crimp), I would approach queerness as a generative tool for alternative forms of sociality and collectivity (Muñoz; Munt). Rather than a site of failed reproductive futurity, I sought to stage the interior of my middle-ageing queer female body as an appreciated (not depreciated or unappreciated) site of creative art production and potential sociality or kinship.

The Uterus Is Listening

I move from the conceptual terrain of what it means to enact failing as a middle-ageing queer subject to the practical terrain of enactment through the experimentation with and execution of performance. The questions of ageing and queerness are not only tied to a symbolic field but to a set of material practices, technologies, and apparatuses that are also the site of my exploration. Working with (and in spite of) the Babypod (an intravaginal speaker) extends my engagement with retooling and appropriating technological apparatuses, appendages, and interferences in and through which the body is regulated to refocus and otherwise queer the viewer's perceptions of the symbolic on the site of my body. Interactive works like *Come Shred My Heart* (2008, 2011), in which viewers shred written advice to their younger selves through the teeth of my (paper shredder) vagina dentate, and *Monarchy Mama* (2007), in which viewers are invited to suckle at one of twenty-one vinyl breasts filled with vodka that I'm wearing, are both examples of this approach. In *Uterine Concert Hall* I seized on the opportunity of an invasive technology that the Babypod presented as a way to think through and stage questions about bioregulation, reproductive heteronormativity, and ageing.

In Canada and the United States, we monitor women's bodies through our expectations of how women look, behave, act, and feel. These expectations are pathologized, reinforced, and

legitimized through medicalized surveillance and control. Invasive and non-invasive examinations and procedures like ultrasounds, transvaginal probes, and visualizing and monitoring technologies are normalized for bodies marked female who are evaluated by a medicalized gaze. In the age of biocapitalism, the makers of medical technologies position their devices at the borders of the body, but soon stake new territorial and corporeal limits for what bodies marked female can do, proposing their devices as necessary solutions. In *Uterine Concert Hall*, I repurpose one such device to queer reproductive technologies and affordances, and to question cultural expectations and assumptions about bodies marked female and why we think we can make any demands of these bodies in the first place.

Figure 8: Babypod (intravaginal speaker), Photograph © Dayna McLeod, 2018.

In 2015, a Spanish company (MUSIC IN BABY, S.L.) released the Babypod, a 54 kHz intravaginal pre-natal speaker that continues a consumer line of products marketed to pregnant parents. Although I am using "pregnant parents" here to include all "bodies with uteruses" in order to avoid assumptions about certain "body parts [correlating] with a gender" (Spade 1), the Babypod promotional materials firmly figure this pregnant parent as cis female. Inserted into the vagina, the Babypod is a walnut sized pink bulb that is connected to a cord that can be plugged into a Smartphone or other device to supposedly deliver music to a uterus bound fetus. "Mothers

and babies united by music before birth. The first shared experience between a mother and her baby" appears on the first page of the accompanying user guide. This text and subsequent copy throughout this guide and the copy on the Babypod website transform the fetus into a conscious baby while removing the pregnant mother from gestational development. Here, she is cast as an outsider to her own pregnancy. "Protection of the fetus is often offered as a commonsensical, and, hence, ideological rationale for intervention into a woman's pregnancy, either through the actual application of invasive technologies or through the exercise of technologies of social monitoring and surveillance" (Balsamo 89). By presenting the Babypod as a necessary aid to reproduction, the pregnant body is rendered as a passive container for reproductive futurity, which is underscored by fully formed babies pictured in utero in blushing pink illustrations and sepia-toned digital ultrasound images. Similarly, the directions for the Babypod continually reinforce the pregnant parent as a bystander to the centralized "learning" technology of Babypod, and the fetus as baby/as child/as future productive community subject: "Thanks to Babypod children can begin to enjoy the pleasure of music before birth" (Babypod, "What Is Babypod?"). Like baby bump abdominal speakers that fasten to the outside of a pregnant belly, the makers of Babypod claim that a developing fetus can "hear" music, which they assert impacts and affects fetal cognition and development, language and communication skills, and helps them "begin to vocalize in the womb," which is "necessary to live in society" (Babypod, "What Is Babypod?") Here we can see that "fetus" has not only converged with "baby" but has transformed into a fully formed child and future well-adjusted listening and speaking adult subject[34] with the help of Babypod (literally) inserted into gestational development.

Although thoroughly problematic in relationship to reproductive and abortion rights, the human personhood status of fetuses, and "woman" as autonomous and cisgender subject, my approach to the Babypod is a non-reproductive queer one. The medicalized and obstetrical gaze extends not only to bodies which house or wish to house a fetus, but to all bodies marked female who are not pregnant, have no wish to become pregnant, nor can become pregnant (Balsamo). My interest in the Babypod began when an ad appeared on my Facebook News Feed. The algorithms cast a wide net towards my queer, non-reproductive body and presumably read "female" for product placement. One of the things that drew me to the Babypod was the corporeal invasiveness of the device and its makers into the body, and their marketable audacity

at insinuating that a body capable of reproduction required their assistance in doing so. I listened to what this technology told me about my body and adjusted accordingly so that my body would be valued. What about my empty queer uterus? How can this product help me as an over-forty, cisgender, queer woman who has never ever wanted children? *What can Babypod do for me?* These absurdist questions were the starting point for *Uterine Concert Hall*.

Realizing Uterine Concert Hall

Uterine Concert Hall (UCH) is a durational artwork that utilizes performance-based methods, audience engagement and participation, and features my body as a concert venue. In the first two iterations of this work at the Darling Foundry (August 2016) and the Monument-National (November 2016) in Montreal, artists Nik Forrest and Jackie Gallant performed as live DJs who pumped sound directly into me via a six-foot cable that reached me from their booth and connected to the Babypod inserted into my vaginal canal. Following the logic of the directions of the Babypod where sound is projected from the vagina through the cervix to the uterus to a fetus, so too was my uterus, then, a receptacle for sound even though it was empty. Audience members were invited to listen to these sounds via stethoscope, which I held firmly to the outside of my body. The stethoscope bell was located near my pubis, and when listening, the audience members heard the faint echoes of the DJ set through the flesh of my body.

The performance began with me presenting myself as something to be examined by the audience members, each of whom was in the position of a sound-seeking doctor: this is the mise-en-scène. UCH pairs the stethoscope as a 100-year-old technology with the Babypod as a new technology. The stethoscope is mobilized too for how it acts as a universal sign of doctor and medicine, and authority over the (female) body. Familiarity with this device is also an asset. We all know how a stethoscope works: you put it in your ears and you listen to the interior of a body, usually the heart or lungs. Some of us might not be familiar with how loud a stethoscope can be or what a listening experience is like on the doctor's end, but most of us have some familiarity with or recognition of the function of a stethoscope. This too contributes to the mise-en-scène and functionality of the work.

This performance builds on the audience members' preconceived notions of what a uterus is for and their relationship to it, and proposes my uterus as a site for non-reproductive art production. Failure was an impetus for *Uterine Concert Hall* in relationship to heteronormative patriarchal expectations of womanliness and required regimens of beauty, femininity, and reproduction. *Uterine Concert Hall* queers the uterus and the Babypod by repurposing both. I do this by interrupting the intended functions of reproductive technologies (i.e., playing music for a uterus-bound fetus from an adjoining vaginal canal) that contribute to the medicalized surveillance and control culture of women's bodies, and by employing a familiar and recognizable tool (the stethoscope) to position the audience as medical expert or doctor. The project assumes that the promotional materials for the Babypod are correct and follows their rhetoric and directions to the letter. However, because a fetus does not occupy my uterus, my uterus is turned into a venue through the very use of the device and its audio broadcasting function. Using the Babypod thusly carves out a valued use for my queer middle-ageing non-reproductive cisgender body so that it will not be disregarded by the medical industrial complex as not having value in a system where reproductive currency, potential, and relationality are coveted in a heteronormative reproductive-centric landscape.

Ultimately *Uterine Concert Hall* asks, What happens when we assume what biocapitalism tells us about bodies marked female is true? What happens if we take these representations of womanliness literally? The objective of *Uterine Concert Hall* is to follow the directions, to adhere to the prescribed passive role of womanliness as container that the Babypod proposes with the small hitch of not housing a fetus. My intention is to use this as a strategy to revel in and reveal the inherent absurdity of this systemic misogyny and make this absurdity apparent to my audience.

Uterine Utopia Considered: The Lineup

In the Darling Foundry and Monument-National iterations, I had hoped that people would attend and be interested in my work, but I did not anticipate them spending upwards of forty minutes in a lineup to experience it. Not recognizing that the lineup was part of the work, or that it would even form, was a huge oversight on my part, and this contributed to my recognizing the audience members' subjectivity as well as considering what was engaging for them about this wait time.

This was a significant discovery, however unfortunate that it was made while I was performing the work. It was encouraging to hear back from audience members that they spent their lineup time talking to each other about what my uterus might sound like. The audience mobilized the location of the performance: the womb had wandered into the lineup.

Figure 9: Dayna McLeod, *Uterine Concert Hall***, Darling Foundry, Montreal, 2016. Photograph by Meredith Fowke.**

The lineup discussions seemed to divide the conceptual proposal of the work into two: reproduction-related concerns about the uterus, and the potentiality of what it might sound like under the conditions of my performance. In my enthusiasm to propose the uterus as a queer non-reproductive yet productive space, I still needed to acknowledge it as a reproductive organ and site. The binary parallels between heteronormativity and queerness, and reproduction versus non-reproduction are also influenced by age and ageing. "Queer" is reinforced by the normativity of heterosexuality and contributes to its definition just as "non-reproduction" is reinforced by reproductivity. In both instances, dominant heteropatriarchy sees queer and non-reproductivity as failure (Edelman; Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*) which ageing exacerbates. How we are oriented towards bodies and objects is based on our own subjectivity and how we know the world, which is marked by gender, sexuality, race, class, age, ability, and size. People talking in the lineup about bodies marked female and their experiences and capacities were still reliant on

40

their own relationality to the figuration of this body. UCH provided them a different experience with this body that they hadn't had before, and the experience was delivered through my body specifically. However, what I hadn't taken into account at the start of this piece was how central their experience was to experiencing my body. The conversations in the lineup pointed to this generative oversight.

While audience members waited in line, they discussed and examined what they already knew about the uterus. How they engaged each other was through their own stories about uteri that centralized their subjectivity. The lineup became a site of community building and exchange where there were many conversations about what a body marked female can do and what a person with a uterus is supposed to do. The attending publics in both iterations talked about expectations and experiences about the female body and other bodies with uteri as they waited to listen for something through my body. People reported back to me with their feedback, and what they overheard in the lineup. There were conversations about the uterus and its capacities—about surgeries, cancer, failed pregnancies, in vitro fertilization, hysterectomies, abortion, and more. The lineup not only generated discussion about bodies with uteruses and what they can do, it also personalized these conversations for many of the participants. "My sister got pregnant," "My cousin had uterine cancer," "I've had my uterus removed," or "As a trans man, I don't have a relationship to my uterus" were some of the conversational statements that were overheard or discussed in the lineup. Recognizing the importance of what was happening in the lineups was a significant discovery because the lineup as a site within the performance was something that I hadn't considered when I began to work on the project. Their chatter shifted the site of the work off of and out of my body to a potentiality they were envisioning for a uterus not bound by reproduction.

It was this potentiality that enabled people to consider my proposition of the uterus as a physical space, a queer space, and a concert hall, and kept them in a lineup for upwards of forty minutes. What the uterus sounds like under these conditions is a proposition for a queer utopic space. To be clear, I am not proposing that the uterus is a utopia. The very idea makes the hairs stand up on the back of my neck for its relationship with or affiliation to essentialism. Proposing the uterus as a utopic space is a task rife with failure. Much like essentialist and biodeterminist

boundaries that decree what makes a woman, staking a claim for utopic consideration similarly forces a uterus into a space that it might not fit into. However, my intent here is to mirror UCH as a process and practice, to see what happens at the mere idea of exploring the conditions it would take for us to consider the uterus as utopic. The cultural production of the uterus essentializes it as reproductive. My queer intervention into this cultural production as a middle-ageing cisgender woman who does not have children and has had no interest in making children happens even before I take the stage. I'm making the uterus generative in a different way than its intended function.

Here I am interested in utopia not as an idyllic destination but as a place of non-fixedness, what José Muñoz calls "a horizon of possibility" that "is not prescriptive" but "renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here" (*Cruising Utopia* 97). Muñoz marks the horizon as the space for queerness as a place of becoming where queerness is "a performance because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete potentiality for another world" (*Cruising Utopia* 1). I am compelled by the potentiality of utopia *as utopia* itself, and by this horizon that Muñoz marks as hopeful. Muñoz rejects the negative relationality of queer theory as conjured by theorists like Lee Edelman and Leo Barsani, and instead embraces hope as "the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence" (*Cruising Utopia* 98). I am also engaged with the precarity of examining exactly what is included and excluded for something to be rendered utopic while attending to how to account for moments of transformation and not fix them onto a future, but map them onto something that is past the idea of now. In UCH, I want to create what Muñoz describes as queer indeterminate space that has "certain potentiality" which is generated "outside of institutions of heterosexuality" as utopic queer space (*Cruising Utopia* 9).

If, as Muñoz tells us, queer utopia is a potential for possibility, it is in this unfixedness where I want the audience to reside and to consider the physical space of my uterus as place, as destination. But, because this isn't an episode of *Magic School Bus* where we can shrink down and accompany Ms. Frizzle (voiced by Lily Tomlin) through my body at a microscopic level, this idea of uterine utopia dislodges (notice me resisting "abort" as a metaphor here), or rather pushes

aside, reproductive futurism's fetus. It is not that UCH asks its audience to not consider or ignore the idea of a fetus residing here, quite the opposite; UCH builds on the audience's preconceived (doh!) notion of what a uterus does, what it is for, and their relationship to it. Not all women have a uterus while some men do. This utopia is in the thinking of what might be, of wonder and not knowing what a uterus "sounds like." This potentiality of utopia is shared with the audience members through sound and through their conjuring of space that is based on their ideas of the interiority of the female body (and other bodies with uteri), which is entirely relational. It is based on how they relate to bodies marked female as a material body, as a people or individual person, and as a concept where reproductive determinism is questioned. The imagined space of the uterus in UCH becomes a utopic vision, a destination in the performance for the audience to listen and achieve, as well as contemplate what this space is now *for* under these conditions. The uterus, determined and destined for reproduction, is considered for a moment as not a space for a fetus, not as a space for reproduction, not as a definition of womanliness, but as a receiving and transmitting conduit for sound.

A utopia proposes an idealized vision of a possible future. But what are the conditions of this idealized future? Who gets to say? What is age in relationship to this utopia? Does the uterus age out of utopia? Does a menstruating (thus reproductively viable) woman age out of utopia? In the same way that the nineteenth-century utopian socialists described utopia as having to have a now to contrast it with—people are hungry, they don't have jobs, people are poor—to create a utopia where people aren't hungry, aren't poor, and have great jobs, UCH asks the audience to consider the uterus (and the female body) not as a container for a fetus or for the sole purpose of reproduction, but as a place and space where other things might happen. UCH asks, what is the potentiality of bodies marked female when they are not constantly compared with motherhood? Further to this utopic thought experiment, how do gender, class, race, age, ability, and sexual orientation intersect with fixed utopias? How are they accounted for and who decides?

The potentiality of utopia as outlined by Muñoz is what engages me here: its unfixedness and potential. My interest rests in this instability, this fragility and vulnerability, not to glorify or reify a preciousness; this unfixedness is compelling because it cannot be fixed. As soon as it becomes fixed as an ideal utopia, we must ask by whose definition is it a utopia? Who gets to

43

decide? Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a utopia for the people in power, but a dystopia to be sure for the women whom Gilead controls. As soon as a utopia becomes fixed, rules start to emerge as boundaries are set to mark what is and isn't utopic, whom the utopia includes and excludes, and ultimately defines a vision that dictates the form the utopia will take. For a utopia to become fixed, it must be made from a vision of what it includes, and by determining what it includes, there is exclusion, regardless of whether the utopia is single or multi-authored. The shared approach to a common destination considers the potential of what a utopia might bring. But utopias are ultimately disappointing. They are fleeting, they are temporary, they are limited in vision as there is invisible labour needed to maintain them. If you can't see the labour, it just might be your utopia. If you see the labour, you probably work there. A collectively constructed utopia still follows this logic: it includes, it excludes for good, for evil, for the few, for the masses. These conditions are subjective.

There is no payoff in my thought experiment of the uterus as a utopia—it is the idea or promise of utopia that I find intriguing and how this intersects with and can disrupt representations of middle-ageing female queerness. I am interested in a temporality where now transitions into a future on a queer horizon. Where we can see a mapping of utopia and see it change, morph, and evolve. This glimpse of utopia, which the audience members may have thought was something else, unsure of what they would find here, connects them. In UCH, queer production over reproduction is the sharing of knowledge and experience, a queer sociality of care. Like Dorothy at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, the potentiality of utopia, or in this case considering other modes of womanliness and uterine functionality outside of reproduction, was right there with the audience members the whole time; they only needed to wait in line to visit UCH to find it.

Maps

This dissertation maps the utopian potentiality of UCH and examines how sound intersects with this potentiality. Various iterations of the project as well as the performance-based research-creation methods I have engaged with are explained and theorized. I also discuss other artists who use performance-based methods in their work with particular attention paid to those who have used explicit body practices. In Chapter 1, I detail how I used the interpellation of

44

perceptions of older female representations of age, femininity, and sexuality as an embodied approach to performance as research in *Cougar for a Year* (2013), a year-long, durational performance piece in which I wore animal print clothing every day, all day as an examination of the "cougar" stereotype. I discuss this project's influence on and relationship to *Uterine Concert Hall* and how overlapping themes about age, femininity, queerness, and the heterosexual matrix connect these works. I examine the evolution of the term "cougar" and the significance of its relationship to middle-ageing femininity and how it works on the body. I discuss durationality not only as a means of production and presentation but also as a performative research method of situated knowledge through my year-long stylized repetition of the cougar. I also discuss the disappearing legibility of my middle-ageing queerness as a cougar, and the strong hold heteronormative culture has on the cougar as an archetype.

In Chapter 2, I detail the formal presentation elements of the first two iterations of *Uterine Concert Hall* in order to effectively describe the performance and my methodology in presenting this work. My intention is to make clear my process and to demonstrate how research-creation and practice-based methodologies contribute to knowledge production as well as map the multiplicities of failure and corporeal and environmental sites as social connection while centering the body. I discuss performing normative femininity, ageing, and queerness, and the importance of mise-en-scène, feedback, rehearsal, collaboration, assistance, and accounting for the different sites and contexts it was presented in. After detailing the Darling Foundry presentation, I account for the outcomes that this work produced. I also discuss the contextual differences between staging the work at the Darling Foundry in August 2016 and at the Monument-National in November 2016, as well as mark these differences and their impact on the need to further develop the piece.

Chapter 3 addresses the research and processes that I engaged with in order to resolve the disengagement and frustration that audience members and myself as the performer experienced in the original iterations of the work. I introduce and investigate karaoke as a means of connecting with the audience through my body. I detail how I accomplished technical and conceptual changes to UCH to account for improved sound volume and quality for clearer legibility for stethoscope listeners, and how I improved audience engagement, in terms of activating the

audience members and engaging them through meaningful participation. I discuss how I refined the staging of my middle-ageing queer female body as a means to critique cisheteropatriarchy and bioessentialist conceptions of femininity and cultural expectations of bodies marked female; and addressed the problematic staging of my cisgender, middle-ageing white body presented on a pedestal as a revered destination. This chapter examines the work I undertook during a residency at Studio XX in May 2018 to achieve these goals. I also introduce "intimate karaoke" as an umbrella term for the formal construction that the new performance takes as well as the affective methods of engagement I employed to achieve empathy between audience members (and between audience members and myself) through collectivity and embodiment.

Chapter 4 further discusses the importance of recognizing the subjectivity of audience members and how they contribute to UCH through their subjectivity. I present two performances of the new and improved *Intimate Karaoke, Live at Uterine Concert Hall* in which audience members are asked to sing their favourite karaoke song into me. Wearing headphones that contain their voice and requested karaoke song, this mix is wired into the Babypod that rests in my vaginal canal for the audience of my uterus and stethoscope listeners. This chapter elaborates on the construction of "intimate karaoke" which engages two audiences: the intimate audience member who listens via stethoscope to a song sung through my body, and an intimate audience member who sees and hears the karaoke singer essentially singing acapella for them live. This chapter also traces affective modes of circulation as well as their formal construction. I present knowledge and outcomes that emerged out of the Studio XX residency as a result of using performance- and material-based methods. I make methodological and theoretical observations about how I staged circulating knowledge and created empathy through its solicitation by engaging audiences to enact a queer sociality around the uterus that is not centered on reproductive or essentialist functions of the female body.

CHAPTER ONE

MEET THE COUGAR: DURATIONAL PRACTICES AND QUEER LEGIBILITY

Figure 10: *Dayna McLeod, Cougar for a Year (Winter)***, 2012; Photograph by Vincent Dilio.**

Dress My Middle-Age

One of the first considerations I have in developing a performance-based work is to ask, "What will I wear?" This may appear on the surface to be a superficial question, and has certainly been treated as such when I discuss my practice. However, representation matters especially when I stage my middle-ageing queer white cisgender body for an audience. Relying on stereotypes and scripts of how femininity is "done" by women is a strategy that I often employ in my practice. How I present myself on a cabaret stage or in an in situ durational performance work like *Uterine Concert Hall*, for example, might capitalize on a presentation of familiar heteronormative, binary femininity for an audience, like wearing a fancy dress and makeup, and having shaved legs and

underarms. In cabaret works, I often collapse this comfortable space to expose the audience's cultural neuroses and anxieties about a middle-ageing queer female body through her display, presentation, and exposure by using queer gestures, codes, and storytelling that reference anything from a lesbian bed death (*Sex Accidents and Home Repair*, 2004), name-dropping Melissa Etheridge and butch-femme dynamics (*Santa's Wife and the Baby Dyke*, 2015), to lesbian and gay fisting (*Careless Fister*, 2017). I use these strategies to hijack dominant normative narratives about femininity, queerness, and ageing by using them in queer ways for both queer and heteronormative audiences.

Cougar for a Year (2013) was a performance work that utilized this approach and examined how the middle-ageing female body is perceived and treated as public property. This project made clear that female bodies are perceived as public property no matter our age, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, or gender presentation, and that recognizable markers of femininity are used as the measuring stick to evaluate these bodies. This performance-based research was crucial in the development of *Uterine Concert Hall*. Here, I focused on a set of abiding themes—intersections of age, femininity, queerness, and the dominance of the heterosexual matrix—that I returned to in UCH. Both of these works examine constructions and presentations of female ageing, how queerness intersects with these representations, and further, how compulsory heterosexuality dominates readings of the female body. The development of this set of interconnected ideas across these projects as well as through other works reflects more than just a timeline of my artistic practice but an ongoing commitment to the critique of cisheteropatriarchy through performative parody, humour, and absurdity. In *Cougar for a Year*, a year-long, durational performance piece, I dressed in nothing but animal print clothing 24/7 to question the stereotype of the "cougar" (a woman over forty who aggressively demonstrates her sexuality). The original intent of this project was to investigate, live, and try on stereotypes of the "cougar" by wearing her uniform, which I identified as animal print for the sake of the project. I chose animal print as the cougar's uniform for its visibility, clarity, and literalization of the "cougar," and for the sexual signification that animal print performs in Western culture. This work utilized dress as a means for me to engage with suspecting and unsuspecting audiences to confront, name, and discuss how middle-ageing feminine subjectivity and sexuality are constructed, evaluated, and executed. In these clothes, I was visible to the public, marking my

territory with leopard spots, tiger stripes, and snakeskin patterns, refusing to disappear into the invisibility of middle age.

My initial interest in the cougar as a stereotype and cultural figure wasn't so much a choice as she was thrust upon me. When I was putting together my project proposal to enter graduate school, people would ask me what I would be studying. Like a good prospective student I told them my central thesis question: *How are over-forty feminist performance artists using the body?* An overwhelming majority of friends, family, colleagues, and strangers on the bus reacted by saying, "Oh so you're doing a project about cougars." This reaction happened so often across social and professional networks that I was compelled to examine it: What word or combination of words in my thesis question was triggering this response? Was "cougar" simply in the air, a reflection of the popularity of the term as indicated in *Newsweek* naming 2009 the "Year of the Cougar," or was something else going on? How was the cougar being hailed here through feminist performance art and (how) would I answer the call? Because of the incredible frequency of this cougar reaction, and a long-term commitment of utilizing misogynist tropes and stereotypes to reveal their absurdity in my performance-based art practice, I embraced the cougar

Figure 11: Dayna McLeod, *Cougar for a Year Birthday Portrait*, 2012; Photograph by Anne Guillaume.

49

as part of my doctoral research and embarked on *Cougar for a Year*, which began on June 1, 2012, my fortieth birthday.

"Cougar" is a unique term, charged with contradictions and double-meanings that can simultaneously mock or celebrate the woman in question. The generally accepted definition for "cougar" is a woman over forty who aggressively demonstrates her sexuality by publicly pursuing a younger man (Reyes; Lawton and Callister; Ames and Burcon; Collard; Montemurro and Siefken). The cougar seeks a younger sexual partner whom she may or may not want a long-term relationship with, and this younger object choice and the cougar's proximity to this person are seen as defining characteristics. The origin of this term has its roots in 1980s Vancouver, where players from the Vancouver Canucks hockey team used "cougar" to describe "groupies of a mature vintage," that is, older single women who frequented games to actively pursue players sexually (Parade Magazine; Lawton and Callister; Collard). The dating website cougardate.com, a website designed to match older women with younger men, is credited with the first published instance of "cougar," which was launched on Valentine's Day in 2001. Also born in Vancouver, cougardate.com was started by Elspeth Sage and Elizabeth Vander Zaag who embraced the term after hearing it from Sage's nephew who referred to the pair as stereotypical cougars. He had picked up the term from his hockey teammates who used it to refer to older women who frequented bars where they could pick up younger men (Gill; Barrett; Collard; Montemurro and Siefken). *Toronto Sun* columnist Valerie Gibson made the term popular with her 2001 book, *Cougar: A Guide for Older Women Dating Younger Men*, a dating guide that attracted mainstream media attention and helped spread the term's use to the United States and beyond (Barrett; Lawton and Callister; Montemurro and Siefken). Further, the *New Oxford American Dictionary* officially recognized "cougar" in 2007 as a runner-up in their Word of the Year competition, and, as noted above, *Newsweek* magazine declared 2009 the "Year of the Cougar" (Oxford University Press Blog; Setoodeh). However, despite the implied accolades that a "[Fill in the blank]—of the Year" *Newsweek* headline suggests, the article itself was a misogynistic diatribe that ridiculed over-forty actress Sandra Bullock, questioned Hollywood insiders' choices for casting older women over younger women in films from that year, and credited the mainstreaming of plastic surgery and Botox to make "some of these [older women/younger men] romances seem marginally believable" (Setoodeh). Cultural experts predict the term "cougar"

will lose its negative predatory connotations if older women/younger men partnerships continue to grow in numbers and as social attitudes change towards gender roles (Lawton and Callister).

Like other bodies marked female that are expected to conform to societal ideals of youth, beauty, and heteronormativity, the cougar is evaluated for her non-compliance with these regulations that focus on her sexuality and her body: "when women are not acting within the heteronormative set of rules they get these special titles" like "cougar" (Romano 44). In their study on the perceptions of older women's sexuality and the use of the term, Beth Montemurro and Jenna Marie Siefken write:

> Women who dress or act like cougars—who use their bodies as a means of displaying their sexual desire—defy expectations about ageing, contesting dominant ideologies that dictate they not only not show their interest in sex or dress in a provocative manner, but also that they not be interested in sex at all. Such women may be viewed negatively because rather than merely resisting ageing by constructing a "natural" youthful appearance they may be perceived as denying ageing by not following the rules, both as older people and as women. (37)

In regards to "naturalizing" the ageing body in gerontology and age studies, Julia Twigg asserts that "essentializing discourses in relation to the body need to be replaced by ones that recognize its nature as a social text, something that is both formed and given meaning within culture. The aging body is thus not natural, is not prediscursive, but fashioned within and by culture" (60). As a "social text" the cougar's body is "both formed and given meaning within the culture," which shapes how we view ageing and the ageing female body while demonstrating public ownership of this body as it is monitored for conspicuous sexuality, cracks, wrinkles, creases, sagging, and fine lines. What surfaces here is a reading of female ageing, which is not static or passive—ageing versus age—but a female body that is *actively* getting older, a body that is *actively* changing, a body that is *actively* distancing itself from an idealized youth. For mainstream culture and its prescribed dominant sexual scripts for older women, which include a desexualized sexuality, a non-sexuality, or a motherly or grandmotherly asexuality, the cougar is punished for acting outside of heteronormative conventions and not complying with its empirical conditions. In a Special Issue on Ageing for *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, Pam Cobrin and Debra Levine define a cougar as an "older woman who desperately seeks sexual contact with

younger men in order to recapture her own youth" (3). Although I take issue with this definition and specifically their use of the word "desperately" (in a feminist performance journal no less), Cobrin and Levine's usage reflects and repeats a dominant cultural perception of the cougar that relies heavily on dismissive and diminutive stereotypes that renders an ageing woman who exhibits her sexuality as a joke. Their portrayal too reflects intent as well as a judgment of that intent: that by "desperately" looking for a sexual partner, a cougar is trying to recapture her glory days in a younger body. But is it a younger body they think she is seeking or is it a quest for what youthfulness represents and is treated, praised, and coveted? As this and more mainstream characterizations of the cougar demonstrate, her derision is amplified and seemingly justified: through her demonstrative sexuality, she is *asking for it*.

Figure 12: Dayna McLeod, *Cougar for a Year Day 196*, 2012; © Dayna McLeod.

Cougar for a Year was an embodied approach to interpellating perceptions of older female representations of age, femininity, and sexuality. Because I lived this project 24/7 for a year, my research-creation practice and life seeped into each other and overlapped. In *Seeing*

Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts, Amelia Jones defines "queer feminist durationality" in her chapter of the same name as "performative and temporal," and she "indicates the potential for doing something with artworks through interpretation that…reactivates them by returning them to a process and embodiment—linking the interpreting body of the present with the bodies referenced or performed in the past as the work of art" (174). This self-reflecting process positions time, space, and referent as durational practice. I propose that queer feminist durationality too, as I experienced and used it as a method of creation, was also a means of acquiring knowledge beyond temporality. Durational performance was not only a technique and means to execute the project but a performative research method of situated knowledge. I had to prepare daily for the project, which started out as a formalized task of dress and appearance, but led to mental and emotional preparations as I navigated social and professional realms. It was in the long-term performativity of the cougar that I fully occupied, engaged with, and enacted this stereotype to experience the normative force of assessment of ageing women by various publics. It was also the daily occupation, engagement, and enactment that was often repetitious (leopard spot jeans *again*), sometimes banal (dressing myself in animal print every day), potentially offensive (what will I wear to a funeral that won't upset the family), and occasionally overwhelming (I can't leave the house today in head-to-toe snakeskin print, *I just can't*). The long-term and daily durationality of *Cougar for a Year* was not just a practice, it was a method of ageing feminine gender performativity[1] and citationality (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). Through year-long stylized repetition, the cougar was inscribed onto my body and psyche. Being cougar was not simply about dressing myself daily in animal print or doing cougar drag, being cougar affected my thinking and feelings. I navigated public spaces differently and interacted with peers and publics differently. Similarly, audiences who were familiar with the project[2] and who saw me repeatedly over the year online and in person recognized both the performance art project as well as my critique of ageing femininity through this repetition of dress and citation of the cougar. This long-term durationality fixed the cougar to me while allowing the audience to see her construction for their own self-reflection about their judgments and biases and how they saw ageing femininities.

Queerness Performed

Although there are queer and lesbian cougars complete with cubs (younger partners of cougars) and social structures within lesbian and queer communities, the cougar is predominantly perceived as heterosexual, which underscores the invisibility of queerness in mainstream culture. My experience of public responses to me living (and performing) this work reinforced this invisibility as I walked down streets on Friday and Saturday nights. In public spaces marked by heteronormativity, that is, all public spaces (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*), my queerness constantly disappeared in *Cougar for a Year*. It was only the presence of my butch girlfriend on my arm (we would need to be touching for our queerness to be legible) that would sometimes make straight men looking at me do a double take and no longer see me as a cougar for them, who they could reject, judge, and otherwise evaluate, but as the femme of a butch-femme lesbian couple—"as stigmas go, being lesbian still trumps being a cougar" (Keogh 17). This butch-femme legibility made sex more apparent and pulled me into focus as a queer subject in heteronormative public spaces. Based on their reactions, my cougaring paired with the presence of my girlfriend seemed to reinforce a mainstream reading of queer lesbian sexuality that was reflective of binary, heteronormative configurations and constructions.[3] I was taken off guard by some of the head-turning responses that frustratingly centred heterosexuality and the male gaze because the men who possessed it centred themselves to me relationally.

It was most curious to see how quickly heteronormativity became centred when we experimented with my girlfriend walking six feet behind me so that she could observe men's responses. When I was "alone" during these walks to a club or on evenings out, I was surely not received as a queer woman but as a woman signalling sexual availability through the mark of the leopard spot. It became clear that my enactment of the cougar did not account for or include queerness when I was by myself, that it was incomprehensible that I could be a queer female subject on my own, that I must be dressing for someone else specifically or casting my net wide for the male gaze, but certainly not for myself. It also became clear that the cougar is read as profoundly heterosexual and cisgender, and that the rigidity of this stereotype refused to release its grasp on me in public. My inability to queer the cougar unless my girlfriend was demonstrably

"with" me reinforced the insistence, dominance, and pervasiveness of heteronormativity. These were outcomes I had not expected.

In *Cougar for a Year* it was important that I challenge the hold that normative culture has on the middle-ageing female body and queer her through my embodiment. To queer the cougar is to give her dimensionality. To queer her is to release her from the trappings of, what Laura Mulvey calls, the to-be-looked-at-ness of the male gaze. To queer the cougar is to turn perceived desperation of her demonstrable sexuality into desire—to mark a beginning or continuation at forty, not an end at middle age. To queer the cougar is to embrace peri/menopause—to use "the change" as a sexual revolution not controlled by cisheteropatriarchy. To queer the cougar is to take up space with one's sexuality where no space was previously allotted, accounted for, studied, or assigned. This is how I approached and resignified this stereotype in my performance of embodying the cougar. This is how I performed the disruption of the cougar and her dominant hetero traits for straight audiences (these disruptions were already legible to and seen by queer ones). This is how I kept queerness active on the site of my body for closer audiences who I could interact with, address, and engage with as queer audiences gave me a knowing wink, danced with me at parties, and envied my clothes, while straight audiences asked others and me, "But I thought Dayna was gay?"

The visibility that I was trying to achieve with this cougar experiment as a middle-ageing woman was blurring me into a stereotype that was obliterating my individuality and queerness for straight people. This was vexing as it made me realize that I had not been paying attention to the heteronormative matrix that I have been living in my entire life but had queered for myself over the last twenty-five years. Since attending art college in Calgary, Alberta, in the 1990s where all of us art students were freaks against the backdrop of redneck cowboy culture soaked in beer and hockey fights, I have generally not looked for the approving (or disproving) gaze of cisgender straight men. I have instead actively looked above the heads of those approaching on the street, and otherwise toughened up to let slide off my back any derisive catcalls or misogynist remarks that might come my way. I had forgotten that as women, we are consumed as public property in the heteronormative matrix and had thought that living in a queer bubble of like-minded friends that I was exempt. However, "queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb

one" (Edelman 17). For Jones, "*queer is that which indicates the impossibility of a subject or a meaning staying still* in one determinable place…queer is anamorphosis, the disorienting of the subject in space and time" (175; emphasis in original). Perhaps it is this unfixedness, this unlocatability of the queer subject in time and space that causes heteronormativity to continually render my queerness invisible and see my femmeness as straight.

Cougar for a Year made it clear to me that my queerness was only perceivable by other queers who knew me within the confines of queer environments and events. My cougared, feminized presentation of self, coupled with my ageing, disappeared this queerness in all other environments and contexts. Because of this straight-washing, the project itself and its subsequent trail of online documentation that has been circulated out of context is also similarly not overtly marked by queerness. In this and other works, I have realized that if I do not constantly keep queerness active on the site of my body through queer gestures, language, and script, it disappears for the audience. Ageing prompts a new set of negotiations of performing queer identity in relation to heteronormative norms and stereotypes.

My extravagance and exaggeration within *Cougar for a Year* (wearing animal print that was 60 to 100% visible all day, every day for a year) pointed to the absurdity of the stereotype's construction. This excess both drew attention to my person as a site for critique and to the evaluation process itself: how much is too much cougar? A head-to-toe dressing in leopard print in winter where multiple layers were featured was ludicrous. Audiences were forced to ask: Is this eccentricity, a fashion faux pas, or something else? The excess points to the effort of dress and putting oneself together for public presentation (read: consumption) where judgment and evaluation of bodies marked female lie. Intimate publics (i.e., friends and family) were also implicated as audience and participants in *Cougar for a Year* as they evaluated whether or not to "explain" me to their (non-queer/heteronormative) families, friends, and communities if I participated in a social event. They also needed to evaluate whether or not to invite me to an event: meeting a friend's family or other friends of theirs often came with a disclaimer that I was "doing a project—she's doing a project!"

Some of the shifts this durational performance marked in my research were beyond the repetition of certain tasks like dressing myself in animal print clothing, and the effects of the year-long longevity of this durationality, but included how the repetition implicit in the durationality of *Cougar for a Year* also accounted for the stylized repetition and citationality of gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). The markers of cougar, that is, the leopard spot and all, were repeated here as a reinforcement and (re)inscription of middle-ageing sexualized femininity. This repetition and citationality was legible to both public audiences and intimate publics because of its dominance at defining middle-ageing heterosexual femininities. The leopard spot did not, however, render queerness legible to straight audiences without a legible queer subject in proximity to my performance, or without me speaking, describing, or otherwise keeping queerness active and present on my person for them. This dominance impacted my cabaret work directly after *Cougar for a Year* was over and would influence *Uterine Concert Hall* in how I could take advantage of these readings of middle-ageing femininities and feminine presentations to put audiences at ease and *sneak in* to address and disrupt dominant discourses of sexuality, gender, and age. *Cougar for a Year* also allowed reflection about my practice and how central queerness is to it. Most importantly, it revealed how immaterial my queerness is to heteronormative audiences and, that if I continue to perform for them, I would need to decide, evaluate, and make clear what identity formations need to be legible for the work to succeed.

This experience informed my performance-based practice and research about self-awareness; modes and techniques of representation; reading, recognizing, and interpellating public perception; privilege; and how each of these contribute and shape the material conditions of the heterosexual matrix. Cougar for a Year underlined the insistent prevalence of how bodies marked female are judged and evaluated in public and private spheres regardless of sexual orientation, age, race, class, or ability. These outcomes informed and continue to inform my performance-based cabaret, durational, and video work. They have also contributed to how I shaped and built *Uterine Concert Hall*, where I used strategies of normative femininity as camouflage to stage my body, and as tactics to engage with my audience to challenge perceptions of middle-ageing and the female body through a queer lens.

CHAPTER TWO

"YOU CAN'T UNSEE A VULVA!" AND OTHER KEY ELEMENTS IN STAGING UTERINE CONCERT HALL AT THE DARLING FOUNDRY AND MONUMENT-NATIONAL IN MONTREAL

Figure 13: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall*, **Darling Foundry, Montreal, 2016. With a stethoscope listener. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.**

This dissertation tracks the development of how different arrangements of the middle-ageing queer female body became the subject of my performance work and the object of my research-creation practice. This includes mapping the multiplicities of failure and corporeal and environmental sites as social connection while centering the body. Tracking these shifts in their shape, terms of participation, architectures, technologies, and modes of presentation in *Uterine Concert Hall* allows me to answer questions about performativity, ageing, queerness, and sites of

failure, normative constraints, and possibility. This is the method of performance as research I employ here to present my findings and to demonstrate their effects on the evolution of the artwork, methodologies, and outcomes that has ultimately led to its successful presentation at the Tang Teaching Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York, in June 2018, and at the SummerWorks Performance Festival in Toronto in August 2018. UCH's formal and conceptual presentation elements were equally important, and I detail below how the performance was staged at the Darling Foundry and how this performance lay the groundwork for its critique and revision. A lot of these elements have changed in subsequent iterations while some have stayed the same. Queer failure[1] here is not so much an art or option as a process of making and materializing my body to be literally and figuratively heard.

The audience's perceived failure of UCH was not a failure *of* the piece but a key critical failure *in* the piece: in the capacity of the uterus to live up to a set of cultural expectations that always deliver (here it was to deliver pitch-perfect sound and not a baby). This failure indicated a different set of capacities the uterus could perform in the performance, not in order to make the sound clearer or for the uterus to more fully fulfill those expectations, but to further explore how the reproductive body could be a venue for something else. In future iterations of the work, I would need to redefine the terms of the performance so that it was clear what I expected from audiences. I discuss these investigations and outcomes in Chapters Three and Four. In the Darling Foundry and Monument-National formations, audiences delivered on their invited role as voyeurs. I did not realize until I experienced negative affective exchanges with individual audience members that I wanted and expected more from them. It would not just be the terms of the performance that I would need to revise but my expectations of the audience as well. I would end up asking more of them through their presence and participation to lessen what I was seeing as their passive role in the work.

Let's Put on a Show: *Uterine Concert Hall* at the Darling Foundry

Uterine Concert Hall was first performed on July 28, 2016, at the Darling Foundry, a repurposed iron works factory that was built in 1880 in Griffintown, Montreal. The building is now a visual arts centre. I was asked to perform as part of *La Place publique*, the Darling's outdoor, site-specific programming that brought together artists and the public through

performance, installation, dance, and other participation-centred activities (Fonderie Darling, "Place publique"). For the 2016 *Filiation—Performance Series*, the Darling Foundry invited an initial pair of performance artists (Michelle Lacombe from Montreal and Richard Martel from Quebec City) to perform in June; these artists in turn invited another pair of artists (Karen Elaine Spencer and Jean‑Sébastien Vague, both from Montreal) for the following presentation session, and so on for a total of four evening presentations throughout the summer. Artists were asked to consider invitees whose work was influential or related to the selecting artist's practice. I was invited by Jean‑Sébastien Vague (collaborative artist duo Jade Barrette and Sophie Rondeau), and I in turn invited multi-disciplinary artist Kama La Mackerel. Performance artist Suzanne Joly was invited by Karen Elaine Spencer, and presented work the same night that I did, and Suzanne invited interdisciplinary artist Danny Gaudreault. According to the Darling Foundry, the intent of this selection process was to "[reveal] the affinities and influences that feed every performance community" and to demonstrate the overlapping effects and ripples performance artists based in Quebec see in each other's work and make apparent these connections to an audience (Fonderie Darling, "Filiations"). This model of filiative invitation also shapes the trajectory of my doctoral dissertation—its citation practices and conversations with other artists; the exchanges, legacies, and future-orientations of our practices; and the community-building and utopic potential of these modes of performative kinship. It also makes networks of influence legible in my research-creation practice. Likewise, the selection of contemporary and historical performance-based artworks I cite in this dissertation draw on artists who have influenced my thinking, methodology, and outcomes. Through the examination of my own performance-based production processes and resulting artworks as well as comparative analysis with other feminist makers, my dissertation maps the relationships, diversions, intersections, interdependence, influences, and relationality of our work.

Mise-en-scène

The *Filiation—Performance Series* took place in the street in front of the Darling Foundry. Artists were encouraged to utilize the space in any way they wanted and to locate the audience's focus on a performative action, gesture, experience, or situation. I chose to stage *Uterine Concert Hall* in the middle of the street, parallel to the front of the building, a site that proved critical to this staging. The event started at 8 p.m. and ended at 11 p.m.. I performed two sets of this work,

which bookended Suzanne Joly's performance. This timing provided a gradual shift in light, from daylight to twilight to darkness. Staging this intimate work outside in a public space under an expansive sky impacted and shaped the experience of the work for me, my collaborators, and the audience. I brought the private, intimate doctor's office visit into the public street while maintaining some of its key elements through shared intimacy and by placing audience members in the position of the doctor complete with stethoscope while I occupied the position of patient.

At the Darling Foundry, I used two white folding tables that were each 6 x 2.5 feet and set them into a loose "T" formation. The DJ booth occupied the crossbar of the "T" and I occupied the stem. The joint of the "T" was not tight with table against table, but instead had about four feet between the two tables with red velvet ropes attached to silver posts marking off and containing this in-between space. I staged it in this way for two reasons: to emphasize the cable that connected the DJ booth output that ran across this space and literally into me where the Babypod speaker rested in my vagina, and to protect the cable from foot traffic so as to not move or otherwise dislodge it on either end. This configuration was set up while the audience arrived at the Darling from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.. The cable stretched from the DJ booth across the space marked by red velvet ropes to the empty table where I was not yet positioned. I circulated in the crowd with a folded beach mat chair under one arm and a hot pink beach bag with all of my gear inside of it under the other. It was important to me to be self-contained in this work; it was also important that I bring all of my gear with me to the performance and, despite the references to a gynecological exam where a person may feel powerless, that I exemplify and perform bodily autonomy.

When the organizers were ready to start, the music that was playing at the outside bar terrasse stopped. Nik Forrest, who contributed the first set of sound for the piece, took their position at the DJ table, and the curator for *La Place publique* introduced the event. I prepared an entrance for this iteration, which has since evolved in subsequent versions of the work, a point I will return to in discussing other performances. I approached my entrance to the piece in a similar way to how I approach performing in a cabaret: I am always "on" whether or not I am onstage. This pre-performance work is important because it helps me assess the crowd and gain an understanding of the mood, tone, and atmosphere of the event. When I perform at a cabaret, I

often circulate through the crowd looking for friendly faces and to get a sense of the audience, depending on what part of the show I am scheduled in, how nervous I am about the work, and whether or not I know anyone in the crowd. Saying hello to people I know and to those I don't humanizes a crowd of people and gives me confidence. Saying hello also humanizes me for them as I shake hands, demonstrate openness and friendliness, and generally perform the affective labour of listening, smiling, and being pleasant as a party hostess might be. I have found this to be a productive strategy on the cabaret stage where audiences are less likely to hurl insults at me while I perform, and can potentially respond enthusiastically when I ask for participation or for a response to a call. This is a strategy that makes individuals in a crowd feel seen. It also reminds me as a performer to be friendly and down-to-earth, and to engage with people on a personal level, both on and off stage. I have cultivated and worked with this authentic on-stage persona for the past twenty-five years and find that this approach over performing a character is most effective for both my audience and myself.

Figure 14: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall,* Darling Foundry, Montreal, 2016. As though anyone could emerge from the crowd to perform the work. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.

Performing *Uterine Concert Hall* at the Darling was different from cabaret work, however, in that there was no stage. The audience was mere feet away from me and surrounded me, and we were outside. There was no back- or off-stage area and I did not want to emerge from the building with a dramatic, theatrical entrance. I was not performing a character and there was no fourth wall. I liked the idea of emerging from the crowd as though any one of us attending this event could be the performer and, thus, examined by the audience of our peers. I utilized my cabaret audience circulation strategy for the same reasons cited above and, even more so, to gain confidence and calm my nerves as I greeted and chatted with people; to indicate the informal tone of the piece; and to reduce perceptions of performative artifice for the audience. As an audience member to and a performer in performance art, I have experienced that a theatrical entrance separates the performer from the audience and reinforces actions as artificially staged. I was also intent on demonstrating personhood for the audience, and by this I mean that I wanted to convey I was not performing a character but emphasizing my identity as Dayna McLeod, a person with whom the audience would be engaging and examining once we got to the piece.

Because I cannot walk around with the Babypod inside of me without discomfort, which would in turn impact the duration of how long I am able to perform the piece, I was very much aware that I would need to figure out a way to insert the Babypod in front of people as simply and precisely as possible without publicly sharing my vulva. Although I had experimented with the illusion of removing and inserting tampons onstage in *Bronze Cowboy* (2014), a viscerally bloody cabaret piece that uses the Older Woman's body as metaphor for monetized art production, I had never publicly inserted anything into my body before. I was concerned about this for several reasons: firstly, I did not want to show any part of my vulva to the audience and have this mental image of insertion overtake the rest of UCH. Secondly, I did not want documentation of my vulva or the insertion circulating on the Internet. Thirdly, I wanted to be able to quickly, safely, and easily insert the Babypod so that I could proceed with the rest of the piece. The documentation frenzy that surrounded this work was confirmed when I sat on the table ready to insert the Babypod, and there was a group of about two dozen people at my feet with cell phones and cameras at the ready. I had no control over how, where, and when images taken of the performance by the audience would circulate. In UCH, I wanted the audience members to find

their way to the interiority of the body through the sound of the stethoscope and the conceptual renderings of the uterus as concert hall, not through literal, visual representations of my vulva.

Enter the Babypod

Having as much control as possible over the presentation and representation of my body in UCH was crucial. As an artist who performs what Rebecca Schneider describes as "work upon the body as stage" and who engages with explicit body performance tactics, I am aware of the positionality of the female body as object (17). The scopic field is loaded with meaning when gazing at this body, and "any body bearing female markings is automatically shadowed by the history of that body's signification, its delimination as a signifier of sexuality—either explicitly (literally) in porn, or implicitly (symbolically) in art and popular representation" (17). The explicit female body cannot escape the history of its cultural representation of sex, the status of the female body as object, of being seen, possessed, and "given to be known" over the masculinized subject who is "given to know" or possess the gaze (22). These binaries that hold a body in place are further complicated by subjectivity, modes of representation, and the perception of "inappropriateness" the body enacts and how the viewer interprets them. I wanted to control what the audience members would see (and not see), because if they saw a vulva in a public performance, they wouldn't be able to unsee it. They also wouldn't be able to see anything else, much less *listen* to anything else, which would distract from my intent with the performance.

In *Sex Objects: Art and the Dialectics of Desire,* Jennifer Doyle discusses the ethics of queer communities and representations of sex, of the "indignities of sex" in relationship to social performance in conversation with Michael Warner's writing about shame (Warner qtd. in Doyle 72). Doyle states that an amount of risk is present in this type of performance, and that the risk varies depending on where you situate yourself and your body in relationship to it: Do you identify with the performing subject or are you outside of the performing subject as critic? While I was preparing for and performing this work, I had to calculate how the audience members would identify, and I determined that, because of my insertion of the Babypod, they would not identify with me at the moment of penetration but would rather take a position as an outsider who might, because of the act, possess a pornographic gaze. A "moral panic" or attachment to shame and stigma were things that I wanted to avoid with this work as "identifying a person

permanently with his or her disgrace" like a visible, public, vaginal penetration could potentially "[mark] the person, not the deed, as tainted" (M. Warner 27-28). My experience as an artist who has worked with explicit body practices, pornography, and sexuality—and who has been refused work and entry to mainstream employment opportunities, artist residencies, exhibitions, and funding—also informed my need to control as much as possible the images of this act from circulating on the Internet. To be clear, it is not my shame and stigma that I was concerned with, but the shame and stigma that could be attached to me as a result of this public penetration that could overtake the rest of the conceptual concerns of the work and potentially threaten my livelihood.

Some of the strategies I employed to minimize these effects and to communicate a laissez-faire attitude while doing so were practice, props, clothing, and light banter with the audience. Executing control during a work is important as it keeps me focused on the task at hand and reminds me that every gesture I do is potentially seen by a live audience and documented by the constant use of their cameras. I rehearsed this in my kitchen where I have a vintage 1970s gynecological table (because of course I have a 1970s gynecological table in my kitchen). These rehearsals enabled me to practice not only my facial expression but also the insertion position (mine and the Babypod), the timing (how long it actually takes to insert the bulb), the physical effects of insertion (evaluating whether or not I need lube, how much discomfort I experience, whether I need a pubic haircut or not so that I wouldn't get all caught up in hair during show time), and what kind of table I needed to sit on in order to perform the work.

Based on these rehearsals, I assessed that I needed a table or chair like the kitchen gynecological table that had a similar reclining angle, as this angle was as comfortable for insertion as it was for hosting people during the rest of the performance. I also determined that I would not require stirrups, which actually put weight and strain on my legs. I found that sitting straight and upright was uncomfortable as it put pressure and weight on the vaginal insertion point whereas sitting at an angle and leaning against the reclining gynecological chair put this weight and pressure on my buttocks and allowed me to relax my back. A folded floral beach mat chair proved to be both comfortable and portable, and it communicated an informal casualness

that helped relax the medical examination references of the work, allowing me to stretch out my legs.[2]

I wore a black-and-white dress, silver flip-flops, which I would remove when I was on the table, and yellow boxer brief Y-fronts. I had my hair up, wore light makeup, had shaved my underarms and waxed my legs. These choices were decisive for several reasons. As previously discussed, I often use stereotypes and scripts of how femininity is "done" in my work as a means to communicate with my audience. Because I want the audience to get the idea of the uterus as a productive space, a queer space, and a physical space accessed conceptually, ideas that are perhaps challenging for an audience to accept or confront, making my physical presentation normative was key. I did not want audiences to be distracted by hairy legs and armpits and fulfill a stereotype of second wave feminism any more than a project that puts a concert hall inside of a uterus has to (McRobbie; Hinds and Stacey). My thinking here was that in order for the audience to accept this wacky idea, it was easier to present myself in a familiar, normative, feminine way without giving them visible markers of deviance, queerness, or perversion.

Similarly, I use, take advantage of, and subvert misogynist "poor thing, she's trying" logic, which is something I discovered while performing *Cougar for a Year*. The idea is that a woman of a "certain age" (an age that shifts depending on who is issuing this declarative statement) is failing at femininity because she is getting older, has "lost" her looks, and is chasing after her youth though actions and upkeep. But a woman who tries (and fails) is still trying and thus acceptable to the social order over a woman who refuses, a woman who can't, a woman who won't. The "acceptable" woman is code for cisgender, heteronormative, non-disabled, thin, and beautiful, whereas a woman who actively refuses is "probably a dyke," a feminist killjoy, and definitely a troublemaker.

To not showcase my vulva to the audience, I determined that men's boxer brief Y-fronts worn under my dress were the best underwear to use. The longer leg ensured that I did not accidentally reveal more of myself than I wanted to. The Y-fronts too were just subversive enough to signal a queer disruption to feminine normativity. What I discovered in rehearsals is that Y-fronts are right-handed, which required further practice as I am left-handed, and

maneuvering the Babypod through the Y-front opening into my vagina was tricky at first as I am not very ambidextrous. The Y-front needed to be snug but not too tight, otherwise my hand would get stuck. Slight snugness over looseness also kept the Babypod cable in place. I also used condoms with the Babypod, which would prove to limit the quality and volume of the sound, a fact I would not discover until two years later in a residency at Studio XX. This discovery, its impact on the project, and other related discoveries will be discussed in the next chapter.

There are several reasons I used a condom in this first performance. Coming to queerness in the 1990s, there was an emphasis on safe sex across LGBTQ+ sexual practices. There was also a general suspicion about what sex toys were made of and making sure that they were clean to prevent infection and STDs. Although the Babypod is made out of silicone and claims to be phthalate[3] free, I did not question using a condom because of this experience. I also took into account the Babypod makers' instructions to use a condom (Babypod, "Professional Area"). The Babypod can be taken apart by twisting it into two halves, which means that when fastened, there is a seam. The Babypod also features a perforated cap, presumably to better let the sound out of the speaker. Because of this perforation and seam (havens for bacteria, I thought!), and because I would be performing the work outside, I used a condom so that I wouldn't inadvertently give myself an infection or ruin the speaker. This proved to be overzealous on my part as I meticulously cleaned it before and after each use, I didn't roll the Babypod around in dirt or dust at the Darling, nor was I passing it around through a sticky-fingered crowd while I was chatting them up. I also used the condom because I thought the ritual of putting on a condom before publicly inserting it would be compelling, that I could tell a few jokes about it, and ease both myself and the audience into my public insertion of the pink bulb into my vagina.

I wasn't expecting the Darling audience to be nervous. Made up of strangers and friends, the audience gave me a wide berth when I set up my reclining beach mat chair, laid out my gear, including the Babypod, and hopped up onto the table. I invited them closer as they were about ten feet away from me at first and there was nervous laughter when I extended the invitation. I said something like, "Don't worry, I won't bite." Collapsing this physical gap implicated them in the work, and made them bear witness to the insertion. It also meant that I didn't have to shout or otherwise raise my voice to talk to them. It was like being on a first date (if that date was with a

large group of people). Their nervousness signalled a particular engagement with my performance, body, and person, which I read as empathy. I can only compare this to when I reperformed Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* at the end of *Cougar for a Year*. As I've written elsewhere about this piece, my community was nervous and, at times, painfully so as they cut off my leopard print dress and underwear out of concern for my modesty and their responsibility to this modesty as I became more and more exposed ("Reflections on Performing Cougar"). Similarly, the audience's nervousness in this presentation of UCH was unexpected. Their nervousness indicated a concern for my body and person and its public penetration, which was amplified by the bare-bone structure of the performance. There was no theatrical artifice: no props, sets, lights, curtains, fourth wall, or character acting for any of us to hide behind or get lost in. They could see me, and I could see them seeing me in the bright daylight. I think this combined with my authentic presentation of self, the intimacy of the act I was about to perform, and the personalized context of showing this new work to my community amplified their empathy for me, which translated into nervousness. Their empathetic nervousness actually made me less nervous and provided a distracting task for me to take care of them and be gentle with them as I took us to the next phase of the performance. It kept me calm and informed my decision-making processes as I was performing this task.

Figure 15: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall***, Darling Foundry, Montreal, 2016. Putting a condom on the Babypod. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.**

Putting the condom on the Babypod allowed both physical and psychological time for the audience and I to prepare for the insertion. While sitting on the table, I explained that the Babypod was a speaker that I would insert into my vagina, and that Nik Forrest would play sound into me in a first set and Jackie Gallant would play music into me in a second set. Audience members could then listen via the double-headed stethoscope through me or via the disco headphones, which played full-volume sound before it reached my body. I opened the condom wrapper, took out the lubricated condom, and placed the Babypod into it. There was excess condom as the Babypod filled only a third of it and I had left the reservoir tip empty. I twisted this excess of the condom so that it would be less bulky when I inserted it. In kitchen testing, I experimented with shoving the whole package (Babypod and condom, tip to end) inside of my vagina versus leaving the excess hanging out. This wasn't so much an aesthetic choice (the audience wouldn't see it) as a comfort and conceptual choice. Having the condom bunched up inside of me felt bulky and itchy. Having it hang outside of me a bit felt weird too but was a similar feeling to using a female condom. I made a joke about the condom being like a garbage liner when I used it at the Darling. I use jokes like these in order to tell them first, to claim them for my body before they are used against me. I made a few more jokes about "safety first" and how you should always use a condom with a sex toy, reassigning the speaker function of the Babypod to that of pleasure for my body, which in turn oriented my body for the audience as a pleasure seeker not simply a container, and prepared to insert the Babypod. I got in position, leaning against the beach mat chair with my legs bent and hips slightly raised. As I talked about what I was doing, I held up my hand and joked, "Well, don't look at me!"

Once the Babypod was in, I placed one set of the double-headed stethoscope in my ears, leaned back on the table in the beach mat chair and used the bulb of the stethoscope on the outside of my lower abdomen to find the sound that Nik was playing to the Babypod. This double-headed stethoscope allowed one other listener and me to hear through my body simultaneously. I invited people to listen via the other stethoscope set, which were attached to mine, or via the disco headphones. These large headphones received the mix before it entered my body and were club kid loud. If you wanted to hear exactly what the DJs were playing, this headset provided ample sound. I placed the bell of the stethoscope against the outside of my lower abdomen or pubis to correspond with the position of my uterus for optimal sound to listen

for the DJ mix that played to the Babypod speaker that rested inside of my vagina. Lineups for each listening experience naturally formed and, once they were established, video artist Mathilde Géromin in the role of my assistant, monitored these lineups and controlled how long a person spent with me and when it was the next person's turn.

Pod Lessons

In this first iteration at the Darling Foundry, Nik started by playing experimental soundscapes. The sound was nearly inaudible and other stethoscope listeners were complaining that they couldn't hear what was being played, which affected my experience of time. After about ten minutes, Nik moved to electro house music predominantly featuring tracks by Jamie XX (from the English indie electronic dream pop group The XX). As performer, manager, and venue, this ten-minute transition felt like half an hour, but could have been only three or four minutes. Similar to a "real" doctor's examination, time on the table varies depending on the experience. As listeners, we were unable to distinguish the experimental soundscapes that featured unrecognizable scratches, tones, and variations through my body and the double-headed stethoscope. Because I was the longest listener throughout the work, with each visiting listener spending thirty seconds to about a minute with me, I was eventually able to concentrate on the sound and find the spot where it was most audible by guiding the bell of the stethoscope on the outside of my body close to my pubic bone. Through the assistance of Mathilde, I was able to communicate to Nik that we couldn't hear what they were playing. Nik increased the volume to its maximum and integrated electro music with heavy bass.[4] Once discovered, I was able to secure this spot by keeping the stethoscope bell firmly placed on it to greet listeners and invite them to listen to my body.

This was a fascinating exchange, as some listeners weren't expecting me to talk to them as demonstrated by their reactions. A few men whom I didn't know personally seemed surprised that I would talk to them, and seemed to want to just get to it. They didn't make eye contact with me, took the stethoscope to their ears immediately, and seemed to look anywhere but at my face. I joked a few times that "my eyes are up here" to point this out, which seemed to throw them off and out of their comfort zone. Generally, women whom I didn't know approached the pseudo-doctor authoritative position with consideration for my body, offering friendly greetings, meeting

my gaze, and engaging with what I would describe as pre-gynecological exam chitchat that many of us have surely experienced on our way to a pap smear. Most visitors I didn't personally know were eager to bypass the small talk and get to the uterine listening, a few shushing me so that they could focus on the stethoscope or interrupting me to say, "Shouldn't I be listening now?" while gesturing to my abdomen. I used these interactions with strangers to inform how much time I talked with other visitors so that their experience of the work wouldn't be dominated by my talking, and everyone could at least listen to my uterus as a concert hall. However, it was important for me to introduce myself to visitors and have them do the same. It was also important that they recognize that I was not (just) a slab of meat to be examined for their pleasure. I wanted to emphasize their accountability and responsibility in listening to my body and acknowledge this as part of the experience. Talking with them was a performative means to do this.

Figure 16: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall*, Darling Foundry, Montreal, 2016. Nik Forrest as DJ. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.

The sound that Nik was putting through me provided a different level of intimacy between myself and the sound, myself and individual viewers, myself and the audience witnessing this exchange, and myself and Nik as DJ, none of which I had prepared for or was

expecting. Active stethoscope listeners[5] described the sound as though it was underwater or far away, like driving down a highway and hearing a concert in the distance. Other listeners who were not patient and expected boom-box sound levels would immediately say that they couldn't hear anything. I would direct them to the disco headphones to hear the sound before it entered my body. A few persisted, saying, "But I want to hear it through you. How come I can't hear it?" Still others said, "I can't hear anything," paused for a moment and repeated, "I can't hear anything" as they listened through the stethoscope. Because I could hear something I would tell them to "relax and to take a minute and listen." A few audience members would insist, getting visibly irritated and exclaim, "No! There's nothing! There's no sound." These types of responses also pointed towards technical failures in the work: my failure to deliver sound that was audibly loud enough for the audience, my failure to anticipate their bypassing of my body to a literal soundtrack through my flesh, and my failure in thinking that a conceptualization of sound would be enough to satisfy an audience if sound was distorted, faint, or otherwise inaudible.

These reactions also referenced a default automatic cultural response on the authority women have over their bodies and experiences in and with their bodies. Audiences of UCH questioned my authority over my own body (because I could hear sound) while trusting their own experience (because they could not hear sound). It was as if the audience was saying, "I can't hear anything so you must be lying," or "You don't know what you're talking about." This was an unexpected outcome because I did not consider that this piece would reflect our cultural gaslighting of female experience, that this work would reflect—on a very personal and intimate level—how we constantly question female authority, agency, and autonomy in cisheteropatriarchy, and whether as women, we know our own bodies, how they work, what they do, or how they function. This indicated to me that not only would I need to make significant changes to the technical aspects of the performance for all audiences to hear sound better through the stethoscope, but that I also needed to resolve this credibility problem as the performing subject. The inability to locate and identify sound in and through my body would mark this iteration of the project as a failure and me as a failing artist for some audience members and reinforce my body as a failing object. These failures became central concerns to resolve in the Media@McGill residency at Studio XX in May 2018, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Some audience members would ask me what the sound felt like, especially if they couldn't hear the transmission. During Nik's set if someone said that they could not hear, I would often say, "I can sure feel it!" and generally describe the sensation for them as "intense." I did not go into detail about how the sound felt and its effects on my body during this first set as I was trying to keep control over my reactions. I kept my descriptions of what I was feeling to a minimum, "I can really feel the bass" and "There's an intense throbbing" were frequent replies. Indeed, it felt at times like a powerfully pulsating bass track, which seemed to resonate through my vagina and outwards in all directions through my body. There was a palpitating sensation that was stimulating, and by that I mean that it incited a near pleasurable sexual response, a discovery that I did not expect to make during this first public staging of the work at the Darling Foundry as I had not experienced this sensation in kitchen testing. I joked after the performance to Nik that our friendship might be taking a turn and that this might be a different type of performance all together. I was worried that I would need to control some sort of orgasmic response, which was not a performance I wanted to present because, similar to my concerns about publicly inserting the Babypod, this would overtake the piece and become what the work was about for audiences. Once I focused on not getting swept away with the sensation, I was able to control it, and ride out the performance until it ended. I wanted to keep the audience focused on the idea that my uterus was a physical space that was hosting a concert that they were listening to, not how sound waves can bring a middle-ageing woman to orgasm in a public venue. I was also aware of the tableau I was presenting for various audiences including a potential passerby street audience unaware of the performance art context, as individual stethoscope listeners examined me. Thinking about this mise-en-scène kept me focused on the task at hand as did the fact that I was required to engage with individual audience members throughout the performance.

After forty minutes and various check-ins with the Darling Foundry curator, we called time on the piece. Mathilde communicated this between myself and Nik, who played a final track. Remaining audience members in the lineup were assured that there would be a second staging of the work that evening. I told the last listener that they were, in fact, the last listener for Nik's set, and Nik faded the soundtrack out. Nik then physically left the DJ table and I removed the stethoscope from my ears. Most of the audience seemed not to pay much attention to me as I removed the condom-encased Babypod from my vagina, in stark contrast to their nervousness

during the insertion that started the piece. I removed the condom from the Babypod, wiped it and my hands down with baby wipes, and threw this refuse into the small pink trashcan I had at the foot of my table. I packed all of my gear into my pink bag, folded up the beach mat chair, and left the white table completely empty, as I had found it. I circulated through the crowd as the music at the terrasse was turned back on, and headed inside to the bathroom to freshen up. There was a short break, and Suzanne Joly performed her work, *Brothers*. There was another short break, and we started again with Jackie Gallant DJing. The crowd seemed markedly uninterested in my re-insertion of the Babypod, which I commented on by saying something like, "I guess we've been there and done that, eh?"

Figure 17: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall*, Darling Foundry, Montreal, 2016. Jackie Gallant the dancing DJ. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.

Jackie Gallant took a different approach than Nik to DJing for my uterus. She played cheesy dance tracks and pop anthems, and performed the corresponding dancing DJ accordingly. Because all of the sound is isolated (in her headphones, in the disco headphones, in my body, in

the double-headed stethoscope), her enthusiastic dancing was set against a backdrop of silence for the audience who were not a part of these intimate zones of listening. Because of the arrangement of our tables, this tableau also showed that Jackie was dancing in relationship to the concert hall housed in my body. This illustrated a connection not only between sound source (Jackie as DJ) and destination (my body and *Uterine Concert Hall*), but also demonstrated our closed-circuit network of non-reproductive queer ageing[6] and feminist performance art production.

As the sun set and darkness fell, it was liberating to lay on the table outside for the rest of the performance, bringing the traditionally closed and sometimes claustrophobic intimacy of the doctor's examination office out into the street, which featured a clear view of the sky above us and was set against the backdrop of an awakening Montreal nightlife. Jackie continued to play upbeat tracks and danced away, underscoring an emerging citywide party vibe. The lineup dwindled and time was called on the work, and Jackie ended her set with a sweet song by Montreal singer Jordi Rosen. The last listener and I were surprised by how clear Rosen's voice was, and that we could hear both the lyrics and some of the synthesized notes featured in the song. We listened deeply and couldn't tear ourselves away from it, sharing looks and nods whenever a particularly clear section resonated through our joined stethoscopes. We talked about how she wasn't sure what to expect because she had talked about the (poor) quality of sound with a few other people who had listened previously, and how she was surprised to hear the lyrics of Rosen's "The Angels Have Called" (2016). She also talked about the listening experience as "magical," that hearing the song somewhat clearly reminded her of the corporeal context through which it was being broadcast. We talked too about the clarity—that it was clear for a stethoscope but not at all comparable to listening to music via earbuds, stereo speaker, or headphones. This seemed significant because, for this last listener, hearing sound through the stethoscope helped her recognize the limits of this device as the act of hearing sound was reconfigured through my body. Because we were expecting sound to not be legible, whenever it became even slightly legible, it was satisfying. At no time did we discuss any other uses for the uterus or the female body but instead focused on its capabilities to deliver sound. I understood from our exchange that she was directed back to the middle-ageing queer female body and its capacities by listening to a

song presented through mine as overheard via stethoscope, and that she was affected by this experience. This is what I wanted for every visitor to *Uterine Concert Hall*.

Figure 18: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall*, Darling Foundry, Montreal, 2016. With a stethoscope listener. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.

The account above reflects a series of different physical, affective, and conceptual intimacies and distances that were created in the work, not all of which I had intended or considered when I started the project. There was the intimacy between the DJs and I as each performed their sets, the intimacy between the stethoscope listener and myself as we listened to the DJ sets together, and the intimacy I was experiencing with the sound itself as it entered and diffused through my body. However, these intimacies also involved distances: the physical and communicative distance between the DJs and myself, which was mediated by an assistant running messages between us; an affective distance between myself and the stethoscope listener which was further affected should the listener not hear what they were expecting or be otherwise disappointed with their experience of my performance; the collapsing of conceptual distance between the stethoscope listener and the promise of sound that seemed to cause them to bypass my body and its physical presence; and the "far away" sound of the music being input into my body that I was hearing and feeling, and that a co-stethoscope listener was hearing with me. There were also larger circuits of intimacies and distances for audiences waiting in the lineup. These intimacies and distances played with the audience's expectations of the potentiality of sound that the project promised as well as the intimate distance between the stethoscope listeners,

the voyeur/bystander audience, and myself as they watched the entire tableau. These closed circuit forms of intimacy and wider circuits of exchange, engagement, and accountability would reveal themselves to be important concerns in need of address to reformat the performance for future audiences. UCH was not simply faced with a technical sound problem, but a circuitry problem. I would need to address various elements, including how to expand the circuit to account for and engage with interpellating audiences, how to manage and render their expectations differently, and think about how my body could specifically mediate these relations. My approach to resolving these issues methodologically would be through situated knowledge and performance as research, and through the staging and testing of circuitry to witness and experiences the effects. I will expand upon and address this more fully later in this dissertation.

Uterine Concert Hall at the Monument-National

In the following description I focus on the changes, shifts, re-animations, and how I accommodated differences in the second performance of UCH at the Monument-National. I also focus on what I learned from the staging of the first performance at the Darling Foundry and reflect on intersubjective exchange, expectations, and disappointments of the body as it is staged, and how queerness and ageing intersect with this staging. The central conceptual concern of this performance was to queer the uterus and its hetero-reproductive function for the audience. As with the Darling Foundry, this would be accomplished through the use of sound projected into my body (via the intravaginal speaker), which the audience could listen to via stethoscope. The perceived uselessness of my ageing queer female body by cisheteropatriarchy would again be recouped for use as a concert venue. The experience that the last listener at the Darling Foundry had had was what I wanted to provide for the Monument-National audience.[7]

Three days after the 2016 American presidential election, on November 11th, I performed the second iteration of *Uterine Concert Hall* at the Monument-National, a concert venue on St. Laurent Boulevard below St. Catherine Street in downtown Montreal as the pre-show for a cabaret program event for the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference.[8] The election that saw Donald Trump ushered into office and how (I assumed) we were all feeling impacted our work as event performers, organizers, curators, and audience members (made up principally of academic conference attendees). It also underlined the importance of being kind to

each other when a lot of us, like so many in the United States and Canada, were feeling raw, vulnerable, exhausted, angry, and scared for the times to come. For *Uterine Concert Hall* specifically, the dawning of this new reality at an entertainment event in an academic setting amplified moments of frustration, disappointment, and apathy that the audience seemed to be experiencing with the work, which in turn intensified my embodied experience of failure. This iteration made clear that if I ever wanted to perform this piece again, I would need to make some changes to satisfy the audience and for the sake of my mental health.

In terms of staging, I had my back to the entrance and I was stretched out on my beach mat chair that sat on a 6 x 2.5–foot folding table that was draped in a red velvet cloth and was placed in the middle of the Monument-National cabaret space on the first floor. I faced the stage and there was row seating on either side of me, which also faced the stage in anticipation of the cabaret. Unlike the Darling Foundry version in which I circulated through the audience before performing the piece and publicly inserted the Babypod as part of this entrance, the Babypod was already installed. The Babypod was once again wrapped in a condom with the end hanging out of me slightly like a liner in a garbage can. I wore a dark blue sequined dress with pink tartan boxer brief Y-fronts and blue suede ankle-high platform boots studded with geometric rhinestone squares. I wore my hair up and wore light makeup, and had added familiar markers of femininity with a touch of sequined glamour to highlight the festive nature of the cabaret event. The dress rode up around my waist as I navigated the stethoscope under it throughout the evening, a feature I did not like and would revise for subsequent presentations.

Jackie Gallant and Nik Forrest each performed a twenty-minute set. They were installed on a raised stage that was twenty feet in front of me. There were red velvet ropes marking the space between us, which drew the audience's attention to the cables that ran from their booth into me. A lineup formed behind me towards the door of the space, and I had one assistant monitoring this lineup. Similar to the Darling Foundry iteration, there were two ways of listening to the mix: through the disco headphones that featured full-volume sound before it entered my body, or via the stethoscope, which listened through the flesh of my body for sound emitting from the Babypod positioned in my vagina.

Figure 19: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall*, **Monument-National, Montreal, 2016. Establishing shot from behind DJ Jackie Gallant. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.**

The Sound of Silence

Instead of playing cheesy pop anthems and performing the dancing DJ as she did at the Darling Foundry, Jackie mixed a selection of Leonard Cohen with John Carpenter's 1978 *Halloween* soundtrack. Her use of Cohen was particularly poignant because he had passed away just a few days before on November 7, 2016. Jackie said she chose Cohen both as homage to him and because of the haunting, deep bass of his voice, which seemed to reflect the mood cast by the results of the American presidential election. Her choice of *Halloween* mixed with Cohen provided an eerie tenor with its high-pitched synthesizer plinks, and the result was uncanny, creepy, and poetic. Listening to Cohen's voice through my body in this way was a moving experience not only because he had just passed away, but also because I could feel the reverberating bass, which I was very aware could potentially cause a pleasurable sexual response, as I had learned from the Darling Foundry iteration. Again, I did not want to publicly perform orgasm, although I'm sure Cohen would have gotten a kick out of using his music in this way.

During Jackie's set, there was an experiential contradiction between the pleasurable vibrations of Cohen's bass and hearing the mix through the stethoscope. Cohen's voice, however, was indecipherable. I could not make out the lyrics or words through the stethoscope. His voice presented a low gravelly moaning which, combined with the high-pitched bell-like ting from *Halloween*, enabled a disconnect between what I was feeling through my body and what I was hearing with my ears as the sound resonated through me while I listened. It was a sensation I can only describe as "feeling hearing" with my vagina, lower abdomen, buttocks, and the top of my thighs. I was not able to adequately articulate this, though, as I was engaging one-on-one with audience members while this was happening; they were hearing this creepy Cohen/*Halloween* mix with their ears via stethoscope and not their body, and processing the fact that they were listening through what was my very flesh. A few audience members talked with me about the eerie quality of the sound as we were hearing it, while others talked about the impact of Leonard Cohen and his passing, while still others talked about their relationship to the iconic *Halloween* and Jamie Lee Curtis's memorable performance in the film. This recognition and familiarity of sound and popular culture and how audiences responded to each would influence the further development of the piece and lend clues to how I could better recognize their subjectivity that would ultimately lead to using karaoke, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Figure 20: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall*, **Monument-National, Montreal, 2016. With a stethoscope listener. Photograph by Nikol Mikus.**

In contrast to the hauntingly disturbing soundtrack that Jackie provided, Nik's set was upbeat and happy. Nik mixed Björk with Beyoncé and this combination provided heavy bass with a range of high-pitched vocals. Nik chose these female powerhouse musicians with a great appreciation for both, having anticipated that we would really need to hear them in light of the American election. Although I could feel the heavy bass in Nik's set, I did not experience it as intensely as I did in Jackie's set, which could in part have been due to the length of the performance and my body adjusting to the pulsation. Audiences that could discern Björk's and Beyoncé's voices seemed to enjoy Nik's mix. Because Nik played after Jackie, a competing noise of the room infiltrated Nik's set, which I elaborate on below.

In this iteration, Jackie and Nik capitalized on what we learned from the Darling performance, namely that using high frequencies—Björk's high octave vocal range and *Halloween*'s equally piercing synthesizer notes—were more audible through my body and the eavesdropping stethoscope. I did not, however, fully account for the constantly increasing room noise and its effects on the quality of sound and listening. I had anticipated that the room would fill with noise but not as quickly, loudly, or voluminously as it did. In contrast to the open street space of the Darling where environmental sounds of the city framed the piece but seemed far away and the closer noise of a murmuring crowd was quiet as it dissipated into the air around us, the sounds of the party that erupted at the Monument-National reverberated in the contained space as people chatted, laughed, drank, and celebrated the end of the conference. This would prove to be a material condition that would need to be addressed in subsequent presentations as it became obvious that the audience was not considering the enveloping party and its noisy effects as part of the work but as an obstacle to the work located inside of my body.

Failure by Design

The majority of the audience at the Monument-National performance responded positively to UCH. A small number of people had complaints about the sound that ranged from slightly annoyed to disappointed to aggressively frustrated to angry. As more attendees arrived to this event, the louder the Monument-National became. This made it much more difficult to hear the DJ mixes through the stethoscope as the party sound competed with what my body made audible. What the negative responses demonstrated was that the demands that were made of my body in

this performance scenario are also the demands of the piece itself. The format of the piece blurs the line between body and art, and negative responses similarly blurred these lines. In this iteration, similar to that at the Darling Foundry, I too expected my vagina and uterus to capture sound and project it audibly back to listeners. I too expected us to hear these sounds above the din of the party. I too expected more from my body. *Why wasn't my body loud enough?* I tried to repress my frustration to not influence the audience experience because I could hear the sound—however softly—through the stethoscope. I understood that people were either unable to hear it due to hearing loss or refused to take the time to actively listen. If audiences did not want to do the work of actively listening and expected my body to produce Dolby Surround Sound™ despite all of the cues telling them this was impossible (that included the title, the description, the medicalized conditions of the work complete with stethoscope, a basic grasp of anatomy in which a uterus is on the inside of the body), how could I fix this? This lack of active engagement on the part of the audience was troubling, and again reinforced an embodied failure of the work on my part. Surely this piece had failed because the audience said it did.

I talk about this project in relationship to failure because this is how I experienced failure in the work. As discussed previously, failure was an impetus for *Uterine Concert Hall* in relationship to cisheteronormative patriarchal expectations of womanliness and required regimens of beauty, femininity, and reproduction. During the Monument-National presentation of UCH, failure seemed imminent and everywhere. Having anticipated disappointment as a response from the audience after experiencing similar complaints at the Darling Foundry, I had hoped that Nik, Jackie, and my discoveries about using high frequencies and their legibility would substantially compensate for the lack of significant changes to volume and the overall piece. At the Darling, we discovered that high-frequency sounds were more audible through the flesh of my body via stethoscope than low frequencies. Die Antwoord's "i fink u freeky" (2012) and Montreal singer Jordi Rosen's "The Angels Have Called" (2016) were fairly clear. We could hear their voices and the words they were singing (over muffled inaudible lyrics from other tracks Jackie played) via stethoscope because the frequency of their voices was high. Both Jackie and Nik took advantage of these lessons in manipulating volume, pitch, and frequency during their respective Monument-National sets to amplify sound for the stethoscope-listening audience so that they could audibly hear through my flesh.

However, as discussed, I did not suitably account for the competing echo chamber that the Monument-National provided. Despite knowing that I was not a boom box and hoping that the audience would similarly recognize this, I witnessed their disappointment turn into aggravation, frustration, and anger while I performed the work. A very aggressive woman listening via stethoscope leaned over me and said to her friend who was listening on the disco headphones, "Barbara! Barbara! Can you hear anything? Well, I can't!" She tore off the stethoscope, which tugged at my ears as I was listening to the attached pair, and stormed off into the crowd. Not cool, friend of Barbara. Not cool.

Although Barbara's friend's response is a seemingly minor incident, it is useful to unpack it as an example of how negative feedback can generate knowledge and inform creative decision making in performance-based practices. Because of its rude aggressiveness, the edges of what constitutes "bad behaviour" in an interactive performance are clear. Lesser complaints might be overlooked or not as easily observed because of their lack of aggression, vigour, or substance. At its root, the intention of the response was to communicate dissatisfaction with the experience I was providing. It was performance-art heckling up close and personal. This is valuable feedback because, regardless of Barbara's friend's demonstrable sense of entitlement and privilege, my work triggered a response of outrage that she could not or would not restrain. That is compelling as it contrasts an apathetic response. Because it was directed at me and not at a collaborator or an assistant, I am able to put myself aside for the moment, to take in this critique and others like it for examination, and ultimately improve the piece. This is not to dismiss my affective responses and presence in the work but to build on both my experience and this very direct audience feedback.

These Boots Were Made for Talkin'

I want to bring our attention to the blue suede ankle-high platform boots studded with rhinestones that I wore in the performance at the Monument-National because, firstly, they were fabulous. I mention them secondly because of the responses they generated during and after the performance which, with Barbara's friend's outburst, would help shape my thinking about the direction the project would take to further develop the work and account for audience reception. These boots illustrate how different performative strategies and their props provided affective sites for

audience connection and fixation. These boots looked as though they were not easy to walk in because of their three-inch platform height that tapered into a half-inch wide sole. They were relatively comfortable but I wouldn't go hiking in them. Some audience members saw them as a reason for me to be stretched out on the table instead of walking around because of their precariousness, whereas I thought my immobility was clear because of the speaker wedged in my vagina. These boots were something that guests seemed to judge relative to themselves and whether or not they would be able to walk in them: audiences were trying on my boots in their minds. These boots provided a space for aesthetic joy as their gaudy kitsch campiness permitted a reprieve from contemplating the uterus as a concert hall/middle-ageing queer female body as sounding object concepts this piece was steeped in. The seemingly superficial feedback about the boots' walkability, comfort, and splendour during and after the performance revealed how the boots functioned as mediators to the performer–audience relationship.
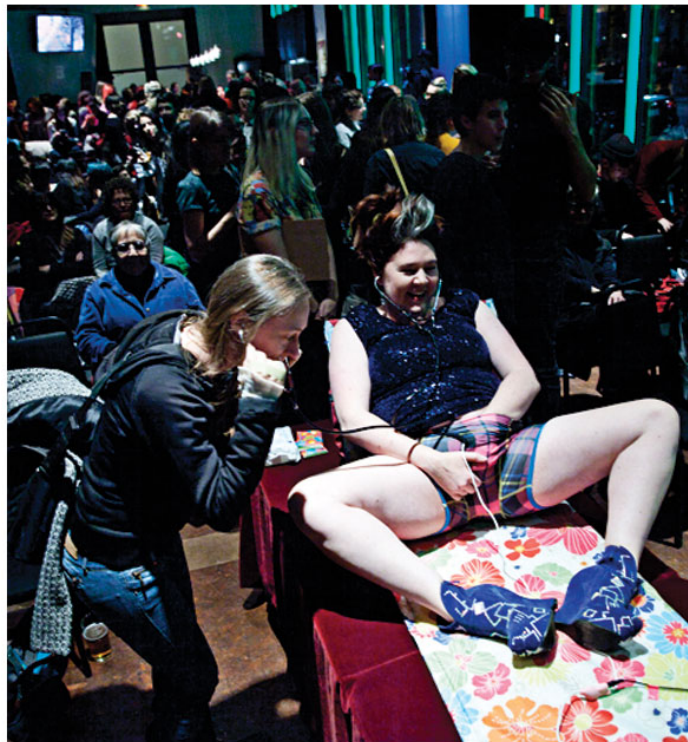
Figure 21: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Uterine Concert Hall*, **Monument-National, Montreal, 2016. With a stethoscope listener featuring "the boots". Photograph by Nikol Mikus.**

I don't mean to mislead the reader in thinking that all we talked about in this version of *Uterine Concert Hall* were blue suede ankle-high rhinestone boots—the majority of people did

84

not. The reason I am bringing this up is because the response to them in this context planted the seeds for the need to figure out a way to incorporate the feelings of the audience in more playful yet meaningful ways in future iterations of the performance. These boots and the reactions to them made clear that in order for the audience to show compassion or empathy for me—which was never the impetus for the work but became a requirement for my mental health—I would need to account for their experience more thoroughly. This was not being achieved by treating them as a faceless crowd visiting my individual subjectivity; I would need to figure out how to approach them as individuals engaging with me on a personal level. I was starting to see that audiences weren't particularly empathetic to my position on the table as a talking, feeling, sounding subject. It wasn't enough for me to be literally splayed out on a table and presented for their aural examination. They wanted more. Their reactions to the boots started my thinking into the importance of recognizing their subjectivity while not doing so at my expense.

In order to balance the utopic and critical aspects of the performance that I intended, I would need to re-examine the formal and conceptual methods, processes, and expected outcomes of the work. This would be crucial in revising the piece to ensure that in future iterations, the audience agreed to the terms of the performance. In its current form, UCH was stalled at a formal critique of sound audibility, which prevented the audience from "seeing" the rest of the work. In other words, I needed to provide enough cues and clues that enabled individuals to distance themselves from the performance enough so that it allowed them to "see" the entirety of the piece (which was not necessarily the entire tableau), the connective possibilities, and the potentiality of a middle-ageing queer uterus (and body) as a concert hall.

Uterine Utopia Denied :(

Uterine Concert Hall proposes the uterus as a physical space by asking audiences to imagine it as such. This new space, this imagined space, relies on the audiences' experience with what they think a uterus does and possibly what it looks like (perhaps recalling the health class handlebar diagram from vagina to fundus), and the physical experience of being in a concert hall. Audiences experience this space and place through sound, muffled through the flesh of my body, underscoring my corporeal presence. They are also physically present outside of my body in proximity to a hall they cannot enter physically, that can be accessed only through their

imagination, and by listening intently through a stethoscope and straining to hear what the sound is. They are assigned the controlling, medicalized, obstetrical gaze through their proximity to me as corporeal object and subject. They stand beside me listening through bone, fluid, and flesh for the DJ's tunes. They try to locate what the sounds and songs are, where they are coming from, and how sound traverses my body. Playing with the uterus as imagined space keeps it activated in the minds of the audience. Sound shapes the body, and contributes to this imagined potentiality of the uterus, a queered space that is not about reproduction but production. This is the utopic vision of the uterus that I had originally intended. What I did not account for were the demands that would be made of my body to deliver pitch-perfect, audible, stereophonic sound. Likewise, I did not fully account for the manner in which the gynecological tenor of the staging of the performance worked to further objectify me for the audience, who lost the criticality to see in this piece a challenge to cisheteropatriarchy's grasp of the female body.

In both the Darling Foundry and Monument-National presentations of *Uterine Concert Hall* people had trouble hearing the sound through the stethoscope. I was perhaps more attuned to the sound because I had listened at length to its accumulative duration, was listening specifically for it, and was the physical source of it, and would instruct individual audience members on active listening—take a breath and focus on the sound especially if it seemed quiet, faint, or far away. Some would do as instructed and hear something and others would not, insisting that there was no sound. This insistence on their part to achieve immediate gratification which led to their impatience with the work, and in turn with me and my body, was ultimately informative to changes I needed to make to the piece. However, receiving such feedback at the time of contact with individual audience members reinforced feelings of failure—my failure as an artist to deliver an experience they had expected, the failure of my body to deliver on these expectations, and a self-reflective failure that the work was not doing what I wanted it to—the audience *was* questioning our expectations of bodies marked female, but was also putting more expectations on my body. Failure was not failing in the way that I wanted it to, nor was it performing as I had intended. I knew that to perform this work in this form without significant change would simply be to solicit further bad behaviour[9] on the part of the audience and induce more internalized failure on my part. This failure was also amplified by the raw feelings we seemed to all be experiencing in the wake of the 2016 American presidential election. Having to perform this

work in these immediate affectively fraught conditions was challenging but informative. I did not want to experience or stage the work in this way again.

In UCH, there is the promise of contact with my body and uterus through the stethoscope, but the audience's collective anticipation and wondering what this might sound like is another important part of where the work resides. I recognized that this community-building of strangers talking about womanliness, uteri, and expectations of the female body was important in further developing the project. Although arriving at my body and the stethoscope was surely magical for audiophiles, it was not for regular listening visitors: failure was the destination that they didn't know about until they arrived. Failure was the bubble bursting—there was no uterine utopia. Closing the distance between the audience and my body brought this failure into focus. My age and queerness were at the very least read as not abiding with reproductive futurism. However, many read my promise of sound as unfulfilled because of its quietness, an aspect of failure that I interpellated about my project after the Darling iteration, and further internalized after the Monument-National presentation.

For the audience to recognize and consider the proposition of an alternative to the reproductive function of the uterus and accept my designation of my uterus as queer in its embodiment and functionality still relied on their recognition of the proposition, "What will the uterus sound like under these conditions?" UCH's conceptual premise asks the viewer to imagine the uterus as a space and place beyond reproduction while they are waiting in the lineup to hear what sound sounds like in it, even if their experience is a critique of how faint the sound was through my body: failure is success. Only when audience members listened through my body and it did not deliver the Dolby Surround Sound™ that they anticipated, did this potentiality dry up and blow away with the audience disappointed. This demonstrable displeasure of some listeners regarding the quality of sound seemed to be focused on an expectation of a high quality of sound and not on any other element of the work or recognition of my body. This was troubling but was such an important part of the work's critique because it was repeated so often. Even when audience members could adequately hear Beyoncé, Björk, Fleetwood Mac, Leonard Cohen, Die Antwoord, or experimental soundscapes through my body via stethoscope, some said disappointedly, "Oh. That's what it sounds like." My body did not deliver what was expected. As

a fellow performance artist friend was quick to point out: "Your piece is actually quite banal once we realize that our fantasies of what it might sound like are not met."

Questions of failure, expectation, intimacy, and distance figure across a number of performance-based works I have cited in this dissertation thus far, as well as work that I will look at in subsequent chapters. They each point to insights about what performance can do, the power relations between performer and audience, the circulation of affect, and negotiating the fetishization of the female body. Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) was a confrontational piece when it was first performed because Schneemann took to the pedestal as a nude, talking subject who controlled the presentation of her body as author of the performance. She also directed the gaze that examined it through how she possessed her sexuality and explicitly used her body as a medium. For Rebecca Schneider, performing with the explicit female body was not at issue for Schneemann and her feminist contemporaries because the female nude had been a cornerstone of subjectivity in Western art history for centuries. However, "the lines by which the explicit body was explicated, by which it was framed, displayed, and even more importantly, 'authored,' had been very well policed, by juridical and avant-garde establishments alike" (40). Schneider asserts that artists like Schneemann disrupted the passive female-as-object stereotype by claiming territory and the authorial voice held by white male artists in the 1960s and 1970s who criticized Schneemann and artists like her because the Art Stud Club[10] interpreted feminist artists' use of the body as "personal" and autobiographical, which "could not be easily digested into the territorial 'bad boy' oeuvre of the avant-garde" (41). Sadly, this kind of critique continues a long history of audiences questioning female authority over our bodies and a gaslighting of female expertise not confined to art history. Although not dismissed as author of UCH by a twenty-first-century Art Stud Club equivalent, the authority I have over my body, what it does, and how it can perform were very quickly questioned when some audience members' expectations of the performance weren't met.

The Darling Foundry and Monument-National presentations of *Uterine Concert Hall* made clear that it was not enough for me to be presented on a table like a Thanksgiving turkey for an audience's examination as talking object-subject. I point again to Annie Sprinkle's *Public Cervix Announcement* in which she staged her cervix for inspection by an audience via speculum

in the 1990s, and that this staging intrigued, titillated, and satisfied audiences at the time. Conversely, my staging of the uterus was not enough for my audience, although I think this also had to do with the hierarchy of the senses and the privileged place vision has here over sound. The stethoscope listener had to strain to hear tunes and vocals, and if anything, cursed the stethoscope for its century-old technology that was definitively not Dolby Surround Sound™. I did not anticipate that my body would be bypassed in search of this sound, or rather not searched for, but have demands made of it to deliver full-on hifi. I also did not anticipate the literal expectations of my promise to the audience: as Annie Sprinkle delivered on her promise that audiences could see her cervix, I promised sound through my uterus and failed in this promise for some listeners.

The goal of UCH was to frame a relationship between individual audience members and my uterus as a concert hall through sound to queer their ideas about the uterus and its hetero-reproductive function. The audience was clearly reading my performance of self while queer and middle-ageing as well as the queering of the uterus as presented by my middle-ageing body. However, in the same way that the audience wanted more from UCH (sound volume, quality, legibility), I wanted more from them (engagement, recognition, interest). Although the audience was conceptualizing my proposition of the uterus as a physical space and site, the legibility of sound was key to further shaping this space. When this was not delivered to some audience members because of their inability to hear sound, my inability to produce sound at a sufficient volume, their expectations of something more beyond hearing sound by listening through my body, and my inability to deliver some sort of transformative experience, the work and my enactment of it failed. Resolving these issues would be central to staging this work again.

In the next chapter, I detail how I accomplished technical and conceptual changes to UCH to account for improved sound volume and quality for clearer legibility for stethoscope listeners; audience engagement, in terms of activating the audience and engaging them through meaningful participation; refining the staging of my ageing queer body as a means to critique cisheteropatriarchy and bioessentialist conceptions of femininity and cultural expectations of bodies marked female; and resolving the problematic staging of my cisgender, middle-ageing white body presented on a pedestal as a revered destination for a lineup.

CHAPTER THREE

NEEDS MORE WORK: INTIMATE KARAOKE AND OTHER FINDINGS AT THE STUDIO XX RESIDENCY

Figure 22: Dayna McLeod, *Headphone Karaoke: Don't Stop Believin'*, **2018; Video still.**

This chapter maps the processes, discoveries, and outcomes I achieved in a one-month residency[1] at Studio XX in Montreal that focused on resolving technical and conceptual issues I had identified in the Darling Foundry and Monument-National presentations of *Uterine Concert Hall* as detailed in the previous chapter. This includes addressing sound quality and volume issues in the performance in response to concerns and complaints from audiences that they were not able to "hear the work." This formal component intersects with making clear my conceptual concerns about queering bioessentialist and reproductive expectations of bodies marked female through the staging of my body, and my invitation to audiences to engage with me by listening through my flesh for sound located in my uterus. Amplifying the sound for audibility would allow audience members to focus on my proposed reconfiguration of my middle-ageing queer non-reproductive body as a concert venue and "see me" (over bypassing my body to access sound) because they were not distracted by what they perceived as the project's failure (not hearing the sound through the stethoscope at a coherent volume). I also acknowledge and approach remedying the

90

problematic staging of the lineup in proximity to my white cisgender body within the performance by reworking the mise-en-scène and machinations of the piece. Finally, I explicate how karaoke as a method of audience engagement has significantly shifted the work to account for the subjectivity of the audience through a method I am calling "intimate karaoke."

In this chapter, I articulate foundational questions with which I entered the residency, questions that shaped the direction it took, how I answered these questions using performance- and material-based methods, knowledge that emerged as a result of this work, and a strategy for how to implement these changes that would be actualized in two subsequent presentations of UCH, which I discuss in the next chapter. My intention with making clear how these residency processes, discoveries, and outcomes impacted changes to the work is to continue to demonstrate how research-creation and practice-based methodologies contribute to knowledge production, which would not have been possible using non-practice-based methods. I use process descriptions as important methodological interventions and include them as illustrative ways of working that are frequently left out of research-creation accounts. These detailed summaries are part of how performance hypotheses are tested, how I elaborate conceptual frameworks in partnership with technologies and audiences, and demonstrate different forms of performance and material-based problem solving. Within my practice, this performance-based feminist praxis is integral to thinking about how performances are elaborated and actualized, how production and performance methods are devised, and illustrate the transformative potential of experimentation.

Key to this work is my attentiveness in examining how feedback can be used as a productive and generative means for performance-based and practice-based research. Building on feedback from audiences, collaborators, and artist peers I received in the two previous iterations, I identified pivotal formal and conceptual concerns with UCH that I wanted to resolve in the residency. Resolutions to these concerns would reveal themselves to be interrelated and this is how I approach writing my findings here. My intention is to make clear this interrelatedness as well as how I navigated studio-based experimentation in this investigation. I outline below the formal and conceptual issues that I addressed in the residency and elaborate on them further in this chapter. These issues are:

- Sound quality and volume
    - How do I make my body louder? How can I make the listening experience for the audience more audibly legible through the stethoscope?

As discussed, this was a central concern that emerged from audience feedback: that some audience members could not sufficiently hear the sound. This technical detail was an important one as to not resolve it would simply mean that this complaint would be repeated and the work would continue to "fail" on its promise to deliver sound from my uterus. Although delivering full volume sound was not the sole objective of the work, audience responses showed that it was important to achieve to improve their experience of the piece. Accounting for and finding a solution to this formal question impacts my specific relations with the audience and their expectations because again, based on their feedback, they were bypassing my body and the doctor's examination mise-en-scène in search of sound. Legibility of sound in the examination process was key to connecting to the utopic potentiality that audiences considered in the lineup. The sound needed to be legible to audiences so that my middle-ageing queer body could similarly be legible as a refurbished site of production and potentiality instead of (yet another) middle-ageing queer female object of failure.

- Audience engagement
    - How do I activate the audience more thoroughly? How do I convert expectations of the body as object (and entertainment) in this context into meaningful audience participation? How do I implicate the audience further in the work?

What became clear after the first two iterations of UCH and that I was able to think about and develop in the two years since the last performance and the residency, was that I was not activating the audience enough. By this I mean that some audiences were approaching the work and my body as an object and treating me as such. For these audience members, there was nothing at stake for them in observing me, only whether or not the work (and in turn, me as the performing artist) would deliver on their expectations. In addition to wanting the audience to consider the middle-ageing queer female body as a site for productive potentiality and non-reproduction, I wanted to meaningfully engage the audience. I did not know that this was an objective until after I performed the piece and I was left interpellating failure in response to

audience responses to the performance. Implicating the audience became a focus in evolving the work so that their participation would be more meaningful to them and to me.

- The effects a gendered middle-ageing queer body provokes in cisheteropatriarchy
  - How do I make a clear critique of cultural expectations of bodies marked female and what they can do? How do I make clear my challenge to bioessentialist reproductive expectations of these bodies, how we see middle-ageing female bodies as failing bodies, and how we see queer female bodies as failing bodies under cisheteropatriarchy? How do I make these conceptual concerns apparent to an audience through the experience of the work?

The relationship between the formal concerns (legibility of sound) and the conceptual concerns of the work (audience engagement and expectation) go to the heart of figuring non-reproductive futurity through performative practice, the dubiousness of bioessentialism, and our cultural judgments about female bodies, our ageing, and our queerness. For José Muñoz, disidentification

> is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. This process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (*Disidentifications* 31).

In UCH, the potentiality of performativity is a mode of disidentification that I engage with to take dominant cisheteropatriarchal and reproductive futurist rhetoric about the female body and reconfigure these expectations. Performativity "scrambles" and "reconstructs" these encoded meanings of womanliness while revealing the normative biases of social and cultural expectations for bodies marked female through disidentification. The previous iterations of UCH had succeeded at illustrating this disidentification through my counter-identification with ageing and queerness. However, some audiences were quick to judge my specific middle-ageing queer female body through my inability to deliver on what they read as promises made about the

artwork: that they would hear sound emitting from my uterus. I would need to revise the work to establish clearer cues to lead the audience to where I wanted them to go conceptually. In its initial form, the interpretive schemas some audiences were bringing to each performance prohibited a re-imaging of the space of the uterus as a space of utopic potentiality. This potentiality was usurped by the failing sound housed in my failing middle-ageing queer body.

- Staging my body
    - How do I resolve the problematic tableau of the lineup to a white cisgender middle-ageing woman presented on a table that is essentially a pedestal? How do I keep the functionality of the lineup but offset this as a scene?

I did not recognize the problematic tableau of the lineup forming to visit my white cisgender middle-ageing female body in the first iteration of UCH until it formed at the Darling Foundry. I had not accounted for a lineup forming in the first place, which was a huge oversight on my part. I take seriously Rebecca Schneider's critique of white performance artists using explicit body practices who "leave whiteness in the realm of the implicit" and her challenge to "white feminist performers to strive to make whiteness explicitly visible in their work, or better, to make it structural invisibility visible" (9). Schneider engages here with Richard Dyer who "has noted the present structural impossibility by which white people only begin to 'see whiteness where its difference from blackness is inescapable and at issue'" (qtd. in Schneider 9). Further Schneider states that "racialized landscapes of class and gender are too often disregarded" by white feminists who might not want "to complicate their work" by "doing battle with their race-marked privilege" and only "acknowledge their gender-marked disprivilege" (9). Staging UCH again at the Monument-National solidified this problematic presentation, and offsetting and addressing this essentialism of whiteness and gender through mise-en-scène would be a focus in the further development of the work.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed describes her discomfort in some queer spaces that cater to middle-class white queers as well as questions the legitimacy of her queerness: is she "queer enough," has she "been queer long enough," is she "the right kind of queer" (151). She also discusses comfort and discomfort as it relates to heteronormativity which "functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already

taken their shape" (148). She compares this comfort to a soft chair that retains the form of bodies that repeatedly sit in it, leaving an "impression" over time as an analogy to heteronormativity and that "the impressions acquired by surfaces function as traces of bodies," heteronormative bodies that have shaped acceptable public social spaces (148). In revising UCH, I was interested in Ahmed's concept of how different bodies and subjects "fit" in relation to comfort and discomfort to address questions of intimacy and circulations of affect. The new demands I make on the audience influence and reconfigure sound arrangements and its circulation, which are further impacted by proximity and distance in the performance. Where and how my middle-ageing queer body is figured in relationship to the audience affects these configurations as well as informs the comfort and discomfort both the audience and I experience.

I am invested in Ahmed's work and her questioning of her place in relationship to queerness as a queer subject, her discomfort in some queer spaces which extend to white middle-class queers and spaces dominated by them, and her assertion that not all subjects who identify as queer are the same, have safe access to public spaces or citizen rights endorsed by some state governing bodies like healthcare, immigration, housing, employment, adoption, or marriage. Ahmed also discusses heteronormative scripts and queer subjects who assimilate, value, and otherwise approximate normative existence. She asks, "If some of the rights of heterosexuality are extended to queers, what happens to queers who don't take up these rights" like gay marriage? (150). Her argument addresses her own bias in defining an "ideal queer life," what it means to be "legitimately queer" when observing how "people must act in some ways rather than others" in regards to mapping ideality in relation to queer(ness) (151). In parsing this out she asks, "How does defining a queer ideal rely on the existence of others who fail the ideal? Who can and cannot embody the ideal?" (151). Ahmed observes that even in claiming queer as an identity for oneself, there may be other intersectional identity markers that prevent a queer subject from living their best queer life.[2] I recognize my privilege in this account: as a middle-class (passing) white cisgender non-disabled middle-ageing woman, I am afforded certain entitlements that are not extended to others who are othered by white supremacist cisheteropatriachy. These privileges enable me to perform works like UCH that employ explicit body practices differently than other performance-based artists whose racialization, non-normative gender presentation, or disability may or may not be the intent and focus of their work,

but is invariably taken up by normative audiences (read: white cisgender non-disabled bodies) as the work.

RECORD and PLAYBACK

The technical complaints about not hearing sound clearly though my body in the first iterations of UCH greatly influenced and impacted the conceptual terrain that the new formation of the work would take. These complaints forced me to examine how and why I was using my body, and how and why I was using sound through my body. My interest in thinking of the middle-ageing queer female body as a site for sound making and as a site for sound playback continues my interest in using my body in performance-based works that focuses on the body's signification by capitalizing on exploiting its social and material conditions. These challenges to the conceptual and technical frameworks of the piece permitted me to experiment with them—to break down the previous iterations of UCH and allow for its reconfiguration. In order to do this, I wanted to look at how sound could traverse my body from the site of my vagina in various ways. In the residency I stretched, turned around, and experimented with the configuration of sound in order to direct it in different directions and track how it moved through my body.

Within the one-month residency, I had allotted two days to working with Jackie Gallant and Nik Forrest, who had each contributed soundtracks as DJs to the first two iterations of UCH. Because Nik and Jackie are both experts in their field, I took advantage of their knowledge and focused on technical, formal, and conceptual aspects in developing the piece while I had access to them. This two-day work session proved to be incredibly productive and informative in addressing some of the concerns I had with the piece that I would further build on and develop in the rest of the residency. We worked during the first weekend of May 2018 and I divided the days into two tasks: record and playback. The "playback" day was dedicated to experimenting with the existing material conditions of UCH and revising them to address sound quality and legibility, and to accommodate the new direction of the work that uses karaoke as a method of audience engagement. The rest of the residency would continue this work without Jackie and Nik to resolve other concerns and refine presentation details through testing and rehearsal.

Because I do not have medical knowledge (nor have I been able to find a medical researcher to work with) I've been adamant about using a stethoscope as an audience listening device for my bodily safety over using a microphone as an amplifying device for the Babypod speaker. Knowledge I do have based on my performance experience with microphones, is that if you put a microphone too close to a speaker, you are going to get feedback. My concern with this little bit of knowledge was what the corporeal consequences this feedback might reap if both of these objects were inside my body or if one of these objects was inside and the other was outside of my body. What might the effects of this be on my body, flesh, vagina, and surrounding tissue and organs? I didn't want to inadvertently burn a hole through my body because of my lack of knowledge in this area, or because I threw caution to the wind and simply did it anyway, a tendency I may have engaged with when I was in my twenties. This restriction was a defining parameter and condition for UCH and continued in my residency work with Nik and Jackie. This technical decision has important conceptual impact about the role of my body, how audiences are invited to listen, relations forged between myself and the audience, the quality of sound, and the failures that became centred and constitutive in the further development of the work.

In this performance, individual audience members are physically placed in the authoritative position of the doctor. In combination with my body laid out for examination, the stethoscope signals the often unequal power dynamic between doctor and patient, while critiquing this imbalance through the structure of the performance. I am the artist of the work who invites the audience to examine me—a talking subject—and directs them on how to examine my body for sound with the stethoscope. This disrupts both the conventional medical exam format and the accompanying medicalized obstetrical gaze that often figures the female body as passive. This exchange informs our performer/audience relationship as a level of intimacy is created through the proximity of our bodies (mine on the table, theirs leaning over me), the double-headed stethoscope that connects their ears to my ears and their ears to my uterus (through the bulb of the stethoscope on the outside of my body), and the shared sound that is transmitted through the stethoscope (from my uterus, which is played from the Babypod fixed in my vagina).

When some audience members complained that they could not hear sound through the stethoscope, this negatively impacted the relationship that we had forged as audience and performer for several reasons. Some saw their inability to hear sound as a failure of the artwork and my failure as an artist to deliver what was promised, which left them dissatisfied with the experience. This revealed to me that the stethoscope was helping them bypass my body as a corporeal presence and in turn, me as a person in search of sound in a place they couldn't see. This indeterminate sound location (the uterus) was not being read on their part for its potentiality of what this site could alternatively do (as concert hall instead of fetal chamber), but reinforced a failure on my part to deliver the goods (legible sound). This critique became a central concern to address through improved technical design. My thinking was that if audiences could adequately hear the sound through the uterus, they would be able to "see" the rest of the piece, namely my body as mediator of sound and what the implications of my middle-ageing queer non-reproductive body as sounding device means against the backdrop of cisheteropatriachy.

Sound Quality and Volume: RECORD

We started with "record" on the first day as this presented the most potential for change, challenge, and experimentation which we hoped would stimulate revisions for UCH should we make any groundbreaking discoveries. We had a loose schedule of activities that centred on recording from my vagina. Here, the microphone literally takes the place of the Babypod so that we can evaluate how sound travels through the body from the site of the vagina-as-stage. We were interested in the process of collecting sound, including formal and technical requirements, as well as the sound itself. This was a compromise on my part as both Nik and Jackie had expressed an interest in working with a UCH sound loop: putting sound into my body, recording it out of

Figure 23: Dayna McLeod, *Studio XX Residency***, 2018. Contact microphone in a condom with Jackie Gallant and Nik Forrest. © Dayna McLeod.**

my body, and then putting it back in again. Whereas I was interested in feedback from the audience and my peers to help evolve and further develop the piece (reflecting my interest in audience reaction), they were both interested in creating audio feedback loops in which sound sent to the Babypod speaker could be recorded with a microphone for them to process and effect, and sent back to the Babypod speaker. Because of my lack of medical expertise, and my safety concerns regarding the proximity of the microphone, speaker, and my body, we hadn't been able to stage an actual feedback loop of what they were playing into me, out of me, and back in again. However, one of the ways we were able to experiment (within the limits of my comfort) was to do vaginal recordings. This would not provide an immediate looping of sound that Nik and Jackie sought but might generate compelling audio material for them to record, process, and play back into my uterus from the site of my vagina occupied by the Babypod speaker. I proposed using my empty vagina as an internal sound stage for recording to see if it would render interesting results.

Womb Tone Room Tone

My intent with UCH was to present my uterus as a physical space—as a platform for a performance, a theatre, a concert hall that an outside-my-body audience could access via stethoscope. However, the poor quality of sound interfered with other conceptual intentions of the work to have the uterus actually function as a concert hall, and for audiences to imagine its capaciousness well beyond its physicality. I had still not delivered to the audience the full potential or a reasonable facsimile of what was being performed or staged for my uterus. I started to think about the room tone[3] an empty uterus or vagina would produce similar to the room tone that an empty concert hall or stage generates. These spaces are not silent as a vacuum when empty but are further activated when sound passes through them. In a concert hall we hear how sound is shaped through its acoustics. Hard surfaces reflect sound while soft surfaces absorb sound (Barron). Applying these acoustic principles to the soft flesh and hard bone of my body, what would it sound like from the inside? What would be the quality of sound? What would we hear?

The residency offered time and resources to explore and experiment with the differences between the body/uterus/vagina as a conduit for a musical performance, and it being the instrument itself. Is the body a listener, a producer, or a site? How does each of these roles

configure different relations between the uterus, the performance of middle-age and queerness, and for the audience to the performance itself? What I wanted to explore with Nik and Jackie was the capacity of the uterus as concert hall and the vagina as stage as physical sites within the work, to capture the sounds that each site has the potential to hold, emit, absorb, produce, and receive before we input sound into them. I wanted to map these sites for their sonic capacities, capabilities, limits, and dimensions. I would do this by capturing and mapping the room tone of the vagina, the uterus, and the body to better evaluate the uterus as effective concert hall and vagina as stage for this concert hall. Our approach was to place ourselves inside of the uterine concert hall to capture this room tone. To do this, we would set up on the stage of my uterus (my vagina), replacing the Babypod speaker with a microphone to record the room tone or what Jackie called, "womb tone." The reason we couldn't record in the uterus is because we certainly could not navigate past the cervix safely with the gear that we had. A procedure like that would definitely require knowledgeable medical supervision, which we did not have.

Ageing Vaginas, Whiteness, and the Colonialist Legacy of Human Display

My concerns with ageing shifts between the uterus and vagina as sites in terms of how each animate the female body and, as discussed previously, how they are often (as is everything between the knees and bellybutton in a woman's body) conflated as a single sex organ.[4] In cisheteropatriarchy, the uterus is a charged and gendered symbol. In UCH, my intention is to redirect its meaning. In cisheteropatriarchy, the uterus is designated as a reproductive organ that eventually ages out of its assigned reproductive functionality, which contributes to the figuring of the middle-ageing and older female body as valueless. Similarly, the vagina as a site for heterovaginal sex ages out the organ and figures it and the body that keeps it as grotesque. In "Stand-Up Comedy and the Legacy of the Mature Vagina," Roberta Mock examines the work of older female comedians who have talked explicitly about their ageing vaginas, bodies, and sexuality like Phyllis Diller, Joan Rivers, and Roseanne Barr. "When speaking of and through the figure of the mature vagina, these comedians allow us to imagine the aging female body at the heart of a gynelineal public discourse and to glimpse the unruly possibilities this might offer" (11). Mock talks at length about specific comedic acts that emphasize age, sexuality, and the body's deterioration, and how this use of in/visibility acknowledges the disappearance of desire and sexuality (observed by the comics themselves and by their audiences), through the use of and

reference to their changing bodies and ageing vaginas. Mock engages with Judith Butler's theory of gender construction and relates these comics' acts as challenging their "radical erasure" because they are not "properly gendered" as ageing bodies because they explicitly discuss their deteriorating sex organs (Butler *Bodies that Matter* qtd. in Mock 13). Mock elaborates: "These 'excluded sites' form the boundaries of the normative sexed body and continue 'to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation'" (Butler *Bodies that Matter* qtd. in Mock 13).

Because we know so little about ageing women's bodies beyond their inability to reproduce after menopause and because of cisheteropatriarchy's designation of post-menopausal women as undesirable, asexual, or grotesque if sexual, this uncertain and unstable terrain of representation helps frame jokes told by older comedians about their bodies, which in turn extend to older women's bodies who are not telling jokes but are bystanders who become implicated in these jokes. The surfaces of the bodies of the joke telling and non-joke telling older women take shape through the impressions left on them by the jokes, the telling of jokes, and the circulation of these jokes beyond their telling.[5] The audience can't help but keep in mind *the idea of* an ideal female body (read: young, taut) when they are confronted with *the reality of* the comedian's live, onstage older body (read: ageing, deteriorating vagina), which is exacerbated by the comedian's constant reference to this body.[6]

Mock emphasizes the importance of situating these comedians in a lineage, which include Jewish female comedians Sophie Tucker, Belle Barth, Pearl Williams, and Patsy Abbott, and African-American female comedians Jackie "Moms" Mabley and LaWanda Page.[7] Mock credits the development of this succession to the "historical relationships between Jewishness and blackness" in the United States and states that critique of these acts reinforced sexualized caricatures of blackness and Jewishness. Mock notes that Sophie Tucker and Moms Mabley were accepted by white audiences of their time because of their demonstrative grotesque displays of sexuality, "hyperfeminine masculinity," and racialized difference, which were embedded in laughter and ageing and therefore not threatening to white audiences (16). Another example of a staged black ageing body that was not threatening for a white colonial gaze is Joice Heth, a nineteenth century, elderly, blind, disabled, black female performer who P.T. Barnum presented

in the United States as George Washington's one-hundred-sixty-one-year-old nursemaid until she died in 1826. In "Mammy–Memory: Staging Joice Heth, or the Curious Phenomenon of the 'Ancient Negress,'" Uri McMillan analyzes Heth through "mammy-memory," which he defines as American national memory dependent on an affective nostalgic longing for a black wet-nurse figure to take care of vulnerable white babies through the very real and material conditions of slavery (36).

McMillan uses performance theory and black performance studies to discuss how the logistics of freak-show staging was used to figure Heth as a corporeal "other" while occupying the position of George Washington substitute. McMillan observes that within the freak show context, which was a "primary venue through which to view corporeal difference" for white audiences in the nineteenth century of age, gender, race, and ability, Heth provided a physical conduit to and direct contact with American history for white spectators, or at least a version of history that romanticized their idea of George Washington (33). McMillan examines Heth as a "deteriorating living commodity" for Barnum, the relationship between Heth's object status and chattel slavery, and the contradictory performance by Heth that often featured her objecting and protesting to fully comply with the performance itself with jubilant Americana which Daphne Brook calls "black female performance work done under duress" (Brook qtd. in McMillan 37). Intersecting with Heth's staging of ancient Negress complicates conceptualizations of America's past and nationhood, revealing them to be equally performed.[8]

White audiences read American history through a colonizer's lens from Heth's body as script while shaking her hand, examining her wrinkles, watching her eat, hearing her sing, asking her questions, and generally scrutinizing her body. Coco Fusco observes that showcasing nonwhite bodies in exhibition contexts in North America and Europe corresponded with European colonialism and American expansionism (40). "These exhibits also gave credence to white supremacist worldviews by representing nonwhite peoples and cultures as being in need of discipline, civilization, and industry" because they "[reinforced] stereotypes of 'the primitive'" and "served to enforce a sense of racial unity as whites among Europeans and North Americans, who were divided strictly by class and religion" until the twentieth century (41). These displays were viewed as "public education" for whites on "primitive" nonwhite cultures and peoples, an

encounter where whites could "discover" nonwhite people (44). These "displays were living expressions of colonial fantasies and helped to forge a special place in the European and Euro-American imagination for nonwhite people and their cultures." The exhibition of Sara Baartman's naked body in life and death from the nineteenth-century through to the late twentieth-century with a focus on her genitals epitomizes this white supremacist colonial gaze and its "educational" bent. It also reflects the exploitation and consumption of black bodies in European and American white supremacy.[9]

In UCH, I confront the audience with the reality of my middle-ageing queer body through its display and by granting access to it while suggesting the potentiality of my body and uterus as a site for art production as a mediator of sound. However, my whiteness permits me certain privileges in this display that are not granted to people of colour in white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy. A racialized body performing this work would signify "the body" in incredibly different and significant ways that could not escape the white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal history of these bodies' objectification, enslavement, exploitation, or dislocation. I would never ask anyone to perform this work in my place for precisely these reasons: my specific body bears the marks of my agency and authority over my person, which cannot be hired out. I recognize the privileges that similarly mark my specific body and render its display distinct and different against a backdrop of white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy. I also recognize that the mediating infrastructure of UCH as a performance depends on specific access to my white cisgender body that would not at all be the same for a racialized body, one that is transgender or non-binary, and or one that is disabled. A goal within the residency was to resolve the problematic tableau that a lineup to my body figured. I return to how I attempt to achieve this later in this chapter through mise-en-scène within the performance. I also discuss this further in the next chapter in relationship to circuitry as I distribute vulnerability and performativity among a range of actors and participants in the new iteration of the work.

Vaginal Microphone Kraftwerk

In my art making practice, I have utilized everyday technologies to hijack them for my own uses to challenge modes of representation. In general, I have a very do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to art making, which reflects (at times) a lack of institutional and financial support as well as an

engagement with feminist and queer production practices that prioritize making over polish. For example, in addition to using the Babypod in UCH as a sound system for the concert hall of my uterus, *Come Shred My Heart* (2008, 2011) hacked a hand wand paper shredder and reconfigured it as a vagina dentate. *Bronze Cowboy* (2014) employed multiple bloody tampons that I remove from my vagina (an illusion involving red corn syrup and trick panties, to be sure) to hang from my ears as earrings. These works disrupt and queer the intended function of their technologies and this is an approach that I continued to engage with in the residency to produce a vaginal microphone out of materials definitely not intended for vaginal use. This set of investigations is located in shifting, confusing, unsettling, hacking, and otherwise fucking up the technologies that I employ to communicate my intent in each artwork. I queer these tools by embracing, breaking, and reconfiguring them for my needs. This exploration and experimentation is unbound from the normative ways in which technologies intersect and interact with the body. Working with the Babypod and making a vaginal microphone out of a ping pong ball is a DIY method of *queering the sound* a body makes by *capturing the queer sounds* that my body makes. Using this handcrafted microphone in the same way that I use the Babypod challenges reproductive futurism's demands on my non-reproductive body by making it a site (and specifically my vagina and uterus as sites) productive.

To prepare for my recording session with Jackie and Nik, I researched how to make a hydrophone[10] used for underwater sound recording that, in combination with online DIY sex toy repair resources, further informed a prototype for a waterproof vaginal microphone. I purchased a pack of five Piezo contact microphones[11] which are "designed to be in physical contact with the object producing sound" that "receives and derives most of its audio signal from mechanical vibrations instead of airborne sound waves" (Sweetwater). Lauren Lesko and Miya Masaoka used this type of microphone in their works, which I discussed in the Introduction. I ordered mine from Amazon for $24.99 for a pack of five. The red plastic cover that encased the contact microphone receptor wires had double-sided tape on the back. I did not want to insert this into my vagina because I did not think that this contact microphone was made out of mucous membrane friendly plastic. With this reasoning and with a set of ping pong balls in hand, I enlisted my girlfriend[12] to make a vagina-friendly microphone. She cut open the ping pong ball and placed a contact microphone inside. The black cable connecting the microphone to the

female quarter inch jack hung out of it. She used household silicone[13] sealant to glue the seam closed.

Spoiler Alert: I did not put this bathroom-caulking-covered ping pong ball microphone into my vagina as part of this research. Although it compared with the overall size and bulk of the Babypod, this Frankensteinian microphone was rough around the seams and presented several other problems. The practical intent of this microphone-crafting project was to build a microphone that would be able to get a clear recording of the interior of my body from my vagina with as little interference from the object that contained it as possible. This is why I was looking for other solutions for casings over condoms because I was concerned that a microphone inside a condom would be too noisy. This was the worst-case scenario I was trying to beat: a noisy condom. However, in my enthusiasm to build a prototype based not on in-depth knowledge about audio recording and microphone construction but instead on an interest in capitalizing on the ping pong ball's relationship to vaginal strength, control, and sexual entertainment[14] (Mars, Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie; Sanders-McDonagh) and engaging my butch girlfriend with this task, I overlooked several key yet fundamentally important factors. I did not consider the impact of not removing the microphone from the casing it came in before putting it into the ping pong ball. This simply added yet another barrier between recorder and body as sound source. Again, I do not have any medical knowledge to evaluate the impact and effects on my body tissue of exposing it to stripped microphone wires had we cracked the casing open and stuck them inside a

condom to place in my body, but I trusted my instincts that this wasn't a great idea without knowledgeable medical supervision.

Once I discarded the ping pong ball vaginal microphone as viable, I settled on a condom wrapped contact microphone as my best option. I was concerned about how noisy it would be, and tried to tie it off to minimize interfering rustle. Before doing the vaginal recordings, Nik, Jackie, and I did baseline tests in my mouth. We approached this testing as artists with (decades old) public high school science education between us in which the microphone was the constant variable and the mouth and vagina were independent variables we were using to compare sound recordings. We recorded a variety of scenarios to test the microphone's ability to pick up sound, to test its sensitivity, and to compare the quality of sound with and without a condom. This included having the microphone in my mouth with and without a non-lubricated latex condom[15] (the taste of which I masked with strawberry flavoured lube), drinking Coke, drinking water, laughing, talking, not talking, Jackie and Nik talking while I was silent, clicking my teeth, and moving the microphone around to my cheek with my tongue. The mouth recording results were necessary to provide recording data for comparison and helped inform how we read the vaginal recordings.

What does the Inside of a Vagina Sound Like?

We conducted several recordings with the contact microphone in a condom in my vagina. This included repeating the exercises above (drinking Coke, drinking water, laughing, talking, not talking, Jackie and Nik talking while I was silent) as well as moving my legs in a cycling motion as though I was on a bicycle, keeping my bent knees together and moving them side to side, keeping my legs tightly together, and having my legs spread apart. For these recordings I was stretched out on the beach mat chair on top of a table just as I am during *Uterine Concert Hall*. The sounds produced were intriguing. Employing my digestive track produced both expected and unexpected results. There were a variety of gurgles when I drank or ate which were expected. What was not expected was how these sounds were amplified and seemed to extend in time and space. By this I mean that sound was given dimensionality as it extended into the body from the site of the microphone inside of my vagina, a sort of multi-dimensional landscape that we created in our minds based on the seeming "distance" that the recordings created. For example, we could

audibly hear gulping as well as a carbonate fizzing of Coke from inside my body that seemed to travel a great distance as it passed near the site of the recording. Unlike the mouth recording, in which the popping carbonation of the Coke sounded immediate and close as it was directly on top of the microphone, the vaginal recording seemed further away, which we attributed to the flesh and tissue that separated the microphone from my digestive track. The sound of me drinking water sounded close to the microphone after arriving from a distance, and sonically disappeared in a different direction. Vaginal recordings of me laughing sounded as though the laugh itself was turned inside out or was somehow recorded from inside of the laugh, which was bizarre.

We purposefully did not employ anatomical diagrams and had no other corresponding visuals (sonograms, MRIs, or other medical imaging processes) of the interiority of my body to guide us, only what we could imagine and glean from the recordings. These uncanny and compelling sounds combined with a lack of visual representation provided creative opportunities for what we could do with them. We also started to think about how we could use the sound to situate a potential audience in a speculative space of their own making that was void of any visual reference to fully immerse them in it. Our research was further complicated when we discovered that we could hear Jackie and Nik talking while we were preparing for a vaginal recording. This recording too sounded as though it was far away, and once we identified what was happening, we conducted further recordings with my legs tightly closed and then fully open while they spoke: was my vagina "hearing" through its opening or through my flesh? How porous to sound was my body?

This research utilized my middle-ageing female body as an experimental subject but gave voice to me as a subject, or rather listened to (and recorded) me as a subject with creative intent, consent, and queer potentiality. This is in stark contrast to the medicalized testing on women and racialized minority groups who have historically been exploited, lied to, and otherwise not treated humanely as participants in clinical medical research and who have been used as tokenistic markers of colonialism through their display (McCarthy; Fusco; Taylor; McMillan). In stark contrast, this recording process with Nik and Jackie also reminded me of certain legacies of feminist performance art in terms of collaboration and collectivity as demonstrated by queer and or feminist artist collectives and troupes in the United States like Split Britches, The Guerilla

107

Girls, and Spiderwoman, and in Canada like The Clichettes, Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, and Kiss & Tell. This recording research also brought to mind specific feminist works that utilized both collaborative production processes and representations of the female body like Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1978) and *The Birth Project* (1985), as well as artists who have historically used explicit performance practices like Annie Sprinkle, Carolee Schneemann, VALIE EXPORT, Linda Montano, Karen Finley, Ana Mendieta, Ayanna Maracle, and Yoko Ono.

These recordings and questions provided creative opportunities to think past the hierarchy of sight and further speculate on using sound captured from interior body space. What Nik and Jackie might do with it as a source material through feedback, sampling, distortion, and other means of processing was equally generative, as were the different sounds that they were each drawn to. The process and the recordings themselves intrigued me as they aurally mapped my middle-ageing queer female body from the inside. This interiority seemed to have a performative life of its own that underscored the potentiality of it as site for the project. I was encouraged by each gurgle, echo, heavy silence, and sound that we couldn't quite identify. I was sure we could translate this into productive knowledge to further evolve UCH in consideration of how the body absorbs, generates, and distributes sound.

It was also fascinating to see what sounds Jackie and Nik were each drawn to. Jackie was interested in digestive sounds—the gurgles that travelled through my digestive track that my vagina recorded—and Nik was interested in the sounds that various movements of my legs produced, some of which sounded like tires on a gravel road. Conducting this "record" research[16] was valuable to UCH as it further defined the formal and conceptual boundaries of the project. This session firmly established that UCH was not about looping sound back into the uterus or vagina by whatever means, and that this space reflects an audible interiority of the body which could be altered through the manipulation of body functions like hunger, eating, drinking carbonated and non-carbonated drinks, laughing, talking, and movement. Identifying these special effects was important as they informed how the Uterine Concert Hall encasing structure (my body) contributed to the shaping of sound input into it. In a sense these corporeal special effects are equivalent to the creaking floors, squeaky seats, furnace hums, fire alarms, and traffic

noise one might experience while attending a concert at a live venue. By doing these room tone vaginal recordings, we were able to get a clearer sense about how my body was managing, generating, muffling, and absorbing these external sounds in collaboration with the concert hall (vagina and uterus) yet within the enclosing structure (my body). We surmised that these room tone sounds would contribute to any sound played into my body via the Babypod speaker, and would ultimately reach the stethoscope listening audience. These recordings informed how the Babypod speaker distributes sound from my vagina through my flesh and allowed us more precision when approaching it in our second day of working together. These recordings also contributed to our understanding of the uterus as a space and the distance the flesh of the body contributes as a barrier to sound and its reception.

Intimate Karaoke

Before I talk about the second day of working with Jackie and Nik—in which we returned to UCH as a host for sound projected into my uterus via the Babypod—I need to address a major conceptual and formal shift in the work that I developed and considered in the two years since the last performance in order to attend to some of the limitations of the original configuration. Some of the things that I reflected on since the Monument-National performance were the audience's joy at hearing Björk and Beyoncé; how some audience members had put themselves in my blue suede rhinestone covered boots; how the death of Leonard Cohen shaped Jackie's DJ selection process; and how audiences were eager to discuss the influence of his music on them as well as Jamie Lee Curtis's role in the original *Halloween*, even though she was conjured solely by Jackie's sampling of the film's soundtrack. These examples helped me focus on using empathy, intimacy, familiarity with pop cultural references, and personal experience with specific media texts as methods of engagement to better future incarnations of UCH. Once I recognized that the work was not just inside, on the surface of, or in the representation of my body but also included the audience as active participants and not just witnesses and bystanders, the conceptual and physical location of the work shifted. This led me to think about ways to create a more meaningful level of engagement with and for the audience and where my body fit in terms of mediating this experience.

"Intimate karaoke" is the umbrella term for both the formal construction of the new performance and the affective methods of engagement I employed, which relied on intimacy, legibility, familiarity, and vulnerability. This resulted in a method of achieving empathy between audience members (and between audience members and myself) through collectivity and embodiment. Karaoke, as a method of engagement and embodiment, proved to address the problem of how I could better engage the audience in meaningful ways and to activate participation.

Karaoke

I use karaoke as a performance technology for its specific engagement with publics as a recognizable and accessible means for publics to play, participate, and be together. Invented by Daisuke Inoue[17] in Kobe Japan in 1969, "karaoke" (from "kara okesutura" which means "empty orchestra" in Japanese)[18] has become a most popular form of entertainment.[19] I use karaoke in the new formation of UCH for the opportunity it provides individual audience members to "sing [their] story" and "speak [their] voice" (Giddens 95). In "Singing Otherwise: Karaoke, Representation, and Practice" Stephen Royce Giddens defines "karaoke mythologizing" as an appropriative means of storytelling in which "karaoke itself acquires a story, a meaning" and "becomes a space from which to communicate…or a space in which to fantasize" (99). In other words, karaoke is a means to participate in and claim a narrative for the singing subject and is an opportunity for individuals to "try on" David Bowie's "Modern Love," Patsy Cline's "Crazy," or the Violent Femmes' "Add It Up" and personalize the narrative each song promotes. Further, Giddens talks about "bad" karaoke performances as political acts that disrupt our knowing of a specific song, which allows the singer to make their personal mark on that song and to "be different" (102). This democratic potential of karaoke interrupts the original version of the song and our memory of it to allow for new interpretations and comparisons with the original version.

I adapt karaoke as a process in the new formation of UCH to create new sites of vulnerability, intimacy, and empathy. This adaptation focuses on how sound is collected, masked, and redistributed, and on controlling who hears what elements and how they hear these elements. This variation of the performance is a reversal of the "complaint" that I focused on in earlier accounts of UCH where some audiences couldn't hear through the stethoscope. In the new work,

I double down on sound as a vital component that needs to be attended to with care in order for it to be heard. I redistribute hearing as a process and form of engagement, and refigure the "space" of my body, the locus of sound, and the community of listeners who participate in the piece. Karaoke functions as a particular process of shared performance between friends and strangers. As Rob Drew observes, "karaoke is not just a personal resource for defining and reinventing selves; it's also a social resource" (33). The new configuration of UCH uses karaoke to focus on the audience who must figure their relationship to other audience members throughout the performance as they enact and witness different roles. Rob Drew writes:

> A karaoke performer positions his audience as well as himself. Consciously or not, he speaks for them and makes a claim on them, offering a particular vision of their realities and possibilities. No less than any other song performance, a karaoke performance carries a normative force and sets a standard for community and contestation. To understand song performance as such challenges us to put aside our fetish for the original and acknowledge the social utility of already-made music. (33)

A karaoke singer speaks to and for their audience through their selection of music as well as their performance of the song. Singers and audience mirror each other, change places, and build community together. In the new version of UCH, this community is further shaped, formed, and connected by the distribution of the singer's voice to the different sites of the piece—the karaoke singing audience who is with the singer in one room and to the uterine listening audience who is with me in another room.

I configured "intimate karaoke" so that there are two audiences in two distinct physical locations: The first audience sees and hears other audience members sing karaoke, but without a musical backing track. The singer, on the other hand, hears the full volume of the musical track through headphones (played via the Internet off of a computer). The singer can also hear the full volume of their voice through a microphone that they're singing into connected to an audio mixing board. This audio mixing board had a reverb effect on it, similar to reverb effects used in karaoke bars and clubs. This mix is not piped through a sound system. No one else in the room where the karaoke singer is singing can hear the musical track or the reverb; they hear only the voice of the singer without music or effect. The singer is thus "singing alone" without amplification. They are performing in a theatre or performance venue without the tools associated

with it and are faced with whether or not they can carry their voice in this physical space and to the conceptual (and corporeal) space of my uterus housed in my body in another room. The second audience is the uterus listeners who hear this mixed soundtrack through my body via stethoscope. We are in a separate room far from the karaoke singing audience. The karaoke singer's vocal and musical backing tracks are seemingly mixed in my body for this audience. In this new configuration, there are few witnesses to these listeners listening. I am able to intimately "host" this audience to my body and to the concert hall within it.

Because people are familiar with how karaoke works, minimal instructions are required. By swapping out a significant process of karaoke in the new version of UCH, namely not having the singer's chosen music played for the gathered audience, I was able to direct everyone's attention to the grain of the voice. By taking out the music and isolating the voice of the karaoke singer for the audience, I emphasized and exposed the singer's vulnerability. This staging mirrors the rest of the audience's vulnerability back to them because the singer is them—they are all each asked within the work to sing (with right of refusal) in exchange for my vulnerability which is staged in another room. Within the karaoke room, the audience is confronted with what is expected of them as performed by the singer: to expose their vulnerability with strangers as witnesses. This generated empathy through intersubjectivity as audiences saw themselves in each singer. I discuss this further in the next chapter as it relates to affective circuitry and intimacy.

Sound Quality and Volume: PLAYBACK

The second day with Jackie and Nik proved to be as equally productive as the first. After discussing with them the new direction that I wanted UCH to take in using intimate karaoke as a means of audience engagement, we focused on the technical needs of this new set up in which the audience would be the sound input using karaoke. Out of this investigation too came ways to make the sound emitting from my body more legibly audible and to establish the material conditions required to successfully perform this piece including assistant labour needs and roles.

No Jacket Required

As previously discussed, I wanted to address some audience members' complaints about not being able to hear the sound clearly through the stethoscope because this complaint was

overshadowing the "success" of the work and my experience of it. Audiophiles (including my collaborators) were fixated on my delivering clear, audible sound. Because of this feedback and because of the repetition of the audience complaints, this became a failure *of* the performance rather than a failure made present *by* the performance. I knew that I had to engage the audience more meaningfully in the work before they could experience deep listening. To do this I would need to increase the volume so that they wouldn't bypass my body (in some cases forgetting about my body entirely) in search of sound located *in my body*. It seemed that in order to achieve a critique of cisheteropatriarchy and bioessentialist reproductive futurism, I would first need to have my body heard and renovate my uterus into a suitable concert hall.

Figure 25: Dayna McLeod, *Babypod Undone*, 2018; © Dayna McLeod.

As discussed in the previous chapter, I had been using condoms as a force of habit, coming out of my own queerness in the 1990s when encountering silicone and plastic sex toys, and based on the instructions for use by Babypod. Jackie convinced me to test the sound levels with and without a condom before I inserted it into my body and I complied. With the Babypod set on the table and outside of my body, volume testing proved to be at least four times louder than with a condom. The difference was remarkable and confirmed that in order for this project to

proceed, I would need to stop using condoms. The volume was still not Dolby Surround Sound™ because of the stethoscope, but it was substantially louder. We continued with tests with the Babypod in its performance position (my vagina) and were very happy to hear the difference. This embrace of bare-backing the Babypod addressed my concerns with how to make my body louder and more audibly legible to the audience through the stethoscope. Jackie, Nik, and I were satisfied with the significant increase in volume with the piece and the changes we had made to the work. Similar to the record session, in playback we experimented with other sound inputs to see if I could generate noises with my body to complement the karaoke soundtrack coming through my flesh. Examples included my not eating lunch, drinking water or Coke, talking, laughing, and pressing on my abdomen and other parts of my body as ways to generate a very personalized version of special effects. Learning to manipulate my body in these ways informed how I would perform the work in subsequent iterations. With all of this new information gathered and incorporated into the piece, we were ready to look at other aspects of the work to further improve it. This included evaluating existing material conditions like the physical space, the karaoke setup, and assistant roles as well as addressing ways to improve audience engagement. How could the audience be further implicated and activated in the work? Did the karaoke singer and I need to see each other as they sang? Did they need to be in the same room as me?

DJ Shadow and the Host with the Most

The shift from having Jackie and Nik DJ into my uterus as sound input for (passive) audiences to using karaoke to activate audiences is a radical but necessary one. These structural and conceptual shifts reflect my dissertation research questions in terms of mapping what effects a gendered, middle-ageing, queer body provokes, enacts, and personifies, and ultimately how this body is at stake in cisheteropatriarchy. These changes also address shifts in performance and performativity, materiality, practice, collaboration, and modes of exchange and reception. Having the audience contribute content through their singing as input mobilizes them as accountable, responsible, and active participants and collaborators in the performance. These revisions do this by implicating the audience more fully through intimate karaoke as a method and as a means of exchanging vulnerability, intimacy, and empathy with my body specifically as a performing subject and by inviting them to be performing subjects themselves. This active engagement and new configuration more clearly shape my body as a non-reproductive site of art production and

concert hall through the voluntary yet necessary involvement of the audience as active karaoke singers. Through this participation, my performance and enactment of a middle-ageing queer female body is clarified, as are critiques of cisheteropatriarchy and reproductive futurism. By having the audience sing karaoke into me, they are contributing to the shaping and potentiality of my uterus as concert hall and to reproductive critique by penetrating me with the sound of their voices for the pleasure of other listeners and myself.

Although the volume of the sound was much louder in this configuration, we established that—for an audience to listen through my body and hear this sound—we needed not just quiet but silence. This meant an enclosed space for my body and the stethoscope listener, and a significant distance from the karaoke singer. At Studio XX, I was set up in a small room with a door that had a window in it that proved to be perfect. We experimented with Jackie as singer looking at me through the glass. This configuration, however, was problematic for several reasons: Firstly, I could hear her singing through the door and this competed with what I was hearing through the stethoscope. Secondly, seeing each other while she sang did not add meaning to the work; if anything, it was distracting for both of us as she had to look at the lyrics that were on the computer monitor, and I had to engage with the stethoscope listener (Nik). We determined that this precarious eye contact did not resolve my concerns regarding audience engagement (activating and engaging it more thoroughly) beyond distraction and her close singing competed with what we heard through the stethoscope. I also returned to the core concept of this work that asks the audience to imagine the uterus as a concert hall. If any visual should be manifest in the singer's mind while they are reading karaoke lyrics it should be this potentiality.

In the two years since the previous iterations of UCH, I have continued to think about the potentiality of the uterus and vagina as sites, and relating this potentiality aurally to the audience. As previously discussed, the potentiality of the uterus as physical space and site was a formative conceptual goal for the performance to communicate. Because some stethoscope listeners were not able to hear sound in earlier iterations, this potentiality "failed" and my specific non-reproductive uterus seemed to continue a legacy of failing middle-ageing queer bodies and failed art projects. When Jackie, Nik, and I were able to raise the volume to audible levels in our testing, this reignited my hope in sharing the potentiality of the uterus as a concert hall through

sound. I was still adamant to not provide visuals or representations of this interiority but to have this space shaped by sound and realized in the minds of the listening audience. I was also still critical of the invasiveness of the Babypod as a means to help pregnant parents make "smart babies" and with the Babypod makers' conversion of a fetus into a full-fledged citizen who can contribute to society, when I as a queer am valued as a non-(re)productive failure under cisheteropatriarchy. As previously discussed, working with the Babypod continues my interest in retooling and appropriating technological apparatuses, appendages, and interferences in and through which the female body is regulated. I was still insistent on using the Babypod to queer it: to reform my failure as a non-reproductive middle-ageing queer through its use and renovation of my uterus as a productive site as concert hall. Inputting sound into the uterus over monitoring it with sound as other medical surveillance technologies do, seemed generative to me as did focusing on the aural over the visual to situate the potentiality of the uterus as site in the minds of the audience.

Although there are other medical aural and imaging technologies that are also very much part of reproductive futurism, I was not so much interested in these monitoring devices as I was in the Babypod itself for its incessant role in claiming authoritative and active participation in and collaboration with gestation. The Babypod is not a monitoring device in the sense that it can record or document the happenings inside of a uterus or vagina like ultrasound technologies (that translate sound into an image). However, its function as a vaginal speaker that promises to unite "mothers and babies…by music before birth" insinuates itself into the pregnant body as a stimulating activating agent necessary to fetal production (Babypod). I was interested in co-opting this activating and stimulating function for my queer uterus through the use of sound and keeping this aural transaction: to pass sound emitting from the Babypod on the stage of my vagina for the audience of my uterus through my body to a stethoscope listening audience. Keeping the sound *as sound* and not translating, converting, or otherwise transcribing it visually was important for the very reason that sound is a particular configuration of representation that is different from vision. My thinking was that through sound, the potentiality of the uterus as concert hall could be further imagined by the audience and that the circuit loop of representation would start for the stethoscope listener as they listened, and that any desire to locate a visual representation would rest with them and the limits of their imagination.

Making Contact

Having the karaoke singer in the same room as me would distract the other stethoscope listener from imagining the concert hall housed in my uterus as well as vocally compete with any sound coming out of the stethoscope headset. We moved the karaoke station and the singer (Jackie) outside of Studio XX into the hallway, as far as the cables would allow us to go in order to put as much aural distance as possible between us. This also proved to be important for sound legibility as well as sound believability. With Jackie singing in the hallway with two sets of doors closed and about fifteen feet between us, Nik and I could hear Jackie through the stethoscope without sound leakage. This isolation would prove to be necessary in future performances of the work as audiences sometimes doubted what they were hearing through the stethoscope, some of whom actually removed the stethoscope headset to see if they could hear the karaoke source coming from somewhere else as though hearing the sound through my body was an impossible proposition.

The karaoke setup included a computer with reliable Internet access, an audio mixer with reverb effects, a microphone and stand, over the ear headphones, a video projector, and corresponding cables, dongles, and extensions for all of this gear. We found that the headphones needed to have as long a cable as the microphone to reach the mixer and allow the singer to move freely in the designated karaoke area without feeling restricted or tied to the mixer. We also needed both microphone and headphone cables to be long enough so that no one would trip over them and bring the entire set up down. The microphone was positioned on a stand with the headphones balanced on top facing the karaoke projection. This, in combination with the video projection, marked the karaoke performance space. This positioning also ensured that the singer's back would be to other audience members. Large projections of the lyrics activated the space and reinforced karaoke as the focal point for audience members who weren't singing. The over the ear headphones helped isolate the singer by blocking out ambient noise allowing for less distraction as they sang which was amplified because they had their backs to the audience. I will talk more about the importance of this set up in the next chapter and how it impacted audiences when I performed this piece in Saratoga Springs and Toronto. What drove these shifts in the installation was to isolate the karaoke audience-member-now-performer and provide as much structural comfort and support to them as possible.

I Get By With a Little Help

While working with Jackie and Nik, we determined that I would need a dedicated karaoke technician, an attendant for the outside space to monitor the lineup and offer directions to the audience, and ideally, a runner or go-between to oversee the piece since I was essentially incapacitated as a helper to the work parked on the table with the Babypod. Recognizing whether or not I need help is important in performance-based work as is defining what their tasks are so that assistants know exactly what is expected of them and what they are in for. Having competent helpers to rely on is good for my own peace of mind and ultimately the successful presentation of the work. A few weeks after my time with Nik and Jackie, I conducted an afternoon test run of the work in which I hired two former undergraduate students as my assistants. This was not only an excellent opportunity for a proof of concept of the work, but also an opportunity to determine and evolve the assistant roles. Before they arrived, I broke down all of the tasks that they would each need to perform: how the equipment worked, what karaoke search terms and tools provided the best results, how to greet guests, when to check in or interrupt the stethoscope listener, and generally how to perform not performing. These assistants did an excellent job.[20] They also provided valuable observations and feedback on the session itself, which featured four people who had responded to a limited email I sent out to shy friends, acquaintances, and colleagues.

I purposefully did not invite performer friends because I was interested in testing the work with a small sampling of people who were not performers and who had not experienced the work before. It was made clear to invitees what the work was, and that I was hoping for some karaoke input, but that was not required. I also made it clear that I was testing the newest form of the performance and was hoping for feedback. Four people arrived, three of whom I knew. The foursome had come in pairs who did not know each other, and within each pair there was one person who stated from the start that they would sing and another person who was adamantly against singing, and who said they would only listen. Once the singer from each pair sang and their listeners had experienced the singing, these non-singers quickly volunteered to sing too. This was an outcome that I had anticipated and proved that my methods of audience engagement were working. My theory was that if a non-singer experiences the work as a listener, both to someone singing karaoke without headphones and demonstrating vulnerability in doing so and listening to another singer through the stethoscope and my body, that this would elicit empathy

118

and contribute to a kind of community building that would encourage them to in turn showcase their vulnerability by singing, despite the small audience that made up the community in this particular case.

There were also several unexpected outcomes that resulted from this testing. The first was that people sang to the person they came with through me. I had not considered this connection before, and this contributed another level of intimacy to the work. This emphasized the potentiality of intimacy between audiences that already knew each other that was mediated by my body, which I ensured to capitalize on in subsequent presentations of the work. Another unexpected outcome was that because there were only four guests and each pair featured one singer and one listener, the singer's listener stayed with me for the entire song which ranged from four to five minutes each. This proved to be an incredibly long time and emphasized a different kind of intimacy, listening, and sociality that I had not experienced with the work previously. The length of time I spent with each listener was longer than the thirty to sixty seconds that were afforded to audience members in previous performances because of the demands and pressure of the lineups and getting as many people as possible through to me. This affective labour is something that I have glossed over in the past but is so essential to my practice. Part of effective affective labour is maintaining its invisibility and not asking for it to be recognized. These are the tasks of the host and are what I tried to perfect during each of these excruciating four- to five-minute sets.

Having four minutes with someone who is listening with a stethoscope to my body that houses a speaker that carries the voice of someone else singing mixed with a musical track is care. Because of this duration, I had more time than usual to ensure that I was hosting them *enough*: are they engaged with the sound; do I need to talk and what do I say; do I engage my special effects (Coke or water drinking) or is that too gimmicky for this particular listener; do I ask them about the song we are listening to; if they know the singer, do I ask about their relationship; if they sang, do I ask them about their experience? I was occupying and performing multiple host roles at once. I was the host to the venue as a talking subject; I *was the venue* with my body hosting; my uterus was a host to sound and to the audience who listened; and we all (me, my body, and my uterus) hosted the voice of the karaoke singer who contributed to the

119

shaping of uterine space as concert hall. The location of these shifting roles and dynamics similarly shifted how care could potentially be enacted, performed, transmitted, and realized in future performances. While wary of reproductive futurism's bioessentialist influence on potential readings of these different modalities of hosting and its traditionally gendered assignment to female-ness, my experience in this testing was that with the help of the karaoke singer and stethoscope listener, we were enacting a queer sociality around the uterus that was not centered on reproductive or essentialist functions of the female body, but creating care and enacting circuits of queer sociality.

This duration also revealed to me the extent to which I "host" the work beyond the body and how I perform care through embodiment. My practice engages with queer sociality as a method of care through exchange, support, and feedback. I lean on my community not just when I am making work but in everyday life and they do the same with me. How I host a show—whether it is inside of my body or on a cabaret stage—is affective labour that is steeped in care to ultimately put my audience at ease and make meaningful connections with them. Inherited surely from my mother, how I host a party, a show, or guests to my home means ensuring that everyone has what they need. Depending on the context and location this could require providing a drink, a snack, a song, a story, a sweater, a laugh, or whatever else is wanted. In the new iteration of UCH, I employ hosting as a means of care to signal and enact it to have it mirrored through the audience. By this I mean that care should take the form of queer sociality, that it should be contagious between the audience and myself, and between audience members. I will *take care* of stethoscope listeners by serving them sound through my body. These listeners will in turn *take care* of me by listening deeply and respecting the vulnerable position I am putting myself in for them. I will *take care* of the karaoke singer by providing them with structural elements to ease their vulnerability (their backs to the audience, headphones to isolate their voice, reverb to "improve" their voice and give them confidence). The karaoke singer will *take care* of me by singing for and into me, and generously donate their voice to *Uterine Concert Hall* to help shape it as a space for stethoscope listeners. The karaoke audience will also *take care* of the karaoke singer by singing along, cheering when required, offering words of encouragement, listening carefully, and otherwise affectively supporting their karaoke comrades. I use queer sociality in this performance as a method of engagement not simply as a surface affect but one that circulates

intimacies, vulnerabilities, and empathies through consent. These affective modes of circulation as well as their formal construction are discussed in the next chapter.

The work that I conducted in the Studio XX residency was fundamental in reconfiguring UCH. By using performance- and material-based methods I was able to gain insightful knowledge about the formal construction of the piece as well as evolve conceptual frameworks that were highlighted by these material conditions. My ongoing commitment to the critique of cisheteropatriarchy helped shape the new direction of UCH. I was able to problem-solve conceptual problems formally, materially, and aesthetically. I made key discoveries about sound volume, frequency, quality, and legibility through condom latex and layers of flesh; how sound moves through the body from and to the vagina as broadcaster and recorder; karaoke as a democratic and familiar means to engage audiences; intimate karaoke as an activating method for audiences that has the potential to redistribute vulnerability to various participants in the performance; and reconfiguring the spatial layout and mise-en-scène that enables me to shift relational dynamics within the piece. None of this would have been possible using non-practice-based methods. This process-based research and work is integral to research-creation as a mode of doing. These outcomes culminate in the reconstructed performance now titled, *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall*.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTIMATE KARAOKE: LIVE AT UTERINE CONCERT HALL

Figure 26: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall*, **Tang Teaching Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York, 2018. With a stethoscope listener. Photograph courtesy of MDOC Storytellers' Institute.**

Feelings, Nothing More Than Feelings

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed examines "how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies," to show how the personal and the public (and the individual and the social) "take shape through each other, or even how they shape each other" (1, 14). This insight is central to my reworking of UCH through "intimate karaoke" as it addresses the circulatory dynamic of affect and its role in shaping collective bodies. In *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall* (IK-UCH) intimate karaoke is about the redistribution of affect and its circulation (in and through sound) to all who participate in the performance. Rather than enacting a binary performer-audience relationship in which the performer bears the weight of the performance and "delivers" sound to an audience who "receives" it, I stage a multiplicity

of bodies through a series of circulatory affect. I shape the experience of IK-UCH for the audience *with* the audience and build on our preconceived notions about what middle-ageing queer bodies marked female can do, are asked and demanded to do, and refuse to do in regards to reproductive futurism under cisheteropatriarchy. This circuitry engages with these affective dynamics collectively through the very structure of the performance.

The performance takes shape through my (the performer's) and the audience's active engagement and participation, as well as through our individual and collective affective labour of care, vulnerability, and empathy. This chapter charts and details this process with an attention to circuitry in IK-UCH and to how affectively mobile emotions can, as Sara Ahmed observes, "move between bodies" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 10). The circulation that I map in the performance is two-fold: representing the affective circuitry of care, empathy, and engagement between audience members and between myself and audience members, as well as the formal circuitry of the piece that stages a sound loop for audiences to move physically between sites within the performance (karaoke party space and the interiority of my body in the examination space) where the audience attends (or not) to corresponding activities (karaoke singing, karaoke witnessing, stethoscope listening).

This chapter maps these outcomes by citing two presentations of IK-UCH, one at the Tang Teaching Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York, in June 2018, and at the Theatre Centre for the SummerWorks Festival in Toronto in August 2018. These performances applied the thinking, testing, and performance-based research explored at the Studio XX residency that were detailed in the previous chapter. I answer and further elaborate on questions I entered the residency with by presenting knowledge and outcomes that emerged as a result of using performance- and material-based methods. I make methodological and theoretical observations about how I staged circulating knowledge and created empathy through its solicitation by engaging the audience. I address formal and conceptual concerns with the work and further describe the machinations of intimate karaoke as a method for generating embodied knowledge.

Time After Time

The uterus is a body clock. It keeps the time of a specific body's menstrual cycle from month to month and throughout the life course of the subject. I use this clock to mark when

Uterine Concert Hall is open. The venue is closed for five to six days a month. But for how long? This project will reach its full productive potential when it isn't burdened by menstruation. Arguably, as soon as I stop having my period, Uterine Concert Hall could be open all of the time and my middle-ageing queer body could be a productive and viable site for late-stage capitalism. Reframed in this way middle-ageing womanliness and queerness no longer fail but thrive.

IK-UCH as a performance is also a time clock based on circularity. This circuit is a subtle metaphor for the menstrual cycle. At different intervals it makes time palpable. There is the time of anticipation, the time of waiting, the time to sing karaoke, the time it takes to listen, and the pressure of knowing that there's someone behind you waiting for your time to finish. The time-based dynamics of the performance are related to the menstrual cycle in that there are different stations within the work that audiences visit and experience throughout its duration and repeat. First, the audience enters the theatre. Much like gaining (just a little bit of) knowledge about menstruation one might experience as a pre-pubescent child from health class, talks with a menstruating role model, or savvy knowledge picked up on the playground, the audience is given hints about what is to come in the performance. Audiences are paraded past me as I am splayed out on the table with a stethoscope listener already in place. This foreshadowing also takes the form of an introduction by an attendant in the karaoke space once the audience is congregated. Pre-show promotional materials (project descriptions on a website or in a pamphlet and press coverage) may also hint at what is to come.

Figure 27: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall*, **SummerWorks Theatre Festival, The Theatre Centre, Toronto, 2018. Audiences pass through the lobby. Photograph courtesy of Henry Chan, SummerWorks Festival c/o FADO Performance Art Centre.**

The second stop on the IK-UCH menstruation metaphor tour is to settle into the karaoke party as an audience member and acclimatize oneself to the space and how it works. If the audience follows the directions of the performance, the third stop is to sing karaoke with the isolating headphones on. This results in singing acappella for the karaoke audience, which also results in a final mixed track sent into the next room and into my body where the Babypod is staged in my vagina. The fourth stop is to visit this next room. Listening to a mix of a song that they cannot witness live but can experience live through my body, this fourth stop is the metaphorical period of the performance. After the stethoscope listener visits me, they are flushed out of this fourth station and sent back into the karaoke party to participate in the cycle all over again. As second time experienced audience members with knowledge of the work and its machinations, these audience members become the knowledge keepers who are like the health class teachers, menstruators, and playground experts who tell pre-menstrutors all about what to expect.

In IK-UCH, sound assembles through my body in a circulatory way and connects to the circuitry of the audience and its movements. Tracing how sound moves in this piece maps these connections: the karaoke singer's voice "travels" to my body through microphone, audio mixer, cable, and Babypod where it meets and mixes with the musical backing track. This mixture permeates my flesh to be heard by stethoscope listeners and myself with bodily special effects peppering the score. Meanwhile, the audience who witnesses the karaoke performance as acappella hears the karaoke singer's voice directly. These sounds circulate through the performance, my body, and the bodies of audience members in a penetrative but non-reproductive way. As Freya Jarman-Ivens discusses in *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*, the singer (or speaker) and the listener are connected through the voice of the singer, which "links two bodies together; it is of my body but it must penetrate yours to be heard, and thus to happen at all, since it is in the hearing that it properly exists" (2). Further Jarman-Ivens presents "two ways of reading the voice as a queer phenomenon: that it functions in a 'third space' in between the voicer and the listener; and that it operates as a mediator between body and language, which are gendered spaces" (13). As a designated destination for sound, my body locates a queering of the karaoke singer's voice as it leaves their body and enters all of the bodies that hear it directly and indirectly (3). This queer circulation of sound inhabits the cycle of

the artwork and its stations and the metaphorical menstrual cycle differently in that it stages the middle-ageing queer uterus as a non-reproductive yet productive site. The labours of the audience and the performer are powered by circulatory affect and the redistribution of sound.

The circuit of IK-UCH allows for reflection for both the stethoscope listener and the singer. The singer has gone through the rigmarole of exposing themselves to an audience with their amateur acapella and public presentation of performance anxiety, shyness, stress, and or pleasure. In both the Saratoga Springs and Toronto presentations of IK-UCH my observations of this singer when they arrived to me as the listening station is that they were relieved, happy, and joyful, and that they were "open" to whatever happened next. They were the ideal listener to my body because they had been generous in sharing their vulnerability through singing acapella karaoke. They arrived focused and ready to listen. Stethoscope listeners who listened first (and who were adamant that they would not sing) seemed to approach me tentatively. Once they heard a singer through me, a change occurred in their response to the sound as though it was magic. Some of these listeners converted to singers through the communion of deep listening. This active engagement is what I had wanted for previous iterations but rarely achieved. This intimacy provided contact between the listener, singer, and I. Once they heard the singer's voice they seemed to recognize the structure of the performance—my body as sonic delivery system and their multiple roles in the work as karaoke singer, stethoscope listener, and bystander witness to other karaoke singers.

These different modes of sound production and reception come together in my uterus as concert hall for the stethoscope listening audience and it is in this coming together that the audience is also brought inside of my body. The promise of sound comes with a bonus track: the karaoke singer is heard with musical accompaniment and the special effects my body provides. Sound completes itself at the site of my uterus and this was what I wanted audiences to experience in the performance. My non-reproductive middle-ageing queer body is rendered productive and magical as it hosts sound and seems to create it. Through deep listening, stethoscope listening audiences hear the finished track. This completes the circuit of sound and acknowledges my body as the site of its production. My middle-ageing queer body is redeemed through the renovation of my uterus as a concert hall.

Close to You

"Intimacy" is a key term that resonates in different ways throughout the new configuration and presentation of the performance. My engagement with intimacy is influenced by Sara Ahmed's understanding of how "emotions circulate between bodies" and stick to these bodies to help shape and form them, as well as our impressions of these bodies and each other (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 4). Affect theory provides an important lens for understanding how performance spaces channel particular intensities and intimacies between bodies and how they create sites of identification and belonging. Intimacy here accounts for closeness, familiarity, togetherness, comradery, affection, and understanding. It also refers to the intimacy of spaces—the coziness of a small venue that creates atmosphere for those in attendance.[1] In IK-UCH there is also of course an allusion to sexual intimacy—to carnal knowledge of the body. Intimacy is central to my thinking about queerness and the middle-ageing body beyond the specificity of my own body in the broader space and place of the performance where different kinds of affect circulate in and through my body. The circulation of emotions between bodies, along the surface of bodies, and through bodies (penetrated by sound) creates new forms of collective belonging (and unbelonging). Physical, emotional, and cerebral intimacies that audience members share with each other and with me contribute to how intimacies are distributed across the whole of this performance. A light touch (physical), feeling or having affinity with a particular song (emotional), or thinking through the circuitry that feeds through my body and what this means (cerebral) circulate through the performance and are passed between bodies within the performance.

The circulation of affect helps arrange the different zones of intimacy and intensity in the new formation of the piece. Sound acts as the intimate affective apparatus that navigates my body, the connections between my body and the audience, and between audience members. Affect theory is often focused on ethics, aesthetics, "the body," and on intensities where the self and the other experience each other. I am interested in relational subjectivity and how—as Ahmed observes—we act on emotions as well as how the focus on surface relates to theorizations of the body, as the body becomes a projection of the surface. I am also attentive to Ahmed's interest in what emotions do to create significant objects and others. She explains how emotions are not just individual to one person but extended to larger materials, practices, and work from

the outside inward instead of inside outward. Ahmed's key intervention is this emergence of emotions from the inside out that "create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place" (10). This contributes to the shaping of community as emotions are passed between bodies and help form impressions about others, objects, and experiences.

I am interested in Ahmed's understanding of emotion as a mode of world making and community building. Through the repetition of this collective experience and passing of emotion from person to person an accumulative affective value can be built together. This is how IK-UCH can "[make] an impression," "create an impression," leave an impression" and otherwise *press upon* the audience (6-8). The audience's participation in the performance builds empathy through collective engagement, intimacy, witnessing, and vulnerability. My intention in the performance is to bond the audience together and create a temporary community through the intimacies they experience by having vulnerability shared and distributed across the work by way of an invitation to participate in the performance and to co-create it with me and with each other. This is a political act of intimacy that engages with practiced modes of queer sociality. It is an offering that uses consent as a model of participation. Intimacy is not necessarily a progress narrative in this work that leads towards a relationship, but it can be. Intimacies here are relational contracts of trust that negotiate boundaries. People share what they are able to based on their own limits, experience, and personal barriers. Everyone has an unconditional right of refusal to participate.

In IK-UCH, distances have the potential to collapse in these intimacies through sound—the physical distance between spaces; the affective distance between audience and performer and audience member to audience member; and the conceptual distance of contemplating the uterus as concert hall. There is also a structural "quietness" that is engaged in these intimacies—the soft singing of some karaoke singers, a careful listening that hears this singer directly, an attentive listening that hears this singer through the stethoscope and my body, and a cautious approach to my body in recognition that it carries and distributes sound. These (sometimes-elastic) distances help shape and personalize intimacies for all of the participants.

There are multiple sites of intimacy in the new arrangement of IK-UCH. One is the "intimate" audience of my uterus. Stethoscope listeners can hear both the karaoke singer and the musical track mixed through my body. My body is the site of sound transmission and I am a co-listener. The second stethoscope audience sacrifices the live karaoke performance in the party room in order to listen for the sound that is mixed to include the vocals and musical accompaniment, a mix that can only be heard by the audience through my body. Because of the locality of this sound mix, it is as though my body does the sound mixing—that my body brings these sounds together to deliver to the audience. Another aspect of distance in IK-UCH is that no one can see, hear, or experience the entirety of the piece at one time, not even me as the artist. Audiences need to make choices about what elements to experience and which to separate themselves from. Separation involves an experiential cost: audiences trade in one type of listening experience for another. Likewise, they trade a singing experience for these different types of listening experiences. They may also opt out of these experiences and act as bystanders to other participants' exchanges of intimacies and demonstrations of vulnerability.

Karaoke allows me to create particular sites of affective intensity and distribute affect differently through the piece for the audience. I use the familiar structure of karaoke as a means to circulate the audience through various affective states of vulnerability and empathy while they physically circulate through the piece to visit the various stations of the work. Aural sensations that resonate through my body that I felt strongly in earlier iterations of UCH are redistributed to and from my body differently in the new work. They are shared through the spaces of IK-UCH, and captured by audience members as they witness others sing karaoke, sing karaoke themselves, and listen to the final mix of vocals and backing track through my body. Karaoke is a familiar and engaging tool that not only solicits participation but also affectively prepares the audience to submit their vulnerability to the rest of the audience and in turn, to me in order to complete the circuitry of the piece. This creates a new location of affective intensity that also becomes a stop on the circuit within the work, which relies on the machinations of karaoke with the ever so small detail of stripping bare the voice of all effect and backing soundtrack.

Vulnerability

I am physically vulnerable in this performance as I am explicitly wired into and publicly penetrated with sound for the audience. This staging amplifies my vulnerability as a middle-ageing queer woman as it also physically stages what this configuration means. There is an emphasis and evaluation put on my appearance (see cisheteropatriarchy's "Standards for Beauty" manual), my functionality as a middle-ageing queer female body which has aged (and queered) out of reproductive futurism, and as an artist and art object who are both demonstrating a non-sexual yet sexualized queer infiltration of a sound technology that is literally entering my body. This explicit vulnerability is also set against the backdrop of art consumption economies where "the body [is] rendered consumptive in representation" (Schneider 52). What I give to the performance through my vulnerability is the opportunity for the audience to respond to it. I had assumed in the first iterations that this response would be entirely positive. As I have discussed at length, it was not. This wrongful assumption made the rejection, non-acknowledgement, and indifference to my vulnerability particularly hard to take because I was not just the site of the work I was the work. My focus on the few bad responses too (as reflected in Chapter Two, which was dedicated almost entirely to the interpellation of failure) indicated to me just how much I needed to satisfy the majority of the audience—I wanted to connect with all of the people all of the time, not just some of the people some of the time.

Because this connection wasn't being made as much as I wanted in the first two iterations of the piece that were performed in "safe spaces" of performance art and feminist academic conference entertainment contexts, I had to think of a way to ask the audience to be as vulnerable as me, or in an equally vulnerable position. Intimate karaoke was the result. Audiences are essentially tasked with singing acapella in front of strangers in a performance setting. If the audience member is not a performer or a singer or if they don't engage in this type of performativity on a regular basis, there is a level of vulnerability that they are sharing. If the social contract of early iterations of UCH was broken by people's frustration and hostility, these were the new terms of *Uterine Concert Hall*. I would offer my body as medium for sound and examination, but audiences would be asked to show a little bit of their vulnerability by singing acapella publicly in order to access my vulnerability. This exchange keeps participating audience

130

members present and focused on their performance, which affects how they approach me afterwards when they listen to someone else sing karaoke through me. The experience of singing orients the audience to the work through their own embodiment. Intimate karaoke helps the audience see me as a person rather than as a static object that can be poked and prodded for sound. Critiquing this object status is what I intended the first iterations to do. However, the demands of the audience on my body and on the sound quality of the project transformed my body into a failing object, and this is why I searched for a solution to this problem.

Empathy

The first two iterations of the work demonstrated to me that some audiences were willing and able to engage with the work and its conceptual proposition of my uterus as a concert hall. What these iterations also demonstrated to me was the importance of not only recognizing their subjectivity, but also engaging with it to generate meaningful experience for the audience and myself. I identified empathy as a means to do this and focused on performance-based methods of embodiment for the audience to achieve this and cultivate care. The goal with this method is for the audience to not only have empathy for me but to have it for each other. Here, empathy emerges out of a shared vulnerability and a witnessing of this vulnerability. Staging vulnerability is a key element of thinking the performance of queerness and ageing, and is tied to this vulnerability in our expectations of bodies marked female, their capacities, and limits. Questions of vulnerability and empathy are important in creating a shared space through the work. I position the audience in a (familiar) position of doctor in relation to my body to conjure their past experience as examined subject. Will they have empathy for me as they examine my body for sound? How/will their empathy interact with my vulnerable state? My embodied performance is intended to demonstrate vulnerability as a corporeal mediator of sound. I engage with explicit body practices to further situate this vulnerability and through direct contact with the audience. Further, I create the potential for empathy between audience members as they witness each other sing acapella in a public setting. In this way, I decentre my body physically but centre it sonically. This reconfiguration of performing subject also reconfigures the scene of the performance.

131

I have used similar methods of engagement, care, and audience attentiveness in previous works, notably *Come Shred My Heart*, *Monarchy Mama*, and my re-performance of Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* at the end of *Cougar for a Year*. In these works, audience participation was key, as without it the artworks would not have functioned. In my version of *Cut Piece*, I placed myself in the scissor-wielding hands of my audience who were tasked with cutting off of my clothes. Because this work requires little to no instruction[2] or active engagement on the part of the performer, I did not provide the hosting care some members of the audience were used to or expected from me. This flipped the dynamic of care while still marking it as an essential component of the work. The audience had to decide when to cut, how much to cut, and whether or not they would cut my clothes off and participate in my literal exposure. With a street level window framing the platform on which I sat, protecting and negotiating my naked vulnerability became part of this task. IK-UCH engages the audience with care and attentiveness in similar yet different ways. Although I am more animated in IK-UCH and take advantage of familiar hosting conventions than my non-animation in *Cut Piece*, My vulnerable position in IK-UCH is not because of my potential nakedness, but because I present myself as a publicly penetrated subject with sound via the Babypod. Care is given by audience members in recognition of this vulnerability and is reciprocated through my providing sound through my body as a welcoming host to the performance. Without audience participation, IK-UCH will not function: if no one sings, the concert hall doesn't work.

The proposition of intimate karaoke sets the audience up to create their own system of empathy in this performance. How will they manage the piece together? Who will volunteer to sing? How will the rest of the audience respond to each singer? How does having a "bad" voice negotiate empathy? These were key questions that contributed to my thinking through the development of the work.

There are two important connections made in the karaoke party space: the connection from the singer to my uterus (and body), which are in another room, and the connection that the singer makes with the rest of the karaoke audience, which is kept active through the singer's vulnerability. Intimate karaoke provokes empathy through the isolation of the singer's vocal track for the audience as well as through the singer's back-facing performance of the song. The

audience members become active bystanders who need to make decisions together on how to manage and respond to vulnerability—their own and other audience members—as they witness and experience it. This also contributes to the isolation provided by the headphones and aided by the singer facing the karaoke lyrics with their back to the audience. This further isolates their experience and gives them more confidence to sing since there is no one watching their face or catching their eye. There is of course the knowledge that people are watching them from behind, but that tension seems to encourage empathy, because the singer has experienced the work as an audience member, and vice versa.

Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before

One of the main issues I identified in the performance and needed to improve was the sound volume. What I came to realize and recognize was that it was not simply audibility through my body and the stethoscope that was a problem but legibility. People were not able to recognize, comprehend, or understand the sound that was being played for them. Additionally, the legibility of the performance itself, my body's role in the performance, and the audience's role in relation to the staging of my uterus as a concert hall were not clear. The new formation of the work would emphasize the role my body played in the performance and the audience's connection and contribution to it. Audiences would generate content for the site of my uterus as concert hall which would make legible these roles, connections, and circulations.

In the Darling Foundry and Monument-National iterations, Jackie and Nik as DJs played music for me, my uterus, and other stethoscope listeners. These were the sites of deep listening. What seemed to fail here was the audience's expectations that my body would literally deliver like a concert hall—that my body was malleable, cavernous, open and easily accessible. If we look at Nik's set specifically in the first iteration at the Darling Foundry—the start of which featured obscure bass-intensive soundscapes which may have been difficult to decipher and read in an installation or environment not housed inside of my body—we can observe that this was made even more challenging to a listener because sound was projected through my body. I had also not prepared the audience to listen deeply.[3] This part of Nik's Darling Foundry was lost on some listeners because they could not hear the frequency, and they couldn't identify the sounds that were passing through my flesh. We were asking audiences not only to experience

performance art, but sound art as well, and this proved too much for some audience members to decipher because they were not familiar with the sounds that were being played. The structure of the work (listening through my body) did not provide any clues as to what they should be listening for. Locating sound through familiarity would further locate it in my body and specifically in my uterus.

Recognizing the importance of legibility led to familiarity as a method of engagement, and how both work together to communicate with the audience. When Jackie played songs like Die Antwoord's "i fink u freeky" at the Darling, there was recognition on the part of the audience because they were able to decipher the sound through a familiarity with the song. However, it was not only a familiarity with this particular song, but with how music works. As time-based artworks, songs have repeated rhythms, beats, and phrases. The grain and tone of the voice made the sound both legible and familiar and gave the audience clues as to what to look for in finding that voice and anticipating what would come next (Pereira et al.). We continued to build on this familiarity and legibility in the next presentation at the Monument-National with Nik playing Björk mixed with Beyoncé and Jackie playing Leonard Cohen mixed with John Carpenter's *Halloween* soundtrack. I also had a better understanding of the most audible and optimal position for the stethoscope bell on the outside of my body to deliver the best sound possible. As discussed, the sound was still not loud enough for some audiences as the room noise competed with the DJ sets and I was still using a condom to cover the Babypod, which drastically reduced the volume. Also, because my body impedes and blocks sound, introducing auditory nuance such as low bass, experimental samples, and other subtleties seemed counterproductive because these nuances got lost. I was asking the audience to do two things: listen for sound (any sound) through my body, and identify what that sound was. If the recognition of either wasn't achieved, the audience was disappointed. What I discovered through these various iterations and the work I did at the Studio XX residency was that familiarity at least helped the listener identify sound that was being broadcast through my body.

My conceptual focus on sound for the performance is no accident. It was driven by a critique of the Babypod and its insinuation into the body as a technology for human gestation. Through its insinuation, this technology contributes to how cisheteropatriarchy recognizes and

reads which bodies are "productive" and viable, and which bodies are not. In this performance, I assume and engage with the use-as-directed functionality of the Babypod as a means of projecting sound into the uterus to better what occupies that uterus. My use however, creates and shapes a concert hall instead of (supposedly) stimulating fetal development. This use transforms the audience's gaze of the uterus (and female body) from ocular to sonic. In this way I queer a traditional interior view of the female body captured through ultrasounds, MRIs, and other imaging technologies that produce visual images as their final outputs. In order to "watch" or monitor changes in the uterus here, one must listen. This "listening" over "watching" shifts the performer-audience relationship as well as the visual-sonic relationship. The audience becomes a performer *for* the performer (me) as they listen to my uterus via stethoscope. This necessary listening makes performative the audience's act of listening and subverts their relationship to my middle-ageing queer body because they are demonstratively listening *for me* as an audience and *for other* audience members—they perform listening for others as they enact it.

This performed listening also subverts how we monitor middle-ageing queer bodies such as mine because, in addition to being performing subjects themselves, the visual of me splayed out before them is lessened as the audience must focus on my body's interiority as site for sound mediation and distribution to experience the work. Because I was concerned with the manner in which people's frustration with the work amplified my sense of personal objectification (and with the female body being doubly objectified by the technology of the Babypod and cisheteropatriarchal expectations of bodies marked female), engaging the audience involved moving beyond this objectification towards a more meaningful connection. I would need to activate and employ their subjectivity in the performance. My intent in doing this was not to emphasize the emptiness of the uterus (i.e. its non-procreative capacity) but rather its capacity to "give birth" to something else; to a kind of queer kinship that isn't heteronormative or reproductive.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the central questions in further developing this work became about how I could further engage the audience: what other kinds of inputs could achieve better results? Appreciating the capacities of empathy in the audience (trying my boots on and empathizing with their perceived discomfort) and recognizing the important

centrality of audiences' past experience with media texts were important milestones in my research that would contribute to how I could shape an exchange between myself and the audience and between audience members in the performance. Pop music seemed to be the most recognizable input based on feedback and reactions to Jackie's set at the Darling Foundry, and both Jackie's and Nik's sets at the Monument-National. This familiarity—or at least the audience's familiarity with how music works—seemed to engage them more than sound inputs that they didn't recognize or could not render as legible.

When creating intimate karaoke as a method for audience embodiment and empathy, I wanted to preserve several elements of the karaoke form it was based on. This included familiarity with how karaoke works as a participatory social activity and the socially acceptable demonstration of vulnerability this provokes. A mainstay for cabaret performers, using popular songs onstage is a means of connecting with and engaging an audience. I've been using karaoke as a method of engagement over the past ten years in cabaret works like *Beaver Fever* (2001); *That's Right Diana Barry, You Needed Me* (2009); *I Live for Menopause* (2015); and *Careless Fister* (2017). Each of these performances use karaoke as a performative means of enlivening the audience to actively include them in my performance. Other examples of artworks by artists that use karaoke and familiar music as a means to connect to their audiences are works like Dara Birnbaum's *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978), Adrian Piper's *Funk Lessons* (1982-84), Pipilotti Rist's *I'm not the Girl who Misses Much* (1986), Sadie Benning's *If Every Girl Had a Diary* (1990), Phil Collin's *They Shoot Horses* (2004) and *The World Won't Listen* (2005), Jess Dobkin's *Flowers* (2012) and Candis Brietz's *I'm Your Man (A Portrait of Leonard Cohen)*, 2017. These works each sample and or interpret familiar music to engage with their audiences by incorporating it to activate audiences with/in their work.

The Karaoke Songbook

We are used to being told what to do in a theatre environment—where to sit, to be quiet, not to leave in the middle of a performance, and to turn off cell phones. Audiences are trained in theatre decorum through these instructions and repeated visits to the theatre. In IK-UCH, I didn't want people to be told what to do too much. I wanted there to be enough clear clues about what was happening so that audiences weren't confused, but I wanted them to have to make some

136

decisions. Instead of asking each audience member what song they wanted to sing, which was what I did in the Studio XX testing, where the response would either be, "I don't want to sing" or "I'll be singing 'Stairway to Heaven,'" we provided a karaoke party context which people were familiar with. These details of not having yet another lineup or a table sign up were important. I wanted everyone to come into the theatre space that was transformed into a karaoke bar, having been paraded past me. My hope was that seeing me was a promise of what was to come in the performance and that they would be a little bit disoriented because of their preconceptions of how theatre is supposed to work. Already through the staging and mise-en-scène, we were communicating "performance art," indicating that this would not be your average theatre experience.

At most karaoke bars, there are usually books of songs to choose from. I did not use these references in IK-UCH because the books would have been too distracting. The karaoke prompt was, "What song in the world do you want to sing?" The karaoke technician looked for the requested song through YouTube by searching for the title with "karaoke." I opted for YouTube and what is generally accessible on the Internet over a designated karaoke program to suggest that the selection process is infinite: whatever your heart desires can be made manifest through the Internet. This is a deception as there is a negotiation between the infinite desire for any song in the world, and the infrastructures and platforms that make only certain (popular) songs available. I was interested in how vulnerability, utopia, and desire could be channeled through an audience member's potentially infinite wish for a song and how this intersects with (available) digital media in and through which their wishes can be fulfilled. This seemingly infinite choice was a slight of hand that enabled us to weed out obscure choices. If a requested search resulted in nothing, then the singer would be forced to pick something else, not just for their own familiarity but for the rest of the audience's as well.

The importance of not having songbooks present within the work is based on my visits to karaoke clubs, parties, and bars. I recall patrons and guests—myself included—studying karaoke songbooks to find *the song*, occasionally checking in with the onstage karaoke singer but distracted by their own potential performance. Although welcome to use their smart phones for searches and inspiration, guests to IK-UCH did not have these books to be distracted by. No two

shows are alike: the audience-generated playlists reflect the specific audience that participates and becomes a marker of not only the performance and what happened in the room, but also a catalogue of the audience/community that was created. Similarly, the seemingly infinite choice of songs available on the Internet relies on the karaoke singer picking from their memory and not by having that memory stimulated or triggered by the name of a song that they have forgotten listed in a karaoke songbook. This reliance on the audience to make a selection based on their memory also holds them accountable to that choice. Not only must they think of a song on their own or with friends, they need to consider what they are willing to perform under these conditions. The question in karaoke is not "What's your favourite song?" as sung by someone else, but "What song can I sing?" I don't think anybody picks a karaoke song because they hate it. People pick a song that they are familiar with, can sing (or are willing to sing), and relate to through their own personal experience with it through memory and nostalgia.

Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall in Saratoga Springs

The first time intimate karaoke was used in a public presentation was at the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs as part of the SURVEIL/SURVEILLED conference by MDOC Storytellers' Institute on June 8, 2018. What was interesting about performing at the Tang Teaching Museum was that the museum and gallery space where both the conference and performance were presented was a post-modern white cube. One of the walls consisted of floor to ceiling windows and, as soon as I saw it, I knew that I wanted to be staged outside of these windows and have the space with the karaoke set up inside. The audience was inside the gallery with their backs to me, facing the wall projection of karaoke lyrics. They could see me through the window staged on the outside of this karaoke activity if they chose to look. The window provided a physical and metaphorical barrier between the karaoke, the audience, and me.

In Saratoga Springs, there were a couple of people who didn't sing "well" and I really appreciated this. Not only was their generosity and vulnerability demonstrable in the act of singing a song they could not sing well, they never quit singing and sang the song through to its end. The audience often worked together to help the singer: people in the room joined in at times when someone wasn't a particularly good singer, and I read this as "helping" the singer by

offering cover by adding their voices. There was also general chitchat too that murmured through the crowd, which I also read as cover to offset (bad) singing. At one point, a young woman ran around and organized people to each sing a different verse of "Bohemian Rhapsody" (Queen, 1977). I could see through the window what was physically happening. All of these people were singing for me and my uterus; they were putting on a show for me. This hit me in the middle of the performance and it was quite emotional because I thought it was so generous of these strangers to sing and share their voices with me in such an intimate and vulnerable way, especially for those who couldn't sing well.

Figure 28: Dayna McLeod, Details of performance: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall*, **Tang Teaching Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York, 2018. A stethoscope listener and Karaoke singer with "helpers." Photographs courtesy of MDOC Storytellers' Institute.**

This experience was in stark contrast to the negative responses I had at the Monument-National that placed demands on my uterus as exemplified by Barbara's friend's outburst where she tore off the stethoscope headset that was connected to mine and walked away because she couldn't hear the DJ set through my body. Both the literal and figurative proximity between the audience and myself is collapsed in both the previous and new versions of the performance. Negative or aggressive feedback demands performative and affective labour on my part. This work is mediated by an intimate exchange with another individual with whom I trust my body. If I am flustered, tense, angry, sad, or upset, this transmits to other audience members and this negative affect can circulate through the piece to the audience. These affective responses can become the work and take its place in the minds and memory of the audience, which is not what I want for this performance. The kind of bad audience behaviour that Barbara's friend demonstrated can also be contagious, escalate quickly, and is potentially physically dangerous for

139

me. In a work that examines my body as object and subject by using it as both, any dehumanizing behaviour on the part of the audience however innocuous amplifies my body's objectification and leads other audience members in treating it as such, personally or as a mob. Previous performance experience where I have utilized explicit body practices and representations of sexualized parts of the body through their exaggeration has taught me this. I have had to shut down performances, scold audiences, and leave performances entirely because of an audience's bad behaviour.

Closer to Fine

In the new version of the performance, karaoke channels a productive and affective connectivity between myself and audience members, and across the audience as a whole. Affective arrangements are solicited by the structural configuration of the performance, and influenced by audience members' relationship to karaoke outside of IK-UCH as well as the context in which the performance is performed. Audiences are asked to sing karaoke into my body in order to "complete" the work. Depending on the audience this can put pressure on them to participate and impact the affective arrangements of a specific presentation of IK-UCH. In Saratoga Springs, a few of the organizers expressed their worry to me that no one would sing karaoke. This circulated a different kind of affect that caused them anxiety but that I found generative. From my perspective, this was an ideal scenario in which to perform IK-UCH and apply intimate karaoke as a method of engaging with vulnerability and empathy. Although I surely wanted the performance to go as planned with active engagement by participants, there was also the potential that no one would sing. What would that look like as an outcome?

The conference audience had to decide how they would proceed together with different pressures influencing their decision-making that included whether or not to participate in a performance at an academic conference by singing karaoke acapella in front of their colleagues, employers, employees, professors, students, and or peers.[4] They also had to negotiate their investment in and responsibility to being a "good" audience in relationship to their stakes in the conference and its organizers who had brought an artist from Canada to perform a work marked by explicit performance practices and vulnerability by being demonstratively penetrated by sound. How this affective state was shared and managed between audience members became a

component of building and shaping the piece. When asked if I had a "backup plan" for the piece in case no one sang, I made clear that the conditions of the performance required someone (anyone) to sing karaoke. Should these conditions not be met we would all (performer and audience) have to sit with this discomfort *as* the performance. Making clear these conditions was important for me to articulate because I had interpellated failure so thoroughly in previous iterations and I wanted to please audiences and "do well" for the organizers. Thankfully Jackie had coached me in the Studio XX residency on precisely this point to ensure that if pushed, I could respond accordingly. No, I can't "just play something" for audiences to "get the idea," there is no Uterine Concert Hall Muzak, and if no one sings that *is* the performance. The audience must contribute their voice to the performance in order for it to function as intended. However, I was intrigued by the possibility that no one would sing as I did not think that this would be a failure of the work but that this would reflect a particular affective arrangement of IK-UCH in a specific context.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed discusses how queer subjects experience comfort and discomfort differently from other subjects. "To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins" (148). She talks about heteronormativity as a "form of comforting" to some subjects who may feel better because of the ease and fit they have with its particular arrangement of world making but who may not recognize this comfort as taking shape around them. She states, "Queer subjects, when faced by the 'comforts' of heterosexuality may feel uncomfortable." She defines discomfort "as a feeling of disorientation" where "one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled." She suggests that some queer subjects might be asked "not to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy," which in turn can create "uncomfortable feelings" for the queer subject who has restrictions placed on what they can and cannot do with their body in public and social spaces. Further, she states that it is important for queer lives not to reproduce heteronormative cultural scripts as homonormative scripts—that queer lives "maintain their discomfort with all aspects of normative culture in how they live" by not getting married, having families, coupling up, or participating in normative rituals like neighbourhood watch or militarized nationalism (149).

In IK-UCH I work with, against, and in spite of cisheteronormative comforts and discomforts to stage a critique of reproductive futurism and bioessentialism under cisheteropatriarchy. As a middle-ageing queer subject, I am used to the discomfort of cisheteronormative patriarchy—these are the living conditions. In this performance, I am interested in how audiences negotiate potential discomfort as a means to generate empathy for each other and as a critique of cisheteropatriarchy. I am also interested in the different arrangements of comfort and discomfort that Ahmed details as they relate to the comfort and discomfort for audiences and myself in IK-UCH. This performance and these variable comforts are set against the backdrop of cisheteropatriarchy where non-reproductive middle-ageing queer female bodies are not comforted or framed as comforting—if anything we make people feel uncomfortable. In IK-UCH audience members and myself each negotiate multiple comforts and discomforts that contribute to shared affect. These negotiations stage queer sociality and challenge normative dominance over the scripts of how intimacies are exchanged, the shape comfort takes, and how audience members can find "comfort" through an experience of the work. These comforts and discomforts travel through the performance and contribute to the circuitry of the work. Audiences must negotiate them in order for the piece to proceed on schedule and as planned.

There is the discomfort of singing karaoke for strangers in an acapella format and potentially demonstrating vulnerability; witnessing someone sing karaoke in this format and participating in their vulnerability; and accepting or refusing to sing karaoke under these conditions. There is also the discomfort in the examination room of the proposition of listening to my body with a stethoscope (a person the audience may or may not know); the act of listening, which brings the audience member in close proximity to my body; the strain of listening through the stethoscope itself as a device; hearing bodily special effects of the performer in this intimate setting; and negotiating conversation and direct engagement with me as a talking subject whom they are examining for sound. I am interested in these discomforts and the potential to use them as modes to access empathy—that by "sticking with" these discomforts, the audience is able to transform them through their shared collectivity—not necessarily into comforts—but into tolerable (and hopefully pleasurable) experience. The emotions generated by their negotiation of

these discomforts pass between bodies (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*) and circulate through the piece.

Figure 29: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall*, **Tang Teaching Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York, 2018. The stethoscope listener who heard the pulse of my body. Photograph courtesy of MDOC Storytellers' Institute.**

A very special response happened in Saratoga Springs from a woman who was listening through the stethoscope. When prompted by the attendant to end her turn, she said, "Oh my God, wait, wait," and because she was so obviously having a moment, I indicated to the attendant that it was okay to let her stay a little longer. After the performance she said, "I'm so sorry that I took so much time. But I could hear the pulse of your body. And I got so sucked into the pulse of your body; I'd never heard that before." I valued this feedback so much because it pointed out to me that I was so focused on finding the song in my body for the listener through the shared stethoscope that I also forgot about the body, about *my* body. I was so focused on finding the best sound for the stethoscope listener that I ignored my bodily sounds and the special effects that I had worked on developing at the Studio XX residency. I was trying to give stethoscope listeners the full-on Freddie Mercury experience and I forgot about the body myself, as the one performing the work. This feedback was so important because it drew me back to the interiority of my body as an infinite space that Jackie, Nik, and I had "mapped" in the Studio XX residency during our vaginal recording session. It also reminded me about the instigating ideas that started the project in which I wanted audiences to consider the uterus as something other than reproductive space in

order to critique existing social, material, and medical conditions for bodies marked female through the potentiality of the uterus as utopic where UCH is a physical space and specific place. That this stranger got lost inside of my body through sound and that this experience was pleasurable for her—this reflected this potentiality of the uterus as utopic as her listening mapped the interiority (concert hall and all) of my body. When we were talking about it afterwards, she said that when she was listening, she was thinking almost impatiently, "Yeah yeah, I could hear the song but I wanted the song to be quieter so I could hear your body."

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Muñoz says that "performance is the kernel of potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses and that the real force of performance is in its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audience and groups that facilitates modes of belonging" (99). In the above exchange with this listener, the potentiality of my middle-ageing queer body is valued over its repurposed function as a concert hall, which was unexpected. In offering my body as a venue, this listener bypassed the concert hall and headed backstage. She was able to hear my body in a way I had not anticipated. IK-UCH generated a *different* "modality of knowing" than what I intended. This listener was able to recognize something else in this work and in my body, which opened up the potentiality of the performance and my body as site for the performance. "Utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not fixed schema" (97). This listener points to yet another productive capacity for my middle-ageing queer body and recuperated the entirely of my body's interior beyond the uterus. In this reconfiguration, I am not a failing queer subject nor am I a reproductive failure, but a site for community engagement, attachment, and sociality.

Toronto SummerWorks Theatre Festival: Fly Me to the Moon

A traditional theatre features a stage with an auditorium of seating. There is usually a front of house with a lobby for audiences to wait in before they enter the theatre. At the SummerWorks Theatre Festival at the Theatre Centre in Toronto, we flipped this configuration for IK-UCH. I was set up in the lobby, and incoming audiences were led past me into the theatre with the karaoke party setup. We kept the rack seating that was in the black box theatre and added about ten tables for cabaret seating and a bar that served soft drinks, wine, beer, and tequila. Coming

from cabaret, I find it helpful to have alcohol available to audiences should they want it. There were other significant changes to the piece in terms of organizing the ebb and flow of the audience and accommodating a large volume of listeners. A quarter of the way into the performance, I started using a four-headed stethoscope instead of a two-headed one. This changed the dynamic of the intimate exchange because individual audience members could now listen with each other as well as listen with me. Additionally, because of the structure of a theatre festival where tickets are sold, we had to figure out how to work with this system. Each arrival of an audience of thirty was called a "flight"[5] and there were four flights of thirty people each for a total of one hundred-twenty people if all of the tickets had sold. Including comps, there were one hundred-four people who attended IK-UCH in Toronto.

One of the things that I discussed with Shannon Cochrane, Artistic and Administrative Director of FADO Performance Art Centre in Toronto who brought me to the SummerWorks Festival to perform IK-UCH, was whether or not we would have an announcement at the start of every flight to explain the event. We reasoned that, should we have an announcement each time, this might signal the end of the performance to the previous flight, and I wanted people to stay for as long as they liked. I was also concerned that this would be too much instruction. Part of this performative inquiry was about seeing what would happen when a bunch of strangers came in on the second, third, and fourth flight as though in mid-performance as a further disruption to theatre conventions.

The first flight of thirty people was ushered into the theatre space (which could potentially hold one hundred-fifty people) and sat at the cabaret tables. This was a different experience for the audience than entering a space with a full house or that would eventually fill up. There wasn't room to get lost in the crowd or hide, especially in a work that asked for audience participation.[6] Cara Spooner, who was one of the attendants, started the show for that first flight at eight o'clock. At 8:05 p.m., she went to the front of the room or "stage" (there was no elevated stage in this space, and the cabaret seating was level with the karaoke setup) just in front of the karaoke microphone, which was on a stand with the headphones and the 52-inch monitor behind and facing the audience. After giving the land acknowledgement[7], welcoming the audience to the show, and explaining how the performance would function, Cara said "Dayna (the artist) invites

you to sing a karaoke song for Uterine Concert Hall." Holding her clipboard and pen at the ready, she then asked "Anyone?" and waited for people to either raise their hands, storm the stage, tentatively approach her, or do nothing. It took a few minutes before someone finally volunteered, and the first song was Elton John's "Rocket Man" (1972). That tension of negotiating participation interests me because we are not used to being asked to do this kind of labour as an audience. If the audience does nothing, the full potentiality of the piece cannot be realized.

Figure 30: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall*, **SummerWorks Theatre Festival, The Theatre Centre, Toronto, 2018. Karaoke party room. Photograph courtesy of Henry Chan, c/o FADO Performance Art Centre.**

In this work, I am privileging the sounds made by bodies—the karaoke singer's voice as performed for the audience who only hear the voices of each other in the karaoke room, sound mediated by my flesh for a stethoscope listener, and my internal special effects. Having the karaoke audience hear only the signer's voice stripped of the musical track created a deeper level of intimacy, vulnerability, and care for this audience. For example, according to one member of the audience,[8] when the first person got up to sing "Rocket Man," the singer kept their voice close to a whisper and was not bombastic, flamboyant, or loudly performative, which is a common mode of singing in regular karaoke clubs, parties, and bars. This quiet singing caused a hush to fall over the live audience who strained to listen more closely. The audience recognized vulnerability in the timber and tone of this first singer's voice as he "put himself on the line,"

which resulted in enthusiastic applause from the crowd and set the affective tone for the rest of the evening.

The introductory instructional announcement only happened once for those first thirty people at SummerWorks. They had the choice to stay all evening or leave; they were not required to leave before the next flight of thirty people arrived, which was every half hour. If only ten people stayed from the first flight or if only two people stayed, when the next thirty people arrived at 8:30 p.m. there would be no announcement from the attendant (although if there was not a single person left from the first flight, the announcement would have been made again), and they were not told what to do by the attendants. The new audience was forced to read the clues and cues in the room or ask someone from the previous flight what was going on. Ideally, at the moment that they were led into the space, they saw someone listening through me with the stethoscope in the lobby, and when they were led into the theatre space, there would be a few people in line to listen to IK-UCH, and someone singing karaoke. There was also a second clipboard attendant (performed by Theo Gallero) who made himself available to take song requests. The audience was continually fed into this karaoke theatre space as well as into the lobby where I was located throughout the night.

Figure 31: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall***, SummerWorks Theatre Festival, The Theatre Centre, Toronto, 2018. Stethoscope listeners. Photograph courtesy of Henry Chan, c/o FADO Performance Art Centre.**

I was interested in creating a situation in which the audience must decide what they are going to do: to sing karaoke or not to sing karaoke. I wanted to present a situation with enough cues so that the audience would know what to do without too much instruction. It would be

impossible for every single person who came to the work to each sing, as this would require a seven-hour performance session, which my vagina would surely not survive. However, it was possible for every single person who came to listen through my body, and the attendants ensured that this happened by regulating the lineup, repeat visitors, and how much time each person spent with me. There was a side door from the theatre that opened into a small storage space that held about six people comfortably, which opened through another door into the lobby out to me. Rhiannon Collett and Athena Trinh acted as attendants on both ends of these doors. Aside from the first and only announcement delivered by Cara, all of the attendants were instructed to act as resources and answer questions, but to not aggressively hound people to sing. Rhiannon and Athena were forced to act like bouncers to monitor time spent with me and lineup priority as audience members made demands on accessing different parts of the experience. Ideally, the audience managed their time and took responsibility as a group for the participation aspect of this piece and to manage my request to sing a song into my uterus and ultimately perform it at Uterine Concert Hall. However, the attendants were present to gently guide audience members who did not pick up on these social cues or who resisted respecting them.

The "clock" of this performance maps the circuit management in the piece, which form a particular arrangement of affect that works through intimate karaoke and queer sociality. José Muñoz argues for "the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity" (*Cruising Utopia* 11). This is the queer sociality I engage with in IK-UCH and how the circuitry of the performance functions. This circuitry depends not just on the physical moving parts from station to station of its participants, but on the affective sharing between bodies that come together to build empathy. Queer indeterminate space creates an opening that allows flow and potentiality. For the circuit of sound to complete itself in and through my body is queer magic. My previously quiet and failing uterus now provides a more "complete" song than the karaoke party space from which it is performed. This karaoke space becomes one that needs to be "carried" by the audience in order to fill its emptiness. My uterus is part of the circuit that I complete together with the audience. When a karaoke singer's voice enters my body with the musical track and it dissipates through my flesh to stethoscope listeners—this connection—this listening, completes the circuit.

Surfacing

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed discusses how affect works to "surface" bodies "as an effect of the impressions left by others" (10). She posits that in turn, these impressions create surfaces and bring emotions to the surface for subjects. Ahmed's committed feminist, anti-racist and queer phenomenology is attentive to the fact that this surfacing—far from the phenomenologically neutral sense of the limits of the body—is intensely coded through race, class, gender, and sexuality. The performative body brings to the surface a series of racialized, gendered, and sexualized affects that "stick" to the surface of the body, even as they intensify through their movement in and across other bodies. Similarly, Coco Fusco points to the importance of how race works on the skin, how it circulates in systems of power, and how not acknowledging it works at actively erasing the subjectivities of people of colour. She states that this has greatly impacted feminist theoretical accounts of performance art.

Fusco argues that the roots of performance art are actually in human specimen displays of nonwhite peoples by colonizing and imperialist powers that she charts from the mid-1400s (41). Fusco calls this "the origins of intercultural performance in the West" and rejects the origins of performance art as deriving from the Dadaist Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 Zürich, which is commonly referred to as the discipline's birthplace (Goldberg; Jones, *Performing the Subject*). Rebecca Belmore similarly proposes an alternative history for performance art that begins in Canada "with the ethnographic display of indigenous persons" and the Mi'kmaq man who was "taken to France where he was placed in a wilderness garden with a deer" as entertainment for the nobility. Belmore proposes "this Mi'kmaq man to be one of the first performance artists of the Americas to work internationally—hundreds of years ago" (Belmore qtd. in Taylor 46). As Belmore recounts from a missionary's log, before fulfilling the instructions to kill the deer with a bow and arrow, skin, dress, cook, and eat it and otherwise perform savagery as imagined and projected onto him by the nobility in attendance, the Mi'kmaq man "took the liberty of expanding on their idea of his performance by 'easing himself before them all.'"

Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña critiqued this colonialist legacy of human display in their performance, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* (1992-93) in which they performed

as undiscovered peoples from a fictionalized island in the Gulf of Mexico called Guatinau. Using performance art, live spectacle, and diorama practices to "blur the distinctions between the art object and the body," "fantasy and reality," and the "history of dramatic reenactment" they staged themselves in a golden cage in a series of performances for audiences in the United States, Europe, and Argentina (40). In *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, Fusco gives a thorough accounting of the performance, her experiences within the piece, how the piece was perceived in different cultural and country contexts, their intention with the performance, and contextualizes this artwork as a "reverse ethnography" (57). Her analysis includes an examination of the racialized and racist politics that played out on their bodies as they performed as undiscovered peoples. Intrigued by the "legacy of performing the identity of an Other for a white audience" and the "implications for us as performance artists dealing with cultural identity in the present," their original intent was to satirically comment, respond, and offer critique on "Western concepts of the exotic, primitive Other" (37). Fusco and Gómez-Peña wanted to provide an "uncanny" encounter for a potentially interactive audience but they didn't have control over how their work would be interpreted or experienced by the viewer. "The cage became a blank screen onto which audiences projected their fantasies of who and what we are. As we assumed the stereotypical role of domesticated savage, many audience members felt entitled to assume the role of the colonizer" (47).

Figure 32: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the West***, 1992-1994; photograph of performance**

Their intent was complicated by two important factors. The first was that audiences believed Fusco and Gómez-Peña to be "real" human specimens from their fictionalized place of origin. The second were accusations that they were "misleading" and "misinforming" the public about their inauthenticity as Other subjects, a critique that came from artists, intellectuals, elites, and institutional representatives. In response to these accusations, Fusco and Gómez-Peña took a "symbolic vow of silence" for critics who "reject the proposition that racial difference is absolutely fundamental to aesthetic interpretation" (39). Here, the performativity of subjectivity is crucial to Fusco's analysis of the work, as she accounts for the performance of race and the viewers' racism that is enforced by the privileges of white supremacy. As Fusco points out, "the central position of the white spectator, the objective of these events as a confirmation of their position as global consumers of exotic cultures, and the stress on authenticity as an aesthetic value, all remain fundamental to the spectacle of Otherness many continue to enjoy" (47).

Central to the various iterations of UCH is how my middle-ageing queer female body is figured under cisheteropatrirachy and reproductive futurism. Ageing and queerness are central modes of being that I mobilize to critique essentialist reproductive expectations of bodies marked female. However, given the racist colonial history of North America; the local, national, and international racist rhetoric that is continuing to shape social, cultural, and political discourse; and the figuration of whiteness as somehow neutral, invisible, or non-racialized—as a white cis performance artist, the least I can do is not perpetuate or contribute to these figurations. Although I believe that I am a marginalized subject under cisheteropatriarchy, my marginalization is slight in comparison to others. To be clear, I do not think that my white privilege is ever lessened or removed because of my queerness or ageing. Similarly, I cannot erase or remove my whiteness or my cisness. However, I think I can enact "anti-racist white womanhood" (Hilary Harris qtd. in Dolan 477) by acknowledging my white privilege and by actively working against racism in performance, my writing, and in life.

What I observed of UCH in the documentation of the first two iterations was that I had set up a tableau in which an audience literally lined up to visit and examine my white middle-ageing cis body, and anyone not part of this lineup perceived this layout and image. As much as the lineup confirmed a site of potentiality in the first iterations of UCH, the tableau that it presented

151

in proximity to my body was problematic. The functionality and presence of the lineup remain in IK-UCH, however it is not staged as a singular spectacle. My intention with the revision of the work was to adjust the optics of the piece through the formal construction of the performance and its machinations. I changed the format of the performance from a single flattened tableau that showed a lineup of people cued to visit my body, to an artwork that does not allow anyone to experience or see the entirety of the piece at one time. These subtle yet significant changes do not displace the centrality of my middle-ageing queer embodiment, but work at lessening the staging of my whiteness and cisness in proximity to other bodies as a tableau for observing audiences to see.

In Saratoga Springs, I was positioned outside of the main space of the conference and performance space, and outside of the building itself. The waiting-to-listen-to-me lineup was not positioned at my feet or visibly close to me as it was in the Darling Foundry and Monument-National iterations. After the performance, Tom Yoshikami the Assistant Director for Engagement for the Tang Museum, related this to me regarding this staging and its effects on the audience: "It was so crazy because when you were doing it, I mean, there's the show. You're right there in the window and we can all see you. And nobody was looking at you, we were all watching the singer and the karaoke… we were all watching the words of the karaoke."

Similarly, my approach to the performance at the SummerWorks Festival in Toronto focused on adjusting the staging to lessen the visual impact of figuring an audience lined up to visit my white cis body. Originally, there was a suggestion that we place me in the middle of the theatre with a "God light" spotlight shining down on me, which exemplifies the problematic tableau that I am trying to avoid. Traditionally, the theatre is a place of privilege where performance-based work is staged, and the lobby is a waiting space for audiences before they enter the theatre. By flipping this orientation, we flipped this theatrical privilege and the audience's place in it by centring them in the theatre itself and placing the performer (me) in the lobby. This also disoriented the audience upon entry about where the performance is, what the performance is, and where the audience should be in relationship to the performance. The audience was marked as part the performance by the structure and meaning of the theatre and their placement within it.

Sara Ahmed discusses the potential queers have for reworking the boundaries of heteronormative spaces the closer queer subjects are to these spaces as this "proximity 'shows' how the spaces extend some bodies rather than others" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 152). IK-UCH demonstrates multiple limits and potentialities for the subjects that engage within it. As a middle-ageing middle-class (passing) white cisgender non-disabled female who adopts and engages with markers of recognizable mainstream femininity as the performer within the work, I am perhaps closer to experiencing comfort in cisheteronormativity than racialized subjects, non-binary or trans people, or people with disabilities. The presentation format and staging of IK-UCH works on cisheteronormativity by pointing to the boundaries that contain, shape, affect, and comfort queer middle-ageing bodies marked female and the potentiality and limitations of the work and the bodies that circulate within it.

From a Distance

Because of their experience as witnesses to the live karaoke performance in the main theatre space, audiences were prepared for deep listening when they came to visit me. Their experience of liveness in the other room as well as their experience of listening with and through me activated and engaged them further as they recognized the mechanics of how the piece worked. Once stethoscope listeners recognized the sound and the liveness of the person singing and heard the song, they also recognized the construction of the work—that is, that sound played through my body. We listened together and were each aware of our physical proximity to each other. We were listening to a disembodied voice that was reanimated and mediated, and became embodied through my body. This listener accounted for these circumstances, and seemed to become more aware of this context as they listened. From my point of view as a co-listener, I was aware of their focused listening and of my focused listening with someone else. I spoke when I thought it was required. I was enthusiastic and appreciative (sincerely!) of the voices that sang through me, and said as much to my co-listener(s).

The majority of the audience to IK-UCH in the Saratoga Springs and SummerWorks iterations were not professional singers although some may have been karaoke enthusiasts, but not necessarily. The isolation of the vocal track implicated not just the singer but also the karaoke

listening audience and the stethoscope listening audience in the work and the process of its creation. The co-productive nature of the work had the potential to bind the audience to each other as they witnessed, participated in, appreciated, and managed each other's vulnerability. These are the construction blocks of community-building, empathetic engagement, and intimate karaoke as methods. This format isolated and enabled the singer to demonstrate vulnerability. When a singer has the headphones on, they could hear the musical track fairly loudly as well as their voice, which had a healthy dose of reverb added to it. Even if singers were self-conscious about singing well, after about thirty seconds into the song, their voices grew louder, an effect I explored with my *Headphone Karaoke*[9] video series while in residence at Studio XX.

The headphones contain and isolate the sound of both the reverb-effected singer's voice, and the musical track. In order to hear their voice more clearly, the singer increases the volume of their voice to hear it over the musical track. The added reverb also helped build confidence. In both Saratoga Springs and Toronto, this resulted in the singer singing louder for the attending crowd. In terms of configuration in the karaoke space, it was important that the karaoke singer's back was to the audience so that they weren't further intimidated by an audience looking at them while they sang. This created a tension between building empathy, community, and social bonds, and mobilizing isolation, distance, and disconnection. On the one hand, there's a shared vulnerability in and through the performance, on the other, each person within the performance is separated from each other (my co-stethoscope listeners and myself from the karaoke space, the singer from the audience to whom they've turned their back, and the karaoke party audience from the fully mixed sound in my body). The conceptual importance of these close proximities and distances is that this arrangement creates affective sites of shared commitment to the performance. Sound becomes the conduit for piecing the performance together, which is collectively built by and experienced with the audience. In this performance, the creation of separate spaces through disconnection emphasizes the importance and significance of the circuit of sound that ties all the elements together and the central roles the audience plays in keeping this circuit connected and operational. The entirety of the performance can never been seen or experienced by anyone at the same time, including me as the performer. These distances keep in place a separation that informs and equalizes the subjectivity of the participants and focuses on the audience.

According to audience members at the Toronto SummerWorks Festival presentation of IK-UCH, there were "great singers who really belted it out" when they sang, turning around at times to face the audience, and who were generally performative. This provided drama as audiences were given permission by the singer to respond to them as performers and allowed for affective release. This also referenced karaoke as a familiar format while drawing attention to how I was deconstructing it. This arrangement also pointed to how the audience was negotiating compliance with my interventionist format. This informed the rest of the piece and made complex the contrast with the singers who were quiet, not great singers, or who otherwise demonstrated vulnerability that the audience in turn needed to figure out how to manage.

Figure 33: Detail of performance: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall***, SummerWorks Theatre Festival, The Theatre Centre, Toronto, 2018. A karaoke singer "belting it out." Photograph courtesy of Henry Chan, c/o FADO Performance Art Centre.**

Gold Star Worthy

In both the Saratoga Springs and SummerWorks Festival performance configurations, I relied on the attendants and people who helped me because I had no control over what was going on in the other room. I had to trust my body with the organizers, attendants, technicians, and ultimately the audience. In both of these new iterations, my attendants and I focused on getting people through the circuit. Each person spent about thirty seconds to a minute with me, depending on the length of the lineup. The attendants worked at hustling people through, who were mostly mindful that other people were waiting to listen through me. However, this depended on the audience and their sense of entitlement.

Figure 34: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall*, SummerWorks Theatre Festival, The Theatre Centre, Toronto, 2018. Stickers. © Dayna McLeod.

In Toronto we tracked audience members who sang and listened through me using stickers. I used the *Uterine Concert Hall* logo that I designed on circular red and white stickers, with white for singing and red for listening, homage to menstruation and the tracking of a cycle. These stickers were signifiers of knowledge of the performance. They acted as conversation starters. People who didn't know what was going on in the performance asked people with stickers how the performance worked. This is where the locus of the performance shifted from previous iterations and instigated a circuitry that was central to the experience, which created new connections, configurations, and networks. It was important in these new iterations that there be a

loop or circuit of knowledge throughout the work. Being an audience member with knowledge who does the entire circuit or has witnessed the entire circuit now had experience to share and transmit to other audience members. Stickers marked audience members as having knowledge as stethoscope listeners and karaoke singers. According to audience members, people were buoyed by their

knowledge of the work which was reinforced by other audience members asking them about the piece, how it worked, what was going to happen, and where to go. These sticker people and audience members who had stayed through several flights of the work became actors with knowledge for new arrivals as well as existing audience members. People were allowed to loop back several times with audience members who had not sung or listened given priority over repeat visitors. What was also interesting was observing how empowered some of these repeat visitors were when they brought someone new to listen through my body as they acted like informed guides to the work, and contributed to the rendering of my uterus as concert hall in their tour.

The physical and experiential staging of circulating knowledge reflects my method of performance-based practice and embodiment. These are the different ways of mapping empathy, participation, and community. Here I share this methodology with the audience by setting up propositions for them to experience for themselves where they come to understand experience as knowledge. I set up this experience of vulnerability for the audience prior to their visit to me with the intent that they come to the experience with embodied knowledge and that they will be more open and empathetic to the experience of listening. Based on my observations and reading of the audience, they had an elevated understanding of the work because of this experience.

My experience of the stethoscope listening audience at both the Tang Museum in Saratoga Springs and at the SummerWorks Festival in Toronto was that they were more open to the potentiality of the experience than audiences were at the Darling Foundry and Monument-National. In contrast to the Monument-National performance where some of the complaints about not being able to hear the sound through the stethoscope and my body were rude, the inclusion of intimate karaoke in the Saratoga Springs and Toronto presentations encouraged people to approach me with compassion and care. Formally speaking, I delivered more fully on what I

promised: a unique listening experience. However, without the deep listening audience training or the audience's affective participation as karaoke singer and witness, this unique experience could not have been achieved. It took the commitment of the audience as careful listeners and their active participation in contributing song to the piece that helped complete the circuit.[10] The vulnerability exchange that happened in the karaoke party space trained the audience to approach me with empathy and foreshadowed what they would hear through the stethoscope in the next listening experience. Volume was still at play here: if a singer sang quietly the audience was required to listen more carefully or actively choose not to. This quiet singing acquainted the audience with the volume of what was to come and prepared them for deep listening through the stethoscope. This acted as a contract between us, a promise of my delivering something more than the missing karaoke musical track, should they come listen through me. They heard the acapella version of a song (any song) as sung by a karaoke singer in the karaoke party room and when they listen through my body and the stethoscope, music was added. This mixing of the music in my uterus acts as the utopic ingredient for the work: the queer magic that finishes the piece and completes the circuit.

On the Streets of Queer Utopia

My uterus is magic. It has been fully recuperated in this performance as a productive site under cisheteropatriarchy. Its renovation as a concert hall has given this non-reproductive uterus value, and in turn, the middle-ageing queer body that contains it. The music that is mixed and projected through my body is the soundtrack for queer utopia.

José Muñoz figures "queer" as not-yet-here but on the horizon. He situates the future as "queerness's domain" in which "queerness is a longing that propels us forward" (*Cruising Utopia* 1). The anticipation of the horizon is what is yet to come, an unfixedness of potentiality that he calls queer utopia. Muñoz's horizon is anticipation and a not-yet-here; a temporal relationship to the here and now that describes a potential future—the horizon is hope. Muñoz thinks of "queerness as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity" (16). The horizon is illusive: as soon as something is fixed or made concrete it slips from the horizon and becomes concretized as something new. The horizon is always in the future because it cannot be reached or apprehended.

It can be approached, but it is a beckoning force that is anticipated—that is why it is on the horizon. IK-UCH is an aesthetic manifestation of the horizon; it only "appears" through its temporal visitation but is a destination that can never be reached. Because we cannot physically visit Uterine Concert Hall and can only encounter it by listening, the sound presents another horizon of hope for the future. IK-UCH offers potentiality through the illusive and unfixedness of the performance, which the audience (and myself as co-audience) encounters as temporal. As soon as a song is over that moment of singing and hearing disappears. However, the memory stays. The audience who hears the song helps further produce it by confirming a glimpse of the horizon and its promised potentiality because they experience the fully realized version of the song mixed in my uterus. My body contributes to the construction of the performance and my uterus shapes it. Without either of these material conditions, the performance would just be a karaoke party.

There are three key ingredients to make potentiality work in IK-UCH: the karaoke singer's voice, the backing musical track, and my uterus as the site of production for the sound mix. My uterus as mixing station leaves magical traces that create a new potentiality—a queer anticipation. Muñoz posits that the potentiality of utopian performativity "is always in the horizon and, like performance, never completely disappears but, instead, lingers and serves as a conduit for knowing and feeling other people" (113). For Jill Dolan, "the affective quality of utopia" is what draws an audience. She defines utopian performativity as "ordinary people being lifted from their lives to form connections" (476). IK-UCH engages in utopian performativity as a method of intimate karaoke. Through the circuitry of the performance where vulnerabilities and intimacies pass between audience members, and between audience members and myself, connections are formed collectively. Structurally, no one can experience the entirety of the piece at the same time: this helps sell the idea of utopia because it is always being pursued—what is happening in the next room? What is on the horizon?

"The best performances do not disappear but instead linger in our memory, haunt our present, and illuminate our future" (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 104). This is my hope for IK-UCH—that audiences take with them their experience of each other; of the collective circuit of empathy they built together by sharing and witnessing vulnerabilities and intimacies. I hope that

they take these arrangements to future encounters and challenge their own expectations of bodies marked female in cisheteropatriarchy. This is the proposition of IK-UCH—a possible future for middle-ageing queer bodies marked female as not having to abide by cisheteropatriarchy and reproductive futurism.

CONCLUSION

Figure 35: Dayna McLeod, Detail of performance: Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall, SummerWorks Theatre Festival, The Theatre Centre, Toronto, 2018. Karaoke singers. Photograph courtesy of Henry Chan,c/o FADO Performance Art Centre.

Long Time Running

My ongoing commitment to the critique of cisheteropatriarchy through performative methods of embodiment, parody, humour, and absurdity are exemplified in this research-creation dissertation. With a focus on performance-based practices as a generative approach to embodied knowledge, this study takes into account queerness, intersubjectivity, performance, and performativity. My research is concerned with the effects a gendered, middle-ageing, queer body provokes, enacts, and personifies. This study is set against the backdrop of cisheteropatriarchy and reproductive futurism and considers representations of middle-ageing bodies marked female as well as the demands made on these bodies. My approach to this research was to present, take apart, examine, study, reflect on, refigure, reassemble, and perform the sound-based, interactive

performance installation *Uterine Concert Hall* (UCH). I thoroughly unpacked the development and realization of this project through its multiple iterations in order to present knowledge and outcomes that were achieved through hands-on research, which would not have been possible using non-practice-based methods.

Informed by Performance Studies, Research-Creation Studies, Feminist Theory, and Queer Theory, this dissertation examines how performance-based practices can present alternative configurations of the middle-ageing queer female body to challenge bioessentialist expectations of reproduction and representations of middle-ageing femininities under cisheteropatriarchy. This dissertation also explicates the importance of queerly disrupting the intended function of the Babypod—an example of a reproductive technology that figures the female body as reproductive in cisheteropatriarchy—as a means to critique these dominant logics. This Babypod hacking and the resulting reconfiguration of it for my non-reproductive middle-ageing queer body is demonstrative of how performance as research manifests as embodied knowledge and intersects with discourses within Performance Studies, Research-Creation Studies, Feminist Theory, and Queer Theory, specifically the normative constraints of cisheteropatriarchy and neoliberal heteronormativity as it relates to middle-ageing feminine gender performativity and citationality. This dissertation also demonstrates how I utilize queer research-creation methods to centre subjectivity, differences of sexuality and gender, and failure and experimentation as means of production.

At the start of my dissertation research, the central question I wanted to answer was: How do performance-based practices impact, affect, and intersect with what a gendered, ageing, queer body provokes, enacts, and personifies? Secondary questions included, How do I use the physical body within UCH (my own, collaborators, assistants, and the audience)? How does age factor into the production of the work aesthetically, physically, laboriously? How am I represented in the work, i.e., how is the body used as a representational concept and how is the body used within the work as a material object?

These questions centered my research throughout my dissertation. However, as my research progressed, these questions evolved to also include a more focused examination of the

audience, my engagement with them, their subjectivity, and how they might be more meaningfully incorporated into performance-based work. Not only was I examining how I used my body within UCH as a middle-ageing queer female subject, representational concept, and material object to observe its relationship to and effects on particular representational strategies for the audience, I was examining how the audience marked, contributed to, and activated sites within the performance that were separate from (and relational to) my body. This investigational shift was significant as it not only made more precise and rich the knowledge I was able to produce as a result of this research, my findings contributed directly to the production and staging of *Intimate Karaoke: Live at Uterine Concert Hall* (IK-UCH) as a new performance work with integrated and meaningful audience participation.

This conclusion returns to the themes and questions I started with, as well as those that evolved out of them, in order to reflect on my research-creation process and its outcomes. I illustrate how this research-creation study proposes and considers a set of performance strategies for engaging questions of gender, age, and queerness, and for building sites of shared vulnerability and empathy in order to address broader effects this could have on performance-based practice and research. My intent in this conclusion is to also address how my findings can ultimately contribute to Feminist Performance Art Studies and Research-Creation Studies and locate my place within these fields as an artist-scholar. I believe I do this with this dissertation by addressing a scarcity within these fields of queer and feminist performance artists-scholars such as myself, and thus a lack of self-reflexive and auto-ethnographic accounts of feminist and queer performance research-creation, processes and work, particularly with respect to ageing. It is in this gap that my research makes an original contribution to these fields and addresses a theoretical lack regarding embodied materiality of the middle-ageing queer female body through performance as research and research-creation practices of knowledge and art production.

My dissertation builds on feminist performance art history with a focus on explicit body practices from an artist scholar's perspective. Through the examination of my own embodied art-making production processes, I put my research-creation practice and iterations of UCH into conversation with other feminist artists who use performance-based methods to chart the relationships, common themes, intersections, influences, and relationality of performance-based

practices between the contributors and myself. I focus on specific artworks by historically significant and influential artists like Carolee Schneemann, Annie Sprinkle, VALIE EXPORT, Yoko Ono, Lauren Lesko, and Coco Fusco as well as works by important contemporary artists whose work I see affiliations with, such as Jess Dobkin, Miya Masaoka, and Anna Troisi. One of the goals of this inquiry was to study explicit body practices while considering how age and ageing intersect with the production of artworks and contribute to performance-based art making.

True Colours

In performing *Uterine Concert Hall*, I was interested in proposing my uterus as a queer physical site housed in my middle-ageing female body. I wanted to focus the audience's attention on heteronormative and reproductive expectations of bodies marked female and why we think we have any right to make demands on these bodies in the first place. In UCH, I draw the audience's gaze to the ways that I use my middle-ageing queer body in the performance. This dissertation examined the context and lens of this gaze to exploit the audience's preconceived notion of what this particular body means and signifies under cisheteropatriarchy.

I talked at length in the Introduction and in Chapter One about performing queerness for straight and queer audiences and its effect on myself as a performer and the artworks that I have made (and adjusted) for these audiences. In Chapter One, I discussed my frustration while performing the year-long durational performance *Cougar for a Year* and observed that my queerness was not legible or visible to straight audiences or in public, since such spaces are explicitly and implicitly shaped by heteronormativity (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*). I wanted to ensure that queerness was legible to audiences in the various iterations of UCH in *some form*, whether that was through the audience recognizing me as a queer subject, through the queering of the uterus as site for production rather than human reproduction, the queer examination of a middle-ageing female body for sound, the queer penetration of that body with sound, or the queer sociality employed as method using karaoke and vulnerability to elicit empathy.

Instead of constantly having to keep queerness activated on the surface of my body through script, articulation, and gesture (as I have done in other works), in IK-UCH I built

queerness into the structure of the performance itself so that it spread to every aspect of the work in both obvious and subtle ways: this is queer research-creation. By juxtaposing my non-reproductive middle-ageing body with cisheteropatriarchy's reproductive expectations (which are everywhere), the audience was able to plainly see that this particular middle-ageing body was not participating in the reproduction of humans. Further examination of my body revealed productive alternatives to figuring the middle-ageing queer female body in cisheteropatriarchy in playful ways, namely as a sound receiver and karaoke transmitter. Having the audience recognize the voice of a karaoke singer "penetrate" me further recovers my middle-ageing queer female body as a failing subject and permits the audience to envision a potentiality for this body. This queerly sonic penetration also positioned the audience as the penetrator of my body and further revealed the structure of the performance, their role within it, and a distanced yet intimate relationship to my body. By using my middle-ageing queer female body in this way, I was able to engage with a critique of gender, age, and queerness under cisheteropatriarchy with the audience as co-producers.

Truly Madly Deeply

As discussed in Chapter Two, this method of incorporating the audience more fully in the production of the performance started by recognizing their subjectivity. Not recognizing their subjectivity was a huge oversight on my part, which only came into view as audience members lined up to visit me, and when they arrived to my body with preconceived expectations of the work in the very first performance at the Darling Foundry. This significant observation marked the beginning of a need to reconfigure the performance and is a key aspect that runs through the entirety of my dissertation. Accounting for failure and using it as a productive means to further develop the work was crucial. Acknowledging and working with the audience's subjectivity meant that I needed to incorporate this "waiting" time and "lineup" space more fully into the performance so that it became part of the performance. As I observe throughout this dissertation about the first two iterations of UCH at the Darling Foundry and Monument-National in Montreal, the audience had great expectations of the sound that would emit from my body—expectations that sometimes erased my corporeal presence for them in search of this coveted sound.

In this dissertation, I have extrapolated the different registers of intimacy within UCH and the fundamental importance that sound plays within the piece. I have also demonstrated the pivotal discoveries made in the Studio XX residency for resolving formal sound configurations through experimentation, rehearsal, and testing. It was at Studio XX that I was able to reformulate the technical and conceptual machinations of the performance and address and clarify my commitment to the critique of cisheteropatriarchy using performance-based methods. It was also here where I was able to account for the different sites of intimacy, collaboration, and engagement within the performance, and formulate a circuitry that could account for the ways audiences could move through the piece physically, affectively, and conceptually.

I have investigated karaoke as a method of relating to and connecting with the audience through my body in this dissertation. Discovering "intimate karaoke" as a method of audience engagement was a way to activate and incorporate the audience more meaningfully into the performance. By focusing on the audience's potentiality for vulnerability—in an effort to have them match mine as a publically penetrated subject who is displayed for their aural examination—intimate karaoke solicits and stimulates empathy across different stations within the performance between audience members, and between audience members and myself. This affective engagement is amplified through the formal construction of UCH as karaoke singers sing acapella for a room full of other audience members. This karaoke audience and singer are forced to reckon with each other—to "take care" of each other through various modes of encouragement, applause, active listening, singing, performing, performing-not-performing, and building collective engagement together.

Intimate karaoke is also dependent on and connects with the intimate listening that happens with me in a separate room. Karaoke singers are encouraged to participate in this performance because, without a singer, *Uterine Concert Hall* as a performance or a venue will not work. This tenable connection is a condition that underscores everyone's karaoke performance and potentially activates reluctant audience members to become singers and participate in this intimate and affective collaboration. How affect moves between bodies as well as sticks to individuals in the audience shapes the performance and its formal circulatory arrangements (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*). This affective circulation between

166

audience members, and audience members and myself as the performer is integral to shaping and evoking empathy within the work. Audiences see themselves as karaoke singers when another audience member is performing that role. This creates an empathetic bond that extends past individual bodies to create collective vulnerability and community.

This dissertation also accounts for the weight and responsibility that is placed on the performer in the performance context. In these times of increasing vulnerability for women, queer, trans and non-binary people, people of colour and others minoritized subjects, my research addresses how performance has the potential to create spaces of shared vulnerability, empathy, and alliance. How I interpellated failure was a key finding in this research, as was using audience feedback as a generative tool to revise the performance. Examining failure through these modes of knowing permitted me to make significant changes to the work. This accounted for technical shortcomings (poor sound quality) that marked the piece—and me as performer and artist—as a failure. My thinking is influenced by Jack Halberstam's work on queer failure in *The Queer Art of Failure*. Halberstam writes that the queer art of failure "quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being." In IK-UCH, failure was part of the queering of the performance as a "way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline as a form of critique" (88). In the reworking of the performance, I was able to address the mirrored effects and affects of failure between myself as a middle-ageing queer female subject in cisheteropatriarchy and myself as a middle-ageing queer female artist in a performance. Thinking through and with failure in these ways impacted how I remade UCH into IK-UCH and will surely impact my performance-based research creation work in the future.

The formal circulation of IK-UCH as a loop generates knowledge for individual audience members as they visit different stations and fulfill corresponding roles within the performance (karaoke party, karaoke singer, stethoscope listener, repeat). At each stop, they gather stickers along the way for their participation in these stations, which identifies them for other audience members as knowledge keepers. These knowledgeable participants then act as tour guides within the work and further evolve the circulation of knowledge, exemplifying a queer sociality that is directly tied to the performance. My middle-ageing queer body circulates the audience past me and through me using sound, mutual displays of vulnerability, collective empathy, and queer

sociality. In this performance I am able to create a temporary kinship network with audiences that is realized during the presentation of the piece. Hopefully, when they leave the performance the memory of the work and their experience will linger and continue to shape encounters with other people positively, as well as challenge assumptions about bodies marked female in cisheteropatriarchy.

Queer Futures

UCH frames my non-reproductive middle-ageing queer body in an unusual way to transform the audience's attention from sight to sound. My dissertation is an intervention that emphasizes the embodied experience of the middle-ageing queer feminist performance artist, one that acknowledges and accounts for the intersections of gender, queerness, white privilege, and age. I consider the body's shifting significance and status as the very meanings of embodied acts change through this experience and staging. My specific intervention shuttles between gender and queerness as modes of being and knowing while attending to how age informs my analysis. I account for my whiteness and the privilege it permits me in the staging of my body in this performative endeavor. This research-creation dissertation situates these deliberations and has connected them to the construction, performance, and reception of UCH. How I engage with and utilize queer research-creation as a methodology illustrates an embodied approach to this thesis and knowledge production through practice and performance as research.

The methodologies and processes that I developed in this study will have lasting effects on my future scholarly work and artmaking production. In terms of what is ahead for me in this regard, I am committed to continuing to work with alternative representations of queerness that do not sensationalize, over-sexualize, or trivialize queer and non-binary people's identities, bodies, and stories but instead reflect a queer and feminist epistemology of respect, consent, and ethical practice. My performance-based work will continue to use my body as a communal site for audiences and mobilize queer sociality as a means of production. Future research-creation work will also explore how ageing queer and non-binary artists grapple with in/visibility and mediate their bodies within their artmaking practices, and how audiences contribute to and participate in representational modes of knowing that can be productive, kind, and generative as well as destructive, ignorant, and fatal.

168

My research-creation practice and the work that I produce is a radical alternative to how other middle-ageing and older performance-based artists are represented in academia. By using my middle-ageing queer body—a body deemed by cisheteropatriarchy as having little to no value because of my age and queerness—and staging it for audiences to encounter, I confront the audience's anxieties about middle-ageing queer female bodies in an up close and personal way. This close proximity enables me to understand how an audience interprets my embodiment, representation, and composition of middle-ageing queer femininity and respond accordingly. I have seen firsthand what it means to age-in-practice, and I actively work against mainstream heteronormative representations of womanliness, queerness, and ageing which has given me critical insight into alternative forms of value and expression. It is because of my relevant expertise in performance and media production as demonstrated throughout my career as well as my commitment to document, support, curate, and analyze the work of queer and non-binary artists that I am dedicated to ensuring that our work does not disappear because we are not valued by cisheteropatriarchy and mainstream culture.

Endnotes

INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO UTERINE CONCERT HALL

[1] Split Britches (Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw, and Deborah Margolin) are regularly cited as the go-to lesbian performance troupe in Feminist Performance Studies scholarship. See Case, *Split Britches*; S. Warner; Allain and Harvie, Cobrin and Levine.

[2] Peggy Shaw's monograph, *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, features a collection of Shaw's scripts with a forward by feminist performance art scholar Jill Dolan.

[3] There has been research on representations of ageing in Canadian literature (Jamieson) as well as research into menopause (Callahan), women and plastic surgery (Braun; Slevec and Tiggemann), mid-life career changes for women (Gerlicher; August), and the cougar phenomenon (Franklin; Fischler; Kershaw).

[4] For institutional definitions of research-creation and "research and creation" specific to Quebecois and Canadian governmental funding agencies for social sciences and humanities academic research and the fine arts, see: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC); The Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC); Canada Council for the Arts; and Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ).

[5] Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt have also contributed to the development of "studio-based inquiry" and "creative art practice as research" in the academy to establish art-based research as a recognized discipline (186).

[6] I am grateful to Louis-Claude Paquin for his generous provocations and insights.

[7] Amelia Jones describes body art—a term she uses over performance art to reflect the history of both in 1970s and 1980s Western art history—as the site of intersubjectivity, the projection of the artist's body "into the work as a particularized subject," and that makes it possible to "transform the way we think about meaning and subjectivity" ("Body Art" 14). Jones describes body art as differentiated from performance art in that performance art in the mid-twentieth century was identified with the infamous Dadaist cabaret that took place in 1916 Zürich at Cabaret Voltaire that is widely credited as the origin story of performance art, and took the form of theatrical staging for an audience. Jones identifies body art as not inherently political or reactionary, but possessing this potential, and includes works that "*take place through an enactment of the artist's body*" that may be recorded specifically for another form of art like photography, film, or video that exists in its own right and not simply as documentation of a performance art event ("Body Art" 13-14; emphasis in original).

[8] Phelan uses Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80)—a photography-based self-portrait series in which the artist stages herself as tropes of female representations in cinema—as an example to illustrate this point.

[9] According to Rebecca Schneider, explicit body performances aim to "explicate bodies in social relation" and replay the historical drama of gender and race across the body of the artist as stage. Schneider discusses how performance artists use their bodies to "peel back layers of signification that surround their bodies" and how the explicit body in representation carries historical meaning, and social hierarchies of privilege (2). She notes that explicit body performance artists have used their material bodies to "collide literal renderings against Symbolic Orders of meaning" (3). Schneider is interested in the relationship between art and sex, art and pornography, and the high art/low art distinctions that elitism promotes and enables through their comparison.

[10] Schneider further contends that "the sexually active woman as both (low) object and (high) artist straddles and challenges a deeply ingrained gender divide in which active, or overt, or "virile" female sexuality is conceived as inherently animalistic, primitive, and perverse" (29). In other words, once a female artist uses her body or sexuality to create art, she is seen to disrupt gender norms as well as norms of who is the artist and who is the object. The female (artist) has always been (the other as) object, and to climb off of the display mount and take up brush, camera, or other forms of creative agency is to disrupt the genius white male artist. Schneider compares Marcel Duchamp with Carolee Schneemann and Schneemann with Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, in an attempt to rearrange the subject/object/artist positioning and reveal how the materiality of the embodied-female-as-object differs from the embodied male performing female as subject. In her analysis of Duchamp and his alter ego, Rrose Sélavy, Schneider says that his performance of gender, of "creating" a woman, denaturalizes gender and renders it as performative.

[11] For example, Schneemann performed as *Olympia* in Robert Morris's performative installation *Site* (1964), in which he moved objects and furniture around an Olympia-ized Schneemann. Here, Morris was not interested in his objects (Schneemann's body included, presumably), whereas Schneemann was invested in examining the object, since her body was in fact that object (Schneider).

[12] I am indebted to Carolee Schneemann as an artist, and appreciative of her outspoken and unapologetic accounting of her practice and history. She passed away as I was writing this dissertation on March 6, 2019.

[13] For a thorough, deep dive into the layers of this legend—including how women with guns are fetishized, issues of authorship over this piece and images, and analysis of the rumour's construction and circulation, see Robinson.

[14] In reference to *Public Cervix Announcement*, Roberta Mock points out how "there is always the danger that these performances may reify and reinscribe the very objects of their critiques, including the "natural" sexualization of women's bodies and the beauty myths that lead to their modification" (22).

[15] I saw this piece performed at the *Edgy Women Festival* in Montreal in 2009. I knew about this work and what was going to happen as news of this piece had spread from Toronto where Dobkin had originally performed it earlier in 2009 at a *7a-11d Performance Festival Fundraiser* and at *Cheep Queers*. The 2009 edition of the *Edgy Women Festival* was presented at Tangente, a small, quiet, black box theatre with raked seating (as opposed to a cabaret venue). My impression of the audience that attended the program that included Dobkin's *It's Not Easy Being Green,* was that it was not easy being green for them more so than it was for Dobkin. Her performance seemed to elicit mixed feelings from the audience. Some members could not look at her once she had been fisted, and physically turned away from the stage. Some cried out while others cheered as part of an otherwise well-behaved theatrical audience who had responded seemingly appropriately to other performances in the show.

[16] Although Dobkin is taking advantage of the neutrality of the puppet as object, she is refusing the ideology of *The Muppets* and Jim Henson as values neutral. She intervenes in their propagated family values neutrality and symbolic masculine dominance by putting her body, which is not neutral, in intimate proximity with Kermit, and capitalizes on the fact that puppets are supposed to be neutral and lifeless until activated by an operator. Dobkin also interrupts the meaning of Kermit the Frog and leaves her audience with a disoriented view of a previously unproblematic figure before her contact with it.

[17] I'll leave the reader to map the green room and wings and or fly system with the ovaries and fallopian tubes, respectively.

[18] I have based these measurements on research, not my literal vaginal and cervical measurements. See Barnhart et al.; Singer; and Villines.

[19] To hear this visceral recording, see Lesko.

[20] According to NASA, this drawing also features a "breakdown of the most common element in the universe— hydrogen" that "anyone from a scientifically educated civilization having enough knowledge of hydrogen would be able to translate the message" (NASA).

[21] GIV is an artist-run, video distribution centre in Montreal who supports the production and presentation of works made by women. In 2015 they commissioned me to curate a program from their collection to celebrate their 40th anniversary. In 2015, GIV's collection featured 1,260 works by 330 artists.

[22] I screened works that were available online via YouTube, Vimeo, or the artist's own server; the last two platforms often required a password which was supplied to GIV for curatorial projects. For works not online, I visited GIV and screened the works in one of their editing suites.

[23] *That's Right Diana Barry—You Needed Me* was originally commissioned as a performance piece for *Anne Made Me Gay*, curated by Moynan King and Rosemary Rowe, Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto in 2008. I have performed this work live at various venues in Toronto and Montreal.

[24] The Centaur Theatre is Montreal's largest English-language theatre. I was asked by Kiss My Cabaret regular, Harry Standjofski, to write and perform a fifteen-minute monologue for their yearly *Urban Tales* Christmas program (*Urban Tails* because it was a "sexy" edition) for a five-night run. After our first performance, I experienced an Eliza Doolittle moment when I descended the stairs from the theatre to the opening reception and Harry said, "There she is! Finally a lesbian at the Centaur!" This was followed by an analysis by Harry and another middle-ageing, straight, white man friend who wondered why I hadn't "butched it up" a bit more in my monologue dress and delivery. The opening reception also featured a few encounters with cishet men who were confrontational and aggressive with me, one of which was an argument with a dude who wanted me to point out the women in the audience I would have sex with and describe how. We got into a shouting match and his girlfriend apologized for his behaviour. I would not describe my experience as a performer at the Centaur at this time as a particularly safe one as a queer person.

[25] When I performed *Careless Fister* at Buddies in Bad Times in Toronto, I situated the piece by saying "when I performed this in Montreal for the straight people, I had to explain a few things about fisting." Their knowing laughs and nods demonstrated a different kind of engagement than the uncomfortable laughs and response of the straight audience I originally performed this for in Montreal. Because of the timing of the performance, which was just one week after the Harvey Weinstein scandal broke, I made sure to explain to the straight audience that I wasn't offering a lesbian "how-to" for straight dudes to have sex with their girlfriends, and that my instructions were for the ladies in the room on how to fist their cishet boyfriends. This piece also features a surprise guest appearance by my butch girlfriend MJ Raposo, who emerges from the curtains to perform the song's signature saxophone solo.

[26] Leticia Sabsay provides a very thorough definition: "The naturalization of normative heterosexuality and the gender binary on which heterosexuality depends as the standard norm that organizes society. It describes a 'sexual order' organized around the deeply embedded assumption that heterosexuality is equivalent to 'the normal' and the consequent socio-sexual hierarchy that defines and marks all gender positions and sexualities in relation to the heterosexual norm. Heteronormativity is embedded in every social institution, at the level of actual policies, everyday practices, cultural imaginaries, enacted through manifold of heterocentric assumptions implicit in the ways social relations, practices and identities are hierarchically imagined" (607n1).

[27] Two specific examples of this are in stage pieces I have done as part of my doctoral research: *Santa's Wife and the Baby Dyke* (2015) and *Careless Fister* (2017).

[28] With respect to J. Halberstam and their book, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

[29] I am not talking about age costuming, but the embodied presentation of the performer in the age that they are at which can be read as such, taking into account markers of class, gender, race, and ability.

[30] With thanks to R.M. Vaughn for his insights and frank discussion about being "too old to not be" a fixed queer subject.

[31] In 2004, Lisa Duggan coined the term "new homonormativity," which she defines as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50). Duggan's term is a response to Michael Warner's "heteronormativity," a term he coined in 1991, which draws on Adrienne Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality" as well as Gayle Rubin's work on the sex/gender system. In *The Trouble with Normal*, Warner continues to employ this term as well as question the gay movement's normative mission for same-sex marriage, which for him "represents a widespread loss of vision in the movement" (vii). Conrad Ryan's *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion* continues this work in relationship to neoliberal, homo- and hetero- normative analysis within and pressing against gay and lesbian movements, and queer and trans activism in a collection of essays written between 2000 and 2014. It does this by building on these ideas and focusing critique on mantels that the contemporary American mainstream gay and lesbian rights movement have taken up that are marriage equality, gay service in the military, and hate crime legislation, with effects on prison reform and abolition. Essays note neoliberal victories in the United States like the repeal of DOMA and the popularity of gay marriage, the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), and federal hate crime legislation. The costs of these neoliberal "achievements" is the uniting thesis of the essays in this anthology, and intersect with larger LGBTQ+ issues as to the legal, political, and social effects on lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans bodies.

[32] For a thorough critique of gay marriage and regulatory definitions of queer families, see Yasmin Nair "Queer Critiques of Gay Marriage" in *Against Equality*. Here, Nair outlines that the writings in the collection respond to marriage advocacy and question "the idea of marriage as any kind of solution for our problems" as it "perpetuates the very inequities that gay marriage advocates claim to resolve" (21). She also states that "a queer radical critique of the family is not simply the celebration of an outsider status, although it is often that, but an economic critique. A queer radical critique of gay marriage exposes how capitalism structures our notion of "family" and the privatization of the social relationships we depend on to survive" (20). This collection reframes queer progress narratives by placing marriage advocacy and advocates in conversation with queer activist history, while considering broader social, political, and economical contexts informed by intersectionality, and insist "that we stop looking for 'equality' in the narrow terms dictated by neoliberalism, where progress means an endless replication of the status quo," and further "insists that we stop acquiescing to the neoliberal demand that our identities should dictate what basic rights are given to us" (20).

[33] For a study of queer issues in Canada that intersects with the law, history, health, education, age, and representation, see Auger and Krug; Knegt.

[34] Marie Thompson has written about the Babypod and other uterine audio technologies and their relationship to biocapitalism, reproductive labour, and sonic affect, and draws comparisons between these devices and the rhetoric that surrounds them to functions of social reproduction.

CHAPTER ONE
MEET THE COUGAR: DURATIONAL PRACTICES AND QUEER LEGIBILITY

[1] In *Undoing Gender*, Butler elaborates that gender is constantly being performed, at times without the will or intent of the subject as "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (1). Furthering her theories beyond

performative utterances she states that "performativity is not just about speech acts. It is also about bodily acts" (198).

[2] I was diligent about documenting *Cougar for a Year* every day through an online interactive database (www.CougarThis.com), which included daily photographs, diary entries, video, and a *Cougar Sightings* section where online users could contribute pictures of people wearing animal print. This website continues to serve as an archive of the performance. There were also several articles and interviews published during and after the project, which also contributed to an awareness of what I was doing. See Lussier; Montgomery; Rosen; Burnett; Slone.

[3] Sue-Ellen Case talks about performance troupe Split Britches and how Peggy Shaw's butchness does not reinforce or mimic heteronormativity, but in fact that "butch-femme relations challenged feminist rejections of lesbian subcultural practices" by making "lesbian" visible: without Shaw's butchness, both Shaw and performing and life partner Lois Weaver might disappear (8).

CHAPTER TWO
"YOU CAN'T UNSEE A VULVA!" AND OTHER KEY ELEMENTS IN STAGING UTERINE CONCERT HALL AT THE DARLING FOUNDRY AND MONUMENT-NATIONAL IN MONTREAL

[1] With respect to J. Halberstam and their book, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

[2] I used a vintage wooden gynecological table with stirrup footholds in *Come Shred My Heart* (2008, 2011). This experience reminded me of the discomfort I would feel in my legs and buttocks for an extended period of time should I use stirrups in UCH. It also made me aware of the potential for vaginal "openness" such a position would provide as I perched at the end of the table. Neither were ideal for *Uterine Concert Hall* and the Babypod.

[3] Often found in sex toys, phthalates are chemicals in plastic that permit pliability but do not adhere to the plastics they are added to; limited exposure to them is recommended (Queen; Sloan; Melby; Crinnion).

[4] This is my recollection of the work and its timing based on my experience of the piece but might differ with what was actually played, the sequence and mix of Nik's playlist, and the timing.

[5] By "active" I mean audience members who approached the work prepared to listen deeply and who recognized the potential auditory limitations of the technology (stethoscope) and structure (listening through my body's flesh) of the piece.

[6] At the time of this performance, Jackie was fifty-one.

[7] Spoiler alert: I would fail in this pursuit.

[8] An evening of performance-based works curated by the WIVES collective followed my performance. This event was sponsored by the McGill Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies (IGSF); the Feminist Media Studio (FMS) at Concordia University; and Concordia's Simone de Beauvoir Institute, all institutions I have presented work at before.

[9] I hope I have made it clear that I am not equating "bad behaviour" with criticism, but referring to rude and aggressive complaints about the work and my body.

[10] Art Stud Club is the name Schneemann gave to her male contemporaries. See Schneemann.

CHAPTER THREE
NEEDS MORE WORK: INTIMATE KARAOKE AND OTHER FINDINGS AT THE STUDIO XX RESIDENCY

[1] This residency was sponsored by Media@McGill and housed at Studio XX in Montreal where I had twenty-four-hour access to a studio space. Media@McGill was an interdisciplinary research group based in the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University that focused on contemporary media (Media@McGill). This residency was part of their last year of projects. Founded in 1996, Studio XX is a "bilingual feminist artist-run centre that supports technological experimentation, creation and critical reflection in media arts" (Studio XX).

[2] Ahmed cites Gayatri Gopinath's work about visible public forms of queerness not necessarily available to South Asian lesbians (qtd. in Ahmed 151). See Gopinath.

[3] "In film and video production, the term room tone means the sound of an empty room, or a room in which all the actors are standing silently. To a newbie, room tone means silence. To an audio professional, room tone means the

subtle, low-volume sounds present in every room. Importantly, room tones are not all the same—every room has its own unique sound" (MediaCollege).

[4] When I first performed UCH in 2016 and I began to get press interviews about the work I started to use "vaginal canal" as a descriptive because some journalists were conflating uterus, cervix, and vagina into "vagina." I continue to explain this mapping when I describe the work because it seems the cervix is as difficult for some to identify or acknowledge as the clitoris.

[5] Sara Ahmed argues that "the surfaces of bodies 'surface' as an effect of the impressions left by others" and that "the surfaces of collective as well as individual bodies take shape through such impressions," meaning that "emotions are not [inherently] 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 10).

[6] Mock details a joke told by Roseanne Barr on a talk show about her having vaginal rejuvenation surgery that exemplifies the threat of the grotesque ageing female body and the deluge of online troll commenting that resulted. "The image that Barr created seemed to pose some sense of personal threat, perhaps due to the possibility that an old vagina might somehow evade its visual signifiers and "pass" as something to be desired" (21).

[7] Mock also cites Mahadev Apte's cross-cultural ethnographic work that observes post-menopausal women participating more readily in humour with their male counterparts. "In the majority of societies, post-menopausal women are overwhelmingly considered to be either masculine or sexless. As their sexual freedom ceases to be a threat to social order, they are allowed to engage publically in humor that may be considered ribald or even obscene" (Mock 16-17). Also see Apte.

[8] Consent, agency, subservience, dissent, spectatorship, showmanship, and manipulation are also explored by McMillan in relation to the accuracy and truthfulness of the archive, largely authored by P.T. Barnum and his avatars, with a colonial, patriarchal, racist, and ageist pen. McMillan also notes Heth's performance of not simply ageing, but ancient ageing in this context, amplified through manipulated staging by both Barnum and Heth.

[9] For more on Sara Baartman, see Levin.

[10] I am indebted to composer and artist Erin Gee for recommending resources to make my own hydrophone.

[11] This type of microphone was recommended by Jackie and Nik as well as several other artists working with sound.

[12] You may remember from earlier in this dissertation me mentioning that my girlfriend is butch. This, her enthusiasm for the task, and a room full of tools are her only qualifications to construct this microphone.

[13] Online waterproof microphone makers recommended epoxy or silicone caulking and sex toy repair experts recommended silicone caulking (Joy et al; CrankSturgeon; SexToysPro). Erin Gee recommended hot glue. I decided to proceed with silicone caulking based on the sex toy repair recommendations.

[14] I was interested in queering and subverting ping pong shows (sex shows that feature a woman shooting ping pong balls out of her vagina, made popular by sex workers in Thailand) by using its tools. Films like *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), *Ali G Indahouse* (2002), and *The Hangover Part II* (2011) make reference to these ping pong shows through a misogynist and racist cinematic gaze.

[15] With thanks to Chantal Allard for donating condoms from her work as a sound grip where non-lubricated latex condoms are used to hold microphone receivers and battery packs on the bodies of actors.

[16] The recording session led us to determine that this was a separate project, and to pursue it we needed further funding, time, and research to develop this work. We also determined that although related, sound generated from and processed by Nik and Jackie based on these vaginal recordings was an entirely different piece separate from *Uterine Concert Hall* that Jackie named *Womb Tone* based on my originally proposed *Room Tone*. We envisioned *Womb Tone* as an immersive sound installation without objects or imagery in it, but acknowledged that this could change and evolve. We determined that we needed resources to secure knowledge, tools, and technologies appropriate to the task at hand, i.e. hydrophone microphones and or vagina friendly microphones and other sufficient audio recording gear (not five-dollar contact guitar microphones), consultation and collaboration with audio experts and engineers who construct microphones, and consultation and collaboration with medical researchers working with the effects of audio on flesh and tissue, which is a goal for future UCH research in general.

[17] Inoue's "Juke 8" machine featured a microphone, amplifier, eight-track tape deck, and coin box. Mass production followed and the machine was made available in 1971 where it quickly became popular in Kobe Japan. For ¥100 (about $0.35) a singer could purchase five minutes of music to sing to with Inoue's machine (Inoue).

[18] As a term "karaoke" has its origins in 1952 Osaka where an orchestra went on strike and was replaced by a machine provided by Matsuda Electronics that played music. According to Inoue "It is said that someone from Matsuda looked into the pit and said, 'The music is playing but the orchestra pit is empty!'" (Inoue).

[19] According to Music Trades, there were 17.6 million dollars in sales of karaoke related products in the United States in 2018 (up from 17.2 in 2017).

CHAPTER FOUR
INTIMATE KARAOKE: LIVE AT UTERINE CONCERT HALL

[1] Thanks to Moynan King and Carolyn Taylor for their thoughtful reflections and engaging discussion about intimacy.

[2] Instructions were announced at the start of the piece by Jennifer Fisher, La Centrale's Artistic Coordinator.

[3] Pauline Oliveros developed deep listening as a technique of "learning to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound – encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible. Simultaneously one ought to be able to target a sound or sequence of sounds as a focus within the space/time continuum and to perceive the detail or trajectory of the sound or sequence of sounds. Such focus should always return to, or be within the whole of the space/time continuum (context)" (Oliveros xxiii).

[4] One of the organizers expressed her concern about singing karaoke in front of her students. She said that I shouldn't be offended if she didn't sing but that the stakes were just too high for her to participate because her students weren't used to seeing her in that capacity. I told her it was really no problem at all and entirely up to her. She ended up signing Björk's "It's Oh So Quiet" (1995) at the end, much to my delight and the delight of the crowd.

[5] Pip Bradford, the Production Manager of the SummerWorks Festival suggested "flights" as a naming and organizational device based on her previous successful experience with it in other shows.

[6] The webpage for the event features a list of warnings: "Audience Participation" is the only item listed (SummerWorks, "Intimate Karaoke, Live at Uterine Concert Hall").

[7] The SummerWorks Festival provided text for the land acknowledgment in their 2018 Artist Handbook, which read: "As a Festival that brings together performance from across this land and beyond, we wish to acknowledge that SummerWorks takes place on the traditional territory, Tkaronto, 'Where the Trees Meet the Water,' 'The Gathering Place' of the Mississauga, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat Nations. As we come together, we pay our respects to all our relations who have gathered and will continue to gather in this place" (2).

[8] Thanks to Moynan King for her careful observations.

[9] This video series features me singing along to karaoke music that only I can hear and at times, describe it for the viewer. See *Headphone Karaoke: Don't Stop Believin'*. During these tests I thought I sounded amazing. After reviewing an hour of footage in which I sing about a dozen karaoke songs, it was clear that I did not.

[10] Many thanks to Emer O'Toole for her challenging questions and insights regarding affect, audiences, and intimacies.

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