Pleasure inQueery
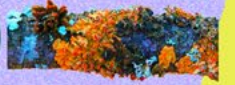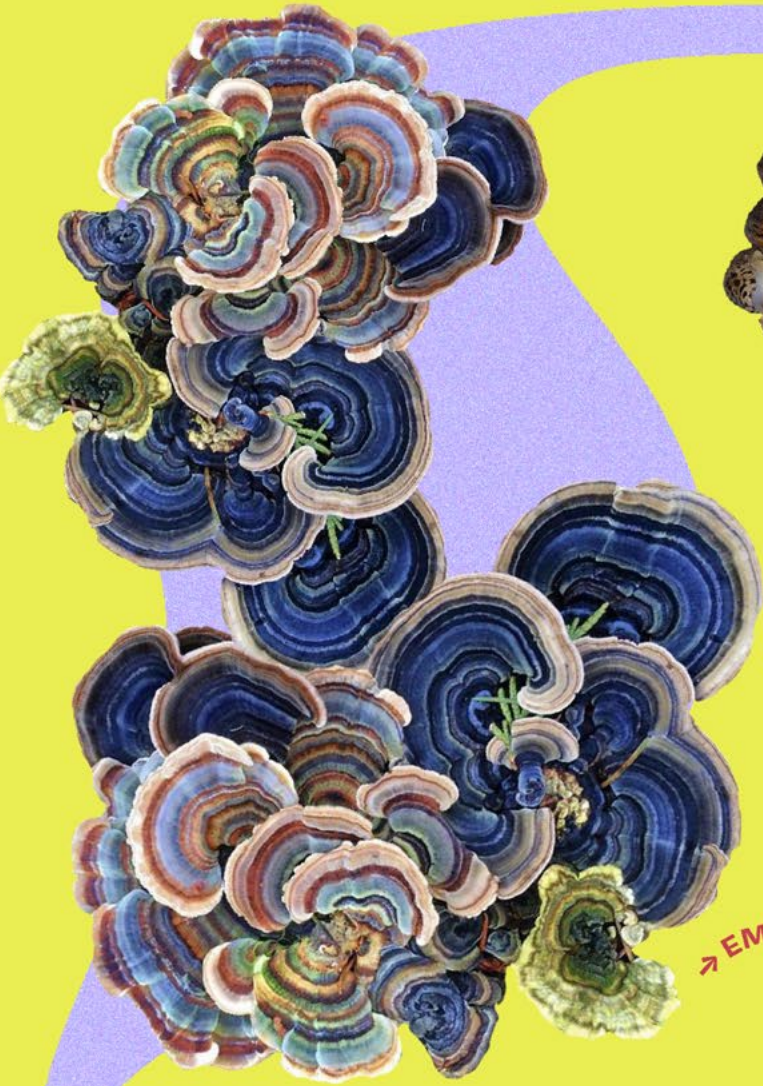
→ MAKE LIKE A LEOPARD SLUG

→ EMBODY LIKE FUNGI

→ DO LIKE LICHEN DO & INVOLVE

✧ The Pleasure inQueery Project ✧

A Humble Attempt at *Making the Revolution Irresistable* ♡

· REPORT ·

· by Georgia Vincent · December 2021 ·

Pleasure

Contents

Introduction

Pleasure:

a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment,

or,

sensual gratification.

Rooted in themes of social and environmental justice and gender equality, the *Pleasure inQueery Project* aims to examine and que(e)ry human relationships to pleasure under patriarchal, extractivist capitalist systems through a lens of queer ecology and pleasure activism.

I will situate the need for research into pleasure through my contextual review, examining the interconnected natures of gender and sexual equality, the mental illness epidemic and the crisis of connection to self, other and planet. I will then examine the politics of pleasure in my literature review, exploring how it appears in our lives and our bodies, and the tension between individual agency and responsibility, and systemic cultures of repression. Subsequently, my methodology and design approach will portray the rich variety of tools and contexts I used to queery and analyse human relationships to pleasure, citing various theoretical frameworks that helped me definte my research question:

> How might we redefine pleasure as intrinsic to both human and ecological health and position it as a powerful tool for change-making?

This culminates in my co-design workshop; *Mapping Radical Prefigurative Topographies*. Following this, I critically evaluate the impact of the workshop, highlighting its limitations, in addition to the design knowledge acquired. To conclude, I present my plans for the next iteration of *The Pleasure inQueery Project, Life's Queer Tapestry*.

"Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth. and that game must be one of response and respect... Queer messmates in mortal play. indeed." (Harraway. 2007).

THE CASE FOR PLEASURE

The link between the social and ecological crises went, until recently, somewhat overlooked in mainstream environmental dialogue. Latterly, however, the toxic effects of extractivist capitalism and excessive consumerism on people and planet have become achingly clear.

The link between climate change, soaring inequality and mental health problems is astounding. In a sense, climate disaster is to the Earth as depression is to the human, an imbalance in the ecosystem that sends chaotic murmurations rippling outward and inward, in waves of reprecussive disruption.

The symbiotic potential we share with our ecosystem, and the beauty held therein, is dangerously out of alignment and engaging people with the subject matter and with capacities of care is an increasing challenge, when time for self-care is already heavily taxed.

This is why the case for pleasure is so important; it is remedial to the widespread anhedonia, anxiety and depression that robs people of agency and enthusiasm and feeds off of social paralysis. As Toni Cade Bambara said, "Revolution begins with the self, in the self." (Lewis, 2012).

Contextual Review

THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM: SEXUAL AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Secondary research into the statistical data of the interconnected problems associated with gender inequality, sexual violence and the mental health crises.

1 / 3
women
globally

54,000
testimonials
gathered
in 1 year

773,000
reports of domestic
and sexual abuse

HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO EITHER PHYSICAL AND/OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIFTIME according to the World Health Organisation
(VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, 2021).

FROM SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY THE PLATFORM Everyone's Invited
(A PLACE FOR SURVIVORS TO SHARE THEIR STORIES., 2021)

THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC according to The Crime Survey of England and Wales.
(OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS, 2021.)

In 2019 the Office of National Statistics recorded highest levels of sexual assault since 2006.
(OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS, 2021.)

"Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled."

(DEFINING SEXUAL HEALTH, 2010)

MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Looking at recent statistics, it is achingly clear that the state of mental health, both in the UK and globally, is worsening.

meantal illness affects 1 BILLION perople worldwide

AND IS CURRENTLY THE LEADING CAUSE OF DISABILITY, WITH DEPRESSION AS THE LEADING CONTRIBUTOR AND 250 MILLION DIAGNOSED WORLDWIDE

(CARHART-HARRIS, 2021)

1 / 5
adults in England
suffer with
depression

MARCH 2020, ONE IN 10 ADULTS IN ENGLAND SUFFERED FROM MODERATE TO SEVERE DEPRESSION, DOUBLING TO ALMOST ONE IN 5 BY JUNE 2020

(CAMPBELL, 2021)

Loneliness, although 'commonly understood to be an emotional state, is but one manifestation of a society organised around such dogmatic individualism.'

(WARFIELD, 2021)

THE CRISIS OF CONNECTION; TO SELF, OTHERS AND THE EARTH

2 / 3
UK ADULTS FEEL
DISCONNECTED
FROM NATURE

ACCORDING TO A 2017 SURVEY BY THE WILDLIFE TRUST

(MACFARLANE, 2020)

In The Crisis of Connection: Roots, Consequences, and Solutions (2018), Way et al identify that we are suffering from a crisis of connection, rooted in the broad scope of diverging ideologies that people subscribe to, such as patriarchal ideologies, capitalism and white supremacy, which compromise our ability to listen to ourselves and each other, create inclusive communities and recognize our common humanity. Our ideologies and their corresponding stereotypes and values, in order words, lead to a crisis of connection.'

They identify that increasing disconnection from ourselves and each other can lead to loss of trust and empathy, rising depression and anxiety, and increasing levels of loneliness and social isolation.

MAPPING SYSTEMS OF OPRESSION AND INJUSTICE

Today's landscape under patriarchal and extractivist capitalism.

ECO-RACISM — RACISM

COLONIALISM — ACCESS TO EDUCATION — ORGASM GAP

ANTHROPOCENTRISM — SEXUAL VIOLENCE

EXTRACTIVIST CAPITALISM — PATRIARCHY — GENDER INEQUALITY

CLIMATE CRISIS — ECONOMIC EQULAITY — SOCIAL JUSTICE — SAFETY

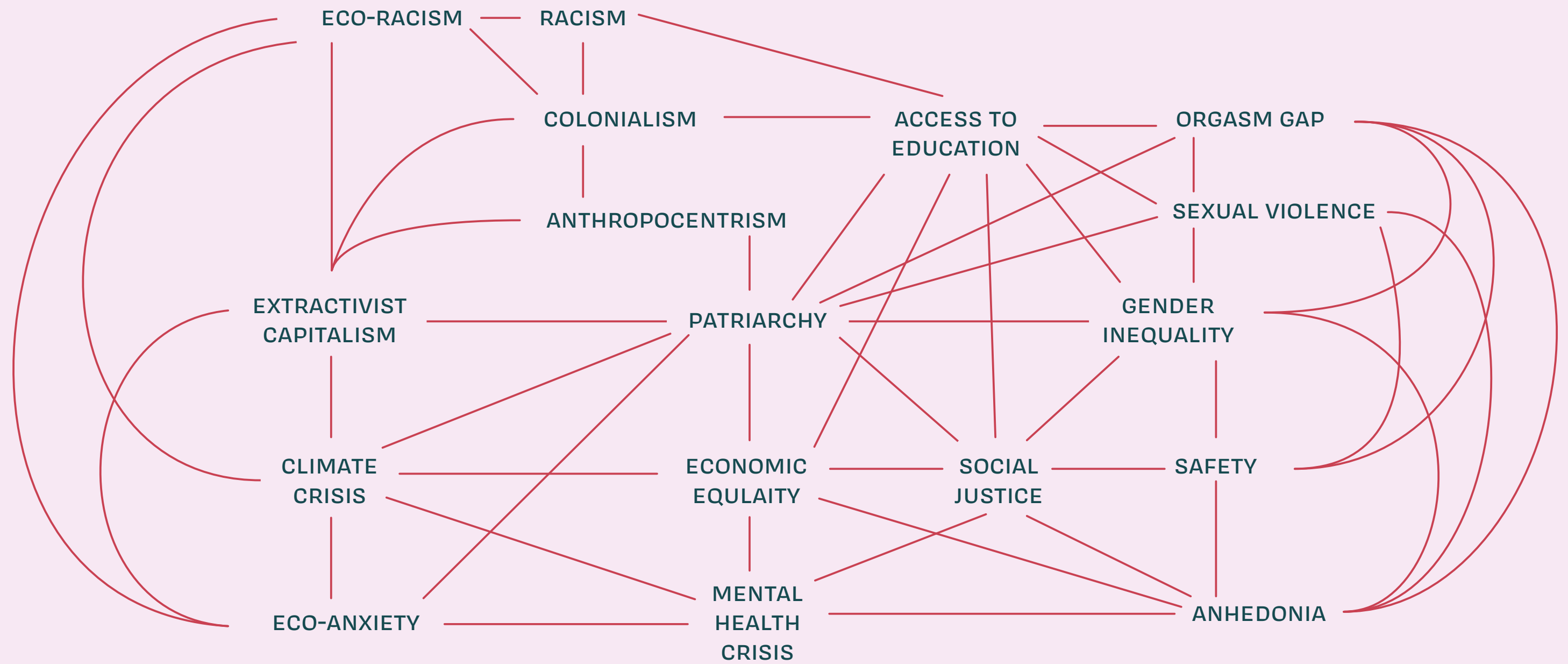ECO-ANXIETY — MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS — ANHEDONIA

FIGURE 01A: MAP OF 'WICKED PROBLEM'

MAPPING PREFIGURATIVE POSSIBILITIES

Tomorrow's landscape under regerenerative chthulucentrism[1], equality and care.

ECO-RACISM — RACISM

DE-COLONIALISM

COLONIALISM

EDUCATIONAL COMMONS

ICITY

ORGASM GAP

CHTHULUCENTRISM

ANTHULUCENTRISM

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

DONUT ECONOMICS

EXTRACTIVIST CAPITALISM

SOCIAL EQUITY & THRIVING BIO-DIVERSITY

PATRIARCHY

INEQUALITY

THE GOOD ENOUGH MODEL

CLIMATE CRISIS

ECONOMIC GROWTH

SOCIAL JUSTICE

SAFETY

PLEASURE ACTIVISM

PLEASURE NEURAL NETWORK

ECO-ANXIETY
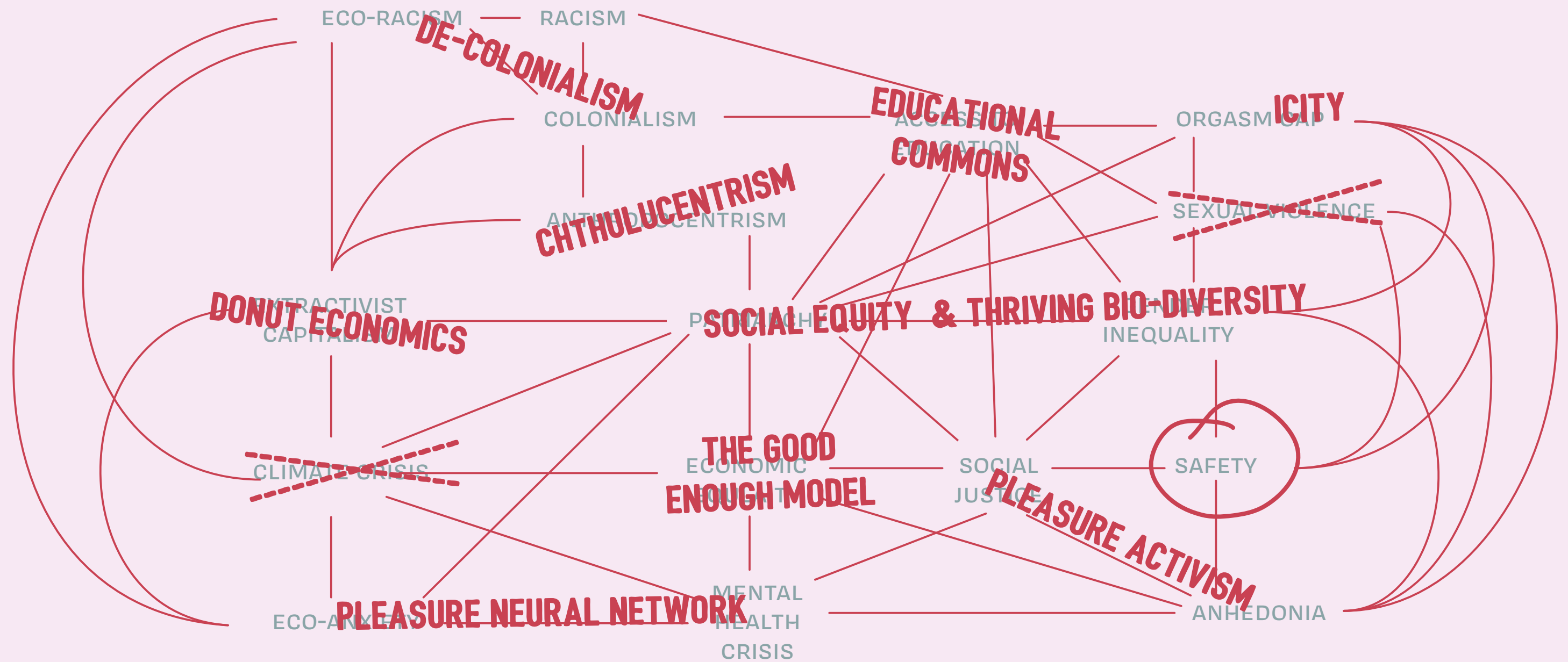
MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

ANHEDONIA

FIGURE 01B: MAP OF 'WICKED PROBLEM-SOLVING'

[1] "THE CHTHULUCENE IS MADE UP OF ONGOING MULTISPECIES STORIES AND PRACTISES OF BECOMING-WITH IN TIMES THAT REMAIN AT STAKE" (HARAWAY, 2016).

Literature Review

THE POLITICS OF PLEASURE

To substantiate pleasures' place in socially just futures, theory in the form of three seminal texts was used to inform the socio-political, biological, emotional contexts that pleasure holds to humans.

PLEASURE ACTIVISM

Adrienne maree brown (2019) offers a working manifesto that grounds the potential expansion of social justice work within a foundation of pleasure and its possibilities, asking how to "make justice and liberation feel good"? It addresses matrices of power, oppression and the socio-political dynamics that shape our understanding of and relationship to pleasure, framing it as an innate human right and powerful tool for positive action and change. Of particular interest was one of the last of the Pleasure Principles; moderation. Brown asks the reader to examine their unique relationship to 'enough', society's relationship to excess and the inequalities and scarcity it breeds. Brown writes, "A central aspect of pleasure activism is tapping into the natural abundance that exists within and between us, and between our species and this planet. Pleasure is not one of the spoils of capitalism. It is what our bodies, our human systems, are structured for".

WHY GOOD SEX MATTERS

Similar themes on the effects of excess and overstimulation on human pleasure receptors are put forth by cognitive neuroscientist and psycho-sexual therapist Nan Wise (2019). Wise cites anhedonia as a recurrent nexus amongst her patients, and positions pleasure as its antidote, crucial to emotional, physical and mental wellbeing.

"Because sex is biological, psychological, and social, it governs so much of who we are and how we are doing at any given time. Our relationship with our sexuality gives us a way to assess our capacity for pleasure."

THE RIGHT TO SEX

In Amia Srinivasan's groundbreaking work (2021), sex is scrutinised as a political phenomenon through shrewd philosophical interrogation, taking conversations beyond consent, through the murky waters of choice and morality, into desire and its contentious relationship to power and liberty.

"When I wrote that '[in the very best cases] desire can cut against what politics has chosen for us, and choose for itself', I was not imagining a desire regulated by the demands of justice, but a desire set free from the binds of injustice… what's disciplined here isn't desire itself, but the political forces that presume to instruct it."

(Srinivasan, 2021)

While acknowledging the systemic oppressive forces that can drive desire, there is also a call to action for an in-depth evaluation of our desires; why they are what they are, what shapes them, and is emancipation from them possible, to discover what we truly desire, unimpeded by neoliberal patriarchal oppression?

Together these texts have mapped the complex and fluctuating landscape of human relationships to pleasure and its relevance in broader socio-eco-political contexts. As such, the scope for exploration is rich, leading to several assumptions to test and some guiding research questions. Firstly, have morality and heteronormativity noticeably stifled the journey to pleasure? Secondly, how does prioritising pleasure feel in a broader framework of care, equality and justice? Finally, can exercises in transforming desire make space for more ecologically and socially just futures?

Methodology and Design Approach

PREFIGURATION

In its affiliation with radical political organising and direct democracy, prefigurative design offers an embodied methodology to apply my design skills to the enmeshment of the political and the pleasurable unearthed in the literature review. As DiSalvo (2016) states in *The Journal for Design Strategies*, "Prefigurative politics refers to practices that strive to enact desired political conditions or systems. When "doing" prefigurative politics, we act out the social values and relations we want to see realised— we perform them into being."

I translated this prefigurative methodology into worldbuilding for my co-design workshop, trying to stay mindful of the potential alienation that worldbuilding can create for those who do not conform. As Srinivasan (2021) forewarns us, "At its worst, prefigurative politics allows its practitioners to substitute individual personal transformation for collective political transfiguration. It becomes...a liberal politics", though the author also notes that the same could be true of a refusal to interact with the same method. As I am exploring the power and influence of personal transfiguration on political activism I was mindful of leaving space for critique at the end, so those who did not align with this prefiguration could share why that may be.

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

As a research method that recognises and values the positionality of the researcher and their relationship to both stakeholders and the context of the research itself, auto-ethnography felt like an appropriate way to bring my lived experiences as a queer woman and my experience in the field of sex education, into my working process. These topics are deeply personal to me, and erecting a Brechtian-style fourth wall of objectivity, felt not only paradoxical to the content but somewhat deceptive in regards to my proximity to the work. Alternatively, I have chosen to follow in the sage footsteps of Bell Hooks and "subvert the mind/body split" present in much academic writing, , in an attempt to bring wholeheartedness and care to all aspects of this project, in turn, practising a *wholebodiedness* too (Hooks, 1994).

In *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research*, Adams (2015) writes, "Social life is messy, uncertain, and emotional. If we desire to research social life, then we must embrace a research method that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion". I find this synchronous to the delicate landscape of human desire, offering a richer and more nuanced context than traditional qualitative methods.

CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS AS DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

In *Design, When Everybody Designs*, Manzini (2015) frames design for social innovation as "an open-ended co-design process, where every design activity, considered as part of a larger design research program, created new design knowledge: knowledge that was transferable from one project to another." This theory is evident in the iterative design process that took me from my workshop to my final design output, *Life's Queer Tapestry*. An ongoing, involving co-design piece that I hope can capture reflections on public discourse around topics of gender, sex, politics and ecology and the evolving contexts that surround them. It should also be noted that this was not my initial intention or ideation for the workshop outcome, but instead, a reflexive response to the subject matter, or design knowledge, raised within it.

Cooperation has been a common thread throughout both design iterations. As discerningly noted here, "cooperation is a craft (that is, a social artefact to be built using a specific skill...) Sennett observes that 'modern society is de-skilling people in practising cooperation'." (Sennet, 2012 as cited in Manzini, 2015). It could be said that all co-design practice is an effort to reverse this trend and rebuild community cooperation.

LOCAL DISCONTINUITIES

If a discontinuity is to "propose ways of behaving that are radically new", a local discontinuity first frames the context of its locale to then assess what can be deemed radically new (Manzini, 2015). As my project is located in London – a bastion for capitalism built off of colonialism – I think that posing questions and imagining pathways to pleasure free from capitalism is a radical act, as is asking co-designers to take time – capitalism's invisible metronome – to sit and reflect on these themes. During my workshop, I asked participants to define their current contexts of pleasure as initial framing.

RESILIENCE BUILDING

Manzini (2015) insists that cultural diversity and creativity are bedrocks of any resilient society and takes this further, positioning resilience against a contemporary backdrop, offering it as a "possible reconciliation between human beings and nature, between human beings and the irreducible complexity of our world." I have kept this in mind when sourcing the literature and materials that informed this project, searching for voices that could offer an intersectional cross-section of the themes of this project. It also coincided with my use of a queer ecological framework as a tool for representation, and as Manzini put it, reconciliation.

STORYTELLING

Storytelling was an essential element in structuring this prefigurative world. Manzini proposes that "It enables us to communicate the complex ideas and values that today's co-designing processes must often deal with". In my case, it offered an opportunity to break from the first half of the workshop, grounded in present-day experiences in order to contextualise and benchmark, and move into the creative and hopeful headspace needed for utopia building.

CRAFTIVISM

Offering a blend of craft and activism through intersectional feminist, anti-capitalist and environmentally conscious values, the collective power of craftivist practice held much promise as a method to bring people together in my design in action. As Greer writes in Knitting For Good, "craftivism is a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper & your quest for justice more infinite" (Greer, 2008). With *Life's Queer Tapestry*, I believe that there is an opportunity for participants to upskill within the design process, especially for those who do not usually engage with maintenance and repair processes, which offers itself as a means to fight the disposable culture that is so pervasive in Western society today.

QUEER ECOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE ECOLOGY AS TOOLS FOR REPRESENTATION

In *Queer Ecologies* (2010), Mortimer-Sandilands *et al* wites, "Queer theory was part of an agenda to build solidarity between and among genders, sexualities and cultures. Queer ecology, by contrast, could function as a mode of investigation that better recognises more nuanced differences as part of broader initiatives for environmental justice." To me, queer ecology provides an active framework that interrogates colonial and patriarchal relationships to ecology's natural abundance and diversity. As a queer person, I am interested in relationality and representation's roles in shaping hopeful futures for marginalised groups. The documentary *Disclosure* (2020) evidences the consistent work of the trans community to be seen and resist societies attempted erasure of them. Could the same theory be applied to the plant kingdom, especially in discourses of gender and sexual queerness? Could seeing ourselves reflected in the beyond human support conservation efforts and battle the loneliness epidemic in which we find ourselves? Moreover, could demonstrating the inherent queerness of the living world be used to dismantle binary thinking, systematic oppression and domination of marginalised groups?

The chapter *Landscape Ecology as a Queer Spatial Vocabulary* introduces the fundamentals of landscape ecology. As the first science to affirm the cultural elements present in all ecosystems and locales, landscape ecology holds a unique perspective in framing subjectivities of the human erotic and their inherent interconnectedness to the biophysical (Mortimer-Sandilands *et al.*, 2010). This begs the question of how one might creatively interpret a landscape? As an artwork, an interface, corporally or even communally? How might we explore the ecotones between the human and more than human, the queer and the heterosexual?

Queer nature has also offered a rich visual language that can be used for education on the abundance and diversity of the more than human world and a potential tool in moving participants and readers beyond anthropocentric thinking.

Design Process

WHAT IF'S AND FRAMING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

After compiling my secondary research findings, I used the statement 'what if' (Dunne and Raby, 2013) to hypothesize on future scenarios and refine my research questions:

1. How might we redefine pleasure as intrinsic to both human and ecological health and position it as a powerful tool for change-making?

2. How might we further emancipate people from binary thinking and invite people to seek representation and affinity with the more than human, in order to build a more compassionate, inclusive and sustainable future?

ETHICS AND REPRESENTATION

As representation is a theme central to this project and prefiguration its tool, it was important to – where possible – use literature, resources and references from people that reflect the inclusion and diversity I wish to see in the world. Similarly, co-design was the selected methodology due to its capacity to offer a multiplicity of lived human experiences and expressions. My design in action did not target any specific stakeholders; instead, inviting in the complexity of diverse human experiences.

I obtained oral consent from participants to record the workshop and use all content provided in my research findings and process documentation. The video recording will be deleted after my grade is released.

DOUBLE DIAMOND

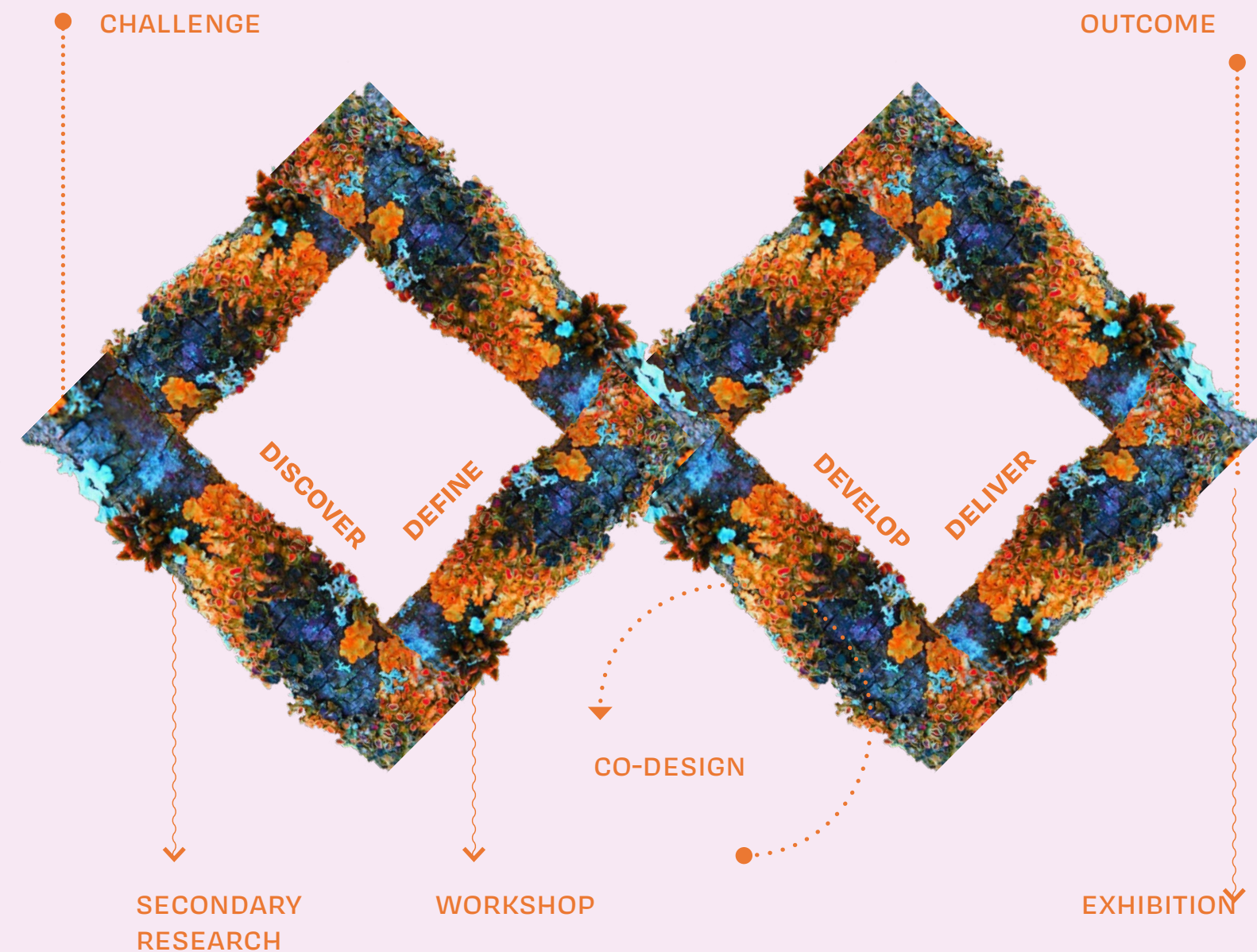I followed the Double Diamond framework throughout the project (Design Council, n.d).

FIGURE 03: DOUBLE DIAMOND (DESIGN COUNCIL, N.D).

THEORY OF CHANGE

NEED

AIM

An end to the social inequality and environmental damage propogated by capitalist extractivism.

Reframe access to pleasure as a basic human right & postion pleasure as activism in a socially equitable future.

ENABLERS

Using Pleasure Activism and prefigurative design as philosphy tools.

The knowledge I've aquired throughout this MA.

ENABLERS

Ensuring the making process is accessible and easy to participate in, sharing helpful tools and prompts to inspire participants.

Using our grad show as an opportunity to introduce people to the work.

ENABLERS

Using Social Media and inviting queer creatives and people who inspired the project to participate and spread the world.

Tapping into UAL's LGBTQ+ network to spread the word!

SHORT TERM

EMPOWER & IMAGINE

Increase awareness of systemic oppressive power structures whilst promoting pleasure activism as resistance.

MEDIUM TERM

CONNECT & CREATE

Community building and craftivism through *Life's Queer Tapestry*.

LONG TERM

GROW

Develop the digital edition of *Life's Queer Tapestry* and try to engage an international community in the project.

WHAT?
Collective and inclusive imaginings of alternate, diverse and equitable social and environemental futures through prefigurative collage making.

HOW?
Digital workshops on Miro to capture words, imagery, memes and drawings of participants pre-figurative worlds.

WHY?
To benchmark participants existing feelings around pleasure and society

To share knowledge I've acquired on this MA

To practice the power of collective imagining

To compare and contast participant Utopias against their lived realities in order to bridge the gap between the two.

WHAT?
Taking time and space to create an ongoing, co-designed tapestry, weaving narratives of our own queer ecologies together.

HOW?
I will be running workshops at our graduate showcase, Murmurations.

WHY?
To test an active form of pleasure activism, taking the time and space to gather and discuss pleasure.

WHAT?
Build the instagram account and start creating the digital version of *Life's Queer Tapestry*.

HOW?
Using the power of social media and promoting the work at UAL's LGBTQ+ showcase for Pride month, where I have been invited to join and host participatory events.

WHY?
Engage public discourse and feedback and put the theory into practice. And to develop my own practice after the masters and share some pleasure.

DESIGN INTERVENTION

Online Workshop Mapping Radical Prefigurative Topographies

My initial design intervention was an online co-design workshop that first asked participants to benchmark their average daily routine, then, following some prefigurative storytelling, to perform the same exercise according to this defined temporality, finally concluding in reflective practice about the process.

1. A somatic grounding exercise following breath through the body
2. A rapid word association game - exploring participants unfiltered responses to Pleasure, Indulgence, Hedonism, Capitalism & Climate Crisis
3. Benchmarking pleasure touchpoints within daily routine
4. Sharing: systems map of power and domination and its interconnectedness to pleasure, followed by a systems map of how we as a society could be.
5. Prefigurative storytelling:

   We're not so far apart, the differences could almost be distilled to different metrics. Your pace was undoubtedly faster, impressive, but also aggressive and built hierarchically. We grew slow, observing our plant elders and ancestors for guidance. They shaped our society and organising. We are bound by neither gender, nor race, nor sexuality, nor borders. Every Earthlingthing is unique and instrumental to the variety that keeps our planet [bio]diverse and thriving, with philosophies of mutual aid and care. Our value is not measured in time and capital but communal and ecological wellbeing and resilience.

6. Prefigurative worldbuilding using the same structure from benchmarking to compare and contrast results
7. Afterglow: Reflective Practice

I hoped that through this prefigurative mapping exercise, I would be able to create a map of the present and a pleasurable, egalitarian future, and with the information gathered, potentially find paths between the two. However, as is often the case in design, the unintended design knowledge acquired informed the next iteration of the design process, far removed from my original conceptions of A Roadmap to Pleasurable Futures.

Benchmarking

home	morning routine	work	community	play	rest

Busy

What does your average morning look like?

necessary, not enjoyable

Does your home make you happy?

Yes when I do not work there

Is your work rewarding?

Yes - nye opening and breaking taboos

Do you get to spend as much time with loved ones as you'd like?

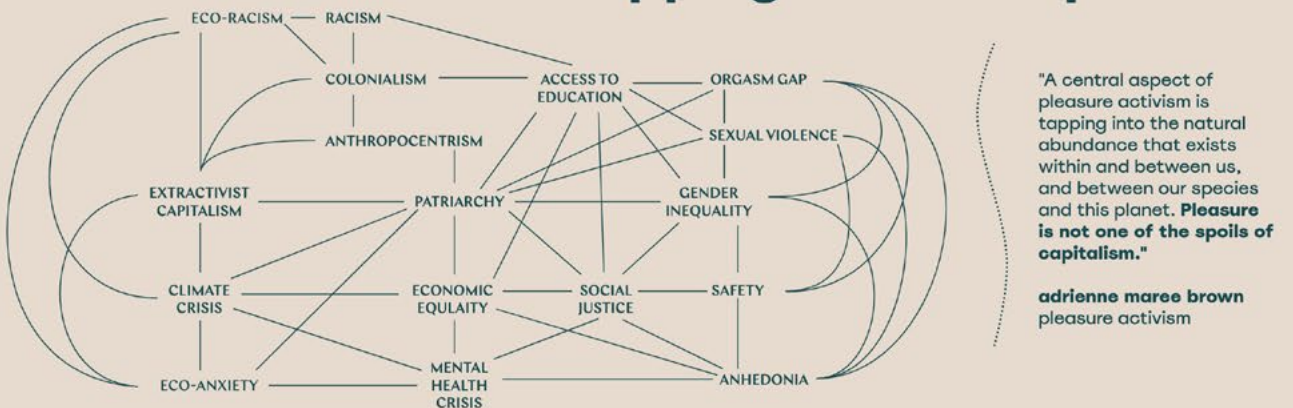**How much time do you get for pleasure and play on your average day?**

How do you unwind?

Orgasms, food, friends and TV/films

reading

cooking

Craft, cooking, gardening, reading

Do you know your neighbours?

Wanking also.

Are you doing what you want to be doing or what you need to do?

TV, wanking

Do you get enough sleep?

Do you live where you want to or where need to?

Need to

sleeping in, getting up at 10:30

8 hours baby

INDICATORS: necessary, stressful, soothing, joyful, playful, rewarding, boring, painful.

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mapping a wicked problem

ECO-RACISM — RACISM
COLONIALISM — ACCESS TO EDUCATION — ORGASM GAP
ANTHROPOCENTRISM — SEXUAL VIOLENCE
EXTRACTIVIST CAPITALISM — PATRIARCHY — GENDER INEQUALITY
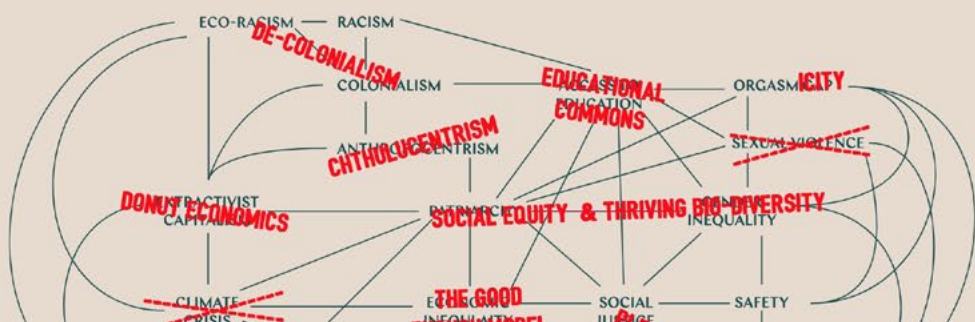CLIMATE CRISIS — ECONOMIC EQUALITY — SOCIAL JUSTICE — SAFETY
ECO-ANXIETY — MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS — ANHEDONIA

"A central aspect of pleasure activism is tapping into the natural abundance that exists within and between us, and between our species and this planet. **Pleasure is not one of the spoils of capitalism.**"

adrienne maree brown
pleasure activism

"As a culture worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to **make revolution irresistible.**"

Toni Cade Bambara

ECO-RACISM — RACISM
DE-COLONIALISM
COLONIALISM — **EDUCATIONAL COMMONS** — ORGASM **JCITY**
ANTHROPOCENTRISM — **CHTHULUCENTRISM** — **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**
DONUT ACTIVIST CAPITALISM — **SOCIAL EQUITY & THRIVING BIODIVERSITY** — INEQUALITY
CLIMATE CRISIS — **THE GOOD** — SOCIAL JUSTICE — SAFETY

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diversity = prosperity

"what you pay attention to grows"

...what could be?

"when i am happy it's good for the world"

adaption favours fluidity

think in fractals

home

morning routine

work

art & sex & cooking

community

play

rest

ONE CANNOT THINK WELL, LOVE WELL, SLEEP WELL, IF ONE HAS NOT DINED

I can care for you, care for you

After glow...

compare the present day and pre-figurative days you have mapped.

How do you feel?

Trapped

Like I put myself under too much pressure

calm after the workshop

Shedding of guilt

It's hard to have guilt free pleasure and play when people in society have it so shit

I squeeze in a lot of pleasurable things into my day, but key word 'squeeze'. Often guilt, time pressure or stress that impedes the pleasure.

like a real human being, not just being a person who is productive

not feeling guilty about taking time and space for me

trying to find a freer way of being...but imagining it for society is difficult

Calm, reflective

Yearning, impatient

Defeated

Hopeful hearing other people share

What stands out?

I'm in the rat race

Desire to escape, find a different path that is sustainable in a capitalist system

How much I am or feel responsible for more than myself

Pleasure sometimes = time, that is a privilege (one view)

Individual efforts at pleasure vs. communal structures that facilitate pleasure

How tangible does this reality feel?

Don't think wider structures are there yet - how to support community; rest, play, better working conditions. We know how, but the widespread effort needs a lot of alignment

Not all that far off, to be honest. I feel as though a version of my utopia is in my grasp.

There are some small things I could do to make me happier

Not tangible. We're getting poorer, when will we be able to retire

hard to imagine

It's a build for me to shape small parts of the lovely in the everyday

Confidence and Permission are needed to help

Has your opinion on pleasure changed throughout this workshop?

I resonated with the discussion about internal pleasure and the wellbeing of the planet, how you need to feel at ease, to help others, and how this feels undeserving if other people are suffering...

Yes, it is more powerful than I think until I think about it

I feel that maybe it's not so far outside of our reach - we just have to aim high and make it happen

Would you be interested in participating in a follow up study I have prepared?

Sure :)

YES.

yeah

Yes

Of course xx

Impact and Evaluation

INSIGHTS

From all the information gathered, the area of most interest was the reflective process at the end of the workshop, and I have focused most of my analysis on this section, as it grounds the prefigurative work in the here and now and offers excellent insight into what participants needs and concerns are, to take the project forward. I designed a reflective feedback process within the final section of the workshop, with the following questions: Compare the present day and prefigurative days you have mapped:

1. How do you feel?

2. What stands out?

3. How tangible does this prefigurative reality feel?

4. Has your opinion on pleasure changed throughout this workshop?

I compiled the results from the Miroboard and transcribed and compiled the conversations that took place simultaneously. I then categorised both sets of findings into key themes, first mapping the nuance of their interconnected nature in a Venn diagram and then reflecting and analysing each individually.
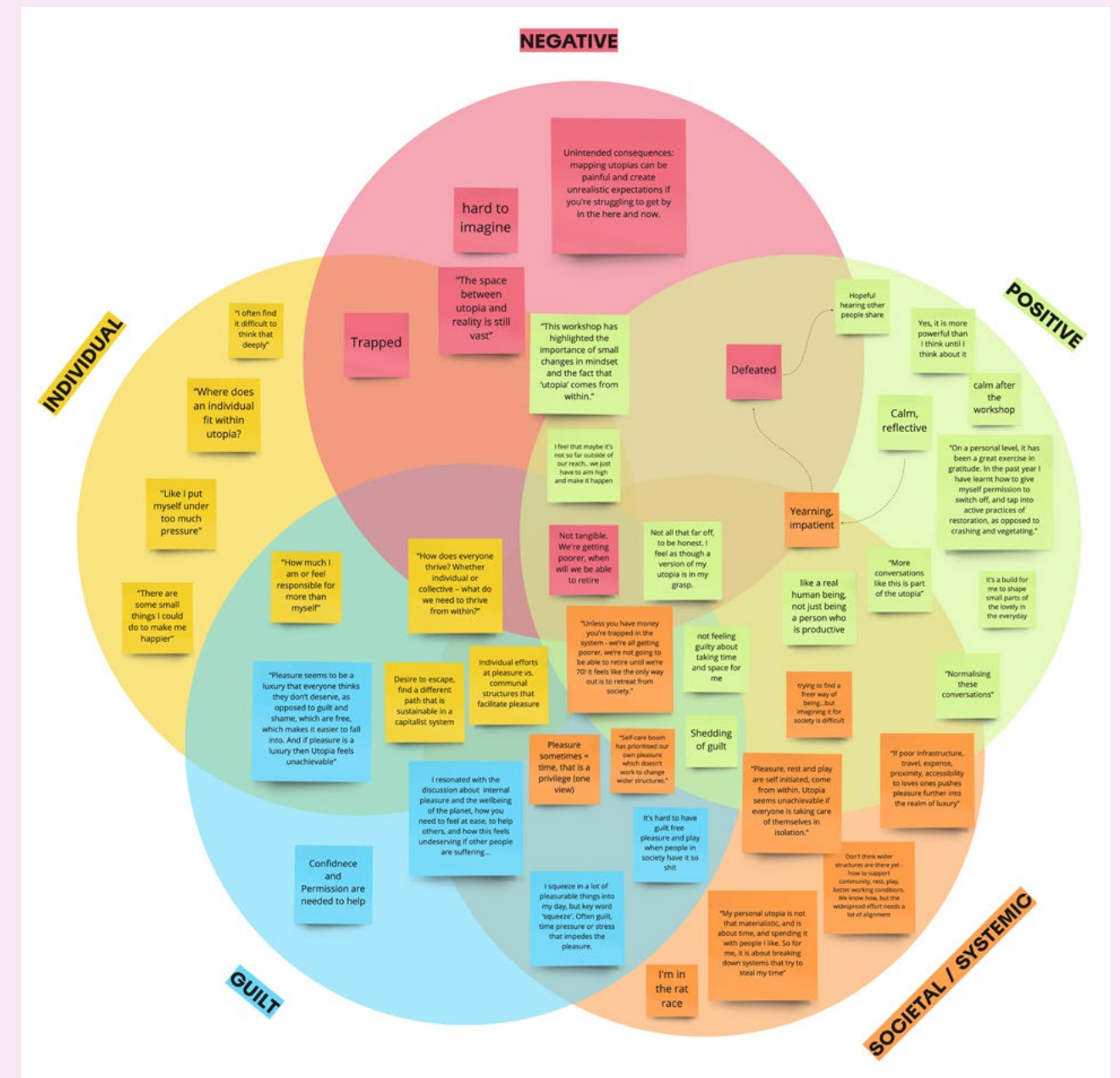

FIGURE 05: VENN DIAGRAM OF FINDINGS FROM WORKSHOP

1. Individual Responsibility to Pleasure

"Where does an individual fit within utopia?"

"This workshop has highlighted the importance of small changes in mindset and the fact that 'utopia' comes from within."

"Individual efforts at pleasure vs communal structures that facilitate pleasure"

There was much discussion about pleasure coming from within and how the workshop highlighted the personal steps we can take to increase our capacity for pleasure. Additionally, the space between individual pleasure and the societal or systemic structures that can facilitate or impede pleasure was frequently cited. This brings me back to the very essence of what activism and grassroots organising hold to be true; the power of collectivism and democracy to enact change. Even though oppressive power structures often seem indomitable, it was not so long ago that the divine right of the monarchy was a given, and the larger we grow the collective or collective power, the less it can be ignored. "Describing cooperation, Sennett says that 'mutual support is built into the genes of all social animals; they cooperate to accomplish what they can't do alone." (Sennet 2012 as cited in Manzini, 2015).

2. Societal and Systemic: Structures that Facilitate or Inhibit Pleasure

"My personal Utopia is not that materialistic and is about time and spending it with people I like. So for me, it is about breaking down systems that try to steal my time."

"trying to find a freer way of being... but imagining it for society is difficult."

"Pleasure, rest and play are self-initiated, come from within. Utopia seems unachievable if everyone is taking care of themselves in isolation."

The findings suggest that societal and individual themes are in a feedback loop between one another, a cycle that extends far beyond the discourse of pleasure and into most of society's problems today. Perhaps there is no either-or, rather a concerted effort needed from both sides. It seems that looking at the problem systemically creates a feeling of powerlessness, where neither individual nor collective action offers hope. Sirivasan (2021) writes, "What does it mean to say that we want to transform the political world – but that we ourselves still remain unchanged?". Moreover, holding space for an ongoing questioning of power, agency, responsibility and where it lies is crucial to responsive and resilient design practices.

3. Guilt and its Relationship to Pleasure

"I resonated with the discussion about internal pleasure and the wellbeing of the planet, how you need to feel at ease, to help others, and how this feels undeserving if other people are suffering...."

"I squeeze in a lot of pleasurable things into my day, keyword 'squeeze'. Often guilt, time pressure or stress that impedes pleasure."

"Pleasure seems to be a luxury that everyone thinks they don't deserve, as opposed to guilt and shame, which are free, which makes it easier to fall into. And if pleasure is a luxury, then Utopia feels unachievable."

Here, we see in action the economic growth imperative that Western capitalism compells, thus monetising time. Indeed, pitting productivity against pleasure.

Queer ecocology suggests an abundance of diversity within nature, which should be translated across to the human experience. As such, particpants' comments on the challenge of locating time and space for pleasure alongside responsibilities of production highlight the dissonance between a queer ecological ontology and capitalist realities, which might be manifesting in feelings of guilt.

4. Positive Outlook Towards The Importance Of Pleasure And The Impact Of The Workshop

"Shedding of guilt."

"Normalising these conversations."

"On a personal level, it has been a great exercise in gratitude."

"Yes, [pleasure] is more powerful than I think...."

This feedback was joyful and insightful to read, as it highlighted the need for more conversations on these themes, and shows that one participant has had a personal reframing of pleasure and its power, which was close to the initial goal of my project: *How might we redefine pleasure as intrinsic to both human and ecological health and position it as a powerful tool for change-making?*

It offers hope that this work has power, even if it inches the thinking, hopefulness and pleasure practice of just one participant forward. To me, it is a success, and fuels my desire to learn from this workshop, refine my process and continue the work, which – as you will shortly discover – is precisely what I have done.

5. Negative Feelings Towards The Tangibility Of A Just And Pleasurable Future

"[I feel] Trapped!"

"Defeated"

"The space between utopia and reality is still vast."

"hard to imagine."

I echo these sentiments deeply; it is why I pursued this work, to transfigure my hopelessness and scepticism into productive action, so to see that reflected here is no surprise. Firstly, I believe that close examination of interconnected oppressive systems and forces can be overwhelming and defeating – I have been there – and have no delusions about the vast amount of work needed to change them. The question then is how to take these feelings and support people in transforming them? Reflecting on the workshop as a whole, I feel that it could be summarised as educational and informing, quite cerebral. Next, I would like to create a space and process that is a more embodied form of pleasure activism, as Wise (2020) referred to it "brain-body", that feels more assertive in its intentions and holistic in its practice.

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF PROCESS & LIMITATIONS

1. In the reflective session at the end of the workshop, of the 40 desired answers (one from each participant), only 25 responses were recorded [excluding the conversations I transcribed], meaning not everyone participated in this section. I should have considered that some participants may not feel comfortable critiquing their workshop experience directly to me. Perhaps an anonymous post-workshop evaluation form would have offered participants an uninhibited space to share their thoughts.

2. While participants were answering final reflective questions on the Miroboard, I opened up the discussion to reflect on the experience of the workshop as a whole and gathered a lot of valuable qualitative data through transcribing those conversations. This space for conversation provided both the co-designers and me with some of the most rewarding and impactful findings, and it would have been fruitful to have built more time for reflective conversing into the workshop. Time and space for conversations on these themes is a crucial piece of acquired design knowledge that is focal to the next stage of my design in action.

3. While analysing the findings from my workshop, I was able to see how gathering demographic information on participants would have provided keener insight into the different types of responses that different groups provide, especially as I speculate that socialised gender dynamics affected these results. Although this was a very intentional design decision, as the prefigurative reality dispensed with human classifications by gender, race, sexuality and so forth, is it not also counterproductive and misrepresentative of the injustices that marginalised people face today, not to gather information on how different groups organise, act and imagine? I remain unsure of the correct way to navigate this but recognise the case for both.

4. When facilitating spaces that address the profoundly subjective topics of pleasure and human experience, and their sociological, psychological, biological and political dimensions, one must become comfortable with holding space for the complexities that can arise therein. Outdated notions of the designer as a problem solver must be relinquished. The designer must remain fluid, adapting responsively to the design knowledge generated.

Design in Action

'Research through designing uses the knowing of doing to achieve productive outcomes which in turn indicate the knowing and the knowledge used in their production' (Downton, 2003 as cited in Vaughan, 2017).

If design in action can be considered a continually evolving, responsive design practice, then my next design iteration, *Life's Queer Tapestry*, is a realisation of this process. Following on from my prefigurative workshop, I wanted to create a design response that incorporated the mind-body connection often discussed by sex educators to find a more active engagement of pleasure activism, in addition to bringing more of a focus to queer ecological theory in this iteration.

Life's Queer Tapestry is an evolving co-designed tapestry, asking participants to meditate on themes of pleasure activism and queer ecology and contribute to the tapestry with the question "What's Your Queer Ecology?". Inspired by craftivism, mending and maintenance workshops, this piece of participatory design hopes to occupy spaces and create conversations that unite humans with their plant and animal ancestors, foster care and compassion, eradicate intolerance and create communities where [bio]diversity and pleasure are celebrated.

The tapestry will be installed at our graduate exhibition, Murmurations, where visitors will be invited to participate. Initially, it will be made from my old clothes and offcuts from a fabric store, using found and waste materials where possible. Correspondingly, I have created a digital version of the tapestry using Instagram to take the project online and further afield, using the social platform as a space to share resources and knowledge on the project's themes unearthed in my research. I hope that this enables the work to reach a wider variety of co-designers worldwide and that the contributions can embrace truly divergent and intersectional responses. Furthermore, I am happy to report that *Life's Queer Tapestry* has been selected to participate in the UAL LGBTQ+ showcase for Pride month.

FIGURE 06A & B: PREPARING THE TAPESTRY SWATCHES FOR PARTICIPANTS

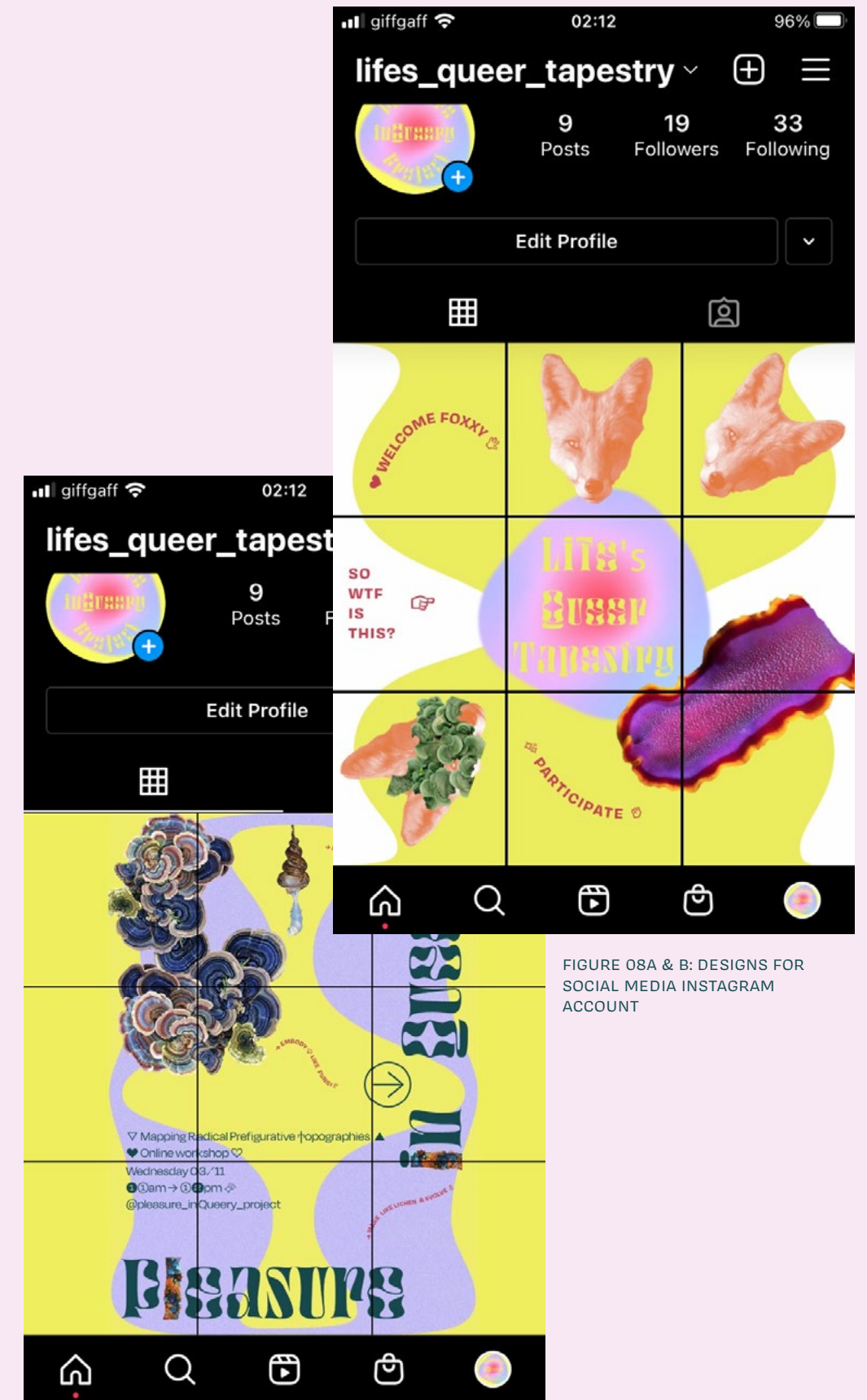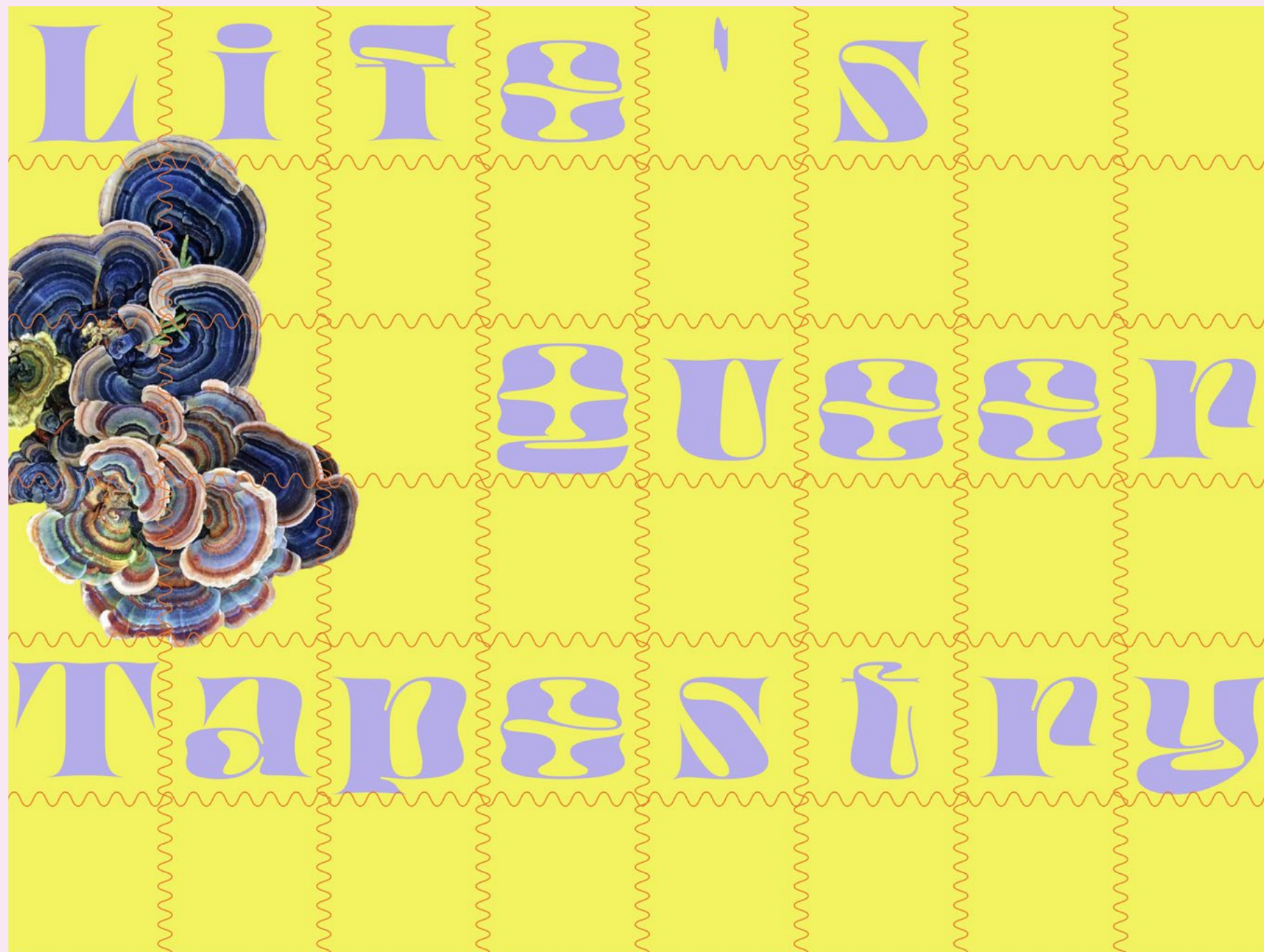FIGURE 07: DIGITAL MOCK-UP OF LIFE'S QUEER TAPESTRY

FIGURE 08A & B: DESIGNS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

Conclusion

This report has examined the social, environmental, political and psychological spheres in which pleasure appears in our lives, evaluated the short-term impacts of The *Pleasure inQueery Project*, and presented the medium-term ambitions for *Life's Queer Tapestry*.

When speaking to designs for social innovation, Manzini (2015) writes that "they spark off new initiatives, feed social conversations and help the process of convergence toward commonly recognised visions and outcomes. In short, they make things happen". If I couple this statement with some of the positive findings from my research through design to date, I believe that this project is a positive, ongoing venture into design for social innovation.

Moving forward, I hope that the continuation of this work can not only substantiate the case for pleasure in activism, but propose a new methodology of pleasure within the wider practice of design in action.

This project has been deeply personal, firstly, as a queer woman who has experienced the constraints and alienation of heteronormative culture and education. Secondly, as a sufferer of depression and anxiety, and thirdly, as a friend, daughter and ally to too many people who have suffered the horrors of sexual assault, sexual violence and rape. To say that this project has been emotionally tumultuous underserves the depth and breadth of the rage and pain that inspired it. However, this process has offered me a means to take that pain and rage and transfigure it, or part of it, in gentle and loving ways that seem contrary, if not radical, to the contentious emotions that brought it about. This alone feels like a timely and crucial life skill to have developed at a time when adaptation and compassion are paramount to the survival and flourishing of both the human and the more than human.

"...desire as a force that is ontologically imminent to all life on earth, and that propels "earth moves" across and between geological strata and biological orders."

(Deluza and Guattari, 1987 as cited in Mortimer-Sandilands et al., 2010.)

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: ZOOM RECORDING OF WORKSHOP

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rY5SzmA4lhLfA5Giramw1xv-ueYk6CJ6?usp=sharing

APPENDIX 2: HIGH RESOLUTION OF WORKSHOP MIROBOARD

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rY5SzmA4lhLfA5Giramw1xv-ueYk6CJ6?usp=sharing

FIGURE LIST