

Semester Report

Year 1, Term 2: Entrances and Exits

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<https://paulhughes.substack.com/>

<https://www.chattingtanum.info/phd>



Fatima in Cyber, 2021

Photoprint of digital collage, and text on tracing paper
Chatting Tanum (after Kris Alex, Desire'e Kelley & Stanislaw Lem)

Overview

This report covers second term of this PhD project: the twelve weeks from 4th January – 26th March. Most of my activity is as follows:

- Practice. The main focus of practice of this term was *Letters of Resignation*, a choreography course at Siobhan Davies Studios I ran with my collaborator Rohanne Udall. This involved both administrative tasks (writing copy, communications with commissioning institution, budgeting and planning), inviting and supporting guest artists, facilitating meetings with participants, and fabricating the letters that made up the body of the course. Other forms of practice included: a series of embroideries on paper called *Stewards*, bodily practice of anal penetration (solo and with partners), ink paintings, and continuing work to support student activism at Roehampton University (primarily around making the collective's administrative and organizational structures more accessible for new participants).

- Lurking. Since the start of the calendar year, I have been virtually attending meetings at Sadler's Wells Theatre, the institutional partner of this PhD. Primarily these have been the weekly meetings the programming team. Without any clear goals at the minute, I am mostly trying to get a sense of the values and practical constraints by which the programming team work, and an understanding of the institution's internal structure.

- Reading. Various texts, talks, lectures relevant to the PhD research, and various training sessions with the university and TECHNE, the funder of my PhD.

- Writing. I was invited to contribute to a publication by some fellow PhD students. I wrote an essay about my embroidery practice (see 'outputs'). Otherwise, I was writing monthly letters to my supervisors, working on my 'RDCom2' form (a pretty sizable administrative thing that the university expects about 6 months in to the PhD process, that I've ended up postponing to September), and some short texts with Rohanne that sit as and alongside some artistic materials.

- Discursive partners. This includes reading groups, meetings with my supervisors, different peer groups with fellow PhD students, and weekly sessions with a therapist.

- Peers. Probably the smallest amount of time, but I put some of occasional or one-off work I do with artistic peers in this category. This work isn't obviously connected to my research, but it feels important (and interesting) to insist on and highlight this time in which I engage with, support, and learn from the work of artist peers.

Nearly all of this activity took place from my home studio in Nottingham, UK.

The title of this term points to what I saw as a common theme of entrances and exits (bodily, institutional, conceptual) across all this activity: the central question of *Letters of Resignation* ("what does it mean to resign from an organization when you hold no formal role of office there?"); my entrance into Sadler's Wells Theatre (attending meetings, being given an institutional email address), my efforts to better enable new participants to join in the student protest collective; my writing about wounds; and my interest in anal penetration.

Output

The most significant 'output' of this term are:

- [*Letters of Resignation*](#). Rohanne and I designed and managed a choreography course with Siobhan Davies Dance in London. Taking place primarily through post, the course is composed of 5 letters by guest artists and three Zoom sessions for 15 participants. The majority of the organizing work took place in this semester, although it continued to run until June. There will be a further public dissemination of course materials at the end of summer. You can see one of the things we made for this course [here](#) – an image and text work called *Fatima in Cyber* – a copy of which we posted to anyone who applied to the course and didn't get a place.

- *To suture a wound open*. I contributed an essay to *Metaphor as Metamorphosis*, a journal put together by PhD students Keira Greene and Marlo Mortimer. This text writes from and about my practice of embroidering wounds, and mostly ends up trying to address the limits of writing from woundedness: what it means to speak from harm, grief and shame. The journal is scheduled to go public in July 2021.

- *The Microscope Sessions*. I was invited by Rhiannon Armstrong and Tim Spooner to join in their (Zoom) [performance in February](#) with some live writing. I've written about this work – which I love – in the past, and we were all curious about what a live writing practice before / alongside / after the work would offer an audience. It was interesting, but I doubt we'll do it again. Unfortunately there was no documentation – but I hope to develop some of the writing into a more public thing at some point.

- Letters to supervisors. I wrote two letters to my supervisors which account for my activity and thinking across these months; and [reproduced them online](#) for a more public readership. I try to write one each month, but I fell behind in February due to other commitments.

- Various other forms of practice – including linoprints, embroideries, ink paintings and sculptural work – which make their way into envelopes to friends or social media, but haven't found a substantial home yet.

I find it interesting that the embroidery text was written this semester, but is yet to go public, and can't be neatly signed off on as part of this semester's 'report'. There's a number of things that are slowly moving through different pipelines. So there's something around timelines, and a lack of independence or control when activity gets tied up in various grassroots or institutional collaborations. And there's also a more general disjuncture of 'activity' and 'output': like how a number of major commitments (like the student organizing, like the sex practice) basically have no real 'output' (yet?) to share.

Finances

The annual stipend of this PhD is £17,285, which breaks down into £4321.25 per term.

While this PhD (and its funding) is solely in my name, I want to distribute these funds in a way that acknowledges the highly collaborative processes of this research. Rohanne and I are trying to directly test the possibilities (and risks) of going beyond standard models of institutional remuneration (binaries of salaried and freelance) to test what it would mean for everyone to be paid at the same rate for time they spend doing the work.

Last semester's report gives a more detailed breakdown of how we calculate the figures: basically, we add up all the time we each spent working on PhD stuff, and split the lump sum (after expenses) based on our respective time commitment. So if I work 100 'sessions' (each morning, afternoon and evening counting as one of three possible sessions of work each day) and Rohanne works 50, we would respectively receive two thirds and one third of the money. How much we are paid (and the rate for our time) depends on how much each of us works; we figure out how much that is at the end of each semester.

It's a flawed system: it's not always clear what counts as 'work' that is 'relevant' to the PhD; the recording of time is pretty crude (morning, afternoon and evening 'sessions' rather than 'minutes' or 'hours'); and it doesn't (yet) account for the work done by people other than Rohanne and I. But we're interested in committing to it as a basic model, and trying to build in more complexity as we go.

The major difference from last semester's finances is due to the *Letters of Resignation* project. Rohanne and I were invited to run this course by Siobhan Davies Studios, which had a £1000 budget (that came from the government's Cultural Recovery Fund). This money could only pay for five 'guest artists' to deliver individual sessions that

compose the course, and so they needed it to be curated and managed by members of staff whose time was already paid for through their salary. They asked Rohanne if she would be interested, as she works there as their Content and Communications Manager (even though this isn't really part of her job at all).

As this set up – of artists 'guest curating' projects within institutions – sits pretty centrally within this PhD research, we agreed to co-run the project – with our time being covered across her salary and the PhD stipend.

So as with last semester, Rohanne and I had to tally up our respective time working on PhD related stuff – including *Letters* – but also had to account for how some of that time was being paid for through her salaried role.

On to the numbers:

- With each day divided into 3 'sessions' (morning, afternoon, evening), I undertook 163 sessions of work 'relevant' to the PhD. Rohanne did 31 sessions; 24 of which fell under the remit of her job at Siobhan Davies Studios.
- The PhD stipend is tax-free. And so to simplify our calculations, we calculated how much Rohanne is paid per session with her take-home / post-tax salary: £19944.96 per annum. Working 46 weeks of the year, and 4.5 days (or 9 sessions) a week, this amounts to £48.18 a 'session'. (She's actually only contracted to work 4 days a week, but we averaged that she works at least one extra evening a week.)
- Therefore alongside the PhD stipend, there is an 'income' of 24 sessions @£48.18 per session, £1156.32. I was also paid £200 by Rhiannon and Tim for my writing contribution for their performance in February. So the total income is £4321.25 + £1156.32 + £200 = £5677.57.

- Expenses came to £760.63 (covering books, art materials, and thirteen sessions of therapy). This does not include expenses relating to *Letters of Resignation* – roughly £350 for materials and postage – but that was covered by a separate budget (quite poetically, this money was diverted from Siobhan Davies Studios' postage budget for that financial year, which was otherwise untouched). Total income minus expenses comes to £4916.94.

- With 163 sessions of work undertaken by Paul, and 31 by Rohanne, this breaks down as £4,131.17 for Paul and £785.68 for Rohanne.

This sum corresponds to £25.34 per 'session' of work; £50.68 for a day of work (morning and afternoon, with evening off); and £253.40 per week (5 days of work with 2 days of weekend). This is a little bit better than my rate last term (£21.46 per session) and a lot worse than Rohanne's normal salary rate (£48.18 per session). However, when we crunched the numbers, it basically means Rohanne needed to pay me ~£350, which is pretty much what she got paid for work on the PhD last semester.

There's lots more to dig into, but this report is already a few months late, so I'll leave it there.