sair goetz
The Making of *THE ABCs AND XYZs OF LMNs* (2021)

LMYE #5 pays particular attention to the work of sair goetz, one of the Aural/Oral Dramaturgies project's artists in residence chosen in collaboration with Battersea Arts Centre. In this Laboratory documentary, the Bay Area-based artist introduces us to their multi-faceted, multimedia and multidimensional project *The ABCs and XYZs of LMNs,* which departs from the term 'lemon' as used in American English to describe the purchase of a defective good (i.e. Lemon Laws) to investigate the idea of 'something that just doesn't fit its requirements from the beginning'.

'The Lemon Project', as goetz refers to it, is an abecedarian piece: its structure is given by the letters of the alphabet, each of which opens up a number of 'vignettes' that speak to avenues of thinking within the artist's idiom, explored through solo and ensemble work in performance and film. In this documentary, goetz shares the process of making 'M – Magical, Miraculous, Monstrous': we learn about its roots in goetz's previous pieces, the influences around it, goetz's rehearsal process and their attention to the differences between rehearsal for film and for performance, and the conceptual and technical apparatus they deploy. 'Magical, Miraculous, Monstrous' takes its cue from a text goetz had previously written about ventriloquism, a key practice in their research into voice and identity. They go deep into explaining how ventriloquism has functioned in history 'from the Oracle at Delphi to the Industrial Revolution', and share some of their sources of inspiration, notably the transsexual English ventriloquist and magician Terri Rogers: 'Terri Rogers makes magic happen, actual magic, because there is nobody else who can embody two different genders and not have people screaming for the hills.' From here, we hear how goetz defines and explores a will to get outside of gender, and learn about the rich and multitudinous directions the work might take in the future.

The ABCs and XYZs of LMNs is a complex and ambitious piece that fuses a deep investigation into how language functions, its associative powers and its relationship to voice and to identity with a masterful aesthetic and technical vocabulary capable of moving between ideas and media while keeping the concept 'still'. This LMYE Laboratory grants precious insight into a fascinating, provocative and endlessly generative working process.

[00:00:23] AN ABCs AND LMNs OF XYZs OF…

Hello everybody. I'm sair goetz. That's sair rhymes with 'their' or 'air' or 'stare', and I use they/them pronouns.

I've been working on a project that I will be showing you a little bit of today, specifically the process work of it, but also a little snippet of where some of the finished work is going. I usually refer to this project as *The Lemon Project,* just as I'm talking to people out and about in the world, but the full title and the full way to think about it is *The ABCs and the XYZs of LMNs.* But actually lately I've been thinking of it more as 'An LMNs of Everything Else'.

So I'll clarify that a little bit. So this work is abecedarian, meaning that it uses the Latin alphabet as a structure for something that otherwise has no structure, So I've used abecedarian words or I've used the alphabet – and many, many other artists and film-makers in history have used the alphabet – to order the unorderable. I particularly find this strategy really helpful when I'm thinking, when I'm trying to wrap my head around something that is just too big, so to break it into small chunks is really helpful.

So we all understand that the alphabet goes from ABC to XYZ, and the alphabet has been used as a primer, as a teaching tool, as an explaining tool for many years, and we use it to learn how to speak and how to read and how to categorise and how to think. So the ABCs are easy, everybody's used to them, so if somebody says: 'A is for apple, B is for banana, C is for citrus', you understand that we are now in the world of fruit. The 'ABC of' is something that attempts to create something that's

somewhat encyclopaedic, and that, in itself, has an appeal to and claiming of authority. So to make an 'ABCs of…' demonstrates ownership of a concept, and I think about this specifically in terms of what it is to claim or reclaim a term. So like a reclaiming of some words that are hard for some people in the queer community such as 'fag' or 'queer' itself actually for some people, depending on their age and their background is also really hard. And so thinking about what it is to claim something, to own something – but it's also the ownership of an educational model. To own an educational model means control of how knowledge is formed and then distributed. So that covers the ABCs idea.

And I'm really interested also in the XYZs idea, and that's a little bit more complicated, a little less mainstream. I'm not sure if it's just a figment of my own imagination or not, but it's also a little bit more on the illicit side. So in Latin root languages, the letters themselves are more commonly – XYZ are more commonly found within the middle or at the end of words rather than at their start, unless we're looking at really unpronounceable scientific terms, sex works websites, and then gender coding languages – so X-X and X-Y. The XYZs though are a place of some mystery to me, but also a place of predictability, of very obvious predictability. So if you look at ten books that are like the ABCs of animals, for example, every single Z is going to be 'zebra' and every single Y is going to be 'yak'. So I tend to think of the *XYZs* as operating in a sort of tokenising space. So they're token letters, they're there because they have to be there, they're there because they're in the alphabet but not because we're like – not because at least the English language is terribly invested in really using those sounds. So the Z and 'zebra' is not part of the English language in the same way as it might be in another one.

Side note: I used to hate the letter C because I was like: 'You are taking the role of an S and you are taking the role of a K, and what are you for? You're just so useless!' And it's not – clearly my brain was not optimising as a child but anyway...

So anyway, my point of this is that the idea of like token letters, tokenising, meaning both like inclusion because of the pressures in inclusion and in these abecedarian works, because it's part of the alphabet, you can't leave it out, but also a lot of isolation or being used as something that's not really supposed to be used for. Like so many abecedarian things use 'X-ray' as X. And I'm like: 'I don't know if that really counts, I think it's a cop-out.' Anyway. But that's just sort of the context of where I'm coming from on this. 'The Lemon Project' for me is actually about all the fruitiness in the middle, it's about the normalisation but also the fantasisation – the making fantasy of queerness.

So I'm quite interested in normalisation as it plays out in fantastic movies, movies that are supposed to be magical in some way. What makes the magic feel real is how normal it is. I hate to go to JK Rowling but it's just so available. So like if you didn't have like a candy store in that story and if you didn't know Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans or whatever, you wouldn't get as much of a picture of what that world is. So one of the things that I'm thinking of is like how, if a lemon is my fruity queer, and that's the character or set of characters or a worldview that I'm like coming from are looking at, what is their normal? What kind of Covid masks do they wear? What's their go-to shoes?

So these are some of the things that I'm thinking of in terms of normal – like what did they complain about at work? What do they talk to their co-worker about? But also thinking about this totally in a fantastical world where I'm using lots of different types of imagery to play, just play, just have fun with this, within this narrow concept of the lemon.

So while 'fruit' seems to be pretty common slang for queers on both sides of the Atlantic, I want to take a moment here since this is a London-based project to explain for the European audience another way that 'lemon' functions in the US. Lemon Laws are United States state laws – there is a federal law also – but they're state laws that, and I'm directly quoting here – 'provide a remedy for the purchases of cars and other consumer goods in order to compensate for products that repeatedly fail at meeting the standards of quality and performance'.

While most of these things – most lemons are referring to automotive things, so vehicles specifically, cars, trucks, motorcycles et cetera, it can be used for anything, anything that is defective or that doesn't live up to expectations of the consumer. And this whole idea came into real prominence with a paper that was written in 1970, called 'The Market for "Lemons"' by a Nobel prize-winning

economist George Akerlof. It's quite interesting actually because there's another paper that I reference in my movie, or in this project, that's called 'Mafia: The Market for Lemons'. So this idea of lemons as something that's broken comes back often, but I'm back in here thinking about like what it is to reclaim something. And the idea of a lemon as something that is broken comes through in many different ways throughout this project.

So it's also not something that's just broken – I want to clarify that. If something is a lemon, it's not that it was well, it was whole, it was good and then it was broken. It was something that was created wrong way from the beginning. Or created in a way that doesn't fit its space. From the get-go, from its birth, it is not correct according to a set of criteria. To be a lemon is to be not correct. And I'm interested in this concept because it's also just got a very deep history of creation, the not-correctness inside of lemon. Lemons themselves are a created species of fruit, they are a hybrid of a pomelo and a mandarin. Actually, a lot of our common citrus are also hybrid fruits, they're not natural, so when people say 'not genetically modified', most of the time they don't know what they're talking about. [*Laughter.*]

So like there's no such thing as a non-GMO lemon, because they were genetically modified, they're just done in an old-timey way. So anyway, lemons are really interesting, they're embedded in the history of clinical trials, scurvy, the mafia, colonialism, modern agriculture, of course, contemporary science, and of course the culinary – lemons are in everybody's food. Lemons, as some form of citrus, at the very least they're in everybody's food. I think it's a really interesting cross-section for a lot of reasons, but I want to get back to that normalisation and fantasy of queerness. 'LMN', which just reads so easily as 'lemon', is the centre point of the alphabet, and for me that allows the idea of a lemon to take place inside of an order but allow for real chaos.

So I always get – a little bit of a side note here – when I'm starting a project and I'm like beating my head against the wall thinking about structure, because I was trained as a structuralist film-maker, for better or worse I can't shake it, you can't shake that training completely. So when I'm thinking about the structure of something, honestly I get *The Sound of Music* in my head and I get Julie Andrews going over and over and over again: 'Let's start at the very beginning, / A very good place to start', and then going into the 'Do-Re-Mi' song. And it's really annoying [*laughter*] in the studio to always have that idea of starting at the beginning.

I find it very frustrating, I fo-ind it veery frustrating – the idea of starting at the beginning for something that is so complicated.

So for me, starting in the middle, in media res, like starting at M of the lemon is… was very liberating. And it lets me sit inside of an order where it truly is in some ways chaos, trying to orchestrate an encyclopaedic approach to such a gigantic topic.

And so for me starting at the dead centre of the alphabet has felt really important. So what you're going to see today is M, yeah.

[00:14:50 to 00:22:21] 'Magical, Miraculous, Monstrous' from *THE ABC AND XYZs OF LMNs* (2021) by sair goetz

[*Voice-over from the clip*]

Tonight on Respite Radio economic historians Dimicio, Isopi and Olsson have made an astonishing yet convincing argument that the Sicilian mafia arose in correlation with the market for lemons. You heard right lemons, not the car you wish you hadn't bought but the bad seed fruit itself, the hybrid of pomelo and mandarin someone proper told you to suck when they were mad. This sour of sours, the lemons next week we'll have you yelling our scurvy cure in your grocery aisle when we get into the details about James Lind and the birth of clinical trials. To get to the story we fast forward and flash back to 1870. Lemons were that year's new hot thing as this recently discovered cure for scurvy finally got recognition from the British admiralty which included one item of citrus in each man's ration from that day forth. Colonialism turned the golden rind of the lemon into the golden lined pockets of the men hired to protect this

valuable vitamin C source. The size of a fist and the colour of the sun lemons were easy prey for night-time bandits and who better to prevent theft than the former thieves themselves thus the mafia was born love child of high profits… Magical, miraculous, monstrous…

I would like if I may to take you on a strange journey through the unexpected life of one of the world's most beloved and belittled citrus – the lemon. Our encyclopaedic investigations of lemon start deep in the middle of the word and in the middle of the alphabet as today's episode is brought to you by the letter M.

It rubs the lotion on its skin or else it gets the hose again.

[00:22:25] REHEARSING 'MAGICAL, MIRACULOUS, MONSTROUS'

Right, so before I get too far into discussing this work, I should say that my current working conditions and quarantine mostly alone have brought forward some of my oldest working habits that are really largely rooted in rehearsal and performance. And I've said many times that my background is in film-making, I was trained as a film-maker, all of this stuff, but when I teach film-making I often bring up this point, which is I think too often forgotten, that film-making has multiple trajectories. And the way that it often gets – depending on the university – often film-making will get stuck in or art film-making anyway, will be stuck inside of a trajectory that follows still photography. But some of the earliest film-making was like cabaret style, like it was set up with a sharp dichotomy of audience space and performer space. And because film itself was so precious there was a relationship to rehearsal that I think has somewhat gotten lost. But actually I find that using digital media I find myself even more committing to the idea of rehearsing something, because I can shoot every rehearsal.

And sometimes that rehearsal is far better actually. You can hear it in my delivery, I am actually – I'm going to hire a voice actor to do some of the audio that you heard. I'm not sure if I'm going to blend our voices or not. But in any case, the first time I did this sort of radio announcer voice talking about the mafia it sounded so much better, so much better than the final recording. But I hadn't finalised the script. So you know, it's just, I find that this coming back to spending a lot of time rehearsing, also because I'm very rarely in the space I get to shoot it – so spending a lot of time rehearsing the material that at the moment is turning into video, very much plays into the way that I think this piece will go forward. I've always thought of it as a blend, as a hybrid of recorded material and live material, and in Covid I'm just very deep inside of the recorded material space, but I'm really excited to be also building what I think will be a live performance alongside of that material. So a voice relationship to material that is pre-recorded.

And working with collaborators. You didn't see it here, but I've got multiple sort of sound collaborators that I've been doing it in a radio space of all things, which is not common to me, but that's also one of the spaces where I see this piece going – some iteration of it anyway.

So how rehearsal has functioned in previous pieces can be seen really easily in a few of my older works – and I don't want to get too far into that but one of the factors that has always come to play for me has been doing things on screen that can't be undone. So for one of the shots that you saw in this piece I actually bleached my hair and dyed my hair to get this hair colour, so that I could do this image of this hair coming out of this mouth space, and I can't just grow that back immediately. So the way the things happen on screen having a sort of permanence also really comes into this, like trying it over and over again, mocking it up over and over again until the one moment when I just can't reverse. And that's played a lot into costuming over the years, particularly in – I'm going to just do a quick little screen share – particularly in this piece [*screen-shares a still image*] which I've talked about multiple times, *Me and My Army,* when I cut the chest out of this costume. It was part of a four-minute choreography, [*laughter*] which is kind of a bizarre term for me to use, it freaks me out a little bit, I'm not a dancer, I don't have choreography. But I had to choreograph this, I had to block it out, and that's not something that – long takes are not part of my previous relationship to film-making, so it's very much opening me up. This process has been opening me a lot up to spending more time rehearsing and less time shooting.

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Oh, I did want to show one more little background moment, which is all the takes of some very, very small moments that you're getting here.

Because this is a shot where the lighting changes and because I'm shooting this alone, I'm actually moving my lighting set, I put my lighting stand on a – [*laughter*] it was so ridiculous, I put my lighting stand on something I usually use to move my tripod around, so just some wheels, and then I rigged up a broom handle to my lighting stand so that I could just guide it around. Solo work in Covid has been really special! So in order to change the lighting, I had to do this over and over and over and over and over again, [*laughter*] except for this shot where I got to shoot my puppet, which was very relaxed. After shooting myself in a mask where I couldn't see that was really special, and trying to just go by feel. So everything has really turned far more into dance than I ever thought it would be. But I will say some of my film-making background also is in like camera movement, which is very much a choreographed art, so it's not that surprising that it is. Still, it's been really interesting learning the muscle memory of lighting.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the 'Magical, Miraculous, Monstrous' idea. So this is coming from a text that I wrote, and I'm going to show just really quickly.

[*Screen-shares a live feed showing the pages of the book* Break Your Voice]

So this is *Break Your Voice*, which is a book that I wrote in 2018, 2019, and it takes place largely on sticky notes. And for me it was a sort of like a non-binary manifesto slash working through some things that felt very important at the time, and I think are still quite important. But one of the things that stuck with me, if I had to reduce this whole text down to nothing, it was this idea of fitting a whole lemon in one's mouth… I'm trying to find this page – here it is!

So this idea of being a lemon came from this text:

'So what if I am already

magical

miraculous

monstrous

'So what if I am already

a whole lemon

under one roof

of your mouth'

And this idea, this point really, came largely from this question of being a lemon, being something that was broken, but instead of being something broken, something that just doesn't fit. So the Lemon Laws, like I said at the very beginning, are not about something that is broken. It is about something that is not fitting the requirements from the beginning.

[00:32:30] MULTI-VOICE ENSEMBLE

So this idea of 'Magical, Miraculous and Monstrous' is actually directly lifted from a text about ventriloquism, because if you go through the history, the deep history of ventriloquism, you get into things like the Oracle at Delphi, you can see how it plays into magic and demons and exorcism, and then a little bit into parlour magic at the end of the Victorian era and toward the Industrial Revolution.

And if you really, like, continue along the line of ventriloquism as a concept, you get into radio, you get into telegraph, you get into – I mean, our relationship to a voice outside of ourselves now is like insane because of these things. [*Holds up smartphone.*]
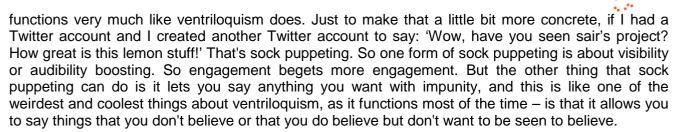
This brought me into thinking through how many voices I find myself using on a regular basis and how there's this sort of bizarre irony in the fact that I do so many weird things because I'm working alone, physically alone, I find myself in very bizarre situations trying to film things and feeling things differently because I'm alone and then also recognising that I have – and then I have one voice I have no voice training, so I have the vocal range that I have, it's not amazing. But then there's always multiple voices – I'm always pulling from multiple sources. And I really think that the only way that I am interested in making work is through something that functions like dialogue. So how do I go about making multiple characters, for example, if I'm one body?

And so some of that, I've hired out voice actors, other trans people – well actually exclusively other trans people. Because I'm very interested in the way that digital manipulation can allow trans people to achieve some of their voice goals in a way that only really 30 years of training will allow them, and constant training, will allow them to do in real time and space. Not that it's impossible, it's just hard, and I'll get into talking about Terri Rogers who is a master at this. But one way that I thought of to do this, [*produces puppet*] was actual puppeteering – turns out I'm no better at puppeteering than I am at voice acting. So you know, it's got its problems, but we're working on it together.

This idea of the monstrous is something that has been connected to trans people in popular media for as long as popular media has talked about trans people as something that is unnatural, people who are called unnatural or evil or et cetera. So the one clip that you saw that I didn't shoot in this film – well no, there's some stock footage in there – but the one clip that I was pulling from media at large is actually from *Silence of the Lambs*, this character named Buffalo Bill, who is like written supposedly to not be a trans person but somebody who thinks they're trans. Anyway, it's like this very mucky, messy thing that really wasn't well thought out in the screenplay itself, like it just doesn't bear pressure. But this idea of a trans woman who is dehumanising real women, cis women, to steal their skin is so wrapped up in popular culture, at least in the US that I had to watch it, I had to get a take on this. And I had been doing all of this research about monsters for this film before thinking about lemons and thinking about monstrosity and thinking about ventriloquism and monstrosity. And so I got really into this space of thinking about horror films and some of the tropes of like a horror film, so it's like how on earth do you make a lemon scary, an actual lemon? How do you make a real lemon scary, the fruit? I'm like: I just don't know. So I brainstormed with some of my friends who are a lot more into horror films that I am. We talked about some of the tropes of like being followed, of finding things in the mirror, of having your own body change, of being put in a situation that is scary, so being stuck in a well. It felt important to me, it always feels important to me when I'm working with a piece of pop culture that I find offensive – so, *Silence of the Lambs* – to find where the humour lies. Because it's always ridiculous, something that's offensive to me in pop culture is almost always just stupid. It's not that it's evil, it's just dumb. [*Laughter.*] And this trans role, this supposedly trans/not trans person on screen being made out to be dehumanising of other people and using 'it' as a pronoun for the person that he has captured – and he is definitely 'he', just for the record, this person is not trans. So he has captured this person and uses 'it', which is by far the most offensive thing that you could ever do to anyone, and is in fact something that is constantly done to trans people. So it just felt so weird and bizarre, and I felt like I needed to address it in this moment. So this, as it stands, is sort of like a beginning of a set of vignettes that are at the moment functioning as a movie but I think will function inside of some ensemble piece later.

In ventriloquism there is always one sentient being who is functioning alongside someone or something like a puppet [*produces puppet*] that is not a sentient being, or if it's like an exorcism, you've got your exorcist who's talking to the victim – I don't know what to call the victim of exorcism, the devil, I guess, that is inside of a being. The body that is holding the other voice is always a shell but holds another sentient being. So something that would be a monologue from the 'Sentient Being One' or a human and are, say, a devil or just a ventriloquist dummy, becomes a dialogue – and dialogue allows for dialectic. So the moving of thesis and anti thesis to create a new thesis, I think, is very important, especially when you're trying to talk about things that you don't agree with or don't believe yourself. And there's a pseudolegal term in the US called 'sock puppeting', and this is when you create identities on the internet in order to have a conversation with yourself in public. So it

functions very much like ventriloquism does. Just to make that a little bit more concrete, if I had a Twitter account and I created another Twitter account to say: 'Wow, have you seen sair's project? How great is this lemon stuff!' That's sock puppeting. So one form of sock puppeting is about visibility or audibility boosting. So engagement begets more engagement. But the other thing that sock puppeting can do is it lets you say anything you want with impunity, and this is like one of the weirdest and coolest things about ventriloquism, as it functions most of the time – is that it allows you to say things that you don't believe or that you do believe but don't want to be seen to believe.

And I, working alone, have been constantly questioning – it's like how do I create a dialogue, how do I create a dialectic? And in the clip that you just saw, I did a number of techniques. So I'm just going to quickly go through those. The easiest to explain is a very simple technique that I saw first in Hollis Frampton's 1972 piece *Hapax Legomena*, also known as *Poetic Justice*. And I'm going to show just a quick little snippet of that.

[00:42:40 to 00:43:56] Excerpt from *Hapax Legomena ii: Poetic Justice* (1972) Hollis Frampton

So it's a numbered shortlist. He describes this piece as both a movie and a book, which feels really accurate to me. Especially stuck within the constraints of quarantine, using this as a way to think through and show material that I can't shoot, physically can't shoot, is really helpful, but also what I really love about this method is that it allows for a hiding, it allows for a removal of characteristics. So you can – this piece has no gender in it, Hollis Frampton's piece has no gender in it. Mine has no gender in it either. And that is just such a rare and beautiful thing to me. I get very giddy whenever I see movies that just don't include gender as a subject matter. So this concept of the 'You' character and the 'Your Lover' character is taken directly from this Hollis Frampton film.

Also *Lemon* is another of his movies, which is not why I came to this. I've been a Hollis Frampton fan for a long time because he's a structural film-maker and he's very smart. But his *Lemon* film got me looking at his movies again and thinking through this way of creating multiple characters. Having to have – letting them all exist without description, without me giving them description felt very important. So it sort of functions a lot like how I described my interest in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. It's like a space that's operating in describing what is not shown or what is in the background or what is supposed to be hidden, feels very exciting, and a really cool imagination space to play with. And we've talked before about how much my work is just grounded in things that are off screen or non diegetic. So another way to create that ensemble thing is the 'mystery science theatre' thing that I mentioned with *Silence of the Lambs*, and then another one is very, very simple, which is just radio announcers or guided meditation teachers don't have a body. So this disembodied voice that's just supposed to be disembodied feels like a space I'm really excited about. I'm very excited about how that could translate in a live performance. I'm working with a sound designer to make this function in the film a little bit better than it is right now. But anyhow in a live performance I'm really excited about the idea of like having those disembodied voices have a physical location in space as opposed to the way that they exist as like voiceover, which is not embodied at all on screen.

[00:46:25] VOCAL MAGIC

So the moment we've all been waiting for! Terri Rogers.

I will show this tiny little clip of hers, and then I would like to talk about her.

[00:46:41 to 00:47:20] Excerpt from a performance by Terri Rogers (YouTube)

So the thing that is so special to me, as just a human being but also as someone thinking about voice and performance, is that Terri Rogers makes magic happen, actual magic, because there is no other place that I've come across or heard of where someone can so thoroughly embody two different genders and not have people screaming for the hills. Like people are not running away. She's not scary. This isn't scary. It's maybe uncanny, but ventriloquism is supposed to be uncanny. It feels good to the audience, it feels satisfying to the audience that Terri Rogers reads so much as a woman and that her character reads so much as a man – or that her dummy reads so much as a man. The way that she is able to just really own gender on stage while combining it, while separating it back

out, while knowing that all of this is coming from her vocal training just astounds me every time. And I find it very exciting that she can be a male character and a female character believably without either of those characters being read or seen as monsters.

And then this is the only time in any of the stand-up that I've seen of hers where she openly says anything about her own transness. So the line is: 'Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, and those of you who are not too sure.' And I'm like every time, like: 'Hey that's me!' [*Laughter.*] Like every time I watch it I'm like: 'I feel so seen, Terri Rogers, this feels great!' So just to round her out a little bit, she was also a magician, she was famous for her magic tricks, she kept doing this until she died. Shorty Harris, her dummy, still exists, it's been preserved. But her access to her own vocal range is something I deeply aspire to. It is something that I want to pick out a little bit more because it really does function and reinforces this idea of the dialectic that by existing next to each other, they reinforce. So Shorty Harris's maleness reinforces her femaleness, and vice-versa, making him extra believable as alive and making her extra believable as a live woman.

One of the other things that is also reinforcing this, but is playing inside of the history of dummies and ventriloquism, is the way that her vocabulary, her accent is very neat – is 'posh' appropriate, is that posh? – and his accent is really common and what he says is really common. And this play of your dummy is always free to be offensive is something that I find myself always longing for, a space not to be offensive exactly but definitely to say what's on my mind, and to be able to rebut that. And so it's very exciting in a way that, say, like other forms of becoming another character – just straight acting or lip syncing – just doesn't do. To become another character is something I feel like I have access to. But to become multiple other characters the way that she does is really, truly magic.

So aside from Terri Rogers' just magical abilities which I don't have access to at this point, there's a whole other set of vocal tactics that I find very interesting.

There's a clip from *The Powerpuff Girls* which shows the character Him, who is a bad guy devil person, who has this extreme – I can only describe it as whiplash in his voice. So it goes from being cloying and high feminised, overly sexualised to being very threatening and low and overly masculinised. That also happens with the character, the main Blue Meanie, in the movie *Yellow Submarine*.

There's another technique that I think is really interesting that I in my head I call the 'waah-waah' voice because of *Charlie Brown*. All the adults go 'Waah waah! Wah-waah waah wah-waah!', and you never understand anything they say. Another great example of this, one of my favourites, is the *Clangers,* where all of these little mice on the moon run around and their voices are slide whistles. I just, yeah I love it. And then there's scat, popularised by Ella Fitzgerald, this sort of like using your voice to emote but without content.

And then there's one other form of voice that I find particularly interesting and I call it the multi-voice – I'm not sure if it has a term – that can be seen in these two clips from *Adventure Time*, and from, I believe, 1990s *Hackers*, where the character inhabits multiple voices at once, and they're usually of a wide spectrum. So always a deep masculine voice and a high feminine voice, but unlike Him from *The Powerpuff Girls* or the Blue Meanie in *Yellow Submarine*, the multi-voice is always at the same time, as opposed to a whiplash effect between the two.

[00:54:28 to 00:54:52] Excerpt from 'Sky Witch' *Adventure Time* (2013) (YouTube)

[00:54:53 to 00:55:10] Excerpt from *Hackers* (1995) (Movieclips, YouTube)

I've played with how these function multiple times, the way it erases some characters like the 'waah-waah' voice from *Charlie Brown*, it others the characters as opposed to like the Clangers, where it just kind of makes them cute but it infantilises them, definitely, which is appropriate – it's a kids' show.

But the way that the whiplash between masculine and feminine functions in these bad guy characters is of particular interest, and the multi-voice where it's masculine and feminine at the same time are also always bad guys. So it's just this space that I'm thinking of, playing inside of, and it shows up a little bit in this film.

[00:56:08] STORY BOARDING: PROCESS AND PLANNING

I have one sort of note about process and planning, which is that I storyboard constantly basically, that's really what that boils down to. I am always drawing new ideas. Scriptwriting and storyboarding together is something that I'm always doing. I was never formally trained to write scripts so I see the line between instructions to myself and the actual script that goes into the film, anything spoken, dialogue, speech et cetera, all of that is a play space it feels very fluid.

[*Screen-sharing a live feed of leafing through their storyboard book.*]

So like I was saying, my process work involves a lot of planning out these drawings, thinking about lighting. My drawings are not super elaborate all of the time. So this is just to marry a little bit of what's happening in this one. This is a series of physical exercises, like training how to be a lemon. I would say that some of the ways that I've been thinking about the categories of what I'm working on with lemons is, like I said, if you are working through something that has an abecedarian process, if you're trying to create something that's all-encompassing – I always talk with my hands, so 'hi!' – if you're trying to do something that is all-encompassing, one of the ways that I think is sort of like an modern encyclopaedia is YouTube and Google, and there's several categories of videos on YouTube. So there's lots of training videos on YouTube, there's lots of how-to videos on YouTube, cooking videos, electronics videos. So some of my work is – so I've got this whole category of exercises – these are push-ups with lemons, where you do the push-up where your fingers are creating a cage over the lemon and then you have this like somewhat dramatic moment if you can't do it, you actually end up crushing your lemon so you get lemon juice everywhere. So lemons as like a metric for fitness in that case.

This is a set of just ordinary habits, this is the kind of stuff that doesn't end up on YouTube that I'm interested in, which is like when you get home: taking off your mask, lighting your cigarette or whatever, taking off your shoes, changing your clothes, putting on something else. So thinking through what functions inside and outside of the space of public.

[00:59:50] GETTING OUTSIDE OF GENDER

I already talked about getting outside of gender. I haven't really mentioned the green screen suit and chroma key yet, but it's… Actually this hoodie that I'm wearing right now is the perfect example of this is that there are occasionally items that you can wear as a character, just as a person that so overtake your body and space, this amazing, amazing orange hoodie. Whether you're wearing a green screen suit for the purpose of actually chroma-keying the suit out, or the way that I've been using it in here which is just another form of costuming, another form of masking and another form of hiding, it just removes a specificity from these characters, character. It is negotiable.

So I'm going to share my screen so that there's an image paired with that comment.

[*Screen-shares the video project on their desktop and points out examples.*]

So the way that the green screen suit in shots like this one can allow me to totally remove that character or in shots like this one where it's very much a part of the image. Or in shots like this one where I can further highlight the objects in my shot by making the body a little less part of the action. Like I have to use my hands to do this, but these green gloves are so ubiquitous in this film that I think they become a little unremarkable, and allowing a human body to become unremarkable is exciting to me.

[01:02:05] POSSIBLE VERSIONS

My last note about this project comes back to this question of where is this going? I've mentioned a few times that I see it as a hybrid, something that will always have recorded media and, in my dream world, will always have some performative live element. At the moment, just because Covid just keeps going on forever and ever with new variants, I am not sure – I've been playing a little bit with what a live performance on Zoom can mean. I'm not a huge fan so far, because part of what I love

about live performance is taking up space with my body in a space, taking up space but not bodily attention. It's a funny weird dynamic of being like: 'I'm just a colour, but also I'm here.'

And so I find myself really missing that element, and dreaming and sketching a lot about what this is, what this could look like. My original dream was to have it exist as two channels where you see both – depending on where you are in the audience, you see one channel or the other. But then a large portion of the audio is created live, real time, so that the audio makes sense on both screens, which is a common trope in video installation, but to do that live, potentially with multiple people, potentially with people who would call in, is something that I would really enjoy.

I've been working with my collaborator Luan Joy Sherman. We've been working on a project called *Respite Radio* for a couple of years now. I think our first broadcast was, oh my gosh, almost three years ago. And so we've been working on and off. He is going to be my sound designer for the film, but I think he will also be involved in the sound design for it as a live performance. And we've been working on where and how some of the writing of this material can fit into our show, *Respite Radio*.

And so I made my lemon puppet [*produces puppet*] and so my sort of character on our *Respite Radio* is DJ LMN and his character is DJ Melon, so lemon and melon. It's cute, we like it. And so playing with the fruitiness again is sitting in a really fun way in that space. And I've been working with a voice actor, Iris, and yeah… So it's starting to accumulate a few more people which is really exciting to me to see how other visions are shaping this. And I think I've mentioned already but I'm excited about some of those avenues. I'm tentatively also thinking about how the vignettes could function as something that exists in a purely digital space as 30-second clips on Instagram or as like one-minute videos on YouTube or weekly instalments. But I think that's sort of a question for later right now. It's very much a space of play and I think it's going nicely.

Transcription by Nick Awde

Clips Summary

[00:15:20 to 00:22:49] 'Magical, Miraculous, Monstrous' from *The ABC AND XYZs OF LMNs* (2021) by sair goetz

[00:43:16 to 00:44:34] *Hapax Legomena ii: Poetic Justice* (1972) Hollis Frampton

[00:46:41 to 00:47:20] Performance by Terri Rogers (YouTube)

[00:54:28 to 00:54:52] 'Sky Witch' *Adventure Time* (2013) (YouTube)

[00:54:53 to 00:55:10] *Hackers* (1995) (Movieclips, YouTube)

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