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**EMBRACING ONE'S INNER WEIRDO:
a guide to monstrous experiences**

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1 INTRODUCTION

The starting point of this paper roots in my experience of having the urge to get close to, even sometimes to touch, art works in an exhibition context: or what I call the emotional embrace. As one might already be aware of, such behaviour is frowned upon and not the norm when visiting an exhibition. This made me think of my artistic practice that touches on the topics of instinctive repetition, weirdness and monstrosity. I realised that this unconventional urge was the exact thing I aim to create in my works. This led me to ask myself what the connection between my practice and the way I feel I would like to approach art was.

This topic interests me because the emotional embrace stands as the central point of my artistic practice. It connects the inner Weirdo, monstrosity, *GARY* (2025) and anti-normative theoretical frames. It is also the starting point for going through monstrous experiences. Therefore, I will be investigating how the emotional embrace, as a monstrous experience, can influence one's relationship to art, as an artist and a viewer. Meaning the central question of this paper is:

How is the urge to intimately connect to an artwork a manifestation of one's inner Weirdo?

Furthermore, I am interested in understanding how the Weirdo and monstrosity intertwine into one another and mirror how we are expected to function as a society in an artistic context.

I will start by defining the emotional embrace, monstrosity, the inner Weirdo and care. Also, I will provide a short explanation of my artistic practice by using my artist statement to clarify my position towards the inner Weirdo, to link it to the emotional embrace and to explain the narrative surrounding it. This will allow me to highlight the main idea of my practice: caring for your inner Weirdo will let them transpire. To support the concept of care, I will make an overviewed use of *To care as we would like to: Socio-ecological crisis and our impasse of care* (2022) by Manuela Zechner (she/her).

Secondly, I will argue how letting your inner Weirdo transpire means having monstrous experiences. For this, the focus will mainly be on the first chapter called *monster theory* of the essay by Lauren Elkin (she/her) *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (2025). She gives two different explanations to the term art monster: the first being a noun, the art monster, relating to the artist themselves and the second being a verb, arts monsters, meaning giving a piece agency to act or provoke a certain effect. These concepts will show us how monstrosity/weirdness intertwines the artist and the viewer.

Thirdly, I will shortly hint towards how the touch of the emotional embrace can be a means for transformation, as it is explored in *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020) by

Legacy Russel (they/them). This chapter's purpose lies solely in providing a perspective on the potential trace the emotional embrace can leave that I strive to explore in my practice.

Lastly, I will analyse *HOME SCREEN* (2026) by Daria Blum (she/her) and *The School of Lovers* (2024) by Melanie Bonajo (they/them) through the lens of the emotional embrace. This means trying to understand which elements of the piece were responsible, what was the effect of the emotional embrace and what impact did it have on the viewer. In the case of this paper, the viewer's perspective will be mine, for I have witnessed both works in exhibition contexts and have not gathered other viewers' experiences.

2 DEFINITIONS

2.1 THE EMOTIONAL EMBRACE

The emotional embrace happens in the context of viewing an art piece. It is an instinctive, non-verbal, and intimate exchange of selves between two beings that simply *just* happens, and that simply *just* ends. It can be recognised by the urge to get closer, to connect, to touch or to hug accompanied by a deep emotional response. Very often, this experience feels very clear yet also indescribable with words. It leaves a mark on one's self. As it was put by Schneeman in Lauren Elkin's monster theory: "I have the sense that [...] our best developments grow from works which initially strike us as 'too much': those which are intriguing, demanding, that lead us to experiences which we feel we cannot encompass, but which simultaneously provoke and encourage our efforts."¹ It's almost a way of feeling that art alone can produce.²

2.2 THE INNER WEIRDO

The idea of weird is pulled from the monster figure. The monster is a tall marginal creature with an often scary or appalling appearance. It is considered abnormal but yet fascinating as its presence tries to draw in the viewer. The monster ends up being the ultimate representation of the weirdo and the result of the existence of societal norms, as both depend on each other in order to exist as opposites.

Therefore, some might be monsters and some simply weirdos. And for those who seem "normal", there may even be an inner weirdo hidden within. For the characteristic of normal can only be a superficial one, a shield protecting one's most sacred version of oneself. How much one lets it transpire is an individual choice. Thus, one is on one's way to find a comfortable spot on the spectrum of the weirdo.

¹ Schneeman (*More Than Meat Joy*), quoted in Elkin 2023, p.18

² Elkin 2023 p.64

One can physically grow closer to this unknown monster. And, as one embraces this weirdo, we share a small instant of intimate connection and affection (i.e. the emotional embrace). The weirdo's physicality is soft and fragile and must be handled with care. Through this moment of touch, there is the possibility to transform and maybe even let a part, however slight it might be, of the personal inner weirdo emerge.

2.3 CARE

To clarify my understanding of care, I will lean on the definition brought by Manuela Zechner in her essay *To care as we would like to: socio-ecological crisis and our impasse of care* (2022)³.

Manuela Zechner is a feminist care activist, researcher, artist and facilitator that works with the topics of care, ecology, micropolitics and social movements.⁴

In her essay, she explores the model of care first introduced by Joan C. Tronto (she/her) and Berenice Fisher (she/her) in their 1990 article *Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring*⁵, where they define it as a set of continuous and intertwined activities that all aim toward living in our world as well as possible. They propose four stages of care: caring about, taking care of, caregiving and care receiving. Later, Tronto adds a fifth stage: caring with. Zechner reexamines them considering our current eco-socio-political context⁶ to address what she calls the care impasse: our collective inability to care transversally across all five stages.

1. CARING ABOUT: Becoming aware of a need or a problem⁷.
2. TAKING CARE OF: Taking action to address a perceived need⁸.
3. CAREGIVING: A practice where life is reproduced like kitchens, farms, or slaughterhouses, encompassing both love and exploitation. Caregiving is not always a wilful and sovereign act.⁹
4. CARE RECEIVING: Acknowledging one's own needs and vulnerability.¹⁰
5. CARING WITH: A practice of solidarity that involves fighting with others for mutual systems of welfare, healthcare, education, housing, and more. It gives us the possibility to bridge all five stages of care on a social and global scale.¹¹

Therefore, in this paper, care means a continuity of actions and responses that aim to sustain each other's well-being. It is to be understood as an interconnected system of feelings, emotions and needs.

³ Zechner 2022

⁴ <https://transversal.at/bio/zechner>, 20.02.25

⁵ Tronto and Fisher 1990, pp. 36-54

⁶ <https://mediathek.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/gropius-bau/journal/to-care-as-we--would-like-to>, 20.02.25

⁷ Zechner 2022

⁸ Idem

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ Idem

¹¹ Idem

2.4 MONSTROSITY

Monstrosity is a strategy for making works that reach one viscerally. Meaning they touch something so profound it almost feels irrational. Monstrosity allows one to bring back touch and feeling into one's encounters with art by centring the bodily experience to liberate it from patriarchal and normative views.¹² It serves as the system supporting the figure of the monster and the Weirdo.

3 MAIN PART

3.1 CARING FOR YOUR INNER WEIRDO

Caring for one's inner weirdo means caring for something that does not possess a true physical form because it will always appear through an interface, whether it be analogue, digital or human. In reality, the inner weirdo is simply a manifestation of a need or impulse that has constantly been repressed or denied. Hence, we find ourselves at the first stage of care: becoming aware of the inner weirdo¹³. The next step then implies to indulge in a form of emotional embrace and with that, simultaneously accepting this need of weirdness. This experience can then lead to more forms of emotional embraces, maybe some with other human beings instead of the inner Weirdo alone. If one imagines this process happening simultaneously all over the world, it would lead to the creation of a system of support for the emergence of weirdness, or maybe even create a new perception of what is "weird" and what is "normal".

One cares for one's inner Weirdo by experiencing emotional embraces, glitching and acknowledging the existence of a spectrum of weirdness. Letting the emotional embrace happen is a form of care for one's inner Weirdo because it allows one to rethink the systems that have pushed one to deny their existence. It is important to care for them so that new systems that do not rely on binary perceptions may come to be. In a society that pushes the boundaries of individualism further and further, it is primordial to start making the personal a universally relevant category.¹⁴

Of course, this process of care is a long and bumpy process because one finds oneself going against systems and rules that were put in place during one's whole upbringing. Therefore, the first step of caring for the inner Weirdo is reflecting and unlearning to relearn. Now what does this imply in an artistic context?

This means forming a relationship with one's art, finding ways to communicate with it through different interfaces (mediums), acknowledging urges and impulses, listening to one's gut. And on the other hand, this also means trying to create contexts where

¹² Elkin 2023, p.64

¹³ Zechner 2022

¹⁴ Elkin 2023, p.64

the spectrum of weirdness can come alive and push viewers to question themselves and criticise systems. As we have seen before, care is not just about receiving it, it is also about giving.

The way in which an artist wishes to bond with their work is an individual matter. This may take the form of repetition work, destroying something, moments of contemplation, talking to it or about it, ...

Now how to provide care for the viewer's Weirdo means considering diversity in background, education, status, race, gender, neuro-spiciness, height, language, upbringing, ... It is obvious that this requires impossible tasks. However, one can, as an artist, hope to simply emotionally touch the viewer. To gift them something to take from the experience of looking at the work. And as we have read before, the emotional embrace is the door to the inner Weirdo.

3.2 THE MONSTER INNER WEIRDO

In order to achieve this simple gift to the viewer, one must make use of the strategy of monstrosity. The inner Weirdo first found its roots in the monster-term realm to provide a physical description of them. As this term evolved in my practice, it ended up separating itself from the original idea of a monster towards a more monstrous shift.

The inner Weirdo was first a monster in the fairy-tale sense: big, scary, spiky, with wings and horns, slightly repulsive and with pointy teeth. Of course, as we already saw in its definition, the inner Weirdo is not always in its monster form, but it will always inevitably carry some essence of monstrosity. As the inner weirdo comes from its host, each individual finds themselves holding onto a piece of monster. We now find ourselves in a position where not only is the viewer responsible for the emotional embrace, but also the artist in a form of shared and layered connections. Lauren Elkin deals with this topic of monstrosity in her book *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* published in 2023. She is a French American author and translator. In her essay, she addresses how feminist artists have confronted the question of telling the truth about their experiences as bodies. She asked what their language is, what are the materials they need to transcribe it?¹⁵ The focus from this literature will remain on the first chapter *monster theory* where Elkin defines the term "art monster" as bisemous.

1. THE ART MONSTER (noun): a feminist artist who uses monstrosity to authorise themselves to deny received ideas about what they, and their art, should look like and behave.¹⁶ In other words, an art monster goes against preconceived conventions of gender, race, class, etc.

¹⁵ <https://www.laurenelkin.com/artmonsters>, 31.10.2025

¹⁶ Elkin 2023, p14

2. ART THAT MONSTERS (verb): art that makes the familiar strange, allows us to envision different ways of being, “lets the body and the imagination speak and dream outside the strict boundaries placed on them by society, patriarchy and internalised misogyny”¹⁷.

As we have seen before, meeting the inner Weirdo is a path to constructing new ways and systems. Now, by using the strategy of monstrosity, one is allowing oneself, as much as a viewer as an artist, to reach deep within the body. This is exactly what happens in the case of the emotional embrace: the experience is so profound that it can hardly be accurately described in words. Also, it is in this hidden place that one may journey to find one’s inner Weirdo.

Adopting monstrosity as a strategy, as an artist, means bringing back the focus to the body through the method of touch. It can be used during the creative process by hugging one’s work, modelling with clay, stroking the cold computer, typing, drawing, etc. As long as this touch carries an emotional reaction in the body, the relationship to one’s work perpetuates itself, as we have established in the caring for one’s inner Weirdo. Since these works would be carrying a heavy connective load with the artist, this would inevitably play a central role when showing the piece. Therefore, the allowance to indulge into any form of interaction with it would be necessary. In a certain way, the art monster carries the responsibility to create the context within which art that monsters can exist.

Keeping this in mind, art that monsters creates a more propitious setting when it concerns feeling something big and indescribable as a viewer. As we saw in the definitions chapter, these are part of the core elements of an emotional embrace. Now, the ultimate form of the emotional embrace is when one hugs the art piece to exchange a fleeting moment of intimate connection, meaning reaching the pinnacle of relationship with the inner Weirdo. Therefore, I wonder if instead of simply having the art monster and art that monsters, we would instead need a monstrous art system going from art class in primary school to art degree programs to emblematic institutions. It would be unfair to delegate the complete responsibility of monster changes solely to the artist because, when it comes to care, it is a constant flow carried and created by the whole.

I like to imagine that if most artists embraced the strategy of monstrosity, this would push towards major curatorial and value changes in exhibition spaces because it would mean that nearly any work would contain interaction. This could go from the role of the invigilator becoming more sociable than policing, the actual architecture of the building being rethought to allow better bodily experiences to clear curational values about interaction being stated nearly as an artist statement for the space.

¹⁷ Elkin 2023, p.14

3.3 TRANSFORMING WITH THE EMOTIONAL EMBRACE

As we have seen so far, connecting to one's inner weirdo through the emotional embrace carries the seed to plant something much bigger. One aspect, on the larger scale, has been made clear thus far: rethinking societal norms and expectations and the systems they create. But as we know, the emotional embrace is first and foremost a very intimate and personal experience. I believe that this moment allows one to find a means to transform, as explored in *Glitch Feminism* by Legacy Russel.

In *Glitch Feminism*, Russel explores the sociological and technological constructs of gender and sexuality, and how, within them, space can be found for malfunctions, errors and glitches that in reality, may not actually be anomalies but simply a form of correcting the social machine.¹⁸ I will focus specifically on the chapter titled *Glitch Ghosts*, to explore the embrace as a transformative form of care. In this chapter, Russell uses the pop-culture term “ghosting”, the act of ending a personal relationship by abruptly and without any explanation withdrawing from all communication, as a metaphor for disengaging from societal norms. They encourage us to ask, “What is a body?”¹⁹ and to reconsider where the boundaries of a body lie, one of them being the physical boundary, which is accessible through touch.

Russell quotes black feminist theorist and critic Hortense Spillers (she/her), who addresses “the question of touch – to be at hand without mediation or interference [...] [as] the gateway to the most intimate experience and exchange of mutuality between subject”²⁰. She defines it as a purely instinctive experience between two beings, a sort of raw instant connection that is not rooted in social constructs, technology or any external influence; it *just* happens.

In the case of the emotional embrace, touch may happen physically or metaphorically. By allowing this moment to happen, one “ghosts” the expectation of simply finding art aesthetically pleasing and of having to understand the work, to know what it is about. One evolves from viewer to glitch, as a virus would enter and alter the DNA of its cellular host infinitely replicating until full invasion of the body. From simply seeing to transforming. One refuses to be regulated. By choosing to transform, one recognises that one has the power to either consent or refuse the status of one's relationships to binary norms.²¹ A state of transformation implies a non-static relation to the inner Weirdo, for they do not only appear when emotional embraces happen. There is no ‘either/or’. Their relationship to one's inner self is a continuous flow of exchanges in thoughts, feelings, impulses, dreams and fantasies. Transformation here is to be interpreted in the sense of evolving, one is not just one being, one version, but layered and entangled like an onion. One then gains the capacity to access deeper parts of the self, understand systemic patterns, or maybe even realise that one's emotions do still exist and that they can be named.

¹⁸ <https://www.legacyrussell.com/GLITCHFEMINISM>, 20.02.25

¹⁹ Russel 2020, p.68

²⁰ Spillers (*To the Bone: Some Speculations on Touch*), quoted in Russell 2020, pp. 61-69

²¹ Russell 2020, p.64

The result of this transformation could be going from an introspective journey to full-on societal rage and critic. This would be the positive outcome in the form of self-growth accompanied by a critical approach to art institutions and systems both as an artist and as a viewer.

One could also imagine getting lost whilst in this transformative process. To no longer be able to discern inner Weirdo fiction from inner Weirdo reality. To be so taken by the emotional embrace that one feels like one is inside of the work in ways that the human brain and body cannot compute. All this then unfortunately leading to psychosis or simply fainting. This is what is known as the Stendhal Syndrome. It is defined as an emotional overload that occurs when looking at an art piece.²² Of course, the emotional embrace does not aspire to reach such levels of response. But Stendahl Syndrome does stand as proof that an artwork can provoke deep, even very intense, emotional responses in our brains.

4 ARTISTIC EXAMPLES

4.1 *HOME SCREEN*, 2025, PROGRAMMED VIDEO, SOUND AND LIGHT SCRIPT, 20 IKEA TÅGARP LAMPS, 3 BOTEX DMX-SWITCHPACKS, DISCO BALL, LOOP - DARIA BLUM

Daria Blum is an artist and performer. Her installations move between performative interventions and tragicomic narratives. They host different competitive characters, each one rooting from her own persona, that seem to fight over the stage. As she distributes agency between those characters, she also shares it with the objects and technologies of her installations.²³

HOME SCREEN is a sound, light and lamp performance installation. The IKEA lamps and screens switch on and off, flicker and sway as synth keys divide the installation into chapters. A roaming spotlight screens and frames every detail as to distribute who is performing and when.²⁴

²² https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syndrome_de_Stendhal, 27.02.2026

²³ Unser 2025

²⁴ Unser 2025



Figure 1: HOME SCREEN (exhibition view), 2026

A softly lit room filled with lamps of all sizes, some even going up all the way to the ceiling, resonates with the sound of melodic synth keys. The room is white, orange, yellow, and covered in small star-like spots of light, black. This magical sensory mix draws one in as if to drift to another realm. The choreography of projection, lamp and synth transforms into a profound yet simple means of communication. One finds oneself in a state of naïve admiration that hints back to when, as a child, the world was still being discovered. And as one finds oneself in this state, facing the dancing TÅGARP lamps, something deep within activates. Suddenly, one feels so connected that one then knows very clearly what the installation is telling us, as if one was listening to an old friend. But at the same time, it seems impossible to share this conversation with anyone else for what was shared feels clear in emotions and sensations in the body. There are no words to describe it. As the chapters of the installation go on, the small breaks in between could be just enough time to look away and lose the connection. It felt like I could stand there and look at it for hours. I had an emotional embrace with *HOME SCREEN*.

As I stood there watching, so did many others. I feel they too were trying to understand what the lamps were telling them. Something clearly calls to us, draws us in. Even though I can never be fully certain, I can imagine that some of them were also going through an emotional embrace and therefore caring for their inner Weirdo, maybe even without realising.

In my opinion, Daria Blum can be considered an art monster that creates pieces that monster. She clearly cares for her inner Weirdo because she shares agency with the elements of her work, whether they be lamps or characters impersonated by her. To me this is a clear indication that there is a relationship with her work and her inner Weirdo. Blum pushes to go against the preconceived idea of having a stage director versus simple props. Her and the lamps share an equal role as they perform, nearly as an extension of herself.

HOME SCREEN monsters because of the use of the daily object of the Ikea lamp as a performer. This pushes the viewer to rethink if maybe, in their own way, objects that they have at home could also be “alive” and entertain a relationship with them.

In a way, these extensions show us her different inner layers as Blum believes them to be parts of her persona. The artist transforms by leaving their physical body and encompassing their viscerality in an inanimate object of one’s daily life. The expectation seeing her on stage gets ghosted.

The viewer transforms by encountering unexpected feelings and connection with the urge to walk through the lamps yet not knowing if they would dare to. It would even almost feel wrong to walk past it on the side to go use the bathroom in the back of marytwo. The process of overcoming the “something” that seems to hold them back forms the core of their transformative process. How can we expect the viewer to indulge these desires when they have been taught that their relationship to art is only hierarchical and never on eye-level, nor with value and importance.

4.2 SCHOOL OF LOVERS, 2024, FULL HD SINGLE CHANNEL VIDEO FILM WITH SOUND, 38:45 MIN - MELANIE BONAJO

Melanie Bonajo is an artist, filmmaker, sexological bodyworker, somatic sex coach and educator, cuddle workshop facilitator and activist. Through their videos, performances, photographs, and installations, they examine current problems of co-existence in a crippling capitalist system.²⁵

The School of Lovers is a cross-genre art and education project realized by Melanie Bonajo, Daniel Cremer, and Yanna Rüger in collaboration with the inclusive Theatre HORA. The work addresses questions of relationship and touch, research and learning.²⁶ This video addresses people with and without disabilities by showcasing a group of individuals that explore together the meanings of words such as “consent”, “real sex” and “personal space” in a playful and humorous way. They navigate through

²⁵ <https://shedhalle.ch/en/melanie-bonajo/> , 31.10.2025

²⁶ <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/584651/melanie-bonajoschool-of-loversphilipp-guflerdis-identification>, 03.11.25

a 3D digital and colourful realm of plants and goo with the help of a narrator/commentator.²⁷



Figure 2: *The School of Lovers* (film still), 2024



Figure 3: *The School of Lovers* (film still), 2024

²⁷<https://vimeo.com/982682460>, 26.02.2026



Figure 4: *The School of Lovers* (film still), 2024

As one watches the first few seconds of the video in a small and dark room, one is instantly caught by the playfulness and the near naivety of the questions and their answers. But one quickly realises that the people in the film are indeed right: no one ever taught us what all those words and concepts mean. This triggers a form of self-reflection: what does “real sex” then mean to me? This leads further to questioning the systems in place around sexuality and intimacy and how they are deeply rooted in patriarchal binary values. Although I had already started an unlearning process prior to seeing this work, this moment of questioning happened anyway.

There is then also a fascination for the way in which these topics are discussed amongst the actors. Their discourse seems detached and yet also fully engrained in societal expectations of the topics of sex and intimacy. It almost feels like watching young children talking about love. There seems to be an innocence towards all the horrors of the world, despite the fact that they are adults that already have their own experiences.

Now the emotional embrace happens exactly through this fascination. It triggers a strange form of endearment but then leads, as one starts reflecting on the topic, to disillusion. It could almost be described as an emotional rollercoaster, although I did not find it to be that intense. The connection to the work is drawn by the realisation of the lack of information on these topics, on how long it has taken to start talking about them and defining them. One asks oneself: why did I not see or hear about this sooner? One connects because one is thankful and appreciative. Because one is validated through gentle soft play. One is freed from binary body views and expectations. And everything then just seems so peaceful.

With this piece, Bonajo cares mostly for other people's inner Weirdos. They teach and show us what concepts and words around sex and intimacy can mean. As the words get performed by one or more actors/actresses, one sees that they can be different for other people. For some, this could be a form of comfort, and for others of education. Either way, this video ends up validating the individual experience meaning the impulses, the urges or the feelings in moments of intimacy. Also, it acts as a helper to care for one's inner Weirdo that appears in non-artistic contexts through artistic methods.

Melanie Bonajo is an art monster because they place the bodily experience at the centre of their practice. They place it in contexts of intimacy by rethinking what this means and disconnecting the automatic assumption that intimacy only occurs in a sexual context. Therefore, there is a clear detachment from expected views on the topic.

The School Of Lovers monsters because it allows the viewer to envision different ways of being. The performers are encouraged to let their imagination run free when trying to answer to the different topics posed, such as personal space. On top of that, through the mediation of the purple fairy-looking being, the viewer is invited to also reflect on the term, of course leading them to imagine a situation that would illustrate it. This can then lead to some confusion, amusement or intrigue towards the way the performers, coached by Bonajo, decided to show a meaning of the word. In which ever way this friction happens, the viewer engages in a reflective process.

As this process happens, one finds oneself with the option to choose transformation. In the case of *The School of Lovers*, its outcomes can range from comfort, redefining a word in a better way to make more sense of one's own needs to feeling let down by the sex education system in place.

5 MY OWN ARTISTIC PRACTICE

5.1 MY INNER WEIRDO NEEDS AN ARTIST STATEMENT

Over time, I have grown fascinated with the weird and the strange, particularly with what one calls the "inner Weirdo". I believe it to be the part of oneself that never really grows up, that never really conforms but yet is still present within every human being. Through my instinctive and colourful practice, I try to allow my inner Weirdo to surface. This forms the base for my ongoing research on how to form a relationship with the inner Weirdo. How do you meet a Weirdo monster? How do you embrace them? How do you connect with them in a world based on norms? In an attempt to find answers to these questions, I navigate through the fields of techno feminism, glitch aesthetics and feminist monster theory.

At the start of my bachelor's degree, I made a series of monster-looking creature collages that I called *on n'aime pas les têtes qui dépassent* (2023). During these past three years I have continued working with these collages that eventually became the start of the *GARY* series. It became clear to me that those creatures were more than just monsters, they were the Weirdos because this first work was all about the feeling of somehow not fitting in. Also, the category of the monster implied something that was out of this world, which was not the case when it came to the Weirdo.

As *GARY* came to be, I was also trying to understand how to name this feeling that I kept on having around them: the urge to hug them. This was the start of the thought process around the emotional embrace. With that in mind, I really started to reflect upon what kind of relationship it was that I had with *GARY*. Were there power structures at play? Did *GARY* actually also want to hug me? And where do they come from? I believed our communication was not in words but in actions and that *GARY*'s journey with me through analogue mediums would eventually come to an end. They are a creature from this and another world because, as an inner Weirdo, they carry part of their human with them.

I have imagined that the creation of the Weirdo (in my case *GARY*) goes as follows: The Weirdo was born from a mix of goo, glitter and animal snippets. The mixture was concocted by a young potions master. The snippets leaked out of the potions master's eyes, inevitably melting them. This is what they call the goo starter. The rest of the goo was gathered from the highly condensed gas clouds. And the glitter was stolen from a dumpster. Everything was blended together until it smelt absolutely divine. The mush was left to sit, simmer, and fester until what was divine turned into the most wretched stench. As the stench thickened, their neon aura started glowing until it combusted to reveal: the Weirdo. *Shimmers*

5.2 MY INNER WEIRDO NEEDS *GARY* (2025 – ongoing)

This work is about the persona of *GARY* coming alive in their digital habitat. It started by a creative writing process around their story, where they come from and who they are. They've been with me for nearly three years now and I had the feeling that I'd been trying to pull them away from their home, or at least from somewhere they felt safe. As I feel I have started to bond with *GARY*, I interpret the moment when my finger got severed by a metal pedestal as an act of rebellion, or maybe even resistance, from *GARY* during the process of making a grey papier mâché sculpture that would serve as their projection surface in order to hug them.

Through the interface of the blog, *GARY* can allow themselves to fully experience the power of the glitch in the digital realm. They cannot be fully read as human nor as an animal nor as a bot by the system of humans. They communicate, or better said stay

in touch, by writing blog entries that are always accompanied by an imaged mood. As the viewer scrolls through the blog, they get an insight into the narration surrounding *GARY*, their encounter with a human and their journey to return to the digital realm because all these normative binary expectations make them unhappy.



Figure 5: GARY – on the road to glitch (exhibition view), 2025

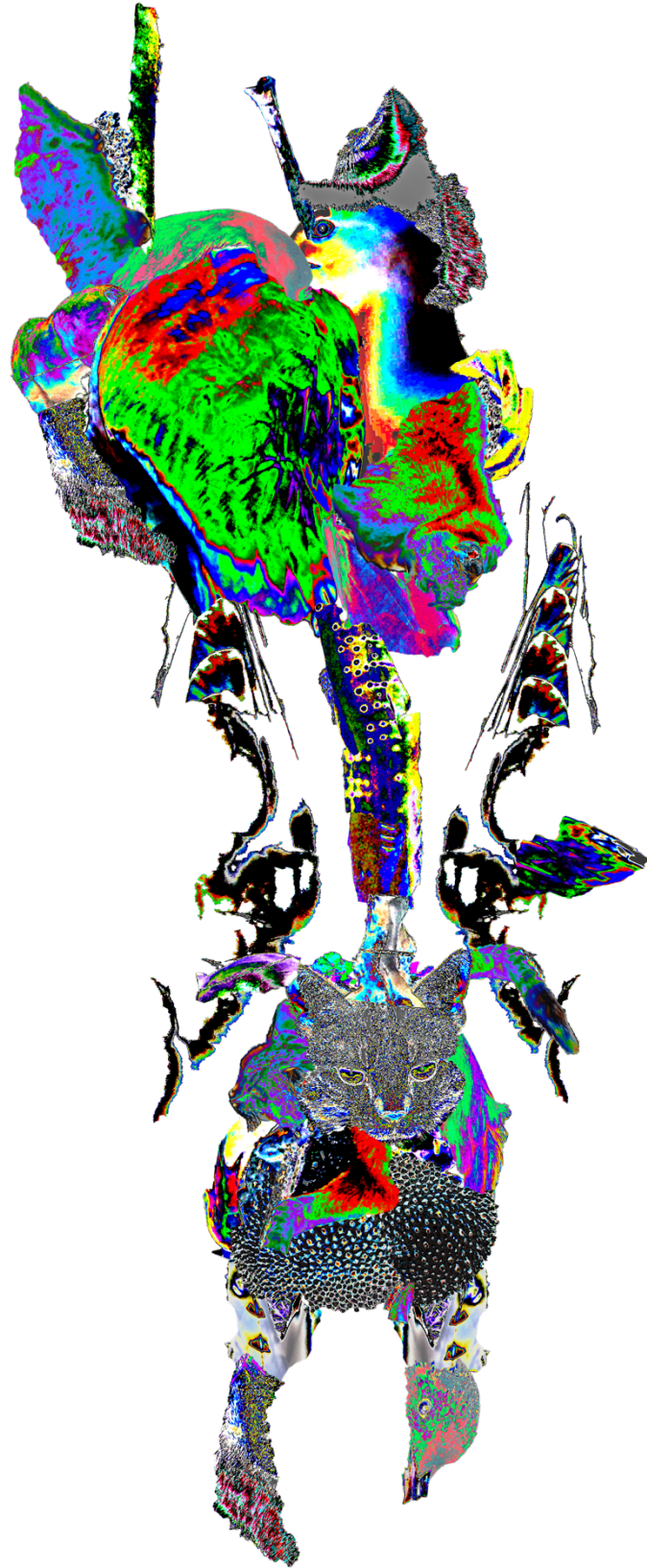


Figure 6: on n'aime pas les têtes qui dépassent (digital collage), 2023

GARY serves an example of how meeting and navigating with one's inner Weirdo looks like in the hopes that others may want to try and embrace this journey too. With this work, I aim to give the viewer to opportunity to experience an emotional embrace, and therefore care for their inner Weirdo, by putting interaction at the centre of the work. They are invited to engage with their body in order to really take something from this piece. Also, the whole creative process surrounding *GARY* and our relationship always relied on finding the best conditions possible for us to live our lives well, which, as we have seen in the definitions chapter, is an essential aspect of care.

I believe that I can be considered an art monster because I want to place the bodily experience as the means of connecting and communicating with a piece. It is by listening to the body than one indulges in the emotional embrace. I do not expect viewers to fully understand my works nor to find them particularly beautiful, I would rather they simply feel with them.

GARY – on the road to glitch monsters because it invites one to rethink the expectations of how one should interact with an art piece, and, on a larger scale, to question normative views on bodies, feelings and technology. At the same time, it delivers an extensive insightful narrative about the main character *GARY* that reaches one through unexpected emotions and sensations.

When it comes to transformation, the choice to transform appears more subtly than in the previous examples of Melanie Bonajo and Daria Blum because one is left with a feeling of intrigue and unease instead of clear options to follow. But that is exactly the point, the Weirdo never appears as clear as day. Their arrival process is an emergence, not a huge sign in front of one's eyes. So, what transformation could come from something so intangible? The answer is: the hint. Metaphorically speaking I would say: to dip a toe in the sea of weirdness before diving in with the hopes that this will trigger a desire to swim some more.

6 CONCLUSION

To conclude this paper, I would say the need to emotionally connect to a piece now seems more like a very human experience than something inherently peculiar. What makes it part of one's inner Weirdo is the context in which it happens; the context carrying certain rules and expectations. So as the concept of the Weirdo themselves, the emotional embrace roots in the existence of a binary normative functioning society. I do not wish to presume that every person to ever witness an artwork has gone through an emotional embrace as described in the examples. It is rather a desire to bring light to something inherently personal and profound that can be lived in different ways by different people, hence the word "guide" in the title.

Lastly, I could imagine this research continuing by gathering viewers' experiences when going through an emotional embrace, or somehow collaborating with curators, art historians, psychologists, sociologists and neuroscientists to look at it from a more interdisciplinary perspective.

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7.3 IMAGES

Figure 1:

Blum, Julian, 2026, *HOME SCREEN* (exhibition view),

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Figure 2:

Bonajo, Melanie, 2024, *The School of Lovers* (film still),

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Figure 3:

Bonajo, Melanie, 2024, *The School of Lovers* (film still),

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Figure 4:

Bonajo, Melanie, 2024, *The School of Lovers* (film still),

<https://vimeo.com/982682460>

Figure 5:

Melissa Scovell, 2025, *GARY – on the road to glitch* (exhibition view), personal documentation

Figure 6:
Melissa Scovell, 2023, *on n'aime pas les têtes qui dépassent* (digital collage),
personal documentation

AI was used in this paper to correct grammar, spelling and syntax.