

***'The chaosmos of the personal': syncretism, alchemy and informational excess as strategies in a critical and creative exploration of the surrealist fictions of Leonora Carrington, Ithell Colquhoun and Claude Cahun***

“For once she blazes her trail in the symbolic; she cannot fail to make of it the chaosmos of the ‘personal’ - in her pronouns, her nouns, and her clique of referents.”

*(Hélène Cixous, Le Rire de la Méduse, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1976, vol. 1, no. 4)*

My practice-led PhD deploys creative writing as a methodology for investigating the distinctive contributions made to surrealist prose by women practitioners on the margins of its original men’s club. Its creative component, a contemporary surrealist novel entitled *The Cinema Beneath the Lake*, situates my selected authors as characters in an adventure novel, in search of a mythical cinema taking the form of a giant glass jellyfish (or méduse) which inhabits Lake Pavin. This cinema-creature reputedly projects the unconscious of any occupant in a once-only film-dream.

Using the lake and its cinema as organisational metaphor, I have deployed surrealist methodologies to develop a work which interrogates the limitations imposed on extended fiction under the dogma of early surrealist proclamations and to explore ways in which my three authors challenge these impositions in their own work. The novel’s content and form have been ‘shaped’ throughout by a deliberately de-centring multiplicity of voices and chance-driven research methodologies.

Aspiring to reflect on these processes within the work of my selected authors and on their implications for creative-critical practice, this paper comprises a critical discussion alongside a selection of contextualised sequences from the novel itself.

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