

GOFT SPOTS

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Situated Design

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Abstract

In the year 2020 I got diagnosed with Type-1 diabetes. I waited a few months after having symptoms to go to the doctor because I thought these symptoms were a sign of stress. I internalised stress as a part of the body that you 'just have to push through.' After my diagnosis I wondered how I did not recognize the weight loss, low energy, hair loss and a lot of bathroom visits as something alarming.

I noticed that the relationship I had with my body was distorted and that I ignored the vulnerabilities that I felt towards my body. I started to call the relationship I have toward the vulnerabilities I felt toward my body soft spots. The thesis is part of my process in rebuilding my relationship with soft spots by engaging in the relationship with my periods, body size and queerness.

In order to engage with soft spots I will practise staying with soft spots. For that I developed the process of first noticing soft spots, then valuing them, developing a relationship with them and learning from them. This was approached using the following: recording and writing - explored as a way to have a more observing attitude towards soft spots, sketching - explored as a way to connect with my body from a different perspective and finally by rug making with the craft of tufting as a form of capturing and celebrating valuable moments with soft spots.

By sharing my journey of softness I want to take up space for vulnerability as a form of resistance situated in a social system where softness often isn't valued.

A soft spot

14-years-old:

I hid my super plus tampon in the side pocket of my bag so nobody could see it. I used to carry my tampons in my pencil case until my classmate asked me for a pen and discovered my tampon, showed it to everyone and laughed. Apparently, this tampon was too big and shameful... The next day I tried my sister's tampon, but after one hour it leaked, so I knew that I needed the bigger tampon to be able to sit through the class without leaking. I just had to hide my tampons better.

At that moment I learned that there was a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to have your period and I did it the wrong way. As a 14-year-old in puberty, still trying to figure out my identity and where most of my social life depended on how I got along with my classmates. Being part of this group seemed one of the most important things in my tiny world. Changing my behaviour by hiding my tampons was a way for me to protect myself from being singled out again with the risk of not being part of this community anymore.

Incidents like the one described above, the influence from my surroundings and my media consumption over the years, have told me that my body is not okay as it is. Because of this I slowly developed soft spots: a vulnerable relationship with my body that I am sensitive and aware about, which in the meantime I have learnt to perceive as a weakness and that at some point of my life I forgot to value.

Brooklyn based writer and publisher Be Oakley and GenderFail (Publisher) (2018) describes softness in their essay 'Radical softness as a boundless form of resistance' as something powerful. They describe softness as deep internal power, as a feeling that does not always get

voiced or enacted in public spaces that are built for that are white middle class men in cisgender, abled bodied, healthy, neurotypical and heteronormative bodies. At the same time it is something that is in our core, that drives how we carry ourselves in this world; it is how we survive and is the result of our friendships, support systems or chosen families. The radical part of the softness is allowing yourself to embrace vulnerability as often as you feel able with a boundless form of strength.

I attempted to make soft spots invisible by hiding the parts of my body, the parts of me where I feel vulnerable by adapting my behaviour, like hiding my tampons. Feminist writer Sarrah Ahmed (2017, p. 55) describes this adaptive in her book 'Living a Feminist Life' as a compromise, a product of what we have been taught from past experiences even if it is not consciously registered. It is a way to protect yourself from being alienated from existing structures: She calls it resistance to recognizing as something that might be a coping mechanism to live with that thing."

Making soft spots invisible is a way of resisting recognition. By resisting to recognize soft spots, it does not allow me to connect with them and keeps the idea intact that there is no place for softness. Looking at my body with the lens of radical softness teaches me to embrace sensitivity and define soft spots as a valuable source that I want to nurture.

Staying with soft spots

28-years-old:

I have to go to the toilet again, it could be the tenth time today, but I lost count. Lately I cannot even go through one night without going to the bathroom. I open the button of my jeans - even though it is not necessary, I can pull them down without opening them - I presume the jeans must have been stretched over time. With pain in my chest, I go back to my laptop to work on my thesis, or rather I ended up simply staring at the screen. Today I feel tired. Actually, I feel tired every day for a while now. But it must be just the stress of graduation. I stare at my screen asking "why can't I do this, I was able to do this, everybody else is doing it..."

Being tired, losing weight and going to the bathroom often are symptoms of diabetes. I was diagnosed in April 2020. The diagnosis came as a huge shock, because I kept on assuming it was 'just stress.' For me stress was a given factor of life that you 'just had to push through' to get stuff done. I did my bachelor's at the Design Academy Eindhoven where students worked continuously under a lot of stress. It was normal to work every day until late in the evening and having no sleep before deadlines. When you did not 'work hard enough' you would fail the class meaning having to prolong the course and racking up a bigger student debt. I felt that students who failed multiple classes were looked down upon, so I did not want that to become me.

With this, I do not wish to blame the Design Academy for normalising the stress in my body, but the educational system and culture did make a huge impact on my work ethic of 'don't complain, work hard and push harder until the work is done' attitude. By maintaining this attitude in regard to my body, I was hiding the needs of my body even from myself. My body was giving out signs that I was ill, but these became a soft spot and thus, I was hiding these signs until my body was too exhausted. I had to stop my masters course and work as a designer for a while.

Since my diagnosis I am getting to know my body in a different way. Like an old friend you haven't seen for years and now you get to know each other again. But this time I want our relationship to be different. Instead of hiding soft spots I want to practise staying with soft spots. Staying with soft spots means firstly noticing soft spots, then valuing them, developing a relationship with them and learning from them.

Writer and Poet Sonya Renee Taylor (2021) connects the body with apologising by asking the question: What have we been apologising for? In her book the body is not an apology, Taylor proposes the concept of radical self-love, radical self love goes further than self acceptance or confidence. Self esteem and confidence are primarily fueled by ego and external conditions. Radical self love is an inherent existence practising taking back the experience of being worthy to our spiritual, mental and physical body. According to Taylor the system is failing, not the body. For example, it is not accidental that there are millions of people dieting with a whole industry behind it, it is part of a social system.

According to Taylor, taking back the feeling of worthiness of the body is an act of interruption of the social, economical and political system's profits upon us wanting to apologise for our bodies. The radical idea is that when enough of us detach from that system, this system will fall.

Taylor wants to cultivate new ways of being in our bodies, she states that how we value and honour our bodies impacts how we value and honour the bodies of others. Working towards a world of radical self love that works for everybody and every-body.

I realise that I was apologising for my body by hiding soft spots, adapting my behaviour and ignoring my symptoms - even subconsciously. This was a way of trying to keep up with a culture of performance. Looking at my body from a radical self love and radical soft point of view helps me to stay with soft spots as a learning process, in which I allow myself to value vulnerability and learn to stop apologising for my body.

Be Oakley (Publisher) (2018) unpacks how radical softness can serve as a form of resistance. This form of resistance is not about standing on the streets with protest signs, even though Oakley acknowledges the power of people taking agency by coming together and speaking up. They also state that this form of resistance is limited and not everybody has access to this form of protest, for example when you are physically challenged you can be excluded from this form of protest. Instead, Oakley tries to give language to other forms of resistance that do not rely on an ableist focus on the body's actions, but one that snowballs through public language actions and become a forum of a public dialogue. Oakley sees their publishing practice as a form of resistance, the content of the published materials is radically soft and can serve as an aesthetic and linguistic protest. The printed object becomes a forum of public dialogue, the author becomes a protester each time the publication is read, discussed and shared.

I consider my project of staying with soft spots a form of resistance as well by communicating a soft narrative around my body as another voice in the patriarchal society. Moreover, by making this process visible through the thesis, exhibitions and having conversations around the work, I let soft spots become part of the public.

Within this project I will continue to build on the relationship with soft spots and search for the (visual) language in which I will make them visible and find a context where it can be meaningful to share as a form of resistance. I will stay with three soft spots:

- Staying with periods: My relationship with birth control.
- Staying with size: Engaging in building a connection with my body size.
- Staying with queerness: The process of opening up about my queerness.

Over the last year whilst working on this project, my relationship to these three soft spots has changed. In staying with soft spots and making these visible,

I explored a design process taking on different approaches:

- Capturing: explored as a form of capturing and celebrating a valuable moment in time with the craft of tufting.
- Connecting: explored as a way to look at the body from a different perspective by sketching.
- Reflecting: explored as a way to have a more observing attitude towards soft spots by writing down memories and recording conversations.

I will introduce these approaches further in the next section, before sharing more about the process of staying with each of the soft spots mentioned above.

Capturing, Connecting and Reflecting

Tufting is a technique of high pile and loop pile rug making.(Textiel Museum, n.d.) On social media there is a whole community of people who are tufting and who blow me away with their use of bright colours, pop references and textures. But what I like most about this community is the willingness of these people to share their expertise and help teach me the craft. The Youtube channels of Sam Lao (Sam Made That, 2021) and the channel of Tuft the World (Tuft the World, 2019) taught me most of what I need to know to get started on my tufting exploration.

The craft of tufting has an important role in my work process, as the repetitive movement has a meditative effect and gives a sense of healing. The size of the rugs are around 150x160cm and it takes a lot of hours to materialise. With the making of the rug I am capturing precious moments I had with my soft spots. Seeing the image being rendered stroke by stroke empowers me to look at my body with love and compassion, taking time to value these soft spots and gradually feel more comfortable sharing them with the public in the form of a rug that is soft in its content as well as its tactility.



Another important part of my work process included sketching. Because of my body size, I feel self-conscious and still experience judgemental thoughts. Content creator, writer and podcast maker Ash Nischuk (Fat girls club, 2021) came up with the concept of the 'fat spectrum' where she categorised different sizes of fatness to create more consciousness about the privileges and disadvantages connected to each part of the spectrum. I fall in the "small fat" category meaning that I have no trouble in plus size stores but don't always fit straight size clothes. I am able to enter public spaces and experience little to no discrimination when it comes to healthcare due to my size.

Sketching became a way of engaging with how I perceive my body. I am conscious about the privilege of my body size still and I do have difficulties feeling comfortable with my size. I want to appreciate my body in all of its shapes and sizes but emotionally I can feel disconnected to my size to the point that I can struggle to even look at my body. I remembered that during the first year of my bachelor degree, I had an assignment to paint myself naked and how this was the first time I really looked at my body from up close. I decided to sketch my body as a way to experience this relationship with my body again. In sketching, I am able to look at myself without judgement, remaining focused on shape, colour, composition and light.

Finally, during the past year I recorded conversations with myself and people who are close to me and wrote thoughts and memories down related to soft spots. I use the writing and recordings as a way to reflect on soft spots. Having the memories written down in text and recorded in audio files gives me the chance to revisit those moments and look back with a more observing view. These writings and recordings will also be used as a communication tool to give the readers of the thesis and the visitors of the exhibition an insight into the exploration of staying with soft spots. The recordings will be exhibited together with the tufted rugs.

In the next chapters I will zoom in on different aspects of soft spots using the approach of capturing, sketching and reflecting as a practice to stay with soft spots.

Staying with periods

15-years-old

It's lunch break. I am smoking a cigarette with my group of girlfriends; the cigarette makes me dizzy and I am not sure if I am doing it the right way but I like these moments we have together. For some reason when we are smoking we really open up and talk about things like beer and boys, it is like we are a little pack that is already doing something that we should not do. It's something that our parents wouldn't allow us to do so we might as well talk about the other frowned-upon things as well.

You could call Julia (pseudonym) the leader of the pack, she was my age but mentally a bit older. She had a boyfriend who was older than her and she was on 'the pill'. Julia used to have heavy acne just like me. "It is the Diane pill", she says after inhaling her cigarette like a pro "Since I am on that pill my acne disappeared, my flow and cramps are a lot less heavy and I can have sex with my boyfriend". Unlike me Julia had no shame in talking about sex and periods and that's what I liked about her.

I did not say much but I listened and thought to myself "Wow a pill that lets your acne disappear - how great is that - and as a bonus I don't have to have an awkward talk with my parents if I get a boyfriend because by then I will already be on 'the pill'".

A few weeks later I went with my mum to the doctor to ask for this magic pill. The doctor looked at my acne and said he understood why I wanted this pill. Without too many questions I got the subscription for the Diane-35 pill. I swallowed this pill every day until investigative journalistic TV program Zembla (Zembla, Fatale pil, 2013) would devote an episode to the Diane-35 pill. Revealing that the Diane pill was not registered as a contraceptive pill but as an anti-acne pill that has a contraceptive side effect. A rare side effect of this pill is thrombosis and

in the year 2013 twenty-seven menstruating people under thirty died of the side effects of this pill in the Netherlands.

After watching this TV program, I spent the rest of the evening googling different kinds of contraceptive drugs and landed on the IUD. It still had some side effects but less than the Diane pill. I had some friends who were in a lot of pain after placing the IUD because their body rejected it, but I also had friends where the IUD worked for them and as a bonus they did not get their period anymore. I was willing to take the risk of my body rejecting the IUD, the thought of me getting pregnant seemed so much more terrifying.

Eight years and two IUD's later and no periods anymore. I'm not very happy and I am not very sad. I feel 'medium' most of the time. It made me think about my IUD and its side effects again, from migraines to psychiatric problems (Apotheek.nl, 2021). Some risks are smaller than others, but it made me wonder why all the risks and responsibilities of contraceptives are with the people who menstruate. I decided to take out my IUD and three months later I menstruated again.

Looking back on my contraceptive journey I wonder if I would have done things differently with hindsight. I recorded a conversation with my friend Simone who also started the Diane-35 pill when she was fifteen years old because of her acne. She says she would do it again if it was up to her 15 year old self, even though the pill sometimes gave her dark thoughts "As a teenager you want to fit in, these thoughts were already there but more in the background and having clear skin made me feel more confident and become more open, I think that is what I needed back then".

I felt the insecurity that Simone felt too. Complying with a certain beauty standard was an essential part of not being singled out, even if in this case the acne was just a part of my teenage body's development (Njoo, n.d.). The glorification of beauty standards was for me the biggest part of my decision to start taking the Diane-35 pill.

Choosing birth control is deeply personal and has to suit your body in your phase of life. That is why I try to be careful in how I choose my next words because hormonal contraceptives help a lot of people with uterus. The following section is not written to dismiss or disincentivize others from using hormonal birth control, but is my personal experience with quitting contraceptives.

Quitting the hormonal contraceptives was a way of resisting putting all the responsibilities of birth control onto my body. Before I quit I did not menstruate anymore, mentally I felt colourless and I wanted to be more in touch with my cycle. I was so happy when I menstruated for the first time again, it meant this part of my body was still working and I started to feel more and more connected with the different hormonal phases of my menstrual cycle also known as the menstrual seasons (Hill, 2020). I decided to celebrate this sacred moment with a tufted rug. The first design I embroidered was a cheerful looking bleeding vulva with a punch needle in fabric because having my period again was a celebratory moment, it just had to be bigger. The blood in the design is bursting out of the vagina representing the new found freedom after being suppressed for years. Firstly from hiding my tampons and leaking spots, later by hormones, but now I finally found the comfort within my body to share this bloody happy moment.



First design of the bleeding vulva.



Big version of the bleeding vulva.

Staying with size

Susan: Hi Leonie, you look great! Did you lose weight?

Me: Uuhm, I don't know?

Susan: Yeah you look good girl, your face is way less puffy.

Me: Oh okay, yeah maybe but I didn't change anything in my diet or exercise so...

Susan: You really look way better, the last time I saw you you were wearing a skirt with all these pleats, it made you look really large.

Me: Oh, okay.

Susan: But wow you're really a bomb now.

Me: (laughing awkwardly) he he, well thanks I guess?

Susan (pseudonym) was meant to compliment me but all I heard was 'Wow you are finally a worthy person and don't you dare gain that weight again.' The reason I had lost a lot of weight at that moment was because I had Type 1 Diabetes but at that time it wasn't diagnosed yet. I do believe that this person had good intentions by wanting to compliment me when in fact she just complimented me for my illness. I wish people would stop seeing weight loss as a compliment, as you don't know what is behind the weight loss, what the person's

relationship is with food, their (mental) health or their size.

After my diagnosis I had to balance my food with insulin injections and exercise. My body got the nutrition it needed again and I gained back the weight that I'd lost over time. I also noticed my body got stronger again and that I slowly gained my energy back. I appreciated what my body could do, it helped me to be more kind toward my body by looking at its capabilities rather than judging by its size, but my size is still a part of my body. When I go shopping to buy new pants and the biggest size does not fit me, I am confronted with my size. From an intellectual perspective I am thinking "this is not my fault but the one fault of the manufacturer, they should be more inclusive in their design". At the same time another voice is saying "There is something wrong with me, I have to be the one that has to change to be able to fit in these clothes, to fit in society". Noticing this voice helps me not to blame myself, but the feeling of judgement is still there.

When I grew up there was no social media. Most of my references of what a 'beautiful body' would look like came from television, movies and magazines. The fat character was always the dumb one, the funny one,



¹ (Natalie Being Fat Shamed in Love Actually, n.d.)



² (Fat Monica in Friends, n.d.)



³ (Ursula in the Little Mermaid, n.d.)

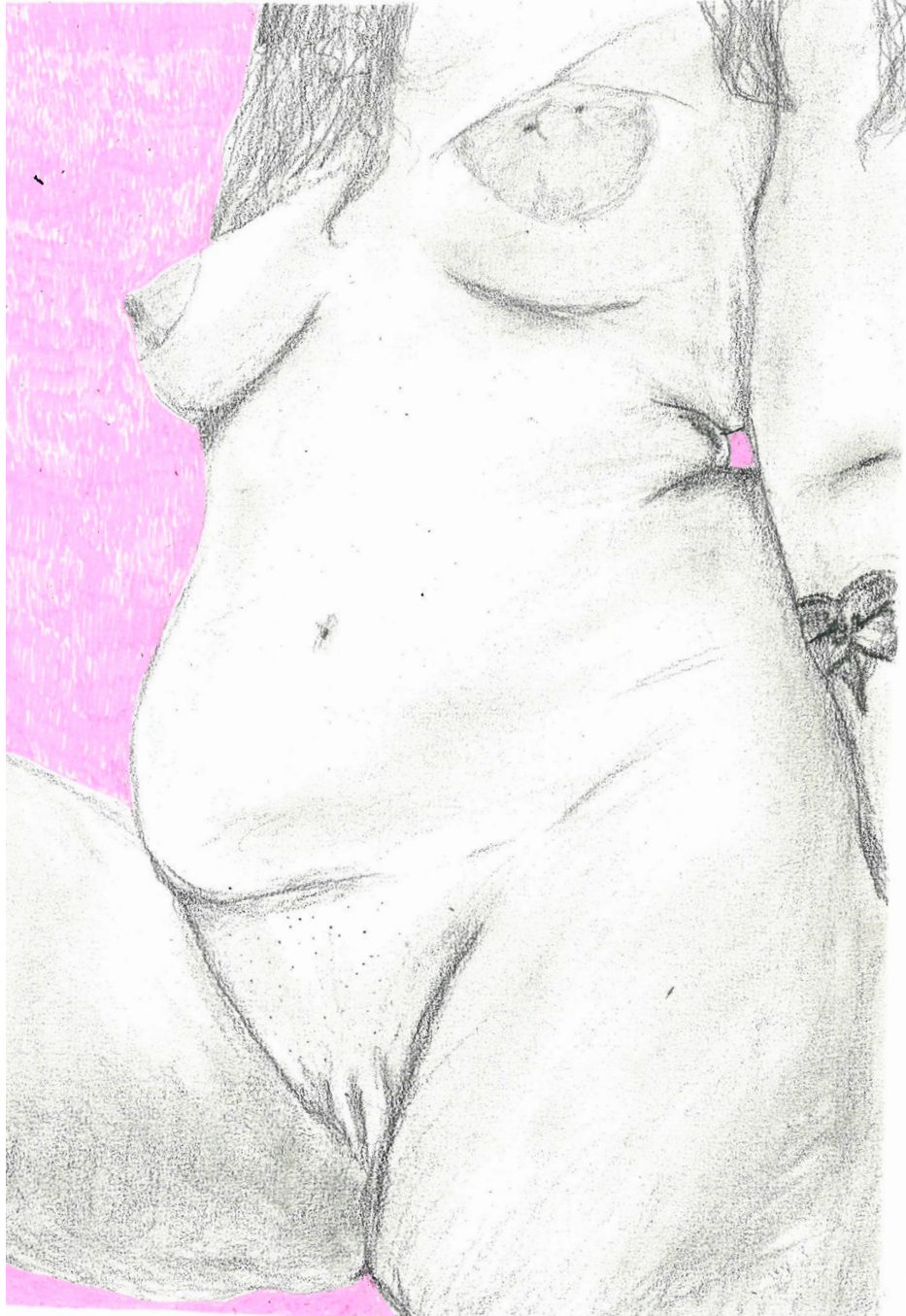
the nerdy or the gross one . Size was immediately linked to the intellect, personality and desirability and worthiness of a person. Even though I wasn't that big I was still one of the biggest kids in my class. Ultimately my classmates had the same references as me and bullied me for being fat. That is one of the reasons why I often identify with fat characters in the media.

My parents never told me to lose weight and always told me I was beautiful the way I was. But my mum has been trying to stay slim for as long as I can remember. In staying with my soft spot, I started to record a conversation with her about the relationship she has with her body and I noticed how important beauty and keeping to a certain standard of beauty is to her. My mum is a conventional beautiful skinny woman in her 60's, I never liked when my mum was on a diet and I felt judged because she was skinnier than me. If she did not think her body was good enough, what must she think about my body? When I confronted her with this question, the conversation immediately started to go to beauty again "your body suits you", "your fat is on your hips, mine is on my belly". The conversation turned to where fat 'should' and 'shouldn't' be. I noticed that I became annoyed, even though I knew I shouldn't judge her for feeling pressured to be young, beautiful, and skinny.

¹. Natalie was in the movie Love actually (Curtus, R. 2003) the centre of 'fat jokes' she was dumped by her ex because of her size and got referred to as 'plumpy', 'the chubby girl', and someone with a 'sizeable ass,' and 'huge thighs'

². The character Monica in Friends (Crane, D., & Kauffman, M. 1994 - 2004) was a fat teenager in the story-line also known as 'Fat Monica'. Monica being fat was the centre of the joke, she got mocked by her size and only found love after she lost weight.

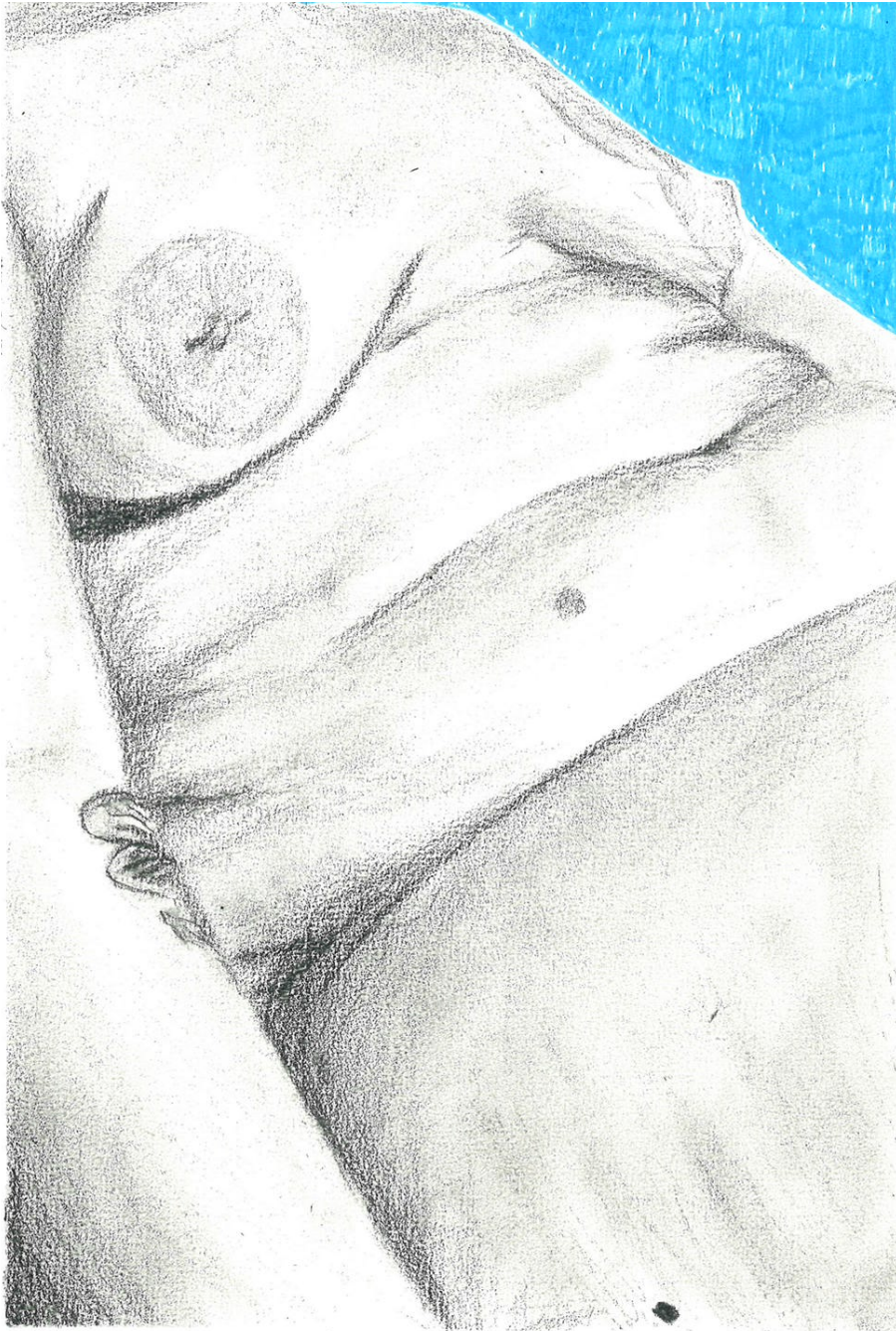
³. Ursula was the fat villain in The Little Mermaid (Clements, R., & Musker, J. 1989). In the movie Ursula is fixated on Ariel's beauty. By silencing Ariel by stealing her voice, the narrative of silencing women gets pushed and beauty is the only thing being valued.



Sketch 1



Sketch 2



Sketch 3

What I realise is that I can feel that same pressure that makes me look at my body with judgement. In sketching, I am zooming in on the body. This helps me build a relationship with my body size. In the process of sketching, I started out by taking pictures of myself that I used as reference for the sketches. For sketches 1 and 2, I made a lot of pictures until I found the right pose and angle. It is clearly visible that I am posing in these images, I still tried to look 'flattering' in this exercise even though I attempted to look at the body with less judgement. This wasn't a conscious decision, I noticed I was posing when I finished sketches 1 and 2. But I realised I needed to make the first two sketches this way in order to ease the process of observing my body from up close. When I noticed my posing, I decided to make another sketch, but this time in a more natural position.

Sketch 3 shows my body as I sit on the couch. I took just one photo as a reference and made no effort in posing. While sketching I started to enjoy drawing every fold and blemish. The process of sketching gave me the chance to get to know the shapes of my body and become more comfortable with them. The posed drawings are just as representative of my body as the drawings where I did not pose. They are all part of the process of building a relation with my body size.

Sketching my naked body was an intimate process in which I could find compassion in my size. I combined the three sketches in the design melting into each other as one body. The illustration of the rug is figurative and I wanted to keep the design as close to the sketch. I wanted to capture the intimacy and comfort I felt with my body during the sketching process as a reminder of the comfort I am able to feel within my body.



Sketch 1, 2 and 3 combined in the design for the rug.



Body size rug.



Close up body size rug.



Staying with queerness

Whatsapp message to Jesse:

Date: 26-11-2021

Time: 00:07

Leonie: Hi Jesse, shall we have a coffee over Zoom tomorrow?

Time: 00:20

Leonie: I have something to tell you... it's quite difficult and I don't really know who I can talk to about it... as you know me and my partner haven't had sex for a while and I am just doubting to myself if I am even attracted to men or is it just something that I have always know. I have difficulties talking with my friends about it because they are also friends with my partner as well and know him well. I sent this message to you because I had some wine and maybe that's why I'm a bit more in touch with my feelings. I'm also afraid that if I don't send you this message I will probably think tomorrow "whatever, my life is easy and safe this way, never mind". I think I just have to let it out. I am even doubting if I should press send because then it would become real and I'd have to deal with it tomorrow. I'm just going to do it, you don't have to respond I am just glad that I am able to let out my thoughts .<3

The above are the text messages I sent to my friend and queer artist Jesse van den Berg. I don't know what would have happened if I had not hit the send button, perhaps I wouldn't have had the courage to start the conversation about my queerness. This was not the first time that I acknowledged to myself or somebody else that I wasn't straight, but it was the first time that I was deciding to act upon it.

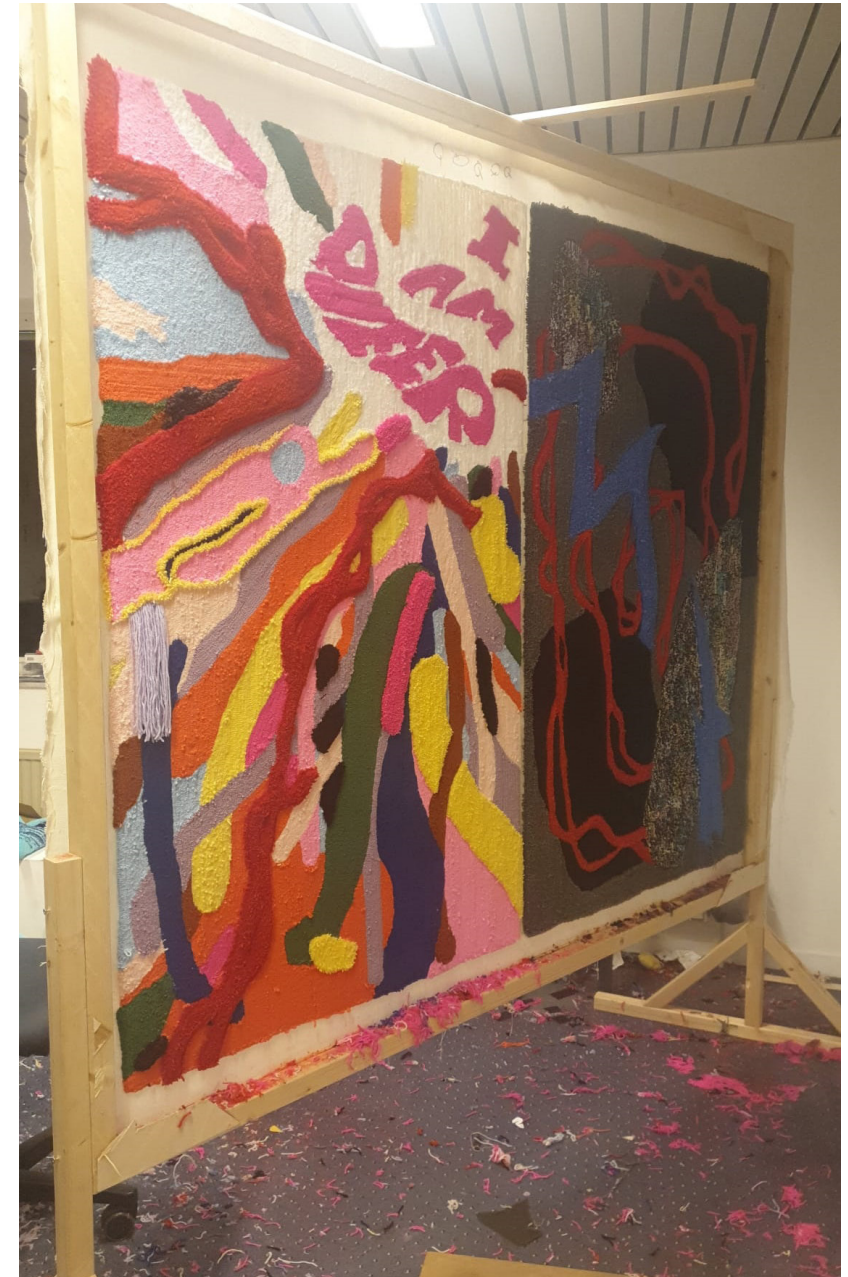
The next day I had tickets to the film *Anne+* (Wiemeijer, 2022). The film is based on the Netflix series, *Anne+*, about a Lesbian girl in her 20's living and studying in Amsterdam with her queer group of friends. I haven't seen much bi or lesbian representation in the media, even if there is queer representation in a TV episode or movie it is mostly about queer men. Lesbian love gets hyper sexualised a lot and often the bi or lesbian character gets killed (Scott, 2018). The thing that is refreshing in *Anne+* is that there is no big deal made in the series of her and her friends being gay, it is just a given fact. For me *Anne+* was a show where I could recognise myself and my friends even though I was in a straight relationship when I got to know the show. When I saw the film in the theatre, I started feeling really awkward. I recognised that feeling of awkwardness as a confirmation of my queerness.

Even though I was happy in my relationship, I also felt I had become stuck, stuck in the house where we lived together. I felt too 'old' to come out and was scared of acknowledging my true feelings, knowing that this would have a huge impact on my life. I went online and started searching for other people with the same experience. I landed on a reddit page called: 'Late bloomer lesbians' (• r/Latebloomerlesbians, 2018), where I found a lot of stories from women who were older than twenty-five leaving their long term relationship in order to discover their queerness. I recognised the doubts, the sadness but also the hope and excitement in the stories these people were willing to share. I felt supported by these messages and they made me feel a little less scared. For the last six years I was in a heterosexual relationship and within a couple of days I was a queer women living in a heteronormative society.

Four months later and I am sitting on Jesse's couch with my audio recorder looking back on the first message I sent to them. For Jesse this message was something that they could recognize within themselves, but then from a long time ago: "It was a long time ago that I found these thoughts, scary thoughts". We had a conversation about what queerness means for them and for myself. Even though I'm not comfortable labelling my sexuality, when you look at the definition of the different sexual orientations, bi or pan-sexual are the ones I feel closest to my experience (Gay Times, 2021). At this moment I call myself queer because it gives me the sexual freedom without needing to give it a label or to categorise myself (Reijmer, 2020).

I did not have the feeling that I had to 'come out of the closet' but I did experience that my queerness became more real the moment I started speaking out about it. I was a little bit nervous to tell my parents about my queerness, but I did not want them to make an assumption that I was straight, living together with a man again and having kids, so I told my mum during a recorded conversation. In the recording you can hear me laughing nervously and making jokes to lighten the mood. I asked her if she needed to get used to the idea of me being queer; the answer was "no", not because she always thought I was gay, but because she did not make any assumptions about my sexuality and she really does not care as long as I am happy.

I was relieved to know that I have the privilege of a supporting surrounding. However the most important part was opening up and coming out to myself, acknowledging my soft spot and becoming comfortable with it myself. The recognition of my queerness opened up a scary but exciting world for me that I captured in a tufted rug. Looking back on the recordings I noticed the value of sharing soft spots with others even though it can feel awkward. I am able to value my queerness more when I am open about it because every time I express my queerness out loud, I feel more engaged, connected and comfortable with it. It becomes more and more a part of me.



Staying with queerness rug on the tufting frame



Backside of the staying with queerness rug during the MIVC graduation show 2022



Frontside of the staying with queerness rug during the MIVC graduation show 2022

Conclusion

In this project I wanted to explore ways in which I could build a nurturing relationship with soft spots. I searched for different ways of staying with soft spots. Soft spots are a vulnerable relationship with my body that I am sensitive and aware about and are something I forgot to value. In order to rebuild my relationship with soft spots, I chose to engage with my periods, body size and queerness.

Staying with soft spots is about the journey not the destination, it is about developing the relationship with the body. This journey is deeply personal and feels vulnerable, sometimes awkward, but is also exciting and loving. Within this thesis I invited the reader to embark upon my journey of soft spots by letting them read parts of my memories and conversations I had with people close to me.

Sketching became an important part of connecting with my body size. I can feel discomfort looking at my body but by engaging with it through sketching I was able to observe my shapes without judgement. During these intimate moments I learned to look at my body with compassion and felt comfort with my size.

In the process of staying with soft spots I found a new feeling of worthiness towards my body. I showed the comfort and joy I was able to experience with soft spots in the form of tufted rugs. This is a way of taking up space for the narrative of finding comfort in vulnerabilities, in a social system that does not always provide that space of comfort for my body.

The rugs will be exhibited together with the recordings and the written text in an installation. By showing the comfort and discomfort I feel towards soft spots unapologetically, I want to value my vulnerabilities as an essential and powerful part of my body.

When this thesis is published and the work is exhibited, it becomes public. I consider sharing my journey of staying with soft spots as an act of resistance by embracing sensitivity in a patriarchal society. Making my personal experiences public feels scary, yet still I want to be open about my vulnerabilities.

By hiding soft spots I am participating in a system where there is no place for softness. That is why my work will be an ongoing process in which I want to create a soft narrative around the body, to redefine softness from a weakness to a powerful tool that can help detach us from the system that makes me want to apologise for my body.

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